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Local perceptions and socio-economic impacts of foreign peacekeeping forces in post-conflict Kosovo

This study explores the relationship between residents of post-conflict Kosovo and international peacekeeping forces, focusing on socio-economic impacts, public perceptions, and geographical proximity to foreign deployments. Based on survey data from late 2022 and early 2023, key issues in civil-military relations, including security perceptions, socio-economic effects, and cultural dynamics, are examined.

Findings indicate that most respondents view peacekeeping forces positively, citing increased security and stabilization, though concerns persist regarding cultural clashes, sovereignty limitations, and isolated incidents involving foreign personnel. Security is the primary perceived benefit, while geographical proximity to bases has limited influence on attitudes. Generational differences are evident, and older residents are more likely to hold negative views. This study underscores the need for broader demographic representation in future research and provides actionable insights for policymakers to enhance the effectiveness and community integration of peacekeeping missions.

Key words: social attitudes, post-conflict studies, civil-military relations, peacekeeping missions, Kosovo

Introduction

Since June 1999 Kosovo has been an area of peacekeeping missions and foreign state actors' zone of influence. After 2008 when authorities in Prishtina declared independence, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNIMIK) supported by the Kosovo Force (KFOR) continued its mission. Among many publications and analyses about the geopolitical role of the youngest country in Europe in the Balkan theater, there is lack of research concerning local and regional aspects of foreign peacekeeping forces and their activities, which also could have an impact on international relations. Also, existing research on civil-military relations in Kosovo does not provide sufficient answers to questions regarding the local effects of foreign military and police force activities in the area. Analysis of available studies on public attitudes towards security forces in post-conflict regions also points to a research gap concerning Kosovo.

Due to ongoing political tensions in the Balkans, especially in relations between Kosovo, Serbia, and Albania, it is important to understand the effects of the presence of foreign peacekeeping forces at the local and regional levels, as well as their perception. In this way, one can reveal new processes and factors influencing civil-military relations and emphasize the importance of the geographic factor (proximity) in analyses on this subject.

The article begins by presenting existing literature and concepts on public attitudes toward security forces in post-conflict regions. It also provides historical context for the foreign military and police missions in Kosovo. The second part details the design of the conducted research. Subsequent sections elucidate the current landscape of international peacekeeping forces presence in Kosovo. Next, the results and the statistical analyses used in the conducted survey are presented; followed by a clarification of the findings and a discussion of the connections between specific elements of the study. The final part of the article elaborates on recommendations and implications derived from the study results and presents the authors' conclusions. The study framework is then applied to residents' perceptions of foreign peacekeeping forces stationed as part of official missions by international organizations and institutions within the post-conflict territory of Kosovo.

The analysis of social attitudes towards the presence of foreign military and police forces expands the knowledge base and fills gaps in the research literature concerning Kosovo. The knowledge gained from this research sheds light on the relationships between the fulfillment of international peacekeeping tasks and the daily functioning of local communities. It also points out the impact of the geographic proximity of military objects that may be regarded by locals in the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) fashion. This information provides both civilian and foreign military/police actors with a deeper understanding of the factors shaping local relationships. These findings can be taken into account when designing new collaboration strategies in areas where peacekeeping forces operate, thereby influencing the level of security and development at both the local and national levels.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Studies and contributions regarding the relationship between residents in post-conflict areas and international peacekeeping forces consider many aspects, but this study focuses on three in particular. The first is to examine the role of local communities in the process of peacebuilding. This highlights how the community's socio-economic status impacts the perception of peacebuilding and security processes (Hartoyo et al., 2020). With particular concern for multi-ethnic societies, the authors indicate that the social attitudes of local communities towards peace and security efforts carried out by foreign peacekeeping forces significantly influence the success of these initiatives. The second view is to examine efficiency of peacekeeping operations. This analysis examines the impact of peacekeeping missions on the perceptions and stability of local communities, underscoring the importance of peacekeepers' ability to adapt to both changing circumstances and specific

local contexts. Social attitudes towards security and peacekeeping forces are influenced by armed conflict. Conflict directly disrupts these components of relationships, thus generating diverse types of attitudes toward foreign peacekeeping forces that operate in the post-conflict area (Fiedler, 2023).

The third aspect of this study considers public opinions on peacekeeping—examining how perceptions towards peacekeeping operations have developed and changed over time due to historical events and policy shifts. This research offers valuable insights into the perspectives of populations in post-conflict regions regarding peacekeeping operations, particularly in the context of recent international and regional developments (Joshi, 2013).

Military interventions are typically driven by strategic objectives, such as supporting allied regimes, bolstering national security, promoting regional stability, and safeguarding economic interests. In recent years, there has also been a notable rise in armed interventions justified by humanitarian motives. Examples include the NATO intervention during the Kosovo War to stop ethnic violence (Peksen and Lounsbury, 2012). Beardsley (2011) examined whether peacekeeping interventions produced stability beyond the target state by preventing the spread of both intrastate and interstate wars. His findings revealed that such missions are likely to prevent the diffusion of armed conflicts. The same author studied the role that foreign military ventures might play in rebuilding failed states, stopping violent humanitarian crises, and sustaining peace in unstable countries (Bellamy and Williams, 2005; Dobbins et al., 2005). There are also studies that explored the possible effect that armed interventions have on socio-economic (Pickering and Kisangani, 2006) and human rights conditions (Murdie and Davis 2010) in the target state.

Regarding the issue of interest in this paper, Osmani (2014) discusses the role of the KFOR intervention in Kosovo's past and compares the competencies of KFOR with mistakes made in these missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of Bosnia, the intervention occurred only after the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995, raising questions regarding the belated international response or even complicity (of the international community) in the crime (Abe 2019; Delpla et al., 2012).

Stemre (2012) sheds light on some aspects of understanding the purpose, outcome, and potential of KFOR in the Kosovo conflict. Additionally, the author focuses on the relationship between the population of an area and the international military involved in the post-war state-building mission. Pugh (2000) in his article pointed to the factors that presented the military with a hegemonic role in Kosovo and assessed the current balance in civilian-military relations in relief work and peacebuilding, addressing the questions of how and why military organizations have come to take a significant or leading (in the case of Kosovo) role in relief work. Pateras (2013) analyzed the cooperation between KFOR and EULEX in peace and state-building. Furthermore, the author investigated the multi-level phenomenon of EU-NATO cooperation in Kosovo, exploring the different dynamics and influences of all stakeholders at each level.

While some politicians and scholars have warned that NATO's intervention in Kosovo and Yugoslavia was a mistake and did not respect international law, others, such as Kalousdian (2014), have argued that it was a delayed action. According to him, the key stages to understanding the escalation to war and analyzing the policy options to resolve the conflict can be described in two moments of U.S. foreign policy: the Christmas warning of 1992 and the unsuccessful implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution.

Minear et al. (2000) discuss the humanitarian reasons that prompted NATO to launch a bombing campaign against the Serbian army. Roberts (2000), in the chapter entitled "NATO's Humanitarian War over Kosovo" noted that it was the first sustained use of armed force by the NATO alliance in its existence and the first major bombing campaign intended to halt crimes against humanity being committed by a state within its borders (Minear et al., 2000). In addition to the political, economic, and security dimensions, different authors also wrote about NATO's intervention and its impacts on the environment and people's health (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Martel, 2003).

The continuous presence of NATO in Kosovo post-war, and the shifting role from classical ceasefire monitoring to increasingly complex efforts of state-building, has highlighted the importance of institutional cooperation in peacekeeping missions (Brosig, 2010). Conflict resolution is a much broader process than merely ending the war with an international force's intervention. According to the European Security Strategy (2003), conflict resolution aims to address the root causes of conflict, often requiring a social, political, and economic transformation.

Gashi and Molnar (2012) noted that the Kosovo Liberation Army was demilitarized and demobilized pursuant to the Rambouillet Accord articles and UN Resolution 1244, under the oversight of KFOR. KFOR operates under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244, which was passed on 10 June 1999 following the conflict in the region. KFOR deployed on June 12, 1999, two days after the suspension of the NATO air campaign, following the signing of the Military Technical Agreement and the adoption of UNSCR 1244. It operates under Chapter VII of the UN Charter as a peace-enforcing/supporting, operation. The original mandate included the following points: deter renewed hostility and threats against Kosovo by Yugoslavian and Serbian forces; establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order; demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army; support the international humanitarian effort and coordinate with and support the international civilian presence.

Initially, KFOR comprised approximately 50,000 men and women from NATO and non-NATO countries under unified command and control. The improved security environment enabled NATO to further reduce troop levels to 17,500 by the end of 2003.

At the time of writing, KFOR forces are stationed in several bases in strategically-significant locations, with the largest international military contingents located at Camp Bondsteel near the city of Ferizaj and Camp Film City in Pristina. In the context of the conducted research, questions regarding the future of these areas after the conclusion of military missions arise. Will their conversion for civilian purposes be feasible, and how will this impact local economic development and social relations? These questions require more specialized research to properly explore.

The security landscape in Kosovo is shaped by a complex interplay of local and international forces, primarily orchestrated under the umbrella of NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). These entities operate within a framework established by various international agreements and mandates, aiming to support Kosovo in achieving a stable, democratic, and multi-ethnic society.

According to Hamiti (2015) KFOR is perceived by the majority of Albanians (92.9% of the population of Kosovo by latest estimates) as a liberation force and a friendly organization. This might be the key element of KFOR's successes in Kosovo. KFOR proved its capacity to deal with serious crises when it tackled multiple incidents of public unrest in March 2004 in Kosovo. Fueled by ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs, the March Riots posed a significant threat to the international missions in Kosovo. Although some of the incidents were labeled as "ethnic riots" due to actions taken by the Kosovo authorities, implying that they were not grassroots movements--, the real causes of these riots have not been uncovered to date.

KFOR's security-first approach, shared broadly by the international community in Kosovo, prioritizes security as the cornerstone of peacebuilding and nation-building efforts. In this context, security serves a dual role: it is both a long-term objective and the essential prerequisite for the overall success of the operation. Political transition and economic reconstruction are not possible without effective control of (use of) force (Jeong, 2005).

KFOR coordinates closely with the Kosovo Police and EULEX, being the third responder to security incidents, which underscores the collaborative approach to law and order in the region. Regular interactions with stakeholders in both Belgrade and Pristina are a critical aspect of its operations. These interactions facilitate dialogue and cooperation with various entities including EULEX, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and members of the diplomatic community.



Fig. 1 Kosovo Force (KFOR) sectors on the territory of Kosovo
Source: Authors' elaboration based on official KFOR data



Fig. 2 Italian soldiers from KFOR guarding in Pristina during the local protest
Source: author's photograph (May, 2022)

A significant part of KFOR's mission involves supporting the development of civilian institutions within Kosovo. This includes assistance in law and order, the judicial system, penal systems, and electoral processes, which are vital for the political, economic, and social stability of the region.

Established in February 2008, shortly after Kosovo declared independence, EULEX was designed to support Kosovar institutions in implementing the rule of law. This mission came into effect following a five-point plan agreed between Serbia and the UN, which led to the UN Security Council's endorsement of EULEX as a mission working alongside UNMIK rather than replacing it. EULEX is composed of approximately 3,200 police and judicial personnel, blending international and local expertise to foster legal and administrative structures.

The current mandate of EULEX, which extends until 14 June 2025, underscores its ongoing commitment to supporting the rule of law in Kosovo and emphasizing the long-term international commitment to the region's stability and development.

Civil-military cooperation in Kosovo is a dynamic and evolving field characterized by the synergistic efforts of various international bodies and the local government. The presence and operations of KFOR and EULEX are pivotal in transitioning Kosovo towards a peaceful, stable, and self-sustaining future. Continued international support and local engagement are essential for maintaining security and fostering the rule of law in Kosovo, aiming at a harmonious integration of the region into the broader European framework.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Due to the limited existing research on the socio-economic impacts of foreign peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, this study is exploratory in nature. Therefore, the main aim is to identify areas of residents' lives that may be influenced by international peacekeeping forces stationed in Kosovo. Specific research questions include:

- What are the prevailing social attitudes among residents of Kosovo concerning the presence of international peacekeeping forces personnel?
- Does geographical proximity to the deployment sites of international peacekeeping forces affect local perspective on them?
- In which specific areas of socio-economic life is the presence of international peacekeeping forces in Kosovo likely to exert an impact?

By exploring these research questions, the authors' goal is to contribute knowledge to the political, social, and geographical picture of the post-conflict state of Kosovo. The results can shed light on new factors that are important in the process of peacebuilding, not only in this case, but also in other post-conflict areas, thus enhancing the effectiveness of cooperation between local and state authorities and foreign missions.

This study is based on existing survey research, which was preceded by a one-month pilot study (May, 2022) involving participant observation, photographic documentation, and unstructured interviews. The questionnaire survey was conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 using an open online platform, accessible to adult residents of Kosovo, primarily those residing in the capital. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, acknowledging limitations in the generalizability of the results. However, this method allowed rapid data collection from a diverse, albeit urban-centric, sample. The questionnaire was developed in alignment with prior studies on civil-military relations and piloted to ensure clarity. The survey contained a total of 25 questions across four sections, utilizing Likert scales and multiple-choice formats to gauge awareness, attitudes, and demographic information. Ethics approval was obtained, and informed consent was provided by each participant before beginning the survey. The questionnaires employed in this research were designed to maintain full respondent anonymity.

The initial section of the questionnaire included questions aimed at assessing respondents' awareness of the reasons for the presence of foreign military and police forces in Kosovo, as well as their preferences regarding Kosovo's potential accession to the European Union and NATO. The subsequent section examined the frequency with which respondents observed foreign peacekeeping forces in public spaces, personal interactions with foreign personnel, and respondents' perceptions of the attitudes displayed by foreign personnel toward local residents. Additionally, this section addressed issues concerning the proximity of foreign forces stationed near respondents' residences. Following this, participants provided their views on the perceived impact of foreign forces across three key dimensions of daily life: (a) social; (b) economic; and (c) environmental. The final section of the survey collected demographic data from respondents.

As a result, we gathered 102 responses, which provided an overview of social attitudes toward international peacekeeping forces present in Kosovo and were subsequently subjected to basic statistical analyses. To gain insights into the areas influenced by foreign troops and the prevailing public attitudes toward them, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted. First, exploratory and frequency analyses were performed to understand the distribution of responses across key variables. This step helped identify general trends in public attitudes. Next, using Python software, a cross-tabulation was employed to explore relationships between demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, and education) and specific survey responses, allowing for a more detailed examination of subgroup attitudes. Finally, the chi-square test was applied to assess the statistical significance of differences in responses across groups, ensuring that observed patterns were not due to chance. This analytical approach provided a nuanced understanding of the basic factors shaping public attitudes toward international peacekeeping forces present in Kosovo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 3 presents charts which detail the demographic data of the respondents, including age, gender, level of education and profession. The vast majority of respondents were young people under the age of 26 with a university education. The high representation of young, high-educated respondents may be due to the online method of distributing the survey which made the recipients primarily young people with daily access to the internet, including social media. This issue will be taken into account when interpreting the results. It is also important to note employment--the majority of respondents do not attribute themselves to any of the proposed groups, which may suggest either their association with education or unofficial employment and thus their unwillingness to answer this question. In terms of gender, the results are similar for both men and women. In terms of national identity, the majority of people declared themselves as Kosovars, a smaller number as Albanians, and no one indicated Serbian or other nationality.

The distribution of responses suggests that inhabitants of Kosovo think that the most common reason for international peacekeeping forces to be present in their country is to maintain security and to engage in peacekeeping activities, but we are not sure about geographical limitations of such an actions (Fig. 4). Security considerations and goals are also important to take into account, certain, where we can be certain that that the main task is to protect from the external threats.

Figure 5 indicates a positive relationship between residents and foreign peacekeeping force personnel. However, almost 30 percent of the respondents still consider them to be neutral, thus it can be also assumed that attitudes towards foreign soldiers or police are difficult to determine due to infrequency of interaction. Therefore, we asked about the situations in which respondents meet members of foreign forces (Fig. 6), the main areas affected by the foreign presence (Fig. 7), and which social life dimensions are the most affected according to the respondents (Fig. 8).

The data shows that the most common place for encountering international peacekeeping forces is the public space, which is probably due to daily routines, e.g. patrols. Both the traffic and meetings on the street

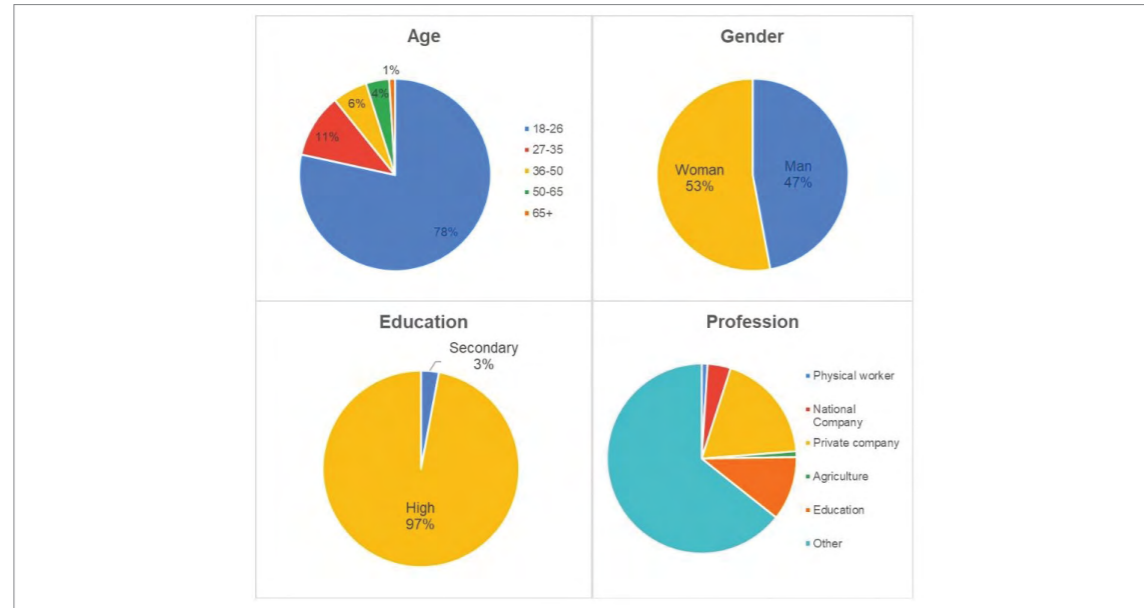


Fig. 3 Demographic measures of survey respondents

Source: Own research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

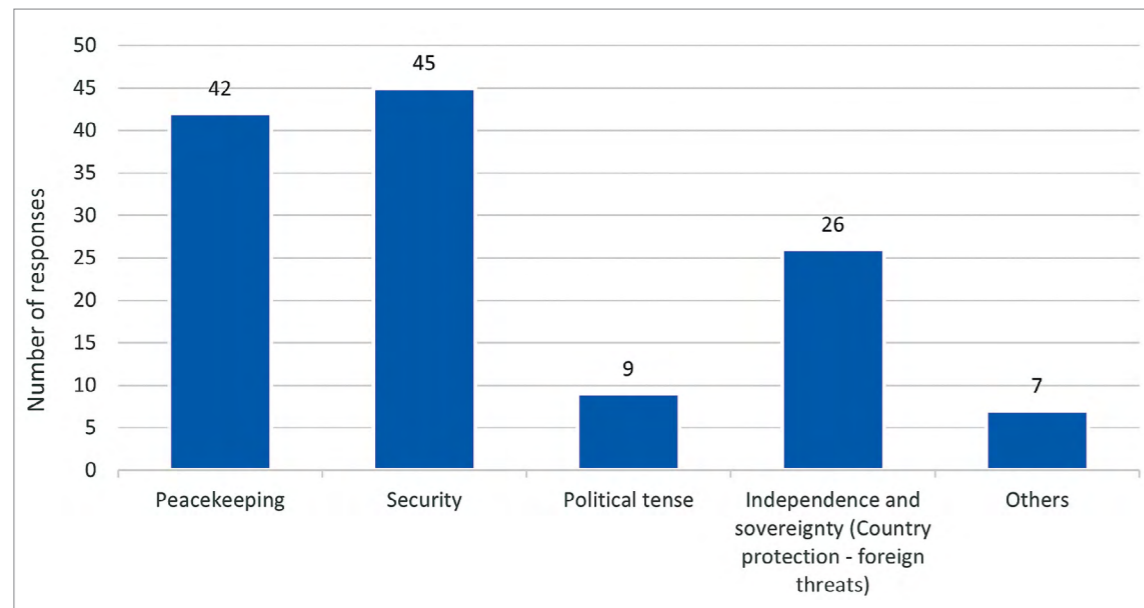


Fig. 4 Reasons of foreign forces' presence in their country, in respondents' opinion

Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

may suggest, that contact is occasional and respondents are not engaged in personal relations. At the same time it highlights their visibility within the community in everyday situations.

Figure 7 illustrates the perceived impact of the presence of foreign armed forces on various social, economic, and environmental aspects. Each aspect has been rated in terms of average level of impact, with scores ranging from 1 (very small impact) to 5 (very big impact).

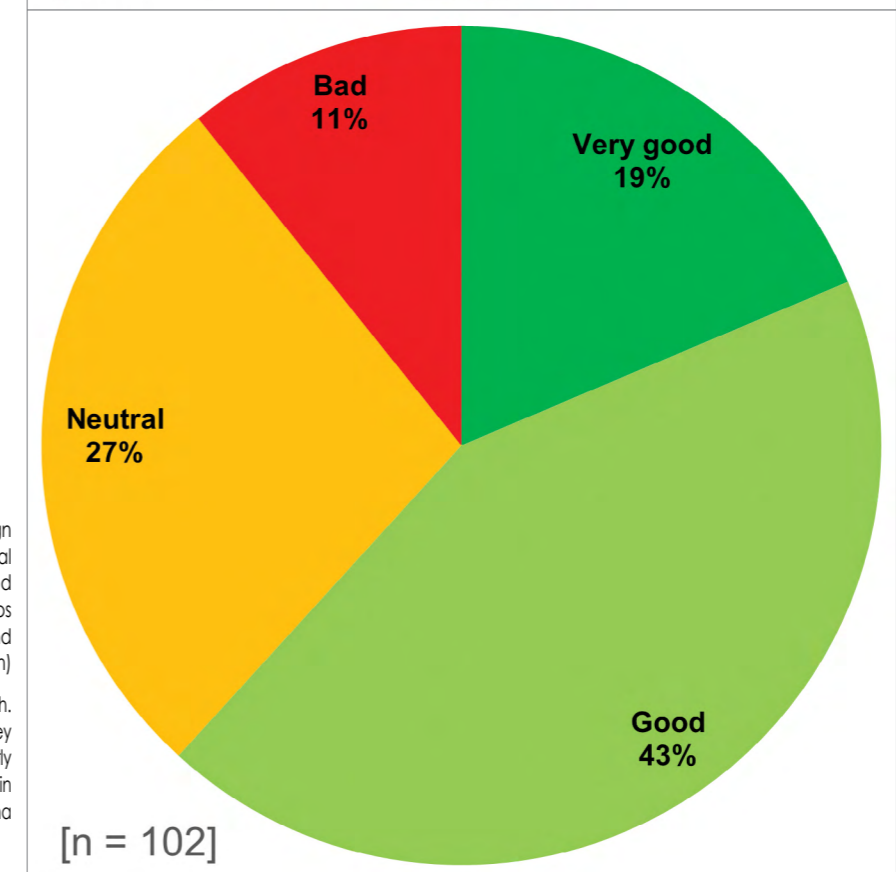
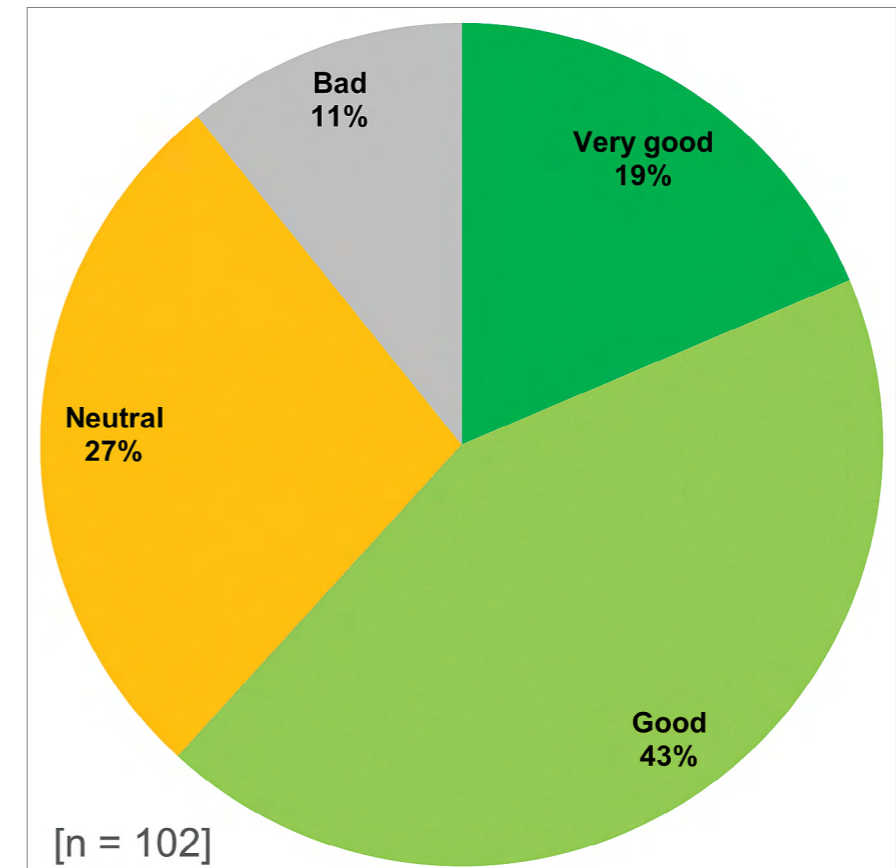


Fig. 5 Assessment of foreign forces' attitudes by local residents in Kosovo (up) and perceived quality of relationships between foreign forces and local residents (down)

Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

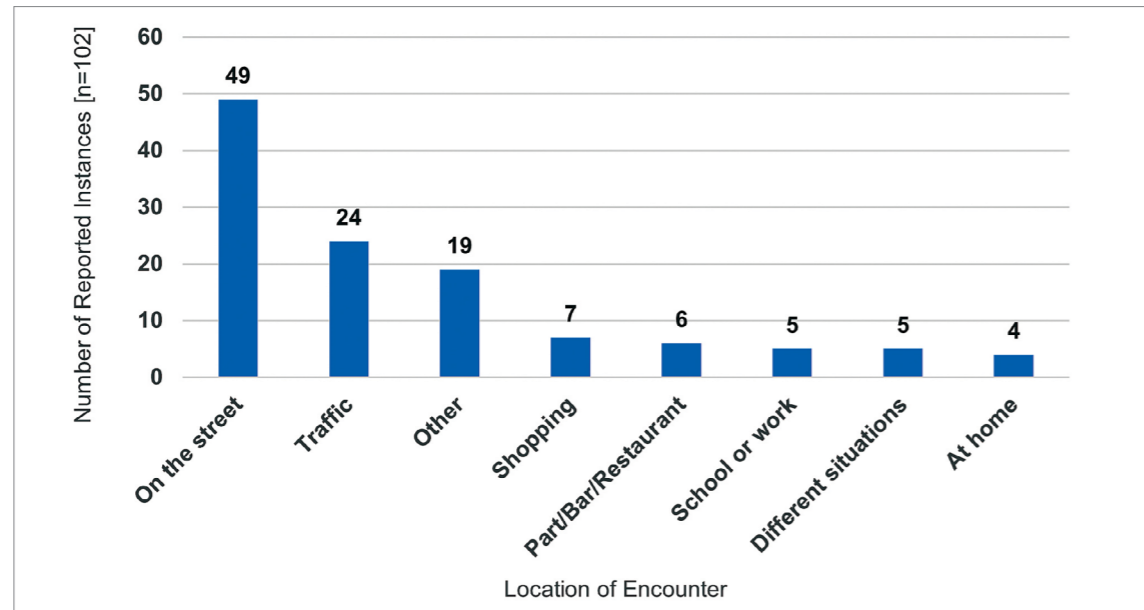


Fig. 6 Contexts in which respondents encounter members of foreign forces in Kosovo
Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

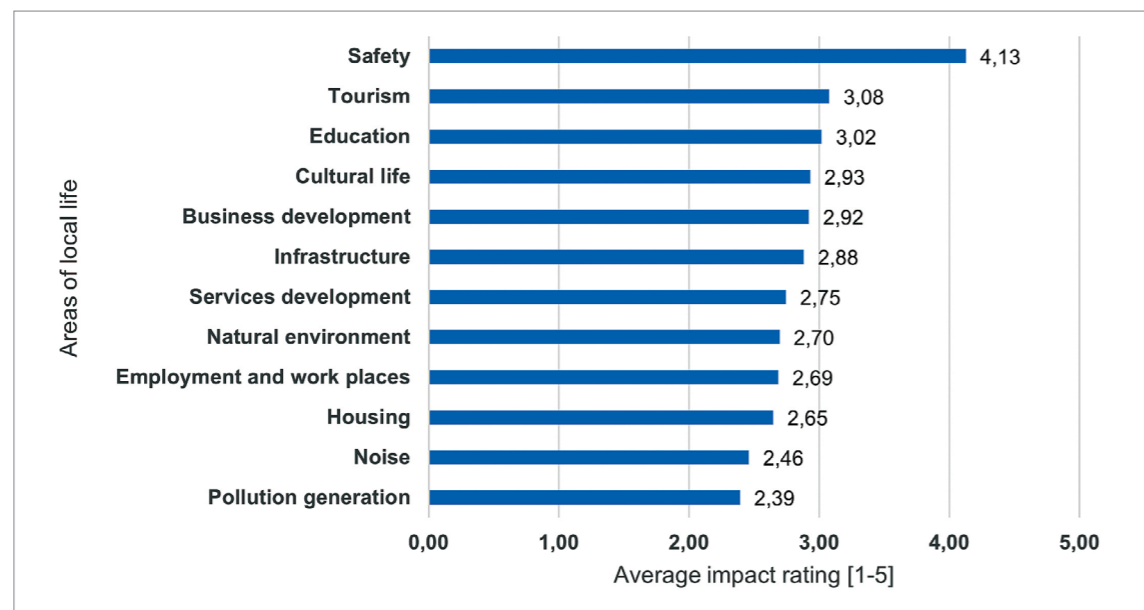


Fig. 7 Perceived impact of foreign forces on various aspects of local life (1 – very small impact; 2 – small impact; 3 – neutral/no impact; 4 – big impact; 5 – very big impact)
Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

We can notice that social areas like education, tourism and safety scored higher on average, suggesting a more significant perceived impact of the presence of foreign forces. This graph highlights residents' differing views on how international peacekeeping forces affect different aspects of their lives and environment. Some impacts are perceived to be more pronounced, potentially reflecting areas of concern or interest that merit

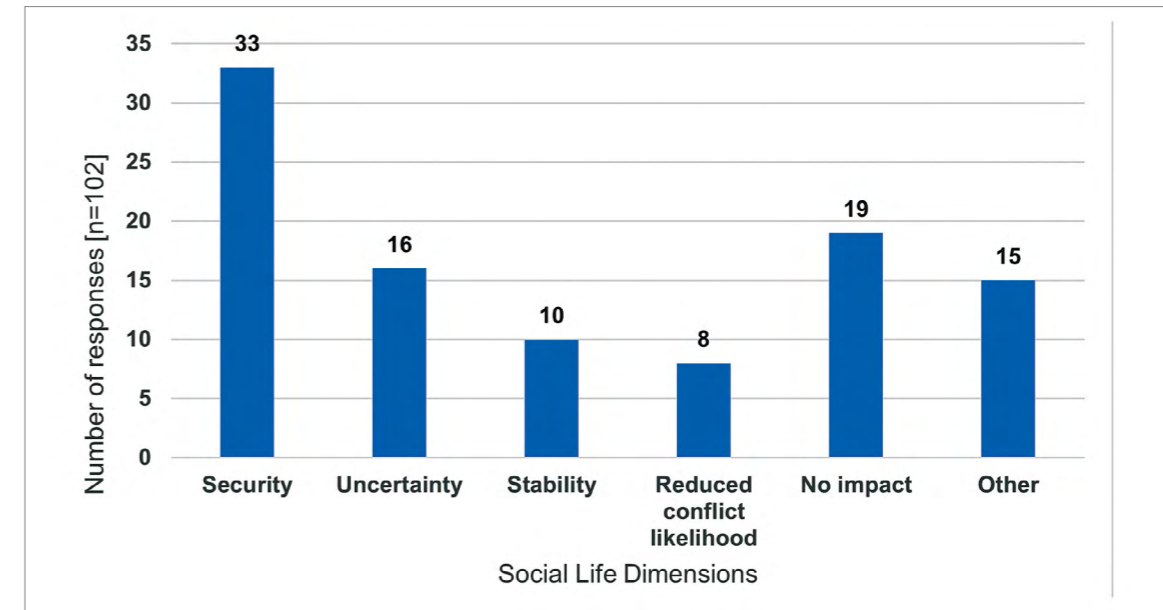


Fig. 8 Perceived impact of foreign forces' presence on key social life dimensions, as indicated by respondents
Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

further exploration or dialogue. This analysis highlights the complexity of the presence of foreign forces, illustrating that its effects are felt differently in different aspects of respondents' lives.

The most prominent perceived effect distinguished by residents in their lives is an increase in security, with a significant number of respondents acknowledging this aspect. In contrast, Uncertainty also stands out, indicating divergent views on the presence of foreign peacekeeping forces. While some see it as stabilizing, others feel it contributes to uncertainty or has no perceivable effect at all. What's important to note is that foreign forces' presence (the main task of which is to keep and build the peace) is not universally perceived as reducing the possibility of conflict.

The questions in the survey also allowed for verbal opinions on the presence of international peacekeeping forces in Kosovo and their impact on the surrounding area. When asked about the impact on the daily lives of residents, we received varied responses, indicating differing attitudes toward foreign forces and the sources of these attitudes.

The first group of statements (positive attitudes) refers to defense and security issues related mainly to potential Serbian aggression. It is also mentioned that until Kosovo is fully accepted internationally as a state, its current status as a foreign forces' "host" must be maintained:

"They made people feel relieved from the fear of an attack from Serbia" - survey Respondent 22, 2022.

"I think that as long as we are not consolidated as a state, we are dependent on the direct and inevitable protection of KFOR and NATO in Kosovo. We are very safe, we move freely, and we do our jobs fully" - survey Respondent 74, 2023.

"It helps with the feeling of being safe because we know that as long as they are in Kosovo, we will not be attacked by centuries-old enemies (Serbia)" - survey Respondent 46, 2022.

The second group of statements (negative attitudes) shows that respondents pay attention to the military or police personnel behavior which can point, for example, to cultural differences. Respondents

often stressed that although most foreign soldiers behave courteously, there are situations in which their behavior is a cause for concern. Examples such as loud behavior in public places, insulting each other, showing a sense of superiority, and cases of harassment of women point to significant cultural and ethical problems:

“Usually, foreign soldiers are polite, but there are frequent cases when, in public places, they make a lot of noise, insult each other, behave as if they are very powerful, and often harass women” - survey Respondent 78, 2023.

“There is fear about the possibility of new foreign soldiers arriving in the future” - survey Respondent 94, 2023.

Another aspect that was mentioned by respondents in the survey is the economic link between international peacekeeping forces and inhabitants. This is expressed not only by local spending on the part of foreign forces in local service outlets or investments but also in employment, indicating a wide range of impacts and the need to analyze multiplier effects in future studies on the subject:

“I think it has a positive effect because some citizens of Kosovo are employed in some of their camps. It is also enough that the citizens feel free and safe with their presence” - survey Respondent 36, 2022.

The previous citations provide detailed insight into the diverse opinions of the local community on the presence of foreign forces in the region. They help identify specific areas of impact and point out that, despite the vast majority of positive attitudes among residents toward the presence of foreign uniformed services, there are also testimonies of negative activities by international peacekeeping forces.

To obtain the most detailed information regarding civil-military relations, we conducted a Chi-square test. We analyzed socio-demographic indicators: age, gender, education, occupation, and nationality, in conjunction with data obtained from responses to questions expressing opinions on the impact of the presence of foreign forces.

The results indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship only between age and views on foreign soldiers (Chi-square Value: 11.56; p-value: 0.021). Different age groups seem to have different perceptions, with the older age group (65+) tending to hold more negative views compared to younger groups. Considering other socio-demographic factors, no such similar relationships can be identified.

One of the questions in the survey focused on geographical proximity to any foreign forces' infrastructure, spot, or base. Therefore, we analyzed the impact of geographical proximity to foreign military facilities on shaping residents' social attitudes towards them. Table 1 shows the cross-distribution of data with responses categorized as positive and negative.

A Chi-square value of 0.0 and a p-value of 1.0 indicate no statistically significant relationship between the proximity to foreign armed forces and overall attitude (positive or negative) towards them. This result suggests that whether respondents are near foreign armed forces or not does not affect their overall perception as positive or negative. The lack of a significant relationship may suggest that other factors (e.g. personal experiences, broader political views, or media influence) impact attitudes towards foreign armed forces more than mere physical proximity.

Tab. 1 Comparison of geographical proximity to foreign forces with social attitudes towards them

Foreign Forces Proximity	Negative attitude	Positive attitude
Near	2	47
Not near	3	50

Source: Authors' research. This study is based on a survey conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 among 102 respondents in Pristina

International peacekeeping forces in Kosovo are perceived as impacting mainly social aspects of local life, with security, education, and cultural life identified as the most affected areas. Qualitative responses reveal mixed sentiments: positive attitudes emphasize the sense of security provided against external threats, while negative attitudes often highlight cultural differences and occasional disruptive behavior by foreign personnel. Statistical analysis indicates a significant correlation between age and attitudes toward foreign armed forces, with older respondents generally holding more negative views, while proximity to foreign bases does not appear to significantly influence perceptions.

Overall, these findings underscore the nuanced and multifaceted impact of foreign military presence on Kosovo's social landscape, offering basic but valuable insights into civil-military relations in post-conflict area.

The function of foreign military and police units is crucial for building the stabilization of Kosovo following the Balkan wars and the bloody conflict in 1999. However, their presence is also marked by numerous challenges and controversies, especially in the context of civil-military relations. Respondents' statements indicate that their presence guarantees security and Kosovo's statehood, but it can also be perceived as undermining or limiting Kosovo's sovereignty and the authority of local institutions. This can affect the function of institutions at both the national and local levels.

On a broader scale, it is necessary to consider the issues of external political influences, for which the presence of foreign peacekeeping forces may serve as a basis for stirring unrest within the society, even at a local level. Simultaneously, data obtained from the study indicate that it is precisely the presence of these forces that protects the Kosovar community from destabilizing movements, both internal and external.

It is important to note that despite the large number of stationed forces in the relatively small area of the country, the geographical proximity of foreign military facilities does not affect the perception of their presence. This could be the result of their historical role in ending the war in 1999 or from the ongoing militarization of the space, which involves integrating military elements into the lives of residents, accustoming them to the reality of sharing the country with foreign military and security forces. Therefore, the issue of integrating military forces with local society is significant. However, the obtained results do not indicate a high frequency of personal contact with foreign force personnel, which may imply a lack of such efforts and a certain level of separation between these two groups.

The vast majority of opinions on the presence of international peacekeeping forces and their relationship with the local population are positively assessed by respondents. However, there are signs regarding situations and events that may be considered controversial, such as statements about the treatment of women. Given the unique culture and function of military and police institutions, it can be assumed that this issue will likely be key in the event of attempts to incite social unrest. This is particularly significant due to Kosovo's religious structure and the perception of women's roles in society. Referring to the symbolic boundaries theory (Lamont and Molnar, 2002) the presence of international forces may establish symbolic boundaries between local residents and foreign troops. KFOR and EULEX personnel may indicate and create division between “insiders” and “outsiders”. This important aspect may influence social attitudes towards the foreign military and police presence and evokes a range of extreme emotions among local residents. According to the concept of place identity (Proshansky et al., 1983) it could be also the beginning of developing a distinct identity related to the presence of foreign troops.

Regarding the impact on selected social, economic, and environmental spheres, the overwhelmingly dominant effect is a positive impact on security. The least indicated impact was that on environmental factors, such as pollution or noise, which may be related to a lack of ecological awareness among residents or the limited operation of heavy foreign military equipment in densely populated areas. Conducting larger-scale studies would benefit from spatial identification, such as distinguishing between rural and urban areas or specific localities and creating cartographic analyses in this regard.

The main group of respondents in our studies were young and educated individuals, likely due to the use of online surveys. Therefore, the opinions of older and less educated individuals are missing. Additionally, none of the respondents identified with a nationality other than Albanian or Kosovar (i.e. there were no Serbian participants), which could also provide significant insights and results. This indicates the need to expand the scope of research and reach a broader audience, including through in-situ surveys. The conducted studies highlight an important direction for policymakers and researchers to explore, which has been insufficiently addressed so far. If location data is obtained, it would be worthwhile to base analyses on the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) research approach. An interesting development would also be to enrich the interpretation of research results using methods applied in anthropological studies.

Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2016), in developing the concept of post-conflict geography, argue that peace building is not solely a political or economic process; it also has a spatial dimension, involving the reorganization of territories, identities, and power relations within these areas. It requires the transformation of both physical spaces (infrastructural) and social spaces (norms and relationships in the conflict-affected area). Considering the events of 1999, the ongoing tensions in Kosovo, and the results of conducted studies, the presence of foreign forces still seems crucial for maintaining human regional stability and human rights. If Kosovo still needs peacekeeping and stabilization forces 15 years after gaining independence, it is also necessary to conduct broader studies to develop a long-term cooperation strategy at various spatial scales.

CONCLUSION

The activities of foreign peacekeeping forces in Kosovo have a varied impact on residents, but positive attitudes towards their presence prevail. Actual encounters with foreign forces are not frequent, which could indicate their impact on residents' daily lives. In the case of Kosovar residents identifying themselves as Albanian or Kosovar, more influence seems to come from policies at the international level or the actions of neighboring states, mainly Serbia.

The lack of significant impact of geographical proximity to foreign military and police installations suggests that either social attitudes are not influenced or that these installations are not of an operational nature or do not have heavier equipment. Instead, the nature of the interaction and the wider political or social context are likely to be more influential.

Given the technical challenges of full analysis, further research is recommended to fully understand how different segments of the population perceive international peacekeeping forces. This may be crucial for policy making, community relations, and strategic planning of foreign force operations in Kosovo. The article tackles an important topic by combining issues of socio-economic geography, political science, history, security science, and sociology. Historical circumstances indicate a decidedly positive view of the presence of troops and foreign police in the area. This is directly related to the US's active engagement against the Serbian military and its direct role in ending the Kosovo War.

While we are aware of the limitations of a small research sample, this work is an attempt to fill a certain research gap, and to draw attention to the essence of local interactions, dependencies, and processes taking place in the lives of Kosovo residents. Twenty five years after the end of the bloody war and more than 15 years after the country declared independence, it is also an attempt to draw attention to the issues of civil-military relations in this part of Europe, particularly their geographical and sociological dimensions. In-depth research should be conducted by more researchers, which can provide decision-makers with information and, in practical terms, influence the strategy of relevant organizations both internationally and locally.

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