

# Integrating the Civil–Military Relations Subfield

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## Abstract

The subfield of civil–military relations has experienced a remarkable revitalization in recent years, yielding a wealth of intriguing insights. Yet, despite these auspicious developments, research remains unnecessarily divided across multiple dimensions: along the subdisciplinary boundaries of comparative, international, and American politics; within these subdisciplines by independent and dependent variables; by regional focus; by regime type analyzed (democratic, democratizing versus authoritarian); and by scholars' emphasis on normative versus positive analysis. This article aims to bridge existing divides and reduce fragmentation. It proposes several pathways forward, including proposing innovations in deductive theorizing, developing new analytical frameworks, and synthesizing and adjudicating empirical findings. It also suggests ways of bridging to research beyond the study of civil–military relations, such as that on the global phenomenon of democratic backsliding, the efficacy of nonviolent strategies of political struggle, military effectiveness, and the causes and outcomes of interstate war.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the subfield of civil–military relations has experienced a remarkable revitalization. A new cohort of junior scholars has joined an established generation in the development of novel arguments and new data, yielding a wealth of intriguing insights. These contributions have significantly advanced our understanding of the causes and consequences of civil–military relations. Equally important, recent scholarship has generated knowledge relevant for research across the discipline of political science and beyond.

Yet, despite these auspicious developments, bad habits also persist within the subfield of civil–military relations. Research remains unnecessarily divided across multiple dimensions: along the subdisciplinary boundaries of comparative, international, and American politics; within these subdisciplines by independent and dependent variables; by regional focus; according to regime type analyzed (democratic, democratizing versus authoritarian); and in scholars’ emphasis on normative versus positive analysis. Of course, some amount of specialization is expected in a subfield so encompassing; and some sprawl and disorderliness in the development of research is inevitable. Yet, too often compartmentalization and disintegration needlessly constrict intellectual inquiry on civil–military relations. Future research should aim to bridge existing divides and reduce fragmentation.

This article advances that effort. It reviews the civil–military relations scholarship with the aim of identifying opportunities for enhancing connections in research across the subfield. There is no single means proposed for achieving improved integration. Rather, the review highlights multiple avenues, which include innovations in deductive theorizing, developing new analytical frameworks, and synthesizing and adjudicating empirical findings. It also suggests pathways for bridging to research beyond the study of civil–military relations, such as that on the global phenomenon of democratic backsliding, the efficacy of nonviolent strategies of political struggle, military effectiveness, and the causes and outcomes of interstate war.

This article identifies four major research emphases within extant scholarship on civil–military relations in political science. It then proposes three overarching steps forward to facilitate connections within and beyond the subfield. First, however, it defines the concept of civil–military relations and related terms.

## WHAT ARE CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS?

The concept of civil–military relations encompasses several different civilian and military relationships, which are variously studied by sociologists, historians, and political scientists. Those relationships include that between the military institution and broader society, between the military and other government bureaucracies, and between leaders and their organizations within the military (Nielsen & Snider 2009, p. 3). The primary emphasis within the discipline of political science, however, is on relations between political elites and the senior military leadership at the state’s apex.

Within a state’s coercive apparatus, the military is the actor that is formally mandated to defend against foreign threats. Members of the military wear uniforms and operate within a formal chain of command. While they ostensibly focus on external defense, they may also have internal security missions and participate in state-led repression. Military leaders come from the senior ranks of the officer corps and hold key positions of authority within the military organization.

Formal definitions are rare within the scholarly literature, but there are two general meanings for the concept of a civilian leader. The first focuses on the process through which an individual takes office and his or her status once there. Civilians generally accede to office through established

institutional processes, versus extralegal coups d'état; in the latter case, military officers who seize power might still be deemed civilians if they remove their uniforms and delegate daily command of the military. By this definition, civilians are absent in what scholars call military regimes, in which a military cohort governs collectively while in uniform.

Alternatively, civilian and military leaders may be defined according to functional roles. Whether or not they came to power in a coup or wear a uniform, civilian (or more broadly, political) leaders occupy the chief executive offices of the state, which are in charge of the broad panoply of policy domains and state functions; military leaders run the military on a day-to-day basis. From this perspective, all regimes have civilian or political leaders, although if they lack influence and are solely beholden to the military for their positions, they may not be especially interesting or important analytically.

Many scholars assume that militaries are exceptional actors, worthy of study with unique concepts and empirical analyses apart from other actors in the state and coercive apparatus. This assumption stems from the complex role militaries play in both regime and state security. On the one hand, the military is a regime and state's chief protector. A regime's military is its last line of defense against its internal opponents and must repress both civilian protesters and armed rebels when needed. It also defends the state against foreign threats and external challengers in armed conflict. On the other hand, the military is also a regime and state's chief threat and source of insecurity. A military can turn its guns on the government and remove leaders by force, or compromise the state's security by losing on the battlefield. Combined, these dynamics generate what Feaver (1999) calls the civil–military “problematique”: States must ensure the military is both submissive to civilian authority and effective in armed conflict. Much research on civil–military relations in political science seeks to address some aspect of that central dilemma.

Civil–military relations are also distinctive because of their Janus-faced nature. They can affect a state's international relations through their impact on the quality of strategic assessment between political and military leaders and the military's war-fighting performance. But they also shape a state's domestic politics because of the political power militaries often maintain in regimes and their coercive capacity to unseat leaders. Hence, while some scholars emphasize civil–military relations in one domain, others explore how their dual facets interact and influence one another.

## **SURVEYING AND CONNECTING RESEARCH ON CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS**

Below I discuss four themes in the scholarship on civil–military relations: military coups, military defection, civilian control, and societal–military (dis)integration. In each section, I suggest ways that scholars might enhance their research through greater integration with other scholarship.

### **Military Coups d'Etat**

Among the most well-studied phenomena in civil–military relations is the military coup d'état. The first generation of coup scholarship emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in response to a rash of coups in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Many of these studies sought to identify global or regional patterns in coup propensity, focusing on the effects of macro structural factors, economic crises, and political instability (Gassebner et al. 2016). Other scholars emphasized corporate grievances as the rationale for military interventions (Thompson 1973, Nordlinger 1977). Interest in coups subsequently waned with the onset of democratization in Latin America and Asia, and scholars began to study the military's role in those regime transitions (O'Donnell et al. 1986, Huntington 1991). In other places, notably in the Middle East and parts of Africa, coups became less frequent,

yielding long periods of leadership continuity in authoritarian regimes. These periods of stability generated efforts to understand how leaders prevented coups and otherwise accommodated the military to their rule (Decaulo 1989, Brooks 1998, N'Diaye 2001, Cook 2007).

In the last decade, scholars have resumed studying coups, propelled by prominent military interventions in places such as Thailand (2014), Egypt (2013), and Mali (2012) and by new data-gathering efforts (Powell & Thyne 2011, Harkness 2016, Johnson & Thurber 2017, Sudduth 2017, White 2017, De Bruin 2018). This voluminous literature is impossible to summarize in a few paragraphs, but three major foci stand out.

The first, on the relationship between democracy and coups, has already yielded intriguing and paradoxical findings. Scholars have found that democracies, like their autocratic counterparts, are vulnerable to coups (Pilster & Böhmelt 2012, Bell 2016). However, experiencing a coup does not necessarily mean that a state will succumb to authoritarianism. According to Marinov & Goemans (2014), for example, today coups are likely to be followed by competitive elections, because coup makers face international pressure to hold them. Similarly, while coups still mostly perpetuate authoritarianism, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a significant increase in the frequency with which they yield democratic regimes (Wright et al. 2016).

A second body of literature seeks to unpack the phenomenon of coups and to explore their various incarnations and implications. Coups are a tactic (Harkness 2016), which can have different operational characteristics, aims, and outcomes. They can be bloodless or yield significant civil disruption and violence. They can be perpetrated by various actors within the military, such as junior officers or senior military leaders, for very different reasons and with distinct determinants of success (Singh 2014, Albrecht & Eibl 2018). Coups also do not end the same way. One important innovation in the current literature is the effort to evaluate the determinants of failed coups and not just those that are successful (Powell 2012, Singh 2014). For those that succeed, scholars also now distinguish between coups that merely reshuffle leaders and those that displace regimes altogether (Aksoy et al. 2015).

A third focus is on autocrats' coup-prevention or "coup-proofing" tactics (Brooks 1998, Quinlivan 1999, Belkin & Schofer 2003). There is a plethora of methods on which leaders rely, which variously affect military actors' motives and capacity to organize conspiracies. In particular, several recent studies have focused on the efficacy of counterbalancing, a tactic in which leaders proliferate rivalrous units within the military and security sector in order to prevent coups (Belkin & Schofer 2003, Powell 2012, Böhmelt & Pilster 2015, De Bruin 2018). Other studies focus on autocrats' efforts to "stack" the military with allied ethnic or sectarian groups (Harkness 2016, Roessler 2016). Scholars have also begun to explore the actual process through which leaders impose coup-prevention measures, and how they do so without precipitating a coup in the process. Sudduth's (2017) analysis, for example, shows that leaders time purges of the officer corps for periods when they anticipate the threat of a coup is limited, using the firings to stave off the growth of future military challengers.

As scholars consider future projects in this rich research on coups, they might take two steps to promote greater connections within the scholarly literature. First, scholars might bridge to comparative research beyond coups—and to studies of democratic backsliding, in particular (Waldner & Lust 2018). The international pressures to allow postcoup elections emphasized by Marinov & Goemans (2014), for example, could help explain why political leaders have resorted to these incremental measures to expand their power, rather than sponsor coups against the government; or normative pressures against coups could explain why those leaders can steam-roll democratic processes without fearing the military will oust them for doing so. As normative pressures against coups potentially abate with the fracturing of the liberal world order, coups might in turn increase in incidence, in part because research suggests junior officers are especially attuned to declines in

political liberalization (Albrecht & Eibl 2018). More broadly, particular patterns of civil–military relations might enable, or foreclose, the use of these power-grabbing tactics (Harkness 2017). In short, both the coup and backsliding literatures might be enriched by greater cross-fertilization.

Second, scholars might do more to synthesize insights and adjudicate empirical findings within the rapidly expanding research on coups. The vibrancy of the new generation of scholarship has had a bit of a downside in this respect. The proliferation of new data sets using alternative definitions of concepts, operationalizations, and sources has led to findings that are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Scholars also tend to motivate hypotheses with narrowly tailored analytical logics, yielding sometimes important but often piecemeal findings; the sum of the parts often seems greater than the whole.

One way to achieve greater integration is to begin with more ambitious and fully specified deductive theories of autocratic civil–military relations (Svolik 2012). Scholars, for example, might aim to identify the broader strategic logics that underpin an autocrat’s effort to prevent coups. Presently, coup-prevention tactics are treated largely as a menu of interchangeable options from which autocrats choose. These tactics beg for some strategy. In fact, there is already some empirical evidence from Arab states that autocrats’ strategies of political control may vary in systematic patterns (McLauchlin 2010; Brooks 2013, 2017; Bou Nassif 2015a). Autocrats may, for example, sometimes employ strategies that marginalize the military politically, keeping it docile by attenuating its role in the authoritarian regime, as did President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. Alternatively, like Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak, they may vest the military in their rule by ceding prerogatives and organizational benefits in a grand bargain with the senior leadership. Or, like Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad, they may divide and rule by forging bilateral deals with military chiefs in charge of autonomous competing units (Stacher 2012).

In addition, scholars might also innovate a common conceptual framework for studying the origins of coups. Insights from bargaining models of war might provide the foundation for that framework. Indeed, they highlight an important puzzle that has yet to be fully addressed in the literature: Political and military actors should prefer to settle their disputes through bargaining and concession making to avoid having to pay the costs of a coup (Svolik 2012). Factors that affect each side’s political power, or military actors’ motives and capabilities to engage in a coup, should seamlessly produce renegotiation and affect the terms of a new deal—not yield coups. So why do coups happen? The answer, from this perspective, depends on the reasons why military and political leaders might not be able to reach agreements: Coups result from bargaining failures.

There are already some clues within the extant literature for why political–military bargaining might fail. A political leader’s commitment to uphold his end of the deal may not be credible, for example, if he empowers competing parts of the coercive apparatus in order to undercut the military’s future bargaining power (Kandil 2012). Conversely, the senior military leadership’s threats to coup might not be credible if its senior officers view governing as harmful to the military institution (Hunter 1998, Barany 2012, White 2017). A political leader may then underestimate those officers’ resolve and fail to compensate them adequately to sustain a deal. Uncertainty about relative capabilities and each side’s incentives to exaggerate its capabilities could also generate bargaining failures. Coup plotters, for example, might be unable to communicate their capability to launch a coup without compromising the strategic surprise essential to coup success (Piplani & Talmadge 2016, De Bruin 2018).

Similar dynamics may also help explain some striking empirical patterns in the coup literature. According to Powell & Thyne (2011, p. 255), from 1950 through 2010, coups failed more than half the time in Latin America and the Middle East, and in Asia and Africa the odds of success were not much higher. Bargaining failures might help account for that high rate of failure. If plotters both overestimate their capabilities to coup and cannot reach a deal with political leaders in part

because of that miscalculation, they might attempt coups that have low probabilities of succeeding. Uncertainty and bargaining dynamics could explain both why coups happen and why they often fail.

## **Military Defection**

Spurred by the Arab uprisings of 2011, interest in military defection has surged in recent years. Defection is the term by which scholars commonly refer to the decision by senior military leaders to abstain from using force to disperse mass unarmed protests that threaten a regime. The uprisings seemed to offer scholars a natural experiment: Faced with large protests in late 2010 and early 2011 across the Arab world, militaries reacted differently. Some defected from their political leaders and refused to fire on protesters to disperse them (Tunisia and Egypt); some remained loyal and repressed protesters (Syria and Bahrain); others fractured, with some units defending the leader and others refusing to repress demonstrators (Libya and Yemen). Building from the observed outcome of defection/no defection, a large scholarly literature emerged to account for the variation (for a review see Brooks 2017). The Arab Spring has since provided a focal point for scholars working on civil–military relations and mass protests.

Despite this scholarship's many contributions, it illustrates the perils of selecting on the dependent variable when designing research. Beginning with the apparent similarity in the Tunisian and Egyptian militaries' reaction to the 2011 protests, for example, scholars have worked backward to find a common cause for the outcome. In so doing, they have neglected important differences in the two militaries' roles in the regime crises and in the causes of the decision to withhold force—facts that were later underscored by the countries' very different trajectories in the uprisings' aftermath. Syria's puzzling no-defection outcome, in which the security structure coalesced in defense of the regime, went mostly unappreciated; divided security structures like Syria's, composed of rival units, often splinter in regime crises and may form pacts with protesters (O'Donnell et al. 1986, T. Lee 2015, Morency-Laflamme 2018). Why an elite consensus to repress emerged instead in Syria thus requires explanation (McLauchlin 2010, Stacher 2012). The protests themselves were also treated as independent observations, neglecting authoritarian learning about military repression and how that may have affected outcomes across the cases. Many analysts failed also to think seriously about the theory of autocratic civil–military relations implied by the concept of defection: What was the nature of the agreement between the senior military and political leadership such that not repressing constituted a defection?

Fortunately, that initial flurry of research, combined with other scholarship on protests and military behavior in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Pion-Berlin et al. 2012, T. Lee 2015, Barany 2016), paved the way for some important current research and new insights. Recent scholarship, for example, has sought to move beyond the focus on defection and conceptualize forms of military insubordination more comprehensively (Albrecht & Ohl 2016, McLauchlin & La Parra-Perez 2018). Scholars now recognize variations in the structure of autocratic militaries, with some highly factionalized and others exhibiting a corporate structure and ethos (Bellin 2012). They also have begun to examine how a military's decision to fire on protests depends on its social composition and on relations between junior and senior officers (Johnson 2017, Grewal 2019). Bou Nassif (2015a) argues, for example, that if senior military officers anticipate that rank and file or junior officers will disobey orders to fire, they will be more inclined to defect from their political leaders.

Scholars working on the next generation of defection research might consider two new directions, which would help bridge existing divides. First, they might expand on recent efforts to study different incarnations of military insubordination. These include mutiny, fratricide,

desertion, breakdowns in discipline or cohesion, individual officer resignation, and even failing to reenlist (legal forms of exit in the military) (Cortright 2005, Castillo 2014, Albrecht & Ohl 2016, Shields 2017, McLauchlin & La Parra-Perez 2018). Often these are studied as distinct forms of political action, but they might also be considered as alternative responses or outcomes and be conceptualized accordingly. They are also phenomena that occur in militaries across regime types, and therefore may facilitate comparison of civil–military relations in democracies and nondemocracies.

Second, scholars working on defection might reverse the causal arrow and explore the endogenous effects of civil–military relations on protest. Doing so would connect civil–military relations scholarship with studies of political violence and contentious politics. A state’s civil–military relations could affect the origins or trajectory of popular uprisings through several causal pathways. One possibility is that activists’ expectations about the character of their state’s military may condition their decisions to organize nonviolent protest movements in the first place. Organizers in Egypt in 2011, for example, deliberately employed nonviolent protest tactics against the army, whose corporate character and social esteem among Egyptians rendered its leaders receptive to those tactics (Bellin 2012).

Civil–military relations also may affect how selectively military forces apply state repression to the citizenry and therefore the likelihood of protests emerging or escalating once begun. Militaries that are difficult to control, such as those composed of rival autonomous units or those that have been ethnically stacked, might be prone to indiscriminate repression that intensifies grievances. In contrast, regimes where repression can be targeted may be better able to create disincentives to join opposition movements (Greitens 2016). Jordanian forces’ careful management of demonstrations in early 2011, for example, may help explain why those protests failed to escalate into a full-blown uprising. Conversely, the brutal repression by Syrian forces of several teenage boys responsible for antiregime graffiti in Dara’a ignited a protest movement in March 2011 that few foresaw (Brooks 2017).

In addition, civil–military relations may shape protest movements through their effects on a political leader’s strategy to manage mass demonstrations. A leader who is facing incipient signs of mobilization and doubts whether the military will fire might offer concessions to prevent the emergence of a full-scale uprising (Johnson 2017). In this manner, civil–military relations might shape the trajectory of protest movements even absent any explicit action taken by the military. Finally, militaries themselves may deliberately engineer protests against political leaders in order to provide the pretext for abandoning them in office (Ketchley 2017). In these cases, the military’s dilemma to defect or not is manufactured; protests are epiphenomenal to some prior civil–military rift.

## Civilian Control of the Military

A third cluster of scholarship focuses on civilian control of the military, or “how do civilian political actors manage (or fail to manage) to subordinate the military to their authority?” (Perlmutter & Leogrande 1982, p. 779). Scholars generally define the presence or absence of civilian (or more broadly, political) control according to whether civilians’ preferences prevail over the military’s across the state’s policy domains, including those that bear on the military itself. In the presence of civilian control of the military, civilian leaders also allocate institutional prerogatives and choose when to delegate authorities to the military (Croissant et al. 2010, Feaver 2003). As such, civilian control is a more encompassing expression of civilian authority than is analyzed in the coup and defection scholarship. Even without those extreme forms of military insubordination, a political leader’s capacity to make or implement policy—and therefore control—may be compromised.

There are three major sets of scholarship related to civilian control. The first explores the development of institutions of civilian control in new democracies. Even after militaries withdraw to the barracks during democratization, they often retain significant domestic political power, which varies with the conditions of the transition, their popular support, and other factors. Militaries can then use this power to claim formal institutional prerogatives or to contest civilian authority through informal means (Stepan 1988; Pion-Berlin 1997; Croissant et al. 2010, p. 956). The degree of civilian control evinced in a state depends on the allocation of these prerogatives as well as the institutional capacity and experience of civilian entities in charge of overseeing military activity (Bruneau & Tollefson 2006, Lagasse & Saideman 2017, Lupton 2017).

Scholars of American civil–military relations also study civilian control and military contestation, although with different terminology and a more normative orientation than those of comparativists. Huntington’s (1957) seminal *The Soldier and the State* and his concept of “objective control of the military” are essential background for understanding these debates. Huntington contends that objective control is the preferred model of civilian control because it both promotes civilian supremacy and assures that the military remains effective in armed conflict (i.e., it solves the dilemma inherent in the civil–military “problematique”).

Specifically, objective control entails a separation of authority and domains of responsibility into a military and a political sphere. Political leaders unilaterally make decisions about when force is to be used; military leaders then take over and translate those objectives into military strategy and operations free from civilian micromanagement (a Huntingtonian concept). According to Huntington (1957), this division of labor promotes an apolitical professional ethos among officers, who become experts in the “management of violence,” while steering clear of politics and remaining deferent to civilian authority.

Huntington’s objective control powerfully frames the scholarly debate on civilian control in the United States (Nielsen & Snider 2009, Bruneau 2013). As Cohen (2002) puts it, Huntington’s is “the normal theory” against which all other approaches must position themselves. Huntington’s objective control concept also has had intense normative reverberations within the American military. In particular, his standard of apolitical professionalism is the backdrop against which political behaviors by military leaders are evaluated by analysts and often by officers and senior leaders themselves (Kohn 1994, Snider & Matthews 2005). These behaviors include appealing to the public, as in chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell’s advocacy against intervention in the Bosnian civil war in the early 1990s; leaking information to the press, as some suspect an ally of General Stanley McChrystal did during the Obama administration’s 2009 Afghan strategy review; and endorsing candidates, as a growing number of retired officers have been doing in presidential elections since the 1990s (Kohn 1994, Mahoney-Norris 2008, Brooks 2009, Ulrich 2015). Comparativists working on civilian control might recognize these as predictable forms of contestation by a socially esteemed military, of which the American military is an example. But in the United States, these behaviors are mostly judged to be aberrant and are swiftly condemned as norm violations—a reflection of the way that Huntington’s (1957) apolitical professionalism has shaped both analysts’ and the military’s conception of appropriate behavior.

Recent experimental research by Golby et al. (2017) affirms the potential political impact of military contestation. These scholars find that when a military leader makes statements opposing a civilian’s plan for military intervention, public support for the action falls. Advocacy by military leaders thus constrains civilian decision makers by increasing the political risks they face when pursuing their preferred policies. Recchia (2015) similarly shows how military leaders can threaten to withhold support for a military operation to force civilians to seek multilateral burden sharing. Feaver (2016) goes so far as to suggest that the military might even use such threats to sabotage



the entire plan for humanitarian intervention—a clear demonstration of contestation of civilian authority.

Huntington's (1957) concept of objective control also bears on a third strand of literature on civilian control, namely a debate about its implications for strategic assessment and military effectiveness. "Professional supremacists" agree with Huntington (1957) that effectiveness is maximized when the military enjoys exclusive authority over the conduct of war (Feaver 2011, p. 89). Other scholars reject the argument that ceding autonomy to the military promotes sound wartime strategy and operations. Posen (1984) and Van Evera (1984), for example, argue that civilian control is essential to ensure the integration of political goals with military means; a military left to its own devices will pursue parochial military doctrines that reflect its organizational interests. Militaries also may reject the legitimacy of some missions or develop particular views about how and when force is to be used that put them at odds with civilians [Betts 1991 (1977), Avant 1996/1997, Feaver & Gelpi 2005]. Others find that civilian supremacy is a prerequisite to sound strategic assessment, but that other factors, such as the intensity of preference divergence, also affect its quality (Brooks 2008).

The most direct and prominent challenge to Huntington, however, comes from Cohen (2002) in *Supreme Command*. Cohen contends that civilian intervention and engagement with military leaders in an "unequal dialogue" are a superior model of civil-military relations. Huntington (1957) maintains that a clearly defined division of responsibility and authority between political and military leaders (to which each which would strictly adhere) would promote military effectiveness. Cohen, however, contends that civilians regularly have to intervene in military activity to make sure that tactical and operational activity aligns with the state's strategic and political goals. Like Huntington's, Cohen's approach has had a striking normative impact within the US Defense establishment. It has shaped the views of civilians in the Pentagon and fueled a "culture clash" with their military counterparts about the role of civilian oversight in military operations (Davidson 2013).

These three areas of scholarship on civilian control could be better integrated and tied to other research, such as that on coups. Studies of civilian control in new democracies offer an important corrective to the "fallacy of coup-ism," or the tendency to define civilian control as the absence of coups (Croissant et al. 2010, p. 954; see also Cook 2007). They also help illuminate the bargaining process that might substitute for coups by showing how militaries use their political power to extract concessions and win prerogatives.

Haggling over prerogatives, especially in the national security domain, in fact may be fundamental to civil-military relations across regimes types. According to Bacevich (2007), regardless of what objective control dictates, the reality is that bargaining is the dominant means of accommodation in US civil-military relations (for other critiques of Huntington 1957, see Feaver 2003, Owens 2011, Bruneau 2013, Rapp 2015). Scholars working on the American case might look to scholarship on democratizing states to better understand the rudiments of this implicit bargaining process. Conversely, those studying new democracies might examine the empirical incarnations of military contestation in the United States (see Brooks 2009). This might yield more comprehensive typologies of military involvement in politics across regime types (Finer 1962).

More investigation into the causes of civilian control would also help integrate extant scholarship. As suggested above, in the American military, civilian control is assumed to depend on norms rooted in military officers' self-concept as apolitical professionals; the military itself moderates the degree and domain in which it contests civilian authority. Structural conditions, however, also likely underpin that self-restraint (Strachan 1997, Sechser 2004). Scholars of new democracies conversely stress material factors such as the military's residual power in a regime as the cause of civilian control. But even in nondemocracies, how a military defines its appropriate missions and

whether it believes in the legitimacy of civilian rule may also affect whether it intervenes in politics (Stepan 1973, Taylor 2003, Barany 2012). Clearly, the effects of ideational and material factors on civilian control could be better understood.

### **Societal–Military (Dis)Integration**

The last major focus of the literature concerns the relationship between the military and society at large. This theme appears in several areas of the scholarly literature, but is especially prominent in studies of the United States.

Since the 1990s, scholars of US civil–military relations have observed several gaps between the American military and society (Rahbek–Clemmensen et al. 2012). The first relates to patterns of partisan affiliation and demographics in the military versus American society at large. Several studies, including foundational surveys of the officer corps by the Triangle Institute of Security Studies (TISS) in the late 1990s, demonstrate that the military is disproportionately Republican (especially its officers), Southern, and rural relative to American society (Feaver & Kohn 2001; Dempsey 2010; Urban 2013; Schake & Mattis 2016; Liebert & Golby 2017, p. 116; Burbach 2019). These differences have been rendered acute by intensifying partisanship: Senior officers have long been conservative, but in the past many identified as nonpartisan or independents rather than professing support for a political party (Liebert & Golby 2017, p. 119). Several factors may explain this gap: a reduction in the percentage of Americans who serve or know someone who served in the military (in part due to the creation of an all-volunteer force in 1973); the concentration of military bases in the country's southern states; and a growing tendency for hereditary service, in which those who volunteer also have a family member who served (Liebert & Golby 2017, Desch 2001).

A second cultural gap relates to the values held by military personnel relative to civilian society. Scholars have long debated the degree to which the military inhabits a unique sphere and therefore engenders (and potentially requires) a distinct worldview among its members (Huntington 1957, Janowitz 1960). Yet, however natural, that divergence from the broader culture in values has in recent decades mutated into something perverse. In the 1990s, Ricks (1997) first drew attention to the issue when he reported on his interviews with Marines in which they disparaged civilian society for what they saw as its dissolute and indolent character. Subsequent TISS surveys showed that such derisive attitudes toward American society were not uncommon among military personnel (Feaver & Kohn 2001). This finding is especially striking given that the attitude is not reciprocated; the American public expresses more confidence in the military than any other institution in the country, as shown in commonly cited Gallup polling. But, while Americans venerate the military, they also know little about it and seem disinclined to learn more (Fallows 2015, Schake & Mattis 2016). The result is an odd disconnect, in which Americans (blindly) revere a military many of whose members do not appear to regard them similarly.

There is a deep intuition among scholars that these gaps represent something troubling in US civil–military relations. There have, however, been far more efforts to document these partisan and cultural divides than to identify and evaluate hypotheses about their implications. Still, there are clues in the extant scholarship that these gaps might matter profoundly (Fordham 2001, Feaver & Gelpi 2005), especially for the effectiveness of the military in the country's wars. In particular, Americans' uninformed reverence for the military could create disincentives for politicians to challenge the judgments of esteemed military leaders and could discourage public scrutiny and accountability of the military (Fallows 2015; Liebert & Golby 2017, p. 122; Golby & Karlin 2018). They may foster a belief in the infallibility of the military and in the use of military force that contributes to a militarist culture in the United States (Bacevich 2013). The result might be what

journalist James Fallows (2015) calls a Chickenhawk Nation “that is more likely to keep going to war, and to keep losing, than one that wrestles with long-term questions of effectiveness.” In sum, there are vital issues at stake in researching contemporary civil–military gaps, and while there is some scholarship that bears on them, much remains for social scientists to investigate. Doing so would help connect academic social science to critically important policy debates about the health of civil–military relations in the United States.

Comparativists too study the nature and implications of military–societal integration—albeit with a very different set of research questions and empirical focus. Rather than partisan and cultural splits, they focus on social structural differences, and especially the tribal, ethnic, and sectarian composition of the military and how well it aligns with or diverges from the composition of society. They also emphasize the political origins of those divides: Leaders manipulate gaps for their own purposes. Through selective recruitment, promotion, and appointments, leaders disproportionately select military personnel from particular subsections or groups in society. As described above, the ensuing gap between society and the military helps secure the latter’s loyalty and prevent coups. Similarly, promoting social distance between society and the military helps guarantee that junior officers and enlisted personnel will fire on protesters if called upon (Bou Nassif 2015a, Bellin 2012, Johnson 2017).

A separate body of comparative scholarship on the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants after civil wars emphasizes the reverse dynamic. Rather than exploring how leaders create divisions, it analyzes efforts to ameliorate societal–military gaps through the development of national armies (Johnson 2017). Indeed, research shows that when properly implemented, policies to integrate militaries render peace agreements self-enforcing and facilitate power-sharing after civil wars (Glassmeyer & Sambanis 2008).

Cross-fertilization of this research could yield substantial new insights into societal–military relations. Most research on social stacking of the military focuses on the analytical and empirical ramifications of those divisions (for coups and defection). What occurs within militaries that are not stacked, such as those that are socially homogeneous, multiethnic, or demographically representative, is less theorized. Scholars might expand their understandings of the latter by examining the militaries that have successfully reintegrated after civil wars.

Researchers working on these issues would also benefit from thinking more about the importance of the politics of “military design” (Johnson & Thurber 2017), or how political leaders formulate policies related to personnel recruitment, deployment and basing decisions, officer selection, and advancement. Here, comparativists provide a lesson to scholars of American civil–military relations: Gaps are not created and sustained by themselves; they result from political decisions. This is as true in the United States as in other countries. Manpower policies are political decisions (Blankshain et al. 2017), as are decisions to locate bases in particular regions of a country (Rahbeck-Clemmensen et al. 2012). Japan, for example, has adopted policies that have sought explicitly to mitigate its societal–military gap (Feaver et al. 2005, p. 252).

Scholars researching ethnic stacking might also think more about its design. Stacking can take different forms, potentially with different consequences, such as involving disproportionate recruiting into the officer corps as a whole, or the creation of separate paramilitary units composed of loyalists (Harkness 2016). The civil wars scholarship also shows that how military integration is designed and implemented is a major cause of its success; this observation might provide lessons on how and under what conditions political leaders can safely abandon ethnic stacking. At the same time, the stacking scholarship offers an important warning to the applied literature on DDR: A leader’s incentives to retain ethnic, sectarian, or tribal bias in the military to prevent coups might obstruct the creation of national militaries. What is seen by practitioners as a problem of design is, in fact, a deeply political phenomenon.

## THREE BIG STEPS FORWARD

Below I suggest three paths for promoting integration within the subfield of civil–military relations and connecting with other research areas in the discipline of political science.

### Consider the Multidimensionality of Civil–Military Relations in Authoritarian Regimes

A first step in promoting integration involves conceptualizing more comprehensively the complexities of autocratic civil–military relations. Presently, defections, coups, and civilian control are analyzed as largely separate phenomena—as distinct problems that must be resolved by political leaders. Yet, that approach misrepresents the multidimensionality of autocratic civil–military relations. Political leaders do not choose which of these problems to address; they must deal with them all, simultaneously.

Specifically, autocrats face four competing imperatives. The first is a coup-prevention imperative, which involves ensuring that the military abstains from conspiracies against the regime. The second is a repression imperative, or guaranteeing that the military will use force against societal groups to protect the regime when required. The third imperative involves safeguarding military effectiveness, or ensuring the military performs well in armed conflict. The fourth might be termed a governance imperative. It relates to civilian or political control, but it represents a broader challenge: Autocrats seek not only to retain the authority to make decisions but also to ensure that the military does not compromise their preferred policy and resource-allocation outcomes.

An autocrat's central challenge is to balance all four imperatives. Doing so likely requires making trade-offs in the risks he or she accepts. For example, although not explicitly framed in these terms, such trade-offs are a central theme in the body of scholarship on how coup-prevention tactics impede military effectiveness. Many such tactics, such as politicized appointments and centralized command structures, compromise the military's ability to fight (Biddle & Zirkle 1996, Brooks 1998, Pilster & Böhmelt 2011, Piplani & Talmadge 2016). Leaders must accept greater risks of either military defeat or loss of office from coup conspiracies. When leaders begin to experience serious losses during wars, for example, they often abandon coup-prevention tactics and adopt organizational forms that are conducive to military success (Talmadge 2015).

Autocrats may make similar trade-offs when waging counterinsurgencies. Roessler (2016) argues that many African autocrats successfully employ ethnic stacking to prevent coups, but this tactic compromises their ability to acquire intelligence about excluded social groups and therefore to effectively battle internal insurgencies. In contrast, counterbalancing with militias drawn from the local population provides information about opposition groups, thereby enhancing counterinsurgency success (Carey et al. 2016). Leaders may also be willing to divide the military in order to prevent military conspiracies, even if it means they face greater risk that those forces will indiscriminately repress civilians and incite societal opposition (Greitens 2016). Other research suggests that autocrats also experience trade-offs across the governance and defection imperatives. Ben Ali's experience during the 2010–2011 uprisings in Tunisia is instructive. For decades prior to the uprisings, marginalizing the Tunisian military's roles in politics had provided the dictator substantial latitude to govern. Yet, one consequence was that the military had little investment in saving the regime once protests began. Military leaders failed to seize the initiative and take over from police when their efforts to disperse protesters faltered (Brooks 2013). Future scholarship might consider other trade-offs and dilemmas of this kind facing political leaders across these central imperatives.

## Normalize the Military's Role in Politics

Working to normalize the military's role in politics is a second means for integrating civil–military relations research. As noted above, the military has long been treated as an exceptional actor, in part because it controls the most lethal forms of armed force in the state and has the power to directly oust political leaders from office. While the military's coercive power is important, however, its political power is not reducible to it. In many respects, the military is akin to other powerful constituencies in the state in how it derives power and impacts distributional and policy outcomes. Neglecting these more routine dimensions of influence attenuates our understanding of the military as a political actor. It also creates an artificial division between the study of the military in authoritarian contexts and in democracies by obscuring similarities in the way the military can influence politics in both.

Militaries can exercise power in various ways that do not depend on a threat of armed intervention in the government. Large militaries often enjoy bureaucratic power within state institutions as the result of their budget, mission, and positions, which they can use to claim the prerogatives of competing bureaucracies (Brooks 2016). Senior military leaders can exercise influence by shirking when fulfilling their responsibilities (Feaver 2003); they may agenda-set when giving advice and slow-roll when implementing orders (C.A. Lee 2015). Lower-ranking soldiers' roles in the execution of tactical operations can also be a source of political power (Ruffa et al. 2013). Military organizations, in addition, may enjoy structural power because of their size, impact on the economy, and reach into civilian society via military bases and the presence of veterans' organizations (Burk 2001). Their leaders may be able to leverage ties to legislators or otherwise rely on them to protect their bureaucratic interests (Avant 1994, Kriner 2010). Meanwhile, the challenge of mobilizing societal opposition to overseas military deployments may bolster military officials' influence in national security decision making (Milner & Tingley 2015).

Military leaders and organizations can acquire political influence by actively coalescing with organized interest groups in society to advance their organizational interests (as President Dwight Eisenhower famously observed when he coined the term “military–industrial complex”). Militaries may also be able to draw on another common source of influence: popular esteem. Where militaries enjoy high levels of social esteem, citizens may support greater roles for them in the state, and senior military leaders may seek to harness the public's positive regard to advance their political agendas (Kurlantzick 2018). Factions or suborganizations of the military can make pacts or forge alliances with societal constituencies. This may occur in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. For example, Liebert & Golby (2017) worry that growing partisanship inside the military and polarization in American society could give rise to cross-coalitions of military and societal constituencies. Partisan officers might form alliances with subsections of the US electorate to promote their preferred policies. The senior military leadership might also align with politicians they think will protect the institution's interests. Such an outcome would not be surprising, even though it is at odds with prevailing norms of civil–military relations in the United States. Like other bureaucratic actors, Fordham (2001, p. 345) notes, “the military must rely on ties to society in order to get the resources it needs and have its policy expertise heeded.” The US military—like all militaries—fights for its interests, and coalescing with civilian constituencies is one means to do so.

Importantly, these alternative sources of power matter even when the military also retains a viable coercive threat. Societal alliances and popular esteem, in particular, may be pivotal to the military's bargaining power in authoritarian regimes. After the Egyptian military's devastating performance in the June 1967 war, for example, its social esteem plummeted, which laid the

groundwork for a massive reclamation of decision-making prerogatives by Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Brooks 2006).

Normalizing the military's roles in politics paves the way for analyzing how the organization and its leaders shape policy and distributional outcomes in states. Yet, it also may be relevant for more traditional dependent variables related to leadership tenure and regime change: organizing coups or failing to repress mass protests are not the only means through which militaries can affect a leader's position in office. Military actors may be able to affect elections or elite politics through conventional channels, such as coalescing with societal groups and appeals to public opinion. In short, exploring the unexceptional aspects of the military's power is an essential step to revealing its full impact on politics.

## Connect with Research Across the Discipline

A final step in better integrating the field of civil-military relations is to build bridges to other research in the discipline of political science. Below I suggest three steps that political scientists can make to promote these connections.

**Research the causes and effects of "civil-military relations" in nonstate actors, both violent and peaceful.** Many large militant groups and movements have formally designated political and military wings, and others exhibit informal divisions of labor across political/strategic and operational roles. Similarly, nonviolent social movements also often have both tactical and politically/strategically minded leaderships. This raises important questions for research: How do relations among these wings or leaders vary? When does the political leadership control the operational wing, or vice versa? What consequences do those relations have for the tactics, strategy, cohesion, and resilience of the movement or group?

Civil-military relations may also affect the efficacy of protest movements employing strategies of nonviolent political action. Some militaries may be especially responsive to those tactics, like the Egyptian military discussed above. Other militaries, however, might be resistant, such as those that have been heavily involved in human rights abuses or that administer daily repression (Hunter 1998, p. 305). Determining when militaries will be resilient against strategies of nonviolence might help predict when those methods are apt to be successful in achieving a social movement's goals. In addition, understanding how violent rebellions affect a military's propensity to engage in coups may be essential to understanding the evolution and outcomes of civil wars (Bell & Sudduth 2017).

**Expand research on the variety of actors in the security sector.** Scholars should also continue their efforts to disaggregate and explore the causes and effects of intramilitary divisions (Albrecht & Ohl 2016; Barany 2016, pp. 24–29). Scholars working on defection and coups already focus on relations between junior and senior officers and ethnic divisions. But other cleavages might be fruitfully explored in the next generation of research, including interservice rivalries, generational cohorts among officers (White 2017), regional differences (Grewal 2019), or informal factions among officers based on preference alignments or allegiance to different charismatic leaders (White 2017, McLauchlin & La Parra-Perez 2018, Grewal 2019).

Scholars also might research in greater depth the complexities of relations among the military, police, and other security forces. Scholars of counterbalancing assume these entities compete, but the nature of that competition or other aspects of relations within the security sector remain underexplored (Böhmelt & Clayton 2017). As mutual agents of repression in autocratic states, for example, militaries and police often have both complementary and conflicting interests (Kandil

2012, Brooks 2013, Bou Nassif 2015b). Too little is presently known about the complexities of police–military relations.

Militaries may also have relationships with other state militaries, such as through the United States’ International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. In the small extant literature on these programs, there is little consensus on their effects, and more could be done to study these dynamics. Some scholars argue that educating foreign officers perniciously increases autocratic militaries’ human capital and enables coups (Caverley & Savage 2017). A more sanguine perspective contends such programs impart norms of professionalism and promote civilian control (Atkinson 2006).

Militaries also interact with foreign militaries when they provide security force assistance, of the kind the United States increasingly supplies to African militaries (Allen 2018). This too raises many questions for research. How do the civil–military relations in the recipient state affect the success of those training efforts? How might the training condition the recipient state’s civil–military relations? Future research should engage questions related to military–military relations.

**Research (further) the relationship between civil–military relations and war.** Elucidating the effects of civil–military relations on interstate war is a long-standing theme in the scholarly literature, as the above discussion of military strategy and effectiveness demonstrates. Recently, scholars have begun to reverse the causal arrow. They find that international threats or wars have largely palliative effects on civil–military relations, reducing the odds of military intervention in politics (Desch 1999, Belkin & Schofer 2003, McMahon & Slanchev 2015, Piplani & Talmadge 2015, White 2017).

Many other causal linkages between interstate wars and civil–military relations, however, remain to be explored in future scholarship. Top military leaders, for example, often have direct ties and regular interactions with their counterparts in foreign state militaries. Those liaison relationships might provide a source of information about the other state’s capabilities or preferences, a means of influence, or a channel through which to communicate interests and signal resolve during interstate disputes. Military–military relations may impact crisis resolution.

A state’s civil–military relations may also condition its strategic interaction with other states in unforeseen ways. Domestic political competition between bellicose military leaders and political leaders could obscure information about the state’s resolve—states with discordant civil–military relations might be difficult to “read”—complicating interstate bargaining (Brooks 2008). Conversely, politically powerful militaries, especially those inclined toward war, might facilitate signaling resolve and enable peaceful resolution of disputes, or they might take belligerent actions that escalate crises to war (Weeks 2012). In short, more remains to be known about war and civil–military relations.

## CONCLUSION

Civil–military relations is a vibrant field of study, but it suffers from unnecessary compartmentalization and fragmentation. The next generation of scholarship should do more to promote integration. This can be achieved through innovations in deductive theorizing, new analytical frameworks, bridging with other research in political science, and generally pursuing opportunities to synthesize findings and adjudicate empirical analyses. Future accumulation of knowledge about civil–military relations depends on these efforts.



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## Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Political Science* articles may be found at <http://www.annualreviews.org/errata/polisci>