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THE MILITARY GHOST IN SOUTH AMERICA: HOW MILITARY INFLUENCE UNDERMINES DEMOCRATIC REGIMES IN THE SOUTHERN CONE AND BRAZIL[1]

O FANTASMA MILITAR NA AMÉRICA DO SUL: COMO A INFLUÊNCIA MILITAR MINA OS REGIMES DEMOCRÁTICOS NO CONE SUL E NO BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the military ghost phenomenon, which consists of the diffuse idea within society that the military still plays a relevant role in politics. The phenomenon emerges from two conditions currently present in South American politics: a scenario of democratic crisis and the challenge of consolidating civil government, especially concerning its capacity to control military influence. The analysis is focused on the democratic scenario in Southern Cone and Brazil, evaluating how institutions and conjunctures in the region support the military influence on politics.

KEYWORDS: Democracy; Military-Government; Political-Transition; Democratization.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga o fenômeno do *fantasma militar*, que consiste na ideia difusa dentro da sociedade de que os militares ainda possuem um papel relevante na política. O fenômeno surge a partir de duas condições atualmente presentes na política Sul-

[1] This article is derived from the author's thesis *The military ghost: why do South American countries still fear the military in politics? A tentative answer from the balance of power in political transition.* The full thesis is available in the Harvard Collection of Thesis, the digital repository of Harvard University.

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americana: um cenário de crise democrática e o desafio de consolidar o governo civil democrático, especialmente no que concerne sua capacidade de controlar a influência militar. A análise é focada no cenário democrático do Cone Sul e Brasil, avaliando como instituições e conjunturas regionais alicerçam a influência militar na política.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Democracia; Governo-Militar; Transição-Política; Democratização.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, then-Congressman Jair Bolsonaro presented his vote in favor of the impeachment of Brazil's President, Dilma Rousseff. His discourse at that time became notable for a passionate defense of Colonel Carlos Alberto Bistra Ustra, former commander of the DOI-CODI (Destacamento de Operações de Informação - Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna). Colonel Ustra is considered a high-profile figure of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964 – 1985), and the DOI-CODI was directly responsible for the torture and disappearance of hundreds of political opponents. (BBC News Brazil 2016).

Bolsonaro's speech could have been an isolated incident in Brazil's post-democratization period if he hadn't become the next elected president in 2018. Taking advantage of a global wave of radical-right-wing political platforms worldwide, Bolsonaro's election supplanted almost sixteen years of Worker's Party government in Brazil. During his government, Bolsonaro employed around 6,157 military personnel in government positions and openly reaffirmed his ties to the military establishment. (Revista Veja 2022). This scenario reproduced a "military ghost" in Brazil, a sensation that the military is still a political player.

The presence of the military in Brazilian politics is not a recent development under Bolsonaro's government. During Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (1995-2003) and Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's (2003–2011) governments, the military influence in politics was present but shadowed by the apparent stability of democratic institutions. Zaverucha highlights the fragility of Brazilian democracy after the transition, characterized by the "strong presence of military apparatus in the State and the political decision process" (Jorge Zaverucha 2000, 1:16). According to the author:

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> This presence manifests either through articulations behind the political scenes or explicitly through vetoes of laws or policies with which the military does not agree, by maintaining political spaces achieved during the military regime, or by interfering in issues beyond typically military activities. (Jorge Zaverucha 2000, 1:16).

Nonetheless, Bolsonaro's government was undoubtedly responsible for explicitly reaffirming the military's influence on Brazil's politics. During his mandate, Bolsonaro exalted the military as guardians of democracy, electing them "the last obstacle against socialism." (Uol Política 2022). Bolsonaro's political speech revigorated the social perception of militarism in Brazilian politics, thus strengthening the military ghost.

On June 12, 2019, in the first year of Bolsonaro's government, a public survey among Brazilians revealed that around 40% of respondents believed at that time that there was a significant risk of the country returning to a military dictatorship (Veja/FSP, 2019). The same survey demonstrated that most Brazilians supported democracy as the preferable political regime but were doubtful about democratic resilience during his administration.

Brazil's closest neighbor in economic and social relations, Argentina, also witnessed the rise of a right-wing government with the electoral victory of Mauricio Macri in 2019. Macri adopted a discourse against the "populism of the *kirchnerismo,"* referring to the twelve years of the left-wing governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, who were considered contemporary representatives of *peronismo* (Ámbito 2022). Macri and Bolsonaro's elections have common characteristics, such as a context of economic and social crises and the widespread disenchantment with politics. Both politicians presented as rescuers of economic and political liberalism, attributing responsibility to the *Pink Tide* phenomenon[3].

However, the similarities between Bolsonaro and Macri do not include the position regarding the role of the military in the government. While the former adopted a nationalist discourse, acclaiming the Armed Forces as the pillar of the State, militarism was not a relevant topic for the latter. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the

[3] The Pink-Tide phenomenon in politics refers to the rapid succession of electoral victories by left-leaning and center-leftist presidential candidates in Latin America at the beginning of the 21st century (Ellner 2019) . Lula in Brazil and the Kirchner couple in Argentina are examples of pink-tide governments.

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military in politics has been present and intense in Brazil, but the same didn't happen in Argentina.

Brazil and Argentina were military dictatorships during the 60s and 70s and faced a complex process of liberalization and democratization. The same happened with other South American countries like Chile and Uruguay. All these countries are currently considered democracies by indexes like V-Dem, Freedom House, and Economist Intelligence Unit. However, these countries have significant differences concerning the military influence on politics, as the situations of Brazil and Argentina illustrate.

This paper aims to present conceptually the idea of the military ghost and how its occurrence impacts the quality of democracy in Southern Cone and Brazil. Another objective is to demonstrate how the phenomenon's intensity and characteristics vary across countries with a similar transition background from a military autocratic regime. Subsequent works will address the causes and correlations that can explain the military ghost and the potential mechanisms to mitigate its adverse effects.

1. MILITARY GHOST: CONCEPT AND CONDITIONS

I define the *military ghost* as a diffuse idea within society that the military still plays a relevant role in politics. This role involves the direction of politics, the self-preservation of its members, and the capacity to block any policy against its interests. The *ghost* reference is explained by the phenomenon usually acting in the shadows without explicit recognition from political agents and institutions. Additionally, the idea of the ghost conveys a sense of threat, suggesting that the military has the power to subvert democracy and assume political power.

Despite being qualified as a diffuse perception in society, which gives a sense of abstraction, I defend the military ghost as a phenomenon that can be objectively measured and has concrete bases on political institutions. The measurement can be obtained by quantitative and qualitative instruments, such as surveys evaluating the social perception of the military's role in politics and the number of military staff in government positions. The bases can be interpreted from the content of institutions such

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as the constitution, in which the presence of norms around military prerogatives and rights can express its strength within the government.

To understand the military ghost phenomenon and its persistence in some South American states, it is essential first to identify its conditions. Conditions are the facts and circumstances necessary for the emergence of the idea that the military is an active player in politics. A diffuse sense that the military can influence politics would hardly exist in society if these conditions were absent.

Two critical conditions characterize the military ghost: Firstly, a social environment of democratic disenchantment, where there is a shared sense of dissatisfaction with the outcomes delivered by the democratic system and its fundamental institutions. Secondly, a social perception that the democratic civil government is unable to control the military's influence on politics, being hostage to the interests of the latter.

Many people today are disenchanted with politics, particularly in specific segments of society. Political science is currently studying why democratic regimes in Western countries are facing a profound crisis, marked by the rise of radical and populist politicians and parties. These politicians share political platforms that promote nationalism, anti-globalism, and “traditional” values. They all speak out against the establishment and use political polarization to achieve their goals.

Several recent works in political science are dedicated to understanding the democratic crisis and the emergence of political radicalism and populism in Western democracies, such as Levitsky and Ziblatt’s book *How democracies die* (2018), Monk’s *Peoples vs. Democracy* (2018), Runciman’s *The Confidence Trap* (2017), among others. Theories connect the democratic crisis to “fateful alliances” among political elites and authoritarian politicians, who reject the democratic rules of the game, deny the legitimacy of political opponents, tolerate violence, and are ready to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).Some believe the crisis stems from the failures of contemporary democratic regimes, characterized by economic stagnation and a social identity crisis (Mounk, 2018). Other theories connect the democratic crisis with the effects of globalization, which left behind significant social

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groups and promoted societal conflicts, as Stiglitz stated in his seminal work *Globalization and its Discontents.* (Stiglitz 2002).

This study does not aim to delve into the reasons for the democratic crisis, mainly because, despite a global disenchantment with democracy, each region and country has particularities. In the case of the Southern Cone countries and Brazil, there is a correlation between the phenomenon of the military ghost and the context of democratic crisis. In fact, throughout history, the risk of a military backlash has been linked to political environments where civilian players and institutions seem unable to address social and economic issues. In South America, all military dictatorships emerged during a political crisis in which the military was perceived as outsiders to the political system. Curiously, when a military coup is possible, it usually arises from their vested interest in political matters rather than being true outsiders to politics.

The second condition of the military ghost concerns the level of stability of the civil government in the country. When the civil government is consolidated and has the means to restrain the military influence on politics, it can hardly be configured as a military ghost scenario. Conversely, a weak civil government, incapable of controlling the military influence, creates the ideal condition for the emergence of the military ghost.

Feaver argues that the relationship between the military and civil government creates a paradox: "The institution created to protect the polity is given enough power to become a threat to the polity itself" (Feaver 1999, 214). The paradox stems from the military needing to be strong enough to prevail against external threats. Still, this strength must be limited by the civil government for democracy to exist. Despite having the physical power to impose their desires on civilians, the military is still subject to the authority of civilians in a democracy. As Feaver (1999) notes, the hierarchy of *de jure* authority in a democratic society favors civilians over the military, even when the distribution of *de facto* power favors the latter. This factor means that in a democracy, civilians must always remain the political masters, regardless of the military's strength.

In a large-scale democracy, certain political institutions are necessary, such as the control over government policy being vested in officials elected by the citizens, as emphasized by Dahl in his work (2020, chap. 8). Therefore, having a representative

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government comprised of elected officials is a democratic need. Dahl's condition implies that this representative government must be accountable for the true sovereignty of a democracy – the people. After a military dictatorship, countries that undergo democratization often face the challenge of ensuring that their newly elected representatives are held accountable by the people, not by the military that previously held power.

Consolidating a civil elected government is a crucial condition for democracy and marks the final stage in a political transition from a military autocracy. However, defining what *consolidation of a civil government* means in this study is essential. Consolidation is more a quality than a fact, which means that the stabilization of civil government can be measured in varying degrees of quality across different countries. Hence, even though Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile have persistent issues with the strong presence and threat of military backlash, they are still democracies with stable civil governments.

Three main conditions can summarize the different criteria by which the consolidation of civil government can be attested in a democracy. The first condition is the *institutional capacity of the civil government to limit the military influence*. This limitation goes beyond the capacity to avoid a military coup with its classic characteristics of tanks and troops on the street, which have become rare worldwide. Instead, as Levitsky and Ziblatt highlight, democratic breakdowns "have been caused not by generals and soldiers but by elected governments themselves" (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 4). In this sense, civilian governments must avoid military control in the shadows, which is more important than preventing a classic military coup. Feaver argues that a traditional military coup can weaken the military rather than strengthen it, reflecting its inability to achieve its goals through normal political channels (Feaver, 1999, p. 218).

Stepan describes multiple aspects of the civilian democratic control of the military, but two are particularly significant (Stepan 2020). The first is the dimension of military opposition to the policies of the new civilian democratic leadership, which is related to the level of conflict between the military and the incoming government regarding relevant issues (Stepan 2020, 68). For example, a crucial factor is how to address the incidents of

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torture and persecution that occurred during the military autocracy. The military budget is another point of contention that remains intense in contemporary politics.

The second dimension mentioned by Stepan is the military's prerogatives, which are the areas where the military institution assumes that they have the right or privilege to exercise effective control, whether challenged or not. Stepan suggests that several factors indicate the level of military influence in politics. For instance, the military's role in areas such as intelligence, the defense sector, and police can serve as good indicators of their control over the civilian government (Stepan 2020, 89)

A second condition required to assess the consolidation of civil governance in a state is the *internal organization and ideology of the military*. Stepan distinguishes between the military as an institution and the military as a government and how these situations can lead to inner conflict (Stepan, 1975). It can be argued that the first stage in liberalization, usually the initial step towards democratization, is the emergence of internal conflict within the military between hard-liners and soft-liners through the military government (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 2013). The sources of this inner conflict vary across different transitions, but two are especially relevant. First, it concerns the extent of rights that should be granted to the regime's opponents during the liberalization. Second, it pertains to evaluating how much the military as a government is undermining the prestige and unity of the military as an institution. Both sources directly correlate to cohesion and coordination within the military government and the Armed Forces as an institution.

According to O'Donnell and Schmitter, when the armed forces are not responsible for the regime's policies, they tend to stay uninvolved in the transition process. They may claim their only concern is institutional values and national security, showing indifference towards the new democratic government's emerging rules. However, if the military has a broader and more significant position in the government, the transition period must address the military's role in the post-transitional period. (O'Donnell and Schmitter 2013, 38). In summary, the military's ideology and internal organization during the autocracy era, particularly its level of unity and integration within the armed forces, will impact the

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military's stance during the transition period and, subsequently, the extent to which the armed forces will follow and adhere to the civilian government.

To sum up, for a civil government to be stable and dominant, there needs to be a consensus among the military that they are a state institution and not a political force. When this consensus is absent, and armed groups believe they have the right or obligation to interfere in politics, the military's influence on the civil government will continue to exist.

Institutional conditions can influence the military's self-understanding about their role in a democratic state. Certain norms, such as Article 148 of the Brazilian Constitution, grant the Armed Forces the authority to ensure law and order[4]. However, these norms can be misinterpreted as authorization for the military to meddle in politics.[5] Moreover, the current Chilean Constitution is still the one enacted by Dictator Pinochet in 1980. Although it has undergone significant reforms to eliminate its more anti-democratic features, it remains the same constitution. Fuentes highlights that the democratic authorities have amended the Chilean constitution through a moderate and gradual process rather than sudden changes (Fuentes 2011, 1749). The fact that a constitution drafted by a military dictatorship is still in effect in Chile has led to ongoing debates, and it can also affect the way the military views its role in society. Despite the slow process of modernization that has occurred since the country became a democracy (Batarce and Soriano, 2019), militarism still challenges Chilean society.

According to Linz and Stepan, the third condition necessary for establishing a stable civil government in a democracy is creating a general understanding within society

[4] Original version in Portuguese: "Art. 142. As Forças Armadas, constituídas pela Marinha, pelo Exército e pela Aeronáutica, são instituições nacionais permanentes e regulares, organizadas com base na hierarquia e na disciplina, sob a autoridade suprema do Presidente da República, e destinam-se à defesa da Pátria, à garantia dos poderes constitucionais e, por iniciativa de qualquer destes, da lei e da ordem". Author's translation: "The Armed Forces, made up of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force, are permanent and regular national institutions, organized on the basis of hierarchy and discipline, under the supreme authority of the President of the Republic, and are intended to defend the Fatherland, guarantee constitutional powers and, on the initiative of any of them, law and order"

[5] There are in Brazil some interlocutors defending that the military should intervene to maintain law and order in cases where there is a conflict between the judiciary, legislative, and executive branches, as states, for instance, Ives Gandra Martins (2021) . Martins warns that any such intervention should not be against democracy; nonetheless, this position gives the military an institutional avenue to influence and pressure civilian players, which poses obvious democratic risks.

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that democracy is the only option available (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Diamond expands on this idea by stating that this understanding must be embraced by all three societal layers: the popular mass, the intermediary, and the elites (Diamond, 1999). According to Diamond, "the essence of democratic consolidation is a behavioral and attitudinal embrace of democratic principles by elites and masses" (Diamond 1999, 20). Therefore, if one layer of society views autocracy as a viable political option, democracy is not consolidated. Diamond's theory allows relevant insights in analyzing the military ghost in South America since the transition from the bureaucratic-authoritarian model – the terminology used by O'Donnell to identify the regimes in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile[6] – to the democratic one left consequences on the three social layers referred by Diamond. The main challenge during the transition was establishing the concept of *civil society* as the basis for the new regime since this concept was full of complexities and contradictions during liberalization and democratization.

The lack of a well-established civil society, a condition for democratization and the health of established democracies[7] (Foley and Edwards 1996), was exploited by the military to promote *liberalization* without implying *democratization*. This scenario was mainly present in Brazil, which had a political transition characterized by a *slow and gradual opening* ("abertura lenta e gradual").

After establishing the two conditions for the emergence of the military ghost, I evaluate the extent to which these conditions are present in Southern Cone and Brazil,

[6] According to O'Donnel, the defining characteristic of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state are "(a) higher governmental positions usually are occupied by persons who come to them after successful careers in complex and highly bureaucratized organizations-the armed forces, the public bureaucracy, and large private firms; (b) political exclusion, in that it aims at closing channels of political access to the popular sector and its allies so as to deactivate them politically, not only by means of repression but also through the imposition of vertical (corporatist) controls by the state on such organizations as labor unions; (c) economic exclusion, in that it reduces or postpones indefinitely the aspiration to economic participation of the popular sector; (d) depoliticization, in the sense that it pretends to reduce social and political issues to "technical" problems to be resolved by means of interactions among the higher echelons of the abovementioned organizations; and (e) it corresponds to a stage of important transformations in the mechanisms of capital accumulation of its society, changes that are, in turn, a part of the "deepening" process of a peripheral and dependent capitalism characterized by extensive industrialization" (O'Donnell 1978, 6).

[7] In seminal work, Foley and Edwards debate the paradoxes of civil society and how this concept "leaves many questions unanswered" (1996, p. 38). Among these questions, certainly some concern the definitional issue, "arising from the different ways in which civil society has been applied in various times and places" (p. 38).

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especially concerning how institutions and social, economic, and political conjunctures favor the phenomenon occurrence.

2. THE *MILITARY GHOST* HAUNTING SOUTH AMERICA: MILITARY INFLUENCE AND THE DEMOCRATIC STATUS OF ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, CHILE, AND URUGUAY.

In this section, I analyze the status of democracy in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile concerning the military ghost. As mentioned earlier, the military ghost phenomenon results from two interconnected conditions: democratic disillusionment and the perception that the civil government cannot control the military. Therefore, factors such as the autonomy of accountability and governmental institutions and the military's role in the state are crucial in assessing the status of democratic governance in the region.

Considering the focus on elements correlated to the military influence in politics, I analyze each country's electoral freedom level, evaluating how much the military influences the electoral process. Then, I analyze the degree of autonomy of the civil government concerning the military, considering the extent to which the military takes part - or has the means to participate - in the political decision-making process. Finally, I evaluate the military's role within the country, determining whether it is only configured as a state institution or has a political structure and if a social perception exists that the military represents a political alternative within society.

2.1. ELECTORAL FREEDOM IN THE SOUTHERN CONE COUNTRIES

Competitive elections are an essential dimension of democracy. The Schumpeterian concept that democracy consists of a method of choosing political leaders (Schumpeter 2003) is often criticized for reducing the democratic regime to a formal procedure (Lorencini 2018), setting aside substantive democratic values, such as political equality and universal access to essential goods. However, in the real world, where democratic regimes are far from the abstract and ideal principles of democracy, participation in free and fair elections represents the democratic climax.

Dahl recognizes the distance between the ideal and the feasible for democracy. For this reason, he prefers using the term *polyarchy*, defined as a "relatively (but

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incompletely) democratized regime characterized by inclusive participation and public contestation." (Dahl 1972, 12) According to Dahl, these two dimensions – inclusive participation and public contestation – are achieved when citizens can form and signify preferences and have their preferences weighed equally in government conduct. (Dahl 1972) These conditions are obtained through some institutional guarantees: i. Freedom to form and join organizations, ii. Freedom of expression, iii. Right to vote, iv. Eligibility for public office, v. Right of political leaders to compete for votes, vi. Alternative sources of information, vii. Free and fair elections, viii. Institutions for making governmental policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference (Dahl 1972). Dahl's theoretical dimensions are an excellent approach to understanding electoral freedom, which is not fulfilled with mere elections. In IDEA International's report, the state of liberal democracy is based on four categories: the quality of political representation, political rights, rule of law, and political participation. Electoral freedom connects with all these categories but has an immediate correlation with *political representation* – derived from factors such as free and fair elections, eligibility of most public positions, political party freedom, among others – and *political participation*, which is correlated with the degree of suffrage inclusiveness, level of electoral participation, and the strength of civil society.

Regarding South America, IDEA informs that the region performed well in electoral participation and representation, with most countries fulfilling positions in national government through elections. Chile and Uruguay are among the 20 best-ranking countries in the IDEA world ranking concerning political representation and participation (IDEA 2023). However, following the trend in the continent, the Southern Cone countries are also observing a drop in electoral freedom due to populism and increased militarization. In a political polarization scenario, militarism's shadow has grown in countries like Brazil and Chile (IDEA 2023).

In Brazil, during the 2022 elections, Jair Bolsonaro defended the military participation in the vote-counting procedure, including the right to access the source codes of the digital voting machines (Poder 360 2022). In several moments, Bolsonaro questioned the Brazilian electoral system and the integrity of the electoral voting

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machine, putting himself and his government in an open and direct conflict against the Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral – TSE)*, which develops the role of electoral accountability institution in the country (CNN Brasil 2023). The military participation in the electoral process created an environment of institutional tension during the 2022 elections, decreasing electoral freedom.

In Chile, facing a wave of widespread riots in 2019, President Sebastián Piñera called in the military using the constitutional provision of the "state of emergence," recovering for many "the image of soldiers in the streets and enforcing curfews immediately brought back dark memories." (Aguero 2019) The militarization persisted during the Piñera government, with the militarization of four provinces in South Chile due to the territorial conflict between the Chilean state and Indigenous native communities (France24 2021). Even the election of President Gabriel Boric's left-wing government did not prevent the strengthening of military presence in political matters (Inglis 2023).

A good measurement of electoral freedom, at least in what refers to the military influence in elections, concerns the autonomy of the Election Management Body (EMB). The EMB is responsible for auditing and controlling the electoral process, assuring its independence from the government or other institutions, such as political parties or the military. In this sense, as with any accountability institution, a golden rule for the EMB is its independence and impartiality since it cannot be controlled in its decisions by other organizations, and, at the same time, it must refrain from beneficiating any candidature.

The following graph, based on data from the V-Dem research, shows the level of EMB autonomy in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (figure 8). The graph shows interesting data: despite the issues concerning military influence in politics, Brazil and Chile are better ranked in terms of EMB autonomy. The electoral accountability institution in Brazil is the Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*), which integrates the Judiciary system and is entirely independent of other institutions. In Chile, the *Servicio Electoral* is also an autonomous organization, with the members of the Director Conseil being chosen by the president and confirmed by the Senate. In Argentina, the country with the worst evaluation, the EMB is the *Dirección Nacional Electoral*, which integrates the

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Department of the Interior into the Argentinian government. In Uruguay, the *Corte Electoral* is an autonomous organization, with its members appointed by Congress.

Figure 1. Autonomy of the Election Management Body (EMB)

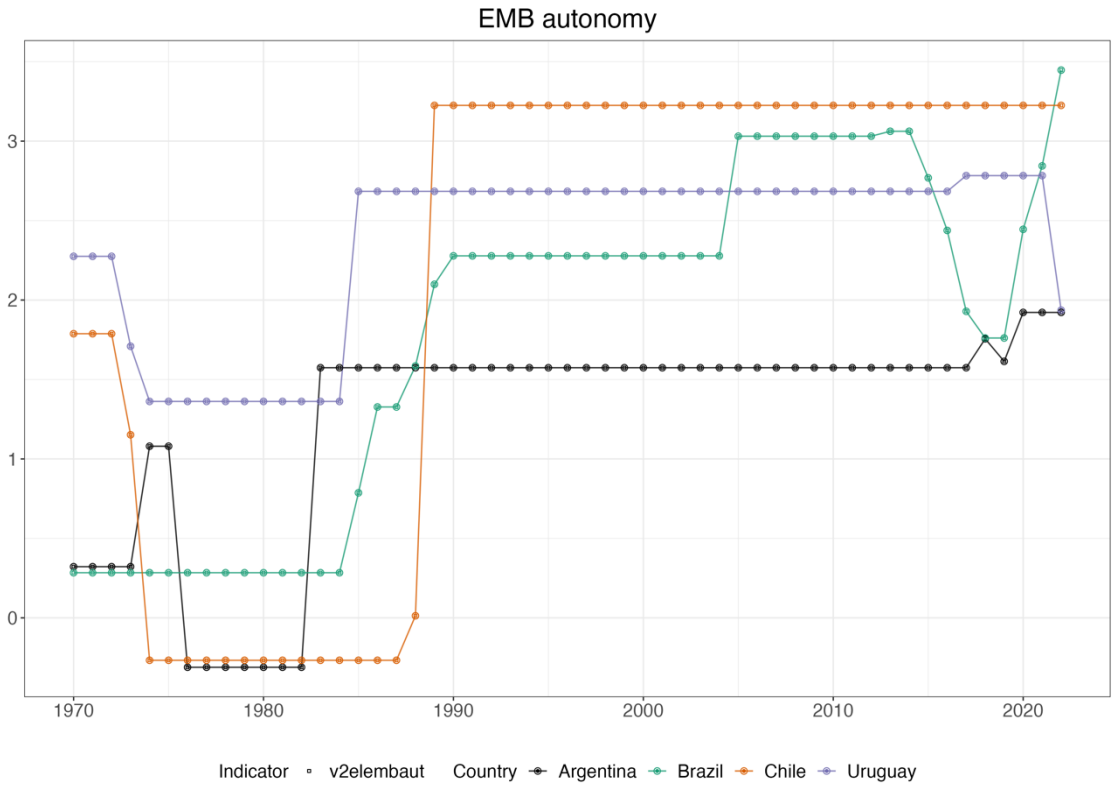

Figure 8. EMB Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.

In conclusion, the military influence on politics can reach different levels of electoral freedom, varying from a basic form – such as controlling or influencing the elections – to more complex and dissimulated mechanisms, such as hidden negotiations or public manifestations in favor or against politicians or political parties. In the field of accountability in the electoral system, Brazil and Chile were able to build a more independent Electoral Management Body, which is essential to prevent military influence, at least in the basic form mentioned earlier.

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2.2. THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTONOMY FROM THE MILITARY

As discussed earlier, the subordination of the military to a civil government is a crucial factor in democratization. This circumstance is particularly significant in South American countries where democratic consolidation is still under work. Given the military's history in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, it is essential to pay close attention to the limits of the Armed Forces' role in the democratic regime. The presumption is that the more restricted the military is to national defense issues, the better it is for democratic stability.

However, the scenario in South America is going in the opposite direction. Corrales mentions that the region risks becoming a "land of militarized democracies" (Corrales 2019). He argues that there is a growing trend of civil governments in South America to appeal to the military to face political or social challenges. In 2019, Chile experienced popular protests and violence on the streets. In an effort to reestablish social order and end the disturbances, President Piñera declared a state of emergency in the country and called upon the Armed Forces to assist. Meanwhile, throughout his government in Brazil, Bolsonaro frequently relied on the military to act in various areas of state politics, including holding significant public positions.

Can the increment of military influence in political matters mean a return to the past, that is, a step backward in democratization, with the military recovering their space in the decision-making process? Pion-Berlin and Acácio disagree with this prognosis, arguing that while "today's wider military presence might stir troubling echoes of days gone by, the current wave of military activism in Latin America is, in fact, not a return to the past" (Pion-Berlin and Acácio 2020 152). According to Pion-Berlin, the military's role in democracy surpasses the national defense, including three significant roles: i. Internal security due to the presence of organized crime and high levels of violence; ii. Response to national disasters, and iii. Social programs and civic actions (Pion-Berlin 2016). The authors argue that these military activities do not mean any defiance of civilian control; instead, the "current wave of military activity has been happening *because* of civilian control" (Pion-Berlin and Acácio 2020, 153).

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Despite Pion-Berlin and Acácio's observations, I argue that this growing military participation in political matters is the more concrete expression of the military ghost. If the military ghost in politics results from the two variables mentioned in a previous section – disenchantment with democracy and absence of civilian government control – the democratic militarization mentioned by Corrales expresses how the *ghost* evolves in everyday politics.

Attributing to military activities such as responding to natural disasters or implementing social programs may seem harmless. However, the deviation from the traditional military role of national defense has risks. Firstly, if this deviation is done without institutional support, that is, disregarding the constitutional definition of the military role, the legal limits for the military are mitigated. The potential danger of this approach is straightforward: While the role of the Armed Forces may be adaptable for positive purposes, such as when soldiers work to limit the effects of a natural disaster or combat organized crime, it is also adjustable for harmful purposes, meaning that it may provide an opportunity for the military to become directly involved in political affairs.

Secondly, according to the proverb, *bad habits are like a comfortable bed: easy to get into but hard to get out;* the more democratic governments appeal to the military to solve their political issues, the more they increase their political influence. Along the same line, if the social perception of the "Armed Forces alternative" is one of the variables that express the military ghost, it seems clear that continually exposing the military as a multirole institution to society can contribute to the feeling that the Armed Forces is "always there" as a problem solver.

Thirdly, using the military for activities different from natural activities can contribute to an institutional deficit in South American countries. Using the military to perform internal security duties generally reserved for the national police can lead politicians to neglect investment and improvement of the police force. The same applies to protests, social disturbances, and natural disasters. Soldiers trained for combat and defense should not be used to address issues entirely different from their traditional duties. Doing so can harm the state's efficiency in providing public services.

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The appointed risks do not mean that any military function that exceeds national defense represents a risk to democracy. The warning is related more to the need for a clear institutional basis for these extraordinary activities than any alert of imminent democratic collapse. I agree with Pion-Berlin and Acácio's point that these military activities do not necessarily mean a return to the past, mainly because it is relevant to remember Levitsky and Ziblatt's observation that democratic crisis in current times is correlated to the behavior of civilian elected leaders, rather than with the military assuming political power in one day with tanks and arms (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Therefore, in a democratic environment and an international context of peace, it seems reasonable to attribute the military extra-functions as coherent and adaptable to its institutional capacity. However, the danger resides in the military's level of autonomy for making decisions that should belong to the political field and in the absence of an explicit institutional provision that defines the military extra functions. It is essential for democratic preservation that the army acts under civil command and within the limits imposed by civilian institutions.

The conditions described above have not been observed in Brazil and Chile. Brazil has a longstanding tradition of GLO (Garantia da Lei e da Ordem) acts. These acts involve a temporary presidential authorization for the military to work in severe social disturbance cases, aiming to restore law and order. This practice is not limited to any particular government in Brazil, as both right and left-wing administrations have regularly enacted GLO decrees.

Article 142 of the Brazilian Constitution is often used to justify the deployment of the Armed Forces in public safety operations (GLO). However, this interpretation is not literal because the article does not explicitly mention this type of action. This constitutional gap complicates things, especially considering the military has frequently acted as a security force in poor Brazilian communities. This circumstance raises concerns about protecting human rights and the accountability mechanisms to regulate military conduct (Passos, 2020).

In Chile, for the first 20 years after democratization, the government did not use the Armed Forces for internal tasks or declared a state of emergency that constitutionally

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would allow. However, during Piñera's first two presidential terms (2010-2014 and 2018-2022), he initiated plans that included the military as a means of maintaining law and order: the *Plan Frontera Norte* (2011) and the *Plan Frontera Norte Segura* (2018) (Abbott 2023).

In Argentina and Uruguay, military use for missions external to national defense has been a topic of public debate. Despite these countries having a more restricted military utilization for extra-national defense matters compared to their neighbors, there are law reform proposals to amplify this possibility. The concern of human rights organizations and scholars is increased human rights violations and lack of accountability for military actions (Acuña et al. 2018; Amnistía Internacional 2019).

2.3. THE MILITARY'S INSTITUTIONAL ROLE AND THE MILITARY AS A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

The design of military institutions is crucial in defining their role in a democratic government. As mentioned earlier, one of the challenges during a transition is determining the boundaries and responsibilities of the Armed Forces as an institution. It is necessary to strike a balance in creating a design that maintains the credibility and importance of the military in a democracy but prevents them from having undue influence in politics. The country's constitution is the best source to analyze the institutional role of the military. The constitutional design is a critical moment for democratization since the constitution receives inputs from the interplay between incumbents and opposition. Theoretically, the military's empowerment level in the new democratic government depends on the balance of power favoring them during the transition.

The constitution should only define the roles and structure of the military. However, if the military takes control of the political transition, the constitutional text goes beyond these primary factors and deals with issues related to military careers. This definition includes establishing privileges and providing differentiated treatment compared to other public careers.

The following table describes how the military is ruled in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, identifying separately the essential roles and other provisions:

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Table 1. Constitutional provisions about the military in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay

Country	**Norm defining the essential role**	**Other provisions**
Brazil	Art. 142. The Armed Forces, constituted by the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force, are permanent and regular national institutions organized based on hierarchy and discipline, under the supreme authority of the president of the Republic, and are intended to defend the Homeland, to guarantee constitutional powers and, at the initiative of any of them, law and order.	• Military career rules (art. 142, §3º, sections I, II, VI, VII, VIII, X) • Prohibition of unionization and strikes (art. 142, §3º, section IV) • Prohibition of political affiliation to the military staff (art. 142, §3º, section V) • Military commanders as members of the *Conselho da Defesa Nacional* (art. 91, section VIII)
Argentina	The Argentinean constitution has no explicit norm about the Armed Forces organization and roles. These provisions are part of the *Ley de Defensa Nacional* (statute n. 23.554/88).	• President as commander in chief (art. 99, section 12)
Chile	Article 90. The forces dependent on the Ministry in charge of national defense are constituted solely and exclusively by the Armed Forces and the Law Enforcement and Public Security Forces. The Armed Forces consist of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. They exist to	• Ingress in the military career (art. 91) • Appointment by the president of the military commanders (art. 93) • Promotion and retirements in military career (art. 94) • Military commanders as members of the *Consejo de Seguridad Nacional* (art. 95)

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Country	Norm defining the essential role	Other provisions
	defend the homeland, are essential for national security, and guarantee the institutional order of the Republic. The Law Enforcement and Public Security Forces consist only of Carabineros and Investigations. They constitute the public force and exist to effectively enforce the law and guarantee public order and internal public security as determined by their respective organic laws. Carabineros will also be integrated with the Armed Forces to ensure the institutional order of the Republic. The Armed Forces and Carabineros, as armed bodies, are essentially obedient and not deliberative. The forces dependent on the Ministry in charge of National Defense are also professional, hierarchical, and disciplined.	• Function of preserving the rule of law during elections and plebiscites (art. 18, section)
Uruguay	The Uruguayan constitution has no explicit norm about the Armed Forces organization and roles. The *Ley Orgánica de las Fuerzas Armadas* (statute n. 19775/19) provides the legal foundations for	• Nobody is obliged to provide their own home for the military except by a judicial order (art. 35). • Prohibition of the politicization of the military (art. 77, section 4)

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Country	Norm defining the essential role	Other provisions
	the military in the country.	

Table 2. Military constitutional basis

The table shows a scenario in which Brazil and Chile's constitutions contain more intense institutional provisions about the military. In contrast, Argentina and Uruguay have more limited constitutional treatment of the military. Theoretically, the former countries have a constitutional configuration that favors the military ghost, while in the latter, the constitution works as a safeguard against military influence.

Besides the institutional configuration, it is relevant to consider the social perception of the military's role within the State. If the military remains a political alternative to society, it is possible to affirm that democratic stability can be in crisis since the authority of the democratic government can be under constant threat[8].

Regarding democratic stability in the Southern Cone and Brazil, some data can help provide a better analysis. First, the following graph (figure 9) shows the level of electoral freedom of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay in the V-Dem index, which is a foundational element for democratic stability (Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell et al. 2022a).

Figure V-Dem'sm's ranking of electoral democracy in the Southern Cone and Brazil

[8] Several works explore the current democratic crisis. To mention some: (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mounk 2018; Przeworski 2019)

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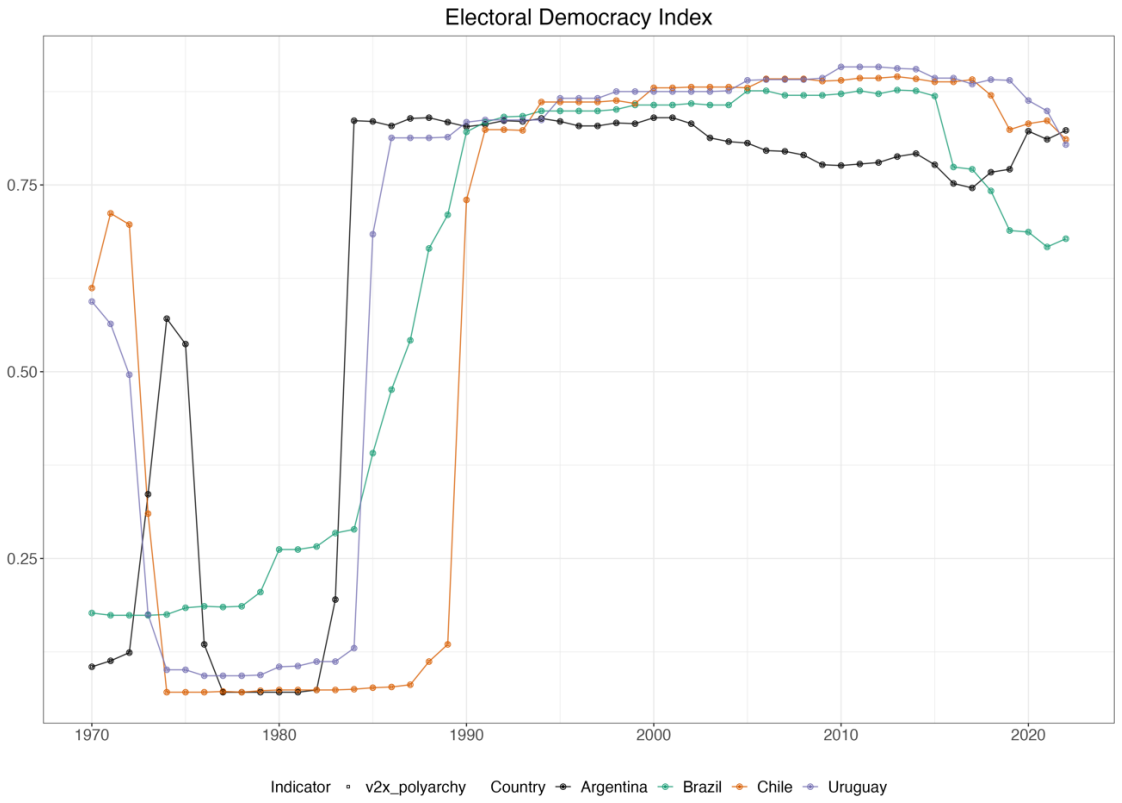

Figure 9. Electoral democracy ranking of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay

The region currently performs well on the electoral democracy scale, with a score closer to 1 representing higher performance and closer to 0 representing lower performance. Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay are in the superior quadrant of the ranking, while Brazil has a mid-range performance. Based on this empirical data, it is reasonable to affirm that the foundational requirements for a democratic regime are well-established in these countries, indicating democratic consolidation in the region.

However, a deeper exploration concerning democratic stability, especially regarding military influence, can reveal some challenges for the Southern Cone countries and Brazil. For instance, according to V-Dem's research on the groups that the current political regime depends on to maintain power, the data (as shown in Figure 10) indicates that the military still plays a significant role.

Figure 2. The military support for the political regime in the Southern Cone and Brazil

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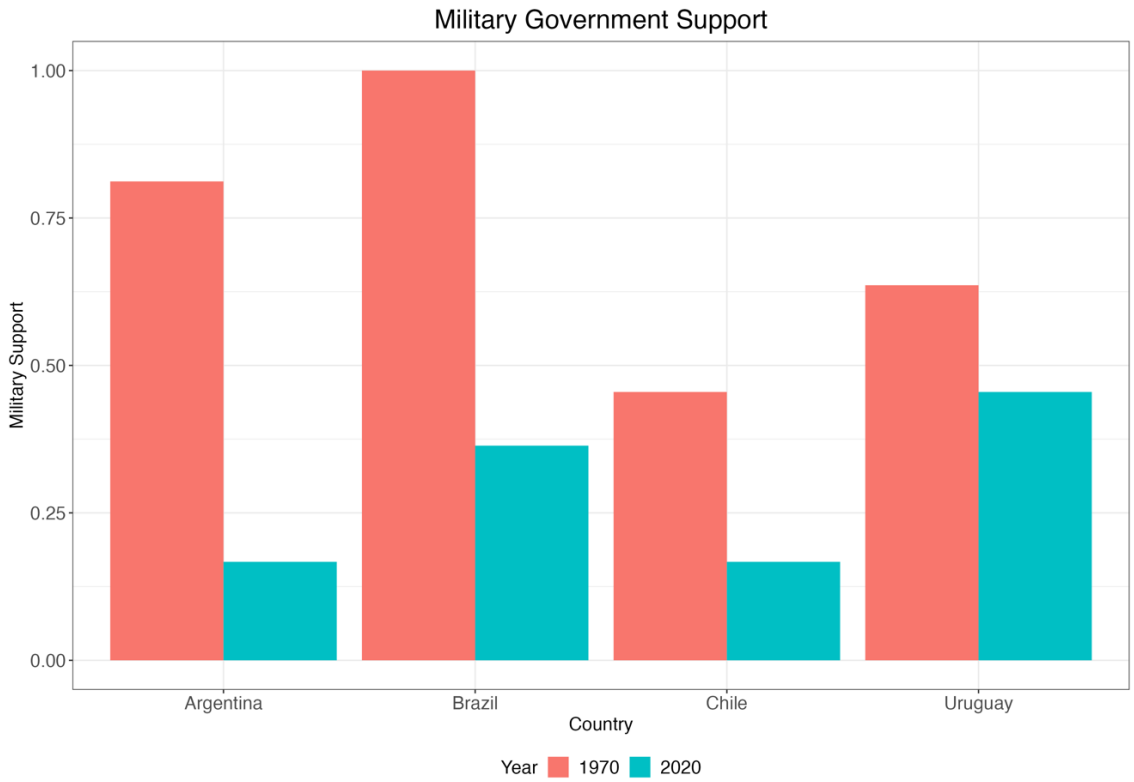

Figure 10. The military as a support group for the government in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell et al. 2022b)

The available data indicates that in 1970, Brazil was already under a dictatorship, and the other countries were experiencing political turmoil that led to military autocracy. In contrast, in 2020, the relationship between the civil government and the military has improved. However, regarding this topic, Brazil and Uruguay still perform moderately. It is important to note that the V-Dem research relies on opinion surveys, which can be limited in accuracy. Furthermore, the survey's multiple-choice question included other groups, such as business elites and religious groups, which could have introduced bias into the answers.

To sum up, the social perception of military influence is still present in the South American countries under consideration, which is one more factor that sustains the existence of the military ghost phenomenon in this context.

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CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data and analysis above, Brazil faces more challenges than any other country studied regarding the military's influence on politics. Despite reestablishing democracy in 1988, the military did not leave politics. Instead, they continued to exert their influence behind the scenes, creating a monitored democracy. As shown in Zaverucha's work, all post-democratization civilian presidents had to make concessions and give political space to the military; otherwise, they risked tensions and threats. (2000)

Despite the military ghost being present in Brazil during the post-democratization period, during Bolsonaro's mandate, it left the shadows and assumed an explicit position in the Brazilian government. While this study is being developed, Bolsonaro and his staff are accused of planning a state coup in 2022, which would be carried out by denying eventual defeat in elections and the military avoiding the opposition to assume the mandate (BBC News Brazil 2024)The accusation against Bolsonaro is incipient, and further investigation is needed; however, the fact that this event is currently debated in Brazil demonstrates how the country still faces challenges in overcoming its military roots.

At a lower level than Brazil, Chile also deals with the reminiscence of militarism in its politics. The main circumstance that shows the presence of the military ghost in politics is the persistence of Pinochet's constitution ruling the country. Although the text has been significantly changed, extricating the authoritarian features of Pinochet's period, the persistence of the military dictatorship's main document has a symbolic effect on society, causing intense political polarization.

This situation in Chile is well demonstrated by the two failed tries to replace Pinochet's constitution. In 2020, after the violent riots in 2019, a plebiscite was held where 78% of Chileans voted to create a new constitution to replace the one established during the dictatorship. However, in the 2022 plebiscite, 62% of the voters rejected the proposed text, which had leftist tendencies (The Economist 2022)As a result, a new plebiscite was held in 2023, this time with a conservative text. This attempt was also defeated, with 55% of Chileans voting against it.

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The polarized political scenario in Chile has several causes, but undoubtedly, the ashes of the dictatorship still contaminate Chilean society. Even though the data shows a good performance of the country in the rankings of quality, Chilean democracy will only be free of the reminiscences of militarism when extricating all structures that grounded the autocratic period. Some of these structures are explicit, such as the case of the Constitution; some are hidden in the shadows of the government and society.

Uruguay and Argentina seem more efficient in undermining the military ghost despite facing different political, economic, and social scenarios. The former is the democracy with the better performance in the main rankings, and its politics is known as the more progressive in the continent. The latter has been facing successive political, social, and economic crises, dealing with high inflation, an increase in poverty, and political polarization. Despite these differences, both countries were able to reduce military influence in politics, turning militarism into a topic out of the political debate.

In this paper, I exposed the idea of the military ghost in politics, its characteristics, and how it has been present in the Southern Cone and Brazil. In future studies, I will explore arguable causes and correlations to the phenomenon, assuming the political transition as a starting point for this analysis.

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