

The Moral Hazard Myth: Nuclear Umbrellas and Reckless Allies

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Nuclear Protégés: An Illustration



Research question: How do nuclear alliance commitments influence the conflict behavior of **protégé states**?

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Finding: Defense commitments from nuclear powers are associated with **lower levels** of protégé aggression.

→ Nuclear weapons deployments have no effect.

Competing Pressures

Emboldenment

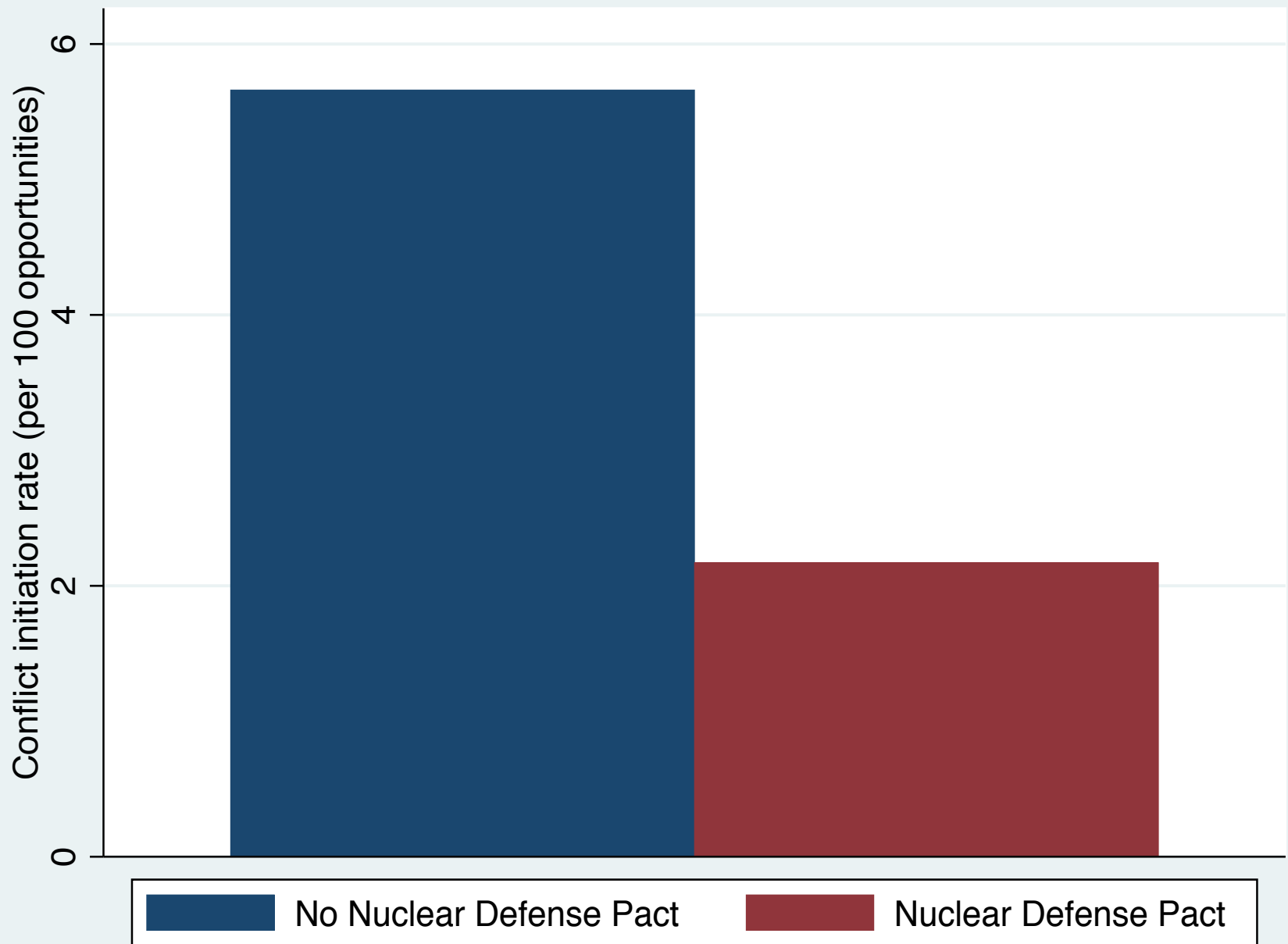
- Alliance commitments may insulate states from the costs of conflict.

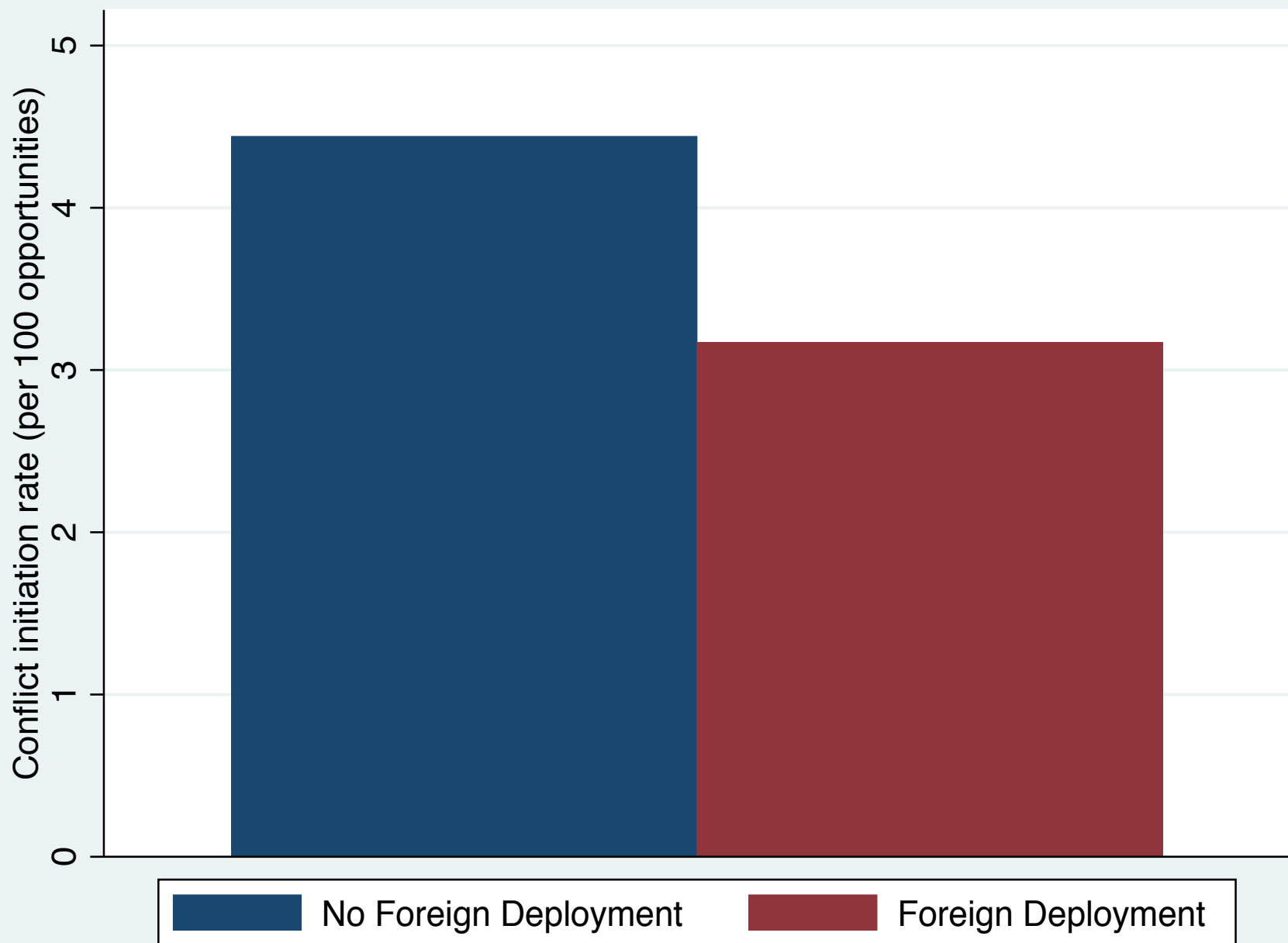
Restraint

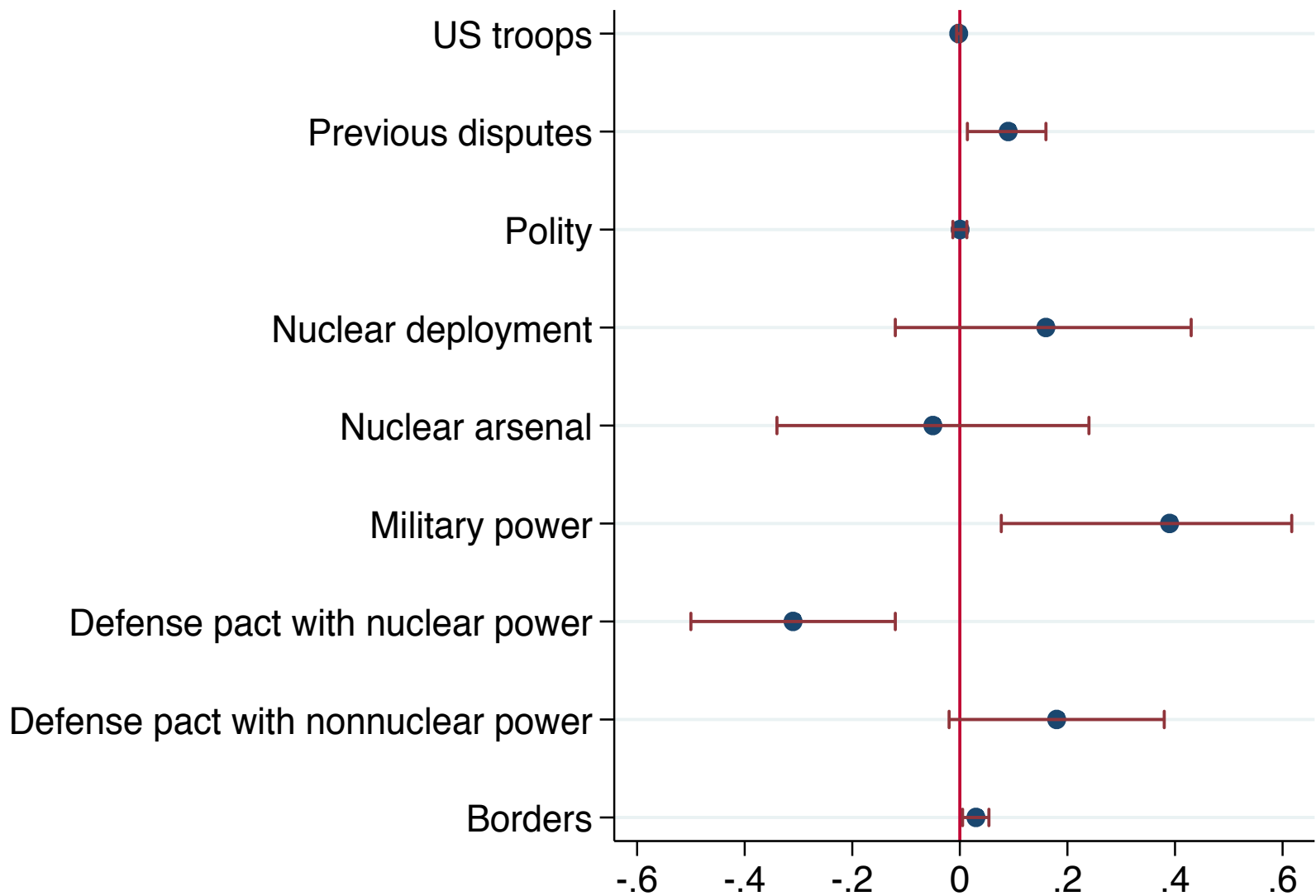
- Nuclear patrons have greater leverage, and protégés may not want to jeopardize the alliance.

Research Design

- **Country-year dataset, 1950–2000**
- **Dependent variable: military conflict**
 - Violent dispute initiation
- **Independent variable: nuclear defense commitments**
 - Defense pact with nuclear power (Gibler and Sarkees 2004)
 - Foreign nuclear deployment (Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014)
- **Controls**
 - Nonnuclear alliances, U.S. troops, nuclear possession, conventional power, regime type, borders, conflict lag



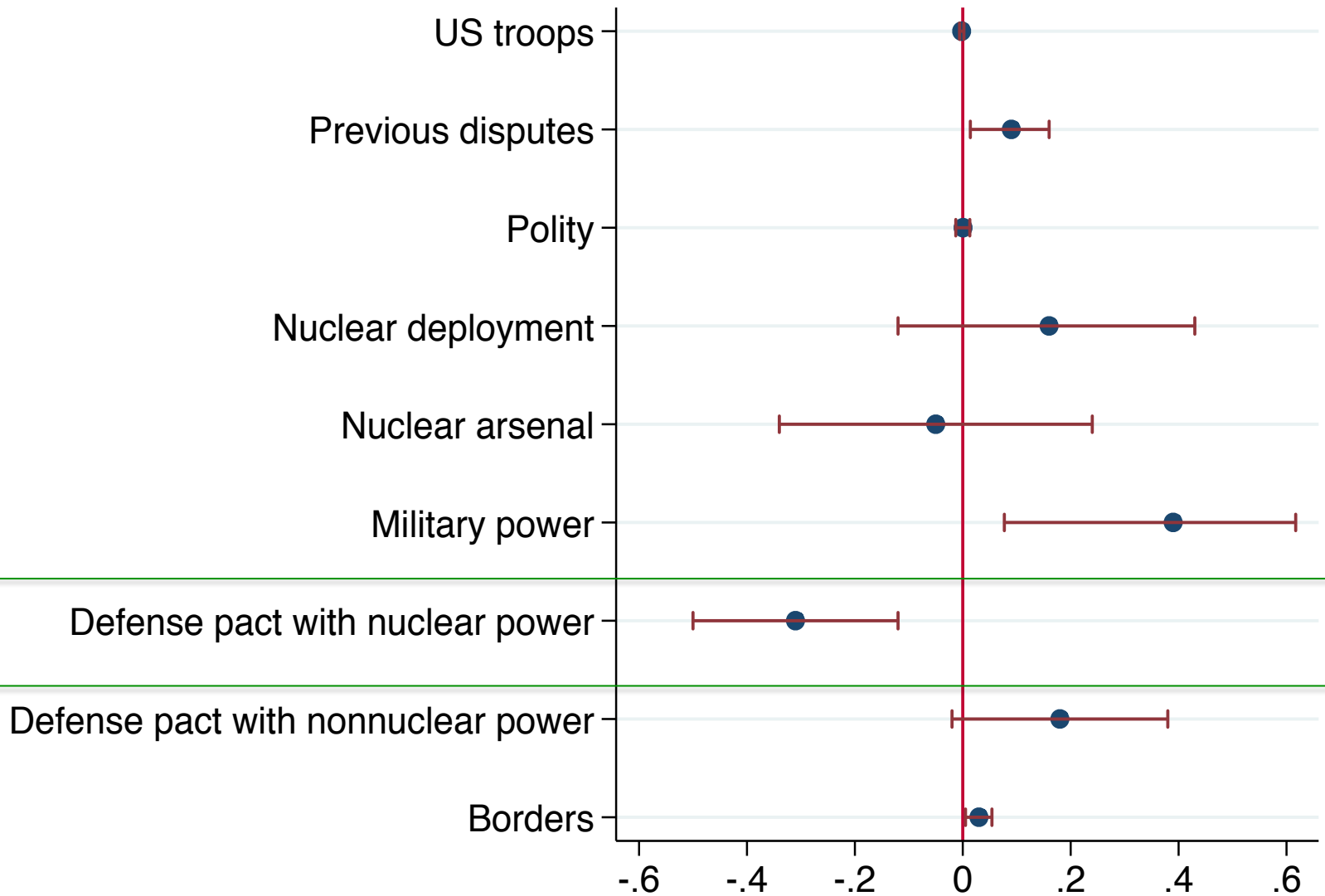




Coefficient

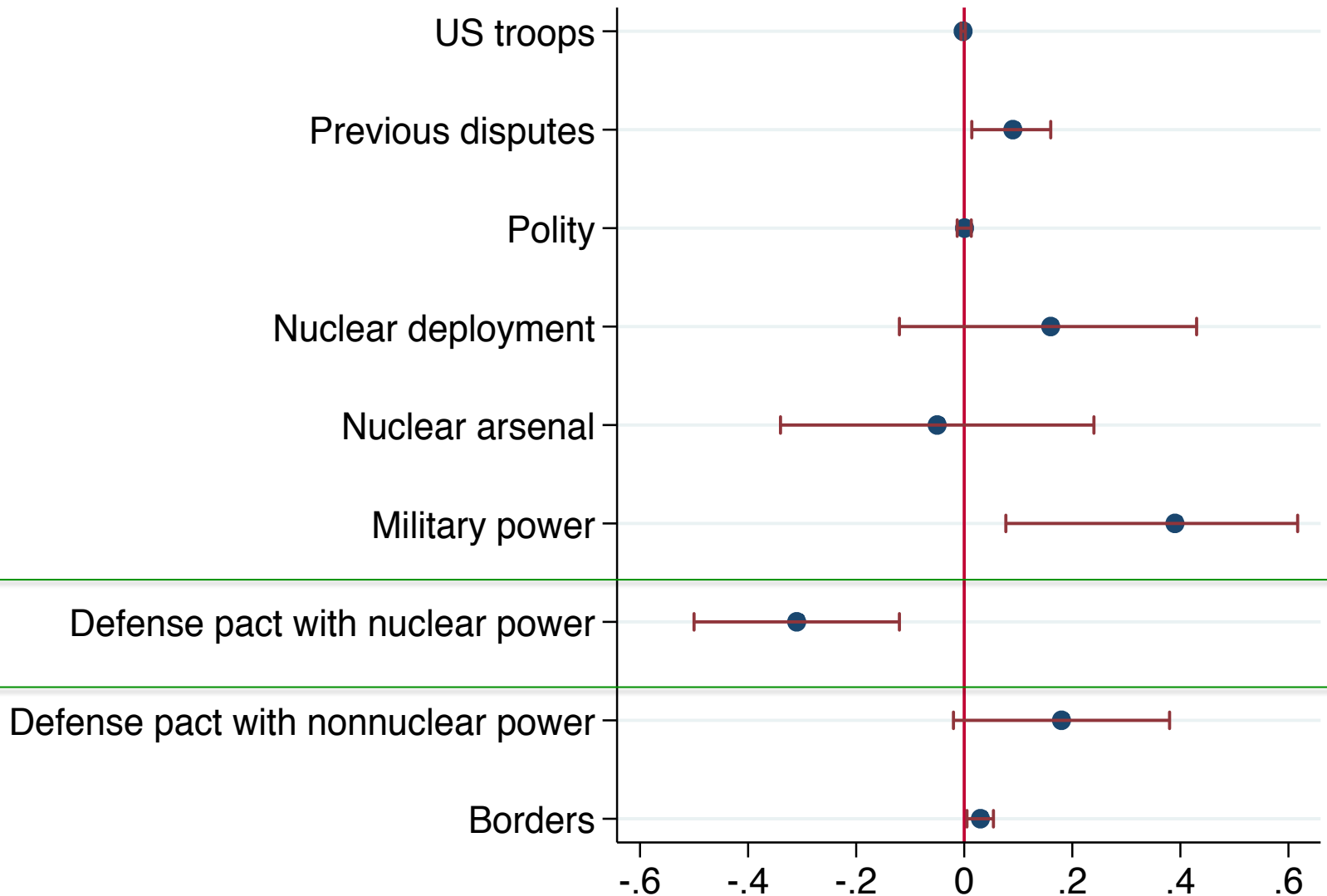


95% C.I.



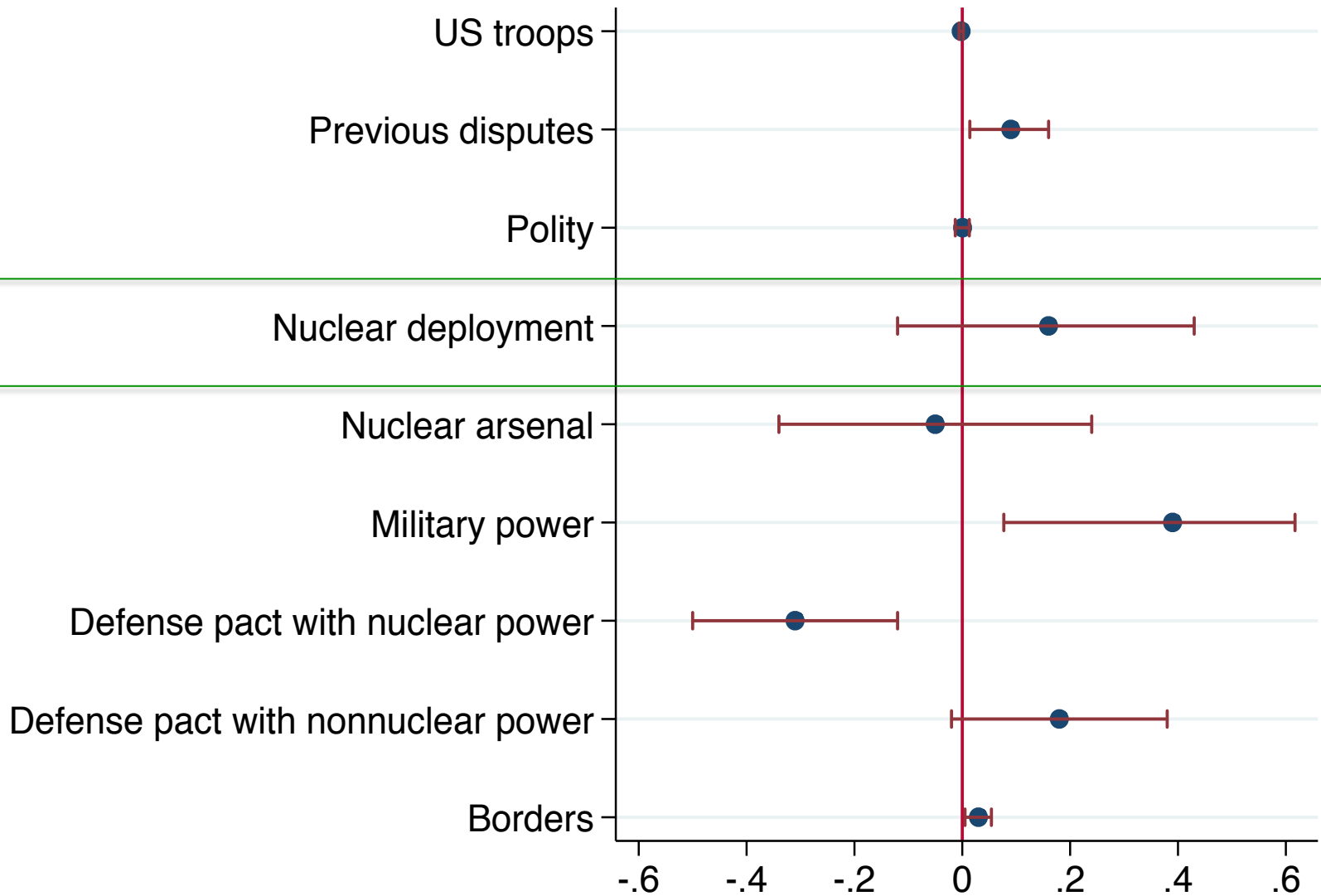
● Coefficient

— 95% C.I.



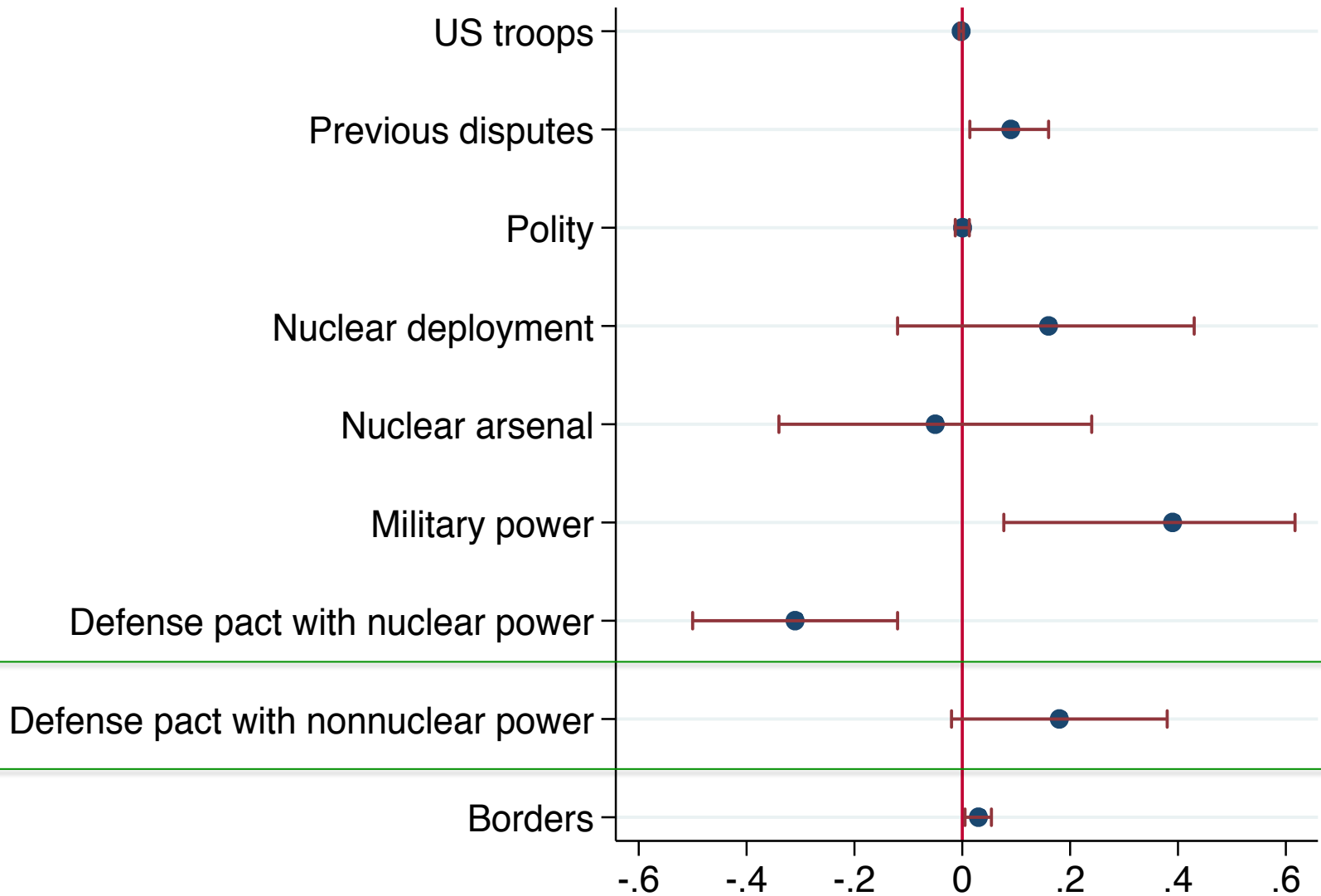
Substantive effect: alliance with a nuclear power cuts the probability of conflict in half, from **3.5% to 1.7%**

● Coefficient — 95% C.I.



● Coefficient

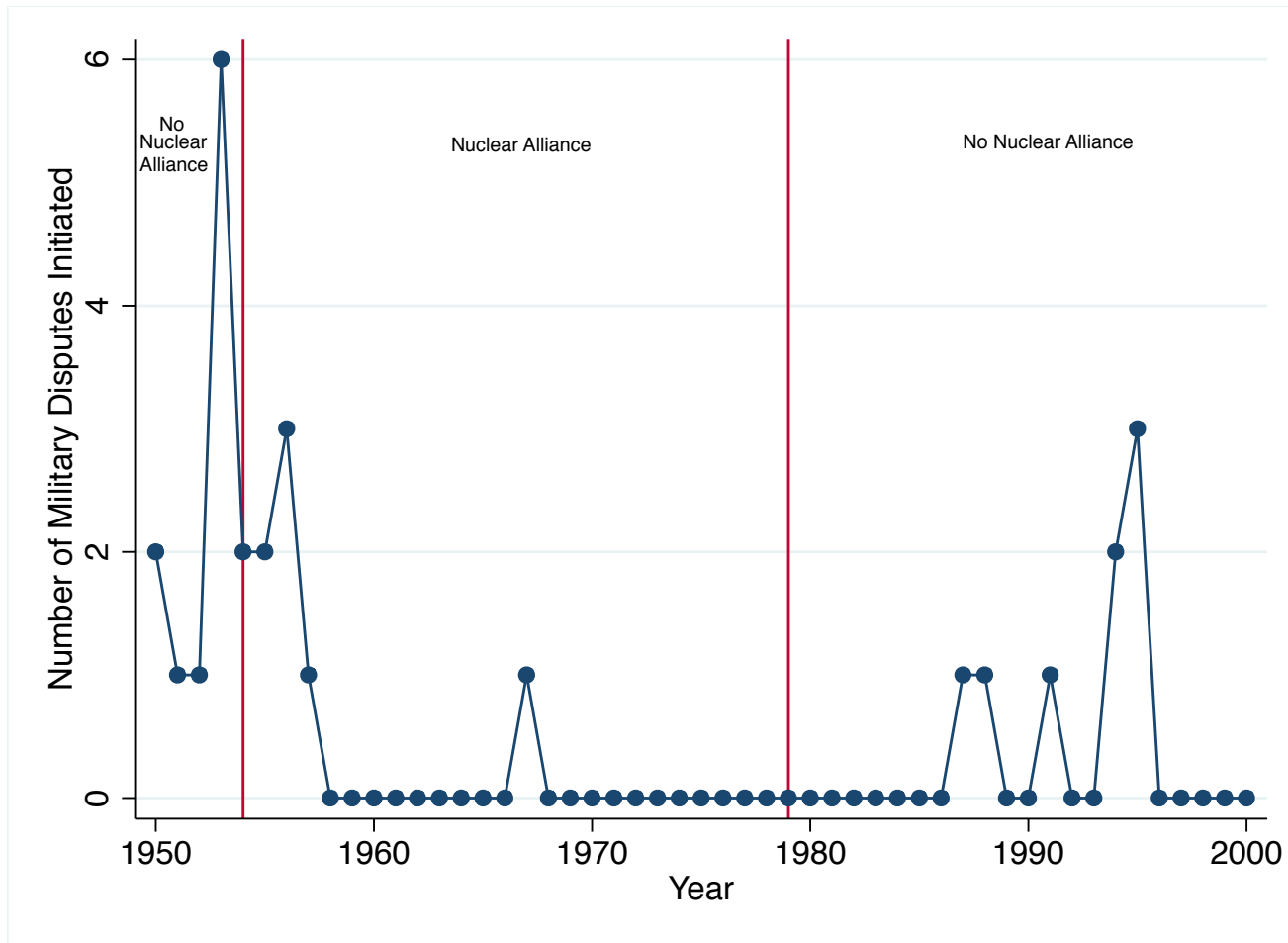
— 95% C.I.



● Coefficient

— 95% C.I.

Illustrative Case: Taiwan



Potential Objections

- **1. Data generation process: nuclear alliances**
 - Matching: pre-process the data
- **2. Nuclear or conventional power?**
 - Analysis from 1895-1945
- **3. Dyadic analysis more appropriate**
 - Replicate using directed-dyad dataset
- **4. External validity: could protégés be more aggressive in other ways?**
 - Analysis of militarized compellent threats

Conclusions

- Nuclear defense pacts may constrain, rather than embolden, protégé states.
- Moral hazard problem of alliances may not be as severe as sometimes feared.
 - Implications for US retrenchment.
- Another way in which nuclear weapons may contribute to deterrence?