Gender Equality in the Military: Analysing the Opposing Conscription Policies of Sweden and Finland

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Abstract

Sweden and Finland are renowned for their egalitarian state models. Despite this, there is a gendered difference between their military conscription policies. Finland conscripts only men into the military compared to Sweden which conscripts on a gender-neutral basis. This thesis explores the reconciliation of conscription policy with a gender equality agenda. It questions why the two states of Sweden and Finland adopted different conscription policies despite both being highly gender equal societies and if notions of gender equality impact state conscription policy.

A critical frame analysis is utilised to find that Sweden has chosen

to recruit on a gender-neutral basis to transform the military from a bastion of masculinity. This is based on the notion of the transformative effect of female representation in masculine spaces when paired with other gender mainstreaming policies. Finland has chosen not the conscript women due to its equality of sameness agenda within the military, which does not challenge masculine norms. It does not interpret gender equality as the conscription of women into such as masculine institution, as it would force them to conform to larger patriarchal power structures. These differing interpretations of gender equality explain and justify the diverging policy decisions of the states.

Why have the two states of

Sweden and Finland adopted

different approaches to the

gendered nature of the military

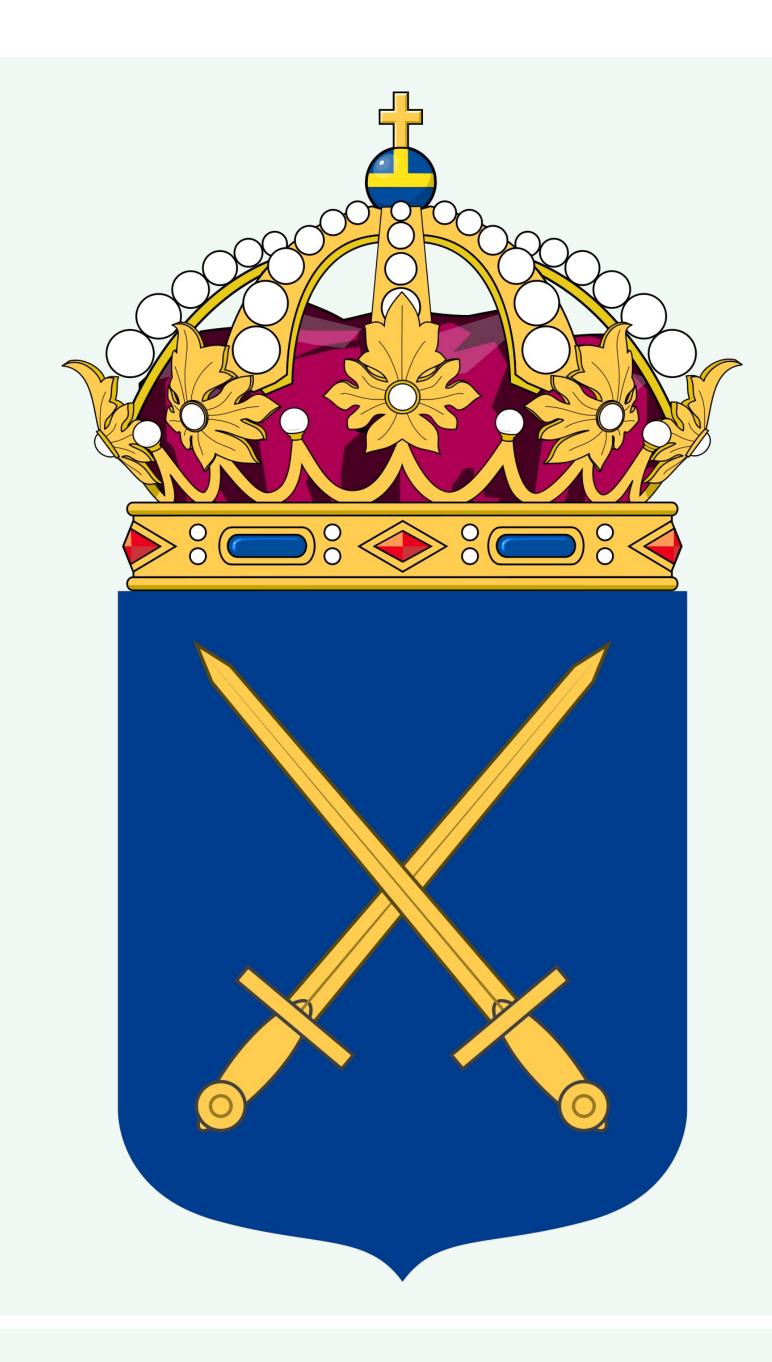
despite both being highly gender
equal societies? Do notions of

gender equality impact state

conscription policy?

Methodology

- Sweden and Finland Case Selection: most similar systems design focusing on the difference between Sweden and Finland's military conscription policies.
- Constructivist Lens
- Critical Frame Analysis: assumes multiple interpretations in policymaking and helps
 identify the dominance and exclusion in policymaking (Verloo and Lombardo 2007).
 Views policymaking as a political process influenced by the mechanisms of political
 processes. Utilised to understand the policy problem's diagnosis, the policy solution's
 prognosis, and the voice and roles of actors who are present (or excluded) in policy
 documents (Verloo 2005).
- Data Analysis: comparative analysis of three primary documents in Sweden and
 Finland. The government action plans for gender equality in government institutions,
 national action plans in response to the UN Security Council resolution on Women,
 Peace, and Security, and statements on gender equality by the military.



Key Findings: Sweden

Sweden actively pushes gender mainstreaming throughout all forms of government with a variety of national action plans as well as checks and balances in place to ensure consistent mainstreaming throughout governance. Policy documents evidenced a formally institutionalized equality of transformation perspective throughout governance which translated to equality of transformation policy on all levels in line with Rees's understanding of transformative policy (1998). As such, it can be understood that Sweden aims to implement gender equality and transform the patriarchal structure of the institution as part of a state-wide renegotiation of gendered norms. This aligns with other scholarly interpretations of Sweden's conscription policy decisions (Strand 2023). It has been established that simply placing women within an institution does not lead to transformation. However, the pairing of integration of women in institutions alongside other gender mainstreaming policies is a fundamental part of transformative institutional change (Kennedy, Norris, and Lovenduski 2001; Childs and Krook 2008). Sweden's decision to conscript women into the military gender neutrally with men can be interpreted as this transformative form of gender equality and gender equality policy.

Women's participation in the military is critical to broader goals of gender transformation which are ongoing in the military. As such, women will not be subject to the dominant masculine norms expected of a military and will actively contribute to changing gendered norms both within and out of the military due to its fundamental attachment to the state (Strand, 2023). By conscripting women and rewriting the formal and informal norms of gender roles within the military, Sweden aims to further transform patriarchal structures within and outside the military by challenging dominant structural behaviours with gender mainstreaming.

Legitimacy is lent to this process through various government acts, repeatedly referenced in gender equality statements as guiding documents. This formalizes the equality process within institutions. Moreover, the government's active feminist stance in its foreign policy, in which the military is included, lends further legitimacy to the process. Gender equality and equity are considered fundamental throughout the state for men, women, and government institutions. This is considered on both a formal and informal basis. This is vital as both are important when considering if it is true gender equality to place women within the military (Lovenduski 1998). The formalization of this policy, and the responsibility taken by the government to intuitionalism new norms and reshape the gendered nature of the military, demonstrates a commitment to transforming patriarchal norms throughout the state (Borchorst and Siim 2008). This transformative agenda circumvents the feminist critique of women's inclusion in the military due to the hostile nature of many militaries and institutions to women (Duncanson 2017). As such, the introduction of women in the conscription policy on a gender-neutral basis is appropriate as they are entering an institution that is actively changing to make space for feminine norms.

Key Findings: Finland

Finland constructs gender equality and policy solutions to gender inequality differently from Sweden. While gender mainstreaming is highlighted as one of two solutions to gender inequality, it is one of two government gender equality strategies and only to be implemented where appropriate. The government does not view gender mainstreaming as the only solution to gender inequality and suggests that it is unsustainable in some institutions. Military documents analyzed demonstrated a reluctance to place the responsibility for gender inequality with the institution itself, instead placing it with individual units and military members, suggesting a tinkering approach to gender equality within the military. This approach to gender equality relies upon women in the institution to conform to masculine norms to succeed within the institution (Rees 1998). As such, the lack of a gender-neutral conscription policy can be attributed to an understanding of the Finnish government that conscripting women into the institutions of the military would force them to conform to masculine ideals, which would not be in line with a gender equality agenda.

There is a vision for gender mainstreaming within broader government policy. However, there is no mention of gender mainstreaming within the military itself, which suggests that the military is an area where mainstreaming is not deemed an appropriate strategy. Focus within the military is placed on the equal treatment of those who choose to join. However, there is no mention of intent to increase the representation of women within the military itself. The lack of an active agenda to recruit women into the military is due to the lack of formal institutional support for transformative gender equality within a national security policy, as noted in the Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plan. As such, Finland views introducing women into the military without institutional change, for which there is little support, as inherently unfair and unjust. This stands in defiance of the beliefs of critical mass scholars (Benschop and Verloo 2006; Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977). There has been a clear decision by policymakers that it would be unjust to conscript women into the military due to its inherently masculine nature.

Each state's respective policy actions are taken with consideration wider gender equality agendas within the military, the strength of masculine norms within the military, and how the subjection of women to these norms would impact them as conscripts. Both policy decisions are the result of differing gender equality agendas based on conceptions of equality and state norms. If in the future Finland did choose to implement transformative gender equality policies within the military, then a change in conscription policy would be justifiable and a positive step towards further gender equality. However, this requires a structural transformation of the institution, as the mere placement of women within masculine institutions does not lead to gender equality and is inherently unjust.



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Background

In Sweden, gender equality machinery within the country has been the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender Equality since 1979 and within the Gender Equality Division as of 1982. This division works to improve gender equality policy, prepares legislation, coordinates gender equality work with other ministries, and solely concentrates and gender issues, as there are separate divisions for other inequalities within government. In the summer of 2018, young men and women began their military service, the first gender-equal conscripts in the nation's history. While the introduction of gender-neutral conscription was instated in 2010 when male conscription was removed and replaced with gender-neutral conscription, it was paired with a simultaneous move to de-activate conscription due to peacetime (Persson and Sundevall 2019). The reactivation of conscription in 2018 marked the beginning of active gender-neutral conscription for one of 2 states worldwide (Chakravortty, 2023).

In Finland, gender equality machinery has been a secondary duty of another ministry since its creation in 1977. As part of reforms in 2001, the country created a separate unit for administering gender equality policy, the Gender Equality Unit, with drastically increased resources for Finnish gender equality policy. However, the unit remains within Ministry for Social Affairs and Health and ranks lower than all other ministries (Borchorst et al. 2012). Despite the decision of neighboring Norway and Sweden to conscript on a gender-equal basis into the military, Finland has refrained from doing so. Conscription based on citizenship and civil duties is a fundamental and widely supported concept in Finland. However, half of the citizens are excluded from this process (Kosonen, Alisa, and Teemu 2019). Male conscription has been compulsory since the independence of the country in 1917 (Jukarainen 2012). This duty to protect has been tied to national identity building, centering the military as a fundamental basis for nation-building beyond an issue of national security