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Nuclear Weapons in the Tweede Kamer: Analysis of Nuclear Motions in the Dutch House of Representatives in Times of Contestation

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US nuclear weapons are presently hosted in five European countries. In recent years, parliaments in four out of the five countries held debates about these weapons. For most of them, this was the first (or the only) debate in many years. By contrast, in the Netherlands, the *Tweede Kamer*, the House of Representatives, held forty-four votes related to nuclear weapons in the last two parliamentary periods alone. Although parliament's powers are restricted, these votes can oblige government to pursue a certain policy and ultimately put soft constraints on government's freedom of action. Yet, the extent of the contestation of nuclear weapons in European parliaments is almost unknown. Using the Dutch case and spatial modeling methods, we offer three lessons: first, that security policy does not stand above the parliamentary politics; second, that cross-bench voting happens but the activity originates in partisan silos; and third, that there is a strong partisan element to the debates about nuclear weapons in Europe.

Actualmente, cinco países de Europa poseen armas nucleares estadounidenses. En los últimos años, los parlamentos de cuatro de los cinco países fueron parte de debates respecto de estas armas. Para la mayoría, fue el primer (y único) debate en muchos años. En cambio, en los Países Bajos, la *Tweede Kamer* (Segunda Cámara) llevó a cabo 44 votaciones relacionadas con las armas nucleares solo en los dos últimos periodos parlamentarios. Si bien los poderes del parlamento están restringidos, estas votaciones pueden obligar al gobierno a seguir una determinada política y, en última instancia, limitan ligeramente la libertad de acción del gobierno. Sin embargo, prácticamente se desconoce el alcance del conflicto de armas nucleares en los parlamentos europeos. A partir del caso holandés y los métodos de modelización espacial, presentamos tres lecciones: en primer lugar, que la política de seguridad no está por encima de la política parlamentaria; en segundo lugar, que las votaciones cruzadas tienen lugar, pero la actividad se origina en silos partidistas, y en tercer lugar, que hay un fuerte elemento partidista en los debates sobre las armas nucleares en Europa.

Des armes nucléaires américaines se trouvent actuellement dans cinq pays européens. Ces dernières années, les parlements de quatre de ces cinq pays ont tenu des débats concernant ces armes. Pour la plupart d'entre eux, il s'agissait du premier (ou du seul) débat à ce sujet depuis de nombreuses années. En revanche, aux Pays-Bas, la *Tweede Kamer*, l'équivalent de la Chambre des représentants, a organisé 44 votes relatifs aux armes nucléaires rien qu'au cours des deux dernières périodes parlementaires. Bien que les pouvoirs du parlement soient restreints, ces votes peuvent obliger le gouvernement à poursuivre une certaine politique et, en fin de compte, imposer des contraintes souples à la liberté d'action du gouvernement. Pourtant, l'ampleur de la contestation des armes nucléaires dans les parlements européens est presque inconnue. Nous nous sommes appuyés sur le cas néerlandais et sur des méthodes de modélisation spatiale et nous en avons tiré trois enseignements : d'abord, que la politique de sécurité ne supplante pas la politique parlementaire, ensuite, que des votes d'autres allégeances ont lieu mais l'activité vient de cloisonnements partisans, et enfin, qu'il y a une forte composante partisane dans les débats sur les armes nucléaires qui sont menés en Europe.

Introduction

In recent years, parliaments in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands all discussed the merits of nuclear deterrence and the role of forward-deployed nuclear weapons in the security of their country and of the North Atlantic alliance. In all of these countries, the parliaments discussed (and in all but Germany voted) on motions on withdrawal of these weapons and/or signing the nuclear ban treaty. The newly found interest in the nuclear deterrence among European parliamentarians is linked to the growing tensions with Russia following the occupation of Ukraine, the breakdown in US–Russian arms control, and the rise of the nuclear ban treaty. Yet, nowhere was this activism higher than in the Netherlands. Since 2012, the Dutch House of

Representatives (*de Tweede Kamer*) voted forty-four times on nuclear-weapons-related motions, more than parliaments in the other three countries combined.

This activity is surprising because the Dutch House of Representatives'—just like those of many other parliaments—formal powers in foreign policy are heavily restricted and the role of the parliament in foreign policy is mainly consultative (Hamilton 2010). Such engagement is also not mandated by law. Individual members' (MPs) activity in the *Tweede Kamer* is generally not reflected in the party's likelihood to renominate the person for the electoral list (Louwerse and Otjes 2016). Even if a motion is passed, it is not legally binding, although it can create political sensitivity. Hence, this activity is puzzling because

parliamentarians decide to spend their scarce time on a topic where the chamber's rights and their own individual gains are limited. By looking at how the *Tweede Kamer* addresses the question of nuclear weapons, we also contribute to the growing literature on the role of parliaments in foreign policy (Malamud and Stavridis 2013; Kaarbo and Kenealy 2017; Mello and Peters 2018).

The case itself goes to the heart of a major security policy debate. The American nonstrategic (tactical) nuclear weapons are currently forward-deployed in five countries in Europe: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey (known as “host countries”; Kristensen and Korda 2020). The forward-deployed nuclear weapons are a backbone of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s nuclear deterrent since the Cold War (Schulte 2012). Although there is a debate among the military experts about their military utility (Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014; von Hlatky and Wenger 2015; Fuhrmann 2018), there is little debate that they constitute a powerful political symbol of the alliance unity (Schelling and Halperin 1961; Rudolf 2020).

The fact that the domestic politics of nuclear weapons in the host countries is contentious is not new. Yet, while the scholarship has recognized that there is now more attention to the growing contestation in the host countries (Fuhrhop, Kühn, and Meier 2020; Meier 2020; Fuhrhop 2021; Onderco 2021), the attention specifically on parliaments as the locus of contestation has been missing (however, see a recent survey of German parliamentarians and their views on nuclear sharing in Onderco and Smetana 2021). This is rather surprising given that parliaments present a suitable locus to study nuclear weapons as a special case of security sector governance (Born, Gill, and Hänggi 2010). Our article looks at the microfoundations of the nuclear politics in Europe today.

In this article, we fill this gap by looking more closely at the contestation of nuclear weapons in the Dutch House of Representatives. We look at all nuclear-weapons-related motions filed in the last two electoral periods (2012–2017 and 2017–2021). This is a period of time when nuclear weapons became much more salient in the Netherlands concretely but in Europe more broadly. For example, in the period 2010–2012 (Mark Rutte's first term as the Prime Minister), the Dutch House of Representatives voted on only five motions on an annual basis—less than half compared to subsequent years. With these data, we look at the treatment of nuclear weapons in the Dutch parliament in two steps: explaining the sponsorship of the motions and explaining the voting.

Next to filling a scholarly gap, our article also carries an obvious policy relevance. The opposition to nuclear sharing in the national parliament can be seen as a practice of norm contestation, which—if performed over time—has a norm-generating potential (Wiener 2014). What European parliaments discuss and vote on nuclear weapons, therefore, inherently matters. While the questions of nuclear weapons have been historically decided by technocracies with limited involvement of the general public (Dahl 1985), the activities in parliaments (together with other civil society activities) can have effects in longer term. They can also create soft constraints for the governments—the Netherlands was, for example, the only NATO member that participated in the negotiations of the Treaty on Prohibition of the Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), due to the pressure from the parliament. The relevance of such pressures is also clear to NATO itself: speaking of contestation of the existing NATO nuclear deterrent, the NATO 2030 Reflection Group recommended “effectively counter[ing] hostile efforts to undermine this vital policy” (de Maizièrre et al. 2020, p. 38). Parliamentary

activity, often opposing the current NATO nuclear policy, may be seen as one potential reflection of such contestation.

The remainder of our article continues as follows. In the second section, we review the existing scholarship on the nuclear weapons politics in the Netherlands. In the third section, we offer theoretical insights into the role of parliaments in foreign policy, and particularly the influence of party politics on contestation of security policy. The fourth section then introduces the data and the methods. In the fifth section, we analyze the motion sponsorship, and in the sixth section we look at the voting on these motions. In the final section, we offer three lessons: first, that security policy does not stand above the parliamentary politics; second, that cross-bench voting happens but the activity originates in partisan silos; and third, that there is a strong partisan element to the debates about nuclear weapons in Europe.

Nuclear Weapons in the Netherlands

The US nuclear weapons were first deployed in the Netherlands in 1960 (Wiebes and Burr 2021). At that time, the Dutch government sought to resolve three problems with the deployment. The economic problem was related to providing defense against the Soviet threat at the time when the reconstruction of the country after the World War II required a substantive investment. The security problem was related to the fact that the Dutch elites found it unacceptable that the NATO defense of Europe would take place along the Rhine–IJssel line and hence take place on the Dutch territory. Deployment of US nuclear weapons in the Netherlands pushed the battlefield further east, to Germany. The status problem was related to the Dutch desire to belong among the first-class allies of the United States in Europe. Stationing of the nuclear weapons was seen as evidence thereof (this history draws on van der Harst 1997).¹

Yet, the government was painfully aware of the public opposition to the nuclear weapons (Everts 1985). For this reason, the presence of the US nuclear weapons on the Dutch territory was never officially acknowledged. The Dutch government is one of the most secretive from all host countries in Europe about its participation in the nuclear sharing and has recently fought a lawsuit against a journalist who sought publication of documents from the 1950s and 1960s, which were made available to him by the National Archive (Modderkolk 2021; Wiebes and Burr 2021).

The public opposition against nuclear weapons was channeled through the civil society, particularly Christian organizations. The Dutch Protestant peace movement *Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad* (Interchurch Peace Council, IKV) was one of the first ones to link the Christian theology with the opposition to the nuclear weapons in general and their stationing in the Netherlands in particular (Brinkel 1982; van Dijk and Schaaper 2015). The Dutch Christian Democrats has been strongly influenced by IKV and its Catholic counterparts *Pax Christi* (Everts 1984). The peace movement managed an impressive mobilization of the public, leading to the historically biggest protest in the Netherlands, at Malieveld field in The Hague in 1983 at the height of the Euromissiles crisis (Nutti et al. 2015). Yet, the movement became soon controversial after some of its members became more broadly supportive of the general disarmament and became seen as too pacifist (ter Veer 1988).

¹At present, about ten to twenty thermonuclear gravity B-61 bombs are believed to be stored at the Volkel air base (see Kristensen and Korda 2019, 2020). In case of need, these weapons would be delivered by the Dutch fighter jets by the Dutch pilots, even though the command of these weapons is under the operational control of the US President. See Alberque (2017).

After the activist 1980s, the scholarly and policy interest in nuclear weapons in the Netherlands decreased. The lull, however, ended with the rise of the so-called humanitarian initiative to ban nuclear weapons (Gibbons 2018). The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the umbrella organization for civil society abolitionists, explicitly aimed at shifting public opinion on nuclear weapons, including in many countries under US nuclear umbrella (Mekata 2018; Fihn and Högsta 2020). PAX, a merger between IKV and *Pax Christi* and member of ICAN, tried to revive the old antinuclear feelings. This led to citizens' initiative in favor of the withdrawal of nuclear weapons with over forty-five thousand signatures (PAX No Nukes 2016). As a result of the public pressure, the parliament demanded the government to join the TPNW negotiations. The Netherlands participated in the negotiations, and ended up being the only participant in the negotiations voting against the treaty (Kingdom of the Netherlands 2017; Shirobokova 2018).

The Dutch government's position on nuclear weapons is a perfect manifestation of the tension between morality and pragmatism in the Dutch foreign policy (Anderweg, Irwin, and Louwerse 2020). When it comes to nuclear weapons, the moral principle in the Dutch foreign policy leads to championing of global nuclear disarmament, a position that the Netherlands held for decades (Knapen et al. 2011). However, the pragmatic element underlines the relevance of the nuclear umbrella for the Dutch security (van der Meer 2019). The most recent Integrated Security Strategy perpetuates this dilemma (Government of the Netherlands 2018). The moderate attitude resulting from this dilemma is also reflected in the public opinion surveys. While a plurality (or even a majority) of the Dutch population is skeptical about the nuclear weapons and supports the goals of global nuclear disarmament, the share of population holding these views is in diverse surveys often lower than in other European host countries or even lowest among them (ICAN 2018, 2019, 2021). The share of the Dutch population that would want the US nuclear weapons withdrawn without any preconditions from their national territory is, for example, lower than in Germany and the Dutch society is more evenly split on this question (Smetana, Onderco, and Etienne 2021).

Parliaments, Parties, and Foreign Policy

The role of parliaments has been historically restricted in order to keep governments' scope of action to defend national interests (Peters and Wagner 2011; Peters, Wagner, and Deitelhoff 2010; Mello and Peters 2018). One important exception to this rule is the US Congress that has used different tools to influence the US foreign policy (Lindsay 1994; Hersman 2000; Auerswald and Campbell 2012). However, the legislatures in other countries have been more restrained. In Europe, parliaments often play a secondary role in determining foreign policy: by limiting the war powers of the governments (Dieterich, Hummel, and Marschall 2010, 2015), by becoming involved in the European Union (EU) affairs in case of European parliaments (Auel and Christiansen 2015; Auel, Eisele, and Kinski 2018), and occasionally by joining governments in multilateral negotiations (Götz 2011).² As governments faced pressure over time to consider multiple societal actors in foreign policy-making (Krotz and Maher 2011) and foreign policy has become increasingly contested (for a recent special issue and an ex-

tensive review of literature, see Biedenkopf, Costa, and Góra 2021), the role of parliaments increased.

This growing role of parliaments in foreign policy goes hand in hand with the growing politicization of foreign policy. Traditionally, foreign policy was seen as being animated by larger, structural forces and hence above the party politicking (Keman 1986; Pennings 2017). However, recent research has amply demonstrated that partisanship and party politics play an increasingly important role for our understanding of security policy (Hofmann 2013; Wagner 2020; Hofmann and Martill 2021).

Before continuing further, we need to address one further point: contrarily to how legislative politics in general, and nuclear politics in particular, is being discussed in the United States, there is no distributional angle aspect to the nuclear weapons discussions in the Netherlands. While in the United States, military bases and production sites are relevant because Congress and Senate members are elected locally (Eaves 2021; Hartung 2021); the parliamentarians in the Netherlands are elected on the basis of party lists, and hence they have no motivation to cater to the interests of "their" districts.

As mentioned in the introduction, we look at the motion sponsorship and voting on the motions separately. This allows us to analyze activity at different stages of the policy process.

Motion Sponsorship

We were first interested in sponsorship of these motions, as sponsorship represents the origin of the parliamentary activity. To explain this behavior, we draw on theories that explain parliamentary questioning (Bailer 2011; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Otjes and Louwerse 2018). The work on parliamentary questioning has thus far not specifically addressed issues of foreign policy, much less nuclear policy, at the same time, submitting parliamentary motions is an activity that puts policy into a spotlight and raises attention. For this reason, looking at motion sponsorship is an important step to understand the origins of parliamentary activity on nuclear weapons. In this way, motions resemble parliamentary questions, because they signal individual MPs' activity but have very limited practical consequences.

The existing literature on parliamentary questioning argues that the key motivation for the activity lies in the government agenda, party platform, and position within the institutional setting.³ Otjes and Louwerse (2018) argue that parliamentary questions (and hence also motions in our case) are strategic party tools. Parties use them, because they want to send a certain message. Parliamentary politics hence becomes an extension of the party politics (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). As security policy becomes increasingly politicized in the parliaments, the importance of party politics—and party positioning—increases (Mello and Saideman 2019). We, therefore, look particularly at two motivations that may motivate parties and MPs to be active on a particular dossier: ideological distance and institutional position in the parliamentary system.

Ideological distance draws on the idea that parties' position on particular foreign policy questions is subject to genuine policy differences (Rathbun 2004). In parliamentary motions, the parties seek to direct attention to a particular

²See also an overview of the literature on the role of European parliaments in foreign policy in Raunio and Wagner (2017).

³Existing scholarship on legislatures and foreign policy also discusses other potential arguments, such as grandstanding (Lindsay 1994). However, as we mention in the introduction, the Dutch electoral system and the parliamentary system exclude those motivations so we do not consider them.

policy of their ideological opponent. “[P]arliamentary politics can be seen as the continuation of political campaigning by other means” (Otjes and Louwerse 2018, 500). Parties may do this because they want to indicate voters that they offer a genuine alternative policy on a particular issue. Parliamentarians may also be interested in signaling citizens or civil society that they care about particular issue (Bailer 2011). The further away the party is ideologically, the more substantive difference the party has with the government policy and with the minister occupying a particular portfolio (Ridout and Holland 2010). Submitting motions is, therefore, a way for these parties not only to indicate their genuine difference but also to signal to the voters alternative policy positions.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: *Parties whose ideological position on nuclear weapons is farther removed from the party holding the portfolio in government are more likely to submit motions.*

The second hypothesis we put forward is related to the institutional position within the parliamentary system.

Through submitting motions, the parties force the governments to react to particular topics (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). Opposition uses “whatever ammunition at hand to attack government” (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011, 1038). Governments, by contrast, are usually the ones executing the policy and hence more likely to be attacked (Walter 2014). In case of an unpopular policy—such as nuclear weapons in the Netherlands—this provides an excellent “ammunition” for the motions. Given that these motions are relatively cost-free for the MPs submitting them, they can submit as many as possible. This is, however, difficult for coalition MPs whose parties are bound by the coalition agreement.

Furthermore, and particularly relevant to the case at hand, coalition MPs might feel more responsible for alliance commitments undertaken by the Netherlands and are hence less likely to criticize long-standing policies rooted in the alliance agreements (see Kreps 2010 for an analogous argument). Hence, they are less willing to submit motions because there is less to win (and they may end up criticizing their own government).

H2: *Opposition parties are more likely to submit motions.*

Voting

After studying motion sponsorship, we looked at the voting on parliamentary motions. Voting represents a second step of policy activity. When it comes to voting, we test two explanations: one focusing on the institutional position within the parliament (analogous to H₂ above) and one focusing on party politics of foreign policy.

When looking at the institutional position, we take the same starting point as in developing H₂. Opposition and coalition parties would be likely to vote in opposite directions on motions on nuclear weapons, since such motions are critical of the government’s existing policy. The argument that the government and opposition are split in legislative settings is not unique to this topic. The government–opposition split was found to navigate the policy splits in a number of national settings (Milner and Tingley 2011; Hix and Noury 2016), including in the Dutch one (Louwerse et al. 2016). Previous research also shows that such splits are present even when it comes to foreign policy issues (Onderco and Joosen 2021), including on military deployments (Wagner et al. 2018). We hence expect that the nu-

clear weapons are mainly contested along the government–opposition axis.

H3: *The voting on nuclear weapons motions is split primarily along the government–opposition axis.*

Our second expectation is linked to the party politics of foreign policy. Recent scholarship has found that the ideological split related to foreign policy runs, at least in Western European countries, along the left–right axis (Hofmann 2013; Mello 2014; Haesebrouck 2016; Wagner 2020; Hofmann and Martill 2021). This finding highlights that even security policy issues are being contested by political parties. Parties on the opposing sides of the ideological spectrum may have genuinely different perspectives when it comes to seeing how conflicts should be resolved. Whereas the political left often prefers accommodation, the political right usually sees conflicts best resolved through confrontation and force. These two are associated with different models of conflict and conflict behavior (Jervis 1976; Rathbun 2004). They may, however, also have preferences rooted in alternative use of government resources, traditionally referred to as the “guns vs butter” dilemma (Wenzelburger and Böller 2020).

The questions of nuclear weapons were subject to partisan politics during the Cold War as well. In Germany, the left-wing parties held fundamentally different positions on these issues than right-wing parties, often stemming from the way these parties saw the role of the United States in the European security (Kelleher 1975; Müller and Risse-Kappen 1987; Risse-Kappen 1997). More recent research similarly indicates that the left-wing parties are more likely to be critical of nuclear weapons compared to right-wing parties in Germany and the Netherlands (Fuhrhop 2021; Onderco 2021). Hence, we expect that it is the left–right split that animates nuclear weapons contestation in the Dutch parliament.

H4: *The voting on nuclear-weapon-related motions is split mainly along the left–right axis.*

Methods and Data

Our analysis focuses on the *Tweede Kamer*, the lower house of the Dutch Parliament. The Netherlands has an extreme version of the proportional political system, with a threshold that is only limited by the number of seats (in practice, approximately 0.7%). This means that the *Tweede Kamer* includes a large number of political parties (over a dozen) covering the whole political spectrum, from far-left to far-right as well as “exotic” special interest parties (such as the animal rights party).

For our analysis, we looked at all nuclear-weapons-related votes that took place in the Dutch House of Representatives between September 20, 2012, and March 30, 2021. All members of the Dutch parliament can submit motions “to express an opinion on the policy pursued, to ask the government to do or not to do something, or to express a more general opinion on certain issues or current developments” (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal* 2021). The government is, however, not obliged to follow a motion, even if it is approved (*Rijksoverheid* n.d.).

The period under study includes the time during which the Netherlands was governed by Mark Rutte’s second (2012–2017) and third (2017–2021) governments. Throughout the period, the ruling coalitions were dominated by the liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), joining with Labour (PvdA) in 2012–2017 and with Christian Union (CU), Christian-Democratic Appeal

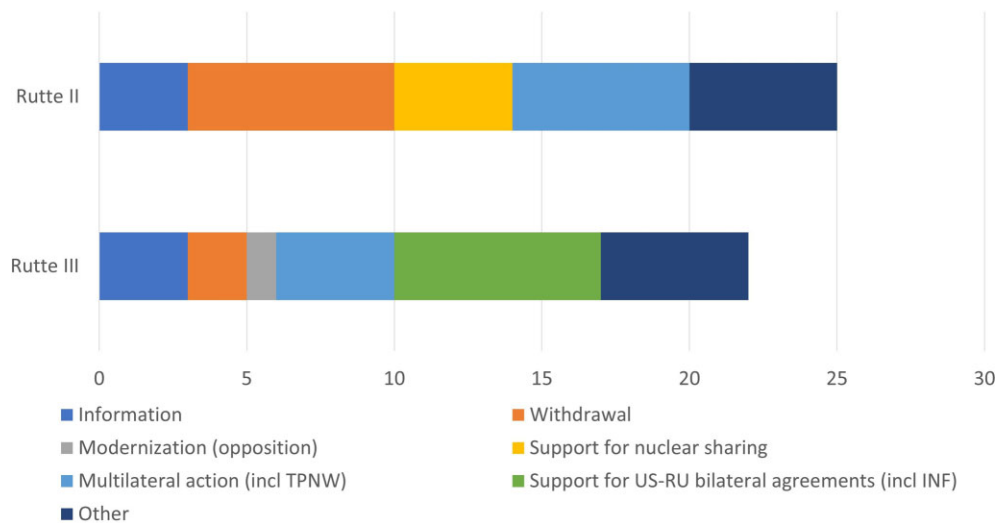


Figure 1. Subjects of nuclear-weapon-related motions.

(CDA), and Democrats 66 (D66) in 2017–2021. We choose this period, because it captures the most recent period of increased polarization in the global nuclear regime, following the increased attention to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the rollout of the nuclear modernization programs in the nuclear weapons states (Williams 2018).

In figure 1, we provide a simple overview of the topics that these motions include. For every motion, we coded operative phrases to see what the motion aims at. We coded the operative phrases at the level of a motion but assigned more than one code per motion if there were multiple goals. As can be seen in figure 1, during the Rutte II, motions related to the withdrawal of nuclear weapons were the most frequent, followed by motions in favor of multilateral action including joining the TPNW. By contrast, the votes requesting more information were less numerous. During Rutte III, the motions are mainly in support of the existing US–Russian bilateral agreements. This is particularly driven by the crisis induced by the US decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 2018, which led to a number of calls, in the House of Representatives, to take steps in favor of securing the treaty.⁴

To analyze sponsorship, we looked at the sponsors of these motions. Each motion can be sponsored by any number of MPs. We coded them and the parties they belonged to. We then calculated how many motions a party sponsored through individual MPs as a share of the period total. To estimate ideological distance from the minister with the nuclear weapons portfolio, we look at the absolute distance between the party position of the minister with the defense portfolio (VVD for 2012–2017 and CDA for 2017–2021) and each other party on defense policy. To calculate the defense policy position, we calculate the difference between items “military positive” (per104) and “military negative” (per105) using Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data (Volkens et al. 2020). We also code for each party whether it is a coalition or an opposition party.

To analyze voting, we rely on NOMINATE, a spatial voting method that is a standard method to study voting behavior (Rosenthal and Voeten 2004; Poole and Rosenthal 2017).

This spatial modeling method distinguishes MPs on one or more dimensions. As all motions were voted on along party lines, we modeled the position of parties rather than MPs. To set the number of dimensions for our analysis, we relied on scree plots to see how much variance can be accounted for by looking at additional dimensions (Poole 2005). As shown in the online supplement appendix, eigenvalues decrease considerable after one dimension, indicating that one dimension captures much of the voting variance. Furthermore, to estimate a valid position, NOMINATE requires twenty non-lopsided votes⁵ (Poole 2005). This reduces the number of parties from 17⁶ to 11 for the Rutte II parliamentary period and from 20 to 13 for the Rutte III period. The analysis for Rutte II is based on twenty-four votes and for Rutte III this is twenty votes. Beyond votes in favor and against for all parties, NOMINATE requires a conservative end of the scale to estimate dimensions. We use the Christian Reformed Party (SGP) as it scores furthest right in the right–left indicator (RILE) of the CMP in both periods (Volkens et al. 2020). Using this input does not bias our results in favor of either H_3 or H_4 as the SGP is also an opposition party in both periods and takes an extreme position with respect to other political dimensions (such as GAL-TAN (Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist)) as well. To measure left–right positioning of parties, we use the CMP’s RILE indicator as well.

Sponsors of Nuclear Motions

Let us start by looking at the sponsorship of the nuclear motions. In figure 2, we present the data to evaluate H_1 . What we find there is a quite strong link between the ideological distance and the likelihood to submit party motions. This link appears to be very strong during Rutte II. The pattern during Rutte III changes a bit. It is distorted by two parties—the liberal VVD and the animal rights party PvdD, who are both further away from the CDA holding the defense portfolio, but sponsor very little. For the animal rights party, a relatively small party with five seats in the *Tweede Kamer*, defense is not a key theme. VVD, by contrast, is by far the most

⁴That the House of Representatives voted on motions requesting government to take steps where it had no legal powers is particularly interesting.

⁵Lopsided votes are those in which the minority of votes is less than 2.5 percent of the total votes.

⁶This includes MPs that split off from their parties during the period.

Table 1. Sponsors of nuclear motions

Name	Motions sponsored	Name	Motions sponsored
van Bommel (SP)	Eleven	Karabulut (SP)	Twelve
Sjoerdsma (D66)	Eight	van Ojik (GL)	Nine
Servaes (PvdA)	Four	Ploumen (PvdA)	Seven
Voordewind (CU)	Four	Voordewind (CU)	Six
van Tongeren (GL)	Four	van Helvert (CDA)	Five
van Ojik (GL)	Three	Sjoerdsma (D66)	Five
Knops (CDA)	Two	Kuzu (DENK)	Two
van Klaveren (GrBrK)	Two	Leijten (SP)	Two

Note: Opposition members in bold type.

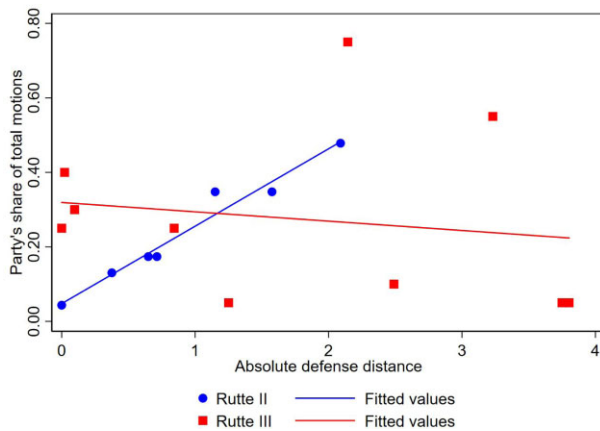


Figure 2. Motion sponsorship and ideological distance.

hawkish of the parties. In the situation when the true extent of the Dutch participation in the nuclear sharing is still secret it is, however, difficult for this party to advocate for even stronger Dutch involvement. However, coming back to H_1 , we see that in general, there is a link between ideological distance and filing of parliamentary motions.

These findings indicate that as the parties become more distant from the party holding the defense policy portfolio, they also become more active in signaling that distance. This is in line with the expectations from the existing theories (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Otjes and Louwerse 2018) and indicates that parliamentary motions are indeed similar to the questions as a strategic party tool in communicating party positions externally.

To move on to H_2 , we look at which MPs are most active in putting forward the proposals. While in theory each motion can be sponsored by any numbers of MPs, we notice that the activity is restricted to a small sample of parliamentarians, usually one per party. Table 1 presents all sponsors of nuclear-weapon-related motions who sponsored at least two motions. All of these MPs focused on foreign policy and/or defense portfolios in their parties. The difference between the coalition and the opposition during the two periods is telling. The most active MPs come from the opposition Socialist Party (SP)—Harry van Bommel and Sadet Karabulut, during Rutte II and Rutte III, respectively. Sjoerd Sjoerdsma, an MP from the liberal D66, and Joël Voordewind, an MP from Christian-Democratic CU, were active in both periods. Their parties were in the opposition during Rutte II but in coalition during Rutte III. Labour (PvdA) MPs were active during both periods as well. However, during Rutte II, the only coalition MP among the most active ones was Michiel Servaes from PvdA. During Rutte III, the list of most active

MPs includes multiple coalition MPs, including Voordewind (CU), Sjoerdsma (D66), and Martijn van Helvert from the Christian democrats (CDA).

During Rutte II, some co-sponsorship between coalition and opposition happened—four out of twenty-three motions were co-sponsored between coalition and opposition. However, the coalition and opposition MPs never co-sponsor motions together during Rutte III. Having said this, there is significant co-sponsorship among the opposition parties in both legislatures and during Rutte III also among the coalition MPs. These findings are in line with patterns of contestation during the Cold War, when nuclear policy was contested both from the left and by the Christian parties. These appear to be in the driving seat of the contestation today, but it is clear that their activities are separate.

These data indicate that the opposition is often in the driving seat of the contestation of nuclear weapons, even though this relationship weakens during Rutte III, which may be linked to the bigger size of the coalition in this period. However, there is a clear government–opposition dynamic, and the opposition is in the driving seats of putting the motions on the floor. These findings support the earlier scholarship, which found that the coalition is more likely to be the target of parliamentary activity (Walter 2014) and that the opposition is more likely to be its originator (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Otjes and Louwerse 2018). These findings further confirm that the opposition is more likely to politicize security policy issues (Mello and Peters 2018), likely because this is a strategy to indicate its different position on particular issues. This is further supported by the fact that the ideological distance on defense policy is related to the likelihood to submit motions.

Voting on Nuclear Motions

To scrutinize H_3 and H_4 whether the government–opposition split and the left–right split explain voting on nuclear weapon motions, we use scatterplots.⁷ In these scatterplots, we present the ideal points derived from the voting record. Figures 3 and 4 indicate the distribution of the NOMINATE scores (y-axis) across a left–right axis (x-axis) during Rutte II and III, respectively.

What we notice are the differences between the two periods. During Rutte II, there is a curious clustering of parties. In the top-right corner, we see that the right-wing parties do tend to cluster together. What we, however, also observe is that in the center-left camp, there was quite a bit of variation, with Labour being more similar to the center-right parties, and smaller center-left parties (on the

⁷ Due to the low number of observations, statistical methods are not feasible.

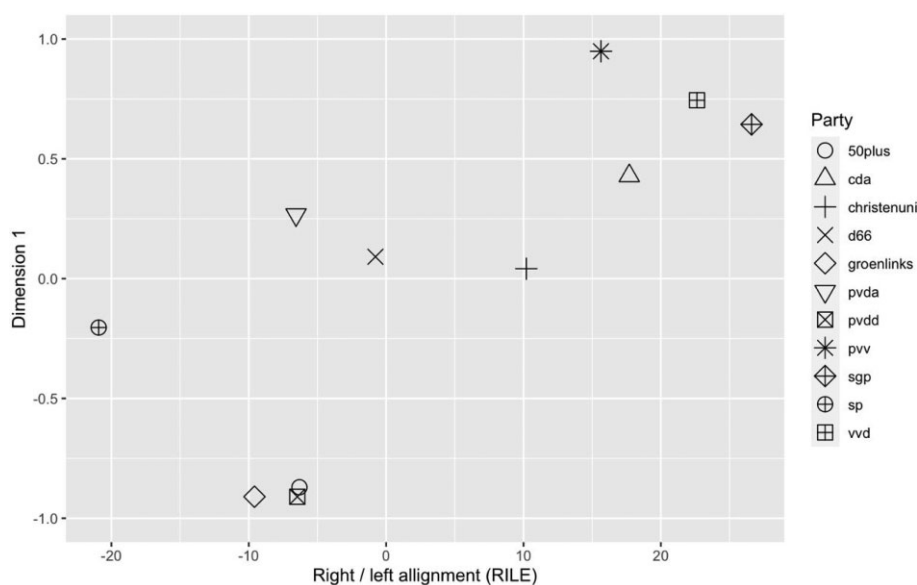


Figure 3. Contestation of nuclear motions along the left–right axis during Rutte II.

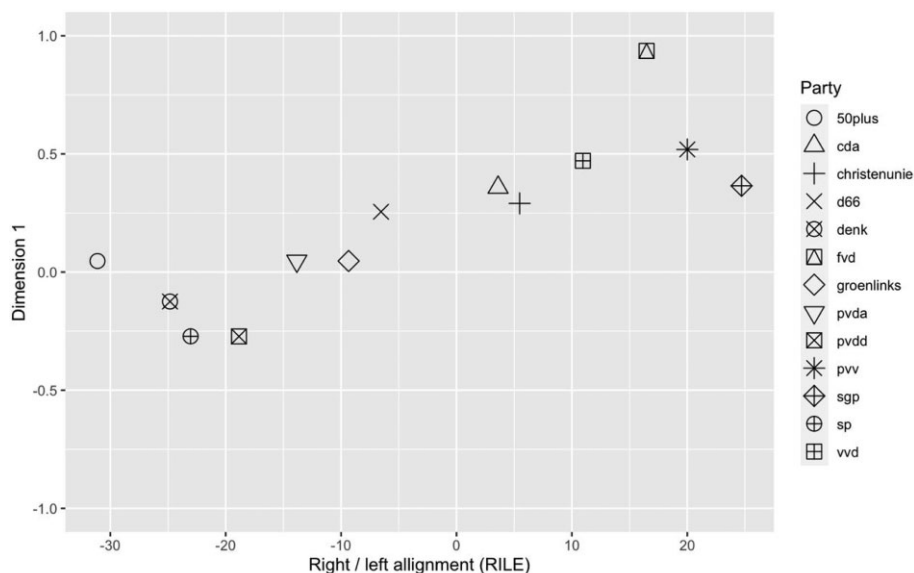


Figure 4. Contestation of nuclear motions along the left–right axis during Rutte III.

bottom left) tend to cluster together. The socialists, on the far left in the figure, are somewhere in between the Labour and the small left-wing parties on the nuclear matters (denoted by positioning on the y-axis). During this period, we see no government–opposition clustering when it comes to voting.

The debate on April 28, 2016, on the Citizens’ Initiative Sign Against Nuclear Weapons (*Burgerinitiatief Tekan Tegen Kernwapens*) is a good illustration of the arguments used by the different parties in their argumentation. The critics of nuclear weapons (mainly from the center and left) use a broad set of arguments. Harry van Bommel (SP) argued that the modernization of nuclear weapons is expensive and makes nuclear weapons more likely to be used. Lisbeth van Tongeren (GL) argued that nuclear weapons have only a limited strategic value. Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66)

called for “using the Dutch society as a slinger to achieve national ban on nuclear weapons, and through this national ban [to achieve] further disarmament.” Multiple MPs from diverse parties called for openness of the agreements about the placement of nuclear weapons in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the supporters of the existing arrangements (mainly from the parties on the right) highlighted that the withdrawal of the nuclear weapons would not change anything about the risk posed by nuclear weapons globally (Raymond de Rooy, PVV) and highlighted that unilateral steps would not be beneficial for the Dutch national security (Han ten Broeke, VVD). Overall, we see that a cluster of right-wing parties defending current arrangements leaned more toward realist and rationalist views on nuclear disarmament whereas the challengers from the more varied left-wing parties believe in symbolic value of Dutch unilateral

action (all citations from [Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2016](#)).

During Rutte III, we see almost a textbook alignment along the left–right axis. In the center, we see a cluster of the coalition parties (D66, CDA, CU, VVD), with far-right being to the right of them (and higher up on the *y*-axis). The fact that all the parties are within a fairly limited policy space (within 0.5 points from the mid-point on the *y*-axis) demonstrates less polarization during this period. Overall, we observe that the left–right axis matters strongly. However, the government–opposition divide is not clear during either of the periods. This is quite curious since it differs from the findings from the sponsorship analysis, which show that there is some government–opposition difference.

The debate on July 2, 2020, is an emblematic example of our finding for Rutte III. During this debate, Sadet Karabulut (SP) as a leading proponent of signing the TPNW argued that signing the TPNW would contribute to a serious European initiative toward disarmament. Bram van Oijk (GL) focused again on more transparency on the current nuclear weapons' arrangement in the Netherlands. However, Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66), whose party was by now in the coalition, instead argued for more strategic dialogue toward verifiable and irreversible withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the whole of Europe and pleaded for a confidential briefing by the US government on the status of modernization of nuclear weapons. This position was slightly different from that which Sjoerdsma pleaded in the previous period when his party was in the opposition. The arguments of the proponents are again more linked toward normative impetus stemming from the TPNW, whereas the coalition MP Sjoerdsma was more moderate and focused on other instruments, such as arms control (all citations from [Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2020](#)).

When looking at voting in more details overall, our findings support only partially the emerging received wisdom that the left–right axis animates the partisan splits on foreign and security policy. During Rutte II, when the Labour party was a part of the coalition, the link between partisanship and voting was more complex. However, the link became more straightforward during Rutte III as the government was composed from center-right parties. This indicates an added layer of complexity when it comes to scrutinizing the link between partisanship and security policy.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we set out to analyze the parliamentary activity on motions related to nuclear weapons in the Dutch House of Representatives. We did so by analyzing the front end of the activity (proposal sponsorship) and its tail end (voting). This analysis offers a new contribution to the work on parliaments in security policy, by looking at parliamentary activity in situations when engagement is not required by law (as is the case, e.g., for troop deployments) and when parliamentarians are more free to engage. Our findings indicate that in such a situation, even on security policy, parliamentarians slip into a more conventional attack mode.

Looking at the sponsorship, we observed that during both periods, the parties further away from the party holding defense portfolio were more likely to submit motions, particularly during Rutte II, and to lesser degree during Rutte III. Furthermore, we see that the sponsorship of the nuclear-related motions does not follow the same paths during the two periods. During Rutte II, almost all of the sponsors of nuclear-related motions were from the oppo-

sition. This changed during Rutte III, when the coalition included more parties. Yet still, the coalition and opposition parties did not cooperate in submission of the motions. This demonstrates that at least when it comes to the origins of these motions, there is quite some differentiation between the coalition and opposition. This split between coalition and opposition is rather curious because it demonstrates that there are, as if, two conversations ongoing in Dutch House of Representatives. These conversations are not dissimilar to the former distinction of the antinuclear camp in the Netherlands during the Cold War, into the left-wing and Christian opposition. In sum, we find some government–opposition structuring in the sponsorship of the motions, confirming the earlier findings that found this alignment relevant for explaining legislative activity ([Walter 2014](#); [Hix and Noury 2016](#); [Louwerse et al. 2016](#)).

When it comes to voting, the left–right alignment was more pronounced—and especially so during Rutte III. Compared to the findings in the second cluster where we find that the government–opposition split animated the sponsorship, we see that here the voting is more aligned along the left–right axis.

Despite the limited powers of the parliaments in foreign policy, the activity in the Dutch House of Representatives demonstrates that parliamentarians are able to influence policy-making. In the Netherlands, the parliamentary motions forced the government to take part in the negotiations of the nuclear ban treaty (as the only NATO country), for example. Policy officers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in off-record discussions, often raise parliamentary activism as something that causes them to be very cautious about their actions. Even though the debate on the nuclear weapons in the Dutch House of Representatives is exceptional in terms of the sheer number of motions submitted, it would be reasonable to expect that similar dynamic applies to debates on nuclear weapons in other European countries in the same period of time. The period in the last decade is unusual because it does reflect a period of increased importance of nuclear weapons in Europe. Because nuclear weapons appear to be more sharply contested, it is also likely that they are more contested than other areas of security policy. However, only further research can address these questions conclusively.

Our findings offer three takeaway messages. First, the parliamentary politics seem to animate also discussions about security policy as well. These do not stand above the partisan politics—much to the contrary, partisan politics very much animates discussions even on very sensitive security policy issues. In this way, we confirm the findings from the recent scholarship ([Wagner et al. 2018](#)). When given an opportunity, the parliamentarians will engage in the somewhat traditional political attacks and posturing even on sensitive issues. Yet, the voting is more likely to follow expectable left–right patterns.

Second, and more specifically to the case at hand, our analysis shows that there is quite a bit of cross-bench voting but the activity originates within silos. Voting is less polarized than motion sponsorship. This highlights that the polarization needs not to be identical in all stages of policy activity. This finding leads us to the third takeaway message, which is relevant particularly for the scholarship on parties and foreign policy. There might be different forces at play during different stages of the policy process. While the existing scholarship largely focuses on voting—the final stage of the policy process ([Ostermann et al. 2020](#)), there are also other aspects of the policy process that are relevant and that might be driven by other factors.

The article also carries policy significance for our understanding of nuclear deterrence in Europe. While the existing scholarship on contestation of the nuclear weapons in Europe has a strong “people versus elites” tint (Egeland and Pelopidas 2020), our article demonstrates that the debates about nuclear weapons have a very important partisan element. Recent research on public opinion in Europe confirms such findings (Onderco et al. forthcoming). The growing contestation of nuclear weapons might be a reflection of the normative contestation, but this contestation follows (to a degree) partisan patterns. Nonetheless, given NATO’s emphasis on promoting democratic values, the public opposition to a key element of NATO’s defense policy opens questions about its long-term viability.

Our research also opens the door to the future research about the microfoundations of the nuclear politics in Europe. Given the continuous relevance of nuclear weapons in Europe, we should better understand how the global political developments (translated into media attention) drive the political agenda and the attention that the people’s representatives give to this topic. For this reason, future studies into parliamentary activities in security policy in Europe should be encouraged.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the ISAGSQ data archive.

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