

# Empowering the Citizen: Finland's Comprehensive Security Model Against Russian Disinformation

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## Abstract

In an era where warfare transcends territory, democratic governments are actively seeking security policies against cognitive operations that exploit transparent and free information spaces. Amidst these countries is Finland, a nation that shares a 1,343-kilometer long border with Russia, and actively faces disinformation campaigns that aim to rupture social cohesion. In response, Finland has developed a whole-of-society understanding of defense, integrating the government, private sector and the civil society under its comprehensive security concept (*kokonaisturvallisuus*). This collaborative security policy emphasizes the role of the citizen in foreign policy, resting on the democratic pillars of trust, communication and civic responsibility. This paper examines the Finnish security model in its fight against Russian disinformation operations, explaining its effectiveness through its historical development, and considering the growing threat of AI-driven hybrid warfare.

Keywords: Hybrid Warfare, Comprehensive Security, Disinformation, Cognitive Warfare, National Resilience, *Kokonaisturvallisuus*

## 1. Introduction

In a period redefining the nature of warfare, wars are increasingly being fought not with weaponry, but through information, perception of authorities and the manipulation of the truth<sup>1</sup>. Hybrid warfare, by blending conventional military force with cyber attacks,

economic coercion and information operations, has become a defining trait of modern international relations<sup>2</sup>. With this evolving global landscape, land security is no longer determined by territorial defense, but by a nation's ability to maintain domestic cohesion and public trust. This evolution in warfare defines Russian foreign policy, with its systematic attempts of

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<sup>1</sup> Ieva Berzina, "From 'Total' to 'Comprehensive' National Defence: The Development of the Concept in Europe," *Journal on Baltic Security* 6, no. 2 (2020): 1.

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<sup>2</sup>"Hybrid Threats." *Defence Industry and Space*, accessed November 16, 2025.

destabilizing democratic governments in Europe by polarizing populations and eroding their trust in institutions through the employment of disinformation campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

For a small country sharing a 1,343-kilometer long border with Russia and a complex history of war and diplomacy, Finland has long been the victim of sustained covert operations from the East<sup>4</sup>. In response, the government has developed a comprehensive security model, *kokonaisturvallisuus*, which integrates all vital societal actors, from the government to large businesses and citizens, in the process of national defense<sup>5</sup>. This approach to land security seeks to fortify national resilience through an informed, confident, and unified population<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and consequently Finland's NATO membership in April 2023 have caused Russian hybrid warfare efforts to be intensified, testing the very foundations of this model<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Wieslander and Elin Schiffer, *Securing Northern Europe: Toward a Comprehensive Approach* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2019), 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26696>.

<sup>4</sup> Vesa Valtonen and Minna Branders, "Tracing the Finnish Comprehensive Security Model," in *Nordic Societal Security: Convergence and Divergence* (July 8, 2020), 91–108.

<sup>5</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi: Tietoja Suomen Kokonaisturvallisuudesta," *Turvallisuuskomitea*, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Lauri Jauhiainen and Sarah Schiffling, "Comparing the Resilience Objectives of Finnish Comprehensive Security Model and the NATO Baseline Requirements for Resilience," *Journal of Military Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1.

<sup>7</sup> Wieslander and Schiffer, *Securing Northern Europe*, 3.

### 1.1.1 Research Question

Despite increased efforts of fragmenting Finnish society, national resilience and unity remains at an all-time high, driving the question of how the security model is able to transform a polarising threat into a source of unity. In order to uncover this paradox, this paper will aim to answer the question "How does Finland's comprehensive security model (*kokonaisturvallisuus*) build national resilience against Russian disinformation campaigns, and what adjustments are required to counter the emerging threat of AI-driven cognitive warfare?"

### 1.1.2 Methodology

In order to explore how the security model creates a society that is able to withstand Russian disinformation efforts, this paper approaches the topic from a qualitative approach. It will mainly base itself on the analysis of Finnish government publications, comprehensive review of secondary literature, a comparative case study and insights from interviews with experts from the Finnish Foreign Ministry. The analysis will emphasize tracing the historical development of the model in order to understand the extent to which security is intertwined with society in Finland, followed by an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the model. In doing so, the paper will highlight the model's mechanisms, and reveal gaps in existing frameworks.

### 1.1.3 Key Terminology

In analyzing the broader Finnish security policy, this paper will employ the term comprehensive security to refer to the whole-of-society model (*kokonaisturvallisuus*), which integrates public, private and civic actors into national defense. The analysis will consider Russian hybrid efforts in general (i.e. cyberattacks, economic coercion and the weaponization of migration), but will specifically focus on disinformation campaigns. This paper defines such campaigns as the dissemination of false information online aimed at eroding public trust and the legitimacy of authorities.

## **2. The Evolution of the Finnish Security Model**

In interviewing Vesa Kekäle, Specialist on Information Influence in the Russia and Central Asia Unit of the Finnish Foreign Ministry, it was highlighted that Finland's security today is what "history has shaped society to be"<sup>8</sup>. Kekäle's comment frames the current security policy as not an institutional framework built over recent years, but one that has gradually cultivated through the historical development of Finnish society. Therefore, in order to understand its mechanisms, Finnish historical trajectory in relation to Russia must be dissected, taking into consideration the country's

unique geopolitical position that forced it to adopt a state of constant preparedness.<sup>9</sup>

After gaining independence from Russia in 1917, the Finns developed the concept of *sisu*. Untranslatable, it means relentless perseverance, courage and determination, and it quickly became a defining characteristic of the population that repeatedly endured hardship<sup>10</sup>. This cultural ethos built Finland's national identity, directly influencing the nation's approach to both security and governance. It became apparent during the Winter War (1939-1940) and the Continuation War (1941-1944) against the Soviet Union, where a small country of 3.5 million fought and persevered against a superpower with a population of over 180 million<sup>11</sup>. During this, the concept of *sisu* extended beyond a psychological trait into practical necessity, embodying the collective will to resist Russia in the mobilization of all national capabilities through unity, adaptability and resourcefulness<sup>12</sup>. Finland's success, "against all odds", in protecting its sovereignty, had a "socio-historical impact on collaborative thinking and support" for the government, as outlined by Vesa Valtonen, former Secretary General of the Security Committee<sup>13</sup>. According to him, this impact would later on be institutionalized in the framework of the comprehensive security model. Above all, this period solidified the concept of *sisu* in domestic thinking,

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Vesa Kekäle, Specialist in Information Influence/Warfare in the Foreign Ministry's Russia and Central Asia Unit, November 24, 2025. Original response "Vahvuus on suomalaisen yhteiskunnan olemisen tapa, se millaiseksi historia on yhteiskuntaa muovannut." translated from Finnish to English.

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<sup>9</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi."

<sup>10</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 96.

<sup>11</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 96.

<sup>12</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 96.

<sup>13</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 97.

where national survival became a matter of unity and collaboration between all.

During the Cold War, Finnish foreign policy was defined by its geopolitical position, forcing it to balance between the East and West, leaving it unable to formally integrate in Western defense structures.<sup>14</sup> For example, Finland actively engaged in trade with both blocs, setting up a free trade agreement with the European Economic Community while maintaining a similar arrangement with the Soviet Council for Mutual Economic Assistance<sup>15</sup>. It continued heavy investment in territorial defense capabilities, and conscription, integrating civilian infrastructure into defense planning.<sup>16</sup>

However, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the U.S.S.R brought the European security landscape into a new context that was now defined by political, economic and information conflict, rather than direct military confrontation.<sup>17</sup> Senior Researcher at the Latvian Center for Security and Strategic Research, Ieva Berzina underlines this rearrangement as a turning point in Finnish security planning.<sup>18</sup> Now, the threat of crisis extended beyond military risks, expanding the scope of defense policies.<sup>19</sup> This new approach was formalized between 2003 and

2010, when policymakers institutionalized coordination between major societal actors under the Security Committee (*turvallisuuskomitea*).<sup>20</sup> These “vital functions” of society were: leadership, defense capability, internal security, economic stability, international cooperation, infrastructure and psychological resilience, seen in Figure 1).<sup>21</sup>

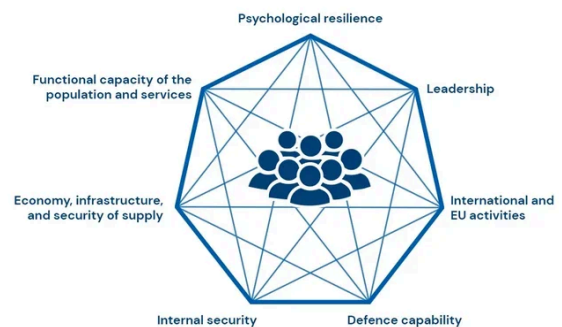


Fig. 1: The Security Committee's Seven Main Societal Pillars to National Security.

Source: *Turvallisuuskomitea*.<sup>22</sup>

This institutionalization of security coordination between the seven pillars of society became known as the comprehensive security model, where national defense was considered from a whole-of-society approach, recognizing that Finland's security depends on the conservation of a stable, functional and resilient society<sup>23</sup>. It formalized the cultural ethos that had survived a decade of war and complex diplomacy, defining defense as a shared civic responsibility.<sup>24</sup> This mentality is reflected in 80% of Finns actively expressing their willingness to defend the country, as well as in the

<sup>14</sup> Berzina, “From ‘Total’ to ‘Comprehensive’,” 5.

<sup>15</sup> Johanna Rainio-Niemi. “Puolueettomuus ja suomettuminen: Suomalaista viiteryhmä- ja muistipolitiikkaa kylmästä sodasta nykypäivään.” *Helda*, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Valtonen and Branders, “Tracing the Finnish,” 100.

<sup>17</sup> Valtonen and Branders, “Tracing the Finnish,” 100.

<sup>18</sup> Berzina, “From ‘Total’ to ‘Comprehensive’,” 2.

<sup>19</sup> Berzina, “From ‘Total’ to ‘Comprehensive’,” 2.

<sup>20</sup> Turvallinen Suomi.”

<sup>21</sup> “Comprehensive Security,” *Turvallisuuskomitea*, accessed November 15, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> “Comprehensive Security.”

<sup>23</sup> “Comprehensive Security.”

<sup>24</sup> “Turvallinen Suomi.”

public's exceptional trust in the authorities, military and media—which remains among one of the highest in Europe.<sup>25</sup> These factors, alongside a strong education system and institutional transparency, shape the social foundation of Finland's resilience against modern security threats.<sup>26</sup> Yet, these same elements leave the country's democracy vulnerable in an era of constantly evolving hybrid warfare, where power is exercised not only through military capability but also through the manipulation of information and perception.

### 2.1.1 A Regional Comparison: Finland and Estonia.

The unique nature of Finland's approach to security and simultaneously its distinctive success can be understood by comparing it to Estonia, another victim of Russia's hybrid warfare efforts. Both countries' defense strategies are adaptations of a comprehensive security approach, relying on a whole-of-society framework where psychological defense is constructed through the individual. However, their specific policies function as a reflection of each country's unique historical course and political culture.

Estonia's security concept (*Eesti julgeolekupoliitika alused*) was constructed rapidly after its independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991, aligning it tightly with NATO's collective defense architecture which emphasized military readiness and territorial resilience<sup>27</sup>. The model relies on armed volunteer

groups, like the Estonian Defense League (*Kaitseliit*), emphasizing areas like cybersecurity in defense<sup>28</sup>. While Estonia's approach provides strong capabilities, as seen in its resilience against the 2007 Russian cyberattack, it doesn't replicate Finland's depth of societal integration and long-term psychological resilience.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Estonian defense development, Finland's security model evolved over multiple decades of Cold War governance, which fostered a deep civic trust and shaped a distinct national identity between the East and the West. With late NATO membership in 2023, Finland's security approach holds a broader scope than NATO's Baseline Requirements for resilience<sup>30</sup>. For example, the Finnish model aims to build a functional capacity in the population, which ensures that households are able to survive without public aid during the first 72 hours of crisis. Its broad model relies on public trust, civic education, and a coherent society where citizens are treated as active political agents in national security. Unlike Estonia, and other similar models, Finland's national identity is inseparable from its whole-of-society concept of security due to its history and political culture<sup>31</sup>. The notion of preparedness is ingrained in Finnish culture, present in everyday practices born out of historical experience. This deep societal integration explains how the Finnish approach to security, in contrast to countries in similar

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<sup>25</sup> "Suomalaiset Eivät Kaihda Aseellista Maanpuolustusta," *Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta*, December 31, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Dominic Saari, Panu Moilanen, and Miriam Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," *EU DisinfoLab*, April 2025, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ministry of Defence (Estonia), National Defence Strategy*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ministry of Defence (Estonia), National Defence Strategy*.

<sup>29</sup> Rain Ottis, "Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective," *Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence*.

<sup>30</sup> Jauhiainen and Schiffling, "Comparing the Resilience," 1.

<sup>31</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish Comprehensive," 100.

contexts, is uniquely able to build national resilience against Russian disinformation efforts by transforming attempts at polarisation into the reaffirmation of shared cultural identity. This intertwinedness of national identity with security is greatly absent from more militarised security models, like Estonia's, explaining the Finnish unique security context.

### 3. Russia's Hybrid Warfare

Russia's use of covert operations traces back to the Soviet policy of active measures (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*) that emphasized the use of covert operations, like disinformation, in advancing political goals in foreign countries<sup>32</sup>. After the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., this policy was restructured by the Federal Security Services (FSB) to conform to the evolving security landscape of the 21st century<sup>33</sup>. This reformation of policy was emphasized under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, where covert operations increased in cyber, economic, political and informational spaces, blurring the line between peace and war in Europe<sup>34</sup>. From the 2007 cyber-attacks against Estonia to the state's dissemination of disinformation during the 2008 conflict in Georgia, covert operations define Russian foreign policy<sup>35</sup>. Ultimately, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 revealed the full potential of these hybrid capabilities, combining

covert military action with large-scale disinformation campaigns delegitimizing the local government.<sup>36</sup> The Kremlin has recognized the power of covert operations below the threshold of open warfare, integrating strategies like disinformation as a key pillar in its foreign policy towards its proximate neighbors. Understanding the relevancy of covert means in Russian aggression emphasizes the urgency for other European states to establish and maintain strong security measures against them..

For Finland, this evolution in Russian warfare targets the nation's very strengths of openness, trust, and transparency as potential entry points for manipulation and interference<sup>37</sup>. Moscow has combined an array of tools, such as cyberattacks, border manipulation, and infrastructure pressure to test the limits of Finland's resilience. In 2020 and 2021, the Finnish Foreign Ministry became the target of a sophisticated cyber attack that was linked to the Russian APT28 group that was seeking to disrupt diplomatic correspondence<sup>38</sup>. Then, towards the end of 2023, Finland accused the Kremlin and the FSB of weaponizing migration after it received an unprecedented spike in immigration at its eastern border of 1,323 asylum seekers<sup>39</sup>. Authorities continue

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Active Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations," *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies*, June 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Galeotti, "Active Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations."

<sup>34</sup> Berzina, "From 'Total' to 'Comprehensive'," 2.

<sup>35</sup> Sergiy Solodkyy and Kateryna Zarembo, "The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare: Ukraine," *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*, October 18, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Solodkyy and Zarembo, "The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare: Ukraine."

<sup>37</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

<sup>38</sup> Claudia Wallner, with Simon Copeland and Antonio Giustozzi, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> Greta Rosen Fondahn, "Asylum Seekers 'missing' after Crossing Russia Border to Finland," *Reuters*, January 19, 2024.

to document GPS jamming cases in Lapland and around the Gulf of Finland, particularly during NATO and EU joint exercises.<sup>40</sup> Finland's accession to NATO positioned the country at the forefront of Russian hybrid warfare, intensifying the level and frequency of these covert operations. Therefore, it remains crucial that states understand the effectiveness of protective mechanisms in order to guarantee the survival of free, and open democracies.

#### 4. Warfare by Disinformation

Within Russia's hybrid strategies, disinformation remains as one of its most persistent and adaptable tools, directly reaching citizens. Finland's openness and high levels of trust set it as a target to these operations<sup>41</sup>. In taking advantage of these elements, Russian disinformation campaigns aim to alter the perceptions and beliefs of individuals, to sow doubt regarding the legitimacy of authorities and weaken societal consensus.<sup>42</sup>

Popular narratives circle around the Finnish government being "Russophobic" and "revanchist" due to its exclusion of Russian-speaking minorities and alleged plans to invade Russia.<sup>43</sup> Another popular means of instigating doubt towards authorities is the distortion of history, falsely accusing Finnish forces of atrocities, such as genocide in Leningrad or operating

concentration camps in Karelia during the 1940s.<sup>44</sup> In addition, an increasing number of articles criticise Finland's NATO membership, claiming it a loss of sovereignty.<sup>45</sup>

Russian authorities and state-backed groups release disinformation incrementally across multiple platforms, from state media to Telegram channels, creating the illusion of organic content and authentic public discussion.<sup>46</sup> By alluding to emotionally charged themes like betrayal and societal exclusion, narratives aim to exploit nationwide social anxieties and leverage the global trend of growing polarization.<sup>47</sup> They exploit the dynamics reflected across Europe and North America, where media environments amplify division, for example over the issue of migration. In Finland, 83% of the population expressed interest in stronger border control measures, signifying a drastic increase from previous years.<sup>48</sup> This trend has been amplified by false narratives that are circulating online.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Russian campaigns are able to blend seamlessly into

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<sup>40</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

<sup>41</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

<sup>42</sup> Wieslander and Schiffer, *Securing Northern Europe*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

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<sup>44</sup> "St Petersburg Court Finds Finland Guilty of 'Genocide' during 1940s Leningrad Siege," *Yle*, October 21, 2022, <https://yle.fi/a/3-12664441>.

<sup>45</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

<sup>46</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>47</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>48</sup> Jorge Liboreiro and Vincenzo Genovese, "Half of Europeans Disapprove of EU Migration Policy, Poll Shows," *euronews*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/03/26/half-of-europeans-disapprove-of-eu-migration-policy-and-demand-stronger-border-controls-po>.

<sup>49</sup> Jorge Liboreiro and Vincenzo Genovese, "Half of Europeans Disapprove of EU Migration Policy, Poll Shows," *euronews*, March 27, 2024.

already growing records of social anxiety, magnifying their impact in Finland's information space.

As Russian disinformation grows both in complexity and alignment with global polarization, Finland's ability to remain resilient and cohesive depends greatly on the strength and adaptability of its security model. At the same time, the development of Russian warfare by disinformation continues to target the very foundations that this model relies on; trust, unity and open communication. This fragile balance between growing disinformation pressure and national resilience underlines the central question of the paper; how the mechanisms of the Finnish comprehensive security model are able to translate polarising pressure into national resilience, and what gaps are emerging with a constantly evolving security landscape.

## 5. Evaluating the Finnish Model

### 5.1.1 Building Resilience Through Education

As national security concentrates on the individual in Finland, a foundational pillar in upholding resilience is the comprehensive security model's emphasis on the role of education<sup>50</sup>. Effective psychological resilience originates from the manner in which individuals are able to recognize and resist external manipulation, a capability that the government describes as the general level of civic awareness (*kansalaistaito*)<sup>51</sup>. In interviewing the Finnish Deputy Head of Mission in Prague, Virpi Kukkasniemi, it became apparent that media literacy has been central to school curriculums

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<sup>50</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi."

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, Finnish Deputy Head of Mission in Prague, Tuesday, November 11, 2025.

since the 1970s. It has created an education system that fosters critical thinking skills in students from an early age<sup>52</sup>. These curriculums are built to cultivate civic competence, as students are constantly encouraged to evaluate sources of information and to reflect on their individual role in society. As a result, Finland consistently ranks first in the European Union's Media Literacy Index, showcasing the population's exceptional ability to critically assess and evaluate information, identifying information manipulation from external actors like Russia<sup>53</sup>. Therefore, attempts of distorting historical trajectory fail to gain traction, as the well-educated population is generally able to recognize falsehoods due to the education system's emphasis on history and social sciences courses.

The Finnish Foreign Ministry's Specialist in Information Warfare (Russia and Central Asia Unit), Vesa Kekäle, highlighted a political consensus: "the elementary school teacher is the first line of defense against disinformation"<sup>54</sup>. In this sense, a strength of the Finnish security model against disinformation is its redefinition of education as a long-term investment in national defense, as it increases the population's ability to critically evaluate information online, neutralising disinformation attacks before they are able to fragment the Finnish social fabric.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

<sup>53</sup> Mackintosh, "Finland Is Winning the War on Fake News."

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Vesa Kekäle, November 2025. Original response "alakoulun opettaja on ensimmäinen linja disinformaatiota vastaan" translated from Finnish to English.

<sup>55</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi."

### 5.1.2 Trust in Authorities

Civic awareness is complemented by transparent governance and communication, allowing for comprehensive security to cultivate high levels of public trust and confidence<sup>56</sup>. Finnish society, since its founding, has been grounded in open and factual communication between the state and its citizens. Legislation like the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), which mandates government actors to publicize all official activities, formalizes this, committing the nation to honest and transparent procedures<sup>57</sup>. This pillar of the security model produces a society that perceives communication from the government as credible and informative, rather than politically coercive<sup>58</sup>. Finland's perfect score (100/100) by the Freedom House political and civil freedom report underlines the country's remarkable openness towards governance, fostering a society built on trust<sup>59</sup>. With this confidence, there are less informational gaps for Russian authorities to capitalize on with disinformation campaigns. When faced with falsehoods, like Russia's recurring narrative of Finnish authorities kidnapping Russian children from their families, citizens are inclined to dismiss baseless claims as propaganda. Moreover, government responses to such accusations, with transparent and empirical claims, have the capacity to easily override disinformation<sup>60</sup>.

Therefore, the security model's mandate of transparency in government communication transforms public trust into an active tool of national defense, shielding individuals from falling susceptible to Russian disinformation attacks.

### 5.1.3 Coordinated Action

On the other hand, while transparency and communication build trust, the institutional design of the comprehensive security model allows it to convert the given trust into coordinated action<sup>61</sup>. The design, formalizing cooperation across ministries, businesses and the civil society, creates a framework that decentralizes the multiple processes of preparedness. Regular briefings and scenario exercises strengthen confidence and ensure that crisis management remains cohesive across the nation, with each sector fulfilling their respective responsibilities<sup>62</sup>. For example, the National Defence Courses (*maanpuolustuskurssit*) bring together political leaders, media, business and civil society representatives into intense training programs that foster a shared understanding of Finland's security conditions and promote networks between actors<sup>63</sup>. This participatory structure ensures that preparedness is viewed as a collective task, transforming public trust into security policy, allowing Finland to respond to hybrid attacks in an organized and unified manner.

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<sup>56</sup> "Comprehensive Security."

<sup>57</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi."

<sup>58</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 8.

<sup>59</sup> "Finland: Freedom in the World", *Freedom House*, 2025.

<sup>60</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 8.

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<sup>61</sup> Alberto Guidastri, *Managing National Security: Analysis of the Provision of Societal Security in the Case of Finland* (master's thesis, Aalto University, 2024).

<sup>62</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish Comprehensive Security Model," 92.

<sup>63</sup> "Turvallinen Suomi."

#### 5.1.4 International Cooperation

Finland's security model is able, by virtue of its institutional design, to reflect its internal coordination on an international level in the information-security structures of its alliances<sup>64</sup>. The clear and coordinated cross-sectoral participation allows information to flow efficiently between Finnish and international actors, encouraging rapid and consistent responses to disinformation. Located in Helsinki, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats sets Finland at the core of Europe's strategic communication web<sup>65</sup>. With greater foreign coordination, Finland benefits from shared intelligence, data training, and faster information flow<sup>66</sup>. It contributes to the creation of a united European information ecosystem with less knowledge asymmetries, leaving smaller margins for disinformation campaigns to gain traction. Access to larger databases also allows Finnish authorities to map out disinformation trends across countries, before they manage to reach domestic audiences<sup>67</sup>. The model's alignment with broader European security frameworks enlarges Finland's defense perimeter, allowing for the security model to detect and counter Russian disinformation campaigns before they reach the Finnish population. This enlarged defense perimeter is driven by a higher speed of information flow, access to more databases and the prevention of informational gaps in the Western bloc.

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<sup>64</sup> Jauhiainen and Schiffing, "Comparing the Resilience Objectives," 1.

<sup>65</sup> Berzina, "From 'Total' to 'Comprehensive'," 5.

<sup>66</sup> Wieslander and Schiffer, *Securing Northern Europe*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Wieslander and Schiffer, *Securing Northern Europe*, 5.

#### 5.1.5 The Mobilization of the Individual

Ultimately, what sets the Finnish security model apart from traditional policies against disinformation is its mobilization of citizens as active participants in defense. As information integrity becomes a shared civic responsibility, the coordinated awareness, trusted communication and critical thinking in individuals constructs a protective mechanism against potential information attacks. When false claims appear, the Finnish public has proved itself to respond quickly and skeptically, reporting disinformation and countering with actual, empirical narratives<sup>68</sup>. Vesa Kekäle argues that the "image of ownership of one's country and participation in its fate" is what ultimately sets the Finnish model apart in its ability to foster resilience<sup>69</sup>. In warfare that seeks to capitalize on the vulnerabilities of the citizens, a politically active and engaged mind is naturally bound to resilience when faced with external interference, as is the case for Finland. With politically active citizens, the responsibility of information security is diffused across an entire population, leaving less vulnerabilities for Russian disinformation to exploit.

#### 5.2.1 Reliance on Societal Cohesion

While the Finnish security model has proved itself to be remarkably effective, there are certain gaps that must

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<sup>68</sup> Mackintosh, "Finland Is Winning the War on Fake News."

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Vesa Kekäle, November 2025. Original response "alakoulun opettaja on ensimmäinen linja disinformaatiota vastaan" translated from Finnish to English. Original version "haltijuuden mielikuva omaan maahan ja osallisuudesta sen kohtaloihin" and "hänen kyvykkyyksiensä vaaliminen ja edistäminen, jotta kansalainen kykenisi tietoon perustuviin valintoihin, ei olisi jokapäiväisessä elämässään informaatiomanipulaation armoilla vaan voimaantunut." translated to English.

be addressed in order to ensure a sustainable framework that is capable of withstanding continued hybrid warfare. Senior Researcher Berzina highlights the failure of comprehensive security in former Yugoslavia, arguing that “social cohesion is a definite prerequisite for comprehensive defense to be effective”.<sup>70</sup> She argues that if this precondition is not sustained, the security framework risks becoming a “threat to society itself” as openness without trust, unity and collective responsibility gives opportunities to wage hybrid influence.<sup>71</sup> While these conditions have prevailed in Finland for years, accounting for the model’s success, they are now being tested at unparalleled levels. Unemployment is at an all time high of 9.1%, the second highest in Europe, and inequalities continue to grow. These factors are continuously testing the limits of societal cohesion in Finland.<sup>72</sup> With economic hardship, the risk of polarization grows, which is reflected in the global trend of a growing presence of populist rhetoric amongst younger generations on social media platforms, as highlighted by a study by the University of Helsinki.<sup>73</sup> This enables false claims, like the government’s discrimination against Russian-speaking minorities, to gain traction online, empowering disinformation campaigns in alienating parts of the population. Thus, the comprehensive security model requires the precondition of social

unity—a factor that is continuously being tested. Unless the Finnish government is able to reconcile with the growing domestic threats driving potential social fragmentation, Russian disinformation operations may locate openings for disinformation material to spread.

### 5.2.2 Minorities and Information Asymmetry

Another vulnerability appears in the assumption that there exists a high sentiment of national unity amongst the Finnish population, which dismisses linguistic and cultural diversity among Russian-speaking minorities and migrant communities. The level of media literacy and institutional trust varies amongst those whose primary language, media consumption and social networks are oriented towards another country. For example, Finland’s almost 100,000 Russian speakers tend to consume news from Russian outlets, causing an information asymmetry that the Kremlin has learned to exploit to drive their agenda of polarization<sup>74</sup>. Simultaneously, they demonstrate significantly lower levels of trust in state communication.<sup>75</sup> Limited multilingual communication reduces the government’s ability to reach these groups effectively, simultaneously leaving large migrant communities outside of Finland’s resilience complex. Those who received their early education in another country remain socially excluded in the sense of unity that upholds the security framework, leaving them vulnerable to Russian disinformation.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the comprehensive security

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<sup>70</sup> Berzina, “From ‘Total’ to ‘Comprehensive’,” 2.

<sup>71</sup> Berzina, “From ‘Total’ to ‘Comprehensive’,” 2.

<sup>72</sup> “Finland’s Unemployment Rate Rises in August to Highest Level in at Least 15 Years,” *Reuters*, October 21, 2025.

<sup>73</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, “The Disinformation Landscape in Finland,” 2.

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<sup>74</sup> “Russian Speakers’ Trust in Finnish Institutions Declines, Survey Finds,” *Yle*, October 30, 2024.

<sup>75</sup> “Russian Speakers’ Trust.”

<sup>76</sup> Guidastrì, *Managing National Security*, 2024.

model, despite its reliance on the population, fails to uniformly protect everyone in Finland. This disparity suggests that resilience is unevenly distributed, which reveals gaps for Russian disinformation efforts. Unless the government is able to tailor its communication and education to support all communities equally, these informational blind spots may grow, giving leeway for Russian disinformation to torment Finnish society.

### 5.2.3 Limited Financial Resources

The long-term sustainability of the comprehensive model is threatened by the government's limited financial and material resources. Due to its wide cross-sectoral scope, the effective implementation of the security model is dependent on continued significant investment across areas such as education, defense and information security.<sup>77</sup> After the recent budget negotiations in September 2025, in order to restore economic balance and alleviate national indebtedness, the Finnish government announced billion euro cuts across sectors, from migrant integration programs to business support.<sup>78</sup> These cuts directly strike the pillars of comprehensive security, risking deepening divides between native and migrant communities, as well as urban and rural regions, a threat to Finland's capacity of producing a unified defense response. In addition, financial planning is tied to four-year long government cycles that coincide with parliamentary elections, forcing security planning to remain a short-term

process.<sup>79</sup> While areas like education remain central to most parties, the current right-leaning coalition often prioritizes fiscal concerns over social issues, determining the allocation of resources.<sup>80</sup> This structural barrier to long-term planning, as well as fluctuating priorities in parliament determined by the orientation of current coalitions, threaten the model's long term feasibility. In the rapidly changing security environment, security policy demands substantial funds to remain technologically prepared against modern warfare.

### 5.2.4 Conflict Between Freedom and Regulation

Balancing security protocol with the democratic principles that define the Finnish open society remains a fundamental conflict within the comprehensive security approach. As security has expanded to the social, economic, and even private domain, concerns regarding the individual rights and freedoms of citizens have emerged. Political scholars have warned about the threat of securitization, the treatment of benign, non-military issues as national emergencies to advance political agendas. In 1991, only 11% of government proposals were rationalized as an issue of national security, whereas in 2017 the number rose to 51%, raising questions about the politicization of security.<sup>81</sup> Legal advisor to the Defense Forces, Alberto Guidastrì, warns about the risk of shifting responsibility over national security from the state to individuals, setting preparedness as a personal burden.<sup>82</sup> This delegation of obligation could foster a "culture of individual

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<sup>77</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 105.

<sup>78</sup> "Hallitus Sai Miljardin Euron Leikkaukset Kasaan – Listasimme Merkittävimmät Kohteet," *Yle Uutiset*, September 2, 2025.

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<sup>79</sup> Valtonen and Branders, "Tracing the Finnish," 105.

<sup>80</sup> "Hallitus Sai Miljardin Euron Leikkaukset Kasaan."

<sup>81</sup> Guidastrì, *Managing National Security*.

<sup>82</sup> Guidastrì, *Managing National Security*

insecurity”, where citizens feel personally responsible for managing external crises—which risks eroding the solidity of national resilience.<sup>83</sup> Simultaneously, controlling the circulation of information around media may pose a fundamental dilemma in balancing national cognitive defense with the protection of freedom of speech. Policies regulating online spaces can easily blur the line between preserving the truth and restricting expression, particularly on sensitive topics such as discrimination against Russian-speaking minorities. If state orchestrated interventions are perceived as politically restrictive, the government could risk undermining the very trust that constitutes as the country’s strongest defense against Russian disinformation.<sup>84</sup>

### 5.2.5 The Threat of Artificial Intelligence

The most pressing vulnerability of comprehensive security is the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) as a mechanism of warfare by disinformation<sup>85</sup>. For decades, the complexity of the Finnish language has functioned as a protective layer against disinformation due to the difficulty of reproducing it artificially in a natural and persuasive manner<sup>86</sup>. However, as generative AI tools continue to develop and acquire the ability of producing Finnish text and audio content at the level of a native speaker, this protective shield has begun to erode<sup>87</sup>. Security analysts continue to warn about AI’s

ability to replicate targeted messaging mimicking the exact tone, syntax, and cultural nuance of local communication —creating a window of opportunity for Russian propagandaists<sup>88</sup>. The rapidly generated AI content also threatens bypassing Finland’s manual, and thus slower disinformation detection systems, risking the admission of Russian disinformation into circulation around the media.<sup>89</sup>

More importantly, the danger of AI is not simply the rapid spread of false narratives, but also the erosion of collective confidence in public information, leaving individuals unable to identify which sources and images to believe<sup>90</sup>. This uncertainty may drive cognitive fatigue, which, when sustained, could weaken the psychological resolve of the population. Therefore, the Finnish government must adapt to the evolving nature of hybrid warfare where AI generated communication is increasingly indistinguishable from authentic information. While the security model has been able to counter traditional disinformation campaigns to a great extent, the emergence of AI challenges the foundational assumptions of the model itself, continuously straining public trust. This uncertainty calls for the critical assessment of whether Finland’s open, trust-based governance can endure the digitally driven security landscape of today, and begs the question of what can be done to protect it.

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<sup>83</sup> Guidastrì, *Managing National Security*.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

<sup>85</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

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<sup>88</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>89</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>90</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

In order for the Finnish security model to remain the backbone of national resilience, the framework must adopt continuous improvements as both the political and social climates evolve. The existing weaknesses identified in the previous section could be mitigated by linguistic inclusion, European expansion, adult media literacy programs, regulation against securitization and AI protection mechanisms.

### 6.1.1 Linguistic Inclusion

Official Finnish websites, such as the notices published by the Foreign Ministry, are currently only available in Finnish, Swedish, and English. Beyond these groups, they fail to acknowledge growing ethnic minorities, such as the Russian diaspora.<sup>91</sup> In order to eradicate these information asymmetries that this shortcoming creates, the government must expand linguistic access. For example, government notices, policy explanations and other public communication must be made available in more diverse linguistic options like Russian, Arabic and Somalian.

Greater information accessibility is expected to foster higher levels of trust and civic engagement amongst minority communities, as was the case in Philadelphia's Language Access Program that mandated multilingual communication.<sup>92</sup> The program proved a remarkable booster in trust between citizens and officials—an outcome that could be replicated in Finland with greater linguistic offerings.

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<sup>91</sup> "Russian Speakers' Trust."

<sup>92</sup> Clare Schmitt, "How Language Access Enhances Civic Engagement", *Piedmont Global*, November 22, 2024.

### 6.1.2 Adult Media Literacy Programs

Finnish resilience against disinformation is often credited to its world-leading education system that ignites media literacy in citizens from an early age on. However, a crucial gap remains—the unequal distribution of education amongst different age groups. Older generations, who either received their education before the rise of the digital era, or got schooled in another country, remain particularly susceptible to Russian disinformation campaigns. Therefore, in order to make sure that older generations are able to safely navigate the online information ecosystem, the Finnish government must implement education programs targeted towards these demographics. Such initiatives could include free adult media literacy programs, requirements for media training to be integrated into workspaces, and local-level initiatives in libraries and retirement homes. By improving older citizens' ability in navigating online platforms, they would be more likely to recognize external manipulation efforts, and know to constantly verify sources. Like greater linguistic access, adult media training would ensure that resilience is equally distributed across demographics, further unifying the nation's protection.

### 6.1.3 Regulation Against Securitization

As discussed earlier, the acceleration of securitization threatens undermining the legitimacy and credibility of public discourse and eroding civic liberties. Therefore, Finland must seek legal regulatory mechanisms that ensure that matters of inherent national security only get framed as such. Implementing regulatory

mechanisms should start by the provision of clear legal definitions that distinguish security threats from social conflict. Then, independent committees should provide regular assessments on public concerns, evaluating whether they reach the previously determined criteria of national security. In doing so, the Finnish state could ensure that public political participation remains focused on relevant concerns, averting political fatigue and the overburdening of the citizen. In implementing such mechanisms, Finland should consider Canada's National Security and Intelligence Review Agency's 2024 report, which highlights the prevention of securitization through its mandate on interdepartmental jurisdiction, complete access to information and symmetrical resourcing.<sup>93</sup> If these steps are implemented successfully, it can be expected that comprehensive security continues to foster resilience by maintaining high levels of public trust and political participation. The mechanisms would ensure that the security approach remains a collective effort based on transparency, rather than a politically-driven security agenda.

#### 6.1.4 European Expansion

As disinformation campaigns are not limited by borders, Finland's growing integration in European institutions drives the need to consolidate a broader, regional resilience framework. Bridging European states together in a coherent policy map could prevent Russia from exploiting informational gaps between

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<sup>93</sup> "National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Annual Report", *National Security and Intelligence Review Agency*, December 4, 2025.

populations, allowing for a proactive stance in the war against disinformation. The consolidation of a united European resilience framework would require a multi-layered transition based on the policies of the 2024 Niinistö Report to the European Commission.<sup>94</sup> From replicating Finnish education programmes to harmonizing security protocol, greater intersectoral coordination beyond immediate, physical security needs could propel European resilience against Russia's aggression. In the long-term, it could be expected that European states that mirror Finland's respect for democratic values, political participation and public trust, are able to consolidate similar resilience networks as Finland. And with that expansion, Finland itself could consolidate a broader resilience framework and the removal of informational gaps within alliances.

#### 6.1.5 Adaptation to Artificial Intelligence

The Royal United Services Institute believes that Moscow considers artificial intelligence as a force multiplier in warfare, amplifying its cognitive operations through automated content creation.<sup>95</sup> Beyond the Kremlin, the rapid development of AI technologies lowers barriers to entry into the information ecosystem, allowing other pro-Russian actors like hacktivist groups (i.e. NoName057(16)) to advance politically driven disinformation.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, as Russian covert strategies are starting to incorporate

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<sup>94</sup> "Safer Together: A Path Towards a Fully Prepared Union", *European Commission*, 2024.

<sup>95</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>96</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

AI in their campaigns, the Finnish authorities must find immediate mechanisms to adapt the existing comprehensive security framework to adjust to these technological developments. With the pace at which machine intelligence is developing, this becomes the most urgent policy gap that continues to taunt the comprehensive security model.

As the first step towards adopting national resilience against AI disinformation, the Finnish government should seek to invest in content provenance technology. The 2025 IBC Accelerator Programme produced a *Stamping Your Content: C2PA* (Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity) *Provenance-project*.<sup>97</sup> The project was created through the collaboration of major tech and broadcasting companies, such as Finnish *Yle*, aimed at creating a protection mechanism against AI generated media.<sup>98</sup> The *C2PA Provenance-project* created a protocol in which media content was cryptographically marked at the point of creation, remaining untouched throughout the process of editing, publishing and online distribution.<sup>99</sup> On an accompanying application, users could confirm whether media had been altered after its creation, which allowed them to distinguish between what was real and what had been created by artificial intelligence. Such provenance tools strengthen the integrity of the informational ecosystem, easing the pressure of verification by safeguarding the online space from artificially created content.

Adapting a similar system could improve Finland's ability to counter AI-generated disinformation, as citizens could instantly verify the authenticity of public media. In addition, public discussions surrounding measures taken against AI-generated content could alleviate any sense of cognitive fatigue caused by uncertainty and constant questioning of whether public information is real or fabricated. By restoring confidence in the authenticity and reliability of public information, provenance tools could reinforce psychological resilience in Finland, maintaining the effectiveness of the comprehensive security model in the face of the new era of AI. In doing so, the intertwinedness of security and technological adaptation becomes another pillar of comprehensive security, ensuring that the Finnish society is able to remain resilient by virtue of trust and open governance. Moreover, citizens would be able to continue to serve as drivers of security policy by navigating the deceptive information environment with greater confidence.

## 7. Conclusion

Finland's success in combating Russian disinformation with its whole-of-society approach to security illustrates that in a constantly evolving security landscape, military security alone is insufficient in safeguarding a nation.<sup>100</sup> Its comprehensive security model that empowers the citizen as an active political body proves that modern security requires the coordination of vital societal functions to provide complete defense. Through decades of open governance

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<sup>97</sup> "Accelerator Project 2025: Stamping Your Content."

<sup>98</sup> "Accelerator Project 2025: Stamping Your Content."

<sup>99</sup> "Accelerator Project 2025: Stamping Your Content."

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<sup>100</sup> Saari, Moilanen, and Hautala, "The Disinformation Landscape in Finland," 2.

and promotion of civic responsibility, Finland has been able to transform decades of historical insecurity into a source of national strength. Tracing the historical trajectory of Finnish security and evaluating its current mechanisms reveal that the Finnish security model builds resilience not through individual policies, but through a comprehensive system of trust that is rooted in society itself. Nevertheless, as the nature of warfare continues to evolve, the looming threat of the accelerating development of artificial intelligence technologies reminds us that resilience and security must continue to adapt to our environments.<sup>101</sup>

Global discussion continues to circle around Finland's security model, with new European states, like the Czech Republic, seeking to translate Finnish practice into their own national contexts.<sup>102</sup> This global interest underlines the fundamental resistance that the model builds in populations, a characteristic that, unlike traditional warfare, can't be achieved merely by extensive military spending.<sup>103</sup>

The defense of democracies against hybrid threats relies on the cooperation between all societal actors. As the lines between war and peace begin to blur, countries must invest not only in weapons and military alliances, but also in the intellectual frameworks that foster trust and resilience. With constantly expanding NATO budgets and emerging weaponry technologies, governments must consider Finland's security concept

when allocating public finances. Defense spending must not come at the expense of social policy, for in the end, both serve as pillars of national security.

Finland's case offers a blueprint, showing that cooperative, resilient, and informed populations are the key to safeguarding democratic practices and maintaining national stability in an era marked by uncertainty and unprecedented hybrid warfare.

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<sup>101</sup> Wallner, *Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare*.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Virpi Kukkasniemi, November 2025.

## List of Figures

**Figure 1.** The Security Committee's Seven Main Societal Pillars to National Security. Adapted from *Turvallisuuskomitea*. Found on page 4.

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