

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Anchoring Sweden's Downsized Military – People's Attitude to, Knowledge About, and Trust in Our Military Defense

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The hypothesis was that post-Cold War downsizing of the military defense is associated with low levels of public anchoring, and that better anchoring is associated with a perception of a better performance by the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) and with a SAF connection and military experience. An additional research question concerned the level of concordance between the military and political elites and the population on these issues.

A questionnaire was sent to 3,000 randomly selected residents. The results showed that post-Cold War downsizing was only partly associated with low levels of anchoring. Better anchoring was associated with a perception of a better performance by the SAF and with SAF connection and experience. There was significant concordance between the elites and the public. The study shows that anchoring is best supported by increased communication of the results and benefits of the military defense to all subgroups of the population.

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**Keywords:** anchoring; trust; downsizing; Swedish Armed Forces; concordance

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## Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, many countries have dramatically downsized their armed forces. This means that the distance between the military and large groups of the population has increased. Knowledge, interest, and trust in the military may be negatively affected when a much smaller proportion of the cohort does military service and when people see less military activity. Accordingly, an important question is how to maintain healthy civil-military relations with a downsized force.

For a long time, the relationship between the military and civil society has attracted scholarly attention. Recent reviews address the multidimensionality of the field, which is described as a sprawling, complex mix of various themes and analytical approaches (Pion-Berlin & Dudley 2020), a field divided across multiple dimensions (Brooks 2019), or a field with many models, but none appropriate for all nations (Rukavishnikov & Pugh 2018).

One challenge that research has addressed is how to keep the power of the military under democratic control, and there has been debate about the appropriate level of independence or integration of the military in relation to civilian society (Burk 2002; Feaver 1999; Avant 1998; Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. 2012). A central question is whether, or to what degree, the military elite will follow orders from the political elite (Burk 2002). Another central question concerns the civil-military gap that exists, according to most scholars. This gap deals with the level of military influence on policy, differences between military and civilian populations, the degree to which the military is representative of society, and the amount of friction between civilians and the military in day-to-day interactions (Szayna et al. 2007; Feaver & Kohn 2001).

The present civil-military issue in Sweden is not the risk of a coup or that the military becomes too strong and independent. The problem is how to maintain a healthy societal anchoring in a situation of downsizing and distancing from the defense. This study will address this specific civil-military problem.

Most recent research shows that the armed forces in many countries enjoy a high level of public confidence and support (Hill, Wong, & Gerras 2013; Hines et al. 2015; Tiargan-Orr & Eran-Jona 2016). Western Europeans

and Americans trust their militaries more than they trust other national institutions (Johnson 2018). However, while trust is high and citizens' attitudes to the military are positive, citizens' knowledge of security matters is limited in many European countries (Caforio 2007). Besides the increasing distance created by downsizing and the abolishment of conscription, the performance of the military, the presence of a major national threat, and the civil-military gap are major factors supposed to facilitate public support and confidence (Avant 1998; Feaver & Kohn 2001; Hill, Wong, & Gerras 2013; Tiargan-Orr & Eran-Jona 2016; Jonsson, Nilsson, & Larsson 2011; Delhey & Newton 2003; Kelleher & Wolak 2007; Newton & Norris 2000; Newton 2001).

Since this study is made in a Swedish context, we will provide some background information about the specific Swedish situation. Throughout most of the 20th century, Swedish defense policy was based on the principle of non-alignment in peacetime, neutrality in wartime, and a strong national defense (Weibull 2007). During the Cold War, around 50,000 conscripts completed military service each year. Conscription and the fact that the male half of every age cohort completed basic military training represented the solution to the civil-military challenges of having, on the one hand, democratic control of the armed forces, and on the other, armed forces that are strong enough to deter a potential enemy from attacking.

After the end of the Cold War, the number of those completing military service was reduced to around one tenth of the previous numbers. This implied that the presence of the military in society diminished dramatically. Between 2010 and 2017, peacetime conscription was deactivated, and the SAF (Swedish Armed Forces) became an all-volunteer military. The government decided to reintroduce conscription from 2018 due to a shortage of volunteers and general rearmament in the region (Ministry of Defence 2016). The Defence Commission now proposes to double the number of those completing basic military training from about 4,000 to 8,000 (Ministry of Defence 2019). Still far from Cold War numbers, though.

Previous research in a Swedish context has shown that support for the SAF is relatively good (Berndtsson, Bjereld, & Ydén 2019; Berndtsson, Dandeker & Ydén 2015; Jonsson, Nilsson, & Larsson 2011; Ydén & Berndtsson 2012; Ydén & Berndtsson 2014; Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency 2018). A majority of citizens support armed resistance in case of an attack, even if the outcome is uncertain. Men and senior citizens generally have a more positive attitude to the military defense. At the same time, a majority is critical of the defense policy. Most prefer a conscription-based defense over a purely professional military. There is more support for international missions like the one in Afghanistan than for a national defense (Hines et al. 2015; Ydén & Berndtsson 2012). However, the support has varied over time, depending on the type of mission. People claim to have knowledge about the SAF, but it often proves to be limited, traditional, and stereotypical. People trust the armed forces, but do not know much about the institution (Jonsson, Nilsson, & Larsson 2011; Nilsson et al. 2012).

In a previous study we interviewed the military and the political elites about their view of factors that promote or hinder the SAF's societal anchoring (Wallenius et al. 2019). The military elite consisted of executives at the SAF Headquarters with strategic positions in relation to societal anchoring. The group consisted of military officers, mainly generals/admirals, colonels/navy captains, and lieutenant colonels/commanders, and civilians at corresponding levels. The political elite consisted of members of the parliamentary Committee on Defence and their officials. The results showed that both groups found that the public in general has little interest in the SAF, that the public's knowledge about the SAF is inadequate and out-of-date, and that the public finds the capacity of the SAF to be insufficient, although varied. Regarding trust, the problem described was not whether the public trusted the SAF to fulfil the political mission. Instead, the problem was that neither the military nor the political elite fully trusted the other. This could be related to the civil-military gap discussed above. According to the interviewed groups, anchoring could be negatively affected by an unclear defense policy, unclear expectations of the SAF, uncertainty about the purpose of the military defense, unclear responsibility for informing the general public/society, and insufficient external communication on the part of the SAF.

However, there are challenges facing research on civil-military relations that need to be addressed. First, the different political situations worldwide complicate generalizations. Most research is done in a specific national (often U.S.) context and is not necessarily valid in other national contexts (Cotter, Edmunds, & Forster 2002; Hedlund 2013).

Second, the theoretical foundation needs to be further developed. Bland (1999) argues that theories are either too narrowly conceived or they miss critical aspects of the problem. They concentrate on preventing a military coup, though this may not be the major problem in many countries. There are also few studies that systematically compare explanatory factors (Feaver 1999).

Third, there are several outcome variables concerning the public's relations to the military. One such category is public support/opinion and public endorsement of defense spending. Another category is public

confidence, trust, respect, and pride. A third is public interest, knowledge, and understanding. In our previous study, the term *societal anchoring* was defined as follows: The general public (1) is familiar with the SAF and their mission, (2) trusts the SAF to act in accordance with political wishes, and (3) is confident that the SAF reflect the values of the civilian society (Wallenius et al. 2019). Accordingly, we do not equate societal anchoring with a generally positive view of the defense. Neither do we define any political position in itself as more or less anchored. It is, however, desirable that people's opinions are based on knowledge and involvement, and that people trust government agencies.

Hence, it is in the interest of a nation to maintain good civil-military relations or, to put it differently, – to have a satisfying societal anchoring of the national defense. While we have some knowledge about the perceptions of the elites, we lack corresponding knowledge about the population in general. Hypotheses and questions are:

**Hypothesis 1:** In the general population, the post-Cold War downsizing and distancing of the military defense is associated with low levels of anchoring (public interest, knowledge, and trust). This hypothesis is based on the research reported above, indicating that especially interest and knowledge are limited, although few question the need for a military defense.

**Hypothesis 2:** On the individual level, better anchoring is associated with a perception of better performance by the SAF. This hypothesis is based on the research reported above, showing that trust in public institutions and in the military defense is associated with perceived performance.

**Hypothesis 3:** On the individual level, better anchoring is associated with an SAF connection and with military experience. This is a logical conclusion, though it indicates a problem, since a historically small proportion of the population presently has such connections and experience. Accordingly, the character of this relationship is important.

**Question 1:** What level of concordance is found between the military and political elite, on the one hand, and the general public, on the other, when it comes to issues related to anchoring? Schiff's (2009) concordance theory emphasizes the importance of conformity between the population, the political elite, and the military. Since this has never been studied in the Swedish context, it is formulated as an open question rather than a hypothesis.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants in the study consisted of a random selection of persons aged 18 to 84 years registered in Sweden. The sample size was 3,000. The service was provided by Skop-Research AB, which in turn purchased a sample from the Swedish population register (the National Register of Personal Addresses). The survey was conducted as a postal survey with two reminders. Each participant in the survey received an introductory letter, which explained the purpose of the survey and provided a personal password for an online questionnaire containing the same questions as the postal questionnaire. The participant could then choose between the paper and online forms.

Of the 3,000 people surveyed, 56 were unable to answer the questionnaire due to living abroad, illness, and the like. Of the remaining 2,944 people, 1,170 chose to answer the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 40%. In eight cases, only the background questions and/or single questions were answered. These eight respondents were excluded from the analyses. This means that 1,162 (39%) questionnaires have been analyzed. Of these, 1,038 (89%) responded by post and 124 (11%) online.

The gender distribution was largely even, and the age distribution is shown in **Table 1** below.

Of the respondents, 18% reported having completed primary and lower secondary school, 34% had completed upper-secondary school, and 47% had a post-secondary degree as the highest level of education. On the issue of main employment, 50% stated that they were employed, 40% that they had retired, and others that they were entrepreneurs, students, or job seekers. The proportion of married couples or cohabitants was 71%, while 29% were single. The proportion of respondents with children under the age of 18 was 23%. In addition, 81% of the respondents had been born in Sweden and had Swedish-born parents, 7% had been born in Sweden and had at least one foreign-born parent, and 12% had been born abroad.

### *Representativeness*

Respondents with a post-secondary degree were overrepresented in the sample (48% of the sample versus 36% of the population). Respondents with a secondary education were underrepresented (34% of the sample versus 45% of the population). Respondents with a primary education were somewhat under-

**Table 1:** Age of Respondents.

Age	Percentage of the sample	Percentage in the whole country *
76–84	9%	6.7%
66–75	22%	13.8%
56–65	19%	15.2%
46–55	17%	17.1%
36–45	13%	16.8%
26–35	10%	16.7%
18–25	10%	13.7%

*Note:* \* The figures are from 2014 and collected from Statistics Sweden (2015a).

represented (17% of the sample versus 19% of the population) (Statistics Sweden 2015b). Foreign-born respondents were underrepresented (12% of the sample versus 19% of the population) (Statistics Sweden 2015d). The gender distribution was representative of the general population with 49.9% female and 50.1% male respondents (Statistics Sweden 2015c). Finally, respondents aged 18–45 years were slightly underrepresented, while respondents aged 55–75 years were overrepresented (see **Table 1**). Compared to the general population, the respondents were thus somewhat older, more educated, and included slightly more Swedish-born individuals.

To correct for any selective non-responding, post-stratification was conducted for region, gender, and age. A weighting variable was constructed. However, the weight did not affect the mean values of the indices. Since no real differences were detected, respondents were assumed to be representative of the population, and unweighted data could thus be used.

### **Measures**

The survey consisted of 95 questions/statements and one open question. The majority were answered on a five-point scale (agree entirely – do not agree at all), and most were derived from the results of a previous interview study within the project (Wallenius et al. 2019). The factors which the interviewees in these studies (the executive and political elites) considered important for anchoring, and which were relevant to the public, were included. This means that problems that were considered defense-internal or internal political issues were left out of this survey.

The survey contained the following blocks:

- Assessment and concern for societal risks and threats (disasters, military attacks, terrorism)
- Interest in the SAF and the defense policy
- Knowledge about the SAF and the defense policy
- View of the SAF's focus, tasks, and cost
- Perception of the SAF's focus, tasks, and cost, and the defense policy's focus and long-term perspective
- Opinion of the SAF's international missions
- Trust in the SAF and the defense policy
- Statements of ways to strengthen the trust

In addition, the questionnaire included background questions (gender, age, education, employment, marital status, place of birth, size of the place of residence, and personal connection to the SAF) and one open question, where the respondents could state if they saw any other or more significant threats to the country than a military attack.

The data collection was conducted between 4 June and 4 September 2015.

### **Converting Questions/Statements into Indices**

Indices were formed through factor analyses of the various blocks of questions. Questions with a low response rate (more than 30% missing) were removed from this part of the analysis. The indices were largely identical to the survey blocks. In some cases, however, the blocks were divided into several indices (see **Table 2**).

**Table 2:** The Indices Formed after Factor Analysis.

Original blocks	Index	Typical item	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Assessment of and concern for societal risks and threats	Perceived risk of different threats to society (disaster, military attack, terrorism)	How do you perceive the risk that a major crisis/disaster will occur in Sweden in the next five years?	5	$\alpha = .867$
	Worries about different threats to society	How big is your concern for a major crisis/disaster to occur in Sweden?	5	$\alpha = .907$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	How interested are you in the direction and activities of the Armed Forces?	7	$\alpha = .957$
Knowledge about the defense policy	Knowledge about the defense policy	I follow the defense policy debate.	8	$\alpha = .927$
Knowledge about the SAF	Knowledge about the SAF	I think that I have a good knowledge of how the SAF are recruiting and training soldiers and corresponding personnel groups today.	4	$\alpha = .876$
Opinion of the SAF's focus, task, and costs, and the defense policy's focus and long-term perspective	Positive attitude to a military defense, military service, and defense industry	I believe Sweden should have a defense industry.	9	$\alpha = .881$
	Positive attitude to defense alliances	I believe Sweden should become a NATO member.	2	$\alpha = .797$
Opinion of the SAF's international missions	Positive attitude to international missions	I believe Sweden's military operations abroad have contributed to increased peace and security.	4	$\alpha = .819$
	Concern about international missions	I believe Sweden's military operations abroad have increased the risk of military attacks against Sweden.	2	$\alpha = .791$
Trust in the SAF and defense policy	Trust in the SAF	I have confidence in the SAF's ability to accomplish its tasks.	5	$\alpha = .857$
	Trust in the defense policy	I have confidence in the government's defense policy.	3	$\alpha = .914$
Ideas for strengthening trust	The SAF's core values are important	How important for your confidence is it that the SAF engage in diversity issues?	4	$\alpha = .830$
	The SAF's transparency is important	How important for your confidence is it that the SAF are open about their activities?	4	$\alpha = .751$

*Note:* Most items were answered on a five-point scale (agree entirely – do not agree at all). Items formulated as questions were answered on different five-point scales (non-existent – very large; not at all – very much).

### Analysis

The study is cross-sectional, and the purpose is to show statistical correlation between different factors as well as to highlight differences between subgroups.

The indices were created through block-to-factor analysis (direct axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation). The indices' reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The relationship between the indices was studied through correlation analysis (Pearson bivariate), and the differences between subgroups were mapped via t-tests (independent samples) or variance analysis (one-way ANOVA).

Effect size was calculated to get a better indication of the relative size of the mean value differences. The measure of one square ( $\eta^2$ ) can vary between 0 and 1. A value of .01 is considered a small effect, a value of .06 a moderate effect, and a value of .14 indicates a great effect (Pallant 2013).

## Results

The results section starts with a section comparing different subgroups, before identifying the statistical relationships between the different indices.

### *Index Means and Standard Deviations*

Even if there is reason to be careful when comparing the different scales, we can conclude that the majority of respondents consider both the SAF's value-based work and openness as important for increased trust (see **Table 3**). Generally, respondents have a relatively positive attitude to the defense, military service, the defense industry, and international missions. However, with regard to international missions, there is more variation in the responses. The mean for experienced knowledge about the defense policy and SAF is remarkably low. It should also be noted that the public clearly trusts the SAF more than the defense policy, even though this trust is generally limited. Simply put, people have "partial" trust in the SAF and between "to a low degree" and "partial" trust in the defense policy.

### *Open Question About Perceived Threats to Society*

The survey also gave the respondents a chance to provide examples of threats to the Swedish society which they considered bigger than military threats. 568 respondents answered this open question. Terrorism was the most common answer (45%). Other commonly occurring responses were environmental and climate changes (16%), socioeconomic differences and threats to the welfare society (13%), infrastructure threats, including cyber threats (10%), crime (10%), immigration (8%), xenophobia (6.5%), integration and conflicts between (ethnic) groups (5.8%), and economic threats (5.5%).

### *The Relationship Between the Indices*

The relationship between the indices is shown in **Table 4**. It is also illustrated in **Figure 1**, where medium or strong correlations are shown. The limit of .350 was chosen for this illustration.

Some of the relationships shown in the correlation analysis were expected. Examples include the positive correlations between perceived risk and perceived concern, between interest in and knowledge about the SAF/the defense policy, and between trust in the SAF and trust in the defense policy. Also expected was the correlation between a positive attitude to the SAF and a positive attitude to defense alliances and international missions, as well as to interest in the SAF and the defense policy.

The correlation between a positive attitude to the SAF and worrying about/risk of different threats to society is notable. We do not know the causal direction, but a reasonable hypothesis is that some degree of

**Table 3:** The Different Indices Ranked by Mean.

	<b>Index</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	The SAF's transparency is important	963	3.97	0.72
2	Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	780	3.85	0.86
3	The SAF's core values are important	955	3.79	0.88
4	Positive attitude to international missions	772	3.34	0.84
5	Trust in the SAF	900	3.16	0.75
6	Positive attitude to defense alliances	762	3.12	1.39
7	Perceived risk of different threats to society (disaster, military attack, terrorism)	1,032	2.67	0.74
8	Concern about international missions	966	2.62	0.95
9	Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	1,113	2.56	1.02
10	Knowledge about the defense policy	923	2.53	0.89
11	Worries about different threats to society	1,066	2.53	0.83
12	Trust in the defense policy	817	2.46	0.88
13	Knowledge about the SAF	993	2.27	0.83

*Note:* Large Index 7, 11: Scale 1–5, where 1 = nonexistent, 3 = moderate, and 5 = very.

Index 9: Scale 1–5, where 1 = not at all, 3 = quite interested, and 5 = very interested.

Index 1, 3: Scale 1–5, where 1 = not important, 3 = quite important, and 5 = very important.

Others: Scale 1–5, where 1 = do not agree at all, 3 = agree in part, and 5 = agree entirely.

**Table 4:** Correlations Between the Indices.

	Risk	Worries	Interest	Know DefPol	Know SAF	Pos Def	Pos All	Pos IntMi	Conc IntMi	Trust SAF	Trust DefPol	Core Values
Worries	.812**											
Interest	.327**	.289**										
Know DefPol	.206**	.160**	.804**									
Know SAF	.055	.008	.591**	.717**								
Pos Def	.387**	.357**	.416**	.334**	.234**							
Pos All	.189**	.212**	.141**	.133**	.093*	.464**						
Pos IntMi	.032	.021	.297**	.218**	.324**	.379**	.275**					
Conc IntMi	.270**	.279**	.092**	.036	-.025	.163**	.172**	-.134**				
Trust SAF	-.103**	-.098**	.111**	.021	.168**	.141**	.154**	.535**	-.087*			
Trust DefPol	-.310**	-.224**	-.064	-.069	.056	-.129**	.033	.246**	-.103**	.546**		
Core Values	-.165**	-.111**	.024	.008	.021	-.139**	.015	.309**	-.104**	.305**	.335**	
Transparency	.086	.125**	.281**	.231**	.147**	.269**	.230**	.329**	.025	.221**	.086*	.429**

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; Know = knowledge, DefPol = defense policy, Pos = positive attitude, Def = defense, All = alliance, Conc = concern, IntMi = international missions.

worrying/risk makes a military defense more relevant. Also worth noting is the fact that trust in the SAF is strongly connected to a positive attitude to international missions, whereas its connection to other indices is weak or insignificant.

### Significance of Respondents' Background

#### Age

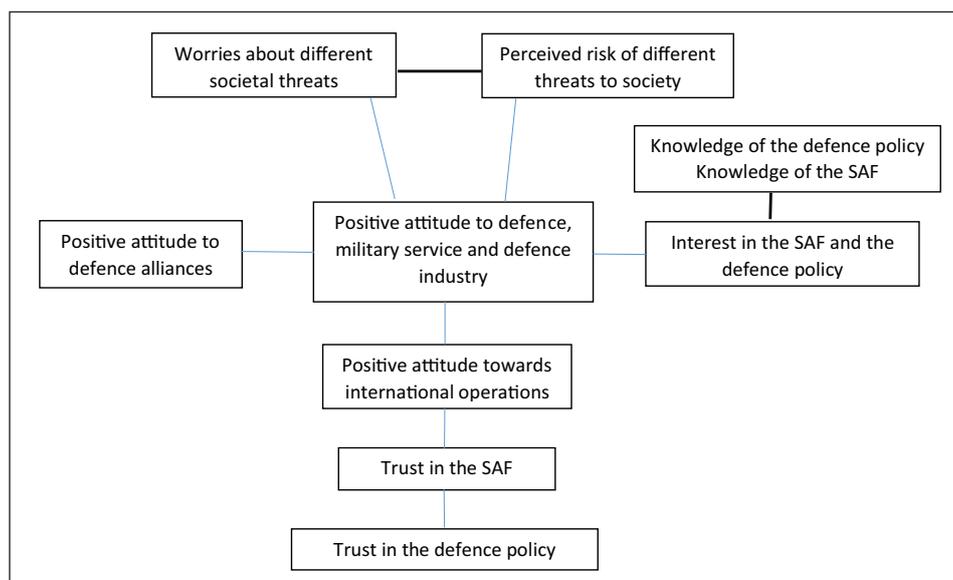
Age has little or no impact on the different indices. The index with the largest correlation with age is trust in the defense policy ( $r = .183$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Younger respondents showed slightly less trust in the defense policy than older respondents, but the correlation is weak.

#### Gender

For several indices, there is a significant difference between women and men, albeit with a small to moderate effect size (see **Table 5**). Men claim to be more interested in the SAF and the defense policy, as well as having greater knowledge of these areas. Men also have a somewhat more positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry, international missions and defense alliances. Women consider the SAF's value-based work as more important for their trust in the SAF. Part of the gender gap remains, even if you check for military service (see further below on military service).

#### Education

The questionnaire defines four levels of education: primary and lower-secondary school ( $n = 175$ ), upper-secondary school  $n = 381$ ), post-secondary education of less than three years ( $n = 209$ ), and post-secondary



**Figure 1:** An illustration of how indices are correlated. Only medium and strong correlations ( $> .350$ ) are included.

**Table 5:** Index Where Men and Women Differ.

	Men <i>M (SD)</i>	Women <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.85 (1.02)	2.27 (0.93)	10.01	<.001	.083
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.78 (0.87)	2.23 (0.81)	9.87	<.001	.096
Knowledge about the SAF	2.53 (0.84)	1.98 (0.72)	11.13	<.001	.110
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	3.98 (0.83)	3.64 (0.87)	5.51	<.001	.038
Positive attitude to international missions	3.42 (0.88)	3.23 (0.75)	3.22	.001	.013
Positive attitude to defense alliances	3.28 (1.38)	2.88 (1.39)	3.89	<.000	.020
The SAF's core values are important	3.65 (0.88)	3.93 (0.85)	-4.96	<.001	.025

education of three years or more ( $n = 319$ ). The higher the education, the greater the respondent's interest in and knowledge about the SAF and the defense policy (see **Table 6**). Higher education also implies that the SAF's transparency is an important factor with regard to trust.

For other indices, the post hoc test (Scheffé) shows the following significant differences between the groups ( $p \leq .05$ ). Concern about international missions is significantly greater among respondents with an upper-secondary education than among respondents with a post-secondary education of three years or more. Trust in the defense policy is significantly greater among respondents with a primary and lower-secondary education than among respondents with an upper-secondary education. The SAF's core values are considered significantly more important by those with a post-secondary education of three years or more than by those with a primary or secondary education.

### Place of residence

The questionnaire included items about the size of the place of residence. The division was:

- City with more than 200,000 inhabitants ( $n = 279$ )
- City with 81-200,000 inhabitants ( $n = 199$ )
- City with 21-80,000 inhabitants ( $n = 248$ )
- Rural area, less than 20,000 inhabitants ( $n = 408$ )

The larger the hometown, the greater the respondent's interest in the SAF and the defense policy and knowledge about the latter (see **Table 7**). For other indices, the post hoc test (Scheffé) shows the SAF's core

**Table 6:** Indices Where Levels of Education Differ.

	All <i>M (SD)</i>	Primary. <i>M</i>	Second. <i>M</i>	Post-second. <3years <i>M</i>	Post-second. ≥3years <i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.57 (1.02)	2.25	2.45	2.68	2.82	14.77	<.001	.041
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.54 (0.89)	2.23	2.40	2.57	2.81	17.07	<.001	.056
Knowledge about the SAF	2.28 (0.83)	1.97	2.22	2.35	2.46	12.35	<.001	.038
Concern about international missions	2.61 (0.94)	2.63	2.74	2.55	2.48	3.96	.008	.013
Trust in the defense policy	2.44 (0.87)	2.67	2.35	2.52	2.41	4.22	.006	.016
The SAF's core values are important	3.79 (0.88)	3.71	3.65	3.82	3.97	7.26	<.001	.024
The SAF's transparency is important	3.98 (0.72)	3.86	3.88	4.09	4.06	5.65	.001	.018
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	3.84 (0.87)	3.84	3.91	3.93	3.71	2.71	.044	.011

**Table 7:** Indices Where Those Living in Cities of Different Sizes/Areas Differ.

	All <i>M (SD)</i>	< 20 <i>M</i>	21–80 <i>M</i>	81–200 <i>M</i>	< 200 <i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.57 (1.02)	2.45	2.53	2.65	2.71	4.09	.007	.011
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.53 (0.89)	2.42	2.53	2.56	2.68	3.86	.009	.013
The SAF's core values are important	3.79 (0.88)	3.82	3.61	3.78	3.91	4.65	.003	.015
The SAF's transparency is important	3.97 (0.72)	3.95	3.87	4.04	4.04	2.65	.048	.008

Note: Citizens in thousands.

values to be more important in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants than in cities with 21,000-80,000 inhabitants.

**The SAF's presence and visibility at place of residence**

Respondents living in a town that is home to a military unit or military school (n = 235) show a greater interest in the SAF and the defense policy and have more knowledge about both than respondents living in a town that is not home to a military unit or military school (n = 704) (see **Table 8**). The effect size is small for all indices.

Respondents who reported that the SAF are visible in the neighborhood (n = 156) are more interested in the SAF and the defense policy than respondents who do not experience the SAF as visible (n = 917). The former also report greater knowledge about the SAF (see **Table 9**). However, the power size is small.

**Foreign descent**

A total of 11% (n = 133) of the respondents are foreign-born, and 18% (n = 210) have at least one foreign-born parent. Of those who were born abroad, almost all (n = 124) also have a parent who was born abroad, and therefore, the group of foreign-born respondents is almost entirely included within the group of respondents with one foreign-born parent.

Foreign-born respondents report lower perceived risk of threats to society and less worrying than those born in Sweden (see **Table 10**). They perceive themselves as having less knowledge about the defense policy. They are more positive toward defense alliances and have greater trust in the defense policy. The effect size for foreign descent or not is small for trust in the defense policy and very small for the remaining indices.

Respondents with at least one foreign-born parent have a slightly lower mean score for worrying than others (see **Table 11**). They also have a more positive view of defense alliances and largely report that they trust the defense policy. However, the variable foreign-born parent has little effect on these indices.

**Personal connection with the SAF**

The questionnaire included questions about whether the respondent or a close relative of the respondent was connected to the SAF, and whether the respondent had been an employee of the SAF or active in the Home Guard. 15% (n = 154) had such a link, and 85% (n = 887) did not.

**Table 8:** Indices Where Those Who Live Near a Military Unit or School Differ from Those Who Do not.

	SAF at home <i>M (SD)</i>	SAF not at home <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.85 (1.03)	2.57 (0.98)	3.65	<.001	.015
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.83 (0.79)	2.51 (0.88)	4.44	<.001	.025
Knowledge about the SAF	2.50 (0.84)	2.27 (0.81)	3.45	.001	.014

**Table 9:** Indices Where Those Who Perceive the SAF as Visible in the Neighborhood Differ from Those Who Do not.

	SAF visible <i>M (SD)</i>	SAF not visible <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.82 (1.04)	2.57 (0.99)	2.71	.007	.007
Knowledge about the SAF	2.58 (0.85)	2.25 (0.81)	4.27	<.001	.019

**Table 10:** Indices Where Foreign-Born Differ from Those Born in Sweden.

	Foreign-born <i>M (SD)</i>	Born in Sweden <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Perceived risk of different threats to society (disaster, military attack, terrorism)	2.44 (0.89)	2.69 (0.72)	-2.75	.007	.007
Worries about different threats to society	2.34 (1.00)	2.55 (0.80)	-2.15	.034	.004
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.31 (0.94)	2.56 (0.88)	-2.57	.010	.007
Trust in the defense policy	2.74 (1.00)	2.44 (0.86)	2.87	.004	.010

**Table 11:** Indices Where Those with Foreign-Born Parents Differ from Those with Parents Born in Sweden.

	At least one foreign-born parent <i>M (SD)</i>	No foreign-born parents <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Worries about different threats to society	2.39 (0.92)	2.56 (0.80)	-2.28	.023	.005
Positive attitude to defense alliances	3.37 (0.70)	3.20 (0.60)	2.73	.006	.010
Trust in the defense policy	2.70 (0.99)	2.42 (0.85)	3.27	.001	.013

**Table 12:** Indices Where Those with Personal Connections to the SAF Differ from Those Who Do not Have Connections.

	Pers. connection <i>M (SD)</i>	No pers. connection <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Perceived risk of different threats to society (disaster, military attack, terrorism)	2.82 (0.72)	2.64 (0.73)	2.64	.008	.007
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.92 (1.01)	2.47 (0.99)	5.01	<.001	.025
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.78 (0.84)	2.46 (0.88)	3.81	<.001	.017
Knowledge about the SAF	2.59 (0.81)	2.19 (0.80)	5.35	<.001	.031
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	4.09 (0.75)	3.78 (0.87)	4.21	<.001	.025
Positive attitude to defense alliances	3.46 (1.31)	3.05 (1.40)	2.96	.003	.013
Trust in the defense policy	2.24 (0.88)	2.50 (0.86)	-3.02	.003	.012
The SAF's core values are important	3.62 (0.93)	3.83 (0.85)	-2.67	.008	.008

Respondents with a personal connection with the SAF experience greater interest and knowledge about the SAF and the defense policy (see **Table 12**). They have a more positive attitude to the defense, military service, the defense industry, and defense alliances, but less trust in the defense policy. Respondents who are closely linked to the SAF also experience threats to society as greater risks and consider core values less important factors when it comes to increasing trust in the SAF. However, the effect size is small on these indices.

### Completed military service

Respondents who have completed military service ( $n = 350$ ) differ from those who have not ( $n = 691$ ). They experience greater interest in and more knowledge about the defense policy and the SAF (see **Table 13**). The power size is moderate. Those who have completed military service also have a more positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry, as well as to international missions, though the size of the impact is small.

As 338 of the 351 respondents who have completed military service are men (98.6%), comparing men who have completed military service ( $n = 338$ ) with men who have not ( $n = 187$ ) can isolate the effect of military service. The men who have completed military service experience greater interest in the SAF and the defense policy compared to those who have not completed military service (see **Table 14**). They also believe to have more knowledge about the defense policy and the SAF, and they have a more positive attitude to the defense, military service, the defense industry, and international missions. However, the effect size of conscription experience is moderate.

The results also show that completed military service explains a part of, but not the whole difference between men and women. Even the men who have not completed military service have a higher mean than women with regard to interest in and knowledge about the SAF and the defense policy.

## Summary of Results

### Level of anchoring

The respondents have a relatively positive attitude to the defense, military service, the defense industry, and international missions. People generally feel the need for a military defense, but their attitudes to military

**Table 13:** Indices Where Those Who Completed Military Service Differ from Those Who Did not.

	Service <i>M (SD)</i>	No service <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.93 (0.96)	2.36 (0.98)	-8.67	<.001	.070
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.89 (0.81)	2.32 (0.86)	9.44	<.001	.097
Knowledge about the SAF	2.62 (0.77)	2.08 (0.78)	9.93	<.001	.099
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	4.05 (0.78)	3.69 (0.90)	-5.78	<.001	.045
Positive attitude to international missions	3.42 (0.83)	3.30 (0.82)	2.03	.043	.006

**Table 14:** Indices Where Men with Completed Military Service Differ from Men Who Have not Served.

	Men with service <i>M (SD)</i>	Men without service <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	2.92 (0.95)	2.70 (1.09)	2.33	.020	.011
Knowledge about the defense policy	2.88 (0.81)	2.59 (0.95)	3.21	.002	.022
Knowledge about the SAF	2.61 (0.77)	2.36 (0.91)	3.05	.002	.019
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	4.05 (0.78)	3.82 (0.93)	2.53	.012	.015

alliances are more varied. Many people have little knowledge about both the defense policy and, above all, the SAF. Their trust in the SAF is somewhat greater than in the defense policy, though the latter can be regarded as remarkably low.

#### Relations between the indices

Some of the correlations were expected, such as the correlations between worrying and risk, between a positive attitude to the SAF, to military alliances, and to international missions, between trust in the SAF and trust in the defense policy, and finally, between interest and knowledge. Worth noting here is that trust in the SAF is strongly connected to a positive attitude to international missions.

#### Differences between demographic categories

**Table 15** provides a summary of the significant differences between subgroups (male, foreign-born respondents, respondents with a longer education, respondents living in a large city, respondents with a personal connection to the SAF, and respondents who have completed military service). It is clear that interest and knowledge are greatest among male respondents, respondents with a longer education, respondents with a personal connection to the SAF, and respondents who have completed military service. Male respondents, respondents with a personal connection to the SAF, and respondents with military experience are also somewhat more positive to the defense, military service, the defense industry, military alliances, and international missions. These groups are, of course, overlapping, as mainly men have military experience.

Foreign-born respondents show greater trust in the SAF and the defense policy than Swedish-born respondents. Core values are considered more important among female respondents and respondents with no connection to the SAF.

At the same time, it should be noted that although the differences between groups are statistically significant, they are generally small to moderate. They should consequently be understood more as trends than as all-or-nothing relationships.

## Discussion

According to the study, hypothesis 1 – that post-Cold War downsizing is associated with low levels of anchoring – is only partly true. The defense's current level of societal anchoring is acceptable, judging from the present results. Confirmation of this hypothesis is restricted by a lack of established measures and of reference values from previous eras, though. What could threaten this anchoring is lack of knowledge and the distance between the SAF and large groups of the population.

**Table 15:** Overview of Background Factors with Significant Differences Between Subgroups.

Index	Men	Foreign-born	High education	Big hometown	Connection to SAF	Completed service
Perceived risk of different threats to society (disaster, military attack, terrorism)		–			+	
Worries about different threats to society		–				
Interest in the SAF and the defense policy	++		++	+	++	++
Knowledge about the defense policy	++	–	++	+	++	++
Knowledge about the SAF	++		++		++	++
Positive attitude to the defense, military service, and the defense industry	++				++	++
Positive attitude to defense alliances	++	+			+	
Positive attitude to international missions	+					+
Concern about international missions						
Trust in the defense policy		+			–	
The SAF's core values are important	—				–	
The SAF's transparency is important						

*Note:* + means that the subgroup has significantly higher value, – implies significantly lower + respectively – means that  $p \leq .05$ ; ++ respectively — means that  $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 2 – that better anchoring is associated with a perception of better performance by the SAF – was confirmed, as trust in the SAF is correlated with a positive attitude to international missions. The Afghanistan mission (ISAF) was for a long time the most visible of the SAF's activities and affected the public view of the SAF's performance, even though Sweden has now entered a phase with more focus on national defense.

Hypothesis 3 – that better anchoring is associated with a personal SAF connection and experience – was also confirmed, as those who experience relatively more interest and knowledge are men who have done military service, have a personal connection with the SAF and a higher level of education.

Turning to question 1 – concordance between the elite and the general public – we can conclude that there are significant similarities between the results of the present study and the results of a previous study focusing on how the military and civilian elites perceived societal anchoring (Wallenius et al. 2019). The public is relatively positive to the idea of a military defense and considers it necessary. The elites feel that the public wants a military defense, but that the opinion varies somewhat, depending on the current threats to the nation. Furthermore, the public reports a relatively positive attitude to international missions. Among the elites, international missions enjoy great support, but the fact that their purposes are perceived as unclear has impaired the anchoring.

The public perceives their interest to be low to moderate. The elite groups hold a similar view: that public interest in the SAF and the defense policy is generally low. The public reports having limited knowledge about the SAF and the defense policy, and the elites find that the public knowledge is inadequate and outdated, albeit varied. The public reports partial trust in the SAF, and the elites find that the general public has inadequate, albeit varied views of the capacities of the SAF, in particular regarding national defense.

Lack of trust in the defense policy is assumed to reflect a general lack of trust vis-à-vis politicians and political parties. However, we have not measured public trust in other policy areas and therefore do not know whether public trust in defense politicians differs from public trust in politicians in general.

One conclusion of the study is that politicians, as well as the SAF, must be better at communicating the results achieved in their activities, including international missions. What seems to be critical is not whether we should have a military defense or not, but that this defense delivers reasonable and clear results.

As for target groups in the population, we find that there are differences between the subgroups. However, it should be noted that these differences are consistently moderate and do not give reason to exclude any group from future communication efforts. The results suggest that it is the *content* of the information provided that is important, not to whom it is addressed. If you were to formulate some general advice on the basis of this study, it would be to communicate the results and benefits of the military defense and to do so widely.

This study has confirmed the conclusions of the studies referred to in the introduction: that downsizing in itself does not necessarily have a significant negative effect on the societal anchoring of the armed forces. The important gap seems to be not between civilians and the military, but between those with and those without knowledge of the latter. Most people simply do not have up-to-date knowledge of the present status of the armed forces and how it relates to the defense policy. Only a minority within the political and military elites do.

When it comes to conceptual issues, this study has deliberately avoided outcome variables like support for higher defense spending. This would be to regard certain political views as more correct than others, which is not a scientific task. We believe, however, that knowledge and trust are generally preferable in any democracy, despite ideological views. Finally, this study has highlighted the importance of the armed forces informing the public of what they do, why they do it, and how successful they are when doing it.

A cross-sectional study based on self-reporting has its strengths and weaknesses. It provides a good picture of the views of the public, including different subgroups, of their own knowledge and attitudes at a specific point in time. You can also see connections between the different variables that have been identified as relevant to understanding people's anchoring. However, there are also limitations. For example, people's views of their own knowledge may differ from their actual knowledge. In addition, a cross-sectional study never provides knowledge about causes and effects. On the other hand, it can provide a basis for formulating hypotheses of causal relationships.

This study was conducted at a specific point in time: 2015. Since then important political changes have been made concerning defense policy and rearmament, but the main problems – lack of public knowledge and the limited number of people connected to the SAF – have not changed dramatically. The deteriorating security situation, especially after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, represents one change from 2015 till today. Still, armed conflict or a military attack is low on the list of perceived threats, and the level of worrying in the public has been quite stable since 2015 (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency 2018). These facts may indicate that the results of the study are still relevant. How anchoring and attitudes to defence are influenced by current events should nevertheless be an issue for further research, preferably with a longitudinal approach.

There is also a need for measuring both subjective and objective variables. For instance, this study did not include any measurement of the respondents' actual knowledge, only their perception of their own knowledge. Further research could address the need to measure actual knowledge about the defense and the SAF, or actual and observable behaviors of people as a result of an experienced threat or interest in defense issues.

## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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