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Source: *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, Mar., 1999, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1999), pp. 103-124

Published by: Canadian Political Science Association and the Société québécoise de science politique

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3232774>

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Democratic Breakdown and Democratic Stability: A Comparison of Interwar Estonia and Finland

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Introduction: The Sources of Stable Democracy

Within the theoretical literature on democratization, certain requisite factors are frequently or even continually stressed. However, it is also generally accepted that no one single factor is sufficient, that having a combination of various factors is desirable if not indeed necessary, and that this combination can vary from one successful democratizer to another.¹ A standard list of such “favourable factors” can be grouped into four main areas. First of all, a high level of socio-economic development correlates very closely with the presence, or the persistence, of democracy.² More precisely, Robert Dahl has termed the combination of high and growing income, education, occupational diversity, urbanization, private property and autonomous social and economic organizations as constituting a modern dynamic pluralist (MDP) society.³ An MDP society is favourable to democracy because it disperses power, authority, financial ability and knowledge (what Vanhanen has called “power resources”) amongst many individuals and groups rather than

- 1 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 37-38.
- 2 The relationship between development and democratization is most associated with the work of Seymour Martin Lipset, going back to his “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959), 69-105. However, Przeworski and Limongi have concluded (for the post-1945 era) that whereas the level of economic development relates to the stability of a democratic regime, it does not affect the probability of a transition to democracy (Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49 [1997], 155-83).
- 3 Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 251.

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Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique
XXXII:1 (March/mars 1999) 103-24

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and/et la Société québécoise de science politique

concentrating these resources.⁴ Phrased differently, an organized civil society of voluntary associations not only limits (excessive) state power, but also encourages participation, accommodation and political accountability.⁵

Secondly, democracy is obviously favoured by a democratic political culture, that is, one in which tolerance, willingness to compromise, trust, pragmatism, moderation and civility of discourse are central values and beliefs.⁶ These values tend to be more likely to occur in Protestant or secular societies which emphasize individualism rather than collectivism.⁷ In any case, political leaders may or may not choose to emphasize these values in their behaviour and discourse.⁸ For Dahl, what is crucial is the *legitimacy* of democracy, particularly in the minds of political elites and activists.⁹ Legitimacy is more likely where democracy evolves slowly and with the agreement or acquiescence of predemocratic elites, rather than arising because of a sudden collapse of the old regime.¹⁰ The policy choices and outcomes of a new democracy are also crucial, since a new democracy has no legacy of long-term efficacy which produces a reserve of legitimacy.¹¹ Yet without a strong belief that democratic procedures are the only legitimate ways to govern and to transfer power, the possibility of military intervention in politics will always remain.¹² Dahl also feels that democratic values are generally more likely to arise if competition precedes participation, that is, if participation is first restricted to a small elite who are more likely to trust each other (even if they disagree politically), then slowly expanding and incorporating, indeed, assimilating, more heterogeneous groups as time goes on. In contrast, if the growth of participation precedes or parallels that of competition, either heterogeneous elites have to socialize themselves quickly into democratic behaviour or, much

4 Ibid., 251-52; and Tatu Vanhanen, *The Emergence of Democracy: A Comparative Study of 119 States, 1850-1979* (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1984), 33.

5 Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Introduction: What Makes for Democracy?" in Diamond, Linz and Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (2nd ed.; Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 27-29.

6 Ibid., 19.

7 Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 37, 39.

8 Diamond, Linz and Lipset, "Introduction," 16-19.

9 Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 129-62; and Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 260-62.

10 Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 40-43.

11 Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 21.

12 Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (2nd ed.; Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 78-80.

Abstract. Two of the new states of interwar Europe were Estonia and Finland. Both arose out of the Russian Empire and both were literate, Protestant nations. Yet democracy broke down in Estonia but survived in Finland. These outcomes would seem ironic, given that Finnish independence involved a brutal civil war and Finland was linguistically divided—factors not present in Estonia. This study, however, examines not just the nature of independence but also the constitutional structures, party politics and regime crises of these two neighbouring cases. In terms of the factors commonly cited as favouring stable democracy, the Estonian-Finnish contrast shows the particular explanatory importance of political culture, the speed of democratization, the views of elites and the nature of the party system. What happened in Finland also implies that a presidential, or at least a balanced semipresidential, system cannot be considered as inherently dangerous for democratic stability.

Résumé. Deux des nouveaux États de l'Europe de l'entre-deux-guerres furent l'Estonie et la Finlande. Tous deux provenaient de l'Empire russe et étaient des nations instruites et protestantes. Néanmoins, la démocratie s'est effondrée en Estonie mais a survécu en Finlande. Ces résultats peuvent sembler ironiques étant donné que l'indépendance finlandaise a entraîné une guerre civile brutale et la Finlande fut divisée linguistiquement—facteurs non présents en Estonie. Cependant, cette étude examine non seulement la nature de l'indépendance mais aussi les structures constitutionnelles, la politique de partis et les crises des régimes de ces deux cas voisins. En ce qui concerne les facteurs cités comme étant généralement favorables à la stabilité démocratique, le contraste entre l'Estonie et la Finlande montre l'importance explicative particulière de la culture politique, la rapidité de la démocratisation, les avis des élites et la nature du système de partis. La situation finlandaise suggère aussi qu'un système présidentiel, ou à tout le moins semi-présidentiel équilibré, ne peut pas être considéré comme dangereux en soi pour la stabilité démocratique.

more likely, democratic norms will be weakly supported or opposed by some or all of these elites.¹³

Thirdly, the more heterogeneous the society the harder will it be to achieve mutual tolerance, trust and so forth. Thus stable democracy is more likely if a society is homogeneous. Failing this, some sort of agreed-upon federalism, or else “consociationalism” among the political elites, will favour democracy, whereas subcultural polarization will hinder it.¹⁴ Even if not polarized, a highly fragmented society will simply find it difficult to achieve effective democratic government. Democracy, thus, is favoured by a party system which is neither polarized nor highly fluid, but rather involves ideally no more than a few organized, autonomous, moderate parties.¹⁵

Fourth and finally, international and regional factors can affect democratization and democratic stability in a nation. In terms of direct effects, foreign powers and agencies can lend support to democratization, or seek to undermine it. Indeed, democracies with “everything internal going for them” can still be conquered by nondemocratic powers, thus ending their democracy. Less consequentially, the democratic developments (positive

13 Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 33-39.

14 Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 254-60; and Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

15 Diamond, Linz and Lipset, “Introduction,” 33-36.

or negative) of a country's neighbours, homologues and protectors will have demonstration and possibly spillover effects, maybe even producing what Huntington calls a "snowballing" pattern.¹⁶

Furthermore, there is an "institutional" debate—rather than an academic consensus—regarding the comparative effects on democratization of presidential and parliamentary systems. In particular, Juan Linz has concluded that "presidentialism seems to involve greater risk for stable democratic politics" due to various flaws in most presidential systems.¹⁷ He is also sceptical about semipresidential systems,¹⁸ seeing in these the threat of either instability or imbalance.¹⁹ Moreover, as Mainwaring has stressed, the combination of presidentialism and multiparty politics is especially inimical to stable democracy, since this combination is likely to lead to deadlock, polarization and difficulties in coalition building.²⁰

The Estonian-Finnish Contrast

The neighbouring cases of Estonia and Finland provide an interesting application of democratization theory, inasmuch as these two nations

16 Ibid., 48-52; Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 263; and Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 100.

17 Eight flaws noted are: the individual president is by definition elected in a zero-sum "winner-take-all" contest; often with only a plurality of (public) support; the losing candidate(s) lose more, and they lack the position of an opposition parliamentary leader; the president is elected for a fixed term, usually of six years, and cannot be removed if unpopular or incompetent; in the case of death, the presidency is immediately transferred to the then-vice president, who may be similarly flawed, or even more so; the president and the congress can be hostile forces, yet each can claim the legitimacy of democratic election; the inability to re-elect a given president makes that person unaccountable, and may also be frustrating in the case of a good president; and a presidential system—like single-member-plurality voting—effectively "compresses" the party system into less than three main parties, which is not desirable for heterogeneous societies (Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?" in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 1 of *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994]). The cited conclusion is from page 70.

18 The classic definition of semipresidentialism is that of Duverger, who defines it as having three elements: "(1) the president of the republic is elected by universal suffrage; (2) he possesses quite considerable powers; [and] (3) he has opposite him, however, a prime minister and ministers who possess executive and governmental power and can stay in office only if the parliament does not show its opposition to them" (Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research* 8 [1980], 166).

19 Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," 48-55.

20 Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination," *Comparative Political Studies* 26 (1993), 198-228.

shared many features. Indeed, in their 18-country analysis of democratic survival versus breakdown in interwar Europe, Gisèle de Meur and Dirk Berg-Schlosser found interwar Estonia and Finland to be the two “most similar” cases.²¹ Both countries arose out of the old Russian Empire and were two of the most developed and “Western” parts of that empire. Each nation, for example, had close to full literacy and each was essentially Protestant in religion. However, the circumstances of their respective foundings were very different. In Estonia, the War of Liberation (against both Imperial Germany and Revolutionary Russia) was a unifying factor. Estonia was also basically a homogeneous nation, whose only pressing political issue was land reform of the traditional Baltic German estates.

In Finland, on the other hand, political divisions led to an all-out civil war in 1918, involving some 6,794 battle deaths.²² To these casualties one must add the more than 1,500 murdered during the “Red terror” of the winter of 1917-1918, the 8,380 similarly murdered in the “White terror” after their victory in the war and the more than 9,000 Communists who later died in White prisoner-of-war camps. For a nation of only 3.3 million people, this brutal civil war left a bitter legacy for the new nation-state. Moreover, the civil war—with the Red side almost exclusively Finnish-speaking—only served to complicate further the tension between the Finnish and Swedish in Finland.²³ In summary, the Finnish situation in 1919 did not bode well in terms of national unity and political stability, at least in comparison with its Estonian neighbour.

Yet it proved to be Estonia, and not Finland, where democracy ultimately broke down in the 1930s. This article seeks to compare and contrast these two new nations in order to show how and why democracy proved more resilient in Finland. In so doing, it adds to the theoretical debate about the factors relating to democratic stability. First, the constitutional and party political structures of these two cases as they functioned during the peaceful 1920s are considered. Next, the rise of right radicalism in these nations, that is, the Veterans movement in Estonia and the Lapua movement and the *Isänmaallinen Kansanliike* (IKL) in Finland and the respective responses of the established political actors to these regime crises are examined. Finally, the differences in regime outcomes are explained in terms of several key factors that should be stressed in any general analysis of the causes of democratic breakdown versus stability.

21 Gisèle de Meur and Dirk Berg-Schlosser, “Comparing Political Systems: Establishing Similarities and Dissimilarities,” *European Journal of Political Research* 26 (1994), 198.

22 D. G. Kirby, *Finland in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 64.

23 Pekka K. Hamalainen, “Revolution, Civil War, and Ethnic Relations: The Case of Finland,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 5 (1974), 117-25.

Constitutional Structures and Party Politics

In 1919, Estonians voted for a Constituent Assembly. Public desire for land reform helped produce a left-centre majority at the expense of both the conservative Agrarian League (founded in 1917 to represent the traditional peasant proprietors) and the far left. In 1920, the Social Democrats and the liberal centre parties produced a Basic Law which has been called “the most liberal constitution in the world.”²⁴ Civil liberties, standard freedoms, minority rights and even the autonomy of cultural minorities were all recognized.²⁵

Power was centred in the Estonian Riigikogu, or National Assembly, which consisted of 100 members elected by universal suffrage and proportional representation for a fixed three-year term. The Riigikogu not only had legislative powers and control over the budget, but it also elected the members of the Supreme Court and, above all, had the right to *appoint* as well as dismiss the government. Indeed, the Estonian government was totally dependent on the graces of the National Assembly, since the Constitution did not grant the government any corresponding power to dissolve parliament and call new elections, as in the British tradition. The cabinet thus became, in practice, little more than a committee of the Assembly.²⁶ The main restriction on parliamentary power was an even more popular method of control: the right of referendum. The support of only 25,000 voters was needed to demand a referendum on the modification, passing or repeal of any law. This was in addition to obligatory referenda on all constitutional changes.²⁷

There was no head of state in Estonia; instead, the office of Riigivanem or “State Elder” was established. The Riigivanem led the activities of the government and signed all Acts, but—like the government collectively—could not veto legislation, nor dismiss the Assembly, nor even submit a bill for referendum.²⁸

In contrast to the Estonians, the Finns did not start “from scratch” in 1919. Under the Russian Empire, Finland had enjoyed constitutional autonomy as a Grand Duchy, and in 1906 the Diet of Estates was replaced by a unicameral assembly of 200 members, the Eduskunta. Suffrage thus jumped from about 4 per cent of the population to universal suffrage for both sexes. In this new parliament, elected by proportional representation with no national threshold starting in 1907, the Social

24 Imre Lipping, “The Emergence of Estonian Authoritarianism” in Arvids Ziedonis, Jr. et al., eds., *Baltic History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), 209.

25 Henn-Jüri Uibopuu, “The Constitutional Development of the Estonian Republic,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 4 (1973), 13.

26 Ibid., 14; and Jackson, *Estonia*, 166.

27 Uibopuu, “Constitutional Development,” 12.

28 Ibid., 15.

Democrats were always the largest party. The Finns were thus able to build on a parliamentary tradition when it became time to draft a constitution for the new independent nation. Moreover, the struggle for the use of the Finnish language had produced in 1860 the first political party: the Finnish Party. In response, the Swedish-speaking elites formed their own political party, so one can in fact speak of a Finnish *party system* dating back to the 1860s.²⁹

Committee work on a new constitution began with Finnish independence in 1917, but was soon interrupted by the civil war. The victorious White forces then split bitterly, but not violently, between those who wished to keep the new nation a republic and those who wanted a monarchy with extensive powers. A republican, semipresidential constitution for Finland was finally approved in July 1919.³⁰ In response to the events of 1918-1919, and in contrast to the new constitutions of Estonia and Latvia, a strong executive was created in the office of the Finnish president. The presidency was, in part, seen as a brake on a traditionally leftist parliament. However, universal suffrage, the *Eduskunta* proper, and its election by proportional representation were all unchanged by the 1919 constitution.

In 1919, the Progressive lawyer and professor of public administration, K. J. Ståhlberg, was elected by the *Eduskunta* as the first president of Finland, defeating the White civil war leader Gustaf Mannerheim by a wide margin (143 votes to 50) on the first ballot.³¹ The new republic was thus led by a strong liberal, rather than by an authoritarian conservative such as Mannerheim, as might have seemed more likely given the reaction after the civil war.

Estonia and Finland also differed in terms of their parliamentary configurations. Finland excepted, parties in the Russian Empire, thus including Estonia, were only permitted after the 1905 Revolution. Yet aside from branches of all-Russian parties, there was in fact only a single, truly Estonian party before February 1917: the liberal bourgeois

29 David Arter, *Politics and Policy-Making in Finland* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987), 6-8; and Francis Jacobs, "Finland," in Francis Jacobs, ed., *Western European Political Parties: A Comprehensive Guide* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), 520ff.

30 Finland is thus the "oldest of the [ongoing] semi-presidential regimes" (Duverger, "A New Political System Model," 174).

31 The Finnish president serves a six-year renewable term; from 1925 until 1988 the standard procedure was a national vote for an electoral college of 300 *party-affiliated* electors who then voted in multiple ballots until someone had an absolute majority. Parties were free to "make deals" and to change their support between ballots. Only in 1919, 1944, 1946 and (effectively) 1974 was the president selected by parliament rather than an electoral college (Arter, *Politics and Policy-Making in Finland*, 80-82).

Estonian National Progressive People's Party.³² After February 1917 a highly fragmented party system soon developed in Estonia.

TABLE 1

ESTONIAN ELECTION RESULTS, 1919-1932 (by seats)

Party	Constituent Assembly 1919	State Assembly (Riigikogu)				
		1920	1923	1926	1929	1932
<i>Right</i>						
Agrarian Union	8	21	23	23	24	} 42 ^a
Settlers			4	14	14	
<i>Centre</i>						
Christian Democrats	4	7	8	5	4	} 23 ^b
Populists (Nationalists)	25	10	8	8	9	
Labour	30	22	12	13	10	
Others		1	8	2		
<i>Minorities</i>						
Russian	1	1	4	3	2	5
German/Swedish	4	4	3	2	3	3
<i>Left</i>						
Social Democrats	41	18	15	24	25	22
communists ^c		5	10			
far left	7	11	5	6	6	9
Total seats	120	100	100	100	100	100

a United Agrarian Party

b National Middle Party (included ex-House-Owners Party)

c Banned after 1924 Putsch.

Source: Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 46.

In the 1923 election to the Estonian Riigikogu, 26 parties ran, and 14 won seats (see Table 1). The main party on the right was the Agrarians, led by Konstantin Päts, a nationalist lawyer and newspaper publisher. The party was backed by the urban elites as well as by rural voters. The centre of Estonian politics was occupied by the National Progressives (or Nationalists) who, in March 1919, renamed themselves the Populists. They drew support from liberal intellectuals and professionals. Jaan Tõnisson, the well-known and respected Populist, had been a key leader in the struggle for liberal democracy and Estonian autonomy. In the centre-left was the secular, reformist, Labour

32 Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 37; and Alvin Isberg, *Med demokratin som insats: Politiskt-konstitutionellt maktspel i 1930-talets Estland*, *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 4 (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1988), 13.

Party, and on the left were the Social Democrats, Independent Socialists and Communists. Finally, there were also various small parties representing economic actors, religious interests and the Russian, German and Swedish ethnic minorities.³³ The centre-right, however, remained dominant throughout the democratic period.

The agrarian reforms of the Constituent Assembly created a new class of peasant proprietors from the formerly landless. This large group was soon represented by the Homesteaders' or Settlers Party, founded in 1923. The Riigikogu began with a centre-right majority, and the growth of the Settlers Party only reinforced this. Consequently, of the 20 coalition governments between 1919 and 1934, the Social Democrats participated in only six, compared to 16 for the Labour Party, and 17 each for the Populists and the Agrarians.³⁴

In the first Finnish election after its civil war, in 1919, the Social Democrats still led with a respectable 80 seats. In the political centre were the Finnish Agrarian Union, the liberal Progressives of Ståhlberg and the linguistically based, multiclass, Swedish People's Party. On the political right was the National Coalition, with conservative and monarchist roots. Aside from the split between the communists and the socialists, parliamentary support for the various Finnish parties remained quite stable throughout the 1920s, as is shown in Table 2.

This period was thus one of consolidation for Finland. Mention has already been made of the moderate and democratic influence of President Ståhlberg. Yet perhaps the key factors for democratic consolidation were party political: first, the centrist nature of the Agrarians, and second, the moderate role played by the Social Democrats under their pragmatic leader, Väinö Tanner.

The pivotal role in Finnish politics was to be played by the Agrarian Union, founded in 1906. The Agrarian Union stood on radical democratic ground, which involved opposition to the elites and the educated classes, and to the dominance of city life. In short, the Finnish Agrarian Union had many common interests with the Social Democrats; however, it also included rightist members who were most comfortable working with the bourgeois parties.³⁵ More generally, the

33 Henry de Chambon, *La république d'Estonie* (Paris: Éditions de la revue parlementaire, 1936), 119; and Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 45-48.

34 Tõnu Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Estonia* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1975), 10; and Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States*, 46-47.

35 W. E. Nordström, "Agrarförbundets Uppkomst," *Granskaren* (September 1937), 110-14; and Kari Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien" in Heinz Gollwitzer, ed., *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: C. Gustav Fischer Verlag, 1977), 169-206.

Agrarian Union (as well as the smaller Progressive Party) believed in the goal of reconciliation with the working class and the Social Democrats. However, the 1925 presidential victory of the right-wing Agrarian Lauri Kristian Relander led to increased cooperation with the political right. Thus, during the late 1920s, the Agrarian Union became in practice a centre-right party, distancing itself from social democracy.³⁶

TABLE 2

FINNISH ELECTION RESULTS, 1919-1939 (by seats; total: 200)

Party	1919	1922	1924	1927	1929	1930	1933	1936	1939
<i>Right</i>									
IKL							14	14	8
National Coalition	28	35	38	34	28	42	18	20	25
<i>Centre</i>									
Swedish People's Party	22	25	23	24	23	20	21	21	18
Progressives	26	15	17	10	7	11	11	7	6
Agrarian Union	42	45	44	52	60	59	53	53	56
<i>Left</i>									
Rural populists						1	5	2	2
Social Democrats	80	53	60	60	59	66	78	83	85
Communists ^a		27	18	20	23	(banned until 1945)			
<i>Others</i>	2					1			

a Socialist Workers' Party

Sources: Jaakko Nousiainen, *The Finnish Political System*, trans. by John H. Hodgson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 180-81; and Kari Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien," in Heinz Gollwitzer, ed., *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: C. Gustav Fischer Verlag, 1977), 190-91.

Within the Social Democrats, a minority in fact opposed the revolutionary coup in January 1918. This minority had been defeated by the more radical socialists in the interparty rivalries of the 1910s. Väinö Tanner belonged to this moderate group, and he soon reconstructed a Social Democratic Party committed to parliamentary democracy and willing to operate in a bourgeois Finland. The Social Democrats gave tacit support to minority centrist governments in the 1920s, and from December 1926 to December 1927 formed a minority government of their own. This peaceful transfer of power between the bourgeois and socialist blocs was an important step for the Finnish political system.³⁷

36 Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien," 180-83; W. E. Nordström, "Agrarpartiet under Självständighetstiden," *Granskaren* (April 1938), 58-62.

37 John Coakley, "Political Succession and Regime Change in New States in Inter-war Europe: Ireland, Finland, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic Republics," *European Journal of Political Research* 14 (1986), 200.

In summary, Finnish parliamentary democracy was functioning well in the 1920s, with the Social Democrats on working terms at least with the centre parties. In Estonia, the ideological gaps, not to mention the founding tensions, were doubtless not as great—yet in this case parliamentary government developed much less smoothly. The average duration of Finnish and Estonian cabinets in the 1920s was about the same, around 300 days.³⁸ However, what differentiated the two cases was the *nature* of cabinet instability. Finnish cabinets were frequently minority ones, as the parties were often split over various policy issues. In contrast, from 1925 to 1933 every Estonian cabinet initially enjoyed majority support in the Riigikogu. The problem was that parties would continually desert the cabinet in the hopes of striking a better bargain with other groups.³⁹ Such self-interested behaviour in Estonia tended to be reinforcing. In contrast, the Finnish parties rarely deserted each other merely for the sake of gamesmanship. Moreover, it should be noted that in the 1920s, Finland had only two presidents, as both Ståhlberg and Relander served full terms.

A further crucial difference between these two nations that should be emphasized is the parliamentary experience of the Finnish political elite. Tanner was first elected to parliament in 1907; Ståhlberg was a cabinet minister back in 1905.⁴⁰ Many Finns had personally participated in the struggle for rights under Imperial Russia.

By the end of the 1920s, Finland thus seemed to have moved from the right to the centre. The National Coalition was losing support, and the Agrarians were gaining. However, aspects of the right were still very much in evidence. The nationalist Academic Karelia Society continued to draw support from intellectuals desiring a “Greater Finland.” The paramilitary civil guard (Suojeluskunta) was supported by all of the bourgeois parties, and was still four times the size of the Finnish army. Estonia also had a civil guard; however, in Finland there was also a legal strike-breaking organization called Vientirauha (Export Peace). This was established in 1920 by the woodworking industry, and dealt with many strikes involving unskilled labour.⁴¹ Thus Finland,

38 Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 111.

39 Artur Mägi, *Das Staatsleben Estlands während seiner Selbständigkeit: 1. Das Regierungssystem* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967), 234-43; Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 14-17; and J. Hampden Jackson, *Estonia* (2nd ed.; London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), 180-81.

40 Marvin Rintala, *Four Finns: Political Profiles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 50, 76.

41 Risto Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 206-07; and Jorma Kalela, “Right-Wing Radicalism in Finland during the Interwar Period: Perspectives from and an Appraisal of Recent Literature,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1 (1976), 112.

more than Estonia, seemed to have the potential for right-wing radicalism. Yet both experienced regime crisis.

Regime Crisis in Estonia

In Estonia, the central regime question was that of constitutional reform. After the failed communist putsch of 1924, further proposals to create a presidency were made—especially by the Agrarian Union and (in a secret memorandum) by the army—but nothing concrete was done. Soon, other parties besides the Agrarian Union began to favour constitutional change.⁴² Matters came to a head with the economic downturn brought on by the world depression, regarding which the deputies in the Riigikogu could not quickly agree on any decisive action.⁴³

Public discontent with the workings of the Riigikogu, which had of course always existed and had led to public protests, now grew sharply. However, the most important pressure came from the veterans' association. The Central League of the Veterans of the War of Independence (Vabadussõjalaste Keskliit or, popularly, the VABS) was founded in 1929, coalescing various small veterans' groups. From 1932 onwards, however, the VABS lost its character as a veterans' association and became an openly political, populist, fascist-oriented organization. Artur Sirk, an ambitious, demagogic young lawyer, became its dominant force. The VABS had a paramilitary aspect, with the requisite uniforms, parades, salute, propaganda and centralized leadership typical of right-radical movements in interwar Europe. The Veterans could not, and did not, claim that there was a communist threat in Estonia, but they did soon start attacking the Social Democrats.⁴⁴ Mainly, though, the Veterans were a single-issue group, demanding a strong executive. Specifically, the VABS proposed a directly elected president with a five-year term who would select the rest of the government, who could freely dissolve a 50-member assembly and who could invoke vaguely defined powers of rule by decree. To be eligible for election to this presidency, one had to be at least 40 years old and be nominated by at least 10,000 citizens of voting age.⁴⁵

42 Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States*, 46; and Lipping, "The Emergence of Estonian Authoritarianism," 210.

43 For example, it was not until July 1933 that the Estonian kroon was finally devalued—and this measure was only narrowly passed (Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 43).

44 Georg von Rauch, *Geschichte der baltischen Staaten* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1970), 128-29; Lipping, "The Emergence of Estonian Authoritarianism," 212; and Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 39-40.

45 Isberg, *Med demokratin som insats*, 33.

In March 1932, the Riigikogu had in fact adopted a bill which created an office of president along Weimar German or Finnish lines, and which also reduced the number of deputies to 80. As required, this constitutional change was submitted for public confirmation in August. Both the Veterans and the Social Democrats actively campaigned against it. The VABS felt that the new office would not be powerful enough, whereas the Social Democrats had always been opposed to the idea of a president. In the end, the electorate rejected this proposal by a narrow margin (330,236 opposed; 315,900 in favour). Undaunted, and hoping to forestall the Veterans' initiative, a similar proposal to that of March 1932 was put to a public vote in June 1933. This time the vote was a clear two-to-one against. The Veterans' proposal was finally scheduled for an October 1933 referendum, when it was accepted by 73 per cent of the voters.⁴⁶

With this result the then-Tõnisson government resigned, and Konstantin Päts took over at the head of what was supposedly a transitional cabinet. Amid great controversy, the Social Democrats supported this government, in an apparent understanding with Päts that the Veterans would somehow be kept out of power.⁴⁷ The new constitution went into force on January 24, 1934, with elections for a new Riigikogu and the newly created president scheduled for April. In the meantime, however, Päts became acting president according to the new constitution. He thus enjoyed very broad powers and was no longer responsible to the Assembly. Päts was no doubt pleased with this new constitutional situation. At the Fifth Agrarian Congress in 1926, Päts, to enthusiastic agreement, had explicitly called for a directly elected president and a strong government. And in 1933, at the Eighth Congress of the Agrarian Union, he spoke in favour of the VABS' constitutional proposal.⁴⁸

The Veterans, for their part, now agitated against the Päts government and the other parties, announced their possession of arms and began a campaign of intimidation. In the local elections of January 1934, Veterans candidates did surprisingly well, taking 42 per cent of the total urban vote. Momentum was apparently with the VABS, who had clearly become the favoured party of the urban middle classes—the social group seemingly most concerned with constitutional change. Even more crucially, the VABS figurehead, (retired) General Andres Larka, was the clear leader in the required collection of signatures for the presidential ballot. Given this lead, and the success of the VABS'

46 Jackson, *Estonia*, 189-90; Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 41-42, 51-55; and Uibopuu, "Constitutional Development," 17.

47 Isberg, *Med demokratin som insats*, 40, 158; and Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 119.

48 Hellmuth Weiss, "Bauernparteien in Estland," in Gollwitzer, ed., *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert*, 207-22.

demagogic and populist propaganda, they appeared likely to win the national elections set for April 1934, as they had done in the January local elections. In short, the prospect of the Veterans taking over Estonia was a real one.⁴⁹

However, on March 12, 1934, a month before the elections, Päts suddenly invoked the emergency powers granted to the president by the new constitution. Parliament was suspended and all political parties were banned. The Veterans were disbanded, their leaders arrested and their victories in the January local elections annulled. Resistance from the VABS and from their presumed sympathizers was surprisingly minimal for an armed group with supposed mass appeal. The April elections were postponed indefinitely even though this particular step was clearly unconstitutional.

Päts quickly consolidated his authoritarian regime, aided by the use of generous agricultural and industrial subsidies. The army was supportive, a planned coup by the Veterans in December 1935 having been thwarted even before it was attempted. Opposition to the Päts regime soon consisted only of staunch democrats such as Tõnisson. In 1935, Päts founded the Fatherland League, based on the old agrarian parties, as his new national party. Päts's authoritarianism was, however, of a comparatively mild nature: there were no political murders, the courts remained independent, religious observance remained free and even the autonomy of cultural minorities was totally respected—unlike after the coup in neighbouring Latvia. Nevertheless, the press was controlled, the traditional parties were banned and, of course, democracy ceased to exist in Estonia.⁵⁰

Päts next sought to legitimize his rule through a new constitution. In February 1936, a referendum approved his calling of a new constituent assembly. Control of propaganda ensured that this Constituent Assembly was dominated by Päts's followers in the Fatherland League, although opposition leaders were also elected to it.⁵¹ A new constitution was thus drawn up and proclaimed in 1937, combining a very strong presidency, much stronger than the VABS' 1933 version, with a new bicameral parliament. Of course, since Päts had created a pliant assembly, he did not have to use the full range of presidential powers.⁵²

49 Isberg, *Med demokratin som insats*, 45, 51; Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 55; and Lipping, "The Emergence of Estonian Authoritarianism," 212, 215-16.

50 Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 56-57; and V. Stanley Vardys, "The Rise of Authoritarian Rule in the Baltic States," in V. Stanley Vardys and Romuald J. Misiunas, eds., *The Baltic States in Peace and War, 1917-1945* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 79.

51 De Chambon, *La république d'Estonie*, 121; and Jackson, *Estonia*, 203-04.

52 Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence*, 55-56, 75.

The new House of Representatives had 80 members, elected as individuals in single-member districts rather than by the traditional system of parties and proportional representation. Elections for the new House of Representatives occurred in February 1938, with the Fatherland League the only national party allowed to campaign. Other candidates had to stand as individuals, either on a pro-regime or an anti-regime platform. After a semi-open campaign, supporters of Päts won 63 seats against 15 for opposition candidates (such as Tõnisson) and two independent Russians. In April 1938, the new electoral college officially elected Päts (the only candidate) as the first president of the Estonian Republic.⁵³ Constitutionality was thus restored a full four years after Päts assumed control in his coup d'état.

The new regime was thus authoritarian rather than totalitarian. In this way, Estonia was similar to Latvia (1934) and Poland (1926), and Päts may well have drawn inspiration from the latter regime. A political amnesty was proclaimed in 1938, but the state of emergency remained in effect. The universities were basically free but the press was not, and there was a State Propaganda Service. Perhaps most telling was Päts speech of February 1940, in which he opposed the return of party politics.⁵⁴ Estonian democracy *did* end in 1934. Thus, even setting aside the Soviet occupation in 1940, these events make it hard to imagine how a peaceful transfer of power away from Konstantin Päts could ever have taken place.

Regime Crisis in Finland

In contrast to Estonia, the democratic regime in Finland was able to survive the threat of a breakdown in 1930-1932. By the late 1920s, some of the scars of the civil war had healed. In particular, the Social Democrats were on reasonable terms with the centre parties. However, the communist Socialist Workers Party and the other communist-front organizations such as the main trade unions were all deeply disliked by the entire bourgeois bloc. The coming of the depression only added to the tensions in the economic and political climate.

These tensions culminated in an incident in November 1929: on a Sunday, Finnish Communist youth paraded in the small town of Lapua, in conservative, religious Ostrobothnia. This provocation so angered the local White small farmers that they responded with a physical

53 The upper house, or senate, was a corporatist body of 30 interest representatives including leaders of the military, churches and universities, plus 10 direct presidential appointees. Both houses served a five-year term. Also, the voting age was raised to 22 from a comparatively low 20 (Uibopuu, "Constitutional Development," 23-24, 33 n. 198, 34 n. 217; and Jackson, *Estonia*, 205-08).

54 Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 60.

attack. From this was born the popular anti-communist movement named after the town. In the summer of 1930, 12,000 Lapua members marched on Helsinki, where their demands were heard sympathetically by the conservatives Mannerheim and Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, and by the Agrarian president Relander.⁵⁵

Members of the National Coalition party and right-wing Agrarians had leading positions in the Lapua movement. The centre-right parties themselves were supportive of the demands of the movement: White speakers such as Mannerheim laid great stress on its “patriotism.” Indeed, at the end of 1928, the government had already drafted anti-communist legislation. In June 1930, despite lacking legal authority, the Agrarian-Progressive government of Prime Minister Kyösti Kallio banned all communist newspapers. The Communist deputies in the Eduskunta were all arrested on grounds of treason. The Communist-led union confederation was soon banned as well. Nevertheless, certain centrists—in particular, deputies of the Swedish People’s Party—joined with the Social Democrats to stop the immediate passage of the anti-Communist laws.⁵⁶

In order to get the necessary two-thirds majority for such constitutional changes, the Svinhufvud government called new elections in 1930 in which the Communists could not take part. This election produced a major victory for the National Coalition party (see Table 2). The anti-Communist laws were now passed, as no centrist deputy dared vote against them a second time. Attention now turned to the polarized presidential election of 1931. Here, the Lapua movement saw Prime Minister Svinhufvud as its own presidential candidate and strongly backed him. With the votes of the Agrarian delegates to the electoral college proving to be decisive, the leader of the civil guards contacted the Agrarian leadership and warned of violence should Ståhlberg be elected over Svinhufvud. In these circumstances, the Agrarians decided to support Svinhufvud on the third ballot; he thus narrowly won (151 votes to 149 for Ståhlberg).⁵⁷

In the summer of 1930, Lapua violence had begun to escalate, including a campaign of kidnapping opponents and dumping them over the Soviet border. Over 1,000 people were victims of this terror, including even (or especially) K. J. Ståhlberg.⁵⁸ The outrage at this par-

55 Kirby, *Finland*, 85-87; and Risto Alapuro and Eric Allardt, “The Lapua Movement: The Threat of Rightist Takeover in Finland, 1930-32,” in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 132.

56 Krister Wahlbäck, *Från Mannerheim till Kekkonen: Huvudlinjer i finländsk politik 1917-1967* (Stockholm: Aldus/Bonniers, 1967), 115; and Kirby, *Finland*, 85-87.

57 *Ibid.*, 241; and Kirby, *Finland*, 89.

58 Alapuro and Allardt, “The Lapua Movement,” 131.

ticular action led the bourgeois forces—in particular, the Agrarian Union—to distance themselves from the Lapua movement. From 1930 onwards there was a “lawfulness front” in the Eduskunta, consisting of the Swedish People’s Party, the Progressives, the Agrarians and the Social Democrats, with the first three parties being in the government majority. Only the National Coalition stuck with the Lapua movement, as the conservatives increasingly became a “disloyal opposition.”⁵⁹

In February-March 1932 an uprising occurred at Mäntsälä, a small town 60 kilometres north of Helsinki. Lapua reinforcements poured in from throughout the country, with the rebels demanding a new “patriotic” government. However, the state responded strongly with emergency measures. Svinhufvud appealed to the rebels to disperse, and forbade Suojeluskunta (civil guard) units from supporting them. The army was split over the uprising, but Aarne Sihvo, the commander-in-chief, was opposed to it, and in the end the armed forces remained loyal to the government. Nor did the leadership of the civil guard back the rebels at this crucial moment, although some individual members did join the revolt. In the end, the uprising failed to gain mass support, and by March 6, 1932 the rebels had all surrendered. The Lapua organization was subsequently banned.⁶⁰

The Lapua movement had thus clearly overstepped its limits. Suppression of the Communists *was* popular in interwar Finland, yet there was, more generally, strong support for the concepts of parliamentary government and law and order, dating back to the struggles against Tsarist autocracy. Svinhufvud himself had been imprisoned and exiled for his defence of the Finnish parliament, and had in his view spent all his life working for a legal social order.⁶¹ The “law of Lapua,” that is, the “law” of arbitrary violence, was bound to prove unpopular in a nation that had a “paternalistic” stress on law, order and obedience.⁶²

For its part, the Agrarian Union was initially split apart by the rural Lapua movement. Yet in practice, the Lapua movement was ultimately supported mainly by the larger farmers, as well as by right-wing professionals and academics. The movement’s unquestioned support of the capitalist order meant that it was of little practical help to the debt-ridden smaller farmers. The debt problem of Finland’s farmers further widened the gap between the Lapua movement and the Agrarian Union, which withdrew from the government in 1932 when it became clear that the other bourgeois parties would not support credit-re-

59 This is Linz’s term in his *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 27ff.

60 Kirby, *Finland*, 89-90.

61 Marvin Rintala, *Three Generations: The Extreme Right Wing in Finnish Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 192.

62 Dag Anckar notes that the Finnish political culture at the turn of the century was a paternalistic one. See his *Liberalism, Democracy and Political Culture in Finland* (Åbo [Turku]: Åbo Akademi, 1983), 10.

flation. Similar tensions *within* the Agrarian Union led to the formation of two new splinter parties: the Finnish Smallfarmers Party (formed 1929) and the People's Party (formed 1932) were both populist agrarian parties, the programmes of which drew from social democracy as well as the Agrarian movement. Their support peaked in the 1933 election, when they won three and two seats respectively.⁶³ In this election (see Table 2), the Agrarian Union lost six seats, a result which showed the effects of appearing insufficiently progressive. More generally, this notion of centre-left agrarianism had clear parallels in Scandinavia but, as we have seen, was alien to Estonia.

One should not, however, conclude that Finnish right-radicalism vanished after 1932. In fact, only three weeks after the Mäntsälä revolt, various right-wing figures, including President Svinhufvud, met in an attempt to continue the spirit of Lapua by legal means. On April 10, 1932 a new far-right party, the People's Patriotic Movement, the *Isänmaallinen Kansanliike* (IKL), was established. In its leadership principle and foreign policy, the IKL was clearly a fascist party.⁶⁴ The IKL had links with the Estonian Veterans, and gave support to the latter's planned 1935 Putsch.

The Lapua movement had been a farmers' movement which had managed, for a while, to capture broad popular support. The IKL, in contrast, was an elitist party, the vehicle of the Finnish-speaking educated classes. It drew strong support from the clergy and the Academic Karelia Society, with unilingualism and the concept of a "Greater Finland" being carried over from the Society.⁶⁵ Although the IKL did win 14 seats in both the 1933 and 1936 elections, it remained on the fringes of Finnish politics until being banned in 1944. In the mid-1930s, Finland was governed by minority centrist cabinets with tacit Social Democratic support. After Svinhufvud's defeat by the Agrarian Kallio (aided by Social Democratic votes) in the presidential election of February 1937, the way was clear for the Social Democrats to re-enter the cabinet. In March 1937, a centre-left coalition government of Progressives, Agrarians and Social Democrats was thus formed. A stable Finnish parliamentary democracy had been established.

63 Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 212-14; and Kalela, "Right-Wing Radicalism in Finland," 120; and Hokkanen, "Die finnischen Bauernparteien," 184.

64 Göran Djupsund and Lauri Karvonen, *Fascismen i Finland: Högerextremismens förankring hos väljarkåren 1929-1939* (Åbo [Turku]: Åbo Akademi, 1983), 18-19.

65 Kirby, *Finland*, 90-91; and F. L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism* (2nd ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 164-69.

Conclusions and Theoretical Implications

Despite a far more chaotic and divisive separation from Imperial Russia in 1917, democracy ultimately survived in Finland but failed in Estonia. In their study of interwar Europe, de Meur and Berg-Schlosser noted that the greatest discrepancy between the two “most similar” cases of Finland and Estonia occurred “within the area of political culture, indicating that one should investigate this aspect and its different components (including their historical roots) more closely.”⁶⁶ Indeed, as this article has shown, a central part of the explanation for the difference in outcomes involves the presence versus absence of a democratic civic culture in the two nations. In turn, this relates to the long history of democratic rights in Finland, which confirms Dahl’s analysis of the superiority of having competition develop before mass participation,⁶⁷ rather than both occurring simultaneously, as in Estonia. In a comparative sense, those new interwar nations whose citizens and elites had even limited previous experience with democracy and with public office fared much better in terms of democratic stability than those new nations lacking such a background.⁶⁸ David Kirby also stresses the importance of the long constitutional traditions in Finland compared to the Baltic states.⁶⁹

The Finnish elites remained strongly committed to their parliament, and knew how to work within it. Estonian politicians, in contrast, had to learn parliamentary government as they went along, and some never did—or even tried: for example, the Veterans’ demagogue, the lawyer Artur Sirk, never served in the Riigikogu. However, one should not focus solely on individuals. If Finland had its Ståhlberg, then Estonia had its Tõnisson. Rather, stress should also be placed on the behaviour of political parties. Moderation and a sense of compromise were traits much more evident in the Finnish than in the Estonian parties.

Clearly, one good example of this is the contrasting behaviour of the socialist parties. The Finnish Social Democrats accepted the political system that arose after the civil war, and did their best to aid the success of this regime, often by tacitly supporting or at least not obstructing cabinets with conservative, pro-business policy goals. This was of course not always an easy or palatable task—yet Tanner certainly did not want another civil war. When right-radicalism arose in Finland, the Social Democrats minimized polarization by eschewing the revolutionary countermobilization adopted by other European so-

66 De Meur and Berg-Schlosser, “Comparing Political Systems,” 210.

67 Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 33-39.

68 Coakley, “Political Succession and Regime Change”; and Taagepera, “Civic Culture and Authoritarianism,” 408-09.

69 David Kirby, *The Baltic World, 1772-1993* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), 328-29.

cialists in similar situations, thus avoiding the resulting centrifugal breakdown.⁷⁰ In contrast, the Estonian Social Democrats showed little interest in being in cabinet, and were generally disinclined to cooperate with the centre parties.⁷¹ Moreover, they maintained their uncompromising opposition to an executive right to the end, ensuring that the resulting regime change would be far more dramatic than need have been.

An even more crucial difference was the contrasting views and behaviour of the ultimately democratic Finnish Agrarians with their Estonian counterparts. The view of the countryside in each country was crucial, given its support for key parties and, more generally, its numerical dominance. It should not be forgotten that Finland was one of the most rural nations in interwar Europe. For example, in 1930, its share of the economically active population involved in agriculture was higher than that of Estonia and exceeded only by Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Lithuania and Poland, all of which failed at stable democracy. The Finnish Agrarian Union started out as a left-leaning party, moved to the right in the 1920s, but then shifted back leftwards beginning in 1932. In part, this pattern reflected the pragmatic response of a “hinge” party to the situation in each period.⁷² In part, this also reflected the tensions and divisions within the party. Yet in the end, the clear majority of Finnish Agrarians held certain beliefs about democracy and social justice from which they could not be shaken.

In contrast, the Estonian Agrarian Union started out as the effective conservatives on the political spectrum, and always remained right of centre. Moreover, Estonian farmers—whether they supported the Agrarians or their smallholder allies—were primarily interested in a strong government that could deliver specific economic benefits. They did not share the urban population’s broader concerns with the nature of the regime. Post-independence land reform had changed a land-owner/peasant economy into an *economically* modern rural sector without equally “modern” democratic beliefs. As Risto Alapuro argues, the sudden changes in 1917-1919 Estonia produced “an incongruity between the political system and the social structure,” in that authoritarian beliefs carried over into the new regime.⁷³

In summary, both the centre and the dominant left in Finland—unlike in Estonia—were very “Western” in their primary commitment to democracy. Equally, leadership and elites also left their mark, espe-

70 Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 217; and Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 76.

71 Vincent E. McHale, “The Party Systems of the Baltic States: A Comparative European Perspective,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 17 (1986), 308.

72 David Arter, “The Finnish Centre Party: Profile of a ‘Hinge Group,’” *West European Politics* 2 (1979), 108-10.

73 Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 258.

cially on the authoritarian side in Estonia. Contrasting Finland with the Baltic States and Poland, Alapuro notes that “peasant parties [in East-Central Europe] were largely manipulated by their non-peasant leaders and were less autonomous than the Agrarian Union in Finland.”⁷⁴ Konstantin Päts, the lawyer-publisher turned Agrarian leader, was a good example of such a political opportunist. In contrast, the Finnish conservative elites proved to be largely bulwarks of democracy, symbolized in Svinhufvud’s radio broadcast to the Mäntsälä rebels: “I have fought throughout my whole long life for law and rights, and I cannot allow that the law now be trampled on.” In 1937, after his bid for presidential re-election failed, Svinhufvud willingly retired to his country estate. This was hardly Päts’s personal choice or behaviour.⁷⁵

Returning to the original theoretical listing of factors favouring democratic development and stability, a comparison of interwar Finland and Estonia thus confirms the importance of (1) a democratic political culture and (2) a strong legitimacy of democracy felt by elites. Democratic stability in Finland was also aided by (3) a party-system that, while obviously multiparty, was centripetal rather than centrifugal, and which involved organized, disciplined parties with stable support. This, in turn, can be related to the fact that the main Finnish parties had been in existence since before independence, in some cases for decades, whereas the Estonian parties and party system more or less “appeared” in 1917-1919. In addition, (4) the slow progress towards full democracy in Finland allowed the political elites to establish themselves organizationally as well as become comfortable with parliamentarism. Generally, though, the international and regional environment does not seem to have been crucial for democratic stability in these cases, although it did relate to what followed, that is, Stalin’s successful imposition of Soviet hegemony over Estonia, but failure to do so to Finland in 1940 and unwillingness in 1944-1945, presumably in part due to the much greater challenge of imposing totalitarian control over a democratic people.⁷⁶

Moreover, (5) institutions also mattered. The strong president in Finland was an important factor of continuity, and a clear contrast with the three Baltic States and their ultra-democratic systems.⁷⁷ This con-

74 Ibid.

75 Parming, *The Collapse of Liberal Democracy*, 65-66; L. A. Puntilla, *Politische Geschichte Finnlands 1809-1977*, trans. by C.-A. von Willebrand (Helsinki: Otava, 1980), 160-61; and Kirby, *Finland*, 105. The quotation is given in Puntilla, *Politische* 161 (my translation).

76 Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 192-93.

77 Coakley, “Political Succession and Regime Change,” 201; and Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 259.

clusion seems to contradict the mooted superiority of parliamentary over presidential systems, yet the reality is more subtle: democratic breakdowns have been most likely in those cases where the president has been *very* powerful within the political system.⁷⁸ This, however, was not and has not been the case in Finland, where the role of head of government has been shared between president and prime minister, thus producing what Duverger calls a “balanced” semipresidentialism.⁷⁹ Indeed, of the eight potential flaws of a presidential system noted by Linz, the post-1919 Finnish system was “flawed” only in terms of the basic definitional features of a single individual (point 1) being elected for a fixed term (point 4). Having the choice, through 1988, made ultimately by interparty bargaining rather than by the national campaign (to the extent there even was one), allowed much more parliamentary-like flexibility.

Equally, not all parliamentary systems are the same. The system arising out of the 1920 Estonian constitution clearly produced a situation of excessive parliamentarism,⁸⁰ rendering governments unstable, and frustrating the timely passage of legislation. “Pure” proportional representation also ensured that this all-powerful parliament would contain several significant parties. Yet the 1937 Estonian constitution was also quite imbalanced but in the opposite way—towards the executive. Ironically given their fascistic nature, the VABS-inspired constitution of 1933 was not a particularly bad document. If this had been the original constitution—with more mature behaviour by the political parties—then the interwar political evolution of Estonia may well have turned out differently. The rules of the game *do* shape political behaviour, especially for new players.

The comparative history of interwar Estonia and Finland supports the views of Sartori that semipresidentialism is preferable to either pure presidentialism or pure parliamentarism.⁸¹ More generally, the different outcomes of Estonia and Finland show that democratic political culture, a slow transition to democracy, cooperative elite behaviour, a non-polarized party system and institutional structures are *all* relevant factors in democratization and democratic consolidation. Comparative analysis should thus stress their interaction as part of the ongoing study of the causes of democratic breakdown versus democratic stability.

78 Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 157.

79 Duverger, “A New Political System Model,” 173-76.

80 Uibopuu, “Constitutional Development,” 26-27.

81 Giovanni Sartori, “Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism,” in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, 109-10.