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Finland has traditionally been characterised by a broad national consensus on foreign and security policy. This also comprises European Union (EU) policy, which is mostly perceived from a diplomatic rather than a party-political perspective. The cross-party consensus includes, among other things, a high regard for the EU's common foreign, security and defence policy, a positive attitude to the single market, a strict adherence to the rule of law, and a desire not to be relegated to a "second tier" of differentiated integration. At the same time, Finnish parties are generally "frugal" when it comes to the EU budget and mostly sceptical of Euro-federalist symbolism.

The dominant foreign policy perspective also implies that the EU is rarely perceived by the Finnish public as an arena for democratic party politics, which is largely confined to the national level. While Finns have a relatively high level of trust in the EU, Finland is among the few member states where [trust in national democratic institutions is even higher](#). In general, the focus of the European policy debate in Finland is less on different views of the common supranational interest than on the benefits of the EU for Finland's own national interest. When Finnish opposition parties (of various political orientations) attack the government on EU issues, this is usually based on a perceived lack of effectiveness rather than policy substance.

The cross-party consensus on EU policy is not complete, however. On the pro-European side, the business-friendly National Coalition Party (NCP), affiliated with European People's Party (EPP) political group in the European Parliament (EP), stands out as an advocate of open markets and economic integration. Also decidedly pro-European is the Swedish People's Party (SPP/ALDE), which represents the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. On the Eurosceptic side, the Finns Party, affiliated with European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) in the EP, made its mark during the euro crisis as a fierce opponent of transnational financial transfers and has since flirted with the idea of Finland leaving the EU (Iso-Markku and Stewart, 2024).

The current Finnish government under Petteri Orpo (NCP) unites both of these extremes. It consists of four parties – NCP, Finns, SPP and the small Christian Democrats (EPP) – that are held together mainly by an agenda of fiscal austerity and labour-market liberalisation. On EU policy,

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the [government programme](#) is a compromise based on traditional Finnish positions: it wants Finland to be an “active, reliable and solution-oriented member state”, but also highlights that “Finland’s national interests must be identified and safeguarded in decision-making”. The three official EU policy priorities are “strategic competitiveness”, “clean and digital transformation”, and “comprehensive security”. On the latter, Prime Minister Orpo has launched the idea of a “preparedness union”, presenting Finland as an example to other EU member states.¹

Meanwhile, the centre-left opposition – the Social Democratic Party (SDP), affiliated with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the EP; the Greens, with the European Green Party (EGP); and the Left Alliance (EL) – has recently positioned itself as more integration-friendly than the government, [especially in fiscal and environmental matters](#) (Raunio, 2024). Still, supranational democracy as such is a priority only for the Greens, which is traditionally also the party most open to transnational fiscal solidarity. The fourth major opposition party, the Centre, affiliated with the Renew Europe (liberals) EU group, is traditionally cautious about European integration, accepting the status quo but opposing further deepening in most areas except security policy.

Campaign topics

EU election campaigns in Finland are usually short. In early May, the parties had only recently adopted their manifestos and nominated their candidates, and the media were only beginning to pay attention to the upcoming elections. After the national parliamentary elections in April 2023 and presidential elections in January/February 2024, a certain election fatigue could be expected from Finnish citizens. Nevertheless, [opinion polls](#) in the spring of 2024 showed that early interest in the EU elections was actually [higher than usual](#).

At the national level, the Finnish debate in early 2024 was unusually polarised, marked by a wave of political strikes against the government’s planned spending cuts and restrictions on trade union rights. In this context, the EU has sometimes served as an external reference point: for example, [the government has justified](#) its measures as necessary to avoid an excessive deficit procedure against Finland². However, the debate is essentially seen as a domestic issue and has not been linked to the European elections as such.

Before the election campaign, both national [politicians and expert commentators](#) expected security policy, the economy and climate protection to become the election’s main issues. This is mostly in line with the Spring 2024 Eurobarometer, according to which 55% of the Finnish respondents see “the EU’s defence and security” as one of the most important issues of the elections – [almost twice the EU average](#) (31%). Despite this considerable interest, the broad Finnish consensus on these matters means that the fundamental direction of the EU’s foreign and security policy will hardly be up for debate in the campaign. By contrast, economic and fiscal policy offers much greater potential for controversy: while the government opposes any new EU financial instruments, [the SDP supports a supranational investment](#) fund financed by new EU own resources to prevent state aid races between member states.

1. Petteri Orpo’s speech in the European Parliament, 13 March 2024.

2. *Yle News*. “Finland plans ‘difficult but necessary’ spending cuts and tax rises” (16.04.2024)

Regarding climate policy, the main bone of contention is its impact on the forestry industry, which plays a similar political role in Finland to agriculture in other countries. While climate policy is one of the EU issues that Finns are most interested in, the parties with a strong rural voter base – the Finns Party and the Centre – as well as the pro-business NCP criticise it for being too restrictive on forestry. In March 2024, [the Finnish government helped](#) to block the EU Nature Restoration Law in the Council, for which it was praised by the Centre and condemned by SDP, Greens and the Left Alliance.

Finally, many [Finnish media also report](#) on the rise of the European radical right as a key aspect of the European elections. In this context, radical right parties in other member states are often portrayed as a threat to democracy and the rule of law, and especially to the EU's unity in the face of Russian aggression. In contrast, Finland's own far-right party, the Finns Party, has caused relatively little controversy in recent months. After a racism scandal in the summer of 2023 died down, the party discreetly aligned itself with the government's prioritisation of fiscal and economic policy. This has led to a certain normalisation in public perception, which is also facilitated by the NCP. For example, when centre-left MEPs criticised Prime Minister Orpo in March 2024 for cooperating with the radical right, he replied that "there are no far-right parties in my government". In an editorial, Finland's leading newspaper [Helsingin Sanomat described](#) this as characteristic of how national and European views of a country's politics can diverge.

While the Finns Party had campaigned on leaving the EU in the 2019 European elections, it has since downplayed this goal – partly because support for EU membership in Finland has reached record highs following Russia's war on Ukraine, and partly because the party's leadership does not want to cast doubt on its ability to participate in an NCP-led government. In its [2024 manifesto](#), the party claims that EU withdrawal "should not be treated as a taboo" although "it is not realistic for Finland to unilaterally leave the EU in the near future".

Candidates

Finland has an open and unranked party-list electoral system, in which voters cast their vote for a specific candidate. Individual personalities therefore always play a central role in election campaigns. In 2024, this is exacerbated by the fact that an unusually large number of incumbent Finnish MEPs are retiring and will not be standing again in the election, leaving many voters to find a new preferred candidate. As a result, media reports often focus on the [presentation of the candidates from Finland](#), which include many personalities with a high national profile, such as several former or outgoing party leaders as well as former ministers from the 2019-23 centre-left government. However, most of these high-profile candidates have made their names in national politics and are not primarily known for their positions on EU policy.

Meanwhile, the supranational European parties and their lead candidates are almost completely absent from the Finnish debate. After speculation in early 2023 that [then Prime Minister Sanna Marin](#) might run as the PES's lead candidate failed to materialise, the Finnish media lost track

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of the process. While EPP candidate Ursula von der Leyen is of course well known as the current commission president, PES candidate Nicolas Schmit has no media presence at all. Even when Schmit visited an SDP event in Helsinki shortly after his nomination as lead candidate, the only newspaper to pick up on this was the SDP's own [party organ *Demokraatti*](#).

Likely results

Since 2004, Finnish voter turnout in European elections has usually been around 40% – below the EU average and far below the turnout in Finnish national elections. However, there are significant differences in the parties' voter mobilisation. Parties with a clearly pro-European reputation, especially the NCP and the SPP, tend to do well, while the SDP and the Finns Party have often underperformed in comparison with their national results. As a result, the NCP has won the most seats in all Finnish EU elections since 1999.

Opinion polls in spring 2024 seem to confirm this pattern. While the SDP narrowly leads the NCP in general national opinion polls, the latter comes first when voters are asked specifically about the EU elections. However, if overall turnout increases, as early interest polls suggest, the mobilisation gap could narrow and the NCP's advantage could be reduced.

Compared to 2019, only minor changes in the seat distribution are expected. The NCP, the SDP and the Left can hope to gain one seat, while the Greens – who did exceptionally well in 2019 – would lose one. For the SPP, which is suffering from its electorate's dissatisfaction with the current government, its only seat in the European Parliament could be in jeopardy.

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Still, given the low level of media interest and the expected relative stability of the results, the elections are unlikely to have a major impact on Finnish politics or policy. The main effect is likely to be the high turnover of candidates, which will lead to many new Finnish faces in the next European Parliament.

References

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