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**BAUSKA'S CHAIRMEN: PARTY LEADERSHIP AND
TWITTER ENGAGEMENT IN ESTONIAN AND LATVIAN
POPULIST FAR-RIGHT PARTIES**

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Abstract

Political parties in the Baltic states remain largely understudied, especially when it comes to the populist radical right (PRR). Currently, two of the three Baltic countries have PRR parties represented in their national parliaments, *Nacionālā apvienība* (the National Alliance, henceforth the NA) in Latvia and *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* (the Conservative People's Party of Estonia, henceforth EKRE) in Estonia. Both parties have charismatic leaders and are led in a top-down manner, keeping in line with the literature on this party family. Many political actors in numerous countries make ample use of Twitter and other social media, and the PRR in particular has proved very successful at using social media to their advantage.

My article provides a comparison between the leadership of the two aforementioned parties, using a paired comparison method, highlighting the position of the party leader; how each leader is selected; the political activity of party leaders; the electoral activity of each leader; and, finally, an analysis of how each party leader uses the social media microblogging site, Twitter.

The NA and EKRE are similar in that they are both parties which can be categorized in the PRR party family and are nationalist parties in countries which experienced Soviet occupation as well as the policy of Russification. Further, until quite recently¹, both have directed nativist policies around language issues and the Russian-speaking population (Auers and Kasekamp 2013, Wierenga 2017). Therefore, the NA and EKRE make for an ideal comparison.²

Keywords: National Alliance, Conservative People's Party of Estonia, party leaders, party organization, social media, Latvian politics, Estonian politics

Introduction

In the advanced digital age of Web 2.0, the role of party leaders is becoming a stronger factor. Meret (2015) highlights the links between the electoral performance and the popu-

1 Prior to the 2015 European-wide refugee crisis, there was no large-scale migration from Africa or the Middle East. After 2015 this issue was raised by both EKRE and the National Alliance.

2 Bauska is in reference to the Bauska Declaration, signed in 2013 by The National Alliance, EKRE, and the Lithuanian Nationalist Union.

larity and charisma of party leaders in populist, right-wing parties. EKRE and the NA are both in their respective national parliaments. However, the path taken to electoral success and the current position of each party has been vastly different, as has their reputation in each country and approach to nationalist politics.

The NA is firmly rooted in the Latvian political system and currently sits in government, with 12 of 100 seats in the Latvian Parliament, while EKRE occupies 19 of 101 seats in the Estonian Parliament and, as of April 2019, is in the government as part of a three-party coalition. Both the NA and EKRE currently hold the speakership of their respective parliaments. EKRE and the NA are very similar ideologically and are signatories, along with the Lithuanian Nationalist Union, to the 2013 Bauska Declaration (Wierenga, 2017), a nationalist doctrine which calls for the Baltic countries to maintain traditional social values, and opposes a United States of Europe, a resurgent Russia, and the immigration policies of Western Europe.³

As Kasekamp, Madisson, and Wierenga (2019) point out, EKRE's initial success is directly related to the father and son duo of Mart and Martin Helme, the party's chairman and vice-chairman, respectively. The Helmes successfully merged a social movement, the Estonian National Movement, with an existing political party, the People's Party, to create EKRE (Kasekamp et al, 2019). EKRE gained parliamentary representation for the first time in 2015, at a time when the electoral climate all over Europe was ripe for populism and national conservatism.

The NA was also born out of a merger between For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK and All for Latvia! (VL!). The existing literature notes that the NA is also a party which is driven by a charismatic leader in Chairman Raivis Dzintars, thus keeping the party consistent with the majority of other parties in this party family (Auers & Kasekamp, 2013)⁴. Yet, the NA is fully embedded in Latvian politics, whereas EKRE, although not yet facing a formal cordon sanitaire, is largely seen as an ultra-nationalist party by two of the five elected parties in Estonia.

There has been much research on many of the populist radical right (PRR) parties throughout Europe, yet this party family is vastly understudied in the Baltic region, even more so when it comes to scholarship on political leadership. Auers and Kasekamp (2013) note that charismatic leadership is particularly important in the early phases of party development as it is crucial for parties to attract new members and become ingrained in the public consciousness.

Charismatic leadership amongst PRR parties is a key component in the literature as to the rise of the PRR in Europe since the 1980s (Eatwell 2018; Mudde 2007 & 2016). However, there is an ongoing debate within the scholarly literature as to the extent to which this impacts the success of PRR parties.

I use a comparative research design to examine the leadership of EKRE and the NA by using official party documents to ascertain the role of leadership, as well as data from the Latvian and Estonian governments to inform the electoral activity of each leader, and, finally, the social media communication strategies using the online microblogging site, Twitter.

3 Bauska Declaration. <https://ekre.ee/bauska-deklaratsioon/>

4 There is a debate within the literature as to if charisma is a useful determinant of PRR party success, and to what extent. See McDonnell (2016), Art (2018) and Eatwell (2018). As the literature on EKRE and the NA is still scarce, the issue of charismatic leadership has not been explored in detail.

In social media communication analysis, leadership will also be extended to other prominent party members who sit in the national parliament of each country or the European Parliament for comparison. The reasoning behind this is that these people are the driving force behind the party and are the most prominent voices in their party. The timeline for social media analysis begins in 2014 and finishes in the spring of 2019 because this is one year prior to the onset of the European migrant crisis.

As PRR parties across Europe have been significantly emboldened by recent events, such as the 2015 European migrant crisis, Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump, furthered with the ease of use of Web 2.0, the communication and rhetoric of this party family is beginning to change. In the 21st century, the use of social media is unprecedented for politicians reaching their audience, circumventing the traditional medium of broadcast media. Both parties have several members who are active Twitter users. Using a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of tweets, this article asks the following questions: How do party leaders use Twitter and how does the leaders' usage of Twitter differ in thematic content from other prominent party members? Party leaders will be defined as the chairmen of each party. For comparative purposes, the Twitter analysis sample will extend to other prominent members of each party, who are leading figures in each party, but are not the official head, which I define as the party chairman.

This article proceeds as follows: first, a discussion of the state of the art will be presented, which places each party under analysis into the PRR party category. As scholarship of both parties is scarce, I provide a background of each party. Next, the literature on party leadership will be presented followed by a section which highlights previous research on the use of Twitter and social media in politics. Lastly, I provide a results section for data on party leaders of each party as well as the analysis of social media use which is followed by a discussion and conclusion.

The populist radical right

Both parties under analysis in this article can be categorized according to Cas Mudde's (2007) populist radical right (PRR) framework. In keeping with Mudde's framework, a PRR party is one which combines three components: nativism (a combination of nationalism and xenophobia), authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism is widely argued to be the most integral component of the three for parties included in this party family. Indeed, Rydgren (2017) argues that it is misleading to label such parties as merely populist, since ethnic nationalism is the key feature, as opposed to populism. While this is certainly the case, populism is still an integral component of this party family, it is just communicated quite differently than left-wing populists. Therefore, and in keeping with the literature, the term of populism will be applied to the parties in question.

The radical right in the Baltics

In a seminal study, Minkenberg (2017) highlights, arguably, that the most important difference between the PRR in Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe is that the PRR in Central and Eastern Europe is both more ideologically extreme and more organizationally fluid than their counterparts in Western Europe. This is a result of his-

tory, not geography. According to Minkenberg (2017), the differences are a direct result of the post-communist transition process and unfinished nation-building in the region. Although the NA is one of the parties included in Minkenberg's 2017 study, EKRE is not, as they are a relatively new party, gaining representation in the Estonian parliament for the first time in 2015. While many of the parties in Central and Eastern Europe are very radical, with some even considered to be on the extreme right, both the NA and EKRE are not as extreme or as radical as many of the parties in this region.⁵

Another notable distinction in parties from both regions of Europe is who the parties target as the source of national issues. In Western Europe it is almost exclusively Muslims, as well as immigrants, and descendants of immigrants from a non-European background. After 2015, this focus has shifted dramatically to refugees and economic migrants. In contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe the primary target of nativist policies, which often transcends the radical right and enters into the mainstream discourse, are national minorities, the Roma, and, for some parties, Jews. As Bustikova and Kitschelt (2009) note, a significant difference in PRR parties from post-communist parties is that the 'other' constitutes ethnic groups who have been in the region for centuries.

Bustikova (2018) highlights two types of radical right mobilization against minorities in Eastern Europe. The first occurs in countries which are ethnically homogenous, such as Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic. In this case, the radical right focuses primarily on social and religious issues, as well as mobilization against Roma and ethnic minorities with limited political capacity (Bustikova, 2018). The second category highlighted by Bustikova (2018) occurs in countries which are more ethnically pluralistic, which includes Estonia and Latvia, as well as Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, and Ukraine. In this case, radical right mobilization is directed towards larger ethnic groups which enjoy a high degree of politicization (Bustikova, 2018).

Prior to 2015, the radical right in the region did not mobilize against new minorities from non-European countries (*ibid*). However, the European-wide migrant crisis presented a shift and an opportunity for the radical right (as well as many mainstream actors in the region). As Minkenberg (2017) alludes to, concerns on immigration had increased in Estonia, as well as Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia even prior to the 2015 surge in refugees (Minkenberg 2017, p. 50). This concern was shared in Latvia, both by political parties, including but not limited to the NA, as well as a significant share of the population (Muravska 2015; Ragozin 2015).

In the case of the Baltics, this group has been in the region for decades, not centuries, but constitutes a national minority: namely, Russian-speakers. Auers and Kasekamp (2013) find that there is a distinct brand of nativism in the Baltic states which is directed at the Russian-speaking population who arrived during the Soviet occupation. Russian-speakers form between 31.8 to 33% of the population of Latvia and 27.6 to 37% of the population of Estonia (Di Gregorio 2018; Vihalemm et al. 2019).⁶

5 There is a slight disagreement in the literature as to the precise categorization of the NA. Bustikova and Kitschelt (2009) and Minkenberg (2017) consider the NA to be an extreme right party, due to the regime of Karlis Ulmanis being central to party ideology. Auers and Kasekamp (2015) categorize the NA as an ethnocentric radical right party, not as an extremist radical right party. While acknowledging both the disagreement in scholarship and the central importance of Karlis Ulmanis to the party, the author places the NA in the radical right party family and does not view them as an extreme right party.

6 Di Gregorio places the total number of Russophones in Estonia at 25.1% Russians; 1.7% Ukrainians; and 0.8% Belarusians and the total number of Russophones in Latvia at 26.2% Russians; 3.2% Bela-

Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic States, have not experienced large-scale immigration from outside of Europe. Even during the migrant crisis of 2015, the numbers who arrived in Estonia and Latvia are incredibly low. Only the threat of potentially large numbers of migrants from Africa and the Middle East arriving in countries with a small population was used by radical right actors.

One of the key themes of both of these parties is that of the Russian Federation. A resurgent Russia under President Putin is seen as an external enemy of the Baltic nations and is a key component, along with the Russian-speaking population of Estonia and Latvia, of the discourse of these parties. Wierenga (2017), in an analysis of EKRE and their view towards Russian-speakers as ‘white’ in light of the refugee crisis, through interviews with party members, found that the party would accept Russian-speakers as members provided that they are Estonian citizens, are fluent in Estonian, and are self-professed Estonian patriots. Additionally, there was to be some interest from Russian-speakers in Estonia who share socio-conservative values and were against the idea of Estonia accepting refugees and migrants from Africa and the Middle East in light of the European commission’s migrant quota.

This is largely the same in Latvia, where the issue of Russian-speakers is, arguably, more politically polarized. The primary political cleavage in Latvia is ethnic (Minkenberg 2017, p. 72; Auers 2015, p. 151). Namely, Latvian nationalists are juxtaposed to the Russian minority, most of whom arrived during the Soviet occupation. This translates into a cleavage between all parties in Latvia and pro-Russian speaker parties (Minkenberg 2017).

The Social Democrat Party “Harmony” (henceforth, Harmony) is the largest party which represents the Russian minority in Latvia, although the party is not composed entirely of Russian-speakers. Latvian politics is largely a contest in controlling the capital city, Riga (Auers, 2015: 90). Further, elections in Latvia are often a contest between ethnic Latvians and the Russian minority due to the high percentage of Russians in Riga (ibid). Currently, Harmony is in opposition nationally, but in power in the city of Riga. Although not quite the same, the political situation is similar in Estonia. The election process in the Estonian capital of Tallinn is similar to Riga as many Russian speakers live in Tallinn. In municipal elections, Estonian residents who are not citizens are permitted to vote, making the percentage of eligible Russian-speaking voters higher (Auers 2015).

The Estonian Center Party has traditionally courted the Russian vote, although it also has non-Russian members, including the current Prime Minister, and it cannot simply be accurately categorized as a ‘Russian party’. Despite this, and similar to Harmony in Latvia, the Center Party is the most popular political party amongst Russian-speakers in Estonia. Also similar to Harmony is that the Center Party had a cooperation agreement with United Russia, which has only recently been frozen (<https://www.dw.com/en/estonia-swears-in-new-government/a-36498676>). Thus, this is ripe grounds for parties beyond the PRR.

The National Alliance

The National Alliance “All for Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK” (henceforth, the National Alliance (NA), although substantially under-researched, is one of the rusians; and 2.4% Ukrainians. Vihalemm et al. place the total number of Russophones in Estonia at 33% and the total number of Russophones in Latvia at 37%.

more successful parties in the populist radical right (PRR) party family. The NA has been part of the Latvian government since 2011. At the time of writing, the NA entered a newly formed, five-party coalition government, holding two (of 14) ministerial positions. The party is the result of a merger between an already established political party in Latvia and a social movement. They are currently the fourth largest party in the Latvian *Saeima* (Latvia's Parliament), along with the party, Development/For!

The 2010 merger between All for Latvia! and For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK) (Minkenberg, 2017: 75; Auers and Kasekamp, 2015: 140–142) resulted in two parties with slightly differing ideology being lumped into one, creating a mix of ethnonationalists, conservatives, and economic liberals (the Economist, 2011). Party Chairman Raivis Dzintars was largely instrumental in both the founding of All for Latvia! in 2000 and the merger with TB/LNNK. In terms of the far-right, this merger between the two parties constitutes what Kott (2016) labels far-right entryism.

All for Latvia!, which was founded in 2000, became an official political party in 2006. Prior to this, it existed as a political organization. This was the more nationalistic faction of the National Alliance. TB/LNNK, founded much earlier than All for Latvia! in 1993, was a combination of moderate national conservative and free market economic principles. Each faction was founded and led by, arguably, two of the most prominent figures in the NA today: Raivis Dzintars, the current chair of the NA and Roberts Zile, the party's sole MEP until 2019 and candidate for Prime Minister in the 2018 national elections.

The NA made it back into government in 2019 following the 2018 elections and several months of coalition talks. However, they lost four seats and remain in government as part of a five-party coalition formed in large part to exclude Harmony from government.

EKRE

Although they are a relatively new party, founded in 2012 out of a merger between the People's Party (*Rahvaliid*) and the Estonian Nationalist Movement (*Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine*, henceforth ERL), EKRE quickly went from having no seats to seven seats out of 101 in the 2015 national elections and from seven to 19 in the 2019 national elections. Two of the main tactics that have propelled them to such popularity are grassroots activism and social media engagement (Kasekamp, Madisson and Wierenga, 2019). Kasekamp et al. (2019) identify four themes that EKRE successfully framed in their political communication through social media channels: an anti-Russian stance, Euroscepticism, promotion of family values, and an anti-refugee discourse.

Twitter and social media use in politics

Social media is undoubtedly an important tool for politicians to communicate with. In his synoptic characterization of the charismatic personality, Eatwell (2018) notes that PRR leaders have adapted to using new media, including Twitter, noting France's Jean-Marie Le Pen's early adaptation to the Internet which he used to promote his image. There is an ample amount of literature on Twitter use in politics.

Jungherr (2016) correctly notes that the literature review on the use of Twitter during election campaigns alone, to say nothing of other types of use, has become too large to

cover in a single review. In fact, studies of Twitter use by different politicians have been so prominent in the past decade that Jungherr (2016) presented an entire article devoted to a literature review of 127 studies on the use of Twitter in elections. Yet the majority of these do not pay attention to the PRR party family.

Jungherr's (2016) comprehensive literature review solely focuses on election campaigns. The social media analysis in this article will focus on constant Twitter engagement spanning four years, not solely concentrating on campaigning and election cycles. It can be said that PRR parties are, essentially, always campaigning as many of them are only now becoming firmly entrenched in the political systems of their respective countries and many parties and individual members use every opportunity to disseminate their ideology.

Although most of the early wave of scholarship on Twitter use in politics has been focused on the United States, recently, in the past four years⁷, there has been some scholarship on Twitter use by politicians in Europe, especially populist parties⁸. Although analyzing populism, albeit on both the left and right side of the political spectrum, Jacobs and Spierings (2018) compare populist politicians use of Twitter with their mainstream counterparts. This is not the goal of this article, but rather to compare the two PRR parties with elected representation in two of the Baltic countries.

Recently, the general consensus by leading scholars in the field is that the rise of populism is partly linked with the importance of social media and Internet engagement (Mudde, 2016, Jacobs and Spierings, 2018 & Kasekamp et al, 2019). Indeed, Jacobs and Spierings (2018) note that there is both a theoretical and empirical gap in the scholarship as to whether and how politicians of populist parties use Twitter. This is precisely a gap which this research aims to fill, looking explicitly at PRR parties and excluding populist parties of the left. Jacobs and Spierings (2018) analyze the Twitter adaption and use of populist parties in the Netherlands, focusing on both right and left-wing populism. Their cases of analysis are Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) and the Socialist Party (SP). They find that populists in the Netherlands are slower to open an account on Twitter, especially the PVV.

Van Kessel and Castelein (2016) also focus solely on the PVV and the SP and their use of Twitter. They find that populist actors in the Netherlands use Twitter to engage in an ongoing campaign against mainstream parties. In light of the current studies of Twitter engagement of populist actors, Van Kessel and Castelein (2016) call for more research to focus on the individual tweets of political actors, which is precisely the nature of this research article. They conclude in their study that the nature of the tweets from both parties in terms of their anti-establishment message was in keeping with the ideological characteristics of both parties under analysis.

Outside of Twitter, there have been some studies with regards to how the PRR uses other venues of social media. One of particular importance is Karl's (2017) analysis of how the Hungarian party Jobbik successfully uses Facebook to attract young and first-time voters. Already in 2009, Koopmans and Muis (2009) called for notice to be made of the role of media in order to account for political change in terms of the PRR. Pytals (2016) successfully demonstrates how Poland's current ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS), who is considered by some to be a PRR party as of 2015, used alternative media venues which

7 Vergeer and Hermans, 2013 is an earlier instance.

8 Though not limited to right-wing populism.

included blogs and other various Internet platforms to spread their message and increase their popularity.

Twitter was selected as the sole social media analysis because tweets can be seen as a useful method in which politicians can self-promote and because Twitter provides a valuable analysis of individuals' positions and ideology (Van Kessel & Castelein 2016, p. 595). As Jungherr (2016) points out, there is no concrete link between Twitter engagement and electoral success (Jungherr 2016, p. 74). Therefore, the aim of the analysis presented in this article is not to determine the extent to which Twitter engagement influences the Estonian and Latvian electorate, but rather to assess how prominent politicians from EKRE and the NA use Twitter.

Methods

In comparing the data on leadership of both parties, this article will use a paired comparison method. This article is inductive in nature and utilizes qualitative content analysis for Twitter analysis. In this case, I began by selecting all tweets beginning in 2014, or the first tweet if a politician created a Twitter account after 2014. All tweets were analyzed manually by the author and without the use of analysis software such as NodeXL, Crunchbase, or The Washington Post's @MentionMachine.

Elected officials from both parties were selected upon the following criteria: being a high-ranking member of the party holding elected office at either the national or the European level and having an active Twitter account. The politicians whose Twitter feeds analyzed in this article are as follows:

- From the National Alliance: Party Chairman Raivis Dzintars; MEP from the NA and candidate for Prime Minister in the 2018 elections Roberts Zile; Speaker of the Saeima, Inara Murniece; and Party Deputy Chairman Janis Dombrova.
- From EKRE: Party Chairman and Minister of the Interior Mart Helme; Deputy Party Chairman and Finance Minister Martin Helme; and MEP and former Deputy Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee in the Estonian Parliament, Jaak Madison.

Official party Twitter accounts are excluded from the analysis, as the purpose of this article is to analyze how individual politicians use Twitter.

Each tweet was coded and placed in a category based on its theme. A comprehensive list of tweet categories can be found in the appendix. Some tweets are cross listed if they fit in more than one category. For example, a tweet from Janis Dombrova in May 2015 reads, "Among EU countries, the highest proportion of non-Latvians is in Latvia, therefore, admission of new immigrants is not possible". This tweet was cross-coded and placed in both the 'immigration/refugees' category and the 'Russian-speakers' category as, by "immigrants" he was referring to the refugee crisis and by "non-Latvians" he was referring to Russian-speakers residing in Latvia.

Twitter was chosen as the sole social media site for analysis for two reasons. First, Twitter has a character limit, and serves as a more direct and to the point source of information. Topics are very easily recognized, and all pages are public even if one does not have an account. In comparison to Facebook, while also being popular and used as a political venue, it has no limit on the number of words or characters for posts. It is often the case that politicians have official Facebook pages in addition to a personal page with privacy

settings. Second, Twitter serves as an unmediated source of communication, where politicians are able to sidestep traditional media, who might filter or edit content, and can communicate directly with their audience in real time (Jacobs & Spierings, 2018; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

An additional, important feature of Twitter, which is of direct importance to PRR parties, is how it relates to the power of party leaders. Jacobs and Spiering (2015 & 2018) point out that, due to the fact that Twitter is free and easy to use and does not require any technological knowledge, party members are able to use Twitter as their own press agency and support base. One common consensus in the study of PRR parties is that these parties operate from the top down and are, as mentioned previously, led by a strong and charismatic leader.

Party leadership

EKRE: The party chairman wields a substantial amount of power in this party. Congress is the highest body of EKRE, and it is through congress that the party chairman is elected. Congress is convened by the party board, which convenes once a year, or if an extraordinary congress is called.⁹ In order to be elected as chairman, candidates require at least half of the votes from those entitled to vote at congress, and whoever receives the greatest number of votes is elected as chairman.¹⁰

Once EKRE was created out of the merger between ERL and *Rahvaliid*, Mart Helme was elected as party chairman. He has since been re-elected three times and currently holds the position. Both Mart Helme and his son Martin have been active in Estonian politics for decades. While the chairman of the party is Mart Helme, it is widely perceived that both Mart and Martin are the driving force of the party and it is clear that they control the direction which the party takes. Both Helmes are considered successful political entrepreneurs. They were the instrumental parties behind the merger of ERL and The People's Union of Estonia, which created EKRE in 2012, and took over its leadership (Kasekamp et al. 2019).

Mart Helme has a long history of involvement in Estonian politics. Shortly after re-independence, Mart Helme served as the ambassador to Russia. In this capacity, Helme took part in the border negotiations between Estonia and Russia.¹¹ Following his appointment as ambassador, Helme became the Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in 1999 founded the Conservative Club.¹² He became involved in politics again serving as a member of the agrarian party, *Rahvaliid* and eventually being elected as the Chairman of EKRE one year after the merger of ERL and *Rahvaliid*. Mart Helme was EKRE's candidate for the 2016 presidential elections. Once the coalition was approved after the 2019 elections, Mart Helme became the Minister of the Interior and was appointed to fill in for the Prime Minister in his absence.¹³

9 EKRE Statutes, 10.1. <https://www.ekre.ee/pohikiri/>

10 EKRE Statutes, 10.7. <https://www.ekre.ee/pohikiri/>

11 Mart Helme — Esimees, <https://www.ekre.ee/esimees/>

12 Ibid.

13 <https://news.err.ee/935364/ratas-appoints-mart-helme-first-substitute-in-absence-of-prime-minister>

Martin Helme was at first a member of The Estonian National Movement (ERL) and then became the leader. The ERL went on to merge with The People's Union of Estonia (*Rahvaliid*) to form EKRE. Prior to this, he ran for several elections at the local, national, and European elections, both as an independent and for EKRE once they became a party. He was also involved in the Estonian National Conservative Union, which included some current EKRE members, notably Speaker of the Parliament Henn Polluaas. As of April 2019, Martin Helme is the Minister of Finance. In turn, this means that, as a minister, his seat in the parliament went to a replacement candidate. Prior to his appointment as Minister of Finance in the second Ratas Cabinet, Martin Helme served as the parliamentary chair, being replaced by Siim Pohlak. Martin Helme also serves as the vice-chairman of the party and the party board.

The chairman and vice-chairman of the party are key figures in all of the governing bodies of the party and, therefore, wield significant power in the party. The party congress is composed of 15 members, 11 of whom are members of the board, one chairman, and three vice-chairmen.

The council has its own chairman and vice-chairman. The chairman and vice-chairman of the party take part in the work of the council, along with other members, including the chair and vice-chair of the council. However, as the chairman and vice-chairman of the party at large, they are in the most senior positions within the party and are in positions of higher authority in the council.

The management board of the party consists of 13 people. Martin Helme serves as the chairman of the board while Mart Helme is not on the board. The chairman of the party holds a further position of power as the chairman convenes and chairs the board.¹⁴ Like the party, both Helmes increased their vote share during the last election. Mart Helme received 6,714 votes in the 2015 election¹⁵ and 9,170 in the 2019 election.¹⁶

The National Alliance: The highest body of the NA between congress is the council. The NA also has a congress which is composed of delegates who are nominated by its congress.¹⁷ The chairman of the party chairs the NA executive body, which manages the party.¹⁸ The chairman of the NA is elected through the congress, but can also be revoked by the same body.¹⁹

Similar to the NA, in addition to the council and congress, there is also a board. The board is chaired by the party chairman and consists of 18 members of various capacities in the party. The congress has the privilege to adopt and amend party statutes and programs, while the board nominates and approves candidates for national, and European elections, and approves candidates for local elections, which are put forward by regional NA divisions.²⁰

The party chairman is elected by receiving the most votes by secret ballot.²¹ The current chairman has an advantage in this case, as the board and any division within the party,

14 EKRE Statutes, 12.3.

15 Riigikogu valimised, valitud Riigikogu liikmed.

16 Ibid.

17 National Alliance statutes, 3.1.

18 National Alliance statutes, 3.3

19 National Alliance statutes, 4.4

20 National Alliance statutes, 4.4 & 6.9. Though appointments are not the sole function of the board.

21 National Alliance statutes, 7.1.

which is comprised of at least 20 members, has the right to nominate candidates for the position.²² The board then composes a list of all of the nominees.²³ All formal party opinions may only be expressed by the chairperson or deputy chairperson without authorization from the party board.²⁴ Therefore, once elected to the position, the chairman has considerable authority over the party, but, in principle, limited power.

A notable difference in current political activity between the two parties is that the chairman of the NA did not become a minister in the current government, whereas both Helmes did. Raivas Dzintars was not the candidate for Latvian prime minister in the most recent elections, whereas Mart Helme was a prime minister candidate in Estonia. Upon analysis of official party documents, the chairman of EKRE holds more power than the chairman of the NA due to the ability of the congress of the NA to revoke the chairman.

In the most recent Latvian elections, Raivis Dzintars appeared first on the list and received 44,654 votes.²⁵ Latvia has an open party list system where voters can either mark with a plus or cross out to indicate support or rejection of a candidate (Auers, 2015, pg. 83). Dzintars received 14,523 pluses and 1,335 cross-outs in the 2018 national elections.²⁶ Dzintars won more votes than any other candidate for the NA, with Inara Murniece placing second with 3,9553 votes.²⁷

Findings and discussion

The findings indicate that party leaders in both parties under analysis tweet considerably less frequently than other party members. Twitter is used more frequently by the NA than by EKRE, with the exception of EKRE's Jaak Madison, who tweeted more than any of the other politicians included in the sample. The official website of the NA includes a section with links to the Twitter accounts all members, party activists, and regional groups as well as other social media sites. The EKRE official website has a section entitled "social media" but only includes a link to their official Facebook page.

A likely explanation for the low tweeting frequency of the Helmes is because EKRE relies heavily on Facebook and they also have their own media apparatus, *Uued Uudised* (new news), as well as a wide-ranging informational sphere which includes their own official newspaper called *Konservatiivide vaba sõna* (Free Word for Conservatives). Mostly beginning in 2015, this informational sphere includes numerous critical blogs on immigration, as well as small and large information portals and social media groups (Kasekamp et al. 2019).²⁸ As EKRE has taken a firm stance on refugees and immigration, and have been almost constantly rising in opinion polls prior to the most recent election, any dissemination of such information, especially by party supporters, would likely assist in the parties rapid rise amongst the electorate. As indicated in Fig. 1, both the chairman

22 National Alliance statutes, 7.3

23 Ibid.

24 National Alliance statutes, 7.6.

25 Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija, <https://sv2018.cvk.lv/pub/ElectionResults/CandidateList?id=axC8x4iKXxa2gCU9m7iC2A%3D%3D&locationId=cWhUANL58dDrG1BuYgatEA%3D%3D>

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 For example, Kasekamp et al (2019) note that two prominent Facebook pages, „No to refugee-masses” and „Estonians against refugee quotas” were, at the time of writing, both followed by 20,000 people.

and vice-chairman of EKRE, and the chairman of the NA tweet the least, whereas Jaak Madison's tweeting frequency is comparable to the other politicians from the NA, being the sole EKRE member whose tweets during the period of the sample surpassed 200.

The following codes were selected for analysis: refugees/immigration, which was coded for any tweet discussing immigration from outside Europe, including, but not limited to, the refugee crisis; the domestic politics of Latvia and Estonia; Russia/Putin; Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia; the Soviet occupation, Stalinist deportations and the USSR; tweets related to the EU and European Union politics²⁹; Crimea and Ukraine; tweets relating to their own party and tweets detailing their own political activity. The results varied, but overall patterns can be discerned.

Fig. 1. Total number of Tweets

Politician	Number of Tweets
Raivis Dzintars	110
Janis Dombrava	650
Roberts Zile	606
Inara Murniece	484
Mart Helme	44
Martin Helme	151
Jaak Madison	690

Fig. 2. Topic of tweets

Politician	Refugees/immigration	Domestic politics	Own political activity	Russia/Putin	Ukraine/Crimea	USSR Occupation Deportations	Own party	EU/EU politics
Dzintars	1	22	4	6	1	5	15	0
Dombrava	113	94	16	79	20	18	47	7
Murniece	0	55	128	88	33	14	22	9
Zile	36	67	76	74	7	11	4	235
Mart Helme	8	40	1	2	0	0	5	2
Martin Helme	10	38	9	7	1	0	46	8
Madison	71	66	15	30	7	4	44	48

²⁹ A separate category was created for European politics — any tweet that dealt with European politics at the domestic level and out of Estonia and Latvia. The category of inclusion is for any tweet that mentions the EU or politics at the EU level.

The results in Fig. 2 indicate that the refugee crisis and immigration was not a relatively large topic for the majority of politicians. Party leaders were amongst the least likely to tweet about this topic. However, this does not mean that this issue was not raised by both parties. On the contrary, EKRE paid particular attention to this issue in the most recent election and includes it in their ideology to maintain the ethnic composition of Estonia. Further, they publicly opposed the Estonian government signing the UN Global Compact for Migration in Marrakech. Likewise, the National Alliance, also a signatory to the Bauska Declaration, was openly opposed to Latvia accepting any refugees and was one of three parties to state their opposition to the Latvian government signing this UN compact. The Latvian government backed out, while the Estonian government signed after a period of uncertainty. Both Helmes have a low number of tweets in general, while Jaak Madison tweets more frequently. Further, Madison and Janis Dombrava both exhibited a high number of tweets in this category.

Tweet categories were selected for two intertwined reasons. First, there is ample literature on the dalliances that many PRR parties have with Putin and the Russian Federation. This is not the case for the PRR in the Baltics. Using Political Capital Institute's three categories of PRR parties of committed, open/neutral, and hostile, to determine their stance towards the Russian Federation, Wierenga (2017) placed EKRE in the hostile category as they are not friendly to Putin.³⁰ Political Capital Institute does not include EKRE, but does place the NA in the hostile category (Political Capital Institute, 2014). Second, the issues of Soviet occupation, the Stalinist deportations, and a resurgent Russia, especially after the annexation of Crimea, remain important topics in Latvia and Estonia. Therefore, it would be paradoxical for a Latvian or Estonian nationalist party to be pro-Russian. The categories focused on reflect the ideology and values of the Bauska Declaration, which in turn highlight the unique nature of radical right parties in the Baltic states.

For the aforementioned reasons, all tweets related to Ukraine and Crimea were also analyzed. Tweets relating to the politics of other European countries as well as the European Union were included. Detailing their own political activities was also part of the analysis as this affords politicians the opportunity to let their supporters know how they are carrying out their mandate.

Conclusion

Overall, the results show that party leaders from both parties tweet with less frequency than junior members. Janis Dombrava (the NA) and Jaak Madison (EKRE) tweet the most and in categories which might be expected from MPs in PRR parties, namely, with regards to immigration and refugees. Inara Murniece and Roberts Zile, both of the NA, tweeted most frequently in line with their positions—the Saeima, as speaker of the Saeima, and the European Parliament, as the sole MEP from the NA, respectively. This demonstrates that party leaders do not have a monopoly on communication when it comes to social media. In neither party is it the case that the chairman leads in terms of tweeting frequency. In both parties, it is other prominent members who utilize the personalizing effects of Twitter more. Further, in both cases, neither party chair had the most followers of those

30 Although the author is aware that, as of April 2019, EKRE signed a statement that it is committed to join Mateo Salvini's alliance of right-wing parties for the upcoming European elections, they are not a pro-Putin party.

analyzed in the sample.³¹ This opens up several venues for further research. For example, is there a contradiction between leader-centered parties and how this plays out on social media. Further, the importance of Twitter may vary depending on both party and individual. The official website of the NA contains links to the Twitter accounts of several party members ranging from senior to junior, whereas EKRE does not seem to place much emphasis on Twitter, but has members who are active on Facebook as well as an official news portal which is frequently cited and reposted on Facebook as well as other online sources (Kasekamp et al. 2019).

With regards to the position of party chairs, both parties have similar procedures for electing the chairman and chairs have similar duties once elected. Both Raivis Dzintars and the Helmes were instrumental in the mergers which formed the NA and EKRE as they exist currently. Future research would benefit from an analysis of if, and to what extent, charisma plays a role in the success of the party. Data on both parties suggest that party structure and, especially in the case of EKRE, grassroots organizations and their own media apparatus play a monumental role.

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31 At the time of writing, Raivis Dzintars had 7,152 followers; Janis Dombrava had 4,587; Roberts Zile, 10,1K; Inara Murniece, 4,593; Mart Helme, 659; Martin Helme, 950, and Jaak Madison, 1,546.

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APPENDIX: TWEET CATEGORIES

- Nationalism/nation/culture
- European politics
- Language
- European Union politics
- Twitter engagement
- Borders
- Refugees/migrants
- NATO/military/security
- Immigration (other)
- Elites/other politicians
- Russian Federation/Vladimir Putin
- Own party
- Ukraine/Crimea/Donbass

- Self-promotion/political activity
- Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia
- Demographics/diaspora/family
- Soviet occupation/deportations
- Conservative values/anti-liberal message
- History
- Terrorism/Islam
- National holidays
- Corruption
- Law and order
- N/A/misc.
- Domestic politics