

**Gray and Red Turn Blue:
Framing the Impact of Irregular Warfare on Identity Salience**

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Abstract:

Why do some identities remain salient in the face of external pressures while others do not? In order to answer this question the case study of Finland is qualitatively analyzed to develop a theory that integrates the effect of irregular warfare into a constructivist perspective on identity formation. Historical analysis of Finnish history is utilized to provide a basis by which this theory can be developed, with particular focus on periods of prolonged irregular action against Finnish identity by Russia. It is found that irregular warfare provokes a constructivist process of increased identity salience via external threat perception, and results in a more salient identity over time. The process occurs due to changes in identity over time that form a defensively oriented and cohesive group identity, due to both structural and agency based factors. This work aims to expand upon the definitions of war traditionally used within ethnic studies literature in order to fall more in line with the increased usage of actions that constitute irregular warfare.

Introduction

“We fought 600 years for our freedom”

- Jean Sibelius (Los Angeles Philharmonic, N.D.)

History is rife with cases of identities erased from foreign pressure. The competitive nature of human existence has made forced assimilation and conquest fundamental to the course of history. Modernity has not been able to change this, even with the neoliberal consensus of the 20th century, and contemporary events give a plethora of cases wherein one identity attempts to overtake another. The process of statebuilding itself can be argued to be an attempt to consolidate disparate identities into a single group (Anderson, 2020). An interesting question then develops: what leads some identities to survive these attempts, while others are destroyed? Narrowing the lens for the purpose of parsimony, the case of Finnish national identity presents a valuable case study. Finnish identity emerged as a nationality largely during the period Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian empire, and developed true salience via the Finnish struggle for total sovereignty (Nortio et al., 2022). Why then does Finnish sovereignty remain so salient in the modern day, while multitudes of other identities within the historical bounds of the Russian state have been completely subjugated into the larger national identity of their overlord (e.g. Livonians, Khazars, etc)?

The puzzle of why some identities have remained salient while others are erased leads to the research question of: *What explains why Finnish and Ukrainian identities are so salient despite centuries of attempted assimilation by Russia?* Through analysis of Finnish identity over time, and examination of the means by which Russia has attempted to enforce its own national identity I have developed the theoretical argument that: *Persistent irregular warfare motivated by suppression of an identity serves to reinforce the salience of the identity over time via a*

process of constructivist identity formation. This claim will be evaluated by examining the process undertaken by Russia in attempting to overtake distinct identities, and use a constructivist framework to identify the means by which it has served to reinforce the salience of Ukrainian and Finnish identity. This paper will primarily focus on Finnish identity formation from the 18th century onward.. Particular focus will be paid towards the impact of irregular warfare on identity formation over time through building a national consciousness rooted in opposition to a former overlord.

Finnish identity presents a valuable case by which this theory can be evaluated. Finland was historically a peripheral province of Sweden, until the 1809 annexation of eastern portions of the Swedish Kingdom by Russia in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars (Nortio et al., 2022). The establishment of the semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland as a part of the Russian Empire enabled the formation of a distinct Finnish national identity (Paasi, 1999). The Grand Duchy of Finland maintained limited sovereignty, however it held no distinct foreign policy, and internal politics were heavily influenced by their Russian overlords (Paasi, 1999). Russian efforts at identity consolidation were greatly accelerated under the rule of Tsar Alexander III, and greater intervention in Finnish internal politics deepened the already large rift between Finland and Russia (Paasi, 1999). The eventual dissolution of Finnish sovereignty in 1899 hugely impacted Finnish identity, as opposition towards Russia and aspirations for an independent state became fundamental to what it meant to be a Finn (Nortio et al., 2022). The collapse of the Russian state during the 1917 revolution presented the Finns an opportunity to declare independence which resulted in the 1918 Finnish civil war between the victorious nationalist White faction and Russian backed socialist Red faction (Nortio et al., 2022). The Bolshevik support of the Reds led to Finnish identity becoming even more defined by resistance towards Russian efforts at control

(Nortio et al., 2022). The USSR attempted to invade Finland in the 1939 Winter War but was repelled, and the successful defense of their sovereignty led to total crystallization of a Finnish national identity defined by opposition to Russian aggression (Nortio et al., 2022). Victory in the Winter War was a seminal moment in the Finnish national myth, as it displayed perseverance against incredible odds (Paasi, 1999). While Finland remained neutral during the Cold War, a decision largely influenced by the pragmatic realpolitik of former president Urho Kekkonen, the USSR maintained a great deal of influence and continued to pursue gray zone warfare against Finland through propaganda and intelligence campaigns (Paasi, 1999). After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 Russian gray zone tactics continued in the 2000s, and this culminated in the Finnish decision to break neutrality and join NATO in 2023 (Nortio et al., 2022). History serves to illuminate the primary argument of the theory, as Russian gray zone aggression has been pivotal in the formation of Finnish identity across time. When the theory is applied to this case it demonstrates the impact of irregular warfare on identity formation.

Literature Review

Understanding how hybrid tactics influence identity development is an understudied field in ethnic studies. While much has been written about the impact of war on identity formation, there is a gap in research looking at the full spectrum of war. A key assumption to many papers examining the relationship between identity and warfare is that warfare exists solely in the traditionally defined sense. The methodology of Fearon and Laitin exemplifies this, as they utilize a dataset that bases a definition of war on total casualties, an understanding widespread throughout the field of political science (“criteria are broadly similar to those stated by the Correlates of War (COW) project”) (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). While groupings like this are useful for broad quantitative analysis, they differ considerably from what security scholars and more

importantly practitioners, would define as warfare. Clausewitz's famous axiom of "war is politics by other means" rings particularly true here, as examining warfare solely in its most overt form is like examining politics only through elections and coups. The basic assumption found throughout literature that war exists only as large-scale violence is outdated and leads to critical failures in attempting to understand the relationship of war and identity. While it is true that a broader definition of war reduces parsimony, not using it reduces accurate explanatory power. This paper aims to help bridge this gap by introducing analysis focused on irregular warfare, and seeks to provide explanation for the impact of hybrid conflict on identity formation. At this point it is useful to provide a concise definition of irregular warfare (also referred to as gray zone, or hybrid tactics/warfare) as it will be considered within the bounds of this paper: "deliberate multidimensional activities by a state actor just below the threshold of aggressive use of military forces." (Hoffman, 2016). Through this definition it becomes clear that the field of ethnic studies would benefit greatly from adopting a more fluid understanding of warfare, as many identity based conflicts fall more in line with irregular war than total war (e.g. the Burmese states usage of propaganda narratives to facilitate ethnic violence against Muslims) (Cheesman, 2017).

Theory is determined by which variables are examined and which are not, and to briefly invoke Waltz: "Theories are designed not to explain individual or particular events, but rather to explain classes of phenomena", thus the lack of consideration for irregular warfare leads to a failure in ethnic studies to explain a wide array of phenomena not associated with traditional notions of state violence (Waltz, 2010).

The work of Kalyvas provides a strong starting point for how irregular warfare impacts identity formation. In *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* the argument that violence during civil wars is a rational process based on incentives and opportunity is made to great effect (Kalyvas,

2006). In the case of Finland his theory can be directly applied to explain the high degree of violence against civilians in the 1918 civil war, with both factions engaging in violence for the purpose of gaining popular support (Hamalainen, 1974). The Whites were keen to utilize micro level grievances to garner support, and the societal effect of the civil war left a lasting memory in Finnish culture regarding violence (Hamalainen, 1974). When paired with a theory that more directly addresses how civil war impacts identity formation this framework becomes much stronger for explaining the case. Wood argues that civil war leaves a lasting legacy on social networks, and can serve to accelerate shifts in identity (Wood, 2008). The civil war catalyzed a nationalist vision of Finnish identity formed by the White faction in the wake of their victory, and part of this identity was built around opposition to socialist movements (Hamalainen, 1974). Russian support for the Red faction, which included direct military aid, formed a national memory that linked Russia with the carnage of the civil war (Hamalainen, 1974). Using these two frameworks enables an understanding of how civil war can form identities based around a shared memory of violence, which is useful for understanding the fact Finnish identity crystallized in the wake of the civil war. The limitation of this type of analysis is it fails to take into account the influence prior interaction between Russian and Finnish identities. The Russification campaign of the 19th century had left a lasting mark on Finland by producing a reactionary national focus on maintaining Finnish cultural distinction (Paasi, 1991). Persistent irregular war presents an interesting case of rational choice, one wherein citizens are incentivized to consolidate their identity in response to an external threat. Identity based divisions within society provide far less gains to individuals when there is a persistent threat to a nation state's sovereignty. Irregular warfare incentivises cohesion and increased identity salience through a process of both traditional and normative rationality, as realist concerns meld with the

constructivist process of shared historical memory to produce the effect identified in Finland. The extremely low rate of corruption and high societal trust within Finnish society are quantifiable long term outcomes of this process, as when the whole of Finnish society feels threatened by an external threat rent seeking behavior is far more socially costly (Zouaoui et al., 2017). While Kalyvas and Wood offer a starting point on understanding the impact of irregular war on identity formation, both fail to take into account macro-level factors unrelated to civil war and fall into the trap of narrowing their focus solely to full scale conflict.

Moving towards a more outright constructivist approach, Laitin's work offers considerable insight into identity formation. The argument that identity is not fixed, and is formed through individual responses towards incentive structures is a valuable viewpoint for developing a theory of irregular warfare's effect on identity formation (Laitin, 1995). Applying Laitin's work; Finnish identity developed as a strategic response to structural conditions that incentivized its salience. I argue that irregular warfare serves to create a structure that significantly impacts rational choice decisions, as it presents the options of assimilation or resistance. In the case of Finland this occurs both structurally and deliberately. Finnish elites responded to Russification attempts by promoting national identity, a rational choice taken in order to maintain power against foreign interference (Arosalo, 1998). Additionally when individuals recognize their identity being subject to gray zone tactics, it provides an incentive to increase salience in a "rally round the flag" effect. The literature broadly supports the finding that war has a positive correlation with national identity salience, and this is particularly true in the case of defensive territorial conflicts (Gibler et al., 2012). The state further enables these incentives by building institutions linked with national identity that promote language and culture, an effect clearly observable over time in Finnish society. In the mid 19th century,

Swedish remained a prominent language throughout the Finnish elite, however in response to russification efforts linguistic consolidation occurred rapidly (Paasi, 1999). Finnish has a high degree of visibility due to its roots in Uralic languages, which has historically contributed to a more salient identity since the uniqueness of Finnish identity is enhanced by its contrast to Slavic or Nordic languages (Paasi, 1999). Laitin's framework is limited in its ability to explain the influence of Soviet intervention on Finnish identity in the civil war period, however his findings on the constructed nature of identity and focus on elite driven decision making offer strong starting points for further examination of the case.

Relative deprivation theory as formed by the work of Gurr offers strong explanatory power to the Finnish case, particularly when progressive deprivation is applied. Progressive deprivation identifies conditions improving over time then sharply declining as a mechanism by which identity salience increases (Gurr, 2015). After gaining partial autonomy in 1809 Finns saw dramatic improvements in economic conditions and ethnic political representation, and once Russification efforts began saw sharp declines in both (Paasi, 1999). In 1899 Tsar Nicholas II instituted the February Manifesto, a decree which dissolved Finnish limited sovereignty and placed the Russian empire in *de jure* as well as *de facto* control of Finland (Jussila, 1984). Gurr's theory can be applied to explain both the increase in Finnish identity salience in this time period, and the decision made in 1917 to declare independence from Russia. The process of Russification produced high levels of grievance within Finnish society, and was multiplied by the shared Finnish historical memory of once having a sovereign nation state. Further strengthening this application was the 1939 Soviet Invasion of Finland, which once again produced a sharp decline in living standards tied to action by the Russian state. While Gurr offers a strong framework for understanding how relative deprivation produced a salient Finnish identity, and

why Finland chose to declare independence; it does not incorporate a constructivist process of identity formation (Gurr, 2015). This gap in explanatory power makes it only partially effective for explaining the case, as it may offer an explanation for questions examining a single point in history (e.g. identity salience around 1917), but does not fully explain the development of Finnish identity over time. Another key weakness is its overemphasis of agency based variables, which leaves key structural effects unexplored.

The work of Posner is far too influential to be ignored in any case of ethnic studies. In any theoretical application it is valuable to simply ask: is group size the real determinant of this outcome? While it is true that Finns have always maintained a strong ethnic majority within their territory, this variable alone does not explain the case. Posner's theory of group size is valuable, yet overly parsimonious with its assumptions regarding the nature of identity (Posner, 2004). Similar to Gurr, the failure to take into account structural factors produces an oversimplified view of rationality. While it is true that group size will have a strong impact on rational choice decisions (particularly when elites are attempting to produce a mobilization effect), it is more critical to examine how normative factors influence valuation. Posner lacks the ability to explain Finnish identity evolution, particularly in how state behavior has affected identity formation over time. The multifaceted relationship of Finnish identity towards Russian and Swedish identities was critical in impacting the development of salience over time. For much of Finnish history there was not a strong incentive under a traditional rationalist framework for elites to mobilize Finnish identity, however this is seen repeatedly in response to state behavior. The inability of agency based theories like Gurr to fully explain the case necessitates the examination of literature directly pertaining to Finland.

Finland remains an understudied case in ethnic studies literature, however the work of Paasi offers a strong starting point for case specific explanations. Paasi takes a geographical perspective towards Finnish identity formation that posits that a shared cultural memory developed in the 19th century and was partially driven by the natural landscape of Finnish territory (Paasi, 1996). He argues that nation building is fundamentally linked towards cultural attitudes around territoriality, and that the Finnish identity became salient when the territory occupied by Finnish people became sovereign (Paasi, 1996). Further building on this thesis two case specific historical factors are identified as being critical to identity formation, military service and cultural works (Paasi, 1996). The *Kalevala* is a historical epic derived from Finnish oral tradition that was published in 1835, and marked the first significant literary work to be published in Finnish (Paasi, 1996). At the same time the musical works of Jean Sibelius rose to prominence throughout Europe, much of Sibelius' works were focused on the natural landscape of Finland (demonstrated well in the masterful *Karelia Overture*, and historically important *Finlandia, Op. 26*), and this helped further a sense of Finnish artistic romanticism tied to land (Paasi, 1996). Military service is another key part of Finnish identity that has become tied to the development of a distinct concept of what it means to be a Finn. Even prior to a national consciousness emerging, Finnish peoples were included in the Swedish Army and played a critical role in the Thirty Years and Great Northern Wars (Paasi, 1996). During the initial period of independence Finland lacked a standing army and was dependent on Russia as a security guarantor, one of the most significant catalysts for resistance towards Russification was the 1878 conscription law passed by the Russian Duma (Jussila, 1984). In the 20th century military service became inexorably linked with civic nationalism through defensive wars, and Finland maintains a policy of mandatory national service in the 21st century (Paasi, 1996). While the

work of Paasi is valuable in providing case specific analysis of Finnish history, his theory of territorial identity linkage does not fully explain Finnish identity formation. The independent variable put forth does not account for the impact Russification had beyond the assumption that it had one. This theory could be applied to explain the linkage of cultural symbols over time, but not the macro level trend of increased identity salience over time.

Overall the literature offers a strong foundation for examining the case of Finland, but does not offer a satisfactory explanation for the observation of Finnish identity becoming salient in spite of state level repression by an external actor. Ethnic studies literature has traditionally emphasized the study of civil wars, and has limited depth in explaining the effects of inter-state conflict on identity.

Theoretical Argument

Returning to the core argument of: *Persistent irregular warfare motivated by suppression of an identity serves to reinforce the salience of the identity over time via a process of constructivist identity formation* the application of this theory will now be directly applied to the case of Finland. Breaking down this argument requires further definition of what persistent irregular warfare and constructivist identity formation mean to the case.

While irregular warfare is often assumed to be a modern phenomena, historical analysis shows it has always been present as a core aspect of organized violence (look towards the story of Gideon and the Midianites found in Judges 6-7 as a notable example). One of the most extreme applications of irregular warfare is the act of genocide, which serves as the cruel apotheosis of any tactic designed to modify enemy civilian perception (Vacca & Davidson, 2010). The wide spectrum of actions between conventional war and peace includes applications of hard and soft power, and both can be observed throughout Finnish history. The repressive

force of the imperial Russian security apparatus was felt throughout Finnish society, and strict censorship was paired with routine imprisonment of Finnish intellectuals (Jussilia, 1984). My theory posits that this type of persistent irregular warfare targeting identity has a reciprocal counter-effect of increased identity salience. It is well understood through ethnic studies literature that war is a fundamental accelerating force on identity salience, yet this outlook traditionally focuses solely on full scale conflict. Logic then dictates that the same effect would be observed at a lesser effect for forms of conflict that do not meet the threshold of war as defined by datasets like the COW. I expand upon this logic by introducing the mechanism by which the identified process occurs, one of constructivist reciprocal social interaction.

Constructivism at its core examines the normative process by which actors interact and change their identities as a result (Wendt, 1993). I argue that irregular warfare acts as a form of social interaction that, while intended to produce the opposite effect, leads to stronger identity salience. The Russification campaign of the 19th century included a multitude of elements easily identifiable with irregular warfare, and was explicitly targeted at subverting a distinct Finnish identity. As such, Russian state policy towards Finland across time can be characterized as threatening towards Finnish identity. Research in sociology shows that salience emerges as a response to collective threat, and while international relations scholars should be careful about the overemphasis of psychological principles on macro social behavior, the constructivist process formed by Wendt goes beyond traditional level of analysis problems (Singer, 1961) (Wendt, 1993) (Fischer et al., 2010). Irregular warfare produces a widespread revaluation of rational choice throughout a group that favors increased salience, however agency represents only part of the explanatory power of this perspective. A multitude of structural effects can likewise be identified to form portions of the constructivist process, while identifying the full breadth of

these effects is beyond the scope of this paper numerous examples abound. Using a simple one, irregular warfare promotes identity cohesion via a formed migration pressure on individuals with lower rates of salience. While the same effect is seen in cases of total war, irregular war does not allow for the same level of measures limiting voluntary migration (e.g. conscription laws not allowing men to leave the state), and so the process self selects for only those with stronger salience to remain in the state. Simply put, if society feels a war may be approaching, those unwilling to fight will leave. Finnish identity evolved over time with resistance to Russification as a core part of identity, which then produces the effect of forming a positive feedback loop where undertaking acts of resistance reinforces identity and provides further incentive for Russia to amplify subversive tactics. Specific events like the declaration of the February Manifesto or 1939 Winter War act as catalysts that accelerate this process and provide cultural anchors of memory for identity to form around. I further argue that Finnish identity, and others subject to similar conditions, have formed around societal resistance to irregular tactics.

Case Description

In order to describe the impact of irregular warfare on Finnish identity over time, I will evaluate two key examples of hybrid tactics being utilized by Russia, and how they impacted Finnish identity.

The relationship between Finnish and Russian identity is complex, but can be generally summarized over time as hostile. Even prior to modern state formation, Finnish tribes were subject to extensive raiding by foreign kingdoms, particularly the Russian speaking Novgorad Republic (Bohlin, 2021). The populations that became Finnish held a long standing shared memory of violent irregular tactics (raids, abductions, micro level territorial conflict) at the hands of Slavic peoples. The early modern period holds a key example of this fact with The

Great Wrath, a period where Russian forces occupied Finland from 1714-1721. The exact number of casualties is difficult to estimate, but it is widely agreed that tens of thousands of Finns were enslaved, tortured, murdered, and subject to sexual violence in this period (Bohlin, 2021). In an area whose population did not exceed 500,000 this meant that every Finn had been directly exposed to this period of brutality (Bohlin, 2021). Aside from the general lack of discipline in military forces during this time period, Russian brutality was a deliberate response to Finnish resistance movements, and was meant to disincentivize insurgency through violent reprisal (Bohlin, 2021). The effect of this on Finnish collective memory was profound, and served as one of the pillars that identity coalesced around. Over time the portion of Finnish identity tied to resistance and aspirations towards sovereignty grew due to the feedback loop previously identified. It is important to note that the exact moment that Finns gained a national conciseness is difficult to identify and explaining this is not within the bounds of the theory. My theory does not seek to explain how identity formed, but rather how it changed over time to become more salient in response to irregular tactics. In order to demonstrate the eventual outcome of this progression, we can turn towards contemporary Finnish politics.

Despite decades of non-alignment and a persistent incentive formed by realist pressures to maintain good relations with Russia, in 2023 Finland joined NATO. While some would simply argue the systemic effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine invoked the need for Finland to guarantee security via international cooperation, this oversimplifies the relationship between Finland and Russia in the 21st century. Russia has maintained a widespread irregular warfare campaign against multiple European states, with particular focus towards states that share a direct border with Russia (Kaczmarek, 2023). Finland has been subject in particular to cyberattacks on government institutions and weaponized migration, both of which have been

conducted since 2014 in order to destabilize Finnish society (Kaczmarek, 2023). While this case of irregular warfare has had small success in increasing political polarization, the primary result has in fact been galvanizing Finnish attitudes towards NATO membership (Kaczmarek, 2023). I believe this demonstrates both the direct process of my theory, and how the process has changed Finnish identity over time. Hybrid tactics served to increase the perceived level of threat generated by Russia, forming a constructivist process where Finns identity shifted away from a pragmatic neutrality and towards Western alignment (Kaczmarek, 2023). Finland is a particularly notable example of this process due to the extensive history of irregular warfare tactics conducted with the goal of decreasing identity salience.

Analysis & Application

The case of Finland offers rich historical depth to utilize the theory proposed, and serves to demonstrate the long term effects of irregular warfare on identity over time. Given the observed dependent variable of a salient national identity despite attempts to subvert it, Finland demonstrates the applicability of the proposed theory well. While current theories focused on the impact of war on identity could offer a similar result, understanding how action conducted both within and outside of traditional boundaries confining warfare adds additional theoretical depth. The inclusion of a constructivist perspective enables the theory to better explain the mechanism of interaction between the two identified variables. As to the question of why Finnish identity has remained salient in the face of attempts to subvert it, I believe this theory provides an adequate level of explanation for the result. If the effect of irregularity is outright ignored then any analysis of Finnish national identity fails to take into account the profound impact of events like Russification and The Great Wrath on the national consciousness that underpins identity salience. Beyond mere explanation, this theory can provide predictive power to other cases.

Applying the irregular warfare identity framework as a predictive instrument can offer considerable insight towards the future of Finnish national identity. If the irregular warfare campaign conducted by Russia is maintained then Finnish identity can be expected to further increase in salience due to threat perception. If the opposite occurs, and relations between the two states improve then Finnish identity will remain at the current levels of salience. Expanding into other cases, the framework offers predictive power for the development of other identities subject to irregular warfare. Taiwanese identity could serve as another valuable case study due to the persistence of Chinese irregular warfare in the past decades, and the case of Ukraine offers another very strong application of the theory. Ukraine and Finland both share a history of victimization by Russia that aims to subvert national identity, and Russia has often turned towards hybrid tactics in service of their goal. If this model had been used prior to the 2022 invasion, then it would have predicted the outcome of Ukrainian identity strengthening and remaining cohesive.

Turning back to Finland, a limited analysis of survey data can serve to demonstrate the applicability of this theory. Using survey data gained from polling attitudes around NATO accession over time demonstrates a strong positive correlation between increased Russian hybrid aggression in the mid 2010s and more positive outlooks towards becoming Western aligned, particularly after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Date	Commissioned by	Yes/ agree (%)	No/ disagree (%)	IDK/ neutral (%)
2022/01	MTV News	30	43	27
2022/01	Helsingin Sanomat	28	42	30
2022/02	Finnish Broadcasting Company	53	28	19
2022/03	Helsingin Sanomat	61	16	23
2022/03	Helsingin Sanomat	54	21	25
2022/03	Finnish Business and Policy Forum	60	19	21
2022/03	Finnish Broadcasting Company	62	16	21
2022/03	Helsingin Sanomat	48	27	26
2022/04	Helsingin Sanomat	65	13	22
2022/04	MTV News	68	12	20
2022/05	Helsingin Sanomat	73	12	15
2022/05	Finnish Broadcasting Company	76	12	11
2022/05	The Advisory Board of Defence Information	68	15	17
2022/06	Helsingin Sanomat	79	10	11
2022/11	Finnish Business and Policy Forum	78	8	14
2022/12	The Advisory Board of Defence Information	85	12	3
2023/02	Ilta-Sanomat	82	8	10
2023/02	Helsingin Sanomat	80	8	11
2022/02	Finnish Business and Policy Forum	72	10	18
2022/06	NATOpoll	81	7	11
2022/06	Helsingin Sanomat	79	10	11
2023/09	Finnish Business and Policy Forum	77	8	15
2023/11	NATOpoll	82	7	11

Fig 1. *Public opinion polls on Finland's NATO membership in 2022* (Forsberg, 2024).

Finland's strong democratic institutions likely results in an increased correlation between widespread public opinion among those of Finnish identity with policy implementation. Overall additional research into the validity of this theory is necessary to demonstrate a statistically significant quantitative correlation, but qualitative historical analysis makes for a strong starting point in determining theoretical viability.

Conclusion

The viability of this theory is seemingly strong, however I would argue the mindset around its creation may serve to be a more valuable contribution overall to the field of ethnic studies. A widespread overemphasis on methodologies and datasets with definitions of war that

differ from what current security studies literature views as war has resulted in a pedagogical tunnel of cognitive biases around the subject. A comparison could be made to the state of international relations theory in the early 1990s prior to the work of Wendt, where overemphasis on building upon traditional concepts of realism and liberalism resulted in theories with limited practical application. Ethnic studies must look towards new theoretical outlooks in order to maintain explanatory capability and expand upon pre-existing frameworks. The shift in global conflict towards greater use of irregular warfare seen in the 21st century necessitates a greater theoretical understanding of both what the gray zone is, and how it impacts identity.

As a final note I will briefly examine the Finnish cultural concept of *Sisu*, a spirit of “embodied fortitude” that lacks a direct translation into English (Lahti, 2019). *Sisu* has emerged as one of the core tenants of Finnish identity, and represents a societal outlook focused on perseverance against struggle (Lahti, 2019). Constructivism gives us a tool for examining the process by which cultural concepts are formed by, and subsequently form, historical processes, demonstrating the impact of historical events on identity formation. In the case of Finnish identity, outside pressures that have attempted to subvert identity have been so strong over time as to form a cultural concept focused on maintaining identity salience. The pressures of irregular warfare combined with traditional conflict have forged a notion of the Finn as distinct, fearless, and willing to endure suffering; all for the purpose of maintaining Finnishness against all odds.

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