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1 An Introduction to the Finnish Electoral Context

Åsa von Schoultz and Kim Strandberg

Introduction

Elections are fundamental in representative democratic systems. In elections, voters are able to hold governments accountable for their actions and to express support for future policies. By analyzing the political behavior of citizens, the motivations behind their vote choices, and the processes that shape the outcome of elections, we get a better understanding of how a particular democracy works. This book, thus, zooms in on contemporary political behavior in Finland, a Western European country less well known to the public than many other countries belonging to the same region. One reason as to why Finland as a political arena and Finnish political behavior have featured to a limited extent in international scholarship is the comparatively late introduction of a national program for election and voter studies. It was not until after the turn of the new millennium that a group of scholars decided to join efforts and establish the Finnish National Election Study (FNES) consortium, and to collect regular voter surveys at times of parliamentary elections.

One purpose of this book is to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the FNES. The primary aim is, however, to provide readers interested in political behavior and Finnish politics with an interesting and comprehensive read, covering classical topics in political behavior, and with extended insights into Finnish elections and democracy. Finland is in many ways a fascinating democracy. Today, the country can be classified as a typical Western European democracy with a proportional electoral system with relatively stable governments and a relatively stable structure of coherent political parties. From a historical perspective, however, Finland was for long perceived as an outlier in the Western European sphere. The country had up until the 1990s a distinct semi-presidential system with a president who held substantial political powers (Duverger, 1980). The sensitive geopolitical location manifested by a border to Russia spanning over 1,300 km and a complex and intertwined relationship with the eastern neighbor also positioned Finland in a gray zone in terms of international politics during the cold war. Finnish national politics was in its earlier periods further marked by a high degree of party system polarization, with a strong communist party dividing the left, and of government instability (for an overview, see Karvonen et al., 2016, 18–21).

The transformation of Finnish politics started after the long reign of President Urho Kekkonen (1956–1981). It accelerated with the ending of the cold war and with Finland joining the EU in 1996, and was in many ways finalized with the introduction of a new constitution at the turn of the millennium, which formally established the decreased political powers of the President (Karvonen et al., 2016, 11). While the Finnish president still has substantial powers within the field of foreign policy, the development converted Finland to a country firmly rooted in the Western sphere, with a more distinct parliamentary system and a more open political culture. While recent changes in the international arena, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have again underlined the delicate geographical position of Finland, today there is no gray zone in terms of collaboration and positioning, which is further manifested by the country's recent ascendancy into membership in the security alliance NATO.

Returning to the political situation after the turn of the millennium, Finland has some features of particular interest for scholars interested in political behavior and elections – features that will be highlighted throughout this volume. The key institutional structure which today makes Finland into a particularly interesting case is that votes are cast for individual candidates rather than for a collective party list and the effects this has on the dynamics of elections and campaigning. The mandatory preferential voting for a single candidate makes the political arena highly personalized, with a high degree of competition not only between parties but also within parties. It further has substantial effects on how elections are played out with a combination of party and candidate-centered political competition, campaigning, and media coverage, which can be challenging for voters to navigate (Söderlund et al., 2021). The strong personalization in Finnish politics has contributed to an early professionalization of political campaigning and to Finland being one of the first adopters of online and social media campaigning (Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Isotalus, 1998).

In what follows, we will provide an overview of the central features of contemporary Finnish democracy that are useful for contextualizing the more in-depth analyses in the following chapters. This will include the central political institutions such as the electoral system but also structural features such as the party system and the main political cleavages, and the development of political campaigning. After this, we move on to an overview of the volume and the 15 thematically oriented chapters it entails.

Finland's political system

Finland is a relatively young state, gaining its independence in 1917. Up until 1809, what today constitutes Finland was a part of Sweden, often referred to as the eastern part of the kingdom, after which the country was a Grand Duchy of Russian Empire for roughly a century. As a part of the process toward full independence from Russia, Finland held its first parliamentary election already in 1907. This first election was arranged according to the, at that time, radical Parliament Act of 1906, including universal and equal suffrage, with eligibility to vote and stand as candidate for adult women and men of 24 years of age or older. This made Finland the first European

country to grant women the right to vote. The electoral system adopted was proportional representation with relatively large constituencies. The rationale behind the 1906 Parliamentary Act was to foster national unity by allowing all adults the right to vote and ensuring wide representation of different societal groups in the Finnish parliament (for more on this see Raunio, 2005). The first decades of Finnish democracy were, however, characterized by internal conflicts with a civil war, linguistic conflict, a strong right extremist movement and repeated labor market struggles. In addition, the country fought two wars against its neighbor in the east.

Today, Finland is a parliamentary democracy and a unitary state but with a recently introduced (2023) regional government responsible for organizing health, social, and rescue services, and a local government with more than 300 municipalities. As part of its Swedish heritage, Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, Finnish (spoken by 87 percent of the population) and Swedish (spoken by about 5 percent), given an equal status in the constitution. Until the turn of the millennium, Finland was classified as a semi-presidential system. Especially during the long presidency of Urho Kekkonen, the far-reaching constitutional powers of the presidency were used to control domestic politics and government formation to guarantee a stable foreign policy line and to avoid tension in the sensitive Finnish–Soviet relations that marked Finnish politics until the end of the Cold War (Karvonen, 2014, 14). With the new constitution introduced with the new millennium, the powers of the presidency were substantially reduced, and its former powers over cabinet formation were abolished (Paloheimo, 2016, 57–66).

The earlier patterns of high degree of party system polarization (Sartori, 2005, 129) and government instability (Gallagher et al., 2001, 366) have, in the post-Kekkonen era, been replaced by consensus (Mickelsson, 2007) and government stability (Karvonen, 2014, 73). In Finnish politics of today, ideological differences are less pronounced, and governing coalitions can be formed among virtually all parties (Karvonen, 2016, 122). The most common type of Finnish government has been a surplus (or oversized) majority coalition. The high occurrence of this type of government is unique by European standards (Karvonen, 2014, 7, see also Chapter 4.). Voting in the Finnish parliament – the Eduskunta or Riksdagen in Swedish – is characterized by a high level of intraparty voting cohesion, particularly among the parties constituting the government in power (Pajala, 2013, 44).

The party system

In terms of party politics, Karvonen et al. (2016) point toward five characterizing qualities: a high degree of *party system fragmentation*, the absence of a *dominating party*, the strength of *the Centre Party* (agrarian), recurrent waves of *populist protest* and an increased *weakness of the left*. The Finnish multiparty system is, indeed, one of the most fragmented in Western Europe with an average effective number of parties of more than five in the post-World War II era (Bengtsson et al., 2014, 29). The party system was, however, for long relatively stable and tended to consist of seven parties winning over 90 percent of the vote in almost all parliamentary elections.

The core of the party system was up until the parliamentary election of 2011 constituted by three medium-sized parties with a historical basis in two cleavages and three major poles of conflict: labor/workers (the Social Democratic Party), capital/business owners (the National Coalition Party), and the rural periphery/farmers (the Centre Party) (Rokkan, 1987, 81–95). The oldest of the Finnish parties is the *Social Democratic Party* (SDP), formed in 1899 to represent the interests of the workers. The party was, however, split between reformist social democrats and communists in 1922, and the left has since been divided with a relatively strong (former) Communist Party and, seen from an international perspective, relatively weak Socialist Party. In the election in 2019, the SDP won close to 18 percent of the vote. The National Coalition (KOK) was formed in 1918 but has roots in the Finnish Party formed in 1863 to further the position of the Finnish language and independence. The party of today is a classic right-wing party focused on economic policy. The Conservative Party won 17 percent of the vote in the 2019 election. The *Centre Party* (KESK, earlier the Agrarian Party) was formed to defend the interests of independent small and medium-sized farms but has along with comparatively late but intense Finnish urbanization been successful in winning the support of the population residing in the countryside and peripheral towns. The Centre Party (KESK) won 21 percent of the vote in the 2015 parliamentary election and became the largest party in the parliament. In 2019, the success turned into a historical setback, and the party won less than 14 percent of the vote. These three parties – the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the National Coalition (KOK), and the Centre Party (KESK) – have dominated political competition in Finland, and two of the three have, in altering constellations, generally constituted the central components of the government.

The smaller but fairly stable components of the party system are the Left Alliance (VAS), the Christian Democrats (KD), and the Swedish People's Party (RKP). The *Left Alliance* was formed in 1990s after the collapse of the old left Socialist-Communist Party and can be described as a green-socialist party. The party won eight percent in the 2019 election. The *Christian Democrats* has been represented in the parliament since 1970 (until 2001 the party was named the Christian League) and won just below four percent of the vote in 2019. The *Swedish People's Party* is an ethnic or linguistic party, formed already in 1906. The party has its roots in the Swedish nationalist movement, active during the heated language conflict in the second half of the 1900 century. The language issue has at times been a source of political conflict, especially up until the first half of the 2000 century (Himmelroos & Strandberg, 2020). Today, the party primarily represents the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority, constituting just above five percent of the population. The electoral support of the RKP has decreased as the Swedish-speaking population and the party won 4.5 percent of the vote in the 2019 parliamentary election.

Finland also has two newer parties, both distinct representatives of the value dimension GAL–TAN, i.e., Green–Alternative–Libertarian versus Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist values. In 2011, the populist-right party the *Finns Party* (then labeled the True Finns Party, PS) had its major breakthrough when it won 19 percent of the vote and became the third largest party in the parliament. The party has its roots in earlier agrarian populist movements. In the 1970s and 1980s, the

Rural Party fought several strong elections but faced bankruptcy in the 1995s after which the Finns Party was formed. The breakthrough of the Finns Party disrupted the traditional setup of three core parties, and the fragmentation of the system further increased. This new configuration with four medium-sized parties was continued in the 2015 and 2019 elections. Since the 1980s, Finland also had a party representing post-materialist and environmental values, the *Green League* (VIHR). The party was established as a political party in 1988, but representatives for the Green movement successfully ran as independent candidates already in the 1983 parliamentary election. The party has increased its support over the years, winning its strongest electoral support of roughly 11 percent in the 2019 election.

The electoral system

Elections to the Finnish national parliament take place on a Sunday in April every fourth year with the Ministry of Justice as the highest election authority. The electoral system is classified as an open-list proportional representation system or OLPR (for an in-depth description of the electoral system see Raunio, 2005 or von Schoultz, 2018). The 200 seats in the Eduskunta/Riksdagen are distributed in 13 districts (including the single-member district of the autonomous Åland Island), using the D'Hondt highest average method. The number of seats distributed in each district is determined based on the number of inhabitants. In the 2019 parliamentary election, district magnitude (M) ranged from 6 to 36. The variation in seats across districts has increased over time, and no fixed electoral threshold at the national level is applied. There is also no mechanism linking the share of votes a party receives at the national level with the distribution of seats at the district level. The practical implications of these rules are that the system is disadvantageous for parties with a relatively low and geographically equally distributed support.

The Finnish OLPR combines the feature of open lists with a pooling vote (Cox, 1997, 42), which makes the system highly competitive both between candidates (intraparty) and between parties (interparty). Parties and constituency associations, or an alliance of parties or constituency associations, present a single list of candidates at the district level, and all individual preference votes count for the list. The total amount of votes cast for candidates on each list determines how many seats the list is rewarded.

The aspect that makes the Finnish system stand out in comparison to most other PR systems is that the fully open-list system makes it impossible for parties or constituency organizations to guarantee the election to parliament of any individual candidate. Preferential voting is obligatory: to cast a vote, all voters are obliged to choose one candidate from a fairly large selection of aspirants, and they do so by writing the number of their preferred candidate on the ballot paper. The sole criterion in determining the party's internal ranking of candidates is the amount of preference votes each candidate receives. Moreover, most parties refrain from ranking their nominated candidates. By presenting candidates in alphabetical order on the lists, voters are left without indications of the parties' preferred order of preference. Lists are allowed to contain a maximum of 14 nominated candidates

per constituency, or, if M exceeds 14, as many candidates as there are seats to be distributed (Ministry of Justice, 2022). This generally amounts to an extensive number of candidates for voters to choose from. To provide an example: in the largest constituency of Uusimaa/Nyland, 492 candidates were nominated by 22 parties or constituency organizations in the 2019 parliamentary election.

Finnish election campaigns

When it comes to political campaigning, Finland is characterized by being a forerunner in terms of innovation and professionalization. Although Finland, like the other Nordic countries, has a strong public service media, its media system is surprisingly liberal and media ownership concentration is very low in international comparison (see Strandberg & Carlson, 2021; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Noam & Mutter, 2006). Thus, television in Finland has partially been funded by advertising since its early days and there are no regulations or limitations on political advertising. This has created a fertile ground for innovation and professionalization of political campaigning.

Campaigns in Finland also highly reflect the fact that votes are cast on candidates, not parties. While the parties run and coordinate the broader campaign highlighting main issues and themes, a lot of freedom and responsibility to the campaign is on the individual candidates (Karvonen, 2010; von Schoultz, 2018). Candidates typically have their own support groups, raise their own funds, and are free to run political advertising as they like (Mattila & Ruostetsaari, 2002). According to some estimates (Mattila & Sundberg, 2012; Moring & Borg, 2005), individual candidates handle roughly 75 percent of all campaign spending. One consequence of the freedom to advertise and the responsibility for individual candidates to campaign is that Finnish campaigning has become very personalized, focusing on party leaders as well as individual candidates' policies and image (Karvonen, 2010).

The combination of the liberal media market and individual campaigning has also brought with it a desire to innovate and try out new campaign forms (Strandberg & Carlson, 2021, 77–78). The first online campaign websites in Finland appeared already in the 1996 election for the European Parliament and the 1999 Parliamentary elections were the first in which the internet was used as a campaign platform (Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Isotalus, 1998). Finland has, thus, been, and still is, one of the global leaders in online campaigning. In the 2019 election campaign, almost 90 percent of candidates had a Facebook page and younger candidates used a wide array of social media in their campaign communication (Strandberg & Borg, 2020). Digital media also gave rise to a peculiar feature of Finnish elections; the Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) hosted on media sites since 1999. The VAAs have been the most popular feature of Finnish elections for long, both in terms of their usage by voters and the media attention (Strandberg & Carlson, 2021, 80–81). Leading up to the Parliamentary election in 2019, VAAs were used by almost 60 percent of the electorate with one-third of all voters and over 80 percent of young voters reporting that the VAAs strongly influenced their choice of candidate (Strandberg & Carlson, 2021; Strandberg & Borg, 2020).

In the era of social media, the digitalization of Finnish campaigning has further increased in both scope and speed of uptake. In fact, Strandberg and Carlson (2021, 78) deem digitalization as the main transformation of Finnish campaigning since the mid-2000s. Already in the 2007 elections, YouTube and blogs were being employed as campaigning tools by candidates. In 2011, Facebook usage by candidates surged to 88 percent and Twitter also started emerging as a campaign tool. 2015 saw Twitter use rising to above 50 percent and Instagram starting to be adopted by some candidates. In the last 2019 election, campaign Instagram use by candidates was already over 40 percent. Strandberg and Borg (2020, 118) state that by 2019 there is no doubt that digital campaigning in Finland has reached a level of maturity and professionalism and is now to be considered the most important arena for Finnish campaigning (see also Strandberg & Carlson, 2021).

The contents of the volume

This volume is the first to provide a thorough analysis of the Finnish electoral democracy of today, mainly from a voter perspective, for an international audience. The book is also the first to make use of all the FNES datasets collected between 2003 and 2019 and disseminate this knowledge for international readers. Thus, most of the chapters in this volume both describe key features of Finnish electoral behavior from a longitudinal perspective and provide thorough explanatory analyses and interpretations of the 2019 election.

The volume provides a broad assessment of Finnish electoral democracy by focusing on parties and candidates, voters and campaigning. Thus, the chapters of the volume analyze mechanisms related to the electoral output and demand. Furthermore, the volume sets the stage by describing and analyzing the core state of Finnish democracy, the electoral playing ground so-to-speak. These three aspects form themes under which the individual chapters are sorted. Thus, the first section zooms in on *the state of democracy*, the second on *the electoral connection* (voters in relation to parties and candidates) and the third on *campaigning*. We will now provide a brief overview of the chapters within these three themes.

Theme 1: The state of democracy

This theme contains five individual chapters that examine citizens' perceptions of democracy and its health (Chapters 2–4) as well as participation in both elections and other activities (Chapters 5 and 6). Together, these chapters shed light on the core functioning of Finnish electoral democracy and citizens' trust in it as well as highlighting potential challenges in the forthcoming years.

Chapter 2: What kind of democracy do people want? By Lauri Rapeli and Kim Strandberg

In this chapter, Lauri Rapeli and Kim Strandberg focus on Finnish voters' support for different models of democracy. Specifically, they describe the longitudinal

development of support for representative-, direct-, deliberative-, and stealth democracy. Furthermore, the chapter studies individual-level explanations along an ideology-based and dissatisfaction-based perspective for supporting these democracy models at the time of the Parliamentary election in 2019. The findings show that representative democracy has the strongest support followed by deliberative democracy, direct democracy and stealth democracy. Support for various models of democracy was found to best be explained by dissatisfaction, or satisfaction, with representative democracy. Thus, people being satisfied with democracy and its institutions and actors support representative democracy whereas various constellations of dissatisfied citizens support the other models.

Chapter 3: Finland: A country of high political trust and weak political self-efficacy. By Maria Bäck, Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen and Thomas Karv

This chapter studies trust in political institutions and actors as well as political self-efficacy among the Finnish citizens. The longitudinal development of both aspects is presented for the years 2011–2019 and 2003–2019, respectively. In the explanatory part, the authors use political self-efficacy as the main independent variable for explaining variations in political trust. The descriptive findings in the chapter essentially show that political trust in Finland has been high and stable over time. The picture for political self-efficacy is the opposite: it has been stable but low over time. In explaining high levels of political trust, the chapter shows that political self-efficacy only has a weak significant effect whereby low efficacy explains high trust and high efficacy explains low trust. The most important explanatory factors for high political trust are social trust, strong identification with a political party and positive evaluations of the MP's competence.

Chapter 4: In safe elections, democracy wins: Perceptions of electoral harassment among candidates and voters. By Veikko Isotalo and Hanna Wass

This chapter focuses on what might be deemed as an increasing threat to democracies worldwide within the hybrid-threat era we are currently living in: electoral harassment. Specifically, the chapter studies the extent to which candidates and citizens reported that they had experienced various forms of harassment in the 2019 election. The authors also focus on whether certain types of citizens and candidates are more prone to be harassed than others are. This chapter incorporates data from the Finnish parliamentary candidate study 2019 to shed light on candidates' experiences alongside the FNES data for citizens' experiences. The main results of the chapter are that candidates report a much higher extent of harassment than voters. The most common types of harassment are disinformation, negative campaigns against certain candidates and various DDOS attacks on websites (traffic overload) or negative spamming on social media accounts. Regarding the question of whether certain types of candidates and voters experience harassment to a higher extent, the findings show that younger candidates seem to experience more harassment. Among voters, this age pattern is also evident as is an effect that women experienced harassments more than men.

Chapter 5: Foiled at every turn? Understanding turnout in Finland. By Theodora Helimäki and Hanna Wass

In this chapter, Helimäki and Wass provide an in-depth overview and explanatory contemplation on one of the main puzzles of the otherwise healthy Finnish democracy: the relatively low turnout in general elections. The chapter provides a longitudinal description of turnout in Finnish parliamentary elections according to gender (1908–2019), age (1987–2019) and education level (1987–2019). For these aspects, the main findings are that modern Finnish elections have a reversed gender gap whereby women vote more than men do. Furthermore, life-cycle differences in turnout are shown to gradually becoming less pronounced over time, partly due to generational differences in turnout levels. For education level differences in turnout, the chapter demonstrates that what was already a substantial gap between lower and higher educated citizens in 1987 has grown even bigger into 2019. The final part of the chapter contemplates the applicability of two explanation models for turnout in Finland: an institutional-level factors model and an individual-level factors model. The former of these discusses effective electoral thresholds, effective number of parties and electoral uncertainty. The latter model contemplates socio-economic factors and their transmission over generations through political socialization. Health-related factors are also discussed.

Chapter 6: Act your age! Generational differences in political participation in Finland 2007–2019. By Janette Huttunen and Henrik Serup Christensen

The authors examine participation in nine different activities according to five voter generations: Traditionalists, Baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Furthermore, the chapter studies within these five generations how political interest, left-right ideology, GAL-TAN position, and satisfaction with democracy associate to different participatory activities. The findings show that boycotts and signing petitions or citizens' initiatives are the most popular activities among Finnish citizens, whereas party activity and taking part in legal demonstrations are the least popular. Younger generations tend to be more active in new forms of activities, such as consumerism and signing citizens' initiatives, whereas no big generational differences are evident for traditional activities. Finally, the chapter shows that political interest seems to be the one attitude which, across generations, is associated most often with participatory activities. Younger generations' activities seem to be more driven by attitudes than what is the case for older generations.

Theme 2: Elections, parties and candidates

In the second theme of the volume, seven chapters that focus on various aspects of the connection between the citizens and the parties and candidates are included. Mainly, this connection is studied concerning the bases or mechanisms of citizens' vote choices (Chapters 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12). Furthermore, the section contains a chapter on how the parties tie into affective polarization among citizens (Chapter 10) as well as a look at what candidate attributes contribute to electoral success (Chapter 13).

Chapter 7: The social basis of the vote: Class voting in Finland. By Aino Tiihonen and Peter Söderlund

In this chapter, Tiihonen and Söderlund depart from cleavage theories and build a longitudinal exploration of class voting in Finland between 1984 and 2019. The main focus is on the extent to which working-class voters vote for left-wing parties, but an assessment of total class voting is also made. The FNES data is complemented by data from the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA) to build the longer time-series. The authors focus on both occupational class and self-identification into social classes. The findings show that class voting, both in terms of working class voting for leftist parties and in terms of total class voting, has declined over time in Finland but still remains at a significant level. A major part of the decline was until the early 2000s, after which the trends have plateaued. The working-class vote has gradually shifted from a leftist slant to increasingly being captured by the populist Finns Party. Self-identification with social class has a clearer association with class voting than occupational class has.

Chapter 8: Value dimensions and party choice in Finland. By Kimmo Grönlund and Peter Söderlund

In this chapter, the authors study how ideological differences within the Finnish electorate have evolved between 2003 and 2019. Specifically, the focus is on the traditional left-right dimension and the GAL-TAN value dimension. The authors also focus on how strongly value dimensions have predicted party choice over time. The results of the analyses show, first, that left-right differences are rather small and have not grown much over time. The differences regarding GAL-TAN values, secondly, are starker and have grown over time. The examination of the predictive power of value dimensions on party choice shows that GAL-TAN values have more effect on party choice than the left-right values have. The left-right dimension has only increased its importance over time for voting for the Social Democrats (SDP) and for the National Coalition Party (KOK). Looking at the impact of GAL-TAN values over time, the impact has grown significantly for the two parties representing the two most extreme positions in these values: the Green League (VIHR) and the populist Finns Party (PS).

Chapter 9: Party identification. By Sami Borg and Heikki Paloheimo

This chapter studies the extent to which Finnish citizens display identification with, or attachment to, political parties. The authors also focus on which party's citizens feel close to, and the explanatory part of the chapter seeks to explain this party identification. The latter of which uses sociodemographic variables (gender and age), native language, subjective class identification, area of residence and a number of attitudinal value orientations as potential explanations of party identification.

The descriptive trends show that party identification has grown overall in Finland between 2003 and 2019, from 44 percent to 60 percent of citizens feeling close to the party. Regarding which specific parties people feel close to, the Finns party appears to be the main party that has grown the most (from 1 percent to 18 percent). This seems to have been due to people feeling close to the Social Democrats and the Centre Party shifting allegiances as these two parties have seen the biggest declines in the share of citizens feeling close to them. The explanatory analyses reveal rather differing factors explaining support for specific parties. An interesting pattern is found regarding GAL-TAN values which form strong predictors for the parties at either end of the spectrum (Greens/Left vs. The Finns/Christian Democrats).

Chapter 10: Friends and foes: Affective polarization among Finnish voters.
By Arto Kekkonen, Staffan Himmelroos and Daniel Kawecki.

The authors examine developments in affective polarization among the electorate between 2003 and 2019. Furthermore, they seek to understand differences regarding affective polarization at both ideological and individual levels. The authors focus on three cleavages across which they study affective polarization: political parties, socioeconomic values (left-right) and sociocultural values (GAL-TAN). The findings over time show a clear increase in party-based affective polarization. Looking at ideological drivers of affective polarization, the analyses show that extreme positions for the socioeconomic as well as the sociocultural dimensions are the ones who have polarized the most over time. At the individual level, the authors find that the intensity of GAL-TAN values appears to be an important driver of affective polarization. Party identification and vote choices are also important predictors.

Chapter 11: Parties and candidates as objects of electoral choice.
By Peter Söderlund

This chapter sheds light on one of the key features of the Finnish electoral system: the attention voters pay to either candidate or party when casting their votes. Söderlund describes and explains both the extent to which voters vote for candidates rather than for parties and the attitudes toward preference voting for individual candidates in Finland. The descriptive findings show that the party has, over time, become slightly more important than candidates are for citizens' vote choice. The Finnish electorate nonetheless displays a strong level of support for the ability to vote for individual candidates. The explanatory analyses mainly reveal a pattern whereby political sophistication and attachment to a party are the main dividers of voters seeing the party or candidate as more important for their vote choices. As to support for the ability to cast votes on candidates, the findings show that age seems to be the main driver of this whereby older citizens value the current candidate-focused electoral system the most.

Chapter 12: How to find a needle in a haystack: Which candidate characteristics matter for voters' choice of candidate? By Theodora Helimäki and Åsa von Schoultz

This chapter examines Finnish voters' evaluation of factors that are important for their choice of candidate and how these have developed between 2003 and 2019. Helimäki and von Schoultz also explore which type of voters are prone to use certain types of heuristics in their decision-making process when choosing which candidate to vote for. The factors in focus in the chapter are the candidate's party affiliation, their age, previous experience in politics, gender, and their locality. The findings show that party affiliation is the most important attribute for Finnish voters and has been so during the whole period of study (2003–2019). Political experience of a candidate is the second most important factor followed locality, gender, and, lastly, age. The explanatory part of the chapter explains five types of voter heuristics: same-gender voting, same-age voting, locality voting, ideological proximity voting, and political experience-based voting. The main differences found between factors explaining these various voting-heuristics are age, interest in politics, and closeness to a party.

Chapter 13: What makes a successful candidate in the Finnish open-list proportional election system? By Veikko Isotalo and Åsa von Schoultz

This chapter studies individual, so-called, vote-earning attributes of candidates and how these relate to earning actual votes. This topic is first explored longitudinally for candidate gender, incumbency, political experience, and celebrity status. For these, the findings show that gender and celebrity status do not seem to make a difference in votes earned, whereas incumbency and political experience do. In the explanatory part of the chapter, the authors seek to explain candidates' individual vote shares in light of eight independent variables: being an MEP, MP, party leader, celebrity, local councilor, previous experience, age, and gender. The effect of these on vote shares are exactly in the order they were listed. Thus, being an MEP has a strong effect, followed by incumbency as MP and so forth. Further supplementary analyses also revealed that campaign spending has a clear independent effect on vote shares as well.

Theme 3: Campaigning

The final theme of the volume is about campaigning, which is arguably the main mechanism that connects citizens to parties and candidates. Without campaigning, parties and candidates would be rather unknown objects for citizens and, thus, also very hard to form opinions on and to cast votes for. The chapters in this theme focus on what candidates emphasize in their campaigning (Chapter 15), which specific campaign activities they engage in and with what level of funding (Chapter 16) as well as the extent to which different generations of Finnish voters follow campaigns via the internet and social media (Chapter 14).

Chapter 14: Generational patterns in voters' use of the internet and social media in Finnish parliamentary elections 2003–2019. By Tom Carlson and Kim Strandberg

In this chapter, Carlson and Strandberg provide a longitudinal overview of citizens' use of both so-called Web 1.0 (party/candidate websites, blogs, VAAs, and online election news) and Web 2.0 (social media, YouTube et cetera) information channels for following elections. This is broken up according to generations of voters: traditionalists and boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. The authors, thus, focus on whether certain generations use the Internet and social media to a larger extent than other generations do. Furthermore, in the explanatory part, the authors focus on the 2019 election and explain Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 use in light of the generations, demographic factors, political interest, efficacy, and engagement in political discussion. Explanatory analyses are also done within each generation. The longitudinal trends for both Web 1.0 and 2.0 unsurprisingly show that the younger the generation, the higher the extent of usage is. The regression analyses confirm that belonging to the younger generations predicts a high extent of using the Internet and social media. Other significant predictors are political interest and engaging in political discussion in everyday life. A notable finding within the youngest Generation Z is that political interest does not predict the high use of social media in the following elections.

Chapter 15: Candidates and campaigning. By Peter Söderlund

In this chapter, using data from the Comparative candidate survey, Söderlund first explores variations in campaign styles among individual candidates at the constituency level between 2007 and 2019. He focuses specifically on to what degree candidates have pursued a personal vote rather than a party vote. Furthermore, he focuses on longitudinal trends in the tendency of individual candidates to campaign on their own personal strengths. Finally, the analyses identify factors that explain variation in the level of campaign personalization across candidates. The findings show that candidates focus on either party or themselves is a rather even split. In the 2019 election, a slightly higher share of candidates did state that they focused more on their own attention than the parties in their campaign. Söderlund's findings also show that roughly 80 percent of candidates focus on issues relevant to them as individuals and also on their own personal characteristics. Nevertheless, the candidates also emphasize party-related issues and merits to a high extent which indicates that campaign focus between party and candidate is not a zero-sum game. The explanatory analyses of what explains an individualized campaign show that, among other, candidates who perceive their chances to get elected and are in competitive races tend to campaign in an individualized and personalized way.

Chapter 16: Individualized Campaigning in the Finnish Open-List System

By Mikko Mattila

In the final chapter of the volume's analytical chapters, Mattila examines, using the Comparative candidate survey, how important various campaign activities, or specific tools, were for candidates in the 2019 election campaign. He also provides an overview of campaign spending for all candidates running in the election. Finally, the explanatory part of the chapter seeks to explain candidates' vote shares in light of campaign variables, candidate experience, and with control for sociodemographic variables. Mattila's findings show that Facebook was considered the most important campaign tool by the candidates. Generally, candidates tended to favor campaign activities that are tailored for individualized, rather than party-focused, campaigning. Regarding campaign spending, the overview shows that candidates spent, on average, 8,000 euros on their campaign. Elected candidates spent 35,000 euros or more. Mattila notes that younger candidates tended to spend more on their campaign than older candidates did. In explaining the candidates' number of votes, Mattila finds that campaign funding is an important factor. Interestingly, though, a focus on digital rather than traditional campaigning appears to yield votes as well. Lastly, candidate experience as either an incumbent MP or as a local councilor has very strong effects on votes as well.

Data [reference to data appendix]

Main data: FNES (including CSES Module)

Other data used: Finnish Parliamentary Candidates Study 2019; CCS; EVA data (Tiihonen & Söderlund, ch. 7). VAA-datasets (Isotalo & von Schoultz, ch. 13).

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