

Social Origins of Dictatorships: Elite Networks and Political Transitions in Haiti

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Abstract

Existing theories of coups against democracy emphasize that elite incentives to mount a coup depend on the threat that democracy represents to them and what they stand to gain from dictatorship. But holding interests constant, some potential plotters, by the nature of their social networks, have much more influence over whether or not a coup succeeds. Naidu, Robinson and Young (2016) develop a model of elite social networks where coups generate rents for elites and show that the likelihood of an elite participating in a coup is increasing in their network centrality. They empirically explore the model using an original dataset of Haitian elite social networks which they linked to firm-level data on importing firms. By doing so, they show that highly central families are more likely to participate in the 1991 coup against the democratic Aristide government. They then find that the retail prices of the staple goods imported by coup participators differentially increase during subsequent periods of non-democracy. Finally, the authors find that urban children born during periods of non-democracy are more likely to experience adverse health outcomes.