

## The 1972 Parliamentary Election in Finland

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### 1. The Framework of the Election

The Presidents of the Finnish Republic have used their power of dissolution rather sparingly. The elections of 1954 and 1962 were held following a dissolution, but those decisions only moved the election from July to March and February of the normal election year. The last time the Eduskunta had been dissolved before serving through the first half of its term was in 1930.

The Election Act of 1969 was fully implemented in 1972. Only political parties were now permitted to nominate candidates. According to the 1969 Law on Political Parties, political parties are defined as those associations which the Ministry of Justice has entered in an official party register. Any party failing to gain a parliamentary seat in two consecutive elections will lose its party status, and new parties will be recognized only if they present a petition signed by the minimum of 5000 enfranchised supporters. Those 1969 reforms that had already been implemented in the 1970 election include the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 20 years, the right to nominate the same person as a candidate in one constituency only, the requirement that the local election boards notify each elector by postcard where he is registered and when and where the voting will take place, and the three more hours' time allowed for voting on the first election day (a Sunday), both days now starting at 9 a.m. and closing at 8 p.m.

The legal time table of the election was the following:

- October 29, 1971, the President ordered the new election;
- November 12, 1971, the last day of presenting candidates to the Central Election Boards;
- December 13, 1971, the first day of advance voting by post in hospitals and other institutions, in Finnish Embassies, etc. abroad, and in 815 selected postoffices;
- January 2–3, 1972, the election days; immediately followed by ballot counting at 8 p.m. on Monday;
- January 22, 1972, the meetings of the Central Election Boards announcing the official returns (delayed by a special law in order to provide the old parliament with necessary time to finish its most urgent business; the Budget for 1972 was actually passed on January 14);
- February 1, 1972, the beginning of the four-year term of the new Eduskunta.

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however, forced the parties to campaign with some efficiency at least during those three weeks preceding the election. Because the new parliament did not meet sooner than four weeks after the election, the first cabinet negotiations were carried on formally among the party leaders as individuals and not among the representatives of the newly elected parliament groups.

Two political parties did not cooperate in election alliances. They nominated the full number of candidates (199 with no candidate for Aaland), namely the Social Democrats (as usual), and the Conservatives (for the first time since 1939). The previous cooperation of the (communist) FPD and the Social Democratic League continued now in seven constituencies and the FPD and SDL ran separately in seven others. The Centre Party was alone in seven, in an alliance with the Liberals in five, and with the Swedish People's Party in two constituencies. The Rural Party and the Christian League acted jointly in ten and separately in four constituencies. The total number of candidates competing for the 200 seats was 1295.

## 2. The Campaign

The resignation of the Cabinet of Prime Minister Ahti Karjalainen and the dissolution of the parliament immediately thereafter were due to a disagreement on agricultural income. The demands presented by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers pushed the farm prize issue to the forefront in October, and it was no longer possible to hold the SDP/Centre/LPP/SPP coalition together. The mutual fight of the Social Democrats and the (agrarian) Centre Party then became the central theme of the campaign. Obviously such a leading role was beneficial to both actors: it increased the victory of the SDP and moderated the loss of the Centre.

However, the campaign contained plenty of arguing and guess-work regarding the real or implicit reasons for this election, and the electorate seemed confused and unconvinced about the utility of the unexpected election. Hence issues and general themes were lacking in the campaign of 1972. Some parties only carried through their minimum election routine, and few produced actual platforms. The three socialist parties did find a common theme in income distribution. The SDP had the best prepared and most efficient organization in this generally mild, colourless, and nervous campaign.

A few additional characteristics of the campaign might be singled out. For example, the socialist/bourgeois cleavage was seen in the fairly class-conscious attitudes of the three leftist parties, but the non-socialists did not reply to this challenge. The government/opposition layout was apparent in the critique presented by the opposition parties and the defense of the government by its two small partners, the Liberals and the Swedes, whose defense perhaps revealed a desire to be included in the next coalition also. The Conservatives may have been handicapped by their outsider image, while the other opposition party, the Rural Party, was generally criticized for inefficiency. The FPD was handicapped by its internal antagonisms. The moderate and the hard-core communist wings competed for personal votes, and the SDL was the third wheel in seven constituencies. However, the intra-communist struggle did not seem to cause alienating cross pressures. The FPD campaign was able to hide it from the less knowledgeable electors, while it activated party identifiers to take sides in the internal fight. The Centre Party launched a dual strategy aiming at two images, the 'party of the whole' and the defender of the farming interests.

## 3. The Results

Finland's record turnout of 1962 (85.1 percent) has been declining slightly since then. In 1972, 81.4 percent of the electorate went to the polls. The total electorate had grown by 2.5 percent in two years, but the number of voters grew only by 1.5 percent. Three of the eight parties increased their actual number of voters. The changes were

Table 1. Results of the Parliamentary Elections in Finland in 1966, 1970, and 1972

Political Parties	Votes			Percentages			Seats		
	1966	1970	1972	1966	1970	1972	1966	1970	1972
Finnish People's Democratic League*	502,635	420,556	438,757	21.2	16.6	17.0	41	36	37
Social Democratic League	61,274	35,453	25,527	2.6	1.4	1.0	7	—	—
Social Democratic Party	645,539	594,185	664,724	27.2	23.4	25.8	55	52	55
Finnish Rural Party	24,351	265,939	236,206	1.0	10.5	9.2	1	18	18
Christian League†	10,800	28,547	65,288	0.4	1.1	2.5	—	1	4
Centre Party	503,047	434,150	423,039	21.2	17.1	16.4	49	36	35
Liberal People's Party	153,259	150,823	132,955	6.5	5.9	5.1	9	8	7
National Coalition ‡	326,928	457,582	453,434	13.8	18.0	17.6	26	37	34
Swedish People's Party**	141,688	144,436	138,079	6.0	5.7	5.4	12	12	10
Others	725	4,111	.	0.0	0.2	.	—	—	.
Total valid ballots	2,370,046	2,535,782	2,577,949	99.9	99.9	100.0	200	200	200
Disqualified ballots	8,537	8,728	9,111						
Total electorate	2,800,461	3,094,359	3,178,169						
Percentage turnout	84.9	82.2	81.4						

\* Includes the Finnish Communist Party.

† Includes minor Christian groups in 1966.

‡ Conservative Party.

\*\* Includes the Aaland Coalition.

the following: The Christian League + 129 percent, the SDP + 12 percent, the FPDL + 4 percent, the Conservatives - 1 percent, the Centre - 3 percent, the Swedes - 4 percent, the Rural Party - 11 percent, the Liberals - 12 percent, and the SDL - 28 percent.

The combined proportion voting for the three socialist parties grew from 41.4 percent in 1970 to 43.8 percent in 1972. This means some movement leftward but remains far below the results of 1966, when the left received 51.0 percent of the votes and obtained 103 seats. In Finland's nine elections since World War II, the non-socialist majority has only twice become larger than now (in 1962, 113-87; in 1970, 112-88; in 1972, 108-92).

If there was a surprise in 1972, it was the stabilization of the seat distribution. The Rural Party returned again with 18 members, and the SDL remained seatless. The government party SDP and the opposition party Christian League gained three seats each, and the FPDL won one seat. Losses were encountered both by the government parties, SPP, LPP, and Centre, and the opposition Conservatives.

Because the d'Hondt system of proportional representation tends to be kind to the large parties (and therefore also to electoral alliances) when the 'last seats' are distributed in the constituencies, joint electoral alliances of two or more parties may change the seat distribution to some extent. Thus the actual party composition of the new Eduskunta might be compared with two hypothetical situations, one presuming that the votes would have been counted separately for all parties in all constituencies, and one where the whole country would constitute only one constituency (as in Israel). The three distributions are the following:

	Actual result	Without alliances	One constituency
FPDL	37	37	34
SDL	—	—	2
SDP	55	59	52
FRP	18	17	18
Christian	4	—	5
Centre	35	35	33
LPP	7	5	10
Conservative	34	36	36
Swedish	10	11	10
	200	200	200

The alliance tactic helped the FRP, the Christian League, and the LPP to 'capture' a total of six seats from the SDP and the Conservatives; the entire representation of the Christian League depended on the joint alliances it had formed with the Rural Party.

The changes that occurred in the distribution of votes both continued and reversed previous tendencies. Examples of continuity include the decrease of the Swedish percentage since 1936 and that of the Centre and the SDL votes since 1962. The Liberal vote declined now to the 1945 level of the Progressive Party. The reversals of the results of 1970 include the growth of the SDP and the FPDL, and the decline of the winners of 1970, the FRP and the Conservatives. In all elections since 1945 the changes in the LPP and the Conservative shares of the vote have been in the opposite direction, but now both went down simultaneously. The reason might be their new competition with the Christian League, the 'protest movement' of 1972.

Of the 200 members elected in 1970, 84 had no previous legislative experience. But in 1972 the incumbent candidates had a very favorable position. Ten members did not

want to be nominated for re-election, and 16 members changed 'automatically' because of changes in the allocation of seats among the constituencies and the wins and losses of the parties. The number of re-elections was 157, higher than in any election since 1954. The new legislature has a total of 165 members with previous experience, as the former (and present) Speaker, V. J. Sukselainen, the Chairman of the Communist Party, Aarne Saarinen, and some others who failed election in 1970 were also returned to the Eduskunta in 1972. The record number of women in parliament was 'stabilized' as well: 43 gained election both in 1970 and in 1972.

#### 4. The Party System and the Formation of Cabinets

Between 1945 and 1966, the parliamentary parties were of four different size categories in Finland. One might have described the party system with the equation  $0 + 3 + 1 + 2 + 1 = 7$ . There was no 'dominant' party; each of three large parties (the FPD, the SDP, and the Agrarians) had approximately one-quarter of the seats and thus had the potential of forming two-party majority coalitions; one (the Conservatives) was moderately small; two (the Progressives and the SPP) were small; and often-times a minor party completed the picture. In 1970 and again in 1972 the equation acquired a new form:  $0 + 1 + 3 + 1 + 2 + 1 = 8$ . Only the SDP remains in the large party category; the decline of the FPD and the Centre Party and the growth of the Conservatives has brought about a new group of moderately large parties, each able to control one-sixth (required to prevent urgent constitutional amendments), but with no hope of forming two-party majorities; the rise of the FRP has created a new, moderately small party; the two small ones (the LPP and the SPP) remain; and the Christians are the newest minor party. Giovanni Sartori might consider Finland a borderline case between what he calls moderate and extreme multipartism, but obviously Finland is closer to the latter type than are the other Scandinavian countries.

The Party Law of 1969 probably aims at a reduction of the number of political parties in Finland. Some signs of its effectiveness are beginning to emerge. First, it is no longer possible for new and spontaneous alternatives to be recognized on the ballots. The 1972 election statistics will not contain the column 'others', an earlier expression of political deviation and sometimes a beginning of potentially powerful political movements. Secondly, when the results were officially announced on January 22, the SDL was removed from the Party Register because of its two succeeding failures to gain representation. But the party announced that it had collected the 5000 signatures required for new parties to be officially recognized. The SDL will decide later whether it actually will continue its activity as a political party.

The impact of state support to political parties is also noticeable. First, the parties had money to invest in this hasty campaign, and, secondly, the centralized control of public subsidies seems to strengthen the position of the national leadership within the party organizations. Some doubts were even expressed in 1972 that public support might have been channelled to the benefit of some rather than all individual candidates in the campaign.

The fragmented party system does not make it easy to form government coalitions in Finland. The five-party Cabinet of Dr. Ahti Karjalainen, which was appointed on July 17, 1970, rested on the parliamentary majority of 144 members. However, its three FPD ministers were replaced by three additional Social Democrats on March 23, 1971; now the remaining four-party coalition (the SDP, the Centre, the LPP, and the SPP) had a majority of 108 members. When the Karjalainen Cabinet resigned, a non-party caretaker cabinet, headed by Teuvo Aura, was appointed on October 29, 1971. Aura had also been Prime Minister in 1970, before the parliamentary Karjalainen Cabinet was formed.

After the election of 1972, there are 123 different combinations of parliamentary parties that would constitute a majority. But very few combinations are realistic. Only the five- and four-party versions of the Karjalainen Cabinet were considered serious majority alternatives to replace the 'voluntary firemen' of Prime Minister Teuvo Aura. As neither alternative could be realized, the biggest party formed a one-party minority cabinet. The Social Democrats had publicized their election victory so much that it would have been difficult for them to avoid government responsibility, and the long list of vacant positions waiting to be filled on all levels of the civil service obviously seemed very attractive to the SDP. The 55th Cabinet since 1917 was appointed on February 23, 1972. Rafael Paasio is the Prime Minister (was also in 1966-1968), and Mauno Koivisto, Prime Minister in 1968-1970, is now the Minister of Finance.

New elections of two other types already cast their shadows on Finnish politics. Local elections will take place in October 1972, with 18 years as the likely minimum voting age. It is also being discussed how (not whether) President Urho Kekkonen will be re-elected in 1974.

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