Country in Scandinavia, bounded to the north by Norway, east by Russia, south and west by the Baltic Sea, and northwest by Sweden.

**Government** Finland is a multiparty democracy with a parliamentary executive. Under its 2000 constitution, it has a single-chamber legislature, the Eduskunta, with 200 members elected by universal suffrage through a system of proportional representation, from 15 electoral districts for a four-year term. The parliament selects the prime minister on the basis of assembly support, who selects a cabinet (council of state). The president is elected for six years by popular vote, with a run-off between the two leading candidates if no one wins an absolute majority. Prior to 2000 the president chose the prime minister and Finland had a ‘dual executive’ similar to that in France. Since 2000 the prime minister and cabinet has charge of domestic and European Union affairs, with the president sharing with the government responsibilities for foreign policy. Because of the system of proportional representation, there is a multiplicity of parties, and the prime minister invariably heads a coalition government, typically comprising four parties.

**History** The nomadic Saami, or Lapps, were the earliest known inhabitants. From about the 1st century BC they were gradually driven north by the ancestors of the present-day Finns into the far northern region they occupy today. Swedish settlements were made on the southwest coast before and during the Viking era (8th–11th centuries AD). The Finns themselves were not converted to Christianity until conquered by the Swedes in the 12th–13th centuries.

Swedish and Russian rivalry for control Finland remained a dependency of Sweden for 500 years, but enjoyed autonomous government, becoming a grand duchy in 1581. Russia repeatedly tried to seize the country from Sweden, and in 1721, by the Treaty of Uusikaupunki (Nystad), Peter (I) the Great of Russia won the part of Finland that formed the Karelian province of Vyborg. In 1743, by the Peace of Turku, Peter the Great’s daughter Empress Elizabeth extended the Russian frontier to the Kymijoki.

Russian rule In 1809, during the Napoleonic Wars, Russia invaded Finland, and Sweden ceded the rest of the country, with the Åland Islands, to Alexander I of Russia in the Peace of Hamina (Fredrikshamn). During the 19th century nationalist feeling grew. Finland preserved its ancient constitution until 1897, when its autonomy was attacked by the Russian government. In 1899 Russia declared its right to legislate on Finnish affairs, regardless of the consent of the Finnish parliament, and between 1900 and 1902 the national Finnish forces were incorporated into the Russian army, and Russian was made the official language of the Senate (government) and of the more important public departments.

There was great discontent in the country, and in 1904 Nikolai Bobrikov (b. 1839), the ultranationalist Russian governor general, was assassinated. In 1905, the Constitutionalists and the Social Democrats formed a coalition and, taking advantage of trouble in St Petersburg (in the Russian Revolution, 1905), succeeded in winning certain concessions from the new governor general, Prince Obolenski. There was further trouble in 1908 when the Russian government again attempted to curtail the powers of the Finnish parliament, and in 1910 the ‘Imperial Legislation Law’ was passed depriving the parliament of its
right to legislate on such questions as the imposition of taxes, police direction, school management, and the control of the press, which, it declared, affected ‘imperial interests’. In 1911 the Russian Duma (parliament) passed a bill ‘placing Russians on civil equality with the Finnish citizens in the grand duchy’.

**The struggle for independence** Following the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Finnish parliament declared Finland independent (December 1917). However, a large contingent of Russian troops in Finland remained to support the Red Guards that had been formed by Finnish socialists. The Red Guards seized control of southern Finland, including Helsinki and Tampere. White (anticommunist) forces under Carl Gustav Emil von Mannerheim, supported by Finnish soldiers trained in Germany (the Jägers) and later by German troops, fought the Red Guards in a civil war marked by atrocities on both sides. The Whites finally won in May 1918.

The White-dominated rump parliament elected the German Frederick Charles of Hesse as king of Finland, but on Germany’s collapse at the end of World War I in November 1918 he refused the crown. New elections in Finland produced a pro-republican parliament, and under the constitution of 17 June 1919 Finland became a republic under an elected president, K J Stahlberg, with wide executive powers. Peace was concluded with the Soviet government at Tartu, Estonia, in 1920, and Finland’s independence was acknowledged.

**Finland between the wars** In the 1920s the Social Democrats were brought into government as a conciliatory move and formed a minority government in 1926-27. However, the idea of communism continued to alarm some Finns, and the movement was outlawed in 1930. However, the extreme right-wing Lappo (Lapua) movement was decisively crushed when it tried to organize a coup in 1932. In the same year a nonaggression pact was signed with the USSR. Other internal troubles arose over the bitter struggles between the Finnish and Swedish language groups, but a dispute with Sweden over possession of the Åland Islands was settled peacefully by the League of Nations in Finland’s favour in 1921.

The extension of Soviet influence in the Baltic in 1939, following the establishment earlier in the same year of military, naval, and air bases in the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, offered an obvious threat to Finland. Finland had been assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence by the Nazi–Soviet Nonaggression Pact (the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact) of August 1939, and the USSR went on to demand from Finland a small part of the Karelian Isthmus, some islands in the Gulf of Finland, and the right to establish a naval base at Hanko. There were negotiations in Moscow, but it was clear that the USSR was presenting demands incompatible with Finnish independence. When the talks collapsed, the Soviet government denounced the nonaggression pact of 1932 and diplomatic relations were broken off.

**The Winter War** In November 1939 Soviet bombers began hostilities by attacking Helsinki and a number of other Finnish towns, including Viipuri (Vyborg) and Enso (now Svetogorsk). The fortress of Hanko was bombarded by Soviet warships and the Arctic port of Petsamo (Pečenga) was seized. At the same time a so-called Finnish people’s government was set up at Terijoki (Zelenogorsk) by Otto V Kuusinen, one of the founders of the Finnish Communist Party, who had been in exile in the USSR for many years. This ‘Winter War’ was branded by the League of Nations as an act of Soviet aggression in December 1939.

Although outnumbered, the Finnish forces, under the leadership of Field Marshal Carl Mannerheim, offered a determined resistance to the Soviet invasion. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the Soviet
troops both in the Karelian Isthmus and to the north of Lake Ladoga (December). Large numbers of Russian tanks were destroyed in the course of the gradual withdrawal of the Finns to the Mannerheim Line, a series of fortifications across the Karelian Isthmus. The USSR then proclaimed the blockade of the Finnish coast of the Gulf of Bothnia down to Hanko and 32 km/20 mi out to sea. The Finnish government appealed to the world for help, but though Finland won much verbal sympathy, little concrete aid was forthcoming.

In December 1939 the Soviet Union, by means of massed troop attacks, made attempts to break the Mannerheim Line, but was repulsed with great losses. Heavy damage was done to Helsinki in numerous air raids later in the month. The Finns continued to offer a strong resistance, defeating the Soviets at Aglajärv, Salla, and elsewhere, and even crossing the Soviet frontier north of Lake Ladoga; while in the far north the Soviets were also forced back in retreat. The Soviet command retaliated with more bombing raids on the main Finnish towns, and these repeated raids undoubtedly had a cumulative effect on Finnish morale. In the penultimate week of January 1940 many Soviet attacks were launched northeast of Lake Ladoga in a new effort to outflank the Mannerheim Line, but the Finns still held firm.

The Soviet command then brought up some of their best shock troops in a determined effort to break the stubborn Finnish resistance. Massed attacks were made ceaselessly, and at length the Finns were forced to withdraw from their advanced positions (February 1940), having inflicted some 30,000 casualties on their attackers. Finland appealed in vain to the Swedish government for military assistance, and by the end of February the Russian offensive on the Karelian Isthmus had brought their forces close to Viipuri (Vyborg) and compelled the Finns to evacuate the important fortress of Kovisto.

**The Finnish defeat**  Defeated by sheer weight of numbers (around 1 million Soviet troops were deployed in the February 1940 offensives), the Finns were forced to sue for peace. Hostilities ended early in March 1940, and a peace treaty was signed in Moscow on 12 March. Under it Finland ceded the Rybachiy Peninsula on the Arctic Ocean, the Karelian Isthmus, and other land in southeastern Finland, including Viipuri, Viipuri Bay, and the shores of Lake Ladoga, as well as a 30-year lease of the port of Hanko and neighbouring mainland. The total land and lake area ceded under the treaty was 41,880 sq km/16,166 sq mi.

These terms were far more onerous than those presented by the USSR in the Moscow negotiations of October–November 1939, as the ceded territory included the whole Mannerheim Line defences; nor were any concessions made to Finland such as had been previously proposed by the USSR. Finland did, however, retain its independence.

**Finland in World War II**  When Hitler invaded the USSR in 1941, Finnish troops became involved, together with German forces, in hostilities with the USSR, because of bitterness caused by the Winter War and the country's concerns that the USSR was still seeking to annex Finland. Finland's sole goal was restoration of its former borders and it reoccupied most of the land ceded under the treaty of 1940. It controversially also seized part of Soviet East Karelia, but refused to attack Leningrad (St Petersburg). In 1944 the USSR, which had been counterattacking throughout 1943–44, made a determined effort to eliminate Finland from the war. Finnish resistance was overcome, and Viipuri fell in June 1944. In September 1944 an armistice was signed with the USSR, the UK, and Finland.

Finland was ordered to expel all German troops on its soil, and Finnish troops were to be withdrawn behind the frontiers fixed by the treaty of March 1940. Territorial concessions were severe (12% of Finland's total area): Finland agreed to cede the Petsamo area, its only outlet on the Arctic Ocean, and

to lease for 50 years the Porkkala headland in the Gulf of Finland, with a considerable stretch of sea and land for use as a military base. The leased territory was handed back to Finland, without compensation, in 1955. Finland also undertook to pay $300 million in reparations within six years.

Post-war relations with the USSR Of all the problems that faced Finland in the post-war period, the foremost was to build up relations with the USSR on a basis of peaceful neighbourly dealings between two sovereign states of widely different size and power. In 1948 Finland signed the Finno-Soviet Pact of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (the YYA Treaty). The YYA Treaty was extended in 1955, 1970, and 1983, and a 15-year trade agreement was signed with the USSR in 1977. Although the YYA Treaty required it to repel any attack on the USSR through Finnish territory by Germany or its allies, Finland maintained a policy of strict neutrality, which was accepted by all the major powers.

Economically, the reconstruction and resettlement of the population of the ceded territories was a major undertaking. The payment of the very heavy war reparations to the USSR, completed by 1952, was another remarkable achievement – during 1945–48 the payments represented 5% of the gross domestic product and inflation soared during this period. However, within ten years of the end of hostilities, Finland had begun to recover its former prosperity. Its devastated towns had been rebuilt with vision and imagination, and the country was once again continuing the social progress that had been a characteristic of the years between the world wars.

The effects of the world recession and the disruption of trade with the former USSR led in 1992 to the markka being devalued and cutbacks being made in the extensive welfare system.

Finland in international organizations In 1955 Finland joined the United Nations and the Nordic Council (which includes Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). From 1962 Finland was an associate member of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), and a trade agreement was signed with the European Community (EC) in 1973. With the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s, Finland was able to move towards closer ties with western Europe and dismantle the 1948 treaty with Russia. In 1989 Finland was admitted into the Council of Europe. A national referendum in October 1994 gave support to Finland's application for European Union (EU) membership, and in January 1995 it became a full EU member.

Postwar politics Finnish politics have been characterized by instability in governments, with over 30 between 1944 and 2000, and minority coalitions. The presidency, on the other hand, has been very stable, with only five presidents in the same period. The military leader, Carl Mannerheim, was president 1944–46, followed by Juho Kusti Paasikivi of the National Rally/Conservative Party (KOK) 1946–56, Urho Kekkonen of the Centre Party (KESK) 1956–82, and two Social Democrats (SSDP), Mauno Koivisto 1982–94 and Martti Ahtisaari 1994–2000. In February 2000, Tarja Halonen, another Social Democrat, who had been foreign minister since 1995, was elected the country’s first female president and won a second term in January 2006.

The Social Democrats and Centre Party dominated Finland's coalition politics for many years until the 1987 general election resulted in the Social Democrats entering government in coalition with its arch enemies, the Conservatives, while the Centre Party was forced into opposition. The Conservatives' Harri Holkeri served as prime minister 1987–91.

Centrist governments The Centre Party (KESK) emerged as the largest single party at the 1991 general election and its leader, Esko Aho, became prime minister. The Centre Party suffered a heavy
defeat at the March 1995 general election and the Social Democrats returned to power, forming a five-party centre-left ‘rainbow coalition’, including the environmentalist Greens, with Paavo Lipponen as prime minister. He oversaw Finland's entry into the EU in 1995, engineered a reduction in the unemployment level and promoted adoption of European Monetary Union (EMU) in 1998. Despite the Social Democrats losing seats at the March 1999 general election, Lipponen narrowly retained power. In January 1999 Finland was in the first wave of countries to adopt EMU and on 1 January 2002, euro notes and coins were introduced as the national currency.

The Lipponen government was weakened from 2002, after the Greens left in opposition to government support for the proposed building of a nuclear reactor to reduce Finland’s dependence on Russia for energy. It was weakened further in 2003 by divisions over the US-led war to topple Saddam Hussein in Iraq. There was strong popular opposition to the war and the government’s position was that there should be no military action without a UN Security Council mandate, but Lipponen was seen as too warm towards the US Bush administration.

The Centre Party emerged as the largest single party in parliament after the March 2003 general election, with 55 seats out of 200, two ahead of the Social Democrats. The Centre Party leader Anneli Jaatteenmaki became Finland’s first female prime minister, heading a grand coalition which included the Social Democrats and the centre-right Swedish People’s Party (SFP). But in June 2003 she resigned as party leader and prime minister after allegations over her use of information about Lipponen in the run-up to the general election. Matti Vanhanen, of the Centre Party, replaced her as party leader and prime minister, leading the grand coalition. Denmark sent 460 peacekeeping troops to southern Iraq, which remained there until 2007.

Swing from centre-left to the centre-right Vanhanen gave emphasis to environmental issues and voiced opposition to a proposed EU common defence policy. He stood as his party’s candidate in the January 2006 presidential election but finished well behind the Social Democrat Tarja Halonen, who had been president since 2000. Despite this, he led the Centre Party to a narrow victory in general elections in March 2007, after which he formed a centre-right coalition with the SFP, the centre-right National Coalition Party (NCP), and the Green League. The 20-member cabinet included 12 female members, the highest proportion of any government in the world. The left-wing Social Democrats finished in third place and went into opposition for the first time since 1995.

In June 2010 Vanhanen stood down as Centre Party leader and prime minister and was replaced by Mari Kiviniemi. However, the Centre Party was damaged by a party financing scandal and finished fourth in the 2011 general election, behind the populist-nationalist and euro-sceptic Finns (True Finns) party, whose vote share rose from 4% to 19%, and the Social Democrats, also with 19% of the vote, and the NCP, led by Jyrki Katainen, with 20% of the vote. A six-party coalition government was formed, built around the NCP and Social Democrats, with Katainen as prime minister, but excluding the Finns party.

The conservative Niinistö becomes president In February 2012, the NCP’s Sauli Niinistö, a strongly pro-EU former finance minister 1996–2001, was elected president with 63% of the vote. He was the first conservative president since 1956 and the first in 30 years from a party other than the Social Democrats. He was re-elected president in January 2018, again winning 63% of the vote.

Recession and government change The Katainen government pursued an austerity programme intended to reduce the high level of public debt, but the economy became mired in recession in 2012–14, which left the level of debt still high. In early 2014, the Left Alliance left the coalition government and
in June 2014 Katainen stood down as prime minister to become a European Commissioner. The former trade and European affairs minister Alexander Stubb became prime minister and NCP leader. Stubb led the same five-party centre-left coalition, but put forward an economic stimulus programme involving tax cuts and infrastructure investments of 1.1 billion euros. He also expressed support for potential Finnish membership of NATO.

The April 2015 general election saw the Centre Party, led by Juha Sipila, a successful businessman who entered politics in 2011, finish ahead of the NCP. In May 2015 Sipila became prime minister, heading a centre-right coalition which included the NCP and the right-wing populist Finns Party, entering government for the first time.

Concerns rose in Finland from 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, regarding the increase in Russian military activity in the Baltic Sea region. Finland responded in October 2016 by signing an agreement on closer defence collaboration with the USA.

From 2016, following a decade of stagnation and rising unemployment, Finland's economy began to grow more strongly and unemployment fall.

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