

WHO DRIVES DEFENSE POLICY: ELITES OR PUBLIC INTEREST?

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ABSTRACT

With a massive budget deficit and an ever-increasing national debt, while Congress and the President almost shut down the federal government over funding for Planned Parenthood in 2011, defense spending seems to be nearly immune to cuts. Scholars think of defense spending in two different ways. The conventional wisdom states that, as voters have little interest in foreign affairs, elites decide foreign and defense policy. On the other hand, public policy researchers emphasize the strong influence of public preference over Congressional budget making. Is defense spending used as a *de facto* jobs program, or does it truly reflect the needs of the American military? The thesis discusses these questions using a twenty-one year time-series dataset that uses the proposed Pentagon budgets and final Congressional appropriations bills to examine what affects the change in monies given by Congress versus the monies requested by the Pentagon.