

THE FINNS PARTY

IMPACT: The Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, or PS), formerly known as the True Finns, is a Finnish far-right, anti-Muslim political party. Founded in 1995 following the dissolution of the Finnish Rural Party, it has since become one of the country's largest political parties. The Finns formed part of a 2015 government coalition and became the second largest party in the 2015 and 2019 national elections. In the European Parliament, the Finns are part of the anti-Muslim far-right political group "Identity and Democracy."

- The Finns party (PS) was founded in 1995 following a series of political splits. According to a 2015 *BBC article*, the party's "origins lie in a split in the Centre Party (then known as the Agrarian League) in 1959" following former cabinet minister Veikko Vennamo's resignation. Vennamo went on to establish the Rural Party in 1966 with a platform "focused on providing care and support for the poor and unemployed, with a dose of nationalism mixed in." The **Rural Party failed to deliver once it came to power in a government coalition and, "by 1995, the party was in ruins, and the True Finns Party was established from its ashes."**
- Since its founding, the party has embraced nativist identity politics of Finnish nationalism and appeals to rural voters. **Until 2017, the party was divided into two camps: a more "moderate" faction led by Timo Soini, and a more racist faction, championed by Jussi Halla-aho, who is known for his hostile attitudes towards immigrants, multiculturalism, and Islam.** Along with appealing to nativist sentiments, the party has campaigned against climate action, and in May 2020 called for Finland to exit the Eurozone amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **From 1997 to 2011, the party did not achieve any major electoral successes.** The Oxford Research Group noted in 2017 that prior to the 2011 election, the party "had been widely dismissed as a joke, a harmless protest movement, and a nuisance on the fringe of Finnish politics. **Their discourse was aggressive and rude and the media mostly only saw entertainment value in them.**" However, **in 2011, the party won thirty-nine out of two hundred seats and became the third largest in the country.** In 2011, the *Guardian* noted the inclusion of "harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric" in the party's 2011 manifesto, specifically its statement that, "Basic Finnish immigration policy should be based on the fact that the Finns should always be able to decide for themselves the conditions under which a foreigner can come to our country and reside in our country." Additionally, the manifesto demanding immigrants "accept and observe Finnish laws and cultural norms," "immigrants granted a residence permit should not receive social benefits," and "refugee quotas must be linked to economic reality."
- Following the national parliamentary elections in April 2015, the PS initially formed a coalition with the liberal Centre Party and the centrist-right National Coalition Party—the first time in Finland's history that a far-right party had become part of the government. The coalition, however, only lasted until June 2017. **Following the election of hardliner Jussi Halla-aho as the new PS party leader, the coalition's other parties declared that they did not see grounds for continued cooperation with PS.** The Finns subsequently split; a group left, rebranded as the Blue Reform (initially New Alternative), and continued in the coalition with all five ministers and twenty MPs, and the PS entered opposition again. In the **April 2019 national parliamentary elections, the PS became the second largest party with 17.5 percent of the votes**, only slightly trailing the Social Democrats with 17.7 percent.
- In the 2009 elections, the PS entered the European Parliament with one seat (9.79 percent). In the subsequent 2014 and 2019 elections, the party increased its electoral support (12.87 percent and 13.8 percent respectively) and gained two seats in each election. **Since 2009, it has been part of the main far-right group in the European Parliament**, which in 2009 was the Europe of

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[freedom and democracy Group](#) (EFD), in 2014 the [Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group](#) (EFDD) and in 2019 became **the [Identity and Democracy group](#) (ID)**.

- In June 2017, researcher Mari K. Niemi from the University of Turku [noted](#) in *Reuters* that **while the PS “had sought to represent underprivileged people from rural areas,” it had become a “more radical right-wing populist party”** as “young, sometimes educated people with an anti-immigration focus have become a more significant power within the party.” She compared the parties current profile to that of other European far-right parties such as the [Sweden Democrats](#) and France’s [National Rally](#). **A survey published in 2016 revealed that 24.4 percent of Finland’s police forces voted for the PS.**
- Out of Finland’s 5.5 million population, Muslims number around [70,000](#). According to the International Social Survey Programme of 2008, **out of forty-two countries surveyed, Finland’s population led in anti-Muslim attitudes.** The study [found](#) that **approximately half of the population had a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims.** According to the anti-racist activist and author [Enrique Tessieri](#), “the rise of the Islamophobic PS as a major political force in Finland after the 2011 elections is a sign that Islamophobia and racism, in general, is an unchecked social ill too many are willing to deny or accept with their silence.”
- In a study on the representations of Muslims and Islam in the Finns party newsletter, author Markus Lindholm [shows](#) how the **“Finns Party masks its anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments in its overt anti-asylum seeker discourse [...] trying to keep a moderate image when it comes to specific minority groups,** due to signing the anti-discrimination proclamation in 2011, as well as due to the hate-speech convictions.” At the same time, Lindholm [argues](#) that, “the party is refraining from explicitly oppressive rhetoric, while individual platforms of MPs (such as blog texts) allows party members to express more overt rhetoric.”
- The PS proposed numerous anti-Muslim policies while in power. In **October 2016, the MP Vesa-Matti Saarakkala submitted a proposal to amend a law to add the prohibition of face veils in public spaces.** [According](#) to MP Saarakkala, “[...] there are reasonable grounds to believe that Muslim women in Finland or elsewhere in Europe in principle do not wear the face veil out of their own will and thus the law amendment would not violate the article on the right to liberty and integrity of the person in the Finnish Constitution.” This proposal was [not welcomed](#) by the coalition partner. In **October of the same year, then-European Parliament member (MEP) Jussi Halla-aho proposed to apply ethnic profiling “aimed particularly at people whose ethnic roots are in the Middle East, North Africa, or Central Asia” as an instrument to prevent “Islamic terrorism” in Europe.**
- In **June 2012, Halla-aho, at the time an MEP, was found guilty of “ethnic agitation” (incitement of racial or ethnic hatred) by the Supreme Court of Finland.** The verdict was due to his 2008 [comments](#) that, “Prophet Muhammad was a pedophile and Islam justifies pedophilia and Pedophilia was Allah’s will.” He also **made racist claims that, “robbing passersby and living on taxpayers’ expense are cultural, and possibly genetic, characteristics of Somalis.”** Even after his conviction, Halla-aho [argued](#) that, “The pedophilia of Muhammad and the pro-pedophilia of Muslims and Allah can only be disputed by denying the literal truth of the Qur’an or Muhammad’s status as a messenger of God whose deeds are in accordance with God’s will.” **Later during the 2019 national parliamentary elections, he did not retract his position, saying: “I don’t regret that particular text, because it still makes the right point.”**

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- In addition to Halla-aho, other leading politicians of the PS have also made discriminatory and bigoted remarks about Muslims. When **Laura Huhtasaari, then-VP of the Finns party, ran in the presidential elections in January 2018, she claimed to protect Finland from “political Islam” and wanted to ban the full face veil.** Researcher Linda Hyokki noted that Huhtasaari’s comments implied that, “Muslim women do not have freedom of choice,” and that such comments effectively otherized Muslim women. In **November 2018, Huhtasaari said that she does not want “white Finnish culture” substituted for foreign ones like Islam or women and girls wearing veils in public. She has also claimed that a fear of Islam can be explained by “Muslim backwardness.”**
- Numerous members of the PS have also been convicted of making racist statements.** After the terrorist attack in Nice, France, **MP Teuvo Hakkarainen, the second Vice-Chair of the party, was convicted in 2017 for incitement to hatred due to his facebook posts that stated, “Get Muslims out of this country! Not all Muslims are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims.”** PS MP Sebastian Tynkkynen was convicted on charges of ethnic agitation in October 2019 for his 2016 Facebook posts on Islam. **Tynkkynen had posted images of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks and stated, “they have one thing in common: they all serve Allah.”** The court ruled that his writings about Islamic groups were “premeditated, racist in nature and constituted defamatory hate speech that targeted Muslims and were likely to provoke contempt and even hatred based on intolerance of Islamic groups.” In July 2016, Tynkkynen, a long-time chairman of the youth branch of the Finns wrote on his Facebook page that, “Islam should be stamped out of Finland.” Following his conviction, the youth organization of the PS suggested that the articles on incitement of hatred and against freedom of worship should be removed from Finnish Criminal Law.
- Terhi Kiemunki, former head of the local PS branch in Tampere (Finland’s third largest city), was publicly criticized for her blog comments comparing Muslim girls to witches.** In December 2016, Kiemunki was convicted of incitement of racial hatred for a blog entry in March 2016 that included an “image of a future Finland where women and children are raped, ‘heathens’ killed and mosques erected because of an Islamic invasion.” **In another 2016 blog post, she wrote: “Our old Europe cannot get rid of terrorism as long as we continue accepting the teachings of Islam. All Muslims are not terrorists but these days all terrorists in Europe are Muslims.”** Despite being convicted in a court of law, none of the three politicians mentioned above were expelled from the Finns Party. In a July 2019 tweet, Abdirahim Hussein, a councilor for the City of Helsinki affiliated with the social democratic party, wrote that, “all Finns Party members and their voters/supporters are racist”.
- PS politicians have frequently supported anti-Muslim movements** such as the Finnish Defense League, Soldiers of Odin, Suomen Vastarintaliike (Nordic Resistance Movement in Finland), Rajat Kiinni (Close the Borders), and Suomi Ensin (Finland First). In **2015, the Finnish Defense League organized a rally entitled “Against radical Islam - for freedom and democracy” against a mosque project with 150 participants. The event was supported by the youth branch of the PS,** whose chairman, Jarmo Keto, said that, “Islam as an ideology is responsible for many conflicts and terror attacks. Thus such a mosque project is an irresponsible idea.”