

FINLAND: OPEN AND PUBLIC CONTESTS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS MORE POWERFUL PARTY LEADERS AND GENUINE LEADER CONTESTS

The Finnish political landscape has changed dramatically during the past five decades, accentuating the role of party leaders (Koskimaa 2016; Paloheimo 2005) and leader selection contests (Niemi 2014). Compared to earlier periods, contemporary contests are clearly more open, public and competitive.

Several major forces have shaped Finnish parties' operating context (Arter, 2006; Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen et. al, 2016). Most notably, a rare institutional reform, which started in early 1980s and was finalised in a new constitution in 2000, turned a semi-presidential regime into a parliamentary one. The right to form governments and drive executive decision-making was transferred from the president to the prime minister and the government was made responsible to parliament. The prime minister's position, which since the early 1990s has automatically belonged to the leader of the largest party, replaced the presidency as the *de jure* and *de facto* head of government, and the leaders of coalition partners took on other central cabinet posts. In a quickly "governmentalising" governance culture, party leaders have come to control all political top positions.

The transformation of Finnish decision-making culture from highly conflictual to extremely consensus-driven served to enhance government stability and the governing capacity of "minister-party-leaders". Prior to the 1980s, Finnish governments operated under strong presidential rule, often only for short periods, and until the 1970s Finnish work life was plagued by recurrent industrial disputes. Due to co-operation between governments and labour market actors, however, both the domestic economy and politics in Finland stabilised considerably. Since the 1987 "blue-red" coalition, comprising Social Democrats and the conservative National Coalition, almost all "coalition cocktails" have been tried – and,

notwithstanding occasional prime minister reshuffles and the withdrawal of minor coalition partners, they have lasted for full terms.

Finally, intra-party power dynamics were affected by the dramatic change in Finland's international position. Until the turn of 1990s, Finnish politics had a strong connection to the Soviet Union. The long presidency of Urho Kekkonen in 1956-1981 was greatly fortified by his tight personal linkage with the USSR. After its demise in 1991, however, Finland assumed full EU membership within just a few years, in 1995. By increasing the distance to party organs and national decision-making arenas, the EU and the internationalisation of politics generally enhanced the powers of party leaders (Raunio 2002).

Indeed, these changes, alongside the mediatisation and personalisation of politics, have pushed Finnish parties themselves – perhaps a little ironically – towards "presidentialisation". In the 1980s, party leaders were still constrained by the president and by central party organs (national executives and parliamentary groups). In the 1990s, party leaderships and ministerial groups developed more clearly into an independent "face" of the party. Since the mid-1990s, Finnish political practice has been centered on party leaders, who first compete in "prime ministerial elections" and then take control of relatively stable "extra-surplus" coalition governments (Koskimaa 2016; Paloheimo 2005).

Cross-temporal studies on Finnish party leaders suggest that the change in leaders' roles are reflected in their selection. According to Paloheimo (2005: 258-259), in 1950-1979 none of the changes of leader in the three largest parties, the Social Democrats, the Centre and the National Coalition, were caused by those leaders' personal unpopularity or electoral defeats. After 1980, however, 60 per cent of changes were prompted by such reasons. While party leaders are now more autonomous vis-à-vis their parties, their responsibility for parties' success has become more tangible. Voters now seem to pay more attention to party leaders (Paloheimo 2005; Paloheimo and Raunio 2008; Karvonen, 2010).

Leader contests have also become more open and public. Until the early 1990s, party leader selection in Finland was mostly parties' internal affair. Due to limited publicity and a weak information flow, the leaders of district party organisations were often able to "ram through" their favored candidates by tying up deals over "leadership packages" before decisive party congresses. As politics mediatised, journalists began to cover the contests in detail, from the

start; and the parties started to feed the media in order to maximise their publicity, which had developed into a hot commodity. Party leader contests turned into public spectacles, assuming the features of public elections. (Niemi, 2014, 104-111.) As will be shown below, the contests have also become more competitive.

These tendencies suggest that the contemporary Finnish way of selecting party leaders is much less "managed" than in, say, neighbouring Sweden. To find out if the processes that precede the final selection are as open, public and competitive as they appear to be, this chapter examines, in-depth, three significant selection processes from the 2010s. They occurred in cases that together represent the range of Finnish major parties' practice of intra-party democracy, which can be regarded as the most significant variable to affect intra-party processes. Two took place in 2014 in major governing parties that have employed the traditional congress-based selection model: the Social Democrats, who have a member-driven mass-party heritage, and the National Coalition, which has its roots firmly in the more leader-centric and elitist cadre-party tradition. The third process occurred in 2011 in the Greens, which nodded to their activist-driven roots by utilising a membership ballot for the first time in Finland. To assess the generality of the findings, more recent processes from these parties are also described briefly. The study used research literature, memoirs, party documents and webpages, press materials and party elite interviews to trace the processes.

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

In Finnish political parties, "party leader" refers to the chair of the extra-parliamentary party organisation's uppermost decision-making unit, the national executive (*'puoluehallitus'*). Before the 1990s, Social Democrats' leader contests could attract several candidates. But the name of the winner was usually known well before the party congress that formally makes the decision, because district-level party elites had agreed on how to distribute the party's leading positions. Prior to the 1990s, incumbent leaders were not challenged either. In 1990, Paavo Lipponen broke tradition by openly challenging party elite's favorite, Pertti Paasio (chair in 1987-1991). Lipponen initially failed. However, in 1993, after Paasio had been replaced by Ulf Sundqvist (chair in 1991-1993), Lipponen surprised party elites and won. According to the pundits, it was the first real contest in the Social Democrats in three decades (Niemi 2014, 64-66).

Since the early 1990s, multi-candidate contests have become more competitive. In 1987, Paasio, who was the district heads' official suggestion (see below), amassed 81.44 per cent of the congress delegates' votes. In 1990, when Lipponen challenged him, Paasio still gained 74.4 per cent. After he stepped down in 1991, Sundqvist took the chair with 67.2 per cent. When Lipponen (chair in 1993-2005) took over in 1993, he won with just 54.6 per cent (against three competitors). Lipponen had to defend his position only once: in 2002 he defeated Erkki Tuomioja with 63.7 per cent. When Lipponen stepped down in 2005, Eero Heinäluoma (chair in 2005-2008) succeeded him after attaining 57.4 per cent (against two competitors).

After the 2007 parliamentary election, in which the Social Democrats suffered significant losses, Heinäluoma resigned and left the leader's position vacant. A record nine contenders ran to replace him in 2008, and toured around the country campaigning. Eventually, only five entered the vote, but the dispersion of the votes was historically wide: Jutta Urpilainen gained only 37.7 per cent in the first round and, for the first time in the party's history, the winner was decided in a runoff, which Urpilainen won with 62.3 per cent (Niemi 2014). In 2014, Antti Rinne challenged Urpilainen and beat her by a mere 14 votes (his total share was 51.4 per cent). When two fellow MPs challenged Rinne in 2017, he won with 56.8 per cent. Open challenges and low winning margins, which reflect increasing unpredictability, appear to have become more general in the 2000s, especially since 2010. They would have been unthinkable in the 1980s.

Next, in order to illuminate the dynamics of contemporary leader contests in the Social Democrats, the chapter delves deeper into the 2014 selection process.

The 2014 selection

Like several other European social democratic parties, the Finnish Social Democrats arrived in the 2010s in relatively poor condition. As recently as in the 1995 parliamentary election, the party had enjoyed its best result since the world wars – 28.25 per cent, almost 10 percentage points more than the runner up, and 63 of the 200 seats in the national parliament, the Eduskunta. By 2007, however, its seat share had shrunk to 45 and it was only the third-largest party. At the 2008 congress, as we saw, the party chose Urpilainen, a 32-year old school teacher, to "save" a party that was internally fragmented and in steep electoral decline.

A "third-way" proponent, she wanted to bring the party closer to urban middle class voters (Urpilainen 2011). She faced no contenders in the 2010 congress. However, the party continued to lose ground, and because these losses became associated personally with Urpilainen, her position started to weaken – especially in the eyes of the party's trade-union faction, which was after a more traditional leftist orientation (Mörttinen and Nurmi 2019). A major turning point was the populist Finns Party's striking success in the 2011 parliamentary elections, to which a "leak" of working class male voters from the Social Democrats contributed.

The loss stirred heavy criticism among the ranks. Yet, Urpilainen managed to take the party into the government and maintained her position, again without competition, in the 2012 congress. In the summer of 2013, however, a group of youngish (30-40-year-old) party activists that operated in the party's affiliate organisations, mainly in various trade unions, started to convene with the aim of replacing Urpilainen before the 2015 general election. After a short searching period, the group approached Antti Rinne, a well-known union leader who had shown willingness to lead the party by standing (without success) at the previous party congress for the position of deputy chair. According to Rinne, requests that he challenge Urpilainen had been addressed to him for years (Mörttinen and Nurmi 2019). In October 2013, Rinne agreed to run and the group started quietly to prepare a takeover at the next summer's party congress. After months of systematic preparation, which included writing campaign material and contacting party activists (who had power over the nomination of congress delegates), Rinne publicised his bid in February 2014. Traditionally, leaders who faced major internal opposition had "read the signs" and resigned (Niemi 2014). This time, although such signs emerged through the ranks and the media, Urpilainen defended her position. Rapidly and, compared to Rinne's "team", rather belatedly, Urpilainen organised during April a counter-campaign.

The respective teams fought fiercely until the historically close vote at the congress: 257 votes to Rinne, 243 to Urpilainen. While Urpilainen managed to win several undecided delegates during the congress, Rinne's careful preparation proved superior. Through their networking activities in the districts, such as finding secure Rinne supporters, recruiting more hesitant ones and maintaining communication, "the team" managed to predict the exact result of the vote (Mörttinen and Nurmi 2019).

As this brief overview already indicates, contemporary leader selection process in the Social Democrats – and in Finnish parties more generally – differs significantly from the Swedish parties' internal processes, which tend to be tightly managed by formally appointed, powerful steering agents. The Finnish Social Democrats' statutes do not recognise any steering agents. The party chair is elected at a party congress, now every three years, by 500 congress delegates from local party branches. All congress delegates can propose candidates and vote. If no candidate gains a majority, the two top contenders enter a run-off. In relation to the process that precedes the congress, the statutes say nothing.

The only formally appointed organ that has interfered with the process is a selection committee, which the party congress appoints when it starts. The committee consists of district party functionaries. It used to play a more significant role, by assessing candidates for various leadership positions and proposing to the congress its preferred "packages". As late as in 1987, the committee found "wide unanimity" to suggest Paasio for the leader's position. Although another candidate emerged, too, Paasio won with a significant majority (81.5 per cent), signaling the strength of the deal the district heads had set. In 1990, the committee deliberated on two candidates and suggested the re-selection of Paasio. However, after a debate, the congress wanted to vote for all proposed candidates. In 1991, the committee asked the congress if it wanted a suggestion. Almost unanimously, the congress said no. Since then, the committee has not made suggestions about the party leader.

According to an interviewee, the selection committee used to hold significant steering power, as most congress delegates had no first-hand experience of the candidates. Although ballots were closed, district heads had more leverage to call concerted "district decisions". The method still applies to lesser positions, such as seats on the national executive, but it is no longer applied to the selection of the party leader.

The analysis of the 2014 pre-congress process reveals that it was not "managed" by a singular agent, which could effectively steer towards a certain result, let alone determine it. Instead, a genuine contest evolved rather spontaneously – under political culture that generally supports open party leader contests. However, two sets of actors affected the process.

The first set of actors, the general secretary and the staff of the party's central office, bears a faint resemblance to a steering agent, as they administered the technical execution of the

competition. They informally registered the candidates and organised a candidate tour, which have become standard operations in Finnish parties. These were basic organisational chores, which no principal assigned to them. The actors assumed a markedly apolitical role in securing the integrity of the contest, which was deemed very important for the pre- and post-congress developments. Indeed, to avoid suspicions of partiality, the competitors agreed that the incumbent general secretary, Reijo Paananen, would continue whoever won. If Paananen's position had been controversial, the party's head of association would have organised the candidates' tour. Instead of trying to find and endorse a specific candidate, these actors deliberately avoided doing so – under an explicit threat of removal. Instead of steering the process, the actors "facilitated" a fair contest. Thus, it is doubtful whether the label of steering agent fits them.

In an open system like the Finnish one, it is hard, if not impossible, to filter out candidates who want to run. In the contemporary leader-centric party culture, it could be assumed that the party chair would be the most capable of doing so; but there is no evidence that Urpilainen tried to use the party office to restrict Rinne's challenge. In fact, such an initiative would have seriously undermined Urpilainen's leadership. Overall, the central party's ability to filter out prominent candidates was very low, if it existed at all.

The role of information control as a process-management tool, too, seems highly improbable. In theory, candidate tours could be used to manipulate information for the benefit of a certain candidate, by, for example, arranging panels in certain locations and on certain themes, or by distributing campaign resources unequally. In reality, the party office's explicit impartiality prevents this. The point of the tours is to offer the selectorate information about candidates' positions and personas, much as in general elections. Perhaps even more importantly, the tours bring publicity for the parties and help to present their top politicians to the general electorate. The party office organised two general debates. Instead of concealing or tweaking information, the debates revealed the candidates' views on all the main aspects of social democracy (the state's role as an employer, the unions' power, and so on). To maximise their visibility, the debates were streamed online, so the options from which the congress delegates were choosing became crystal clear. The party central office's capacity to steer the process politically was very low, too.

The second set of actors that affected the process were the candidates' campaign teams. While they undoubtedly tried to steer the process into a specific political direction, as a *bona fide* steering agent would do, considering all organised political forces as steering agents stretches the concept too far. Still, as the teams' relevance for the Finnish party leader selection is fundamental, their qualities and role are also described briefly.

The teams organised professionally, rather like candidates' support teams in parliamentary elections. Rinne's team, which originally consisted of four trade-union-based members and soon expanded to a group of five to ten (including former top functionaries from party headquarters), operated informally and privately. Yet it had a designated campaign manager (Vesa Mauriala, a long time trade union worker and the former head of the party's policy unit) and recruited members along the trail, reaching up to 30 by the end of 2013 and up to 50 in February 2014. In addition, several trade unions openly funded Rinne's "team", as they thought Rinne would be better for their cause. Later, Urpilainen organised a similar group.

The teams operated independently; they were not commissioned by external principals. The only party "face" that authorised a campaign team was Urpilainen herself. While it appears that the opposition to her ignited within the party's trade union faction, no external sponsor sought to steer its activity. According to the interviews and Mörntinen and Nurmi (2019), the group emerged rather "organically", among old acquaintances who got worried over the party's future, and slowly developed into a wider coalition, which also encompassed activists from party's other factions, including "far-left red-greens" and "*lipposlaiset*" (a rightist faction named after former party leader Paavo Lipponen), without whom the "coup" would not have succeeded. It thus seems doubtful if any kind of precursory delegation occurred during the Social Democrats' 2014 leader selection process.

The teams naturally tried to encourage and discourage their candidates and their opponents, respectively. The former happened especially to Rinne and the latter to Urpilainen, whom Rinne's team tried to persuade to give up. However, the teams could not filter out the candidates. In terms of information management, too, Rinne's team was very active. Even before publicising his bid, the team prepared a campaign book, a webpage, a thorough social-media plan and letters to party organs, and 50 meetings around the country. The group also reached out to local networks in order to affect the selection of favorable party congress delegates. Later, Rinne presented a policy platform (to which participant factions contributed)

and toured extensively, and his team approached selected congress delegates in order to "ram" them behind him. Urpilainen's team countered with similar measures, although her platform was, of course, clearer to the selectorate, as she had led the party for six years. Thus, before the congress, the selectorate was clearly well aware of the candidates' political preferences. In addition, the selectorate's opinion – the congress delegates' preferences – was constantly polled by the national and party media during the competition. In a fully open competitive environment, information management is a rather inefficient steering method.

A singular, specifically commissioned and politically motivated steering agent did not "manage" the Social Democrats' 2014 leader selection process. The central party office, led by the party's general secretary, was the closest thing to a steering agent, but it only administered the process, in markedly non-partisan fashion, in order to "facilitate" a fair competition. The campaign teams combated politically, but due to their multiplicity and open partisanship they cannot be considered as steering agents. Rather, they correspond to candidates' campaign teams in general elections. Overall, due to its open, public and competitive nature, which the party office enhanced, the process was "managed" only very lightly – if at all. No one could filter out candidates, and the publicity of the contest and the candidates' celebrity (although Rinne was relatively new in party circles, he was a famous "strike general" that had appeared in the national news media for a decade) made sure that the selectors knew perfectly well what was "on the table".

As was noted, the selection of 2014 was not the first or the last genuine competition. After losing eight seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections, resulting in the smallest parliamentary group in the party's history, and failing to get the party into the government, two prominent MPs, Tytti Tuppurainen and Timo Harakka, challenged Rinne. In the 2017 party congress, Rinne won in the first round with 56.8 per cent of the votes (Harakka got 32.1 per cent, Tuppurainen 11.1 per cent). Compared to earlier situations when the incumbent was challenged (in 1990 and 2002), excluding 2014, the winning margin was rather small. Although decreasing margins may only reflect growing factionalisation, it nonetheless seems clear that the era of pre-settled leader selection is over in Social Democrats.

THE NATIONAL COALITION

Finland's old conservative party, the National Coalition Party, was formed in 1918 as a merger of two upper-middle-class cadre parties that descended from fractions in the 19th-century diet. Prior to the 1980s, its leaders were usually selected with substantial winning margins, likely due to the steering of the district heads (see below). Also, challenging the incumbent has been a rare treat. It has occurred five times during the party's history. Three of those were during the past half a decade (Yli-Huttula 2018: 311; Toropainen 2017: 61).

In the National Coalition, too, the multi-candidate contests appear to have become more competitive over time. Formally, the party's process is as vague as that in the Social Democrats. Sub-national party organs select congress delegates who elect the chair in party congress every two years. All delegates may propose candidates in the congress and a runoff takes place if no one gains a majority. The statutes do not recognise anything akin to a steering agent.

However, in National Coalition, too, the congress has appointed an election committee, composed of district representatives. It may deliberate on proposed candidates and make suggestions to the congress. As in the Social Democrats, however, the committee used to be a more significant organ. Until the mid-1980s, it proposed – unanimously, or with just one dissenting vote – a single candidate for the congress. "Flash candidates" might emerge, and the congress thus had to vote. But the committee's proposed candidate typically won with significant majorities, reaching up to 90 per cent in the 1970s, when the incumbent leader, Harri Holkeri, was challenged a few times. When he retired, his "crown prince", Ilkka Suominen (chair in 1979-1991), was selected without competition (Toropainen 2017).

There was a degree of change in 1983, when the committee explicitly endorsed the incumbent leader, Suominen (chair in 1979-1991), and he beat a challenger, Pertti Salolainen, with only around 60 per cent of the vote in the first round. And although Suominen then faced no competition in three consecutive congresses (1985, 1987 and 1989), when he stepped down in 1991, several contenders to replace him emerged. At that point, the election committee formally presented the candidates, but it did not favour any of them – and the habit then stuck. Since the early 1990s, the committee has not endorsed anyone (Toropainen 2017). In the National Coalition, then, this old institution has also become rather redundant, as contests for party leader's position have become more open, public and competitive. All contests in the 2000s have required a second round of voting.

As Niemi (2014, 25) has charted, it was Salolainen (chair in 1991-1994) who succeeded Suominen in 1991, after winning 70.7 per cent (against two competitors). Although a weak leader, he successfully defended his position in 1993 against a challenger, gaining a 66.8 per cent in the first round. In 1994, Sauli Niinistö (chair in 1994-2001) faced four competitors, but still managed to win in the first round with 58.2 per cent.

True, Niinistö's successor, Ville Itälä (chair in 2001-2004), was coronated without competition. It has been suggested that the process was heavily "managed" by former party chairs (Yli-Huttula, 2006; Toropainen 2017). However, in 2004, despite public endorsements from former party leaders, five fellow MPs forced Jyrki Katainen (chair in 2004-2014) into a second round, which he won with mere 59.4 per cent of the votes. Pundits claimed that this was the first time a majority of congress delegates in the National Coalition was not "rammed" behind a certain candidate by the district party leaders (Niemi 2014).

Indeed, according to an interviewee, the 2004 contest marked a turning point in the party culture. There and thereafter, congress delegates were no longer ready to accept a pre-made plan. The second time a "genuine" competition occurred, in fact, was in 2014, when Katainen, who never faced challengers during his leadership, stepped down (Niemi 2014: 66). Next, the chapter describes the 2014 process in order to assess the details of the National Coalition's contemporary style of leader selection. As will be demonstrated, it does not differ much from Social Democrats' style. Instead, a distinct "Finnish style" becomes clearly detectable.

The 2014 selection

The 2014 leader selection process started unexpectedly when Katainen, who had led the party successfully for 10 years and who was the incumbent prime minister, stepped down in the middle of the government term that was set to run until 2015. Katainen announced his resignation on 5 April 2014. The congress was scheduled for mid-June. The lack of an incumbent and the shorter duration of the campaign were the most significant differences to Social Democrats' 2014 process.

The next party leader would also replace Katainen as prime minister, so the stakes were exceptionally high. Perhaps as a consequence, the candidates' "extreme intra-party celebrity"

characterised the contest. The first to announce his bid, casually on YouTube two weeks after Katainen's resignation, was Jan Vapaavuori, a long-serving MP and a former chair of the parliamentary group. He was minister of economic affairs in Katainen's cabinet, the latest of numerous government jobs in his career. He was the favourite of the party elite and of the party's main associated organisations, those of employers and investors .

A week later, Alexander Stubb, a former MEP and minister of foreign affairs, and the minister for Europe and foreign trade in Katainen's cabinet, joined the race. Stubb was known as a fierce competitor and election specialist. In respect to politicians' ability to attract personal votes in Finland's list-based electoral system, Stubb had, since 2004, ended in the top three in every election in which he had participated. Luckily for him, he competed in the 2014 election to the European Parliament, which was held only a month before the party congress. After gaining almost 150,000 personal votes, almost twice the tally of the second-most popular candidate, his bid for the party leadership was strengthened considerably. Stubb was the voters' favorite throughout the contest. Last to join the race was Paula Risikko, another long-serving MP and minister, and the minister of social affairs and health in Katainen's cabinet. The party's women's union (Kokoomusnaiset) supported her.

In the National Coalition, too, the central party office facilitates a campaign tour if more than one candidate emerges. This is a routine chore and no external principal delegates the task. According to an interviewee, when – decades ago – party leaders' close associates controlled central party offices, they could work rather openly for the incumbent or the party elite's favorite. In the 2010s, when most party office workers are general media specialists, the central office works in a markedly professional, equal and apolitical fashion. For this leadership contest, the party office only provided technical administration and some general resources (not for the candidates). Due to its neutral role, it could not affect the result of the competition.

In regard to process management, the central office's role was insignificant. Prospective candidates registered there for the tour preparations, but the office could not filter anyone out from the contest. Its scope to manipulate information for the benefit of a certain candidate was small, too, because the campaign tour was open and very public. The aim of the tour was to provide information for the electorate and, perhaps even more, to enhance the party's public image. To make the most of the situation, the central office connected the process to the

ongoing European election campaign. It organized six events, at which "prime minister candidates" were thoroughly questioned by journalists. While the geographical representativeness of the districts was stressed, the party's national visibility was more important. The debates took place in the most significant districts, while smaller districts, where the events would have attracted only minor attention, were avoided. However, the debates were streamed online, too, in order to reach the intra-party selectors. Considering this, and that all of the candidates were very well known, the tour's potential to affect the result, via information management, was close to non-existent. Overall, the party's central office had no political impact.

The candidates' campaign teams organised in a very professional manner. They largely consisted of the candidates' close associates. For example, Stubb recruited MP Outi Mäkelä as his campaign manager and hired a team of young, media-savvy associates, mainly his former aides, to assist her. As Stubb was mostly known for his international career, the team prepared him carefully for the campaign debates, which mainly dealt with domestic issues, by serving him briefings from the party's and ministries' policy specialists. He was carefully marketed, too: the team wrote numerous speeches and pressed pins and balloons for the congress. The team also recruited several well-known party members to voice their support and persuade prospective congress delegates. According to Stubb, he personally called over 600 delegates (out of 850) (Stubb and Hämäläinen: 2017). According to an interviewee, Vapaavuori and Risikko chose a more traditional approach, emphasising contacts with district organizations.

The teams were not commissioned by external principals, although each received some support. The party's women's union's explicit support for Risikko was significant. She would not have run without it. Although Vapaavuori was supported by the party's traditional main associates, he organized his own team. Likewise, Stubb, who considered his neutrality as a strength, organised independently.

The teams were obviously motivated to steer the competition in a certain political direction. However, while they could encourage and discourage candidates, they could not filter anyone out. "Marketing" was the only way to make impact, but the candidates' long careers in the highest party echelons, and their national celebrity, made sure that information on their basic political preferences was impossible to conceal. As the contest was also about the next prime minister, the candidates' differences and likely impact on the position were thoroughly

assessed by journalists and political scientists. In addition, the national and party media polled the party's sub-national organisations constantly to reveal the final principals' preferences. Again, everyone was well aware of the candidates' preferences.

As in the Social Democrats, the main political effects of the campaign teams likely traversed through their direct contacts with the congress delegates. Despite the open and democratic nature of contemporary Finnish party leader contests, traditional networking and "ramming" in district parties naturally still matters, as the delegates for the party congresses are selected in the sub-national party branches.

Against the party elite's preference, Stubb won the first round of voting. However, he was not able to gain a majority (he only got 39.1 per cent). Unexpectedly, Risikko (30.9 per cent) forced party elite's favorite, Vapaavuori (30 per cent), who had hoped to beat Stubb in the second round with Risikko's votes, out of the competition; the margin was a mere eight votes. In the second round, Stubb beat Risikko with 58.9 per cent. He assumed the positions of party leader and prime minister.

No singular, specifically commissioned and politically powerful agent "managed" the 2014 leader selection process in the National Coalition. The party office facilitated a contest between independent candidates in a non-political fashion, and the campaign teams fought for their candidates much like parties in general elections. The absence of a defending incumbent, the "high calibre" of the contenders and the publicity of "prime minister candidates" made the process even harder to manage than the Social Democrats' 2014 selection process. Mostly, however, the two processes were organised very similarly, highlighting the contests' open, public and competitive nature.

It is widely believed that Stubb won because a majority of congress delegates believed that his personal charisma – which the result of the recent European election had highlighted – would "radiate" over the party and help it to win the 2015 parliamentary election. However, the party lost, and strong pressure was put on Stubb. Although he took the National Coalition into the coalition government, only a year later, in the spring of 2016, a few months before the summer's party congress, heavy criticism started to feature in the media. A prominent minister from Stubb's cabinet, Petteri Orpo, challenged Stubb – and defeated him in the 2016 party

congress. In the National Coalition, too, top-down managed leader selection nowadays appear to belong to history books.

THE GREENS

In the 2010s, two Finnish parties, the Greens (in 2011 and 2017) and the Left Alliance (in 2016) employed a new method for selecting their leaders. In line with their historical emphasis on intra-party democracy, they arranged a ballot of their members. Finnish law prohibits binding membership votes for party leadership, so, legally, the ballots were only advisory. In all cases, however, the parties publicly agreed and announced prior to the decisive party congresses that they would respect the ballots' results. Nevertheless, despite ordinary members' wider involvement, the contests shared the main characteristics of the "Finnish model": they were fought in open and public fashion between independent, "high-calibre" candidates.

The Greens' statutory regulations on party leader selection do not differ much from those in the "old parties". The chair is selected in party congress, every two years, by 400 locally appointed delegates. Local branches and congress delegates may propose candidates. In addition, however, the statutes grant to the national executive the right to call in an advisory membership referendum on "an important issue".

In regard to leader selection, the importance of membership ballots increased during the first decade of the 2000s, as the party's membership grew. The 2007 party congress received a motion that called for a membership vote on the leader. In response, the national executive designed a postal ballot for the 2009 congress, which utilised the single transferable vote: the least popular candidates were to be eliminated and their preference votes redistributed until someone won a majority. At the 2009 congress, Tarja Cronberg (chair in 2005-2009) vacated the leadership, but the new procedure was left unused, as no one stepped forward to compete with Anni Sinnemäki (chair in 2009-2011) in due time. Leader contests in the Greens have typically been competitive and the incumbent has been deposed on several occasions. The contests became more professionalised in the 2000s, after Sinnemäki's nearly successful campaign against Cronberg in 2005 (which Sinnemäki lost by just 10 votes).

The 2011 selection

The 2011 general election was a great shock for the greens. The party had increased its seat share almost consistently since its first effort in 1983. Until 2011, it had only ever lost one seat, in the 1995 election. In April 2011, the Greens lost a third of their mandates. Sinnemäki got the blame. She had directed an image-centred campaign, which – with hindsight – was considered a failure. Already before the election, the national executive had decided to call an advisory membership vote on the party leadership before the summer's statutory party congress. Following the work done in 2007-2009, the meeting accepted an election procedure that set the details – eligibility requirements, voting method and the like – for the ballot.

Organising a postal ballot for all members of a medium-sized party is expensive. In order to determine whether the candidates had any real support, and were not just trying to enhance their personal profiles, a candidate had to be supported by one district organisation or a national union (women or youth), or at least two local branches that had a combined membership of 50. In theory, entry requirements could be used to block candidates. In practice, this would have been very hard, because the Greens' activists, who still widely adhere to ideals of grass-roots democracy, generally object being "managed" from above. More importantly, the "high-calibre" candidates of the 2011 and 2017 contests could merely announce their bid in the media and get official backing afterwards. Such candidates are nearly impossible to filter out.

Only a few days after the election, a party activist from Lapland, Mika Flöjt, opened the race. In the face of heavy criticism, Sinnemäki was initially hesitant; but she decided to defend her position. The chair of the Greens' parliamentary party group, Ville Niinistö, who had fairly recently become a party favorite, decided to stand only after the election defeat (Niinistö 2019). He announced his bid in early May. The last to join the race, a few days later, was the deputy chair of the parliamentary group, Outi Alanko-Kahiluoto. Aside from Flöjt, the candidates were of the highest possible "calibre". The party congress, where the results were to be ratified, was scheduled for mid-June.

Two party actor groups facilitated the process without steering it in a specific (political) direction. At its meeting on 1 April, the national executive set up a special election committee to direct the technical execution of the membership ballot. Its task was to oversee that the

contest progressed according to the election procedure. The committee consisted of a chair and few additional members that were selected outside from the current party elite (they were mainly former district party leaders), and a representative of the party office (not the general secretary). The committee directed the preparation of candidate and voter lists, ballot slips and postal arrangements, and eventually the collection of votes. The committee's task was also to settle disputes and uncertainties during the contest. As its main duty was to secure a clean race, it operated in a markedly non-political fashion, explicitly demanding neutrality from its members.

Another set of actors was the party central office's publicity specialists, led by the general secretary, who designed a media plan and arranged a candidate tour. As in the "old parties", these were considered as ordinary party-office chores. The campaign was strongly motivated by media presence, because most party members could only see the candidates through the media. It was also important to make the new chair and other party heads familiar to the general electorate. The campaign's more general aim was to re-formulate the party's image after the excruciating election loss. Over a month, the group organised ten regional panels, mainly chaired by editors of local newspapers. The video and document material was compiled to a designated webpage.

This group, too, was set out to facilitate a clean race, and so its members were explicitly forbade taking stances vis-à-vis the candidates. In addition to self-control, which was enforced by a threat of sanctions, the candidates' campaign teams constantly monitored the group's actions. For example, the distribution of blog space and likes and retweets in social media were carefully counted, and even candidates' positions in the party's photos were rotated for equality. Inter-candidate strife was deliberately avoided, because it would reflect badly on a campaign in which the party had invested heavily. Overall, the party agents' capacity to steer the process via information management, too, was very low.

Yet the Greens' selection process was by no means devoid of deliberate political influence. As we saw in the other parties, leader candidates' campaign teams share many similarities with the teams that support candidates in parliamentary elections, which, in the Finnish open-list system, are highly personalised. Both types are composed of campaign managers, social-media specialists, graphic designers, video directors and website coders, who preferably have vast electoral experience. In leader contests, the teams predominantly operate on a *pro bono*

basis, increasing the importance of the candidates' personal networks. Compared to the "old parties", the Greens' campaign had one significant difference: instead of persuading congress delegates, whose hands were tied by the result of the ballot, the teams needed to persuade ordinary members, who were much harder to locate. Therefore, the district-level "ramming" was likely less intense in the Greens.

The ballot was closed three days before the congress, at which the result was published and immediately ratified. According to the election procedure, turnout had to exceed 50 per cent of the total membership in order to make the result binding. Of around 6,650 members, 65 per cent participated. Niinistö got 55.5 per cent of the votes in the first round and was selected to lead the party. Sinnemäki came third, with 18.3 per cent. Alanko-Kahiluoto collected 20 per cent and Flöjt 6.2 per cent.

With this significant mandate, Niinistö led the party successfully for three consecutive two-year terms, the statutory maximum, without ever being challenged. When he finally had to step down, at the 2017 party congress, a membership ballot was again called to select a new leader. A formidable group of candidates emerged and toured around the country, including the chair of the parliamentary party group, several prominent MPs and two of the party's deputy chairs. Due to the large number of candidates (a total of six) and the lack of clear frontrunner, the result of the ballot, which this time attracted a 66 per cent turnout, was much less clear than in 2011. Only after full five rounds of elimination did Touko Aalto, an MP and deputy party chair, secure a majority (with 60.5 per cent of the votes). The party congress nonetheless unanimously confirmed him as party leader.

After committing to the procedure, it seems highly unlikely that a party like the Greens could stop selecting leaders through membership ballots. It is important to note, however, that this commitment does not necessarily lead to a highly competitive, multi-candidate contest.

Only after a year and few months after being selected, Aalto resigned due to personal problems. The chair's duties were taken over by the deputy chair, Maria Ohisalo, who had come third in the 2017 ballot. Ohisalo did well, but the party decided to compete in the 2019 parliamentary elections under the leadership of the party's founder, former chair, presidential candidate and MP, Pekka Haavisto. After the election, which was a great success for the party, a membership ballot was called again to select a new leader, to be confirmed at the

2019 congress. However, as in 2009, only one candidate, Ohisalo, emerged and was thus selected without a ballot. Flöjt, who in 2010s joined several intra-party contests to pursue his ambition of becoming an MP, could not find backing for his bid this time. Party elites likely played a role in the process. However, they probably did so in order to avoid the high costs of a ballot, not because Flöjt posed a threat to Ohisalo (in the 2017 contest, Flöjt had been eliminated in the first round, after gaining less than 4 per cent of the vote). Had another "high-calibre" candidate emerged, a ballot would very likely have taken place.

CONCLUSIONS

Before the 2000s, the selection of party leaders in Finland was significantly affected by party elites, especially at the district party level, who tied up "package deals" about leadership positions before decisive party congresses. By the 2010s, along with the "presidentialisation" and mediatisation of party politics, their control had weakened. Contemporary leader contests are more open, public and competitive – in a sense, more democratic.

According to the party elite interviews that were conducted for this study, the change relates, first and foremost, to the general weakening of parties' membership organisations. Earlier, district party leaders were respected insiders, who possessed special information about the candidates, as only those insiders visited central party headquarters frequently. Through their status, information resources and ability to affect lower ranks' careers, they gained leverage to persuade (or "ram") congress delegates behind their preferred candidates. Gradually, more direct communication between activists and candidates became possible. Due to the decline of party memberships and traditional authority structures, intra-party hierarchies started to erode. District elites' power resources lost relevance, especially in the eyes of younger generations. The contemporary congress delegates want to decide independently and they expect genuine campaigns from the candidates.

Contemporary Finnish party leader contests, when they occur, are characterised by open and public competition between independent "high-calibre" candidates, who are supported by their professionally organised campaign teams. While the teams try – and to some extent likely succeed – to steer the processes in certain directions, they cannot be considered as steering agents, because no party principal commissioned them and they operate in strictly

partisan fashion. They are merely agents of the candidates – political movements in a very traditional sense.

Two caveats should balance the generalisation on the contemporary "Finnish model". First, although genuine multi-candidate contests have become more common, it is still rather customary to coronate an incumbent leader before his or her next term. However, this does not necessarily result from active filtering of potential competitors. More likely, it flows from the simple facts that selectors happen to be satisfied with the incumbent, and the political costs of challenging a popular leader are high. Secondly, although the contests have "democratised", district-level "ramming" still occurs. As long as party congress delegates make the final decisions, it makes sense to try to win them over. However, advisory membership ballots should defy this old logic.

In contemporary Finnish parties, the closest thing to a steering agent is the party central office, which organises a campaign tour if several contenders emerge. In the Greens, who in 2010s have selected leaders via membership ballots, an election committee that administers the vote is also commissioned. In regard to steering the process, the most important feature of these actors is their explicit commitment to non-partisan behaviour. Instead of sieving a single candidate for the approval of the party congress, these actors work in markedly non-political fashion to facilitate a clean contest between several candidates. Their task is the exact opposite of that allocated to Swedish steering agents. Instead of "managing" intra-party democracy to a certain direction, they aim to foster a genuine political competition.

Does this mean that contemporary Finnish party leader selection processes are not managed at all? Essentially, the answer depends on what is meant with process management. If mere technical administration suffices, without any political motivation or capacity, then party offices can be regarded as steering agents. It actually makes some sense to think this way, because if the final principals (party congress delegates) wish to receive several options to choose from, and not just one, a neutral party office whose only task is to facilitate a clean contest fulfills this task.

If process management also asks for political influence, then Finnish party offices' steering-agent quality is very low or non-existent. Even if a general secretary, party office or an election committee wanted to steer the process in a certain direction, it would be extremely

hard, because they are constantly monitored by other party actors and campaign teams, and partiality tends to be explicitly sanctioned. While party offices could in theory try to steer the processes, in practice it would not be possible, at least in an effective manner. If mere political ambition with no actual capacity suffices, then party offices could be conceived as steering agents, as all party actors surely have some political preferences. Such a definition, however, does not demarcate any party or political actors and thus hollows out the concept.

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PRIMARY DATA SOURCES

The news archives of *Helsingin Sanomat* and the National Broadcasting Company (YLE). Six semi-structured in-depth interviews (two per party) from acting or former members of party elites (3 general secretaries, 1 campaign manager, 1 policy manager, 1 party archive director). Combined duration: 393 minutes (~6,5 hours).

Party statutes and other official party documents (party congress minutes, etc).