

## Overseer, Supporter, Protector, or None of the Above: Understanding the Roles of Defense Agencies in Contemporary Democracies

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This paper aims to understand the varying roles defence agencies—Ministries and Departments of Defense—may have and to understand the pattern of variation among the world's democracies. The conventional understanding in the civil-military relations literature is that the civilians in the standard department or ministry of defense are responsible for helping their country's leadership to oversee the armed forces. However, there may be more variation in this role conception than commonly understood. It may be the case that the defense agency sees its role as protecting the military from unwanted civilian interference. An alternative in between these two extremes is for the civilians to consider their role as supporting their armed forces. The larger project from which this paper is drawn compares fifteen democracies from across the world—East Asia, South Pacific, North and South America, and Europe—including older and younger democracies facing higher and lower degrees of external threats.