Manuscript Chapter Two

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Abstract

This is the second chapter of the book.

Chapter 2 - Theory

This chapter develops a comprehensive theory that explains how and why particular features of a state's domestic environment influence the degree to which the three central principles of civil-military relations effectively constrain the behavior of civilian and military actors. The theory developed in this chapter argues that two variables in particular drive the degree to which civilian and military actors adhere to the central principles of civil-military relations. These variables are political polarization and the prestige of the military.

This chapter proceeds in four broad sections. The first provides an overview of the theory, defines the components of the theory, and shows how the components of the theory fit together. The second section, the longest of this chapter, defines the variables of polarization and military prestige, and then describes how these variables actually constrain the behavior of civilian and military actors. This second section concludes with the presentation of hypotheses to be tested, analyzed, and explored throughout the remainder of the book. The third section of the chapter examines alternative explanations and addresses endogeneity concerns that are present within the theory. The fourth and final section of the chapter summarizes the theory and then briefly discusses the logic behind the empirical methodology employed in the empirical chapters that follow.

Section 1: Overview of the Theory

The core argument of this book is that the two independent variables of political polarization and military prestige influence an intervening variable, the constraining influence of the central principles of civil-military relations. This intervening variable in turn impacts the dependent variable, the political behaviors that military and civilian actors engage in that involve the military. A visual representation of this theory is shown in Figure 1. In the paragraphs below, I define the individual components of the theory in reverse order, beginning

with the dependent variable.

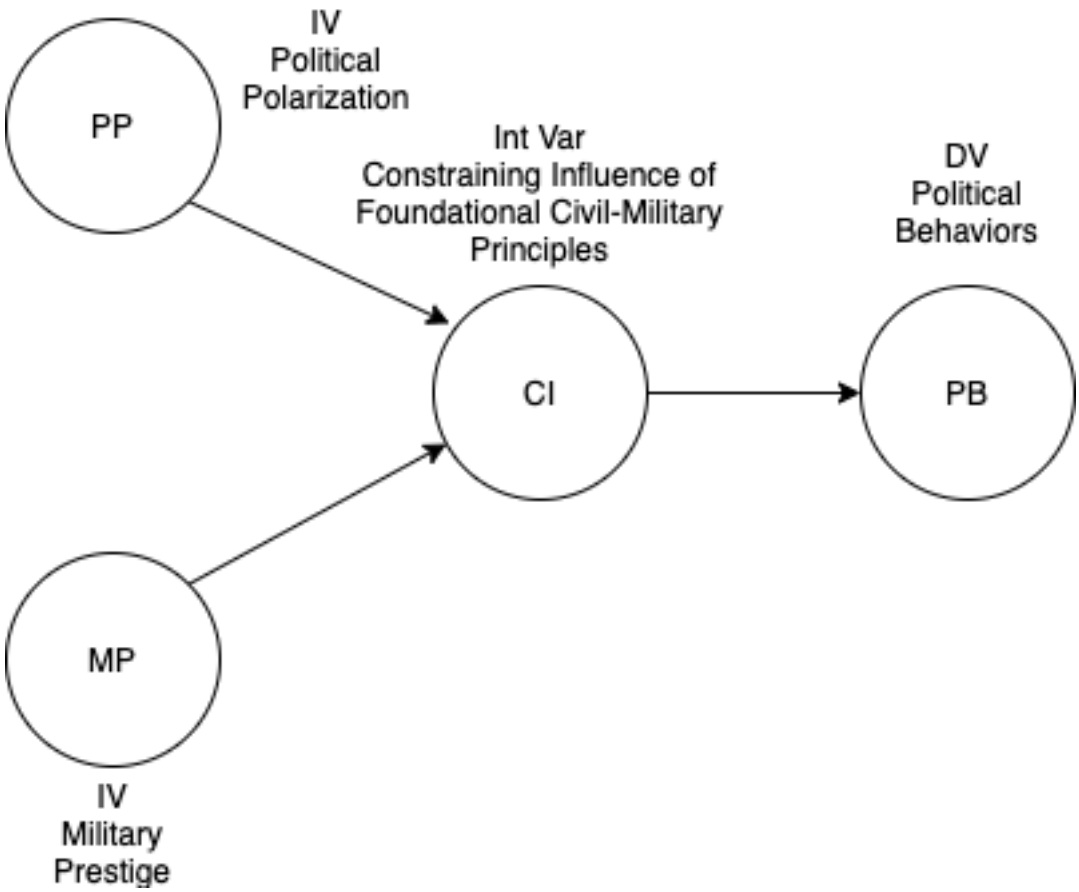

Figure 1: The Impact of Polarization and Military Prestige on Political Behaviors Involving the Military

The Dependent Variable, Political Behaviors Involving the Military

In general, a political behavior involving the military is any action that invokes or harnesses the military for primarily a political purpose, or in a way that results in significant political impacts. Civilian and military actors can and often do engage in different types of these behaviors. But this general definition is not particularly helpful. As those who read Clausewitz know, militaries always accomplish generic political ends, and we can all agree that it is tough sometimes to know, both theoretically and practically, where the line between politics and the military should be drawn.

Towards this end, the three central principles of civil-military relations can help us more precisely define political behaviors that involve the military. The political behaviors that we should be concerned about involving the military are those acts undertaken by civilian or military actors that violate one or more of the following central principles of civil-military relations: civilian control of the military, non-partisanship of the military institution, and military non-interference.

There are at least two major advantages to developing and employing a framework that measures political behavior involving the military by adherence to the three central principles of civil-military relations. The first advantage is one of consensus. That is, there is a sense of unity among scholars and practitioners surrounding the primacy of these principles. As the last chapter argued, scholars such as Samuel Huntington as well as his critics share the aspirational ideal of military and civilian actors adhering to the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference of the military. This is helpful insofar as such a framework is already well positioned to meet at least some semblance of approval.

The second and perhaps greater advantage to the framework offered here is its ability to measure civilian and military adherence to the central principles of civil-military relations over time. This is perhaps an especially important advantage in our current era, and particularly in the United States, where there seems to be much discussion and concern (at least in the late 2010s and early 2020s) in the culture about the military, its role in politics, and whether certain political leaders have overstepped their bounds, at times, by inappropriately involving the military in politics. The framework offered here enables us to compare behaviors involving the military in one era to another era. Such a comparison can better inform our current situation in important ways. First, however, we need to better understand more specifically the types of political behaviors that military and civilian actors can engage in that involve the military. The following paragraphs explore such behaviors, beginning with those committed by military actors.

Political Behaviors Available to Military Actors

Previous scholarship has discussed many of the ways in which military actors can and do engage in behavior that involves the military in conspicuously political ways. For instance, Brooks (2009) notes that political behaviors undertaken by military actors are actions that are designed to influence "policy outcomes" or generate "political costs" that a civilian leader must contend with (Risa Brooks 2009, p. 213). Such a definition is consistent with the broad definition above, i.e., any action that invokes or harnesses the military for a primarily political purpose.

It would be difficult — perhaps impossible — to render an exhaustive list of these political behaviors available to military actors. However, we can conceive of these behaviors existing along a theoretical spectrum. At one end of the spectrum are behaviors that tend to be public, obvious, and deliberately intended to alter policy outcomes or partisan futures. Two such behaviors are acts of "explicit insubordination" by the military and "politicking," a behavior that would include things like endorsing political candidates for office or organizing voting drives (Risa Brooks 2009, p. 213). What is important to note here is that military actors who engage in these particular behaviors are in almost every case, by definition, violating the principle of civilian control (in the case of explicit insubordination) and non-partisanship of the military (in the case of politicking).[1]

At the opposite end of the spectrum are behaviors that tend to be far more subtle — perhaps not even fully visible to observers — and which are not always deliberately intended to alter policy of partisan outcomes. Three such behavior types include those of forming alliances with civilian interest groups, lobbying in pursuit of a particular cause, and selectively

[1]The act of resignation in protest is one behavior that scholars differ with respect to whether such behavior is normatively inappropriate. Many, such as M. Shields (2017) and Jim Golby (2015) view the behavior as an overtly political act of defiance and thus normatively wrong for military officers to engage in. Other scholars instead argue that a military officer's moral agency should at least allow for the possibility that resignation is not only appropriate, but a justified and necessary outcome, particularly in response to an immoral order which violates the officer's moral conscience. For such views, see Dubik (2014); Snider (2014); and Milburn (2010).

providing advice or complying with civilian directives.[2] It is important to point out that due to both the subtlety of these behaviors, as well as the variety of goals that military actors may seek to achieve by engaging in these behaviors, it is not always clear whether such acts violate one or more of the central principles of civil-military relations.

Observers would want to know more about what goal military actors pursued by engaging in behavior such as lobbying and forming alliances, and even then, final judgments could prove difficult. Consider the hypothetical case of military actors allying with Congressional leaders in order to pass legislation designed to curb veteran suicide — a problematic issue that has understandably gained more attention in recent years. On the surface, we would likely conclude that such behavior is not inappropriately political, and thus does not violate the principles of civil-military relations. But we might conclude differently if, for example, the military actors in this hypothetical case were primarily forming alliances with Congressional leaders from one political party at the exclusion of another, a development that could present the behavior as partisan in nature. Similar difficulties may arise in the case of military actors partially complying or slow-rolling a legitimate Congressional directive. Observers would need to show moderately compelling evidence that such behavior was deliberately political, and not simply the military giving other tasks — such as warfighting — higher priority.[3]

Somewhere between the ends of this theoretical spectrum, however, fall a host of other political behaviors that are not subtle, and furthermore, which may or may not violate the principles of civil-military relations, depending on how such behaviors are committed and the greater context in which these behaviors occur. The behavior of a military actor running for office is one such behavior. There are at least two factors that need to be examined in the case of a military actor running for office, including the timing of the candidate's announcement for political office relative to his or her military service, and the degree to

[2] Brooks (2009) calls the first two of these behaviors "alliance building" and "shoulder tapping".

[3] See Risa Brooks (2020) for a recent example of the military providing selective advice, particularly with respect to how senior US military leaders shaped their advice to civilian leaders regarding the surge to Afghanistan in the early stages of the Obama Administration.

which the candidate harnesses his or her record of military service while campaigning for political office. As to the first factor, it would be important to ask whether the military actor declared his or her candidacy for political office after his or her military service was completed, or before. Assuming the military actor did not declare himself or herself for office while serving on active duty, this study's view is that the military actor did not violate the principle of non-partisanship by engaging in such a behavior.

The second factor — the degree to which the military actor harnesses his or her own military service while running for office — is more complicated. Is it wrong for a political candidate who is also a veteran to showcase one's military service in an attempt to garner votes? Unsatisfactory as the answer may be to some, a fair (but perhaps unsatisfactory) answer is that it depends. For example, long-serving Republican Senator Lindsey Graham appeared in his military uniform after retiring as a Colonel in the US Air Force (Troyan 2015). Such an example stands in stark contrast, however, to the case of an active duty military officer actively who campaigned for the US House of Representatives in 2021 while wearing a military uniform (Beynon 2021), a case that clearly violated the principle of non-partisanship.

Another obvious behavior that may or may not violate the central principles of civil-military relations is that of writing opinion commentary (a behavior that is examined in systematic fashion in the following chapter). When General Colin Powell, while serving as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the early 1990s, wrote a series of op-eds in which he articulated his views regarding the use of force, his behavior generated political costs for Bill Clinton — a political candidate when Powell's first op-ed was published who then became President (Powell 1992a; Powell 1992b). Moreover, engagement in this behavior — by a highly respected and the nation's top military figure — undoubtedly influenced public opinion, and thus constrained the options available to President Clinton as a number of crises erupted in the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda. In my own personal view, Powell's

actions in this instance violated the principle of civilian control of the military. Yet not every op-ed penned by a military actor criticizes the commander-in-chief's foreign policy. When retired admirals and generals write op-eds about the importance of remembering our nation's fallen on Memorial Day, for instance, they are not creating political costs for the President to contend with.

Table 1 lists and describes several types of political behaviors that military actors may engage in. Several of these behaviors were first theorized by Risa Brooks (2009), but I have built upon her typology by adding several additional types of behaviors and by placing them in a general order of severity (Risa Brooks 2009, p. 219). That is, near the top of the table are those behaviors that by definition tend to violate the principles of civil-military relations. As discussed in this section, these include the behaviors of explicit acts of insubordination and partisan politicking. The table also includes six other behaviors which, unlike the top two, are those that may or not be inappropriately political, depending on various facets relating to *how* such behaviors are conducted and the *context* in which these behaviors occur.

Political Behaviors Available to Civilians

Like military actors, civilians can also engage in behaviors that harness the military for political purposes. A good definition of political behaviors by civilians that adversely "politicize" the military comes from Jim Golby's (2021) concept of "civilian activation," which he defines as efforts "by civilian political elites to court or co-opt the military for personal, partisan, or electoral gain" (Jim Golby 2021, p. 153). Scholars of comparative politics have long noted the behaviors civilian leaders may engage in that involve the military, particularly for the purposes of consolidating their hold on power. For instance, Quinlivan (1999) articulates a series of "coup proofing" behaviors civilians may undertake in order to prevent military forces from launching a coup, such as establishing "parallel" militaries who hold a "special loyalty" to the regime in power (Quinlivan 1999). Similar civilian efforts are described and

Table 1: Political Behaviors Undertaken by Military Actors

Behavior	Description	Audience	Examples	Facets to Consider
Explicit Insubordination	Refusal to Follow Lawful and Moral Orders	Mass Public, Congress, Fellow Military Officers	General Ulysses S. Grant refuses to follow the order of President Andrew Johnson to go to Mexico in 1865	Few; assuming order is legal and moral, such behavior by definition violates the principle of civilian control (at least)
Politicking	Retired officer endorsements; organizing vote drives	Mass public	Crowe's endorsement of Clinton in 1992; Frank's endorsement of Bush in 2004	Few; this behavior by definition violates the principle of non-partisanship (at least)
Grandstanding	Threat of resignation or resignation	Mass public, Congress, executive branch	Hypothetical; if Eric Shinseki had resigned in 2003	Reason for resignation - is the disagreement related to policy (in which case, such behavior inappropriately political), or about moral values (in which case, some scholars view the behavior as potentially justifiable)?
Public Appeal	Public, value-laden commentary	Mass public	Colin Powell's 1992 statements on intervention in Bosnia	Content and message that comprises the public appeal
Running for Office	Prominent Veterans run for office	Mass Public	Ulysses S. Grant, Winfield Scott Hancock, Dwight Eisenhower, and Wesley Clark (ran for President); William Westmoreland (ran for Governor); James Stockdale (Vice Presidential candidate)	Timing of candidacy announcement; Extent of relyong on military imagery during the campaign
Shoulder Tapping	Military leaders setting an agenda by bringing issues to attention of politicians and engaging in lobbying-like activities on behalf of those issues	Congress	Military Mobilization of key members of Congress over gays in the military in early 1990s	Goal and purpose of mobilization effort
Alliance Building	Military leaders form ties with civilian interest groups	Congress	Air Force and Lockheed Martin over procurement of F-22 raptor	Objective of Alliance-Building Activity (is it a political or partisan goal?)
Selective Obedience/Compliance	The military obeys parts of orders and regulations, but delays or ignores others	Mass public, Congress, Fellow Military Officers	Pentagon slow-rolling investigation into the use of funds in Afghanistan	Legitimacy of the Reason for Delay or Non-Compliance

[a] Much of the above is reproduced from Brooks, Risa (2009), 'Political Activities of the Military' in American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era, Eds. Suzanne Nielsen and Don Snider.

articulated by De Bruin as "counterbalancing" behaviors (De Bruin 2019).

Though such examples are thought to occur primarily in autocratic or weakly democratic regimes, there are nonetheless a host of political behaviors that civilian leaders in mature democracies can undertake that involve the military and which seek to further a leader's political or partisan advantages. Before diving into these behaviors, it is important to note that just as contextual factors were important to consider when examining political behaviors conducted by military actors, so too it is vital to examine contextual facets when assessing behaviors committed by civilians that involve the military. This may be even more important than in the the case of military actors, for as Golby notes, "elected political leaders often provide alternative explanations to legitimize or excuse their behavior," and observers cannot readily or easily observe the "intent" of the civilian actors who engage in such behaviors (Jim Golby 2021, p. 152).

Again conceiving the range of possible political behaviors that civilian actors can undertake within mature democracies as a spectrum, we can envision one end consisting of those behaviors that are committed exclusively for partisan or political advantage. These would include acts such as partisan stacking, which involves Presidents appointing military actors to positions primarily on the basis of shared partisan or ideological alignment, or the act of engaging in a diversionary deployment, which involves Presidents engaging in act of military force at home or abroad in order to divert the public's attention away from some other (usually domestic) political issue or set of issues.[4] In both cases, such behaviors would likely violate at least the principle of non-partisanship. By appointing military officers on the basis of partisan or ideological advantage instead of merit, a President has violated the principle of non-partisanship in obvious ways, as partisan alignment has replaced objective qualification standards as the most important criteria for attaining a higher rank or position. And by engaging in a diversionary deployment, a President has violated the principle

[4]The act of civilians appointing officers on the basis of shared partisan convictions is one manifestation of what Huntington called "subjective civilian control." See Huntington (1957), 80-81 for more details.

of non-partisanship because in so doing, the President is likely seeking to reduce the domestic political pressure he or she is facing.[5] Other behaviors near this end of the spectrum include that of the use of military actors to speak at major partisan gatherings (such as political conventions), or to explicitly endorse or attack political candidates during political campaigns. These instances of electoral swaggering committed by a civilian would almost certainly violate, at a minimum, the principle of military non-partisanship.

On the other end of the spectrum lie behaviors that likely involve the military for partisan advantage, but in a far more subtle form, and to a far less degree. Suppose, for instance, that a Presidential candidate seeks to garner support for his or her healthcare plan. The candidate asks an elderly military veteran to travel with him or her in order to publicly affirm the candidate's plan, a behavior that would fall under what I call the category of "the military as sales reps". Perhaps such behavior involves the veteran standing up during political town halls and being asked to briefly affirm that the candidate's healthcare plan indeed takes care of the nation's veterans in a satisfactory manner. There is no doubt that such behavior seeks to leverage the military for partisan gain broadly speaking, but in this case, the political candidate is using a much subtler means (an elderly veteran talking about the specific issue of veteran healthcare) than, for instance, employing a prominent military actor at a political convention (a retired general or admiral endorsing the candidate for office). Use of the military as sales reps can take on other forms as well. Some observers, for example, alleged that President George W. Bush's use of General David Petraeus, an immensely popular military figure, to garner Congressional support for the Iraq "surge" strategy in 2007-2008 politicized

[5]One such example involves President Donald Trump's deployment of several thousand troops to the US border with Mexico in the fall of 2018 in response to an impending caravan of migrants approaching the US from South America. Some observers saw the move as a type of political move ahead of that year's midterm elections, including several retired Army Colonels who penned an op-ed titled, "Trump's Border Stunt Is a Profound Betrayal of Our Military." See Adams, Wilkerson, and Wilson III (2018) for more details. At the same time, others saw the move not as a politically motivated use of the military, but rather as a drastic yet shrewd response to a legitimate crisis that had developed on the US southern border. For such a viewpoint, see Wright (2018). Whether the move was inappropriately diversionary or properly decisive depends largely on the observer's point of view.

the military in unhealthy ways (Coll 2008). Others disagreed on the grounds that the former general, having both the knowledge and experience from having served previously in Iraq, was precisely the right individual to speak to Congress about the new strategy.[6]

Several other political behaviors available to civilian actors may similarly violate one or more principles of civil-military relations, again depending on a number of contextual factors, including how and why each is undertaken. One example is that of "showcasing the Troops," which could include civilian political candidates who, in the course of running for office, feature generic military images and symbols in their campaign ads (a behavior that is explored in detail in chapter four). The common practice of featuring general images of US Troops while patriotic music plays in the background of a political advertisement is likely not problematic. However, if an advertisement instead features images which contain the faces of recognizable senior military leaders in uniform, while the narrator simultaneously states something along the lines of, "Candidate X is trusted by the military to defend the nation," such an advertisement is more problematic, as it directly conveys a partisan connection between the candidate seeking office and the particular military officers shown in the ad.[7]

Instances of Presidents visiting and engaging US Troops, either at home or abroad, is another form of showcasing the Troops that can likewise be controversial. These instances may or may not violate principles of civil-military relations. Presidents have long visited military bases to meet and interact with Troops, make major policy announcements, and in the case of visiting service academies in particular, to preside over officer graduation and commissioning ceremonies. President Trump's visit to Iraq in 2018 generated a moderate level of controversy, however, because as some critics alleged, the President's visit had more

[6] My own point of view in this instance is that while there is room for debate, it was proper and appropriate for General Petraeus to spearhead the collection of Congressional support to help turn around a war that, for the previous several years, had been trending in the wrong direction.

[7] In the latter instance, assuming the military officers whose faces were featured in the advertisement were not given a chance to refuse appearing in the ad, the civilian actor (either the candidate or the candidate's campaign team) has committed an inappropriate political behavior.If the officers did agree to appear in the campaign ad, the behavior would still be inappropriate, but the responsibility would be shared between the civilian candidate and the military actors.

the look and feel of a partisan campaign stop than that of a Commander in Chief visiting Troops in combat. Indeed, some of the Troops reportedly adorned hats and other "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) gear during the President's visit, which the President happily signed (Fritze 2018). The President's visit in and of itself was not problematic. However, the way in which some of the Troops appeared to endorse the President in clearly partisan tones *was* problematic.

Another behavior available to political actors that is both controversial and that may or may not violate the principles of civil-military relations is that of placing "brass in the cabinet." This behavior involves civilian actors who appoint military actors, civilian or retired, to key positions within the government. This behavior is fairly common, and it seems to be gaining momentum. For instance, Presidents George W. Bush, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden all appointed prominent military figures to key civilian billets in their administrations.[8] There is little consensus surrounding at what precise point such behavior becomes problematic, but three factors that should be considered are the relative prevalence of such behavior (which could be measured by examining the percentage of key, top-tier civilian positions filled by retired military officers), the former military rank of those retirees appointed to civilian positions, and the length of time that has passed since the prospective appointee retired from military service. The second and third factors in particular address concerns aimed at the degree to which civilian positions are in fact filled by bona-fide civilians.

Table 2 lists and describes several types of political behaviors that civilian actors may choose to undertake that involve the military. Some behaviors, such as partisan stacking and diversionary deployment, contain clearly partisan currents, while others, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, involve a far greater degree of subtlety. Unlike in the case of

[8]President George W. Bush appointed General (Retired) Colin Powell as his Secretary of State. President Donald Trump appointed a number of active and retired flag officers to positions of prominence, including Army Lieutenant General (Retired) Mike Flynn and later, Army Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster as his National Security Advisors, Marine Corps General (Retired) James Mattis as Secretary of Defense, and Marine Corps General (Retired) Michael Kelly as White House Chief of Staff. President Joe Biden appointed Army General (Retired) Lloyd Austin as Secretary of Defense.

military actors, observers must remember that civilian political actors are to a certain extent inherently partisan creatures, a reality that can complicate rendering decisive judgments regarding instances of behavior that violate principles of civil-military relations. This word of caution is not intended to provide excuses for civilian actors to behave in ways that challenge the norms of democratic civil-military relations so much as to draw the reader's attention to the fact that judgments involving civilian actors, and some types of behaviors that are available to civilians in particular that involve the military, tend to prove more difficult.

Together, Tables 1 and 2 show that there are a variety of behaviors available to military and civilian actors that have the potential to involve the military in politically unhealthy ways. Furthermore, when the three central principles of civil-military relations are in fact the standard by which political behaviors involving the military are assessed, these tables also show that political behaviors exist on relative spectrums, where some types of behavior almost certainly violate one or more principles of civil-military relations, whereas other types of subtle behaviors may not always do so. Finally, the tables illumine some of the contextual factors to consider when attempting to determine whether certain behaviors in fact violate one or more of these central principles. With the dependent variable studied in this book explained and defined, we now shift focus to examining the two independent variables of this study, political polarization and military prestige.

Political Polarization

In the academic discipline of political science, polarization generally refers to the movement of thoughts and attitudes within a political community away from the political center and toward more ideological extremes (Hare and Poole 2014; Abramowitz 2018). Pulling on this thread a bit more, we can state that the level of polarization describes the degree to which a society shares fundamental values, is capable of incorporating divergent worldviews in the political sphere, and the overall degree to which a state's values unite or divide

Table 2: Political Behaviors Undertaken by Civilian Actors

Behavior	Description	Audience	Examples	Facets to Consider
Partisan Stacking	Assigning/removing military officers to/from positions on the basis of shared partisan or ideological convictions	Mass Public, the Military	Andrew Johnson replaces Generals Sheridan, Sickles, and Pope as 5th, 3rd, and 2nd Military District Commanders during Reconstruction	Few; such behavior is driven by partisan considerations and violates principle of non-partisanship
Diversionary Deployment	The use of military force - at home or abroad - for the purposes of diverting public attention away from a civilian leader's domestic troubles	Mass Public	Allegations that Bill Clinton launched missiles against targets in Africa in 1998 as domestic controversy brewed surrounding his inappropriate behavior with a White House intern; Allegations that Donald Trump deployed Troops to the US border with Mexico ahead of the 2018 midterm elections	Extent to which the intent of such action is done for narrow partisan considerations
Electoral Swaggering	Featuring military officers (active or retired) to speak at political conventions, or to endorse/attack political candidates	Mass public	Generals Flynn (Republican) and Allen (Democrat) speaking during 2016 party conventions on behalf of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton	Few; the use of prominent military figures at political events almost always violates principles of non-partisanship
The Military as Sales Reps	Sending military actors to garner support for civilian leader policies	Mass public, Congress	Generals Grant and Custer, along with Admiral David Farragut, accompany President Johnson on 'The Swing Around the Circle' Tour ahead of the 1866 midterm elections; the Bush Administration's use of retired military elites to publicly support multiple controversial policies during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	Object being sold (partisan or not); Prominence of the military sales figure
Brass in the Cabinet	Appointing military actors (active and retired) to key positions within the cabinet	Mass public	President George H.W. Bush appoints LTG Colin Powell as National Security Advisor in 1987; President Trump appoints several military officers (active and retired) to key postings in the cabinet, including James Mattis as Secretary of Defense and John Kelly as head of the Department of Homeland Security (later White House Chief of Staff)	Prevalance of brass in the cabinet; distance (time) between the brass's military career and civilian service
Showcasing the Troops	Use of military symbols and imagery in commercials or printed material; speaking at/visiting military bases	Mass public, the Military	George W. Bush declares 'Mission Accomplished' on an Aircraft Carrier in 2003; Donald Trump visits Iraq in 2018	Extent to which the goal and feel of showcasing the Troops is partisan

a nation (Marsden 2014; Deneen 2018). There is always some level of polarization within a community (i.e., there is never no polarization whatsoever). But when polarization operates at relatively high levels, it indicates there is a modicum of discord among the populace that is higher relative to when polarization is low.

In this book, I rely on a definition of polarization that is consistent with these descriptions, yet one that includes much clearer moral — even theological — undertones. More precisely, polarization in this book denotes the degree to which public contestation exists in the political sphere over issues that squarely involve what theologians refer to as the concept of the *image of God*. I contend that where there is political polarization in a community, there is also contestation over how the concept of *the image of God* features in and is applied to our politics.

Why attempt to include the concept of *the image of God* in a definition of polarization? Is this really a necessary component of this study, or does attempting to make such a connection risk going down a rabbit-hole that will ultimately result in little benefit for a study of civil-military relations? At first glance, the concepts of *the image of God*, polarization, and civil-military relations may seem disconnected. But as this book argues, this is far from the truth. Rather, the concepts are heavily inter-related. The concept of *the image of God*, when applied rightly, is a critical component to ensuring that societies live in a orderly and harmonious manner. When societies live in an orderly and harmonious manner, the level of polarization within a political community will be relatively low. Finally, when polarization is relatively low, civilian and military actors are likely to adhere to the central principles of civil-military relations, facilitating healthy civil-military relations. Simply put, a brief understanding of the concept of *the image of God* will prove greatly beneficial in understanding not just what polarization is, but why it occurs.

The following section first defines the *image of God* and argues that the concept is important in political life. Second, the section then describes America's contemporary polarizing

environment. In doing so, I connect the scholarship between political scientists and those from other scholarly fields to argue that my contention — that when heightened polarization exists, there is increased contestation over political issues that involve the concept of *the image of God* — is at least plausible, if not likely.

The third section broadly orients the reader to the levels of political polarization in United States history. I assert in this section that in the years leading up to and after the US Civil War, when political polarization existed at a relatively high level in the United States, this polarization was driven in fact by political debates and concern over slavery and civil rights for African Americans, two political issues that are highly connected to the concept of *the image of God.* This assertions helps strengthen the linkage I am making between the variable of polarization and how I am defining it, i.e., the presence of contestation over political issues that involve the concept of *the image of God.*

Before diving in, I want to clearly state that what I have in mind by the variable of polarization as the contestation of political issues involving the concept of the *image of God* is not the same thing as secularism (the erosion of religious belief in society). To understand this claim, a few considerations are warranted. First, we should note that one of America's most polarizing eras — the years leading up to, during, and after the US Civil War — was not an especially secular era, at least relative to the contemporary US, where the percentage of adults who claim no religious beliefs has risen sharply over the past several decades (J. E. White 2014). I will contend, however, that in both the mid-19th Century and the modern day United States is that several political issues divided citizens sharply, resulting in high degrees of polarization, because those issues dealt significantly with issues matters pertaining to the concept of *the image of God.* Second, as I seek to make clear below, the concept of the *image of God* is not something that applies to only some persons, and not to others. Rather, I rely on a general evangelical understanding of the concept of *the image of God* that understands that all persons, without qualification, are made in the image of God.

One of the many important implications of this statement is that even among people who strongly reject the existence of a God, the fact that they are made in his image carries consequences. That is, people and societies operate at their best — that is, the way that they are intended to — when the image of God is appropriately respected and applied in our politics. This is true regardless of the religious beliefs of the citizens of a political community.[9]

The Image of God

The concept of the image of God stems in part from Genesis 1:26-27, which in the English Standard Version of the Bible reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." In the biblical storyline, God himself spoke these words as He put the final touch on creation of the Earth by making the very first man and woman. For millenia, scholars and theologians have debated the full meaning of what it means for men and women to be made in the image of God.[10] And while I cannot present the full range of views on this topic here, the works of even just a few scholars can help establish a general understanding of the image of God and what it means for politics.

First, to be made in the image of God means that mankind, in a way that is different from other objects God made during creation (such as animals, rocks, and trees), has a special type of connection to God himself. [11] Second, and more substantively for the purposes of this book, being made in God's image denotes that God has endowed men and women with

[9]Of course, people are flawed, and they have misapplied the concept of the image of God throughout history, including in the United States and abroad. See Kilner (2015), 17-26 for an overview.

[10]For just two of the possible works to explore on the image of God, see Kilner (2015) and VanDrunen (2014).

[11]Some theologians, such as Wayne Grudem, describe this connection as a shared likeness to God in that mankind has similar aspects or traits, including the traits of moral responsibility and rationality. See Grudem (1994), 445-449 for more. However, Kilner (2015) argues that a trait-based or characteristic-based understanding of the concept of the image of God is precisely what has led to instances of one group of people abusing another throughout the course of human history. See Kilner (2015), 17-27 for more.

a clear purpose as they live out their lives on the earth. This specific purpose for mankind is "to exercise benevolent rule in this world as God's representative and under his authority" (VanDrunen 2020, p. 59).

To see this point in particular, theologians often point to what God immediately said to Adam and Eve as well as the greater context of the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:28, we are told, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Furthermore, these words take on an even clearer meaning when we understand and observe how God has created in a manner that is purposeful throughout Geneses 1. As David VanDrunen points out, God has been making things and assigning the things he makes with a purpose, including "an expanse in the midst of the waters…to separate the waters," and "a light in heaven…to separate day and night" (VanDrunen 2020, pp. 59–60). That men and women are made in the image of God means that we are to live our lives on the earth in a way that mirrors much of the way God rules, at least so far as is evident in Genesis Chapter 1. VanDrunen (2020) sums this up by asserting that mankind made in the image of God means that men and women are to live on the Earth in a way that exhibits the traits of "justice and generosity" (VanDrunen 2020, p. 60).[12]

For men and women to exhibit justice and generosity on the Earth — because they are made in the image of God — implies much for our political life, the high contours of which I can briefly comment on here. The first implication for our politics involves the universality of who is made in God's image. God fashioned the entire human race with a likeness to himself, and not just a certain group of people. All human beings are therefore made in the image of God, and thus each possesses equal worth, honor, and dignity. Policies that harm or oppress people on the grounds of their race, gender, or country of origin, for example, therefore go

[12]Or, as Wayne Grudem explains, "the fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God." See Grudem (1994), 442

against what it means for all people to be made in God's image. A second political implication involves the order, or the hierarchy, of both creation itself and the created order. As the creator who fashioned mankind in his image, God is therefore the author, center and origin of the universe. While mankind possesses inherent dignity in that men and women are made in God's image, questions and issues of moral right and wrong — the moral order — are informed first and foremost by God, and not by humans.[13] A third implication stemming from mankind made in God's image involves the general duties and responsibilities that men and women assume in the world. In other words, human beings that are made in the image of God are to live their lives in a way that honors God and his character. Men and women are concerned with living justly (exercising justice) and rightly (exercising righteousness) because we want to honor our creator, whose standards of justice and righteousness are perfect.[14]

Taking these three implications together — that every person is made in the image of God and thus possesses equal worth and honor, that God created and is head of the moral order, and that we as humans have a responsibility to live in such a way that honors this Creator God — it becomes clear that, at least for those who take the concept of the image of God seriously, they cannot easily divorce the image of God from their politics.[15] How one thinks about the concept of the image of God impacts how one thinks about several of life's perhaps most vital questions, including: what is a human being, what does it mean to be created male and female, what obligations do I owe my fellow human beings, and what is the purpose of

[13]Of course, a significant question that then arises is how can human beings who do not believe in the God of the Bible still know what moral right and wrong are? Jews and Christians generally respond by suggesting that God has a natural law that is communicated to mankind through several aspects of the natural created world itself. For more on this topic, see VanDrunen (2020), 124-150.

[14]As prominent evangelical Pastor and author John Piper explains, "images are created to image…God created us in his image so that we would display or reflect or communicate who he is, how great he is, and what he is like." See *What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?* (2013) for more.

[15]Indeed, as Wayne Grudem notes, the concept of the image of God "has profound implications for our conduct toward others. It means that people of every race deserve equal dignity and rights. It means that elderly people, those seriously ill, the mentally retarded, and children yet unborn, deserve full protection and honor as human beings." See Grudem (1994), 450.

my existence.[16]

Connecting Polarization and the Image of God in Politics

The next step in my argument consists of linking the concept of mankind made in the image of God to the variable of political polarization. To do this, I examine several political and cultural features of the contemporary United States. I begin with exploring how our polarizing political moments are thought of and explained by political scientists, most of whom, so far as I know, do not explicitly invoke the concept of the image of God when explaining polarization. However, I then examine other observations of contemporary American culture made by several theologians and cultural critics. When these observations and critiques are integrated, they point in a direction that is consistent with my contention, namely, that heightened political polarization occurs when significant contestation exists in the political sphere over issues that squarely involve the image of God.

For clarity in my argument, I am not suggesting that the world in which we live can ever be perfect, or that there can be a time when there will be no disagreement about how the image of God should be followed and applied in our politics. Such an assertion would be naive. What I am suggesting, though, is that even in the 21st Century, there are times when the political issues we face involve higher moral stakes and questions more closely related to the created order than other times. Such periods are more likely than others to result in disagreement, or contestation, in questions of public policy, because they often involve the image of God, and both whether and how the concept should be applied. When relatively heightened contestation exists concerning how the image of God should be applied to the political issues citizens face, polarization will be relatively higher compared to times when little contestation exists about how to apply the image of God to our politics.

[16]The answers to these and other important questions, many of which involve the concept of the image of God, help form our worldview. Worldview is a concept that Sire (2020) has defined as "a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart…about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being." See Sire (2020), 6-9 for a more-detailed explanation.

Contemporary polarization in the US can be described as a relative erosion of cohesion brought about by profound differences in the way people see the type of country that America should be and what it should stand for. Indeed, political scientists who specialize in the study of polarization note that the level of polarization has increased in recent years. But it is not so easy to diagnose why this has been the case. Allen Abramowitz, one of the world's leading experts on polarization, explains the causes of America's contemporary polarizing politics as "fundamentally, a disagreement over the dramatic changes that have transformed American society and culture since the end of World War Two, and that continue to have huge effects in the twenty-first century" (Abramowitz 2018, p. x). Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck (2018) argue similarly that the US has undergone profound changes over the past several decades, and specifically describe the 2016 Presidential Election — in which Donald Trump defeated the heavily favored Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton — as "symptomatic of a broader American identity crisis," and that "issues like immigration, racial discrimination, and the integration of Muslims boil down to competing visions of American identity and inclusiveness" (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018, p. 10). These scholars together assert that the US is not as cohesive as it perhaps once was.

Scholars also note that there are at least three features of today's polarized environment in America. The first is that polarization goes far beyond political differences harbored between political elites. Indeed, average and everyday citizens who identify as Democrats simply dislike those who identify as Republicans, and vice versa, at greater levels than previously seen. This phenomenon has been coined "affective polarization" (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar, Lelkes, et al. 2019; Abramowitz 2018). A second feature of today's polarizing environment is the increasing scope of the partisan battleground. Politicians and citizens do not disagree and wage political war merely over a handful of important issues, but rather over what seems like everything. Scholars have called this dynamic "conflict extension" (Layman and Carsey 2002; Layman, Carsey, et al. 2010). A third feature of politics in the US

today is the seemingly all-encompassing nature of identity politics. As any contemporary observer can attest to, group identities and political interests are heavily bound up together in issues concerning the topics of race, gender, religion, immigration, and more (J. K. White 2002; Mann and Ornstein 2012; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018).

Now we will explore observations made by scholars from outside of the field of political science on the topic of contemporary American culture. Carl Trueman, a church historian and cultural theologian, argues that many of the modern political debates and issues in the West today — especially those that involve issues of sexuality, such as the entire LGBTQ+ movement — are not so much problems that *cause* political polarization, but rather *symptoms* of a massive change that has occurred over the past decades and even centuries involving how society views the notions of selfhood and identity. Whereas individuals in previous societies generally accepted that the individual was not the center of the universe but rather part of a transcendent and sacred order, Truman argues that the modern self is ultra-focused on seeking pleasure, expressing one's self, and bucking historical notions of authority (Trueman 2020). This gradual but significant change has occurred, Truman argues, as various intellectual traditions such as Nietzche, Marx, Freud, Marcuse, and others have supplanted the more-traditional and sacred origins of identity in our modern societies. There has been a gradual rejection of the acceptance of the concept of the image of God by western societies with respect to key ways in which people live.

Truman asserts that perhaps the quintessential contemporary issue that signifies the rejection of sacred order is the transgender rights movement. Underneath the many questions that have roiled many parts of the country over the past several years on the topic of transgender rights, including whether a person can or should be able to change their gender, whether doctors should be allowed to provide gender-affirming care (Sapsford and Armour 2023), whether people should have to use bathrooms that correspond to their sex at birth (Kusisto 2022), and whether there should be strict rules for who can compete on male and

female sport teams, is a far "deeper rejection…of any and every sacred order" because a person is categorically rejecting one of the deepest of ways that he or she has been created (Trueman 2020, p. 381).[17]

We can more clearly understand polarization to involve contestation over issues that involve application of the concept of the image of God when we see that that even among those who hold religious beliefs, there seems to be little consensus and instead, significant division, about how to apply the image of God appropriately to particular political issues. This strongly suggests that those who are interested in the proper application of the image of God feel strongly about the particular issue or set of issues in question, which makes further sense when we see many of these issues as involving moral aspects. Aaron Renn (2022) notes that in less than 30 years (since 1994), American society has changed such that Christian morals and principles have gone from being seen as a generally positive thing to one in which they are now "expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order" (Renn 2022). This is a significant development in modern America, but there is even more to this story, as Renn notes. Indeed, Renn posits that since 2014 (the Obergefell Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage, to be exact), there has been a culture war "within evangelicalism itself" concerning how to function in a society where Christianity is no longer regarded positively (Renn 2022).

When we integrate the observations of political scientists with those made by Trueman and Renn above, we are able to see that contemporary polarization in the US is, at the very least, associated with issues that are rife with significant moral currents and undertones. More than this, though, it would seem that polarization especially deepens when the various sides and factions that seek to influence political issues are not merely comprised of different types, but rather when these represent worldviews that are increasingly opposed to each other in fundamental ways. Often, such opposition occurs when there is also contestation

[17] Although I focus on arguments made by Carl Trueman here, he is not alone in his critiques of contemporary American society. See also, for instance, Taylor (2007).

over the image of God and how it features into politics.

The issue of abortion in contemporary US politics continues to show this reality in perhaps the clearest of ways, as abortion is a longstanding political issue that deals with multiple facets of the image of God: what is a human life, when does a life begin, and who or what can terminate such a life, for what reasons, and how do we account in a response about the life and welfare of the mother? In the US, it seems as though one political party predominantly fights to preserve a woman's right to have an abortion, so much so that in recent years, some Democrats have advocated for abortions to be performed as late into a pregnancy as possible. Another political party has fought hard to curb abortion significantly, with few exceptions. Republicans rejoiced across the board when, in 2022, the Supreme Court, fresh with three justices appointed by Donald Trump, voted to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that since 1973, guaranteed a woman's right to choose.

At the risk of truncating what is a complex and divisive political topic, the important point here is that that common ground is unlikely to be found on such an issue, particularly when each side pursues vastly different objectives. Too much is at stake for those on both sides of the political aisle. Those who are against abortion routinely invoke the image of God along the lines by pointing out that life begins at conception, that all human beings are created by God, and therefore that only God can choose when to begin and end a life. Those who are against abortion are likely to find these arguments unconvincing, or less convincing than arguments that appeal to the health of the mother.

Table 3 captures several contemporary political topics in the United States. For each political issue, several acute questions exist that indicate how citizens feel towards a certain issue. Furthermore, for each issue, the table captures at least one instance of how the military has been impacted by the political issue, demonstrating that these are not topics that the military can avoid or stay away from altogether, much as it may wish to. Finally, the table distills how each political issue relates to the concept of the image of God.

Table 3: Contemporary Political Issues, the US Military, and the Image of God

Political Issue in the Contemporary US	Acute Questions on the Issue	Instance of US Military Impacted by Issue	How the Concept of the Image of God Relates to the Political Issue
Abortion	When does human life start?; Should women be allowed to terminate a pregnancy, and if so, until what point?	Senator Tummy Tubberville's months-long hold on military promotions in 2023 over DoD policy involving service members who elect to have abortions	When does life start?; What is a Human Being?; How does one rightly handle issues that involve both the life of a baby and the life of a mother?
Gender Roles	Are men different from women, and in what ways?	President Obama's opening of all military jobs to women in 2014; debates involving physical fitness tests for military services, and whether there should be different standards for men and women	What does it mean to be created male and female?
Definition of Marriage	What is a marriage?	Various discussions concerning what obligations Commanders and Chaplains in particular owe Troopers who marry someone of the same sex	What does it mean to be created male and female?; Is marriage something that was ordained and designed by God, or by mankind?
Transgenderism	Can I change my gender?	Different policies under Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden regarding whether Transgender Troops can and should be allowed to serve; should the military pay for gender transitions?	What does it mean to be created male and female?
Borders and Immigration	Generally speaking, are borders a good or bad thing? Should America enforce its borders? To what extent should America have a national culture?	President Trump's deployment of Troops to the US-Mexico border in 2018, and more broadly, what role, if any, should the military play in securing our national borders?	What obligations do I owe my fellow human beings?; How should a country best balance the traits of compassion and kindness with the rule of law and justice?
Personal Merit and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	What role should personal merit play in the workforce, academia, and in other arenas of life? Is it right to bypass a more-qualified candidate, and instead to select someone for a position because he or she is an ethnic or racial minority?	Should military service academies be allowed to include race as a factor in admissions (2023); debates after the death of George Floyd in 2020 as to whether the US military had a sufficient number of minorities in top leadership positions	What is a human being? What obligations do I owe my fellow human beings?
Government Control	To what extent should the government have control over my life? Can I be forced, for example, to wear masks and get vaccines because the government says so?	Should Troops be forced to get the COVID-19 vaccine, and face dismissal for refusing?	What is a human being? What obligations do I owe my fellow human beings?
National Narratives	Is the United States a systematically racist country? Should Americans be proud of their history, and to what extent? Were the founders of the US racists?	Discussions in the 2021-2022 timeframe involving whether the US military has a problem with extremism	What obligations do I owe my fellow human beings?; Are there common values that all Americans can get behind, and if there are, what are they today?

Polarization and the Image of God in the US Over Time

In political science, one of the benchmark measurements of polarization in the United States has been that of dynamically-weighted, three-step estimation scores (DW-NOMINATE), which are derived from examining roll call voting patterns among members of Congress (Jeffrey B Lewis et al. 2020). Figure 2 shows polarization levels present in the US House and Senate since the latter portions of the 19th Century (Hare and Poole 2014; Jeffrey B Lewis et al. 2020). As Figure 2 demonstrates, polarization levels in the United States were very high around 1880, and remained high before gradually decreasing early in the 20th century. The figure further shows that polarization reached its nadir in the years before World War Two, then remained at relatively low levels until approximately the mid-1970s. Since that time, however, polarization in both chambers of the US Congress has increased steadily, to the point that contemporary levels now exceed those previously recorded.

The fact that polarization existed at an extremely high level after the end of the Civil War is consistent with the notion that has previously been set forth; that is, polarization rises when the political issues that are at stake generate contestation regarding the concept of the image of God and its application. Slavery and the resulting quest to secure civil rights for African Americans, including the US Civil War, were issues that involved the image of God in the most significant of ways. Even Abraham Lincoln the Presidential Candidate — hardly an abolitionist — invoked the image of God implicitly when forming his thoughts on how to debate Stephen Douglas, his Illinois political opponent, in the early 1850s. There is in fact strong evidence that the concept of the image of God weighed on Lincoln quite heavily as he formed his political opinions, even though he did not explicitly use the term *image of God.* For instance, the renowned Lincoln scholar Allan Guelzo recounts that Lincoln, "needed the morality of natural law, even of natural theology", to counter Douglas's stances on the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" when slavery threatened to be spread into the territories of Kansas and Nebraska (Guelzo 2010, p. 188). Guelzo recounts that Lincoln believed black

people were, as human beings, of infinitely more worth than mere property, and thus, that the proponents of popular sovereignty who favored expansion of slavery to the West on the grounds that slaves constituted property "in the same sense that hogs and horses are" were deeply mistaken (Abraham Lincoln cited in Guelzo 2010, p. 190).

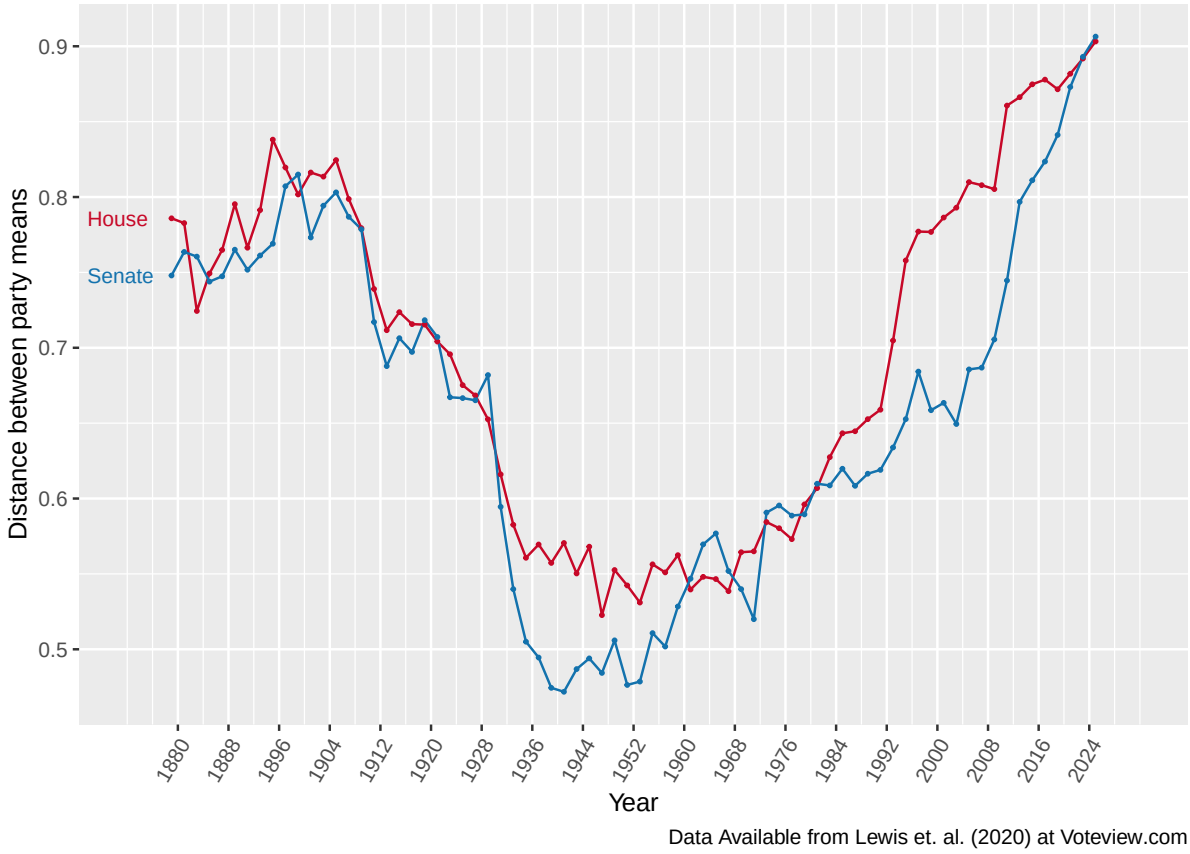

Figure 2: Liberal-Conservative Partisan Polarization by Chamber, 1880-Present

Polarization has been measured in a second way in the American politics literature. First derived by Iyengar et al. (2012), measurements of "affective polarization" or "negative partisanship" have been derived by using data from the American National Elections Studies (ANES) (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Beginning in the late 1970s, the ANES has asked a series of "feeling thermometer" questions, in which respondents are asked to provide, on a scale ranging from 0-100, how they feel about a range of topics, including their feelings about political parties. Figure 3 graphs the results of how partisans feel about members of

their own party, members who affiliate with the opposite party, the difference between these two answers, and a total level of affective polarization, which is the sum of the difference for each of the two main parties in the United States. As Figure 3 shows, measurements of how favorable each party is have remained more or less constant over the past several decades. However, partisans have increasingly rated those on the opposite side of the political spectrum as increasingly less favorable over the same time period. In other words, data shows that partisans do not necessarily like the party with whom they affiliate more, but rather that they disdain those on the other side of the aisle at greater levels.

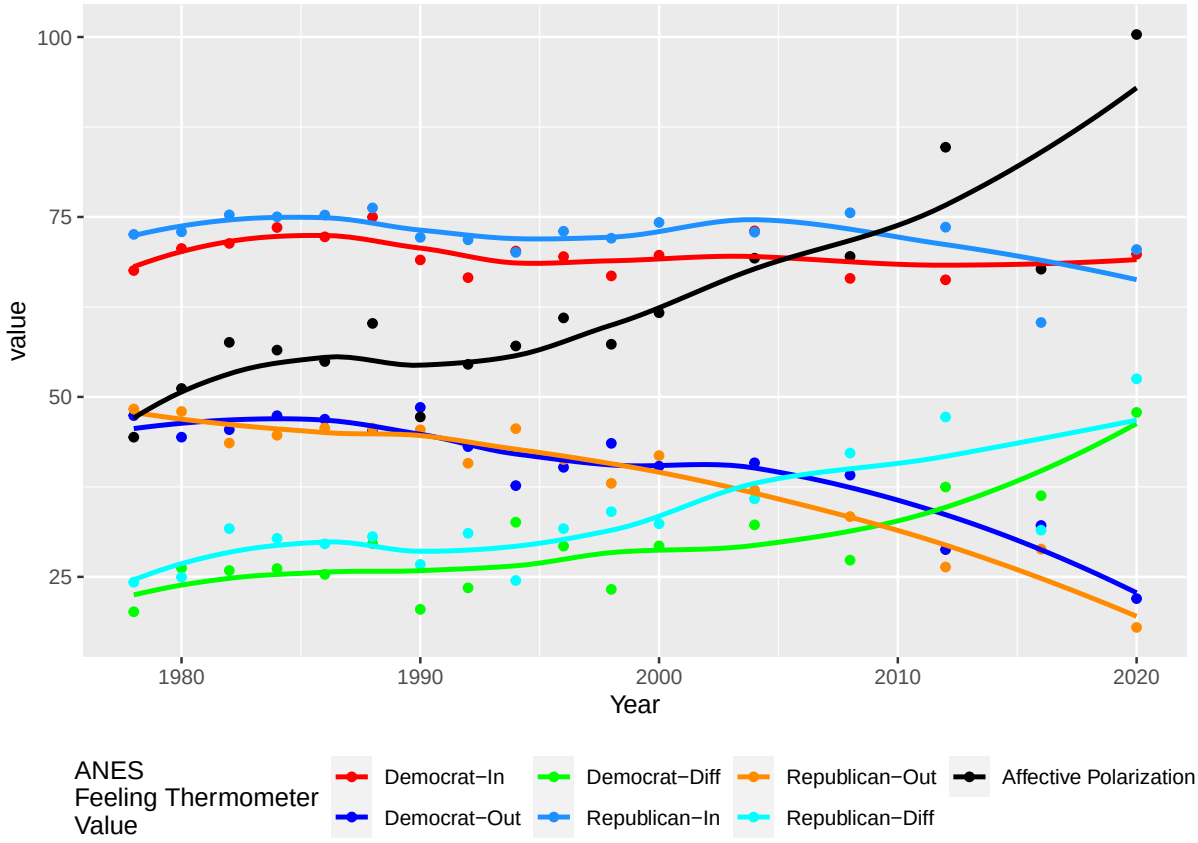

Figure 3: Affective Polarization and various 'Feeling Thermometer' Scores in the US, 1978-2020

Summary - Why Polarization Matters

One does not have to look hard today at American political culture to notice our current levels of high polarization. Indeed, it is little wonder that both candidates running for President of the United States in 2020 claimed that the very "soul of the nation" was at stake (Dias 2020). Like anyone else, members of the US military are not immune from holding strong views and opinions on central questions that involve the concept of the image of God. As previously explained, these types of questions and issues tend to invoke deeply moral and often theological commitments. Thus, when central and consequential issues and concerns are at stake that relate to the image of God, members of the military and civilian actors will increasingly behave in a way that advances the values and worldview that they believe in, even if doing so runs counter to the central principles of civil-military relations.

Military Prestige

The second independent variable examined in this study is military prestige. In defining prestige, I follow the sociological literature regarding the stratification of professional occupations and professions. This literature denotes two components that comprise the variable of prestige (Davis 1942; Jaco 1970). The first component deals with how important an occupation or profession is in terms of its positional role in society, or what Davis (1942) calls, "the invidious value attached to any given status or office" (Davis 1942, p. 312). This component of military prestige thus has in mind the relative *importance* or *centrality* of the military with respect to the function it serves and the roles and tasks it carries out. We might anticipate that the importance or centrality of the military varies as a result of factors such as the threat environment. For example, a society that lives under the constant threat of attack by another nation, and whose military is constantly working to ensure that these threats are defeated, may view its military as more central to the state than another society that rarely faces significant threats.

The second component of prestige examines society's evaluation of the *performance* or *excellence* of an occupation or profession, or the manner in which its members "[carry] out the requirements of [their] position" (Linton, 1936 as cited in Davis 1942, p. 312). Applying this to the prestige of the military, this second component of prestige thus deals with the degree to which society deems the military is skilled. We might say that this component of prestige involves the degree to which the military meets society's expectations, or is judged to be competent by society.[18] For example, if a state's military is victorious in battle, one might expect that state society's evaluation of the skill of its military to increase. Similarly, the presence of significant scandals might result in a relative decrease in a society's evaluation of the skill, or excellence, of its military.[19]

The distinction of these two components of military prestige matters insofar as that theoretically, the two components may operate at different levels simultaneously. It is possible, for instance, for a military to be viewed as highly central or important, but nonetheless not very skilled, or conversely, for a military to be relatively unimportant to society, yet rather skilled at the tasks society expects it to perform. Furthermore, it follows that changes to the overall level of military prestige may be driven by one or both of the components described above. For example, the US military victory during the Gulf War likely did not primarily alter the centrality of the military in terms of the centrality of the function it provided the United States. The military had, well before the Gulf War, occupied a central role — defending the nation — throughout the Cold War period. But the victory in the Gulf War did change how Americans perceived the military's overall skill and professionalism. When President George H.W. Bush proclaimed, in 1991, that "It's a proud day for America. And, by God,

[18]This second component of military prestige is probably most similar to "public confidence" in the military, a variable that is explored in great detail by Peter Feaver in P. D. Feaver (2023). In this book, particularly in the empirical chapters, I rely on a measure of public confidence in the US military to serve as a proxy for military prestige

[19]Feaver (2023) found some proof, in fact, for these specific causal pathways using experimental data, though he cautions that the actual effects may be lessened once partisanship is accounted for. See P. D. Feaver (2023), 91-118.

we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all," his comments pointed to the fact that the US military had shed any lingering perceptions or doubts regarding its abilities, dating back to the end of the Vietnam War (Bush 1991).[20]

The following section briefly traces the contemporary US military's high level of prestige through each of the two components described above. With respect to the military's centrality to the nation, the following section argues that for a majority of the post-World War Two era, the US military has played a central role in helping to craft and implement American foreign policy. With respect to society's perception of the military's professional excellence, the section then describes how society's level of public trust in the military has changed over the past several decades.

The Centrality of the Military Institution

Over the past seventy-five years, the United States instituted a series of significant bureaucratic reforms that firmly cemented the military as a central player in American foreign policy by expanding the military's scope and influence within the government. The first of these significant reforms occurred after World War Two, when President Truman signed The National Security Act of 1947 in order to unify the defense and intelligence establishments. Despite emerging victorious in Europe and in the Pacific, World War Two had proven that the American military services did not always work well together (Kaiser 2014). On several occasions, they had proven to be parochial and self-interested, traits that were less than helpful in a resource-constrained environment, such as war.

The National Security Act sought to make the military establishment more effective and more efficient. It created new institutions such as the National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the US Air Force (*National Security Act of 1947* 1947), and more formally, merged the Departments of War and Navy into the "National Military

[20]Senior military leaders who participated in the Gulf War likewise viewed that victory as the signature expression of an Army that had, in the two decades after Vietnam, rebuilt itself. See Kitfield (1997).

Establishment," which essentially served as the precursor to what became the Department of Defense in 1949 (Locher 2001). These reforms were not only reflective of the central role that the nation's military would play in international affairs in the years to come, but they also proved to be quite successful.[21]

The military underwent a second set of institutional defense reforms known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act in the 1980s. Named after Senator Barry Goldwater and Congressman William "Bill" Nichols, several incidents occurred in the early 1980s that exposed deficiencies in the way the US military conducted operations. For starters, the failed Iranian hostage rescue in 1980 demonstrated that the separate military services were unable to operate in an integrated, or joint, environment (Kitfield 1997). The ultimate goal of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was to ensure that in an age in which military technologies and equipment were becoming increasingly sophisticated, American national defense interests would be identified and prioritized over and above the parochial organizational interests of the individual and separate military services (Locher 2001).

Importantly, among the most significant of the changes wrought by the Goldwater-Nichols Act was codification of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the President's principal military adviser, a change which meant that all advice from the respective individual service chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps would flow through the new Chairman (Locher 2001; Wills 2016). Also important, the Goldwater-Nichols Act created several regional combatant commanders, each of whom would report directly to the Secretary of Defense (Locher 2001; Wills 2016). In essence, the Goldwater-Nichols act institutionalized both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Combatant Commanders as incredibly powerful military positions — positions that remain very powerful today.

[21] So influential was the National Security Act that fifty years after its signing, President Bill Clinton stated that as a result of the institutions created by the National Security Act and the people who had served in them, a generation had "helped to secure the peace and prosperity that America enjoys…the success of their efforts and of the historic legislation enacted half a century ago is reflected in an outstanding record of achievement: nuclear war averted, the Cold War won, and the nations of the world turning to democracy and free markets." See Clinton (1997) for more details.

A further source of the contemporary military's importance to the nation involves the widening scope of responsibility the military has assumed, especially in the post-9/11 era. Although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq each involved a sizable civilian component for at least a portion of the wars, the military nonetheless assumed control for a significant portion of the day-to-day decision making of these conflicts, even over issues that once were, at least ostensibly, primarily civilian responsibilities.[22] So central has the military become as a result of the legislative changes wrought over the past several decades, combined with nearly two decades of overseas experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, that one scholar has argued that in essence the Pentagon has replaced the State Department as the government's "organizational center of gravity for U.S. national security and foreign policy" (T. Schmidt 2019).[23]

Finally, an important indicator of centrality within the government is the size of the military budget compared to other government departments. Figure 4 displays each department's total budget in 2016 real dollars between 1962-2016. The graph clearly hints at the idea that the Defense Department has taken on a growing role relative to the State Department over the past several decades. The resulting inference is that the Department of Defense continues to be a very large player in shaping American foreign policy.[24]

[22]The topic of the interaction (or lack thereof) of military and civilian efforts during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts has become a burgeoning literature that includes a mixture of official government reports, autobiographical memoirs, and works that offer other theoretical and historical insights. For a sample of this literature, see *The Iraq Study Group Report* (2006); Ricks (2006); Chandrasekaran (2007); Hodge (2011); Chandrasekaran (2013); Gallagher (2019).

[23]Another scholar states that the US military's institutional influence has become so powerful that asking for "Pentagon 'help' is like being hugged by an eight-hundred-pound gorilla: it can squeeze the life right out of civilian efforts." See Rosa Brooks (2016), 91 for more details

[24]In the empirical chapters of the book, the predominant measures of military prestige rely on measurements of public trust and confidence in the military, as reported through various public opinion polling. The relative size of the DoD versus State Department Budget could also be used, but these budgetary differences likely also reflect institutional developments, such as the advent of the All-Volunteer Force, which is very expensive to maintain. For this reason, public opinion measurements of trust and confidence in the military are better (though still imperfect) measures of the military's overall level of prestige, and are used throughout the book.

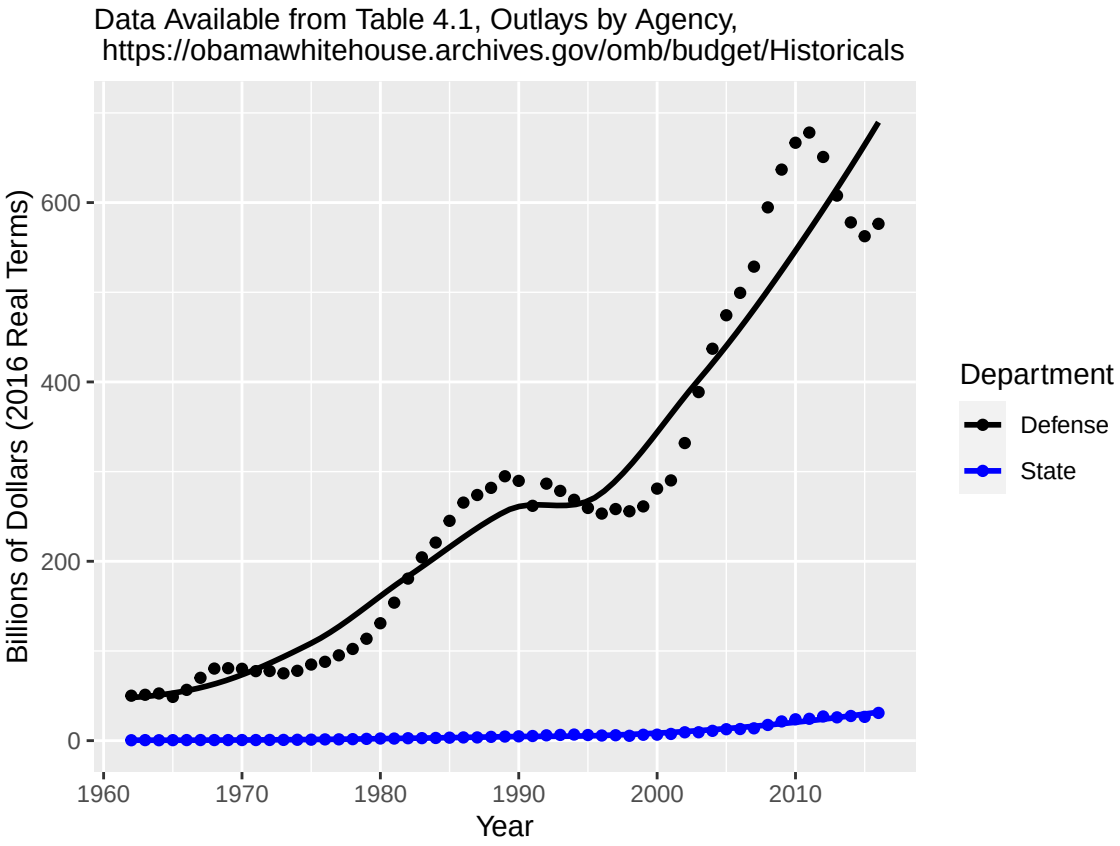

Figure 4: Budgets for US Departments of Defense and State, 1962-2016

The Military's Skill & Expertise

The second factor comprising the military's high level of prestige involves society's perceptions of the military's skill or excellence. There are few direct measurements of this component specifically, but a closely-related measurement is the degree of public trust — or confidence — that Americans place in the military.[25]

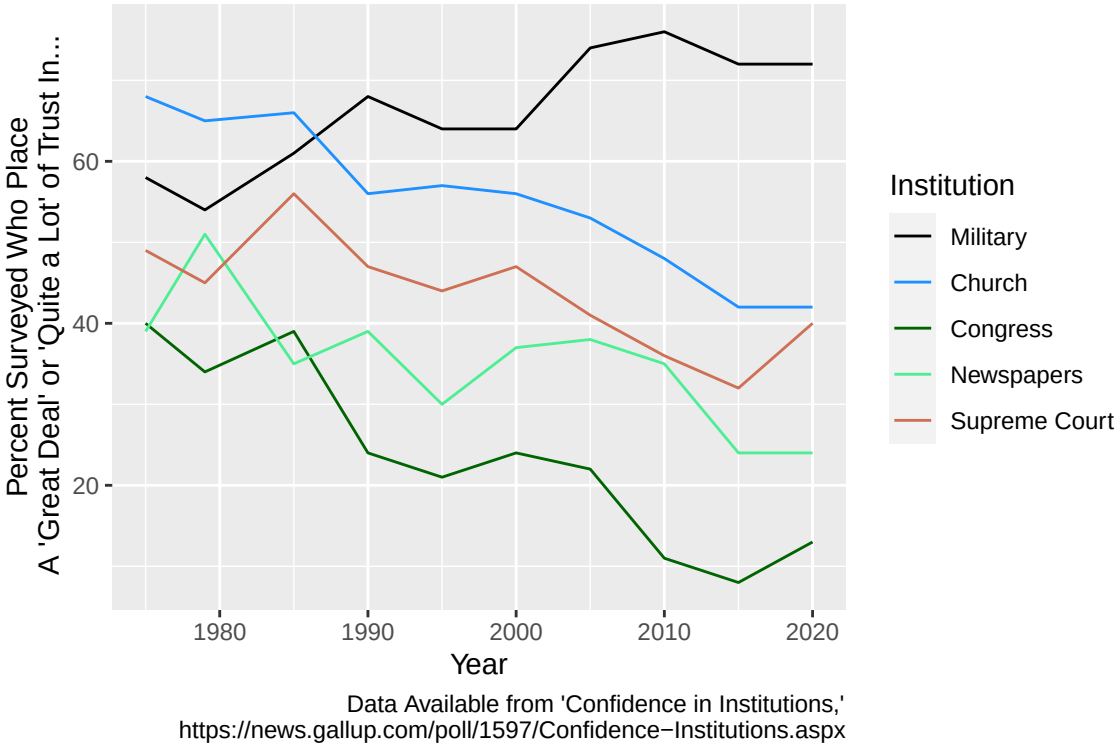

Figure 5: Public Trust in American Institutions Over Time

While recent polls show that trust in the military may in fact be slipping (McIntyre 2021), the fact is that relative to other institutions, Americans still seem to respect their military considerably. According to recent Gallup public opinion polls, 72 percent of Americans indicate that they trust the military a "great deal" or "quite a lot" – the most of any institution,

[25]The definitive work on public confidence and the US Military is P. D. Feaver (2023). One of the key findings in the book, which relies on novel survey data taken in the 2019-2020 period, is that there appear to be several broad factors that influence public confidence in the military, including performance, professional ethics, partisanship, and peer pressure. But, because the book relies on survey data, Feaver notes that it is not possible to state if these factors are responsible for changes over time in the levels of public confidence in the military. See P. D. Feaver (2023), p.90 for more details.

to include Congress (13%), the Presidency (39%), the police (48%), the Supreme Court (40%), and the church/organized religion (42%) (*Confidence In Institutions* 2020). Moreover, trends in trust of various American institutions over time reveal that, whereas trust in the military has generally increased over the past 45 years, trust in the other institutions has generally declined or remained the same. These trends are displayed in Figure 5.[26]

This section has focused on the institutional military. But it is important to at least allow for the variable of military prestige to operate along an individual level, too. Indeed, history shows that military leaders can and often do become widely popular, particularly if they earn fame and renown on the battlefield (corresponds to the seconding dimension of the variable of military prestige, skill/excellence) or if they are serving in important roles (corresponds to the first dimension of the variable of military prestige, centrality). Generals George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and David Petraeus are all such figures. In this book, I argue that when the prestige of the military is high, civilian and military actors possess a greater opportunity to use the military in ways to leverage public opinion relative to when military prestige is low. Furthermore, when military prestige is high, I argue that civilian and military actors may be less inclined to act in ways that adhere to and are consistent with the fundamental principles of civil-military relations.

Section 2 :How Polarization and Prestige Impact the Constraining Influence of the Central Principles of Civil-Military Relations

Having defined both the dependent and independent variables in this chapter, and having defined the central principles of civil-military relations in the previous chapter, we can now blend these elements into a cohesive theory. First, I argue that high levels of political polar-

[26] Again, here the insights of Feaver (2023) are incredibly helpful. His work points us to *why* Americans tend to trust their military. Among these insights, he finds that the following beliefs tend to result in increasing levels of trust and confidence placed in the military: belief that the military is competent, shares the values of citizens, is not too partisan, is truthful, and is ethical. See P. D. Feaver (2023), 85-90.

ization provide a *motive* for military leaders to engage in political behaviors that challenge the central principles of civil-military relations. Then, I argue that a high level of military prestige provides *both* military and civilian leaders with an *opportunity* to do the same (Finer 1962). Finally, I argue that the combination of relative levels of polarization and military prestige lead to the formulation of four distinct domestic political environments in which civil-military relations occur.

Polarization - A "Motive" to Challenge the Principles of Civil-Military Relations

Increasing polarization serves as a *motive* for military actors to behave in ways that violate the central principles of civil-military relations. This occurs because high polarization denotes there is division within a society regarding how the concept of the image of God should be applied to political issues that are often moral in nature. Highly polarized climates signify not merely political differences within a community, but, especially at extreme levels, incompatibility regarding the underlying moral values and worldviews that seek to shape society. Thus, as polarization rises, military actors increasingly encounter situations in which they must make judgments about whether to abide by the fundamental principles of civil-military relations, or to engage in acts of behavior that, although violating the central governing principles of civil-military relations, are nonetheless congruent with a particular set of values that these military actors support. The extreme example of this in US history occurred on the eve of the Civil War, when, of the 1,080 officers on the rolls of the active officer corps, 286 (26.5%) resigned (Murray 2012, p. 9). This act of resignation for the purposes of taking up arms against the Army in which one had just served is perhaps the epitome of a behavior that violates the principles of civil-military relations. And yet each who chose to resign had to weigh the decision to resign against other factors, including where he stood with respect to the issue of slavery, an issue with significant ramifications regarding the image of God.

Military officers are taught to eschew politics, but doing so is more difficult the more that politics involves moral issues, which as this chapter has argued, are more likely to surface during periods of relatively high polarization. Military officers are part of the American society that they serve. Before they join the military, military officers are young men and women who grow up somewhere. Like the rest of American society as a whole, military actors collectively become polarized as different worldviews and ideologies compete for supremacy in the political square. Furthermore, after joining the military, each military officer further develops his or her own worldview, and relies on certain moral values to help guide his or her behavior. When worldviews are increasingly at odds with each other to the point that they become incompatible — which is the case when contestation is present over issues that squarely involve the image of God, as I argued earlier in this chapter — military officers will encounter greater friction as they execute their routine duties.

This friction has at least two sources. First, highly polarized environments increase the frequency with which military officers encounter situations in which they have to choose between supporting and obeying their civilian leaders or following the dictates of their own moral conscience. Rising polarization, in other words, ultimately leads to a problem of authority, and specifically, who or what is the highest authority that military officers will obey. Second, highly polarized environments increase the magnitude of the disparity that exists in these choices because the difference in outcomes (e.g., obeying and supporting a civilian leader or following one's conscience) is more likely to involve not merely a minor difference in political opinions, but a difference in worldviews, moral values, and the purposes that seek to influence American society. We can see both of these sources by examining those who resigned from the US Army on the eve of the Civil War and later joined the Confederate States Army. First, while these officers may have held views that were favorable towards slavery in some cases for many years prior to resigning, the issue of slavery and its extension became more pronounced and thus, more urgent, in the 1850s. Second, those who ultimately resigned

likely eventually came to the realization at some point that there could be no middle ground. The choice they faced was to stay in the US Army and to take up arms against slavery and their home states, or to not (and for many, to instead join the ranks of the Confederate States Army). Indeed, the perceived difference in outcomes of this choice was significant.

Thus, as polarization rises, some military officers will be willing to violate the principle of civilian control when they deem that the preferred policies held and promulgated by a particular civilian leader or administration are not simply politically unwise, but wrong in a moral sense. If rising polarization reflects differences about what moral values and worldviews are to govern the nation and society, then the definition of which orders or policies are immoral will increasingly depend on the worldview and moral values held by a particular military officer relative to those espoused and promulgated by a civilian leader.[27]

In a similar vein, some military officers may be willing to violate the principle of non-partisanship if they believe that one of the major political parties possesses an agenda that is not simply wiser from a political perspective than the other party, but rather one which aligns to the moral views of the officer on a particular issue or set of issues. Finally, some military officers might be motivated to violate a standard of "non-interference" of the military into certain areas of state policy if they believe that the military should play a greater role in advancing the underlying ideology or values associated with a particular issue or set of issues.

Example - The Military and Race in Contemporary America

Among the clearest contemporary examples of polarization providing a "motive" for military actors to engage in political behaviors which violate the principles of civil-military

[27] Furthermore, military doctrine regarding officership and ethics has long noted the immense role of morality in guiding the behavior and conduct of military officers. For example, Army Doctrinal Publication 6-22, entitled, *Leadership and the Profession*, states that, "The Army ethic has its origins in the philosophical heritage, theological and cultural traditions, and the historical legacy that frame our nation." See Army (2019), 1-7, for more details.

relations is the issue of race in America. For any observer or participant of American politics over the past several years, it comes as no surprise that the issue of race has become one of the most polarizing political issues in the United States.[28] The military, along with many other institutions, such as primary education, corporate America and business, and religious establishments such as the church, has been thrust into discussions involving race in America and what to do about it.

At the risk of summarizing what is a topic that deserves a much fuller and lengthier treatment than can be given here, I will attempt to capture why the military and the issue of race have collided so drastically over the past few years, and to show how they have done so. In articulating this example, my aim is to demonstrate how the issue of race has served as a *motive* for some military officers to engage in behaviors that violate, or at least challenge, the principles of civil-military relations. Furthermore, the key to understanding why this has been the case is in understanding that the events and discussions that have made race in America such a visible issue over the past several years have ignited different worldviews, values, and ideologies among military officers (like the nation itself) on the topic of race.

Recent Pew Research public opinion data (2021) reveals just how split Americans are over the issue of race and what to do about it. Of Americans surveyed in July of 2021, 49% said that "a little" (34%) or "nothing at all" (15%) needs to be done "to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic background" (Center 2021). In the same survey, however, 50% of those said that "a lot" needs to be done to advance the same (Center 2021). Moreover, among the 50% who believe that "a lot" needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all, respondents were split with respect to whether current systems could accommodate the changes that needed to be made, or whether "most US laws/institutions need to be completely rebuilt" (Center 2021).

It is difficult to find any place, organization, or work space today that is not somehow im-

[28] In many ways, and as the first case study describes, this is not an entirely new issue. The military has played a central role within issues that pertain to race, including desegregation of the Armed Forces.

pacted by discussions revolving around race. The military is no exception, and strong opinions abound whether these developments and the approaches that have been implemented to achieve racial harmony actually harm or help. What cannot be denied is that beliefs and convictions on the issue of race increasingly compel behavior that aligns with one's view on this topic (and other polarizing topics). For instance, in the wake of the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer on May 25, 2020, multiple high ranking military officers penned opinion pieces that, while directly addressing President Trump's handling of protests across the United States, also more broadly revealed their own perspectives on race in the United States (Risa Brooks and Robinson 2020). For example, Retired Admiral Mike Mullen, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, penned an article in *The Atlantic* shortly after these events occurred entitled, "I Cannot Remain Silent," in which he blasted President Trump's reported use of the National Guard to clear a path through Lafayette Square in order for the President to walk to nearby St. John's Church for a photo.[29] In the article, however, Mullen further stated, "We must, as citizens, address head-on the issue of police brutality and sustained injustices against the African American community" (Mullen 2020).

This last sentence is clear evidence of Mullen's worldview, and it explains, at least in part, why he was willing to write an opinion piece that strongly and directly criticized a sitting President. The title itself, "I Cannot Remain Silent," describes how Mullen prioritized his worldview and his personal values over adhering to the principle of civilian control of the military, which likely would have resulted in either not writing the piece to begin with, or at least couching the piece in softer language that did not directly criticize the former President. To be clear, my aim here is neither to claim that Mullen was wrong for writing the piece, nor that he was right to do so, but rather to suggest that at a minimum, Mullen's

[29]In June of 2021, interestingly, the Inspector General of the US Department of the Interior issued a report in which he did not and could not corroborate any finding suggesting that Trump had given the order to use US Capitol Police to clear the park, and that the plan to clear the park had been in place for hours before Trump's walk from the Rose Garden to the church. See Montanaro (2021) for more details.

personal decision to write the piece and to criticize the former President in the process flowed directly from his personal worldview regarding race in the United States and what should be done about it.

The topic of race in America is likely to remain a motive for military officers to behave in ways that violate principles of civil-military relations for some time. More than a year after the death of George Floyd and the aftermath that followed, race in America remains a visibly hot topic, even in the military. Indeed, more than a year after Mullen's publication, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, appeared before Congress to answer questions regarding the military and its supposed stance on *Critical Race Theory* (CRT). Critical Race Theory is something that most Americans had never heard of before 2020, but in recent months, debates about what Critical Race Theory is, and whether and how it should be implemented and applied in American institutions, have been extensive.[30] During the hearing, General Milley greatly angered Republican Members of Congress when he essentially stated that the military does not teach CRT, but that it remains a topic that should be learned and read about so as to better educate American military officers (Kurtzleben 2021).

The bottom line is that the issue of race in America may serve as a motive for some military actors to engage in behaviors that challenge the governing standards of civil-military relations, depending on where a particular military officer stands with respect to the issue of race in America. Those who strongly believe that the lack of relative proportional minority representation among senior general and flag officers and among key occupations such as

[30]I do not have the space to unpack CRT, or *Critical Theory* in general, in this book, nor is that my goal. What is interesting, however, is the extent to which multiple institutions of nearly every flavor are debating, criticizing, or commenting on CRT. For example, evangelical churches are sharply divided over whether Critical Theory is even compatible with their religious doctrines. See, for instance, Allen (2020) and Baucham (2021) and two evangelical leaders who offer strong warnings against the church adopting views on social justice that are compatible with *Critical Theory.* See also Belkin (2021) for an example of the role of CRT in school board battles ahead of the Virginia Gubernatorial Election, an election that many contemporary political observers interpreted as a resounding defeat of progressive education policies that aggressively implemented CRT. See also D. Saunders (2021) for a confirmatory view, but also Saletan (2021) for a more nuanced view.

fighter pilots constitutes proof of a pernicious form of racism that still exists are more likely to behave in ways that affirm such a view. Other military actors who believe that the presence of these dynamics are the result of other underlying factors, such as selection of certain types of military roles that are correlated with race and socioeconomic background, are more likely to behave in ways that affirm these viewpoints (see, for instance, Dinick 2021).

Debates over these differing ideologies, worldviews, and things like CRT are not likely to remain merely philosophical or ethereal debates for members of the military. Indeed, differences over these particular issues impact how the military functions and operates. Consider the military's promotion system, and how different worldviews and ideologies lead different people to institute various policies. In June of 2020, Trump's Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, announced that the Department of Defense would remove all photographs of personnel as they are considered for promotion, in order "to ensure promotion boards and selection processes enable equal opportunity for all service members, promote diversity in our ranks, and are free from bias on race, ethnicity, gender, or national origin" (Mark Esper quoted in Schogol 2020). Such a policy is likely to please those who disagree with the assertions and goals of CRT, and who would affirm a *colorblind* approach to combat racism. At the same time, such a policy is inherently against the assertions of proponents and advocates of CRT. Just a year later, some leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps announced that removing the photographs from promotion boards has hindered the Navy from achieving its goals with respect to diversity, and therefore, that the photos should be reinstated. For instance, Vice Admiral John Newell remarked at a panel on the topic of diversity in 2021, "I think we should consider reinstating photos in selection boards…we can show you where, as you look at diversity, it went down with photos removed" (Newell quoted in Toropin 2021).

This example serves as just one timely and relevant example of how different ideologies can impact, and have impacted, the behavior of various military actors as their personal

worldviews and moral values are thrust into the political spotlight.[31] The example of Admiral Mullen as a retired senior military officer blatantly criticizing a sitting US President shows how polarizing environments can lead to military officers behaving in ways that support the worldview, ideology, and moral values that they hold to, even as such behavior also violates one or more of the principles of civil-military relations.

Does increasing polarization mean that civilian actors will also increasingly violate the central principles of civil-military relations? In my view, no, it does not. The main reason for this is that rising polarization by itself does not automatically denote that civilians will seek to employ the military in necessarily controversial ways, or in the pursuit of partisan ends related to highly polarizing issues. To be clear, there are numerous historical instances in which the military finds itself at or near the center of polarizing and controversial political issues. For example, the military played a major role during Reconstruction at the end of the Civil War, and the military has played a sizable role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in modern times, which has certainly been a bitter and polarizing issue across the United States. These are both examples of the military finding itself at or near highly polarizing issues, in which case, I think it is reasonable to suspect that civilian actors might increasingly violate central principles of civil-military relations. But the military is not at the center of every polarizing topic.

Pew Research Center polling conducted in 2020, for instance, found that among the most polarizing topics in the US today are climate change, gun control, the environment, and immigration (Center 2020). Other public opinion research has found that issues such as abortion are now more polarizing in the US than they have been in several decades (Blazina, Lipka, and Gramlich 2021). The theory I have offered thus far affirms that members of the military, like

[31]There are many examples of how different views regarding race have generated friction within the US military. One example involves a letter penned to the leaders of the United States Military Academy by several recent graduates alleging the systemic racism of West Point; see Askew, Bindon, and Blom (2020) for the original letter and more details. How one interprets this letter is largely a function of one's belief about the issue of race in the United States. See Dreher (2020) for a right-of-center analysis of this letter and its implications.

the public, are strongly divided over all of these listed issue areas. But it is not necessarily the case that civilian leaders will use the military, directly or indirectly, to achieve their desired policy goals in each of these areas. For example, of those described above, only immigration and to a lesser degree, climate change, have directly intersected with the military. This is not to say that future gun control and environmental policies do not and will not impact the military, but rather that to date, these issues have not induced significant military action or involvement.[32] Thus, rising polarization weakens the constraining influence of the central principles of civil-military relations for military actors, but not necessarily for civilian actors.

Prestige - An "Opportunity" to Challenge the Principles of Civil-Military Relations

Rising military prestige, on the other hand, offers an *opportunity* for both civilian and military actors to engage in behaviors that violate the central principles of civil-military relations. This stems from the connection between rising prestige and its perceived influence on the *potential* to impact public opinion. Note that for purposes of this theory, rising military prestige need only increase the *potential* of the military to impact public opinion, not necessarily the *efficacy* to actually do so.[33]

A significant amount of scholarship in the subject area of political communication describes how, why, and the extent to which elites can influence public opinion (for a sampling of this scholarship, see E. N. Saunders 2017; Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017; Baum and Potter 2008; and Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). Scholars differ on the degree to which elites actually impact public opinion; nonetheless, the literature shows that in general, the public

[32]Furthermore, one does not have to imagine scenarios that are too far flung to ascertain that significant civil-military strife could follow if the military were to be used in a greater way over any number of polarizing issues. Hypothetically, if a future President were to order active-duty forces to secure abortion clinics within the United States, there would likely be significant tension, if not between the President and military leaders, then at least among political parties and press outlets.

[33]Scholarship has examined whether using the military, or specific military actors, actually can sway the public. The results are not conclusive. See James Golby, Dropp, and P. Feaver (2012) and Jim Golby, Dropp, and P. Feaver (2013) for two such studies.

looks to elites who are "knowledgeable" and "trustworthy" when thinking about which public voices to listen to (Lupia and McCubbins 1998, pp. 69–76). Scholars also claim that the more elites are perceived by the public to hold the attribute of credibility (broadly speaking), the greater capacity these elites have to "cue" public opinion (Zaller 1992, p. 47).

Viewed through the lens of varying levels of military prestige, we can now project this scholarship onto the ability of trusted military elites (and perhaps the military institution in general) to impact public opinion. It is reasonable to consider that the more prestigious a military becomes, the more that military leaders will be considered to be "knowledgeable and trustworthy" (Lupia and McCubbins 1998, pp. 69–76). This is especially true if we conceptualize the second component of military prestige, its perceived level of skill or excellence, as the degree of public trust placed in the military (which I have argued, earlier in this chapter, is at least a reasonable proxy for military prestige). Thus, during periods in which military prestige is high, both civilian and military actors have an *opportunity* to use the military to attempt to influence public opinion.

We may certainly expect that civilian actors will be responsive to rising levels of military prestige. After all, a primary motivation of political actors is to remain in office (Strom 1990). Furthermore, previous scholarship extensively shows that leader credibility, in any number of domestic and international contexts, is important (E. N. Saunders 2017). Thus, if and when civilian actors believe that engaging in behaviors that harness a prestigious military will improve their electoral chances, these civilians are more likely to engage in these behaviors, even if they violate one or more of the principles of civil-military relations in the process.

There is also ample reason to suspect that military actors — not just civilians — are also responsive to rising levels of military prestige. If military actors know that they are increasingly valued, trusted, and esteemed by society, they may be more likely to behave in ways that violate one or more of the principles of civil-military relations. This could be because highly esteemed military actors believe that the public who values them will overlook or

forgive such infractions, or because they, conscious that they are viewed as a highly trusted and respected voice in the nation, believe they have an increasing duty to act as the saviors or guardians of the country (Finer 1962; Fitch 1998, p. 129; see also T. A. Schmidt 2023). Regardless of the reasons for which it occurs, higher military prestige results in a greater likelihood that military actors may behave in ways that challenge the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference of the military.

At first glance, the fact that civilians are responsive to high levels of military prestige seems to fit several instances in US history. Indeed, popular military figures have influenced public opinion in significant ways and in a variety of different periods. Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower, for instance, were both wartime commanders who, largely as a result of the popularity they commanded with the public for an extended period of time in uniform, ultimately ascended to the Presidency (Teigen 2018).

In summary, high levels of military prestige present an *opportunity* for civilian and military actors to use the military as an instrument to impact public opinion. This can result in both civilian and military actors engaging in behaviors that violate the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference of the military institution. These behaviors, as the examples listed below illustrate, can take a variety of forms.

Examples - Colin Powell Opinion Commentary and Retired Officers Speaking at Political Conventions

Instances of civilian and military actors using the military during periods of high military prestige to sway public opinion abound in US history. In the paragraphs below, I give two examples, both of which are intended to illustrate how a high degree of military prestige – either at the personal or institutional level – provides an *opportunity* for both military and civilian actors to engage in political behaviors that violate the central principles of civil-military relations.

The first involves the well-known instance of General Colin Powell who, as the sitting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late 1992 - early 1993, wrote two opinion pieces in popular press outlets as Bill Clinton assumed the presidency. These pieces essentially challenged Bill Clinton's views regarding the use of military force and what could be achieved in the Balkans, where a very serious war had started in the wake of the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Powell 1992a; Powell 1992b). The timing of these pieces was also critically important. Powell's editorial in the *New York Times* was written just weeks before Election Day in 1992, while Clinton was still campaigning, and Powell's *Foreign Affairs* piece was published later that winter, right as Bill Clinton assumed the presidency itself. Perhaps Powell cleared the content of both pieces with the Bush Administration, which was still in charge when these opinion pieces were likely submitted for consideration.

But what is important from the perspective of the three central principles of civil-military relations is that even if Powell did allow the Bush administration to review the content of his articles, Powell at a very minimum knew that airing his views in a public manner would generate political costs for Clinton, if elected President. This is because the content of Powell's opinion pieces contradicted many foreign policy views held by Clinton and members of his cabinet. For instance, Powell's *New York Times* editorial entitled, "Why Generals Get Nervous," explicitly stated that, "In Bosnia, there are no clear military goals," (Powell 1992a) and his piece in *Foreign Affairs* stated that a potential mission of sending US military forces lacked "clear and unambiguous objectives" (Powell 1992b, p. 38).

Powell's opinions clashed not only with Clinton's, but also with those held by many of his deputies, including Madeline Albright, Clinton's Ambassador to the United Nations and later, Secretary of State. Albright felt more optimistic about the goals that American military forces could achieve in the Balkans and in other trouble spots around the world. In a 2006 interview, Albright recalled the way in which Powell would frame military choices in rather stark terms for Clinton's foreign policy team. Albright recalls that, "On a regular basis Colin

would come in and do a presentation…he'd go through this and say, 'We can take that hill and we can do that and we can do this. You know we have the best military in the world, but it's going to take 500,000 men and $500 billion and 50 years.' So he'd lead you up the hill of possibilities and then drop you off the other side, and you'd end up with no options" (*William J. Clinton Presidential History Project Interview with Madeleine K. Albright* 2006).

By the mid-1990s, Powell was no longer Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but by appealing to the American public through opinion commentary as Clinton came into office and by framing military options in excessively black and white terms for the new administration, Powell not only likely steered public opinion against the possibility of American military intervention in Bosnia, at least initially, but he also likely made the option increasingly unappealing to policymakers behind closed doors. Regardless of the wisdom of Powell's advice, I contend that his actions also violated the fundamental principle of civilian control of the military in that it did not allow the Commander in Chief to genuinely consider and weigh a full range of possible policy options with which to respond to multiple developing crises in the world after the end of the Cold War.

And while we cannot be certain what drove Powell to write the two opinion pieces when he chose to write them, it is reasonable to conclude that Powell's actions were facilitated — at least in part — by the enormous degree of personal clout and prestige he carried. Powell was a charismatic, well spoken, educated, and likable figure who had become increasingly well known in the wake of the US victory over Iraq in the Gulf War. Powell likely believed that by engaging in the public behaviors that he did, a significant portion of the public would not only agree with his stance on military intervention in Bosnia, but be willing to either overlook or forgive any perceived breach of protocol insofar as military figures eschewing the political spotlight. In this way, Powell's high personal prestige afforded him an *opportunity* to behave in the way that he did.

A second and different example involves Army Lieutenant General Mike Flynn and Ma-

rine Corps General John Allen, each of whom, as retired officers, spoke at the respective Republican and Democratic Conventions in 2016. Regardless of what they said at the convention (Flynn is known for leading chants of "lock her up," referring to the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton), the act of speaking at an event that is inherently partisan violated the principle of non-partisanship of the military. In the aftermath of these conventions, Retired Army General Martin Dempsey, who had recently served as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, published an opinion-editorial piece in *The Washington Post* in which he criticized both the retired officers and the candidates who had asked them to speak. Dempsey argued in his op-ed, "As generals, they have an obligation to uphold our apolitical traditions. They have just made the task of their successors — who continue to serve in uniform and are accountable for our security – more complicated. It was a mistake for them to participate as they did. *It was a mistake for our presidential candidates to ask them to do so*" (Dempsey 2016, emphasis mine; see also Exum 2017).

In this example, the military institution's relatively high prestige likely provided an *opportunity* for Flynn, Allen, and the civilian leaders who asked each of these generals to speak to violate the principle of military non-partisanship. Neither Flynn nor Allen were household names at the time, and it is doubtful that most Americans could identify either general's photograph today. It is more likely the case that each of the political candidates and their campaign organizers sought a military general's public endorsement because each believed that having a high ranking military voice would prove politically advantageous. Furthermore, both officers who agreed to speak also likely did so, at least in part, because each officer believed that he could influence public opinion and ultimately advance the political prospects of each candidate proceeding to the presidency. I am not suggesting that the high level of polarization that prevailed in 2016 was also not a factor in the officer agreeing to speak; indeed, the theory I have offered would instead affirm that high polarization played a large role in shaping and contributing to each officer's behavior. Rather, I am pointing out

that first, it is highly unlikely that either general would have been asked to speak in the first place at either of these conventions had the military as an institution not commanded relatively high prestige at the time of the party conventions in 2016; and second, that each officer likely agreed to speak *at least in part* because he believed he could impact public opinion, at least to some degree, because the institution with which each officer was primarily affiliated – the military – was highly prestigious.

Polarization and Prestige Generate Four Types of Domestic Structures

If high levels of polarization signify that military leaders possess a *motive* to intervene in politics, and if high levels of military prestige afford both civilian and military leaders an *opportunity* to use the military to engage in political behaviors, it follows that four broad types of domestic political structures exist that denote varying adherence to the fundamental principles of civil-military relations. These four structures are displayed in Table 4. Given the presence or absence of *motives* and *opportunities*, the simple typology below captures variation in each quadrant along two primary axes: the predominant type of actor inducing politicization by committing political behaviors (military or civilian) that violate the principles of civil-military relations, and the overall level (low, moderate, or high) of these acts. The final evaluation made in each quadrant stems from the combination of the axes, and offers a prediction for the overall potential for civil-military conflict (low, moderate, or significant) that exists under the domestic political conditions found in each quadrant.

Low Polarization, Low Military Prestige

In this environment, military actors lack an ideological *motive* to intervene in politics in ways that involve the military, and both civilian and military actors lack an *opportunity* to harness the military in ways that seek to leverage public opinion. This leads to the theoretical expectation that while there might certainly be conflict between military and civilian leaders

Table 4: Types of Domestic Environments for Civil-Military Relations and Their Impact on Political Behaviors and the Conduct of Civil-Military Relations

Environment	Low Polarization	High Polarization
Low Prestige	No politicization; low levels of political activity; low potential for civil-military conflict	Military (induced) politicization; moderate levels of political activity; moderate potential for civil-military conflict
High Prestige	Military and Civilian (induced) politicization; moderate levels of political activity; moderate potential for civil-military conflict	Comprehensive politicization; high levels of political activity; high potential for civil-military conflict

in this type of domestic environment, such conflict will likely not be widespread nor comprised of highly visible and public acts. Political behaviors involving the military do occur in this environment, but they do not generate significant civil-military tension. Historical examples in the United States of this domestic structure include the post-Vietnam (roughly 1973-1990) and immediate pre-World War Two (roughly 1936-1944) eras.

High Polarization, Low Military Prestige

When polarization is high but military prestige is low, military actors possess a *motive* to engage in political behaviors that threaten or violate the central principles of civil-military relations. However, as a result of the low level of military prestige that exists in this type of domestic structure, civilian and military actors lack the *opportunity* to use the military in ways that leverage public opinion. This leads to the theoretical expectation that in this environment, military actors in particular might engage in political behaviors involving the military, but that civilian actors are unlikely to induce political behavior involving the military. Furthermore, the overall level of political activity that occurs in such an environment accords with moderate potential for civil-military conflict. A historical example of this era includes the years between the end of American Reconstruction and the start of the Spanish American War (roughly 1877 - 1898).

Low Polarization, High Military Prestige

In a domestic structure where polarization is low, but military prestige is high, military actors lack an ideological *motive* to conduct behaviors that involve the military politically. However, because military prestige is high, both civilian and military actors possess an *opportunity* to use the military to leverage public opinion. This leads to the theoretical expectation that under these conditions, both actor types are likely to engage in visible political behaviors involving the military institution. However, the potential for civil-military conflict is only moderate, because even though both sets of actors might seek to employ the military to shape public opinion, there is not as significant a level of contestation in the political sphere over political issues as a result of a low level of polarization.

Broad examples of this period include portions of the post-World War Two era until the end of the Vietnam War (roughly 1945-1973) and the post-Gulf War period (roughly 1991-2009). Several historical civil-military relations crises occurred under these conditions, including a major dispute between between President Truman and General Douglas MacArthur in 1951, another between General Matthew Ridgeway and President Eisenhower over the role of nuclear weapons and American's "New Look" policy, and yet another between President Bill Clinton and General Colin Powell in the early 1990s.

High Polarization, High Military Prestige

When polarization and military prestige are both high, military actors possess a *motive* to intervene politically, *and* both military and civilian actors possess an *opportunity* to involve the military in ways that are intended to leverage public opinion. Under these conditions, military actors are increasingly willing to behave in ways that violate the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference. Furthermore, both military and civilian actors have an *opportunity* to use the military to appeal to the public. This leads to the theoretical expectation that both actor types, military and civilian, will engage in highly

visible political behaviors that challenge the principles of civil-military relations. Furthermore, because polarization is high, such an environment is likely to include contestation over political issues that involve the application of the image of God, signifying that military actors in particular are more willing to press against and potentially violate the principles of civil-military relations out of a desire to act in a way that accords with their particular moral stance. Accordingly, there is high potential for civil-military conflict in this domestic structure.

Examples of this period include the immediate post-US Civil War period during the start of American Reconstruction (roughly 1865-1868) as well as in the modern era (roughly 2010-2021). These conditions are also associated with a number of recent and historical civil-military relations disputes, including between President Andrew Johnson, General Ulysses S. Grant, and Congress for control of the military as an institution in the early years of American Reconstruction, and recent tension between the military under the leadership of President's Trump and Biden in the present day.

Based on the theoretical predictions that follow from Table 4, it is possible to derive the following five hypotheses, which will be tested in the remainder of the book:

H1: Military actors increasingly violate the central principles of civil-military relations when polarization is high relative to periods of low polarization.

H2: Military actors increasingly violate the central principles of civil-military relations in public and visible ways when military prestige is high relative to periods of low military prestige.

H3: Civilian actors increasingly violate the central principles of civil-military relations when military prestige is high relative to periods of low military prestige.

H4: Military and civilian actors engage in relatively more visible and public forms of political behavior that involve the military institution when military prestige is high relative to periods of low military prestige.

H5: The most extreme levels of overall political activity occur in environments that are characterized by simultaneously high levels of political polarization and military prestige.

Section 3: Endogeneity and Alternate Explanations

This section highlights the extent to which endogeneity poses a concern for the theory offered thus far. This section also addresses several alternate explanations. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) note, endogeneity is a "common and serious problem" in the social sciences, especially in non-experimental settings (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). As this book relies entirely on observational and historical methods, rather than experimental methods, endogeneity poses a genuine concern that must be both acknowledged and dealt with. Endogeneity essentially involves the "direction" of causality, or how the variables that comprise a theory work in a sequence (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). While there are many different types of endogeneity, all forms generate concerns that the relationship between a particular set of independent variables and a dependent variable is not, in reality, what the researcher concludes it is (see Chapter 11 of Gerring 2012, for a description of different types of trouble that endogeneity poses).

Applying concerns about endogeneity to the theory that has been offered thus far in this chapter involves asking whether it is possible that instead of the levels of polarization and military prestige driving the political behaviors committed by civilian and military actors that challenge the principles of civil-military relations, which I have argued, is it possible that the behaviors committed by civilian or military actors which involve the military actually drive levels of polarization and military prestige in the society, and if so, to what degree? I address the potential relationship between political behaviors that involve the military and the levels of polarization and military prestige each in turn. Ultimately, I make two conclusions with respect to concerns over endogeneity. The first is that the degree of concern regarding endogeneity in the theory offered thus far exists at mild and manageable levels.

The second is that the greater concern involves the potential impact of political behaviors involving the military on military prestige, rather than the impact on polarization. I briefly trace the logic in arriving at these conclusions in the paragraphs to follow.

Do Political Behaviors by the Military Drive Polarization?

I do not strongly suspect that specific acts of political behavior committed by either civilian or military actors that involve the military institution are likely to impact levels of polarization. This may seem surprising at first. After all, one can conceive of a situation in which the military acts in a highly controversial way, such as undertaking a coup, which elicits a strong response from a divided domestic public (for example, some parts of society might favor the coup, while others are opposed to it), further contributing to a society becoming more polarized.

However, a clear definition of what polarization is (and is not), and a clear operationalization of the concept, shows that such a relationship is unlikely. As I have argued in this chapter with emphasis, polarization does not merely point to a public that is divided, although it certainly manifests itself as such. Polarization points to something much deeper, that is, it indicates societal division stemming from contestation over issues that involve the *image of God*, and how the concept of the *image of God* should be applied in the political space. Viewed through this lens, it is highly unlikely that political behaviors involving the military institution exacerbate division in the moral worldviews or moral values that citizens hold. It is far more likely, rather, that such divisions would be pre-existing, but that political behaviors conducted by the military draw these pre-existing fissures out in a more noticeable way.[34] In short, concerns about endogeneity (with respect to the relationship between polarization and political behavior involving the military) can be managed if the variables used

[34]This argument is congruent with that of Deneen (2018) and Trueman (2020), both of whom state, albeit in different ways, that the discord present in American society and culture today is not the cause of our polarized politics, but rather the symptoms of far-deeper problems.

are operationalized and defined as precisely as possible. Care has been taken throughout the book to do just that, although I do not pretend that it has been done so perfectly.

Do Political Behaviors by the Military Drive Military Prestige?

The relationship between military prestige and instances of political behaviors involving the military requires a more careful examination, however. The theory presented in this chapter argued that rising military prestige provides civilian and military leaders with an *opportunity* to engage in political behaviors that violate the principles of civil-military relations. With respect to endogeneity, then, we then must ask to what degree these types of political behaviors influence the prestige of the military.

Admittedly, it is theoretically plausible – indeed, it is likely – that certain political behaviors involving the military impact the prestige of the military. To begin with, the relatively high degree of military prestige is in no small way an ostensible consequence of the fact that the US military *does not* regularly intervene in politics in significant ways. For example, we can rightly suspect that if the US military were to stage a coup and topple the duly elected government, the military's prestige would rapidly fall. Although not the same as conducting a coup, Feaver (2023) found that confidence in the military fell when citizens were made aware of the military acting in an unethical manner (P. D. Feaver 2023, pp. 103–108, 267). In broad terms, then, there appears to be moderate evidence, as well as a theoretical plausibility, that the relationship between military prestige and instances of political behavior might operate in both directions, as shown in Figure 6.

Importantly, however, this is likely not the case for every instance of a political behavior which involves the military institution. As this and the previous chapter made clear, the principle of civilian control of the military can be violated through a number of behaviors that vary in terms of severity and impact (see Croissant et al. 2010; Risa Brooks 2020; Risa Brooks, Jim Golby, and Urben 2021; Beliakova 2021). As this book focuses squarely on the case of the

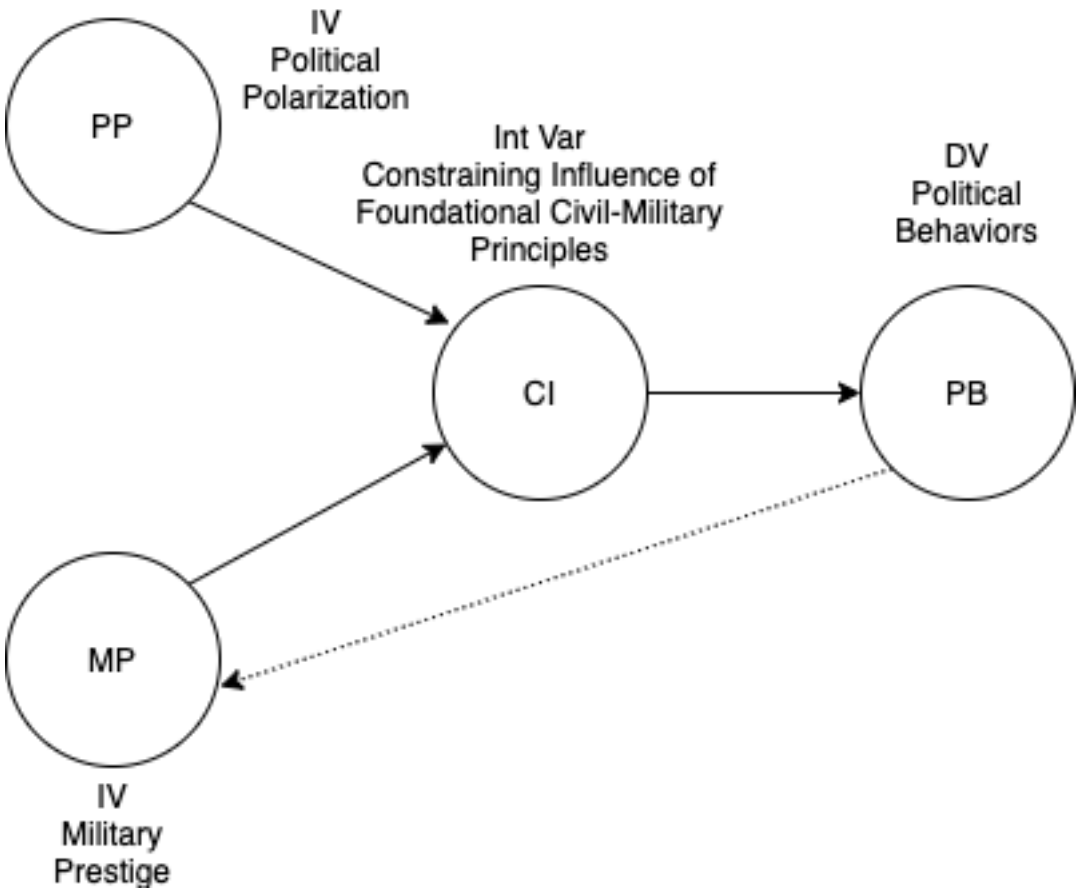

Figure 6: Endogeneity Concerns Regarding the Relationship between Military Prestige and Behaviors that Violate the Central Principles of Civil-Military Relations

United States, it examines challenges to the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference that occur via visible but subtle behaviors. For instance, in terms of impact to the principle of civilian control, the behavior of a military officer writing an op-ed is not the same as undertaking a coup. Similarly, it is unlikely that every instance of a military officer giving an interview to the press impacts the broad level of military prestige in the country, unless, of course, a significant number or portion of these interviews violates the principles of civil-military relations that military and civilian leaders are expected to uphold. Careful operationalization of the dependent variable is critical to minimizing concerns about endogeneity. This is upheld throughout the book, I argue, and especially so in the two quantitative empirical chapters. The case studies (Chapters 5 and 6) also help clarify the sequence and order of the overall system of variables that are at play within the theory.

In addition to specifically defining and operationalizing the dependent variable to the fullest extent possible, the intervening variable in the theory offered thus far significantly aids our understanding of the sequence in which the component parts of the theory work together. The previous chapter and this chapter argued that the levels of polarization and military prestige impact the degree to which the central principles of civil-military relations effectively constrain civilian and military actor behavior. When the constraining influence of the central principles is high, both military and civilian actors generally behave in ways that adhere to the principles, but when the constraining influence is low, these actors behave in ways that violate these principles. With respect to concerns for endogeneity, what is important to note is that the theory suggests that changes in the constraining influence drive actor behavior, and not the other way around. Actors violate one or more of the principles of civil-military relations because they are less constrained by the central principles, as a result of the motives and opportunities afforded by changing levels of polarization and military prestige. I readily admit that to a moderate degree, the converse could also be true, but with an important caveat. Indeed, an actor's behavior that violates the central principles of civil-

military relations likely indicates a weakening of the intervening variable, the constraining influence of the central principles of civil-military relations. The caveat here, however, is that at some point, it becomes difficult to disentangle the order of events. Does a behavior that violates the central principles of civil-military relations *indicate*, or *result in*, a lessening of the constraining influence of the central principles? This is an important question, especially when we consider the possibility of norm change as an alternate explanation, and specifically, whether civilian and military actors are more willing to engage in behavior that violates principles of civil-military relations because such behavior is simply occurring more often.

I concede here that we have to be aware of both possibilities, that a weakening influence of central principles results in actor behavior that violates the central principles (as I have offered), as well as that the behaviors that violate central principles further weaken the constraining influence of the central principles of civil-military relations. Real though this risk is, it is important point to remember that as the theory has argued, norms and principles do not just weaken spontaneously. Even if norms change (and they do), we need to ask why they change, and the explanation offered in this book serves as one such starting point. In summary, endogeneity poses a very real concern in this book, especially because this study heavily relies on analyzing observational data, rather than manipulable experimental methods. However, by carefully and clearly defining the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in this study, and by testing for endogeneity in the empirical chapters, concerns regarding endogeneity can be managed.

Alternate Explanations

In addition to polarization and military prestige, what other factors could impact the degree to which civilian and military actors commit behaviors that involve the military, and which violate the principles of civil-military relations? Furthermore, how can we test these competing claims? In the paragraphs below, I first identify two alternate explanations. These

include the presence of conflict and/or type of threat environment, and norm change. Both of these alternate explanations are plausible in my view, and each offers various ways of testing these alternate claims.

Conflict and the Threat Environment

One alternate explanation for civilian and military leaders committing behaviors that challenge the principles of civil-military relations involves the presence of conflict or the overall threat environment. I link the presence of conflict and the threat environment together because of the relationship between these concepts, even though each likely functions differently in terms of impacting the political behavior of military and civilian leadership. It is plausible to think that when there is an ongoing conflict, such as a major war, military leaders are naturally less constrained to adhere to the fundamental principles of civil-military relations. While, to this author's knowledge, there is no formal theory explicating such a concept, one can reasonably see how when the lives of soldiers and troops are at stake, military leaders might be more willing to violate principles of civil-military relations. Indeed, one can argue that this was precisely the case when Colin Powell wrote the opinion pieces that he did in late 1992 and early 1993, just as Bill Clinton won the Presidency and assumed office (see Powell 1992a; Powell 1992b). According to this alternate explanation, Powell's behavior stemmed not from partisan ideological differences, but rather differences about the use of force and the subsequent consequences of intervention in a certain way.

Other scholars have argued that the threat environment directly shapes civil-military relations. For instance, Michael Desch (1999) argues that changes in the international security environment impact the relationship between civilian and military leaders (Desch 2001). Desch argues when a nation faces a high external threat and when that country's internal threat is low, such an environment serves as the best possible posture for both sets of actors to maintain the principle of civilian of the control of the military (Desch 2001, p. 14). There is some

similarity between the variable of polarization and Desch's variable of internal threat level, but the variables are not exactly the same. Polarization, as I have conceptualized it, speaks much more to the degree of ideological difference that exists in a country, whereas internal threat level speaks more to how the military is postured for domestic use, and importantly, how such a posture impacts its ability to operate abroad (Desch 2001).

One might also contend here that victory or defeat in war would impact the degree to which military actors in particular shun the principles of civil-military relations. In particular, one can reasonably foresee scenarios in which defeated military officers engage in any number of political behaviors against a political administration that was perceived to have been against the military in some way, similar to some popular narratives regarding the Vietnam War (McMaster 1997; see also Summers 1982). One can also foresee an instance in which victorious military officers, fresh from success on the battlefield, engage in any number of political behaviors that challenge the principles of civil-military relations. These are real concerns. However, I conceive the variable of military prestige as having already captured the effects of defeat and/or victory on the battlefield. In other words, I think it is important to allow for the possibility that either victory or defeat (and many levels in between) can improve or lessen the military's overall prestige. Thus, I do not foresee including defeat or victory in war as an important control variable.

Given the theoretical expectation that the presence of conflict and/or threat environment can shape the willingness with which the military in particular adheres to the principles of civil-military relations, it is important to control for whether the US is involved in an external conflict where possible throughout the book. This raises additional concerns, however, mainly involving the fact that much of the quantitative data examined in this book is recent, and covers the post-September 11, 2001 era. This could be problematic in that to a certain extent, this era is one in which the US military was continuously deployed, particularly in Iraq and, until recently, Afghanistan. Still, there are various ways to control for the presence

of conflict, which I do when appropriate throughout the book.

Norm Change

A second type of alternate explanation is one of norm change. This alternate explanation starts from the viewpoint that the principles of civil-military relations themselves – civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference – are all behavioral norms that have been constructed by the civilian and military actors over time. This alternate viewpoint, moreover, would explain any sharp change in the political behaviors that defy these norms as a routine process of changing the accepted norms of behavior. Such a viewpoint would emphasize that whereas the accepted norms of behavior used to include binding prohibitions against obvious incursions that violate the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference, these principles are no longer held or deemed as inviolable by the civilian and military actors who practice civil-military relations. Norm change as an alternate explanation is consistent with a rich set of literature within international relations that builds out of the constructivist tradition, and which views various actors such as states (Wendt 1992) and organizations (Finnimore and Sikkink 1998) who create norms that shape their behavior.

Norm change stands as a plausible alternate explanation, but it possesses one major flaw that, in my view, renders the likelihood of norm change explaining changing levels in political activity that violate the standards of civil-military relations exceedingly small in the United States. This is particularly true from the perspective of military actors, and less so from that of civilian leaders.

This flaw is found in the fact that virtually every single official document that aspirationally guides the behavior of military today emphatically states or implies the principles that have been derived thus far in this book. Army Doctrinal Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, for instance, notes in its first few pages that the Army profession is "a trusted vocation of Soldiers and Army civilians whose collective expertise is the ethical

design, generation, support, and application of landpower; serving under Civilian authority; and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people" (Army 2019, p. ix). Similar language emphasizing the principle of civilian control is found in several other places throughout the document (see for instance Army 2019, pp. 1–6, 1–9). Other documents, such as Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, dated February 19, 2008, prohibit service members from committing certain types of activities that violate the military's non-partisan ethic (Defense 2008). It is clear that the military as an organization, then, has not reduced its commitment to upholding the central principles of civil-military relations.[35]

And yet, I do not deny that perhaps the organization's members no longer feel as bound as they perhaps once were to uphold these central principles. Indeed, a significant aspect of my book is acknowledgement of and explanation for this being the case. Perhaps some military (and civilian) actors commit behaviors simply because they see others engaging in similar behaviors more often. In this way, norm change as an alternate explanation is still plausible. However, because the organization itself is still rather committed to upholding the central principles of civil-military relations, norm change is not likely the major driver of any recent change in levels of political activity.

Section 4: Summary and Way Forward

This chapter developed a theory which argued that the two independent variables of political polarization and military prestige combine to impact the dependent variable — specific instances, types, and patterns of political behavior involving the military by civilian and military actors. The theory also posited that the independent variables impact the de-

[35] I also make this argument in the historical case studies, particularly in Chapter 5 regarding the post-US Civil War period. To be clear, norms against political involvement by military actors were not as strongly developed in the 1870s as they are today. I address this issue in Chapter 5. Directly comparing military behavior from the 1870s against that in the 1980s might not be a great comparison, but I do argue that the ways in which the independent variables impact the dependent variable operate the same in both periods. For this reason, the historical case studies are not only appropriate, but can greatly round out this study.

pendent variable through an intervening variable, which is the constraining influence of the principles of civilian control, non-partisanship, and non-interference of the military.

The theory argued in this chapter holds that high levels of polarization provide a motive for military actors to behave in ways that challenge or violate the standards of civil-military relations (Finer 1962). This occurs, as argued herein, because increasing political polarization reflects disagreement in the populace not only about specific policy matters, but about the moral values and worldviews that should govern society, to what extent, and why. When polarization is high, military actors are increasingly willing to challenge civilian leaders, adopt positions that align with partisan entities and organizations, and advocate for the military to weigh in on or solve problems that are indirectly related to national security and defense. Military actors are increasingly willing to engage in these sorts of behaviors because doing so advances the worldview or moral values held by these actors.

In addition, it is herein argued that high levels of military prestige provide both military and civilian actors with an opportunity to use the military to influence public opinion (Finer 1962). High levels of military prestige reflect a military that is trusted and respected by the public, and both civilian and military actors are cognizant of this reality. For this reason, holding all else equal, a highly prestigious military has a greater potential of committing or being asked to commit (by civilian leaders) behaviors that violate one or more of the principles of civil-military relations.

Finally, the theory contends that both polarization and prestige need to be considered in tandem to determine the relative level of political activity that will occur in domestic political environments marked by the presence or absence of high polarization and prestige. When both the motive and opportunity to commit behaviors that violate one or more of the principles of civil-military relations exist, the resulting environment with respect to the conduct of civil-military relations promises to be tense. When neither motive nor opportunity are present, the environment for the conduct of civil-military relations is not perfect but is likely

more tranquil. When either a motive or opportunity exist, but not the other, distinctions with respect to the level of overall political activity and which actor commits these activities is less clear. The next four chapters of the book test the predictive power of the theory with intent to sharpen our understanding of each of these four potential domestic environments. We now pivot to the first empirical chapter of the book.

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