THE FINNISH EXCEPTION: IS THE PARTY COMPETITION IN FINLAND INACCESSIBLE TO RADICAL RIGHT POPULIST PARTIES?

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Ever since the latest rise of radical right-wing extremism in the 1980s, the main interest in studies has been on occurrences of the phenomenon. Non-occurrences have not received much attention, even though they could have something to offer the research in the field as well. Compared to the other Nordic countries, the radical right has been non-existent or at least insignificant in Finland. The article focuses, therefore, on the “Finnish exception” and asks if there have been significant cleavage transformations in the party system, which could provide a niche for a successful radical right-wing party. Moreover, it tries to describe and classify the current political actors of radical right-wing persuasion and explain why their efforts have proven to be unsuccessful. The main data used in the study is the European Values Survey (1999–2000), analysed by principal component analysis. Even large-scale surveys, however, do not reach Finnish radical right-wing voters to such an extent that their description would be possible. Thus, radical right-wing policies are evaluated through the opinions of candidates in the “Electoral machine” prior to parliamentary elections of 2003 and EU elections of 2004, as well as through official platforms of parties under scrutiny. Theoretical framework consists of several supply and demand side approaches, Kitschelt’s “winning formula” –thesis and the New Politics approach serving as starting points. The analysis shows that both supply and demand side factors have prevented the radical right-wing rise in Finland despite the declining party identification, changes in social structure and occasional political dissatisfaction. Strategies and consensus of moderate parties, public control, political history and weak radical right-wing party alternatives can be claimed to have hindered its mobilisation so far, as well as moderate views of the Finnish electorate on socio-economic and socio-cultural issues. More generally, the analysis shows that certain supply and demand side factors assumed to facilitate the success of radical right parties should be evaluated critically: they may exist also in cases of non-occurrences, still not producing a radical right populist party, or benefiting it in the system.