

# [***New NATO member Finland elects a president set to keep up hard line on neighboring Russia***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B9T-2MJ1-DYMD-63R8-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

HELSINKI — Former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb has narrowly [*won a runoff vote*](https://apnews.com/article/finland-presidential-election-runoff-stubb-haavisto-545f7942ec9855152c4d9ac8dc840c10) to become Finland's next president, who will steer security policy that includes integrating the new NATO member into the alliance at a time of concern over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The final tally from Sunday's runoff shows Stubb, of the center-right National Coalition Party, had 51.6% of the votes, while independent candidate and former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto from the green left got 48.4% of the votes. The two were the top vote-getters in the second round of the election. Haavisto had served as Finland’s top diplomat in 2019-2023.

Stubb is taking over from the hugely popular President Sauli Niinistö, whose second six-year term expires next month and who wasn’t eligible for reelection.

A runoff was required after none of the original nine candidates got a majority of the votes in the first round on Jan. 28. In tradition with consensus-driven Finnish ***politics*** and no below-the-belt attacks during the campaign, Stubb visited Haavisto's election party event late Sunday after the result was clear.

“You're one of the nicest people I have ever met,” Stubb told his opponent Haavisto at the party event, according to Finnish broadcaster YLE.

The presidency is a key political post in this northern European country of 5.6 million people. Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government.

But he is also expected to remain above the fray of day-to-day ***politics*** and stay out of domestic political disputes while acting as a moral leader of the nation.

The head of state also commands the military — a key role after Finland [*joined NATO in April 2023*](https://apnews.com/article/nato-finland-russia-ukraine-membership-enlargement-c703d23a8423d89577d5b752d69d76eb) in the aftermath of [*Russia’s attack on Ukraine*](https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine) a year earlier. Finnish media outlets on Monday pointed out how Europe's security is at stake as never before since World War II, due to Russia's invasion.

At a news conference in Helsinki, Stubb was asked by The Associated Press to assess the state of the Finnish military and whether he intended to be a hands-on commander.

“We have one of the strongest military forces in Europe,” Stubb replied. He pointed to Finland´s wartime military strength of 280,000 through reservists - a number that is augmented by some 900,000 men and women who have received military training through conscription service.

“When the Cold War ended, Finland did not run down its military - quite the contrary," Stubb said, referring to the modern state of the country´s defense forces.

"We will play our part in the alliance (NATO). People trust us and they know that we are serious about our defense for rather obvious reasons. Will I be an active commander-in-chief? Yes, I intend to do that," he said.

Doubts also linger in Finland as elsewhere in Europe over the United States' future commitment to NATO — doubts that former [*President Donald Trump appeared to rekindle*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-nato-foreign-aid-russia-2b8054a9fe185eec34c2c541cece655d) over the weekend as the front-runner for the Republican nomination ramped up his attacks on foreign aid and long-standing international alliances.

“Stubb will become a president of difficult times, possibly even a wartime president,” Finnish newspaper Ilta-Sanomat said in an editorial.

The 55-year-old Stubb, who was prime minister in 2014-2015 and started his political career as a lawmaker at the European Parliament in 2004, will become the 13th president of Finland since its independence from the Russian empire in 1917.

Stubb later served briefly as finance minister before exiting Finnish ***politics*** altogether in 2017. He had also earlier served as foreign minister and minister for European affairs and foreign trade. He holds a doctorate in international relations at the London School of Economics and has worked as a professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, since 2020.

During his campaign, Stubb said Finland's priorities include maintaining a hard line toward Moscow and Russia’s current leadership, strengthening security ties with Washington, and the need to help Ukraine both militarily and at a civilian level.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was among the first foreign dignitaries to send “sincere congratulations” to Stubb. The war in Ukraine has deeply affected the citizens of Finland, which shares a [*1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border*](https://apnews.com/article/finland-russia-border-migration-313b2a1846f4aa4b349fa577ce8c39a4) with Russia.

Zelenskyy said in message on X, formerly Twitter, that “Ukraine and Finland, in solidarity with other partners, are strengthening the security of the entire Europe and each nation on our continent. I look forward to advancing our relations and our shared vision of a free, united, and well-defended Europe.”

Voter turnout in the runoff was reported at 70.7%, compared to the first round when it was 75%.

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