

It's the story, stupid! Timo Soini, Jussi Halla-aho and the battle for the story of the Finns Party

Abstract

What role does storytelling play in right-wing populist parties? With a focus on the Finns Party and its leaders Timo Soini (1995–2017) and Jussi Halla-aho (2017–2021), this article depicts the narrative struggle that ensued when the Finns Party joined government in 2015 and exposes the challenges populist storytellers face when engaged in governing coalitions. Whereas Soini argued in favour of joining government and actively participating in broad, consensus-based policymaking, Halla-aho focused on directly challenging government by targeting migration as a key concern for party voters. These tensions culminated in the breakup of the party, where a small faction continued in government until 2019 while the mother party returned to the opposition. A storytelling perspective shows the importance of a credible truth-telling narrative in understanding far-right populist electoral success and demonstrates the challenges government responsibility presents for populist narrative credibility.

Keywords: narrative, storytelling, populism, discourse, Finns Party

Introduction

The steady rise of populist parties across the world has been matched by a growing interest in populist storytelling, as the narratives of populist leaders are becoming increasingly relevant for how the public makes sense of key issues and events around them. The recent success of far-right populism across Europe, as well as further afield in countries such as Brazil, United States and the Philippines, points towards the ability of the populist right to generate significant political traction, making it a major contender in the political field (Bustikova, 2014; Tebble, 2006). Their electoral strength has also meant that they have become acceptable coalition partners for mainstream parties, or governments have otherwise depended on their support (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). Often, they are portrayed to benefit from a protest vote 'motivated more by what the established parties fail to offer voters and less by what the newcomers on the extreme right offer them' while voters 'are held to be swayed by the appeal of "charismatic" leaders' (van der Brug & Mughan, 2007, p. 30).

Many explanations of this success tend to focus more on the leader—their charisma and communication skills (Zaslove, 2008), or performative skills (Moffitt, 2016)—while the party itself or the overall populist narrative are seen as mere vehicles for the charismatic populist leader (Mény & Surel, 2002). Or, as Ungureanu and Popartan summarise, 'current populism is usually characterised by the presence of a

Ketola (University of Edinburgh, UK) & Nordensvärd (Linköping University, Sweden). Corresponding author's e-mail: markus.ketola@ed.ac.uk. © Author(s) 2022. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). ISSN 2736-9749 (print), 2814-5038 (online)

charismatic or messianic leader (usually a man) claiming to express the real will of the people' where the 'leader is brave, sincere and able to unmask with his straight talk the elite hiding hypocritically behind the veil of political correctness. The leader is the supreme unmasker' (2020, p. 42). Such analysis pushes the political party or the populist narrative itself to the sidelines, where focus has been on the performative aspects of the party as a venue for a divisive, transgressive and provocative leader (Oliver & Rahn, 2016, p. 191). The leader is seen as a 'charismatic "truth-teller"' (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2021, p. 1) whose performance may also include 'bad manners' (Moffit, 2016), 'agitation, spectacular actions, exaggeration' (Heinisch, 2003, p. 94) or behaviour akin to that of a 'drunken dinner guest' (Arditi, 2007, p. 78). Yet, how does such story-telling change when the political party and the populist storyteller arrives in political power? Here we want to prime the actual narratives that have been neglected by focusing solely on charisma and loose messages. As Caiani and Graziano (2022) outline, the impact of government responsibility on populist agendas is somewhat ambivalent, as some have found it to weaken the anti-establishment and anti-elitist agenda of right-wing populists (Roodjuin et al., 2014), while others have found the opposite to be the case (Zulianello, 2020). It is rare, however, to witness a leadership change at a time when the party is in government and at the height of its political power.

The aim of this paper is to better understand the challenge populist storytelling faces to retain credibility when the storyteller transitions from 'David' to 'Goliath'. It does so by studying the storytelling by two Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset* – PS¹) leaders, Timo Soini (1995–2017) and Jussi Halla-aho (2017–2021). Using the case of the PS gaining political power and joining government under the steerage of Timo Soini, the article outlines the narrative struggle between Soini and Halla-aho. Soini presents the ultimate goal of government as achieving change, which involves taking responsibility and tough decisions that may compromise some of the principles and earlier promises of the party. This exacerbates an existing rift within the party and leads Soini along with 20 colleagues to create a new parliamentary group that remains in government, while the rest of the party moves to the opposition with the new leader, Jussi Halla-aho. This makes for an interesting case to study how political power and consensus politics affect populist storytelling. We therefore ask: How does being in power challenge the narrative credibility of a populist storyteller? We interrogate how political power impacts populist storytellers, and whether losing the status of a dark horse or an outsider weakens their narrative credibility².

In analysing this case study we are applying the method of interpretative analysis to the populist storytelling of Soini and Halla-aho. In contrast to more positivist approaches to social science research, interpretative analysis aims to create understanding of how we make sense of policy and politics with a focus on meaning (cf. Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2019). Moreover, such a perspective seeks to 'develop a deeper, interpretative understanding of practices and process in general' including 'perspectives on discourse, narration, governmentality and practice' (Durnova & Zittoun, 2011, p. 103). This article looks at populist storytelling from a narrative discourse perspective.

We find that the narrative credibility of the PS under Timo Soini is also closely connected with Soini himself as the protagonist-in-chief of the PS narrative. Under Halla-aho, the party draws less on the leader as the main protagonist and more on the credibility of the narrative in speaking truth to power and challenging mainstream political perspectives. Consequently, we can see that populist storytellers struggle to engage in consensus politics where defending compromises and 'tough decisions' can be seen as an act of selling out and losing the ability to speak truth to power.

Narrative as theory and method

Our theoretical starting point can be found within the discursive study of narratives. A discourse analysis approach tends to focus on how pieces of talk or text 'function in the linguistic and social context in which they are deployed' (Johnstone, 2005, p. 183). For example, discourse analysis of policy seeks to understand how texts are structured in a particular way and what social and political implications this will have

(Jaworski & Coupland, 2000). A discourse does not primarily describe reality, but it constitutes it in a specific way (Keller, 2004) and is closely connected to power and coercion (Keller, 2005, p. 22). As Koller notes, '[d]iscourse is embedded in socio-cultural practice' (2005, p. 200).

Narrative is a particular linguistic discourse that structures our social reality by creating patterns out of scattered events. These narrative patterns revolve around depictions of a change in state, 'a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another' (Ochs, 1998, p. 189). Moreover, these patterns centre on a 'key event' that brings about change and 'disrupts the equilibrium' (Ochs, 1998, p. 197). Narratives are then seen as ways to use linguistic patterns. This does not necessarily mean that narrative itself exists; we create narratives to construct and reproduce our reality. In so doing we rely on the plot to provide the 'intelligible unity that holds together circumstances' (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 178) and causal connections between events in a narrative (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019).

Populist narratives in turn are built around a generic narrative frame of betrayal by the corrupt, selfish elite, at the expense of the interest of the uncorrupt people, whose interests are deemed more legitimate because they represent the majority (the general will) (Mudde, 2010). The 'people' and the 'elite' are engaged in an antagonistic relationship informed by a perpetual sense of crisis and where the superiority of the people as well as popular sovereignty are prioritized (Stanley, 2008; Moffit, 2016). As Bronk and Jacoby suggest, this aims towards 'subverting the normative frames with which voters interpret events' (2020, p. 25). More generally, we might see populist narratives as 'quest narratives' concerning a return to a nostalgic past or utopian future (Sudgen, 2015). Table 1 further outlines this unmasking role of the truth-teller in the context of the populist narrative framework.

Table 1. The populist narrative frame and the role of the party leader as truth-teller

	Populist narrative frame	The unmasking role of the truth-teller
Characters	Protagonist (people, rural, native) and antagonist (elite, urban, non-native) pitted against each other.	To expose the antagonists as corrupt and undeserving of respect or trust.
Plotlines		
EQ(A): What is the first equilibrium of the story?	The narrative portrays the protagonists as being exploited by the antagonists. This is articulated as a crisis.	To expose the betrayal of the protagonists by the antagonists, and the terrible way this will end unless change is realised.
Change: What disrupts EQ(A) and creates change?	The solution to the crisis is black and white: it can be found through policies that support the interests of the protagonists, rather than antagonists.	To show how they have the keys to finding a path to success.
EQ(B): What is the next/last equilibrium of the plot?	The protagonists achieve sovereignty and challenge the antagonists' betrayal.	To depict a utopian future only possible through the path they have charted.

In narrative analysis, it is important to remember that narratives are not fixed; they can be taken apart and rewritten with a new focus, a new plot and a whole new narrative. The same sequence of events could contain an indefinite number of different plots, and depending on which one the observer chooses to create, the narrative will be given a different meaning (Czarniawska, 2000; 1998). In this article, the storytelling plot of Soini and Halla-aho will be reconstructed into narratives by posing the following questions:

1. EQ(A): What is the first equilibrium of the story?
2. Change: What disrupts EQ(A) and creates change?
3. EQ(B): What is the next/last equilibrium of the plot?

The importance of the populist leader notwithstanding, we propose that in order for the truth-telling narrative of the party leader to be credible, it needs a high degree of congruence with the core narrative of the party. The success of a given political party could therefore depend on the skills of the party leadership in fashioning what Bronk and Jacoby term ‘a narrative coup’, or a ‘wholesale reshaping of both the guiding narratives of their electoral base and the framing normative or conceptual grids with which they interpret events and decide how to act’ (2020, p. 2). By applying this populist narrative frame (Table 1) to the case of the PS we will demonstrate how the credibility of the truth-telling narrative of the party leader depends on its alignment with the narrative of what the party is about.

In doing so we have adopted a theory-generating case study approach. As Eisenhardt notes, this approach is most appropriate in the early stages of research on a topic ‘when little is now about a phenomenon’ (1998, p. 548), or when the aim is to refine existing theoretical concepts through an empirical case (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In developing this case study we rely on a wide range of published sources: blogs written by both Soini (*Ploki*) and Halla-aho (*Scripta*), newspaper articles from the time period in question (*Helsingin Sanomat* in particular), documents published on the PS website, books written by Soini (2008; 2014; 2020) and about Soini and Halla-aho (Nurmi, 2017; 2020) and election manifestos of the PS from the 2015 and 2019 parliamentary elections (see Table 2 for details). The key inclusion criteria concerned the fact that the document, or the primary text contained in it, had been written for a public purpose, with the intent of projecting a certain narrative about the party for public consumption.

Populism as storytelling

Our study diverges from some of the more common approaches to the study of populism. Mudde (2004), for example, focuses on the substantive aspects of populism, seeing it as a *thin ideology*, which, apart from the distinction between the pure people and the corrupt elite, lacks any specific content. Populism as an ideology is based on politics as an ‘expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Our approach also diverges somewhat from Laclau (2005), who sees populism as a performative and rhetorical logic through which hitherto unheard voices can enter the democratic debate, where it is seen as a *tool for mobilization*, particularly in the context of social movements generating space for alternatives. As Laclau suggests, ‘[t]he imprecision and emptiness of populist political symbols cannot be dismissed so easily: everything depends on the performative act that such an emptiness brings about’ (Laclau, 2005, p. 12). By digging deeper into these performative acts, scholars see in populism not just a tool to mobilize people for a cause but *an end in itself* – a form of storytelling that helps to make sense of who we are and where we fit. Populist storytelling, therefore, as developed by Nordensvärd and Ketola (2021) and Ungureanu and Popartan (2020), helps us say more about the everyday practice of populism, something missing in the ideological and rhetorical perspectives of Mudde (2004) and Laclau (2005).

The story of the *Perussuomalaiset*

In analysing the populist storytelling of Soini and Halla-aho, we focus on the political rise of the party, and how this led to a role in government before the success turned sour and led to a split in the party, the exit of Soini from the party and the rebranding of PS as an opposition party by Halla-aho. Our analytical timeframe therefore begins from just before reaching government.

The *first equilibrium* of the story therefore describes the storytelling of the gradual *rise of the party* from its establishment in 1995. The party follows in the footsteps of the Finnish Rural Party (*Suomen*

Table 2. Empirical material

Document Type	Qty	Title
Governmental document	8	Perussuomalaiset. (1995). <i>Yleisohjelma</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2003). <i>Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2007). <i>Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2010). <i>Nuiva vaalimanifesti</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2011). <i>Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2014). <i>European Union election programme</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2015). <i>Maahanmuuttopoliittinen ohjelma</i> . Perussuomalaiset. (2019). <i>Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma</i> .
Books	5	Soini, T. (2008). <i>Maisterisjätkä</i> . WSOY. Soini, T. (2014). <i>Peruspomo</i> . WSOY. Soini, T. (2020). <i>Populismi</i> . Pole-kuntatieto. Nurmi, L. (2017). <i>Perussuomalaisten hajoamisen historia</i> . Into. Nurmi, L. (2020). <i>Jussi Halla-aho: Epävirallinen elämäkerta</i> . Into.
Blogs, blog entries, speeches	5	Halla-aho, J. (2003-). Scripta [blog]. www.halla-aho.com/scripta Soini, T. (2007-). Ploki [blog]. www.timosoini.fi/category/ploki Halla-aho, J. (2017). Puheenjohtaja Halla-ahon linjapuhe Jyväskylässä. Perussuomalaiset. https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/ajankohtaista/puheenjohtaja-halla-ahon-linjapuhe-jyvaskylassa/ Halla-aho, J. (2021). Speech announcing resignation from party leadership, 21 st June. Iltalehti. https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/aa8babe6-6417-4a5c-871e-d562a187251c Immonen, O. (2015). 'I'm dreaming of a strong, brave nation'. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/334608399882600/posts/im-dreaming-of-a-strong-brave-nation-that-will-defeat-this-nightmare-called-mult/1072540946089338/

Maaseudun Puolue – SMP) that had just closed the previous year. Over the next 20 years, the party slowly gathers electoral traction until 2011, when it secures over 19% of the vote and becomes the third largest party overnight. However, the party declines invitations to join the coalition government, citing irreconcilable differences in views with other coalition parties over Finland's position on the EU stimulus packages aimed at supporting EU member states in the aftermath of the financial crisis. By focusing on the narratives strategies that precede the 2015 elections, we look at how both leaders make sense of the rise of the party and their own role as truth-tellers speaking truth to power. Whilst largely congruent, the narratives are beginning to diverge, with Soini focusing more on a broader conservative agenda and Halla-aho more on anti-immigration narratives that resonate with the rank-and-file members of the party.

The change comes with the rise to power and with Soini and Halla-aho positioning themselves on different narrative pathways. We define this as the *change and disruption* where the stories diverge more substantially. This occurs in 2015, when, with over 17% of the vote PS becomes the second largest party and joins the coalition government together with the Centre Party and Coalition Party. It receives five ministerial appointments in return, including Soini himself as the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Deputy Speaker of the Finnish Parliament. At this point Soini's narrative shifts away from classical populist storytelling of speaking truth to power and engages with the political processes of compromise, consensus and wielding power responsibly. His narrative is focused on working hard in the interest of the Finnish nation rather than speaking truth to power. Halla-aho in turn presents a counternarrative that problematizes the consensus-seeking narrative of Soini and speaks truth to power by focusing first and foremost on the threats of immigration and multi-culturalism.

These tensions are resolved when the party splits in two. This follows from Soini's decision in 2017 not to stand for re-election for the party leadership, lending his support to his chosen supporter, Sampo Terho.

However, the leadership election is won comprehensively by a challenger, Jussi Halla-aho, a controversial public figure whose outspoken views over Finland's immigration policy are well known. The coalition government refuses to work with the party under Halla-aho's leadership due to disagreements over immigration policy. Twenty of the PS MPs resign from the party and create their own parliamentary group, called 'New Alternative' and continue as the coalition partner until June 2019. Under Halla-aho's steering the party receives 17,5% of the vote share in the 2019 parliamentary elections, and has their best ever result in the 2021 municipal elections, with 14,5% of the vote.

Results and discussion: Narratives of Soini and Halla-aho compared

In what follows we present the two competing narratives in three stages, focusing in turn on 1) First Equilibrium (the rise of the party); 2) Change (party in government); and 3) Second Equilibrium (the split of the party). At each stage we compare the narratives of Soini and Halla-aho, and depict the narrative battle that ensues between them, and how the former loses narrative credibility vis-à-vis the latter.

The first equilibrium: The rise of the party

Our first equilibrium focuses on the rise of the PS as an agrarian and working-class party that looks after the interest of the Finns far away from the metropolitan elite of Helsinki. We therefore call Soini's populist narrative in this phase as "Speaking truth to power" while Halla-aho's approach engages in a similar narrative, but in relation to immigration.

Speaking truth to power: Soini and the agrarian populist narrative of the party

In this narrative Soini develops the difference between mainstream and the PS, where he constructs legible differences between the main characters (Soini, PS, elite, the mainstream parties). The scene depicted by this narrative pits two versions of Finland against each other: an urban elite that lives by multicultural, cosmopolitan, and liberal values, and whose worldview dominates Finnish politics but who nevertheless represent a minority; and the rural population and urban working classes, whose focus on hard work, family and community represent the core values of Finnishness and a Finnish way of life, but that is constrained by the elite. It's a battle of two sets of interests, where Soini and PS are the main protagonists protecting the interests of the small man.

Historically, the party narrative has focused on representing the forgotten people of Finnish politics – working classes and rural smallholders – and about speaking truth to power and challenging entrenched political interests. The roots of this narrative can be traced back to the 1960s and the emergence of the SMP which was motivated by a focus on the interests of the poor, particular in rural communities (Enävaara, 1979) and a desire to challenge the consensus-driven, pro-Soviet approach dominating mainstream political debates by expressing an 'absolute refusal to conform to self-censorship' (Arter, 2010, p. 486).

These SMP traditions continued to play a central role in the PS, which emerged from the ashes of the bankrupted SMP in 1995. Timo Soini, one of the founders of the PS and its leader for 22 years, in fact served his political apprenticeship in the SMP where he rose to the position of party secretary. Soini frequently references the SMP roots of his populism (2020, 2016; Nurmi, 2017), seeing the PS as a continuation of the SMP traditions of representing the forgotten, the rural, and the poor while taking an anti-establishment stance on key issues ranging from gay rights and abortion to European Union and immigration.

The PS continues the SMP's populist tradition. The first equilibrium of the story draws out the anti-elitist origins of the SMP as an alternative to the mainstream consensus politics and depicts the PS as carrying the SMP's flame (Soini, 2008, 2014). This crystallizes in supporting the small and marginalized in society:

[I]t begins with traditional norms of an agrarian society [...] family, religion, honesty, hard work, supporting small businesses, resisting corruption and bureaucracy, resisting large units and big money, as well as brutally blocking the power of (elite) society. (Soini, 2020, p. 10)

The first general programme of the PS from 1995 is instructive in setting out Soini's narrative framework and in setting the first equilibrium of the story. The programme is based on the values of 'Christian-social thinking', Finnish sovereignty, and targets the political elite, the European Union and the liberal cultural elite as the villains of the story and the cause of the plight of the ordinary Finnish people (Perussuomalaiset, 1995).

Immigration is a prickly issue for Soini's narrative. Whilst recognizing the challenges of immigration is an important part of the narrative of challenging mainstream consensus, at the same time Soini makes it very clear that he is constantly firefighting against the image of the PS being a single-issue party focusing on immigration:

For some people PS supporter is interchangeable with anti-immigration. That bothers me. (Soini, 2013, loc. 1569)

This is not to say that immigration plays no part in his narrative. For example, under no circumstances should multiculturalism be protected at the expense of Finnish culture, because a system that fosters 'cultures within culture' is likely to drive Finnish culture towards an 'endangered position' (Perussuomalaiset, 2007). Yet, it is presented as one issue among many, one that highlights the primacy of Finnish culture over others, and never as a high priority.

We can see that even as Soini dominates the party narrative there exists an undercurrent that is priming the critique of immigration and multi-culturalism that has been the hallmark of Halla-aho. We see this as an alternative form of speaking truth to power, as presented below.

Speaking truth to power: Halla-aho and the anti-immigrant narrative of the party

The origins of the immigration-focused populist narrative predate Halla-aho's leadership. In this sense, the change in 2015 was less a sudden shock than a culmination of a longer-term transition. Already in 2010, Halla-aho, along with 12 other PS municipal government representatives, published their own 'Dour election manifesto' (*Nuiva vaalimanifesti*), which focused solely on the issue of immigration and the failures of multiculturalism and contemporary immigration policy. It stated:

[I]mmigration is one of the most important current and future political questions. The social and economic consequences of the bad immigration policies will be fatal for Finland, and we are running out of time to change course [...] negative phenomena such as asylum tourism and the shameless exploitation of the Finnish innocence must receive a dour response. (Perussuomalaiset, 2010)

The manifesto sets the scene for the immigration-focused populist narrative that pits immigration as the central battle ground between the people and the elite. From 2011 onwards, we can see this alternative narrative begin to take more definite shape within the PS. It is visible in the immigration policy programme, penned by Halla-aho for the 2015 parliamentary elections (Perussuomalaiset, 2015). We can therefore see that the groundwork for diverging narrative pathways had been laid even before the PS reaches government.

Narrative change and disruption: Party in Government

All stories need a change of state, and here the catalyst of change is the act of joining government. Soini adapts his narrative, moving away from being in opposition and speaking truth to power, a move we have

named ‘Making tough decisions’, alluding to the compromises that challenge their populist storytelling agenda. A rift appears in the party, voiced by Halla-aho who challenges the credibility of the leadership by exposing the lack of emphasis on anti-immigration policies, a narrative we have labelled as ‘The emperor’s new clothes’.

Making tough decisions: Soini and the narrative of ‘shaping the agenda’

In this version of the narrative the rift between the PS and the mainstream is reconciled: They both share a common interest in ensuring a prosperous and successful Finland. Moreover, the PS and its leadership in particular are depicted as characters who have grown up and are now ready to take responsibility. In this narrative the interests of its key constituencies—the rural populations and the urban working classes—are no longer separated out from the rest, but rather their interests are best protected by ensuring that Finnish social and economic interests in general are protected.

After the 2015 parliamentary elections the narrative of the PS shifts noticeably. The narrative needs to make sense of the decision to join the coalition government and accept five ministerial appointments. The narrative shifts from situating the party outside the corridors of power, to one that highlights the importance of working hard for voters in order to have policy impact and deliver results. Soini also make sense of his own role as someone who was not being taken seriously by the mainstream but who kept working hard to represent the marginalized voices:

[...] if someone had told me that [...] I would become the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, they’d been sent to a room with soft walls. [...] For the first six years as the party leader I threw water on cold sauna stones. Any rational person would have given up. (Soini, 2016, pp. 10–11)

The narrative pits the party elite against the mainstream political elite, working for a set of issues nobody else would take seriously and that other parties refuse to represent. It is a story of persistence and resilience, driving forward the policy agenda of ordinary Finnish people. First, the drift away from the original framing of the party narrative was justified by a logic of doing what it takes to govern well. Once in government, a key part of the job was to develop government policy. This position is clear throughout the 2015-2017 period and is particularly highlighted by the 2017 leadership elections. For example, Simon Elo, PS parliamentarian and a staunch supporter of Soini, justifies the compromises and working together with others:

The collective interests of the fatherland take priority over own interests [...] I don’t want to just talk, but to generate results. And those we are creating at a steady pace. (Elo, 2017)

The party narrative is no longer about speaking truth to power and challenging the elite. Instead, it attempts to justify the veering off from the original policy narrative as a necessary bargain:

This is not the time to rock the boat. We are not looking for any kind of revolution. We have a job to do. (Soini, 2017a)

Second, the drift away from the core narrative is described as having the determination to act responsibly and take tough decisions:

We went into government. We took responsibility. This government has improved growth and reduced unemployment. (Soini, 2017b)

The narrative of the party leadership explains the move into mainstream as a daring move. The party continues to work for the benefit of the vulnerable working classes and owners of small businesses, but their modus operandi has shifted from being located outside the corridors of power, and ‘speaking truth to power’, to an enterprising narrative where priority is on ‘getting things done’ through negotiation,

compromise and consensus politics. The broad agenda is also highlighted through contrasts with the single-issue focus of the more anti-immigrant minded faction within the party:

I have told our young men that if you have no issues other than immigration, your agenda is not very long. You are young men, you already have families, where is your social policy, your education policy? I am little annoyed that our young men are so far on the right, because I have never been. (Soini, 2013, loc. 1479)

You need all three pillars: democracy, rule of law and the traditions of Christian faith. If we give this up, and pursue a populist-xenophobic style, this party will drop to five percent, and deserves it. Who needs that kind of party? (Soini, 2013, loc. 2169)

Emperor's new clothes: Halla-aho and the narrative of 'exposing the truth'

In this narrative, Halla-aho, along with other like-minded PS members cast the PS elite (the PS ministers and party leadership) as characters who have drunk the government Kool-Aid, sold out, and are out of touch with the rank-and-file members of the party. This narrative gains largely a singular focus in the issue of immigration. While many of the party members see this as the most important policy issue, the PS elite has joined the mainstream elite in ignoring this. Rather than exposing the truth about immigration, the PS elite is actively downplaying the issue. The PS elite no longer represents the people. Soon after the 2015 election, in July Halla-aho questions the decision to join government in his Facebook posts:

Once again I have been forced to ponder what is the point of being in the centre and at the table making decisions if the highest virtue is to agree with the real, or imagined, majority. After all, Finland in general and the Finns Party supporters in particular can agree with the majority if they wish, even if we were not sitting in the centre ourselves. (Halla-aho, 2015a)

Not only does this jar against the anti-elite credential of the party, it also compromises the ability of the party to speak truth to power, which manifests itself in a resistance to maintain an active focus on the negative impact of immigration. In October of the same year, commenting on the imminent decision to expel PS MP Oras Tynkkynen who had been highly critical of the PS leadership for towing the government line on immigration, Halla-aho states:

Separating critics from the party is problematic in itself, at least if the party has "a high ceiling and wide walls", but it is particularly problematic if a significant proportion of the party's supporters and actors consider the criticism itself to be justified and based on the party's core platform and values. (Halla-aho, 2015b)

Halla-aho points to what he sees as the growing rift between the core values of the party leadership and its members. The most public articulation of this narrative emerges on the eve of the 2015 party conference, a celebration of the recent electoral success as well as the 20-year anniversary since the founding of the party in 1995. Olli Immonen, a PS MP wrote a Facebook post (in English) that described multiculturalism as the main threat to the Finnish nation:

I'm dreaming of a strong, brave nation that will defeat this nightmare called multiculturalism. This ugly bubble that our enemies live in, will soon enough burst into a million little pieces. Our lives are entwined in a [sic.] very harsh times. These are the days, that will forever leave a mark on our nations [sic.] future. I have strong belief in my fellow fighters. We will fight until the end for our homeland and one true Finnish nation. The victory will be ours. (Immonen, 2015)

The party's formal response was muted, with little formal commentary in favour or against, demonstrating the trickiness of the political terrain the party leadership was navigating. With the party ranks firmly in

support of Immonen, and the rest of the governing coalition strictly opposed to his views, the space for manoeuvring was limited, and moving with minimal fuss seen as the best option. Halla-aho, however, spoke directly to the issue at the party conference:

The fact that a person is a Member of Parliament is an indication they have chosen parliamentary means. The enemies of democracy include ... politicians who do not respect the will of the people as expressed in elections [...] Europe is currently facing unprecedented migratory pressures [...] The political pressure on countries like Finland is intense, but it is difficult times that require leadership and political will. That is what our voters expect of us. People vote for us because we are the alternative. They will vote for us only as long as we are an alternative. (quoted in Nurmi, 2020, p. 123)

We can see that the clash of narratives of governing in the interest of people versus protecting the people against threats from outside (migration) and inside (multi-cultural elites). We can see that these narratives are very much impossible to reconcile and prepare the path of the split.

The next equilibrium: The split of the party

The story concludes with the split of party into two—one bent on continuing governing and the other on being in opposition. Here Soini doubles down on his vision and aim to represent the true and original vision of the party, anchored in SMP populism. We call this narrative ‘Uncompromising’. Alternatively, Halla-aho aligns more closely with peoples’ fears and desires, a story we call ‘Representing peoples’ concerns’ focused on highlights the old party elite as being out of touch.

Uncompromising: Doubling down on the foundation narrative

This narrative sees Soini reinforcing his decision to split away from the PS by distinguishing between the mature and responsible approach of the splinter group that remained in government and the naïve and inexperienced approach demonstrated by the new PS leadership. It does so by first, continuously highlighting the positive policy results associated with Soini’s decision to join government, and second, by highlighting the difference between what the party has become and what it used to be. This second aspect mainly focuses on the complete erosion of the SMP legacy, which has been replaced by a single-issue obsession with migration. For example on his blog, in an entry from 2018 where he looks to justify his actions as a party leader taking PS into government, Soini argues that:

I led the PS to electoral success again in 2015. Finland was in a period of economic and operational stagnation. For the sake of the motherland, a change of direction was needed. [...] As a responsible leader, I could not allow the party to drift into the margins and let the losers rule. The party was about to embark on a programme of government that was demanding. [...] Unfortunately, at the party conference in summer 2017, the party took a new line. The parliamentary group broke up as a result. I was not a candidate. When I was I always won. When I wasn't, the party fell apart. The Blue Party was born, determined to stick to what had been mutually agreed. Finland will be lifted out of the mire, and it will rise. [...] [T]he Ministry of Finance announced that the government will achieve all its key objectives. [...] Employment will rise, the economy will grow, debt will be reduced... not everything will be fixed, but it will get better, and that is what we have set out to do. The price has been high. I took the party into government because that's what a party is for, to influence and make decisions. Let's take responsibility. (Soini, 2018)

Secondly, Soini continues to draw the contrast between his legacy as a PS leader and Halla-aho’s record. For example, he argues:

The party did not split because of ministerial appointments. It split because we, who left, refused to be in a party led by Jussi Halla-aho. That's what it was about [...] a party that is led through an anti-immigrant world view and morals is an impossibility for me. Immigration has not been the question for me. I have a different view of humanity, and for me it's an impossible thought to hate another human being... (quoted in Nurmi, 2017, pp. 142–143)

Representing peoples' concerns: Doubling down on the narrative of immigration

This narrative brings together the prioritisation of immigration as a policy issue and the need to respond to the democratic demand from supporters to focus on immigration.

Following Halla-aho's election, the story of how the first equilibrium is disrupted is focused almost completely on the negative consequences of immigration. The social policy programme prepared for the 2019 parliamentary elections offers a good illustration of this shift. Whereas the 2015 social policy refers to immigration 19 times in a 15-page document, in 2019 there are 71 references to immigration in a 14-page document (Perussuomalaiset 2015; 2019). In fact, the central logic of the 2019 document is to argue that the Finnish welfare state will only be affordable if we limit immigrants' access to it. Finland needs to focus on 'internal solidarity' and refrain from 'collecting more people needing help into our country'. Immigration, according to the document has 'entrapped the Finnish welfare state' (2019, p. 3). The relationship between immigration and welfare follows a simple but clear arithmetic—more immigration equals regressive welfare:

We want to emphasise that the more immigration there is, the more impossible it will become to maintain good social security, good terms of employment and good wage development. (2019, p. 4)

[I]t seems that most decision makers in fact want more poverty, class differences, and people living on social security, since they support immigration that is harmful to us. (2019, p. 4)

This disruption to the equilibrium is caused by the elite's careless prioritization of immigration at the expense of everything else, particularly the welfare of ordinary working-class Finns. There is a serious misalignment of priorities, of which migration is the most important one, but that also include the environment and sexuality. It is a case of misspending limited resources on fringe issues that are not in the best interest of ordinary Finnish people, and which is resulting in an ever-deepening cultural and socioeconomic crisis. Situating Finnish interests and immigration in an antagonistic relationship is an explicit and deliberate narrative strategy. As the main party programme document for the 2019 elections argues:

Confrontation is necessary because these things are in opposition to each other. Immigration into Finland makes it impossible to maintain [...] a good Finland. (Perussuomalaiset, 2019, p. 4)

We have a mandate from half a million Finns, but we have to be able to interpret the message and guidelines contained within that mandate, or, rather, the common denominator within half a million messages: the hard core of the PS. [...] Interpreting that message and applying it every day is the most important mission of party leadership. (Halla-Aho, 2021)

Halla-aho recaptures the populist narrative logic through migration. It returns to a clear antagonistic framing of the elite as the villains who allow multiculturalism and lax immigration policy run amok, and the people as the underserving victims of policies that prioritise the interests of migrants at the expense of the Finnish people. Immigration become a central sense-making tool that is used to articulate the alternative party narrative.

Concluding discussion

In their influential intervention on the study of right-wing populism in power, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) leave us with the lesson that ‘while populist parties naturally suffer setbacks from time to time, there is nothing to suggest that they are *destined* to be “flash-in-the-pan” parties’, but rather, ‘they have in many ways become like other parties’ and are able to ‘act “responsible” in a variety of ways without laying aside their radical rhetoric’. Moreover, even party members supported the view that policy compromises were justified as long as this meant progress on other important issues: ‘if you stay out of government, you cannot do anything’. They conclude that ‘*it is not inevitable* that populist leaders will fail to carry their members with them when they take power’. (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015, pp. 165–175.)

The case of the PS shows a somewhat different trajectory, suggesting that at least under certain conditions right-wing populists remain a special case when it comes to government responsibility. On the one hand, the failure of PS to leverage political power for its benefit may be explained by the changes in party membership that stemmed from the electoral success. The new younger and more immigration-aware members eventually outnumbered the older, SMP-minded supporters, leading to the leadership changes we describe. On the other hand, our findings show that when faced with a choice between two narrative strategies, the response was to support the one that is more populist and intrinsically aligned with the core story of what the party is about. In particular, the case of the PS highlights the importance of narrative credibility.

How should we think about this narrative credibility? How is it achieved? It may be that such stories that make sense of the role and purpose of populist political parties possess what in narratology is referred to as ‘tellability’; the ‘quality that makes stories inherently worth telling’ (Ryan, 2005, p. 757). In the case of populist politics as storytelling (cf. Polletta et al., 2011), the tellability of the story elicits some connection to a ‘core populist narrative about good people reclaiming power from corrupt elites is rooted in evocative stories drawing on mythical pasts, crisis-driven presents, and utopian futures’ (Taş, 2022, p. 2). Populism can be understood as a way of developing a story with tellability, complete with authentic heroes, villains and plotlines promising change, collectively constructing a credible narrative that brings together the party, its members, and future success.

Additionally, narrative credibility might also depend on the *ethos* of the storyteller. Deriving from Aristotle treatise, *On Rhetoric*, *ethos* refers to the ability of the storyteller to garner credence among a chosen audience. Gaffney (2017), in his work on the Labour Party in the UK argues that *ethos* is key to understand how party leaders build a connection with the party, suggesting that ‘*ethos*’ has become the ‘aim’ of political rhetoric and what the speakers intends to convey is their direct relationship ‘to normative issues, to emotion, to argument, and, especially to audience [...] this is how, performatively, the leader aspires to “embody” the party’ (2017, p. 16–17). Narrative choices play a key part in conveying the *ethos*, the credibility of a given story as they determine the usefulness of the story as a sensemaking device (Gee, 1999). A storytelling perspective, therefore, points to the importance of having a credible truth-telling narrative that aligns with the core narrative of what the party is about.

The relationship between the truth-telling party leader and their party is complex, nuanced and ambivalent. In the populist literature the leader is often seen as a ‘performer’ and the party acts as the stage, or vehicle, for that individual. By focusing on the narrative perspective to populism (Ungureanu & Popartan, 2020), we highlight the close interplay between the story of the leader and the story of the party, and show how, in the case of the PS the story about joining government and wielding political power through political office proved ultimately less persuasive than the existing populist story of what the party was about, speaking truth to power and representing the views of its members.

Endnotes

¹ The Finns Party used to be known by the English translation ‘True Finns’, but this was changed in 2011. The change was explained as an effort to avoid the confusion caused by alternative translations, such as ‘Basic Finns’ and ‘Normal Finns’.

² The terms ‘storytelling’ and ‘narrative’ are often used interchangeably in the literature with no clear distinction in meaning. Here we refer to ‘storytelling’ as the performance and articulation of the narrative, and to ‘narrative’ as the patterns of text organised to depict reality in a certain way.

References

- Arditi, B. (2007). *Politics on the edges of liberalism: Difference, populism, revolution, agitation*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (2015). *Populists in power*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315725789>
- Arter, D. (2010). The breakthrough of another West European populist radical right party? The case of the True Finns. *Government and Opposition*, 45(4), 484–504. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2010.01321.x>
- Bronk, R., & Jacoby, W. (2020). The epistemics of populism and the politics of uncertainty. *LSE ‘Europe in Question’ Discussion Paper Series*, No. 152/2020. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/103492>
- Bustikova, L. (2014). Revenge of the radical right. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(12), 1738–1765. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013516069>
- Caiani, M., & Graziano, P. (2022). The three faces of populism in power: Polity, policies and politics. *Government and Opposition*, 57(4), 569–588. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.4>
- Czarniawska, B. (1998). *A narrative approach to organization studies*. Sage. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412983235>
- Czarniawska, B. (2000). *The uses of narrative in organization research*. Gothenburg Research Institute. <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/2997>
- Durnova, A., & Zittoun, P. (2011). Interpretive policy analysis in a French setting: The Fifth Interpretive Policy Analysis Conference, Grenoble, June 2010. *Critical Policy Studies*, 5(2), 103–05. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2011.576518>
- Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 532–550. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258557>
- Eisenhardt, K.M., & Graebner, M.E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(2), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888>
- Enävaara, R. (1979). *Unohdetun kansan puolesta. SMP 20 vuotta 1959-1979* [For a forgotten people. SMP 20 years 1959-1979]. Suomen Maaseudun Puolue.
- Gaffney, J. (2017). *Leadership and the Labour Party: Narrative and performance*. Palgrave.
- Gee, J.P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.
- Halla-aho, J. (2015a, July 16). *Tässä on taas ollut pakko miettiä sitä kysymystä, että mitä iloa on olla ytimissä ja päättävissä pöydissä...* [Once again I have been forced to ponder what is the point of being in the centre and at the table making decisions...] [Status update]. Facebook. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0oauRhMbnhuYFePVar5zxnZbnbe7ACgyJMak3AtZjDXoo2cMBwQNaD9GujazM33Vel&id=100003306096376
- Halla-aho, J. (2015b, October 26). *Ottamatta nyt sen enempiä kantaa näytelmän osapuoliin muistelen puheenjohtajamme eri yhteyksissä teroittaneen, että sillä on väliä, miltä asiat NÄYTTÄVÄT.* [Without taking more of a stand on the different actors in the play I remember our chairman stressing on various occasions that it matters what things LOOK like...] [Status update]. Facebook. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0oauRhMbnhuYFePVar5zxnZbnbe7ACgyJMak3AtZjDXoo2cMBwQNaD9GujazM33Vel&id=100003306096376

- [com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02ufm9WBfYgB2UnK2dV97mNAwtTagFHVruqqH1GZfmeiL5pd-fJZEHyJbmgaxXTnB6l&id=100003306096376](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02ufm9WBfYgB2UnK2dV97mNAwtTagFHVruqqH1GZfmeiL5pd-fJZEHyJbmgaxXTnB6l&id=100003306096376)
- Halla-aho, J. (2017, June 6). *Puheenjohtaja Halla-ahon linjapuhe Jyväskylässä*. Perussuomalaiset. <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/ajankohtaista/puheenjohtaja-halla-ahon-linjapuhe-jyvaskylassa/>
- Halla-aho, J. (2021). *Jussi Halla-aho luopuu PS:n puheenjohtajuudesta* [Jussi Halla-aho gives up PS leadership] [Video]. ILTV. <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/aa8babe6-6417-4a5c-871e-d562a187251c>
- Heinisch, R. (2003). Success in opposition—failure in government: Explaining the performance of right-wing populist parties in public office. *West European Politics*, 26(3), 91–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380312331280608>
- Immonen, O. (2015, July 2015). *I'm dreaming of a strong, brave nation that will defeat this nightmare called multiculturalism. [...] [Facebook post]*. <https://www.facebook.com/334608399882600/posts/im-dreaming-of-a-strong-brave-nation-that-will-defeat-this-nightmare-called-mult/1072540946089338/>
- Jaworski, A., & Coupland, N. (2000). Introduction: Perspectives on discourse analysis. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The Discourse Reader* (pp. 1–35). Routledge.
- Johnstone, N. (2010). Discourse Analysis (linguistics). In Herman, D., Jahn, M. & Ryan, M-L., (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory* (pp. 183–188). Routledge.
- Keller, R. (2005). *Wissensoziologische Diskursanalyse. Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms* [Discourse analysis in the sociology of knowledge. Foundation of a research program]. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Koller, V. (2005) Critical discourse analysis and social cognition: Evidence from business media discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 16(2), 199–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926505049621>
- Koschorke, A., & Golb, J. (2018). *Fact and fiction. Elements of a general theory of narrative*. De Gruyter.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. Verso.
- Mény, Y., & Surel, Y. (2002). The constitutive ambiguity of populism. In Y. Mény & Y. Surel (Eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (pp. 1–21). Palgrave.
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The global rise of populism. Performance, political style and representation*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqsd8>
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(3), 541–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>
- Mudde, C. (2010). The populist radical right: A pathological normalcy. *West European Politics*, 33(6), 1167–1186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2010.508901>
- Nordensvärd, J., & Ketola, M. (2019). Rethinking the consumer metaphor versus the citizen metaphor: Frame merging and higher education reform in Sweden. *Social Policy and Society*, 18(4), 555–575. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746418000465>
- Nordensvärd, J., & Ketola, M. (2022). Populism as an act of storytelling: Analyzing the climate change narratives of Donald Trump and Greta Thunberg as populist truth-tellers. *Environmental Politics*, 31(5), 861–882. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1996818>
- Nurmi, L. (2017). *Perussuomalaisten hajoamisen historia* [History of the break-up of the Finns Party]. Into.
- Nurmi, L. (2020). *Jussi Halla-aho: Epävirallinen elämäkerta* [Jussi Halla-aho: An Unofficial Biography]. Into.
- Ochs, E. (1998). Narrative. In T.A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as structure and process / Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction, Volume 1* (pp. 185–207). Sage Publications.
- Oliver, J.E., & Rahn, W.M. (2016). Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 667(1), 189–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716216662639>
- Perussuomalaiset. (1995). *Yleisohjelma* [The General Programme]. Perussuomalaiset. <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/puolueen-yleisohjelma-1995/>
- Perussuomalaiset. (2007). *Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma* [Finns Party Parliamentary Election

- Programme]. Perussuomalaiset. http://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Perussuomalaisten_eduskuntavaaliohjelma_2007.pdf
- Perussuomalaiset. (2010). *Nuiva vaalimanifesti* [Dour election manifesto]. Perussuomalaiset.
- Perussuomalaiset. (2015). *Maahanmuuttopoliittinen ohjelma* [Programme for immigration policy]. Perussuomalaiset. <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Maahanmuuttopoliittinen.pdf>
- Perussuomalaiset. (2019). *Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma* [Finns Party parliamentary election programme]. Perussuomalaiset. <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Eduskuntavaaliohjelma-2019.pdf>
- Polletta, F.B., Chen, P.C.B., Gardner, B.G., & Motes, A. (2011) The sociology of storytelling. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 109–130. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150106>
- Ricoeur, P. (1983). On interpretation. In A. Montefiore (Ed.) *Philosophy in France today* (pp. 175–197). Cambridge University Press.
- Rooduijn, M., de Lange, S.L., & van der Brug, W. (2014). A populist zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe. *Party Politics*, 20(4), 563–575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811436065>
- Ryan, M-L. (2005). Tellability. In D. Herman, M. Jahn, & Ryan M-L. (Eds.), *The Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory* (pp. 589–591). Routledge.
- Soini, T. (2008). *Maisterisjätkä* [The Bloke with a Masters]. WSOY.
- Soini, T. (2014) *Peruspomo* [The Everyday Boss]. WSOY.
- Soini T. (2017a, June 20) *Isänmaan Asialla* [On Behalf of the Fatherland]. Maaseudun Tulevaisuus [Future of the Countryside]. <http://www.maaseuduntulevaisuus.fi/mielipiteet/vieraskolumnit/is%C3%A4nmaan-asialla-1.196404>
- Soini, T. (2017b, June 23) *Aina väärin kuitenkin oikein* [Always wrong yet right]. Ploki [Blog]. <http://timosoini.fi/2017/06/aina-vaarin-kuitenkin-oikein/>
- Soini, T. (2018, April 14). *Olin oikeassa – Mitä sitten?* [I was right – So what?]. Ploki [Blog]. <http://timosoini.fi/2018/04/olin-oikeassa-mita-sitten/>
- Soini, T. (2020). *Populismi* [Populism]. Pole-kuntatiето.
- Stanley, B. (2008). The thin ideology of populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13, 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822289>
- Sudgen, E. (2019, April 12). *There are dark stirrings in Brexiteers' sudden fixation with poetry*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/12/brexiteers-poetry-epic-quest-eliot-tennyson-years-brexiteers>
- Taş, H. (2022). The chronopolitics of national populism. *Identities*, 29(2), 127–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2020.1735160>
- Tebble, A.J. (2006). Exclusion for democracy. *Political Theory*, 34(4), 463–487.
- Ungureanu, C., & Popartan, A. (2020). Populism as narrative, myth making and the ‘logic’ of political emotions. *Journal of the British Academy*, 8(s1): 37–43. <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/008s1.037>
- Van der Brug, W., & Mughan, A. (2007). Charisma, leader effects and support for right-wing populist parties. *Party Politics*, 13(1), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068806071260>
- Herman, L., & Vervaeck, B. (2019). *Handbook of narrative analysis*. University of Nebraska Press. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118458204>
- Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946268>
- Zaslave, A. (2008). Here to stay? Populism as a new party type. *European Review*, 16(3), 319–36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798708000288>
- Zulianello, M. (2020). Varieties of populist parties and party systems in Europe: From state-of-the-art to the application of a novel classification scheme to 66 parties in 33 countries. *Government and Opposition*, 55(2), 327–347. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.21>

Author biographies

Markus Ketola, PhD, is Senior Lecturer in Global and International Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh, UK. Previously, he was a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Ulster University. His research interests include policy narratives, storytelling and far-right populist approaches to welfare politics.

Johan Nordensvärd, Dr. rer. pol., is Associate professor / Docent at the Division in Political Science at Department of Management and Engineering (IEI). He has previously worked as a Senior Lecturer in Political Science at Uppsala University and Stockholm University, and as a Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Southampton. Johan's work focuses on the intersection of environmental politics, international development and social policy, especially regarding sustainability, innovation and energy policy. He also does research on politics and policies of populist nationalist discourse.