

Small States Challenges to democracy

ESTONIA

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Index	ESTONIA
Nations in transit, 2020; values from 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest	
National Democratic Governance	6.00
Electoral Process	6.50
Civil Society	6.25
Independent Media	6.25
Local Democratic Governance	5.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	6.50
Corruption	5.25
Democracy Score	6.07
Internet Freedom Score	94 (out of 100)
V-Dem project, 2019; rank and score from 0 to 1, with 1 representing higher quality	
Liberal Democracy Index	2/ 0.858
Electoral Democracy Index	2/ 0.892
Liberal Component Index	7/ 0.95
Egalitarian Component Index	11/ 0.913
Participatory Component Index	24/ 0.65
Deliberative Component Index	33/0.879
Polity IV, 2014; scores between -10 to 10, where 10 is full democracy, 6 to 9 democracy, 1 to 5 open anocracy, -5 to 0 closed anocracy and -10 to -6 autocracy	
Authority trends	9, since 2001
The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy index, 2019; rank and scores between 0 to 10, where 0 to 4 are Authoritarian regimes, 4.01 to 6 hybrid regimes, 6.01 to 8 flawed democracies and 8.01 to 10 full democracies	
Electoral process and pluralism	9.58
Functioning of government	7.86
Political participation	6.67
Political culture	6.88
Civil liberties	8.53
Regime type	27/ 7.90
Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, 2018, rank and score between 1 and 10 where 10 is the highest value	
Status Index	2/9.54
Political Transformation	2/9.80
Economic Transformation	4/9.29
Governance Index	1/7.46

Small States
The quality of
democracy in
the country

“Objective” measures

Subjective measures of dimensions of quality of democracy, EVS, 2008 and 2017; mean values			
Variable	Year	2008	2018
How good is having a democratic political system to govern this country? (1- very good, 4- very bad), v228 Q66, v148 Q43		1.97	1.63
Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (1- agree strongly, 4- disagree strongly) v229 Q67		1.90	8.70
How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? (1- not at all important, 10- absolutely important) v142 Q40			
How satisfied are you with democracy? (1- very satisfied, 4- not at all satisfied) v223 Q64		2.65	6.33
And how democratically is this country being governed today? (1- not at all democratic, 10- completely democratic) v143 Q41			
People have different view about the system for governing this country. How well things are going? (1- very bad, 10- very good) v224 Q65		4.64	5.28
How satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country these days? (1- not satisfied at all, 10- completely satisfied) v144 Q42			
Confidence in: Government (1 - a great deal, 4 - none at all) v222 q63 V 131 Q38		2.82	2.61
Confidence in: Parliament (1 - a great deal, 4 - none at all) v211 q63 V121 q38		2.89	2.79
Confidence in: political parties (1 - a great deal, 4- none at all) v221 q63 V130 q38		3.27	3.13
Confidence in: European Union (1- a great deal, 4 - none at all) v214 q63 V124 q38		2.47	2.49
Confidence in trade unions (1 - a great deal, 4 - none at all) v209 q63 V119 q38		2.64	2.55
Confidence in environmental organizations (1 - a great deal, 4 - none at all) v220 q63, V129 q38		2.33	2.3
Confidence in: social security system (1 - a great deal, 4 - none at all) v213 q63 V123 q38		2.35	2.35
Confidence in: armed forces (1- a great deal, 4 - none at all) v206 q63 V116 q38		2.37	2.16

Small States
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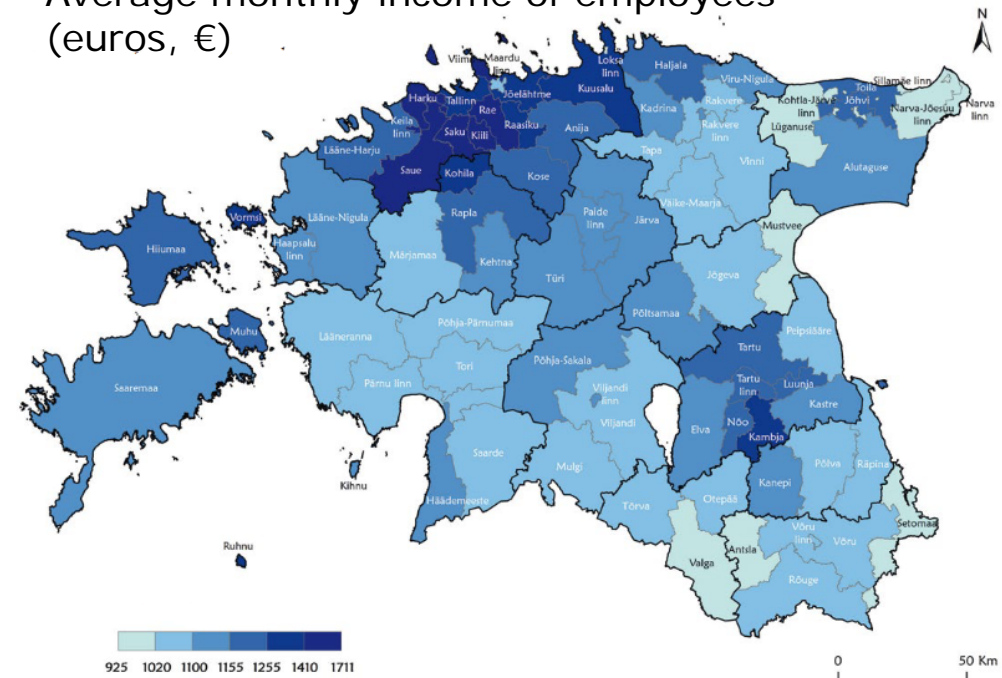
“Subjective” measures

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Social cleavages

- What kind of political/social cleavage exist in the country?
 - Economic cleavages between:
 - Urban and rural inhabitants (level of relative poverty 17% in North of Estonia compared to 34,6% in North-East Estonia in 2017)
 - Ethnic groups (higher level of unemployment for non-Estonians and non-Estonian speaking population)
 - Men and women (highest gender wage gap in the EU, 22,7%)
 - Ethnic cleavage
 - Russian speaking population comprises 24% (327 802) of the Estonian total population. Concentrated into North and North-East Estonia.
 - One of the main dividing line in the Estonian party system.
 - Political cleavage between conservative and liberal political groups
 - „Open“ (liberal parties, pro-LGBT) versus „Closed“ (conservative, anti-immigration, traditional marriage) policy (Saarts, 2019).

Average monthly income of employees (euros, €)



Source: Statistics Estonia 2018

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Mobilisation of anti-democracy sentiment

- What is the topic that mobilizes anti-democracy sentiment?
 - The main topics are **immigration** and **national identity** combined with perceived lack of control over political decisions of the European Union.
 - Immigration and the perseverance of the Estonian nation as the main topics for the Estonian Conservative People's Party.
 - Modest potential for mobilisation.



Anti-refugee march in Tartu in 2015.

The sign claims „No to national suicide“.

Photo: Priit Mürk, <https://www.muurileht.ee/uudishimulammataav-uudisvasimus/>

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Corruption and inefficiency

- Corruption level in Estonia is low.
 - According to the Corruption Perception Index, Estonia ranks 18 out of 180 countries.
- Significant improvements in the efficiency of corruption legislation and institutions during the past decade.
- Corruption continues to be highest in the public sector (44% of all registered corruption cases (72) in 2019) and local governments (33%). (Ministry of Justice, 2020)
- Increase of registered financial crimes since 2016, especially in money laundering.
 - In 2018 investigation revealed that around 230 billion dollars were laundered through the Tallinn branch of Danske Bank between 2007-2015.
 - In 2019 legislation was adopted to increase money laundering prevention measures.

Small States Populism

- The populist radical right political party EKRE was created in 2012 by father and son.
- Gained significant support during the European refugee crisis by building their election campaign around the question of refugees.
 - In 2015 – 7 seats in the Parliament
 - In 2019 – 19 seats in the Parliament.
- Typical populist party features (Petsinis 2019; Kasekamp, Madisson & Wierenga 2019; Makarychev & Sazonov 2019; Trumm 2018):
 - National conservative ideology that builds on the collective historical memory and the perceived fragility of independence
 - Anti-establishment rhetoric
 - Euroscepticism (e.g. comparisons between the EU and the Soviet Union (Petsinis 2019)).
 - Opposition to immigration

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Extremism and extremist parties

- Politically right and economically left
- EKRE and small religious civil society organisations (e.g. The Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition (SPTK) advocating for „traditional values“ that include the prohibition of abortions and same-sex marriage.
- Increasing support
 - religious groups
 - Men and dissatisfied citizens whose primary identity is Estonian (Trumm 2018).
- EKRE is currently driving the agenda in the coalition government, by holding the minister position in the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Interior (migration, border protection) and the position of the Minister of Foreign Trade and Information Technology (e-voting).
- SPTK is well organised and has a multidimensional communication strategy.

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Extremism and extremist parties



March for life in Tallinn 2020 (©Kiur Kaasik)



„Every life counts“. March for life in Tallinn 2020 (©Kiur Kaasik)

„March for life“ against abortion in Tallinn in August 2020. Organized with the help of SPTK.

Small States Democracy and COVID-19

- How did the pandemic affect democratic institutions?
 - Crises management was centralized from the Health Boards of Estonia to the Estonian Government.
 - Concentration of executive power during the emergency situation in Estonia (12 March – 17 May).
 - Minor instances of administrative violations related to lack of communication and insufficient transitional period when adopting additional Government regulations (e.g. late-night alcohol sales, direct flight restrictions).
- How did people react?
 - Survey in August 2020 showed that 85% of Estonians did not perceive any violation of human rights during the emergency situation (Estonian Institute of Human Rights, 2020).
 - Modest opposition to imposing mandatory mask wearing.

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Prospects of democracy

- Several trends indicating potential damage to democracy
- The coalition government includes three parties: The Centre Party (broad based), EKRE (national conservative), IE (national conservative).
- Changes in political culture after the 2019 elections.
 - Increasing polarisation between oppositions
 - Several cases indicating the attempt to politicise the appointment of top level civil servants (e.g. The case of the Director of the Police and Border Guard Boards, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the appointment of the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance without a public competition process).
 - Strong criticism towards the media and threats to decrease funding.
 - Legitimization of a crude public discourse (Kasekamp, Madisson, Wieregna 2019).
- Strong polarisation on the question of same-sex marriage.
 - Referendum in Spring 2021.
- The marginalisation of rural areas continues to increase (National Audit Office of Estonia, 2020), resulting in even higher level of regional inequality and dissatisfaction.