



## Finland Elections: Gains for Nationalist True Finn Party

Finland is a curious blend of statist socialism and national independence. Its politics do not always fit easily into American thinking. No one would call the small country a socially conservative nation. Religious belief is weak, and vices such as illegitimacy, alcoholism, and pornography are shockingly more prevalent than in its cousins — Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland.



Nevertheless, the Finns have proven robust defenders of their national sovereignty. During the 1939-40 Winter War, they resisted Soviet aggression valiantly and so humiliated the Red Army that Stalin concluded a peace rather than attempt to impose a Marxist regime on the country. Americans remember Finland as the only nation which actually [paid its WWI debts](#) to the United States.

Although the Finns fought against the Soviet Union in WWII, it was never occupied by the Soviets after defeat. Since the Truman and Marshall plans, American hawks warned that if the United States did not rebuild Germany, provide vast military forces for NATO, and tie its foreign policy to European “allies,” there was a danger of “Finlandization.” It was never clear exactly how “Finlandization” (or the “ization” of Switzerland, Sweden, or Austria — three other free, prosperous neutral nations in the middle of Europe) threatened America. Finland maintained good relations with America and, without foreign aid, returned to prosperity fairly quickly.

Finland and Switzerland actually fit well what America should have hoped for in Europe. Both countries were nonaligned, friendly, relatively free, and asked nothing more than to be left alone. Although many observers find the socialism and atheism of Sweden highly distasteful, there was never any doubt that the Swedes asked nothing from the United States and were willing to protect their own national interests and territory.

During WWII there was a good reason Hitler never really threatened the Swedes or the Swiss: both nations possessed excellent self-defense forces. Even their weapons — the Swedish Bofors and the Swiss Oerlikon cannons — were excellent reminders of just how bloody a nose any would-be invader of either nation would receive. The Finns, in both the Winter War and the Continuation War (1944-1945) also showed how tenaciously the citizens of this small nation would fight to defend their territorial integrity.

The [general election](#) in Finland on April 17 may be a long-awaited electoral counterpart to the Winter War. Finland, like many European nations with parliamentary systems, is a patchwork of several different political parties. Going into the election, eight different parties held seats in the 200-member national parliament: the National Coalition, the Social Democrats, the True Finns, the Center, the Left



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Alliance, the Swedish People's Party, and the Christian Democrats.

As Finns voted, the domino-falls of several corrupt and irresponsible European nations were at the forefront of public policy. Greece, which is paying very high interest rates for its bonds and has been caught providing highly misleading information about its financial condition, has needed a bailout. Portugal, whose public bonds are at present just slightly better than junk bonds, is struggling to maintain the confidence of investors. Ireland, facing a long and deep recession, did not help itself by printing its own euros earlier this year. Belgium each day sets a new world record for going the longest without a government. Spain and Italy, both with much larger economies but the same sort of problems as Portugal and Greece, by their very size would need much more painful bailouts from those European nations which, like Finland, have kept their financial houses in relatively good order.

Money was not the only issue during the campaign in Finland. In addition to national financial self-reliance, Finns pondered national cultural and social integrity. Muslim immigrants, once largely confined to southern Europe, have moved north into Denmark and Sweden. Muslim youths have attacked Scandinavian girls and threatened Danes because of cartoons of Mohammed. The True Finns Party believes in the preservation of Finnish culture and the restriction of Muslim immigration.

Timo Soini, the devout Catholic leader of that party, called the True Finns' jump from four percent of the vote in 2007 to 20 percent in the most recent election an "historic change." Tuula Kuusinen, a True Finn candidate in Helsinki, declared: "We are five-and-a-half million people. We have to stop giving money to every other country. We just can't afford it." The True Finns view nations with profound financial crises as "squanderers."

The practical impact of the nationalist True Finn Party's election gains is that it will now be much more difficult to persuade the Finnish government to support additional bailouts for financially irresponsible nations such as Portugal and Ireland. Olavi Borg, a European political analyst, observed: "This result will give Europe gray hairs. It will cause them problems over the bailout funds."

Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats in Germany have already taken an electoral beating over the bailouts. The voters in those nations which have been relatively responsible — maintaining a reasonable debt-to-revenue ratio and a sustainable debt-to-GDP ratio — can see that the only way to preserve the artificial European Union, with its common euro, is to reduce their own standard of living and to increase their own public financial risk. The government of Finland has already pledged about €8 billion (\$11.5 billion) in guarantees, about €1,500 for every Finn. The European Union is working to boost its lending capacity, which will increase that exposure. Although Finland is a small nation, if it balks at future bailouts, the proportional share of those bailouts borne by other nations will naturally rise. If it cuts back on Muslim immigration, pressure will be put on the rest of Europe to accept those immigrants, thus weakening their cultural identities.

Beyond opposing bailouts for other nations, the True Finn Party also disapproves of foreign aid and stands against Finland joining NATO. In addition to restrictions on immigration, it favors the preservation of Finnish cultural values. Although critics have compared it to the Tea Party in America, there are differences (the True Finn Party supports a progressive income tax, for example).

One wonders how many other European peoples will show the sort of instinct for national survival that the True Finn Party has shown.

Every European party that attempts to assert national identity is invariably condemned with epithets such as "Far Right" or "Fascist," in the hopes of ending serious discussion. But True Finns are not



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attempting to impose their values on other nations or interfere with them at all. There is no long heritage of Finnish empire. The True Finn Party is simply trying to preserve the values of their small and peaceful nation. Though it is too early to tell whether the recent victory of this party will bring a sense of survival to other nations in Europe, it is a step in the right direction.

*Photo: Eduskuntatalo, the main building of the Parliament of Finland in Helsinki.*



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