



2020-21

Legislative International Education Study Group

OVERVIEW OF FINLAND'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Political Structure:^{1,2}

- Finland is a parliamentary representative republic with both a popularly elected president, whose role is mostly ceremonial, and a parliament with a cabinet and a prime minister.
- Finland has a 200-member unicameral parliament (Eduskunta). Almost all members are directly elected in single- and multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote to four-year terms. The most recent parliamentary elections were held in April 2019 (see below). They will be held again in April 2023.³
- Finland's president is directly elected by absolute majority popular vote for a six-year term and is eligible to serve a second term. The current president, Sauli Niinisto, was elected in 2012 and reelected in 2018. The next presidential election will be held in 2024.⁴
- Finland's prime minister is appointed by the Eduskunta.⁵ The current prime minister, Sanna Marin, was appointed in December 2019 (see below).⁶

Political Context:

Finland has a strong history of multi-party politics, with no one party having majority control for long.

In 2015, the Center Party won the majority of parliamentary seats and formed a coalition with the National Coalition Party and the relatively new Finns Party. The Finns Party was formed in 1995 and is a nationalist, Euro-sceptic and anti-establishment party. The 2015 coalition was the first time the Finns Party had participated in government. However, in March 2019, just a month before parliamentary elections in April, the coalition government fell apart.

The April 2019 national election was the first in Finland's history in which no party came away with more than 20 percent of the vote. The Social Democrats secured 17.7 percent of the vote after a campaign focused mainly on reforming the expensive healthcare and welfare system and responding to the threat of climate change. The far-right Finns Party secured nearly as much support (17.5 percent of the vote), and recent

¹ Excerpted from ["Finland: Political Forces at a Glance,"](#) *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, December 4, 2019

² Excerpted from ["Finland: Political Structure,"](#) *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, December 4, 2019

³ Excerpted from ["Government: Finland,"](#) *The CIA World Factbook*, December 17, 2019

⁴ Excerpted from ["Government: Finland,"](#) *The CIA World Factbook*, December 17, 2019

⁵ Excerpted from ["Government: Finland,"](#) *The CIA World Factbook*, December 17, 2019

⁶ "Who is Sanna Marin, Finland's 34-Year-Old Prime Minister?" (Megan Specia, *The New York Times*, December 10, 2019)

polls indicate that the Finns Party has gained additional support since then.⁷ The Finns Party's platform was anti-immigration and anti-policies to address climate change. The center-right National Coalition Party finished in third place with 17 percent of the vote. The Center Party finished fourth with 13.8 percent of the vote.

After the election, five parties – the Social Democrats, the Center Party, the Green League, the Left Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party – formed a coalition led by the Social Democrats. The coalition promised to increase spending to preserve the country's generous social benefits, respond to climate change, and continue a pro-Europe outlook. Social Democrat Antti Rinne was appointed prime minister in June 2019.

In December 2019, less than six months after his appointment, Rinne was forced to resign over criticism of his handling of a postal workers' strike. Sanna Marin, also a Social Democrat, became the world's youngest prime minister when she was chosen to replace Rinne in early December.⁸

⁷ "Who is Sanna Marin, Finland's 34-Year-Old Prime Minister?" (Megan Specia, *The New York Times*, December 10, 2019)

⁸ "Who is Sanna Marin, Finland's 34-Year-Old Prime Minister?" (Megan Specia, *The New York Times*, December 10, 2019)