

## Chapter 6

### Confusing compass points of human security – Finnish perspectives

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#### Introduction

The narrative of the eastern threat has long been extensively used in Finland. The narrative builds on actual historical military conflicts, yet has also attained more ideological if not physiological functions. For Finland the customary acknowledgement is that “the threat is located to the East, not to the West” (Laitinen, 2006: 45) – or in any direction. Of course, the East here is a euphemism for the Soviet Union, and later Russia, yet often in a broader ideological sense asserts – and seeks to convince others – that Finland is properly part of the West – despite the “incorrect activities” of Cold War era politicians who had expressed “dangerous loyalty” to and fraternised excessively with the Soviet Union (Moisio, 2003; see also 1998; Laine 2013). Indeed, the enemy image of the East has deep roots, and it has constituted a major building block for the entire Finnish nation-building process. While the enemy image developed for the most part following the onset of the oppressive russification policy of the Russian Empire, which aimed to limit the Grand Duchy’s special status at the end of the nineteenth century, it gained more ideological elements after Finland’s independence in 1917 (Luostarinen, 1989). The narrative has since appeared in various strengths yet has maintained its prevalence in the Finnish national imagination and in Finnish history writing (Klinge, 1993; Tervonen, 2014).

The narrative holds firm and is often repeated in various forums – including academia. While the rhetoric often fuels itself in public and occasionally in political debate, it is not uncommon to read narrowly oriented scholarly accounts that fuel the flames and bulk up the conventional narratives, presumably for their own purpose (see e.g. Giles and Eskola, 2009). What is apparent here lies in the notion that the acknowledgement of other challenges may be overshadowed by the preservation of the more familiar eastern threat, which in turn

jeopardises the preparedness for them. It is also characteristic of this rhetoric that it tends to continue to actively yet selectively emphasise those elements that encourage inflexible definitions of Finnishness and Russianness to be applied and acted out in the static frame of the state (Laine, 2017: 95). While the narrative has its understandable historical roots, the eastern threat has itself gained an existential momentum of its own, becoming mythologised and systemically maintained as a sort of autobiography of the Finnish state – as an almost all-encompassing explanation of why things are as there are. Both history and geography are commonly posited as the reasons for the “uniqueness” of the Finnish relationship with Russia and the “acuteness” of the Finnish perception of Russia as a source of security challenges (Giles and Eskola, 2009: 2). These notions suggest that national identity is a collective condition, and a threat to it underlines a contextually specific threat (Anttonen, 1996: 1–2). Threats, and especially their constructed images, have not only been one of the most compelling driving forces in politics (Limnell, 2009) but are vital bonds in building and moulding national identity (Laitinen, 2006).

While this narrative must not be understated, this chapter makes a conscious effort to deviate from it. The insecurities many currently feel, it argues, are much broader and more varied than the conventional narrative of the eastern threat entails. This chapter arises from the premise that it is not the heralded return of Cold War rhetoric and the stark East-West confrontation that are the most pressing concerns for many in Finland, but the very fragmentation of this familiar worldview. That is, though threatening, the customary narrative of the eastern threat also comes with elements that may be soothing in their familiarity and bring a sense of psychological comfort amidst the current multiple crises and perceived chaos. In contrast with the previous more alarming but more predictable – and hence manageable – threat perception, the contemporary security scene is characterised by increased unpredictability and a complex combination of traditional geopolitical challenges and new security threats that are not necessarily connected with inter-state relations. As the idea of security is constructed in relation to the perceived threats, a better knowledge of and ability to anticipate the latter leads to an increased sense of the former.

As Finland’s operating environment has changed remarkably since the Cold War era, the ordinary security compass has been thrown off track by the current multiple crises and diverse threats that require a conscious effort to escape the narrative straitjacket of the eastern threat. As well as adjusting the mere compass points, this chapter underlines the interwoven

nature of the external and internal security challenges that need to be properly balanced if a more comprehensive state of security is desired. This also requires us to look more deeply beyond the national security scene, often assumed as something coherent, to unravel its static state, because it is argued here that insecurity is ultimately experienced and felt by people, not states, and threat perceptions can greatly differ between different groups and individuals. The need to feel secure and safe is an essential human condition, and its various components cannot be simply decided collectively at the national level. After all, fear is a psychological, not a political, phenomenon (Laine, 2020a: 70). It cannot simply be made to go away with a political decision. To provide evidence for this recognition, this chapter utilises recent Eurobarometer survey data<sup>1</sup> to examine Finnish citizens' perception of the most important issues they face. Acknowledging the limitation of survey data, no claim is made here regarding the representativeness of the presented results. Instead, the data is used to illustrate the diversity of the opinions voiced and thus unravel the customary imaginary of a coherent threat perception and *national* security. The data comes from the time before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore does not reflect what may be assumed to be its significant impact on the perceived challenges.

This chapter underlines the need to address the concept of security in the term's broadest sense, recognising that it is not limited to inter-state relations or issues of a merely geopolitical nature. Following and building on the general Critical Security Studies agenda (e.g. Williams, 2005), it advances the notion that security means different things at different times, in different places, and for different people. It focuses on the interwoven external and internal "intermestic" security environment of and in Finland, where domestic and international concerns meet. In choosing not to engage in an in-depth elaboration of any existing or perceived geopolitical threats or challenges, the aim of this chapter is by no means to ignore them or downplay their importance. Rather, what follows has been written to balance the security-oriented discussion by distancing itself from its traditionally state-centric confines and formal inter-state relations, and drawing attention to the need to approach the concept of security through its human-centredness and multi-dimensionality – that is, through its comprehensiveness. In doing this, the chapter seeks to provide further evidence for the observed need for new multi-layered approaches to security that capture both global

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<sup>1</sup> The Standard Eurobarometer surveys are conducted at the request of the European Commission. This chapter does not represent the opinion of the European Commission. The views and arguments expressed are the author's interpretations, based on the data.

processes that potentially translate into external security challenges, and new supranational and transnational developments that penetrate everyday life at the national and local levels (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2009). In short, in contrast with taking security merely as a contract between sovereign states, seen as the nation's Westphalian prerogative (see e.g. Holsti, 2006), this chapter builds on the notion that states are no longer the only entities either *experiencing* (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007) or *producing* security (Fierke, 2007). Whether it is insecurity, uncertainty, or a lack of safety, they are – despite their sources – experienced and ultimately felt by people as individuals and members of their community. Any policy implementation must therefore also be evaluated in relation to the empowerment of individuals (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007; Wibben, 2008; Korhonen, 2011).

## Whose security?

The concept of national security, with its narrow focus on state sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity, has become largely insufficient for grasping and explaining complex post-Cold War conflict and emergencies, an increasing share of which no longer transcends the territorial state linearity. The East-West confrontation that had dominated the international security agenda during the Cold War receded from view quite rapidly following the dissolution of the USSR (Lynn-Jones and Miller, 1995: 3). “Hard” military security was redefined, spearheaded by the Copenhagen School of Security (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 1998), to allow non-military threats to be included in the analysis. Although the “softer” societal, political, environmental, and economic security therefore became increasingly prominent, the assumption that states are not only the most important objects of security but the only subjects that produce it has remained stubbornly strong.

Of course, the broadened concerns did not suddenly appear at the end of the Cold War but were revealed as having been previously overshadowed by Cold War preoccupations. What has since been commonly referred to as “non-traditional threats” include transnational organised crime, international terrorism, trafficking, smuggling, environmental risks, access to scarce resources, and irregular migration and other forms of population pressures, as well as factors of more personal concern, as this chapter aims to show. These new dangers, Lynn-Jones and Miller (1995: 3) had already posited in the mid-1990s, were inherently “global in scope, persistent in nature, and potent in their implications”. Yet there are a number of

examples of how states and their borders continue to function in the era of post-national policies and non-territorial flows (Laine, 2016). The regression of recent events – for example, the “migration crisis” or even more fittingly the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic – into state-centric thinking, border closures, and the strong nation state continue to be offered, if not as the solution, at least as the conventional cure for the threat perceived to be external to *us*.

The redefinition of security in the post-Cold War milieu was scarcely only a matter of replacing one system with another. Instead, the era’s profound sociopolitical transformations fuelled a burgeoning of various security agendas focusing on a different set of endangerments and threats. Of particular importance and applicability for this study was the emergence of the multidimensional “human security” concept. It gained wide popularity, becoming the subject of a plethora of studies, in 1994, when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) famously pronounced in its Human Development Report that the concept of security had been interpreted too narrowly for too long, suggesting that the ideological conflicts between states had overshadowed the lack of security ordinary people were experiencing in their everyday lives (UNDP, 1994: 22). In contrast with inter-state rivalries or geopolitical tensions the UNDP report explained that “[w]ith the dark shadows of the Cold War receding, one can now see that many conflicts are within nations rather than between nations”: for many security now symbolised protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards (ibid.). Human security was therefore largely seen as the outcome of a positive and indispensable connection between security, development, and human rights (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007), and as such applied predominantly in studies addressing the “Global South” (Thomas, 2000; Alm and Juntunen, 2011). However, as Korhonen (2011: 18) specifies, human security is a “universal concept; it is the right of the people who live in poor as well as in rich countries”. The approach here builds on this notion yet contests its resistant state specificity. Indeed, people and their insecurities are *equal* regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, or other factors which define a human being (ibid.), yet these insecurities are not necessarily the *same* for all. Instead, it is these factors, rather than just because of a formal belonging to a certain state or nation, that mean an individual may feel insecurity and be faced with particular challenges in her or his daily life.

In approaching the interconnectedness of security's external and internal dimensions in this study, I rely on the notion of *human security* to argue that narrow views of security that define the emergence of risk as the mere product of geopolitical contestations obscure more than they illumine in overshadowing the impact of socioeconomic, cultural, health-related, and more broadly social tensions (cf. United Nations, 2003/9). The close relationship between subjective wellbeing and public security has already been documented at an everyday level throughout the world (Webb and Wills-Herrera, 2012; Chase, 2013). While the security debate has advanced a great deal during the last two decades, and a vast array of studies has been conducted, many of the critical approaches have failed to acknowledge the interlinked nature of state-centred, militarily defined security and human security (e.g. as something that reflects the human condition), instead treating them as separate but equal domains (James, 2014). Meanwhile, security is as much an everyday phenomenon as a (geo)political one; there is also a need to focus on environmental, economic, social, and identity-based factors (United Nations, 2003/9; 2016). While security must be extended beyond the frame of the nation state, the state remains if not "the most important producer of human security", as Korhonen (2011: 25) suggests, at least one of the most important. As the introduction of this volume has already discussed in more detail, the key in moving forward lies in acknowledging the increasing interdependence and interconnectedness between the "hard" and "soft", and "internal" and "external", aspects of security (Duke, 2013, Szabo, 2015; Fierke, 2015).

While there are various definitions and applications of human security, the perspective advanced here relies on the recognition of security's perceptual and socially embedded foundations. This implies linking individual wellbeing to questions of national – Finnish in this case – and broader European security, not least because human security can only flourish in supportive sociopolitical and economic environments (see Tabyshalieva, 2006). As suggested by Bauman's (2000: 161) concept of *Unsicherheit*, the threats to human security derive from a complex combination of the uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of safety that result from the economic, social, and cultural consequences of globalisation and their entanglement with national, regional, and local contexts, penetrating all aspects of individual life. According to the Commission on Human Security (2003: 4) the concept is essentially about "protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. (...) It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity." As a socially embedded

phenomenon, security is closely linked to perceptions, emotions, and imaginaries of threat that can be created and manipulated for political purposes (Schwell, 2015).

Fear is a factor that cannot always be explained away rationally. The essentialised imaginaries of security threats based on exaggerated representations and imaginaries of foundational differences between people, cultures, and states (see: Rumelili, 2015) cannot be ignored, because in contexts of socioeconomic stress and geopolitical instability the sense of insecurity can dramatically increase, regardless of whether the assessment made is rational. Even if affectual – even imagined – these imaginaries and perceptions and their related concerns are not necessarily any less meaningful or impactful (Laine, 2020b), for they impact individual behaviour and how people see their place in the work and world around them. The feeling of insecurity can escalate to the point that it hinders one's ability to manage the uncertainties of daily life, eroding the sense of confidence and trust that the world is what it appears to be (Kinnvall, 2004: 746). Security threats do not exist objectively but are the outcome of an inter-subjective ideational social construction (Laine, 2018a: 296). Seeking to resolve conflicts by convincing people the customary “other” is no longer a threat, or at least not as dangerous as it once was, may generate high levels of anxiety (Hansen, 2012; Browning and Joenniemi, 2015; 2017). This is to say that a well-defined and stable threat can be easier to manage and live with than constant unpredictability and instability, which generate uncertainty in the general population and eventually create political goals (Laine, 2017).

## Multi-layered threat perceptions

As scholars of European security have noted, the levels of fear, anxiety, and threat felt by many seem to drastically exceed the actual levels of physical risk to contemporary EU citizens (Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen, 2018: 149). As the public debate throughout Europe clearly illustrates, the recent waves of immigration have especially triggered extensive anxieties and insecurities among the European population. Migration has become defined as a problem, a risk, and even a direct threat. Once framed as an emergency in need of a security response, a distinct system with tough border controls and bilateral agreements with countries of origin develops to fill this frame (Andersson, 2016; Cuttitta, 2014; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). This is seen as required if the EU is to protect itself from and combat the perceived

threat. However, this development is of quite recent origin. As Ceccorulli and Lucarelli (2017) note, migration did not even figure in the European Security Strategy (2003). Now “fear” and “risk” have become central to the description of irregular migration. Their close analysis of the narratives used in EU documents has revealed this discursive change concerning migration. The EU’s narratives now clearly prioritise the safety of the EU’s territory over that of migrants (Ceccorulli and Lucarelli, 2017: 97).

The EU has been duly criticised for securitising migration through its bordering regime and exclusionary practices, which more than anything else have jeopardised its proclaimed ideals and hollowed out its core values (Cuttita and Last, 2020; Laine, 2020a; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). Many academics seem to agree that the security-driven narrative on migration has not diminished but has strengthened the fear and desire for protection, allowing both far-left and far-right populist parties in the EU to capitalise on it for their own political gain. These insecurities have only been exacerbated amidst the current Covid-19 pandemic, which has also further reinforced the perception of borders as barriers to *foreign* threats (Laine, 2020a/c). With a mounting democratic deficit, growing debt, a struggling labour market, related social security concerns, the unfavourable demographics stemming from an ageing population, declining birth rates, and a cumulative brain drain the resilience of European societies had already been considerably weakened before these developments.

Behind the EU’s shattered mosaic of various national narratives, cultures, and histories lie profound differences between geopolitical and strategic interests (see e.g. Fiott, 2020). The conventional Finnish perspective can be summarised, given the lack of space for providing a more comprehensive account, by a reference to the then Finnish Defence Minister Häkämies’s 2007 Center for Strategic and International Studies speech in Washington, in which he famously declared that “the three main security challenges for Finland today are Russia, Russia and Russia” (Häkämies, 2007). While Häkämies’s interpretation may have contained some truth, especially given his position, the assessment was undoubtedly narrow. Yet he was not alone in his concerns: the focus on Russia he initiated has remained strong ever since – even if the word “threat” is used less often – in various government-funded reports (e.g. Kuusi, Smith, and Tiihonen, 2007; 2010; Ministry of Defence, 2008; 2012; 2019). In the foreword of the latest report ordered by the Ministry of Defence (2019: 4), in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, a group of



commissioned experts paint a somewhat disconsolate picture of the security scene in proclaiming:

*International tensions have increased in recent years, and the security situation has weakened in Europe and in Finland's neighbouring areas. No positive developments on this front are currently foreseen. There is talk of a return of the Cold War, increased significance of nuclear weapons, the end of the rules-based international order, and an end to diplomacy. Through its actions and in its public pronouncements, Russia has shown its disdain for the rules-based international order and security.*

While the report does acknowledge that Russia is not the only actor on the security scene, mentioning the United States and China as additional sources of uncertainty, its thrust continues to be based on the understanding that the threats are primarily external and caused by particular states. Even when broader crises or global megatrends are briefly mentioned in report, they are associated with Russia. While there is justification for this linkage, there seems less for the extent to which Russia should continue to supersede all other potential challenges. The conflict in Ukraine has deservedly been given special attention in the report and is interpreted through the prism of the toughening methods of Russian foreign policy it is seen to imply (Ministry of Defence, 2019: 39). The Ukraine crisis unquestionably triggered drastic changes in the European security environment, bringing an end to the post-Cold War status quo in Europe. Fuelled by the perception that the annexation of Crimea was not a single isolated incident but a demonstration of President Putin's strategy of restoring Russian hegemony in the region, the crisis fostered a general sense of unpredictability, especially among Russia's immediate neighbours, including Finland (Laine, 2017: 103; 2018b).

However, it cannot go unnoticed that an alternative and more comprehensive security approach has been in the making alongside the conventional narrative. Especially when it was gearing up for its six-month stint at the helm of the EU's rotating presidency, which began on 1 July 2019, the Finnish government called for an improvement to the coordination of security and defence inside the EU to better prepare for new hybrid threats. Pekka Haavisto, the Finnish foreign minister (quoted in Valero, 2019), saw the need to improve Europe's resilience towards both the traditional threats and to address new ones, yet underlined that the

proposed efforts were not directed “against countries but against the phenomenon itself”. His statement reflects the logic of the *Security Strategy for Society 2017*, a government resolution seeking to harmonise national preparedness principles and guide preparedness in its various administrative branches. The resolution has been prepared by the Security Committee, based at the Ministry of Defence, with the task of assisting the government and its different ministries in broad matters pertaining to an understanding of security far more comprehensive than in the earlier definitions. In deviating from the narrow threat perceptions, the strategy addresses preparedness in various types of incident and emergency by laying out what it defines as vital functions in society – the basic functions that must be safeguarded in all conditions and at all operative levels. These are: 1) leadership; 2) international and EU activities; 3) defence capability; 4) internal security; 5) economy, infrastructure, and security of supply; 6) the functional capacity of the population and services; and 7) psychological resilience (Security Committee, 2017). It is also noteworthy that the ninety-nine-page document itself mentions Russia only twice – and in both cases with reference to collaboration.

This dispersity is reflected in Iloniemi’s and Limnell’s (2018) assessment that predicting threat perceptions has become increasingly complex. Alongside the traditional dangers arising from Finland’s location and position an entirely new set has emerged, partly because the world has moved into the digital age. In balancing Håkämies’s (2007) previous narrow three R-word assessment of the most acute threats to Finland, Iloniemi and Limnell (2018) not only broaden the picture but importantly invert its fundamental logic in noting that the threats are not always external or foreign. Their list of the three most important includes Finland’s current demographic development due to the low birth rate and immigration, Europe’s fracturing unity, and the traditional threat perception stemming from the internal development of Finland’s immediate surroundings (for which read “Russia”). If considered from the perspective that the most severe threats are those whose materialisation would be the most unfavourable, the role of a military threat is accentuated. Assessed in these terms, the collapse of public confidence in society ranks second, and the unpredictable outcomes and effects of technological development third (Iloniemi and Limnell, 2018).

In following its mandate, the Finnish National Emergency Supply Agency (2020) in turn underlines the need to focus on the consequences of disruptions rather than their root causes. Its perspective relies on the notion that the functioning of Finnish society, especially its

economy, increasingly depends on the functioning of international networks, supply chains, and logistics systems. Other major threats to society include disruptions inflicted by major accidents, environmental disasters, and disease outbreaks affecting the population and public health – of which the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, with its broad societal impact, can be taken as a prime example. The agency asserts that while the threats to national security must be taken into account in preparedness planning, their likelihood, like armed conflicts in neighbouring areas, is low (National Emergency Supply Agency, 2020).

To better grasp the complexity of the security scene, it is necessary to disentangle the national frame and unravel its assumed cohesiveness. This is not least because surveys like the one commissioned by Alma Media in 2018 suggest that the biggest threat Finns perceive is actually the country's division and polarisation (Soinsalon-Soininen, 2018). As has already been argued regarding the broader EU level, an essential cause of insecurity stems from the population, and in this case nation, becoming increasingly divided and ruptured (Laine, 2020c). The still survey ranks unemployment, although it has been in steady decline for years, in second place. Climate change, which has been rising rapidly, is reported to be the third most important threat (Soinsalon-Soininen, 2018). Despite what the rhetoric at the higher levels would lead us to believe, concerns of military threat were the least frequently mentioned item of the nine response options.

## Issues *we* are faced with

To unravel the socially embedded foundations of security and to link subjective individual wellbeing to questions of national, in this case Finnish, and broader European security, the multilevel multi-layered security scene discussed above is illustrated here with the help of Standard Eurobarometer data.<sup>2</sup> The analysis provided seeks to elucidate not only how the concerns at different levels differ, but that different individuals perceive the concerns facing these various levels differently based on who they are, not necessarily merely on where they are expected to belong. The custom of referring to Finns as a coherent group with well-

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<sup>2</sup> The Standard Eurobarometer surveys, conducted at the request of the European Commission, consist of approximately a thousand face-to-face interviews per country. The data in this part of the chapter is derived from Standard Eurobarometer surveys 91 (spring 2019) and 92 (autumn 2019), as well as earlier Eurobarometer surveys in tables where the historical trend is shown. The latest survey, Standard Eurobarometer 92, was conducted in Finland in November 2019, when 1,001 interviews were conducted.

defined national interests and threats obscures the picture. The following figures (6.1–6.3) provide an overview of the issues cited most frequently as the main challenges. At the national level in Finland health and social security has been the most frequently cited concern, followed by the environment and climate change. Concerning the EU, the environment and climate change appear the most pressing concerns from the perspective of the Finnish participants, while immigration is a close second (cited by 38% of respondents) – having ranked only sixth (14%) at the national level. At the individual level migration appears even less of a concern (4%), while health and social security is ranked first, followed by households’ financial situation.

### Figures 6.1-6.3 here

However, a more thorough assessment reveals more noteworthy nuances and trends. Beginning with the highest frame of the analysis, the EU, the historical trend is itself revealing. As Table 6.1 shows,<sup>3</sup> the customary pattern whereby the economic situation was perceived as the top concern for several successive years, followed by other finance-related issues, unemployment and EU member states’ public finances, was finally broken in 2015, when what became known as the “migration crisis” shook the resilience of European societies. Correspondingly, immigration suddenly trumped the previous economic concerns as the main concern facing the EU. In accordance with broader European public opinion non-EU immigration especially was regarded negatively in Finland, while the immigration of people from other EU member states was clearly seen more positively. At the same time, although still among the leading concerns, mentions of terrorism have been in constant decline. In 2019 increasing concern about the environment and climate overtook immigration as the top concern facing the EU. Although immigration concerns were now at their lowest level since “the long summer of migration” in 2015, they were still cited by 52.9 per cent of respondents. The division between EU and non-EU immigration remains stark: in 2019 83 per cent of Finns (EU average 67%) continued to regard immigrants from other EU member states positively, while 51 per cent (EU average 48%) viewed the immigration of people from outside the EU negatively. Concerns about terrorism, which had spiked in 2017, declined by more than half. In the last decade the general economic situation has clearly become less of a

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<sup>3</sup> The spring and autumn surveys of each have been merged in the table into an annual average for the sake of clarity. It must be noted that the fluctuation has thus been toned down to an extent. The same also applies to Tables 2 and 3.

concern. Concerns about EU member states' public finances were already ranked third from the Finnish perspective, with close to 31 per cent – twice the EU average – citing it as one of the two main concerns they felt.

**Table 6.1 here**

However, in the aftermath of and amidst the political aftershocks from the multiple witnessed and ongoing crises, the EU's influence in the world has increasingly been questioned, and the Finnish respondents already mention it almost as frequently as economic concerns. Notably, the Finnish figure (22.9%) is the highest of all the participating countries and more than twice the EU average (11%). Nevertheless, somewhat paradoxically, Finland ranks among the top countries with regard to trust in the EU: 56 per cent of Finnish respondents stated that they trusted the EU; the EU average was 43 per cent.

When the 2019 figures are assessed in more detail, it becomes evident that the environment and climate change create more anxiety for women (47%) than men (37%), while men (43%) are more concerned about immigration than women (35%). Interestingly, as Figure 6.4 shows, immigration to the EU causes worry especially among the young (15–24).

**Figure 6.4 here**

Environmental concerns, and interestingly immigration, and the EU's influence in the world are raised as concerns by highly educated respondents, most frequently by those who are still studying. Terrorism, the economic situation, and unemployment are in turn cited more often by those who are less educated. Those who consider themselves to belong to the upper class mention the EU's influence in the world as the top concern approximately three times more than the other social classes. The environment and climate change is the most frequently mentioned concern among the upper middle class, while those who see themselves as lower or working class rank immigration as their key concern. The place of residence seems to matter only marginally for the perspectives, apart from environmental matters, which are mentioned as the top concern more often by those living in large cities (54%) than rural residents (34%).

When the most important issues facing *Finland* are assessed, the situation differs significantly from that at the EU level (Table 6.2). Health and social security is now perceived as the most important national issue, mentioned by 48 per cent of respondents. This proportion is the highest of all participating countries (EU 28 + five candidate countries). Unemployment is no longer at the top of the rankings, while the environment and climate-related concerns have been rising rapidly and have been the second most frequently mentioned concerns over the last two years. The economic situation ranks as the third most important issue at the national level (17.9%). It is especially noteworthy that immigration, which was perceived as a major concern facing the EU, was seen as less important at the national level in Finland. Certainly, a spike can be observed in its assessment around and following the “migration crisis”, yet even then only one in five mentioned immigration as a top concern facing Finland. Terrorism, which had also gained prominence as a perceived issue confronting the EU, was assessed as a significantly less severe concern at the national level, ranking thirteenth, having been mentioned by only 2.7 per cent of the participants in 2019.

#### Table 6.2 here

Health and social security concerns were ranked as the main challenge by both sexes. However, they were cited considerably more often by women (55%) than men (39%). The second most frequently mentioned concern, the environment and climate change, was identically perceived by both sexes, while economic affairs, including the general economic situation, government debt, and unemployment, caused more concern among men than among women. Age-wise, health and social security-related concerns were predictably cited most often by those who were 55 or older (55%). Environmental concerns were raised most often by respondents between 40 and 54, who also cited the economic situation as a concern more often than the other age groups. Immigration was most often mentioned by those between 25 and 39, while 12 to 24 year olds highlighted unemployment as a top concern more frequently than others. Although concerns about health and social security were greatest, whatever the individual’s educational background, the variation became more prominent in other perceived concerns. Generally, the highly educated tended to worry about the environment and climate change, those with low educational attainment about immigration, and those still studying about unemployment. Those who considered themselves upper class seemed to worry most about the economic situation, inflation, the cost of living

and taxation, while those in lower social classes were more concerned about health the social security, and – in comparative terms – about unemployment and pensions (Figure 6.5). At the national level the environment and climate change mostly concerned dwellers of large cities, especially in the Helsinki Capital Region.

Figure 6.5 here

Predictably, at the personal level the top concerns were those closest to home (Table 6.3). In 2019 rising prices and the cost of living was finally ousted by health and social security concerns from its long-held position as the top individual concern. The frequency of citing living costs was more than halved from the previous year, while environmental and climate concerns, ranking third, increased by almost ten percentage points, making them almost as frequently cited as the household's financial situation, the second most pressing concern in 2019. Previous concerns about the economic situation in Finland and unemployment reduced significantly. Outside the ten most frequently mentioned concerns immigration was in twelfth place, cited by 4.6 per cent of respondents. Terrorism was fifteenth and last, with 1.6 per cent in 2019.

Table 6.3 here

Health and social security, as well as the environment and climate change, was mentioned more often by women than men. The latter gave more weight to the financial situation of both one's own household and Finland as a whole. Health and social security concerns, as well as pensions, were mentioned most frequently by those aged 55 and older, the environment and education by 15 to 24 year olds, while those between these age groups raised concerns about working conditions, housing, and the economic situation more frequently. Education-wise (Figure 6.6), health and social security concerns ranked as the main concerns for all apart from those still studying, who saw the environment and climate change as the key challenge. Students also mentioned the education system and unemployment considerably more often than the other age groups, while those with low educational attainment were more worried about pensions and housing. At the other end of the ranking immigration, crime, and terrorism – despite their prominence in the media – caused little personal anxiety.

Figure 6.6 here

When self-defined social classes are assessed, the following broad trends can be observed at the individual level. The well-off worried less about health and social security and more about the economic situation, but also the environment. By far the most drastic variation between social classes was evident in the evaluation of Finland's economic situation as a factor for personal wellbeing. No less than 88 per cent of those who situated themselves in the upper class mentioned this as the most severe issue they were personally facing – compared with 24 per cent of the upper middle class, 10 per cent of the middle class, 12 per cent of the lower middle class, and six per cent of the working class. Interestingly, inflation and the cost of living were raised as the key concern by the upper class twice as often as the other classes. In contrast, those who considered themselves to belong to the lower middle or working class seemed more concerned about social security, pensions, and unemployment.

At the individual level the place of residence had a slightly greater influence on perceived challenges than was the case when the issue facing either Finland or the EU was concerned. While health and social security concerns were raised as the main concern by those living either in rural areas (42%) or small and midsize towns (45%), for city residents the environment and climate change (37%) outweighed social concerns (32%). Here the residents of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region (the capital plus the region in which it is located) stood out from the rest of the country, mentioning environmental concerns (38%) as the main challenge more than twice as frequently as respondents from the rest of the country (17%). Inflation and the cost of living were mentioned as the main challenge by 21 per cent of rural residents, compared with only eight per cent of large city residents. Yet those living in large cities ranked housing as the third most severe issue they faced (21%), while for rural residents this was clearly less of a concern (9%). At the other end of the scale immigration was mentioned as a main concern by two per cent of rural residents and five per cent of city residents; terrorism was raised by only one per cent of all respondents.

## Conclusions

This brief discussion of the challenges and concerns Finns see themselves as facing is not offered here as an all-encompassing description of the contemporary multilevel security



scene. It has instead sought to steer the discussion away from a narrow understanding of security by drawing attention to the diversity and multiscalarity of the perceived threats to it. The ordinary security compass has not merely been reoriented but more profoundly thrown off track by changes in the broader security scene. The conventional eastern threat – perhaps psychologically comforting in its familiarity despite its continued severity – has not been replaced but is accompanied by an array of other concerns of an increasingly unpredictable nature. It is this general uncertainty, rather than any specific threat, that appears a key cause of the anxiety they may feel. Importantly, the concerns many cite as the main issue they face are not necessarily *foreign*, at least not in the conventional state-centric understanding of the word. The threats to individual wellbeing and security consist of a diverse combination of issues, many of which are inherently “intermestic”, a combination of international and domestic. What makes a comprehensive picture even more difficult to attain is that the issues cited are not equal in scale or scope, and many are interlinked – accentuating the need for a comprehensive approach to security. Instead of assessing any individual factor only on its own, attention must also be paid holistically to their multiplier effects: climate change will also affect immigration, immigration is likely to affect economic development and employment, and so on.

These issues come with a different severity for different people, based on a multiplicity of factors, not merely citizenship. Although this study’s focus was on Finnish citizens, the aim has been to show that this definition should indeed be addressed in its plurality, as opposed to the description of Finns as a coherent group with a single perspective or a clearly-defined national threat. As individual concerns are improperly mingled with the state’s interests, the common interest – the voice of the people that serves as the basis of the state’s assumed unity – tends to become increasingly polyphonic (Laine, 2020c). This confirms that security means different things to different people, and the issue perceived as posing a threat to it cannot always be rationally explained away, given their strong emotional load with a frequently strong psychological impact. Further attention needs to be paid to the notional consequence of the increasingly divergent perspectives. Increasing polarisation or dissent can itself be seen as a security challenge, testing the resilience of society and hampering its ability to effectively address and respond to common challenges. Yet individual human security is fundamentally socially embedded and can only flourish in a supportive sociopolitical environment. The state remains an important – though not the only – *producer* of human

security, yet it can also be its *cause*. However, the severity of the perceived risks increases within contexts of socioeconomic stress and geopolitical instability.

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