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Common Threat, Diverging Responses? Explaining European States' Military Spending After the War in Ukraine

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Defence cooperation - whether through NATO, the EU, or bilateral and multilateral arrangements - plays a crucial role in national security across all European states. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reinforced the importance of military preparedness. However, after three years of war, it is clear that European responses in terms of defence spending have varied significantly. While some countries have substantially increased their military budgets, others have shown only modest adjustments. This paper applies Coincidence Analysis (CNA) to explain these diverging trajectories in European defence spending following Russia's war in Ukraine. Integrating insights from the literature on military burden sharing and defence economics, we develop a theoretical framework that combines international-level factors, such as threat perception, with domestic-level drivers, including government ideology and fiscal constraints. Our findings indicate that the strongest increases in defence spending occurred in states facing an acute territorial threat from Russia, as well in those that face a significant - though not a territorial - threat, and had previously underinvested in defence. Countries with only moderate threat perceptions but low fiscal constraints and low defence budgets saw intermediate increases, while those facing moderate threats, high existing defence expenditures, or severe fiscal limitations made only minor adjustments. These results suggest the emergence of a three-speed Europe in defence, which can be expected to significantly impact future defence cooperation across the continent: (1) a small group of strong spenders, (2) a large middle group aligning their investments with economic capacity, and (3) a cluster of "free-riders" falling behind. Our study contributes to the broader debate on defence cooperation by illustrating how external threats interact with domestic political and economic factors in shaping national defence policies.

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No

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