

FINNISH SOCIETY, CULTURE, POLITICS AND HISTORY

A short introduction

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UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU

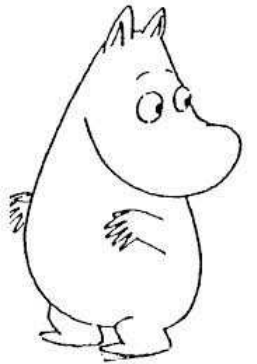
Topics today

- The Finnish way of life and its peculiarities
- A short history of Finland
- Key facts and figures about the contemporary Finland
- Contemporary Finnish political system and society
- Finland and the “emerging new normality” after February 24, 2022

Where are you?

What you might know?

- Finland is one of the Northern Countries, located in the Northern Europe
 - Lakes, forests, rocky ground, no mountains
 - Winter is cold, summer is not so warm
 - Capital city: Helsinki (~650.000 inhab.)
- Periphery of “classical” Europe and the Russian, Eastern sphere, dependency on others but also isolation
 - Crossroad of influences and battlefield
 - “Nordic community” with Sweden, Denmark and Norway
- Member of the European Union (EU) since 1995, NATO since 2023
- **National languages (2022) Finnish (86.5 %), Swedish (5.2 %), Sami – foreign languages 8.9 % (Russian 1.7%, Estonian 0.9%, Arabic 0.7%, English 0.5%)**



The Finnish Way of Life

- Finland is officially “an orderly, peaceful, functioning, educated society”
- A liberal, European society with few problems and small differences in standards of living, a safe place to live
- The nature – forests, lakes, archipelago, sea – still belong closely to the Finnish mental landscape
 - unique summer cottage (*kesämökki*) lifestyle, berry & mushroom picking, hunting and fishing
 - The so-called “everyone's right” (in (gender-free) Finnish: *jokaisenoikeudet*) allows you to move freely in the nature (no free camping, no fire), pick berries, mushrooms etc. in forests and to catch fish with a rod and line (spinning/trolling only against a fishing fee!)
- A rather strong “Protestant ethics” stressing hard work and traditional values (~67 % Evangelical Lutherans [in 1950. 95.0 %, in 2000: 85.1 %])
 - The younger generation “ticks differently” in some respect → a rather strong cleavages between “cosmopolitan value-liberal” and “conservative-national” groups
- A catching-up urbanisation (urbanisation rate (2019): 84.2 %)

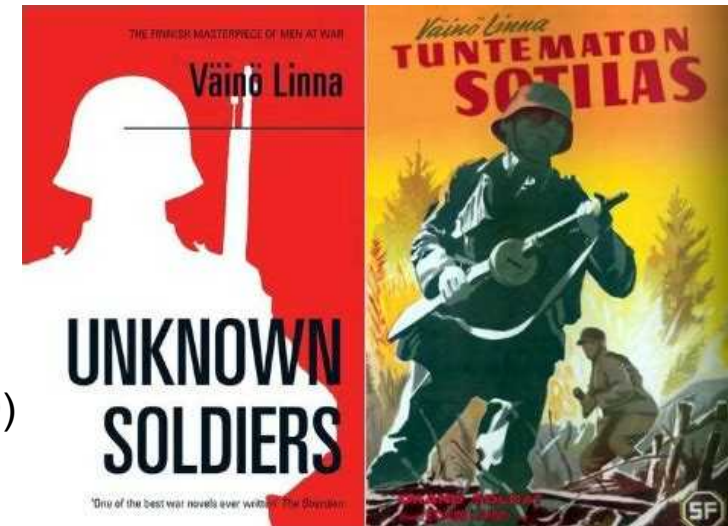
Some peculiarities...

- Foreigners might find Finnish silence and reserve disturbing and even offensive
 - Finnish society can still be very parochial
- Dark humour, harsh self-irony
- Strong national identity coupled with an inferiority complex towards the outside world
- Odd leisure time activities include ice swimming, wife carrying or Nordic walking



A short history of Finland (I)

- From the 13th century to 1809 Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden
- Turku (*Aboa*) was the most important city and the unofficial capital from 1809-1812
- The Finnish Parliament declared independence on 6 December 1917
- Following the February and October revolutions in Russia, there was a similar breakdown in Finnish society
 - In the spring 1918 armed military groups - the White (republicans) and Red Guards (communists) – fought against each other in the Finnish Civil War
 - The White Guards won the Civil War, but the country was in a turmoil, its economy destroyed, its political apparatus and its people divided
- During the inter-war period Finland was slowly reunited through compromises of moderate political groups on both the left and right
- During the WW2 Finland fought twice – in the Winter War (1939-1940) and the Continuation War (1941-1944) against the Soviet Union
 - Finland allied itself with the Nazi-Germany
 - After the signing of the Moscow Armistice (September 1944) Finland was obliged to force German troops from its territories → the Lapland War (1944-1945)
- In the aftermath of the WW2 Finland had to cede a number of territories, including much of Karelia, to pay the Soviets reparations of \$300 million (~ ½ of the Finnish GDP in 1939)
 - Finland did, however, retain its independence
 - More than 63.000 Finns died, almost 160.000 wounded during the WW2



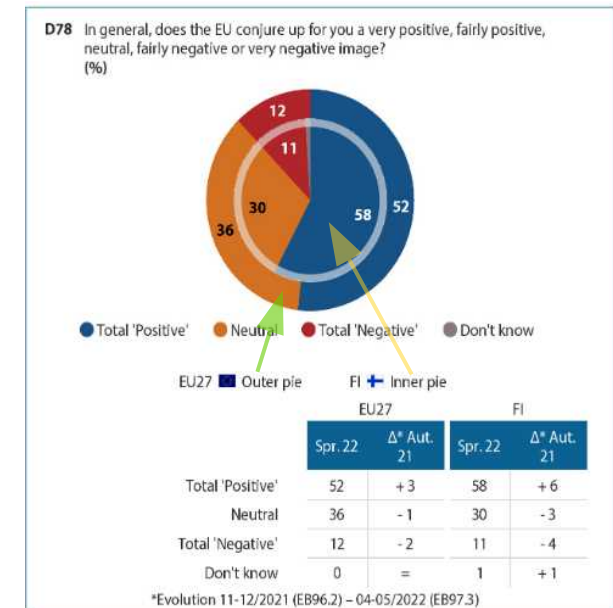
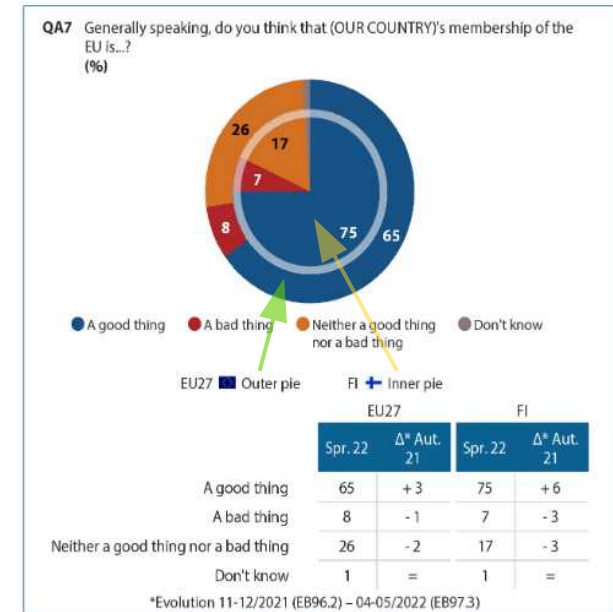
A short history of Finland (II)

- Finland could retain its democratic structures and market economy
- During the period from the late 1940s to the mid-1990s Finland transformed from an agricultural 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 of 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 neutral country between the superpowers
 - In 1975 Finland hosted the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which was a personal triumph for President Urho Kekkonen
- The most important “imagined community” was the Nordic community with Sweden, Denmark and Norway (+Iceland)
- The severe depression in 1991-1993 was a shock for the Finnish economy and left deep trails in the Finnish society

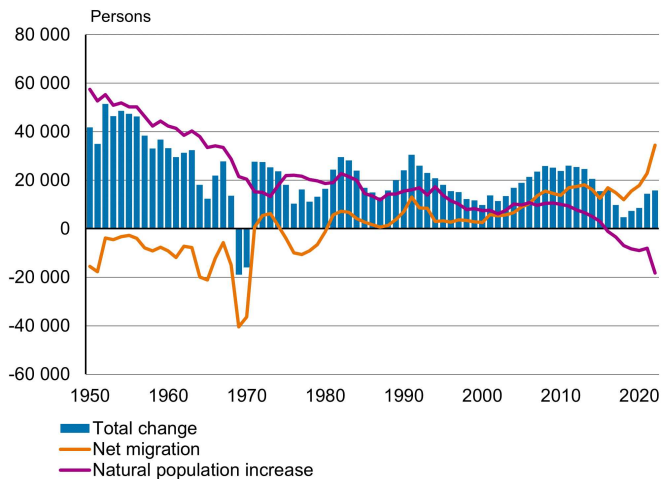
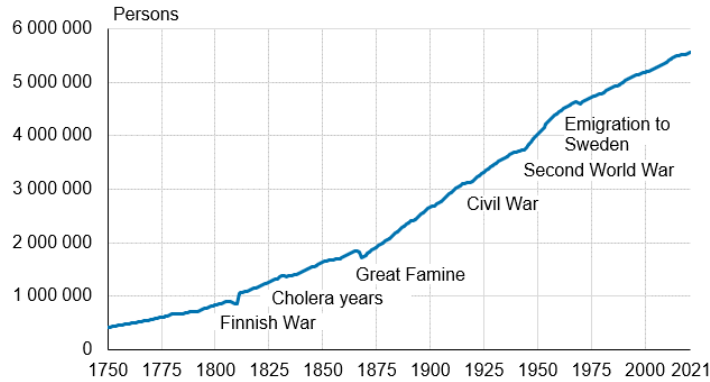


A short history of Finland (III)

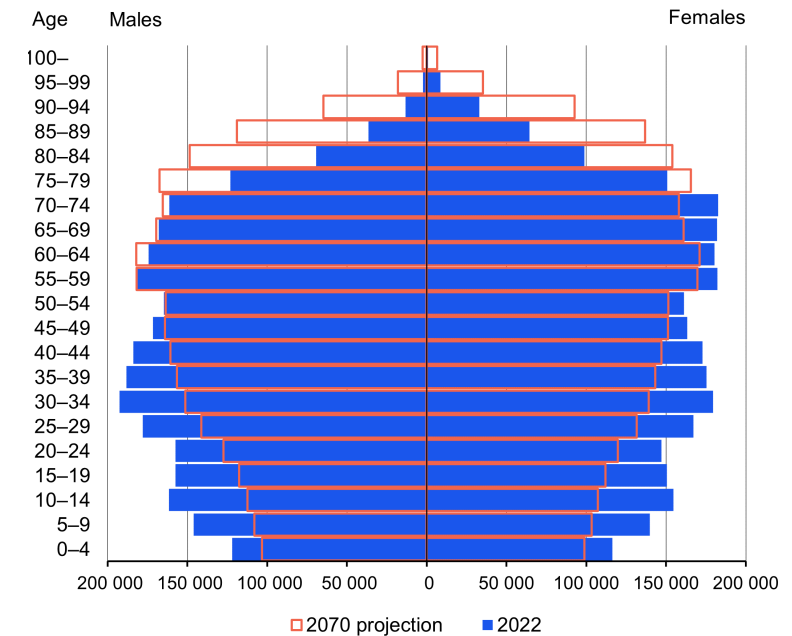
- Joining the EU in 1995 – together with Sweden and Austria – was one of Finland's most important and impactful decisions after WW2
- In the contemporary EU Finland is one of the smallest member states → the most important reference countries are the other Nordic EU-countries and Germany
- Generally speaking, the Finns are rather positive about the EU and Finland's membership in the EU
 - Biggest worries (according to recent Eurobarometers): economic situation, climate change, immigration
 - Turnout in the EP elections has been remarkably low (<50%)
- Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine since February 24, 2022 has dramatically changed the "mental map" of the Finns (more on that on the last slides)



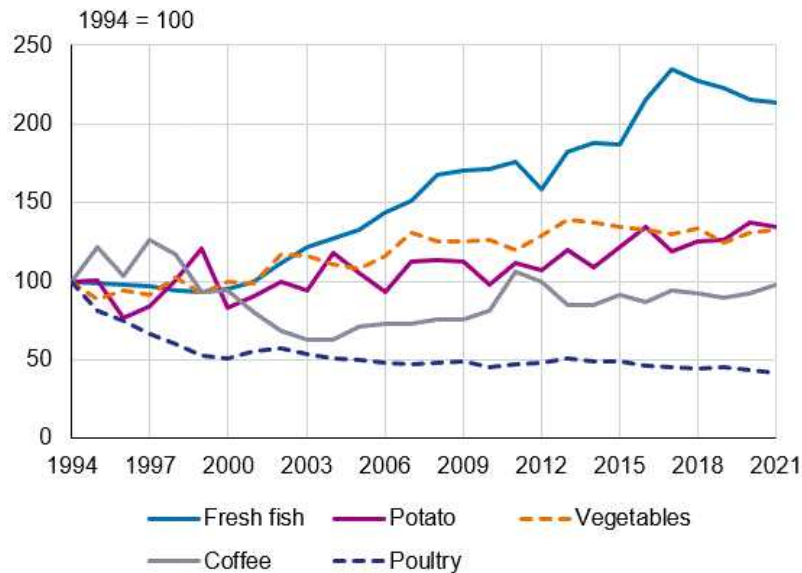
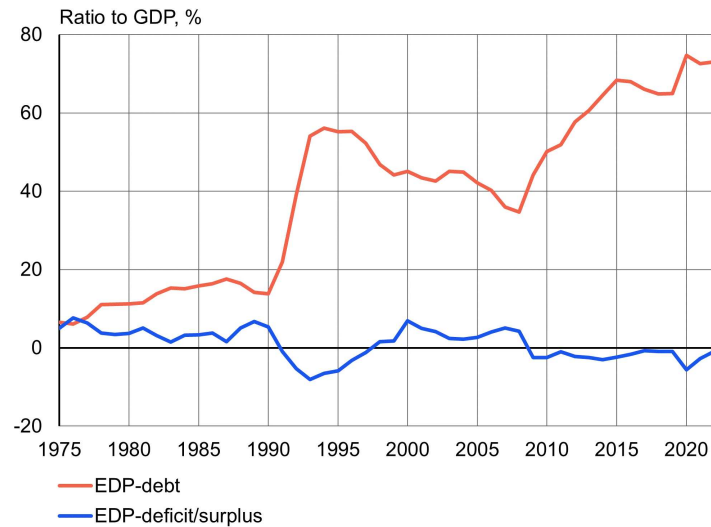
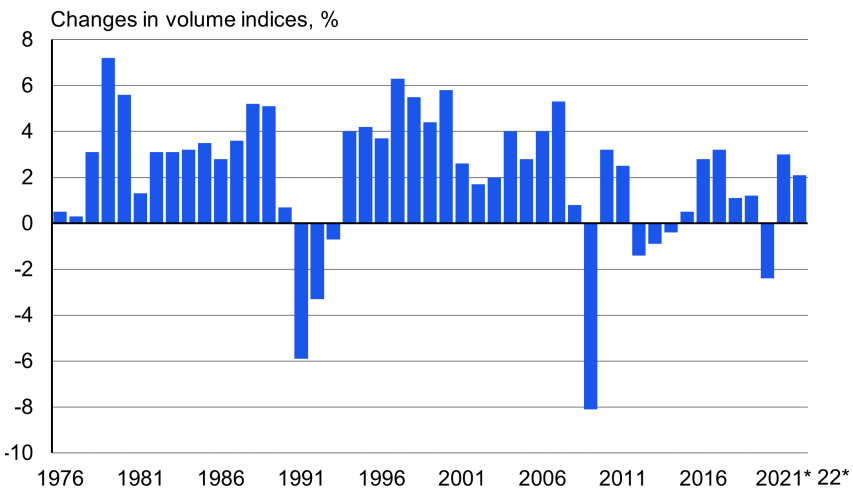
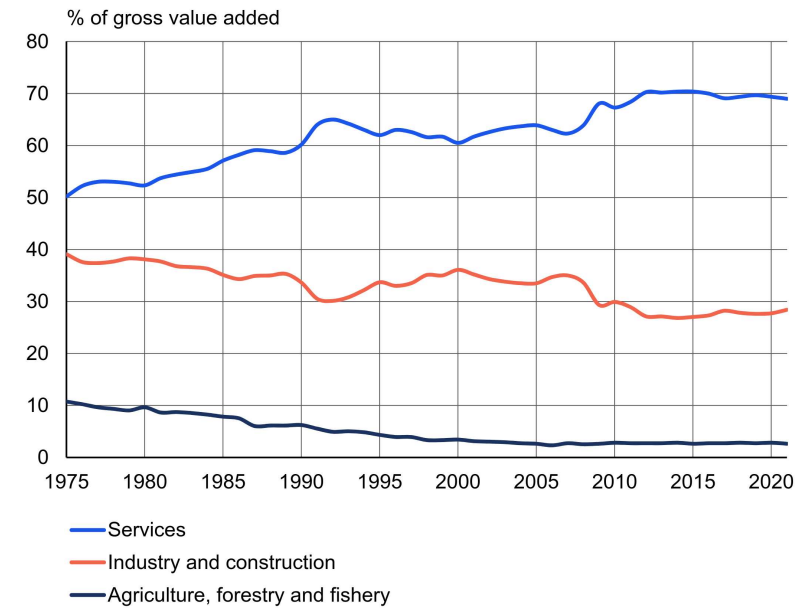
Population



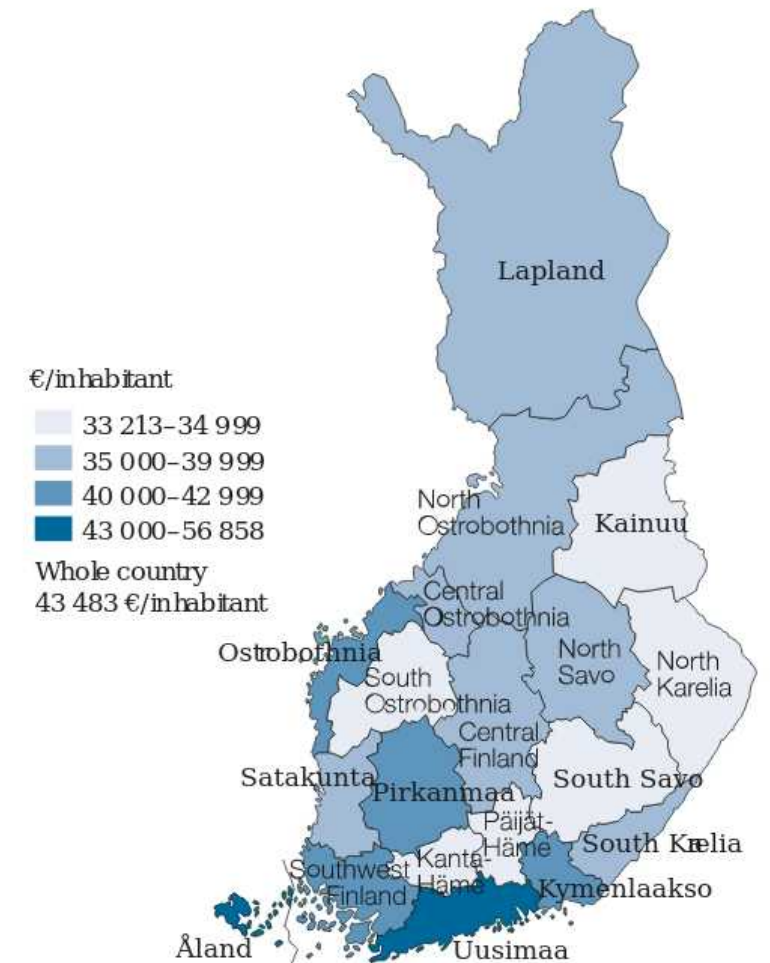
Population 31.12.2021 5 548 241			
Persons with Finnish background 5 078 608		Persons with foreign background 469 633	
Born in Finland	5 024 514	Born in Finland	81 437
Native language:		Native language:	
Finnish	4 739 395	Finnish	13 535
Swedish	274 113	Swedish	1 246
Sami	1 950	Sami	8
Other language	9 056	Other language	66 648
Born abroad	54 094	Born abroad	388 196
Native language:		Native language:	
Finnish	40 361	Finnish	6 952
Swedish	7 110	Swedish	5 464
Sami	36	Sami	29
Other language	6 587	Other language	375 751



Economy



Gross domestic product per capita by region, 2019



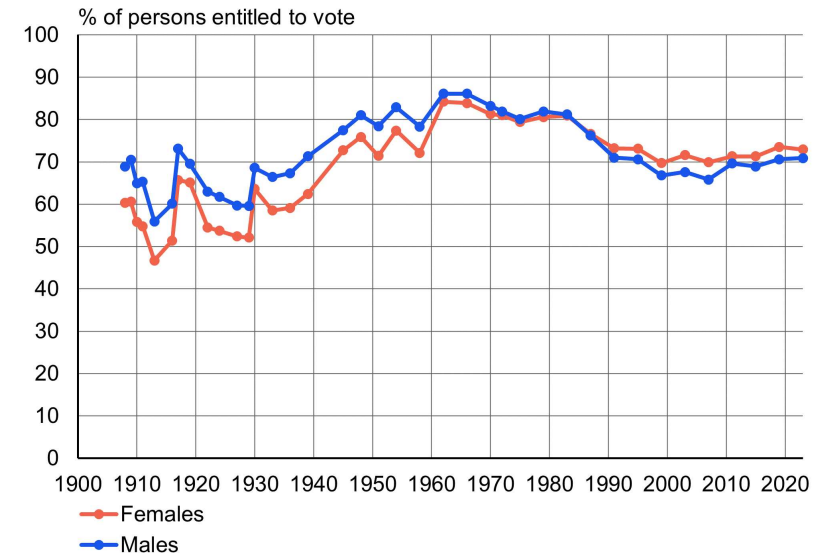
Political system

- Finland gained independency on 6 December 1917
- Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a multiparty political system
- Legislative power is exercised by Parliament (*eduskunta*)
- Relations between Parliament, the Government and the President are governed by the principles of European party-based parliamentarism
- President (the Head of State): Sauli Niinistö (term: 2018-2024)
 - Minor executive role, major role in foreign policy
 - Next scheduled elections on 28 January, 2024
- Prime Minister: Petteri Orpo (National Coalition Party, term: since 6/2023)
 - PM is the most powerful executive actor
 - Current coalition: NCP, Finns, SPP, CD



Parliament (*eduskunta*)

- At its birth in 1906, the Finnish Parliament (*eduskunta*) was something of a rarity
 - unicameral and elected by universal suffrage, women included
- Consists of 200 MPs, elected by the People for a term of four (4) year
 - Current legislative period: 2023-2027 (scheduled)
- Parliament has three main functions: (1) it passes laws, (2) it debates and approves the national budget and (3) it supervises the way the country is governed (=parliamentarism)



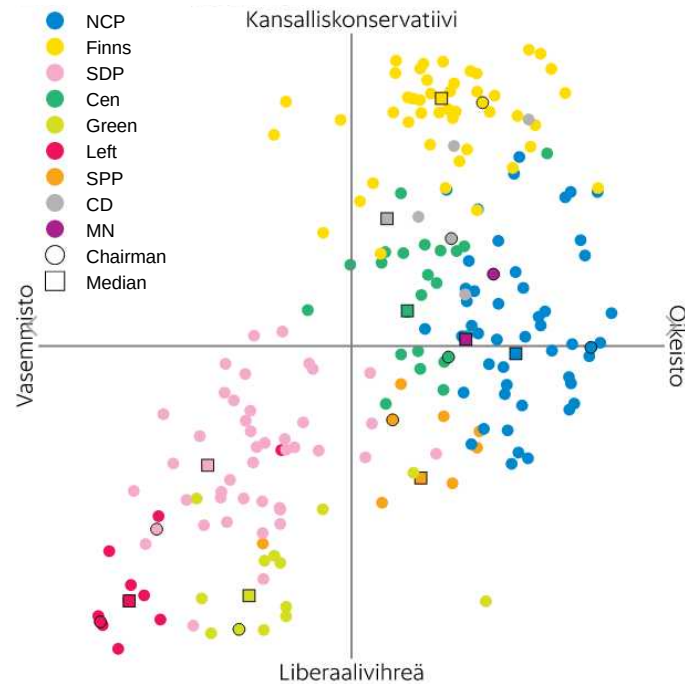
Parties and elections

Parliamentary elections 2023

Value map of Eduskunta 2023

x-axis: left ... right

y-axis: GAL (bottom)... TAN (top)



Parties

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%	-	-

European Parliament elections 2019

Party	Votes	%	Change from 2014	Number of Euro-MPs elected
			% points	
National Coalition Party	380 460	20,8	-1,8	3
Green League	292 892	16,0	6,7	2
Finnish Social Democratic Party	267 603	14,6	2,3	2
Finns Party	253 176	13,8	1,0	2
Centre Party of Finland	247 477	13,5	-6,1	2
Left Alliance	126 063	6,9	-2,4	1
Swedish People's Party in Finland	115 962	6,3	-0,4	1
Christian Democrats in Finland	89 204	4,9	-0,4	-
Others	57 208	3,1	1,2	-
Total	1 830 045	100	-	13
Females	1 000 059	54,6	6,0	

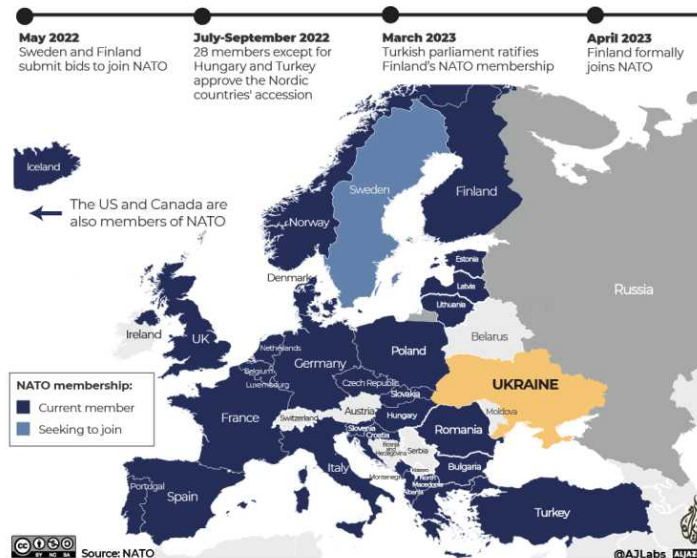
Voting turnout of Finnish citizens resident in Finland 42.7%

Finland and the “emerging new normality”

NATO

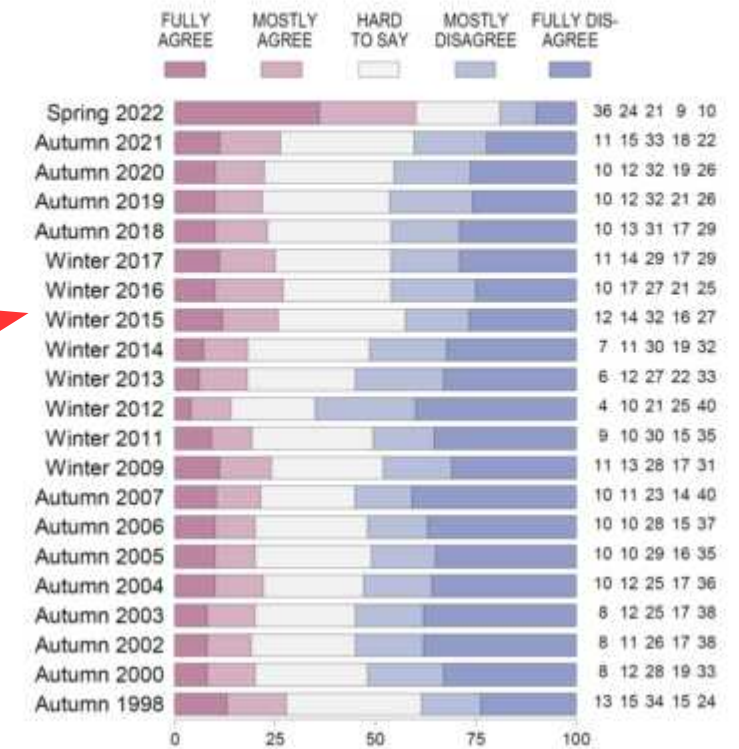
Finland joins NATO

Finland has become the 31st country to join the world's largest military alliance. The Nordic nation shares a 1,340km (833-mile) border with Russia, which has long complained about NATO's eastwards expansion.



- Russia's aggressive 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 the closest neighbourhood
 - Finland is only indirectly affected by the energy crisis in Europe
- Finland's immediate reaction was the decision to apply, together with Sweden, for a membership in NATO in spring 2022
 - This foreign and security political (U-)turn was supported by a “about-turn” of opinion polls on NATO membership within the shortest period of time
 - Finland's full membership in NATO (since 4 April, 2023) is, as regards its impact, less dramatic 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” (%)

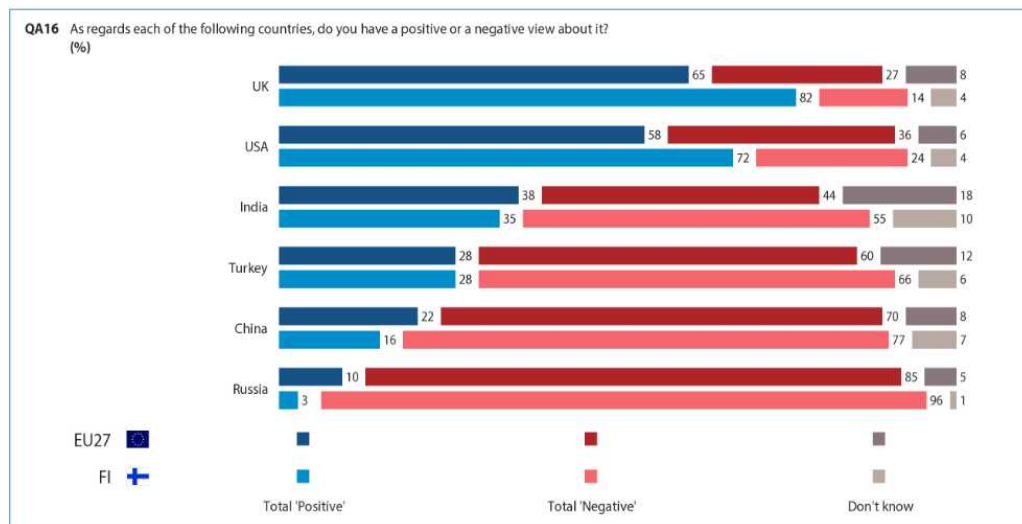
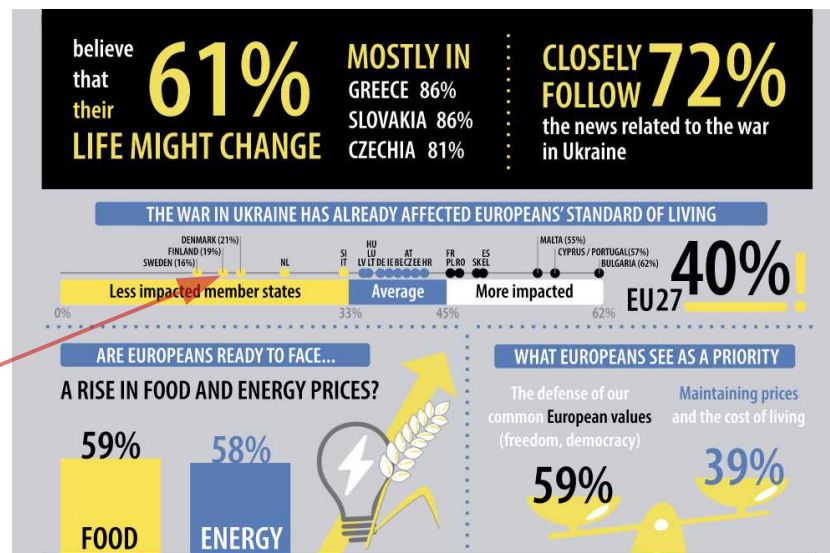


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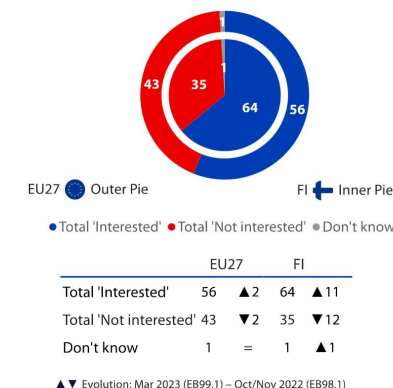
<https://bbcgossip.com/news/nato-chief-urges-turkey-not-to-veto-sweden-joining-alliance/>

<https://www.eva.fi/en/blog/2022/03/22/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-shifted-the-opinion-of-a-majority-of-finns-in-favour-of-nato-membership/>

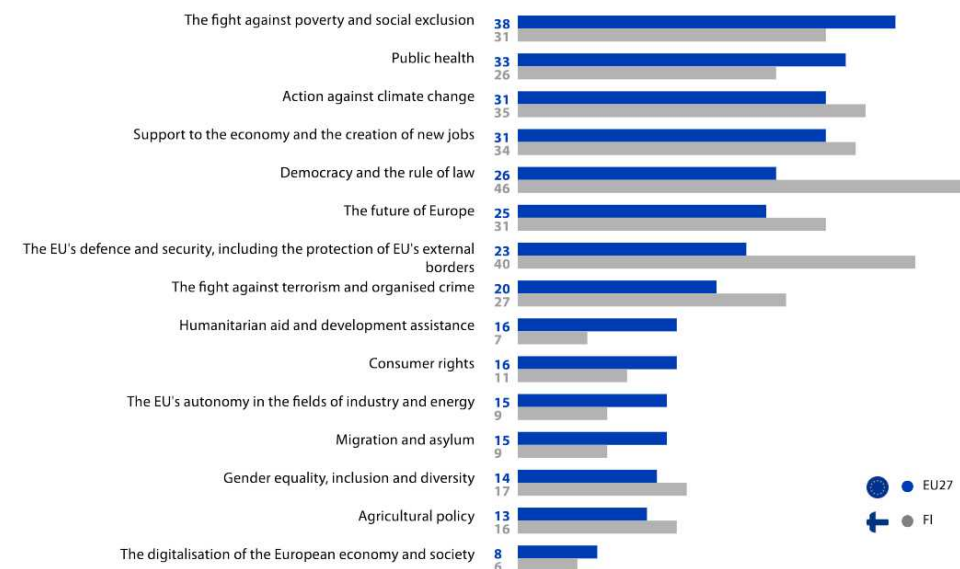
Finland and the “emerging new normality”



QA15. The next European elections will be held in May or June 2024. How interested or not would you say you are in these elections? (%)



QA7ab. Which of the following topics would you like to see addressed in priority by the European Parliament? Firstly? And then? (%)



Want to find out more?

- <https://finland.fi/> - a portal for Finland
- http://stat.fi/index_en.html - Statistics Finland
- <https://toolbox.finland.fi/> - most important facts about Finland
- <https://www.discoveringfinland.com/about-finland/finnish-history/> - Finnish history compact
- <https://um.fi/frontpage> - Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
- <https://www.kansallismuseo.fi/en/> - The National Museum of Finland



Thank you for your attention!
Have a nice time in Turku & Finland!