



THE FIRST FOREIGN- AND SECURITY POLICY OPINION POLL IN GREENLAND

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Ilisimatusarfik/University of Greenland has conducted a public opinion poll amongst the Greenlandic population on foreign- and security policy issues during November-December 2020. This has been done in cooperation with HS Analyse in Nuuk, Greenland and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Stockholm, Sweden.

Background

Foreign and security policy has become a topical issue in an Arctic context during recent decades, and especially in the last couple of years. The attention paid to the Arctic and Greenland is manifold and relates to issues, such as, climate change, natural resources, new shipping routes, indigenous affairs, geopolitics, and postcolonial contexts. In academia, we see an enhanced literature on the various topics related to Greenland's international role. However, the preferences and attitudes amongst the population are less known. The opinion poll is a first study where a representative sample of Greenlanders have been participating and answering questions about foreign- and security policy. Thus, this poll gives a first indication of what the population actually thinks about international relations and cooperation, as well as challenges in international and Arctic affairs.

Some tentative results show that Greenlanders are not immensely concerned about the geopolitical games that the larger powers are playing in the Arctic (i.e., USA, Russia, and China). This is not seen as a challenge for Greenland by the vast majority. In a comparative perspective, the new geopolitical order in the Arctic has been addressed by other Nordic countries as a major concern. NATO as a security partner is seen as a natural shelter for Greenland. This is related to the fact that the USA still has Pituffik/Thule Air Base at its disposal, even though, this is not a NATO base. Another issue, which is somewhat surprising, is that China is not seen as a major threat. This finding is surprising in a comparative perspective and because China has been debated through negative statements in various Western media outlets. This finding is not totally uniform in a Greenlandic context, however, since some other answers indicate that China is valued lower as a partner in international cooperation than other countries. Foreign- and security policy is generally not a theme that has much attention in the Greenlandic public debates. Results show that Greenlanders tend to be more worried about internal matters, such as, unemployment, the economic situation, and increasing living costs. This is in line with the political debates that are taken place in the parliament, Inatsisartut.

The Survey, Method and Data

The data in the opinion poll is based on telephone interviews conducted by HS Analyse with a representative sample drawn from the Greenlandic population (N = 704). We have tested the representativeness with statistics taken from Greenland Statistics to check for the validity and reliability, and the result is that the participants within the survey are within the normal distribution when it comes to gender, age, education, profession, and place of residence. A list of telephone numbers has been distributed by Tele-Post in Greenland where 6000 numbers with fixed subscriptions, mobile or prepaid subscriptions have been delivered. The survey was available in three languages: Greenlandic, Danish, and English. The questions were formulated by the authors with inspiration from a similar survey conducted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)¹. Another similar report from Iceland is also in progress. We have reused parts of the Norwegian survey for comparative purposes, but also altered and adapted some questions to the Greenlandic context. Other questions of interest have also been added. Only adult persons from age of 18 and over have been able to participate in the survey.

The survey has 17 questions and some background variables. We have followed the Norwegian example as much as possible for comparative inquiry, but questions related to the EU and China have been reduced and instead more questions about e.g., the USA have been included (since the relationship towards USA is historically and presently important in a Greenlandic context). Some questions did not function as well as expected in the survey, especially a question about the effect of Brexit, where most respondents answered “don’t know”. Overall, we have received a satisfactory turnout with a high percentage of answers. The statistical margin of error is between 2.5-3% at a 95% confidence interval.

Greenlandic international relations and challenges

Greenland has had a noteworthy development from colony status back in 1721-1953 to county status from 1953-1978, home rule 1979-2008, and now extended self-government from 2009. During the colonial days, all major decisions in relation to foreign policy were taken in Copenhagen in Denmark. The county status gave Greenland some administrative rights, but Greenland was rarely able to participate within international relations at the time. A notable exemption was the referendum on membership within the EEC in 1972, where a majority of Greenlanders voted against membership, whereas Denmark proper was in favor of membership. Since Greenland only had a county status, the votes were pooled together with the Danish votes, and, hence, Greenland was forced into the EEC together with Denmark against the will of its people. With the introduction of home rule in 1979, Greenland introduced a legislative and executive branch according to the principle of division of power. This led to Greenland convening a new referendum on the membership of the EEC in 1982 and Greenland seceded from the Community three years later. In 1985, after the exit-treaty was ratified, Greenland became an Overseas Country and Territory (OCT), and this is still the situation today in relation to the EU. The OCT framework concerning

¹ See Øyvind Svendsen and Åsmund Weltzien (2020), '*Norwegians Adapting to a Changing World*', NUPI Report nr. 9/2020.

former European colonies and autonomous regions within Member States has existed since the Treaty of Rome in 1957. It provides Greenland direct access to EU programs in addition to some bilateral agreements with the Union in form of a Partnership Agreement in relation to education and iterative fisheries agreements, etc. However, Greenland is not a member of the EU. When asking Greenlanders about if Greenland should cooperate with the EU, 65% answer that Greenland should cooperate more with the Union and only 22.8% answer that Greenland should cooperate less with the EU (12.3% do not know) (see figure 1). In terms of reviving EU-membership, if there would be a referendum regarding rejoining the EU, Greenlanders are somewhat sceptic towards this. In total, 60% are against such a membership, while 40% are for such a membership (see figure 2).

Figure 1: Cooperation with Other Countries and Organizations

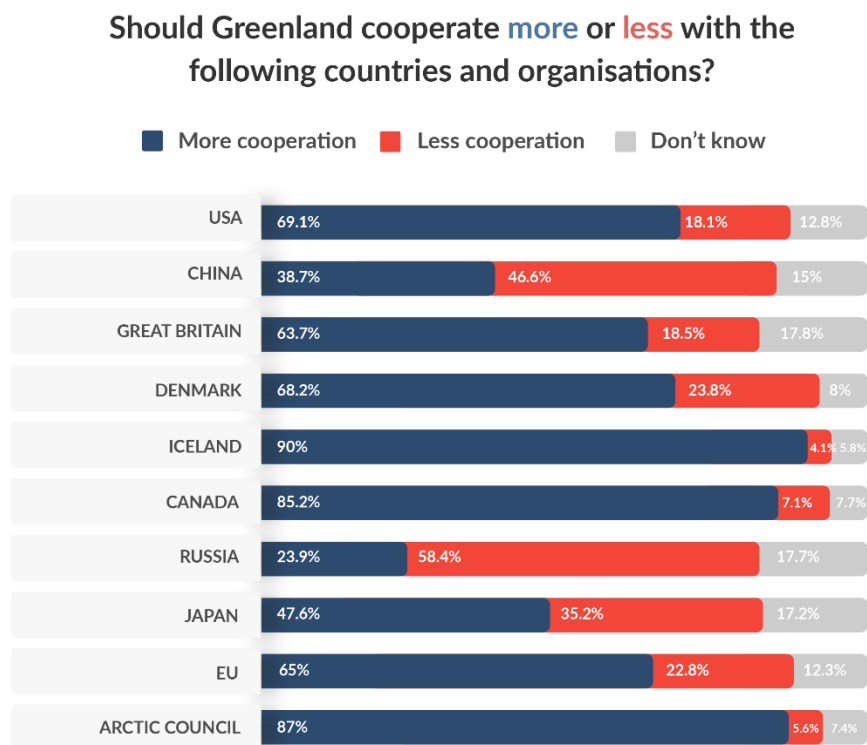


Figure 2: Referendum on Rejoining the EU



The development of self-government has been giving Greenland more room for maneuver within international relations as well. Greenland has possibilities to become a member in international organizations where other actors than states can be members and sign bilateral treaties with foreign powers on, *inter alia*, fishery. In practice, Greenland is involved in foreign policy developments to a larger extent than the *de jure* prerogative in the Danish Constitution of 1953 stipulates. In addition, Greenland partakes in solving many challenges that have been addressed in an Arctic context: climate change, permafrost thawing, natural resources and resources of dual use, as well as negotiated détente on the geopolitical scene with the Ilulissat Declaration in 2008, reaffirmed in 2018, etc. However, when asking Greenlanders which are the three most vital challenges towards the Greenlandic society, the answers show that it is not any of the international challenges that are in focus. Instead, internal, domestic affairs score high with the economic situation (19.5%), unemployment (17.2%), and higher living costs (16.6%) as the three most urgent challenges for the Greenlandic community. Climate change is coming in fourth place (11.3%) (see figure 3). Regarding a more explicit question about perceived security threats, most Greenlanders do not seem to be too concerned. Up to 35.1% of the respondents are evaluating that the security threats are normal or as they used to be. 29.1% see low security threats in relation to Greenland and 17.7% evaluate that there are high security threats (see figure 4). This is in line with the notion that the Arctic is regarded as a low-tension region.

Figure 3: Main Challenges Towards Greenland

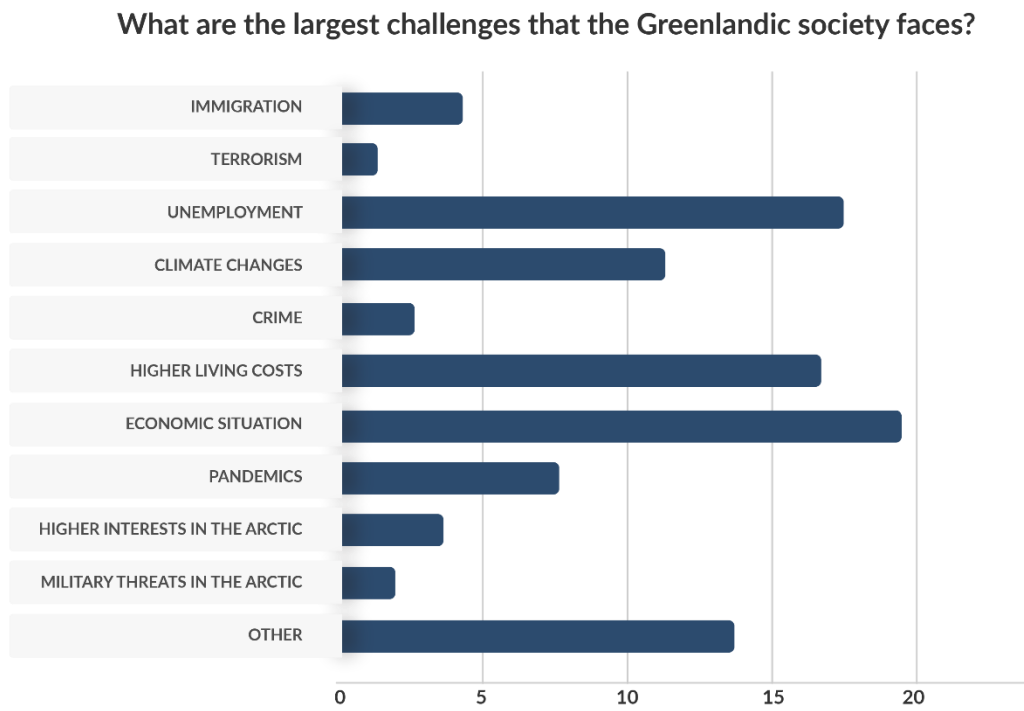
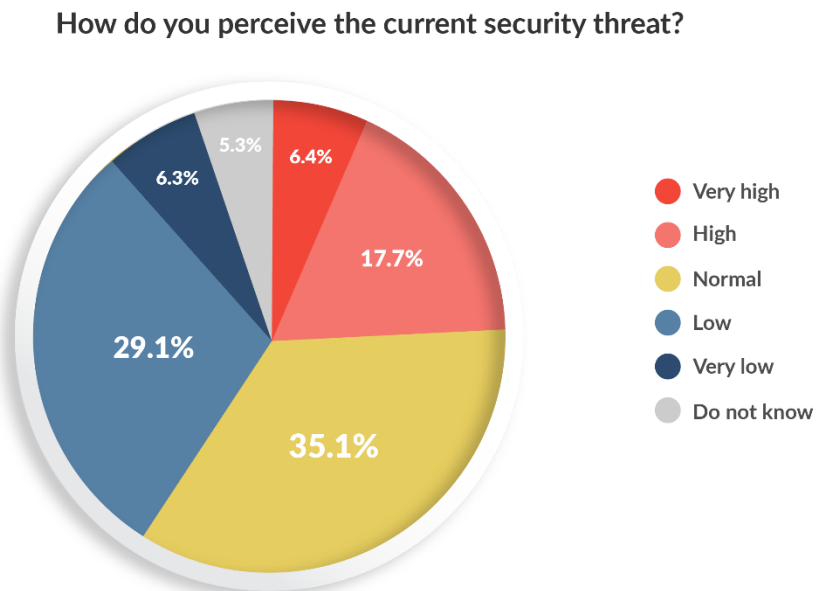


Figure 4: Perceived Security Threats



Greenland and the superpowers

Greenland has been having close relationships with the USA since WWII due to the geostrategic position located between the North American and European continents. Greenland was a strategic outpost during WWII and the Cold War, and the USA established several military bases around Greenland at the time. The only military base left in operation today is the American Thule Air Base, or Pituffik in Greenlandic. The Thule Air Base is an extended arm of the US Air Force and is therefore integrated into the American defense. When the Greenlandic population is asked about more or less cooperation with the USA, 69.1% answer that they would like to see more cooperation with the neighboring superpower. Only 18.1% would like less cooperation and 12.8% do not know (see figure 1). Regarding the question if Greenland should pursue the same policy as the USA in relation to China, Greenlanders are exceedingly more reluctant over following the American policy. Only 18.4% are favoring the same policy as the USA, while 81.6% are against USA's policy towards China (see figure 5). In terms of the question of which possibilities Greenland should follow in security policy, the Greenlandic population show quite a high support for closer cooperation with existing alliances, including USA and NATO (68%) (see figure 6). However, when asked about the relationship and what is most important an interesting result unfolds. The Greenlandic population would like to see a clear standpoint towards USA in relation to foreign- and security policy. 52.6% of the Greenlandic population like to see a clear standpoint, while 37.9% would like better economic relation with the superpower (see figure 7).

Figure 5: USA's Policy Towards China

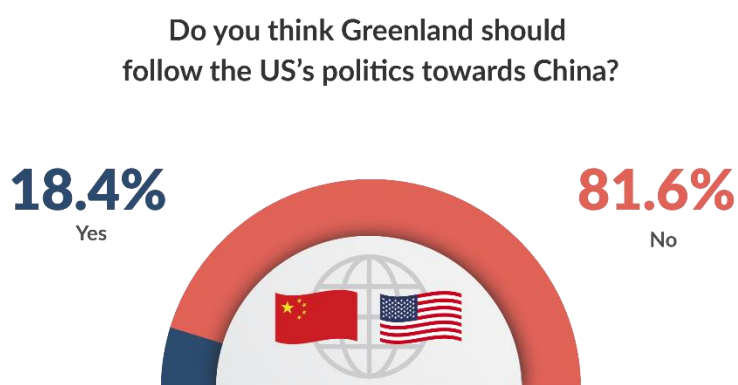


Figure 6: Alliances

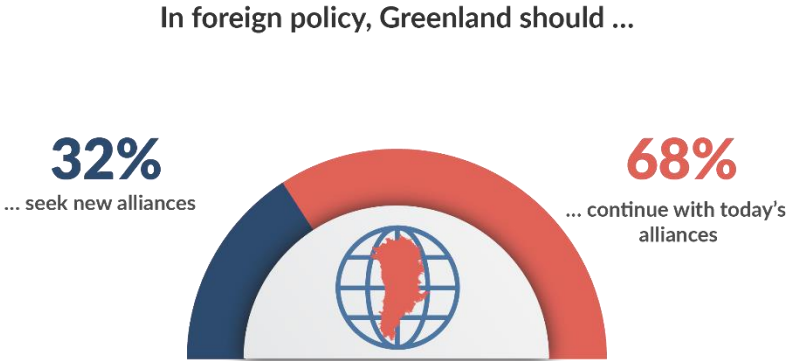
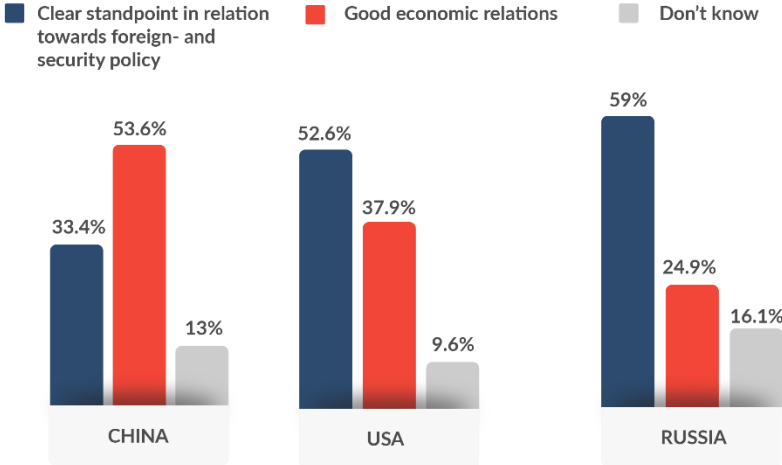


Figure 7: Great Powers

Greenland's relationship towards the great powers



China is becoming more and more interested in the Arctic region and see themselves as a “near-Arctic state”. Officially, China’s interest is usually of scientific and economic character. There are huge interests for investments in extractive industries and to have good scientific relationships with the Arctic states, including Greenland. China has been in the process of becoming an observer in the Arctic Council and after a long process from 2004-2013, China received its observer status at the Kiruna meeting in 2013. Many countries are afraid of China’s development as a superpower in international relations and are very reluctant towards China as a country due to the non-democratic political system and some evidence of the economic dependency situation that some African countries have encountered in their relationships with China. The parts in the survey about China, show that Greenlanders have diverse attitudes to the Asian superpower. Approximately 53% of the Greenlanders see China’s increasing influence in the world as a positive thing, whereas almost 47% see it as a negative thing (see figure 8). However, regarding investments from China, the Greenlandic population is somewhat hesitating. Only 32.2% say yes to Chinese investments, while 67.8% say no thanks to foreign investments from China (see figure 9). Moreover, when looking at how the Greenlandic population look at China’s influence within international organizations many Greenlanders seem positive, 58.1%, while 41.9% are more negative to this (see figure 10). In regard to the question of what is most important in relation to China, most Greenlanders would like to see good economic relations towards China (53.6%), while 33.4% wishes a clear standpoint in relation towards foreign- and security policy (see figure 7). On the one hand, the Greenlandic population see China’s influence in the world and within international organizations as a positive thing, while on the other hand China is evaluated more negatively in relations to economic investments, but still good economic relations are seen as important. In sum, there is not a clear-cut picture in relation to the superpower. It also shows when asking about cooperation where 46.4% would like less cooperation with the superpower, while 38.7% would like more cooperation with China (see figure 1).

Figure 8: *China's Influence in the World*

China's influence in the world is increasing. Do you feel ...



Figure 9: *Investments from China*

China's influence in the world is increasing. Do you feel ...



Figure 10: China's Influence in International Organizations



In relation to Russia, Greenlanders would like to see a clear standpoint towards foreign- and security policy, 59% of the population expresses this will, while 24.9% are in favor of good economic relations. Here we find a sizeable number of 'do not know' of 16.1% (see figure 7). Russia is the major power in the Arctic, but due to the long border in Barents Sea, Russia's main interest are found in the close neighborhoods of Norway and Finland. Occasionally, submarines in the GIUK-gap and close to the Greenlandic east coast pops up in discussions. Greenland and Russia do have some bilateral agreements in place in relation to the fishing industry and cooperation in e.g., the Arctic Council, but there is not otherwise much domestic debate about Russia's whereabouts.

International cooperation and organizations

Greenland has been a pioneer within international cooperation as a sub-national territory since the 1970s and became a member within the EEC back in 1973 together with Denmark and a founding member within ICC (Inuit Circumpolar Council) back in 1977. Greenland has been active within the UN framework, especially within matters related to indigenous issues. Greenland also became a member of the Nordic Council in 1984. Sometimes Denmark has been given Greenland the task to represent the whole Kingdom of Denmark in e.g., the Arctic Council from the mid-1990s. Nowadays, Greenland takes an active part in various organizations and networks, sometimes within the Danish delegation and sometimes as an own polity. Assorted popular sentiments are clearly shown when asking the Greenlanders about cooperation with different international actors, where the Arctic Council (87%), Iceland (90%) and Canada (85.2%) stand out as the most important

partners Greenlanders would like to see more cooperation with (see figure 1). Another question about how Greenland should act within foreign policy, also reveals that Greenland should follow its own interests; 56.7% of the population agree upon that and 43.3% would like to see Greenland cooperate with current alliances (see figure 11). NATO is seen as an overwhelming positive alliance; 75.5% states that NATO is a positive alliance, while only 2.8% see it as a negative alliance. 21.7% of the population see it as neither positive nor negative and are therefore having a neutral standpoint on the issue (see figure 12). In terms of having foreign investments in Greenland most of the population is very positive (27%), positive (31.1%) or both positive and negative (30.6%), while only a small percentage are negative (4.9%) or very negative (1.4%) (see figure 13).

Figure 11: Greenland's Interests in Foreign Policy Cooperation

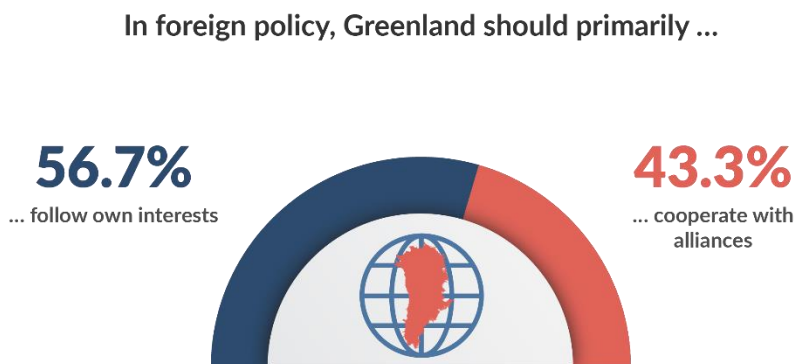


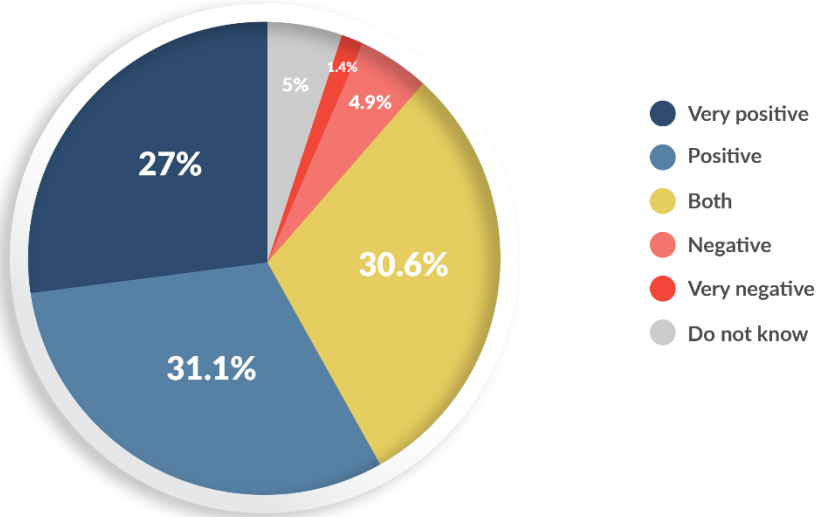
Figure 12: NATO

Do you think NATO is a positive or negative alliance?



Figure 13: FDI in Greenland

What is your opinion about foreign investments in Greenland?



Conclusion

We can conclude that foreign policy is not a salient topic in Greenlandic public debates. The answers to the survey reflect in which context the questions about foreign- and security policy have been addressed, especially towards the great powers. An interesting finding is that Greenlanders' attitudes towards the EU is that they would like to see more cooperation, but at the same time Greenlanders are not willing to take the step to become a member of the Union again. Another issue is that it seems that internal challenges are more prominent in the Greenlandic population's mind than global issues. It is the economic situation, unemployment and rising living costs that are in the forefront, while climate change, immigration, crime, military threats in the Arctic and the like are not seen as any major threat towards the country. Establishing its own military by popular demand is not likely in the near future (see figure 14). The relationship towards the current alliances and the USA are mostly positive, but we also see that Greenlanders would like to see a clear standpoint on foreign- and security policy towards the superpower. A final conclusion is the ambivalent relationship towards China. China is not seen as a threat *per se* in international relations, but at the same time Greenlanders would not necessarily like to cooperate more with the superpower nor see too much foreign investments coming from China. On the other hand, good economic relations are preferred, so there are mixed signals as to how China is perceived by the Greenlandic population. A direct comparison with USA, China, and Russia (cf. figure 7) conveys an interesting finding in regard to the preferences between security and economics vis-à-vis each superpower, which future research should address more carefully. This report is based on the first nation-wide survey but constitutes just a snapshot of what Greenlanders think about foreign- and security policy. There is arguably more research to be done in the area to get a more nuanced picture of the matter. In the future, we hope to conduct regular opinion polls to obtain more knowledge and be able to follow the country's seminal development, as Greenland's international role evolves.

Figure 14: Greenlandic Military

Do you think Greenland should have its own military?

