

The academic community has not yet reached a consensus on the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy. To contribute to this theoretical debate, this research investigates how public opinion influenced Sweden and Finland's foreign policy preferences, especially security policy, in response to the increasing security tension following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, both Sweden and Finland witnessed gradually deteriorating relationships with Russia, with many efforts to improve their security arrangements through both domestic empowerment and international cooperation. Nevertheless, both countries, well-known for their longstanding military neutrality and non-alignment traditions, remained consistent in opting out of military alliances, most significantly NATO, until 2022. The 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine fundamentally changed this strategic atmosphere, most significantly with the increase in domestic public support for NATO membership. Both countries seriously considered and eventually pursued NATO membership as not only a viable but also a necessary decision to ensure their national security. Though the past pattern was strategically favourable to both Sweden and Finland, why did they embrace a seemingly riskier direction (embracing NATO membership and facing Russia antagonism)? How did the Swedish and Finnish public opinion influence this riskier policy that Sweden and Finland pursued?