

MONUMENTS - GHOSTS FROM THE PAST OR A MATTER OF DISCORD FOR ESTONIAN POLICE AND BORDER GUARD CADETS

Kai Veispak-Rawlings

MA, Lecturer, Geo-Politics, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

e-mail: kaiveispak@gmail.com, Tallinn, Estonia

Abstract. *This article first gives a history of and purpose for monuments and memorials. Then, it provides answers through research on what Estonian citizens think about the recent removal of specific objects, emphasizing national security. Many examples are represented from across Finland with the results and feedback of Finnish citizens.*

Empirical research was conducted over a period of three years with anonymous surveys of over 200 border guard officers and students, police officers, and cadets associated with the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences. Direct questions were asked and tabulated. Opinions were also allowed for shade and color of personal thoughts.

The majority agree that the Government has the right and obligation to remove and/or replace monuments that reflect directly on the risks to national security. The sentiment was largely expressed that monuments and statues should be preserved in some non-risk form, when possible, for art and cultural purposes.

Keywords: *cultural opposition, monuments, memorials, national security, removal of monuments.*

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to obtain a broad understanding of citizen attitudes for Government officials tasked with making decisions about removal of monuments. This study, employing empirical research, was conducted over three years to provide definitive opinions on the national security aspects and controversy that envelopes surrounding removal of old statues and monuments. The method used was qualitative research with an open-ended survey. Opened ended questions were asked of Police and Border Guard Officials opinions within their own ranks and what they think the public opinions are. An anonymous questionnaire was used, and the results tabulated.

History and Current Status

Monuments and memorials are a critical cultural practice with a rich history and ongoing significance. From the ancient pyramids of Egypt to the abstract memorials of today, monuments have served as symbols of power, remembrance, and cultural identity. In addition to serving as symbols of remembrance and cultural identity, monuments also have the potential to cause controversy and stir up emotions, ranging from reverence and respect

<https://doi.org/10.17770/bsm.v5i10.8318>

*This journal is distributed with an international license:
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License*



to hate and revenge, which is their primary objective. The types of monuments created are for various purposes, i.e., military - to honor veterans, exceptional leaders, and victories and to remind citizens of past achievements and threats of future problems; arts and culture - to honor and respect the culture of a country or state to instill loyalty and pride in ones belonging. They commemorate a person or event considered monumental; historical - created primarily as a reminder of past events in a country's history, i.e., The Memorial - Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940 - 1991. "Every monument, statue, and plaque is a history record. It says, "Look here, remember this thing/person" (Cudny & Appelblad, 2019) Inspirational - Two sculptures in Tartu explain this category. The kissing monument inspires young love, and the sculptures of Oscar Wilde and Eduard Vilde provide literary inspiration.

"Monuments fulfill different important functions: artistic, symbolic, commemorative, political, social, religious, marketing, and mixed. Additionally, monuments reflect the contemporary transformation of ideas and social orders and contemporary urban debates. They are products of social relations, powers, ideas, identities, and the collective memory reflected in the urban spatial structure of cities. From a spatial perspective, the role of monuments depends on their different impacts on people's perceptions and interpretations of space" (Cudny & Appelblad, 2019)

From the Artistic point of view, the famous saying, Beauty is in the eye of the beholder is essential. "If you say that something such as beauty or art is in the eye of the beholder, you mean that it is a matter of personal opinion. (Collins English Dictionary). Some would designate a battle tank as offensive, and others would herald it as an aspect of state security. The state must solve the issue of whether it creates animosity or respect among the citizens. Can a monument of a battle tank inspire anarchy and lead to a threat to National Security?

The replacement of the Bronze Soldier created the most significant backlash in Estonia. Questions were formulated in the research to understand Estonian sentiments about this event. The recent replacement of the Narva battle Tank monument with a museum has also created debate amongst the citizenries.

Finland has been systematically removing statues of Lenin. According to historian Jussi Jalonen, the statue debate was related to the effort to shake off the last shreds of Finlandization. "The Lenin statue in Turku is by no means the only statue of Lenin that has disappeared from Finland's street scene. After Russia started the war of aggression against Ukraine, Lenin's monuments became a topic of discussion in several cities. Finland's last Lenin statue was removed from Kotka in October 2022" (Hjelt & Perenimi, 2023).

Petri Laukka, a Finnish Political Historian, writes, "Statues are being torn down in Europe. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, monuments of the Red Army from the Soviet Union have been vandalized during the summer. The Baltic countries are easy to understand; the statues and stone columns are warrior monuments erected in their honor by the occupying state of 1944-1991. The same occupier attacked Ukraine half a year ago. Destroying statues is not common in democracies. The statue of Tsar Alexander II still adorns the Senate Square in Helsinki from 1894, who granted freedoms to Finns, which Poles wonder about. The tsar bloodily defeated Poland's dreams of independence and made it a Vistula province. The old-fashioned ruler who gave Finland the markka and national school erased Poland from the map. In countries with rare rulers, busts fell as soon as the former ruler could be pushed aside. In Moscow, the statue of Alexander II was torn down as a sign of the change of power in 1918. Vladimir Putin ordered a new one for his second term in 2005" (Laukka, 2022). Laukka also described - "The funniest case happened on the Karelian Isthmus in Vammelsuu in the 1950s. The Soviet Government destroyed the small, inconspicuous Tomb of Love monument. It was a bronze sculpture of a young woman, and a teddy bear placed on a natural stone in the middle of the forest. It was a completely innocent rebellion but represented wrong thinking. Moscow was afraid that the new Soviet citizens who had settled on the Isthmus, taken from Finland, would have started to ask about the background of the monument. Removing the sculpture was safer than leaving it open to question, as this is how power cuts history into pieces."

The last statue of Lenin in Finland was moved. According to journalist Minna Kaipainen, "A statue of Lenin made by the Estonian sculptor Matti Varik stood in a hidden park in the center of Kotka. The first bombs of the Winter War fell on these corners in November 1939, when the Soviet Union launched an attack against Finland without a declaration of war. The Lenin statue was received as a gift in 1979 from Tallinn, Kotka's sister city, which was part of the Soviet Union then. The statue has been the target of vandalism several times and has been vandalized. The statue was moved to a museum by the initiative of both the council and the municipality. The initiatives suggest that the statue was moved to the provincial museum because it offends the memory of people who died as victims of Soviet war crimes." (Kaipainen, 2022).

Qualitative Research Questions and Analysis

The following research was conducted using written responses from students of EASS. The ages and experience represent a cross-section of senior long-term officers to new cadets. The students were asked three questions:

1. Who do you think are the people against the Soviet monuments in Estonia?
2. Who do you think are the people for keeping the monuments?
3. What is your own opinion?

As Police and Border Guard officers are taught and engage in profiling and cultural issues to perform their enforcement functions more efficiently, the questions were worded for them to reflect on the opinions of others. The first section summarizes exact quotes from each of the three categories.

The total number of respondents was 202 with 144 male, 58 female, 28 Russian and 174 Estonian. Of the 58 females, 9 were Russian and 49 were Estonian. Of the 144 male respondents, 125 were Estonian and 19 were Russian.

Answers

The following is a selection of the most common and some of the most interesting and surprising answers.

Symbols:

- P Boy
- G Girl
- R Russian
- E Estonian

1. Who do you think are the people against the Soviet monuments in Estonia?	
BE	Right-wing activists, communities who have suffered during the Soviet time. Artists and architects.
BE	Estonians and integrated Russians.
BE	People who grew up in Estonian speaking environment
GE	People who think the monuments arouse anger among people.
GE	People who see them as praise to the Soviet Union and its power.
GE	People who do not want to remember the occupation and WWII.
GE	Those who don't have anyone to reminisce about them.
BE	Those who feel these monuments are not part of our country are negative.
GE	Many Estonians, especially those who suffered repressions in the Soviet Union. Young people see it as something backward.
GE	Those who are against Russian propaganda and those who suffered repressions in the Soviet Union.
BE	Estonians who feel that the monuments worship totalitarian regimes and remind them of deportations.
GE	Those for who the monuments symbolize communism. Also, it brings the Ukrainian war to mind.
GE	People for whom the monuments are old and unimportant.
GE	People who don't want to be reminded of sad events. Our government after the beginning of the Ukrainian war.

BE	Estonians for whom the monuments symbolize occupation and suffering.
BE	Estonians who cannot stand Russia
GE	Those who remember how dangerous Russia is.
GE	People who see monuments as symbols of the Russian regime. People who it has hurt.
BR	I cannot read people's minds.
BR	For some people, their meaning has changed over time; before, it was good, but now it isn't good.
GR	Those who think the place of the dead is in the cemetery. The Soviet Union killed their relatives.
BE	Many sufferings are related to the Soviet Union and the Red Army.
GE	Used in the propaganda war
BE	Estonian speakers, if we leave them, it leaves the impression that we are grateful for what the Russians did.
BE	Why should we glorify Russian heroes?
BE	We live in Estonia, not in Russia
BE	Those for whom they symbolize suffering
BR	Some Estonians, not all, because it is also a memory for many. Government because of politics.

2. Who do you think are the people for keeping the monuments?

BE	Russian-minded organizations, Russia need a reason to instigate riots - Russians who consider their victory in the war sacred.
BE	Russians who do not feel they are part of our society but want to enjoy our benefits.
BE	People who grew up in a Russian-speaking environment want to remember their past.
GE	Those who consider it an essential part of history and want to reminisce about some people.
GE	People who want to reminisce. Plus, those who want to live under Russian power and Putin.
GE	Those who want to remember the people killed in the war.
GE	Those who want to remember their relatives. Mostly Russian speakers.
GE	Russians and Russian-minded people, art historians, and cultural heritage keepers.
GE	Those Russian speakers who lived here during the Soviet Union.
BE	Russians who feel that it is part of their identity. They think the Soviet Union was a good time.
GE	Russians living in Estonia feel that the monuments justify their activities - monuments used as Russian propaganda.
GE	People who respect their original meaning.
GE	People for whom the monuments symbolize Russia's victory over Estonia.
BE	Russians who do not identify themselves as Estonians; for them, it is a piece of Russia.
BE	Russian-minded people.
GE	People who are grateful to Russia for something. Russian-minded people.
GE	People who bow to Russia and Putin and consider Russia as their homeland.
BR	I cannot read people's minds.

BR	They symbolize that we don't want the war to happen again.
GR	Those who feel that they are part of this history.
BE	Those whose relatives fought in WWII.
BE	Part of their identity.
BE	To remind Russian-minded people what Russia has done to Estonia.
3. What is your own opinion?	
6 boys Estonians	Must be blown up. It would serve them right, considering what they did to Estonians and what they are doing to Ukrainians.
BR	They have historical value. It should be collected in one place.
BE	They must be removed because they remind us of evil. Us tolerating them would be the same as Jews tolerating swastikas. Russians living here must decide whether they belong to the east or west.
BE	Must be in museums to remind us what happened.
BE	Must be removed or destroyed. But if they are dedicated to someone, they may be kept.
BE	Must be kept but rebuilt into something neutral, with no foreign symbols. We need to remember what happened. Soviet monuments should be hidden. We must not forget history.
GE	They should be removed, but democratically, after a discussion.
GE	They should be redesigned, and the Russian language should be removed.
GR	Destruction would create anger. Part of our history and do not make current adverse events. They should be kept.
GE	They should be removed and kept in a museum with a lengthy description of what was done to Estonians by the Soviet Union. Occupant's power should not be worshipped!
GE	They could stay if they didn't cause terrorism.
GE	I don't understand why we need to reminisce about people who were killed but were not of our nationality.
BE	100% should be taken away. They should not be in our country.
GE	Earlier, I thought they could be kept. Now, because of Russian aggressive behavior, I think they should be demolished.
GE	They should be taken away. They are like Russian propaganda and against democracy. I think that people who are trying to keep the monuments are living in the wrong country.
BE	Monuments should be repurposed to reminisce deported Estonians.
GE	Should be removed and replaced by happier monuments.
GE	I am afraid of Russia's response when we remove the monuments.
BE	Monuments should be in a museum. Russians can go and see them there. They really believe that those tanks brought us freedom.
BE	Should be removed. I don't want to see Russia's monuments in my country.
GE	It is better not to have places where Russian-minded people can gather and create havoc.
GE	They should be removed because we live in Estonia and have nothing to do with Russia. They destroyed our lives in the past and are now doing it in Ukraine.
BR	I am a police officer, and I act according to the law. I will never betray Estonia.
BR	I don't care. We should relate them to current events.
GR	They should be gathered in one place so we can keep an eye on the supporters

	of aggression.
BE	They should not be in Estonia, which brought a lot of suffering to my family and other families.
GE	They should not be there because they reminisce about the Red Army and the Russian war in Ukraine.
GE	Removal is proper. They remind me of the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian war.
BE	I don't mind them. Getting rid of them may arouse Russian anger.
BE	They should be rebuilt, and the correct information should be added.
BE	Why should we glorify the country that creates more dead bodies every day?
BE	To be removed, they are propaganda tools.
GE	They should be hidden somewhere and replaced by Estonian monuments.
BE	Those who want them may go to Russia and look at them.
BE	They should be removed. Estonia should show it will never want to be occupied again.
BR	They should be moved fast because people get drunk on the 9 of May, even if they had nothing to do with the war. Also, they may create riots.

Sampling

The following is a sampling of the responses selected to reflect a cross-section of all reactions.

BR	<p>1. Historical value: the past is reflected through Soviet monuments, and their destruction may seem like an attempt to erase or rewrite the past.</p> <p>2. Commemorating the victims: Some monuments are dedicated to the memory of people who died in wars and repressions and tearing them down can seem disrespectful to the memory of those people.</p> <p>3. Cultural Heritage: Many of these monuments are works of art and are important to cultural heritage.</p>
GE	I think people who want red monuments see them as a symbol of the past, for example, representing struggle and victory in history.
GE	I think that people don't want red monuments because they associate them with violence and other violations of human rights. They want to stay away from events that happened in history or not bring them into modern life. Although red monuments have different meanings for people, and maybe I am too young to express an opinion and make good arguments, I still think that there should be no red monuments in Estonia. They symbolize a totalitarian regime that has caused much pain and suffering to many people.
GR	I am aware of why many non-Estonians want the red monuments preserved where they are placed. This is for a certain reason - namely, for them, red monuments are a symbol of peace. The red monument is like a grave or a memorial commemorating those who died or suffered in the Second World War. There are certainly Estonians for whom the red monuments are of historical importance. On the other side are the Estonians, for whom the red monuments remind us of the loss of freedom. Also, red monuments can be offensive to those who suffered under the communist regime. I think they should be removed from the street scene but could be preserved in a museum. I believe that they have their own historical value and that we can learn from

	history. The stories of these monuments must be used so that historical events do not repeat themselves.
BE	Historical aspect: People (mainly of Russian nationality) go there to commemorate their loved ones. Why don't you want the monuments to be preserved? They remind people of the time of occupation, gathering places for pro-Russian people, and Russian aggression in Ukraine. My own opinion - I think that these monuments and symbols should not be displayed in public spaces in Estonia, and all symbols related to the occupation or glorifying Russia should be prohibited.
BE	Probably because many people's ancestors fought in the Red Army in World War II, and Red Monuments are memorials made for fallen Red Army soldiers, people want to keep this memory. Why don't we want red monuments in Estonia? I think that since a lot of the suffering that is related to Estonia or Estonia is related to the Red Army and the Soviets, it is logical that people do not want monuments related to this ugly history to be located in Estonia. I think that there should be no red monuments in Estonia because, as said before, the Red Army and the Soviet power have brought suffering to my ancestors and to other people's ancestors.
GE	This creates conflicts and confusion in society and also in the interpretation of history. They seem to show that the occupation of Estonian territories by Russia was the right thing to do, but in fact, it is not. For pro-Russian people, these are important monuments, reminding them of the Soviet Union. Many pro-Russians still prefer to belong to so-called Russia. My personal opinion? I think they should be removed, especially since Russia is currently at war with Ukraine. They want to occupy the territories of Ukraine in the same way as they once occupied our country - this is not right. Also, red monuments are bad for me; why commemorate those who came to take over our country by force? In my opinion, occupation is in no way justified.
GE	Some people want the red monuments to be where they are because it helps them to remember and commemorate important people who have fought in some historical event, for example. They want the monuments to remain, as they are usually installed near or in honor of the place where the events took place. On the other hand, people don't want the red monuments to be where they are because they can symbolize humiliation for the local people, etc., so they want them not to be from the places where they are. So, local people don't like the glorification of events whose commemoration might bring up hurtful memories. I think that changing the locations of the red monuments is okay if it does not harm anyone's interests. People who are interested in commemorating an event could still do so. Everyone's interests must be considered, but the love of Estonia and the sense of security in the homeland are still more important.
BR	Historical Significance: Red monuments often mark important events or figures in history, be it revolutions, wars, or important political leaders. For some people, these monuments help to preserve and pass on historical heritage and recall important moments from the past. Tribute: Red monuments can be a way to honor and remember those who have fought or sacrificed their lives for certain principles, ideas, or values. Usually, they can be memorials to fallen soldiers or cultural leaders. Historical interpretation: Some people may find red monuments distasteful or offensive because they may represent past

	<p>events or ideologies that conflict with their own beliefs. For example, people may feel an aversion to monuments that honor well-known figures of an authoritarian regime. Contextual issues: Red monuments may be erected in a certain historical context, which may change over time. Symbolic Meaning: Some people may feel that red monuments symbolize past events or ideologies associated with violence, oppression, or discrimination. Such monuments can create negative emotions and opposition to their preservation.</p>
Yemeni girl	<p>Why do some people want to get rid of Soviet-era monuments? For some people, Soviet-era monuments represent a political symbol. That is, for them, they represent the kind of totalitarian regime that involved human rights abuses, violence, censorship, repression, authoritarian rule, and all kinds of deportations by the Reds. For some, the monuments may remind them of the historical tragedy that accompanied the era when Russia ruled the Republic of Estonia. For some, it is a question of identity, and they want to get rid of them in order to shape their country's identity and historical narrative. My opinion. To me, Soviet-era monuments are important to some extent because they remind me of what Estonia was like in the past and what Estonia is like now. These are signs that even if we were once under the Soviet Union, it did not stop us from winning our freedom. This shows that we achieved our great goal, which was the Republic of Estonia, but at the same time, we lost human lives, and these memorials can be used to remember and pay respect to them. At the same time, it is a question of identity, and the past is part of our identity. It doesn't matter how bad it might have been, and it turned Soviet Estonia into the current Republic of Estonia. For me, Soviet-era monuments are not at all a mark of shame, on the contrary.</p>
BR	<p>I cannot give an exact answer to the question of why some are in favor of demolishing red monuments and others are against demolishing them. I don't know what thoughts people have in their souls, hearts, and heads. I also don't want to fantasize or invent anything. A good police officer must act according to facts, orders, and laws. Personally, I do what the state tells me. I swore loyalty to the Republic of Estonia and will never betray the fatherland. Why do they want red monuments? Red monuments are rather wanted by persons of Russian nationality to commemorate the old regime. Rather, it is about pro-Russian persons. Why don't we want red monuments? You don't want red monuments because people who are against the Russian regime and feel disgusted by what happened in history don't want red monuments in the Republic of Estonia because we live in Estonia, not Russia. My opinion: I think that there should not be any red monument in Estonia that would justify and commemorate a regime or war that existed in history. If people miss these monuments, they can go to Russia and see them there.</p>
GE	<p>Why do they want to preserve the red monuments? - Red monuments are part of history and memory. People mourn their dead. This is an important place for parts of society. Why do some people not want to? Reminds Estonians of the invasion of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Republic of Estonia. My opinion - I think that if they didn't have such a big impact on terrorism, they could stay put or be in a museum somewhere.</p>
BE	<p>Why some want to get rid of them: Because they assume that they are a redundant memory of what was and is not good for the present time. Because it is already past and, to some extent, inciting anger. Why do some want them</p>

	to stay? Because they like the messages conveyed by these monuments or simply want to preserve history, there are also those who support that era and respect these monuments. My opinion: My opinion is that everything should be removed as soon as possible because now we are Free Estonia, and these monuments should have no place here. They are part of our history but not something that we should directly remember.
GE	Why do people want to get rid of red monuments? According to some people, red monuments in public spaces incite the negative pressure of the Soviet era and can psychologically traumatize those who have previously experienced the way of life of the era. Why don't some want to? According to the opinion of the other party, monuments are an important part of the country's culture and history. Monuments are often dedicated to persons who died in battle or in another dignified way, which is why it is considered important to remember and honor them. My opinion. In my humble opinion, formed with little background research, it would be a better idea to remove red monuments from urban spaces or redesign them. I think it would be a good idea to place the monuments in museums to satisfy the masses who don't want the memorial stones destroyed. At the same time, those who do not want to see red monuments in broad daylight in parks or other public spaces could agree with the idea. In my eyes, as a representative of Generation Z, the memorial stones remind more of pride in communism than commemoration and moving forward from the so-called dark times. At least the writing on the monuments should not be in Russian - such a change is easy to make. However, I do not want to say that honoring the hero in the form of monuments is not pointless. Still, I think that monuments do not represent Estonian society correctly.

Summary and Conclusion

Qualitative research is not an 'absolute' method but must be used when public discourse and information need to be heard, discussed and debated. The author kept an open mind as much as possible to allow an entire discourse to take place. The article contains a cross-section of all answers to enable the reader to draw their conclusions.

To summarize, the article emphasizes the relevance of considering the historical worth, cultural legacy, and cultural importance of monuments in Estonia.

Certain individuals advocate for the preservation of monuments as they serve as a means of remembrance and commemoration for significant individuals who participated in historical events. These monuments are believed to safeguard and transmit historical legacy, commemorate significant events from the past, and pay tribute to individuals who have bravely battled or made sacrifices for specific ideals, ideas, or values. Nevertheless, certain individuals may perceive monuments as objectionable or provocative, as they may symbolize historical occurrences or ideologies that contradict their personal convictions. Contextual difficulties may also emerge, as the historical conditions surrounding the construction of

monuments may clash with contemporary ideals or perspectives. Symbolic significance may also be a consideration, as certain individuals may perceive monuments as representing historical occurrences or ideologies linked to aggression, subjugation, or prejudice.

There is a desire among certain individuals to remove Soviet-era monuments because of their association with a totalitarian period characterized by human rights violations, violence, censorship, repression, authoritarian governance, and mass deportations carried out by the Communist authorities. Some argue that these monuments no longer embody the principles of their community and that political perspectives evolve with time. Monuments play a crucial role in honoring and commemorating historical events, as they are integral to Estonia's identity and its connection to the past. Overwhelmingly the Estonian respondents look at those who want to keep the monuments as the 'others', and the Russian respondents support keeping the monuments as a humanistic approach.

References

1. Collins English Dictionary. (n.d.). *In the eye of the beholder*. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/in-the-eye-of-the-holder#:~:text=If%20you%20say%20that%20something,the%20eye%20of%20the%20beholder>
2. Cudny, W., & Appelblad, H. (2019). Monuments and their functions in urban public space. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift. Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 73(5), 273-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2019.1694976>
3. Kaipainen, M. (2024, September 14). Tässä on viimeinen Lenin-patsas Suomen katukuvassa – Venäjä-tutkija ihmettelee, miksi ne halutaan karrätä piiloon: "En ymmärrä logiikkaa". *Yle*. Retrieved from <https://yle.fi/a/3-12434662>
4. Laukka, P. (2024, September 14). Häviätäänkö vanhat neukkupatsaat myös Suomesta – vai olisiko jokin muu keino? *Kaleva*. Retrieved from <https://www.kaleva.fi/havitetaanko-vanhat-neukkupatsaat-myos-suomesta-va/4905279>
5. Hjelt, Y. (2024, September 14). Palaako Leninin patsas Turun katukuvaan? Hallinto-oikeus kumosi Turun pormestarin päätöksen Lenin-patsaan poistamisesta. *Yle*. Retrieved from <https://yle.fi/a/74-20057766>