

## **POLITICAL PARTIES IN ESTONIA**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report comprehensively analyzes political parties in Estonia, with special emphasis on the legal ramifications of party formations, the evolution of party strengths in the Estonian parliament (Riigijogu), party membership, organization and election of leaders, party structures for internal and external governance, and party staff and resources.

## **1. Legal and constitutional provisions**

The regulation of political parties in Estonia begins with the Constitution, where it is stated that “Everybody has the right to assemble into non-profit associations and unions” (Article 48). In addition, however, it is stated that “Only Estonian citizens may belong to political parties.” In this respect, the Constitution makes a clear distinction between Estonia’s citizens and non-citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The second legal foundation for parties is the Party Act, adopted in May 1994, and as amended during subsequent years. The law’s basic provisions are the following:

- a) a party is defined as “a voluntary political association of citizens...,the objective of which is to express the political interests of its members and supporters and to exercise state and local government authority”. (§1.1) Also, “A political party shall be a non-profit association.” (§1.2) This means that it is required to submit the same kind of founding and reporting documents as other non-profit organizations.
- b) According to §5, only “an Estonian citizen with active legal capacity who has attained eighteen years of age may be a member of a political party.” At the same time, however, the Act lists a few occupations, the representatives of which cannot belong to a party.

These are:

- judges and public prosecutors;
- police and border guard officials;
- military men and border guards who are in active service;
- the Legal Chancellor;

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<sup>1</sup> And is different in this respect from Latvia, where non-citizen permanent residents can belong to political parties.

- the Auditor General and chief auditor of the State Audit Office.
- c) As well, the President of the Republic must also suspend his own party membership during his time in office.
- d) Parties cannot have collective members.
- e) Parties whose aims and actions are directed towards violent reversal of the constitutional order are forbidden.
- f) The activities of a party of some other country or its structural unit on the territory of the Estonian Republic are forbidden.
- g) Parties can be formed only on territorial principles, i.e. parties cannot found sub-units in institutions, enterprises or organisations.
- h) A minimum of 1000 members are necessary to register a party.
- i) A party cannot be funded by organs of the state or a local authority. At the same time a party has the right to receive money from the state budget. (See section 12, below.)
- j) A party cannot accept money from any state and local authority of a foreign country.
- k) A party can dissolve itself, but a party also can be dissolved by the state through the courts.

## **2. Party system evolution**

The development of political parties in Estonia is best summarized by the evolution shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Evolution of Estonia's Political Parties**

<u>Political Party</u>	<u>Immediate predecessor</u>	<u>Earlier predecessor</u>	<u>Original predecessor</u>
Centre Party (1991)	Popular Front (1988)		
Pro Patria Union (1995)	Pro Patria (1992)	Christian Democratic Party (1988) Christian Democratic Union (1989) Conservative Popular Party (1990) Party of Republicans (1990)	
	National Independence Party (1988)		
Reform Party (1994)	Liberal Democratic Party (1990)	Popular Front (1988)	
Moderates	Moderates	Social Democratic Party (1990)	Popular Front (1988)
		Rural Centre Party (1990)	Popular Front (1988)
	Popular Party (1998)	Party of Conservatives and Republicans (1994)	Pro Patria (1992)
		Peasants Party (1994)	
Popular Union (2000)	Rural Union (1989) Country People's Party (1994) Party of Families and Pensioners (1994)		
United Peoples' Party (1994)	Russian Democratic Movement (1991)	Popular Front (1988)	
Progressive Party (1996)	Centre Party (1991)		
Social Democratic Labour Party (1997)	Democratic Labour Party (1992)	Communist Party of Estonia	
Independence Party (1999)	Future Party (1993)	Pro Patria (1992)	
Democratic Party (2000)	Blue Party (1994)		

In more detail, the nationalist bloc of the Estonian party system is anchored by the Pro Patria Union. It derived from two earlier nationalist groupings: the Estonian National Independence Party (ENIP) and the Pro Patria party. The former was Estonia's first opposition party, formed in 1988 from within the anti-Soviet dissident movement. It was also one of the

main forces behind the nationalist Congress of Estonia movement, which campaigned for a restorationist approach to Estonian independence.<sup>2</sup>

The Pro Patria party was a coalition formed in 1992 from among four proto-parties, which had emerged during 1990-91. (See diagram.) During the 1992 elections the two groups ran separately, but later formed a governing coalition together and were essentially allies from early on. By 1995 and the date of Estonia's second post-independence elections, the experience of having governed during this period meant that neither party could expect to be re-elected unless they merged. For the actual election they remained merely a coalition, the Fatherland Union. But after the election (when they did succeed in staying in parliament), they formalized the merger as the Pro Patria Union.

Estonia developed a pro-business, liberal party—the Reform Party—in 1994, in part as a consequence of the same 1992-1995 electoral decline within the nationalist right, but also because this niche had simply remained vacant until then. While the Pro Patria and ENIP coalition had pursued a strong policy of market reform during its years in government, they were often at odds over their nationalist tendencies, which otherwise might have called for more protection of the domestic market or Estonian national interests.

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<sup>2</sup> Restorationism involved the idea that because the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940 had been illegal, the only way Estonia could pursue independence in the late-1980s was to insist on an end to that occupation and a 'restoration' of the pre-1940 republic. This idea was in contrast to creating a 'new republic', something similar to what France has done repeatedly throughout its modern history, and which was supported by many leaders of the centrist Popular Front as a more realistic option. Although the Congress never overtook the Front as the main Estonian political organization during this period, it was successful in establishing restorationism as a cornerstone of post-independence Estonian politics. Not only was independence 'restored' as a part of the August 1991 failed Soviet coup, but also a restorationist citizenship policy was enacted, which defined as citizens only those people who had been citizens in 1940 or their descendants. This policy excluded from automatic citizenship all Soviet-era immigrants to Estonia along with their descendants. Instead, these people would have to be naturalized based on an Estonian language requirement as well as fixed residency.

In 1994, one of the constituent members of Pro Patria, the Liberal Democratic Party, broke off and linked up with a number of other defectors from the Moderates (see below). The new party was also helped by the decision of the popular chairman of the Bank of Estonia, Siim Kallas, to become its leader. In the subsequent 1995 elections, the Reform Party performed as a newcomer and thus helped the right retain a significant part of the vote. They continued with an average 15% share of the vote through 2002.

The center in Estonian politics has been held by the Moderates, which got their origins in 1992 as a coalition between two small parties, the Social Democrats and the Rural Centre Party. The two parties formally merged in 1995. In 1999, the Moderates also absorbed a small, marginal party, the People's Party, which had gained prominence after the long-time émigré Estonian diplomat and later foreign minister, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, decided to enter politics and joined the People's Party. Through this move, he negotiated a more powerful position in the Moderates (which formally now became the People's Party Moderates), and eventually became its chairman.

A secondary position in the center was held during 1992-1999 by the Coalition Party (CP). The CP was a party mostly made up of Soviet-era professionals and administrators—what some people called apparatchiks. Nevertheless, the party proved very strong in 1995, when it was the alternative for most voters disgruntled with the 1992-1995 rule by Pro Patria, the ENIP and the Moderates. As a result, the party was the main governing party from 1995 to 1999. During the 1999 elections, however, the CP was decimated, receiving only 7.6% of the vote, and that was only thanks to a joint list with the Pensioners and Families Party (see below). In the more competitive atmosphere of the Estonian political marketplace, the leaders of the CP



realized that they no longer had a niche to fill, and thus they decided to dissolve the party in 2000.

A major ally of the CP during its 1995-1999 rule was a group of rural and social-niche parties, which eventually all merged into the People's Union in 2000. These parties included

- the Rural Union (*Maaliit*), which was formed in 1990 among leaders of Estonia's Soviet-era collective farms,
- the Country People's Party (*Maarahva erakond*), which was formed in 1994 as another 'new-face' party to contest the 1995 elections, but which essentially battled for the same rural electorate,
- the Farmers Assembly (*Põllumeeste kogu*), which was a very marginal agrarian party founded in 1991, and
- the Pensioners and Families Party (*Pensionäride ja perede erakond*), which emerged gradually in 1994 as a party appealing to the interests of the two groups in its name.

During the 1995 election, the four were allied in the Country People's Union (*Maarahva ühendus*), which ran as a partner with the Coalition Party. They worked more-or-less closely, although in 1999 the first three parties ran as a single list (under the banner of the Country People's Party), while the Pensioners and Families Party joined the CP. Nevertheless, after the 1999 election the four parties were brought together under the skillful leadership of Villu Reiljan, a former environment minister, and the People's Union was born. The party continues to occupy an important rural niche, with the strongest popular base in the countryside. Reiljan's adroit politicking during the 2001 presidential campaign also succeeding in getting the party's grand old man, Arnold Rüütel, elected president in a special electoral college.

In the Estonian party system, the center-left is dominated by the Centre Party, led by the longtime Estonian politician Edgar Savisaar. Savisaar had been a key founder of the moderate Popular Front during Estonia's struggle for independence in 1988-1991. He remained at the helm of the Front through the restoration of independence, and long after a number of other prominent members broke off from it—in part to create their own parties, but also because of dissatisfaction with Savisaar. Savisaar was well known for his strong leadership style, which his opponents, however, also called an authoritarian tendency. In 1991, Savisaar steered the remnants of the Front into his new party, the Centre Party.

Through most of the time since, he has been the party's chairman. Only during a major political scandal in 1995-1996 was Savisaar forced to relinquish the party leadership. In October 1995, it was revealed that Savisaar had secretly tape-recorded confidential negotiations he had had with other political leaders in March of that same year concerning efforts to form a post-election government with the Coalition Party. The negotiations had been successful and Savisaar received the post of Interior Minister.

When the scandal broke, he refused to resign and was eventually dismissed by President Lennart Meri. This disgrace forced Savisaar also to give up the Centre Party chairmanship. However, after some six months, when the party convened a congress to rejuvenate itself, Savisaar engineered a recovery and was re-elected leader. This move prompted a number of disgruntled liberals in the party (including the interim chairwoman, Andra Veidemann, and four of the Centre Party's members of parliament) to leave and form their own party, the Progressive Party. However, the dissenters did not attract many followers, and eventually the Progressives faded entirely.

Most of Estonia's sizable Russian population has been represented by three different parties, the United People's Party (UPP), the Russian Party of Estonia (RPE), and the Russian Unity Party (RUP). The UPP was founded in 1994 on the base of the Russian Democratic Movement, which was the first moderate Russian grouping to be formed immediately after Estonia regained independence in 1991. During 1988-1991, the pro-Soviet communist Intermovement had dominated Russian community politics, essentially because of the strong position retained by Communist Party functionaries among the mostly industrial, working-class Russian population. After independence, these leaders were discredited, and thus an avenue opened up for more moderate Russian politicians. These leaders, however, were never able to mobilize much support because of Estonia's restorationist citizenship policy (see note 1, above). In 1992, no Russian party even contested the first parliamentary elections. In 1993, the UPP and RPE did well in local elections.

However, in 1995, the UPP, the RPE and the RUP had to come together in an electoral alliance in order to break the 5% parliamentary election threshold and thus enter the Riigikogu. Their alliance survived more-or-less for three years, until the UPP and the RPE had a falling-out. The RPE sought to stake out a more forceful position in defense of Russian community interests. In the 1999 election, the RPE decided to go it alone, while the UPP kept the RUP under its wing, and also brought in the Social Democratic Labour Party, Estonia's meager communist successor party. The RPE's tactic failed miserably, while the UPP (and its partners) returned to parliament.

In 1999-2001, however, all of the Russian parties suffered another series of splits and rows. Among these was a decision by a young progressive leader of the UPP, Sergei Ivanov, to break away and form his own party, the Baltic Russian Party. Ivanov sought to cross the ethnic divide and develop cooperation with the Reform Party on the basis of similar, liberal views. His

efforts eventually helped bring the Russian parties in the Tallinn city council into a coalition not only with the Reform Party, but with Pro Patria as well. His idea of phasing out ethnicity in politics did not survive even within his own Baltic Russian Party, however, for in early 2002 he was ousted from the party leadership by colleagues, who argued that he had gone too far.

Lastly, a number of marginal parties deserve mention. During the 1992 parliamentary elections, a maverick émigré Estonian, Jüri Toomepuu, formed a small nationalist grouping called 'Estonian Citizen'. On the basis of a fantastic showing in his own electoral district, Toomepuu not only succeeded in getting himself elected, but five other party members as well. Soon, however, Toomepuu's comet faded and the grouping fell apart. In the 1995 elections it failed miserably. Likewise a phenomenon of the early years of independence was the Royalist Party. This group also secured 5 parliamentary seats in 1992, but eventually disintegrated with many of its top politicians joining the Centre Party. A second wave of start-up parties came in 1995. These included the Future Estonia Party, which was a splinter group from Pro Patria, but which also eventually failed. In addition, a group of intellectuals and natural scientists attempted to form an alternative party called the Blue Party. After a dismal showing in both the 1995 and 1999 elections, the party reorganized itself into the Democratic Party, but it continued to be a marginal player. Finally, Estonia saw the emergence of its first religious party, the Christian People's Party (CPP), in 1999. But the CPP also failed to gather much support.

### **3. Electoral and parliamentary strength of parties**

Briefly stated, the Estonian *Riigikogu* is elected based on proportional representation with a 5% national threshold. However, because citizens' votes are actually cast for individual candidates, the first and second 'tiers' of mandate distribution go as 'direct mandates' to

individual candidates who have received a minimum quota of personal votes in their particular electoral districts. Only after this are all the candidates' votes aggregated nationally by party, with any remaining mandates distributed via proportional representation and national party lists. This system means that it is possible for independent candidates (i.e. those who are not affiliated with any national list) to run.

Estonia's three parliamentary elections in 1992, 1995, and 1999 (for the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> *Riigikogu*<sup>3</sup>) have seen swings between the center-right, center-left and back to the center-right. For the 2002 elections, the trend was expected to be again to the center-left.

As noted above, a number of political parties were formed in Estonia during 1990 and 1991. However, the real party landscape began to take shape only in 1992 with the first *Riigikogu* elections. It was at that point that all the politicians felt that they could begin developing the party system in earnest because there was a new constitution in place, along with an electoral system.

For these first elections, practically every political or citizen association was allowed to run, as a result of which the ballot featured a total of 38 parties or associations. These were grouped into a total of 17 electoral lists. The outcome of the 1992 elections, and the resulting governing coalitions, are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

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<sup>3</sup> Again following the principle of legal continuity, elections to the *Riigikogu* has numbered sequentially following the 6<sup>th</sup> *Riigikogu* from 1938.

**Table 2: Results of the 7<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu Election, 20 September 1992**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Seats</b>
Pro Patria	101	100,828	22.00	29
Secure Home	73	63,329	13.60	17
Popular Front	103	56,124	12.25	15
Moderates	49	44,577	9.73	12
ENIP	97	40,260	8.79	10
Royalists	30	32,638	7.12	8
Estonian Citizen	26	31,553	6.89	8
Greens	14	12,009	3.71	1
Entrepreneurs	14	10,946	2.39	1
Others	121	66,983	14.60	-

Source: Vabariigi presidendi ja Riigikogu valimised 1992, Eesti Vabariigi Valimiskomisjon, Tallinn, 1992, p. 138-139.

**Table 3: Governments During the 7<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu**

<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Governing period</b>	<b>Leading party</b>	<b>Partners</b>
Mart Laar	X 1992 – XI 1994	Pro Patria	Moderates, ENIP
Andres Tarand	XI 1994 – IV 1995	Moderates	Pro Patria, ENIP, Right-wingers

The big victor of the elections was Pro Patria, which rode a wave of pro-market reform and national satisfaction over independence to a dominant position in the parliament. Together with the strength of the ENIP and the Moderates it was able to form a government under the premiership of a 32-year old historian, Mart Laar. The opposition was formed by the ‘Secure Home’, which was the first partnership between the Coalition Party and the Rural Union, and the ‘Popular Front’ coalition, which was dominated by the Centre Party. Surprise showings were made by the Royalists and Estonian Citizen. However, as mentioned above, these parties soon faded. Two parties—the Greens and the Entrepreneurs Party—gained single seats via direct mandates thanks to the strength of their leaders in their individual districts; the parties did not, however, top the national 5% threshold.

By the time of the 1995 elections, the center-right government had taken a beating because of the severity of its shock-therapy economic policies. In late 1994, Mart Laar was forced to relinquish the premiership in favor of an interim cabinet headed by the Moderate Andres Tarand. As a result, the Secure Home coalition gained in stature and now included the Country People's Party. The resulting 'Coalition Party-Country People's Union' served as the main alternative for those voters weary of reform. Although many voters also sided with the Centre Party, the CP-CPU was seen as the stronger option. In addition, the elections saw the entry of the Reform Party, which attempted to create a new right-of-center niche in the shape of a liberal, pro-market party. It also attracted votes from among those who wanted to register their disapproval with Pro Patria, but who did not want to vote for the center-left. The results are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4: Results of the 8<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu Election, 5 March 1995**

<u>Party</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Seats</u>
Coalition Party and Country People's Party	161	174 248	32.23	41
Reform Party	103	87 531	16.19	19
Centre Party	114	76 634	14.17	16
Pro Patria & ENIP Union	109	42 493	7.85	8
Moderates	101	32 381	5.99	6
'Our Home is Estonia!'	73	31 763	5.87	6
Right-wingers	101	27 053	5.00	5
Others	494	68 596	12.69	-

Source: Riigikogu valimine 5.märts 1995, Tallinn, 1995, p.84

**Table 5: Governments During the 8<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu**

<u>Prime Minister</u>	<u>Governing period</u>	<u>Leading party</u>	<u>Partners</u>
Tiit Vähi I	April 1995 – October 1995	Coalition Party	Centre Party
Tiit Vähi II <sup>4</sup>	October 1995 – March 1997	Coalition Party	Reform Party (until November 1996) Progressive Party (from November 1996)
Mart Siimann	March 1997 – March 1999	Coalition Party	Progressive Party

For these elections, only formally registered political parties could field candidates; however, electoral coalitions were still permitted. This provision allowed, for example, Estonia's Russian parties to form a substantial enough coalition in order to win nearly 6% of the vote and 6 seats. Another newcomer was the Right-wingers Party. This was a short-lived formation, which broke off from Pro Patria in 1994 during internal wrangling over Mart Laar's leadership. The party barely squeaked into parliament, but later merged back into Pro Patria. Lastly, in a sign that voters were beginning to adjust to the electoral system, the number of 'wasted' votes declined, and unaffiliated candidates also received vastly fewer votes.

Although the plurality won by the CP-CPU in 1995 was stronger than that of Pro Patria in 1992, the new centrist grouping still had a hard time finding a suitable partner between either the Centre Party or the Reform Party. After initial overtures to the Reform Party failed, the leader of the CP-CPU, Tiit Vähi, turned to the Centre Party and Edgar Savisaar. This coalition lasted, however, only for seven months, until it was revealed that Savisaar had secretly tape-recorded confidential conversations he had had with other politicians in March 1995, and thereafter he

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<sup>4</sup> During Vähi's second government, the Reform Party left the government in November 1996. However, because Vähi did not resign, but merely replaced the departed ministers with other members of his CP-CPU coalition as well as the Progressive Party, there was no new investiture of the government.



was forced to resign. Vähi then formed a new government with the Reform Party, yet this government also survived barely a year, when in October 1996 the Coalition Party decided to resume cooperation with the Centre Party at the level of the Tallinn city government. This move was repudiated by the Reform Party and it left the coalition. Thereafter, the CP-CPU continued as a minority government, even after the resignation of Tiit Vähi over a housing privatization scandal.

**Table 6: Results of the 9<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu Election, 7 March 1999**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Seats</b>
Centre Party	242	113 378	23.41	28
Pro Patria Union	178	77 917	16.09	18
Reform Party	212	77 088	15.92	18
Moderates	303	73 630	15.21	17
Coalition Party	216	36 692	7.58	7
Country People's Party	167	35 204	7.27	7
United People's Party	172	29 682	6.13	6
Others	395	40 648	8.40	-

Source: Riigikogu valimine 7. märts 1999, Vabariigi Valimiskomisjon, Tallinn, 1999, p.335

**Table 7: Governments During the 9<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu**

<b><u>Prime Minister</u></b>	<b><u>Governing period</u></b>	<b><u>Leading party</u></b>	<b><u>Partners</u></b>
Mart Laar	April 1999 – January 2002	Pro Patria Union	Reform Party, Moderates
Siim Kallas	January 2002-present	Reform Party	Centre Party

The 1999 Riigikogu elections (results shown in Tables 6 and 7) saw a further modification of electoral law in that electoral coalitions (like the CP-CPU) were formally banned. This meant that only single parties could field candidate lists (although non-affiliated, independent candidates were still allowed). This change was meant to encourage consolidation

of the party system. By this time, the requirement that a party must have at least 1000 members had also taken effect. Yet because the banning of electoral coalitions came relatively late (November 1998), smaller parties were not always able to formally merge in time for the election. Instead, in many cases smaller parties added their candidates onto the formal lists of larger parties. Thus, in the campaign they would continue to talk about cooperation between parties (and these parties would continue to exist legally), but formally they were within the electoral law. (The changes did not go so far as to require that every candidate on a party list actually be a member of that party. So members of other parties could run on any party list.) The result was that although there were only 12 electoral lists for the March 1999 poll, the total number of parties subsumed under these lists was closer to 20.

The result of the election was the return to power of the center-right based on an agreement between the Pro Patria Union, the Moderates and the Reform Party. Because the Pro Patria Union received the most votes, it was given the premier's post and this went once again to Mart Laar. His coalition, however, lasted for slightly less than 3 years, until in December 2001 the Reform Party decided to enter into a coalition with the Centre Party on the level of the Tallinn city council. This move led to fatal reverberations on the national level and prompted Laar to resign in January 2002 and the erstwhile coalition collapsed. This forced the Reform Party to negotiate a national (minority) government with the Centre Party, and the RP leader Siim Kallas became prime minister.

This development also caused considerable consternation among political observers, since a coalition between the pro-market Reform Party and the left-leaning Centre Party was unprecedented and had been almost inconceivable to most analysts. Nevertheless, the two parties agreed to set aside a number of the differences on policy issues (such as taxes and state

subsidies) in order to hold power through to the March 2002 elections. It was widely expected that the Centre Party would win the upcoming poll, and then continue the coalition with the RP or form a new center-left coalition with the People's Union (a merger of the Country People's Union, the Rural Union and the Pensioners and Families Party), if the latter gained enough seats.

#### **4. Membership in Political Parties**

Membership in Estonian political parties has grown steadily over the years. However, because government officials have required formal statistics from parties about their members only since 1998 (when all parties were required to re-register pursuant to the minimum 1000-member requirement enacted in 1994), reliable numbers about party membership have been lacking for the early years. The data available from 1998 are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Party Membership 1998-2002**

<b>Party</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Reform Party	1000	1400	1600	2300	2327
Pro Patria Union	1100	2600	2800	2800	2815
People's Union	4050 <sup>a</sup>	5000 <sup>a</sup>	5400	6200	6600
Moderates	2450 <sup>b</sup>	3000	3200	3200	3308
Centre Party	2500	3400	4000	5700	6192
United People's Party	1100	1400	1500	1600	n/a

<sup>a</sup> Combined total of Country People's Party, Rural Union and Pensioners and Families Party, before merger;

<sup>b</sup> Combined total of Moderates and People's Party, before merger.

The Centre Party and the People's Union have been the largest parties in Estonia, standing head and shoulders above the rest. The People's Union gained its size via its merger of the Country People's Union, the Rural Union and the Pensioners and Families Party in 2000. Its base has been among rural residents. It also dominates in many rural local governments. The

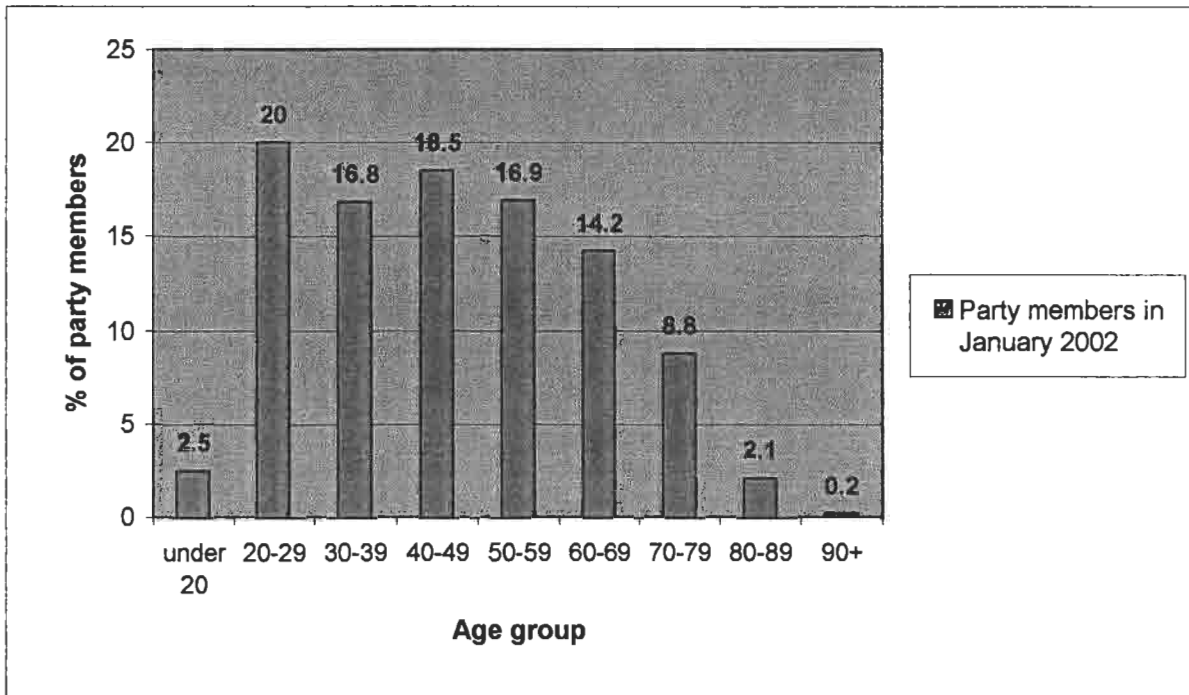
Centre Party, meanwhile, has attracted members among urban residents, but has also made inroads in the countryside. It has long been the best organized party in Estonia, with local organizations across the country.

Although analysts have spoken widely about the dominance of Edgar Savisaar within the party, it is somewhat of a paradox that in fact it has the widest support base. It would be too much to call it a mass-party, since it attracts mostly middle- and lower-class voters. However, it is the only party that has steadily sought to gain more members. By contrast, the three main center-right and centrist parties—the Pro Patria Union, the Reform Party and the Moderates—have remained limited to the major cities and have never posited mass membership to be among their goals.

Since 1998, parties in Estonia have been required to submit formal membership lists to the Ministry of Justice. In spring 2002, the Ministry posted these on the internet, which prompted a major Estonian daily newspaper, *Postimees*, to analyze these more thoroughly as well as make public a general database of all 35,000 names. A minor scandal arose, as over 700 people were shown to be on the rolls of several parties at once. In some of these cases, people had joined a precursor party and simply had been mechanically added to the successor party. In other cases, people swore that they had submitted a letter of resignation to the party, but that party officials had been slow in deleting their name—perhaps in order artificially to maintain party numbers. Lastly, some instances were reported where an individual's membership appeared to have been simply faked, including the application.

On the basis of *Postimees*'s preliminary analysis, the basic demographic data regarding party membership was as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Demographic Breakdown of Party Members, January 2002**



In terms of application procedures, a citizen may become a member of a political party based on a simple application. In most cases, the executive board of the party's local branch approves the application. In only two major parties (the Reform Party and the Centre Party) are recommendations required. Party dues vary, and in most cases these have not been very extensively institutionalized. As for disciplinary procedures, most parties have provisions which punish major infractions of party bylaws, including insubordination to party leadership decisions. In response to a number of cases where some party members have been caught in embarrassing public situations, almost all of the parties have rules which govern indecent behavior or causing

'moral damage' to the party. At the same time, these provisions have not been used very widely, mostly because the political class is small and active members are hard to come by.<sup>5</sup>

## **5. Party penetration**

Although data on party membership became widely available in 2002, information on party penetration has been more limited, mostly because such data are not required by law. A survey of Estonia's major parties in mid-2002 showed the number of local branches indicated in Table 9.

**Table 9: Number of Local Branches Among Parties**

Reform Party	n/a
Pro Patria Union	67
People's Union	17
Moderates	7
Centre Party	27
United People's Party	n/a

## **6. Organization of parliamentary party**

The basic rules for the organization of the parliamentary party are given by the *Riigikogu* Rules of Procedure Act, whose §31 says that parliamentary party groups (or factions) may be formed by a minimum of 5 MPs. Each parliamentary party group must elect a chairman and a deputy chairman; if there are more than 12 members in the group, it may also elect a second deputy chairman. Furthermore, an MP may belong to only one parliamentary party group at any one time. If an MP leaves a parliamentary party group and hence also the list on the basis of which he/she was elected, he/she cannot join another parliamentary party group but must remain

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, in cases where even members of parliament have been caught driving drunk or been involved in public lewdness, the sanctions have never gone so far as to expel a member.

as an unaffiliated MP. (This rule was meant to improve MP discipline, since unaffiliated MPs do not get access to perquisites like secretarial assistance or automatic membership in legislative committees.) Committee assignments are in general done by consensus and organized mainly by the three-member executive board of the Riigikogu (the speaker and 2 deputy speakers, one of whom is always from the opposition), who must go through each parliamentary party group's requests and make compromises.

### **7. Candidate nomination procedures**

In Estonian electoral law there are no formal requirements as to how parties shall choose their electoral candidates. As mentioned above, candidates are not required to be members of the party on whose list they run. Thus, parties may recruit independents or even members of other parties, if they form a veiled coalition. Of the six major parties in Estonia<sup>6</sup>, only two—the Centre Party and the United People's Party—formally allow local party organizations to draft a list of candidates for their respective electoral district. This is submitted to the national executive, which coordinates the different districts as well as drawing up the ranking of the national list. In the Moderates Party, a special electoral committee is formed, which manages the process. Lastly, in almost all parties, the standing council (*volikogu*, or intermediate representative body that exists between congresses alongside the national executive) has the final say on the national list. In the case of the Reform Party, a congress may be called as part of the nomination and ranking process.

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<sup>6</sup> Reform Party, Pro Patria Union, Moderates, Centre Party, People's Union, United People's Party.

## **8. Party and the cabinet**

The party distribution of cabinet posts has become more and more routinized as time has gone by. During the first post-communist governments of 1990-1992, there were few political designations or affiliations among ministers. Following the 1992 election victory of Pro Patria, ministerial posts were divided among different coalition partners, although in some cases a party would choose a relatively unpoliticized individual to fill the post. A rough breakdown of portfolios held by different parties during different governments is given in Table 10.

**Table 10: Party Distribution of Cabinet Portfolios**

<b><u>Premier</u></b>	<b><u>Date of Investiture</u></b>	<b><u>Leading Party</u></b>	<b><u>Coalition partners</u></b>	<b><u>Portfolio distribution<sup>a</sup></u></b>
Mart Laar	October 21, 1992	Pro Patria	Moderates, ENIP, Lib.-Dem. Party	PP 10, M 4, ENIP 6, LDP 4, Indep. 2
Andres Tarand	November 4, 1994	Moderates	Pro Patria, ENIP, Reform Party, Right-wingers	PP 3, M 3, ENIP 3, RP 2, Right-wingers. 2, Indep. 1
Tiit Vähi	April 17, 1995	Coalition Party (CoP)	Country People's Party (CPP), Rural Union, Party of Families and Pensioners, Farmers Union, Centre Party (CP)	CoP 7, CP 5, CPP 1, Rural Union 1
Tiit Vähi	November 6, 1995	Coalition Party (CoP)	Country People Party, Rural Union, Party of Families and Pensioners, Farmers Assembly, Reform Party	CoP 12, RP 6, CPP 3, Rural Union 1, Progressive 1, Indep. 1
Mart Siiman	March 17, 1997	Coalition Party	Country People Party, Rural Union, Party of Families and Pensioners, Farmers Assembly, Progressive Party	CoP 10, CPP 2, Farmers 1, Progressive 1, Indep. 2
Mart Laar	March 25, 1999	Pro Patria Union	Reform Party, Moderates	PPU 5, RP 5, Mod. 5
Siim Kallas	February 2002	Reform Party	Centre Party	RP 6, CP 8

<sup>a</sup> Number of ministers is sometimes larger than number of cabinet posts because of minor reshuffles that bring in independents or minor parties (e.g. the Progressive Party).



## **9. Party congresses**

Almost all political parties are required by their bylaws to hold party congresses at least once a year. (Only the Centre Party requires congresses once every two years.) Delegate selection criteria vary, from the Centre Party which allows all members to participate, to the United People's Party, which leaves the representational norm up to the standing council (volikogu) to decide. In most other cases, parties establish a proportion based either on a certain number of party members (e.g. 10 or 20) or based on party branches. Local branches are generally free to choose who they will send.

During the congress, delegates are responsible for approving and making amendments to the party's bylaws as well as its political program. In some cases (i.e. the Moderates), the congress will also lay out an activity plan for the next year or other necessary time period. In general, delegates will also hear reports from different party leaders; these include:

- a. the chairman directly (RP, Moderates, PPU),
- b. the national executive (Centre Party),
- c. the general secretary (Moderates, PPU),
- d. the auditing committee (PPU, People's Union),
- e. the parliamentary party group (RP, PPU, Moderates, People's Union, United People's Party)
- f. the standing council (volikogu) (United People's Party)
- g. the court of honor<sup>7</sup> (United People's Party, Centre Party, Moderates)

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<sup>7</sup> Decides issues of party discipline.

All party congresses elect the party chairman, in most cases until the next congress (although in the case of the Moderates, for two years); in most cases they also elect deputy chairmen. In addition, they are responsible for the election of the national executive (see below), as well as auditing committees; and in the case of the Moderates, the electoral committee in charge of drafting candidate lists and the program committee. In all cases, congresses have the final decision over dissolution of the party; generally this also includes mergers.

Lastly, party congresses can also decide over:

- a. membership in international organizations (Centre Party, Moderates),
- b. the level of party dues (UPP, PPU, Moderates),
- c. Riigikogu electoral lists (People's Union, Moderates, RP),
- d. presidential candidates (People's Union)
- e. the creation of party-internal factions or sub-groups and their representation at congresses (PPU)

Most parties allow the passage of congress resolutions by a simple majority of those participating in the congress. In cases of amending the bylaws or dissolving the party, a supermajority of 2/3 may be required.

## **10. Party executive organs**

The executive organs of parties in Estonia vary in size. They have ranged from 12 to over 20. In many parties the exact size is left open to the party congress to decide. Many boards also include *ex officio* members, such as the general secretary. A brief outline of the composition and function of major party executives in 2002 is given in Table 11.

**Table 11: Size and Function of National Party Executives**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Member-ship</b>	<b>Selection</b>	<b>Function</b>
Reform Party	11-15	Chairman and then individual members	Approves budget, gives permission for political negotiations, names party candidates for ministerial positions, organizes work of party HQ, decides party expulsions
Pro Patria Union	15	Separate vote for party chairman and then the top 14 vote-getters among all candidates for national executive	Leads party activity, prepares draft budget, nominates candidate for general secretary, organized party financial activity
People's Union	11	Honorary Chairman, deputy chairmen, parliamentary party group chairman and other elected members	Concludes contracts with salaried staff, registers departures and expulsions of members, manages general activities which follow from decisions by the party congress or general council, also manages financial matters
Moderates	9-21	Chairman, deputy chairmen, general secretary, individual members chosen by party general council	Executes decisions of general council, makes political decisions in the name of the party, manages party property, appoints staff and salaries, prepares draft budget, submits proposals for bills to parliamentary party group
Centre Party	18	Chairman, parliamentary party group chairman, chairman of youth org., chairman of general council + 14 elected members	Manages activities of the party, receives activity report from parliamentary party group, registers membership changes, responsible for party finance, appoints salaried staff
UPP	???	Chairman and other members elected by party congress	Organizes membership rolls, coordinates activities of party cells, draws up draft budget, organizes economic activity, appoints party HQ staff

As mentioned above with regard to the history of Estonian political parties, the only major challenge to a sitting party chair was that against Edgar Savisaar in the Centre Party in late 1995. This ouster, however, did not last long, since Savisaar was able to muster support from among the rank-and-file of the party and engineer his re-election some 6 months later. A second major party challenge was against Mart Laar as chairman of Pro Patria in 1994. This was during the period when his first government began to collapse under the stress of enacting radical economic reform.

Laar also was accused of making too many decisions based on a narrow ‘kitchen cabinet’ of advisors, instead of consulting more broadly with the parliamentary party group or the party. He was replaced by Toivo Jürgenson for about three years, but Jürgenson proved to be a weaker leader. Laar returned to the chairman’s position in 1998 in advance of the 1999 election, which saw the Pro Patria Union come back into government.

### **11. Party Staff**

Only limited data exist as yet about party staff. Thanks to state subsidies, which the parliamentary parties have been receiving since 1996 (see below), each of these parties has been able to build up some kind of permanent national party headquarters, usually staffed by 4-8 full-time or part-time staff members. These include the general secretary, office assistants, and public relations experts. In parliament, parliamentary party groups are allocated 2-3 state-paid staff members, depending on the size of the group. They are free to hire their own staff. Among local branches, most of the major parties (PPU, RP, Moderates, People’s Union) have offices in the second-largest city of Tartu. The United People’s Party and Centre Party have offices in northeast Estonia.

### **12. Party resources**

Pursuant to §12<sup>6</sup> of the Political Parties Act (as amended in 1996), “Political parties represented in the Riigikogu have the right to allocations from the state budget. The amount of the allocation shall be proportional to the number of seats received in the Riigikogu elections.” The subsidies began in 1996, and were originally set by party consensus at around 0.05% of the national budget. In 1999, a round figure of 10 million Estonian kroons (roughly \$625,000) was

used. During 2000-2002, this figure was doubled to 20 million. Using this figure as a baseline, we can estimate that each party has received roughly the amounts of state support shown in Table 12.

**Table 12: Estimated State Subsidies for Parliamentary Parties, mil. of EEK**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Reform</b>	<b>PPU</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>Moderates</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>UPP</b>
1996	0.940	0.396	2.029	0.297	0.792	0.297
1997	1.881	0.792	4.059	0.594	1.584	0.594
1998	1.862	0.784	4.018	0.588	1.568	0.588
1999	1.788	1.519	2.033	1.396	2.450	0.588
2000	2.852	2.852	2.218	2.694	4.437	0.950
2001	3.564	3.564	2.772	3.366	5.544	1.188
2002	3.564	3.564	2.772	3.366	5.544	1.188

Estonian political parties receive a major source of income via the state subsidy, which is 5, if not 10, times greater than party dues. Income received from business sponsors is often comparable to the state subsidy, e.g. 2-3 million per year. Single individuals may also contribute, although there has been controversy over the way in which this is phrased in law. Formally, individuals cannot contribute 'at any one time' more than 1000 kroons. In early 2001, however, it was revealed that leading members of the People's Union had repeatedly contributed 999 kroons on successive days.

### **13. International and Domestic Party Linkages**

Many Estonian political parties began cultivating international contacts as early as 1989 and 1990 as a way of lobbying for Estonian independence via international party groups. Thus, for example, one of the founding members of the Moderates, the Estonian Social Democratic Party, became a member of the Socialist International in 1992. To this day, the Moderates are a

member of Socialist International. Likewise, a forerunner of the Reform Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, established contacts with the Liberal International, and the RP is now also a member of the Liberal International. This has led to controversy with the Centre Party, which despite its leftish views on social policy, has also sought to join the Liberal International. However, because of the RP's long-time antipathy toward the CP, the RP blocked the CP's candidacy. Lastly, the Pro Patria Union has been a member of the European Democratic Union and has cultivated ties with other Christian Democratic parties as well as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

### **Conclusion**

Domestic inter-party alliances have been fairly stable and based on a right-left cleavage, up until the current government was formed in January 2002. As discussed earlier under electoral competition, the three main center-right parties (the PPU, the RP and the Moderates) have generally stuck together, while the Centre Party and the People's Union have occupied the left. The reign of the Coalition Party during 1995-1999 was not necessarily an anomaly. Yet, because it collapsed after the 1999 elections, it appears that there is little room for a strong centrist party. (Part of the Coalition Party's demise was also probably linked to the fact that its politicians were mostly middle-age Soviet-era professionals, who lacked the dynamism to last for the long-term under electoral competition.)

In January 2002, this entire picture changed, when the Reform Party decided to break with the PPU and Moderates, and join with the Centre Party. It is unclear, whether this will become a long-term change in party system cleavages, since the two parties have sufficiently deep differences over major economic and social policy issues that they would not be able to

govern effectively over, for example, an entire parliamentary term. Nevertheless, the rupture left many scars among the RP, the PPU and the Moderates, and it will take time to heal these divisions on the center-right, if the three parties find themselves in the opposition again.