

Finland Turned Right:

VOTING AND PUBLIC
OPINION IN THE
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
OF 2023



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Foreword

This report is based on data collected in the Kansalaismielipide/ Medborgaropinion online panel survey maintained by the Social Science Research Institute (Samforsk) at Åbo Akademi University. This panel is part of a national research infrastructure for public opinion (FIRIPO) funded by the Academy of Finland. The data in this report were collected both prior to and after the 2023 parliamentary election (see Technical Appendix for details). With this brief report, we hope to give insight into voting behavior and public opinion in Finland during the spring of 2023.

As editors of this report and managers of the panel survey, we would like to strongly emphasize that this report and all the work behind it has been a team effort. We would therefore like to give our sincerest thanks to all contributing colleagues for their quick and excellent work on the individual chapters in this report. We know that the schedule has been tight, and yet you have all found time within your busy schedules to deliver interesting chapters, and on time. So, thank you all. No report would of course exist without the data on which its analyses are based, and therefore we would like to send a very big thank you to our former research coordinator Rasmus Sirén who, for years, did an extensive amount of work in maintaining the panel, disseminating surveys, collecting data, communicating with panelists and just keeping everything

ticking. Concerning data, doctoral student Kim Backström deserves a big thank you as well for all the work with the current data collection and panel recruitment in one of our busiest springs yet. For the massive amount of work that has gone into producing the report—such as coordinating communication with the authors, proofreading, layout, and printing—we would also like to give very big thanks to Research Assistants Eva Aspnäs and Hanna Holmbäck. This report would certainly not exist without you two.

The data collection was mainly funded by the Academy of Finland infrastructure funding, decision number 345714, and the research behind the report by the Åbo Akademi Center of Excellence in Public Opinion Research, FutuDem. Last, but certainly not least, we want to thank all the citizens who are part of our panel and who took time to answer the surveys this spring. Thank you.

We hope that you will find the report interesting and that it gives you information on things you may have wanted to know about voting behavior and public opinion in conjunction with the 2023 election. The goal with the report has been to quickly provide the public with accessible information on different aspects of the Finnish electorate.

June 6, 2023

Kimmo Grönlund and Kim Strandberg

1

Introduction

Kimmo Grönlund and Kim Strandberg

AN ANALYSIS OF VOTING AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE FINNISH GENERAL ELECTION OF 2023

This is, by scientific standards, a quickly produced report on the Finnish Parliamentary Election that was held on April 2, 2023. This is the second time, the first being in 2019, that the political science team of Åbo Akademi University has gathered data, analyzed it, and written a report on a parliamentary election within a short time frame. The report has two main purposes. First, it is a comprehensive report on Finnish voting and public opinion, which is written in English targeting both an international and a national audience. It aims at providing popularized scientific evidence on contemporary Finnish public opinion and political behavior. Second, we want to promote the open science goals of the Academy of Finland by publicizing the data gathered through the Finnish National Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion, FIRIPO. The data used is mainly from a web-based survey in panel-format among the Finnish population (we explain more about the survey at the end of this introductory chapter), and the data will be distributed through the Finnish Social Science Data Archive FSD free of charge to anyone interested in using it in their research.

The report is roughly structured around four themes. The first theme concerns voting and voting patterns in the 2023 election. After this introductory chapter, in which we present the main results of the election, Kimmo Grönlund discusses party choice in Chapter 2, Thomas Karv focuses on party leader evaluations in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 by Jonas Schauman deals with candidate attributes and their link to electoral success, and in Chapter 5 Henrik Serup Christensen analyzes gender patterns in voting. The second block of chapters concerns broader participation and political values. Herein, Chapter 6 by Peter Söderlund analyzes value orientations among the electorate, and Janette Huttunen explores participation among young people in Chapter 7. Furthermore, Chapter 8 by Lauri Rapeli focuses on political efficacy, and Fredrik Malmberg analyzes institutional trust among Finnish voters in Chapter 9. The next theme of the report focuses on public opinion from various angles. Chapter 10 by Linnéa Henriksson deals with policy issues and the 2023 election, Chapter 11 by Marina Lindell also concentrates on policy opinion but with a focus on changes since the 2019 election. In Chapter 12, Kim Strandberg studies affective polarization between voters of different parties. Chapter 13 by Albert Weckman analyzes opinions on Russia and the NATO issue, and finally, in Chapter 14, Nanuli Silagadze explores opinions on the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The final three chapters of the report concern support for government and democratic processes. Thus, Chapter 15 presents Maija Jäske's study of opinion on the Finnish Citizens' initiative process. Chapter 16 by Isak Vento analyzes citizen evaluations of government, and in the final chapter, Inga Saikkonen focuses on support for democracy.

THE ROAD TO THE ELECTION OF 2023 AND ITS RESULTS

After finishing first in the election of 2019, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) formed a coalition government with the Centre Party (Keskusta, KESK), the Green League (Vihreät, VIHR), the Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliitto, VAS), and the Swedish People's Party (Svenska Folkpartiet, SFP). Within the coalition, the three left-green parties were ideologically coherent, and their cooperation in government went smoothly. Also, the smallest coalition party SFP, which is used to working in all kinds of coalition governments, was able to adapt to the policies of the government,

whereas several times during the governmental period, the more morally conservative and bourgeois Centre Party publicly showed that it was not content with the coalition. For example, as a result of distrust by the Centre Party, PM Antti Rinne, who had led SDP to an election victory in 2019, had to resign as PM and leave the government in December 2019, after less than six months in office. After that, Sanna Marin was chosen as PM by SDP, and she managed to lead the coalition for almost 3.5 years, until the election.

In the build up to the election, the main opposition parties, the Conservative National Coalition Party (Kokoomus, KOK) and the populist right Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, PS), criticized the government for leftist-green policies and had a successful electoral campaign. Opinion polls promised a tight election, which materialized on election day. The KOK and PS were both able to attract slightly more votes than SDP, which finished third. Table 1.1 shows the results of the 2023 election and the changes from the 2019 election.¹

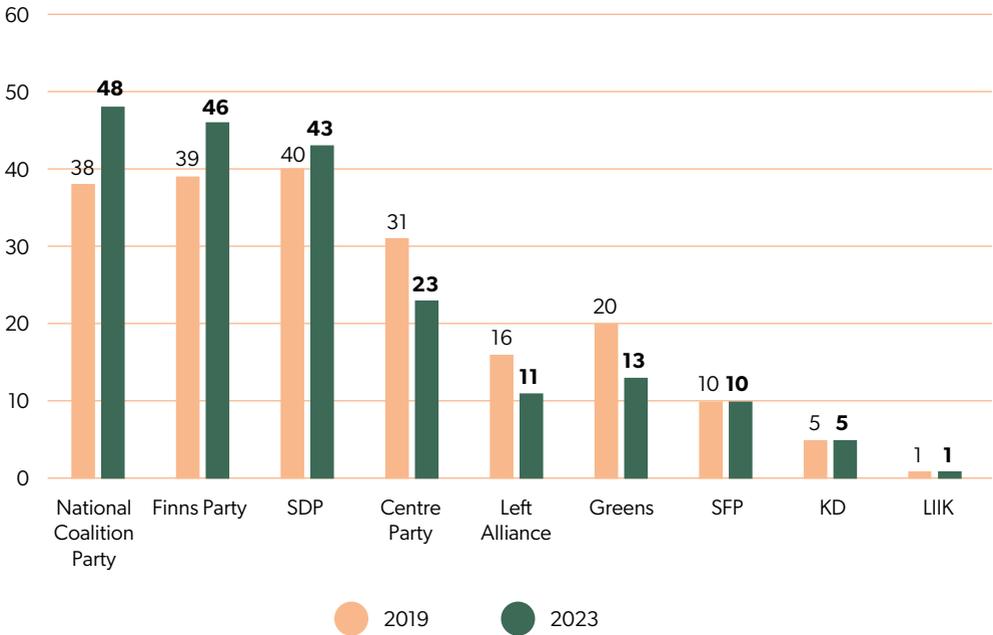
TABLE 1.1 The results of the 2023 election and changes from 2019 in percentages for each party

Party	2023	change
National Coalition Party	20.8	3.8
Finns Party	20.1	2.6
SDP	19.9	2.2
Centre Party	11.3	-2.5
Left Alliance	7.1	-1.1
Greens	7.0	-4.5
SFP	4.3	-0.2
KD	4.2	0.3
LIIK ¹	2.4	0.1
Others	2.9	-0.7

¹ Movement Now (LIIK) was not a registered party in 2019, but its total vote share aggregated from constituencies is used here.

The National Coalition Party, which had been in the lead in opinion polls especially after the Russian war against Ukraine, was able to maintain its pole position and received 20.8% of the vote. The struggle for the second position was even harder. Even though PM Sanna Marin was immensely popular (see Chapter 3 in this report), and her SDP was able to gain more support than in 2019, the Finns Party finished second with 20.1%. SDP got 19.9% of the vote and was left third. All three of the largest parties increased their electoral support from 2019, and this was the first time in twenty years that the PM's party was able to grow in a parliamentary election. In the end, the difference between PS and SDP was by a mere 3,429 votes nationwide. None of the other parties in government were able to increase vote shares. The Greens (Vihreä liitto, VIHR) lost the most, by 4.5 percentage points, and finished sixth in terms of electoral support, with 7.0%, slightly behind the Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliitto,

FIGURE 1.1 Seats in Parliament after the elections of 2019 and 2023



VAS), which got 7.1% of the vote. Among the bourgeois coalition partners, the Centre Party (Keskusta, KESK) lost 2.5 percentage points finishing at 11.3%. The Swedish People's Party (Svenska Folkpartiet, SFP) was able to maintain its support at 4.3%.

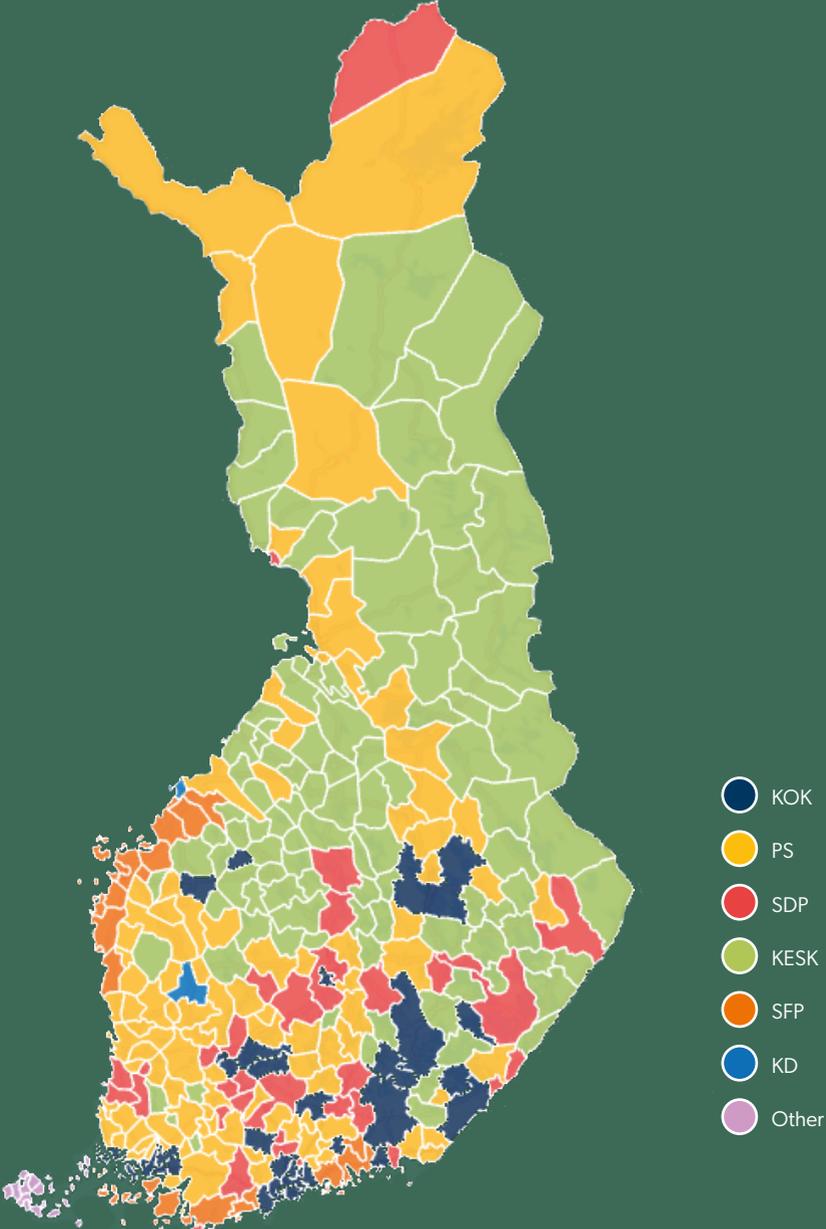
Finland has a proportional electoral system that uses the d'Hondt method and open party lists, but the constituencies vary in size, and this causes differences in the effective threshold. Thus, the seats do not totally reflect vote shares for each party, as can be seen in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 shows the seats for each party after the elections in 2019 and in 2023. The electoral gains for the three largest parties are easily seen in the figure. Of the total 200 seats in the Finnish Parliament (eduskunta, riksdag), KOK got 48 seats, an increase of 10 seats from 2019. The second party, PS, got 46 seats (+7). SDP gained three seats and finished with 43 seats. Among the mid-sized parties, the losses were big. KESK lost 8 seats, finishing with 23, VAS got 11 seats (-5) and VIHR, even though their national vote share was lower than that of the Left Alliance, got 13 seats (-7). SFP retained its nine seats. We included the MP from the autonomous Åland Islands in this party since the MP from Åland is part of the parliamentary group in practice. KD kept its five seats in Parliament, as did the right-wing fringe party Movement Now (Liike Nyt, LIIK).

Figure 1.2 is a map of Finland with all its 309 municipalities. The map has been colored to show which party gained the most votes in each municipality in the election. Since many of the municipalities are small in terms of population, the map does not fully mirror the election result. Looking at Finland, we see mostly Finns Party yellow and Centre Party green on the map. Support for the National Coalition Party and SDP is more concentrated in larger cities in southern Finland. Compared to a similar map for the election of 2019, the most dramatic shift is from KESK green to PS yellow, showing the magnitude of the Centre Party losing ground in the periphery.² SFP has the position of the largest party in some coastal regions with a high share of Swedish speakers.

Voter turnout for voters living in Finland was 72.0%, and the total turnout for all eligible voters, including those living abroad, was 68.5%. The total turnout decreased slightly, by 0.1 percentage points. The share of men who turned out was 71.0% and of women 72.9%; the share of women voting is normally higher than that of men in Finland. It is worth noticing that voter turnout was 40.5% after advance voting, which means that over 56% of the votes were cast in advance, a new record of advance

FIGURE 1.2 Party that received the highest share of votes by municipality



voting in parliamentary elections in Finland. Table 1.2 shows “hard” data from the official electronic voting registry in Finland. The table reports turnout for the Finnish electorate according to age and education. The table combines data on turnout at the individual level from an electronic voting register, the Election Information System of the Ministry of Justice, with background data from Statistics Finland. The electronic voting register does not include all Finnish voters, but almost half, 49.1%, of all eligible voters are in the register.

TABLE 1.2 Turnout according to age and education in the election of 2023

	Total	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Lowest tertiary	Lower tertiary	Higher tertiary, doctorate
Total	70.9	54.9	67.5	84.4	83.4	90.8
18–24	58.0	51.6	62.6	..	84.3	..
25–34	63.9	32.0	58.6	54.1	81.1	90.3
35–44	70.2	41.0	63.1	69.9	81.4	88.9
45–54	75.1	48.7	68.6	82.2	84.4	91.4
55–64	76.8	57.0	72.7	84.9	87.0	92.4
65–74	79.5	68.3	78.3	88.3	91.0	93.3
75–	66.8	57.5	70.0	80.2	82.9	87.3

n = 2,098,132

Starting with age only, we see that turnout was the highest (79.5%) in the age group 65 to 74, followed by 55 to 64 (76.8%) and 45 to 54 (75.1%). The lowest turnout was among the youngest voters 18 to 24 (58%) and the next youngest group 25 to 34 (63.9%). In a similar manner, only looking at education and turnout, we see a clear linear

relationship. Among people with a lower secondary education, only 55% voted, whereas among people with at least a master's degree, nine of ten turned out. When age is combined with education, huge differences emerge. Of young adults (25–34) with a lower secondary education, only one in three voted, whereas in the same age group nine of ten with the highest education level turned out. The impact of education is least evident in the age group 65 to 74, probably reflecting their stronger sense of voting being a civic duty, but the difference in turnout between the lowest and highest education level is still 25 percentage points in that age group. The figures above are very similar to those in 2019,³ and we can see that voting is still very unevenly distributed in Finland according to age and education.

THE SURVEY

The data used in the chapters in this report was collected using the Kansalaismielipide/ Medborgaropinion online panel survey at the Social Science Research Institute at Åbo Akademi University (see Technical Appendix for details on the panel). The panel has been running since 2019 and currently has around 5000 members. The data for this report was collected using six survey waves between the end of February and the end of April 2023, which got between 1,937 and 3,885 responses. All analyses were conducted using a statistical weight to correct for biases in the sample (see Technical Appendix for details on weighting). It should be noted that the number of panelists who did not have Finnish or Swedish as a mother tongue was very low, only 200, and only 24 of these respondents reported that they voted. Therefore, these respondents as a whole group are regarded as Finnish-speakers in the analyses in this report. According to the election data of Statistics Finland, citizens with other languages have a very low participation rate of 39.3%, and a large share of them lack the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

¹ The electoral data in this chapter is from Statistics Finland and the Ministry of Justice.

² Grönlund and Strandberg 2019, 4

³ Grönlund and Strandberg 2019, 5

2

Party choice

Kimmo Grönlund

The purpose of this chapter is to decipher characteristics of voters for each political party in the Finnish election in 2023. It is structured in the following manner. First, Table 2.1 presents party choice according to the basic sociodemographic variables gender, age, and education. After that, I present two figures that show party choice in a combination of gender and age for the six largest parties in Parliament. Table 2.2 then summarizes voters according to gender and age within parties; it shows what the vote share within each party looks like. Finally, Table 2.3 shows where votes from the 2019 general election went in the 2023 election. Some conclusions are provided at the end of the chapter.

TABLE 2.1 Party choice within sociodemographic strata 2023

	KOK	PS	SDP	KESK	VAS	VIHR	SFP	KD	LIIK	Others	sum ¹	n
Gender												
Female	17	12	24	12	10	10	5	5	3	2	100	1,807
Male	24	26	17	11	4	5	4	3	2	4	100	1,460
Age												
18–24	16	23	16	7	13	12	3	2	6	3	101	289
25–34	18	19	19	6	12	12	2	3	5	5	101	452
35–44	17	26	17	7	9	9	5	3	1	6	100	423
45–54	17	28	13	14	5	6	4	6	3	3	99	488
55–64	22	23	23	9	4	5	6	5	2	1	100	585
65–	26	12	24	16	6	4	5	5	1	1	100	1,066
Education level												
Basic	10	35	18	15	5	2	2	5	4	3	99	621
Secondary	19	22	21	11	8	6	3	4	3	3	100	975
Tertiary	26	13	20	10	7	10	6	4	2	3	101	1,700
Election result	20.8	20.1	19.9	11.3	7.1	7.0	4.3	4.2	2.4	2.9	100	

Notes

¹ = Because of the rules of statistical rounding, in some cases the total rounds up to 99 or 101.

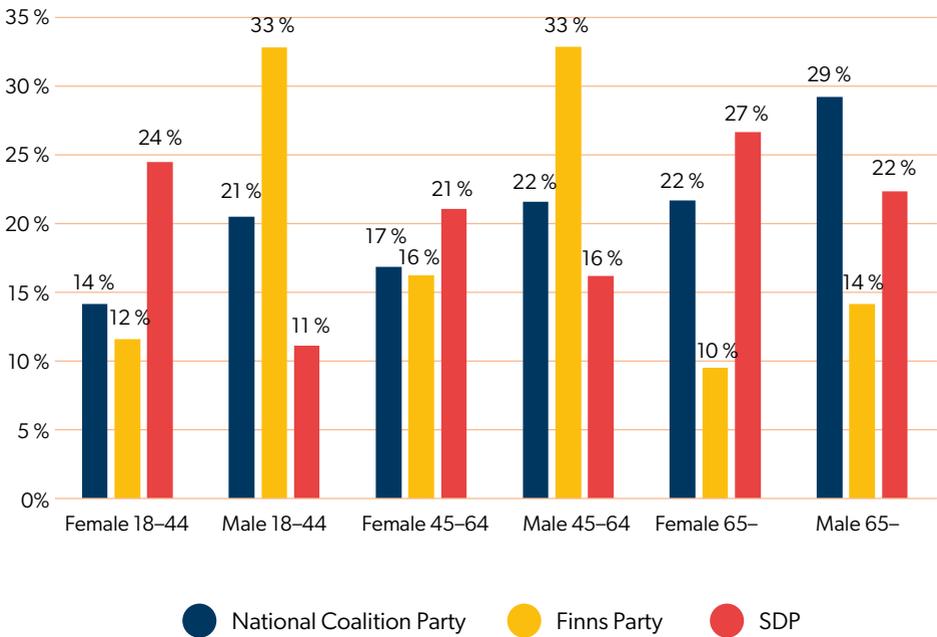
Starting with differences between male and female voters, we see that old patterns prevailed. The most popular parties among male voters were the Finns Party (abbreviation PS), with 26%, and the National Coalition Party (abbreviation KOK), with 24%. In the parliamentary election in 2019, their shares were 22% (PS) and 17% (KOK). Among women, 12% voted for PS, compared to 11% in 2019, and 17% for KOK, compared to 16% in 2019.⁴ This means that the electoral victory of both bourgeois opposition parties was induced especially by male voters. Regarding other parties, the Social Democrats were a mirror of the National Coalition party: SDP attracted 24% of the female vote, compared to 18% in 2019, and 17% of the male vote, compared to 18% in 2019) Whereas the Centre Party (KESK) showed no gender differences, the Left Alliance and the Greens attracted significantly more women than men to vote for them in the election. This pattern could already be seen in the election of 2019. Around 10% of women voted for the Left Alliance and the Greens, whereas the amount among male voters was around 5%. Of the remaining parties, both the Swedish People's Party (SFP) and the Christian Democrats (KD) were slightly more popular among women (5% each) than men, which is consistent with voting in 2019. The "one-man" party of Harry Harkimo, Movement Now (LIIK), seems to have gotten more votes from men than from women.

Moving on to age differences, it is easy to see that the Finns Party was the most popular party in all age cohorts up until the oldest group of 65 and older. In two of the age groups, 25–34 and 55–64, SDP and KOK were more or less equally popular. Among the 25 to 34-year-olds, the shares of each party were just less than a fifth of all who voted (18–19%), and among the late middle-aged group (55–64), all three parties got even more, 22–23% of the vote in that age group. It is notable that the popularity of PS was mainly seen among the working-age population, whereas pensioners voted heavily for KOK (26%), SDP (24%), and for KESK (16%). The pattern here largely resembles the voting in the 2019 election. Among the smaller parties, patterns regarding age are similar for the Left Alliance and the Greens. Compared to 2019, the Greens lost support among the youngest voters. In 2019 we estimated that about 30% of 18–24-year-olds voted Green, but in the election of 2023 the share sank to 12%. Of course, some of these were new voters.

Education is an indirect proxy for social class, and this is clearly visible in voting patterns. Among people with basic education, the Finns Party

has become the predominant party with a vote share of 35%; SDP is second with a vote share of 18%. In the election of 2019, SDP attracted 28% of voters with a low education level, followed by PS with a share of 20%. The third largest party among voters with a low education level was the Centre party in both elections. Voters with secondary education were more evenly split between the three largest parties PS, SDP, and KOK; compared to the election of 2019, support for KOK increased in this group. Among the most educated, KOK was the most popular choice with 26% of the vote, which was similar to the vote in 2019. In the most educated group, the popularity of SDP rose the most, probably as a result of the popularity of PM Sanna Marin and her public announcements for people to vote for SDP if they did not want a right-wing

FIGURE 2.1 Party choice according to gender and age, large parties



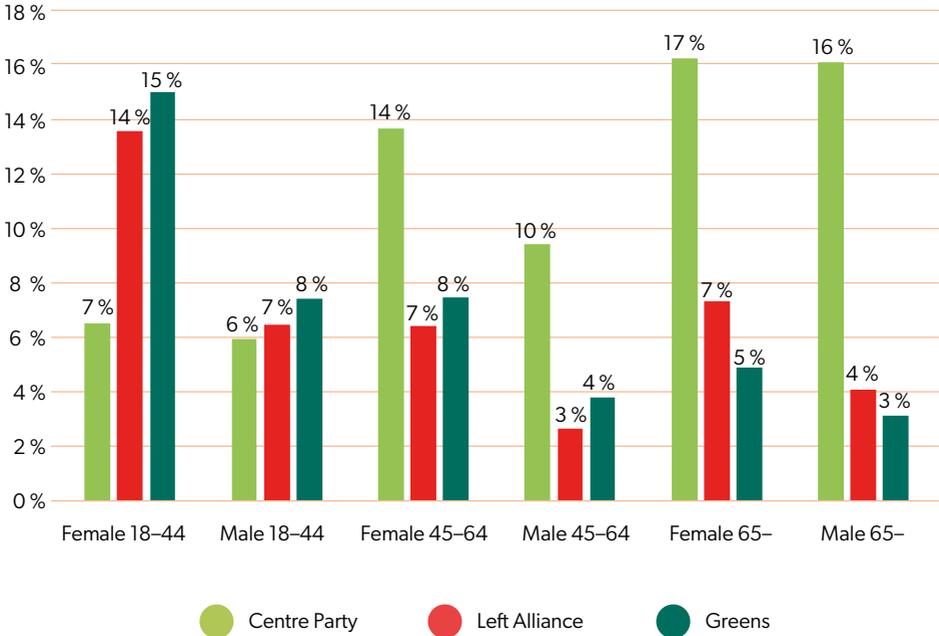
government. We saw a doubling of support, from 10% to 20%, in this group between 2019 and 2023. As a result of this, the vote share of the Greens among the most educated group sank from 15% in 2019 to 10% in 2023. The vote share of the former workers' party, the Left Alliance, sank in this election among the least educated to 5%, compared to 12 in the election of 2019. Among the smaller parties, SFP attracted a larger share among the most educated population than the other groups.

Since Table 2.1 suggests that there is a clear divide between men and women, and differences in voting according to age, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 look at vote choices of men and women according to age. For this purpose, I have combined age groups so that the number of observations is larger and the shares more reliable. Thus, we look at three age groups among men and women, 18–44, 45–64, and 65+.

Figure 2.1 shows the shares of the three largest parties for different age groups of female and male voters. The differences mapped out in Table 2.1 are even more visible here in this combination of gender and age. In the youngest age group, 24% of women, and only 11% of men, chose SDP. For the Finns Party, the gender difference was even larger, one-third of young men voted for PS, but only 12% of young women. There is also a gender difference in voting for the National Coalition Party among voters 18–44, but the difference is smaller: 14% of women and 21% of men voted for KOK. Gender differences are also evident in the middle-aged group, but they are less apparent. PS was the most popular party for male voters, and in this age group, the party attracted 33% of the vote, followed by KOK with a share of 21% and SDP with a share of 16%. Among 45 to 64-year-old women, the votes were more evenly split: SDP got 21%, KOK 17%, and PS 16%. Among the oldest voters, SDP was the most popular party for women, with a vote share of 27%, whereas KOK attracted 29% of male pensioners' votes. PS was somewhat more popular, getting 14% among retired men, than women, of whom 10% cast their vote for PS.

Figure 2.2 maps voting according to gender and age for the three middle-sized parties. Starting with Left Alliance and the Greens, it is striking how similar their shares of votes were in different groups. Both the Left Alliance and the Greens were popular among young (18–44) women, and both attracted up to 15% of the vote in this group. In the same age group among men, the parties got 7–8% of the vote. Both the Left Alliance and the Greens were much less popular in older age

FIGURE 2.2 Party choice according to gender and age, mid-sized parties



groups. Especially for male voters 45 years old and above, they were fringe parties in the election with a support of 3–4%. For the Centre party the pattern is the total opposite; it got 16–17% of the vote among men and women in the oldest category, and it was also rather popular among middle-aged women (14%).

Table 2.2 shows the electorate of each political party according to gender and age. Thus, when reading the table, one should look within each party in order to see what the total vote for a particular party consists of.

Based on the first column, which shows the electorate of KOK, we see that the single largest group of votes came from men aged 65 and over; their vote share of the total vote for KOK was 27%. In a similar manner, only

TABLE 2.2 Per cent shares of voters according to gender and age within each party in the election of 2023

		KOK	PS	SDP	KESK	VAS	VIHR	SFP	KD	LIIK
Female	18–44	11	10	20	10	34	36	18	13	20
	45–64	12	12	15	18	14	16	16	23	23
	65–	14	6	18	20	15	10	18	21	4
Male	18–44	18	30	10	10	18	20	11	9	30
	45–64	19	30	15	15	7	10	21	19	10
	65–	27	13	21	28	12	9	16	15	13
Total		101	101	99	101	100	101	100	100	100

Note. Because of the rules of statistical rounding, the total in some cases rounds up to 99 or 101.

11% of the party’s vote came from retired women. As for PS, we see that 60% of the party’s votes came from working-age men (18–64). For SDP, the situation was different. Its electorate consisted of three almost equally large shares: retired men (21%), young women (20%), and retired women (18%). The Centre party got its votes mainly from retired men (28%) and women (20%), but also from middle-aged women (18%) and men (15%). The Left Alliance and Greens once again had very similar voter profiles. Both parties got about half of their total vote from working-age women, especially young women, and almost a fifth of their electorate were young men. SFP had the most balanced division between different sub-groups, but had trouble winning the votes of young men (11% of the total vote).

In Table 2.3, voting in 2019 is compared to voting in 2023 by cross tabulating the data we have on our panel members for how they voted in 2019 with their voting in 2023.

To read Table 2.3 one should start by looking at the vote in 2019 and move on to the different columns that display the vote in 2023. We begin with the biggest party in the 2019 election and trace where their voters went in 2023. First, we see that about three out of four (74%) of the voters who voted for SDP in 2019 also voted for SDP in 2023. This party’s “losses” in 2023 were rather evenly split among other parties. Moving on to PS, 78% per cent of the 2019 PS voters also voted for PS in 2023. PS, who got an electoral victory in 2023, lost some votes to KOK (7%). KOK, on the other hand, seems to have kept 74% of its voters from 2019 but lost 10% to PS. All three of these parties were winners of the election in 2023, which explains why they did not lose much to other parties.

TABLE 2.3 Where did voters from the 2019 election go? Party choice in 2019 and their vote in 2023 per part.

Party in 2023→ Party 2019 ↓	SDP	PS	KOK	KESK	VIHR	VAS	SFP	KD	LIIK	Other	n
SDP	74	5	4	5	2	4	1	2	3	1	422
PS	3	78	7	4	0	0	0	3	2	3	485
KOK	4	10	74	4	1	0	2	2	2	2	608
KESK	3	10	9	69	1	1	0	6	2	1	325
VIHR	31	1	8	5	42	7	1	1	1	3	352
VAS	29	3	1	3	6	55	1	0	0	2	240
SFP	9	1	6	0	1	0	81	0	0	3	117
KD	6	11	6	8	1	0	0	66	0	2	84
LIIK	11	15	33	0	4	7	4	0	22	4	27
Other	9	18	7	4	7	9	2	2	5	39	57

More evident losses can be traced among the parties that lost in the election. The Centre party kept 69% of their voters from 2019 and lost about 10% to PS and KOK each. They also lost 6% of their voters to Christian Democrats. The biggest losses can be traced for the Greens and the Left Alliance. The Greens only managed to keep 42% of their voters, and the Left Alliance 55%. Both lost almost a third of their voters from 2019 to SDP in 2023. SFP was the party with the highest “keep” rate in 2023; 81% of the voters who voted for the party in 2019 also did so in 2023.

This chapter has deciphered party choice in the Finnish parliamentary election of 2023 with simple cross tabulations and figures. We have seen that men and women vote differently in Finland. The most popular parties among men in the 2023 election were the Finns Party (26%) and the National Coalition Party (24%), whereas 24% of women voted for SDP. A combination of gender and age show large differences in terms of party choice. The populist radical right Finns Party has established stable support, especially among working-age men in Finland, among whom the party’s vote share was 33%.⁵ KOK attracted the most votes among retired men (29%), whereas SDP was the most popular among retired (27%) and young (24%) women. Among the smaller parties, the Left Alliance and the Greens had similar voter profiles; both were popular among young female voters.

The 2023 election became an even competition between the three largest parties, and there was an element of strategic voting on the left. During the campaign, the social democratic PM Sanna Marin strongly urged people who did not want a bourgeois government to vote for SDP. We can see that her tactic (almost) succeeded. Table 2.3 shows that almost a third of the voters for both Greens and the Left Alliance in the 2019 election voted for SDP in the 2023 election. This boosted the support for SDP but led to heavy losses for the Greens and the Left Alliance. Moreover, SDP finished third, which meant that the party lost the position of PM.

⁴ All references to voting in the 2019 election in this chapter are from Grönlund 2019.

⁵ For a definition of populist radical right parties, see Mudde 2007.

3

The party leader effect in the 2023 elections

Thomas Karv

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the influence of the party leader (PL) on party choice in the 2023 parliamentary elections. Party-voter ties in Finland are changing as the traditional political cleavages have weakened, in turn resulting in increasing electoral volatility, for example, the phenomenon of individual voters switching parties between elections.¹ As voters are becoming more volatile, other factors are gaining in importance for explaining individual-level party choices. One of these factors is the so-called PL effect, that is, the influence that the party leader has on party choice.² The growing interest in the PL effect could be considered a logical outcome of a political and social environment becoming increasingly

individualized.³ Even as the personal popularity of the PL and the party are expected to be closely associated, parties are prone to elect PLs considered to have the potential to increase the party's chances for electoral success.⁴ In Finland, the emergence of PS under the leadership of Timo Soini (1997–2017) is widely attributed to the personal popularity of Soini, just to mention one of the most recent examples of a positive PL effect on a specific party in a Finnish context.⁵ However, it is also possible that, instead of being a resource for the party, the PL could become something of a problem, thus contributing to a reversed PL effect.⁶ In a Finnish context, earlier studies have shown that the importance of the PL for party choice increased between 1991 and 2011 but that it has since remained stable.⁷

Going into the 2023 parliamentary elections, Sanna Marin (SDP) was the acting prime minister (PM), having replaced Antti Rinne (SDP) as both PL and PM after Rinne was forced to step down following a political scandal in 2019. During her time as PM, Marin became something of a global phenomenon as she led Finland through a pandemic as well as towards a NATO membership. Thus, the increased international interest in the 2023 parliamentary elections broadly centered around whether Marin would become re-elected as PM or not. Marin had also been involved in various controversies during her time as PM, leaving something of a mixed political legacy domestically.⁸ In retrospect, Marin might even become remembered as among the most divisive PMs in Finnish political history. In this chapter, the research aim is thus to explore and analyze the impact of Marin and the other main PLs on party choice in the 2023 parliamentary elections.

OPERATIONALIZATION

In order to assess and measure the possible impact of the PL on the electoral support of the party, it is crucial to also account for the popularity of the political party represented.⁹ One of the survey items available in the dataset asks respondents to grade their opinions of all the PLs and political parties respectively on an eleven-point scale from 0–10, with 0 indicating “strongly dislike” and 10 indicating “strongly like”. By subtracting the mean value of popularity of the party from the mean value of popularity of the PL, it is thus possible to create something resembling a PL popularity index.¹⁰ This enables a direct comparison

between the popularity of the PL and the political party. Going forward, the mean value from the PL evaluation item is consequently used as a measurement of the popularity for the respective PL, while the difference between the PL evaluation and party evaluation, which is referred to as the PL popularity index, is used as a measurement of the popularity of the PL in comparison with the party. The survey data also includes a survey item measuring the importance of twelve different statements for party choice, with response options on a four-point scale from “no importance” (0) to “decisive importance” (3). Among these twelve various statements, there are two that are of particular relevance for this research purpose: *The party has a good party leader* and *The leader of the party was the most suitable as prime minister*. These two survey items are subsequently used to add an extra dimension to the overall picture of the impact of the PLs.

RESULTS

The overall popularity of the nine PLs representing parties in Parliament is summarized in Table 3.1, and their popularity among party supporters is thereafter summarized in Table 3.2. Among the PLs, Sanna Marin (SDP) was by far the most popular, followed by Anna-Maja Henriksson (SFP), Li Andersson (VAS) and Sari Essayah (KD). However, when looking at the popularity index ratings, Essayah and Andersson were the most popular, followed by Henriksson and Marin. An overview of the period 2003–2019 also shows that this was the first election since 2003 that the PL of SDP had a positive rating in the popularity index.¹¹ The popularity scores of Essayah, Andersson, and Henriksson are similar to their respective popularity index ratings in 2019, while Riikka Purra (PS) also had the same rating as her predecessor Jussi Halla-aho in 2019.

Three PLs had a negative popularity index rating: Petteri Orpo (KOK), Annika Saarikko (KESK), and Maria Ohisalo (VIHR). In 2019, Saarikko’s predecessor, Juha Sipilä, who was PM at the time, had a personal popularity rating of 4.5, while Orpo, who was Minister of Finance then, had a personal popularity rating of 4.8 (both having a popularity index rating of 0.0). Pekka Haavisto, the predecessor to Ohisalo as PL of VIHR, had a personal popularity rating of 5.8 and a popularity index rating of 0.7 in 2019, a quite eye-catching difference in comparison with Ohisalo’s numbers in 2023.

TABLE 3.1 Popularity of PL and political party among all voters (mean values, 0–10)

Party	PL	PL	Party	Popularity index
SDP	Sanna Marin	5.3	4.9	0.4
PS	Riikka Purra	4.1	3.9	0.2
KOK	Petteri Orpo	4.4	4.8	-0.4
KESK	Annika Saarikko	3.7	4.0	-0.3
VIHR	Maria Ohisalo	3.6	3.9	-0.3
VAS	Li Andersson	4.6	3.7	0.9
SFP	Anna-Maja Henriksson	4.7	4.2	0.5
KD	Sari Essayah	4.6	3.7	0.9
LIIK	Hjallis Harkimo	3.7	3.7	0.0

Note: Scale from 0–10 (0=Strongly dislike; 10=Strongly like).

TABLE 3.2 Popularity of the PL and political party among party voters (mean values, 0–10)

Party	PL	PL	Party	Popularity index
SDP	Sanna Marin	8.7	8.3	0.4
PS	Riikka Purra	8.0	8.4	-0.4
KOK	Petteri Orpo	7.3	8.3	-1.0
KESK	Annika Saarikko	6.8	7.7	-0.9
VIHR	Maria Ohisalo	7.3	8.3	-1.00
VAS	Li Andersson	8.9	8.8	0.1
SFP	Anna-Maja Henriksson	7.8	8.3	-0.5
KD	Sari Essayah	8.6	8.4	0.2
LIIK	Hjallis Harkimo	7.3	8.0	-0.7

Note: Scale from 0–10 (0=Strongly dislike; 10=Strongly like).

**TABLE 3.3 Importance of PL for party choice among party voters
(mean values, 0–3)**

Party	The party has a good PL	PL most suitable as PM
Total	1.6 (5)	1.5 (7)
SDP	2.0 (7)	2.2 (4)
PS	1.8 (7)	1.9 (6)
KOK	1.4 (7)	1.6 (5)
KESK	1.3 (5)	1.0 (8)
VIHR	0.9 (7)	0.5 (10)
VAS	1.9 (6)	1.3 (8)
SFP	1.5 (5)	0.6 (12)
KD	2.0 (4)	1.4 (7)
LIIK	2.1 (4)	0.9 (10)

Note: Scale from 0–3 (0=No importance; 1=Some importance; 2=Strong importance; 3=Decisive importance). Position among twelve factors of importance within parentheses.

In Table 3.2, the popularity of the nine PLs and their respective parties is presented among party supporters. The popularity index ratings show that Marin, Essayah, and Andersson are all more highly rated than their respective parties among those that voted for the party in the 2023 parliamentary elections. At the other end, Orpo, Ohihalo, and Saarikko got personal popularity ratings well below the mean popularity ratings of their respective parties, thus giving them low ratings on the popularity index.

Table 3.3 summarizes the importance that the party having a good PL and the PL being suitable as PM had on party choice in the 2023 elections. Among voters for LIIK, KD, SDP, VAS, and PS, a significant emphasis for party choice was placed on the fact that the party had a good PL. However, when it comes to the PL being the most suitable for being PM, voters for SDP and PS stand out as putting the strongest emphasis on that aspect. Here it is also worth noting that, of the twelve statements, having a PL most suitable for being PM had the fourth highest mean value among SDP voters. Still, for all parties, the party having good values scored the highest mean value for party choice.

CONCLUSIONS

It is challenging to assess the actual impact on party choice derived from the party having a popular PL. Of course, other factors influence party choice, too; PL is just one of many factors involved in the decision. Nevertheless, it is likely that having an unpopular PL could constitute a problem for a party while, reversibly, having a popular PL could be clearly beneficial.¹² Still, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, SDP was the only party going into the elections with a PL with a negative popularity index rating (Antti Rinne) while still managing to become the largest party in Parliament, and in the 2023 parliamentary elections, KOK also became the largest party even though they had a PL with the lowest popularity index rating. Hence, one should not overestimate the actual influence exercised by the PL on party choice, as earlier studies have also argued that it is marginal at best.¹³

Notwithstanding this caveat and given that there was some type of influence derived from the PLs on the 2023 parliamentary elections, it is possible based on the results presented in this chapter to broadly divide the PLs into three categories from the perspective of each respective

party's electoral outcome. These categories are *gainers* (positive popularity index rating both internally and generally), *holders* (mixed popularity index ratings), and *problems* (negative popularity index rating both internally and generally). In order to summarize the main results derived from this chapter, Marin (SDP), Essayah (KD), and Andersson (VAS) are therefore here categorized as gainers, Purra (PS), Henriksson (SFP), and Harkimo (LIKK) are categorized as holders, while Orpo (KOK), Saarikko (KESK), and Ohisalo (VIHR) are all categorized as problems. Still, and most importantly, more empirical research is needed to assess the suitability of these labels for the respective PLs' influence on the 2023 parliamentary elections.

¹ Karv, 2020; Söderlund, 2020, p. 462; Westinen, 2015

² Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011

³ Karvonen, 2010

⁴ von Schoultz, Järvi & Mattila, 2020, p. 172

⁵ Borg, 2012; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2014

⁶ von Schoultz, 2016

⁷ von Schoultz, 2016; von Schoultz et al., 2020

⁸ Palonen, 2022, 157

⁹ Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011; von Schoultz, 2016; von Schoultz et al., 2020

¹⁰ von Schoultz, 2016; von Schoultz et al., 2020

¹¹ von Schoultz et al., 2020, pp. 174–175

¹² von Schoultz et al., 2020, p. 172

¹³ Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011

4

What candidate attributes matter the most and for whom?

Jonas Schauman

INTRODUCTION

In the Finnish open list proportional electoral system, citizens who are eligible to vote cast their vote on a specific candidate instead of voting directly on a political party. All political parties in Finland have a list of candidates, the Finnish electorate pick their favorite candidate from the list, and the most popular candidates are elected to Parliament according to the d'Hondt model. Therefore, each candidate is motivated to run their own electoral campaign to secure as many votes as possible. The Finnish open list system results in the electorate paying more attention to the attributes of individual candidates,¹ and therefore, the Finnish electoral system is very candidate centered.²

Within the research field that focuses on elections, it is well-known that different candidate attributes related to socio-demographic factors influence the electorate. Recent research has shown that gender-voting occurs in Finland; women are more likely than men to vote for a female candidate.³ The effect of age on the voter's candidate choice has also been discussed in previous studies, and especially younger voters have been said to be more prone to support younger candidates.⁴

OPERATIONALIZATION

This chapter examines the effect of candidate attributes on the Finnish electorate in the parliamentary elections of 2023. This is done by analyzing the answers from the survey question "To what extent did the following influence your choice of candidate?". The question contained the following topics as sub-questions: (1) the candidate's age, (2) the candidate's gender, (3) the candidate's education, (4) the candidate's place of residence, (5) the candidate's prior experience of politics, (6) the candidate's reliability, (7) the candidate's ability to push an agenda, (8) the candidate's opinions and stances on matters, (9) the candidate's party affiliation, (10) the candidate's chances to get elected, (11) the candidate's answers in candidate selectors on the internet (election compasses, etc.), and (12) a family member or a friend voted for the candidate.

The respondents answered the sub-questions using a five-point response scale containing the following options: (1) decisive factor in my choice, (2) a lot, (3) somewhat, (4) not at all, and (5) don't know.

TABLE 4.1 Reasons for candidate choice

	Age	Gender	Edu- cation	Place of resi- dence	Prior experi- ence of politics	Relia- bility	Ability to push an agenda	Opinions and stances on matters	Party affiliation	Chances to get elected	Answers in candi- date selectors on the internet	A family member or a friend voted for the candidate
Gender												
Female	22	28	33	29	48	88	89	90	81	34	36	7
Male	15	10	28	28	38	82	83	85	76	32	32	6
Age												
18-24	31	25	26	15	23	78	79	86	78	17	56	11
25-34	25	19	26	17	22	79	79	87	72	17	56	6
35-44	22	17	27	24	28	86	84	88	72	24	46	5
45-54	12	16	20	29	37	80	85	82	81	31	36	3
55-64	16	19	27	34	48	87	90	87	74	39	24	6
65-	15	20	42	35	62	90	90	91	86	45	19	8
Educa- tion												
Primary	16	14	24	27	40	84	86	86	75	34	34	8
Sec- ondary	19	23	30	30	45	85	86	90	81	34	35	5
Tertiary	23	27	44	30	46	87	87	89	85	30	34	5

RESULTS

In Table 4.1, the percentages of those who answered either “decisive factor in my choice” or “a lot” are summed together and displayed according to the background variables gender, age, and education. There are several interesting differences with respect to the background variables in Table 4.1. As can be seen from the table, the candidate’s gender was much more important for female voters in comparison to male voters. This corresponds strongly with previous research, which

has shown that a candidate's gender usually matters more for female voters.⁵ The candidate's age and education also seem to have been somewhat more important to women. There are no noteworthy differences between men and women regarding the place of residence of the candidate. For women it was more important that the candidate had previous experience of politics than it was for men. Over 80% of both women and men regarded the candidate's reliability and their ability to push an agenda important in their candidate choice. This was also the case regarding the candidate's opinions, stances on matters, and party affiliation. About one-third of both women and men thought that the candidate's chances of getting elected as well as how the candidate has answered in different election compasses online were important factors in their candidate choice. How a family member or friend voted had a small impact on candidate choice for both genders.

As mentioned in the chapter's introduction, age has been shown to play a greater role in candidate choice among young people; they are believed to be more likely to cast their vote on young candidates. The data presented in Table 4.1 partly supports this notion: younger voters placed a bigger emphasis on the candidate's age than older voters did. The candidate's gender also seems to have been more important for the youngest voters (18–24), while the candidate's education level was more important to the elderly (65+). Prior experience of politics and the candidate's place of residence correlates with a higher age and was regarded as most important by voters who were 65 years or older. The candidate's reliability was regarded as important by the vast majority of the age groups represented in Table 4.1, as was their ability to push an agenda, however both candidate attributes had a larger influence on older voters. Over 80% of all age groups also viewed a candidate's opinions and stances on matters as influential for their choice of candidate.

Unsurprisingly, a candidate's party affiliation seems to have been most important for the oldest (65+) age group. It is well-known within political science that partisanship has declined,⁶ and consequently younger people (on average) are less loyal to a specific party. Older voters also seem to put much more importance on a candidates' chances of getting elected; the difference on this issue between the older and youngest voters is considerable. However, younger voters paid more attention to how candidates had answered in different online voting advice applications (VAA). One might assume that this is at least partly explained

by the digital context of VAAs, where younger people often have a greater knowledge of the technical aspect. Another age-related result in Table 4.1 that could be regarded as unsurprising is that the effect of how a family member or a friend voted being somewhat more visible amongst younger voters' candidate choices. Previous studies have claimed that uncertainty amongst the electorate has increased during the 21st century,⁷ and this trend has been most noticeable among younger cohorts. Therefore, it is not surprising that when the youngest age group (18–24) considers who to vote for, they are more influenced (compared to other age groups) by the voting behavior of people in their nearby social sphere.

Lastly regarding education, age was considered by voters with a higher educational background as somewhat more important. We can also see that the effect of gender correlates with a higher education and that those with a tertiary education valued the candidate's gender the most. It is also worth mentioning that the difference between the highest education (tertiary) and the lowest (primary) is considerable. Voters with a higher educational background seem to have paid much more attention to the importance of the candidate's educational background. Here again, the difference between the voters with a tertiary education and a primary education are considerable. The importance of the candidate's party affiliation also seems to correlate with a higher education, and prior experience of politics was regarded as the most important by voters with a tertiary education. As can be seen in Table 4.1, there are no notable differences that can be explained by a voter's educational background, regarding the candidate's chances of getting elected, regarding how the candidate had answered in different online tests, or if a family member or a friend had voted for the candidate.

CONCLUSION

The candidate's reliability, ability to push an agenda, party affiliation and the candidate's opinions and stances on various matters had a great influence on all respondents no matter their demographic background. Another interesting similarity amongst the respondents was the small effect that the voting behavior of a close friend or family member seemed to have had on their candidate choice. Some unsurprising results, which have been discussed in previous studies, were that gender mattered

more to female voters,⁸ and age had a greater influence on younger voters.⁹ Furthermore, the results showed that the candidate's prior experience of politics and chances of getting elected mattered more to older voters, a finding which has also been noted in previous studies, while the candidate's gender and party affiliation usually mattered more to voters with a higher educational background.¹⁰

¹ Coffé & von Schoultz 2021

² Koskimaa, et al. 2021

³ Helimäki et al. 2023

⁴ Pomante & Schraufnagel 2015

⁵ Helimäki et al. 2023

⁶ Dalton, McAllister & Wattenberg 2002

⁷ Irwin & van Holsteyn 2008

⁸ Helimäki et al. 2023

⁹ Pomante & Schraufnagel 2015

¹⁰ Schauman 2022

5

The gender gap in political participation in the 2023 parliamentary election

Henrik Serup Christensen

The gender gap in political participation has been an established part of research on political behavior. Traditionally, due to differences in social norms and structural and situational factors, women have been less likely to be engaged in most political activities, including casting their vote on Election Day.¹

However, recent studies show that the pattern of male domination may well have been broken.² When it comes to electoral turnout, studies indicate that women are as likely as men to cast their vote, at least in the more important elections.³ The reasons for this include changing conceptions of gender norms among younger generations, and increased equality in terms of salary and job opportunities, all of which boost women's share of civic skills and resources that have traditionally been associated with increased political participation.

This trend has been evident in Finland since the late 1980s.⁴ In the 2019 parliamentary elections, turnout among women was 74% compared to 71% among men, and it was only among citizens aged 75 and older that men were more likely to vote (74% compared to 64%). Hence, gender differences are relatively small when it comes to turnout in Finland, and to the extent that any gender gap persists, it is men who are at a disadvantage. The domination of women in political matters was perfectly illustrated by the five female party leaders who were the face of the government for much of the 2019–23 term. All of this shows that the gender gap in electoral turnout has all but disappeared in elections.

While this may be hailed as a sign of reaching gender parity, it is still not clear whether this also pertains to the campaigns leading up to the elections. Studies show that men participate in more formalized political activities such as party activities while women prefer less formalized political activities such as political consumerism and organizational work.⁵ Accordingly, even if the gender gap in overall political participation may have declined or even reversed, there are still important differences in how men and women participate in political matters. Furthermore, these differences may lead to differences in political influence since some political activities are better suited for achieving specific political goals.⁶

It is therefore still important to examine how gender shaped political participation during the electoral campaign. It is particularly important to examine how gender differences differ across the life cycle, as it is likely that the observed differences can be related to traditional gender roles, especially during the more "family dense" stages of life. Although these

differences are less pronounced than before, women are still likely to be the primary caretaker in households with children.⁷ It is often women who stay at home in the early years, who are the primary contact person with day care and schools, and who stay at home with children during illness.

This has pronounced implications for career developments and expected income for women in general but is also likely to affect the time they feel they can reserve for political activities. This parenting trap may entail that the gender gap in political participation differs across the course of life.

OPERATIONALIZATION

To examine the political participation of men and women, respondents were asked what political activities they performed during the campaign (“We here mention different forms of political participation. Which of these did you do in conjunction with the election, or, if the issue was important to you, which ones could you do?”). For each activity, respondents indicated whether they performed the activity in question, whether they would be willing to do so, or whether they under no circumstances would perform the activity. Respondents could select between 13 activities (the short names used in the tables and text are in parentheses):

- Write a letter to the editor (Letter)
- Sign a petition (Petition)
- Contact politicians (Contacting)
- Organize party campaign activities (Campaign organizing)
- Take part in party campaign activities (Campaign involvement)
- Participate in other organizational activities (Organizational activities)
- Involvement in a support group for a candidate (Support group)
- Donate money to a candidate (Donate)
- Use campaign material from a party or candidate (Campaign material)
- Take part in legal demonstrations (Demonstration)
- Demonstrate civil disobedience by taking part in an illegal direct action (Civil disobedience)
- Discuss political matters on social media (Discuss on social media)
- Share political content on social media (Share content on social media).

These activities include a broad range of political activities, including those traditionally performed in conjunction with political campaigns, but they also include acts of protest towards the political system and various online activities. This broad range of activities should make it possible to detect differences in campaign activities across genders.

I present the results in two parts. First, I show gender differences for all political activities included in the study to see whether men or women were more active during the election campaign. I also report the shares who were willing to take part to see whether there is a reservoir of participation potential that for some is deactivated. In a second step, I restrict the focus to actual participation in three dimensions or modes of political participation that the activities are related to: campaigning, protesting, and social media participation.¹ I here show how the differences in participation between men and women develop over the course of life to examine whether there are pronounced differences between genders in when they become active.

It should be noted that all analyses are entirely descriptive, meaning I do not control for any factors that may help explain the observed differences. While it has been common in popular discourse to argue that, when it comes to issues such as income, gender differences disappear when controlling for other factors. However, controlling for differences that may themselves be caused by structural gender inequalities may lead to a biased estimate of the existing differences.

RESULTS

I first present evidence on the gender differences in political participation when it comes to a wide range of political activities performed during the electoral campaign preceding the elections on 2 April 2023. The results are shown in Table 5.1.

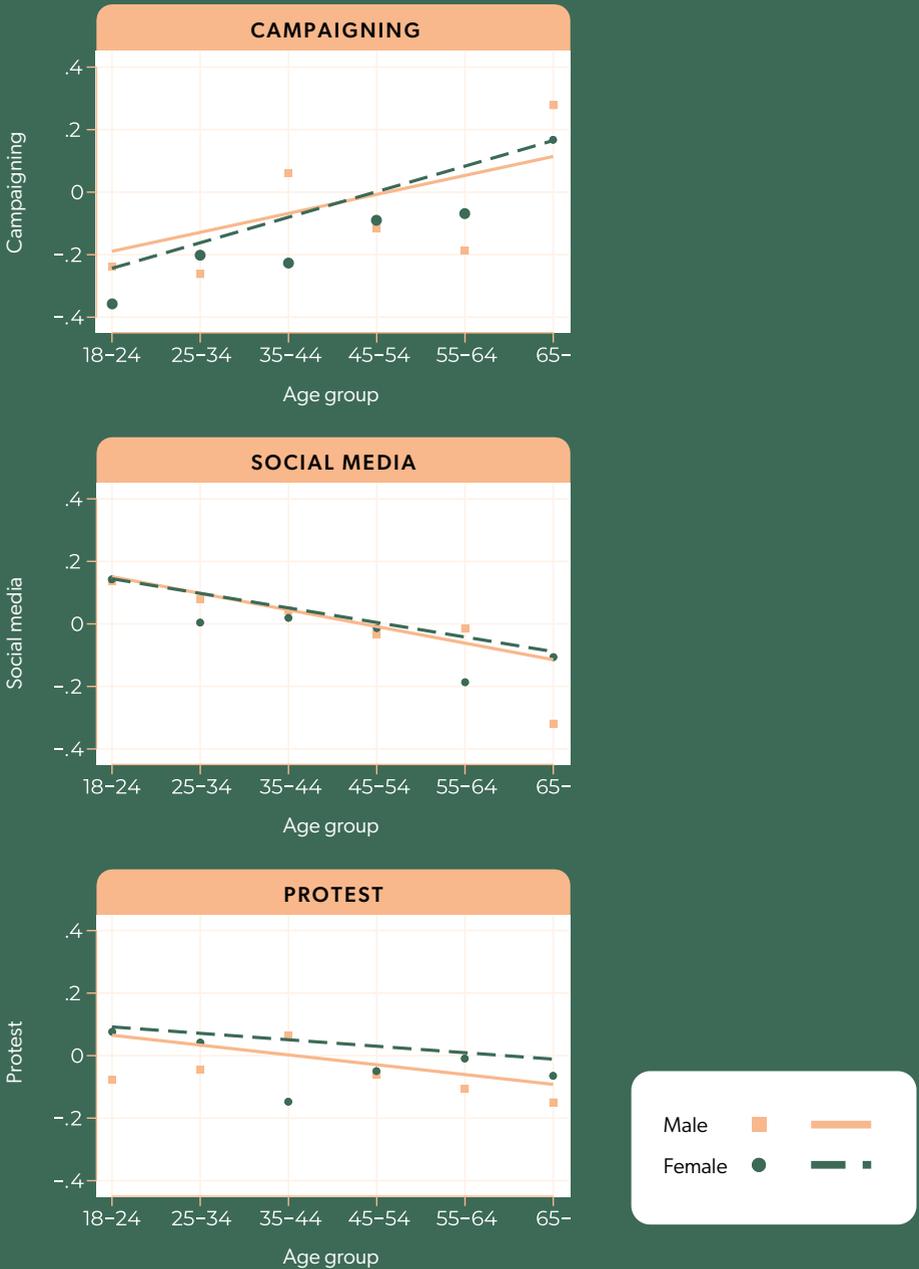
¹ I used principal component analysis, which is a statistical technique for identifying underlying dimensions based on observed data, to reduce the 13 activities to three dimensions of activities that people tend to combine: campaign activities (organize party campaign, take part in party campaign activities, involvement in candidate support group, donate money to candidate, and use campaign material from party or candidate), protesting (legal demonstrations, civil disobedience, and sign petitions) and online participation on social media (discuss political matters on social media and share content on social media). The indexes used to measure participation are standardized so that scores over 0 indicate higher than average levels of involvement and conversely for scores below 0.

TABLE 5.1 Percentages of people who have participated in political activities

%	Male			Female			Total		
	Has done	Would do	Would not do	Has done	Would do	Would not do	Has done	Would do	Would not do
Petition	20	65	15	25	65	10	23	65	12
Discuss on social media	23	37	41	22	34	44	22	36	42
Share content on social media	20	31	49	18	28	55	19	29	52
Contacting	17	65	18	13	69	17	15	67	18
Organizational involvement	13	68	20	12	70	18	12	69	19
Campaign material	9	48	43	11	48	40	10	48	42
Campaign organizing	10	50	40	7	50	43	8	50	43
Campaign involvement	10	44	46	7	45	48	8	44	47
Support group	8	55	37	7	54	39	7	54	38
Demonstration	5	55	41	7	59	34	6	57	37
Donate	5	31	64	5	21	74	5	26	69
Letter	5	55	40	3	52	45	4	54	43
Civil disobedience	2	21	78	0	16	84	1	18	81

The gender differences are generally minor for most political activities. The largest differences exist for the most popular activity of signing petitions, where 25% of women had signed a petition compared to 20% of the male respondents. Contacting, on the other hand, was slightly more favored by male respondents, since 17% of men had done so compared to 13% of women. There also seems to be a slight overweight of men in terms of having engaged in campaign activities, but the differences are not pronounced.

FIGURE 5.1 Gender differences in participation for campaigning, protesting, and using social media



Overall, there is no clear indication that either men or women were more active during the election campaign. For both genders, there are large shares of people who were potentially willing to participate across most activities, but there does not seem to be systematic differences in whether men or women were likely to be willing but nonetheless inactive.

However, these rather small differences may conceal the difference in activities that men and women tend to perform. The next step therefore involves focusing on three modes of participation: campaigning, protesting, and social media participation. We focus here on exploring the differences in participation between men and women across the life cycle. The results are shown in Figure 5.1.

These results show quite remarkable differences across the life cycle, especially for campaigning and protesting, whereas the differences for participation via social media are less pronounced. For both campaigning and protesting, it is noticeable that men are much more likely to be active when they are 35–44, whereas the differences are less pronounced for other age groups. This is noteworthy since this is the most “family dense” period for most people. This would seem to suggest that, even during this election, the involvement of women was hindered by other obligations that used up the time available for political activities. A similar pattern is not visible for participation via social media, which makes sense considering that participation via social media is more flexible and less dependent on being available at certain times. However, these are also the activities that previous studies have argued to be less likely to provide genuine influence on political decisions.

Despite this worrying sign of gender inequality, it should also be pointed out that the differences even out for older age groups, where women are again as active or even more active. Nevertheless, this does not compensate for the lack of participation during an important part of the life cycle.

CONCLUSION

These results suggest that while the gender gap in political participation is not as wide as before, it is also not entirely a thing of the past. We see a general pattern of relative equality in political participation, albeit with some differences in how men and women participate. However, it seems to be the case that women are still less likely to be active during the years

when family commitments are more intense, especially in activities that are arguably more effective ways to influence political decisions.

It is important to note that the results can be interpreted in two different ways, and it is not possible to determine which one is more correct from the present data. According to an interpretation in line with the life cycle effect, the differences are persistent between men and women since women are still the primary caretakers in most families. An interpretation focusing on generational differences would suggest that the differences observed are more pronounced among older generations, whereas the differences among younger generations are small and inconsequential. If this interpretation holds true, gender differences in political participation is a disappearing phenomenon associated only with older generations.

It is not possible here to discern which interpretation is more correct. Only time will tell whether the younger generations of today manage to maintain gender parity or succumb to the same pressures of the traditional life cycle, which entails that women continue to carry the bulk of the responsibilities in the family. At present, we can only observe that the gender gap in political participation persists in Finland, in particular for those aged 35–44.

¹ Burns, Schlozman & Verba 2001; Inglehart & Norris 2003.

² Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013

³ Kostelka, Blais & Gidengil 2019

⁴ The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) 2023

⁵ Coffé & Bolzendahl 2010; Stolle & Hooghe 2011

⁶ Stoker 2016; Christensen 2011

⁷ Goldin 2021

6

Political value orientations

Peter Söderlund

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the economic and cultural positions of voter groups in Finland regarding political values. Such political value orientations refer to individuals' beliefs about the organization and functioning of society. People typically expect their political values to be reflected in the actions and policies of political actors and the overall political system.¹ These values guide the assessment of political alternatives and shape behavior. Previous research on voting behavior has recognized the predictive role of political ideology and values. Voters tend to support parties that align with their ideological and issue-related preferences.²

Studies on political value orientations often adopt a two-dimensional model. The first dimension is the traditional left–right economic cleavage,

which represents the ideological divide on state intervention and economic redistribution. The left advocates for a larger state and equality, while the right supports a smaller state and free-market capitalism. The second dimension, referred to as the cultural dimension, captures non-economic issues that have become salient following processes of cultural, economic, and social change over the past decades.³ Various concepts have been employed for this alternative non-economic dimension, including post-materialism versus materialism,⁴ libertarianism versus authoritarianism,⁵ a sociocultural dimension comprising opposing liberal and conservative values,⁶ and GAL-TAN.⁷ The abbreviations GAL and TAN stand for green-alternative-libertarian and traditional-authoritarian-nationalist, respectively. This concept encompasses a broader set of issues such as immigration, law and order, environmental protection, lifestyle choices, and support for EU integration.

OPERATIONALIZATIONS

To measure left-right and GAL-TAN attitudes, twelve relevant items were first identified. Respondents rated their opinion on political proposals for the direction of Finland's future with response alternatives ranging from "very bad proposal" to "very good proposal". The scales were scored so that higher values indicated economic right and TAN positions. Responses are presented based on a five-point scale (1–5). Data for 3,253 participants were available.

Quantitative evaluation, using principal component factor analysis, confirmed that political value orientations can be represented as two main dimensions. Four items loaded onto an economic left-right dimension, reflecting preferences regarding the size of the public sector, taxes, income differences in society, and privatization of elderly care. Six items loaded onto the GAL-TAN dimension, which encompasses conservative values relating to criminal punishment, climate tax on beef, immigration policy, the rights of sexual minorities, environmental protection, and support for the EU. Two indexes were created by calculating the mean responses for each dimension. Table 6.1 displays the wordings of the survey items and to which dimension they belong. Two items, namely "increase financial support to rural areas" and "increase the digitalization of society", did not load exclusively onto any dimension ("other" in Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1 Survey items by value dimension

Survey items	Left-right	GAL-TAN	Other
Finland should have a smaller public sector	√		
Taxes should be reduced even if public services must be cut	√		
Reduce income differences in society*	√		
Allow private corporations to be responsible for elderly care	√		
Implement much stricter prison sentences		√	
Introduce a climate tax on beef*		√	
Accept fewer refugees to Finland		√	
Strengthen the rights of gender and sexual minorities in society*		√	
Invest more in an environmentally friendly society*		√	
Finland should leave the EU		√	
Increase financial support to rural areas			√
Increase the digitalization of society*			√

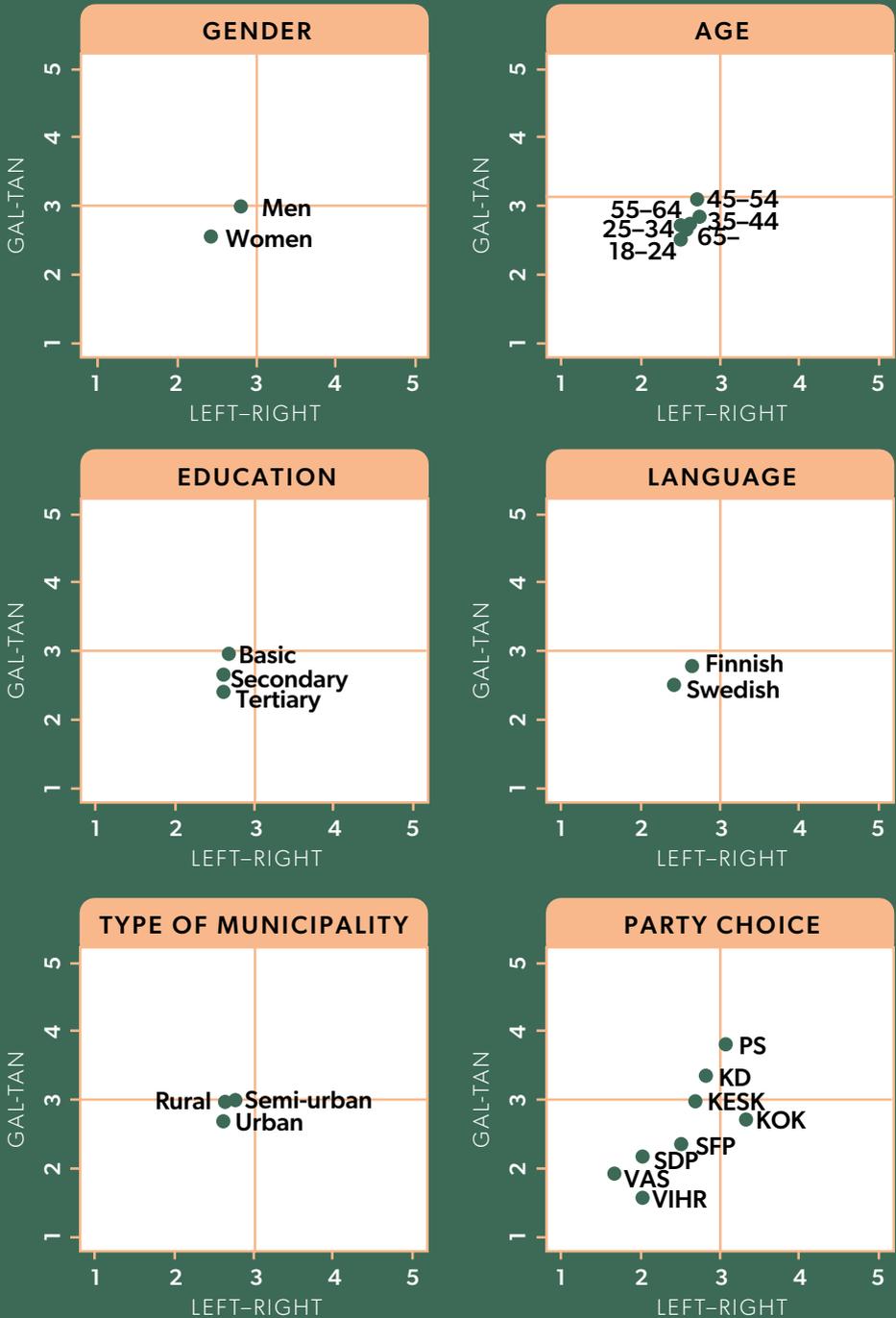
* Scale reversed so that a greater score reflects economic right and TAN attitudes.

Six predictor variables were included to account for variations in value orientations. Gender (man, woman), age (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65+ years), education (basic, secondary, tertiary), language (Finnish-speaking, Swedish-speaking), place of residence (urban, semi-urban, rural), and party choice.

RESULTS

This section maps the positioning of individuals in the political space according to their sociodemographic background and party choice. Figure 6.1 plots the two dimensions with left–right on the horizontal axis

FIGURE 6.1 Left-right and GAL-TAN positions by sociodemographic background and party choice



and GAL–TAN on the vertical axis. The grand mean for left–right is 2.6 and 2.8 for GAL–TAN. On average, respondents are located near the middle but lean slightly towards the left and GAL ends.

The results indicate small but statistically significant differences in political values across various sociodemographic groups. Men tend to hold more right-leaning economic values compared to women, with a difference of 0.4 points. Middle-aged, lower-educated, Finnish-speaking, and semi-urban individuals also lean towards the right, deviating by a maximum of 0.15 points from other groups. Along the GAL–TAN dimension, larger differences between sociodemographic groups can be observed. Men, middle-aged individuals, and those with lower education levels exhibit more conservative TAN values, deviating by 0.4 to 0.6 points from their counterparts. Finnish speakers and residents of rural and semi-urban areas also show a higher inclination towards TAN values, with differences of approximately 0.3 points.

Political value orientations vary to a greater extent across different party supporters. Left Alliance voters are furthest to the left on the left–right dimension, while National Coalition Party voters are furthest to the right, differing by 1.7 points. Hence, the Left Alliance represents economic left-wing values and the National Coalition Party economic right-wing values with regards to state intervention and distribution policies. Supporters of the Social Democrats and the Green Party lean strongly towards the economic left. Those who favored the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party, and the Swedish People’s Party are slightly left of the center line, while Finns Party voters lean slightly right. The GAL–TAN dimension exhibits higher polarization: the difference between the Green Party and the Finns Party is 2.2 points. Green Party and Left Alliance voters hold more liberal opinions, while Finns Party and Christian Democrat voters are closer to the TAN pole. Supporters of the National Coalition Party and the Swedish People’s Party lean towards the GAL pole, while Centre Party voters are near the midpoint.

Finally, Figure 6.2 plots the average positions by party choice for each survey item individually. The same parties feature in the extremes but

Note. Party abbreviations: SDP=Social Democratic Party; PS=Finns Party; KOK=National Coalition Party; KESK=Centre Party; VIHR=Green Party; VAS=Left Alliance; SFP=Swedish People’s Party; KD=Christian Democrats.

with one exception. Left Alliance (VAS) voters supported a larger public sector, higher taxes, smaller income disparities, and opposed private elderly care. On the other hand, National Coalition (KOK) supporters held opposite views. Green Party (VIHR) voters were the most liberal in terms of GAL-TAN values, while Finns Party (PS) supporters were the most conservative (apart from Christian Democrats who most ardently opposed sexual minority rights). As for the omitted survey question, Centre Party voters supported rural economic support, which was to be expected. Differences among groups regarding digitalization of society were small.

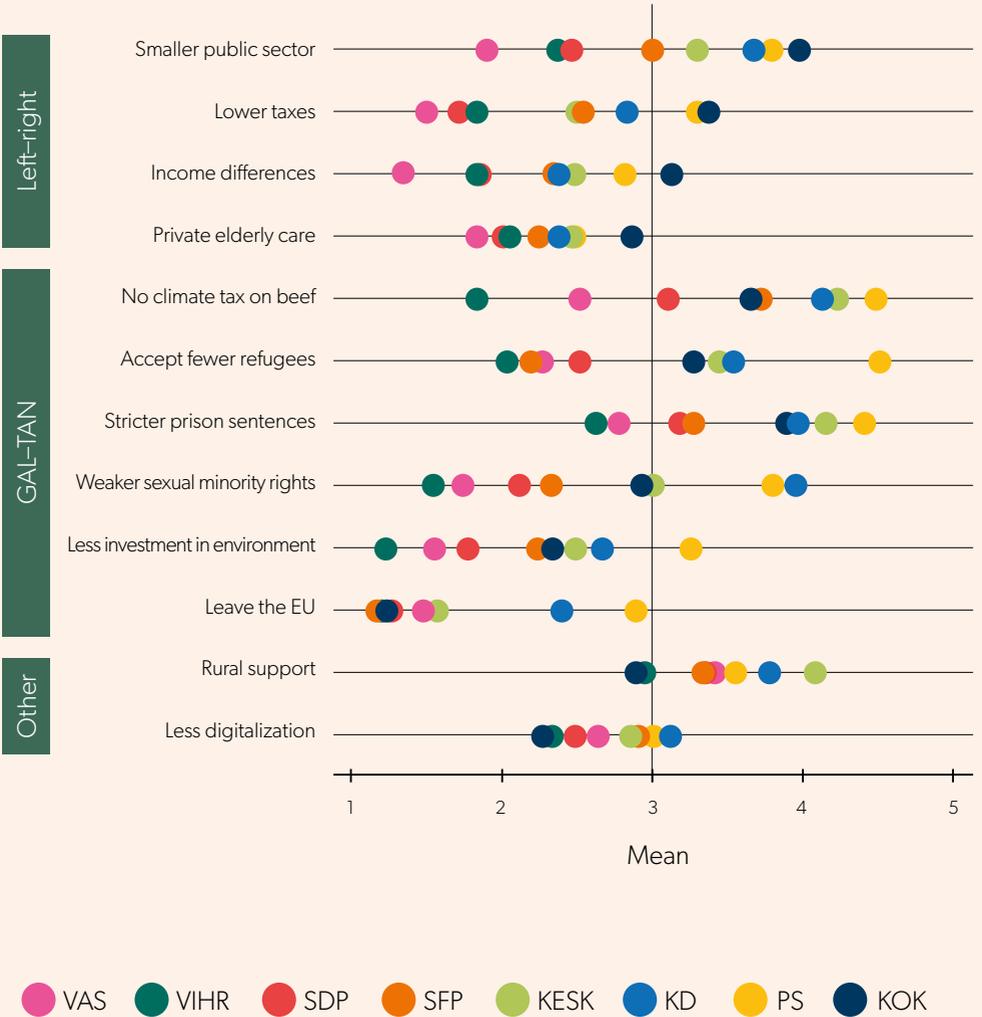
CONCLUSION

This chapter shows that, in Finland, the role of attachments to certain social groups like gender, age, education, language, and place of residence is weak in predicting political value orientations. Instead, there was stronger evidence for partisan sorting since party choice better predicted different political value orientations. Partisan sorting refers to the phenomenon where individuals increasingly align themselves with political parties that agree with their pre-existing beliefs and values.

The traditional left–right economic cleavage persists, meaning that there is a divide between supporters of different parties over the role of the state versus markets in the economy and welfare services. Voters’ attitudes on the cultural GAL-TAN dimension are even more divided, pitting liberals who endorse social change and the rights and freedoms of others against conservatives who favor upholding existing social structures and traditional values. In other words, there is greater partisan sorting around issues related to the cultural values dimension than around issues related to classical distributional political conflicts. This is not surprising, given that in recent decades many established democracies, including Finland, have seen a shift towards greater salience of issues such as migration and the environment.

Note: Higher values indicate economic right and TAN positions.

FIGURE 6.2 Responses to individual survey items by party choice



This chapter does not address whether polarization has increased over time, meaning whether voters have increasingly been divided into distinct and opposing groups or camps with little or no overlap. However, the findings reveal that supporters of political parties exhibit a considerable degree of ideological homogeneity, similar to party elites. While polarization can result in heightened conflict and instability within society or the political system, distinct ideological camps presently still exist, which enables voters to engage in ideological voting if they desire.

¹ Knutsen & Kumlin 2005

² Campbell et al. 1960

³ Kriesi et al. 2008; Norris & Inglehart 2019

⁴ Inglehart 1977

⁵ Kitschelt 1994

⁶ Kriesi et al. 2008

⁷ Hooghe et al. 2002

7

Young people and their political behavior in the 2023 election

Janette Huttunen

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that young people vote less than older people do and participate less in other institutionalized forms of politics such as party activities.¹ This has caused a lot of worry over the engagement of young people in, and attachment to, the representative democratic system. However, the worry over young people's political participation has also been seen as exaggerated; theorists and empirical evidence suggest that young people do participate in politics, only in different ways than older people do. Due to societal, educational, and technological changes in recent decades, young people are expected to participate in alternative, non-traditional, and non-institutional political activities, such as single-issue movements, ecological consumption, and online activism.² However, Finnish young people are also known to be quite traditional in their political attitudes, and voting is typically seen as the best way to participate.³ In the latest two national elections (2019 and 2023), the turnout of young people has even increased.⁴ Even alternative and non-institutionalized political activities have been popular among young citizens in Finland—perhaps most notably, the modern climate strike movement has gathered a lot of youth support in recent years.

In this chapter, the political behavior of Finnish young people is examined with the aim of studying in which political activities young people participated in 2023 as well as the differences in political participation between young and older people in Finland. In addition to looking at actual participation, differences in attitudes towards different political activities are examined. For an analysis of the party selection of Finnish young people, see Chapter 2 by Kimmo Grönlund.

OPERATIONALIZATION

To examine the political participation of young people in the 2023 elections, respondents were asked what political activities they performed during the campaign with the question, "Which of these did you do in conjunction with the election, or, if the issue was important to you, which ones could you do?" Thirteen different activities were presented to the respondents (the short names used in the tables and text are in parentheses):

- Write a letter to the editor (Letter)
- Sign a petition (Petition)
- Contact politicians (Contacting)
- Organize party campaign activities (Campaign organizing)
- Take part in party campaign activities (Campaign involvement)
- Participate in other organizational activities (Organizational activities)
- Involvement in a support group for a candidate (Support group)
- Donate money to a candidate (Donate)
- Use campaign material from a party or candidate (Campaign material)
- Take part in legal demonstrations (Demonstration)
- Demonstrate civil disobedience by taking part in an illegal direct action (Civil disobedience)
- Discuss political matters on social media (Discuss on social media)
- Share political content on social media (Share content on social media).

The thirteen different activities ranged from activities closely linked to political institutions, such as political parties, to activities that protest against the political system or make use of participation opportunities provided by technological advancements. Respondents answered the question for each activity using a four-point scale (have done in conjunction with the current elections, have not done but would do, would not do, do not know)

The analyses are descriptive. In the analyses, the youngest possible respondents, 18–24-year-olds, are categorized as “young” (n=481), while the rest of the respondents are categorized as “older”.

RESULTS

The comparison between young (18–24) and older (25+) respondents is visible in Table 7.1. All results are weighted.

First, we focus on actual political activity. The three most frequent activities that young people engaged in in connection to the 2023 elections were sharing political content on social media, signing petitions, and discussing politics on social media. Sharing content was clearly the most

TABLE 7.1 Comparison between young (18–24) and older (25+) respondents

%	Young (18–24)			Older (25+)		
	Has done	Would do	Would not do	Has done	Would do	Would not do
Share content on social media	32	40	27	18	29	53
Petition	26	61	13	23	65	12
Discuss on social media	26	53	21	22	34	44
Campaign material	14	50	36	10	48	42
Organizational involvement	9	64	27	13	69	18
Demonstration	8	60	32	6	57	37
Contacting	7	64	29	16	67	17
Support group	5	60	35	8	54	38
Campaign organizing	4	60	36	9	49	42
Campaign involvement	4	53	43	9	44	47
Donate	2	27	71	6	26	68
Letter	2	33	65	4	55	41
Civil disobedience	1	23	76	1	18	81

popular form of participation: 32% of 18–24-year-olds had shared political content on some social media platform. We see that the same three activities were also the most popular among older people, but the level of popularity was different. Over 26% of young people had participated in all three of these activities, while only 18–23% of older people engaged in the same activities. The most popular activity for respondents over 25 years of age was signing petitions.

The least frequently done activities were the same for the young and older respondents as well: civil disobedience, writing a letter to the editor and donating money to a campaign. Even though the activities were the same, here we also see a difference in popularity between the young and older respondents: older respondents were three times more likely to donate money than young people

were, and twice as likely to send a letter to an editor, although these forms of engagement were quite unpopular in general. In the least popular activity, civil disobedience, there was no difference in activity between young and older respondents.

The biggest differences in political activity between young and older respondents were in sharing content on social media (14 percentage points), contacting politicians (9 percentage points) and campaign organizing and involvement (5 percent points in each). In the first measure, the young respondents were more active; in the others, older respondents participated more actively. These findings support the notion that young people are less likely to engage in institutionalized participation in connection to political institutions such as political parties but are more likely to take advantage of newer activities such as online participation.

Turning from actual activity to attitudes towards potentially taking part in political activities in the future (“would do” or “would never do”), we see that the biggest differences between the young and older respondents are in writing a letter to the editor and in social media participation. Even if sharing political content on social media was the third most common activity for older people, it was also the third least popular activity among the same group: over half (53%) of the respondents over the age of 25 said they would never share political content, whereas only 27% of the young people shared this sentiment. The young people were also more likely to state that they would never contact a politician (29% versus 17% of older people). These differences suggest that different channels for political communication feel natural to the different age groups: the young feel comfortable online, while the older see the value in political communications in traditional media and in directly contacting decision-makers.

The age-related differences are also quite large in campaign organizing (would do: 60 vs 49%). Despite expectations that activities related to political parties may not be as appealing to the young as to the old, it was actually the young people who said they would be more likely to engage in organizing political party campaign activities if the need arose. This is noteworthy, especially since turnout among young people has increased in the two latest elections. These trends hint that the new youngest generation of age, Generation Z, could be more positive towards institutionalized politics than the generation before them, the Millennials. However, this finding may also be related to respondent

bias: especially in young cohorts, politically active people are more likely to respond to surveys, which may skew the results.

CONCLUSIONS

The most frequent ways in which young people participated in connection to the election 2023 (outside of voting) were petitions and online participation. This relates to previous research, where petitions (and citizens' initiatives)⁵ and online activities⁶ have been shown to be successful in engaging the young.

It is notable that the same activities were the most frequent for older people, indicating that the patterns for youth participation are similar to the general political participation patterns in Finland. However, there were some differences between the political behavior of young people and that of older people. Social media participation was clearly more popular among the young; young people both participate more online and have more positive attitudes towards online participation. The young had much less positive attitudes than older people towards writing letters to the editor—perhaps the social media savvy young people saw it as an old-fashioned participation channel.

Finally, since civil disobedience has become a more frequent part of the political repertoire in Finland, due to it being used by the (youth) climate strike movement Extinction Rebellion, possible age-related differences in attitudes towards civil disobedience pose an interesting question. Civil disobedience was the least popular activity among both young and older people. Respondents of all ages were very negative towards it. There were, however, some differences: 23% of young people stated they would use civil disobedience if the need arose, while 18% of 25+ respondents were of the same opinion. Thus, despite the general attitude towards civil disobedience, young people are less critical than older people are.

¹ Bennett 2007; Grasso et al. 2019

² Chou 2017; Dalton 2016; Hustinx & Roose 2016; Norris 2004; Pickard 2019

³ Myllyniemi 2014; Huttunen 2021, 49

⁴ Statistics Finland 2019; Allianssi 2019

⁵ Myllyniemi 2014; Huttunen & Christensen 2020

⁶ Strandberg & Borg 2020

8

Political efficacy among the Finnish electorate

Lauri Rapeli

INTRODUCTION

The sense of being “efficacious” refers to the personal belief of being able to accomplish a desired result. Applied into the realm of political behavior, the term “political efficacy” originally referred to the “feeling that individual action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process”.¹ Since its introduction in the 1950’s, researchers have converged on a two-dimensional conceptualization. *Internal political efficacy* is considered to reflect an individual’s personal assessment of their ability to understand what goes on in politics, whereas *external political efficacy* is a measure of the extent to which a person thinks the political system is responsive to the citizens’ needs and demands.² Together, the two capture key aspects of the psychological drivers of political behavior: a sense of self-confidence to follow politics and to act politically, as well as a sense that those actions are meaningful. Without internal efficacy, political action is unlikely because of a lack of belief in self-capacity. A lack of external efficacy manifests itself as a feeling of powerlessness and political apathy.

For democratic systems to be sustainable, they need a citizenry which feels politically efficacious. Citizens need to have faith in their own abilities to act politically, and they must also feel that they are being heard if they are to continue showing support for democracy.³ To be sure, previous research has demonstrated that political efficacy has a positive impact on political participation and that people with a low sense of political efficacy display feelings of political alienation.⁴ Consequently, as we examine political efficacy in this chapter, it allows us to get a sense of the health status of a democracy, from a citizen’s perspective. Furthermore, it allows us to see how political efficacy is distributed across different voter groups and whether it is associated with voting behavior. The analysis especially focuses on two important factors behind individual variation in efficacy: gender and education. There is a persistent gender gap in political efficacy, with men scoring higher on efficacy measures than women, already in early adulthood.⁵ Similarly, people with higher education typically demonstrate higher feelings of efficacy.⁶

OPERATIONALIZATIONS

For both types of efficacy, three Likert-scale (totally agree–totally disagree) items were combined into sum variables and recoded into values

ranging between 0 and 9. For some items, coding was reversed so that higher values would indicate higher efficacy. The scale measuring internal efficacy consisted of the following items:

- Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I cannot really understand what is going on.
- I trust my own ability to participate in politics.
- I know what I think about important societal questions.

The scale for external efficacy consisted of:

- I have no say in what the government and the parliament of this country decide.
- MPs quickly become alienated from the problems of ordinary people.
- Politicians take citizens' views into account when they make decisions.

Age, education, and gender were measured in the same way that is presented in the other chapters of this book, and the same survey weight was used.

FINDINGS

Table 8.1 displays the means in internal and external political efficacy across relevant sociodemographic groups.

As both scales range between 0 and 9, the significantly higher mean values for internal efficacy confirm a canonical finding from Finland, namely that people tend to have faith in their own ability to understand politics (internal efficacy mean \approx 6) but that they feel much less able to affect decision-making (external efficacy mean \approx 4). While the age pattern is not straightforward, the highly educated, the men, and the Swedish speakers stand out as typical high-efficacy groups.

When it comes to partisanship, the Finns Party voters, and those of Movement Now, felt about as self-confident about their ability to understand politics as everyone else, but their sense of external efficacy was much lower than everyone else's. In other words, the supporters of these parties had much less faith in the responsiveness of the political system than supporters of all other parties.

Based on linear regression analysis, Figures 8.1 and 8.2, respectively, show the impact of education for internal and external efficacy, separately for men and women, while also controlling for age.

TABLE 8.1 Means in internal and external political efficacy across relevant sociodemographic groups

	Internal	External
TOTAL		
	6.1	3.8
Gender		
Female	6.3	3.9
Male	5.9	3.8
Age		
18–24	6.1	4.2
25–34	5.6	3.5
35–44	6.3	3.5
45–54	6.0	3.5
55–64	6.2	3.8
65+	6.1	4.0
Mother tongue		
Finnish	6.1	3.8
Swedish	6.6	4.1
Other		
Education level		
Primary	5.8	3.4
Secondary	5.8	3.7
Tertiary	6.6	4.4
Party voted for in 2023		
SDP	6.0	4.5
Finns Party	6.0	2.6
National Coalition Party	6.4	4.3
Centre Party	5.9	3.9
Green League	6.1	4.6
Left Alliance	6.2	4.2
Swedish People's Party	6.5	4.1
Christian Democrats	6.3	3.9
Movement Now	6.4	1.8
Others	6.8	1.8

FIGURE 8.1 Internal efficacy

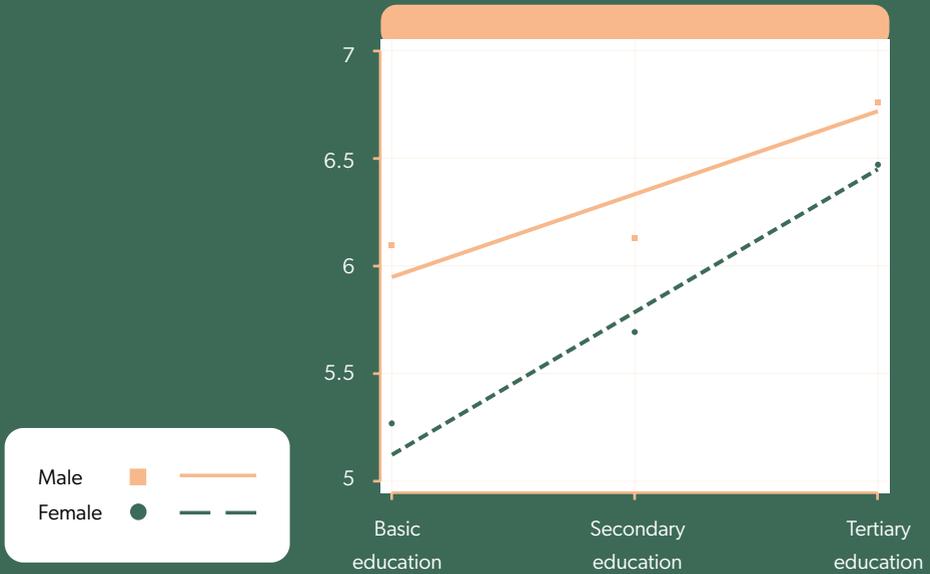
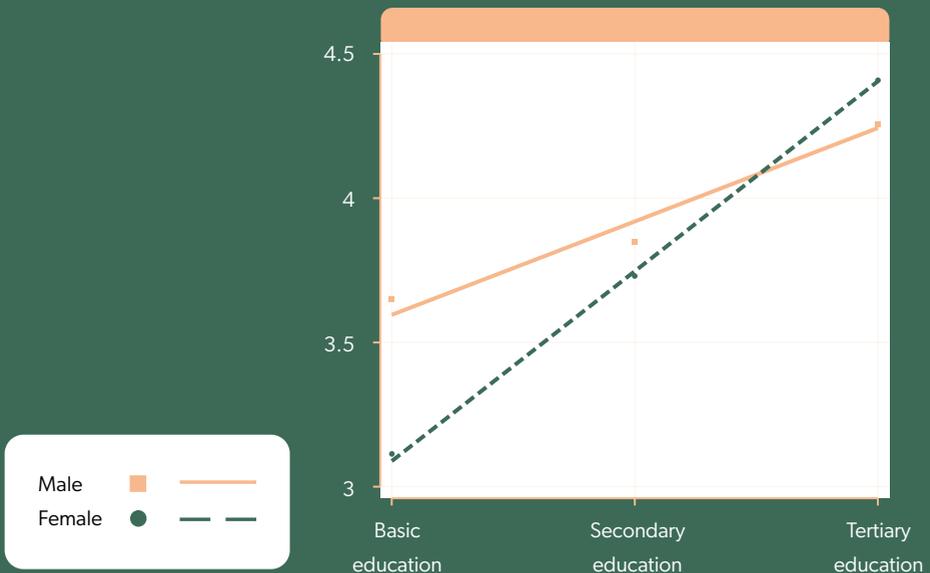


FIGURE 8.2 External efficacy



Firstly, the figures confirm the strong, positive impact of education on efficacy. Secondly, they show that men tended to have a higher sense of political efficacy, across the different levels of education. In both cases, efficacy increased more sharply with education among women, suggesting that women in particular benefited from education, when it came to political efficacy. However, there is one interesting deviation from the general pattern associated with the gender gap. Highly educated women had a higher sense of external efficacy compared to men with a similar education level.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally, Finnish voters feel somewhat able to understand what goes on in politics, but they are rather skeptical about whether politicians and the political system will be responsive to their needs. In other words, while internal political efficacy is relatively high, external political efficacy clearly lags behind. This is particularly true when it came to the voters of the Finns Party and Movement Now. Given that the Finns Party had approximately 20% support in the Finnish electorate, it seems important to note that low external efficacy was likely one of the driving forces behind their rise to one of the largest parties in the country. Low external efficacy should be seen as a reflection of a sense of powerlessness, and it was quite pronounced among the Finns Party voters.

Unsurprisingly, a gender gap, which gives men an advantage over women in political efficacy, exists in Finland. However, education seems to even out some of the gender difference in internal efficacy, and the difference in fact favors women among the highest educated. Previous research suggests that it is not the content of the education as such that explains the particularly strong positive impact. Rather, measures of (high) education capture a range of personal circumstances, such as social status, media consumption habits and social networks, which are conducive for the development of political efficacy. These circumstances seem to become especially significant for highly educated women, who, even much more than their male counterparts, feel that democratic politics responds to their needs. This, in turn, aligns with the extensive literature that has demonstrated time and again that democracies typically produce policies that best correspond with the preferences of affluent and well-educated citizens.

Overall, the message from Finnish voters is that many of them believe they grasp politics, and for many of them it means that politicians do not deliver what they want. Those who most strongly feel this way vote for a right-wing populist party. Consequently, the findings show that political efficacy provides useful insight into how voters' subjective feelings play into their voting behavior.

¹ Campbell, Gurin & Miller 1954, 187

² Craig et al 1990; Niemi et al. 1991; Levy 2013

³ Morrell 2003; 2005

⁴ Karp & Banducci 2008; Hay 2007

⁵ E.g. Arens & Watermann, 2017

⁶ E.g. Rasmussen & Nørgaard, 2018

9

Institutional trust in Finland

Fredrik Malmberg

INTRODUCTION

Institutional trust has been defined as an evaluative orientation towards political actors and institutions, often assumed to be largely based on perceptions of their performance according to normative standards and expectations.¹ Hence, institutional trust can be understood as the relationship between the citizens and the various central parts that constitute the political system.

High levels of institutional trust are often recognized as a vital resource for well-functioning democracies that helps to bring peace, prosperity, and stability to societies, especially when they need it the most, as in during large-scale shocks and crises. It is argued to function as a reservoir of favorable attitudes that helps citizens tolerate a certain degree of underperformance and dysfunction within the political system.²

Expectations and evaluations regarding public actors and institutions vary greatly across individuals, groups, and societies over time. Finland has traditionally ranked high in international comparisons of institutional trust, which is often attributed to its high-quality welfare institutions and relative lack of corruption.³ Still, some variation exists between different individuals and groups within Finnish society that needs to be explored more closely if we hope to better understand the various sources of trust. Moreover, earlier research has indicated that the average subjective competence, or internal efficacy, is exceptionally low in Finland when compared to that of the other Nordic countries.⁴ A lack of belief in one's ability to understand politics coupled with growing inequalities in political participation could potentially have dire consequences for institutional trust. This makes it imperative to examine trends and intergroup differences in institutional trust. The aim of this chapter is therefore to explore patterns in the levels of trust in key political actors and institutions among Finnish voters and to look at potential differences across sociodemographic groups.

PATTERNS IN INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Institutional trust was operationalized using standard survey questions that requested the respondent to state their level of trust in seven different political institutions on a scale from 0 to 10. The results for these survey items have been analyzed using independent samples t-tests and ANOVA (analysis of variance) in order to check for statistically significant differences between groups and are presented in a simple descriptive figure and table.

Figure 9.1 lists the mean level of trust for different political institutions at three points in time: 2015 (FNES data), 2019 (eOpinion 2019 survey), and 2023 (Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion 2023 data). The lowest level of trust in both the current and the previous surveys can be found for politicians ($\bar{x}=5.39$) and political parties ($\bar{x}=5.49$), where responsibility becomes more personified compared to institutions such as the parliament ($\bar{x}=6.48$) and the government ($\bar{x}=6.62$), which demonstrate somewhat higher levels of trust. The highest level of trust can be found for the president ($\bar{x}=8.41$), an institution that of course is also highly personified but has nonetheless traditionally been highly trusted in Finland. One plausible explanation for this is that the Finnish

president does not partake in the same way in daily politics as ordinary politicians and parties.

The European Union (EU) has been the least trusted institution in previous FNES studies (\bar{x} =4.95 in 2015 and 5.09 in 2019), but this was not the case in our two online surveys where the average trust levels were significantly higher (\bar{x} =6.00 in 2019 and 6.21 in 2023). It was speculated in 2019 that this might have been due to the then current European Parliament election, since institutional trust tends to increase during election years.⁵ However, since this trend continued, it would suggest that there is some other explanation for this observation. This potential rise in trust is, in fact, in line with a very recent report by the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA) showing that support for the EU has increased to a new record high during the past year,⁶ a development argued to be a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This would be because the EU, alongside NATO, is claimed to be perceived as a security solution that binds Finland closer to the West, thereby providing security and stability. Still, trust in the EU remains somewhat lower than in the national parliament and the government. Generally, average trust levels seem somewhat higher in the 2023 survey compared to the 2019 survey, especially in the case of the government (\bar{x} =5.70 in 2019 and 6.62 in 2023); this could potentially be interpreted as a sign of greater satisfaction with the performance of the outgoing Marin government compared to the previous Sipilä government. However, it could also be part of a more general "rally-round-the-flag" effect caused by the security crisis in Europe, since previous studies have indicated that trust in political leaders sometimes tends to rise during crises, especially if they are caused by external (f)actors.⁷

Table 9.1 shows group means for institutional trust according to gender, age, mother tongue, education, and party choice in the 2023 parliamentary election.

Socioeconomic variables have traditionally been considered relatively weak predictors of institutional trust; for instance, gender was concluded to be a non-significant predictor in the previous election report. Here, however, the findings show that women were significantly more trusting of all institutions except for the national parliament and the party closest to the respondent, although the gender differences are generally very small. For age, in turn, the results show the highest levels of trust in the EU among the youngest age group (18–24) and the oldest group (65+). Generally, trust seems to be highest in the oldest age group for

FIGURE 9.1 Mean trust in different political institutions in Finland



practically every institution and lowest in the lower middle-aged group (35–44).

Moving on to examining differences across language groups, the findings demonstrate a clear pattern of Swedish-speaking respondents showing a significantly higher level of institutional trust than Finnish-speaking respondents in all cases except for trust in the president and the party closest to the respondent. For education, a strong and consistent pattern where institutional trust tends to increase with a higher level of education can be seen. This becomes especially clear when comparing the lowest (primary) level of education with the two highest levels.

Institutional trust varies across different groups depending on party preference. Here, there are also some clear and significant differences in institutional trust across the various parties represented in the Finnish Parliament. Supporters of the Finns Party demonstrated the lowest level of trust in almost all the examined institutions and actors, compared to

TABLE 9.1 Institutional trust (mean 0–10) according to sociodemographic background and party choice

	Parliament	Government	Parties	Politicians	President	EU	Own party
TOTAL							
	6.5	6.6	5.5	5.4	8.4	6.2	7.4
Gender							
Female	6.5	6.7	5.6	5.5	8.6	6.5	7.4
Male	6.4	6.5	5.4	5.3	8.3	5.9	7.4
Age							
18–24	6.4	6.4	5.7	5.4	8.5	6.7	7.5
25–34	6.1	6.3	5.2	4.9	8.2	5.9	7.0
35–44	5.8	5.9	4.9	4.8	7.8	5.6	7.1
45–54	6.2	6.4	5.4	5.4	8.3	5.5	7.4
55–64	6.6	6.9	5.5	5.4	8.6	6.3	7.3
65+	7.0	7.1	5.8	5.8	8.7	6.8	7.8
Mother tongue							
Finnish	6.5	6.6	5.5	5.4	8.4	6.2	7.4
Swedish	6.8	6.9	6.0	5.9	8.4	6.8	7.5
Education level							
Primary	6.2	6.3	5.2	5.1	8.2	5.8	7.3
Secondary	6.7	6.9	5.7	5.6	8.6	6.4	7.6
Tertiary	7.0	7.1	5.9	5.9	8.7	6.8	7.6
Party voted for 2023							
Social Democratic Party	7.2	7.5	6.2	6.0	8.6	7.4	7.8
Finns Party	5.4	5.3	4.6	4.3	8.0	4.0	7.2
National Coalition Party	7.3	7.3	6.1	6.1	9.4	7.2	7.8
Centre Party	7.2	7.3	6.0	6.1	9.3	6.6	7.4
Green League	6.8	7.4	5.7	5.7	8.3	7.5	7.7
Left Alliance	6.3	6.5	5.5	5.4	7.5	6.7	7.9
Swedish People's Party	6.7	7.2	5.6	5.8	8.8	7.0	7.3
Christian Democrats	6.8	6.6	5.3	5.9	8.6	5.6	8.1
Movement Now	6.0	6.0	5.1	5.1	9.3	6.1	6.8
Others	3.3	3.5	3.2	3.0	4.1	3.2	6.6

the other parties in Parliament. Notably, their trust in the EU was especially low ($\bar{x}=4.028$). Likewise, supporters of the newest party in Parliament, Movement Now, also demonstrated a lower trust than supporters of the more established parties, which is clearly in line with the criticism towards the establishment that these types of “challenger” parties tend to present together with the extra-parliamentary parties.⁸

CONCLUSIONS

It has been repeatedly stated that institutional trust is key for well-functioning democracies, although a healthy amount of skepticism is also important for a continuous societal development.⁹ While institutional trust has continued to be comparatively high in Finland, there are a multitude of factors, both on the national and the individual levels that can have an impact on trust.

This chapter demonstrates that institutional trust in Finland has increased across the board from previous levels, possibly in response to the current security crisis in Europe, which has increased the need for security and stability, but perhaps also because of the relatively successful handling of other previous and ongoing crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰ At the individual level, the results of the 2023 survey suggest that variations in institutional trust across genders continues to be small, albeit significant in some cases, while variations are somewhat larger when it comes to age, mother tongue, and education. Furthermore, we find that supporters of the so-called “outsider” parties (Finns Party and Movement Now) have generally lower institutional trust, which is to be expected based on their critical stance towards the political elites and the establishment.

¹ Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012; Norris 2022

² Easton 1965

³ Malmberg & Karv 2022

⁴ Bäck & Kestilä-Kekkonen 2019; Easton 1965

⁵ Bäck 2019

⁶ EVA 2023

⁷ Mueller 1970

⁸ Lavezolo & Ramiro 2018

⁹ Norris 2022

¹⁰ Kestilä-Kekkonen, Koivula, Tiihonen 2022

10

Policy issues: The easy distant and the hard close

Linnéa Henriksson

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the opinions of Finnish voters on six of the policy issue themes relevant during the campaign before the parliamentary elections in April 2023. The items used here stem from the question, “What do you think about the following topical political issues?” Respondents could choose from the same five alternatives for each item: (1) totally agree, (2) partly agree, (3) partly disagree, (4) totally disagree, and (5) don’t know. The questions were asked during two different waves (wave 2 and wave 6). However, this is not highlighted in the analysis, so possible changes in opinion during the campaign are not examined. A total of 14 items, divided into six thematic groups, were analyzed mainly by cross tabulating opinions by party choice, education, gender, and

place of residence (as type of municipality). This chapter looks at the firm and decided voices in favor of the statements—the tables only show the percentage of the respondents who totally agreed with a statement.

RESULTS

Tables 10.1 and 10.2 show a cross tabulation of opinion on policy issues according to party choice. Most voters had a firm and decided opinion on some issues (see Table 10.1). Of all the respondents, 66% totally agreed that “Finland applying for NATO membership was a good thing” (91% of the voters for KOK and 30% of the voters for VAS, as the extremities). Thus, they assented to the Finnish Parliament, who voted on joining NATO in March 2023 with a crushing 184 votes for and 7 votes against (1 empty, 7 absent). From the perspective of security policy, 59% totally agreed that Russia posed a threat to Finland (with a range from 74% of the voters for KOK and 35% of the voters for VAS). The statement “It is safe to live in Finland” received 45% agreement. In the same manner, in terms of international cooperation, 46% and 56% of the respondents totally agreed that EU membership has been a positive matter for Finland and that Finland should strengthen its Nordic cooperation, respectively. The voters seemed to have had a uniform understanding of Finnish security and foreign policy before the parliamentary elections in spring 2023. This is, of course, not very surprising—Russia’s attack on Ukraine made it easy to answer these questions. (The question of NATO is examined further in Chapter 13 by Weckman.) On the other hand, strengthening Nordic cooperation sounds obvious and harmless, but also diffuse and hard to attach precise expectations to.

Voters for PS had differing views on two of these items. Only 23% of them totally agreed that it is safe to live in Finland, a view that they had in common with voters for LIUK. Based on the rhetoric of PS, it is probable that this item is not understood only as foreign policy, but also as a question of “street safety”, at least for PS voters. Voters for PS, as well as those for KD and LIUK, were less likely to totally agree with EU membership being a positive matter for Finland.

In the field of value-based issues, 51% of the voters totally agreed that sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish. This varies significantly between different parties, though, because 90% of the voters for VIHR, while only 5% of the voters for KD, totally agreed with

TABLE 10.1 Policy issues on security, international cooperation, and minorities

	It is a good thing Finland applied for NATO-membership	Russia poses a security political threat to Finland	It is safe to live in Finland	EU-membership has mainly been positive for Finland	Finland should strengthen its Nordic cooperation	Sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish	It is good that the Parliament approved the Act on transgenderism
total	66	59	45	46	56	51	33
Voted for party							
SDP	65	54	46	62	62	68	54
PS	55	55	23	10	45	24	4
KOK	91	74	56	66	55	47	25
KESK	71	63	52	34	61	36	20
VIHR	64	63	56	71	69	90	83
VAS	30	35	37	47	53	79	67
SFP	84	67	63	60	71	70	56
KD	50	64	55	21	55	5	2
LIIK	76	57	29	14	62	67	6
Other	28	24	18	26	41	66	17
<i>Don't know</i>	4	2	0	4	3	5	10

N=2643-2678

the statement. (The development of opinion on this matter is presented in Chapter 11 by Lindell.) The voters are more hesitant on whether the parliament approving the new act on transgenderism¹ was a good thing. In total, 33% totally agreed, and the scale here is used from top to bottom: 83% of the VIHHR voters totally agreed, but only 2%, 4%, and 6% of the voters for KD, PS, and LIK, respectively, agreed. Matters of conscience are tricky issues in the sense that what is a matter of human rights for people belonging to and supporting a minority are considered as highly political questions by others.

One of the future-related issues discussed during the campaign before this election was the question of immigration in general and work-related immigration in particular. The population in Finland is declining, and immigration was considered (by most) to be the only way of maintaining the current living standard. Work-related immigration is often presented as an easy solution, but it overlooks the reality that Finland is not a very popular country in the eyes of potential immigrants. Among all voters, a total of 37% totally agreed that Finland needs more work-related immigration. There was, however, considerable variation between voters of different parties, with 60% of the SFP electorate totally agreeing with the statement and only 9% of the PS electorate agreeing. A total of 18% totally agreed with immigration mainly being good for Finland. For this issue, the highest share was among VIHHR voters, of whom 47% totally agreed with the statement. Only 0.4% (two people) of the voters for PS totally agreed with immigration being good for Finland.

Another future-related issue during the campaign was that of climate change. A total of 18% totally agreed that Finland must counter climate change significantly more actively, and 17% agreed that Finland should restrict deforestation. The latter was a hot topic since, in 2022, researchers showed that carbon neutrality in Finland was further away than expected because the ability of forests to serve as carbon sinks had collapsed.² Respectively, 69% and 61% of the VIHHR voters totally agreed, while 1–8% of the voters for PS, KOK, KESK, and LIK assented.

Finland is a big and sparsely populated country, and different parties have quite unequal distributions of voters throughout the country. This becomes very visible in the responses to the statement “the ambition is to keep all of Finland inhabited despite the costs”. A total of 22% totally agreed with this statement. As illustrated in the table, there are some significant differences between the voters of different parties. Only 6% of

TABLE 10.2 Policy issues on immigration, climate action, and internal affairs

	Immigration is mainly good for Finland	Finland needs more work-related immigration	Finland should counter climate change significantly more actively than today	Finland must restrict deforestation	The ambition should be to keep all of Finland inhabited despite the costs	To balance the Finnish economy, public services must be cut	The reform of social and health care, which established the Wellbeing Services Counties, is mainly a good thing
total	18	37	18	17	22	17	6
Voted for party							
SDP	26	44	24	24	12	3	15
PS	0	9	1	6	35	27	1
KOK	19	46	6	8	10	37	1
KESK	11	36	4	2	53	16	7
VIHR	47	55	69	61	6	4	5
VAS	33	46	53	45	12	0	9
SFP	32	60	19	7	28	11	8
KD	3	29	20	9	20	8	7
LIIK	2	22	2	8	29	12	0
Other	4	17	6	22	31	10	0
<i>Don't know</i>	4	4	3	8	4	4	21

N=2643-2678

the voters for VIHR totally agreed with the statement, while the majority (53%) of the voters for KESK totally agreed.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the levels of expenditure and the national debt have increased significantly during the last years. Hence there is a perceived need for balancing the Finnish (governmental) economy. A total of 17% of the voters totally agreed with cutting public services in order to balance the economy, 37% of the voters for KOK but none of the voters for VAS totally agreed.

During the last parliamentary term, the Finnish welfare system underwent the biggest reform in Finnish administrative history when the responsibility for organizing health and social services was transferred from the municipal to the regional level from the beginning of 2023. Voters are, however, not yet convinced that this reform was for the best as only 6% of the voters (although 15% of the voters for SDP) totally agreed that the reform of social welfare and healthcare, creating the wellbeing services counties,ⁱ is mainly a good thing. It is, perhaps, only reasonable to expect some uncertainty or even criticism right after a reform. A total of 21% of the voters chose "I don't know" concerning this statement, while the usual number of unsure answers varied between 0% and 10%.

As a whole, Table 10.1 sheds light on at least two circumstances. The first is related to the differences in the voters' approval of the policy issues in question. These differences can be interpreted in several ways. One way could be to disseminate the items according to the type of statement. Some of the items were connected to decisions by the government (NATO, the act on transgenderism, the reform of social and health services; government performance is examined in Chapter 16 by Vento), some were connected to things that occurred (Russia's attack on Ukraine), and some to opinions on a particular matter (safe to live in Finland, EU is a good thing, sexual minorities living their life, immigration is a good thing). Another category of the items can be understood as requests for the future (strengthening Nordic cooperation, more work-life immigration, countering climate change, restricting deforestation, keeping Finland inhabited, cutting services to balance the economy). The opinions of the voters, however, did not follow this divide. On the contrary, voters seemed to assent the further away an issue was. The

ⁱ This is the official English translation of the (suom.) *hyvinvointialue(et)* / (sv.) *välrfärdsområde(n)*.

TABLE 10.3 Policy opinion according to education, gender, and place of residence

	EU membership has mainly been positive for Finland	Sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish	It is good that Parliament approved the act on transgenerism	Immigration is mainly good for Finland	Finland needs more work-related immigration	The ambition should be to keep all of Finland inhabited despite the costs	To balance the Finnish economy, public services must be cut
Education level							
basic	33	45	27	12	27	28	13
secondary	45	57	38	21	38	19	15
tertiary	58	59	42	27	47	15	20
Gender							
men	43	41	22	14	33	22	22
women	41	60	43	20	36	24	9
Place of residence							
city	46	53	36	20	37	17	15
town	34	46	28	14	31	36	16
rural	29	43	23	11	23	41	14

N=3594-3669

voters agreed with the statements on security policy and international cooperation, as well as on minority rights, (i.e., issues that are at a distance or do not concern more than a few people) to a higher extent than they assented to statements that required or concerned change in daily Finnish society (immigration, climate action, social and health services, cuts in public spending or allocating resources within the entire country). One interpretation of the differences in the opinions of the voters is that it essentially is a question of *distance* from the issue.

The second circumstance illuminated in Table 10.1 is that the traditional and new cleavages in society, manifested as differences between voters for different Finnish parties, are still relevant. Some of the cleavages visible here are further examined in Chapter 6 by Söderlund and Chapter 11 by Lindell.

EDUCATION, GENDER, AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Many of the issues examined in this chapter are in essence complicated and multifaceted. Since the main feature of Table 1 was a tendency to agree more with statements on more distance issues, it is possible that this is a case of “the more you know, the trickier it gets”. To examine this further, Table 10.3 shows a cross tabulation of opinions on policy issues and education, gender, and place of residence. In this table, only seven of the original 14 items are included. Concerning the excluded statements (NATO, Russia’s threat to Finland, safe to live in Finland, Nordic cooperation, climate change, deforestation, and the reform of social and health services), there is little or no variation between members of the different groups examined in Table 3. (They follow the percentage for the line “total” in Tables 10.1 and 10.2.)

The effect of education is a somewhat firmer opinion on every statement. There is a larger percentage who totally agree with each statement among voters with secondary-level education compared to voters with basic-level education, and again among voters with tertiary-level education compared to voters with secondary-level education. The only exception from this mechanism is the statement about the ambition to keep Finland inhabited, where the direction is the opposite. A greater share of the voters with basic-level education totally agreed with this statement than of the voters with secondary- or tertiary-level education.

Men were more prone to totally agree with the statements regarding security policy, EU membership, and cuts in public spending. The biggest differences in opinion between voters of different gender concerned sexual minorities, but smaller differences were also found concerning climate action and cuts in public spending.

Voters living in more urban areas totally agreed with the statements concerning the EU, minorities, and immigration more often than voters living in rural areas. The opposite, and the biggest difference between voters from different places, concerned the ambition to keep the entire Finland inhabited despite the cost. More than 40% of the voters in rural areas totally agreed with this statement, but only 17% of the voters living in cities totally agreed.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a slight tendency in the opinions of the voters to agree to a higher extent with statements about issues further away from their daily life, than with issues close to home. In general, there are very few surprises in the voters' opinions, compared to earlier similar studies.³

¹ The Act on Legal Recognition of Gender (295/2023).

² LUKE 2022

³ Suuronen, Grönlund & Sirén 2020, 267; see also Grönlund 2019, 10

11

Opinions on political and societal issues

Marina Lindell

INTRODUCTION

Public opinion is an important force in politics. Politicians, interest group leaders, journalists, corporate executives, and ordinary citizens are interested in knowing: “What does the public think?” Having a working knowledge of public opinion at any given time is crucial to understanding sentiments in society and knowing what policies and initiatives voters are willing to support.¹

Opinions are shaped by a multitude of factors. In Finland, traditional divisions have revolved around socioeconomic factors and the urban-rural divide. Over the past two decades, identity politics has gained importance in shaping both opinions and voting decisions. Individuals identify with specific groups that provide a sense of social identity, which contributes to their pride and self-esteem. However, a potential downside arises when social identity fuels an “us versus them” mentality.²

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the opinions of the Finnish population on a range of political and societal issues. Firstly, the opinions on political and societal issues among the Finnish population are examined: are there issues where there is consensus, and are there issues where opinions diverge? I analyze the issues where opinions are divided in order to clarify patterns of opinion: are there differences between gender, age groups, education, or urban-rural municipalities? Next, comparisons between the 2019 and 2023 elections are made to see how opinions changed over time. Lastly, to understand the significance that people attribute to different societal and political issues, I conclude by comparing issue importance between 2019 and 2023.

MEASURES

To investigate the political climate of 2023, two waves (2 and 6) of survey responses were used. In Table 11.1, the items are combined into four categories: 1) Moral and cultural issues, 2) economic issues, 3) international cooperation, and 4) current political issues. The scale for all items used in this chapter is 1–5, where 1 indicates “strongly agree/very important”, 2 “agree/important”, 3 “disagree/not very important”, 4 “strongly disagree/not important at all”, and 5 “don’t know”. The precise wording of the survey items can be found in Table 11.1. For the subgroup analyses, the numbers in Table 11.2 indicate how much (plus or minus) the average of each sociodemographic group differed from the average of the total sample. Data for 2019 is from corresponding surveys conducted in the panel in conjunction with the 2019 election.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 11.1, the opinions among the Finnish population were deeply divided on many societal and political issues.

The opinions were nearly evenly split, with close to a 50/50 division on whether Finland should fight climate change more actively, if public services need to be cut back in order to balance Finland’s economy, whether Finland should restrict logging, if it should introduce conscription for women, and whether the government should subsidize energy costs for private households. Opinions were also somewhat divided over the approval of the new act on transgenderism, whether immigra-

TABLE 11.1 Opinions on political and societal issues in 2023

	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Moral and culture issues					
Sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish	51	33	8	3	5
It is good that Parliament approved the act on transgenderism	33	20	17	19	11
Immigration is mainly good for Finland	18	39	24	15	4
Finland needs more work-related immigration	34	38	15	9	4
Finland should counter climate change considerably more actively than today	17	28	29	22	4
Our country needs strong leaders who can restore discipline and order in society	21	34	24	16	5
Economic issues					
The healthcare reform, which established the Wellbeing Services Counties, is mainly a good thing	6	25	28	19	22
To balance the Finnish economy, public services need to be cut	15	30	28	22	5
International cooperation					
EU membership has been mainly positive for Finland	42	33	13	7	5
Finland should strengthen its Nordic cooperation	55	38	3	0	4
Current political issues					
Learning Swedish should be voluntary	32	29	22	14	3
Finland must restrict logging	17	28	27	18	10
Conscription should also apply for women	13	34	28	15	10
The government should subsidize energy costs for private households	11	32	36	11	10

Note: Unweighted n=3,794–3,821 (weighted n=3,621–3,668)

TABLE 11.2 Differences in opinions between sociodemographic groups in 2023

	Act on trans-genderism	Sexual minorities	Immigration	Climate actions	Strong leaders	Cutting public services	Logging	Conscription for women
TOTAL	53	84	57	45	55	45	45	47
Gender								
Female	11	3	4	10	-3	-13	8	-6
Male	-12	-4	-4	-9	5	13	-8	7
Age								
18-24	18	7	-1	5	-13	-9	13	3
25-34	4	6	-10	2	-8	-8	2	6
35-44	-3	0	-9	2	-5	-4	6	1
45-54	-5	-1	-11	-10	5	-2	-8	0
55-64	-4	1	-2	-6	0	0	-2	-5
65+	1	-4	14	4	6	7	1	1
Education								
Basic	-7	-3	-9	-9	8	-2	-4	-3
Secondary	5	1	4	5	-2	-3	3	1
Tertiary	9	4	17	14	-13	6	9	7
Type of municipality								
Urban	4	1	2	5	-3	-1	5	1
Semi-urban	-7	-1	-6	-9	8	2	-9	-4
Rural	-12	-8	0	-8	7	1	-9	0

Note. The table contains the total share (%) of strongly agree and agree. The numbers indicate how much the sociodemographic groups' average differ from the average from the total sample. The differences between groups for all variables are statistically significant.

tion is good for Finland, and the necessity for strong leaders to restore discipline. There seems to have been more consensus that sexual minorities should be allowed to live as the way they wish, that Finland requires more work-based immigration, and that learning Swedish should be voluntary. There was also strong support for European and Nordic cooperation. To examine potential differences in opinions among various societal groups, and to shed light on the issues characterized by the greatest polarization or disagreement, subgroup analyses were conducted. Table 11.2 shows significant differences in opinions between sociodemographic groups.

The gender divide seen here is significant. Women were more prone to support sexual minorities, immigration, and climate actions, and to disapprove of cutting public services and of strong leaders. Men seem to have had more conservative values, including less support for sexual minorities, immigration, and climate actions while showing stronger support for strong leaders and for cutting public services. Women were more supportive of restricting logging while men were more supportive of conscription for women.

There is also a significant age divide, with people between 18 and 34 showing support for sexual minorities and climate actions while being more negative towards immigration and strong leaders. People aged 45–54 seem to have been more conservative than other age groups with lower support for immigration and climate actions. The younger age groups were more supportive of restricting logging and conscription for women than the older age groups. People with basic education were also more conservative while people with tertiary education seem to have had the most liberal values. Finally, the type of municipality also mattered as urban municipalities were more prone to supporting sexual minorities, immigration, and climate actions.

Let us now examine if and how opinions changed between 2019 and 2023. In 2023, we found significantly more support, 45% compared to 34% in 2019, for cutting public services to balance Finland's economy. This might be partly due to the election campaign in 2023, which placed significant emphasis on economic issues and raised concerns about Finland's debt. The support for Swedish being voluntary in schools also increased, as has support for strong leaders to restore discipline and order. It is somewhat surprising that the overall support for climate actions decreased.

TABLE 11.3 Comparison between opinions on political and societal issues in 2019 and 2023

	2023	2019	change
Sexual minorities should be able to live the way they wish	84	87	-3
Finland should counter climate change considerably more actively than today	46	55	-9
Immigration is mainly good for Finland	57	56	1
Our country needs strong leaders who can restore discipline and order in society	55	50	5
The healthcare reform, which established the Wellbeing Services Counties, is mainly a good thing*	31	39	-8
To balance the Finnish economy, public services need to be cut	45	34	11
EU membership has been mainly positive for Finland	75	81	-6
Finland should strengthen its Nordic cooperation	97	97	0
Learning Swedish should be voluntary	61	52	9

Note: The table contains the total share (%) of strongly agree and agree.

*) formulation in 2019: A healthcare reform that involves consolidating social and healthcare services into larger responsible entities, namely regions, would be a good thing.

2019: unweighted n=1,492–1,718 (weighted n=1,344–1,346)

2023: unweighted n=3,794–3,821 (weighted n=3,621–3,668)

Finally, let us look at the importance people placed on societal and political issues. The respondents could select multiple issues (no upper limit). Hence, we cannot determine the specific issue they considered most important; we can only identify issues that were mentioned most frequently by the respondents.

The five most significant political issues in conjunction to the parliamentary elections of 2023 were social and health care, national security and defence, elderly care, safety and crime prevention, and education. Again, it is a bit surprising to find the climate issue in the bottom of the list. However, this might be partly due to the wording of the survey question:

TABLE 11.4 Importance for political issues in 2019 and 2023

	2023	2019	change
Social- and healthcare	69	53	16
National security and defence	66	n/a	
Elderly care	63	50	13
Safety and crime prevention	63	n/a	
Education	62	48	14
Employment	58	53	5
Youth and family with children	52	40	12
Taxation	40	46	-6
Operating conditions for companies	40	32	8
European cooperation and the EU	31	26	5
Minority rights	29	23	6
Immigration and immigrants	24	25	-1
Climate/environmental protection*	37	43	-6

Note: Share (%) of very important

2023: unweighted n=3,802–3,809 (weighted n=3,647–3,656)

2019: unweighted n=1,622–1,641 (weighted n=1,283–1,285)

*) 2019: climate; 2023: environmental protection

“How important is environmental protection to you?”; hence, the focus is not on climate actions but on environmental protection. A comparison with 2019 indicates that in 2023 there was increased importance placed on social and health care, education, elderly care, youth and families with children, the operating conditions for companies, minority rights, employment, and European cooperation and the EU. In 2023, less emphasis was placed on taxation and climate/environment. Given the support for the Finns Party, it is somewhat surprising that only one out of four considered immigration an important political issue.

CONCLUSIONS

The Finnish population seems more divided than united on most of the political and societal issues examined in this chapter. An overwhelming majority found European and Nordic cooperation important. There was significant support for sexual minorities, although the approval of the new act on transgenderism faces opposition primarily from men and older middle-aged individuals. The population also generally agreed that Finland requires more labour migration, although opinions were more divided on immigration in general. People appear to have been quite critical of the health care reform that established the Wellbeing Service Counties, both in 2019 and even more so in 2023.

The opinions of the population were most divided on the need for climate change action, the necessity of strong leaders to restore discipline in society, and whether Finland should reduce public services to balance the economy. Additionally, current political issues such as logging restrictions, conscription for women, and subsidizing energy costs further have divided the population into two camps.

The differences in opinions between sociodemographic groups are significant. This might raise some concerns about the possibility to find common ground to make decisions. It seems that women and men have largely opposite views and values. Different age groups also have significantly different views. A democracy needs different opinions, debate, and opposition in order to flourish. In this sense, a division of opinions might be good for democracy as it fosters a lively debate. However, if a population is strongly divided into two opinion groups, and understanding and empathy for the other group diminish, the societal climate might turn hostile, disrespectful, and deteriorated. This can eventually lead to increased social division: creating an “us vs them” mentality and fostering hostility between different political groups. This might prevent constructive dialogue and cooperation, and result in difficulties in addressing pressing issues, making decisions, and implementing policies.

¹ Glynn et al. 2004, 3

² Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Isotalo et al. 2020

12

**“Us and them”
– Affective
polarization
among voters
of different
parties**

Kim Strandberg

INTRODUCTION

The concept of polarization is one that has received a considerable amount of both media and scholarly attention of late.¹ This chapter studies the occurrence of affective polarization towards parties and party leaders among voters of different parties.

Drawing on the classic sociological concept of social ingroups and outgroups,² affective polarization³ entails that people have a) positive feelings towards their ingroup and b) negative feelings towards their outgroup. Within the realm of politics, political parties constitute the typical social group that people either relate to or do not relate to. Using parties as social groups, affective polarization has been observed in survey-based studies from the US where “in-party love and out-party hate” have grown over the last decades.⁴ While multiparty systems of the Northern European kind tend not to exhibit similar levels of affective polarization as in the US context, research has nevertheless shown that affective polarization between clusters of parties exists and is slowly growing.^{5, 6}

METHODS AND DATA

In this chapter, I study how voters of the Finnish parties feel about the political parties and the political party leaders in Finland. While a simplistic approach, I chose to consider the party that each voter voted for as their in-party (ingroup) and then explore which party/parties constitute their most disliked out-party (or -parties). A similar logic is used for voter assessments of party leaders where the leader of the party each voter voted for is considered their in-party leader and, thereafter, I explore patterns of like-dislike towards the other party leaders.

The analyses focus on two types of measures of how voters feel about parties and party leaders. Firstly, I use voter ratings of parties and party leaders on a zero to ten scale, where zero represents full dislike and ten full liking of each party/party leader, respectively. Secondly, I focus on a social distance measure of affective polarization. Thus, respondents were asked to state, on a scale from 1 to 7, how uncomfortable/comfortable they would feel to be friends with someone who supports a specific political party.

TABLE 12.1 Party ratings among voters of different parties

Party assessed → Party voted for ↓	SDP	PS	KOK	KESK	VIHR	VAS	SFP	KD	LIIK
SDP	8.2	1.6	3.1	3.3	5.8	6.3	4.7	2.2	1.9
PS	2.4	8.4	4.9	3.4	1.0	1.7	2.3	4.5	5.6
KOK	3.9	4.1	8.3	4.7	3.6	1.8	5.2	4.8	5.0
KESK	4.2	4.0	5.7	7.7	2.8	2.7	4.4	5.3	3.7
VIHR	6.2	0.7	3.5	2.6	8.3	6.4	4.8	1.5	1.8
VAS	6.7	0.8	1.7	2.3	6.6	8.8	4.1	1.3	1.5
SFP	6.4	1.5	5.3	3.9	4.6	3.8	8.3	3.7	2.9
KD	3.3	5.6	4.8	4.8	2.1	1.8	3.3	8.4	4.3
LIIK	3.1	5.4	4.8	3.9	2.3	1.8	3.5	3.8	8.0
Total:	4.9	3.8	5.0	4.0	3.9	3.7	4.3	3.8	3.7

FINDINGS

Feelings towards parties and party leaders

In the first analysis, Table 12.1 presents the findings for how voters of each party rated the political parties on a scale from zero to ten. The table is to be read horizontally whereby each row shows the ratings among voters for that party for each party (columns). The diagonal cells are bolded since they represent how voters rated their own party. For each party's voters, I have highlighted the most liked party in green and the most disliked party in red. Parties in light green are liked as well and parties in amber are disliked parties.

Table 12.1 shows that voters of all parties liked their own party the most, which is hardly surprising. The National Coalition Party was, on average, rated the highest, closely followed by SPD. The Left Alliance was the least liked, together with Movement Now, closely followed by the Finns Party. Table 12.1 also shows that there are clusters of parties whose voters liked each other's parties and, at the same time, disliked the same group of parties. Thus, the Social Democratic Party, the Green League and the Left Alliance voters form one cluster, and their opposite is the voters of the Finns Party, the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and Movement Now. We continue by taking a look at how voters rated the party leaders on the same dislike–like scale (Table 12.2).

Table 12.2 shows some noteworthy findings. Voters of all parties liked their own party leader the most with a noteworthy exception of the Green League, whose voters rated Li Andersson (VAS) and Sanna Marin (SDP) higher than their own leader Maria Ohisalo. Ohisalo (VIHR) was, in fact, the most disliked leader on average, together with Harri Harkimo (LIKK), with Riikka Purra (PS) coming in third. Prime Minister Sanna Marin (SDP) is in a league of her own in terms of which leader was the most liked on average. Anna-Maija Henriksson (SFP) was the second most liked party leader with Li Andersson (VAS) and Sari Essayah (KD) sharing the third spot. As in Table 12.1, the findings in Table 12.2 reveal similar clusters of parties who display strong in-cluster love and out-cluster dislike. Especially the axis of the Finns Party on one side and SDP, VIHR, and VAS on the other is very evident.

Social distance affective polarization among voters

So, the analyses thus far have revealed rather clear patterns, or clusters, among Finnish voters. Of course, in all the findings presented hitherto, respondents were asked to assess parties or party leaders. For most Finns, neither parties nor their leaders tend to be that important in their everyday life. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent the feelings towards parties and party leaders indicate that affective polarization has other implications in the lives of Finns. This final part of the chapter explores this aspect. Thus, Table 12.3 presents the findings for how comfortable voters of different parties were with being friends with people who openly followed a particular party (Table 12.3).

TABLE 12.2 Party leader ratings among voters of different parties

Party leader assessed → Party voted for ↓	Marin (SDP)	Purra (PS)	Orpo (KOK)	Saarikko (KESK)	Ohisalo (VIHR)	Andersson (VAS)	Henriksson (SFP)	Essayah (KD)	Harkimo (LIIK)
SDP	8.7	2.1	2.8	3.5	5.5	7.4	5.9	2.9	2.1
PS	2.1	8.0	4.5	2.6	1.1	1.9	2.5	5.4	5.6
KOK	4.5	4.6	7.3	4.5	3.4	3.3	5.1	5.9	4.7
KESK	4.7	4.3	5.9	6.8	2.7	3.7	5.0	5.6	4.0
VIHR	7.7	1.2	3.1	3.0	7.3	7.8	5.9	3.0	1.8
VAS	7.6	1.3	1.7	2.8	6.3	8.9	5.1	2.1	1.5
SFP	7.2	1.8	4.7	4.0	4.6	5.8	7.8	4.1	3.0
KD	3.4	5.5	5.0	4.1	2.1	2.8	3.8	8.6	5.3
LIIK	3.2	5.5	4.0	3.4	1.4	3.1	3.3	4.7	7.3
Total:	5.4	4.1	4.6	3.8	3.7	4.7	4.8	4.7	3.7

Compared to the previous tables, it is noteworthy that Finnish voters appear to have less problems with being friends with a supporter of another party since the scores are on average higher than in the earlier analyses. Beyond that, though, Table 12.3 shows patterns that are very familiar by now: voters would feel the most comfortable being friends with someone who supported their own party, and the same cluster of voters who like each other are seen here as well. However, in contrast to

TABLE 12.3 Willingness to be friends with supporter of different parties

Party assessed→ Party voted for↓	SDP	PS	KOK	KESK	VIHR	VAS	SFP	KD	LIIK
SDP	6.3	2.5	3.7	3.9	5.2	5.6	5.0	3.1	2.8
PS	3.8	6.0	5.0	4.3	2.7	2.7	3.6	4.4	5.0
KOK	4.8	4.3	6.0	5.1	4.4	3.4	5.2	4.7	4.8
KESK	4.4	4.6	5.2	6.2	3.3	3.5	4.7	4.9	4.0
VIHR	6.2	2.1	4.8	4.2	6.6	6.3	6.0	3.4	3.6
VAS	5.8	2.4	3.4	3.7	5.4	6.2	4.8	2.9	3.4
SFP	4.7	2.8	4.6	4.0	4.1	3.5	6.2	3.7	3.3
KD	4.3	5.1	5.0	5.4	2.8	3.1	4.6	6.1	4.8
LIIK	5.4	5.6	5.1	4.2	3.0	3.1	4.8	5.0	5.7
Total:	5.1	4.0	4.8	4.6	4.2	4.1	4.8	4.1	4.1

earlier findings, the clusters of disliked parties are less pronounced with most voters clearly indicating only one party, rather than several parties, for which they would feel uncomfortable being friends with a supporter of. Supporters of the Social Democratic Party were the group who people felt they would be most comfortable being friends with, followed by KOK and SFP. The Finns Party received the lowest average score of 4.0 with VAS, KD and LIIK all with 4.1.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this chapter are probably not that surprising for anyone who followed the election campaign and the public debate prior to the 2023 election. The division between, on one hand, SDP, VIHR, and VAS, and, on the other hand, PS and KD was plain to see for all observers. This is mainly a value-driven division where the former group of parties (and their supporters) represent value-liberalism whereas the latter parties (and their supporters) stand for value-conservatism. The findings here also show that issue-focused parties, such as KOK and SFP, apparently are not as affected by such severe dislike by other parties' supporters. Nevertheless, an indication of affective polarization is evident among supporters of Finnish parties. Whether this trend is here to stay or not remains to be seen. For now, it is of utmost importance that the current affective climate is not allowed to hamper the ability for respectful political debate, consideration of the arguments of the "other side" and the ability for political compromise.

¹ McCarty 2019

² Tajfel & Turner 1979

³ Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes 2012

⁴ Iyengar et al. 2018

⁵ Kekkonen et al. 2022

⁶ Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila 2021

13

The view of NATO and Russia in connection to the parliamentary elections 2023

Albert Weckman

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policies and national security are seldom topics that dominate political discussions during parliamentary election campaigns in Finland. Instead, focus often lies on domestic areas such as state finances and social and health care, that is, issues that feel closer to citizens and affect their everyday lives in a more comprehensive manner. These issues are perhaps easier to understand, compared to foreign or security policy, for instance. This was the case in the running up to the national elections of 2023. Even though national security had been one of the main talking points in the media for a long time, from a politician's point of view, there was not much to gain, in terms of popularity, by opposing the nationwide consensus on Finland's membership in NATO. In addition, the decision on NATO had already been made in spring 2022 and was backed up by the majority of the population, according to various opinion polls. The Finnish Parliament approved the membership by an overwhelming vote of 184-7. Finland was during the election period, waiting to be accepted into the alliance, and it was, shortly after Election Day, on 4 April 2023.

The NATO membership marks the biggest change for Finland's foreign and security policies since gaining EU membership in 1995. After decades of weak support for military alignment, Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a rapid surge in support for NATO. Over the years, the opinion numbers on NATO have been stable, with only minor fluctuations during the 21st century. These few significant fluctuations have occurred in connection with different security crises in Europe, more specifically Russian military aggression.¹ On average, only around a quarter of Finns supported the idea of joining NATO before 2022. The tradition of neutrality, or liquid neutrality,² was earlier seen as an important tool in Finland's foreign policy.

In this chapter, I explore how Finns positioned themselves on security-related issues in connection to the parliamentary elections of 2023. Did Finns still view the NATO membership as a good idea? In addition, what was the perception of Russia? To what extent was Finland's Eastern neighbor seen as a threat to Finland's security?

OPERATIONALIZATION

Taking a closer look at two survey items, I first examine the support for NATO among respondents based on the survey question “If you had the opportunity to vote for or against Finland’s NATO membership today, how would you vote?”. Respondents could answer: “I would vote for membership”, “I would vote against membership”, and “Don’t know”. The second item examined measures to what extent respondents viewed Russia as a security threat to Finland. The respondents took a position on the claim “Russia poses a security threat to Finland”. The survey item had five possible response alternatives: “totally agree”, “somewhat agree”, “somewhat disagree”, “totally disagree”, and “don’t know”. First, I present the overall distribution of responses to both survey questions. Secondly, I focus on the distributions on a more individual level.

RESULTS

I begin by looking at to what extent Finns perceived Russia as a security threat according to their survey responses. Figure 13.1 provides an overview of those responses. Out of all the respondents, 55% totally agreed with the statement, and 32% somewhat agreed. With both response alternatives added together, it means that 87% thought that Russia posed a security threat to Finland. Altogether, a mere 10% of respondents disagreed with the statement and 3% answered “Don’t know”. It is apparent from these results, that the view of Russia as a security threat has remained relatively unchanged, compared to results from similar survey questions, for instance in the ABDI surveys during late 2022.³

Figure 13.2 illustrates the distribution of NATO attitudes. Over 80% of the respondents answered that they would still vote for Finnish membership in NATO. Again, only 10% would vote against membership, and 8% answered “Don’t know”. Based on these results, the support for NATO is still very high among Finns.

How does the distribution then look like, on a more detailed level? Table 13.1 provides a breakdown of the attitudes towards joining NATO according to age, gender, education, and party choice. In relation to earlier years, and other opinion results, the discrepancies between different groups have been levelled out, due to the overall high support for joining NATO. However, a closer inspection of the table shows some interesting differences. There is a slight difference between genders

FIGURE 13.1 Russia poses a security threat to Finland

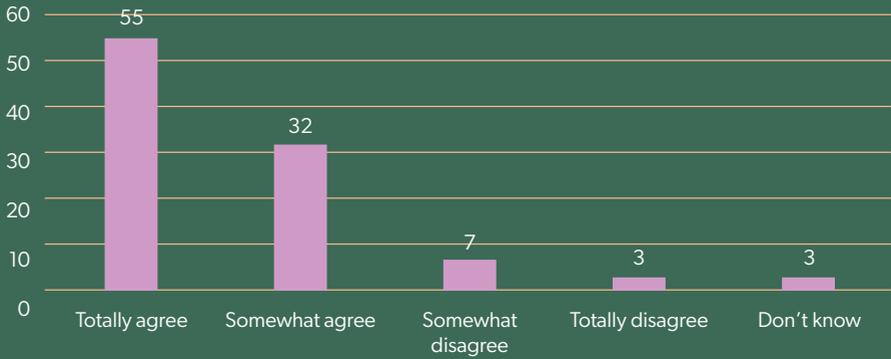


Figure 13.1 : The distribution of responses on the survey item “What is your opinion on the following statements concerning current political issues. Russia poses a security threat to Finland”. Note: All entries are percentages.

FIGURE 13.2 Attitudes towards Finnish NATO membership

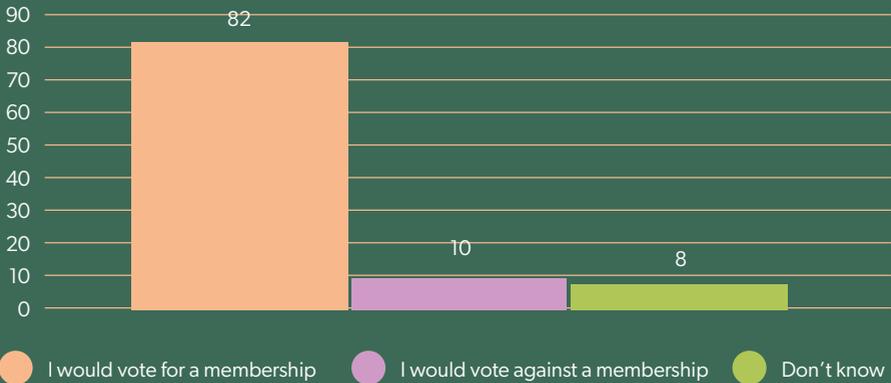


Figure 13.2: The distribution of attitudes towards NATO. Respondents answered the survey question: “If you today would have the opportunity to vote for or against Finland’s NATO membership, how would you vote?”.

TABLE 13.1 Distribution of attitudes towards NATO membership by gender, age group, education, and party

	Vote for membership	Vote against membership	Don't know
Total	82	10	8
Gender			
Male	85	11	4
Female	79	12	9
Age group			
18-24	57	28	15
25-34	68	15	17
35-44	81	14	5
45-54	80	17	3
55-64	85	8	7
65-	86	9	5
Education			
Basic	77	15	8
Secondary	84	11	5
Tertiary	83	11	6
Party voted for in 2023			
SDP	89	3	8
Finns Party	84	11	5
National Coalition Party	99	1	0
Centre Party	90	3	7
Green League	91	4	5
Left Alliance	53	31	16
Swedish People's Party	93	1	6
Christian Democrats	63	18	18
Movement Now	100	0	0
Others	33	67	0

in the “agree” column. Over the years, there have been differences between males and females in attitudes regarding joining NATO. In fact, according to scholars within the field, an attitude difference on security-related issues between males and females is something that can be found in many parts of the world.⁴ But ever since 2022, these differences have diminished in Finland due to the overall consensus.

Table 13.1 shows that a smaller proportion of younger age groups, compared to the older age groups, would vote for membership. Younger individuals overall seem to be more critical towards Finnish membership in NATO. At the same time, younger age groups are largely more unsure of their opinion. Scholars within the field have pointed towards the existence of a generation gap in terms of security policy attitudes.⁵

The differences among groups with different education levels are slim, especially between those having a higher education and those with a basic education. Lastly, it is worth noting the distribution of attitudes between party affiliations, illustrated in Table 13.1. Across most of the party affiliations, an overwhelming majority answered that they would still vote for membership in NATO. The largest proportion of those who responded that they would not vote for a Finnish membership were among those voting for the Left Alliance. Among Christian Democrat voters, we find the second largest group, 18%, of those who were critical. The most striking support can be found among those who said they would vote for the National Coalition Party and those who would vote for the Swedish People’s Party, which has been the case for many years. During earlier years, those voting for the Green League were very critical towards NATO membership. This, however, changed during 2022, and the Greens still seemed to support NATO membership in the 2023 survey.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking at security policy attitudes among Finnish citizens over time, it is clear that a paradigm shift took place in 2022. The results from the Citizens’ Panel show that the Finnish population had not budged in its view as of spring 2023. The vast majority would, given the opportunity, still have voted in favor of Finland’s NATO membership. An even larger proportion of Finns also thought that Russia posed a security threat to Finland. From a Finnish perspective, such a level of support for NATO

and the level of concern for Russia is something that we had not seen before Russia began its invasion in Ukraine. Seldom does the public display such a consensus on foreign and security policy questions.

It will be interesting to see how Finnish citizens will fluctuate in their views on NATO and Russia during the upcoming parliamentary term, as Finland seeks its place among other NATO countries and forms its new foreign and security policies. The country's newly elected political elite will have many security-related issues on the table, issues that the public will probably be surveyed on, since the public pulse has become more influential on the political decision-making in Finland.

As long as Russia's invasion of Ukraine rages on, Finns will most likely continue to show strong support for NATO and view Russia as a security threat. Opinion differences will, however, most likely gradually become greater as earlier research has shown that, when rapid shifts in support for a security policy occur, they tend to be short-lived. Attitude shifts due to changes in the security environment tend to level out and withdraw when the security crises pass or become less salient. To what degree this will be the case for NATO support in Finland, time will tell. For now, there is a strong consensus on national security issues in Finland.

¹ Weckman 2023

² Roitto & Holmila 2021

³ The advisory Board for Defence Information 2022

⁴ Page & Shapiro 1992; Eichenberg & Stoll 2015

⁵ Holsti 1996

14

From pandemic to politics: The COVID effect

Nanuli Silagadze

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest crises that the world has seen since WWII posing an unprecedented challenge to established democracies. It has had enormous implications on the daily lives of people, economic activities as well as decision-making processes. Most governments made the difficult choice to enforce a variety of measures, including lockdowns, to limit the spread of the virus. Finland has been no exception, although the enacted measures were relatively mild compared to other European countries.¹

Political effects of the pandemic are multi-faceted. Evidence from 15 Western European countries shows that lockdowns raised vote intentions for the party of the prime minister/president and increased trust

in government and overall satisfaction with democracy. Furthermore, research shows that loose pandemic policies were politically costly since governments were punished in terms of political approval when infection numbers accelerated, especially in the absence of effective lockdown measures. Contrarily, governments that placed more weight on health rather than short-term economic outcomes enjoyed an increase in their approval rates.²

In this chapter, I explore the public's view on how well the Finnish government handled the pandemic, how strict or lax the measures were perceived, and whether they were appropriate and well-balanced in the eyes of the citizens. In addition, I address to what extent Finns trust their government to handle the consequences of the pandemic in the future and how COVID-related positions correlate with party choice.

OPERATIONALIZATION

To examine citizens' views on COVID-19 measures and the government's response to the pandemic, I use four questions that were fielded in waves 5 and 6 of the panel study:

- "How well do you think the government handled the pandemic?" The respondents were given the following options: "very well", "well", "neither well nor poorly", "poorly", or "very poorly".ⁱ
- "If you think about the pandemic era, were the measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus reasonable given the severity of the disease?" Possible options: "measures were too lax", "measures were reasonable", or "measures were too strict".
- "Do you think that the measures implemented in Finland to limit the spread of the coronavirus..." Possible options: "did not prioritize the economy enough for the sake of public health", "did not prioritize public health enough for the sake of the economy", "have been well balanced between the country's public health and economy".

ⁱ All the questions had a response option "Don't know". However, in order to simplify the presentation of the results and due to the fact that the share of the "Don't know" answers was very low, these answers have been excluded from the analysis.

- “To what extent do you trust the government to handle the pandemic’s consequences?” The respondents answered using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 stood for “don’t have confidence at all” and 10 for “have full confidence”.

The analyses are descriptive, and all the data has been weighted (see the Technical Appendix for more details on the weighting system).

RESULTS

We begin the empirical part of the chapter by looking at what the public thought about how well the government handled the pandemic. As shown in Table 14.1, the majority of citizens (55%) were satisfied with how the government acted in the face of the pandemic. However, a significant segment of the population (26%) was of the opposite opinion and felt that the government’s response to COVID was poor or very poor.

If we take a more differentiated look, it becomes evident that women were more positive in their evaluations than men. Furthermore, elder citizens were most satisfied with how the government managed the crisis. For example, around 65% of people who were 55 years old or more ranked the government’s actions (very) favorably. In contrast, the most critical age group was those between 35 and 44—one-third of them evaluated the government’s response to COVID as poor or very poor. One possible explanation could be that people in this age group usually have families, and they were highly affected by the lockdown, which included the closure of schools and/or even temporary unemployment.

Regarding education, we can observe that those with tertiary education had the most positive outlook: 63% of them assessed the government’s response to COVID as good or very good, followed by those with secondary education, whereas only half of the respondents with basic education shared this view. Similarly, among the people with basic education, the share of respondents who thought that government handled the crisis poorly or very poorly was the highest: 32% compared to 17% among those with tertiary education. This might be explained by the fact that people with higher levels of education often have more secure jobs. Hence, white-collar professionals were less affected by COVID. In contrast to more manual, labor-intensive jobs, their employment was not threatened to the same degree, and remote work was possible.

TABLE 14.1 Evaluations of the government's response to COVID-19

	Very well	Well	Neither well nor poorly	Poorly	Very poorly
	%				
TOTAL	16	39	18	16	10
Gender					
Men	13	36	18	19	13
Women	18	42	18	13	8
Age					
18-24	17	40	18	16	7
25-34	17	39	19	14	10
35-44	14	38	17	16	14
45-54	16	39	16	15	13
55-64	21	43	17	12	6
65-	21	46	19	10	4
Mother tongue					
Finnish	15	38	18	16	11
Swedish	29	50	10	8	3
Education level					
Basic	15	35	17	19	13
Secondary	16	42	21	14	6
Tertiary	17	46	19	11	6
Party choice					
SDP	36	46	13	5	0
Finns Party	3	18	20	31	28
National Coalition Party	8	39	27	19	6
Centre Party	12	52	19	13	4
Green League	26	53	12	5	3
Left Alliance	26	55	11	7	2
Swedish People's Party	30	53	13	3	1
Christian Democrats	6	35	24	27	7
Movement Now	5	27	10	39	20
Others	5	24	21	18	32

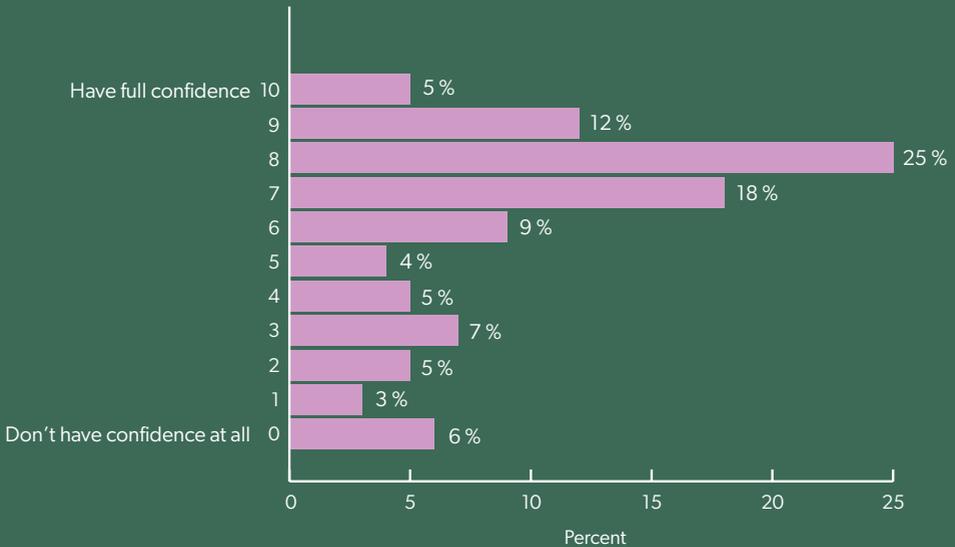
TABLE 14.2 Measures against COVID-19 and Party Choice

	Measures were too lax	Measures were reasonable	Measures were too strict	Did not prioritize the economy enough	Did not prioritize public health enough	Have been well balanced between the country's public health and economy
	%			%		
TOTAL	5	56	34	30	9	49
SDP	2	85	10	7	7	77
Finns Party	7	28	61	53	15	21
National Coalition Party	3	52	40	39	6	48
Centre Party	3	65	28	28	4	57
Green League	2	74	18	16	8	63
Left Alliance	9	73	14	9	16	64
Swedish People's Party	2	84	13	22	9	67
Christian Democrats	2	44	53	42	1	51
Movement Now	22	24	53	40	32	18
Others	1	32	63	40	22	32

As shown in Table 14.2, more than half of the population (56%) thought that the measures were just right and appropriate. Around one-third of society (34%) perceived the measures as too restrictive for individual freedoms and economic activities. Only 5% of people viewed the measures as too lax.

However, regarding the balance between public health and the economy, citizens were more skeptical. Less than half of the respondents (49%) said that the measures against spreading the virus were well-balanced between the country's public health and economy.

FIGURE 14.1 Confidence in the government to handle the consequences of the pandemic



One-third of the population expressed their concern that too little consideration was given to the economy. Only 9% of citizens thought that too little consideration was given to public health.

Our data shows a clear pattern in the evaluations of the government's actions. For example, respondents who voted for one of the parties in government, predominantly assessed the response to COVID as good or very good. Around 80% of voters for SDP, the Green League, the Left Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party viewed the government's response to COVID in a positive light, while supporters of the Centre Party were most pessimistic with only 64% of their voters evaluating the government's actions as good or very good.

Supporters of the opposition parties were more critical. For example, among the voters for the Finns Party and Movement Now, 60% ranked the government's response to COVID as poor or very poor, and 34% of those voting for the Christian Democrats and 25% of supporters of the National Coalition Party shared this viewpoint.

We can observe the same trend regarding the anti-COVID measures. Supporters of the parties in the government had the most favorable assessment: between 65% and 85% said that the measures were reasonable. In contrast, the majority of voters for the opposition parties viewed measures as too strict: 61% from the Finns Party, 53% from the Christian Democrats, and 40% from the National Coalition Party.

Thinking about the future, citizens were rather optimistic: 60% had high confidence in the government being able to handle the consequences of the pandemic, and around 20% had low confidence (Figure 14.1).

SUMMARY

The pandemic represented a complex interplay of public health, economy, politics, media coverage and citizens' attitudes. Governments across the world were put under pressure to act quickly and decisively. Finland has managed to handle COVID relatively well, the Finnish recession being among the mildest in Europe.³ Our data confirms this viewpoint—the majority of Finns were of the opinion that the government responded well to the crisis and that the measures were appropriate. Furthermore, citizens had high confidence in the government to tackle the consequences of the pandemic in the future. It is noteworthy that people who were older and had higher levels of education had a more optimistic outlook.

At the same time, among those who voted, a clear pattern emerged. Citizens who were content with how the government had handled the pandemic had voted for one of the parties in government, while those who were not satisfied had voted for the opposition parties. This had clear electoral consequences. As predicted by some scholars,⁴ the right-wing parties were the winners of these post-crisis elections as they were able to benefit from the looming economic crisis and COVID fatigue.

¹ Varanka 2022

² Trebesch et al. 2020

³ Varanka et al. 2022

⁴ Bets 2020, Burni 2020

15

The Finnish Citizens' Initiative: Public opinion after 10 years

Maija Jäske

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Finland introduced a new instrument for citizen participation called The Finnish Citizens' Initiative (CI). The Citizens' Initiative Act¹ determines that 50,000 eligible voters in Finland have a right to submit a question to the agenda of the Finnish Parliament, Eduskunta. This chapter presents fresh data on the popularity and use of the CI among the citizenry and investigates how well the public knows the institutional design of the CI instrument. The Finnish CI is a so-called agenda initiative, meaning that it is discussed and decided upon by the elected

representatives. Thus, it differs significantly from the other archetype of citizens' initiatives, so called full-scale initiatives, which automatically lead to a referendum.²

The Finnish CI can take one of two forms: It can be written as a law proposal or it can be a call for action for the Finnish Government to start a legislative process on a given issue. Statements of support are collected mostly on the governmental online platform www.kansalaisaloite.fi using strong identification protocol, although it is also possible to collect signatures in paper format. Signatures must be collected within six months, and after verification by the Finnish authorities,³ all initiatives that succeed in collecting 50,000 valid signatures are handed over to Parliament. Parliament then decides which committee will be responsible for handling the initiative. If the committee has not managed to act on the initiative by the end of the electoral term, the initiative will lapse.

From a comparative perspective, it is quite unique that the government has sponsored an online signature collecting system since the beginning of the CI. This significantly lowers the costs of launching and campaigning for an initiative for civil society actors.⁴ During the first 10 years of existence, 64 initiatives have been submitted to Parliament, covering a wide range of issues.⁵ Although the legislative impacts of CIs have remained modest, the initiative as succeeded in raising new questions for the parliamentary decision-making agenda. For example, gender-equal marriage legislation was accepted because of a citizens' initiative in 2014. It is therefore important to investigate how the public perceives this democratic innovation and how they have used it to participate in politics.

VARIABLES

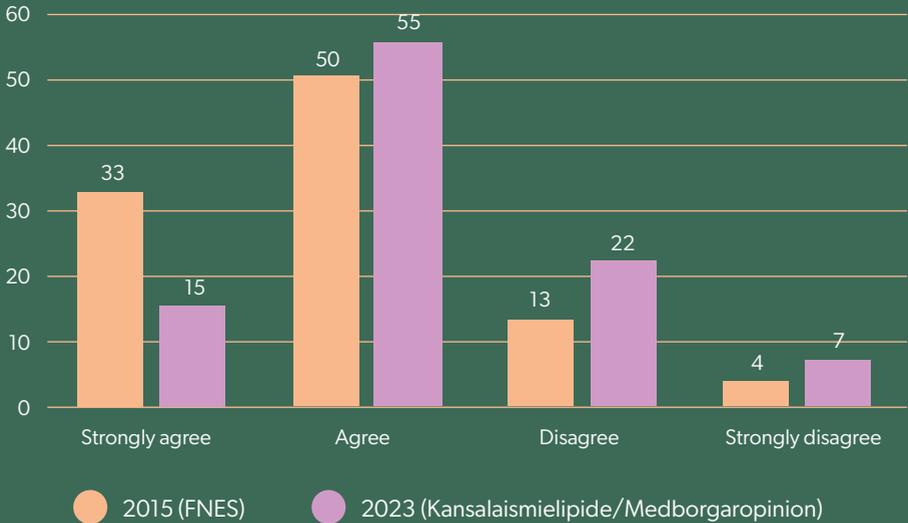
The data for the descriptive analyses come from five survey questions. The first measure captured the overall satisfaction with the citizens' initiative using a 5-point Likert scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". Participation by signing, launching, or otherwise supporting citizens' initiatives is measured with three variables. The first question "Have you signed citizens' initiatives at the national level?" had four answer categories, 1="I have signed three or more CIs", 2="I have signed 1–2 CIs", 3="No, I have not signed any CIs but I could do so", 4="No, I have not signed any CIs and will not do so", and 5="Don't know". The second question, "The citizens' initiative can be launched by at least five eligible

voters. Have you launched a citizens' initiative?", had four answer categories: 1="Yes, I have launched two or more CIs", 2="Yes, I have launched one CI", 3="No, I have not launched any CIs but I could do so", 4="No, I have not launched any CIs and will not do so", and 5="Don't know". The third question is related to different ways of supporting CI campaigns: "It is also possible to support national-level citizens' initiatives by collecting signatures on paper, sharing information about an ongoing initiative campaign at kansalaisaloite.fi on the internet, or donating money to an initiative campaign. Have you done any of these?". The answer categories were 1="I have done one of these", 2="I have not done any of these, but I could do so", 3="I have not done any of these and will not do so", and 4="Don't know". Finally, knowledge of the procedural elements of the CI was measured with a fairly difficult question with three wrong (W) statements and one correct (C) statement: (1) "The committee can only hear experts who have not been involved in drafting the CI" (W), (2) "Parliament can decide not to handle a CI that has succeeded in gathering 50,000 signatures" (W), (3) "CIs that have not been handled by committees by the end of the electoral term lapse" (C), (4) "The CI must be handled by two Parliaments with an election between so that it can be approved" (W), and (5) "Don't know". Finally, participation by signing a CI is investigated in relation to standard socioeconomic indicators that have previously been associated with CIs, including age, gender, education, and place of residence.

RESULTS

First, we look at the overall satisfaction with the Citizens' Initiative among the Finnish adult population. Figure 15.1 indicates citizens' opinions on whether CI has improved the functioning of Finnish democracy. Here, we have the possibility to compare public opinion in 2023 to data from the 2015 national election study where the same question wording was used (Christensen et al. 2016). As we see in Figure 15.1, approximately 70% of Finns were at least somewhat satisfied with the initiative instrument, which points to wide public support (N=1,511). Compared to public opinion eight years ago, when the CI was a relatively new democratic innovation, the share of those who were not satisfied with it has increased from 17% to 29% in 2023. It seems that the excitement boosted by the legislative reform and introduction of a new participatory

FIGURE 15.1 General satisfaction with the Citizens' Initiative (%)

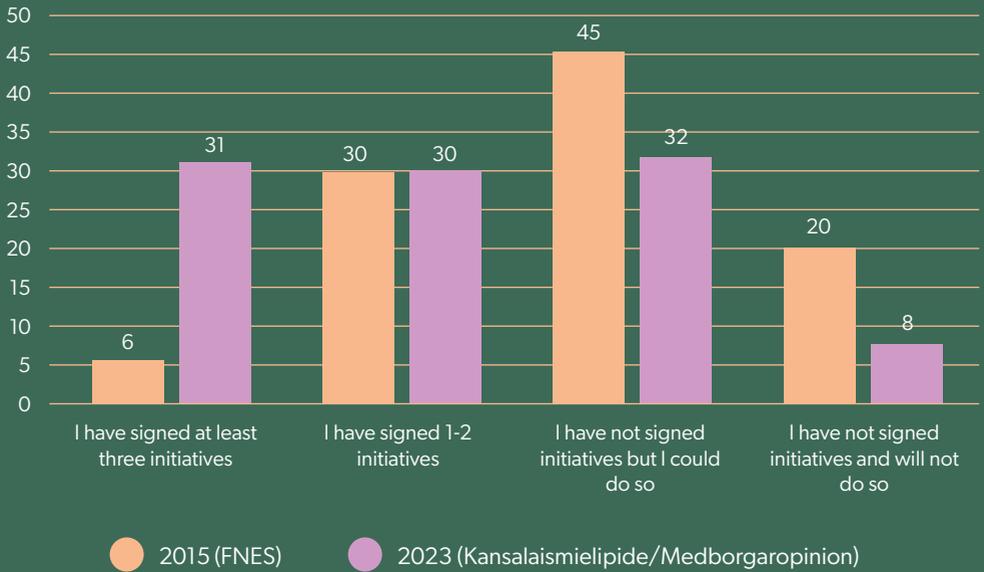


Question wording: “What do you think about the following statement: The Citizens' Initiative has improved the functioning of Finnish democracy?”

instrument has abated, but it is still considered beneficial for Finnish democracy.

Next, we turn to three types of self-reported participation in CI campaigns. As the CI is a democratic innovation that enables mass participation by all eligible voters in Finland, it is important to first assess how many have used this opportunity by signing initiatives. Here again we can compare the results to data from 2015. Figure 15.2 shows that in 2023, more than 60% of adult Finns have signed one or more CIs (N=1,699). Although the question wording does not specify the period when signatures were given, a clear majority of citizens have used the opportunity to push issues to the parliamentary agenda at least once, and half of these have supported three or more CIs since the introduction of the instrument. As one could expect, the share of those who have signed at least one CI increased from 35% to 61% between 2015 and 2023.

FIGURE 15.2 Participation by signing Citizens' Initiatives (%)



Question wording: "Have you signed citizens' initiatives at the national level?"

At least five eligible voters are required to draft and register a CI to launch a collection of signatures, and once the period to collect signatures has started, the campaign can also be supported by collecting signatures on paper in public places, sharing information online or donating money to the organization(s) running the campaign. As we see in Table 15.1, drafting and registering CIs is a very exclusive and rare form of participation as only 1% of adult Finns have been actively involved in launching citizens' initiatives (N=1,668). This does not mean, however, that initiative campaigns are only endeavors of a few because 19% stated that they have campaigned for CIs in other ways.

Survey research on democratic innovations is challenging because such participation forms are innovative by nature, and therefore also rare. General questions on whether citizens support certain instruments

TABLE 15.1 Participation by launching and campaigning for Citizens' Initiatives (%)

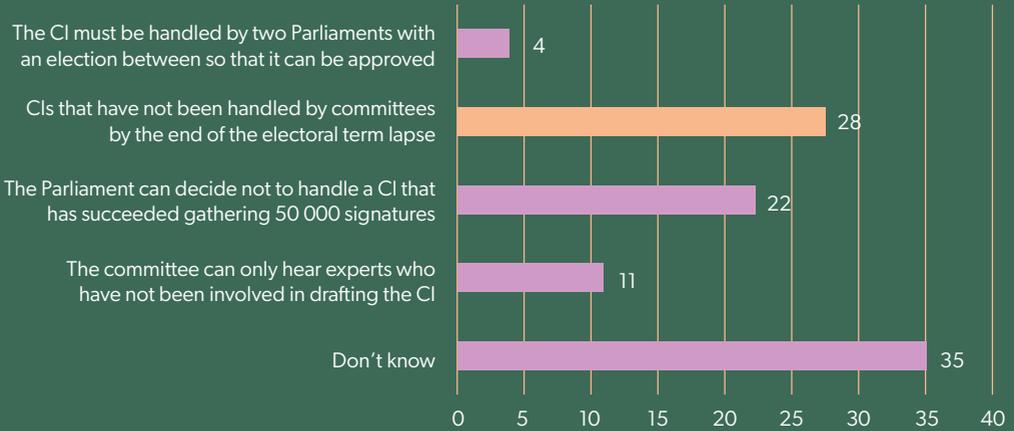
Launching	Yes, I have launched 1 or more initiatives	1.0
	No, I have not launched initiatives but could do so	50.7
	No, I have not launched initiatives and will not do so	48.3
Campaigning	I have done one of these	18.4
	I have not done any of these but could do so	47.3
	I have not done any of these and will not do so	34.3

Question wordings: “The citizens’ initiative can be launched by at least five eligible voters. Have you launched a citizens’ initiative?”, “It is also possible to support national-level citizens’ initiatives by collecting signatures on paper, sharing information on an ongoing initiative campaign at kansalaisaloite.fi on the internet, or donating money to an initiative campaign. Have you done any of these?”

may be hard to interpret as many are not aware of their basic features, and even fewer know the procedural details of participation. Figure 15.3 shows that approximately one-fourth of Finns know the correct answer concerning CI procedure: that CIs that have been submitted to Parliament but have not been handled in committees by the end of the electoral term will expire, and they will not be handled by the next Parliament. Almost the same share of respondents, however, thought that Parliament can decide not to consider CIs that have reached the required signature threshold. Furthermore, more than a third answered “don’t know”, indicating a fairly low knowledge about the procedural details of the instrument.

Finally, it is important to ask whether the Citizens’ Initiative can increase political inclusion by mobilizing diverse citizens from different social

FIGURE 15.3 Knowledge about Citizens' Initiative procedures (%)



strata. Previous studies on the Finnish Citizens' Initiative have found that it has served as a channel to mobilize younger generations in particular.⁶ Table 15.2 shows that, in terms of age, the results point to the same statistically significant relationship as previous studies. Citizens in the age group 25–34 have been most active in signing citizens' initiatives, and as many as 87% in this group have signed at least one initiative. In the oldest age group, on the other hand, less than half have signed CIs. The share of those who explicitly say that they would not sign an initiative is also highest (10%) in this group. Higher education is a statistically significant correlate for signing CIs, but the differences between levels of education are fairly small, which confirms findings from earlier studies showing that education alone does not predict mobilization through CIs.⁷ Those who have signed CIs also seem to live in urban areas more often than in rural or other densely populated areas.

TABLE 15.2 Socioeconomic background and signing Citizens' Initiatives (%)

Variable (n)	I have signed...		I have not signed...			Pearson X ²	Eta
	Three or more initiatives	1-2 initiatives	But I could do so	And I will not do so	Total		
TOTAL	31	30	32	8	100		
Age (1,699)						174.8***	0.28
18–24 (34)	38	26	35	0	100		
25–34 (120)	52	37	12	0	100		
35–44 (147)	51	27	16	7	100		
45–54 (195)	43	32	18	7	100		
55–64 (335)	32	38	26	5	100		
65+ (868)	22	27	42	10	100		
Gender (1,687)						2.28	0.037
Male (845)	30	31	32	7	100		
Female (842)	32	29	31	8	100		
Education (1,699)						23.46***	0.052
Basic (762)	32	27	32	9	100		
Secondary (331)	26	36	35	3	100		
Tertiary (606)	33	31	29	8	100		
Dwelling (1,700)						13.5*	0.083
Urban (1,225)	33	30	29	7	100		
Densely populated (263)	27	30	34	9	100		
Rural (212)	26	28	40	6	100		

DISCUSSION

The Finnish agenda initiative has become an institutionalized part of Finnish democracy. This chapter demonstrates that the CI enjoys wide support among the citizenry, but expectations around it have become more moderate than in the early years. Now that experiences have accumulated in how initiatives are handled in Parliament, there are more critical views on its potential to improve the functioning of Finnish democracy. There are three different modes of participating via CI, and participation quite naturally varies according to the time and energy required. The majority of adult Finns say they have signed a citizens' initiative, whereas less than one-fifth have supported initiative campaigns in other ways, and only 1% have launched initiatives. Despite the popularity of signing initiatives, the procedural details of the CI are still complex and difficult to grasp in the eyes of the public. Results presented in this chapter suggest that more work is needed to communicate about the CI, and democratic innovations in general, with the wider public, in order to increase public awareness and capacity to take advantage of new forms of participation. Finally, the Citizens' Initiative seems to have succeeded in enhancing democratic inclusion, at least in terms of age, since signing initiatives is most widely spread among the age group 25–34. It also remains popular among those aged 18–24, for whom it is not a novel instrument but part of the political action repertoire as any other form of participation. Although highly educated citizens and urban dwellers are slightly overrepresented among those who have signed initiatives, inequalities in participation are not as stark as they are in voting.

¹ Citizens' Initiative Act (12/2012)

² Jäske & Setälä 2019

³ Digital and Population Data Services Agency

⁴ Jäske & Setälä 2019

⁵ Data from www.kansalaisaloite.fi

⁶ Christensen et al. 2017; Huttunen & Christensen 2020

⁷ Christensen et al. 2017

16

The citizens' evaluation of the Finnish Government

Isak Vento

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I study how the public evaluated the output of the Finnish Government of Sanna Marin. How citizens evaluate the output of government is a key element in shaping the legitimacy of the political system.¹ This study therefore depicts how citizens evaluated the most recent government in general and the handling of one of the two major crises that occurred during the government's mandate period, the war

in Ukraine. This forms a continuum of previous systematic studies of government performance dating back to at least 2003.² The government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis is covered in Chapter 14.

In this chapter, I also analyze the evaluations by party vote, which shows the extent to which the party vote coincides with a positive or negative evaluation of the government. The public opinion of government performance tends to coincide with party affiliation, and previous studies of the dynamic in Finland have found that the association is particularly evident for the prime minister's party.³ This study also examines citizens' evaluation of opposition parties in the Finnish Parliament in 2019–2023. Lastly, the study looks at the citizens' evaluation of the development of distinct policy areas since the last national parliamentary elections in 2019. The study does not consider the performance of the government of Antti Rinne, which only lasted from June 2019 to December 2019.

OPERATIONALIZATION

To examine the evaluation of the government in general and its handling of the two crises, as well as the evaluation of the opposition, I rely on the following questions:

- "How good or bad of a job do you think Marin's government did between December 2019 and April 2023?"
- "How good or bad of a job did the government do on the war in Ukraine?"
- "How good or bad of a job have the opposition parties done since the election of 2019?"

Each question had the same answer scale of "Very good", "good", "not good or bad", "bad", "very bad", and "don't know". The "don't know" answers were excluded from the analysis of all questions due to fractional shares of answers, except for the last question concerning the opposition parties because of a notable share of answers.

The development of specific areas after 2019 was examined with the following question, which also presented a list of conventional policy areas for the evaluation (see Figure 16.4 for the policy areas):

- "Compared to the time of the 2019 election, do you think the following areas have gotten better or worse?" and the answer options were "a lot better", "a little better", "not better or worse", "a little worse", "a lot worse" and "don't know"

I examine the answers to the first three questions across party vote based on self-reported voting in the current election. All analyses are weighted.

RESULTS

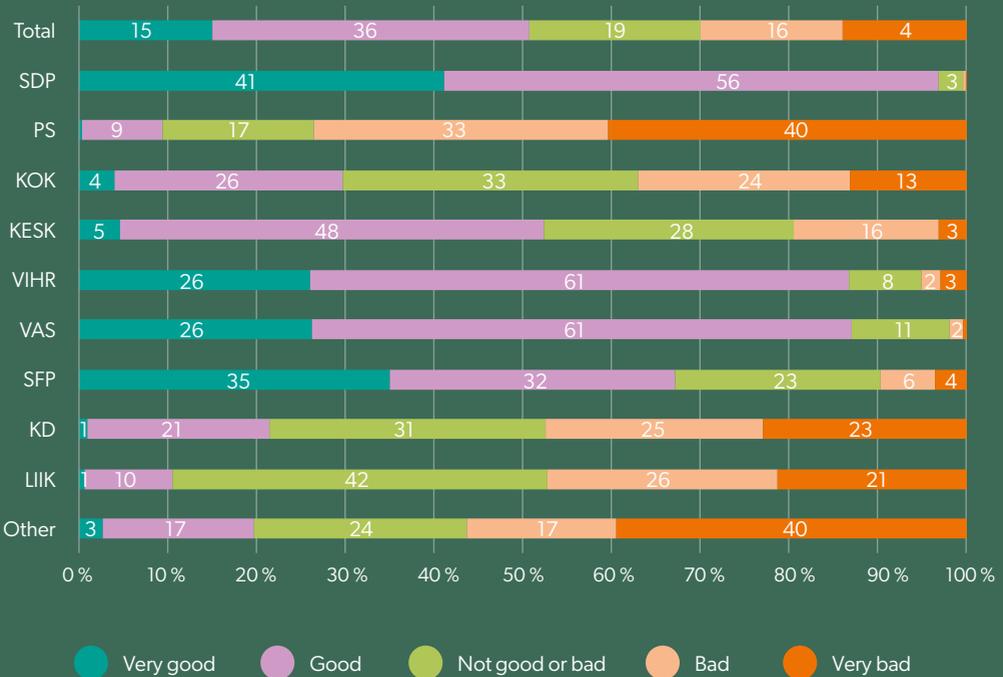
In general, the respondents evaluated Sanna Marin's government positively since 51% of all respondents indicated that the government had done a good (36%) or a very good (15%) job (Figure 16.1). The share of critical respondents was only 20% in total. This result is in notable contrast to evaluations of previous governments, where the positive evaluations were about half of those reported for Marin's government.⁴

When examining results by vote for party, it is no surprise to see that respondents who voted for Sanna Marin's Social Democratic Party (SDP) were also the most positive about the government's actions. However, the finding that 97% of SDP's voters evaluated the government positively and less than 1% thought it did a bad or very bad job, is nothing short of astonishing, especially when comparing to similar evaluations of previous years. Moreover, overwhelmingly positive evaluation is not confined to SDP. Of the respondents who voted for the coalition partners, the Green League (VIHR) and the Left Alliance (VAS), about 87% evaluated the government's actions positively. Even the respondents who voted for the center-liberal coalition partners, the Centre Party (KESK) and the Swedish People's Party of Finland (SFP), had positive evaluations of the government's actions with clear margins of 53% and 67%, respectively.

The respondents of the opposition parties, the National Coalition Party (KOK), the Finns Party (PS), the Christian Democrats of Finland (KD), and Movement Now (LIIK) obviously had a more critical evaluation of the government's actions.

Respondents had an even more positive evaluation of the government's action on the war in Ukraine: 72% in total evaluated it positively (Figure 16.2). Again, the most positive evaluations came from those who voted for the government coalition parties, but it is notable that, even among the opposition parties, the majority of voters gave a positive evaluation. Among PS voters was there not a majority who gave a positive evaluation. This result probably reflects the longstanding tradition of consensual decision-making on defense and foreign policy in Finland as well as that Finland's decision to enter the defense alliance NATO because of Russia's attack of Ukraine received broad support in Parliament. Turning the table and examining the evaluation of the opposition during the

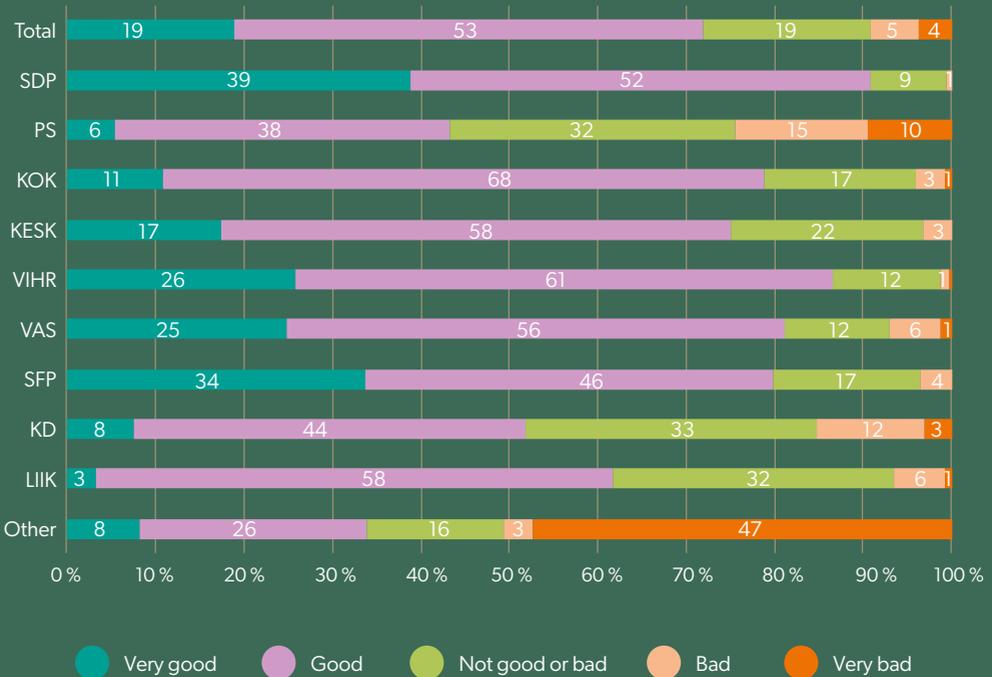
FIGURE 16.1 How good or bad of a job do you think Marin’s government did between December 2019 and April 2023?



government’s term, the respondents in total were neither positive nor critical since 48% were unable to give a positive or a negative evaluation (Figure 16.3). Together with respondents who answered “don’t know”, the total share of undecided was a majority of respondents. This is evidence that there was less scrutiny of the actions of opposition parties.

Voters of the opposition parties had more positive evaluations, and voters of the government coalition parties had more critical evaluations. However, none of the parties’ voters gave a positive evaluation of the opposition’s actions, with LIIK

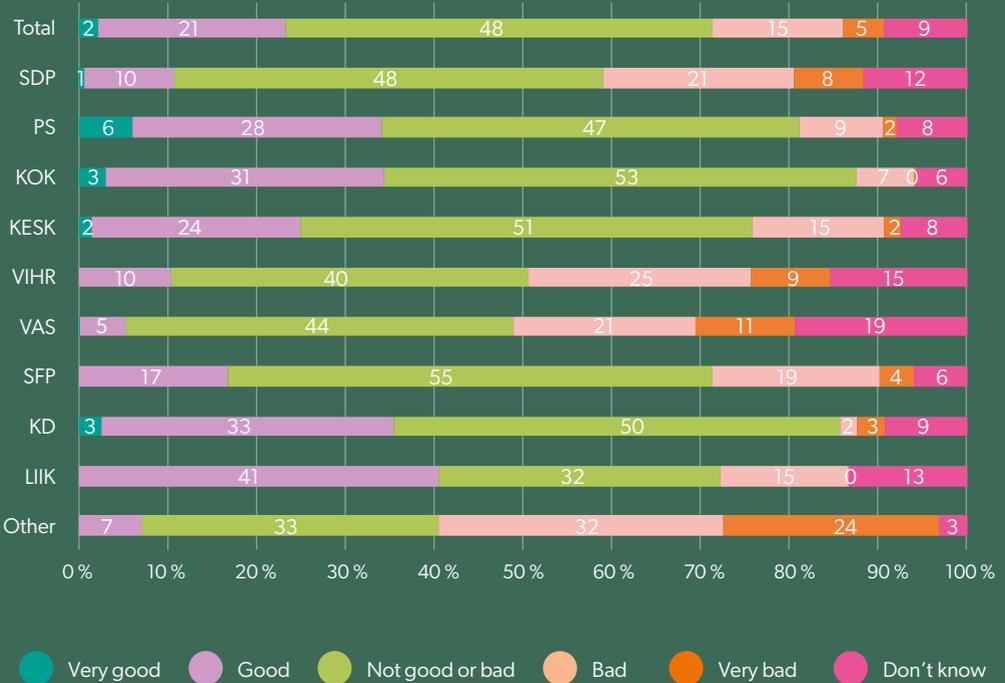
FIGURE 16.2 How good or bad of a job did the government do on the war in Ukraine?



coming closest to a positive with 41%, followed by KD’s 36%, and PS’s and KOK’s 34% each.

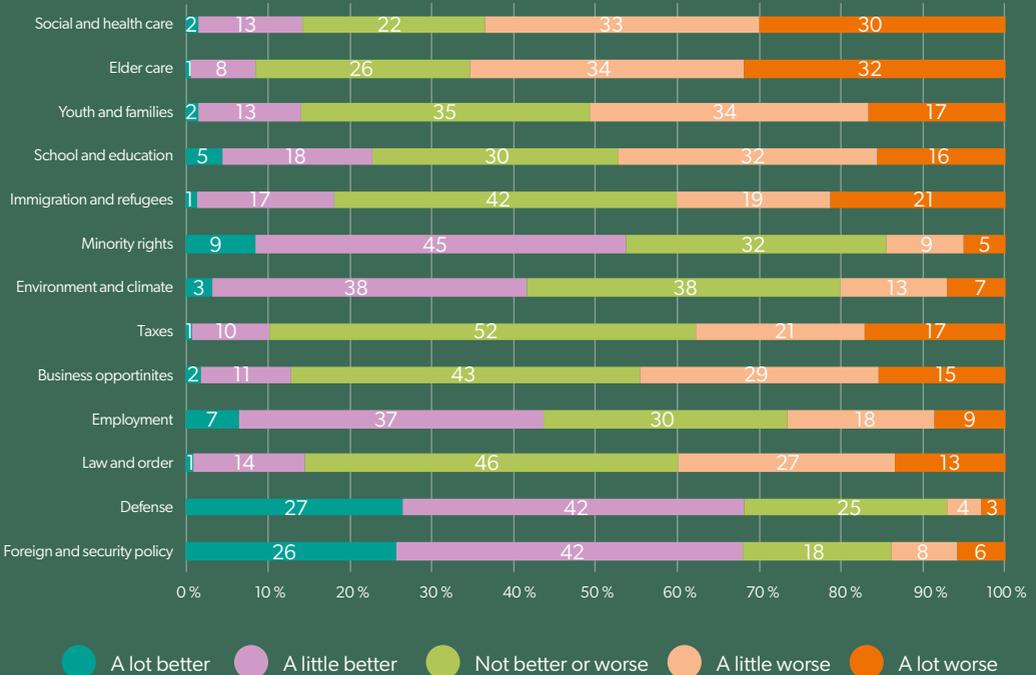
If we look at the evaluation of the development on different policy areas, however, the respondents thought the development had been negative in most areas over the government’s term. For both “social and health care” and “elder care”, where the government made major efforts by implementing the health and social services reform, only 15% and 9% of respondents believed that the areas had improved, while the majority, with 63% and 66% thought the areas had declined.

FIGURE 16.3 How good or bad of a job have the opposition parties done since the elections 2019?



At the other end of the spectrum, the areas of “defense” and “foreign and security policy” got positive evaluations, since 69% and 68% felt there had been positive developments in these areas. Perhaps these evaluations are not attributable to the actions of the government as much as they are to the major change in the security environment because of Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022 and Finland’s joining of NATO. However, “minority rights” was also seen as improved during the government’s term by 54% in total, which is a development that cannot as easily be explained with factors exogenous to the government.

FIGURE 16.4 Compared to the time of the 2019 election, do you think the following areas have gotten better or worse?



CONCLUSIONS

The 76th Government of Finland, led by Sanna Marin and consisting of the parties SDP, KESK, VIHR, VAS and SFP, gained a positive evaluation by the voters of the 2023 election compared to the evaluation of the government of the previous Parliament's term. Moreover, the evaluations are also remarkable because they are more polarized by partisanship. The respondents who voted for a party in the government coalition were extremely positive in their evaluation of the government, topped

by SDP voters, of whom less than 1% were critical of the government. The study also found that respondents were ambiguous over the opposition parties' actions.

Lastly, most respondents had negative evaluations of the developments since the last election in more specific policy areas. Only "defense", "foreign and security policy", and "minority rights" were thought to have gotten better. A speculative conclusion from this is that maybe voters did not attribute all development to the actions of the government. This, however, should be analyzed more rigorously with an adequate research design before drawing firm conclusions.

¹ Strebel, Kübler & Marcinkowski 2019

² Borg & Paloheimo 2020

³ Paloheimo & Borg 2020

⁴ Borg & Paloheimo, 2020

17

Finnish voters and support for democracy

Inga Saikkonen

INTRODUCTION: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Democratic stability requires broad popular support among the citizenry.¹ Recently, some scholars have raised concerns about declining support for democracy in established democracies.² Younger generations, in particular, have been argued to be more open to non-democratic forms of governance.³ Despite this, the latest cross-national studies suggest

that Europeans overall still support democracy, although the support among younger generations is more indefinite.⁴ Further, some recent experimental studies have found an association between democratic dissatisfaction and lower commitment to democratic principles.⁵

I investigate whether Finnish respondents continue to support democracy or indicate a preference for non-democratic regime types with data from the 2023 Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion panel study. The chapter also examines whether these attitudes differ between various population sub-groups, including between those satisfied and dissatisfied with democracy in Finland.

OPERATIONALIZATION

The support for different political regime types was measured with a question asking respondents to evaluate a given political regime as a governance system for Finland with the following options: “Very good”, “Fairly good”, “Fairly bad” or “Very bad”.ⁱ The respondents evaluated the following political regime types:

- “Democratic political system”
- “Strong leader who does not have to take the parliament or elections into account”
- “The military in power, i.e., a military regime”
- “Experts, not the government, make decisions according to their judgement for the best interests of the country”

The first option measured respondents’ preferences for a democratic regime type. The next two options measured preferences for authoritarian regime types; first, for a “strong leader” who is not democratically accountable to the electorate or the parliament and, second, a military regime. The fourth option measured respondents’ preferences for a system in which executive power is delegated to non-elected experts (“stealth democracy”).⁶

I first examine the overall distribution of the regime preferences among the respondents. I then move on to examining sub-group differences on these preferences by the respondents’ gender, age, and education level.

ⁱ In order to simplify the presentation of the results and due to the fact that their share was very low (ranging from 1.6% to 4.5%), the “Don’t know” answers have been excluded from the analysis. Robustness checks indicate that this does not affect the substantive results.

TABLE 17.1 Support for different political regimes

Evaluation of the political regime	Democracy	Strong Leader	Military Regime	Expert Rule
Very Good	60	1	1	7
Fairly Good	36	9	4	42
Fairly Bad	3	21	20	34
Very Bad	1	68	74	17
Total	100	100	100	100

For the ease of interpretation, in this section the regime preference variable is coded as a binary variable denoting whether respondents indicated that they supported the regime (“Very good/Fairly good” governance system) or did not support it (“Fairly bad/Very bad” governance system).

The respondents’ gender, age, and education levels were measured using the standard background variables included in the panel survey (see the Technical Appendix). Satisfaction with democracy is measured with a question that asks the respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Finland using a 0–10 scale (wave 5). Respondents who indicated 0–4 were classified as “Dissatisfied”, those who answered with 5 were classified as “Intermediate”, and respondents who chose 6–10 were classified as “Satisfied”. All the data has been weighted in the analysis (see the Technical Appendix for more details on the weighting system).

RESULTS

Firstly, Table 17.1 presents the frequencies of answers for respondents’ preferences for different political types.

The descriptive results suggest that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (96%) expressed preference for a democratic type of governance in Finland. Yet, around 10% of the respondents also indicated

TABLE 17.2 Support for different political regimes by respondent group

		Democracy		Strong Leader		Military Regime		Expert Rule		
		% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	Total
Gender	Men	94	6	14	86	6	94	50	50	100
	Women	98	2	8	92	5	95	48	52	100
Education level	Primary	95	5	15	85	7	93	52	48	100
	Secondary	97	3	7	93	6	94	48	52	100
	Tertiary	98	2	4	96	3	97	41	59	100
Age	18–24	96	4	7	93	6	94	60	40	100
	25–34	93	7	13	87	7	93	56	44	100
	35–44	93	7	13	87	9	91	58	42	100
	45–54	94	6	13	87	4	96	54	46	100
	55–64	97	3	12	88	7	93	50	50	100
	65–	98	2	8	92	4	96	37	63	100

TABLE 17.3 Democratic satisfaction and support for different political regimes

		Democracy		Strong Leader		Military Regime		Expert Rule		
		% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	% Support	% Oppose	Total
Democratic Satisfaction	Dissatisfied	79	21	27	73	14	86	58	42	100
	Intermediate	97	3	13	87	4	96	53	47	100
	Satisfied	98	2	8	92	4	96	46	54	100

support for a political system led by a democratically unaccountable “strong leader”. Support for a military regime appears lower among the respondents as around 5% supported this regime type. However, strikingly, almost half of the respondents (49%) indicated a preference for “stealth democracy”, that is, a political regime type in which executive power is delegated to unelected experts.

The sub-group analysis, presented in Table 17.2 shows some differences between the population groups. The cell entries denote the percentage of respondents who supported/did not support a given political regime by gender, age, and education level. Overall, men indicated a stronger preference for undemocratic rule than women: whereas almost 14% of the men indicated a preference for an unelected “strong leader” rule, only 8% of women indicated this preference. The support for authoritarian regime types (“strong leader” rule and military rule) as well as “stealth democracy” was highest among the respondents with basic educational attainment. However, there were no systematic patterns in preferences pertaining to the different age cohorts.

In contrast, the sub-group differences are notable when examining regime preferences between respondent groups based on their level of democratic satisfaction, as seen in Table 17.3. Support for non-democratic types of governance was considerably higher among those who were dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in Finland than among those satisfied with democracy. A total of 27% of the respondents who were dissatisfied with the working of democracy indicated support for authoritarian “strong leader” rule, whereas less than 8% of the respondents who expressed satisfaction with democracy indicated this preference. Similar patterns can be observed for preferences for military rule and for unelected expert rule.

CONCLUSION

The results of the survey indicate that an overwhelming majority of the Finnish respondents supported a democratic form of government; the results do not indicate strong preferences for outright authoritarian regime types. However, a surprisingly high share of the respondents (49%) indicated a preference for a rule by unelected experts. This level is higher than in previous studies from Finland, but comparable to findings of some comparative studies.⁷

Support for authoritarian systems of government was somewhat higher among men and the least educated respondents, but the majority of these groups still supported democracy. Furthermore, there were no systematic age group differences in democratic support.⁸

However, there were substantial differences between the different sub-groups on the basis of their satisfaction with democracy. The least satisfied respondents indicated a greater support for authoritarian regime types and much less commitment to democracy. However, it should be noted that the results presented here are entirely descriptive, and the analysis does not control for any potentially confounding variables. Yet, these findings are in line with recent experimental results from Finland and Europe and thus warrant further research.⁹

Overall, the survey results indicate a high level of support for democracy as a regime type in Finland. However, answers to direct survey questions about democratic support may not tell the whole story about the resilience of the Finnish public to democratic backsliding. Emerging experimental literature has shown that, even if people indicate a strong commitment to democratic norms abstractly, they may still be willing to make significant trade-offs between democratic norms and other favored political goals.¹⁰ We should therefore not take pro-democratic attitudes and democratic resilience for granted in Finland.

¹ Lipset 1959

² Most prominently Foa & Mounk 2016

³ Foa & Mounk 2016

⁴ Wuttke, Gavras & Schoen 2022

⁵ Saikkonen & Christensen 2022; Svobik et al. 2023

⁶ Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002

⁷ Bengtsson & Mattila 2009; Rapeli 2016

⁸ For experimental results see Huttunen & Saikkonen 2023

⁹ Saikkonen & Christensen 2022; Svobik et al. 2023

¹⁰ For evidence from Finland, see Saikkonen & Christensen 2022

Technical Appendix

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The Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion panel consists of almost 5,052 participants, of which 80% have been recruited via different probability samples, while the remaining participants have been recruited via non-probability sampling. The panel composition by recruitment mode is described in more detail in Table 18.1.

The Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion election study 2023 consisted of a total of 6 waves that were sent to the panel participants between February and April 2023. Variations in response rates and the number of responses are due to wave 4 not being sent to people who stated in wave 3 that they had pre-voted, and the recruitment that occurred during the field period resulted in larger samples in the later stage of the overall field period. The waves are described in more detail in Table 18.2.

TABLE 18.1 Panel composition by mode of recruitment (24.4.2023)

Nr	Field period	Type	Registered
1	03/2019	Mixed online non-probability recruitment (28%) and simple random sample postal recruitment (72%)	1,286
2	05/2020–07/2020	Online non-probability recruitment	1,003
3	01/2021–03/2021	Simple random sample postal recruitment	1,990
4	03/2023–04/2023	Disproportionate stratified random sample postal recruitment	2,645
			6,924

TABLE 18.2 The Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion election study 2023

Survey	Main topic	Field period	Responses	Response rate %
Wave 1	Political opinions and previous voting	27.2.2023–22.3.2023	2,219	88.1
Wave 2	Opinions on political issues	6.3.2023–22.3.2023	2,162	86.3
Wave 3	Pre-voting exit-poll	28.3.2023–1.4.2023	3,580	82.4
Wave 4	Election day exit-poll	2.4.2023–3.4.2023	1,937	63.5
Wave 5	Reasons for party choice	4.4.2023–23.4.2023	3,763	75.2
Wave 6	Political values and opinions	12.4.2023–24.4.2023	3,885	76.9

TABLE 18.3 Composition of the final sample (24.4.2023), n=4,875

	Unweighted	Weighted	Population
Gender			
Female	52.4	48.8	48.8
Male	47.6	51.2	51.2
Age			
18–24	9.9	9.2	9.2
25–34	15.3	14.8	14.8
35–44	14.5	14.9	14.9
45–54	14.3	14.5	14.5
55–64	17.5	16.5	16.5
65+	28.4	30.1	30.1
Education			
Primary	5.6	20.7	20.7
Secondary	43.3	54.5	54.5
Tertiary	51.1	24.8	24.8

A rake weight was used to adjust the sample according to the known marginal distributions of the target population. The rake weight was calculated using the *anesrake* R package. The weights were trimmed not to exceed a maximum of 7 to avoid a major loss in precision. The composition of the final sample with and without weights is described in Table 18.3, while the operationalization of the weight is described in Table 18.4.

TABLE 18.4 Operationalization of the rake weight based on the voting age population

Variable	Levels	Categories
Vote 2023	10	% of votes by political party (SDP, PS, KOK, KESK, VIHR, VAS, RKP, KD, LIIK, Other)
Gender	2	Male, Female
Age	13	Age categories with 5-year intervals
Education	7	Basic schooling or no education
		Short vocational school (vocational school, institute, course)
		Vocational training at the institute level
		High school (matriculation examination)
		University of applied sciences or similar
		University degree (bachelor's or master's)
		Degree from graduate studies such as a licentiate or Ph.D. degree
Election district	12	% of population in each election district
Language	2	% of population with Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue People with another mother tongue recoded as Finnish speakers

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FINLAND TURNED RIGHT: VOTING AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF 2023

In the election of 2023, Finland arguably turned right. Thus the National Coalition Party won the election closely followed by the Finns Party. During the weeks leading up to the election on April 2nd, and a couple of weeks after, political science researchers at Åbo Akademi University collected data on citizens opinions through an online panel called Kansalaismielipide/Medborgaropinion. This panel has around 5,000 participants who answered, in total, six surveys.

This report provides brief insights into voting patterns and public opinion in conjunction with the 2023 election. The 17 individual chapters cover themes such as voting and party choice, political participation, values and public opinion as well as political trust and satisfaction with government. The report is published by the Social Science Research Institute (Samforsk) at Åbo Akademi University.

