

Perception of Security Among the Members of Pro-Defence Organisations in Poland: A Comparison of 2018 and 2022

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The article aims to analyse the motivation and perception of security among the members of pro-defence organisations in Poland. The multidimensionality of threats and challenges in the area of national and international security necessitates the use of all forces and means. This also applies to using the potential, interest, and involvement of specific people within the state security system. In the case of Poland, a large role is played by numerous pro-defence organisations with many members, including young people. In the last few years, a large number of events with a direct impact on the sense of national and international security have occurred. This article attempts to perform a comparative analysis by considering the perspectives in 2018 and in 2022, which are based on an original survey of a selected group of respondents.

Keywords: security sociology, pro-defence organisations, national security, international security, Poland

INTRODUCTION

A nation's security is the result of many conditions. Defence capabilities, based both on human and material resources, are extremely important elements. Adequate motivation, mental and physical preparation, and personnel equipment are essential in this respect. It is obvious that military forces, especially a professional army, have a fundamental place in the security and defence systems understood this way. It should be noted that volunteer defence formations, which, thanks to their systematic activity in this area, constitute the direct backup and human resources necessary for support or combat operations, play a very important.

The article aims to point out selected issues illustrating the essential importance of pro-defensive formations in Poland's security system.¹ Research questions focus on three issues: (1) How significant are pro-defence formations? (2) What motivates the members of these organisations? (3) What is their opinion on the prospects of national and international security?

The research process adopted in the article is based on content analysis and an analysis of empirical data. Collection of the material for analysis was based on selected literature on the subject and the author's research work. These were based on the data obtained using

¹ The author would like to thank the reviewers for all useful and helpful comments on his manuscript.

the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The sample selection was deliberate. The internet survey was addressed to members of pro-defence formations based on institutional email addresses. The study was conducted in two periods: 2018 and 2022. The sample established included 180 respondents and was fully implemented in 2018. The sample carried out in 2022 numbered 162 respondents.² The age range was mainly based on people aged 18–24 (66% in both analysed years), 25–40 (27% in both periods), and over 40 (7% in both periods). In the gender structure, the majority of the respondents were men (70% and 68%, respectively).

The research sample was based on the members of pro-defence formations in south-eastern Poland. In both periods, the respondents' research compliance was around 70 per cent. The structure of member involvement in the analysed organizations serving the fifth formation of the Polish Army, the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT), looks very interesting.³ In 2018, 55% of soldiers of the Territorial Defence Forces were among the studied group, while in 2022 this indicator increased to 74%. This is a consequence of the growing interest of part of society in military service as part of voluntary formations (Dojwa-Turczyńska 2018; Skrzypczak 2017).

An important element influencing the range of the comparative analysis is the occurrence of three serious challenges and threats that are directly related to the research area during the survey periods: the COVID-19 pandemic, a hybrid attack at the Polish-Belarusian border, and an armed attack by Russia on Ukraine, which has obvious consequences, especially for migration processes in south-eastern Poland. The article is based on a number of general assumptions and conclusions illustrating the tendencies and specificity of the perception of safety within a selected research group.

PRO-DEFENCE ORGANISATIONS IN POLAND AS AN ANALYTICAL AND PRACTICAL PHENOMENON

Pro-defence organisations are an important subject of research in the social sciences. According to Durkheim's concept (Durkheim, 1982), among others, this is due to the classical approach to the role and tasks fulfilled by social groups, especially concerning the nation and the state. From this perspective, the specificity of pro-defence organizations is also an important research area (for example, within the sociology of security) in Poland. The reason for this is that these subjects are available and popular⁴ in the field of safety disciplines at the secondary school and university education levels. Since 2017, the Ministry of National Defence (MON) has been running a special program called Certified Military Uniform Classes (Czuba 2015).

In 2021, defence education was conducted in about 200 profiled secondary schools. As part of the activities of the Ministry of National Defence, an additional programme for military preparation units, which includes over 130 classes, has been operating since 2020. Departmental data of 2021 indicate that about 11,000 students in Poland were being

² The lack of eighteen respondents may be a consequence of a large part of the respondents being involved in activities supporting uniformed services in crisis situations.

³ Members of pro-defence formations are natural candidates for service in the Territorial Defence Forces. After joining its ranks, they do not cease to be members of the parent organisation at the same time.

⁴ The number of pro-defence formations in Poland is estimated at over 130.

educated in defence programmes. At the university level, education in security-related fields is provided by about 120 curriculum subjects.⁵ The *Legia Akademicka* (Academic Legion), the programme of the Ministry of National Defence, is also very popular among students in Poland (Wywiał 2018; Soler, Duda 2016). It is a proposal for students to undertake voluntary military training implemented as part of the theoretical programme at the university within three modules: basic, non-commissioned officer (graduating with the rank of corporal), and officer (graduating with the rank of second lieutenant), lasting a total of 93 days, including exercises at military bases with units. By 2022, more than 16,000 students had already benefited from this offer.

Researchers of pro-defence organisations point to several important issues concerning this area. They are important in a broad context, taking into account many countries and international organizations (Urych, Matysiak 2022). Based on many years of experience and the best military tradition in Poland, they most certainly have great potential and are often highly specialised, (Stąskiewicz 2022; Zadorożna 2018). These constitute an important element in building a civil society, with particular emphasis on security issues (Kośmider 2016; Soboń 2019). Raising awareness and building positive models in this field are important elements of broad security education (Araucz-Boruc 2019; Urych 2019; Drabik 2019; Pieczywok 2018).

MOTIVATION OF THE MEMBERS PRO-DEFENCE ORGANISATIONS

The motivation of pro-defence organization members is of key importance for effective use the potential of pro-defence organisations. Their conviction as to the meaning of involvement in such activities is an element that builds these formations around clearly identified and professed values. In most cases, this translates into permanent involvement in safety processes in one's professional life. In this context, defence preparation and activities within pro-defence formations are a stage towards a professional career or systematic support for security processes by volunteer specialists who work in a different space.

An important issue is also linking one's motivation with a wider context, based on maintaining national traditions and supporting the interests and challenges faced by the state, in this case, Poland. This is related to patriotic attitudes and cannot be confused with nationalism. This problem is unfairly mentioned in terms of Poland, especially by external entities and institutions. Some analysts who understand this issue in this way learn about Poland only from the media and indirect broadcasts, never, or very rarely, being on the spot.

Based on the conducted research, it is possible to indicate the main motives of the respondents. This applies primarily to the issues that directly concern the nation and the state. In the case of comparing changes between the years analysed, there is a noticeable decrease in motivation based on seeking adventure to support social processes (Table 1). This may be the result of the commitment of the members of pro-defence formations to provide aid, for example, to the sick and the elderly, during the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This help was not only a one-time act, but a systematic form of volunteering.

⁵ These data include only such fields as internal security and national security. In addition, at some universities, education also takes place in the fields of defence, security management, etc.

Table 1. Pro-defence motivation of members of pro-defence formations, in per cent

Question	Responses ⁶	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
What are the main reasons for your involvement in the activities of pro-defence organisations?	Implementing independence and patriotic ideas	70.2	61.3
	Personal support for state security processes	64.1	60.5
	Involvement in social activities	24.9	31.3
	Increasing physical fitness	22.7	25.3
	Experiencing an adventure	20.4	7.5
	Making new friends	12.2	15.4

Source: Personal research.

The respondents also indicate clear motivation related to planning their career path related to the uniformed services. This is quite understandable and related to two possible, but not the only, circumstances. Pro-defence organisations carry out many activities with various services and guards. Hence, it is natural that a large number of members in these formations (Table 2) are prepared to work in uniformed institutions which are a natural choice for them. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the uniformed services enjoy great social acceptance in Poland and are a valued and reliable employer. Therefore, the choice of such a career path, for most, guarantees a good level of employment and income.

Table 2. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards the future of uniformed formations, in per cent

Question	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
Do you see your future in professional work with the uniformed services?	Definitely yes	55.9	43.2
	Rather yes	26	36.4
	Probably not	16	17.9
	Definitely not	2.1	2.5

Source: Personal research.

THE SECURITY PERSPECTIVE AMONG THE MEMBERS OF PRO-DEFENCE ORGANISATIONS

The presented research was carried out among people directly involved in Poland's security processes. It was therefore assumed that the obtained answers were based on a good understanding of the issue in question. However, many interesting conclusions arise from the analysis. This applies to the national and international perceptions of security (Table 3).

⁶ The sum of the responses exceeds 100 per cent since the respondents could choose up to two positions.

Table 3. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards the perceptions of security and Poland's contemporary international position, in per cent

Questions	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
In your opinion, is Poland a safe country today?	Definitely yes	8.8	7.4
	Rather yes	66.3	58
	Probably not	21	28.4
	Definitely not	3.9	6.2
How do you evaluate Poland's contemporary international position?	Definitely positive	11	6.2
	Rather positive	60.2	55.5
	Rather negative	26	32.1
	Definitely negative	2.8	6.2

Source: Personal research.

The change in the security environment between 2018 and 2022 was mainly due to three challenges and threats: COVID-19, a hybrid attack at the border with Belarus, and the war in Ukraine, which influence opinions concerning Poland's security. Fortunately, this is not a clear turnout in the assessment. There is a noticeable 10% decrease in the sense of security. However, positive opinions in this regard amount to nearly two-thirds of all responses. It seems that this may be due to the respondents themselves being involved in state security, testing its capabilities in difficult, operational, and near-combat conditions. The financial and material expenses for the armed forces in Poland are among the highest in NATO. Interest in voluntary service in uniformed formations, including the army, is also growing.

The consequence of that is the opinion on Poland's international position. In this case, the change between 2018 and 2022 also shows about a 10% disadvantage. The analysis of this indicator is based on the criteria directly related to safety, especially in the external dimension. However, the high-level rating, exceeding 60%, is still maintained. The reason for such a feeling may be, in particular, the way of dealing with threats resulting from the situation on the eastern border, among others, mainly the crisis of illegal migration from Belarus. It includes positively addressing the great magnitude of the inflow of over seven million war refugees from Ukraine to Poland (as of October 2022). Poland is coping with both situations by relying on its resources, often forced to repel and correct false data and fake news, which also comprise a type of information warfare.

The assessment of threats that may affect Poland is very interesting (Table 4). In some cases, they can be treated as a result of aggressive actions by neighbouring states or seen as common to the Central European region or the entire EU. The growing concern directly related to Russia reviving its great-power ambitions (by nearly 20%) is clearly visible. This mainly concerns the possible outbreak of a large-scale war (an increase of nearly 16%). The decrease in concerns over the occurrence of terrorist attacks can be associated with the scale of the two above-mentioned threats and the relatively quick and easy assessment of the problem by anti-terrorist services operating in Poland. There is also a noticeable change regarding possible socio-economic crises connected with, among others, the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that

these fears will grow in connection with the war in Ukraine and its direct impact on the energy and financial crises, including inflation, which are now affecting the entire world. Poland has been doing quite well in this situation so far (as of August 2022).

Table 4. The attitude of members of pro-defence formations towards the threats to Poland's security, in per cent

Question	Responses ⁷	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
In your opinion, what mainly threats Poland's security today?	Military conflicts	27.1	43.2
	Terrorist attacks	26	7.4
	Uncontrolled migration	42.5	39.5
	Russia's power ambitions	37	56.8
	Socio-economic crises	47.5	54.3
	Natural disasters	18.8	6.2

Source: Personal research.

Considering the geopolitical situation in Central Europe and its immediate vicinity, as well as the activities and actual decisions made at the level of individual countries and international organisations, it is not surprising that we must consider Poland responsible for its defence (Table 5). No country, even with solid alliances, can neglect its defence responsibilities. These result primarily from their interests and reasons for existing. Taking this as well as the real possibilities of, for example, the EU's defence potential, into account, the indications of the respondents are absolutely clear and unquestionable. NATO is to be the organisational guarantor of the security of European states. The prerequisite for the implementation of allied guarantees, however, is each Alliance country meeting its defence obligations.

Table 5. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards Poland's main defensive measures, in per cent

Questions	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
What, in your opinion, should constitute the basis for the nation's defence activities?	Developing our defence capabilities	86.7	73.5
	Close cooperation with NATO	11.6	26.5
	Close cooperation with the EU	2.7	0
	Fully professional army	8.3	16
What should Poland's armed forces be based on?	Professional army with volunteer forces (e.g., WOT)	79.6	72.8
	Army with compulsory conscription	12.2	11.1

Source: Personal research.

⁷ The sum of the responses exceeds 100 per cent since the respondents could choose up to two positions.

A discussion about the structure of the armed forces takes place in every country. In most democratic countries, modern solutions are based on a professional army. A departure from universal conscription has become obvious in the last 30 years, especially after the collapse of the Cold War division in 1989. However, one of the negative consequences of the reforms of the armed forces in a great number of European countries was the systematic reduction of their defence capabilities. The belief in 'eternal peace' in Europe turned out to be tragic in the light of Russia's military practices, which were underestimated several times, especially in the context of the attack on Georgia in 2008, hybrid actions in eastern Ukraine, and the subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Today, this 'dormancy' of vigilance and neglect of the area of security turn out to be difficult to compensate for. We can see this clearly as of February 24, 2022, when Russia became openly aggressive towards virtually the entire nation of Ukraine. Hence, the surveyed members of pro-defence formations in Poland hold a common belief that the development of their defence capabilities is based on a professional army supported by voluntary formations, including Territorial Defence Forces.⁸ The conviction about the legitimacy of universal defence in society is today the experience of the Ukrainian people. In the absence of unequivocal external military support, only this belief, drives Ukraine to bravely repel Russia's attack and partially enter into a counter-offensive. The issue of how long such an attitude will last, however, remains open and quite risky.

The basic problem concerns the issue of organising cooperation among allies. This concerns both responsibilities beyond national borders, within missions, and also internal solutions, including the presence of the allied forces in Poland (Table 6).

Table 6. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards the method of organising cooperation among allies, in per cent

Questions	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
Do you think Polish soldiers should take part in military missions abroad?	Definitely yes	35.9	27.8
	Rather yes	47.5	50.6
	Probably	16	16.7
	Definitely not	1.6	4.9
What is your opinion on stationing NATO troops in Poland?	I am definitely for it	29.8	54.3
	I am rather for it	56.4	40.2
	I am rather against it	9.9	4.3
	I am strongly against it	3.9	1.2

Source: Personal research.

⁸ In 2022, the number of volunteer soldiers for the Territorial Defence Forces amounted to over 32,000 and interest in the formation is constantly growing.

For many decades, Poland has actively participated in foreign missions, also during the Cold War (e.g., as part of UN missions). In the period of pre-accession to NATO, Polish soldiers were an important part of the allied contingents as part of UN and NATO stabilisation missions. After 1999, the Polish Army was an important element of the allied forces, including in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hence, for the members of pro-defence organisations, continuing such activities is extremely important. Today, Poland's forces are involved in a significant part of training programmes for other countries, including Ukraine, for example, by a joint Multinational Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIGADE), consisting of soldiers from Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine based in Lublin.

NATO is the basis of Poland's allied security. Poland fulfils all of NATO's membership criteria. It is one of the few Member States that allocates the required financial resources to defence. At the end of 2022, it will reach the level of 2.4% of the GDP. Poland is the frontline country of the Alliance. Hence, it is very important from a geopolitical point of view not only to guarantee security, but also to ensure the real presence of allied forces on Poland's territory. In light of Russia's aggressive military behaviour, the constant and increased presence of NATO troops in Poland and the Baltic states is a key means for implementing defence objectives. In this context, there are no doubts about the opinions expressed in Poland, including those of the respondents, about the legitimacy of this presence (94.5%). The level of strong acceptance has significantly increased by nearly 25%. Poland is a key country in ensuring stability in Central Europe. Since the breakup of the USSR, Russia has been emphasising its claims to the so-called near abroad, the countries of the former USSR and the Eastern Bloc. The direct border with Russia in the north-eastern section of the Kaliningrad Oblast requires an effective security policy based on reliable partners. For obvious reasons, a democratic, predictable, and non-aggressive Russia would be a natural partner for Poland, especially in terms of economy. However, it is difficult to count on having such a neighbour. The same applies to other countries in the region, especially Lithuania, which has experienced threats similar to Poland in the last dozen or so months. This can be seen in the declarations of the respondents regarding the stationing of NATO troops in Poland and the region.

Russia's actions against Poland have been decisively confrontational throughout most of history. Many European societies do not understand this situation. The *modus operandi* of other major players in the EU, especially France and Germany, does not encourage forming a strategic security alliance among these actors. Poland is the only country in the region to have a permanent, institutional partnership with these two Western powers within the Weimar Triangle. The problem, however, is its actual operation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Poland has chosen the transatlantic alliance with the USA (over 70% of opinions, Table 7). For the USA, Poland is also of key strategic importance in Europe. It is obvious that this partnership is much more demanding for Poland, since it constitutes an effective axis of cooperation and guarantees security not only for this nation but also for the entire Central Europe. Therefore, it is extremely important to strengthen this presence through regional initiatives, including the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest Nine, and the Visegrad Group. The benefits of these partnerships are outlined by many analysts, led by Georg Friedman (Friedman 2010).

When selecting the three main threats and challenges of the last few years – the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in relations with Belarus, and Russia's attack on Ukraine, the question should be asked about the shape of the world in the near future. A decade or two is not a long time. However, this is so important that it is difficult to predict the number and types of threats

Table 7. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards Poland's main allied entities, in per cent

Question	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
Which of these countries should, in your opinion, be the main allied entity for Poland?	China	8.8	6.8
	France	0.6	1.2
	Germany	9.4	10.5
	Russia	8.3	4.3
	The United States	68.5	70.4
	Great Britain	4.4	6.8

Source: Personal research.

and challenges that may be associated with the world in the future. The way the pre-pandemic world functioned does not seem to be returning. Further threats are only a matter of time, and they can have a domino effect.

The main topics are dominated by ideological and philosophical issues, including climate change. This has far-reaching consequences for social and economic life. The optimism of the respondents about the world's future security has slightly increased (Table 8). Perhaps this is the result of the recent 'Egyptian plagues' that hit the world, especially in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Perhaps some of the respondents see an opportunity to reverse this trend. After all, the vast majority of people want to believe in a better future.

Table 8. The attitude of the members of pro-defence formations towards the global security perspectives, in per cent

Question	Responses	2018 N = 180	2022 N = 162
What do you think will be the state of global security in 20 years?	The world will be less secure than today	74	70.4
	The world will be as secure as it is today	19.3	17.9
	The world will be more secure than today	6.7	11.7

Source: Personal research.

CONCLUSIONS

Security is one of the human's basic needs. Meeting this need conditions many other activities. In the absence of the sense of security, it becomes impossible to carry out most of daily-life activities. This applies to individual, social, and group activities.

The researcher's assumptions in the form of questions posed in the introduction and the survey analysis performed allow formulating general conclusions. They are not based on complicated correlations, which was not the purpose of this article. The conclusions presented result directly from empirical data gathered and based on a survey questionnaire.

First, the importance of defence organisations for the security system of individual countries, including Poland, is significant and seems to be growing. Their activities and the role they play is also an opportunity to at least reduce the negative causes and effects of multidimensional events. This is proven in the introduction, which presents the number and multidimensional aspects of these organisations.

Second, members of pro-defence organisations have clear and grounded motivation resulting from the professed values and specificity of relations prevailing in the jointly created environment. Their motives are based on patriotic inspirations and personal convictions. These translate into undertaken, systematic activities and career plans.

Third, there is an awareness of contemporary and future opportunities, challenges, risks, and threats in the area of security among pro-defence organisations. This applies to both the national/state and international levels. It seems that the members of the organisations concerned can realistically look at the complicated reality and security environment.

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Gynybinių organizacijų narių saugumo suvokimas Lenkijoje: 2018 ir 2022 m. palyginimas

Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti Lenkijos gynybinių organizacijų narių motyvaciją ir saugumo suvokimą. Dėl grėsmių ir iššūkių nacionalinio ir tarptautinio saugumo srityje daugialypiškumo būtina panaudoti visas jėgas ir priemones. Tai taip pat taikoma kalbant apie konkrečių asmenų potencialo panaudojimą, suinteresuotumą ir dalyvavimą valstybės saugumo sistemoje. Lenkijoje didelį vaidmenį atlieka daugybė už gynybą pasisakančių organizacijų, turinčių daug narių, įskaitant jaunimą. Per pastaruosius kelerius metus nutiko nemažai įvykių, turėjusių tiesioginės įtakos saugumo jausmo suvokimui nacionaliniu ir tarptautiniu mastu. Straipsnyje siekiama atlikti lyginamąją analizę, atsižvelgiant į 2018 ir 2022 m. perspektyvą, remiantis originaliomis atrinktos respondentų grupės apklausomis.

Raktažodžiai: saugumo sociologija, gynybinės organizacijos, nacionalinis saugumas, tarptautinis saugumas, Lenkija