



Gender and Generation Differences in Finnish Defence Policy Opinions 2000–2020

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Outside Finland, gender differences in opinions on defence and security policy have been the subject of analysis in Western states of all sizes. This study investigates whether political opinions on key issues of defence policy in Finland are affected by differences in gender and age, and how such differences can be understood in the context of a small-state where there is conscription for men. Gender differences are suggested in relation to both the Finnish social and political context and the gendered division of labour in a society long characterised by a high willingness to defend the country, male conscription, and military non-alignment. Generational differences are proposed to be related to the directions of potential social change in the population. We analyse survey data from the Finnish Advisory Board for Defence Information collected between 2000 and 2020 on four survey items and test whether opinions on (a) willingness to defend Finland, (b) mandatory male conscription, (c) defence spending, and (d) military alignment vary as a function of sex or age. What emerges as statistically significant is that Finnish men will support the military defence of the country if it is attacked, while older cohorts tend to support mandatory male conscription. Defence spending and military non-alignment in the years 2000 to 2020 were mostly inconclusive on gender and generational differences. With illustrative findings from qualitative interview data from women's preparedness training in voluntary defence, we suggest a contextual explanation of *situated socialisation*, where self-perceived proximity to defence issues leads to men being more convinced and women being more ambivalent in their views on defence policy.

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Results of annual Finnish security and defence opinion surveys (e.g., [Advisory Board for Defence Information 2021](#); [2022a](#); [2022b](#)) tend to be the subject of lively political debate (see [Kaarkoski & Häkkinen, 2022](#)). Most often, however, the surveys act as barometers of well-known questions such as the willingness to defend Finland, referring to political support for defending Finland with military means if attacked. While data have been accumulated annually for decades, there has been little scholarly analysis of the material archived or how opinions are distributed within the population. Furthermore, data have not been reflected upon in light of international research literature on gender and generation gaps in political opinions. Are there gender and age differences in political opinions on key issues of defence policy in Finland, we ask, and how can such differences be understood in a small-state context characterised by widely applied male conscription? We investigate this research question by analysing gender and age differences in survey data on public opinion regarding (a) willingness to defend Finland, (b) mandatory male conscription, (c) defence spending, and (d) military alignment in Finland in the years 2000–2020. This is complemented by some illustrative qualitative data from women’s voluntary defence training between 2018 and 2019.

Analysis reveals that between 2000 and 2020, differences between respondents are statistically significant in only two areas: gender differences in willingness to defend, and generational differences in attitudes towards the existing model of male conscription and voluntary military service for women. When asked, men tend to support defending Finland with military means in all contingencies in greater numbers than women do. Older respondents tend to support organising national defence around the existing model of male conscription and voluntary military service for women. Gender differences, however, are not statistically significant in this question. Men are more often of the opinion that public spending on defence could be augmented, and older generations concurred on this in the years 2015–2020. Between 2000 and 2020, in the era preceding Russia’s attack in Ukraine in spring 2022, opinions on military alignment and membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) did not offer conclusive results from the perspective of gender and age differences in the longer term.

We set ourselves the task of examining variation in support by gender and age for central defence policy choices in Finland, and seek to explain it contextually in light of structural (widely applied and legally sanctioned male conscription) and cultural (socialisation into gender roles) traits of Finnish society. A population and an electorate are never monoliths, and understanding the significance and formation of policy opinions gives depth to understanding wider societal issues such as the division of security-related labour between the sexes and social change in how different generations approach legal duties like conscription. We offer a contextual explanation, *situated socialisation*, according to which gendered experiences of proximity to defence issues characterise how strongly or ambivalently individuals approach survey questions on defence policy. Simplified, conscription plays a significant role in men being more convinced of the importance of defending Finland in all situations than women. Older generations hold on to the existing model of male conscription; perhaps somewhat surprisingly, gendered differences in attitudes towards conscription are not statistically significant in this age group.

This study has been inspired by Wagnsson et al., (2020), who offer an account combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives on gender differences in defence and security opinions in Sweden. Studies in this area form a small field of their own at the crossroads of politics, sociology, and war studies. This field has been studied to the largest extent in the United States ([Eichenberg, 2019, 2016](#); [Eichenberg & Stoll, 2012, 2017](#); [Lizotte, 2019, 2020](#)). As the Finnish Social Science Data Archive provides similar quantitative data to the data analysed by Wagnsson et al., (2020), it is of interest to examine the context of Finland, a society in many ways like Sweden, to see how support for different areas of defence policy is distributed societally, between different demographic groups. While political contexts may vary, examining public support for questions of life, death, and the defence of the state itself is of perennial interest in a democracy.

This article is structured in five sections. First, relevant literature on gender gaps and generation gaps in public opinion, and gender differences in defence policy opinions, is reviewed; second, theoretical approaches to explaining these gaps are explored; third, the data and methods

chosen are introduced (the main body of the analysis is derived from an examination of archived quantitative survey data of the years 2000–2020, complemented by insights from qualitative data consisting of interviews conducted between 2018 and 2019 with Finnish non-reservist civilian women participating in emergency preparedness training courses within voluntary defence training); fourth, the quantitative and qualitative results are presented; fifth, the results are discussed with an emphasis on a historically and geographically contextual approach of situated socialisation.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH: PUBLIC OPINION, GENDER, AND GENERATIONS

Public opinion underpins defence policy and the extent and form of how a state prepares for kinetic and non-kinetic attacks against its sovereignty and integrity. Russia attacking Ukraine in February 2022 and the full-scale warfare that ensued have shown that staples of public opinion such as the willingness to fight continue to be relevant (Inglehart et al., 2015; Anderson, Getmansky & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2020; Rutkauskas, 2018; Andžans & Sprāds, 2020; Berglund et al., 2022). This is significant not just in evaluating support for defence policy but also in predicting the willingness of the population, both frontline fighters and the wider population, to fight against an external aggressor (Norris & Kizlova, 2022). Thus far, there has been some research on the statistical significance of demographic and socio-economic factors predicting what is called, in the Finnish context, *maanpuolustustahto* –“willingness to defend the country” (Harinen & Hannola, 2013; Hägglom, 2022). Though willingness to defend has been studied qualitatively in the context of Finland (Kosonen et al., 2019a, 2019b; Hadar and Häkkinen, 2020), studies addressing gender and generation differences or other demographic variation in in defence and security policy opinions are lacking.

When studying Swedish society, Wagnsson and her colleagues (2020) built their analysis of gender differences in security and defence opinions on combining qualitative and quantitative perspectives around theoretical notions on the ethic of care. They built on Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1982), a response to Kohlbergian developmental moral theory, according to which female socialisation and mothering produce attitudes to moral problems characterised by the avoidance and resolution of conflict (see Conover, 1988; Conover & Sapiro, 1993). Cross-culturally, when women are both highly educated and highly politically mobilised, gender differences in political opinion are notable (Eichenberg 2019, pp. 12–15, 37–38; Wagnsson et al., 2020). In national security issues, women tend to support diplomacy and dialogue, and to not support repressive solutions, (Eichenberg 2019).

In this article, gender is taken to mean the structural and social categories of women and men in society shaped by social norms, political subjectivities, and normative expectations. As humans form social and political communities with social and hierarchical structures such as male/female and masculine/feminine, it is of interest to analyse gender differences; social and political changes occur over time. Research on gender differences in political opinion often refers to gender gaps (Lizotte, 2020; Inglehart & Norris, 2000). Generation gaps also feature in the literature, identified among voters and political representatives (Norris, 1999; Segard & Saglie, 2021). In the data, these differences exist within a binary classification of the self-reported sex of the respondents and the age they reported at the time of data collection.

Richard Eichenberg (2019), who has studied gender differences in defence policy opinions extensively, reports that while gender differences in defence opinions exist, they vary immensely across societies and cultures. Origins for the gender gap in opinions on defence and war are unclear (Lizotte 2019, p. 124). From study to study, certain differences between women and men emerge; although women cannot be considered more straightforwardly pacifist, they are less likely to support the use of force and violence to achieve political goals. In the United States, a superpower with frequent overseas military deployment, the context of public opinion underpinning political decision-making is different to that of small states like Sweden or Finland, which focus on maintaining national defence against a potential foreign aggressor.

In studies on the United States, it has been noted that, when in positions of power, women tend to be more pacifism-driven, “dovish” (Bendix & Jeong, 2020; Moore and Dolan, 2012). Overall, in the U.S. context, women are less supportive of the use of military force and other “hawkish” measures (Brooks & Valentino, 2011; Eichenberg, 2003; Feinstein, 2017). Women also offer stronger support for universalist values, social justice, and equality (Lizotte et al.,

2020). Based on survey data from Israel, Egypt, Palestine, and Kuwait, Tessler and Warriner (1997) argue that it is less the gender of the respondents and more their attitudes towards gender equality that are relevant to opinions concerning diplomacy and compromise in solving state conflicts. In the same era, research documented less support for defence spending from women than men in Denmark, where Danish women were more favourable toward reducing the defence budget (Togeby, 1994). In Israel gender and age differences in attitudes towards peace and conflict have not been significant (Fielding & Penny, 2009). Recently, similar findings from the United Kingdom show that women have tended to be less supportive of the use of force and of increasing defence spending (Clements & Thomson, 2022).

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: EXPLAINING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DEFENCE OPINIONS

Different kinds of explanation models have been proposed for women's less belligerent attitudes concerning defence and war. The most comprehensive accounts and comparisons have been carried out by Eichenberg (2019) and Lizotte (2019). According to Lizotte, women's views on defence and security policy may be explained by economic and political marginalisation, feminist political identities, social roles, motherhood/maternalism, and differences in emphases on moral values. In turn, Eichenberg (2019, pp. 11–22) has evaluated the explanation models of biological differences, economic and political reasoning, fears of threat, risk and violence, and socialisation tied to different world views. Eichenberg finds little evidence to support what he calls “the essentialist hypothesis,” according to which the differences in attitudes between women and men can be attributed to biological differences.

Otherwise, Lizotte's and Eichenberg's explanations have much in common. Lizotte (2019, p. 125) points out that feminism and marginalisation have been tested: “The four explanations are economic/political marginalisation, feminist identity, Social Role Theory, and value differences. Two of these explanations, marginalisation and feminism, have been tested, while the other two are largely untested”. Explanations may not be mutually exclusive, she notes, and different explanations such as marginalisation and social role socialisation give rise to gender differences in political values which then produce gender gaps regarding attitudes towards war and the use of force (2019, pp. 129–130). In turn, Eichenberg (2019) argues that, for women, it tends to be the acceptability of war that figures in attitudes to defence spending. Economic development, gender equality and gender differences, he found, form one of the most consistent correlations to differences in the perception of war; to a certain extent, indeed, women may be more favourable to the use of force if it is backed up by the United Nations.

We add one more perspective, tying together political marginalisation, social role socialisation, and the social division of high-risk tasks such as warfare. In all societies, there exists a social division of labour according to one's sex. How stark this division is in different areas of work varies from one society to another. This tends to be particularly visible in the professional and civic fields of security professions and warfare. Taking into account this social structure, which happens to be pervasive and stark in Finland, we argue that a lack of familiarity with state monopolies of violence offers a possible explanation for women's uncertainty or negative attitudes towards risk-taking and the resort to hard measures in defence and security. This resonates to the largest extent with Eichenberg's explanation models: aversion to working in the field of threat and violence, and in socialisation to feminised areas of social life such as female-dominated professions and vocations.

In the Finnish context, where legally sanctioned and widely applied male conscription signifies a stark division of war labour and civic duties between most men and most women, the majority of the male age cohort and a small number of women opting for voluntary military service obtain hands-on training in national defence. However, as comparatively very few women complete military service, to most Finnish women national defence remains an area distant in practice and politics alike. About two thirds of the male age cohort complete military service, and volunteer women make up 4–5% of about 20,000 young people completing military service annually (Defence Command, 2022). It is possible that the social and practical distance to national defence experienced by Finnish women leads to greater uncertainty in their answers to public opinion poll questions on defence issues. We expect this based on an idea derived from theoretical insight into values: military service, as a tradition for the male population, represents collective activity which, considered socially essential for men, is thus reflected in their values and subsequent opinions (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 1993: 9–10).

In political opinion, generation, analysed from differences in opinion between age groups, is one way of analysing the degree of social change occurring in a population. According to Pippa Norris (1999, p. 145), “generational explanations emphasize that formative experiences leave a long-term imprint upon cultural and political values” which may then stay the same for years to come. When it comes to a willingness to serve in a nation’s defence, the Finnish economist Vesa Kanninen has suggested, following the work of Gary Becker (1981), that intergenerational altruism in fighting against a foreign aggressor would drive attitudes. To him, this orientation of altruism and potential sacrifice from an older generation towards a younger generation constitutes an “intergenerational altruistic preference structure of individual fighters” connected to the probability of survival of the fighter’s offspring (Kanninen, 2018, p. 618). This raises the question of whether age and familial circumstances characterise political opinions on defence policy. While relevant data on this from Finnish opinion surveys is very inconclusive, this could be studied in more detail with other data gathered from other European states. The attitudes of older generations may be more altruistic, but also more pessimistic or cynical than of younger generations. For example, after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, older age groups in Finland were slightly more in favour of NATO membership, possibly based on their experiences of the Cold War era (Weckman, 2023, p. 9).

METHODS AND DATA

The quantitative survey data analysed consists of a series of annual surveys conducted between 2000 and 2020. The sample was formed by drawing data from seven of these assessing opinions of the Finnish public on issues of security policy, defence policy, and the implementation of national defence. Each annual subsample was acquired by quota sampling, the control characteristics being age, sex, region, and the type of municipal corporation. The target size of each annual subsample was 1,000 (range 981–1169) and Finnish citizens, excluding residents of the Åland Islands, aged 15–79 were targeted. Descriptive information of the demographics of the subsamples is reported below (see Table 1).

YEAR	2000	2005	2009	2012	2015	2018	2020
N for sample	1015	990	981	1017	1005	1034	1169
Percent male (responses)	48.9% (496)	46.8% (463)	47.0% (461)	49.8% (506)	49.2% (492)	46.9% (485)	53.9% (630)
Percent female (responses)	51.1% (519)	53.2% (527)	53.0% (520)	50.2% (511)	50.8% (511)	53.1% (549)	46.1% (539)
Age mean	42.19	45.04	45.80	47.06	46.95	47.38	50.09
Age Standard deviation	17.21	18.034	18.464	18.342	18.484	18.695	16.92
Age range	15–94	15–79	15–79	15–79	15–79	15–79	15–79

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for subsamples.

Out of a large body of data, the four analysed survey items were chosen from the most often-repeated questions, among them the willingness to defend Finland and support for male conscription. “Willingness to defend Finland” measures political support for the state deciding to take up arms if attacked. “Support for male conscription” measures the acceptability of the Finnish system in which there are legal consequences for refusing to do military service – a system for providing manpower for the defence of the nation rare in contemporary Europe. Key political questions of military spending originating from the distribution of state resources and the political choice of military alignment (the prospect of NATO membership) constituted the last of four questions. These concerned significant aspects of the Finnish defence system before the nation joined NATO in 2023. The first three themes each had a single survey question; there were two separate questions on military alignment and NATO membership. Each question represents a dependent variable in our analysis. The included scales are presented in Table 2; individual items are reported in Appendix 1.

The questions on supporting male conscription and NATO membership were not included in the 2000 ABDI survey. For other years, all questions chosen for analysis in this study were included. While there was some slight variation in the precise phrasing of the questions in

different annual editions of the survey, this variation was sufficiently small to not meaningfully depart from the substantive themes listed above. The translations of the questions presented in this study are taken from the English translation of the survey created by the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD Archive 2000–2020).

The primary data analysis method was binary logistic regression. For each sample, a single regression model was constructed for each dependent variable. The chosen independent variables for this study were the respondent’s sex as a binary categorical variable and the respondent’s age in years as a continuous variable. There were no missing responses on sex or age in any of the samples chosen for analysis. The independent variables were input into each model in a single block. To facilitate the analysis, original ratings needed to be modified. The questions on support for male conscription and defence spending had non-binary, non-Likert categorical response options. These variables were re-coded into binary variables so that the status quo response option, generally also the largest single response category, was kept as one category and other response categories were combined. The questions on willingness to defend, military alignment, and NATO membership had binary response options in the original survey. These variables were not re-coded for analysis. All questions had the response option “I don’t know” (*en osaa sanoa*). This response was coded as missing for each dependent variable. (See Table 2.)

Each model examined the odds of choosing what might contextually be considered the conservative response option most in line with Finnish national defence doctrine, such as answering “yes” to the question on willingness to defend. The reference category for each model was “woman.” The analyses thus examine the relative odds of men responding conservatively to the chosen questions when compared to women.

VARIABLES PER YEAR OF ANALYSIS	2000	2005	2009	2012	2015	2018	2020
Willingness to fight	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support for conscription		X	X	X	X	X	X
Defense spending	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Military alignment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
NATO		X	X	X	X	X	X
N per year	1015	990	981	1017	1005	1034	1169

Table 2 Corresponding variables in annual surveys.

Qualitative data from interviews with lay Finnish women with interest in civilian involvement in national defence, expressed by taking part in voluntary defence training, offers some limited illustration of the social and practical distance felt and expressed by non-reservist women to national defence. The views expressed offer frames of reference for understanding the kind of views female citizens may hold. In this case, they were women who had not completed voluntary military service but had taken the step of taking part on weekend courses in voluntary defence training, providing a context useful to a further understanding of their relation to national defence.

The qualitative data (FSD Archive 2021) was gathered between 2018 and 2019 within a larger research project focusing on how citizens relate to national defence and the kinds of attitudes, confidence, skills, and agency they had in the area (Kosonen et al., 2019a; 2019b). A qualitative study (Hart, 2022) focused on Finnish non-reservist women participating in voluntary emergency preparedness courses. The interviewees were lay women with an interest or a longer personal history in involvement with defence-oriented civil society activities. 22 women were interviewed in individual, pair, and group interviews in 17 interview sessions all over Finland. Most were aged 50–60 years, ranging between 20–70 years, and the majority lived in southern and western Finland. (See Appendix 2.)

The interviewees were recruited through the Women’s National Emergency Training Association (WNEPA), an umbrella organisation for women in national defence and civic involvement in security. Interviews were held separately from WNEPA events, for privacy and anonymity. All interviewees gave written consent for recording, transcribing, anonymising, and archiving the interviews in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive. As the analysis is built on

archive-retrieved data, it was not possible to include qualitative data from men or youth. The interview data offers insight into how key questions such as how the division of war labour (male conscription) is perceived by older women, a cohort tending to be most removed from the current context of voluntary military service and thus fully-fledged participation in national defence in Finland.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

WILLINGNESS TO DEFEND

As reported in Table 3 throughout the period under examination, men consistently expressed a higher willingness to defend the country than women, ranging from a 1.75 times higher likelihood of responding positively (2015) to a 2.74 times higher likelihood of a positive response (2005) to the traditional Finnish question on the willingness to defend the country: “If Finland were attacked, should Finns, in your opinion, take up arms to defend themselves in all situations, even if the outcome seemed uncertain?”. This is a long-running survey question, first asked in 1970 (Advisory Board for Defence Information 2022b: 21–25; 60). The results for gender were significant at the 0.05 level for all iterations of the survey analysed except for the results of the 2018 survey. Older respondents consistently expressed a higher will to defend the country than younger respondents, ranging from a 1.004-fold increase in the likelihood of responding positively per one-year increase in age (2012) to a 1.033-fold increase per year (2020). The results for age were significant at the 0.05 level for all iterations of the survey analysed. (See Table 3.)

It is worth noting the high overall rate of positive responses in each sample, which is in line with historical data on willingness to defend Finland. In an international context, Finns have historically expressed exceptionally high levels of willingness to defend the country (Inglehart et al., 2015). There is a slight reduction in the overall rate of positive responses across the examination period, with the rate of positive responses declining from 81% in 2000 to 66% in 2020. A corresponding increase in negative responses, however, cannot be seen; there is, rather, a notable increase in the rate of missing responses, particularly for 2018 (12%) and 2020 (16%). This suggests that the decrease in the rate of positive responses is attributable to an increasing uncertainty of opinion regarding national defence rather than a decreasing will to defend the country. Despite the decrease in the overall level of expressed willingness to defend Finland over the era analysed, the relationship between willingness to defend and gender and age remains largely consistent throughout the examination period.

	OR	P	VALID N	N (0)	N(1)	MISSING
2000			972 (95.8%)	155 (15.3%)	817 (80.5%)	43 (4.2%)
Gender	2.089	<0.001				
Age	1.019	0.001				
2005			938 (94.7%)	185 (18.7%)	753 (76.1%)	52 (5.3%)
Gender	2.738	<0.001				
Age	1.016	0.001				
2009			940 (95.8%)	217(22.1%)	723 (73.7%)	41 (4.2%)
Gender	2.219	<0.001				
Age	1.018	<0.001				
2012			964 (94.8%)	187 (18.4%)	777 (76.4%)	53 (5.2%)
Gender	2.094	<0.001				
Age	1.004	0.043				
2015			949 (94.4%)	174 (17.3%)	775 (77.1%)	56 (5.6%)
Gender	1.749	0.001				
Age	1.020	<0.001				

Table 3 Regression model for the willingness to fight.

If Finland were attacked, do you think Finns should in all circumstances take up arms in defence of their country, even if the outcome seemed uncertain?

0 = No, 1 = Yes.

Reference category: Woman.

(Contd.)

	OR	P	VALID N	N (0)	N(1)	MISSING
2018			908 (87.8%)	217 (21.0%)	691 (66.8%)	126 (12.2%)
Gender	1.169	0.322				
Age	1.017	<0.001				
2020			977 (83.6%)	204 (17.5%)	773 (66.1%)	192 (16.4%)
Gender	2.373	<0.001				
Age	1.033	<0.001				

SUPPORT FOR MALE CONSCRIPTION

The current model of military service in Finland is mandatory military service for men aged 18–30 years. As reported in Table 4, gender was not associated with support for male conscription in any iteration of the survey analysed. This suggests that there are no significant differences between men and women on opinions on conscription in Finland. However, there were clear differences in support for male conscription between older and younger respondents. Older respondents consistently expressed more support for maintaining the current system of conscription than younger participants, ranging from a 1.017-fold increase in the likelihood of supporting the current system per one-year increase in age (2012) to a 1.034-fold increase per year (2018). The results for age were significant at the 0.05 level for all iterations of the survey analysed. There was a notable increase in the odds ratio during the period 2015–2020 (OR = 1.028–1.034) compared to 2005–2012 (OR = 1.017–1.018). This suggests that the difference in opinion between younger and older participants on male conscription is increasing, and that it represents a generational divide. (See Table 4.)

In contrast to the results for the willingness to defend, it is worth noting that the overall level of support for conscription remains remarkably consistent throughout the examination period. This is the case for support for reform to the current system (21.8%–26.7%), support for maintaining the current system (72.0%–77.6%), and missing responses including “do not know” (1.3%–4.8%). This suggests that opinions on male conscription in the overall population have not changed during the period under analysis, and that increased support for male conscription among older participants reflects changing views as participants age, rather than strictly generational differences.

	OR	P	VALID N	N (0)	N(1)	MISSING
2005			976 (98.4%)	208 (21.0%)	768 (77.6%)	14 (1.4%)
Gender	0.856	0.323				
Age	1.018	<0.001				
2009			968 (98.7%)	262 (26.7%)	706 (72.0%)	13 (1.3%)
Gender	0.878	0.375				
Age	1.018	<0.001				
2012			1001 (98.4%)	269 (26.5%)	732 (72.0%)	16 (1.6%)
Gender	1.006	0.965				
Age	1.017	<0.001				
2015			980 (97.5%)	224 (22.3%)	756 (75.2%)	25 (2.5%)
Gender	0.852	0.303				
Age	1.028	<0.001				
2018			986 (95.4%)	229 (22.1%)	757 (73.2%)	48 (4.6%)
Gender	0.815	0.190				
Age	1.034	<0.001				
2020			1113 (95.2%)	255 (21.8%)	858 (73.4%)	56 (4.8%)
Gender	1.003	0.986				
Age	1.029	<0.001				

Table 4 Regression model for the support for mandatory male conscription.

Should Finland keep its present defence System which is based on universal conscription?

0 = The System should be changed, 1 = The System should remain as is Reference category: Woman.

As reported in Table 5, gender was associated with the respondents' views on defence spending throughout the enquiry period. Men consistently expressed more support for increasing the funding given to the Finnish Defence Forces than women, ranging from a 1.302 times higher likelihood to respond positively (2000) to 1.920 times higher likelihood (2009). The results for gender were significant at the 0.05 level for each iteration of the survey analysed.

The results for age were less consistent. In the data sets analysed from the period 2000–2012, age was not associated with the respondents' opinion on defence spending. However, in the last three iterations of the survey analysed in this study (2015–2020), older participants expressed significantly higher support for increasing the funding given to the Defence Forces than younger participants. The difference in opinion for this period ranged from a 1.010-fold increase in the likelihood of responding positively per one-year increase in age (2020) to a 1.013-fold increase per year (2015 and 2018). This change is consistent with the results for views on male conscription. Taken together, these results suggest that there may have been a recent increase in relative hawkishness among older citizens relative to younger citizens. (See Table 5.)

There was a slight increase in the proportion of missing responses from 2000 (2.3%) to 2018 (7.6%), reflecting slightly higher uncertainty among the respondents. It is also worth noting that the overall level of support for increasing funding for Finnish Defence Forces varied somewhat across the examination period, ranging from a low in the positive response rate of 27.2% (2009) to a high of 45.5% (2000). The relatively large swings in opinion may in part be accounted for by the fact that the question is in effect a relative, rather than absolute, measure of views on defence spending. This is particularly true given that the target outcome in this analysis is the relatively hawkish view of increasing defence spending.

	OR	P	VALID N	N(0)	N(1)	MISSING
2000			992 (97.7%)	530 (52.2%)	462 (45.5%)	23 (2.3%)
Gender	1.302	0.039				
Age	0.995	0.170				
2005			954 (96.4%)	670 (67.7%)	284 (28.7%)	36 (3.6%)
Gender	1.728	<0.001				
Age	1.001	0.695				
2009			954 (97.2%)	687 (70.0%)	267 (27.2%)	27 (2.8%)
Gender	1.920	<0.001				
Age	1.003	0.383				
2012			990 (97.3%)	646 (63.5%)	344 (33.8%)	27 (2.7%)
Gender	1.832	<0.001				
Age	1.004	0.236				
2015			962 (95.7%)	511 (50.8%)	451 (44.9%)	43 (4.3%)
Gender	1.476	0.003				
Age	1.013	<0.001				
2018			955 (92.4%)	544 (52.6%)	411 (39.7%)	79 (7.6%)
Gender	1.835	<0.001				
Age	1.013	<0.001				
2020			1087 (93.0%)	710 (60.7%)	377 (32.2%)	82 (7.0%)
Gender	1.763	<0.001				
Age	1.010	0.008				

Table 5 Regression model for the support for defence spending.

What is your opinion on the Defence Forces¹ funding?
0 = Funding should be maintained or decreased, 1 = Funding should be increased
Reference category: Woman.

As reported in Table 6, gender was inconsistently associated with views on military alignment. In the surveys from 2000, 2012 and 2020, men were significantly less likely than women to express the view that Finland should remain unaligned. The difference in opinion ranged from 1.425-fold lower odds (OR = 0.702, converted to an inverse ratio to obtain a figure higher than 0 for clarity of interpretation) to respond positively (2012) to 2.375-fold lower odds (OR = 0.421) to respond positively (2020). The results for 2005, 2009, 2015 and 2018 were not significant, indicating that the gendered difference in opinion on military alignment is not consistent across the period of examination. (See Table 6.)

The results for age were similarly inconsistent, being significant at the 0.05 level for 2000, 2009, 2018 and 2020; for 2000, 2018 and 2020, older participants were more likely to express the view that Finland should remain unaligned, ranging from a 1.011-fold increase in the likelihood of responding positively per one-year increase in age (2000) to a 1.014-fold increase per year (2020). In the 2009 iteration of the survey, older respondents were in fact less likely to express the view that Finland should remain unaligned (OR = 0.990). However, given the fact that the odds ratio in this case is very close to 0 and the direction of the result differs from the other significant results, the result for this year can be approached as a statistical anomaly. As was the case in the results for male conscription and defence spending, the results for 2018 and 2020 indicate a sharper divide in opinion between older and younger participants in the later iterations of the survey analysed. Variation in opinions may be linked to events in international crisis management: Finnish involvement in the operation in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, for example, has been the subject of critical discussion.

The overall rate of positive responses remained largely consistent across the examination period. It is worth noting that in the 2005 survey, each respondent was only asked one of the questions on military alignment and NATO membership, leading to a much higher rate of missing responses for these questions. A clear decline in positive responses can be seen between 2012 and 2015, indicating less favourable views on military non-alignment. There is also a sharp increase in the rate of missing responses from 2012 (7.5%) to 2020 (17.7%), indicating increasing uncertainty in the respondents' views on military alignment.

	OR	P	VALID N	N(0)	N(1)	MISSING
2000			926 (91.2%)	258 (25.4%)	668 (65.8%)	89 (8.8%)
Gender	0.659	0.007				
Age	1.011	0.010				
2005			434 (43.8%)	151 (15.3%)	283 (28.6%)	555 (56.2%)
Gender	0.700	0.079				
Age	0.998	0.765				
2009			907 (92.5%)	315 (32.1%)	592 (60.3%)	74 (7.5%)
Gender	0.953	0.753				
Age	0.990	0.01				
2012			939 (92.3%)	240 (23.6%)	699 (68.7%)	78 (7.7%)
Gender	0.702	0.020				
Age	1.002	0.658				
2015			886 (88.2%)	325 (32.3%)	561 (55.8%)	119 (11.8%)
Gender	1.016	0.908				
Age	1.006	0.093				
2018			858 (83.0%)	266 (25.7%)	592 (57.3%)	176 (17.0%)
Gender	0.83	0.210				
Age	1.013	0.002				
2020			962 (82.3%)	284 (24.3%)	678 (58.0%)	207 (17.7%)
Gender	0.421	<0.001				
Age	1.014	0.001				

Table 6 Regression model for military alignment.

In your opinion, should Finland continue its policy of military non-alignment or enter a military alliance?

0 = Finland should enter a military alliance, 1 = Finland should remain unaligned
 Reference category: Woman.

As reported in Table 7, the results for gender on NATO membership echo the results on military alignment. For 2005, 2018, and 2020, men were significantly less likely to oppose NATO membership than women, ranging from 1.418 times lower odds to oppose membership (2018) to 2.732 times lower odds to oppose membership (2005). The results for 2009, 2012, and 2015 were not significant and the 0.05 level. Age was only significantly associated with opinion on NATO membership in the 2009 iteration of the survey, where older participants were 1.454 times less likely to oppose NATO membership per year of age increase than younger participants. In each other iteration of the survey, age was not significantly associated with the respondents' opinion on NATO membership. (See Table 7.)

The overall rate of positive responses – those opposing NATO membership – remained largely consistent across the period of examination. However, as was the case in the results on military alignment, there was a notable increase in the rate of missing responses from 2012 (9.6%) to 2020 (23.8%), indicating higher uncertainty in the respondents' opinion on NATO membership.

	OR	P	VALID N	N (0)	N(1)	MISSING
2005			480 (48.5%)	136 (13.7%)	323 (32.6%)	531 (53.6%)
Gender	0.366	0.002				
Age	0.691	0.351				
2009			887 (90.4%)	274 (27.9%)	613 (62.5%)	94 (9.6%)
Gender	0.632	0.518				
Age	0.688	0.014				
2012			914 (89.9%)	186 (18.3%)	728 (71.6%)	103 (10.1%)
Gender	0.733	0.061				
Age	0.996	0.337				
2015			860 (85.6%)	260 (25.9%)	600 (59.7%)	145 (14.4%)
Gender	0.894	0.453				
Age	1.000	0.985				
2018			812 (78.5%)	206 (19.9%)	606 (58.6%)	222 (21.5%)
Gender	0.705	0.032				
Age	1.003	0.431				
2020			891 (76.2%)	241 (20.6%)	650 (55.6%)	278 (23.8%)
Gender	0.446	<0.001				
Age	1.000	0.998				

Table 7 Regression model for the NATO membership.

In your opinion, should Finland seek to become a member of NATO?

0 = Yes, 1 = No.

Reference category: Woman.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Just like the quantitative data in this article, the qualitative data were collected at a time when NATO membership was not on the political agenda. All the data reflect lay opinion in the context of a period pre-dating Russia's full-scale attack in Ukraine in early 2022. Willingness to defend Finland, in the sense of offering support to policies and political decisions concerning national defence, was widely shared in the data. As a corpus, the interviews reflected recognition of one's place and agency in the generally abstract and distant possibility of defending the country against a foreign aggressor. Many of the interviewees came from the age cohorts for whom women's voluntary military service was never possible, as it was opened in 1995 to women between 18–30 years.

As one interviewee belonging to the cohort for whom women's military service was not possible (Interviewee 17, 50–60 years, March 2019), put it: "So it is about the duty to defend what you have. That is perhaps what is most important. And of course, to defend what we have achieved, so traditions need to be defended as well." For her, this was accentuated due to having relatives who were involved in national defence in wartime or some other time, and the personal significance of defending the country was reflected to her opinions. The logic of necessity works also in favour of allocating resources. As the same interviewee said:

I hold it in esteem what they do. Even if it feels like it takes a lot of money, they always talk about expenditure, but they do things and try to keep a step ahead... I believe that they try to keep ahead and be prepared for everything. I also think they need to do that, even though it takes money. (Interviewee 17, [FSD Archive 2021](#))

Another interviewee, also part of the cohort for whom women's military service was not possible (Interviewee 13, 60–70 years, March 2019), understood male conscription as an unproblematic feature of Finnish defence. She did, however, make a distinction regarding women and military service:

I'm not in favour of compulsory military service for women, no. The reason being that for many, it is the time when it is possible to have children, under the age of thirty. But women can give their own share, I think. Particularly in managing crisis situations... So, actual defending in the army I'm not in favour of, even though I'm in favour of voluntary service for women. (Interviewee 13, [FSD Archive 2021](#))

A different view was espoused by an interviewee of the same age group (Interviewee 12, 60–70 years, March 2019), who believed national defence should be obligatory to everyone, both men and women. When asked for more detail, the arguments she put forth concerned a variety of civic skills, not just armed defence: "When you are in the army, you learn a lot of things, not just how to handle weapons. There... if you are not a leader, you learn how to be led. Actually, it is a very important aspect of behaviour. That you don't get mad when someone tells you what to do." ([FSD Archive 2021](#))

A typical way of viewing NATO membership is illustrated by a quote from an interviewee discussing threats concerning Finland (Interviewee 16, 40–50 years, March 2019) and expressing the careful attitude Finland used to have towards naming Russia as a threat:

Well cyber threats, at least, are all over the place, and talked about a lot, concerning companies as well as states. I suppose we need to be careful and speak prudently towards Russia, can't say anything we like... I haven't been following NATO stuff and such, but I have gathered that Finland needs to think about what to say out loud. And which alliances we join and such. (Interviewee 16, [FSD Archive 2021](#))

In the context of voluntary defence training in Finland, a field of civic activity for reservists and civilians wishing to acquire and maintain military and preparedness skills, the civilian women who participate try to overcome, as far as they can, the gaps they perceive in their practical security skills. It is possible that a lack of familiarity with defence-related activities and defence and security policies affects the way female respondents answer quantitative opinion surveys. For the women interviewed who were mainly 50 years and above in age, both gendered expectations in society and material and physical conditions of existence such as age and sex dictated that they were on the margins, as a cohort, of participation in the wider social division of security labour. For younger generations of women, more possibilities are available, in military, professional, and civic roles.

DISCUSSION

In Finland, the willingness to fight – or, in the phrasing of the long-running survey question "the willingness to defend the country" – is better supported by men than women. In addition, older generations support the existing model of male conscription and voluntary military service for women more than younger generations. Among younger generations, support for the current model of conscription is lower than among older generations; gender differences on this question are not statistically significant. Generational difference in attitudes towards male conscription may point towards support for legislative change in the conscription model; support materialising into such change and systemic reform, however, is a different issue. Demographic change may eventually prompt a reconceptualization of defence policies.

The findings of this study suggest that defence-related opinions in Finland are characterised by differences in gender and generation in two central questions, and underline the social

positioning of national defence as a conservative-aligned and male-dominated field. To interpret differences between genders and generations in defence policy opinions in Finland, explanation models such as economic and political marginalisation, value differences, and socialisation into world views need to be considered together. In Finland, there exists a stark and legally sanctioned division of labour when it comes to military duties such as participating in training and preparing for potential combat. For women, situated socialisation into a less direct relationship to national defence is one possible source for fewer positive responses, compared to those of men, in the willingness to defend the country with military means in situations of attack. Due to widely applied and legally sanctioned conscription, the majority of adult male citizens in Finland have first-hand experience of military training. Due to the structured and standardised nature of the institution of the armed forces and the socialisation of the majority of Finnish men into reservists during military service, it is possible that their perceptions and positions on this matter as a sub-population is likely to be more homogenous than that of Finnish women.

Conversely, Finnish women do not usually participate in military training – a possible explanation for the comparative heterogeneity of their perceptions and positions. As participants in quantitative opinions surveys, their responses as a group may have been affected by more sources of variance, producing a different response pattern when compared to males. Thus, women may respond to survey questions more cautiously, resulting in a more frequent manifestation of lower values on the scale. More cautious response patterns to the survey question may not merely reflect opinions, however; they may also point to a different frame of conceptual reference and sense-making.

In the qualitative interviews of women taking part in courses offered in the field of voluntary defence training, there were common themes such as a relative lack of self-identified competence in the evaluation of defence policies. The social division of security labour marked by male conscription in Finland plays a considerable part in this. More broadly, the social division of labour as an empirical, observable fact can be seen in many fields of employment in Finland; professions such as health care, social care, education, and (especially) early and primary education are far more the province of women than men.

We suggest that a contextual approach to explaining the differences in opinion between women and men of different ages highlights situated socialisation. Social and legal structures such as male conscription push men towards professional expertise or non-professional skills in national defence, and to holding strong opinions on defence. On the material and practical level, many areas of work and civic activity are highly gendered. As a male-dominated field, national defence is one of these; this might lead to more direct and affirmative answers from men. Women express more distance, and at times hesitation, to support for defence policy issues, even though at a level of political principle, maintaining structures of national defence are supported by the population.

Together with other Nordic countries, Finland stands out on the international scale when it comes to the willingness to fight (Inglehart et al., 2015); we may understand this as a form of political support for defending the country in times of crisis, not simply combat. The inconsistent and generally nonsignificant results for military alignment in 2000–2020 suggest that there were no gendered or generational divides in opinions on Finland's geopolitical defence positioning.

It may be predicted that a willingness to defend the country will remain comparatively high in international terms, and will probably increase following Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022. Male conscription is a societal norm that might be challenged politically and legislatively in the coming years, if the younger generations continue to support models for the organisation of national defence other to the currently operating model of male conscription and voluntary military service for women.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendixes.** Appendix 1 and 2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.197.s1>

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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