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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Constrained Cooperation: Activist Politicians and Their Engagement With Social Movements in Protest and Parliamentary Arenas

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ABSTRACT: The article contributes to the study of the intersections between institutional and non-institutional politics through an analysis of politicians from activist backgrounds who continue to cooperate with social movements while in office. Previous research on institutional activism and dual militancy has paid inadequate attention to the differences between politicians and civil servants in this respect even though these two groups of actors face differing constraints and opportunities for promoting movement agendas within political institutions as well as for participating in movement activities such as protests. The article maintains that to best understand the relationship between these 'activist politicians' and social movements, it is necessary to consider the micro, meso and macro levels alike. In other words, the overall relationship is affected by the politicians' identities and role properties, the organisational characteristics and dynamics of movements and parties, in addition to structural and cultural factors. The empirical case discussed in the article concerns migrant rights activism in Finland in the late 2010s.

KEYWORDS: activism; Finland; migrant rights; politicians; social movements

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, it has become increasingly commonplace in social movement studies to describe how social movements intersect and overlap with political parties and governmental institutions, rather than understanding them as separate entities that merely affect and influence each other (see e.g. Kriesi 2014; Duyvendak and Jasper 2015; della Porta and Chironi 2015). Although this argument is not new as such (Kriesi and van Praag 1987; Maguire 1995; Goldstone 2003, 2004), the issue has recently received more widespread attention. Conceptualisations such as 'multi-engagement' (Combes 2015), 'party activism' (Hadj Abdou and

Rosenberger 2019) and 'governmental activism' (Verhoeven and Duyvendak 2017) exemplify attempts to illustrate the forms of politics that cross the boundary between the institutional and non-institutional. The proliferation of 'movement parties', as well as the scholarly interest they have received (della Porta, Fernández, Kouki, and Mosca 2017; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2019), belongs to this same phenomenon.

In this article, I explore this theme through an analysis of the interplay between social movements and politicians from activist backgrounds who continue to cooperate with movements while in office. The benefits of such 'institutional activists' for movements have been demonstrated in previous studies (Santoro and McGuire 1997; Pettinicchio 2012). However, despite their overlaps and intersections, movements and political institutions operate with different logics, thus forging and maintaining alliances and a sense of commonality across the two poses its own challenges (Böhm 2015; Abers and Tatagiba 2015). Even if in some cases this relationship is so close that institutional activists could actually be considered as a part of a movement (Banaszak 2010), the question that interests me is how the distance or closeness between movements and institutional activists comes about and how it varies. I argue that answering this question requires the consideration of all three 'levels' of social formation: micro, meso and macro. In other words, institutional activists' identities and role properties, organisational characteristics and dynamics, in combination with structural and cultural factors, all play a role in the matter. I will elaborate on these below.

Moreover, in order to delve further into detail in the matter, it is necessary to note how politicians and civil servants differ as institutional activists. In previous research, civil servants have either been used as generalised examples of institutional activists (Banaszak 2010; Abers and Tatagiba 2015) or the differences between these two groups have been overlooked (Santoro and McGuire 1997; Pettinicchio 2012) (for an exception, see Hysing and Olsson 2018). After all, politicians and civil servants face differing constraints and opportunities for insider activism and for participating in movement activities. As my focus is only on politicians, in order to highlight the distinction, I use the term 'activist politician' instead of the more general 'institutional activist' in this article. By politicians, I mean members of parliament specifically.

The empirical case discussed in the article concerns migrant rights activism in Finland during the tenure of 2015–2019 government. During that period, every one of the more immigration-friendly parties was, somewhat exceptionally, relegated to the opposition after the nativist Finns Party won 17,7 votes in the April 2015 parliamentary elections and succeeded in entering a governing coalition for the first time. Consequently, restrictions on asylum rights were agreed to in the government platform, and new constraints were issued that very autumn in the wake of the 'long summer of migration'. The following analysis addresses the question of what facilitated and what hindered the cooperation between the migrant rights movement and the pro-immigration activist politicians in both protest and parliamentary arenas, that is, in two of the key arenas where migrant rights were debated and fought for. As for the protest arena, the focus is on one particular migrant rights protest, 'Right to Live', which lasted several months in Helsinki in 2017, whereas interaction in the parliamentary arena will be discussed more generally. The data consist of interviews with four activist politicians and seven social movement activists (both advocacy organisation employees and autonomous activists), conducted in 2017–2019.

In the next section, I will discuss at a greater length the conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning the article. This is followed by a presentation of the empirical context and the methodology, before moving on to the analytical section and the conclusions.

2. Understanding the relationship between activist politicians and social movements

In their early exploration on the topic, Wayne Santoro and Gail McGuire separated institutional activists from other institutional actors according to three criteria: institutional activists share the *ideology* of a social movement, they have been *mobilized* in a social movement in a similar fashion to non-institutional activists and their support for a social movement is apparent in their *political action* (voting record, sharing their resources with movements, creating access to other decision-makers etc.) (Santoro and McGuire 1997, 505). Considering the second criterion, even though I will also focus on cases where movement participation has preceded an actor's institutional career, it should be noted that some institutional activists become involved with movements while already working for the state (Banaszak 2010, 64, 86). Such findings further testify to the 'fuzzy boundary' thesis and work as a reminder that even those institutional activists from a movement background do not necessarily 'disappear' within institutions but that their political engagement may rather continue to be trans-sectoral, i.e., they go on practicing dual militancy (see ibid., 129; Combes 2015, 64).

Moreover, again in relation to the second point, I find it reasonable to assume that many institutional activists do not cooperate only with movements with which they share a background but also with others from the same movement family. In my own data, none of the politicians originally came from the narrowly-defined migrant rights movement but from ideologically similar progressive/leftist movements (see details below). Thus, even though there are presumably some common particularities in the relationship between a movement and institutional activists directly originating therefrom (such as greater expectations and a stronger sense of accountability), the factors that I highlight are not specific to such cases only.

As stated earlier, rather than concentrating on institutional activists in general, my focus is on 'activist politicians' in particular. The following table presents the micro, meso and macro level factors that I find relevant with regards to how they affect such politicians' relationship with social movements, and I will discuss all of them briefly below.

Table 1 - Factors affecting the relationship between activist politicians and social movements

Micro	*Meso*	*Macro*
Political identity	Movement constitution	Political opportunity structure
Role constraints and opportunities	Party profile	Political culture
	Inter-party power dynamics	

Micro

Political identity. Many studies demonstrate how social movement participation can have a long-term impact on an individual's life trajectory (for a summary, see Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016, 5–6). Accordingly, an activist identity may even persist over long periods of inactivity (Corrigall-Brown 2012). However, in the case of institutional activists with a movement background, one needs to pay attention to the differences between politicians and civil servants in this respect. In comparison to civil servants, who occupy a non-partisan role and who are 'simply' salaried employees, politicians represent their parties in public and try to garner support for them. Movement parties notwithstanding, the parties generally are not social movement organisations. Thus, it is logical to assume that activists-turned-politicians face greater pressures for identity

change than activists-turned-civil servants and that activist politicians can also identify with their parties and not only with movements, leading to conflicting loyalties (see Böhm 2015, 5–6).

Role constraints and opportunities. The previous point relates to the characteristics of the politician's role. As politicians operate on a popular mandate, they need publicity, but they also need to ensure that their public appearances do not jeopardise their electability. In terms of movement interaction and protest participation, these role demands have both advantages and disadvantages: in contrast to civil servants, politicians have greater capacity to provide visibility to movements and their issues, but they also need to carefully consider what kinds of causes and activities they can be associated with. Another difference between politicians and civil servants is that the latter are usually specialists whereas the former are compelled to command and take stances on several issues. (See Hysing and Olsson 2018, 95–97.) In relation to the empirical context in question, an interview study on Finnish politicians demonstrates that politicians struggle to familiarise themselves with all the required topics and keep up with all the demands of their jobs (Mannevuo 2020). In terms of movement cooperation, the disadvantage of this is that politicians cannot dedicate themselves to the advancement of issues that are particularly salient to them. Evidently, politicians' role opportunities and constraints depend considerably on what other posts, aside from being a parliamentarian, they hold.

Meso

Movement constitution. Movements and their subgroups differ in their degree of outsider status. Minority movements and movement constituents typically have more limited access to political institutions than majority movements and constituents, although even the latter may suffer in their mission to garner support for their ideas in political parties and governmental offices (Banaszak 2005, 155–156). In addition, radical movement groups generally shun cooperation with parties and the state, which in turn can create avenues of influence for moderate groups, as the radical flank effect theory suggests (Haines 2022). What groups the movement is constituted of also influences the choice of protest tactics, affecting movement-politician interplay in the protest arena.

Party profile. The characteristics of the activist politicians' respective parties evidently play a role in what capacity the politicians are able to cooperate with movements. Relevant factors in this respect are the parties' general relationship with social movements, what constituents they seek to represent and, relatedly, how salient particular issues are in their overall politics.

Inter-party power dynamics. The relative positions of activist politicians' respective parties vis-à-vis other parties is yet another crucial factor in determining how well such politicians succeed in advancing movement goals. Issue salience depends on this aspect as well because larger parties have greater agenda-setting power, influencing what issues become politically dominant. An example of this is the rise of the nativist radical-right parties and the manner in which their ascent has not only affected the immigration policies of other right-wing parties but also of left-wing parties under some circumstances (Muis and Immerzeel 2017, 918).

Macro

Political opportunity structure. The arrangement of political elites (e.g. according to political cleavages) and whether some of these elites are supportive of a social movement are part of the movement's political opportunities. Moreover, the general legal and institutional composition of the polity determines how open or closed it is in terms of movement access. (McAdam 1996, 27–28.) In her study on the women's movement in the USA, Lee Ann Banaszak has illustrated the various ways through which institutional activists act upon and modify political opportunities. To begin with, insider activists can help outsider activists to become aware of

the existing political opportunities and, conversely, incite outsider mobilisation when institutional avenues for change are limited. Moreover, insider activists actively create new institutional opportunities for the movements, for example when they succeed in establishing new agencies and offices. (Banaszak 2010, 7, 116, 130, 159–160.) I will discuss how such findings resonate with my data in the empirical section.

Political culture. Finally, another broader contextual factor informing movement-politician interplay is political culture, i.e. 'the sets of symbols and meanings or styles of action that organize political claims-making and opinion-forming, by individuals or collectivities' (Lichterman and Cefaï 2006, 392). Action in both parliamentary and protest arenas is affected, to an extent, by such durable cultural traits.

In the analysis, I will address all these different factors within the limits of my own empirical case. Next, I will provide some background to the inquiry by discussing the meso and macro levels in Finland with respect to migrant rights and how they play out in the two arenas in question.

3. Empirical context: migrant rights in parliamentary and protest arenas in Finland

3.1 Parliamentary arena

After receiving 19 per cent of the votes in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections, the Finns Party had achieved an electoral base comparable to the three traditionally dominant parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Centre Party and right-wing National Coalition Party. The rise of the Finns Party has signalled the emergence of a new notable cleavage in Finnish politics, namely one between value conservatives and value liberals (Westinen 2015). The Finns Party's conservatism is the most evident in its nativist and anti-immigration agenda. According to the official study on the 2015 elections, Finns Party voters held the most negative attitudes toward immigration and multiculturalism. Those who casted their votes for the other government parties (the Centre and National Coalition Parties) were situated in the middle in terms of these attitudes, along with SDP voters. The most positive views toward immigration and multiculturalism were found among the voters of the Swedish People's Party (SPP), the Greens and the Left Alliance, all of which are small to mid-sized parties (in the 2015 elections, they each gained between 5–9 per cent of the votes). (Westinen, Kekkonen, and Tiihonen 2016, 282–283.)

The relevance of the new cleavage became apparent in the formation of the 2015–2019 government because the most univocally value liberal parties (the Greens, Left Alliance and SPP) were left outside the government, despite the fact that the formation of governments through ideological lines had not traditionally been commonplace in Finland. Rather, ideologically diverse and broad-based majoritarian governments have been the norm throughout modern Finnish politics (Arter 2008, 232–234). A particularly notable change was that the SPP, a centre-right liberal party representing the Swedish-speaking minority, was relegated to the opposition for the first time since 1979[1].

Thus, conjunctural political opportunities for migrant rights movements were, exceptionally, very limited during the term of the 2015–2019 government. On the other hand, the opposition politicians supporting such issues may have felt a heightened need to align themselves with like-minded activists, opening new possibilities for interaction and cooperation. Especially for politicians representing the Greens and Left Alliance, which have the closest ties to progressive social movements out of all of Finland's parliamentary

[1] After the parliamentary elections in 2023, a left-right cleavage became more pronounced than a conservative-liberal schism as both the Finns Party and SPP became part of the government coalition.

parties, their parties' opposition status may have enabled them to emphasise their liaisons with social movements (cf. Hadj Abdou and Rosenberger 2019; Hutter and Vliegenthart 2018).

Regarding the openness of the political institutions in general, especially well-established civil society organisations (CSOs) maintain relatively effective access to the parliamentary arena as parliamentary committees invite experts and civil society representatives to issue their statements on legislative bills (see e.g. Seo 2017, 130–138). Furthermore, due to Finland's corporatist past, the multi-stakeholder extra-parliamentary working groups in which legislative bills are crafted, continue to be an even more valued advocacy arena than the parliament for interest groups (Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz 2018). Such findings suggest that activists do not struggle with access to political institutions per se in the Finnish context, but *who* has access and *when* and *where* is an entirely different matter. This leads us to ask what kind of role activist politicians play in bridging movements to political institutions.

3.2 Protest arena

Moving to the protest arena, migration became a mobilisation issue for the left-libertarian scene at the turn of the new millennium during the 'alterglobalisation' protest wave. The still-operating migrant rights network *Vapaa liikkuvuus* (Free Movement Network), formed in 2006, originates from this movement milieu. However, an unprecedented wave of refugee solidarity was spurred by the 'long summer of migration' in 2015. For example, people with no activist background began offering their homes to the newly arrived (Merikoski 2020), while at the same time, several pro-migrant groups, events and protests were formed and organised. The 2017 asylum seeker protest 'Right to Live', which will be discussed in the analysis, was also part of this mobilisation cycle. Similarly, various counter-protests took place in the fall of 2015 and later, and new far-right groups, such as the street patrol group Soldiers of Odin, were also established. The expanded far-right anti-immigration mobilisation led to the increased involvement of anti-fascists, many with anarchist or anti-authoritarian views, in the migrant rights movement. (Seikkula 2021.) For politician-activist interaction in the protest arena, the activation of these new players – the counter-movement and the anti-authoritarian radical flank – constituted a potential obstacle.

Finally, Finland's weak protest culture is one issue that should be taken into consideration. Due to the specificities of the Finnish state-making process at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, demonstrations and other forms of protests acquired only a secondary place in the political repertoire and have historically been regarded as disorderly and potentially threatening activities (Alapuro 2016). Recently, however, protesting has become more commonplace. According to the 2010 European Social Survey, in that year, 1.4 per cent of Finnish respondents reported that they had taken part in a lawful demonstration in the past 12 months (ESS 2010), whereas in 2018, the percentage was 3.9 (ESS 2018). Although the figure is still relatively low, the change is nonetheless noteworthy. When protesting becomes more common and the stigma of 'disorderly conduct' vanishes, participation becomes easier for those groups of people who are regarded as the guardians of legal order, such as politicians. For activist politicians in particular, these conditions enhance their opportunities to engage with social movements to a greater extent. The mid-2010s in Finland witnessed two large anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations (*Meillä on unelma* in 2015 and *Peli poikki!* in 2016), which enjoyed significant politician participation, with some even being the main speakers in the former.

4. Methodology

The interview data consists of seven activist interviews and four politician interviews, all conducted in 2017–2019. The sampling strategy was organisation-based, and thus with regards to the activist interviews that were firstly conducted, the primary objective was to identify key migrant rights activist groups in the research period of the late 2010s. From each group, I pursued 2–3 prominent activists for interviews. At the time of the data collection, two of the interviewees worked with refugee rights in a human rights organisation (the organisation's name is not disclosed to protect the anonymity of the interviewees). In addition, I have interviewed two activists from the Free Movement Network. Furthermore, three activists involved in the Right to Live demonstration were interviewed (the two Free Movement activists participated in the protest as well). Five of these interviewees are native-born Finnish citizens, one an asylum seeker and another is a Finnish citizen with an asylum-seeker background.

The four politician interviewees were selected based both on activists' reports on their 'ally politicians' and on my prior knowledge of their engagement with migrant rights. Even though all four are easily identifiable to anyone familiar with Finnish politics, I nonetheless prefer to retain their anonymity to emphasise the issue at hand rather than the particularity of these individuals.

The politicians represent four different parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Swedish People's Party (SPP), the Left Alliance and the Greens. At the time of the interviews, the first two interviewees had had decades-long careers in politics. The SDP parliamentarian was active in the New Left movements of the 1960s, and in 1970, he was elected to the parliament for the first time at the age of 23. From 1979–1991, he served as the deputy mayor of the city of Helsinki until returning to the parliament. For her part, the SPP representative had already joined progressive student organisations in her middle-school years in the early 1970s and was involved in many causes of the time, such as aid for the Third World and anti-nuclear activism. She also joined the party in her late teens but did not become a parliamentarian until 1991. In 2006–2015 she held non-political offices, for example serving as the national Non-Discrimination Ombudsman in 2010–2015. She was re-elected to the parliament in 2015.

As for the latter two politicians, they both shared backgrounds in the autonomous social movements of the 2000s, such as the squatter's movement and the movement of the 'precariat' and were only in their 30s at the time of the interviews. In their respective cities, the Green representative was elected to the city council in 2008 and the Left Alliance representative in 2012. In 2015, they were both elected to the parliament for the first time.

Despite the small sample size, both activist and politician interviewees represent diverse actor profiles, thus providing a sufficient amount of information for examining the factors of interest. The interviews were semi-structured, and their main focus was on recent experiences of interaction between the two set of actors. The data warrants two clarifications. Firstly, the initial aim was to study the relations between social movements and politicians in general rather than 'activist politicians' in particular. The eventual focus resulted from the observation that politicians with the closest ties to social movements tended to have an activist background themselves and also expressed dissatisfaction if categorised solely as politicians. As institutional activism and dual militancy were not the primary objects of the study, some questions pertaining to this, such as the politicians' identity development and activists' views on former activists 'changing sides', have not been asked. The subjects' political trajectories have been addressed in the interviews, but they do not amount to proper life history interviews with detailed attention to changes and continuities over time (see Bosi 2022). I will note this limitation in the analysis, but overall, the data ended up discussing the themes of institutional activism and dual militancy to a considerable extent despite this not being the initial goal of the study.

Secondly, the study targeted the broader anti-racist movement of which the migrant rights movement was considered as one case. Thus, the politicians were questioned about their relationship with anti-racist as well as migrant rights activism and also with anti-fascist organising. I have employed all this material to best clarify their movement liaisons. However, as migrant rights were such a central mobilisation issue during the study period, many of the answers revolved around this particular issue. Additionally, the Right to Live protest was one of the campaigns that was specifically highlighted in the interviews. (See the appendices for further information on the interview questions.)

5. Cooperation in the protest arena: building bridges instead of strong bonds

The protest under discussion here, called Right to Live, was started in February 2017 by Iraqi and Afghan asylum seekers and Free Movement Network (FMN) activists. The demonstration was the first large-scale asylum seeker protest in Finland. It was also an unusually long demonstration, taking place from February to September of that year (with some pauses) on different squares in central Helsinki. The longest continuous encampment was located on the square next to the main railway station between mid-February and the end of June. The main motivation for the protest was to oppose the restrictions made to the asylum policies in the previous year. (See Näre 2020 for more details on the protest.) The protest swiftly mobilised a diverse group of supportive Finnish participants. According to an interviewed activist, in addition to FMN activists, these participants consisted of anarchists, antifascists, leftists as well as church-based and CSO actors. The demonstration was met by a far-right counter-protest, which subjected the Right to Live protesters to continuous harassment and even violent attacks.

5.1 Politicians' protest participation as an expression of an enduring activist identity

Numerous politicians also visited the Right to Live demonstration, both impromptu and upon invitation. For example, the protesters organized a movie night, screening Aki Kaurismäki's refugee-themed film *Le Havre*, inviting politicians to attend. The interviewed asylum seeker participant regarded interaction with politicians as a matter of right and respect: 'I think when it comes to matters of policy-making, we should be able to interact with them [politicians], even as to be able to feel like a human being with equal rights living in Finland, regardless of your background.'

The four interviewed politicians also paid visits to the demonstration. An issue-specific reason for their participation was the desire to make their support for the asylum seekers' cause concrete and visible, exemplified here by the Left Alliance MP: 'I wanted to make clear that there are members of the parliament who see and hear their concerns and demands; that a part of representative democracy, in some way, represents them as well'. Thus, through 'descending' to the protest arena, the politicians extended their representative mandate to the beneficiary constituent of the movement who lacked any formal rights in relation to the political institutions and who were unable to promote their cause therein (see Banaszak 2010 above on the institutional reach of different movements and their constituents).

Besides aligning with the particular cause, the politicians' predisposition for activism and cooperation with movements also spurred them to participate in the protest. In my interview with the Green parliamentarian, she recounted how the Right to Live demonstration coincided with her and her party's efforts to advance asylum rights in the parliament, therefore attending the protest was only natural to her and moving between the two arenas did not pose any problem for her. In fact, at the beginning of the interview, when I informed her that I am interviewing both institutional and non-institutional actors, she replied, 'So I represent the

institutional side, is that it? Because for me those [boundaries] are rather blurred'. Furthermore, her continued allegiance with social movements became evident in her vehement statement that she should just quit being an MP if she loses her ties to movements: 'For me, the environmental and human rights movements are my reason for being here [in the parliament], so if I no longer know what is going on or I have no contact there, then I'm in the wrong place.'

The SPP politician also pushed backed on my attempt to accentuate her politicianhood at the expense of her other political engagements. When she narrated the course of her political life, I speculated that party politics must have taken priority after her election as an MP, to which she responded emphatically: 'Yes, but CSOs have always been terribly important for me, I have always been active in them'. For his part, the SDP politician also recounted being a contributing CSO member regarding some other issues but emphasised how his activity around migrant rights and anti-racism took mainly place through party structures. Nonetheless, he regularly expressed his support for these causes by attending protests and other events organised by movement groups.

Concerning post-2015 migrant rights activism, the Left Alliance representative reported that she had tried to be 'a sort of link between the civil society and the authorities'. Reflecting on her relationship with social movements more generally, she stated similarly to the Green MP, 'After all, movements are the motors of social change; I never want to lose grasp of this fact nor lose my connections to that side'. For this reason, she also did not want to be a parliamentarian for the rest of her life and could envision herself returning to some sort of activism. Referring to her mother, who had taken part in the recent migrant rights activism and had turned into a 'radicalised granny', she stated that 'perhaps I will become a radicalised granny in the future, too'.

For the interviewed politicians, practising 'outsider' activism simultaneously with being a politician was a matter of importance, rather than these two being distinct phases in one's political career. The continued interaction with movements helped to project the activist identity and the possible re-prioritising of activism into the future, as the quote from the Left Alliance MP demonstrates. However, as will be elaborated further below, their dual militancy also meant a dual identity: for the interviewed politicians, party politics was not simply instrumental for advancing movement goals, but they also held positive views of their respective parties, signalling a more affective relationship with them.

5.2 Moderateness for the sake of the beneficiaries: intra-movement dynamics facilitating politicians' participation

In addition to the activist politicians' predisposition to activism and their alignment with the movement, the manner in which the Right to Live protest was carried out also enabled their participation. Previous research demonstrates – perhaps unsurprisingly – that politicians tend to favour interaction with moderate rather than radical movement groups. For example, in her study on party responses to social movements, Daniela Piccio determined that even though parties may also be responsive to radical movement groups' demands when ideological affinity exists between the party and the movement, organisational ties are nonetheless most likely to be formed with moderate groups (Piccio 2019, 164). In a similar vein, Hadj Abdou and Rosenberger's (2019) findings demonstrate that narrow and policy-oriented claims facilitate party involvement in protests. (See also Jämte and Pitti 2019 regarding interaction between activists and governmental institutions.)

In my own data, this preference for moderation especially manifested itself in the fact that all of the politicians named non-violence as a precondition for their protest participation. This was not simply a matter of principle to everyone but also a testament to the interviewees' role constraints, which was most explicitly expressed by the Left Alliance MP. When explaining her reasons for not associating with the more radical

anti-fascists despite ideological similarities, she recounted how 'they [the media etc.] keep a pretty close eye on where I go' and how this made her somewhat cautious regarding her protest participation.

At the Right to Live demonstration, there was a strict non-violence policy, even though the counter-protesters violently harassed them. Although the policy was primarily established in such a way as to not further jeopardise the asylum seekers in their already precarious situation, it nevertheless facilitated politicians' involvement in the protest. Moreover, the moderate framing of the protest was another facilitative factor in this respect, although this was not mentioned in the interviews: the 'right to live' resonated with liberal human rights discourse, whereas more radical framings such as 'no borders' or 'free movement for all' would have made it more complicated for politicians to attend the protest. That the movements appear moderate may be particularly crucial for politician-movement cooperation in contexts such as Finland where political radicalism is met with suspicion and disruptive political action is generally condemned (see Pirkkalainen 2023, 54 for this reasoning in the Right to Live demonstration).

Considering that radical anti-authoritarian activists also attended the protest, it might have been possible that even the participation of activist politicians was unwelcome. However, the radical 'conscience constituent' also respected the asylum seekers' leading role in the protest, and as it was their decision to invite politicians to the site, this choice remained unopposed. Yet, how the decision was not wholeheartedly applauded by all can be detected from an interview with an anti-authoritarian participant who discredited the politicians' participation as 'posing'. For his part, a long-term FMN activist recounted how they have generally downplayed their political ideology in their activities: 'In a way, our thinking sprang from independent leftist and anarchist movements, but in reality, we have focused on acting together with certain migrant groups and our argumentation has been very much rights-based'. Such prioritisation of the beneficiary constituent and its interests helped to transform the Right to Live demonstration into a site where cooperative relations with politicians and activists were possible.

5.3 Visiting politicians, committed activists: weak and strong bonds of a protest camp

The politicians' involvement with the protest amounted to occasional visits to the protest site, and they did not play any more substantial role in its organisation and operation. In social movement studies, it has been demonstrated that protests are important moments in the lives of social movements as coming together in public to take a stance creates affective bonds and blurs the boundaries between the individual and the collective. The public and emotionally charged nature of protests is conducive to producing collective memories that serve as a basis for future encounters, thus helping a movement to extend itself in time. (Berezin 2001, 93; Eyerman 2006, 196.) Seen from this perspective, one could conclude that even the politicians' brief visits to the protest site might have been enough to foster this type of belonging to the movement.

However, as the Right to Live demonstration was a months-long encampment, its maintenance required sustained effort and an around-the-clock presence. The form of the protest relates to the movement constitution to the extent that the asylum seekers themselves were available for such time-consuming participation, and their supporters saw the need for a persistent struggle. Due to the long duration of the protest, the more active participants ended up forming strong bonds with each other. In ethnographic studies on the protest, it has been reported how the protest camp, with its sense of communality, had a sort of 'magnetic pull' that encouraged one to become more engaged with it. The core group even referred to itself as 'family', which sparked criticism of exclusion from the outer circle of participants. In addition, the fear caused by the aggressive counter-protesters and the anger stirred by police's perceived indifference to the wellbeing of the asylum seekers, both served as unifying affects in the protest. (Näre and Jokela 2023; Pirkkalainen 2023.) Even though many kinds of life commitments may hinder such immersed protest participation, the time constraints that politicians

generally suffer from (Mannevuo 2020), which all the interviewed politicians also complained about, resulted in politicians remaining outside of the affective protest community.

Based on the interviews, the activist politicians' main contribution was to act as brokers between the movement and the parties and between the protest and parliamentary arenas. One protester was of the opinion that 'the demonstration helped to build a bridge for discussion with the Left Alliance and the Greens, and perhaps a little with the Social Democrats, too; that was really good'. In a similar vein, the SPP politician who visited the protest several times lamented the fact that she was unable to make much difference in concrete terms, but in her view, this did not render her and other politicians' participation meaningless: 'I know it helped, at least many said that it helped that they knew we were on their side, reflecting on the issue and asking questions [in the parliament]; it gave them strength to carry on'. Thus, even though the politicians were unable to participate in the protest in a substantive manner and forge stronger ties with the movement, their willingness to participate in the first place succeeded in eroding, to an extent, the boundary between the institutional insiders and outsiders.

6. Cooperation in the parliamentary arena: activist politicians strengthening movement influence within the bounds of party politics

6.1 Opening the gate wider: activist politicians making use of political opportunities

My interview material is in line with the above-cited research on the Finnish political system (Seo 2017; Vesa *et al.* 2018) in the sense that the activists did not struggle with access to the political institutions as such. For example, an employee of a human rights organisation recounted how they had reliable access to civil servants and were generally treated 'in a respectful and professional manner' in these encounters; noting, however, 'as to how much of an impact we have, that is a different matter'. Regarding the question of what kind of role institutional activists play in relation to political opportunities, my data demonstrates that the activist politicians made use of the institutionalised opportunities in order to strengthen movement access and influence at a time when conjunctural opportunities (due to the government coalition) were minimal.

Based on the interviews, a notable cooperation platform had been the parliament's human rights network that consists of parliamentarians from all political parties, even though not all are equally active therein. The network is the sort of institutionalised opportunity that requires insider activists' agency in order to become effective for movement purposes: in the hands of different types of politicians, such a network could turn into a dead letter or simply an intra-parliamentary discussion group, whereas for activist politicians, it offers an avenue for cooperation with social movements. The interviewed SPP politician, who acted as the network's president at the time of the interview, credited the effectiveness of the network to its loose and informal nature, which allows it to swiftly react to topical affairs and organise seminars on short notice. The network invites CSOs and individual activists to speak at these events, thus offering them a chance to voice their views within the parliament. For example, on the World Refugee Day in June 2017, the networked organised a seminar with 40 CSOs who demanded that the government raises Finland's annual refugee quota.

Activist politicians may also independently serve as 'gate-openers' vis-à-vis the parliamentary arena, using their contacts and status for convening meetings and events. For instance, the Left Alliance MP described how she had arranged an audience for a lawyer working with asylum seekers with the then Minister of Justice (from the National Coalition Party), this at a time when the government placed restrictions on asylum seekers' legal assistance. Moreover, on another occasion (in March 2018), she had organised a seminar with migrant rights

activists in the parliament where the then Minister of the Interior (also from the National Coalition Party) had been present. According to her,

> You can use the parliament as a space where they [activists] can speak to the minister, and he needs to respond. I find this really important in this situation in which the activists get frustrated. (….) So that for once there is a chance to command response from the person in charge.

Both the June 2017 and the March 2018 events took place in an annex building of the parliament (*Pikkuparlamentti*, 'Little Parliament') in a ground-floor auditorium that is specifically designed for MPs to organise public events. This space was thus another structural opportunity that the activist politicians made use of.

Moreover, the activist politicians also created indirect access to movements inside the parliamentary arena, through making use of their expertise. Both politician and activist interviewees reported how politicians contact civil society organisations when they need any background information for the purposes of their parliamentary work. Activist politicians may purposefully overlook civil servants as the experts they are supposed to rely on and favour movement 'specialists' instead. The Green parliamentarian was emphatic about who the true experts in this issue are: 'I find it important that people would understand what strong expertise exists in civil society, for example on asylum policy (….) You will be hard-pressed to find similar expertise in the administrative apparatus of the state'.

Regarding this issue, one can detect the facilitative effect of both institutional opportunities and the political culture. In a corporatist system, interest organisations have an incentive to cultivate expertise that makes them more credible players in governmental arenas. However, especially after the decline of mass organisations and their 'strength in numbers' in the late 20th century, the authority that civil society representatives have in deliberative or decision-making forums became increasingly tied to their professional expertise rather than to a popular mandate (Ylä-Anttila 2011, 192–193). Moreover, in contrast to 'disorderly' protesting, expertise sits well with a political culture that favours calm comportment and rational (instead of passionate) discourse (Luhtakallio 2012, 148, 171). The manner in which large established CSOs are more broadly respected in Finnish politics, and not simply by like-minded politicians, was evident in the Green MP's account whereby 'it is terribly important that these bigger actors give statements and take a stance as that is our means inside the house [of parliament]'. Tapping into this opportunity, when the politicians cite their sources in written documents and speeches, they increase both the visibility and the authority of the activists in the parliament.

However, activist politicians may also value the expertise 'on the ground' that one acquires through grassroots movement activities. For instance, the same Green MP stated that even more than the established CSOs, she appreciates the activists who work (on a voluntary basis) side-by-side with the asylum seekers as they are her 'contact to the reality in which these people actually live'. This kind of thinking demonstrates even greater affinity with social movements than a reliance on the semi-institutional 'expert organisations'. Further, this type of reasoning succeeds in linking a broader variety of movement groups and their expertise to the parliamentary arena.

6.2 Activist politicians in the midst of party politics

The movement activists did not criticise any individual activist politicians for their lack of dedication to migrant rights. This fact supports the Green MP's claim that 'folks do realise that one opposition politician's chances of implementing change are limited, - - but there is certain trust there that comes from sharing the same values and me having a movement background.' However, where the views of the activists and the

politicians clearly differed was in their assessment of the parties. In general, the politicians tented to have a rather positive view of their own parties. For example, the Green MP recounted a dispute in the city of Helsinki concerning Roma migrants and how pleased she had been over the fact that 'our gang [the Greens] was really unanimous in the matter; there were some [critical] statements expressed from nearly all [political] groups but not from us.' For her part, the Left Alliance MP related that defending asylum seekers stirs only 'occasional' criticism from the party members whereas according to their own surveys, in reality 'antiracism is a very important issue' for both the members and potential voters of the party. Lastly, because of its representation of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, the SPP politician was of the opinion that 'minorityhood sits terribly deep in SPP's ethos and it's not just about ourselves'.

Considering that I did not directly ask the politicians about their political identities nor what party politics mean to them, it is difficult to draw any far-reaching conclusions about the matter from such passing remarks. Nevertheless, I interpret the politicians' desire to defend their respective parties as a sign that their party involvement is not purely instrumental, as a means to an end, but that it is also has emotional significance for them. Despite expressing strong affinity with social movements, their 'gangs' also included their parties, indicating a dual political identity whose significance to their political action would require a more sustained inquiry. The conclusion here is that even though activist politicians may emphasise their activist background and continuous support for movements as a testament of their 'true' political colours, it is necessary to look past such proclamations to obtain a deeper understanding of their actual political praxis.

In comparison, the migrant rights activists criticised even the activist politicians' parties, suggesting a lack of identification with said parties. Firstly, they noted that also the more immigration-friendly parties are comprised of politicians with varying levels of commitment to migrant rights. As an employee in a human rights organisation expressed, 'there are many politicians [in these parties] who have quite a pragmatic understanding of refugee and migrant rights in practice'. Moreover, migrant rights do not hold a very central position in any progressive party's overall politics. In the words of an FMN activist, 'the Finns Party notwithstanding, issues related to immigration are not a priority to the Finnish political parties; they are marginal compared to public services and the like'.

Besides the heterogeneous member profile of the parties, the lack of issue salience was also credited to inter-party competition, namely to the rise of the Finns Party and how this has affected other parties. The interviewed politicians and activists held differing views concerning which parties' politics had been impacted by this development. Instead of criticising their own parties, the politicians placed the blame elsewhere. For instance, the politician representing the SPP highlighted how in the Centre and National Coalition parties, there are also those who are more progressive in these issues but 'they are wary of voicing their opinion because of the distorted idea that the majority of people shares the views of the Finns Party'[2]. In a similar vein, the Left Alliance parliamentarian expressed her concern that the other large parties have been influenced by the Finns Party and in order to halt the party's progress, they had thusly adopted similar positions: 'I think this is the most problematic thing; that the general agenda moves to the direction the Finns Party wants'. The interviewed Social Democrat was the only respondent who admitted that there is some tension in the SDP regarding immigration. Even though he denied any straightforward influence of the Finns Party, he acknowledged that 'we have reflected on what should be done so that we could keep these [voters]'.

In contrast, the activists did not absolve the more immigration-friendly parties either. The FMN activist stated that even these parties are prone to adjust their actions in this matter to the political climate, taking the

[2] When the SPP joined the government with the Finns Party in 2023, the SPP interviewee was the most vocal (although not only) critic of her party's decision to do so. Moreover, she has continuously called into question the immigration policies of the new government and even refused to vote in favour of the government's bills.

fall of 2015 and the great increase of asylum seekers as an example: 'even if the Green-Left [parties] had been in power, I am quite sure the policies would have been relatively similar'. He referred to Sweden, where the Green-Left government ended up closing the borders. Also, the human rights activist did not hold high expectations on a change of government: 'In my view, the trend is that things are going downward, and only how fast everything goes downhill is dependent on who is in government'. Such views suggest that movement activists have a rather sombre understanding of activist politicians' room for manoeuvre in this matter and, therefore, what can and what cannot be achieved through interacting with them.[3]

7. Conclusions

This article has promoted the argument that creating a nuanced picture of institutional activist-social movement relationship requires, firstly, a multi-level approach, and secondly, attentiveness to the differences between politicians and civil servants. Here, the focus has been on politicians, but had the spotlight been on civil servants, the micro, meso and macro factors and dynamics would have also looked different. By way of conclusion, I want to draw attention to the factor that has merely been implied throughout the text, namely *time*. Instead of examining institutional activism solely from the perspective of how the institutional and non-institutional political spheres overlap – a postulation from which I also launched my investigation –, incorporating greater consideration for the temporal dimension would enrich the research on the topic.

Regarding the institutional activists themselves, the evolution of their identities and affinities over their political careers merit further inquiry (see also Combes 2015, 71–72). In my own data, all the four interviewed politicians also interacted with 'movements on the streets' and not only with established CSOs, but it was nonetheless the youngest two who expressed the strongest attachment to social movements. Even though their ideological standpoints and the fact that they had continued their political careers in movement-oriented parties evidently played a role in the matter, having more recent experiences of immersed movement participation echoed in their answers. On the other hand, as the SPP and the SDP are not equally movement-oriented parties (the former even less so), the older two politicians had succeeded in maintaining their activist disposition in less favourable circumstances. This indicates a strong personal proclivity for trans-sectoral political engagement, even if it was not expressed as vehemently as by the younger two interviewees. Moreover, also the Green and the Left Alliance representatives had already undergone an identity change from mere activists to activists *and* politicians. Thus, rather than being an adequate adjudicator of institutional activists' identities itself, the passage of time should be addressed in relation to the other factors involved.

Furthermore, how movements develop over time also affects their dynamic with institutional insiders. Even if initially an institutional activist has had an evident and uncomplicated relationship with a particular movement, in the course of decades, the movement's framings and constituents may have changed dramatically or the movement may have ceased to exist entirely. Such changes can even take place in a shorter period, as was the case here: in a matter of years, the migrant rights movement was rearranged in terms of radical-moderate and beneficiary-conscience constituent divides, which had an impact on its relationship with

[3] In 2019, a new government took office in Finland, with the Social Democrats as the leading party, joined by the Centre Party, the Greens, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party. The government programme included several amendments to asylum rights, for example, the reintroduction of the right to legal aid in asylum hearings that was withdrawn in 2016. However, considering the many restrictions made to asylum rights during the office of the previous government, the amendments mainly aimed to repair some past damage rather than constituting any ambitious new asylum policy. Moreover, by the end of the government's reign in the spring of 2023, several of the planned improvements had not ever been implemented, and the government even issued new restrictions on border crossings in reaction to the war in Ukraine (see Miraftabi and Tervo 2023). Thus, the activists' limited expectations were not entirely unfounded.

both allies and opponents. In addition, developments in the institutional side (such as the emergence of a new political cleavage and its effect on issue salience) can drive movements and institutional activists either closer or further apart. Thus, social movements and institutional activists end up constantly re-positioning themselves vis-à-vis each other, rather than this relationship being essentially of a particular kind.

Finally, not only is there contextual but also temporal variation in the extent to which protest and parliamentary arenas provide opportunities for cooperation between movements and institutional activists. As my data suggests, the parliamentary arena (and political institutions in general) continues to present many opportunities for movement inclusion in Finland despite politico-economic changes: institutional units, cooperation platforms, physical spaces, deep-seated cultural habits, et cetera. Institutional activists can draw on these in their efforts to bring the activists inside the parliament. As for the protest arena, even though this was not directly discussed in my interview material, politicians' participation in a controversial protest where the threat of violence posed by its opponents was palpable could be interpreted not only as a testament to the politicians' personal convictions but also to the changing protest culture in Finland. What opportunities the two arenas provide for cooperation and how this evolves over time are important questions for prospective comparative research on institutional activism and dual militancy.

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AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

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Appendix 1: Interview guide for activists

X- name of the organisation

Y- name of the campaign/event

Biographical

- Can you provide me a picture about how your social/political engagement has been expressed throughout your life? How did you become active in the first place?
- How did you become involved with migrant rights causes?
- In what way or with which organisations have you been involved?

Current organisation

- Can you describe X on a more general level?
- How would you describe the problems you are trying to address? Why?
- What methods do you use? Why?
- How would you describe the goal you are working towards?
- What role would you say that X has within migrant rights activism?
- Why and when did you decide to begin organising in in X? In what way are you active? Has this changed over time?

Campaign/-s

- Why did X get involved in Y?
- How did you and your group/organisation work within Y?
    - What methods did you use?
- What were you hoping to achieve with these mobilisations? What where your main demands? Who were you directing these demands at?
- What did you achieve with this campaign?
- On an overall level, what role would you say that X has within this campaign?

Interaction/Interplay

Movement

- Which groups within the movement did you work with during Y?
- What are your experiences of cooperating with other groups within the migrant rights movement?
    - How did this interplay come about?
    - Where there any disagreements? (*About political focus, targets, demands, methods, potential allies within institutionalised politics*)
    - What where the outcome of this interplay?
    - Did you refuse contact or co-operation with any other actor? Did any actors refuse to co-operate with you? Why?

Politicians

- Moving on to institutionalised politics; on a general level and in your experience, what role do political parties play in the migrant rights activism?
    - Do individual politicians play a different role?
- In relation to which issues or mobilisation do you have contact (or relationships) with political parties? Why?
- Where does this interaction mostly take place?
- What is your experience of contacts or collaborations with political parties or politicians in relation to Y?
    - Why and in what way where you in contact? If not, why not?
    - How did you interpret the outcome of this interplay?

Is there something you would like to add, in accordance with what has already been said?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for politicians

X- name of the organisation

Y- name of the campaign/event

Organisation and interviewee's role

- When and how did you become politically active? In what kind of activities/groups have you participated (before/aside party politics)?
- How did you become involved in party politics?
    - What were your main reasons for joining and becoming active in a political party?
    - Why did you choose X from amongst the other parties?
- What kinds of roles and responsibilities have you had in X?
- Can you describe X on a general level?
    - How would you summarise X's political agenda?
    - What makes X different from other parties?
    - Which parties do you consider to be closest to X?
    - Are there some things that you would like to improve in X?
- In relation to antiracism in general, what is X position? How is X trying to advance antiracism? If so, how? Within X, are they any disagreements in relation to antiracism? How about migrant rights – what are similarities and differences in respect to what was said in relation to antiracism?

Cooperation with movement organisations

- Who would you consider to be the most important/notable actors within civil society in relation to anti-racism/migrant rights?
- Are you a member of or otherwise involved with these or similar organisations?
- On a general level, could you describe what kinds of contacts you maintain and how you cooperate with civil society actors working with these issues?
- Where does this interaction/cooperation take place?
- What leads you to collaborate with some organisations and not others?

Interaction/Interplay during Y (one or several)

- In relation to Y, did you (personally) collaborate with any civil society actor?
    - If so, on which occasion? With whom? Why? How?
    - How would you describe your experiences of cooperating with them?
    - Did you experience any challenges when collaborating with civil society actors?

  Were there any disagreements? (*About political focus, targets, demands, methods*)
    - What were the outcomes of this interplay in your opinion?
- Did you refuse contact or co-operation with some actors? Why?
- Did any of these actors refused to cooperate with you? Why?

Final questions

- In general, can you think of some ways the interaction between politicians and social movements could be improved?
- Is there something you would like to add, in accordance with what has already been said?