



Guarantees for multifold security concerns: Finns' expectations for security and defense policy in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential elections

S.M. Amadae, Hanna Wass, Jari Eloranta, Tuomas Forsberg, Mika Hentunen, Ilmari Käihkö, Marianne Laine, Julius Lehtinen, Janne Tukiainen, Leo Valkama, Johanna Vuorelma & Albert Weckman

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Introduction

In this report, we examine the views of Finnish people on security and defense policy ahead of the presidential election. The review is part of the “*Dynamic Support for Security and Defense Policy (NATOpoll)*” research project funded by Kone Foundation, where the same respondents are interviewed at regular intervals and the development of their views is compared. The previous survey was carried out before the Vilnius summit in June 2023 (Amadae et al. 2023, Wass et al. 2023). The information used in this report was collected between 10 and 23 November 2023 (see appendix 1). The thermostatic model (Wlezien 1995) has been widely used in political research. It has identified that public opinion changes dynamically in relation to the security environment, policy actions, as well as to the frames through which politics is interpreted. Politicians in turn seek to control these interpretive frames using different rhetorical, symbolic, and performative means (Baumgartner and Jones 1991).

The security and defense policy environment in Finland has changed significantly in the past two years. In December 2021, Russia announced a set of treaty proposals, in which it repeated its demands for security guarantees and stopping NATO's eastern expansion (Käihkö 2023). The demand to put an end to the expansion of NATO, perceived by Russia as a security threat, specifically mentioned Ukraine. However, it also expressed that this stance extends to “other states” in the region. Within NATO and the EU, Russia’s actions were seen as an indication of the intensification of a longer-term process relating to its frontline goals. The events leading to the increased tensions include the support expressed by NATO in 2008 for the membership aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia, the occupation of Crimea in February 2014 and subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine (Forsberg and Patomäki 2023). Finland strongly rejected Russia’s demands. In his 2022 New Year's speech, President Niinistö emphasized that all states have the right to national self-determination and stated that Finland's military alliance and possible application for NATO membership fell solely within the scope of national decision-making (President of the Republic of Finland 2022).

In early 2022, both the United States and NATO negotiated with Russia, but they ended without results. Russia began its large-scale attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This was the largest war in Europe since the Second World War, and it quickly became clear that it was necessary for Finland to re-evaluate its security and defense policy choices. In April 2022, Government published a report regarding changes in the security environment (Finnish Government 2022a). This report partially laid out the context for the report on the possibility of Finland joining NATO, published in May 2022 (Finnish Government 2022b). After an intensive chain of events, Finland delivered a declaration of interest in acceding to NATO on mid-May and signed the accession protocols together with Sweden on July 5, 2022 (Nurmi 2023). The ratification of Finland’s membership took eight months because Turkey and Hungary extended the process. Yet, on April 4, 2023 Finland was accepted as a member of the defense alliance in the accession ceremony held in Brussels. In the Vilnius summit in July 2023, for the first time, Finland participated as a full member of NATO. The membership of Sweden, however, is still awaiting ratification by Turkey and Hungary.

During the fall of 2023, the global security situation has become more tense. The geopolitical power struggle is increasingly structured between the US-allied constitutional democracies (Friedberg 2023), the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, China, and South Africa; with Argentina, Egypt,

Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia newly invited to join the intergovernmental organization), and the Global South, which bears the harshest brunt of the consequences of the climate crisis. There are also significant military, socioeconomic and environmental inequalities between blocs. NATO's member states represent approximately 12 percent of the global population, \$43,000 annual GDP per capita in 2022 (Global Economy 2023) (with the world's average being approximately \$12,600/year in 2022 (Macrotrends 2023)), 1.26 trillion USD of military spending in 2023 (Statistica 2023) (with a global total of 2.2 trillion USD in 2023 (SIPRI 2023)), and contribute approximately 20 percent of global carbon emissions (Lin et al. 2023; Worldometer 2023).

The competition between the blocs is not restricted to economic policies, but also extends to competition in military capabilities. The divisions between the blocs are visible in how different states position themselves in relation to the different crises occurring around the globe. As well, the blocs are not internally united, since a variety of different tensions exist within them. Signs of such internal tensions are visible in the recent of waning of economic and military support for Ukraine (currently at 222 billion USD in aid since 2021 (IFW 2023) compared to 204 billion USD of all official foreign humanitarian aid in 2022 (OECD 2023), as the war drags on in apparent stalemate.

Continued military and financial support would be necessary for Ukraine to achieve victory on the assumption of its ability to achieve military advances through continual escalation until Russia concedes (Lavikainen 2023, 7–8). In early December 2023, the US Senate decided not to grant Ukraine a 60 billion USD aid package. The Republicans who voted against the aid package, linked the support for Ukraine to their domestic political agenda, which included further securitizing the US's southern border with Mexico. They positioned the reforms to US immigration law and border control as a condition for supporting Ukraine. Donald Trump's possible candidacy and victory in the November 2024 presidential elections further increases uncertainty about the commitment of the US in guaranteeing European security, defending constitutional democracy, and providing effective leadership of NATO. With these observations in mind, it is worth mentioning that in December, the US Congress approved a bill barring any president from unilaterally withdrawing from NATO without Congressional approval.

Among the EU member states, in addition to Hungarian President Viktor Orbán, Slovakia's new Prime Minister Robert Fico, as well as Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom who won the elections in 2023, have been critical of the arms aid given to Ukraine. Poland had ceased sending arms to Ukraine in the fall of 2023, but may resume under their newly elected Prime Minister Donald Tusk. In some European countries, a clear imbalance can be observed between governments with a strong positive attitude towards supporting Ukraine and citizens who are significantly more reserved (Stolle and Gareau-Parquette 2023). During the summit between EU leaders in mid-December, Hungary blocked the 50 billion euro aid package to Ukraine, however, in the summit the leaders agreed to formally open membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova.

From the point of view of Finland and other neighboring states of Russia, the question of encouraging or directly pressuring Ukraine to commence peace negotiations is fundamentally related to the critical question of whether the use of military force can be accepted as a means of changing state borders and as the final arbiter of conflicting interests. This has also led to a discussion over whether Finland needs to improve its military preparation (Yle 2023a). This coincides with concrete actions, such as

Finland's recent agreement to acquire the David's Sling anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system from Israel (Fabian et al. 2023). ABM systems have been regarded by some strategists as being potentially escalatory for undermining the mutuality and symmetry of nuclear deterrence (Bruce et al. 1997; Rukavishnikov 2008).

In the beginning of October, the extremist organization Hamas, which originated with Israel's support, attacked Israel and took hostages. Israel subsequently engaged in intensive airstrikes and ground attacks, which shifted international attention from Ukraine to the conflict in the Middle East. The situation has exacerbated differences of opinion over Israeli versus Palestinian sovereignty, self-determination, and culpability for war crimes in both the EU and the UN. At the same time, in the case of Ukraine, the issue of civilian casualties has become ever more prominent, as well as tough conscription policies prohibiting male emigration given the national mandate to field troops. In particular, the countries in the Global South have criticized the EU for upholding double standards because it sought to remain neutral regarding the war and has refrained from unequivocally condemning Israel's military actions and the civilian casualties. Respecting the issue of double standards, the EU has engaged in some self-criticism, especially the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, has emphasized that all civilian victims should be treated with the same seriousness. The indifference shown by both Hamas and Israel towards the rules of war, and the inability of the international community to intervene in their violation, has raised the broader question of the functionality of the international rules and treaty-based system (Kauffmann 2023).

The eight months following the ratification of the Finland's NATO membership have also been a tense time in terms of Finland's security. In the beginning of October 2023, the discovery that the Balticconnector gas pipeline and data cables in the Gulf of Finland had broken, sparked a discussion on the possible involvement of Russia and China in the events. A Chinese ship is known to have damaged undersea data cables with its anchor in Taiwan in February 2023. Findings from the Balticconnector investigation suggest that the damage was caused by the anchor of the same Chinese cargo ship. However, the investigation regarding the responsibilities and the intentionality of the act is ongoing. The same has applied to the explosion of the Nord Stream gas pipeline in September 2022, which some experts speculate was committed by Ukrainian sympathizers (Ashford 2023; Danner 2023).

In the beginning of November 2023, the Finnish Border Guard publicly announced that, since August, significantly more asylum seekers from countries of the Global South, had begun to arrive at the border crossing points in Southeast Finland and North Karelia without the required travel documents. Through the Prime Minister's announcement, the Orpo government, described the events as an "influence operation" in which the Russian authorities systematically transport asylum seekers to Finnish border stations and threaten Finland's security (Suomen Eduskunta 2023). The Government first decided on the partial closure of the border crossings for three months, a week later a decision was made to close the entire eastern border until mid-December. The decision was preceded by an extensive discussion on the compatibility of compliance with the rule of law and international human rights treaties and guaranteeing national security. The point of view in which human rights are perceived as secondary to national security concerns, rather than mutually supportive, has been considered particularly problematic (Mattila and Pirjatanniemi 2023). In mid-December, during an extraordinary session, the Government decided to extend the border restrictions for a month, with the exception of two northern

border crossing points. On December 14, the hybrid operation as deemed to be ongoing, and the Government decided to close the entire eastern border for another month. At the same time, Norway's border crossing at Storskog with Russia remains open, with restrictions (Politiet 2023).

The upcoming presidential elections beginning in late January 2024 are thus being held in a context characterized by both broader global political turmoil and concrete security risks in Finland. In the background, there are broad threats affecting the whole of humanity including the climate crisis, existential risk of nuclear war, loss of species diversity and natural habitat, and deepening economic and social inequalities within and between regions. The combination of these Anthropocene developments contribute to global pressures on human populations, especially on migration from the south to the north. Throughout the 2020s, there has been a tendency that successive and reinforcing crises come on top of previous unresolved problems (World Economic Forum 2023). An environment characterized by a multitude of crises causes worry, lack of perspective and a variety of different security needs, especially in the younger generations. This situation strengthens a paradigm of comprehensive security incorporating a broad conceptualization of security from military to climate, pandemic, terrorism, resource scarcity, and migration (Security Committee 2023) and also expands the spectrum of actors involved in crisis management to include, for example, national central banks, which played a significant role in handling the corona pandemic (Batemann and van 't Klooster 2023; Gabor 2021; Lindberg and Ronkainen 2023).

The upcoming Finnish elections, in which nine candidates are running for presidency, offer an opportunity to have a versatile and in-depth discussion on foreign, security and defense policy issues. What are the key security threats today and in the future; how can Finland, as part of the Western alliance, prevent and influence their realization; and what kind of security policy choices best support this? The president's constitutional powers are focused on foreign and defense policy, and the president also represents Finland at NATO summits. This is also reflected in the voters' expectations of the role of the president. In a survey carried out by Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA (2023a), "foreign relations professional", along with acting as the spokesperson of the nation, was seen as the most important role of the president. Reflecting the voters' evaluations, foreign policy experience is also emphasized in the profiles of the candidates. The importance placed on foreign and defense policy in the presidential elections is further heightened by the fact that the parliamentary elections held in the spring of 2023 were strongly focused on national economic policy. Thus far, the role of NATO-Finland in the rapidly changing geopolitical and economic environment has not been a central theme in any elections, or within the reach of citizens' democratic control.

Finland's role as a NATO member is still in the process of developing and, in addition, new security issues, which need to be resolved appear on the political agenda. To ensure that the decisions that are being made are democratically sustainable, it is important to have an open public debate about these issues even if that may imply that tensions emerge. It is common that when discussing national security issues, consensus is fostered, however, this may weaken the knowledge base of decision-making and the capacity to engage in farsighted politics that take into consideration future generations (Wass 2023). In such situations, certain political frameworks may be prioritized as was the case of the NATO debates in the spring of 2022. In these debates, the military alliance was framed as a community of shared values. Therefore, other considerations, such as the risk of nuclear escalation may become a secondary political framework.

In addition to this, in crisis situations, the concentration of decision-making and secrecy is at times justified as necessary in order to ensure speed and efficiency in decision-making. For example, the Finnish Government justified its quick countermeasures to Russia's actions at the eastern border by stating that it had received disclosed intelligence information about the operation, which impeded public debate on the situation.

The development of support for NATO membership

We first examine the development of the support for NATO among Finns by socio-economic status (Figures 1a and 1b), political orientation (Figure 1c) and party affiliation (Figure 1d). The basis of the comparison is our survey data collected in June (n=2,877). Out of the original group, 2,038 Finns (71%) responded to the survey conducted in November. The question formulation is the same as the one used by NATO in its own citizen surveys. In NATO's most recent survey conducted in April-May 2023, the defense alliance's support had practically remained unchanged compared to the previous survey, conducted a year earlier, which showed the highest support figures in the history of the survey. In the most recent survey, on average, 70 percent of the citizens of the member countries would vote in favor of staying in NATO, 14 percent in favor of leaving, and 16 percent could not say their position (NATO Audience Research 2023). Support in individual member countries has not changed significantly since the previous survey, with the exception of Hungary, where the proportion of those voting in favor of membership has decreased from 84 percent to 74 percent (NATO Audience Research 2023).

Figure 1a. The development of support for NATO membership by gender, age and education (%).

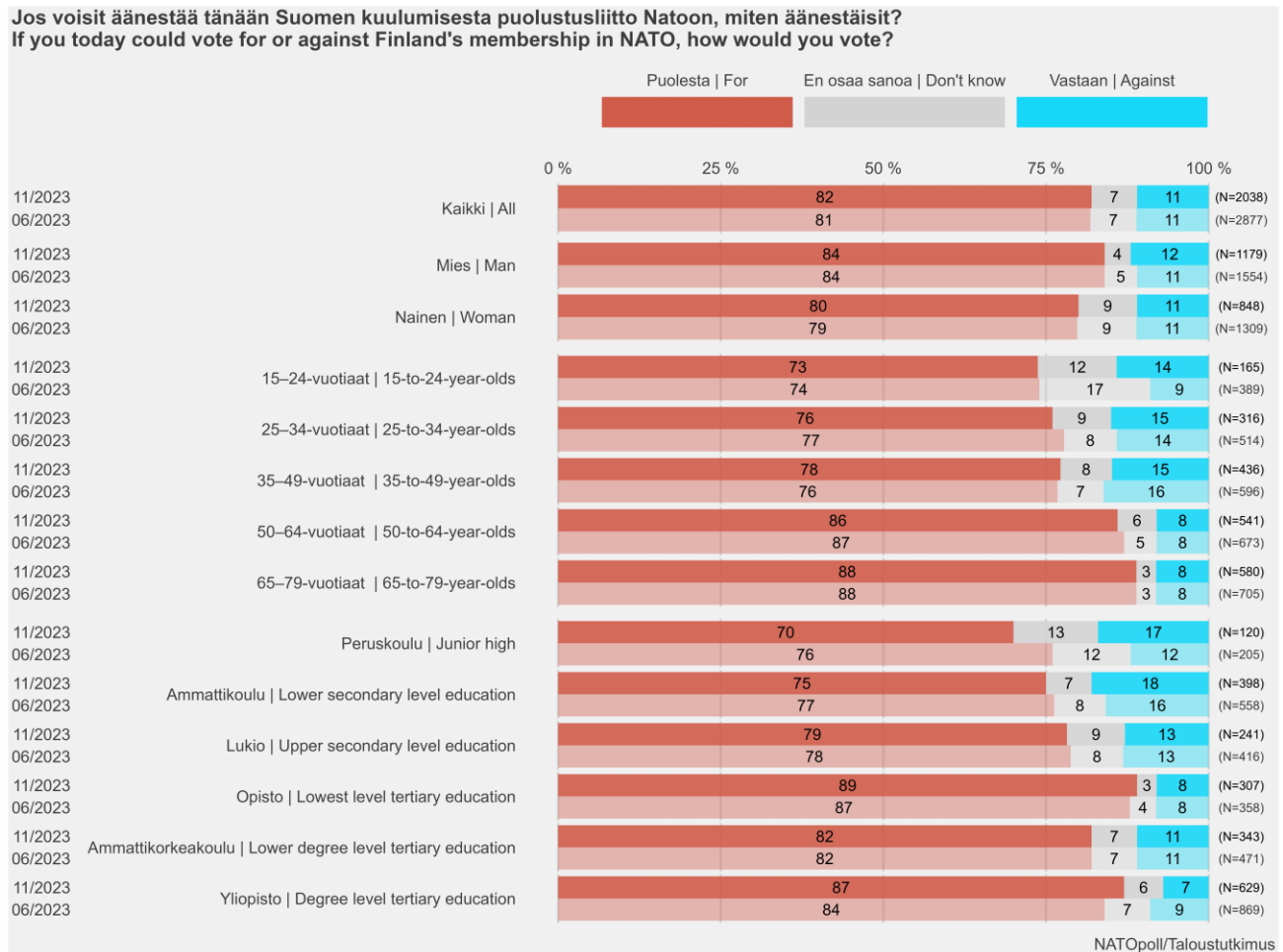
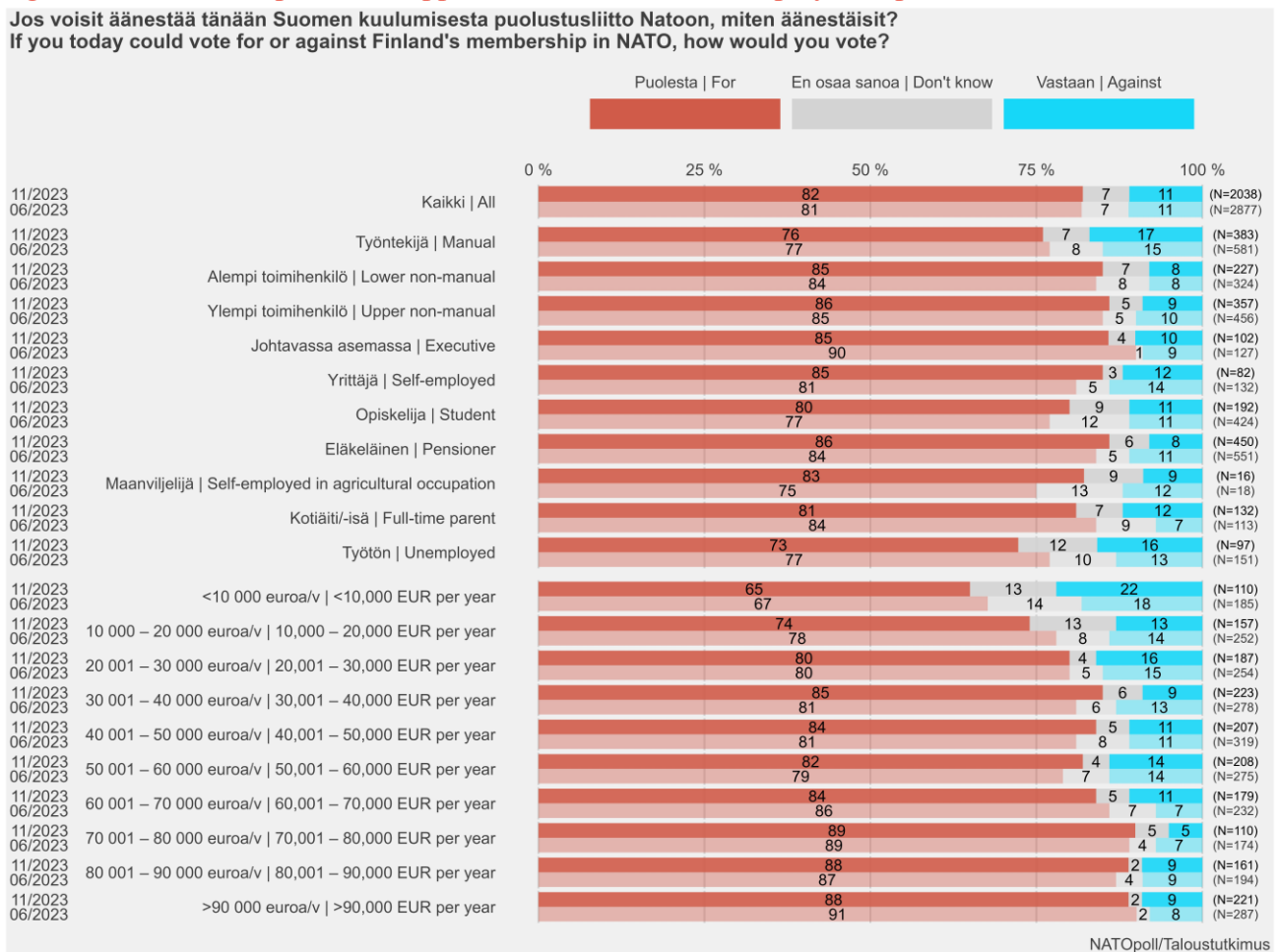


Figure 1a illustrates that the observations regarding the stability of the support for the NATO membership also applies to the case of Finland: the support for NATO has remained relatively unchanged compared to the findings in our previous survey, conducted before the Vilnius summit. In this regard, the findings of our panel-based data differ from the findings of a survey conducted by the Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA (2023b). The findings of the EVA survey suggest that following the dip in support during the spring of 2023, the support for NATO is now at an all-time high. Finns also hold more positive attitudes towards NATO than the average of all NATO countries.

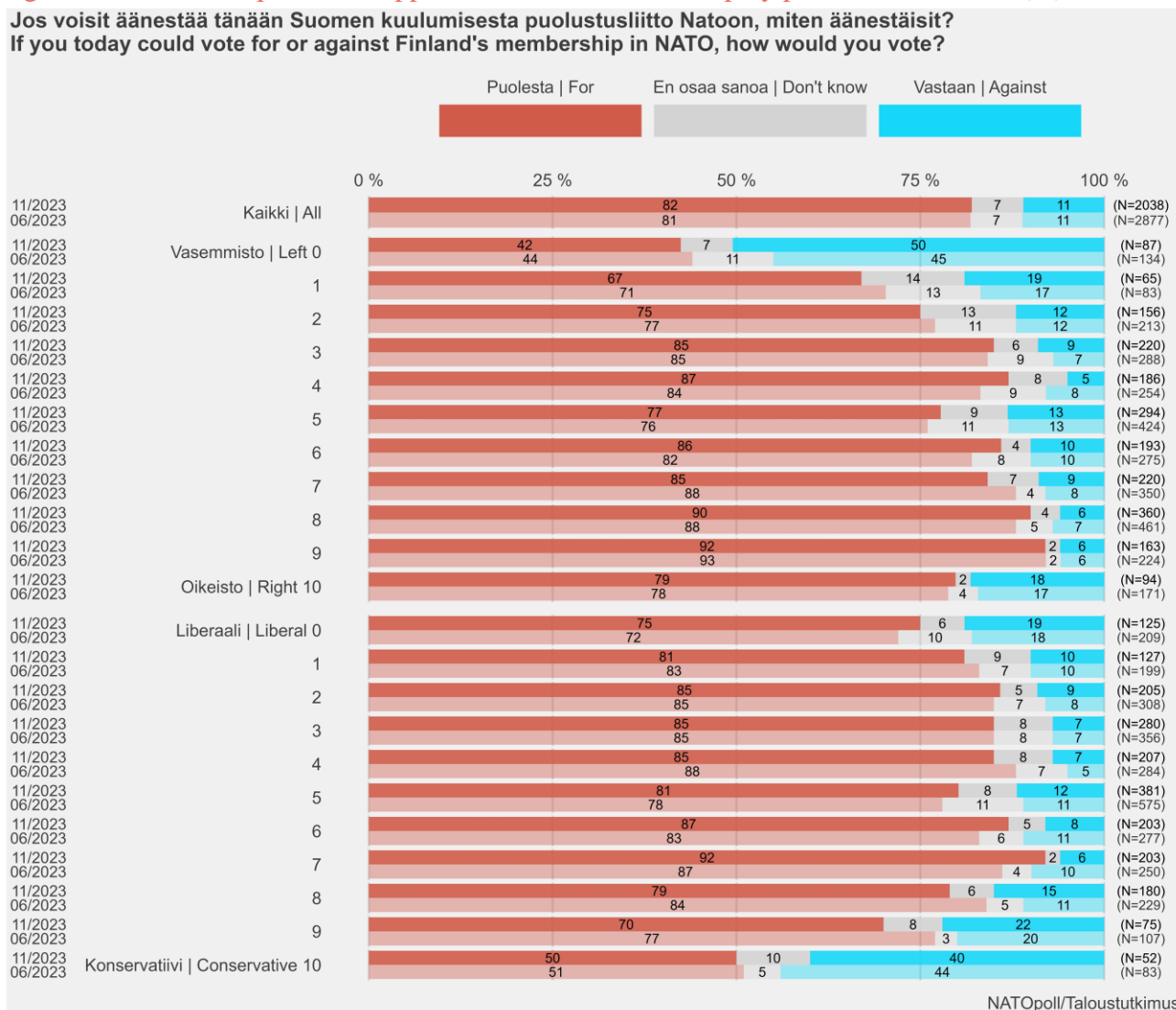
Figure 1b. The development of support for NATO membership by occupational class and income (%).



Figures 1a and 1b show that the socio-economic differences in the attitudes towards the membership of the defense union have remained unchanged. The highly educated, those in upper occupational groups, and the highest earners demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes towards the membership than those who have completed junior high school education, manual laborers, the unemployed, and citizens at the bottom of the income distribution.

Previous studies have also highlighted differences between educational groups in the support for NATO (Weckman 2023). The only noticeable change that has occurred is that support for NATO has dropped significantly in five months (–6%-units) among those who have completed junior high school education. The support for NATO was already lower-than-average within this group in the previous survey (Figure 1a).

Figure 1c. The development of support for NATO membership by political orientation (%).

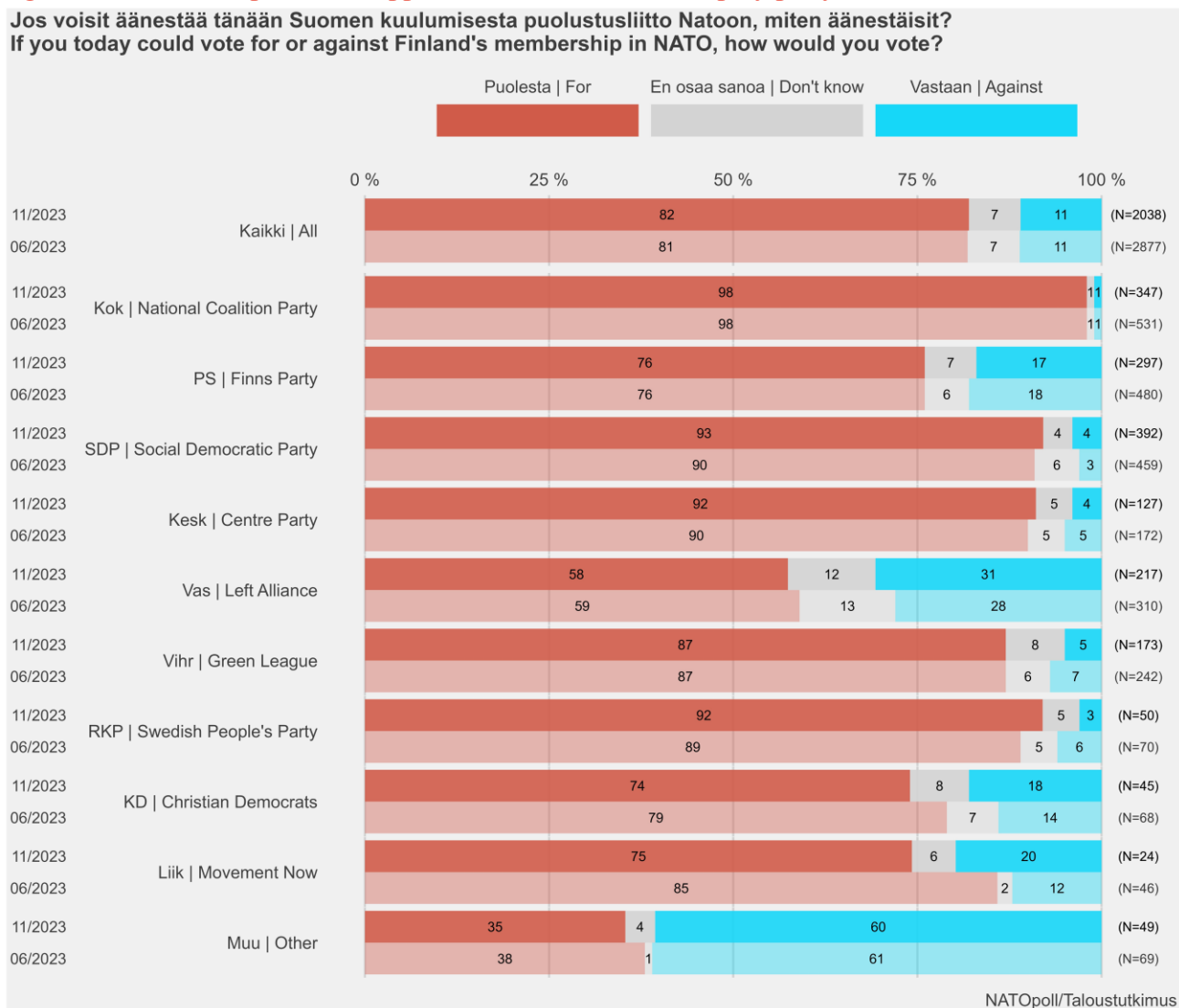


As was the case in the previous survey conducted before the Vilnius Summit, the attitude towards Finland's NATO membership also divides Finns according to their political orientation. Respondents were surveyed according to how they conceived their political orientation both along the left-right spectrum (economic dimension), and the liberal-conservative spectrum (social-cultural dimension).

Figure 1c shows that positive attitudes towards NATO are highest among those respondents that consider themselves to be on the political right (economic dimension) of the left-right spectrum (Figure 1c). Half of those who consider themselves to be completely on the left-end of the spectrum (economic dimension) would vote against Finland's NATO membership, while a large majority of those who describe themselves to be on the very right end of the spectrum (economic dimension) are more strongly in favor of Finland's NATO membership.

On the (social-cultural) liberal-conservative spectrum, those who consider themselves to be at the center show highest support for NATO membership. Those respondents who considered themselves to be on the very conservative end of the (social-cultural) liberal-conservative spectrum, were most critical of the Finnish NATO membership.

Figure 1d. The development of support for NATO membership by party choice (%).



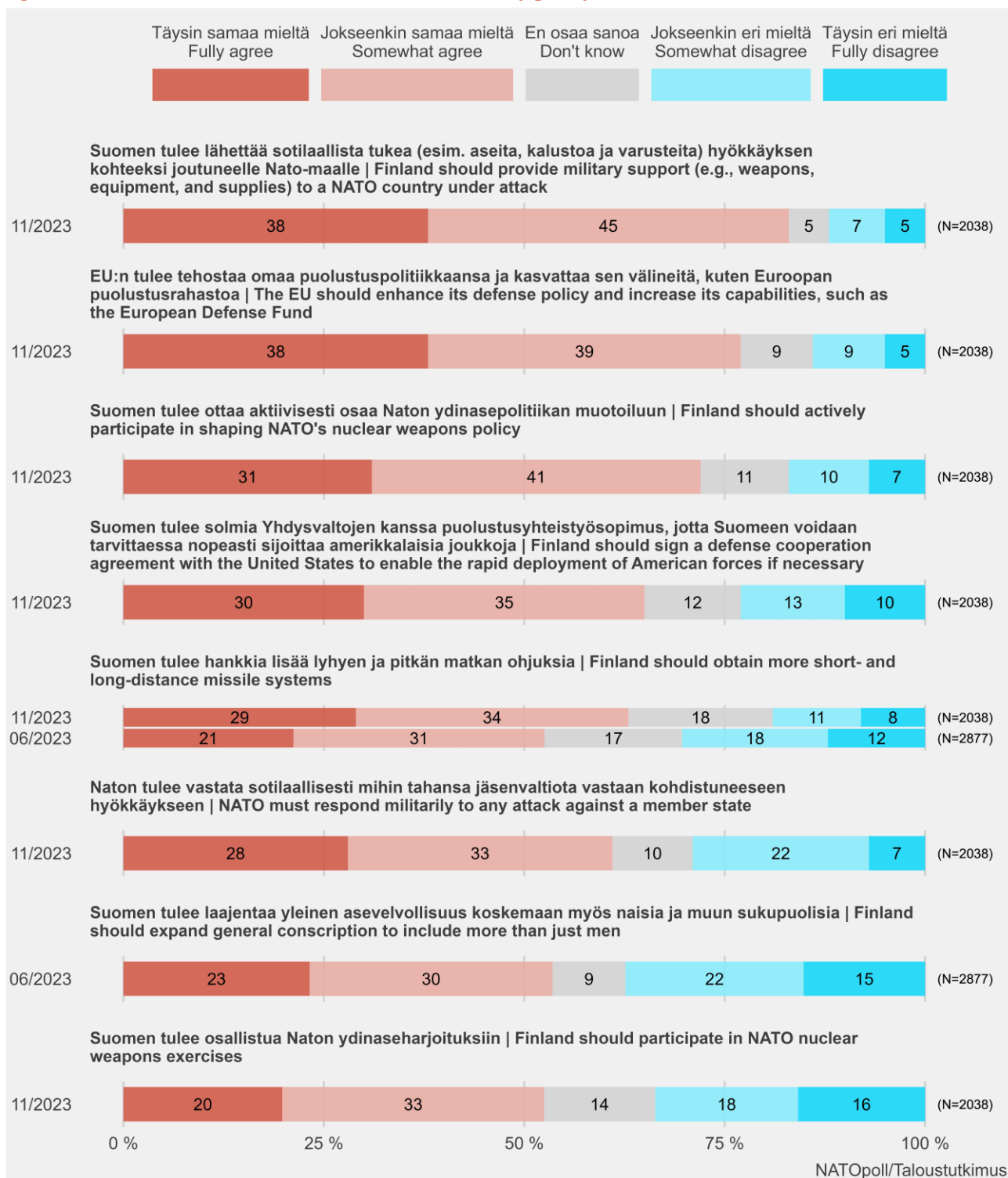
The attitudes towards the NATO membership are not divided along the lines of those who vote for the parties that are currently in the government coalition and those that vote for parties that are currently in the opposition (Figure 1d). There is considerable dispersion within both groups. Within the government coalition, practically all of the voters of the National Coalition Party support Finland's NATO membership (98%). Support is also very high among the Swedish People's Party voters (92%). By contrast, the attitude of the voters of the other two parties in the government coalition, the Finns Party (76%) and the Christian Democrats (74%), is clearly more critical.

Out of the parties in the opposition, the voters of the Left Alliance are the most critical: roughly 50 percent of the voters support Finland's NATO membership. Supporters of the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party widely hold positive attitudes towards Finland's NATO membership. It is also noteworthy that the attitudes of the voters of the biggest parties regarding NATO membership have remained remarkably stable. However, only time will tell if these attitudes reflect the honeymoon stage of NATO membership or if they are indicative of an enduring commitment to NATO as a permanent part of Finland's defensive posture.

Preferences for Finland's security and defense policy decisions

Figures 2a and 2b examine citizens' preferences security and defense policy solutions concerning NATO, Europe and Finland. Some of the questions are the same as in the previous survey, and some are themes that became especially relevant during the fall.

Figure 2a. Preferences for Finland's defense and security policy choices (%).



The first insight that can be drawn from the combination of Figure 2a and 2b relates to the mission of NATO and the role that Finland should adopt as a member of the defense alliance. The views of the citizens reflect a sense of reciprocity in that Finland is considered to have an obligation to support other members of the defense alliance when necessary. Four-fifths of the respondents either completely or somewhat agree with the statement that Finland should send weapons, equipment and supplies to a

NATO country under attack. Similarly, a majority (61%) expects NATO to respond militarily to any attack against a member state, however, the majority of respondents (61 %) also consider that member states should have the discretion to determine the type of assistance to be provided. This can also be interpreted as an indication of the high level of the public's NATO awareness: the expectations placed on NATO are in line with the guidelines regarding its operating principles.

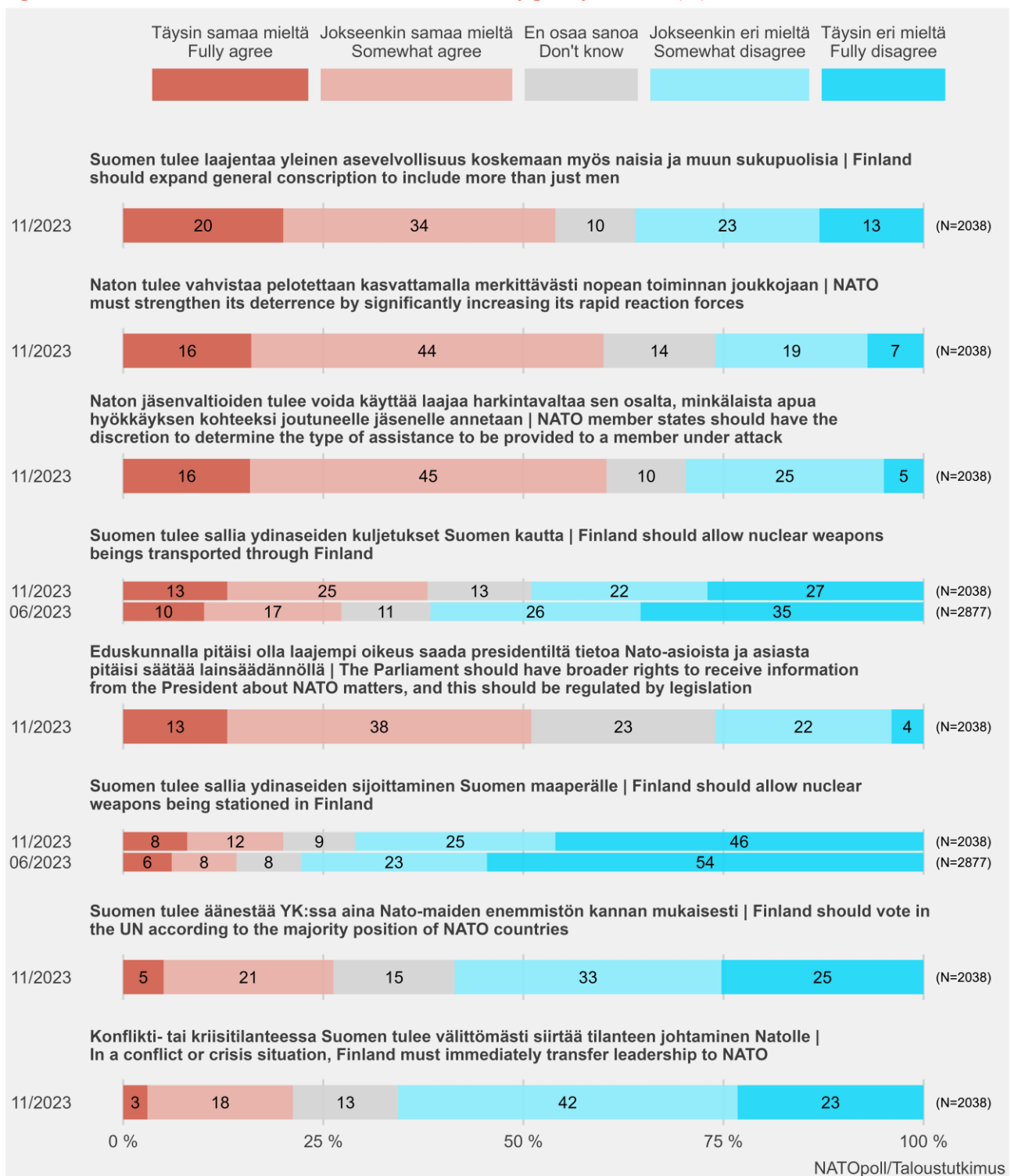
The majority of Finns also want a strong NATO: 60 percent considers that NATO should significantly increase its deterrence by strengthening its rapid reaction forces. In addition, it is seen as important that Finland is an active member of the defense alliance. Nearly three quarters (72%) consider that Finland should take an active part in shaping NATO's nuclear weapon policy. Half of the respondents think that Finland should also participate in NATO's nuclear weapons exercises. This is contrary to the recommendation of a Finnish expert group researching the nuclear weapons issue. According to these recommendations, NATO's conventional armed forces offer sufficient security to defend against attacks (Yle 2023b). In this respect, there are many similarities in the attitudes towards Finland's NATO membership, and its EU membership, especially in the early days: compliance with institutional rules is perceived as important, and respondents want Finland to be involved in all centers of decision-making and in the negotiation when rules are formed (Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003). However, the ability of Finland to maintain independent discretion in decision-making is perceived to be important. Only a quarter of the respondents (26%) consider that Finland should always vote in the UN in accordance with the position of the majority of NATO countries. It can be assumed that the responses may reflect the discussion that emerged in Finland in late October following Finland's decision to join the UK, Italy and Germany in refraining from voting on the UN resolution demanding cease-fire in Gaza.

However, on the issue of nuclear weapons Finns appear to draw the line in their otherwise high readiness to accept the changes that may follow from membership in the defense alliance. NATO's official position is that NATO is an alliance that has nuclear weapons, and nuclear weapons are thus an important part of its deterrence. However, NATO does not require that its members accept nuclear weapons on their own territory. For example, Norway and Denmark have refused to place nuclear weapons on their territory and do not allow aircrafts carrying nuclear weapons to enter their airspace. NATO has also promised Russia that it will not place nuclear weapons in its "new" member states, which in practice refers to the Eastern European states that joined in 1999 or later (NATO 1997). Nuclear weapons are currently not stored in these states (Bell 2018). US nuclear weapons in other coalition countries are currently located in Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Turkey (Kütt and Mian 2022).

Most Finns continue to be critical towards nuclear weapons as part of the NATO membership, however there has been a notable softening of attitudes. When in June of 2023, only 27 percent of respondents were willing to allow the transportation of nuclear weapons through Finland, in the past five months, the proportion has risen to 38 percent. Similarly, one fifth of the respondents would now allow nuclear weapons to be placed on Finnish territory. This is almost double the number compared to the beginning of the summer (14%). This can be seen as a clear indication of dynamically developing public opinion. Given NATO's earlier stance, it is rather unlikely that nuclear weapons would be placed on Finnish territory (NATO 1997). However, although Finland has been a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (see Gibbons 2020) since 1967, it, together with other NATO

member states, has not signed the new UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) (Amadae 2024a). The NPT specifies that signatories do not acquire nuclear weapons, and that nuclear weapons states seek nuclear disarmament aimed toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons (Amadae 2024b; Graham 2004). The discussion over whether NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement is consistent with the NPT dates back to the 1960s and has continued (Butcher et al. 2000; Hiyashi 2021). The TPNW prohibits the states that have joined it from developing, testing, transporting, possessing, storing, using and threatening to use nuclear weapons (Lindgren 2022).

Figure 2a. Preferences for Finland's defense and security policy choices (%).



The second insight that may be concluded from combining Figures 2a and 2b, relates to defense initiatives linked to, or complimentary to NATO membership. Finns also have a very positive attitude to bilateral defense cooperation with the United States, which is considered to strengthen Finland's security and promote the implementation of the obligations of NATO membership (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2023a). Two-thirds (65%) of respondents consider that Finland should enter into the

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the United States. DCAs are a bilateral agreement, which forms an institutional and legal framework for practical defense cooperation, and are increasing but can be legally controversial (Kinne 2018). The US has similar agreements with various NATO member states, including the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. In Eastern European countries, discussions on the content of the agreements have generally centered in the possibility of US troops to move on the territory of the contracting party and the related jurisdiction, as well as the legal status of the troops. For example, the agreements may also be extended to issues related to taxation and environmental protection (Baksa 2019). Finland and the United States signed the agreement on December 18, 2023. In the agreement, the US was given access to fifteen military bases, which US troops can use for tasks related to visiting, training, support and maintenance (Ministry of Defence 2023). In addition to this, it is possible to use the bases to place US materials in preparation for defensive actions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2023a). Unlike a similar agreement between Norway and US in 2021, nuclear weapons are not specifically excluded from the agreement (Helsingin Sanomat 2023a). However, the import of nuclear explosives is prohibited in the Finnish Nuclear Energy Act (Ministry of Defence 2023). The research conducted at the Finnish Institute for International Affairs has concluded that likely nuclear policies involving Finland would not be made public (Pesu and Iso-Markku 2022, 36).

Alongside the cooperation with NATO and the United States, the EU's common defense policy is also perceived as important by the respondents. Three-quarters (77%) of Finns consider it necessary to strengthen EU's defense policy and invest in its instruments, such as the European Defense Fund. Finnish experts conclude, analyzing background information, that there is an obvious dividing line within the parties in the government coalition regarding this matter. Investing in EU's own security receives considerable support from the voters of the National Coalition Party and the Swedish People's Party, (83% and 85%, respectively), while the voters of the Christian Democrats (56%) and the Finns Party (67%) are somewhat more reserved.

A positive attitude towards improving EU's own defense may in part reflect preparation for the fact that US investment in guaranteeing Europe's security may decrease in the future. Countering this, NATO and the EU also carry out extensive defense cooperation, and 22 of the 27 current NATO member states are also members of the European Union. The EU, like NATO, has a joint defense clause, but this has often been seen as weaker than NATO's defense clause because, unlike NATO, the EU does not have operational plans for crisis situations (Virkkunen 2022). EU's defense cooperation has also not been as tightknit as NATO's, although it has clearly become more so with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The EU has drawn up an official defense strategy, directed more funds to the European Peace Fund to support Ukraine, and increased joint defense procurement (Fiott 2023).

The third set of insights that can be drawn from the combined analysis of Figures 2a and 2b relates to views on Finland's actions to strengthen its defense capability. In this regard, a particularly interesting observation is related to the procurement of short- and long-range missiles. While in June 2023 roughly half (52%) of the respondents were in favor of their procurement, the share has risen to 63 percent in five months. Expanding conscription to include non-males continues to receive a slim majority of support (54%). Finns also want to clearly maintain agency in defining its own defense policy. Only one fifth (21%) of respondents consider that in a conflict or crisis situation, Finland should immediately transfer the leadership to NATO. Clarifying the internal power relations and operating

models of security and defense policy is also seen as important. Half (51%) of the respondents consider that the parliament should have the right to receive information about NATO matters from the president and that this should be regulated by legislation. According to the Constitution (Perustuslaki 731/1999, § 93), the Parliament has the right, at the request of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to receive an explanation from the Government on matters related to foreign and security policy.

The Constitution (Perustuslaki 731/1999, § 97) separately mentions the procedures for the various functions of the European Union, but it does not yet contain similar regulations regarding NATO. The president, who represents Finland at the NATO summits, therefore currently has no direct obligation to provide the parliament with information on issues related to NATO in advance of or subsequent to events. This has generated debate on the need to guarantee the right of the parliament to access information (Raunio 2023). The lack of formalized practices makes the question especially topical when electing a new president. Findings of a party survey prepared by *Helsingin Sanomat* (2023b), illustrated that the Social Democratic Party, the Left Alliance and the Green League support broader access to information written into law than is currently legally mandated. The Christian Democrats responded “maybe” and the National Coalition Party, the Finns Party, the Centre Party, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Movement Now did not support it. As the positions of the parties are divided along the current government coalition parties and the opposition parties, it is unlikely that under the current administration, laws regarding Parliamentary access to NATO-related information would be changed. According to the survey, all parties also wanted to uphold the current government structure, wherein the president represents Finland at NATO summits.

Congruence between party voters' and presidential candidates' views on security and defense policies

Figures 3a and 3b illustrate citizens' views according to their party affiliation on the same security and defense policy questions that were presented to the presidential candidates in voting advice application by *Helsingin Sanomat* (Figures 4a and 4b). Some of the questions were already included in the first data collection of the NATOpoll project, carried out in June 2023.

Figure 3a. Preferences for Finland's defense and security policy decisions by party choice (%).

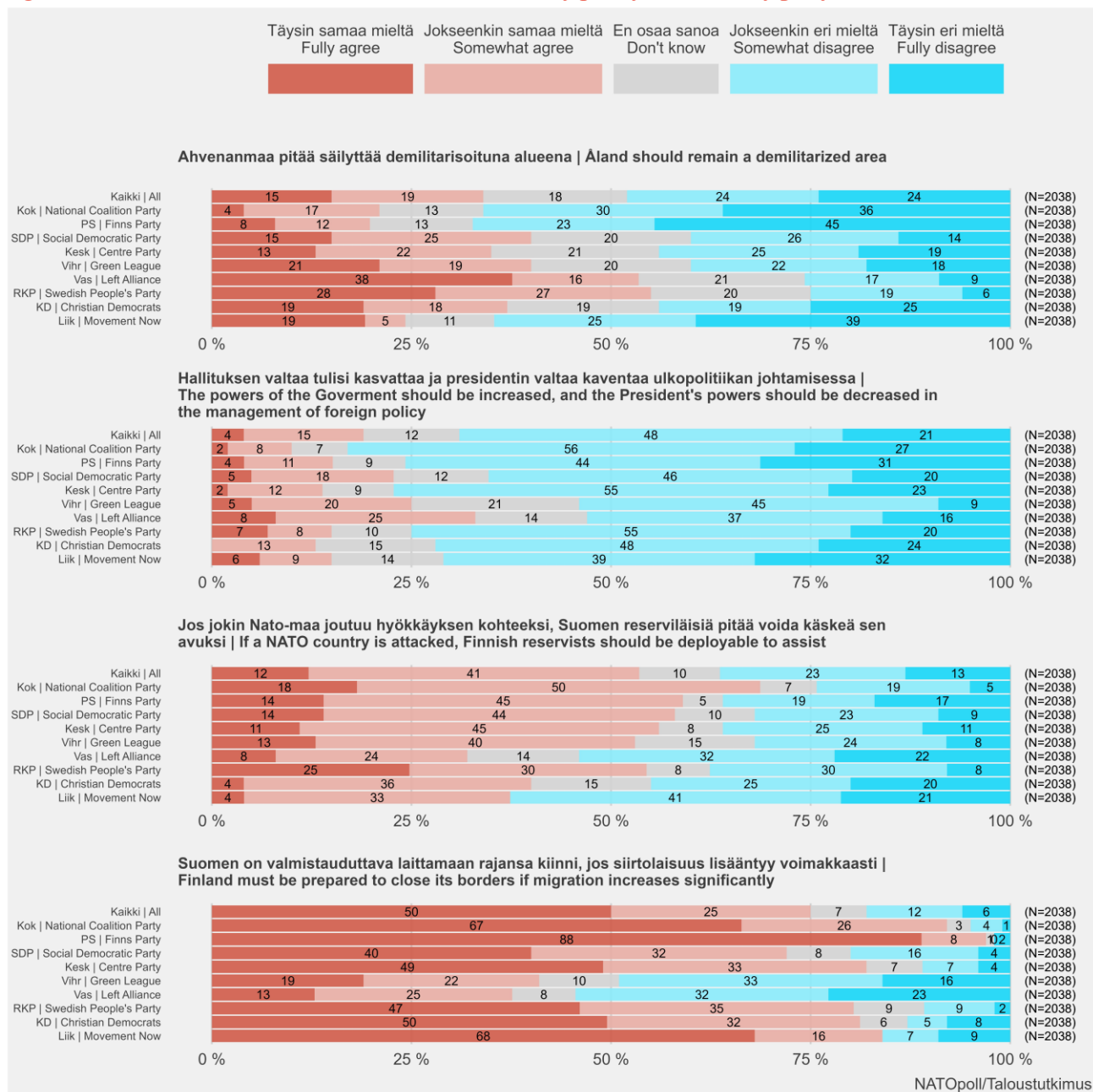
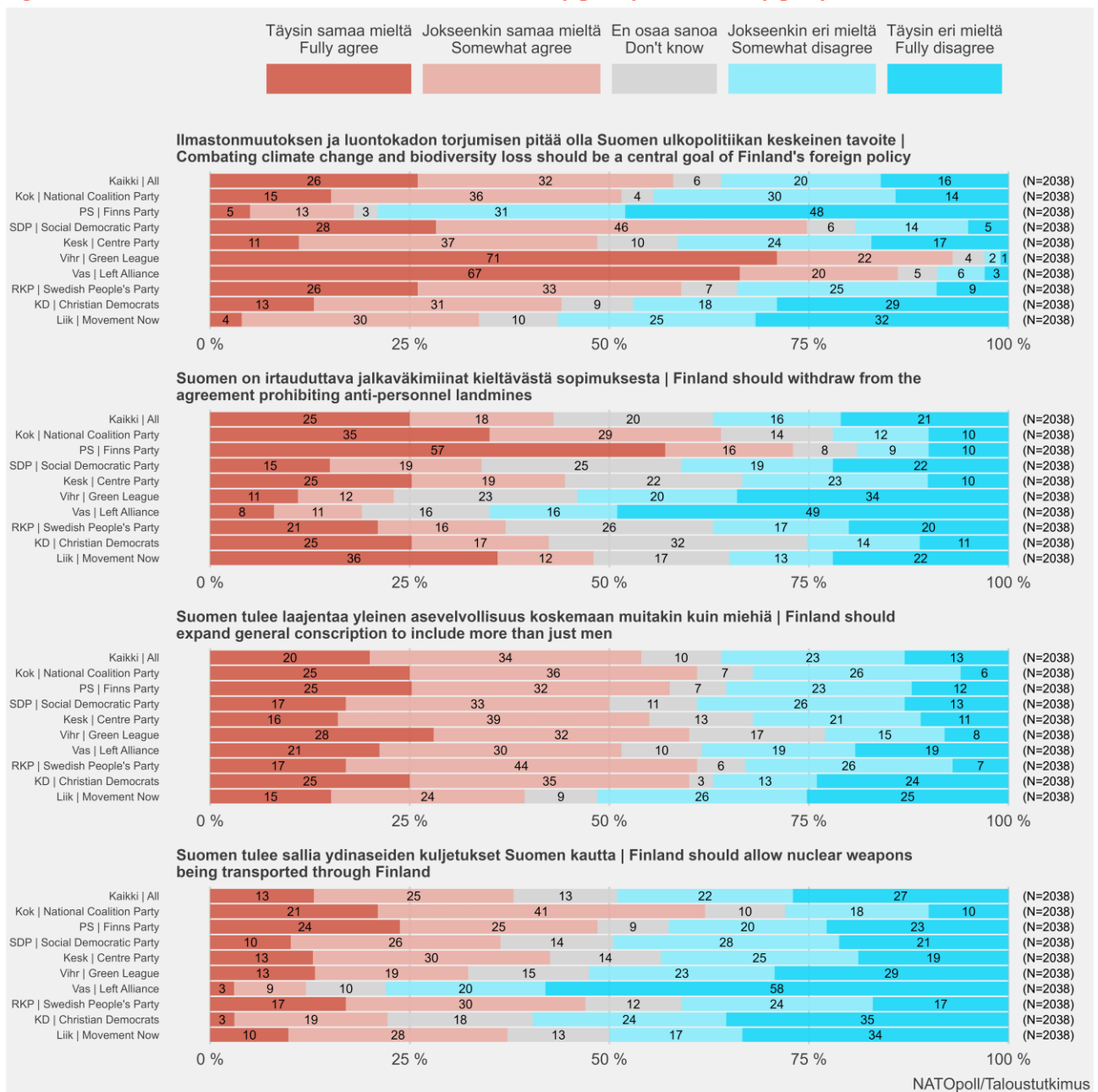
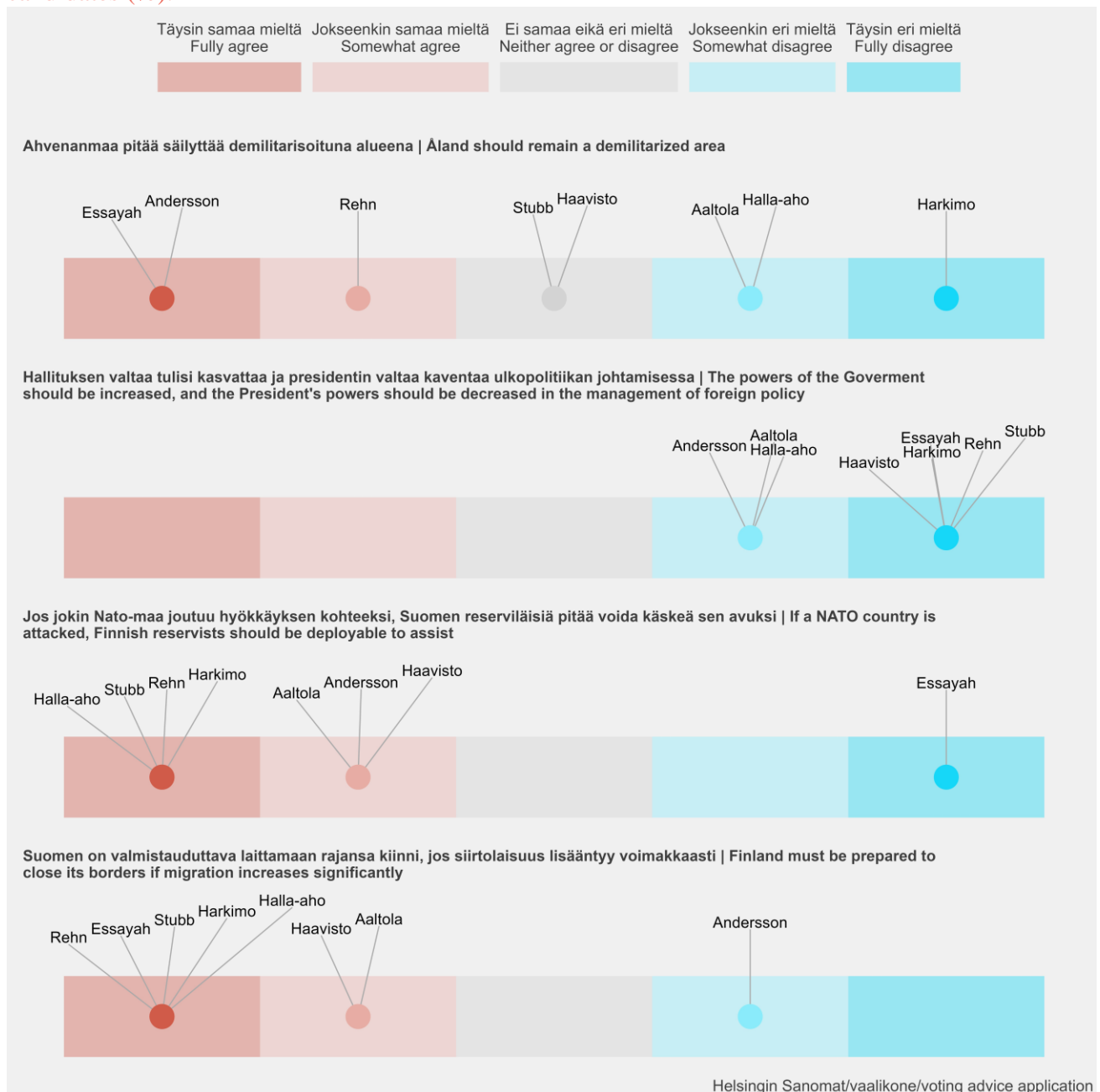


Figure 3b. Preferences for Finland's defense and security policy decisions by party choice (%).



The key observation is that some of the security and defense policy solutions strongly divide voters of different parties as well as presidential candidates. The candidates nominated by the party or supported by a party are well aligned with the views of the party's voters. The issues that distinguish the candidates are attitudes towards the demilitarization of Åland, the treaty banning landmines, allowing the transport of nuclear weapons, and gender-neutral conscription (Figures 4a and 4b). In contrast, the fight against global warming and the loss of natural habitat, and the closing of borders in a situation of strongly increasing migration are issues on which the views of the voters are significantly more divided than those of the presidential candidates. Yet, the importance of preserving the president's foreign policy powers is generally agreed upon by all.

Figure 4a. Preferences for Finland’s defense and security policy decisions among presidential candidates (%).



Among the clearly divisive themes, the issue of the demilitarization of Åland (figures 3a and 3b) has been a frequent topic of discussion in the context of Russia's aggressive foreign policy. The demilitarization of Åland means that military presence in the province is not allowed and Åland must not be fortified (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2023b). Finland signed the Åland Convention in 1921, in which several countries agreed on the demilitarization of Åland. In addition, Finland and Russia are bound by the agreement signed between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1940, on the demilitarization of Åland. Both parties reaffirmed this in the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty and the EU has also recognized Åland’s special status in international law (Hannikainen and Horn 1997). As shown in Figure 3a, only one third (34%) of the respondents consider that Åland should remain demilitarized. Especially the voters of the National Coalition Party, the Finns Party and the Movement Now support the re-

militarization, while the voters of the Left Alliance and the Swedish People’s Party hold the opposing view. The same division can also be seen among the presidential candidates when they were asked about their stance on the issue, although Alexander Stubb (the candidate for National Coalition Party) and Pekka Haavisto (an independent candidate supported by the Greens) state that they neither agree nor disagree (Figure 4a).

Figure 4b. Preferences for Finland’s defense and security policy decisions among presidential candidates (%).



Forty-three percent of citizens support Finland's withdrawal from the Ottawa agreement banning anti-personnel landmines, which Finland ratified in 2012 (Figure 3b). The agreement prohibits the use, collection, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines and requires the destruction of existing anti-personnel landmines (United Nations Treaty Collection 2023). In the public debate that emerged

before the ratification of the agreement, supporters of landmines emphasized that they are an important part of Finland's defense and cannot be completely replaced by other weapon systems. Opponents emphasized the human suffering that they cause and the existence of substitute alternatives (Majamaa 2017). Out of the respondents in the survey, the voters of the Finns Party are most supportive of withdrawing from the Ottawa agreement (73%), this is a stance also supported by the party's presidential candidate Jussi Halla-aho. Remaining in the agreement is most strongly supported by the voters of the Left Alliance (65%) and the Greens (54%). Of the presidential candidates, Li Andersson of the Left Alliance and Pekka Haavisto, supported by the Greens, also agree. Andersson's views on the border issue is also clearly in line with the majority (55%) of her party's voters who consider that the borders should not be completely closed, even if immigration begins to increase rapidly. When it comes to combating climate change and loss of biodiversity, Jussi Halla-aho, a candidate nominated by the Finns Party, is significantly more supportive than his party's voters, of whom only 18 percent believe that it should be a central goal of Finnish foreign policy. Andersson is more supportive of deploying Finnish reservists to assist if a NATO country is attacked than her party's voters (32%). Forty percent of the Christian Democrats voters support deploying reservists and 45 percent oppose. The party's presidential candidate, Sari Essayah, takes the latter position.

Conclusions

Finland's security environment has become more multifaceted during the past two years. This has affected citizens' interpretations of the nation's security and defense policy agenda. The newly perceived Russian threat, the political and economic effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the opportunities and obligations that Finland's NATO membership imply, shape the foreign policy views of Finns. At the same time, the increasingly strict dividing lines between the Global South and the Global North, as well as the strained relations between China and the United States, are raising tensions in world politics. Military and financial support for Ukraine at the end of 2023 will no longer be as uniform the previous year. In many countries, there are clear differences between global political perspectives and domestic political goals. The conflict between Israel and Hamas has further increased tensions.

All these developments are reflected in the public debate as Finland prepares to elect its next president in early 2024. Since the summer of 2023, Finland has faced concrete threats, such as damage to communication cables and Russia's efforts to instrumentalize asylum seekers as part of its political activities. These themes become salient in the election debates, as well as in the concrete actions of the government aimed at avoiding the threats of hybrid forms of conflict.

The two sets of survey data that were collected in June and in November 2023 illustrate that support for NATO membership has remained very high. Finns interpret Finland's NATO membership as giving Finland a necessary and viable military deterrent against Russia. Similarly, the link between education and income and NATO attitudes has remained unchanged: the most highly educated and those who earn the most report the most positive attitudes toward the membership. Support for Finland's NATO membership decreased most notably among those who have completed junior high school education.. Those who lean more to the right on the left-right political spectrum (on the economic dimension) continue to firmly support Finland's NATO membership, while half of those who position themselves on the left end of the political spectrum (on the social-cultural values

dimension) would now vote against Finland's NATO membership. There is no clear dividing line demarcating attitudes toward NATO membership between the government and the opposition.

Those who vote for the National Coalition Party are almost unanimously in favor of Finland's NATO membership, while the supporters of True Finns (who are also in the government coalition) are hold more reserved views. Only roughly half of the supporters of the Left Alliance support Finland's NATO membership. However, the critical attitude towards NATO manifests itself as quiet opposition rather than loud protest and active political advocacy. The views of Finns' regarding the obligations and security policy solutions that Finland's NATO membership entails, are relatively straightforward. Finns want a strong NATO, perceive Finland's active role as a member of the defense alliance to be important and are ready to invest so that Finland can meet its membership commitments. In this aspect, the attitudes towards NATO's nuclear deterrence is noteworthy. The respondents consider that Finland should be involved in the formulation of nuclear weapons policy as part of NATO's military deterrence. While the transport of nuclear weapons through Finland or their placement on Finnish territory is still widely rejected, there has been a noticeable shift in the opinions, which have become more positive than those expressed in the previous survey conducted in June 2023. Interpretations of NATO's tasks and Finland's role in the defense alliance reflect a strong respect for the principle of reciprocity. This also appears to extend to the further expansion of NATO: Finns clearly hold more positive attitudes towards Ukraine's possible NATO membership than the European average (Thomson et al. 2023, 2492).

Multi-dimensional security interests are reflected in the fact that bilateral commitments, such as the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), signed with the United States, are perceived as important alongside NATO membership. There is also strong support for increasing EU-level defense cooperation, although the different interpretations regarding the usefulness of European integration by different political parties is reflected here. It is also important for Finns to maintain and develop their own strong defensive capability. Overlapping and difficult-to-manage international conflicts shape risk scenarios and interpretations of effective means to respond to threats. This is reflected, for example, in increased support for missile procurement. Respondents widely agree that the management of crisis or conflict situations should be kept firmly within the scope of national decision-making. Moreover, respondents consider that the president's foreign policy powers should be maintained. However, respondents regard the improvement of Parliament's right to access security information to be necessary. There are, however, significant differences regarding the legally required scope of access between supporters of the different political parties. There are differences between the views on certain security policy issues between the presidential candidates, and the supporters of the parties they represent. However, there appears to be a strong consensus on Finland's broadly construed security interests.

The especially divisive themes include the demilitarization of Åland, anti-personnel mines, allowing the transport of nuclear weapons over Finnish territory and gender-neutral conscription. Climate crisis and the fight against natural habitat and biodiversity loss divide voters more than candidates. While the overwhelming majority of the voters of the Green League, the Left Alliance and the Social Democratic Party consider that the fight against the climate crisis and nature loss should be the central goal of Finland's foreign policy, only a minority of the voters of the Finns Party and the Christian Democrats agree. In this respect, the voters of the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party are

placed in the middle of these two groups. However, out of the presidential candidates, only Sari Essayah of the Christian Democrats disagrees with the statement that combatting climate change and biodiversity loss should be a central goal in Finland's foreign policy.

It is notable that, even with regard to divisive themes, disagreement appears to be a question of pluralism and dispersion of views, rather than polarization, with clearly opposing opinions. The broad spectrum of different views offers the presidential candidates the opportunity to build their own security policy profiles, which can cater to a wide variety of voter groups. This can best be enhanced through the presidential electoral debate which inspire lively discussion about the future prospects of global security, Finland's future geopolitical and geoeconomic position, and the means of the international community and national governments to respond to the increasingly diverse security concerns.

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Contributors

S.M. Amadae is an Adjunct Professor in Political Science and the director of “*Global Politics and Communication*” MA program at Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Helsinki. She is a co-PI of the NATOpoll project.

Jari Eloranta is a Professor of Economic History and a Vice-Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Helsinki.

Tuomas Forsberg is a professor of International Politics at Tampere University.

Mika Hentunen is Asia correspondent at the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE. Before his current assignment, he worked at NATO reporter for YLE.

Ilmari Käihkö is an Adjunct Professor at the Swedish Defence University and a Visiting Scholar at the Aleksanteri Institute.

Marianne Laine is a Project Researcher for “*Global Politics and Communications*”, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki.

Julius Lehtinen is a Doctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Helsinki. His dissertation examines the effect of electoral systems on candidates political preferences.

Janne Tukiainen is a Professor of Economics at the University of Turku and an Associate Research Professor at the VATT Institute for Economic Research.

Leo Valkama is B.Soc.Sci. He is a MA student of “*Politics and Communication*” MA program and “*Societal Change*” MA program. He is a Research Assistant of the NATOpoll project.

Johanna Vuorelma is a University Researcher at the Centre for European Studies at Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Helsinki.

Hanna Wass is an Adjunct Professor in Political Science and a Vice-Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Helsinki. She is a PI of the research project “*Dynamic democratic support for Finnish defense policy (NATOpoll)*” (2023–2025) funded by the Kone Foundation.

Albert Weckman is a Doctoral Researcher at The Social Science Research Institute, Åbo Akademi University. His dissertation investigates citizens’ opinions in security policies.

APPENDIX 1. Research data

The report is based on two different surveys designed by the research project “Dynamic Support for Security and Defense Policy (NATOpoll)” funded by the Kone Foundation. The first survey was collected by Taloustutkimus from June 8 to June 19, 2023. A total of 2,877 Finns aged 16 to 79 participated in the survey. The survey was conducted in Taloustutkimus’ permanent internet panel, from which a sample was selected based on age, gender, and region. The lower response rate of younger age groups was addressed by inviting more representatives of this age group to participate. Regarding the geographical area aspect, the panel focuses on cities and urban areas. As to the socioeconomic status of respondents, those who had vocational education and those working in manual labor are underrepresented. Moreover, there are less entrepreneurs within the respondents than their share of the population. These material biases were taken to account by weighing these results to correspond with the population statistics on age, gender, and place of residence. The margin of error is approximately +/- 1.8 percentage points.

We first asked respondents to state their stance on Finland’s NATO membership if a referendum on the topic were to be held today. Following this, we asked the respondents to express their opinion on eight statements that reflected the possible policies that Finland could promote following the NATO membership. We examined the political frames linked to NATO by inquiring how accurately 11 different statements of NATO’s missions described the nature of the alliance as an actor. Additionally, we asked the respondents to evaluate the significance of 11 security threats for Finland, and NATO’s role in the mitigation of these threats. We also asked how much the respondents were personally willing to pay annually to assure that Finland’s defence capability is credible and sufficiently resourced in the opinion of NATO, the Finnish Defence Forces, and experts (this data will be used subsequently). Finally, the respondents were asked to answer a broad range of questions regarding their political affiliation, ideological orientation, and social status.

We conducted a second round of data collection from November 10 to November 23, 2023. The survey was targeted at those individuals in Taloustutkimus’s permanent internet panel who had responded to the first-round survey in June. The survey includes 2,038 respondents aged 17–79, representing 71 percent of the first-round respondents. Second-round respondents were weighted to match the age, gender and location of the first-round respondents. The margin of error is approximately ± 2.2 percentage points.

Some of the questions in the second round were the same as in the first round. Additionally, new questions on current security and defense policy themes were included. Some of these questions were the same as those in voting advice application by Helsingin Sanomat. We also asked about respondents’ views on the role of the state and perceptions of democracy. A conjoint survey experiment was also included, presenting respondents with two cards at a time, each listing different features related to the state’s security environment. The respondents had to choose the state in which they would prefer to live. Like in the first round, the survey concluded with a comprehensive set of questions measuring respondent’ political affiliations, ideological orientations, and social positions. This time, questions about national identity were also included.



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