



Military and Civil Society in Conflict Areas: A Sociological-Legal Study on the Dynamics of Power and Legitimacy

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Abstract: *This article examines the complex interactions between the military and civil society in regions affected by conflict, approached from a sociological-legal perspective. The study seeks to understand how military power influences civil society, the ways in which legal and social legitimacy are established, and how local communities respond to military presence and control. Employing a qualitative case-study methodology, the research utilized in-depth interviews with community members and military personnel, extensive field observations, and detailed analysis of relevant legal documents. The findings reveal that military power structures significantly impact civil rights, security, and social dynamics, with interactions ranging from cooperative engagement to open conflict. Furthermore, the legitimacy of military actions is closely linked to factors such as operational performance, transparency, accountability, and social acceptance by local populations. Based on these insights, the article argues for the importance of improving communication channels between military forces and communities, integrating formal legal frameworks with local norms and practices, and actively involving community members in security and governance programs. These measures are proposed as strategies to enhance the legitimacy of military operations, reduce conflict, and promote long-term social stability. The study contributes to the broader understanding of civil-military relations by highlighting the sociological and legal dimensions of military influence in conflict-affected areas.*

Keywords: *Civil society, Conflict, Legitimacy, Military, Sociology of law.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in certain regions often result in significant changes in the relationship between the military and civil society. The military not only plays a role in maintaining security but also influences social, economic, and cultural structures within the affected communities (Huntington, Samuel P, 1957). This interaction raises important questions about legal and social legitimacy: how is military power accepted or resisted by society, and to what extent do formal law and social norms serve as the basis for control and societal acceptance (Kaldor, Mary., 2012: 56).

Sociology of law is relevant as it provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of power, legal compliance, and legitimacy in conflict contexts. According to Ehrlich, law is not merely a set of formal norms but also a social reality practiced and accepted by the community (Ehrlich, Eugen, 2002: 90). This approach allows researchers to examine the complex relationships between the military, law, and civil society in conflict situations.

This study aims to: (1) analyze how military power affects civil society; (2) identify factors determining military and legal legitimacy; and (3) explore forms of community responses, ranging from cooperation to resistance against military control. The main research questions include: How does the structure of military power interact with civil society? How is legal and social legitimacy formed in the midst of conflict? (Weber, Max , 1978: 52).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociology of Law

Sociology of law emphasizes that law is not only a set of formal rules but also a social reality practiced and accepted by society. According to Ehrlich, effective law aligns with social practices and community norms. This is particularly relevant in conflict contexts, where military law and formal law must interact with local norms to achieve social legitimacy.

Theory of Military Power

Huntington argues that the military is a professional actor with specialized loyalty and discipline, playing both political and social roles in society. Military power is expressed through territorial control, operational decision-making, and intervention in civil life. Hierarchical structures and chains of command influence the effectiveness and nature of military-civil interactions (Janowitz, Morris, 1960: 67).

Legitimacy Theory

Weber distinguishes three types of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal.

- a. Traditional legitimacy: authority recognized based on custom or tradition.
- b. Charismatic legitimacy: authority accepted due to the abilities or charm of military leaders.
- c. Rational-legal legitimacy: authority based on formal law and accepted procedures.
- d. In conflict contexts, military legitimacy often combines formal law, military performance, and social acceptance (Suchman, Mark C, 1995: 571-160).

Conflict and Civil Society

Civil society can act cooperatively, neutrally, or resistively toward military control (Gurr, Ted Robert, 1970: 86).

- a) Cooperative: participating in military security or development programs.
- b) Neutral: avoiding conflict, remaining passive toward military policies.
- c) Resistive: rejecting military control, engaging in protest or resistance.

Social participation theory and conflict case studies emphasize that community responses are influenced by experience, local norms, and perceptions of legitimacy (Tilly, Charles, 2008: 52).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics between the military and civil society in conflict contexts. A qualitative method is chosen because it enables the exploration of meanings, perceptions, and social experiences that cannot be fully captured through quantitative data (Creswell, John W, 2013: 23-27). The case study design allows contextual analysis of power structures, legitimacy, and community responses within a specific setting (Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba, 1985: 23).

The research location was selected purposively based on the presence of conflict characteristics or significant military involvement. Research subjects include military personnel, community leaders, civil society organizations, and directly affected residents. Data collection techniques consist of in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis of national regulations and relevant operational policies (Flick, Uwe, 2014: 45).

Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, thematic categorization, and reflective interpretation to identify patterns linking military power and social legitimacy. Research validity was ensured through source and method triangulation to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings (Yin, Robert K, 2018:60).

4. RESULT AND AND DISCUSSION

Structure of Military Power and Operational Patterns

The findings indicate that military power structures in conflict areas are hierarchical and centralized, with decision-making dominated by vertical chains of command. This model enhances operational effectiveness, particularly in situations requiring rapid security responses. However, socially, such a structure often creates communicative distance between military personnel and civil society.

In territorial control, the military performs security functions through routine patrols, access restrictions, and coordination with civilian authorities. According to Buzan and Wæver, security is not purely military but also encompasses social and political dimensions shaping perceptions of threats and state legitimacy (Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver, 2003: 56). Field findings reveal that when security policies are communicated transparently and participatively, public acceptance increases significantly. Conversely, coercive approaches without dialogue tend to generate social tension.

Thus, military power structures influence not only security effectiveness but also the construction of social legitimacy. Closed and rigid authority may be perceived as domination, whereas communicative authority is more readily accepted as protection.

Military–Civil Interaction: Between Cooperation and Tension

The research demonstrates that military–civil interaction exists along a spectrum between cooperation and conflict. In several instances, communities adopted cooperative attitudes by participating in social programs, infrastructure development, and security dialogue forums. This reflects a model of civil-military relations grounded in social integration.

However, tensions arise when security policies affect economic activities or freedom of movement. From a power-relations perspective, Foucault argues that power operates through surveillance, discipline, and normalization of behavior (Foucault, Michel, 1977: 105). Intensive monitoring practices in conflict zones are often interpreted by communities as restrictions on civil autonomy.

The findings also emphasize the importance of procedural justice. When communities perceive fair treatment and have access to complaint mechanisms, resistance decreases. Conversely, perceptions of discrimination or excessive measures increase distrust toward military institutions.

Legitimacy, Social Perception, and Long-Term Stability

Military legitimacy in conflict contexts is dynamic and context-dependent. Community perception analysis shows that legitimacy relies not only on formal legality but also on effective protection and respect for civil rights. In political legitimacy theory, Beetham asserts that legitimacy consists of legality, normative justification, and expressed consent (Beetham, David, 2013: 29).

In this study, the legality of security policies was generally acknowledged due to their grounding in national law. However, normative and social legitimacy strongly depended on policy implementation. Proportional, transparent actions that respect local norms tend to strengthen public trust. Conversely, disproportionate measures may undermine legitimacy even if formally lawful.

Overall, long-term stability in conflict areas is determined not solely by military strength but also by the quality of social relations between the military and society. Legitimacy built through dialogue, fairness, and respect for social norms proves more sustainable than dominance-based approaches.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the interaction between the military and civil society in conflict contexts is complex, dynamic, and multifaceted. Hierarchical and centralized military power structures may effectively ensure short-term security stability; however, without communication and transparency, they risk creating social distance. Operational effectiveness does not automatically translate into social legitimacy.

The findings further confirm that military legitimacy depends not solely on the formal legality of security policies but also on their proportional, fair, and socially sensitive implementation. Perceptions of procedural justice, access to complaint mechanisms, and opportunities for community participation are critical factors in fostering public trust.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that legitimacy is a social construction emerging from the interaction between power, law, and societal acceptance. Practically, long-term stability in conflict areas is more likely to be achieved through dialogical and participatory approaches rather than dominance-based security measures alone.

Recommendations

First, mechanisms for communication between the military and civil society should be strengthened through regular dialogue forums, transparent security policies, and the involvement of community leaders in decision-making processes that directly affect residents. Such measures may reduce social distance and enhance normative legitimacy.

Second, the implementation of security policies must emphasize proportionality, accountability, and respect for civil rights. Establishing accessible and independent complaint mechanisms will strengthen perceptions of procedural justice and reduce the potential for social resistance.

Third, further longitudinal research is necessary to assess the long-term impact of military–civil relations on social stability and post-conflict development. Comparative studies across different regions would also be valuable in identifying general patterns and contextual variables influencing legitimacy.

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