

Obituary: Tatu Vanhanen 1929–2015



The political scientist Tatu Vanhanen, who died on 22nd August 2015 aged 86, was Finland's most notorious academic. This was principally on account of his work carried out with Richard Lynn on national IQs, first published in *IQ and the Wealth of Nations* (Lynn & Vanhanen, 2002). This book, combining Lynn's calculations of national IQs and Vanhanen's mastery of political science and economics, argued that there were national differences in (strongly heritable) IQ and that these predicted differences in national wealth.

In August 2004, Vanhanen gave an interview about the book to the monthly magazine attached to Finland's biggest newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. He told the journalist 'Whereas the average IQ of Finns is 97, in Africa it is between 60 and 70. Differences in intelligence are the most significant factor in explaining poverty.' This 'thought crime' resulted in Finland's Ombudsman for Minorities, Mikko Puumalainen, demanding that Vanhanen be prosecuted for 'inciting hatred against an ethnic group'. The Finnish National Bureau of Investigation (the Finnish FBI) then announced that they were investigating whether there were grounds for prosecution. The incident generated huge media coverage because Vanhanen's son, Matti, had become Prime Minister the previous year. Matti

Vanhanen distanced himself from his father's remarks but refused to become embroiled in the affair. However, it was announced that there was insufficient evidence to proceed against the 75 year-old Emeritus Professor and the case was dropped. As a result, Tatu Vanhanen became a household name in Finland and his death, after a long illness, was reported in every national and significant local newspaper in the country. Even some of my own research on Finland has been of interest to the Finnish press partly because it was co-authored with Richard Lynn and he had worked with Tatu Vanhanen.

Tatu Vanhanen was born on 17th April 1929 in the village of Sintola in the municipality of Vuoksenranta in the eastern Finnish province of Karelia. His father was a farmer, Taavi Vanhanen (1905-1968). In November 1939, the Soviet Union demanded that Finland give up eastern Karelia (often simply referred to as 'Karelia' in this context). Eastern Karelia included Vuoksenranta and the country's second city, Vyborg. Together with the areas of Lapland the Soviets wanted, the Finns would have to give up 12% of their territory and 20% of their industrial capacity. When Finland refused to concede to the Soviet Union, the Soviets invaded. Despite a surprisingly successful resistance campaign during the Winter War, Finland lost the territory, and most of Karelia's 410,000 residents (12% of the Finnish population) fled to the new Finland, including Vanhanen's family. Then, in the so-called Continuation War, Finland took Karelia back again in 1941 and about half the residents returned, the Vanhanens among them. But the Finns were forced to surrender Karelia to the Soviets in 1944, with the Karelian Finns given just 10 days to get out before the border would be closed. Vanhanen's family were part of the huge re-exodus of Karelian refugees to the new Finland. The Vanhanen family were evacuated to Kauraketo near Somero in south-western Finland where Vanhanen's father later became chairman of the local forestry and fishing society. Farmers were compensated in proportion to their previous landholdings but received about a third of their original farm size.

In the chaos of war, Vanhanen had to leave school at 12 and begin working on a farm. He gained his secondary school education via a part-time correspondence course organized by the Finnish Lifelong Learning Society. Vanhanen joined the Agrarian League (later known as the Centre Party), a traditionalist party with strong rural support which was, and remains, one of Finland's largest political parties. The party was involved in running the Alkio Folk School – an adult education college – in Jyväskylä, in the center of the country. The young Vanhanen studied there and it was there that he met his future wife, Anni Tiihonen, whom he married in 1951.

From 1950, Vanhanen studied political science part-time at the Tampere School of Social Science (Tampere University as of 1966) while working as a

journalist. From 1955 to 1956 and again in 1958, Vanhanen edited the influential *Keskisuomalainen*, the largest newspaper in central Finland. In 1958, he began working for the Agrarian League's newspaper in Helsinki, editing it from 1959 to 1969. In 1957, Vanhanen obtained a Master's degree (Vanhanen, 1957) with a thesis on the government of Nehru in India, and in 1963 he obtained a Licentiate with a thesis on Indian politics (Vanhanen, 1963). In order to research for this topic he spent 10 months living in New Delhi.

It was not until his early 40s that Vanhanen made the move into academia full time. In 1968 he completed his doctoral thesis (Vanhanen, 1968), which analyzed political pluralism in ten Commonwealth countries. Thereafter he pursued a life of prolific research, focusing especially on the sociological and economic factors underpinning the development of democracy. This program included a number of books written in English, including the *The Roots of Democracy* (Vanhanen, 1982) and *The Process of Democratization* (Vanhanen, 1990). Vanhanen was assistant professor of political science at Jyväskylä University from 1969 to 1972, and was made docent (Adjunct Professor) of political science at Helsinki University that year. Between 1972 and 1974 he was a researcher at the Academy of Finland and from 1974 to 1992 he was assistant professor of political science at Tampere University. In his capacity as a politics expert, Vanhanen was occasionally on the Finnish TV news and on Election Night broadcasts.

It was only when he approached retirement that Vanhanen began to turn to more 'controversial' areas of research. Having read Wilson's (1975) *Sociobiology*, Vanhanen became fascinated by its potential to explain ethnic conflict. Wilson and others (e.g. Van den Berghe, 1981) promoted the 'inclusive fitness' theory that organisms could pass on their genes by aiding the survival of their kin. So, it would potentially make biological sense to be nepotistic, to support members of one's own ethnic group as an extended kin network. Accordingly, in some circumstances, extreme sacrifice in aid of the ethnic group would promote an individual's genetic inclusive fitness. Vanhanen applied this model in his book *On the Evolutionary Roots of Politics* (Vanhanen, 1992). He argued that political ideology was a means of promoting one's genetic interests and ethnic nepotism only really made sense within the framework of sociobiology.

On his retirement in 1992, Vanhanen was made Emeritus Professor at Tampere University and eventually moved to the village of Klaukkala, half an hour from Helsinki. He was now entirely free to pursue further research. In 1999 he published *Ethnic Conflicts Explained by Ethnic Nepotism* in which he argued that ethnic group members were genetically related, that ethnic nepotism promoted the inclusive fitness of the group and when two ethnic groups lived in the same

territory there would inevitably be ethnic conflict between them. He published a more detailed case for this thesis in *Ethnic Conflicts* (Vanhanen, 2012), in which he argued that ethnic heterogeneity was responsible for 66% of the variance in ethnic conflict within nations.

It was in 2000 that Vanhanen met Richard Lynn and they discussed working together on national IQs and their economic and social effects. Their first book on this thesis (*IQ and the Wealth of Nations*, 2002) showed that there are huge differences in the average IQs of nations, ranging from approximately 70 in sub-Saharan Africa to approximately 100 in central and northern Europe and the countries colonized by Europeans in the last few centuries (United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), to approximately 105 in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. They showed that for 185 nations the correlation between national IQ and per capita income (real GDP) was 0.63 and therefore that national IQs explain 40% of the variance in national per capita income (0.63 squared = 0.40). They argued that the remaining 60% can be largely explained by the possession of natural resources and the degree to which nations have free market economies.

This was a controversial claim. Hitherto economists had assumed that all the peoples of all nations have the same average IQ. For example, Richard Easterlin, in a keynote lecture with the title *Why isn't the whole world developed?*, given at the 1981 conference of the American Economic History Association, stated that "I think we can safely dismiss the view that the failure of modern technological knowledge to spread rapidly was due to significant differences in the native intelligence of their populations. To my knowledge there are no studies that definitively establish differences in, say, basic IQ among the peoples of the world" (Easterlin, 1981, p.5). Two decades later, the same assertion was made by the economists Eric Hanushek and Dennis Kimbo, who wrote "We assume that the international level of average ability of students does not vary across countries" (Hanushek and Kimko, 2000, p.1191).

Lynn and Vanhanen followed up this work by presenting further evidence in *IQ and Global Inequality* (Lynn & Vanhanen, 2006) and in *Intelligence: A Unifying Construct for the Social Sciences* (Lynn & Vanhanen, 2012). These studies showed that national differences in intelligence predict differences in numerous national indicators including per capita income, historical economic growth, literacy, employment, health, life expectancy, clean water, sanitation, happiness, gender equality and the presence of democratic institutions, together with low rates of crime, religious belief, corruption, infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, fertility and inequality. It also advanced the 'Cold Winters Theory' stating that intelligence has

been selected for more strongly in cold climates due to the need to hunt large animals, build effective shelters, and plan ahead.

Unsurprisingly these claims had a mixed reception. The national IQs were described as “virtually meaningless” by Susan Barnett and Wendy Williams (2004), but the results have become so compelling that they are now virtually universally accepted. Even Earl Hunt, originally one of their severest critics who wrote that their national IQs were “meaningless” (Hunt & Sternberg, 2006), later changed his mind writing in his textbook *Human Intelligence* (Hunt, 2011, p.440) that “Lynn and Vanhanen’s conclusions about the correlations between IQ estimates and measures of social well-being are probably correct”.

In his book *The Limits of Democratization: Climate, Intelligence and Resource Distribution* (2009) Vanhanen argued that national intelligence has been a determinant of the development of democracy because democracy is associated with long-term thinking (constantly guarding democracy against its enemies) and cooperation, and hence democracy has not evolved in low-IQ countries. His final book was *Global Inequality as a Consequence of Human Diversity* (2014). This presented a huge body of data for the genetic determination of national IQs, finding that IQ differences explained 75% of the variance in global differences in living standards.

Among his other interests, Vanhanen wrote the history of the Alkio Folk School (Vanhanen, 1977) and he was a prominent activist among Karelian refugees. In 1971, he co-founded the Vuoksensranta Municipality Society – which aimed to preserve memories of the former Finnish lands. He was its chairman from 1994 to 2000. Vanhanen articulated his longing for Vuoksenranta (now ‘Ozokoye’) in a poem, published by the society entitled, ‘Now tell me a memory of long ago’ (*Vuoksenranta*, ND). Vanhanen produced a history of its refugees’ lives (Vanhanen, 1993), edited a book of assorted memoirs of life in his childhood home (Vanhanen, 1996), and a history of the refugees who ended up in Somero (Vanhanen, 2006). He was given a gold medal for his services to the Karelian League in 1997. The Karelian League campaigns for the interests of Karelian refugees and promotes Karelian culture and language, which differs slightly from Finnish. Vanhanen never ceased his involvement with the Centre Party. He received the Centre Party medal in 1979 in honor of his 50th birthday and wrote a history of the Centre Party’s youth group, published in the 50th year since its establishment (Vanhanen, 1995). He also co-wrote a biography of Centre Party Prime Minister (1964-66) Johannes Virolainen, who argued for the return of Karelia (Sarlund & Vanhanen, 1974).

Apart from politics and research, Vanhanen enjoyed sculpting, especially human statuettes, which he displayed in an exhibition in March 2015 in his home

town. Most of the statuettes were female. 'I've been trying to capture female beauty in clay' he told his local newspaper at the time, adding that his works, 'give one perspective on human beauty and the diversity of the human body.' He also used bronze for one of his pieces. His other artistic outlet was writing poetry. In 2013, along with other members of his local poetry group, Vanhanen gave a public reading of some of his verse.

In April 2015, I wrote a generally positive review of Vanhanen's *Global Inequality* (Dutton, 2015). He wrote to me to thank me for it: 'You criticize several points of my book. I accept all your critical comments and try to learn from them in my new studies if I am still able to continue my research work. We have never met and I may be already too old and sick to see you, but I want to tell you that I am planning to make a new study in which I try to explore how political scientists have explained the origin of democracy and what has been the relative significance of environmental conditions and the characteristics of human nature, like national differences in intelligence' (Vanhanen, personal correspondence, 9th April 2015).

Unhappily, Vanhanen died only a few months later and the study was never conducted. I felt that, in that letter, I had heard the spirit of a true scholar: polite, always open to criticism and new ideas, and always continuing to develop and pursue his research. Vanhanen will be remembered for his courage in weathering the abuse of ideologically motivated researchers and activists in the pursuit of the truth. He is survived by his wife, Anni, and his sons Rauno (a civil servant and entrepreneur), Matti (Finnish Centre Party Prime Minister, 2003-2010) and Tuomo.

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