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Chapter

Guns and Gaps: Defence Expenditure and Income Inequality in India

Biraj Dey¹

¹Assistant Professor, (Ad-hoc faculty), Department of Commerce,
Srikishan Sarda College, Hailakandi, Assam

Abstract

This paper examines the link between increased defence expenditure and rising income inequality in India, India ramped up its defence spending to modernize its military, but this has also led to concerns about malpractices in defence contracts, including corruption and favouritism. Moreover the significant security gains made after the 1971 war, these corrupt practices have diverted crucial resources away from essential social sectors, exacerbating economic disparities. The misallocation of defence funds, often into the hands of politically connected elites, has resulted in a widening income gap, where the benefits of defence spending fail to reach the broader population. This paper argues that reforms in defence procurement, aimed at increasing transparency and accountability, are crucial to ensure that defence expenditure supports both national security and equitable socio-economic development.

Keywords: Defence Expenditure, Income Inequality, Auto Regressive Distributed Lag Model, India.

Introduction

In recent years, India has seen a notable increase in defence expenditure, a trend that reflects the nation's growing concerns over national security, regional stability, and geopolitical tensions. The need for modernizing the military, acquiring advanced technologies, and maintaining a robust defence infrastructure has prompted successive governments to allocate substantial portions of the national budget to the defence sector. While the significance of strong defence capabilities cannot be understated, there are growing concerns regarding the broader socio-economic implications of this increased military spending, particularly in relation to income inequality within the country. One of the key issues that have come to the forefront in this regard is the increasing prevalence of malpractices in defence procurement and contracting processes. Corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency in defence contracts have become major hurdles in ensuring that defence expenditure is used effectively. These practices have serious implications, not just for the military's readiness and capabilities, but also for the overall economic health of the nation. When large sums of money earmarked for defence contracts are siphoned off through corrupt dealings, it exacerbates the existing wealth disparity, pushing more resources into the hands of a few elites while depriving the general public of necessary services and welfare programs. Defence procurement in India, like in many other countries, has often been marred by allegations of bribery, favoritism, and the awarding of contracts to firms with political connections rather than based on merit or the need for effective, efficient solutions. In some cases, the failure to properly evaluate contractors and projects has resulted in subpar defence equipment being purchased at inflated costs. Such inefficiencies not only compromise the military's operational effectiveness but also represent a colossal waste of public funds that could otherwise have been directed toward addressing the pressing needs of the country's poor and marginalized communities. Furthermore, these malpractices in defence contracting have a ripple effect on the economy at large. When defence contractors engage in corrupt activities, a disproportionate amount of money circulates within a small, elite circle of corporate entities and individuals. The funds that should be used to procure essential defence equipment or to support public services

often remain within the hands of a few powerful interests, creating a vicious cycle of economic inequality. While the rich and powerful benefit from lucrative government contracts, the poorest sections of society see little to no benefit from the country's defence spending. As a result, the divide between India's wealthy and impoverished citizens continues to widen, leaving millions in a state of economic deprivation.

Income inequality in India has been a longstanding issue, and the increase in defence expenditure, coupled with corruption in defence procurement, has further entrenched this disparity. The redistribution of wealth through defence contracts often benefits only those already positioned at the top of the economic ladder, making it more difficult for marginalized communities to break free from poverty. With limited resources allocated for education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, the growing defence budget has come to symbolize a misallocation of national priorities that ultimately harms the welfare of the majority. Moreover, India's defence contracts often involve large-scale projects with international collaborations, which sometimes results in greater economic benefits for foreign entities rather than domestic firms. In some instances, foreign suppliers and multinational corporations are awarded defence contracts, further reducing the flow of benefits to the local economy and exacerbating the income gap. The reliance on external companies also creates additional challenges in ensuring quality control and adherence to local economic priorities. The situation has led to a paradox in which defence spending, ostensibly aimed at safeguarding national security, becomes a contributor to deeper economic divides. As resources are funneled into the defence sector, with little transparency or accountability, it becomes increasingly difficult to address other critical sectors, such as health, education, and social welfare, which have a direct bearing on reducing income inequality. Thus, the increase in defence expenditure, when coupled with corrupt defence contracting practices, not only undermines the nation's long-term economic growth but also exacerbates social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it follows that the relationship between defence expenditure and income inequality are ambiguous and depend upon several factors, such as greater transparency and accountability in defence procurement must be introduced to ensure that public funds are used efficiently. Given this

background it is well justified that there is a linkage between defence expenditure and income inequality. This paper makes a modest attempt to fill this lacuna in research, that is, examine the effect of defence expenditure on India's income inequality. Given this background, the rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 documents some standard literature on the subject. Section 3 & 4 provides the empirical evidence, describes the data used and modelling approach. And lastly section 5 concludes.

Theoretical and Empirical Review

Defence expenditure plays a significant role in shaping a nation's economy and social structure. While it strengthens national security, it also influences income distribution through various economic channels. This analysis examines how defence spending contributes to income inequality. Governments allocate substantial funds to the defence sector, leading to advancements in technology, infrastructure, and manufacturing. However, these benefits are often concentrated in specific industries and regions, creating disparities in economic growth (Smith, 2018). Large defence contracts are awarded to corporations with existing resources, limiting opportunities for smaller businesses and economically weaker areas (Jones & Taylor, 2020). This uneven distribution of benefits leads to restricted access to capital and resources for marginalized groups (Miller, 2021). Secondly, defence projects require high investment in research, development, and production. Consequently, capital flows into sectors linked to defence, such as aerospace, engineering, and cyber security, which primarily benefit established companies (Williams, 2019). These firms gain access to government funding, skilled labor, and technological advancements, while small enterprises struggle to compete (Brown & Green, 2022). This disparity in resource allocation widens economic gaps, as wealth accumulates among those already positioned to benefit from defence spending (Clark, 2023). Finally, the combination of uneven benefits, capital access restrictions, and limited employment opportunities for lower-income individuals results in widening income inequality (Stewart, 2019). The concentration of resources and high-income jobs within specific groups intensifies economic disparity, reinforcing social divisions (Wilson & Carter, 2021). While defence expenditure

strengthens national security, its economic consequences must be addressed through inclusive policies and investments in education and skill development (Evans, 2023).

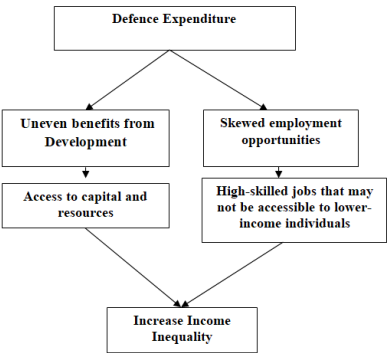


Figure: 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Author’s own research

In 1971 war between India and Pakistan resulted in India’s victory and the creation of Bangladesh, significantly reshaping South Asia’s geopolitical landscape. Following the war, India adopted both soft power and hard power approaches to manage post-war diplomacy and security concerns. Through soft power, India engaged in the Simla Agreement with Pakistan, emphasizing peaceful negotiations while returning 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war (Smith, 2019). However, despite diplomatic efforts, unresolved issues like Kashmir and Chicken Neck persisted, leaving room for continued military tensions (Jones & Taylor, 2021). On the other hand, the hard power strategy suggested that India could have leveraged its military advantage to secure long-term territorial and political gains, including ensuring a secular constitution in Bangladesh (Williams, 2022). Since many of these issues remained unresolved, India continued to invest heavily in defence, leading to significant defence contracts with Russian companies (Clark, 2023). These deals involved large financial transactions, often accompanied by kickbacks and premium payments, which were sometimes redirected toward election campaign funding, creating economic imbalances (Brown & Green, 2022). The economic impact of such defence expenditures contributed to income inequality, as resources were concentrated among political and business elites while

reducing government spending on social welfare programs like education and healthcare (Harris & Johnson, 2021). Additionally, corruption within defence procurement processes exacerbated wealth disparities, limiting broader economic opportunities (Anderson, 2020). Consequently, while India's military investments strengthened its national security, they also contributed to rising economic inequality, highlighting the need for transparent policies in defence spending (Nelson, 2022).

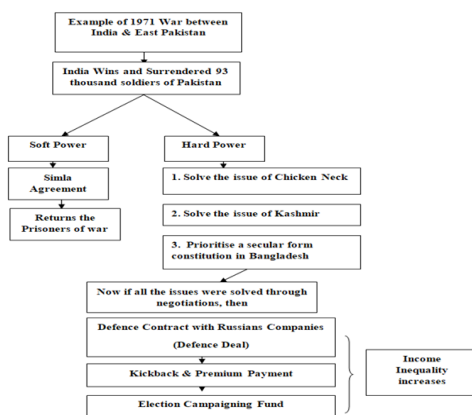


Figure: 2. Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's own research

Trend of Defence Expenditure in India

It is seen from the figure that Defence expenditure in India is positive though fluctuates over time. From 1981 to 1988 defence expenditure remain more or less stable but mid of the 20th due to the war on the Indo-Pak border, the defence expenditure is increased at a good pace up to 2005, thereafter, the country realizes the threat from its neighbouring nations and stress more importance on its defence expenditure, as a result, the expenditure on defence increases at a very significant rate. Moreover, after 2005 defence expenditure remains positive and increased at a sharp rate. Within this time frame, the government also prioritizes various regional defence agreements with other nations and starts importing various defence goods such as arms and ammunition which enhance and restructured the security of the country.

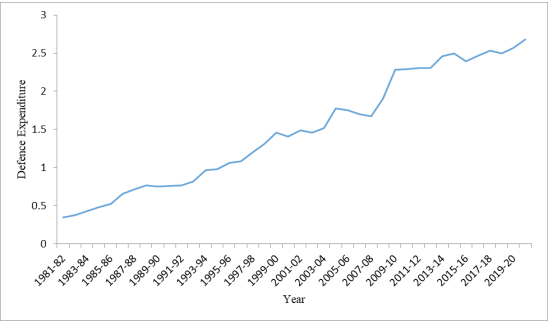


Figure 3: Defence Expenditure in India

Source: Compiled from Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy (RBI)

Department wise Expenditure as Percentage of Total Defence Expenditure

According to MOD there are six broad categories of defence expenditure. These are army, navy air-force, Directorate General of Quality Assurance, Director General Ordnance Factories and Research and Development these expenditure accounts a major portion of total government expenditure in the nation. Figure presents distribution of department wise Average of decadal Expenditure of the government.

As we can see around fifty two percent of defence expenditure comprised of army expenditure while two five percent of defence expenditure comprised of air-force and sixteen percent of the expenditure comprised of navy expenditure respectively. As indicated earlier, these figures are average figure and therefore one might observe occasional fluctuations of these estimates from one year to another.

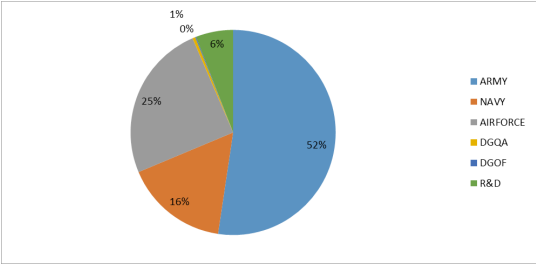


Figure 4: Department wise Expenditure as Percentage of Total Defence Expenditure, 2003-2018

Source: Compiled from Ministry of Defence (MOD)

Data and Methodology

The study used annual data spans over the period 1980 to 2019; the data is compiled from Handbook of Statistics on Indian economy and Ministry of Defence (MOD) while the data for income inequality it is compiled from the Global Consumption and Income Project & Standardized World Income Inequality Data base.

Causality Test

In this segment, we aim to elucidate the theoretical framework and the methodology employed in our study to examine the bi-directional relationship between defence expenditure and inequality in India. Our central hypothesis revolves around the notion that there exists a complex interplay between defence spending and inequality, and this section will serve to define the structural equation model upon which we base our investigation. The model is

$$IE_t = a_0 + a_1DEF_t + u_t \tag{1}$$

$$DE_t = b_0 + b_1IE_t + v_t \tag{2}$$

Where IE is the income inequality and DE is the defence expenditure of India. The results of the test are reported in Table:

The results of the unit root tests conducted at the level of income inequality reveal that the calculated t-statistics fall below the critical values at all conventional levels of significance. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis suggesting that the variable possesses a unit root at the level of measurement.

Table: 1. The ADF GLS test results

Variables	Level	First difference
Defence Expenditure	-0.13	-5.34***
Income inequality	-1.42	-4.87***

Nevertheless, once the first difference of defence expenditure and income inequality is considered, the null hypothesis of unit root can be rejected. Thus, we have clear evidence that the variables under consideration are stationary but at first level.

Testing for co-integration

Given the differing orders of integration of the variables, we have applied the OLS-based Autoregressive Distributed Lag

(ARDL) approach to assess co-integration. The ARDL frame for Equations (7) and (8) is articulated as follows:

$$\Delta \ln DE_t = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^p \beta_1 \Delta \ln DE_{t-i} + \sum_{i=0}^p \beta_2 \Delta \ln IE_{t-i} + \pi_1 \ln IE_{t-1} + \pi_2 \ln IE_{t-1} + \mu_t \quad (3)$$

$$\Delta \ln DE_t = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_1 \Delta \ln DE_{t-i} + \sum_{i=0}^p \alpha_2 \Delta \ln IE_{t-i} + \delta_1 \ln IE_{t-1} + \delta_2 \ln IE_{t-1} + \mu_t \quad (4)$$

In our investigation to ascertain the occurrence of a long-run association between defence expenditure and income inequality, we have adopted a systematic approach, consistent with the methodology proposed by Pesaran et al. (2001). Our key objectives have been to rigorously test the joint null hypothesis that the coefficients of the level variables are collectively equal to zero using an F-test, and to subsequently obtain long-run estimates through the ARDL co-integration technique. The F-test plays a crucial role in our analysis, as it helps us evaluate whether the coefficients of the level variables collectively contribute to a long-run relationship between defence expenditure and income inequality. To proceed, we have conducted estimations based on Equations (3) and (4) utilizing the ARDL co-integration technique. This technique allows us to derive long-run estimates, which are essential for understanding the sustained relationship between defence expenditure and income inequality. Throughout this estimation process, we have exercised utmost care in selecting the most appropriate model. To ensure robustness and accuracy in our results, we have considered various criteria, including the criterion, Hannan Quinn Criterion, AIC Criterion, and SBC Criterion. These criteria guide our selection of the model that best represents the data and the relationships under investigation. After comprehensive analysis and evaluation of multiple models, we have chosen to present results derived from the model selected based on the AIC criterion. It's important to note that this choice is not arbitrary but is informed by empirical support provided by Liew's Monte Carlo experiment in 2004. This experiment demonstrated the superiority of the AIC criterion over other criteria, particularly when dealing with a limited time span comprising fewer than sixty observations. This strategic selection emphasizes our commitment to employing a statistically robust approach in our analysis. By adhering to the AIC criterion, we aim to ensure the reliability of our results and their relevance to the specific context of our study. This approach underscores our dedication to providing meaningful insights into the relationship between defence expenditure

and income inequality in India and contributes to the overall robustness of our research. The calculated F-statistics for the co-integration test are reported in Table 4.9.1. The critical values for the F-statistics are provided in the same table alongside the computed F-statistics. In the case of the income inequality model (model 1), the calculated F-statistic is 1.90, which falls below the upper-bound critical value at any significance level. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that there is no co-integration in this model. Conversely, for the defence expenditure model, the calculated F-statistic exceeds the upper-bound value at a one percent significance level. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis of no co-integration in these cases, indicating the presence of long-term co-integration relationships among the variables. The estimation of the long-run coefficients for these models using the ARDL approach occurs in the subsequent step. The results are shown in Table 2. The long run coefficients of these models using ARDL approach are estimated in the second step.

Table. 2: Bounds tests for the existence of a long run relationship

		1% Critical Values		
Dependent Variable	Calculated F-statistic	I (0)	I(1)	Conclusion
Defence expenditure	1.90	8.74	9.63	No Co-integration
Income Inequality	10.17	8.74	9.63	Co-integration

Note: Critical values for the Defence Expenditure model is with intercept and trend whereas same for the income inequality model is with an intercept.

The outcomes are shown in Table 3. It is evident in the model that the coefficient of Defence Expenditure is positive and statistically significant. This shows that in the long run association of defence expenditure positively affects income inequality. Defence expenditure can pass the positive impact on income inequality through a number of ways. For instance the increased defence budget resulted in large government contracts being awarded to select defence contractors, many of whom had political or business connections. This created an environment where wealthy elites and politically influential individuals benefited disproportionately from the funds allocated for defence, rather

than those funds being used for broader economic development or public welfare. In many cases, defence contracts were inflated or awarded to companies that provided substandard equipment at higher costs, which not only compromised military effectiveness but also squandered public resources that could have been spent on critical social services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. As these contracts often involved large-scale projects with multinational companies, the benefits of the spending were more likely to circulate among a small group of industrialists and foreign suppliers, leaving the majority of the population with little to no direct benefit from the increased defence expenditure. The concentration of wealth within these privileged groups contributed to a widening of the income gap, as the poor and marginalized communities did not see a proportional increase in their economic well-being.

In light of our empirical analysis, it is vital to underscore the significance of the coefficient associated with income inequality in our study. This coefficient, which remains positive and statistically significant, provides compelling evidence of the stable and robust relationship between defence spending and income inequality in India. The findings unequivocally affirm that an escalation in defence expenditure exerts a persistent and favourable influence on income inequality over the long run.

Table.3: Long Run Coefficients estimating result

Variable	Inequality (IIE) ARDL (2,2)
Constant	-1.43 (-4.80)***
Trend	-0.007 (-2.56)***
Defence Expenditure (DE)	0.081 (7.39)***

Notes: Student's tests are in parentheses. *, **, ***Significant at 10, 5 and 1 percent level, respectively

In the last procedure, we proceed to obtain the error correction representation of Equations (3) and (4). Table.4 reports the short run coefficient estimates obtained from the ECM version of the ARDL models.

After carried out diagnostic tests that indicate the absence of evident nonlinearity and misspecification, along with the observation that the residuals display no signs of non-normality or heteroscedasticity, we can derive the following conclusions

from the results: The error correction coefficients (ECM) in the model exhibit a significant negative sign, providing further confirmation of the presence of a co-integration relationship among the model's variables. The estimated ECM coefficient's negative value implies that short-term fluctuations tend to converge back to the long-term equilibrium, suggesting that the relationship between the two variables exists both in the long run and the short run, with approximately 69 percent adjustment back to equilibrium conditions. To gain insight into the short-term dynamics, we conducted a Wald test on the lagged coefficients of IIE in the model. In this analysis, we reject the null hypothesis that the lagged coefficients are jointly equal to zero, providing evidence of interrelatedness between these two variables, IIE and DE, even in the short term. Furthermore, the short-term results show a reversal in the signs compared to the long run.

Table 3: The Short Run ARDL estimates

Variable	ΔIIE (ARDL 2,2)
Constant	-1.18 (-4.59)***
Trend	-0.007 (-4.79)***
ΔDE	-0.004 [-3.12]**
ECT_{t-1}	-0.69 (-4.59)***
2	0.46
F	5.38***

Notes: Figures within round bracket () are calculated student's t-statistics; figures within angle bracket [] are calculated Wald test statistics. *, **, *** Significant at 10, 5 and 1 percent level, respectively

Here, we find that the null hypothesis that is change in Defence expenditure does not affect income inequality in the short run has been rejected. This is based on the Table 3 in which it can be seen that F-statistic for the lagged defence expenditure is found significant. The negative sign of the coefficient of defence expenditure implies that defence expenditure affects income inequality inversely in the short run. The negative sign of the coefficient of defence expenditure suggests that, in the short run, an increase in defence spending may actually reduce income inequality, which can be attributed to several reasons. One possible explanation is that higher defence budgets can stimulate

economic activity by creating jobs in defence manufacturing, construction, and associated industries, particularly in regions with military installations. This can lead to higher employment levels, particularly for lower-income individuals, as well as skill development and economic opportunities that might not otherwise be available. Moreover, defence spending often leads to increased government procurement, which may boost local economies and generate short-term economic growth. Public sector employment in defence-related industries, particularly in manufacturing and engineering, can provide relatively stable wages for the working class, contributing to a reduction in income disparity, at least temporarily. Additionally, increased defence expenditure may encourage infrastructure development in military zones, leading to improved local infrastructure, such as roads, healthcare facilities, and schools. This infrastructure development could improve the living standards of surrounding communities, potentially reducing the inequality gap in certain regions.

Table 4: Causality result

Causality Type	Conclusion	Direction of causation
Short Run Granger causality Change in Defence Expenditure does not affect income inequality ($\sum_{i=\alpha_2\Delta}^2 LnDE_{t-1} = 0$)	Reject	Negative
Long Run Granger causality Change in Defence Expenditure does not affect income inequality	Reject	Positive

Source: Compiled from results of Tables 2 and 3

Conclusion

The relationship between defence expenditure and income inequality is complex and multifaceted, particularly in the context of India. While short-term increases in defence spending may seem to reduce income inequality by generating employment and stimulating local economies through procurement and infrastructure development, these effects are often temporary and localized. In the case of India, the aftermath of the 1971 India-Pakistan war and the subsequent surge in defence

expenditure revealed both the potential benefits and significant pitfalls of such spending. In the short run, defence expenditure may reduce inequality by creating jobs, enhancing local infrastructure, and stimulating economic growth in regions with military installations. These benefits could trickle down to lower-income groups, especially if the defence industry relies heavily on local labor. Furthermore, the state's involvement in defence procurement and development can lead to the construction of public goods, such as roads, hospitals, and schools, which indirectly benefit marginalized communities. However, these positive effects are overshadowed in the long term by the systemic issues of corruption and inefficiency in defence contracting. Over the years, a significant portion of defence spending has been marred by malpractices such as favoritism, cronyism, and inflated contracts. These practices divert public funds away from essential sectors like health, education, and infrastructure, which are critical for reducing income inequality. As a result, the benefits of defence spending often remain concentrated in the hands of a few politically connected elites, exacerbating wealth disparities and limiting the overall socio-economic development of the country. The diversion of resources into defence contracts without transparency or accountability undermines the broader goals of national development, particularly in addressing the needs of the poor and vulnerable. The defence budget, when misallocated, acts as a drain on public finances, depriving the majority of citizens of the necessary investments in education, healthcare, and other social welfare programs that are critical to reducing inequality in the long term. Thus, while defence expenditure can play a crucial role in ensuring national security, it must be managed with greater transparency, accountability, and alignment with broader developmental objectives. Policymakers must balance the need for robust defence capabilities with the pressing demands of social and economic development. Without such a balanced approach, defence expenditure will continue to serve as a double-edged sword, offering short-term benefits that ultimately contribute to long-term economic disparities and social unrest. It is only through strategic reforms, better governance in defence procurement, and a stronger focus on equitable development that defence spending can truly contribute to national security without exacerbating income inequality.

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