

Estonia

Rice

In 1919, Estonia had just declared its independence, and a democratic government, following World War I. The Prime Minister, beginning in 1918, was Konstantin Päts, who had been imprisoned in a German POW camp for the beginning of his term of office. Päts was the leader of the Union of Rural People Party (EMRL), and was in office until May 1919, when he was replaced as Prime Minister by Otto Strandmann, the leader of the Estonian Labor Party (ETE, SOLS change). Strandmann formed a coalition with the People's Party (ER) and the Estonian Workers' Socialist Democrat Party (ESDTP or SDE).¹ Strandmann remained in office until November of that same year, when he was replaced by Jaan Tõnisson, of the Estonia People's Party (ER, SOLS change) in coalition with the ETE/SDE. Tõnisson oversaw the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty with the Soviet Union, which formally established recognition for Estonia as an independent country. On 30 July 1920, Tõnisson's coalition broke apart and Tõnisson ruled out of coalition. This is a minor SOLS change. Tõnisson was in office until October 1920, when he was replaced by Ants Piip, another leader of ETE (SOLS change) (see Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell 2000, 117).

Piip remained in office as Prime Minister until 21 December 1920, at which point the structure of the Estonian government was changed through a new constitution. According to this constitution, the head of state was no longer the Prime Minister, but rather an individual known as the Elder of State (or State Elder), who served as a combination of President and Prime Minister. Piip was the first of these State Elders, but stepped down following elections in January 1921. He was replaced by Päts, who was now the leader of the Union of Farmers (PK, SOLS change). Päts formed a coalition with ETE and the Christian People's Party (KRE). Päts remained in office until his government collapsed in November, 1922, at which point he was replaced by Juhan (or Johannes) Kukk, of the ETE, in a coalition with PK (SOLS change). This government lasted until August 1923, when it was replaced by another Päts (PK) government, with a coalition of ETE, ER, and KRE (The Christian People's Party) (SOLS change). This government lasted until March 1924, when it was replaced by one led by Friedrich Akel, of the KRE², in a coalition with the ERE and the ETE (SOLS change). This coalition held when Akel was replaced by Jüri Jaakson in December 17, 1924 (SOLS change). Jüri Jaakson, ER, formed a coalition with ETE/KRE/PK/SDE.

[Note: we use Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell (2000, 117, Table 5.4: Estonia Government composition, 1919-1933) as our main source of government composition and follow WSM's party abbreviations.]

One year later, on 15 December 1925, Jaakson was replaced by Jaan Teemant, of the PK (SOLS change) Elder in coalition with ETE/Ansiedler/KRE/ER.³ On December 7, 1926, the Labor Party left Teemant's coalition, which changed from PK/ETE/Ansiedler/KRE/ER to PK/Ansiedler/KRE/ER. This is a minor SOLS change. Teemant was in power until December 10, 1927, at which point he was replaced by Tõnisson, who was still a member of the ERE (SOLS change). Tõnisson formed a coalition with PK/Ansiedler/ETE.

¹ All coalition party information from 1919 to 1933 is derived from Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell (2000, 117).

² Regarding Akel's sols, WSM codes it as the ER. But, several sources (see Estonia Government HP and Journal of Olympic 2000: 31) describe that although he had been a member of ER, he changed his affiliation to KRE by the time he became PM.

³ Ansiedler is German for "settler."

[Note: For 1927, Archigos lists Uluots as having been in office between Teemant and Tõnisson. This person is neither listed by Cahoon (2000) nor Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell (2000, 117). Estonian government Web also does not list him as PM in 1927. Although Archigos does cite some sources (e.g., Lentz, Parming and Keesing's information), its description about Uluots is ambiguous. Thus, we do not code Uluots in our spreadsheet.]

In 1928 August Rei of the Estonian Socialist Party of Workers (ESTP)⁴ became PM. Rei's government consisted of a coalition of KRE, ETE, and Ansiedler (SOLS change). This coalition lasted until general elections were held in the summer of 1929, which resulted in a new government under Otto Strandmann, of the ETE (SOLS change). Strandman formed a coalition with KRE/PK/Ansiedler. Strandmann's government was replaced in February 1931 by one led by Päts of PK in coalition with ER/ESTP (SOLS change). This government lasted until February 1932, when Teemant (now of the PKK) formed another government in coalition with ER/ETE/Ansiedler (minor SOLS change). Teemant's government only lasted until July, when Karl Einbund, also of the PKK, formed a new coalition government with Ansiedler/NCP (National Centre Party (NCP) was a coalition of parties that included the ER/ETE/KRE) on June 19. This is a minor SOLS change. Einbund's government was replaced by yet another led by Päts of PK (Taagepera 1993, 55) in November, 1932 (minor SOLS change). Päts formed a coalition with SDE and Center. His government lasted until May 1933.

[Note: Regarding transitions from Pats (PK) to Teemant (PKK) and from Einbund (PKK) to Pats (PK) in 1932, we code them as minor SOLS changes. Since PKK was a merger of PK and agrarian parties, it seems appropriate to code a minor change with them.]

At that point, Jaan Tõnisson formed another ER-led government in coalition with Ansiedler (SOLS change), which was in power until October 1933. Päts of PK formed another government after Tõnisson's (SOLS change), but in January 1934, he performed a coup and began to rule by decree. This "coup" was executed because a group known as the "League of Veterans of the War of Freedom" (a "populist political movement of the far right that demanded a strong presidency" (Taagepera 1993, 56)) had won an overwhelming majority in the legislature. None of the other major political parties supported the agenda of the Veterans, and when it became clear that their candidate would probably win the presidential elections, Päts stepped in and ended democracy, basically creating a personalist state. One can classify Estonia as a personalist state beginning in 1934 because all parties except for Päts' new one, the Fatherland League (I), were banned from participating in elections from 1935 on. Further, Päts did not attempt to return Estonia to a democracy, and shut down newspapers that were opposed to him (Taagepera 1993, 56).

[Note: POLITY codes Estonia as -88 (transitional) from 1933-1935. Regarding *dem* and *regtrans* variables, we decided to keep our original coding (i.e., *dem*=0 for 1933-35 and *regtrans*=1 for 1936)]

Päts held the title of "Head of State" from 1934 to 1938, at which point he again became known as the President. The Soviet Union invaded Estonia in June 1940, and began a period of military occupation in July. Estonia loses independence according to COW on June 16, 1940, so we do not code any other leaders until independence is regained in 1991.

Estonia began demonstrations and protests geared towards independence as early as 1988, but it was not until the Moscow coup in 1991 that the country was officially recognized as free from the USSR. The Estonian government was set up in a parliamentary democracy, where the Prime Minister is the leader of importance regarding state policymaking.

⁴ The Estonian Worker' Socialist Democrat Party (ESDTP) became ESTP in 1925.

Starting in 1990, Edgar Savisaar became interim Prime Minister with the backing of a nationalist political party called the Popular Front of Estonia (R) (See Lagerspetz and Vogt 2004, 90). In late January of 1992, Savisaar resigned, and Tiit Vähi (of the Estonian Coalition Party—EK) was asked to form an interim government before the next election cycle began. By the end of October, the first post-Soviet government had been officially elected. Mart Laar, a member of the Christian-Democratic “Fatherland” Party (called Isamaa), became the Prime Minister, and his coalition included Isamaa, the Moderates, and the Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP). Since Laar is the first regular leader (Savisaar and Vahi are both interim), we treat him according to the “newly independent states” rule and do not code a SOLS change.

This government lasted until 1994, when Laar stepped down and Andres Tarand was asked to head a provisional government that lasted for about a year. In April of 1995, former prime minister Vähi was again put in power, and he led a government of the Coalition Party and Rural Union (KMÜ) as well as the Centre Party (K). Then, in November, the Centre Party was dropped from the government and the Reform Party (R) was added in their place. So the SOLS for 1995 were “Non-party, KMU/K, KMU/R”. In 1996, under Vähi’s watch, the KMÜ merged with several more agrarian parties to form the KMÜ-K, and the Reform Party left the coalition late in the year (signifying a minor SOLS change). In 1996, the SOLS were “KMU/R (Vahi), KMU (Vahi).” 1997 saw Vähi step down from the prime minister position, being replaced by Mart Siimann, who was a member of the same party (denoting no SOLS change). In 1997, the SOLS were “KMU, KMU-K.”

Siimann’s government fell during 1999 elections to former prime minister Mart Larr. This time, Larr was representing the Pro-Patria Union Party (IERSP), denoting a SOLS change. The parties in his coalition included the Estonian Reform Party (RE) as well as the Moderates (M). Larr served with this coalition until he stepped down in 2002.

The next Estonian parliamentary coalition was led by Prime Minister Siim Kallas of the RE, and along with his partners in the Estonian Centrist Party (Kesk), they provided a SOLS change for the government. The coalition lasted for just under a year, when in 2003, Juhan Parts became the new leader. Parts was a member of the Union for the Republic Party (ResP), signifying a SOLS change, and his party entered into coalition with the RE and Estonian People’s Union (ERL).

In 2005, Andrus Ansip of the RE was elected prime minister. His first government, coded as a major SOLS change, was comprised of the Kesk and ERL. In 2007, Estonia underwent a minor SOLS change as Ansip reorganized his coalition to drop the two parties he was not personally affiliated with, replacing them with the Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica (IRL) and the Social Democratic Party (SDE). This government (RE/IRL/SDE) was in power through 2008.

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Pre-1945 revised by Naoko Matsumura June 16, 2013

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Post-1945 updated by Matt DiLorenzo 07/21/2012

Combined by Matt DiLorenzo (Vanderbilt) on 08/01/2013

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