

Use of force and civil–military relations in Russia: an automated content analysis

Brandon M. Stewart and Yuri M. Zhukov*

Department of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Russia's intervention in the Georgian–South Ossetian conflict has highlighted the need to rigorously examine trends in the public debate over the use of force in Russia. Approaching this debate through the prism of civil–military relations, we take advantage of recent methodological advances in automated content analysis and generate a new dataset of 8000 public statements made by Russia's political and military leaders during the Putin period. The data show little evidence that military elites exert a restraining influence on Russian foreign and defence policy. Although more hesitant than their political counterparts to embrace an interventionist foreign policy agenda, Russian military elites are considerably more activist in considering the use of force as an instrument of foreign policy.

Keywords: content analysis; document classification; civil–military; use of force; Russia; elites

On 14 August 2008, two days after ordering a halt to military operations in Georgia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev addressed a group of senior military officers who had just returned from the conflict zone. 'We will call things by their names: the people of South Ossetia have survived genocide – and we should talk about it in this way. It will take years, maybe decades, to heal these wounds. And the fact that the annihilation of an entire nation was averted is lawful, unavoidable and absolutely justified, not to mention that the defense of its people, its citizens, is the direct duty of Russia as a state.'¹ Part humanitarian intervention, part self-defense, Medvedev's rationalization of Russia's first major use of force outside its borders since the Soviet–Afghan War has left many outside observers wondering about the future role of the military as an instrument of Russian foreign and defense policy. Whether one interprets the events of August 2008 as a manifestation of interventionism or realpolitik, the Russian president has characterized the use of force in either case as legitimate and necessary. What is less clear, however, is whether such a seemingly broad interpretation of the military's mission is widely shared by members of Russia's national security establishment.

*Corresponding author. Email: zhukov@fas.harvard.edu

In this study, we examine the debate over the use of force in Russia through the prism of civil–military relations. Do Russian political and military elites share the same foreign and defense policy priorities? Do they share the same attitudes toward the use of force? What explains convergence and divergence in these views? In addressing these three questions, we hope to lend new insights into recent patterns of Russian strategic thought and identify potential areas of consensus and conflict in Russian foreign and defense policymaking.

An emerging conventional wisdom among scholars of civil–military relations in the West has been that military elites tend to exert a restraining influence on foreign and defense policy. Compared to civilian policymakers, military professionals are expected to endorse a less expansive set of foreign policy priorities and a narrower set of missions for the armed forces. While the military conservatism hypothesis has inspired a wealth of academic debate in the US, few efforts have been made to extend this discourse to non-Western political systems, or to study intergroup opinion cleavages directly.²

We take stock of attitudes toward the use of force in Russia by (1) extending the ongoing conservatism–militarism debate to another type of political system, and (2) taking advantage of recent methodological advances in politically oriented automated content analysis. In particular, we employ supervised and unsupervised machine learning techniques to discern trends in the public debate over Russian foreign and defense policy, and offer a summary of data generated from 7920 public statements by political and military elites between 1998 and 2008.³ In so doing, we provide a data-driven characterization of contemporary civil–military relations.

Our analysis of these public statements shows little evidence of military conservatism in contemporary Russia. Although military elites are significantly less likely than political elites to embrace an interventionist foreign policy agenda, they also display attitudes that are considerably more permissive toward the use of force as an instrument of foreign policy. We also find that military and political foreign policy views tend to converge when the two groups of elites are more integrated in organs of executive power.

We begin by briefly reviewing the literature on civil–military relations and the use of force, and derive a series of descriptive hypotheses. Second, we introduce the methods employed to collect and analyze Russian text data. Third, we discuss our new dataset and the implications and limitations of our approach. We conclude with a summary of our findings and offer directions for future research.

To a hammer, everything looks like a nail?

Two views have emerged in the literature on political and military attitudes toward the use of force: military conservatism and military activism. The first of these holds that – compared to civilian policymakers – military elites are inclined to endorse a less expansive set of foreign policy priorities and a narrower

set of missions for the armed forces.⁴ This divergence in views stems in part from military organizational interests, which dictate that an expanding mission set, lengthy operational deployments and extended force postures undermine the readiness and capability of the armed forces to perform their core duties – to fight and win the nation's wars and safeguard its critical national interests. As a result, military officials are expected to be more reluctant than their civilian counterparts in recommending military action where core national interests are not perceived to be at stake.⁵ The use of force for humanitarian relief, regime change, crisis response and other interventionist purposes are areas where political and military opinions are expected to diverge.⁶

The second school of thought – military activism or militarism – sees military elites as more war-prone than their civilian counterparts. The military profession is seen as attracting a certain type of individual, who is subsequently socialized to prefer rapid decision-making over careful deliberation, and place excessive faith in the use of force as a solution to political problems – to a hammer, as the saying goes, everything looks like a nail.⁷ Even if perceptual biases are discounted, military organizational factors such as offensive doctrines and rigid mobilization timelines may raise the likelihood of conflict escalation from the diplomatic sphere to the military.⁸

While the academic discussion in the US has been rich and energetic, for the purpose of our study, it has fallen short in two areas. First, the empirical literature that it has produced has been largely confined to the United States and other Western democracies.⁹ Hypotheses derived from military conservatism literature have generally not been subject to rigorous empirical tests, while the conventional wisdom among scholars of Russian military affairs has tended to support the military activism position.¹⁰

Second, although many of the claims made on both sides of the debate rest on the existence of opinion gaps between political and military elites, few quantitative studies have sought to measure these gaps directly. Instead, authors have generally assumed the existence of such a gap and estimated its effect on decision-making with proxy variables, such as the military experience of policymakers or subjective measures of civilian control over the armed forces.¹¹

We address this empirical problem by estimating opinion cleavages through the analysis of political and military texts. Though largely absent from the literature on US civil–military relations, content analysis has had a long tradition in the study of Russian and Soviet foreign policy.¹² While attitudes over the use of force have not been at the centre of this literature, most Soviet-era studies found broad convergence in political and military views on questions of grand strategy, and minor levels of disagreement on lower-order issues like defense spending and procurement, where military institutional interests were more directly at stake.¹³ Soviet military elites were found to be less outspoken on foreign policy issues overall, although in some areas – such as support for national liberation movements in the Third World – they were sometimes found to be even more supportive of an interventionist role for the Soviet Union than

their civilian counterparts.¹⁴ The extent to which these Soviet-era patterns have persisted remains an open empirical question, although surveys conducted in the 1990s have found a clear and broad gap between civilian and military elite opinion on the source and magnitude of external threats.¹⁵

Hypotheses

As stated at the outset of this study, we are interested in answering three questions: Do political and military elites in Russia share the same foreign and defense policy priorities? Do they share the same attitudes toward the use of force? What explains convergence and divergence in these views? The following section outlines why we consider these questions relevant, and what we might expect to find in each case.

Issue salience

Issue salience can be understood as the relative importance a political actor assigns to a given policy area. The level of attention devoted to an issue is measured in part by the frequency with which it is raised and, insofar as this frequency distribution is not uniform across a population, issue salience can be said to reflect differences in policy priorities and domains.¹⁶ If, for instance, Mr Blue has a tendency to mention ethnic Russians in Crimea in every speech and never mentions missile defense systems, while General Red speaks only of missile defense systems and never of the Russian Diaspora, one can assume that Mr Blue sees the Diaspora as a more salient issue than missile defense, and General Red sees the opposite.¹⁷

Following the framework provided by Gelpi and Feaver (2004), we divide issues relevant to foreign and defense policy into two categories: *realpolitik* and intervention. The first category is more restrictive and reflects only those issues that represent a potentially substantial threat to state sovereignty. These include, but are not limited to, territorial defense, border security, nuclear and conventional deterrence, domestic separatism, protection of sea lines of communication, defense of allies and geostrategic access. The second category is more expansive and includes issues which do not necessarily impinge upon core national security interests as defined by realists, but 'may require intervention inside the boundaries of an allegedly sovereign state and may challenge the claims of sovereignty made by the ruling group within that state.'¹⁸ These include, but are not limited to, humanitarian assistance, foreign internal defense, peace operations, state building, crisis response, regime change and support for insurgencies in foreign states.

If the military conservatism hypothesis holds, the range of issues addressed in public statements by contemporary Russian military elites should be expected to reflect the *realpolitik* category. Statements by political leaders, meanwhile, can be expected to reach beyond these traditional national security issues.

- *H1: Military elites are less likely than political elites to find interventionist issues salient.*

Use of force

Although it can lend insights into the policy priorities of political and military elites, issue salience alone cannot fully capture actors' preferences for the employment of various instruments of state power. As empirically observable phenomena, attitudes toward the use of force are far more elusive than a simple measure of how often a given issue is raised. Government officials typically show great restraint in making statements about the use of coercion, choosing words carefully and permitting multiple interpretations without committing the government to a given action.¹⁹ Judgments of the relative hawkishness of political and military elites are thus inevitably subjective readings of whether the tone and content of a given statement could be considered consistent with an inclination toward the employment of military force.²⁰

While we admit that any dichotomous classification of attitudinal differences risks oversimplification, for the purpose of our second research question we assume perceptions of the utility of force to oscillate between two ideal types – conservatism and activism. Statements consistent with a conservative outlook display a preference toward the use of non-military instruments of power, unless all other means have been exhausted and a successful policy outcome is a near certainty.²¹ Such statements might include explicit doubts about the efficacy of military solutions to specific political problems, or more nuanced expressions of preferences – such as emphases on defensive, rather than offensive military capabilities, inclinations toward multilateral solutions for potential interventionist crises, and general support for limited ends and means in foreign policy pursuits.

Statements consistent with an activist outlook advocate limited constraints on the employment of the military instrument of power. While military force need not be the instrument of first choice, the language used would reflect the author's expressed opinion that it is an equally legitimate and effective means to achieve a desired policy outcome. Such statements might explicitly advocate the use of military power in a specific scenario, but are more commonly limited to expressions of support for offensive capabilities and power projection, unilateral solutions to interventionist crises, and a general preference for foreign policy outcomes that revise, rather than reinforce the status quo. Given the idiosyncrasies of individual opinions, conservatism and activism are of course somewhat arbitrary categories to which exact conformity can only be forced. Yet for our limited purpose of tracking general tendencies in elite preferences, they are sufficient.

If the military conservatism hypothesis holds, public statements by contemporary Russian military elites should be expected to be consistent with conservative attitudes on the use of force. However, such an expectation would be at odds with the conventional wisdom among observers of Russian military

affairs, which has characterized senior Russian officers as reliable foreign policy hawks.²² In light of this theoretical contrast between American and Russian civil–military relations, our second hypothesis assumes activism to be the expected pattern in Russian military statements.

- *H2: Military elites are more likely than political elites to support the use of force.*

Differences in views

The dynamics of convergence and divergence in issue salience and support for the use of force can be seen as indicative of the cohesiveness of political–military relations. A key determinant of group cohesion identified by military conservatism scholars has been the degree of elite integration, particularly the scope of formal authority that active or retired military elites might enjoy in political decision-making structures.²³ When a large proportion of political leadership has a professional military background, the two elites can be considered deeply integrated, and disagreements on foreign and defense policy are expected to decrease. If the military conservatism hypothesis holds, convergence and divergence in the views of Russian political and military elites would be associated with group integration.

- *H3: Military and political views converge when elites are closely integrated.*

Research design

To test these hypotheses, we perform document classification on an original dataset of 7920 speeches, press briefings, articles, interviews and other public statements made by members of Russia's political or military elite between 12 February 1998 and 31 October 2008.²⁴ This range of dates is intended to encompass both terms of the Putin presidency, along with two 'buffer' time periods on each end. Military elites are defined here as active duty and retired officers of field grade and above, or who – at the time of the statement's publication – occupied a position of formal authority or informal influence in the Ministry of Defense or an affiliated agency. Similarly, political elites include civilians in a position of formal authority or informal influence in the executive or legislative branches of the government of Russia, or an affiliated civilian organization.²⁵ As defined here, authority is derived from actors' respective positions in a defined social structure, while influence is derived from control over other sanctions and rewards not associated with the occupancy of a particular position in a formal structure.²⁶ In our sample, formal authority is assumed for persons employed in government agencies and ministries, and informal influence is assumed for individuals at affiliated research and policy analysis organizations, such as the Council on Foreign and Security Policy and the Academy of Military Sciences.

Two different methods of automated content analysis are employed in this study: unsupervised topic modeling and supervised document classification. These correspond respectively to indicators for issue salience and support for the use of force.

Bag-of-words analysis

Bag-of-words (BOW) is the fundamental assumption underlying the unsupervised topic models and supervised document classification methods. The assumption, common in the computational linguistics community, treats documents as a function of the words they contain, independent of the ordering or structure of the document.²⁷ While the bag-of-words assumption is admittedly unrealistic, the result is an efficacious model that has been shown to reasonably handle a variety of classification tasks.

Each analysis begins with a sparse document-term matrix ($d \times t$), which represents the set of documents to be analyzed in terms of their vocabulary. In order to achieve some dimensionality reduction, almost all BOW techniques make use of a stemmer or a lemmatizer to reduce words to their base meanings. Stemmers remove the ends of words in English to bring similar words down to one base meaning. For example, the words ‘great, greater, greatest and greatness’ are all reduced to the stem ‘great-’, and the words ‘economy, economic, economical’ are all reduced to the stem ‘econom-’.²⁸

After the stemming process, a variety of statistical techniques can be applied to achieve further dimensionality reduction on the sparse matrix with the reduced ($d \times t^*$) matrix serving as the feature set. Thus, the only part of the process that is not language agnostic is the initial step of stemming and text processing.

We made the decision to analyze the documents in their native Russian.²⁹ Machine translation is notoriously unreliable, despite the relatively relaxed assumptions of BOW analysis. In order to provide the best results, words must be consistent in their meaning across texts. This requires that multiple words meaning different things in Russian not be translated to the same word in English. Unfortunately, machine translation is not even up to simple word-for-word translation that ignores lexical ordering.

From this common foundation, our approaches for coding the documents diverge. Supervised and unsupervised learning represent two different approaches in the field of machine learning. Supervised learning uses a training set of predefined categories to infer a technique for classifying texts according to the specified structure. Unsupervised learning uses no training set and seeks to cluster on the underlying structure of the documents.

Unsupervised topic models

Unsupervised learning methods are techniques for analyzing large sums of data using relatively few assumptions.³⁰ In this particular case we want to explore the range of topics to which Russian actors in the political and military bureaucracy

choose to devote their attention, with minimal a priori assumptions about the range and nature of those topics. For this task, we choose to adopt Grimmer's (2009) Expressed Agenda Model.

The model assumes a collection of documents that contain a natural hierarchical structure, with actors at the top of that hierarchy and the topics they discuss on the bottom. This structure is typically ignored in unsupervised learning problems. The model – described as an *Expressed Agenda Model* because it captures the attention that actors choose to publicly commit to a topic, rather than attempting to estimate private attention through actions – is designed for situations where the ‘quantities of interest are the priorities a set of actors allocate to issues’.³¹

The model requires the assumption of some number of k topics. The number of topics (k) is selected by the specification that yields the most interesting and substantively relevant topics, following common practice in the unsupervised learning literature.³² The topics are then labeled as either: (1) ‘Realpolitik’ – a category driven by words such as ‘counterweight’ (*protivovyes*), ‘surpass’ (*operezhat*) and ‘military readiness’ (*boegotovnost*), (2) ‘Interventionist’ – driven by words such as ‘police’ (*politseyskiy*), ‘ethnic’ (*etnicheskiye*) and ‘freedom’ (*svoboda*), or (3) ‘None of the Above’.³³

Supervised document classification: an ensemble approach

Whereas unsupervised topic models are sufficiently sensitive for the clustering of documents by issue, our use of force variable necessitates classification of documents by a more specific type of expressed opinion (‘Activist’/‘Conservative’). To this end we employ a supervised learning approach, which uses a training set of 300 randomly selected, hand-coded statements to learn to classify the remaining documents.

In the training set, documents are coded ‘Activist’ if they express support for (1) the use of military power in a specific scenario, (2) the use of military power as the most effective means to reach concrete political ends, (3) unilateral solutions to international security crises, or (4) foreign policy outcomes that revise, rather than reinforce the status quo.³⁴ Documents consistent with a ‘Conservative’ classification include expressions of a preference for (1) the use of military power only as a last resort, (2) interagency and/or (3) multilateral solutions to international security crises, (4) limited ends and means in foreign policy, or (5) explicit doubts about the utility of military power in a specific scenario. All other documents are coded ‘None of the Above’. Following this typology, an example of an activist statement might be ‘Russia historically has been and will remain the guarantor of security for the peoples of the Caucasus [*Rossiya istoricheski byla i ostanetsya garantom bezopasnosti narodov Kavkaza*]’, whereas a conservative statement may be ‘One should resort to military power when the capabilities of other instruments are exhausted [*K voyennoy moshchi sleduyet pribegat*’, *kogda vozmozhnosti drugikh sredstv ischerpany*].’

In selecting our approach, we focus on improving what we view as a key deficiency of the literature as imported into political science – the failure to take into account the inherent inaccuracies of the classification process.³⁵ We seek to address

this problem using an ensemble learning approach, the combination of a variety of machine learning systems that function together to produce a classification.

Ensemble classifiers are optimal in situations where there is significant diversity in the individual classifiers' classification techniques and resulting feature space.³⁶ In these situations, ensemble classification – while not guaranteed to produce better classification rates than any individual classifier in the ensemble – provides increased stability on additional out-of-sample tests. Thus while out-of-sample testing using cross-validation can provide an assessment of system accuracy, the use of ensemble classification gives us confidence that those assessments are approximately accurate across the entire document set. Ensemble classification also provides us with a better picture of the uncertainty that exists within any single classification decision. The weighted predictions of each classifier can be interpreted as probabilities of each category for a given document.

Individual classifiers

We employ four different machine learning approaches in our ensemble classifier, two of which are ensemble classifiers in their own right: K-Nearest Neighbor, Adaboost.M1 algorithm, Random Forest and Support Vector Machine. Figure 1 shows how these classifiers are combined within the ensemble classification system.³⁷

- (1) *K-Nearest Neighbor* proceeds from an intuitive assumption that an unknown case can be classified according to its k nearest neighbors in the parameter space (in this case using Minkowski distance). We selected $k = 5$ and chose an un-weighted version of the model, where all five neighbors were treated equally.³⁸
- (2) *Adaboost.M1* uses several instances of a WeakLearner (in this implementation a classification tree) to generate hypotheses using data randomly drawn from the training distribution. The distribution is then iteratively updated to include instances misclassified by the first algorithm. This proceeds until a weighted majority vote occurs, which yields the final classification.
- (3) *Random Forest* is similar to the Adaboost algorithm but uses a different approach. It is also an ensemble technique and uses classification trees as its sub-component. Rather than iteratively training near examples missed by the classifier previously, the trees are grown using bootstrapped versions of the data and by choosing k nodes for which to search for a split. This introduces random perturbations into the data which generate different results in each tree and prevents over-fitting.³⁹
- (4) *Support Vector Machine (SVM)* is easily the most popular machine learning algorithm in political science due to its easy implementation and broad utility compared to other techniques.⁴⁰ SVM fits a hyper-plane to the feature space, which separates two categories of points from each other and maximizes the marginal distance between the nearest points and the surface.

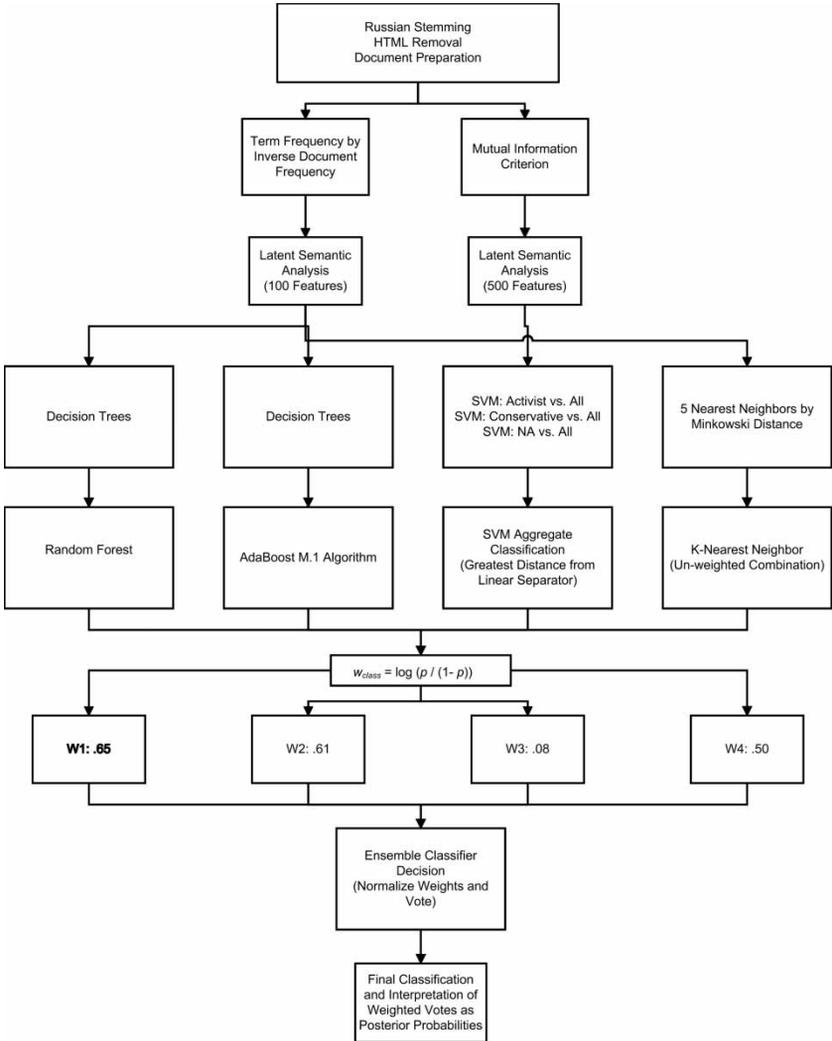


Figure 1. Diagram of ensemble classification system.

The ensemble

In order to effectively weight the predictions from the classifiers, we obtain accuracy measures by cross-validation for each algorithm. Using our training set of 300 hand-coded documents, we randomly sample 275, train the algorithm and then test on the out-of-sample 25 documents. We repeat this simulation 10,000 times for each algorithm to attain out-of-sample accuracy results. We then weight the classifiers predictions based on those results.

Given these weights, we simulate the training of each classifier on the same sample of 275, apply weights to the predictions, attain a final prediction and then verify against the out-of-sample 25. We repeat this process 10,000 times to produce the accuracy rates for the ensemble system as a whole. The accuracy of the system is lower than any individual classifier, but not dramatically. Nonetheless, the ensemble approach guards against the idiosyncrasies of any given classifier.

Uncertainty

We use the estimated weights to incorporate the uncertainty of the classification procedure into our analysis, a form of uncertainty which is often discarded. We infer probabilities of categorization from the individual weights, and then redraw the data 10,000 times using a distribution defined by the probabilities for each class and observation. We can then use this sampling distribution of documents to calculate our quantities of interest, without introducing bias from the classification error.

While all variables have some degree of measurement error, the advantage of our application of an ensemble classifier is the ability to specifically quantify that error. To create the estimates of document classification by category, we take the mean value within each category of interest across all 10,000 runs. All confidence intervals throughout the paper are calculated by redrawing from our classification probabilities and rerunning the analysis to provide a full range of estimates possible under our classifier.

Summary

A summary of document classification is shown in Figure 2. The left pane shows the output of the unsupervised topic model (issue salience), while the output of the ensemble classifier (use of force) is shown in the right pane. Over half of the documents in the dataset are classified ‘none of the above’ for issue salience, while the remainder is roughly evenly split between ‘interventionist’ and

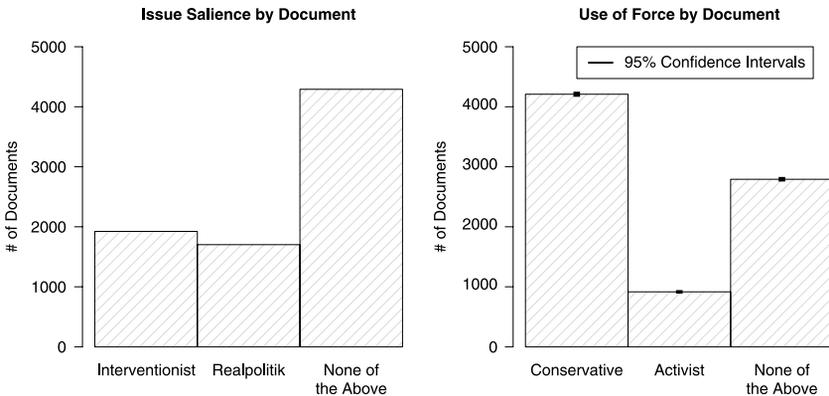


Figure 2. Summary of document classification.

‘realpolitik’ topics. Meanwhile, the number of documents which express a conservative position on the use of force is more than four times higher than those classified as activist. As indicated by the 95% confidence bands in the plot, the margin of error is quite small relative to the number of documents in each category, suggesting that our automated classification approach is sufficiently accurate to permit the drawing of inferences from these quantities.⁴¹

The Russian public debate: empirical findings

Our findings suggest that military conservatism has not always characterized the public debate over foreign and defense policy in contemporary Russia. While military elites are less likely than political elites to find interventionist policy issues salient, they are also far more likely to express an activist view on the use of force. This pattern appears to hold for persons in positions of both formal authority and informal influence. Further, political–military disagreement over foreign and defense policy appears to decline when the military brass is integrated in political decision-making structures.

Realpolitik and interventionism

Evidence of a civil–military opinion gap is quite apparent from Figure 3, which presents comparative distributions of average monthly issue salience and activism scores between the two groups. The left pane of the figure suggests that statements by Russian political elites have been far less likely than those by military elites to address realpolitik foreign policy issues. Consistent with the military conservatism hypothesis, the distribution of political elite statements (solid line) has a mode near 1.0, representing interventionist issue salience, while the distribution of military elite statements (dashed line) has thicker tails and a mode around 0.15, much closer to the realpolitik end of the spectrum. Surprisingly, military elite statements appear to cover a relatively wide range of topics. While in any given month, interventionist

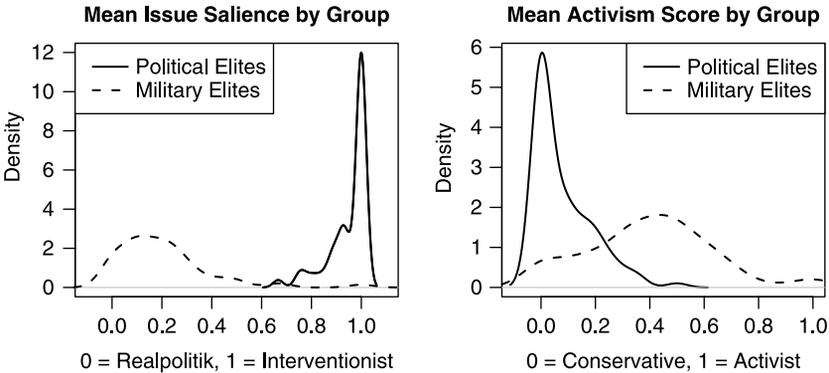


Figure 3. Distributions of dependent variables.

topics occupied the majority of statements by political elites – the left tail of the distribution does not dip below 0.6 on the scale – military elites did not avoid discussion of either type of foreign policy issue. Indeed, the distribution of military statements covers the entire range of the issue scale.

This finding is particularly striking in light of Soviet-era content analysis studies, which found a significant stay-in-your-lane pattern in public statements by military leaders. Insofar as a topic was considered ‘political’ or otherwise outside the scope of a military professional’s institutional portfolio, public statements on that issue by Soviet officers were exceedingly rare.⁴² To be fair, military support for interventionism during Soviet times was not unheard of – indeed, support for national liberation movements was among the articles of faith of the Marxist-Leninist foreign policy wholeheartedly embraced by the USSR’s national security establishment.⁴³ At the same time, it would be difficult to attribute the pattern shown on Figure 3 to residual elements of Soviet-era foreign policy dogma alone. Another explanation may be hierarchical cue-taking, wherein the rhetoric of military officers is to some degree influenced by informal cues or formal strategic guidance from political authorities. In expressing opinions that fall outside the scope of core military institutional priorities, military leaders may thus be signaling concurrence with the stated views of public officials or simply adhering to official state policy.⁴⁴

Curiously, contemporary Russian military elites appear far more eager to discuss non-traditional security issues like ethnic conflict, policing and freedom than their civilian counterparts are to discuss ‘traditional’ security issues like territorial defense, military readiness and the balance of power. Evidently, contemporary Russian political leaders seem no less deferent to military expertise on national security issues than their predecessors had been during the Soviet period.⁴⁵ The public and academic discourse on military security issues – as defined here by the *realpolitik* category – continues to operate as a mostly autonomous sphere, largely insulated from civilian perspectives.

A more detailed representation of issue salience is provided in Figure 4. This bar plot shows the proportion of interventionist and *realpolitik* statements by representatives of six groups: (1) military and (2) political elites in positions of formal authority, (3) military and (4) political elites in positions of informal influence, (5) members of the Russian Parliament, including the State Duma and Federation Council and (6) members of the Presidential Administration and cabinet-level officials in the government of Russia.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the bar plot suggests that statements by both formal and informal military elites are highly likely – 86.9% and 84.2%, respectively – to discuss *realpolitik* topics. Meanwhile, political elites – particularly in the legislative branch and in positions of informal influence – are far more likely to address interventionist issues. The group most likely to discuss *realpolitik* topics is formal military elites, which includes senior officers currently on active duty – precisely the group of elites for whom core military institutional interests are most pertinent.⁴⁶ The proportion of *realpolitik* statements is a bit

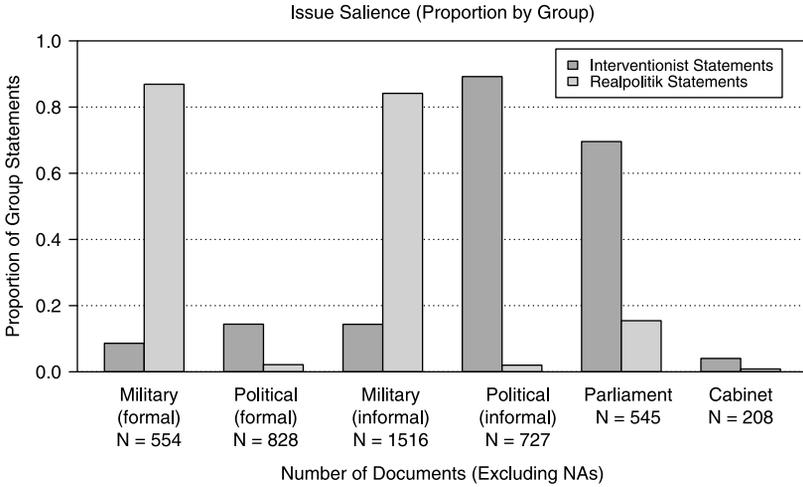


Figure 4. Interventionist and realpolitik statements by group.

lower among the retired senior officers included in the informal military category, who are presumably less constrained by protocol and institutional conventional wisdom, and are slightly more likely to address interventionist topics.

However, even informal military elites find themselves at a great distance from their political counterparts. The proportion of interventionist statements is highest (89.2%) among political elites in positions of informal influence – a group that includes academicians, think tank research fellows, prominent columnists and former civilian government officials. Of statements by members of parliament, 69.6% address interventionist statements, although this group was also more likely than other political elites to consider realpolitik issues salient – 15.4%, compared with 2.2% and below for all other non-military groups. Finally, a relatively small proportion of statements by Cabinet officials and other formal political elites are devoted to either realpolitik or interventionism, suggesting that the bulk of statements by these groups addresses neither topic. Even so, the general trend is the same: political elites are more likely to address interventionist issues than realpolitik issues, while statements by military elites follow the opposite pattern.

Conservatism and activism

Expressed opinions on the use of force, shown in the right pane of Figure 2, are less polarized than the results of the topic model, but still suggest a clear distinction between the policy positions of civilian and military elites. Contrary to the military conservatism hypothesis, the distributions point to a relatively high level of permissiveness toward the use of force in statements by military elites. The distribution of political elite statements (solid line) has a mode near zero, indicating a generally conservative position on the use of military force.

The sentiments of military elites (dashed line) are clustered near the middle of the continuum – hardly monolithic in their support for the use of force, but nevertheless far closer to an activist outlook on average. As in the left pane, the military elite sample covers a relatively broad range of views, has a lower density in its mode and thicker, longer tails, extending to both extremes of the conservative–activist scale.

To the extent that military elites are more permissive toward the use of force than civilians, this figure seems to support the conventional wisdom among observers of post-Soviet military affairs, that military activism – coupled with political deference to military points of view – is the dominant pattern in Russian military opinion.⁴⁷ A number of scholars have argued that Russian military leadership tends to place excessive faith in the use of force as an instrument of conflict resolution, effectively limiting policy options available to national command authorities and occasionally facilitating the rapid escalation of conflicts. For instance, qualitative case studies of uses of force during the interventions in Transdnestr and Tajikistan have attributed decisions to employ military power to the initiative of local commanders, rather than to policy guidance from the Kremlin – which was either limited or non-existent at the time.⁴⁸ Although caution must be exercised in reading too deeply into the distributions shown here, the tone and content of military and political statements under study appear to reflect such a conceptualization of Russian military views.

Consistent with these trends, the bar plot shown in Figure 5 supports our second hypothesis.⁴⁹ While statements by military elites are on balance more likely to make a conservative rather than activist statement on the use of force, the proportion of activist statements is considerably higher among military elites than among their political counterparts. 24.4% of formal military and 26.4% of informal military statements convey attitudes consistent with an activist view toward the use force, compared with less than 10% for most

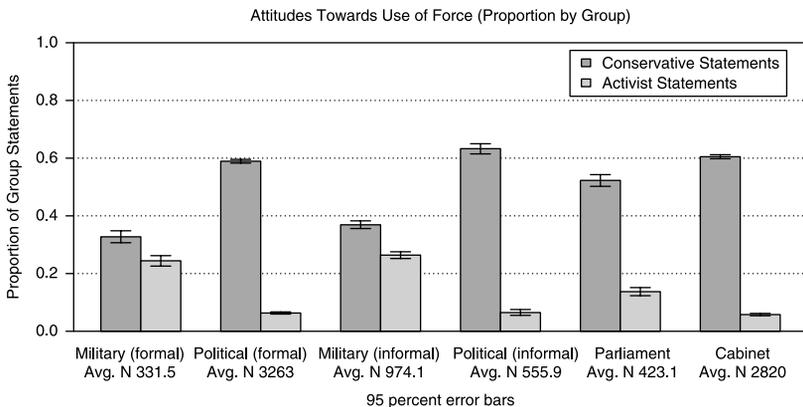


Figure 5. Conservative and activist statements by group.

political groups. This relative permissiveness in considering the use of force as an instrument of foreign policy applies to both formal and informal military elites, although the informal subgroup is slightly – but not much – more likely to express a conservative position. Statements by civilians, meanwhile, tend toward the conservative side of the spectrum. Among political elites, members of the State Duma and Federation Council have the highest proportion of activist statements, at 13.7%, while this statistic is less than 7% for all other political groups.

Agreement and disagreement

While Figures 3–5 offer a glimpse of how political and military views differ on issue salience and support for the use of force, the spatial scatterplot in Figure 6 displays differences in views on these two dimensions simultaneously, with monthly averages of group issue salience scores on the y-axis and use of force scores on the x-axis. A point in the lower left-hand corner thus indicates that a majority of statements in a given month are realpolitik and conservative, while a point in the upper right-hand corner indicates that the majority are interventionist and activist. As one might expect from the above discussion, political elite scores

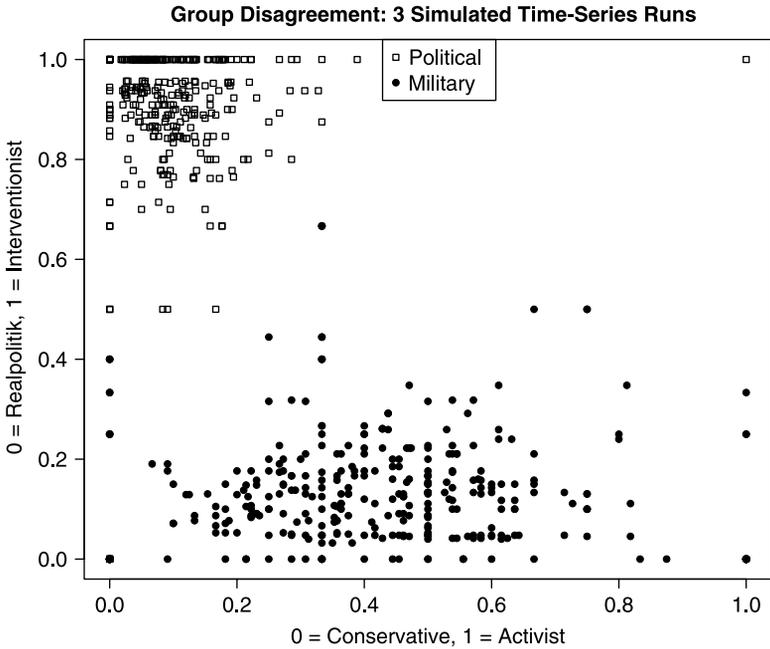


Figure 6. Spatial representation of average monthly issue salience and use of force score by group.

are clustered in the upper left-hand corner, suggesting that – most months – statements by Russian political elites addressed interventionist topics, but were relatively conservative with respect to the use of force. Military elite scores, meanwhile, are clustered near the bottom of the plot, indicating a far higher salience for realpolitik topics, and near the middle on the *x*-axis, indicating a relatively more activist position on the use of force.

Figure 6 further suggests that military and elite positions are not static across time. While, on some months, average military scores appear in the lower-right quadrant of the plot, at other times, the military group is far closer to the political cluster in the opposite corner, indicating relative similarity between the positions of the two groups. To capture this convergence and divergence in views, we use the Euclidean distance between average monthly political and military positions on issue salience and the use of force, where higher distances indicate greater levels of disagreement and smaller distances indicate the opposite.⁵⁰ This spatial measure of disagreement is shown on Figure 7 as a function of elite integration – in this case the proportion of active duty or retired military elites on the Russian Security Council.⁵¹

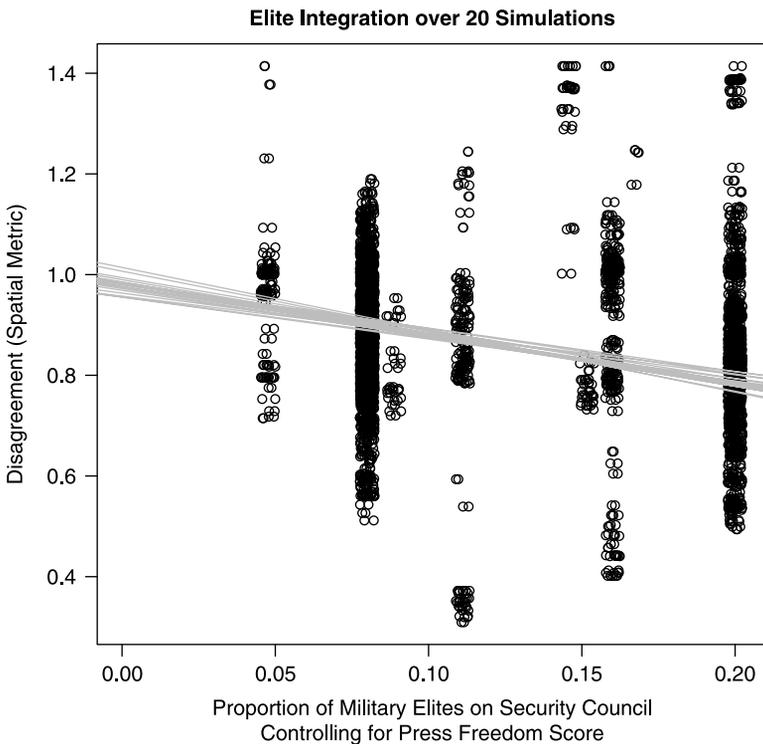


Figure 7. Elite disagreement and elite integrations.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, Figure 7 suggests that political and elite views converge when the two groups are more tightly integrated in the highest echelons of the executive branch. As the proportion of Russian Security Council members with a professional military background increases, the level of disagreement falls. Indeed, some of the largest drops in the level of disagreement have historically coincided with increases in Security Council elite integration. One of these drops, from approximately 1.4 to 0.4, occurred after the election of Vladimir Putin as president and the subsequent appointment of prominent active duty and retired army generals – including Viktor Kazantsev and Konstantin Pulikovskiy – as presidential envoys to Federal Districts. Views converged again in 2001 and 2002, when the proportion of Security Council officials with a military background increased to 20%.

Despite high levels of integration during Putin's first term, disagreement spiked in the first half of 2003, when the president oversaw a partial restructuring of the national security bureaucracy, including the expansion of the powers of the State Security Service (FSB) and the establishment of a new anti-drug trafficking agency. Following these reforms, military elites on the Security Council were gradually displaced by security services professionals from the FSB, Foreign Intelligence Service and Ministry of the Interior. Elite disagreement rose slightly between 2004 and 2005, by which point the proportion of military elites on the Council had dropped by more than half. By this point in Putin's presidency, however, patterns of elite disagreement had largely stabilized, presumably reflecting a consolidation of power in the Kremlin, as well as tightening controls on mass media. More recently, levels of disagreement have followed a slightly downward path – a trend seemingly reinforced by the appointment of additional military elites to the Security Council after the election of Dmitry Medvedev as president in 2008.

Conclusions

Russian political and military elites differ on both the priorities of their country's foreign and defense policy and the role of military force as an instrument of national power. While military elites are less likely than political elites to attach salience to interventionist policy issues like ethnic conflict, policing and regime change, their views are also far more permissive toward the use of force as a policy instrument. These findings suggest that military conservatism – the view that military professionals are a voice of restraint in foreign policy – does not adequately reflect the dominant patterns of civil–military relations in the contemporary Russian state. We also find that the scale of the civil–military opinion gap in Russia depends on the extent to which the two elites are closely integrated in organs of executive power. When a higher proportion of officials on the Russian Security Council has had a military background, opinion cleavages have been less likely to emerge in the public debate.

In addition to the substantive conclusions, we show how the analysis of traditionally opaque civil–military relations can benefit from the introduction

of automated content analysis techniques. We demonstrate two different approaches to document classification, which have different strengths and underlying assumptions. Unsupervised classification allows for issue salience to be modeled with few a priori assumptions about the structure of those documents or the issues they might engage. Supervised document classification follows in the tradition of Soviet-era manual content analysis, while allowing not only for classification on a larger number of documents, but also a more precise estimation of measurement error.

Of course, an individual's expressed views on the use force and attention to a given issue may be driven by a host of considerations other than group affiliation. Building on the descriptive statistics presented here, future research would need to examine the Russian civil–military opinion gap in a multivariate setting, with control variables drawn from a variety of literatures. For instance, studies of diversionary war have expected support for the use of force to increase with the emergence of a perceived external threat and during periods of heightened domestic unrest.⁵² With respect to elite disagreement, the in-group/out-group hypothesis has linked increased policy consensus and internal solidarity with the incidence of international crises and the emergence of foreign threats.⁵³ The influence of these and other exogenous factors must be rigorously evaluated in any subsequent analyses of the Russian public debate.

Russia's intervention in the Georgian–South Ossetian conflict in August 2008 has highlighted the need to develop a broad empirical base of evidence about the priorities and preferences of Russian political and military elites. Such evidence can assist scholars and policymakers alike, by identifying areas of consensus and conflict in Russian foreign and defense policy, identifying bastions of support and opposition in a given policy domain, informing strategic communications and guiding the content of military-to-military engagement. In taking advantage of methodological advances in content analysis to address a largely descriptive set of questions – on issue salience, support for the use of force and disagreement – this paper represents but one effort to improve our understanding in these areas. Our limited inquiry has hardly offered an occasion for optimism – Russia's military leaders appear as hawkish as they had been during Soviet days, while political elites have remained deferential and relatively reluctant to become involved in a meaningful debate over national security policy. Still, we hope that future research will further improve our grasp of the determinants Russian elite opinion and help manage our expectations about the future course of Russian foreign policy.

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Notes

1. Medvedev, 'Vstrecha s voennosluzhashimi Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossi'.
2. Notable contributions to this debate include Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen and the Cold War*; Brodie, *War and Politics*; Ekirch, *The Civilian and the Military*; Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*; Gelpi and Feaver, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick?'; Gelpi and Feaver, *Choosing Your Battles*; Sechser, 'Are Soldiers Less War-Prone than Statesmen?'; Vagts, *A History of Militarism*.
3. See Quinn et al., 'How To Analyze Political Attention With Minimal Assumptions and Costs'; Shulman, 'Editor's Introduction', for two excellent surveys of current work in political science.
4. This view builds on Huntington's, *The Soldier and the State* classic thesis on professional military ethic, which holds that 'grand political designs and sweeping political goals are to be avoided, not because they are undesirable, but because they are impractical. The military security of the state must come first.' Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 68.
5. See Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen and the Cold War*.
6. See Gelpi and Feaver, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick?' and *Choosing Your Battles*. For a discussion of traditional and non-traditional military missions, see the recent special issue of *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no. 3 (September 2008).
7. See Vagts, *A History of Militarism*; Ekirch, *The Civilian and the Military*; Brodie, *War and Politics*, 495.
8. See Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*; Van Evera, *Causes of War*; Sechser, 'Are Soldiers Less War-Prone than Statesmen?'.
9. Notable exceptions have included Scobell, 'Soldiers, Statesmen, Strategic Culture and China's 1950 Intervention in Korea' and 'Show of Force', which have found empirical support for the military conservatism hypothesis in, respectively, China's 1950 intervention in Korea and the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996.
10. Azrael and Payin, '*US and Russian Policymaking*'; Golts, 'Bremya Militarizma'; Gomart, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*.
11. See Gelpi and Feaver, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick?'; Sechser, 'Are Soldiers Less War-Prone than Statesmen?'. Another alternative is opinion surveys. Gelpi and Feaver, *Choosing Your Battles* analyzed survey data on civilian and military attitudes to test the hypothesis that US civilian elites are more supportive of intervention than military elites.
12. Manual thematic analysis of speeches and articles by party and military elites has been used to gauge trends in leadership commentary over a range of substantive areas, from education policy (Stewart, 'Soviet Interest Groups and the Policy Process') to defense expenditures (Zimmerman and Palmer, 'Words and Deeds in Soviet Foreign Policy'), deception (Axelord and Zimmerman, 'The Soviet Press on Soviet Foreign Policy') and articulation of dissatisfaction with federal policies (Breslauer, 'Is There a Generation Gap in the Soviet Political Establishment?'). While the statistical approach to content analysis is new for this literature, the underlying analytic assumptions follow from this previous tradition.
13. Frost, 'A Content Analysis of Recent Soviet Party-Military Relations'.
14. Stewart, Warhola and Blough, 'Issue Salience and Foreign Policy Role Specialization'; Frost, 'A Content Analysis of Recent Soviet Party-Military Relations'; Wallander, 'Third World Conflict in Soviet Military Thought'.
15. Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy* and 'Slavophiles and Westernizers Redux'.
16. To be 'salient', an actor's statements on a given issue need not take the form of coherent policy proposals. These assumptions find precedent in previous work primarily in American politics on senate press releases (Grimmer, 'A Bayesian

- Hierarchical Topic Model') and senate floor debates (Quinn et al., 'How to Analyze Political Attention'; Monroe et al., 'Fightin' Words').
17. Such differences in expressed priorities can, of course, be dictated by bureaucratic portfolios, making it difficult to separate the salience of an issue from the number of personnel assigned to it. Yet since we are interested primarily in *expressed* opinions, it is of secondary importance whether a statement is informed by bureaucratic parochialism, privately held views, or some combination of the two. In either case, the statement conveys the relative importance a group (Military/Political) publicly assigns to a given policy area.
 18. Gelpi and Feaver, *Choosing Your Battles*, 22–3.
 19. Axelrod and Zimmerman, 'The Soviet Press on Soviet Foreign Policy'.
 20. We can classify these subtleties by reference to the document's vocabulary, which is a function of tone and content. This model of text analysis is well established both in sentiment analysis (Godbole et al., 'Large-Scale Sentiment Analysis for News and Blogs'; Hopkins and King, 'A Method of Automated Nonparametric Content Analysis for Social Science') and bag-of-words classification (Manning and Schütze, *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing*).
 21. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.
 22. Golts, 'Bremya Militarizma' and "'Grazhdanskiy kontrol" po-putinnski'; Gomart, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*; Miller and Trenin, *Vooruzhennye sily Rossii*; Golts and Putnam, 'State Militarism and Its Legacies'.
 23. Gelpi and Feaver, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick?'. For a discussion of contested institutions and civil–military relations, see Dassel, 'Civilians, Soldiers and Strife'.
 24. The corpus of documents includes 7920 statements by 533 individuals in positions of formal authority and informal influence, published in government and independent periodicals. While the sample is neither random nor universal, it is a reasonable representation of the public debate. A full source list can be found in Appendix A (available on request from authors).
 25. Full lists of all considered elites are available in Appendix B1.
 26. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 86–90.
 27. Manning and Schütze, *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing*, 237.
 28. Only unigrams (single words) are considered. Full text processing details can be found in Appendix C1.
 29. While Russian is more grammatically rigid and morphologically more complex than English, it is roughly as sensitive to word order as English, making the BOW assumption roughly equivalent across the two languages.
 30. Quinn et al., 'How to Analyze Political Attention'.
 31. Grimmer, 'A Bayesian Hierarchical Topic Model for Political Texts', 4.
 32. Blei et al., 'Latent Dirichlet Allocation'; Grimmer, 'A Bayesian Hierarchical Topic Model for Political Texts'; Quinn et al., 'How to Analyze Political Attention'.
 33. Clusters are often described by the words that most influence the placement of a document in a particular category. Further lists of key words are available in Appendix C3.
 34. Examples of each type of statement are provided in Appendix B.
 35. Whether in automated or manual document analysis, error rates or inter-coder reliability rates are rarely taken into account at the level of estimation. Due to our relatively small corpus of documents we are unable to adopt techniques like those described in Hopkins and King, 'A Method of Automated Nonparametric Content Analysis for Social Science', which rely on having tens of thousands of documents at a minimum.
 36. Polikar, 'Ensemble Based Systems in Decision Making'.

37. Specific settings, feature extraction techniques and package for estimation are available in Appendix C4.
38. Hechenbiechler and Schliep, 'Weighted k-Nearest-Neighbor Techniques and Ordinal Classification'.
39. Breiman, 'Random Forests'.
40. Hillard et al., 'Computer Assisted Topic Classification for Mixed Methods Social Science Research'; Yang and Liu, 'A Re-examination of Text Categorization Methods'.
41. The 95% confidence intervals are the 5th and 95th quantiles of the distribution.
42. Frost, 'A Content Analysis of Recent Soviet Party-Military Relations'.
43. Wallander, 'Third World Conflict in Soviet Military Thought'.
44. The authors are grateful to Kyle Marquardt for this insight.
45. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority*.
46. See Bondaletov, "'Sotsial'no-protestnaya aktivnost" voennosluzhashchikh'.
47. Golts, 'Bremya Militarizma' and "'Grazhdanskiy kontrol" po-putinnski'; Gomart, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*; Miller and Trenin, *Vooruzhennye sily Rossii*; Golts and Putnam, 'State Militarism and Its Legacies'.
48. Dubnov, 'Tadjikistan'; Selivanova, 'Trans-Dniestria'.
49. The bar plot shows expected probabilities and 95% confidence intervals derived from simulation.
50. The use of Euclidean distance allows us to measure disagreement between our groups on two different variables simultaneously. Operationalizing disagreement by simple spatial models is common in the study of parties (Poole, *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting*) and here does not make any additional scaling assumptions other than that the two dimensions are equally important.
51. The plot shows 20 simulated slope coefficients for a linear regression of disagreement on elite integration, controlling for annual press freedom scores (Freedom House, 'Press Freedom Scores: 2009 Edition'). By providing simulations across 20 iterations of the model, we not only demonstrate the 95% confidence interval of the model (the upper and lower most lines), but also show that the relationship is robust across multiple draws of the Use of Force Classification. Regression lines substantively show the effect on disagreement of increasing integration while holding Press Freedom at its mean.
52. Domke, *War and the Changing Global System*; Gelpi, 'Democratic Diversions'; Levy, 'Declining Power and the Preventative Motivation for War' and 'The Diversionary Theory of War'; Ostrom and Job, 'The President and the Political Use of Force'; Russett, 'Economic Decline, Electoral Pressure, and the Initiation of Interstate Conflict'; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*; Wilkenfeld, 'Domestic and Foreign Conflict Behaviour of Nations' and *Conflict Behaviour and Linkage Politics*; Zinnes and Wilkenfeld, 'An Analysis of Foreign Conflict Behavior of Nations'.
53. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*; Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*; Polsby, *Congress and the Presidency*; Simmel, 'The Persistence of Social Groups'; Waltz, 'Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crisis'.

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