

“Centenarian in a Fitness Test”

EVA’s 2007 Attitude and Value Survey

ENGLISH SUMMARY

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According to EVA’s latest Attitude and Value Survey, Finns think the inheritance tax should be discontinued in their country. The other wishes of Finns preparing to celebrate their centennial anniversary of democratic elections are focused on welfare: development of health-care, employment and elimination of poverty.

Finns often say that it is difficult to pinpoint ideological differences between political parties nowadays. Clear ideological differences in emphasis can nevertheless be found between different demographic groups and party supporters. For example, those voting for the Social Democrats are just as ideologically far apart from the Leftist Alliance as they are from the Centre Party.

Gender equality divides opinions between men and women, Finns have doubts about the functioning of market economies, public services do not work well enough, taxation is too high, Finns are ill-prepared for the aging of the population and they are afraid of being dependent on Russia for energy. Among other things, these are the results of EVA’s fresh Attitude and Value Survey “Centenarian in a Fitness Test”.

The report now being published is the twelfth in a series of EVA’s national attitude and value surveys that have been carried out since 1984. It has been prepared by Ilkka Haavisto and Martti Nyberg from EVA as well as by Pentti Kiljunen from Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy, which has also been responsible for the technical implementation of the study. The following summary includes a few of the main results selected from the wide-ranging study.

Centenarian in a Fitness Test

Finns think their one-hundred year old Parliament has a suitable amount of power; they feel the same about their government. They think too much power is wielded by the EU, media, market forces as well as large companies. Too little power is deemed to be in the hands of private citizens, families as well as non-governmental organizations.

The majority of Finns feel there is room for improvement in the functioning of Finnish democracy. The political parties appear to have been drifting further and further away

from the problems of ordinary people. Finns' personal relationship with political parties is nevertheless showing some signs of recovery. The senior citizens' attitudes towards politics can be characterized as the most negative.

A sort of underlying healthy attitude is evidenced, however, by the fact that eight people out of ten think that despite the limited possibilities to exert influence, it still pays off to vote. A change of the direction in politics after the election is seen as very unlikely, even with a change of power.

Traditional recipes trusted

Finns do not believe that there will be a change in governmental power since a majority sees the continuation of the centre-left coalition as the most likely outcome. A fifth think the government will be formed via a left-right coalition while only 7 percent see a centre-right government. Finns take a negative view of greater polarization between the right-wing and the left-wing parties as has been the case in Sweden, as well as the thought of a two-party system coming to Finland. The most desirable base for a government – even greater than any combination of two of the three largest parties – is surprisingly a wide-based rainbow coalition consisting of several parties from the right, centre and left. The next most popular is a centre-left coalition, followed by a centre-right and left-right coalition.

The wishes of Finns regarding the next government's programme are heavily weighted toward domestic questions and especially welfare: development of healthcare, elimination of poverty as well as fostering of employment. It is also worth noting that the wishlist has not changed appreciably since the last Parliamentary elections.

Any ideologists still out there?

Finding ideological differences between parties is nowadays arguably difficult. This survey took a peek "behind the parties' back" by asking Finns, what kind of values and ideological motives should be directing the development of society. The majority are happy with emphasizing the individual as well as equality. Likewise, traditional values and tolerance are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, there are still clear ideological differences in emphasis between different demographic groups and party supporters, centering around individual-liberalistic and collective social dimensions, helping us to understand the Finnish political landscape. On this scale, for example the ideological distance between the Social Democrats and Leftist Alliance supporters is as big as the distance between supporters of the Social Democrats and Centre Party.

Market economy is criticized but entrepreneurship is valued

In addition to the functioning of democracy, the functioning of the market economy is receiving strong criticism. A majority of Finns think that the market economy is not working in the best interest of all citizens in modern Finland. Although some respondents may see their criticism as constructive, a majority of Finns also see our society as being driven too much by market forces. Additionally almost half (although slightly less than before) of the Finns question the presumption that economic growth is the basis of our well-being. Economic and social inequality is also deemed to have grown too much. In spite of this the attitude towards entrepreneurship is still very positive and private business activity is conceived as the primary motor of welfare.

Finnish welfare state opening up?

Finns' criticism towards the welfare state is directed primarily at the fact that it should be working better than at present. The survey this time also asked what the role of the private sector should be in producing welfare services. The private sector is also welcomed into the development of the welfare state. Also the availability of services is higher in Finns' priorities than who is actually providing them. The majority people are still hesitant about companies acting as providers of public services.

Inheritance tax to the trash heap of history?

The statements of Finnish people getting ready for the election regarding taxation are fairly courageous – and partly even radical. Finns would already be prepared to say farewell to the inheritance tax altogether. Taxation is also otherwise felt as being both absolutely and relatively too stringent: 70% of Finns feel that income taxation in Finland is at too high a level. Of retired people the amount is as high as 80%. The majority of Finns also believe in the functionality of tax incentives as a work motivator and promoter of entrepreneurship.

However, an actual tax revolt is not in the air. Paying taxes is generally seen as sensible and useful. Nevertheless Finns' do not see tax policies as a mere zero-sum game between the extensiveness of public services and tax cuts. According to Finns, taxation should not be lowered if that in turn leads to the weakening of public services, but on the other hand almost half of Finns think that the public sector should be able to secure good services with a lighter taxation than at present.

Ill-prepared for aging of population

Finns confidence in the pension system has grown since the previous survey, but it cannot be characterized as unshakable. About a third predicts that it will collapse in the future. One can paint a gloomy picture of working life in aging Finland. Despite a national program for aging workers, the input of older workers is felt to be undervalued and the pace of work much too fast. The idea that the threat of a lack of labour can be alleviated by immigrants is opposed a little less than previously. Finns traditionally rather unenthusiastic attitudes toward immigration has eased slightly also in other respects.

Interests of employees and employers do not meet

Finns feel that the interests of employees and employers have increasingly diverged from one another. This result is the most pronounced during the 12 years of the survey. Even though the competitiveness of the export industry is recognized as still of key national interest, Finns think workers have fallen off the sleds of companies following their globalization strategies. In turn, Finns have become increasingly suspicious of globalization. The innate nature of this phenomenon is also still mostly a question mark for Finns.

Men and women have almost opposite impressions of prevalence of equality

Two thirds of women (67%) think that men and women are not equal enough in Finland today. The majority of men (59%) think things are all right in this respect. Dissatisfaction in the development of equality has grown essentially and opinions now are clearly more critical than before.

Every other person thinks the whole society would benefit if women had more say in the working life. Especially, it is felt that women bring more humane values to decision making. However, the much discussed female quotas do not especially arouse interest. The idea of "motherly leadership" as it has been dubbed in the public discussions has not really lit up a spark either.

Threat of climate change seen as increasingly real

"Climate sceptics" denying the significance of climate change in our country has declined to five percent. The majority thinks that climate change is the greatest environmental threat of our time and it demands (fast) effective measures. The willingness to bargain from your own standard of living in favour of the environment is growing slightly. This is also the case regarding the support for building additional nuclear power. The sixth nuclear power plant now has more supporters (40%) than opponents (39%).

Sceptical of superpowers, misgivings about EU, "No" to NATO

The attitudes toward the United States are at rock bottom. Only 6 per cent of Finns believe the United States is acting right in world politics and deserves the support also of Finns. Also the more positive attitude of Finns toward Russia perceived only one year ago has become considerably more sceptical. Finns do not think their country should be dependant on Russian energy. Finland's term as President of the EU did not particularly boost the European spirit of Finns. There are still equal numbers of persons with positive and negative attitudes toward membership. The attitudes toward expansion of the EU have become more suspicious than previously.

Only a fifth (20%) of Finns are in favour of joining NATO, while over half (52%) are against. Opinions in this respect have remained unchanged from last year. There is even less support for discontinuance of compulsory military service than there is for NATO.

Background information of the study

The results of the study are based on a poll of 1,923 respondents. The data was compiled via a written questionnaire sent by mail between November 27th, 2006 and January 19th, 2007. The survey was based on a population of 4500 persons aged 18-70 randomly picked from Central Population Register. The study was carried out in a bilingual fashion, i.e. the respondents received either Finnish or Swedish language forms depending on their mother tongue. The sample covers 42.7 percent of the total sample. The research data is representative and correct in terms of its internal structure.

The confidence interval, i.e. the margin of error, for the results is one to three percentage points at the level of the total sample. The questionnaire and the distribution of the responses are presented in an appendix of the study. Like the previous ones, the survey was carried out by Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy. The data for the whole series of surveys are held at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD), a unit of the University of Tampere. Data can be obtained from FSD for research and teaching purposes.