Democratic Accountability and Foreign Security Policy:  
Theory and Evidence from India

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Abstract: Identifying the links between democracy and foreign security policy has proven elusive. This paper engages this research agenda by developing a novel theory of “accountability environments” and exploring it in the case of India. We hypothesize that the varying electoral salience of foreign security policy and the clarity of responsibility for policy outcomes combine to create different accountability environments in which politicians operate. Accountability environments determine the incentives that politicians face for devoting effort to external security issues. We illustrate the argument with evidence from India, over time and across issue-areas (India, Pakistan, and defense procurement/development). Scholars need to incorporate the complexities and diversity of representation and rule into the study of democratic politics and international relations.

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Introduction

Research on democracy in international security has witnessed a resurgence in the past decade. Yet undergirding this debate are implicit assumptions about how much voters know, pay attention to, and care about foreign and security policies, and about how responsive leaders are to those concerns. Embedded within many of these arguments, and empirical tests, is a clearly responsible leader who can be punished by the electorate that votes on foreign policy issues.

These assumptions are in fact variables. The institutions, practices, and mass politics of democracy and foreign policy were simply not the same across the French Fourth Republic in the 1950s, the United States during the Vietnam War, and Pakistan in its “democratic decade” of the 1990s – even if all had Polity scores above the standard threshold for democracy. Nor were the domestic politics of foreign policy in 1960 Japan, buffeted by visceral, left-right domestic political divisions during the Security Revision Crisis, the same as those of contemporary Japan, with its different party system and lines of cleavage. Accountability is far more complex than existing approaches to democracy and international relations can accommodate.

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1 Hyde, Susan and Elizabeth Saunders, “Reconsidering Regime Type in International Relations.” (Working paper, 2016).
3 Pakistan was an 8 in Polity from 1988-1996, but its foreign security policy was dominated by an unelected military. France was a 10 in Polity through 1957 - but then dips to a 5 for much of the De Gaulle period of the Fifth Republic.
5 Recent work in American and comparative politics has arrived at a similar conclusion. This complexity holds whether voters are rational (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita) or irrational (Achen and Bartels), though obviously for different reasons.
Tying together a variety of literatures on democracies and foreign policy, we argue that the electoral salience of foreign security policy and clarity of responsibility for policy outcomes vary substantially across democracies, over time, and across issue-areas, generating different “accountability environments.” Accountability environments create incentives for politicians to devote political effort and resources to foreign policy issues. Sometimes, democracy leads politicians to pay careful attention to strategy, supports credible threats to adversaries, and disciplines individual ambitions in line with the electorate’s incentives. In many other cases, however, it creates strong incentives to pay little attention to foreign policy and to delegate power to bureaucracies and militaries, while allowing strategies that evade accountability even for unambiguous failures.

This approach helps advance current debates about regime type and international security.\(^6\) Interpretations of case studies, disagreements over coding, and arguments about appropriate statistical specifications now constitute the bulk of discussion about whether, and how, regime type matters.\(^7\) Yet the problem at hand is not solely one of adjudicating evidence,

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but also of developing appropriate theory and concepts. As Jack Levy argues, for instance, “beyond regime type, we have little theory to predict what kinds of governments, leaders, societies, or contexts are most likely to generate high audience costs.”

The institutions and practices of a democratic state – from fragmented ruling parties to strong presidencies with long terms – shape how easy it is to assign, and enact, credit or blame to elected officials. The salience of foreign policy, relative to social policy, redistribution, patronage, or other dimensions of politics, determines how motivated voters are to enact this credit or impose this blame at the ballot box. If the electorate cares little about foreign affairs issues, politicians have weak electoral incentives to devote attention to these issues. If it is difficult for voters to punish politicians – even if the electorate is motivated by foreign policy – politicians may be able to avoid accountability for even serious, widely-known foreign policy errors.

Four accountability environments arise from the intersection of clarity of responsibility and foreign policy salience: high responsiveness, bounded flexibility, protected politicians, and sclerosis. Each environment creates different domestic political incentives facing elected

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officials. They blend formal institutional structures, informal political arrangements, and mass electoral salience. This creates variation across countries in accountability environments, but also variation within countries across security issue-areas. Both of these can change over time, creating a remarkable amount of heterogeneity in the linkages between democracy, politicians, and foreign security policy.

We use Indian foreign security policy to explore how these dynamics work. This is a case that has been almost entirely ignored in the mainstream IR theory literature, but as the world’s largest democracy and a country with numerous past and contemporary security challenges, it provides a valuable opportunity to build theory and assess existing arguments. We explore how these accountability environments shape the domestic politics of Indian foreign policy in three key areas: its security policies toward its two main adversaries, China and Pakistan, and the underlying approach to defense preparedness against both. Each is central to maintaining Indian security. Yet we show that politicians’ attention and focus have varied. In India-China relations, salience varies over time. In India-Pakistan relations, salience is generally high, but clarity of responsibility has experienced some variation. In Indian defense acquisition and development,

both clarity and salience have generally been low, despite the objective material importance of building and maintaining military power for India’s power position. By exploring variation across these issues, and within time over them, we can probe how different accountability environments affect Indian politicians’ management of security.

We do not seek to explain the ultimate success/failure of different policies, but instead the level of effort devoted by politicians and the constraints that can be identified as coming from mass public opinion in each issue-area. An empirical finding we return to in the conclusion is that even in the best case for theories of democratic advantage – with motivated, attentive politicians faced authoritarian regimes – India does not seem to reap democratic benefits in crisis bargaining or defense preparedness relative to China and Pakistan. We also point to examples from other democracies that suggest the need for broadening our understanding of democratic foreign policies. While there are certainly contexts in which democracies have clear advantages in security policy, this is only a subset of the broader range of possible accountability environments within democracies.

Significant progress has been made in disaggregating autocracies in international relations. There is an opportunity to now better disaggregate democracy, both across countries and issues within them. Institutions, mass public opinion, elites, bureaucrats, and lobbies are central to democracy, and they are not monoliths across countries, issues, or time. With the rise of powerful new political forces in the democratic world that have called into question the postwar international order, there is a real need to rethink what exactly democracy does, and

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11 For a similar conclusion, see the H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable on War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy, Volume IX, No. 18 (2017).
does not, do in shaping foreign security policy. This paper aims to contribute to a new research agenda on the complex linkages between democratic practice and international affairs by synthesizing and organizing the various strands on democracy and international politics into an operational and manageable framework, and illustrating the power of that approach on a key understudied non-Western democracy.

Theories of Democratic Advantage (and Disadvantage)

We focus on theories that make clear claims about how democratic electoral competition shapes the behavior of politicians as they deal with foreign policy. Two lines of research are important: defense management by politicians and credibility in crisis bargaining. They are united by the underlying logic that politicians that pursue policies at odds with the electorate are more likely to be removed from office: politicians care about voters, voters care about security policy, and thus politicians pay attention to foreign policy in order to avoid the wrath of voters. If they lose wars, do not provide security, or back down in crises, they ought to be punished. In Reiter and Stam’s words, "democratic political institutions hold the key to prudent and successful foreign policy."¹³

The first set of theories suggests that democratic leaders will exert careful attention to strategy and military power because of the threat of punishment that looms for policy failures. If security is a public good, and voters vote on public goods, Bueno de Mesquita et al. argue that

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“large-coalition societies, being oriented toward public goods, are more likely than small-coalition polities to provide well for national defense.”

Reiter and Stam argue that democratic leaders will engage in more careful strategic selection of conflicts because of the risks of losing a war. Goldsmith similarly argues that, “the incentive to avoid the political vulnerability inherent in policy failure will drive executives to ensure that they have the resources necessary for policy success.” There is disagreement about the specific mechanism leading to these beneficial outcomes, but all agree that the prospect of punishment through the electoral connection is essential. The shadow of the electorate should lead to higher levels of expertise, strategic assessment, and oversight of defense apparatuses in order to both select the optimal strategy and to ensure that in the event of war the state is appropriately prepared. Elected officials, especially those held responsible by the electorate, will be careful defense managers.

The second line of theory focuses on crisis bargaining. Here electoral competition again matters, as the prospect of punishment causes leaders to make more credible threats. As Fearon argues, “in democracies, foreign policy is made by an agent on behalf of principals (voters) who have the power to sanction the agent electorally or through the workings of public opinion.” Schultz makes similar assumptions in arguing that domestic opposition parties can play an

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15 Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*.
important role in signaling resolve in crises. In particular, when opposition parties stand with the government, threats become more credible, providing a (conditional) democratic advantage. Smith argues that “voters punish leaders who do not carry out their threats” while Guisinger and Smith suggest that if a democratic leader bluffs and the bluff is called, “the domestic audience punishes the leader for destroying the country’s honest record and thus for putting in jeopardy the future benefits of being able to communicate during a crisis.” For Ramsay, democracies “bargain harder” and get “better offers” because of electoral incentives. Experimental research in the US suggests that voters disapprove of presidents who back down in a crisis. Democratic leaders should win crises by manipulating risk in the public eye, pay attention to mass electorates as they make decisions, and be punished if they back down.

Existing work has criticized some of these arguments on empirical grounds. Other research has examined authoritarian regimes. A smaller literature going back to Lippmann and

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Morgenthau has identified democracies as soft or weak states whose publics are not willing to suffer the costs of serious foreign policy. Yet most of these literatures have not grappled with the diversity and heterogeneity of democratic regimes themselves.

Baum and Potter offer the most important critique of this status quo, noting that “very little” of the existing research “differentiates among democracies.” They argue that democratic leaders will be most constrained by public opinion in the face of a robust free press and a large number of opposition parties. This combination is most likely to disseminate quality information that will link public opinion to actual foreign security policy. This is a valuable insight. But it has two limitations. First, information about issues is not the same as viewing issues as important: there may be plentiful information about foreign affairs available in a polity, but it may simply be a lower priority for the electorate than other issues. The public may receive information, but vote on other grounds – social issues, redistribution, and debates over ethnicity and nationalism, among others, are all potent alternative cleavages that may dominate politics. Second, while Baum and Potter argue that the larger the number of opposition parties, the more effectively voter preferences are transmitted, it is also the case that a larger number of parties that results in a fragmented opposition or generates unstable coalition governments can do exactly the opposite. A large number of parties is not an unalloyed good for representation and responsiveness, as the French Third Republic suggests. Third, like most of the literature on

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28 See footnote 9 for important exceptions. For a leader-focused exception, see Croco, “The Decider’s Dilemma: Leader Culpability, War Outcomes, and Domestic Punishment.”

29 Baum and Potter, War and Democratic Constraint, 27. See also the H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable on War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy, Volume IX, No. 18 (2017).

30 They note this ambiguity; Baum and Potter, War and Democratic Constraint, 21 and 25.
They largely focus on the standard array of European and American cases. Thus, even this conditional democratic advantage literature assumes both that voters care about foreign policy, are able to educate themselves about it under at least some circumstances, and can clearly hold leaders accountable. But these conditions vary, and they do so systematically, generating different and identifiable predictions about the different incentives that politicians can face in foreign security affairs.

The Origins of Electoral Incentives: Salience and Responsibility

There are (at least) two key areas in which the link between voters and politicians can vary across space and time: the *salience* of security policy issues among the electorate—how much the average voter cares—and the *clarity of responsibility* among politicians—how easily elected officials can be held responsible—for foreign policy outcomes. These two variables interact to refract the effects of domestic political incentives and structures onto how foreign policy is managed in democracies. We argue that these vary across countries and across issues and over time within them.\(^3\)

**Salience**

The salience of security policy is likely to vary quite dramatically. When there are greater pressures on voters’ time and other interests that can be usefully advanced by voting, we should not expect voting behavior to be significantly aligned with foreign policy preferences. As salience declines, the public’s “zone of acquiescence”\(^3\) in foreign policy grows: politicians have both more latitude to act and less electoral incentive to devote attention to the issue. We should

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\(^3\) Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, hint at this kind of variation as they consider why some democracies are closer to a contemporary consent model vs. an electoral punishment model of how politicians think about consent and war, but do not pursue it (pp. 199-201), noting that “the degree to which either of these models will best explain democratic foreign policy behavior is likely to vary across political systems” (201).

expect dramatic variation in the extent to which security policy matters in elections: this is a variable, not a constant. Furthermore, salience can vary over the time, as well as over issue space, as some issues become more relevant to the electorate, and at particular moments. American grand strategy in Asia was far more salient in the 1952 presidential election, during the Korean War, than in the 1996 election, for instance. Variation in salience is obviously far more sophisticated in reality; certain constituencies may be highly focused on an issue even if the mass electorate is not. But here we focus at an abstract level on the relative level of salience across the electorate, while noting that more nuanced approaches will certainly bear fruit in future research.

When might the salience of a foreign policy issue be low? Economic and social issues can be powerful cleavages that subsume or overwhelm foreign security policy. Under these circumstances, foreign policy will not have a distinctive role in electoral competition: voters may support a politician despite foreign policy failures because of alignment on other issues, or oppose a politician despite foreign policy successes because of conflict on other dimensions. Group attachments, partisanship, and the impact of other cleavages, whether over visions of nationalism or redistributive conflict, can all take higher priority than foreign policy, or subsume it into these domestic divisions. Foreign policy can therefore become marginal, or irrelevant, in the calculations of election-seeking politicians.

Research in American politics suggests that foreign policy has an ambiguous relationship to public opinion. In Aldrich et al.’s words, “the impact of foreign policy on electoral outcomes once again appears to be both potentially substantial and highly contingent.” Other research has

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34 Berinsky, *In Time of War*.
36 Aldrich et al, “Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection,” 491. See also Page, Benjamin I., and
shown that mass political opinion is a weak guide to the foreign policy positions of American elites.\textsuperscript{37} Research on voters holding politicians accountable in general suggests a very complex relationship, ranging from intricate strategic interactions that can lead to a vast array of outcomes to irrational, group-based attachments that limit accountability.\textsuperscript{38} Even in the relatively straightforward, heavily studied American case, there is no reason to believe that voters consistently can hold politicians easily accountable, much less that they focus on foreign policy when trying to do so.\textsuperscript{39}

Distinct from dimension-based political competition, “patronage democracy”\textsuperscript{40} can undermine programmatic party competition over public goods like security.\textsuperscript{41} Patronage involves particularistic, clientelistic exchanges between individual and collective groups of voters, on the one hand, and politicians, on the other.\textsuperscript{42} Differential distribution, not public goods, dominates


\textsuperscript{41} Bueno de Mesquita et al., \textit{The Logic of Political Survival}, argue that “security is the essential public good of foreign policy.” (407)

electoral competition.\textsuperscript{43} This is important because security, victory, and military preparation are theorized in extant work as public goods. However, if the political system revolves around patronage, appeals to public good provision in foreign policy will have limited electoral appeal.\textsuperscript{44} While defense spending policies can have distributional consequences, they are far less pervasive than broader social and redistributive policies across the whole electorate.

Within a country, there is often variation in salience across foreign policy issues. This may reflect objective threat conditions. For instance, foreign sponsored terrorism on the homeland is likely to be higher salience than foreign policy toward a distant, obscure country, and policy toward established adversaries ought to be higher salience than policy toward allies. Yet salience can also be, and often is, de-linked from objective material threats. The fusing of international issues with domestic cleavages, the strategies of parties and politicians, and weight of other domestic cleavages can all make structurally significant international issues low in domestic salience (defense acquisition in India, for instance), while some security issues may emerge as highly salient despite relatively little objective international importance (such as, for instance, the Benghazi issue in American domestic politics).

Salience can increase over time, through at least two mechanisms. First, an external shock that makes it clear to politicians and the public that the security of the state is under significant threat can make national security issues salient to an electoral agenda. We expect this mechanism to be important primarily when the state is attacked or under clear imminent threat; such cases are very rare.\textsuperscript{45} There can certainly be endogenous interactions between external and


\textsuperscript{44} Smith, “International Crises and Domestic Politics”; Bueno de Mesquita et al., \textit{The Logic of Political Survival}.

domestic politics, where international threats shape domestic salience, but these linkages are likely to be multi-faceted and contingent rather than external threats straightforwardly determining electoral salience.

Second, politicians may attempt to make foreign policy salient at a specific moment by exploiting a particular issue as an electoral wedge issue. Strategic campaign dynamics can put security policy in a central position. We should expect opportunistic electoral mobilization when doing so appeals to blocs of voters who can strengthen or undermine the coalition of a ruling government; foreign policy may allow clever politicians to find an issue along which to splinter the support base. It may be not easy to manipulate the salience of foreign security policy if the baseline is structurally low; as we return to in the conclusion, we know very little about when playing the foreign policy card actually works. Both mechanisms can also lead to a decrease in salience, as issues fade from immediacy or politicians stop emphasizing them.

For the purposes of this paper, while acknowledging the dynamic and potentially endogenous nature of issue salience, it is sufficient to note that security policy issues vary dramatically in their electoral salience. Many voters are only peripherally aware of or concerned with issues of defense preparedness, strategy, crisis bargaining, and war-fighting. And even in the midst of raging wars or ominous international rivalries, the electorate may be more focused on ethnic politics, social issues, redistribution, or patronage. Politicians sometimes decide to mobilize around foreign policy, but often choose not to – and sometimes, they try but fail. Salience, and the electoral incentives that flow from it, is a variable, not a constant, but one that is not fluidly manipulable by political elites. We return to the question of manipulation and endogenous change in the conclusion.

Clarity of Responsibility

The second major variable that can shape electoral incentives for security effort is the ability to assign responsibility and punish/reward politicians for policy outcomes.\(^47\) Holding politicians accountable for policy outcomes is easier under some circumstances than others. It can be difficult in some democratic configurations to assign blame to any one politician or party for policy failures. For the same reasons it can be equally difficult to determine how to punish responsible individuals or parties. We cannot assume that there is a single punishable leader to whom all blame and credit will accrue as voters observe the aftermath of policy decisions (perhaps as channeled through the media).\(^48\) Clarity is less important when salience is low, but plays a crucial role when it is high by determining how well the transmission belts of accountability work.

According to Bingham Powell Jr., responsibility requires knowing “who was responsible for policy making” and “a clear opportunity to vote against those incumbents.”\(^49\) This includes, therefore, an important informational component – voters need to have some idea of how they can strategically respond to foreign policy outcomes if there is to be high clarity of responsibility.\(^50\) Leaders are embedded in complex political environments that condition their


\(^{48}\) Powell, G. Bingham, and Guy D. Whitten, “A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context,” *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 2 (1993): 398. For work on responsible leaders that focuses on who was in charge when a decision was made, see Croco, “The Decider’s Dilemma”. Here we also suggest that holding even responsible leaders accountable can be difficult.


\(^{50}\) There may also be an informational dynamic in salience – it is possible that low-information voters on particular issues view those issues as having low salience. Alternatively, they may view them as having little salience as a result of having little information, rather than vice versa. In other cases, however, voters with limited information on an issue may nevertheless view it as highly salient. We view information as endogenous to salience: if voters care about a particular issue, such as China or cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, they will seek the necessary information to assess and punish or reward their leaders for their decisions.
vulnerability to punishment and their opportunity for rewards.\textsuperscript{51} Clarity is thus a function of both formal institutions – like the power of the executive – and informal practices, like coalition government and patronage politics. The Polity scale does not capture these realities of democratic practice. Measuring this concept requires an \textit{ex ante} determination of whether voters can both identify \textit{and} punish those individual or individuals responsible for security policy. When both identification and punishment are possible, we code clarity of responsibility as ‘high.’

Otherwise it takes a value of ‘low.’ Examples of low clarity include complex coalition governments in which power is distributed broadly and voters are at the mercy of deal-making politicians, presidential systems with a long lag between foreign policy decision and actual elections, seat-sharing arrangements (such as in regionalized party systems) in which voters cannot directly vote against an incumbent party but instead are faced with alliances at the state or regional level, co-habitation systems in which presidents and prime ministers both have significant powers, divided government systems with executives and legislatures from different parties, and policy areas in which bureaucrats, military officers, and elected officials each have some kind of policy-making role that diffuses responsibility.\textsuperscript{52} Although Baum and Potter argue that “more is better” when it comes to opposition parties, this is not such a straightforward proposition.\textsuperscript{53} Clarity of responsibility is not identical to the number of opposition parties—sometimes they overlaps, but this is not always necessarily the case.

\textsuperscript{51} In the cross-regime context, this point is made by: Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment} and Weeks, \textit{“Autocratic Audience Costs.”}


\textsuperscript{53} Baum and Potter, \textit{War and Democratic Constraint}, 23.
Variation in clarity of responsibility is a complex function of timing, coalitions, and intra-government maneuvering. These can change over time as these conditions change, but we should generally not expect high levels of fluidity (though there are exceptions when parliamentary systems have rapid turnover): national ruling coalitions do not change monthly, there are long periods between elections in most democracies that limit the ability of voters to punish incumbents, and the institutional distribution of powers in democracies tend to be quite sticky.

Accountability Environments and Political Incentives

This section identifies four democratic accountability environments that reflect different combinations of salience and clarity of responsibility. These are not static, and can be the object of determined political manipulation and mobilization by political entrepreneurs. But they are also not fluid or ephemeral, meaning that they can be used to explain variation even while acknowledging exogenous and endogenous processes of change. Future research will benefit from studying how parties and politicians try to shift salience and clarity, and the conditions under which these efforts succeed and fail.

This section traces out the implications of each environment for patterns of politician effort and attention in foreign policy. We want to know how much politicians invest in foreign policy and how constrained they are by domestic factors. Some of these environments generate other predictions about the insulation of bureaucracies and the behavior of politicians who are not national leaders. Our scope condition is that the state in question be a democracy (using a minimalist definition) where a mass electorate determines the fate of its leaders.\footnote{Przeworski, Adam, \textit{Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America}. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).} We
summarize our expectations in Table 1. This is a simple but original explanatory typology in which salience and clarity of responsibility can each be either high or low.\textsuperscript{55}

Table 1. Accountability Environments and Politicians in Foreign Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Clarity</th>
<th>High Salience</th>
<th>Low Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[I] High Responsiveness</td>
<td>Effort: Central leaders and other politicians invest in foreign policy and pay attention to oversight and learning Constraint: High, as leaders need to pay careful attention to public</td>
<td>[II] Bounded Flexibility Effort: High by highest national politicians, but not by other politicians Constraint: some autonomy to maneuver and back down, but downside risk of visible failure is high, as constraints significantly tighten</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Clarity</th>
<th>[III] Protected Politicians</th>
<th>[IV] Sclerosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effort: Politicians invest in foreign policy Constraint: Relatively low, creating diffuse, complex policymaking environment</td>
<td>Effort: Limited attention or effort by top politicians Constraint: Very little, leading to rise of bureaucratic insulation and ad hoc policy making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accountability Environments and Political Incentives

Four ideal-typical accountability environments emerge. Salience and clarity can vary independently of one another: we may see a system with a clear executive responsible for foreign policy, but electoral politics that center on localized clientelism; we may also see a labyrinthine parliamentary coalition structure in which security policy is central to electoral competition. We do not theorize the strategies that politicians may pursue as they navigate through these

environments – a rich area for future work – but instead highlight structural tendencies created by the underlying patterns of incentives. These ideal types are not static, and polities can shift between them as salience and/or clarity of responsibility change, helping to explain shifts over time and across issue areas in accountability environments.

I: High Responsiveness

The first environment is one with high security policy salience and high clarity of responsibility. Leaders can be directly identified, blamed, and punished for security policy outcomes. The electorate cares and is informed about security policies and outcomes, and thus keeps a close eye on politicians’ activities. Politicians have powerful incentives to pay attention to issues and formulate appropriate policy. This is the idealized environment that is often taken as a given by theorists of democratic advantage in international relations.57

Leaders should invest their time and resources on high-salience foreign policy issues because they are being monitored by an attentive population and can be punished for failure and underperformance. This may require delving deep into bureaucracies to fix suboptimal policies and engaging in costly expertise-gathering.58 Crisis bargaining over high salience issues in high clarity environments is where audience costs should be the most powerful. Politicians can credibly tie hands because they face a mobilized domestic public able to punish weakness and exposed bluffs. This does not mean that they will win every crisis they face, but in crisis behavior they should not stumble into wars or repeatedly undermine their own credibility. This is

the best case for theories of democratic advantage, where “consent breeds success and
democracy builds security.”59

II: Bounded Flexibility

Bounded flexibility is an accountability environment in which responsibility is clear but
salience toward the security issue in question is low. In this environment, political leaders may
be identifiable and punishable, but if the electorate has little incentive to monitor their behavior
on security policies, then politicians have wide latitude to make mistakes, underinvest, or
experiment in security policy. Political leaders have flexibility in policy because they are not
being closely followed and are unlikely to be punished for most of their policy decisions. They
have substantial autonomy to make foreign policy as they wish. National leaders will therefore
dominate foreign policy making, while the vast majority of politicians will not campaign on or
pursue expertise in foreign policy because they have little to gain. The electorate’s attention is
elsewhere, and ambitious politicians will follow it.

The goal of the politicians in charge of policy-making is to invest at least enough to keep
foreign security policy off the radar screen of the electorate so that they are not punished for any
massive mistakes, since there are few rewards to be had for successful management of foreign
policy. However, ambitious and entrepreneurial politicians can personalize foreign policy to
pursue their own goals here, without much domestic constraint.

Flexibility does have a limit: if something goes disastrously and visibly wrong, clarity
makes punishment possible if salience spikes upward. Leaders in these contexts have room to
maneuver but not total freedom. Their primary incentive is to manage downside risk of failure,
which can lead to different kinds of behavior than aiming for success in a particular area. A

59 Reiter and Stam, Democracies at War, 204.
major failing or exogenous shock could raise the salience of a particular foreign security policy that would push the issue toward high responsiveness. This is why flexibility is bounded, leading to attention by senior national politicians who need to at least keep an eye on foreign policy, but not by other elected officials unlikely to face foreign policy issues on the campaign trail.

This is not an outcome of total abdication or apathy by senior policy-makers, but it is de-linked from the day-to-day dynamics of electoral politics. Policies will bear the personalized stamp of policymakers rather than of the median voter. Because of the public is generally not very attentive to the foreign policy issue, policymakers have substantial freedom to experiment in crises that remain low salience. They can back down, reframe results to their advantage, and achieve outcomes between clear success and clear failure. The zone of acquiescence is wide, allowing innovation and flexibility. Bounded flexibility is likely to be very common in democracies, creating a distinctive pattern of foreign policy in which only elite politicians pay much attention to foreign policy and have substantial autonomy to experiment and innovate.

III. Protected Politicians

The protected politicians environment is the opposite of bounded flexibility. When salience is high but clarity of responsibility is muddled, we see a public that is motivated to reward and punish politicians but unable to easily do so. The structure of governance – a result of institutions and/or practices - makes it difficult to figure out who deserves credit and blame and, crucially, exactly how to punish them if they can be identified. The electoral connection is undermined and a core transmission belt of accountability becomes far less powerful. Voters face an incredibly complex political environment that makes straightforward punishment difficult.

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60 This may explain the bluffing and maneuvering that Trachtenberg, “Audience Costs”, and Snyder and Borghard, “The Cost of Empty Threats” highlight.

61 See Saunders, “The Electoral Disconnection in U.S. Foreign Policy,” and “War and the Inner Circle” for some of these elite political dynamics in the US case.
Politicians cannot be punished easily if policies go awry, but they also will not be acclaimed for their successes. This leads to muddled and incoherent policies. Decision-making is not dominated by a leader or tight central leadership. Instead, policy is made by committee, buck-passing and energetic attempts to avoid blame are endemic, and bureaucracies are not consistently monitored. This is clearly different from bounded flexibility, in which central leaders dominate (and often personalize) foreign policy. Because there is public attention to foreign policy, politicians cannot totally ignore the issue, and so there are bursts of oversight and strategic debate but not the development of sustained expertise by national politicians.

Demagoguery and opportunism dominate: when contingent political tides make it worthwhile to intervene in security policy, politicians may do so, but this attention will be variable and unpredictable. Inconsistent attention and buck-passing make the creation of either autonomous or carefully controlled bureaucracies difficult. Strategy, procurement, and planning suffer badly in this environment, which has the all the downsides of politicization with few of the benefits. Because political power is decided through a variety of complex mechanisms that are difficult to predict in advance, accountability is challenging. There should be no distinctive democratic advantage in this environment; instead, inconsistent and contingent crisis strategy dominates, with buck-passing, political struggles to get credit and deflect blame, and opaque decision-making.

IV. Sclerosis

The sclerosis accountability environment, in which both salience and clarity are low, creates an insulated security establishment dominated by unelected elites, little attention to

security policy by the vast majority of politicians, and no strong link between the public and foreign policy. Political incentives militate against elected officials’ investment in oversight, expertise, and attention. If politicians can gain little from devoting sustained effort to security affairs, we should not expect them to do so. If they are unlikely to be punished for failure, there is further disincentive to pay serious attention to these issues. There may be other motivations for politicians to devote effort, like international structural pressures or individual vision, but this context is least promising for the specific democratic accountability mechanism. Even after egregious failings, politicians are insulated by low salience and muddled clarity. This bodes poorly for these types of democracies’ performance in security policy (again, holding all else constant): it is the nightmare of Lippmann, Morgenthau, and other scholars of democratic irresolve and weakness.

Defense preparedness suffers and is replaced by inattention and insulation. Strategic assessment suffers as well, with politicians not contributing to debates and discussions over how to best provide the state with security. Bureaucrats and unelected elites become major influences in strategy without accountability or mass debate about their preferred policies. This is where bureaucracies are the most autonomous: in the other accountability environments, politicians at least sometimes seriously intervene in security apparatuses, whether to satisfy the median voter (under high responsiveness), to put their centralized, personalized stamp on foreign policy (bounded flexibility), or to score political points (protected politicians). Under sclerosis, smart politicians have few electoral reasons to care much about defense issues and the public’s attention is devoted elsewhere. The space for strategic discussion that politicians are supposed to

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64 For a structural approach that abstracts away from domestic politics, see Waltz, Kenneth Neal., Theory of International Politics. (Boston: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979); Mearsheimer, John J., The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001)
occupy is filled by other political actors, from bureaucracies to thinktanks to corporate lobbies. These actors operate in a democratic system, but not in close dialogue with the democratic electorate.

There will be no democratic advantage in crisis bargaining because the core mechanisms that are supposed to connect electoral competition to politician behavior are de-linked. There is little to gain from winning crises; instead there is significant room to back down, reframe failures, and otherwise avoid punishment for crisis outcomes that are not clear successes. Other dynamics, from the conventional military balance to individual leadership, should be more important than perceptions of looming electoral punishment in driving behavior.

*Accountability and Foreign Policy*

Our overview of accountability environments reveals the varying linkages between elections and foreign policy behavior. We can see fundamentally different political incentives *across* equally democratic regimes and *within* them depending on the salience of issues and the particular constellation of representation at any point in time. It generates predictions about how leaders should act, how political parties should behave, and patterns of behavior by security bureaucracies.

This argument is simple and quite modest, but it helps to make sense of the inconclusive empirical debates over democracy and conflict. There may be situations in which a democracy does operate with the focus and efficiency heralded by theorists of democratic advantage, and other political contexts in which a democracy acts in precisely the opposite way. This framework clarifies the diverse domestic-political terrain that democratic politicians navigate in foreign security policy.65

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65 A crucial question is the extent to which foreign policy salience can be strategically manipulated by elites as opposed to being structurally determined by social and economic cleavages or political institutions. On the US
Democracy and Foreign Security Policy in India

The rest of this paper explores Indian security policy toward Pakistan, China, and weapons development/acquisition. We choose India for a several reasons. First, India resides in a relatively high-threat environment, bordered by one neighbor, Pakistan, against which it has fought four wars and with which it continues to have an enduring rivalry and another, China, which is a conventionally superior nuclear weapons power which humiliated India in the 1962 war and with which India continues to have a disputed border. Structural pressures would predict significant attention to these two threats and sustained investment in underlying defense preparedness, such as weapons development and procurement, in order to provide security. These are the core “hard security” pillars of Indian foreign policy. Outcomes different from these would suggest a powerful role for how accountability environments adjust the trajectory of standard structural realist pressures on state behavior.66

Second, India provides significant within-case variation of accountability environments over time and across these multiple important foreign security policy issue areas, allowing us to explore the dynamics of different accountability environments. Third, India is an important non-Western rising power democracy that has been systematically under-studied in extant literature – other than being included in the major quantitative conflict datasets and research on nuclear

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66 Schweller, “Unanswered Threats.”
deterrence\textsuperscript{67}, it is almost entirely absent from mainstream American IR theory.\textsuperscript{68} This provides an opportunity to provide new data to the broader field.

It is important to note that the following sections are not a causal test of the argument. Instead, we leverage our knowledge of India to present a plausibility probe to see if the theorized dynamics actually exist in the real world. The advantage of focusing on a single-country probe is that cross-national comparisons introduce so many potential confounding variables that they are not particularly useful at this stage of theory development. Future work will put India in a more explicit comparative perspective with other democracies (particularly those whose foreign policy was not largely run by the United States).

We examine three core issue-areas in Indian foreign security policy: China, Pakistan, and, related to both, defense procurement and development. In the case of China, salience varies substantially over time, helping us understand both the causes and consequences of shifts in salience. In the case of Pakistan, the issue of cross border terrorism specifically is generally high salience. This allows us to isolate how changing configurations in clarity of responsibility affects India’s behavior. Defense management has almost always been both low salience and low clarity, with complex, long-term projects that evade simple responsibility for outcomes or the knowledge and interest of the general public. These issue areas vary in salience across them, and over time; and the clarity of responsibility over them varies over time within India as parliamentary configurations shift. Yet all of them are of central importance to India’s security posture.


\textsuperscript{68} Though Snyder and Borghard, “The Cost of Empty Threats” does include a discussion of 1962 India-China, India is mostly conspicuous by its absence in extant literature.
There are many other issues that can be studied, and these issue-areas can be disaggregated much more finely across time and sub-issue than we have here, so this only scratches the surface of the empirical record. It also does not deal with efforts by politicians and parties to move the salience of issues or with broader challenges of accountability in the Indian political system. Nevertheless, it provides a basis for further work. Kapur concludes a landmark survey on Indian public opinion by noting that his survey evidence does not address “the precise mechanisms that may link Indian public opinion to the nature of Indian foreign policy. Future research needs to begin to investigate those links”69; here we aim to begin that agenda.

Salience and Clarity in India

The basic structure of Indian politics places foreign policy as a relatively low salience issue. Kapur shows a clear class structure to foreign policy attitudes: “The more elite (defined both by education and occupation), the more likely Indians will be to have an opinion on foreign policy issues. The rural poor either ‘don’t know’ (two-thirds) while another quarter have ‘no response’, indicating that foreign policy has low salience for them.”70 Given the primacy of non-elites in Indian mass politics, it is little surprise that election campaigns tend not to be built around foreign policy issues, though foreign policy is not entirely absent. As Kapur further notes “Parliament rarely discusses issues of foreign policy.”71 Especially at the level of individual districts and states, most foreign policy topics are distant vote-winners, and so members of parliament have weak incentives to focus on them.

This is particularly the case with highly technical issues with little public appeal such as nuclear and conventional doctrine, weapons development, and defense acquisition which only

69 2009.
sporadically make a public splash.\textsuperscript{72} There are of course exceptions – alleged kickbacks from the Bofors artillery gun purchase under Rajiv Gandhi made defense acquisition politically sensitive due to allegations of corruption in the 1980s, and the nuclear test of 1998 was obviously a major event – but such matters rarely factor high in research on why the Indian electorate chooses particular parties and candidates over others.

However, not all foreign policy issues are low salience. “Indian foreign policy elites do appear to be mindful of latent public opinion wherever sensitivities of certain sections of the population are at play, be it religious minorities (in shaping India’s Middle East policies), regional groups (such as Tamils towards Sri Lanka), and the majority (Hindu) community (often reflected in hardline positions vis-à-vis Muslim Pakistan)” (Kapur 2015, 7). Pakistan is nationally highly salient because of its deep important to Indian nationalism and the mobilization of Hindu-Muslim cleavages in domestic politics. Both major national parties, the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have deployed Pakistan as both a specter and an area where their party has or promises to do deliver results. Domestic and international are tightly fused together in the case of Pakistan. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh policy can be salient at times for particular sub-national electorates. Policy toward China and the United States has at times become a highly salient issue – during border clashes with China and parliamentary debates over the US-India nuclear deal – but are not a major preoccupation of the public or regularly deployed in electoral campaigning.

Clarity of responsibility varies substantially across time and issue-area. Under strong prime ministers with clear majorities, clarity should generally be higher than under complex

\textsuperscript{72} On the elite politics of the nuclear program, see Cortright, David, and Amitabh Mattoo, \textit{India and the Bomb: Public Opinion and Nuclear Options.} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Perkovich, George, \textit{India’s Nuclear Bomb,} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
coalitions where seat-sharing, alliances, and elite bargaining complicate the ability of a given voter to vote for or against a policy. The regionalization of Indian politics broadly reduced clarity after 1989.\textsuperscript{73} It is now higher under Narendra Modi’s BJP majority government. The very highest level, most public security issues are squarely the domain of the Prime Minister and ministers of Defence and External Affairs.

Other types of foreign policy issues involve lower clarity. We can see regionally, but not nationally, important issues in which regional parties and state chief ministers can pursue their own foreign policies. Foreign policies that are not easily observed, that involve high levels of information and expertise, and that are carried out over sustained periods of time by large bureaucracies are also susceptible to low clarity of responsibility, even when they involve provisioning defense against Pakistan and China. India’s large but byzantine weapons development and acquisition apparatus is an example we discuss below: despite its central importance to the security of the state, many actors can be plausibly credited or blamed for outcomes, which may stretch over multiple administrations and involve the interaction of numerous agencies, bureaucrats, and elected officials.\textsuperscript{74} These codings are summarized in Table 2, where we select illustrative examples for each accountability environment.


Table 2. Accountability Environments by Issue-Area, India

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<tr>
<th>High Clarity</th>
<th>Low Clarity</th>
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<td><strong>High Salience</strong></td>
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**High Responsiveness: Cross-border Terrorism from Pakistan**

Pakistan is generally a high-salience issue in Indian politics. The public overwhelmingly views Pakistan as a serious threat. Pew polling in spring 2015 showed Pakistan as by far the least favorably viewed country, with twice as many respondents seeing it unfavorably compared to China (64% vs 32%).75 Pakistan was by far the most unfavorably viewed in Lowy India Poll in 2013 as well; using a feeling thermometer, Pakistan scored 20 degrees, compared to 44 for China and 62 for the United States. Kapur’s (2009) foreign policy poll (executed in 2006) is consistent with both of these polls: across both elite and non-elite groups, Pakistan was viewed very unfavorably, and seen as both aggressive and untrustworthy (pp. 294-295). Even though China is materially far more threatening, Pakistan has a much deeper role in India’s domestic political competition.

Given the legacies of Partition, the sensitivities of Hindu-Muslim politics in India, perceived Pakistani military support for insurgents and terrorists that have increasingly targeted Indian metropoles, and repeated wars and skirmishes, this is unsurprising. Pakistan represents a threat both to Indian nationalism and to its material security position; Ganguly notes that both

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75 Pew Global Attitudes Project 2015.
“the fundamentally divergent ideological commitments of the dominant nationalist elites” of India and Pakistan’s national movements and “imperatives of statecraft” have locked the two countries into a protracted rivalry.\(^76\) That is not to say that Pakistan is higher salience than caste, redistribution, language, or communal cleavages, but it seems reasonable to code it as, by far, the highest salience of possible foreign policy issues. As Basrur notes, it is structurally built into the basic structure of Indian politics, with India-Pakistan antagonism deeply embedded in “mutually exclusive identities and the influence of domestic politics.”\(^77\)

If our argument is right, Pakistan policy should generally be a high responsiveness accountability environment: there is no ambiguity about who runs Pakistan policy, except in muddled coalition governments, and it is a high salience issue (as foreign policy issues go). We should expect to see elected leaders investing heavily in Pakistan policy, trying to avoid disastrous stumbles, and paying careful attention to mass public opinion as they craft policies. High responsiveness is no guarantee of success, but it should be a guarantee of effort. Prime Ministers should pay a steep price for being perceived as weak toward Pakistan, making territorial concessions, or failing to respond to Pakistani provocations.

We do indeed see prime ministers investing heavily in trying to manage the Pakistan issue, going back to Nehru, who feared that mishandling Pakistan policy could disastrously exacerbate domestic communal cleavages.\(^78\) The 1965 and 1971 wars were carried out by politicians who exerted real effort in strategy and policy making. Ganguly notes that in the run-


\(^78\) The letters from Nehru to the Chief Ministers in the 1950s show a recurrent concern about the implications of Pakistan relations for Hindu-Muslim relations. Chatterji, Joya, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) notes that this was a particularly issue in West Bengal.
up to 1965, “a series of statements by high-level Indian civilian officials had explicitly communicated India’s deterrent and defensive posture” as part of “a fairly sophisticated strategy.” Raghavan’s account of the 1971 war shows Prime Minister Indira Gandhi carefully assessing strategy, interacting closely with military and civilian bureaucrats, and paying attention to public opinion and opposition parties. This does not mean that either Indira Gandhi or Lal Bahadur Shastri handled these crises with Pakistan perfectly, but they engaged with their militaries prior to and during the conflicts, knowing that they faced extremely high domestic political stakes for disasters. Subsequent prime ministers have also invested heavily in working on Pakistan, from the Narasimha Rao government’s focus on responding to cross-border support for Kashmiri insurgents to the efforts of the Vajpayee and Singh governments toward both clashes—such as Kargil, where Vajpayee personally calibrated India’s military response—and peace initiatives.

During the Kargil War, for example, after Pakistani infiltration was detected across the Line of Control (LoC), our theory would predict extremely high-level attention from India’s paramount political leaders, particularly BJP Prime Minister Vajpayee, who had assembled a majority coalition in Parliament. This is exactly what occurred. Vajpayee and his newly appointed and powerful National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, personally scoped and directed the military response, directly ordering the Army to meet the infiltration head-on and proportionally, and instructing the Air Force to not cross the LoC so as to avoid both conventional and potentially nuclear escalation. With a stable coalition and clearly the man in

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79 Ganguly, Conflict Unending, 38.
82 Malik, V. P., Kargil War: From Surprise to Victory (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2006); Narang, Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era, Chapter 10.
charge, this pattern under Vajpayee would be repeated following a terrorist attack believed to be Pakistan-sponsored on India’s Parliament in 2001. Known as the Twin Peaks crisis, or Operation Parakram, Vajpayee and Mishra directed the mobilization of 800,000 Indian military forces as a coercive measure—under the threat of war—to try to compel Pakistan to shut down its support for terrorist organizations (though unsuccessfully, an issue we return to below). It is important to note that although the compellent effort was unsuccessful, Modi, Mishra, and key ministers such as Jaswant Singh and George Fernandes, were all involved in the day-to-day political management of the crisis and decisions about whether to actually initiate a war with Pakistan. This level of responsiveness in this accountability environment is exactly what our theory would predict.

When Congress won power in 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led similar efforts and paid focused attention to Pakistan. It was clear that cross border terrorism, particularly in the metropoles remained extremely high salience, and Singh was unequivocally the leader of the country with a stable coalition in Parliament. He made a broad peace initiative, known as the Composite Dialogue, one of the centerpieces of his foreign policy toward Pakistan. Part of the effort, to try to outflank veto players in both India and Pakistan opposed to a comprehensive peace, was the so-called secret Backchannel Talks. This was personally managed by Singh and his closest foreign policy confidante, and later Singh’s own National Security Adviser, Shivshankar Menon. Singh’s effort, though again unsuccessful, was a bold initiative to try to stamp out the roots of cross-border terrorism by addressing all outstanding issues with Pakistan.

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84 Ogden, Chris, Indian Foreign Policy. (John Wiley & Sons, 2014): 101-108

The effort was derailed by an event that even further intensified the salience of Pakistan in the Indian electorate: the 2008 attack on Mumbai perpetrated by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Indians, particularly in a heightened 24/7 media environment, bayed for blood, and Shivshankar Menon reveals that he himself “pressed at that time for immediate visible retaliation of some sort, either against the LeT in Muridke…or their camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, or against the ISI, which was clearly complicit.” The decision “not to retaliate militarily [was not taken lightly] and to concentrate on diplomatic, covert and other means was the right one for that time and place.” In a series of intense principals meetings, it was determined that military retaliation risked wider escalation and even potentially Pakistani nuclear use and would not be in India’s broader national interest. Despite criticism of this restraint as weakness and appeasement, Singh, and Congress, won reelection in 2009 partly on the narrative of competent management of both domestic and foreign policy. Keenly aware of upcoming elections, Singh and his team calculated that an emotionally-satisfying retaliation which dragged India into a risky war was not in India’s interests. Politicians carefully judged and assessed strategy in dialogue with military and intelligence officials.

This pattern has continued under Modi. He clearly views Pakistan as a top-tier foreign policy issue, for example placing much on the line with his personal diplomacy and an unprecedented surprise visit to Lahore in December 2015 to try to reengage Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Like Vajpayee and Singh before him, Modi has risked his personal reputation with high-profile attempts to normalize relations with Pakistan. The surprise visit was

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88 Menon, *Choices*, 62.
met with much fanfare and the manner in which it was announced and conducted—the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Pakistan in a decade—made it abundantly clear that Modi was driving Pakistan policy, so the responsibility lay directly with him.\textsuperscript{90}

When, inevitably, Pakistani veto players emerge and conduct cross-border attacks, Modi has been similarly forced into high-level management of India’s response. For example, in September 2016, Pakistani militants burned 17 Indian soldiers alive in a grenade attack across the LoC near a town called Uri. Modi came to power promising action and this attack was one of the first tests of the so-called Modi Doctrine toward Pakistan, which called for retaliating against such provocations. Modi is unquestionably in a high-responsiveness environment with respect to Pakistani attacks: high salience and the prime minister of a government that has an absolute majority for the first time since Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s. Similarly faced with the escalation conundrum, Modi and his influential National Security Advisor Ajit Doval personally devised and ordered what ended up being known as the “surgical strike” retaliation, which involved Indian special forces crossing the LoC for the first publicly acknowledged time in thirteen years and destroying several militant compounds.\textsuperscript{91} Though militarily dubious, and with few obvious long-term strategic effects, the constraints of the high responsiveness environment locked Modi into his previous promises to not let such Pakistani provocations go unmet. Although Modi’s tactics have evolved, from engagement to retaliation, the high level attention paid to Pakistan has been constant. The Indian political-military leadership can be remarkably attentive and responsive - when it has political incentives to be.


In general, Indian leaders devote significant time in speeches and campaigning to discuss Pakistan, the mass media pays attention to Pakistan, and it is widely accepted that there are severe domestic political pressures and constraints that any PM must deal with on Pakistan policy. It is certainly true that none of these leaders have successfully solved the Pakistan problem; in this sense, India has not been a case of democratic triumph in crisis bargaining or coercive diplomacy. But Indian leaders have tried a wide variety of policies, from saber-rattling to outreach, and it is not obvious what objectively better policies they should have pursued instead. Most importantly, as predicted by the theory, virtually every Prime Minister has exerted his or her greatest foreign policy effort toward Pakistan policy, with a careful eye to public constraints.

Protected Politicians: Early 1990s J&K policy toward Pakistan

Despite this general pattern of high responsiveness regarding Pakistan, when clarity of responsibility becomes muddled, even Pakistan policy can lose focus. Here we explore the 1989-1991 period, when an unwieldy coalition government ruled India, an important break from the almost-continuous dominance of Congress. This period corresponded to the “compound crisis” 1990-1 between India and Pakistan, which combined fears of nuclear escalation with the growth of Pakistan-backed insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, against the backdrop of extremely tense military exercises by India (Brasstacks in 1986) and Pakistan (Zarb-e-Momin, plus the Air Force exercise Highmark).92

VP Singh led a National Front that had won the 1989 general election as part of a complex alignment of the Janata Dal with regional parties such as the DMK, TDP, and AGP as coalition partners. It was supported from the outside by both the Hindu nationalist BJP and the

Communist parties, making it a “minority coalition government, whose survival depended upon the Left and the BJP.” The Congress had actually won the largest number of votes, and its percentage more than doubled that of the Janata Dal itself. The Janata Dal, the core of the ruling coalition, was a fragile merger of previously-distinct parties and powerful personalities. The Janata Dal was divided between VP Singh and Chandra Shekhar, a long-time aspirant to being Prime Minister who felt cheated out of his rightful place in power following the 1989 election: “seething personal rivalries endangered its cohesion.” Key state parties and state units of parties were now locked in regionalized, state-level contests that did not map easily onto national political competitions. Moreover, key ministries – like the critical Ministry of Home Affairs under Mufti Mohammed Sayeed – were occupied by defectors from Congress who had jumped onto the Janata bandwagon in the late 1980s. Outside the gates, Congress lay in wait to return to power, as did the opportunistic BJP and Left, despite their support for the National Front.

As Chari et al. argue, in both India and Pakistan, “leaders had failed to win a clear ‘mandate’ and were facing powerful groups on the sidelines waiting to topple their governments.” VP Singh would be pushed out of power in November 1990, replaced by his bitter rival Chandra Shekhar, who would then be forced to resign in March 1991, ending the Janata experiment. In this first incarnation of chaotic coalition politics at the center, it was unclear to the parties—let alone the voters—how to assign clarity of responsibility on foreign policy. This is strongly suggestive of a protected politicians environment.

Indeed, we very clearly observe these political dynamics undermining coherent foreign policy responses. On the issue of the surging Kashmir insurgency, which fused domestic and

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93 Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern*, 107
94 Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern*, 103
95 Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern*, 107.
96 Chari et al., *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 109.
international security, “the Government responded in a contradictory manner,” swinging between repression and accommodation. Indeed, the imposition of Jagmohan as Governor of J&K in 1990, which led to a total breakdown of stable rule, was demanded of VP Singh’s government by the BJP; his recall was then demanded by the Left, the other external backer of the National Front government. George Fernandes of the Janata was put in the Railways Ministry as part of government formation, and he was also briefly given the Kashmir affairs portfolio for unclear reasons before it was taken back from him in 1990. There was not a consistent or clearly-articulated Kashmir policy, and it increasingly was handed over to the Army and Ministry of Home Affairs, with MP’s occasionally showing up in the Valley to visit some government buildings and then quickly retreating to the airport.

On Pakistan policy, Chari et al. argue that “the Indian government’s preoccupation with its survival may well have eroded its capacity for the patient diplomacy needed to address long-existing problem. . . . the confusion within the political system during the last half of 1989 and first half of 1990 might explain the government’s lack of attention to the building crisis.” The National Front took incoming fire from the Congress, but also from its erstwhile ally the BJP which simultaneously backed and criticized the government. Public opinion was engaged and politicians paid attention to it, with even some state-level elections in 1990 featuring campaign

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97 Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern*, 113.
99 Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern*, 113
100 George Fernandes enjoyed going to Kashmir to talk to people in Urdu. He had no previous qualifications to manage Kashmir affairs. He later became Defence Minister under the Vajpayee government.
102 Chari et al., *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 110.
103 Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 93.
rhetoric about Pakistan. The National Front pushed back against its domestic critics, but found it impossible to adopt a unified voice both because of internal rivalries within the Janata Dal and because of coalitional contradictions with the BJP.

This is an important case because it shows how domestic politics within a democracy can undermine the coherence of strategy and the accountability of politicians even in the midst of a highly-salient, geopolitically significant crisis. In general, this has not been the case for Pakistan management, so the National Front’s uncoordinated and ramshackle response to the “compound crisis” is an outlier. Nevertheless, it is a theoretically significant one. Interestingly, neither VP Singh nor Chandra Shekhar were brought down from power by anything to do with foreign policy or the compound crisis, despite the rise of a dangerous crisis and escalation of the Kashmir insurgency under the Janata Dal’s watch.104

_Bounded Flexibility: China_

Although China is structurally India’s larger and more significant long-term threat, given its sheer economic and military power, the public tends to care less about it than Pakistan. As noted earlier, Pakistan is considered a much more salient adversary than China to the Indian public due to a shared tumultuous history and partition, and the frequency of violence with it. Though China is far more materially powerful, Pakistan is much more deeply and viscerally embedded in India’s domestic politics. Regular skirmishes across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China do not garner nearly the attention as Pakistani infiltration across the Line of Control, despite the frequency being higher in the case of the LAC. As former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon said about these regular crossings: “four men, a

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104 Singh was brought down Chandra Shekhar’s maneuverings against the background of 1990’s economic crisis, and Chandra Shekhar was forced to resign when it was revealed he had engaged in intelligence surveillance of Rajiv Gandhi. No Indian PM has been forced to resign over foreign policy issues. Very few MOD or MEA ministers have, either.
dog, and a tent are no military threat.” Thus, the baseline salience of China tends to be lower than Pakistan, although clarity of responsibility for such a high-profile relationship tends to remain high, and with the Prime Minister. This suggests that China falls in the bounded flexibility accountability environment where Prime Ministers’ main goal is to avoid disastrous and humiliating outcomes that can raise the salience of issues with China and provide opportunities for punishment. Otherwise, China policy, while important, tends to remain in the background and off the front pages.

Two very different examples illustrate the bounded flexibility environment with respect to China, where Indian politicians were punished—either at the ballot box or in the court of public opinion—for major mistakes with respect to China policy. The first was run up to and the humiliating loss in the 1962 war over disputed territory between the two states. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nehru had quietly erected the “forward policy” with respect to the border with China. This was not a central axis of domestic politics, though it did gradually rise as the border issue took on significance in Parliament in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{105} This growing importance was a consequence of Chinese strategy in Tibet, particularly the imposition of direct rule as part of a simultaneous counterinsurgency and state-building agenda in the late 1950s. The shift in the balance of forces in the disputed areas occurred because “China shifted forces to suppress the rebellion,”\textsuperscript{106} an event exogenous to the fine points of Indian electoral politics.

In response to opposition charges that he was not alert to the growing border crisis, Nehru “made detailed statements…[that] revealed his evolving position” and the fact that he, along with his Minister of Defense, V.K. Krishna Menon were personally responsible for emplacing units in

\textsuperscript{105}Raghavan, Srinath, \textit{War and Peace in Modern India}. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010): 253.
the so-called Forward Policy. Though of concern to parliamentarians, including within his own party, Nehru nevertheless enjoyed an outright majority. Nehru’s government had significant flexibility as long as it did not make a disastrous mistake. For instance, although he would tell parliament at least twice that the boundary in the Ladakh area was “unclear,” he actually “adopt[ed] a firm line” with Zhou Enlai in personal correspondence about the delimitation of the boundary—able to tell parliament one thing and the adversary another because of the bounded flexibility environment in which he operated.

As the Chinese pushed back and expanded this presence along the contested borders, sometimes with force in limited clashes, the salience of the issue rose. Nehru was forced to take a harder line, saying in 1959 to placate growing parliamentary and public outcry at Chinese aggression: “We will defend our country with all our might.” But absent visible clashes, Nehru quietly erected the Forward Policy over the next several years, largely behind the scenes in a November 1961 directive, because he needed to avoid the one thing that would, he believe, cause him to lose power: ceding any Indian territory to China. He worked closely with civilian and military officials to construct a strategy toward China that would defend Indian interests while avoiding a war.

Nehru probably never believed the Forward Policy would lead to war, intending it to be “aimed at deterring further Chinese incursions by installing posts and ensuring patrolling” (the locations of which, absent alternatives from the military, were directed by Nehru and Menon themselves). Fravel and Garver show, however, that the Chinese interpreted these efforts as

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107 Raghavan, _War and Peace in Modern India_, 258.
108 Raghavan, _War and Peace in Modern India_, 255-256.
109 Nehru quoted in Raghavan, _War and Peace in Modern India_, 258.
111 Raghavan, _War and Peace in Modern India_, 275-276, 279, 282.
part of a broader effort to pressure China’s sensitive Tibet frontiers.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, in 1962, reacting to what it perceived to be Indian provocation on the unsettled border, Chinese forces struck and pushed back the Indian Army in a humiliating defeat. The salience of foreign policy, already growing from 1959, dramatically shot up in this issue area and Nehru’s government was punished for its disastrous mistake. The flexibility he had enjoyed prior to 1962 on policy toward China waned as the salience increased, and bounded significantly when the policy he pursued led to a major military defeat—the attack and the loss both a surprise and shock to Nehru.

Nehru was personally undermined by this loss and his defense minister, V.K. Krishna Menon, lost his political career.\textsuperscript{113} China policy is usually the purview of the elites, where they have the flexibility to pursue whatever they deem in the national interest – but only so long as they do not make major mistakes that bring the policy into negative public view. The 1962 war was one such major episode.

After 1962, China policy tended to remain low salience through both coalition governments and majority governments, giving governments the opportunity to pursue flexible policies within bounds, as predicted by the theory. Recently, however, India’s quest to join a variety of international regimes has run into a Chinese roadblock. Here we illustrate this with one example—admittedly much lower stakes than the 1962 war—which brought China into the headlines over an institution that most Indians would be hard pressed to name or identify: the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). We use this vignette to illustrate how the limits of flexibility operate in China policy.


\textsuperscript{113} He popped back up as an MP from Midnapore as an independent in 1969 and from Trivandrum in 1971, but he was a marginal figure.
Unlike the crisis induced by the shift in forces caused by the Chinese response to Tibetan rebellion, this was an endogenous decision by Narendra Modi, who attempted to get domestic credit for joining the NSG as part of his broader aim to normalize India as a nuclear weapons power. Instead, Modi found himself in a diplomatic showdown with China. Since the 2008 Indo-U.S. nuclear deal, India has sought to join several of the global bodies responsible for nuclear governance. One of those is the NSG, which regulates the rules governing the supply of civilian nuclear technology. Prior to 2016, few elites in India—let alone the average voter—were aware of the NSG or what it did. However, in June 2016, Prime Minister Modi made a concerted effort to join the NSG, after he received American support for joining the body. Accession to the NSG requires unanimous consent of existing members. So, in a flurry of diplomatic activity, Modi tried to secure support of the various holdouts, including nonproliferation hawk countries such as Austria, New Zealand, and Ireland. Modi and his party tried to raise the salience of the issue to reap the rewards of successfully negotiating India’s entry to the NSG.

Unfortunately, the Modi government ignored China’s repeated and unsurprising opposition to Indian entry. The Modi government tried to paint Beijing as the only holdout preventing India from joining the body. China laid down conditions that essentially required Pakistan and India to join simultaneously, which was a non-starter for India. It also turned out that many nations from which India believed it had had support quietly lined up behind Beijing at the June 2016 NSG plenary. The plenary closed with India, for the time being, denied membership into the NSG. Modi paid a public relations price as his attempt to reap the rewards of coopting China into supporting Indian membership backfired. His foreign policy team was

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pilloried in the media for grossly misjudging China. A former foreign minister from Modi’s own BJP party, the highly respected Yashwant Sinha, was publicly critical:

Why was the issue raised to such a pitch, and why did we invest so much diplomatic capital in securing the membership of the body at the last stage i.e. the Prime Minister's meeting with the Chinese President and the visit of the highest-ranking Indian official, namely the Foreign Secretary, to Seoul to hang around when the NSG meeting was taking place behind closed doors in that city? All this shows that India had completely misread the situation and was somehow hopeful, even convinced, that victory was round the corner and the credit for securing this “epoch-making” victory should be shared only by a few. Now who should be held responsible for the failure?

Sinha clearly identifies Modi as the party responsible, and there was much public outcry over an unnecessary gambit to try to isolate China. The NSG episode has been raised by scholars and commentators, like Kanti Bajpai, as an example of how Modi has mishandled foreign security policy with respect to China. Although far lower stakes than the 1962 War, this episode illustrates the constrained flexibility Indian leaders have on China-related policy. Modi gambled to reap the domestic rewards of showing that he could visibly sideline China and advance India’s interests. But when China stood firm, he paid a public relations price for his personalized style of diplomacy. Because clarity of responsibility was high, Modi faced the full brunt of the criticism directly. Just as he gets the credit for when his energetic personalized style pays off, he shoulders the blame when it does not.

Sclerosis: Modern Defense Provision vis-à-vis Pakistan and China

Defense acquisition and procurement is generally an area where both salience—even when it comes to provisioning defense against Pakistan and China—and clarity of responsibility

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115 Jacob, Jabin, “It is time for India to stop blaming China for blocking its NSG bid,” The Wire, August 11, 2016. Available at: [https://thewire.in/78262/it-is-time-for-india-to-stop-blaming-china-for-blocking-its-nsg-bid/](https://thewire.in/78262/it-is-time-for-india-to-stop-blaming-china-for-blocking-its-nsg-bid/).
are low in India, with the issue and those tasked with managing it largely receded to the background. These are often very complex, long-term outcomes that are hard to pin on any specific individual or government, so clarity is low. The public wants the outcome of security, but the technical and fiscal issues at hand are far beyond them. No smart politician is going to make a career out of Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) oversight. This leads to a consistent underprovision of defense capacity, even against structurally important adversaries like Pakistan and China. Indeed, there has been an “astounding lack of political direction in Indian efforts at military modernization.”118 Compare this to Bueno de Mesquita et al.’s claim that “large-coalition societies, being oriented toward public goods, are more likely than small-coalition polities to provide well for national defense.”119 In India – and in many other democracies (very much including the US) – the creation of hard military power quickly descends into a labyrinthine realm of bureaucracy, delay, and opacity.120 This matters because these sinews of military capability are central to both overall power in the international system and the options available to politicians when crises erupt.

Cohen and Dasgupta, in their definitive study of defense acquisition in India, find that politicians are “virtually ignorant about military affairs.”121 While there are parliamentary oversight committees, they do not engage in sustained or vigorous oversight, and are not seen as powerful parliamentary positions.122 Even in the ultimate public good arena of nuclear weapons

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119 Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, 254. This argument requires flipping the logic of collective action on its head by having the mass of voters coordinate on voting for public goods.
122 Chaudhari provides some examples of parliamentary influence over foreign policy. They are, however, primarily focused on Pakistan and China (224-225).
development and strategy, there has been essentially no strategic management or oversight by the Lok Sabha.123 Nuclear doctrinal and development debates have been the purview of an insulated “strategic enclave” dominated by scientists and other unelected policy elites.124 Shockingly, even prime ministers and defense ministers often appear to be ill-informed about and uninterested in the details of the nuclear program.125 Mukherjee notes that “usually defence ministers are important political figures in their own party or coalition and hence have little time to devote exclusively to the defence ministry;” indeed, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee was such an important Congress fixer that he was primarily occupied with political matters rather than actually focusing on defense.126

Weapons testing has failed to have even short-term electoral benefits, and has more often reflected ideological and strategic commitments instead.127 Therefore, in defense management, civilian bureaucrats of the Ministry of Defence dominate procurement, weapons development, and budgeting: “most defence ministers find it convenient for bureaucrats in the MOD to handle day to day activities. Second, lack of expertise on defence affairs makes most political figures insecure about their own knowledge. As a result they are unwilling to challenge preexisting bureaucracies.”128 The military routinely inveighs against this bureaucratic dominance, but it

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123 Perkovich, India’s Nuclear Bomb, 372.
124 This strategic enclave is the dominant focus of Perkovich’s major work.
125 The current Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar (a BJP politician from Goa with no previous experience in defense/security issues), for instance, has played fast and loose with the basics of nuclear no first use, a rather important topic to be clear and consistent about. See Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, “Confusion is risky,” Indian Express, November 18, 2016. Available at: http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/manohar-parrikar-nuclear-policy-no-first-use-nfu-atal-bihari-vajpayee-confusion-4381028/.
128 Mukherjee, Failing to Deliver, 52.
itself has enormous autonomy at the level of military strategy and force deployment. Other than the Prime Minister, his staff, and sometimes a few other elected officials, most politicians, most of the time direct their attention elsewhere. As Mukherjee notes of various reform efforts, “these reforms can only succeed if the political class overrides bureaucratic opposition to re-engineer national security agencies,” but they are consistently unwilling to do so.

This lack of oversight has contributed to massive inefficiency in defense procurement and development and a highly insulated nuclear program. Both of these programs are the pillars of India’s defense against Pakistan and China, yet they are heavily neglected by politicians. Politicians authorize defense provision but slow roll the process or fail to fund it completely or follow through with pressure on bureaucracies. The so-called Mountain Strike Corps on the Chinese front is one of India’s largest unfunded mandates, unsupported by sustained pressure from elected officials. The bulk of India’s infantry—the key units in any wartime contingency with China and Pakistan—is forced to use outdated rifles because the indigenous effort to replace World War II and Cold War era Soviet rifles with the so-called INSAS failed because the gun kept jamming. India’s premier Defense Research and Development Organization, DRDO, has delivered remarkably few effective indigenously produced platforms to the military.

129 Raghavan, “Civil–Military Relations in India” argues that as part of the bargain after 1962, Indian politicians have usually left the military alone to develop its own doctrines. If you believe Snyder and Posen, this is a suboptimal outcome given the organizational preferences of militaries. The strange, checkered history of India’s “Cold Start” doctrine provides an interesting example. For background, see: Ladwig III, Walter C., “A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army’s New Limited War Doctrine.” International Security 32, no. 3 (2008): 158–90.

130 Mukherjee, Failing to Deliver, 54.


and Dasgupta did not mince words in 2010: “DRDO has not delivered a single major weapon system to the armed forces in five decades of existence.”

It is worth noting that defense acquisition has become salient at the national level at least one time. This was because of revelations of large-scale corruption in procurement in the “Bofors scandal” of the late 1980s under Rajiv Gandhi. This scandal was, however, not related to anything about the quality of the gun or its implication for national security—the Bofors gun is actually quite good—but because corruption itself was used by VP Singh and the broader anti-Congress coalition as a cudgel in the 1989 elections. Ironically enough, this has further disincentivized politicians to touch, much less forcefully intervene in, defense management issues due to fears of being embroiled in a career-ending corruption scandal. Political oversight and intervention is essential to making defense work.

With little incentive to improve indigenous defense management, India has had to turn to a host of foreign suppliers, most notably Russia and increasingly the West. But the deterrent of being ensnared in any corruption scandals like Bofors and the issues of time horizon and technical complexity found in indigenous production have contributed to a sclerotic acquisition process. Ironically, while Indian leaders are keenly invested in the face of a terrorist incident aiming from Pakistan, their inattentive management of the larger defense posture circumscribes their options when such attacks occur. Commissions of inquiry are formed and reforms are recommended—indeed the same recommendations have appeared in each committee report for decades—but nothing then happens as electorally-savvy leaders go following votes elsewhere.

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The end result is a persistent underprovisioning of defense, even against India’s most significant security threats.

Is India Unique?

It is possible that India is an outlier: many on the Indian right complain that it acts as a weak, soft state exploited by more ruthless adversaries, while analysts like Tanham have argued that India lacks a culture of strategic thought. These claims are both problematic. India has certainly cracked down vigorously on internal movements, and when its politicians are roused to action they have proven capable of rapid strategic initiatives (such as the aftermath of the 1962 war or run-up to the 1971 war). There is much more variation than a culturalist or state capacity explanation can account for. Instead, we have suggested that there are political roots that make democracy’s relationship to national security complex and often double-edged.

Moreover, India does not appear to be unique. Many democracies have struggled to generate coherent national strategies and to consistently deter or coerce. 1930s France is a far more dramatic, dire example. As Schweller argues, political divisions “were played out in a weak political system that encouraged indecisive and muddled leadership.” Indeed, Hitler was able to read “the internal divisions that were sapping French power,” with bitter left-right polarization operating through, rather than being surmounted by, democratic institutions and elections.

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Similarly, Israel is renowned for the skills of military and intelligence apparatus. But Byman argues that “Israel's national decision making is as disastrous as its military and intelligence services are impressive.” Indeed, “much of the problem is due to Israel's unusual system of democracy, which has an extreme degree of proportional representation.” Like in India, “government ministers are rarely chosen for their expertise, but instead to ensure that the prime minister can form a coalition to stay in government.” As a result, “cabinet turnover is frequent and political horizons are short term, driven by politics rather than the greater good.”

The United States also provides interesting insights into democracy and foreign security policy. The presidential system means that presidents can engage in foreign policy adventurism without facing a direct electoral response through no-confidence votes or parliamentary reshuffles. Presidents have enormous discretion in foreign policy, with congressional checks that only kick in under certain political and legal conditions. There are large disjunctures between mass and elite public opinion on foreign policy, with the latter favoring a more interventionist, internationalist posture. Defense procurement and development are, like in India, often massively inefficient, laden with delay, and largely opaque to the median voter.

Pakistan has worked its way back up to a 7 in the Polity IV dataset by 2013, and is therefore generally considered a consolidated democracy by standard (if imperfect) political science measures. Yet its elected officials do not actually control key aspects of foreign security

142 Byman, *A High Price*.
143 Byman, *A High Price*.
145 Page and Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect*.
Party competition, in turn, is not primarily centered on foreign policy issues; though the PPP and PML-N have foreign policy stances, their electoral fates are far more tightly linked to local issues, party strategy, patronage linkages, and performance in office. While Pakistan shows up in our datasets as a democracy, this tells us remarkably little about the electoral roots of foreign security policy.148

There are serious methodological challenges to the deeply contextual, case-specific approach we pursue here. Because of sub-national variation across issue-areas, countries may not be aggregated into any single democratic “type” that can be easily measured across many countries and years. This creates serious potential problems for comparison and generalization: we cannot just say that India is one type of democracy, while Japan or France are a different type, and proceed apace. But middle-range theory and contextual empirics may provide opportunities for more precise claims and careful evidence that complement broader but thinner comparisons.149 Showing that we can apply this basic framework across these cases should encourage future research, since it suggests that this approach is not specific or bounded to India.

Conclusion

We need to rethink how democratic politics relate to foreign policy behavior.150


148 Raheel Sharif was a particularly influential COAS from 2013-2016, including foreign policy toward China (especially the CPEC corridor) and India. See, among many others, Ilyas Khan, “Raheel Sharif: The army chief who ruled without a coup,” BBC, November 23, 2016. Available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38016273.

149 For instance, Milner, Helen and Dustin Tingle, Sailing the Water’s Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) is built around the specific institutional configuration of the United States, rather than a generic democracy, and Catalinac, Electoral Reform and National Security in Japan, focuses on changes to rules in Japan’s electoral system.

150 H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable on War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy, Volume IX, No. 18 (2017).
Democracy can be an important force in shaping security policy and crisis bargaining—but not in a single direction. The inconclusive empirical debates of recent years reflect the complex linkages between politicians and voters: sometimes democracy encourages policy attention and creates credible threats, but sometimes it distracts politicians from affairs of state and minimizes democratic crisis advantages. This article moves us closer to figuring out when and how domestic accountability influences politicians in foreign security policy in democracies.

It is worth noting that in the best-case scenarios we identified in India— with committed politicians and attentive publics— Indian security policy did not lead to a string of crisis bargaining victories or resounding military victories. Even if on average “democratic political institutions hold the key to prudent and successful foreign policy,”151 India was humiliated in 1962 and stalemated in 1990 and 2001-2. The 1971 war was a major success, but stands out as the exception rather than the rule. Both China and Pakistan (across authoritarian and democratic periods) have been perfectly content to call Indian bluffs, even when the perfect storm of democratic accountability should be forcing them to back down.152 This is quite consistent with recent cross-national evidence.153 Structural pressures have not led to consistent defense management or the development of a sustainable defense-industrial base that realist-inclined analysts would expect. If influential theories of democracy and IR seem rather incongruous when taken to the world’s largest democracy, it is worth thinking more carefully about the conditions under which their hypothesized mechanisms do and do not hold.

None of this should be read as a paean to ruthless Spartan autocracy. There are clearly important conditions under which democratic accountability exists, induces high degrees of

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151 Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 205.
152 Snyder and Borghard, “The Cost of Empty Threats.”
153 Downes and Sechser, “The Illusion of Democratic Credibility.”
political responsiveness, and provides comparative advantages in the international system.\textsuperscript{154} The run-up to the 1971 war and the management of the Kargil war, for instance, showed deep interest and engagement by Indian politicians. But the findings militate against complacency about the interaction of democracy and foreign security policy.

This approach is certainly not the only way to disaggregate democracy and foreign security, but it opens exciting new research directions. In many respects, our paper suggests more questions than it answers. To begin with, we need to more carefully study the relationship between voters and politicians in this area. As noted above, politicians may strategically attempt to raise or lower the salience of foreign policy, or manipulate information to obscure or clarify accountability. We know very little about these dynamics, especially outside of the US context, but they are essential to understanding efforts to move between the accountability environments we identify.

Political leaders may try to put particular issues into different accountability environments, seeking to raise or lower the salience of an issue by mounting protests and rallies around foreign policy, introducing foreign policy issues into coalition negotiations and electoral campaigns, or strategically refraining from playing the foreign policy card. In India, for instance, we see the BJS raising the heat over China in 1959-1962 and the CPM choosing to take a stand over the India-US nuclear deal in 2008: why did they make these choices, and what can we learn from their decisions about how parties try to navigate the domestic politics of foreign policy? Crucially, when does playing the foreign policy card actually work, and when instead does it lead to electoral marginalization?\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{155} The decision by CPM to take a hard line against the India-US nuclear deal did nothing for it electorally, and in fact triggered its ongoing decline. For background, see: Chaudhari, Chapter 8.
Getting inside party strategy toward foreign policy – whether through campaign speeches, media messages, party manifestos, or politicians’ decision about how to invest in expertise – is one way to understand the leadership side of this equation. Historical evidence, quantitative data, and contemporary interviews can all be used to pursue this agenda. Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and survey experiments can, in turn, provide insight on how voters respond to different messages and political contexts. Above all, we need much more evidence about how voters think about foreign policy outside the US and Europe, including research that forces hard trade-offs between partisan and domestic-political loyalties vs. foreign policy choices. The methodological challenges here are severe, but a variety of approaches and insights can cumulate to paint a fuller picture of mass-elite linkages in foreign security policy.

Different electoral environments may open space for different kinds of politics among elites. These politics can operate among senior leaders battling over political influence within the policy-making process\(^\text{156}\), between politicians and various kinds of security bureaucracies\(^\text{157}\), or among other influential political figures.\(^\text{158}\) Politics and policy are not reducible to the preferences of the median voter.\(^\text{159}\)

In India, for instance, bureaucracies, interest groups, think tanks, the media, and social networks can play key roles in making foreign policy. Their influence is enabled by the liberal

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\(^{156}\) Saunders, “War and the Inner Circle.”


democratic political environment in India, but is not enacted through the electoral process. These elite actors are likely to have different incentives and opportunities depending on the accountability environment they are operating in. Sclerosis, for instance, may open space for bureaucratic autonomy or parochial pork barrel spending that is not available under bounded flexibility, while protected politicians environments may allow unelected elites to take advantage of muddled electoral incentives to pursue their favored policies. A greater focus on how political leaders, bureaucrats, and other agents try to navigate democratic contexts, even when not directly facing voters, can broaden our understanding of what democracy does, and does not, do in the formation of foreign policy.

Finally, this begs the question of how outside states try to “read” these domestic politics. Schultz has done important work on opposition parties’ behavior, but this is only a subset of the domestic political dynamics that other countries are interested in assessing.\textsuperscript{160} It would be fascinating, for instance, to study how accurate outside countries’ understandings of domestic political alignments are, and how they assess the constraints on the leaders with whom they are dealing. In the India-Pakistan relationship, for instance, enormous ink is spilled on trying to identify hard-liners, soft-liners, opportunities for “Nixon to go to China,” and the role of various military and bureaucratic organizations. Different accountability environments may lead to different foreign policies by other countries – but only if they are able to properly identify them in real-time. These paths forward suggest a way of moving beyond the existing state of the debate in the study of democracy and international relations, taking seriously the complexities of democratic practice.

\textsuperscript{160} Schultz, \textit{Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy}. 