

FACT SHEET

Political system of Finland

1. Overview

1.1 Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party political system. The President is the head of state, while the Prime Minister is the head of government. The powers of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches are set out in the *Constitution* adopted in 1919. This fact sheet provides an overview of the three branches in Finland.

2. Executive Branch

2.1 In Finland, the executive power is divided between the President and the Prime Minister. Under the new *Constitution* that took effect in 2000 and was amended in 2012, the President directs foreign policy in co-operation with the Prime Minister and other government officials. He or she also carries out other statutory duties specified in the *Constitution*. For example, the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish armed forces and nominates the senior government officials and judges.

2.2 Meanwhile, the new *Constitution* has strengthened the role of the Prime Minister at the expense of the President.¹ At present, the Prime Minister has primary responsibility for all other policy areas not reserved for the President, such as the European affairs. The Prime Minister is also responsible for directing the work of the government and chairing the plenary sessions of the government, the main decision-making body of the Executive Branch.

¹ In the past, the President was entrusted with supreme executive power. The new *Constitution* curbs the presidential powers, including the removal of his or her power to appoint the Prime Minister without the parliamentary consent.

2.3 The Prime Minister is elected by Parliament and appointed to office by the President. Usually the leader of a majority party or coalition winning the parliamentary election becomes the Prime Minister. Other Ministers are appointed by the President in accordance with the recommendations of the Prime Minister.

2.4 Sauli Niinistö has served as the President since March 2012 while Alexander Stubb has been the Prime Minister since June 2014. Both of them come from the National Coalition Party.

Presidential election

2.5 The presidential election is held once every six years. The last election was held in two rounds on 22 January and 5 February 2012 respectively. Sauli Niinistö, nominated by the National Coalition Party, won 62.6% of votes in the second round of voting to become the President. The next presidential election will be held in 2018.

2.6 The President is elected by a direct popular vote. He or she can serve for a maximum of two consecutive terms. If no candidate obtains more than half of the votes in the first round of election, the two candidates with the most votes take part in the second round. The candidate receiving more votes in the second round will be elected as the President.

3. Legislative Branch

3.1 The Parliament ("Eduskunta" in Finnish) is the unicameral legislature of the country. The Eduskunta enacts legislation, approves the national budget, ratifies international treaties and oversees the government. It is also responsible for electing the Prime Minister and approving the government programme. The government programme is a plan of actions agreed by the parties participating in the coalition government and it sets out the main tasks to be handled by the incoming administration.

Parliamentary election

3.2 Election of the Eduskunta is held once every four years unless it is dissolved earlier by a presidential order. The last election was held in April 2011. The National Coalition Party won 44 seats to become the largest party in the Eduskunta followed by the Social Democratic Party with 42 seats. The Finns Party emerged as the third largest party, which increased its number of seats from five to 39 seats. The next election will take place in 2015.

3.3 The Eduskunta is composed of 200 Members returned from 15 constituencies. Among them, one Member is elected from the constituency of Åland (a Swedish-speaking autonomous region in Finland) by simple majority and the remaining 199 seats are allocated proportionally to the remaining 14 constituencies according to the size of their population.

3.4 In each of the 14 constituencies other than Åland, voters are presented with unordered or random list of candidates chosen in party primaries. Voters cannot vote for a party directly, but cast their votes for an individual candidate instead. The number of seats received by each party is determined by the total number of votes gained by its candidates. The order in which the party's candidates are elected to these seats is determined by the number of individual votes they receive.

Current party composition

3.5 The composition of the Eduskunta by political party is as follows:

- (a) National Coalition Party (44 Members) which has the ideology of combining freedom with responsibility, democracy and equality;
- (b) Social Democratic Party (42 Members) which favours a fair society, a supportive state and a sustainable future;
- (c) Finns Party (38 Members) being a populist and nationalist party proposing a progressive taxation regime and opposing same-sex marriage;
- (d) Centre Party (35 Members) which promotes the interests of the rural population, equality and decentralization;

- (e) Left Alliance (12 Members) as a left-wing party formed following the merger of a number of left parties supporting greater job security for workers and environmentally conscious Finland;
- (f) Green League (10 Members) which concerns the protection of the natural environment;
- (g) Swedish People's Party (10 Members) which represents the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority;
- (h) Christian Democrats (six Members) which upholds the value of human dignity, social responsibility and partnership between people and nature;
- (i) Left Faction (two Members) which emphasizes labour rights; and
- (j) Change 2011 (one Member) which advocates direct participation in democratic processes and free speech without restrictions.

3.6 Eero Heinäluoma of the Social Democrat Party has been the Speaker of the Eduskunta since June 2011.

4. Judicial Branch

4.1 The Judicial Branch of Finland comprises:

- (a) courts for regular civil and criminal jurisdiction, consisting of the Supreme Court, six Courts of Appeal and 27 District Courts;
- (b) administrative courts with jurisdiction over litigation between individuals and the public administration; and
- (c) specialized courts such as the Labour Court to hear disputes between employers and employees, and the Insurance Court to handle cases relating to benefit payments and insurance claims.

References

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