

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Faculty of Social Sciences

Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Ines Edur

Factors influencing the population's belief in victory: cases of Estonia and Finland

MA thesis

Supervisor: Heiko Pääbo, PhD

Tartu 2026

Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Word count of the thesis: 28 522

Ines Edur, 18/05/2026

Abstract

This thesis investigates the factors of divergent levels of “belief in victory” between Estonia and Finland. Drawing on academic literature and expert interviews, the study examines how national identity and ethos, collective memory and political communication and rhetoric shape public morale. Findings of this study suggest that differences in belief in victory stem mainly from the unity of the population, national ethos, political communication and public involvement in national defence.

While Finland’s belief in victory is bolstered by its perceived victory in World War II, Estonian population's belief is influenced by the complex legacy of the Soviet occupation – acting both as a trauma that may have a negative impact on belief and also as a unifying force against future aggression. Additionally, the full-scale war in Ukraine has also strengthened belief in victory in both countries. These insights provide a framework for Estonia to strengthen its societal resilience.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
1. Theoretical framework.....	8
1.1 Victory.....	8
1.1.1 Clausewitz's total victory.....	9
1.1.2 Martel's four elements of victory.....	10
1.1.3 Defensive victory.....	15
1.1.4 Three approaches to victory side by side.....	18
1.1.5 Bringing victory to the societal level.....	21
1.2 Belief in victory.....	23
1.2.1 Variables affecting belief in victory.....	25
2. Background.....	30
2.1 Key events that have shaped the historical perspectives of Estonians and Finns.....	30
2.2 Estonian and Finnish defence structures and parameters.....	32
3. Methodology.....	38
3.1 Research puzzle, questions and presumptions.....	38
3.2 Research design.....	40
3.2.1 Data collection.....	40
3.2.2 Framework for analysis.....	45
4. Analysis.....	47
4.1 The influence of national identity and ethos on belief in victory.....	47
4.1.1 Perceived national ethos.....	47
4.1.2 Unity of two societies.....	49
4.1.3 Issues of integration and loyalty of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia.....	50
4.2 The influence of collective memory on belief in victory.....	52
4.2.1 The double-edged effect of historical traumas on the belief in victory.....	52
4.2.2 Collective memory as the reason for the difference in Finnish and Estonian belief in victory.....	54

4.3 The influence of political communication and rhetoric on belief in victory and Estonian and Finnish interpretations of victory.....	55
4.3.1 The military objectives of the two countries in the context of the three identified victory frameworks.....	56
4.3.2 Understanding of the country's military goals and vision of victory.....	59
4.3.3 The different strategies for security related communication between the two countries.....	60
4.3.4 Emphasis on one's own strength or the help of allies.....	62
4.4 Other factors influencing belief in victory.....	63
4.4.1 The full-scale war in Ukraine and its perception in society.....	63
4.4.2 Population awareness and involvement in national defence.....	65
5. Discussion and interpretation of findings.....	68
Conclusion.....	75
Sources.....	77
Appendix 1 – Interview structure (interviews with Finnish experts).....	82
Appendix 2 – Interview structure (interviews with Estonian experts).....	84
Appendix 3 – Consent form.....	86
Appendix 4 – Coding tree.....	88

Introduction

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of belief in victory with a special focus on the cases of Estonia and Finland. The two countries seem to have quite similar national security parameters, both are members of NATO, spend more than 2% of their GDP on defence, have compulsory conscription systems and reserve army, high belief among the population that the country should be defended in the event of military aggression, etc. Yet, people's belief that such defence will be successful and that the state can be victorious differs dramatically between the two societies. In Finland 85% of the population believes that Finnish Defence Forces are capable of defending the country, while in Estonia only 49% of the population believes that Estonia can be defended until the arrival of additional allied assistance (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025; Kantar Emor 2025, 8).

At the same time, belief in victory represents an important component of security for a state. The population's belief in victory refers to its resistance to psychological damage in the context of military conflict, the existence of belief expresses the population's belief that the state's goal is achievable and "worth the price". Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz has also found in his writings that a state's ability to resist a military attack depends on its resources and willpower (Clausewitz 1976, 77). Overcoming the limitation of physical resources requires an enormous amount of willpower (Eado Hecht 2014). When a state suffers physical losses on the battlefield, such belief in the possibility of victory becomes all the more important. When a society loses faith in the possibility of victory, it leads to decline in morale, which in turn can lead to defeat even in the presence of physical force (Hecht 2014; Eyal Lewin 2016, 9).

Commenting on Estonia's low belief in victory, the Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces Lieutenant General Andrus Merilo, has said: *"For me, victory is a mathematical operation in military thinking: resilience equals the available resources multiplied by the will to fight, and in our case also multiplied by the authority to use deadly force. If one of these three is zero, then defeat is inevitable. People must have attitudes that bind society together, and they must also have made real preparations. /.../ Survival as a small nation in our country requires that we have an enormous will to defend, the goal of which is only one: we believe in victory and prepare to achieve this victory if someone foolish decides to attack us, (Holger Roonemaa 2025)."*

In order to avoid the situation referred to by Lieutenant General Merilo, where the "will to fight" could be (or change to) zero and defeat inevitable, the Estonian state must clearly act to increase the belief in victory among the population. This thesis attempts to contribute to this goal. By comparing Estonia and Finland, an attempt is made to determine the factors that have caused the almost 40% difference in the public belief in victory between the two countries, which are seemingly similar in terms of security parameters. For this purpose, expert interviews will be conducted with Estonian and Finnish defence experts within the framework of the study to answer the question: "What factors explain the dramatic difference in public belief in victory between Finland and Estonia, according to defence experts?"

Based on the materials discussed in the theoretical framework of the work, factors such as national identity and ethos, collective memory, and political communication and rhetoric were discovered to have influence on the formation of the belief in victory. In addition, the possibility is left during the semi-structured interviews to identify new factors specific to the Finnish and Estonian contexts. As a result of the qualitative content analysis, it is determined how different factors have influenced the belief in victory in Estonia and Finland, according to the experts, and the differences that may have caused the dramatic difference are identified.

The master's thesis is divided into five parts. In the theoretical part, the framework is established, defining different concepts of "victory" in the context of military conflict and "belief in victory" while also identifying main variables that may affect the population's belief in victory. The second part provides essential contextual background, opening the historical milestones that have shaped national identity and collective memory in both countries, followed by a comparative overview of each nation's defence structure and parameters. Subsequently, the research design and methodology are detailed. In the analysis and discussion of the results section, the data collected from the interviews are presented and analyzed in the context of the research question. Finally, the factors that may have caused the dramatic difference in the population's belief in victory between the two countries are highlighted.

1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis first provides an overview of different concepts of victory in the field of security. The focus is on the three main concepts of victory: traditional total victory, modern strategic victory and defensive victory. The second part of the theoretical framework defines the nature of the population's belief in victory and identifies the main variables that influence it based on academic literature. At the end of the theoretical framework, a central thesis is formulated about how the state's conception of victory is born, how it leads to the belief in victory and what influences such a belief.

1.1 Victory

The conceptualization of victory is made difficult primarily by the fact that the definition of the concept is surrounded by uncertainty. Victory in the context of wars between states could be considered binary, in which case the war has a specific outcome – a winner and a loser. At the same time, against the background of modern hybrid wars, it is very difficult to make such a clear and unambiguous distinction.

In security studies, various authors have discussed the ambiguity of victory as the "fog of victory". For example, Martin Hammarlund (2012, 4) points out how wars must be fought in democratic societies without losing the trust of civil society, which in turn requires continuous success. According to him, the pursuit of continuous success makes concretely formulated success fragile, while flexible and unfixed goals can make the need for conflict unclear.

Several other circumstances testify to the emergence of the fog of victory. Traditionally, victory was represented by ceremonial acts such as declarations of surrender or peace, while in modern conflicts such ceremoniality has largely disappeared (Gabriella Blum 2013, 395). Wars often end without an admission of defeat.

This concept of the fog of victory is intended to denote the state of affairs in modern conflicts, where traditional indicators of victory have been replaced or overshadowed by changing political goals and the absence of decisive battlefield results (Hammarlund 2012, 3-4). This fog is exacerbated by the division of the state into units such as government, population and military (the target includes different groups), requiring a more nuanced and complex formulation of victory between groups (Blum 2013, 393).

Despite the fog that has arisen around the term “victory”, this thesis first attempts to create a clear framework that would allow for framing victory and its various characteristics. To this end, the traditional approach to war and victory by Carl von Clausewitz, a military theorist after the Napoleonic Wars, is discussed. Alongside this, the approach to victory by William C. Martel, who created one of the central theories of victory in the modern era, is highlighted. The concept of defensive victory will also be discussed, which is important in the context of small states and asymmetric conflicts, and which deals with military success from the perspective of fulfilling defence objectives. After a thorough opening of the three approaches, their compatibility and divergences are highlighted.

1.1.1 Clausewitz's total victory

The 19th-century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz has consistently emphasized the morality and political considerations of warfare in his theories. He also uses a two-layered definition when defining victory, distinguishing between the theoretical ideal of war and the complexity of political conflict. In defining war, Clausewitz (1976, 75) states: *"War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will. /.../ To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare. That aim takes the place of the object, discarding it as something not actually part of war itself."*

To achieve such a "total victory", according to Clausewitz (1976, 77), the opponent must be rendered defenceless. He emphasizes that this must be the aim of warfare, because *"so long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me"* (Clausewitz 1976, 77)". This means that Clausewitz's "total victory" means that the victorious side is able to defeat the opponent in such a way that the loser has no hope of improving the situation and reversing it. It must be clear to the enemy that any attempt to launch a new resistance will result in greater losses for him.

Clausewitz (1976, 77) considers the opponent's resistance to be the product of two inseparable factors: the amount of resources at the opponent's disposal and the willpower (resources x will = resistance). Accordingly, "total victory" represents a situation in which the opponent's resistance has been reduced to zero.

Clausewitz's approach so far can be considered abstract and idealistic. The great military theorist himself also notes in his texts that there are still several ways to victory and success in battle, which do not include the complete defeat of the opponent. He points out that in

reality victory is often linked to different political objectives, *"From the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affair: and his general situation, each side, using the laws of probability, forms an estimate of its opponent's likely course and acts accordingly* (Clausewitz 1976, 80)."

He outlines three objectives according to which the fulfillment of the requirements is determined in order to consider the war as over. First, he outlines the armed forces. He outlines that they must be destroyed or in a state where they are unable to fight. Second, the enemy's territory must be occupied so that the enemy cannot form new fighting units. However, for Clausewitz, the most important objective is still the enemy's willpower. Until the enemy (and his allies) has not been driven to ask for peace or the population has not been made to submit, the war is not over. (Clausewitz 1976, 90)

Clausewitz finds that in the real world, victory is achieved when the magnitude of the effort exceeds the value of the political goal. In this case, the goal must be abandoned and peace follows. He points out how, in a situation where neither side is able to completely disarm the other, the desire for peace on both sides begins to depend on the probability of future success and how much effort it would require (Clausewitz 1976, 92). In his opinion, the parties would resolve political disputes by "meeting each other halfway" if such incentives were of equal strength on both sides. As the incentive increases for one, it decreases for the other. According to Clausewitz, the side that feels less desire for peace (or is willing to continue fighting) gets a better deal.

1.1.2 Martel's four elements of victory

According to William Martel, the term "victory" is a universal and highly generic word, used imprecisely by politicians and theorists alike to describe success in war or military intervention (Martel 2011, 25). In his opinion, victory operates on two different levels, on the one hand as an outcome (to describe what has already been achieved) and on the other hand as a goal (to be sought through military action) (Martel 2011, 18). Regardless of whether victory is considered an achievement or a goal, victory, according to Martel, exists on several discrete levels (Martel 2011, 18).

Unlike Clausewitz, Martel rejects the binary concept of victory and defeat. Instead, he proposes a "scale of success", where victory and defeat merely symbolize two extremes of a continuum, but also offers intermediate states such as "did not win", "draw". In his approach,

Martel bases his argument on four elements of victory. The first element of victory is **the level of victory**, dividing victory into three different levels of success, according to their political effects.

Tactical victory is a success in military engagements where the effects are largely confined to the battlefield. According to Martel (2011, 34), this is the most distant origin of victory, which was used, for example, in ancient China and Greece, to express the state's intention to prevail in wars. This is a central approach to land warfare, where disciplined ground forces and leadership played a central role in achieving victory. Complex maneuvers and army size play a smaller role, and tactical victory is primarily about quick thinking and maximum use of advantages. Tactical-level actions and victories are primarily related to the maneuvering of military forces as political results and strategy (Martel 2011, 34).

A **strategic victory** is a success that has decisive effects on a country or region, such as defeating a country's armed forces or bringing about a change in political behavior. According to Martel (2011, 36), it is a kind of intermediate level that includes the conquest of territory and the defeat of armies in wars of limited scope. This level includes those results in which all or some of its goals are achieved. The country uses force to defeat the enemy's forces. Such victories can also lead to political changes, the defeated country is forced to change its political behavior.

In the case of a strategic victory, Martel (2011, 37) brings up the example of Clausewitz, who, as mentioned above, observed that the victor in a war may not always be able to completely defeat the opponent. This means that a war may have political consequences, but these may not be extensive enough to bring about a major strategic victory.

Martel (2011, 37) highlights as an important characteristic of strategic victory that victory in order to achieve its political goals is achieved (or attempted to achieve) through the cumulative effect of many tactical victories. Thus, a state achieves victory when it uses force to destroy military targets. According to Martel (2011, 37), a state also achieves strategic victory when it uses military force to thwart the policies, military capabilities, and institutions of another state. It is important that a strategic victory involves a certain degree of completeness, so that the loser is unable to continue the fight. This requirement once again connects strategic victory with Clausewitz's approach mentioned earlier.

The third and most comprehensive level in Martel's approach is **grand strategic victory**. This means success that has transformative or systemic effects and conduct of international politics. Rewriting the foundations of international politics, this highest level of victory is related to the outcomes of hegemonic wars, where wars are fought to gain dominance over other countries (Martel 2011, 39).

Martel (2011, 39) draws on Robert Gilpin's argument that the goal of hegemonic wars is to determine the countries that dominate the new international hierarchy. Through this premise, Martel defines grand strategic victory as something even more comprehensive. According to him, such a victory is an outcome in which a country achieves victory by defeating or destroying the economic, political, and military resources of another country and preventing their future use as a threat.

Martel's second element of victory is a **change in the status quo**. Martel (2011, 45) views this change as a continuum, ranging from limited to extensive, and corresponding to the levels of victory outlined above. At the "limited" end of the scale, force is used for limited purposes to influence and change the policies (or political behavior), economy, or military behavior of the opponent. This increases to the point where the victor uses force to militarily defeat the opponent or to demonstrate that he has achieved a stronger position than the opponent (Martel 2011, 45).

At the next level of the scale, force is used to change the economic foundations that contribute to the maintenance of state power and legitimacy (Martel 2011, 45). At the most extensive level, war changes the institutional and constitutional foundations of state legitimacy, including, for example, state occupation, regime change, or state-building (Martel 2011, 45).

Martel (2011, 45-46) points out that in the most extreme case, a large-scale change in the status quo will lead to a situation similar to the "Peace of Carthage", where the government and economy of the losing side are destroyed. However, even such a large-scale move may not lead to the grand strategic victory discussed above, as it may not necessarily change the general distribution and organization of the international system. The author emphasizes that although there is a predictable relationship between a change in the status quo and the level of victory, it is not an ironclad rule. For example, if a strategic victory is achieved over an opponent, it may still have only a limited impact on the opponent's status quo. To illustrate

this, Martel (2011, 46) gives the example of the Persian Gulf War – the USA achieved a strategic victory, but it did not significantly reduce Iraq's regional influence.

Martel's third element of victory is **mobilization for war**. In his view, the decision to mobilize for war represents the policymakers' desire to achieve victory (Martel 2011, 47). In his view, mobilization represents a valuable indicator of a state's efforts to prepare for victory, based on the definition of "rapid assembly, production, or deployment of a superior force of military arms" (Martel 2011, 47-48).

Martel points out that the level of mobilization varies constantly and it is important to distinguish between the mobilization of military, industrial, and economic resources and the mobilization of the civilian population and leadership for war (Martel 2011, 48). The extent and speed of mobilization are influenced, firstly, by the fact that states regularly spend resources to maintain military capabilities. Second, by the fact that in the modern world, states can organize their military and industrial production very quickly (Martel 2011, 48).

Resource mobilization begins at the "limited" end of the scale, encompassing, for example, a small part of a country's military strength and existing military equipment stocks (Martel 2011, 48). He points out how comprehensive mobilization belongs more to the total war that dates back to the Napoleonic era, yet also brings the example of the Pearl Harbor attack. President Roosevelt had been struggling to mobilize society, while after the attack, the US mobilized 30-40% of its economy, according to Martel, such rapid mobilization of resources has remained a historical anomaly and a benchmark for all-out mobilization (Martel 2011, 48-49).

Martel also points out that, in addition to military preparations and organizing industrial production, mobilizing public support is very important in mobilizing for war. Victory often requires post-conflict commitments, but also popular support for military goals (Martel 2011, 49). The mass media plays a critical role in this, especially in democratic societies but even for authoritarian or totalitarian states, it may be crucial whether they can maintain popular support for military intervention and the public's perception of victory.

He cites the example of the US Vietnam War to highlight that if the public does not support the war it may actually deteriorate during the war and even cost the country the victory (Martel 2011, 50). He emphasizes a critical nuance for victory: the leadership must be able to articulate what the desired victory is in order to mobilize the population.

The final element of victory for Martel is **post-conflict obligations**. According to his view, a state must be prepared to deal with them if it decides to enter or intervene in a conflict with military force. Victory, both as an objective and as a result, imposes political, economic, human and moral costs on the victor, including the concept of social justice (Martel 2011, 50). Since one of the goals of war is to change the political behavior or nature of the loser, sometimes even to replace the regime, the victor's post-war obligations are essential to achieving victory.

Victory at any level, especially at the higher levels, entails significant post-war political and financial costs and international legal obligations for both the victor and the loser (Martel 2011, 51). For the victor, these primarily represent human and economic resources that are devoted to rebuilding the conquered territories. This can range from limited involvement in the organization and management of areas to long-term occupation of territory and social reorganization (Martel 2011, 51). At the more limited end of the scale, military commitments can also include, for example, the destruction of the losing party's forces to prevent the reversal of victory and the reorganisation of the losing party.

Post-conflict commitments generally increase when the winning party formulates a strategy for victory (Martel 2011, 52). This is primarily because policymakers tend to underestimate the cost of victory and the public expects that post-conflict commitments will be met quickly. However, many of the consequences of victory are unforeseen and the losing party may resist change. However, such strategies are often formulated long before victory. The extent of such post-conflict commitments is directly related to the level of victory sought, the level of destruction and the level of cohesion deemed necessary by the winner (Martel 2011, 52).

Martel (2011, 52) highlights the most important point about post-conflict commitments, which is inversely related to post-war threat. The greater the post-conflict commitments made by the victor, the lower the perceived threat to the defeated state. Martel uses Germany after World War I as an example, where the Allies failed to make post-conflict commitments, which contributed to Germany's subsequent economic collapse, radicalization, and the outbreak of World War II (Martel 2011, 52-53). Therefore, the protracted end of post-conflict commitments may even involve state reconstruction (compared to the limited end mentioned above, which may be limited to the destruction of the losing party's forces). An important paradox is that limited war may not necessarily lead to limited post-conflict commitments, for

example, Martel points out the cases of Afghanistan and Iran between the US, where limited wars led to maximum commitments (Martel 2011, 54).

1.1.3 Defensive victory

Clausewitz and Martel's approaches provide a comprehensive overview of what determines a state's concept of victory and provide tools for identifying the parameters of victory. However, it is clear that these approaches are primarily based on victory as the result of a state's decision to enter into military conflict. However, they don't particularly consider the situation for small countries that are drawn into conflicts and have to defend themselves.

The idea of defensive victory has been discussed by Clausewitz (1976, 93), who points out that defensive victory represents a negative goal. This means that the only goal of the fight is self-defence, to destroy enough of the enemy's strength to force him to abandon his intentions. There is no positive goal such as an attempt to conquer or occupy the enemy's territory, change his policies, etc. Thus, Clausewitz's approach to defensive victory is based on passivity. It is not absolute passivity, he points out that it would mean giving up fighting altogether (Clausewitz 1976, 93). However, he concludes that if the success of the fight is based on self-defence, it means that every action we take is aimed solely at exhausting the enemy and denying him his goal.

Clausewitz (1976, 94) also points out that defensive victory is especially **important for weaker states that are trying to resist larger or stronger ones**. In this case, the defensive approach gives the smaller country an advantage. If it would otherwise have to compete with the opponent's superiority, in this case it has to balance it out until the opponent gives up its goal.

Defensive victory tends towards denial and preservation from traditional approaches to victory, which are based on the goal of conquest. For example, Dano N. Mavrak (2023, 5-6) divides approaches to war into defensive and offensive, pointing out that a country's geopolitical position, historical traumas and heritage, religion, sense of belonging, patriotism, values, and other factors shape a society's "strategic culture".

He finds that a characteristic of a defensive strategic culture is that successful defence is considered synonymous with victory (Mavrak 2023, 6). This is especially true when the country is attacked by a significantly larger and stronger adversary. He also points out how strategic documents of small states may not mention victory as a goal, as much as they

emphasize the protection of national interests and the defence of the state. Mavrak (2023, 6) concludes that a strategic-level victory in a potential conflict can be a successfully executed defence.

As mentioned earlier, both Mavrak and Clausewitz pointed out that in defensive fighting and victory, the defender's goal is not based on the traditional concept of victory. This means that the state does not seek conquest through fighting. The goal is simply to repel the attacker by denying him his goal to conquer the victim or to make the victim act according to his wishes. In other words, the goal of defensive fighting is to **deny the opponent the fulfillment of his goals**.

Another important component of defensive victory that Mavrak (2023, 3-4) refers to is the **protection of national interests**. He points out that in the case of disproportionate opponents, the goal of the stronger party is absolute victory, which fulfills its own interests and does not compromise with the opponent. For a great power, the criteria for victory are the defeat of the enemy's armed forces and economic structure, control of its territories, influencing or changing its policy, etc. (Mavrak 2023, 4; Clausewitz 1976, 90). This means completely redefining the opponent's goals and strategies and changing them against their will, which in turn means that the winner dictates the national interests of the defeated state.

Thus, success in self-defence (or defensive victory) means denying the opponent such a goal and protecting one's own interests. As mentioned above, Mavrak (2023, 5) points out that the strategy documents of small states may refer to the goal of protecting national interests instead of victory.

It was mentioned above how Clausewitz found that being on the defensive creates advantages for a small state, because instead of competing with the superiority of a stronger opponent, it has to simply balance it and drag the conflict out until the opponent abandons its goals. Mavrak (2023, 5) finds that not giving the opponent a quick victory creates opportunities for the state to involve other elements of state power in order to achieve a favorable outcome through negotiations. This means that by **waiting for an opportune moment in the form of defence**, the small state has less trouble than the attacking side.

Martin Hammarlund (2012, 36) makes an interesting remark in his analysis of the 2007 speech of former US President George W. Bush, highlighting how one component of a defensive victory can be things that did not happen. Hammarlund analyses Bush's speech,

where the former president says: *"Our success in this war is often measured by the things that did not happen. We cannot know the full extent of the attacks that we and our allies have prevented, but here is some of what we do know /.../, (Bush 2007)."* The president continued his speech by listing various Al Qaeda attacks that the US and its allies were able to prevent.

Hammarlund (2012, 36) does not continue with a longer analysis of the phenomenon, but highlights how this is a characteristic feature of a defensive victory. This means that in the case of a defensive victory, victory for the defending state is not only the successful defence against the enemy and the preservation of its own interests, but also the successful prevention of enemy attacks or maneuvers that could harm these goals. This means that it is possible to achieve success in a defensive position even through **preventing enemy attacks** (e.g. successful intelligence that allows the enemy's plans to be thwarted).

It is clear here that victory for small states is something different than for great states. Especially in asymmetric conflicts, it is not realistic to count on the ability of a small state to militarily defeat a larger aggressor. Victory becomes a matter of strategic survival. Therefore, the victory of small states (when facing larger adversaries) is mainly addressed through the concept of defensive victory. In addition to the above-mentioned elements of defensive victory (such as denying the enemy the fulfillment of his objectives, protecting national interests, waiting for the opportune moment, and preventing the enemy's attacks), the goal of a small state in a military conflict with an adversary is to make the cost of the conflict too high for the aggressor.

In order for the conflict to cost the small state as little as possible and to achieve the goal of survival and preservation of national interests, small states must use an **exhaustion strategy**. This means that the small state's counterattack is largely aimed at slowing down or deceiving the opponent's progress long enough for it to lose initiative and have to use more and more resources (the cost of war for the opponent would increase). For example, Mavrka (2022, 8) points out that in a situation where the aggressor's pace of progress slows down, he begins to lose initiative and political support in his own country and is at the same time forced to deploy increasingly larger human and material resources than originally planned. According to Mavrka (2022, 8), this can lead to a situation where the aggressor is forced to abandon his goals and the small state has been able to successfully protect its interests. This means that the goal of a small state would be to increase the cost of war for the opponent to a greater extent than its goal.

Mavrak (2023, 3) points out how in an asymmetric conflict the concepts of victory of the parties are also asymmetrical. Thus, if the goal of a larger aggressor could be, based on the approach of Martel and Clausewitz, to occupy the victim's territories, change policies, etc., then a small state, as mentioned above, would proceed from the goals of preserving national interests through the concept of defensive victory. However, such a discrepancy in the goals of the parties and the concepts of victory creates a ground where, as a result of the conflict, both parties can consider themselves winners.

The goals defined before the conflict are particularly important here (Mavrak 2023, 3). For example, if the goal of a small state is to preserve its national interests and independence and the goal of a large state is to expand its territories by occupying the enemy's territory, a situation is possible where, at the end of the conflict, the victim has lost some of its territory, but has still retained its independence and main national interests. In this situation, both may have moved beyond their "ideal goals" (e.g., the ideal of a small state would also be the preservation of territorial integrity and for a great state an absolute victory over the opponent), but both have achieved key goals and can therefore consider themselves winners.

1.1.4 Three approaches to victory side by side

Table 1 below presents the main features and characteristics of all three approaches to victory. One notable difference between the concepts of Clausewitz and Martel is the treatment of the outcome of the conflict. Clausewitz's approach to victory envisages a very specific outcome of the conflict, where one of the parties to the conflict can be considered the winner and the other a clear loser. Total victory is achieved in a situation where the opponent's resources and will, which together form the resistance, have been reduced to zero (Clausewitz 1976, 77). In addition, the opponent's army has been liquidated and the territory occupied (Clausewitz 1976, 90).

However, Martel sees the outcomes of the conflict as significantly more variable and proposes a scale of conflict outcomes or success (Martel 2011, 384). According to his approach, in addition to the two extreme outcomes (won or lost completely), there are several other different conflict outcomes for the parties, such as "won but at a high price", "did not lose", "draw", etc. This means that the results of modern conflicts, as well as the demands of policymakers from conflicts, may be significantly more limited than the traditional approach of complete destruction of the opponent. The defensive victory approach also states the

possibility of a situation in asymmetrical conflicts where both parties can consider themselves winners as a result of the conflict, because their central goals were fulfilled (Mavrak 2023, 3).

A comparison of Martel's and Clausewitz's approaches also reveals how the traditional focus on the goals of conflict is on restoring the situation before the war. At the same time, the modern approach is based on strategic victory, where the political, social and economic systems of the opponent are transformed in the long term. Martel (2011, 50-51) even highlights post-war obligations as an important element of victory, in order to restore the human and economic resources of the conquered territories. In more extreme cases, this can involve occupation and social restructuring in conquered areas.

It is also important to consider the nature of the target that emerges from different conceptions of victory. Clausewitz's conception, for example, is based on a hierarchical enemy, whose "center of gravity" when struck causes the collapse of its entire structure. Emile Simpson (2017, 11), who has analyzed Clausewitz's theory, points out, for example, how Clausewitz's conception of war, where one's goal is to defeat the enemy through physical force and suppress our will, while at the same time excluding him from gathering strength and reversing our success (disarming the enemy), assumes that the enemy is a unified unit.

Yet, the concepts of defensive victory and Martel also recognize more complex conceptions of the enemy's structure. For example, situations where defeating the enemy in battle may not lead to the complete destruction of the enemy or political changes in its nature, in which case military destruction may have only a local effect. Thus, victory can become a mere military concept without a political solution. In Martel's approach, this could be viewed through the theory of levels of victory. He points out that tactical victories on the battlefield may not bring about changes at the strategic level or the fulfillment of political goals (Martel 2011, 37).

Here, the theoretical framework of victory has become clear. Although it is not possible to define victory in a way that would be suitable for summarizing the goals of every military conflict and its parties, the main distinctions in the concept of victory have emerged from the analysis and comparison of the theoretical material presented.

On the one hand, it is possible to distinguish the concept of victory based on the motives of the state entering the conflict. Whether its goal is based solely on the traditional approach of

occupying the enemy's territory and disarming the enemy (suitable for Clausewitz's approach) or whether more extensive goals are added to this goal, such as raising its position in the international hierarchy or fighting a non-standard opponent (e.g. terrorists), for whom merely winning a tactical military battle is not enough (suitable for Martel's approach).

On the other hand, it is possible to distinguish the concept of victory according to the role of the state in the conflict. Whether it is an attacking side (based on Clausewitz's and/or Martel's approaches) or a defensive side (the concept of defensive victory). It is also possible to distinguish, for example, between the approaches to great power and small power victory in asymmetric conflicts, where the aim of the small power is clearly to defeat the opponent or, instead of major strategic goals, to protect national interests and deny the enemy his goals (an approach based on defensive victory).

Here, the thesis has proposed a theoretical framework for the concept of victory, which, although it does not provide a single and definitive term for victory in the context of military conflict, does provide a theoretical basis and framework for determining the nature of victory in the analysis of a specific case. Based on the resulting framework, it is possible to define, for example, how a state may see victory, what elements can be used to implement it, what its central goal is, etc.

	Clausewitz's traditional concept of victory (Clausewitz 1976)	Martel's modern concept of victory (Martel 2011)	Defensive victory concept (Clausewitz 1976; Mavrak 2023; Hammarlund 2012)
Core definition of victory	Goal of forcing the enemy to act according to your will.	A vague term describing military success, which functions as both an outcome and an aspiration.	A successfully executed defence that denies the enemy the (absolute) achievement of their objectives.
Primary aim	Disarming or leaving the enemy defenceless to prevent a later reversal of success.	Achieving specific goals at the tactical, strategic or grand strategic level.	Protection of national interests and exit from the conflict on terms favorable to the state.
Key elements	Resistance (resources x will), total victory, fulfillment of requirements (enemy's forces and willpower destroyed, territories occupied).	Level of victory, status quo change, mobilization, post-conflict obligations.	Denial of enemy objectives, protection of national interests, waiting for the opportune moment, preventing enemy attacks, exhaustion strategy.
Outcome	Binary outcome: one side wins by completely defeating the opponent.	A continuum or scale of success, victory can represent a subjective political perception.	Survival and negative goal: the opponent is denied their idea of victory.

Table 1. A simplified comparison of Clausewitz's, Martel's and defensive victory concepts.
Author's table.

1.1.5 Bringing victory to the societal level

Within the framework of the above concepts of victory, however, an important point about the perception of victory emerges. Namely, it emerges from various sources that the understanding of strategic victory is created by the state. For example, Mavrak (2023, 1) points out that declaring victory at the strategic level is a political understanding of state leaders. At the same time, at the tactical level, it is rather the object of quantitative analysis by military leaders (Mavrak 2023, 1). As Martel (2011, 37) explained above, the tactical level of war is primarily associated with historical traditional wars, while modern military conflicts are characterized by hybridity and the tactical battle component constitutes only one part of

it. Therefore, in the context of this work, it is primarily important to focus on the part that encompasses the strategic level.

Clausewitz (1976, 89) already pointed out that war is a political instrument, although the people must have a passion to wage war (Clausewitz also calls it primitive hatred and enmity), he considers the political goals of war to be a matter for the government. Martel (2011, 18) also states that victory is to be determined by policymakers. He points out the distinction between victory and the result, but in both cases it is something that is determined by the policymaker. In the case of victory as a result, policymakers describe victory as a means for the status quo, mobilization of society and postconflict obligations (Martel 2011, 18). In the second case, policymakers treat victory as an aspiration or goal, when they want to achieve political objects through the use of military force (Martel 2011, 18). Thus, the state determines the goal necessary for declaring victory.

Once a state has defined its goal, it must also gain the support of the population for that goal. Several authors (Hammarlund 2017, 3-4; Martel 2011, 395-397) have highlighted the importance of domestic public support in achieving military goals. Hammarlund cites, for example, the experience of the Vietnam War, which has left a great deal of experience in the development of Western methods of warfare about how important it is to maintain and continuously enforce public belief in war and to multiply the fact that victory has been achieved.

At the same time, losing or missing out on victory can be a major obstacle for a democratic society to give politicians a social mandate to enter into conflict in the future. Therefore, politicians create empty and unclear illusions of victory, which have no direct meaning and remain unclear to the people (Hammarlund 2017, 3).

Martel (2011, 396) points out that how society interprets victory depends on the ability of policymakers to explain precisely and transparently what the military action is intended to achieve, what the risks are, and the overall prospects for victory. Similar to Hammarlund, Martel also points out how politicians tend to speak about victory in a vague manner in order to mitigate risks. Since victory seems to be a very absolute term, politicians use it rather cautiously, preferring to use the term success instead of victory in some military operations (Martel 2011, 396).

At the same time, vague language around victory is also risky. If victory is not clearly defined for the public, it will start to raise doubts and debate among the population about why the country is at war in the first place. For example, Martel (2011, 372) criticizes policymakers in countries that have participated in contemporary wars because they have failed to clearly signal to the public what victory is. The focus has primarily been on how to win, not what victory is.

Public mobilization has already been highlighted as an important element in Martel's approach. He points out how the use of unclear language around victory weakens the ability of policymakers to mobilize the public as an essential component of victory (Martel 2011, 50). According to his approach, policymakers must be able to express at what level of victory (tactical, strategic, grand strategic) and at what level and for how long they need public mobilization. Otherwise, the public may refuse to mobilize, especially if the cost of war for the state increases during the conflict (Martel 2011, 50). Thus, a state's failure to speak clearly about victory directly weakens its ability to gain and maintain public support for its actions in the conflict.

Thus, the meaning of victory is defined by the state (government), but it is extremely important (especially in democratic societies) that this meaning is also clearly and unambiguously understood by the public. Otherwise, as Martel pointed out, the policymaker risks losing public support, which significantly complicates the achievement of victory and, for example, in the case of the Vietnam War, may lead to the situation where the state has to give up on victory and retreat.

1.2 Belief in victory

As discussed above, Clausewitz already found how important it is to defeat the opponent's resistance in order to achieve victory. According to his theory, resistance represented the product of resources and willpower (Clausewitz 1976, 77). This is the importance of willpower that this thesis focuses on. At this point we come to the concept of "belief in victory" (also used as "will to win").

In accordance with Clausewitz's understanding of the two components of resistance (resources and will), Dr. Eado Hecht (2014) also divides the battlefield into two in his approach, with the war being fought simultaneously on a psychological and physical level. Hecht (2014) points out that overcoming the limitation of physical capacity (resources) compared to the

opponent requires an insane amount of willpower. For example, while Martel (2011, 50) previously pointed out how the low mobilization of society led to the US retreat (or giving up on victory) in the Vietnam War, Hecht (2014) finds that despite the significantly greater losses of the communists, their will to achieve victory remained high, unlike the Americans, which also became decisive in achieving victory.

The psychological and physical levels are directly related to each other, the decline of one also undermines the other. Hecht (2014) points out that if the army's physical fighting ability is damaged, it also damages the will and belief in victory. The same logic also applies in reverse, similar to sports, if motivation decreases, it has a negative effect on physical ability (Hecht 2014). The psychological resilience of the country becomes all the more important. Hecht (2014) states that in order to defeat the enemy, one does not have to kill every last enemy soldier, but rather enough must be killed so that the rest do not doubt that the same thing awaits them and surrender. However, it is not possible to know exactly how many losses the enemy is willing to suffer before surrendering. The greater the will of the population to win, the greater the losses they are willing to endure.

Hecht (2014) points out that people lose interest in the goal of war (i.e. victory) when they perceive that the price of war is higher than accepting the enemy's demands or giving up their own goal. Thus, it can be concluded that in order to keep the desire to win alive, one must be militarily successful (to suffer as little as possible and thus keep the "price of war" under control) and/or the enemy's demands must be perceived by the public as very painful and high.

However, Hecht (2014) finds that it is impossible to calculate a "common price list" for wars. This means that different cultures perceive the costs and benefits of conflict differently, and the same group of people can change their opinions in different situations. Hecht (2014) exemplifies the change in opinion among one group of people with the US intervention in the Somali civil war and the Iraq war. While in Somalia the cost of fighting was perceived as too high after the death of 22 US soldiers, in Iraq the limit of tolerance was significantly higher – almost 4,500 Americans died before the conflict ended (Hecht 2014).

Here, belief in victory can be summarized as the resilience of a population to psychological damage in the context of military conflict. Such faith expresses the conviction that the goal (and also the suffering that accompanies its achievement) is worth its cost and that success is

possible. The existence of belief in victory prevents the loss of psychological strength after losses.

Therefore, one of the goals of the enemy may be to undermine the belief in victory among the population of your country. **If the population loses belief in the possibility of victory, this will lead to a decline in morale and social depression, which can lead to defeat even in the presence of physical force** (Hecht 2014; Eyal Lewin 2016, 9). At this point we come to the main variables that affect the population's belief in victory.

1.2.1 Variables affecting belief in victory

The author of the thesis, as a result of the analysis of theoretical materials, has identified three main variables that influence the belief of the population: national identity and ethos, collective memory, political communication and rhetoric.

The first characteristic the author of the thesis found was the people's perception of themselves, generally known as **national identity**, but as a part of which one can also distinguish Edward Lewin's concept of **national ethos**. Here, a broader concept of national identity and Lewin's concept of national ethos are highlighted, but in further work they will be treated primarily as one component of belief in victory, since the two concepts are strongly intertwined and they are rarely distinguished from each other in the literature.

National identity consists of subjective components such as a common collective name, a myth of common ancestors, a collective memory, one or more distinctive features of a common culture, an association with a specific "homeland", and a sense of solidarity (Smith 1991, 21). The more features a social group possesses, the stronger its national identity is.

National identity begins to play a role in the national perception of itself as "chosen". Smith (1991, 36) points out how ethnic groups that lack myths of self-renewal/survival tend to fade into other communities after losing their independence. Such a myth of chosenness promises conditional salvation, it creates a sense of collective sanctity in the people (Smith 1991, 37). Smith (1991, 37) points out how this perception of choice inspires the nation, for example, for religious reforms, but also for cultural restoration.

Eyal Lewin (2016, 1) describes national ethos as a national "creed", which is based on the traditions and values of the people. According to his approach, a nation views its future, past and present through its ethos, which defines the identity of the nation and binds it into a

single social group. According to Lewin's (2016, 2-3) approach, national ethos unites social beliefs into a specific structure and creates conditions for the functioning of social systems and through which members understand the spirit of their social group. This is one of the most important keys to binding a nation into a single society (Lewin 2016, 2).

Collective memory, which will also be discussed shortly, provides the basis for the formation of ethos. While collective memory expresses a group's shared recollection of the past, the transmission of which unites the social group through common ethical values (Lewin 2016, 2-3), national ethos combines values and traditions with the concept of shared history, through which the present and future of the social group are seen in addition to history. National ethos represents a "lens" through which members comprehend the spirit of the group, the "sense of duty" and common goals (Lewin 2016, 2).

Lewin's research shows that a strong national ethos can inspire a nation to fight even against very powerful odds (asymmetric conflict). For example, he points out (Lewin 2016, 12) how a strong national ethos inspired the United Kingdom in World War II. From a collective memory (derived from historical naval confrontations with Spain, France and the Netherlands), the United Kingdom perceived itself as an island that represented an example for the whole of Western civilization and was always under siege but protected by the Royal Navy (Lewin 2016, 12). This understanding of one's role or "duty" motivated people to fight on despite the difficulties (Lewin 2016, 12).

In the same war, Lewin (2016, 12) also analyzed the French Third Republic, which was defeated, and found that their national ethos was largely influenced by the prevailing decadence, political corruption and civil disobedience, which led to a lack of a shared perception of their "duty". As a result, moral depression and defeatism spread among the people, which made the French people little motivated to fight for their country. Lewin (2016, 12) concluded that an inspiring national ethos that arouses enthusiasm for war is a crucial part of a nation winning a war.

Collective memory is a group's shared recollection of constructed history and is transmitted to unite society under common ethical values (Lewin 2016, 2). It is important to point out that nations also wage "memory wars" to establish a version that suits them (Kęstutis Paulauskas 2013, 48).

In the case of collective memory, historical traumas, such as genocides, being conquered, or other crimes committed against a nation, play a decisive role. Such traumas can either destroy the people's belief in victory or, conversely, deepen conviction and ethnic cohesion in order to survive (Smith 1991, 26). Anthony D. Smith (1991, 26) cites the Armenians as an example, who, as the first nation to convert to Christianity, were subjected to wars, were displaced, exiled, and were part of a large influx of immigrants, eventually becoming victims of mass deportations and genocide in their homeland. Despite this, or perhaps in spite of it, the nation has survived.

Similarly, the emphasis on historical success is used to increase belief in victory. By emphasizing past successes, leaders attempt to rally the people's belief in new victories and conquests. For example, Lewin (2016, 13) highlights how Joseph Stalin used the Great Patriotic War of 1812 narrative during the Nazi invasion. For example, a story on this topic appeared in the Soviet Pravda the day after the Nazis invaded (Lewin 2016, 13).

The last factor influencing the belief in victory is **political communication and rhetoric**. As discussed earlier, it is important for countries (especially democratic societies) to constantly enforce society's belief in victory in order to avoid emotional exhaustion and surrender.

The "tolerance" of the population in terms of the "price" of the conflict (various resources, sanctions, but also, for example, the number of casualties, etc.) directly depends on the clear definition of the goal (i.e. victory). The same applies to the belief in victory, if the population understands what is being fought for and in the name of, the people can interpret it for themselves through the other two variables (national identity and ethos, collective memory), ultimately converting it into a belief in victory. Thus, political communication and rhetoric can be considered as a bridge between the previous variables and the people's belief in victory.

For example, Lewin (2016, 6-7) shows how Winston Churchill in 1940s England skillfully exploited the main themes of the English national ethos (1. Island nation as world free trade, world commerce and libertarian fervor wishing to thrive and expand; 2. Britons as an island race, image of the English sailor who always maintains a personal freedom and democratic approach and ready to defend these values; 3. The Royal Navy guarding the coasts, alert and ready to defend the nation) in his numerous speeches, verbalizing these ethos motifs and turning them into empowering phrases. Lewin (2016, 7) finds that the inspiring impact of Churchill's speeches was not so much due to linguistic skill or victorious logic, but because

they expressed the deep roots of the long-developed British national ethos. Similarly, political rhetoric can be pointed out as an attempt to reinvent collective memory. As mentioned earlier, Stalin, for example, made extensive use of the 1812 victory of the Russian Empire over Napoleon to incite enthusiasm for war (belief in victory) among the people through the trigger of national ethos (Lewin 2016, 12).

Hammarlund (2012, 17) points out how the continuous communication of the idea of success to the domestic audience is a significant challenge for modern democratic leaders. By protecting the population's belief in victory, the political leadership reduces (or avoids) the risk that it could lose the public support that legitimizes its actions in the course of an actual conflict. Various theorists have pointed out how, on the one hand, democratic leaders must express to the population as clearly as possible the goals of continuing to fight in a conflict (Blum 2013, 421; Hammarlund 2012, 4, 17). If the perception of victory becomes vague and unclear for the people, faith also decreases, which in turn begins to limit the leadership's actions and the possibility of continuing in the conflict.

On the other hand, it is also a risk for politicians to define the goals of their actions very specifically to the people, because in the event of setbacks or losses, this significantly reduces their room for maneuver (Hammarlund 2012, 4). If the initial goal is failed, the people lose faith, which limits the ability of the leadership to continue in the conflict and try to turn the situation around or pursue other goals. Thus, it is an important task for the leaderships of countries involved in conflicts to ensure through their actions that the population believes in the possibility of victory.

To conclude, the theoretical framework has first identified three central concepts of victory, which states use to set their military and security goals. It has also emerged as an important realization that victory is defined by the state and then communicated to its population. The public's support for its leaders in their actions largely depends on such communication, which in turn can also determine the outcome of entering a conflict. For example, the loss of trust of the people of a country during a conflict can lead to defeat and retreat.

It is clear that such goals vary from country to country, and therefore the concept of victory also varies. However, based on the theoretical framework, it is possible to generally summarize "victory" as the fulfillment of the military goals set by the state (although the

goals may differ significantly between countries, reflecting different concepts of victory presented above).

Based on the theoretical framework, it became clear that the belief in victory of society can be summarized as the resilience of a population to psychological damage in the context of military conflict, and the maintenance of such a belief prevents the loss of psychological strength in the event of losses on the battlefield. The greater the population's belief in victory, the greater the losses it is willing to bear in order to achieve victory. If the people lack such a belief, resistance will fail.

Three central variables were identified that influence the population's belief in victory: national identity and ethos, collective memory, and political communication and rhetoric. A strong national identity and ethos create unity in the population, which has a positive effect on the belief in victory. In the case of collective memory, a positive effect on the belief in victory was also recognized. For example, the people's experiences of historical victories clearly increase the population's belief in future victories.

However, a dual effect was identified in the case of historical traumas; on the one hand, such events can destroy the people's belief in victory. Smith (1991, 26) pointed out how historical traumas can, on the contrary, also deepen conviction and ethnic cohesion in order to survive. Therefore, in the case of collective memory, it is important to point out that historical memories can have a dual effect on the population's belief in victory.

Political communication and rhetoric can also have a positive effect on the population's belief in victory, and it is important that the state's military goals are clearly conveyed to the people. At the same time, Hammarlund (2012, 4) pointed out how defining military goals very precisely in front of the people can also be a risk, because in the event of setbacks or losses, it reduces the country's leadership's ability to maneuver and people's faith can be lost.

It is important to point out here that the other two characteristics (national identity and collective memory) are occasionally used by the state leadership to convey messages about victory, to create stronger emotions and belief in the population and to boost social mobilization. Thus, political communication represents a bridge between the state leadership and the people, and national identity and collective memory are, on the one hand, cognitive indicators that have arisen in people, and, on the other hand, political tools that are used to gain people's support for the country's military goals.

2. Background

The background part of the paper briefly outlines the main historical events in Estonia and Finland that have been cited in academic literature as significant events in the context of national identity or collective memory. These events are highlighted here to provide the reader with context for the subsequent analysis. This is followed by an overview of the security structures and defence indicators of the two countries, to determine whether they are essentially similar in the context of defence.

2.1 Key events that have shaped the historical perspectives of Estonians and Finns

Finnish collective memory has been primarily influenced by various historical events such as the 1918 civil war, the Winter War (Bill Kissane 2020, 2-3 & 24) and the Cold War-era (Katri-Maaria Kyllönen 2025, 3). The civil war lasted from January to May 1918 and began shortly after the Bolsheviks' recognition of Finland as an independent state (Piotr M. Szpunar 2012, 1205; Kissane 2020, 8-9). The civil war period in the second decade of the 20th century has become a "unifying trauma" for Finns, the war between the Whites supported by the Germans and the Reds supported by the Russian Bolsheviks divided Finnish society for a long time (Kissane 2020, 15-16). In 1933, General Mannerheim finally declared a "policy of forgetting", emphasizing that it was not important to ask who fought on which side, until then it was difficult for society to remember or deal with the civil war period at all (Piotr M. Szpunar 2012, 1201-1202).

The Winter War lasted from November 1939 to March 1940, began with the Soviet Union's attack on Finland, and was followed by the Continuation War, which lasted from 1941 to 1944, as a result of which Finland was able to defend its independence from the Soviet Union again (Kissane 2020, 24). Finland was the only former territory of Tsarist Russia that was able to maintain its independence in the 20th century (Kissane 2020, 24). The Winter and Continuation Wars seemed to heal the divisions among the Finns.

Although the Whites' understanding of the civil war remained dominant after the Continuation War (glorifying General Mannerheim and treating the struggle as patriotic and for the freedom of Finland), after the end of the Continuation War, the narrative favoring the Reds began to revive in society, more statues were erected in their honor and they were increasingly discussed in literature (Szpunar 2012, 1206). Kissane (2020, 24) formulated the Winter and Continuation War phenomenon as a challenge, in which Finns had to come to

terms with the losers of the civil war (the local Reds) at a time when they were faced with the threat of the Soviet Union to Finnish independence. At the same time, the Finnish Reds got an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism, which they used (Kissane 2020, 24). Although Finland maintained its independence through great national resistance, it was the only Nordic country to remain within the Soviet sphere of influence, while the other Nordic countries increasingly developed cooperation with the West (Kyllönen 2025, 704–705). According to Kyllönen (2025, 713), Finns consider this period in their history as “shameful”.

Thus, the historically important narratives for the Finnish population are primarily related to the wars that took place during World War II, when the population stood for the preservation of the country's independence, and to the Cold War period, when the country remained in the Soviet sphere of influence (treated as a period of shame).

It is important to note that even though Finnish society at large perceives the outcome of Winter and Continuation Wars as a victory, academic literature finds Finnish wars against the Soviet Union “*de facto* lost wars” (Ville Kivimäki 2012, 482). The peace was achieved through harsh terms where Finland was forced to accept for example annexation of roughly 10% of its territory and significant war reparations (Kivimäki 2012, 498). Yet these events have been successfully reshaped in Finnish memory culture through the “lens” of defensive victory into a narrative of survival and victory (Kivimäki 2012, 494).

In the case of Estonian collective memory, Kaarel Piirimäe (2020, 102) points out that one of the most important pillars of Estonian identity is the narrative of victimhood during World War II and the Soviet occupation. He points out how it is estimated that Estonia lost nearly 25% of its population between 1940 and 1945, and it is likely that most Estonian families experienced the loss of a family member either through war losses or Soviet and German occupation policies (Piirimäe 2020, 102). He also points out the decades-long occupation period, which supports the approach to history through victimhood.

For example, Piirimäe (2020, 102) points out that although the regime changed significantly over time, one constant element was the persecution of people who supported Estonian national sovereignty, and how the idea that Estonia was illegally annexed in 1940 was treated as an anti-Soviet and criminal mindset. Within the framework of official Soviet historiography, the narrative of how the Estonian working people were liberated from foreign capitalists by the fraternal Soviet peoples was emphasized (Piirimäe 2020, 102).

Philippe Perchoc (2018, 7) also points out how after 1991, when the Baltic states regained their independence, their governments began to consciously propagate a national memory regime in which occupation and deportation play a central role. He highlights the most painful traumas of the beginning of the occupation period, for example, deportation, abduction, and the forced mobilization of Estonian men into the retreating Soviet forces prior to the German offensive that ended the first wave of occupation (Perchoc 2018, 6). The second wave of USSR repressions brought new deportations, hunts for “forest brothers”, and the annexation of the Baltic states to the Soviet Union (Perchoc 2018, 6). Alar Kilp (2025, 1) also points out how the Soviet Union has also been treated as a colonial occupier in the context of Estonian historical memory.

According to academic literature, in the context of Estonia's collective memory and identity, the events of the past century that concerned the German and Soviet occupations (and their losses) during World War II and the subsequent Soviet occupation until 1991 are of particular importance.

2.2 Estonian and Finnish defence structures and parameters

Kristian Alexander (2025) has highlighted how Finland is based on a total / comprehensive defence, demonstrating a deep mobilisation culture and territorial planning. Alexander (2025) points out that although the term historically derives from the concept of total war, in the context of modern hybrid threats it is still considered more as a comprehensive defence, encompassing not only the military level but also digital systems, information environments, economic conditions, energy grids and psychological aspects.

Finland primarily uses the term Comprehensive Security Concept, demonstrating a deep partnership between different parts of society (armed forces, government, private sector, local authorities and civil society organisations) (Alexander 2025). The term was developed during the Cold War, when the country had to be prepared for a possible attack by an adversary many times larger than itself, the Soviet Union.

One of the most notable features of Finland's comprehensive security concept is the country's underground civil architecture, which can provide shelter for more than 80% of the Finnish population in the event of a crisis. He points out that the country's advantage is its geology, where the granite base of the landscape creates opportunities for the construction of such shelters cost-effectively. Alexander (2025) also points out how Finnish society is prepared for

crises more broadly through public education, food supplies and planning, a practice that is not seen as just emergency-based but as a kind of national crisis preparedness ecosystem that ensures the survival of society.

Estonia also follows a comprehensive defence approach to security, defining national defence not as mere military defence, but as requiring all state institutions and the entire society to be prepared to defend the country (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2024). The Estonian Ministry of Defence states on its webpage (2024) that the aim of Estonian national defence is not merely to win a military conflict, but to prevent it through deterrence, and that comprehensive national defence increases Estonian society's resilience and readiness for crises.

The Ministry of Defence (2024) defines the operational areas of Estonian comprehensive national defence as the following: the functioning of the state and society (maintaining essential services in a crisis and raising the population's awareness of the crisis), international activities (mitigating international tensions and creating suitable conditions for implementing collective defence), strategic communication (psychological protection and ensuring public support for national defence while also avoiding panic), internal security (ensuring internal security, the readiness of institutions for a crisis and the protection of the interests of the state), civilian sector support for military defence (effectively launching military defence and maintaining it in an effective manner in a crisis), and military defence (developing independent defence capability and implementing NATO collective defence).

The countries are also similar in their defence planning and structure more broadly. Both countries have compulsory conscription (Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2025; The Finnish Defence Forces webpage 2026). Both countries base their defence strategies on a comprehensive national defence, and although independent national armies are also being built and equipment is being procured, defence is also seen as a contribution from every member of society and from allies (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 50; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2024). Since 2023, when Finland joined the alliance, both countries have been members of NATO, with Estonia joining the organisation in 2004 (NATO webpage 2024).

Based on compulsory military service in both countries, both Estonia and Finland are building up reserve forces. The wartime composition of the Republic of Estonia includes 43,000 positions, which are manned by reservists who have been assigned a specific wartime

position, active military personnel, and members of the Defence League (Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2024). In addition, there are another 4,000 supplementary reserve members, and there are nearly 40,000 reservists in Estonia who have completed military training but have not been assigned to a specific wartime position (Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2024). The wartime composition of Finland includes a total of 280,000 people, of whom about 5% are active military personnel and the rest are reservists (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 35). It should be noted that the population of Finland is just over 5.6 million people (as of 2026) and the population of Estonia is just over 1.3 million people (as of 2026) (Statistics Finland 2026; Statistics Estonia 2026), meaning that Finland is more than four times larger in terms of population.

Starting in 2026, Estonia is contributing over 5% of GDP to national defence every year, and 5.43% in 2026 (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2026). Since 2022, when a full-scale war began in Ukraine, Estonia has contributed over 3% (in 2022, 2.14% of GDP was contributed to national defence) (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia 2026, 3). In 2025, national defence expenditure accounted for 3.74% of Estonia's GDP (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia 2026, 3). At the same time, Finland has set a goal of reaching the target of spending at least 3% of its GDP on national defence by 2029 (Finnish Government webpage 2025). It is estimated that in 2025, Finland's national defence expenditure was 2.77% of the country's GDP (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2025, 9).

Thus, in terms of defence expenditure, Estonia has responded faster and stronger to the full-scale war in Ukraine. However, both countries exceed NATO's 2% target, and according to NATO forecasts, both exceeded the average defence expenditure of NATO allies in 2024 and 2025 (2.61% and 2.76% of GDP, respectively) (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2025, 9). In the case of Finland, it is also necessary to take into account the fact that the country only recently joined the alliance and is therefore bound by the 2% spending obligation on national defence. As recently as 2022, Finland's national defence spending was 1.68% of GDP (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2025, 9).

Moving on to the central theme of the work – belief in victory – one can identify a significantly different trend between the two countries. Both Estonia and Finland conduct surveys of public opinion on national defence every year. It is on the basis of these surveys that a strange phenomenon emerges: unlike the Finns, Estonians do not particularly believe in

the possibility of victory in the event of an attack. Moreover, they do not believe that the country can be defended until the arrival of additional allied assistance .

The public in both Finland and Estonia is convinced that the homeland should definitely be defended by an armed army in the event of an armed attack; in Estonia, this figure is 82% as of 2025 (among Estonians, it is as high as 89%) and in Finland, 78% of the population believes that Finns should defend their country (Kantar Emor 2025, 8; The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 22). The will to defend, meaning the willingness to contribute to defence, of the population in both countries is also high. By 2025, 80% of Finnish residents and 62% of Estonian residents (when taken by ethnicity, 70% of ethnic Estonians) are ready to contribute to national defence themselves (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 24; Kantar Emor 2025, 32).

Here we reach a paradoxical situation, the residents of both countries overwhelmingly believe that their home countries should be defended, the vast majority (80%) of Finnish residents and a significant number (70%) of ethnic Estonians (62% of the entire population, which could also be considered relatively high) are ready to contribute to military action themselves in the event of defence. Thus, both nations are actively ready to defend their country and value such action. Yet, at the same time, the studies reveal that while 85% of the Finnish population believes that their army can defend the country from military threats, only 49% of Estonian population believes that it would be possible to defend the country at least until help from the allies arrives (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 18; Kantar Emor 2025, 8).

The ethnic-based view of Estonian respondents does not offer much relief here. The belief in successful defence of the country until help arrives increases by 8% when focusing on ethnic Estonians (the belief of the entire Estonian population is 49%, the belief of Estonians is 57%) (Kantar Emor 2025, 41). This means that almost half of ethnic Estonians and more than half of the entire Estonian population do not even believe that it would be possible to defend Estonia until help arrives. The phenomenon cannot be considered short-term or potentially a sample peculiarity, because the Estonian indicator has been similarly low in previous years and has a downward trend (with a small exception in the first year of the full-scale war in Ukraine): 2024 52% of the population; 2023 56%; 2022 60%; 2021 49%; 2020 54% (Kantar Emor 2025; 41).

An important point of attention is that in Finland the question is asked whether the country can be protected from a military threat without any reference to the arrival of additional help. At the same time, Estonians have low belief in being able to hold out even for a short time. While the question posed to the Finnish people "*do you trust the Finnish Defence Forces' capability to defend the country?*" could be interpreted as successfully carrying out self-defence (and thereby achieving victory through the concept of defensive victory), almost half of the Estonian population excludes the possibility of victory even before the arrival of allied assistance (question posed for Estonian people: "*In your assessment, in the event of a military attack by a foreign country - would it be possible to defend Estonia until the arrival of additional allied assistance?*").

Here it becomes clear, as shown in Table 2, that the two countries, Estonia and Finland, are relatively similar in terms of their security parameters. The opinions of the population on defence issues also seem to be similar, with the population of both countries believing that the country must be defended in the event of aggression (whereas, based on 2025, this indicator is even higher in the Estonian population) and the vast majority of both populations are ready to contribute to national defence in the event of aggression. However, the two countries are distinguished by a dramatic difference in the population's belief in victory, where less than half of Estonian society (49%) believes that they will be able to hold out until additional help from the allies arrives, while 85% of Finns believe that their own defence forces are capable of successfully defending the country (without reference to help from the allies).

	Estonia	Finland
National defence model	Comprehensive defence approach (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia website 2024).	Comprehensive defence approach (Alexander 2025).
Compulsory conscription	Yes (Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2025).	Yes (The Finnish Defence Forces webpage 2026).
NATO membership	Yes, since 2004 (NATO webpage 2024).	Yes, since 2023 (NATO webpage 2024).
Reserve force system	Yes, wartime composition includes 43 000 positions manned by reservists and	Yes, wartime composition includes a total of 280 000 people of which 5% is active

	Defence League and additional 40 000 reservists without concrete wartime position (Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2024).	military personnel and the rest are reservists (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 35).
Expenditure on national defence	Since the beginning of 2026 over 5% of GDP, reaching 5,43% in 2026 (before, since 2022 over 3%) (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia 2026, 3).	Estimated expenditure in 2025 2,77% of GDP, goal to reach 3% in 2029 (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2025, 9 ; Finnish Government webpage 2025).
Current expenditure on national defence exceeds NATO 2% of GDP target	Yes (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia 2026, 3).	Yes (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2025, 9).
% of population that believes the country should be defended in the case of armed attack	82% (Kantar Emor 2025, 8).	78% (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 22).
% of population that is willing to participate in national defence in the case of armed attack	62% (Kantar Emor 2025, 32).	80% (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 24).
Belief in victory	49% of the population believes that Estonia can be defended until the arrival of additional allied assistance (Kantar Emor 2025, 8).	85% of the population believes that Finnish Defence Forces are capable of defending the country (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025).

Table 2. Estonian and Finnish defence parameters.

Author`s table.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological tools and decisions that will be used in the upcoming work. First the research puzzle and - questions and presumptions are presented. Then the research design, data collection and analytical framework are also outlined. The aim of the methodology section is to explain how the research identifies the reasons that have led to the significant difference between Estonian and Finnish populations' belief in victory in the case of military aggression.

3.1 Research puzzle, questions and presumptions

As was clear from the background part of the work on the parameters of the countries' defence (Table 2), the countries are primarily similar in terms of their defence systems: the defence strategy is based on a comprehensive national defence, both are NATO members (although Finland joined significantly later), compulsory military service and the principle of a reserve army in both countries, significant defence spending in the NATO context (both exceed NATO's 2% GDP requirement for defence spending). Similarly, the populations of both countries have a relatively high willingness to defend – 80% of Finnish residents and 62% of Estonian residents (when taken by ethnicity, 70% of Estonians) are ready to contribute to national defence themselves (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 24; Kantar Emor 2025, 32). Therefore, these are countries with relatively similar defence structures.

At the same time, Table 2 also reveals the fact that the Estonian population's belief in the state's ability to counter the enemy until additional assistance from allies arrives is significantly lower (49%) than the Finnish population's belief that the state can defend itself (without reference to allied assistance) (85%) (The Advisory Board for Defence Information 2025, 18; Kantar Emor 2025, 8). This justifies the selection of these countries in the study, as the main indicators in the field of defence of the two countries are relatively similar, but the population's belief in the state's success in the event of aggression is significantly different. The dramatically different social belief in military success in the event of aggression of countries with otherwise similar defence structures also represents a research puzzle for the study.

As the theoretical framework of the thesis revealed, the population's belief in the possibility of victory is crucial because it represents the people's resilience to psychological damage in

the context of a military conflict. The greater the people's belief in victory, the greater the suffering they are willing to endure for it, while the loss of such belief can lead to defeat. Therefore, it is important to investigate why the belief in the possibility of victory of two countries with seemingly similar military parameters is so different.

Based on the conclusions of the theoretical framework, it should be very important for the Estonian state to cultivate such belief, in order to prevent the population's low belief in victory from undermining the country's military success in the event of a conflict. To this end, this study focuses on identifying various factors that may have caused such a difference between the two seemingly similar countries. Since the central research method of this work will be expert interviews (more on this later), **the main question of the study** is: What factors explain the dramatic difference in public belief in victory between Finland and Estonia, according to defence experts?

The theoretical framework identified three variables that mainly influence people's belief in victory: national identity and ethos, collective memory, political communication and rhetoric. This also gives rise to **three presumptions** regarding the research results:

1. The significant difference in belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations is caused by the difference in the strength of national identity and ethos in society (Finland as a clearly unified society, perceiving a common national "goal" and, conversely, Estonian society as non-unified and goalless);
2. The significant difference in belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations is caused by the difference in historical experience and collective memory (Finland as a society experiencing historical success and victory and, conversely, Estonian society as experiencing historical defeat and the resulting national trauma);
3. The significant difference in the belief in victory of the Estonian and Finnish populations is caused by the difference in political communication and rhetoric (the Finnish leadership as the only one clearly and convincingly communicating its military goals and, conversely, the Estonian leadership as the one communicating vague and unconvincing goals).

As the theoretical framework shows, the state defines the victory as the goals of a military conflict and then communicates them to the people. Therefore, the study should also analyze what the military goals set by the states are based on the concepts of Clausewitz, Martel and

defensive victory presented in the theoretical framework. Thus, the **secondary research question** is: To which concept do the national military goals of Estonia and Finland correspond? Based on the theoretical and background sections of the work, the presumption about secondary research question could be:

4. As small countries, both Finland and Estonia are based on the concept of defensive victory in their military objectives (i.e. the central goal is to protect national interests and ensure the survival of the state).

3.2 Research design

To answer the research question, comparative analysis of Estonia and Finland is conducted, collecting information through interviews from experts in defence fields from both countries. The interviews are analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Since the secondary question of the study concerns the countries' understanding of victory, content analysis is also used to analyze the main security documents of both countries. The following is a closer look at the research design, introducing the details of data collection and the analysis framework.

3.2.1 Data collection

The main data collection method of the study is expert interviews. Michael Meuser and Ulrike Nagel (2009, 25-27) point out an important nuance in expert interviews, that when using the method, the socio-cultural conditions of the experts become important in the production of knowledge and attention should be directed to the expert's connection to the circumstances and environments that are touched upon during the interview. It is also pointed out that since the emergence of expert knowledge is influenced by various fields (also outside the professional sphere), it should be ensured that the interviews do not focus solely on the expert's position but also on other experiential fields (Meuser & Nagel 2009, 26).

From Nagel and Mauser's (2009) conclusion on the socio-cultural condition, it is clear that a mere defence expert or an expert specifically concerned with belief in victory may not necessarily provide fundamental results in the context of the study. It is important that the interviewee also perceives the conditions of the countries personally, and that his or her expertise is not limited to simply deep contemplation of central concepts. Therefore, it is important to focus on experts from the countries in the focus of the study, Estonia and Finland. At the same time, it is clear that expertise in the field cannot be completely ignored; in addition to the cognitive perception of what is happening in society, it is important in the

context of the study that the interviewee understands and analyzes social conditions in a broader security context and is able to interpret various indicators as the population's perception of security issues.

Accordingly, the author sets the goal to interview 5-6 defence experts from both Estonia and Finland (10-12 in total), who either have a previous academic background related to society's perceptions of war and national defence or who are directly involved in the defence field professionally and whose work also touches on the defence readiness of the population and other defence factors across society.

The author of the thesis has decided to use semi-structured interviews for the interview. According to Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman (2002, 674), such semi-structured interviews represent an opportunity for the interviewee to respond in their own words, thus creating a deeper and more nuanced response. Since the present study focuses on a relatively abstract topic, the population's belief in the state's ability to be successful and win in the case of a military aggression, the experts' personal perception of the society around them is particularly important here, thus making it important to leave room for their own interpretations and notes.

A semi-structured interview also allows for a conversational approach to the questions, for example by rearranging the order of questions according to the conversation or by asking additional questions (Aberbach & Rockman 2002, 674). This means that the results of the study are not limited to the possible causes of the phenomenon identified by the author of the work in the theoretical framework, but creates an opportunity for the respondent to bring in completely new information. This in turn maximizes the value of the interviews and the results of the research.

Based on the theoretical framework of the work and the chosen method, the interviews focus on the experts' interpretation and perception of the presence of three factors influencing the belief in victory in Estonian and Finnish societies: national identity and ethos, collective memory, political communication and rhetoric. The advantage of using a semi-structured interview is that the author can also ask the interviewees about factors that they think could also influence the nation's belief. This way, the range of possible results expands and the research can reach more fundamental conclusions, as theoretical materials may not reflect all the factors that are important in the context of the target countries, which may be perceived by practicing experts on the ground.

Since the sample consists of experts from two countries, this situation is also used to the maximum; experts from both countries are asked to reflect their perception of the other country in the context of the topic. In this way, the study also includes a dimension of whether the experts' domestic perception of the factors also matches how it appears from the outside. The interview plan is provided in Appendix 1 and 2, the central questions changed depending on the country whose expert was being interviewed (in the case of the Estonian expert, the focus was primarily on the situation in Estonia and they were asked to additionally reflect on the situation in Finland, and other way around with the Finnish experts).

In her discussion of research ethics, Lee Ann Fujii (2012, 718) first emphasizes the power relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer, highlighting the importance of informed consent. Giving informed consent is important to confirm that the interviewee has understood the dimensions of the study and the possible risks or benefits that may accompany participation (Fujii 2012, 718). To ensure that the participants in this study were aware of their rights, understood the aims and scope of the work, and could express their wish to remain anonymous if necessary, all interviewees had to read the consent form and confirm that they had read it and agreed to be interviewed (Appendix 3).

Since the data collection method was expert interviews, by default the interviewees were included in the work as non-anonymous. In order to ensure the reliability of the research results, the background of the experts is also highlighted to confirm that they are experts in their field. However, since the author's primary goal is to gather the necessary information, it was stated both in the consent form and at the beginning of the interviews that experts could remain anonymous if they wished, in which case only the country of the expert and a general description of their previous contact with the topic would be stated. Some interviewees expressed such a wish, and it was respected.

Fujii (2012, 718-719) also highlights the importance of interviewee security. Several measures are implemented in the study to ensure such security. First, the contact details of interviewees are not published or shared with third parties. Second, the names and specific positions of individuals who wish to remain anonymous are also not published, only the indication whether he/she is an expert from Estonia or Finland and general description how they come across the topic (for example, "an Estonian defence expert who has previously studied the population's perception of defence issues"). Third, based on Fujii's (2012, 718) emphasis that the interviewee must also have the opportunity to contact the researcher after

the interview to inquire about their rights, the interviewees were also provided with the author's contact details via the consent form.

For a more detailed analysis of the interviews, they were recorded and transcribed, but the interviewees also had the right to refuse this based on the consent form (Appendix 3), and this was also emphasized at the beginning of the interviews. Both transcriptions, recordings and notes made during the interviews were destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

The use of expert interviews as the main research method may lead to some problems or limitations. First, since Estonia and Finland are relatively small countries and the circle of defence experts in either country is not very large, involving experts may prove to be a challenge. To include the interviewees in the study, the author of the work began with independent background work on the Internet, searching for various Estonian and Finnish officials, people with a military background and academics who had publicly discussed or studied the public attitudes in their country on defence issues. The author also used recommendations for various experts received through his acquaintances. In addition, the "snowball sampling" method discussed by Dvora Yanow (2013, 107) was also used, in which those already involved in the interviews were asked to recommend the next candidates. The use of such a set of methods was successful, the author of the paper managed to involve the targeted number of experts from both countries.

Another challenge was to involve persons in the interviews who could truly be considered experts in the field. At this point, it became important that the person concerned was someone who had knowledge, first of all, of the country's defence field in general, and that the expert had also been involved with studies or analyses specifically investigating the population's opinions / perceptions about national defence or their formation (to avoid, for example, a defence expert focused on tactical or technical aspects assessing the population's perception of defence issues). For this, the expert's position (or previous position) and research background / field of work had to reflect the relevant knowledge. Before contacting the experts, the author of the thesis thoroughly researched their professional background and previous research.

The author of the paper set a goal of interviewing 5-6 defence experts from both countries, but reserves the right to use a saturation point in the interviews when information becomes repetitive. According to Margit Schreier's (2014, 176) qualitative content analysis approach, data is collected until no new additional information is found. This means that the conduction

of the interviews is stopped when the interviewees no longer offer new information but repeat what has already been collected.

In total, the author of the study managed to include 5 Estonian and 5 Finnish defence experts in the study, listed in Table 3.

Expert's name or coded note	Expert's title or background
Estonian experts	
Marek Kohv	Head of Security & Resilience Programme at the International Centre for Defence and Security
Viljar Veebel	Lecturer at the Baltic Defence College
Col. (in reserve) Aarne Ermus	Lecturer at the Estonian National Defence College, reserve officer of the Estonian Defence Forces
Andreas Ventsel	Professor of politics and socio-semiotics at the University of Tartu
Nele Loorents	Research fellow at the International Centre for Defence and Security
Finnish experts	
Teemu Häkkinen	Senior researcher at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, specializing in hybrid threats
Anonymous participant (A1)	Finnish defence expert, previous research includes background in war studies
Anonymous participant (A2)	Finnish defence expert, previous research includes topics of people's will to defend the country and views on national defence
Jarkko Kosonen	Adjunct professor (docent) of the Finnish National Defence University
Pekka Kallioniemi	Non-resident research fellow at the International Centre for Defence and Security, creator of Vatnik Soup series about pro-Russian propagandists

Table 3. Estonian and Finnish defence experts involved in the research interviews.
Author's table.

Since the study also has a secondary question (*to which concept do the national military goals of Estonia and Finland correspond?*) Estonian and Finnish security basic documents are used for its analysis. In the case of Estonia, this is the National Security Concept of Estonia, which formulates the principles of Estonian security, conceptualizes the security environment and presents a central landmark in ensuring national security (Government Office of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2025). In the case of Finland, such material is the Finnish Government's Defence Report, which is the first government report after joining NATO and whose guidelines are set to be valid until the 2030s (Ministry of Defence of Finland webpage n.d). Both documents represent national base materials, which are updated as security considerations change and which represent a set of guidelines for national security policy decisions, formulating security policy goals. Both materials are freely available online and do not require a separate data collection method.

3.2.2 Framework for analysis

The main research question focuses on three variables identified in the theoretical framework that influence the formation of people's belief in victory, and the interviews also leave room for possible additional factors perceived by the interviewees that could influence this. The variables are studied using the expert interviews described above, which are analyzed through qualitative content analysis (QCA). According to Margit Schreier (2014, 170), QCA focuses on the systematic description of qualitative data by dividing it into groups, thereby helping to reduce the amount of material. Such group-based data handling and coding allows for better orientation in the information and drawing conclusions.

The theoretical framework reveals three deductive categories: national identity and ethos, collective memory and political communication and rhetoric. Since the experts have the opportunity to propose new variables in the interviews, which in their opinion can explain the dramatic difference in belief in victory between Finnish and Estonian societies, new inductive categories can emerge through the analysis of the interviews. For example, in the interviews, various experts repeatedly mentioned the involvement of the population in national defence, which also created a corresponding inductive category. The analysis revealed two additional inductive categories: full-scale war in Ukraine and its perception in society; population awareness and involvement in national defence. Appendix 4 provides the coding tree for the analysis.

As the interview sample included defence experts from two countries, in addition to their assessments and perceptions of their home country, they were also asked throughout the interviews to reflect on the situation in the other country. This allowed the analysis to also take into account how the country's society and defence-related activities appear from outside, providing a broader picture.

As mentioned earlier, since the study also has a secondary research question, another content analysis is also carried out for the basic documents on the security of the two states. The focus is on searching for the main features of the three concepts given in Table 1 in the documents. The analysis examines to which concept of victory (outlined in the theoretical framework) do the military goals of the Estonian and Finnish states correspond to?

As found in the theoretical framework, the military goals of a country are defined by the country's leadership and then conveyed to the people in order to gain public support and approval for their implementation. Therefore, the analysis of the country's victory is not completely separate from the interviews. Rather, it can be viewed as a method for analyzing political communication and rhetoric in greater depth. Answering the secondary research question (by analyzing the central national defence documents) provides an opportunity to analyze whether, in the experts' opinion, the state has succeeded in communicating these messages to the people (whether, in the experts' opinion, the people's understanding of the state's victory in the military conflict corresponds to the goals set by the state).

4. Analysis

The analysis is based on three central variables that were discovered through the theoretical framework: national identity and ethos, collective memory, political communication and rhetoric. As mentioned above, in the case of political communication, it is also analyzed which of the concepts of victory identified in the theoretical framework (Clausewitz's traditional, Martel's modern or defensive victory) the Estonian and Finnish military goals corresponds to. For this purpose, the central strategic documents on national security of both countries are analyzed.

Comparisons of the opinions of Estonian and Finnish experts and assessments of the situation in the other country (the Estonian expert's perception of Finland and *vice versa*) are also highlighted throughout. Since semi-structured interviews were used for the interviews, new factors influencing the population's belief in victory that were not identified by the theoretical framework are also drawn. Based on the analysis of the interviews, two new factors influencing belief in victory were identified in the Estonian and Finnish contexts: the full-scale war in Ukraine and its perception in society; population awareness and involvement in national defence.

4.1 The influence of national identity and ethos on belief in victory

The theoretical framework revealed that the stronger the population's national identity, the stronger the population's belief in victory could be. In doing so, Smith (1991) and Lewin (2016) presented their views on how a population that perceives itself as having a “duty” of resistance / survival or a myth of “chosenness” binds the people into a single, unified social group and also makes the survival of the people more likely. For example, Lewin (2016, 12) highlighted how a strong national ethos inspires people to fight even against very strong odds. The following analysis examines the extent to which experts perceive Estonian and Finnish societies as united, and whether a specific “national ethos” can be identified in either country that might foster a belief in victory among the population.

4.1.1 Perceived national ethos

Starting from Lewin's (2016, 1–3, 12) view that the nation's sense of “national duty” (in other words “national ethos”) binds people together and inspires national belief in military success, the author of this thesis discovered during the analysis of the interviews that, according to

experts, in the case of Estonians, the perception of "national duty" remains somewhat vague. However, the interviews clearly show a strong perception of national duty among Finns.

For example, Finnish expert Teemu Häkkinen points out that the goal of Finns could be to remain nationally Finnish, not to become Swedes or Russians. He said: *"We are Finnish people and it's our job to keep things this way also in the future. It is a very simple aim, that also in the future there will be Finland, there will be Finnish people and we will have this freedom."* (T. Häkkinen, personal interview, 20.03.2026)" Jarkko Kosonen (personal interview, 13.04.2026) also points out that the attitude that the Finnish nation can overcome all difficulties can be perceived as a national "duty".

Pekka Kallioniemi (personal interview, 17.04.2026) points out that myths about the Winter War and the rebellion hold a very important place in society and have created a kind of "soldier mentality". Furthermore, when discussing the factor of collective memory in interviews, several experts point out the Finnish remembrance culture and the attitude about resistance not only as a right of the nation but also as a duty towards their ancestors who fought for the country's freedom. As stated in the theoretical framework, national identity and collective memory are strongly intertwined factors, and remembrance culture is discussed in more detail in the context of collective memory (in chapter 4.2.2).

A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) suggested that "survival" could once have been considered a Finnish national duty, but finds that this is no longer an actively cultivated attitude or perception among the population, and overcoming socially complex times probably also plays a role. Although one Finnish expert assessed that their national sense of some kind of "designated mission" is fading, all other Finnish experts nevertheless referred to resistance and state preservation rather than an active mentality. Therefore, it can still be concluded here that Finns do have a sense of national duty.

The answers of the Estonian experts do not reveal any clear sense of the nation about some mythical or historical ethos. Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) points out that the idea of *"where do we have to go?"* could unite the population, but this seems to be reflected primarily in the context of a crisis. Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) also refers to the idea that something that unites Estonians is the idea that one cannot be Estonian anywhere else, saying: *".../ knowing that no one is waiting for you anywhere else in the world. Estonia is our home and where else can you be an Estonian?"* Estonian experts suggest several other possibilities that the Estonian people could perceive as their "duty", for

example, pointing out how much they talk about historical suffering. However, Estonian experts expressed throughout the interviews that they are not convinced that Estonians have a clear perception of their national duty, rather everyone may perceive different important values that are worth protecting. A few Estonian experts speculated that such a perception of some kind of "duty" would likely arise among Estonians in times of danger or crisis.

Thus, there is a clear contrast between Finnish and Estonian societies in terms of the perception of "national duty", where in Finland there is a very clear perception of the duty to resist the enemy and preserve the state, resulting from the efforts of previous generations to protect and preserve freedom during World War II. In the case of Estonia, however, experts perceive that there are different scenarios or possibilities for depicting "national duty", but a unified social ethos has not emerged.

4.1.2 Unity of two societies

Coming to the experts' perception of national unity, the experts' assessment is that Finns seem to be more united as a nation than Estonians. All Estonian experts found that Finns are more united, citing various reasons such as a longer period of independent statehood, a certain experience of victory (when preserving independence during the Cold War), and the absence (or small proportion) of a Russian-speaking population. Col. (reserve) Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) pointed out the somewhat divisive effect of the Finnish Civil War on Finnish society (brought out in the background part), but at the same time stated that several generations have grown up since then and its effect is clearly fading.

Finnish experts refrain from giving a clear assessment of the unity of the Estonian population, but they imply a suspicion that Estonian society may be less united. In doing so, they refer to social cohesion in the case of the Estonian Russian-speaking population. For example, Teemu Häkkinen (personal interview, 20.03.2026) points out that, especially in the context of armed aggression, it would be important for Estonia to pay attention to the social cohesion of Estonians and people of other ethnicities in Estonia.

Analyzing the interviews in the context of national identity and ethos reveals an interesting fact. Several experts point out that one important factor that unites the population is the crisis and the population's perception of the importance and necessity of national defence.

For example, A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) said: *"I think especially in terms of a threat from outside of Finland, Finns would be quite united. /.../ In Finland there's the kind of*

phenomenon of when you have a threat from outside, you become more united. /.../ Finns turn very easily towards the authorities and trust them. If you think about the COVID crisis people were lining up for the medication and doing everything the authorities said. There wasn't much critique. /.../ To me it kind of tells that there's a very easy way for people to adjust to the crisis situation and to listen to the authorities and also to be willing to do something."

Similarly, col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) pointed out: *"Actually, I still believe that difficulties have always united people. I believe that if an attack occurs, then the differences are not so great that they cannot be overcome. There is nothing to be done, throughout history it has been seen that nothing unites people better than an enemy."* In addition, A1 (personal interview, 27.03.2026), Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) and Andreas Ventsel (personal interview, 20.04.2026) also pointed out a belief in the need for national defence and crisis situation as factors uniting the population. Thus, while the theoretical framework previously identified a positive effect of national identity and ethos on the population's belief in victory, the analysis of the interviews has now revealed the positive effect of the crisis on the unity of the population.

4.1.3 Issues of integration and loyalty of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia

Here, a new important nuance emerges in the case of unity, which was not directly revealed in the theoretical framework, but which, according to experts, is an important influencer of belief in victory in the Estonian context. Experts point to Estonia's integration of the Russian-speaking population, which has not been able to eliminate the perceived gap between the two groups in the Estonian population to date. At the same time, experts point out how, due to such a gap, there may be hesitations among the Estonian-speaking population about how the Russian-speaking population will react to the crisis and where their loyalty lies.

As revealed in the previous analysis, the experts found that the Finnish population is more united than the Estonian one. While the Estonian experts were convinced of this, most of the Finnish experts remained more general but referred to social cohesion issues and the Russian-speaking population. Pekka Kallioniemi (personal interview, 17.04.2026) believes that Estonia can be considered a divided country, pointing out that although Finland also has a Russian-speaking population, the level of integration there is very strong. In his opinion, the Russian-speaking population in Estonia seems to be located in specific regions of Estonia and may therefore feel isolated and easily influenced.

Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) is very clear in this, considering Estonia to be the most divided compared to the other Baltic countries and Finland. He directly referred to the Russian-speaking population, pointing out that in his opinion, the social polarization in Estonia between the Estonian and Russian-speaking populations is worsening, depicting it as *"a fist carried in people's pockets, which is becoming increasingly sweaty"*. However, he emphasizes that the problem is not the Russian language, but the unwillingness to integrate.

Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) also points out that the issue is not about similarity, language or culture, but about where the loyalty of this part of the population lies. Experts' statements reflect that uncertainty about the loyalty of the Russian-speaking group can potentially inhibit society's confidence in the national defence capability and belief in victory. The Finnish expert A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) sums it up best when he points out that when Finnish society imagines a conflict situation, a clear distinction between "us and the enemy" emerges. However, he raises the question of whether the Estonian-speaking population may perhaps doubt how the local Russian-speaking population in Estonia would behave in the event of an attack, whether they would be "with us" or "with the enemy", and whether they are trustworthy.

It is not possible to answer the question posed by A2 based on this research; assessing such a perception among the Estonian-speaking population about their thoughts on the Russian-speaking population's loyalty will require a separate study. However, it is clear that, according to experts, the issue of integration and loyalty of the Russian-speaking population might play a role in the Estonian population's belief in victory, directly influencing, for example, people's belief in how the state and its various members would behave in the event of a crisis.

It is clear that, according to experts, a factor influencing the belief in victory is also Estonia's failure to successfully integrate the Estonian and Russian-speaking populations. In this regard, the issue of population unity is starting to play a role in a new way, with experts raising concerns that there is uncertainty among the Estonian-speaking population of Estonian society about where the loyalty of the Russian-speaking population lies and how they would behave in a moment of crisis. At the same time, in the case of the Finns, it is pointed out that the population's perception is unified, "us vs. the enemy".

4.2 The influence of collective memory on belief in victory

As presented in the theoretical framework, Smith (1991, 26) found that historical traumas of the nation (genocide, being conquered, etc.) can, on the one hand, destroy the population's belief in victory, or, on the contrary, influence the unity and spirit of the people. This, in turn, can also lead to an increase in willpower and belief in victory. Lewin (2016, 13) pointed out how emphasizing historical success in society can also lead to an increase in belief in victory. Here, we analyze how historical traumas and successes of the nations have played a role in the context of Estonian and Finnish belief in victory, according to experts.

4.2.1 The double-edged effect of historical traumas on the belief in victory

Opinions differ among Finnish experts as to whether events of the past century (e.g. the Winter and Continuation Wars or remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War) have played a role in Finland's significantly high belief in victory.

A1 (personal interview, 27.03.2026) finds that the events of the past century did have an impact on the Finnish population, but perhaps not in a positive way, pointing out that the results of World War II affected Finnish society in such a way that the country developed a very cautious attitude towards the Soviet Union (and later the Russian Federation). The expert pointed out that this attitude remained in the population until the start of a full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022. Until then, the majority of society held a critical position on the idea of joining NATO.

A1's thought refers to the idea that the historical trauma of Finnish society from remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War was so great that it influenced the country's attitudes for almost thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This demonstrates the idea that Smith (1991) pointed out, that historical trauma can strongly undermine the belief in victory. Joining or not joining NATO cannot be interpreted directly as a belief in victory, but it speaks of a doubtful attitude and caution about taking steps that would irritate the perceived adversary.

Jarkko Kosonen (personal interview 13.04.2026) also found that the collective memory of the Finns has a clear and large impact on the Finns' belief in victory, but in his opinion it still has a positive impact on the belief in victory, highlighting how the stories of fathers and grandfathers who stood for Finland's freedom are passed down through generations.

A2 (personal interview 06.04.2026), however, found that collective memory is more of a second or third-rate factor, pointing out that the current state of defence capability, the legitimacy of the system, the continuity of the conscription system, and only then some kind of mythological or historical basis have a more significant influence. A2 found that in the case of such a historical basis, the main influence is probably the Winter War and to some extent the Continuation War.

In the case of Estonians, opinions differ also on the impact of collective memory on the population's belief in victory. Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) found that the occupation may not have had a negative impact on the belief in victory, but on the contrary, promoted national self-awareness in the context that, despite the occupation, Estonian culture and nationhood remained intact. Such an approach also fits well with Smith's (1991, 26) theoretical framework on the historical trauma of the nation, which does not necessarily mean the erosion of the belief in victory, but can also deepen conviction and ethnic cohesion in order to survive .

Teemu Häkkinen (personal interview, 20.03.2026) also points out that the experience of occupation in the case of Estonia can also be viewed from a positive angle in relation to resistance and avoiding a recurrence of such a situation at all costs. He illustrates this by pointing out that despite the fact that Estonia let Soviet troops in in 1939, in this century the country immediately joined NATO when the opportunity arose and has significantly increased its defence spending. He estimates that, due to the experience of occupation, Estonians are now doing everything they can to resist the aggressor.

On the other hand, Col. Ermus (personal interview 07.04.2026) finds that Estonians tend to pay a lot of attention to the fact that the more Estonian-minded part of society was deported and killed, fostering fears in the people later on (e.g., against the backdrop of the restoration of independence in the 1990s, fear of a reversal of the situation and also today of the loss of freedom). In turn, Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) found, similarly to A2, that the importance of historical events in the context of belief in victory is decreasing and what is seen in the full-scale war in Ukraine has a significantly greater impact.

Thus, in the case of both countries, there were experts who believed that collective memory played a very clear role in the population's belief in victory. This was both in a positive sense (Finland as the preservation of independence in the context of World War II and the Estonians' historical trauma from the occupation as a unifier of the people and a cause of

resistance), and in a negative sense (Finland's remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War as a reason for later cautious policies towards Russia and the experience of the Estonian occupation as a cause lower level of belief in victory).

Here it has become clear that while Finnish society can perceive the events of the past century from very different perspectives, on the one hand, the victorious preservation of independence (a positive effect on belief in victory) and on the other hand, remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence throughout the Cold War (a negative effect), Estonians are able to see the same event (the occupation) as both increasing and decreasing belief in victory. This also supports Smith's (1991, 26) assessment that historical traumas can destroy a people's belief in victory, or, conversely, deepen conviction and ethnic cohesion in order to survive.

However, it is not possible to unequivocally confirm that collective memory would definitely have a strong effect on belief in victory in the context of either country. There were experts in both countries who believed that it was only a secondary influence and that the importance of collective memory was fading away alongside more mundane indicators. However, the influence of collective memory cannot be denied, and some influence has been identified in any case.

4.2.2 Collective memory as the reason for the difference in Finnish and Estonian belief in victory

When experts from the two countries are asked whether, in their opinion, the dramatic difference in the belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations can be reduced to the national trauma of one country (the Soviet occupation for Estonia) and to a perceived victory (preserving the independence during Cold War for Finland) of the other, an interesting nuances emerge. It is pointed out how a certain experience of victory created a tradition of resistance and pride in it among the Finns.

Teemu Häkkinen (personal interview, 20.03.2026) pointed out the year 1939, when the Soviet Union demanded concessions from Finland and when Estonia allowed Soviet bases into the country. Häkkinen states that Estonia's resistance to the Soviet demands could have led to a catastrophe, but it is clear that Finland's resistance at that time has left a tradition and pride of resistance in the nation. Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) also pointed out in his answers how the legend that Finland will never surrender has emerged among Finns, which reproduces itself through time. Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) and Viljar

Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) point out how those who fought for Finland were able to pass on the legacy of resistance to their children, while Veebel points out how opponents of the Soviet system in Estonia were deported and killed.

Häkkinen (personal interview, 20.03.2026) also highlighted an important component of Finland's collective memory in a military context, the **remembrance culture**. As one of its most distinctive features, Häkkinen highlights the saying "*have some spirit of Winter War*", which directs people to refrain from whining. It is used both at the domestic level and by politicians to encourage people to cope in difficult circumstances. This strategy used by politicians to refer back to past efforts (a reference to the spirit of the Winter War) to influence public sentiment and encourage resilience corresponds to Lewin's (2016) idea of how leaders use past successes to rally the public to believe in future success and victory.

Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) also highlights in his interview how Finns view resistance not only as their national right, but also as a duty towards those who once stood for the independence of the country. As the previous analysis established, resistance can be considered as one of the national ethos of the Finns, which is passed down from generation to generation.

Thus, the course of history has clearly favored Finland's high belief in victory. Not only does the experience of victory itself have a positive effect on belief in victory, but also the fact that there are those who can pass on their experience of struggle, resistance and success to future generations. In the Estonian experience, opponents of the Soviet system were punished, many also died, and the spirit of resistance was suppressed in society.

4.3 The influence of political communication and rhetoric on belief in victory and Estonian and Finnish interpretations of victory

As outlined in the methodology section, in addition to expert interviews, this study also analyzes the foundational documents that outline the security policies of both countries. In doing so, we determine which of the concepts of victory identified in the theoretical framework correspond to the state's security principles and objectives. As the theoretical framework revealed, the state defines what national victory in a conflict might look like and then communicates this to the population. Here, an analysis of documents and expert analyses can determine whether the state's conception of victory has reached the experts (whether their

perception aligns with the vision of victory presented in the documents) and whether, in the experts' assessment, the broader public has also received this vision of victory.

4.3.1 The military objectives of the two countries in the context of the three identified victory frameworks

In the case of the Republic of Estonia, the analysis is based on the National Security Concept of Estonia, which formulate Estonia's security principles and security environment and which constitute a comprehensive guide to ensuring national security (Government Office of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2025). In the case of Finland, the basis is the Finnish Government's Defence Report, which is the first defence report published after the country joined NATO and which guidelines extend into the 2030s (Ministry of Defence of Finland webpage n.d). Both are analyzed based on the victory framework presented in the theoretical part (key features summarized in Table 1), i.e. based on the concepts of Clausewitz, Martel and defensive victory.

By analyzing the documents, it is possible to identify some characteristics from all three concepts. Clausewitz highlighted the importance of resistance in his approach to victory, complete victory over the opponent means that his resistance has been reduced to zero (Clausewitz 1976, 77). Resistance consists of resources and will (resources x will = resistance). Both Finland and Estonia emphasize the importance of will as an important foundation for their own defence.

The Finnish Defence Report repeatedly highlights how the Finns' will to defend is a crucial component of Finland's defence (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 8 & 33). Will is described in the Finnish Defence Report as a foundation that boosts societal resistance and the basis for comprehensive defence (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 33). The National Security Concept of Estonia also highlights that "*the foundation of Estonian defence is society's high will to defend*" (Riigi Teataja III 2023, 8). Thus, both countries consider the will of the people to defend the country as one of the most important components for achieving its military and defence goals, which corresponds to Clausewitz's concept, as long as the will of the population persists, the rebellion will continue.

Analyzing the documents in light of Martel's framework, the author of this research managed to identify his idea of levels of victory. Finnish Government Defence Report (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 9) brings out how the country's accession to NATO represents the

biggest change in national security since the Second World War. The report highlights how the country takes into account the common goals of the alliance and how the core functions of Finland's defence are integrated into the organisation's systems. This refers to Martel's concept of grand strategic victory, according to which success (or victory) lies in a change that has a transformative or systemic impact on international politics (Martel 2011, 39), in this case, the expansion of NATO's borders and the inclusion of Finland in the transatlantic alliance.

In the case of both countries, it is also possible to identify the mobilization for war outlined by Martel from the documents. According to his approach, mobilization for war represented the policymaker's desire to win the war, including, for example, regular spending on military capabilities as well as, for example, public mobilization (Martel 2011, 48-50). In the National Security Concept, the Estonian state commits to a minimum of 3% of GDP for security spending (Riigi Teataja III 2023, 4). *(As given in the background section of the paper, from 2026, this already exceeds 5%, reaching 5.43% in 2026 (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage 2026))*. A similar example can be cited from the Finnish report, the country has built a strong reserve army through conscription, with a wartime strength of 280,000 fighters (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 35).

However, the **most important concept, when analyzing the documents, is the concept of defensive victory**. Both countries place a strong emphasis on deterrence in their security by **denying the enemy his goals**. In the National Security Concept, Estonia states that the goal of the state's military defence is to prevent military threats, and in order to deter the enemy from starting a military conflict, the state adopts a strengthened defence posture (a combination of independent and collective defence) (Riigi Teataja III 2023, 7). In their report, the Finns point out that the main goal of maintaining and promoting the defence system is to prevent threats and the use of force against Finland (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 63).

In addition to denying the enemy his goals, the documents also reveal a **negative goal** inherent in the concept of defensive victory. Victory is not seen as conquest against the enemy, but rather as **repelling attacks** and preserving national interests. For example, the Finnish government's defence report states: *"Any use of military force against Finland will be prevented together with Allies. If deterrence fails, military attacks will be repelled,* (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 33)".

Estonia is even more specific in formulating the foundations of its security, stating that: *"Estonia will defend itself in any case and against all threats, regardless of their origin or the time and place of their appearance, and against any overwhelming adversary; Estonia will never surrender. Estonia's aim is to make aggression against the Estonian state unfeasible, (Riigi Teataja III 2023, 2)".* The reference to "any overwhelming adversary" is also a clear indication of the **asymmetry of the potential conflict**, which also clearly ties in with the concept of defensive victory.

Both countries highlight the **protection of national interests** as the main objective in their documents. The Finnish Government Defence Report states that the main objectives of the country's foreign and security policy are to protect the freedom and territorial integrity of Finland, to prevent military conflict and to ensure the safety and well-being of the Finnish people (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 15). Estonia pays even more detailed attention to the protection of national interests. The National Security Concept of Estonia states that the aim of security policy is to ensure the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Estonia, the survival of the Estonian nation, language and culture, territorial integrity, constitutional order, the security of the population and the functioning of society (Riigi Teataja III 2023, 2). Since both countries regard these objectives as key security goals in their official documents, they can also be viewed as countries' visions of victory in a military conflict (the successful achievement of these objectives in a military conflict signifies victory for the state).

In summary, the security objectives of Estonia and Finland contain references to all three concepts of victory identified in the theoretical framework. Both countries emphasize the will of the population as an important basis for defence, which corresponds to Clausewitz. There are references to different levels of victory as described by Martel: Finnish report states how joining NATO has led to the adoption of the alliance's common goals and the integration of Finland into the alliance's systems, thus corresponding to Martel's grand strategic victory, where Finland's accession to the alliance brought an expansion of NATO and a further extension of its borders along the Russian border. Both countries are also paying attention to mobilization for war, focusing on increasing defence spending, creating a reserve army, and a conscription system.

However, it is clear from the analysis of the documents that the most important concept for both countries, when setting the goals and ways of achieving them, is defensive victory. Table

1 presented in the theoretical part also summarizes the central features of defensive victory. When comparing these features with the security documents of both countries, it becomes clear that nearly all the characteristics of a defensive victory are present: denying the enemy his objectives, negative objectives, repelling attacks, asymmetry of the potential conflict and protection of national interests. At this point, it can be concluded that both Estonia and Finland primarily proceed from the concept of defensive victory in their defence bases, complementing it with some features from Clausewitz's traditional and Martel's modern approach to victory.

4.3.2 Understanding of the country's military goals and vision of victory

When experts from both countries are asked to describe their personal understanding of victory, the following keywords emerge across the two countries: independence and sovereignty (their preservation), resistance, deterrence, preservation of key state functions/institutions, and security and preservation of the population. It is clear that the experts' perception of a country's success is also based primarily on the concept of defensive victory.

As the previous chapter showed, for both Estonia and Finland, victory means the preservation of independence, territorial integrity, and the population (in the case of Finland, the prevention of conflict was additionally highlighted; in the case of Estonia, the protection of culture, language, and the constitutional order, as well as ensuring a functioning society, were discussed in greater detail) (Ministry of Defence of Finland 2024, 15 ; Riigi Teataja III 2023, 2), it is clear here that experts from both countries perceive their country's victory in a manner consistent with the state's official position.

The idea of resistance is also a recurring theme in the interviews with experts from both countries, which is consistent with Clausewitz's (1976, 77) approach, according to which in order to achieve "complete victory", the adversary's resistance (resources x will) must be reduced to zero. Therefore, the resistance and its importance to the populations of both countries can also be viewed as denying the opponent their goals, because as long as the resistance persists, the opponent's victory is not "complete".

There is no certainty among experts that the population of either country clearly perceives what a victory or success in a conflict could be. Overall, experts are unable to confirm or deny whether the population has a clear understanding of this, some estimate that the

population's perception could be similar to their own (i.e., the characteristics arising from the concept of defensive victory could be perceived among the population), while the interviews show a certain uncertainty in this regard throughout, and there are experts in both countries who say that they are not convinced. Therefore, it is not possible at this point to conclude whether the populations of either country have a clear understanding of their government's definition of victory in the context of military conflict. This means that it is also not possible to conclude whether either country has been successful in conveying its definition of victory to its people.

4.3.3 The different strategies for security related communication between the two countries

Finnish experts clearly state that victory or the country's military goals are not a topic of discussion in society. A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) says: *"I think in Finland both the military and the political leadership are quite hesitant in terms of talking about war, talking about what could happen and what we would do then. It's something that is not really discussed."* A1 (personal interview, 27.03.2026) also points out that Finland bases its messages on rather vague messages such as "defending the whole of Finland", "Finland is prepared". Both A1 and A2 find that the messages of the Estonian leadership are clearer than those of the Finns.

Pekka Kallioniemi (personal interview, 17.04.2026) also noted that the country's military objectives are not widely discussed in public debate, but he pointed out that, in his view, they should not be discussed in detail. Among Finnish experts, there seems to be a prevailing sense of doubt as to whether military issues should be discussed extensively in public. They cite, for example, war anxiety and uncertainty about how discussing matters in great detail would affect the population.

Relying on "vague messages" and speaking cautiously about war appears to be the Finnish leadership's tactical approach. One reason for this may be the point raised by Hammarlund that defining military objectives too precisely for the public may pose a risk that, in the event of setbacks or losses, it would reduce politicians' room for maneuver to change strategies and actions (Hammarlund 2012, 4).

The answers of the Estonian experts provide a clear guideline for the country's leadership. Considering that three out of five Estonian interviewees reached such a comment without a

corresponding question, this also points to a possible weak point in today's communication in Estonia. Estonian experts Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026), Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) and Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) as if with one voice, that communication alone is not enough. Messages will only have an impact on the people's belief in victory when they are backed up by actions.

The importance of communication backed by actions is also highlighted by Finnish expert Pekka Kallioniemi (personal interview, 17.04.2026), who cites as positive examples of such actions both countries' responses to hybrid threats – such as the detention of traitors and the fight against the Russian shadow fleet – which, in his view, have been actions conveying a clear message that the threat is being addressed effectively.

When talking about Estonian political communication Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) said: *"Political communication and rhetoric are currently too much influenced by current events and are not particularly forward-looking. In a person who is not very familiar with national defence, such messages can cause confusion."* He also points out that Finns talk less and are more action-oriented.

Col. Aarne Ermus and Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) refer to the state's communication concerns in the longer term. Col. Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026) brings up, for example, the issue of drone incidents and the state's initial message about the "drone dome" that is supposed to protect the Estonian sky. The state has had to start explaining why some drones have still landed in Estonia. Ermus said that Estonian politicians tend to initially talk about things in a more powerful way than they actually are.

Evaluating Finnish communication, Ermus finds that Finns can be considered more balanced in their messages, indicating that even talking less can create more confidence in the population than making grand promises and correcting them later. This is again in line with Hammarlund's (2012, 4) view that even discussing goals in great detail can pose risks for politicians. Although Andres Ventsel (personal interview, 20.04.2026) believed that communication regarding military capabilities should be precise, he also pointed out that errors and retroactive changes to messages should be avoided.

As a very important nuance, Ermus and Kohv also highlight the fact that politicians in Finland have reached a cross-party agreement that security issues will not be used for public political attacks. In previous answers, Ermus and other Estonian experts indicate that in

Estonia, public rants by politicians and undermining messages regarding security policy and decisions can cause hesitation and uncertainty among people. Nele Loorents (personal interview, 21.04.2026) pointed out that in Estonia there is a stable and persistent dissonance regarding security policy issues (in addition to other political disputes), where various political forces attempt to stand out from one another by putting forward different messages and reinforcing them. This, in turn, leads to an overload of messages and inconsistency, which negatively affects people's sense of security.

4.3.4 Emphasis on one's own strength or the help of allies

An interesting nuance that emerges from the expert interviews is that Finland appears to focus more in its public messaging on its own defence capabilities and on how it can manage on its own. At the same time, the experts note that Estonia strongly emphasizes the assistance and support provided by its allies in addition to its own defence capabilities.

For example, A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) points out that the Finnish mindset is based on the idea that Finland defends itself. In his view, joining NATO has not changed this; the alliance is viewed as a supplementary measure. Other Finnish experts also point to Finland's long-term development of its defence capabilities and the importance of this in building independent defence capabilities, which has also fostered public confidence in the country's defence capabilities.

Col. Aarne Ermus (personal interview, 07.04.2026), on the other hand, points out that people in Estonia have been talking about the "NATO umbrella" for the past 20 years, and they believe in it. Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) also notes that, in the context of the belief in victory, the most important aspect of communication in Estonia is the stability of partnerships and alliances. He emphasizes that relations with the U.S. are the most important.

Although the emphasis on allies' aid and support does not necessarily constitute a communicative error, Andreas Ventsel (personal interview, 20.04.2026) points out several weaknesses in such rhetoric. First, the state becomes dependent not only on its allies' security support but also on their broader political rhetoric. He points out how the current U.S. administration's rhetoric in international politics presents Estonia with a dilemma: whether to support one of its most important allies under any circumstances or not. Second, allies may not always share Estonia's assessment of threats. Here, Ventsel refers to the U.S.

administration's behavior toward Russia, noting that this could negatively impact deterrence messages, which in turn would affect the population's sense of security.

Nele Loorents (personal interview, 21.04.2026) pointed out that such dilemmas for Estonia are the result of its own politicians' missteps. She believes that the concept of collective defence has been made so central to security policy that it is beginning to fuel the belief that the country cannot manage on its own. At this point, the analysis does not allow us to determine whether the strong focus on allies in communications has been a mistake. There is no clear picture of whether, in the Estonian context, a greater emphasis on independent defence capabilities would have been sufficiently convincing. However, expert opinions suggest that Estonia may have remained too focused on its allies and pushed independent defence capabilities too far into the background, which may have made deterrence messages and public confidence in defence matters overly dependent on the shifting policies of its allies.

Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) also draws attention to another uncomfortable nuance for Estonia in this regard. That the Estonian political leadership must simultaneously convey somewhat different messages to the domestic and foreign audiences. He points out how, on the one hand, Estonia has taken an active role in making its allies aware that Russia is dangerous and that action must be taken quickly, while at the same time, the domestic audience is being conveyed ideas about how there is currently no threat and to stay calm. Such messages are clearly starting to mix in the media, and messages directed abroad may start to cause anxiety in the domestic audience.

4.4 Other factors influencing belief in victory

The following highlights and analyses the factors revealed in the expert interviews that were not identified by the theoretical framework, but which the experts believe might influence the belief in victory in Estonian and/or Finnish societies.

4.4.1 The full-scale war in Ukraine and its perception in society

Experts highlighted the importance of what is happening in Ukraine in the context of the population's belief in victory. First, Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) and Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) highlighted what is happening on the Ukrainian front has made people recalculate their stance in the context of the adversary occupying state's territory and their attitude towards regaining it. Viljar Veebel points out that military success

is defined against the background of the events of the full-scale war in Ukraine, including, for example, in the context of recapturing territories.

Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) points out that the desire to recapture territory also depends on the length of the conflict, saying: *"As for territorial integrity, we can draw a parallel with Ukraine. The opinion there about taking back territory depends on the length of the conflict. If the conflict drags on for a very long time, then the people and politicians are probably willing to make some concessions, which may also concern territories."*

Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) also highlights the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine in relation to the influence of the Estonian experience of occupation. He finds that the proportion of the population today who saw and experienced the beginning of the Soviet occupation and the suffering of that time is steadily decreasing. Instead, the population today is being significantly more influenced by events in Ukraine. He says: *"Almost no one fears the return of the Soviet Union of the 1980s, but they do fear the return of what happened in Butsha. Russia itself has now caused mobilization in our society with what it is doing in Ukraine, (Veebel, personal interview, 24.03.2026)."*

On the one hand, it confirms that the Estonian population keeps an eye on what is happening in Ukraine and calculates its "demands" for the country's military goals (e.g. territorial integrity) based on what is happening there. On the other hand, Veebel's statement shows that for the Estonian population, the collective memory or sense of trauma arising from the events of the past century is not so decisive in terms of belief in victory, but rather Russia's actions in Ukraine. Such activity clearly creates fear among the population that such crimes could spread to the territory of their homeland, but Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) also points to the fact that such serious crimes (such as seen in Butsha) also create mobilization among the population to resist.

Nele Loorents (personal interview, 21.04.2026) also believes that Ukraine is significant in the context of the belief in victory. This has fostered greater cohesion within Estonian society, but also – in her view, even more importantly – has led to a broader understanding within society that every individual plays a part in defending the country and the nation. At the same time, however, she notes that among the population, the sense of urgency regarding a full-scale war in Ukraine is waning, and war fatigue is growing.

Finnish experts also state the impact of what is happening in Ukraine on the mindset of their population on defence issues. For example, A1 (personal interview, 27.03.2026) points out how the vast majority of Finnish society was opposed to joining NATO for a long time because of the mentality or social attitude left over from the Cold War period to avoid excessive conflict with Russia. At the same time, according to A1, it was the events of the full-scale war in Ukraine that brought about the decisive change, also directly referring to the Butsha massacre.

The decisive shift in public opinion regarding NATO membership, as noted in A1, indicates that Russian military activity in Ukraine outweighed a certain historical trauma stemming from remaining within the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War, which, until the outbreak of full-scale war, made Finns overly cautious about confronting Russia (despite the fact that decades had passed since the end of the Cold War).

Teemu Häkkinen (personal interview, 20.03.2026) also points out that in today's world, an important influence on society's belief in victory is what is happening in Ukraine, and a social debate should be initiated about how the public sees Finland in a military conflict in contrast to events and experiences in Ukraine. This again speaks to how Russia has managed to create stronger defence-related forces in Finnish society with the crimes committed in Ukraine, bringing about a historic change in the form of the national decision to join NATO.

4.4.2 Population awareness and involvement in national defence

The involvement of the population and its awareness of national defence were also repeatedly highlighted in the interviews as an important influence on the belief in victory. For example, experts from both countries highlighted the role of the long tradition of conscription in Finland's high belief in victory. A2 (personal interview, 06.04.2026) highlighted the high trust of Finnish society in the Finnish Defence Forces and conscription, which unites generations. He points out that in the context of peacetime, the conscription system is an important link between the Finnish population and national defence, with essentially someone from every family having completed conscription. A1 (personal interview, 27.03.2026) highlighted how the Finnish public views conscription as the "*cornerstone of Finnish national defence*".

Marek Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) also refers to the reserve army that emerged as a result of Finland's long tradition of conscription: "*Finland's military power is also in the consciousness of its people. The reserve force consisting of almost a million people also*

reinforces the knowledge that the country can also manage to defend itself." Throughout the interviews, experts point out how conscription in Finland affects a wide section of society and creates a situation where, through conscription, awareness of the functioning of military national defence also reaches the wider public.

Andreas Ventsel (personal interview, 20.04.2026) points out that when discussing the will to defend or the will to win, it is important to note that the history of conscription in Finland is significantly longer and has become firmly established in Finnish society. In his view, this is not yet the case in Estonia. Although conscription was established almost immediately after the restoration of independence, it was built almost from scratch, and progress in the early years was very slow. In addition, Ventsel points out that attitudes toward conscription in Estonia have only improved over the past 15 years.

General knowledge of national defence is also considered very important among experts, for example, Kohv (personal interview, 18.03.2026) points out that the population who has no direct contact with national defence and who also cannot obtain more general knowledge on this topic is vulnerable to populism. He also points out the previously analyzed issue of political communication, which revealed that Estonian political forces are competing with one another through conflicting messages, which in turn undermines the public's sense of security. Kohv finds that if a person with a national defence background is able to identify "irrelevant" information in such bickering, then it is easier to create uncertainty if one does not know much about national defence.

In his interview, Pekka Kallioniemi (personal interview, 17.04.2026) highlighted the high "level of preparedness" of Finnish society, referring to how every member of society knows what to do in a crisis and the population feels that the state has a plan for them. At the same time, Estonian expert Viljar Veebel (personal interview, 24.03.2026) pointed to a clear problem in Estonian society: in his opinion, the population is not prepared for crises and people do not know whether and what the state can offer them during a crisis (e.g. the possibility of shelter).

At this point, two important factors have emerged from the interviews, which, according to experts, may cause a significant difference in the belief in victory between the Finnish and Estonian populations. Finland has a long-standing tradition of conscription, nearly a million people (or nearly a fifth of society) have completed conscription, and almost every family has someone who has completed conscription. The resulting large reserve army and the people's

direct contact with national defence have, according to experts, fostered the belief of the Finnish population that they can cope with an attack if necessary and have contributed to the spread of broader defence-related awareness in society. The period of operation of conscription in Estonian society has been shorter, and attitudes towards it have only improved in the context of the last 15 years. Thus, it is obvious that the positive impact of Estonian conscription on the belief in victory cannot be compared to that of Finland.

Secondly, experts have a clear perception that Finnish society is better prepared for crises, and the awareness of the population is greater. Finns also feel that the state is also thinking of them in the context of the crisis and that there is a plan for them. However, Estonian experts do not express such certainty. According to one Estonian expert, the situation is the opposite, that the population is not prepared to the necessary extent and there is no understanding of what the state has in store for its people in a crisis. However, since such criticism was expressed by only one of the experts, it cannot be claimed that this is a broader perception of the experts. However, it is worth noting that the Finnish experts themselves paid attention to the preparedness of their country and population, while the Estonian experts did not highlight such a positive phenomenon in their society.

5. Discussion and interpretation of findings

The thesis' discussion and interpretation of findings section presents the results of the analysis, providing an overview of various variables that may have influenced the belief in victory in Estonian and Finnish societies, and in the context of these results, it is concluded whether the presumptions made in the methodology were correct or not. The results of the analysis are then interpreted in the context of the research questions previously posed.

In the case of national identity and ethos, the presumption was brought out in methodology part that "The significant difference in belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations is caused by the difference in the strength of national identity and ethos in society (Finland as a clearly unified society, perceiving a common national "goal" and, conversely, Estonian society as non-unified and goalless)." At this point, as a result of the analysis, we can conclude that such a presumption is rather true.

Summarizing the impact of national identity and ethos on Estonian and Finnish belief in victory, the analysis revealed a very specific connection in the case of Finnish society. The Finnish national ethos can be identified as the societal consensus that the enemy must be resisted and action must be taken to preserve the independence. Such an ethos could clearly have a positive impact on the belief in victory in Finnish society. On the one hand, the idea of victory is already written into such an ethos (the preservation of the Finnish state) and, on the other hand, it calls for action to achieve it (resisting the enemy).

In the case of Estonian society, based on the interviews with experts, a clear national ethos did not emerge. It was speculated that some kind of perception of "national duty" could arise when a crisis arises, but if there is no ethos in peacetime, it cannot influence the belief in victory in peacetime either. Therefore, it could be concluded that there is an ethos in Finnish society and a resulting positive impact on the belief in victory of Finns. In the case of Estonia, no ethos was identified, so there is no impact on belief on victory of the Estonian population either.

The analysis has identified a clear perception by the experts of the Finnish population as more socially united than Estonia. All the interviewed Estonian experts perceived Finland as more united than Estonia, and none of the Finnish experts thought the opposite. The reasons cited here were Finland's longer period of independence and the problems in the integration of the Russian-speaking population in the case of Estonia. It is important to emphasize here

that, according to experts, the problem is not the Russian-speaking population itself, but the perceived gap in society between the two groups (Estonian and Russian-speaking people). Experts speculated that the Estonian-speaking people's belief in victory may also be influenced by uncertainty about how the Russian-speaking population might act in a crisis and where their loyalties lie.

As Lewin (2016, 2-3) pointed out, national ethos is important for uniting people into a single society and providing them with a sense of duty. A strong national ethos can inspire a society to fight even against very strong odds and is crucial for winning a war (Lewin 2016, 12). The analysis found that a national ethos clearly exists in Finland, while in Estonia no clear ethos was formulated. Experts also found that Finland is more socially unified. Therefore, it can be concluded that the first presumption is rather true. However, this is certainly not the only factor that turned out to be relevant in the dramatically different belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations.

Another presumption raised concerned the collective memory of the people: "The significant difference in belief in victory between the Estonian and Finnish populations is caused by the difference in historical experience and collective memory (Finland as a society experiencing historical success and victory and, conversely, Estonian society as experiencing historical defeat and the resulting national trauma)". Here, the analysis established that on the one hand, the Finnish experience can indeed be considered a perceived victory and this also leads to a great belief in victory, however, the results were not as uniform as the presumption would imply in the context of Estonia's historical trauma.

When summarizing the impact of collective memory on belief in victory, it should first be noted that although there were experts in both countries who considered memory to be very important in the context of belief in victory, the analysis does not allow to determine whether the impact is strong or not in the context of either country. There were those in both countries who acknowledged some impact of historical events but considered it to be only a secondary factor and found that everyday concerns are much more important. However, it is clear that collective memory has had an impact on the belief in victory in both countries, no expert disputed this.

In the case of Finland, two ways of dealing with the events of the past century were identified. First, the perceived victory, that the country was able to defend itself during World War II and maintain its independence, has a positive impact on belief in victory. On the other

hand, remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War period was a certain experience of historical trauma, which led to hesitations in society about excessive opposition to Russia and joining NATO even decades after the end of the Cold War. However, experts found that with the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine and accession to NATO, Finland has overcome such hesitations.

In the case of Estonia, however, the historical trauma of the Soviet occupation was the starting point, but in this case a dual effect on the belief in victory was identified. According to experts, on the one hand, the experience of the occupation can be considered one of the reasons why the Estonian belief in victory is significantly lower than that of the Finns. On the other hand, it was pointed out that, on the contrary, it may have increased the people's will to resist the enemy and efforts to maintain independence. Estonians know what it looks like to be under the rule of another country and do everything possible to prevent its recurrence. This in turn confirms Smith's (1991, 26) idea that historic trauma can destroy the people's belief in victory or, on the contrary, increase the people's unity and conviction in order to survive.

An important nuance was discovered in the Finnish context, the culture of remembrance. Experts pointed out how the Finns' resistance during World War II has clearly left a sense of pride and tradition of resistance in people. It also revealed an important nuance of historical victory: not only is victory itself conducive to the belief in victory, but also that people who have experienced such success and resistance can pass on their spirit to future generations. In the case of Estonia, several experts stated the fact that the occupation led to the punishment of opponents of the Soviet system and, for many, even death. The idea of resistance was suppressed.

As mentioned, the analysis confirmed Smith's (1991, 26) idea that a nation's historical trauma can destroy the belief in victory or instead make the people act more strongly in the name of survival. In the Estonian context, this means that the events such as deportation and occupation, can have a dual effect on Estonians' belief in victory. Therefore, it is not possible to say here that Finland's high belief in victory results from perceived historical success and that Estonians' low belief in victory results from historical trauma. Here, the picture is significantly more diverse and it is possible that historical trauma can actually have a positive effect on Estonians' belief in victory.

The third presumption concerned the country's political communication and rhetoric: "The significant difference in the belief in victory of the Estonian and Finnish populations is

caused by the difference in political communication and rhetoric (the Finnish leadership as the only one clearly and convincingly communicating its military goals and, conversely, the Estonian leadership as the one communicating vague and unconvincing goals)." As a result of the analysis, it can be said that this presumption turned out to be wrong.

The analysis revealed several significant paradoxes in the political communication and rhetoric of Estonia and Finland regarding defence issues and the resulting belief in victory. First, the analysis established that both Estonia and Finland base their security frameworks mainly on the concept of "defensive victory" and have developed a corresponding vision of victory (centered on key national interests such as independence, territorial integrity, and the survival of the nation). Although experts from both countries perceived their nations' objectives similarly to the state's perspective, the experts were not convinced that the general public perceives victory in the same way. Thus, the analysis fails to confirm whether either country has been successful in conveying its concept of victory to its population.

It was noted that in public discourse, Finnish leadership primarily relies on "vague messages" (e.g., "Finland is prepared" or "defending the whole of Finland"). In contrast, regarding the messages from the Estonian leadership, the experts noted that politicians tend to exaggerate the situation, and concluded that concrete actions would be more convincing to the public than excessive rhetoric. Additionally, it became clear that in Finland, a cross-party agreement has been reached to keep security issues out of political attacks, whereas in Estonia, according to experts, there are constant discrepancies between political forces regarding security-related messages.

Finally, in the context of political communication and rhetoric, interviews with experts revealed that Finland's defence messaging is primarily based on independent defence capabilities, and NATO membership is viewed as a supplementary measure. In contrast, a potential concern emerged regarding Estonia: there has been an excessive focus on emphasizing allied support, while independent defence capabilities have been pushed too far into the background, which in turn could undermine the public's confidence that the country could manage on its own. It was also noted that Estonia finds itself in a somewhat awkward position regarding communication with allies and domestically: on the one hand, it must convey messages about the threat from Russia and the need for swift action, while on the other hand, it must reassure the domestic audience that there is no immediate threat and that calm must be maintained.

The theoretical framework highlighted how, on the one hand, it is very important for state leaders to communicate military objectives to the public very precisely in order to avoid them appearing unclear and vague to people, which would reduce faith in their implementation (Hammarlund 2012, 4, 17 ; Blum 2013, 421). On the other hand, Hammarlund (2012, 4) also highlighted how defining objectives very precisely for the public significantly reduces the room to maneuver for politicians in the event of setbacks or losses and therefore also poses a risk to politicians. The analysis revealed how Estonia and Finland have started to use different tactics when communicating objectives in this way. The Finnish leadership has decided to use more vague language when talking about military objectives, while Estonian leaders tend to exaggerate things.

Therefore, the third presumption is false, Finland has decided to proceed from vaguer messages and has also reached an agreement across political parties to avoid excessive public discussion of defence issues. However, experts found that the Estonian leadership's overly detailed (and over-amplified) messages may be what creates uncertainty among the people and undermines their belief in victory, because messages do not always correspond to reality.

Here it is also possible to answer the secondary question of the study (*To which concept do the national military goals of Estonia and Finland correspond?*) and the resulting fourth presumption (*As small countries, both Finland and Estonia are based on the concept of defensive victory in their military objectives (i.e. the central goal is to protect national interests and ensure the survival of the state)*). As mentioned, the analysis of the two countries' key security documents revealed that both countries are primarily based on the concept of defensive victory, depicting victory as the preservation of national interests (such as independence, territorial integrity, national salvation). Therefore, the fourth perception turned out to be correct.

The analysis of the interviews revealed two additional variables that are important in the formation of the belief in victory in Estonia and Finland. First, the war in Ukraine and its perception in society came to the fore. Experts pointed out how what is happening on the Ukrainian front can, for example, make people reassess the "demands" regarding the country's military goals, for example, on the issue of territorial integrity. Experts pointed out the full-scale war in Ukraine as a mobiliser among the population for resistance. In the Finnish context, it was pointed out that it was the full-scale war in Ukraine that made the Finns make a historic change of direction and join NATO.

Thus, the perception of what is happening in Ukraine has had a positive effect on the belief in victory in the population of both countries. This also ties in with the experts' assessment of the unity of society, that crises are among the strongest unifiers of the population. However, since, according to experts, a full-scale war in Ukraine has a positive impact on the belief in victory of both the Estonian and Finnish populations, this factor cannot be considered the reason for the dramatic difference in the belief in victory of the two countries.

Another important factor in the context of belief in victory was identified in the analysis as the population's awareness and involvement in national defence. Here it became clear that, according to experts, Finns are very well informed about national defence and are aware of their role. In this regard, according to experts, the long tradition of conscription plays a major role, which affects most Finnish families and therefore also acts as a mediator of national defence knowledge to the population at large.

Although Estonia also has a conscription system, the experts pointed out that its tradition has been shorter and has only recently gained serious momentum. The population lacks clear contact with national defence and knowledge is limited. The experts also found that Finland is better prepared for crises than Estonia. Based on such conclusions, it can be said that the population's knowledge and involvement in national defence also plays a role in the dramatic difference in belief in victory between Finland and Estonia.

The discussion is summarized here by answering the central question of the study: "What factors explain the dramatic difference in public belief in victory between Finland and Estonia, according to defence experts?" The dramatic difference in public belief in victory between Finland and Estonia can mainly be explained by differences in national ethos and unity, political communication and rhetoric, and the knowledge and involvement of the population in national defence. According to the experts, Finland has a strong national ethos (which focuses on preserving independence and resistance to aggression), while no such ethos was identified in the case of Estonia. Also, according to the experts, Finnish society is more united than that of Estonia, and attention was also paid to the gap between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations in the case of Estonia.

In terms of political communication and rhetoric, the experts found that Finland is more uniform and cautious in its messages (it limits itself to generalizing messages instead of details) and primarily focuses on the country's independent defence capability. According to experts, Estonian communication is characterized by greater political fragmentation (different

political forces spread different messages) and perhaps too much reliance on the emphasis on allies. The interviews also revealed that the Finnish population is highly involved and aware about national defence thanks to conscription, while in the case of Estonia, they noted that the tradition of conscription has been short and has only recently gained momentum.

Historical experience also has an impact, although experts disagree on the extent of its importance today. Finland's perceived victory during World War II, thanks to which it was able to maintain its independence, has created a strong and lasting tradition of resistance and confidence in its country's ability to cope. Estonia's experience of the Soviet occupation has a mixed effect: although it may undermine belief in victory due to historical trauma, it may also strengthen commitment to resist future aggression. Together, these factors help explain, according to experts, the dramatic difference in belief in victory between Finland and Estonia.

Additionally, the interviews revealed the impact of the full-scale war in Ukraine on members of both societies, but since a positive impact (increasing belief in victory) was identified in both cases, this factor cannot explain the difference in belief in victory in the two countries.

Conclusion

A country's military success does not depend solely on its military resources or physical strength, but also on the will and psychological strength of the population to cope with the losses resulting from war. The loss of a society's belief in victory brings with it a loss of morale and social depression, which can lead to defeat even despite the presence of physical strength (Hecht 2014; Lewin 2016, 9). It is therefore more important for countries to ensure that such belief exists in the population and to keep it high even before entering a military conflict.

This master's thesis examined which factors explain the dramatic (almost 40%) difference in the belief in victory between Estonia and Finland. The research used qualitative content analysis, for which ten expert interviews were conducted with Estonian and Finnish defence experts. Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the main factors that may cause differences in the belief in victory between Estonian and Finnish society were national ethos and unity, political communication and rhetoric, population involvement and awareness of national defence.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that Finland has a clear national ethos of resistance to the enemy and preservation of independence, which has been passed down through generations. In the case of Estonia, no clear national ethos was identified. The experts also found that Finnish society is significantly more unified than Estonia's, while referring to the gap between the Estonian and Russian-speaking populations and raising the possibility that the Estonian-speaking population might not be convinced where the loyalty of the Russian-speaking population lies and how they may act in the crisis.

Regarding political communication and rhetoric, it became clear that, according to the experts, Finland is more uniform and less detailed in its messages than Estonia. Estonian experts found that the Estonian leadership tends to exaggerate on security issues and has to "correct" messages in the event of inconsistencies or setbacks, which in turn reduces the persuasiveness of the messages and the confidence of society. Political fragmentation was also pointed out in Estonian security messages (different political forces spread different messages), while in Finland there is an agreement across political parties that security issues are not used in political attacks. It was also pointed out that the Finnish leadership has consistently relied on the country's independent defence capability, while the Estonian state's

public messages have focused on allies and the emphasis on independent defence capability has been relegated to the background.

The interviews also revealed a new factor that could cause the difference, which is the population involvement and awareness of national defence. Finland's long tradition of conscription was of central importance, through which the majority of Finnish families have had direct contact with national defence (a family member has completed conscription) and thus has a broader effect, spreading awareness about national defence in society at large. Although Estonia also has a mandatory conscription system, it has lasted for a shorter period of time and only recently has society's attitude towards conscription improved, according to the experts.

Although there was no consensus among experts on the extent to which collective memory has an impact on society's belief in victory, all interviewees confirmed its existence. It turned out that the Finns' perceived victory in the context of World War II, which resulted in the preservation of independence, has created a culture of remembrance among Finns, within which resistance to the enemy is seen not only as a right but also as a duty of the people to the older generations who fought for the country (this is also the origin of the country's national ethos). At the same time, in the case of the Estonian collective memory, a mixed effect emerged: on the one hand, the Soviet occupation represents a national trauma that can undermine belief in victory, on the other hand, it can actually strengthen resistance to future aggressions (people of Estonia know what the reality looks like in the case of surrender).

The analysis revealed that another additional influence on belief in victory was the full-scale war in Ukraine, which has had a unifying effect in both societies and favored national defence attitudes. Therefore, it cannot be considered as the cause of the dramatic difference in belief in victory, although it confirms the experts' assessment that crises have a unifying effect on the people.

This research has identified the central factors that may cause the difference in belief in victory between Estonian and Finnish societies, thereby creating the basis for further research on how Estonia could improve the impact of these factors on its society. Since a society's belief in victory can become decisive in resisting or losing in a military conflict, research should continue in the future on how to increase the belief in victory indicator in Estonian society. In doing so, it is important to identify specific activities, the implementation of which could promote the growth of such belief.

Sources

Aberbach, D., J. & Rockman, A., B. (2002). "Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35(4): 673-676.

Alexander, K. (2025). "Total Defence in Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Singapore." *Institute for Security & Development Policy*. Available here:

<https://www.isdp.eu/total-defence-in-comparative-perspective-lessons-from-finland-sweden-switzerland-and-singapore/> (last visited: 09.04.2026).

Blum, G. (2013). "The Fog of Victory." *The European Journal of International Law*, 24(1): 391-421.

Bush, G., W. (2007). "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union." *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union> (last visited 24th of January, 2026).

Clausewitz, C., von. (1976). "On war". Eds. Howard, M. & Paret, P *Princeton University Press*.

Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage. (2025). "Conscript service." Available here: <https://mil.ee/en/compulsory-military-service/> (last visited 04.03.2026).

Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia webpage. (2024). "Estonian Defence Forces." Available here: <https://mil.ee/en/defence-forces/> (last visited: 04.03.2026).

Finnish Government webpage. (2025). "Finland to raise defence spending to at least three percent of GDP." Available here: <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/236553176/finland-to-raise-defence-spending-to-at-least-three-percent-of-gdp> (last visited 04.03.2026).

Fujii, A., L. (2012). "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45(4): 717-723.

Government Office of Republic of Estonia webpage. (2025). "Eesti julgeolekupoliitika alused". Available here: <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/jpa> (last used 26.02.2026).

- Hammarlund, M. (2012). "The Perception of Victory." *Swedish National Defence College*.
- Hecht, E. (2014). "Defeat Mechanisms: The Rationale Behind the Strategy." *Infinity Journal*, 4(2): 24-30.
- Kantar Emor. (2025). "Public Opinion on National Defence." Available here: https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2026-04/public_opinion_on_national_defence_2025_kantar_emor_0.pdf (last visited: 04.03.2026).
- Kilp, A. (2025). "Making Identity Count: Estonia 1990." *University of Tartu*, 1-26. Available here: <https://dspace.ut.ee/items/52a53f55-5e5e-410d-b26b-f75ceef98b5> (last visited 28.02.2026).
- Kissane, B. (2020). "On the shock of civil war: cultural trauma and national identity in Finland and Ireland." *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 1-62. Available here: <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/100060/1/NandN2018.pdf> (last visited 17.05.2026).
- Kivimäki, V. (2012). "Between Defeat and Victory: Finnish memory culture of the Second World War." *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 37(4): 482-504. Available here: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03468755.2012.680178> (last visited 14.05.2026).
- Kyllönen, K-M. (2025). "Redefining national identity through security discourse: Finland's transition from military non-alignment to active defence cooperation." *Cooperation and Conflict*, 1-25.
- Lewin, E. (2016). "The Importance of National Ethos in Military Victories." *Social Sciences*, 5(3): 1-16.
- Martel, C., W. (2011). "Victory in War: Foundations in Modern Strategy." *Cambridge University Press*.
- Mavrak, N., D. (2023). "The comprehension of victory in the strategic concept of total defence." *Vojno Delo*, 1-10.
- Meuser, M. & Nagel, U. (2009). "The Expert Interview and Changes in Knowledge Production. *Research Methods Series*, 17-42.

Ministry of Defence of Finland webpage. (n.d). “Publications – Defence Policy Reports.” Available here: <https://defmin.fi/en/publications/defence-policy-reports> (last visited 26.02.2026).

Ministry of Defence of Finland. (2024). “Government Defence Report.” Available here: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/d0eaa6a1-5f35-402d-a452-440329eb27ee> (last visited 26.02.2026).

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia (2026). “Sõjaline riigikaitse 2026. aastal.” *Press conference slideshow.* Available here: https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/20260206_2026_aasta_riigikaitstes.pdf (last visited 04.03.2026).

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage. (2026). “Estonia’s defence capabilities will be strengthened this year with a medium-range air defence system.” Available here: <https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/news/estonias-defence-capabilities-will-be-strengthened-year-medium-range-air-defence-system> (last used 26.02.2026).

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia webpage. (2024). “Laiapindne riigikaitse.” Available here: <https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/et/eesmargid-tegevused/laiapindne-riigikaitse> (last visited 09.04.2026).

NATO Public Diplomacy Division. (2025). “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025).” *Press release.* Available here: <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf> (last visited 04.03.2026).

NATO webpage. (2024). “NATO member countries.” Available here: <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-member-countries> (last visited 04.03.2026).

Paulauskas, K. (2013). “The Baltic Quest to the West: From Total Defence to “Smart Defence” (and back?)”. *“Apprenticeship, Partnership, Membership: Twenty Years of Defence Development in the Baltic States” International Centre for Defence Studies*, 45-84.

Perchoc, P. (2018). "European memory beyond the state: Baltic, Russian and European memory interactions (1991-2009)." *Memory Studies*, 1-22.

Piirimäe, K. (2020). "From an 'Army of Historians' to an 'Army of Professionals': History and the Strategic Culture in Estonia." *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 3(1): 100-113. Available here: <https://reference-global.com/article/10.31374/sjms.37> (last visited 17.05.2026).

Riigi Teataja III. (2023). ""Eesti julgeolekupoliitika alused" heakskiitmine – Lisa – "Eesti julgeolekupoliitika alused."" Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/328022023001> (last used 26.02.2026).

Roonemaa, H. (2025). "INTERVJU | Kindral Andrus Merilo: Putinit motiveerib surematuse staatus. Tal ei ole selle saavutamiseks palju aega." *Eesti Ekspress*. Available here: <https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120400180/intervjuu-kindral-andrus-merilo-putinit-motiveeri-b-surematuse-staatus-tal-ei-ole-selle-saavutamiseks-palju-aega> (last visited 14.05.2026).

Schreier, M. (2014). "Qualitative Content Analysis". *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative data analysis*, 170-183.

Simpson, E. (2017). "Clausewitz's Theory of War and Victory in Contemporary Conflict." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 47(4): 7-18.

Smith, D., A. (1991). "National identity." *Penguin books*, 19-42.

Statistics Estonia. (2026). "Population figure". Available here: <https://stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/population-figure> (last visited 04.03.2026).

Statistics Finland. (2026). "Preliminary population statistics". Available here: <https://stat.fi/en/statistics/vamuu> (last visited: 04.03.2026).

Szpunar, M., P. (2012). "Collective Memory and the Stranger: Remembering and Forgetting the 1918 Finnish Civil War." *International Journal of Communication*, 6: 1200-1221.

The Advisory Board for Defence Information. (2025). "Finns' opinions on foreign and security policy, national defence and security." *Bulletins and Reports*. Available here: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/5a00c8c9-209c-4f07-a9b8-7178aea7f6ee/content> (last visited 04.03.2026).

The Finnish Defence Forces webpage. (2026). "General conscription is a Finnish choice." Available here: <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/finnish-conscription-system> (last visited 04.03.2026).

Yanow, D. (2013). "Neither rigorous objective? Interrogating criteria for knowledge claims in interpretive science." *M.E. Sharpe*, 97-119.

Appendix 1 – Interview structure (interviews with Finnish experts)

Introductory questions

- In the event of aggression against Finland, how would you see Finland's victory / military success in this situation? In your opinion, is this vision of victory the same in society?
- What do you think, can victory represent something different for Estonian society in such a situation?
- What factors do you see as determining the emergence and increase of the population's belief in victory? Do you perceive that these factors are different for Estonia and Finland?

National identity and ethos

- How do you assess whether Finnish people are united by values and goals into a single nation? Or are there more divisive factors?
- How might Finnish people perceive their “national duty”? Do Finnish people see themselves as having such a “duty” at all?
- What are the important characteristics that unite Finns in your opinion?
- How do you assess whether Estonian society seems to be significantly more or less socially unified than Finland? What could be causing this?

Collective memory

- How decisive do you see Finland's experience of the Winter and Continuation Wars and remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War for the Finns' belief in victory in the context of the public's belief in victory?
- In your opinion, can the significant difference between Estonia and Finland be reduced solely to the Soviet experience (one remained independent, the other was occupied), or are there other important factors? Which ones?
- In your opinion, what is the significance of the history in everyday life for the two societies, Estonia and Finland? For example, in your opinion, is there much

discussion or coverage in Finland of the fact that the country remained free during the Cold War or that it had to stay in the USSR's sphere of influence? Would you say that this coverage is bigger than in Estonia about the fact that it was occupied?

Political communication and rhetoric

- Speaking of military self-defence and its success in the event of aggression, how do you assess the communication from the country's leadership? Are Finland's goals in the event of an attack clearly communicated to the public, and does the leadership convincingly present that these goals are achievable?
- Compared to Estonia, do you see differences in the country's leadership's communication to the public on the topics of security and victory? Is one country clearer in its messages than the other?
- What messages do you see as important in creating confidence in the public that the country can resist military aggression, such as, for example, emphasizing resources in public, or, for example, emphasizing national identity, common history, and values? Or something else altogether?

Conclusion

- Would you like to point out anything else important about the topic?

Appendix 2 – Interview structure (interviews with Estonian experts)

Introductory questions

- In the event of aggression against Estonia, how would you see Estonia's victory / military success in this situation? In your opinion, is this vision of victory the same in society?
- What do you think, can victory represent something different for Finnish society in such a situation?
- What factors do you see as determining the emergence and increase of the population's belief in victory? Do you perceive that these factors are different for Estonia and Finland?

National identity and ethos

- How do you assess whether Estonian people are united by values and goals into a single nation? Or are there more divisive factors?
- How might Estonian people perceive their “national duty”? Do Estonian people see themselves as having such a “duty” at all?
- What are the important characteristics that unite Estonians in your opinion?
- How do you assess whether Finnish society seems to be significantly more or less socially unified than Estonia? What could be causing this?

Collective memory

- How decisive do you see Estonia's experience of the experience of Soviet occupation for the Estonians' belief in victory in the context of the public's belief in victory?
- In your opinion, can the significant difference between Estonia and Finland be reduced solely to the Soviet experience (one remained independent, the other was occupied), or are there other important factors? Which ones?
- In your opinion, what is the significance of the history in everyday life for the two societies, Estonia and Finland? For example, in your opinion, is there much discussion or coverage in Estonia of the fact that the country was occupied by the

Soviet Union? Would you say that this coverage is bigger than in Finland about the fact that it remained independent during the Cold War or that it stayed in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union?

Political communication and rhetoric

- Speaking of military self-defence and its success in the event of aggression, how do you assess the communication from the country's leadership? Are Estonia's goals in the event of an attack clearly communicated to the public, and does the leadership convincingly present that these goals are achievable?
- Compared to Finland, do you see differences in the country's leadership's communication to the public on the topics of security and victory? Is one country clearer in its messages than the other?
- What messages do you see as important in creating confidence in the public that the country can resist military aggression, such as, for example, emphasizing resources in public, or, for example, emphasizing national identity, common history, and values? Or something else altogether?

Conclusion

Would you like to point out anything else important about the topic?

Appendix 3 – Consent form

Consent Form to Participate as an Interviewee in the Master's Thesis Research of Ines Edur, a Master's Student at the University of Tartu's Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Date:

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are being invited to participate in the research project about the population's belief in victory, using Estonia and Finland as examples, carried out by the master's student Ines Edur from the University of Tartu's Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies. You have been selected to participate in this study because of your in-depth knowledge of the defence sector and of the public's perceptions of defence issues.

The information provided in this form is to help you decide whether you would like to take part in this study. If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at _____ or by phone _____.

**(The author's contact information has been removed from the consent form to prevent its circulation after publication of the work; the version sent to the interviewees included both the author's email and phone number.)*

Aims and implications of the research: The aim of this master's thesis is to examine the factors that influence the population's confidence in the state's ability to withstand and defeat a military attack. The study focuses on two countries, Estonia and Finland, which are largely similar in terms of their defence models, societies, and politics, but which nevertheless exhibit a significant difference in the population's belief in the state's ability to successfully resist an aggressor. This study focuses on the following central questions: How does each of these two countries define military victory for itself? Why is the population's belief in the state's ability to resist and defeat an aggressor so different in two seemingly similar countries? The study aims to identify the root causes of the differences between the two countries, which could assist the Estonian government agencies in fostering its population's belief in the state's capacity for resistance.

Procedures of the research: Should you agree to participate, it will take approximately 30 minutes of your time to be interviewed. During the interview you will be asked to answer questions about your perceptions and assessments related to the security capabilities of the two countries, populations's perceptions regarding security issues, factors influencing the population's belief in victory (such as collective memory and national identity), and the government's ability to convincingly present the prospect of victory to the population. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure that the researcher has an accurate record of the

discussion. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, please let the researcher know. Audio recording will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed. The researcher will ensure protection of personal data and secure processing and storage of the gathered empirical material as outlined below.

Anonymity and confidentiality of personal data:

Since this study uses expert interviews as one of its methods, the participants in the interviews will not remain anonymous in this work. This means that, to ensure the reliability of the study, the interviewee's name and position will be disclosed. The author also reserves the right to quote from the interviews. If you wish to remain anonymous in this study, please inform the author. Your request will be honored, and your name and position will not be disclosed in the study. Your contact information will not be disclosed during the study.

The author will audio-record the interview and it will be transcribed for the later analysis. Both the recording and the transcript will be destroyed after the master's thesis is completed, and it will be ensured that they do not fall into the hands of third parties during the research period. If you do not wish for the interview to be recorded, please inform the author of this work; your request will be respected.

Rights of research participants: You can choose not to participate in this study or withdraw your participation at any time during or after the research begins. Refusing to be in this study or deciding to discontinue participation will not affect your relationship with the investigator or the University of Tartu.

Informed consent: You are freely making a decision whether to participate in this research study. Agreeing to the interview means that you have read and understood this consent form, you have had your questions answered, and you have decided to be part of the research study.

If you have any questions before or during the study, you should talk to the investigator Ines Edur (contacts below). You will be given a copy of this document for your own records.

By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in this study as an interviewee.

Name of the interviewee:

Signature of the interviewee:

Appendix 4 – Coding tree

- I. National identity and ethos
 - A. Unity among people
 - 1. Gaps between different groups in society
 - a) Problems with integration
 - b) Distrust between social groups
 - 2. Crises as unifier in society
 - B. Existence of common national ethos
 - 1. Resistance as a duty not just a right
 - 2. Survival as national duty
- II. Collective memory
 - A. Perceived victories, emphasis on historical success
 - 1. Culture of remembrance
 - 2. Mentality that “Finland will never surrender”
 - B. Historical traumas
 - 1. Historical trauma as destroyer of belief in victory
 - 2. Historical trauma as a force for social cohesion and a catalyst for resistance
- III. Political communication and rhetoric
 - A. Exploiting themes of national ethos
 - 1. References to the spirit of the Winter War
 - B. Communicating the government's military objectives to the public
 - 1. The military objectives defined in documents concerning the state's central security objectives have been communicated to the public
 - a) Experts' perceptions of the country's military objectives
 - b) Experts' perception of the broader public understanding of the state's military objectives
 - 2. Recurring idea of the importance of resistance
 - C. Theme of victory being / not being part of discussion in society
 - D. Nature of the public messages
 - 1. Vague or concrete
 - a) Future oriented or influenced by current events
 - b) Exaggerated messages
 - 2. Idea that communication alone is not enough
 - 3. Security issues being / not being part of political power struggles
 - E. Emphasis on one's own strength or the help of allies
 - 1. The dilemma between domestic and outward-facing messages
- IV. Full scale war in Ukraine
 - A. Recalculating “demands” for states military goals
 - B. Fear of crimes committed in Ukraine by Russian forces

- C. Current situation in Ukraine being more influential on belief in victory than collective memory
 - D. Creation of bigger cohesion among society
 - 1. Decisive change in Finnish mindset about joining NATO
- V. Population awareness and involvement in national defence
- A. Conscription system
 - 1. Amount of people who have completed military service
 - 2. Military service as a broader disseminator of national defence knowledge in society
 - B. General knowledge about national defence
 - C. “Level of preparedness”

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce the thesis and make the thesis public

I, Ines Edur,

1. grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the digital archives of the University of Tartu until the expiry of the term of copyright,

my thesis “Factors influencing the population's belief in victory: cases of Estonia and Finland”,

supervised by Heiko Pääbo;

2. grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the thesis specified in point 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 4.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright;

3. am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in points 1 and 2;

4. confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Ines Edur

18/05/2026