

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Estonia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	6	6	0	Democ:	7	7	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:	16			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	EST	CCODE	366	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	7	3	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
			6 September 1991 (Ind.)																						
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution																									
1992																									
Executive(s)																									
President Toomas Hendrik Ilves (SDE); elected by an electoral college on 23 September 2006 Prime Minister Andrus Ansip; nominated by President and approved by Parliament 12 April 2005																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral: State Council (Riigikogu; 101 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 4 March 2007) Estonian Reform Party (ER): 31 Estonian Centre Party (EK): 29 Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica: 19 Social Democratic Party (SDE): 10 Estonian Greens (EER): 6 Estonian People's Union (ERL): 6																									
Judiciary																									
National Court																									

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

By all accounts, the conduct of elections in Estonia since 1991 has been free and fair. However, this view discounts the serious disenfranchisement of Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian residents in Estonia. In 1991 the Estonian parliament passed a restrictive citizenship law which, in effect, granted citizenship only to those who were citizens of the inter-war republic and their descendants (approximately 60% of the

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

population). By the end of the decade less than 1 million residents (out of 1.5 million) were citizens, resulting in the political disenfranchisement of almost one-third of the population. The sheer magnitude of this disenfranchisement has undermined the democratic character of executive recruitment in this country. However, it has now been more than a decade since independence and, by all account, the government has made serious efforts to integrate the Slavic minority living in Estonia into the political process. While a large segment of the population continues to have no voice in the political process, the government does not appear to be engaged in a systematic policy of discrimination and exclusion other than the indirect restrictions imposed through the language policy.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The Riigikogu (State Council) is the highest organ of state authority. The Riigikogu elects a President with a required two-thirds majority of votes. If such a majority can not be reached in three rounds of voting, the right to elect the President passes to an electoral college composed of the 101 members of the legislature and 266 local government representatives. It also initiates and approves legislation sponsored by the prime minister. The prime minister is directly accountable to the unicameral national assembly. The judicial branch is independent from executive influence.

Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)

Political participation in Estonia is highly competitive, at least for Estonians. Numerous political parties actively compete for positions of power although only citizens of Estonia can participate in these organizations. More than 25% of Estonia's 1.3 million people are ethnically Russian and speak Russian. However, over one-half of these Russian-speakers do not have Estonian citizenship due to an Estonian language requirement. As of 2006, 35% of the Russian-speakers hold Estonian citizenship while 30% hold Russian citizenship and 35% are "undefined". Under Estonian law, residents without citizenship may not vote in elections for either the national or EU parliaments but are eligible to vote in local elections. Given these electoral requirements, in 2007 16.3% of the total population was disenfranchised from national and EU elections. This disenfranchisement, along with allegations of persistent job, salary and housing discrimination, continues to fuel ethnic Russian resentment in Estonia. Despite the contentious relationship between Estonians and Russians, international human rights organizations acknowledge that the Government generally respects the human rights of its citizens and the large "non-citizen" community.

While Estonians dominate the south of the country, Russians are the dominant group in Narva and the north-east of the country. Most of the present-day Russians in Estonia are industrial migrants from the Soviet era and their descendants. Over 45,000 Russians left Estonia and returned to Russia during the 1990s. In the late 1990s, the Estonian government accepted that the entire Russian minority would not simply leave the country and that a large number of Russians still lacked citizenship and a feasible way of obtaining it. There was also growing pressure by international organizations and the EU for the government to grant citizenship to the Russian minority. In response, the Estonian government developed a plan in March 2000, the Integration in Estonian Society Program, to resolve the Russian minority problem. The main component of the Integration Program required Russian-Estonians to learn Estonian so they could pass the citizenship exam and more fully interact in Estonian society. This goal was to be accomplished primarily through the education system, with supplemental language programs for older residents. In November 2001, the legislature abolished the Estonian language requirement for candidates running for seats in the legislature or local councils. However, from the perspective of most Estonians, there is little desire to create a common culture that incorporates both Estonian and Russian elements, primarily because Estonians still view Russians as an occupying force, not as part of Estonian society. The persistence of factional tensions in Estonia was demonstrated most vividly in early 2007 when government efforts to remove a Soviet era war memorial triggered rioting by ethnic Russians.