

Urban-Rural Differences in Respect for the Norms of American Civil-Military Relations

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Abstract

Democracies require militaries that protect citizen well-being without threatening to overthrow the government or otherwise jeopardize public safety. The military should therefore be firmly under the command of civilian elected leaders, playing a minimal role in the political process. Previous research examines whether the public thinks such boundaries of civil-military relations should exist, and finds that people can see the military as a check to democratically elected administrations in the opposing party. Here, we ask a parallel question: Does place of residence influence attitudes about the boundaries of civil-military relations? We expect rural individuals and those higher in rural resentment to similarly see the military as a check to a civilian government as previous research suggests that rural residents are resentful towards government and centers of power. Using original survey data, we find that people high in such rural resentment are sometimes more willing to defer to the military. Finally, we successfully replicate findings from Krebs et al. (2023) under a Democratic administration. These results have implications for democratic governance and public support, particularly among facets of the public that have lower trust in government.

Keywords

US civil-military relations, political geography, urban-rural, rural resentment

Democratic societies require a strong military to defend its people, and their values, from external and internal threats. The people entrust the government to raise and train a militia that can use the most modern warfighting technologies to defend the country should such a threat arise. At the same time, the people and their democratically elected leaders must also ensure that the military does not turn around to overthrow the government or otherwise inflict unspeakable violence on the very people who facilitate their role (Feaver, 1999).

The study of civil-military relations focuses on how civilian elected leaders and the military interact in a context where one side, the military, has a monopoly on the knowledge of the use of force (Desch, 2001; Feaver, 2003). The most ideal balance between the two entities, as spelled out by Huntington (1957), is a world where the civilian elected leaders focus on diplomacy while the military officers and personnel focus on executing missions and fighting conflicts. To achieve good civil-military relations, there needs to be a lot of trust between members of both sides – the civilians need to trust the military in their skills to effectively execute a mission on the battlefield, while the military needs to trust civilians to make the best decision about whether to engage in conflict or to use diplomacy to solve international conflicts (Owens, 2021).

However, there are many scholars who criticize the Huntington (1957) model, including Brooks (2020), Feaver (2003) and Cohen (2003). A true separation between civilian and military entities in government poses many issues, including woeful ignorance on the part of civilians in how to fight wars when military intervention is necessary (Cohen, 2003). Additionally, it is difficult for the military to predict the political consequences of their actions (Brooks, 2019). Finally, it is rather difficult for the military to remain out of the political fray as there is a system of separation of powers that is present in the US government (Banerjee & Webeck, 2024). As the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war and the President to be the Commander in Chief, the military must work with different branches of government and sometimes these interests can differ depending on which political party is in charge (Weiner, 2022). That said, a better model for civil-military relations in the United States is

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perhaps as Feaver (2003) prescribes – oversight of the US military by civilian governmental institutions like the President and Congress. Civilians, and their elected government delegate the act of maintaining national security to the military, but the military, in return, should be accountable to civilian government oversight (Blankshain, 2020). For Feaver (2003), civilians have a “right to be wrong” such that they can send orders that might be counterproductive to good national security policy. However, do members of the public think civilians should be solely in charge of military strategy and that the military should purely be responsive to civilian leaders, as Huntington (1957) might suggest? Or, alternatively, should the military have some say in what battlefield strategies their civilian counterparts advise and be in charge of such planning, or at the very least have iterative discussions between the parties (Bland, 1999)?

Here, we wonder: does the public necessarily perceive the civilian leaders in government and the military officers as separate actors with distinct roles, and what does the public think about the relationship between these two entities? Krebs and Ralston (2021b) argued that a majority of the members in the American public do not necessarily see a boundary between these groups and that many Americans agree to deferring to the military on policy decisions. Furthermore, Krebs et al. (2023) and Feaver (2023) confirmed that Americans generally trust the US military to make the best decisions on mission planning and battlefield strategy, which breaches the norms of civil-military relations. In addition, Krebs et al. (2023) also found that partisanship mattered for these decisions to defer to the military. When their study was fielded in 2019, Democrats were more likely to see the military as a check to the Republican administration and were more open to allowing the military to intervene with civilian strategy-making compared to Republicans.

We expand upon this line of inquiry by looking beyond partisan identity to another major political fault line. Previous research suggests that societal groups who are less distrustful of government, and more resentful of it, are less likely to support democratic norms, including being more supportive of populist anti-establishment candidates and violence against the government (Rooduijn, 2018; Scherr & Leiner, 2021; Šrol et al., 2022). We argue that groups who are more distrustful of and resentful towards government will also be more likely to defer to the military on political decision-making. Although the military enjoys high levels of support throughout society, many people will trust the military while recognizing their role as separate from policy-making. However, those who are instead low in government trust will be more likely to defer to the highly-supported military as a decision-making check on the executive branch.

To test this expectation, we specifically look at urban versus rural residents, as the latter have been found to hold higher levels of resentment towards government (and distrust of government) – and particularly towards elected officials – because political power is perceived to be concentrated in

urban centers (Cramer, 2016; Lunz Trujillo, 2022; Thompson, nd). This resentment is also directed towards certain categories of civil servants perceived to be wasteful or meddling (Cramer, 2016).¹ At the same time, rural residents are disproportionately more likely to be a part of the military, and are perceived to have values that better align with the military (Burbach, 2019; Wallsten, 2023). In other words, people who hold rural resentment may not just be predisposed to trust the military due to military representation and value alignment, but also because they see certain portions of government (elected officials, other parts of bureaucracy) as being controlled by people they do not trust. How, then, does place of residence relate to support for the norms of civil-military relations? Are rural residents – particularly those higher in rural resentment – more likely to see the military as a check to political institutions? In this paper, we are interested in examining how place of residence and/or place-based resentment relates to attitudes surrounding civil-military relations. Given that one’s place of residence and resentment have individually been shown to influence political attitudes, we begin to test a theory on how these factors influence attitudes about the military.

We find that rural and small town residents are not more likely to defer to the military compared to their urban counterparts. However, respondents higher in rural resentment – that is, resentment towards urban centers of power – are more likely support deferring to the military for mission planning decisions in some situations. We also find some evidence to support Krebs et al.’s (2023) conclusion that partisans will support deferring to the military as a check to the current administration by testing this argument under a Democrat-controlled administration instead of under a Republican-controlled one in the original study.

To contextualize these results, we find that feelings of rural resentment are just as *consistent* of predictors as partisanship and age in understanding these outcomes. Further, in some cases, rural resentment is a stronger predictor of deferring to the military than partisanship. These results suggest that people who are resentful against urban centers see the military as an institutional check to a system of government that is perceived to not cater well to their particular interests. This matters for democratic support and concerns over democratic erosion. The separation of powers is intended to prevent one part of government from holding too much power, and is therefore integral to democratic health. Under this system, elected leadership should make decisions on diplomacy and foreign policy while military officers and personnel should execute related missions and focus on effective fighting in conflicts (Huntington, 1957). Without such clear distinctions in significant segments of American society, especially segments that often have disproportionate voting power in some cases (Rodden, 2019), the country risks an imbalance of power between the military and elected leadership that can lead to democratic erosion and backsliding (Feaver, 1999, 2003) through increased societal permissiveness of breaking

these specified roles.

Rural Attitudes About the Military

As noted above, partisan identity significantly relates to civilian preferences for military decision-making in government actions (Krebs et al., 2023). We contend that there are other groups who may also be inclined to do the same. For instance, subsets of the population that are particularly resentful of government or distrustful of it have shown depressed support for democratic norms and increased support for anti-establishment or populist candidates (Rooduijn, 2018; Scherr & Leiner, 2021; Šrol et al., 2022). Existing literature suggests that one politicized group in particular may fit this description well: rural residents, particularly those high in resentment against centers of power.

The urban-rural political divide in the United States has been well established when it comes to vote choice and partisanship (Gimpel et al., 2020; Johnson & Scala, 2022; McKee, 2008; Rodden, 2019), alongside its presence in other dimensions of political behavior such as certain policy attitudes (Fennelly & Federico, 2008; Fudge, 2020; Lin & Lunz Trujillo, 2023a), affective polarization (Lin & Lunz Trujillo, 2023c), and some types of political participation (Lin & Lunz Trujillo, 2023b). Multiple explanations exist for why this division is present and politically relevant. These explanations include the different demographic sorting patterns across urban and rural areas (Bishop, 2008), party realignment (Mettler & Brown, 2022), and economic changes in rural areas (Mettler & Brown, 2022; Rodden, 2019; Scala & Johnson, 2017).

Another contributing factor for this divide stems from group and identity-based concerns - particularly over perceptions of rural disrespect, lack of decision-making in government, and lack of resources from government (Cramer, 2016; Lunz Trujillo, 2022). These sentiments translate to a feeling of resentment against urban-centric centers of power, alongside a greater sense of collective rural consciousness. It is important to note that not all people living in a rural area hold rural resentment, but some do. Rural resentment and rural consciousness have been found to predict a host of attitudes relating to democratic backsliding, including support for populist candidates (Cramer, 2016; Lunz Trujillo, 2022), decreased political trust (Thompson, n.d.), support for political violence (Munis et al., 2023), and resentment towards minority groups (Dawkins et al., 2023; Nelsen & Petsko, 2021). Similarly, attitudes and grievances of rural residents have been linked with general societal-level democratic vulnerability (Mettler & Brown, 2022).

How might such rural-specific feelings of resentment relate to attitudes towards the military? Americans, in general, tend to have higher support for the military compared to other US political institutions, though confidence in the military has declined in recent years (Younis, 2023). Republicans and the non-college educated are more confident in

the military, both of which are disproportionately more constitutive of the rural US versus suburban or urban America (Burbach, 2019). Further, rural residents are relatively more likely to join the armed forces or be a veteran, which should generally bolster support for and confidence in the military.² Other work finds an urban-rural split in military policy preferences (Lin & Lunz Trujillo, 2023a). Taken together, we expect rural residents may have more confidence in or support for the military.

However, added layers of resentment and distrust towards government may impact how support for the military matters for its perceived role in governance and policy decision-making across the urban-rural divide. Eroding attitudes toward elected government officials push people to dampen their support for the distrusted portions of the current political establishment. As such, resentment towards the political establishment causes individuals to seek out alternative sources of government decision-making and accountability outside the standard establishment or the current norms (Cramer, 2016; Rooduijn, 2018; Scherr & Leiner, 2021; Šrol et al., 2022). Therefore, the combination of resentment towards government alongside high support for the military among rural individuals (and among those high in resentment) might cause them to see the military as better suited for making policy decisions, compared to the president or other branches of government. Conversely, civilians who have high support for the military but hold less resentment towards government may see the military making policy decisions as less appropriate. Rural residents, and those higher in rural resentment, should therefore theoretically be more apt to see the military as a check on corrupt or incompetent presidential power, rather than the military potentially overstepping its bounds in situations where it leads policy decision making. Given this, we propose the following set of competing hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis: Rural residents, and those higher in rural resentment, will not differ significantly from their urban counterparts in terms of general willingness to defer to the military for decisions related to use of force.

Alternative Hypothesis: Rural residents, and those higher in rural resentment, will be more willing to defer to the military for decisions related to use of force compared to their urban counterparts.

Data and Analysis Plan

We fielded surveys of US adults in July and August 2023 on LUCID Theorem ($n = 2799$) and Amazon Mechanical Turk ($n = 487$).³ We are interested in respondents' willingness to defer to the military for their expertise on policy issues and decisions related to battlefield strategy and mission planning. This taps into the notion of whether the people think civilian leaders have a "right to be wrong" as discussed earlier

(Feaver, 2003). To this end, each of our 3286 respondents answered the following questions, which are pulled directly from Krebs et al. (2023). Collectively, these items address the notion of “civilian supremacy” (Krebs et al., 2023) such that if the respondent feels that, on different occasions, the national leader (President) should substitute professional military advice with his own judgment, they support the notion that civilians should maintain oversight of the military. However, the opposite would reflect a willingness to defer to the military as civilian leaders have no “right to be wrong” and should request military action that is in line with good national security strategy. The response option that represents a willingness to defer to the military is indicated in italics.

For each of the following statements, please select the response that best reflects your opinions.

1. If senior US military officers object to a proposed military mission, then the president should:
 - (a) *reject the proposed mission—even if the president thinks the mission worthwhile.*
 - (b) reject the proposed mission—only if the president agrees that the mission is not worthwhile
2. If senior US military officers approve of a proposed military mission, then the president should:
 - (a) *approve the proposed mission—even if the president thinks the mission not worthwhile.*
 - (b) approve the proposed mission—only if the president agrees that the mission is worthwhile.
3. If senior US military officers advise using US forces on the battlefield in a particular way, then the president should:
 - (a) use US forces as they advise—only if the president agrees.
 - (b) *use US forces as they advise—even if the president disagrees.*

For our analyses, we predict the tendency for respondents to select the option that promotes greater deference to the military for such decisions. We run survey-weighted logistic regression models to predict this selection for each of the three questions above using a respondent’s place of residence as the main predictor. Our survey weights are calculated based on national benchmarks from the US Census on gender, age, race, education and geographic region. In our analyses, we control for partisanship, racial minority status, gender, education, income, age, personal and family military service experience, and overall support for the US Military.⁴ Support for the US Military is measured using a 0–100 feeling thermometer towards the US Armed Forces, where 0 indicates incredibly cold feelings and 100 indicates incredibly warm feelings towards the US Military.⁵

We measure place of residence according to respondent self-description: we ask respondents to select the option that best describes where they currently live. Response options include a rural area, small town, suburb, or city. In our

regression analyses, these four categories of place residence are kept separate from one another and not combined into a binary urban-rural measure. We do this to provide more detail in our analyses, and because recent work suggests that urban-rural measurement is typically better represented as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (Johnson & Scala, 2022). We opt to use subjective place of residence over other measures for a few reasons. First, different measures of urban-rural residency put forth by government agencies are often not highly correlated, and these different measures are often decided using geographic units that might in actuality contain multiple designations (for example: Dane County, Wisconsin has suburban and small town parts, but it only gets one designation). Second, some existing work suggests that for measuring political attitudes, subjective self-placement is more indicative than more objective measures. (See Nemerever and Rogers (2021) for a detailed discussion of urban-rural measurement).

We also include five items that measure rural resentment. Three of these are based on the 2020 American National Elections Studies (ANES), while the other two are more direct measures of resentment against rural versus urban areas. These are as follows:

ANES Rural Resentment Items

- Compared to people living in cities, how much do people living in small towns and rural areas get more, the same, or less than they deserve from the government?
- Compared to people living in cities, how much do people living in small towns and rural areas have too much influence, too little influence, or about the right amount of influence on government?
- Do people living in small towns and rural areas get too much respect, too little respect, or about the right amount of respect from people living in cities?

General Place Resentment Items

- How much resentment, or bitterness, do you feel towards cities and urban areas in the US?
- How much resentment, or bitterness, do you feel towards rural areas in the US?

The ANES items are re-coded so that greater values indicate that the participants think rural areas get less than they deserve. The general place resentment items are coded so that larger values indicate greater feelings of resentment towards those areas. In any analyses where rural resentment is used as an independent variable, we opt to run one model with only the three ANES items, a separate model with only the two general measurements of place resentment, and a third model that contains all five of the above measures of rural and place-based resentment. We use this strategy because the ANES rural resentment scale and the generalized place resentment

items may introduce multicollinearity into the models due to their conceptual similarity. We also want to see if the ANES rural resentment items (based on Cramer (2016)), which have specific dimensions relating to resources, respect, and political representation, produce comparable results to more general feelings of place resentment items.

Finally, in addition to considering the deference to the military items in isolation, we combine them to identify whether rural residents or those with higher rural resentment will select the more deferential option on more instances than their urban counterparts. To answer this question, we utilize a Poisson regression model (given that the dependent variable is a count variable) using the same set of controls as the logistic regressions. We are interested in counting the number of deferential options, of 3, that respondents select.

Results

We first look at the proportion of respondents living in each place of residence category that select each of the options to

each question that we pose regarding the military. In Figure 1,⁶ we indicate the option that represents a greater willingness to defer to the military using two asterisks. For each question, it seems that a larger proportion of respondents, regardless of their place of residence, are more likely to select the option that respects the traditional views on civil-military relations – the one that maintains a separation of civilian politician and military officers in decisions about war and strategy (Huntington, 1957). However, we are interested in predicting whether rural residence would motivate greater willingness to defer to the military compared to residents in other areas. The descriptive statistics, especially for the use of forces on the battlefield in a certain way, suggests that a greater proportion of rural residents (42%) agree to using US forces as senior officers advise, even if the president disagrees, compared to residents in large cities (34%) who take this position. In addition, 49% of rural residents, compared to 40% of urban, 44% of suburb and 44% of small town residents, approve of listening to senior military leaders’ opinions on missions even if the president disapproves (Panel A).

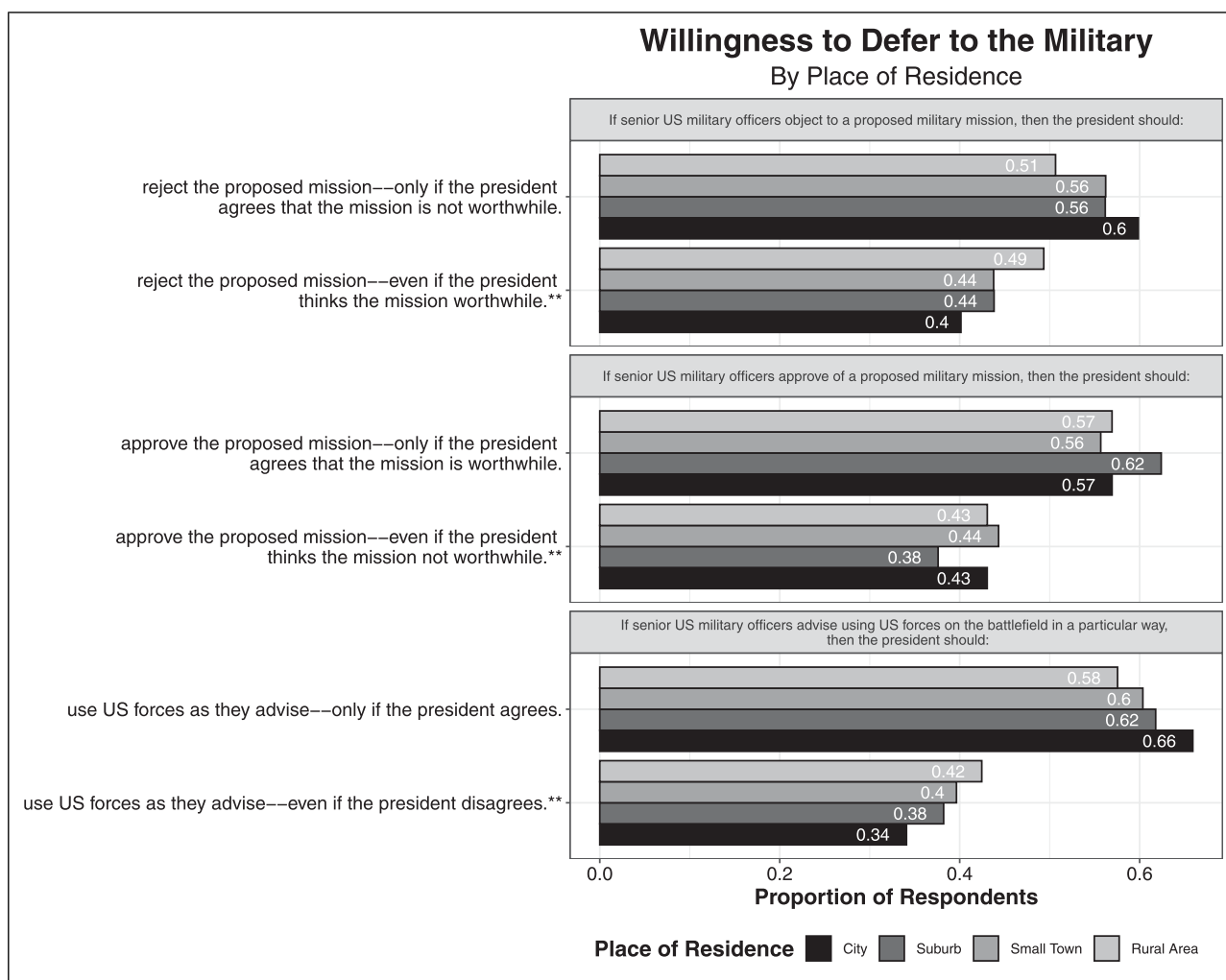


Figure 1. Willingness to defer to the military by place of residence (Asterisks signal the more deferential option).

Turning to the results of our logistic regression models, we find that there are place-based differences in attitudes about whether to defer to the military, and some partisan ones as well.⁷ Looking at in Model 1 in Figure 2, we predict the probability that someone selects the option of “reject the

proposed mission—even if the president thinks the mission worthwhile” to the question “If senior US military officers approve of a proposed military mission, then the president should ...”. Here, from the main model with all five rural resentment items included, we see that there is no difference

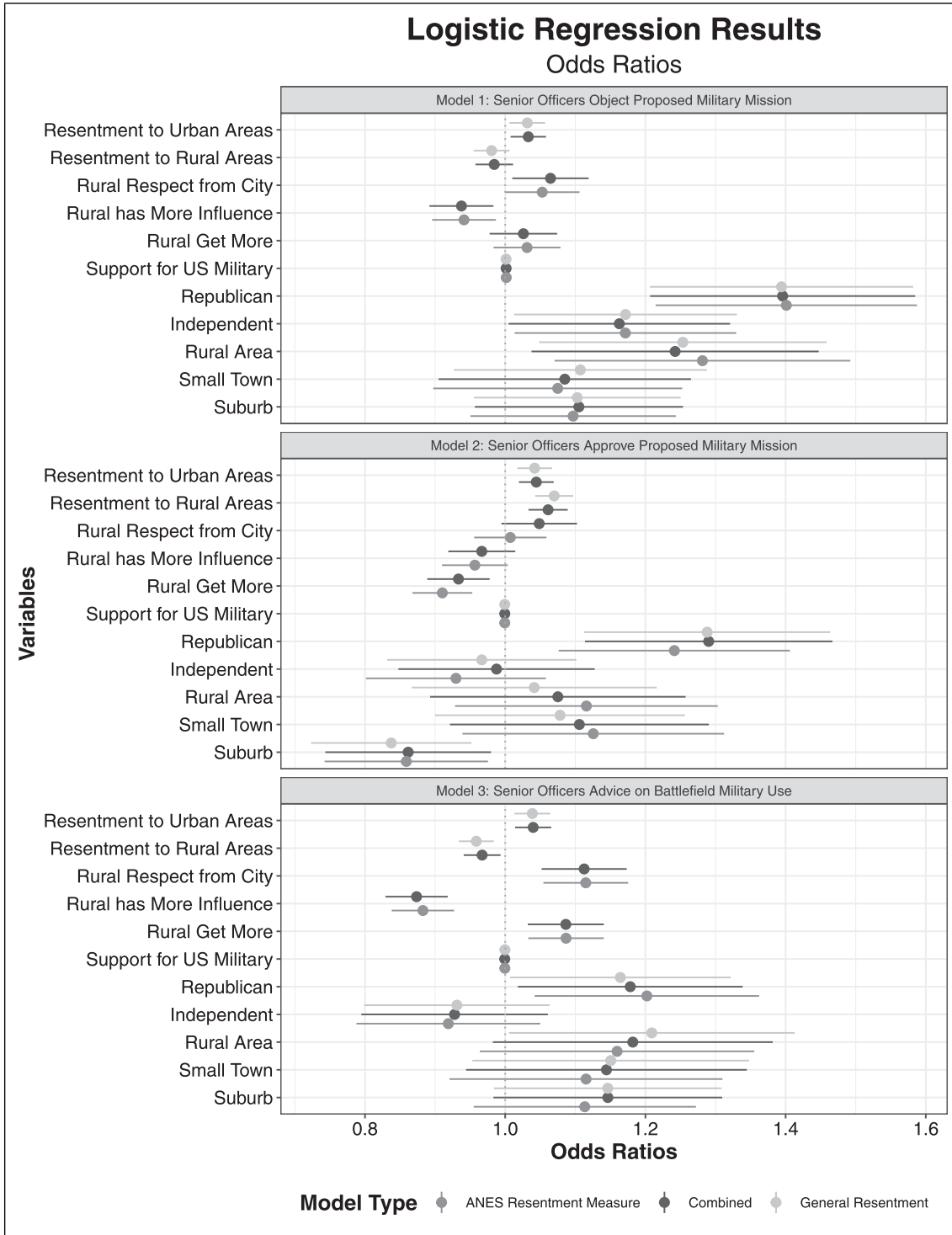


Figure 2. Odds Ratios and standard Errors for logistic regression on deference to the military – predicting odds of becoming more deferential to the armed forces.

in attitudes about deferring to the military between participants living in urban versus rural places. None of the rural resentment items significantly predict this outcome variable.

Next, Model 2 in Figure 2 shows the predicted likelihood of selecting “approve the proposed mission—even if the president thinks the mission not worthwhile” to the question “If senior US military officers approve of a proposed military mission, then the president should ...”. We likewise see that place of residence does not significantly predict deference towards the US Military. Furthermore, when considering the two general rural resentment items in isolation, people who generally have greater resentment to residents in rural areas are more likely to select the deferential response to this item (Odds Ratio = 1.06, $p < .05$), supporting the Alternative Hypothesis. In addition, respondents with greater resentment towards urban areas also have greater odds of selecting the deferential response (Odds Ratio = 1.04, $p < .05$).

In addition, our findings from Models 1 and 2 agree with the conclusions that Krebs et al. (2023) draw with respect to partisanship. The results from Model 1 (reject the proposed mission) showed that Republicans are more likely to support the deferential option compared to Democrats (Odds Ratio = 1.396, $p < .05$). The results from Model 2 (approve the proposed mission) show that Republicans are slightly more likely to approve of this action compared to Democrats (Odds Ratio = 1.29, $p < .1$). For the first item, Republicans are more likely to defer to the military but not so much in the second. The results in Krebs et al. (2023) showed that Democrats were more likely to defer to the military during the Trump administration as their study was fielded in 2019. However, the replication in Krebs and Ralston (2021a) showed that the opposite is true for Republicans during the Biden administration. In their 2021 survey, Krebs and Ralston (2021a) found that Democrats were much less deferential towards the military compared to Republicans, especially as someone from their own party, Joe Biden, was Commander in Chief. However, Republicans were not significantly more likely to defer to the military, which is contrary to their expectations. Our survey was fielded in 2023, at a different time point during the same presidential administration compared to Krebs and Ralston (2021a). At the point of our survey, the nation witnessed many military actions from the current administration, including the withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 (Schaeffer, 2022) and the continuous funding of the war in Ukraine (Cerda, 2023). In these cases, Republicans were less likely to support of the Biden administration’s response and funding proposal, which may be the reason why our findings deviate from Krebs and Ralston (2021a) to be more in line with Krebs et al. (2023) for opposing partisans to the current party in the White House. We find, specifically, that Republicans are indeed more likely to defer to the military in 2023, which counters the findings of Krebs and Ralston (2021a) to be more in line with Krebs et al. (2023).

Finally, looking to Model 3 in Figure 2, we predict the likelihood that a respondent will select “use US forces as they

advise—even if the president disagrees” to the question “If senior US military officers advise using US forces on the battlefield in a particular way, then the president should ...”. Here, in our main model with all five resentment items included, we likewise do not find difference in place of residence on support for deference to the military. However, respondents who believe that rural residents get too little respect from urban residents are more likely to select the more deferential option in both the model with five rural resentment items and in the model with only the ANES items (Odds Ratio = 1.113, $p < .05$). Note that these variables are on a one to seven scale; the odds of supporting this outcome variable are actually 1.897 going from the lowest to highest value of the rural residents get too little respect variable. Interestingly, people who say that rural areas have too little influence are less likely to select the deference to military option (Odds Ratio = 0.875, $p < .05$). Additionally, respondents who believe that rural residents get more from the government are also slightly more likely to select the deferential response to this question (Odds Ratio = 1.086, $p < .1$).

Now, we turn to addressing whether rural residents or people with higher rural resentment would select the more deferential option on multiple instances. We are interested in whether they will be more willing to defer on more instances than their urban counterparts. First, we examine how many of the deferential options respondents selected based on place of residence. Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents in each place of residence that selected any number of deferential responses, ranging from no deferential responses (perfect respect of traditional civil-military relations norms) to three deferential responses (most distant from traditional norms of civil-military relations). From Figure 3, we see that most respondents, regardless of place of residence, select zero or one of the deferential options. Most people, in general, are supportive of the president not deferring to the military on these decisions, in line with the established roles and separation of powers in the US system. That said, however, proportionally more rural residents (18%) selected all three deferential responses compared to urban (12%), suburban (12%) and small town (10%) residents.

In addition, we construct a Poisson regression model.⁸ These results suggest that place of residence does not affect the total number of deferential options that respondents select. People who believe that rural residents get too little respect from the cities will select 1.04 times more deferential responses (increase of 4%) compared to people who do not believe that notion ($\beta = 0.04$, $p < .05$). However, those who believe that rural residents have too little influence on the government will select 0.96 times more deferential responses (decrease of 4%) than those without such resentment ($\beta = -0.04$, $p < .05$). Finally, people with greater resentment towards urban areas are more likely to select more items that are deferential to the military (increase by 2%, $\beta = 0.02$, $p < .05$). Other rural resentment items are not statistically significant predictors. These results do not change when we

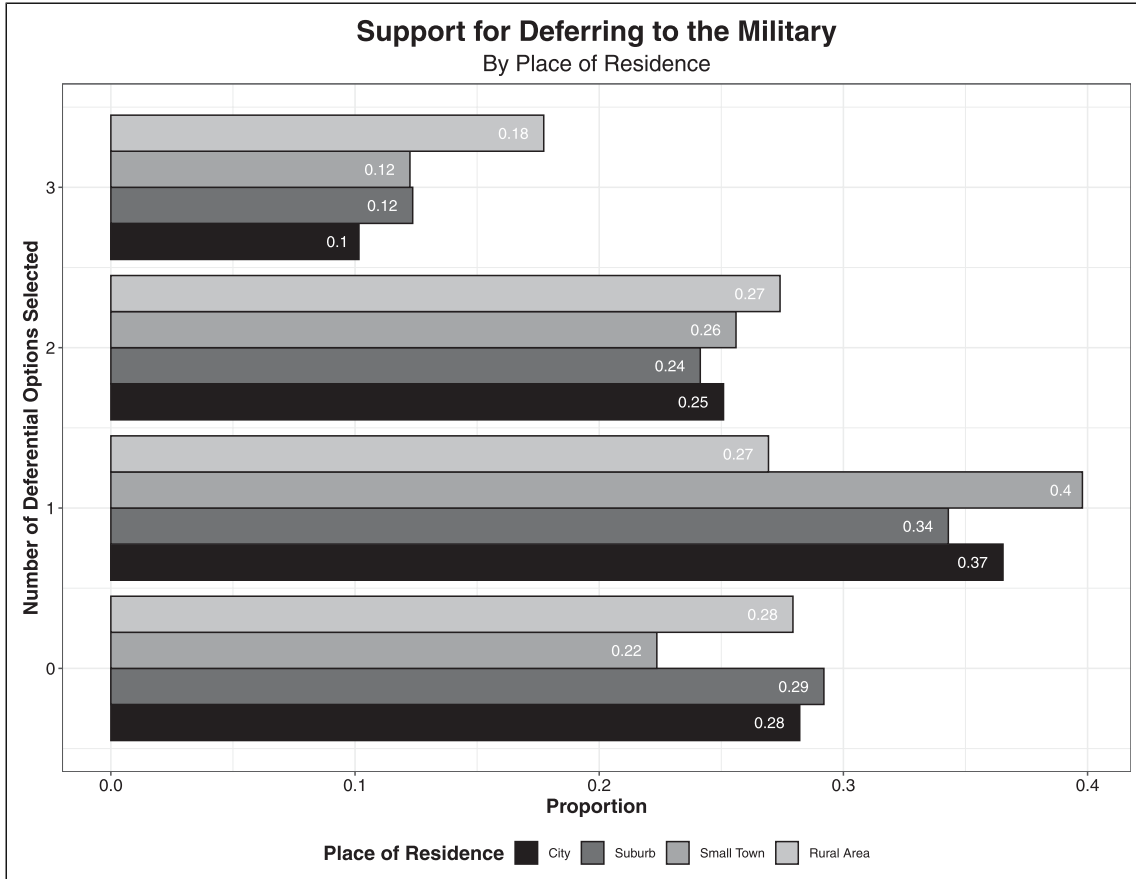


Figure 3. Number of deferential to the military responses selected by respondents in each place of residence.

break the models to focus on specific aspects of rural resentment. Further, we also find that Republicans select 1.14 times more deferential responses (increase 14%) than Democrats ($\beta = 0.14, p < .05$), again in line from expectations from Krebs et al. (2023).

Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, Table 1 provides a summary of the results for each of the items considered. We find that, under some circumstances, people with higher rural resentment are more likely to be deferential to the military for decision-making on battlefield strategy and mission planning purposes. In addition, collectively, we also find that people with higher rural resentment are more likely to select the more deferential option on multiple occasions.

Although we find that most Americans appear to be supportive of the president not deferring to the military, our results suggest that certain groups in society – particularly those resentful towards the elected civilian political establishment – may be more likely to see military officials as being preferable “checks” to presidential decision-making, thus favoring greater military powers in governance. Rural resentment is as consistently predictive of military deference

as other known predictors, such as partisanship, and are sometimes more predictive.

Such results add to our understanding of how rural-specific considerations relate to political attitudes and behaviors. Feelings of resentment based on perceived urban-rural disparities are associated with perceptions of civil-military norms, potentially via eroded political trust. These feelings accordingly relate to public support for democratic norms and the public’s perception of the military’s role. Anti-government resentment and eroding trust found within facets of US society could lead to greater reliance on military officials in a way that goes against the established roles of different parts of government. This jeopardizes the balance of power between civilian elected officials and military leaders proposed by Huntington (1957) and is another avenue that could lead to democratic backsliding in the US. Decisions on whether to declare war and deploy troops lie within the hands of the people, especially in Congress and the President which is spelled out in the US Constitution. Greater support in the military to make these decisions can contribute to the further decay of American democracy because the military leadership is not elected and not accountable to the people in the same way that government officials are (Krebs & Ralston, 2021b). The goal in a society with good civil-military

Table 1. Summary of Findings.

Question	Hypothesis	Conditions	Specifications
Senior Officers Object Proposed Military Mission	Null Hypothesis		
Senior Officers Approve Proposed Military Mission	Alternative Hypothesis	Rural Resentment	General Rural Resentment is significant – greater resentment to residents in rural <i>and</i> urban areas predicts greater deference to the military.
Senior Officers Advice on Battlefield Military Use	Alternative Hypothesis	Rural Resentment	ANES Rural Resentment is significant – Respondents who believe that rural residents get too little respect from urban areas and that rural residents get more from the government are more likely to select the deferential option. However, respondents who believe rural residents have too little influence are <i>less</i> likely to be deferential to the military.
<i>Cumulative Scale</i>	Alternative Hypothesis	Rural Resentment	ANES Rural Resentment and General Rural Resentment are significant – Respondents who believe that rural residents get too little respect select more deferential items while respondents who believe rural residents have too little influence select fewer deferential items. Greater resentment towards urban areas also leads to selecting more deferential responses.

relations is for the military to remain outside the realms of politics and unswayed by partisan and policy motivations. This ultimately cannot happen if (a) members of the military are deeply involved in politics (Urban, 2021) and (b) the military is actively involved in the policy-making process (Brooks, 2020; Golby et al., 2018; Joyner, 2021).

Our work also provides additional data that confirms Krebs et al. (2023), who argued that citizens affiliated with the party not controlled by national government will be more apt to see the military as a check on the executive. These researchers, however, were only able to test this argument under a Republican-controlled administration. We find that this does indeed hold in a Democrat-controlled administration as well. However, more research is needed to identify the connection between the partisanship of the administration, its foreign policy approval, and subsequent willingness for people to defer to the military. Krebs and Ralston (2021a) repeated their original 2019 study as published in Krebs et al. (2023) during the Biden administration, yet our findings still largely agree with their original results from the Trump Administration. As we mentioned earlier, it can be due to the approval of Biden's foreign policy approach, especially to Afghanistan and Ukraine, or it can be due to perceptions of how partisan the military has become, as seen in Feaver (2023). However, as our study is primarily descriptive, we are not interpreting the results in a causal manner. More research would be needed to establish causality for deference to the military.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. We rely on cross-sectional survey data from online opt-in panels. Although we weight to population benchmarks, and although the survey provider has been shown to effectively replicate findings from other survey data sources (Coppock & McClellan, 2019), the responses may not fully reflect the American public as a whole. That said, however, we are mostly interested in attitudinal relationships between certain

demographic or group-based attitudes and attitudes toward military official versus presidential decision-making.

Further, some of the rural resentment items we use were either not statistically significant, or in a few cases, *negatively* predicted our outcome measures. Specifically, the item measuring whether a respondent thought rural areas had too little influence was negatively and significantly associated with the outcome variable for “senior officers give advice on battlefield military use” and for the count dependent variable. However, this finding was not robust in some models, and in the majority of cases rural resentment items were positively predictive of our outcome measures.

Here, we only test one group that we would theoretically predict to have greater deference to the military through decreased trust in government generally, but also heightened trust in the military. There may be other groups who are similarly predisposed to feel this way, such as populist supporters in the United States. Future work should expand analysis into groups that might similarly feel trust or resentment towards non-military political institutions.

In addition, future work should continue investigating what people see as the role of the military in American government. From Krebs et al. (2023) and the present study, it seems that there is a desire to view the military as a reasonable, seemingly objective or nonpartisan, check, but is this assumption correct? As we show Figure 2, people higher in rural resentment are more likely to defer to the military for decisions on whether to embark on a mission and how to use troops in a battlefield. Future research should shed light on the underlying mechanism. Is it because they see the military as an entity that will serve the national interest rather than a particular demographic base?

Additional work should also consider the implications of a greater willingness to defer to the military, including its effects on attitudes towards the armed forces as an institution and its downstream effects on democracy more broadly.

Starting with attitudes about the military, does a greater willingness to defer mean greater support of the military and their spending or missions? Perhaps conversely, does greater support for military spending and missions lead to greater tendencies to defer and subsequently breach traditional civil-military norms? In this paper, we consider support for the military simply in terms of a favorability rating and find that there is no urban-rural difference. As such, we also don't find significance with greater warmth towards the military and a greater tendency to defer. Perhaps a more concise measure of support for military missions and spending can be used to explore this question further.

Finally, more research should consider the subsequent democratic effects of a greater willingness to breach traditional civil-military norms. As Krebs and Ralston (2021b) suggest, perhaps people are unaware of what traditional civil-military norms are. However, if they were made aware of its importance, would they continue to defer to the military? What does a greater willingness to defer imply for American democracy? Do people think the military should be more involved in American party politics or stay out of the fray? Is willingness to defer to the military contingent upon the people seeing the military as an apolitical institution? What would happen to American democracy if the military is simply another partisan actor? Krebs and Ralston (2021b) has sounded some of these warning alarms, which indicates that these questions deserve further exploration.

In sum, in this paper, we find that there is indeed an urban-rural divide in willingness to defer to the military and hence breach traditional civil-military norms. However, as this project is mostly descriptive, we hope this study paves the way for future research on the largely understudied area of American public opinion on civil-military relations and the role of the military as it relates to democratic governance.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. This sentiment can be reflected in calls by conservatives – most recently Donald Trump – to “drain the swamp” (Widmer, 2017).
2. From the US Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-15.html>, see also Wallsten (2023).
3. MTurk was an initial pilot. We pool participants for two main reasons: 1) Coppock and McClellan (2019) find that social science research using MTurk replicates using Lucid, and 2) Lucid gets its participants from a variety of respondent pools and vendors, rather than having its own like MTurk (<https://support.lucidhq.com/s/article/Sample-Sourcing-FAQs>). In other words, Lucid participants are actually not Lucid-specific; they are a conglomeration of pools already. Additionally, based on a power analysis we conducted, the sample for MTurk alone is not enough to satisfy conditions for sufficient power with a modest effect size. This is especially true if we do subsample analysis, as rural residents constitute a minority of the sample. As a result, we did not analyze the MTurk data independently rather, we combine it with the LUCID data for analysis.
4. The full text of the question wording in our survey for these questions, along with their answer choices, is in Supplemental Appendix A.
5. Most Americans are generally supportive towards the military (Burbach, 2019; Feaver, 2023; Leal, 2005) and we find this general trend by place of residence in our own data as well. When we predict support for the military from urban-rural residence and rural resentment using an OLS model, we find that there are no significant differences between rural residence in support for the military. However, Republicans have warmer feelings towards the military than other groups. Furthermore, while people higher in rural resentment are statistically significantly more likely to support the military, greater resentment does not seem to move the meter much on the overall military support on a 0 - 100 scale ($\beta = 0.845, p < .001$) See Supplemental Appendix B for descriptive statistics and regression results.
6. To compare the number of respondents who select the more deferential option on each question, we use χ^2 tests to test independence of place of residence and attitudes on the military. Each model is statistically significant and the results are in Supplemental Appendix F.
7. The full regression table is in Supplemental Appendix C.
8. Full results for the Poisson regression model are in Supplemental Appendix D.

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