

**Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945: Finland**

Authored by: Elwin Reimink

Compiled with the assistance of: Tapio Raunio

With thanks to:

** **

****

# Section 1: Overview of Finnish Electoral System Changes since 1945

Finland uses a proportional electoral system with fully open lists. Voters cast a vote for one candidate. This system has not changed in its fundamentals since 1906. One notable reform, passed in 1954, had the effect of removing a layer of vote pooling across candidates.

**Section 2: Relevant Electoral System changes in Finland since 1945**

**Table 1. Summary of Finnish Electoral Laws and Amendments since 1945**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Law** | **Amendment** | **Date of enactment** | **Location** | **Relevant for the research** |
| Laki edustajanvaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 66/1935 |  | 31.1.1935 | *Valtiopäiväasiakirjat*, Sidotut asiakirjat: A.III:2 (1934vp) | Laki edustajanvaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 66/1935 |
| Laki kansanedustajain vaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 167/1952 |  | 18.4.1952 | *Valtiopäiväasiakirjat*, Sidotut asiakirjat: A.I (1951vp) | Laki kansanedustajain vaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 167/1952 |
| Laki kansanedustajainvaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 336/1955 |  | 30.6.1955 | *Valtiopäiväasiakirjat*, 24.5.1955 Sidotut asiakirjat: A.I | Laki kansanedustajainvaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 336/1955 |
| Laki kansanedustajain vaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 391/1969 |  | 13.6.1969 | <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1969/19690391> | Laki kansanedustajain vaaleista (Act on Parliamentary Elections) 391/1969 |
|  | Laki kansanedustajain vaaleista annetun lain muuttamisesta (Act on Amending the Act on Parliamentary Elections) 319/1975 | 16.5.1975 |  |  |
| Vaalilaki (Election Act) 714/1998 |  | 2.10.1998 | Finnish: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980714>  English: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980714.pdf> | Vaalilaki (Election Act) 714/1998 |

**Section 3: Details of previous electoral systems and electoral system changes.**

***3.1 The 1945Electoral System***

The electoral law in force in 1945 and during the first post-war elections of 1948 was introduced in 1935. Basically, it constituted a single tier of 14 multimember districts plus a single-member district encompassing the Åland archipelago in the Gulf of Bothnia. This mechanism has stayed in force uninterrupted to the present day, bar some alterations in ballot structure, primaries and a few minor technicalities.

*Assembly size*. Fixed at 200 seats.

*Districts and district magnitude*. 1 seat is circumvented for allocation to the Åland archipelago; the other 199 seats are distributed through Hare quota to the 14 multimember districts (in 1954: 15 multimember districts). Note that the total number of citizens, as opposed to the number of eligible voters, is applied as the baseline for the seat distribution to the districts.

*Nature of votes that can be cast*. A voter has two options: either vote for a two-candidate list (filed by an electoral association of at least fifty voters), or vote for a write-in candidate. The voter has only one vote and cannot alter the order of the disposable lists.

*Party threshold*. No party threshold was imposed.

*Allocation of seats to parties at the lower tier*. Electoral associations (which file the lists) can choose to form electoral unions. These electoral unions can consist of an unlimited amount of lists, as long as the total number of candidates within the electoral union does not exceed the total amount of seats that is to be distributed in the district where the union is in force. The combined lists of electoral unions behave as if they form one list. Then, D’Hondt is applied to distribute the number of available seats among the lists and the combinations of lists.

*Allocation of seats to parties at the upper tier*. Not applicable.

*Allocation of seats to candidates*. The two-person lists are completely closed.

Table 2: Allocation of seats at district level in 1948, 1951 and 1954

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Electoral district** | **District magnitude** | | |
| 1948 | 1951 | 1954 |
| Uusimaa | 31 | 33 | 15 |
| Helsinki |  |  | 19 |
| Varsinais-Suomen | 14 | 17 | 16 |
| Satakunnan | 13 | 15 | 14 |
| Hämeen | 11 | 14 | 14 |
| Pirkanmaan | 12 | 13 | 13 |
| Kymen | 32 | 15 | 15 |
| Etelä-Savon | 11 | 12 | 12 |
| Pohjois-Savon | 11 | 13 | 13 |
| Pohjois-Karjalan | 10 | 11 | 11 |
| Vaasan läänin itäinen | 11 | 12 | 12 |
| Vaasan läänin eteläinen | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Vaasan läänin pohjoinen | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Oulun | 17 | 18 | 18 |
| Lapin | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| Åland | 1 | 1 | 1 |

***3.2 The 1954/55 Electoral Reform***

The basic mechanism of the 1935 system was maintained; only the ballot structure was amended.

*Assembly size*. [Short description].

*Nature of votes that can be cast*. In every district, electoral associations can nominate candidates for election; these candidates form one-person lists. Again, these lists can form electoral unions. Voters have the option to vote for the one-candidate lists, or cast a vote for a write-in candidate.

Note that the change from up-to-two-member lists to one-member lists (within overall party lists) was first enacted in a special law applying only to the 1954 election and then made permanent in the 1955 electoral law (Törnudd 1968: 57). As Törnudd (1968: 84) observes of this change:

“before one-person lists were made compulsory in 1954, the party organizations could still manipulate the outcome to some extent, usually by placing some particular candidate or candidates on several lists together with popular vote-getters. In this way, the election of at least one or two particular candidates could be ensured beforehand, although it was not possible to determine in advance the final order of all candidates. Under the present rules, the maximum power left with the district party organization is the power to decide who shall be a candidate.”

*Allocation of seats to candidates*. Not applicable anymore.

No other change.

Table 3: Allocation of seats at district [and provincial] level in 1958, 1962 and 1966

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Electoral district** | **District magnitude** | | |
| 1958 | 1962 | 1966 |
| Helsinki | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| Usamaa | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Varsinais-Suomen | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Satakunnan | 14 | 14 | 13 |
| Hämeen | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Pirkanmaan | 13 | 12 | 12 |
| Kymen | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Etelä-Savon | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| Pohjois-Savon | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Pohjois-Karjalan | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| Vaasa |  | 20 | 20 |
| Vaasan läänin itäinen | 12 |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin eteläinen | 10 |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin pohjoinen | 8 |  |  |
| Keski-Suomen |  | 11 | 11 |
| Oulun | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Lapin | 9 | 9 | 10 |
| Åland | 1 | 1 | 1 |

***3.3 The 1969 Electoral Reform.***

The reform of 1969 was probably the most comprehensive post-war review of the electoral system. This reform is somewhat double-edged: while the ballot structure is fundamentally altered, the actual mechanism of the system remains roughly the same. Together with the ballot reform, parties were recognized in electoral law (substituting ‘electoral associations’), and some provisions were included to ensure democratic intra-party primaries. Both reforms, however, do not fall within the scope of this descriptive.

*Nature of votes that can be cast*. Both registered parties and loose associations of voters can file election lists in districts (in practice, in nearly all cases, only registered parties go on to succeed in actually obtaining seats; Sundberg, 2002). Parties are subject to relatively strict rules regarding intra-party primaries, and can file lists with no more candidates than seats up for election in the district (after 1975, some exceptions were made for small districts). Voters cannot cast list votes, and can choose any one, but only one, candidate (with the option of a write-in candidate).

*Allocation of seats to candidates*. Within every lists (or combination of connected lists), seats are granted in order of the number of votes cast for candidates (a completely open list system). Within combinations of lists, this rule is maintained without any regard to the proportion of votes cast for the separate lists, potentially leading to parties with a small share of the vote grabbing up disproportionally many seats within the electoral combination.

No other change.

Table 4: Allocation of seats at district [and provincial] level from 1970 to 1987

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Electoral district** | **District magnitude** | | | | | |
| 1970 | 1972 | 1975 | 1979 | 1983 | 1987 |
| Helsinki | 22 | 22 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Usamaa | 20 | 21 | 24 | 26 | 27 | 29 |
| Varsinais-Suomen | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Satakunnan | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 12 |
| Hämeen | 14 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Pirkanmaan | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 |
| Kymen | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 14 |
| Etelä-Savon | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Pohjois-Savon | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 10 |
| Pohjois-Karjalan | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Vaasa | 19 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Keski-Suomen | 11 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Oulun | 18 | 18 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 18 |
| Lapin | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Åland | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

*For details on later years, see the appendix*

# References

Nurmi, Hannu, and Lasse Nurmi (2007), “The Parliamentary Election in Finland, March 2007”, *Electoral Studies*, 26:4, 797–803.

Raunio, Tapio (2004). “The Changing Finnish Democracy: Stronger Parliamentary Accountability, Coalescing Political Parties and Weaker External Constraints”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27:2, 133–52.

Sundberg, Jan (2002). “The Electoral System of Finland: Old, and Working Well”, in Bernard Grofman and Arend Lijphart (eds.), *The Evolution of Electoral and Party Systems in the Nordic Countries*. New York: Agathon, 67–99.

Törnudd, Klaus (1968). *The Electoral System of Finland*. London: Hugh Evelyn.

**Project funding provisions**

The ESCE project team wishes to acknowledge that this research was made possible due to the financial support that the project has received from: the FRS-FNRS, the McDougall Trust and the Nuffield Foundation.

**Appendix**

Table 5: Allocation of seats at district [and provincial] level from 1983 to 1995

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of the district** | **1983** | **1987** | **1991** | **1995** |
| Uusimaa | 20 | 20 | 20 | 19 |
| Helsinki | 27 | 29 | 30 | 31 |
| Varsinais-Suomen | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Satakunnan | 13 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Hämeen | 15 | 15 | 13 | 13 |
| Pirkanmaan | 13 | 13 | 15 | 15 |
| Kymen | 14 | 14 | 13 | 13 |
| Etelä-Savon | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Pohjois-Savon | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Pohjois-Karjalan | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Vaasa | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Vaasan läänin itäinen |  |  |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin eteläinen |  |  |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin pohjoinen |  |  |  |  |
| Keski-Suomen | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Oulun | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Lapin | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Åland | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Table 6: Allocation of seats at district [and provincial] level from 1999 to 2011

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of the district** | **1999** | **2003** | **2007** | **2011** |
| Uusimaa | 20 | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| Helsinki | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 |
| Varsinais-Suomen | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Satakunnan | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Hämeen | 13 | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Pirkanmaan | 16 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Kymen | 13 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Etelä-Savon | 8 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Pohjois-Savon | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| Pohjois-Karjalan | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Vaasa | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Vaasan läänin itäinen |  |  |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin eteläinen |  |  |  |  |
| Vaasan läänin pohjoinen |  |  |  |  |
| Keski-Suomen | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Oulun | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Lapin | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Åland | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |