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Political identities or personal attitudes?

How individual attitudes predict affective polarization in Finland

Political science/Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's thesis

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Tässä pro-gradu -tutkielmassa tutkitaan, miten äänestäjien asenne-erot ovat yhteydessä affektiiviseen polarisaatioon Suomessa. Affektiivisen polarisaation on havaittu nousseen voimakkaasti läntisissä demokratioissa 2010-luvun aikana, eikä Suomi ole poikkeus tässä trendissä. Vuonna 2011 alkaneen affektiivisen polarisaatiokehityksen syyksi on usein esitetty ideologisen äärimmäisyyden kasvua, sekä poliittisen kentän kokonaisvaltaista polarisoitumista. Suomalaisen äänestäjäkunnan tiedetään muodostavan affektiivisia blokkeja, jotka rakentuvat jaettujen arvojen kuten liberalismiin tai konservatismiin ympärille, tuottaen tunneperustaisen blokkimuodostelman perusteet yhteiskuntaan.

Tutkielma lähestyy tätä kehityskulkua modernien jakolinjateorioiden viitekehyksestä. Suomessa affektiivisen polarisaation tiedetään olevan yhteydessä esimerkiksi äänestäjän sijoittumiseen GAL–TAN ja perinteisen vasemmisto–oikeisto-ulottuvuuksien ääripäähän. On kuitenkin verrattaen epäselvää, missä määrin ajankohtaisiin poliittisiin kiistoihin liittyvät asenteet vaikuttavat positiivisiin ja negatiivisiin arvioihin muiden puolueiden kannattajista. Tutkielmassa analysoitiin kolmea asennevääntämää, jotka koskettivat vuoden 2023 eduskuntavaalien alla keskeiseksi nousutta kiistaa julkisen talouden sopeutustoimista, maahanmuuton merkitystä suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa, sekä äänestäjien suhtautumista translain uudistukseen. Nämä äänestäjäkuntaa jakavat asenteet kytkeytyvät moderneihin jakolinjateorioihin, joiden mukaan modernia poliittista konfliktia määrittelevät kaksi ulottuvuutta: talousperustainen vasemmisto–oikeisto ulottuvuus ja sosiokulttuurinen liberaali–konservatiivi.

Asenne-erojen vaikutusta affektiiviseen polarisaatioon äänestäjien keskuudessa tutkittiin määrällisin menetelmin, usean muuttujan lineaarisella regressioanalyysillä. Aineistona hyödynnettiin Suomen yleisen mielipiteen tutkimusinfrastruktuurin (FIRIPO) keräämää Kansalaismielipide: Eduskuntavaalikysely 2023 -dataa. Analyysissä selitettävänä muuttujana käytettiin tunnelämpömittari-kysymyksiä eduskuntapuolueiden kannattajista, ja selittävänä muuttujina talous-, maahanmuutto-, sekä sukupuolivähemmistöihin liittyviä asenteita. Lisäksi malli huomioi vastaajien äänestyspäätöksen vuoden 2023 eduskuntavaaleissa. Mallien kontrollimuuttujina hyödynnettiin vastaajien ikää, sukupuolta, koulutustasoa sekä äidinkieltä. Mallien havaintomäärät vaihtelivat 1782 ja 2056 havainnon välillä.

Analyysi osoitti, että äänestäjän asenteet julkisen talouden sopeutuksia, maahanmuuttoa ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen oikeuksia kohtaan ovat yhteydessä affektiiviseen polarisaatioon eri puolueiden äänestäjien kohtaan. Taloudelliset ja sosiokulttuuriset arvoerot vaikuttavat tuottavan affektiivista polarisaatiota epäsymmetrisesti. Yksittäisten arvoerojen vaikutus niin negatiivisiin kuin positiivisiin arvioihin muiden puolueiden kannattajista oli kuitenkin heikompi, kuin äänestyspäätöksen. Tulokset osoittavat, että äänestäjien negatiiviset ja positiiviset arviot muiden puolueiden kannattajista on ensisijassa riippuvainen puolueiden etäisyydestä arvoulottuvuuksilla, sillä vasemmisto–liberaalit ja oikeisto–konservatiivit olivat keskimäärin suopeampia oman blokkinsa äänestäjiä kohtaan, kuin kilpailevan.

Avainsanat: Affektiivinen polarisaatio, jakolinjateoriat, sosiaalinen identiteetti

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This master's thesis studied, how voters' differences in political attitudes are connected to affective polarization in Finland. Scholars have noticed the rising levels of affective polarization throughout Western democracies, and Finland is no exception to this trend. Levels of affective polarization started to rise in 2011, and this development has been credited to rises in ideological extremity and overall polarization of electorate. Finnish voters are known to form affective blocs that are structured around shared values such as liberalism or conservatism, producing affective camps to society.

This thesis approached affective polarization via modern neo-cleavage theories. Finnish affective polarization is known to be connected to voters positioning on either end in GAL–TAN or traditional left–right dimension. Yet, it is relatively unknown how attitudes towards salient political issues are connected to positive and negative evaluations of other parties' supporters. Three attitudinal statements were analyzed, which tapped on disagreement over budget cuts as a means of balancing Finland's national economy, whether immigration is beneficial to Finnish society, and how voters view the transgender legislation reform. These attitudes that currently divide electorate are connected to neo-cleavage theories, which interpret the current political conflict as two-dimensional: economy-based left–right dimension and sociocultural liberal–conservative.

The impact of attitudinal differences to affective polarization was analyzed quantitatively with multiple linear regression analysis. The data was collected by Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion (FIRIPO) of 2023 Finnish parliament election. Models utilized feeling thermometer questions of each parliament party's supporters as dependent variables, and main independent variables were attitudinal variables relating to economics, immigration and rights of gender minorities. Models also included vote choice as one of the independent variables. Models controlled for respondents age, gender, level of education and native language. Observations count of models varied between 1782 and 2056 observations.

Analysis showed that voters' attitudes austerity politics, immigration and rights of gender minorities are connected to affective polarization towards supporters of other parties. Economic and sociocultural differences appeared to create affective polarization asymmetrically. However, the impact of individual values is lesser compared to the effect that vote choice has on evaluations. These findings show how positive and negative evaluations of different partisan groups are primarily related to distances in value dimension, as both liberal-leftist and right-wing conservatives favor partisans within their bloc over rivaling.

Key words: Affective polarization, cleavage theory, social identity

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1 Introduction

The current political atmosphere in many Western democracies can be considered polarized: The developments in political culture throughout the 2010s –presidency of Donald Trump, Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, European migration crisis, and increasing extremism in form of contemporary populism, has left their marks to political culture and electorate. Political polarization is a double-edged sword: In one hand it may increase the competitiveness of politics, clarify issue-positions, and foster participation, but in other hand it may threaten social trust, partisan relations and political tolerance (Torcal et.al., 2025: 372). Ideological disagreements and conflicting interest are at the heart of liberal democratic politics, but when political alignments start gaining identity-based affections, electoral outcomes become a matter of personal victories or losses. This raises the stakes of democratic politics, and may lead to unprecedented threats, such as erosion of democratic system and rule of law (Przeworski, 2019).

In polarization research, traditional metric of political polarization has been parties' distance from each other in ideological space, such left–right or liberal–conservative, and how coherent they are (Reiljan, 2020). Party system polarization is often attributed to strong correlations between voters' class and left–right relationship with party preference (Dalton, 2008: 916). However, political polarization is also a psychological process, characterized by heightened emotions, strong attachments to one's own camp and resentment towards others. Affective polarization is a form of political polarization, referring to a tendency of voters to favor their own political in-group, while perceiving other out-groups negatively (Iyengar et.al., 2012; Torcal & Hartevelde, 2025). Discrimination, bias, favoritism, and negative stereotyping in politics are typical indications of affective polarization.

It could be argued that the current polarization in Western democracies is indeed affective rather than ideological. The roots of public's mass polarization appear to be based on partisan social identities, rather than purely ideological or policy conflicts (Iyengar et.al., 2012; Mason, 2018). This perspective has received considerable criticism, and research on political polarization is currently divided, whether affective polarization is truly an independent phenomenon, or just another manifestation on voters' ideological polarization (cf. Webster & Abramovitz, 2017). Nevertheless, affective polarization has increased substantially in Europe, and Finland is no exception to this trend (Reiljan, 2020; Kawecki, 2022).

It may be surprising for some to learn that Finland has entered to an age of heightened affective polarization. Ever since 1970s, Finnish politics has been characterized by consensual political culture, distinguished by stable majority parliaments, reconciling industry relations, and shared values in both foreign and national politics (Karvonen, 2014; Mickelsson, 2021). However, parliamentary processes and democratic procedures can advance in seemingly consensual fashion, while citizens hardly get along. Perhaps the most damning detail of affective polarization is the creeping transformations in civil society; A slow withdrawal of cross-cutting identities and unwillingness to interact with citizens who have different opinions, beliefs and values. Signs of this kind of withdrawal have already been noticed in Finnish research (see Kantola et. al., 2022).

Notably, political culture of this kind was vital before consensus hit the markets: In the aftermath of 1918 civil war, Finnish society organized into an age of political camps, where citizens social background and class dictated their social sphere (Mickelsson, 2021). The age of camps transformed to an age of consensus many decades ago, and this transformation appeared to change electorate as well: Finnish voters have become seemingly uninterested of politics. This is evident in many metrics, such as constantly lowering electoral participation (Bäck & Serup Christensen, 2020), fading popularity of party memberships (Mickelsson, 2021) and comparatively low interest in politics (Rapeli & Koskimaa, 2020). But if citizens are increasingly alienated from traditional politics, why has traditional political identity started to create stronger affective polarization?

Explanations for heightened affective polarization could be found in profound value differences among electorate. Traditional interpretation of political conflict in European party systems has been the deep-rooted structural divides among electorate (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). However, Western societies have gone through tremendous transformations, which have loosened the effect of structural variables and developed a new dimension of political conflict (Ford & Jennings, 2020). Current political conflict is characterized by sociocultural issues, where the bones of contention are value orientations, lifestyle choices, attitudes towards minorities, and the fate of nation-state in globalized world (cf. Marks et.al., 2021).

Increasing importance of sociocultural value dimension has been noticed in Finland as well: Traditional cleavages that created basis of electoral competition have gradually been transformed into two-dimensional political conflict, where persistent Left–Right economic

cleavage and new sociocultural dimension are currently strong predictors of voter alignments (cf. Grönlund & Söderlund, 2024; Borg & Paloheimo, 2024). A problematic consequence of this two-dimensionality is the emergence of political blocs, as parties and voters start to align at the opposite sides of both dimensions. This makes it difficult to develop alternatives that could bridge over these divides and moderate negative affections between two blocs.

In this light, the 2023 Finnish parliament elections present a fruitful ground for study of political polarization: election campaigning was said to have been “*polarized in an unprecedented way between the right-wing opposition and what the right called the ‘green-left’*” (Palonen, 2024: 145). Essentially, voters were persuaded to support either green-left or right-wing bloc, since cross-cutting coalition governments has seemed impossible to form in recent decade (Kestilä-Kekkonen et.al., 2024). These blocs portray the two sides of current political conflict, where other side emphasizes progressive, liberal values and reinforcement of welfare state, and other traditional values, free-market capitalism and national sovereignty (Wass et.al. 2024: 55–57).

This thesis aims to provide novel insight to the challenge of rising affective polarization by seeking an answer to a research question: *how individual attitudes predict affective polarization in Finland*. Individual attitudes refer to voters’ stance towards salient sociopolitical conflicts of 2020s, which have created significant polarization in politics in recent years. The three individual attitudes studied in this thesis are: the question of austerity measures as an instrument of balancing economy, whether immigration is beneficial to Finnish society, and the rights and status of LGBTQIA+ minorities. These value conflicts are fundamentally connected to relevant value cleavages in Finnish society. Seminal neo-cleavages theories of 2000s provide theoretical framework, which show how and why these three individual attitudes are strong predictors of both vote choice and affective evaluations of other parties’ supporters. One of the core assumptions is that these attitudes are stronger predictors of affective polarization between voters, rather than the social identity of partisanship. These assumptions guide my analysis, and they form the basis for four interconnected hypotheses, introduced in chapter 3.8.

This master's thesis proceeds as follows: Second chapter is dedicated to in-depth overview of the concept of affective polarization, focusing on theoretical background of this concept. Special attention is given to on-going debate of roots and causes of affective polarization. Second chapter will also introduce the current literature of Finnish affective polarization research, what drives affective polarization in Finland, and how this thesis aims to further understand the causes of affective evaluations of other parties' supporters.

Third chapter will lay out the theoretical framework of this thesis, first by defining the concepts of political attitudes, values, and belief systems. These are central to the overall theoretical framework of this thesis, neo-cleavage theories. Third chapter will also show how attitudes currently align citizen to political parties in Finland. Chapter will end to hypothesis section, which defines the four interconnected hypothesis that guide analysis.

Fourth chapter is dedicated to research methodology, how variables are operationalized, and to descriptive statistics. Fourth chapter also introduces the dataset used in analysis. Fifth chapter shows the findings of multiple linear regression models, and the effect that three individual attitudes analyzed in this study have on evaluations of other parties' supporters, when holding other variables in their survey weighted mean values. Sixth chapter ends my thesis to concluding remarks, highlighting the most important discoveries of analysis.

2 What is affective polarization?

At the turn of the decade, scholars in US were debating about the nature of mass polarization; Some scholars (Fiorina, 2006) considered political mass polarization to be widely exaggerated phenomenon by political scientist and commentators, while others claimed that political polarization is not limited to elite-level, as average Americans are increasingly more polarized in their views (Abramovitz & Saunders, 2008). Amid this scholarly debate Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes (2012) offered a new perspective to discussion about political polarization: What if ideological differences have remained stable, but electorate is in fact more polarized than ever, only in different sphere?

Iyengar et. al. (2012) claimed that the traditional ideological polarization is an insufficient indicator of partisan polarization among electorate in the United States. Republican and Democrat voters agreed on many issues, while ideological differences were rather moderate, and shift into two camps had not occurred. Society still felt polarized, and they captured this polarization in emotional and social level: Using social and emotional distance metrics, Iyengar et. al. showed that the emotional and social relationship between Republican and Democrat voters had worsened in recent decades, but this affective relationship was inconsistently linked to policy preferences. (Iyengar et.al., 2012.) They argued that there exists only a loose linkage between ideological and affective polarization, as they found only modestly higher feeling thermometer scores between partisan who were more sorted – that is, the alignment of voters’ ideology and partisanship (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). The relationship between policy preferences (social welfare and cultural issues) on partisan affect was weak, suggesting that ideological and affective polarization are indeed two distinct forms of political polarization. Moreover, partisan identity itself had a weak ideological basis. (Iyengar et.al. 2012.)

Research on affective polarization has surged in recent years, yet there is no single, shared definition of affective polarization (Röllicke, 2023). In their initial analysis Iyengar et.al. defined affective polarization as “*the extent which partisans view each other as a disliked out-group*” (Iyengar et.al., 2012: 406). This general definition has two components: the positive in-group affect towards one’s own party’s partisans, and the negative out-group affect, targeted towards supporters of other parties. This means affective polarization is about two concurrent phenomena: the in-group favoritism and out-group animus. (Iyengar & Wagner,

2025.) Following chapters will introduce the theoretical and methodological elements of affective polarization research. Special attention is given to the debate over distinction between ideological and affective polarization, as this master's thesis argues that affective polarization is fundamentally rooted to ideological value differences, rather than social identity, in Finnish multiparty system.

2.1 Measures and levels of affective polarization

Affective polarization is commonly measured as emotional distance between voters in- and out-groups. Commonly utilized metrics are the feeling thermometers, which are a standard question in national election studies. Thermometers ask respondents to evaluate parties, partisans or party leaders by assigning them a numerical rating, often ranging from 0-degrees to 100-degrees. Higher values indicate positive feelings towards target of affection, and conversely lower evaluations negative. Neutral rating is often marked as 50-degrees. Feeling thermometers are an intuitive way of measuring respondents' subjective feelings of political entities, and they are the most utilized variable in affective polarization research (Gidron et.al., 2022). Another possible metric are the social distance scales, which aim to capture the discriminatory nature of partisanship. These questions inquire respondents' feelings towards the idea of being a close friend with a supporter of other party, or how would they feel if their child married a supporter of certain party. The social distance between partisans can also be measured by asking respondents to assign attributes such as honest, patriotic, or selfish to other partisans. (Carlin & Love, 2025: 57–58.)

In their seminal article, Iyengar et.al. (2012) utilized all three metrics to estimate levels of affective polarization among partisans in the United States. In feeling thermometer evaluations, in-party affect had changed only a little in recent decades, while out-party affect was considerably cooled between Democrat and Republican voters. On social distance metrics, both partisan groups showed increasing distaste towards the idea of their child marrying an out-party supporter, and stereotyping had become increasingly common. More importantly, the in-party bias had climbed up drastically, meaning that Democrats and Republicans saw themselves in much more positive light than before, but partisans were nearly fifty percent more likely to associate negative traits to their opponents than to their fellow partisans. (Iyengar et.al. 2012.)

Finally, affective polarization can be observed in two different axes. Horizontal affective polarization refers to emotional and/or social distance between partisans, while vertical affective polarization is interested of voters' distance to political parties or politicians (Harteveld, 2021). Research has concluded that correlation between horizontal and vertical affective polarization is only moderate, and citizens tend to have systematically more negative sentiments towards parties and politicians, than fellow citizens (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Harteveld, 2021). This appears to be true in Finland as well (Kekkonen et. al., 2022).

Next, I will introduce the theoretical foundation of affective polarization: the social identity theory. I will also highlight, what kinds of issues social identity approach may create to research on affective polarization in multiparty setting. I will also summarize the current debate over foundation of affective polarization. This debate is relevant to my thesis, as I am primarily interested, could ideological differences manifesting in voters' attitudes drive affective polarization, rather than the social identity created by partisanship. Second chapter will end on review of current discoveries of Finnish affective polarization research.

2.2 The social identity theory of political polarization

Iyengar et.al. (2012) introduced the concept of affective polarization as a social identity perspective on political polarization. Social identity theory (SIT) is a model of inter-group behavior, developed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981). SIT studies the psychological processes of group identification, and in Tajfel's classical account, group membership not only provides a social identity to its members, but it also contributes and reinforces positive self-image and esteem. This creates the basis for distinction between "us" and "them". (Tajfel, 1981; Saarinen, 2022.)

The core idea of SIT is that individuals fall into different social categories, such as nationality, favorite sports team, or political affiliation. These categories create a feeling of belonging, and they become a part of individual's self-concept. These repertoires of category memberships create individual's social identity. Crucially, social identity affects how individual should act and behave in different circumstances, as a member of these categories. (Hogg et.al., 1995: 259–260.)

In this regard, the linkage between SIT and politics is relatively straightforward: As individual starts to feel a sense of belonging towards a political group, perhaps at the time of election campaigning, it subsequently becomes a part of their identity – they identify as a voter of certain party. This identification then brings forth different notions of being a voter, and dictates how to feel, think and even act in different circumstances. Notably this effect may be moderate in Europe compared to the United States, where political identities are relatively persistent and stable (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019).

While SIT can explain how citizens attach to their party of choice, it does not necessarily explain the positive and negative emotions that arise from this identification. Thus, an important element of SIT and affective polarization is the positive social identity. Tajfel argued that fundamentally groups tend to differentiate themselves positively from others. When doing so, they create a positive outlook of their in-group, which reinforces the positive aspects of individuals themselves as well. A group's status is intertwined with its members' self-esteem, and by favoring their in-group and discriminating against others, individuals enhance their own social identity and their group's status. (Bankert & Stone, 2025: 172.) This is evident in politics, as partisans often see their own party in a positive light, advancing the national interest and societal well-being, while viewing others as mistaken.

SIT is founded on minimal group paradigm, which is a methodology in social psychology research that studies the conditions for group conflict and discrimination (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Bankert & Stone, 2025). Studies conducted with this method in early 1970s concluded that a minimal requirement for intergroup discrimination is the mere categorization into distinct groups (Brown, 2020). These groupings can be completely arbitrary and bear no connection to individuals themselves, but it is a sufficient trigger for intergroup bias and discrimination. Minimal group paradigm further explains why political identities, even if not particularly strong, create selfish and discriminatory behavior amongst partisans.

While individual might not be active in politics in conventional sense, they might still feel that the party they have been voting for years is a part of their identity. It is also worth highlight, that while party-activism and membership may have lost their appeal in recent decades (Mickelsson, 2021: 356), party identification has not lost its significance; In fact, in Finland the share of party identifiers, i.e. those who feel close to a specific party, has increased throughout the 2010s (Borg & Paloheimo, 2024: 123). While politics might not be a

particular interest or target of enthusiasm for many citizens, the nature of group dynamics and social identities trigger discrimination and favoritism in everyday politics. Naturally, volume of these affections is relative to individual's personal attachment to their party (Iyengar et.al., 2012; Kawecki, 2022).

2.3 Issues of social identity perspective

The concept of affective polarization brought a novel perspective to research on political polarization, focusing on the effects that political identities have in democratic societies. Since the concept of affective polarization is fundamentally tied to party identification, it might be a more apparent issue in two-party systems: In the United States, partisan identities are strong and relatively stable (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019), while in Europe party identification has been in decline (Heath, 2018: 160). Thus, research in the United States has centered on the social identity perspective of affective polarization, while scholars in Europe have adopted a more lenient definition (Garzia et.al., 2025). Afterall, in multiparty systems citizens may identify with several parties and feel distaste in different degrees towards others. As such, in Europe affective polarization is often devised as average dislike of out-party supporters, and average like towards most favored party, or as overall spread across all partisans (Wagner, 2021; 2024).

However, the claim that affective polarization is a distinct form of polarization, manifesting independently from ideology, did not go uncontested. While Iyengar et al.'s article certainly launched an affective turn in political polarization research (Suojanen et. al. 2024), many scholars remained skeptical of weak linkage between ideological and affective polarization. The on-going discussion on foundation of affective polarization has been approached from two perspectives: the social identity approach (party-over-policy) and ideological approach (policy-over-party) (Dias & Lelkes, 2022). Following chapter will summarize this discussion focusing on both approaches and their central arguments.

2.3.1 Social identity approach

Social identity approach of affective polarization suggests that raises in affective polarization are a consequence of increasing status of partisan identities. This was the initial argument of

Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, and subsequent research has presented more evidence of polarization being linked to increasing salience of partisan identities. Since animosity and distaste have more to do with social identity than policy positions or ideology, just knowing that someone belongs to a different political group is enough for negative affection to arise (Turkenburg & van Erkel, 2025).

In the United States, growth of affective polarization has increased in parallel with alignment of different social identities (Mason, 2018), and partisanship seems to increasingly determine policy preferences of voters (Dias & Lelkes, 2022). Scholars argue that affective polarization is therefore functioning through different mechanism than other forms of political polarization. However, ideological and affective polarization manifest in tandem, meaning that research must be able to separate two forms of polarization from one another, to plausibly argue that there exists a weak linkage between the two.

If partisanship as a social identity is truly the root of affective polarization, this would mean that voters with crossing identities would systematically show lower levels of affective polarization. Lilliana Mason (2016) has shown evidence, that well-sorted partisans, i.e. voters whose set of social identities are highly aligned with their party of choice, react with greater anger and enthusiasm to political messaging. Upon hearing that their issue position will not succeed, highly polarized voters react with greater anger than moderates. However, when accounting for level of partisan identity, those with lower levels of attachment show significantly lower levels of anger and enthusiasm towards political outcomes. In contrast, strong partisans are more affectively invested in politics. When controlling for level of social sorting, partisan identity and issue polarization, social sorting has larger overall effect on anger, whether it is about issue-based or party-based threats. Less-sorted individuals, meaning those with cross-cutting identities, show substantially less anger than those with just moderate issue positions. Voters with highest level of social sorting show levels of anger which are indistinguishable from extreme partisans, and to those with highest levels of issue-polarization. (Mason, 2016.)

European political science research has traditionally approached political conflict via cleavage theory (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), and increasing salience of partisan identities may create a new and vital social cleavage to political systems. Westwood et. al. (2018) analyzed, are citizens in the United Kingdom, United States, Spain and Belgium more attached to parties

than to the social groups that they present and does this lead to an increasing discrimination based on partisanship. In many instances, partisan identity is the dominant social cleavage in contemporary democracies, which can overcome the effect of other group affiliations: Partisanship is stronger source of discrimination than salient social cleavages present in studied nations, such as immigration in the United Kingdom or linguistic polarization in Belgium. In general, partisanship significantly affected interpersonal trust in all studied countries. Westwood et. al. concluded that in both unified and divided countries, citizens are more trusting of their co-partisans, and partisanship affects trust in greater degree than ethnic, linguistic or religious social cleavages. However, nature of social cleavage seems to matter, as they can either intensify or moderate affective polarization. Cleavages that reinforce partisan identities lead to higher distrust, but cross-cutting cleavages can soften animosity among partisans. (Westwood et. al., 2018.)

In a large cross-European comparison of affective polarization, Reiljan (2020) analyzed the linkage between ideological and affective polarization. Results were mixed, as in country-level ideological polarization had only weak and statistically insignificant relationship with levels of affective polarization. However, in party systems where left–right dimension has some relevance in politics, there exists a consistent positive relationship between two forms of political polarization. Still, ideological polarization leaves most of the variation in affective polarization unexplained, and high ideological polarization does not guarantee inter-party hostility. (Reiljan, 2020.) In Finnish setting, Kekkonen et.al. (2024) showed that partisan social identity has a strong independent effect on the level of affective polarization: Feeling close to a party in 2019 was equivalent to taking a single step towards the extreme end on ideological scale. Kekkonen et. al. suggest that ideological and affective polarization have a reciprocal relationship, where affectively polarized voters start to adapt increasingly extreme ideological positions, and vice versa. (Kekkonen et.al., 2024.)

2.3.2 Ideological approach

Ideological approach believes that partisanship's influence on affective polarization is explained by policy disagreements (Dias & Lelkes, 2022). While policy disagreements are not equivalent to ideological differences, the conventional understanding in this debate over roots of affective polarization is that policy differences mirror partisans' ideological profile. In this

way, ideology functions as a framework which summarizes political orientations and guides the interpretation of political issues. (Turkenburg & van Erkel, 2025.)

First evidence of ideological roots of affective polarization was presented by Rogowski and Sutherland (2016), who showed that voters give increasingly polarized evaluations of candidates with ideologically divergent policy positions. Rogowski and Sutherland presented respondents a hypothetical pair of candidates and manipulated their ideological extremity. When candidates took more extreme positions and started to differ from each other, respondents reacted with increased affective polarization. More importantly, respondents that were ideologically extreme or politically interested, evaluated candidates more negatively, compared to moderates. In sum, citizens evaluations of hypothetical candidates (and real-life politicians) were based on their respondents' ideological positions, and these evaluations were supplemented by perceived similarity and divergence of hypothetical pair of candidates: If candidates shared similar ideological positions, respondents evaluated them similarly, but if candidates' positions started to diverge, respondents reacted with more divergent affective evaluations. (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016; Turkenburg & van Erkel, 2025: 217.)

In similar vein, Orr et. al. (2023) showed that ideological and policy preferences drive partisan evaluations in the United States: Americans link partisan identity to citizen's policy preferences, and both Republicans and Democrats showed more positive feelings to those who agreed with their preferred positions. In fact, the partisan identity appears to be only secondary concern, as voters considered policy agreements more importantly, showing consistently higher evaluations of voters who shared their policy position, while being somewhat indifferent to their partisanship. In two-party system of United States, partisan loyalty, identity and policy substance all have an impact to affective evaluation of other citizens; Yet voters tend to be concerned of concrete policy preferences, rather than social aspects such as partisan identity and loyalty. (Orr et. al., 2023.)

In turn, Webster and Abramovitz (2017), showed that in the United States, there exists a strong relationship between individual's ideological preferences and affective evaluations of opposing party and its candidates. The level of affective polarization was relative to individual's commitment to ideology itself, as conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats held far more negative feeling towards opposing parties, than moderate partisans. Highly polarizing issues which signaled left–right or liberal–conservative ideological orientations, such as social welfare policies, are strong sources of affective polarization.

(Webster & Abramovitz, 2017.) Similar issues could very well be the source of affective polarization in Finland as well, since disagreements over austerity politics, immigration and LGBTQIA+ rights do signal both economic and sociocultural value orientations, which are either met with approval or disagreement.

The linkage between ideological and affective polarization has been a interest in Europe as well: Algara and Zur (2023) showed that in Downsian framework (Downs, 1957), affective polarization in party systems of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Finland is driven by ideological proximity between voters and parties. Algara and Zur used latent variable scaling to place voters and political parties to same spatial ideological space and showed how greater ideological proximity between voter and their preferred party increases affective evaluations. In left–right terms, closer voter’s ideal point is to the left–right position of their in-party – relative to the positions out-parties – the differences in thermometer evaluations that voters assign to in- and out-parties increases. Notably, this effect extends over traditional left–right dimension to other policy domains, such as to work-related immigration issue in Finland. (Algara & Zur, 2023.)

In sum, affective polarization appears to be driven by ideological differences, usually manifesting as policy disagreements. However, as literature from both United States and Europe claim, two concepts appear to be distinct, as substantial amount of affective polarization is not explained by ideological or policy differences among voters (Reiljan, 2020). Nonetheless, ideological approach seems to have gained edge in explaining affective polarization (Garzia et.al. 2025: 9). This thesis approaches affective polarization from ideological perspective, assuming that fundamentally the affective evaluations of partisans is founded on ideological and/or policy differences over economic and cultural issues.

2.4 Affective polarization in Finland

Finland makes an interesting case of study of affective polarization, as Finnish politics has long been characterized by consensual political culture (Karvonen, 2014). However, several studies have noted that the developments in political culture across 2010s have left their marks on electorate, which now shows signs of heightened affective polarization. In Reiljan’s (2020) cross-European comparison, 2007 Finland held the title as second lowest affectively

polarized party system in Europe. However, already in 2011 affective polarization index peaked at all-time high level, temporarily crossing the Northwestern average (Reiljan, 2020).

The peak in 2011 suggests that rising affective polarization is somehow tied to break through of right-wing populist Finns Party (Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024: 238). The 2011 parliament elections are known as the Big-Bang Elections, referring to first major electoral victory for national populist Finns Party. As Mickelsson (2021) notes, the Big-Bang Elections brought nationalism, populism and skepticism towards feminism and environmental protection at the center of Finnish politics. This shifted the focus of voters and parties from traditional economic and regional debates to political conflicts between liberal cosmopolitan and conservative-nationalist camps. (Mickelsson, 2021: 326.) This change of focus in politics is also reflected in levels of affective polarization: Kawecki (2022) showed that between 2007 and 2015, the election year of 2011 stands out with heightened polarization in ideological dimension. In 2011, voters in extreme ends of sociocultural value dimensions became more polarized than centrist voters, while affective polarization increased broadly among whole electorate (Kawecki, 2022: 498).

After peak in 2011, the general trend of affective polarization started to lower. The 2015 parliament election year can be seen as a time of temporary depolarization in Finland. However, the baseline reached in 2011 elections solidified the levels of affective polarization, but it did not start a consistently rising trend. While levels of affective polarization rose again in 2019 and 2023 parliament elections, it did not cross the height reached in 2011 Big Bang Elections. (Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024.) Next chapter will provide some answers to these trends and show, what has been the catalysator of affective polarization in Finland.

2.5 What explains rising affective polarization in Finland?

While Finland may not rank highly in international comparison, the relatively sudden rises in affective polarization should manifest in increasing animosity among electorate, and politics should feel more polarized. Ideology appears to be a strong predictor of affective polarization, both in traditional left–right, and on the sociocultural dimension (Kekkonen et.al., 2024).

Several studies have concluded that parties active in new value dimension of politics – Left Alliance, Greens and Finns Party – have the most affectively polarized voters (cf. Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024; Kekkonen et.al., 2024). The voter base of more moderately polarized parties

has some variation across studies; However, it appears that affective polarization is more modest among voters of NCP, Centre Party and CD (Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024).

The overall increases in affective polarization are mainly driven by negative out-party affect, and slightly lesser degree by increase in in-party affect (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021). This means that voters do feel more negative of other parties than before, which points the attention towards inter-party relations. So far, the Finns Party voters have been speculated to be scapegoats driving affective polarization in Finland. Indeed, in voters feeling thermometer evaluations, Finns Party is the most disliked party in Finland (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024). This is not surprising, considering that national-populistic Finns Party has radicalized throughout the 2010s, becoming closer with radical anti-immigration groups and rightwing radicals (Cazes, 2019). Kekkonen and Ylä-anttila (2021) conclude that increases in affective polarization between 2015 and 2019 are the result of growing negativity towards the Finns Party, and this negativity is strong among voters of the Greens, the Left Alliance and the SPP. Notably, their analysis shows that the proximity of NCP, Finns Party and Centre Party voters has more to do with shared enemies – voters of the Greens and the Left Alliance in particular – rather than seeing each other as friends. (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021.)

Later Kawecki and Kekkonen (2024) reached similar conclusion, pointing out that between 2011 and 2023, the Finns Party has been the most disliked party – and this dislike is primarily driven by red-green voters of the Left Alliance, SDP and Greens. Red-green parties have become closer to one and another, but this time same could be said about the Finnish right: NCP and Finns Party voters have started to slowly like each other, and so are voters of the NCP and the CD. (Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024.)

These changing relationships between voters of different parties brings forth the pressing issue of bloc of politics: Scholars have been concerned that Finnish party system has started to show signs of bloc politics, similar to other Nordic party systems (Wass et.al., 2024). Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila (2021) have introduced the concept of affective blocs to describe patterns of inter-party relations in Finland. The red–green bloc (SDP, Left Alliance, and Greens) shows strong and mutual positive affect, and share similar views of remaining parties. Its counterweight is the bourgeois bloc, composed mainly of supporters of the NCP, the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, and parts of the Finns Party voters. Bourgeois bloc shares favorable views of the NCP and Centre Party, and negative attitudes of parties in the

red–green bloc. The moderate bloc consists largely of centrist voters, who express distaste towards both political extremes. Finally, the dissatisfied bloc is made up solely by Finns Party voters, who show negativity to everyone else. (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021.)

From more methodological perspective, different expressive affective polarization measures were analyzed in detail by Kekkonen et.al. (2022). Their findings are in line with international literature: correlation between evaluations of political parties and supporters of these parties were only moderately correlated. However, authors show that Finns appear to be somewhat indifferent towards supporters of their disliked parties. Kekkonen et. al. speculate that social distance metrics might be problematic indicators of affective polarization, as many respondents reported discomfort when answering questions relating to these metrics. Unwillingness to answer showed “ideological split”, whereby people on the left side of political spectrum were more likely to answer social distance questions than those on the right. Moreover, leftist voters appeared to be on-average more polarized, suggesting that social distance questions might not be an ideologically neutral metric. (Kekkonen et.al., 2022.)

Finally, as pointed out earlier, party identification functions differently in multiparty systems than in two-party systems. This is true in Finland as well: Not only does electorate form distinct affective blocs, where positive evaluations are targeted to multiple ideologically close parties, but Finnish citizens on-average identify with one to three parties at the same time (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021). However, Kekkonen et.al. (2022) pointed out, that models assuming one in-party and models with multiple, were highly correlated, meaning that electorates identification with multiple parties is not too relevant, at least in Finnish party system (Kekkonen et.al. 2022: 15). This finding is reassuring, as one of the key limitations in my analysis is the fact that it is unable to estimate in-party affect, other than vote choice in 2023 parliament election.

2.6 Towards research of value cleavages and affective polarization

Affective polarization brings an interesting approach to study of political polarization, focusing on inter-party relations of voters. European scholars have translated the study of affective polarization into a multiparty setting by distancing it from the initial social identity perspective. The more lenient definition of affective polarization accepts existence of multiple

positive in-groups and negative out-groups, without an explicit identity. Further, European research indicates that voter's feelings towards parties or other voters can be polarized even without the partisan identity component. (Garzia et.al., 2025.)

The debate around the possible ideological roots of affective polarization implies that affective evaluations, at least to some extent, connected to voters' personal values. Ideological and sociocultural differences are a constant source of political conflict in democratic societies. Ever since the dawn of party systems in Western Europe, a stable set of conflicts relating to both economic concerns and cultural differences formed the basis of party systems, connecting individual attitudes to organizational structure. Conflicts that create divides among voters are known as cleavages, and they structure electoral competition by aligning voters to organized political parties. While traditional cleavages that defined postwar party systems may have lost their significance, scholars have rigorously looked for new cleavages that explain party choice and voter alignments.

There is strong evidence that cleavages are linked to both ideological and affective polarization: West European Politics special issue "*Under Pressure: Polarisation and Participation in Western Europe*" (Borbath et. al., 2023) was dedicated to analyzing how the transformation of cleavage structures in Europe are related to political polarization and participation. As Borbath et.al. argue, "*cleavage theory implies a close link between ideological and affective polarisation along the main contested 'cleavage issues'.*" (Borbath et.al., 2023: 633). Further, Kekkonen et.al. (2022) pointed out that while partisanship might not be a salient part of individual's social identity in Finland, parties and partisanship could mean a political outlet for different identities: Many parties in Finland carry distinct identities, such as agrarianism of the Center Party or working-class heritage of the SDP. In other words, "*parties could serve as useful proxies for studying affective cleavages based on such identities*" (Kekkonen et.al., 2022: 15–16). While Finnish voters may not interpret partisanship similarly to American voters, voting for an agrarian or working-class party could signal social identity, tied to vital value cleavages in contemporary Finland.

These ideas are the core of this master's thesis, as I argue that the fundamental differences among electorate over economics, immigration and LGBTQIA+ rights, structure affective polarization. These attitudes are part of fundamental cleavages, that manifest in modern societies as a conflict between Left–Right economic and Liberal–Conservative value

cleavages. This is not to say that political competition is structured solely by these differences – rather, I argue that these issues have been especially salient in recent years.

What follows is a brief introduction to concept of political values and value systems, followed by introduction to traditional cleavage theory. As traditional social cleavage model is now considered insufficient, chapter 3.3. will introduce the neo-cleavage theories that aim to capture transformations in political competition. Chapter 3. will end on an overview of current voter alignments and value orientations in Finnish politics and introduce the hypothesizes that guide my analysis.

3 Theoretical framework

This thesis aims to find an answer to a research question, “*how individual attitudes predict affective polarization towards supporters of other parties in Finland*”. This points interest towards voters’ personal political attitudes. Following chapter aims to define, what exactly are political attitudes, and how they relate and differ from political values. This chapter will also explore, how attitudes in congruence with values form a personal belief system. As cleavage theory is fundamentally tied to voters’ values and attitudes, it is important to clarify, when they are considered political in nature.

3.1 Values and attitudes in political science research

The definition of political attitudes in political science research originates from social psychology (Rokeach, 1968). Oddbjørn Knutsen (2018) defines political attitudes as “*relatively enduring organizations of beliefs around political objects or situations which predispose individuals to respond in some preferential manner*” (Knutsen, 2018: 345). In other words, individual’s political attitudes are attitudes directed towards political entities, such as parties, supranational institutions or current political events. These attitudes are relatively enduring in a sense that voters do not fundamentally alter their set of attitudes between elections; rather they adjust them, while retaining coherence.

Similarly, the concept of political values stems from social psychology (Rokeach, 1973), where values are divided into two categories: personal values, and social values. As values can be either self-centered or society-centered, values relating to society and politics are considered political values. They are end-states that individuals would like to see characterizing their society and pursued in politics. (Knutsen, 2018: 346.) Political values formulate attitudes, and while they are intangible, they are evident in moral discourse surrounding politics (Van Deth & Scarbrough, 1995: 46).

Further, values constrain attitudes, meaning that empirically it is possible to infer individual’s value orientations by pattering of their attitudes. Congruence of political attitudes forms what is known as personal belief system: According to Converse (1964), beliefs, attitudes and values are connected in an organized system, which is a configuration of personal ideas and attitudes. This system is constrained in a sense that it bounds different elements together.

Knowing this constrain allows makes it possible to predict what further attitude individuals most likely hold. (Converse, 1964: 207; Knutsen, 2018: 348.)

Thus, central to political attitudes is the fact that they establish connections between topics. Some attitudes may be based on topics that are not directly related to politics, while others clearly based on political issues (Mora y Araujo, 2011: 218). For instance, supporting sexual minority rights is strongly correlated with support of gender minority rights, and vice versa. Similarly, less politically charged opinions, such as supporting Christian values, might influence attitudes towards political issues, such as right to abortion or state secularization.

Based on conceptualization of political value orientations and personal belief systems above, we should expect that individual attitudes towards austerity politics, immigration and gender minority rights form a coherent system. This belief system is often referred as ideology. Emma Turkenburg and Patrick van Erkel conceptualize the belief system as an umbrella term for connected attitudes, which are often called ideology. As a framework, ideology summarizes political orientations and guides our interpretation and opinions on political issues. (Turkenburg & van Erkel, 2025: 215.) While ideology is not explicitly measured in my analysis, this conceptualization of ideology serves as basis for this thesis, as it clearly connects individual's attitudes and beliefs into political behavior.

How individual values and attitudes shape political behavior has been central question in political science research. While politics is collective endeavor, voter's political beliefs stem from personal characteristics, opinions and attitudes. Political divides and conflicts are the very core of politics, where parties represent citizens collective interest. Cleavage theory, as first presented by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan in 1967, is the starting point on understanding how ideological alignments explain party choice and political behavior.

3.2 The cleavage theory

In the *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) presented their interpretation of origins of political parties and party systems: Nation building and industrialization had generated four cleavages, which structured consequent political conflict: center–periphery, religious–secular, urban–rural, and labor–capital (Lipset & Rokkan 1967; Ford & Jennings 2020). Lipset and Rokkan portrayed parties as principal agents in transforming societal conflicts into political divisions. Parties articulate and crystallize conflicting interest, creating electoral strategies and political alliances, therefore translating group conflicts into political behavior and participation (Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995).

While central as concept, Lipset and Rokkan did not provide precise definition of political cleavage. The traditional interpretation of cleavage formulation consists of three elements: 1) Belonging into an objectively recognizable group; 2) shared identity, values and attitudes and 3) voting for a party which represents those interests. Thus, cleavage is formed when different groups of society recognize their opposing interests, which leads to them voting for a party that is believed to advance their interests. (Bartolini & Mair 1990; Knutsen & Scarborough 1995) Notably, the concept of cleavage is not synonymous with societal division, as parties give coherence and organized political expression to fragmentary beliefs, values and experiences among members of social groups (Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995).

According to Karvonen (2014), in Finnish party system the most crucial cleavages structuring the electoral competition were the labour–capital and urban–rural cleavages. The labor–capital cleavage reflects the fundamental tension between working class and bourgeois, or more moderately, the tension between capital and labour forces. This cleavage has been especially important, due the strong presence of working-class movements. The urban–rural cleavage is universal since it formed a focal divide across the Western Europe after the industrial revolution. Urban–rural cleavage reflects conflict between public control and individual enterprise. (Karvonen, 2014: 23.)

While original cleavage theory was seminal account of how European party systems were formulated, most scholars agree that classical social cleavage model has declined in importance since the 1960s (Franklin, 2010; von Schoultz, 2017). This is due the profound

transformations in Western societies: Closed social environments that tied voters to parties are now fragmented, religion has declined in importance, traditional class divides have blurred, and mass education has loosened the effect of social background and increased political sophistication (Marks et. al. 2021). Further, Lipset and Rokkan believed that the origin of cleavages was in critical junctures of history, referring to both industrial and national revolutions, as they created two long-lasting structural divisions between sociodemographic groups (von Schoultz, 2017: 32). Western party systems have inevitably undergone new societal changes and revolutions, which have created new social cleavages.

In Finnish context, Westinen (2015) analyzed how original cleavage model predicted vote choice in modern Finland. Westinen concluded that while Finland has been considered as a model of cleavage-based system, the effect of voters' social structural position on value dimension was weak. Cleavages did not determine party choice remarkably, leading to assumption that Finnish party system has transitioned from structural voting to a system where values and attitudes determine vote choice. (Westinen, 2015a.) International literature has presented evidence that the transformation of traditional cleavages has given birth to new cleavages, that crosscuts old divisions and restructures the basis of political competition (Ford & Jennings 2020). Currently political competition unfolds in two-dimensional space, where voters are aligned by two cleavages: the traditional economic left and right, and the new salient sociocultural cleavage. This transformation has manifested in a new family of parties, present in virtually all Western party systems: New Left and radical-populist right.

There may exist some theoretical confusion around the labels of cleavages, since numerous different cleavages show up in literature, such as social cleavages, political cleavages, economic cleavages and value cleavages. Post-Lipset-Rokkan conceptualization of cleavages are often inferred from value orientations (Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995; Westinen, 2015b: 14). Moreover, in post-industrial societies, the prominent model of voting has shifted from structural voting to a model where personal value orientations guide vote choice (Knutsen & Scarborough, 1998). As such, this thesis will utilize the notion of value cleavages. In the next chapter I will introduce three neo-cleavage theories, that are often considered as the most influential propositions for basis of transformed political competition and voter alignments (see Jennings & Ford, 2020: 298).

3.3 Neo-cleavages theories

The current perspective in the field of cleavage theories is founded on the realignment thesis, which interprets the decline of traditional cleavages as re-articulation of political conflict, and emphasizes the growing salience of value orientations (Marks et.al., 2021). New cleavage theories are focused on the tension between postmaterialism and materialism, sometimes seen as struggle over liberalism and authoritarianism (Westinen, 2015a). The aim of neo-cleavage theories is to trace the new patterns of voter alignments, focusing on the gradual shifts in value orientations in modern democracies (von Schoultz, 2017: 40).

After the Second World War, European politics was dominated by left–right dimension, which embedded all sociopolitical conflicts to itself (cf. Thomassen, 2005: 15–16). This embedment began to transform in following decades, often pointed to the rise of new social movements of 1970s and 1980s (Bornschieer et al., 2024: 4). These movements distanced themselves from traditional structural interests, and emphasized individual liberty, alternative lifestyles and communal wellbeing. This profound transformation noticed by Ronald F. Inglehart already in 1970s (Inglehart, 1971).

Inglehart’s “Maslowian” perspective to intergenerational shifts in value orientations was based around the idea that individual’s value things that are scarce, and that one’s basic values reflect conditions that prevailed during pre-adult years. Generations born before Second World War lived their youth in relative scarcity, and arguably in different societies compared to postwar generations. Social welfare, physical security, economic well-being and mass education are all products of historically unprecedented prosperity and absence of war. As such, older voters tend to prioritize material needs in politics, over immaterial values. In contrast, younger generations are customed to material welfare, pointing their value orientation to postmaterial needs, such as liberty, increasing opportunities in society, self-expression, and quality of life. (Inglehart, 1984.) This shift in value orientations manifests as postmaterial–materialist cleavage among different generations of voters.

Inglehart’s studies have been a corner stone of post-Lipset-Rokkan age research on voter alignments. Yet, the postmaterial–materialist cleavage may not be contained to generational differences but linked to very same structural cleavages that created the basis for party system. Central argument of neo-cleavage theories of 2000s is that instead of withering away,

traditional cleavages have transformed into two-dimensional political conflict. Depending on the focus of their research, scholars have presented a diverse range of terminology which all are trying to grasp the new and vital value-based cleavage (Crulli & Emanuele, 2025).

A popular interpretation of this transformation is that the traditional cleavage model transformed into two-dimensional conflict, when highly salient religious–secular (cultural) and labour–capital (economic) cleavages embedded other conflicts into themselves. As such the postmodern political competition is structured by socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions (Kriesi et.al., 2006.) During the last decades the question of European integration has been a highly salient sociopolitical issue, and many scholars argue that the question of advancing European integration and new institutions of supranational governance have pitted two competing worldviews against each other. This so-called transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018: 123) has spawned plethora of theorizing of value cleavages among European electorate, such as GAL–TAN (Hooghe et.al., 2002; Marks, 2006) and integration – demarcation cleavage (Kriesi et.al., 2006; 2008; 2012).

Perhaps the most influential neo-cleavage theory is the GAL–TAN cleavage, introduced by Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole Wilson in 2002. GAL–TAN interprets the re-articulation of political conflict as two-dimensional: Along with economic dimension, political conflict unfolds in a second dimension, relating to communal, environmental and cultural issues. This is operationalized as Green/Alternative/Libertarian and Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist poles. GAL refers to ecological and environmental values, supporting alternative politics such as participatory democracy, and libertarianism. The TAN end of this dimension encompasses traditional values, opposition of immigration and defense of the national community. Hooghe et. al. argue that the question of European integration is ultimately about national sovereignty, but as a salient political issue, it entails EU asylum- and environmental policies as well. Since national sovereignty is the central value opposing European integration, all developments that destabilize national communities are perceived as threats. (Hooghe et. al., 2002; Marks et. al., 2006.) The GAL–TAN cleavage has been a popular tool in Finnish political science research (cf. Isotalo et. al., 2020; Kawecki, 2022; Grönlund & Söderholm 2024). This is why voter alignments in this thesis are presented via parties and voters' positioning in GAL–TAN dimensions.

Similar conceptualization of neo-cleavages was presented by Kriesi et.al. (2008; 2012), introducing the integration–demarcation cleavage. Initial cleavages formulated by Lipset and Rokkan in 1960s emerged from the critical junctures of state-building, transforming local and regional conflicts into national-scale issues. Kriesi et. al. believe that the new critical juncture of our time is the transformation of territorial boundaries into globalized system. This has created a structural conflict between “winners” and “losers” of globalization. Globalization has exposed citizens to a heightened labour market competition, increased the cultural diversity, and transferred some political authority to supranational entities. These structural changes appear to benefit the highly educated, liberal cosmopolitan citizens, whose set of skills and values are well fit to current zeitgeist of European societies. Citizens who identify strongly with their national community and its norms, perceive the weakening of national identity and autonomy as a loss. (Kriesi et. al., 2006; 2012.)

The integration–demarcation cleavage is present in both economic and cultural dimension of political competition, and it is largely manifested as new challenger parties. Prominent challenger parties in recent decades have been the parties of new populist right, which have mobilized the “losers” camp as a significant political force, sorting progressive-minded voters to liberal end of political spectrum. Kriesi et.al. suggest that the cultural and political dimensions of integration–demarcation cleavage are politically more relevant than economic dimension, as individuals place in society is increasingly defined by cognitive skills and cultural resources. This emphasizes impact of education, since value orientations are at least partly connected to individual’s educational background, and education induces general shift towards cultural liberalism, cosmopolitanism and universalism. (Kriesi et.al., 2012.)

In sum neo-cleavage theories suggest that contemporary political conflict is increasingly fought in sociocultural dimension, where one side advocates for progressive, multicultural and liberal views on social issues, and other traditional, national sovereignty-oriented beliefs. These are rooted to seminal changes in value orientations of electorate, identified by Inglehart (and others) already in 1970s. While different in focus, postmaterial–materialist, GAL–TAN and integration–demarcation cleavages are tapping on the same phenomenon: Increasing importance of sociocultural issues, which manifest in electoral competition as a conflict between progressive/liberal and traditional/conservative poles.

This thesis argues that conflicting attitudes over austerity politics, increasing immigration and gender minority rights are connected to contemporary value cleavages in Finnish society. These conflicting worldviews are analyzed via vote choice, linking the differences to organizational system. Next chapter will show, how these cleavages are utilized in my analysis.

3.4 Operationalizing value cleavages to affective polarization research

According to Suuronen et. al., (2020), the most relevant cleavages in contemporary Finland are pro- and anti-immigration cleavage, liberal–conservative cleavage, left–right dimension, a conflict between environment and economic growth, elite versus people, and the status of bilingualism (Suuronen et.al., 2020: 271). My analysis taps on first three cleavages, as I believe these have been the most vital conflicts in Finnish politics in recent years. These are by no means the totality of current political conflict in Finnish politics. Instead, they are a sample of political conflict among economic Left–Right and sociocultural Liberal–Conservative cleavages.

Notably, neo-cleavage theories have already been a part of Finnish affective polarization research: Kawecki (2022) showed that ideological extremity in GAL–TAN axis is a strong predictor of affective polarization in Finland, and the intensity of new value dimension has increased over time (Kawecki, 2022). In contrast Left–Right intensity has remained constant (Kekkonen et.al. 2024: 146). However, this master’s thesis is not interested of overall affective polarization in Finnish multiparty-system, or how voters’ position in Left–Right or GAL–TAN dimensions predict affective polarization. One of the benefits of my approach is the possibility to analyze, how individual values create negative and positive evaluations of other parties’ supporters, instead of aggregating these into two value dimensions. The goal of my approach is to show, how differences in basic attitudes create affective polarization in politics.

The first cleavage is the traditional economic Left–Right cleavage, referring to both traditional labour-capital cleavage (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), and more modern understanding of left–right dimension, which refers to a conflict between pro-redistribution and pro-market ideological leanings. While traditional cleavages may have transformed into new, the class-cleavage appears to be most salient and identity-shaping of traditional cleavages in

contemporary Europe (Crulli & Emanuele, 2025: 3), having some persistence in Finland as well (Westinen, 2015a: 296). Whether or not the traditional class-identification is still relevant to voters, similar conceptualization of economic attitudes is the Left-Right dimension, which appears to be relevant in the minds of Finnish voters (while majority does identify in the center of this conflict). The Left-Right orientation of voters is a popular tool in political polarization research, as it serves a useful proxy for citizens ideological orientation. (Suuronen et. al., 2020.)

As such, we can assume that the voters' attitudes are crudely divided into two camps, the Left and Right side of economic cleavage. In my analysis, this cleavage is examined through attitudes towards cuts in public spending. While attitudes towards taxation or supporting entrepreneurship could be other relevant economic attitudes, the issue of increasing national debt and unavoidable austerity measures were highly salient issue in 2023 parliament elections. As red-green and right-wing parties held practically opposite views on every economic issue, the salience of austerity policies should be sufficient indicator Left-Right alignment. After all, this thesis is not claiming that any party's voters should be considered as leftist or rightist based on the analysis performed here. Rather, the results shown here connect the affective polarization towards partisans to economic dimension, via highly salient issue of cuts in public spending.

The second, and slightly more difficult to assess, is the Liberal-Conservative value cleavage. This cleavage arises from neo-cleavage theories and refers to idea of a new value dimension in politics. This cleavage is present in immigration and gender minority rights attitudes, as I believe, the salient conflict over immigration and multiculturalism, and traditional understanding of gender and sexuality are connected to sociocultural value conflict. Neo-cleavage theories refer to these sides as postmaterial-materialist, GAL-TAN, and integration-demarcation sides of value conflict. In essence, the postmaterial, GAL and integration-oriented voters should be aligned towards parties in liberal-left, and pro-immigration and pro-LGBTQIA+ attitudes should predict higher evaluation of these partisan groups. Conversely the materialist, TAN and demarcation-oriented voters should be aligned to conservative parties in Finnish political landscape, advocating for lesser immigration, and traditional understanding of gender and sexuality. I believe liberal-conservative dichotomy is the easiest way to assess the relationship of two sides of this value cleavage.

Next chapter will show, how Finnish voters align to economic and sociocultural value dimensions, and how these attitudes are indeed structured to these two opposing camps in current political landscape. While it may be argued that vote choice is not necessarily linked to individual's value orientation, seminal research on modern voting behavior in Europe has concluded that the most prominent model of voting is value voting. In value voting, party choice is tied to voters' value orientations, with the cost of structural variables, such as social class or religion (Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995). As vote choice is an integral part of my analysis, it is important to assess, what kind of values does partisanship and voting for a certain party predict in contemporary Finland.

3.5 Value cleavages in Finnish politics

This chapter will show, how value orientations align voters to certain parties in contemporary Finland. Currently party choice in Finland appears to be dictated by partisan sorting, which refers to an alignment of political ideology and partisan identities (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). In 2000s, party choice has been a strong cue of voter's value orientation, and similarly minded voters appear to cluster to certain parties. In turn, voter's positioning on economic Left–Right and sociocultural GAL–TAN dimensions have become a strong predictor of party choice. (Söderlund & Grönlund, 2024.) Finnish voters are currently sorted by economic left–right cleavage, and attitudes on sociocultural GAL–TAN dimension appear to be polarized (Söderlund, 2023: 54).

3.6 Left–Right economic cleavage

In terms of traditional Left–Right economic cleavage, Finnish electorate forms three blocs: a pro-market right-wing bloc, red-green welfare bloc and moderates, who position somewhere between two blocs, depending on issue. Leading pro-market voters are supporters of the NCP: Voter's placement in right end of left–right scale serves as a strongest predictor for NCP identification, and their voters are also highly supportive of lowering taxation, smaller public sector, increasing private entrepreneurship, and free-market economics in Finland. Other pro-market voters come from voters of the Finns Party and Centre Party, while their distance to NCP voters is substantial. (Suuronen et.al. 2020; Borg & Paloheimo, 2024.)

Leftist side of economic cleavage consists of voters of the red–green bloc: SDP, Left Alliance and Greens. Their voters showed strongest skepticism towards lesser taxation, smaller public sector and increasing entrepreneurship and free-market economics (Suuronen et.al., 2020). Unsurprisingly respondent's placement in left side of traditional economic dimension is the strongest predictor for voting either SDP or Left Alliance, while Greens voters have somewhat a unique center-left identity. Voters position themselves at the ideological center are likely to identify to the Greens, but right-wing attitudes decrease likelihood of Greens partisanship. (Borg & Paloheimo, 2024; Grönlund & Söderlund, 2024.)

Voters of the two remaining parties, SPP and CD can be considered as centrist in economic issues. Middle- and upper-class identification and center-right orientation are both linked to identifying to SPP (Borg & Paloheimo, 2024). However, their voters are not too enthusiastic of increasing market economy, lowering taxation or smaller public sector (Suuronen et.al. 2020). In terms of CD voters, it could be argued that economic policies are not the main focus of party, rather their partisanship is based on the religious values and Christian morality. However, in terms of left–right orientations, voters of CD are considered as center-right with SPP voters (Isotalo & Rapeli, 2024: 320).

While the persistence of Left–Right divide may be questioned in postmodern societies, it appears that the self-positioning and interpreting political competition through this conflict is relevant for Finnish voters. This divide manifests as issues relating to lower taxation, smaller public sector and reinforcing entrepreneurship and free-market capitalism, aligning voters into two camps: the right-wing bloc (NCP, Finns Party, Centre Party, and CD), and the opposing red-green bloc (SDP, Greens, and Left Alliance). This leaves SPP somewhere between two blocs, being the only party that has formed a government with both blocs in 2020s. Notably, EVA mapped voters' attitudes towards immediate cuts in public spending after 2023 parliament elections. In their survey, these blocs were visible, as voters of right-wing bloc and SPP were in favor of austerity measures, while voters of the Greens and Left Alliance remained skeptical. Instead, majority of SDP voters (54 %) supported cuts in public spending. (Metelinen, 2022.) These results show how political issues do not predetermine partisans issue positions, while the overall picture of economic blocs remain.

3.6.1 Saliency of economic issues in 2023 parliament elections

The 2023 parliament elections and campaigning were dominated by economic issues (Arter, 2024; Kestilä-Kekkonen et.al., 2024). In the Spring of 2023, Finland's economic forecast looked grim as economy slid into recession (Bank of Finland, 2024). In 2023 FNES, almost 80 % of respondents believed that Finland's economy had worsened in the span of last 12 months, and most economically concerned citizens were voters of the NCP and Finns Party (Mattila, 2024). These concerns were reflected in voters' attitudes: In EVA's pre-election survey, 51 % of respondents considered the national economy as most important issue in candidate and party choice (Metelinen, 2023). These concerns highlight the poor state of economy, and saliency of economic issues in elections. Electorate were presented two alternatives, where right-wing parties offered austerity politics, and the red-green bloc advocated for public investments, rising taxes, and if necessary, increasing national debt (Ahokas, 2023; Wass et.al., 2024: 60).

3.7 Liberal–Conservative value cleavage

For starters, modern conservatism – that is, supporting traditional and religious values, is concentrated around voters of the Centre Party, CD, and Finns Party. Their voters have the largest share of voters who strongly oppose the decline of nuclear family, gender neutral marriage and advocate for Christian identity in Finland (Hjelm et.al., 2023.) NCP voters' sociocultural profile is relatively heterogenous: as a leading neoliberal party in Finland, NCP attract voters from different sociocultural backgrounds. In contrast, most liberal voters show support to either to the Greens, Left Alliance or SPP, while SDP voters perceive these issues more moderately (Grönlund & Söderholm, 2024: 112). In many ways voters of the SDP and NCP can be considered as middle ground in sociocultural issues. As the leading parties of their respective blocs, both parties' voter-base is a diverse mix of both old and young, traditional and progressive voters.

Anti-immigration attitudes are strongest among voters of the Finns Party, and anti-immigration sentiments are single strongest predictor of Finns Party vote: Hansen and Leino (2024) showed that supporting the Finns Party is mainly explained by negative attitudes towards immigrants, as party has effectively gained ownership of immigration issue in Finnish politics (Hansen & Leino, 2024). Anti-immigration attitudes not only define and unite

Finns Party voters, but it also distinguishes them from all other Finnish parliament parties (Westinen. et.al. 2020).

Pro-immigration attitudes are rather widely shared among other parliament parties in Finland. On the other hand, in 2019 FNES, only two parties' voters supported higher levels of immigration in Finland: voters of the Left Alliance and Greens. Thus, while multiculturalism and benevolent attitude towards immigration is a somewhat of shared value, Finnish voters are in general not too keen on more widespread immigration. This is reflected in more economic side of immigration as well: Only party that had more than 50 % of its voters supporting the view that immigration benefits Finland's economy was voters of the Greens, while all party average was only 34 % (Suuronen et.al. 2020.) Immigration attitudes form a clear divide among Finnish voters, which is characterized by the fact that voters of all other parliament parties have less-negative attitudes towards immigration than Finns Party voters (Hansen & Leino, 2024: 6).

In terms of LGBTQIA+ rights, Finns seem to consider sexual and gender minority issues differently, as citizens show more sympathy towards rights of sexual minorities than gender. In *Finland Turned Right: voting and public opinion in the parliamentary election of 2023* using the same set of data as my thesis, voters' attitudes towards LGBTQIA+rights were extensively mapped. Advancing rights of sexual minorities rights widely shared value, as 84 % of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with statement "*Sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish*". In contrast, only 53 % percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "*It is good that Parliament approved the act on transgenderism*", and it was met with larger opposition, where 36 % either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Lindell, 2023.) Strongest support towards transgender legislation reform came from voters of the liberal-left, SDP, Greens, Left Alliance and SPP voters. Each of these partisan groups showed more than 50 % of totally agree -responses. The conservative camp showed substantially lower support, where only 25 % of NCP voters, and 20 % of Centre Party voters supported the reform. By far the lowest enthusiasm is found from extreme end of social conservatism, with 4 % of Finns Party voters and mere 2 % CD voters supporting the reform. (Henriksson, 2023: 78.)

3.7.1 Saliency of immigration issues

Immigration policies have been one of the most salient political issues in the 21st century, both in Finland and beyond. Ever since the Big-Bang elections of 2011, the Finnish political discourse has in many ways been dominated by competing worldviews, broadly relating to nationalism, multiculturalism, feminism and climate change (Mickelsson, 2021: 326). Yet immigration appears to be the most polarizing issue, since in recent years parties have started to discriminate each other based on immigration policies: During the 2023 election campaign, SDP, Greens and Left Alliance openly declared that they will not form a coalition government with Finns Party, due to the fundamental disagreements over human rights. Indeed, Finns Party's condition for government co-operation was a substantial reduction in immigration (Arter, 2023: 434).

It is difficult to assess how salient the issue of immigration was in the 2023 parliamentary elections. On one hand, immigration is an ever-green issue, which is relevant for as long as anti-immigration parties gain electoral success. A month prior to the elections, the right-wing populist Finns Party was holding second place in the polls, only 3 percentage points behind the leading party NCP. On the other hand, Ylisalo (2024) has pointed out that while considering immigration as an important issue was connected to voting for the Finns Party, immigration issues were substantially more important for their voters in past elections (Ylisalo, 2024). Similarly, EVA's pre-election survey showed that around 19% of voters considered immigration as the most important theme in their vote choice, these being primarily voters of the Finns Party (Metelinen, 2023).

While immigration issues were overshadowed by economic concerns, immigration attitudes should be central to voters as a part of a larger sociocultural dimension. The importance of immigration issues is reflected in the campaigning strategy of the Finns Party, as the party released an extensive immigration policy program in January (Perussuomalaiset, 2023). I believe the strongest argument for the saliency of immigration issues is the fact that red-green parties declared that they would not form a coalition government with the Finns Party, no matter the election result.

3.7.2 Salience of gender minority rights issues

Reform of Finland's outdated transgender legislation reform was passed on February 1st of 2023, two months prior the elections. This would suggest that gender minorities' rights could have been highly salient issue during the election campaigning, as reform sparked a lot of public discourse about the nature of gender in contemporary Finland (Heimonen & Pantti, 2025). Reform of transgender legislation did not follow government–opposition lines: Liberal–left parties in Marin's government all voted in favour of new legislation, while Centre Party was internally divided. Among opposition parties, NCP representatives were widely supportive, as 26 voted in favour and only 10 against the government's proposal. Strongest opponents of new legislations came from the Finns Party and CD, all voting against the reform. (Toivonen & Voitto-Robotti, 2023.)

The political rhetoric in parliament discussion showed both sides of Finnish gender minority politics: Opponents framed reform as dangerous, which jeopardizes cisgender women's rights, children safety and is facilitated by LGBTIQ-organizations with their gender ideology (Heimonen & Pantti, 2025: 1023). Advocates of the reform framed gender minority issues as a part of human rights, and how reform would tackle discrimination and reinforce equality in Finnish society (Järviö & Pihlajamaa, 2025). These discourses show how polarizing issue gender minority rights are, despite the limited salience in everyday politics. Indeed, in 2023 FNES, only 3 % of respondents considered "equality and minorities" as most important issue in politics, those being voters of the Greens and Left Alliance (Ylisalo, 2024). Gender minority issues appear to have been a highly salient issue during the parliament process, but diminished quickly, and received limited or if any attention during election campaigning.

3.8 Hypothesis

Four interconnected hypothesizes guide analysis when seeking an answer to a research question, how individual attitudes predict affective polarization in Finland. These

hypothesizes tap on theoretical framework of my thesis – prominent dimensions of political conflict in contemporary Finland – and to social identity perspective of affective polarization.

H1_a Economic attitude predicts higher thermometer evaluations of right-wing parties' supporters

H1_b Economic attitude predicts lower thermometer evaluations of left-wing parties' supporters

First hypothesis relates to economic dimension of political conflict, assuming that economic attitude structures affective polarization along Left–Right economic cleavage. This attitude measures the effect of pro-austerity attitudes to affective evaluations of each partisan group. As parties are essentially sorted to two opposing economic camps: the right-wing bloc, formed by NCP, Finns Party, Centre Party and to some extent, CD and SPP, the red–green bloc of SDP, Greens and Left Alliance. Economic attitude which taps on salient issue of budget cuts, should predict positive evaluations of right-wing bloc parties' supporters, and conversely negative towards left–wing parties' supporters. It also possible that voters do not base their affective evaluations on economic issues.

H2_a Immigration attitude predicts higher thermometer evaluations of liberal–left parties' supporters

H2_b Immigration attitude predicts lower thermometer evaluations of right–wing conservative parties' supporters

As noted by Paloheimo (2008) and Suuronen et. al. (2020), immigration forms one of the most vital cleavages in modern Finland, in line with neo-cleavage theories. As such we should expect the immigration attitude to predict on-average higher thermometer evaluations of all partisan groups associated with pro-immigration attitudes. However, due the current sorting to political blocs, pro-immigration attitudes may benefit parties of liberal–left more than parties associated with right-wing conservatism. Immigration attitude is expected to at least predict substantially negative predictions of Finns Party supporters While pro-immigration attitudes are widely shared value, the association with only anti-immigration movement in Finland may result to negative evaluations of other right-wing conservative parties' supporters.

Immigration attitude and the gender minority rights attitude form the samples of Liberal–Conservative value cleavage. Indeed, the correlation of these two attitudes is very high. This further reinforces the idea presented by neo-cleavage theories, where both attitudes towards minorities are tied to wider liberal/progressive – traditional/conservative value dimension. The third hypothesis relates to attitudes towards rights and status of gender minorities underlining the Liberal–Conservative cleavage in modern Finland:

H3_a Gender minority rights attitude predicts higher thermometer evaluations for liberal–left parties

H3_b Gender minority rights attitude lower thermometer evaluations for right–wing conservative parties

Attitudes towards transgender legislation reform is used as a proxy for gender minority attitudes, as it is reasonable to expect that respondents interpreted this question through the idea of advancing gender minority rights, rather than the institutional process itself. As another element of Liberal–Conservative value cleavage, we should expect gender minority attitude to predict higher evaluations liberal-left parties’ supporters. These are mainly voters of parties in Marin’s government that initiated the reform: SDP, Left Alliance, Greens and SPP. As conservatism in Finland is mainly attributed to voters of CD, Finns Party and the Centre Party (Hjelm et.al., 2023: 36), gender rights attitude should predict negative evaluations towards these partisan groups. In many ways NCP voters position is interesting, as party has for a longest time been divided into conservative, liberal and social reformist camps (Mickelsson, 2021). As the governments proposed reform could not have passed without the help of NCP, it is possible that this translates to voter-level, or voters consider NCP as the helm of right-wing conservative bloc.

H4 – Vote choice predicts affective polarization to a lesser extent compared to individual attitudes

Last assumption relates to scholarly debate over foundation of affective polarization. Voter's attitudes towards austerity politics, immigration and gender minority rights, should be stronger predictors of both negative and positive evaluations of other parties' supporters, compared to the effect of vote choice. Should the vote choice be a stronger source of affective polarization, the social identity created by voting could be the main catalyst of affective polarization in Finland. While it is impossible to assess the volume of this identification with this data, vote choice is nevertheless a sufficient indicator of some identification to political party. While this identification can vary between swing voting and life-long partisanship, voting for a party is the minimal requirement of partisanship.

While not a formal hypothesis, another interest of this thesis is to see, how the bloc structuration of Finnish politics manifest in affective polarization. This is possible through vote choice variable, and the results should mirror the findings of Kekkonen and Ylä-anttila (2021). Affective blocs should be visible in my analysis via the effect that vote choice has on thermometer evaluation of supporters of different parties. These estimates should follow the red–green and bourgeois bloc lines: SDP, Left Alliance, Greens and SPP, should show positive affect towards each other, and resentment towards remaining right-wing conservatives. Same should be true for NCP, CD and Finns Party vote choice. Notably, the Centre Party is an outlier in Marin's liberal-left government, which may predict lower than average evaluation towards other coalition member partisans, and conversely higher evaluations of right-wing conservatives.

4 Methodology

This master's thesis aims to find an answer to a research question, how individual attitudes predict affective polarization in Finland, using multiple linear regression as its method of analysis. This chapter will introduce the methodology and the dataset used in analysis, how variables are operationalized, along with descriptive statistics. All analyses were performed with RStudio software. All tables presented this thesis, excl. barplots and histograms, were made with stargazer-package (Hlavac, 2022), correlation matrixes with corrplot-package (Wei & Simko, 2024), and effect plots shown later in chapter 5. with effects-package (Fox, 2019).

Multiple linear regression analysis is a statistical method, used to analyze the relationship between multiple independent variables effect on dependent variable. While simple correlation coefficient is able to tell the strenght and direction of two variables, linear regression models are able to predict the value of dependent variable, when independent variable gains virtually any value. As we are rarely interested of the relationship between two variables, we need a statistical model which able to estimate the predicted value of dependent variable, when it's "regressed" on multiple independent variables. This makes it possible to control the effect of variables that may influence the relationship between dependent and independent variable, holding other variables at constant level.

Equation of multiple linear regression takes the form of:

$$\hat{y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_k x_k + \epsilon$$

Where

\hat{y} = the predicted value of dependent variable

β_0 = the intercept of regression line

β_1 = regression coefficient

x = value of independent variable(s)

ϵ = error term

In formula above, it is possible to estimate the predicted value of \hat{y} , when taking account the effect of independent variables. (Nummenmaa et.al., 2019: 249).

The actual problem in linear regression analysis is the estimates of intercept and regression coefficient, and most common way of estimating these is the ordinary least squares method (OLS). Simply put, the OLS method aims to find a regression line which is best fitted for predicting values of dependent variable. This is done by analyzing the residuals of predicted y and the actual value of y_i . The difference between two values are residual values, and they represent the volume of error in models prediction. Lower sums of residual values imply that the regression line "fits" the data well, and higher values imply larger error in predictions. These values are squared so that the positive and negative values do not cancel each other out. (Nummenmaa et.al., 2019: 238.)

4.1 Interpreting multiple linear regression models

In practice, when conducting a multiple linear regression in RStudio, we are presented a sophisticated table of results where three values are particularly interesting: 1) The regression coefficients, which depict the changes in dependent variable when independent variables increase; The 2) standard error of those predictions, 3) and the statistical significance (and non-significance) of relationship between dependent and independent variables.

Regression coefficients are predicted via OLS method, and they indicate the predicted change in dependent variable with each "point up" in independent variable. The coefficients indicate, how much the prediction differs from zero, meaning that higher/lower values indicate stronger relationship to dependent variable. For instance, dependent variable in all models is the thermometer scores of supporters of each parliament party, that ranges from 0 to 100. Independent variables are attitudes towards current political issues, ranging from -2 to 2. If the relationship between dependent variable and independent variable is statistically significant, regression coefficients indicate, how moving from one attitude-level to another, predicts the change thermometer evaluation – when other variables are held at their constants. The standard error indicates, what is the estimated error of this prediction.

Table also show the statistical significance of relationship between dependent and independent variable. The multiple linear regression analysis is essentially about estimating the linear correlation between dependent and independent variables, and the statistical significance of this relationship can be estimated via two-tailed t-test. T-test is a form of hypothesis testing, indicating whether we can discard the null hypothesis. In regression

analysis, the assumption in t-test is that the regression coefficient between dependent and independent variable is zero. However, when regression coefficient is estimated, t-test indicates how likely it is that the coefficient is the same size in target population – that is, the eligible voters in Finland. (Nummenmaa, 2021: 451.) As it is likely that our estimates do differ from target population resulting in error of first kind, t-test is further evaluated via level of significance (p-value). If the results of t-test have level of significance <0.05 , the regression coefficient is defined as statistically significant, meaning that the risk of false positive is only five out of 100 consecutive test with different samples. (Nummenmaa et. al., 2019; Nummenmaa, 2021.)

4.2 Evaluating models performance

There are numerous scores and values that indicate, how well multiple linear regression model performed in analysis. Perhaps the most important of these is the coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 value of model indicates the reliability of linear regression, by estimating how much variation in dependent variable is explained by changes in independent variable. In a simple linear regression, the R^2 is the Pearson's correlation coefficient of two variables squared, and when multiplied by 100, it shows the percentagual amount of explained variation.

However, in multiple linear regression analysis, we need to adjust our coefficient of determination to adress the impact of all independent variables. This is due the fact that R^2 value increases whenever a new variable is added to the model, despite not being related to dependent variable. The adjusted R^2 coefficient takes account all variables in the model and increases only if adding a variable improves models predicting capabilities. Put simply, the adj. R^2 is the score that our model recieves in its predicting capabilities, where 0.00 would mean that model is unable to explain any variance, and 1.00 that all proportion of variation is explained. (Nummenmaa et.al., 2019: 252.)

Another relevant metric for assessing the performance of multiple linear regression model is the F-statistic. As said, the results of regression analysis are never fully accurate, and these errors in estimation are determined via residual values. Similarly to coefficient of determination, F-statistic indicates, how much variation is left unexplained by residual values. F-statistic is essentially a value that indiciates the relationship between variance in dependent

variable, explained by linear regression model, and the remaining unexplained variation in residuals. Statistical significance applies here as well: If F-statistic in multiple linear regression model is statistically significant ($p < .05$), the model fits well. (Nummenmaa. 2021: 449.)

4.3 Data

The data used in this master's thesis is from Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion's (FIRIPO) Citizens' Opinion: Parliamentary Election Surveys of 2023 (Grönlund & Strandberg, 2023). Data was collected as a part of the Citizens' Opinion panel between 27th of February and 24th of April 2023, consisting of six rounds of polling with same respondents. The aim of FIRIPO's survey was to chart voters political attitudes, voting behavior and views on the 2023 parliamentary election of Finland. Target population in FIRIPO's survey was over 18-year old people residing in Finland. Final sample size was 4875 respondents. Sampling method FIRIPO used was mixed probability and non-probability sampling, where 80 % of respondents were recruited using various probability sampling methods, and remaining 20 % using non-probability sampling. Data was collected with web-based self-administered questionnaire (CAWI). FIRIPO used a rake weight to adjust their sample to known marginal distributions of target population. (Backström et.al., 2023: 137–140.)

Respondents' political attitudes and views on current political issues were charted through series of statements, such as *"immigration is mainly a good thing for Finland"* and *"public services must be cut to balance the Finnish economy"*. More importantly, FIRIPOS's data includes several questions relating directly to affective polarization research: These questions related to social distance metrics and thermometer evaluations of each parliament party's supporters and chairpersons. The background variables included sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, language, and highest level of education. Only weakness in FIRIPO's data is that there is no income variable of any sort. This is unfortunate, as it is plausible that individuals financial capabilities could have been linked to affective polarization. However, I believe the rational behind affective polarization – the social identity linked to partisanship – is not necessarily conditioned by income.

4.4 Operationalization of variables

This section introduces all variables utilized in multiple linear regression models. For the sake of clarity, the original questions were asked in Finnish, so translations presented here aim to capture the specific nature of question. Original questions asked from respondents can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4.1 Dependent variable

My analysis utilizes eight thermometer scores as a dependent variable for each model. Questions inquiring respondents' feelings towards supporters of each party was "*how would you describe your feelings towards supporters of following parties? – party's name*". These thermometer questions ranged from 0 to 100, where 0-degree evaluation indicates "*I don't like them at all*", 50-degrees "*I am completely neutral*" and 100-degrees "*I like them very much*". The benefit of these questions is that they are relatively easy for respondents to interpret – Supporter can be thought as ordinary voter or as someone who openly advocates for parties' policies. The 50-degree mark was distinctly indicated as neutral stance, making it easy for respondents to place themselves in neutral territory.

Feeling thermometer presents a slight methodological difficulty, as it is a discrete and ordinal variable, having finite number of specific values which correspond to their ordered categories – moving up in thermometer scores, e.g. from 30 to 60 is rising on the scale. As such, it could be argued that logistic regression analysis would be a more suited method of analysis.

However, there are certain reasons why we might operationalize feeling thermometers as continuous variable: for instance, it is not clear, if the difference between 30 degrees and 60 degrees is same as going from three to six degrees. Three and six degrees are very close to "*I don't like them at all*" evaluation, while 30 could be considered as somewhat negative evaluation, and 60 slightly more positive than completely neutral. Moreover, a scale that has 101 different possible values is much easier to operationalize as continuous than ordinal; Logistic regression analysis would result in too many pair-wise combinations, where most of the categories would have insufficient number of observations.

The distribution of feeling thermometer scores for each party is shown in Figures 1.–8.

Thermometer values in all party evaluations tend to concentrate on round numbers, especially on 0-, 50-, and 100- degrees. Looking at the scores of feeling thermometers, we can see that

scores right above 0-degrees and right below 100-degrees have very few observations. In practice this would mean that these categories would have too few observations to accurately predict with logistic regression analysis. Therefore, from both practical and methodological reasons, we interpret feeling thermometer variables as continuous.

What Figures 1. to 8. show is that the thermometer evaluations of traditional parties' supporters – SDP (fig 2.), NCP (fig 6.), Centre Party (fig 4). and SPP (fig 5.) – are distributed relatively evenly. The spikes on the middle of the axis displays neutral evaluations that supporters received. Another way of interpreting the average neutrality is to pay attention to spikes on thermometer scales in 40- and 60-degrees, which signal the somewhat negative and positive evaluations. Traditional parties' supporters share on these is substantially higher as well. Supporters of new parties of Greens (fig 3.) and Finns Party (fig 8.), and more sociocultural extreme CD (fig 7.) and Left Alliance (fig 1.) have much less somewhat-degree evaluations.

Further, the neutrality-bias towards traditional parties is evident when looking at the either ends of thermometer evaluations. For instance, supporters of NCP received a lot more 100-degree evaluations, presumably from pro-market-oriented voters, compared to CD or Finns Party supporters. Same is true when comparing liberal-leftist parties: The more moderate SDP supporters evaluation differs widely from Greens and Left Alliance supporters, as SDP supporters not only received more 100-degree evaluations, but less 0-degree than either of them. SPP supporters sit rather evenly at both ends, but their Figure is characterized by on-average higher thermometer evaluations past the 50-degree mark. The opposite is true for CD supporters, who received fewer neutral evaluations, but lots of zero-degree evaluations. Finns Party supporters thermometer distribution is by far the most unique, as they received on-average the most evaluations under the 50-degree mark, and fewest 100-degree evaluations. Note that their histogram scales differently than others, as Finns Party supporters received nearly 600 0-degree evaluations, while others gap at 400.

Fig 1. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the Left Alliance (0–100)

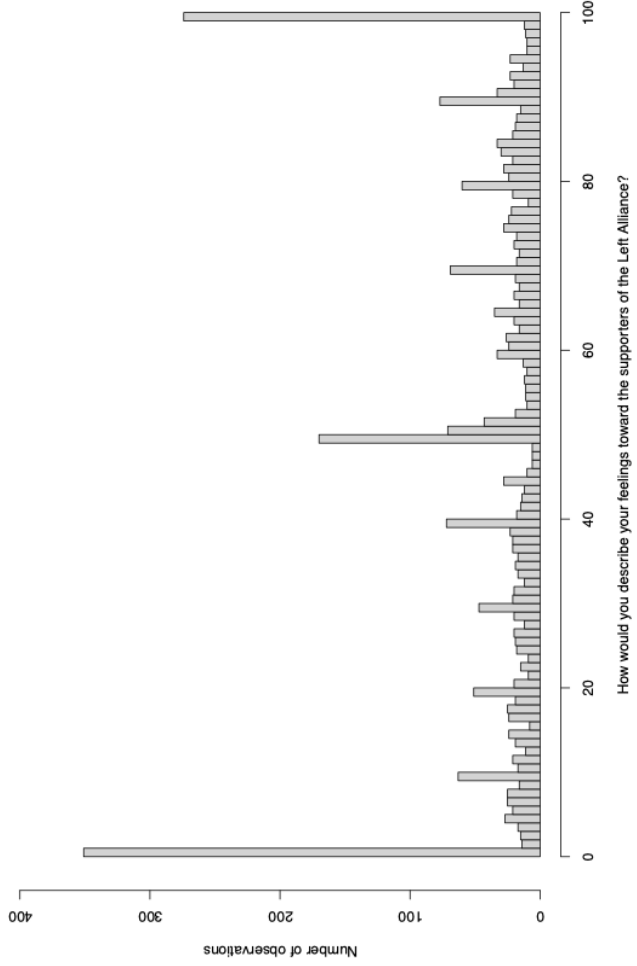


Fig 3. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the Greens (0–100)

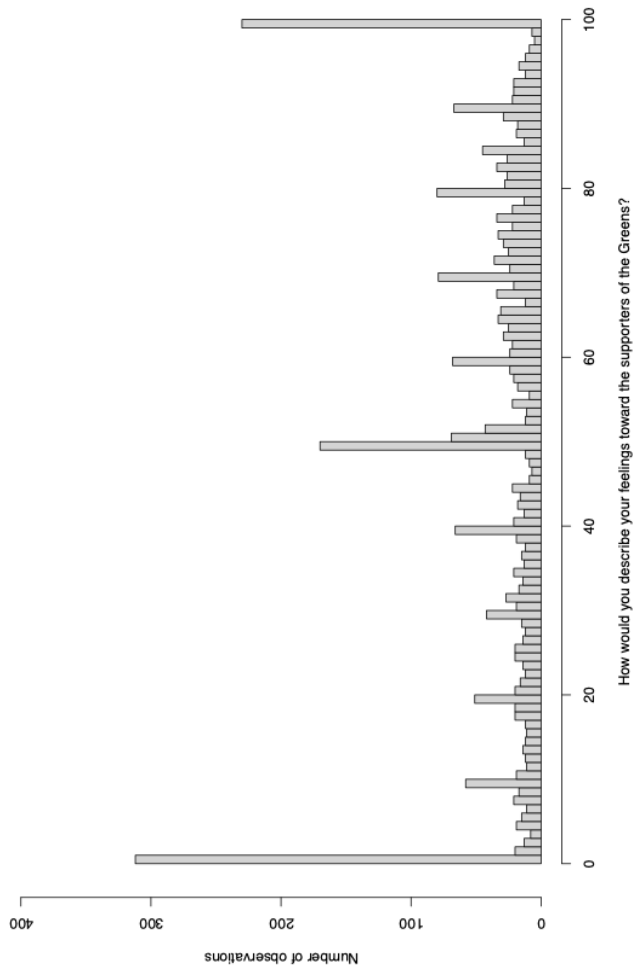


Fig 2. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the SDP (0–100)

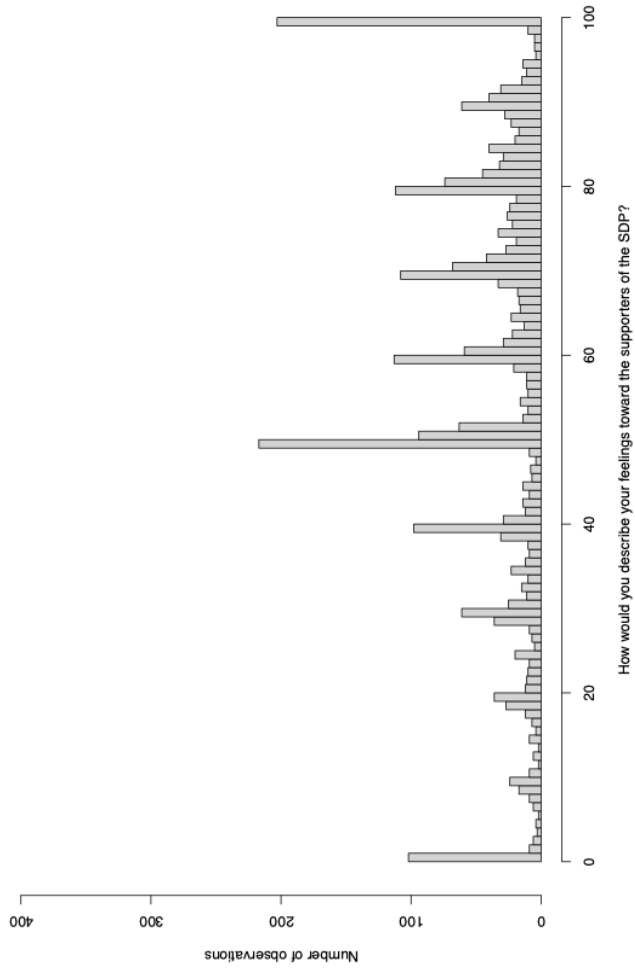


Fig 4. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the Centre Party (0–100)

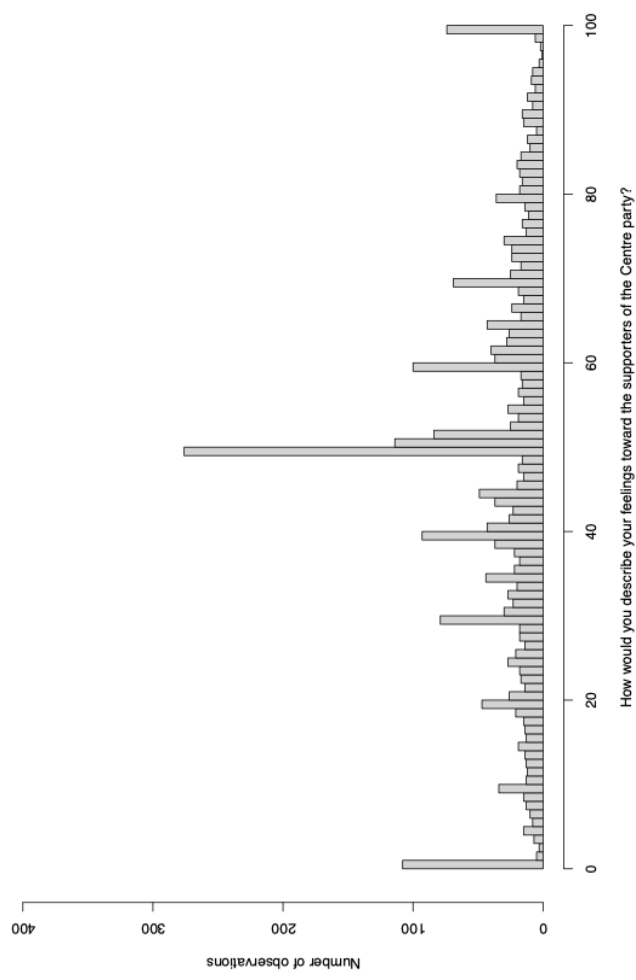


Fig 5. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the SPP (0-100)

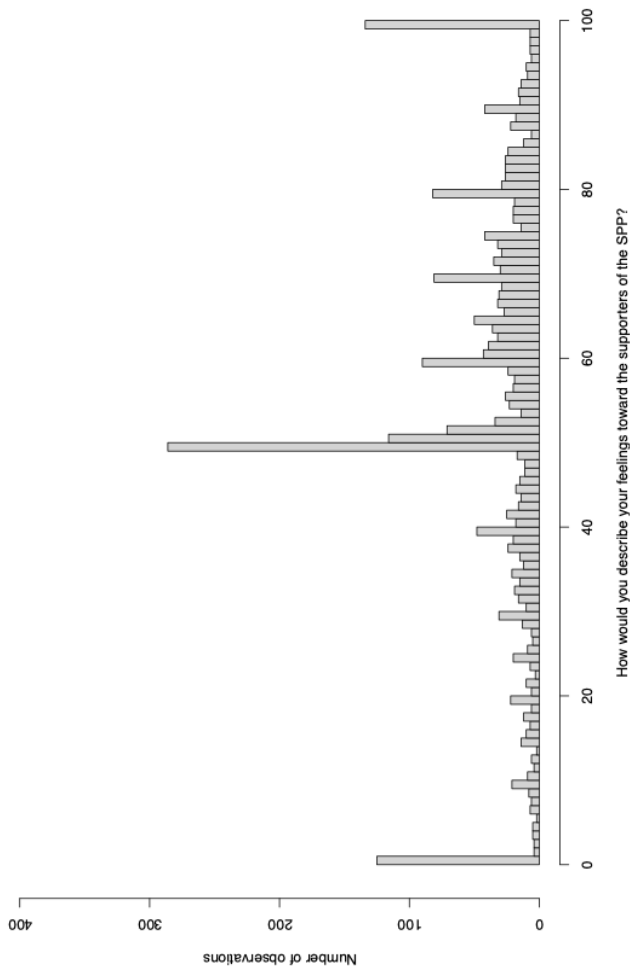


Fig 6. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the NCP (0-100)

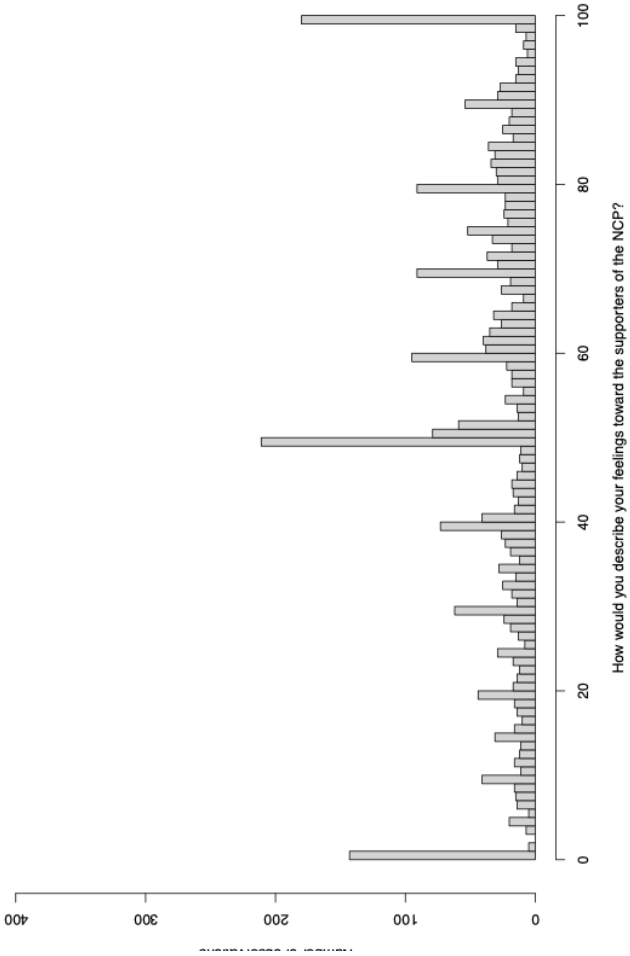


Fig 7. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the CD (0-100)

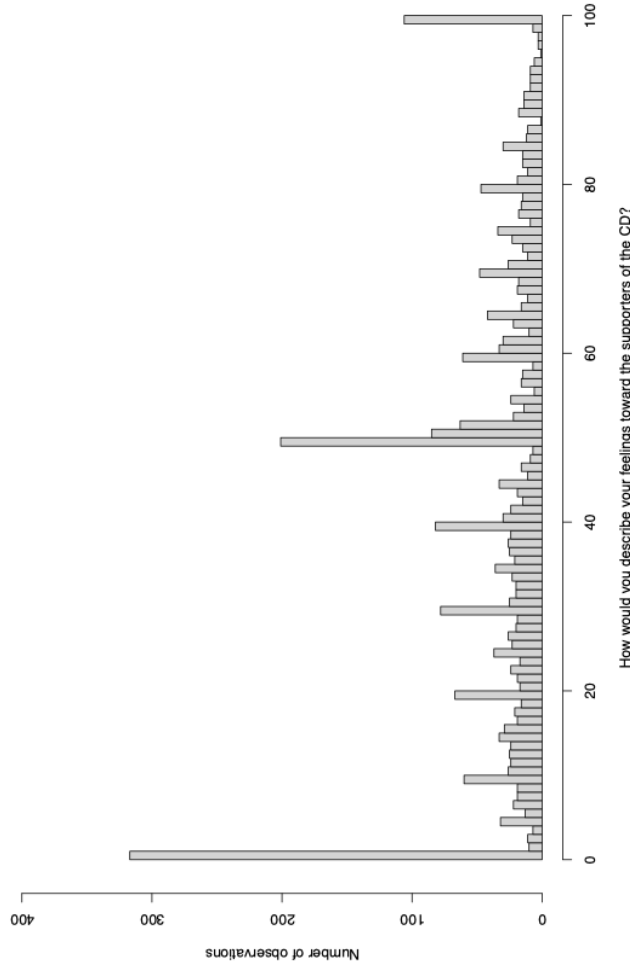


Fig 8. Histogram of feelings towards the supporters of the Finns Party (0-100)

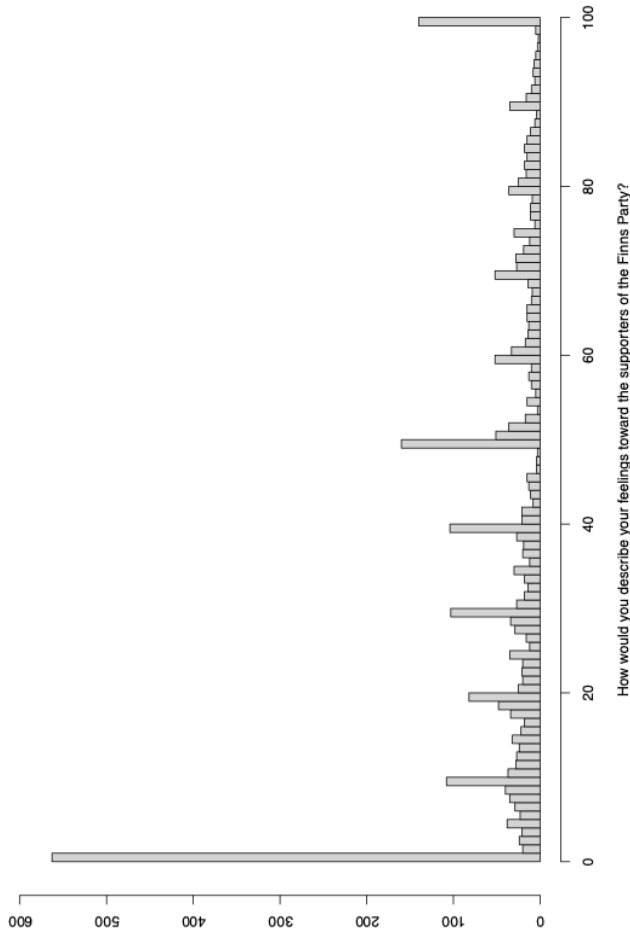


Table 1. Descriptive statistics of thermometer evaluations

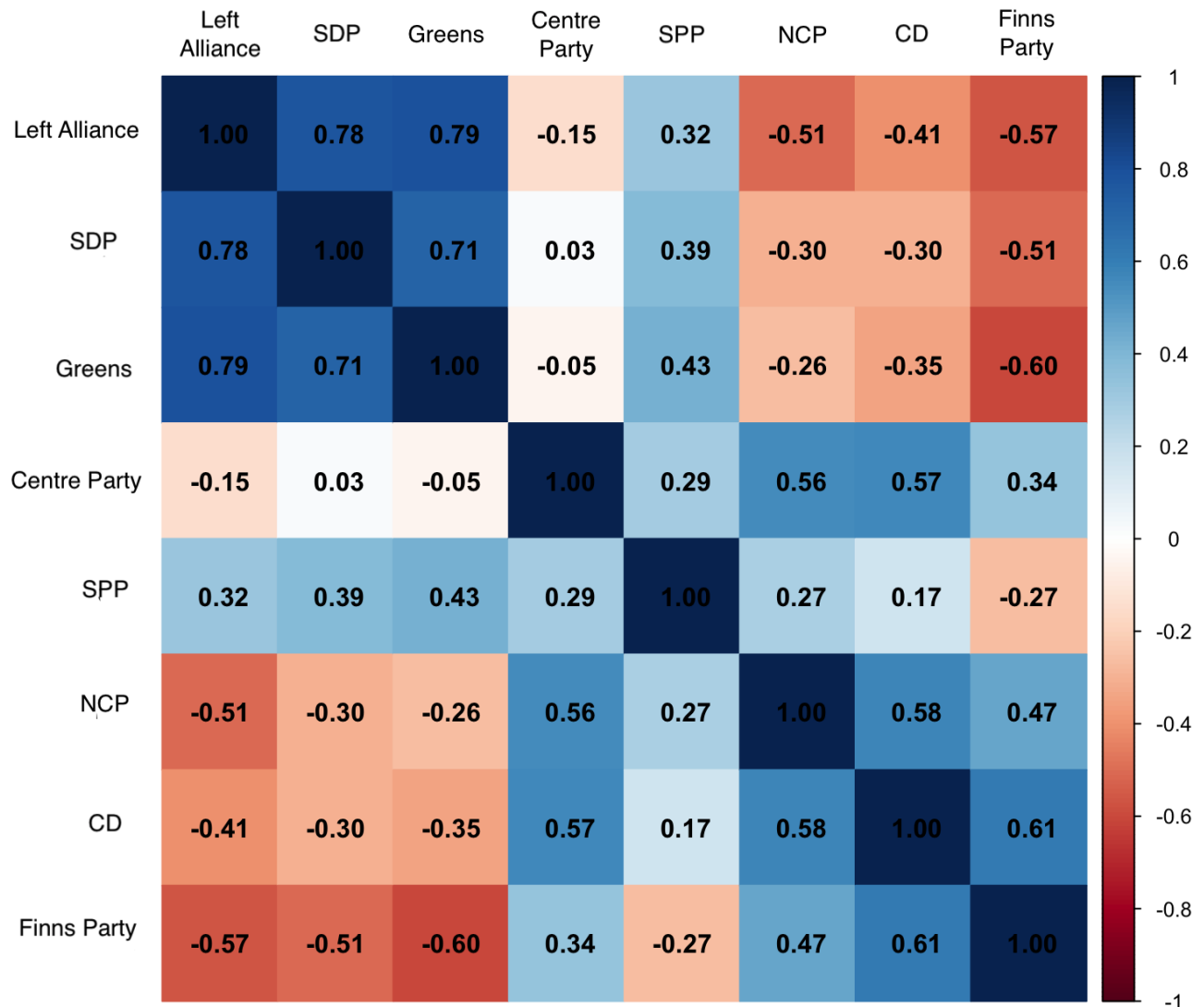
Supporters of:	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
SDP	2,843	59.25	26.63	0	100
SPP	2,636	56.69	25.10	0	100
NCP	2,923	54.79	28.21	0	100
Greens	2,967	51.75	31.81	0	100
Left Alliance	2,955	49.78	33.44	0	100
Centre Party	2,751	48.41	24.06	0	100
CD	2,830	42.42	28.64	0	100
Finns Party	3,075	36.39	30.94	0	100

Table 1. shows the descriptive statistics of each party's supporters thermometer evaluations. All thermometers range from 0 to 100, meaning that every partisan group has respondents who like them very much and not at all. The idea of traditional parties' supporters receiving on-average more neutral evaluations appears to be true for SDP, SPP and NCP, while Centre Party has substantially lower average rating. In contrast lowest means of Finns Party and CD supporters could be tied to the fact that their supporters are associated so strongly with modern conservatism, along with Centre Party. Standard deviation around the means shows quite a bit of distribution, which is also seen in the Figures 1.–8. Standard deviation makes and interesting case when comparing the thermometer evaluations, as higher standard deviation suggests that their voters generate more polarizing opinions.

Figure 9. shows the correlation matrix of all thermometer evaluations. The so-called red-green bloc is visible in top-left corner of the graph: evaluations of Left Alliance, SDP and Greens supporters are highly positively correlated. Interestingly while SPP is predominantly a liberal party, their supporters do not have equally high positive correlation with other parties' supporters in leftist-liberal bloc. The right-wing conservative bloc is similarly visible on bottom-right corner, yet their correlations are weaker: The highest positive correlation is between feeling towards supporters of Finns Party and CD (0.61), compared to weakest positive correlation among red-green bloc (Greens and SDP, 0.71). When looking at the middle of the graph, we can see the Centre Party supporters' association with right-wing conservative bloc, as correlation increases gradually from negative to positive when moving

towards NCP, CD and Finns Party supporters' thermometers. The evaluation of Centre Party's supporters is negatively correlated with thermometers of Left Alliance and Greens supporters.

Figure 9. Correlation matrix of supporters feeling thermometers



When assessing the levels of affective polarization, the assumption that affective polarization would be structured along bloc lines seems plausible, as we can clearly see negative correlation between the bottom-left and top-right corners: The correlation between Left Alliance, SDP, Greens and NCP, CD and Finns Party supporters' thermometers is negative in all instances. Further, the correlation is substantially more negative between Finns Party and all leftist-liberal parties' supporters. Similarly, there is a strong negative correlation between Left Alliance supporters' thermometer evaluations and all the right-wing bloc parties.

These descriptive findings so far paint a picture which supports the idea that affective polarization is indeed structured along party lines. Whether or not these differences on correlations are associated to individual attitudes, requires more sophisticated analysis. One way of demonstrating the affective polarization among partisans is to use affective polarization indices (API). They have been widely popular in European research due the nature of multiparty systems. For starters, parties have differing weight on multiparty systems, which may influence the overall affective polarization: Radical but small parties may distort the view, if their relative size in the party system is not accounted for. There are several ways to operationalize API (cf. Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021; Kawecki, 2022), yet they all share the same idea of trying to estimate the overall affective polarization in multiparty systems by operationalizing the idea of in- and out-parties bit differently. However, as Torcal and Comellas (2025) note, the APIs are practical for measuring the overall levels of affective polarization in multiparty system, but they may be questionable for individual-level measures (Torcal & Comellas, 2025: 70).

As such, my master's thesis does not utilize such indices for three reasons. First, the literature on Finnish affective polarization has already concluded the levels of affective polarization between partisans, as recently in 2023 parliament elections (see Kawecki, 2022; Kawecki & Kekkonen, 2024; Kekkonen et. al., 2024). While these studies did not strictly analyze the horizontal affective polarization, it would make little sense to replicate the same indices with nearly similar set of data from same elections, as vertical and horizontal affective polarization are highly correlated. The second reason is that we are unable to capture the in-party effect required for affective polarization indices, as FIRIPO's data does not have a variable relating to feeling close to a certain party. Third, and the most significant reason is that we are not interested of aggregated level of affective polarization between Finnish voters, but the effect that individual values have to the affective evaluations of other parties' supporters. This effect is already being captured by simple thermometer rating, which is a sufficient and adequate metric for estimating the level of favoritism and resentment. Further, respondents vote choice is sufficient indicator for at least some level of party identification, given that this identification is more lenient and diverse in multi-party systems.

4.4.2 Independent variables

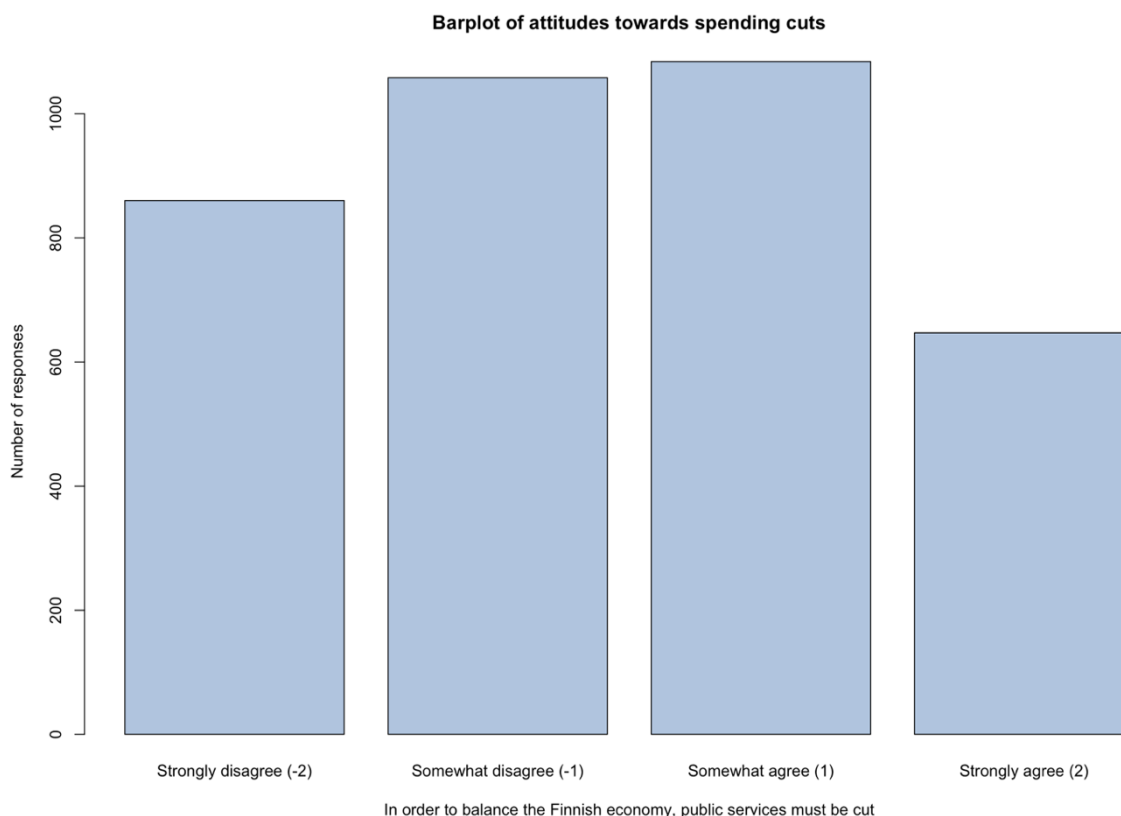
My multiple linear regression models have three distinct independent variables: economic attitude, immigration attitude and attitude towards gender minority rights. Next, I will go over operationalization of these variables, starting with economic attitudes. The multiple linear regression models presented in this thesis do not include the "I don't know" answers. When assessing the effect of certain attitudes, having no attitude or being unaware of their attitude makes little sense. Respondent might not have heard of transgender legislation reform, they are not sure if cuts in public spending are the right way to balance the economy, or they don't feel comfortable about sharing their immigration attitudes. The overall amount of "I don't know" -answers was 662, where 368 deleted *I don't know* answers were discarded from gender minority rights attitude, 145 from economic, and 149 from immigration respectively. Models with discarded "I don't know" answers included in models can be found in Appendix 3. The differences between models are compared in chapter 5.5.

4.4.3 Economic attitude

Respondents' view on budget cuts as a means of balancing Finland's national economy was inquired with following question: "How do you feel about the following statements about current political issues? – In order to balance the Finnish economy, public services must be cut." This variable ranges from one to four, where one represents "Strongly agree", two "somewhat agree", three "somewhat disagree", and four "strongly disagree" and five "I don't know". This variable was recoded to range from -2 to 2, where positive values represented "somewhat agree" (+1) and "strongly agree" (+2), and negative values -2 and -1 represented "strongly disagree" and "somewhat disagree". The total number of observations for economic attitude was 3 649.

In figure 10. we can see the distribution of attitudes towards cuts in public spending. Majority of respondents were somewhat modest towards spending cuts, as 29.7 % of respondents somewhat agreed and ~29 % somewhat disagreed. The difference between strongly disagree (23.6%) and strongly agree (17.7%) is noticeable.

Figure 10. Barplot of economic attitude

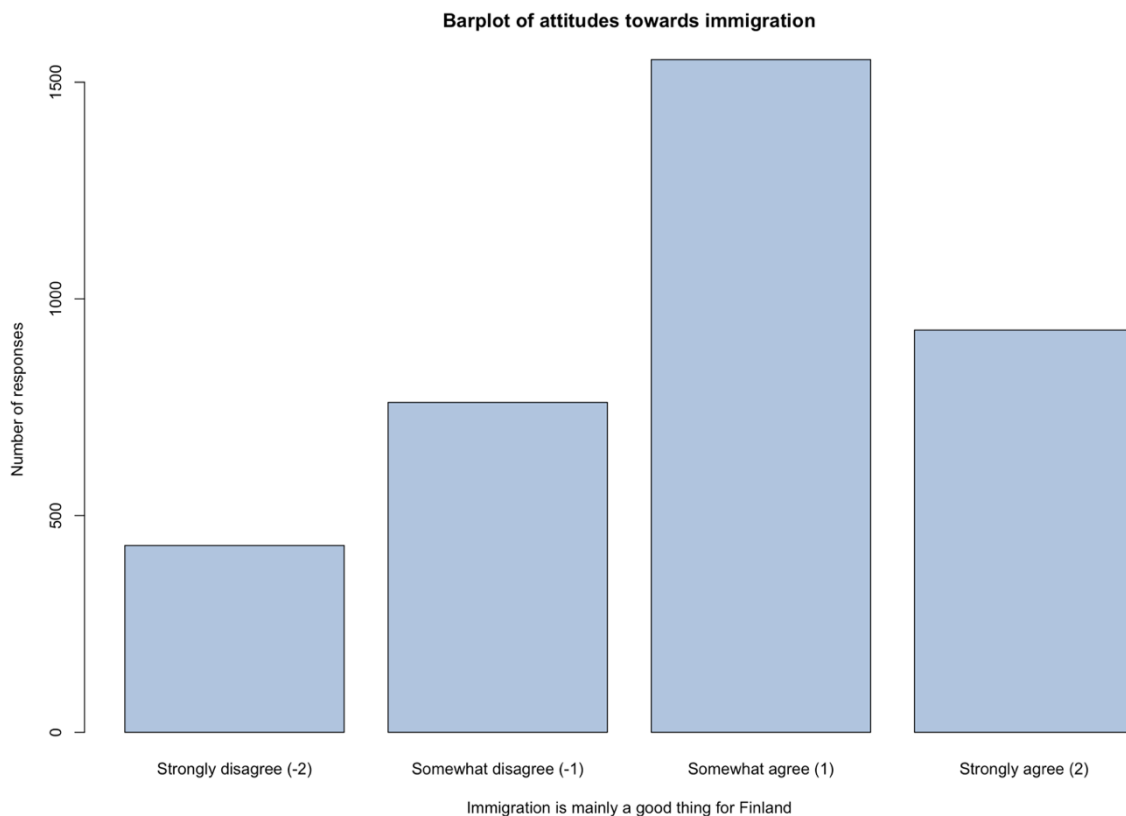


4.4.4 Immigration attitude

Second independent variable in my analysis asked respondents of their view towards immigration in Finland. Respondents' view on immigration was inquired with following question: "How do you feel about the following statements about current political issues – Immigration is mainly a good thing for Finland." This statement was recoded identically with economic variable, where negative -2 and -1 represent "strongly disagree" and "somewhat disagree" and positive values 1 and 2 "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree". The total number of observations in immigration variable was 3 672.

Figure 11. shows the distribution of immigration attitudes. Majority of respondents were at least somewhat supportive of immigration, as somewhat and strongly agree responses make around 68 % of share of answers. In contrast only 20.7 % somewhat disagreed and mere 11.7 % strongly disagreed. Based on the results here, we should anticipate that the anti-immigration sentiments should be limited to a very specific group of voters.

Figure 11. Barplot of gender minority rights attitude



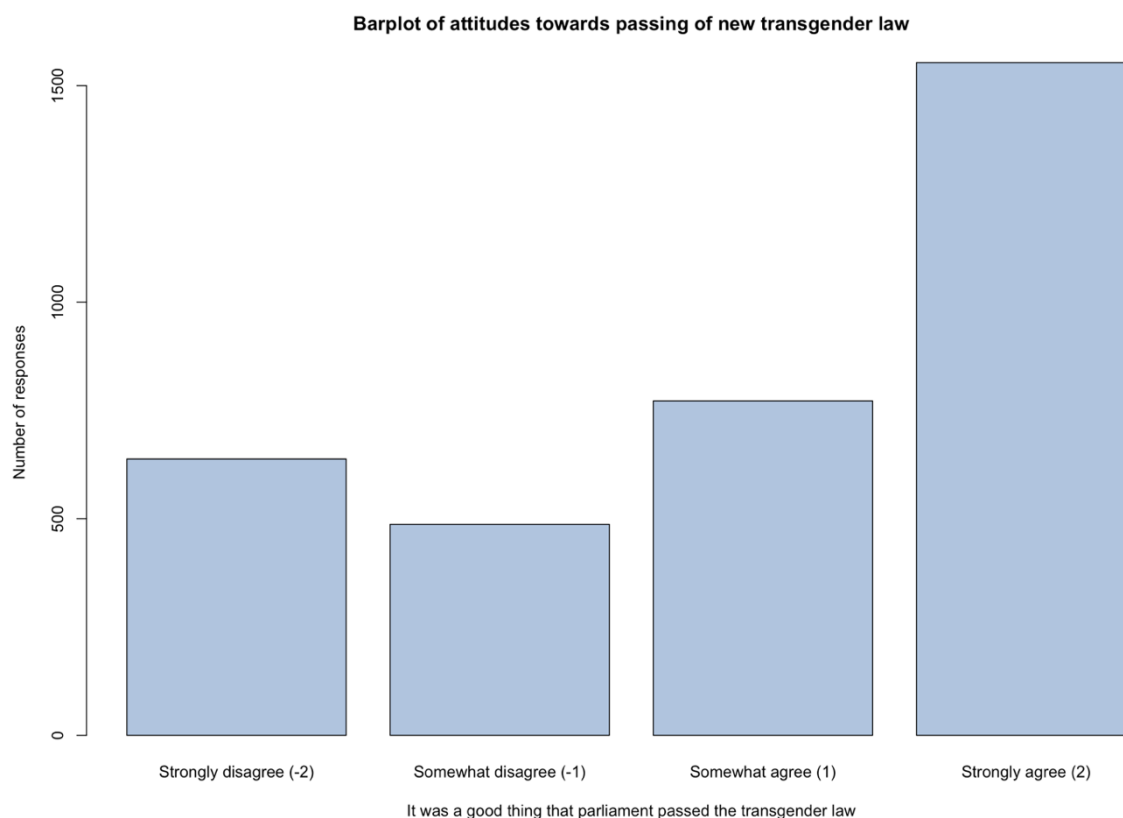
4.4.5 Gender minority rights attitude

The third independent variable in my analysis aims to capture the pro- and anti- LGBTQIA+ sentiments among electorate, which I believe would reflect the larger Liberal–Conservative cleavage in Finland. Question inquiring respondents view towards translegislation reform was asked in following way: *”How do you feel about the following statements about current political issues – It was a good thing that the parliament passed the transgender law.”* This variable was coded identically with economic and immigration variables, where -2 represents the *”strongly disagree”*, -1 *”somewhat disagree”*, and positive values one and two *”somewhat agree”* and *”strongly agree”* respectively.” Total number of observations in gender minority rights attitude was 3 450.

Figure 12. shows the distribution of attitudes towards transgender legislation reform. Interestingly, translegislation reform had more *”strongly disagree”* responses (18.5 %) than *”somewhat disagree”* (14.1 %) which makes it a unique variable compared to others. Similarly, *”strongly agree”* makes 45 % of all answers, having the largest share of responses

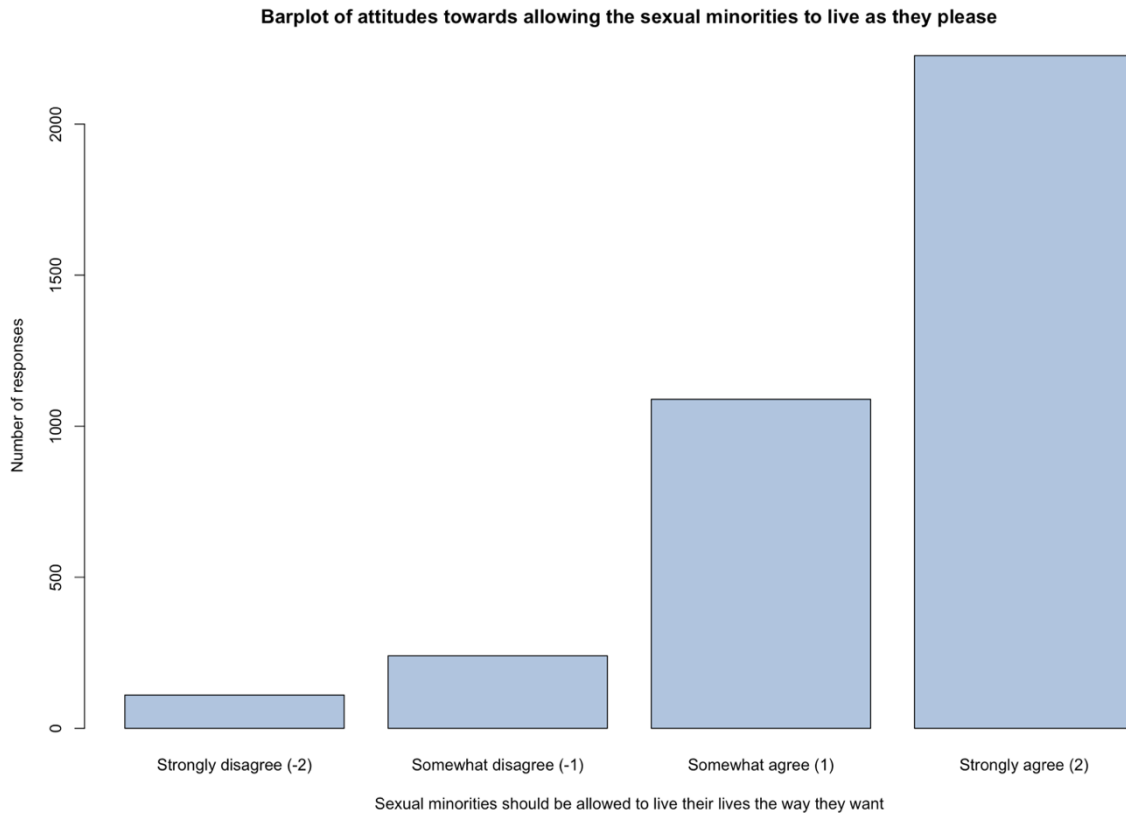
than any other strongly disagree or agree option among attitudes. The share of "somewhat agree" responses was 22.4 %. These distribution highlight the polarizing effect that gender minority rights may have among citizens.

Figure 12. Barplot of gender minority rights attitude



It could be argued that when trying to assess the polarizing effect of LGBTQIA+ rights, attitudes towards rights of sexual minorities should be part of the analysis. For the sake of contrast, Figure 13. shows the distribution of attitudes towards rights of sexual minorities. Question regarding sexual minorities rights was stated as " *How do you feel about the following statements about current political issues – Sexual minorities should be allowed to live their lives the way they please*".

Figure 13. Barplot of attitudes towards sexual minority rights



Evidently respondents were in strong favor of allowing sexual minorities to live as they want, as “*strongly agree*” constitutes 60.7 % of all answers, while “*somewhat agree*” responses almost makes up the remaining amount with 29.7 % share of all responses. This leaves the “*somewhat disagree*” (6.5 %) and “*strongly disagree*” (3 %) in clear minority. I argue that this question does not capture the respondents’ attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ rights issues, since allowing someone to live their lives the way they want is more a normative rather than attitudinal inquiry.

In contrast the translegislation reform does a better job at capturing skepticism of towards minority issues. There are plethora of explanations for this: for starters, it could be argued that gender minority rights are relatively new issue in Finland, while sexual minority rights have reached some sort of consensus among citizens, through decades of work from activists, politicians, NGOs and others. Notably, the share of men supporting rights of sexual minorities in Finland has decreased when the term “gender minority” was introduced in FNES questionnaires (Isotalo et.al., 2024a: 262). It is also possible that dissatisfaction with the

reform stems from disappointment due to its inadequacy. Unfortunately, capturing this possibility is out of scope of this master's thesis, as FIRIPO's data does not ask to specify, why respondent would not show support towards the reform.

Figure 14. Correlation matrix of individual attitudes

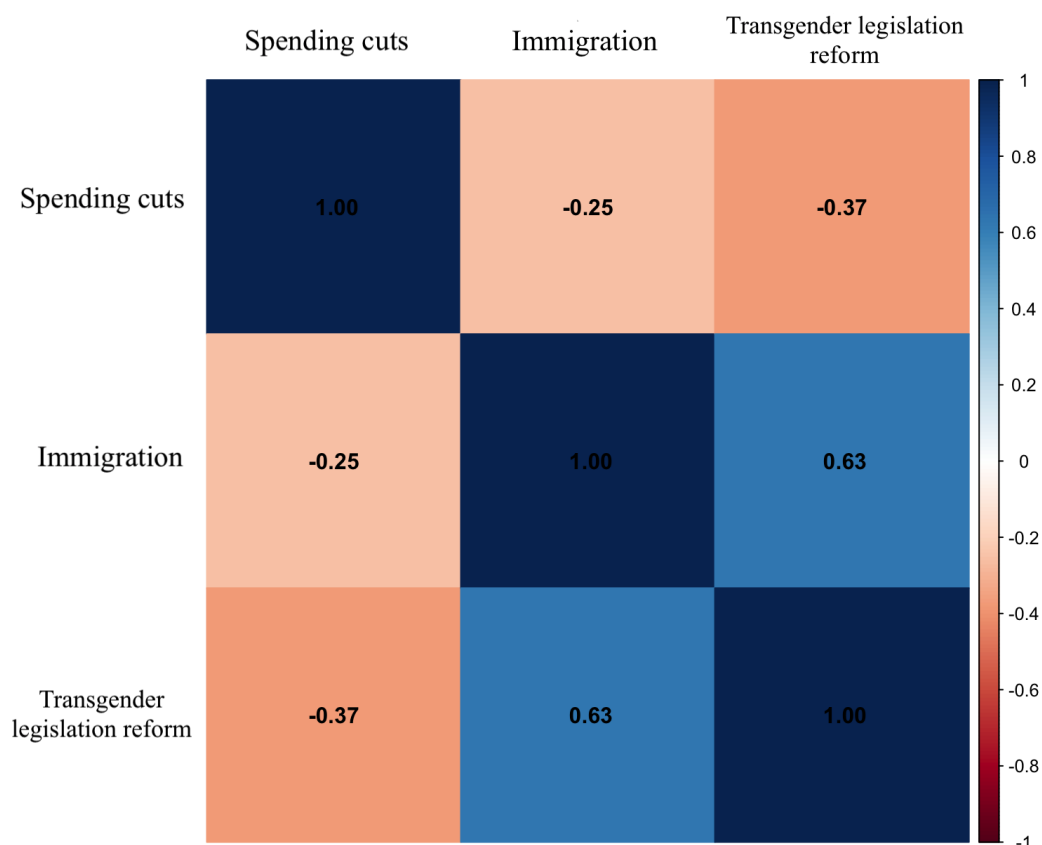


Figure 14. shows correlation matrix of independent variables. There is quite a bit of positive correlation between immigration and gender minority rights attitudes. This is unfortunately common in social scientific research, as personal value systems tend form a cohesive system, as discussed in earlier chapters. However, this did not cause multicollinearity issues that could distort the analysis (see chapter 5.5.). Interestingly, correlation matrix shows moderate negative correlation between attitudes towards spending cuts and immigration and transgender legislation reform.

4.4.6 Vote choice

My analysis consists of eight distinct multiple linear models, where each partisan groups feeling thermometer score is the dependent variable, and respondents vote choice is used to control for the effect of vote choice. When assessing the affective polarization levels towards supporters of SDP, their model has SDP supporters' feeling thermometer as dependent variable, and voting for SDP is used as reference group. This means that model shows the effect of vote choice in relation to voters of SDP. Table 2. shows the distribution of vote choice variable. Out of 4876 respondents 1293 did not report their vote choice in 2023 parliament elections. While the main data was collected pre-elections, presumably FIRIPO contacted respondents after elections to gather their choice of vote, reaching 3583 responses.

Table 2. Distribution of parties voted in 2023 parliament elections

Party	N
NCP	729
SDP	718
Finns Party	583
Greens	458
Left Alliance	432
Centre Party	224
SPP	174
CD	102
Other	163
Total	3583
Missing	1293

The category "Other" is not used as a formal part of analysis, as it bundles up all the minority parties in Finland, such as Movement Now, Feminist party or Pirate Party. This makes vote choice ideologically incoherent, yet these responses affect all other results, so they are included in models. It could be argued that Movement Now should be included as a part of formal analysis, but only 58 respondents declared that they voted for the party. This makes it questionable to reliably draw conclusions on such a small sample size, as the limit of a large sample size is often considered as 100 observations (Healey, 2015: 147).

4.4.7 Control variables

Multiple linear regression models aim to control for the effect of common sociodemographic variables, such as respondents age, gender, level of education and in Finnish context, language (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). To start off, age is treated here as a continuous variable, ranging from 17 to 92, with respondents mean age being 50.24. Gender variable is operationalized as a dummy, where 0 equals men and 1 equals women, meaning that men will be used as a reference category. Unfortunately this dataset does not include other gender options than binary men or women. This is common in survey design, but for the sake of my analysis it would have been interesting to see, how identifying as gender minority interacts with translegislation reform. Share of men and women in my data is relatively balanced, containing 2517 respondents who reported their gender as men, and 2283 women (total number of observations being 4800).

Models also control for respondents' level of education. Education is operationalized as a three level variable, where first level refers to basic education (peruskoulu), second to secondary education (toinen aste), including both gymnasium (lukio) and vocational education (ammattillinen koulutus). Highest level of education is simply tertiary education (kolmannen asteen koulutus), referring to any education past the secondary education (such as bachelor's or master's degree, phd. and so on). Final control variable is respondents language. Finland is a bilingual country, where people speaking Swedish makes around 5.2 percentage of population. More importantly, The Swedish People's Party (SPP) is the dominant ethnical party advocating for Swedish speaking minority's right in politics. Language variable was operationalized as dummy, where 0 means that respondents language is Finnish, and 1 Swedish.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of control variables

	Mean (sd.)	Min/Max	N
Gender	0.48 (0.5)	0/1	4800
Age	50.24 (18)	17/92	4870
Language	0.06 (0.24)	0/1	4876
Education	Share	%	4858
Primary	274	5.64	
Secondary	2102	43.27	
Tertiary	2482	51.09	

Table 4. Multiple linear regression models

	Left All.	SDP	Greens	Centre Party	SPP	NCP	CD	Finns Party
Constant	73.779*** (2.758)	70.664*** (2.274)	66.559*** (2.654)	71.053*** (2.735)	48.863*** (3.495)	73.923*** (2.389)	61.340*** (3.248)	74.381*** (2.041)
Economic attitude	-3.776*** (0.414)	-1.198*** (0.385)	-1.799*** (0.422)	3.720*** (0.442)	2.636*** (0.419)	5.565*** (0.401)	2.915*** (0.451)	1.565*** (0.373)
Immigration attitude	1.498*** (0.515)	1.469*** (0.469)	3.275*** (0.519)	0.789 (0.528)	4.035*** (0.520)	0.469 (0.488)	0.781 (0.548)	-3.541*** (0.459)
Gender minority rights att.	3.569*** (0.435)	2.599*** (0.401)	5.525*** (0.435)	-1.499*** (0.444)	1.470*** (0.436)	-0.819*** (0.413)	-5.863*** (0.462)	-4.280*** (0.391)
		Left All.-11.901*** (1.961)	Left All.-12.097*** (2.525)	Left All.-30.787*** (2.651)	Left All.-14.752*** (3.417)	Left All.-43.096*** (2.260)	Left All.-42.447*** (3.246)	Left All.-41.949*** (2.330)
	SDP-16.420*** (2.140)	SDP-15.624*** (2.113)	SDP-26.473*** (2.078)	SDP-6.737*** (2.934)	SDP-28.747*** (1.683)	SDP-37.320*** (2.945)	SDP-42.479*** (1.852)	SDP-42.479*** (1.852)
	Greens-11.279*** (2.536)	Greens-14.093*** (1.979)	Greens-32.153*** (2.552)	Greens-5.232 (3.338)	Greens-28.887*** (2.155)	Greens-35.518*** (3.336)	Greens-42.311*** (2.306)	Greens-42.311*** (2.306)
	Centre Party 42.070*** (2.516)	Centre Party 33.978*** (1.852)	Centre Party 35.215*** (2.479)	Centre Party 11.633*** (3.208)	Centre Party 18.155*** (1.830)	Centre Party 26.518*** (2.986)	Centre Party 30.369*** (1.913)	Centre Party 30.369*** (1.913)
	SPP-30.609*** (3.588)	SPP-19.490*** (2.863)	SPP-22.622*** (3.445)	SPP-26.276*** (3.460)	SPP-16.253*** (2.959)	SPP-38.106*** (4.063)	SPP-39.253*** (2.973)	SPP-39.253*** (2.973)
	NCP-46.202*** (2.361)	NCP-32.786*** (1.586)	NCP-25.422*** (2.250)	NCP-23.479*** (1.929)	NCP-8.387*** (2.969)	NCP-22.820*** (2.777)	NCP-22.361*** (1.704)	NCP-22.361*** (1.704)
	CD-36.096*** (3.246)	CD-25.875*** (2.783)	CD-26.997*** (3.287)	CD-18.884*** (2.975)	CD-2.725 (3.924)	CD-14.542*** (2.698)	CD-12.232*** (2.394)	CD-12.232*** (2.394)
	Finns Party-43.919*** (2.595)	Finns Party-38.951*** (1.864)	Finns Party-36.544*** (2.547)	Finns Party-28.552*** (2.119)	Finns Party-19.682*** (3.208)	Finns Party-18.280*** (1.783)	Finns Party-25.743*** (2.751)	Finns Party-25.743*** (2.751)
Other parties	36.737*** (2.993)	32.187*** (2.367)	23.870*** (2.989)	34.392*** (2.877)	14.047*** (3.654)	29.083*** (2.509)	30.388*** (3.482)	29.430*** (2.295)
Age	-0.018 (0.029)	0.123*** (0.027)	-0.049* (0.029)	0.084*** (0.031)	0.162*** (0.030)	0.033 (0.028)	0.250*** (0.032)	0.034 (0.026)
Gender	3.270*** (1.055)	2.327*** (0.979)	3.633*** (1.064)	1.865* (1.101)	2.050* (1.072)	1.145 (1.018)	4.941*** (1.137)	-0.336 (0.944)
Education lower	0.029 (1.363)	0.097 (1.281)	-0.990 (1.366)	-0.800 (1.439)	4.081*** (1.402)	0.152 (1.342)	-0.073 (1.496)	-3.356*** (1.255)
Education higher	0.412 (1.529)	-1.256 (1.431)	3.567*** (1.546)	-1.407 (1.607)	6.649*** (1.577)	2.393 (1.498)	0.031 (1.670)	-6.337*** (1.400)
Language	3.901 (2.502)	1.444 (2.266)	0.881 (2.459)	3.260 (2.559)	17.714*** (2.352)	1.032 (2.370)	11.455*** (2.691)	3.490 (2.194)
Observations	1,998	1,916	1,996	1,845	1,782	1,961	1,912	2,056
Adj. R ²	0.552	0.502	0.526	0.246	0.331	0.451	0.390	0.628
Residual Std. Error	20.324 (df = 1981)	18.104 (df = 1899)	20.389 (df = 1979)	20.400 (df = 1828)	19.438 (df = 1765)	19.474 (df = 1944)	21.516 (df = 1895)	18.470 (df = 2039)
F-Statistic	155.046*** (df = 16; 1981)	121.420*** (df = 16; 1899)	139.539*** (df = 16; 1979)	38.519*** (df = 16; 1828)	56.081*** (df = 16; 1765)	101.612*** (df = 16; 1944)	77.243*** (df = 16; 1895)	217.371*** (df = 16; 2039)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

5 Findings

Table 4. includes the results of multiple linear regressions for each parliament party's supporters' thermometer evaluations. The general trend in Table 4. is that all independent variables had a strong statistical relationship with dependent variable, shown in large amounts of statistically significant results with p-value <0.01. However, the independent effect of vote choice is larger than attitudinal variables. What follows is the overview of each attitude variable, accompanied by figures which display the changes that attitude has on thermometer evaluation, when all other variables are held at their survey weighted mean values. This is followed by throughout analysis of vote choice variable, and control variables. The performance of models and some robustness checks are performed after overviewing results. Chapter 5. ends to a discussion chapter of substantial findings and on evaluation of cleavage perspective to affective polarization research.

5.1 Economic attitudes

Attitudes towards cuts in public spending were statistically significant in every model, suggesting that feelings towards supporters of each party is related to individuals' economic attitudes over austerity politics. Regression coefficients reflect the red-green and right-wing blocs of Finnish politics: Supporters of red–green parties Left Alliance, SDP and Greens, had a negative relationship with economic attitude, meaning that support towards spending cuts is a strong predictor of negative evaluations of these parties' supporters. Conversely, economic attitude predicted positive evaluations of supporters of Centre, SPP, NCP, CD and Finns Party. Evaluations of NCP supporters had the highest regression coefficient in economic attitude [5.565*** (0.401)], suggesting that pro-austerity attitudes and evaluations of NCP voters go hand in hand. In contrast, the lowest coefficient was found in Left Alliance supporters' model [−3.776*** (0.414)].

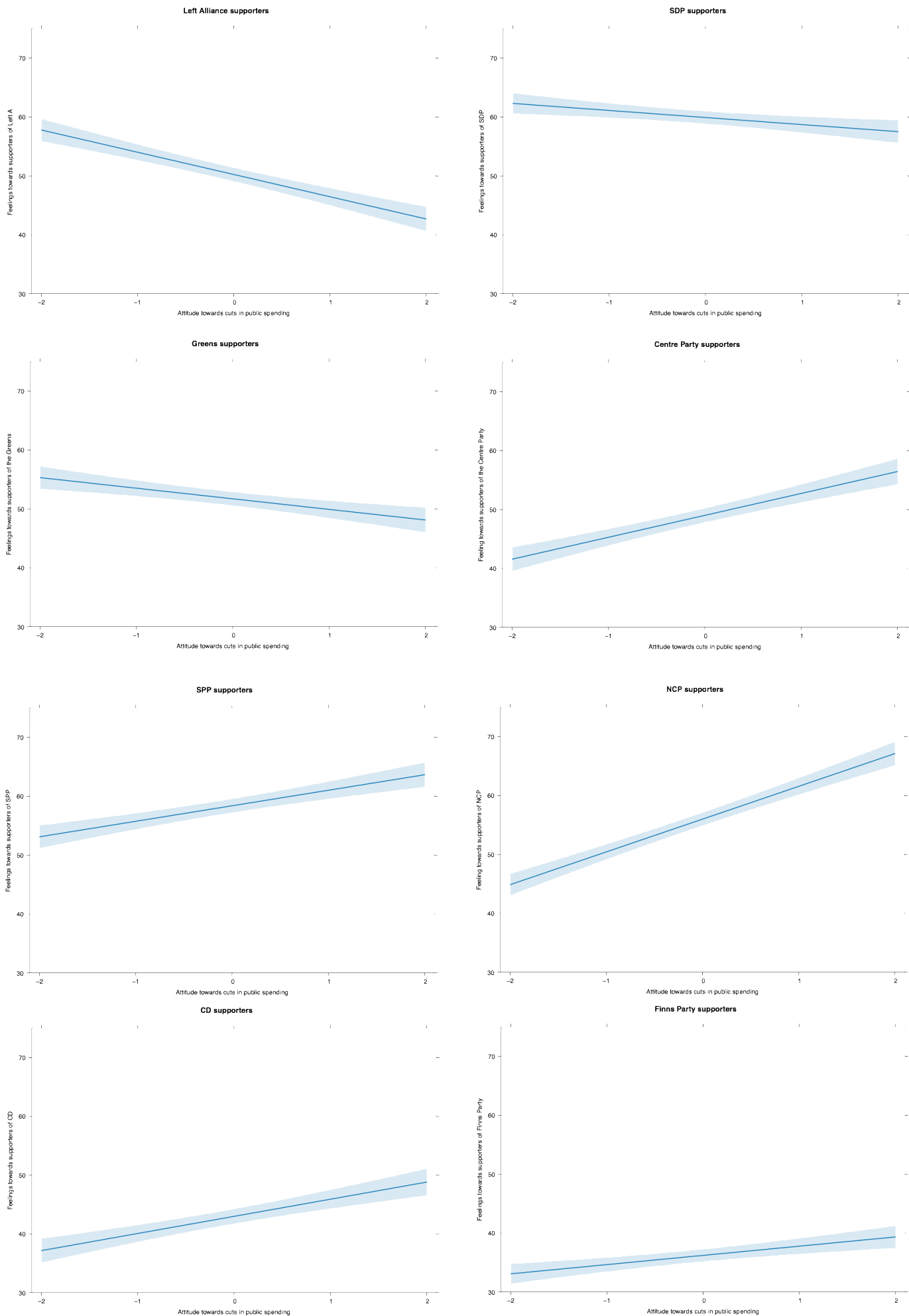
The gap between evaluations of Left Alliance, SDP and Greens supporters in economic attitude is substantial compared to all remaining parties. One way of interpreting this is that red–green parties of Marin's government are strongly associated to Finland's increasing national debt, contradicting with pro-austerity attitudes. However, closest to red-green bloc is surprisingly Finns Party, as economic attitude predicts only modest increase in evaluations

[1.565*** (0.373)]. Apparently, the Finns Party's "fiscal conservative" approach to economic policies in 2023 did not translate to voter level, and party is still first-and foremost an anti-immigration party, reflected in high negative coefficient at immigration attitude [-3.541*** (0.459)]. The supporters of remaining party in Marin's government is the Centre Party. As stated, economic policies of Centre Party voters are closer to other right-wing parties (cf. Isotalo & Rapeli, 2024: 320), and this is reflected in second highest coefficient in economic attitude [3.720*** (0.442)].

Figure 15. shows the predicted value of each party's supporter's thermometer score, with each step on economic attitude when all other variables all held in their survey weighted mean values. These figures are perhaps the best way to illustrate, how salient issue of cuts in public spending shape evaluations of partisans. Beginning with highest and lowest predicted values of regression analysis, NCP supporters have slightly higher baseline compared to Left Alliance. Supporting austerity policies predicts substantially higher thermometer evaluations to NCP supporters, when compared to effect that negative attitudes towards spending cuts have on Left Alliance supporters thermometer. This trend is visible in all other plots, as pro-austerity attitudes appear to have stronger effect on right-wing parties, compared to effect of negative attitudes of austerity politics have on red-green bloc.

Figure 15. also show, what is the baseline of economic attitudes and thermometer evaluations. Baseline can be interpreted as the hypothetical zero value in X-axis, and lowest baselines can be found in CD and Finns Party supporters thermometer predictions. Changes in economic attitudes appear to have a rather minor effect on predicted evaluations in both cases. Only other prediction that predicts less than 50-degrees on thermometer on its baseline is the Centre Party supporters plot. That said, the baseline prediction is not much higher for Left Alliance and the Greens supporters either. Interestingly SDP supporters have the highest baseline, as the predicted thermometer evaluation ~ 60 degrees, and moving to either direction seems to have a small overall effect. In contrast NCP supporters baseline is lower, but their prediction is highly affected by both positive and negative attitudes.

Figure 15. Effect of economic attitude to feeling thermometer evaluations



While it may be difficult to assess, what should be considered a substantial effect, we can characterize the effect of economic attitude in following way: based on the effect plots on Figure 15. the difference between “*strongly disagree*” and “*strongly agree*” responses predict < 10-degrees change in evaluations towards supporters of Left Alliance, Centre Party, NCP, and as a borderline case, CD. For supporters of SDP, Greens, SPP and Finns Party economic attitudes have weaker effect. As such, another important takeaway from economic attitudes impact on affective evaluations is that the effect is asymmetrical.

Results suggest that affective polarization is structured along the Left–Right economic cleavage. As the campaigning of 2023 parliament elections was so heavily invested in national economics, that the negative predictions of red-green parties could be explained by citizens blaming these parties for budget deficit – as Marin’s government did increase the public debt from 44 % to 52 % (Kestilä-Kekkonen et.al., 2024). Further, when assessing the effect of economic attitude independently, pro-austerity attitudes clearly favor right-wing conservative parties’ supporters, and SPP. Effect plots in Figure 15. also highlight the difference of baseline evaluations, where both CD and Finns Party supporters are seen in negative light, despite the increases that economic attitude creates. In sum the initial assumption presented in H1 – attitudes towards spending cut’s predict higher evaluations of right-wing parties, and lower to red–green parties – seems to gain support.

5.2 Immigration attitude

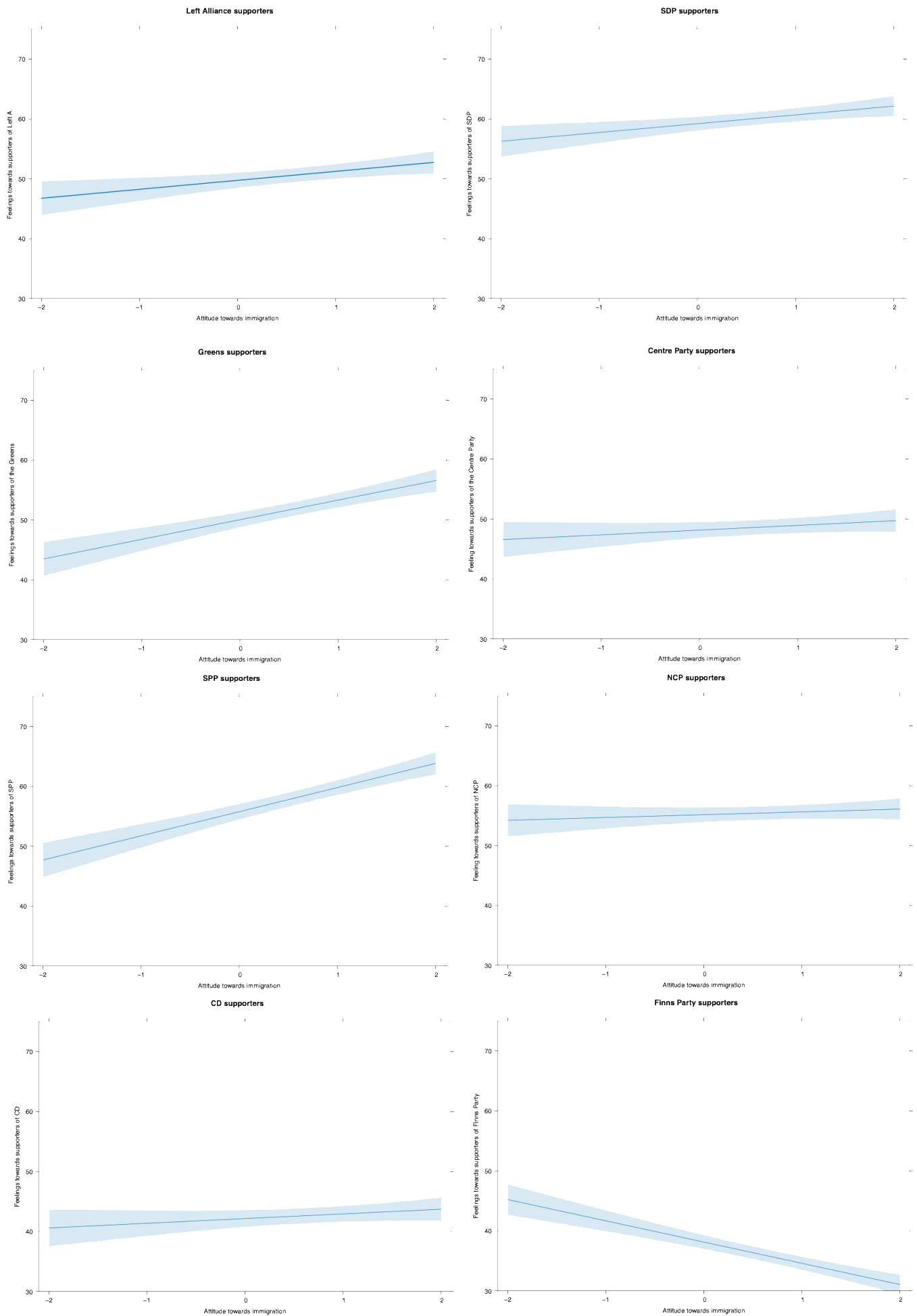
First off, Finns Party supporters are only ones gaining negative coefficient [−3.541*** (0.459)] in immigration attitude, meaning that pro-immigration attitudes predict negative evaluations of Finns party supporters. This is not surprising, given that Finns Party is the dominant anti-immigration movement in Finland. Interesting detail in immigration attitudes is the amount of statistically insignificant results: in Centre Party, NCP and CD supporters models, immigration attitudes have statistically non-significant relationship to feeling thermometer evaluations. This suggests that evaluations of those parties’ supporters are not linked in immigration attitudes – After all, it might be difficult for voters to assess the immigration stances of right-wing partisans, whose ideology does not clearly signal pro- or anti-immigration sentiments.

For the rest of the parties, immigration attitude had a positive and statistically significant coefficient in all models. Highest positive coefficient was in SPP supporters model, [4.035*** (0.520)] and second highest in Greens [3.275*** (0.519)]. Left Alliance's [1.498*** (0.515)] and SDP's [1.469*** (0.469)] supporters receive lower predictions in immigration attitude, compared to their partners in liberal-left. Notably, both Left Alliance and SPP are prominent working-class movements in Finland, so immigration attitudes may not be linked to their supporters.

Figure 17. shows the effect of immigration attitude on parties' supporters thermometer evaluations, when holding other variables on their survey weighted mean values. In contrast to economic attitude, immigration attitude has fewer substantial effects: Only for supporters of Greens, SPP and Finns Party, the impact is considerable, as changes from one end to another signifies over 10-degrees change in thermometer. As seen in Figure 17. positive immigration attitude has a major impact on Finns Party supporters evaluations, predicting near 15-degrees change from strongest anti-immigration sentiment to strongest pro-immigration. In contrast pro-immigration attitudes predict substantially more positive evaluations of Greens and SPP supporters. For Left Alliance and SDP supporters the effect is marginal, yet positive. Similarly to statistically non-significant results in table 4., immigration attitudes have virtually no effect to evaluation of Centre Party's, NCP's or CD's supporters.

Main take-away of immigration attitude is that affective polarization is structured along Liberal–Conservative value cleavage, where pro-immigration attitudes predict positive evaluations of supporters of liberal-left: SPP, Greens, SDP and Left Alliance. Other side of this value cleavage is made solely by negative affection towards Finns Party's supporters. Figure 17. shows that the effect of immigration attitudes is mainly centered towards parties that have traditionally been very active on immigration debate – Finns Party, Greens and SPP. For every other party, the effect that immigration attitude has is subtle. Results presented here align with H2, since immigration attitude did predict higher evaluations of liberal parties, and overwhelmingly negative towards conservative voters Finns Party. The statistical non-significance of supporters of other right–wing conservatives show how immigration policies are concentrated on Finns Party and their supporters, but it presents mixed evidence in support of H2_b.

Figure 16. Immigration attitude and predicted evaluation of parties' supporters



5.3 Gender minority rights attitude

Gender minority right attitude was statistically significant at the <0.01 confidence level in every model, except in NCP's supporters' model (<0.05). This means that attitudes towards transgender legislation was able to predict affective polarization among Finnish partisans. In fact, the attitudes towards transgender legislation reform had the highest dispersion among all attitudes. This would suggest that as a new salient issue, gender minority rights are indeed polarizing topic in contemporary Finland.

Gender minority rights attitude predicts strongest affective polarization towards CD and Finns Party supporters, since both groups received very low predicted evaluations. In fact, the gender minority rights attitude predicts the single lowest evaluation of CD supporters $[-5.863^{***}(0.462)]$ than any other attitudinal variable in all models. CD supporters low coefficient is followed by Finns Party supporters $[-4.280^{***} (0.391)]$, leading to a gap between other negative predictions. Pro-gender minority attitudes predict relatively low effect on evaluations of Centre Party's $[-1.499^{***} (0.444)]$ and NCP $[-0.819^{**} (0.413)]$ supporters as well.

These findings are in line with earlier literature, as in general CD voters exhibit more extreme attitudes towards importance of Christian values and the status of sexual minorities in society, while Finns Party supporters are particularly critical of immigration and environmental protection (Grönlund & Söderlund, 2024: 112). These attitudes are translated to affective evaluations, where supporters of CD and Finns Party are seen as the primary foes of advancing gender minorities status and rights in Finland. Indeed, the strongest opponents of transgender legislation reform were the CD's and Finns Party's representatives, suggesting that citizens are aware of parties' position on these issues, and judge their supporters accordingly.

Earlier it was speculated that NCP supporters might receive positive scores as reform was only able to succeed with the help of NCP representatives. This assumption turned out to be somewhat true: While gender minority rights attitude predicts negative evaluations of NCP supporters, this coefficient is still substantially higher than other parties among right-wing conservative bloc. Closest neighbors of NCP are SPP and Centre Party supporters. Combining this result with the result of immigration attitude, it appears that NCP supporters are seen in

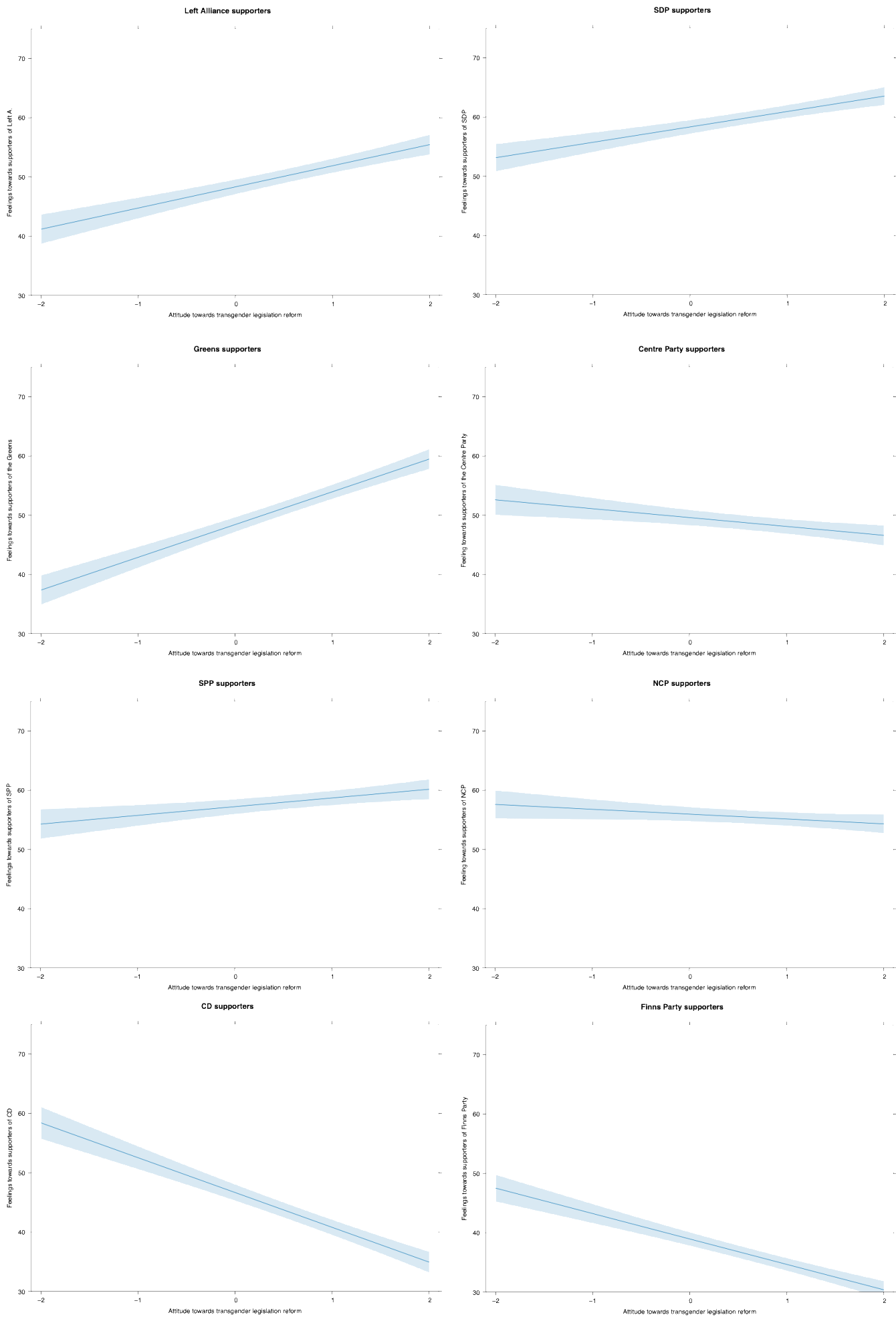
more moderate light than other bloc members. This may highlight the general center–right alignment of NCP voters (cf. Isotalo & Rapeli, 2024: 323).

Attitudes towards transgender legislation reform predicts substantially higher evaluations of Greens supporters [5.525*** (0.435)], followed by other liberal–left parties, closest being Left Alliance [3.569*** (0.435)] and SDP [3.569*** (0.435)] supporters, while there is a conspicuous to SPP supporters [1.470*** (0.436)]. The very low coefficients of CD and Finns Party supporters it met with high predicted thermometer evaluations of Greens and Left Alliances. This shows how the extreme ends of sociocultural dimension are strongly associated to salient sociocultural conflicts. That said, the predicted evaluation of SDP supporters is practically indistinguishable from Left Alliance supporters, meaning that pro-LGBTQIA+ attitudes show strong support towards red–green bloc in general. Perhaps this is the reason why SPP supporters that are outside the red–green bloc gain lower evaluation.

Figure 17. shows the impact of gender minority rights attitude on predicted evaluations of parties' supporters, when all other variables are held at their survey weighted mean values. Using the same metric of substantial change as <10-degrees change in evaluation, this attitude has a major impact: For starters, out of eight groups of supporters, gender minority rights attitude has substantial effect on evaluations of Left Alliance, SDP, Greens, CD, and Finns Party supporters. By far, the largest changes are seen in supporters of Greens and CD, which are practically opposites of each other. The predicted positive evaluations drop over 20 degrees when moving from one end to another. For Greens supporters, this signals high antipathy from Conservative side of value cleavage, while the opposite is true from CD supporters. Notably, the predicted values for Finns Party supporters is not far from CD, the only difference being the substantially lower baseline.

Similar pattern characterizes other parties in Liberal–Conservative value cleavage: Left Alliances and SDP supporters benefit from pro-gender minority rights attitudes, whereas Centre Party and NCP supporters gain negative evaluations. Yet, these changes are not too large. SPP supporters effect plot shows how already high baseline is not really affected from either end of this attitude.

Figure 17. Gender minority rights attitude and predicted evaluation of supporters



Again, the figure 17 shows how Liberal–Conservative value cleavage is tied to individual attitudes, and these have profound impact on affective evaluations of other parties’ supporters. From purely electoral viewpoint, the transgender legislation reform initiated by Marin’s government tied the liberal–left bloc’s supporters positively to gender minority attitudes. While it was speculated that Centre Party supporters might suffer drastically from negative evaluations in gender minority attitude, this effect appears to be only minor when compared to opposition parties’ supporters, especially on CD and Finns Party supporters. In the end, the gain that SPP supporters get, and NCP supporters lose in thermometer evaluations is minor, so this effect appears to be concentrated towards supporters of key parties in Liberal–Conservative value cleavage: Greens, Left Alliance, Finns Party, and CD.

These results suggest that affective polarization among Finnish voters is structured along Liberal–Conservative cleavage, especially in attitudes towards gender minority rights. In contrast to immigration attitude, gender minority rights attitude creates a much clearer divide in evaluations: the liberal side of this cleavage consists of liberal-left parties’ supporters of Marin’s government coalition, except the Centre Party supporters, who are situated firmly among other right-wing conservatives. Results presented here reflect both the government–opposition structure, and the Liberal–Conservative value cleavage of Finnish politics. Evaluations of Left Alliance, SDP, Greens, and SPP supporters’ evaluations are all positively correlated with pro-gender minority rights attitudes, while the exact opposite is true for Centre Party and opposition parties’ supporters (NCP, Finns Party and CD).

5.4 Vote choice

Respondents vote choice in 2023 parliament election was a major source of affective polarization. Only model where vote choice had no statistically significant relationship with dependent variable was in SPP supporters model, where voting for either Greens or CD had no-statistically significant relationship. This suggests that affective polarization is indeed connected to vote choice.

In contrast to other independent variables, I summarize the findings of vote choice variable by bloc basis, starting with liberal–left (Left A., SDP, Greens and SPP) followed by right–wing conservative bloc (NCP, Centre P., CD and Finns P.). Recall that the vote choice variable uses evaluations of party’s supporters as a reference category, meaning that no matter how close

and friendly parties are with each other, the regression coefficient is always negative. Therefore, the positive evaluations are the ones closer to 0, while lowest negative coefficients predict higher affective polarization.

5.4.1 Liberal–Left bloc

When considering the intra-bloc relations, it appears that liberal–left voters form rather unified bloc in thermometer evaluations: voters of Left Alliance, SDP, Greens, and SPP appear to all favor each other. Only exception here is the lower-than-average predicted evaluation of Left Alliance supporters from SPP voters, where their prediction is closer to Finnish right. This is presumably due economic differences.

What Table 4. highlights is the bloc structuration of Finnish politics: All right-wing conservative parties show resentment towards supporters red-green parties. The degree of affective polarization varies: The extremely low evaluation towards supporters of Left Alliance is predicted by voting either NCP [$-46.202^{***}(2.361)$] or Finns Party [$-43.919^{***}(2.595)$]. Voting for NCP predicts relatively negative the evaluation of SDP [$-32.786^{***}(1.580)$] and Greens [$-25.422^{***}(2.250)$] supporters, but they show especially positive evaluations SPP supporters [$-8.387^{***}(2.969)$].

The leading conservative voters in Finland – Centre Party, Finns Party and CD – show resentment towards liberal–left in a different degree: voting for CD predicts on-average more positive evaluations of liberal–left when compared to voters Centre Party, and especially Finns Party. Voting for CD predicts low evaluation of Left Alliance supporters [$-36.096^{***}(3.246)$], yet there is substantial increase in predicted valuations of SDP [$-25.875^{***}(2.783)$] and Greens [$-26.997^{***}(3.287)$] supporters. Voting for remaining conservative parties, Centre Party or Finns Party is a strong sign of affective polarization towards red–green parties: Voting for either Centre Party [$-42.070^{***}(2.546)$] and Finns Party [$-43.919^{***}(2.595)$] predicts highly critical thermometer evaluation of Left Alliance supporters. In similar fashion to NCP and CD vote, SDP supporters' evaluation is higher when voting for Centre Party [$-33.978^{***}(1.852)$] but the difference between Left Alliance and SDP supporters is minor when voting for Finns Party [$-38.951^{***}(1.864)$].

Figure 18. Effect of vote choice to evaluation of leftist-liberal parties' supporters

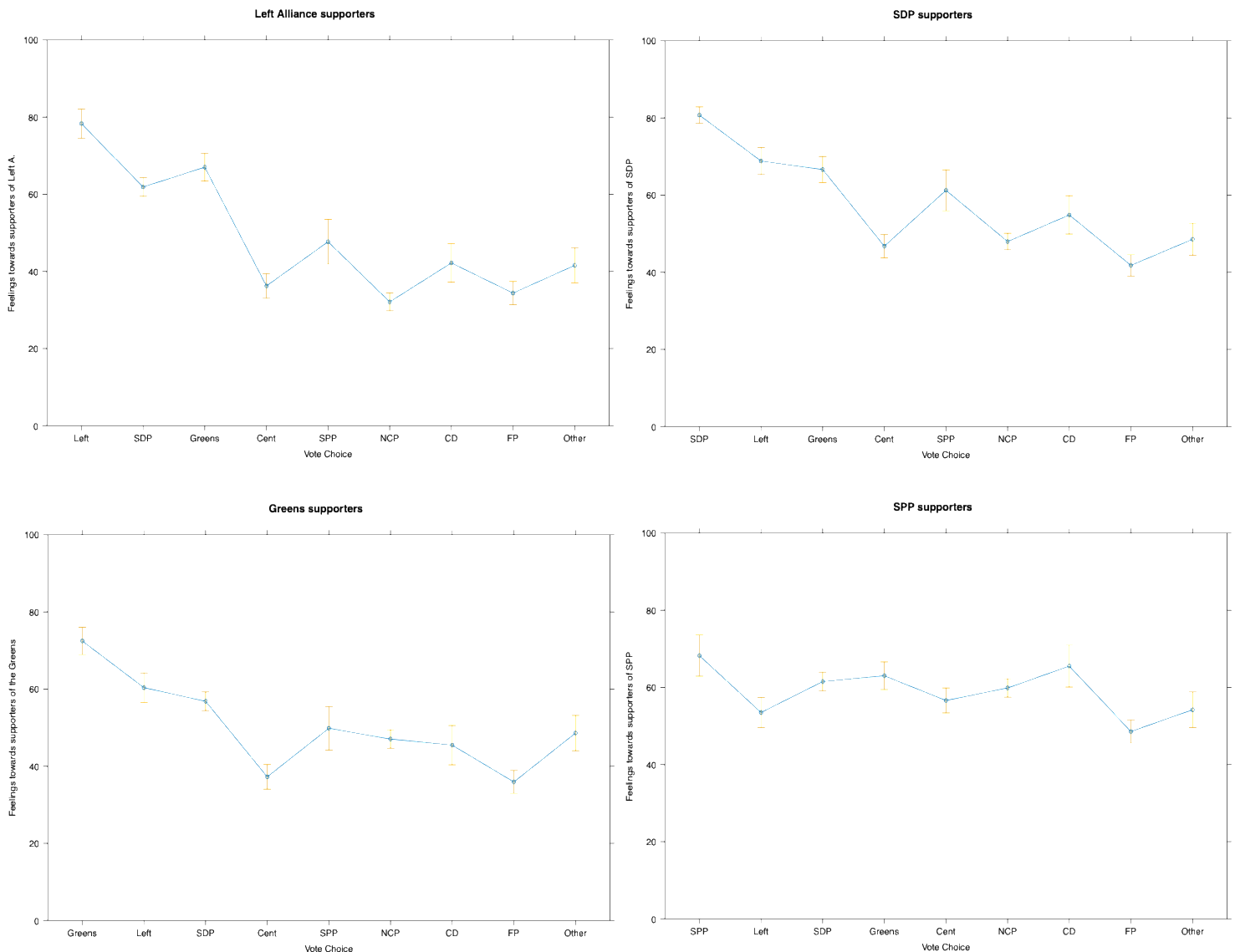


Figure 18. shows the effect that vote choice has on left-liberal parties' supporters when all other variables are held in their survey weighted mean values. The government-opposition structure is visible, as voting for any right-wing conservative party, has a clear negative effect. Both Left Alliance and Greens supporters gain a low predicted thermometer evaluation from all of these parties, only difference being the NCP vote, which predicts substantially lower feelings towards Left Alliance supporters than Greens. Red-green parties of Left Alliance, SDP and Greens have somewhat similar trend in their graphs, where there is an immediate drop in Centre Party vote. However, Greens and SPP supporters are able to rise from this slope but not supporters of Left Alliance or SDP.

Voting for Centre Party drags the thermometer evaluations below the average of right-wing conservative parties, and the difference to voting for Finns Party is marginal. Only SPP supporters seem to be immune to this resentment. In fact, voting for Centre Party predicts lower thermometer evaluation than voting for leading opposition party NCP in all cases, except for Left Alliance supporters. Another interesting detail of SPP supporters model is the relatively negative evaluation from Left Alliance voters: While the overall predicted value is not too low, the difference between voting for a party in Marin's coalition and opposition party Finns Party is marginal.

5.4.2 Right-wing conservative bloc

Unlike liberal-left, right-wing conservative bloc does not really show high positivity towards each other. Rather, their predicted evaluations are less-negative than evaluations of red-green parties' supporters. The coalition government that was formed after 2023 elections manifests in NCP supporters model, as voting for any party in current NCP-led government, SPP $[-16.253^{***}(2.959)]$, CD $[14.542^{***}(2.698)]$ or Finns Party $[-18.280^{***}(1.783)]$ predicts higher than average evaluations of NCP supporters. Single most negative evaluation of any supporter group in right-wing conservative bloc is the predicted evaluation that of voting for Left Alliance predicts toward supporters of NCP $[-43.096^{***}(2.260)]$. Voting for Greens $[-28.887^{***}(2.155)]$ or SDP $[-28.747^{***}(1.683)]$ has much more moderate effect.

Finns Party's model is arguably the most important model in my analysis, as it not only captures the signs of bloc politics, but it also shows how strong predictors sociocultural differences are in affective polarization. Voting for CD predicts the highest thermometer evaluations $[-12.232^{***}(2.394)]$ of Finns Party supporters thermometer, and this is most likely due sociocultural similarities. That said, voting for any conservative right-wing party predicted rather high thermometer evaluations from Finns Party's supporters, compared to any party in liberal-left. Among the three historically largest parties, voting for NCP predicts the best thermometer evaluation $[-22.361^{***}(1.704)]$, showing the early signs of NCP and Finns Party cooperation after 2023 elections. Voting for Centre Party is a predictor of relatively low evaluation of Finns Party supporter $[-30.369^{***}(1.913)]$ yet in a smaller degree than voting for any liberal-left party. This is could due the fact that Finns Party has challenged Centre Party's hegemony in rural areas of Finland.

The predicted evaluations of voting for any red–green parties are so close to each other, that it would be misleading to rank them, but the lowest prediction comes from voting for SDP $[-42.479^{***}(1.852)]$, followed by Greens' $[-42.311^{***}(2.306)]$ and Left Alliance $[-41.949^{***}(2.330)]$. Further, while SPP is currently in government with Finns Party, two parties contradict highly on sociocultural issues (Isotalo & Rapeli, 2024), and voting for SPP predicts large $[-39.253^{***}(2.973)]$ drop on thermometer.

Centre Party supporters appear to be in a difficult spot, as both government partners and opposition voters all show resentment towards supporters of Centre Party. Lowest scores come from Greens $[-32.153^{***}(2.552)]$ and Left Alliance $[-30.787^{***}(2.651)]$, and around equally from Finns Party $[-28.552^{***}(2.119)]$, SDP $[-26.473^{***}(2.078)]$, and SPP $[-26.276^{***}(3.460)]$ voters. Voting for NCP $[-23.479^{***}(1.929)]$ and CD $[-18.884^{***}(2.975)]$ predict most positive evaluations. In contrast to other parties examined so far, the highest score of -18.884 is relatively low, compared to lowest predictions in Left Alliance (Greens -11.279), SDP (Left Alliance -11.901) and Greens (Left Alliance -12.097) supporters models.

Predicted evaluation of CD's supporters align well with Liberal–Conservative cleavage. The CD voters' average evaluation among voters of red-green bloc is dismal, as voting for Left Alliance $[-42.447^{***}(3.364)]$, SDP $[-37.320^{***}(2.945)]$, Greens $[-35.518^{***}(3.336)]$ or SPP $[-38.106^{***}(4.063)]$ has strong independent effect on negative evaluations. Although, conservative side is not particularly keen on CD supporters either: Voting for NCP predicts the highest evaluations of CD's supporters $[-22.820^{***}(2.777)]$. Unsurprisingly voting for other traditional conservatist parties of Centre Party $[-26.518^{***}(2.986)]$ or Finns Party $[-25.743^{***}(2.751)]$ has relatively good effect on evaluation of CD's supporters.

Figure 19. Effect of vote choice to evaluation of right-wing conservative parties' supporters

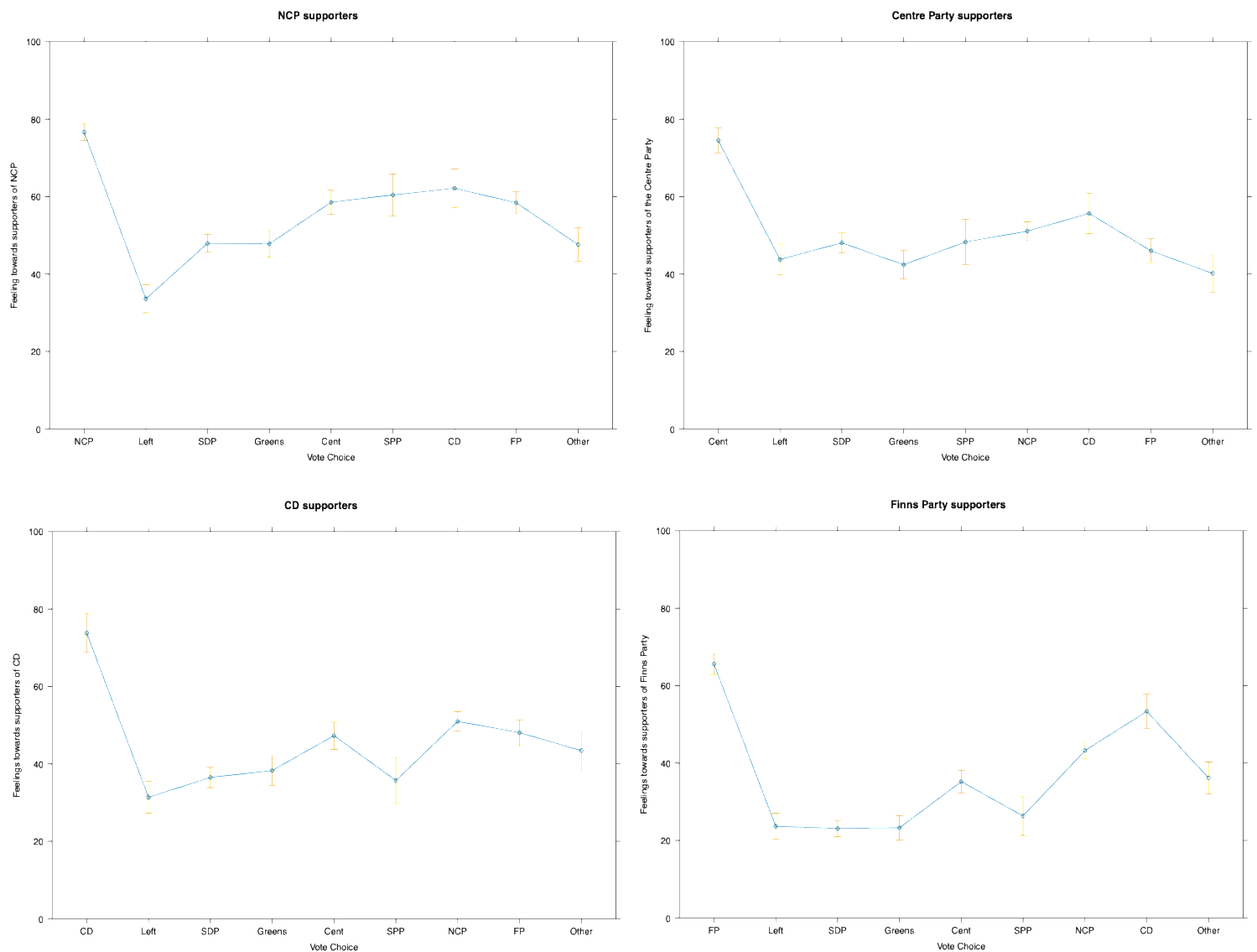


Figure 19. shows the effect that vote choice has on right-wing conservative parties' supporters when all other variables are held in their survey weighted mean values. For starters, all graphs look drastically different when compared to leftist-liberal parties in Figure 18. In one hand, the trends mirror it, since there is a steep drop right after reference group, but evaluations steadily rise when moving towards other right-wing conservatives. On the other hand, there is not a lot of changes between different sides; For instance, NCP supporters gain relatively stable positive trend in their evaluations, and affective polarization is clearly centered on Left

Alliance vote choice. Similarly, the Centre Party' supporters have somewhat stable trend, which constantly improves when moving away from red-green bloc.

When looking at the ideological extremes, the resentment that liberal-left parties show to supporters of CD and Finns Party is clear: Voting for either Left Alliance, SDP, Greens or SPP is a strong predictor of affective polarization. CD and Finns Party supporters graphs also show the bloc structuration of Finnish politics, since voting for Centre Party or NCP has relatively positive effect to evaluations when compared to other side of the political aisle.

What Figure 19 also shows is that affective polarization appears to be concentrated towards Finns Party supporters. Finns Party supporters effect plot is by far most unique, as voting for virtually any party than CD predicts low evaluation of Finns Party supporters. NCP vote stands out as somewhat positive but keeping in mind that pretty much every supporter groups graph was able to climb over the ~ 40-degree mark, this effect is not too large either. Indeed, the conservative voters of CD show greatest sympathy towards Finns Party supporters. In contrast, supporters of SPP appear to be most favored in Finland, as voting for any other party does not predict considerable affective polarization towards them.

Since vote choice ended up being larger predictor of affective polarization than any of the three individual attitudes, all models in Table 4. for were ran with only vote choice and control variables included. In Appendix 2. Table 1. shows the results of these multiple linear regressions. First off, it should be assessed how much percentage of explained variation in dependent variables are lost when discarding individual attitudes. In general, the loss of information, i.e. changes in adj. R^2 values are not too high, ranging from 3 % to 8.5 % average being 5.8 %. While economic, immigration and gender minority rights attitudes were statistically significant at <0.01 confidence level in every model, their overall impact on affective polarization is limited.

This means that affective polarization is largely predicted by respondents vote choice. This, and the clear dominance of vote choice in initial models presented in Table 4., indicate that the core assumption of my thesis – voters conflicting attitudes over salient political issues is the driving force of affective polarization in Finland – is only partly true. Without the explicit measure of party identification, it would be an overstatement to say that these result show how affective polarization is driven by partisan social identities. Vote choice could signal social identity, or it may replicate the effect of ideological differences.

Notably, my analysis does not try to assess, which parties' supporters show the most affective polarization towards others and who does not. This is due the fact that missing party identification component makes it questionable to credit any party as driver of affective polarization. However, when asked to give an opinion of other parties' supporters, voter of any kind could be considered as a supporter, at least in that point of time. Modern partisanship and showing active support towards a political movement is more personal and private than before and rarely involves active participation to party activities. This is why results shown here emphasize that the mere act of voting for a party is a sufficient predictor for positive and negative evaluations others.

5.5 Sociodemographic control variables

My analysis controlled for respondents age, gender, education level, and language to confine their effects on individual attitudes and vote choice. Yet these variables were sporadically statistically significant, meaning that their relationship should be evaluated. First off, respondents age was statistically significant predictor to evaluations of SDP [0.123***(0.027)], Greens [-0.049*(0.029)], Centre Party [0.084*** (0.031)], SPP [0.162***(0.030)] and CD [0.250*** (0.032)] supporters. These results suggest that older voters appreciate supporters of traditional parties. CD supporters may have been looked favorably from older people due the association of traditional Christian values. Overall, the effect of age is very minor. Notably, only negative coefficient is found in Greens supporters model, meaning that young age predicts slightly higher evaluation of Greens supporters. Indeed, Green party has been attractive to younger voters (Paloheimo, 2024).

Respondent's gender was statistically significant in every model, other than NCP and Finns Party supporters. In Finland the modern gender gap materialized between 2019 and 2023 elections, where young and middle-aged women aligned to parties in red-green bloc, whereas men of the same age show support towards NCP and Finns Party (Isotalo et.al., 2024a). Gender not being statistically significant suggest that evaluation of NCP and Finns Party supporters are tied to other factors than gender. However, the other side of modern gender-gap is visible in Table 4., since gender predicts higher evaluations of all liberal-left parties' supporters. This effect is especially strong towards supporters of Left Alliance [3.270*** (1.055)], Greens [3.633*** (1.064)], and to a bit lesser degree SDP [2.327***(0.979)] and

SPP [2.050* (1.072)] supporters. These results show how the modern gender gap also translates to affective level, as positive evaluations of supporters of all liberal–left parties are associated with gender. However, Christian Democrats appear to be an exception of this rule, as little over 60 % of party’s supporters are women (Paloheimo, 2024). This may explain why exceptionally high prediction of thermometer evaluation on CD supporters are related to gender, predicting [4.944***(1.137)] rise on thermometer. Overall, the effect of gender is higher than age’s, similar to the effect of individual attitudes.

Respondent’s education level was controlled with three-level variable, using basic education as a reference group, where lower education level refers to secondary education and higher education to any education past that. This operationalization of respondents’ education level showed statistical significance in few instances. Lower education was statistically significant predictor to both evaluation of SPP [4.081*** (1.402)] and Finns Party [–3.356*** (1.255)] supporters. Put simply, completing secondary education starts to differentiate evaluation of these parties’ supporters, in contrast to those only with basic education. Similarly, completing higher education predicts substantial increase in SPP supporters thermometer [6.649*** (1.577)], and large [–6.337*** (1.400)] drop in Finns Party supporters evaluation. Only other statistically significant result can be found on Greens model, where higher education predicts [3.567** (1.546)] rise in evaluation.

It should be noted education has been identified as a strong source of current liberal–conservative political conflict in neo-cleavage theories. For instance, Kriesi et.al. (2012) present that individuals place in society is increasingly defined by cognitive skills and cultural resources, and mass education has caused a general steer in value orientations towards cultural liberalism (Kriesi et.al., 2012). From this perspective, it expected that the liberal partisans of Greens and SPP receive positive evaluations from educated voters, and conservative-populist Finns Party partisans negative. Interestingly statistically significant results of education variable were higher than age or gender. The fact that these results were only tied to specific parties suggests that more in-depth operationalization of education background could have produced more extensive results.

Finally, respondent’s language was statistically significant only in two models. Language has a major independent effect of [17.714***(2.352)] on SPP supporters feeling thermometer. Language variable could highlight the significance of Swedish Finnish identity is to voters

whose first language Swedish. This also shows how the traditional language cleavage in Finland may be very relevant to Swedish speaking voters (Westinen, 2015a). Language variable also has a significant positive correlation with CD supporter thermometer evaluation [11.455***(2.691)], and this is most likely explained by religious Swedish-speaking voters. While respondents' language was significant in only two models, the independent effect it had was very large.

5.6 Models performance and robustness checks

This section is dedicated for assessing the statistical performance and reliability of main multiple linear regression models presented in Table 4. First off, the F-statistic of models were all statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ confidence level. This means that the OLS-line fitted the data very well in each model. However, the adj. R^2 scores of models varied: Finns Party (adj. R^2 0.628), Left Alliance (0.552), SDP (0.502), and Greens (0.526) supporters models were all able to explain more than 50 % of variation in dependent variable. NCP supporters model almost reached the same levels (0.451).

Only models that were unable to reach satisfying results were Centre Party's (0.246) and SPP's (0.331) models. The substantially lower results are due the fact that the variables included in these models do not tap on the relevant issues of these parties; For Centre Party these could be to regional issues, and for SPP issues relating to bilingualism. CD supporters model was somewhat satisfactory with adj. R^2 score of 0.390. Perhaps adding more attitudes relating to Liberal–Conservative cleavage could have enhanced its performance.

In a similar vein, the standard errors associated with the regression coefficients were generally within an acceptable range. While there is no strict threshold for evaluating standard errors, they are relatively small compared to the estimated coefficients, and all statistically significant results in Table 4. were reasonably precise given the constraints of behavioral data. One exception is the model for NCP supporters, where attitudes toward gender minority rights predict a -0.819 decrease in evaluations with a standard error of 0.413. This estimate is less precise than others and corresponds to the highest p-value ($p < 0.05$), whereas the remaining coefficients are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Second robustness check is running the models with discarded “*I don’t know*” answers. If deleted responses substantially change the results, they should have been included in initial models (Table 4.). The full table with “*I don’t know*” responses as 0-values in attitude variables can be found in Appendix 3. (Table 2.). To start off, deleted observations had a minor impact on relationship between attitudes predicted evaluations, since changes were under one degree. In initial models, immigration attitude had no statistically significant relationship to evaluations of Centre Party or NCP supporters. Adding discarded answers to Centre Party model predicts [1.511***(0.482)] positive evaluation of their supporters. Similar effect happens in NCP supporters’ model, where pro-immigration attitudes predict [0.781*(0.452)] minor positive evaluation.

More importantly, adding deleted observations to models does not decrease the statistical significance of attitudinal variables in initial models. The discarded *I don’t know* answers affects vote choice variables effect only a little, where largest change in evaluation was in SDP supporters’ model, where voting for Centre Party changed the predicted evaluation from [-33.978***(1.852)] to [-31.289***(1.685)]. The added observations however did change the relationship between Greens vote and evaluation of SPP supporters to statistically significant, predicting very good evaluation of fellow liberal voters [-6.444**(3.159)].

Deleted observations had a grander impact on control variables. Age was statistically significant in Finns Party supporters’ model, where older age predicted minor [0.045*(0.024)] increase in evaluation. Gender-variable was no longer in a statistically significant relationship with dependent variable in models of Centre Party and SPP supporters. Education lower - category was statistically significant only in SPP and Finns Party supporters models. After adding the deleted observations, completing a secondary education now predicts relatively good evaluation of SDP supporters [2.015*(1.159)], close to SPP and Finns Party supporters.

Finally, language became statistically significant in Centre Party supporters model, where Swedish language predicts relatively large [4.486*(2.477)] increase in evaluation, which still stays quite a far behind of effect it had on supporters of SPP and CD. While some of these control variables became statistically significant, they should be approached with caution, as standard error of these predictions are quite large compared to their estimate. While these deleted observations did provide some additional explanatory strength to models by improving the standard errors of predictions, their overall effect was trivial.

In addition to Adj. R2 and F-statistics, there are few ways to assess the robustness of multiple linear regression models that further reinforce the results presented in this thesis. First off, one core assumption in multiple linear regression analysis is that independent variables are not correlated with each other (Schroeder et.al., 2017). While this is difficult to reach with behavioral data, high correlation between immigration and gender minority rights attitude (.62) may create issues. Whether or not multicollinearity is too high among independent variables, a VIF-test can be performed to all multiple linear models. If any independent variable has VIF-value over 5.0, and the cause of multicollinearity is unknown, utilizing that variable should be re-evaluated. In Appendix 4. Tables 2. to 9. show the results if VIF-test to all multiple linear regression models. As seen from the tables, multicollinearity between any attitudinal variable did not distort the analysis, and same is true for control variables. However, in every model, the vote choice variable gains > 5 value. This however not an issue because we know the cause of this: Voters evaluated their preferred party's supporters systematically highly. Put differently, it would be odd if voting for a party did not correlate with evaluations of that party's supporters.

5.7 Discussion

Before moving to concluding remarks, it is important to see how results shown in this chapter answer to hypothesis H1–H4 and overall research question. First off, it can be concluded that three individual attitudes that tap on salient issues of austerity policies, immigration and gender minority rights, do predict affective polarization towards other parties' supporters. Yet this effect is limited compared to overarching effect of vote choice. While attitudinal differences do create positive and negative evaluations of other voters, the fact that parties' voters are either part of the same bloc or rival, appears to be the main catalyst of affective polarization.

Each of these three individual attitudes analyzed here can be attributed to sources of both negative and positive affections of other parties' supporters. Gender minority rights attitude stands out as a most polarizing attitude, creating both very positive and very negative evaluations. Economic attitude was certainly polarizing, but the predicted negative affections were relatively moderate. In contrast economic attitude seemed to be a strong source of positive evaluations for some supporter groups. Similarly, immigration attitude only predicted negative evaluations of one party's supporters, but positive to few others. Immigration

attitude was only attitude to not have statistical significance to dependent variable, highlighting how immigration issues are associated to supporters whose parties are active in debates over immigration and multiculturalism.

First hypothesis assumed that economic attitude would predict higher thermometer evaluations for right-wing parties, and lower for left-wing. This assumption was decisively correct, as supporters all red-green parties, SDP, Left Alliance and Greens received negative evaluations from economic attitude. Negative evaluations were substantially higher towards most leftist party in Finland, Left Alliance supporters, and more moderate towards SDP and Greens. Interestingly while Greens is not a working-class movement or, strictly speaking a leftist party, pro-austerity attitudes predicted higher levels of affective polarization towards them than leading left-wing party SDP supporters. In contrast, pro-austerity attitudes predicted very good evaluations of all right-wing parties. These results mirrored the overall structuration of economic right-wing opinions in Finnish politics, where highest predicted evaluation in economic attitude was in NCP supporters' model. Other right-wing parties received positive predictions as well. In sum affective polarization and the vital Left–Right economic cleavage are connected, where pro-austerity attitudes clearly favour the right-wing parties' supporters.

Liberal–Conservative cleavage was examined via two attitudes that relate to salient sociocultural issues of contemporary Finland. Second hypothesis assumed that immigration attitude would predict higher thermometer evaluations for liberal–left parties, and lower evaluations for right–wing conservative parties. This assumption turned out to be somewhat true, since immigration attitude has a positive relationship with all liberal–leftist parties. Only party receiving statistically significant negative relationship with immigration attitude variable is unsurprisingly Finns Party. The fact that immigration attitude was not statistically significant in the models of NCP, Centre Party and CD, makes it questionable to claim that voting for a party associated to right–wing conservative bloc predicts higher affective polarization to supporters of these parties.

Third hypothesis assumed that gender minority rights attitude would predict higher thermometer evaluations for liberal–left parties, and lower for right–wing conservative parties. Indeed, all conservative parties of Centre Party, Finns Party and CD received very negative relationship with gender minority rights attitude. Gender minority rights attitude also predicted negative evaluation of NCP supporters, but very marginally. Conversely, this

attitude had a strong positive relationship with predicted evaluations of all liberal–left parties. Especially strong positive effect was directed towards supporters of Greens and Left Alliance. Fourth and final hypothesis assumed that vote choice would predict affective polarization to lesser extent than individual attitudes. This was a core assumption of my thesis, as I argued that affective polarization in Finland would be predicted by individual attitudes. This assumption ended up being false, as results show that horizontal affective polarization among Finnish voters is driven by vote choice to a considerable degree. Individual attitudes studied here have their effect on intra-group relations, yet the single greatest dictator of both positive and negative evaluations of other parties' supporters is respondent's the vote choice in 2023 parliament elections.

Further, the ideological proximation seems to matter, as parties close to each other in ideological space, such as leftist-liberal or right-wing conservatives, systematically gain lower affective polarization ratings from their ideological partners. Results here show that affective polarization appears to be structured among bloc lines, that reflect the affective blocs Kekkonen and Ylä-anttila presented in their 2021 study: The red-green bloc is constituted of voters from Left Alliance, SDP and Greens, and the bourgeois bloc is made of NCP, Centre Party, CD and Finns Party voters. (Kekkonen & Ylä-anttila, 2021.) This leaves voters of SPP somewhere between two blocs.

Modern cleavage theories argue that political conflict unfolds in two-dimensional space, around economic and sociocultural issues. Results shown here further reinforce this view, as attitudes towards highly salient economic issue in Finland – budget cuts in spending as an instrument of balancing Finland's national economy – clearly structured affective polarization in red–green and right–wing party lines. It appears that partisans' association with leftist politics of Marin's government is a sufficient trigger for negative evaluations, since pro-austerity attitudes predicted substantially lower positive evaluations of these partisan groups, compared to right-wing parties. The sociocultural dimension was present in results as well; however it appears that Liberal–Conservative cleavages is not universal in a sense that immigration attitudes showed more limited results, compared to more polarizing issue of gender minority rights.

Overall, the results suggest that partisan groups that are associated with some sort of ideological extremism seems to have an effect, as very pro-market-oriented voters of NCP

received considerably stronger positive evaluations of economic attitude, and same was true for their counterpart, Left Alliance. Similarly, sociocultural attitudes a major impact on evaluations of supporters of Left Alliance, Greens, Centre Party, CD, and Finns Party. These results show how partisan groups, whose parties represent either ends in sociopolitical conflicts are strongly associated to attitudes that their parties represent.

The only issue is, ordinary supporters of these parties who might not be particularly strong partisans, are associated to these conflicts equally. Further, there might be large contradictions between party's policies and voter's own preferences, and being a supporter of a political party does not necessarily mean supporting its ideology thoroughly. Since voting and supporting a political party is a strong cue of individual's world view, voters tend to prejudge others with limited information of persons actual opinions on these issues. This is the damning detail in affective polarization and value cleavages. Ideally in democratic society, judgements should be made only after offering everyone a chance to explain their values. If this was the case, perhaps individual attitudes studied here would not predict such strong affective evaluations of other parties' supporters.

However, the most problematic detail in current state of affective polarization appears to be the overwhelming effect of vote choice. While ideological and policy disagreements may be possible to reconcile, negative affections that are tied to social identities are more difficult to solve. While voting for a party is not necessarily a signal of strong partisan identity, voting is still a personal statement to give support to one political movement over another. When the mere act of voting for NCP predicts substantial drop in Left Alliance supporters' thermometer, and vice versa, it is relevant to ask, are these negative affections based on negative stereotypes or factual knowledge.

Moreover, is political co-operation between these two groups feasible in any political context? In this sense, results presented here paint an ominous picture: These drops in thermometer were not limited to opposite ends of economic dimension, but they were present across the political spectrum. Surely it would have been beneficial that affective polarization was tied strongly to differences in societal attitudes, rather than to the act of political participation itself. If strictly political act of supporting a party is a sufficient cue for prejudice and favouritism, what sort of assumptions does deeply personal characteristics such as ethnic background, gender, sexuality, or occupation create among citizens?

This study has several limitations: For starters, individual attitudes analyzed in this thesis are by no means the totality of salient issues in contemporary Finland. To assess the structuring capability of Left–Right and Liberal–Conservative cleavages, another set on attitudes should be analyzed and compared against each other. It is possible that voters show shared values over other salient political conflicts, which may paint a different picture of current political conflict and affective polarization. Further, these results may be linked to sociodemographic differences that are not conditioned here, such as individual’s income or place of residence. Another key limitation is the lack of volume in in-party identification. This could be assessed by simply asking respondents, how close they feel to party that they last voted for.

Future research should delve deeper to affective cleavages of contemporary Finland to uncover, could these findings be extrapolated with different sets of attitudes, or with different questions that tap on same issues. Upcoming parliament elections of 2027 may increase salience of different sociopolitical issues, and they may follow the same Left–Right and Liberal–Conservative lines that attitudes studied here. It would also be interesting to see, how these attitudes have predicted affective polarization over time. Whatever the interest of future research is, I highly recommend paying attention to horizontal rather than vertical affective polarization: While the correlation between the two may be high, I believe there is a substantial difference of asking respondents to evaluate parties with numerical rating, rather than fellow citizens.

6 Conclusion

This master's thesis studied, how three individual attitudes tapping on salient sociopolitical issues predicted affective polarization in contemporary Finland. The key assumption was that voters' conflicting attitudes over economic, immigration and LGBTQIA+ issues would be a strong predictor of affective polarization. Analysis was done with multiple linear regression analysis, using data from Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion (FIRIPO) of 2023 parliament elections. Results show that these three individual attitudes structure affective polarization along Left–Right economic and Liberal–Conservative value cleavages. Strongest sources of both positive and negative evaluations of other parties' supporters were gender minority rights and economic attitudes. These benefited partisan groups asymmetrically, where right–wing conservatives consisting of supporters of NCP, Finns Party, Centre Party and CD, gained positive evaluations from pro-austerity attitudes, but negative from gender minority rights. In contrast liberal–left, consisting of supporters of SDP, Greens, Left Alliance and SPP, enjoyed positive evaluations from sociocultural attitudes, but negative from economic. Outlier here is SPP's supporters, who were able to score positive evaluations from all attitude variables.

However, the effect of individual attitudes to evaluation of other parties' supporters was weaker than the effect of vote choice. Strongest predictor of affective polarization was voting for a party that belonged to rivalling political bloc: affective evaluations of other parties' supporters reflected the bloc-lines in contemporary politics, where political blocs that are slowly forming are strong sources of affective evaluations. These evaluations were structured along the Left–Right and Liberal–Conservative lines, where red–green parties of SDP, Greens and Left Alliance favored each other, while perceiving right–wing conservative parties of NCP, Finns Party, Centre Party, and CD negatively. For right-wing conservatives, the intra-bloc evaluations were more modest, but the negative evaluations of opposite red–green bloc persisted. Supporters of SPP were perceived positively by both blocs in general, while voting for either Left Alliance or Finns Party did predict lower evaluations of their supporters.

Levels of affective polarization may not have reached alarming rates in Finland, but the more pressing issue seems to be the very visible bloc structuring of Finnish politics which carries to affective relationships of partisan groups. Economic disagreements and conflicting sociocultural values are both significant sources of affective polarization. While problems of

Finland's national economy may not ever be fully solved, sociocultural differences should be possible to conciliate via open conversation and deliberation.

Therefore, the most relevant policy suggestion is that political elite should approach sociocultural differences through open and respectful dialogue, rather than confrontation and creating divides. More importantly, public discourse should avoid stereotyping partisans, since it reinforces unnecessary prejudgments that citizens make of other parties' supporters. These prejudgments are fuel for affective polarization, since partisanship predetermines personal beliefs which are picked from media, rather than individuals themselves.

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Appendix 1 – Original questions of FIRIPO's data

1. **Feeling thermometer question(s):** [W1_W3_Q12_1] – [W1_W3_Q12_8]

Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista eduskuntapuolueista asteikolla 0-10? 0 tarkoittaa, että et pidä puolueesta lainkaan ja 10, että pidät puolueesta erittäin paljon. Jos et tiedä jostain puolueesta tarpeeksi, sinun ei tarvitse arvioida sitä. – Puolueen nimi

2. **Economic attitude:** W2_W6_Q3_8

Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista ajankohtaisia poliittisia kysymyksiä koskevistä väittämistä? - Suomen talouden tasapainottamiseksi on leikattava julkisia palveluita

3. **Immigration attitude:** W2_W6_Q1_8

Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista ajankohtaisia poliittisia kysymyksiä koskevistä väittämistä? - Maahanmuutto on Suomelle pääosin hyvä asia

4. **Gender minority rights attitude:** W2_W6_Q1_1

Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista ajankohtaisia poliittisia kysymyksiä koskevistä väittämistä? - Oli hyvä asia, että eduskunta hyväksyi translain

5. **Vote choice:** [vote_2023_party]

Puoluevalinta 2023

6. **Age:** [Age]

Ikä

7. **Education:** [edu3]

Mikä on korkein suorittamasi koulutusaste tai tutkinto?

8. **Language:** [language]

Äidinkieli

Appendix 2: Models with only vote choice and control variables

Table 1. Independent effect of vote choice and control variables to party supporters feeling thermometers

	Feelings towards supporters of:							
	Left A.	SDP	Greens	Centre P.	SPP	NCP	CD	Finnis Party
Constant	86.405*** (2.380)	75.989*** (1.981)	80.083*** (2.501)	72.458*** (2.466)	56.107*** (3.230)	77.857*** (2.162)	64.438*** (3.084)	81.615*** (1.858)
Left A.		-11.988*** (1.815)	-12.409*** (2.451)	-38.355*** (2.296)	-19.484*** (3.150)	-54.120*** (1.925)	-39.681*** (2.923)	-62.539*** (1.877)
SDP	-16.605*** (1.987)		-16.066*** (2.089)	-33.909*** (1.792)	-10.876*** (2.745)	-39.682*** (1.419)	-55.377*** (2.537)	-61.868*** (1.410)
Greens	-12.472*** (2.383)	-12.666*** (1.814)		-37.594*** (2.280)	-8.473*** (3.139)	-38.758*** (1.966)	-50.920*** (2.951)	-64.256*** (1.895)
Centre P.	-51.549*** (2.247)	-36.263*** (1.626)	-44.433*** (2.345)		-15.099*** (3.033)	-19.670*** (1.728)	-33.102*** (2.782)	-39.526*** (1.758)
SPP	-39.186*** (3.305)	-23.286*** (2.635)	-28.664*** (3.376)	-27.670*** (3.200)		-21.725*** (2.870)	-47.219*** (3.778)	-54.708*** (2.756)
NCP	-57.489*** (1.984)	-37.037*** (1.290)	-36.865*** (2.073)	-21.602*** (1.755)	-9.713*** (2.814)		-29.411*** (2.520)	-34.612*** (1.418)
CD	-54.043*** (2.774)	-37.604*** (2.394)	-48.231*** (2.945)	-16.930*** (2.673)	-15.099*** (3.033)	-14.649*** (2.515)		-16.725*** (2.319)
Finnis Party	-62.444*** (1.999)	-48.841*** (1.377)	-59.980*** (2.104)	-29.346*** (1.843)	-32.674*** (2.843)	-21.733*** (1.479)	-27.231*** (2.588)	
Other parties	-49.068*** (2.613)	-41.419*** (2.034)	-43.831*** (2.759)	-36.960*** (2.555)	-23.168*** (3.316)	-34.325*** (2.247)	-36.677*** (3.166)	-31.717*** (2.116)
Age	-0.066*** (0.027)	0.089*** (0.024)	-0.093*** (0.027)	0.089*** (0.027)	0.151*** (0.027)	0.032 (0.026)	0.321*** (0.029)	0.059*** (0.025)
Gender	7.796*** (0.964)	4.338*** (0.873)	9.225*** (0.996)	-1.973*** (0.986)	1.138 (0.972)	-2.578*** (0.943)	0.354 (1.048)	-3.745*** (0.890)
Education lower	-1.210 (1.261)	1.583 (1.166)	-1.327 (1.302)	0.871 (1.289)	3.689*** (1.293)	1.913 (1.250)	1.746 (1.408)	-1.386 (1.192)
Education higher	-1.541 (1.426)	-0.009 (1.315)	3.039*** (1.484)	2.419* (1.459)	8.648*** (1.466)	5.767*** (1.411)	3.113** (1.585)	-4.555*** (1.344)
Language	5.205** (2.489)	3.386 (2.099)	-0.501 (2.530)	3.049 (2.489)	16.971*** (2.324)	-0.822 (2.401)	10.555*** (2.689)	-3.623 (2.258)
Observations	2,345	2,252	2,346	2,172	2,003	2,313	2,240	2,422
Adj. R ²	0.513	0.467	0.441	0.216	0.269	0.384	0.313	0.556
Residual Std. Error	21.420 (df = 2331)	18.804 (df = 2238)	22.105 (df = 2332)	21.059 (df = 2158)	20.280 (df = 2079)	20.828 (df = 2299)	22.715 (df = 2226)	20.097 (df = 2408)
F Statistic	191.251*** (df = 13; 2331)	152.415*** (df = 13; 2238)	143.484*** (df = 13; 2332)	46.998*** (df = 13; 2158)	60.228*** (df = 13; 2079)	111.825*** (df = 13; 2299)	79.470*** (df = 13; 2226)	234.505*** (df = 13; 2408)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix 3: Models with “I don’t know” answers included

Table 2. Models with deleted *I don't know* -responses included

	Findings towards supporters of:							
	Left All	SDP	Greens	Centre Party	SPP	NCP	CD	Finns Party
Constant	76.939*** (2.510)	71.048*** (2.049)	67.711*** (2.513)	72.506*** (2.458)	50.597*** (3.283)	73.909*** (2.148)	57.613*** (3.021)	72.479*** (1.892)
Economic attitude	-3.193*** (0.391)	-1.164*** (0.361)	-1.048*** (0.399)	3.548*** (0.414)	2.968*** (0.395)	5.447*** (0.380)	2.307*** (0.428)	1.349*** (0.354)
Immigration attitude	1.540*** (0.472)	1.644*** (0.438)	3.296*** (0.477)	1.511*** (0.482)	3.962*** (0.474)	0.781*** (0.452)	0.217 (0.508)	-3.942*** (0.508)
Gender minority rights att.	3.580*** (0.412)	2.900*** (0.377)	5.359*** (0.414)	-1.693*** (0.420)	1.551*** (0.412)	-1.097*** (0.393)	-5.243*** (0.440)	-4.242*** (0.373)
		Left All -12.534*** (1.826)	Left All -10.808*** (2.374)	Left All -31.523*** (2.435)	Left All -16.803*** (3.215)	Left All -41.844*** (2.075)	Left All -43.001*** (3.106)	Left All -41.772*** (2.158)
		SDP 15.517*** (1.990)	SDP 13.139*** (1.998)	SDP 28.155*** (1.890)	SDP 7.015*** (2.783)	SDP 28.278*** (1.535)	SDP 39.546*** (2.698)	SDP 43.307*** (1.695)
		Greens -12.568*** (2.376)	Greens -14.784*** (1.877)	Greens -33.811*** (2.327)	Greens -6.444*** (3.159)	Greens -29.774*** (2.035)	Greens -33.472*** (3.107)	Greens -42.069*** (2.160)
		Centre Party -42.056*** (2.334)	Centre Party -33.263*** (2.327)	Centre Party -11.357*** (3.025)	Centre Party -16.641*** (1.698)	Centre Party -25.751*** (2.757)	Centre Party -28.312*** (1.755)	Centre Party -28.312*** (1.755)
		SPP 31.926*** (3.359)	SPP 22.783*** (3.290)	SPP 27.947*** (3.248)	SPP 22.783*** (3.248)	SPP 16.103*** (2.833)	SPP 38.260*** (3.843)	SPP 39.492*** (2.826)
		NCP 46.856*** (2.155)	NCP 32.059*** (1.443)	NCP 26.226*** (2.116)	NCP 23.844*** (1.751)	NCP 22.080*** (2.822)	NCP 22.080*** (2.564)	NCP 22.914*** (1.565)
		CD 38.444*** (2.943)	CD 27.162*** (2.322)	CD 26.526*** (3.034)	CD 19.124*** (2.684)	CD 11.979*** (2.592)	CD 14.276*** (2.243)	CD 14.276*** (2.243)
		Finns Party 46.600*** (2.354)	Finns Party 38.292*** (1.685)	Finns Party 37.614*** (2.382)	Finns Party 28.724*** (1.924)	Finns Party 18.322*** (1.646)	Finns Party 24.580*** (2.586)	Finns Party 24.580*** (2.586)
Other parties		-39.663*** (2.671)	-35.336*** (2.073)	-29.118*** (2.747)	-33.893*** (2.530)	-13.759*** (3.356)	-27.223*** (3.120)	-24.117*** (2.039)
Age		-0.043 (0.026)	0.092*** (0.024)	-0.077* (0.027)	0.047* (0.027)	0.141*** (0.027)	0.282*** (0.029)	0.045* (0.024)
Gender		4.131*** (0.978)	2.093*** (0.899)	5.403*** (0.989)	0.901 (1.012)	1.351 (0.989)	4.051*** (1.055)	-0.831 (0.879)
Education lower		-0.519 (1.235)	2.015* (1.159)	-0.801 (1.245)	-0.125 (1.288)	2.895*** (1.274)	0.853 (1.371)	-2.671*** (1.141)
Education higher		-1.191 (1.405)	-0.203 (1.313)	2.510* (1.426)	0.614 (1.462)	6.239*** (1.454)	2.387 (1.552)	-4.498*** (1.290)
Language		3.617 (2.433)	2.587 (2.189)	-0.981 (2.409)	4.486* (2.477)	18.189*** (2.282)	12.450*** (2.630)	-2.583 (2.144)
Observations	2,309	2,216	2,307	2,137	2,059	2,275	2,206	2,390
Adj. R ²	0.551	0.497	0.511	0.254	0.321	0.440	0.373	0.612
Residual Std. Error	20.555 (df = 2292)	18.290 (df = 2199)	20.697 (df = 2290)	20.565 (df = 2120)	19.585 (df = 2042)	19.795 (df = 2258)	21.803 (df = 2189)	18.763 (df = 2363)
F-Statistic	178.001*** (df = 16; 2292)	137.700*** (df = 16; 2199)	151.831*** (df = 16; 2290)	46.391*** (df = 16; 2120)	61.723*** (df = 16; 2042)	112.598*** (df = 16; 2258)	83.064*** (df = 16; 2189)	235.874*** (df = 16; 2363)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Appendix 4. VIF-test of all models

Left Alliance

	GVIF	Df	GVIF [*] (1/(2*Df))
Economic attitude	1.574	1	1.255
Immigration attitude	2.117	1	1.455
Gender minority rights att.	2.105	1	1.451
Vote party – Left A.	6.242	8	1.121
Age	1.205	1	1.098
Gender	1.184	1	1.088
Education	1.148	2	1.035
Language	1.727	1	1.314

SDP

	GVIF	Df	GVIF [*] (1/(2*Df))
Economic attitude	1.625	1	1.275
Immigration attitude	2.070	1	1.439
Gender minority rights att.	2.063	1	1.436
Vote party – SDP	6.065	8	1.119
Age	1.207	1	1.098
Gender	1.207	1	1.099
Education	1.155	2	1.037
Language	1.706	1	1.306

Greens

	GVIF	Df	GVIF [*] (1/(2*Df))
Economic attitude	1.626	1	1.275
Immigration attitude	2.178	1	1.476
Gender minority rights att.	2.114	1	1.454
Vote party – Greens	5.906	8	1.117
Age	1.194	1	1.093
Gender	1.201	1	1.096
Education	1.153	2	1.036
Language	1.645	1	1.283

Centre Party

	GVIF	Df	GVIF [*] (1/(2*Df))
Economic attitude	1.676	1	1.294
Immigration attitude	2.058	1	1.435
Gender minority rights att.	1.996	1	1.413
Vote party – Centre P.	6.165	8	1.120
Age	1.225	1	1.107
Gender	1.189	1	1.091
Education	1.156	2	1.037
Language	1.737	1	1.318

SPP

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^{1/(2*Df)}
Economic attitude	1.570	1	1.253
Immigration attitude	2.128	1	1.459
Gender minority rights att.	2.050	1	1.432
Vote party – SPP	5.647	8	1.114
Age	1.182	1	1.087
Gender	1.181	1	1.087
Education	1.158	2	1.037
Language	1.685	1	1.298

NCP

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^{1/(2*Df)}
Economic attitude	1.619	1	1.272
Immigration attitude	2.028	1	1.424
Gender minority rights att.	1.990	1	1.411
Vote party – NCP	5.741	8	1.115
Age	1.208	1	1.099
Gender	1.180	1	1.086
Education	1.148	2	1.035
Language	1.665	1	1.290

CD

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^{1/(2*Df)}
Economic attitude	1.602	1	1.266
Immigration attitude	1.996	1	1.413
Gender minority rights att.	2.025	1	1.423
Vote party – CD	6.220	8	1.121
Age	1.220	1	1.105
Gender	1.174	1	1.084
Education	1.142	2	1.034
Language	1.735	1	1.317

Finns Party

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^{1/(2*Df)}
Economic attitude	1.582	1	1.258
Immigration attitude	2.077	1	1.441
Gender minority rights att.	2.088	1	1.445
Vote party – Finns Party	5.943	8	1.118
Age	1.201	1	1.096
Gender	1.171	1	1.082
Education	1.151	2	1.036
Language	1.673	1	1.294