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Has Europe's Far Right Turned on Putin?

A Study of European Far Right Parties and Their Support for Russia After the Ukraine Invasion

Master's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Anna Brigevid

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Abstract

This thesis studies the affinity of far right parties towards Russia. More specifically The Finnish Perussuomalaiset (PS) and the French Rassemblement National (RN). The thesis asks the question of what their stance is on Russia today and how their politics have changed since the war in Ukraine. To do this the thesis has based its expectations on a paper by Jakub Wondreys that mapped where all European far right parties stood on the Russia-issue in 2023. The thesis also looks at the how proximity, contiguity and territoriality relate to the PS and the RN's Russia-affinity. To do this the thesis has employed content and discourse analysis on a dataset that was gathered from prominent political figures in both parties. The results and conclusion of the thesis was that there was not much change from Wondreys' results and that proximity, contiguity, and territoriality do play a role in shaping foreign policy and opinions about Russia.

Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen studerer favøren ytre høyre partier har til Russland. Mer spesifikt det Finske Perussuomalaiset (PS) og de Franske Rassemblement National (RN). Avhandlingen stiller spørsmål om hva som er disse partiene sitt ståsted på Russland i dag og hvordan politikken deres har endret seg siden krigen i Ukraina brøt ut. For å løse dette baserte avhandlingen seg på en artikkel av Jakub Wondreys som kartla hvor alle de europeisk ytre-høyre partiene stod på Russland spørsmålet i 2023. Avhandlingen ser også på hvordan nærhet, grenser, og territorialitet relaterer til PS og RNs Russland-affinitet. For å oppdage om det er en relasjon har avhandlingen brukt innhold og diskurs-analyse på et datasett som var samlet fra prominente politiske figurer fra de respektive partiene. Resultatene og konklusjonen av avhandlingen var at det ikke var mye forandring fra Wondreys sine resultater i tillegg til at nærhet, grenser og territorialitet spiller faktisk en rolle i formingen av utenrikspolitikk samt meninger om Russland.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been the culmination of five years of work. I have been studying European studies since 2019 and for my bachelor's thesis I wrote about the far right. I found it very interesting to study such a counterforce in today's society. And with good help and guidance from my supervisor Anna Brigevich on my BA I knew I wanted to write about the far right again. And thankfully Anna wanted to help me again for the MA thesis, so thank you very much all your good help and for wanting to be my supervisor two(!) studies. You have my deepest gratitude.

I also have to thank the translators for their insight and work. My two good friends Erik Maximillian and Teodor for translating and verifying my results with the French tweets that were a bit too difficult for the translation tools to decipher. And to Mira and her husband Barry for their help with the Finnish tweets.

This work would not have been possible without your help and for that I am eternally grateful.

And of course, I must thank my parents and the rest of the family for their love and support. Motivating me to keep going when the going got tough.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Sammendrag	2
Acknowledgements	3
List of Tables	7
List of Abbreviations	7
1. Introduction	9
2. The Far Right Today	11
3. Theoretical Framework.....	17
3.1 Realism	17
3.2 Proximity to Russia	18
3.2.1 Historical Proximity and Contiguity	18
3.3 Hypotheses	22
4. War in Ukraine	23
4.1 Context: War in Ukraine	23
4.2 Public Perception to the War in Ukraine	23
4.3 Finland and France: Russia Relations in a Historical Context	27
4.3.1 Finland’s Change in Alliance Policy	27
4.3.2 France-Russia Relations	28
5. Method	30
5.1 What is Discourse and Content Analysis?	30
5.1.1 Discourse Analysis	30
5.1.2 Content Analysis	31
5.2 Case Selection	31
5.3 Measuring Far Right Parties’ Positions on Russia	33
5.4 Coding scheme and strategy	35
5.4.1 The Coding Scheme	35
5.5 Potential Limitations and Validity Checks	39
6. Content Analysis: France, Finland, and Russia-affinity	40
6.1 France.....	40
6.1.2 Before war results.....	41
6.2 Finland	46
6.2.2 Before war results.....	46
6.2.1 After war results	47
7. A (Short) Discourse Analysis	49
7.1 Tweets From the RN	49
7.2 Tweets From the PS.....	51
8. Conclusion	53

8.1 Limitations	54
8.2 Avenues for Further Research.....	54
Bibliography	56
Appendix A Translation Guide	62

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Household approval ratings for economic sanctions (left) and sending arms (right) 24
- Figure 2. The most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia..... 25
- Figure 3. Which of the following best reflect your view on what Europe should do about the war in Ukraine more broadly? 26
- Figure 4 Educational Attainment Among 25-64-Year-Olds (2022) 32
- Figure 5. France and Finland Direct Comparison 32
- Figure 6. Far-Right parties' positions on Russia 33
- Figure 7. Positions of far-right parties on responsibility for the 2022 Russian (re)invasion of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia 34
- Figure 8. RN Before War Results..... 41
- Figure 9. RN share of self-promotion tweets from before the war 42
- Figure 10. RN After War Results 43
- Figure 11. RN After War Ceasefire Frequency 44
- Figure 12. PS Before war Results 46
- Figure 13. PS After War Results..... 47
- Figure 14. PS After war Results Main Categories..... 48

List of Tables

- Table 1. Coding categories 36
- Table 2. Total number of tweets and percentage of relevant ones 38

List of Abbreviations

- EU: European Union
- MEP: Member of the European Parliament
- RN: *Rassemblement National* (National Rally)
- PS: *Perussuomalaiset* (Finns Party (formerly True Finns))
- CSDP: Common Security and Defense Policy
- CFSP: Common foreign and Security Policy
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- USA: United States of America
- PfP: Partnership for Peace
- IFOR: Implementation Force
- SFOR: Stabilization Force
- KFOR: Kosovo Force
- EAPC: Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
- FIS: Finnish Immigration Service
- GSP: Generalized System of Preferences

1. Introduction

The Far Right, or Radical Right parties have been on the rise for the last decade. Their ideology of countering the current state of the world has convinced voters all around the world. Talking about politics and world views are healthy actions, but turning to exclusion, conspiracy and violence instead is the reason they have earned the categorization of 'radical'. Returning to the way it was "before" is a cornerstone of the far right ideology. Then it should come as no surprise that several of Europe's far right parties have always been a supporter of Russia's President Vladimir Putin (Gyori, 2023, Reuters, 2023). But perhaps not anymore. Ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the far right parties of Europe have been remarkably silent about their previous support for Putin. Some seem to have revoked their support, while others have maintained their support. It is a phenomenon that has been scarcely researched, with only a handful of researchers examining this issue. Because of this, wild claims like 'Putin using the far right to influence European politics' is something that can sometimes be overlooked. That is why this thesis is going to study the far right-Putin connection and uncover how they see him and his country today. In addition to discovering how far right politics have changed in regard to their foreign policy, and more specifically, Russia. Far right foreign policy is therefore something that the thesis is focusing on. Due to there not being much research in this field. Most far right research has been conducted on their domestic policies which makes sense due to there not being that many far right parties in power, however, most research on European far right foreign policy has to do with euroscepticism and this is where this thesis differentiates itself. By focusing solely on their foreign policy towards Russia and not towards any other country or organization. This thesis will use existing work to base itself off of. More specifically, an article by Jakub Wondreys (2023) titled "Putin's Puppets in the West". This article will be discussed further later; however, it highlights the opinion all European far right parties had on Russia in 2023. This thesis uses Wondreys' article as its foundation and intends to build upon it. So instead of studying all European far right parties, the thesis will instead focus on two cases. The Finnish Perussuomalaiset (PS) and the French Rassemblement National (RN). These two cases are quite different even though they are both far right parties. That is because the thesis will use the theories of geographical and political proximity, contiguity, and territoriality to explain their stance on Russia today, and how it has changed from before the war.

Thus, the thesis features two research questions. The first is How does the far right view Putin today? And how has their politics changed since the start of the war? And the second question is: Have far-right parties in countries that are close/bordering Russia (Finland) become less Russia friendly after the war? And how has that affected countries that are not as close (France)?

To adequately answer these research questions, the thesis features an 8-chapter structure. The first chapter is the introduction, and the second chapter is how we know the far right today. This chapter first discusses what we know about the typical far right and their core beliefs. Following that is a lengthened discussion about what the state of the art in research is regarding the far right's foreign policy and how this thesis intends to fill the gap in research. Chapter 3 is the thesis' theoretical framework. Here is the theory that the thesis is going to employ in the analysis. It starts with an overview of the grand theory of Realism that is being employed and is followed by a discussion around the core concepts of proximity, contiguity, and territoriality. In chapter 4 the thesis provides additional context to the war in Ukraine featuring essential public opinion data

and a historical look into Finland's history with Russia for context. Chapter 5 is where the method of the thesis is explained. It starts with a discussion on the two methods the thesis employs, namely content and discourse analysis. Following that is an examination of Wondreys' results and what that means for the thesis. And lastly, a review of the coding scheme that the thesis used to gather data. Chapter 6 is the results. This chapter is the results and the content analysis portion of the thesis. This chapter is going to reveal the results from the data gathering and discusses them in light of the theoretical framework. The next chapter is a shorter chapter that is about the discourse analysis. This chapter looks at a handful of tweets that show anomalous or interesting characteristics and analyzes them in accordance with the theoretical framework and research questions. the last chapter, numbered 8, is the conclusion. This chapter features a summation of the thesis' arguments, concluding thoughts, limitations to the study and possible future avenues of research. This structure should ensure an easy-to-follow, logical and convincing read for the readers.

2. The Far Right Today

For a literature review for this type of research question, it would be hard to find any secondary sources on how the far-right parties stand on Putin today. That is why this literature review will mostly be focused on how they stood on the issue before the war in Ukraine in order to establish their historic view on Putin. Having that in mind, the thesis has identified several areas of research that are important to answering the research question. The first one is what “tenets” a far-right party has. It would be prudent for the thesis to clarify the different beliefs that a typical far-right party has before delving into the more specified areas of the topic. This is also where the thesis will introduce the technical terms that the thesis will rely on later. The second area is the research that correlates Russia and European far-right parties. This area is quite large as it tackles both the relationship between the parties and Moscow and the themes and ideas that they agree on. These themes and ideas being: Anti-Americanism, ethnic nation-state, the reclamation of lost territory, and family values. Focusing on additional themes would jeopardize the depth of the thesis and will thusly not be included. Since a plethora of research has already been conducted on the far right and their domestic policies in addition to how they position themselves domestically and at the EU level, this thesis will rather position itself at the forefront of what we have yet to learn about the far right: their foreign policy. Compared to the research on domestic policies, far right foreign policy has been somewhat overlooked due to, historically, not many far right parties being in power. However, in last decade Europe has seen many far right parties come to power and with that, research is catching up. This section will first encompass what we currently know about the far right. First there will be a discussion around what we generally perceive to be ‘far right’, and after that follows a review of what we currently know about far right foreign policy.

Cas Mudde’s work on far right parties is essential to include. Seeing as he is a leading researcher on the topic. In his book *The far Right Today*, Cas Mudde presents the main characteristics of the far right. He explains far right support through four main elements (or policy areas): Immigration, security, corruption and foreign policy (Mudde, 2019, p. 30). The thesis is not really concerned with how they gain support and power, but rather their foreign policy. So, while the other elements of the far-right agenda are certainly important, the thesis will be more concerned with foreign policy. Putin friendliness is of course deep within the realm of foreign policy so that is what is most interesting for the thesis. However, the section on foreign policy only gives a general overview of far-right foreign policy. Meaning that they are generally against supranational organizations, divided on how the world should be ordered, intent on strengthening their own country in the anarchic international arena, and obsess with reclaiming lost territory (Mudde, 2019, p. 38). The reclamation of lost territory is what a lot of far-right parties admire in Putin. This begs the question of why they have been so quiet about Russia’s attempt to “reclaim” territories in Ukraine when they generally are in favor of exactly this type of foreign policy action. For the most part researchers agree with Mudde’s statements (see Rodriguez-Aguilera, 2014), stating that far right voters vote for far-right parties because of the mistrust to the democratic system, and a feeling that conventional parties cater to organizations and high society rather than the population en masse (Rodriguez-Aguilera, 2014, p. 178). Mix this argument with xenophobia, conspiracy theories, anti-establishment populism, and ethnic exaltation of the nation and you have the vast majority of far-right parties in Europe (and the world). Xenophobia is a recurring theme that will later play into the ethnic nation-state argument. Other themes that are common

ground between Russia and Europe's far right is populism, authoritarianism, and anti-Islamism.

Populism is something that is synonymous with the far right. Populism is a term that is used about many politicians and groups throughout public discourse. But the term has seen some misuse. A definition for populism, which has been largely agreed upon by scholars as well as journalists is "a kind of platform or politician who engages in confrontational anti-establishment politics aimed at displacing the governing elites in representative liberal constitutional democracies and everything that politically enabled them" (Mueller, 2019, p. 1026). What is really the root of populism is the belief that the 'elite', which encompasses the social, economic, and political elite, is corrupt and 'evil'. Far right proponents and populists see them as the main issue with society. (Couperus, Rensmann & Tortola, 2023, p. 256). Couperus et. al. makes the relevant argument that populists seek what they call 'historical justice'. They describe this as something that radicalizes their adherents to believe in this past, and long for it.

"Populists seek [...] a profound political transformation that aspires to 'restore' an idealized past in which 'they' were not yet in power. In this lens, regaining the distant past, and social pride in it, signifies historical justice for the ahistorical collective of the 'good people'—a homogenized collective entity for which authoritarian populists claim to speak." (Couperus et. al., 2023, p. 256).

This can also be described as memory politics or historical revisionism, which takes a central role in far right rhetoric; attempting to change the past to fit to their narrative. More extreme examples of this are, for instance, when the German far right party Alternative für Deutschland "suggested that Germans should be allowed to pride themselves on 'the achievements of German soldiers in two world wars' similar to the French appreciation of Napoleon and the British admiration for Nelson and Churchill" (Couperus, Tortola & Rensmann, 2022, p. 436). However, memory politics will be discussed further in this chapter.

Authoritarianism is also a concept that speaks to the far right. More specifically nativist authoritarianism. Many far right, and indeed, normal voters has been drawn to authoritarian ideals and promises. And on the surface, authoritarianism will look appealing to those that feel like the democratic system has failed them. However, the research done on the typical far right voter suggests that they are the lower strata of the population. In other words, the average far right voter has lower levels of education and are on the poorer side of society (Brils, Muis & Gaidyte, 2020, p. 61). So, the appeal of authoritarianism seems to be reserved for them. Furthermore, subscribers to authoritarianism are typically defined as being anti-establishment and often populist and even anti-democracy. This is why many can see Valdimir Putin as a man that has applied authoritarianism and have a functioning nation to boot. Many therefore have a special affinity for Putin. Much like the Premier of Hungary Viktor Orban, who, as previously discussed, has a special relationship with Putin and stands by him every chance he gets. Orban's definition of democracy is what researchers have sometimes referred to as an 'empty democracy' or a 'pseudo-democracy' (Kovacs, 2023, p. 31). These terms are referring to Orban's Hungary where he has changed the political system to be less democratic. He has kept the existence of the parliament and elections, but diminished the rule of law and the checks and balances of the political system so he can rule by decree and without challenge from other institutions (Kovacs, 2023, p. 31). Much like Putin has done in Russia. Additionally, if the European electorate observes that this kind

of behavior does well, and even improves the nations of which it has happened with impunity from the EU or the world, more and more can see authoritarianism as viable alternative to the democracy they have today. Although one would have to be desperate to not see the advantages of democracy, authoritarianism will remain a valuable tenet for far right parties.

Conspiracy Theories and xenophobia are two fires that fuel each other. Add more of one, and the other also increases. Cas Mudde touches on this in his book *The Far Right Today*, where he links xenophobia and immigration. Immigration is a staple for all far right groups and parties. Almost every far right party in Europe as well as the world will have a thorough immigration policy, and indeed their immigration policy will be the main attraction for their party. Therefore, immigration and xenophobia, and to some extent conspiracy theories, becomes a chicken-and-egg situation, where we do not really know what came first. In other words, the causality of these three is ambiguous. Does more xenophobia lead to stricter immigration policies? Or do stricter immigration policies cause more xenophobia? Nevertheless, far right parties often proclaim that mass immigration is an existential threat to the nation (Mudde, 2019, p. 31). And more extreme far right groups and parties are more concerned about race and where the immigrants are coming from (Mudde, 2019, p. 31). This fuels into the more common conspiracy theories that are common thinktanks for far right subscribers. 'The great replacement theory', 'white genocide' and the like, are both the product and cause of xenophobia. The great replacement theory is perhaps the most prominent conspiracy theory among the arsenal the far right has. Originally popularized by French writers Jean Raspail and Renaud Camus, the theory builds upon 19th century racism and antisemitism that claims that 'the west' is being overrun by eastern and southern immigrants at the behest of western progressive left-wing politicians (Mudde, 2019, p. 31). Furthermore, followers of this theory do not believe that immigration is driven by poverty and war in other countries, but by these politicians that seek to bolster or compensate for their lost electorate by replacing their original electorate with immigrants, thereby importing voters via immigration (Mudde, 2019, p. 31). There is also a general consensus around the connection between prejudice to 'others', referring to jews and Muslims, as stated by Dyrendal: "The relatively strong relation between antisemitism and conspiracy mentality – compared with prejudice against Muslims, for instance – has been confirmed by studies on several regions" (Dyrendal, 2020, p. 188). Nevertheless, it is safe to say that xenophobia and conspiracy theories are cornerstones of the far right. After having discussed the main characteristics of the far right, discussing their foreign policy is tantamount to the relevance of this thesis. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will focus on that.

A paper that is relevant to the thesis is Makarychev's paper on the interdependency between the EU and Russia. He argues that the key groups that are susceptible to Russia's conservative agenda is the far right in western Europe. (Makarychev, 2014, p. 31). Incidentally, these are the groups that have previously proclaimed their support of Putin. So, the normative power of Russia is an interesting subject that the thesis will not explore to its full extent, but the idea of it will be entertained later. The influential factor of Russia is something that is seemingly resonating with the far-right ideology: its 'native first' policies, the restoration of the nation-state-based politics, and the regulation of migration (Makarychev, 2014, p. 31-32). The article has a realist argument about the EU-Russia relationship. Pointing out that as relations has deteriorated since the late 1990s their relationship becomes more as the realist theories sees the world and less like the (neo-) liberalists view international relations. Realism is something that will be discussed

further in the following chapter. This article is therefore relevant to the thesis as it discusses the European Far-right's role in Russian foreign policy. And that the European far-right do admire the Russian sentiment of reclaiming lost territory and creating a nation-state with one ethnicity. Admittedly, the reclamation of lost territory as a policy is only appealing to the western European far-right, as eastern European countries are not likely to share the same enthusiasm for Russia's will to reclaim the lost territories of the Soviet Union. But they have nonetheless been very supportive of Russia historically. Eastern European far-right parties supported Russia's war in Georgia in 2008, leaders from Hungarian Jobbik have a close relationship with Russia and Putin, and of course Bulgarian Ataka have been a vocal supporter of Putin's foreign policy and statecraft (Polyakova, 2014). Even going as far as travelling to Moscow to attend Putin's birthday party to express love and admiration (Polyakova, 2014, p. 36). Polyakova's article is another article that discusses the bond between Moscow and the far right. But an obvious 'hole' here is that the article is from 2014 and therefore does not take into account their views after the war in Ukraine was declared. This is where primary sources will be vital in the tracking of 'Putin-friendliness'. But Polyakova's conclusion puts a light on a probable strategy that Moscow employs: "Fearing the power of voters aligned with UKIP, FN, and other parties, European leaders may become reluctant to take a strong stance against Russia. And an EU so crippled by inward-looking national politics that it cannot be a counterweight to Russian aggression is exactly what the Kremlin wants" (Polyakova, 2014, p. 40).

Another author that backs this is Futak-Campbell. In her article she examines the apparent alliances between Europe's far-right and Moscow. She essentially, comes to the same conclusion. Far-right parties that are infatuated with the nationalistic, populist rhetoric of Russia seek alliances with them to strengthen their position, and in return they gain support from the Kremlin in the form of funding and attention in Russia (Futak-Campbell, 2020, p. 35). The question of does Russia still fund European far-right parties today is obviously very interesting, but the funding is considered secret. So, without being the CIA or the Russian equivalent, getting that data will be quite impossible. The only reason this information is out, is because of American intelligence (if that can be trusted) (Wong, 2022). But of course, if Russia's goal is to destabilize Europe, funding sympathetic Far-right parties in Europe is a great way to do that. Additionally, the articles of Futak-Campbell, Makarychev, and Polyakova all have one thing in common. They all say that the Ukraine-crisis and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was not as divisive as the current war in Ukraine. The far-right parties all were in support of Russia during the campaign. Austria's FPÖ and France's Front National were at the forefront to get the referendum regarding Crimea's reunification with Russia legitimized, and even sent high-ranking officials to act as independent election monitors (Futak-Campbell, 2020, p. 33).

The most relevant literature on this topic is Wondreys' paper on how far-right parties have reacted to the invasion of Ukraine. The article is an excellent dive into how the war in Ukraine is seen through the eyes of the far right in Europe. And the author also exclaims that the connection between Russia and the far right is something that needs more research. Stating that "empirical evidence for the connection between Putin and the far right is still scarce. This is especially problematic given the heterogeneity within the far right which tends to be even more apparent in times of unprecedented global crises" (Wondreys, 2023, p. 1). The article also points out that not all far right parties share the same Putin friendliness as others do. For example, the Finnish far right party The Finns Party is staunchly opposed to Putin and Russia. Not surprising, considering Finland's troubled past with Russia (Wondreys. 2023, p. 2). His results reflect this as well. He

identifies three different categories of far right parties in terms of Russia Friendliness, in the European parliament: Russia-friendly, Russia-hostile, and neutral (Wondreys, 2023, p. 5). The Russia-friendly camp is also significantly smaller than the other camps with only 44 Members of European Parliament (MEPSs) versus 133 MEPs in the Russia-hostile camp and 138 in the Russia neutral camp (Wondreys, 2023, p. 8). So, the heterogeneity of the far right on this issue is apparent and is predicted to withstand. However, the far right is characteristically dynamic in their stances and, after waves of Ukrainian refugees come to Europe or 'Ukraine fatigue' sets in their stances might change (Wondreys, 2023, p. 8). The article is a good foundation to build this thesis on as it provides the initial evidence of who in the far right 'world' that is pro-Putin and who is not. But the article does not provide an explanation for why they have their stance on Putin. And what their stance is in 2024. This provides a gap in the literature that this thesis will fill. Wondreys' article will be discussed further in the methods chapter.

Anti-Americanism is an ideal that would appeal to Russian leadership when looking for a European ally. And as Polyakova wrote, far-right parties are all for the most part decisively anti-American (Polyakova, 2014, p. 38). But to say that only far-right parties are anti-American is a gross generalization. As proved in Lawson and Hudson's paper on Anti Americanism in Europe, they discovered that anti-Americanism is more closely linked to personal characteristics of a voter than of a country: "Our results show strong evidence of anti-Americanism linked to age, education, policy preferences, national origin, and in particular, mistrust of big business. The latter strongly suggests that a root cause of anti-American attitudes is anti-capitalism" (Lawson & Hudson, 2015, p. 12). However, they also note that anti-Americanism is stronger in "old Europe" compared to "new Europe" with France, Spain and Greece standing out as the most anti-American nations in Europe (Lawson & Hudson, 2015, p. 12). Of course, Anti-Americanism is not the only factor for Putin friendliness. One must take into account other areas of agreement in ideologies. But a common distrust of America is a viable theme that could tie far right parties to Russia. As the article explained, France, Spain and Greece have the most distrust to America. In terms of electoral success, this statement harmonizes with Marine Le Pen's RN as a key issue for them is anti-Americanism and a push to rely less on America. A way to create an anti-American sentiment is to do like the far right party LSNS in Slovakia. They use/have used memory politics to paint America and NATO as criminals in order to build alliances with Putin and Russia (Paulovicova & Gyarfasova, 2023, p. 13). Framing the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as an American plot and blaming World War 2 on the West (Paulovicova & Gyarfasova, 2023, p. 13). This is of course one of the many ways the far right garners votes and pro-Russia support. But it is probably not the most common *modus operandi* for far right parties. And it is quite frankly beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is relevant as an example of how inventive the tactics of the far right can be.

The nation state is a term that the European Far-right have taken to their hearts. And they often compare themselves to Russia as they have essentially created a nation state. But have they really? Russian statecraft and nation building policies revolve around their Soviet legacy as the key ethnicity in the old union (Blackburn, 2020, p. 102-103). However, Russian statements from the Kremlin are fairly multi-cultural. Russian messaging and rhetoric do indicate that anyone can be considered 'Russian' as far as the state is concerned. The state is more concerned with Russian culture than where you come from (Panov, 2010, p. 93). The cornerstones of Russian culture are, according to the Kremlin; language, history, values of statehood and patriotism, the idea of the strong and great Russia, uniqueness of the Russian civilization (Panov, 2010, p. 93). "Anyone

can be recognized as 'Russian' as long as he/she shares these values. Judging by the presidential addresses, the Kremlin recognizes as 'Russian' even those who are not Russian citizens but committed to the Russian culture." (Panov, 2010, p. 93).

Russia also has a history with its own far right groups. Russia can seem like a beacon for traditional family values and ethnic "purity". But in reality, the country itself is a fairly diverse nation. The population contains large amounts of Muslim minorities, with some source reportedly stating that Muslims make up about 25% of the population (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 1). This number can arguably have been exaggerated, but this statistic is helpful to the European far right as they have something to compare their own 'immigration' problems. Having a big nation like Russia to compare themselves to and their problems to, can create its own gravity of affinity. Further contrasting to the notion of family values is the countries' divorce rates, which is top three in the world (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 1). And within the state far-right groups have been known to operate with complete autonomy. These groups have been known to harass and attack Muslim minorities or activists and journalists that voice their critique of the Kremlin (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 2). Only for the Kremlin and its leaders to turn on the far right groups at any moment to terminate their relations with the groups and have them arrested and criminalized en masse (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 2). A turbulent relationship with its domestic far right groups, however, does not stop Russia from seeking far right allies abroad. Despite the lack of ethnic purity, falling short of pro-family values metrics and the active repression of its own far right milieu, many European groups sought to support Russia. A large part of that support came from Valdimir Putin's address at the 2007 Munich Security conference where he "firmly rejected the post-cold war system he's still trying to torpedo" (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 2). The book that has been cited in this paragraph is an important source of information about Russia's ties in the European west. It also enforces and provides evidence for the idea that the far right is inspired by Russia.

The far right sees Russia as a model of neo-conservatism and semi-authoritarianism "that can counteract the undermining of nation-states spearheaded by the EU as well as NATO," (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 4). It also highlights how Russia has been attempting to sow disarray in Europe by appealing to eastern Europeans. Russia exerts influence on eastern Europe through, among other things, disinformation to delegitimize western European actions towards the pandemic and to diminish overall credibility (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 5). Additionally, Russia spreads soviet narratives in order to rally more people to their cause. This includes the "Slavic brotherhood" narrative and narratives involving their shared belief in Orthodox Christianity (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 5). Indeed, the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the first to pledge their support to the Kremlin after the war began, consequentially, almost all other orthodox churches went against the Russian church. This resulted in the spiritual leader of the worlds orthodox Christians to call the affair an "atrocious invasion" (Gera, 2022, 29. March). Returning to the book, the authors reinforce the claim put forward by Futak-Campbell. The claim that Russia finances and actively influences European far right groups and parties. Using them as a destabilizing tool in Europe (Molas & Rekawek, 2024, p. 5). Other factors that can draw far right groups towards Russia can be, for example, the case of French far right groups. When France is portrayed as in decline, Putin offers the image of himself as the man who has turned his country around when into chaos and that he restored his country as a leading nation on the world stage (Hénin, 2024, p. 146-147). Additionally, he is offering an alternative to how the western world is organized, offering sovereignty in a world that would otherwise place France in a subordinate position to the United States (Hénin, 2024, p. 147).

3. Theoretical Framework

The thesis uses and actively engages with realism in order to make the argument that opinions of other countries are based on proximity, contingency and territoriality. This chapter will first explain what realism is, and how the thesis engages with it. Since realism is a grand theory and has many avenues, this next section will first explain generally what realism is and can be, after which the thesis will go more in depth on realism in international relations (IR). Complementing realism in international relations, will be a section about the concepts of proximity, contingency and territoriality and the hypotheses of the thesis.

3.1 Realism

Realism is, as previously stated, a grand theory. And with that comes a lot of history. Realism is an old idea in political science, it is said to be invented by Thucydides during the Peloponnesian war, or by Sun tzu in his book *The Art of War* but it has since been expanded on by, among others, Machiavelli in *The Prince*, Thomas Hobbes, E.H (Edward Hallett), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Mearsheimer and Hans Morgenthau. (Heywood, 2015, p. 328). The general idea of political realism is every political move is motivated by the politician or the state's egotistical motives. This is complemented by a constant search for power. In other words, actions can be analyzed in the lens of this search for power. Furthermore, one could also say that realism is "the development of a sensibility based on practical knowledge to balance values and interests and to make value judgments" (Troy, 2021, p. 1194). Either way you define it, political realism puts greater stress on objectivity for its sciences. And it has been criticized for its lack of morality because of this (Rutherford, 2022, p. 398-399). However, for what it lacks in morality it makes up for by being a robust theory in political science. Its focus on anarchy on the international stage can be immensely useful in explaining IR phenomena. Additionally, it is one of the easier theories to grasp. If a country invades another country, it was because it could not use diplomatic means to gain more power and had to resort to military means. Furthermore, political realism accepts and accounts for politicians being human beings, meaning that they are not perfect individuals. They are prone to mistakes and succumbing to egotistical instincts. Realism treats every individual politician equally and sees them as far from perfect. Moreover, realism is more about the aggregate of individuals that make up the state, and therefore uses this notion of human nature as the foundation of all decisions made by politicians and decision-makers (Unoki, 2016, p. 7).

Realism therefore looks at humanity with a pessimistic lens, the idea being that human beings will always act in a way that favors themselves and preferably to the disadvantage of adversaries or others. "[...] men are essentially "bad" creatures who have no compunction about not keeping their word and are always ready to deceive others. As such, he advised that individuals, including rulers of states, must not keep their word or act virtuously if it puts them at a disadvantage or they are no longer able to keep it" (Unoki, 2016, p. 7). Combine this perspective with an anarchical international arena, and one can see why realism is a very apt theory to use when explaining war and analyzing what actions a political leader can and will take. Moreover, because of this realism is a good predictive model for researchers and political scientists. Therefore, it can be said that Realism makes two assumptions about the world. The first is that Human nature is characterized by selfishness and greed, and therefore states on the international arena exhibit the same characteristics. And second, because the international stage is anarchic,

states rely on self-help and therefore prioritize security and survival (Heywood, 2015, p. 327). This is summed up as "egoism plus anarchy equals power politics" (Heywood, 2015, p. 327).

"[...] Politics [should] be addressed as it is, warts and all, and that political theorists should accept as inevitable the character flaws of politicians, the selfish pursuit of interests, the need for compromise and, importantly, the failings of citizens. [And that there is] no compelling reason to believe (and all too often no reason given) that 'morality obviously trumps other kinds of reason of action'" (North, 2010, p. 382).

This does by no means assume that power politics means endless war and restless conflict. But rather that cooperation on the international stage is something that conforms to the assumption because it plays into the overall balance of power (Heywood, 2015, p. 327). As previously stated, the theory is useful for explaining IR phenomena, but it is also an explanatory factor for how war starts. A section of realism that the thesis is going to use is the concepts of proximity, contingency and territorialism. These concepts are rooted in realism and are complimentary to each other, but they also challenge each other. This will be further discussed in the following section. Realism is an important aspect of this thesis as it is very applicable to the war in Ukraine. This is because one of the strengths of realism is to explain war and conflicts, and especially among neighbors.

3.2 Proximity to Russia

This section will explain why proximity to Russia matters in relation to Russia friendliness. The following subsection will discuss the historical origins of the proximity argument. It will also discuss concepts that connect and relate to proximity, being contiguity and territoriality. These three's effects and interconnectedness will be the main theme of discussion in this section.

3.2.1 Historical Proximity and Contiguity

Historically, proximity and especially bordering (contiguity) has been a point of friction between countries. Wars have been fought because of a border that one party felt ineptly represented their nation. Previous research into wars have found that on the international level, countries flow within three states of being: Preparing for war, actively engaged in war, and recovering from war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 277). This "rule" is deeply embedded in the realist school of thought, however, and it does not take into account the empirical statistic that most wars are fought between neighbors (Vasquez, 1995, p. 277). According to the realistic model, neighbors engage in war purely because all states are prone to war and not because of proximity. More refined responses to this phenomenon have been that very few states have the resources to conduct warfare with non-neighboring states (Vasquez, 1995, p.278). The thesis challenges this notion as it implies that war with neighbors happens only out of convenience and not because of an underlying issue that has been brought to the boiling point or an agenda being fulfilled. Although according to realists, war is prone to break out anywhere due to the underlying struggle for power every state faces. Because of these reasons, proximity and neighbor-wars have been largely ignored and dismissed as trivial and without any theoretical

significance (Vasquez, 1995, p. 278). Furthermore, other researchers have found that contiguity have a significant role in conflicts. In a study looking into contiguous conflicts from 1815-1976 found that 93% of contiguous pairs have had at least one militarized confrontation, and 64% have had at least one war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 278). Additionally, another study that investigated contiguous rivalries (which is defined as two states that have had a military dispute or a military confrontation) between 1817 and 1980 showed that approximately 25% of these rivalries escalated to war, while only 2% of non-contiguous rivalries escalated to war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 278). Moreover, the study showed that 12 of the 13 rivalries that go to war did so over disputed contiguous territory or the territory proper of one of the rivals (Vasquez, 1995, p. 278). Vasquez provides more evidence to support the argument of contingency linked to war, but what is the most important takeaway is that war between contiguous states is more likely than war between non-contiguous states. As is the case between Finland and Russia. These two countries are contiguous and have already fought a war relatively recently. Additionally, Russia used to own Finland as a duchy for almost 100 years before Russia lost it when the Russian empire fell, and Finland declared independence. Contiguity is, of course, different to proximity although they both contribute to the same thing; conflict.

Proximity is defined as nearness in space, time, or relationship. Applied to international relations, this term can become the fact that decides whether a foreign state launches an invasion against you. Proximity matters in international relations because war between two states almost always occur if the states are within reach of each other. South Africa and Canada for instance would never engage in war together. The mere thought is nonsensical. Granted there are other factors that contribute to the nonsensicalness of this hypothetical war such as alliances, the democracy rule and pure motivation, but the distance serves as the biggest factor and catalyst for the other factors. Distance also creates incentive or motivation to conduct warfare. In other words, willingness, and opportunity to fight correlate with and are derived from proximity (Vasquez, 1995, p. 279). Additionally, proximity is directly related to a state's force projection, i.e. the further away something is, the less it will feel the force projection of the state (Vasquez, 1995, p. 279). Also called the *loss-of-strength-gradient*, or the "General principle that each party can be supposed to be at his maximum power at home ... but that his competitive power, in the sense of his ability to dominate another, declines the farther from home he operates." (Starr, 2005, p. 390). This is aptly summarized as the "*The further the weaker*" principle (Starr, 2005, p. 390). This way of thinking has perhaps fallen a bit into obscurity and irrelevance in 2024 where technology and military bases has made it possible for countries to wage war outside their proximity and contiguity. Moreover, it would be shortsighted to say that only because a state is neighboring another state that war is statistical certainty. Logically, since contingency and proximity are a constant, they cannot be the cause of something that is relatively infrequent such as war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 280). So, it is therefore better to look at proximity not as a cause of war, but rather as a way to gain the opportunity to war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 280). Other researchers have condensed proximity (or distance) into two concepts "opportunity" and "willingness" (Starr, 2005, p. 390).

"Opportunity" in this sense is based on the direct distance between two actors. So closer distance means more opportunities, or in other words, that they are better able to interact with each other. This concept is referred to as the "interaction opportunity" argument and it is directly derived from "environmental possibilism" (Starr, 2005, p. 390). "Environmental possibilism" is essentially a concept that describes the possibilities decision makers have in any given environment (Starr, 2005, p. 390). It is composed of

three elements: "(1) an actor, or entity, of some sort, (2) an environment that surrounds the entity, and (3) the entity-environment relationship" (Starr, 2005, p. 390). This concept describes the set of factors that serves to limit human opportunities and constrain actions. The concept is also used to explain the sometimes observable inability to take action displayed by decisionmakers (Starr, 2005, p. 390). However, opportunities and possibilities are useless without action and that is what the second concept of "Willingness" seeks to explain.

"Willingness" is defined as "the choice (and process of choice) that is related to the selection of some behavioral option from a range of alternatives. Willingness therefore refers to the willingness to choose (even if the choice is no action), and to employ available capabilities to further some policy option over others" (Starr, 2005, p. 391). Furthermore, this notion is supported by cognitive theories, stating that a person "reacts to his milieu as he apperceives it – that is, as he perceives and interprets it in light of past experience" (Starr, 2005, p. 391). The reason "opportunity" and "willingness" are related is because they affect each other, and they are both affected by distance. For example, action against a faraway actor or state will give decisionmakers different opportunities and choices than that of a close or even contiguous actor/state. Additionally, perceived salience and importance is automatically generated between two contingent states (Starr, 2005, p. 391). This salience is derived from a combination of factors. Since the distance of the two states is so close, greater perception of threat or gain, or of interdependence is generated just from proximity (Starr, 2005, p. 391). Therefore, the willingness to manage a conflict or engage in diplomacy depends on the distance, and if the other state is contingent the willingness to interact will never be higher.

"Thus, proximity makes states (or social units) that are close to one another "relevant" to one another through some combination of both opportunity and willingness. High levels of opportunity and willingness – generated, for instance, by long contiguous borders that go through areas with valuable resources, important strategic features, an on both sides of which live members of the same ethnic group – mean that two states are both easily able to interact with each other and both perceive the other as important and relevant (whether as a possible opponent or cooperator through shared interests)" (Starr, 2005, p. 391).

Other scholars have also backed this claim of contiguity, interaction, and war. For example, Vasquez (1995, p. 280) explains that the closer two states get the more interactions they will have. And contiguous states have the most interactions. As interactions increase, the chance of those interactions becoming disagreements increase. These disagreements can be fundamental differences in culture and beliefs and these in turn may give rise to the use of force and violence, which in turn gives higher probability of war (Vasquez, 1995, p. 280). "Since contiguity is the single largest factor promoting interactions, contiguous states are more likely to have serious disputes and wars" (Vasquez, 1995, p. 280). However, this "rabbit hole" or "slippery slope" does not seem to be a universal law, especially not in the modern world where (neo)liberalist cooperation and interdependency has become such a large part of, at least, the western world. Sometimes this can apply to, for example imperialist wars conducted to regain "lost" territory. For this case, there exists a third reason for war between neighbors which is entitled "the territoriality explanation".

"The territoriality explanation" or "the effect of territoriality" differentiates itself from proximity and interactions to explain war between neighbors. Instead of focusing on physical distance and number of interactions, it instead focuses on the value of territory (Vasquez, 1995, p. 281). Disputed territory is the focal point of this explanation, and it sees war as a last resort for contiguous states that have tried all other options when it comes to a piece of disputed territory (Vasquez, 1995, p. 281). This explanation does not dismiss the other two, it simply provides another perspective that can be more applicable than proximity as the main cause for war between neighbors. Territoriality still treats proximity as the supplier of opportunity, but instead of the number of interactions as the source of willingness, it sees territorial disputes as the source. This explanation does also treat interactions and disagreements as regular occurrences and not reasons to go to war. A downside of this explanation is that it sees territorial disputes as the only reason to go to war. But in defense of territoriality, most wars are started because of territory and a lot of territorial disputes that are not handled correctly and solved have a higher chance of ending in war than other sources of conflict (Vasquez, 1995, p. 282). A possible counter to the proximity argument is that distance has become dynamic in the modern world. What used to be one and only one states' borders has become the borders of many others. Through alliances like NATO and defense agreements like the EUs Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) one country can border any country that is on the fringes of the alliance. In other words, "State A, which does not have a contiguous border with state B, is now able to border state B through an alliance with state C, which is contiguous to B" (Starr, 2005, p. 392). This thesis argues that Finland's sudden shift in alliance policy and NATO push after the (re)invasion of Ukraine is largely due to their proximity to and contingency with Russia. This shift in alliance policy is an interesting topic that the thesis will go more in depth on in the following chapter.

However, as potent as geographical proximity can be as an explanatory tool, political proximity can be just as effective. Political proximity is not something that has been as thoroughly researched as other concepts, but its effects are observable. It theorizes that parties or countries that are politically aligned have more interactions and therefore can cooperate more effectively. In practice this effect was observed when the French opposed the United Nations Security Council's decision to invade Iraq, trade between France and the United States were reduced. French exports to the US were reduced by 15 percent and American exports to France were reduced by 8 percent (Umana Dajud, 2012, p. 2). Furthermore, it is theorized that governments of similar political beliefs have greater willingness to interact with each other (Umana Dajud, 2012, p. 2). On the other end, states that are far apart politically will have fewer interactions. Where for instance some countries get funding and support from developed countries, others that are less politically aligned might not get any kind of support. An example of this is the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which is a program of financial contribution to developing nations. The US for instance, give access to their program largely based on the receiver's political alignment. For example, Laos, Myanmar, and Sudan are denied access to the US' GSP because of political reasons (Umana Dajud, 2012, p. 2). Because of this, the number of interactions between these nations and the US are thereby reduced due to political proximity. Comparatively speaking then, the number of interactions fluctuate more with political proximity than with geographical proximity, and that is why this thesis will use both in its analysis of the PS and RN. The PS' stance on Russia is seen through the light of geographical proximity and the RN with political proximity.

3.3 Hypotheses

Applying this to the relationship between Russia and Finland one can surmise that their relationship is a cold one. Obviously, the history between Finland and Russia is substantial and that will be discussed in the following chapter, but contiguity has played a central role in their relationship. And because of their turbulent past, the thesis hypothesizes that the PS' stance on Russia has not changed much from Wondreys' results. And for the case of the RN, the thesis hypothesizes again that there is not much change from Wondreys' results due to their political proximity. Therefore, the first hypothesis is: There is not much change from Wondreys' projections. In other words, the RN is still neutral, and the PS is still Russia-hostile despite public opinion indicating that support for Ukraine is declining.

As previously discussed, proximity in IR is a phenomenon that increases the interactions between states. It can promote hostility or cooperation. But political proximity is a deciding factor in this. Germany does not see the Netherlands as a threat or vice versa. However, even though the PS is a far right party and should in theory be more Russia-friendly, because of history and territoriality they are incompatible. Therefore, the thesis has this as its second hypothesis: Proximity matters in Russia-friendliness. Moreover, countries that are closer to Russia have a bias towards hostility towards Russia.

The RN is closer aligned with Russia than the PS. For both financial reasons and common interests. The relationship between the RN and Russia will be discussed later in chapter 6. But this hypothesis is presented because the RN fit the political proximity argument. The third hypothesis is therefore: The RN has closer political proximity to Russia and therefore they would be more neutral than the PS.

4. War in Ukraine

In this chapter the thesis will explain why the war in Ukraine matters to the study and the discuss the context the of the study. This chapter is split into several sections. These are: context of the war and the study, public perception to the war, and Finland's history with Russia and their recent NATO push contextualized through the war in Ukraine.

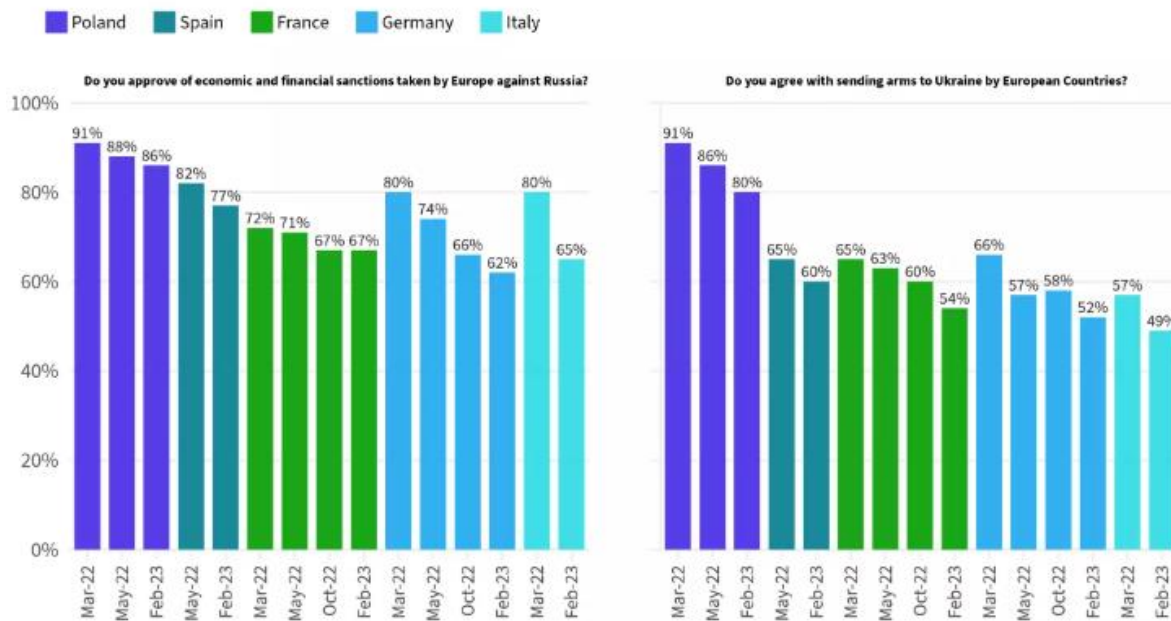
4.1 Context: War in Ukraine

The morning of 24th of February 2022 Russia launched the largest attack on a European country since World War 2. Since then, news surrounding the war has been spotty at best. Misinformation encapsulates the war in ways that make it hard for the media to verify due to the quantities of it. Even to this day it is hard to get accurate casualty numbers. From missing numbers to video game footage impersonating and reported as real videos from the front lines, it can be hard to distinguish what is real and what is not. And when the set of actors in the competition for social media attention contains not only content creators and news agencies but state governments as well, that gives incentives for multiple actors to try and affect the narrative. Not only is the Russian government involved but also third-party actors under their control (Wenzel, Stasiuk-Krajewska, Mackova & Turkova, 2023, p. 193). "They (Russia) operate via affiliated (social and traditional) media outlets and by exerting influence over civil society organizations with goals or worldviews sympathetic to Russia's strategic interests" (Wenzel et. al. 2023, p. 193). There are of course differences between the terms 'disinformation' and 'misinformation'. The former is defined as "the deliberate creation and sharing of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mis-lead audiences, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain" (Wenzel et. al., 2023, p. 193). Misinformation, on the other hand, is described as the opposite, the "inadvertent sharing of false information" (Wenzel et. al., 2023, p. 193). It is important to state that both have the same outcome as far as the oblivious public is concerned, deception and skewed public perception. It is important to have this distinction in mind when the thesis is going to deal with content analysis on the war.

4.2 Public Perception to the War in Ukraine

But have Russia's attempts to skew public perception been a success? As Wenzel et. al. discovered, the poorer strata is more susceptible to these kinds of messages from Russia-friendly or even Russia-owned third-party information sharing organizations. While "better off" or wealthier, more educated individuals are less susceptible to this kind of information (Wenzel et. al., 2023, p. 204). It would not go amiss to the compare these results to the demographic the far-right caters to. As previously discussed, far right parties normally attract the less educated and poorer parts of society to their cause with xenophobia and conspiracy theories. Plainly, the fact that that poorer, less educated are more likely to believe disinformation correlates well with the far right voter base. But even though this is the case, public perception has been generally supportive of Ukraine in their war against Russia although it is currently declining.

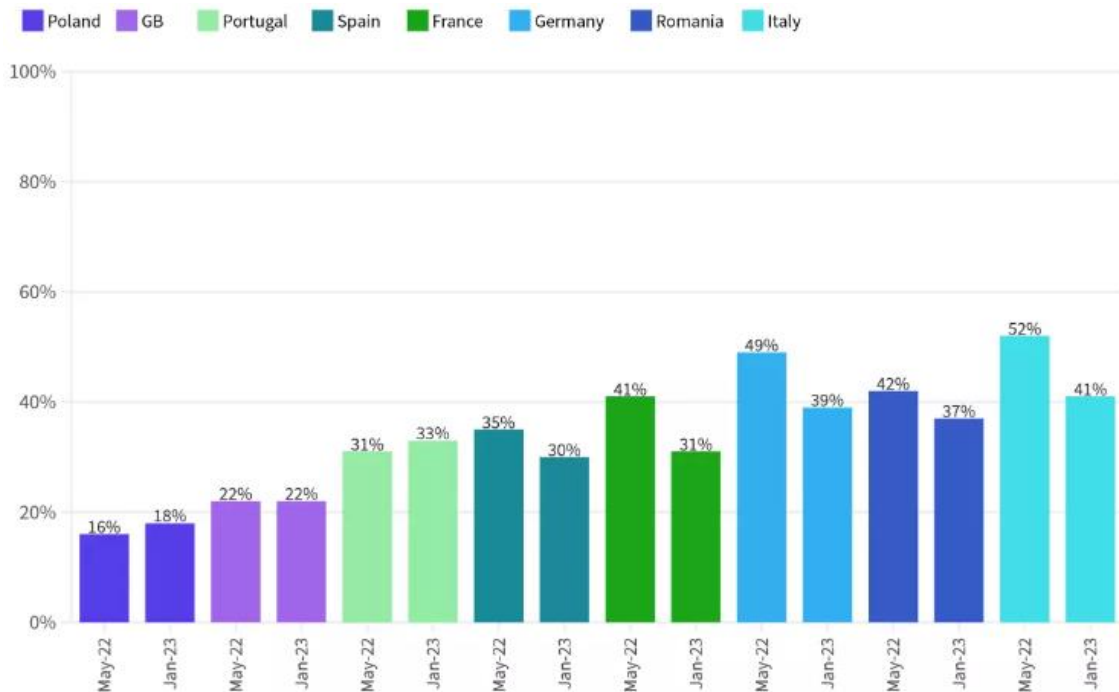
Figure 1. Household approval ratings for economic sanctions (left) and sending arms (right)



Source "European Public opinion remains supportive of Ukraine" by Demertzis, Grand & Moffat (<https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/european-public-opinion-remains-supportive-ukraine>)

As Figure 1 shows, the general approval of sending aid in the forms of both economic and military support was at its highest right after the war broke out (March 2022). But for all countries the support for this dwindled slightly for some and more for others. There can be a plethora of reasons for why the support is decreasing, it can be the fact that the cost of supporting the war is increasing, the war is not as salient as it used to be, people are less scared of the war as it drags on, and/or Russian propaganda effectiveness etc. But as of February 2023, all countries in question still support sanctions to a large degree. So, by these statistics most of Europeans support Ukraine in their fight against Russia. Perhaps more interestingly is another statistic from the same article. In this the researchers asked the question "yes or no: the most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia" The expectation is that as time goes on many would just like to have an end to the fighting at any costs. But the data shows that most of the citizens of countries that was interviewed said no to this question. And even more surprising is that more people said no a year later to the same question (Demertzis, Grand & Moffat, 2023). That means that the trend is that as the war goes on, more people feel that it would be unacceptable to put an end to the war if it meant that Ukraine would lose territory to Russia. That trend is viable for most of the countries except Poland, Great Britain and Portugal who see it more vital to end the war with Ukrainian losses in 2023 than in 2022, (See Figure 2).

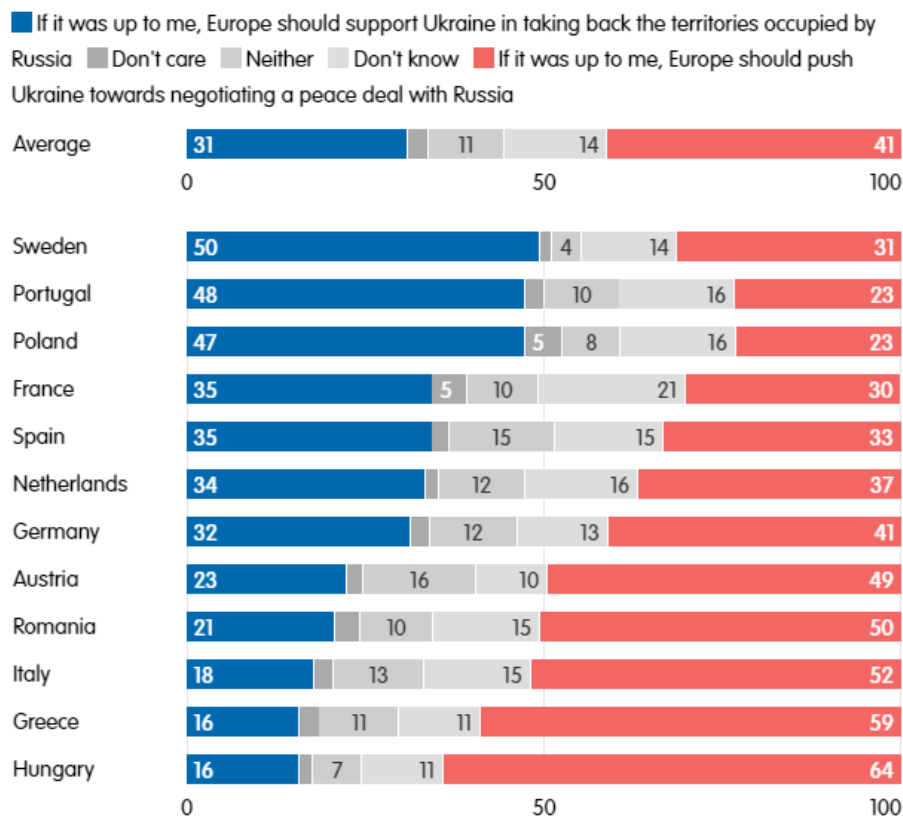
Figure 2. The most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia



Source: "European Public Opinion remains supportive of Ukraine" by Demertzis, Grand & Moffat (<https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/european-public-opinion-remains-supportive-ukraine>)

But these results are from 2023, and a year has passed since that data was collected. In regard to Figure 2, the most recent polling shows that most of the same countries show a opposite position. More people are saying that the war should end even if it meant that Ukraine would cede territory to Russia. Figure 3 below shows this. What is interesting here is that even though there was a clear trend towards Ukrainian support from 2022 to 2023, it seems to be fizzling out by January 2024 which was when the most recent data was collected. Another interesting phenomenon in these statistics is the relevance of proximity. Countries with closer proximity to Russia tend to have greater faith in Ukraine and more animosity towards Russia: Poland and Sweden in Figure 3 and Poland in Figure 2. Although proximity seems to have an effect on public opinion, how come Portugal in Figure 3 and Great Britain in Figure 2 are so against the secession of Ukrainian territory to Russia? Proximity to Russia is something that the thesis will discuss further later on, but for now it is important to keep in mind that proximity has an impact on the opinions of bystanders in this conflict.

Figure 3. Which of the following best reflect your view on what Europe should do about the war in Ukraine more broadly?



Source: “Wars and Elections: How European leaders can maintain public support for Ukraine” by Krastev & Leonard (<https://ecfr.eu/publication/wars-and-elections-how-european-leaders-can-maintain-public-support-for-ukraine/>)

The current public perception of the war in Ukraine is mixed. Everyone wants the war to be over, but not everyone agrees how it should end. The previous polls from Bruegel seem to indicate that Europeans are prepared to support Ukraine for the long term. But from more recent polls it seems as if that support is declining. If support for Ukraine is dwindling, does that then mean that support for Russia is increasing? Not necessarily. Not everyone that stops feeling like they should support a costly war on the fringes of Europe turns into a Russia-friendly individual on the level of Viktor Orban for example. Russia friendliness is something that can be seen within the far right in Europe, and the concept itself is something that the thesis will go further in depth on later on. But overall, the public’s take on the war is, as everything, complicated. Depending on what country you ask the answer will be different. As stated before, proximity and history matter in this respect; countries that have a close proximity to Russia seem to have a more hostile outlook towards them and seem to be more supportive of Ukraine. But exceptions exist. Hungarians for example seem to want a swift end to the war with a loss of Ukrainian territory to Russia. Other factors then come into play here rather than proximity. Factors like Russia-friendliness.

4.3 Finland and France: Russia Relations in a Historical Context

The Finland-Russia and France-Russia relations have traditionally been turbulent. They have been on opposing sides for most of recent history.

4.3.1 Finland's Change in Alliance Policy

Historically, Finland has never been the one to pursue membership in any military nor defense alliance. Finland was never considered for participation in any NATO enlargement either. This is due to their neutrality policy that stood firm until war came to their doorstep. To be more precise, their official stance was military non-alignment which is different to neutrality in that neutrality signals political neutrality which turns out to be impossible for Finland as it relies heavily on the west and the country has better standing and opinion of its western neighbors than its eastern neighbor(s). Either way, Finland had to give up its total neutrality when it became part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and, as mentioned, settle for military non-alignment (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 69). As pointed out in Forsberg and Vaahtoranta's article, Finland shows paradoxes in its security policy. They are deeply concerned with international security and its policies but refuses to let go of its non-alignment. In addition to not letting go of that, they also have not excluded the option of joining NATO in the future. Of course, we now know that they have in fact joined NATO, but that is skipping a bit ahead. Ever since the end of World War 2 Finland has sought protection against its volatile neighbor Russia. But they also had to engage in a balancing act in their foreign policy during the cold war. "The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance" was a treaty that was imposed in Finland in 1948, and it stated that Finland would "stay outside the conflicting interests of the great powers" (Braichevska, Sliusarenko, Krupenyak & Horobets, 2024, p.5). This treaty made it significantly harder for Finland to shape their foreign policy. The treaty contained a clause that stated that "both parties would not enter coalitions and alliances that would go against one of them" (Braichevska et. al., 2024, p. 5), and that Finland had to maintain a friendly relationship with the USSR and take its interests into account in its foreign policy (Braichevska et. al., 2024, p. 5). This treaty also gave root and inception to the Finnish Cold War foreign policy doctrine known as the Paasikivi line: "Strengthening the international position of independent Finland and its stable development through the establishment and maintenance of good neighborly relations with the USSR" (Braichevska et. al., 2024, p. 5). Direct results of this are that Finland, for example, did not take part in the Marshall plan, while it also did not take part in several Soviet international initiatives like the Warsaw pact (Braichevska et. al., 2024, p. 5).

This meant that Finland had to depend on Sweden during the cold war for not only protection, but also stability in an uncertain time dominated by the personality clash between the USSR and the USA. For Finland, the primary reason to join the EU was because of security (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 71). As Pertti Salolainen, who participated in the membership negotiations as a member of government said, "all knew that membership was the way out of Moscow's hug" (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 71).

After entering the EU and the CFSP Finland became a staunch advocate for increasing the strength of the EU in terms of foreign and security policy (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 71). More evidence that support this is when Finland took over the presidency after Germany in 1999, development of the EU's security policy stayed as one of the main

issues on the agenda (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 72). The results of the Helsinki summit as it was to be known as was the reinforcement and strengthening of the EU's crisis management operations (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 72). That being said, Finland has never been in support of moves towards a collective European defense. When Finland discusses the convergence and harmonization of the European defense dimension, they state that this can only be applied to peace support operations (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 73). The reason for this policy could be that they wanted to hold on to their military non-alignment according to their own definition of it. For instance, if a third party were to attack an EU member state, Finland would be forced to join in on the defending side due to the nature of the CFSP and CSDP. Upholding a 'military non-alignment' in a situation as dire as that would be virtually impossible. Gaining protection without offering protection in a common defense treaty is unheard of and essentially impossible.

In addition, Finland is very close to NATO in terms of cooperation. Finnish soldiers regularly partake in PfP (Partnership for Peace) exercises, participated in the NATO-led IFOR (Implementation Force), SFOR (Stabilization Force), and KFOR (Kosovo force) operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. They have also joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), sent several diplomatic missions to NATO including sending staff to work in NATO's staff structure, in the form of both military and civilian participants (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2007, p. 75). All this was done after the fall of the Soviet Union, which meant that the Finns did not have to follow the long-held Paasikivi line. But it is evident that half a decade of the same tiresome foreign policy has long term effects on the psyche of the modern Finns, not wanting to bind themselves to an alliance that could jeopardize the work of 'appeasement' done for their eastern neighbor. But as we shall discover, the notion of not stepping on the toes of the Russians is a faraway concept for some Finns today.

4.3.2 France-Russia Relations

Similar to Finland, France and Russia have also had a colorful past. They have been on the opposite sides of the Cold War, and they can therefore be seen as rivals. And because of this, France primarily views Russia through a lens of security policy (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 2). During the Cold War France was to assert itself as unique and reject the realities of the bipolar world. President Charles De Gaulle wanted to have France carry out a 'policy of grandeur' (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 5). A result of this ambition was the removal of France's integrated NATO military command structure and a two-week visit to the Soviet Union (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 5). Additionally, De Gaulle vetoed the United Kingdom's (UK) entry to the EEC on the foundation of his doubt of the UK's commitment to continental Europe and the independence from the US (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 5). De Gaulle wanted to end the concept of the 'two blocs' and put an end to the division in Europe (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 5-6). The relationship with the east is therefore something that has (at least been attempted to) been nurtured since the 1960s. An observation that is very relevant for this thesis is that the right wing De Gaulle developed relations with the Soviet Union despite his disdain for communism (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 6). De Gaulle's successors also tried to maintain his policy towards the USSR. Although not as stringent. Mitterand for example was a supporter of the western alliance but he also refused to follow the US' sanction policy towards the USSR and resisted US pressure to stop the construction of a gas pipeline from the Soviets (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 6). Generally, the France-Russia

relations in the Cold War can be summarized as France's attempt to "ensure a balance in international relations and to preserve its autonomy of action, which was seen as an end in itself, rather than a means" (Marangé & Stewart, 2021, p. 6). This contrasts Finland's Cold War Russia/USSR policy. Whereas Finland is mandated to cooperate with the USSR, France instead actively chooses to cooperate with them and even engages heavily in relation-building. However, there are similarities as well. As much as France wanted to be in the USSR's good graces, they also had a balancing act to consider. Both countries had to manage their obligations to their respective partners while at the same time trying to accomplish other foreign affairs goals. For France this was to stay in the western alliance with the US while attempting to come closer to the USSR, and for Finland it was balancing their obligations to the USSR while seeking favor with the Nordic countries and NATO. Both of these apparent 'balancing acts' were done for the same reasons however, strengthening their place on the international arena and maintaining their independence and autonomy.

In more recent times France has entertained the idea of coming closer to Russia. And Russia has obliged at every turn, wanting to restore the 'privileged relationship' with France (Mendras, 2013, p. 3). An example of this was the 2011 French sale of two helicopter-carrier warships to Russia. This sale has gone down as the most controversial deal signed by the two governments (Mendras, 2013, p. 3). France's president Nicolas Sarkozy signed this deal in the belief that this would bring the two nations closer and called the affair a 'gesture of trust' (Mendras, 2013, p. 3). Mirroring De Gaulle's actions in the 60s, Sarkozy went against the wishes of the other NATO member-states and explained the deal by stating that "he meant to convince the Russians that he trusted them fully as a security partner and that he could sell them brand-new amphibious assault vessels, endowed with the latest technology" (Mendras, 2013, p. 3), proclaiming that 'the Cold War is over'. The deal, however, became unpopular in both countries after a Russian general brashly stated that the two warships would have secured the victory over Georgia "in less than an hour in 2008" (Mendras, 2013, p. 3). France and NATO did not particularly harmonize with the thought that Russia would use these warships to conquer their neighbors and Russia did not particularly favor the deal either because it caused backlash in the Russian military industrial industry in addition to the fact that the deal did not yield the financial profits it was projected to (Mendras, 2013, p. 3). The history between these countries is something that you can see in the RN, they want to succeed where Sarkozy failed. However, at the same time they might find it hard to garner support for Russia after they started the invasion in Ukraine.

5. Method

In order to study this topic effectively, the thesis is going to use a combination of discourse analysis and content analysis. But first, what is discourse and content analysis? This chapter is divided into several sections. The first section the thesis will explain what discourse and content analysis is and how they are beneficial to the thesis. Following that, the thesis will discuss Jakub Wondreys' article on far right parties and their Russia-affinity from 2023. Here the thesis will provide the most relevant findings from his paper and discuss how this thesis builds upon that. Lastly, the thesis will discuss the coding scheme that was used to obtain the data which will be discussed in the following chapters.

5.1 What is Discourse and Content Analysis?

The thesis will employ both discourse and content analysis because it will provide, in this thesis' opinion, the best results in terms of accuracy, validity and meaningfulness. However, as both methods are suitable for a study such as this, greater emphasis will be placed on content analysis in order to handle large amounts of data that is being analyzed.

5.1.1 Discourse Analysis

Political discourse analysis is an offshoot of critical discourse analysis. Put simply, Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) focuses solely on political discourse, which can take many forms. It can be anything from a group of protestors in a park to an international summit meeting. As long as something political is being discussed it can be counted as a political discourse (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 14). PDA is also characterized by the actors that engage in it. Namely, politicians and other political actors like governments, political parties and parliaments at the local, national and international levels (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 12). These politicians can then be defined as a "group of people who are being paid for their political activities, and who are being elected or appointed (or self-designated) as the central players in the polity (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 13). This approach can be used in several fields of research including, linguistics, communication studies, political science, essentially any field that can use the examination of how language is used in political contexts to shape opinions. For this reason, PDA is very apt for a study such as this. Additionally, one could also say that discourse analysis is a way to analyze and understand how people view and conceive their social reality. To understand this, one has to understand its two main dimensions: textual and contextual. "Textual dimensions are those which account for the *structures* of discourses, while contextual dimensions relate these structural descriptions to various properties of *the social, political or cultural context* in which they take place" (Lupton, 1992, p. 145). The textual dimension is therefore concerned with micro elements in textual discourse, "such as grammar, rhetorical devices (metaphors), syntax, sound forms and the overt meaning and content matter of words and sentences of a text or talk, and such macro structures as topics and themes" (Lupton, 1992, p. 145). The contextual dimension is then more concerned with the production and reception processes of the discourse. Moreover, the "reproduction of ideology and hegemony in such processes, and the links between discourse structures and social interaction and situations" (Lupton, 2019, p. 145). Therefore, one could say that the focus is not on the message itself, but rather upon the individual elements and influences that is part of the

discourse as a whole (Lupton, 2019, p. 145). This thesis, for instance is more concerned with contextual discourse analysis. The thesis will conduct the discourse analysis on a handful of tweets from the dataset of gathered tweet. The contextual dimension of discourse analysis is the most helpful, as on social media, spelling is bound to be unreliable at best, so the context of the tweets is what is most important. The discourse analysis will follow the content analysis in chapter 7.

5.1.2 Content Analysis

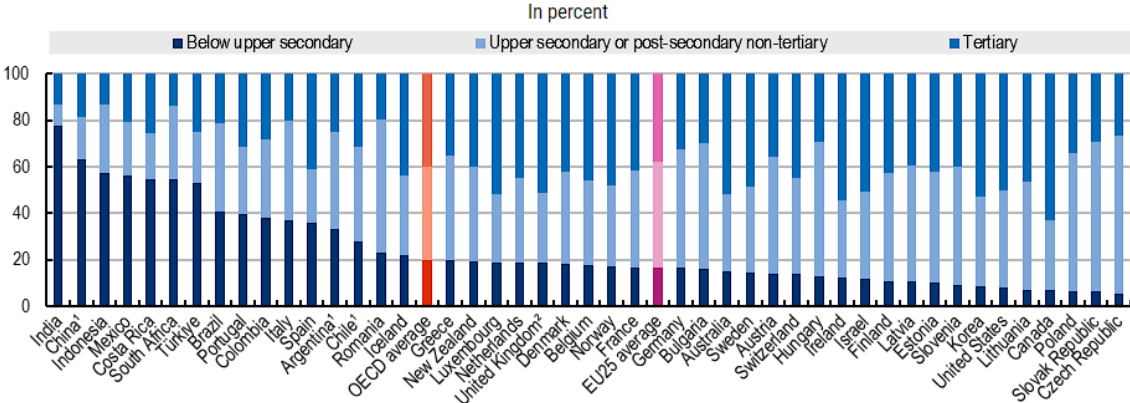
Content analysis in itself is a very important tool for researchers. In fact, Researchers have stated that content analysis is “fundamental in communication research (and thus theory)” (Benoit, 2010, p. 268). Content analysis has a wide range of uses, but what it has been used for most is perhaps the analysis of political messages. By political messages it is often meant as messages sent by politicians to an audience, whoever they may be. Furthermore, content analysis has been improbably hard to define, scholars have spent decades trying to define this widely used tool. Consequentially, there are as many definitions of content analysis as there are fish in the sea. However, the most important traits and ideas of content analysis are “systematic, replicable, valid, inferences about the context” (Benoit, 2010, p. 269). Some definitions have a more statistical outlook while some focus more on context and the reception of those messages (quantitative vs qualitative). Either way you like your flavor of content analysis, the main takeaway is that it gathers and analyses the content of messages sent from an actor. The method strives for validity, objectivity and reliability (Benoit, 2010, p. 269). Generally, content analysis is about interpreting data. How one does that can have as many variations as there are papers. Nevertheless, the goal of all content analysis, and any other method for that matter, is to be as trustworthy as possible (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 8-9). And to make a connection between the results and the context or the environment in which they were produced (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 9).

5.2 Case Selection

A large part of the case selection process was dictated by the idea of proximity. As previously discussed, proximity matters in international relations. It can increase or decrease the number of interactions based on it. And it can also, to some extent, be a major factor for war between neighbors. The original idea was to analyze multiple parties from the EU, but after looking at the data that was available, it became clear that the thesis had to limit the cases to two countries/parties. The thesis thought it important to take two countries that are not in close proximity to each other. In that case the thesis would get a more viable analysis. Different cultures are always going to be an issue when dealing with two different countries and especially in Europe where cultures differ more over shorter distances. Therefore, differing cultures would be unavoidable. The thesis, therefore, ended up with France and Finland as the two candidates. The thesis believes that the difference in geographical location is what will grant the most interesting results for a study like this. Finland was thusly chosen for its geographical proximity, and France was chosen for both its political and geographical proximity. However, the two cases although somewhat similar, are quite different in most demographics. Both countries benefit from the living standards accustomed to western democracies, however there are some differences. The most obvious difference is the size difference between the two.

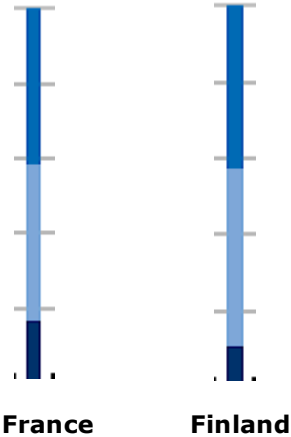
Finland has a population of about 5,5 million while France has about 68 million inhabitants. Furthermore, the average income in Finland is 55,000 US\$, French people has an average income of about 45,000 US\$ (Word Data, n.d.). However, education levels are about the same. As seen in the graph below. The table contains data from several countries but, both Finland and France are included in the table. As shown, Finland has an overall higher level of education in terms of the share of the population that has gone further than 'below upper secondary'. However, the level of tertiary education is about the same.

Figure 4 Educational Attainment Among 25-64-Year-Olds (2022)



Source: From "Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators: France", by OECD (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2b5a2e10-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2b5a2e10-en>)

Figure 5. France and Finland Direct Comparison



Source: From "Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators: France", by OECD (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2b5a2e10-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2b5a2e10-en>)

Above is an enhanced version of the larger graph from OECD. It is included because it gives a better picture of the differences in education levels, and it is easier to read. The main takeaway here is the overall lower education level of France compared to Finland, although the difference is slight. It is important to discuss the differences between the

two cases as it can make it more difficult to analyze. However, the fact that they are also quite similar in some important metrics like education is beneficial for the far right demographics argument.

The thesis has already explored both Finland and France's cultural differences in the previous chapter regarding their historical connection with Russia. And different cultures are not that damning in the grand scheme of this thesis as the focus is on the commonalities between two far right parties and their proximity to Russia.

5.3 Measuring Far Right Parties' Positions on Russia

In this war of opinions then, where does the far and radical right stand? This section is devoted to setting the expectations of the thesis. In other words, where can the thesis expect to see the far-right on the spectrum of Russia-friendliness? To discover this the thesis is going to use an article by Jakub Wondreys (2023) that maps out the stances of the different European Far Right parties.

In the past European far right parties have been somewhat vocal of their support towards Putin. As previously discussed, Wondreys' article titled "Putin's puppets in the West" paints a fairly good picture of what is to be expected of how far right parties think about Putin and Russia post invasion of Ukraine. He divides his findings into three categories. *Russia-friendly, Russia-hostile and neutral* (Wondreys, 2023, p. 3).

"The article divides the parties into categories thusly: "In the first category should be FRPs that are found to blame the West (and Ukraine) for escalating the conflict and/or provoking Russia and, correspondingly, oppose sanctions. Conversely, if FRPs find Putin fully responsible for the (re)invasion, potentially also blaming the West for being too soft on Russia, and support sanctions, they should be placed in the group hostile to Russia. Finally, FRPs that condemn Russia's aggression but are often reluctant to go any further, especially in terms of the sanctions against Russia, and thus are somewhat ambiguous, should end up in the third, Neutral, category" (Wondreys, 2023, p. 3-4).

Having a way to quantify Russia-friendliness is going to be prevalent for this thesis when it comes to the analysis of the gathered data. The data that this article is based on is not only roll-call votes but also public statements on party social media, newspapers, websites and other proclamations by the party leader or other prominent party members in the first four months of the invasion (Wondreys, 2023, p. 3). With all this data the article presented these two tables:

Figure 6. Far-Right parties' positions on Russia

I. Russia-friendly
FPÖ, SPD, AfD, EL, FvD, Republic
II. Russia-hostile
VMRO, DF, EKRE, Ps, Jobbik, Fdl, JA2I, PiS, SDS, VOX, SD
III. Neutral
VB, RN, Fidesz, Lega

Source: "Putin's Puppets in the West? The far right's reaction to the 2022 Russian (re)invasion of Ukraine" by Wondreys, J, 2023, *Party Politics*, 0(0), p. 5

Figure 7. Positions of far-right parties on responsibility for the 2022 Russian (re)invasion of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia

Country	Party	Responsibility	Sanctions
Austria	FPÖ	West ^a , Russia	Against
Belgium	VB	Russia, West ^b	Ambiguous
Bulgaria	VMRO	Russia	In Favour
Czech Rep	SPD	West ^a , Ukraine, Russia	Against
Denmark	DF	Russia	In Favour
Estonia	EKRE	Russia, West ^b	In Favour
Finland	Ps	Russia	In Favour
France	RN	Russia	Against
Germany	AfD	Russia, West ^a	Against
Greece	EL	Ukraine, Russia	Against
Hungary	Fidesz	Russia	Ambiguous
Hungary	Jobbik	Russia	In Favour
Italy	Fdi	Russia	In Favour
Italy	Lega	Russia	Against
Netherlands	FvD	West ^a , Ukraine, Russia	Against
Netherlands	JA21	Russia	In Favour
Poland	PiS	Russia	In Favour
Slovakia	Republic	West ^a , Ukraine, Russia	Against
Slovenia	SDS	Russia	In Favour
Spain	VOX	Russia, Spanish Gov., Far-Left, West ^b	In Favour
Sweden	SD	Russia	In Favour

^aFor either provoking Russia or escalating the conflict by imposing sanctions against Russia and supporting Ukraine.

^bFor either being too soft on Russia or leaving Europe defenceless.

Source: "Putin's Puppets in the West? The far right's reaction to the 2022 Russian (re)invasion of Ukraine" by Wondreys, J, 2023, *Party Politics*, 0(0), p. 5

Since this thesis is going to discuss the two European far right parties of Finland's Finns Party (Ps) and France's National Rally (RN) it is important to get initial impressions out of the way. The Finns Party is listed as Russia-hostile in figure 4. And RN is listed under neutral. Where this thesis seeks to differentiate itself from Wondreys' article is with more up-to-date data and a focus on statements rather than voting pattern. With that being said, the hypotheses of this thesis reflect the expectations set in this article and other works. As previously discussed, this thesis will take inspiration from Wondreys' work and build upon it. The way it intends to do that is to use the proverbial 'bones' of his coding scheme and apply it to a new batch of data that the thesis has gathered. This new data is more recent and should provide a more recent look into how the far right view Putin. Furthermore, the addition of discourse analysis will provide a more in-depth look into two countries, namely, Finland and France and how their far right parties view Russia and why they do so explained through proximity.

5.4 Coding scheme and strategy

This section will go into detail about the process of designing the thesis' coding scheme for the content analysis. It starts with a detailed overview of the process, showing the extent of the dataset that was compiled from the gathered tweets. Subsequently, the limitations of the coding scheme and methodology are addressed.

5.4.1 The Coding Scheme

When designing a coding scheme that would fit the research question, looking at speeches was the first instinct. However, speeches are not always transcribed and since this thesis is analyzing the French RN and the Finnish PS, non-transcribed speeches would be a problem since the author is neither fluent in French nor Finnish. Nonetheless, the thesis settled on tweets from the respective parties. This decision prompted a substantial data-gathering endeavor. Most of the French twitter (X) accounts had 70,000+ tweets in total. So, to be able to gather the relevant tweets the author had to set a limit and timeframe to the gathering. This was important in order to get the most out of the time the author had and the relevance of the thesis. The thesis has divided the gathering into two parts for both parties. The first timeframe is tweets from before the war with tweets being posted between 1. January 2019 and 23. February 2022. And the second timeframe is tweets from between 24. February 2022 to 10. April 2024. The reasoning behind the dates is simple in concept. The 1st of January 2019 gives the tweeters three years to post their tweets which is one year longer than the timeframe for 'after the war', but as the thesis will discuss later, there were not that many tweets from before the war. The 23rd and 24th of February 2022 is the most natural fixed point in time for the data-gathering. As the 24th of February is the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Logically, examining tweets from before the invasion would use the 23rd of February 2022 as the cutoff point. Equally, tweets from after the war would use the 24th as the starting point. The cutoff point for the 'after the war' tweets were, rationally, the point where I was finished collecting.

Collected tweets by themselves would serve no purpose. In order to get somewhere with the thesis, they had to be coded. The coding scheme that I came up with would be simple in its design but would be incredibly expository and robust. The tweets would go through a series of 'questions' connected to a category. And if the answer to that 'question' was 'yes' I would mark it as a 1 and if not, a 0. The tweets were then coded thusly:

Decidedly Pro

This category is marked a "1" if the tweet mentions or uses Russian rhetoric. Examples of Russian rhetoric is: Special military operation, De-nazify, Nazi, Ukrainian Insurgent, Liberation, legal operation, de-militarize.

Decidedly Anti

Marked a "1" if the tweet uses anti-Russian phrases. Examples include: Russian Invasion, Illegal war, unlawful, Ukrainian resistance, "them" when referring to Russia (Exclusionary pronouns).

These two categories deal exclusively in phrases and words. It is automatically marked a 1 if any of these appear in text.

Ceasefire?

Marked a "1" if the tweet calls for a ceasefire.

CF Pro

Marked a "1" if used in a context that would indicate that a ceasefire would benefit Russia. Example: "We need a ceasefire to help Russian troops recuperate." Or "we need a ceasefire and bring the nazi's of Ukraine to justice."

CF Anti

Marked a "1" if "ceasefire" is used in a context that would indicate that a ceasefire would be beneficial to Ukraine or would otherwise negatively impact Russia.

Neutral

Marked a "1" if the tweet has no opinion against either Russia nor for Russia or could go either way. Example: "I do not like seeing people die in Ukraine" or "The Vladimir Putin of today is not the one of 5 years ago, he has made decisions which I condemned, but the fact remains that Russia will remain a distant neighbor of Europe and we need to stop sanctions"¹

Energy/Economic crisis

Marked a "1" if the tweet mentions how the war has affected the economy, food shortage or energy prices.

Promote self?

Marked a "1" if the author either promotes themselves or their party or criticizes the opposition/ruling party. Example: "Macron is inept at governing" or "it is because of the ruling party that energy prices are so high!"

Overall Pro

Marked a "1" if there was nothing in the "decidedly pro" category but the tweet still leans more towards supporting Russia and Putin than neutral and/or opposes sanctions against Russia. Example: "We will see in 6 months which of the Russian people or the French people is most affected by the energy crisis. I say it again, the sanctions against Russia enrich Russian Power and impoverish the French. Stop!"

Overall Anti

Marked a "1" if there was nothing in the "decidedly anti" category but the tweet still leans more towards anti Russia and Putin than neutral and/or supports sanctions against Russia. Example: "Allow me to express my absolute solidarity and compassion with the Ukrainian people."

Table 1. Coding categories

Pro Russia	Neutral	Anti Russia
Decidedly Pro	Neutral	Decidedly Anti
CF Pro	Ceasefire	CF Anti
Overall Pro	Promote Self	Overall Anti

Source: Author's own compilation

¹This last tweet is a tricky one, it starts by condemning Russia (Anti), but then calls for stopping sanctions. This one is marked as pro, anti, and neutral because of that.

This way of categorizing is helpful. The only 'fault' in this coding scheme is the "neutral" category. This category can seem a bit arbitrary or inconsistent. An example is tweets that show 'overall pro', 'overall anti', and 'neutral' characteristics. These are marked with a "1" in all three categories. They could just as easily have been marked as only a neutral tweet. However, doing this would jeopardize the content of the tweet from analysis. Tweets marked as purely neutral are essentially tweets that say nothing about Russia, and only addresses the current issue without any angle. Another name for such 'dry' and non-interesting tweets is 'milk toast' because it is a perfect representation of ultimate blandness. These 'milk toast' tweets should not be mixed with a tweet that contains both arguments for and against Russia and Putin, simply because they are more interesting, although they essentially cancel themselves out by being both for and against Russia and Putin. Other than that, I feel that the coding scheme is sufficient enough to discover whether a person is pro, anti or neutral towards Russia and Putin. For definition's sake, when I am referring to Russia, I do not mean the Russian people, (unless explicitly said so) but the Russian leadership and decision makers.

After setting the timeframe for collecting the tweets, the next step was coming up with keywords or search words to get to the tweets I deemed relevant. This is because sifting through 70,000+ tweets per account would be too time-consuming. Therefore, the search terms I ended up with was 'Ukraine', 'Putin' and 'Russia'. These three keywords were excellent in for their goal. Almost all of the tweets that were produced using these words were always referring to the war in Ukraine, sanctions, refugees, or the Russian leadership. Although, keywords did produce some irrelevant tweets that were mainly about self-promotion. As described above, these were marked down as well. The reason why these were marked down is because of the frequency of which tweets would contain some sort of either pure self-promotion or criticism ranging from valid criticism to animosity. Additionally, marking it down would generate more statistics for the analysis. So, how was the collection process conducted? Twitter has an advanced search option, in there you can put in a multitude of variables, from dates to specific accounts and words. This feature was used in the data-gathering. The initial goal was to get 1000 tweets respectively from each the French RN and the Finnish PS. I first started by collecting tweets from the official party accounts of the respective parties. And this did not grant enough tweets with the three keywords. Only 25 tweets from the RN account and 66 from the Finnish PS account. This was obviously too low to get a clear dataset. So, the next logical step was to look at other accounts. The accounts that I then looked for the French side was Julien Odoul (Spokesperson of the RN), Jordan Bardella (current president of the RN), Louis Aliot (Vice president of the RN), Herve Fabre-Aubrespy (RN party member for 6th district of Lyon and former MEP for the RN) and Marine Le Pen (Current parliamentary leader for the parliamentary group National Assembly and former party leader of the RN). The Finns party had a higher number of tweets compared to the French, but as an attempt to keep the number of tweets comparable to the French, I opted to only investigate 3 twitter accounts. The official PS account, Riikka Purra's account (Party leader of the PS), and Jussi Halla-Aho's account (Spokesman for the Finnish parliament and member of the PS). The final tally for the French tweets after the war was 236, and 37 from before the war. For the Finnish, 380 from after the war, and 38 from before the war. All tweets summarized come to 691 tweets in total. The table below highlights the relationship between the total number of tweets and the ones that were relevant for this study. The full dataset of tweets in excel format is available from the author upon request.

Table 2. Total number of tweets and percentage of relevant ones

Timeframe	Account	Total tweets	Relevant tweets	Percentage
<i>Before war</i>	RN	16,086	7	0.04%
<i>After War</i>	RN	10,724	25	0.2%
<i>Before War</i>	Bardella	5,974	3	0.5%
<i>After War</i>	Bardella	3,983	48	1.2%
<i>Before War</i>	Aliot	17,235	5	0.03%
<i>After War</i>	Aliot	11,490	22	0.2%
<i>Before War</i>	Odoul	6,319	7	0.1%
<i>After War</i>	Odoul	4,213	43	1%
<i>Before War</i>	Le Pen	6,664	11	0.16%
<i>After War</i>	Le Pen	4,442	71	1.6%
<i>Before War</i>	Fabre-Aubrespy	344	2	0.58%
<i>After War</i>	Fabre-Aubrespy	229	12	5.24%
<i>Before War</i>	PS	3,182	6	0.19%
<i>After War</i>	PS	2,121	66	3.11%
<i>Before War</i>	Purra	3,102	14	0.45%
<i>After War</i>	Purra	2,068	71	3.43%
<i>Before War</i>	Halla-Aho	1,126	19	1.69%
<i>After War</i>	Halla-Aho	750	243	32.4%

Source: Author's own compilation

The table above show the total number of tweets tweeted from each individual account in both timeframes, as well as the percentages of the tweets that were relevant. After all, politicians as well as regular people tweet about almost everything so, a low percentage was to be expected. However, what was surprising was the incredible salience displayed by the Finnish spokesperson for parliament Jussi Halla-Aho. Almost a third of all his tweets since the start of the war were about the war: a statistic that is unique in this context. These statistics are supported by Starr, which was introduced in the section about proximity. Where he states that contiguous states automatically create salience (Starr, 2005, p. 391). And interestingly, that is something that is on display here. With the PS and Purra hovering around 3% and Halla-Aho at 32%, compared to the RN which have all members at around 1% of tweets. So, Russia and Putin are more salient topics in Finland than it is in France, at least after the war began.

5.5 Potential Limitations and Validity Checks

conducting content and discourse analysis on people that speak a foreign language is always going to be met with skepticism. Especially when researcher does not speak the language of those he intends to analyze. However, a sound translation strategy is required, and the thesis has that. In the dataset spreadsheet, tweets that had bad grammar and overall, less comprehensible translations after running the original text through two different translation tools were marked down. Admittedly there were not an abundance of such tweets. Only about 10% of the tweets that were gathered showed this characteristic. These tweets were sent to external translators that the author has a personal relation to and speak the language fluently. For the Finnish translations, the thesis had a wonderful woman named Mira who is a native Finn verify the translations and give feedback. And for the French tweets the thesis had two people look them over, who have both studied in France and both speak and write it fluently. These were sent as part of a form they would examine. The form consisted of an explanation of the thesis and the coding scheme, the tweets along with what categories they were put in. Their job was to assess whether they were in the right category and verify the translations. The forms were returned with a mostly correct assessment. Where the categories were wrong however, was where the translation tool had failed and misinterpreted, or plainly translated the wrong word. An example of this is the sentence "L'agresseur qui franchit une ligne rouge, c'est Poutine. L'agressée, c'est l'Ukraine." was translated to "The aggressor who crosses a red line is Putin. The Aggressor is Ukraine." This sentence was obviously wrongly translated. Whereas it was categorized as a "pro Russia" statement it became clear that it was the opposite. Mistakes, however, were on the lower side and the few that were wrong were edited and rectified. See appendix A for the explanation guide for the translators.

Before the full data gathering on the PS and the RN began the thesis first conducted a trail-run with data from Viktor Orban's account. It seemed logical that this would be the target for a trail-run of the coding scheme. As Orban tweets in English, it would negate the complexities of translation. This trail-run honed the coding scheme to what it is today for better and for worse. For instance, the category 'Ceasefire' originated during the trail-run. This was due to the frequency of which he mentioned the term, and as a result, the thesis thought it prudent to include the category along with the subcategories of whether the meaning behind the ceasefire exclamation was in favor or against Russia. As it turned out, neither the PS nor the RN used the term 'ceasefire' that often. However, it still is an indicator of their Russia-friendliness, and the category is still useful in that regard.

6. Content Analysis: France, Finland, and Russia-affinity

This chapter is going to discuss and analyze the main findings and provide a discussion around them. To do this logically and effectively, this chapter will be divided into subsections that tackle the different themes and areas of the analysis. The first subsection will be about France/RN and the second will be about Finland/PS.

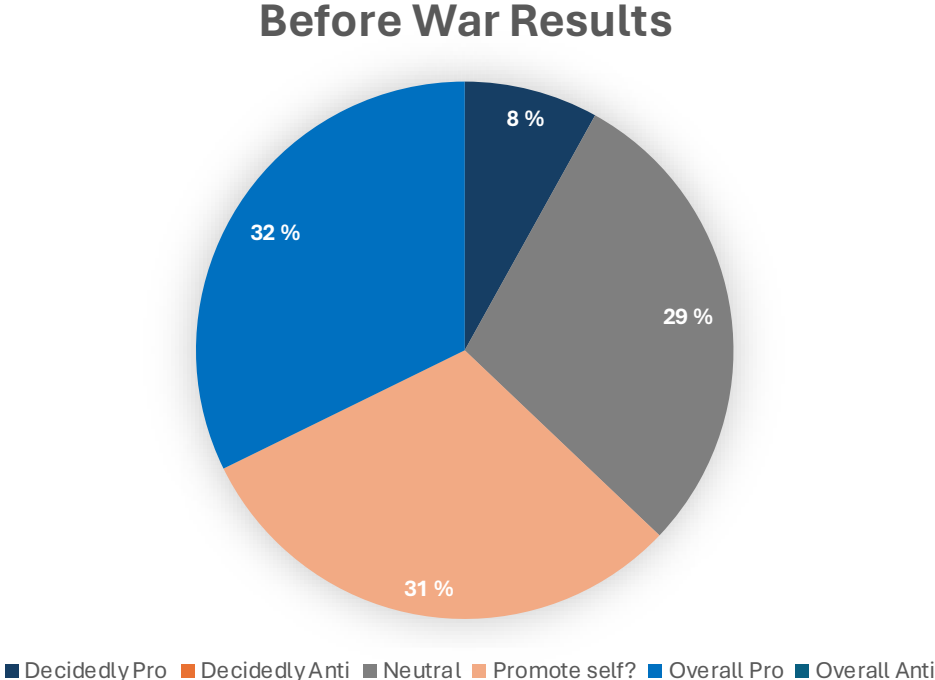
6.1 France

The French political scene, much like any other political landscape, has a plethora of actors and parties. But generally speaking, there are only two major parties that fit the 'far right' characteristic. The National Rally (RN) and Reconquest (Reconquête). These two parties have some similarities, but they are fundamentally different. While the RN has pivoted to a more 'mainstream' approach to their politics, Reconquest remains as a more radical party than the RN. This thesis is not concerned with Reconquest as the main topic is the RN. However, it is worth noting that there are more than one far right party in France. Following a rebranding in 2022 where the RN changed several of their Eurosceptic policies. For example, leading up to the rebranding they wanted to withdraw from the euro and the EU and sanctioned the "most blatant racist expressions among their activists" (Hénin, 2024, p. 145), whereas now they have seemingly pivoted to be more appealing to a wider range of voters. However, they have not let go of everything. They still maintain contact with groups or former members that can be violent, like the Groupe Union Défense (GUD) (Hénin, 2024, p. 145).

The RN and Reconquest are the ones that are the closest to Putin on the French political spectrum. This political proximity is defined by some of their issues, examples include "anti-globalism, anti-liberalism, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-immigration and perceived resistance to a threatening Muslim world" (Hénin, 2024, p. 146). Because of this proximity in policies has resulted in some more favorable interactions with Russia. For example, in 2014, "the RN benefitted from two loans from a Russian bank for a total of six million euros, which led to an even more visible alignment with Moscow's positions" (Hénin, 2024, p. 146). Including financial support, the RN has also gotten support from Russia in the form of election tampering. During the 2017 French election and the electoral debates between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, Russian support made it possible to conduct several illegal activities. This includes "the Macron leaks, an audacious hack and leaks operation carried out with malware developed by Russian military intelligence (GRU) and amplified by the US alt-right through highly visible X (formerly Twitter) accounts and more discreet Telegram channels, aimed to prevent the election of Emmanuel Macron [...]" (Hénin, 2024, p. 146). Keeping the disposition of the RN in mind, here is the data.

6.1.2 Before war results

Figure 8. RN Before War Results



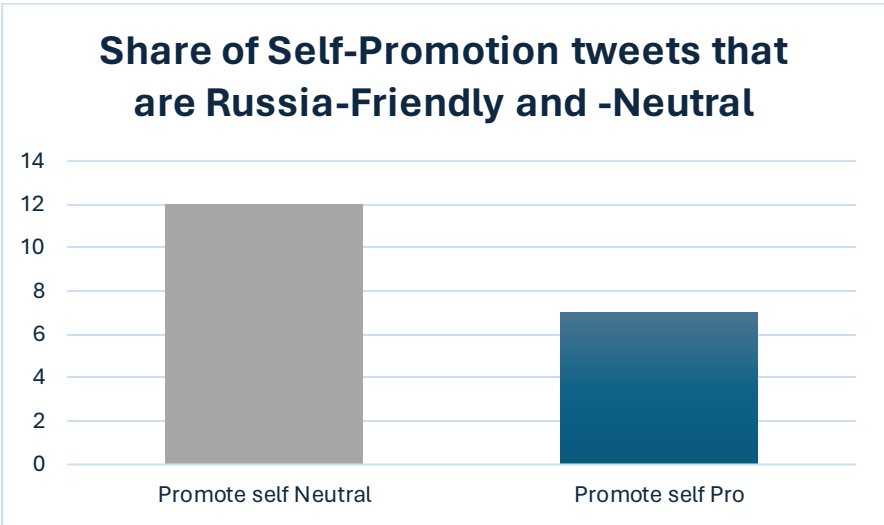
Source: Author’s own Compilation

As previously stated, there were precious little tweets about Russia, Ukraine, and Putin before the invasion (See Figure 8). Clearly a sign that those subjects were not as salient in the period between 2019 and 2022. Out of the 37 tweets it is hard to give a conclusive answer to the research question. However, the coded results are above, and they show that a third of the tweets are Russia-friendly. This is a significant change from the tweets from after the war, where there were tweets that were fairly Russia-hostile. When removing the ‘promote self?’ category the ratio of neutral tweets to Russia-friendly tweets are 42-58. Which as an indicator is significant. In other words, the RN has been having a Russia-friendly policy before the war in Ukraine. Of course, there could have been more tweets about Russia between 2019 and 2022, but there is a chance that they may have been deleted. That is speculation, however. This change in opinion, or at least, apparent opinion towards Russia from before and after the war broke out coincides with the ‘rebranding’ the RN conducted in 2022, according to Hénin. Indeed, the difference is so significant that it gives Hénin’s claims credence, and traction to the hypothesis that something made the RN shift their position on Russia to a more neutral position.

However, there could be a plethora of reasons as to why the RN shifted their position. If you were to use Occam’s razor one could simply conclude that the RN became wearier of Russia after seeing them invade another sovereign nation and bomb civilians. But the far right has never been known to be straight-forward. However, the empirical fact remains that the RN was more Russia-friendly before the war in Ukraine than it is now. The link between the apparent ‘rebranding’ that Hénin discussed is backed up by this data. This data thus establishes evidence for a link and political proximity with Russia. Although as

the results from after the war started will show, the share of Russia-friendly tweets is diminished.

Figure 9. RN share of self-promotion tweets from before the war

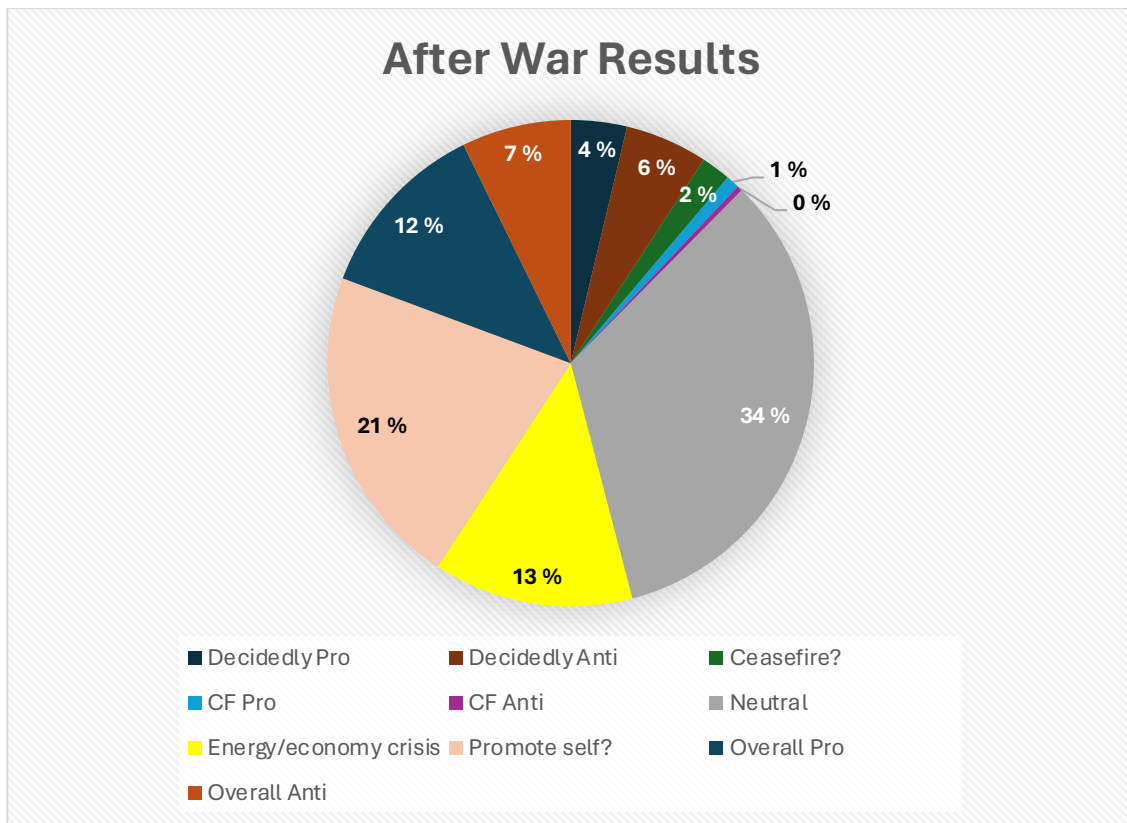


Source: Author’s own compilation

Self-Promotion was a significant portion of RN tweets from before the war. The nature of which was largely neutral as described in the bar graph below, (see Figure 9). In terms of numbers, out of the 19 tweets that contained self-promotion, 12 were inherently neutral and 7 were Russia-friendly. In terms of what this signifies, one could speculate that the RN has a bias towards promoting themselves or criticizing their opposing parties when they do not plan on stating anything Russia-friendly. However, the fact that they do engage in criticism or self-promotion when they are speaking favorably about Russia is an indicator that there is not set pattern or norm for when they self-promote.

6.1.1 'After War' Results

Figure 10. RN After War Results



Source: Author's own compilation

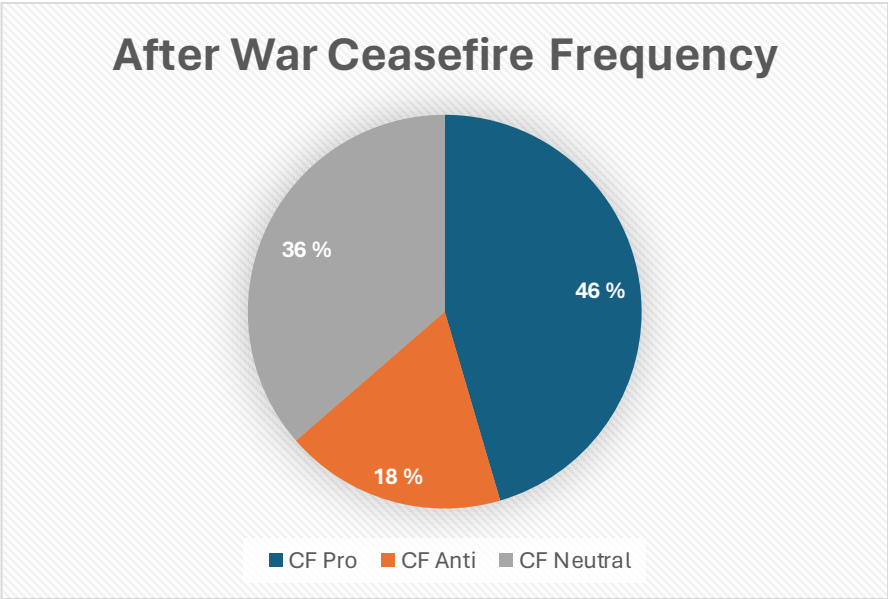
Pictured above (Figure 10) are the coded results of the tweets after the war has started. There is much that is worth noting here, but perhaps the most important statistic is the neutral category. This category makes up a third of the tweets from six RN representatives. Not only does that coincide with Wondreys' projection from 2023, but it does also indicate that the RN has neither strayed from nor to Russia since the war began. This can be due to the neutral nature of their tweeting pattern, but some tweets are wholly anti-Russia while others are overwhelming in support of Russia. This ambivalence in how they tweet is somewhat puzzling. The reason to why, will be discussed in the following section. However, some statements are on both extremes of the Russia-friendliness scale, and somehow include both figurative 'ends' in the same tweet. An example of this apparent balancing act is this tweet from Julien Odoul the spokesperson for the RN: "While unreservedly condemning the aggression of #VladimirPutin, we must understand how we got here. Even if this serves as a pretext, NATO has not respected the 1991 agreement which provided for the neutrality of countries bordering #Russia" (Odoul, 2022).² Furthermore, a lot of the 'overall anti' tweets were about sanctions. An initial expectation was that perhaps there was some division within the RN. After all, even though politicians adhere to the same party, it does not mean that they all completely agree on all issues. Surprisingly, this seems to not be the case for the RN. At least, for the most prominent members of the RN whom this analysis involved. Generally, all agreed on most fronts. For example, five of the six accounts that were part of this thesis have at least one tweet that were about France's

² Translated

purchasing power. Stating that the sanctions against Russia are hurting the French more than it is hurting Russia (Le Pen, 2022a), (RN, 2022), (Bardella, 2022), (Aliot, 2024), (Odoul, 2022a). The only caveat here is, of course, that only people that were tested were the top five people of the party. But the sixth person, Herve Fabre-Aubrespy, despite having been an MEP and has had other prominent political position is currently only a member of parliament for the RN. As shown in table 2, however, he does not tweet as much as his more popular counterparts, and as such the dataset for his views is smaller. And as the author has discovered, he does not have much input on the war in Ukraine. Largely what he tweets about is refugees. From what can be determined from his tweets is that he is deeply involved with and cares for Ukrainian refugees, something that he frequently mentions on his twitter account (Fabre-Aubrespy, 2022). The slight disparity between 'anti' and 'pro' tweets is also an interesting moment to discuss. There seems to be a slight bias towards the pro-Russia tweets with (combining 'decidedly', 'overall' and 'CF' percentages) 17% compared to the frequency of anti-Russia tweets with 13%. This disparity, although minimal, tells us that among all tweets that were tweeted about the war in Ukraine, Russia, and Putin had a bias towards being more Russia-friendly than Russia-hostile. However, because the gap is so close one could also argue that this further enforces the RN's neutral position towards Russia.

Another aspect that is interesting is the share of tweets that self-promote the RN. 21% of the tweets that should in practice be about Ukraine, Russia or Putin are used to either criticize Macron, or promote something that they are doing, or what they would do. On the other hand, twitter is after all a social media and one of the main activities of social media is to let people know what you are doing. Additionally, the unofficial job description of a party that is in opposition to the current government is to complain and tell the electorate (and to some extent the ruling party/parties) what they would have done differently if they were in power. So, self-promotion is expected, but the frequency is somewhat brow-raising when you compare it to the frequency displayed in Finnish tweets. The Finnish tweets will, of course, be discussed in the following subchapter.

Figure 11. RN After War Ceasefire Frequency



Source: author's own compilation

Lastly, the last statistic that is worth discussing is the ceasefire category, (see Figure 11). As previously discussed, during preliminary testing the word "ceasefire" was frequently used, and that prompted the idea to include it in the final coding scheme. However, the accounts that were studied using this final coding scheme rarely used this word. Below is a chart that show the percentages of which context the word 'ceasefire' was used. Bear in mind that the total number of times 'ceasefire' was used were 11 times. In terms of numbers, ceasefire used in a pro-Russia context were 5 times, anti-Russia were 2 times, and neutral were 4 times. There is a slight bias towards Russia-friendly, but the difference is so small that the statistic is near negligible. However, the fact that there were so few of those tweets arguably speak to how little salience and interest there is for a ceasefire among the RN.

6.2 Finland

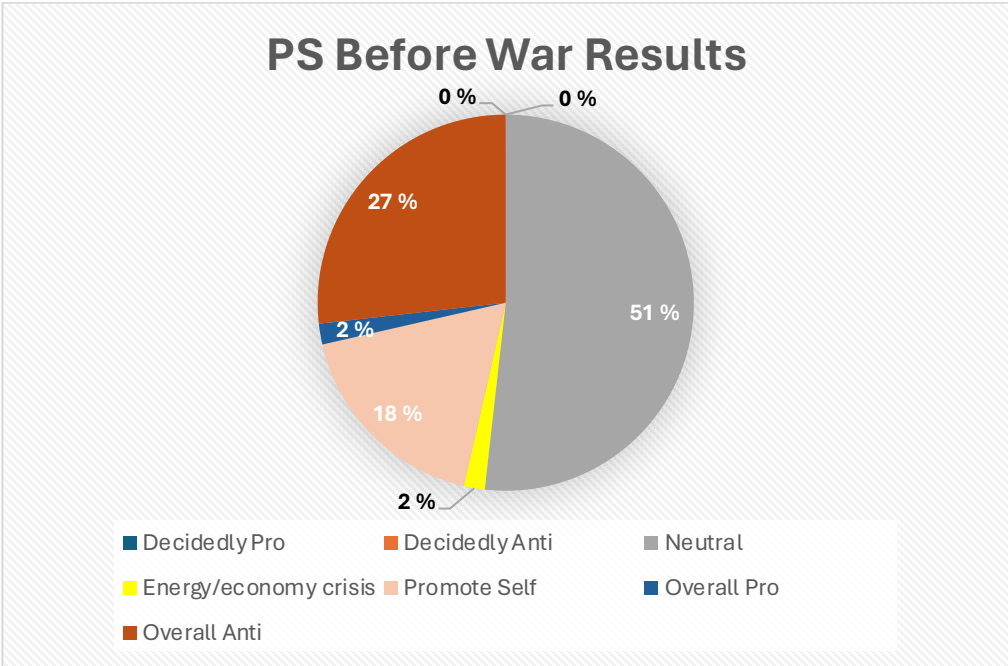
The Finns Party (referred to as the PS and formerly known as the True Finns) are the most popular far right party in Finland. It is like the RN not that old, being founded in 1995 and is currently the second largest party in Finland, (PS, n.d.). finishing the Finnish parliamentary election 20% of the electorate. The PS currently serves in government as part of a majority coalition along three other parties and holds 7 ministerial posts. A distinction to keep in mind as the PS is currently in power while the RN is currently on opposition.

This section will present and discuss the results from the PS. It is split into the two temporal periods and feature graphs similar to the previous section. What is important to keep in mind in this section is the concepts of proximity, contiguity and territoriality and how that affects the results.

6.2.2 Before war results

An expectation that some might have before looking at the 'before war' results is that the PS might be more Russia-friendly. Especially because they do not have a war in their backyard, and the threat of war with Russia should be lesser than it is now. And to some extent, those expectations would be right.

Figure 12. PS Before war Results



Source: Author's own compilation

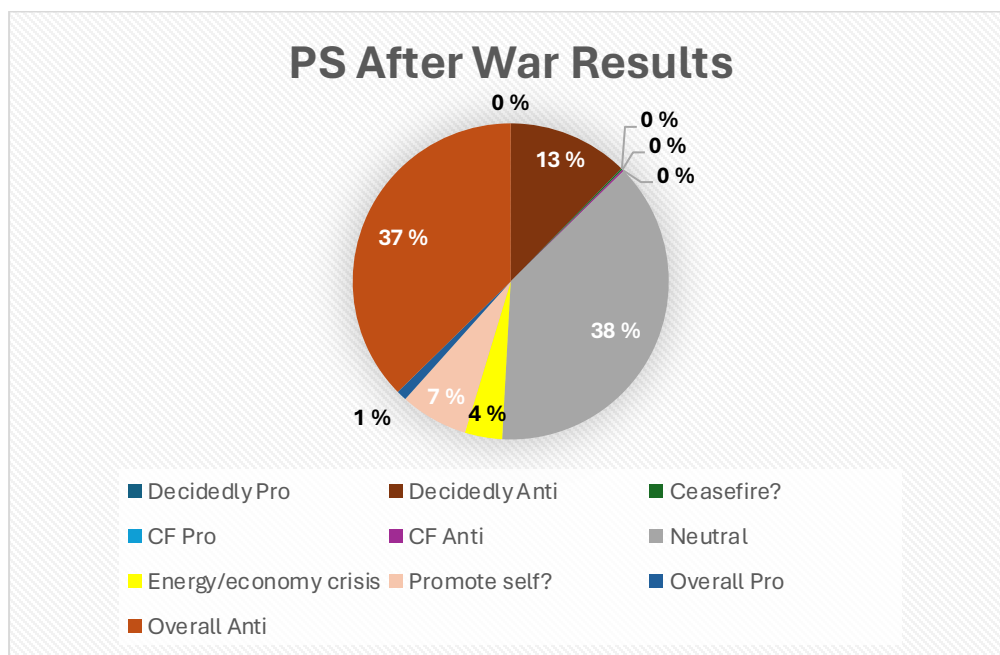
The first issue to address is that, similar to the case with the RN, there were fewer tweets before the war than after. So, the sample size is significantly smaller, but the results still paint a figurative picture of the PS's opinion towards Russia between 2019 and 2022. This is a sign that salience around this issue was lower than after the war, which is logical. There are overall less anti-Russia statements (percentagewise) than after the war, (see Figure 12). There are also about the same percentage of 'overall pro' tweets as well. Perhaps the largest difference between the two timeframes is the share of

'overall anti' and 'neutral' tweets. The share of Russia-hostile tweets has increased with time. As before the war, the lion's share of tweets were neutral in nature. Obviously, there were no calls for ceasefire in this period as the war in Ukraine did not exist yet. Moreover, there was only observed one tweet that complained about the current economy/energy and that tweet was mainly about how they refute the claims that Russia is seeking influence through them (PS, 2019). However, another important takeaway from this is the lack of any decidedly pro or anti tweets. One could assume that this is somewhat anomalous as the Finns showed great animosity towards Russia after the war. But as discussed in the methods chapter, the coding scheme only puts tweets that contain certain words in the decidedly category. Otherwise, it is coded as overall anti/pro.

6.2.1 After war results

The initial expectation was that the PS would be more sceptic towards Russia because of Finland's proximity to Russia. As previously discussed, proximity can be a factor for war, and it increases the number of interactions two countries have. Having that in mind, the results in Figure 13 seem to support that hypothesis.

Figure 13. PS After War Results



Source: Author's own compilation

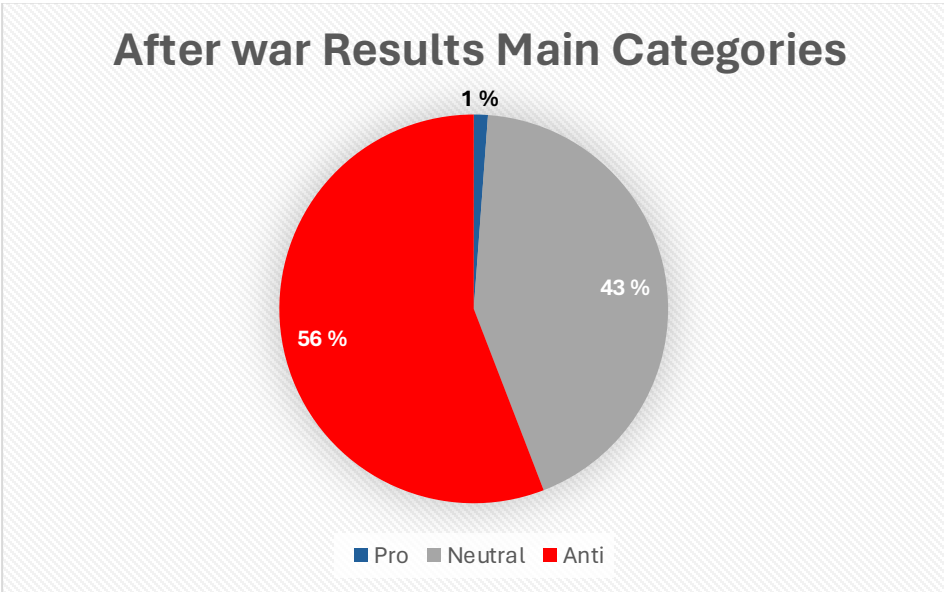
The results from the PS' accounts show a correlation with the hypothesis. Furthermore, with the Ps being a far right party on the same plane as the RN one could arguably expect that they would share the same sentiment as the RN. After all, they share some of the same ideological tenets, so would they not be similar in their opinions of Russia? As the results show, they do not. Of all tweets gathered from the PS since the start of the war, 50% of them are actively antagonistic towards Russia and Valdimir Putin. Interestingly, only 5% of tweets were Russia-friendly. A major contrast to the RN's 14% and overall neutrality towards Russia. Furthermore, self-promotion also stands as a significant difference between the PS and the RN. The PS's meager 7% against the RN's 21% signals that the Finns are less concerned with themselves and more concerned with criticizing Russia and the war. They seem driven by sharing their opinion on twitter

without any motive to push themselves on their readers. Arguably, however the effect of self-promotion can still be tangible by just sharing your thoughts. Because sharing your thoughts on social media can in some cases create engagement and popularity, purely from the normative power of your statement combined with your professional position.

From the results one can also see that the PS is not really concerned with the energy crisis following the war, on the contrary in some tweets they call for even more sanctions against Russia. And in some of the most extreme tweets they call for an armed intervention against Russia in Ukraine (Halla-Aho, 2022a). From that tweet one can get a sense of the fear and anxiety from Halla-Aho. This fear is something that the thesis does argue stem from their proximity to Russia. Again, comparing this to the RN who are more concerned with not antagonizing Russia and wanting to keep a healthy relationship with them, the PS are visibly more anxious about their security when tweeting about Russia. Sometimes that anxiety seems to boil over into anger, prompting them to call for more support to Ukraine and blaming other European countries for not doing enough (Halla-Aho, 2022b). Furthermore, it is worth noting that there were no tweets that contained any decidedly pro statements or words. So that further solidifies the notion that the PS is very much against Russia.

Lastly the ceasefire category. Again, the infrequency of the word 'ceasefire' is apparent here as well. Even less frequent than with the RN, but in this case, it was to an extreme. Only once was the word ceasefire used. And, following the trend of the other tweets, it was used in a Russia-hostile context (Halla-Aho, 2022c). So as is in the case of the RN, the ceasefire category is not as frequent as it was in the testing. The takeaway of the category is somewhat inconclusive due to the small sample size. However, as it stands now, the results further indicate that if a call for ceasefire is written, the probability of that being in the spirit of benefitting Ukraine is high. Figure 14 highlights the amount of animosity towards Russia Among the PS. It is split into the three main categories of *Pro*, *Neutral*, and *Anti*. And the most impressive statistic is the share of statements that were Anti-Russia. What is important to note here is the 56% that signals a significant bias towards Russia-hostility.

Figure 14. PS After war Results Main Categories



Source: Author's own compilation

7. A (Short) Discourse Analysis

In this chapter the thesis will go in depth on a few hand-picked tweets that are either anomalous or deserve further analysis and discussion. While the methodological focus is content analysis, the thesis finds it important to explore some tweets in greater detail. So, this chapter will conduct a limited discourse analysis to complement the findings in the content analysis. The chapter is split into two sections. The first subsection will discuss tweets from the RN and the second will discuss tweets from the PS. The tweets in question are presented in their original language first, and their translations second. Some tweets were written in English and therefore does not need a translation.

7.1 Tweets From the RN

The first tweet that deserves further analysis is a tweet posted by Julien Odoul the 5th of March 2022. This tweet is special because he writes it in a way that makes it seem as if he is catering to both sides. The overall 'feeling' that the reader is left with is that he seems to more Russia friendly than hostile. In this tweet he writes

"On peut condamner sans réserve la politique de #VladimirPoutine et l'invasion de l'#Ukraine sans verser dans l'outrance la plus crasse @BHL. Contrairement aux islamistes, les armées de Poutine n'ont jamais commis des massacres en France, égorgé un prêtre ou décapité un enseignant" (Odoul, 2022b).

"We can unreservedly condemn the policies of #VladimirPutin and the invasion of #Ukraine without falling into the crassest excesses. @BHL. Unlike the Islamists, Putin's armies have never committed massacres in France, slit the throat of a priest or beheaded a teacher." (Odoul, 2022b) (Translated).

This tweet starts out with a decidedly anti stance against Putin and Russia, with a 'unreserved condemnation' of Putin. However, he means that Russia-criticism is too uncivil because of what others are saying. And after which he states that it could be worse, comparing the invasion of Ukraine to Islamic terror attacks in France. Clearly, he is trying to shift the focus to xenophobia and away from Putin and the war in Ukraine. One could therefore surmise that mister Odoul is more concerned with Muslims in France than he is with the threat level of Russia in France. And, frankly because of France's political proximity to Russia, there is justification for his statement in those terms. And because of the RN's political proximity to Russia, it would be expected for them to try to focus on their core policies, which include immigration and the xenophobia that fuels it. This claim is supported by the conceptualization of the far right in terms of xenophobia. It is supported by the concepts of both political proximity and the RN 'rebranding' trying to be more Russia-neutral but still holding on to their core values. This tweet is an excellent example of their stance on Russia after the war broke out. But how does a tweet form before the war compare to this one?

"@ThierryMARIANI: "La #Russie n'est pas notre ennemi ! Il y a une sorte de parano anti-russe, alors que la Russie n'est pas un danger. Mon ennemi c'est le TERRORISME !" @BFMTV #Européennes2019 #OnArrive" (RN, 2019).

"@ThierryMARIANI: "#Russia is not our enemy! There is a sort of anti-Russian paranoia, while Russia is not a danger. My enemy is TERRORISM! @BFMTV #Européennes2019 #OnArrive" (RN, 2019) (Translated)).

This tweet is from May of 2019 and is from the official RN account on X (Twitter). There are not many ways to analyze this tweet. The context of this tweet is a quote from a debate on a news broadcast on BFMTV, a primarily economy focused network. In this debate/interview Thierry Mariani, an MEP for the RN was answering questions regarding if whether Europe was in Russia's shadow. His answer was recorded and tweeted by the official RN account as stated above. This statement is a clear pro-Russia statement. The thesis does not believe that one can become any more Russia-friendly than this. Compared to the tweet from after the war it is clear that their stance has changed. Among others, this tweet stands among several with essentially the same message. This tweet also further enforces the RN agenda of xenophobia and authoritarianism.

The neutral tweets from this period are often unrelated to Russia or Putin.

"Décollage réussi pour Thomas Pesquet et son équipage ! Dans la course à la conquête spatiale, je souhaite que les Nations européennes retrouvent le chemin de l'ambition et rivalisent avec la Chine, la Russie et les Etats-Unis. Nous en avons le potentiel ! MLP #NASA #SpaceX" (Le Pen, 2021).

"Successful takeoff for Thomas Pesquet and his crew! In the race to conquer space, I hope that European Nations will find the path to ambition and compete with China, Russia and the United States. We have the potential! MLP #NASA #SpaceX" (Le Pen, 2021).

This tweet was marked as neutral in the dataset. It was marked that way because it says nothing about Le Pen's attitude towards Russia, not Putin. Although one could make the argument that she aspires for France to be like Russia, however that argument would be a stretch. The tweet is, after all, about the European space agency and in includes an uncharacteristically earnest remark about European unity. It is surprising due to, historically, she has been somewhat Eurosceptic. And this tweet comes from an era that should signal a more Eurosceptic stance. For example, in 2020 she tweeted this:

"L'Union européenne a démontré son inefficacité TOTALE, et n'a servi à RIEN ! L' #Italie a été obligée d'en appeler à l'aide sanitaire de la Russie et de la Chine, pendant que l'UE était occupée à signer des accords de libre-échange et à intégrer l'Albanie ! #BourdinDirect" (Le Pen, 2020).

"The European Union demonstrated its TOTAL ineffectiveness and has served NOTHING! #Italy was forced to call on health aid form Russia and China, while the EU was busy signing free trade agreements and integrating Albania! #BourdinDirect" (Le Pen, 2020) (Translated)).

This tweet was posted in 2020 during the pandemic and is a display of mistrust towards the European Union; a show of euroscepticism characteristic to the RN. This tweet was also categorized as neutral in the dataset for mainly the same reasons as the previous tweet. However, unlike the previous tweet, this one stands out as being wholly neutral towards Russia, while displaying euroscepticism and keeping the focus of the message. So, the tweet that came from RN about Russia and Putin were, as Figure 8 shows, mostly pro-Russia, but to highlight some of the inconsistencies in their messaging after the war, the following tweets are included in this section.

"Les révélations sur les atrocités commises à Boutcha imposent que l'ONU établisse les responsabilités. La Russie, comme tout autre pays, ne devrait réintégrer le concert des nations sans que soient punis les coupables de crimes de guerre établis par la communauté internationale." (Le Pen, 2022b).

"The revelations about the atrocities committed in Boutcha require that the UN establishes responsibilities. Russia, like any other country, should not rejoin the comity of nations without punishing those guilty of war crimes established by the international community" (Le Pen, 2022b) (Translated)).

This tweet is an example of the ambivalence and inconsistency of RN messaging after the war. It was posted as a reaction to the massacre of Bucha in Ukraine. The massacre itself consisted of the rape, torture, and executions of 73 civilians along with 458 other victims (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022, 7. December). The massacre was so horrifying that it resulted in Russia losing their seat on the UN Human Rights Council. Le Pen even states this in the tweet: "they should not be allowed back without punishing those guilty" (Le Pen, 2022). It is therefore a decidedly anti-Russia statement. One could argue that because of the obvious atrocities in light of the emerging evidence, Le Pen is practically forced to condemn Russia for this or risk looking entirely unsympathetic to the loss of life and therefore hurting their electoral prospects. Another reason can be that a lot of tweets are tweeted in response to something that have happened. And that 'something' is though about by politicians in regard to how they can 'spin' it and get their politics across while staying relevant to the 'something' that happened.

7.2 Tweets From the PS

This subsection will present a small number of tweets from both before and after the war. The first tweet from the PS comes from the official PS account. It was originally an anomalous tweet because it stood among the few tweets that can be considered Russia-friendly.

"Rajat tukittava laittomilta tulijoilta ja kotouttamiseen varatut rahat käytettävä ulkorajavartiointiin. Valko-Venäjä ja Venäjä määriteltävä turvallisiksi maiksi" (PS, 2021).

"Borders should be supported from illegal immigrants and the money set aside for integration should be used for external border guarding. Belarus and Russia to be defined as safe countries" (PS, 2021).

In fact, this tweet was originally the only one from before the war that is categorized this way. This tweet is about immigration and states that Russia and Belarus are considered to be safe countries. Calling this tweet Russia-friendly is entirely up to the interpretation of what is meant by the classification of 'safe' country. Are they referring to the amount of crime? Or perhaps they mean that immigration from these 'safe' countries are accepted? According to the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS), 'safe' countries in terms of asylum seeking and refugees mean that Finland does not accept asylum seekers from those countries (FIS, n.d.). However, they explicitly state that there is no list of 'safe' countries, and that all asylum seekers are evaluated on their own merits (FIS, n.d.). Additionally, the tweet specifically states "immigration" and not "refugees" or "asylum seekers". So officially there is no list of 'safe' countries that are excluded from seeking asylum to Finland, however, the PS are free to say what they want and stating that Finland should not accept refugees and Russia and Belarus fits better with their narrative than stating that immigration is a non-issue between Finland, Russia and Belarus.

This next tweet is an example of a 'standard' that thesis has discovered during the data gathering phase. It contains a phrase that is often used when criticizing someone or something.

"Toivottavasti kunnioitat oikeuslaitoksen ratkaisua. Oikeuslaitoksen kyseenalaistaminen on juuri sitä, mitä Putin haluaa" (Halla-Aho).

"I hope you respect the court's decision. Questioning the judiciary is exactly what Putin wants" (Halla-Aho, 2020) (Translated)).

The phrase "this is exactly what Putin wants" or "this is playing into Putin's hands" is something that all three of the accounts that were included in this study have stated several times. It is a negative connotation that is used when criticizing current policies, or addressing a discourse among other politicians, or when they are accused of being Putin friendly. In their eyes, these extreme far right views like opposing the rule of law and this kind of authoritarianism are what Putin wants. In other words, this shows that the PS is not like any other far right party, they do not want to diminish the judiciary, ergo, they do not support the typical authoritarianism that is displayed by other European far right parties. However, despite this statement the PS has had a history with authoritarianism and researchers have pointed out and classified the PS as a populist and authoritarian party (Arter, 2010, p. 497). Additionally, the PS is also grounded in traditional family values (Arter, 2010, p. 497). Something that in theory should be compatible with Putin's Russia and should therefore create 'common ground' between the PS and Russia. However, that connection or 'common ground' is not present according to the data. This supports the hypothesis of proximity and territoriality causing worse relations. Additionally, Finland's history with Russia is also a major factor as to why Finns generally do not see Russia in a favorable light. Moreover, the PS has displayed a distaste for Putin and Russia over both periods the thesis has gathered statements from them. Signifying that they are just as Russia-hostile as any other Finnish party, perhaps even more so.

"We should cease to recognize Mr Putin and his regime as legitimate actors. We did not negotiate with ISIS, we should not negotiate with Mr Putin. This is both a moral and a practical (see 2, 3, 4) matter" (Halla-Aho, 2022d).

This tweet stands among a plethora of Russia-hostile tweets that originate from the PS. Other examples of speech of the same caliber are plentiful, for example Halla-Aho also stated in the same tweet 'chain' that "The west has treated Mr. Putin with relative respect despite his being a genocidal tyrant, terrorist and war criminal" (Halla-Aho, 2022b). The rhetoric towards Russia in Finland is quite hostile indeed. Since 56% of all tweets after the war were Russia-hostile and they all, to a certain degree, share this style of speech one can conclude that the data is consistent with Wondreys' projections and his results. Furthermore, it shows that parties (at least the PS and the RN) has not strayed from his results a year later.

8. Conclusion

During this thesis, there has been a red 'thread' that has been maintained and woven into most sections. And that is proximity, contiguity and territoriality. Linking this concept to the Russia-affinity of two far right parties has been the goal of this thesis. With the help of Jakub Wondreys' article on where far right parties stand (or stood in 2023) was the basis of the thesis and what it built upon. To that end the thesis argued that proximity, contiguity and territoriality is the cause of The PS' Russia-hostility, and that, for the RN, it played a smaller role, but they do not have the same threat perception of Russia as the PS does due to their proximity. Additionally, the thesis has made claims about the RN's political proximity to Russia as an explainer for their neutral stance towards Russia. Additionally, the thesis made the argument that the RN's neutrality can also be explained through their financial ties to Russia and that it could be a factor as to why they are neutral towards them.

Some arguments may have more merit than others, however. The argument that proximity, contiguity and territoriality is the primary factor as to why the PS is Russia-hostile may be exaggerated. Historical factors between these states are a major reason and foundation for their foreign policy towards each other. However, one can argue that the Finnish policies towards Russia are permeated by their contiguity and disputed territories, like Karelia, which is to this day divided between the two states being originally Finnish territory before the Winter War and Continuation War during World War 2. Although being divided between them, Russia still holds the largest part, which they took after World War 2. Historical factors have therefore been used to explain the Nordic countries' relation with Russia by researchers before, in fact, it has remained as an important method in this field for a long time (Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski, 2023, p. 22). However, in terms of causality, the history between the two nations would arguably not have happened if it were not for their contiguity and having disputed territory. Furthermore, the change in Finland's alliance policy and their shift from military non-alignment to a full NATO membership in the short span of time after the war in Ukraine broke out, signifies a substantial piece of evidence that supports the hypothesis.

In the case of the RN, the inherent large distance between the two nations of France and Russia does, according to proximity, imply less interactions between the two nations. And that is exactly what is happening. The RN is calling for more interaction with Russia and calling them important in the context of Europe and its energy market. However, the case with The RN is interesting because they seek closer proximity to Russia politically, but because of the heinous acts that Russia has committed since 2022, it makes it hard for them to do so. And this notion becomes prevalent in their statements through Twitter. Additionally, because of allegations that Russia has financially supported the party makes it even harder for them to be as Russia-hostile as the PS. Simply there is no incentive to be Russia-hostile. The only incentive for the RN can be that they are trying to appeal to mainstream voters after their 'rebranding' in 2022 and its shows in their statements. Statements condemning Russia and calling them the aggressor, but at the same time criticizing sanctions against Russia and calling for closer cooperation with them. So, when summing up the tweets, the RN lands in the 'neutral' category, but in reality, the RN is playing both sides to see which will give them better chances in elections and what will grant them more power.

Returning to the original research question “How does the far-right view Putin today? And how has their politics changed since the start of the war in Ukraine?”, it is the thesis’ opinion that the original hypotheses were correct. The parties of the PS and the RN has indeed remained in the same categories as Wondreys put them in in 2023. And in terms of how their politics have changed, the answer is quite interesting. For the PS, they have entirely changed their alliance policy, they were against entering NATO before the war, and now right after becoming a member themselves, they are complaining that NATO is not doing enough to help Ukraine. So, their foreign policy has been significantly altered after the war. And with the RN, they did undergo a change in 2022 that aimed to make them a more appealing party for mainstream voters. And as the data showed, they have gone from a more Russia-friendly disposition to a more Russia-neutral disposition. So, the thesis would conclude that, yes, their policies regarding Russia have become more neutral than they were prior to the war. While the PS if anything has become more cautious and Russia-hostile after the war. And to address the second research question, which was “Have far-right parties in countries that are close/bordering Russia (Finland) become less Russia friendly after the war? And how has that affected countries that are not close (France)?”. As the thesis has discussed, the proximity of states has a significant effect on the foreign policy and opinion of each other. The thesis has therefore enough evidence to conclude that The PS has become less Russia-friendly after the war broke out and the RN has become more Russia-friendly due to proximity.

8.1 Limitations

There were some limiting factors. One being that the sample size could have been bigger in terms of people that were targeted for this analysis. A larger sample size would possibly uncover hidden themes such as party division. This will be discussed in the next section, however.

Further limitations are the fact that this does not cover public opinion to a large degree as the study primarily analyses politicians and party statements. However, the thesis has used and gathered public opinion data where it was applicable. This data is, regrettably, not gathered by the author, but by either other researchers or institutions. This data should be sufficient for the purposes of this study, however, as that is not really within the scope of the thesis. Furthermore, one could argue that since politicians should in theory represent the voice of the people, the current percentage of the electorate that either RN or PS has can be interpreted as that percentage’s opinion on the matter.

8.2 Avenues for Further Research

There are several ways to continue this research. One could for example gather data from more people. This would ensure larger sample sizes so the data could be more definitive. This could be from the same parties or from other parties across Europe. The data would either way be interesting as this thesis did not really look into party division. Party division was a viable avenue of research as the data gathering started, but it turned out that the people that were selected were in agreement on almost everything so party division turned out to be a nonissue for both the gathering and the analysis. Admittedly, there were 2-3 tweets per account that were contradictory to something someone else had said but compared to the large amount of data that harmonized, those 2-3 tweets were considered to be fringe cases and thereby negligible. But with a larger

sample size one could presumably discover party divisions. Another way to continue this research is by examining other temporal areas. Before and after the Crimean annexation are two periods that are quite interesting to see compared with the data in this thesis. Since this thesis only covered a relatively small temporal period, other periods might prove even more interesting. Another way to research further is to rectify and use the limitations of this thesis. Having someone who is fluent in the language of the research subjects is definitively a strength that is not to be underestimated.

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Appendix A Translation Guide

Some pretext before this appendix. The translators are Norwegian so the 'verdicts' are translated into Norwegian by them before they give a verdict. The following text is what was sent to the translators as a quick introduction to the coding scheme and a job description.

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in my master's thesis. It really means a lot to me. For the empirical base of my analysis, I am using tweets from official twitter accounts belonging to the party in question (RN, PS/Finns party). Since I am not a French/Finnish native speaker, I am using online translation tools. In this document I have included tweets that had somewhat weird translation in English and their translation, as well as the binary coded data. What I would like you to do is to translate the meaning (i.e. the "spirit" of the content, i.e. "what does the author actually mean when he/she writes this). After you have done this, take a look at the coded results and determine if they align with what you read. If they do, put a "yes", if they don't put a "no" and explain how you would categorize the tweet.

Tweets are coded thusly:

Decidedly Pro

This category is marked a "1" if the tweet mentions or uses Russian rhetoric. Examples of Russian rhetoric is: Special military operation, De-nazify, Nazi, Ukrainian Insurgent, Liberation, legal operation, de-militarize.

Decidedly Anti

Marked a "1" if the tweet uses anti-Russian phrases. Examples include: Russian Invasion, Illegal war, unlawful, Ukrainian resistance, "them" when referring to Russia (Exclusionary pronouns).

These two categories deal exclusively in phrases and words. It is automatically marked a 1 if any of these appear in text.

Ceasefire?

Marked a "1" if the tweet calls for a ceasefire.

CF Pro

Marked a "1" if used in a context that would indicate that a ceasefire would benefit Russia. Example: "We need a ceasefire to help Russian troops recuperate." Or "we need a ceasefire and bring the nazi's of Ukraine to justice."

CF Anti

Marked a "1" if "ceasefire" is used in a context that would indicate that it would be beneficial to Ukraine or would otherwise negatively impact Russia.

Neutral

Marked a "1" if the tweet has no opinion against either Russia nor for Russia or could go either way. Example: "I do not like seeing people die in Ukraine" or "The Vladimir Putin of today is not the one of 5 years ago, he has made decisions which I condemned, but the fact remains that Russia will remain a distant neighbor of Europe and we need to stop sanctions"*

*This last tweet is a tricky one, it starts by condemning Russia (Anti), but then calls for stopping sanctions. This one is marked as pro, anti, and neutral because of that.

Energy/Economic crisis

Marked a "1" if the tweet mentions how the war has affected the economy, food shortage or energy prices.

Promote self?

Marked a "1" if the author either promotes themselves or their party or criticizes the opposition/ruling party. Example: "Macron is inept at governing" or "it is because of the ruling party that energy prices are so high!"

Overall Pro

Marked a "1" if there was nothing in the "decidedly pro" category but the tweet still leans more towards supporting Russia and Putin than neutral. Example: "We will see in 6 months which of the Russian people or the French people is most affected by the energy crisis. I say it again, the sanctions against Russia enrich Russian Power and impoverish the French. Stop!" (Many of the overall pro tweets are opposed to sanctions against Russia)

Overall Anti

Marked a "1" if there was nothing in the "decidedly anti" category but the tweet still leans more towards anti Russia and Putin than neutral. Example: "Allow me to express my absolute solidarity and compassion with the Ukrainian people"



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