

RESEARCH PAPER

COMPARING MILITARY
AND HUMAN SECURITY
SPENDING:
KEY FINDINGS AND
METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

MAY 2022
UN WOMEN

RESEARCH PAPER
COMPARING MILITARY AND
HUMAN SECURITY SPENDING:
KEY FINDINGS AND
METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

PEACE AND SECURITY SECTION

UN WOMEN

New York, May 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is part of UN Women's new research on military expenditure and women, peace and security and was supported by the generous contribution from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Dr. Ruth Carlitz conducted the research and authored this paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
Historical Trends	1

DRILLING DOWN	3
Conflict-affected country examples	3
Overspending on Defence; Underspending on Health, Women, and Children	4
Pandemic Priorities	5

APPENDIX	
Table A1. Overview of Data Sources Consulted	7
Table A2. Military Spending vs. Social Protection	8

BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
--------------	---

1.1

OVERVIEW

This paper leverages publicly available data¹ to compare trends in government spending on the military² with spending on human security (social protection, education, and health). It also examines whether military spending crowds out policy measures governments have taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In both high- and low-income settings, the pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities with respect to health and well-being; domestic and care work; relational (domestic) violence; and work and poverty.³ While some countries have taken measures to address these issues, in others they have not been prioritized. This analysis raises questions about the extent to which this can be attributed to a lack of fiscal space resulting from prioritizing the military. Spending patterns and trade-offs in fragile and conflict-affected countries⁴ are highlighted in particular.

1.1.1

Historical trends

Data on trends over time in military spending vs. spending on social protection⁵ is available through 2017 for 164 countries. Figure 1 shows that fragile and conflict-affected countries have tended to spend relatively more on defence than on social protection, whereas countries that are not classified as such depict the opposite trend. This pattern holds controlling for income.⁶

In Afghanistan (the only high-intensity conflict country included in this dataset), military spending has exceeded one third of total government spending since 2010,

whereas less than 4 per cent of government spending has gone toward social protection. In contrast, in countries that are not classified as fragile or conflict-affected, the proportion of state spending going to social protection has been over 25 per cent on average since 2010, with less than 6 per cent of spending going to the military in any given year.

Data for military spending versus spending on health and education, is available for a wider set of countries and a slightly longer time series (through 2019). Figure 2 shows that in countries not classified as fragile or conflict-affected, governments have tended to spend nearly twice as much on health as on their militaries. However, in conflict-affected countries, the trends are reversed: military spending is typically more than twice the proportion spent on health. (Education spending outpaces spending on defence in all countries, though the gap is smaller in conflict-affected areas.)

1 See Appendix Table A1 for details on data sources consulted.

2 Includes all current and capital expenditure on: (a) the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; (b) defence ministries and other government agencies engaged in defence projects; (c) paramilitary forces, when judged to be trained and equipped for military operations; and (d) military space activities. For more information, see <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/sources-and-methods>.

3 Fisher, Alexandra N and Michelle K Ryan. 2021. "Gender inequalities during COVID-19." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24(2):237–245

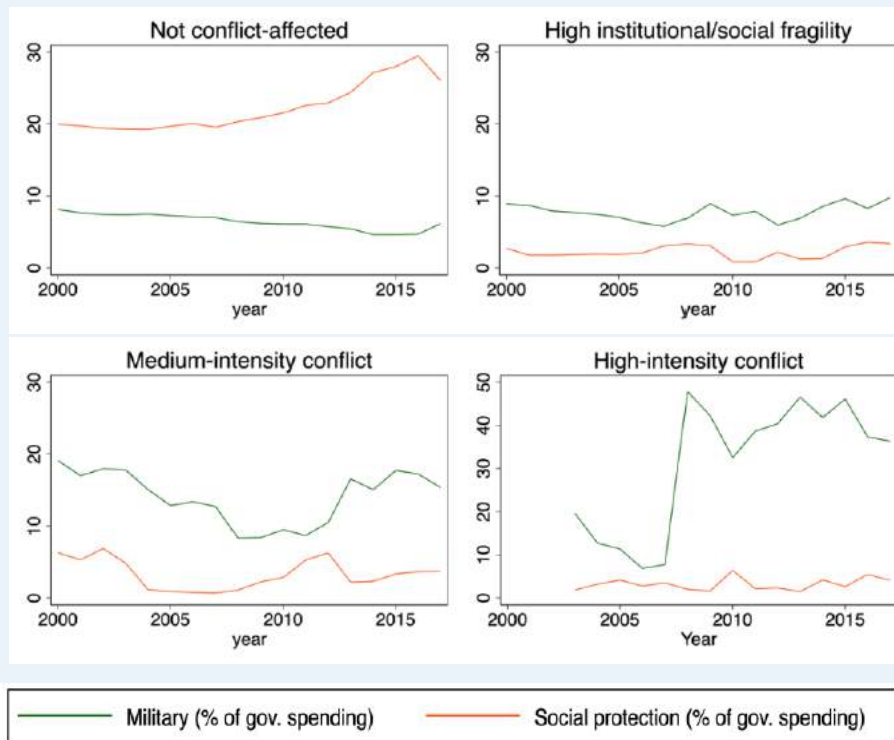
4 In FY21, the World Bank classifies the following countries as affected by (1) high-intensity conflict: Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic; (2) medium-intensity conflict: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Dem. Rep. of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, Rep. of Yemen; and (3) high institutional and social fragility: Burundi, Comoros, Rep. of Congo, Eritrea, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Kosovo, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Liberia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Venezuela, West Bank and Gaza, Zimbabwe

5 Includes spending on Sickness and disability; Old age; Survivors; Family and children; Unemployment; Housing; Social exclusion n.e.c.; R&D Social protection; Social protection n.e.c.

6 Countries that are not fragile or conflict-affected tend to be wealthier, and thus spend more on social protection given obligations such as pensions. However, the tendency for conflict-affected countries to spend more on their militaries than on social protection holds when we control for country income (see Appendix Table A2.)

FIGURE 1

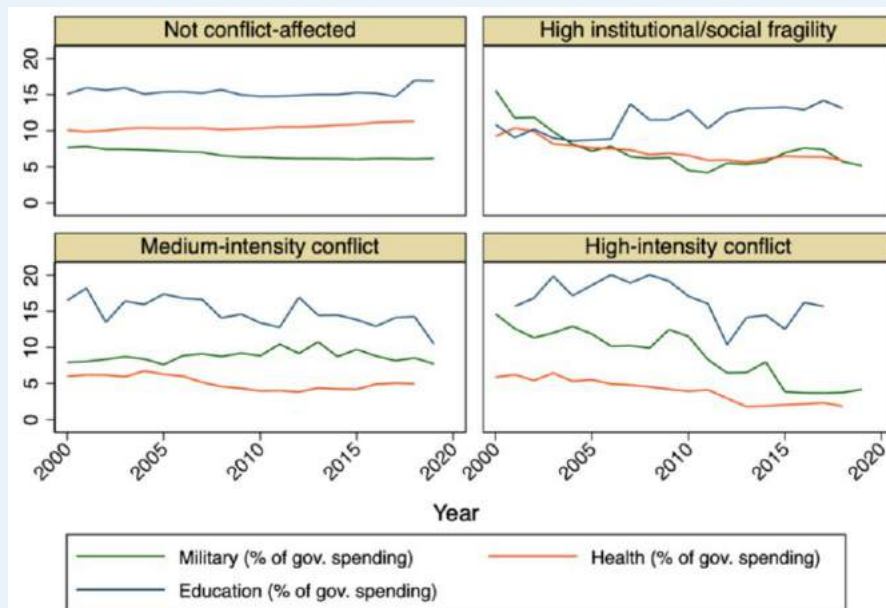
Spending on Military vs. Social Protection



Data from IFPRI Statistics on Public Expenditures for Economic Development (SPEED)
The Y-axis scale has been adjusted for the high-intensity conflict countries (bottom right).

FIGURE 2

Spending on Military vs. Education and Health



Data from World Bank World Development Indicators.

2.1

DRILLING DOWN

The preceding analysis suggests that human security – particularly health and social protection – is less likely to be prioritized in conflict-affected countries. In order to further illustrate how this plays out in budgetary terms, this section examines the experiences of select conflict-affected countries for which recent line-item fiscal data is available.⁷

2.1.1

Conflict-affected country examples

In 2019, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of government spending in Afghanistan was devoted to defence and another 13 per cent went to activities related to “public order and safety.”⁸ In contrast, less than 6 per cent of government spending went to the health sector, about 9 per cent went to education, and just 4 per cent was spent on social protection (including all programs coded as targeting families and children). In Burkina Faso, a medium-intensity conflict country, the government budgeted over 10 times as much for defence as for social protection (including all programs coded as targeting families and children) in 2020.⁹

Similar trends prevailed in Mali (another medium-intensity conflict country) in 2017 – with the government spending over five times as much on national defence and security as on social programs. In contrast, we see distinct trends in countries that are not considered to be conflict-affected (but are still low-income). For instance, in Senegal, government spending on defence, order and security accounted for under 6 per cent of total spending in 2018, whereas 14 per cent of government spending went to education and research, and another 4 per cent went to health and social services.

⁷ All data in this section is from the World Bank BOOST Open Data Portal; see Appendix Table A1 for further details.

⁸ Calculations are based on all spending classified according to the OECD’s Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG); Afghanistan dataset also includes some unclassified spending.

⁹ 2020 figures for Burkina Faso based on revised budgeted amounts; actual spending figures for this year not yet included in BOOST data.

2.1.2

Overspending on Defence; Underspending on Health, Women, and Children

Another way to gauge governments' prioritization of different sectors is through an examination of budget credibility, or the extent to which governments execute their budgets as planned (and as approved by their legislatures).

The International Budget Partnership has conducted illustrative research in this area on a sample of 35 countries for which comparable, fine-grained data is available between 2009-2017.¹⁰ Overall, they find that national budgets in these countries are underspent by almost 10 per cent, but these deviations are not evenly distributed across sectors. Notably, spending on defence tends to rise during implementation relative to other sectors. In contrast, underspending plagues the health sector – especially when it comes to immunization and infrastructure improvements. Capital budgets for education (e.g. for the construction of schools) also tend to be underspent.

These deviations tend to be greater in poorer countries: whereas the average net deviation in defence spending was +5.1 per cent in high- and upper-middle countries, low-income countries overspent their defence budgets by +51 per cent on average for the period in question. This stands in stark contrast to the rates of underspending on immunization and other health-related activities – rates that are particularly high in a number of conflict-affected countries.

For instance, in Afghanistan the government underspent its immunization budget by 27.4 per cent between 2012-2016, and underspent by 29.7 per cent on health in general for the same period. In Burkina Faso, underspending on immunization was 25.4 per cent on average between 2009-2015 and 37.8 per cent for the health sector overall. Niger also experienced underspending on immunization of 18.9 per cent between 2009-2016 and by nearly a third (30.1 per cent) on health overall. Underspending on immunization-related line items can lead to vaccine stockouts – reflecting a critical concern for the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A recent case study of budget credibility in Nigeria¹¹ (a medium-intensity conflict country) confirms the general patterns of underspending discussed above and also allows for a more detailed analysis of sectoral prioritization. While underspending is a problem for the vast majority of the country's central government ministries, departments, and agencies, it is particularly striking for the ministry dealing with women (which spent just 34 per cent of its budgetary allocation in 2015) and that dealing with youth (which spent just over half of its budget that year). In contrast, the defence ministry was able to spend 65 per cent of its budget in 2015 while the office of the National Security Adviser spent 100 per cent of its budgetary allocation.

¹⁰ De Renzio, Paolo, Jason Lakin, and Chloe Cho. *Budget Credibility Across Countries: How Deviations are Affecting Spending on Social Priorities*. International Budget Partnership. September 2019. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/budget-credibility-across-countries/>

¹¹ Atiku, Samuel and Jason Lakin. *That's Incredible! The Contours of Budget Credibility in Nigeria*. International Budget Partnership and Budget. September 2019. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/the-contours-of-budget-credibility-in-nigeria/>.

2.1.3 Pandemic priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic motivated many countries to take extraordinary policy measures to support population health and otherwise provide economic relief. At the same time, military spending did not abate in much of the world – particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Many of these countries saw military spending increase between 2019-2020 (as a percentage of GDP and as a share of government spending).¹² For instance, Nigeria saw the share of government spending allocated to the military increase from 3.6 per cent to 5 per cent. However, even some countries that are not currently classified as fragile or conflict-affected saw considerable increases in military spending. For example, Uganda registered the largest increase of all countries in percentage point terms (from 9.3 per cent of the government’s budget in 2019 to 13.1 per cent in 2020).

Furthermore, such spending may have reduced the fiscal space for countries to implement policies that respond to people’s particular needs as a consequence of the pandemic. Analysis of recent IMF data shows that military spending dwarfed pandemic-related fiscal measures – particularly those related to population health – in much of the world. While countries experiencing medium- and high-intensity conflicts devoted relatively smaller amounts of additional expenditure and foregone revenue to pandemic-related health issues, military spending outpaced such spending (as a proportion of GDP) even in countries not considered to be fragile or conflict-affected.¹³

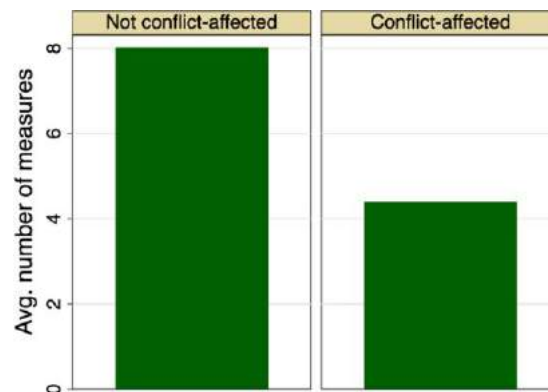
Conflict-affected countries have also been less likely to enact social protection measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been tracking these responses for 209 countries. Figure 3 shows that, on average, conflict-affected countries enacted half as many social protection measures in 2020 (4.4 policies on average) compared to countries that are not classified as conflict-affected (which enacted 8 such policies on average).¹⁴

¹² Analysis of military spending in this paragraph based on data from SIPRI; see Appendix 1 for details.

¹³ Data on pandemic-related health spending from IMF Fiscal Monitor Database; see Appendix 1 for details.

¹⁴ In this section, “conflict-affected” countries are those classified as medium- or high-intensity conflict.

FIGURE 3
Pandemic-related Social Protection



Data from ILO Social Protection Monitor on COVID-19

In addition, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and partners have been tracking social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in 131 countries in the Global South. This database has been more recently updated (through July 2021 for some countries) though country coverage is less comprehensive. Results, however, are similar to those generated by analyzing the ILO data: within the Global South, conflict-affected countries enact about half as many social protection measures as their more peaceful counterparts (4.7 vs. 8.6 on average).

Finally, a number of countries enacted policies designed to target women and girls' particular needs during the pandemic. Notably, measures targeting violence against women (VAW) and unpaid care were less likely to be enacted in conflict-affected countries and those that spent relatively more on their militaries (as a proportion of total government spending) in 2020. For instance, Peru enacted 14 distinct VAW policy measures during the pandemic.¹⁵ At the same time, Peru's military spending was just 4.8 per cent of overall government spending in 2020 – a significantly smaller proportion than the average among countries that are not classified as conflict-affected. In contrast, conflict-affected countries enacted fewer than two VAW policies on average and no conflict-affected country enacted a single policy related to unpaid care. This suggests that military spending not only reduces the fiscal space for broadly beneficial social spending but may also constrain the ability of policymakers to respond to the particular needs of women and girls – needs which have become especially apparent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁵ Data from UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker

APPENDIX

TABLE A1:

Overview of data sources consulted

Data Source	Time coverage	# countries	Sectoral coverage	Conflict-affected country coverage	Other notes
FPRI Statistics on Public Expenditures for Economic Development (SPEED)	1980-2017	164	Defence and social protection aggregates (+ education; health)	Does not include Libya, Somalia, or Syria (among high-intensity conflict); Chad or South Sudan (among medium-intensity)	Useful for generating time-series comparing defence spending to social protection (and/or education and health) for large universe of countries
SIPRI Military Expenditure Database	1949-2020	172	Military spending aggregates	All conflict-affected countries included	Data is most comprehensive from 1988-onwards
World Bank World Development Indicators	1971-2019	217 countries/terr.	Military, education, and health aggregates	All conflict-affected countries included	Database only updated through 2019 but possible to access underlying military spending data from SIPRI through 2020
World Bank BOOST Open Data Portal	Varies by country	44 countries/regions	Line-item fiscal data, classifiable into sectoral aggregates	4 conflict-affected countries: Afghanistan; Burkina Faso; Mali; Niger	Classification and time coverage are not consistent across countries; best for highlighting trade-offs within countries
IMF Fiscal Monitor Database	Jan. 2020-Mar. 2021	182	Additional spending/foregone revenue in terms of health and non-health aggregates; also information on below-the line measures and contingent liabilities	Syria not included (among high-intensity conflict)	Database includes detailed information by country on nature/extent of additional spending and forgone revenue in health sector and areas other than health; also details on below-the line measures and contingent liabilities
ILO Social Protection Monitor on COVID-19	Feb.-Dec. 2020	209 countries	Presence and number of social protection policies	All conflict-affected countries included	Detailed information on policies included in database, including URLs with more details
IPC-IG Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South	2020-2021	131 countries	Presence and number of social protection policies	All but Central African Republic and Somalia	Detailed information on policies included in database, including URLs with more details
UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker	Jan. 2020-Mar. 2021	219 countries and territories	Presence and number of policy measures addressing women's economic security, unpaid care work, and violence against women	All conflict-affected countries included	Detailed information on policies included in database; in some cases the amount budgeted or spent is included. Analysis is based on March 2021 version of dataset.

TABLE A2:

Military Spending vs. Social Protection

DV=military spending-social protection spending (as % of government spending)	
Fragile or conflict-affected	14.01*** (1.35)
GNI per capita (log)	-5.79*** (0.23)
Observations	1730
R^2	0.359

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atiku, Samuel and Jason Lakin. *That's Incredible! The Contours of Budget Credibility in Nigeria*. International Budget Partnership and Budget. September 2019.

<https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/the-contours-of-budget-credibility-in-nigeria/>

De Renzio, Paolo, Jason Lakin, and Chloe Cho. *Budget Credibility Across Countries: How Deviations are Affecting Spending on Social Priorities*. International Budget Partnership. September 2019.

<https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/budget-credibility-across-countries/>

Fisher, Alexandra N and Michelle K Ryan. 2021. "Gender inequalities during COVID-19." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24(2):237–245.

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017, USA

www.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomen
www.twitter.com/un_women