This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Unlu, Ali; Kotonen, Tommi

Title: Online polarization and identity politics : An analysis of Facebook discourse on Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities in Finland

Year: 2024

Version: Published version

Copyright: © 2024 The Authors. Scandinavian Political Studies published by John Wiley & Son

Rights: CC BY 4.0

Rights url: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Please cite the original version:

Unlu, A., & Kotonen, T. (2024). Online polarization and identity politics : An analysis of Facebook discourse on Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities in Finland. Scandinavian Political Studies, Early View. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12270

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Online polarization and identity politics: An analysis of Facebook discourse on Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities in Finland

Ali Unlu[1,2] | Tommi Kotonen[3]

[1]The Cultural, Behavioral and Media Insights Centre (CUBE), Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), Helsinki, Finland

[2]Department of Computer Science, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland

[3]Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

Correspondence: Ali Unlu, The Cultural, Behavioral and Media Insights Centre (CUBE), Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), Mannerheimintie 166, FI-00271 Helsinki, Finland.
Email: ali.unlu@thl.fi

Abstract

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the nature of Facebook posts related to Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals in Finland, spanning a period of 4 years. Through the use of the CrowdTangle platform, the researchers extracted and analyzed Facebook posts that encompassed predetermined keywords indicative of potential hate speech. The findings underscored divergent patterns of engagement and sentiment toward these two groups, with implications for the different levels of societal acceptance and tolerance exhibited. Posts related to Muslims typically elicited controversy and were often depicted as threats, whereas posts about the LGBTQ+ community generally advocated for inclusivity. However, persistent negative stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community were also evident. The analysis also brought to light how political parties strategically used these discourses to steer conversations, consolidate their ideological positions, and mobilize their respective supporters. Grounded in the social identity theory, this study sheds light on the complex dynamics of online political discourse, revealing its far-reaching impacts on societal attitudes, intergroup relations, and formation of group identities. The nuanced understanding derived from these observations suggests that interventions fostering healthier public discussions on social media platforms could contribute significantly to combating societal division, prejudice, and bias. This research underscores the importance of scrutinizing online discourses to address issues of societal cohesion and social acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Polarization is the clustering of society into opposing groups based on their distance, homogeneity, and size, often defined by political party affiliation and ideological coherence (Reiljan, 2020). Political polarization, prevalent in contemporary politics, contributes to societal fragmentation. In Finland, the complex dynamics between LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities exacerbate this polarization. Despite the nation's progressive stance on human rights and social welfare (Lehtonen, 2023), tolerance to these communities reveals a complicated political landscape.

The analysis of Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals often involves categorizing them as distinct entities, yet their intersections present unique challenges in understanding political polarization. Politicians frequently make this distinction to comprehend and address the dynamics specific to these communities. A nuanced approach is crucial to appreciate how different factors contribute to political polarization (Marino & Iannelli, 2023). Each group, with its distinct challenges and societal interactions, shapes the political landscape in unique ways. By focusing on these specific issues and concerns, we can better understand the drivers of polarization within and across these communities. Moreover, acknowledging their differences highlights the role of identity-based factors, such as religion, culture, and sexual orientation, in exacerbating political divides.

Examining Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals as distinct categories is challenging since these groups may overlap. This distinction is frequently drawn by politicians to better understand and address the specific dynamics related to these communities. The framed distinction enables a more nuanced comprehension of the varying factors contributing to political polarization. On the other hand, each group faces unique challenges and experiences that shape their interactions with society and the political landscape. By examining these groups, we can better identify the specific issues and concerns that drive polarization within and between these communities. Additionally, recognizing the differences between these groups can help reveal the extent to which political polarization is influenced by identity-based factors, such as religion, culture, and sexual orientation.

In recent years, political polarization has emerged as a significant concern in numerous countries worldwide, including Finland. Despite this, existing empirical research exploring the effect of social and digital media on polarization has mainly focused on the United States and United Kingdom.

In Finland, political polarization has evolved over time. Historically, during the Soviet Union era polarization primarily stemmed from political isolation and security challenges (Silvennoinen, 2015). However, in recent times, the focus has shifted. The country now grapples with societal divisions and marginalization, particularly concerning Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities (Vallinkoski et al., 2021). The latest statistics on reported hate crimes show that Muslims and LGBTQ+ people were targeted. In 2021, hate crimes against Muslims increased by 44% (from 39 to 55 cases), and by 9% in 2022 (from 55 to 60 cases). Similarly, hate crimes motivated by the sexual orientation of the victim increased by 85% in 2021 (from 68 to 126 cases), and by 11% in 2022 (from 126 to 140 cases) (Rauta, 2022, 2023). Furthermore, especially on online platforms, and along with the rise of populist parties with an anti-immigration agenda, talk about Islam is, according to a recent research, "intertwined with discussions about sexual minorities" (Jantunen & Kytölä, 2022, p. 42).

Applying the social identity theory (SIT) framework, this study investigates how social media impacts political polarization in Finland. It will examine divergent and convergent themes in Facebook posts of Finnish politicians regarding Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities from 2018 to 2022. By linking observed polarization to broader social and political trends, the study seeks to understand factors driving division on social media and explore pathways for promoting social cohesion.

This study's significance lies in its exploration of the nuanced dynamics of political polarization in Finland, focusing on the intersection of Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities. By analyzing social media discourse and the shifting landscape of Finnish society, it aims to deepen our understanding of how identity-based factors like religion, culture, and sexual orientation contribute to societal divisions, offering insights for promoting greater social cohesion in a context marked by evolving political and social challenges.

A mixed-method approach is employed to achieve this goal. First, Natural Language Processing (NLP) text analysis, utilizing the PyTextRank algorithm and Scattertext library, discerns divergent and convergent themes, patterns, and trends in the conversations. Subsequently, qualitative text analysis provides deeper exploration of the context and motivations underlying the observed polarization, considering its intentions and impacts on individuals and communities. By examining potential connections between these themes and broader social and political trends in Finland, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the issue and contribute to the creation of strategies for reducing polarization and enhancing cohesion.

The research aims to respond these questions: (a) What are the most divergent and convergent themes discussed by Finnish politicians regarding Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals in their Facebook posts and comments? (b) What are the most distinctive differences in argumentation between political parties concerning Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals, and which features of

Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities are being targeted? (c) What are the broader social and political trends in Finland that may be connected to political polarization toward Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals?

SIT AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

SIT is a useful framework for understanding the phenomenon under investigation in this research study (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While identity politics can also be used to study civil rights and multiculturalism (Saarinen & Koskinen, 2022), the SIT approach was chosen because it offers valuable perspectives on the mechanics of political polarization, particularly with respect to minority communities such as Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals. According to SIT, people's sense of self and belonging is influenced by their affiliations with diverse groups like nationality, race, religion, and political allegiance (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). This sense of identity allows people to define themselves while also contrasting themselves with others whom they regard as dissimilar or inferior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT emphasizes two key processes: social categorization and social comparison (Jaspal, 2017). Social categorization is the process of grouping individuals based on shared traits, forming in-groups (those belonging to the same group) and out-groups (those belonging to different groups) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This categorization fosters a tendency to favor in-group members over out-group members (Brewer, 1999), which can potentially lead to negative attitudes and behaviors, such as political polarization targeting Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals (Hewstone et al., 2002; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

Social comparison is a fundamental process in SIT that enables individuals to evaluate the categories created through social categorization by interpreting and valuing characteristic group features (Hogg, 2016). Social comparison helps individuals understand how they perceive their own group (in-group) in relation to other groups (out-groups) and establish their sense of self and worth within the broader social context. This process is driven by various factors, including the need for self-esteem (Swann et al., 2012), validation, and a sense of belonging (Greenaway et al., 2015). It motivates individuals to evaluate their in-groups more positively than out-groups, providing them with feelings of self-worth and pride. Recent research highlights the significance of social comparison in comprehending intergroup conflict and cooperation, such as political tolerance toward Muslims among young people (Noll et al., 2010), Muslim communities in the context of political party affiliations (Everett et al., 2015), blaming initial transmission of the COVID-19 (Arabaghatta Basavaraj et al., 2021), the disparity in anti-Muslim sentiment between East and West Germany (Kalter & Foroutan, 2021), election campaigns constructing Muslim immigrants as a "threat" to the nation (Doerr, 2021) and the impact

of religious identity on polarization on social media discussions (Grigoropoulou, 2020).

Drawing from SIT, the downward comparison principle posits that individuals tend to juxtapose their in-group with out-groups on favorable dimensions (Pettigrew, 2016). Social identity construction surpasses the simple cognitive acknowledgment of group belonging and integrates the affective significance of membership (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Consequently, this process enhances, sustains, or amplifies the value ascribed to relevant groups and their members. Within the realm of political polarization, individuals may downplay negative aspects of their in-group's history or actions while accentuating divergent beliefs, cultural practices, or values (Mols & Jetten, 2016). This behavior can result in distorted perceptions of out-groups, such as Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals, by emphasizing perceived adverse traits or threats and minimizing their positive attributes or societal contributions (Pehrson et al., 2009).

In this study, we apply SIT to analyze the dynamics of political polarization regarding minority groups, specifically Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals. While in-group refers here particularly to party members, or with a broader interpretation, Finns, representing national identity, our focus remains solely on the investigation of how the out-group is conceptualized. We focus on two dimensions of out-group: (1) political actors employing negative out-group rhetoric to enhance in-group cohesion, and (2) political actors using out-group argumentation to support these minority groups. The first dimension investigates how political actors exploit the distinctions between their in-group and minority out-groups to foster unity. By highlighting differences and perceived threats from Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals, these actors create an "us versus them" mentality, reinforcing bonds within their political in-group. This divisive approach leads to the marginalization and stigmatization of minority groups, as they are often portrayed as threats to the in-group's values.

The second dimension explores how political actors challenge negative stereotypes and assumptions about minority out-groups to foster empathy and understanding. By doing so, they contribute to the formation of alliances between various political actors who share common goals of promoting inclusivity and social justice. This approach counterbalances the negative effects of political polarization and aims to create a more inclusive society.

Understanding the theoretical implications of SIT in the context of political polarization among minority groups like Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals sets a foundation for examining how these dynamics are further influenced and manifested in the digital realm, particularly through social media platforms.

The intersection of social media and political polarization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, significantly impacting the dynamics of political discourse. Scholars have emphasized the role of social media in exacerbating political polarization. The use of extremist language in social media plays a

significant role in reinforcing and perpetuating in-group/out-group dynamics. Extremist language often perpetuates positive stereotypes of the ingroup and negative stereotypes of the outgroup, reflecting a linguistic intergroup meaning-giving function in perception (Baele et al., 2023). This is especially evident in the context of significant political and social events, including Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been associated with the heightened spread of problematic information and increased social media news use, intensifying political polarization (Kim, 2019; Marino & Iannelli, 2023).

In the Finnish context, social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping political discourse. For example, Horsti and Nikunen (2013) uncovered xenophobic narratives in Finnish online news media. Jantunen and Kytölä (2022) further explored the intersection of anti-Muslim and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse on Finnish social media, highlighting propagandistic disinformation networks' role in exacerbating polarization. Paatelainen et al. (2022) examined how Finnish political parties and leaders used social media during the 2019 parliamentary elections, offering insights into the broader implications of these platforms in political communication.

These platforms often create environments known as "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers," where users are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their existing views and interests (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). The algorithmic features of these platforms contribute to selective exposure and the formation of echo chambers, influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors. This phenomenon not only reinforces confirmation bias but also homogenizes in-groups, further deepening polarization between different societal groups (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Additionally, the tendency of social media algorithms to prioritize user engagement can lead to the accelerated spread of misinformation and emotive content (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). The literature posits that social media platforms provide a space for the amplification and dissemination of polarizing content, contributing to extremism within these echo chambers (Williams et al., 2017; Zhang & Davis, 2022).

Recent research has broadened our understanding by providing in-depth insights into the ways social media influences public opinion and the polarization of politics, with a focus on diverse cultural and geographical contexts. These studies underscore the need to consider geographical heterogeneity and a more diverse range of social media platforms in future research (Flamino et al., 2023; Guess et al., 2023; Savchuk, 2023).

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how social media contributes to political polarization, there is an emerging consensus among scholars about the importance of expanding research beyond US-centric studies. This approach would facilitate a deeper exploration of the various facets of this complex issue in different societies and media spaces, ultimately

enriching our understanding of the relationship between political polarization and problematic information (Marino & Iannelli, 2023).

This study builds on these insights by examining how political actors in Finland strategically employ social media to steer discourse about Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals, thereby shaping the dynamics of intergroup polarization. In doing so, it connects the theoretical underpinnings of SIT with the practical implications of social media on political polarization, offering a comprehensive view of the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

NAVIGATING IDENTITY AND POLITICS IN FINLAND

In this section, we explore the dynamics of political polarization in Finland on two distinct levels. We begin by providing an overview of Finland's current political landscape. Following this, we delve into a summary of scholarly literature, focusing on how political polarization has evolved within the SIT framework.

The political polarization in the Finnish political landscape was during the time period of this study much affected by the prominent role the populist Finns Party played in the parliament as a major opposition party. It was the second largest party in Finland after the parliamentary elections held in 2015 and again after the next elections in 2019. The leading party holding the office of prime minister was until 2019 the Centre Party, which has been at that time considered a center-right party. The ruling position was taken by the Social Democratic Party in the 2019 elections, which, as the new government was formed around red-green bloc, also meant an overall turn to the left regarding the composition of the governing coalition. The Greens too joined the new coalition. The supporters of the Greens and the Finns Party have seen each other in a more negative light than any other party (Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021), forming two opposed poles based on the issues such as equality, migration, or environment. Although ideological differences between parties in Finland are relatively small, and coalitions may even include parties from opposing ends of the political spectrum (ibid.), according to an electorate study conducted in 2015 voters could be divided into several distinctive blocs. These included two blocs based on the sociocultural dimension, the conservative bloc and the red-green liberal bloc (Westinen & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2015), which also formed the basis of two governments ruling during the time period of this study.

Certain key events, besides changes in governing coalition, may also be seen relevant for this study and are also visible as topics in the data. Just before Christmas 2018, the Oulu police reported of several cases of child exploitation and rape, with asylum seekers or refugees as suspects. Followed by these events, immigration became one of the major campaign themes in the 2019 elections despite the number of refugees arriving to Finland was relatively low at that time (Arter, 2020). Another intensely debated issue especially in the social

media was the reform of the so-called trans-law, changing the eligibility criteria for legal recognition of gender. Although the final vote was in 2023, the parliamentary debate on the issue started already in the Autumn 2022. Third issue, although less visible in the data, was the COVID-19 pandemic, which at least indirectly affected the discussions, as the countermeasures in the Spring 2022 included tightened border control diminishing the number of asylum seekers to record-low level (Unlu et al., 2023). Far-right rhetoric on the pandemic however had also a xenophobic dimension (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022).

This evolving political rhetoric in Finland, marked by a rise in anti-immigration, xenophobic, and heteronormative discourse, sets the stage for a deeper examination within the SIT framework. The following literature review engages with this theory to unpack the complexities of these political dynamics, highlighting how cultural and ideological differences are constructed and perceived in the Finnish context.

Regarding the first dimension of SIT, the rise of anti-immigration political rhetoric, buttressed especially by the Finns Party, but gaining some support also by the politicians from the National Coalition Party, Finnish Centre Party, and Finnish Social Democratic Party (Mäkinen, 2016), has normalized such views in public discourse (Horsti, 2015). Xenophobic and anti-Muslim political discourse has evolved to exclude explicit racial references, instead focusing on cultural disparities and threats to national identity and "Western" or "Christian" values (Hatakka et al., 2017; Saarinen & Koskinen, 2022). It is common for Islam and its associated religious values to be depicted as a formidable challenge to the considerable strides that Finland has made in terms of social and political equality over recent decades. Islam is frequently portrayed as an aggressive and fundamentalist culture that differs significantly from the Western liberal values and civilized conduct that are generally accepted as the norm (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014).

These ideologies express a fear of migrants from Africa and the Middle East, arguing that they pose a threat to Western values like gender equality and individual freedom (Keskinen, 2013). Far-right movements also express concern about perceived feminism and power shifts, believing these changes threaten traditional gender roles and societal structures in Finnish society (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014).

On the other hand, populist anti-immigrant rhetoric labels liberal-leftist women as "the Tolerant," accusing them of naively supporting both LGBTQ+ rights and Muslim immigration, while framing both groups as threats to national unity (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019; Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014). This contradictory nature of populist discourse exhibits conservative tendencies alongside support for gender equality and gay rights when facing perceived threats like immigration and Islam, ultimately promoting hegemonic power relations.

The Finns Party utilizes gender populism to challenge feminism and women's rights (Saresma, 2018). Far-right politics in Finland emphasizes preserving traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures to protect the nation from external threats (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014). Despite the secular outlook of the Finns Party's populist nationalism, Christian and conservative values significantly impact attitudes toward Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014; Saarinen & Koskinen, 2022).

Far-right movements in Finland connect their arguments to gender-related politics, attempting to legitimize exclusionary and discriminatory policies under the guise of protecting traditional values and cultural identity (Berbrier, 1999; Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014). They exploit fears about the loss of national identity and erosion of gender norms, resonating with a significant portion of the Finnish population. Opposition to Muslim immigration is often expressed as a way to protect Finnish women and LGBTQ+ individuals and maintain societal frameworks prioritizing gender and sexual equality (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014), as similar strategy used by far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD) (Doerr, 2021). However, the use of feminist ideals is typically aimed at controlling and regulating the behavior of Muslim men, rather than genuinely improving the status of women (Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014). In this context, both Muslims and leftist-green liberals are targeted as "Others," with immigrants and homosexuals often being constructed as unified groups, disregarding their inherent diversity and intersectional aspects.

Regarding the second dimension, left-wing political parties generally prioritize gender equality and feminist concerns, focusing on empowerment and transformation of gender roles (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Left-wing parties are better allies for feminist politics than right-wing parties, which often oppose feminism, gender equality, multiculturalism, and diversity. In contrast, right-wing parties like the Finns Party have blocked progressive gender equality policies, addressing these issues mainly through a limited freedom-of-choice discourse (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019; Nygård & Nyby, 2022).

In Finland, there has been a notable increase in openly gay or lesbian politicians over the past four decades, attributed to the emergence of new political parties and the implementation of open-list voting systems (Juvonen, 2020). However, gay men have demonstrated greater success in winning elections compared with their lesbian counterparts, with factors such as prejudice, symbolic representation, and media influence contributing to this disparity (Juvonen, 2020).

Political ideology is associated with gendered political consciousness and political engagement (Harnois, 2015). Women subjected to significant racial, ethnic, or sexuality-based discrimination are more inclined to cultivate a strong gender-based political consciousness, highlighting that such discrimination can heighten awareness of gender inequality and stimulate political advocacy for

gender equality (Harnois, 2015). This challenges the presumption that gendered political consciousness primarily emerges from perceived similarity, underscoring the need to address multiple inequalities in this context.

Finally, social media plays a significant role in the rise of far-right political parties in Finland and elsewhere by facilitating engagement with like-minded individuals and attracting potential voters through radical statements (Horsti, 2015). Anonymous online spaces were instrumental in the early stages of the anti-immigration movement, allowing direct communication among supporters. However, when the movement merged with the Finns Party, undisciplined members spreading racist comments generated political rivalries and media attention, but the party managed to survive by presenting themselves as underdogs (Horsti, 2015). Followed especially by the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, the anti-immigration, radical right faction of the party, which was supported by the social media activists, however, gained the upper hand over more conservative representatives, which eventually led to a party split in 2017 (Backlund & Jungar, 2019).

Politicians use social media to spread hate speech by claiming victim and hero positions, using blame deflection, minimizing harm, and justifications like protecting culture, religion, or way of life (Pettersson, 2019). The propagation of national-populist ideology extends beyond textual communication, and includes the use of images that activate emotions such as fear, anger, and resentment (Hokka & Nelimarkka, 2020). This mechanism ultimately engenders a powerful affective economy. Muslims and the LGBT community are particularly targeted by hate speech, as indicated by a report from the Ministry of Justice (Kettunen & Paukkeri, 2021). Supporters of far-right ideologies have been responsible for physical attacks on minority groups in several countries, including Finland (Ravndal et al., 2019).

METHODS

The research design employs a mixed-methods approach to address certain limitations associated with computational methods (Koljonen et al., 2022). Data were gathered from Facebook and subjected to explanatory data analysis. Subsequently, data mining methods were employed to select posts for qualitative analysis. The ethical committee of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare reviewed our research (THL/5565/6.02.01/2022), as it involves individuals and their opinions. To ensure the protection of their identities, we employed anonymization and paraphrasing techniques for quotes that may reveal their personal information during the analysis process. We have taken these measures to uphold ethical standards in our research.

Facebook data was analyzed to investigate polarization in Finland due to its unique functionality and popularity. Facebook provides key advantages for examining political polarization versus other platforms. Its vast user base

enables extensive analysis of discourse—over 3.6 million users[i] are in Finland alone (Meta, 2022). Lack of post length restrictions facilitates richer, more detailed political debates than Twitter (Garimella & Weber, 2017). Closed groups become echo chambers where like-minded users interact without outside views, potentially amplifying polarized thinking (Garimella et al., 2018). Algorithms promoting engaging content can unintentionally boost polarization by ranking emotional or outrageous political posts higher (Crockett, 2017). Moreover, Yarchi et al. (2021) found that despite users being more likely to engage with outgroup members, Facebook displayed the least homophilic behavior and ingroup/outgroup polarization had an affective dimension compared with other platforms. However, Facebook is a major source of hate speech in Finland, contributing to polarization by connecting like-minded individuals. It fuels political polarization as a primary source of political information, exposing users to extreme views and reducing tolerance of opposing viewpoints (Hokka & Nelimarkka, 2020; Pohjonen, 2018; Unlu et al., 2023).

The data from Facebook was obtained through the CrowdTangle[ii] platform, which is owned by Meta, the parent company of both platforms. CrowdTangle offers an Application Programming Interface (API) that grants researchers access to publicly available data on various social media platforms. However, researchers are only given access to the API after their research is evaluated, and they agree to use only publicly available data (CrowdTangle Team, 2022). The researchers used the platform's search engine to identify posts that were likely to contain hate speech terms. They employed a predefined set of 27 keywords and 420 variants (the complete list is available in the Supporting Information). These keywords encompassed a range of variations in inflection, conjugation, and phrasing that are typical of the Finnish language. The researchers began by selecting an initial set of keywords based on previous research (Kettunen & Paukkeri, 2021; Mäki-nen, 2019). Then this list was expanded through iterative analysis of posts, which involved repeatedly examining a sample of posts and adding new hate speech terms that they were encountered.

The study covers posts that were made between January 1, 2018, and the date of data extraction, which was October 10, 2022. We chose this period because several major political changes occurred in Finland between these dates, which are discussed above. We focused on posts that were published on personal pages, special pages, or groups. While we collected data on user interactions, such as likes and shares, we intentionally excluded user comments because of their potential for misinterpretation without context. We collected data on LGBTQ+ content using 13 search terms, while for the Muslim data collection, 14 keywords were utilized. Out of the total of 12,351 messages collected, 5966 were about Muslims, while 6385 were about LGBTQ+ people.

Our research objective is to conduct a comparative analysis of the political rhetoric concerning Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities. To accomplish this

goal, we employed meta tags to identify the authors of social media posts. Facebook provides its users with the option to categorize their pages, which we used to identify political affiliations. Although it is challenging to identify all politically affiliated accounts, we selected pages belonging to four categories, including *political organization*, *political party*, *politician*, and *political candidate* who posted in Finnish language.

PyTextRank (Nathan, 2016) is a versatile open-source Python library that offers several NLP functionalities, such as text ranking, summarization, and keyword extraction as in our case here. Its main feature is the use of the PageRank algorithm to identify the most important sentences within a document, which can be used for generating summaries.

In our study, we combined the PyTextRank algorithm with the Scattertext library (Kessler, 2017), which is another Python library used for identifying distinguishing terms in corpora and presenting them in an interactive HTML scatter plot. This allowed us to analyze the remaining corpus and identify patterns and trends in political discourse. By highlighting the distribution of words or phrases within the text corpus, text scattering enables researchers to gain insights into the frequency and context of specific terms across the corpus, aiding in identifying emerging trends or changes in political discourse. Overall, text scattering facilitates the analysis of large amounts of text data and provides valuable insights into the patterns and trends of language use, making it a valuable tool for qualitative research in this area. Thus, employing Scattertext, we were able to determine the most divergent and convergent themes that politicians discussed regarding Muslim and LGBTQ+ community.

In the final stage, we applied thematic analysis to the selected posts. This method is a qualitative research approach that involves identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within textual data. Thematic analysis involves a systematic examination of the content of posts to uncover latent themes and gain insights into the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of social media users (Clarke & Hayfield, 2015). By utilizing, for example, a rigorous process of data coding and categorization, researchers can identify recurring themes and patterns related to a particular topic. Thematic analysis is however a flexible and widely used method for analyzing social media posts that can be adapted to various research questions and provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of online communication.

In this study, thematic analysis has been conducted in three steps, recognizing the flexible nature of analysis and open-endedness of coding[iii] (Clarke & Hayfield, 2015). First, general thematic clusters with a very basic descriptive level were identified based on interactive HTML scatter plot and selecting based on keywords the relevant posts for a closer analysis. To provide a more nuanced picture, these initial thematic clusters were then worked upward inductively, and posts in each cluster were further classified based, for example, on emotions and arguments presented and what kind of a rhetorical

reality they create. At the final stage of thematic analysis, the core themes identified within two groups, Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities were compared and contextualized, to identify similarities and discrepancies between themes present in the posts regarding these groups.

RESULTS

Text analysis

The results of our study indicate that the frequency of posts related to Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals on Facebook are not correlated with each other. Figure 1 illustrates the fluctuating pattern of the posts over the 4-year period, revealing numerous peaks and troughs. Notably, the peaks in the number of posts related to LGBTQ+ individuals are more distinct compared with those related to Muslims. Additionally, the number of posts about Muslims shows a
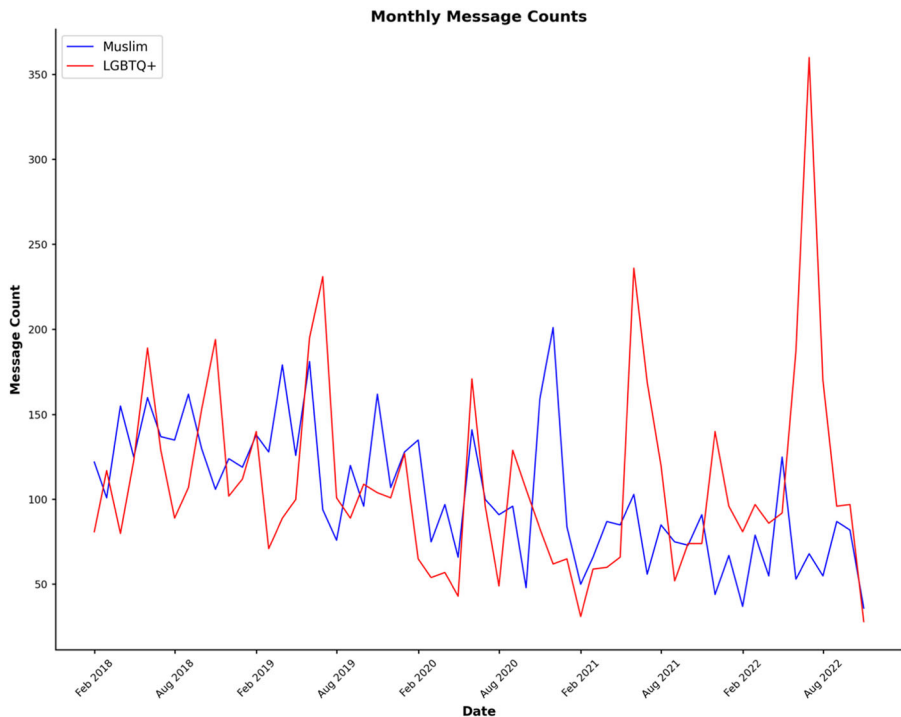
FIGURE 1 Timeline analysis of Facebook posts about Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals in Finnish language. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

slight decrease over time. The results indicate that the topics more likely emerged based on certain events regarding these groups.

Table 1 presents the means, *t* test, and χ^2 results for Muslim and LGBTQ+ groups on Facebook posts (the distributions are also provided in the Supporting Information). The table shows that the total interactions on posts ($n = 12{,}351$) for both groups are almost similar with no statistically significant difference. However, there are some significant differences in the means of specific interactions. For example, comments and angry reactions on posts about Muslims are significantly higher compared with those about LGBTQ+ people. This trend is persistent over time. Muslims consistently exhibit a higher frequency of angry emojis, wh4ile LGBTQ+ individuals consistently express a higher frequency of love emojis, as depicted in Supporting Information: Figures 1 and 2. On the other hand, shares, love reactions, haha reactions, and care reactions are higher for LGBTQ+ posts. Additionally, the table indicates

TABLE 1 Facebook post comparison between LGBTQ+ and Muslim groups.

Metric	Muslim mean	LGBTQ+ mean	T-statistic	*p* Value
Total interactions	121.37	120.10	0.16	0.87
Likes	68.97	68.06	0.18	0.85
Comments	21.52	17.86	36,161	**0.05**
Shares	45,084	13,636	42,064	**<0.001**
Love	14,305	46,539	−2.73	**0.01**
Wow	45,200	41,640	−0.30	0.77
Haha	35,156	28,430	−4.89	**<0.001**
Sad	26,755	29,312	−0.10	0.92
Angry	11,933	46,844	19,146	**<0.001**
Care	0.32	0.55	−2.23	**0.03**
Post views	49.25	134.67	−1.72	0.09
Total views	4981.48	446.63	24,473	0.09
	Weighted freq	**Weighted freq**	χ^2	
Video share status			36.0860	**<0.001**
Cross-post	3.85%	5%		
Owned	41.03%	71.67%		
Share	55.13%	23.33%		

Note: *p* Values in bold indicate statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

that video-sharing status has a statistically significant association with the type of post (i.e., owned, shared, or cross-posted). The results suggest that posts about LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to be owned or shared (created/ uploaded by users), while posts about Muslims are more likely to be cross-posted.[iv] Overall, these findings provide insight into the patterns of user engagement with Muslim and LGBTQ+ posts on Facebook.

In order to maintain the reliability of our thematic analysis, we only considered posts containing 100 or more characters. Filtering posts to a minimum length of 100 characters facilitates sentence-level analysis, thereby enhancing the granularity of data for both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Given that the PyTextRank algorithm performs better with longer texts, we employed triangulation to mitigate potential bias. This involved combining short posts with qualitative analysis and expert validation, as illustrated in additional tables and figures within the Supporting Information. As a result, we analyzed a total of 1000 posts, with 586 of them focused on Muslims and 414 on LGBTQ+ individuals. Given that our thematic analysis aims to identify political party distinctions, we did not conduct any further text analysis categorization.

Based on the self-declared information of the Facebook pages, we utilized text mining techniques to identify the distribution of party affiliations using party-related search terms. Our analysis revealed 584 texts that indicated party affiliations through their Facebook page name, username, or description. However, it is worth noting that some politicians may prefer not to state their party affiliation in their page description, or they may change their description during the data extraction period, which may have affected our results.

Among the seven major parties in Finland, our findings indicate that Finns Party had the highest number of posts (264), followed by the Greens (183), National Coalition Party (64), Left Alliance (41), Christian Democrats (15), Social Democrats (9), and Centre Party (7). A comparison between Finns Party and the Greens showed that Finns Party were more likely to post about Muslims (222 vs. 42), while the Greens were more likely to post about LGBTQ+ community (140 vs. 43). Similarly, while National Coalition Party posted more frequently about Muslims (51 vs. 14), Left Alliance had more posts related to LGBTQ+ community (33 vs. 8). These findings suggest that the different political parties in Finland prioritize different social and political issues in their online presence. However, given the limitations of our analysis, further research is needed to confirm these findings and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the party affiliations and their associated online activities.

Using the Scattertext approach, we have identified the most distinctive and commonly used keywords and phrases for the LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities (Figure 2) among politicians. The prevalent and frequently used words for both groups include terms such as "child" (lapsi), "work" (työ), "Europe" (Euroopassa), "parliament" (eduskunta), "society" (yhteiskunta),
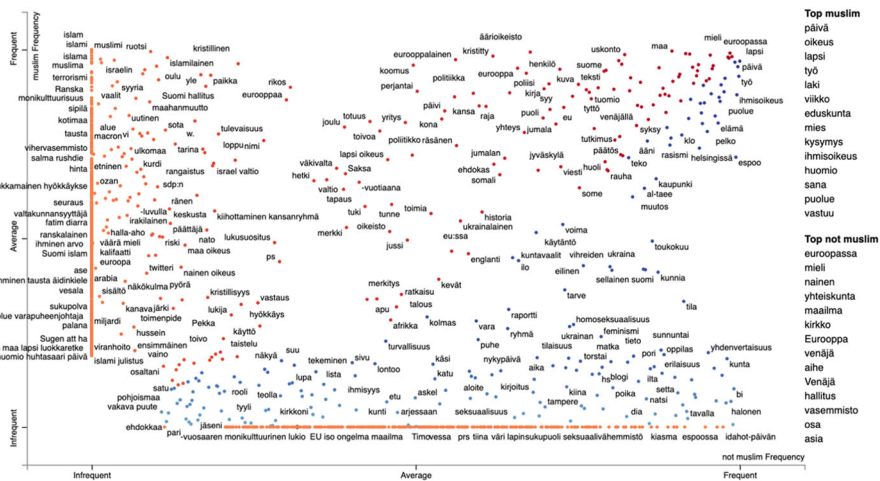
FIGURE 2 Scatterplot analysis of word frequency distribution using PyTextRank. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

"research" (tutkimus), "vote" (ääni), "judgement" (tuomio), "decision" (päätös), "freedom" (vapaus), "religion" (uskonto), "god" (jumala), and "law" (laki), which collectively indicate the social, political, and legal dimensions of these phenomena. Additionally, certain countries were mentioned in both groups, including Russia (Venäjä), Ukraine (Ukraina), Somalia, and Germany (Saksa).

The Muslim group has collected a significant number of distinct and commonly used terms, which can be organized into various categories. These categories include discussions related to specific countries such as France, Israel, Sweden, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, concepts associated with religion such as Islam, Muslim, and Christian, and explanations for the Muslim movement, including war (sota) and migrations (maahanmuutto). Furthermore, the group has also accumulated terminology pertaining to Finnish state, politics, and identity, including homeland (kotimaa), Finnish Government (Suomen hallitus), state (valta), future (tulevaisuus), citizen (kansalainen), governing political party (SDP), elections (vaalit), and greenleft (vihervasemmisto). Additionally, the Muslim group has focused on event-based cases, such as Oulu (a Finnish city, and a rape event related to Muslim immigrant), Macron, and Salman Rushdie, as well as attributes such as terrorism, crime (rikos), penalty (rangaistus), cowardly attack (raukkamainen hyökkäys), and multiculturalism (monikulttuurisuus).

The LGBTQ+ phenomenon is characterized by the prevalence of certain recurring topics that are frequently discussed. These topics can be broadly

categorized as local events and issues, which encompass municipality-related discussions as well as specific locations like Tampere, Pori, and Espoo. Additionally, concepts related to inclusiveness and social life, such as equality (yhdenvertaisuus), diversity (erilaisuus), and discrimination (syrjintä), are prominent in the discourse. Lastly, gender-related terminology such as homosexuality (homoseksuaalisuus), boy (poika), feminism, gender (sukupuoli), sexual minority (seksuaalivähemmistö), sexual (seksuaalisuus, seksuaalinen, sukupuoli), and man and woman (mies, nainen) are also frequently discussed in relation to the LGBTQ+ phenomenon.

The Scattertext approach shows that both words used for LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities are related to their social, political, and legal status in Finland. The posters also mention some countries that may have different attitudes or policies toward them. This suggests that the discussants are aware of the rights and challenges of minority groups in Finland and that they may face discrimination or hostility from some segments of society.

However, the Scattertext approach does not show how these words are used in context or what tone or sentiment they convey. It also does not show how these words compare to other groups or topics in Finland. Therefore, it may not capture the full extent or nature of hate speech or its impact on these communities. Due to these limitations, we held qualitative analysis to identify underlining the thematic disparity between groups.

Among these keywords and phrases, 10 distinct ones for each group and aimed to extract the top twenty posts based on total interaction scores, encompassing various types of user engagement, including likes, shares, and comments, as outlined in Supporting Information: Table 2. We retrieved a total of 357 highly reactive posts. However, due to the presence of some keywords in multiple posts, the number of unique posts decreased to 229 (comprising 22.9% of the total selected posts), which were created by 94 distinct users. Specifically, the LGBTQ+ group generated 177 distinct posts by 60 unique users, while the Muslim group contributed 124 unique posts written by 53 distinct users. Additionally, there were 72 posts that mentioned both Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals in the same context.

Thematic analysis

General thematic clusters identified on the basis of HTML scatter plot indicated, that the posts in category "Muslim" appear more directly politically loaded, negative, and threat-based, whereas category "LGBTQ+" showed more tendency toward referring to the rights of this minority, and as such, also more inclusive. This is in line with the initial observation made above, that comments and angry reactions on posts about Muslims are significantly higher compared with those about LGBTQ+ individuals.

In this section, selected posts were studied qualitatively in more detail based on research question from the perspective of exclusion and inclusion and using

manual coding. Posts, initially selected on the basis of number of interactions, were coded based on their in-group and out-group reach, as well as negative and positive attitudes toward rights of the minorities and were further analyzed following the themes detected from coding. The key themes analyzed here were security, rights, and inclusion. As shown below, these themes however often intertwine while also in some respects differ between two groups analyzed. Security issues regarding posts on Muslims focus on perceived threats caused by an alleged outgroup, whereas in posts on the LGTBQ+ the emphasis is more on the threats the community itself has faced. Themes of rights and inclusion mirror also divergence between post categories and show in addition how the right-based discourses may be abused.

Framing Muslims as a security threat

When analyzing the most interacted posts regarding Muslims, they seem to appear in a negative light in several ways, and are defined especially as a security threat. This aspect is prominently represented within posts related to terrorism or criminality, in which polarizing discussion becomes also evident. Out of 22 posts that discussed terrorism and gathered most interaction, the majority were written by Finns party MPs or other, lower-level party representatives. In addition, a handful of posts were by MPs of Muslim background.

In posts by Finns party members, Muslims are typically presented as an external category, alien to Finnish or Western values, as stated by one poster, holding rather extreme and categorical view: "In my opinion Islam does not belong to Western society. Not by any measure, not in any circumstances." Although here the poster talks about Islam, the first sentence of the post shows that what is meant is a certain group of people: "The original Nordic population did not bring bombings, throat-cutting and terrorism to the North." This view was also repeated in several other posts, which show Muslims as an out-group either implicitly by referring to Islam, or more explicitly by directly addressing Muslims. In these posts, the Muslim community in Finland is however often not so much the actual topic, but the discussion is rather aimed to highlight how Muslims are handled by the government, or how the people opposing the alleged "Islamization" are deprived of their rights.

Rights-based discourses related to Muslims and Islam

The topic of terrorism enables the populist radical right to embrace, at least rhetorically, their support for fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech or more generally also present themselves as tolerant, while simultaneously claiming the fundamental rights are under threat by the government because of

the hate speech legislation. The blame-game is obvious within most interacted posts by some Finns party members. They argue, that "tolerant people," "green-left" or "blue-eyed" MPs allow terrorism to happen by accepting refugees, and that they refuse to condemn Islamist terrorism.

Interestingly though, also left-wing and Green party politicians used almost similar, rights-based rhetoric while discussing Islam and terrorism. According to one poster, "Radical-Islamist terrorists want to destroy the foundations of Finnish society: freedom, rule of law and democracy." Here the argument however is that terrorism is not Islamist per se but is based only on interpretations made by a small minority of radical Muslims, emphasizing simultaneously that the Muslims are often also victims of terrorism. Comparison is additionally built between far-right and jihadism, which both represent for them nontolerant, exclusive rhetoric and actions. A left-alliance MP also suggested that media is biased when not discussing far-right terrorism as much as jihadism. Nevertheless, negative stereotypes are not dismantled in detail, and posters are often satisfied with stating "not all Muslims are terrorists," thus only presenting defensively the opposite view and staying within previously set frames of threat-based discussion.

In other Muslim-related posts, similar trend is visible, although not so dominant. For example, the theme of anti-Semitism is used to oppose Muslim-immigration, based on an argument that fundamental Muslims are the key reason behind rising anti-Jewish attitudes. This also partly reflects the division between minorities; Jews may be presented in a positive light, at least if such an argument can be used to target other minorities. Migrants are not a homogenous group, and possible divisions between migrants may be played against other groups, especially Muslims. This observation is in line with the fact, that an increasing number of people with migrant backgrounds are voting and even become activists of radical right parties (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019).)

Inclusive and exclusive rhetoric in posts on Muslims

In the most interacted posts related to topic "crime" and Muslims, Muslims are in most cases represented as perpetrators of terrorist or sexual crimes. Only a handful of posts refer to them also as victims, and in such cases mostly as victims of far-right hate crimes. Here again, discussion is predominantly externalized; Muslims are treated as a group, not as individuals or as having an agency. Another topic, related to crime and entirely dominated by Finns Party views in our sample is posts regarding Sweden and Muslims. This is unsurprising, considering Finns Party activists have for years been warning about "the Swedish way," meaning growing crime rates caused by migration, and using Sweden as a warning example of dystopian development (Thorleifsson, 2019). Notable here is also that many of these tropes are popular also internationally, not only in Finland.

Posts by Finns party members thus regularly reflect the polarizing mechanism often considered to be producing extremism via strict separation between in-group and out-group (Berger, 2018), whereas left-wing and Green party writers try to focus on more inclusive rhetoric, however simultaneously targeting and blaming right-wing activists for polarization. In previous studies, Finns party and the Greens have also been seen as two extremes regarding attitudes toward refugees, in which context especially the Muslims are discussed (Lönnqvist et al., 2020).

Addressing discrimination and crime in LGBTQ+ related posts

Predominantly rights-based discussion regarding the LGBTQ+ community differs in many respects when compared posts on Muslims, which are more focused on security issues. LGBTQ+ community is not, generally speaking, regarded in posts as alien to Finland, or as a strictly defined out-group. Active agency for enhancing their own right and victim status are also present in these posts more extensively than when discussing Muslims.

Polarizing discussion in general is thus not so common in these posts, and focus is more on the threats and discrimination caused by open trans- and homophobia. Leading left-wing politicians comment how they have seen and heard about verbal and occasionally also physical attacks against minorities. On the other hand, attitudes and rhetoric shared by far-right parties and groups are seen as a one cause behind these phenomena.

Several of these posts appear somewhat as ritualized reminders for the need of tolerance and show of alliance, and a substantial number of posts were made on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia. However, also more personal, individual statements were presented. These include one MP telling a story of her long fight against prejudice, with a reference to a photo of her demonstrating for the LGBTQ+ rights as a teenager, as well as one MP telling how she suffered when she could not talk openly about her nonbinary identity. The more inclusive posts have been mostly made by Left-Alliance and Green Party members, reflecting the divisions in attitudes toward Muslims, and showing issue-alignment (Lönnqvist et al., 2020).

Although intensity and targeting mechanisms differ from posts on Muslims, similar divisions and polarizing rhetorical devices are nevertheless employed here too. Notable is, however, that while posts in general support the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, most of them do not directly challenge the negative stereotypes. The approach in majority of the posts is policy oriented, emphasizing the need for both municipal and national level actions. When those spreading the negative stereotypes are addressed, it is done at the relatively general level: "Examining one's own thought patterns, recognizing hidden attitudes and learning away from them over and over again is dismantling discriminatory attitudes."

The task is thus seen as everyone's concern, and, unlike in some anti-discriminatory comments on Muslims or Islam along the lines "not all Muslims," the blame lies exclusively with people outside the LGBTQ+ community. On the other hand, some see cynical power politics behind the negative attitudes. The opponents of the LGBTQ+ rights "want to depict the Rainbow minorities as enemies and travesty of freedom for advancing their own privileges and power-positions." Therefore, more allies are called for to join the struggle.

Rights of the LGBTQ+ individuals

While in topics related to Muslims the rights were used often as an alibi for presenting negative stereotypes, it is interesting to notice, that while discussing LGBTQ+ issues, also some liberal Muslims see problems in some people's anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes within Muslim community, and especially in Islamic states. Although argument is structurally almost similar, that is, that (some) Muslims do not respect the rights of the LGBTQ+ people, the intended purpose is not exclusive.

Finns Party members framed these issues also in terms of polarized interpretations of freedom of speech, and, in line with the issue-alignment thesis (Lönnqvist et al., 2020), included Muslims as well in the discussion. One aspect of this is claiming only right-wing people are accused of hate speech, and that especially Islam is protected. "If you call Jesus a gay, no consequences. If you say the same about Allah, you will face consequences. Wake up people! We cannot let Islam to rule in Europe." Here the writer is careful enough to talk only generally about the religion, whereas some party members are more explicit and do not avoid talking about the people as well. One MP for example commented on double standards regarding, among others thing, threats to human rights and equality, stating that obviously this does not mean "human masses swearing in the name of Islam, swarming to Europe from Middle East and Africa." Alleged double standards have been especially one of the key-topics of the Finns party members, and, unsurprisingly, it shows also when discussing the rights of the LGBTQ+ people.

Some posts by Finns Party members, however, seem to take a more general stand against what they call "rainbow ideology," into which they include supporting trans-rights, and present fears regarding women's safety in locker rooms, as well as alleged sexual perversions to which also children are exposed to. References to nonbinary gender they see as antiscience: "Although some supporters of the ideology are on the right cause, it includes too much anti-scientific mumbo-jumbo and unhealthy activities."

Inclusion and exclusion in posts on LGBTQ+ community

For some of the posters the ultraliberalism in general is the actual reason behind negative development they experience. In such posts, liberals are not seen as

political opponents, but more intensively as enemies. Referring to popular far-right trope of cultural decay, one poster representing Finns Party for example claimed that "we live currently the golden era of gay- and leftist decay." Describing other actors in a hostile manner with organic metaphors, often used by extremists (Cassam, 2021), may increase the calls for their exclusion from a "healthy society." As Kawecki (2022) among others suggests, this may be a sign of an increasing polarization between parties.

Whereas topics related to Muslims are dominated by Finns party members, who also set the exclusive tone and frames for discussion, the most interacted posts on LGBTQ+ community have more inclusive nature with more Left Alliance and Green Party members among top posters. They seem to have an issue ownership (Backlund & Jungar, 2019; Borg et al., 2020), which sets the tone of the discussion. Nevertheless, and despite more positive tone, types of arguments tend to have relatively similar structure and may be interpreted to reflect also here the issue alignment. Migrants, and especially Muslims are as an issue more securitized, and as such beyond everyday politics, whereas ideological and political struggles and political motives are more present in posts regarding the LGBTQ+ rights.

DISCUSSIONS

This exploratory study investigates the frequency and content of Facebook posts related to Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals over a 4-year period in Finland. Our examination reveals pertinent insights about online discourse, pointing to broader societal and political perceptions of these groups. Initially, we observed that the frequency of posts pertaining to Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals did not correlate as these two groups are distinct from one another. This lack of parallel trends implies a separate context of discussions for these groups, possibly triggered by different types of events, such as legislative changes or high-profile incidents, although thematic analysis indicated also a certain level of issue alignment.

We observed divergent patterns of engagement and sentiment toward Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals. Posts about Muslims triggered more comments and angry reactions, suggesting controversy and dispute. Conversely, posts concerning the LGBTQ+ community garnered more love, haha, and care reactions and shares, possibly reflecting greater acceptance and support. This indicates that the divergent patterns of engagement and sentiment toward Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals reflect the different levels of social acceptance and tolerance for these groups in society. Moreover, it shows that politicians use different strategies and tactics to mobilize their supporters or opponents on social media. It also reveals the different forms and expressions of online abuse and hate speech that target these groups on social media.

Thematic analysis highlighted a dichotomy in the tone of these posts. Discourse pertaining to Muslims was typically negative, politically charged, and

often depicted Muslims as threats. This aligns with existing research underscoring the prevalence of negative and discriminatory online discourse targeting Muslims (Hatakka et al., 2017; Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014; Saarinen & Koskinen, 2022). The posts established a stark in-group and out-group dynamic, framing Muslims as alien to Finnish or Western values, a tactic possibly designed to fuel extremist rhetoric. Interestingly, the same posts also facilitated political parties, like the Finns Party, in critiquing hate speech legislation under the pretext of safeguarding freedom of speech, thus revealing the nuanced nature of such discourse.

Contrastingly, discourse related to LGBTQ+ individuals has notably emphasized inclusivity and advocacy for rights, reflecting findings from previous studies (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019; Nygård & Nyby, 2022). Discussions involving the LGBTQ+ community were largely centered around inclusivity, yet elements of societal division were discernible through references to discrimination and prejudice.

It's noteworthy that posts about both groups were strategically utilized by diverse political parties to steer discourse in their favor. Far-right parties tended to depict Muslims as threats, while left-wing and Green parties accentuated the theme of inclusivity. Intriguingly, both sides frequently leveled accusations at each other for instigating polarization. This differential discourse accentuates the polarization in online political conversations, mirroring the varied degrees of social acceptance and tolerance toward these groups within society.

Anti-Semitism and crime have been used to argue against Muslim immigration, reflecting the manipulation of divisions within migrant communities that seeks to divide minority communities. For instance, the populist party AfD in Germany has propagated anti-immigrant sentiments, particularly against Muslims, suggesting that large-scale migration from Muslim-majority countries is a challenge to liberal-integrationists and providing an opportunity for xenophobic, anti-Muslim tendencies and sentiment (Gedmin, 2019). Likewise, during the US presidential elections, there was a rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This rhetoric was often used to argue against Muslim immigration, and it served to further divide minority communities. It is found that exposure to anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric was associated with increased prejudice against both groups (Center on Extremism, 2018; Gerteis & Rotem, 2023; Müller & Schwarz, 2020; Telhami & Rouse, 2022). These studies suggest that political rhetoric that seeks to divide minority communities can have a negative impact on interminority relations. When minority communities are divided, it becomes easier for those in power to exploit those divisions and to further their own interests.

Despite positive rhetoric surrounding the LGBTQ+ community, posts often failed to challenge negative stereotypes, and biases against the community persisted. For example, even among people who expressed support for LGBTQ + rights, many still held negative stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people (Hazel &

Kleyman, 2020; Schlatter & Steinback, 2010; Semlyen & Rohleder, 2022). These stereotypes can lead to discrimination and violence against LGBTQ people.

The research findings suggest that political parties in Finland may prioritize different social issues based on ideological leanings or voter preferences. Our findings indicate that parties like Finns Party and National Coalition Party often engage in discussions about immigration and religious diversity, while the Greens and the Left Alliance tend to focus on matters related to LGBTQ+ rights and equality.

These observations lead to three potential interpretations. First, parties might leverage these social issues to solidify their ideological positions and mobilize their core supporters amidst rising political polarization (Levin et al., 2021), indicating that focusing on issues resonating with their base may consolidate support and offer a political edge. Second, parties may be reflecting their voters' differing attitudes toward these social issues, which can be influenced by factors such as education, income, age, gender, and religion (Chen et al., 2021). This suggests that their focus on specific issues might be a direct response to their voters' expressed preferences. Lastly, parties could be responding to the evolving social and demographic landscape of Finland by adapting their focus to tackle emergent issues such as immigration, populism, nationalism, and extremism (Patkós, 2023). Overall, these interpretations suggest that political parties' focus on different social issues could be a strategic move to signal ideological stances, mirror voter attitudes, or adapt to societal changes (Borg et al., 2020). Further research is needed to validate these explanations.

Our study provides new insight into online political conversations regarding marginalized groups in Finland, but these findings must be contextualized within broader debates on social media and discourse. A sizeable body of research has examined how social media platforms shape political attitudes and polarization. Due to algorithmic filtering, users often inhabit "echo chambers" where they interact predominantly with like-minded individuals, reinforcing existing beliefs and biases (Garimella et al., 2018). Relatedly, the "filter bubble" effect limits exposure to opposing views, entrenching users in ideological bubbles (Flaxman et al., 2016). Beyond filtering, social media conversations elicit strong emotions, impacting virality and engagement (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Outrage and moral emotion boost content diffusion, potentially inflaming societal divisions (Brady et al., 2017; Crockett, 2017). Our findings show that the most significant emotions in posts are love, anger, or joy (haha) with a varying degree of group preferences. While our study was limited to Facebook, these key mechanisms—echo chambers, filter bubbles, and emotional appeals—fundamentally structure online discourse more broadly. Our findings accord with research on how political rhetoric and narratives divide minority groups (Müller & Schwarz, 2020), and foster polarized conversations (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Situating our case study within this

wider scholarship clarifies how broader technological and psychological dynamics shape the discourse we observed.

However, our focus on Finland and Facebook means findings may not fully generalize beyond this context. Further research should examine political discourse across diverse online platforms and geographical settings. Nonetheless, our study provides valuable evidence to ongoing debates on social media's societal impacts. The added nuance on discourse regarding Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities advances understanding of these issues in the Nordic region. Overall, while our analysis centered on Facebook posts in Finland, incorporating perspectives from the wider research literature situates the findings within pivotal debates on online platforms and political polarization. This clarifies how the observed divisions and rhetoric reflect broader technological and psychological patterns shaping social media discourse.

The Finns Party, since June 2023 a part of the governing coalition, was however in opposition during the whole period of data collection. Until June 2019, the Finnish government coalition consisted of three center-right or right-wing parties. The coalition included originally the Centre Party, Finns Party, and National Coalition Party. When the Finns Party changed its leader in 2017, the party was split into two and the more moderate Blue Reform, with the former leader of the Finns Party among its ranks, took the cabinet posts and Finns Party was left in opposition. In June 2019, center-left coalition government was formed, after the Social Democratic Party won the parliamentary elections. Social democrats formed a coalition with the Centre Party, the Greens, the Left Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party. The government program promised more inclusive politics and a focus on social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Government initiatives as well as research concerning hate speech were heavily criticized, especially by the Finns Party members. During the 2019 elections, they also ran a relatively polarizing campaign (Salojärvi et al., 2023), which may have given an extra-boost for their members in using exclusive rhetoric. This however does not clearly show in our data.

Our research findings underscore the intricate dynamics of online political discourse concerning minority groups and its profound influence on societal attitudes. This complexity embodies a spectrum of impacts: from reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes, prejudices, and biases, to challenging these notions with fresh perspectives and narratives (Coe & Griffin, 2020). Additionally, online political discourse regarding marginalized groups can influence societal attitudes by exposing people to diverse viewpoints and experiences, or by creating echo chambers and filter bubbles that limit exposure to opposing views (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Lastly, our research findings also suggest that online political discourse concerning minority groups can sway societal attitudes through eliciting emotional reactions, facilitating collective action, or conversely, inciting apathy and disengagement (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2019).

Recognizing the biases inherent in these discussions is paramount. By understanding the narratives that play out online, policymakers can work more effectively to combat discrimination, prejudice, and societal division.

Our findings provide an initial foray into the complexity of online dialogs regarding Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals. Future research should utilize quantitative and qualitative methods to delve deeper into these conversations. This exploration is fundamental to understanding the intricacies and implications of discourse, addressing divergent themes, political polarization, social trends, and strategies for social cohesion.

This study also reveals areas for further investigation. It indicates a more diverse dialog surrounding LGBTQ+ community issues and suggests that the discourse around Muslims is less varied. Further study is needed to understand the interplay in posts mentioning both groups. Ultimately, this research lays the groundwork for more profound insights into the online political portrayal and perception of these groups.

Our findings reveal several potential policy implications. First, implementing educational campaigns and intercultural dialogs may help reduce prejudices against marginalized groups. Governmental policies should also combat online hate speech targeting these communities. Furthermore, increasing representation in politics and media can enhance inclusion and challenge biases. Additionally, research is needed on divisive political rhetoric that exacerbates tensions between minority groups. Social media platforms must be incentivized to limit algorithmic filtering that entrenches polarized discourse. Overall, multifaceted approaches spanning education, policy, media, and technology are required to shift public perceptions, foster mutual understanding, and achieve greater social cohesion.

LIMITATIONS

Our study faces several limitations. First, focusing solely on Facebook limits the generalizability of our findings across other online and offline communication platforms. The use of CrowdTangle for data collection only allows access to publicly available data, and our reliance on predetermined keywords for data extraction could lead to potential biases or omissions. Our categorization of political affiliations based on Facebook page classifications has weakness to leave out relevant politically affiliated accounts. Also, the use of PyTextRank and Scattertext could overlook subtle nuances in language, tone, and context. Lastly, our thematic analysis, while systematic, was conducted based on data collected in the previous part of the study and focusing on only a limited number of posts and not including comments. Because of this, it may not entirely capture the intended meanings of the posters. However, the mixed-method approach and data triangulation enhances the reliability of the results.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has provided a nuanced understanding of online discourse related to Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals in Finland, shedding light on its profound influence on societal perspectives. Our findings, analyzed through the lens of SIT, have elucidated how these narratives actively shape group identities and relations. The differing engagement patterns with posts about the Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities underscore a central aspect of SIT: the delineation of in-groups and out-groups. Discourse concerning Muslims often perpetuates negative stereotypes, reinforcing a divisive "us versus them" dynamic. In contrast, discourse about the LGBTQ+ community emphasizes inclusivity, despite persistent negative biases.

Moreover, political parties strategically employ group narratives to steer discourse, aligning with SIT's premise that intergroup conflict can be harnessed to fortify in-group cohesion. The strategic alignment between parties and their supporters echoes the theory's assertion that individuals often conform to the norms of their in-group. Our research underscores the impact of online discourse on shaping social identities and intergroup relations. It illuminates how echo chambers can perpetuate biases and polarize groups, while exposure to diverse viewpoints can foster empathy and acceptance, challenging group boundaries.

Importantly, this study's originality lies in its comprehensive exploration of these dynamics within the Finnish context, contributing to the broader discourse on online communication and identity formation. Our research makes explicit the significance of understanding these dynamics as a means to promote societal cohesion. Policymakers, educators, and social media platforms should consider these insights to foster healthier public discourse, transitioning from a divisive "us versus them" mentality to a more inclusive "we."

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID
Ali Unlu ⓘ http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0140-7761

ENDNOTES
[i] The population of Finland is approximately 5.5 million.

[ii] https://www.crowdtangle.com

iii Regarding different qualitative approaches to thematic analysis, see Clarke & Hayfield (2015).

iv Cross-posting on Facebook is when the same content (i.e., sharing news or event links) is shared on multiple Facebook pages or groups, which helps to increase visibility and engagement. This can be done manually or through automated tools provided by Facebook.

References

Arabaghatta Basavaraj, K., Saikia, P., Varughese, A., Semetko, H. A., & Kumar, A. (2021). The COVID-19–social identity–digital media Nexus in India: Polarization and blame. *Political Psychology*, *42*(5), 827–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12774

Arter, D. (2020). When a pariah party exploits its demonised status: The 2019 Finnish general election. *West European Politics*, *43*(1), 260–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1635799

Backlund, A., & Jungar, A.-C. (2019). Populist radical right party-voter policy representation in Western Europe. *Representation*, *55*(4), 393–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1674911

Baele, S. J., Boyd, K., Coan, T. G., & Naserian, E. (2023). Lethal words: An integrated model of violent extremists' language. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2213963

Berbrier, M. (1999). Impression management for the thinking racist: A case study of intellectualization as stigma transformation in contemporary white supremacist discourse. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *40*(3), 411–433. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1999.tb01727.x

Berger, J. (2018). Extremism. In *The MIT essential knowledge series*. The MIT Press.

Borg, S., Kestilä-Kekkonen, E., & Wass, H. (2020). *Politiikan ilmastonmuutos: Eduskuntavaali-tutkimus 2019 [Climate change in politics: Parliamentary election study 2019]* (8765). Oikeusministeriön julkaisuja [Publications of the Ministry of Justice]. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162429

Brady, W. J., Wills, J. A., Jost, J. T., Tucker, J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *114*(28), 7313–7318. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1618923114

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, *55*(3), 429–444. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00126

Cassam, Q. (2021). *Extremism: A philosophical analysis*. Routledge.

Center on Extremism. (2018). *Mainstreaming hate: The anti-immigrant movement in the U.S.* Anti-Defamation League. https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/mainstreaming-hate-anti-immigrant-report-2018-v3.pdf

Chen, T. H. Y., Salloum, A., Gronow, A., Ylä-Anttila, T., & Kivelä, M. (2021). Polarization of climate politics results from partisan sorting: Evidence from Finnish Twittersphere. *Global Environmental Change*, *71*, 102348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102348

Cinelli, M., De Francisci Morales, G., Galeazzi, A., Quattrociocchi, W., & Starnini, M. (2021). The echo chamber effect on social media. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *118*(9):e2023301118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118

Clarke, B. V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. In A. Smith, *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 222–248). SAGE Publications.

Coe, K., & Griffin, R. A. (2020). Marginalized identity invocation online: The case of President Donald Trump on Twitter. *Social Media+ Society*, *6*(1), 205630512091397. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120913979

Crockett, M. J. (2017). Moral outrage in the digital age. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *1*(11), 769–771. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0213-3

CrowdTangle Team. (2022). CrowdTangle. https://www.crowdtangle.com

Doerr, N. (2021). The visual politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, ethno-nationalism, and gendered images. *Social Sciences*, *10*(1), 20. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10010020

Ellemers, N., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). Social identity theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, E. T. Higgins, & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 379–398). Sage Publications.

Everett, J. A. C., Faber, N. S., & Crockett, M. (2015). Preferences and beliefs in ingroup favoritism. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, *9*, 126656. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2015.00015

Flamino, J., Galeazzi, A., Feldman, S., Macy, M. W., Cross, B., Zhou, Z., Serafino, M., Bovet, A., Makse, H. A., & Szymanski, B. K. (2023). Political polarization of news media and influencers on Twitter in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *7*(6), 904–916. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01550-8

Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *80*(S1), 298–320. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006

Garimella, K., De Francisci Morales, G., Gionis, A., & Mathioudakis, M. (2018). Political discourse on social media: Echo chambers, gatekeepers, and the price of bipartisanship. *Proceedings of the 2018 World Wide Web Conference on World Wide Web - WWW*, *18*, 913–922. https://doi.org/10.1145/3178876.3186139

Garimella, V. R. K., & Weber, I. (2017). A long-term analysis of polarization on Twitter. *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, *11*(1), 528–531. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v11i1.14918

Gedmin, J. (2019). *Right-wing populism in Germany: Muslims and minorities after the 2015 refugee crisis*. Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/research/right-wing-populism-in-germany-muslims-and-minorities-after-the-2015-refugee-crisis/

Gerteis, J., & Rotem, N. (2023). Connecting the "others": White anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim views in America. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *64*(1), 144–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2022.2045882

Greenaway, K. H., Haslam, S. A., Cruwys, T., Branscombe, N. R., Ysseldyk, R., & Heldreth, C. (2015). From "we" to "me": Group identification enhances perceived personal control with consequences for health and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *109*(1), 53–74. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000019

Grigoropoulou, N. (2020). Discussing God: The effect of (ir) religious identities on topic-sentiment polarization in online debates. *Review of Religious Research*, *62*(4), 533–561. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-020-00425-y

Guess, A. M., Malhotra, N., Pan, J., Barberá, P., Allcott, H., Brown, T., Crespo-Tenorio, A., Dimmery, D., Freelon, D., Gentzkow, M., González-Bailón, S., Kennedy, E., Kim, Y. M., Lazer, D., Moehler, D., Nyhan, B., Rivera, C. V., Settle, J., Thomas, D. R., … Tucker, J. A. (2023). How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign? *Science*, *381*(6656), 398–404. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abp9364

Harnois, C. E. (2015). Race, ethnicity, sexuality, and women's political consciousness of gender. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *78*(4), 365–386. https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272515607844

Hatakka, N., Niemi, M. K., & Välimäki, M. (2017). Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties' strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media. *Discourse & Society*, *28*(3), 262–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516687406

Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Shen, Y., Vandewater, E. A., & Russell, S. T. (2019). Proposition 8 and homophobic bullying in California. *Pediatrics*, *143*(6), e20182116. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2116

Hazel, K. L., & Kleyman, K. S. (2020). Gender and sex inequalities: Implications and resistance. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, *48*(4), 281–292. https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2019.1627079

Hewstone, M., Rubin, M., & Willis, H. (2002). Intergroup bias. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *53*(1), 575–604. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135109

Hogg, M. A. (2016). Social identity theory. In S. McKeown, R. Haji, & N. Ferguson (Eds.), *Understanding peace and conflict through social identity theory* (pp. 3–17). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29869-6_1

Hokka, J., & Nelimarkka, M. (2020). Affective economy of national-populist images: Investigating national and transnational online networks through visual big data. *New Media & Society*, *22*(5), 770–792. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819868686

Horsti, K. (2015). Techno-cultural opportunities: The anti-immigration movement in the Finnish mediascape. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *49*(4), 343–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1074371

Horsti, K., & Nikunen, K. (2013). The ethics of hospitality in changing journalism: A response to the rise of the anti-immigrant movement in Finnish media publicity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *16*(4), 489–504. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413491718

Iyengar, S., & Westwood, S. J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(3), 690–707. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152

Jantunen, J. H., & Kytölä, S. (2022). Online discourses of 'homosexuality' and religion: The discussion relating to Islam in Finland. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, *11*(1), 31–56. https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.20011.jan

Jaspal, R., & Cinnirella, M. (2010). Coping with potentially incompatible identities: Accounts of religious, ethnic, and sexual identities from British Pakistani men who identify as Muslim and gay. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *49*(4), 849–870. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466609X485025

Jaspal, R. (2017). Social identity theory. In F. M. Moghaddam, (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of political behavior* (pp. 1–4). Sage Publications.

Juvonen, T. (Ed.) (2020). Out lesbian and gay politicians in a multiparty system, In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1182

Kalter, F., & Foroutan, N. (2021). Race for second place? Explaining East-West differences in anti-Muslim sentiment in Germany. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *6*, 735421. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2021.735421

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2019). Populism and feminist politics: The cases of Finland and Spain. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*(4), 1108–1128. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12333

Kawecki, D. (2022). End of consensus? Ideology, partisan identity, and affective polarization in Finland 2003–2019. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *45*(4), 478–503. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12238

Kekkonen, A., & Ylä-Anttila, T. (2021). Affective blocs: Understanding affective polarization in multiparty systems. *Electoral Studies*, *72*, 102367. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102367

Keskinen, S. (2013). Antifeminism and white identity politics. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, *3*(4), 225. https://doi.org/10.2478/njmr-2013-0015

Kessler, J. S. (2017). Scattertext: A browser-based tool for visualizing how corpora differ. Proceedings of ACL-2017 System Demonstrations.

Kettunen, L., & Paukkeri, M.-S. (2021). Utilisation of artificial intelligence in monitoring hate speech (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2021:19).

Kim, Y. (2019). How cross-cutting news exposure relates to candidate issue stance knowledge, political polarization, and participation: The moderating role of political sophistication. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *31*(4), 626–648. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edy032

Koljonen, J., Isotalo, V., Ahonen, P., & Mattila, M. (2022). Comparing computational and non-computational methods in party position estimation: Finland, 2003–2019. *Party Politics*, *28*(2), 306–317. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820974609

Lähdesmäki, T., & Saresma, T. (2014). Reframing gender equality in Finnish online discussion on immigration: Populist articulations of religious minorities and marginalized sexualities. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, *22*(4), 299–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2014.953580

Lehtonen, J. (2023). Rainbow paradise? Sexualities and gender diversity in Finnish schools. In M. Thrupp, P. Seppänen, J. Kauko, & S. Kosunen (Eds.), *Finland's famous education system: Unvarnished insights into Finnish schooling* (pp. 273–288). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5_17

Levin, S. A., Milner, H. V., & Perrings, C. (2021). The dynamics of political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *118*(50):e2116950118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2116950118

Lönnqvist, J.-E., Ilmarinen, V.-J., & Sortheix, F. M. (2020). Polarization in the wake of the European refugee crisis – A longitudinal study of the Finnish political elite's attitudes towards refugees and the environment. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *8*(1), 173–197. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v8i1.1236

Mäkinen, K. (2016). Uneasy laughter: Encountering the anti-immigration debate. *Qualitative Research*, *16*(5), 541–556. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794115598193

Mäkinen, K. (2019). Sanat ovat tekoja. Vihapuheen ja nettikiusaamisen vastaisten toimien tehostaminen [Words are actions. Enhancing measures against hate speech and cyberbullying]. *Sisäministeriö [Ministry of the Interior]*, *23*, 86. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-324-264-7

Marino, G., & Iannelli, L. (2023). Seven years of studying the associations between political polarization and problematic information: A literature review. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *8*, 1174161. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1174161

Meta. (2022). *Facebook users in Finland*. https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-finland/2022/01/

Mols, F., & Jetten, J. (2016). Explaining the appeal of populist right-wing parties in times of economic prosperity. *Political Psychology*, *37*(2), 275–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12258

Mulinari, D., & Neergaard, A. (2019). A contradiction in terms? Migrant activists in the Sweden Democrats party. *Identities*, *26*(2), 222–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2017.1418275

Müller, K., & Schwarz, C. (2020). Making America hate again? Twitter and hate crime under Trump. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3149103

Nathan, P. (2016). PyTextRank, a Python implementation of TextRank for phrase extraction and summarization of text documents [Computer software]. Derwen. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4637885

Noll, J., Poppe, E., & Verkuyten, M. (2010). Political tolerance and prejudice: Differential reactions toward Muslims in the Netherlands. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *32*(1), 46–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530903540067

Nygård, M., & Nyby, J. (2022). Chapter 9: The role of ideas in parenting leaves: The case of gender equality and its politicization in Finland. In I. Dobrotić, S. Blum, & A. Koslowski (Eds.), *Research handbook on leave policy* (pp. 114–125). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800372214.00018

Paatelainen, L., Kannasto, E., & Isotalus, P. (2022). Functions of hybrid media: How parties and their leaders use traditional media in their social media campaign communication. *Frontiers in Communication*, *6*, 817285. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.817285

Patkós, V. (2023). Measuring partisan polarization with partisan differences in satisfaction with the government: The introduction of a new comparative approach. *Quality & Quantity*, *57*(1), 39–57. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01350-8

Pehrson, S., Vignoles, V. L., & Brown, R. (2009). National identification and anti-immigrant prejudice: Individual and contextual effects of national definitions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *72*(1), 24–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/019027250907200104

Pettersson, K. (2019). "Freedom of speech requires actions": Exploring the discourse of politicians convicted of hate-speech against Muslims. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *49*(5), 938–952. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2577

Pettigrew, T. F. (2016). In pursuit of three theories: Authoritarianism, relative deprivation, and intergroup contact. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *67*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033327

Pohjonen, M. (2018). Horizons of hate: A comparative approach to social media hate speech. VOX-Pol Network of Excellence. https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/30568/1/HORIZONS_OF_HATE_A_COMPARATIVE_APPROACH.pdf

Rauta, J. (2022). Poliisin tietoon tullut viharikollisuus Suomessa 2021 [Hate crimes reported to the police in Finland in 2021]. Poliisiammattikorkeakoulu [Finnish Police Vocational College]. https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/780352

Rauta, J. (2023). Poliisin tietoon tullut viharikollisuus Suomessa 2022 [Hate crimes reported to the police in Finland in 2022]. Poliisiammattikorkeakoulu [Finnish Police Vocational College]. https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/808142

Ravndal, J. A., Lygren, S., Hagen, L. W., & Jupskås, A. R. (2019). *RTV TREND REPO rt 2019 RIGHT WING TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE in Western Europe, 1990-2018*. Center for Research on Extremism. University of Oslo. Accessed January 10, 2020.

Reiljan, A. (2020). 'Fear and loathing across party lines' (also) in Europe: Affective polarisation in European party systems. *European Journal of Political Research*, *59*(2), 376–396. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12351

Saarinen, R., & Koskinen, H. J. (2022). Recognition, religious identity, and populism: Lessons from Finland. In P. Slotte, N. H. Gregersen, & H. Årsheim (Eds.), *INTERNATIONALIZATION AND RE-CONFESSIONALIZATION* (pp. 315–336). University Press of Southern Denmark.

Salojärvi, V., Palonen, E., Horsmanheimo, L., & Kylli, R.-M. (2023). Protecting the future 'Us': A rhetoric-performative multimodal analysis of the polarising far-right YouTube campaign videos in Finland. *Visual Studies*, *38*, 851–866. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2023.2249430

Saresma, T. (2018). Gender populism: Three cases of Finns party actors' traditionalist anti-feminism. In U. Kovala, E. Palonen, M. Ruotsalainen, & T. Saresma (Eds.), *Populism on the loose* (pp. 177–200). Jyväskylän yliopisto. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7401-5

Savchuk, K. (2023). A surprising discovery about Facebook's role in driving polarization. Insights by Stanford Business. https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/surprising-discovery-about-facebooks-role-driving-polarization

Schlatter, E., & Steinback, R. (2010). 10 anti-gay myths debunked. Intelligence Report, Winter Issue. https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/10-anti-gay-myths-debunked

Semlyen, J., & Rohleder, P. (2022). Critical psychology perspectives on LGBTQ+ mental health: Current issues and interventions. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *13*(5), 1105–1108. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.2019961

Silvennoinen, O. (2015). 'Home, religion, Fatherland': Movements of the radical right in Finland. *Fascism*, *4*(2), 134–154.

Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Emotions and information diffusion in social media—Sentiment of microblogs and sharing behavior. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *29*(4), 217–248. https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222290408

Swann, W. B., Jetten, J., Gómez, Á., Whitehouse, H., & Bastian, B. (2012). When group membership gets personal: A theory of identity fusion. *Psychological Review*, *119*(3), 441–456. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028589

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel, (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relation* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

Telhami, S., & Rouse, S. M. (2022). *The antisemitic and Islamophobic fringe is alarmingly emboldened—But it's shrinking*. Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2022/12/29/the-antisemitic-and-islamophobic-fringe-is-alarmingly-emboldened-but-its-shrinking/

Thorleifsson, C. (2019). The Swedish dystopia: Violent imaginaries of the radical right. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(5), 515–533. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1656888

Unlu, A., Truong, S., Tammi, T., & Lohiniva, A.-L. (2023). Exploring political mistrust in pandemic risk communication: Mixed-method study using social media data analysis. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 25, e50199. https://doi.org/10.2196/50199

Vallinkoski, K., Koirikivi, P.-M., & Malkki, L. (2021). 'What is this ISIS all about?' Addressing violent extremism with students: Finnish educators' perspectives. *European Educational Research Journal*, 21, 778–800.

Westinen, J., & Kestilä-Kekkonen, E. (2015). Perusduunarit, vihervasemmisto ja porvarit: Suomalaisen äänestäjäkunnan jakautuminen ideologisiin blokkeihin vuoden 2011 eduskunta-vaaleissa [True working men, red-greens and bourgeois: Ideological blocs in the Finnish electorate in the 2011 Parliamentary Election]. *Politiikka*, 57(2), 94–114.

Williams, M. L., Burnap, P., & Sloan, L. (2017). Towards an ethical framework for publishing Twitter data in social research: Taking into account users' views, online context and algorithmic estimation. *Sociology*, 51(6), 1149–1168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517708140

Wojcieszak, M. E., & Mutz, D. C. (2009). Online groups and political discourse: Do online discussion spaces facilitate exposure to political disagreement? *Journal of Communication*, 59(1), 40–56. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01403.x

Wondreys, J., & Mudde, C. (2022). Victims of the pandemic? European far-right parties and COVID-19. *Nationalities Papers*, 50(1), 86–103. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.93

Yarchi, M., Baden, C., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2021). Political polarization on the digital sphere: A cross-platform, over-time analysis of interactional, positional, and affective polarization on social media. *Political Communication*, 38(1–2), 98–139. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1785067

Zhang, X., & Davis, M. (2022). E-extremism: A conceptual framework for studying the online far right. *New Media & Society*, 146144482210983. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221098360

Zuiderveen Borgesius, F. J., Trilling, D., Möller, J., Bodó, B., De Vreese, C. H., & Helberger, N. (2016). Should we worry about filter bubbles? *Internet Policy Review*, 5(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.14763/2016.1.401

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Unlu, A., Kotonen, T. (2024). Online polarization and identity politics: An analysis of Facebook discourse on Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities in Finland. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12270