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Kim Strandberg and Åsa von Schoultz

Introduction

As stated in the introduction to this volume, the purpose has been to provide thorough analyses of Finnish electoral democracy of today, both through describing recent trends in behaviors and attitudes and through providing explanatory analyses. Three themes have constituted the core logic of the volume: the State of democracy; Elections, parties and candidates; and Campaigning. What conclusions, then, can be drawn about contemporary Finnish electoral democracy from the 15 chapters which have analyzed the core themes of the volume?

The state of democracy

In recent times, one can safely say that the surrounding context of Finnish democracy has changed significantly. The war in Ukraine altered the perceptions of NATO membership in Finland almost overnight and eventually ended in Finland joining the alliance on April 4th, 2023. At the conception of this volume, this was an inconceivable change in Finland's core stance towards military alliances. Granted, the volume and its chapters are not about threats to Finland's security, but this development serves to demonstrate that Finnish democracy currently experiences both external and internal turmoil. The analyses in this volume have shed some light on the latter type of turmoil. An important caveat is needed though; generally, Finnish electoral democracy is in a healthy state and among the world's leading in that regard (e.g., V-dem, 2023). Chapter 2, thus, demonstrated that support for representative democracy is generally very strong among Finnish citizens. Similarly, the analyses in Chapter 3 showed that the level of institutional trust in Finland is stable and remains among the highest in Europe. Turnout is also fairly high in international comparison (Bäck & Christensen, 2020), but low in comparison with the other Nordic countries (Bengtsson et al., 2014). There are also signs that younger generations have developed a taste for online- and newer innovative forms of participation (see Chapter 6 by Huttunen & Christensen).

Nevertheless, there are also some dark clouds on the horizon. Rapeli and Strandberg, having found support for the dissatisfaction hypothesis regarding democratic preferences, concluded their chapter (Chapter 2) by stating that Finland serves as

a reminder of how a calm surface may hide underlying disappointment with the workings of democracy. The last of which has often been seen as one of the main drivers for the explosive rise in popularity of the populist Finns party during the last decade (see Borg, 2012, 202). Bäck, Karv, and Kestilä-Kekkonen (Chapter 3) also revealed through their explanatory analyses of the relationship between political self-efficacy and institutional trust that critical citizens dominate over supportive citizens. Thus, citizens who believe in their own capacity to understand politics are the least trusting and vice versa. Furthermore, Bäck et al. point out that there is a differentiation among citizens' trust in political institutions which may partly feed into a fragmentation of participation (see also Chapter 5 and Lahtinen, 2019; Martikainen et al., 2005). Huttunen and Christensen (Chapter 6) having studied differentiation of participation across generation of Finnish citizens, gave further insights. Thus, their analyses show that while traditional participation is not differentiating Finnish generations, online activities (see also Chapter 14) and democratic innovations such as the Citizen's initiative are.

Turnout in Parliamentary elections has been stable during the period analyzed in this volume, but there was a sustained period of decline 15 years before that in which turnout dropped from around 80 percent to around 70 percent (see Chapter 5). Helimäki and Wass also (Chapter 5) discuss that the Finnish electoral system places a high cognitive burden on voters (see also Cunow et al., 2021; Söderlund et al., 2021). Thus, turnout in Finland has become segmented so that voters from disadvantaged family background, with low socio-economic position and poor health, vote to a significantly lower extent than citizen high in participatory resources. The final aspect of the state of Finish democracy studied in this volume was the occurrence of electoral harassment (Chapter 4 by Isotalo & Wass). As in many countries, harassment in conjunction with election has been a rather recent phenomenon in Finland, likely partly due to the rise of social media and the digitalization of societies in general. Chapter 4 demonstrated a rather worrisome situation whereby experiences of harassment are rather high among nominated candidates campaigning to be elected, albeit that voters do not report corresponding levels of observations of harassments. A more positive finding is that experiences of serious forms of harassment such as hacks and data leaks are rare. Nevertheless, there are clear indications that many of the malaises of digitalization—disinformation, defaming campaigns, hate speech, faking content—are commonplace in the views of Finnish candidates and often directed at younger candidates (see Chapter 4). Early reports on the 2023 election suggest that this trend has only intensified in recent years (Laakso, 2023).

Overall, the analyses of the state of Finnish electoral democracy within this volume show that although Finland is one of the healthiest democracies worldwide (e.g., V-dem, 2023), it is not a democracy without its challenges. The time period under scrutiny here is particularly interesting in this regard whereby several recent negative trends have been observed. Nevertheless, the political consensus-seeking culture, the strong position of public service media (Horowitz & Leino, 2020; Matikainen et al., 2020) and the general high trust in democracy and its institutions provide a strong basis for Finnish democracy to so-to-speak weather the current storm.

Elections, parties, and candidates

Turning to the second focus area of the volume, the analyses provided by the individual chapters have showed that the recent decades is a mixture of old and new, of stability and volatility, visible in the relevant political divides, in the party system, and in the behaviors and attitudes of voters.

On the one hand, the traditional cleavages of center/periphery, rural/urban, and workers/capital (e.g., Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) upon which the Finnish party system was formed (see Chapter 1) still retain a clear importance for the electorate. Thus, Tiihonen and Söderlund (Chapter 7) show that while the trend is downwards, class voting is still quite prevalent among the electorate, especially among working class voters. In Chapter 8, Grönlund and Söderlund likewise display that voters' average position on the socioeconomic left-right scale has been very stable since 2003. Furthermore, they also show that voters of different parties line up on the left-right axis as one would more-or-less expect and that the left-right dimension is clearly significant in explaining voting for the SDP, KOK and VAS. Borg and Paloheimo (Chapter 9) similarly show that the left-right dimension retains a strong explanatory power on voters' party identification. Furthermore, they also demonstrate how the heterogenic party system reflects in the party identification of the electorate whereby there "is a party for every taste".

On the other hand, the period under scrutiny is one in which new cleavages driven by socio-cultural—i.e., the GAL-TAN dimension (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2002)—rather than socio-economic values have grown in Finland and laid their mark on both the parties and voters. As has been mentioned throughout this book, the populist the Finns party surged in popularity in the 2011 parliamentary election largely on an anti-EU, anti-immigration, anti-minority, and anti-environmental protection rhetoric, and the party has been able to uphold its strong support in the parliamentary election that has followed.

Furthermore, in Chapter 8 (Grönlund and Söderlund), the analyses show that there has been significant movement in voter's average positions on the GAL-TAN dimension, which is centered around the same issues as the populist's agenda. Furthermore, the positioning of the voters of different parties on the same dimension has clearly spread out more, or become more sorted, over time so that certain "signpost" parties of the GAL (the Green League and Left Alliance) and TAN (The Finns and Christian Democrats) have emerged. The GAL-TAN dimension has doubled its explanatory power on party choice between 2003 and 2019, and it is a particularly strong predictor of support for the Finns (TAN values) and the Green League (GAL values). Borg and Paloheimo's findings (Chapter 9) similarly indicate that some of the components of socio-cultural values, especially traditional values versus liberal values, matter for party identification too.

In their chapter, Kekkonen, Himmelroos, and Kawecki (Chapter 10) provided an interesting angle on how the sorting of parties is potentially reflected in citizen's levels of affective polarization towards Finnish parties. A moderate but stable increase in affective polarization is observed between 2003 and 2019. This trend has been more evident among left-leaning than right-leaning citizens and

equally evident for GAL and TAN leaning citizens. Although it is important to note that a large share of the Finnish electorate is not polarized, and that voter sorting partly explains the trend (see Chapter 10), the development can be seen as worrisome and adds to the notion of the recent Finnish elections being character-ized by turmoil. In the 2023 election (not analytically covered in this volume), a general observation is that all these GAL-TAN driven cleavages and their effects have amplified further.

Turning to the chapters on voting, the analyses shed light on how the Finnish open-list proportional election system where votes are cast for candidates on (gen-erally) unranked party lists, clearly reflects on voting behavior. Firstly, Söderlund (Chapter 11) showed that voters generally feel that both the party and the individual candidate matters for their vote, albeit with a recent slight increase in the share of citizens who feel that the party is important. The latter is likely to be driven by the (moderate) increase in affective polarization and party sorting which has followed the Finns party's growth in support, whereby certain segments of voters are more strongly motivated by the party collective, compared to the individual candidates. Söderlund's analyses also show that Finnish voters value the preferential electoral system and that the central role of candidates in the Finnish system is reflected in voters' opinions. Thus, 77 percent felt that being able to vote for a candidate is important. In the exploratory analyses, Söderlund demonstrated that people with strong party identification and more extreme ideological leaning are the ones who tend to value party over candidate in their vote. Younger and less politically inter-ested citizens tend to be more focused on candidates than parties.

Chapters 12 and 13 analyze candidate voting further. Helimäki and von Schoultz (Chapter 12) study motivations for voters' candidate choice, whereas Isotalo and von Schoultz (Chapter 13) focus on which candidate traits translates into the high-est shares of votes. It should be noted that Helimäki and von Schoultz found that party affiliation was the most important aspect that voters focus on when choosing which candidate to vote for. Beyond party affiliation, though, both chapters point to the importance of political experience for Finnish voters and candidates. Thus, political incumbency is clearly an important shortcut that voters use when plac-ing their vote, especially for older voters. Likewise, incumbents on all levels of government (i.e., MEP, MP, and local councilors) are more likely to be successful in securing intraparty votes (see Chapter 13). Isotalo and von Schoultz also found clear effects on personal votes from other factors related to name-recognitions such as being a party leader, a celebrity or having ran for election before. All these find-ings point to something of a catch-22 of the OLPR-system; most factors related to success are those that come from previous success. Thus, campaigning techniques may be one of the few ways in which unknown candidates can have success. This is confirmed in Isotalo's and von Schoultz's chapter, where they found that cam-paign spending is strongly linked to electoral success (see also Chapters 16). Other take-aways from Chapters 12 and 13 are that substantive aspects appear more im-portant for voter candidate choices than descriptive aspects such as same-gender or same-age voting. A similar pattern shows regarding vote-earning attributes where factors such as candidate gender and age have little importance.

Overall, the analyses of the second part of the volume show how the electoral- and party system sets the stage, or boundaries, for an intricate and multifaceted electoral playing field. In this sense, the duality of the Finnish electoral system, with both individual candidates and parties being of central relevance for voting be- havior and the outcome of elections, makes Finland a particularly interesting case. Furthermore, the period of analysis has been one of considerable stress regarding values, cleavages, and affective polarization. This latter has, despite the interna- tional trends towards a more personalized political arena (Rahat & Kenig, 2018; Karvonen, 2010) and dealignment between parties and voters (Schmitt, 2014), con- tributed to parties as collective actors again regaining some of their relevance.

Campaigning

When it comes to campaigning – the third theme of the volume – the era which has been under scrutiny in this volume has seen three major trends; professionaliza- tion, personalization, and, above all, digitalization that all are nowadays mainly candidate-driven rather than party-driven. Granted, the turn towards profession- alization and increased personalization of Finnish campaigning started already in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Railo et al., 2016) and digital campaigning took its first steps in the late 1990s, so the observations on campaigning in the chapters of this book mainly serve to underline that these trends are continuously developing from each election.

In this regard, Söderlund (Chapter 15) found that while the overall reported emphasis of candidates' campaigns is evenly distributed across either the candidate him- or herself or on the party, the candidates nevertheless emphasize personal campaign issues and personal records more than their party's main issues and re- cords in the actual campaigning. Being a young candidate was especially impact- ful for a candidate-centered focus in campaigning. This lends some support to the notion we presented in the previous section on how campaigning is the main tool that candidates lacking incumbency, experience, and name-recognition can use to break in on the electoral playing field so-to-speak. Söderlund also concluded that the campaign focus of Finnish candidates is very heterogenic and thus reflective of the party- and electoral system itself. The likelier a candidate is to succeed in being elected, the likelier she or he focuses on her-/himself. Other candidates that know that they are running to fill out the party's list and thus gather collective votes tend to focus on the party to a higher extent.

Mattila's (Chapter 16) analysis of the actual campaign forms and how these relate to electoral success reflect the professionalization and personalization of campaigning in Finland. He found, firstly, that candidates use a broad range of campaign techniques, most of which were entirely handled by their own campaign- groups and not the party. This, of course, reflects what has been stressed through- out this book that the Finnish system is candidate focused. This also applies for the main responsibility for running campaigns (see Introduction and Karvonen, 2010; von Schoultz, 2018). Furthermore, Mattila's findings indicate a professional marketing approach whereby candidates spread out their campaign messages over

several different forms. This is often referred to as a long-tail marketing approach (see Anderson, 2006). When analyzing factors explain electoral success, Mattila's findings further show how important professionalism and the individual candidates are. Thus, campaign funding matters which, of course, is a core trait of a professional campaign. On average, getting elected requires a campaign budget that is over four times bigger than the average budget of all candidates (Table 16.2 in Chapter 16). Furthermore, the experiences of the candidate herself or himself are crucial significant factors for electoral success.

Mattila also found, finally, that digital forms of campaigning are predominant among Finnish candidates with social media leading the way, but with traditional forms of campaigning remaining important. Facebook is the most used campaigning tool and all digital techniques add up to 53 percent of the campaign tolls that Finnish candidates deem to be the most important part of their campaign. Digital campaigning was also more effective for electoral success than traditional campaigning, almost being statistically significant even when campaign spending and political experience is considered. These findings, of course, indicate the digitalization trend of Finnish campaigning. While, as stated earlier, the digitalization of Finnish campaigning had started before the elections studied in this book, the 2003–2019 era is certainly the one in which the phenomenon exploded and took over among candidates (Chapter 16, see also Strandberg & Borg, 2020).

The digitalization trend is also very evident in Carlson's and Strandberg's (Chapter 14) analyses of inter-generational patterns in voters' use of online sources for following the elections. Firstly, they observe a general steep rise in the use of both older (web 1.0) and newer (web 2.0) forms of online sources among all generations of voters. The first of which rose from 9 percent in 2003 to 52 percent in 2019 and the latter of which rose from 11 percent in 2011 to 37 percent in 2019. Secondly, Carlson and Strandberg showed that the digitalization of following campaigns among voters is, most unsurprisingly, the clearest among the digital natives that is generation Z (those born 1995 or later). Nevertheless, all but the oldest generations of Finnish voters nowadays use online sources, to a large extent, for following elections. An interesting finding from the explanatory analyses in Chapter 14 is that using social media to follow elections is not predicted by resource-based factors such as education level or social class, and neither by having a high level of political interest. Thus, digitalization is not only breaking patterns of *how* politics is followed but also regarding *who* are following. In the 2023 election, this became even more evident when some young, inexperienced populist candidates where able to reach entirely new voter groups through TikTok (Äijälä, 2023).

A given summary of the chapters on campaigning is the same as for the previous section; the electoral- and party system set the boundaries for a heterogenic and evolving campaigning. The analyses have shown how digitalization has become predominant among both candidates and voters, a trend which is bound to continue since all new generations of candidates and voters alike are digital natives. A normative view on campaigning in Finland is that it is generally healthy, albeit that the high costs of getting elected may become problematic (see Chapter 16 for discussion on this) since candidates become reliant on funders (who have their policy

preferences). The 2023 election (not analyzed in this book) also saw a clear turn towards more negative campaigning than ever before in Finland (Laakso, 2023). Again, this development has mostly been driven by the populist Finns party and its candidates.

Conclusions

What, then, are the main take-aways from this book? First of all, the analyses have shown that the mechanisms of both electoral supply and demand are largely shaped by the institutional context. The party- and electoral system nudges both candidates and voters towards certain behavior and shape campaigning norms and practices. To put it simple, an individual-focused system places a lot of responsibility on individual candidates and makes voters inclined to place a lot of emphasis on individual candidates too. That said, the book has also demonstrated the heterogeneity hidden within this broader electoral framework, so this conclusion is to be taken as indicative, not definitive. Secondly, the period in time that the book focused on has been one of changes. Although the direction of causality is not proven here, the surge in popularity of the Finns party appears to be in the center of driving values towards polarization, in altering voting behavior and campaigning practices. Whether these observations are the start of a new era in Finnish electoral democracy remains to be seen. After all, the analyses here also observed stability regarding aspects such as class voting and left-right values. Nevertheless, the observations show that even a Nordic welfare democracy is not immune to the current global trends of populism and polarization.

Finally, we chose to end on a methodological conclusion since this book—as stated in the Introduction chapter—was conceived to celebrate 20 years of the Finnish National Election Study. Thus, we feel that the analyses and findings throughout the book have served to emphasize the importance that continuous collection of voter surveys holds. Such data can be used for tracing longitudinal developments, for comparisons with other countries and, as was the case with the Comparative Candidate Study data here, for analysis in conjunction with candidate data. So hopefully, in another 20 years, a similar book this one will emerge to celebrate the Finnish National Election Study. Until then, happy 20th anniversary to the Finnish National Election Study!

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