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## The Argentine Military in Democracy:

Moving Beyond Issues of Civilian Control  
to a Citizen Soldier Paradigm

Kristina Mani

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## Executive summary

Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983 ended decades of cyclical military interventions in politics. Since then a long and complex process of confrontation, incorporation, and, finally, subordination has established democratic civilian control of the armed forces that is more far-reaching than anywhere else in Latin America. Civilian reformers accomplished this through a combination of force restructuring, legal restrictions on military roles, and creation of an increasingly robust defense ministry. In this context, civilian leaders since 2003 have shifted the focus of reform to resocialization of the armed forces — seeking to create “citizen soldiers” appropriate to a modern, socially progressive democracy. Thus institutional restructuring has led to efforts to promote a culture shift in the armed forces.

This paper examines Argentina's process of legal and institutional reform of the military since the 1980s, and then turns to the development of the citizen soldier model through legal, gender, and educational innovations since the mid 2000s. It finds that while this sequence of reforms is promising, bringing a citizenship model to fruition within the armed forces requires sustained commitments from civilian political leaders and civil society. In short, even the “best case” Argentine example reminds us that effective civil-military relations in contemporary democracy require both the institutions of oversight and a political culture that engages the military in the citizenship ideals of the polity.

# 1. Introduction

Among Latin American militaries that have had to adapt to democratization since the 1980s, the transformation of the Argentine military undoubtedly has been the most far-reaching. Where once the Argentine military frequently intervened in politics (1930-32, 1943-46, 1955-58, 1963, 1966-73, 1976-83), such intervention has become virtually unthinkable. This was demonstrated in 2001, during Argentina's most devastating and recent economic crisis, when the military did not intervene in any significant way — not even through public statements, nor in private meetings with political candidates — in events of the crisis (Diamint 2006:163). Enabling this restraint were nearly two decades of reform of the armed forces that included reduction of the institution's prerogatives, separation of the military from internal security roles, curtailment of military budgets, and divestment of the armed forces' extensive defense and industrial sector holdings. In addition, a vigilant human rights community maintained moral and investigative pressure on the armed forces, long after the unprecedented prosecution of former military leaders in the 1980s for human rights abuses. Beyond this unique set of constraints, like other countries in the region, Argentina abolished obligatory military service, introduced the military to regular participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and expanded the recruitment of women into the military corps. Effectively, within two decades of the return to democracy the armed forces were subordinate to civilian authority.

Yet the important achievement of subordination is insufficient for effective civil-military relations in contemporary democracy, which requires institutions and a political culture of active civilian oversight of the military. In Argentina, it is only since the last decade — in the wake of the 2001 economic crisis and the return to power of leftist Peronist governments — that institutional structures such as a robust defense ministry framework have been created, which can enable civilian oversight in day-to-day decision-making. This element of active oversight is a crucial one in the establishment and maintenance of democratic civilian control, which scholarship on civil-military relations has established as necessary for the consolidation of democracy. Democratic civilian control exists when the armed forces are constitutionally accountable to a democratically elected legislature and executive, which set legal guidelines for their conduct and oversee such conduct through an institutional framework (e.g., a civilian-led defense ministry); in this framework civilian authorities have control over defense budgets and defense policy, and set parameters for the military's professional training, education, promotion policies, and military doctrine (Fitch 1998:172; Diamint 1999:29–30).

Since the wave of transitions to democracy that began in Latin America in the 1980s, political leaders in many countries have shown disinterest in studying and understanding issues of national defense. This is a rational choice, according to Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas (2007), who argue that Latin American politicians are generally satisfied with avoiding coups and feel free to ignore defense issues because of the region's relatively peaceful interstate relations and the fact that defense issues do not win elections. Yet this outcome is sub-optimal, as Bruneau (2005) has argued, because, like the fox in the fable recounted by Isaiah Berlin, politicians know many things, while, like the hedgehog, the military knows one big thing: as politicians will never know as much about defense as the military itself, they must take initiative in acquiring some understanding of defense issues in order to capably create the institutions, rules, and parameters required to guide the military. Viewed from this rationalist perspective, the Argentine case is indeed unusual, as Argentine civilian leaders have slowly but deliberately increased control over the armed forces by engaging defense issues and the military itself.

While the military's dishonorable exit from government in 1983 was characterized by failed policies and defeat in war, it was by no means inevitable that civilian leaders would establish democratic civilian control over the armed forces. As this paper lays out, the process was long and complex, effectively taking more than two decades to secure. It is therefore significant that in recent years civilians have shifted the burden of appropriate defense sector management and execution to one the military itself

can and should carry: with a legal and institutional defense ministry framework established since the mid 2000s, civilian leaders have shifted the focus to resocialization of the armed forces — seeking to create “citizen soldiers” who are both public servants specialized in the profession of national defense, and citizens with obligations and rights substantially equal to those of all other citizens. Development of the citizen soldier model has relied on legal, normative and educational reforms. Such reforms are appealing and promising, and arguably essential for modern socially progressive democracies. Yet they also require important commitments from civilian political leaders and civil society to endorse the same principles in order to cement a model that rests on citizenship principles.

This paper proceeds in four sections. Following a brief overview of the Argentine military’s historical development in part I, part II identifies the sequence of control strategies civilians have exerted with respect to the military since democratization, from confrontation in the decade of the 1980s, to incorporation during the 1990s, and finally to subordination in the 2000s. Part III identifies the most significant legal, gender, and educational innovations undertaken within the last decade to create a “citizen-soldier” culture of the armed forces that is appropriate to modern democracy. Part IV concludes with a discussion of issues that remain pending on the current civil-military agenda.

## 2. Historical context of the military in Argentina

As was typical elsewhere in South America in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Argentine political elites turned to state-building in the wake of civil and interstate wars that had redrawn national boundaries and power relations established under Spanish colonial rule. Particularly the major participants in the balance of power system that developed in South America — Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru — sought to create permanent, professional armies and navies in order to strengthen national defense capabilities and emulate the great powers from which elites still took their social and political cues despite national independence (Resende-Santos 2007). Modeling its forces after what were then the world's top war-makers, between the 1880s and 1920s Argentina's army professionalized under the influence of German military missions, while its navy modernized under British influence (Nunn 1983; Rouquié 1981).

The process of military professionalization turned the military into a powerful institution and a key agent of Argentina's nation-building process. Through universal military service instituted in 1901, the military made citizens, including many from a wave of new European immigrants arriving on Argentine shores in this period. Through a system of rank and promotion established in 1905, professional education and merit-based advancement became the norm. Through a scholarship system and literacy promotion in the barracks, within a decade (between 1917 and 1928) 40 percent of officers promoted to brigadier general were second-generation Argentines, from the growing immigrant community (Loveman 1999:115). No less important, through the exploration and surveying of territory, the military established Argentine sovereignty over spaces to which political leaders till then had merely asserted claim. This led to the development of geopolitical doctrines designed to secure territory and maintain Argentina's strategic place in the region (Dodds 1993).

Most significantly, the military's modernization reflected a larger modernization of Argentine society, one that was rapidly expanding due to immigration and export-led economic growth, and changing through the rise of a significant middle class demanding political representation (Germani 1981 (1942)). Officers were occasionally drawn into politics, usually on the side of the middle class Radical Civic Union Party,<sup>1</sup> to join political plots, to participate in anti-oligarchical rebellions, and to put down striking workers. They generally resented these "politicizations" that contradicted the legal prohibition, established with a 1905 law, on the armed forces' participation in political activities (Potash 1969:9). Indeed, the most important civilian accomplices in this gradual politicization of the military were the Radicals, who came to power with the establishment of universal male suffrage through the 1912 electoral reform law. That law also assigned to the military the task of supervising elections, effectively beginning an era in which the military became the legal guardians of the political system. Politicization further developed in the Radical period, particularly under the first Radical president, Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922, 1928-1930) who factionalized the armed forces by blatantly promoting his progressive political favorites over meritorious senior officers, and using the army to secure "interventions" that placed Radical leaders in key provincial offices. Ultimately, Yrigoyen himself was overthrown in 1930, when counterfactions in the military put an end to Radical rule — it would not reemerge until the 1950s, and then always under the tutelage of the armed forces.<sup>2</sup>

Thus by the 1930s the military was not only politicized, but deeply factionalized. Cleavages within the military reflected those held in the wider society, with conservative, liberal, and corporatist statist-

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<sup>1</sup> Despite their name, the Radicals reflected the ideology of modest social progressivism supported by a growing middle class that was dissatisfied with the traditional conservative and liberal parties that had long dominated politics. Radical parties became prominent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay.

<sup>2</sup> On the military in this period, see Potash 1969; on the wider scope of cleavages among Argentine elites in the 1930s-1960s period, see Imaz 1970.

nationalist factions the most prominent (Potash 1969; Rouquié 1981). From this last faction would emerge the military's most influential individual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Juan Perón (1946-1955, 1973-74), whose focus on promotion of state-led industrialization and related labor and social citizenship rights made his Peronist movement a permanent and always contested fixture on the political scene. As a result, the Argentine military had unusually close links to society, in contrast with other militaries in the region such as Chile (Remmer 1989). Societal support was no less crucial when it brought to power in 1966 Argentina's first long-term military-led regime under Gen. Juan Carlos Onganía, in which the military sought to preside indefinitely, to depoliticize society and enable industrial "deepening" that would require input from economic technocrats (O'Donnell 1979). Recognizing the military's debilitating factionalism, Onganía sought to keep the military out of the policy-making process (Remmer 1989:161). Yet ultimately such top-down discipline was impossible: as a retired officer, Onganía could exercise only weak control of the military, and could do little to alter the fief-like autonomy of the military services, their crosscutting factionalism, and weak societal initiative to assume leadership in key policy-making areas.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, factionalism and terrible policy choices would lead to the military's institutional collapse. Argentina's last military regime called itself the *Proceso*, or Process of National Reorganization (1976-1983) for its goals of permanently staunching political mobilization. To end political mobilization, it relied on repressive strategies like torture, extra-judicial killings and "disappearances" of at least 8,960 Argentines, but never developed a cohesive political-economic strategy to implement its goals, leading instead into economic crisis and astronomical national debt.<sup>4</sup> The *Proceso*'s powersharing formula for military rule failed abysmally even on the battlefield in the Malvinas/Falklands War of 1982, a campaign to recover the South Atlantic islands from Great Britain that lacked unified planning and command (Fontana 1986; Rattenbach Commission 1988).

Thus, a long history of politicization and factionalism, producing a string of failed policies, had culminated in the military's own institutional breakdown. Defeat in the war in June 1982 marked the beginning of an 18-month transition, as political parties and civil society groups that had been suppressed during the dictatorship struggled to regroup and prepare for elections held in 1983. These brought a remarkable shift in Argentine politics that would mark the initial conditions for the transition: the centrist Radicals for the first time since the 1920s won control of both the presidency and lower house by a broad margin (52 percent and 50 percent, respectively) in a fair, free election. The new Radical leader, Raúl Alfonsín, had defined the return to rule of law and protection of human rights as national priorities, marking a clear mandate for a liberal democratic agenda that would be the new context for the country's civil-military relations.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Argentina had no core group of civilian economists trained as cohesively as Chile's famous Chicago Boys. On the Pinochet regime's ability to avoid factionalism, in part by drawing support from a large conservative sector of society, see Remmer (1989).

<sup>4</sup> For a concise portrait of the *Proceso* period, see Romero (2002, chapter 7). The figure of 8,960 is the number officially documented by the investigative Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (1986).

### 3. The return of democracy: Three decades of evolution in civil-military relations

The evolution of Argentine civil-military relations can be seen in three main strategies applied by civilian leaders to control the military over the last three decades of democratic rule: confrontation in the 1980s, incorporation during the 1990s, and subordination in the 2000s. Initial strategies of confrontation served to punish the military and diminish its prerogatives, while strategies of incorporation reduced civil-military tensions by providing the armed forces with new international missions in security confidence building with neighbors and international peacekeeping. The political crisis unleashed by the country's economic collapse in 2001 provides a good measure of achievements from these strategies: while the military never sought to take over politically, on numerous occasions it proposed initiatives to address the situation — showing that the military remained an intrepid agenda-setter despite two decades of civilian rule. The final strategy civilians have pursued is largely a response to such military initiative, as subordination has involved the resumption of civilian initiative on policy making through empowered institutional structures of civilian control.

#### 3.1 Confrontation, 1983-1990

The multiple failures of military rule and the resurgent support for a liberal democratic alternative empowered the first government of the new democratic period to actively confront and punish the armed forces. Among the main issues pursued under the first post-authoritarian government of President Raúl Alfonsín (1984-1989) were human rights trials of the military junta's leaders, resolution of the historic rivalries with neighboring states, and curtailment of budgets, prerogatives and roles of the armed forces. Yet there were also areas that civilian leaders did not address, leaving important areas of policy making, including strategic planning, in the hands of military officers.

##### Setting a human rights agenda

In his human rights agenda, Alfonsín championed a process unprecedented anywhere else in the world at the time, without parallel as far back as the Tokyo and Nuremberg Trials at the end of the Second World War: successfully prosecuting the former leaders of the military junta for systematically ordering human rights abuses, including abduction, torture, and murder. The prospect of continued prosecutions into lower ranks over the course of the decade eventually led to multiple military rebellions, which were seen as a threat to the continued stability of the new democratic regime. As a result, the president and congress authorized the Full Stop and Due Obedience laws, which respectively halted future prosecutions and absolved lower-ranked military and security personnel of responsibility for human rights crimes in which they had followed orders from above. Thus, by 1987, the new democracy had created its own widespread amnesties for military-led crimes of the past, a major concession made on behalf of continued governability (Acuña and Smulovitz 1995; Norden 1996). These laws would not be revoked until the 2000s.

## Cooperating in regional relations

In relations with neighboring states, like Brazil and Chile, the new government bridged historical rivalries—with Brazil it took the unprecedented step of creating a binational nuclear safeguards agency to verify non-military use of nuclear materials, and with Chile it resolved the maritime boundary in the Beagle Channel that had almost led to war between the countries in 1978. In both cases, Argentina pursued a security cooperation agenda that effectively undermined the military's established war scenarios and set the foundation for transforming the military into a constructive agent of an internationalist regional security regime (Mani 2011).

## Curtailing military resources and roles

Throughout the 1980s, budget cutting was a necessity in a long period of economic crisis, though political aims of curtailing the military's prerogatives also mattered. Thus economic and political priorities trumped any strategic interests in maintaining or expanding what once were one of the region's largest and most amply equipped armed forces. Soon after assuming office early in 1984, the president retired and replaced over half of the senior officer corps, and initiated legal reforms that formally established civilian control of the military, exercised by the defense minister and ultimately by the president as commander-in-chief. By the end of the year, immediately upon the conclusion of the Beagle Channel Accord with Chile, Alfonsín began one of the most ambitious projects of his administration: reducing the manpower and authority of the military, focusing on the largest services, the army and navy.

Within days of the Accord, he promulgated a sweeping executive decree that: 1) cut army manpower by 75 percent by discharging 50,000 conscripts; 2) abolished army and navy control of the border and coast guards; 3) placed, for the first time, a civilian at the head of the sprawling military industrial conglomerate Fabricaciones Militares; 4) relocated away from the capital the Naval Mechanics School, which had become an infamous detention center during the Proceso; and 5) abolished the First Army Corps and closed its Buenos Aires-based headquarters (LARR 1984). The first three changes were impressive curtailments of military prerogatives. The last two were significant both politically and symbolically, particularly the dismantling of the First Army Corps that historically had been a center of military conspiracy and coup-making. In addition, Alfonsín initiated significant budget cuts. Whereas during the dictatorship military spending had hovered annually between 3.5 percent and 5.1 percent of GDP, for the first four years of the new democracy it was reduced to 2.3 percent annually, and ever since has been in steady decline in relation to GDP, as Table 1 shows.

**Table 1. Military Expenditure in Argentina, 1988-2011**  
(Data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://www.sipri.org>)

Year	US\$M (2008 process/exchange rate)	Percent of GDP
1988	[4,397.0]	[2.0]
1989	[3,580.0]	[1.8]
1990	[2,428.0]	[1.4]
1991	[2,436.0]	[1.4]
1992	[2,306.0]	[1.3]
1993	[2,175.0]	[1.3]
1994	2,471.0	1.5
1995	2,422.0	1.5
1996	2,149.0	1.2
1997	2,113.0	1.1
1998	2,130.0	1.1
1999	2,195.0	1.2
2000	2,091.0	1.1
2001	2,060.0	1.2
2002	1,756.0	1.1
2003	1,808.0	1.1
2004	1,861.0	1.0
2005	1,955.0	0.9
2006	2,015.0	0.9
2007	2,333.0	0.9
2008	2,650.0	0.9
2009	3,146.0	0.8
2010	3,476.0	1.0
2011	[3,167.0]	0.9

A final curtailment of military autonomy came in 1988, with passage of the National Defense Law, which limited the military's role to defense against external threats and made a separation between national defense and domestic security. Now, only in extreme circumstances and under presidential orders may the military temporarily participate in internal security missions. Even today, the 1988 law is a rarity in the region where militaries are frequently called upon to combat internal threats from criminal organizations and terrorist groups. The law also enabled the ministry of defense (MOD) to direct, regulate and coordinate all defense activities not reserved for the president, and gave the minister the formidable mandate of deciding high-level personnel assignments, retirements, and discharges from service.

Taken together, these reforms created a solid legal basis for reforming defense policy. Yet no measures to implement the law would materialize for another 18 years, in 2006. In the meantime, efforts to develop efficient means to plan budgets or a cohesive strategy for the armed forces did not materialize from the civilian leadership: neither from the president nor his second in command, the minister of defense. A notable example recounted by Pion-Berlin (1997:165-166) is the president's initiative in 1984 to authorize the Military Joint Staff (Estado Mayor Conjunto, EMC) to develop a new strategic plan for the armed forces. As an advisory group to the defense minister, the EMC was staffed with military officers but had no operational authority over the individual services. Still, it could function as a unifying counterweight to the notoriously independent services, particularly if empowered by the minister. As a result, when the EMC indeed devised a plan to create joint (multiservice) operational commands, Alfonsín authorized its creation in an unpublished decree. However, he never followed through with full authorization, so the plan was shelved. What accounts for the president's hesitancy to implement what would have been a watershed reform that he himself had set into motion? Pion-Berlin

concludes that the president likely had second thoughts about tasking the military with so great an initiative, particularly because “there were no civilians within MOD who knew enough” to supervise the plan’s development and implementation (1997:166).

In sum, despite notable restrictions on the military’s capabilities and autonomy, the Alfonsín government remained highly apprehensive about the military taking any new initiatives. This outcome is not surprising given the lack of civilian expertise on issues of military war planning or doctrine so early after the transition. Yet the prevalence of status quo would persist, as the military was unlikely to purge itself as government officials hoped (Acuña and Smulovitz 1995). From the military’s perspective, Alfonsín represented control without effective leadership. Fitch has found that 88 percent of officers he surveyed in the 1990s viewed Alfonsín’s military policies negatively (Fitch 1998:79). Moreover, military thinking remained heavily infused with concepts appropriate to the Proceso period — continuing the counter-insurgency war, recapturing the Malvinas, and addressing threats from Argentina’s neighbors. In the context of confrontation without civilian guidance, there was no innovation in military thinking or organization.

### 3.2 Incorporation, 1990-2003

By the early 1990s, changes in the political leadership produced a new military policy. Known as a maverick Peronist for his embrace of neoliberal reforms, President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) sought to assert civilian control through a different strategy, by diffusing military grievances and assigning the armed forces to new missions in confidence-building on international security issues with neighboring states, and in international peacekeeping. His strategies succeeded, when measured in terms of military approval for the president’s initiatives, which differed starkly from those of his predecessor: only 4 percent of officers surveyed by Fitch at the end of the 1990s viewed Menem’s military policies negatively (Fitch 1998:79).

#### Investing the military in pragmatic internationalism

Menem applied a pragmatic carrot-and-stick approach in dealing with the military. On the one hand, he issued blanket pardons to military mutineers and to officers implicated in human rights abuses under the Proceso, diminishing official political pressure on the military. He appointed defense ministers viewed favorably within the military (Pion-Berlin 1997:109). He frequently praised the military, holding up its dramatic reforms of doing more with less “at times nearly without resources” as an example that other state sectors should follow (La Nación 1996).

On the other hand, Menem abolished obligatory service and made further cuts to military manpower, reducing the armed forces from 175,000 in 1985 to about 75,000 — a number they maintain to this day. He deepened defense budget cuts and retained them even when economic growth resumed by the mid 1990s. Menem also rapidly divested the extensive array of defense-related industries the military had established and managed since the 1920s. Proceeds from the sales netted only US\$ 820 million, a fraction of the industries’ multi-billion dollar asset value. The military received only a small amount of these proceeds for reinvestment, as many enterprises were in debt (Scheetz 2004). Not least, given the military’s budgetary strictures, new equipment acquisitions came to a standstill. The net effect of budget cuts and divestiture was to transform the military’s resource base from a classic inward-looking statist enclave into one dependent on Argentina’s success as an international actor, thus in line with other foreign policy efforts of the period.

Applying an internationalist grand strategy centered on economic openness and security cooperation, Menem sought to “reinsert” Argentina as a reliable actor in the international arena (Fontana 1998; Mani 2011). The military became a key component in Argentina’s new internationalism, which included improved relations with Britain, Chile, and the US; elimination of the Condor II missile program; participation in the Gulf War; and participation in numerous United Nations peacekeeping missions (Fontana 1998; Mani 2011).

Until the 1990s, Argentina had participated infrequently in international peacekeeping missions. Indeed, Fitch finds that in 1985 only 3 percent of officers saw it as a primary mission of the armed forces (Fitch 1998:120). Now Argentina became one of the world’s most reliable contributors of military and civilian personnel to United Nations’ peacekeeping missions. Between 1990 and 2003, it sent more troops to UN peacekeeping missions than any other Latin American country: 13,863, with nearly two-thirds participating in challenging peace enforcement missions (Sotomayor 2014:104). The impact of this new mission was remarkably quick and deep on the thinking of military officers. Fitch finds that, as early as 1992, 81 percent of officers he consulted saw peacekeeping as a priority for the military, second only to national defense (Fitch 1998:120). What is most significant about this finding is not the shift to peacekeeping, but the rapidity of the shift and the general confluence of officers’ perceptions around their new pragmatic role in the state. Army officers’ comments in 1992 indicate the lessons learned:

“The world is different [now]; the international context includes democracy in all countries of the world.[...]To break the rules of the world game that is consolidating itself, was an act of desperation.[...]Swimming against the current of the world is irrational.”

“The problem of Argentina is that we have always been estranged from the world. We believed that there is no international order, that there are no actors with the power to police that order. We found out differently in the Malvinas.”

Similar effects were apparent from Argentina’s security rapprochement with Chile. In order to pave the way for greater economic integration, the two countries had to resolve a variety of territorial disputes which required development of confidence and security building mechanism (CSBMs). Beginning in 1995 and continuing to this day, Argentine and Chilean civilian and military officials regularly meet in flexible binational working group sessions intended to strengthen communication, transparency, and exchanges between the two countries’ defense establishments. By the end of the 1990s, the countries had institutionalized a systematic policy-making process on issues of bilateral security cooperation — an achievement unprecedented in Latin America (Mani 2011:124-132).

## Failing to build robust defense ministry institutions

Still, there were limitations to these efforts in terms of institutionalizing democratic civilian control. Most notably, Argentine leaders did little to shore up the defense ministry’s civilian staff. As in the 1980s so in the 1990s, most defense ministry officials typically had backgrounds in law or economics and came as political appointees who averaged about 16 months in office (Pion-Berlin 1997:162). Bureaucratic rivalries also mattered. For instance, when a career official at the foreign ministry was appointed to an undersecretary position in the MOD and sought to prepare a civilian staff for MOD positions, he was later “punished” by foreign ministry superiors for his defection to defense (Mani 2011:148).

In addition, civilian leaders sought short cuts to their policy ends that deferred to military expertise. For instance, preparation of the country’s first White Book on National Defense was a significant initiative intended to demonstrate transparency and provide information to the Argentine public on issues of national defense. While it was presented as a project of the MOD, its substantive preparation was

completed by former military officers employed at the ministry, and, of course, approved by civilian leaders. Similarly, in the CSBM agenda with Chile, civilian leaders inserted the EMC in the relatively uncertain process of bilateral confidence-building to devise confidence-building measures under very general civilian guidance — and therefore with substantial autonomy. This was done not because the EMC was the most effective and influential actor to include, but because it was the easiest to bring on board, in contrast to the individual services. Yet the EMC's lack of institutional clout within the military made coordination of CSBMs among the highly autonomous services a constant challenge (Mani 2011:130). In short, expediency trumped effectiveness in the planning of one of Argentina's most important defense-cooperation relationships.

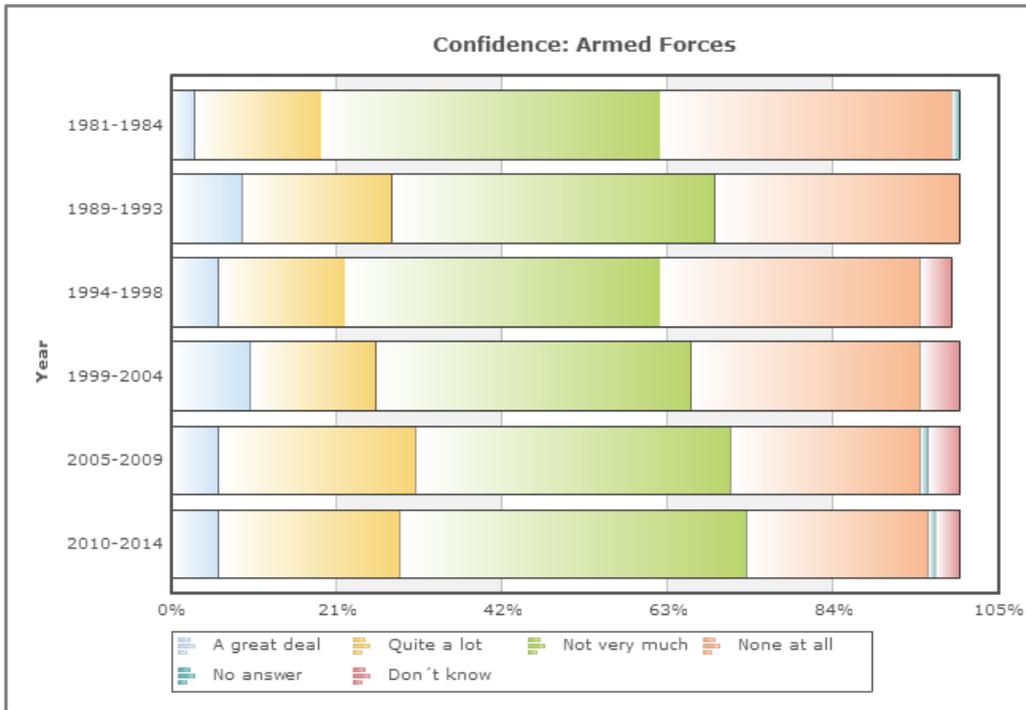
This model of defense “planning,” in which civilians set general parameters for military behavior with only limited civilian oversight, continued through the government of Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001). As economic recession dragged on from the late Menem period the military could do little to alter its budgetary and equipment situation, but it could take initiatives in other areas to try to undo the structural constraints enforced in earlier years. The most prominent effort in advent of the 2001 economic crisis was the brainchild of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ricardo Brinzoni: to develop a corps of “volunteers for defense.” By this juncture it had become common for military leaders to outline major institutional goals directly to the public, arguably as a way to pressure political leaders to take notice. As a result, Brinzoni made his case not only through institutional channels but publicly in a detailed article in *La Nación* (2000). Framed as a way to alleviate unemployment and provide additional income for young men and women hard-hit in the recession, the plan was a straightforward agenda to develop a corps of reservists for the army. Yet the most notable piece of this story came several months later when the plan was proposed again, this time with a different advocate and more acute goal: an initiative of the defense ministry that would help 15,000 unemployed. However, even with the ministry's support the plan languished in Congress. Yet, at a later juncture, during the economic crisis, the military would revive the idea, as I discuss below.

In sum, during the long decade of the 1990s the strategy of incorporation allowed the military to develop a new image as a model of frugality and non-intervention at home, and as a peace-builder abroad. In the absence of regular civilian oversight, however, the armed forces maintained their position as de facto decision-maker on a variety of important policy initiatives.

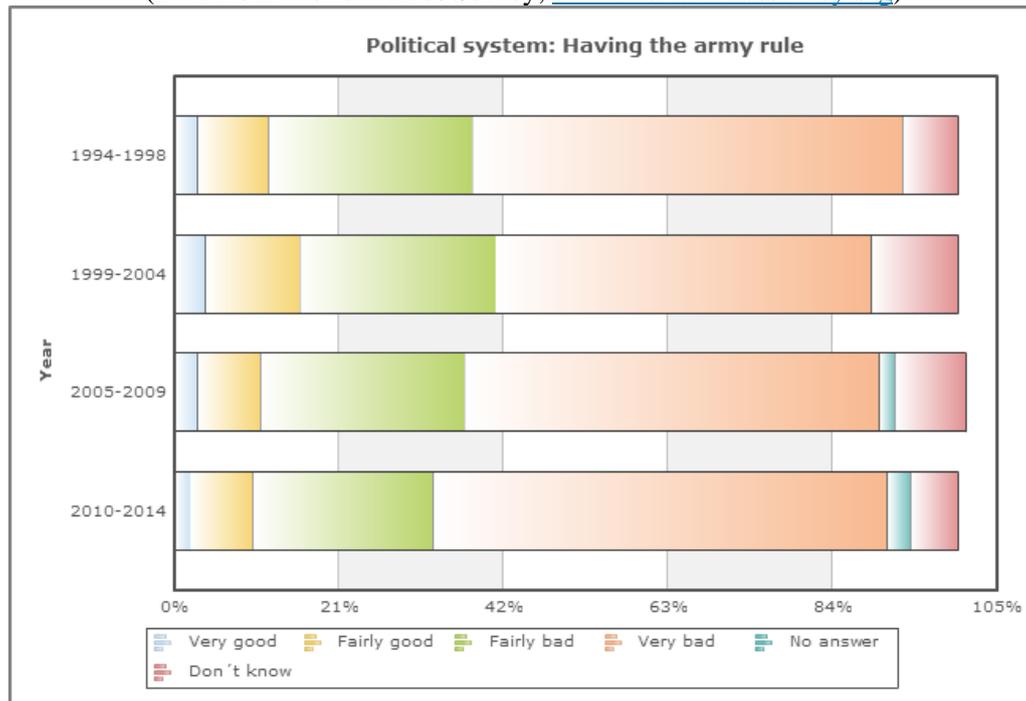
### A test of military subordination: The economic crisis of 2001 creates a new social legitimacy for the armed forces

The political and economic crisis that exploded in December 2001 through popular protests, the quick succession of five leaders through the presidency, and the largest debt default in history (over US\$ 140 billion), raised concern that the military might intervene to reestablish order and stability. Yet, rather than intervene, each of the military chiefs individually declared his service's support for the constitutional order and democracy. Subsequent public opinion polls show that this choice boosted the military's image to new heights. National surveys taken in September 2002 ranked the military third, after news reporters and the Church, among institutions viewed favorably. This reflected a substantial improvement in the military's image — with favorable views increasing from 27 percent to 42 percent over the course of the economic crisis. By contrast, favorable ratings of the police, with direct involvement in the maintenance of domestic order during the crisis, dropped from 40 percent to 32 percent in the same period. Political and judicial institutions weighed at the bottom, with favorable ratings below 10 percent. Figure 1 shows this effect in broader context, while Figure 2 shows a boost, albeit temporary, in support for military rule at this time—these numbers subsequently declined again.

**Figure 1. Argentine Public Opinion: Confidence in the Armed Forces, 1981-2014**  
 (Data from World Values Survey, [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org))



**Figure 2. Argentine Public Opinion: Having the Army Rule, 1981-2014**  
 (Data from World Values Survey, [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org))



As the crisis deepened, the military proposed its participation in a series of social assistance projects. Interim President Eduardo Duhalde took the first step by authorizing a major emergency distribution of grain rations using military transports. Thereafter, military offers to assist grew, including provision of 200,000 meals on a daily basis for those in need, as well as use of mobile military hospitals for healthcare in remote areas. Pilot programs using these resources began in major cities such as Córdoba and Mendoza, and in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos and Tucumán; in addition, the military helped to contain an outbreak of dengue in a deeply remote area of Formosa. By October, the military, now with full backing from Defense Minister Horacio Jaunarena, was again launching a defense ministry campaign to create military reserves. While ultimately the plan would not bear fruit, it was widely discussed by political leaders in the election campaign of 2003. With its newfound public legitimacy and demonstrated utility for society, the military had succeeded in sparking debate among political leaders who earlier had rejected such ideas out of hand.

### 3.3 Subordination, since 2003

In the wake of the economic crisis of 2001-2002, the leftist, social justice wing of Peronism, which had not held the presidency since the return of democracy, reasserted itself under Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (since 2007). It moved the civil-military relations agenda decidedly into a new phase centered on insuring military subordination, but also advancing in long-declared goals of empowering and streamlining the defense ministry institution.

#### Restoring the human rights agenda

A key step in subordinating the military to civilian institutions was the revival of the state's human rights justice agenda. Immediately upon assuming the presidency, Kirchner purged the army's top ranking generals. Because some in the army high command had either been involved in the Dirty War repression or were likely to resist new human rights inquiries, Kirchner retired nearly half of the military high command—20 of 37 senior generals—in order to appoint a trustworthy general of lower rank, Brigadier General Roberto Bendini, as Army Chief of Staff. Such a profound purge of the army's top tier had not occurred since 1955, when the military ousted Juan Perón and purged its own ranks of Peronist supporters. Kirchner's move was not only controversial within the military, but countered expected practice that the president would privilege rank and experience in choosing the army's commander.

Next, in contrast to the neoliberal brand of conservative Peronism under Menem, who had set aside the human rights agenda and pardoned military officers convicted of human rights crimes, the new Peronist government restored retroactive justice mechanisms. In 2003 Congress annulled the Full Stop and Due Obedience laws of the 1980s, enabling human rights cases from the dictatorship era to be reopened. The Supreme Court subsequently confirmed these steps by finding the laws unconstitutional, while lower courts struck down the Menem-era pardons that had freed officials and military mutineers. Over the next decade, over 400 new convictions of both civilian and military officials for dictatorship-era crimes would be issued, along with 35 findings of not guilty (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Not least, events symbolic of the cleaning and transformation of the military took place. In a widely publicized ceremony, the new president and his defense minister presided over Gen. Bendini's removal of portraits of the army's dictatorship-era presidents from the gallery of the military academy. Noting that "a wall of portraits in an institution such as the military academy should not include pictures of mass murderers and baby snatchers" (Mercopress 2004), the government both acknowledged the

military's importance and condemned its darkest offenses. Even more significant was the conversion of the Navy Mechanical School, which had served as a site of illegal detention and murder during the Proceso regime, into Latin America's largest museum of national memory, with a national memory archive and cultural center coordinated with prominent human rights organizations. Taken together, these efforts revived a state-sanctioned culture of "never again" regarding military impunity toward society and the rule of law.

## Institutionalizing national defense

Argentina's 1988 National Defense Law had established core parameters of roles of civilians and military on defense matters, yet as noted earlier it had never been implemented. This occurred finally in 2006, through an executive "implementing" decree (727/2006) that specified how the law would be applied, realizing three main aspects of the 1988 law.

First, the decree specified civilian control over core functions in which the military had de facto maintained much autonomy simply through ad hocery and inertia. For instance, defense spending and acquisitions now fell squarely to civilians to determine, along with the task of defining a national defense policy. Similarly, core tasks of assessing, appointing, and promoting military personnel were now clearly tasked and structured through the defense minister's office. In addition, the decree created a National Security Council (CODENA), which only the president can call to order and which must have full access to all information, including classified intelligence, requested from civilian and military officials in the defense establishment.

Second, the decree realized "jointness" by substantively empowering the EMC so that it serves not only in an advisory role to the defense minister, but finally also has the authority to define the military's operational plans and strategy. This step marks an important curtailment of the individual services' decision-making autonomy. Now all military planning is centralized within the EMC, which prioritizes the ability of the military services to operate jointly rather than attending to individual services' goals. In addition, the EMC now advises the minister on promotion in the services' general staffs—a significant realization of the EMC's new power over the services.

Finally, the decree reconfirmed the restriction of the military's mission to external defense against state actors, and specified that the military was prohibited from planning, equipping or gathering intelligence for internal security operations. Taken together, the implementation of the national defense law marked not only confirmation of a civilian-led defense policy making process, but one that transcends political orientations of governments by establishing parameters for state policy. Despite their long delay, the Argentine reforms came sooner and went further than those of any other country in the region.

## 4. Transforming the armed forces into citizen-soldiers

If the first two decades of Argentina's redemocratization focused the civil-military relations agenda on controlling the armed forces through purges, punishments, curtailed resources, and new internationalist missions, it was still possible for a leading politician to declare: "Our armed forces exist, but we don't know for what purpose—this is one of the outstanding issues of the Argentine democracy." Given the general public's lack of interest in issues of defense, this sort of declaration is not surprising. Yet the social justice Peronism of the kirchnerismo that came to power in 2003 sought not only to empower civilian-led defense institutions with the aim of insuring military subordination. Its wider aim regarding the military has been to "citizenize" the members of the armed forces—essentially conforming them to a culture of progressive, rights-based social democracy appropriate to the 21st century.

As described earlier, the Argentine forces have a long history of factionalism and politicization that frequently undermined both domestic regimes and the state's reputation as a reliable player in the international community. The Proceso dictatorship's severe failings meant that the military was effectively ostracized from mainstream Argentine society, as reflected in wary or unfavorable public opinion of the military (see Figures 1 and 2, above). To address this civilian-military rift, a new citizen-soldier notion, developed in the 2000s, has sought not to embrace the military as such, but to instill it with elements of both public service and a democratic culture, and thereby make the armed forces an institution directly participant in the consolidation of democracy in Argentina.

### 4.1 The agenda of *ciudadanización* for the military

The notion of creating citizens of soldiers — *ciudadanización*—was initially applied under Defense Minister Nilda Garré (2006-2010), who presided over the implementation of the national defense law. Framed in terms of a new "Argentine model for defense," the MOD articulated a comprehensive vision related to the citizen-soldier (Ministerio de Defensa 2009). As applied to the military, *ciudadanización* has two main components: to train the armed forces both as public servants specialized in the profession of national defense and as citizens with obligations and rights substantially equal to those of all other citizens (DerGhougassian 2011). According to this concept, while members of the military are restricted from organizing politically given the duties of their profession, in all other respects they can be seen as equal citizens. As a result, the defense ministry has initiated a series of innovations reaching deeply into the military's disciplinary and formative structures. Three main areas are featured here: military justice, gender equalization, and an educational system centered on the integration of democratic values to strategic military thinking.

#### Reform of the military code of justice

Dating back to 1951, Argentina's Code of Military Justice (CJM) embodied the tradition of the *fuero militar*—the separation and privileging of the military estate from other sectors of society, with origins in Spanish colonial rule. In 2008, new national legislation abrogated the existing code and instituted a new one, issuing a sweeping reform that sets Argentina far apart from other states in the region. The new Law of Military Justice (26.394) abolished the jurisdiction of military courts in peacetime, and abolished the death penalty thus conforming the military code to civilian code of law. In addition, it revised regulations governing military discipline, by reducing penalties in many instances and prohibiting punishment for actions that are protected as civil rights (e.g., free thought and expression, religious choice);. It also increased transparency by creating a public registry of disciplinary sanctions

(Filippini and Tchrian, 2011:127). The reform bears clear elements of *ciudadanización* not only in bringing military actors into common courts with other citizens and holding them to the same legal standards, but also in bringing to light the punishments instituted within the military's disciplinary system. In consequence, equality, transparency, and essential human rights protections have become core elements in a military culture long detached from wider society as well as punitive in practice.

## Gender equalization

As of 2013, in Argentina 14 percent of the army, 16 percent of the navy and 23 percent of the air force are women—some 12,632 individuals, ranging from enlisted personnel to officers. Overall, the Argentine military now comprises 16 percent women (Resdal 2014: 137-138). This marks a significant increase in just the last five years— a 40 percent growth in the number of women for the army and air force, and 130 percent for the navy. Women were first admitted to the professional officer corps in 1982, but not to the command corps until the late 1990s and early 2000s, reflecting variation by service branch (Rial 2010: 53 and 55). While women have yet to reach the highest ranks (general/admiral/brigadier, for the army/navy/air force respectively), they increasingly reach command corps ranks, a trend likely to continue. Yet advancing women to senior positions within the armed forces is only one piece of the Argentine MOD's agenda.

Within the ministry, the Council for Gender Policy was created to promote a broader gender equalization agenda. Among its goals, the Council has targeted equal access to entry and promotion in the armed forces, as well as family leave benefits and protections; it also has set goals of eradicating gender-based violence within the military and improving detection and treatment for domestic violence in military families. Such protections can have tremendous positive implications in a military whose most significant demographic shift in the last two decades has been the growing incorporation of women. In addition, the ministry has created innovative new supportive structures, like the Gender Office in each of the military services to field gender-related personnel complaints and other matters that individuals would be unlikely to pursue through the conventional chain of command (Ministerio de Defensa 2009: 32-33). Particularly given its historical image and in light of the shift in the 1990s from obligatory to voluntary service, the military must strategize both to attract and retain enlisted and officer personnel; attention to gender protections can significantly advance recruitment and retention goals.

## Strategic thinking through democratically rooted education

Without doubt, of the three reform areas described in this section, the defense sector educational reforms Argentina has undertaken have had the widest and most direct impact on both military and civilian personnel. Beginning in 2006, the MOD oversaw a profound, bottom-up reform of defense sector education centered on two broad goals. One goal was to establish a solid humanistic basis for defense study at all major military academies (as well as military liceos or high schools) so that curricula would incorporate human rights, and democratic values and practices to a significant extent (Kreizer 2012). So, for instance, in 2007 the MOD established a “common core curriculum” of seven courses required for all Argentine officers (in addition to further service-specific courses). Notably, nearly half of these courses center on fundamental legal norms, highlighting the centrality of the rule of law concept vital for democracies:

- State, Society, and Market
- Argentine History 1810/1990
- New Scenarios in International Relations, Globalization and Regionalization
- Sociology of Organizations
- Constitutional Law and Administrative Law
- Military Law, Military Justice Code
- International Law, Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, and International Law of Armed Conflicts.

This core curriculum reflects an interdisciplinary humanistic foundation and insures that all officers regardless of specialization have a common intellectual and practical foundation in their collective strategic thinking.

The second goal of the reforms was to centralize coordination of the historically “self-referential and unconnected” strategic studies centers of the military services (Ministerio de Defensa 2009:29). Now the development of their research agendas is coordinated through the MOD’s Manuel Belgrano Strategic Studies Center to reflect the military’s newly joint vision, as does the recent creation of the Superior Joint War College, the first joint education site for officer training. These new efforts join established ones that have already trained military and civilians side by side, including the MOD’s National Defense School and the prominent Argentine Joint Peace Operations Training Center (CAECOPAZ) that was the first military institution in the country to provide courses focused on conflict reduction techniques, human rights, and international and humanitarian law (Sotomayor 2014:74). Worth noting is the growing number of matriculants from other countries in the region and abroad (in particular China, as well as African regional powers Nigeria and South Africa).

In sum, while maintaining attention to more traditional theoretical and skill-oriented learning, the new educational reforms promote a resocialization of the Argentine defense sector that will be most apparent in rising junior and mid-career professionals, those who will impact military organization and planning over the next generation. Taken together, the innovations across military law, gender issues and education are recent and remain a work in progress. Nonetheless, they mark a profound shift from traditional norms guiding the role of the military within the state. In Latin America, militaries have long held a privileged role within the state as protectors of the nation—essentially they have been protectors of the state rather than of society. Argentina’s break from this traditional notion is indeed revolutionary. In recent decades, while other countries in the region have eliminated the military’s role as “guarantor of the constitutional order” from their constitutions, none has gone as far as Argentina to reconceptualize the role of professional soldiers to emphasize their integration in the larger society.

## 5. Conclusion

Argentina's achievements in controlling the military and creating a more cohesive defense sector are remarkable. Even so, critics point to weaknesses that downplay these achievements. For instance, Bruneau (2013) notes three distinct weaknesses. First, Argentina's military effectiveness is weak when measured in terms of defense acquisitions and maintenance of material. Second, defense sector efficiency is limited through a budget that prioritizes payrolls and pensions over strategic investment in future-oriented equipment and technology. Third, that civilian leadership is lacking, as the defense bureaucracy features frequent civilian turnover and lacks commitment towards development and retention of dedicated career-oriented defense professionals.

While such critiques certainly have merit and warrant continued scholarly attention and policy efforts at reform, they are not debilitating factors. Issues of effectiveness are balanced by Argentina's foreign and defense policy successes in establishing a cooperative regional security agenda that privileges collective problem solving and military professionalism. Issues of efficiency must be considered in light of larger, structural inefficiencies that perpetually plague the national economy. And issues of bureaucratic instability have steadily diminished as the country builds a civilian defense culture—comprised of academics, policy consultants and even career-track bureaucrats—that may be small but is impressive given that nothing of its kind has existed before. .

Rather, concern over today's civil-military relations challenges more frequently implicates civilian politicians than the military itself. Such concerns apply widely across Latin America's democracies according to Rut Diamint, who notes that “the willingness to leave issues unresolved and lack of civic responsibility among both the public and the political leadership to whom society has granted a mandate to head the state provokes greater instability than the autonomist provocations of the armed forces” (Diamint 2014:120).

In Argentina, ample legal and institutional structures were created to staunch such failings, yet politicians can manipulate this progress. For instance, since 2011, the military has been ordered to provide logistical support to police forces confronting the problems of common and organized crime that since the 1990s have become a growing factor in citizen insecurity, particularly in economically hard times. Such support is feasible and legal even under Argentina's restrictive national defense and internal security laws. Still, it was not until recently that, via executive decree, the government authorized Operación Escudo Norte (Northern Shield), in which military forces provide radar-based surveillance support to police seeking to control illegal trafficking in Argentina's national entry ports, maritime ports, and airports in the country's northeast and northwest. Escudo Norte limited the military's mission to the transmission of tracking information to the National Gendarmerie and Coast Guard forces, and did not put the military into contact with civilian populations. However, making the military a participant in counter-drug trafficking missions is worrisome to many who see a slippery slope into internal security work that is not normally mandated under national legislation. Argentina succeeded early—while other countries in the region did not—in defining the military's role so that countering “new threats” from actors within national territory was beyond the scope of the military's missions. Bluntly then, “civic responsibility among both the public and the political leadership,” in Diamint's formulation, is what must prevent any slide down the slope that undermines solid legal statutes. While the “citizen-soldier” model has fundamental, even indispensable merit, it will not prevent civilian political weaknesses from undermining hard-sought legal and institutional advances.

Maintaining democratic civilian control of the military is a recurrent challenge for even the most well-established democracies, impacting where real policy-making power lies. Effective civilian leadership is essential in this process, else the military will retain the autonomy—and cause—to take day-to-day

matters that belong in civilian hands into their own. Shaping “citizen-soldiers” is likely a necessary and vital part of integrating the military usefully in the democratic state, but it is not sufficient to insure military subordination. Key advocates of the model recognize this, as they first structured the institutional context in which to ground the next step of culture shift.

As Narcis Serra (2010) has emphasized, advances in democratic civilian control are best devised in stages, which will likely not follow the same sequence in every situation. Even so, the Argentine case suggests some basic lessons to note. First, political leaders both idealistic and pragmatic were able to contribute to the military reform. Regardless of leaders’ ideological proclivities, however, essential progress came fundamentally through the development of legal and institutional reforms initiated throughout the democratic period. Second, often the most substantial progress came on the heels of a crisis. Crises can open doors for actors to take initiative and for new ideas and strategies to take hold. In Argentina, periods of the early 1980s opened doors for an unprecedented human rights justice process to take hold, setting crucial terms for going forward despite later setbacks. Similarly, economic liberalization paved the way for Argentina’s adoption of new regional cooperation strategies and military roles. And it was economic crisis in the early 2000s that brought new political leaders to office who consolidated the military reforms through a revitalized human rights and social justice agenda. A final lesson is that the civil-military binary risks sideline the broader political context in which civil society also plays a role. Imagining the Argentine story without civil society groups is impossible, although, frequently, scholars and policy makers focus only on a stylized elite political-bargaining dimension. Democratic civil-military relations are unlikely to survive where a larger context of civic democracy is weak or unraveling. Latin America has both a rich historical record and scholarly tradition of incorporating societal actors and organizations into analysis, yet this sociological tradition has come under siege from economic models of political behavior that privilege the rational individual devoid of social and cultural context (Luna et al 2014). To move forward not only in regional studies but in civil-military relations theory, for Latin America as well as for other regions, we need to revive the analysis of the larger and often messier social structures that provide crucial context for the advances and setbacks we seek to explain.

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**INDEXING TERMS**

Argentina, armed forces, democratic civilian control,  
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Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983 ended decades of cyclical military interventions in politics. Since then a long and complex process of confrontation, incorporation, and, finally, subordination has established democratic civilian control of the armed forces that is more far-reaching than anywhere else in Latin America. Civilian reformers accomplished this through a combination of force restructuring, legal restrictions on military roles, and creation of an increasingly robust defense ministry. In this context, civilian leaders since 2003 have shifted the focus of reform to resocialization of the armed forces — seeking to create “citizen soldiers” appropriate to a modern, socially progressive democracy. Thus institutional restructuring has led to efforts to promote a culture shift in the armed forces.

This paper examines Argentina's process of legal and institutional reform of the military since the 1980s, and then turns to the development of the citizen soldier model through legal, gender, and educational innovations since the mid 2000s. It finds that while this sequence of reforms is promising, bringing a citizenship model to fruition within the armed forces requires sustained commitments from civilian political leaders and civil society. In short, even the “best case” Argentine example reminds us that effective civil-military relations in contemporary democracy require both the institutions of oversight and a political culture that engages the military in the citizenship ideals of the polity.