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Relating to Tradition: Civil Religion and the Evangelical Lutheran Church on Finnish Independence Day

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Abstract

By analysing a survey and elicited thematic writings, this article seeks to identify the main elements in the civil religion (CR) of Finnish Independence Day (FID) celebrations, how FID is related to CR, and the role the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) plays in FID. It further demonstrates the utility of an open definition of CR in which its relationship with church religion is understood as an open question and tests the various dimensions of CR presented in previous discussions. The CR of FID celebrations centres on its *traditional mode* in the memory of war and employs other national symbols. The *negotiating mode* is favoured by younger generations and distances itself from the rituals of the traditional mode, while the *critical mode* uses the rejection of FID celebrations as a platform for a general social critique. Membership of the ELCF, Finnish as a mother tongue, higher education levels, and an identification with higher social classes are the most important predictors for celebrating FID. In the writings the ELCF's role is associated with the traditional mode in blending with the backdrop of other national symbols, especially those related to the war.

Keywords*: civil religion, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Independence Day, cultural religion, banal nationalism*

On national days ideas of nationality or nation-ness typically taken for granted or operating in the background (Billig 1995) are publicly reflected on in a ritualized manner. Such occasions serve as focal points for matters deemed nationally relevant, and they possess a certain sacred quality (Warner 1974), combining national myths, rituals, and symbols. National days provide an appropriate arena for an examination of *civil religion*, a concept widely utilized yet often ambiguous within the sociological study of religi-

on that can have both religious and secular dimensions, depending on the definition (Botvar 2021; Helve and Pye 2002, 95; Kyyrö 2018; Mahlamäki 2005). In this article civil religion's relationship with the religious dimension is an open question.

Previous studies on national day celebrations in Finland and other countries have explored various aspects, including the development of celebration forms (Halonen 2003; Klinge 1979; Kuusi 1979; Nyyssönen 2009). They have often focused on public dimensions such as national symbols, speeches, parades, rituals, and media coverage (Elgenius 2011; Nyyssönen 2009; Paasi 2016; Pajala 2012; see also Blehr 1999; Botvar 2021). The role of church religion in national day celebrations has also been approached through public materials. In Finland the focus has been on Independence Day church services (Meriläinen 2011; Sihvo 1992; 1998).

This article seeks to identify 1) the main elements in the civil religion of Finnish Independence Day celebrations; 2) how Independence Day is related to; and 3) the role the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) plays in these celebrations. Previous studies have approached Independence Day celebrations through public materials, but it is also important to consider how individual Finns receive and relate to this public phenomenon. This article complements the previous research on Finnish Independence Day and national days in other countries, as well as studies on civil religion, by examining how the public phenomenon has been received and related to from the private and individual perspectives.

Independence Day celebrations in Finland

Finnish Independence Day, celebrated on 6 December, commemorates the acceptance of the senate's proposal of independence from Russia in 1917. It was officially established as a politically neutral date in 1919 during the presidency of K. J. Ståhlberg (1919–25) following the civil war between the Reds and Whites in early 1918 (Nyyssönen 2009, 140). The declaration of Independence Day as a paid holiday played a significant role in its establishment as the national day, with laws passed in 1929 and 1937 (Halonen 2003, 18). Military parades and special church services have been part of the celebrations since the early years of independence, while certain public traditions like the presidential ball took shape in the early years and developed further after World War II (Kuusi 1979; Nyyssönen 2009).

The lighting of two candles in the window continues to be the most spontaneous popular custom related to Independence Day (Kuusi 1979). It

is derived from the years of Russification (1899–1905 and 1908–17; known in Finland as 'the years of oppression'), when lighting candles became a kind of silent protest. In 1927 the Independence League began to propagate the idea that this custom should be adopted on the evening of Independence Day along with traditions related to the flag (Halonen 2003; Kuusi 1979, 185).[1] Whereas the lighting of candles originated before independence, and the flying of the flag and the president's reception in its early years, the Winter War (1939–40) and Continuation War (1941–44) against the Soviet Union introduced a new stratum of commemorative traditions to Independence Day, many of which take place at war graves (Halonen 2003).

The role of the special church service held on Independence Day has been the subject of scholarly discussion. Attended by the President of the Republic, the cabinet, and members of parliament (Sihvo 1988), it has been seen as a sign of the ELCF's role as a state church. For those who prefer to characterize the ELCF's role as a folk church it is a remnant of the old state church model, which was allegedly abandoned after the 1867 Church Law (Meriläinen 2011, 362). This issue has also been discussed among civil religion scholars. For Juha Meriläinen state church religion is not civil religion, and the special church service therefore does not qualify as such (ibid.). Jouko Sihvo, meanwhile, counts 'Independence Day church services [including others than those attended by the president and cabinet], along with war grave visits, military parades and university students' processions', as civil religion (Sihvo 1992, 52–53). Since 1998 the special church service has been ecumenical, but it has been organized in the ELCF's Helsinki Cathedral in a central location on Senate Square close to the presidential palace.

To shift the focus to the nonreligious aspects of Independence Day, television has played a significant role in its celebration. The day's media ritual builds on the national military parade and the special church service shown during the day, which are usually followed by Edvin Laine's war film *The Unknown Soldier* (1955). The media ritual culminates in the evening with the presidential ball, a notable citizens' celebration at the presidential palace. The televised presidential ball and *The Unknown Soldier* have been among the most watched television programmes throughout the 2000s. Although war remembrance is by no means alien to national day celebra-

1 There are competing interpretations of the origin of the custom: according to Nyyssönen 'Some say that the custom already commemorated [national poet Johan Ludvig] Runeberg's birthday whilst others refer to an illegal jaeger movement to signify a safe house on their way out of the country' (Nyyssönen 2009, 148). The origin of the custom in the jaeger movement was also mentioned in one of the thematic writings.

tions in various countries (e.g. Botvar 2021), Mari Pajala notes that since the 1990s, following the collapse of Soviet Union, remembrance of the Winter War and Continuation War increased in the media, and 'independence' has come to be associated with them (Pajala 2012, 131–134). This turn in the memorizing of the war has been described as neo-patriotic. It has been accompanied by an interpretation that instead of losing the wars, Finland won a 'defensive victory'. Veterans have since gained a more prominent role in the presidential ball. The screening of *The Unknown Soldier*, based on a novel by Väinö Linna (1954) describing the Continuation War from the perspective of a Finnish machine gun company, is a new tradition of the 2000s. It is associated with the increased war remembrance (Nyyssönen 2009, 137, 147; Pajala 2012) and has acquired a central position in the contemporary Independence Day media ritual.

Another focus of public attention is the various street activities that oppose the official forms of public celebrations – or in the case of demonstrations, each other. In the 1960s the elitism of the presidential ball was criticized, and since 1967 an alternative party for the homeless has been organized (Nyyssönen 2009, 144). This tradition of an 'Independence Ball for the Poor' has continued into the 2020s. Since the 1990s, and especially during the 2000s and 2010s, various left-wing, anarchist, nationalist, neo-Nazi, anti-immigrant, and anti-EU groups' street activities have been prominent (see also Heikka et al. 2016; Nyyssönen 2009, 144).

Civil religion and Independence Day

The definition of civil religion has been widely debated within the sociology of religion and related fields. For Robert N. Bellah American civil religion is not denominational but Christianity-influenced general religion that legitimizes the nation's transcendent ideals, which can be found in presidents' inauguration speeches (Bellah 2006). Marcela Cristi has noted that although Bellah's notion of civil religion builds on both the Durkheimian sociology of religion and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political theory, there is a paradox in how Bellah combines them. Cristi maintains that Rousseau's view of civil religion as a usable political resource (top-down) has received insufficient attention, and the Durkheimian view that sees civil religion as a spontaneous cultural product (bottom-up) has dominated the discussion (Cristi 2009, 49). Johanna Sumiala underlines that it is the official state that is at the centre of the moral order and thus of civil religion (Sumiala 2013, 111). This is also the case with Finnish Independence Day's media ritual,

which is centred on the presidential ball (Nyyssönen 2009). This article approaches civil religion from the bottom-up perspective, but it is important to note that there is a dynamic at play between public and officially endorsed forms of civil religion and the responses to it of individual citizens, who may be active participants in or oppose civil religious practices.

Another question has been whether definitions of civil religion should be limited to those phenomena that concern belief in a divinity or the supernatural (e.g. Lüchau 2009, 377–383; Warburg 2017, 130), or whether secular phenomena should also be included. A related discussion is civil religion's relationship with secular nationalism. Bellah was himself critical of equating civil religion with religious nationalism: he understood civil religion as subjugated to the transcendent and nationalism as idolatrous self-worship (e.g. Richey and Jones 1974, 14–18). Yet scholars of nationalism have often equated them, understanding nationalism-as-civil-religion as a modern substitute for religion. Following the latter reasoning, Michael E. Geisler writes about how historiography takes religion's place in secular national holidays (Geisler 2009, 20).

In the Finnish and wider Nordic context scholars of religion have used the concept to refer to the special role the Lutheran 'folk churches' have played in society (Lampinen 1984; Sundback 1984). While Tapio Lampinen, employing Bellah's concepts, analyses references to God and biblical archetypes in various materials, for example, Susan Sundback understands Finnish civil religion as an ideology that enables citizens to remain members of the church, regardless of secularization. Belief in God is unnecessary for civil religion or the 'folk church ideology' to exist. Additionally, Finnish historians and sociologists have used the concept to refer to secular phenomena like the temperance movement or Finnish nation building (for a wider overview see Kyyrö 2018). Helena Helve and Michael Pye include even nationally relevant sets of beliefs related to sport and business as 'civil religious' (Helve and Pye 2002, 97), seeing civil religion as something shared by the majority and related to shared symbols and ideas of right and wrong (ibid., 98; cf. Mahlamäki 2005, 212).

A discussion of Sundback's understanding of folk church Lutheranism as civil religion has resurfaced alongside the discussion of cultural religion. In the context of nonreligious identification in Finland, Teemu Taira, Kimmo Ketola, and Jussi Sohlberg write that for older generations, especially those who are more religious, there is nothing special about the connection between Finnishness and the ELCF. The latter has supported the former, which was constructed in opposition to the communist and atheist Soviet Union. As the chain of memory of the wars against the Soviet Union weakens, especially among millennials, so does the ELCF's role as a cultural religion (Taira et al. 2022, 14).

Tiina Mahlamäki defines civil religion as a system of beliefs, myths, and ritualized practices that are associated with the nation and national belonging (Mahlamäki 2005, 212). Following Mahlamäki, I have proposed that especially in the Finnish context civil religion should be defined to include both secular and religious forms of sacralizing the nation, instead of focusing only on its divine legitimation. This allows more scope for a consideration of the various ways of sacralizing, and the roles church religion may or may not play. How religious institutions, practices, and beliefs (i.e. going to church, believing in or referring to God) are related to sacralizing the nation thus becomes an open question, and the data determine whether civil religion is religious or secular (Kyyrö 2018, 203). This creates more opportunities to discern the reciprocity of the religious and secular in the celebration of the nation.

I have also pointed out that in the 2000s and 2010s secular civil religion in Finland was divided between the conservative remembrance of the war and relations with the Eastern neighbour and the liberal valuing of the development of democratic institutions and the welfare state (Kyyrö 2018). These versions of civil religion emphasize different periods of trial for the nation (Kyyrö 2018; see also Bellah 2006). Several scholars have pointed out that the use of civil religious language increases during crises such as war, when the structures of society are threatened (e.g. Lampinen 1984; Mahlamäki 2005; see also Billig 1995, 44).

The study of civil religion has often focused on the public and official rituals, myths, and beliefs associated with the nation. Mahlamäki notes that public civil religion is often masculine and conservative, while the private side is more feminine (Mahlamäki 2005, 201, 213–214). Valdermar Kallunki observes that Finnish civil religion combines Lutheranism and values and myths connected with national defence. Kallunki has found that groups of conscripts and those who undertake civil service are differentiated by how they orientate themselves to working life and the national churches, group orientation, education, types of hobbies, and their relationship with alcohol and drugs (Kallunki 2013).

Using survey data, Pål Ketil Botvar examines popular celebrations of the Norwegian National Day (Constitution Day, 17 May) and the influence of religion in these events. Like Finland, such celebrations are a majority activity and are therefore associated with the majority religion. He distinguishes between 'exclusive' ethnocultural or religious nationalism and 'inclusive' civil religion. Botvar finds that the Lutheran church lacks a prominent official presence but plays a more subdued role in casual allusions to God in songs and speeches, for example. Although restrictive types of ethnocultural nationalism are less prevalent, participation in celebration is related to 'church involvement, pat-

riotism, and sometimes an inclusive form of national identity' (Botvar 2021).

Based on previous research on civil religion and Finnish Independence Day celebrations, various dimensions need consideration. The first is the religious–secular dimension. Being religious can take various forms, from strict belief in God to inactive membership of a national church. The secular aspect can also take various forms such as war remembrance or an appreciation of the welfare state. The second is the dimension between official and unofficial civil religion, which is connected with the third, public and private, dimension: citizens may celebrate Independence Day privately as part of the media audience or participate in public events, and they may take certain officially endorsed or produced forms of celebration for granted or reject them. Finally, various sociodemographic factors such as gender, social class, education, political orientation, and so on may be connected with the other dimensions.

Data and methods

This article employs two datasets, quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative dataset is the 'Historical Consciousness in Finland 2009' (FSD2932) survey; the qualitative dataset is a collection of *thematic responses* to a writing call on customs and meanings related to Independence Day ('Päivä itsenäisyyttä – A Day of Independence'). In the following I refer to the respondents of the former dataset as 'survey respondents' and the latter as 'writers'. Ultimately, the two datasets reveal for whom Independence Day is important, how the respondents relate to it, and what they consider relevant about the day.

Survey data

The 'Historical Consciousness in Finland 2009' survey was collected in October–December 2009 by a research project led by Dr Pilvi Torsti. It included several questions about the importance and meaning of events, periods, and history. The survey was conducted using mailed structured questionnaires by Statistics Finland. The survey's target group was Finnish- and Swedish-speaking people between 15 and 79 living in Finland, with 1,208 valid responses and a 35.3 per cent response rate. The sample was drawn from the population register using probability sampling. It included two questions of specific interest here: *whether* the respondent celebrated Finnish Independence Day; and an open-ended question about *how* the respondent celebrated it. Additionally, the survey included the respondents' background variables. All the analyses in the survey dataset were made using a weighting

that balanced the dataset so that it was more representative of the Finnish population[2] (FSD 2014). Some variables were recoded further from the data to ensure that each category had more than 30 responses. The generations variable was the categorization of birth years, which was based on Wass and Torsti (2011), using the same dataset. Wass and Torsti name the generations by their key experiences as follows: 1930–1944: the generation of war and reconstruction; 1945–1958: the generation of President Kekkonen, the moon landings, and the 1960s; 1959–1974: the generation of the end of the Cold War; 1975–1984: the generation of EU membership and economic depression; and 1985–1994: the generation of technology, internationalism, and terrorism (Wass and Torsti 2011, 172).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables included in the logistic regression model.

Descriptive statistics of the variables		**Count**	**%**
Do you celebrate Finnish Independence Day?	No	234	19,6 %
	Yes	959	80,4 %
Gender	Woman	618	51,2 %
	Man	589	48,8 %
Place of habitation	Big city (100,000+)	336	28,1 %
	Suburb or suburban area	111	9,3 %
	Small or medium town or commune (20,000 to 100,000)	329	27,5 %
	Smaller town or commune (20,000 or less)	215	18,0 %
	Countryside	205	17,2 %
Main acitivity	Working or temporarily not working	596	50,1 %
	Student	174	14,6 %
	Unemployed	64	5,4 %
	Retired	287	24,1 %
	Other	69	5,8 %
How many books do you have at home?	10 or fewer	98	8,2 %
	11–50	323	27,1 %
	51–200	438	36,7 %
	201–500	210	17,6 %
	500 or more	124	10,4 %
Mother tongue	Finnish	1142	94,5 %
	Swedish	66	5,5 %
Do you have evacuee Karelian roots?	Yes	282	23,8 %
	No	904	76,2 %

2 The weighting balances the overrepresentation of the Swedish-speaking and younger populations, as well as non-responses (FSD 2014, 4).

Belonging to a religious community	Does not belong	356	30,3 %
	Evangelical Lutheran	765	64,9 %
	Other or cannot say	57	4,8 %
Household income	€0–999	136	11,6 %
	€1,000–1,499	145	12,4 %
	€1,500–1,999	174	14,9 %
	€2,000–2,999	252	21,5 %
	€3,000–4,999	352	30,0 %
	€5,000 or more	112	9,5 %
Generation	1944 or before	202	17,0 %
	1945–1958	296	25,0 %
	1959–1974	313	26,4 %
	1975–1984	190	16,1 %
	1985 or later	184	15,5 %
Education	Primary	148	12,3 %
	Lower secondary	194	16,2 %
	Upper secondary general	102	8,5 %
	Upper secondary vocational	331	27,6 %
	Post-secondary or more	425	35,5 %
Self-identified social class	Working class	236	19,8 %
	Lower middle	186	15,6 %
	Middle	546	45,9 %
	Higher middle or upper	116	9,8 %
	Rather not say	107	9,0 %
Childhood social class	Working class	397	33,4 %
	Lower middle	217	18,3 %
	Middle	392	33,0 %
	Higher middle or upper	104	8,8 %
	Rather not say	78	6,5 %
Military service	Did military service	494	44,8 %
	Did civil service or released from military	49	4,4 %
	No military service	561	50,8 %
Party voted in parliamentary elections 2007	Center	169	14,5 %
	National Coalition	195	16,8 %
	Social Democratic	172	14,8 %
	Left Alliance	46	3,9 %
	Green League	124	10,7 %
	Swedish People's	43	3,7 %
	Finns	75	6,5 %
	Other party	60	5,1 %
	Did not vote	173	14,9 %
	No right to vote	105	9,0 %

In the survey data I examined the statistically significant demographics associated with the respondent's celebration of independence, as well as the most common ways of celebrating Independence Day. The background variables were chosen based on the civil religion research described in the previous section. The responses to the question about how Independence Day and the responses contextualize each other.

First, the association of various sociodemographic variables with the question about whether the respondent celebrated Independence Day was analysed by building and interpreting a binary logistic regression model (Tables 1 and 2). Logistic regression calculates the effect of each covariate (independent variable) on the dependent variable. The dependent variable is binary (one either celebrates Independence Day or does not), the method is suitable for modelling categorical independent variables, and continuous variables can also be used as covariates. The values of independent categorical variables are displayed as 'dummy' variables (for example, one either is or is not of a certain gender or a voter for a certain party). In the analysis of the survey data each independent variable was first modelled pairwise with the dependent variable, after which the statistically significant variables were chosen as covariates in the adjusted model. The adjusted model reports the effect of each variable when the other variables are standardized. This helps in evaluating whether the effect of a variable is mediated by another variable.

The logistic regression model reports the statistical significance of each independent variable and the odds ratio by which the presence of the variable affects the independent variable rather than the reference category (the other gender or one of the parties). Additionally, the model's prediction power (sensitivity) is calculated as a percentage of correct predictions, its performance with the Nagelkerke R^2 value, and its fitness with the Hosmer-Lemenshow test value. The interpretation of the logistic regression model and its parameters are presented in the 'Who celebrates Independence Day, and who does not?' section. This part's findings contextualize the responses and help estimate their generalizability.

Second, the open-ended survey responses give an idea of the prevalence of a specific custom, and the responses help understand the meanings of a certain practice. The open-ended survey responses were further categorized, and repeating customs and references to symbols were coded.

Thematic responses

The responses were collected through an open call formulated in cooperation by the author, Dr Tiina Mahlamäki, and the Finnish Literature Society. The call was forwarded to the respondent network of the Finnish Literature Society and published online, and it could be responded to online and by mail. The call was made in Finnish, Swedish, and English in two rounds in December 2016 and 2017. It yielded 49 and 17 responses respectively. The returned writings were in Finnish (65) and Swedish (1). Elderly people and women were overrepresented in the dataset. The median year of birth of the writers who provided information about their age was 1955, and 63.6 per cent of the writers were women, 25.8 per cent men, and 10.6 per cent of unspecified gender (see Table 3).

The writings provide a detailed insight into the customs and meanings attached to Independence Day and independence. First, ways of celebrating were analysed to identify the recurring customs, rituals, and symbols the writer attached to Independence Day. Most importantly, the repeating modes of relating to Independence Day were analysed: how the writer characterized their relationship with Independence Day. First, recurring customs and symbols, as well as the writer's relationship with the celebrations (embracing, critical, distancing, humorous), were coded. On this basis the three main modes of relating were summarized, and the dominant mode was coded for each writing.[3]

Who celebrates Independence Day, and who does not?

In the following I will answer the question presented in the section headline by interpreting the logistic regression model that predicts the celebration of Independence Day. Table 2 presents the unadjusted and adjusted binary logistic regression models. The unadjusted effects were produced by modelling each predicting variable independently with the dependent variable.

3 Regarding the limitations of the data and methods, neither of the datasets captures the views of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities other than Swedish speakers, meaning the article's focus cannot be on the minorities. Although the responses to the survey question 'Do you celebrate Finnish Independence Day?' say little about differences in celebrating and not celebrating, the responses and the statistically significant difference in the responses between certain groups of survey respondents reveal that this relationship is somewhat divisive. The responses do not include views that were completely indifferent to the day, while some of the non-responses to the survey may be a signal of this indifference. Additionally, the responses do not contain consistent background information other than age and gender, which would have allowed a more thorough comparison with the survey data.

Statistically significant variables were chosen for the second, adjusted, model, in which all the predicting variables were modelled together. I focus on the odds ratio ('Exp(B)') and the statistical significance of individual variables. The odds ratio ranges between zero and indefinite. The statistically significant variables are those with a value of 0.05 or less, indicated by asterisks. The odds are calculated against the reference categories (ref.) that have a value of 1.

Table 2. Logistic regression model: 'Do you celebrate Finnish Independence Day?'

Dependent variable: Do you celebrate Finnish Independence Day?		Unadjusted effects			Adjusted effects		
Predicting variables		Exp(B)	S.E.	Exp(B) data bars	Exp(B)	S.E.	Exp(B) data bars
Gender	Man (ref.: Woman)	0.63**	(0.15)		0.74	(0.41)	
Main activity	Working or temporarily not working (ref.)						
	Student	0.98	(0.22)		1.23	(0.41)	
	Unemployed	0.46**	(0.28)		0.54	(0.39)	
	Retired	1.49*	(0.20)		1.06	(0.38)	
	Other	0.76	(0.30)		0.61	(0.37)	
How many books do you have at home?	10 or fewer (ref.)						
	11–50	1.33	(0.26)		1.40	(0.33)	
	51–200	1.84*	(0.26)		1.43	(0.34)	
	201–500	1.81*	(0.29)		1.42	(0.38)	
	500 or more	2.49**	(0.35)		1.13	(0.43)	
Belonging to a religious community	Does not belong (ref.)						
	Evangelical Lutheran	3.81***	(0.16)		3.04***	(0.20)	
	Other or cannot say	0.88	(0.30)		1.00	(0.40)	
Mother tongue	Swedish (ref. Finnish)	0.55*	(0.28)		0.24**	(0.50)	
Household income per month	€0–999 (ref.)						
	€1,000–1,499	1.04	(0.28)		0.67	(0.36)	
	€1,500–1,999	1.27	(0.27)		1.07	(0.37)	
	€2,000–2,999	1.71*	(0.26)		1.11	(0.37)	
	€3,000–4,999	1.74*	(0.24)		0.97	(0.37)	
	€5,000 or more	2.58**	(0.36)		1.42	(0.50)	
Generation	1944 or before (ref.)						
	1945–1958	0.72	(0.27)		0.88	(0.42)	
	1959–1974	0.55*	(0.26)		0.55	(0.48)	
	1975–1984	0.40***	(0.27)		0.46	(0.51)	
	1985 or later	0.50*	(0.28)		0.49	(0.59)	
Education	Primary (ref.)						
	Lower secondary	1.17	(0.25)		1.99	(0.37)	
	Upper secondary general	1.15	(0.29)		2.09	(0.42)	
	Upper seconday vocational	1.86**	(0.24)		3.94***	(0.35)	
	Post-secondary or more	2.33***	(0.23)		4.01***	(0.37)	
Self-identified social class	Working class (ref.)						
	Lower middle	1.78*	(0.25)		1.32	(0.30)	
	Middle	1.74**	(0.19)		1.17	(0.27)	
	Higher middle or upper	3.85***	(0.36)		2.73*	(0.49)	
	Rather not say	0.90	(0.26)		0.88	(0.36)	
Military service	Did military service (ref.)						
	Did civil service or released from military	0.50*	(0.32)		0.63	(0.40)	
	No military service	1.32	(0.16)		0.98	(0.43)	
Party voted in parliamentary elections 2007	Center (ref.)						
	National Coalition	1.40	(0.33)		1.31	(0.39)	
	Social Democratic	1.49	(0.34)		2.13	(0.40)	
	Left Alliance	0.32**	(0.39)		0.77	(0.48)	
	Green League	0.65	(0.32)		1.02	(0.38)	
	Swedish People's	0.55	(0.43)		2.10	(0.69)	
	Finns	0.59	(0.36)		1.15	(0.43)	
	Other	0.59	(0.39)		1.07	(0.46)	
	Did not vote	0.24***	(0.27)		0.74	(0.34)	
	No right to vote	0.59	(0.33)		1.38	(0.53)	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. The data bars visualize the odd ratios: the red bars refer to odd ratios below 1 and the blue ones above 1.
*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.
The model's sensitivity was 82.5%, and its Nagelkerke R^2 value 0.227; the fitness of the model (Hosmer and Lemenshow test value) was 0.038.

In the adjusted model the differences produced by gender, main activity (employment status), household net income, generation, military service, and number of books were similar and had no significant effect on the celebration of Independence Day. No statistically significant political pattern could be identified when adjusting for increased differences between voters by party. It is noteworthy, however, that in the adjusted model the celebration was most popular among voters for the politically established parties, the Social Democrats, National Coalition Party, and the Swedish People's Party and least popular among Left Alliance voters and non-voters. The biggest differences were accounted for by level of education, belonging to a religious group, mother tongue, and self-identified social class. Those with upper secondary vocational or post-secondary or higher education were four times more likely to celebrate Independence Day than those with only primary education. Swedish speakers were four times less likely to celebrate than Finnish speakers. Members of the ELCF were three times more likely to celebrate than those not belonging to any religious group.

The increased likelihood of celebrating Independence Day is connected with social class (through self-identification and education). Although the majority (80.4%) of survey respondents reported celebrating Independence Day, the association with higher social classes may partly explain the elitist stigma some of the respondents associated with the celebrations (see below). Evangelical Lutherans' positive and Swedish speakers' negative odds support the idea that celebrating Independence Day in the late 2000s was a majority activity.[4] Those who were less likely to celebrate Independence Day belonged to minorities or lower social classes.

Regarding the qualitative analysis that follows, it is important to note that in the adjusted model the generations had no significant covariation with celebrating Independence Day, although younger generations were less likely to celebrate than the generation born before 1944. An obvious explanation is that the generational effect on celebration was mediated by religious belonging.

Previous studies have noted that public Finnish civil religion is masculine and conservative and complemented by private and feminine 'civil faith', which is connected with being on the 'threshold' of citizenship (Mahlamäki 2005), and that the civil religious orientations of conscripts and those who

4 At the end of 2006 82.5% of the Finnish population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. In 2017 the share had fallen to 70.9%. In 2006 91.5% of the population were Finnish speakers, and 5.5% Swedish speakers. In 2017 the respective shares were 87.9% and 5.2% (StatFin 2022).

choose civil service differ (Kallunki 2013). Based on the logistic regression model, the celebration of Independence Day is not divisive in respect of these social categories, but it is celebrated by men and women, voters for conservative and liberal parties, those who have been through military service, and those who have not. Viewed from the individual perspective, the celebration of Independence Day is a combination of participation in public and private practices, which may explain its wider popularity. Some symbols or rituals of Finnish Independence Day may indeed be considered too conservative, but a negotiating approach can be taken to them that allows distanced participation, as we will show below. Answering 'yes' or 'no' to the question about whether one celebrates Independence Day reveals something about how one relates to the day, but analysing the qualitative writings provides a further insight into the variation in these ways of relating.

Relating to Independence Day

In the following three sections I will present the main findings about the writings, supporting them with the survey's open-ended responses. The three modes of relating are presented in the 'Traditional Mode', 'Negotiating Mode', and 'Critical Mode' sections. Respectively, the names of the sections are broad classifications based on the analysis of the data. Table 3 presents the dominant mode by gender and generation in the writings. I have classified both the writings and the survey respondents by generations based on year of birth. The generation classification is the same as in Wass and Torsti (2011) (see the 'Survey data' section), which was also used in the FSD2932 dataset.

Table 3. Modes of relating to Independence Day in the writings.

Modes of relating to Independence day by gender and generation of the writer										
	Traditional		Negotiating		Critical		N/A		Total	
Gender										
Not specified	4	(57.1%)			2	(28.6%)	1	(14.3%)	7	(100.0%)
Woman	32	(76.2%)	8	(19.0%)	2	(4.8%)			42	(100.0%)
Man	6	(35.3%)	2	(11.8%)	9	(52.9%)			17	(100.0%)
Generation										
1944 or before	13	(92.9%)			1	(7.1%)			14	(100.0%)
1945–1958	12	(70.6%)			5	(29.4%)			17	(100.0%)
1959–1974	5	(55.6%)	2	(22.2%)	2	(22.2%)			9	(100.0%)
1975–1984	2	(28.6%)	3	(42.9%)	2	(28.6%)			7	(100.0%)
1985 or after	2	(28.6%)	4	(57.1%)	1	(14.3%)			7	(100.0%)
Not specified	8	(66.7%)	1	(8.3%)	2	(16.7%)	1	(8.3%)	12	(100.0%)
Total	42	(63.6%)	10	(15.2%)	13	(19.7%)	1	(1.5%)	66	(100.0%)

The traditional mode

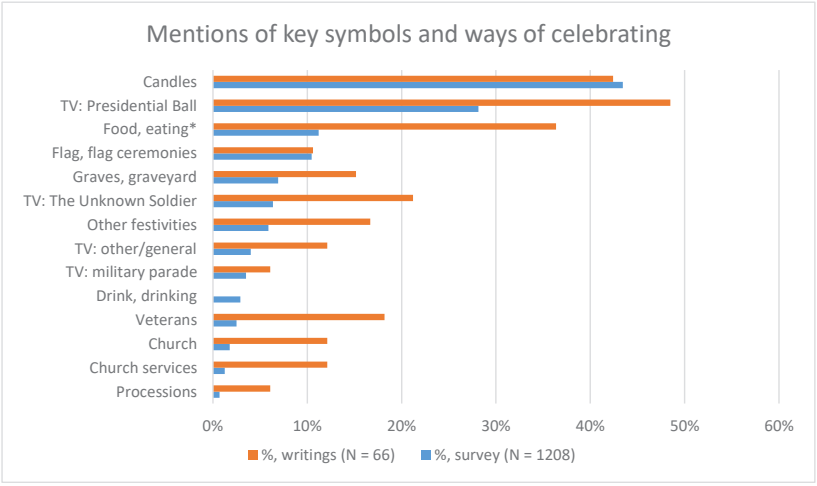

Figure 1. Key symbols and ways of celebrating Independence Day. *'Drink, drinking' was not counted separately from the writings and was included in the 'Food, eating' series.

Traditional customs and symbols related to celebrating Independence Day could be easily identified in both datasets. These included lighting two blue and white candles in a window between six and eight o'clock in the evening, watching the presidential ball on television, eating better than on normal holidays, raising the national flag or displaying it at home, visiting the graveyard, and watching *The Unknown Soldier* on television. The excerpts below crystallize the traditional way of relating to Independence Day:[5]

> Independence Day is a patriotic festival associated with the commemoration of the war and the deceased. The day's traditions include the national parade and university students' procession. The laying of a wreath on soldiers' graves is a valuable tradition. My husband and I light candles on the graves of my father-in-law and father, who fell in the Winter War. We dress appropriately for our church service, after which we have lunch. A white tablecloth, a standard on the table, lit candles, and the best tableware dignify our dinner table. Watching the president's reception on television is an annual tradition (SKS KRA. PI2016-23. Woman, born in 1937).

5 All translations by the author.

> My Independence Day celebration starts with the raising of the Finnish flag on our housing cooperative's flagpole. During the morning I prepare my suit for the afternoon's Independence Day festivities. I put my suit on, with a couple of medals, at about 11 o'clock.
>
> At 11.30 I participate in a memorial service at the war graves as part of the audience. From the war graves I go straight to the church for the celebratory service. After the service the City hosts a coffee party. After coffee we move on to the festival premises. The City and local associations organize the festivities.
>
> After the festivities I start to prepare the illumination: between four p.m. and six p.m. a candle is lit in every window. And then we watch the Independence Day parade on television. The evening programme at home continues with watching the presidential ball until almost midnight.
>
> The flag has been lowered at eight o'clock (SKS KRA. PI2016-9. Man, year of birth not specified).

In these excerpts churchgoing is part of the symbolic and ritual setting of Independence Day. Remembrance of the war plays a significant role, often with reference to relatives who took part in, fell in, or simply lived through it. The traditional mode is dominant among the generations born before 1974. The memory of the war is closer for them, and churchgoing is a more natural part of good citizenship. Those identifying as women favour the traditional mode.

Negotiating mode

The negotiating mode emerges among writers born after 1959 and becomes dominant among writers born in 1975 or after. Typical of this mode is a distanced, more individualistic relationship with the traditional expression. The writers try to find their own ways of relating to Independence Day, sometimes humorously:

> When I was between the ages of 20 and 26, I often spent Independence Day working in restaurants. The restaurant manager put fancy candles in the restaurant's windows. I thought it was important to light them. But often when I was working, I sold beer to those who had an extra day off, and me

> and my workmates went to a bar to hang out, and the occasion wasn't different from the Epiphany[6], for example.
>
> Now I'm in my thirties, and I always feel a bit funny about what to do. My husband and I ponder the current state of Finland, and why the celebration is so solemn. This time [this Independence Day] we went to sauna, ate, and tried watching the presidential ball with a bottle of sparkling wine and a drinking game (drink when someone shakes hands for too long, steps on a long dress that drags on the ground, etc.) (SKS KRA. PI2016-24. Woman, born in 1986).

However, such an approach can also be combined with the more traditional mode, which is often endorsed by the parents:

> This Independence Day I slept late with my boyfriend because we were at a party the previous night. On Independence Day eve there were many gigs and parties. My friends and acquaintances were laughing in advance at the [idea of celebrating the] Independence Day, but anyway, everyone celebrated it with pleasure. We even received a blue and white candle as a gift, which we lit. However, the food was Tex-Mex pizza – intentionally as un-Finnish as possible. The beer, however, was Karjala, which we joked about.[7]
>
> Part of my tradition is visiting the graveyard with my father. We take a candle to his parents' grave, and I think it's very atmospheric to look at the flames flickering on the war graves and the university students' torch processions. It's nice to see other people too, to experience something communal (SKS KRA. PI2017-9. Woman, born in 1988).

Compared with the negotiating mode the generations born in 1974 or after favour, the traditional mode older generations favour often appears more humorous and less individualistic, but in the cases presented above the traditional Independence Day is also part of the general background, as something that is given. These three excerpts reveal that Independence Day traditions are mediated by both media culture and families. Adapting

6 The Epiphany is a minor holiday marking the end of the Christmas holidays.
7 The brand refers to Karelia and the historical province of Finland ceded to the Soviet Union after World War II, except for the contemporary regions of North and South Karelia. Another text also mentioned the brand, and it can be interpreted as a signalling of ironic distancing from the memory of the war.

to the traditions happens from a distance: in wonder, but also comically or ironically, and in creating one's own makeshift versions of them. In the negotiating mode church religion is not prominent, and as with the traditional mode women dominate among the writers.

Critical mode

Some of the traditional forms of celebrating Independence Day prompt direct criticism. This critical mode was steadily present but not dominant in all generations. Interestingly, men favoured the critical mode. Some of the writers criticized the militarism of Independence Day:

> [I] appreciate independence, but I find the gloom of the celebration heavy. Why can't we be happy about it without reproducing the gloomy and the warlike. Must all the music be in a minor key? And I don't understand why we can't celebrate independence without constantly drawing parallels with World War II. The celebration's stark nationalism is unappealing (SKS KRA. PI2016-15. Woman, born in 1958).

> I think wallowing in the memory of the Winter War on Independence Day today is a false religion, and that other achievements of Finnish independence should be celebrated. Riding on the veterans' achievement of independence has brought about several disgusting phenomena such as neo-Nazism, which is a grotesque reflection of the short-sightedness of many regarding Finnish independence (SKS KRA. PI2016-3. Gender not specified, born in 1975).

Solemnity is understood as gloominess, and the focus on the remembrance of the war is criticized. Nationalism and war remembrance are associated, and they are seen as pathological causes of undesirable phenomena such as neo-Nazism. As mentioned in the introduction, during the 2010s nationalist and neo-Nazi demonstrations became commonplace during Independence Day celebrations.

Apart from the critique of the ways of celebrating independence, a more general social critique could be found in the responses. One writer was 'appalled and saddened by the prevailing extremely neoliberal political atmosphere' (SKS KRA. PI2016-37. Woman, born in 1976). In addition to the economic critique, some writers highlighted the elitism of the celebrations and society in general:

> As a historian, I have a critical view of the idea of independence. The power to make decisions has been given away to such an extent that we don't have our own currency, we barely have our own language, and there's no agrarian or foreign policy or judicial system. So in the morning I was critical of the day. Anyway, I wanted to see how the day went, so first I went to see Heikki Hursti's independence celebrations in Hakaniemi. The view was rather harsh, people waiting for their food bag to get even the necessary. Then I went to the front of Kiasma [modern art museum] for the Independence Party's event, where people spoke the truth. I saw Independence Day from its dark side (SKS KRA. PI2016-42. Man, year of birth unknown).

The writer's views are aligned with EU-critical arguments that juxtapose independence with EU membership (see also Blehr 1999; Paasi 2016). The small extra-parliamentary Independence party has raised similar points. The response paints a picture of the little people who have been left outside society by referring to the Poor's Independence Day celebration that has been organized since the 1960s, first by Veikko Hursti and later by his son, Heikki. However, the writer was not displeased with the same year's presidential ball because many 'regular Finns, voluntary workers, and representatives from the cultural field and the authorities' were on the guestlist (SKS KRA. PI2016-42. Man, year of birth unknown).

In the critical writings the public celebration of Independence Day reflects the corrupt state of the country and its elite (SKS KRA. PI2016-10. Man, born in 1974; SKS KRA. PI2016-20. Man, born in 1949). Interestingly, in the latter passage the writer regards the celebration as too cheerful. One writer (SKS KRA. PI2016-20. Man, born in 1949) begins his response by discussing his relatives who participated in the Civil and Winter Wars. His father, who was wounded in the Winter War, had not received proper compensation from the state for his back injuries. Like many writers, he evokes his relatives' wartime sacrifices, but this time they are used to question the state's legitimacy, as they emphasize the importance of the state's independence rather than the writer's belonging to society in the more traditional cases.

What is noteworthy in the critiques presented above is that they all identify the central ways of celebrating Independence Day and see some of them as undesirable. There is a critique both of nationalism and militarism and of society and its elite in general. The elite is contrasted with regular Finns. The sacrifices of the veterans and wartime generation – who are also understood as regular people – are not questioned, but the construction of society on their sacrifice is seen as false.

These two modes of social critique were also prevalent in the Independence Day demonstrations of the 2000s and 2010s, discussed at the beginning of this article. There is a critique of nationalism and militarism, which stems mainly from liberals and the left, and there is an anti-elitism, present in the left-wing 'gate-crasher parties' but also in far-right and anti-EU demonstrations. These anti-elitist critiques often build on the 'little people', those who are underprivileged, or whom society mistreats. It is noteworthy, however, that although the traditional mode is criticized, neither religion nor the ELCF is among the targets or means of critique.

Conclusion: Independence Day, civil religion, and the role of the ELCF

Based on the analysis, the Independence Day celebration is associated with the linguistic and religious majority, as well as higher class positions, all of which reflect the ideal components of national belonging. The traditional mode of celebration, favoured by older generations, is directly connected with this ideal of national belonging, as the negotiating mode of the younger generations distances itself from it. The criticism of Independence Day stems from a more general societal unhappiness.

Keeping in mind that in the logistic regression analysis one of the most important predictors for celebrating Independence Day was membership of the ELCF, in this section I will summarize the role church religion plays in Independence Day celebrations. In the survey's short open-ended responses only a few mentioned the church or church services, and there was only a few examples of religious significance being given to Independence and Independence Day in the writings:

> I think Independence Day and its celebration have a religious significance for me. I believe in God and His influence on the fate of nations, which means it also has a worldview-related, as well as increasing political, significance today (SKS KRA. PI2016-26. Woman, born in 1937).

> I eat my humble meal whenever I feel it's appropriate. In my heart I thank God that we still live in an independent Finland (SKS KRA. PI2017-2. Woman, born in 1946).

These references are connected with other traditional forms of celebration and come from the generations born before or immediately after the war. However, the role of religion in the form of the ELCF seems mostly to be

strongly connected with memorial services at war graves and participating in church services and in the special televised church service. This variation shows that religion can be connected with the civil religion of Independence Day in various ways: belief in or references to God may indeed be part of it as a side note, but religion more often takes the role of cultural religion, in which it is an unquestioned part of the national backdrop.

Although there were too few mentions of church or churchgoing (Figure 1) in the survey to draw statistically significant inferences, most were by older generations (more than 90 per cent of mentions of the church or church services were made by those born before 1975). This supports the notion that the ELCF is associated with the traditional mode, as cultural religion (Taira et al. 2022, 14). My argument here is that it is precisely its role as a supporter of Finnish identity and the chain of memory the ELCF plays in Independence Day celebrations that is apparent in the traditional mode. The popularity of the negotiating mode among younger generations reflects their distance from the cultural memory of the war, as the traditional mode with its war remembrance is more popular among older generations. The ELCF is therefore associated with the same constellation of symbols as war remembrance, which is less important to younger generations.

As an afterthought, the role of the ELCF can be approached from the perspective of banal nationalism, an everyday imaginary related to national belonging. Anssi Paasi maintains that Independence Day condenses banal and hot nationalism through recurring performances (Paasi 2016). The ELCF's presence in the Independence Day celebrations – both as media representations and participation in its practices – reproduce its position in relation to the Finnish nation. By combining Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism with Stig Hjarvard's (2013) derived notion of *banal religion*, such religion can be characterized as *banally nationalist institutional religion*. It neither emphasizes nor requires expressions of belief in God but is connected with national belonging in the minds of individuals, and as an institution it provides props that maintain nationality and serve as a reminder of what it is, thus reproducing its own position. There is thus great similarity with the 'banal Christianity' of Christmas celebrations in the Nordic countries, where secularized Christian symbols are defended or are objects of nostalgia (Lundmark 2023; cf. Warburg 2017, 138). By emphasizing the word 'institutional', I am pointing out that Christianity is not merely present as symbols or cultural products, as Hjarvard's notion of banal religion suggests, but that the banality concerns how the ELCF takes its place as an institution in society.

Independence Day is neither the only nor the most important setting where the ELCF can take the banal nationalist role. Nor is the ELCF as a means of reproducing a shared idea of nation-ness the only means from the perspective of Finnish civil religion: both public and private rituals that refer to shared symbols (notable persons, memories of war, past generations, national flag, candles, processions) do this too, and the ELCF is in the background. The ELCF's subsidiary role is emphasized by the fact that although ideas of nation-ness and ways of remembering the past are criticized or contested, it has not been part of these contestations but has instead been ignored in the critiques. If the ELCF had a more central position, it might also be among the objects of criticism.

* * *

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