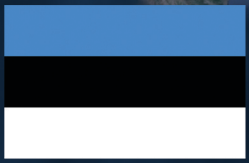
Expeditionary Culture Field Guide



ESTONIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo: Estonian women wearing traditional dress dance during a culture day in Tallinn, photo courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Baltic States.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Estonian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: US Army engineer visits a school near Lasna, Estonia).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at http://culture.af.mil/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity (Photo: US and Latvian military personnel take a break during reconstruction of an orphanage in Latvia).

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing

constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, social and political systems, among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture (Photo: Trakai Castle in Lithuania).

Social Behaviors across Cultures

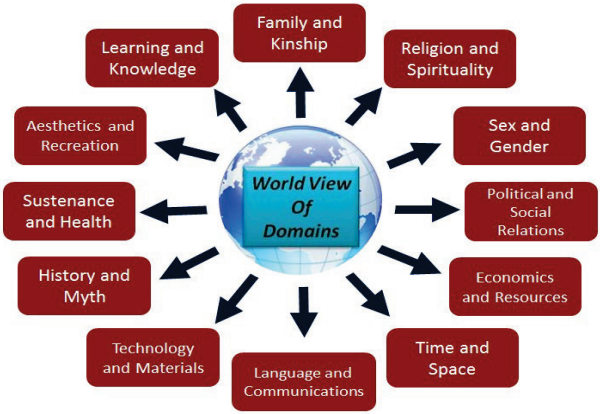
While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.



This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

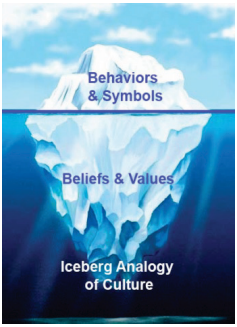
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true, regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed (Photo: Winter in Estonia).

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change (Photo: US and Estonian soldiers).

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success (Photo: US and Lithuanian paratroopers prepare to parachute from a Black Hawk helicopter during a multinational exercise near Rukla, Lithuania).

As you travel through the Baltic States, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

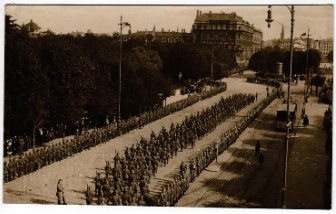
1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language (Photo: A relief depicting Lithuanians battling Teutonic Knights).

The Baltic States comprise 3 countries bordering the Baltic Sea on the northern edge of Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. While archaeological finds suggest people inhabited the region as early as 9000 BC, scientists believe that Finno-Ugric tribes from the east settled in the region beginning around 3000 BC. In present-day Lithuania, these tribes were later joined by Indo-Europeans around 2000 BC. As their populations increased, all groups erected permanent, loosely-allied settlements sustained by agricultural production. By the 1st century AD, inhabitants began participating in trade networks that extended as far as the Roman Empire.

Beginning in the 9th century, Vikings from Scandinavia began raiding the Baltic coast, and by the 11th century, Russian armies made several fruitless invasions of the region. In the 12th century, German knights tasked by the Pope with Christianizing the inhabitants of the Baltic region began to conquer parts of Estonia and Latvia, consolidating their rule over both by end of the 13th century. While they did not always retain political control in subsequent centuries, the Germans dominated commerce in the region and significantly impacted Estonian and Latvian government, religion, and education as well as the social and justice systems.

By contrast, Lithuania successfully repelled the German invaders, forming a powerful independent state and later uniting with neighboring Poland to control large parts of the region through the 18th century. Unable to stave off persistent attacks from Russia, all 3 Baltic States fell to Russian rule by the late 18th century. Over the next nearly 120 years, Russia quelled nationalist movements and imposed a series of measures intended to promote Russification, including suppressing the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages and increasing Russian immigration to the region.



All 3 Baltic States experienced substantial conflict during World War I (WWI). Estonia and Latvia then engaged in wars of independence leading to several decades of peace. By contrast, as a diminished independent state Lithuania remained embroiled in territorial disputes through the onset of World War II (WWII). For that war's duration, all 3 States became a battleground. During its wartime occupation of the region, Nazi Germany murdered, deported, or confined most of the region's sizeable Jewish population and other "undesirables." The blunt of the regime's atrocities occurred in Latvia and Lithuania (Photo: German troops in Riga in 1916).

At war's end, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) absorbed all 3 nations, imposing its communist system, nationalizing private companies, and appropriating private property. During their almost 50 years of occupation, the Soviets deported thousands of ethnic Baltic residents to prison camps in Russia. Furthermore, it murdered those deemed a threat to the new system, and repressed national languages, religions, and cultures while rapidly expanding industrial development.

Upon independence from the USSR in 1991, the 3 Baltic States transformed their governments into democracies. They adopted market capitalism and pivoted away from Russian influence to aggressively pursue political, military, and economic integration with the West.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

All 3 Baltic States are parliamentary republics led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and 1-chamber legislature. Executive power is vested in the Prime Minister, who leads the government together with the support of a Cabinet of Ministers. Presidential powers are largely ceremonial.

Within all 3 States, political parties typically form coalitions in order to attain and maintain power. The States have successfully created stable, well-run democracies, although they face several challenges to maintaining the democratic process. Weakened by overly broad and at times differing ideological profiles, some ruling political coalitions dissolve shortly after consolidation, in some cases resulting in frequent changes of government. In addition, corruption is particularly pervasive in Latvia and Lithuania, permeating all levels of government.

Following their independence from the USSR, the Baltic States formed strong regional and international alliances, such as joining the European Union (EU) and NATO. Today, the Baltic States are representative examples of democracy and post-Soviet economic growth, serving as advocates of a democratic and pro-Western agenda in the region (Photo: Former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates meets with the 3 Baltic State defense ministers in NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium).

The Baltic States rely heavily on NATO, the EU, the US, and other international allies to augment their military capabilities and to defend against external, state-level threats. Recently, rising tensions with neighboring Russia dominate the Baltic States' security environment.

In 2015, the US supported the Baltic States with $100 million in aid to build defense capacity and improve border security as part of a $3.4 billion "European Reassurance Initiative" fund intended to bolster NATO readiness in Europe. Meanwhile, NATO agreed to increase the number of troops permanently stationed in the region, despite fears that the increase in military presence might escalate tensions with Russia (Photo: City square in Riga, Latvia).

The 3 States exhibit differing levels of ethnic diversity. In Lithuania, 84% of the population are ethnic Lithuanians, while Poles are the largest minority group at just 7%. By contrast, the native populations of Estonia and Latvia are significantly lower, 69% and 61% respectively. In both countries, ethnic Russians comprise about 25% of the population.

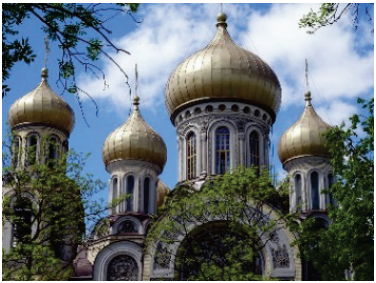
Relations between ethnic groups are somewhat strained in Estonia and Latvia where citizenship laws, language policies, and social divisions create some friction. Amid recently rising tensions with Russia, there is some concern that the Russian government may attempt to capitalize on the existing tension and by provoking social unrest among those countries' sizeable Russian-speaking populations.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Residents of the Baltic region were among Europe's last to adopt Christianity. By the late 13th century, German knights had consolidated their rule over Estonia and Latvia and converted most residents to Christianity. By contrast, an independent Lithuanian state repelled the German crusaders, maintaining its pagan belief system as the state religion through the early 15th

century, when it finally adopted Christianity. Of note, many residents of all 3 Baltic States were slow to embrace the new religion, continuing their pagan practices or incorporating them into Christian worship for centuries (Photo: A church in Vilnius, Lithuania).



As the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe in the early 16th century, both Estonia and Latvia saw the Catholic Church reorganized under Lutheran authority. By contrast, a Catholic counter movement in Lithuania prevented Protestantism from taking root. Throughout the centuries, Russian Orthodoxy and Judaism also enjoyed some growth in the region. The Lithuanian Jewish community grew significantly, eventually becoming a regional center of learning that lasted until the annihilation of the community during WWII.

During their years of occupation, the Soviets repressed all religious institutions and activities in the States. Further, the Soviets deported clergy while destroying or converting churches and synagogues for other uses. Over the years, membership in religious organizations decreased significantly.

Today, some 60% of Estonians and 44% of Latvians remain religiously unaffiliated. Among Estonians who do claim an affiliation, about 14% are Orthodox Christian and about 8% are Lutheran. Observant Latvians are about evenly split among Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. By contrast, the majority of Lithuanians claim some religious affiliation, with about 77% identifying as Roman Catholics.

While Estonia and Latvia are home to small Muslim communities predominantly comprised of recent migrants, Lithuania's Muslim population traces back to the early 14th century. In all 3 Baltic States, small Jewish communities are experiencing some growth.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of the Baltic States’ societies. Baltic residents maintain strong connections with both immediate and extended family members, supporting them emotionally and financially while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Most households comprise 2 parents and their children, with many families choosing to have just 1 or 2 children.

The urbanization of the Baltic States’ society has changed family life in recent years, as urban inhabitants marry later or cohabit (live in long-term, unmarried partnership) and have fewer children. Consequently, while the traditional family structure remains common in rural areas, urban households are usually smaller and family structures more diverse (Photo: US Air National Guard member shows her camera to a Latvian boy).

While historically marriage was an arranged union, today both genders choose their own partners. Generally, couples spend several years dating, with some living together and having children before choosing to marry. Divorce carries little social stigma and is increasingly prevalent among younger generations. In fact, in all 3 Baltic States, divorce rates are among the highest in Europe and comparable to the US.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture’s categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Baltic States' historically patriarchal culture privileged men as leaders and providers. While some of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional values – men as breadwinners and heads of household and women as mothers and wives – gender roles and responsibilities began to transform during the Soviet era and are changing more rapidly in some families, particularly among younger generations in the post-Soviet period (Photo: US Army soldier talks with Estonian counterparts during a multinational military exercise).

Although women hold equal rights under the law, they continue to face barriers to their full participation in political, social, and economic spheres. For example, women often face discrimination in the hiring and promotion process, routinely receive lower wages than their male counterparts, and suffer from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Despite these barriers, the number of women serving in elected, diplomatic, and judicial positions across the region has increased over the past few decades. Baltic women hold a significant proportion of national and sub-national government positions, maintaining similar participation rates in their national legislatures as women in the US. Additionally, in all 3 States women have held prominent leadership positions, including Prime Minister, President, and Speaker of Parliament (Photo: US Marines perform for trainees at the Baltic Guard Youth Camp).

Notably, Baltic women suffer from one of Europe's highest rates of gender based violence (GBV), both domestic abuse and rape. Considered private matters, many incidences of GBV go unreported. If cases are reported, the prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Although homosexuality is legal in all 3 Baltic States, many residents consider homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender activity inappropriate.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Following years of linguistic repression under Soviet rule, all 3 Baltic States named their native languages as official languages following their 1991 independence. Notably, while Estonian is derived from the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family, Latvian and Lithuanian belong to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family (Photo: Estonian street signs).

In Estonia and Latvia, about 1/3 of the population speak Russian as their first language. Russian is also prominent in Lithuania, where over 1/2 of residents speak it as a 2nd language. Russian was the predominant language in education, in media, and government proceedings during the Soviet era but no longer the region's main language. The Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages have supplanted Russian in each Baltic State, though many residents continue to use it in business and everyday life.

All 3 Baltic States are also home to native speakers of other languages including Polish, Ukrainian, Finnish, Belarusian, German, and other regional languages. English has become increasingly popular over the last several decades and is spoken widely in business and by young and urban Baltic communities.

Generally, Baltic residents demonstrate respect, privacy, and candor in their communication practices. They typically do not display strong emotions in public, tend to be reserved in all communications, feel comfortable in silence, and prefer direct speech. Residents usually share personal information only with family or close friends and rarely engage in small talk with strangers.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 16th century, most formal education in the Baltic States occurred in religious institutions, where clergymen taught religion and basic literacy. By the 17th century, all 3 States saw the founding of universities and other centers of academic learning. By the late 1800s, Estonia and Latvia had developed extensive public school networks and possessed some of the world's highest literacy rates.

The governments of all 3 States established free and compulsory public education systems in the early 20th century. The subsequent Soviet occupation brought significant changes to schools and curricula. During that period, the education system promoted Soviet ideology and communist tenets and emphasized Russian culture and language. It also prioritized vocational instruction, while simultaneously suppressing Baltic languages and culture (Photo: Lithuanian students).

Today, the Baltic States invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than in the US. School enrollment rates are high

and nearly 100% of Baltic residents are literate. Challenges to the education system include low teacher salaries, rural school closures, and disputes over the languages of instruction in Russian and other minority language schools.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Inhabitants of the Baltic States generally adhere to these habits, valuing punctuality, a sense of responsibility, and efficient and candid professional interactions. Within their personal lives, most Baltic residents invest significant time in establishing and maintaining relationships.

In Estonia and Latvia business tends to move at about the same pace as in the US, although more slowly in Lithuania. Like Americans, Estonians and Latvians prefer to build some trust before doing business but may engage in business activities without cultivating deep professional relationships. By contrast, Lithuanians typically invest time in building relations before conducting business. In all 3 Baltic States, residents rarely discuss their personal lives in business settings.

Concepts of personal space are similar to those in the US. For example, while conversing, Baltic residents stand at about the same distance as Americans, but may touch less often and display less affection when in public.

The Baltic States enjoy a number of public holidays. Besides the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, residents typically celebrate their nation's Independence Day. Further, all 3 States mark mid-summer with a public holiday and various festivities (Photo: US Marines enjoy a cookout with members of the Baltic Guard Youth Camp in Latvia).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Baltic States' forms of artistic expression, including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the region's rural peasant past, history of foreign occupations, and modern global trends.

Traditional music and dance in the Baltic States typically explore topics like nature, the seasons, rural life, and love. Folk songs usually include multiple melodic verses, while dances are slow and intricate. Under Russian and Soviet influence, classical ballet became a common form of dance across the region. The Baltic States' commitment to and enjoyment of song and dance are expressed every 4-5 years in national choir and dance festivals – a tradition that dates to the late 19th century. Rock, jazz, and classical music are popular contemporary genres (Photo: Latvian song and dance festival).

Rural landscapes and geometric designs are common themes in visual arts. Baltic residents also practice a variety of traditional handicrafts and folk art which reflect the region's rich peasant history, while incorporating Christian or ancient pagan motifs. Soccer and basketball are the most widely followed sports in the region. During the winter, residents also enjoy ice hockey, cross-country skiing, ice skating, bobsledding, and luge.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Baltic dishes tend to be simple, hearty, and mildly seasoned. Most meals are based on a staple – often potatoes, buckwheat, oats, or barley. Dark bread is particularly popular across the region and accompanies almost every meal. Although beer is

the most popular alcoholic beverage, Baltic residents also enjoy unique herbal liquors and vodka.

Health in the Baltic States has improved significantly in recent decades, as evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents have access to free, state-funded healthcare.

The region's healthcare systems face several challenges such as rapidly growing healthcare expenditures associated with a shrinking yet aging population. Further, although residents generally have access to modern healthcare, the quality of care varies between urban and rural areas. Rural clinics are often burdened with heavy workloads, equipped with outdated medical equipment, and understaffed (Photo: Latvian rye bread).

Non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases account for the majority of all deaths in the region. In all 3 Baltic States, cardiovascular diseases are overwhelmingly the leading causes of death, followed by cancers and respiratory diseases. In addition, Baltic residents suffer from high rates of suicide and alcohol poisoning. Notably, Baltic men experience significantly higher mortality rates than Baltic women primarily because they are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol, and follow unhealthy diets.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Prior to the 19th century, the States maintained largely agrarian economies, with many residents engaged in subsistence agriculture or laboring as serfs on German-owned holdings.

During the 1800s, Russian occupiers began to industrialize the region. These efforts intensified during the Soviet era, when the government implemented a centrally-controlled economic

system, established large collective farms, and developed various heavy industries.

Following their independence from the USSR in 1991, all 3 Baltic States immediately sought to de-centralize their economies and adopt liberal, free market systems. The transition initially caused their economies to contract, but by the mid-2000s, all 3 nations experienced significant growth. While the Baltic States' 2004 accession to the EU spurred further economic expansion, the 2008 global financial crisis slowed investment in the region and reduced demand for exports. As a result, the Baltic economies experienced severe contraction.

Reacting quickly, all 3 Baltic States enacted strict internal reforms, allowing their economies to recover within just a few years. Today, the Baltic States maintain stable, diversified economies, characterized by large, successful service industries and modernized industrial sectors. In fact, experts predict that each State will maintain current economic growth rates, which exceed the EU average, through 2020. Despite these positive trends, the Baltic States' economies face some challenges, including increasing income inequality, relatively low wages and productivity, corruption, outward migration of skilled workers, and ongoing unemployment (Photo: Skyline of Tallinn, Estonia).

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. While all 3 Baltic States have invested heavily into extensive road networks and efficient public transportation systems, Lithuania maintains the best roads. While only about 1/5 of roads are paved in Estonia and Latvia, over 4/5 of Lithuanian roads are paved. Railways connect major cities throughout the region, and a planned high-speed train will soon

connect the Baltic States with Europe. Because Latvia and Lithuania geographically separate Russia from Western Europe, both nations serve as important regional transit and trade hubs.

Modern information technology is widely available throughout the Baltic States. Cell phones are extremely popular while about 80% of residents regularly use the Internet. Estonia enjoys the region's highest rates of Internet connectivity and usage, especially among the younger generations.

Estonia is a net energy exporter, producing most of its energy from its large shale oil industry. By contrast, both Latvia and Lithuania heavily rely on oil and natural gas imports from Russia to meet domestic demand. Looking to decrease their dependence on Russia, both nations are actively diversifying their energy sources with the goal of reducing Russian imports in coming years.

Renewable energy is an important resource in Latvia and Lithuania, where it comprises about 39% and 20% of energy consumption respectively. Although Estonia is currently generating the least amount of renewable energy in the region, it plans to increase renewable consumption by 2020 (Photo: US Army and Lithuanian Land Forces personnel participate in airborne exercises near Rukla, Lithuania).

The EU is by far the region's largest trading partner. As EU members, the Baltic States enjoy a stable currency, a secure business environment, and free movement of goods and services. In addition, the Baltic States maintain important trade relationships with Russia. Regional trade among the Baltic States is also strong.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize the Baltic States' society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Estonia.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Dominated by foreign powers for centuries, Estonia has had an eventful and often tragic history, suffering famine, plague, war, invasion, and occupation. Situated on the divide between Western and Eastern Europe, Estonia was one of the last European countries to adopt Christianity. Estonia gained independence twice in its history, first in 1920 for 19 years and again in 1991. Since then, it has transformed its government into a democracy, adopted market capitalism, and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

Early History

Estonia's earliest archaeological finds include 10,000 year-old Stone Age tools. Scientists believe Finno-Ugric tribes, ancestors of modern Estonians, moved into the area from the east around 3500 BC. By about 2000 BC, inhabitants were producing pottery and ax-heads with artistic designs, building hill forts, engaging in animal husbandry, and living in settlements (Photo: Remains of an ancient hill fort).

Roman historian Tacitus first mentioned the "Aestii" or Estonian people in the 1st century AD. While the Roman Empire never reached Estonia, its trading networks did, bringing iron tools and jewelry. The region's first invaders were Vikings from Scandinavia who passed through Estonia in the mid-9th century seeking trade routes to Kiev (Ukraine) and Istanbul (Turkey). Ancient Arabic, German, and Turkish coins indicate the region participated in extensive trade networks, exporting furs, timber, and honey in exchange for metal.

The region also experienced conflict in its early history. While Estonian pirates raided the coasts of Denmark and Sweden, Danes and Swedes tried unsuccessfully to Christianize Estonians in the 11th and 12th centuries. Further, conflict with neighboring Russians was frequent: between 1030 and 1192, Estonians successfully repelled 13 Russian attacks.

German Conquest

In 1193, the Pope as leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, called for a religious crusade against all northern European non-Christian "heathens." In response, a German bishop established the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, an organization of knights with the mission of Christianizing the inhabitants of the Baltic region, by sword if necessary.

Supported by German merchants who were eager to access new trading frontiers, the German knights mounted a military invasion of the Baltic coast in 1200. By 1208, the knights had conquered tribes to the south then turned their attention to Estonia. Although the Estonians put up a fierce resistance, the knights subdued most of southern Estonia by 1218.

Meanwhile, Russians were also making occasional raids into Estonia. Concerned about renewed Estonian resistance and further attacks from Russia, the German knights allied with King Valdemar II of Denmark in 1219, who invaded the northern coast and built a fortress at the site of Estonia's present-day capital, Tallinn (Photo: Tallinn's Toompea Castle, built by the Danes and rebuilt by the German knights).

In 1227, the knights acquired the only remaining Estonian territory, Saaremaa Island. Once the region was under German and Danish control, the Germans turned their attention to acquiring vast agricultural estates where they forced Estonians to labor.

In 1237, the Teutonic Order absorbed the Order of the Brothers of the Sword and took control of the area known as Livonia (present-day southern Estonia and Latvia). Meanwhile, northern Estonia remained under Danish control. In addition to their agricultural activities on their estates, Germans settled in newly-established towns as merchants and craftsmen. Several Estonian towns – including Tallinn, Tartu, and Pärnu – prospered as members of the Hanseatic League, a powerful trading confederation of northern European towns and states.

Following several uprisings, the Danish crown sold its northern Estonian holdings to the Livonian Order, a branch of the Teutonic Order in 1346. With this acquisition, the Germans became entrenched in Estonia. Although they would not always have political control, the Germans would dominate commerce and have a hand in government, religion, education, and the justice system for the next 500 years.

Beginning in the 15th century, Estonian peasants began to lose their right to own land. By the early 16th century, most Estonians had become serfs, enslaved laborers who were bought and sold with the land they worked for German estate-holders.

From its origin in Germany, the Protestant (Lutheran) Reformation reached Estonia in the 1520s, permanently changing Estonia's religious landscape (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: 15th-16th century towers and walls in Tallinn).

The Livonian War

Other regional powers turned their attention to Estonia: Poland-Lithuania in the south, Sweden to the west, and Muscovy (Russia) to the east. Between 1552 and 1629, intermittent fighting among these powers resulted in the death of half of Estonia's rural population, the desertion of farms, crop failure, and widespread famine. In 1558, Russian tsar (ruler) Ivan IV ("the Terrible") penetrated deep into Estonia, leaving a trail of destruction.

Fearing further Russian expansion, the Germans requested assistance from Sweden, which soon invaded northern Estonia and seized Tallinn. Meanwhile, upon the dissolution of the Teutonic Order in 1561, Poland-Lithuania gained control of Livonia. The Swedes and Russians fought through the 1570s, with deadly consequences for the Estonians who saw their population dramatically reduced again. This constant warfare came to end in 1581, when Sweden expelled the Russians from northern Estonia.

The Swedish Period

In a 1629 truce, Poland-Lithuania surrendered most of Livonia to Sweden. With Sweden's 1645 acquisition of the Estonian islands from Denmark, all of Estonia was united, for the first time, under Swedish rule, a period of relative peace and prosperity (Photo: St. Michael's Swedish Church in Tallinn).

Under Swedish rule, the Germans retained their holdings and, with the approval of the Swedes, even took over many farms that had been abandoned during the prolonged wars. Although life for rural Estonians toiling as serfs on German estates changed little, Estonia's cities prospered.

Estonian culture experienced a renaissance during the Swedish period. For the first time, scholars studied the Estonian language, and in the 1630s, the Swedes opened printing presses that produced grammars, hymns, and Bible stories in Estonian. Swedish clergy founded village schools and taught Estonians to read and write. The University of Tartu opened in 1632 (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

In the mid- to late-17th century, plague and then famine killed almost 20% of the population. Meanwhile, the Swedish king attempted to abolish serfdom for Estonian peasants but German landholders fought successfully to retain enforced servitude. By 1700, Estonia's "golden era" was ending as Sweden faced a powerful alliance among Poland, Denmark, and Russia that sought to regain lands lost in the Livonian War.

The Great Northern War

Swedish rule soon began to collapse under assaults on several fronts. While the Swedes were able to push back the Russians' first attack in 1700, by 1703 Russian tsar Peter I ("the Great") was using newly-founded St. Petersburg as a secure base for further attacks on Estonia. During subsequent fighting, Peter I's scorched-earth tactics destroyed all Estonian cities but Tallinn. Then, in 1710, plague struck Tallinn, killing 70% of its population. With Tallinn's capitulation, the Russians took control. At the 1721 Peace of Nystad, Sweden formally ceded all of its Baltic provinces to Russia (Photo: 19th century painting of Peter I in Estonia).

Russian Rule

Like the Swedes before them, the Russians allowed the Germans to retain their estates, even engaging them to keep order among the Estonian peasantry and collect taxes. The peasants' lot initially worsened when the Russians retracted the few rights they had gained under Swedish rule: a 1739 declaration confirmed the landlords' legal right to buy and sell their serfs, decide their marriages, and administer corporal punishment.

Influenced by European Enlightenment philosophy that emphasized the dignity of the individual, Russian rulers eventually became appalled at the serfs' deplorable conditions and sought to improve them. In 1804, Russian Tsar Alexander I gave the Estonian peasants the right of private property and inheritance then proceeded to abolish serfdom outright between 1816 and 1819. Although the Germans' hold on their vast Estonian estates began to crumble, they were able to maintain their superior social and economic position by diversifying their economic interests.

Slowly, the Estonians' situation continued to improve: an 1863 law gave peasants the right of free movement, while an 1866

law took away landowners' right to whip their workers. Soon, some peasants were buying their own farms. The Germans' role further diminished when Russian civil servants took over the administration of justice from German landlords in 1890. By 1900, 40% of all privately owned land was in Estonian hands.

The Estonian National Awakening

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, Estonia's cities prospered due to industrialization and the construction of a railway line that linked Estonia to Russia. Gradually, a sense of Estonian national consciousness arose. For the first time, Estonians were permitted to participate in local government. The first Estonian-language newspaper appeared in 1857. Authors began to produce a variety of Estonian-language works, both fiction and non-fiction, while scholars began to compile and publish Estonian songs and folklore (see "Myth" below).

Meanwhile, nationalists pressed for equal political rights for Estonians. Of note, Estonia's first song festival was held in 1869, a tradition that continues today (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) (Photo: Late 19th century depiction of Estonian traditional dress).

This period of renewal was not without tension. The 1871 founding of the German Empire caused considerable worry among the Russians, especially given the strong German presence in Estonia. Further, the Russians came to view the Protestant Lutheran Church with its German roots as a threat to the Russian Orthodox Church. Consequently, the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries also marked a period of rigid Russification in Estonia (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

In 1882, the Russians implemented their own criminal and civil codes. In 1887, Russian replaced Estonian and German as the language of instruction in schools and for the civil service. In 1893, Russian replaced German as the language of instruction at the University of Tartu. Despite this Russian influence,

Estonian “awakening” trends continued. In 1901, Estonian Konstantin Päts, future leader of independent Estonia, founded a newspaper focused on Estonian affairs. Some 3 years later, Estonians dominated the Tallinn town council elections for the first time.

The 1905 Russian Revolution: The 1905 Russian Revolution with its mass political and social unrest spread quickly to Estonia. In the fall, newly-founded political parties demanded political autonomy for Estonia, while 20,000 workers went on strike. In December, Päts called a peasant congress in Tallinn, then the Russian government declared martial law.

Some Estonians took to the countryside where they looted and burned German manor homes. In response, the Russian government shot or hanged scores of Estonians while Päts and other leaders were forced to flee the country. Because the attacks, demonstrations, and nationalist groups lacked a focus, this initial momentum quickly faded. In 1910, Päts was allowed to return to Estonia where he re-established his newspaper.

World War I (WWI) and the Russian Revolution of 1917

Over the course of WWI (1914-1918), Russia conscripted some 100,000 Estonians for its fight against Austria-Hungary and Germany, with some 10,000 killed in action. Of greater significance for Estonia were the events surrounding the Russian Revolution of 1917, which eventually brought the country autonomy.

In February, Russian revolutionaries forced Russian tsar Nicholas II to abdicate. Following protests by some 40,000 Estonians in the Russian city of St. Petersburg in March (pictured), a provisional Russian government agreed to Estonian autonomy. By summer, an Estonian National Assembly, known as the ***Maapäev*** was formed, which then appointed a provisional government with Päts as premier in October 1917.

Progress towards independence was temporarily halted when the so-called October Revolution in Russia brought the socialist faction, the Bolsheviks, to power under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. When the Estonian *Maapäev* formally announced it would break away from the Russian state, the Bolsheviks appointed a puppet communist government.

Then, in February 1918, German troops entered Estonia, prompting the communists to flee. Taking advantage of continuing chaos in Russia, the now-underground *Maapäev* declared Estonia's independence on February 24, 1918, a date still celebrated as Estonia's Independence Day. In March, Russia [soon to be the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)] and Germany signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which transferred sovereignty over Estonia from Russia to Germany.

German control lasted just a few months. With Germany's surrender to the US and the Allies on November 11, 1918, WWI ended. The Estonian provisional government headed by Päts immediately proclaimed independence again. Despite support for independence from several Western countries, the USSR proclaimed the treaty void and entered Estonia on November 28. By January 1919, Soviet forces had overrun half the country.

Estonian forces supported by weapons from the Allies, a British naval squadron, and Finnish, Danish, and Swedish troops initiated a counteroffensive. Within a few weeks, the Estonians had re-taken all of Estonia and penetrated Soviet territory, although Estonian and British military forces continued to engage the Soviets through 1919. On February 2, 1920, the USSR signed the Tartu Peace Treaty, renouncing its right of sovereignty over Estonian territory (Photo: Estonian troops in 1919).

Independence

For the first time in its history, Estonia was independent. On June 15, 1920, the Estonian government adopted a constitution that provided for a single-chamber Parliament, a system of proportional representation, and universal suffrage.

Estonia's subsequent 19 years of independence were for many a golden era. German residents were granted some time to liquidate their holdings before their estates were nationalized and redistributed to Estonians. For the first time, many Estonians owned and worked their own land. The government adopted the Estonian language for all aspects of public life and introduced compulsory education (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Despite this progress, the political situation was unstable. Between 1920 and 1933, Estonia's government comprised 20 different political party coalitions headed by 10 different statesmen. Further, a feared communist subversion proved real in a 1924 failed coup d'état. The worldwide Great Depression of the early 1930s brought falling agricultural prices and broad unemployment.

Unable to cope with the perceived communist threat and the dire economic situation, the government promulgated a new constitution in 1933 that gave sweeping powers to the executive branch. Upon taking office as acting Prime Minister, Päts (pictured) proclaimed a state of emergency on March 12, 1934 and assumed dictatorial powers. He arrested opposition party leaders, forbade the political activities of all parties, and dissolved parliament.

In 1938 Estonia adopted a new constitution that allowed some political opposition. Although Päts was elected President for a 6-year term that year, the events of World War II soon ended Estonia's 19 years of independence.

World War II (WWII)

In August 1939, Nazi Germany and the USSR signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a secret nonaggression pact which essentially divided Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of influence, with Estonia falling into the Soviet sphere. When WWII began with Germany's invasion of Poland in September, Estonia declared itself neutral. Ignoring this declaration, the Soviet government imposed a treaty of mutual assistance on Estonia that allowed the Soviets to occupy Estonian military bases. Germans remaining in Estonia were recalled to Germany, although most had not lived there for generations.

NY DAG

SVENSKARNA PÅ VORMSÖ
hälsar Stalin och den nya regimen.

Metallarbetarna avgör
redan av ombud i dag.

365 dagars krig – 363 sjömäns liv.

2500 mötesdelegater
på Medborgarsyntaxen.

The Soviet Occupation: By mid-1940, Soviet forces occupied the whole country. President Päts and other political leaders were deported to the USSR. A puppet government installed by the Soviets approved a resolution in July to join the USSR. Some 2 weeks later, the USSR formally incorporated Estonia as one of its constituent republics (Photo: A Swedish newspaper reports the Soviet occupation of Estonian in 1940).

The Soviets rapidly imposed their communist social and economic system on Estonia, nationalizing private companies and appropriating private property. The Soviets replaced the Estonian currency with their own, forbade religious education at school, made Christmas a normal working day, and privileged the use of the Russian language in many contexts. Further, over the next 12 months some 60,000 Estonians were either killed or deported to the USSR to labor camps.

The Nazi Occupation: In June 1941, Germany turned on its former ally and attacked the USSR. Taking advantage of the situation and mistaking the Germans as their liberators, Estonian forces attacked the Soviets, freeing large areas of the country before the German army reached Estonian territory.

The Germans quickly suppressed Estonians' hope for a return to independence, executing some 7,000 Estonians identified as communist collaborators. Further, the Germans deported thousands of Estonians to Germany as forced labor and rounded up all Estonian Jews who had not previously fled the country (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), holding many in the Klooga and Vaivara labor and transit camps. For the next 3 years, the Nazis occupied Estonia, making it part of Germany's *Ostland* province and conscripting nearly 40,000 Estonians.

In February 1944, the Soviets began another invasion of Estonia, including bombing its cities. About 70,000 Estonians escaped to Sweden by sea while another 30,000 fled to Germany. By September, the Soviets had overwhelmed the Germans and their Estonian allies and took Tallinn. By war's end, about 10% of Estonians lived abroad while some 280,000 people (a quarter of Estonia's population) had been killed in action, executed, sent to Soviet labor camps, or exterminated in Nazi concentration camps (Photo: 1941 *Ostland* stamp with Hitler's image).

The Soviet Era

Following the end of WWII in 1945, the USSR immediately reincorporated Estonia. The eradication of Estonian national consciousness and restructuring of the country in the Soviet Socialist mold required repression and Russification. Between 1945 and 1953 the Soviets executed some 19,000 Estonians and deported some 80,000 more to prison camps. A particularly large wave of deportation occurred in 1949 during the Soviet campaign to collectivize agriculture.

Along with agricultural collectivization programs, the Soviets concentrated on developing heavy industry along Estonia's northeastern coast. The extra workforce needed for these and other initiatives came from ethnic Russians who were encouraged to settle in Estonia, which served to decrease the native Estonian portion of the population (see p. 12 of *Political*

and Social Relations). Due to these settlement policies, some Estonian communities are still majority Russian-speaking while Russian/Estonian identity and language disputes still simmer today (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 2 of *Language and Communication*).

Over the next 3 decades, Estonians enjoyed a higher standard of living than most other Soviet republics. There was a larger variety of merchandise in stores, better housing, and a more dependable infrastructure. Some opening to the West occurred over the decades. Ferry service to Finland re-opened in 1965, enabling some exiled Estonians to visit home and allowing others to experience Western life and use Western goods.

Discontent grew when Estonians gained access to Finnish television and its depictions of life beyond the Iron Curtain. When some events of the 1980 Moscow Olympic games were held in Tallinn, some Estonians got their first ever contact with foreigners. Of note, dissidents vocally protested the Soviets' human rights violations as well as the dangers of industrial pollution during these years.

The Forest Brothers

Calling themselves the ***Metsavennad*** or "Forest Brothers," some 14,000 Estonians formed an armed guerilla movement that operated against the Soviets from bases in Estonia's forests beginning in 1944. Most active in the late 1940s, the Forest Brothers primarily attacked Soviet arms depots and supply convoys. Although the Soviet military had largely crushed the movement by 1956, one Forest Brother eluded the Soviets until 1978, when he died trying to escape arrest by KGB agents.

An Opening

Beginning in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a series of reforms that would eventually result in the dissolution of the USSR. These reforms – most notably ***perestroika*** (restructuring) and ***glasnost*** (openness) – introduced market forces into the struggling Soviet economy

and increased individuals' freedom of expression. Although the attempted reforms were largely unsuccessful, deteriorating economic conditions sparked a wave of democratic movements in the Soviet republics, including Estonia.

In 1987, Estonian protestors forced the USSR to abandon large-scale industrial development plans that would have brought toxic environmental pollution. That same year, economists at the University of Tartu dismissed the USSR's centralized economy and called for a self-regulating Estonian economy (Photo: Gorbachev and Former US President Reagan in 1987).

In 1988, Estonians discreetly celebrated Independence Day and displayed the Estonian flag. The Soviets employed force against Estonians for the last time in February of that year, when the Soviet police violently dispersed a demonstration in Tartu. Soon, an opposition Popular Front emerged that pushed the legislature to pass a resolution on Estonian sovereignty. In September, a quarter of a million Estonians gathered at the Estonian Song Festival grounds (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and captured international attention with their "singing revolution."

In 1989, Estonian once again became the country's official language. Then, with the publication of the once secret 1940 USSR-Germany nonaggression pact, it became clear that the Soviet Union's claim that Estonia had "voluntarily" joined the USSR was untrue, further fueling independence efforts.

Independence Restored

Disobeying Gorbachev's orders, Estonia held free elections in 1990 that were dominated by supporters of independence. In August 1991, the Estonia Supreme Council formally declared independence. Over 40 countries gave independent Estonia diplomatic recognition within days. Within a month, the USSR also recognized Estonia's independence. Significantly, Estonia had achieved independence without a single violent death.

In June 1992, Estonia adopted a new constitution and in September held elections. Supported by the conservative Fatherland alliance, Lennart Meri became President and Mart Laar became Prime Minister (PM). The new government immediately set to work transforming Estonia into a free market economy and negotiating the withdrawal of Russian troops. By late 1992, many new private companies had been founded; air and sea links to the Western world were opened; and Western consumer goods were pouring in.

An immediate issue facing the new republic was the rights of non-ethnic Estonian residents who had immigrated to Estonia after the Soviet annexation in 1940. The new government's decision that these residents, primarily ethnic Russians, must apply for citizenship and prove their Estonian language proficiency strained relations between Estonia and Russia and continues to be an issue in Estonia today (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 4-5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Transition from a Soviet state to independence was not always easy. The uncertainties of the market economy, including a stock market collapse, business bankruptcies, and unemployment, caused substantial economic suffering. Further, some Estonians regretted the loss of the social safety net the Soviet system had provided. For the majority, though, the transition was welcome (Photo: Tallinn's Freedom Square with the Independence War Victory Column).

Despite allegations that some politicians had committed acts of corruption and abused their power, by the late 1990s Estonia had developed a stable democracy and embraced a market economy. Since independence, Estonia has sought to reorient itself toward the West. In 1999 Estonia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and in 2004 it became a full member of both NATO and the EU (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Modern Estonia

Elected in 2006 and re-elected in 2011, Toomas Hendrik Ilves serves in the largely ceremonial post of President (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). Since Estonia's first free elections in 1992, coalitions of political parties have formed alliances to control parliament and the office of PM, where the real power lies.

From 2005-2014, a coalition led by right-of-center Reform Party leader Andrus Ansip controlled the government. During the European financial crisis of 2008-09, PM Ansip implemented economic austerity programs that maintained the economy's strength. This initiative enabled Estonia to join the so-called Eurozone in 2011 and adopt the EU's Euro as its currency (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). His popularity slipping, Ansip stepped down in 2014 and was succeeded as PM by Taavi Rõivas (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The Bronze Soldier Incident

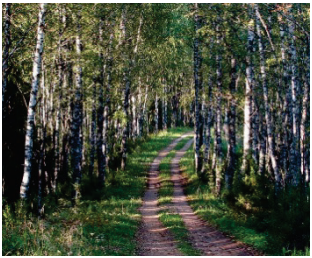
In 2007, the Bronze Soldier, a monument to Soviet war casualties in Tallinn, became the site of demonstrations by both Russian nationalists and Estonians. To defuse the situation, PM Ansip suggested moving the statue out of town. But when government workers moved to exhume the remains of Soviet soldiers buried underneath the monument, the situation quickly escalated into 2 days of rioting by ethnic Russian youths. Although the Russian government made its own protests when the statue was moved to a military cemetery, most Estonian Russians denounced the riots and the violence ceased. In what most observers believe was retaliation initiated by the Russian government, hackers then successfully disabled most of Estonia's commercial and banking websites. To better respond to similar cyber-attacks, NATO opened its cyber defense center in Tallinn in 2008.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

For Estonians, myths and folklore have played an important role in maintaining Estonian identity through years of conflict and occupation by foreign forces. During Estonia's 19th century "National Awakening," Estonian scholars collected myths and stories from rural inhabitants. For example, Jakob Hurt recruited 1,400 volunteers to visit every Estonian household, then compiled the findings in a 162-volume collection of folklore. In another effort, F.R. Faehlmann and Friedrich Reinhard Kreutzwald focused on Estonia's folk poems, compiling and publishing them as Estonia's national epic ***Kalevipoeg*** (Son of Kalev) in 1857-61.

As in many Estonian folktales, the predominant motifs of *Kalevipoeg* are supernatural forces and the struggle between good and evil. Written in a particular style of verse, *Kalevipoeg* emphasizes heroic deeds, honesty, and peaceful labor as supreme virtues, while portraying Estonia's conquerors as devils bringing ruin to a once free people.



The epic's central character and mythical founder of the Estonian nation is Kalevipoeg, a hero and king who possesses supernatural powers allowing him to speak with birds and other animals. According to the story, Kalevipoeg journeys to hell where he defeats the devil, but then retreats to a forest following his own defeat by invading forces. The epic ends with the prediction that Kalevipoeg will return one day to rebuild life for Estonians and bring them renewed happiness (Photo: Estonia's forests frequently provided a place of refuge against invaders and occupiers).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Estonia
Eesti Vabariik

Political Borders
Russia: 201 mi
Latvia: 207 mi
Coastline 2357 mi

Capital
Tallinn

Demographics
Estonia's population is about 1.3 million, making it the least populous of the Baltic States and one of the most sparsely populated countries in all of Europe. Significantly, Estonia's population is shrinking at a rate of –0.5% annually, in part due to Estonia's low birthrate (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*), a high death rate (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*), and emigration stemming from Estonians' search for employment abroad. Nearly 68% of the population lives in metropolitan areas, primarily in the capital city of Tallinn and its rapidly expanding suburbs.

Flag
The Estonian flag consists of 3 equal horizontal bands of blue, black, and white, each with several layers of significance. The top blue stripe symbolizes the principles of loyalty, faith, and devotion while also representing Estonia's sea, sky, and many lakes. The black band indicates Estonia's dark and tumultuous history, as well as the nation's rich soil. Lastly, the white band simultaneously denotes virtue and enlightenment, while also representing the color of snow and birch bark.

Geography

Estonia's long north coast faces the Gulf of Finland. To the east Estonia shares a border with Russia, part of which divides Lake Peipus (Peipsi in Estonian). Estonia borders Latvia to the south and the Gulf of Riga and Baltic Sea to the west. Finland lies just 50 mi across the Baltic Sea to the north while Sweden is 235 mi across the same sea to the west. Estonia's total land area, which includes 1,521 mostly small and uninhabited islands, is about 28,100 sq mi, making it approximately twice the size of New Jersey and slightly bigger than Belgium. Situated in the Baltic Sea to the west, Saaremaa (pictured above) is Estonia's largest island, followed by Hiiumaa, Muhu, and Vormsi.

Estonia has a low, marshy terrain characterized by stretches of unspoiled natural landscape with more than 1,000 natural and artificial lakes. Much of the border with Russia runs through Lake Peipus, the largest lake in Estonia and 4th largest in Europe. The flat northern coastline features bays, inlets, straits, and towering limestone cliffs, while marshland is prevalent in the East and Central regions. Estonia's South consists of sloping hills. ***Suur Munamagi*** ("Great Egg Mountain" – pictured) is Estonia's and the Baltic region's highest elevation at 1,043 ft (compared with Alaska's Mount McKinley at 20,320 ft, the highest elevation in the US). About half of the country is covered in birch, spruce, and pine forests (see "Myth" in *History and Myth*).

Climate

Estonia experiences a temperate climate with all 4 seasons marked by winters with extended periods of bitter cold and cool

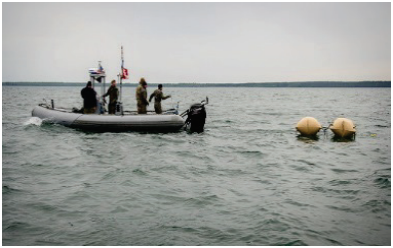
summers. Temperatures in the summer month of July average around 62°F on both the islands and mainland. In the winter month of February, temperatures vary from an average of 26°F on the islands to 18°F inland. Of note, the number of hours of daylight changes dramatically between winter and summer. For example, darkness falls around 3:00pm in January, while in June daylight lasts 18 hours.

Natural Hazards

Even though Estonia remains relatively free of natural hazards, it is vulnerable to heavy snowfall during winter months and occasional springtime flooding. Snowfall is heaviest mid-December to late March, although major roads typically remain cleared and safe to drive the entire winter season.

Environmental Issues

Many of Estonia's environmental issues over the last few decades stem from detrimental activities carried out by the Soviets during their 45-year-long occupation of Estonia (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*). In addition to industrial activities that caused substantial pollution (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), the Soviet army regularly dumped jet fuel, toxic chemicals, and discarded weaponry, including explosives, in coastal and inland waters (Photo: US and Estonian Navy personnel tow a World War II-era mine in the Baltic Sea).



Although Estonia's government has substantially cleaned damaged areas, topsoil and underground water supplies remain contaminated in some regions. Despite strict legislation regulating the release of contaminants, air pollution caused by sulfur dioxide emissions from oil shale power plants in the Northeast remains a concern. Smaller lakes and parts of the Baltic Sea are at risk of pollution by wastewater, agricultural runoff, and industrial waste.

Government

Estonia is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 15 counties (***maakonnad***), which further subdivide into 213 administrative units with local governments. Adopted in 1992, Estonia's constitution (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*) separates power among executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and in detail outlines the fundamental rights of Estonian citizens, including the protection of minority groups.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the Prime Minister (PM), who forms and leads a 14-member Council of Ministers and is head-of-government. The PM and Council of Ministers are responsible for implementing domestic and foreign policies, supervising the work of government institutions, and submitting draft legislation to the Parliament (see "Legislative Branch" below). Nominated by the President and approved by the Parliament, the PM is generally the leader of the party or coalition of parties that hold the majority of seats in the Parliament. Representing the Estonian Reform Party, PM Taavi Rõivas, took office in 2014.

By contrast, Estonia's President, who is head-of-state and commander-in-chief of Estonia's Defense Forces (see "Defense" below), is elected by the Parliament and may serve up to 2 consecutive 5-year terms. Presidential powers are largely ceremonial. Estonia's current President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves (pictured, with his wife and US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama), took office in 2006 and is currently serving his 2nd term.

Legislative Branch

Estonia's legislature is a 1-chamber Parliament (***Riigikogu***), comprised of 101 members directly elected through proportional representation to serve 4-year terms. The

Parliament holds all federal legislative powers, including the passing of laws and resolutions, amending the constitution, ratifying international treaties, passing the national budget, approving declarations of war, and appointing positions in government and military (Photo: Estonia's *Riigikogu* in Tallinn).

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes first-level county courts, appellate circuit courts, and a 19-member National Court (***Riigikohus***). As the highest court, the National Court is the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases and provides guidance on the constitutionality of laws. The President nominates the Chief Justice, who is then appointed for life by the Parliament. A system of lower city courts oversees minor cases.

Political Climate

Estonia's political landscape includes a multi-party system in which political parties or coalitions of parties compete for power. Typically, members of the party or coalition with the most seats in the Parliament occupy the majority of government leadership roles. Consequently, these political parties significantly influence Estonia's political environment (Photo: Tallinn's busy central square).

Estonia's current coalition government is composed of the Estonian Reform Party (RP), led by PM Taavi Rõivas, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL). Presently holding 30 seats in the Parliament, the liberal RP has consistently participated in most Estonian government coalitions since the party's founding in 1994 and is Estonia's largest, most influential political party.

Supported predominantly by well-educated, young urban dwellers, the RP advocates market liberalism and promotes low taxes, a free market economy, and civil liberties (Photo: Political advertisement in Tallinn).

Joining the RP as a coalition member with 15 seats in the Parliament, the SDP is presently the 3rd largest party and is ideologically similar to its coalition partner, advocating fiscal and socially liberal policies. Holding 14 seats in the Parliament, the socially conservative IRL is the 4th largest party and final member of the ruling government coalition.

Other active parties include the populist Estonian Centre Party (currently the 2nd largest party in the Parliament with 27 seats), the Free Party (5th largest party with 8 seats), and the Conservative People's Party (6th largest party with 7 seats). Other recently active political parties that do not currently participate in the Parliament include the Estonian Greens, the Party of People's Unity, the Estonian Independence Party, and the Estonian United Left Party.

Despite their different ideologies, Estonia's governing parties and coalitions have historically pursued common political, economic, and security goals. Since independence in 1991, they have cooperated to create a stable, well-run democracy with an established free market economy (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*) and successfully integrated Estonia into international organizations (see "Defense" and "Foreign Relations" below) (Photo: US President Obama and Estonian PM Rõivas speak with US Army paratroopers in Tallinn in 2014).

Defense

The Estonian Defense Forces (EDF) are a unified military force consisting of primarily ground forces, with smaller maritime, air, and internal security branches. Military service of at least 1 year is compulsory for all Estonian men aged 19-28. Women may choose to join the military and today make up 11% of active duty personnel.

With a joint strength of just 5,750 active duty troops, 30,000 reservists, and 12,000 internal security personnel, Estonia relies heavily on military support from its international allies to defend against external, state-level threats. Estonia receives the majority of defense support from NATO, a political and military alliance among 28 nations (including the US) that promotes the safety of its members through collective defense.

Army: As the largest branch of the EDF, the Estonian Army is a well-trained force of 5,300 active-duty troops, consisting of 5 maneuver brigades and battalions (including reconnaissance and light), 4 combat support battalions, and 1 combat service support battalion (Photo: Estonian soldiers during NATO exercises in 2014).

Navy: Consisting of 200 active-duty personnel, the Estonian Navy is a small force consisting of 1 patrol and coastal combatant and 4 mine warfare and countermeasures vessels.

Air Force: The Estonian Air Force consists of 250 active-duty personnel and 2 transport squadrons. One squad consists of 2 aircraft and the other 4 helicopters.

Defense League: Charged with internal security, the Defense League consists of 12,000 active-duty personnel distributed across Estonia's 15 counties. The Defense League has 144 armored personnel carriers, 376 artillery units, and other equipment.

Estonia Air Force Rank Insignia

Foreign Relations

Since independence, Estonia has actively pursued economic, political, and military integration with its Western European, Baltic, and Nordic neighbors, culminating in its accession into the UN in 1991 and into NATO and the EU in 2004. Through its successful democracy and stable economy, Estonia is an important regional advocate of a democratic and pro-Western agenda for Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and other former Soviet states (Photo: Estonian soldiers march during a training exercise in Latvia).

Regional Cooperation: Regionally, Estonia participates with Latvia and Lithuania in the trilateral Baltic Assembly, established in 1991 to address common economic, political, and cultural issues. Estonia is also active in the Nordic-Baltic Cooperation (with Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania) formed to coordinate economic policy, foreign and national security, energy and transportation infrastructure, and civil protection. Estonia also enjoys substantial economic interdependence with the Nordic nations. For example, over 35% of Estonian exports were sent to Sweden and Finland in 2014 and today over 3/4 of foreign investment in Estonia originates from Nordic countries.

Relations with the EU: The EU is a political and economic partnership among 28 European nations. Estonia's accession into the EU marked its divergence away from a Russian sphere of influence toward its current social and political alignment with its European neighbors. Further, Estonia views its membership in the EU as a security buffer against a somewhat unpredictable Russia. Of note, Estonia adopted the EU's euro as its own currency in 2011, further solidifying its economic integration with European states (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*).

International Cooperation: Estonia also works with other international institutions, including the Western European Union (WEU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), among others. Of note, Estonia has participated in a number of UN, NATO, and EU peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Relations with the US: The US and Estonia have strong political, economic, and military ties. First establishing diplomatic relations with Estonia in 1922, the US did not formally recognize Estonia's incorporation into the USSR at the end of World War II (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*). Today, the US views Estonia as the legal continuation of the independent republic that existed between the 2 World Wars (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). The US considers Estonia a reliable partner in promoting democracy and peace in Western and Eastern Europe. Further, the US supported Estonian membership in NATO against initial resistance from several European nations which feared Estonia's involvement might create friction with Russia.

Today, the US offers security assistance to Estonia, while in return Estonia supports US-led military efforts, including in Afghanistan and Iraq. In another example of amicable US-Estonia relations, Estonia is one of 38 nations allowed to participate in a "Visa Waiver" program, which allows Estonians to travel to the US for up to 90 days without obtaining a visa (Photo: Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves greets US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter).

Security Issues

Estonia's security environment is dominated by a historically volatile relationship with neighboring Russia (see *History and Myth*). Estonia considers its membership in NATO, the UN, and the EU vital to its security and defense, relying on its international partners to insulate it against large, state-level

threats like terrorism and cyberattacks, such as the hacking attack that occurred in 2007 (see text box on p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Estonia is vital to NATO interoperability in the Baltic region and, in 2014, hosted a multilateral military exercise for NATO members (Photo: US and Estonian sailors talk during a multinational maritime exercise).

Estonia and Russia: Although relations with Russia have markedly improved since the end of the Soviet occupation (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*), political and social tensions persist. Some stress originates from Estonia's economic and political realignment with Western Europe since Estonia's independence in 1991. Other friction stems from perceived social inequalities afflicting ethnic Russians in Estonia (see "Social Relations" below).

Relations between Russia and Estonia substantially deteriorated in 2007 following controversy over a World War II monument (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Recently, Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and associated unrest in eastern Ukraine have caused concern in Estonia. In response, Estonia is considering permanently accepting NATO ground forces in its territory and has made plans to construct a fence along its eastern border with Russia. Despite these strains, Russia and Estonia maintain a dialogue and economic ties that somewhat diffuse political tensions (Photo: US and Estonian soldiers celebrate the installation of a helicopter landing pad in Narva, a city on the Estonian-Russian border).

Ethnic Groups

During a long history of conquest and occupation by other peoples (see *History and Myth*), Estonians always retained their distinctive language and cultural identity. Partly due to the Estonian language's similarity to Finnish, Estonians tend to feel culturally closer to the Scandinavians than to their Baltic neighbors, Latvia and Lithuania.

Estonia's population today is ethnically diverse. During the USSR's occupation of Estonia, the state encouraged ethnic Russians to settle there (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, the ethnic Estonian proportion of the population fell significantly, from 90% before World War II to 60% in 1990. By the 2011 census, the ethnic Estonian proportion had increased somewhat, to about 69% (Photo: Estonians participate in a dance festival).

Russians continue to comprise the largest minority group, about 25% of the total population. Other groups include Ukrainians (1.7%), Belarusians (1%), and Finns (0.6%). These non-ethnic Estonian residents live primarily in urban areas. The Estonian government funds activities that support the cultures and languages of these minority groups.

Some linguistic and cultural differences exist among ethnic Estonians. About 10,000 Setu people live in southeastern Estonia. They speak a different dialect of Estonian (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) and largely identify with Slavic culture and the Russian Orthodox religious tradition (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The inhabitants of the Muhu archipelago also have their own dialect.

Estonia is home to about 1,000 Roma, or "Gypsy" people. Like similar populations across Europe, the Roma suffer discrimination in employment and higher-than-average school drop-out rates.

Social Relations

In 1992, newly-independent Estonia mandated that all non-ethnic Estonian residents must apply for Estonian citizenship. The policy immediately rendered 32% of Estonia's population stateless, straining relations between ethnic Estonians and ethnic minorities (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*).

To become citizens, applicants had to prove their proficiency in Estonian language and history by passing a series of exams, some of which Russia and the EU criticized for being too challenging. In response, Estonia eased some of its naturalization requirements, and today, non-citizens make up about 8% of the population. Most ethnic Russians either have applied for and received Estonian citizenship or accepted Russian citizenship while remaining residents of Estonia.

The government largely supports the integration of ethnic minorities and non-citizens, although specific policies occasionally cause tensions. For example, non-citizens may vote in local elections but are prohibited from participating in parliamentary elections. Generally, the distinction between citizen and non-citizen will continue to lose significance: since 1998, the law decrees that children born in Estonia to parents who have lived in the country at least 5 years automatically receive citizenship.

Other policies cause societal tensions between Estonians and ethnic minorities, whether or not they are citizens. For example, a law requiring a minimum Estonian language competence for public sector employees has been divisive. Legislation concerning the use of the Russian and Estonian languages in public schools has been especially controversial (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge)* (Photo: The city of Narva on the Estonian-Russian border is predominantly ethnic Russian).

Other friction stems from perceived social inequalities. Originally encouraged to move to Estonia to support industrial development (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), ethnic Russians still work predominantly in industry where they experience higher unemployment and earn lower wages than ethnic Estonians (Photo: A Russian-majority town on the island of Piirissaar in Lake Peipus).

Generally, Estonia's Russian speakers are not fully integrated into Estonian society. In fact, most live relatively segregated from Estonians. Proud of their cultural differences, ethnic Russians tend to marry other Russians (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*), live together in Russian-speaking neighborhoods, attend Russian language schools (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*), and socialize separately. Russian-speakers make up the majority in some areas, including the northeast county of Ida-Viru, where Russians constitute 73% of the population. About 38% of Tallinn's residents are Russian.

While some older Estonians who lived under the Soviet occupation hold some anti-Russian sentiment, there have been no overt conflicts between Estonians and ethnic Russians since 2007 (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Although they may protest certain government policies, most ethnic Russians express satisfaction with their lives in Estonia. Few support Russian nationalist ideas, mostly appreciating the liberties and comforts Estonia provides.

Still, the Estonian government worries that Russia may try to inflame societal tensions or foment anti-Estonian feelings among the Russian population, especially through its media. Significantly, less than half of Estonia's Russian speakers regularly access Estonian media for their news and information. Meanwhile, almost 3/4 of them regularly turn to Russian media outlets. To counteract any potential negative effects of Russia's media penetration, the Estonian government has begun broadcasting its own programs in Russian.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Outside observers often refer to Estonia as the least religious country in the world. In a 2009 survey, only 20% of Estonians acknowledged religion as having an important role in their lives. Further, a 2012 study found that almost 60% of Estonians do not identify with any religious tradition. Across the world, only the Czech Republic and North Korea have higher rates of religious non-affiliation. Religious or not, most Estonians enjoy the Christmas holiday season (Photo: Tallinn's Christmas market).

The Estonians who do identify with a religious tradition are largely Christian. According to the 2011 census, about 14% of Estonians identify as Orthodox while slightly more than 8% identify as Lutheran. Other Christian groups – including Baptists, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of Christian Free Congregations, and Pentecostals – collectively constitute just over 1% of the population (Photo: Tallinn's St. Nicholas Church houses an art museum).

Estonia's constitution protects religious freedom and recognizes no state religion. Generally, neither religion nor particular churches have much influence on Estonian politics, business, education, or intellectual life. Despite their lack of commitment to organized religion, many Estonians consider themselves spiritual in a very private and personal way. For example, over

half of Estonian survey respondents in 2012 expressed belief in some sort of spiritual or life force.

Estonia's Early Spiritual Landscape

While scholars know few details of Estonians' religious beliefs and practices before the arrival of Christianity, they believe regional residents practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in natural objects such as trees, rocks, hills, fields, and animals. Early Estonians likely believed that these powerful spirits could guide or obstruct human behavior. Further, Estonians recognized several gods or perhaps several aspects of 1 divine being, including *Taara* (War), *Uku* (Thunder and Lightning), *Maaema* (Land), *Ahti* (Water), and *Vanejumi* (Fertility).

The Arrival of Christianity

Compared to most other parts of Europe, Christianity arrived relatively late to Estonia. While Christian missionaries from Denmark and Sweden arrived as early as the 11th century, with the Swedes installing the region's first Christian bishop in 1165, the religion initially failed to take root. Only the Setu, a minority people living in southeast Estonia (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), adopted Orthodox Christianity brought by Russian missionaries during this early period (Photo: Tallinn's St. Olav's Church dates to the 14th century).

The situation began to change at the end of the 12th century. As head of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, the Pope announced a religious crusade against all northern European "heathens" or non-Christians in 1193. By 1200, German knights had mounted a military invasion of the Baltic coast and subdued most of southern Estonia by 1218 (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Forced to convert to Catholicism and suspicious of services conducted in Latin, a language they could not understand, the Estonians were slow to embrace the new religion. Throughout the 14th

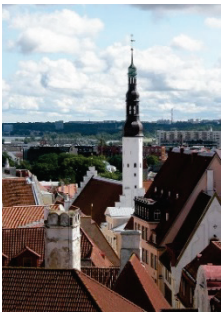
century, Estonians continued to practice their old nature-based rituals, especially for weddings and funerals.

Over the next decades, many Germans established a permanent presence, acquiring vast agricultural estates and settling into towns (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). A Catholic bishop oversaw the construction of cathedrals while Catholic religious orders founded monasteries. By the 15th century, Estonians were using Christian names and combining their ancient rites with Catholic rituals.

The Protestant Reformation and Rise of Lutheranism

The Protestant Reformation began in the early 16th century to answer a call for change in the Roman Catholic Church from all across Europe. A key event in the movement occurred when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Germany in 1517. Critical of several Catholic Church teachings and the authority of the pope, Luther's ideas spread quickly among German-speaking populations, especially through the use of the newly-invented printing press.

At this time, most Estonians were serfs, enslaved laborers who worked the land for German estate holders (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Although some German landowners initially resisted the change, they eventually welcomed Lutheran teachings and required their Estonian serfs to adopt the new faith as well. At first, the Lutheran Church in Estonia developed slowly due to extended periods of warfare in the region (see p. 3-4 of *History and Myth*). By the mid-16th century, though, the place of Lutheranism was secure: Estonia's Christian church was reorganized under Lutheran authority and all Catholic monasteries had closed (Photo: Tallinn's Church of the Holy Spirit dates to the early 14th century).

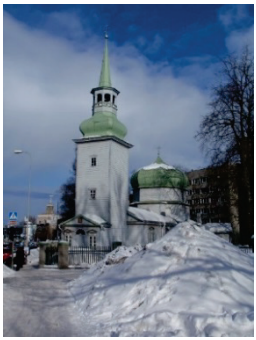


Upon taking control of Estonia in the 17th century (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), the Swedes made the Lutheran Church Estonia's state church. Swedish clergy strived to make church teachings more accessible to Estonians, establishing schools (see p. 1 of

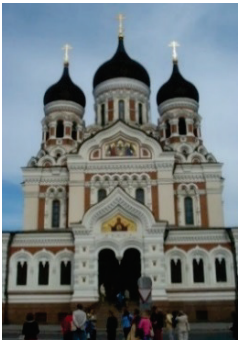
Learning and Knowledge), printing Bible stories in the 1630s, and publishing the Bible's New Testament in Estonian in 1686.

The Arrival of the Russian Orthodox Church

Following years of war and plague (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), the Swedes formally ceded Estonia to Russia in 1721. With an influx of Russians into Estonia over the next 200 years of Russian domination, the Russian Orthodox Church enjoyed moderate growth through state support. Meanwhile, the Lutheran Church began to decline due to its repression by the state coupled with dissatisfaction among some Estonians who resented the religion being forced upon them (Photo: Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church, built in 1721, is Tallinn's oldest wooden structure).



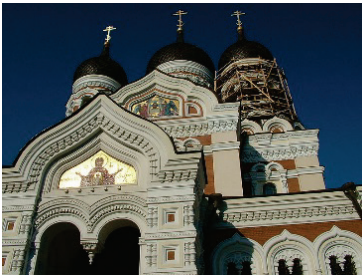
Threatened by the 1871 founding of the German Empire and distrustful of the Lutheran Church, Russia in the late 19th century imposed a period of rigid Russification on Estonia (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Along with the implementation of Russian legal codes and language policies, this era included the state's overt promotion of Russian Orthodoxy and construction of Russian Orthodox churches across the country. Despite these efforts, most Estonians remained affiliated with Lutheran churches while about 20% of the population, primarily ethnic Russians, were members of Orthodox churches (Photo: Tallinn's Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Cathedral, commissioned by Russian tsar Alexander III in the late 19th century).



Revolution and Independence

The events of the 1917 Russian Revolution and World War I resulted in Estonia's first period of independence (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*). With Estonia under self-rule, the Lutheran Church reorganized as the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and flourished, with about 80% of the population officially listed as members. Orthodox Church members continued to comprise about 19% of the population.

While a 1925 decree proclaimed the separation of Church and state, the independent Estonian government demonstrated some preference for Lutheranism, such as incorporating Lutheran religious instruction in the public school curriculum. Meanwhile, some Estonians affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church split to establish the Estonian Orthodox Church, offering services in Estonian rather than Russian (Photo: Tallinn's Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Cathedral).



Religion during the Soviet Period

The Soviet Union's 1940 invasion and annexation of Estonia (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), brought permanent changes to Estonia's religious landscape. Besides attempting to eradicate Estonian national consciousness and restructure Estonia to fit their socialist order (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), the Soviets imposed their communist anti-religious worldview of atheism, or the disbelief in deities and the rejection of religion.

The Soviets' brutal repression of the Estonian population in general (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*) also included the execution, deportation, or banning of around 2/3 of the clergy. Further, the Soviets abolished the Estonian Orthodox Church while granting the Russian Orthodox Church some privileges designed to extend Russian culture and language through the region.

Despite this nominal support, both the Russian Orthodox and the Lutheran churches saw their activities drastically cut. Lutheran ministers could preach only censored sermons in a reduced number of churches, while Orthodox priests could only celebrate the liturgy. Congregations could undertake no other activities or charitable work. Further, it was illegal to provide religious education to children.

While Orthodox priestly candidates could attend a seminary in Russia, training for Lutheran clergy was virtually nonexistent. The Soviet state confiscated many church properties and converted them for other uses (Photo: The interior of Tallinn's St. Michael's Swedish Church was used as a gymnasium during the Soviet occupation).

By the 1970s, fewer than 10% of Estonians identified as Christian. With Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's social and economic reforms in the 1980s (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*) came the lifting of religious repression. For the first time in 40 years, the Lutheran Church enjoyed a resurge of interest and allied itself with the growing independence movement.

Religion following Independence

Following Estonia's 1991 declaration of independence (its second), there was a brief revival of religious activity, including renewed conflict between followers of the Estonian and Russian Orthodox churches. The split between the 2 was formalized in 1997, with the Russian Orthodox Church remaining within the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Estonian Orthodox Church becoming part of the Constantinople Patriarchate.

Religion Today

Today, the government estimates that about 14% of Estonians belong to 1 of the 2 Orthodox churches. Ethnic Russians tend ro affiliate with the Russian Orthodox Church, which has about 30 congregations nationwide. Although it counts about 60 congregations, the Estonian Orthodox Church has far fewer members, around 25,000. About 8% of the population are Lutherans divided into 165 congregations. Members of other Christian churches make up about 1% of the population, including about 6,000 practicing Roman Catholics.

Judaism: Jews arrived in Estonia as early as the 14th century, and by the early 1930s, the community numbered about 4,300. While over 3/4 of Jews fled Estonia before the Nazi occupation in World War II, most of those who remained were sent to Nazi concentration camps where they perished (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Since the end of the war, a small community of around 2,500 Jews has re-established itself primarily in Tallinn, where a synagogue re-opened in 2007.

Islam: Estonia is home to a small number of Muslims who originated primarily from Muslim-majority former Soviet republics such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. They came to Estonia during the Soviet era to become industrial workers.

The Old Believers

The shores of Lake Peipus on the Estonian-Russian border are home to the Old Believers, members of an offshoot of the Russian Orthodox Church. Today's Old Believers are descendants of Russians who objected to mid-17th century reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church. To avoid persecution in their home communities, they fled to Estonia where they formed communities dedicated to maintaining their unique social and religious traditions. In addition to rejecting mainstream Orthodox Church leadership, the Old Believers conduct their services in Old Church Slavonic, a medieval language.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

In recent decades, many Estonians have moved to urban areas to pursue employment and education opportunities and therefore tend to marry later and have fewer children. Despite these changes, family remains at the center of social life. Estonians typically visit close family members once or twice a week and involve them in all important life decisions.

Residence

While over 2/3rds of Estonians live in urban areas, the other 1/3 identify with the solitude and tranquility of the rural countryside. Urban dwellings, especially apartments, tend to be small with just 2-3 rooms. By contrast, rural residences are typically more spacious and may comprise multiple structures.

Rural: Following independence in 1991 (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*), some rural Estonians who had been employed on Soviet-era state-run collective farms chose to remain in the countryside. Today, rural Estonians mostly live on small, self-sufficient family-owned farms. Some farmhouses lack indoor plumbing and electricity, requiring residents to rely on wood burning stoves for heat.

Estonians traditionally erected rural homes of thick wooden logs to block out the cold. Today, homes are commonly constructed from cement and bricks. Besides a main house, most rural residences include a separate storehouse and a sauna. Typically constructed outside the home and consisting of a single room, the sauna contains benches and a wood-burning heating element (Photo: A rare barrel-type sauna).

Estonian Saunas

Offering relief from Estonia's long winter, saunas are a fundamental aspect of rural Estonian life and a popular Estonian pastime. Basic saunas consist of a small, insulated room heated by an iron stove surrounded by hot stones and bricks. Bathers toss water on the stones to produce clouds of steam, often brushing their skin with birch twigs to increase circulation and stimulate nerve endings. Traditionally used to treat illness, saunas today give Estonians a place to relax, socialize with family and friends, and escape the bitter cold.

Urban: During the Soviet occupation (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*), the state built large, basic high-rise apartment buildings (pictured) on the edges of cities to accommodate the influx of rural Estonians and ethnic Russians seeking work in Soviet industries (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Today, many of these tenement blocks continue to house a large portion of Estonia's ethnic Russian residents and lower income Estonians. Although many apartment buildings have been renovated, some remain in poor condition, with unreliable water and electricity.

Seeking an alternative to Soviet-era architectural styles, many Estonians invest substantially in their apartments and homes to make them more attractive and comfortable. Many middle and upper income families live in new, luxury apartment buildings or modern single-family homes. Many urban dwellers also own 2nd homes on the outskirts of their cities, where they retreat for rest and recreation during the summer and on weekends. Of note, over 80% of Estonians own their residences.

Family Structure

While most family households comprise nuclear families (2 parents and their children), extended family members remain important in daily life, gathering frequently for meals, birthdays, and other special occasions. Traditionally, the father is the head of the household, while the mother holds responsibility for household chores like cleaning, child-raising, and preparing meals (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). This view of gender roles and responsibilities is changing in some families.

Estonians highly respect their elderly family members, often choosing to provide physical and financial care for their aging parents. Nursing homes generally house only elderly who have critical health conditions or who are without close kin.

Children

Most Estonian families choose to have just 1 or 2 children. As implied earlier, urban dwellers tend to have fewer children and at a later age than rural inhabitants. While other extended family members may help raise children, grandparents are often significantly involved in child rearing, particularly while both parents work. Children often live with their parents until they marry, although a growing number of young adults move away for education or employment opportunities. It is common for parents to financially support adult children when needed (Photo: Estonian children on a school trip).

Birth: Estonians consider the birth of a child a significant event. After the birth, the child's parents host a ***katsik*** (newborn party), during which family and friends visit the mother and child. Guests may bring gifts to the *katsik*, such as flowers, cakes (if the child is a girl) and sweet pastries (if the child is a boy). Some Christian Estonians may baptize their children within a month of birth, though this custom is relatively uncommon.

Dating and Marriage

Boys and girls typically interact from a young age and begin dating around age 15. Couples meet through mutual friends, by attending parties, at school, or at work. Relationships are not always strictly defined, and couples may spend some time together before deciding to pursue a serious relationship. Popular socializing activities include attending cultural events and parties, dining, and going to the movies. Estonians typically spend several years dating and often live together before deciding to marry (Photo: Young people attend a music festival).

Of note, attitudes toward marriage have changed dramatically over the past 2 decades. Instead of viewing marriage as an inevitable step to be taken at a certain time in their lives, more Estonians are delaying or choosing to avoid marriage altogether. Of note, over 58% of Estonian children are born to unmarried, cohabitating couples or single mothers – a substantially higher rate than the US rate of 41%. Of note, marriage between Estonians and ethnic Russians or other ethnic minorities is rare (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Weddings: Although a 2004 regulation allows Estonians to marry in places other than a government office, church ceremonies remain uncommon. Instead, most Estonians marry in a civil ceremony at the local government marriage bureau. During the service, the bride and groom typically recite vows, exchange rings, and sign a marriage contract. Afterwards, the mother of the groom may place a cap or veil on the bride's head to signify her passage from maidenhood into womanhood.

Families generally share wedding costs and together organize the celebration that follows the marriage ceremony. Festivities typically include a series of parties held at a hotel, restaurant, or family home. Family and friends may gather for 2-3 days to

play games, feast on elaborate meals, dance, and play practical jokes. In one tradition, guests seek to “steal the bride,” a game in which guests temporarily kidnap the bride and then challenge the groom to perform various challenges before he can claim her back.

Divorce: Divorce is increasingly common and carries little social stigma. In fact, some Estonians view divorce as an unfortunate yet unavoidable event. At 2.5 per 1,000 people, Estonia’s divorce rate is among Europe’s higher rates, but remains lower than those of its Baltic neighbors Latvia (3.6) and Lithuania (3.5). In comparison, the rate in the US is 3.6 per 1,000 people.

Death

After a loved one’s death, Estonians commonly place an announcement in the local newspaper. Mourners then gather for a casket viewing at the deceased’s family home or on its front porch. In urban areas, the casket may instead be placed in the church where the funeral will be held. Mourners typically cover the road leading to the family home or church with fir tree branches – a residual animist practice (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Later, mourners gather at a church, home, or cemetery for a funeral service. Following the service, mourners may throw handfuls of dirt into the open grave as a symbolic gesture. The casket is then buried near other family members. Of note, urban Estonians are increasingly choosing cremation over a casketed burial (Photo: Cemetery with chapel on Hiiumaa island).

Following the ceremony, family and close friends gather for a quiet meal to honor the deceased. On All Souls Days, celebrated in November each year, family members may light candles in remembrance of the dead, placing them in windows and on graves.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, Estonian society was patriarchal, meaning that men held most power and authority. Over the past few decades, that outlook has changed somewhat. Nevertheless, women continue to face barriers in the labor market and challenges to their full participation in the political process.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Estonian women traditionally held responsibility for all household chores and childcare. In addition to their domestic duties, women in rural areas often performed farm work alongside their husbands to support their families. Women who work outside the home today still perform the majority of domestic work, including child rearing. Some women find it difficult to manage both work and family life and elect to forfeit employment. Some women reenter the labor force only several years after having a child (Photo: A woman waits for a bus in Tallinn).

Labor Force: About 53% of Estonian women work outside the home, roughly the same rate as the European Union (EU) average and slightly lower than the US rate of 57%. Women often work in the traditional "female" professions, such as teaching, healthcare, social work, and in retail. Some women hold high level positions in government and business. In all sectors, women typically receive lower wages than men with comparable work experience and education levels. In fact, Estonia exhibits the highest gender income gap in the EU, with Estonian women earning an average of 31% less than their male counterparts. Women also experience discrimination in hiring and promotion. As of 2013, just 8% of board members of the largest public corporations were female, a rate that is half the EU average.

Gender and the Law

Estonia's 1992 constitution guarantees equal rights to women in employment, education, and social welfare. In 1996, the Estonian government established the Gender Equality Department, a federal agency tasked with drafting gender equality legislation. In 2004, the government passed a sweeping Gender Equality Act (GEA) to promote the equal treatment of men and women in Estonian society.

The GEA explicitly prohibits gender discrimination by public and private employers while affording special protections to single mothers and pregnant women. The GEA further dictates that women and men enjoy equal rights within marriage and in their authority over their children while granting both spouses equal inheritance and divorce rights. In addition, both genders may confer citizenship to their children and share equal land access and property rights.

Despite this legal framework, laws are not always enforced, particularly in cases of gender discrimination. Although over 100 women brought accusations of gender discrimination in 2013, courts confirmed unequal treatment in just 15 cases. Sexual harassment remains a serious workplace issue despite being ruled unlawful.

Gender and Politics

While it names no specific proportion, the GEA mandates that both genders must be represented in all councils, committees, and other bodies formed by the national and local governments. In 2014, 5 female ministers held positions in the 13-member Council of Ministers while women held 21 seats in the 101-member Parliament (see p. 4-5 of *Political and Social Relations*). This rate is comparable to the US, where women comprise 20% of all Congress members. Of note, the deputy speaker of the Estonian Parliament is a woman (Photo: US Deputy Secretary of State

Blinken greets Estonian Foreign Minister Marina Kaljurand in 2015).

Estonian Media Stereotypes

Recent studies revealed that Estonian media outlets regularly reinforce negative female stereotypes. Although Estonia has a large number of female journalists, few hold leadership positions. Further, female journalists receive only 20% of television airtime and are rarely featured as experts or opinion leaders. Acknowledging the problem, Estonia has launched media campaigns with a "Does it have to be like this?" tagline to promote equality and reduce stereotypes in the media and workplace.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

A 2014 study found that 1/3 of Estonian women have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, with 20% suffering from domestic abuse. Rape, including spousal rape, is a criminal offense and carries a penalty of up to 15 years imprisonment. Although there is no specific law against domestic violence, instances of physical or psychological harm to women are addressed by Estonia's federal penal code and punishable by 1-5 years imprisonment.

While authorities encourage victims to seek justice, indictment and prosecution of GBV perpetrators is relatively rare. For example, in 2013, courts convicted only 33 individuals out of 135 reported rape cases, giving prison sentences ranging from 11 months to 13 years. That same year, courts ruled on approximately 25% of all reported domestic violence cases.

Estonia opened its first battered women's shelter in 2002. Today, a network of shelters and support groups offers victims of violence temporary housing, counselling, and medical assistance. In addition, the Estonian government and non-profit organizations provide training to police officers and social workers to help combat GBV crimes and offer relief to victims.

Sex and Procreation

During the Soviet era (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*), open sexuality and displays of affection were largely socially unacceptable. Today, Estonians generally have developed an easygoing and liberal view of sexual intimacy. Accordingly, public displays of affection, including kissing and holding hands, are common.

Estonia's birthrate has been declining in recent decades, from 2.3 children per woman in 1988 to 1.6 in 2013, well below the rate required to maintain the population. This drop is due in part to young Estonians' prioritization of career or financial objectives over procreation. Concerned about the low birth rate, the Estonian government offers families incentives to have children. In addition to generous leave policies, the government provides families "parents pay" equivalent to the parent's normal monthly salary for a period of 18 months following a baby's birth (Photo: US President Obama and Estonian President Ilves greet children in Tallinn).

Of note, abortion is legal and common in Estonia. In 2013, abortion significantly outpaced Estonian birth rates, with 26 abortions to 10 births per 1,000 women.

Homosexuality

Estonia's 1992 constitution decriminalizes homosexual activity and prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. In 2013, Estonia passed a law criminalizing same-sex rape, then in 2014, adopted the Civil Partnership Act, which recognizes same-sex couples and affords them civil protections. Despite these legal protections, LGBT Estonians commonly experience harassment but often avoid reporting incidents of violence. Many are also reluctant to display affection in public for fear of physical or verbal assault.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Estonia's official language is Estonian, which about 69% of the population speaks as a first language. As a result of large numbers of ethnic Russians settling in Estonia during the Soviet occupation (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*), almost 30% of Estonia's population speak Russian as their first language. Just over 1% of the population have another primary language, such as Ukrainian, Finnish, Belarusian, or another regional language.

Estonian

Estonian belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family. It is most similar to Finnish and a distant relative of Hungarian. Since language is often an important marker of identity in Estonia's ethnically diverse population (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), the Estonian language is becoming a significant symbol of national identity. To be "Estonian" often means the ability to speak Estonian, regardless of ethnicity or surname (Photo: Estonian military musician performs in front of the War of Independence Victory Column in Tallinn).

Over centuries, regional dialects of Estonian developed. Following the late 19th and early 20th centuries "National Awakening" (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), the dominant northern dialect became the national language. Võro, the most commonly-spoken form of the southern dialect, was declared a separate language in 1998. More than 75,000 native Võro speakers live primarily in rural southeastern Estonia. Võro-Setu, the language of the minority Setu people (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), is a variant of Võro spoken by about 10,000 people. Mulgi and Tartu are other variations of the southern dialect, although they are more similar to standard written Estonian than Võro.

Estonia passed the Language Act of 2011 to develop, preserve, and protect standard Estonian by promoting its use in public life. According to the law, all forms of public information must be available in Estonian. In addition, the law states that residents of towns with a majority of non-Estonian speakers have the right to access information in their primary language as well.

Estonian features a complex grammatical system that may make it a difficult language for English-speakers to learn. Further, Estonian utilizes many unfamiliar vowel sounds, such as ä, õ, ö, and ü. Consequently, some Estonian words, particularly those with multiple vowels such as ***jääääär*** (edge of the ice) and ***kõueöö*** (night of thunder) may present pronunciation challenges. Stress is almost always placed on a word's first syllable (Photo: Street sign in Estonian and Võro).

Russian

Estonia's Russian-speakers are concentrated in the Northeast, particularly the county of Ida-Viru and in Tallinn. Of note, about 95% of the population of Narva, Estonia's 3rd largest city, speak Russian.

In the Soviet era, Russian was a required subject in school, and Estonians were compelled to use the language in all communications with Russians and the citizens of other Soviet republics. Further, the Soviets considered Estonian an inferior language. Because of this history, language issues occasionally cause tensions between Estonian and Russian speakers (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

To avoid causing offense, foreign nationals should speak Russian only if their Estonian communication partner indicates a preference for the language. Despite governmental efforts to require employees to speak Estonian during public business engagements (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), some Russian-speaking service sector workers in Russian-majority areas elect not to comply and speak only Russian.

Other Languages

About 95% of Estonians speak another language besides Estonian or Russian. Common 2nd and 3rd languages include English, Finnish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, German, Swedish, Latvian, and Lithuanian.

English: Some 67% of Estonians aged 15-74 have some knowledge of English. Generally, urban youth are more likely to speak English than older Estonians or rural residents. Many schools begin offering English instruction in the 3rd grade. Estonians who have different 1st languages may use English to communicate.

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Estonia requires not only knowledge of Estonian but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Estonian communication patterns reflect the value Estonians place on privacy and candor. Compared to Americans, Estonians may seem reserved, feel comfortable in silence, and display strong emotions only during certain social situations, such as music and sporting events (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). In addition, most Estonians prefer direct speech and an even tone. Because they value the privacy of their home and family, Estonians conduct most socializing in public places. Further, Estonians typically share personal and family information only with relatives or close friends (Photo: US Airman speaks with Estonian air controllers during a NATO training event).

While Estonians are typically proud, confident people, they are often modest when speaking about their achievements. Most Estonians appreciate humor, which tends to be self-deprecating, sophisticated, mocking, and ironic. Of note, rural Estonians and Russian speakers tend to be more open and expressive than urban Estonian speakers.

Hierarchy is important in Estonian communications. Age, experience, and position/title oblige respect. For example, Estonians typically introduce elders and people in senior positions first and may follow their lead in decision-making.

Greetings

Estonian greetings are usually simple and direct, often consisting of ***Tere*** (hello) and a firm handshake. After greeting once, subsequent acknowledgement between colleagues is unnecessary. While close friends and family may exchange hugs, Estonians rarely exchange cheek kisses even though that greeting is common in some other European countries.

Estonians typically expect youth to greet and initiate conversation with elders and men to do the same with women. When approached, Estonians often stand up to acknowledge the newcomer's presence and maintain eye contact throughout the greeting (Photo: An Estonian general introduces staff to US Army General Dempsey).

While less common, some Estonians prefer greetings like ***Kuidas läheb?*** (How's it going?) or ***Kuidas elate?*** (How's life?). Unlike Americans, Estonians may interpret these expressions as personal questions that require a thorough and sincere response.

Forms of Address

Estonians use different forms of address to demonstrate respect and the nature of the relationship. For example, Estonians typically address new acquaintances with a title and last name. The use of ***Härra*** (Mr.), ***Proua*** (Mrs.), or ***Preili*** (Ms.)

or appropriate job title or military rank combined with the last name is appropriate. Close colleagues, friends, and family may call each other by first names.

Estonian has different "you" pronouns that reflect degrees of formality and respect. They tend to use the formal "you" or ***teie*** when meeting for the first time, with elders, and with authority figures. By contrast, Estonians reserve the informal ***sina*** for relatives, friends, and close colleagues. Foreign nationals should use formal forms of address unless directed otherwise.

Conversational Topics

Estonians rarely speak much about themselves, their property, or their wealth. Instead, their culture, language, and politics are popular conversation topics. Estonians appreciate any polite attempt to speak even just a few words in Estonian (Photo: Members of the US Army 173rd Airborne Brigade brief 3 Estonian soldiers).

Foreign nationals should avoid potentially sensitive topics such as the foreign occupations of Estonia, neo-Nazism, and relations between Estonia's Russian- and Estonian-speakers. Of note, the Estonian language has very little profanity. Foreign nationals should avoid language that could be considered vulgar or ill-mannered.

Gestures

Estonians rarely use gestures and may find frequent gesturing inappropriate. Like Americans, Estonians use the "thumbs up" gesture to indicate a positive occurrence. Estonians consider pointing with the index finger to be impolite. Instead, they indicate direction with the entire hand.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at http://culture.af.mil/resources/index.aspx for language training resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Estonian
Hello	Tere
Good morning	Tere hommikust
Good afternoon	Tere päevast
Good evening	Tere õhtust
How are you?	Kuidas läheb?
I'm fine, thanks	Tänan hästi
My name is _____	Minu nimi on _____
Please / You are welcome	Palun
Thank you	Tänan
Yes/No	Jah/Ei
Goodbye	Head aega
Goodnight	Head ööd
Have a nice day!	Ilusat päeva!
Excuse me	Vabandage
Sorry	Vabandust
No problem	Pole viga
Do you speak English?	Kas te räägite inglise keelt?
I don't speak Estonian	Ma ei räägi eesti keelt
Please speak more slowly	Palun rääkige aeglasemalt
I don't understand	Ma ei saa aru
I don't know	Ma ei tea
What?	Mis?
When?	Kui?
Where?	Kus?
Who?	Kes?
Why?	Miks?
Cheers!	Terviseks!
Help!	Appi!
Are you OK?	Kas teiega on kõik korras?
I am lost	Ma olen eksinud

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

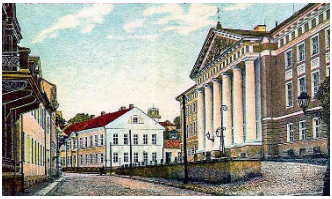
Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 99.8%
- Male: 99.8%
- Female: 99.8% (2015 estimate)

Early History of Education

Before the arrival of formal education that accompanied the introduction of Christianity (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, and historical knowledge to younger generations. From the 13th through the 16th centuries, Germans and Danes established schools to train clergymen, typically in Latin or German. Meanwhile, children of Estonia's mostly German elite learned to read and write in church or at home.

Estonian peasants acquired access to formal education following the 16th-century Protestant Reformation (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). To make Lutheran teachings more accessible to the general population, the Swedish clergy printed Bible stories and taught some Estonian peasants to read Swedish and Latin.

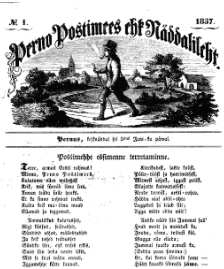


During the 17th century, the Swedes established academic schools called "gymnasiums" in Estonia's 2 largest cities – Tartu and Tallinn – primarily for Swedish and German elites. In 1632, the Swedes founded the University of Tartu, which offered courses in theology, philosophy, law, and medicine (Photo: A 1910 illustration of the University of Tartu).

Years of war and disease in the early 18th century (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*) caused educational offerings to reduce in number and quality. Following the Russians' acquisition of the region in 1721, educational opportunities initially decreased and then improved in the 19th century when the Russian rulers fell under the influence of European Enlightenment philosophy (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*).

The National Awakening and Early 20th Century Education

An integral part of the Estonian National Awakening (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) was the widespread use of written Estonian. By the mid-19th century, Estonian-language journalism and literature were supporting the rise of an Estonian national consciousness. An 1881 census revealed that Estonia had one of the world's highest literacy rates at the time: 94% of the population could read and 48% could write. Estonian authors and poets produced new works, while scholars collected Estonian folklore and folk poems (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: First edition of the Estonian language newspaper *Postimees* from 1857).


№ 1. 1857.

Perno Postimees ehk Nädhalileht.

Pernos, hellapäval ja 1ne Juni-ks päiwal.

Postimehe esimenne teretamine.

Tere, armed lugeja!
Minna, Pernoe Postimeesik,
Sinnanne oma wahepäl
Mõll, mis Sinnil sinna ses,
Nenne mõtsa sõita saeth,
Et ta sinne ostmat tahth,
Mõtta kõll nee-ilma mõnd
Olawad ja kaggemad.

Wanemaltne Sõnawõtt,
Mõgi Kõrter, pidewätes,
Mõnnes ottse, mõlemaspäis
Ja ei mõõ ratsutada
Ja ei mõõ ka ratsut ette,
Kuun ilma ketta sõnn ülle,
Mõõ ta ilma mõõa ommi,
Jõggemõõ Kõrt tõmmel.

Kõrtchõd, mõõ tõõll,
Põlle-tõõll ja kaemõõll,
Mõnnel tõõll, kaggõ mõõll,
Mõõjatte kõnnõõll:
Mõõ tõõll, mõõ-mõõ,
Mõõta ainõ mõõ-mõõ
Saggõõll ja kõõk õõ;
Ügge mõõ õõta mõõ!

Mõõta mõõ ülle Jõemõõ lõõ!
Ainõ mõõ ja mõõtõõ ka,
Mõõta, mõõ, mõõ, mõõ!
Mõggõõ ka mõõta
Mõõ-mõõ-mõõ-mõõ-mõõõ

increasing compulsory schooling to 8 years in the 1950s, the Soviets used the education system to impose their socialist system (see p. 10 of *History and Myth* and p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Consequently, the curriculum emphasized Soviet patriotism and communist tenets such as collectivism, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and socialist humanism. In response to this lack of freedom of thought and speech, many Estonian intellectuals fled the country, further facilitating the dominance of Soviet ideas in education (Photo: Tallinn school known as "Vocational School #10" during the Soviet era).

Further, the Soviets reinforced a divided education system. Ethnic Russians residing in Estonia (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*) attended separate Russian-language academic and vocational schools. These schools followed the Soviet curriculum and offered little instruction in Estonian. Meanwhile, ethnic Estonians primarily attended schools which also followed the Soviet curriculum, including mandatory Russian language and history courses, but offered most instruction in Estonian. Tensions that trace to the development of these 2 systems continue today (see "Modern Education System" below).

By the 1970s, the Soviets had implemented universal secondary education, prioritizing vocational schools to give residents the requisite skills to work within the Soviet military-industrial complex. About 99% of 18-year-olds held secondary degrees (high school diplomas) by the early 1980s.

In the late 1980s, Estonians began to protest education's focus on Russian language and culture and demanded reform. In line with calls for independence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth)*, the 1987 Estonian Teacher's Congress adopted a new secondary curriculum that replaced Soviet philosophy and educational goals with Estonian nationalist ones. Following the 2nd

independence in 1991 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), legislation laid the foundation for the current curriculum, which emphasizes Estonian national identity, traditions of lifelong learning, computer literacy, and education within a globalized context.

Modern Education

Following significant reform, Estonia's educational achievement is now among the world's highest, particularly in math and science. Students' scores on 2012 international exams were significantly higher than those of American students and were Europe's 4th highest scores. In 2011, the government spent 13.4% of its budget on education, slightly higher than total (local, state, and national) government spending on education in the US (Photo: Primary school on Saaremaa Island).

Technology is central to Estonian education. Public school teachers, administrators, and parents access assignments, attendance and grades via the ***eKool*** (e-School) platform. A public-private partnership created in 1996 focuses on computer skills, including ***Proge Tiiger*** (Code Tiger), a pilot program that teaches students how to write computer code.

About 20% of public school students, mostly ethnic Russians, attend schools that follow the Estonian national curriculum but teach most lessons in Russian. A controversial 2007 regulation requires that all upper secondary schools, including such Russian-language schools, offer 60% of their courses in Estonian. The regulation further requires upper secondary students to pass an Estonian proficiency exam to graduate.

Many Russian-speakers protest these requirements, claiming that the proficiency exam is difficult for students who have taken few Estonian language courses. Further, critics point to disparities between students who attend Russian and Estonian schools. For example, Russian-language students typically

have a weaker command of Estonian (which can limit their career choices – see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), score lower on national exams, and are less likely to attend university.

Other educational challenges include rural school closures due to population decline, a mismatch between course offerings and labor market needs, low teacher salaries, and declining university standards. The Ministry of Education and Research has addressed these and other issues in its Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Proposed measures include funding for universal digital learning access, an increase in teacher salaries, and more resources for informal study programs.

Pre-Primary: Public nurseries and kindergartens provide non-compulsory, low-cost preschool education for children aged 2-7. In 2014, 76% of children enrolled in such programs.

Basic: Consisting of 9 grades starting at age 7, basic schooling is compulsory and consists of primary school (grades 1-6) and lower secondary school (grades 7-9). The curriculum includes Estonian and/or Russian, math, nature study, social sciences, history, natural sciences, foreign language (including English), art, music, handicrafts, and physical education. To graduate, students must pass exams in Estonian (or, for Russian speakers, Estonian as a 2nd language), math, and 1 subject of the student's choice. In 2013, 95% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in basic schools.

Upper Secondary: While upper secondary school (grades 10-12) is not compulsory, most Estonian students enroll. About 70% of students attend so-called "academic gymnasiums" to prepare for university entrance, while the remainder enroll in vocational schools (Photo: Academic gymnasium in Tallinn).

The upper secondary academic curriculum allows students to deepen their knowledge of basic school subjects as well as explore various elective subjects. To qualify for university studies, students must pass exams in Estonian, a foreign language, math, and 2 subjects selected by the student.

A significant part of the Soviet educational system, vocational schools remain an important part of Estonian education today. About 2/3 of all upper secondary vocational school students are males who primarily study science and engineering. Other programs include tourism, information technology, telecommunications, agriculture, and education.

Post-Secondary: Estonians may pursue post-secondary academic and vocational education at 24 institutions of higher learning. In the early 1990s, Estonia restructured its higher education system so that institutions now offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral academic degrees as well as vocational certificates. About 38% of 25-64 year-olds hold post-secondary degrees, close to the US rate of 42%.

While many universities offer English-language programs, Estonia is notably one of the smallest countries in Europe to offer university instruction in its native language. To encourage the use of Estonian, the government offers scholarships for students who enroll in any post-secondary program taught in Estonian at public or government-supported private institutions.

Hobby Schools

The government funds so-called "hobby schools" to provide students of different backgrounds the opportunity to learn together, develop their personalities, and cultivate Estonian language and culture. These schools provide informal instruction in sports, dance, drama, art, music, nature, handicrafts, and technology. Annual competitions and events serve to engage the local community. In 2013, nearly 70,000 young people participated in these non-compulsory learning opportunities.

8. TIME AND SPACE

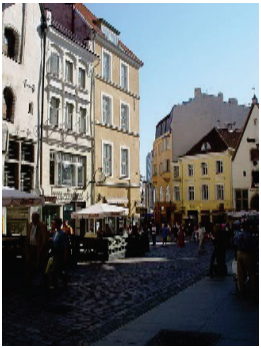
Overview

Estonians tend to maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives. While they typically invest significant time fostering relationships in their personal lives, they rarely cultivate deep professional relationships and typically manage their professional time closely.

Time and Work

Estonia's work week runs from Monday-Friday with most business hours from 8:30am-5:00pm, although hours of operation vary by store size and location. Urban stores typically open Monday-Saturday from 10:00am-7:00pm, with some large malls and supermarkets open until 9:00pm and on Sundays.

Rural shops have less consistent schedules, frequently with earlier closing times and typically remaining closed on Sundays. Banks and post offices typically open weekdays from 9:00am-5:00pm and for a half day on Saturday. While businesses, banks, government offices, museums, and schools close on public holidays, restaurants and cinemas typically remain open (Photo: A street lined with shops in Tallinn).



Working Hours: Estonia's standard work week is 40 hours, though many Estonians work longer hours, especially those employed by private businesses. While Estonian law does not explicitly limit the total number of hours employees may work in a single week, it does require a period of at least 11 contiguous hours of rest in every 24 hours. Further, special protections exist for minors and those who perform work that poses health risks, is performed underground, or is otherwise unique. On average, Estonians enjoy 28 days of paid leave annually.

Time Zone: Estonia adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Estonia observes daylight savings time from April-October, which makes Estonia 3 hours ahead of GMT during that period.

Date Notation: Like the US, Estonia uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Estonians tend to write the day first, followed by the month and year.

Time and Business

Business in Estonia tends to move at about the same pace as in the US. Like Americans, Estonians prefer to get acquainted casually prior before doing business, sometimes relying on a personal introduction or a referral from a mutual acquaintance or trusted source. Some Estonian workplaces are hierarchical, with managers making decisions without significant input from their subordinates. Other businesses follow an informal, consultative, and democratic approach to decision-making. Even in such non-hierarchical structures, upper management typically must approve final, high-level decisions (Photo: A vendor sells clothing in Tallinn).

Estonians value punctuality, generally adhere to deadlines, and consider significant tardiness to be rude. If they anticipate arriving late to a meeting, Estonians will notify other attendees of their tardiness. Estonians strive for the efficient use of time during meetings and rarely allow them to run long. Afterwards, Estonians often follow up with e-mail correspondence, detailing discussion points, deadlines, and agreements for both parties' reference. Of note, business discussions typically occur during scheduled meetings in the office and not during meals or outside of working hours.

Most Estonians are hardworking, ambitious, and reliable but tend to be modest about their own individual achievements and generally reserved in their communications (see p. 3 of

Language and Communication). Some Estonians may be openly critical of ideas and proposals and willing to voice concerns or openly question a workplace situation. Nevertheless, managers typically avoid critiquing their employees publicly and may be hesitant to offer negative feedback. Instead, it is customary as in America for Estonians to convey constructive feedback privately to avoid causing embarrassment or risk offending a colleague.

Personal Space

As is common in most societies, personal space in Estonia depends on the nature of the relationship. With strangers, Estonians maintain about an arm's length of distance when conversing, while with family and friends the space tends to be closer.

Public Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February 24: Independence Day
- March/April: Good Friday and Easter Sunday (dates vary each year)
- May 1: Spring Day or May Day
- 7th Monday after Easter: Pentecost
- June 23: Victory Day
- June 24: St. John's Day or Midsummer Day
- August 20: Day of Restoration of Independence
- December 24: Christmas Eve
- December 25: Christmas Day
- December 26: Boxing Day

Of note, if the date falls on a Sunday, the holiday is observed the following Monday.

Touch

In general, Estonians use conversational touching less frequently than in some other cultures. Although close friends and family members may touch during conversation to convey

sincerity, affection, concern, or friendliness, strangers rarely touch after the initial greeting (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*). Foreign nationals should wait for their Estonian counterpart to initiate any touch to avoid appearing invasive, flirtatious, or offensive.

Eye Contact

Estonians tend to maintain direct eye contact when conversing with colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. They generally consider a reluctance to make eye contact a sign of dishonesty.

Photographs

Churches, museums, government buildings, and similar places may prohibit photography. If in doubt, foreign nationals should acquire permission before taking photos of public places and should always ask an Estonian permission to take his photo.

Driving

Estonians tend to disobey certain traffic laws, tailgate, and ignore lane markings when passing and maneuvering congested urban streets. While city roads tend to be well maintained, poor lighting and signage can make driving hazardous in rural areas. Of note, trolleybuses and trams always have priority over cars in Tallinn. Estonia has a zero-tolerance drunk driving law, meaning infractions are immediately punishable with fines and in some cases imprisonement. The government requires all pedestrians to wear a reflector during the long dark winter months (Photo: A street in Tallinn).

Despite Estonians' aggressive driving habits, deaths from traffic related accidents have significantly decreased in recent years, from 204 road fatalities in 2006 to 78 in 2014. This decrease primarily results from firmer enforcement of traffic laws and government road safety advocacy programs. Like Americans, Estonians drive on the right side of the road.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Estonia's traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect its kinship with other northern Europeans, its rural peasant history, past foreign occupations, and modern global trends.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Traditional dress serves as a visible expression of Estonian national culture. Estonians commonly wear traditional costumes for special events, during festivals, and on national holidays (Photo: Estonians dressed in traditional costumes).

Although each county has its customary costume, women's wear typically includes a long, woven black, red, yellow, or orange skirt decorated with thin vertical or broad horizontal stripes. If married, women may wear an apron over the skirt held in place by a black or patterned belt. Accompanying blouses are usually white, long-sleeved, and held in place by large ornamental pins. The blouses often feature laced collars and cuffs embroidered with floral patterns. White stockings, black shoes, and white linen caps or kerchiefs adorned with lace usually complete a woman's outfit (Photo: Estonians in traditional dress at a song and dance festival).

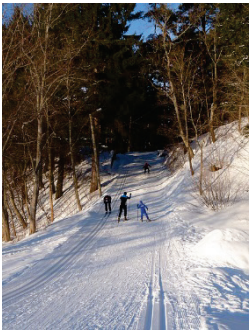
Men's traditional wear usually includes black breeches secured at the knees with silver buttons topped by a white, long-sleeved shirt fastened at the neck with a braided tie or pin and worn

under a dark patterned vest. Men complete their traditional look with white stockings, black shoes, and sometimes a skullcap or hat.

Modern: For day-to-day wear, Estonians typically wear clothing that reflects the latest European fashion trends, although particular styles often depend on age and geographic location. Estonian women tend to dress more formally than men. While older women often wear dresses, particularly in the summer, younger women tend to prefer pants or jeans. Men commonly dress in long pants with collared, long-sleeved shirts. Generally, most Estonians prefer a "smart casual" dress code, although business attire is often more formal. Due to the severe climate, Estonians rely on heavy clothing during much of the year.

Recreation and Leisure

Many Estonians prefer to spend their leisure time alone or with close friends and family. Popular activities include visiting saunas (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*), swimming, meeting at bars/cafes, and playing chess. Other leisure activities are seasonal. During the cold, dark winter months, Estonians often frequent the theater and cinema, participate in snow sports (pictured), or socialize indoors. Increasing numbers of Estonians travel south to warmer destinations during the winter months.



During the temperate summer, many Estonians retreat to homes in the countryside, where they tend to feel connected to the land (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Popular activities include gardening, long forest walks, picking wild mushrooms and berries, camping, and visiting the beach to relax, swim, and participate in water sports.

Festivals: One of Estonia's most significant cultural events, the Estonian Song Festival, traces to Estonia's 19th-century "National Awakening" and has been held about every 5 years

since 1869 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). The 1988 event in Tallinn attracted about 300,000 people, or more than 20% of the population, who sang patriotic songs and openly demanded independence from the USSR (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Today's Song and Dance Festival typically occurs in July and features around 40,000 singers, choir members, and folk dancers. The next festival will be held in 2019 (Photo: Tallinn Song Festival Grounds).

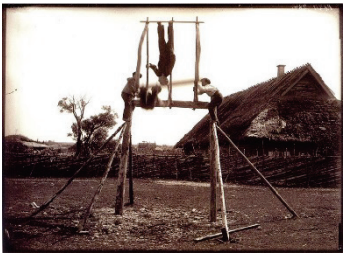
Other popular festivals include Tallinn Music Week, Viljandi Music Festival, Baroque Music Days, Pärnu Classical Music Festival, August Dance Festival, Tallinn Jazz Festival, and Tartu Accordion Festival. The popular ***Õlle Summer*** festival attracts visitors from across the region for its music, food, and beer offerings. Other festivals celebrate calendrical events. For example, Midsummer Festival celebrates ***Jaanipäev***, the summer equinox, while the ***Mardipäev*** festival celebrates the end of the harvest. Although most festivals are held in the summer, popular winter festivals include the Black Nights Film Festival and Midwinter Night's Dream theater festival.

Sports and Games

Sports: Estonians enjoy many winter sports, including bobsledding, luge, ice skating, ice hockey, and cross country skiing. Considered the winter sports capital of Estonia, Otepää in southern Estonia regularly hosts a Cross Country World Cup event. Basketball, ice hockey, and football (soccer) are the most popular team sports, and many Estonians enjoy sailing during the summer months. Of note, Estonians have been successful at the Olympics, winning medals in cross-country skiing, wrestling, track and field, and rowing in recent years.

Traditional Games: Estonians enjoy traditional games, especially during holidays. Popular children's games include ***kull*** (tag); ***jooks kartuliga*** (***munaga***), a foot race conducted

while balancing a potato on a spoon; ***silmategemine***, a winking game similar to musical chairs; and ***kotisjooks***, a bag race. Card games are popular among all ages as is chess, the national pastime. Based on a traditional game, ***kiiking*** (swinging) involves competitors attempting to move all the way around the fulcrum of a swing (Photo: Estonians on a swing in 1913).



Music

Traditional: As a result of the 19th century "National Awakening" (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), Estonia has one of the world's largest collections of traditional music, some 133,000 songs. The oldest Estonian folksongs, known as runes or runic music, consist of short tunes sung in a particular poetic meter without end rhyme and using a limited range of tones. Traditionally sung by women, these songs tell of love, daily life, work, and myths (see p. 16 in *History and Myth*).

Traditional instruments include simple wind and reed instruments, horns, wooden trumpets, flutes, and whistles. The ancient harp-like ***kannel*** (pictured) is the most popular folk instrument. Typically 5-stringed, the *kannel* has no standard shape and is played on a table or the musician's knees. Other Estonian instruments include the ***torupill***, similar to a bagpipe, and the ***talharpa***, a 4-stringed bowed lyre.

During their 17th century rule (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), the Swedes introduced violins, guitars, drums, and accordions to Estonia. These instruments feature prominently in modern folk ensembles. German and Swedish choral music became popular in the 19th century. Choirs are now integral to Estonian

musical traditions, exemplified in the song and dance festivals that brought Estonia its nickname, the “singing nation.”

Modern: Well-known Estonian composers include Veljo Tormis, Erkki-Sven Tüür, and Arvo Pärt, who is especially famous for his minimalist style (employs limited or minimal musical materials) and choral compositions. While thriving rock and jazz scenes feature local bands like Jäääär, Ruja, and Jazzkaar, many Estonians also enjoy international pop music.

Dance

Performed by both men and women, traditional Estonian folk dances exhibit certain common characteristics. Groups of dancers typically perform in lines or circles, sometimes while singing; dance steps are performed methodically and usually slowly; and dancers rarely show emotions.

The most popular folk dance is the ***kaerajaan***, similar to a square dance with roots in the late 19th century. Other common dances include the ***labajalavalss***, a folk dance similar to the German waltz, and the polka. Over time, dance traditions from other European countries influenced and altered Estonian folk dances (Photo: Dancers at the Estonian Dance Festival).

Modern and artistic dance began to develop in the early 20th century. Under Soviet rule (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*), Estonia became an important center for Russian classical ballet. Today, Estonia is home to world-class ballet dancers who compete and perform around the world.

Literature

Traditional Estonian folklore and folk poems, first collected during the 19th century “National Awakening” (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), have significantly influenced Estonian literature. During Estonia’s first period of independence in the early 20th century (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), authors and

poets produced original Estonian works, many of which depicted Estonian rural life. Known as the "Estonian Shakespeare," A.H. Tammsaare produced his 5-volume epic novel ***Tõde ja Õigus*** (Truth and Justice) during this period.

Much early 20th-century literature reflected the political climate of the time, emphasizing the common themes of rural peasantry, ordinary people, and life under foreign rule. The early 20th-century ***Noor Eesti*** (Young Estonia) movement comprised writers and poets who emphasized Estonian identity yet strived for a place within broader European culture.

During the Soviet era (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*), Estonian authors were subject to censorship. Despite this restriction, some authors like Jaan Kaplinski and Jaan Kross managed to disguise their treatment of contemporary themes within historical settings, such as Kross' 1978 novel *The Czar's Madman*. Much of Estonian literature remains inaccessible to readers outside of the country because it has not been translated.

Visual Arts and Handicrafts

Like other Estonian creative works, Estonia's art often reflects common themes, including the political condition, patriotism, Estonian folklore, peasantry, and rural life (Photo: 1914 painting of Kalevipoeg, mythical founder of the Estonian nation – see p. 16 of *History and Myth*).

Handicrafts and folk art reflect Estonia's rural, peasant history when Estonians made all their clothing, tools, footwear, utensils, and toys by hand. Today, traditional handicrafts include textiles, metalwork, wooden objects, and ceramics. The Estonian government has invested in the preservation and promotion of traditional handicrafts through the development of cultural centers, handicraft courses, and hobby schools (see p. 6 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Socializing during meals with family and friends is an important aspect of Estonian life. Families usually gather for meals prepared at home, while friends often dine together in bars and restaurants. Characteristically hearty, Estonian dishes feature meats, dairy products, and fresh, local vegetables.

Dining Customs

Estonians typically eat 3 daily meals and may snack throughout the day. When invited to an Estonian home for dinner, guests always arrive on time, often bringing flowers, chocolate, or wine as gifts for the hosts. Guests usually remove their shoes upon entering the home. As a gesture of respect to their guests, hosts typically serve them first, although it is polite for guests to postpone eating until everyone at the table has been served. To begin a meal, Estonians may wish one another "***head isu***" ("good appetite"). While dining, they tend to keep their hands above the table and consider resting elbows on the table to be impolite. After finishing their portions, guests may request additional servings. Estonians consider it impolite to leave unfinished food on a plate (Photo: A holiday buffet often features Estonian pancakes).

Diet

Historically, Estonians ate meals primarily consisting of wheat porridge or light soup served with bread and salted herring. As nutrition improved in the mid-20th century, meat became more common. At that time, a typical meal included pork and potatoes accompanied by a sauce. Today, potatoes, along with a variety of breads, remain an important staple. In some rural areas, stewed turnips replace potatoes as the main staple. Besides pork, Estonians today enjoy a variety of other meats such as beef, veal, lamb, and chicken.

Estonians do not typically eat fish as a main meal, but rather, consume it as an appetizer or incorporate it in salads with sour cream or mayonnaise dressings. Often served smoked or salted, common varieties include trout, salmon, herring, sole, whitefish, pike, and perch. Sprats, small fish preserved in brine and spices, are particularly popular in Tallinn.

Besides potatoes and turnips, common vegetables include wild mushrooms, carrots, cabbage, beets, and beans. Estonians also consume assorted dairy products, such as cottage cheese, yogurt, sour cream, cheese, and milk.

Estonians enjoy a number of native fruits, including apples, cherries, pears and a variety of wild berries, such as blueberries, currants, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, and cloudberries (pictured). Because fresh fruits and vegetables may only be available and affordable in the spring and summer, Estonians often preserve them for consumption when fresh items are out of season.

Popular Dishes and Meals

Common breakfast foods include porridge, fried potatoes, eggs, cheese, pastries, dark rye bread, and various sandwiches, usually accompanied by milk, tea, or coffee. As the largest meal of the day, lunch typically begins with a hearty soup, such as cabbage, sauerkraut, or pea, followed by a main dish of meat served with potatoes and seasonal vegetables.

Dinner is usually a lighter meal, typically incorporating dark rye bread served alongside salad, potatoes, stew, pasta, or soup. Salads range from platters of lightly dressed green vegetables to heavy mixtures of eggs, potatoes, fish, meat, and/or vegetables tossed with mayonnaise or sour cream.

Other popular items include ***piruka*** (a pastry stuffed with meat, vegetables, or other fillings); ***pelmenid*** (small pockets of dough filled with meat); and ***pankoogid*** (pancakes served with meat, cheese, or mushrooms).

Typical holiday dishes include ***verivorst*** (blood sausage), ***sült*** (head cheese), black pudding (a savory dish made from pork fat, onions, spices, and pig blood), roasted pork, and jellied meats. Popular dishes of Russian origin include ***seljanka*** (a meat soup with olives, onions, and pickles, often served cold); ***rosolje*** (a potato salad, known for its distinct pink color that includes beets and salted herring); and ***borscht*** (a beet, meat, and potato soup, served hot or cold).

For dessert, Estonians may enjoy fresh fruit, fruit preserves, ***sai*** (sweet buns), or ice cream. Cakes, including ***kringel*** (a sweet loaf with dried fruit), chocolate cake, and curd cake are also popular and typically served with whipped cream.

Eating Out

Many Estonians, especially in urban areas, eat out regularly, gathering in bars and restaurants for a casual meal or to celebrate special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays. Restaurants range from upscale establishments serving regional and international cuisine to small eateries offering inexpensive meals. Casual cafes and bars typically serve sweets and savory snacks, including smoked sausages, cheeses, salted herring (pictured), and smoked eel. Rural ***kõrts*** (inns) specialize in simple, traditional Estonian fare. Most establishments do not automatically add a surcharge to the bill and expect a 10% tip for good service. While street stalls are not particularly popular, some vendors in city squares sell light snacks and sweets, like sugared almonds spiced with cinnamon.

Beverages

Estonians enjoy coffee and tea throughout the day. Popular alcoholic beverages include vodka, cognac, ***Vana Tallinn*** (Estonia's national liquor, crafted from a blend of spices and herbs), and ***Kristelkuumu*** (a caraway seed liquor). Beer (***õlu***) is Estonians' most popular alcoholic beverage, especially local brews like Saku and A le Coq. At fairs (***laat***), many Estonians enjoy strong moonshine-type drinks like ***Hansa*** and ***Buskar***.

Health Overview

Estonia's healthcare system has improved dramatically in recent decades, increasing the population's overall wellbeing. Between 1991 and 2015, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1), decreased dramatically from 17 to 4 deaths per 1,000 live births. Similarly, maternal mortality dropped from 42 to 9 deaths per 100,000 live births. Meanwhile, life expectancy at birth steadily increased from approximately 70 to 76 years, though it remains shorter than the EU and US averages of 80.

While quality of care varies somewhat between urban and rural facilities, the majority of Estonians have access to free, modern healthcare. Of note, Estonian men experience a higher mortality rate than Estonian women, which experts link to a prevalence of unhealthy behaviors among men, particularly smoking and alcohol abuse.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Estonian medicine emphasizes the use of herbal remedies, not surgical methods, to identify and treat the basic causes of illness.

Knowledge of natural remedies is widespread. Many Estonians use traditional remedies in conjunction with conventional therapies. While merchants in both urban and rural markets commonly sell medicinal plants, many Estonians grow or gather their own. Most pharmacies sell over-the-counter herbal medicines. Common components of herbal remedies include honey, butter, rye sprouts, marigold, and plant resin. Example remedies include sea-buckthorn (pictured) juice to boost the immune system and chokeberries to reduce high blood pressure. Saunas are also popular because of their perceived therapeutic and healing properties (see p.1-2 of *Family and Kinship*).

Modern Healthcare System

Most Estonians have access to state-funded healthcare. The national, publicly-funded Estonian Health Insurance Fund (EHIF) insures about 95% of Estonians and finances over 90% of hospitals and medical facilities which, in return, offer free care. Today, Estonia has approximately 800 family primary care physicians (FPCPs) and 65 public and private hospitals, including 35 specialized rehabilitation and nursing hospitals (Photo: A clinic in Tartu).

FPCPs provide basic curative and preventative care, acting as "gatekeepers" to other medical facilities by coordinating, managing, and authorizing health services for their patients. Urban hospitals deliver a full range of emergency, intensive, and surgical care, while rural facilities provide emergency services and limited surgical procedures. Hospitals also commonly provide inpatient support, including home care for cancer patients, those adjusting to disability, and the elderly.

Healthcare System Challenges: The quality of care diminishes somewhat in rural areas. Generally, city hospitals are well-equipped while some rural medical facilities are understaffed, outdated, and offer limited surgical procedures. Caring for as many as 2,000 patients, FPCPs tend to be burdened with heavy workloads, struggle to meet patient needs, and offer a limited scope of primary care services. Further, the medical training of some FPCPs is outdated, particularly among Russian-speaking practitioners who encounter language barriers when accessing Estonian-language training courses and literature. Finally, some newly graduated and highly-trained Estonian physicians and nurses choose to leave Estonia to practice in other countries where they receive better pay.

Of note, Estonia's aging population is likely to burden its healthcare system in coming decades. The almost 20% of the population aged 65 or older in 2015 is expected to grow to about 30% by 2040. As the population ages, the rising prevalence of chronic diseases and associated need for nursing and rehabilitation services will challenge the adequacy of Estonia's health system.

Health Challenges

As in most developed countries, communicable diseases like tuberculosis, polio, and hepatitis are no longer the leading causes of illness and death. Instead, Estonia's aging population suffers from chronic and non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease and cancer, which now account for about 79% of all deaths (Photo: US Airmen visit Tallinn's children's hospital).

In 2013, the leading causes of death included cardiovascular diseases (54%) and stomach, lung, and breast cancer (25%). Heavy industrial pollution in northeast Estonia (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*) results in high rates of chronic respiratory diseases, including asthma as well as lung and throat cancers. So-called "external causes," such as accidents and suicides, caused about 6% of all deaths. Among those external causes, suicides accounted for nearly 20% of deaths, while alcohol poisoning accounted for 11%. Notably, external causes are the primary reasons of death for Estonians under age 34.

The average life expectancy of Estonian women is 82 years, which is considerably higher than the average of 72 years for men. In fact, Estonian male life expectancy is the 3rd shortest in the EU, just ahead of its Baltic neighbors of Latvia (70) and Lithuania (69). As noted earlier, Estonia's higher rate of male mortality is primarily linked to external causes of death like accidents and suicides as well as higher rates of alcohol abuse and tobacco use.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, Estonians subsisted as peasants in an agrarian economy controlled by German landowners (see *History and Myth*). In the late 1800s, Russian occupiers began industrializing Estonia, then intensified those efforts during the Soviet era (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*). Besides large, collectivized farms, the Soviets developed shipbuilding, timber, machinery, and oil shale industries until the USSR's collapse and Estonian independence in 1991.

Using the West as a model, newly independent Estonia initiated extensive reforms in order to transition from the centrally-planned Soviet economy to a liberal free-market system. These included the privatization of many state-run industries and collective farms, the establishment of a new currency, and an influx of foreign investment. Initially, the enormity of this effort caused a decline in growth, hyperinflation, and high unemployment. Gradually, growth resumed due to Estonia's support for the free flow of capital, goods, and services. As the economy began to grow, the government promoted transparency within the open market, technological innovation, and trade. Between 1997-2011, Estonia created 4 trade zones open to tariff- and tax-free foreign investment at ports in Muuga, Paldiski, Sillamäe, and Valga (Photo: Tallinn's old town).

By the early 2000s, the diversified economy included a modernized industrial sector as well as large services and agricultural sectors. Stable banks, low public debt, low flat tax rates, high-quality low-cost production, and limited corruption brought over 8% growth from 2000-2007. Successive governments encouraged technological innovation and entrepreneurship, supporting the

growth of companies such as Skype, founded in Estonia in 2003. Estonia's 2004 accession to the European Union (EU) further facilitated its economic liberalization and expansion.

The health of Estonia's economy is largely dependent on that of its trading partners. Because of decreased foreign investment and low demand for its exports during the 2008-09 financial crisis, the Estonian economy shrank by 14.7%. Thanks to government austerity programs, growth rebounded to 7.6% in 2011, allowing Estonia to be the first former Soviet republic to join the Eurozone that year. The term Eurozone refers to those EU member states that have adopted the euro as their currency.

With a few exceptions, Estonia's economy has remained stable, and experts predict that it will grow by just over 3% through 2020, moderately higher than the predicted EU average. The government's "Estonia 2020" strategic plan aims to increase economic efficiency, inclusion, and competitiveness (Photo: A wind farm in Estonia).

Despite the economy's impressive transformation since independence, wages have not kept pace: today, the average Estonian income is only about 70% of the EU average. Other challenges for the Estonian economy include high structural unemployment (mismatch between skills workers possess and those the economy demands), emigration, slow productivity growth, and labor market barriers for many Russian-speaking Estonians (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Services

Accounting for 68% of both GDP and employment, the services sector is the largest, fastest-growing segment of the Estonian economy. Key services industries include telecommunications, banking, information technology (IT), and tourism.

IT and Telecommunications: A technology innovator, Estonia pioneered government "e-services" and became the first

country to offer internet voting in 2005. Also a first and exclusive to Estonia, “e-residency” was created in 2014, providing state-issued secure digital identity for non-residents.

Tourism: Estonia is one of the fastest-growing tourism markets in the EU. Many of Estonia’s 4 million annual tourists are Finns who travel to Tallinn by ferry. Other tourists come from Sweden, Germany, Russia, and Latvia to shop, relax in spas, or visit resort areas in Pärnu, Haapsalu, the islands, and Otepää (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) (Photo: Tallinn’s busy harbor).

Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for 28% of both GDP and the labor force. The most significant industrial sub-sectors are manufacturing, oil shale, and construction.

Manufacturing: About 25% of this sub-sector consists of electronics and vehicle production. Other manufactured goods include wood and paper products, food and beverages, chemicals, and metals.

Oil Shale: This industry comprises about 4% of GDP and 1% of the labor force. Developed by the USSR in order to support the energy needs of other Soviet republics, shale oil generation (shale oil is generated from oil shale, a rock) reached its peak in the 1980s. Today this industry provides for about 85% of the country’s electrical needs. In addition, Estonia exports energy produced through shale oil to Finland, Latvia, and Russia. Of note, the oil shale industry employs many Russian-speakers in Estonia’s northeast.

Construction: Construction accounts for 7% of GDP and 10% of employment and has been key to promoting Estonia’s transition to an open market economy. Generally, this sub-sector has experienced high growth since 2010. Foreign projects account for about 11% of total construction volume.

Agriculture

This sector, the smallest component of Estonia's economy, includes farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and accounts for nearly 4% of both GDP and employment.

Farming and Livestock: About 21% of Estonia's territory is dedicated to cultivation. Major crops include cereals, oilseed, potatoes, and vegetables, mostly for domestic consumption. Nearly self-sufficient in food production, Estonia exports berries, mushrooms, and organic produce. Dairy cows, poultry, and pigs are the most common livestock. With privatization following independence, most farms became small, family-owned businesses. Over the past decade, some farms have consolidated into larger, more efficient industrialized farms (Photo: Saaremaa Island farmhouse).

Fishing: Estonia's relatively large fishing fleet consists of over 950 vessels. The industry produces nearly 70,000 tons of sprat, herring, prawn, eel, and other fish, mostly for domestic consumption. Exports account for about 20% of the harvest, most of which is processed and canned for shipment to about 60 countries. The industry employs about 4,000 fishermen.

Forestry: With over 50% of its territory covered in woodlands, Estonia has a highly-developed forestry industry that provides jobs for about 35,000 people. Besides raw timber, the forestry industry supports the production of paper, cellulose, furniture products, and wood chips for power plants. Commercial harvests include pine, spruce, and birch.

Currency

The ***euro*** (€), the EU's common currency, is issued in 7 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500) and 2 coin values (1, 2). A euro subdivides into ***senti***, issued in 6 coin values (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50). With the variance in exchange rates, $1 has been worth between 67 and 95 *senti* in recent

years. Most businesses accept credit cards, although some smaller vendors may only accept cash in small denominations (Photo: 1€ coin).

Foreign Trade

Totaling $15 billion in 2014, Estonia's exports include machinery, electronics, food and chemical products, mineral fuels, timber and wood products, metals, vehicles and parts, and textiles. That year, Estonia's most important export partners were Sweden (19%), Finland (16%), Latvia (11%), Russia (10%), Lithuania (6%), and Germany (5%). In 2014, imports to Estonia totaled $16.4 billion, including machinery, electronics, mineral fuels, food and chemical products, metals, and plastics from Finland (16%), Germany (12%), Sweden (9%), Latvia (9%), Lithuania (8%), Poland (8%), the Netherlands (6%), Russia (5%), and China (5%).

European Union

Participation in the 28-member EU (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations)* provides Estonia with many economic benefits, including a large common market for exports, a stable currency, a secure business environment, and easier access to foreign direct investment. In 2014, about 78% of Estonian trade was with EU countries. Some disadvantages to membership include market regulations that restrict the flow of a few goods and services, as well as easier emigration of Estonians to other EU countries, which negatively impacts Estonia's labor force.

Foreign Aid

The EU is Estonia's largest provider of aid, giving more than €3.4 billion from 2007-2013 for infrastructure and regional development. Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein are notable individual donors. The US pledged $68 million to Estonia in 2015 to develop military base infrastructure. In 2016, the US pledged $3.4 billion to Europe as a whole in response to recent Russian aggression. Although Estonia is a net recipient of aid, in 2014 the Estonian government gave about $3 million in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to Ukraine, Syria, South Sudan, and others.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Estonia's modern physical infrastructure includes well-maintained roads and efficient public transit systems. Estonians enjoy the most advanced media and telecommunications network in the Baltic States, with a free press and unrestricted Internet access.

Transportation

Most Estonian families have a privately-owned vehicle (POV), although local travel by taxi, bus, foot, bicycle, or mass transit is common. Tallinn's public transit system, which is free for residents, includes buses, trams, and trolleys that usually run from 6am-midnight. A well-maintained nation-wide trail system and flat geography facilitate biking, which has gained popularity in recent years (Photo: Street in "New" Tallinn).

Many Estonians commute long distances for work, including those who travel by POV to Tallinn or even by ferry to Helsinki, Finland. In early 2016, Tallinn and Helsinki agreed to build a 57-mile rail tunnel connecting the 2 cities to reduce commuter travel time.

In 2013, Estonia became the first country to build a national electric vehicle charging network. Over 160 charging stations service electric cars on major roadways and in towns with 5,000+ residents.

Roadways: In 2014, Estonia had over 36,500 mi of roads, 18% of which are paved. While only city streets and major roads tend to be paved, nearly all roads are in good condition. Due to low levels of traffic across Estonia, expressways are often only 1 lane in each direction outside urban areas. The primary Estonian throughways are E67, E263, and E20, which connect Tallinn with Pärnu, Tartu, and Narva, respectively.

Railways: Estonia has about 1,350 mi of railways. While trains remain a slow alternative to local and regional buses, the 2007 re-nationalization of ***Eesti Raudtee*** (Estonian Railways) has increased efficiency. Estonia's National Transport Development Plan 2014-2020 includes plans to make trains the preferable mode of transportation by increasing the number of stations, train speed, and connectivity to Russia and Latvia. A planned electric high-speed *Rail Baltic* train is set to connect Estonia to the European Union Railroad Network by 2025 (Photo: An electric train en route from Tallinn to Keila).

Ports and Waterways: Estonia has nearly 210 mi of navigable waterways. Major ports include Kunda, Pärnu, Tallin, Sillamäe, Muuga, and Paldiski – the latter 3 are free trade zones (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). The Port of Tallinn is Estonia's largest port authority for both passengers and cargo. In 2015, nearly 10 million passengers departed the port to Helsinki, Stockholm (Sweden), and the Estonian islands. Of note, the Tallinn-Helsinki ferry route is 1 of the world's busiest.

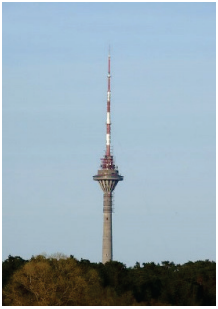
Airways: Estonia has 18 airports, 13 having paved runways. The Lennart Meri Tallinn Airport accounted for more than 95% of passenger air traffic in 2015. Since the 2015 bankruptcy of Estonian Air, Avies Air is Estonia's only domestically-based airline, serving local cities and Stockholm. Several global carriers connect to international destinations.

Energy

Estonia produces about 85% of its energy from shale oil and is an energy exporter (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). Estonia presently generates the remaining 15% of its electricity needs from wood, peat, biomass, and hydroelectric dams. By 2020, Estonia seeks to bring its share of renewable energy consumption to 25%. Estonia also imports a limited amount of Russian natural gas. Of note, *Eesti Energia*, the state-owned energy firm, is the largest company and employer in Estonia.

Media

The Estonian constitution provides for freedom of speech and press. Estonian media outlets are some of the world's most open, with little censorship or government interference. Although television is the most popular media form, a vibrant press includes daily newspapers in Estonian, English, and other languages. Popular daily newspapers include *Eesti Ekspress*, *Eesti Päevaleht*, and *Postimees* (a newspaper originally founded during Estonia's 19th century National Awakening – see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). The main English-language paper is *The Baltic Times*, which is based in Latvia. Many Estonians get their news from online sources



(Photo: Tallinn TV tower, Estonia's tallest structure).

Radio and TV: The Estonian state-owned broadcaster, *Eesti Rahvusringhääling*, operates 3 digital TV channels and 5 radio networks in Estonian and Russian (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Most households subscribe to cable, satellite or Internet services providing content in several languages

Telecommunications

Estonia's telecommunications network covers almost the entire country. In 2014, Estonia had 30 landline and 160 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people. The major mobile phone service providers are Elisa, Tele2, and EMT, which plans to pilot one of the world's first 5G networks by the end of 2016.

Internet: With a high-speed fiber-optic broadband network available to nearly every household and free Wi-Fi in most public spaces, Estonia has earned the nickname "E-stonia." In 2014, nearly 85% of residents used the Internet, with rates near 100% among youth who use it to conduct banking, make payments, and even vote. With its deep support of free and open Internet access, the Estonian government plans to continue to develop, promote, and invest in its telecommunications infrastructure as a part of its Digital Agenda 2020.

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