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**Institutionalising Civilian Control of the Military in
New Democracies:
Theory and Evidence from South Korea**

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Institutionalising Civilian Control of the Military in New Democracies: Theory and Evidence from South Korea

Abstract

This paper aims to answer the question of how and under what circumstances civilian control can be established in newly democratised nations. To do this, I propose a new theoretical argument that conceives of the process of institutionalising civilian control in new democracies as a series of power struggles between the democratically elected civilians and the military leadership. The outcome of these power struggles depends on the respective bargaining power of civilians and the military, which is in turn a function of (1) the willingness of civilians to challenge the military's institutional prerogatives and the military's willingness to defend them and (2) each party's ability to bear the costs of a civil-military conflict. To illustrate and assess the argument, I derive a number of propositions about the expected development of civil-military relations after the transition to democracy and the possible outcomes of civil-military power struggles, subsequently testing them via an in-depth case study of civil-military relations in post-transition South Korea.

Keywords: Civilian control, civil-military relations, democratisation, military, South Korea

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Institutionalising Civilian Control of the Military in New Democracies: Theory and Evidence from South Korea

David Kuehn

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1 Introduction

In 1987, South Korean voters participated in the first democratic presidential elections since the 1960s, marking the end of three decades of military rule and the beginning of a process of democratic transition and consolidation, which today, another three decades later, can only be considered a success story (Bertelsmann Foundation 2014).¹ Not only has South Korea seen the development of democratic institutions such as a differentiated party system, the

1 This paper is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, entitled "Institutionalising Civilian Control in New Democracies. A Game-Theoretic Contribution to the Development of Civil-Military Relations Theory," submitted to the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at Heidelberg University (Kuehn 2013). The author wishes to thank the German Research Foundation for its generous funding of this research.

rule of law, constitutional checks and balances, a free press, and a lively society, but also, and crucially, the military, which previously enjoyed tremendous political influence over a wide range of political, economic, and social issues, is now under effective civilian control. This, however, only became possible after a long and often confrontational period of reform, as the South Korean armed forces were able to secure considerable institutional privileges through the transition and well into the democratic period.

This is not untypical of the development of civil–military relations in “third wave” democracies (Huntington 1991). By 2010 a considerable number of newly democratised countries, mostly in Eastern and Southern Europe (inter alia Hungary, Poland, Portugal, and Spain) but also including a few in Latin America (Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay), had achieved a considerable degree of civilian control. In the majority of the Asian, Latin American, and African new democracies, however, civilian control remained limited to certain policy matters and the military continued to dominate defence and military policy, or the civilian government was effectively under the tutelage of the military (Smith 2005; Barany 2012; Croissant and Kuehn 2015). This suggests that the successful establishment of civilian control is hardly an easy task: not only is it costly for civilians to spend political capital on challenging the military’s existing prerogatives and creating the necessary institutions to meaningfully influence defence and military policy, but civilians also have to take into account the possibility that the military might actively oppose the push for more civilian control and challenge civilian principles. This raises the crucial question of how and under what circumstances civilian control can be established in newly democratised nations.

While the relevance of the establishment of civilian control over the military is undisputed (e.g., Dahl 1989), a definitive answer to the above question remains elusive. There is little agreed-upon theoretical knowledge on the factors and causal processes that explain the establishment of institutions for civilian control in newly democratised countries (Croissant et al. 2013). In this paper, I propose a theoretical argument to answer to this question. I argue that the development of civil–military relations during and after the transition to democracy can best be conceived of as a series of intermittent power struggles between civilian and military elites. The outcomes of these power struggles ultimately depend on the respective bargaining power of civilians and the military, which, in turn, is a function of the importance these actors place on the respective material issue that is being contested, and their ability to bear the costs of a civil–military conflict.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I define and conceptualise civilian control of the military and briefly review the existing literature on civil–military relations in new democracies. I argue that even though the field has produced a considerable number of theoretical arguments, it has focused too heavily on individual causal factors that influence civil–military relations while paying too little attention to the mechanisms through which this causal influence is exerted. This, I argue, has hampered the development of a coherent analytical answer to the question of why and how civilian control can be institutionalised in new

democracies. In Section 3, I present my theoretical argument, which seeks to overcome this fragmentation by focusing analytically on the causal mechanisms underlying the institutionalisation of civilian control. Section 4 illustrates and tests this argument by systematically tracing the historical development of civil–military relations in South Korea after the transition to democracy in the late 1980s. Section 5 concludes the paper with a comparative assessment of the case study.

2 Defining and Explaining Civilian Control in New Democracies

2.1 *Defining and Conceptualising Civilian Control*

The military's monopoly over the means of violence, as well as its hierarchical organisational structure, raises the question of how unarmed civilians can ensure that the military remains firmly subordinate to the legitimate civilian holders of political office (Finer 1966: 2).² The latter situation has traditionally been captured under the notion of "civilian control." While there are a number of competing definitions and conceptualisations of "civilian control" (Desch 1999: 3–5; Feaver 1999; Croissant and Kuehn 2011: 18–24), all share a core understanding of what the term denotes – namely, a hierarchical relationship in which civilians make decisions that are binding for society as a whole, with the military responsible for advising on and implementing those decisions that have been delegated to them by the civilian decision makers. Consequently, the degree of civilian control depends on the degree to which civilians have the *authority* to make socially binding decisions, as well as sufficient *oversight* to ensure that the military fulfils its delegated functions in the way that the civilians want (Welch 1976; Agüero 1995; Alagappa 2001; Feaver 2003). Accordingly, civilian control can be understood as *that distribution of authority and oversight under which civilians are able to autonomously decide on all relevant political decision-making matters, can delegate and repeal the delegation of political decision-making and implementation to the military, and can oversee and direct the making and implementation of those decisions that they have delegated to the military.*

2 In defining the relevant actors in civil–military relations, I follow the standard discussions in the literature. Civilians are the members of those political organisations and agencies that are entitled by constitutional mandate to decide on the "authoritative allocation of values for a society" (Easton 1965: 3) and to formulate, implement, and oversee the implementation of these authoritative political decisions. This includes the members of the executive and legislative branches of government at the national level. The military (or "armed forces"; both terms will be used interchangeably), on the other hand, is that hierarchically structured, bureaucratic state organisation that is constitutionally mandated to advise on and implement that subset of authoritative decisions that are concerned with establishing and upholding the state monopoly on organised coercion and with protecting society and the state against – predominantly but not exclusively – external security threats (Edmonds 1988: 26; Feaver 2003: 4; Shemella 2006). This includes the armed services (e.g., army, navy, and air force), and other organisations of organised coercion (such as paramilitary units or military intelligence agencies) that are under the command of the professional officer corps (Croissant et al. 2010).

Authority and oversight over decision-making matters are realised through a framework of *institutions* (Pion-Berlin 1992; 1997; Bland 1999; Bruneau 2006) – that is, a set of human-made operational rules and organisations that regulate, constrain, and enable the behaviour of civilians and the military on a day-to-day basis (North 1990; V. Ostrom 1990: 50–55; Hall and Taylor 1996: 948). While the concrete empirical structure of “institutional regimes” that ensure civilian oversight over decision-making matters will vary across time, space, and different substantive issue areas, the underlying functional attributes of institutionalised civilian control are invariant: First, institutions that enable civilians to exercise effective authority and oversight must be *present*. Second, institutional prerogatives (Stepan 1988) that guarantee the military’s autonomous authority and freedom from civilian oversight must be *absent* (Pion-Berlin 1992; Ben-Meir 1995; Alagappa 2001; Croissant et al. 2010).

The institutions of *authority* define the extent of civilians’ autonomous decision-making power over policies by channelling “the degree of pressure an actor can bring to bear on policy and the likely direction of this pressure” (Hall 1986: 19). These institutions include (1) formal rules that ensure civilians’ right to propose and enact legislation in all political matters – including internal security, defence, and military policy – and to decide on matters of war and peace and declare domestic emergency situations, as well as (2) effective organisations such as defence ministries and legislative committees with actual decision-making power and with civilians in command, without undue influence from active or retired military personnel (Croissant et al. 2010). *Oversight* institutions enable civilians to monitor and direct the implementation of decisions delegated to the military, and to punish military misbehaviour. They include (1) regulations on ministerial oversight, legislative scrutiny, and the auditing of defence policy, military policy, and budgets, as well as on the judicial accountability of the military, and (2) civilian-led agencies such as ministries, legislative committees, auditing chambers, and courts that are mandated and able to oversee and direct the military’s operations and to punish military “shirking” (Feaver 2003; Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2010; Bessner and Lorber 2012).³

2.2 Explaining Civilian Control

Since the publication of Samuel Huntington’s groundbreaking work *The Soldier and the State* (Huntington 1957), the scholarly literature has produced a wide range of arguments to explain the conditions under which civilian control can be established, is likely to be upheld, or will break down. Following Peter Feaver (1999), these explanations can be roughly divided into those focusing on the specific characteristics of the military (military-internal factors)

3 This *institutional* definition of civilian control runs counter to a *behavioural* understanding of civilian control as the absence of military coups (e.g., Finer 1962; Luttwak 1968; Belkin and Schofer 2003; Svolik 2010) or other forms of civil-military conflicts of interest (Desch 1999; Kemp and Hudlin 1992; Kohn 1997). As I and my colleagues have discussed elsewhere, this exclusive focus on the behavioural dimension is problematic for methodological and substantive reasons (Croissant et al. 2010).

and those that focus on aspects of the civilian society, broader structural or historical developments, or the international system (military-external factors). The former include not only normative variables such as military values – for instance, “professionalism” (Huntington 1957; Barany 2012) – or the degree of popular support for the military (Mares 1998) but also structural and institutional factors such as the military’s class structure (Nun 1967), its corporate interests or grievances (Beeson and Bellamy 2008), its size (Collier and Hoeffler 2006), and its internal cohesion (T. Lee 2014). The list of military-external variables is even longer. It includes historical factors such as colonial history (Collier and Hoeffler 2005), the nature and type of the regime preceding the new democratic system (Agüero 1997), and the prevalence of military coups prior to the transition to democracy (Ezrow and Frantz 2011); structural variables such as existing domestic security threats (Alagappa 2001), socio-ethnic cleavages (Frazer 1995) and socio-economic factors (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006); institutional explanations such as the cohesion of the civilian elites (Serra 2010), the specific configuration of political institutions and the system of government (Trinkunas 2005), and the degree of consolidation the new democratic institutions have achieved (Croissant et al. 2013); and international factors such as the influence of international actors and organisations (Ruby and Gibler 2010) and external security threats (Desch 1999).

Despite this wealth of existing theoretical arguments, civil–military relations theory, both in general and specifically regarding newly democratised nations, has repeatedly been criticised as being weakly developed and having failed to contribute much to our understanding of civil–military relations and civilian control (e.g., Sigmund 1993; Pion-Berlin 2001; Nelson 2002; Feaver and Seeler 2009; Bruneau 2012). In sum, the critique is that the pluralism of individual arguments has resulted in a host of unconnected “partial theories” or “heuristic themes” (Kennedy and Louscher 1991: 1) that do not provide much structure for a broader approach or explanatory framework. On the one hand, this is due to the lack of rigorous empirical testing of competing explanations (Feaver 1999: 224). On the other hand, civil–military relations theory is also relatively weak in terms of theoretical quality, with a high number of explanations that border on tautologies (e.g., Huntington 1957), or variables whose causal effect is theorised inconsistently in the literature (e.g., Andreski 1968; Desch 1999). Most importantly, however, theory development and the meaningful accumulation of knowledge in the field has thus far been undermined by the disregard for the explicit theorisation of the causal processes (or causal mechanisms)⁴ linking cause and effect (Feaver 1999).

4 The definition of causal mechanisms and causal processes are hardly uniform in the methodological and philosophical literature. Some scholars differentiate between mechanisms and processes as two different concepts (e.g., Elster 2007), while others treat these terms as synonymous (e.g., Brady and Collier 2010; Gerring 2011). In addition, the concept of causal mechanism is itself disputed: John Gerring (Gerring 2010), for instance, identifies 10 substantially different understandings and conceptualisations of the term. In this study, I treat the terms “causal mechanisms” and “causal processes” as synonymous (see also Rohlfing 2012).

Most existing work on civil–military relations focuses on individual (or sets of) variables and their effect on civilian control. If processes are addressed at all, this is usually done *ex post*, by constructing a hypothetical narrative of the causal pathway from the causally relevant variable to the outcome; however, this process hypothesis is typically neither theoretically specified nor empirically evaluated. This means that, ultimately, these explanations remain incomplete and underspecified due to the absence of an integrating structure and agency (Kuehn and Lorenz 2011).

The next section addresses these weaknesses by proposing a new theory of civil–military relations in new democracies that is based on the causal mechanism of strategic interactions between civilians and the military. The theory provides the “microfoundations” (Little 1998) for deriving theoretical arguments and propositions on the relevant factors influencing the institutionalisation of civilian control, and thus for systematically integrating the existing “proto-theoretical” arguments (Nelson 2002) or “partial theories” (Kemp and Hudlin 1991).

3 A Theory of the Institutionalisation of Civilian Control in New Democracies

Following the discussion in Section 2.1, the establishment of civilian control in new democracies can ultimately be understood as a series of institutional changes toward civilian authority and oversight over all relevant political decision-making matters. The rational choice institutionalist literature (Shepsle 2006) has termed these types of institutions, which distribute gains and losses, privileges and duties among the relevant actors, “distributive” institutions (Tsebelis 1990). Unlike “efficient” institutions, distributive institutions do not emerge out of a shared interest on the part of the relevant actors in increasing the gains of “cooperation, coordination and communication” (Calvert 1995), but rather as a result of a power struggle over the distribution of privileges between actors with conflicting interests: the more powerful actors are better able to mould the institution such that the distributive effects are more beneficial to them than to the other, less powerful, actors (Moe 2005). This is undoubtedly true for institutions of civilian control. The military’s institutional prerogatives as well as the institutions of civilian authority and oversight distribute decision-making power, autonomy, and accountability. Consequently, the institutionalisation of civilian control is best understood as a sequence of civil–military power struggles (Bruneau 2006: 7; see also Welch 1976; Agüero 1995: 11; Croissant et al. 2013: chapter 2). A theory on the institutionalisation of civilian control, therefore, needs to depart from the conflicting interests of civilians and the military and discuss the factors that affect the civil–military balance of power and the outcomes of these power struggles.

3.1 The Conflict between Civilian and Military Interests

As noted above, civilians and the military are likely to be opposed in their preferences for the degree of civilian control. During and after the transition to democracy, civilians will generally

be interested in strengthening civilian control, extending their own decision-making power, increasing their authority and oversight over the military, and reducing the military's prerogatives and spheres of political influence. This is because civilians' ability to stay in office and their legitimacy as democratic political leaders depends on their ability to keep the military from challenging the outcome of democratic elections, to actually influence all substantive political matters, and to hold the state apparatus, including the military, accountable (Agüero 1995: 259; Croissant et al. 2013: chapter 2). Civilians' legitimacy and power also depends on their reduction of the military's autonomy and decision-making prerogatives, which allows them to funnel funds from the military to other, more electorally rewarding goals (Hunter 1997: 8–16).

This runs counter to the interests of the military leadership, who, all else being equal, will prefer to maintain their prerogatives and will therefore prefer less over more civilian control. Like all bureaucratic organisations, the military prizes autonomy, the maximisation of its size, and access to resources (Pion-Berlin 1992; Feaver 1996). It has certain functional preferences, such as internal and external security, social order, and stability (Huntington 1957; Finer 1962; Nordlinger 1977; Abrahamsson 1972), and maintains certain preferred views on how to pursue defence and security policy, which might or might not be similar to the views of the civilians (Avant 1994; Feaver 2003). Moreover, in addition to these institutional interests of the first order, the military might also have the second-order goal of maintaining political influence beyond defence and security issues, because participation in political decision-making bodies (e.g. the legislature) or the ability to veto civilian decisions allows military officers to defend their existing prerogatives and to maximise the military's size and autonomy (Pion-Berlin 1997).

However, this logic also suggests that not all military prerogatives will have equal importance for the civilians. They are likely to attach different values to authority and oversight in different political matters as not all military prerogatives equally undermine civilians' ability to stay in office and their legitimacy as democratic leaders, and cutting back the military's autonomous decision-making authority in some areas is likely to allow greater civilian discretion in allocating the state budget than doing the same in other areas. For instance, because it is likely to have greater effects on the chances that the civilians will stay in office, civilians will prefer to cut back such core challenges as military veto over the state budget or the direct participation of military officers in policymaking procedures over more narrow issues such as increasing civilian oversight over military-internal operations. Similarly, the military will not value each prerogative equally, but will be more interested in defending its institutional and functional interests – for instance, the maintenance of autonomy over internal processes, strong influence or even dominance over defence and security policy, and legal impunity for human rights violations – than in defending prerogatives that are further removed from its own institutional and functional core, such as influence over non-security-related policy fields. Nonetheless, civilians will prefer more civilian control and the military

will prefer less. This raises the question of whose interests prevail when civilian and military interests clash.

3.2 *Explaining the Outcome of Civil–Military Conflict*

As discussed above, the divergent interests of civilians and military officers will lead to conflicts about the institutionalisation of civilian control. Analytically, these conflicts can have four distinct outcomes: If civilians decide not to challenge the military's prerogative, the *status quo* prevails. If civilians challenge the military and the military decides not to offer resistance, the institutional prerogative will be abolished and *civilian control* (as defined in Section 2.1) over the respective political decision-making matter will be established. If the civilians challenge the military and the latter resists, one of two outcomes will occur: either the military will be willing and able to *block* the establishment or extension of civilian control, or the military will be unable to fully hamper the strengthening of civilian control but will manage to defend some of its prerogatives, which will result in some *intermediate outcome* between full control and the status quo. Which of these outcomes occurs depends on three factors: the strategic nature of civil–military interactions, each actor's bargaining power, and uncertainty.

First, in deciding for or against an attempt to establish or strengthen the rules and organisations of authority and oversight, civilians will *act strategically*. That is, they will reflect not only on their own goals, but also on the goals of the military, as well as the latter's possible reactions to civilians' threats to its institutional prerogatives.

Second, the outcome will be affected by each actor's *bargaining power* – that is, the willingness and ability of an actor to assert itself in the case of a conflict of interest with the other actor(s) (Knight 1992; E. Ostrom 2005; Hall 2010). The actors' bargaining power, in turn, depends on their *valuation* of extending or resisting civilian control over a given issue area, as well as the *costs* that civil–military conflict will have for that actor. The former is mainly a function of the closeness of the contested issue area to civilian and military core interests: As discussed above, civilians place greater value on gaining civilian control over issue areas that ensure their ability to remain in office and give them discretion over electorally rewarding policy fields, while the military mainly prizes autonomy and the absence of oversight over defence and security policy and its own internal affairs. However, these "natural" valuations of certain political issues can be affected by idiosyncratic factors, which might increase or reduce their value for the respective actors. For instance, the existence of a serious external security threat (Desch 1999; Bruneau 2005) or pressure from civil society organisations (Belkin and Schofer 2003) or international actors (Barany 2012) might motivate civilians to strengthen civilian control over defence and military policy, while the existence of a violent domestic conflict might prompt civilians not to challenge the military's existing prerogatives in internal security provision. The costs of civil–military conflict depend mainly on the actors' cohesion, which measures an actor's ability "to overcome problems associated with the development of a collective strategy and the mobilisation of a constituency in support of that strategy"

(Hall 2010: 209) and directly affects that actor's ability to persist in conflict and its vulnerability to the costs of civil–military conflicts. The more limited the cohesion, the greater the difficulties in forming effective resistance and the greater the costs an actor will have to bear in a conflict (see also Knight 1992; Tsebelis 2002: chapter 2; Moe 2005).

Third, the strategic interactions between civilians and the military and the two parties' ability to realise their respective interests are also affected by the *degree of uncertainty* regarding the other actor's power. As in most other substantive political matters (Gates and Humes 1997), such knowledge is likely to be incomplete in civil–military relations, either because it is actually impossible for an actor to be certain of the other's capability of realising its goals or because collecting complete information is too costly. Moreover, uncertainty is likely to be asymmetric in that the military will be well aware of the civilians' bargaining power due to the relative openness of the political arena but the civilians' knowledge concerning the military's bargaining power will be incomplete because of the opaqueness and secrecy of the decision-making procedures within the military institution (Feaver 2003: 68–72). Such asymmetric uncertainty complicates the cost-benefit calculations and introduces the potential of suboptimal decisions: civilians might opt to confront the military because they assess the latter's bargaining power as being more limited than it actually is.

3.3 *The Argument*

The argument can be summarised in the following stylised narrative: After the transition to democracy, civilians will be interested in abolishing those political and institutional prerogatives the military was able to secure beyond the transition, and in asserting authority and oversight over those areas that were previously the exclusive purview of the military. This puts the civilians against the military, which benefits from the status quo and has incentives to hold on to its prerogatives and to keep the civilians from increasing their control. Consequently, civilians will take into account the possibility that the military will resist their attempts to challenge the institutional status quo in civil–military relations. They will weigh the intrinsic value of establishing control over a given decision-making matter against the expected costs of challenging the institutional status quo. Civilians will only challenge the military's prerogative if these cost-benefit calculations are in their favour, while they will accept the status quo if they expect the likely costs to surpass the expected benefits of expanding control over the military.

If civilians do decide to confront the military, the military must decide how to react to the challenge. Like the civilians, it will make this decision based on calculations that compare the benefits it receives from the persistence of the institutional privilege with the expected costs it will have to bear in the case of conflict: only if the costs of conflict will be lower than the value the military derives from the institutional status quo will it offer resistance.

The civilians' estimations of the possible costs and benefits of challenging the military's vested privileges are affected by the uncertainty about the military's bargaining power,

which is defined by its willingness to defend the given prerogative and its ability to engage in political conflict with the civilians. A military with great bargaining power will be able to block civilian challenges effectively and retain its institutional benefits, while a weaker military might find the costs of engaging in conflict with the civilians too severe to resist the civilian challenge. Furthermore, a comparatively weak military will not be able to completely block the civilians' drive for greater civilian control, even if it does offer resistance. Instead, it may only secure some intermediate outcome.

From this general argument, six empirically testable propositions can be derived:

First, the process of institutional change in civil–military relations will be sequential and characterised by periods of stability punctuated by periods of conflict and change. Situations in which either successful institutional change or military contestation is likely to occur require significant changes in those variables that drive the civil–military cost-benefit calculation: the value each actor ascribes to a given prerogative, each actor's cohesion, and the degree of uncertainty. These variables, however, are unlikely to be in continuous or even frequent flux; rather, they tend to be relatively stable.

Second, the temporal sequence of changes will reflect the different value civilians and the military ascribe to the different prerogatives. Civilians are likely to first address those issues they value most and which the military values little. Only later in the process will civilians be likely to challenge those prerogatives that are particularly important to the military but of only marginal value to the civilians.

Third, civilians will not challenge a given military prerogative and the *status quo* will prevail if civilians assess the military's bargaining power as being sufficiently high that it deters them from making such a challenge.

Fourth, the *successful* abolition of an existing prerogative and the institutionalisation of civilian control is the result of civilians challenging a prerogative and the military deciding not to resist. This will occur if the military's cohesion and its valuation of the prerogative is sufficiently low.

Fifth, civilians will challenge the military's prerogative, but the attempt will be *blocked* by open military opposition if both civilians and the military value the prerogative highly, if the military has a high degree of bargaining power, and if, due to uncertainty, civilians expect the military's bargaining power to be lower than it actually is.

Sixth, civil–military conflict will result in an *intermediate outcome* if civilians and the military value the prerogative highly enough to risk conflict and if the military has insufficient bargaining power to fully block the civilians' attempt to strengthen control.

4 Institutionalising Civilian Control in South Korea

In this section, I illustrate the explanatory power of the theoretical arguments outlined above based on evidence from South Korea. South Korea is a particularly interesting case for the

application of my theoretical argument: Even though the military dominated the authoritarian regime and was able to secure a wide range of prerogatives well into the democratic period, civilians ultimately managed to establish civilian control. As such, it can be considered an “extreme case” (Gerring 2007) which is particularly useful for illustrating theoretical arguments. Moreover, because the transition occurred almost three decades ago, it is sufficiently historically distant that the processes of interest are likely to be more or less complete, thereby reducing the problem of having to set an arbitrary end point for the temporal scope of the case study (Büthe 2002). In addition, data availability is relatively good as the South Korean transition was studied closely by historians and political scientists. Also, gaining access to data sources and interview partners has become much easier, even on politically sensitive issues such as civil–military relations.⁵ The case study proceeds as follows. In order to identify the degree of civilian control and the existing military prerogatives during and after the transition to democracy, I first provide a brief summary of civil–military relations under the authoritarian regime, identifying the main issues of civilian control that civilians faced after the transition. I then analyse the empirical development of civil–military relations following the transition. Finally, I discuss the civil–military conflict in greater depth in relation to three issue areas that were particularly relevant for the development of civil–military relations in South Korea.

4.1 Historical Background

The military took its place at the centre of South Korean politics on 16 May 1961, when, under the leadership of Major General Park Chung-hee, it staged a coup against the democratically elected government (Cumings 2005: 352). After Park’s assassination in October 1979, Major General Chun Doo-hwan and Lieutenant General Roh Tae-woo seized control of the military and staged a coup on 12 December 1979, establishing a new military-led regime under the leadership of Hanahoe (Group One), an informal but deeply connected faction within the military that was originally founded by General Park to ensure his personal control over the army. Its members were almost exclusively recruited from cadets of the Korean Military Academy in Park’s home province of Taegu-Kyongsang (Yu 2010) and were systematically “favored in advancement and assignment of positions” (J. B. Lee 2001: 165), especially high-ranking and powerful posts such as those within the presidential secretariat, the military intelligence services, and the leadership of elite combat units. While Chun made sure to give his regime constitutional and civilian window dressing – for instance, by retiring from the

5 In the course of this research, I have drawn on a wide range of primary and secondary materials and newspaper articles. In addition, during two field trips to East Asia in 2010 and 2011, I conducted more than 50 personal interviews with former and active-service military personnel, active and retired politicians and lawmakers, journalists, civil society activists, and academics, some of whom were actively involved in the processes of civil–military change during and after the transition to democracy. The interviews were conducted in English, German, and Korean, the latter with the help of interpreters.

military and recruiting civilian technocrats into state agencies – it was nevertheless a continuation of Park’s military regime and “undoubtedly the most nakedly authoritarian regime on the whole in contemporary Korea” (Oh 1999: 87). This was demonstrated most drastically in May 1980, when 20,000 elite combat troops under the command of Hanahoe officers violently cracked down on anti-government protests in the city of Kwangju, leaving 200 dead and thousands injured (Oberdorfer 2001: 124–133).

Furthermore, in matters of defence and external security policy, the military’s control was total. Non-military agencies had no meaningful authority or oversight over the defence budget, and the planning, development, and implementation of defence and security policy was completely in the hands of military-controlled institutions such as the Ministry of National Defense (MND) or the Agency for National and Security Planning (ANSP, the main, formally civilian intelligence service) and military-internal agencies. Civilian participation and public debate on matters of defence and national security were severely restricted (Moon 1989: 15). In addition, officers continued to be recruited into core positions in government, the diplomatic service, the bureaucracy, paragovernmental organisations, and public enterprises (Yang 1999: 439; Hahn 2001: 128–129; Jun 2001: 139). While the military dominated politics, Hanahoe dominated the military: its members continued to monopolise the leadership of “politically sensitive” military units such as military intelligence, the Capital Garrison Command, the Special Forces Command, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In addition, all security-relevant government bodies, including the MND, the Ministry of the Interior, and the ANSP, were headed by retired Hanahoe officers (K. Y. Park 1993: 188).

4.2 The Development of Civil–Military Relations after the Transition

When widespread public demand forced the Chun government to initiate the transition to democracy in 1987 (Cotton 1992), the military enjoyed extensive political privileges and institutional autonomy. Three clusters of institutional prerogatives can be identified: the widespread penetration of the political institutions by retired military officers with strong connections to the active officer corps and, especially, Hanahoe; the military’s control over the internal security apparatus and the heavy involvement of military intelligence and security agencies in the supervision and suppression of the political opposition; and the complete absence of any civilian influence on matters of defence and military policy.

After the transition, the military’s influence on politics initially appeared to be uninterrupted. Retired lieutenant general Roh Tae-woo, one of the leaders of the 1979 coup and a leading member of Hanahoe, was elected president with a narrow plurality (S.-J. Han 1988). In a 1988 poll, over three-quarters of all respondents indicated that retired military officers still had significant influence in domestic politics (K. Kim 2009: 68). Moreover, in defiance of Roh’s orders, military intelligence agencies continued to monitor civilians (Saxer 2004: 389). Stagnation was particularly obvious in the military’s full control over South Korea’s defence

policy and its internal affairs, where the “structure and process of the national security machinery [remained] by and large intact” (Moon 1989: 15).

It was only under the presidency of Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) that serious changes took place. In a radical break from his predecessors’ practices, he recruited a large number of “‘progressive outsiders’ and ‘reform-oriented men and women’” without links to the previous administration into his government (Oh 1999: 31), thereby reducing the share of former military officers in the cabinet from 19.6 per cent to 8 per cent (Croissant et al. 2013: 61). As I discuss in greater detail below, this was only possible because Kim had purged Hanahoe from the military leadership. Moreover, while the rigid network of security laws and regulations remained in effect (Cumings 2005: 396), the military’s role in internal security was effectively ended early in Kim’s presidency, when military surveillance of civilians was finally abolished and parliamentary oversight over the intelligence apparatus was established (Cha 2003: 208). These efforts reduced the military’s political power such that in a 1995 survey only 3.2 per cent of the respondents stated that they considered the military the most important political actor (Cho 2001). This decrease in power was further emphasised that same year when former presidents Chun and Roh, together with 14 military officers, were charged for corruption, the 1979 coup, and the Kwangju massacre (Roehrig 2002: 178–179).

Despite these successes, the “military and national security establishment remained substantially independent of civilian control” (Diamond and Shin 2000: 7–8) under Kim Young-sam. While there were some gains in increasing civilian oversight – for instance, when in 1993 a civilian became head of the National Assembly’s defence committee for the first time (W. Kim 2008: 159), and when a parliamentary review of arms procurement processes was established (Paik 1994: 739) – meaningful progress was only made in Kim Dae-jung’s presidency (1998–2003). He introduced civilian experts into the MND; established the National Security Council (NSC) in 1998 (Yu 1999a; M. Y. Lee 2001) as a tool for coordinating his reformist foreign, security, and defence policies (J. Kim 2011); and had the MND publish defence white papers in an attempt to make defence and military policy more transparent (Chung 2009: 548–549). These institutional innovations were further strengthened under Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008). He expanded the power and political influence of the NSC (Bechtol 2005: 620), and his presidency saw the establishment of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), a powerful administrative agency mandated to exert authority and enact effective oversight over the military’s arms procurement programmes (Y. Park 2011). Finally, he strengthened legislative oversight of the military. In March 2008, the National Assembly’s defence committee had to confirm the president’s candidate for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) for the first time (MND 2011).

While these changes created a formal institutional framework for civilian authority and oversight that allowed civilians to decide on the broad and general lines of defence and national security policy, the defence apparatus continued to be dominated by active and retired military officers. Even up to today, there have been no genuinely civilian defence ministers.

Furthermore, while the ratio of active military officers within the ministry has been reduced over time, such that in 2004 only approximately 50 per cent of the total MND staff and its directors were active military officers (MND 2008), as of 2008, only 3.6 per cent of – usually very low-level – positions within the MND were staffed with genuine civilians. The majority of “civilian” positions were actually held by retired military officers (Hong 2008: 258). Nevertheless, since the transition to democracy all three of the military’s political prerogatives and legacies from the authoritarian period – the political power of Hanahoe and the representation of former military officers in the government, the military’s control over the internal security apparatus, and the complete absence of civilian influence in defence and military policy – have been successfully addressed and civilian control has been firmly established. Two decades after the transition to democracy, the South Korean military is subject to robust civilian authority and oversight.

4.3 Demilitarising Politics and the Purging of Hanahoe

As discussed above, under the authoritarian regime, Hanahoe was the crucial link between the military-as-institution and the formal political decision-making bodies (Yu 2010). As such, it fulfilled a dual function: For the political elite, it generated support within the top tiers of the military, which was critical for the stabilisation of the presidents’ personal power over the military. Within the military, it provided important interpersonal linkages to further the promotion and appointment of its members to prestigious posts, and it constituted a direct channel of access from the military leadership into the political arena (Moon and Kang 1995: 175; J. Kim 2011). This was particularly important because the competition for officer posts above colonel was fierce (I. Kim 2008: 152). While there were suspicions both within the military and the better-informed segments of the public about the existence of some kind of military-internal fraternity, the actual existence of Hanahoe was a closely guarded secret (Yu 2010).

All this remained unchanged until well into the democratic period, and long after former general Roh Tae-woo was elected president in 1987. He relied heavily on the network and its control over the military to ensure the loyalty of the armed forces. In the fall of 1992, tipped off by an anonymous military officer, journalist Yu Yong-won published a report in the *Monthly Chosun* about a secret organisation within the military, making public a list of names (Moon 2010). At first, the military leadership denied the existence of any informal military fraternity within its ranks. In spring 1993, a few months into the presidency of Roh’s successor Kim Young-sam, however, a second list of Hanahoe members was publicised by a military officer. President Kim, who even before the list was published had appointed a personal confidant and non-Hanahoe officer as defence minister (Roehrig 2002: 170), began reshuffling the military leadership (I. Kim 2008: 73). Through the MND, lists of Hanahoe members were made and non-Hanahoe officers were identified as possible candidates for future promotions. Thus, shortly after he had taken office, Kim was able to change the military leadership. He retired the army chief of staff and the head of military intelligence, appointing non-Hanahoe

officers to their positions (H. B. Lee 2010; J. B. Kim 2011). With the top military leadership wrested from Hanahoe control, a large number of the faction's members were removed from office in the subsequent months. By the end of Kim's first year in office, over a thousand officers had been purged (Rhie 1995: 142). During this process, the military's reactions were very subdued. Aside from some protest from individual Hanahoe members (H. B. Lee 2010) and warnings from veteran's organisations (Oh 1999: 159), the military did not undertake any organised opposition. The abolishment of Hanahoe ultimately cut the military's ties to politics, something which was a precondition for the subsequent steps involved in enhancing civilian control (Roehrig 2002: 170).

This development can be represented well through the theoretical arguments outlined above. Under Roh Tae-woo, the status quo prevailed because the president was neither willing nor able to purge Hanahoe. First, because he himself was a member of Hanahoe, the network did not pose an immediate threat to his political survival and was a useful instrument to ensure his grasp over the military (Croissant 2004: 370). Moreover, even if he had wanted to break with Hanahoe and cut the network's links to politics, the costs would have been prohibitively large: In order to abolish the network, he would have been forced to strike a bargain with the non-Hanahoe segments of the military, which would have undermined his hold over the military. Furthermore, given that all the major military leadership positions and intelligence agencies were controlled by Hanahoe, preparations to organise military-internal resistance to the network could have led to serious intra-military conflict or even concerted action by the military leadership against Roh himself.

Like Roh Tae-woo, Kim did not challenge Hanahoe's hold over the military, at least for the first two months of his presidency. Unlike the case for Roh, however, this was not the result of the limited additional value a demilitarised polity and the "decapitation" of Hanahoe would have had for him. Kim was acutely aware of the military's remaining political power and was convinced that he would only be safe from a military coup when the threat of a politically active and politicised military was eliminated (H. B. Lee 2010; J. B. Kim 2011). In addition, civil society was vocally demanding the demilitarisation of politics, the prosecution of the former military presidents, and the bringing to justice of those responsible for gross human rights violations during the previous regimes and, especially, the Kwangju massacre (Roehrig 2002: 161–174; S. Kim 2011). Kim was, however, uncertain about the military's willingness and ability to defend Hanahoe and its political privileges, and was thus initially deterred from challenging Hanahoe.

All this changed almost immediately with the publication of the Hanahoe files in 1993. They allowed Kim to update his beliefs about the military's bargaining power: The files showed that the military was not a single cohesive entity, but was actually split into a small clique of politicised Hanahoe officers on the one hand and a large majority of "powerless officers," who were severely disadvantaged in terms of their career chances, on the other (I. Kim 2010). In addition, because this information came from a military source, the Hanahoe

files also sent a powerful signal to the new president that the military-as-institution would not resist a severe cut to its political power if this resulted in better career chances and greater promotion possibilities within the armed forces and meant that the military's institutional interests would be catered to (J. B. Kim 2011). Finally, the clear demarcation of a relatively small group of officers who would be purged meant that made this promise credible. Even if military officers were held accountable for the 1979 coup, the human rights violations, the Kwangju massacre, and the rampant corruption under the authoritarian regimes (Oberdorfer 2001: 376–382), prosecutions would be limited to the responsible officer within Hanahoe. Consequently, for the non-Hanahoe officers, the costs of a conflict over the military's access to the centres of political decision-making would certainly outweigh the value. Thus, the publication of the Hanahoe lists signalled to Kim that the military's cohesion was sufficiently low. This led him to challenge the military and to the military's acceptance of the institutional changes.

4.4 Civilianising Internal Security

The elaborate internal security apparatus was one of the main instruments that guaranteed Chun Doo-hwan's hold on power: it ensured regime security against the civilian opposition and was an important element of the government's control over the military institution itself. Consequently, Chun maintained close control over the numerous internal security and intelligence agencies by having them report directly to him and by staffing their leadership positions with fellow Hanahoe officers (Jun 2001: 136–137). The military's internal security and intelligence agency, the Defense Security Command (DSC), had a broad jurisdiction far beyond the military's close confines. It monitored political parties, universities, and the media (Moran 2005: 183), making it the state's most important intelligence institution (Moon and Kang 1995: 182; Rhie 1995: 138).

The first steps towards limiting the military's internal security prerogatives were attempted under the Roh administration. In a move to increase his personal power over the government, Roh renamed the DSC the Military Security Command (MSC), replaced its leadership with people loyal to him, abolished its existing offices within the National Assembly, and ordered a halt to the surveillance of civilians (Graham 1991: 128; Yang 1999: 469; Moran 2005: 185). However, the MSC ignored these demands and continued to keep "at least 1,300 politicians, labour leaders, academics, religious leaders, reporters, and others under regular surveillance," including the opposition's presidential candidates (Saxer 2004: 389).

Again, profound changes only took place under Kim Young-sam. Shortly after taking office he dismissed the commander of the MSC and demoted the MSC commander's rank from three- to two-star general. These moves were followed by a series of swift reforms that completely restructured the MSC and effectively abolished its formerly extensive internal security prerogatives. In spring 1993, Kim cut the number of generals within the MSC from five to three; downsized the agency; retired or transferred three generals, 47 colonels, and over a

thousand personnel to other military units; and restructured the line of command, which had run directly from the president to the MSC commander, rerouting it through the MND and thus cutting the military intelligence's direct links to the president (Rhie 1995: 139–140; Kil 2001: 59; Cha 2003: 208). In addition, the "MSC's civilian surveillance bureau, which Roh had promised to close, was finally abolished" (Y. C. Kim, Liddle, and Said 2006: 255), as were the MSC's bureaus in local government offices (Katz and Arrigoni 1992). In October 1993, the MSC command was again reshuffled, and in March 1994 the MSC's budget and finances were put under the supervision of the now civilian-led ANSP (Rhie 1995: 140). Legislative oversight over the military's intelligence apparatus was also increased: in October 1993, the MSC commander appeared for the first time before the National Assembly defence committee, and in 1994, a specialised intelligence committee was established. The latter has since become considerably more effective in controlling the intelligence apparatus (Kil 2001: 58; Moran 2005: 191).

Again, these developments are in line with the theoretical expectations outlined above. The minimal success of Roh's reforms can be understood as an intermediate outcome that resulted from Roh's (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to limit the DSC/MSK's autonomy in internal security. Reducing that autonomy was valuable because his legitimacy and political leeway depended on his ability to distance himself from the practices of Chun's authoritarian regime (Cotton 1993), and because the DSC's autonomy and continued surveillance of civilian politicians threatened the president's own position. This was especially true after the 1988 parliamentary elections, when Roh depended on the cooperation of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, which strongly demanded an end to the DSC's political surveillance activities (S.-J. Han 1989). This suggests that Roh valued the reduction of the DSC's autonomy sufficiently enough to risk a conflict with the DSC, especially because his Hanahoe connections allowed him to realistically gauge the military's inability to completely block his challenge. At the same time, the DSC was interested in maintaining its internal security functions, and the costs of resisting the president's challenges were not prohibitive as long as resistance was limited to the covert undermining of the president's orders rather than open conflict. Moreover, even if the contestation was detected, the chances were good that sanctions would remain limited, because the president was interested in maintaining the DSC's regime security functions (Moon and Kang 1995). At the same time, the DSC was too weak to completely prevent institutional reform, because the Hanahoe-led intelligence agency could not have hoped to mobilise sufficient support from either the military or the political arena. Consequently, the DSC resorted to a more covert form of resistance, subverting the president's orders and continuing its political surveillance operations.

Again, the situation was different after Kim Young-sam took office, and this allowed him to successfully abolish the military's remaining internal security prerogatives. Because he had no professional links to the military apparatus and could not hope to control the MSC's activities, the value of restricting the scope of the military's internal security involvement

and putting it under systematic and effective authority and oversight was even greater for Kim than for Roh. At the same time, Kim's bargaining power was strengthened by the strong public support for him and the isolation of the MSC, which continued to be led by a Hanahoe member until October 1993, after the rest of the military leadership had already been purged of Hanahoe officers (Rhie 1995: 139). This isolation severely weakened the MSC's ability to mobilise sufficient political power to resist the president's challenges. In addition, the value of protecting the MSC's status quo for the military was significantly reduced, as President Kim stressed the continued importance of being vigilant against internal enemies and kept most major internal security legislation intact (Cumings 2004: 396–399). The latter satisfied the military's functional interests in internal security and stability and led it to accept the institutional changes; the value of upholding the MSC's prerogatives was lower than the possible costs of resisting the strengthening of civilian control.

4.5 The Failure to Civilianise the Ministry of National Defense

As discussed above, civilians were effectively banned from external security matters until the end of the military regime in 1987, and even after the transition to democracy the expansion of civilian control over defence and military policy was a slow process (Steinberg 2000). Well into the democratic period, the president's authority remained limited as he did not have an independent advisory and decision-making body for defence and external security policies that could prepare presidential policies independently from the military and steer and coordinate the security agencies. This was inconsequential for the Roh Tae-woo government since the president could rely on his personal contacts with the military leadership and "unofficial meetings with military and intelligence personnel in making major security decisions" (Jun 2001: 134). For his successors, however, this proved problematic; they could not draw on personal networks within the military to effectively steer defence and security policy. Because the MND continued to be dominated by military officers, presidential control over defence and military policy still depended on the MND's willingness to cooperate. The failure to civilianise the MND was not due to a lack of interest; increasing the percentage of civilians in the defence establishment had been a crucial part of all presidents' defence reform plans (Moon and Lee 2009). However, attempts to civilianise the MND remained mostly unsuccessful: from 1948 to 2007 only six of the 40 defence ministers did not have a military background, and the last civilian, Hyun Seok-ho, held the office in 1961 (Hong 2008: 253). Moreover, only two civilians held the mostly powerless position of deputy minister during the 1988 to 2007 period (K. Kim 2009: 186). As of 2010, the crucial processes in the promotion of military officers continued to be controlled by military agencies, the responsibility for proposing and screening candidates lay exclusively with the MND (Song 2011), and all key decision-making posts remained firmly in the hands of active-duty generals and field-grade officers (Hong 2008: 254; Chung 2010).

This long period of stagnation and the absence of any meaningful attempts to civilianise the MND perfectly exemplifies the scenario in which civilians do not challenge the military's dominance because they expect strong opposition that would undermine any expected benefits of greater civilian control over this area. For one, the military's bargaining power was very high. This was partly because the military leadership was relatively cohesive as a result of the dominance of army officers, who made up over 80 per cent of the ministry's top-level bureaucracy (Y. Park 2011). More importantly, it was critical to the military to keep the MND in its own hands: First, the army not only controlled the MND but also had much to lose from giving up that control, as the latter ensured its ability to veto any defence reforms aimed at reducing the size and importance of the ground forces and increasing the importance of the navy and the air force. Second, particularly under the civilian presidents who had no personal contacts within the military leadership, the minister was an important spokesperson and channel for the interests of the military in the government (Anonymous 2010). Third, the military was acutely concerned about higher-ranking job opportunities within the defence establishment. In the late 1980s, the congestion within the senior officer ranks had been noted as a crucial obstacle to the establishment of civilian control (Moon 1989: 18). During the 1990s and the first decade of this century, this problem intensified due to the 1993 revision of the military service law, which pushed back the retirement age for colonel- and general-grade officers and thus caused a bottleneck for field-grade officers who were due to be promoted to higher positions (Yu 1999b; Y. Han 2006). At the same time, the cutting of officers' preferential treatment in transfers into the civilian bureaucracy in the early 1990s, together with the rapid modernisation of the South Korean economy, made it increasingly difficult for senior officers to find adequate jobs outside the military. Finally, the military leadership was acutely anxious about the consequences of civilianising the ministry given the external threat situation. While in the late 1980s and early 1990s the threat level seemed to have decreased due to the end of the Cold War, the situation deteriorated rapidly upon the renewal of armed provocations from North Korea in the mid-1990s. This time period saw the publicised testing of ballistic missiles and the beginning of a nuclear brinkmanship policy on the one hand, and the death of North Korea's leader Kim Il-sung in July 1994 on the other (C.-S. Lee and Sohn 1994; 1995; Koh 2001). Given the security situation, opening up the MND to civilians was deemed too risky by a majority within the military, especially because, after decades of exclusion, civilians were considered to lack sufficient expertise to control the MND and effectively steer defence policy (Y. Han 2006; W. Kim 2008: 162; K. Kim 2010).

At the same time, the civilians' cost-benefit calculations led them to accept the status quo and not challenge the military. For one, the value of successfully establishing a civilian at the top of the defence administration would have been relatively limited because the public generally shared the military's conviction that civilians lacked defence expertise and that given the threats from North Korea no experiments should be conducted with the defence ministry (Hong 2008). Moreover, it was felt that the costs of a conflict with the military leadership

would have outweighed the benefits. This perspective was based particularly on the fact that the presidents could estimate the military's ability and willingness to risk conflict with sufficient clarity. It was demonstrated clearly during the 2003 nuclear test crisis, when President Roh Moo-hyun, who had been the most reform-minded and radically progressive president and who had long stressed the need to civilianise the military leadership, quickly dropped the proposal after the first signs of resistance from within the MND (W. Kim 2008: 162; K. Kim 2010).

5 Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to answer the question of how and under what circumstances civilian control can be established in newly democratised nations. To do this, I have proposed a theoretical argument that conceives of the process of institutionalising civilian control in new democracies as a series of power struggles between the democratically elected civilians and the military leadership. The outcome of these power struggles depends on the respective bargaining power of civilians and the military, which is in turn a function of (1) the willingness of civilians to challenge the military's institutional prerogatives and the military's willingness to defend them and (2) the ability of each party to bear the costs of a civil–military conflict. From this argument, I have derived a number of propositions about the expected development of civil–military relations after the transition to democracy and the possible outcomes of civil–military power struggles, which I have tested through an in-depth case study of civil–military relations in post-transition South Korea.

I have found that the theoretical argument explains the development of civil–military relations in South Korea very well. First, the historical background of the Korean case study has substantiated the basic argument that even after a transition, civilians may be confronted with a military that continues to be represented in the political decision-making bodies, remains deeply involved in internal security operations, and completely dominates defence-related policymaking. Second, the case study has corroborated the first and second propositions derived from the model: The process of institutionalising civilian control in South Korea was characterised by long periods in which the status quo persisted, punctuated by crucial moments in which change was attempted. Moreover, the reform of civil–military relations was a sequential process as civilians first attempted to push the military out of politics, and only much later attempted to increase their control over defence and military policy.

Third, the in-depth analyses of three critical areas of South Korean civil–military relations provide empirical support for three of the four propositions regarding the outcome of individual instances of civil–military conflict. I have identified and explained three instances of the persistence of the status quo (the failure of President Roh Tae-woo to challenge Hanahoe due to his low valuation of the potential benefits, 1988–1993; the failure of President Kim Young-sam to challenge Hanahoe due to his lack of information on the faction's isolation,

early 1993; and the failure of civilian leaders to civilianise the defence ministry, 1988 to today); two cases of the successful institutionalisation of civilian control (the abolishment of the DSC's civilian surveillance operations under Kim Young-sam, 1993; Kim Young-sam's purge of Hanahoe after the publication of the Hahanoe files, 1993); and one case of an intermediate outcome (the DSC's subversion of President Roh's order to stop its surveillance of civilians, 1988–1993).

Finally, the three in-depth analyses have also shed light on those factors that affect the outcome of civil–military interactions. For one, the case studies have corroborated my argument that the civilians' perceptions of the value of abolishing a military prerogative, and the military's willingness to resist the civilians' attempt to expand civilian control, depend mainly on that prerogative's closeness to the civilians' and the military's core institutional interests: Civilians strongly valued the demilitarisation of politics and the expansion of civilian control over the internal security apparatus, but they were less motivated to increase control over defence and military policy. At the same time, the military's resistance was particularly likely when civilians wanted to challenge its prerogatives in the latter matters. For another, the case studies have also shown the importance of the actors' cohesion and their ability to shoulder the costs of conflict. The quick and almost frictionless demilitarisation of politics in South Korea was possible mainly because the military leadership consisted of Hanahoe officers, who were isolated from most of the officer corps.

While the above incidents suggest that my theoretical argument can explain the development of civil–military relations in South Korea, the case study is of course not a conclusive test. First, South Korean civil–military relations do not include an instance of the military blocking a civilian attempt to strengthen civilian control. Consequently, I was not able to test my last proposition empirically. Second, in analysing the individual instances of change within the institutional status quo, I have focused on “critical moments” in the development of civil–military relations after the transition to democracy. While these moments represent the critical constitutive events in the development of civil–military relations in South Korea, the focus on these “highlights” means that the more long-term and opaque mechanisms of institutional change such as “layering” or “conversion,” which often occur in small steps (Mahoney and Thelen 2010), cannot be captured. Both of these limitations in my empirical analysis suggest that additional research is necessary to test and further develop the theoretical argument presented here.

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