

Heini Larros – Sami Metelinen

ALL-AROUND SECURITY

Finns join NATO as one

- **78% of Finns are in favour of NATO membership. 83 per cent think that because Finland is situated next to an unstable Russia, it is safer for Finland to be a member of NATO than militarily non-aligned.**
- **Only seven per cent feel that Finns have no reason to take a negative attitude towards Russia. 85 per cent disagree.**
- **74 per cent are satisfied with the way our leaders have handled issues related to the war in Ukraine. Helping Ukraine unites Finns across party lines.**
- **More than half (53%) think that Finland should be open to all cooperation within NATO, including military bases in Finland.**

Finns clearly agree that the country's decision to apply for NATO membership in May 2022¹ was the right one. In November, at the time of writing, 28 of NATO's 30 member states had ratified Finland's membership.²

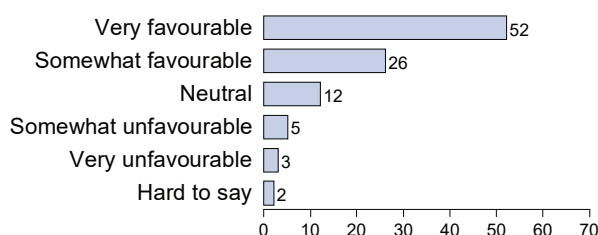
As part of EVA's Values and Attitudes Survey for autumn 2022, Finns were asked for the first time how they feel about our country's membership of NATO. 78 per cent of Finns have a favourable attitude towards NATO membership, while 8 per cent have an unfavourable attitude

(Figure 1). Just over a tenth (12%) take a neutral position on NATO membership.

Favourable attitudes towards NATO membership are also strong, with more than half (52%) having a very favourable attitude.

Attitudes towards NATO membership can be mirrored against support for NATO membership before Finland's decision to apply for membership of the Alliance. In the last Values and Attitudes Survey of support for NATO membership, conducted before Finland's application

Figure 1. What is your current stance on Finland's NATO membership? (%)



at the beginning of March 2022, 60 per cent of Finns were in favour.³ Support for membership grew rapidly after Russia launched its major offensive in Ukraine in February 2022. Only a year

Being pro NATO does not depend on party affiliation.

ago, in the autumn 2021 survey, only 26 per cent were in favour of joining NATO.

The proportion of pro-NATO voters now measured is broadly in line with the support for NATO membership in the last surveys conducted before the application for membership, in which three quarters of Finns were already in favour of joining the Alliance.⁴ In other words, minds have not changed much since the NATO decision.

The strong support for NATO is probably due to the fact that Parliament was quite united in its decision to support the application. Of the 200 members, 188 were in favour and only eight against.⁵

Like Parliament, various demographic groups are also broadly in favour of NATO membership. It is seen as a positive thing by almost all demographics (see separate figure appendix).

Men (83%) are more positive about NATO membership than women (75%). It is noteworthy, however, that while a minority of women were still in favour of NATO membership in the EVA spring 2022 survey, support for NATO membership is now very strong among women as well.

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A clear majority of all demographic groups are in favour of NATO membership, with the exception of Left Alliance supporters, of whom 48 per cent are positive about membership, and far fewer (23%) negative. In addition to supporters, the NATO question was also difficult for the Left Alliance MPs, with six of its 16 MPs voting against membership. Yet the supporters also seem to be gradually warming to the idea of alliance, as only a third (33%) of Left Alliance voters were in favour of membership at the beginning of March.

Among the different parties' voters, the strongest support for NATO membership comes from the National Coalition Party (97%), the Social Democrats (89%) and the Centre (87%).

Finns' support for NATO membership is also strong by international standards. According to a survey conducted by the US-based Pew Research Institute in spring 2022, support for NATO membership was strongest in Poland, where 89 per cent were in favour. In the countries targeted by the survey, the average level of support for NATO membership was 65 per cent. In our neighbour Sweden, support for NATO (79%) was as strong as in Finland today.⁶

The Pew poll found an increase in support for NATO in several countries, probably explained both in Finland and elsewhere by the exceptional brutality of the war of aggression waged by Russia.⁷

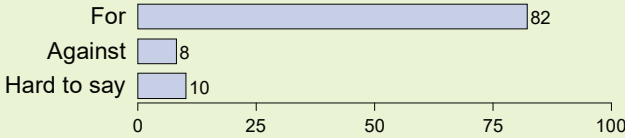
In a referendum, NATO membership would receive clear support

If a referendum on Finland's membership of NATO were held now, 82 per cent would vote in favour, 8 per cent would vote against and 10 per cent could not say how they would vote (Figure 2).

Across all demographic groups, more than half would vote in favour of NATO membership, and the proportion in favour would be slightly higher than the proportion of those with a favourable attitude towards

NATO. This is primarily because many more people (45%) who are neutral about membership would vote for it than against it (8%, see Figure appendix). Even among those who have reservations about NATO, alliance is seen as wiser than non-alliance while there is a war raging in Europe.

Figure 2. If a referendum on Finland's NATO membership were held now, would you vote for or against membership (%)



Support for NATO driven by the Russian threat

The ultimate reason for Finland’s preference for NATO membership is Russia’s actions, which Finns perceive as threatening. 83 per cent think that because Finland is situated next to an unstable Russia, it would be safer for Finland to be a member of NATO than militarily non-aligned (Figure 3). As many as 59 per cent strongly agree with this statement. Only 6 percent reject this claim.

The share of those who see Russia’s instability as a reason for joining NATO has increased by 19 percentage points since last spring, and attitudes have changed completely since the ear-

ly years of the millennium, when Russia was not perceived as a security threat that would require joining the alliance.

Both long-term and short-term changes in attitudes strongly support the view that it was Russia’s military action that turned Finns towards NATO membership. It is also noteworthy that the share of those who consider NATO membership a safer option than non-alignment is slightly higher than the share of those who are in favour of NATO. This is explained by those who are neutral towards membership, with a majority (56%) considering alliance as the right option (see Figure appendix).

Figure 3. “Because Finland is situated next to an unstable Russia, it would be safer for Finland to be a member of NATO than non-aligned” (%)

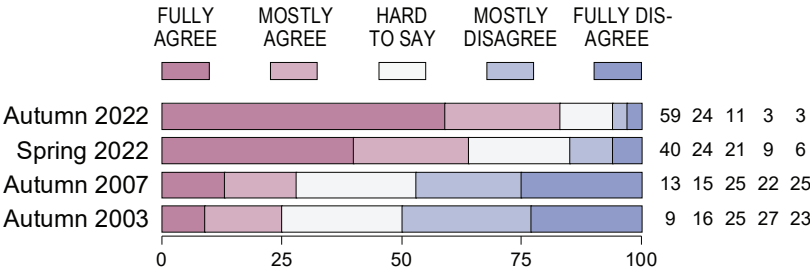
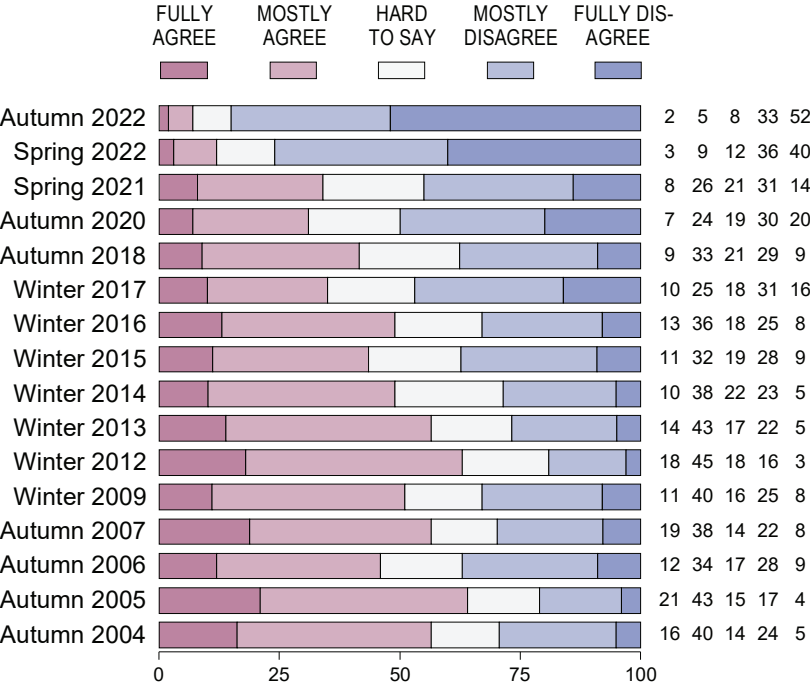


Figure 4. “While Russia has its own problems, nowadays Finns have no reason to take a negative attitude towards our big neighbour” (%)



Finnish attitudes towards Russia have become more negative than ever since the war in Ukraine. Only 7 per cent feel that there is at present no reason for Finns to have a negative attitude towards their large neighbour, even though Russia does have its own problems (Figure 4). 85 per cent have a negative view of Russia.

The proportion of those with a positive attitude towards Russia has continued to fall from the previous year's figure, and the share of those with a negative attitude has continued to grow. The increase in the negative attitude towards Russia since its invasion of Ukraine has been exceptionally quick, steep and broad-based. Compared with the same survey conducted a year and a half earlier, negative attitudes have grown by as much as 40 per cent. Such a large change in attitude is very exceptional in the history of the Values and Attitudes Survey.

In all population groups, a clear majority has a negative view of Russia, and there are very few whose view is understanding. The most positive attitudes are among those who are negative towards NATO, of whom more than a third (35%) have a positive attitude towards Russia, but even of them, half (50%) take a negative stance.

More security from NATO

Russia's invasion of Ukraine turned Finns against Russia and pro NATO. However, this does not mean that Finns think that NATO alone will solve Finland's security problems.

A third of Finns (33%) feel that NATO membership does not guarantee that other countries will eventually help Finland during a real crisis (Figure 5), while 45 per cent disagree with this. This view has remained virtually unchanged since last spring.

Although Finns are strongly pro NATO, they are more reserved in their expectation of assis-

tance. On the other hand, the reservation is not very widespread in any population group. The expected exception to this rule is made only by those with a negative view of NATO (82%), who do not trust the help of its member states at all (see Figure appendix).

Of the party voter groups, supporters of Movement Now⁸ are the least confident that help will come when needed, with 52 per cent of them expecting NATO countries to renege on their commitments, and there is also fairly widespread scepticism among Finns Party voters (46%). For these groups, attitudes may be explained by a general lack of trust in international institutions.

Those who are most confident in the help of NATO countries are the voters of the National Coalition Party (65% reject the claim), SDP (55%) and Centre Party (55%), men (55%), 56–65 year olds (53%), people with an academic degree (53%), people living in small municipalities (52%) and entrepreneurs (52%). More than half of these groups reject the claim that NATO's security guarantees would not hold in an actual crisis.

This wariness about receiving outside help may go back at least in part to the Winter War, when Finland did not receive direct military aid from foreign powers against the Soviet invasion. On the other hand, the experience of being left alone has also been used as a reason for supporting NATO membership.

In fact, Finns look to NATO above all for additional security, and they do not want to see national defence downgraded. The majority (55%) feel that Finland must be able to ensure its security on its own under all circumstances, because other countries will not help (Figure 6). Just under a third (31%) disagree.

The perception of the primacy of national defence has strengthened somewhat since last

People are not totally convinced help will come.

Figure 5. "NATO membership does not guarantee that other countries will eventually help Finland during a real crisis" (%)

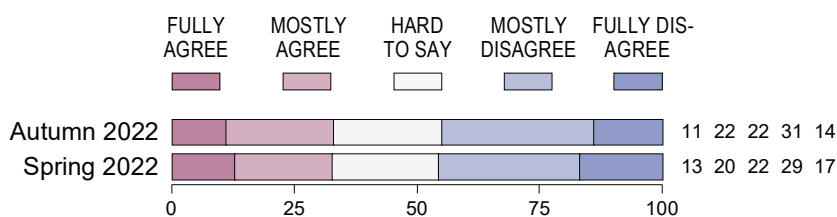
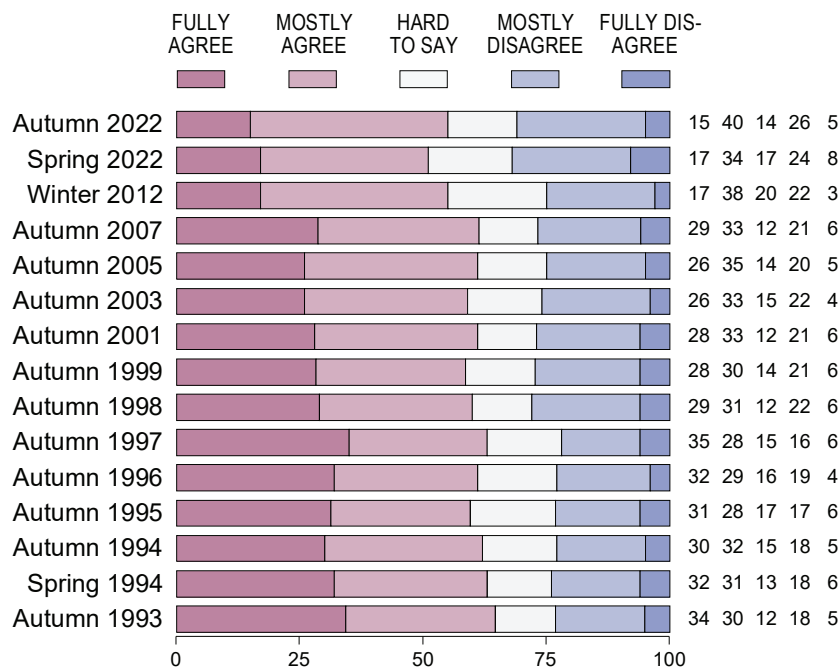


Figure 6. “Finland must be able to ensure its security on its own under all circumstances, because other countries will not help” (%)



spring, which shows that Finns have internalised NATO’s idea of common defence: each country is primarily responsible for its own defence, but NATO obliges other countries to help to the best of their ability.^{9,10}

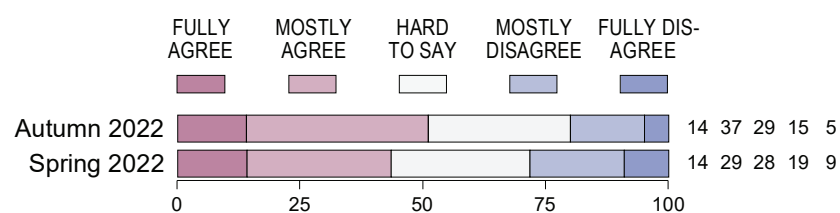
The long time series of results also reflects Finns’ strong will to defend their country¹¹ and their commitment to the conscript army. In the early 2000s, many countries abandoned conscription, and in Finland people have worried that NATO membership might reduce support for conscription.^{12,13}

One of NATO’s key protections is the security it provides through deterrence: together, the Alliance is so strong that an attack against it would be unwise under any circumstances. Historically, NATO’s deterrent effect has worked: no state has attacked a NATO country.

Indeed, half of Finns’ (51%) believe that NATO’s security guarantees are such a robust deterrent that no one dares to threaten its member countries (Figure 7). Only a fifth (20%) do not believe in the absolute deterrent effect of NATO’s security guarantees, but quite a few (29%) do not know what to think.

Since last spring, confidence in NATO’s deterrence has increased by eight percentage points. The increase in confidence is probably due to the failure of Russia’s military action in Ukraine, but also to the determined help for Ukraine from the United States, the main NATO member. Messages from various NATO countries about military assistance to Finland, in case Finland was attacked even before NATO membership had been ratified by all countries, have also surely been significant.¹⁴

Figure 7. “NATO’s security guarantees are such a robust deterrent that no one dares to threaten its member countries” (%)



Welcome, military bases

When Finland submitted its application to join NATO, the details of membership were left for later negotiations. One of the key details is whether NATO bases could be located in Finland.

More than half (53%) of the survey’s respondents feel that Finland should be open to all cooperation within NATO, including locating military bases in Finland (Figure 8). Only a quarter (25%) reject the open cooperation policy, including bases.

Voters who are particularly open to cooperation and bases are those who vote for the National Coalition Party (84%), those in leading positions (69%), men (68%) and Finns Party voters (68%). Those who vote for the Left Alliance (51%) and the Swedish People’s Party¹⁵ (46%) are more reserved about open cooperation.

Attitudes towards military bases in Finland are also favourable when the question is turned around and directed specifically at bases. Only 28 percent of Finns believe that permanent NATO military bases should not be located in Finland while Finland is a member of NATO (Figure 9). 42 percent would allow bases, but as many as 29 percent do not express a preference.

The high percentage of those who are not sure about their position indicates that the attitude towards military bases is quite open. The majority do not unconditionally demand a military base in our country, but if one were offered, the percentage of those who would reject a NATO base outright would appear to be moderate.

In practice, it has been particularly difficult for new NATO countries to have bases located on their territory. The Baltic countries lobbied NATO for years to get bases. However, the invasion of Crimea changed the situation and in 2016 NATO decided to establish permanent NATO battlegroups in the Baltic States and Poland, and the groups were established in 2017. The war in Ukraine has already increased the presence of NATO troops in countries such as Estonia, so the situation regarding NATO bases may change.

The Finnish attitude to NATO cooperation seems to be just as pragmatic as the Finns’ conversion to NATO supporters. Finland’s incentive to join NATO is Russia, which has become a threat. In the new global state of affairs, Finns are ready at least to consider all additional measures to mitigate the Russian threat.

Figure 8. “Finland should be open to all cooperation within NATO, including military bases in Finland” (%)

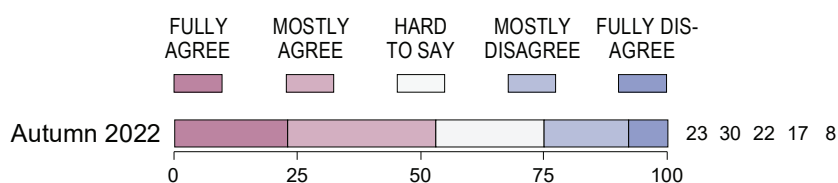
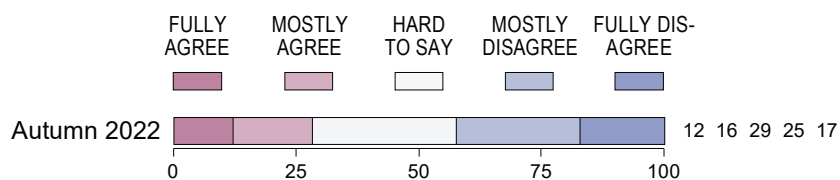


Figure 9. “As a member of NATO, Finland should not have permanent NATO military bases in our country” (%)



Helping Ukraine unites Finns across party lines

Almost three out of four Finns (74%) are satisfied with the way our leaders have handled issues related to the war in Ukraine (Figure 10). Only 11 per cent see something to criticise.

Majorities across all demographic groups are satisfied with the action taken by decision-makers on the war in Ukraine, although as expected, opposition party supporters are somewhat less satisfied than government party supporters (see Figure appendix). Helping Ukraine has clearly united Finns across party lines.

Finland has provided both humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine, and Defence Minister Antti Kaikkonen said in mid-November that Finland was already preparing a tenth aid package, which would be larger than the previous ones.^a

The relatively high level of satisfaction with Finland's efforts to help Ukraine is reflected in the fact that only a quarter (24%) of Finns think that Finland has not supported Ukraine sufficiently in the war against the aggressor, Russia (Figure 11). 47 per cent reject this claim.

Figure 10. "I am satisfied with the way our decision-makers have handled the war in Ukraine" (%)

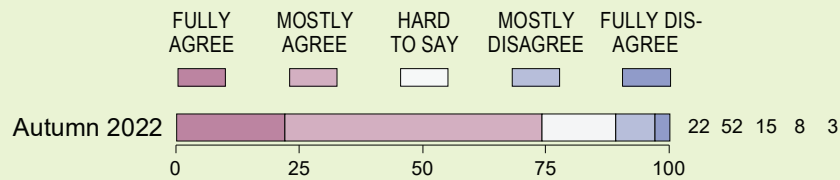
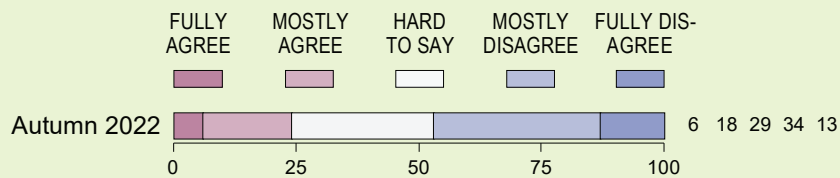


Figure 11. "Finland has not supported Ukraine sufficiently in the war against Russia, which attacked it" (%)



^a MTV (2022).

References

- 1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022).
- 2 Yle (2022a).
- 3 Haavisto (2022a).
- 4 In a separate EVA survey (14 April–2 May 2022), 74 per cent supported NATO membership (see Haavisto 2022b). In a survey conducted by Yle in early May (4–6 May 2022), 76 per cent were in favour of membership (Yle 2022b).
- 5 Six MPs of the Left Alliance, one of the Finns Party and one of the Valta Kuuluu Kansalle (Power Belongs to the People) group opposed the application for NATO membership. See Helsingin Sanomat (2022a).
- 6 Pew Research Center (2022).
- 7 See for example Yle (2022c).
- 8 Due to the small size of the group and the low number of respondents, the results are indicative.
- 9 Ilta-Sanomat (2022).
- 10 NATO (1949).
- 11 See Metelinen (2022).
- 12 Demokraatti (2017).
- 13 Helsingin Sanomat (2022b).
- 14 See Helsingin Sanomat (2022c) and Yle (2022d).
- 15 Due to the small size of the group and the low number of respondents, the results are indicative.

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How the survey was conducted

The results are based on the responses of 2,088 people. The error margin of the results is 2–3 percentage points in each direction on the level of the entire population. The data were collected from 19 October to 31 October 2022. The respondents represent the population aged 18–79 across all of Finland (excl. Åland). The material was compiled using an online survey by Taloustutkimus and weighted so as to represent the population according to age, gender, place of residence, education, profession or position, sector and party affiliation. The statistical analysis of the material was carried out and the graphics of the results created by Pentti Kiljunen at Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy. The results and their more detailed itemisations by population group are available on EVA's website. EVA has conducted the Survey on Values and Attitudes since 1984.

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