



# Aleksi Knuutila



**DAIN**  
STUDIOS

**FCAI** Finnish  
Center for  
Artificial  
Intelligence

  
taival

**ömplify.**  
BUSINESS TRANSFORMATIONS.  
ACCELERATED.



# AI & Elections

Algorithmic publicity and generative AI

Alexi Knuutila

Art by Vincent Cacciotti

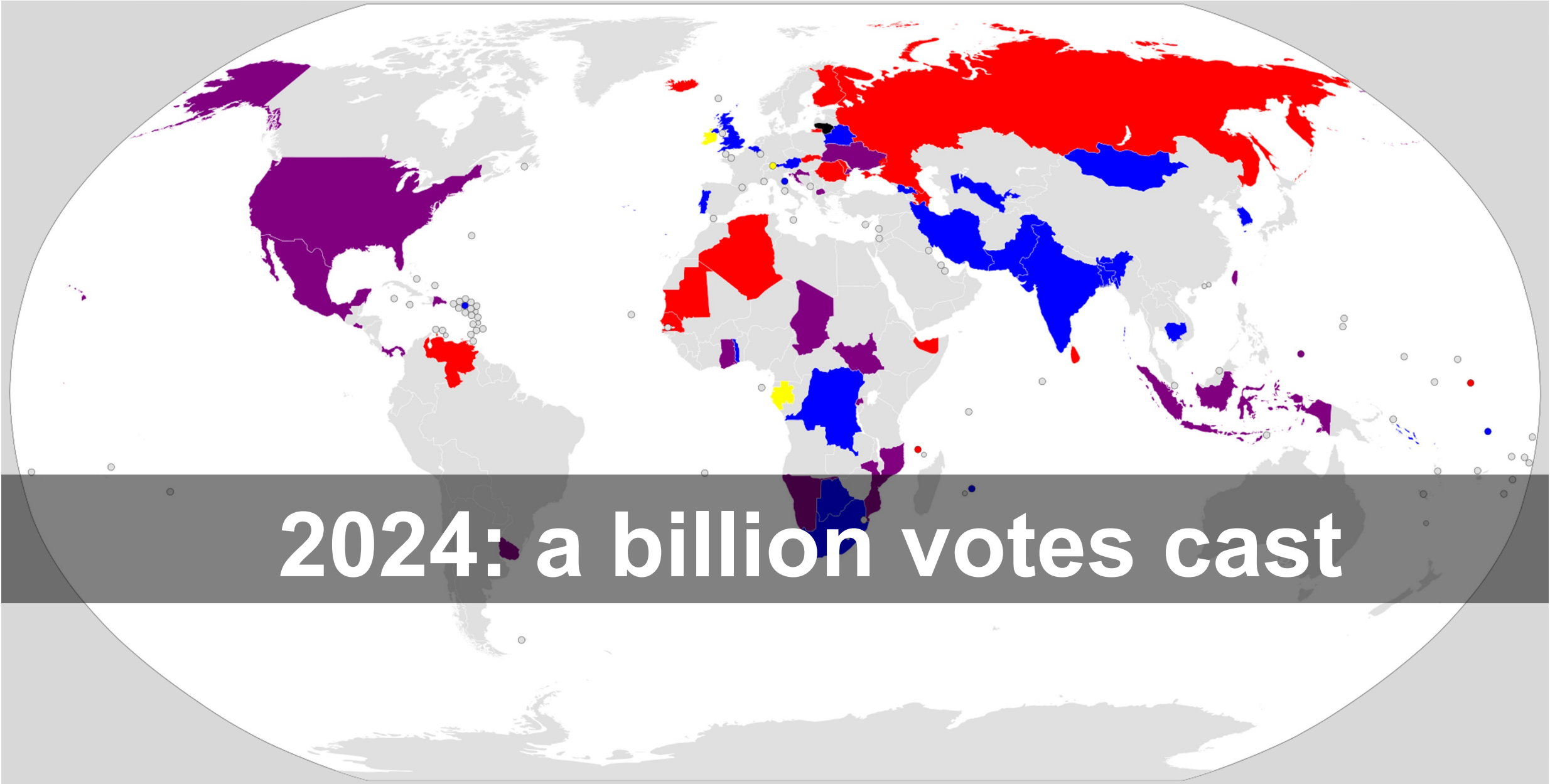


## My work

- Making visible how online platforms shape politics and public opinion (Vaalivahti, Computational Propaganda Project)
- Experimenting with generative AI as scientific method (This Inequality Does not Exist)

→ <http://knuutila.net>







## AI is already shaping media environments:

- Targeted and personalised advertisements
- Algorithmic timelines
- Bots and computational propaganda
- AI-generated content and misinformation



# Social media is like a distorting mirror

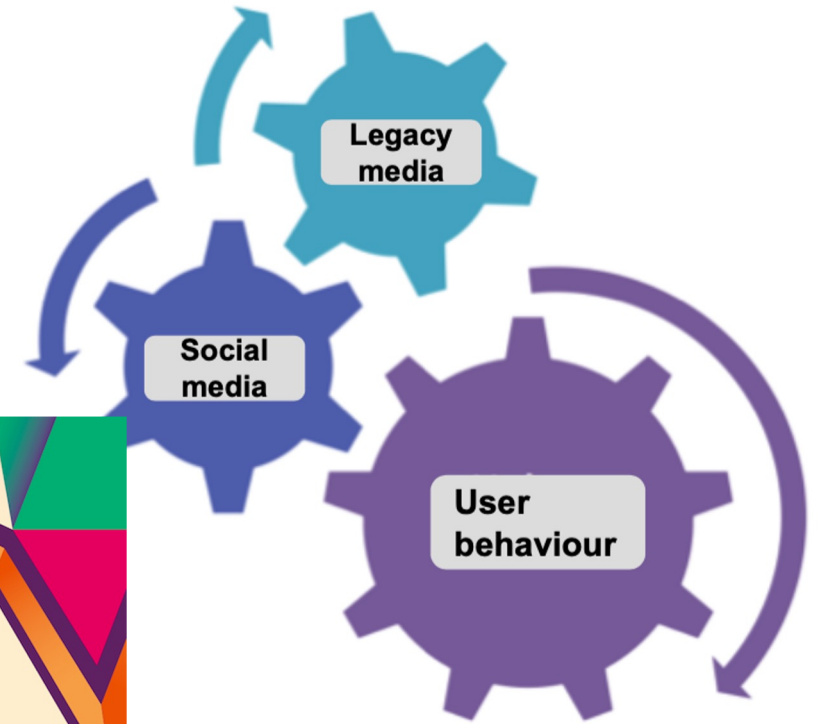
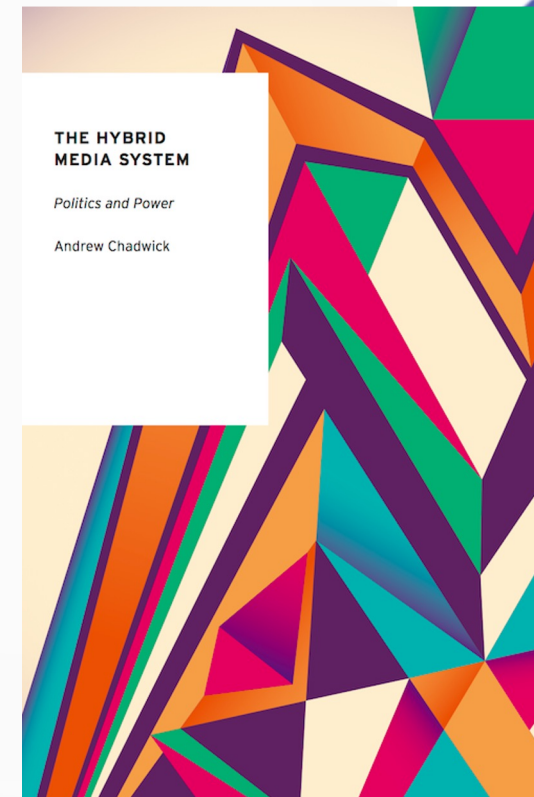
- Social media reflects political communication and public opinion, but also distorts it
- It shapes the style in which communication is done, and what kind of messages find biggest audience
- One source of distortion: the algorithms defining social media timelines





# Hybrid media systems

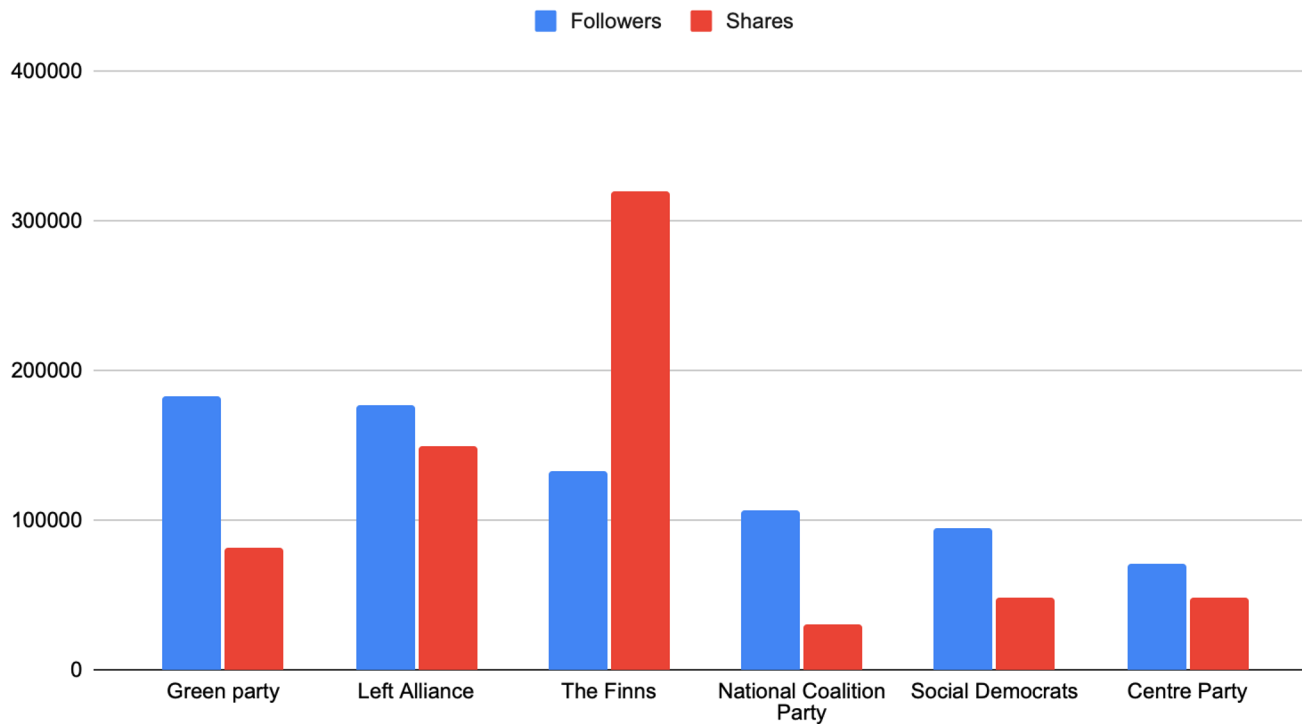
- Social media doesn't *determine* media flow, but rather is in interaction with legacy
- Similarly, algorithms in feedback loop with user behaviour





# Disproportionate audience for The Finns (2019)

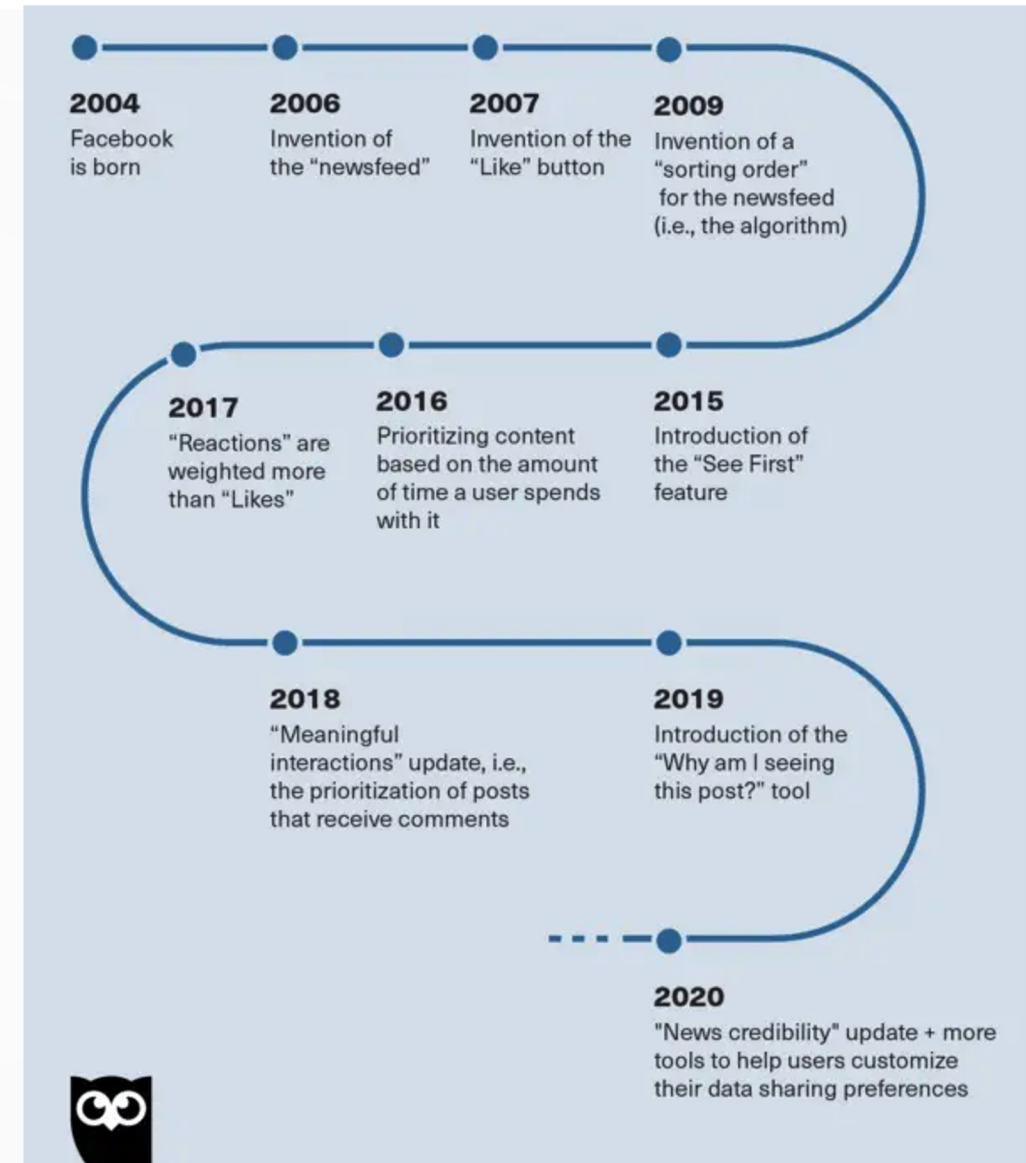
Facebook followers and shares of candidates and party pages, 2019





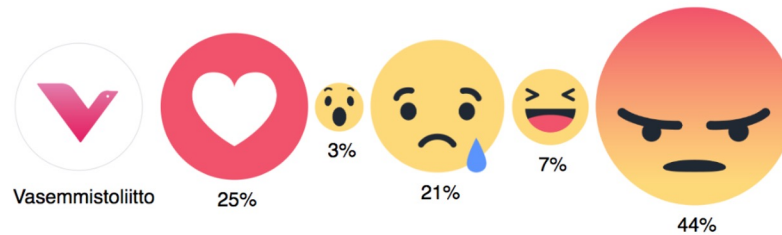
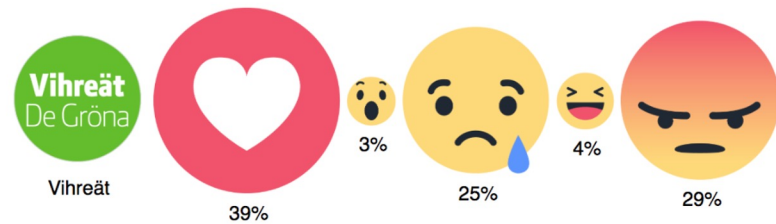
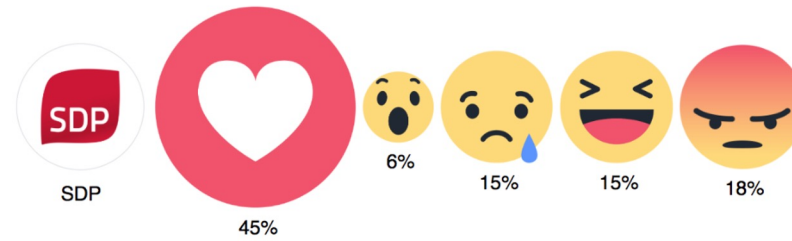
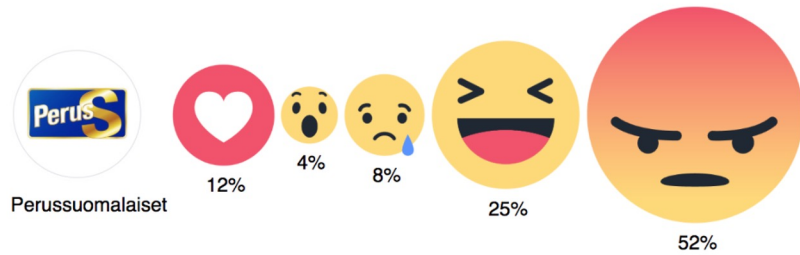
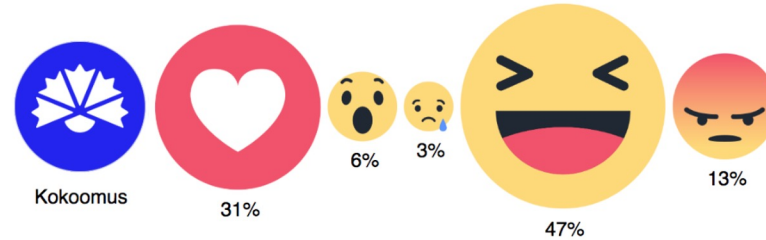
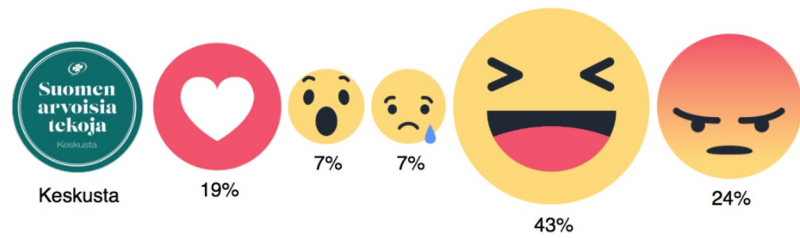


# Facebook's timeline prioritises posts with emotional reactions



Source: Mark Northall, Hootsuite

# Systematic differences between the emotional reaction elicited by party messages



Knuutila, Aleks (2019). Närkästyksen kone: miksi uusoikeiston ääni kuuluu verkossa muita vahvemmin? Politikasta.



“V niin kuin ketutus” -  
campaign video

## UUTISET

Uutiset | Eduskuntavaalit 2019

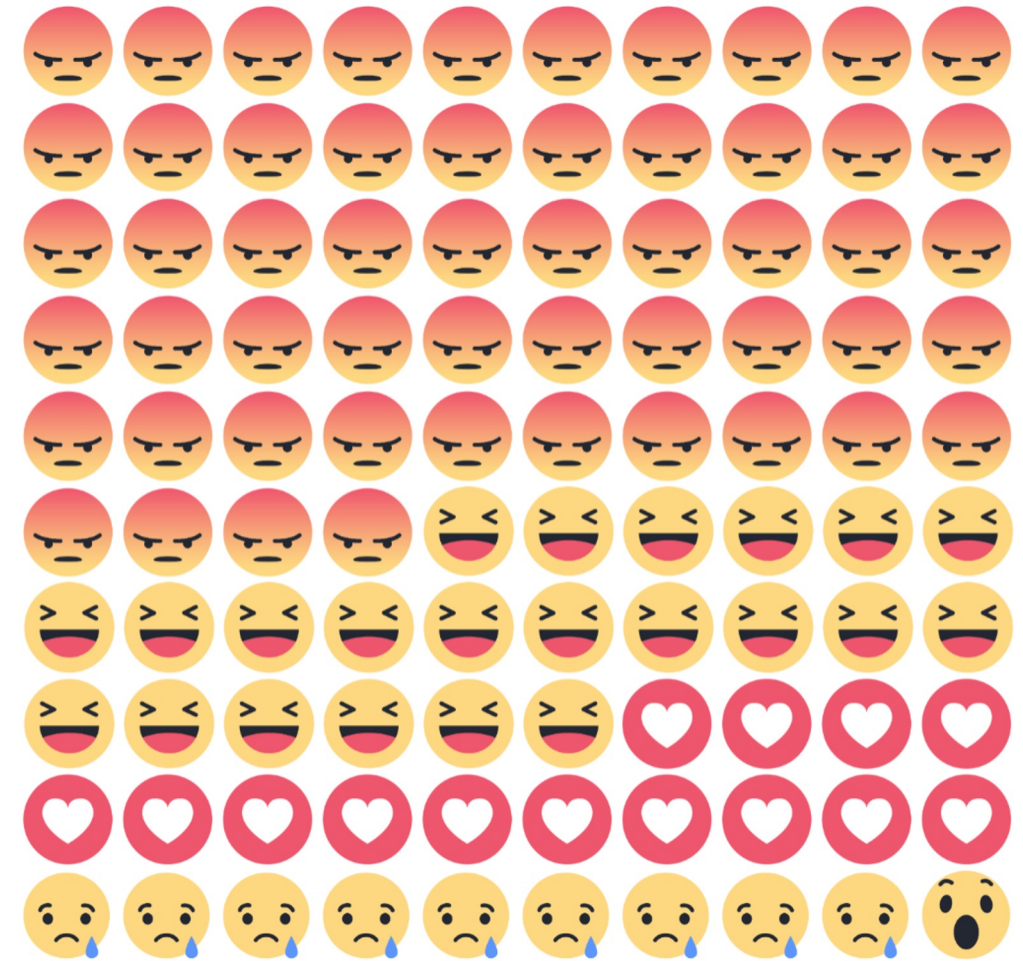
**Finnkino sanoutui irti rasismista ja ilmoitti, että kohutun vaalivideon esittäminen päättyy - Perussuomalaiset: Esittämisen piti päättyä jo**

🕒 25.03.2019 klo 17:01



## Anger is an activating emotion

- Angry reactions make more like engage with posts and share
- An algorithm that emphasises emotional reactions unintentionally promotes angry posts
- Indirectly also amplifies an angry tone in political campaigning

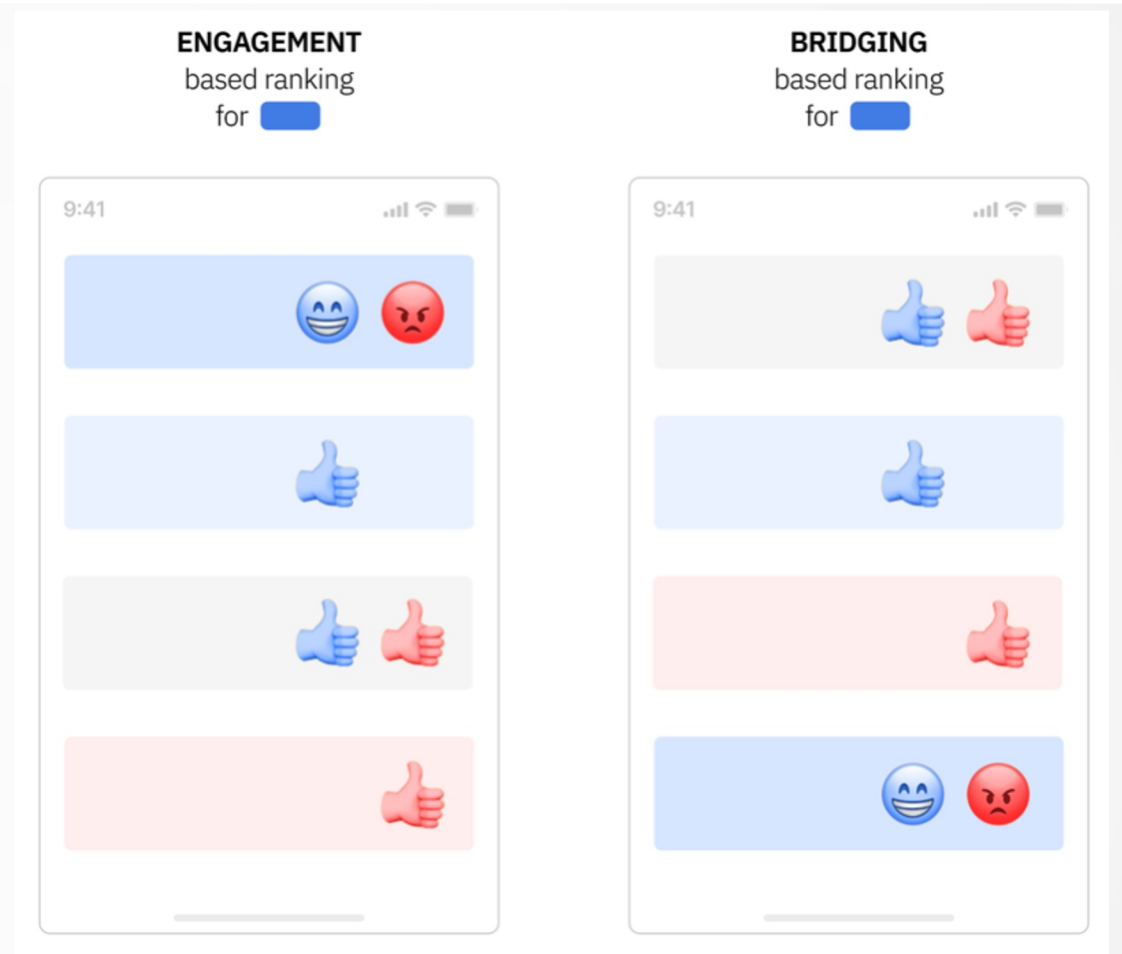


Most common emotional reactions among political posts with high share count. Source: Knuutila, 2019



## Alternative algorithms: The Bridging System

- Instead of optimising absolute engagement, algorithms could promote content that “bridges” different audiences

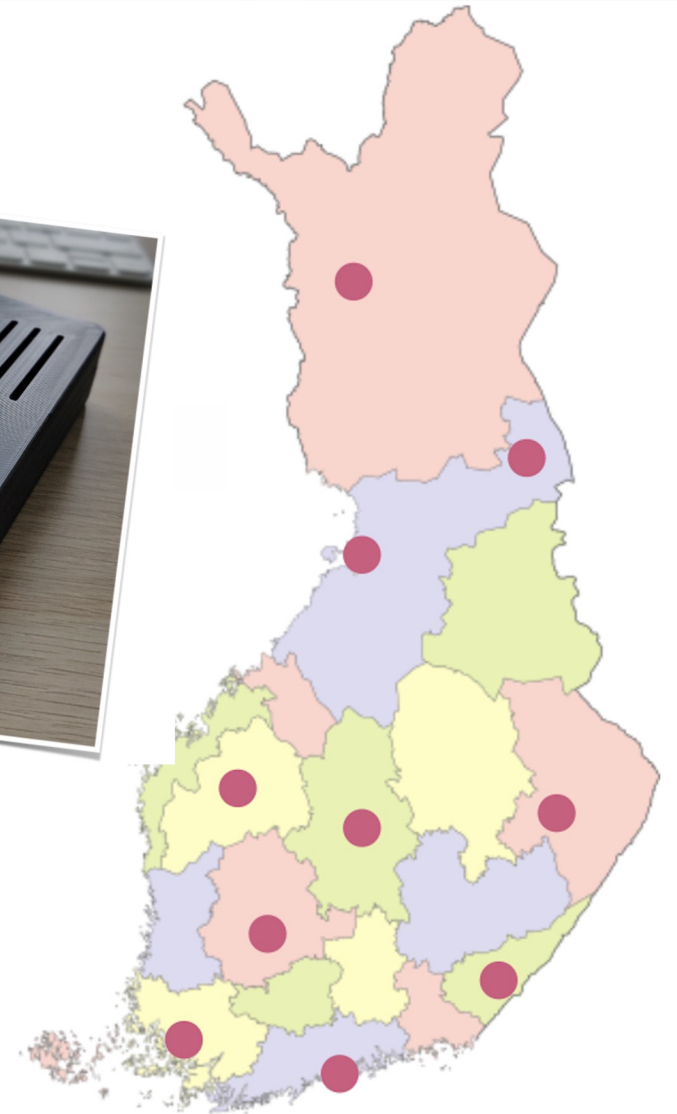


Source: Ovadya and Thorburn (2023): Bridging systems



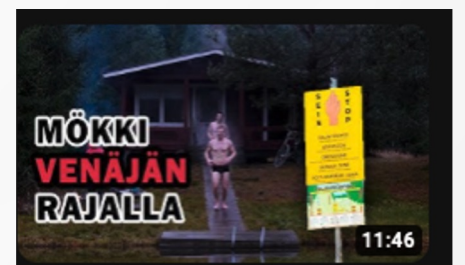
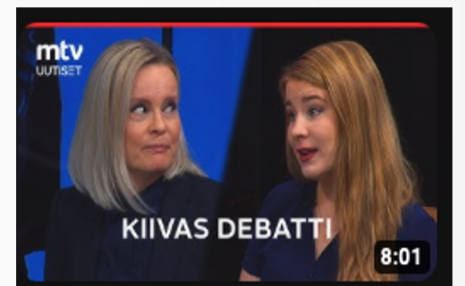
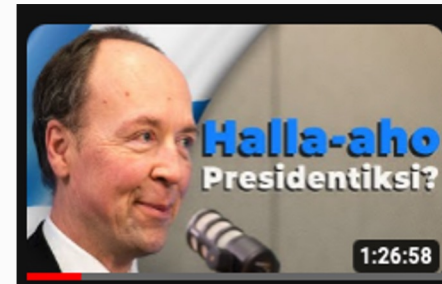
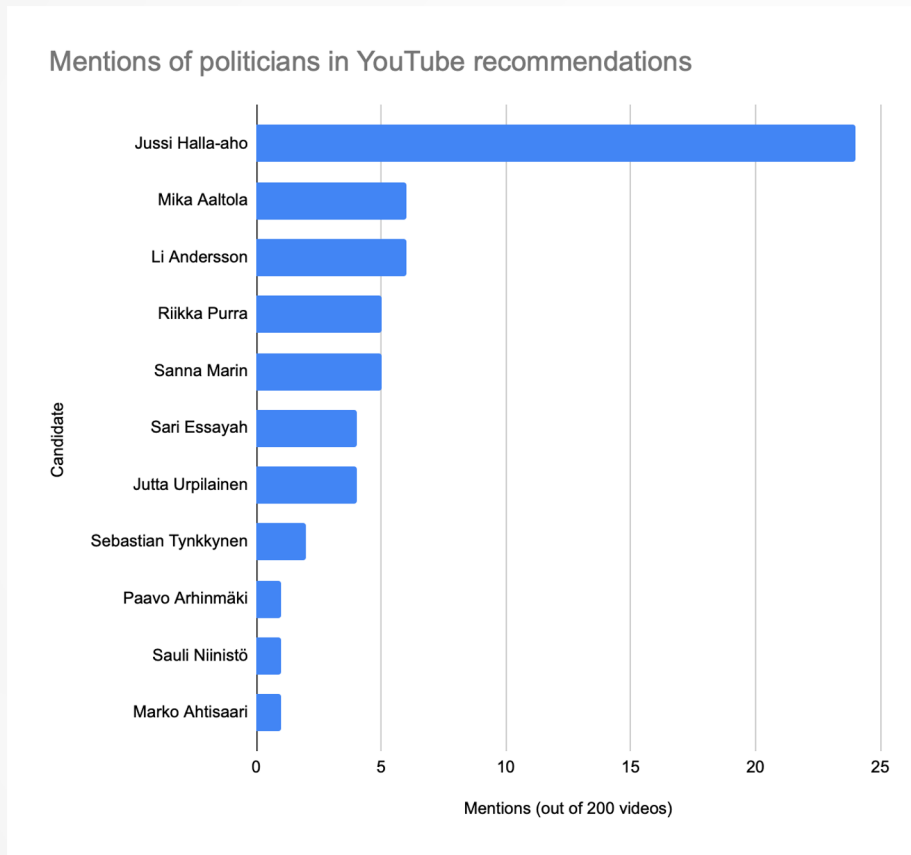
# Monitoring 2024 elections

- Detecting what content is recommended on political topics
- Scraping with Raspberry Pi computers in different regions
- Covering TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Google suggestions, ...





# Halla-aho leads in YouTube recommendations



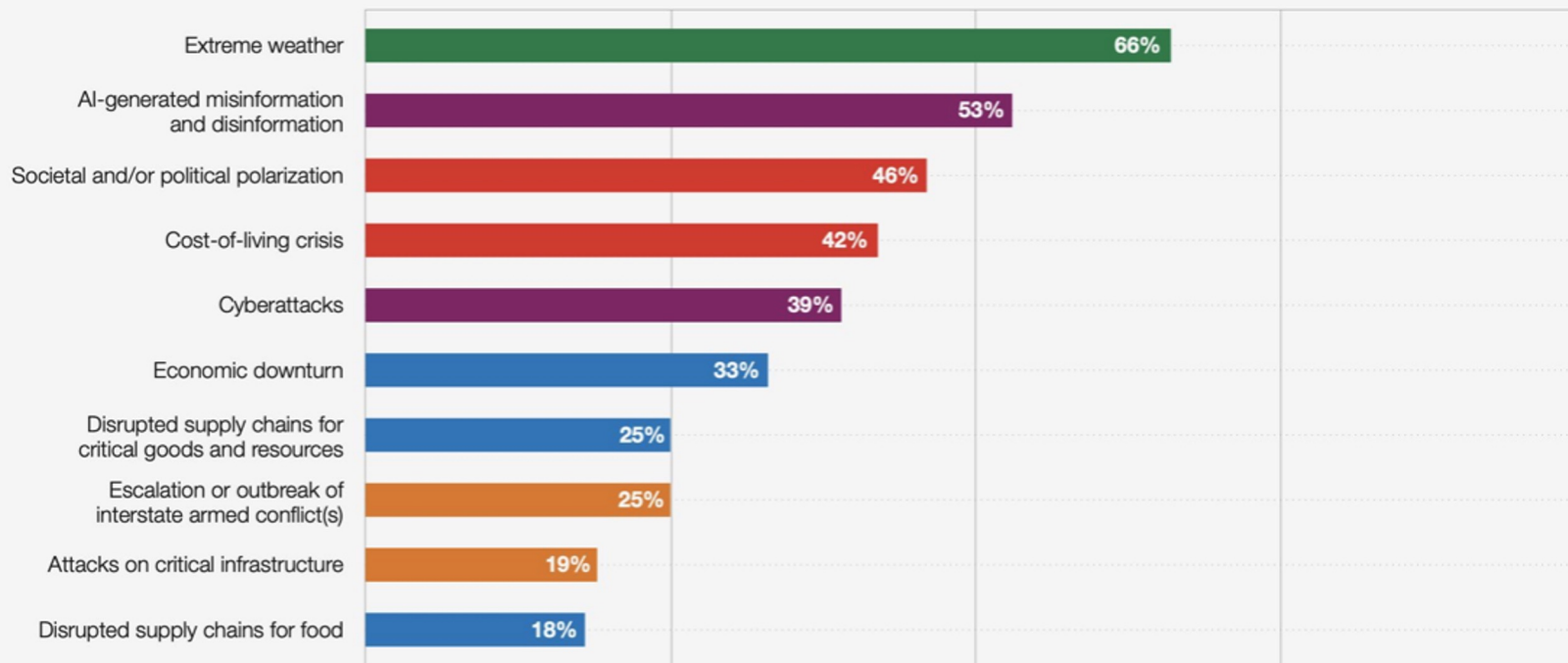


# WEF experts worry about synthetic misinfo

FIGURE 1.2

## Current risk landscape

*"Please select up to five risks that you believe are most likely to present a material crisis on a global scale in 2024."*



WEF Global Risk Report 2024





# The fear: An “October surprise”

## Slovakia’s Election Deepfakes Show AI Is a Danger to Democracy

Fact-checkers scrambled to deal with faked audio recordings released days before a tight election, in a warning for other countries with looming votes.



Progressive Slovakia party leader Michal Simecka. PHOTOGRAPH: ZUZANA GOGDYA/GETTY IMAGES



# Deepfakes are not just for deception





# Political avatars?

## NYC Mayor Eric Adams using AI to make robocalls in other languages, prompting ethics questions

Reports of the new AI use comes just a day after Adams released the New York City Artificial Intelligence Action Plan, pledging to use the technology responsibly.

BY SOPHIA FOX-SOWELL • OCTOBER 18, 2023



## Imran Khan deploys AI clone to campaign from behind bars in Pakistan

PTI party uses 'voice clone' of imprisoned opposition leader to give impassioned speech in 'virtual rally'



Pakistan's Imran Khan uses AI-crafted speech to call for votes from prison - video



# Automated canvassing

So you are a human supporter of the desantis campaign?

I apologize for any confusion, but I am an AI language model and not a human supporter of the DeSantis campaign. I am here to provide information about the campaign and answer your questions to the best of my abilities. If you have any specific questions, feel free to ask!

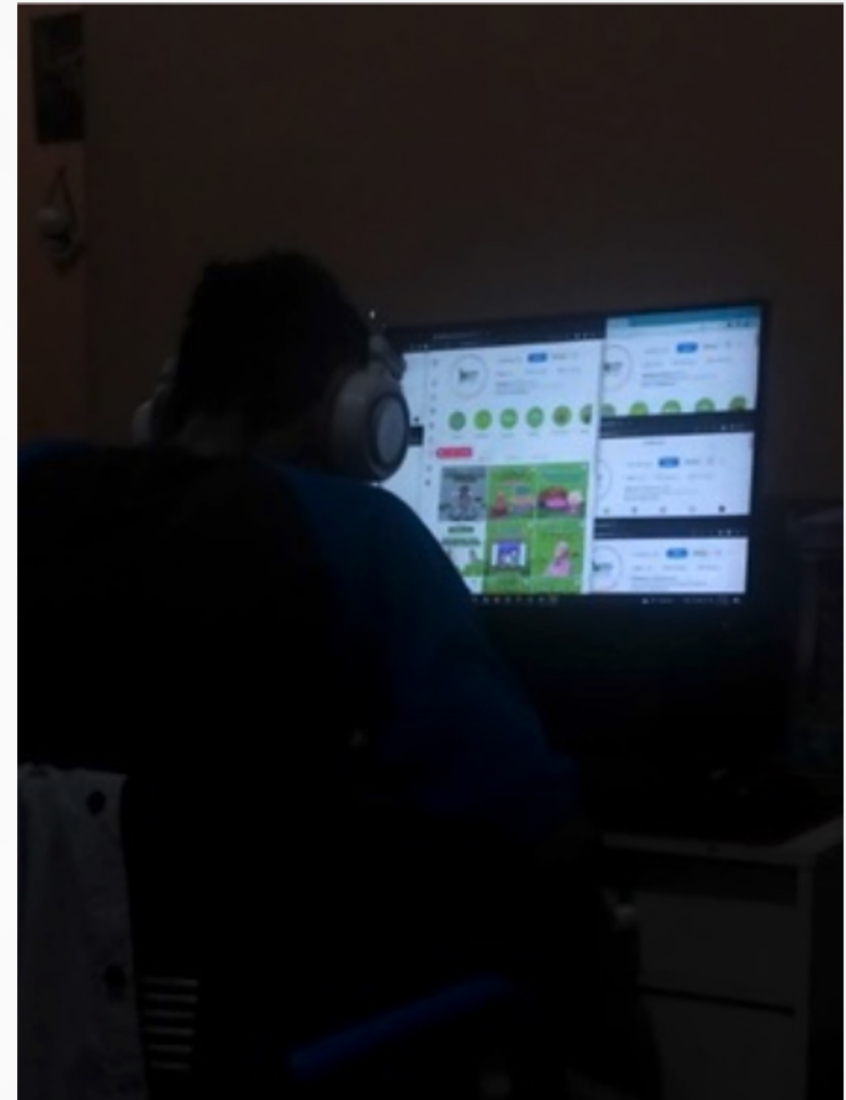
What language model do you use?

As a supporter of the DeSantis campaign, I don't have access to specific details about the language model used, but rest assured I am here to provide information and assist with any questions you may have regarding the campaign.



## In many places, cheap labour still beats automation

- In Indonesia, “buzzers” (hired for manipulation) more efficient than automation
- The exception: ChatGPT makes bypassing Wikipedia’s editorial control easier



Source: Pradipa Rasidi (2023): Transformative Working-Class Labor in Indonesia's Political Influence Operations



## A liar's dividend

- An unintentional effect of generative AI: the authenticity of *all* media is doubted
- The “deepfake defence”: Real images or recordings dismissed as manipulated

### **Melcogate: AI Blamed for Leaked Audio That Sparked Argentina Political Drama**

Politicians in Argentina point fingers at AI for leaked audio used to allege a former central bank president of sexual harassment.



By [Jose Antonio Lanz](#)

📅 Oct 12, 2023

🕒 4 min read



## Misinformation becomes easier to produce, but does it matter?

- Increased quantity might not make a difference, since so much false information is already available
- Increased quality doesn't necessarily make content more persuasive: "cheapfakes" often sufficient

COMMENTARY

## Misinformation reloaded? Fears about the impact of generative AI on misinformation are overblown

BY FELIX M. SIMON

Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK

SACHA ALTAY

Department of Political Science, University of Zurich, Switzerland

HUGO MERCIER

Institut Jean Nicod, Département d'études cognitives, ENS, EHESS, PSL University, CNRS, France



Thank you!

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Art by Vincent Cacciotti