

Sauli Niinistö is still the main favourite in the Finnish Presidential election just one week before the first round.

from **Corinne Deloy**

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J-7
7 days before
the poll

On 22nd January next 4,402, 622 Finns are being called to ballot to appoint the successor to Tarja Halonen, as President of the Republic. Elected for the first time as head of the country on 6th February 2000 she cannot stand again since the Finnish Constitution prohibits the head of State from undertaking more than to executive terms in office.

Early voting started on 11th January last and will end on 17th January. Usually around 40% of the electorate vote this way. Turnout is due to be high, since the presidential election is extremely popular in Finland. If none of the candidates wins the absolute majority in the first round a second round will take place on 5th February.

8 candidates are officially standing for the supreme office in Finland:

- 63 year old Sauli Niinistö, candidate of the Conservative Assembly (KOK);
- 65 year old Paavo Väyrynen, the Centre Party candidate (KESK);
- 70 year old Paavo Lipponen, is the Social Democratic Party's candidate, (SPD);
- 49 year old Timo Soini, leader of the True Finns (PS);
- 53 year old Pekka Haavisto, is the Green candidate (VIHR);
- 44 year old Sari Essayah, the Christian Democratic Party candidate (SKL);
- 35 year old Paavo Arhinmäki, the Left Alliance candidate (VAS);
- 50 year old Eva Biaudet, is the candidate of the Swedish People's Party (SFP).

Just one week before the election Sauli Niinistö is still the main favourite. According to political analysts he is not due to win on 22nd January. The name of the candidate who will come second and have to face the conservative on 5th February is therefore a major point in the electoral campaign. According to the polls, populist Timo Soini, centrist Paavo Väyrynen, ecologist Pekka Haavisto and social-democrat Paavo Lipponen are all likely to reach the second round. Heikki Paloheimo, professor of political science at the University of Tampere, believes that the gap between Sauli Niinistö and the other candidates should gradually diminish as 22nd January approaches.

Paavo Lipponen, who is losing ground in the polls, is extremely active in the final part of the electoral campaign. He is standing as the most "realistic"

candidate in the presidential election and accuses Sauli Niinistö of not having a politically clear attitude. The Social Democrat is standing as the defender of the European Union and notably of the euro, a position that is not always easy since the Finnish are increasingly critical of Europe, and are even more eurosceptic. However according to the most recent poll on the subject, published on 27th December last, two thirds of the Finns (63%) say they want their country to stay in the single currency. "*Paavo Lipponen dares to be what he is because he has nothing to lose in the elections,*" says Goran Djupsund, professor of Political Science at the University of Abo Akademi in Vaasa.

Paavo Lipponen describes himself as the person who prevented Finland joining NATO, a subject that he wants to debate in the electoral campaign. All eight candidates are against their country joining the North Atlantic Treaty. Centrist Paavo Väyrynen and the Left Alliance candidate, Paavo Arhinmäki are resolutely against it; the six others believe that although the subject is not really topical, debate is still possible, and it might even be necessary. In the interview he gave to the *Iltta-Sanomat* newspaper, Sauli Niinistö said that he was not sure that Finland's membership of NATO would increase Finnish security and recalled that not much was known about what membership really cost.

At present the share of the Finnish population against Helsinki's entry into NATO is the highest ever recorded. It totals 68% in a poll undertaken by TNS Gallup and published by the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* in January.

Paavo Lipponen is struggling however to distinguish himself from Sauli Niinistö. He is also having problems in rallying the Finnish left to his name.

Presidential Election in Finland 22nd January and 5th February 2012

Recently the general secretary of the Left Alliance, Sirpa Puhalkka said that he was not really the left's representative. The social democrat suffers due to the popularity of the conservative candidate amongst the older voters, who usually vote more in support of the Social Democratic Party.

If Paavo Lipponen or Paavo Arhinmäki do not succeed in taking second place on 22nd January next the left will not be represented in the second round of voting, which would be an all time first in Finland's history and a catastrophic result for the social democrats who did not rise above the 20% mark in the last general elections on 17th April 2011 (19.1% of the vote).

As in the last election the attitude towards the EU has become the main issue in the presidential election – which might prove decisive according to political expert Ville Pitkänen of the University of Turku

if Sauli Niinistö faces Paavo Väyrynen or Timo Soini, both eurosceptic candidates, in a second round of voting.

According to the latest poll by Taloustutkimus and published by the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* on 9th January last, Sauli Niinistö still stands easily ahead in voting intentions in the first round of voting with 37% of the vote. Pekka Haavisto is due to come second with 8.3% of the vote followed by Paavo Väyrynen 8.2%, Timo Soini 7%, Paavo Lipponen and Paavo Arhinmäki 4% each. Two candidates end the list: Eva Biaudet is credited with 2% and Sari Essayah 1%. Around three people in ten (29%) do say however that they have not made their choice. The Finns want their next president to be pragmatic and able to mediate. They also say they want their head of state to discuss human rights issues when he makes official visits to countries where these are ignored or violated.

Reminder of the presidential election results on 15th and 29th January 2006 in Finland

Turnout: 73.9% in the first round, 77.2% in the second

Candidates	No.of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No.of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Tarja Halonen (Social Democratic Party, SPD)	1 397 030	46,3	1 630 833	51,8
Sauli Niinistö (Conservative Assembly, KOK)	725 866	24,1	1 517 947	48,2
Matti Vanhanen (Centre Party, KESK)	561,990	18,6		
Heidi Hautala (Greens VIHR)	105 248	3,5		
Timo Soini (True Finns, PS)	103 492	3,4		
Bjarne Kallis (Christian Democratic Party, SKL)	61 483	2		
Henrik Lax (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	48 703	1,6		
Arti Lahti (independent)	12 989	0,4		

Source : Helsingin Sanomat

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