

The Character and Origins of Military Attitudes on the Use of Force*

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Abstract

Do military and civilian attitudes on the use of force differ and, if so, why? Past scholarship is divided not only on whether decision-makers with military experience are more hawkish but also in whether differences stem from organizational selection or socialization. We contribute to these debates through a unique opportunity to survey incoming military officers at the US Military Academy before and after basic training – and pair the results with simultaneous surveys of a nationally representative sample. We find that future military elites are more hawkish than civilians, the gap is evident upon arrival, and initial socializing experiences cannot explain the gap. Numerous tests addressing potential socialization effects over a longer period reveal that experience may attenuate hawkishness but that it is insufficient to offset initial differences. The results indicate that preexisting attitudes shape the groups into which elites select as much as experiences in those groups shape attitudes.

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A conventional wisdom holds that past experience in military organizations likely affects an individual's foreign policy attitudes, particularly regarding the use of force. International relations (IR) scholars suggest these effects are sufficiently large to generate a gap in the beliefs and behaviors of elite decision-makers with and without military experience—be they bureaucrats inside military organizations (Huntington, 1957; Narang and Talmadge, 2018), senior military advisers (White, 2021), or even political leaders (Weeks, 2014; Horowitz and Stam, 2014).

Despite a generally held view that elites with military experience possess distinct foreign policy attitudes, existing research offers contradictory theoretical expectations in two ways. First, the field disputes *how* military attitudes on the use of force differ. Some suggest that those with military experience hold foreign policy attitudes less permissive of the use of force (Gelpi and Feaver, 2002). Huntington (1957, p. 69-70) advanced the view that military elites are more conservative in their support for military action. Others argue the opposite, suggesting that elites with military experience hold beliefs more permissive of interstate violence (Weeks, 2014; Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik, 2015), particularly when lacking combat experience (Horowitz and Stam, 2014). Second, the reasons *why* military elites exhibit attitudinal differences on the use of force are similarly contested. One camp emphasizes socialization, noting that military organizations have functional incentives to improve performance by exposing members to common experiences that alter member attitudes—often in short order.¹ Another camp emphasizes selection. As an interview-based study of US soldiers during the Cold War describes, relatively little “rubs off” during military training and “much of what *appears* to be the product of the training is, more accurately, a function of what the trainee himself brought into that environment” (Karsten, 1978, p. 21).

Identifying the relative importance of selection and socialization helps clarify the microfoundations of prominent studies tracing elite behavior to military backgrounds (Weeks, 2014; Horowitz and Stam, 2014). For instance, is the hawkish behavior of generals such as Douglas MacArthur or leaders such as Muammar Qaddafi attributable to hawkish attitudes that induced them to select into military service, that they formed during military service, or some interaction of the two? While elite military attitudes have long been an object of empirical inquiry (Holsti, 1999; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004), their study faces a significant limitation: surveys of military elites observe their foreign policy attitudes well into their careers. These approaches struggle to empirically adjudicate between socialization and selection mechanisms, which could exert reinforcing or countervailing effects.

¹See Snyder (1989, p. 28-9); Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik (2015, p. 985).

We contribute to these debates by developing a theoretical framework that situates the potentially reinforcing or countervailing effects of selection and socialization. We then study a sample that allows us to directly investigate the interconnected questions of the nature and origin of military attitudes on force. First, seizing access to incoming US military officer candidates at West Point on an unprecedented scale, we conduct a survey of these future military officers *before* and *after* they undergo potentially attitude-shaping experiences early in their careers, paired with a simultaneous survey administered to a nationally representative sample of US adults. In the first wave of the study, respondents completed the surveys on the cadets' first full day of basic training. The design enables us to compare civilian and military responses at time of organizational entry, directly measuring selection effects. Inferences drawn from this sample are especially valuable—these incoming officers have elevated prospects for subsequently serving in elite roles throughout the military bureaucracy—though they are subject to generalizability considerations that we grapple with below. Second, we adopt multiple approaches to unbundle and estimate the (potentially heterogeneous) effects of different socialization experiences that occur during an individual's organizational membership. A difference-in-differences analysis of the two survey waves provides an estimate of socialization effects associated with one of the most common cross-national experiences in military service: basic training. Additional statistical tests compare military attitudes at the time of entry to those of cadets with multiple years of military education at West Point—as well as with individuals with several decades of training and experience.

Our study yields two important findings. First, incoming officers arrive with substantially more hawkish attitudes compared to civilians, offering strong evidence of an attitudinal gap rooted in organizational selection. Evidence for the selection mechanism is robust across specifications controlling for, and matching on, a range of demographic confounders that several past studies omit. Holding constant salient factors such as partisanship, socio-economic status, and family background, those that choose military service still tend to exhibit more hawkish attitudes. Second, while socialization during four years at West Point mollifies hawkish attitudes, the relative size of these effects is insufficient to offset the magnitude of hawkishness observed at selection. We further find no evidence that basic training changes attitudes towards the use of force – or that individuals with experience in operational military units exhibit hawkishness different from individuals at time of selection. In sum, our evidence collectively suggests that military officers tend to enter as hawks and that socialization, when it occurs, is insufficient to override this tendency. We observe tempered, not socialized, hawkishness.

The analysis makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, our evidence is consistent

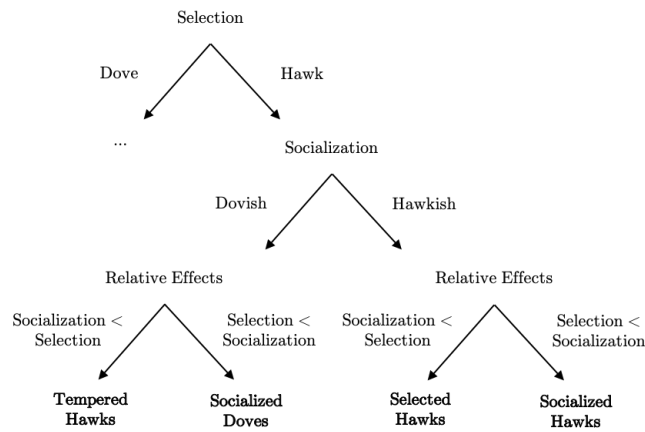
with those who argue that individuals with military experience tend to exhibit hawkishness (Horowitz and Stam, 2014) rather than prudence (Huntington, 1957). Second, the strong evidence for the selection mechanism suggests that this hawkishness comes *before* experience in the causal chain (Hatemi and McDermott, 2016). Preexisting attitudes affect the experiences individuals opt into, which helps explain the attitudinal clustering documented in military organizations but which IR scholars often emphasize emerges due to socializing experiences that generate hawkish attitudes (Snyder, 1989; Franke, 2000). We find no such evidence suggesting that military experience itself makes individuals more hawkish. Instead, our finding that extensive military training partly *dampens* hawkishness suggests that socialization, at least those socializing experiences we observe, has limited ability to explain hawkishness documented among military elites in past studies (Holsti, 1999; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004). Third, consistent with recent findings in Lupton (forthcoming), socialization to temper hawkishness requires time to emerge. It is not simply the case that, as some argue, the military can “routinely take groups of young people and change their preferences in relatively short periods of time” (Rosen, 2005, p. 16). Our findings provide microfoundations of how selection and socialization interact and underpin theorized connections between military service and foreign policy attitudes.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ELITE MILITARY ATTITUDES

Do military and civilian attitudes on the use of force differ? Past scholarship provides two perspectives on this question. On one hand, several canonical works predict prudence, or conservatism, within military institutions. Huntington (1957, p. 69-70) famously argues that being the most “familiar” with it, military actors are “the strongest voice against immediate involvement in war.” Current or past proximity to war costs should render individuals *more* sensitive to marginal increases in expected casualty levels than comparable civilians who do not suffer war’s highest consequences (Erikson and Stoker, 2011). On the other hand, cross-national analyses find that more military representation in elite political bodies, such as cabinets and politburos, is associated with more frequent conflict initiation and escalation (Sechser, 2004; Weeks, 2012). A body of survey research finds that individuals with military experience express more support for the use of force (Karsten, 1978; Dempsey, 2009; Klingler and Chatagnier, 2014). Military elites similarly tend to possess more hawkish dispositions (Holsti, 1999), although with considerable nuance. US military elites are more likely to endorse using force for traditional security goals, such as coping with China (Feaver and Gelpi, 2004) or during debates over escalating ongoing conflicts (Betts, 1977).

Two candidate mechanisms—selection and socialization—might explain *why* either type of attitudinal gap arises. To clarify how these two mechanisms potentially interact, we develop a simple theoretical framework that situates contentions from the existing literature and develops testable implications from this framework. Figure 1 depicts various possible combinations and outcomes of the mechanisms. As shown, selection and socialization mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. While one could produce no effects, meaning all attitudinal gaps are attributable to the other, it is easy to imagine both are operative. Selection and socialization could reinforce (the right two outcomes) or counteract (the left two outcomes) one another. Moreover, if both are operative, their effects need not be of equal magnitude. Their relative effect sizes are important for apportioning importance if they reinforce each other and determining net effects if they counteract each other.

Figure 1: Potential Effects of Military Selection and Socialization



The first candidate mechanism for attitudinal gaps, well established in military sociology and civil-military relations and depicted by the top node of Figure 1, is selection into the organization (e.g., Bachman et al. 2000; Krebs 2004, p. 94-9). Individuals select into military organizations for a variety of non-random reasons, ranging across family background, race, socio-economic status, partisanship, career alternatives, and social networks (Rohall, Ender and Matthews, 2006; Kleykamp, 2006; Dempsey, 2009). Much of this research emphasizes that these demographic factors shape incentives to select into military organizations.

However, pre-existing attitudes on using force are another potential basis for selection into the military—above and beyond demographic factors. As Hatemi and McDermott (2016, p. 345) summarize, “it is clear that attitudes and ideologies shape life experiences.” Consider an individual’s choice to

select into military employment in a society without conscription. An individual possesses some prior disposition regarding the use of force (i.e., they are hawkish or dovish) and some prior knowledge about the tasks associated with military careers. Specifically, the military fights a nation's wars and thus accepting military employment means an increased probability of direct or indirect exposure to and participation in violence. Individuals expressing attitudes more permissive of the use of force should, in general, be more permissive of their own occupational participation in the application of that force.² Based on these considerations, those *more* permissive of using force should be more likely to opt into military organizations. Individuals with strong aversions to military conflict (i.e., doves) are less likely to choose an occupation demanding them to perform tasks that they do not support.³ Our argument is not that economic or demographic factors play no role in an individual's choice to accept military employment. Rather, we argue that both material and dispositional considerations factor into employment decisions. A first hypothesis follows from the selection mechanism line of reasoning.

H1: Hawks are more likely to select into military experience than doves.

A second candidate mechanism is socialization, defined as the “process by which people learn to adopt the norms, values, attitudes and behaviors accepted and practiced by the ongoing system” (Sigal, 2006). The literature on socialization emphasizes that organizations are social environments that shape the attitudes and preferences of newcomers, including “inductees into a military” (Johnston, 2014, p. 21). Military organizations may shape member attitudes and preferences through exposing them to new information, life experiences, or social pressures to conform to organizational culture (e.g., Hammill, Segal and Segal 1995; Teigen 2006; Nteta and Tarsi 2016; Lupton forthcoming). Legro (1995, p. 235) describes that “lessons for soldiers” within military organizations are “clear and immediate: conform or forget about career advancement.”

Socialization could shape member attitudes in a more or less hawkish direction. Prominent IR studies emphasize that military officers might be “socialized to see military force as standard operating procedure” or otherwise see the world as more threatening (Weeks, 2014, p. 24). Military experience “generates expertise in the use of violence,” which can “crowd out other potential solutions for dealing with military challenges, leading to a perceptual bias in favor of using military force” (Horowitz and Stam, 2014, p. 532). In examining European militaries prior to World War I, for example, Snyder (1989,

²The selection decision itself may similarly prompt individuals to increase support for the use of force as means of minimizing cognitive dissonance (Jennings and Markus, 1977). We return to this possibility below.

³While possible, there are few reasons to expect those largely opposed to using force to opt into military service. Accordingly, we save space and do not include that full pathway in Figure 1.

p. 28-9) found that officers were “over-socialized” because “professional training and duties of soldiers force them to focus on threat to the state’s security and on the conflictual side of international relations.” Similarly, Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik (2015, p. 985) argue that soldiers “experience intense socialization intended to increase their aggression toward rivals” and “make them more comfortable with the use of force.” Franke (2000, p. 191) similarly finds that socialization “fosters a military identity committed to the combat-oriented warrior spirit.” Based on these perspectives, we might expect that socializing experiences increase hawkishness among future military elites.

Yet, socialization might produce the opposite effect, making individuals less hawkish over time. Gelpi and Feaver (2002, p. 791-2) show that the US is less likely to initiate conflicts in periods with high veteran representation in the executive and legislative branches – a finding attributed to “socializing experience” in the military. Bell (forthcoming) finds that training on the law of armed conflict affects West Point cadet attitudes on civilian protection on the battlefield. Our second hypothesis addresses socialization effects and is phrased to reflect the perspective that socializing experiences decrease hawkishness among future military elites.

H2: Socialization decreases hawkishness among individuals with military experience.

Selection and socialization mechanisms can both be operative, as Figure 1 shows. If they are, the relative effects of each becomes especially important for pinning down the sources of a civil-military attitudinal gap on the use of force. Moreover, because socialization subsumes a variety of experiences—including basic training, military education, extended service, and combat—these experiences could have disparate effects. A single snapshot of service-members implemented years into their careers cannot disentangle the effects of these distinct experiences. The research design below helps unbundle these socialization experiences and their associated consequences for attitudes.

RESEARCH DESIGN: SURVEYING FUTURE MILITARY ELITES

Our study consisted of two principal parts. First, we fielded a two-wave survey on two populations: incoming officer candidates at the US Military Academy (USMA) and US adults administered through Survey Sampling International (SSI). We administered the first wave to new cadets (n=1,242) on their first full day of basic training in July 2017. We fielded the same survey on a nationally representative sample of US adults (n=1,811) through SSI within one week before and after the West Point implementation. The second survey wave went to the same USMA and SSI respondents, beginning the day

after new cadets were accepted into the student body in August 2017. Of those re-contacted, a total of 1,115 completed the second survey wave (USMA n=250; SSI n=865). We address attrition below and in the Supporting Information (SI). Second, during the second wave, we expanded the sample to all four USMA classes (n=918). The survey instrument, provided in the SI, collects a battery of demographic characteristics. It then measures the dependent variable: respondent approval of use of US military troops in six hypothetical scenarios drawn from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) using a 7-point Likert scale. The scenarios were: to ensure the supply of oil; to destroy a terrorist camp; to intervene in a region where there is a genocide or civil war; to assist the spread of democracy; to protect American allies under attack by foreign nations; and to help the United Nations uphold international law.

Choosing West Point as the sample population provides a number of research advantages. First, cadets graduate from West Point as junior officers, which have suffered casualty rates comparable to enlisted personnel in recent US conflicts. Between September 2001 and July 2015, there were 2,180 combat-related Army casualties with the rank of lieutenant or captain.⁴ Of these, 267 were killed in action, died of wounds, died while captured, or are missing.⁵ Across ranks, we estimate that West Point graduates comprised approximately 22% of these deaths.⁶ Clearly, and sadly, the sample population is exposed to war's deadly cost. If cost exposure does foster military conservatism as Huntington contends, we would expect to observe these effects in a sample of West Point cadets.

Second, our panel was fielded at the beginning and end of a military training program formally titled Cadet Basic Training, which mirrors basic training experiences associated with military induction and combat training across the US Military. Daily activities include hand-to-hand combat, firing weapons with live ammunition, using grenades, bayonet training which simulates stabbing adversaries, and small unit combat which simulates killing adversary units. There is also strong evidence to validate the assumption that individuals opting in to military service have access to information on the types of tasks military organizations perform. General knowledge that military organizations fight wars aside, materials from the West Point Admissions Office clearly validate this assumption. Cadets will acquire "the skills necessary to fight and win our nation's wars" through exercises emphasizing "combat-

⁴This constituted 5.4% of combat-related Army casualties sustained during Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn, and Freedom's Sentinel. Junior Army officers constituted 8.7% of active duty personnel. Calculations based on data available from US Department of Defense annual personnel reports.

⁵Data obtained through FOIA 14-F-1512 from the US Defense Manpower Data Center.

⁶96 West Point graduates died in military operations between September 2001 and July 2015, of which 60 were active duty junior officers. Data obtained from the US Military Academy Association of Graduates and FOIA 15-F-0012 from the US Defense Manpower Data Center.

focused physical training,” “rifle marksmanship,” “hand-to-hand combat,” and “small unit tactics” that “introduce cadets to the essence of our Army—winning the close ground fight.”⁷

Third, West Point cadets are an interesting population because promotion rates to general officer are historically higher for them compared to other officer promotion pathways. West Point graduates have on average recently constituted 19% of the US military officer corps, but as much as 85% and currently 75% of four-star generals.⁸ Of course, the majority of incoming cadets will not reach such high ranks. Nonetheless, surveying West Point cadets provides an opportunity to observe the attitudes of some individuals likely to fill senior military positions in the future, *prior* to their socialization experiences.

Our research design offers methodological advantages over existing studies that have explored selection and socialization mechanisms through surveys administered at US military academies (e.g. Lovell, 1964; Karsten, 1971; Franke, 2000).⁹ First, our survey instrument includes demographic questions that allow us to control for factors driving selection, such as socio-economic status, gender, race, military family, and partisanship. Surprisingly, past surveys examining hawkishness at West Point employ simple statistical models (cross-tabular analysis or ANOVA and t-tests) that exclude covariates. By controlling for these demographic confounders, we are better able to evaluate our theoretical intuition that hawkishness itself, rather than solely demographics, shapes organizational selection. Second, to our knowledge, our panel analysis offers the first longitudinal study of hawkishness administered at West Point – which, as Dempsey (2009, p. 157, fn. 20) notes, are exceedingly rare. We review methodological limits of past studies in the SI.

Several limitations of the sample may limit the study’s generalizability. First, the period of socialization we observe with panel data is comparatively short and socialization may require more time to exert effects—although see Rosen (2005) and Legro (1995). To address longer socialization periods, our analysis also compares attitudes between West Point cohorts, between those with and without prior military service preceding their arrival at West Point, as well as military elites years into the career. Moreover, we see a trade-off between widening the temporal scope and external validity. Basic training is perhaps the most common experience associated with military membership across the military branches, as well as other militaries. A measurement specific to this common experience promises one of the most externally valid quantities.

Second, this study yields insights on several socialization experiences: basic training, extended

⁷ *US Military Academy Admissions Catalog*, pp. 37, 39.

⁸ Data obtained from the US Department of the Army.

⁹ The SI reviews other surveys administered at US military academies *not* studying hawkishness.

service academy education, and years of military service. We grant, however, that the experience of military training and indoctrination at professional military education institutions might have different effects than the experience of garrison life or combat (Horowitz and Stam, 2014; Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik, 2015).¹⁰ The innovation of our study is a research design that isolates the effects of the first and most common of these experiences. Future research, including with the same panel of respondents, can extend our design to measure attitudinal change after follow-on experiences, such as combat.

SELECTION RESULTS: HAWKISH UPON ARRIVAL

We find that elites selecting into military organizations hold systematically different attitudes on using force compared to civilians upon arrival. Those already more supportive of employing force are more likely to opt into a career specializing in it. *Force Support*, the main outcome variable, measures respondent approval for using US troops in the six hypothetical scenarios. Higher values (max.=7, min.=1) indicate greater support. Figure 2's left panel displays mean support levels, excluding all respondents with prior military service, across the hypothetical cases. Cadets (grey diamonds) arrive at basic training expressing greater support for using force in all conflict scenarios except for securing the flow of oil¹¹ as compared to the full civilian sample (solid black circles) and the sample of civilians under 23 years old (empty black circles).¹² The plot only includes respondents who also completed the second wave survey, though results are similar when including all first wave respondents.

Regressions with control variables ensure the result is not wholly attributable to demographic differences between the samples (SI Table A1). Controls account for a variety of demographic factors commonly linked to selection into military service including party ID, news consumption, income, gender, age, race and ethnicity, and veteran status, which may also affect attitudes on using force. All models employ ordinary least squares (OLS) given the linear outcome measures. *Cadet* is a binary indicator for whether the respondent is in the USMA or SSI sample. Figure 2's right panel depicts the results in black bars. Cadets convey greater support for using force across a wide variety of contexts. These attitudinal differences are present in five of the six conflict scenarios and statistically significant

¹⁰Only seven incoming cadets and 39 SSI respondents possessed combat experience.

¹¹One possible interpretation of our finding regarding oil is that other logics of (in)appropriateness regarding seizing another state's energy resources were sufficient to override otherwise hawkish dispositions.

¹²Our finding regarding genocide is in tension with surveys from the 1990s, who found that military officers were reluctant to support humanitarian missions (Feaver and Gelpi, 2004). This may reflect the influence that prolonged stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have had on perceptions of appropriate combat missions.

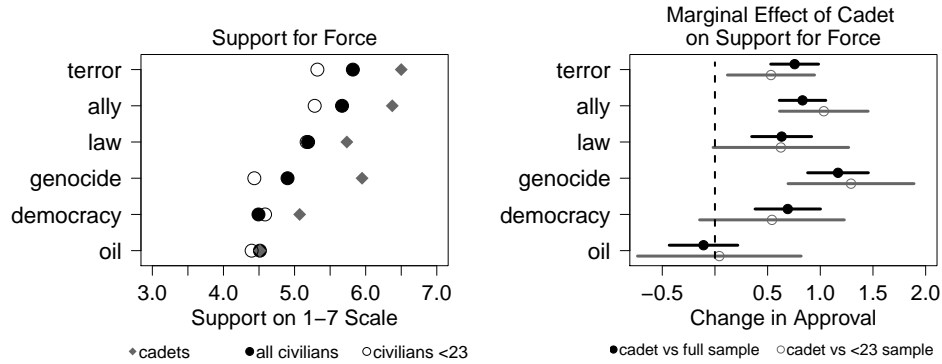


Figure 2: *Left panel:* Mean support for use of force, excludes respondents with prior military service. *Right panel:* Marginal effect of switching from nationally representative survey respondent to incoming cadet respondent on support for using force. Based on specifications including controls for partisanship, news consumption, income, gender, age, race and ethnicity, and veteran status. Bars show 95% confidence intervals.

at the 99% level despite using the reduced sample of only those completing both survey waves. This remains true after adjusting p-values for multiple testing. Shifting the respondent from a civilian to an incoming cadet consistently increases support for using force. For all except the oil scenario, the associated increase is between 0.6 and 1.2 on a 7-point scale, which represents a 13% to 28% relative increase versus civilian support levels.

The results strongly support H1 which contends that individuals selecting into the military are more hawkish. This provides the most systematic and robust evidence to date on the importance of selection considerations. In the framework of Figure 1, we find clear evidence for the right pathway from the initial selection node.

Though some may harbor concerns about the comparability of future military officers to civilians generally, we believe analyses across all civilians provides the most direct approach to descriptively assess civil-military attitudinal gaps. Nevertheless, our findings persist in specifications that match on demographic differences. *Age* is the most salient difference and takes on values in the SSI sample for which there is no overlap among the incoming cadets (maximum age equals 22). We address the concern by pruning the sample to include only civilian respondents younger than 23. Grey bars in Figure 2's right panel plots the marginal effects using this subsample, which limits the precision of the estimates. Additionally, we employ genetic matching and produce large covariate balance improvements on party ID, income, and gender (SI Table A1 Model 8 and SI Table A7) (Diamond and Sekhon, 2013).¹³

¹³Another potential difference between the samples might be that hawkish cadets are more aware of less costly forms

Other robustness tests demonstrate the stability of the results. Models respectively drop all control variables except for *Veteran*, exclude veterans entirely from the analysis, include all first wave survey respondents rather than only those completing both waves, broaden the conception of *Veteran* status to include those who attended the US Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS), and account for whether cadets have immediate *family members* in the military which may have previously socialized cadets (SI Tables A2-A6). Including dummy variables reflecting US Census regions also does not change the key selection finding. It does reveal some inter-regional differences in hawkishness levels, with Southern respondents being more hawkish than Midwestern ones (SI Table A5). Below we address the possibility that new cadets express hawkish views as a form of anticipatory socialization, believing it to be the appropriate attitudes to hold as a cadet.

SOCIALIZATION RESULTS: MILITARY EDUCATION ATTENUATES HAWKISHNESS

Incoming military elites exhibit greater hawkishness compared to civilians upon entry into military organizations. Do socializing experiences alter relative attitudinal differences? As Table 1 previews, we assess this across three experiences which progressively expand the time and intensity of socialization: (1) basic training, (2) additional military education, and (3) years of active service.

Table 1: Summary of Socialization Analyses

Socialization Experience	Empirical Comparison	Finding
Basic training	New cadets before vs. after basic training	Null
Service academy education	Cadets across years at USMA	Less hawkish
Extended service	New cadets with no prior experience vs. respondents with prior military experience*	Null

**Analysis of elite civil-military attitudinal gaps from the FPLP, TISS and Golby, Cohn and Feaver (2016) further address extended service.*

First, to evaluate the effect of basic training, we construct an outcome measure *Change in Force Support*, which reflects the difference between an individual’s wave two and one responses ($y_{i2} - y_{i1}$, where i indexes individuals and the second subscript indicates survey wave). *Cadet* is the main explanatory variable which represents the socializing experiences of basic training which civilians do not undergo. Models drop respondents who have already been socialized through prior military experience. We

of military force such as drones (Kreps, 2016). However, results below show that upper cohorts—who presumably possess even more information about the potential uses of military force—actually display *less* hawkishness.

exclude covariates because those that are time-invariant would be differenced out while others may vary as a consequence of basic training and thus introduce post-treatment bias (King and Zeng, 2006).

We find that basic training, a nearly ubiquitous experience of professionalized militaries which includes martial activities as described earlier, has no meaningful effect on attitudes. Contrary to existing research noted above, if military socialization occurs, it requires a longer time horizon – a finding congruent with Lupton (forthcoming). The left panel of Figure 3 shows that cadet attitudes did not substantively change during basic training as compared to civilian attitudes (SI Table A8). Military inductees arrived more hawkish and remained equally so. To simplify the results presentation, we employ principal component analysis (PCA) to construct a single metric capturing overall willingness to use force. Higher values of the PCA measure indicate greater support for using force (mean=0.1, std. dev.=2.3). Figure 3’s right panel plots the mean PCA scores for each sample for each survey wave including only respondents who completed both waves of the survey and excluding any with prior military service which would muddy the socialization analysis. As the parallel lines indicate, there is a nearly identical attitudinal gap before and after basic training. Contrary to H2, the socializing experiences embedded in basic training do not alter attitudes on using force.

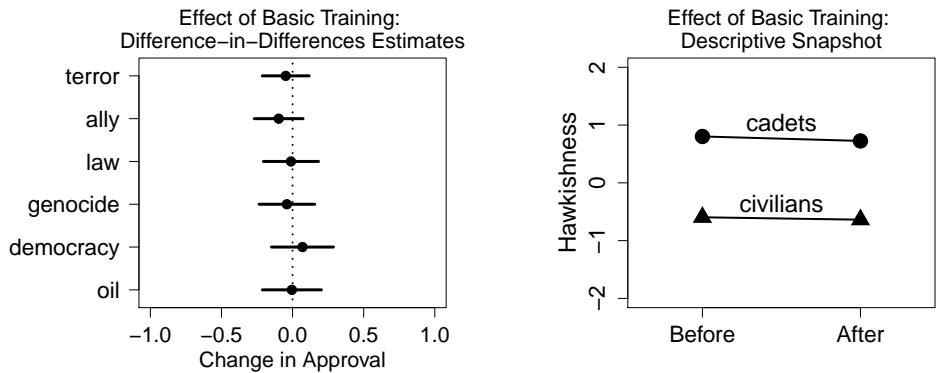


Figure 3: *Left panel:* Difference-in-differences estimates for effect of socialization experiences of basic training on attitudes toward the use of force. Bars show 95% confidence intervals. *Right panel:* Mean PCA hawkishness score for each sample for each wave.

The limited impact of basic training on cadet attitudes persists across alternative models. Specifications address attrition across survey waves by employing inverse probability weighting based on the observed correlates of completing both survey waves (Blattman, 2009). While this approach cannot address unobserved characteristics that jointly affect attrition and susceptibility to socialization, it does

preclude several possibilities. Notably, there is no evidence that differential attrition related to initial hawkishness accounts for the dearth of socialization effects. Results are similarly robust to repeating the pruning and matching approaches used in the selection analysis as well as excluding both veterans and cadets who attended USMAPS who may already be socialized (see Table A8 Model 8 and Tables A9-A11 for results and additional discussion).

Second, to expand the temporal scope of socialization experiences, we compare incoming cadets to those across all years at USMA. The left panel of Figure 4 plots the marginal effect of shifting from the civilian sample to the four USMA classes using the PCA measure (SI Table A12). Cadets across all classes are more hawkish than civilians, which further challenges theories of military conservatism on the use of force.

More saliently for the hypotheses, we show a decline in overall hawkishness each year: the civil-military attitudinal gap shrinks by roughly 50% between a cadet’s first year and fourth year (statistically significant at the 95% level).¹⁴ Socialization experiences at West Point are associated with attitudinal shifts—but in a *mollifying* direction consistent with H2 and opposite to the literature attributing hawkishness to socialization. This may be a feature of the West Point curriculum, which includes extensive professional training on morality and ethics in war. For example, all cadets are required to take a philosophy course, which includes extensive discussion of Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars*. Such experiences may have also tempered respondent understanding of the situations under which it is appropriate to use military force. Socialization might also result from general factors associated with more prolonged exposure to military organizations. Training rotations in operational military units, required of all West Point cadets during their later summers, may provide more information about the costs of war. In addition, first-year respondents may perceive the costs of US military action as temporally distant, whereas fourth-year respondents nearing graduation may perceive war’s toll as more salient.

A more complete exploration of the microprocesses involved in military education is an important area for future research.¹⁵ Crucially though, the four years of dovish socialization effects are insufficient

¹⁴One possibility is that this shift is partially due to a social desirability bias to report less hawkish attitudes as cadets gain more information about the organizational culture of the US military. We have no design-based reason to suspect that social desirability affected the results, as respondent participation was voluntary and anonymous. Cadets take anonymous surveys frequently, which should provide assurance that their responses offer neither reward nor punishment. However, even if social desirability does affect the expressed beliefs of respondents, this would remain consistent with an understanding of socialization as “social influence” (e.g. Johnston, 2014, p. 24).

¹⁵We also cannot rule out cohort effects, although find them likely minimal as the observed cohorts entered USMA during a period—2014 to 2017—in which US force levels deployed to combat missions remained relatively stable. The linearity of effects also suggests that additional education drives the change in attitudes. Cohort concerns would be larger if we instead found second/third-year cadets more hawkish than first-year cadets who were more hawkish than fourth-year

to override the hawkishness gap evident upon selection. Thus, the combination of strong hawkish selection effects and modest dovish socialization effects is most consistent with the Tempered Hawks outcome in Figure 1.

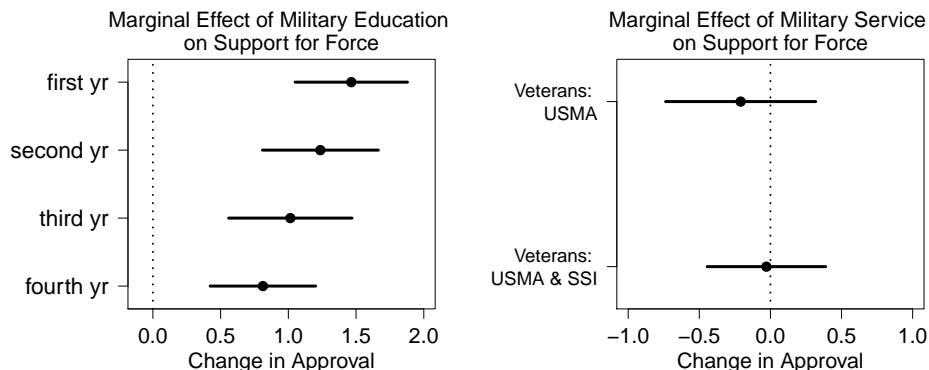


Figure 4: *Left panel:* Marginal effect of additional years of military education compared to civilian baseline. Higher value indicates more hawkishness; bars show 95% confidence intervals. *Right panel:* Marginal effect of active military service compared to incoming cadets with no prior service.

Third, expand the scope of socialization to include experience in operational military units in several ways. One approach capitalizes upon heterogeneous individual experiences within our USMA and SSI samples. Among the USMA sample, 65 cadets spent up to 4 years serving in active or reserve units before arriving at USMA. The SSI sample includes 144 individuals with up to 29 years of military experience. The top bars in Figure 4’s right panel (Table A13) compares the attitudes of incoming cadets without prior military service experiences to surveyed individuals with it using the PCA score. Regardless of whether incoming cadets had military experience, they held similarly hawkish attitudes upon arrival, showing minimal effects of socialization via service. This result also helps address possible anticipatory socialization whereby new cadets convey elevated hawkishness because they perceive it appropriate to do so. Presumably those new cadets with years of prior service would feel less acute pressure to inflate their hawkishness. The lack of substantive attitudinal differences between the two groups, however, casts doubt on anticipatory socialization. The lower bar of Figure 4 plots the marginal effect of shifting from a cadet with no prior service experience to an individual with prior service experience whether a fellow cadet or SSI respondent. Even using this pool of individuals with decades of military service, attitudes on the use of force are remarkably similar among those who selected into the military.

cadets.

Another approach accounts for the possibility that the experience of *commanding* troops provides the cornerstone socializing experience for military elites, consistent with Huntington’s notion of the prudent officer. We turn to three available military elites surveys that span the past several decades: the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) implemented routinely between 1976 and 1996; the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) survey of civilian and military elites implemented during the 1990s; and a post-9/11 survey analyzed by [Golby, Cohn and Feaver \(2016\)](#). All three show that extensive military service is not associated with reluctance to employ force compared to civilians. First, consistent with our USMA results, [Holsti \(1999\)](#) shows that military officers scored higher on militant internationalism than civilian elites. Second, the TISS survey¹⁶ finds military elites express greater support for the use of force than their civilian counterparts on a 4-point scale where higher values represent more hawkish attitudes.¹⁷ The mean among civilian elites is 2.7 ($n = 893$) while among military elites it is 3.0 ($n = 729$), indicating a marginal difference of 0.3 (± 0.1 at the 95% confidence level). Third, [Golby, Cohn and Feaver \(2016, p. 130, Figure 4.13\)](#) show that veteran elites were about 24% more supportive of principles such as pursuing total victory when using force, quick and massive application of force during foreign interventions, pursuing military rather than political goals during the use of force, and public resistance to casualties. In short, the attitudinal bent among incoming military elites is similarly evident years into their careers. The comparisons in this paragraph merit cautious interpretation. The extensive time between these surveys and our own complicates extrapolations between the two.

In sum, across the socialization experiences of basic training, extended service academy education, and years of military service (for a subset of the sample), we consistently find that (1) military individuals are more hawkish than civilians and (2) no evidence that socialization produces hawkish effects. We do find some evidence of socialization whereby extensive service academy training dampens hawkishness (consistent with H2), but not so much as to override the large attitudinal gap evident at time of selection.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By studying the arc of military elites’ development, this research note disentangles the sources of the attitudinal gap in which those with military experience hold more hawkish foreign policy attitudes. It illuminates the central importance of selection for explaining this gap, providing systematic and robust

¹⁶Military elites in that sample consist of officers a decade or more into their careers. Civilian elites are drawn from *Who’s Who in America*, the State Department, and other sources ([Feaver and Gelpi, 2004](#)).

¹⁷The most comparable TISS prompt states “The US should take all steps including the use of force to prevent aggression by any expansionist power.” Questions addressing the threat environment, importance of military tools, or ideal foreign policy are less comparable for our purposes (see [Feaver and Gelpi 2004](#)).

evidence that attitudes often *precede* experiences. It also shows that certain socializing experiences—specifically, years of training at a service academy—alter attitudes on the use of force, but in a fashion that cannot explain why those with military experience express more permissive views on the use of force. We now address issues of generalizability and future research before highlighting the study’s contributions.

The findings, and limits to their generalizability, point to fruitful paths for future research. We find that various socializing experiences produce disparate effects with some activities dampening hawkish attitudes while others have little influence at all. A key experience that this study does not capture is that of combat service. While past work studies the effects of combat on attitudes (Jennings and Markus, 1977; Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik, 2015), combat is typically bundled with additional socialization, such as basic training. New studies may attempt to disentangle these myriad experiences with repeated measurements before and after each additional socialization opportunity. In addition, the era of extended combat characteristic of the contemporary American military could magnify selection effects if civilians display heightened war-weariness compared to cadets.¹⁸ Cross-nationally, this study’s results are plausibly representative for democracies without conscription, especially those with an elevated likelihood of deployment or conflict. The same basic selection considerations presumably apply for those opting into military service with a reasonable prospect of having to use force, whether due to a more activist foreign policy (e.g., the UK) or a heightened threat environment (e.g., Latvia). The null effect from basic training is likely to hold more broadly given the similarity of experiences—notably the preliminary exposure to the means of violence—across professionalized militaries. Scholars could profitably test these contentions.

This study makes several contributions to the IR literature. First, our results qualify the microfoundations of theories linking military experience to leader behavior. Consider world leaders that prominent studies (Weeks 2014, p. 24; Horowitz and Stam 2014, p. 532) suggest initiated armed conflicts due to their military experiences: Wilhelm II, Franco, Nasser, Pinochet, Galtieri, Suharto, Qaddafi, or Hussein. A common theme connects these individuals: each *selected* into service. In fact, roughly 55% of world leaders with military experience selected into military education (Horowitz and Stam, 2014). For example, Nasser applied to the Obassia Military Academy twice, after being rejected his first attempt (Aburish, 2004, p. 15). Franco chose to enter a military academy at the age of fourteen despite strong parental objections (Payne and Palacios, 2014, p. 11-2). These salient examples suggest that selection

¹⁸However, our analysis of CCEs responses from 2006 to 2016 found that aggregate support for the use of force declined in *both* veteran and non-veteran populations, suggesting that war-weariness spans across the civil-military divide.

mechanisms may account for more of the attitudinal gap than existing accounts acknowledge.¹⁹ This complements a wave of behavioral work in IR highlighting how individual attitudes come at least in part *before* experiences in the causal chain (Hatemi and McDermott, 2016; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer and Renshon, 2018).

Second, the length of time in military organizations matters substantially. Our panel study illustrates that short life interventions, such as basic training, are insufficient to yield any observable change in foreign policy attitudes. This is important in the study of IR because the posited effects of military experience are implicitly assumed to occur quite quickly (e.g. Rosen 2005; Legro 1995 above). But over 20% of heads of state with military experience served for four years or less. Of the 17 US presidents with prior military experience since 1875, 10 served for less than the length of a college education.²⁰ Yet, as Horowitz and Stam (2014, p. 555) argue in the case of one leader with three years of military experience, “It is the George W. Bushes of the world [...] who are statistically more likely to engage in militarized behavior in office.” Our findings caution that more time is required to activate socialization.

Third, we find that some peacetime military experiences—not just combat—may dampen, rather than create more hawkish attitudes. From the perspective of *process*, this supports the canonical view that military experience can foster more prudent leaders in certain institutional contexts (Huntington, 1957). However, from the perspective of *outcome*, our findings suggest that no observed change is sufficiently large to offset the initial hawkishness gap. Military officers with at least a decade of organizational experience exhibit an attitudinal gap that is substantively similar to the gap found on the first day of basic training.

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¹⁹For example, Feaver and Gelpi (2004, p. 195) argue that socialization is the “more plausible explanation” for attitudinal gaps (Gelpi and Feaver, 2002, p. 792).

²⁰Authors’ calculations on heads of state (1875-2004) in the LEAD Dataset (Ellis, Horowitz and Stam, 2015).

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