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To cite this article: Burhan Findıklı (24 May 2023): The military involvement and extraordinary policymaking in higher education: evidence from Turkey, Policy Studies, DOI: [10.1080/01442872.2023.2215729](https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2023.2215729)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2023.2215729>



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Published online: 24 May 2023.



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The military involvement and extraordinary policymaking in higher education: evidence from Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Armed forces have been involved in higher education reform processes as either the sole or dominant reform actors in various regions of the world throughout the twentieth century and onwards. During the rule of (interim) military governments or juntas, higher education institutions and systems have been considerably affected by top-down reform initiatives. However, we know relatively little about what role they have played in reform processes and what kind of change outcomes these reforms have produced. Against this backdrop, this study brings two largely unexplored phenomena into the forefront of higher education policy: extraordinary policymaking and military involvement in policy reforms. Theoretically, it crystallizes certain propositions about the nature and actors of policymaking and develops some insights into change expectations based on historical institutionalism and the available empirical research. Empirically, it examines three illustrative case studies, i.e., higher education reforms in Turkey, which came after the 1960, 1971, and 1980 military interventions, in terms of institutional and systemic governance. Even though the analysis offers empirical knowledge only on the case of Turkey, its conceptual and theoretical underpinnings may have relevance for further studies on other countries that have experienced similar processes in higher education policymaking.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 July 2022
Accepted 14 May 2023

KEYWORDS

Higher education
governance; extraordinary
policymaking; military;
historical institutionalism;
Turkey

Introduction

Higher education (HE) policy is simply about how HE institutions are governed, funded, managed internally, coordinated, and structured at a national level (Meek 2018). HE policies have traditionally been designed, implemented, and evaluated by political parties, state actors from ministries to agencies, and representatives from the academic world. The increasing involvement of non-state actors characterizes the current trend in HE policymaking (e.g., market forces, interest groups, and other stakeholders), which ultimately makes the HE policy a multi-actor initiative.

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Over the last decades, research on HE policy has gained ground in identifying relevant policy actors and their impacts on reforms and exploring the multifarious set of interactions, alliances, and conflicts between them, which ultimately determine policy outcomes. More recently, scholars have delved into the effects of specific organizational actors on policy processes, such as evaluative agencies (Capano and Turri 2017) or stakeholder organizations (Vukasovic 2017), by singling out one type from a multi-actor institutional set-up.

However, we are still in the dark when it comes to understanding the role of certain policy actors in HE policymaking. The influence military governments have exerted on HE policy reforms during the second half of the twentieth century and onwards in certain policy settings, for instance, has largely remained understudied. This article thus aims to contribute to the HE policy literature that explores actor constellations by bringing a mostly unexplored element into question: How can the influence of armed forces on policy reform processes in HE be conceptualized; and what kind of policy outcomes could be expected under a military rule?

This question can seem untimely as military involvement in politics, a conventional way of democratic breakdown, has declined in frequency after the end of the Cold War (Bermeo 2016). The recent scholarship focusing on democratic backsliding deals with either decline in the quality of democracy within diverse political regimes in terms of, among others, participation, competition, and accountability or “executive takeovers” (Svolik 2019) – the subversion of democracy by elected officials – than direct military takeovers (see Waldner and Lust 2018). Scholars of HE policy has similarly studied democratic backsliding in the context of the deterioration of university autonomy under hybrid regimes (Tomic and Radeljcic 2022).

It is true that military involvement in politics or policymaking, either via coups or indirect ways, has become less conventional. Nevertheless, they are not yet fully obsolete or out of the question, even in established democracies. Furthermore, military intervention in certain policy areas, such as HE, has been rarely studied or explored. We can thus derive general lessons by studying historical cases that speak to the concerns of the present.

This article has both theoretical and empirical (or case-specific) aims. To deal with the questions, which have attracted little attention among HE and education policy scholars, it builds some preliminary propositions into what to expect when militaries intervene in HE policies. To this end, the paper combines insights of the concept of extraordinary policymaking (Keeler 1993), the historical institutionalist approach, the research literature on civil-military relations, and the available empirical studies focusing on the reform processes under military governments. The aim is to make inroads into the understanding of the military as an extraordinary policy reform actor in HE. Empirically, it presents a comparative analysis of the three illustrative cases: e.g., the HE reforms that came after the 1960, 1971, and 1980 military interventions in Turkey. These three cases are typical cases, namely representatives of the phenomenon under study, given the scope (contextual) conditions of the theoretical arguments developed in the remainder of the article.

The article is organized as follows. It begins by introducing the theoretical framework and the methodological approach that would inform the study. The following sections respectively discuss and compare the outcomes of three HE reforms in terms of institutional and systemic governance. The paper ends with remarks on the limitation and contributions of the paper.

Theoretical framework

Extraordinary policymaking and the military as a policy actor

The military's role as a sole or dominant reform actor in HE, a largely uncharted territory in HE policy studies, has consequences in our normative presumptions about democratic policymaking in two respects. The first is about the type of policy actors. A basic premise of the democratic theory is that civilian control over the armed forces is a *sine qua non* for a democratic rule in which policies are, in principle, made and implemented by civilians (Burk 2002). The principal-agent framework, as deployed by civil-military relations scholars, expresses the ideal mode of interaction between civilians (the principal) and the military (the agent) in a democratic polity (Feaver 2003). Nonetheless, as the history of military interventions in politics demonstrates, different modes of interaction between *civilian* and *military* actors are possible.

The second is about the nature of policymaking. In this respect, I make a distinction between *ordinary* and *extraordinary* policymaking for analytical purposes. The concept of extraordinary policymaking was originally used by Keeler (1993) to describe the situations in which a temporary policy window for substantial reform is opened by either a government's achievement of an impressive *mandate* or by the onset of a severe socio-economic and/or political *crisis*. These two window-opening mechanisms, i.e., electoral landslides and crises, make extraordinary policymaking possible. In this paper, I am interested in crisis-induced policymaking processes in which the military emerges as the sole or dominant reform actor.

The first possibility applies to democratic policymaking in which civilians are the main actors. Impressive electoral victories come at critical moments and encourage winners, i.e. a mandate-driven reform government, to make extensive reforms with radical change implications. On the other hand, a crisis can also create a political context that is uniquely conducive to an array of reforms. A crisis can trigger a sense of urgency among the political and bureaucratic elite, including the military, predicated on the expectation that already severe problems will be aggravated by inaction (see also Gourévitch 1986). It can also prompt a sense of fear if combined with a large degree of social mobilization based on the expectation that inaction may bring subversive results. The need to take rapid action, however, can entail a poor policy design. Therefore, I present two basic propositions based on extraordinary policymaking and civil-military relations literature.

Proposition 1: When a severe crisis situation opens a policy window for substantial change, the military (or a military junta) can intervene in politics, and (interim) military governments can assume the role of a reform government to respond to an ongoing crisis.

Proposition 2: During sequences of extraordinary policymaking in HE, the policy design would likely end up being poorer, reflecting the need to take rapid action without a serious public debate and participation from a wide range of actors.

Accordingly, a basic heuristic typology capturing possible combinations of policy actors and the nature of policymaking can be developed (Figure 1). An overwhelming majority of research on HE policy understandably seems geared toward Quadrant I. Research that may fall into Quadrant II is rare, although some scholars have delved into HE reforms implemented under long-lasting military rules (for instance, Babyesiza 2012; Kandiko

<i>Nature of Policymaking</i>	<i>Types of Actors</i>		
	Ordinary	Civilian	Military
		I	II
	Extraordinary	III	IV

Figure 1. Possible combinations of policy actors and the nature of policymaking.

Howson and Lall 2020). There are few studies (Tarrow 1993; Kim 2017) that exemplify extraordinary policymaking where civilian or military governments implemented sweeping educational reforms (Quadrant III).

This article is an endeavour to explore what happens when military actors dominate reform processes during sequences of extraordinary policymaking (Quadrant IV). The three Turkish cases presented below, along with the propositions developed, neatly fit into this quadrant. Still, this does not mean that the theoretical and causal arguments put forward only apply to the Turkish cases and hence are non-transferable to other cases. This necessitates specifying and delimiting the scope (or contextual) conditions under which theoretical propositions may apply. I have already implied two necessary conditions that should be present in all potential cases, namely an extraordinary policy-making sequence (1) in which the military temporarily emerges as the sole or dominant policymaking actor (2). Additionally, there should be an identifiable reform attempt in the HE policy sector (3)¹ even though this reform attempt has not always resulted in formal institutional change.²

Historical institutionalism and theoretical expectations towards change

In this section, I generate some expectations drawing upon the existing case studies addressing similar phenomena (e.g., military involvement in HE policymaking processes) and historical institutionalist scholarship. Historical institutionalism has several competitive advantages over other approaches in understanding the role of military involvement in policy processes. First, historical institutionalism can be instrumental as it is sensitive to “exogenous shocks” or crises leading to “critical junctures” that considerably weaken institutional constraints and provide powerful actors (in our case, the military) with opportunities to bring about substantial change. Second, historical institutionalism has leverages over frameworks calibrated to explain policymaking in assumedly liberal-democratic institutional contexts (Levitsky and Murillo 2009). When we talk about the military as an extraordinary policy actor, we go beyond the democratic “policy cycles” of an assumedly democratic policy context. Third, it is distinctively concerned with the “quality” of policy change as evidenced by the effort in theorizing its sources, types, and mechanisms.

Analytically, I pay attention to three dimensions, the *type*, *implications*, and *mechanism* of change, in generating several propositions.

Historical institutionalism broadly defines institutions as “the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions” embedded in a given polity (Hall and Taylor 1996, 938). Accordingly, the type of institutional change we expect can be both *formal* and *informal*. Formal change involves explicit changes in formal rules, i.e., modification, abolition, or creation of laws and regulations, as well as organizational structures and

processes. Informal change simply expresses changes that occur outside of the formal-legal configuration of a polity, such as in (unwritten and unofficial) values, rules, or ideas (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Koning 2016, 643–647). Extraordinary policymaking sequences driven by crises are conducive to being ended with formal changes as the extraordinary policymaking actor possesses the capacity to advance their formal reform agenda. Drawing upon the available empirical evidence and our expectations concerning extraordinary policymaking induced by an exogenous development, I suggest the following proposition:

Proposition 3: When a military becomes the sole or dominant reform actor in HE reform, it will likely induce formal rather than informal change.

With respect to the implications of change, I operationally make a distinction between moderate and radical reform outcomes. The former pertains to a path-following or marginal shift from the existing arrangements, while the latter marks a profound deviation from the former status quo. The existing research on HE policy under military governments hints at an important causal factor that can shape the reform outcomes: exclusion or inclusion of academic actors.³ When a military involves in HE reform, it is expected to take a highly coercive and exclusionary stance towards both academic organizations (universities, academic associations, unions, etc.) and individuals (academics and students) rather than to see them as potential partners with vested interests in formal rule-writing processes. This expectation is also aligned with Keeler's (1993) argument that a macro policy window opened by a crisis situation profoundly reduces institutional and political opposition and the number of veto players, thereby rendering extraordinary reform actors capable of proposing far-reaching policy reforms. Given the power concentration and institutional prerogatives of military governments, along with their exclusion of potential veto players from formal policymaking processes, I then expect a formal shift in rules and regulations that are largely detrimental to the interests of academic actors. In certain critical junctures (such as the reform that came after the 1960 coup in Turkey), however, military actors may also closely collaborate with academic actors in determining the policy content and hence substantiality of reform outcomes. Therefore:

Proposition 4: If military governments include incumbent academic actors in formal rule-making and reform processes, the HE reform outcomes would be more likely moderate and in favor of those included. If not, the implications of outcomes would be more radical and detrimental to academic actors.

When it comes to understanding the mechanisms of change, historical institutionalists have traditionally relied on the *punctuated equilibrium* model that identifies a rapid institutional change followed by a long period of stasis (Krasner 1984). This model underlies path-dependent analyses that consider critical junctures in which actors adopt a particular institutional arrangement that amounts to a fundamental rupture from the former institutional path as moments of institutional change (Mahoney 2000). Recently, historical institutionalist scholars have developed an interest in exploring more endogenous and gradual forms of institutional change, such as *layering*, *drift*, and *conversion* (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). This theoretical effort emphasizes that institutional change may unfold as an incremental and slow-moving process, for actors may prefer to modify,

redeploy, or deliberately keep rules constant rather than dismantle them. We may easily expect the institutional change mechanism following a military intervention in HE policy to conform to punctuated equilibrium expectations. A theoretical corollary is that the rules and policies crafted by military governments aiming at responding to a crisis or dramatic event would “lock in” and shape the subsequent institutional trajectory.

A recent contribution by Levitsky and Murillo (2013), however, poses challenges to both gradual change and punctuated equilibrium models by introducing the concept of *serial replacement*. Using Latin American politics as a laboratory, these scholars argue radical change patterns can go beyond mere infrequent punctuated equilibrium patterns and might occur infrequently. Serial replacement is likely where there is *uncertainty* in power distributions and *incongruence* between rule writers and power holders (96–100). Armed forces in Latin America have influenced policy arrangements as either informal veto players or de facto power holders, making them vulnerable to displacement. These observations and theoretical arguments are transferable to the Turkish cases studied in the paper, as the period is characterized by the high political autonomy of the military as either a powerful veto player or a temporary power holder (see below). This leads to the following:

Proposition 5: In (HE) policy settings where democratic institutions are either structurally weak or temporarily weakened by a crisis, the primary mechanism of change would more likely be a serial replacement.

Methodological considerations

This study is based on a comparative case study research design. A case can be defined as “an instance of a class of events” (George and Bennett 2005, 17). The three case studies presented here are to be seen as instances of military involvement in the HE reforms during extraordinary policymaking sequences in Turkey.

They are theory-guided case studies that are idiographic in essence, aiming at explaining and interpreting certain historical episodes according to the specific analytical dimensions outlined. On the other hand, the paper would possibly serve as what Lijphart (1971) called a “hypothesis-generating case study” (see also Levy 2008, 5–6). Such case studies are conducted by researchers in areas where there is either no theory or rudimentary theoretical propositions. Propositions generated in this article, per se, are not qualified to explain or predict policy outcomes. They rather have an auxiliary role in identifying potentially important conditions and factors that may have causal relevance. Therefore, this study may inform further analysis of the role of militaries in (extraordinary) policymaking and reform process in HE by suggesting some preliminary insights, potentially important variables, or mechanisms, thereby helping a subsequent theory-building effort. In other words, while this embraces an idiographic approach to explore the three Turkish cases, it also draws some general lessons for the study of HE policy, which may have relevance for studies that would explore HE policymaking in contexts that may fall into the scope conditions established above.

With an aim to explore the Turkish military’s role in HE reform processes, I focus on three cases, e.g., reforms that came after the 1960, 1971, and 1980 military interventions. In each case, I briefly discuss the factors that led to the outcomes of interests with an

emphasis on the role of the military governments or military-backed interim governments. Case studies particularly deal with the reform outcomes in terms of two dimensions: change in institutional (e.g., the pattern of governance within individual HE institutions) and systemic (e.g., the relationship between the central authorities and HE institutions) governance arrangements.

The study embraces a highly parsimonious approach to these concepts, given the purposes of the paper. Institutional governance is simply understood around the two ideal-typical coordinating principles of *collegiality* and *hierarchy* (Bleiklie 2012). The former holds that academics make decisions on behalf of their institutions and negotiate with funders and stakeholders while preserving the autonomy of their institutions. The latter holds that institutional leaders (rectors, presidents, etc.), rather than academic decision-making bodies, perform the same duties. The changes in formal rules provide sufficient observable manifestations of where the locus of power lies and how the authority is distributed at the institutional level.

Similarly, systemic governance is conceived around the specific role that the government and central authorities play in governing HE systems by drawing upon Capano's (2011) typology of systemic governance modes: *procedural*, *hierarchical*, *self-governance*, and *steering at the distance* modes. The first two modes represent traditional modes in which the state appears as the main control and command actor. The government either specifies both goals and means through which goals are pursued (the hierarchical mode) or gives them agency to select their own goals, provided they are obliged to abide by the central rules and regulations (the procedural mode). The last two modes imply the indirect influence of the government in systemic governance. The government either chooses to leave the policy arena completely free (the self-governance mode) or set collective targets before leaving the institutions free to choose their own means (the steering at the distance mode).

The article relies on qualitative data consisting of various sources, including legal and policy documents, and secondary sources to carry out the analysis. Legal documents (constitutional provisions, laws, bylaws, etc.) are the most indispensable primary sources through which one can pursue formal and legislative changes chronologically. The high rule-making autonomy of the military governments (or interim civilian governments backed by the military) under a state of emergency gave them latitude to intervene in society through public law, as seen in the case of HE policy. Secondary sources include a variety of academic papers produced by scholars and observers in different periods, which provide valuable information on different aspects of extraordinary policymaking processes.

Case studies

In the comparative case studies presented below, I exclusively focus on the description of the core outcomes of reforms in terms of institutional and systemic governance arrangements. Then, I provide comparative conclusions drawn from each case and discuss findings in interaction with the propositions and theoretical perspectives presented above. Before embarking on the presentation of case studies, however, it would be useful to provide brief background information on the main features of civil-military relations in Turkey.

Main features of civil-military relations in Turkey

The research on civil-military relations in Turkey suggests that the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) has been not only a military institution but also a major political actor (see, for example, Hale 1994; Sakallıoğlu 1997; Demirel 2005; Karaosmanoğlu 2012; Sarıgil 2014). The literature underlines that the TAF has considered and rendered its role as the guardian of official principles, specifically nationalism and secularism, in addition to its assigned duty to provide security against external and internal threats. The TAF has intervened in civilian politics (in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997) either through direct (i.e., coups and coup threats via memoranda) or indirect (i.e., briefings on political issues; private meetings; mobilizing social groups) ways and mechanisms with the motivation of protecting the social order and national interests, rather than with an intent to set up a long-term military rule (Demirel 2005; Sarıgil 2014).

The military elite played a crucial role in establishing the republican regime out of the moribund Ottoman Empire, following the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). During the formative period of the new nation-state, retired military officers filled crucial positions within single-party governments (1923–1946). The Armed Forces Internal Service Act of 1935 (Law no. 2771) codified the TAF's duty to protect the republican regime (Article 34), which provided a legal basis for legitimizing military interventions. The military's loyalty to the republican regime was clear, yet its notion of democracy was ambivalent and peculiar, characterized by a fundamental dilemma: on the one hand, they promoted democratic values and methods since it was an integral part of modernity, implying civilian supremacy over the military; yet, on the other hand, they abstained from acting as an agent of the civilian governments since they believed that subordination to the civilian rule would undermine their role of guardianship (Karaosmanoğlu 2012, 152–154).

Therefore, as distinct from fully democratic systems in which armed forces are expected to operate as the agents of civilian principals without having so much “political autonomy” (Sakallıoğlu 1997), Turkish civil-military relations have produced unstable principal-agent configurations during the history of the Republic. The 1960 coup, as the first military intervention in politics, opened a new path in Turkish civil-military relations by starting a new era of what is generally called “military tutelage” or “militocracy” (Sarıgil 2014) in which the TAF kept a watchful eye over the political system and attempted to interfere in political life when it deemed it necessary. This made the military a strong “veto player” on critical issues in the political system despite formal transitions to civilian rule. In the 2000s, governments made essential legislative and institutional reforms to restrict the TAF's political power as part of the general reform trend triggered by the country's motivation to meet the European Union requirements with the beginning of its formal candidacy for full membership (see Gürsoy 2011). These reforms relatively decreased the military's institutional privileges and assertive guardianship over the political system.

The 1960 coup and university reform

The 1960–1961 period, which came after a ten-year (1950–1960) Democrat Party (DP) rule, was the first military rule that the Republic of Turkey experienced. The key

factors behind the coup were a combination of the DP's authoritarian practices and the reaction of a group of military and bureaucratic elite fearing that they were losing ground (Demirel 2005). At the beginning of the DP rule, academics enjoyed university autonomy and academic freedom, which had suffered ideologically motivated purges during the single-party government (Findıklı 2022). Soon after, the university again turned into a site of ideological contestation in which the politicization of academics incited the DP to amend the University Act several times. The DP's authoritarian measures against the RPP, the press, universities, and civil society during the late 1950s led to the emergence of an informal oppositional bloc against the DP.

When a military junta took power on 27 May 1960, they were heavily supported by a substantial part of the bureaucracy, the press, academia, and intellectuals: an informal alliance of the old elite or so-called "vigorous forces" (Karpat 2004, 116–117). The junta formed a military commission called the National Unity Committee (NUC) immediately after the coup to create a favourable political milieu and constitutional order before handing over their authority to an elected civilian government. The academic community was expected to play a key role at this juncture by not only implicitly endorsing the coup but also actively supporting it. The law professors prepared a report legitimizing the coup, based on the reasoning that it aimed at putting Turkish democracy on the right track (Göney 2011). Most of those professors also became a member of the constitutional committee to prepare a constitutional draft.

Academics working in harmony with the military government found an opportunity to influence the NUC in amending the University Act of 1946. In terms of systemic governance, the new law (Law no. 115), adopted a couple of months after the coup, removed the traces of continental-style ministerial oversight of universities by revoking the authority of the Ministry and the Minister in overseeing universities in the name of government (Art. 14). The law strengthened the role of the Interuniversity Council in systemic governance, giving it *ex officio* powers to make ultimate nationwide decisions on crucial aspects of HE. The Interuniversity Council, composed of rectors, deans, and elected representatives from each university in the country, was an advisory body designed to assist the government via the Ministry of Education in agenda-setting and policy formulation related to HE. However, the new legal arrangement *de facto* converted it into a supreme body with binding decision-making powers since its decisions were not subject to any governmental or ministerial approval. This was a clear turn towards a procedural mode.

Similar changes apply to the institutional level. The Senate, the universities' utmost decision-making body whose members consisted of solely senior academics (e.g. the rector, deans, and elected academic representatives), was further empowered by the new Act. It had the authority to draft laws and bylaws concerning university affairs and submit them to the Ministry, to put the proposals coming from sub-councils into operation, to make decisions regarding university affairs (Art. 10). The Senate also had the power to oversee the actions of the rector who acquired novel responsibilities due to the shrinking authority of the Ministry over universities. The rector was responsible for monitoring faculty activities in areas of teaching, research, and administration to see if these tasks were performed properly (Art. 12), as the Act limited the hierarchical authority of the rector in the face of the increasing power of the self-governance of the

academic community. Collegiality rather than hierarchy thus characterized the new legal arrangement.

The new legal arrangement restored the institutional autonomy of universities and led the university to acquire almost a privileged and prestigious status within a highly centralist bureaucratic system. Furthermore, the new constitution, adopted after the law amendment on universities in 1961, provided a constitutional guarantee on university autonomy, specifying that universities, as corporate bodies, were only to be governed and controlled by organs the members of which had been elected by their peers (Art. 120). The constitution of 1961 also stipulated that a university organ cannot be dissolved, or any external authority cannot discharge a faculty member.⁴

The 1971 military intervention and a reform reversed

From the late 1960s and onwards, Turkey witnessed a gradual upsurge of student movements of all shades, from boycotts and sit-ins to occupations and guerilla warfare (Szyliowicz 1972). In the advent of 1971, many universities had to suspend their operation due to the violence and conflict between adversary groups. The campus unrest and radicalization of student movements, combined with factors such as distributional problems, ideological polarization, and political instability, formed a basis for another military intervention (Tekeli 2010).

The Chief of General Staff and the commanders-in-chief issued a memorandum addressed to the President and Prime Minister on 12 March 1971, demanding the formation of a credible and powerful government that would end the anarchy on campuses and streets and carry out reforms envisaged in the Constitution (Hale 1994, 184–185). This time the military did not directly assume power yet backed several technocratic non-party civilian interim governments until 1973.

The new government amended the provisions on universities in the Constitution (Art. 120) to give the Council of Ministers the authority to seize control of universities, faculties, or any other administrative unit within universities when freedoms of learning and teaching are under threat. The constitutional amendment further restricted institutional autonomy with a provision that universities are governed “under the observance and supervision of the state” (Art. 120/2).

The University Act of 1973 (Law no. 1750) was enacted as a legislative reform that did not considerably alter institutional governance arrangements but brought fundamental changes regarding systemic governance. As distinct from the 1960 reform that was substantially formulated and endorsed by academics, this one came into existence despite considerable resistance from academia. The generals interpreted campus unrest and student radicalization as the malfeasance of the greater autonomy bestowed on the academic profession and universities (Arslan 2004).

The new Act laid down the establishment of two new central bureaucratic bodies in addition to the already existing Interuniversity Council to secure heavy state control over universities: The Council of Higher Education and the University Supervisory Board. A corollary was the downgrade in the powers of the Interuniversity Council, which had enjoyed being the ultimate supervisory authority over universities with binding decision-making powers in academic and administrative matters. The Interuniversity Council was fully dominated by academics, without incorporating representation

from the world of politics, industry, or business, making it a coordination agency of the academic profession at the national level. The new Act placed it in a lower position, where it could operate as an advisory body on merely academic matters (Art. 9).

The most important innovation of the new Act was the establishment of the Council of Higher Education, a supreme body responsible for systemic coordination among HE institutions and conducting research and evaluation pursuant to the policy targets of the national development plan to steer HE (Art. 4). Composed equally of academics and bureaucrats and chaired by the Minister of Education, the Council had the authority to prepare short and long-term plans for structural aspects of HE, to review draft legislation and bylaws regarding HE institutions, and to ensure coordination among institutions to make them operate in line with the national development plan (Art. 6).

The final supervisory body was the University Supervisory Board, founded in the cabinet under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister (Art. 7). It was assumed to take control of universities in special but unspecified circumstances and demand the competent authorities to start prosecution on campus-related affairs (Art. 8). These provisions were a direct and decisive response of the state to the campus unrest and political dissidence of academia. The HE system, thereby, was taken under close supervision over ever before through three different supreme boards.

The introduction of these central agencies comes under attack by the academic community, law societies, intellectuals, and some politicians. Universities applied to the Constitutional Court for reversal of the provisions as to the new supreme boards, based on the argument that their composition, operation, and powers contradicted the constitutional provisions regarding university autonomy (Tekeli 2010). The Constitutional Court adjudicated in 1975 that relevant clauses in the new University Act regarding the composition and powers of these two supreme boards are null. Hence, these two were inhibited from coming into effect and performing their assigned duties. Thus, the reform that aimed to build a hierarchical control regime in HE with three central agencies unintentionally engendered a vacuum of central policy control, coordination, and planning. To a considerable extent, the HE governance maintained its former characteristics due to the stillborn reform.

The 1980 coup D'état: forging a large-scale reform in HE

The 1980–1983 military government established after the 1980 coup d'état approximates what a full-blown military regime is (Demirel 2005). The Armed Forces organized a coup in line with the chain of command and established a National Security Council (NSC) immediately after, which ruled the country with an ironfist under martial law until the elections in November 1983. The NSC, immediately after the military intervention, dissolved the parliament, suspended all political parties, suppressed numerous civil society organizations and unions, and ordered the detention and arrestment of tens of thousands of people. After these draconian measures, the NSC settled down to redesign the political sphere and the entire society. Still, in common with the other takeovers, the junta did not envisage a permanent military regime but aimed toward a transition to civilian parliamentary rule as fast as possible once they restored public order (Karpat 2004, 367).

HE policy was among the priorities of the NSC as it rendered the political violence precipitated by the extreme political and ideological polarization between militant

right-wing and radical left-wing groups and the extreme politicization of universities during the 1970s as one of the major reasons compelling them to stage a coup (Evren 1991). They regarded university campuses as bastions of radicalism, some academics as instigators of politically-motivated acts of violence, and some students/student groups as perpetrators of terrorist activities (Tunçay 1983; Turan 2010). The military government insisted on legislating an all-inclusive law on HE to form a unified and central regulatory structure. Several expert commissions comprising military officials, educational specialists, and legal advisers were formed to immediately make the new law (Arslan 2004, 485–492). Upon the invitation of the NSC General Secretariat, İhsan Doğramacı, a well-known academic and administrator with international experience, emerged as an influential policy and institutional entrepreneur by conveying his ideas to resolve specific policy problems (Evren 1991, 374).

The Higher Education Act of 1981 (Law no. 2547) was a comprehensive legislative arrangement in HE, marking a departure from the former institutional status quo. The most important outcome of the reform with respect to systemic governance was the establishment of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) as a supreme central body with wide-ranging powers and responsibilities in areas of central planning, systemic coordination and regulation, financing, evaluation, among others (Art. 7). It has a substantial policy autonomy derived from both the legal powers it holds and the governmental capacity to steer as a principal, making it a *dominant agency* according to Capano and Turri's (2017) typology of agencies in HE. The rise of such a dominant agency, on the other hand, occurred through the disempowerment of the other agencies that had overseen systemic governance, particularly the Interuniversity Council. The new Act (Art. 11) considerably truncated the legal powers and authority of the Interuniversity Council and transformed it into a mere academic advisory body that would assist the CHE in certain academic matters. The CHE was able to determine both goals and means through which goals are pursued, which indicates a clear turn towards a hierarchical mode.

The legislative reform also brought substantial changes to institutional governance. The most important outcome was the empowerment of the managerial level, especially the rectorship, and the undermining of academic and collegial bodies as decision-making organs. It abolished the election procedure for the rector position and laid down that the President of the Republic appoints the rector among candidates nominated by the CHE (Art. 13). The main motivation was to end ideological polarization that frequently turned election processes into a political tug of war within institutions. The Act also equipped the rector with unprecedented powers and responsibilities sufficient to turn him/her into a strong administrator from the former *primus inter pares* role. The rector is now the ultimate decisionmaker and implementer at the institutional level, who is not accountable to university organs but directly to the CHE for his/her actions. The Senate, which traditionally had been a highly influential collegial decision-making body whose decisions were binding for the rector, was converted into a symbolic advisory body that acts upon instructions by the rector (Art. 14). The reform thus embraced *hierarchy* rather than *collegiality* as the main principle of coordination at the institutional level.

Overall, this reform has been the most durable one among others as its products, such as the CHE and regulations regarding institutional and systemic governance arrangements, are still alive apart from minor revisions.

Conclusion

This paper brought two issues to the forefront of policy analysis. One pertains to the study of extraordinary policymaking in HE under military rules. Another relates to understanding the military's role as a policy actor in HE reforms. It generated several propositions by drawing upon the theory and extant empirical insights from diverse settings and analyzed three cases from Turkey as illustrative instances.

Based on the short description of the reform outcomes, I can draw some comparative conclusions from the three cases. [Table 1](#) succinctly compares the three reforms according to the main points discussed above.

The three reforms brought *formal* rather than informal change, which confirms Proposition 3. We observe the introduction of new rules and regulations (i.e. new acts and constitutional amendments) that significantly altered the existing institutional arrangements in HE governance. Yet, when it comes to the substantiality of outcomes, we see that the changes that the 1960 reform brought were not so radical in comparison to the others, meaning that it did not replace collegial governance with hierarchical governance or increase the central oversight over universities. A factor that accounts for this variation is the academics' mostly positive stance towards endorsing the military intervention and the military actors' inclusion of academics in formal rulemaking and reform processes. This, in turn, led the reform outcomes to become relatively moderate and in favour of the academic elite, lending legitimacy to Proposition 4. Thus, the mode of interaction between putschists and the academic elite should be considered an important independent variable that may affect reform outcomes.

Table 1. The comparison of the three reforms.

	1960 Coup	1971 Intervention	1980 Coup
<i>Academics' stance towards military intervention</i>	Mostly cooperation	Mostly resistance	Strong resistance
<i>Military actors' stance towards the academic actors</i>	Partially coercive and partially inclusionary	Coercive and exclusionary	Coercive and exclusionary
<i>Extraordinary reform actor</i>	Interim military government (1960–1961)	Military-backed interim civilian governments (1971–1973)	Interim military government (1980–1983)
<i>Type of change</i>	Formal change: Constitutional amendment and new legislation	Formal change: Constitutional amendment and legislative change – mostly failed as the Constitutional Court overruled some provisions	Formal change: Constitutional amendment and new legislation
<i>Main mode of coordination at the institutional level</i>	<i>Collegiality:</i> Rector as primus inter pares and the Senate as a powerful collegial body	<i>Collegiality:</i> Similar to the former, with some setbacks in the power of collegial bodies	<i>Hierarchy:</i> Rector with overarching managerial powers
<i>Main mode of systemic governance</i>	<i>Procedural:</i> Interuniversity Council as a powerful national academically-dominated supreme board	<i>Hierarchical</i> in design: Interuniversity Council (as the two new supreme boards become void)	<i>Hierarchical:</i> The Council of Higher Education as a central bureaucratic body with wide-ranging powers
<i>Change outcomes</i>	Moderate change – as it restored and further strengthened the former regulations	Radical in design but moderate in practice – as some drastic measures rendered invalid	Radical change – as it marks a fundamental rupture from the former institutional status quo and governance arrangements

The analysis partially confirms the expectation that the policy design would be relatively quick and poor (Proposition 2). It is true that the reforms were characterized by the limited participation of important stakeholders and the absence of comprehensive public discussion. Yet, the 1981 reforms created the most comprehensive and robust policy design in respect to dealing with the exogenous shock and achieving the desired results. Given the frequency and substantiality of the reforms, we also see a *serial replacement* mechanism according to which formal rules and institutions are replaced radically and frequently in short periods of time, giving countenance to Proposition 5. Still, the last reform brought the most comprehensive and persistent arrangements in terms of systemic and institutional governance. The post-1981 policy trajectory of Turkish higher education shows that powerful incumbent policy actors tended to preserve the institutional status quo as far as possible. Thus, over the last four decades, we only observe gradual change rather than wholesale institutional replacement even though the environmental conditions change fundamentally, and “change agents” constantly demand reform (see Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Therefore, it is safe to argue that reforms forged by military governments can also be conducive to creating a new institutional equilibrium that, in turn, produces path-dependent characteristics (cf. Salto 2020) that lead to persistence and stickiness over time, going beyond mere a serial replacement pattern.

I have already discussed the contributions of the article. It, nevertheless, has certain limitations. In the first place, propositions built should not be taken as sufficiently well-performing theoretical propositions. Rather, they should be thought of as an early attempt at exploring a puzzling yet less-studied phenomenon. They can serve as a point of departure for future analysis examining the extent to which these expectations hold in other countries with similar experiences. As more research becomes available, the preliminary propositions put forward in this study could be either further bolstered with similar evidence or refined with more specific evidence. Only then can we build robust hypotheses that can be used to understand different historical or temporary cases or predict outcomes in future cases.

Second, historical institutionalism is certainly not the only relevant approach in studying HE policy change under military regimes. Its conceptual toolbox firmly gives the researcher certain leverages over other approaches in exploring “crisis” policymaking connected to external shocks. Still, there are other perspectives that can be utilized either as an alternative or complementary to it. For instance, in his paper explaining differing policy outcomes in HE under the non-democratic regimes of Argentina and Chile, Salto (2020) argues that ideational and structuralist (class) arguments can be used in tandem with the historical institutionalist approach in developing hypotheses addressing why non-democratic (or military) regimes made different policy choices (cf. Levy 1981).

Third, the scope conditions of theoretical arguments developed in the study are also narrowly defined. One further effort might be to examine how certain structural and macro-institutional characteristics, which identify overall national “policy styles” (Howlett and Tosun 2019) or “politico-administrative regimes” (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017), could be related to (HE) reform outcomes the under the assumption of extraordinary policymaking.

Notes

1. This is a crucial point to establish the scope conditions of the theoretical argument, as some military governments have not been specifically interested in reforming HE. For instance, the Greek Junta (1967–1974) “did not proceed to a radical overhaul of tertiary education, retaining the old regime” (Karamanolakis 2015, 36). Instead, they preferred to purge the dissident academics and control universities through centrally appointed commissioners.
2. Although theoretical arguments made are principally applicable to “positive cases” where the outcome of interest (e.g., a reform) is present, they may also inform prospective case studies that will focus on “negative cases” where the outcome is absent despite all other conditions are present (Mahoney and Goertz 2004) or “near misses” (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007) denoting reform attempts that were very close to being implemented but narrowly reversed. The gist of this argument is that “failed institutional change attempts” (Issar and Dilling 2022) are frequently conducive to influencing subsequent change attempts in the post-failure trajectory.
3. Latin American experiences provide evidence that fits these expectations (Levy 1981; Bernasconi 2008, 36). Bekerman (2013, 254), for instance, argues that military coups in Latin America have typically led to “severe changes in academic rules, faculty expelling, and deinstitutionalization.”
4. Nonetheless, the reform came with a price. The military government dismissed 147 academics (Law 114) from different universities without providing any clear justification. Weiker (1962) provides a discussion on why the “147 incident” happened and what were the possible motivations of the military junta.

Acknowledgments

The author is currently not affiliated with the above-mentioned institution.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics approval statement

Ethical approval was not required for the present study.

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