

# Political cycles in military deployment

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What determines the number of troops a country deploys? A rather extensive literature already exists on these determinants. The factors are typically divided into domestic- and conflict-related aspects. The latter group of factors can largely be labelled as international security concerns. These concerns are measured by variables such as the proximity and the intensity of the conflict, but also by the number of refugees or internally displaced people caused by the conflict<sup>2</sup>. For example, there is a positive relationship between conflict intensity and deployment of troops. The former group relates to characteristics of the deploying country and traditionally includes socio-economic factors such as the relative wealth of a country, trade interests in the receiving country, and population and/or military personnel<sup>3</sup>. For example, wealthier as well as larger countries (in terms of population) seem to send more troops abroad (in absolute numbers). Our research adds to this literature by studying the effect of political variables of the deploying country. Does the timing of elections and government ideology affect the number of troops a country deploys? Several studies have already supported the significance of these political variables in explaining patterns in defence spending. Since military deployment is a very salient aspect of military spending, we hypothesise that these variables also influence deployment.

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<sup>2</sup> See studies such as: Bellamy, A. J., & Williams, P.D. (2013). Introduction. In: Alex J. & Paul D. Williams (ed.) Providing Peacekeepers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-22; Du Bois, C., Buts, C., & Raes, S. (2015). Post-Somalia syndrome: does it exist? Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy, 21(4), 515-522.

<sup>3</sup> See studies such as: Gaibulloev, K., Sandler, T., & Shimizu, H. (2009). Demands for UN and non-UN Peacekeeping. Nonvoluntary versus Voluntary Contributions to a Public Good. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 53(6), 827-852.

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The theoretical framework for our research questions is provided by political cycle theories. These theories either use electoral or partisan motives to explain the cycles. Electoral theories suggest that the moment in the electoral cycle has a large effect on policy choices and hence on government spending<sup>4</sup>. The underlying reasoning is that close to elections, politicians will be driven by the objective of re-election and will re-orientate government spending towards more visible spending. Since voters are likely to be more concerned about employment, politicians will increase spending on social programs before elections and hence, will decrease military spending. In this way, electoral cycles are translated into political (budget) cycles. Partisan theories, however, pose that ideological concerns primarily drive policy choices and government spending<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, political cycles occur when the government ideology changes. Since military spending is typically assumed to be less-distributive than other forms, left-wing governments are expected to allocate a relatively smaller proportion to military spending than right-wing governments.

To empirically test our research questions, we combine data on military deployment, the control variables suggested by the literature on troop supply and data on national elections. We opt for a sample containing all OECD member states<sup>6</sup> during the period from 1990 until 2014 and test multiple empirical models<sup>7</sup>.

All our tests support the electoral theories and show that countries deploy significantly fewer troops in an election year compared to non-election years. We also find that having a rather central administration negatively affects troop deployment. At first glance, this effect on troop deployment from more central governments contradicts the partisan theory that expects right-wing governments to send more troops. One possible explanation for our results is that most 'right' governments in Europe are rather centre-right<sup>8</sup>. Another argument for our results is that military spending can be a welfare policy in disguise.

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<sup>4</sup> Rogoff, K. (1990). Equilibrium Political Budget Cycles. *American Economic Review*, March 1990, 21-36.

<sup>5</sup> Dubois, E. (2016). Political business cycles 40 years after Nordhaus. *Public Choice*, 166(1), 235-259.

<sup>6</sup> We include only those countries for which information is available in the Comparative Political Dataset (Klaus, A., Isler, C., Knöpfel, L., Weisstanner, D., & Engler, S. (2016). Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2014, Bern: Institute of Political Science, University of Berne). Furthermore, Iceland is excluded as they do not maintain a standing army.

<sup>7</sup> The choice for this period follows from the availability of data on UN peacekeeping missions at the International Peace Institute and data availability in the Comparative Political Dataset.

<sup>8</sup> Eichenberg, R.C., & Stoll, R. (2003). Representing Defense: democratic control of the defense budget in the US and Western Europe. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 47(4), 399-422.

Military expenditure could positively influence employment growth and is thus welfare enhancing. Due to these welfare effects of military expenditure, the role of ideology on military spending is more complicated than simple left-right. However, it also tends to stimulate inflation which can induce more right-wing governments to decrease military expenditure<sup>9</sup>. Hence, while our results clearly show the negative effect of elections on deployment, they also indicate that the effect of ideology is more complicated than a simple left-right dichotomy.

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<sup>9</sup> Whitten, G.D., & Williams, L.K. (2011). Buttery guns and welfare hawks: the politics of defense spending in advanced industrial democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(1), 117-134.