

Explaining Military Relapse

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Abstract

Renewed interest in authoritarian rule has sparked a groundswell of literature on regime change and consolidation. Most of this work does not explicitly mention or address the tendency for military regimes to transition to multi-party civilian rule, only to quickly revert back to military control. We define this phenomenon in which a military regime transfers power to civilian leaders only to retake power “military relapse.” By integrating insights from contemporary work on autocracies with older literature on the military and civil-military relations, we develop a theory to explain military relapses. We find that characteristics unique to the military motivate their exit from power. In establishing the civilian regime to follow, the balance between civilian and military prerogatives is determined by the relative levels of unity within each party, which also influences their mutual levels of trust. These factors, combined with the potential costs for the military of reclaiming power, explain the likelihood of and trends in military relapse. Case studies of multiple civilian-military interactions in Myanmar and Peru support this theory.

1 Introduction

Mohammed Morsi, the first democratically elected president of Egypt, found himself forced into house arrest after only a year of uneasy rule. The army, responsible for consolidating the ouster of dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, once again drove its armored vehicles to the front of the presidential palace to remove a leader that it did not find suitable to the nation. Within 29 months, the military made two momentous interventions in Egypt’s domestic politics—once with potential hopes of leading Egypt toward democracy, and then later with the potential of undermining this objective. The country serves as a clear reminder that even today, the road to democracy is often a tumultuous one.

Egypt’s last three years exemplify a surprisingly common pattern of regime change. A look at regimes across the world from 1950 to 2012 using new data from Magaloni et al. (2013) highlights

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that a substantial number of countries that have alternated between different forms of governance. Interestingly, this fluctuation most commonly occurs between multi-party civilian regimes and military regimes. See Figure 4 for examples of this movement. We see that the lack of regime consolidation is often due to military intervention. Thus, it is not just backsliding, but rather, backsliding into military rule. This observation is hardly made explicit in the literature but is substantively and empirically hard to ignore. We call this reversion to military rule after a period of civilian government a military relapse.

What explains patterns of military relapse? Perhaps more specifically, why do military governments (often quite short in length) stage elections only to reclaim power later? Such recidivism carries monetary, reputational, and political costs that risk international sanctions and domestic instability, yet backsliding occurs time and time again. And furthermore, why do relapses often occur multiple times in a brief time span? Despite a renewed academic interest in autocratic rule and democratic consolidation, few comprehensive explanations exist for the occurrence of military relapses.

We hope to provide an initial answer. By bridging the gap between recent studies of authoritarianism and decades-old literature on military governance, we develop a theory based on trust (or lack thereof) between the military and civilian elites in the aftermath of instability. First, we observe that the “normal state of affairs” in civil-military relations is one in which a civilian government tuns the bureaucracy and the military provides security. This is a stable equilibrium that is optimal for the state both in terms of economic production and security. But sometimes this relationship breaks down and the military intervenes into politics, generally because of an economic or security shock. After an initial military intervention, the process of returning to civilian rule involves three steps: a political bargain between the two parties; the civilian regime’s subsequent policies toward the military; and the military’s decision to stay in or re-exit the barracks. The relative unity of each side influences the bargain struck and the level of (mis)trust, which affects civilian policy toward the military. All of the preceding factors figure into the military’s choice of whether to incur the costs of initiating a military relapse. We find trust to be lowest in cases where one party is significantly more unified in its aims than the other and highest when the parties are of commensurate unity. At lower levels of trust, the military will be willing to suffer greater costs to reclaim power to protect its interests. Case studies of several military regimes in Myanmar and Peru support these intuitions.

We believe this paper makes several important additions to the literature. First, this pattern of military relapse was made evident by analyzing a new dataset of regime classifications—a resource that we hope will be useful for the study of autocracies. Second, recent works in political science have said more about the initiation of military regimes, while older works (prematurely) studied the end of military regimes. Few have addressed the interplay or overall trajectory that exists between the two; doing so would fill in a large hole in the story of military rule and also bridge a twenty-year gap in scholarship. Third, we make note of and explain a phenomenon not explicitly observed in current political science literature.

In addition to its academic import, the phenomenon of military relapse has several normative

implications. As power is repeatedly usurped from civilian leadership, military relapse often involves social, political, and economic instability and the state use of repression. Civilian rule, generally in the form of democracy, is also widely considered a more legitimate form of government than military dictatorship. Given the remarkable frequency of military relapse, even today, answers to the questions posed previous would prove highly valuable to our empirical understanding of autocratic and/or democratic consolidation.

The following section defines and describes the phenomenon of military relapse. We then assess the literature on the military in politics and the consolidation of new political regimes. Turning to the theory, we first establish some basic tenants regarding the military’s core interests and (in)ability to participate in politics, and then develop our theory of military relapse. Case studies on Peru and Myanmar are used to give empirical credence for the theory. We conclude with some remarks on the cases, future steps for our project, and policy implications of our theory.

2 Identifying Military Relapses

To study military relapses, we require some definitions and descriptive statistics that speak to its significance. Our main data source for defining and observing military relapses is the new Autocracies of the World, 1950-2012 dataset (Magaloni et al. 2013). This dataset classifies all country-years from 1950 to 2012 as democratic or autocratic. Autocracies are further categorized as being monarchy, single-party, hegemonic, or military. To code the different types of autocratic regimes, the authors “focus on three aspects of the political regime: source of policy making, institutions that structure intra-elite interaction and competition, and composition and selection of the executive and political leaders.”

A military relapse, in broad strokes, is a return to military rule after a brief period of civilian government. Our conception of military rule, civilian government, and “a brief period” are described below.

Our notion of military rule comes from Magaloni (2008), in which “the key distinctive trait of military regimes is that the armed forces control access to the principal positions of power,” and even if political parties exist, “the dictator and his critical ruling coalition share power through the institution of the armed forces rather than the party” (731). It is not sufficient for an executive to simply have a military background; the military must have effective control of government.

We use “civilian government” as a catch-all term for the remaining regimes that are not effectively regulated by the armed forces: democracy and party autocracy, the latter being subset into single-party and hegemonic regimes.¹²

“Brief” is clearly a subjective term, but we can try two different approaches to capturing it. The first is more institutional: The military takes back power while the first new civilian leader is

¹For more precise definitions of these regime types, refer to Magaloni (2008). However, they will not be necessary for the purposes of this paper.

²In virtually all of the cases, the period of “civilian government” is a period of multi-party electoral government: democracy or hegemonic party rule.”

still in power. The second definition is strictly temporal: The military takes back power within five years of return to civilian rule.

We mentioned the prevalence of military relapses since World War II in the introduction. The Magaloni et al. (2013) data makes this trend clear.

Using this data, we can identify cases of military relapse between 1950 and 2012. We are looking for cases of oscillation of military-civilian-military, where the civilian period either (1) has only one executive or (2) lasts five or fewer years.³ The first definition yields 25 military relapses, while the second yields 24.⁴ Sixty-three countries had a military regime at some point between 1950 and 2012; nineteen of those had a relapse, regardless of definition. Therefore, roughly thirty percent of countries that have experienced military rule go through a relapse. Some summary statistics are listed in Tables 1 and 2. Perhaps more informative are Figures 1 and 2, which map the frequency of relapses across the world. As another reference, Figure 3 shows a count of all military regimes.

1 Relapse		2 Relapses
Bangladesh	Mauritania	Argentina
Central African Republic	Myanmar	Benin
Chad	Sierra Leone	Ghana
Guatemala	Suriname	Pakistan
Guinea	Syria	Peru
Haiti	Thailand	Sudan
Honduras		

Table 1: Military relapses between 1950 and 2012, using the “one executive” definition.

1 Relapse	2 Relapses	3 Relapses
Bangladesh	Nigeria	Benin
Burundi	Pakistan	Ghana
Central African Republic	Peru	Sudan
Guatemala	Sierra Leone	
Haiti	Suriname	
Mauritania	Syria	
Myanmar	Thailand	
Niger		

Table 2: Military relapses between 1950 and 2012, using the five-year definition.

We can use the data to also peer into regime changes within each country. Three countries that provide illustrative examples of relapse are Benin, Argentina, and Ghana. The trajectories of these countries’ regime types, based on the Magaloni et al. (2013) data, are shown in Figure 4.

³We will miss potential cases where a country is listed as civilian in 1950 but was preceded by a military regime. Thus, we are only pointing out cases where the complete pattern of oscillation occurs between 1950 and 2012. Moreover, the country-year nature of the data precludes us from recording military relapses where the civilian government was never given the chance to formally re-assume power. The case of Myanmar in 1990, described as a case study, is one of these cases.

⁴There are 40 total cases of military-civilian-military oscillation regardless of number of civilian executives or time.

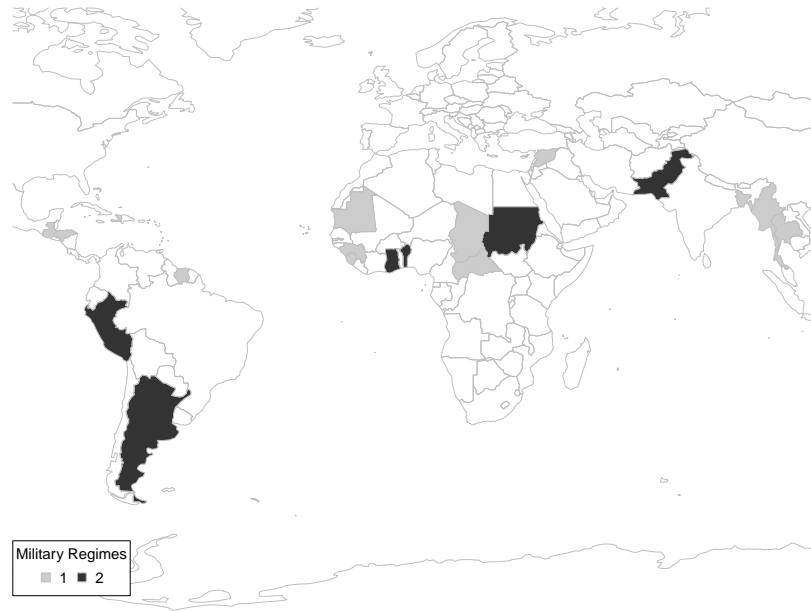


Figure 1: Military relapses between 1950 and 2012, using the “one executive” definition.

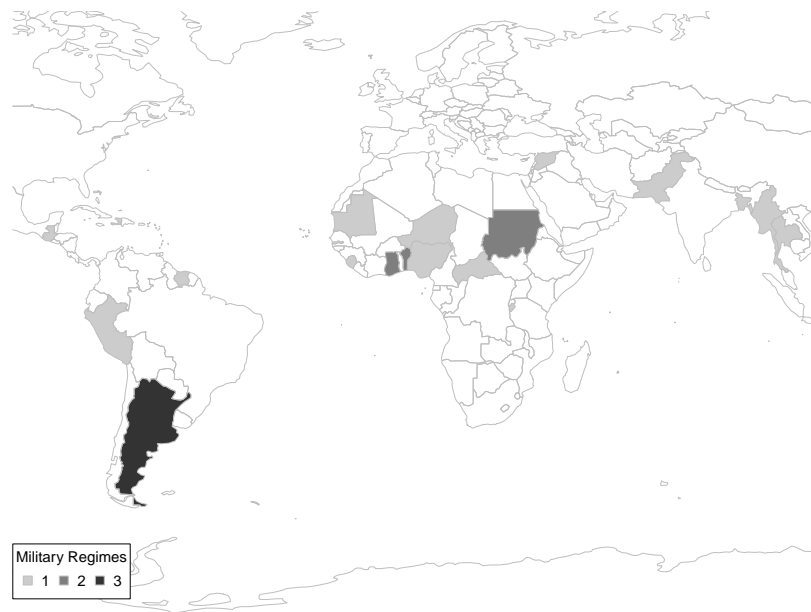


Figure 2: Military relapses between 1950 and 2012, using the five-year definition.

3 State of the Research

The phenomenon of military relapse discussed in the previous section speaks to main two bodies of scholarship: the literature on the military in politics and the literature on transitions in and out of democracy. Each corpus of literature has matured in its own right, but seldom do the two literatures address one another. Scholarship on the military in politics generally overlooks the military’s special role in the process of regime transition. Conversely, literature on regime transition does not appear to acknowledge or make use of the militaristic aspect of most unconsolidated democracies. This

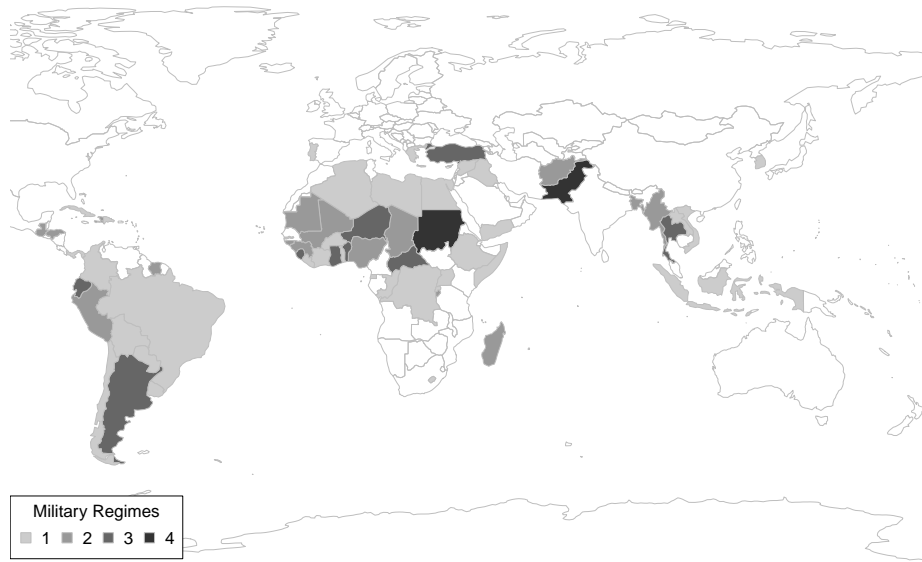


Figure 3: All military regimes between 1950 and 2012.

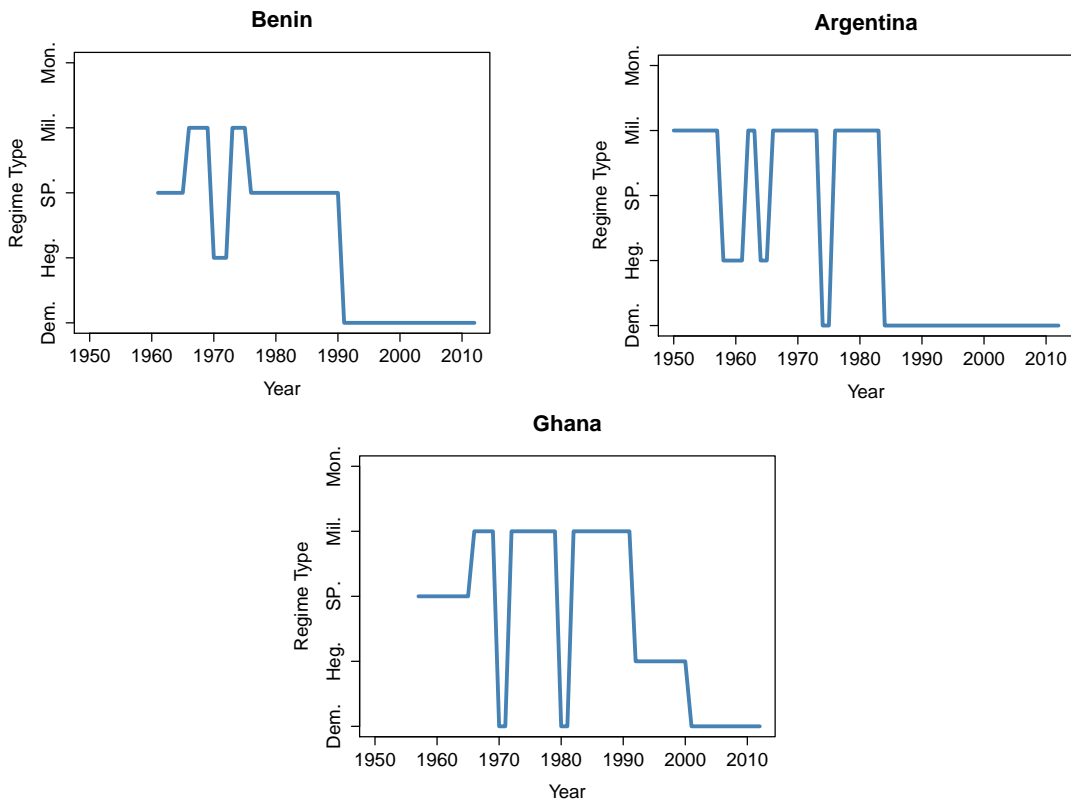


Figure 4: Regime plots of Benin, Argentina, and Ghana. Note the brief periods of civilian rule quickly ended by reversion to military rule.

section gives an overview of the major developments in each literature, focusing on scholarship that might provide insight into solving the puzzle of military relapse.

3.1 The Military in Politics

As countries in every region of the world fell to military intervention and dictatorship following World War II, a wave of scholarship developed to examine civil-military relations and the process through which a military becomes politicized. This literature tracked closely with the trajectory of actual regimes worldwide,⁵ peaking in the 1970s and essentially fading at the end of the Cold War.⁶ To explain military intervention and civil-military relations, authors have studied variables such as professionalization (Huntington 1957), political culture (Finer 1988), and organizational features (Janowitz and van Doorn 1971).

Somewhat contradictory to this earlier work, Huntington (1968) argued that military intervention into politics is not a military-specific phenomenon. Instead, when political order decays, many groups in society fight to control the state, but the military is the only group that has the resources and capability to do so (Huntington 1968). As discussed further in our theory section, Huntington provides key insights into the onset of military intervention, but other scholars have rightly noted that characteristics of the military are not irrelevant: Political dynamics that occur once the military has intervened can only be explained by recognizing the unique qualities of the military.⁷

This “first wave” of mainly qualitative scholarship set the stage for more recent research on the military in politics, though many of the previously prominent explanatory variables such as professionalization and political culture have fallen out of prominence. In her seminal work on authoritarian regimes, Geddes (2003) uses a Battle of the Sexes (BoS) game theoretic model to succinctly capture the interest of organizational unity in military governments, a trend noted by Stepan (1971). Geddes argues that concerns about unity lead the military to retreat to the barracks if a faction of the military wishes to do so. Rather than split, the military prefers to stay together and will thus retire from politics because they can enjoy a prestigious career even under a civilian regime. She suggests that this game attests to military regimes’ short durations relative to other types of authoritarian regimes, which she demonstrates by quantitatively analyzing autocratic regime duration in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸

Geddes’s model provides an important insight into how a characteristic of the military—corporate unity—might affect political outcomes. It also gives a clear starting point for future theoretical and empirical work on military governments. There are, however, many empirically salient features of military regimes left unexplained by the model. For example, staying in the barracks is a Nash Equilibrium in the BoS game, and thus Geddes’s model does not account for why a military in the barracks would attempt to coordinate on leaving the barracks with the risk of failing to coordinate effectively and undermining their unity. But most relevant to this paper,

⁵For examples, see McKinlay and Cohan (1975); Finer (1988); O’Donnell et al. (1986a, 1986b); Clapham and Philip (1985); Stepan (1988).

⁶Additionally, the tail end of this literature often referred to the “end” of military regimes (refer to Danopoulos 1988; Barkey 1990). The two-and-a-half decades since then have shown this to be a premature conclusion. With more data beyond the late 1980’s, we are in an ideal position to investigate military regimes in a new light.

⁷See the edited volume, Janowitz and van Doorn (1971).

⁸Magaloni (2008) also finds that military regimes tend to survive shorter than other types of autocracies, though she does not explicitly provide a theory of military regimes.

the BoS model does not provide much in the way of explaining the military relapses.

Representing another recent development in the military politics literature, an uptick of econometric work has analyzed the determinants of coups d'état, which are the most common manner in which military regimes appear. This literature attributes coups d'état to drops in wealth, inequality, major economic crises, and lack of legitimacy (Powell 2012; Londregan and Poole 1990; Houle 2009). Londregan and Poole (1990) and Collier and Hoeffler (2005) note the existence of a “coup trap,” where the illegitimate entry of the military into power only serves to further legitimize subsequent overthrows. Svobik (2013) also shows that military interventions are more likely when the military's interests, proxied by military spending and personnel, are threatened. He speaks to democratic consolidation more generally in an earlier paper (2008), though he does note that democracies with military pasts tend to revert back to authoritarian rule more quickly.

This quantitative literature has its own set of limitations. By predominantly focusing on systemic factors for instability such as inequality and levels of wealth, most works do not account for factors specific to the military, which is the key actor in catalyzing regime change. Svobik's recent attempt to measure interests using military data from the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities dataset is perhaps the best effort, but still cannot explore intrastate dynamics. Moreover and importantly, the quantitative literature focuses on individual coup events, overlooking the overall trajectory of regime change in a country over time. All focus is also placed on military regime initiation. Therefore, little has been said about the logic of military rule once intervention takes place, which lies at the heart of understanding when and why the military cedes or reclaims power.

3.2 Regime Transition and the Consolidation of Multi-party Civilian Rule

As shown above, literature specific to the military has thus remained quiet in our understanding of regime changes over time within a single polity. Classic political science literature, however, has long investigated transitions in and out of democracy and autocracy using qualitative (O'Donnell et al. 1986a, 1986b; Lipset 1960), quantitative (Przeworski et al. 2000), and formal (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001, 2006) methods.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2001, 2006) make the most relevant attempt to explain the role of the military in unconsolidated democracy. A confluence of high inequality, low destructiveness of coups or revolutions, and economic crises set the scene for unconsolidated democracy. However, this work makes a fundamental assumption that the military's interests coincide with those of the elite to the extent that their formal model and exposition refer to the elite staging coups to undo democracy. This simplifies their model, but as the case of Peru will show, is often inaccurate.⁹

In later work, Acemoglu et al. (2010) no longer treat the military as a perfect agent of the civilian elite. Instead, they point to a credible commitment problem between the military and civilian elite.

⁹As another example, the Greek Army Officer Corps twice sided against the traditional elite in an attempt to *alleviate* stark levels of inequality in the country (Kourvetaris 1971). In Latin America, the military often sided with the population in seeking greater representation for the public (Rouquié 1987). Huntington (1968) also notes the middle-class origins of much of the military. The Egyptian army's role in pushing out Mubarak also contradicts this belief.

A nascent democratic regime is unable to credibly commit to upholding the military's interests, which causes the military to intervene. Their explanation seems intuitive but is fundamentally unidirectional: While they can explain the incentives that instigate military intervention, the model cannot account for the reversion of power back to civilian rule. History demonstrates that such transitions are exceedingly common. Moreover, the dynamic we empirically observe of repeated military relapses does not appear "rational" at first blush. Indeed, a credible commitment problem and the fixed nature of some of the model's key parameters might suggest that the military would never have a reason to attempt a transition. Then once we assume that, for some reason, the military cedes power, the credible commitment mechanism is hard-pressed to explain why civilian leaders take actions that obviously threaten military relapse. But indeed, the military repeatedly cedes power (challenging the idea that all political actors seek to maximize their time in office), and subsequent civilian regimes provoke the military.

This initial wave of literature addresses some key concerns of military organization, interests, background, and agency, but a couple issues remain. Much of the analysis is somewhat haphazard and lacks a coherent or explicit theory, instead relying on ad hoc explanations that identify particular aspects of the military that could explain observed behavior. We hope to develop a theory of military relapse that bridges these distinct literatures and explains an important political phenomenon.

4 Understanding the Military

The military is often treated like any other political actor, and this leads to incomplete theories that cannot explain many of the empirical regularities surrounding military governments. Thus, the first step in our theory of military relapse is to establish the military's core interests and unique characteristics. To do so, we draw on previous scholarship on civil-military relations, especially from political-sociological tradition.

4.1 Military Interests

The military, typically one of the most durable institutions of the state, develops corporate interests that promote its own maintenance and fulfill its professional duties. Specifically, two general ingredients are key: (1) autonomy and unity of the military as an organization, and (2) stability of the state. Autonomy and unity are supported by material well-being and political independence, and stability is derived from political order and security.

4.1.1 Autonomy and Unity

Modern military professionalization involves processes to make the military more consistent, independent, depoliticized, effective, efficient, and integrated. The allocation of resources and the clear demarcation of military-civilian spheres of authority play a substantial part in realizing these ends. The military is hard-pressed to afford sufficient resources and wealth to protect the state without sufficient funding. Low wages and conditions may also demoralize the median soldier, increase

criminal activity, and threaten corporate unity. Well-provided militaries tend to be more professionalized, and more professionalized armed forces are satisfied with playing an advisory role in security issues while executing whatever civilian policy is ultimately developed (Huntington 1957; Ruby and Gibler 2010). Thus, all militaries, regardless of their level of professionalization, seek material resources to sustain themselves and consider this a principal concern. Even as far back as the Crises of the Roman Republic around 100 BC (during which the expansion of Rome coincided with economic crisis, unrest within the agrarian lower classes, and political backstabbing within the ruling elite), the military was more concerned with being well-paid and equipped than with the health of the state itself (Abrams 1971). If soldiers feel that their resources are jeopardized, they will consider use of force to repossess power.¹⁰

Regarding the military's authority within its own organization, there must be clear safeguards and rules regarding degrees of civilian versus military control over several areas. These include: who organizes the national defense system; who appoints, promotes, and relieves high commanders of the armed forces; who determines the country's allies and enemies; and whether the military is protected from investigation by civilian courts (Obando 1994). Predictable civilian control of the military's budget and overall autonomy therefore plays a notable role in professionalization and the armed forces' willingness to be subordinate to civilian rule. Over time, as professionalization and co-dependence on the civilian elite increases, the military's capabilities in using force efficiently also increase, and the maintenance of order (which ensures a predictable flow of material resources) becomes another key concern. The military becomes further divorced from political sphere and specializes in the use of force and preservation of stability.

4.1.2 Stability of the State

Indeed, the maintenance of order and the preservation of the national interest are paramount objectives to most militaries. Such sentiments come to full view in writings by military officials. In 1910, a colonel in Argentina wrote, "Today, the army is the nation. It is the external armor that guarantees the cohesive operation of its parts and preserves it from shocks and falls" (Maligne 1910, as translated by Rouquié 1987). These words were written twenty years before Argentina's first coup d'état; these sentiments of guardianship were not simply lip service provided in the immediate aftermath of regime upheaval. The breakdown of rule and civil order are an anathema to the military, and in moments of interregnum where authority has effectively broken down, the military is often the only coherent organization with a potential monopoly on the use of force (Weber 1919) and ability to restore a semblance of order. However, sudden changes such as these may throw the arrangement between the military and civilians into jeopardy. It is to this stage that we turn next.

¹⁰Powell (2012) also shows that from 1961-2000, regimes in which the military was underprovisioned tended to face less professionalized armies that were more willing to step into politics for themselves. Classic literature on military regimes, including Nordlinger (1977) and Thompson (1973), attests to the importance of corporate grievances in the staging of coups. As Powell (2012) notes, even Huntington (1991) recommends that democratizing states provide sufficient resources ("toys") to the military to disincentivize intervention.

4.2 Inability to Govern

The restoration of order, which may be the initial goal of the military upon intervention, is a separate challenge from restoring a healthy civil society and government. Huntington (1968) notes that “military officers are not necessarily skilled in the esoteric arts of negotiation, compromise, and mass appeal which are required for political action in a complex society” (229). The supremacy of hierarchy and obedience innate in most effective militaries does not combine well with the politicking and compromise necessary to broker political exchange among different social groups. Additionally, most modern military personnel are professional rather than aristocratic, and see themselves first and foremost as soldiers with an expertise in providing national security rather than running the state bureaucracy (Huntington 1968). As a manifestation of their inexperience, military leaders sometimes make large miscalculations about their popularity. On many occasions, such as in the 1990 Myanmar elections, the military has fielded its own candidate or party only to be shocked when losing an election by a landslide.

In addition to being inept at politics, the very act of running a government is often harmful to the military corporate unity on at least two dimensions. First, the disagreement between proponents of “military-as-institution” and “military-as-government” must be addressed quickly, or political infighting between guardians and activists can begin to break bonds (Huntington 1963, Farcau 1996). Furthermore, as military government faces an increasing number of policy decisions, the varying policymaking inclinations within the military engender political cleavages that were not salient before (see Thompson 1976). For example, after ousting Isabel Perón in 1976, the armed forces struggled to agree upon economic policy, sparking a series of events that led to an humiliating public defeat over the Falkland Islands (Vanden and Prevost 2012; 450). Horizontal cleavages (splitting elite versus non-elite) may spark resentment within the lower ranks, while vertical cleavages may create rivalries across all levels of the military. In either case, the military’s hierarchical structure is undermined and those involved are hard-pressed to adapt.

No longer shielded from politics or popular opinion, militaries (especially when highly professionalized) also become quite sensitive to the possibility of their social standing and/or prestige being jeopardized.¹¹

The legitimacy of the military’s rule is inherently shaky, based almost exclusively on its promise to correct the severe distresses from the previous civilian regime. Legitimacy therefore dissipates if the military cannot provide desired policy outcomes or services (Belkin and Schofer 2003, Barkey 1990). More often than not, the military falls short and contemplates civilian rule. This is not limited to modern history. Abrams (1971) reflects on Oliver Cromwell’s short-lived military regime under Commonwealth of England, and how the military promptly found itself ill-equipped to run government. Under Cromwell, the army found themselves ever-busier, straining the administrative capacities of the regime... [the state became in debt] to meet the cost involved in military rule and

¹¹An economic interpretation of the military’s reputation or image concerns might be that reputation or image is essentially the military’s retirement package or, maybe more relevant here, its bargaining strength against a civilian government upon returning to the barracks.

thus allow the regime to continue, military rule had to be civilianized. It was necessary for the tax to be authorized by a Parliament if the soldiers were to have any hope of collecting it. (49-50)

As will be made evident in the analysis of Latin America below, the military often prides itself as being an enlightened elite and hopes that posterity will remember them in that manner. The intangible fear of losing the historical legacy of enlightened leadership weighs on the decision of whether to remain in power or not.

In sum, ineptitude at politics and desire for corporate unity thus contribute to the military's willingness and ability to restore order, but also its unwillingness and inability to effectively govern. Most military regimes thus choose to cede power to a civilian government, typically chosen through national elections.¹²

5 Two Equilibria: Trust and Mistrust in Civil-Military Relations

Having understood some of the unique traits to the military, we can now move on to a theory of military relapse. In very broad terms, and as we have done implicitly thus far, we can split a civilian states institutions into two parts: the civilian government and the military. While both entities clearly prefer a stable state to one threatened by chaos, each party is also characterized by its own goals, strengths, and weaknesses.

Leaders within the civilian government seek to maximize their time in office and/or political rents. This aspiration has long been accepted in the political science literature (see Goemans 2000). Meanwhile, the military hopes to maintain internal order while also preserving its autonomy and corporate unity. Note that much of the recent literature does not draw this distinction between civilian and military leaders, instead assuming a common interest in maximizing rents and time in office.¹³ However, following the vast literature on the military in politics discussed above, we believe it is not only empirically more accurate to treat the military as having distinct qualities, but theoretically useful as well.

5.1 Cooperation and Trust in the “Normal” State of Affairs

Each group has its comparative advantage in the promotion of a stable and active state. The civilian administration has a vast bureaucracy that focuses on shaping policy to promote economic growth, while the military's preponderance of force allows it to defend the state from internal and external threats. These two dynamics both promote stability and prove to be complementary: Order and security provide breathing room for economic growth, and economic growth satisfies the citizens

¹²The middle-class origins of the modern military help explain this choice which is typically the one championed by the non-elite citizenry. (For a formalized approach to the appeal of democracy to non-elites, see Acemoglu and Robinson [2001, 2006]. The idea that expanding militaries shifted toward middle-class interests also finds some precedence in Tilly [1992].) As further evidence, many studies find high levels of inequality to be a key determinant in military intervention, with the military seeking to ameliorate the disparity (Svolik 2013, Kourvetaris 1971). Depending on how pre-planned the exit from power is, the military attempts to bargain some degree of autonomy or protection for itself (Agero 2001).

¹³See, for examples, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) and Kricheli and Magaloni (2010).

while also providing more potential resources for security apparatus. This division of labor between the military and civilian components of the state is typically considered a “normal” state of affairs.

However, this does not directly speak to the power dynamic between the two. That balance is manifested across a broad range of decisions mentioned above, many of which clearly go beyond simple control over the military budget. Typically, the military is subordinate to the civilian regime, and this has normally been the normatively preferred arrangement especially after the end of the Second World War.

This “normal” state of affairs is an equilibrium that requires mutual trust between the civilian government and military.¹⁴ Each side must feel assured that its prerogatives will not be drastically altered. If such dramatic changes occur, then each side may attempt to subvert the other. Civilians that foresee a military coup will take steps to consolidate power and subordinate the military. A military that fears civilian meddling may seize power via a coup. Fortunately, subversion is typically not a salient concern.

5.2 Breakdown and Mistrust in Civil-Military Relations

This arrangement, however, can be jeopardized when an external shock forcibly alters the dynamics between the military and civilian government. An exogenous shock, typically economic crisis, can trigger a collapse in political order that neither the civilian government nor military desire. However, the military is especially averse to such disorder, and due to its comparative advantage in the use of force, it will intervene to stem violence (Huntington 1968). This praetorian stewardship of government tends to be undermined by the military’s dislike of and ineptness at politics. Military rule is not sustainable, and due to corporate concerns of reputation and unity, the military regime plans to divest power to a civilian government.¹⁵

But neither the military nor civilian elite can deny that things have changed, and this change foments mistrust. Civilian leaders, having witnessed the military intervene and control the bureaucracy by force, are suspicious of the military’s willingness to cleanly return to the barracks. The military, aware of this civilian concern, is worried about losing its autonomy to an apprehensive civilian government. Additionally, the military may have taken unpopular actions during its time in power and thus fears retribution from the civilian government. From both sides, suspicion is evident.

The transition to civilian rule is therefore a bargaining process in which the two parties must strike a deal with some assurance that the terms of the agreement will be upheld. Both seek to understand the other’s true intents with the hope of discovering a trustworthy counterpart. Each side is typically willing to give the transition some time to glean this information.¹⁶ It is worth noting here that the military always has some bargaining leverage: Regardless of its political performance, the military is the incumbent and largely monopolizes the use of force.

¹⁴This attention on trust, as well as subsection titles, is loosely inspired by Kydd (2005).

¹⁵This is consistent with the model of military regimes established in Geddes (2003).

¹⁶However, in severe cases, the military may even stage a coup before the civilian government has an opportunity to take office. The case of Myanmar in 1990, described later in this paper, is an example.

The transition process has three main phases. First, the military determines the terms of returning to civilian rule. Second, the civilian government decides whether and how to redefine policy after upon its resumption of political leadership. Third, the military decides whether or not to re-take power. The outcome of this process is jointly determined by two main factors: the relative unity of each party at the time of transition to civilian rule (phase one), and the perceived costs of intervention versus staying in the barracks when the military decides whether or not to re-take power (phase three). These two factors are defined and discussed below.

First, unity is defined as the degree to which “definitions of institutional interests, missions, and role are shared” (Agüero 2001, 202). While we have already spoken to the military’s inherent corporate interest in unity, unity also has political functions that are important to the civilian elite. The ability of a group to coalesce around a specific mission is essential to promoting its own aims, withstanding opposition, and limiting the opposition’s options. Unity enhances both “defense” and “offense” in political struggles. If one side does a worse job of gathering around a coherent alternative, its relative appeal, aptitude, and legitimacy are shaken.

When military and civilian elites have commensurate levels of unity, neither side can bully the other into large concessions. As such, the two sides strike a deal that is relatively balanced and gives each party a clear sense of its duties and prerogatives, and thus the civilian leadership will not encroach on the military’s interests upon returning to power. Also, by approximating what existed during normal times, the chance of relapse is minimized. When levels of unity are unbalanced, however, civilian rule is less sustainable.

If the civilian leadership is relatively more unified, it is better able to gather around a single agenda and extract changes from the relatively factionalized military. Addressing mistrust toward the military, civilian leaders are better able to institutionalize the decreased autonomy of the military. This tends to intrude on the military’s interests and reinforce its beliefs that the civilian government seeks retribution for its initial assertion of military rule. Costs (discussed below) allowing, military relapse will thus be relatively more likely in this case than in the case of commensurate unity.

If the military is more unified, the armed forces have a solid idea of what compromises they are willing to make, while civilians struggle to propose a coherent alternate regime. This disparity allows the military to institutionalize greater amounts of resources and autonomy for itself as it exits power. Civilians have little choice but to accept these stringent terms, and none of this reassures them about the military’s trustworthiness or underlying motivations. Once in power, the new civilian government’s concerns translate into policies that attempt to undermine military prerogative where possible to reassert control. Even if these moves are meant to be “defensive,” they provoke a relatively powerful military, which will consider reclaiming government to prevent further encroachments. In this case, the probability of military relapse is the highest. Note that since the military is more unified and able to consolidate gains before ceding power, it will be willing to intervene again at relatively higher costs.

In the case that the military is extremely unified compared to a disintegrated civilian leadership,

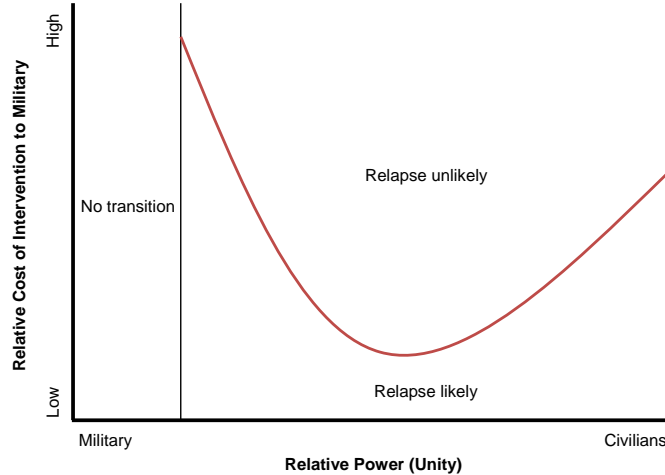


Figure 5: Predicted probabilities of military relapse with respect to relative unity and costs.

there should be no transition to civilian rule in the first place. Either civilian unrest is still so pervasive that the military believes its imperfect rule is preferable to civilian turmoil, or the civilian elite simply have no credible alternative to the status quo. In a sense, this is a special case of there being a very high probability of relapse—that the military just keeps power.

Second, the military evaluates the costs associated with the decision to re-intervene. Generally, the spoils of office are relatively low for the military when it cedes politics back to a civilian regime. The military stepped down because it did not want to govern and/or proved itself incapable of doing so. The armed forces’ main concern is the potential costs to be incurred in the future, and these costs differ according to the civilian government’s actions and factors external to the country.

The costs of staying with the new civilian regime are the potential loss of autonomy and resources through civilian circumvention or violation of institutionalized agreements. For example, the civilian government may shuffle the military leadership or begin to prosecute military officers for human rights abuses. The costs of re-entering politics, on the other hand, involve both domestic and international rebuke. Intervention might lead to decreased economic activity via sanctions and reduced aid. Both waffling and the return of clumsy politicking may also severely tarnish the military’s historical legacy. However, in the cases where the costs of maintaining the new status quo are higher than the costs of reclaiming government, the military will instigate a military relapse. The higher the costs of intervention are to the costs of maintain civilian rule, the less likely it is that such relapses will occur.

These predictions of potential outcomes are summarized in Figure 5. The outcome of bargaining over institutions is represented by movement along the x-axis, which represents relative unity at the time of transition. Positioning on this axis is fixed once the balance between military and civilian prerogatives is institutionalized. The civilian government’s subsequent policies toward the military, along with changes in the international environment, are then represented by movement along the vertical axis, which represents the relative cost of intervention compared to maintaining civilian

rule.¹⁷

One additional point is worth mentioning. Figure 5 would be improved by the addition of a third dimension: presence of a common enemy. This could be folded into the costs of intervention (since intervention would distract the military with affairs of state in the midst of war), but it may be conceptually distinct and significant enough to be treated separately. Whether this threat comes from an external actor like an aggressor state, or an internal actor like an insurgent movement, this shared threat forces civilian elite and the military to engage in their respective comparatively advantageous roles. The civilian government must support the military to fend off the threat. The military, for its part, therefore feels ensured about its corporate interests and prefers to focus on matters of war than bureaucracy. This repugnant third party helps to re-establish a cooperative equilibrium. Suggestively, McClintock (1989) notes that the only Latin American countries to consolidate democracy in the late 1950s—Venezuela and Colombia—were ones that dealt with guerilla threats.¹⁸

To provide empirical support for our theory, the next two sections examine the history of military relapse in Peru and Myanmar. Peru and Myanmar’s history of military rule reflect two different histories and geographic settings, yet they both highlight many of the salient features of military relapse. We utilize a case study approach due to data availability issues which severely and systematically undermine any statistical analysis. Moreover, the dynamics of civil-military relations that we identify below would not be fully captured by country-year data. As we note in the conclusion, a formal model that explicitly captures the theory presented above would add greater traction to the case studies below.

6 A Case Study in Latin America: Peru

Peru’s political history since its independence is laden with turmoil. Within those 186 years of tug-of-war between civilians and the armed forces, the country experienced two military relapses in 1962 and 1968. The first was extremely brief, while the second presaged a twelve-year period of military rule. See Figure 6.

Beyond the relapses, Peru is also instructive for the lack of military intervention after 1980. The evolution of the uneasy relationship between the armed forces and nascent civilian regime serve to illustrate several aspects of the theory presented in this paper.

First, we will briefly review Latin America’s distinctive military heritage and its effects on modern politics in the region. Second, we turn to Peru and trace its history of civil-military relations after independence in the early nineteenth century. Emphasis is placed on the role of

¹⁷Note that the cost threshold for relapse is lower on the right than the left. On the right, the military is lower on resources, autonomy, and unity; it is thus less able to stage a coup. On the left, autonomy, unity, and resources are greater, so the military is more willing and able to suffer more costs to reclaim power.

¹⁸Larger forces such as the end of the Cold War; norms against military rule; the threat of economic instability from sanctions or loss of global trade all contribute to the decreasing number of military regimes. Nonetheless, we believe that the domestic interaction between civilian elite and the military is a fundamental ingredient to understanding relapses, especially when repeated. Older cases of stabilization are also not sufficiently accounted for using these worldwide considerations that only became more salient in the later 1980s and early 1990s.

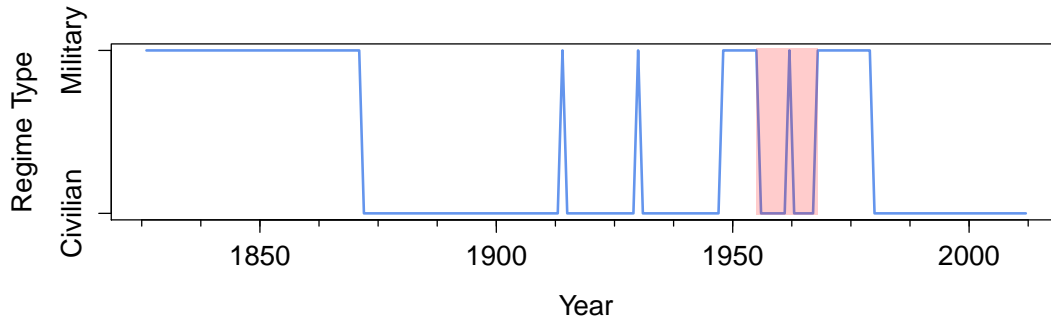


Figure 6: Peru’s trajectory between military and civilian rule since independence. Shaded areas indicate periods of military relapse.

agrarian socialist interests and their relationship with the military. We then look at the twelve-year period of military rule and its decline. We conclude the section by looking at politics after 1980 and understanding the apparent stability of civilian government.

6.1 Latin America in General

It is difficult to ignore the unique nature of military politics in Latin America. More than any other region of the world, Latin America has long legitimized the importance and rule of the armed forces. The Iberian influence of the conquistadores; the lack of agreed-upon territorial boundaries; and the external threat of Western Europe after the independence movements of the early 19th century placed the military as a key actor in Latin American politics (Isbester 2011). The dependence on military power injected the army with a high social standing. Besides material benefits, members of the military saw themselves as an enlightened elite that fundamentally represented and defended the state. A sense of social responsibility is evident. In a Brazilian military journal, an officer writes: “The army needs to be ready to preserve and stabilize the social elements in action. It should be prepared to correct the internal disturbances that are so frequent in the tumultuous life of developing countries.” (Rouquié, 113). Furthermore, a legacy of *caudillismo*, or the exercise of power by strongmen using methods of clientelism, has infused the region with a political culture that can favor personalist rule; swift responses; and an all-or-nothing perception of politics, rather than diffused power and protracted efforts at compromise.¹⁹

6.2 Setting the Stage: The Appearance of Political Actors before World War II

Upon obtaining hard-fought independence from Spain in 1826, Peru underwent a tumultuous period of power jockeying within the military.²⁰ This embroiled the nation for decades before General Ramón Castilla grasped power in 1845. Over the next century, Peru experienced periodic fluctuations between civilian and military rule.

¹⁹For more discussions about political culture, see Almond and Verba (1963) and Stepan (1988). The long history of military rule in Latin America also led to a higher amount of familiarity with politics, which may contribute to the “bureaucratic authoritarianism” that kept many Latin American military regimes in power for one or two decades.

²⁰Werlich (1978) notes that over thirty executives claimed power between 1826 and 1845; six were officially recognized (Hunefeldt 2004).

Castilla's rule was defined by a boom in the international guano market, which lifted the cratered economy. This surge had two important consequences. First, Castilla spent massive resources to establish the country's first standing army (Rudolph 1992). Second, decades of stability based on guano allowed for the development of a civilian capital-based oligarchy that accumulated power and finally had both the unity and resources to politically challenge the military establishment. Once this trade boom ended, Castilla's massive debts caught up to him and undercut his popularity. Civilian and former mayor of Lima, Manuel Pardo y Lavelle, ran for and won the presidency.

Indeed, lucky economic windfalls based on international trends were often the primary reason Peruvian military regimes survived. This makes sense given that most domestic instability was caused by economic crises and the government's inability to deal with these issues adequately. Meanwhile, this economic unrest, tied together with growing levels of inequality within society, engendered discontent within the agrarian and laboring classes. Originally a diffuse subset of the population, these poorer citizens slowly accumulated a political presence; from the military's point of view, they were increasingly perceived as a source of instability and disorder. This came to a head in 1914, when pro-labor President Billinghurst attempted to circumvent the conservative legislature, attempting to force elections and appealing for popular uprisings in the street. Unsettled by both the leftist fervor and endangerment of status quo institutions, the military re-entered politics for the first time in over forty years. The armed forces ousted Billinghurst and reinstated Pardo the following year.²¹

In 1924, socioeconomic dissatisfaction found a unified voice. Disenchanted student activists, led by Victor Paul Haya de la Torre, founded the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA) in Mexico City. Conceived of as a pan-Latin American organization, APRA overtly used Marxist rhetoric and sought full democratization; benefits for the working classes; leadership of intellectual elite; and the end of oligarchic rule and international interference. The military's general aversion to instability evolved into aversion to APRA. This enmity exploded in 1932, when an *aprista* assassinated former military official and then-civilian president Luis Miguel Sánchez Cerro; and in 1933, when APRA killed dozens of unprepared soldiers in a raid of a military compound in Trujillo, which resulted in the military's execution of hundreds of citizens in the city. This violent period also planted the seeds for an important reversal of military thought that would become salient thirty years later: Despite being reprehensible, APRA's actions made many in the military explicitly aware of the discontent and poverty in the countryside and its potential to destabilize the nation's internal security on a more fundamental level than simple politics.

6.3 Post-World War II: Changing Attitudes Toward Instability

With all of the major political actors in place, Peru entered the latter half of the twentieth century on the cusp of two military relapses.

²¹We skip exposition on the "spike" in the data at 1919, which represents Augusto B. Leguía's forceful entry into power by a military coup. A past president from 1908 to 1912, Leguía himself had no military background, but coopted portions of the military to support his cause. He then pushed through a new constitution in 1920 that consolidated his authoritarian rule until he was ousted in 1930.

By the mid-1940s, APRA could not be denied a spot in national politics. It was legalized as a party in 1945 and (by moderating its agenda and joining several coalitions) strategized its way into the new administration of civilian Jose Bustamante y Rivero. Economic troubles and political disagreements surfaced immediately. Major General Manuel Odría, serving as Minister of Government and Police, urged Bustamante to ban APRA yet again. Bustamante's refusal to do so, along with Odría's hatred of APRA, sparked his coup against Bustamante in late 1948. Odría's regime established conditions for the nation's first relapse fourteen years later.

Odría and the military's concern with instability from below continued to evolve: Instead of taking a completely adversarial approach with the poor, Odría attempted to address their grievances. Odría's eight-year rule (often referred to as the *ochenio*) was luckily timed, buoyed by massively lucrative copper exports during the Korean War.²² These resources allowed Odría to engage in a populist agenda and slew of expensive but popular policies. In the background, Odría's regime also engaged in corruption and violations of civil liberties. The end of the war brought his poorly chosen spending patterns to light. Labor unrest and protests spread across the nation. Odría's policies of repression also began to face internal rebellion, including an abortive coup attempt by the minister of war, General Zenón Noriega, in 1954, and a military revolt led by General Marcial Merinos Pereyra in 1956 (Bertram 1991).

By 1956, Odría sought to limit damage to the military's reputation and began to seek an exit while his regime still maintained some favor with the general citizenry. However, despite his pivot toward populism, he also feared the growing status of the leftist movement, which he saw as being too extreme and inimical to the state. Odría allowed for elections in 1956 but also sought to protect the military's corporate interests as much as possible. The military was clearly splintering as it entered negotiations. However, the civilian elite were even more fractured, split in their support of two frontrunners: moderate Manuel Prado Ugarteche and leftist Fernando Belaúnde Terry. Further disagreements within both civilian camps (especially in their attitude toward forming coalitions with APRA) made matters worse. This meant the military had the upper hand in bargaining the terms of the new civilian regime. To prevent the election of Belaúnde, Odría struck a deal with candidate (and former president and army officer) Manuel Prado to support his candidacy in 1956 if he promised not to look into abuses and corruption during the *ochenio*. This deal was successful for the military, and amnesty—protection of the military's reputation and legal autonomy—was essential to this arrangement. Prado won the election with 45.5% of the vote while the military ensured a central role in Peruvian politics.

This arrangement could only last through Prado's six-year tenure. APRA leader Haya de la Torre was more popular than ever before during the 1962 election. By this point, APRA's constant political strategizing had heavily diluted the group. An APRA presidency was no longer very threatening to society as a whole, but due to their sour history, still distasteful to the military. Compared to the past, the costs of military intervention were relatively high compared to tolerating an APRA presidency. However, the military's strength allowed it to tolerate greater costs in order

²²Technically, Odría resigned from the military and became a civilian president in 1950. However, he was the only candidate in these elections and it was clear that Peru remained a military regime through his tenure.

to reclaim power. It did so in 1962, marking the country's first military relapse.

Unwilling to accept the possibility of APRA's victory, General Ricardo Perez Godoy seized power before the elections—a takeover that was facilitated by the armed forces' strength. But shortly thereafter, ineptitude set in. Godoy set off a series of short-sighted and profligate policies that undermined what most Peruvians citizens viewed as an illegitimate regime. Godoy also proved unwilling to leave office even though a quick exit was part of the original plan. The second-in-command, Nicolas Lindley López, pushed Godoy out and staged civilian elections. Belaúnde won the presidency in 1963. This turnover of power was not favorable to the military. Godoy's swift junta and subsequent unwillingness to leave office were public spectacles. The humiliating ordeal unraveled military unity while civilians rallied around the leftist government that they hoped would redress the country's chronic social and economic woes.

Even though they were broken and chastened, the armed forces remained highly wary of what they saw as the undoing of Peru's internal security. Starting in the early 1960s, a new military philosophy (undeniably influenced by United States efforts in the Cold War²³)

known as the National Security Doctrine strongly overlapped with ideas that had long been percolating within the military. Beyond simple force, economic development and reform were seen as necessary components to ensure domestic security (Hudson 1992). This approach appealed to a substantial contingent of progressive-minded military officials, who watched Belaúnde with a keen eye. In terms of our theory, the lopsided balance of power (unity) between the military and civilian leaders in 1963 left the military weak and distrustful of Belaúnde's regime. The military would be keen to re-intervene, but would require a compelling reason to do so.

By 1968, the Belaúnde government was floundering and financially crippled.²⁴ Progressives within the military, led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado, were steeped in the National Security Doctrine. They grew frustrated with the country's inability to address fundamental socio-economic issues that were worsening the nation's long-term security. The perceived costs of allowing Belaúnde and other civilian leaders to mismanage the country into permanent turmoil seemed far worse than the military elite's plans for reform. In Peru's second military relapse, Belaúnde was ousted five years into his presidency. Velasco being the highest ranking officer in the Peruvian military helped to redevelop a sense of stability and unity that also allowed for the handing out of offices according to military hierarchy and promotional schedules. A relatively clear set of objectives, alongside strong central leadership, likely contributed to the military regime's longevity (Barkey 1990).

The apolitical and efficient nature of the military defined the Revolutionary Government of

²³The Cuban Revolution in 1953 sparked an extraordinary wave of American intervention in Latin America. Fearing the Communist threat, the United States sent heavy aid to Latin America which peaked in the mid-1960s, as the United States sent upwards of \$6 billion in economic aid and nearly \$1 billion in military aid to the region annually (2010 dollars; Meyer and Sullivan 2012). Intellectually, American military policy also inculcated an aversion to leftist and guerilla movements. Tied together with a historical sense of guardianship of the state, Latin American militaries became highly sensitive to the presence of extremist movements that might destabilize the state.

²⁴It was also mired in political scandal. Peru had an enduring disagreement with Standard Oil of New Jersey over several oil fields. Belaúnde resolved the conflict by paying Standard Oil for what many Peruvians felt was rightfully theirs. Outrage hit a peak when Belaúnde published the agreement while omitting the eleventh page, which contained the value of the compensation. Even after his entire cabinet resigned, this scandal was one of the justifications given for the coup.

the Armed Forces (*Gobierno Revolucionario de la Fuerza Armada*, or GRFA). The small cadre that took power criticized politicians' incompetence at dealing with the nation's troubles. The group asserted that it represented the entire military and that it sided with no particular party or class, but rather the "general interests of the country" in relieving socioeconomic schisms (Cotler 1983, North 1983). It is worth noting that while many past military interventions sided with the restoring order (and hence protecting elite interests), the 1968 coup was decidedly anti-elite and more ambitious in scope than any previous military regime. The middle-class background of much of the military probably accommodated the shift away from oligarchic interests (Havens et al. 1983). Nonetheless, each of these military forays was based on the preservation of national security; the philosophy which informed what "national security" should entail evolved over time. By 1968, the fundamental alleviation of disparity and social tensions were seen as crucial needs—ones that unruly civilian politicians had proven that they could not provide.

The reform-minded military regime undertook a massive campaign of economic reform and infrastructural investments that it hoped would consolidate the domestic markets while strengthening and middle classes and ending the oligarchy. Nationalist fervor led to Peru pushing out many foreign investors that were seen as encroaching upon and taking advantage of the country. Agrarian reform broke apart large swaths of farmland in exchange for bonds. Despite international scorn, these actions initially proved successful: Peru's gross national product grew at an average of 6.5% from 1970-1973 (Rudolph 1992). Such growth won the Velasco regime a great deal of initial public support.

Velasco's feverish deluge of reforms and economic activity was stimulating but not sustainable. Overvalued currency resulted in massive imports and staggering debts; subsidies for food and fuel also dug a deeper hole; and investments in oil and copper floundered. Disagreements with the United States stymied a large source of investment and aid. The military's interests also played a major part: Worried about war with Chile, which itself fell to Pinochet's military dictatorship in 1973, the armed forces engaged in massive arms purchases and military spending. Defense expenditures from 1970 to 1974 averaged an increase of 7.2 percent a year, but soared to 22 percent from 1974 to 1977 (Cotler 1983). Foreign debt ballooned four-fold (to \$3 billion in 1975), extinguishing Velasco's pledge to free the country from foreign intrusion. As a consequence of this narrow concern, the military regime ignored its technocrats' repeated appeals for a policy of austerity, and public discontent with the government grew as promises made fell short. Organized opposition grew. The legitimacy the military government had in taking power to restore the economy was withering, and the military, now facing more political pressures, fractured.

The Velasco government clearly would not allow for victories or participation by parties that it did not believe it could heavily influence. Francisco Morales Bermudez Cerrutti, who quietly assumed power in a bloodless coup after Velasco suffered a severe stroke in 1975, had little luck improving the overall situation. The replacement of Velasco's reform efforts with severe government austerity (influenced by the U.S. banks and later I.M.F. underwriters) only deepened the economic crisis and crippled the military's reputation. Stagnant wages and rising costs sparked successive

street protests and calls for civilian rule, which the military attempted to stem by rolling back civil liberties and increasing military spending even further. As unrest grew, the military gradually believed that withdrawal was the only way to stem military disintegration and to retain any sense of political legitimacy to be a political actor in the future (Cotler 1983, Hunter 1997, Villanueva 1972). Politics were tearing the military apart. By 1977, Morales Bermudez proposed a blueprint for a Constituent Assembly and return to civilian rule by 1980. The Revolutionary Government of the Armed forces thus dissolved without accomplishing its promised objectives (if not worsening certain conditions), disheveled and humiliated.

6.4 Uneasy Consolidation of Civilian Rule

Peru has remained under constant civilian control since 1980. However, at the same time, the government has tampered with the military's resources and prerogatives. Several considerations explain the military's reluctance to trigger another military relapse, each of which speaks to the dynamics between the military and civilians; and the changing costs of intervention over time.

Elections brought Belaúnde back to government, twelve years after his ouster. The military interpreted this effective continuation of the Belaúnde presidency as a strong electoral mandate and a unified civilian front. Chastened and splintered by their recent failure, the military was aware that the public blamed them for the economic downturn and was not willing to gamble the remainder of its legitimacy away. Much of the lower and middle classes also grew disenchanted by the military regime and would constitute a forceful opposition movement if the military returned to power (McClintock 1989). Despite these considerations, Belaúnde was patently aware of the potential for a military relapse. Belaúnde and the civilian elite had an upper hand in negotiations but were aware of the danger associated with the mistrust that this entailed. In seeking to placate the armed forces, Belaúnde effectively preserved their autonomy and even boosted their budget during the first years of his presidency, to the extent that Peru's external debt grew further (Obando 1994). Not a single prerogative or privilege was touched, including the military's immunity from civilian trials about human rights violations (Mauceri 1991). In effect, the civilian government promised the military several guarantees on its autonomy—even a guarantee of chauffeured vehicles for officers. The military, disgraced by its failure as military-in-government, accepted these relatively favorable terms.

Alan García, who assumed the presidency in 1985, sought a drastically different approach. Garcia was a member of the APRA party and, despite the full de jure acceptance of APRA into politics, feared a military relapse. Instead of placating the military, the new president tried to castrate the military. Economic struggles forced a decline in the military budget. Against the wishes of all other parties, Garcia unified the Ministries of War, Navy, and Air Force into a single ministry and fired two top military officials for human rights abuses—the first case in Latin America of a civilian leader firing such a high commanding officer. Meanwhile, the regime co-opted corruptible senior military officials with offers of high ministries, leaving the remaining armed forces unable to lobby for resources. Trust between the armed forces and the Garcia regime withered and threatened

the country's stability.

However, the armed forces' loss of autonomy on the national level was quickly compensated in other arenas. 1980 not only brought back civilian rule to Peru, but also the start of the insurgency by Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*), an extremist Maoist group that used guerilla tactics to establish a communist state. Both the Belaúnde and García governments initially underestimated Shining Path's prominence and capabilities, only to be deeply startled by their insurgent tactics and deep presence around the Andes. Both the Belaúnde and especially the Garcia governments were unprepared to deal with this situation. The two leaders saw no choice but to declare areas of emergency and give the military full authority to quell the violence.²⁵

Just by the mid-1980s, the armed forces had effective control over a third of the nation's territory. Shining Path appears to be an important aspect of the military's willingness to accept civilian rule. Besides its autonomy at the local and regional level, bolstered by immunity from trials for a growing number of human rights abuses (Cornell and Roberts 1990), the military feared that a coup would embolden Shining Path and spark civil war (McClintock 1989). The central government's need for the military against Shining Path ultimately helped compel both parties to cooperate and focus on their areas of expertise while also ensuring the military's autonomy and well-being.²⁶ Alberto Fujimori's presidency from 1990 to 2000 also alleviated the military's concerns, since Fujimori lacked true party support and thus relied on the military to back his *autogolpe* in 1992. At the start of his second term in 1995, Fujimori even formally granted amnesty to the military for all its acts between 1980 and 1995.

Accumulating years under civilian rule, alongside growing international disdain for military rule (at the normative, political, and economic levels) have made the Peruvian military, along with most other Latin American militaries, more docile. Its key role against Shining Path is also a factor that plays into the equilibrium between civilian government and the military.

7 The Tatmadaw and Myanmar Politics

Myanmar's political history since its independence in 1948 exemplifies both typical and exceptional attributes of military authoritarian rule.²⁷ Typical of military autocracies, the Tatmadaw (the

²⁵ "In December 1982, President Belaúnde authorized the military to engage in the fight against insurgency. Using his authority under Article 231 of the 1979 Constitution, which states that the 'Armed Forces assume control of internal control when the President of the Republic decides,' Belaúnde decreed states of emergency [...] Using vague constitutional authority, Belaúnde designated *Comandos Políticos-Militares*, who were invested with absolute political and military authority, to take control of those zones." (Mauceri 1991, p. 90)

²⁶ This situation could also be a domestic/intrastate variant of the credible commitment argument made by Acemoglu et al. (2010).

²⁷ Burma's official name was to the Union of Myanmar on July 20, 1989. Initially, many governments and people continued to use the name Burma to protest the government's poor human rights records and illegitimate seizure of power after the 1990 elections. Beginning with the gradual transition to civilian rule in 2010, many governments, observers, and major news agencies have begun to use Myanmar, though there are important exceptions. The etymology and legitimacy of the name Myanmar is beyond the scope of this paper. In this exposition, we use Myanmar and other official names of places for consistency and recognition and referencing convenience only. We also follow the convention of distinguishing 'Burmese' as a term for the people of Myanmar from 'Burman' as a term for the majority ethnic group. See Dittmer (2008) for additional notes on nomenclature.

formal name for Myanmar’s armed forces since 1948) has a record of inviting civilian rule only to rescind power. The data captures one episode of military relapse in 1962, which terminates a period of democracy from 1960 to 1962. There is an additional episode of military relapse in 1990, but it is not shown in the data because the civilian government was terminated preemptively.²⁸ Unusual among military governments, however, the Tatmadaw has retained uninterrupted control over Myanmar’s political system between 1962 and 2012, which places its lifespan well above the mean military regime’s lifespan in our data.²⁹ The extent to which the Tatmadaw permeates Myanmar’s economic and social spheres is probably also unmatched by any other twenty-first century military government. These trends are evident in Figure 7.

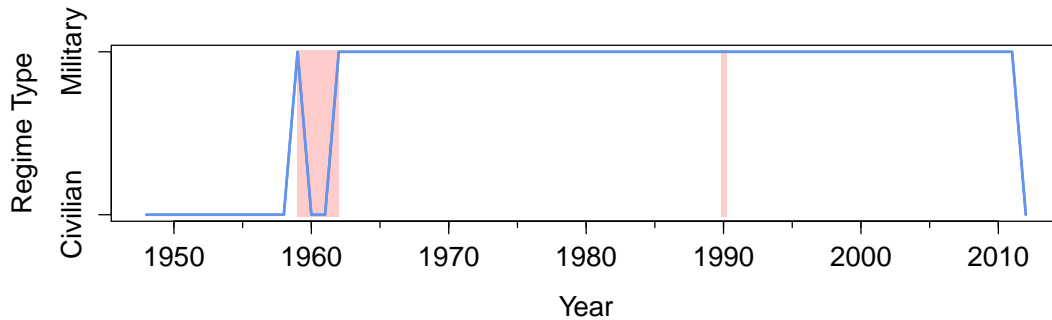


Figure 7: Myanmar’s trajectory between military and civilian rule. Shaded areas indicate periods of military relapse.

The objective of this case study on Myanmar is to highlight the political dynamics underlying the Tatmadaw’s government and its decisions to give and take-back power from civilian leaders in the post-independence period. Emphasis is placed on illustrating the key theoretical mechanisms that explain military relapse rather than on comparing Myanmar to other military dictatorships. The rest of this section proceeds in five parts. First is a brief history Myanmar prior its independence in 1948. Second is an overview of the Tatmadaw as an organization, its interests, and its role in Myanmar society and politics. Third and fourth are discussions on Myanmar’s two instances of military relapse in 1962 and 1990. Fifth is the conclusion, which includes some remarks on the partial return to civilian rule in 2010.

7.1 Historical Origins of the Modern Tatmadaw’s Organization and Interests

The political lineage of modern Myanmar can be traced to a group of city-states that existed along the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River, which runs north-south through central Myanmar. At least since the eleventh century until the colonial period, Myanmar was ruled by a series of kings.³⁰ In general, the Myanmar dynasties’ political authority diminished with increasing distance from

²⁸Strictly, the 1990 event might not be considered an episode of military relapse, but it highlights many of the same strategic problems and theoretical puzzles underlying civil-military relations that are outlined in our theory.

²⁹The mean lifespan of a military regime is 1.8 years and standard deviation is 3.43 years. Even if 1990 is counted as a break in military rule, the regimes’ lifespans are still over 6 standard deviations higher than the mean.

³⁰With exception to a period of disunion and political fragmentation that lasted roughly from 1287 to 1531 CE.

the center, especially once territory reached rough terrains.³¹ The military, then named the Royal Armed Forces, was largely subordinate to the monarch and used to conquer new territory and defend against external threats. The Alaungpaya dynasty (1752-1885 CE) was the last Myanmar dynasty. It grappled with many of the problems that its predecessors faced, which include overseeing successions between kings, controlling the periphery, and safeguarding against international rivals like China and Thailand. Facing a new international threat, however, Myanmar encountered the European imperial powers in the early eighteenth century. A series of wars with Britain led to Myanmar's total incorporation into the British Empire via British India by 1886.³²

Myanmar was under British colonial rule from 1886 to 1941 and from 1945 to 1948. In the intervening years, Japanese forces pushed out the British and occupied Myanmar with the military assistance of a group of Burmese that hoped to bring Myanmar independence. That group quickly learned, however, that independence would be slim under the Japanese. Ultimately, a coalition between the British and various Burmese groups, including those who had originally "betrayed" the British, drove out the Japanese and British rule was temporarily reinstated until Myanmar's independence in 1948.

Callahan (2003) is the seminal work on the military and Myanmar's political development from the colonial period to the 1962 coup and it argues that the interaction between Britain and Japan's colonial regimes and Myanmar's military and society was fundamental to political outcomes in the post-colonial period. Three key points from Callahan's study, also echoed in the literature on Myanmar's military, are discussed below.

First, British and Japanese colonial policies aggravated and institutionalized existing tensions between the Burman ethnic majority and peripheral minorities. After conquering Myanmar, Britain employed primarily Indian and ethnic minorities (mainly the Karen) to police its new colonial territory.³³ Japan, on the other hand, mainly used ethnic Burman soldiers to conquer Myanmar. Japan also helped establish and train members of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA), a predecessor of the modern Tatmadaw. The establishment of the BIA helped cement a sense of nationalism and unity among Myanmar's ethnic majority. In general, the center-periphery conflict that formed along ethnic lines was not unique to the colonial period, but the policies adopted by Myanmar's colonizers served to cement and aggravate existing tensions.

Second, colonialism led to a widespread militarization of Myanmar's population that lasted beyond the colonial period. Japan armed its temporary Burmese allies, and the subsequent British regime also armed the Burmese people as India became less willing to send its citizens to Myanmar in the latter colonial years. Disarming the population was never achieved, and by independence many pockets of armed groups formed in Myanmar. As a result, security threats to the state and

³¹See, for example, Harvey (1925) for a discussion of Myanmar's struggle to exert political authority over the Arakan (Rakhine) region in the pre-colonial period.

³²Britain and Myanmar fought three Anglo-Burmese Wars between 1824 to 1886, each of which led to annexations of Myanmar's territory by the Britain. Myanmar interacted with other colonial powers such as the Dutch and French to a lesser extent.

³³A ban on Burman soldiers was kept until 1923, after which the ethnic composition of the population versus military remained disproportionate: In 1931 ethnic Burmans made up 75.11% of the population and 12.30% of the military. See Callahan (2002), Table 1.

difficulties in ensuring state integrity were salient issues.

Third, colonialism disintegrated the indigenous social and political order. The Myanmar monarchy lost its political authority and was non-existent by 1948. Callahan observes that Britain’s colonial interests in Myanmar were relatively secondary to its other colonies such as India and business in Myanmar was mainly for economic exchange and production. Because long-term interaction with the Burmese population was not a priority, Britain adopted a “coercion-intensive” colonial apparatus in Myanmar: only military and security institutions were cultivated. By the end of the colonial period, the military was the only somewhat cohesive social unit left in Myanmar.

When independence came in 1948, the ethnic Burmans in central Myanmar were given authority over the Myanmar state, including various peripheral regions that sought sovereignty. This discussion makes clear, however, that the state’s *de facto* authority over its *de jure* borders was far from perfect.³⁴ Pre-colonial conditions and colonial policies made ethnicity between the center and periphery a political salient cleavage. Among the Burmese ethnic majority, a communist-socialist political cleavage over the nation’s future also formed, which will play a role in inciting the 1960 coup discussed below. The country achieved independence, but political order was frail. Power was passed to a civilian government led by Prime Minister Nu,³⁵ but the Tatmadaw stood not so silently in the background.

7.2 The Tatmadaw after 1948: Interests and Organization

The Tatmadaw has played an active role in politics since Myanmar’s independence whether directly in times of military rule (1958-1960; 1962-2012), or indirectly in times of civilian government (1948-1958; 1960-1962; since 2012).³⁶ Before turning to the major events in military-civilian interaction in modern Myanmar, the interests and organizational features of the Tatmadaw need to be discussed.

The Tatmadaw laid out its official mission statement in 1999. Why the Tatmadaw waited until 1999 to do so is unclear, but its proclamation seems to be reflective of the military’s core interests since independence.³⁷ The mission statement reflects two fundamental security interests. First, regarding internal affairs, the Tatmadaw is concerned with three main national causes: “non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity and perpetuation of national sovereignty.” The Tatmadaw’s domestic political concerns—sovereignty and the integrity of the state’s political authority and territory—are common to most modern militaries, but they are especially salient because of Myanmar’s history. Second, regarding external relations, the Tatmadaw is concerned with both the non-interference of other states into Myanmar’s affairs and vice versa. Fear of foreign intervention has been at the forefront of Myanmar’s political outlook, which stems

³⁴See Lee (2013) for a theoretical framework on sovereignty gaps.

³⁵Popularly known as U Nu. “U” is a term of respect for older males and actually part of Myanmar names. “Daw” is the female equivalent (for example, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi).

³⁶The recent transition to civilian institutions began in 2010, but opposition parties and significantly the National League for Democracy did not hold seats in the parliament until 2012. Because the military personnel monopolized the government until 2012, we mark the transition to civilian rule in 2012. This is also reflected in the data: Myanmar transitions from a military regime to a hegemonic party regime in 2012.

³⁷See Maung Aung Myoe (2009), chapters 1 and 2, and Selth (2002), chapter 2, for extended expositions on the Tatmadaw’s core interests and doctrine.

from its colonial past. As evidenced by the refusal to allow outside aid after Cyclone Nagris in 2008, Myanmar's fear of external interference often outweighed immediate political and humanitarian concerns.

In terms of military organization, one of the Tatmadaw elite's chief concerns has been to maintain autonomy from civilian interference and unity from internal faction. Maung Aung Myoe (2009) demonstrates how "a weak, small, and disunited Tatmadaw in Myanmar has emerged into a considerably strong, large, and more or less united one" in the post-independence period. Concerns about maintaining autonomy factored into the Tatmadaw's decision to stage coups, which is discussed further below. Fears regarding internal faction led to purges and reshuffling of the Tatmadaw corps, including the removal of ethnic minorities and officers affiliated with the Communist party.

7.3 The 1958 and 1962 Coups

Myanmar fell under military rule for the first time in October 1958 when the threat of coup prompted the civilian government led by Prime Minister Nu to "voluntarily" hand power over to the Tatmadaw.³⁸ The 1958 coup took place in anticipation to the November-December elections later that year. A split within the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), Myanmar's dominant political party of mainly ethnic Burmans and politically non-communists, precipitated a sequence of events leading up to the coup. Prime Minister Nu formed the "Clean" AFPFL and U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nein formed the "Stable" AFPFL, named after their slogans of cleaning-up the party or maintaining stability in the state.³⁹

After the AFPFL officially split in April 1958, each faction prepared for the November-December elections by vying for the support of existing AFPFL members. Prime Minister Nu and his Clean AFPFL party found that the Stable AFPFL was leading in party support. To catch up, Nu decided to expand his constituency to previously disenfranchised groups, including members of the pro-communist National Unity Front party (NUF) and various members of the Rakhine (Arakanese) and Shan communities. Nu also attempted to garner the support of former rebel communities by granting amnesty to ex-rebels from the Peoples Volunteer Organization (Trager 1958, p.151-152).

Prime Minister Nu's new support base of Communists, ethnic minorities, and former insurgents was essentially a coalition of the Tatmadaw's enemies since independence. Leading up to the election, both factions of the AFPFL and the Tatmadaw generally supported a unified and democratic Myanmar. PM Nu and his party, however, could not ensure that the minority and Communists' interests of territorial and political autonomy would not dominate policy if Nu were to win the elections. Trager (1958, p. 154) observes that, though unlikely at the time, if the communists were able to form a significant minority bloc within Nu's party, Nu would not be free to conduct the policies of his choice. Once elected, Nu could not guarantee that his party's policies would not threaten

³⁸The successful threat of coup that leads to military rule is essentially a bloodless coup. PM Nu announced his decision to transfer power on September 26, but the actual transfer occurred on October 28, which is the transition date used in the data.

³⁹The party politics surrounding the split are extensively discussed in Trager (1958). This paper only discusses the split insofar as it is relevant to the military regime and intervention.

the Tatmadaw's core interest in the state's territorial integrity. Instead of waiting to see what the elections would bring, the Tatmadaw threatened Nu with a coup and forced him to concede power.

The Tatmadaw was granted a mandate to oversee the government for six months, though that mandate was extended for an additional year. This eighteen month period from October 1958 to February 1960 is sometimes referred to as the Bogyoke (General's) Government or Caretaker Government, and during this time the Tatmadaw saw itself as a temporary government reacting to political crisis. The Tatmadaw's stated intention for temporarily taking political power was address problems such as corruption, insurgency, political instability, and the unity and independence of the army. These claims were consistent with the military's overarching interests in ensuring domestic stability and organizational autonomy. Its decision to relinquish power, however, is more puzzling.⁴⁰ Scholars might also find the Tatmadaw's voluntary return to the barracks especially puzzling given the widespread assumption that political leaders would take all measures to retain power and office.

Callahan (2003) gives two main explanations for why the Tatmadaw was willing to hold democratic elections in 1960. First, the Tatmadaw's reputation among the public was declining as they held onto power. Second, intra-army tensions heightened between soldiers on the field and soldiers taking political posts over advancement opportunities, respect, and prestige.⁴¹ Thus, the Tatmadaw stepped down from political power before political inexperience could diminish too greatly its organizational integrity and status within society. Upon returning to the barracks, the Tatmadaw led by General Ne Win began to strengthen corporate unity by purging dissident officers and field commanders (Callahan 2003, p.198-201). In sum, the Tatmadaw left politics to preserve corporate unity footing and it quickly sought to consolidate its strength upon exiting office.

Despite the Tatmadaw's voluntary retirement from official politics, civil-military relations soured for the foreseeable future. In the 1960 elections, Nu's party won and Nu was reinstated as Prime Minister. Upon forming his new government, Nu and his party began pursuing policies to consolidate civilian power and to undermine the Tatmadaw, but these same policies would once again draw the Tatmadaw out of the barracks. To give some examples, Nu campaigned against the continued operation of the National Defense College and the creation of a Central Intelligence Organization; he removed the police from the Tatmadaw's jurisdiction; and he reshuffled some leaders of the Tatmadaw by assigning them to marginalized civilian positions (Trager 1963, p.312-313). On first look, Nu's policies seem puzzling and irrational, especially since they seem to obviously provoke the Tatmadaw. In the lens of our theory, however, Nu's actions can be interpreted as defensive precautions taken by a relatively weak and distrustful civilian government, worried about a strong and potentially interventionist military. Nu's government, assuming power in a relatively weak position and seeing the Tatmadaw consolidate strength, could not help but to do what it thought would minimize the prospects for future military intervention.

The Tatmadaw reacted to these threats from PM Nu's government by staging another coup in March 1962. But in contrast to the 1958 coup, the Tatmadaw made no claims to be a "caretaker"

⁴⁰Callahan (2003, p.195) notes, "[o]ne of the mysteries of postcolonial Burmese politics is the question of why the Bogyoke government scheduled the 1960 election."

⁴¹Also see Maung Aung Myoe (2009, p.56-57) for a discussion on the conflict between field officers and staff officers.

government. Instead, it established the Revolutionary Council to govern Myanmar and made no timetable for a return to civilian rule. Observers seem to agree that the Myanmar public reacted mildly or even positively to the 1962 coup, which reflects the military's relatively strong standing in society compared to the civilian regime at the time (Trager 1963; Badgley 1962). It would not be long, however, before failed economic policies and growing administrative incompetency and corruption would lead to widespread discontent with the military regime.

7.4 Failed Elections in 1990

After the 1962 coup, the Tatmadaw became increasingly present in all levels of Myanmar's social, economic, and political life. The previous civilian government was largely disbanded and the military remained the only cohesive political group in the Myanmar,⁴² though eventually, poor governance and economic decline would incite popular protests, and the military would re-attempt civilian rule in 1990. From 1964 to 1988, the Tatmadaw governed Myanmar through the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), and Myanmar became increasingly isolated from the world during this period. Myanmar was virtually autarkic except for receiving foreign aid, though it engaged in a large unofficial drug and smuggling with its neighbors.⁴³ Internally, Myanmar was infamous for its inefficient bureaucracy, economic mismanagement, and rampant corruption. Myanmar-expert David Steinberg observed, "By late 1987 Burma was all but bankrupt of foreign exchange; the official economy had virtually collapsed" (Steinberg 1990, p.592). Following particularly bad crop years and the uncompensated demonetization of over two-thirds of the country's currency in 1987, widespread demonstrations broke out.⁴⁴ The Tatmadaw responded with force and clashes between the military and civilians led a series of deadly massacres in August 1988. Burma Watcher observes, "the Tatmadaw, which started the year as a respected component of Burmese society, reached year's end as a popularly hated organization" (Burma Watcher 1989, p.180).

To a large extent, the military's failed policies since 1962 and its brutal acts of repression in 1988 served to unify a previously non-existent civilian opposition. Finding themselves in a precarious position in relation to an aggravated civilian populace, the Tatmadaw adopted a series of economic and political changes beginning in late 1988.⁴⁵ Toward economic change, the BSPP was replaced with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), marking an end to socialist Myanmar. Also, as western nations terminated foreign aid in response to state repression, Myanmar began to open its economy to trade and investment elsewhere, especially to its neighboring states. This marked a shift in relations with historical rivals like China and Thailand.⁴⁶ Despite some liberalization, the Tatmadaw still dominated exchange through various bureaucratic rules and agencies.

⁴²We interpret this period as exemplifying the "no transition" region in Figure 5.

⁴³See Steinberg (1990) for a discussion of Myanmar's economic relations during this time.

⁴⁴The initial and largest demonstrations were led by students in the urban center, especially in the capitol, Yangon (Rangoon). Subsequent demonstrations spread throughout Myanmar, even outside of the major cities, and drew in participation from the wider civilian population.

⁴⁵See Guyot (1991) for a detailed discussion of the SLORC's four declared goals in 1989, which were to maintain law and order, secure transportation, provide for people's needs, and hold democratic elections.

⁴⁶See Guyot and Badgley (1990, p.192-193) for further discussion of economic opening in the region.

In any case, moderate gains in economic liberalization persisted into the 1990s.

The Tatmadaw also made plans for political liberalization in response to the 1988 events, but political liberalization, unlike economic opening, did not last. To appease protestors, the SLORC legalized political parties and announced plans to hold democratic elections in 1989. Leading up to the May 1990 elections, several opposition parties formed, the largest and most famous of which is the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi. These groups were generally free to gather and campaign publicly, though there are important exceptions such as the placing of Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for “sedition” in July 1989. Elections were finally held in May 1990, and to its surprise, the Tatmadaws favored the National Unity Party (NUP) was overwhelmingly defeated. Securing about 20% of the casted votes, the NUP won 10 of 485 legislative seats. Meanwhile, the NLD secured 60% of the votes and 392 legislative seats (Tonkin 2007, p.34-35). Following the embarrassing defeat, the SLORC used several tactics to stall the transition of power before eventually flatly declaring the country unready for democratic rule. The National Assembly with its newly elected members was never allowed to form, and most of the opposition leaders were jailed.

Why did the military take back power in 1990? Some argue that the Tatmadaw never intended to lose power and the 1990 events can be simply attributed to miscalculation. Miscalculation is plausible: One of our theory’s premises is that the military is inept at politics and would be prone to misjudge their prospects in a general election. Whether or not the Tatmadaw miscalculated, however, does not explain why it could not trust the civilian government with political power.

There were many civilian political parties that formed to compete in the 1990 elections, but for simplicity, we consider the National League for Democracy (NLD) to represent a general civilian opposition to the military government. Not only did the prolonged military rule, protests, and repressions serve to unite the NLD but they also created discord within the military. Disillusionment and discontent regarding the military’s role as political rulers grew within a small but significant minority within the Tatmadaw. For example, high ranking officers critical of the regime such as Brigadier General Aung Gyi and Major General Tin Oo “defected” and joined the NLD to campaign for democracy.⁴⁷ With the civilians tightly unified and the military relatively weakened, the transition back to civilian rule that began in late 1988 and culminated in 1990 favored civilian interests both economically and politically.

The NLD was emboldened by the Tatmadaw’s concessions. During their campaign for and immediately following the 1990 elections, the NLD began to take several steps to assert its role as a credible alternative to the Tatmadaw’s regime, but these steps did little to assure the Tatmadaw that its core interests would be protected under an NLD dominated government. For example, Selth (2001) observes that “[a]s early as the 1990 election campaign there were a number of indications that, under a NLD government, the *Tatmadaw* would be drastically reduced in size” (286). Tonkin (2007) further comments:

⁴⁷They were also both jailed at different times most likely for their opposition to the Tatmadaw’s policies. For a discussion of civilian/democracy sympathizers within the rank and file of the Tatmadaw, see Selth (2001, p.260).

The political parties, and the NLD in particular, seemed to regard the SLORC as the enemy to be dealt with once “democratic” power had been achieved....NLD Spokesman U Kyi Maung, flushed with the NLD’s landslide election victory, observed to AsiaWeek correspondent Dominic Faulder in July 1990—“In actual fact, how many Germans stood trial at Nuremberg”. The SLORC saw the writing on the wall. They knew what awaited them when power had been transferred. They were now unlikely to let this happen. (41-42)

Additionally, NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi was highly critical of not just Myanmar’s Head of State General Ne Win, but the Tatmadaw more generally, including statements concerning human rights and the military’s deviation from its original role as guardians of Myanmar (Guyot and Badley 1990; Tonkin 2007, p. 43-44). The NLD was conscious that a successful transition to civilian would require significant military cooperation and attempted to reassure the Tatmadaw (Selth 2001, p.277-284), but given contradictory statements such as those mentioned above, it is no wonder that the Tatmadaw was quick to recapture power.

In terms of our theory, the NLD was strong and united following 1988, but their strength ironically drove the Tatmadaw to fear civilian retribution and to ultimately determine that the cost of civilian rule would be too great. Compared to the return to civilian rule in 1960, civilian unity in 1990 was relatively greater, which should decrease the probability of military relapse. But in 1990, the cost of civilian rule became significantly greater, as the Tatmadaw had much to lose if the new government, for example, decided to prosecute human rights abusers from the 1988 massacres. When the Tatmadaw rejected transition and jailed its political opponents, the NLD could do little but to concede, seeing as the Tatmadaw held a monopoly over the use of force. Prospects for political liberalization were crushed.

7.5 Back to Civilian Rule Again? Hegemonic Rule in 2012 and Beyond

In 2012, the Tatmadaw allowed opposition groups to legally participate in the government for the first time in fifty years. Many observers wonder if this return to civilian rule will last or will the military take back power as it did in 1962 and 1990. In many ways, the recent return to civilian rule is similar to the events in 1990. Massive protests in 2008 triggered by natural disaster and economic decline were first followed by government crackdown and then progress toward economic and political liberalization. But one important difference is that the Tatmadaw in 2012 has allowed opposition groups to compete for only a small portion of the legislative seats, while reserving a majority of the seats for its own party, rather than holding completely open elections. The Tatmadaw was able to set up election rules to safeguard its interests because it controlled the guns and incumbent government. ⁴⁸

Currently, the Tatmadaw and its favored party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), control over two-thirds of the legislative seats. The NLD, however, is able to stand on

⁴⁸In our data, Myanmar is coded as a hegemonic regime as of 2012.

relatively equal political footing due largely to its vastly popular leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and its democratic and civilian appeal to many foreign nations. Unlike in 1990, clear institutional rules and coherent political visions on each side seem to have made the recent transition sustainable.⁴⁹ Much of whether the current civilian regime persists and perhaps transitions to full democratic government will depend on whether the Tatmadaw and NLD can build trust and assure one another that each side's core interests will be respected. The Tatmadaw has already taken the hugely risky step of opening up the regime to the NLD and allowing Aung San Suu Kyi to be active in politics both domestically and internationally. And the NLD, perhaps learning from the 1990 episode, has also been careful in criticizing the Tatmadaw for its past and current uses of repression in its domestic security policies. Whether this tenuous relationship would be sustainable if the Tatmadaw did not control a majority of the government is uncertain. Both sides will benefit if normal civil-military relations to be restored, but only political prudence will guarantee it.

8 Conclusion

The case studies of Peru and Myanmar lend credence to our theory. The military's unique corporate interests of domestic and organizational security motivate their interventions and political ineptitude once in office. Perhaps the most striking observation is the two-way dynamic in these countries: Both military and civilian leaders play important roles in triggering military relapses. It is the relative strength that determines the shape of institutions and how readily each side trusts the other. This belies how much of the media and academia focus almost exclusively on the military's decision-making. Peru and Myanmar show that this is only half of the picture.

While not made prominent in either study, we cannot forget the role of international factors on the increasing costs of relapse over time. General norms against undemocratic rule and human rights abuses have grown, as have economic and political consequences tied to them. Shining Path obviously contributed to Peruvian government's and military's decision to cooperate, but external pressures to change behavior affected the calculus of both the Peruvian armed forces and the Tatmadaw. These global shifts surely contribute to the overall decrease of military relapses in the last two decades.

This paper is only a first step in identifying and understanding military relapses. A formal model explicitly capturing unity, mistrust, costs, and the comparative advantages of the civilian and military elite would provide a compelling and widely applicable framework. It could also potentially explore the military's initial choice to exit power—a decision that this paper largely treats as exogenous or simply as an eventual consequence of bad politicking.

Our theory carries some policy implications. One we note is the potentially perverse consequences of civilianizing government. Efforts to democratize and civilianize a country are normatively worthwhile. However, doing so by giving the civilian elite a disproportionately high amount of power while marginalizing the previous military caretakers may prove counterproductive, espe-

⁴⁹See Callahan (2012) and Diamond (2012) for tentatively optimistic statements and discussions about the recent transition.

cially if the military cannot guarantee that its core interests will be protected once it steps down from power. Additionally, without having the correct incentives that make military intervention far too costly, these highly civilianized transitions may engender mistrust within the armed forces that is manifested in a relapse—one which could worsen civil liberties or further undermine future prospects at democracy. The United States' continued \$1.3 billion military aid package to Egypt despite Morsi's ouster speaks to the importance of reinforcing transitions with the appropriate inducements. History suggests that transitions away from military rule to democracy must be met with moderation; opportunities to foster mutual trust; and sufficient material and reputational repercussions for backsliding.

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