

FINNISH HISTORY, SOCIETY, AND POLITICS

A short introduction

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The topics of today

- Key facts and figures about contemporary Finland
- The Finnish way of life and its peculiarities
- A very brief history of Finland
- Contemporary Finnish political system and society
- Finland today – between the past, the present and the future

Where are you now? What you might know?

Finland is one of the Nordic Countries, located in the Northern Europe.

Finland is **NOT** a Scandinavian country. Scandinavia = Sweden + Norway + Denmark.

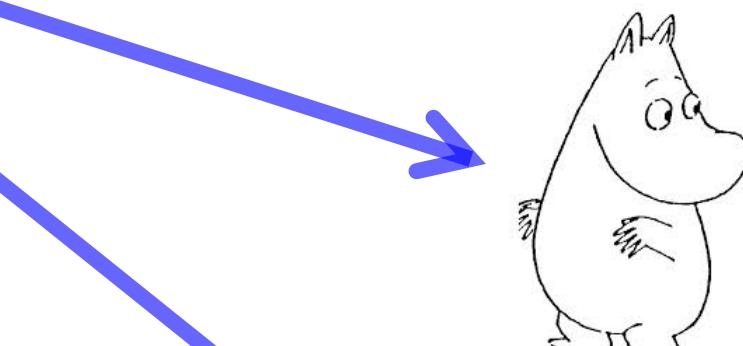
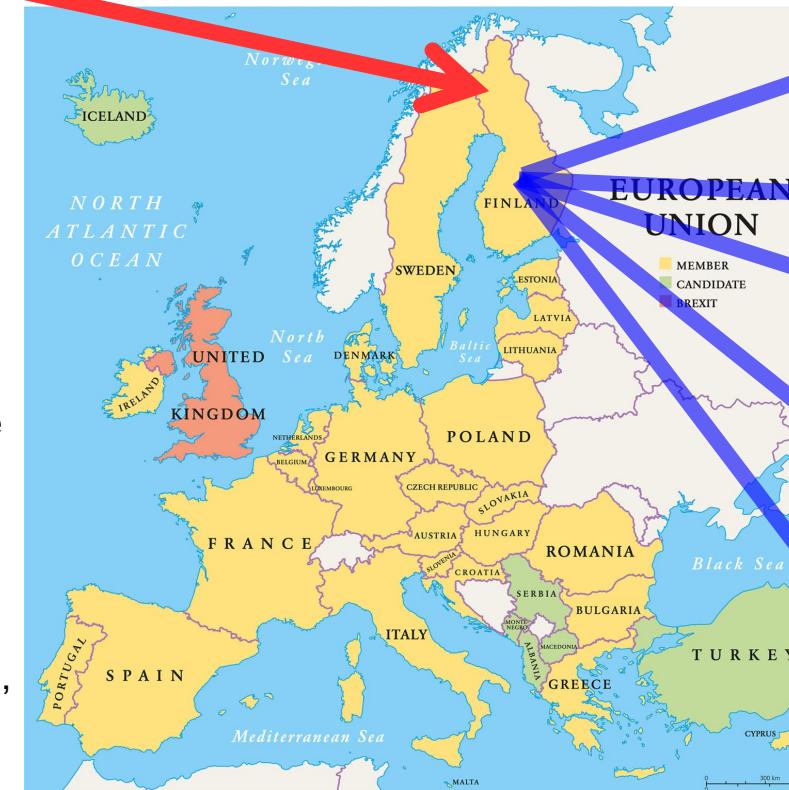
Thousands of lakes, large forests, rocky ground, no big mountains but fells and big hills in Lapland and elsewhere, large inland and maritime archipelagos.

Winter is cold, especially in January. Summer is moderately warm, sometimes even hot, due to the Gulf stream in the Atlantic Ocean.

The capital is Helsinki (~675.000 inhabitants).

In the periphery of Europe, on the border of Russian sphere, in history sometimes isolated, sometimes conquered, now independent and well-integrated into Europe. At the crossroads of geopolitical passions and cultural influences.

“Nordic community” with Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Member of the EU since 1995, and member of NATO since 2023.



A Finnish way of life

Finland is officially “an orderly, peaceful, functioning, and educated society”.

A liberal and pluralistic European society with few problems and quite a small differences in standards of living. Also, Finland is seen as a safe place to live.

The nature, including forests, lakes, archipelago, and the Baltic Sea, is still an important part of the Finnish mental landscape. We have quite a unique summer cottage (*kesämökki*) lifestyle, berry & mushroom picking, hunting and fishing, outdoor sports, and physical exercise.

The so-called “everyone's right” allows you to move freely in the wilderness (but no free camping, no fire), to pick wild berries and mushrooms in forests and to catch fish with a rod and line (but spinning and trolling with a motorboat only against a fishing fee!).

Traditionally, Finns have subscribed to a rather strong “Protestant ethics”, stressing hard work and traditional values. Nowadays ~ 67 % of the population belongs to Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1950 95.0 %, and in 2000 85.1 % belonged to the church. The younger generations “tick differently” in some respect → there are widening cleavages between “cosmopolitan value-liberal” and “national conservative” groups, even among the young people.

A catching-up urbanisation: in 2022 ~85 % of the population lives in urban areas.



A short history of modern Finland I

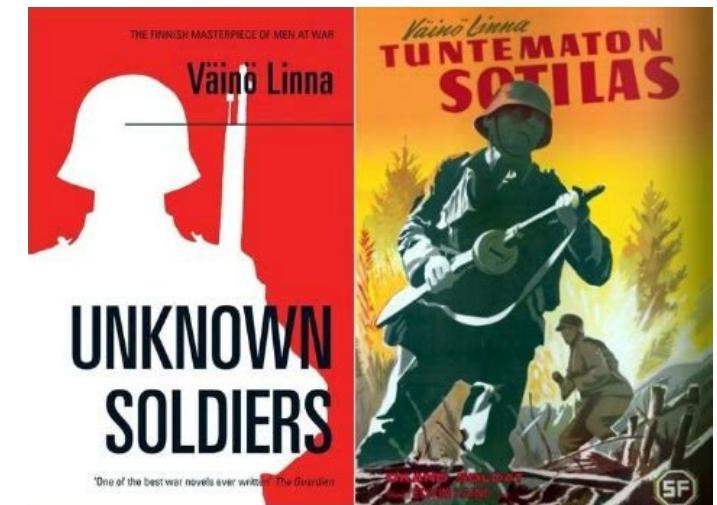
From the 13th century to 1809 Finland was a province of the Kingdom of Sweden. From 1809 to 1917 Finland was an **autonomous Grand Duchy**, ruled by the Russian Czars. Autonomous Finland had its own constitution, currency, customs border, senate, administration etc.

The Finnish Parliament declared independence on 6 December 1917. Following the revolutions in Russia 1917, there was a similar breakdown in Finnish society.

In spring 1918, from late January to early May, two armed groups, the White (republican) army and the Red Guards (communists), fought against each other in the **Finnish Civil War**. Casualties: 38.000 dead. Finnish government and the White army won the Civil War, but the country was in a turmoil, its economy destroyed, its political apparatus and its people divided. The Communist Party of Finland was established by the former red leaders who fled to Soviet Russia.

Despite of suspicion and bitterness on both sides, **a slow recovery** started after the Civil War. In the 1920s and 1930s Finns became reunited through compromises of moderate political groups on both the left and right. Right wing extremism was largely rejected in the early 1930s, and **Finland remained a parliamentary democracy, even through the years of World War 2**.

During the WW2 Finland fought twice against the Soviet Union – in the **Winter War** (1939–40) and the **Continuation War** (1941–44). In 1941, Finland aligned itself with Nazi Germany and its invasion to the USSR. After the signing of the Moscow Armistice (Sept. 1944) Finland repelled the German troops from its territories in the **Lapland War** (1944–45). Nearly 97.000 Finns died and almost 160.000 wounded during the WW2. Finland had to cede several of its Eastern territories, including Karelian Isthmus, Salla and Petsamo, and pay the Soviets reparations of \$300 million (half of the Finnish GDP in 1939).



A short history of modern Finland II

Finland was able to retain its democratic structures and market economy during the Cold War years. Between the late 1940s and the mid-1990s, Finland transformed from a mainly agricultural society to a post-industrial, service-based information society.

Although heading to the West(ern Europe), Finland remained politically and militarily non-aligned. In 1948, Finland signed the *Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance* with the USSR. Despite the treaty Finland succeeded in balancing between the West and the East and in maintaining its status as a relatively neutral country between the superpowers.

However, the priority of the Soviet relations reflected on Finnish society and inner politics, and even compromised some features of democratic institutions, such as the presidency of the republic. President Urho Kekkonen remained in power from 1956 to 1982. He considered himself as the only guardian of Finnish sovereignty. In 1975, Finland hosted the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which was a personal triumph for President Kekkonen.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland suffered from severe economic depression in 1991–93. It was a shock for the industries, small enterprises, and ordinary citizens. It cut deep wounds in the society. Many Finnish banks and companies went bankrupt, and unemployment remained high until the late 1990s.



A short history of modern Finland III

Joining the EU in 1995 – together with Sweden and Austria – was one of Finland's most important and impactful decisions after the WW2. The membership anchored Finland into the Western sphere of liberal democracies.

In the contemporary EU, Finland is one of the smallest member states → the most important reference countries are the other Nordic EU-countries and Germany.

Generally speaking, **Finns are rather positive about the EU** and Finland's membership in the EU.

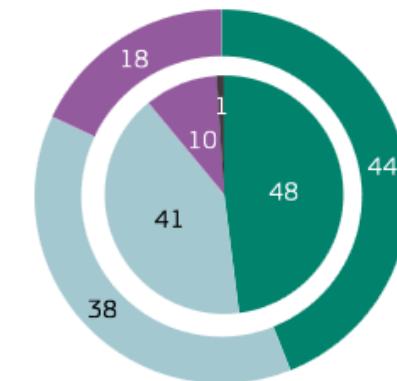
Important milestones in integration: In 1999, Finland joined the **EURO area** and in 2002 it followed 11 other EU countries in adopting **euro currency** (€). In 2005, together with other Nordic countries, Finland ratified European **Schengen agreement** on border controls.

Main societal trends in Finland mirror wider European trends. Turnout in the EU parliamentary elections has been remarkably low (<50%).

Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 and a full-scale war against Ukraine since 2022 have dramatically changed the "mental map" of the Finns (more on that on the last slides).

Source: [EB100](#) (Autumn 2023).

D78. In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (%)



EU27 Outer Pie



Outer Pie

FI + Inner Pie



Total 'Positive'	44	▼1	48	▼6
Neutral	38	▲1	41	▲9
Total 'Negative'	18	=	10	▼3
Don't know	1	=		

▲▼ (ST100 Oct/Nov 2023 - ST99 May/June 2023)

Political system

Finland gained independency on 6 December 1917.

Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a multiparty political system.

Legislative power is exercised by the Parliament (*eduskunta*).

Relations between the Parliament, the Government and the President are governed by the principles of European party-based parliamentarism.

President (the Head of State): Alexander Stubb (term: 2024–2030). Minor executive role, but major role in foreign policy and military.

Prime Minister: Petteri Orpo, National Coalition Party (term: since 6/2023). PM is the most powerful executive actor.

Current coalition of the Finnish government: NCP, Finns, SPP, CD.



President Alexander Stubb (above) and PM Petteri Orpo (left).

Finnish Parliament

At its birth in 1906, the Finnish Parliament (eduskunta) was something of a rarity, because:

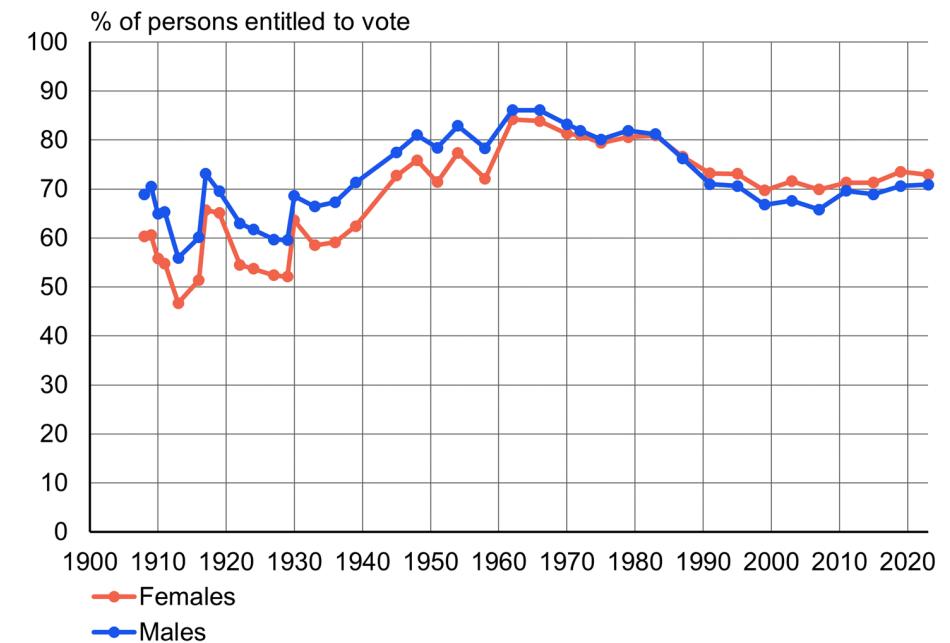
1. Finland was not a sovereign state, but an autonomous state within the Russian Empire.
2. Unicameral and elected by universal suffrage, women included not only voters but also as MP candidates.

Consists of 200 MPs, elected by the people for a term of four years.

Current legislative period: 2023–2027 (scheduled).

Parliament has three main functions:

1. passes all the laws
2. debates and approves the national budget
3. supervises the way the country is governed (parliamentarism)



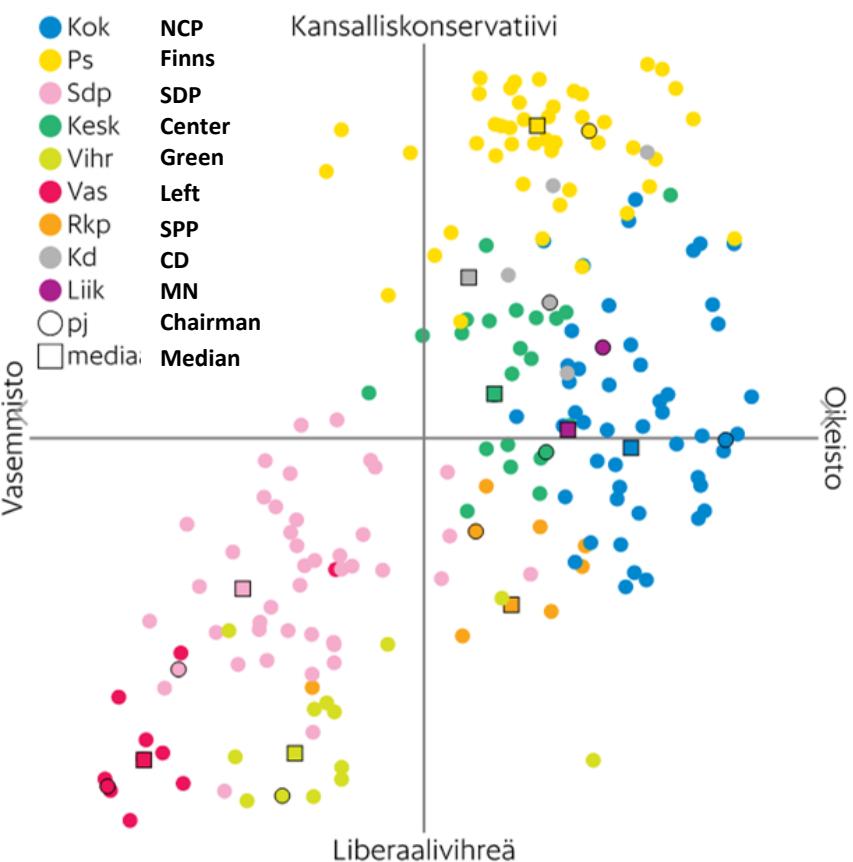
Parties

Finnish parliamentary elections in 2023

Value map of Eduskunta 2023

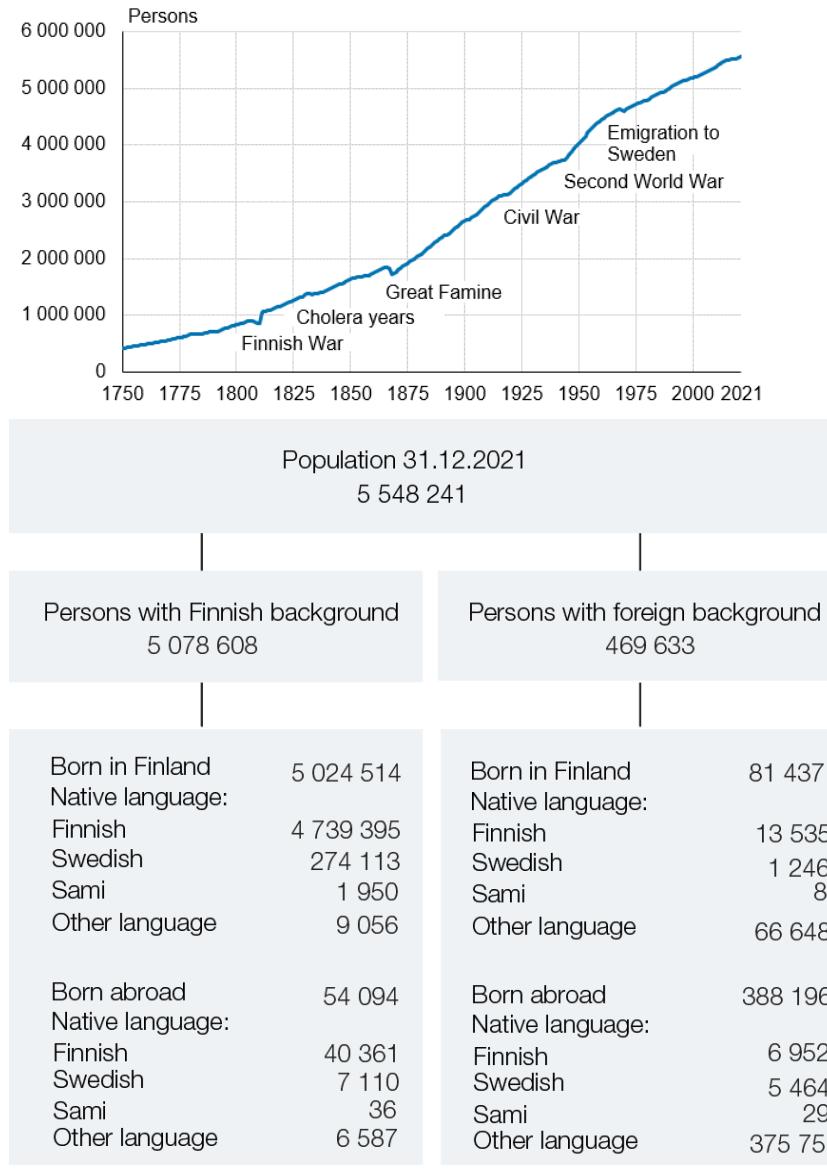
X-axis: left wing – right wing

Y-axis: liberal (bottom) – conservative (top)



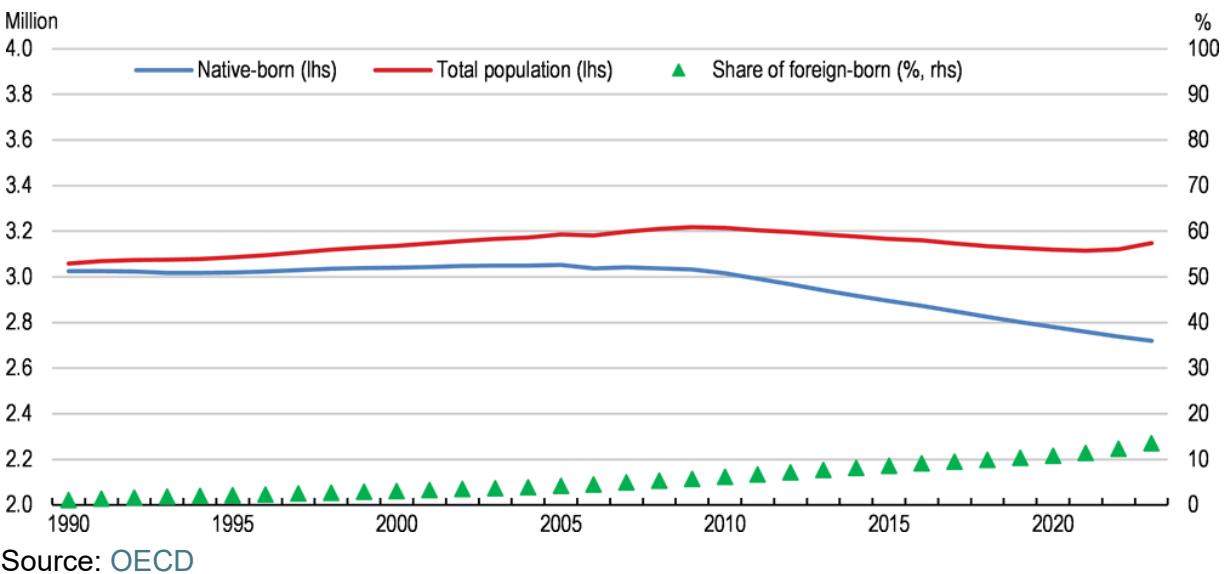
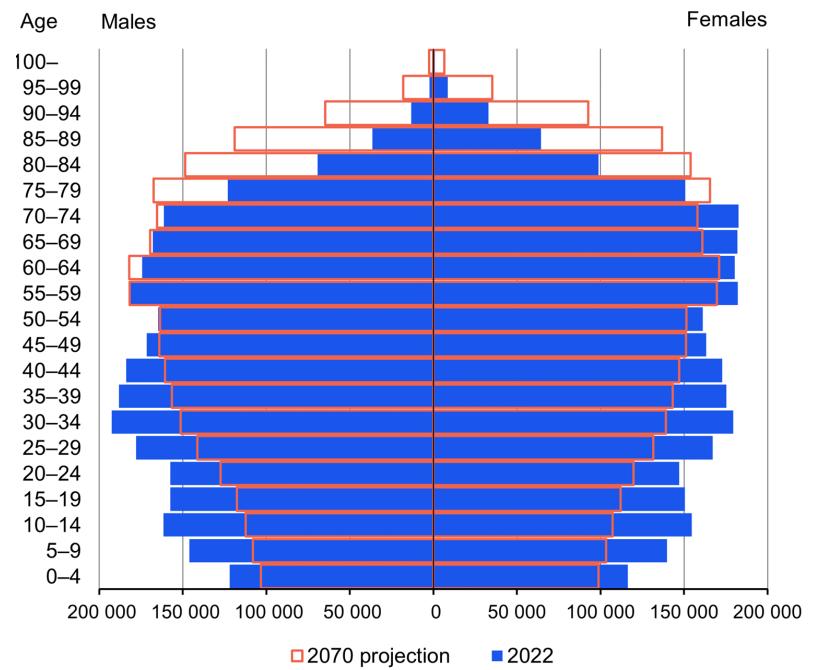
Seats Support % Results table

Party	Places ▲	EV2019	%	EV2019 %	KV2021 %
NCP	48	+10	20.8%	+3.8	-0.5
Finns	46	+7	20.1%	+2.6	+5.6
SDP	43	+3	19.9%	+2.2	+2.2
Cen	23	-8	11.3%	-2.5	-3.6
Green	13	-7	7.0%	-4.5	-3.6
Left	11	-5	7.1%	-1.1	-0.9
SPP	9	0	4.3%	-0.2	-0.7
CD	5	0	4.2%	+0.3	+0.6
MN	1	+1	2.4%	+2.4	+0.8
others	1	-	0.5%	-	-

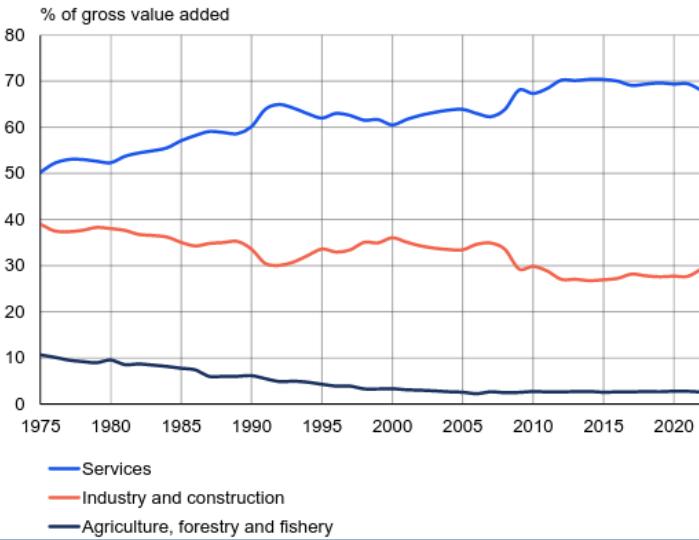


Source: [Statistics Finland](#)

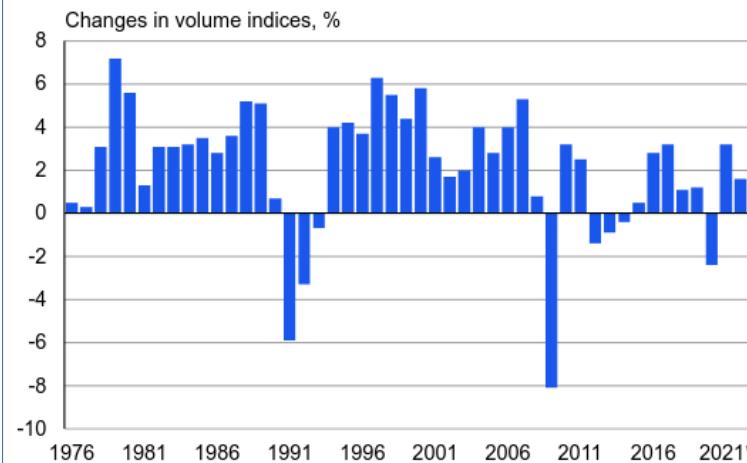
Population



Structural change of the economy, 1975–2022*

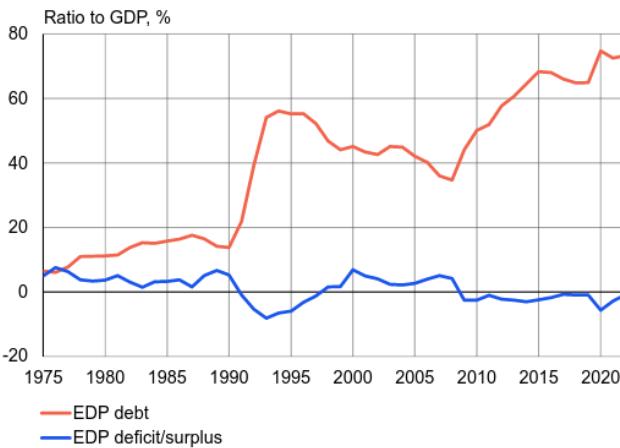


Annual change in the volume of gross domestic product, 1976–2022*

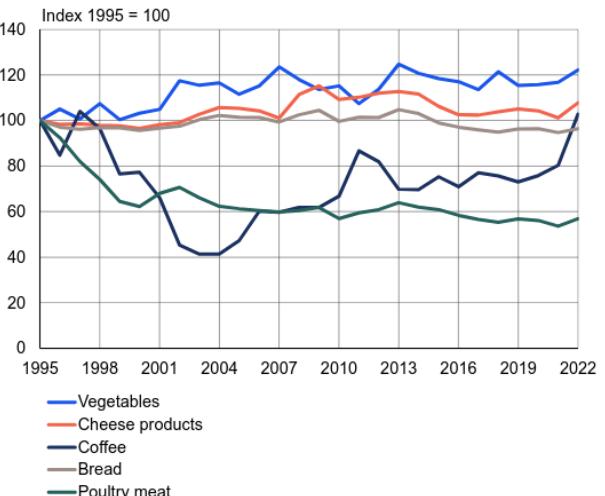


Economy

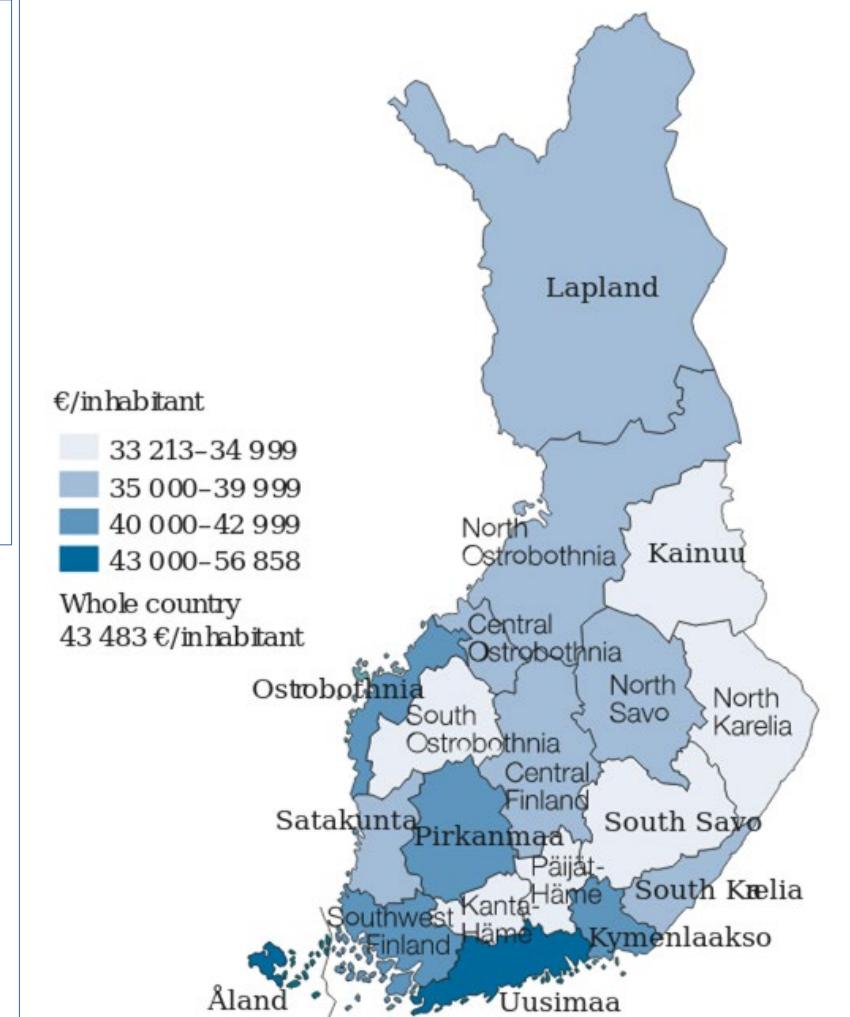
General government deficit/surplus and debt, 1975–2022*



Real price development of selected food items 1995 = 100

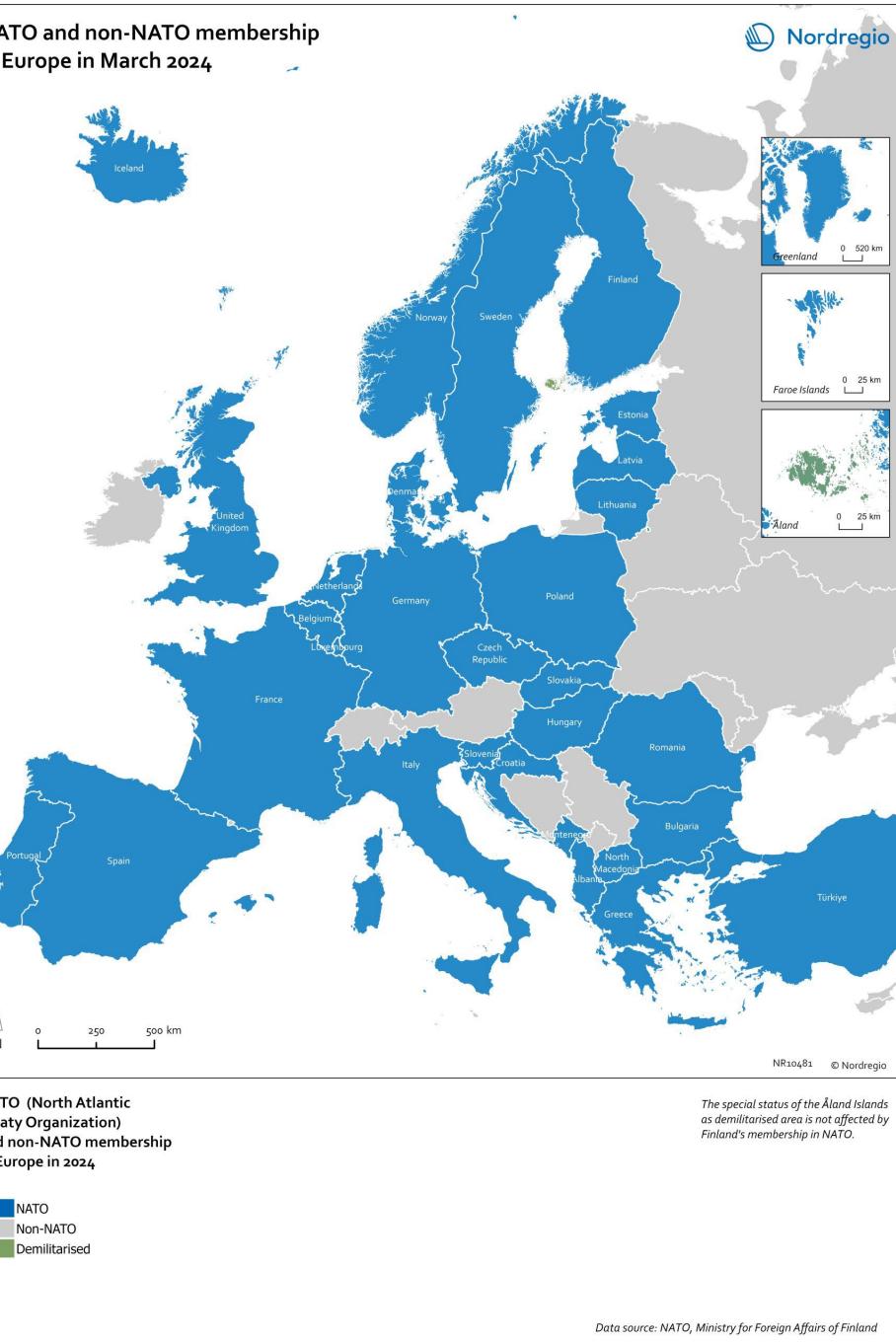


Gross domestic product per capita by region, 2019



Source: https://stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_kansatalous_en.html

NATO and non-NATO membership in Europe in March 2024



Finland joins NATO in 2023

Russia's war against Ukraine has reset the security framework of Europe established in 1975 (CSCE). The EU – and Finland as its member – is facing an armed conflict in its closest neighbourhood.

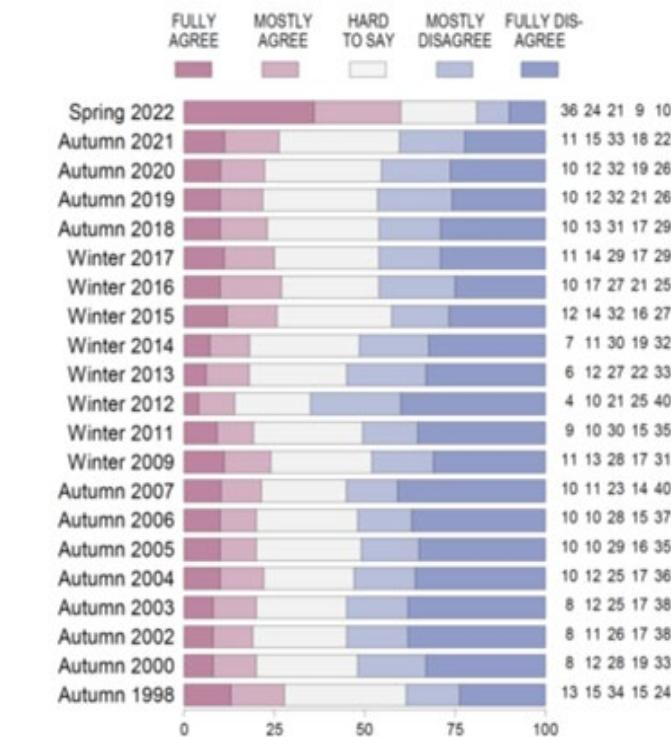
Finland is only indirectly affected by the energy crisis in Europe. Finland is not dependent on Russian oil, gas or uranium.

Finland's immediate reaction was the decision to apply, together with Sweden, for a membership in NATO in spring 2022. This turn was supported by a strong turn of the opinion polls in favour of NATO membership.

Finland's full membership in NATO since 4 April 2023 is, as regards its impact, less dramatical compared to the joining of the EU → the strongest expected change will be in Finland's geopolitical position and status.

Finland's (and Sweden's) membership will also change NATO → 1300 km new border with Russia and a new Northern dimension. The biggest impact, however, will be on Europe's future security-political architecture.

"Finland should join NATO" (%)



Sources: [Nordregio](#), [Eva](#).

Do you want to know more?

Portal for Finland – <https://finland.fi/>

Statistics Finland – http://stat.fi/index_en.html

The most important facts about Finland – <https://toolbox.finland.fi/>

Finnish history compact –

<https://www.discoveringfinland.com/about-finland/finnish-history/>

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland – <https://um.fi/frontpage>

The National Museum of Finland – <https://www.kansallismuseo.fi/en/>



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Thank you for your attention.

Have a great time in Turku and Finland!