Electoral Reversals: The International Community and the Coup d'État

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Abstract

In this paper, we use new data on coup d'états and elections to uncover a striking development: whereas the vast majority of successful coups before 1990 installed the leader durably in power, after that the picture reverses, with the majority of coups leading to competitive elections. We offer a theoretical argument that helps explain why some coups are followed by elections but not others. Our theoretical argument and empirical evidence point to the crucial importance of international pressure for whether elections emerge early after the coup. We find that post-Cold War those countries that are most dependent on Western aid have been the first the embrace competitive elections after the coup. Our theory is also able to account for the pronounced decline in the non-constitutional seizure of executive power since the early 1990s. While the coup d'état has been and still is the single most important factor leading to the downfall of democratic government, our findings indicate that the new generation of coups have been less nefarious for democracy than their historical predecessors.

1 Introduction

"I came in on a tank, and only a tank will evict me." - Abu Zuhair Tahir Yahya, Iraqi Prime Minister, 1968[1]

The first measure will be to "to recall the previous parliament and make sure the proceedings are constitutional." - Muhammad Naguib, leader of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952[2]

The military coups in Greece in 1967 and Mali in 1991 began alike. The ruling authorities had become deeply unpopular. The plummeting appeal of the government manifested itself in rising political instability. In Greece, the crisis took the form of a prolonged stand-off between the king and George Papandreou, the ousted prime-minister. After months of domestic political turmoil, culminating in street protests, the army moved to restore political order. In Mali, the entrenched one-party government of Moussa Traoré refused demands for reform and fired at protesters. A coup followed. While in both cases the army staged a quick and successful power grab, post-coup events followed a different path in each case. In Mali, the army decided to give up power in competitive elections. The Greek colonels, in contrast, elected to stay in power. It took a botched foreign intervention, and the specter of war with neighboring NATO ally Turkey, to dislodge the military from office.

In this paper, we uncover substantial variation in the time it takes a country to return to civilian administration after a coup. The variation breaks down by historical period. Before the end of the Cold War, most forceful seizures of power resulted in the successful coup leaders keeping power to themselves. After 1990, the same large majority of cases - 74 % - lead to competitive elections.[3]

Surprisingly, a large and well-developed literature devoted to the coup d'état offers no look at the question of when and why successful coup entrepreneurs would prefer elections to staying in power. Scholars have focused their attention on questions such as what types of countries are at risk of experiencing coups (Jackman, 1978; Johnson, Slater and McGowan, 1984; Belkin and Schofer, 2003), whether coups promote the corporatist interests of the military (Jackman, 1976; Zuk and Thompson, 1982), what is the relationship between political instability and economic growth (Londregan and

[1]Quoted in Luttwak (1969, p. 149).

[2]Quoted in Finer (1988, p. 32).

[3]This statistic rests on an examination of the five year period following the coup and derives from 1960-2001 data detailed in the empirical section of the paper.

Poole, 1990; Alesina et al., 1996). While these are important questions, existing work has by and large assumed that coup leaders replace existing governments in order to install a government they like, and, usually, lead.[4] This assumption has obscured an important choice coup entrepreneurs actually face.

We offer an explanation of why some coups lead to elections and not others. We do so with the help of a simple two-stage optimization problem in which a coup-plotter decides on attempting to grab power, and on whether to hold elections after that, while incorporating the different payoffs associated with not undertaking anything, attempting a coup and then holding elections or attempting a coup and staying on without a popular contest. One of the insights of the two-stage approach is that, due to selection dynamics, the factors that lead to a coup may not predict the timing of elections after. If lack of economic development makes for a weak state and facilitates coups (as suggested by the literature), we would expect a coup leader who succeeds to exploit the weakness of the state and to hold on to power. For that reason, many of the domestic factors that have been offered as key explanations of coup activity provide limited empirical leverage over the timing of post-coup elections.

We argue that external factors drive significantly the decision to hold elections after a coup. With the end of the Cold War, the West has began to promote free elections in the rest of the world. While elections have not always been free and fair, nine of every ten countries in the world today hold regular elections that are significantly more competitive than the forms of political contestation most of these countries had before 1990.[5]

External factors help explain the timing of post-coup elections because they play a different role at the two stages of the process we model: outside forces may be unable to intervene quickly enough to forestall a rapid power grab, but foreign donors have ample time to influence the direction of the new regime as it struggles to consolidate.

If elections are bound to follow, why do domestic actors still bother to seize power? We show that under certain conditions, moving policy away from the current status quo and in the direction of the median voter benefits potential coup plotters. The gains of moving policy may be enough to explain the continuing allure of taking a gamble by moving against the current government.

Our empirical section exploits original data on more than 200 coups between 1960

[4]It is telling that in formal models of democratization and dictatorship, the coup represents the event of taking power from the median voter and transferring it to the propertied elite (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006).

[5]Authors' data.

and 2001. We use foreign aid as a proxy for Western pressure to hold elections post-1990. We find results consistent with our argument. We show that dependence on Western aid tends to make countries more likely to hold competitive elections after coups - but this result only holds for the post-Cold War set of cases. We get no relationship between aid and the speed with which elections are adopted for the period between 1960 and 1990. Our identification strategy exploits the changing views of the Western countries on the desirability of promoting elections abroad. Western views changed largely because the Soviet Union crumbled – a disintegration driven by fundamentals that are arguably exogenous to the decision to undertake elections after a coup.

The model provides a relatively straightforward explanation of the empirical regularities we uncover in the data: less developed countries are especially susceptible to coups but they are also most likely to listen to outside donors if asked to hold elections. Levels of economic development have not changed sufficiently to eliminate the kinds of factors that make coups possible; but a changing international climate has made their electoral consequences notably different.

Our argument seeks to contribute to the literature in three ways. We identify an important if neglected choice faced by coup leaders before the new regime has taken shape: what is to be done with power? We agree with intuitions by Geddes (1999) and others that the leaders of military regimes are often split on this issue in principle, with some prepared to return to the barracks and call for elections. We focus on post-coup settings that are too fluid to be characterized as regimes, and we show which factions will win the argument, and why.

Second, we explicitly link the strategic decision to hold a coup to the decision to proceed with elections. One of the important implications of our two-stage model is that we expect the externally-imposed requirement of holding competitive elections after a coup to reduce the incidence of such events in the first place. The electoral norm reduces the incidence of coups by making the prize of gaining power less attractive to coup-entrepreneurs. This may help explain the drop in coup activity we observe in post-1990 data.

Third, we contribute to the literature on the international influences on democratization (Pevehouse, 2002; Hyde, 2007; Donno, 2010). Historically, the coup d'etat has been the biggest single danger to democracy, accounting for 3 out of every 4 lapses in democracy according to one authoritative source (Cheibub and Gandhi, 2004). The dramatic expansion of democratic countries in the world in the course of the "third

wave" of democratization has been accompanied by a steady drop in the average per capita income of the countries constituting the democratic club.[6] Our work on coups suggests why representative institutions may have survived better than expected in conditions where they might otherwise be expected to quickly falter. By discouraging coup-plotters and changing post-coup behavior, international forces may have helped democracy in precisely those cases where representative institutions need help the most - in weak and underdeveloped states.

2 Theory

While there has been a lively literature in political science on the causes of the coup d'état, it provides few leads on whether or not, and with what speed, competitive elections may fallow the grab of executive power.

Analytically, the problem of the d'état has often been viewed as a problem of political instability. Political instability, whether manifested in institutional gridlock or mass protests, invites members of the ruling elite or military to supplant the government and take the reins of power in their own hands. There are many explanations of the causes of political instability but two stand out. One line of thought examines a country's rate of economic modernization and its rate of political development, and traces the roots of instability to lack of congruity between the two. Karl Deutsch famously observed that as economic modernization transfigured urban and rural communities around the world, it created immense pressure on governments to meet the demands of a new class of politically conscious individuals (Deutsch, 1961). When governments fail to deliver, political instability follows. In a similar vein, Huntington (1968) noted that economic modernization could ultimately transform traditional societies into stable polities but the process itself may be profoundly destabilizing.

A related set of arguments views the problem of political instability as a problem of political legitimacy. Governments become illegitimate when they fail to deliver on the expectations of the citizens. Economic performance is an important measure of how government's are able to meet expectations. Thus, economic decline can be profoundly destabilizing while economic growth may solidify a government's claim to legitimacy (McGowan and Johnson, 2003; Londregan and Poole, 1990; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997).

[6] The pre-1990 democratic club had an average income of 11,510 dollars as compared to 8,883 for members of the same club after 1990 (constant 1995 dollars).

Other explanations of the coup d'état focus on how and why the army – the most likely culprit in the event of one – intervenes in politics (Karakatsanis, 1997; Trinkunas, 2005; Ruby and Gibler, 2010). Often the army sees itself as the bulwark against chaos, and justifies its intervention in government with reference to real or alleged threat to a country's institutional stability, economic welfare, or foreign policy direction (Johnson, Slater and McGowan, 1984). This tendency is reinforced where the army holds a special place in society, due, for example, to events surrounding the origin of the state. The army and its leaders played a central role in the founding of Turkey, and in the liberation wars that spawned states in Latin America (Cheibub, 2006).

These insights may tell us why power is seized but provide limited leverage on the question of what coup-leaders would do with power. Arguably, this is a different stage and strategic calculations may be broadly similar, or may differ in important ways.

The literature on authoritarian regime breakdown and democratic transitions provide some arguments we can build on. A well-known proposition in the literature argues that democratization and economic development are systematically related (Lipset, 1959). While the exact nature of the causation is subject to debate (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Boix and Stokes, 2003), one plausible hypothesis to arise from that research would link the holding of competitive elections to a country's level of economic development. A more developed country is more likely to face pressure for elections, all else equal.

Geddes (1999, 2003) offers a perspective on why dictatorships break down. She argues that "military regimes ... carry within them the seeds of their own disintegration" as corporate interests pull the military back to the barracks, creating factions and splits within the leadership (Geddes, 1999, p.122). The coordination problems that arise with splits result in the military agreeing to pull out of politics much more often than other types of dictatorships. The original argument is meant to apply to consolidated dictatorships (at least three years in existence) but its core insight can be extended to the problem of post-coup elections. One could observe that most coups are military-lead and, therefore, expect that whether elections are held or not would depend on whether factions form and on which faction wins out.

Empirical anecdotes indeed suggest that debates about what to do with power are common among successful coup-leaders, and that they result in different outcomes. In the 1960 Turkish case, the army moved to take away power from the inept and increasingly authoritarian Menderes government. Soon, disagreement emerged between the army's commander in chief, General Gürsel and some the younger brass. The

General favored a quick return to civilian administration while others wanted the army to stay in power longer to reform Turkey. In the end, the pro-election faction prevailed (Finer, 1988; Yalman, 1968, p.33). After the 1962 coup d'état in Peru, ranking officer of the military junta, General Ricardo Pérez Godoy favored a return to negotiations with the elected Congress. His viewpoint lost to younger members of the junta who wanted to remake the political composition of the elected legislature (Needler, 1966). A similar rift within the Egyptian Free Officer movement emerged between the formal leader of the army General Muhammad Naguib and the young charismatic Nasser after the coup on July 23, 1952 (LaCouture, 1970, p.100). Ultimately, Nasser won and stayed in power.

The observation that internal debates create coordination problems which may result in different outcomes is helpful, but what we want to know is, under what conditions will the pro-election faction win out?

We offer a simple two-stage optimization problem to help. Consider the following time-line:

1. A coup plotter chooses between attempting a coup or sticking with the status quo. If the status quo is chosen, the actor gets $t_{sq} \in [0, 1]$ in expected utility, which can be thought of as the benefit of some policy outcome or as a transfer of resources.
2. If attempted, the coup succeeds with probability $\alpha \in (0, 1)$. Failure yields 0 in expected utility.
3. If successful, the coup entrepreneur decides between calling for elections or retaining power. Calling for elections brings expected utility of $t_m \in [0, 1]$, which is simply where the median voter would set the policy outcome or the transfer of resources.
4. If the coup-plotter attempts to stay in power, they succeed with probability $\beta \in (0, 1)$. Failure yields 0 as a payoff (and power changes hands without elections); success yields a payoff of 1.

In this setup, the actor will attempt to keep power after a coup if:

$$\beta - t_m \geq 0$$

A coup will be attempted if:

$$\alpha V - t_{sq} \geq 0,$$

where V, the expected continuation payoff after a successful coup, is:

$$V = \begin{cases} \beta & \text{if } \beta - t_m \geq 0, \\ t_m & \text{if } \beta - t_m < 0. \end{cases}$$

To derive comparative statics, we imagine that both α and β are functions of some main independent variable or variables of interest x and of some covariates of interest y. We will assume that α and β are continuous and second-order differentiable functions of the parameters. For simplicity, we will assume that the second-order derivative with respect to x is 0. The marginal effect of a change in x for a value of the argument $x = x^*$ and for a specific draw of the covariates $y = y^*$ on whether to attempt a coup, the first-stage, depends on the impact on the probability of successfully grabbing power and on the change in the post-coup continuation stage:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left[\alpha V^* - t_{sq}\right] = \frac{\partial \alpha(x^*, y^*)}{\partial x} V(x^*, y^*) + \frac{\partial V(x^*, y^*)}{\partial x} \alpha(x^*, y^*), \tag{1}$$

where the marginal change in the post-coup continuation value, the second-stage, is:

$$\frac{\partial V(x^*, y^*)}{\partial x} = \begin{cases} \frac{\partial \beta(x^*, y^*)}{\partial y} & \text{if } \beta - t_m \geq 0, \\ 0 & \text{if } \beta - t_m < 0. \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

The two-stage model explicitly endows successful coup leaders with a choice to hold elections or not. It also links the (first-stage) decision to seize power with the (second-stage) choice of whether to move to elections. The key factors motivating choices will be status quo policy, the policy outcome under competitive elections, and the probabilities of successfully seizing and holding on to power.

The model is flexible enough to serve as a useful heuristic about the relationship between coups and elections, and, with some restrictions on the functional forms and parameters, allows us to derive comparative statics. Note that, instead of explicitly modeling the coordination problem faced by the actors seizing or attempting to hold on to power, we have the reduced form probabilities of success of the different factions at the two stages, α and β, and we offer arguments for how domestic and international conditions may strengthen the pro-coup and anti-election factions.

First, consider the relative and absolute position of the policy outcomes t_{sq} and t_m. Suppose that $t_{sq} = t_m$, the status quo corresponds to the median voter's preferred point, as would be the case soon after free and fair, competitive elections produce a government. Under these conditions, the only coups that would occur would be those seeking to install durably a (military) government in place. This rhymes well with many events in the record: Franco's coup in Spain was a response to a socialist victory at the polls in 1936. The military was not interested in elections because they were bound to produce the same radical, from a right-wing point of view, policies. The same applies to Pinochet's move against Allende, and to the Greek colonels intervention in Greek politics, just before an expected Left-wing victory in the polls.

Those types of coups have become paradigmatic of how we think of the forceful seizure of power, but the model indicates that they do not tell the whole story. When the status quo policy outcome moves away from the preferences of the median voter ($t_m - t_{sq} > 0$), we may see a 'guardian coup': the military takes power from a corrupt and inept civilian administration, and promises to return the country to elections after 'reforming' the system to ensure truly representative government. The 1960 coup in Turkey, the 1974 coup in Portugal, the recent Bangladeshi coup in January of 2007 fit this description. In such cases, the actions of the army are greeted by enthusiasm, as is the promise to hold fresh elections quickly after purging corrupt politicians. When unpopular governments move status quo policy away from the median voter's ideal point (through corruption or repression against the opposition), coup-leaders may have enough to gain from taking and then relinquishing power in terms of policy ($t_m - t_{sq}$) to make the grab of power and subsequent elections worthwhile.

Finally, where the status quo policy is closer that what coup-plotters can get in elections ($t_m - t_{sq} < 0$), we may not see any coups, and if we did, they are never followed by elections. We have a stable authoritarian pattern where one coup-lead government may be replaced by another but transitions never take the form of democratic opening (Svolik, 2009).

More importantly, the model allows us to think about how factors that may be influencing either the probability of successful power seizure (α), or the probability of surviving in power without elections (β) or both play out. It is useful to consider some realistic restrictions on how specific factors may influence α and β.

First, and least likely, it could be that $\frac{\partial \alpha(x^*, y^*)}{\partial x}$ and $\frac{\partial \beta(x^*, y^*)}{\partial x}$ are signed differently. This would mean that the same factor, at least under some conditions, makes coups easier to pull of, but then makes it harder for the coup-leaders to stay in power without

elections. While not impossible in the abstract, we are not aware of a single argument linking a causal factor to the two stages of the process in this way.

Second, it could be that $\frac{\partial\alpha(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x}$ and $\frac{\partial\beta(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x}$ are both increasing or both decreasing in terms of changes in the independent variable x. We will only consider the 'increasing' case as it is easy to recast any x so that the derivative is positively signed. Consider the example of state strength. It is easier to commit coups in weak states, and it should also be easier to avoid a call for elections (because civil society is underdeveloped, for example). In this case, an increase in state weakness, by (1) and (2), makes at the same time more attractive to commit a coup and to a to tempt to keep power. This implies that a selection dynamic is at work: we are most likely to witness coups where elections are least likely.

The selection process may explain why traditionally the literature has ignored even the possibility of elections after a forceful seizure of power: many domestic factors that have been identified as causes of the phenomenon, would also be responsible for lack of elections after the event. Attrition in the values of the independent variable x in the coup-sample may make it hard or impossible to detect an effect of x on the likelihood of post-coup elections.

Third, it could be that $\frac{\partial\alpha(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x} > 0$ and $\frac{\partial\beta(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x} = 0$. In this case, a causal factor facilitates coups but has no bearing on whether elections are preferred. It is possible to think of past coup history as a potential variable belonging in this category. Presumably, at some point, and mostly with experience, militaries may develop a technology for seizing power that makes it very hard to go wrong. In the 1981 coup attempt in Spain, the military forgot to cut the King's phone line, which he then used to call loyal offers and advise them to stay away from the plotters. Presumably, developing a playbook as some Latin American militaries in the past did, eliminates possibilities such as those, while not necessarily saying much about the calculation to stay in power or exit through elections. By definition, variables that enter the model in this way play no role at the second-stage.

Fourth, it could be that $\frac{\partial\alpha(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x} = 0$ and $\frac{\partial\beta(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x} > 0$. Substantively, this says that, a variable has no (or negligible) impact on whether power can be seized from the government but would make elections more or less likely at the second stage. We would argue that this is a plausible characterization of the attitude of Western donor governments and organizations after the end of the Cold War, and so should characterize countries' levels of dependence on Western aid in that way.

With some exceptions, the role of international factors for the choices successful

leaders make has been neglected.[7] This is unfortunate. We know that coup-leaders care intensely about international reactions to their power grab. In his first communique, Colonel Bokassa of the Central African Republic hurried to announce, among policy changes such the "abolishment of the bourgeoisie", one important continuity - that "all foreign agreements shall be respected" (Luttwak, 1969, p.175). The Greek colonels intensely lobbied the U.S. government for speedy recognition.[8] General Manuel Orellana, who ousted the Conservative government in Guatemala in 1931, tendered his resignation before the National Congress after the U.S. withheld recognition.

After the Cold War, major players in international affairs, including the United States and the European Union, have professed a commitment to defend democracy, including by punishing attempts to bring down elected incumbents. In fact, since 1997, the US President has been bound under an act of US Congress to suspend foreign aid to another country in the case of a coup d'etat.[9] A comparable commitment has been made on the EU level in 1991. Smith (2003, pp. 205-208) records how the EU suspended aid after following coups Burundi 1993, Comoros 1995, Gambia 1997, Haiti 1991, Niger 1996, Pakistan 1999 and Sierra Leone 1997. The insistence on competitive elections reflects normative concerns with the political rights of others, but also rests on an understanding that a liberal international order is in the long-term strategic interests of the West (Ikenberry, 2000).

Because the coup d'état by definition involves the non-constitutional seizure of power, Western donors have called for the establishment of an elected government without respect for the type of government being toppled.

Not surprisingly, recent coup leaders have often made negotiations with Western donors a top priority upon seizing office. The first announcement often is a commitment to institute or restore constitutional order and elections. Major Daouda Malam Wanke, head of the presidential guard that deposed the corrupt leader of Niger in 1999, assured the European Union that elections will be held soon and requested a life-line of Western aid. One of the poorest countries in the word, Niger lives off foreign aid - some 80 %

[7]Some of the scholars who discuss the international dimension are Coufoudakis (1977), who talks about the impact of the European Economic Community's decision to suspend the Greek association agreement on the junta's behavior; Hagopian and Mainwaring (2005), who illustrate the importance of changing North American attitudes under Carter for Latin America; Le Vine (2004), who discusses the French role in supporting and thwarting coups in Francophone Africa.

[8]State Department, "Memorandum regarding U.S. policy toward Greece following the 4/21/67 military coup in that country" (issued: Feb 27, 1968; declassified: Mar 15, 1996).

[9]See §508, Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1997 – §101(c) of title I of Public Law 104-208.

of its operating budget. The September 2003 coup in Guinea-Bissau, the coup in Mali in 1991, among others, tell similar stories.

The effect of international pressure on α, the probability that a coup d'état will succeed, is somewhat more ambiguous. While we may want to say that Western opposition to coups translates into a direct effect on α, one may also argue that the leverage outsiders have in influencing the rapid chain of events associated with a power grab is limited. Even in cases Western militaries have 'boots on the ground', there has been a reluctance to get drawn in a local, possibly bloody struggle for power.[10]

Arguably, the conditioning of outside resources on elections has important implications for actors contemplating whether to seize power. While the events surrounding the execution of a coup d'état occur often too quickly for direct Western intervention to make a difference, the aftermath of a successful seizure of power presents the new leaders with a difficult and potentially protracted consolidation phase. The international community is presented with ample opportunities to press conditions on the country's leaders, while they worry about having sufficient resources to stave off challenges to their untested grip on power.

Note that even if the direct effect of aid dependence on α os 0, this does not mean that the tying of aid to the holding of post-coup elections has no effect on the attractiveness of committing a coup. Because the pre- and post-coup stages are related, and because calling for elections reduces the prize coup-plotters may look forward to, the attractiveness of seizing power in the first place decreases. By expression (1): $\frac{\partial V(x^*,y^*)}{\partial x}\alpha(x^*,y^*)$. This tends to discourage precisely the types of coups that would otherwise lead to an attempt to stay in power ($\beta > t_m$). Even without affecting directly the ability of local actors to perpetrate a coup, foreign insistence on elections would tend to bring down the appetite for coups.

The same dynamics cannot be expected to hold for the Cold War period. During the earlier period, the United States and the former colonial powers in Europe had an ambiguous attitude toward coup plots: sometimes helping, sometimes thwarting, and sometimes doing nothing. The American involvement in Allende's removal has given U.S. democratization policy of the period a poor reputation. In reality, the United States sometimes opposed coups in support of freely elected governments.[11] Because

[10]Thus, Le Vine (2004, pp.381) scours French military interventions in Africa and finds only 3 after 1990 in which the French actively tried to intervene in the direction of an unfolding coup - a sharp contrast to events before 1990.

[11]President Kennedy, for example, supported the coup in Argentina but opposed the army takeover in Peru in 1962. Administration officials were aware of the ambiguity inherent in this policy. Kennedy recalled

the world was thought to be a chessboard of West vs. East, attitudes toward both the seizure of power by the military and about whether to pressure for elections varied by which side of the ideological conflict the relevant actors took. The same applied to the policies of the other major donors. This suggests that the general relationship between dependence on Western benefits and both the likelihood of coups and the likelihood of elections after them was ambiguous, or zero.

The simple model we offer indicates that, while it is conventional in the literature to equate the coup d'état with lapse in democratic institutions, we show that this is more of a special case than a general empirical regularity.

Our argument so far proceeded in the following steps: (1) we drew on the literature to explore what kinds of factors may precipitate a coup and cause movement toward elections; (2) we outlined a two-stage logic that allows us to think about the relationship between the two decisions, and what that implies for attempts to test the underlying causal variables; (3) we referred to the literature and to empirical developments to motivate restrictions on the direction and nature of the effects of different variables at the two stages.

We proceed to offer specific testable hypotheses that arise from this discussion.

H1 Higher levels of economic development should make post-coup elections more likely

H2 Coups committed by the military should be more likely to result in early elections

H3 Greater dependence on Western benefits should make post-coup elections more likely after the end of the Cold War

H4 Greater dependence on Western benefits should have no impact on the timing of post-coup elections during the Cold War

Hypotheses 1 and 2 build on modernization and institutional arguments in the literature, whereas Hypotheses 3 and 4 contribute a new appreciation for the role of international factors during a critical stage of the decision on what to do with power. Note also that selection effects may attenuate the impact of the two factors to a degree that makes it difficult to detect their impact after observed coups.

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being asked by his brother Edward why support one and not the other, and joked that he himself could only tell the difference after 'thinking about it for a while'. See "Meeting on Peruvian Recognition", Naftali (2001, p. 39). Green (2010, p.29) goes over a conversation between Kennedy and US Ambassador to Brazil Gordon in 1962, in which they agree to support military intervention as long as it is against the Left.

3 Data and Definitions

We want to know how long it takes a country to adopt elections after a successful coup d'état, which calls for data on both.

Coups

The coup d'état is defined here as the seizure of effective executive authority through the threat or use of force. The actors perpetrating the coup may include the military, the police, a domestic armed group, a member of the governing elite, or some other set of domestic actors. Coups always involve a departure from the formal or informally accepted rules of transferring power within a particular country. The use of force may be overt, such as fighting in the capital, or may come in the form of tacit support by the military and security apparatus of the power grab.[12]

A change in power within a military junta, if it involves the threat or use of force, is also considered a coup. Social revolutions and popular uprisings are generally not considered that, unless at some point a group of actors threatens or uses force to remove the government in place. Unsupported assassinations, where the perpetrator or perpetrators lack the basic organization or resources to take power, are not considered a coup. Likewise, where the forcible ouster of a regime is accomplished solely by foreign actors, the case is not considered a coup.

Our data on coup d'états is original. It is constructed from a database on political leaders *Archigos* (Goemans et al., 2004). The database codes the identity of all leaders in 164 countries in the world. It includes information about the manner in which leaders assumed and left office. We look at how power is transferred between two leaders to identify the set of events that may qualify as coups. We first code a variable to identify all irregular exits by a leader, then we code a number of additional variables to distinguish between the different types of irregular exits in the record. An irregular exit occurs when constitutional or customary provisions for power changeover in a country are not observed. Additional variables tell us whether the case involved the use of force, whether force was used or merely threatened, whether the military, rebels, government insiders, or foreigners were behind the events.

Based on this information, we identify 233 instances of a coup d'état between 1960 and 2004.

[12]Where the use of power is less than obvious, we need specific evidence that a threat was actually made to conclude that a coup has taken place.

While our definition is broadly similar to others, differences exist.[13] There are also a number of alternative datasets.[14] We note briefly what we share in common and how we differ from existing definitions and data collection strategies.

The basic insight that we share with the literature is the emphasis on the use or threat of force in effecting regime change, and the notion that the transfer of power should violate constitutional or customary procedure. We disagree with existing approaches in the following ways.

First, we do not include unsuccessful coups. Coup plots and attempts are difficult to establish systematically and independently of potentially questionable claims and interpretations by governments. We do allow, however, leaders to be in office for a brief period of time, such as a week. One could decide to call a brief tenure in office by a coup leader a failed coup. Indeed, sometimes existing datasets seem to effectively do that. We feel that keeping power even briefly is a coup. Because we record the time a coup leader (as well as any leader) keeps office, our data allows other judgement calls to be made easily.

Second, we do not require the transfer of power to result in substantially new policies for it to qualify as a coup event. We feel that whether or not the actors who seize power will choose to adopt new policies matters but it should be a dependent variable in its own right. Our dataset is sufficiently general to allow other scholars to define the policy changes they may want to study and to ask which coups result in those changes and which ones do not.

Third, we allow the perpetrators of the coup d'état to be members of the government security apparatus but also to be members of the government itself (Daud Khan to Taraki in Afghanistan), or rebel forces battling the government (Habre to Deby in Chad). The reason is that we feel the emphasis on extra-constitutionality and use of force associated with coups should cover such events. Some existing datasets claim to adopt a more narrow view of the coup d'état, stating that only takeovers by government

[13]One alternative definition of the coup d'état, due to McGowan and Johnson (2003), sees coups as "... events in which existing regimes are suddenly and illegally displaced by the action of relatively small groups, in which members of the military, police, or security forces of the state play a key role, either on their own or in conjunction with a number of civil servants or politicians."

[14]Classical treatments such as Jackman (1978) aside, a recent paper by Belkin and Schofer (2003) features a dataset with 339 coup events, attempted or successful, between 1945 and 2000. Alesina et al. (1996) present data on 112 countries, between 1960 and 1982. Their source of coup data is the Jodice and Taylor 1983 *World Handbook of Social and Political Indicators*. Londregan and Poole (1990) use the same source. McGowan (2003) has data on 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1946 to 2001. The data includes successful coups, unsuccessful coups, and plots to overthrow a leader. Perhaps the most recent effort is the coup events data by Monty G. Marshall and Donna Ramsey at the Center for Systemic Peace.

insiders (as opposed to insurgents) qualify. However, we have found those claims to be inconsistently applied. For example, in about one third of the cases in which we find that rebels effected the government takeover, the Marshall and Marshall dataset concurs that a coup d'état has taken place. The authors never clarify why these cases count but not the other two thirds of similar transfers of power we uncover.[15] Thus, it is not clear why the power transitions from Gamsakhurdia to Ioseliani in Georgia 1992 and from Nabiyev to Iskandrov in Tajikistan 1992 are not cases of a coup d'état. We aim to be always consistent in applying our basic definition to all cases in the record. That said, we do code specific variables to distinguish the different seizures of executive power so we know when the rebels vs. the military acted, for example. We are able to test our key claims against alternative definitions.

There are other disagreements in the literature.[16] We feel that our approach adds some clarity and flexibility to difficult definitional choices surrounding the coup. We also believe that, to the extent that we systematically go over all leadership changes in the large cross-section of countries we study, we capture cases that some datasets may have overlooked. The degree of correlation between our data and other sources ranges between 65 % and 82 %, suggesting that we both contribute a new conceptual and empirical perspective while sharing substantial agreement with previous work.[17]

Elections

Data on elections comes from the NELDA dataset (Hyde and Marinov, 2010). The dataset codes all national-level elections in 165 countries (Presidential, Legislative, and Parliamentary), together with a variety of attributes. Some of the attributes coded allow us to determine whether an election was competitive. A competitive election is defined as one in which: (1) political opposition is allowed; with more than one candidate allowed to run for office; (2) multiple parties are allowed; (3) the office of the incumbent leader is contested.

We put together the coup and elections data to generate our unit of analysis - the time to election after a successful coup. We construct coup-spells as the basic building

[15] See the Center for Systemic Peace.

[16] Another definitional conundrum is whether the speed which power is seized should matter. Luttwak (1969), for example, emphasizes the idea of speed and surgical precision as being central to a coup, and something that distinguishes the coup d'état from an insurgency. Again, we believe that it is best to provide an inclusive set of candidate events while providing a separate variable to capture the speed of the power transition.

[17] The comparison between our data and existing datasets is part of the replication archive for this article.

block of our data. A country enters a coup spell in the year it experiences a successful coup. The country exits the coup spell when it holds a competitive election. This may happen in the year of the coup, some years later, or we may still be waiting to see an election. The latter case, in the language of duration analysis, is the case of right-hand censoring. A country which is currently in a coup spell and experiences a fresh coup has its current spell censored and enters a fresh coup-spell. The format of the data is country-year: in cases more than coup takes place in a year, only the last one enters the analysis.

Our dependent variable is the termination of the coup spell by an election (*coupfail*), and we allow this process to have an underlying duration. Conceiving of the problem in this way allows us to deal appropriately with cases that are censored.

The two datasets we put together give us information on 164 countries, observed between 1960 and 2004, and yield 210 distinct coup-spells.[18] The average duration of a spell is 8 years, and the range is between under a year, to 36 years (Libya).

From Coups to Elections: Before and After the Cold War

We next construct a simple graphical illustration of the variation in our dependent variable. We look at the five-year period following the seizure of executive power to see how often competitive elections are observed within the chosen time-period. Figure 1 shows the result broken down by period. While the holding of post-coup elections was the exception before 1990, observed in 25 % of the cases, after the end of the Cold War, it is the rule – elections occur in 74 % of the cases.

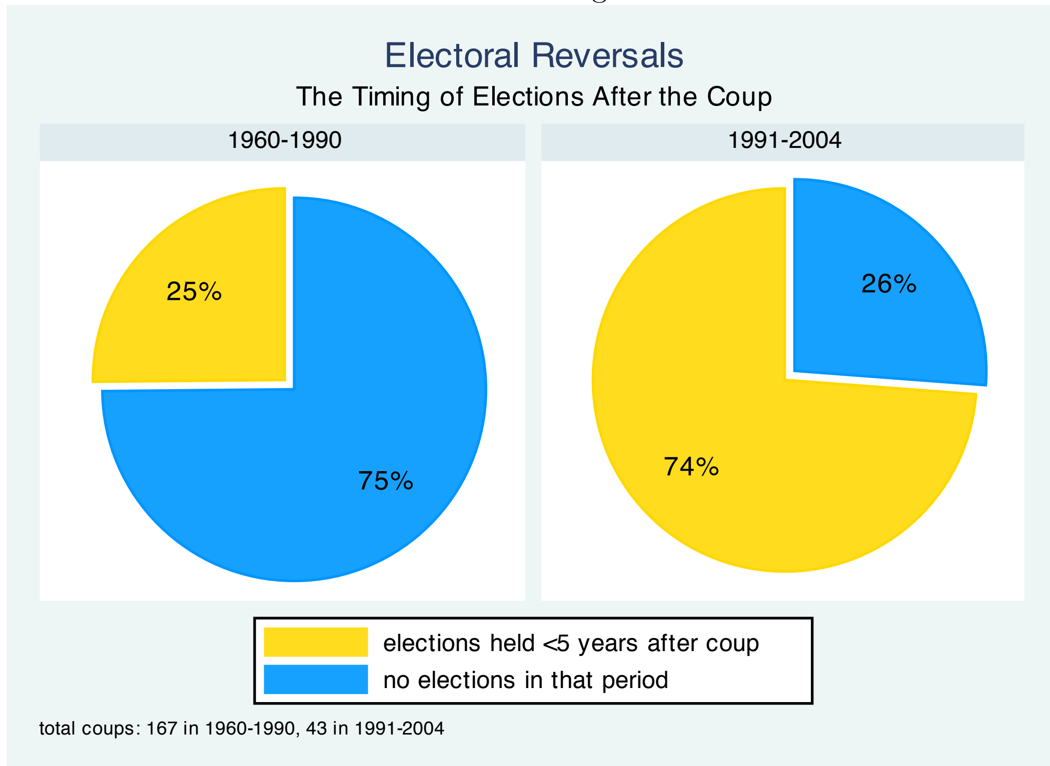
The graph indicates two things. Ignoring the question of post-coup elections may have been justified for a long period of time but would be a sizable omission at present. Second, whatever factors are responsible for the rise of post-coup elections, they should correlate strongly with the end of the Cold War.

We use data on competitive elections as our dependent variable because we want the data to match the concepts we draw on in our theory as closely as possible. Still, we pause to address some potential objections. Do the elections we consider really have a bite? If it turned out that post-coup elections did not amount to much any findings we may have may not mean what we think they do.

We compile a set of characteristics of post-coup elections to speak to this point.

[18] The format of the data is country-year: in cases more than coup takes place in a year, only the last one enters the analysis.

Figure 1:



First, we use information available in the NELDA dataset to ask whether or not the incumbent leader of the country in question was replaced as a result of the vote. We also break down the comparison by pre- and post-Cold War to check for possible trends in the data. We find that 51 % of all post-1990 contests end with the incumbent leader being replaced by a newcomer (table 1). The pre-1990 statistic is 62 %. While post-1991 elections seem to be somewhat less prone to fire the executive from office, they still represent a significant rate of leadership turnover.

Second, we ask whether the actor who lead the coup is out of power after the elections we consider. We find that in 76 % to 78 % of cases, this is true (column 2 of table 1). These numbers, again reinforce our sense that these elections can be characterized as a meaningful transfer of power.

Third, we exploit another variable we have information on to learn about the competitiveness of the post-coup election. We look at the fraudulent-or-free verdicts international election observers pass on contests they monitor. Since electoral observation took off only after the end of the Cold War, we really have little information on this variable prior to 1990. What we do have is that in international observers agreed

that more than 80 % of all monitored post-coup elections (post coup elections were overwhelmingly monitored) were free and fair.

Table 1: **The Bite of Elections After Coups by Period.**

	Incumbent Replaced	*Coup-Leader Out*	*Fraud-Free*
Cold War	62 %	78%	*N/A*
	n=55	n=55	
Post Cold War	51 %	76%	82 %
	n=33	n=29	n=39

Cross-checks against datasets of democratization (not reported) confirm that competitive elections represent a major liberalizing step, and that the post-coup choices made before and after the end of the Cold War have substantially different consequences.

We next turn to identifying what explains the greater incidence of elections after 1991.

4 Analysis

Our identification strategy is based on the observation that the end of the Cold War produced an exogenous shock in the West's willingness to tie various benefits to progress toward democracy. While the Soviet Union was around, there were powerful reasons to look the other way when country leaders suspended constitutional liberties and rigged elections. After the Soviet Union disappeared, for reasons arguably unrelated to the propensity of countries to experience free elections, the decision-making calculus in the powerful power centers in the West changed. The United States and the European Union moved swiftly to adopt formal and informal rules that called for free elections as one condition for good relations with the West.

Development aid is one important benefit countries around the world value when it comes to the relations with the west. From a scholarly point of view, aid has the advantage of being easily measurable for a large set of countries. There are other benefits other countries care about including military assistance, alliances, and investment. In

this paper, we focus on Western development assistance as a measure of the potential pressure successful coup leader are under to move to free elections.

It is important to note that we do not claim that democratic conditionality, the act of tying benefits to progress toward elections and democracy, needs to to be applied by different donors against different countries in the same way. Rather, we claim that there is a marked difference between the overall degree to which the West as a whole is willing to tie aid to democracy before and after the demise of the Soviet Union. Our research design exploits the shift in this average propensity to tie benefits to democracy before and after the end of the Cold War. We also confine the analysis to the years prior to 2001 to avoid picking up the effect of the terrorist attacks against the United States (and any changes to conditionality that may have brought about), as well as to avoid picking up the effect of a growing Chinese presence in the developing world. Our data peters off in 2004, making this restrictions as much of a virtue as a necessity.

4.1 Logit Model

We first look at what makes post-coup elections more likely. We divide our sample into two sets of "coup spell" years: those observed before 1991 and those observed after. Some spells occur solely before or after 1991. Some spells span both periods and are present in both of our samples. Our choice of regression model for the grouped-duration data we have is ordinary logit (Beck, Katz and Tucker, 1998).

We estimate a model in which the dependent variable is whether or not a country experienced competitive elections in year. Our main independent variable is dependence on Western aid, defined as the ratio of the total aid receipts reported to the OECD and the country's GDP in year, lagged one year. What we expect to find is that aid dependence should have no effect on whether elections are held before the end of the Cold War but should be positively related to the occurrence of elections after that.

We include a number of covariates in the estimation. First of all, because we want to know whether the process of adopting elections is path-dependent, we include a measure of the number of years since the coup. It maybe that the longer a country remains in a coup-spell, the less likely it is to adopt elections as leaders consolidate their power base, or become more unpopular and therefore more wary of a competitive contest. It could also be that the effect goes the other way, with the need to rebuild legitimacy through competitive elections going up over time. We only include a linear

counter of years since coup - our inclusion of more complex forms such as cubic splines did not add explanatory power to the model.

Second, we use the NELDA dataset to generate and include a measure of whether or not the country was an electoral democracy when the coup occurred. The idea is to see whether institutions are sticky: if countries that have a tradition of electing their government revert to having elections faster, that would be evidence for the residual bite of institutions.

Next, we include a logged and lagged measure of GDP per capita. It maybe that domestic pressures to adopt elections are higher in societies at higher level of socio-economic development. Especially because a country's aid dependence and levels of GDP per capita are likely correlated (in a negative direction), we need to include this variable as a covariate in the model. We include a lag of economic growth in the regression as well: arguments tying the behavior of political actors to legitimacy and crises suggest that how a country is doing may play a role in the decision to move to elections (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997).

We also include a dummy for whether or not the country is a former French colony. This is an effort to pick up the presence and impact of French troops. We know that unlike other colonial powers France has been willing to station troops in colonies and use them in support of against the government in place (Le Vine, 2004). While the dummy captures French military involvement only noisily, it should help distinguish the effect of France's ability to influence events on the ground through means other than aid disbursements.

We draw on the Archigos dataset to include a variable measuring whether military actors committed the initial seizure of power. We do so in an attempt to capture the different calculations and capabilities of the military in the post-coup strategic environment (Geddes, 1999).

Table 2 presents basic descriptive characteristics of the the data. Table 3 shows results of the logit analysis. The first column reports the pre-1991 results, and the second column reports the post-1991 results.

As expected, aid dependence has no consistent relationship with the speed with which a country moves to the ballot box after a coup pre-1991. This is in contrast to the aftermath of the Cold War (more specifically, the 1991-2001 period), when higher aid dependence predicts a faster onset of competitive elections. This result is consistent with our theoretical expectation. The probability of moving to elections in a year increases from 0.12 to 0.30 when the country is highly dependent on development

Table 2: **Summary Statistics**

variable	mean	std. dev.	min	max
Post-Coup Elections	0.075	0.264	0	1
Aid Dependence	0.093	0.128	0	0.951
Log of Wealth Per Capita	6.448	1.304	3.898	11.468
Economic Growth	0.031	0.081	-0.574	0.614
French Colony	0.357	0.479	0	1
Pre-Coup Electoral Democracy	0.326	0.468	0	1
Military Actors	0.598	0.490	0	1
Years Since Coup	7.520	7.877	0	36
$N = 1,285$				

aid.[19]

The time elapsed since the country entered a coup spell has a negative effect on the likelihood of elections, confirming the hypothesized effect by Svolik (2009) and findings in Bienen and Van De Walle (1989).

We find no evidence that whether or not the coup d'état is undertaken against an electoral democracy makes a difference for how quickly electoral institutional are adopted. The positive sign is in line with expectations that pre-existing institutions are sticky but the coefficients fall short of standard significance levels. We attribute this finding to possible selections dynamics in the data - if electoral democracies discourage coup leaders, then much of the effect of the variable occurs at the selection stage, leaving too little residual variation to demonstrate a statistically significant post-coup effect.

We also find higher levels of economic development do not predict faster adoption of competitive elections after a coup. The signs of the coefficients on the lagged and logged GDP are positive in both models, which is consistent with the hypothesized effect, but they are not significant. The non-finding in this case is consistent with selection-induced attrition in the economic development variable. While the mean

[19] The 95 % Confidence intervals are 0.08-0.17 and 0.19-0.42 respectively, simulations in Clarify (effect of changing aid dependence from 2 standard deviation below to the same above mean on aid dependence, other variables at their mean).

Table 3: **Logit Model of the Likelihood of a Post-Coup Election.** Robust standard errors clustered on coup-spell in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$,$^{***}p < 0.01$, two-tailed tests. Calculations performed in STATA 11.

	1960-1990	*1991-2001*
Aid Dependence	-0.247	2.711**
	(1.701)	(0.838)
Wealth Per Capita	0.003	0.020
	(0.141)	(0.202)
Economic Growth	-1.822	5.157**
	(1.458)	(1.672)
Former French Colony	-0.777	0.915**
	(0.448)	(0.318)
Pre-Coup Electoral Democracy	0.588	0.302
	(0.334)	(0.378)
Military Actors	-1.548***	-0.452
	(0.452)	(0.349)
Years Since Coup	-0.123***	-0.059*
	(0.033)	(0.024)
Constant	-1.471	-2.144
	(1.135)	(1.142)
N of observations	984	301
n of countries	61	46
Log-Likelihood/df	-174.28	-112.92

GDP per capita in countries that are in a coup spell is 1,404 dollars (1995 constant terms), the mean for all countries observed between 1960 and 2001 in the data is 5,235 dollars. Thus, it may be the case that the variation in the economic development variable that remains in the sample selected into a coup spell is insufficient to identify the effect of modernization on the adoption of elections absent selection dynamics.

We find that economic growth had no effect on the decision to adopt elections in the earlier period, but higher growth is strongly associated with progress on that front post-1991. Good economic times should enable coup entrepreneurs to stay in office without calling for elections, rendering the latter finding puzzling. The relationship between growth and elections after coups calls for further research.

Our findings on how former French colonies differ from the rest in terms of time to elections after a coup d'état is consistent with our expectations. Prior the the end of the Cold War, former French colonies in a coup-spell were neither more nor less likely to move to elections. This changes post-1991, with those countries being much more likely to adopt competitive elections following a coup. We believe that this result may be due, in part, to strong economic conditionality coming from Paris (not otherwise picked by the aid dependence variable), but also possibly, due to an overt or covert threat to use force against successful coup leaders who defy the directions to call voters to the ballot box.

Military actors appear to play a somewhat unexpected role. In the 1960-1991 period coups lead by active members of the army were significantly less likely to lead to elections. It is possible that this speaks to the superior ability of the military to consolidate its power once it has seized it. The direction of the coefficient is the same but the effect no longer significant for the post-1991 sample. The lack of significance could be a reflection of the smaller sample or a smaller effect at work.

How the direction of the effect squares with findings in Geddes (1999), who argues that military dictatorships last longer is interesting. The apparent discrepancy could be due to at least two reasons. First, we study post-coup elections which may overlap but is not the same as liberalization of dictatorships. Some dictatorships may not have come to power through coups. Second, and perhaps more relevant, is Geddes' emphasis on 'consolidated' dictatorships, understood as regimes that have been in existence at least three years. The effect we uncover may be telling us that the military are much more likely to consolidate their grip on power without elections early on, as a regime begins to take shape after a coup. In addition, some military-lead seizures of power may evolve over time into personalist or single-party rule, which do last longer per

Geddes. The evolution of authoritarian forms of government after a forceful seizure of power is an area that merits further research.

Overall, the results on Table 3 help shed light on why elections are much more likely to follow the coup after the end of the Cold War. Dependence on Western donors for development aid, the impact of changing French policy toward its colonies, and the different role of military actors help account for why countries that before would have remained under a post-coup dictatorship are much more likely to experience competitive elections. Importantly, economic development, rising as it maybe for most of the world, plays little role in explaining the new empirical regularity of coups being followed rapidly be elections.

4.2 Propensity Score Matching

Talk about how cases before and after compare, possibly construct a table for illustrative purposes that looks something like Figure 2.

Figure 2:

Aid Dependence

	lo dep		*hi dep*	
pre1991	Ghana Nigeria Gabon Afghanistan Thai76 Indonesia	Iraq Myanmar Fiji Swaziland Syria Libya	Mauritania78, ot Burkina Faso Comoros	Niger74 Guinea-Bissau 1980 Mali 1968
post1991	Libya	Iraq(Saddam) Myanmar Swa Fiji91, Fiji00 (?) Syria Libya	Les93*, Les98* Bur93* Gambia94*	Niger96* GuiBiss99* Mali92*

*elections in <5 years

4.3 Two-Stage Estimation

Figure 3: **Logit of the Likelihood of a Coup d'État**

VARIABLES	(1) 1960-1990	(2) 1991-2001
Aid Dep	0.190	0.919
	(1.433)	(1.880)
Wealth per cap	-0.336**	-0.531**
	(0.149)	(0.245)
Econ growth	0.718	0.943
	(1.931)	(1.087)
Coup History	8.266***	11.82***
	(1.584)	(2.852)
Elect Democracy	-0.106	-1.743***
	(0.270)	(0.500)
French Col	0.353	0.338
	(0.318)	(0.442)
Constant	-0.835	0.597
	(1.072)	(1.814)
Observations	2,103	1,218

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 3 provides an illustration of how some of the factors we included in the time-to-elections regression affect the process giving rise to coups, the first stage. Possibly run a two-stage probit.

5 Discussion

5.1 Conditioning Aid

Is Western aid conditional on coups, and their aftermath, after the end of the Cold War? We know from statements and policy discussions that this should be the case. The effects show up in the aid data as well. While countries experiencing a coup experienced on change, on average in their aid receipts prior to 1991, Western aid declined by 20 % following a coup after 1991. The drop in aid, and the difference

between the average drop before 1991 and after are statistically significant based on a $t-$test.[20] Countries that do adopt competitive elections in the latter period are in a much better position to restore their aid flows to pre-coup levels than those that do not. Together with the evidence from multiple cases from intense negotiations between the affected country and the Western donors on the timing of elections, these trends confirm the operation of causal chain of events linking foreign aid to post-coup elections after 1991.

5.2 Decline in Coups

Our data shows a pronounced over time change in the time it takes a country to hold elections after a successful coup d'état. If our argument is right, and changing international pressure is responsible for the effect, we would also expect to find a decline in overall coup levels. Per the argument we develop, pressure to hold elections after a coup makes the prospect of seizing power less attractive to actors who may otherwise be capable of grabbing power. A successful coup leader after 1991 may be threatened by international pressure sufficiently to hold elections, or punishment may be too low to make governing without elections unattractive, but in both cases the payoff they get should be lower than the one in the counterfactual case of no international repercussions for overthrowing a government and governing dictatorially.

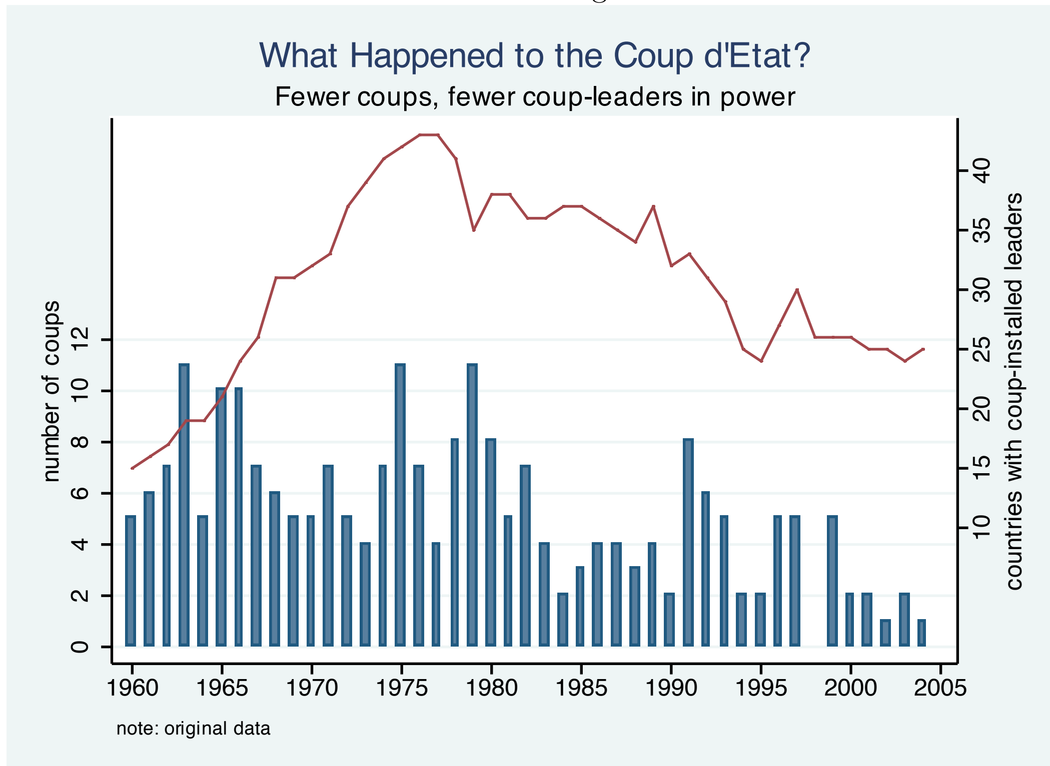
We use our data to plot the over time variation in the incidence of successful coup d'états. Figure 4 shows two trends. The bars indicate the number of coups in a given year. The line represents the number of countries with coup-installed leaders.

The overtime decline in the incidence of coups is evident. The popularity of coups peaked at the height of the Cold War between 1960 and 1980, with some years recording 10 or more extra-constitutional seizures of executive power. Before 1991, there was not a single year on record in which a coup did not succeed at least once. After the end of the Cold War, some years record no coups, and the maximum number of events we see in a single year does not come close to the maximum observed in the earlier period.

While the decline in coup-activity is broadly consistent with our argument, we need to make two points. First, while we still believe that the end of the Cold War is the best proxy for an overall decline in the tolerance toward coups in the West, we are aware that U.S. policy started to shift even in the 1980s, and especially so in the Americas. In that sense, some of the decline recorded in the 1980s is likely consistent with our

[20] Test looks at fall of aid receipts in year of coup as compared to previous year, for 150 events pre-1991 and 35 after that year.

Figure 4:



argument even if it illustrates that the way we measure the timing and scope of the external shock is somewhat crude.

Second, the spike in coup-activity in 1991 and 1992 is primarily an artefact of the new (unstable) countries entering the system with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and of the overthrow of dictators previously supported by the Soviets (such as Najibullah in Afghanistan).

Third, the decline in coup levels is likely driven by many factors, including rising affluence and growing professionalization of the armed forces. Nonetheless, insisting on elections after the forceful seizure of power, by reducing the expected benefit for coup plotters, may provide an independent contribution to this process.

6 Conclusion

6.1 What this means for spread of democracy

Coups often menace democracy and this is one reason we care to study them. For the same reason, understanding the post-coup trajectory of the regime is important.

When a country's government is overthrown by a set of actors whose main claim to power is guns and the ability to deploy violence, there is typically little to cheer about. The coup d'état has been and remains the single most important threat to democracy around the world (the spreading popularity of autogolpes notwithstanding).[21] People often die in such transitions, repressions and political vendettas are sometimes part of the aftermath, as may be a fall in investment and economic growth.

Yet, depending on the specific circumstances, a coup can sometimes provide few reasons for condemnation. When President Yala of Guinea-Bissau was finally overthrown in a bloodless coup on 14 September 2003, the international community saw little by way of loss. Yala's corrupt, heavy-handed style of government had few supporters among the country's donors. When the leaders of the coup promised to return the country to constitutional rule and elections, international indifference turned to praise and support. Our results indicate that this event is part of a norm, a systematic trend in the data, and the exception to the rule. Recent coups tend to lead to elections, and do so sooner rather than later.

Our results fall well short of an endorsement of the coup d'état. But they do point out to two ways in which these types of transfers of power are less worrisome today than before. First, while the holding of competitive elections is not democracy, it is a step in the right direction. Today's coup leaders are doing much more to bring their countries closer to democracy than their predecessors in the 1960s, for example.

Second, because insisting on the holding of elections ex-post would reduce the ex-ante benefit of seizing power, our findings imply that the incidence of coups should recede. This, given the often unpalatable consequences of the unconstitutional seizure of executive power, should be a good thing.

Our findings have implications on what the international community can and cannot do to help democracy around the world. While democracy remains importantly a home-grown institution, democratic norms have a far better chance of taking root in a country if some minimum procedural trappings of democratic government can

[21] We have data on auto-golpes that leads us to believe that autogolpes are nowhere nearly as prevalent as coups, both before and after the end of the Cold War.

be maintained over time. The world's poorest countries pose a difficult terrain for representative political institutions. We argue that the international community can help in important ways those countries guard their emerging representative institutions from the dangers of the irregular transfer of power. The actual gain for democracy may be slow and fiful to materialize in some cases, but this comes with the underlying diffuculty of the task.

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