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Explaining Civil-Military Relations in New Democracies: Structure, Agency and Theory Development

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This article discusses the structure-agency problem in explaining civilian control of the military in new democracies. The authors first provide a systematic analysis of the core contents of the structure-agency problem and its implications for theory-building in civil-military research: the agential entities whose interactions are constitutive of civil-military relations, the relevant environmental factors, and the theoretical argument which links agents' behaviour with the environment. Based on these meta-theoretical deliberations, the authors analyze four recent attempts to explicitly connect structure and agency in explaining civil-military relations in new democracies. The analysis shows that while being important contributions to theory development in the field, none of these theories have consistently dealt with the agency-structure problem in explaining civil-military relations in new democracies.

Keywords: Agency; Civil-Military Relations; Democratization; Structure; Philosophy of Science

Introduction

Political scientists have proposed a multitude of contending theories on civil-military relations in new democracies, postulating an array of explanatory variables ranging from ideational factors like military internal norms and values (e.g., Stepan, 1988; Fitch, 1998; Loveman, 1999) or the dominant political culture in society (e.g., Mares, 1998), institutional factors like the legacies of the prior regime or the institutional set-up of the state (e.g., Agüero, 1995a; Pion-Berlin, 1997), to large-scale structural conditions like socio-economic performance and the security situation of the new

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civilian democratic regime (e.g., Desch, 1999; Alagappa, 2001). Each of these approaches not only subscribes to a specific substantial claim concerning the most important factors explaining civil-military relations in new democracies, but also takes up a certain position towards the *structure-agency problem* which has been identified as a core issue in social science theory. Simplified, the problem centres around the question how to theoretically capture the fact that social phenomena are produced by human (inter-)action ('agency'), while at the same time appreciating that these actions themselves are influenced by factors exogenous to the actors ('structure') (cf. Dessler, 1989; Wight, 2006). Up till now, however, the literature has not explicitly addressed the interplay of structure and agency in the explanation of civilian control in new democracies.

In this article, we argue that this lacuna has the potential to undermine the persuasiveness of theoretical explanations of civil-military relations and the ability to derive unambiguous hypotheses from them. The explanatory value of a theoretical proposition is dubious if it is silent on the interplay of the structural surroundings of action and the action itself which produces the outcome. Furthermore, insufficient attention to the interplay of agency and structure weakens the argument by reducing the number of empirically testable implications derived from the theory. This article investigates this problem in three steps. We first shortly discuss the structure-agency problem in the social sciences. Second, we outline the theoretical implications of the problem in relation to theory-building in civil-military relations. Finally, we evaluate selected theories of civil-military relations in new democracies on how they deal with this problem. The article closes with a short summary of the argument and a concluding observation.

The Structure-Agency Problem in Social Sciences and Civil-Military Study

The structure-agency problem is inherent to any causal explanations in the social sciences. Following a minimal definition, causal explanations account for a phenomenon (the 'effect', or *explanandum*) by citing the instances or events which bring it about (the 'cause' or *explanans*) (Woodward, 2003). Since social phenomena are by definition the result of human action and interaction (cf. Weber, 2008; Blondel, 2010), causal explanations need to be grounded on some idea of how human (inter-) action affects (or brings about) the *explanandum*. This includes an argument on how human (inter-)action is embedded in and interacts with the structural and cultural environment in which it takes place: Even though human behaviour is constitutive of social phenomena, humans do not make their choices in an ecological vacuum, but within structural, cultural and historical contexts which influence their behaviour to the extent 'that at least for some or even a substantial part of the time their actions are determined' (King, 2009: 277). Consequently, all explanatory theoretical propositions necessarily entail some—albeit implicit—assumption on the nature of the agents, the relevant structures and the interrelationship between the agents and the structures in which their interactions take place.

For the development of social science explanations, this raises the question if there is an explanatory hierarchy between structure and agency. To this three ideal type 'solutions' have been proposed (Wendt, 1987: 339). The first perspective gives precedence to agency. Such explanations, often characterized as 'voluntarist' or 'intentionalist' (cf. Mahoney and Snyder, 1999), explain social phenomena primarily by relying on the intended (and sometimes unintended) outcomes of actors' behaviour which is—in principle—unconstrained by structural causes. In the ideal type 'voluntarist' account, actors are free to choose from a variety of options according to their interests, and structures do not carry any autonomous explanatory weight. In 'structuralist' explanations, on the other hand, actors' choices have no autonomous explanatory power. Even though they do not disregard the relevance of human action for the emergence of social phenomena, these approaches argue that action can be accounted for as an effect of the structural environment in which the actors find themselves.

Even though some theoretical perspectives do indeed explain social phenomena exclusively by referring to either agency (e.g., Elster, 1976; Coleman, 1990) or structure (e.g., Blau, 1977; Luhmann, 1995) and reject the explanatory value of the respective other, the vast majority of social theorists do not subscribe to either of these reductionist positions. Rather, most social scientists—at least implicitly—subscribe to a third position and 'believe that the properties of agents and those of social structures are both relevant to explanations of social behavior' (Wendt, 1987: 337). Social theorists have provided a range of insightful approaches to integrate structure and agency (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Archer, 1982; 1995; Giddens, 1979; Cohen, 1989; Dessler, 1989; Jessop, 1990; 2007; Stones, 1991; Carlsnaes, 1992; Sewell, 1992). While quite different in their philosophical and theoretical foundations as well as their conclusions, these arguments agree that social phenomena are constituted by the outcomes of human actions and interactions which, in turn, are constrained and enabled in an environment of structures, many of which are results of prior human actions. In this understanding, structure and agency remain analytically distinct, but are systematically related such that 'the activation of the causal powers associated with constraints and enablements depends upon the use made of personal emergent properties to formulate agential projects' (Archer, 2003: 7).

The structure-agency problem is particularly prevalent for theorizing periods of institutional change. Changing the existing political rules and processes and moulding a new institutional framework has long been considered a highly contingent enterprise which cannot be explained by relating to structural factors alone. Rather, it provides space for *heresthetics*, that is, political creativity, manoeuvring and the 'successive invention, revision, and elimination of alternatives' (Riker, 1984: 2). This is for an even stronger reason the case in periods of political transition and regime change. When the core institutions which define the political system are in flux, new space for political action emerges. Not only does the former balance of power between the political actors change, but new actors might arise on the political scene while formerly relevant actors become obsolete. Similarly, under the conditions of institutional

transformation and political uncertainty, the actors are confronted with a wide range of actions, reactions and political decisions, many of which might not have been possible under the preceding authoritarian regime (cf. O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991). Still, even under these circumstances agents will unlikely be completely autonomous from the constraints and generative elements of their environment. Rather, transition periods are best thought of as periods of 'structured contingency' in which the potential for choice, strategic decisions and political manoeuvring is enhanced but agents are not completely free to ignore the structural context in which they operate (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). As the recalibration of civil-military relations is one aspect of such institutional change during a transition process (Huntington, 1991), the relationship of structure and agency needs to be systematically addressed in order to develop and test theories of civil-military change in new democracies.

Theorizing Civil-Military Changes in New Democracies

The substantive core problem for theories of civil-military relations in new democracies is to explain how and under what circumstances civilians succeed (or fail) in institutionalizing civilian control over the military.[1] Institutionalizing civilian control has two aspects (Stepan, 1988; Cottey *et al.*, 2002). First, the military must give up any formal or informal influence on public policy and the formation (and dissolution) of governments it might have held under the authoritarian regimes. Second, civilians must secure their authority over former 'reserved domains' (Valenzuela, 1992), that is, those policy areas of political decision-making in which the military had enjoyed exclusive institutional autonomy. Based on the useful conceptualization of 'entities', 'environments', and their 'relationship' (Sprout and Sprout, 1957) an explanation of civilian control needs to address three general problems: (1) it must identify the relevant *agential entities* which are part of the process of institutional change; (2) it must make some argument about the relevance of one or more of the *environmental variables* under which these agents make their decisions; and (3) it must describe how the agential entities and the environment *relate* to each other in producing the outcome.

Agential Entities: Specifying the Relevant Actors

The first dimension in theorizing change in civil-military relations is the identification of the relevant actors. While many social actors might be considered relevant for civil-military relations in some way or other, their ultimate relevance depends on two characteristics: the actors must possess the ability to *directly* make a difference in civil-military relations; and their actions must be *intentionally directed* at changing or maintaining civil-military relations (cf. Dietz and Burns, 1992). The ability to directly influence the status of civil-military relations depends primarily on the underlying definition of civilian control: By defining civilian control in a certain way, one makes an implicit or explicit statement on the most important social entities by

which civil-military relations are constituted and, correspondingly, by whom they can be altered. In most studies, civilian control is understood as one pole of a continuum which describes the distribution of political power between the civilian political elites on the national level and the military leadership (cf. Croissant *et al.*, 2010). Since—by definition—their interaction and behaviour in relation to each other define the outcome of civil-military relations, the set of possible relevant actors will at least consist of these functional elites, that is, the members of the civilian political executive and legislative institutions, and the general-rank members of the officer corps (cf. Huntington, 1957).[2]

The second necessary characteristic of relevant actors is the intentionality of their behaviour. This does not imply that the *outcome* of the actors' behaviour will necessarily reflect their intentions. However, in order to make a coherent theoretical argument about agency, it must be assumed that actors do not act randomly but according to a certain set of *goals* they want to achieve (Cohen, 1994: 39). Since there is ample intuitive reason to suppose that actors do indeed have goals and try to reach them through their actions, this general assumption is hardly problematic. More problematic is the specification of concrete goals for the respective actors. This, however, is a critical step in making sense of structure and agency in social science explanations since without specifying the interests of the actors, there cannot be grounded statements about the possible behaviour of the actor which, in turn, would lose any explanatory value. Based on deductive reasoning and empirical evidence, civil-military researchers usually assume that civilian politicians want to extend their political influence over those areas in which the military still holds political power. The military, on the other hand, is assumed to be interested in safeguarding its existence as a bureaucratic and hierarchical organization, and maintaining its political and institutional autonomy (Janowitz, 1964; Hunter, 2001).

Environmental Variables: Specifying the Causally Relevant Factors

However complete theoretical accounts are in their description of goals, reference to the relevant agents alone is not sufficient to explain civil-military change in new democracies. Even if one takes into account the institutional fluidity which characterizes the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, civilians and military officers do not act in a 'historical vacuum' (Bacevich, 1998). Rather, agent behaviour is at least to some degree influenced by the 'temporal priority, relative autonomy and causal efficacy of structural properties and their influential powers' (Archer, 2000: 69), that is, those material and immaterial aspects of the environment in which agents operate and which might have an influence on their actions (Parsons, 2007: 49). Hence, the second step in explaining civil-military relations in new democracies is to define those *environmental variables* which are thought to be causally relevant. Civil-military researchers have proposed a large range of factors in order to explain civilian control. Based on Parsons' (2007) distinction, these can be classified into three families: structural, institutional and ideational.[3]

Structural arguments in the narrow sense explain civil-military relations by relating to some material factors which configure the macro-social and macro-political environment of social action and which exist independently of the will of the actors, for instance, the level of modernization, socio-economic performance of the civilian regime, or the threat environment (e.g., Finer, 1962; Huntington, 1968; Desch, 1999). While structural factors often are the results of prior action, at the time when the actors of interest are producing the *explanandum*, these structures are part of the 'given' environment. Institutional arguments explain civil-military relations by relating to 'lower order structures' (Easton, 1990), namely, man-made, formal or informal rules and conventions which in their totality constitute the institutions of the political system such as the centralization of decision-making power or the 'path dependence' of authoritarian legacies (e.g., Avant, 1994; Agüero, 1995; Pion-Berlin, 1997). Ideational factors centre on subjective aspects of human action and the influence of culture, norms and values on actors' behaviour, for instance the political socialization and self-understanding of the officer corps (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Stepan, 1973) or the degree of social militarization (Mares, 1998).[4]

Of course, these categories are rather abstract groupings and various environmental factors can be integrated into more complex, multi-causal arguments. In fact, there are a range of integrative theoretical approaches to explaining civil-military relations which combine structural, institutional and ideational factors. Irrespective of the concrete configuration of the environmental variables which are assumed to be causally relevant, however, they alone cannot account for changes in civil-military relations. As there is no direct causal connection between the structures and the outcome (Desch, 1999: 11–12), the causal power of structures needs to be instantiated through the actions of the relevant actors.

Relationship of Entities and Environment: Aligning Structure and Agency

All causal explanations need to specify the relationship of entities and environment, that is, how structure and agency interact in bringing about the outcome. Consequently, in order to produce a coherent theoretical argument, the mechanism needs to be defined by which agents choose a certain action given the structural environment. This can be conceptualized as a repeated analytical 'filtering' process in which the actors evaluate the 'possibilities open to [them] in their own time' (Gardner, 2004: 6), make some assumption about the possible outcome of each of their actions and compare these possible outcomes to their goals. The first analytical filtering consists of specifying for all actors those courses of action which are considered relevant for the status of civil-military relation, that is the 'feasible set'. In any given situation, of all actions an actor could possibly perform, only a certain range of actions will reasonably have any influence on their respective goals.

The second filtering consists of the decision of the actors 'which member of the feasible set shall be realized' (Elster, 1979: 213). It is in this step that the actual integration of agential entities and the environment takes place. The decision for a

certain action needs to be built on some coherent argument on how the environment influences the goals and constitutes or constrains the feasible set of possible actions. Based on Mahoney and Snyder (1999), there are three possible perspectives on the effects of structure on the choice of alternative actions. In the first conception, structures are understood as *constraints* which limit the set of actually possible actions due to material impossibility, institutional limits, or normative convictions. In the second conception, structures are understood as *generative factors* which are 'internalized by actors and from which their interests, identities, and goals derive' (Mahoney and Snyder, 1999: 6). Generative factors influence actors by defining them and their preferences or even call the actors themselves into existence.

A third perspective, the *resource* model, combines elements of the first two conceptions by assuming that structures provide actors with the necessary resources to realize their goals: In order to select a certain action from the feasible set, actors investigate their structural resources and choose that action which, given the allocation of resources, will most likely lead to the best realization of their goals (Dessler, 1989; Gardner, 2004: 6).

Finally, explanations of actors' behaviour must rest—at least implicitly—on some rule that determines how actors choose between the various structurally constrained and/or enabled courses of actions. This final filtering is usually conceptualized by referring to the *rationality assumption*, that is, the idea that actors rank their goals as well as the expected outcomes of their actions and that they will choose those actions which best satisfy their goals (Levi, 1997). This filtering also includes some assumption to what extent the mechanism of choice allows degrees of freedom in translating goals, structures and actions into outcomes. Idiosyncrasies in choice can stem from various sources, for example, the indeterminacy of the structural environment, cognitive insufficiency of the actors to correctly perceive the structural environment, or actual non-rational, that is norm-driven, action. Regardless of its concrete contents, the decision-rule must be specified in order to derive unambiguous hypotheses about the respective actions given the actors' interests and the structural environment in which they take place.

Structure-Agency in Theories of Civilian Control of the Military

There are a large number of different theoretical approaches to explain civil-military relations in new democracies. They put forward different substantial explanatory factors, but also provide different perspectives on the structure-agency problem. Some approaches, for instance, Desch (1999) or Mares (1998), centre on the importance of 'structure'. Desch's argument traces the outcome of civil-military interaction mainly to the external and internal threat environment while Mares focuses on the prevalent cultural norms of the civilian society. Both make clear statements about the influence of certain characteristics of the 'environment' of civil-military interaction on the status of civilian control but their theorems do not provide much room for the working of agency in producing the outcome. As such,

these approaches can be characterized as being mainly 'structuralism': agency is not explicitly modelled and not seen as causally independent but determined by the structural (and cultural) situation.

At the other pole of the continuum are 'voluntarist' approaches like Hunter's (2001) game theoretic model of civil-military relations. Hunter explains the reduction of military prerogatives after the transition to democracy as a clash between civilian interests to push the military out of politics and to punish the military for human rights abuses on the one hand and the threat of a military backlash on the other. Even though it operates on a high level of abstraction this approach is very specific on the relevant actors, their interests and the logic of the decision-making processes leading to the outcome. However, while Hunter does state that the actors' payoffs are influenced by certain structural variables, these factors are neither explicitly specified, nor is their concrete influence on the agents' behaviour defined. As the explanation ultimately depends on the characteristics and decisions of the 'entities', this theorem is close to the ideal 'voluntarist' explanation.

In addition to these approaches, attempts have been made to develop theories which systematically integrate agential and structural arguments into coherent and clearly specified frameworks that can thus be termed 'integrative' approaches. In the following, we analyse four such integrative theories proposed by Agüero (1995a; 1995b; 2001), Alagappa (2001), Trinkunas (2005), and Croissant *et al.* (2011). All four theories aim at explaining the establishment of civilian control over the military in new democracies and in this attempt to provide complete theoretical explanations which specify 'entities', the 'environment' and their interaction for explaining the outcome. At the same time, the approaches differ in the concrete treatment of these three argumentative aspects of agency and structure. While Alagappa can be considered closer to the structuralist pole of the continuum and Trinkunas' and Croissant *et al.*'s arguments are closer to the voluntarist pole, Agüero takes a middle ground. Given this variance and their attempts to consciously systematize the relationship of entities and environment in explaining civil-military relations, these theories provide excellent 'case studies' for analyzing to which extent the structure-agency debate has been dealt with in the research field of civil-military relations.

The first question all authors have to address is which entities should be conceptualized as relevant actors for changes in civil-military relations. In principle, all authors agree that civil-military relations are defined as the result of concrete actions between the civilians on the one hand and the military on the other, and thus converge on the idea that the degree of civilian control depends on the actions of both civilians and the military. However, their approaches differ in analytical focus.

In accordance with his definition of civilian control, Agüero includes both civilians and the military as actors capable of initiating change in civil-military relations. He assumes that the military leadership strives for autonomy mainly because it fears the uncertainty after a democratic transition and hence prefers to be able to remain in control over its internal affairs even if that means an expansion in relation to the

status quo ante during the authoritarian regime. While he assumes all civilian elites will attempt to reduce military influence, he focuses solely on those civilians who 'reside in the government' (Agüero, 1995a: 22).

Similarly, Alagappa sees civil-military relations as 'a struggle among competing political and military elites', but includes the executive, legislature, and judiciary within the concept of civilian actors and points out that a factionalized military might consist of several actors. However, he stops short of granting actor quality to all societal groups and restricts political, civil, and international society to the status of influencing environmental factors (Alagappa, 2001: 30-31). While Alagappa assumes civilian preferences to be ruled by upholding regime security and extending civilian control, he conceptualizes military preferences not as fixed but rather as dependent on the military's position under the authoritarian political system (Alagappa, 2001: 63).

Trinkunas focuses on the actions of civilians trying to maximize control over the armed forces. He includes the military as a purely reactive force interested in conserving its prerogatives and inclined to resist civilian challenges. Hence, in deciding on their actions civilians have to take into account the possibility of unified military resistance (Trinkunas, 2005: 10). While Trinkunas mentions the civilian executive above all as the locus of agency, his empirical analysis points towards the fact that other civilian groups, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), can also gain agential qualities and attempt to change civil-military relations on their own. In the example he cites, human rights groups in Argentina undermined a presidential decision to acquiesce to the military by initiating trials in civilian courts (Trinkunas, 2005; 242–243). This independent agency of non-state actors violates Trinkunas' definition of civilian control as a state in which 'elected officials or their political appointees have authority to decide the resources, administration, and roles of the armed forces' (ibid.: 6).

Croissant *et al.* (2011) follow Trinkunas in stating that the chances of institutionalizing civilian control mainly depend on decisions made by the civilians. Unlike Trinkunas, however, they agree with Edmonds (1988: 26) in restricting agential capacity to political elites, that is, those civilians who 'have the authority to formulate, implement and oversee political decisions' (Croissant *et al.*, 2011: 77). In this, they assume that civilians want to stay in power and are generally interested in expanding civilian control. However, the authors explicitly stress that not all civilians are alike once in power. Even though most can be assumed to prefer civilian control to military control, they might differ in their exact preference order, namely the costs they are willing to incur in order to achieve their goal (ibid.: 83).

Concerning the environment, the authors agree on many variables influencing the chances of institutionalizing civilian control over the military. At the same time, they differ widely in *how* structural factors influence actors' decisions. At first glance, Muthiah Alagappa relies primarily on a single structural variable to explain the extent of civilian control: 'the weight and role of coercion in governance is the crucial determinant of the nature and content of civil-military relations' (Alagappa, 2001: 10).

If coercion is a necessary tool for the implementation of government decisions, the military will have a wider scope of roles and will possess more decision-making authority. Even though Alagappa names socio-economic development as an additional variable, its effect is mitigated by the government legitimacy it helps to create. Consequently, modernization will increase legitimacy and thereby decrease the amount of coercion necessary for the implementation of government decisions, while external or internal security threats, violent mobilization of the masses and so forth are detrimental to civilian control as they increase the importance of coercion for upholding the political regime. Even though the salience of coercion is, hence, a bundle of variables, on the surface this remains a very parsimonious argument. However, while Alagappa stresses that these factors alone are good long-term predictors for the status of civilian control, he argues that concrete changes in civil-military relations cannot be explained by these structural variables. They rather depend on actor behaviour and 'the beliefs, interests and power of the key civilian and military actors tempered by the power and beliefs of civil society as well as the policies and actions of key external actors' (Alagappa, 2001: 63). Thus, Alagappa's argument implicitly entails a 'generative' model of integrating structure and agency which assumes that structure mainly influences action through moulding actor preferences. This is most apparent in his discussion of civilian preferences which are thought to be endogenous to the level of external and internal threat, and military preferences that depend on the extent and type of past military prerogatives (Alagappa, 2001: 7–8, 63). Even though this is a valid way of conceptualizing the effect of structure, it somewhat deprives agency of its independent explanatory power. Simultaneously, Alagappa's power argument suggests a 'resource model' that includes economic, coercive, organizational, as well as 'political and ideational components that merge with beliefs' (Alagappa, 2001: 63). Beliefs, finally, could be construed as normative 'constraints' on actor behaviour that have been engrained through the prolonged hegemony of a group espousing them (ibid.). What Alagappa does not provide, though, is a model of actors' decisions or an explicit statement of discrete actions leading to different outcomes. Hence, the concrete working of the relatively large number of structural factors in producing the outcome is not theoretically specified.

In contrast, Felipe Agüero conceptualizes the process of institutionalizing civilian control as bargaining between civilians and the military. In this, he assumes that environmental factors function as resources determining the relative power distribution between the military and civilians. Agüero enumerates a list of variables which influence the civil-military balance of power. The most important factor, Agüero argues, is the extent of military control over the democratic transition which determines if existing prerogatives can be carried into the democratic era (Agüero, 1995b: 139). The more institutions of military influence survive the transition, the more institutional power will the military have in its attempts to stifle reform (ibid.: 144). Other institutional factors include the system of government and the general degree of democratic institutionalization in the polity. Agüero argues that while

presidential and parliamentary systems can both successfully bring the military under control, civilians in presidential systems might be weakened by a split between the executive and legislative branches of government. On the other hand, if the civilian elites are united against the military, for instance, as a result of a transitional pact, their power vis-à-vis the military is strengthened (ibid.: 153). Next to these institutional factors, Agüero lists a variety of ideational arguments: Military factionalism and weak corporate cohesion are valuable resources for civilians, especially if parts of the military are 'professionally' minded and thus normatively accept the principle of military subordination (ibid.: 133). On the other hand, the military can more easily resist civilian challenges to its political prerogatives if they can point towards a credible military alternative to a democratic government. In comparison, Agüero puts less emphasis on structural factors. He merely stresses that civilians can use social mobilization during the transition to their advantage as long as demonstrations remain non-violent, as violent clashes would likely trigger the assertion of the military's coercive power.

Through the bargaining model, Agüero provides a compelling micro-argument on the process by which civil-military relations in new democracies are moulded. Furthermore, he relates certain resources with concrete actor behaviour on both sides. Nonetheless, his theoretical argument fails to clearly elaborate how a given set of resources is instantiated. Actors, he somewhat vaguely states, will 'brandish' their resources after making their intentions clear to the opposite side. For civilians he neither presents a set of feasible actions, nor does he discuss how actors choose among them. Instead, he later introduces a list of strategies meant to 'upgrade' civilian bargaining resources (Agüero, 2001: 201). Consequently, these actions are not conceptualized as agency which, as part of the bargaining process, produces the outcome, but rather they are ways for civilians to enhance their resources through strategic behaviour. Military strategies are not comprehensively listed either, nor does Agüero connect them with the resources at the military's disposal or provide a decision rule for choosing among contending alternative actions. Hence, his theoretical approach is underspecified both in terms of the agency perspective and the relationship between action and structure.

The agency perspective is the very point of departure for Trinkunas' argument. While he stresses that structural factors like the level of social mobilization or military factionalism influence the outcomes of a democratic transition, he believes that 'there is considerable room for agency and strategy during this period' (Trinkunas, 2005: 9). Unlike the previous authors, his argument is based on a set of clearly defined actions through which civilians can change civil-military relations. These are, in order of ascending 'robustness': appeasement of the military leadership, monitoring of the armed forces to discover potential threats, divide and conquer, and sanctioning the military for not complying with civilian demands (ibid.: 10–12). For each of these strategies to succeed, civilians will need certain institutional resources, for instance internal or external agents for monitoring the military (ibid.: 11–12). The degree of civilian control depends on the ability of the military to resist reform initiatives, but

civilians can act strategically to 'co-opt, recruit, or intimidate a sufficiently large number of military officers into supporting the government's agenda so as to prevent the armed forces from acting cohesively to oppose civilian control in a new democracy' (ibid.: 10). Choosing a strategy appropriate to a civilian government's resource situation will maximize its leverage in dealing with the military. Even if civilians manage to maximize their leverage in this way, they will need additional resources in order to successfully institutionalize the changes they made. This theoretical step necessitates an additional set of—again—mainly institutional resources like specialized state ministries, legislative committees, courts, an independent press, and NGOs. Trinkunas calls the combination of these second-tier resources and the political leadership necessary to use them 'regime capacity' (ibid.: 17–19). Trinkunas' theory focuses on the agency of civilians and includes not only a clear argument on the possible actions civilians can undertake to increase civilian control but also specifies a clear link between these actions and discrete outcomes in civil-military relations. It therefore, provides a systematic argument on an important aspect of the underlying causal mechanism which produces a given outcome. However, his theory is weaker in relation to the specification of the environment and its influence on the choices civilians make for increasing civilian control and the effect of these choices. Trinkunas neither elaborates on a set of causally relevant environmental factors, nor does he make a clear statement concerning the interplay of environment and agents' interests in selecting a certain control strategy. In other words, while Trinkunas is very strong on the agency part of the integrative theorizing, he neglects the structural aspect.

Starting with Trinkunas' insight, Croissant *et al.* (2011) also focus on civilian strategies to systematically integrate structure and agency. Besides expanding the range of possible strategies they also attempt to produce a more complete theoretical account by explicitly specifying a theoretical link between civilians' choices for a given strategy (or a combination of strategies) and the structural, institutional and ideational environment. Croissant *et al.* assume that civilians in all new democracies face the remaining political prerogatives of the military as institutional legacies from the authoritarian regime. In order to reduce these remaining privileges and to institutionalize control, civilians need to engage the military through 'control strategies'. More 'robust' strategies intrude deeper into the military's institutional sphere and are considerably better suited to improve control over the military than more superficial or 'weaker' strategies.

While in principle, civilians can freely choose among a large range of strategies, Croissant *et al.* argue that the actual choice for either weak or more robust approaches will depend on the political resources at their disposal. Even though the authors do not provide a list of individual factors, they attempt to show that a variety of structural, institutional, and ideational resources can possibly influence civil-military relations by enabling or inhibiting the successful application of more robust control strategies. While providing a systematic argument on how the environment influences the choice of action, Croissant *et al.* do not specify the

variables thought to be particularly important for these choices and their outcomes. Hence, like Trinkunas, their approach is strongly focused on agency.

The analysis above, summarized in Table 1, shows, that none of the four integrative theories includes a complete theoretical argument as defined in the previous discussion. In the first theoretical step of specifying the relevant actors, all authors agree in principle that civil-military relations are determined by the interplay of civilian and military actors. Furthermore, they agree on the general interests of civilians to increase control over the military and of the military to keep its remaining prerogatives. However, the authors differ in the concrete conceptualization of the actors. Agüero, Alagappa and Croissant *et al.* focus on the civilian political elites while Trinkunas also includes non-state actors, violating his own definition of civilian control. Similarly, the authors disagree on how to conceptualize the military. Trinkunas and Croissant *et al.* specify the military as a merely reactive force. Hence, change towards more control has to be initiated by the civilians. Agüero and Alagappa, on the other hand, argue that the military can also function as an agent of change and only Alagappa conceptualizes it as possibly consisting of several agents. All others analytically capture the military as a single corporate entity.

Similarly, Alagappa is the only author who does not specify exogenous preferences for civilians and the military and who conceptualizes structure as generating actors' interests. This makes it impossible to ascertain the independent explanatory power of agency. All other authors conceptualize the environment as a set of resources for civilian actions. However, these authors also suffer from shortcomings. Even though Agüero points towards bargaining as a mechanism for translating the structural context into concrete actions, his failure to specify a set of feasible actions for either side limit the explanatory power of his theory. Approaching the *explanandum* from a more voluntarist perspective, both Trinkunas and Croissant *et al.* specify how

Table 1. Structure and Agency in Integrative Theories of Civil-Military Relations

Author	Relevant actors	Preferences civilian/ military	Environmental factors	Feasible set	Model of alignment	Decision-making rule
Agüero	Civilian government and military	Specified/ specified	Clearly specified	Not specified	Resource model	Not specified
Alagappa	Civilian government and military (+factions)	Partially specified/ partially specified	Clearly specified (trend); vague categories (actual changes)	Not specified	Long-term: none Short-term: mixed	Not specified
Trinkunas	Civilians in government and non-state actors	Specified/ specified	Partially specified	Specified	Resource model	Not specified
Croissant *et al.*	Civilian government	Specified/ specified	Partially specified	Specified	Resource model	Not specified

civilians can use the environment to fuel civilian strategies in order to affect the distribution of decision-making authority. However, unlike Agüero and Alagappa, they do not elaborate on which variables will affect the actual choice. Despite the differing degrees of specification in defining the relevant environmental factors, all authors agree that a combination of variables accounts for the outcome. While Alagappa and Agüero produce a definitive list of variables, Trinkunas and Croissant *et al.*, remain relatively vague. Finally, concerning the decision-rule, all authors at least implicitly assume that actors choose their actions rationally, but they fail to elaborate on the exact degree of freedom that remains.

Even though all explanatory frameworks analysed here strive to provide a complete and coherent approach to explaining civil-military relations and attempt to go beyond existing treatments of the subject, the analysis shows that none truly integrates structure and agency on equal footing and gives preferential treatment to the specification of either structure (Agüero; Alagappa) or agency (Trinkunas; Croissant *et al.*).

It seems that in the practice of theory-development there is a trade-off between focusing on agency and focusing on structure. To account fully for both within an integrated framework by elaborating a comprehensive feasible set—like Trinkunas and Croissant *et al.*—and by including a large array of environmental variables—like Agüero and Alagappa—would result in inherently more complex theories with a large number of possible combinations of environmental factors and outcomes. A focus on either structure or agency in order to reduce this complexity might reflect conscious reasoning and an analytical decision on the relative importance of either for developing coherent theories. Trinkunas, for instance, argues that agency can overcome structurally-defined civilian weaknesses. However, even if such analytical hierarchy between structure and agency is assumed, theories need to include a statement on all aspects defined above: skipping a step altogether will challenge the integration of structure and agency and, thus, weaken the persuasiveness of the proposed theoretical explanation.

More generally, a lack of specification undermines the ability to derive clear and unambiguous hypotheses which can be put to an empirical test. If any of the theory's argumentative steps are not clearly specified, it will be impossible to explain how they relate to each other and predict a hypothetical outcome. Hence, either one can derive a number of hypotheses from a given underspecified theory which are mutually contradictive, or the theory does not at all allow for hypotheses to be drawn. Both cases obviously undermine a theory's 'goodness' (Gerring, 2001: Chap. 5). For instance, if one does not specify the interests of the actors, one cannot make any explicit predictions how that actor will behave in a given situation even if all other parts of the theoretical argument have been clearly defined. This problem, of course, exponentiates if multiple parts of the theory remain underspecified. In Alagappa's framework, for instance, the endogeneity of military preferences makes it impossible to hypothesize the military's reaction under given environmental conditions as he

neither specifies a feasible set, nor identifies a concise list of environmental factors that factor into the military's calculations.

Finally, the wide array of relevant environmental variables put forward and the ability of actors to make creative use of functional equivalents in their endeavours will make truly integrative theories inherently more complex. In the end, generalisable theories might show that civilian control can be improved by different means and through different actions, a fact that some authors explicitly acknowledge (Croissant *et al.*, 2011; Trinkunas, 2005: 18). However, even if parsimony is priced over completeness, theories need to address every step outlined above at least rudimentarily in order to derive unambiguous hypotheses.

Conclusion

This article has argued that in order to build comprehensive explanations of civil-military relations in new democracies, theory-building should include a clear statement on the relationship of structure and agency in the social sciences. This refers to three analytical steps: (1) defining the relevant actors, their interests and possible actions; (2) specifying the relevant environmental factors which influence the outcome; and (3) defining the relationship between environment and actors by outlining the process through which the environment influences the actions of the relevant agents in producing a specific outcome. Based on the comparative analysis of four recent theories of civil-military relations, the article has furthermore shown that integrative theories have made important contributions in developing the state of theory in the field by aligning structure and agency, but have thus far failed to build complete theoretical arguments from which unambiguous hypotheses can be drawn.

This is not to say, however, that these theoretical approaches are inherently flawed or analytically useless. Even though they cannot provide a 'final' theory of civil-military relations in new democracies, they provide the most advanced attempts to systematically theorize the structure-agency link so far. Not only do they deal with a hitherto understated aspect of social reality and provide useful analytical frameworks for empirical studies, but they also constitute theoretical 'building blocks' (George and Bennett, 2004: 78) for further research which leads to a more explicit and complete understanding of the interplay of structure and agency. Croissant *et al.*'s work, for example, puts much effort in to clarifying the agency perspective. As it makes explicit the actors' goals, their possible actions and the outcomes of these actions, theirs is a useful approach for inductively deriving the most important causal factors which influence the choice (and eventual outcome) of these actions. Such a conscious 'building blocks' approach to theory development, however, requires clarity on the core aspects on which the cumulative theories are based, such as the structure-agency relationship. Based on meta-theoretical arguments and the analysis of existing approaches, this article has attempted to contribute to further theory development by clarifying the various elements of the structure-agency problem in the explanation of civil-military relations in new democracies.

Before concluding the article, a final observation is in order. As of now, we have discussed the persuasiveness of theories of civil-military relations from an exclusively theoretical angle. However, evaluating explanations on theoretical grounds alone is insufficient as a complete theory can be empirically false. Only a complete theoretical argument can derive unambiguous hypotheses, but evaluation of a theory in the end depends on confronting these observable implications with empirical evidence (King *et al.*, 1994). While it can be argued that a theoretically sophisticated solution to the interplay of structure and agency increases the number of observable implications and hence makes theory testing more convincing, this next step raises a range of methodological problems which cannot be addressed here but should be subjected to further research.

Notes

[1] To be sure, the issue of control is not the only problem in civil-military relations in new democracies which are often troubled with questions of efficiency and effectiveness in defence and military management (Bruneau, 2005; Bruneau and Matei, 2008), or the problematic legacies of human rights violations during the authoritarian regimes (Roehrig, 2002). However, in the light of democratic transition the problem of civilian control is of paramount importance, as there can be no democratic rule without the military being under the control of the elected civilian leaders (Croissant *et al.*, 2010).

[2] A related aspect is the decision concerning the appropriate level of aggregation for conceptualizing the relevant actors. While strictly speaking only individuals can act, most civil-military researcher argue that the assumption of 'collective actors' is often justified as an analytical abstraction. As long as can plausibly be assumed that the group is sufficiently coherent, distinct from its environment and that a relatively consistent preference order can be established for the group itself, it is possible to treat the collective entity 'as if' it had agential characteristics (Pedersen and Dobbin, 1997).

[3] In addition to the three categories 'structure', 'institutions', and 'culture', Parsons proposes 'psychological' arguments as a fourth family. Explanations based on such claims argue 'that people take certain actions because they interpret their world in hard-wired (and almost always irrational) ways' (Parsons, 2007: 134). Up till now, however, this strand of argument has yet to find use in the study of civil-military relations.

[4] Classifying cultural factors under the broad category of 'structure' might seem odd since there are significant conceptual differences between the material phenomena which are usually understood as comprising first and second order structures and the non-material phenomena which are part of the cultural or ideational make-up of society (Archer, 1988). From the perspective of this article, however, it is reasonable to lump them together under the somewhat unfortunately ambiguous label of 'structure' as both the causal efficacy of ideational and genuinely structural factors follows the same logic being exogenous and in principle autonomous from the actors themselves at the time when they make their decision for a certain action.

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