



behaviour wise

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Neutrality or NATO?

*Irish attitudes to neutrality and
possible NATO membership*

About BehaviourWise



BehaviourWise is a Dublin-based consultancy specialising in behavioural science and insight.

We conduct research into what drives human behaviour, and identify the best ways to influence behaviour to achieve better outcomes.

Our work is based on the latest behavioural science, which brings together scientific understanding from the fields of psychology, neuroscience and economics.

To find out more please visit: www.behaviourwise.ie

About this research



We set out to discover how Irish people feel today about key aspects of our defence policy – our neutrality, our investment in defence and our membership of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

We wanted to explore how Irish people feel about the possibility of joining NATO or an EU army (although not in existence today, it is indicative of how people would feel about closer EU military cooperation).

From a behavioural science perspective we wanted to explore how narratives impact people's thinking and may influence their voting behaviour if we were for example to have a referendum on NATO membership. We tested the impact of two narratives; one focused on military conflict and the other on food insecurity, both often mentioned in the context of NATO.

Methodology

- Online survey conducted among a random sample of 1,845 Irish adults aged 18+
- Respondents recruited via Qualtrics from professionally managed market research panels
- All respondents aged 18+, resident in the Republic of Ireland and fluent English speakers
- Quota controls set for gender, age and region to mirror the 18+ population profile
- Fieldwork conducted between 21/06/22 and 13/07/22
- Data quality checked (response speed, attention checks, response patterns) and any sub-standard responses removed
- Margin of error on total sample base + / - 2.3% (for certain questions where sample base is lower the relevant margin of error is flagged)



The Context

Increasing geo-political tensions

War in Ukraine

Global food insecurity and rising food prices

Sweden and Finland complete NATO accession talks

Chronic underfunding of Irish Defence Forces vs. other EU nations

Increase in Irish Defence spending to €1.5 billion by 2028 announced on July 12th



<u>24/02/22:</u> Russia launches full scale invasion of Ukraine	<u>23/06/22:</u> Ukraine granted EU candidate status	<u>28 - 30/06/22:</u> NATO summit takes place in Madrid	<u>04/07/22:</u> Finland and Sweden complete NATO accession talks	<u>12/07/22:</u> Irish government announces defence spending increase	<u>23/07/22</u> Russia and Ukraine reach grain export deal
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Behavioural Science – the power of narratives

At a sub-conscious level, our behaviour is highly influenced by prevailing narratives.

Narratives and images tap into our emotions and can often have a stronger influence on our thinking and behaviour than facts and data.

Narratives influence our perception of the world around us, our perception of risk and the decisions we make about how we should protect ourselves from it.



Testing the impact of Narratives

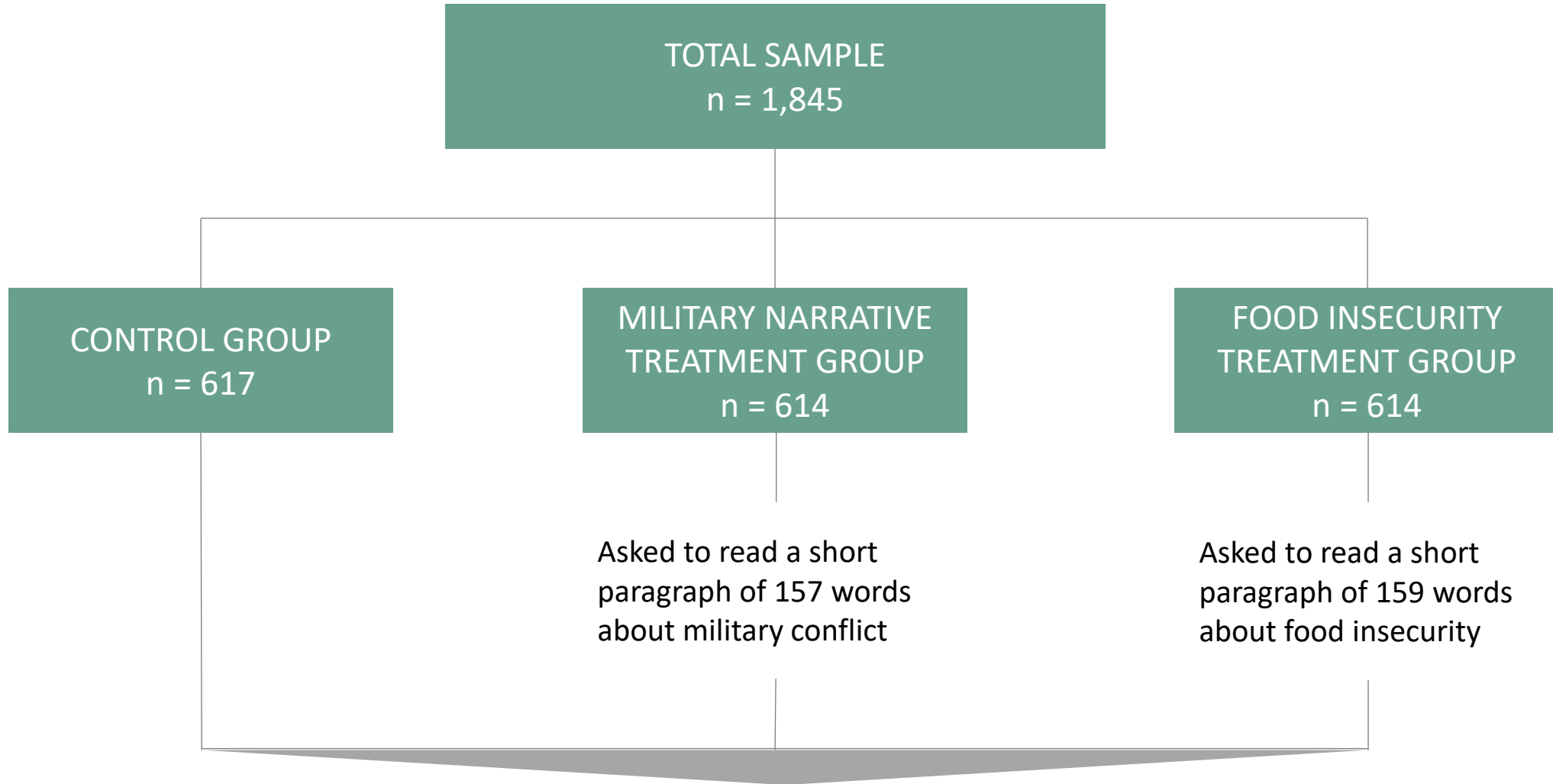


We composed two paragraphs, one on the theme of military conflict, another on food insecurity, each of similar length (157 / 159 words). Each included facts already in the public domain.

We split our sample into three separate equally sized groups. One group was asked to read the paragraph about military conflict, another the paragraph on food insecurity. The remaining group served as a control group and was not asked to read any text. All groups were then asked an identical set of questions.

We compared responses across all groups. We checked for statistically significant differences between the military conflict treatment and the control group, and between the food insecurity treatment and the control group to learn what impact if any exposure to these narratives had.

Testing the impact of Narratives



All groups asked an identical set of questions.
Differences between responses given by control group vs. each treatment group in turn analysed.
The following slides will highlight where significant differences were found.

Narratives – key points

Military Narrative

- **Germany to boost military spend**
Military experts are warning that European nations need to wake up in the face of continued Russian aggression. In response, Germany has agreed to boost its military spending by €100 billion.
- **Denmark to meet NATO military spend target**
while smaller nations like Denmark have finally agreed to meet the 2% of GDP military spending target set by NATO. Sweden and Finland, former neutral countries, recently applied to join NATO.
- **Sweden & Finland applying to join NATO**
Finland, former neutral countries, recently applied to join NATO.
- **Ireland military spend lowest in EU (% of GDP)**
Ireland spends just 0.3% of its GDP on military spending, the lowest in the EU. This is especially worrying with cyber attacks, NATO, geographic location and outside NATO geographical position make Ireland a potential target. A 2022 report concludes Ireland would not be able to meaningfully defend itself against attack. In 2022, foreign affairs specialist Fiona Hill warned that we may already be in the middle of world War 3, we just haven't realised it yet.

Food Insecurity Narrative

- **Global food crisis likely to lead to increased migration**
The world may be walking into a global food crisis, which is likely to lead to increased migration. We could see food prices rise dramatically as climate change, conflict and supply disruptions across the world severely restrict the food supply. Currently 29% of global wheat sales come from Russia and Ukraine. As a result, we may see many wheat products like cereal and sunflower oil simply become unaffordable. In Ireland, the Agricultural Input Index which measures the cost inputs of food production increased at an annual rate of almost 17%. Fertiliser alone rose by 120% from 2021-2022. India banning food exports to maintain domestic stability—a dangerous precedent. Ireland is a major food exporter, and banning many food exports in order to maintain stability at home. This is a dangerous precedent. UN warn 323 million 'marching towards starvation'.
- **Climate change, conflict and supply disruption could restrict supply and drive up prices**
- **29% of global wheat sales from Russia and Ukraine**
- **Cost of inputs to food production increasing in Ireland**
- **India banning food exports to maintain domestic stability—a dangerous precedent**
- **UN warn 323 million 'marching towards starvation'**

Summary

Attitudes to neutrality and possible NATO membership

The country is almost evenly split on whether Ireland should join NATO, despite many claiming neutrality is important to them personally.

There is support for increasing military defence spend. Only 1 in 10 suggest the current level of spend is too much. Note: virtually all responses collected before the Government's recent announcement of an increase in Irish defence spending to €1.5billion by 2028.

There is little understanding of the primary purpose of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of which Ireland is a member. This highlights the need for information and education about the CSDP and Ireland's role in it.

Men and those aged 65+ are more likely to favour joining a military alliance, whether NATO or an EU army. Support for joining an EU army extends to those aged 18-24 and 55+.

A majority of Government party voters are open to ending neutrality, while Sinn Féin supporters are split.

Overall, our findings point to a need for education and an informed national conversation on our policy of military neutrality and possible future membership of NATO or any other international military alliance.

The impact of a military conflict narrative

When presented with a short narrative about military conflict, people are significantly more likely to support Ireland joining NATO or an EU army, and to support an increase in military defence spend.

They are also more likely to agree that Ireland would be safer if we joined an international military alliance, and less likely to agree that Ireland remaining neutral is important to them.

In a situation where the country is almost evenly split on whether Ireland should join NATO or a future EU army, how the prevailing narrative is framed can have a significant effect on how people might vote in any future referendum on the topic.

This highlights the important role narratives play in influencing our thinking and our decision-making.

Concern about food insecurity and the impacts of War

A clear finding that emerges from this research is the high level of anxiety about rising food prices and potential food shortages:

- Nine out of ten are worried about the rising cost of food.
- Almost two thirds don't believe Ireland is safe from global food insecurity.
- Eight out of ten are worried that the war in Ukraine will lead to food shortages and hunger in many countries, and a majority believe Ireland should stockpile food to prepare for possible food shortages.

There remains substantial support (6 out of 10 agree) for Ireland continuing to accept refugees fleeing war in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Interestingly there is a similar level of support for the EU banning Russian energy imports even if it means higher energy prices in Ireland.

The impact of a food insecurity narrative

The short narrative about food insecurity did not have any effect on support for Ireland joining NATO or an EU army, or on increasing military defence spend. This is despite conflict being mentioned as a contributing factor to food insecurity.

The food insecurity narrative did however significantly reduce the likelihood of people agreeing that Ireland is safe from the threat of global food insecurity. It also increased the likelihood of people agreeing that Ireland should stockpile food to prepare for possible food shortages.

As noted, there is already a very high level of concern about rising food prices and possible food shortages. In that context, a narrative about food insecurity can heighten sensitivity to the issue.

Key Findings

Ireland is split on whether to join NATO

Total Sample

Do you think Ireland should join NATO?



■ Yes (52%) ■ No (48%)

Yes over-indexes among:

65+:	65% *
Males:	58% *
ABC1F+:	54%*

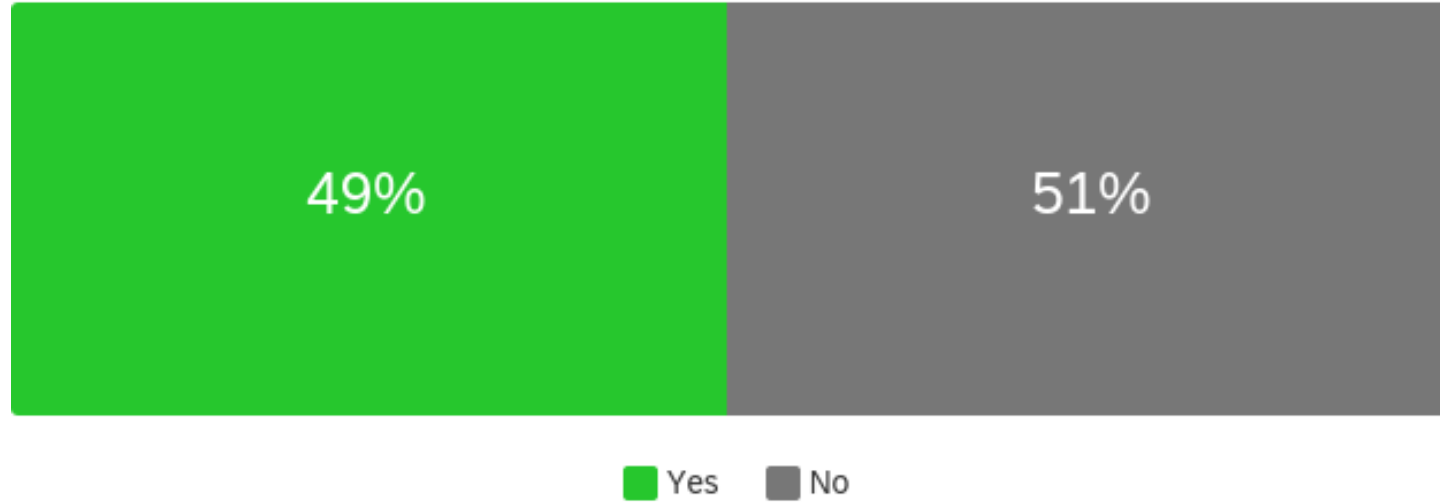
No over-indexes among:

45 – 54:	54%*
Females:	53% *
C2DEF-:	51%*

Military narrative significantly increases support for NATO membership

Military treatment
vs. Control

Do you think Ireland should join NATO? (Control)



Do you think Ireland should join NATO? (Treatment)



Higher proportion in favour of joining a future EU army (vs. joining NATO)

Total Sample

Would you support Ireland joining a future EU Army? (Total Sample)



■ 54% ■ 46%

Yes Over-indexes among:

18 – 24:	62% *
55 – 64:	64% *
65+:	67% *
Males:	64% *

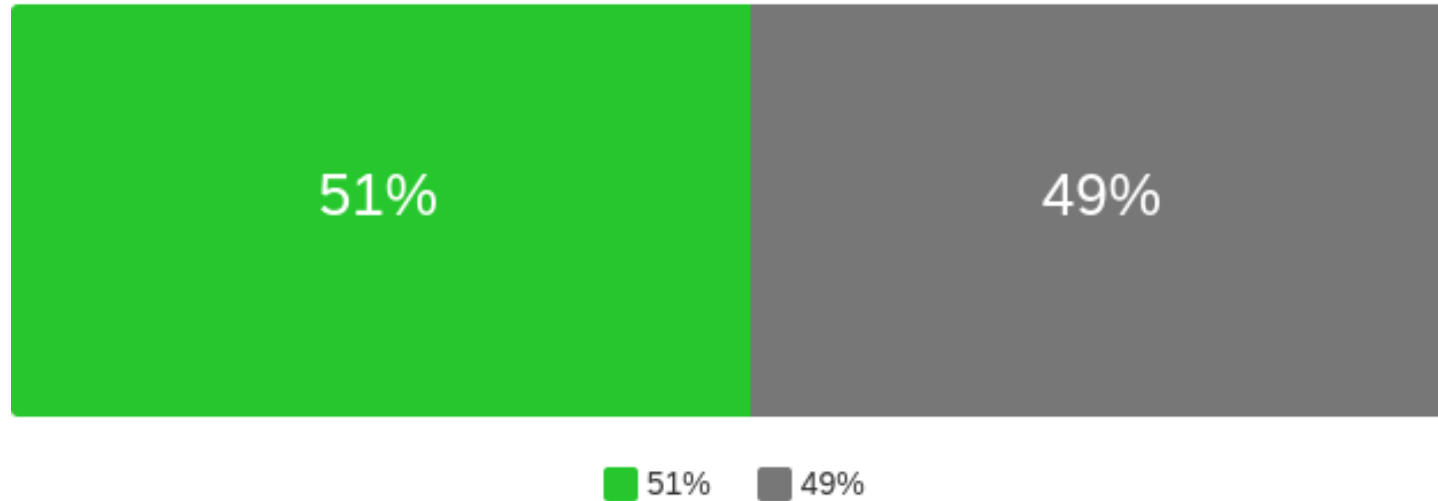
No Over-indexes among:

25 – 34:	52% *
35 – 44:	57% *
Females:	55% *

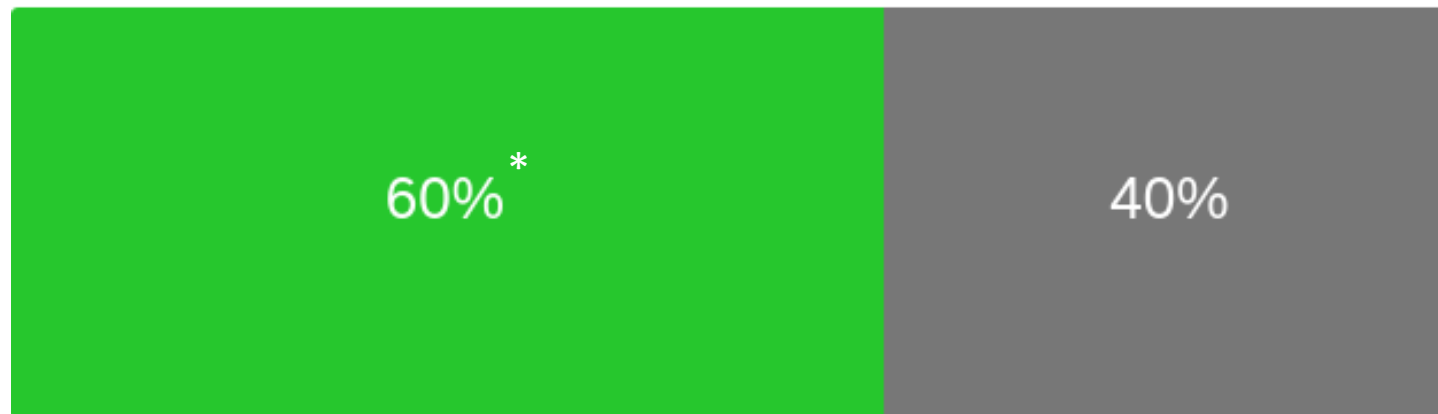
Military narrative significantly increases support for joining a future EU army

Military treatment
vs. Control

Would you support Ireland joining a future EU Army? (Control)



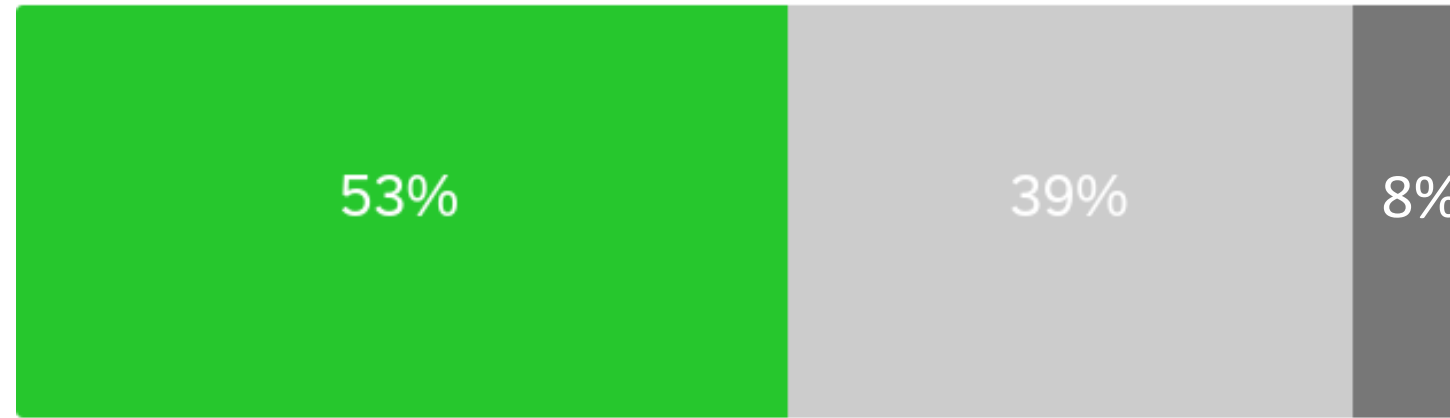
Would you support Ireland joining a future EU Army? (Military Treatment)



There is support for increased military investment

Total Sample

Ireland currently spends 0.3% of GDP on military and defence compared to an EU average of 1.5% (5 times as much). Do you think Ireland's currently level of military spending is (Total Sample):



Note: This reflects views before the Government's July 12th announcement of an increase in Irish defence spending to €1.5 billion by 2028.

■ Too little ■ About right ■ Too much

Too little
over-indexes
among:

55 – 64: 66%*
65+: 76%*
Males: 62%*
ABC1F+: 55%*

About right
over-indexes
among:

18 – 24: 48%*
35 – 44: 50%*
Females: 48%*

Too much
over-indexes
among:

C2DEF-: 12%*

Military narrative significantly drives support for increased military investment

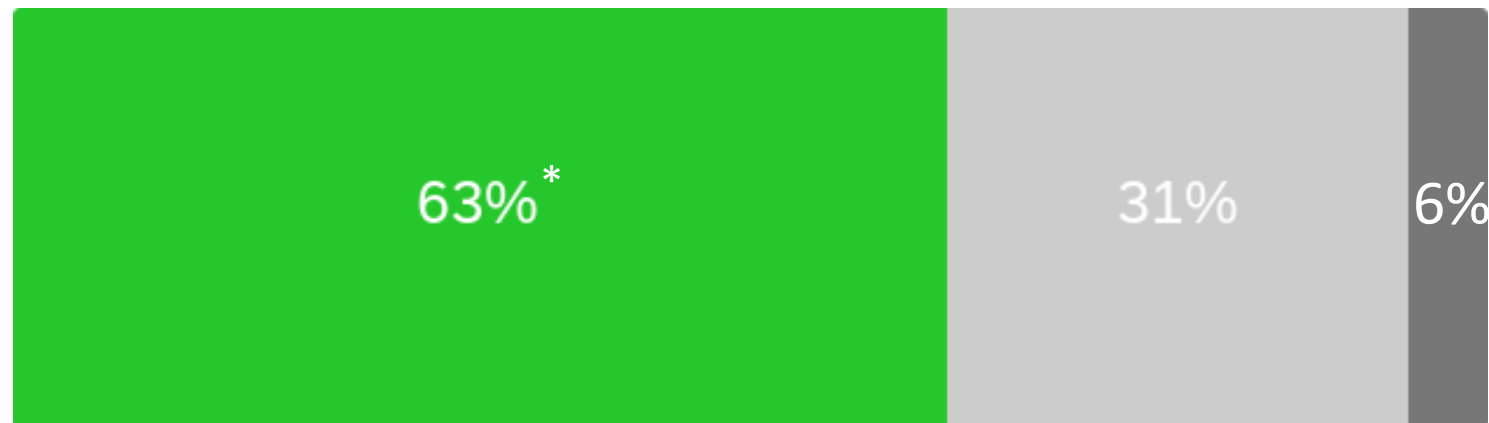
Military treatment
vs. Control

Ireland currently spends 0.3% of GDP on military and defence compared to an EU average of 1.5% (5 times as much). Do you think Ireland's currently level of military spending is (Control):



(Military Treatment)

■ Too little ■ About right ■ Too much

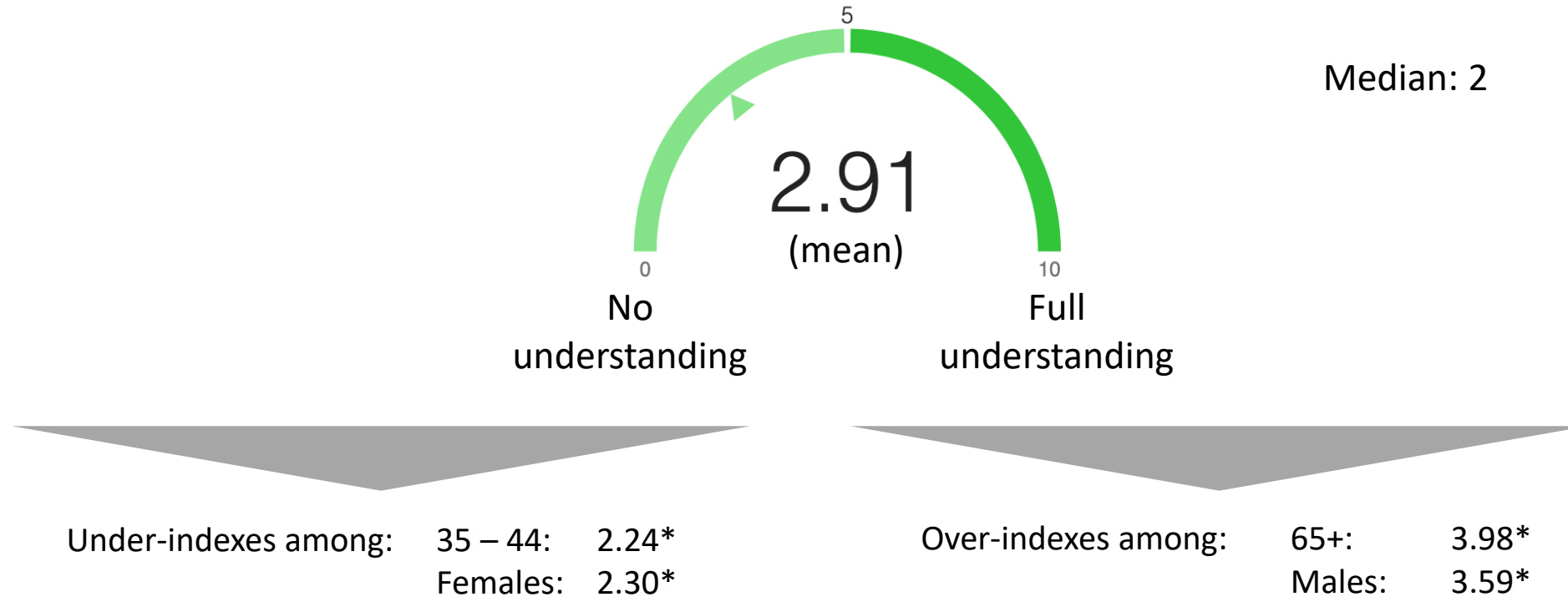


Military treatment sample n = 614. Control sample n = 617. Margin of Error: 3.9%. * = statistically significant at 95%.

Low understanding of the CSDP's primary purpose

Total Sample

How well would you rate your understanding of the CSDP's (Common Security and Defence Policy) primary purpose?



Total sample n = 1,845. Margin of Error 2.3%. * = statistically significant at 95%.

Perspectives

*Based on extent to which people agree or disagree with a
list of attitudinal statements*

Perspectives

We asked people to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the following statements about food insecurity, neutrality and war in Ukraine based on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Net Agree:	Net Disagree:
• <i>I believe Ireland should send military aid to Ukraine</i>	40%	39%
• <i>I believe Ireland's neutrality would keep us safe in the event of a global war</i>	42%	39%
• <i>Ireland remaining neutral is important to be me</i>	63%	18%
• <i>I believe Ireland would be safer if we joined an international military alliance</i>	43%	33%
• <i>Ireland should continue to accept refugees fleeing war from Ukraine and elsewhere</i>	58%	28%

Perspectives

We asked people to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the following statements about food insecurity, neutrality and war in Ukraine based on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Net Agree:

Net Disagree:

• <i>I believe the EU should ban Russian energy imports even if it means higher energy prices in Ireland</i>	60%	22%
• <i>I am worried about the rising cost of food</i>	89%	5%
• <i>I am worried that the war in Ukraine will lead to food shortages and hunger in many countries</i>	83%	9%
• <i>Ireland is safe from the threat of global food insecurity</i>	19%	64%
• <i>I believe that Ireland should stockpile food to prepare for possible food shortages</i>	57%	22%



Thank You

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