

European
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

9 candidates in the running for the presidential election in Finland. Towards a 2nd round: Alexander Stubb (KOK) - Pekka Haavisto (Greens)?

On 28 January, in the first round of the presidential election in Finland, 9 candidates are running for the supreme office. If no candidate receives more than half the votes, a second round will be held on 11 February. Finns can vote by post from 17 to 23 January (17 to 20 January for those living abroad.) After two consecutive terms leading the country, the current head of state, Sauli Niinistö (National Coalition Party, KOK), cannot stand for re-election.

The Presidency of the Republic is the institution in which Finns have the most confidence (84%), according to a recent survey conducted by the Foundation for Municipal Development and published in January 2024.

THE CANDIDATES RUNNING

9 are candidates in the presidential election:

- Alexander Stubb (National Coalition Party, KOK), former prime minister (2014-2015) and several times minister, currently director of the School of European and Transnational Governance at the European University Institute in Florence;
- Pekka Haavisto (Green League, VIHR), former foreign minister (2019-2023) and diplomat at the United Nations. He has already been a presidential candidate on two occasions: in 2012 and in 2018, defeated on both occasions by the incumbent president Sauli Niinistö;
- Jussi Halla-aho (Finns Party, PS), current President of the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the single chamber of parliament;

- Jutta Urpilainen, President of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), European Commissioner for International Partnerships, former Finance Minister (2011-2014);
- Olli Rehn (Centre Party, KESK), current Governor of the Central Bank of Finland, former European Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society (2004), for Enlargement (2005-2010) and for Economic and Monetary Affairs (2010-2014);
- Li Andersson, leader of the Left Alliance (VAS), former Minister for Education (2019-2020 and 2021-2023);
- Sari Essayah, leader of the Christian Democratic Party (SKL), current Minister of Agriculture and Forestry;
- Harry Harkimo (Movement Now, LN), businessman, known for hosting the Finnish version of the reality show *The Apprentice*;
- Mika Aaltola, Director of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, is running as an independent candidate.

The opinion poll carried out by the Verian Institute on 20-21 December gave Alexander Stubb and Pekka Haavisto the lead in the first round with 24% and 22% of the vote respectively. The KOK candidate is the most popular among men and older voters; the Green candidate seems to have been adversely affected by the entry of the Social Democrat candidate, Jutta Urpilainen. The populist Jussi Halla-aho would come 3rd with 12% of the vote, followed by Olli Rehn (9%) and Li Andersson (7%).

Presidential election in Finland

28th January 2024

The Taloustukimus institute has tested the two candidates likely to come out ahead in a 2nd round which should therefore be a choice between left and right: Alexander Stubb would beat Pekka Haavisto by 58% of the vote (42% to the Green candidate). The KOK candidate should be able to count on the votes of Jussi Halla-aho and Olli Rehn voters in the 2nd round and the left-wing candidate on the votes of people who chose Jutta Urpilainen or Li Andersson in the 1st round.

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

The powers of the President of the Republic were reduced in Finland in 2000, but the Head of State still oversees foreign and security policy, which, at this time of war between Ukraine and Russia, is central to the presidential election campaign. However, all the candidates share the same position on the conflict and the threat from Moscow (Finland shares a 1,340-kilometre-long border with Russia). The attack by Russian armed forces on Kyiv on 24 February 2022 united Finns of all political persuasions, who largely approved the country's entry into NATO on 4 April 2023, an act that put an end to a policy of military non-alignment that had been in force since the 1990s and to decades of neutrality. When the candidates' positions are so close on the main issue of the election campaign, voters tend to turn to the personal qualities of each candidate.

Long the favourite in the polls, Pekka Haavisto has been overtaken by Alexander Stubb in opinion polls over the last few months. The ecologist candidate can point to his experience at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: among other things, he worked for his country's entry into NATO. He has attracted support from all walks of life, including parties opposed to the Green League, as well as many artists and sportsmen and women. The Green candidate has collected 48,000 signatures of support for the presidential election, more than double the mandatory minimum of 20,000 signatures required for a candidate to compete with the support of a group of voters. Pekka Haavisto is running as the candidate of a voters' association supported by the Green League.

Alexander Stubb has the invaluable support of Petteri Orpo (KOK), who became Prime Minister on 20 June

2023 following the KOK's victory in the parliamentary elections on 2 April 2023. He currently lives in Italy, having previously lived in Luxembourg (where he was Vice-President and a member of the Management Committee of the European Investment Bank, EIB). He has been a Member of the European Parliament (2004-2008), in charge of diplomacy (2008-2011), Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade (2011-2014) and is very much at home on the international stage. Alexander Stubb said that his decision to return to politics was motivated by his concern regarding the attack by Russian armed forces on Kyiv. *"I can say, with my hand on my heart, that I had no idea of running for the presidency of the Republic before February 2022"*, he declared, adding *"In the global political context, however, when your country calls you, you owe it to yourself to be there"*.

THE PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTION

The Finnish Head of State is elected for a 6-year term by direct universal suffrage. The elected candidate takes office on the first day of the month following his/her election, i.e. 1 February if elected on 28 January and 1 March if elected on 11 February. If there is only one candidate for the office of President, no ballot is held and the sole candidate is automatically elected Head of State.

The President of the Republic may not serve more than two consecutive terms. It is also customary for him to surrender his political party membership card during his term of office. Candidates, who must be born Finnish citizens, may be nominated by a party sitting in parliament or by a group of electors comprising at least 20,000 registered voters.

The office of President is a prestigious one in Finland, even though the powers of the Head of State were restricted in 2000 by a reform of the Constitution. The President of the Republic directs the country's foreign policy and defence (in collaboration with the government) and is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. However, he has no power over domestic affairs. Since 2011, Finland has been represented within the European Union by its Prime Minister.

Results of the presidential election of 28 January 2018

Turnout: 66.73%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes won
Sauli Niinistö (National Coalition Party, KOK)	1 874 331	62.65
Pekka Haavisto (Green League, VIHR)	370 823	12.40
Laura Huhtasaari (Finns' Party, PS)	207 175	6.93
Paavo Väyrynen (Citizens' Party, KP)	185 143	6.19
Matti Vanhanen (Centre Party, KESK)	122 320	4.09
Tuula Haatainen (Social-Democratic Party, SDP)	97 254	3.25
Merja Kyllönen (Left Alliance, VAS)	89 815	3
Nils Torvalds (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	44 661	1.49

Source : https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/TPV-2018_1/en/ehdtulos_kokomaa.html

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