

Leadership Transitions and Survival: Coups, Autocoups, and Power Dynamics

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Abstract

This thesis addresses a notable lacuna in the study of irregular leadership transitions by systematically incorporating autocoups—instances wherein incumbent leaders extend their constitutionally mandated terms through extra-constitutional means. It refines the conceptual definition of autocoups by resolving prevailing ambiguities, thereby aligning them more closely with conventional coup frameworks. On the basis of this refined definition, the thesis introduces a novel global dataset of autocoup events spanning the period from 1945 to 2023, comprising 83 documented cases, 64 of which were successful.

Utilising this dataset, the study conducts a large-N empirical analysis to examine the structural determinants of autocoups. The findings indicate that most power-centred regimes—presidential democracies and personalist regimes—are significantly more susceptible to employing autocoups as a strategy for power retention, in contrast to other regime types. This pattern diverges from that of traditional coups, which have historically been more prevalent in military regimes.

The analysis then shifts to the question of leadership survival, employing survival analysis techniques to compare the political longevity of leaders who assumed office via traditional coups with those who retained power through autocoups. Contrary to the hypothesis that autocoup leaders survive longer than their coup-installed counterparts, the results reveal that—once very short-lived leaderships (less than 180 days) are excluded—the method of power acquisition does not exert a statistically significant effect on leadership duration. Instead, regime type emerges once again as the critical determinant: military regimes exhibit a significantly

higher hazard ratio for leadership removal compared to the reference category of dominant-party regimes, mirroring trends observed in classic coups.

The thesis also assesses the broader institutional ramifications of such irregular power transitions, particularly with respect to democratisation. Using Polity scores as a proxy for democratic quality and applying a country-fixed effects model, the analysis demonstrates that autocoups are associated with a sustained erosion of democratic institutions both preceding and following their occurrence. In contrast, while traditional coups often precipitate an immediate and sharp decline in democratic quality, they are frequently followed by democratic recovery or transitions over time. These findings highlight the divergent political trajectories engendered by coups and autocoups and call for greater scholarly and policy attention to the consistently negative consequences of autocoups for democratic governance.

Taken together, the findings underscore the distinct nature, drivers, and consequences of coups and autocoups. This research makes several substantive contributions: it clarifies the conceptual boundaries of autocoups; provides a new empirical basis for their systematic study; and offers robust comparative insights into how different modes of irregular power transition influence both leadership survival and institutional development. The implications are substantial for academic scholarship and policy-making alike, particularly in the context of global democratic backsliding and the resilience of political institutions.

Keywords: *Coups, Autocoups, Leadership transitions, Leadership survival, Democratic resilience*

Chapter 1

Introduction

At the heart of contemporary political dynamics lies a fundamental question: why are some political leaders prematurely removed from office, while others succeed in extending their tenure beyond constitutionally mandated limits? Furthermore, how does the mode of their survival or removal shape political stability and democratic institutions? This thesis seeks to address these critical questions by analysing the structural and strategic foundations of irregular leadership transitions.

1.1 Motivations

The stability and resilience of political systems depend crucially on the orderly transfer of power. When leadership transitions occur within established institutional frameworks, they reinforce political legitimacy and contribute to regime durability. In contrast, the breakdown of conventional mechanisms for political succession often precipitates instability, violence, and democratic backsliding. Among the most disruptive of such breakdowns are irregular leadership transitions, which leave lasting institutional legacies and fundamentally alter the political trajectory of regimes. Understanding the causes and consequences of these events remains central to the study of political order and regime change.

The extant literature identifies a broad array of catalysts for irregular leadership exits, including civil wars (Kokkonen and Sundell 2019), international conflict (Mesquita and Siverson 1995), ethnic divisions (Londregan, Bienen, and Walle 1995), economic crises (Miller 2012; Krishnarajan 2019), and natural disasters (Quiroz Flores and Smith 2012). Among these, coups d'état are particularly consequential due to both their frequency and their direct displacement of incumbent leaders. In autocratic regimes, coups account for nearly one-third of all leadership exits—exceeding regular transitions, which constitute just over one-fifth (Frantz and Stein 2016). Furthermore, over 63% of non-constitutional removals in dictatorships are attributable to coups (Svolik 2009).

Consequently, coups have received extensive scholarly attention. A substantial body of research explores their causes, outcomes, and long-term implications for democracy and development (Thyne and Powell 2019). In particular, the study of coup determinants has flourished, with scholars proposing nearly one hundred explanatory variables. Yet, a widely accepted baseline model remains elusive (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016).

By contrast, another form of irregular power transition—the autocoup—has received comparatively limited academic scrutiny. In an autocoup, an incumbent extends their tenure by circumventing or overriding constitutional term limits through extra-constitutional means. While autocoups do not immediately result in leadership change, they constitute a fundamental breach of institutional succession norms and obstruct the expected regular transfer of power. As such, they warrant classification as a critical, albeit understudied, variant of irregular leadership transition.

This thesis argues that autocoups deserve systematic analysis alongside traditional coups within a unified analytical framework. Despite differences in execution, both coups and autocoups involve extra-constitutional efforts to acquire or retain power, and both have significant implications for leadership survival, regime stability, and democratic integrity. Comparative analysis of these two forms of irregular transition can reveal shared drivers, divergent outcomes, and broader lessons for democratic resilience.

The urgency of this inquiry is underscored by the serious risks associated with irregular transitions. Both coups and autocoups may trigger immediate crises—ranging from institutional paralysis to civil unrest—and leave deep institutional scars. More fundamentally, they tend to dismantle constitutional checks and balances, undermine electoral processes, and accelerate democratic decline or authoritarian consolidation.

Historical cases illustrate these dangers vividly. Ghana’s turbulent era from 1979 to 1984 reflects the destabilising effects of classic coups. Following Jerry Rawlings’s 1979 coup, eight individuals, including three former heads of state, were executed ([Pieterse 1982](#)). Rawlings launched another coup in 1981 and subsequently quashed three further coup attempts ([Haynes 2022](#)). In contrast, the 1992 autocoup in Peru, orchestrated by President Alberto Fujimori, exemplifies how an incumbent can dismantle democratic institutions without a change in leadership. Fujimori dissolved Congress, suspended the constitution, and ruled by decree ([Mauceri 1995](#); [Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b](#)).

These patterns are increasingly salient in today’s global political landscape. According to Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2024 report, global political rights and civil liberties declined for the eighteenth consecutive year in 2023, with setbacks recorded in 52 countries and improvements in only 21 ([Freedom House 2024](#)). The persistence of democratic erosion highlights the pressing need to understand the mechanisms that facilitate it—including both coups and autocoups.

This thesis seeks to advance both theoretical and empirical understanding of irregular leadership transitions. It offers insights with substantial implications for scholarly research and policy formulation in fragile or democratising regimes.

1.2 Research objectives and contributions

In response to the pressing challenges posed by irregular leadership transitions, this study undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis structured around four core research objectives.

First, it seeks to refine the conceptual definition of autocoups and introduce a novel dataset amenable to large-N empirical analysis. Second, it aims to identify the structural and institutional determinants of autocoups through a systematic quantitative investigation. Third, it compares the survival prospects of leaders who ascend to power via traditional coups with those who extend their tenure through autocoups. Finally, it assesses the divergent impacts of coups and autocoups on democratisation trajectories and the resilience of political institutions.

By examining both coups and autocoups from 1950 to 2023, this thesis addresses a significant gap in political science by developing and applying a unified analytical framework that treats these events as distinct yet interrelated forms of extra-constitutional power transition. Through this lens, the study makes four principal contributions to the literature on leadership dynamics, regime stability, and institutional development.

Conceptual clarification and empirical foundation for autocoups

This thesis advances conceptual clarity by situating autocoups within the broader typology of irregular power transitions. It offers a refined definition of autocoups—centred on the executive’s unilateral extension of tenure—and clearly differentiates them from both executive aggrandisement and traditional military coups. Building upon this conceptual framework, the study introduces an original dataset of autocoups spanning the period from 1945 to 2023, documenting 83 incidents, of which 64 were successful. This dataset addresses a long-standing empirical lacuna and provides a foundational basis for systematic comparative analysis, thereby enabling future research into a previously under-examined form of institutional disruption.

First empirical analysis of determinants of autocoups

Utilising this newly compiled dataset, the thesis undertakes the first empirical examination of the structural and institutional conditions under which autocoups are likely to occur. The analysis finds that leaders operating within power-concentrated systems—particularly presidential

democracies and personalist regimes—are significantly more prone to extending their tenure through autoups than those operating in other regime types. These findings contribute to the literature on the relationship between regime characteristics and irregular power retention, highlighting the critical role of institutional structures in shaping leaders’ strategic decisions to override term limits.

Comparative analysis of leadership longevity: Coup vs autoup leaders

The research further contributes to the study of leadership survival by comparing the tenure durations of leaders who attain power through coups with those who retain it via autoups. Employing survival analysis on both the coup and autoup datasets, the study finds that, contrary to the assumption, the method of power acquisition is not a significant predictor of leadership longevity. However, it reaffirms that regime type plays a decisive role in leader survival, irrespective of the mode of accession or retention. The survival models indicate that leaders within military regimes exhibit a higher hazard ratio of removal compared to those in dominant-party regimes. These results underscore the influence of regime structure on leadership durability and elite turnover.

Comparative democratic implications of coups and autoups

The thesis also investigates the differential impacts of coups and autoups on democratic development. Employing country-fixed effects regression models and utilising Polity V scores as an indicator of democratic quality, the analysis finds that autoups are consistently associated with gradual and sustained democratic erosion—both preceding and following the event. In contrast, coups yield more heterogeneous institutional outcomes. While they often result in immediate setbacks to democratic norms, in certain instances they facilitate democratic transitions, including shifts from autocracy to democracy. This disaggregated analysis reveals the distinct trajectories and institutional consequences engendered by different forms of irregular

power transitions.

1.3 Policy implications

Although scholarly debate persists regarding the potential for coups to inadvertently foster democratisation under certain conditions (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; Miller 2016), there exists a strong policy consensus that coups constitute inherently illegitimate mechanisms of political change. As violent disruptions of constitutional order, they tend to inflict immediate institutional damage, precipitate instability, and lead to unpredictable political trajectories. Accordingly, both international and domestic policy responses have rightly prioritised prevention—most notably through “coup-proofing” strategies designed to insulate regimes from military intervention or elite defection (Quinlivan 1999; Pilster and Böhmelt 2012; Jonathan M. Powell, n.d.; Albrecht 2014a; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015; C. S. Brown, Fariss, and McMahon 2015; Sudduth 2017). However, as this thesis demonstrates, such approaches have well-documented limitations (Albrecht 2014b; Reiter 2020), and deeper structural power dynamics within regimes are frequently more decisive in determining vulnerability to both coups and autocoups.

From this vantage point, the findings of the study generate several important policy implications.

The first, and most immediate, implication concerns the design and architecture of political institutions. Regimes characterised by robust horizontal accountability mechanisms—such as independent legislatures, judiciaries, and oversight bodies—demonstrate greater resilience to irregular power seizures. A carefully calibrated balance of power reduces both the opportunity and the incentive for executive actors to override constitutional constraints. Institutional designs that disperse authority, limit executive aggrandisement, and embed strong checks and balances may therefore serve as the primary bulwark against both coups and autocoups. Promoting sound governance practices—through the enforcement of constitutional term limits, the strengthening

of civil society, and the institutionalisation of transparent succession procedures—is essential to mitigating the risk of authoritarian entrenchment.

A second major policy implication concerns the role of external actors and international institutions. Regional and global organisations—including MERCOSUR, the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, the European Union, and the Council of Europe—have played a significant role in deterring unconstitutional leadership changes. By establishing legal frameworks that uphold democratic governance and deploying instruments such as sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and suspension of membership, these bodies can exert meaningful pressure on regimes that come to power via military coups or other overt breaches of constitutional norms ([Wobig 2014](#); [Shannon et al. 2014](#); [C. Thyne et al. 2017](#)).

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is often more limited in the context of autocoups. Unlike traditional coups, autocoups are typically executed through procedural manipulation—such as emergency decrees, rigged referenda, or constitutional amendments—rather than overt displays of force. This legalistic façade complicates international responses: the absence of visible violence or abrupt leadership change often leads to delayed or inadequate intervention, hampered by political ambiguity and the absence of consensus.

Given the rising incidence of autocoups since the early 2000s and their central role in contemporary democratic backsliding ([Bermeo 2016](#); [Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017](#)), international actors must adapt their monitoring and response frameworks accordingly. A third and urgent policy recommendation thus emerges: regional and international organisations must shift from reactive to proactive modes of engagement, developing criteria that capture gradual institutional erosion—a defining feature of modern authoritarian consolidation. Rather than awaiting clear-cut disruptions, policymakers should utilise existing democratic monitoring instruments—such as Polity scores, Freedom House ratings, and V-Dem indices—to track sustained declines in institutional quality, media freedom, judicial independence, and electoral competitiveness. Observable patterns of democratic regression should be treated as early warn-

ing indicators, prompting calibrated responses such as diplomatic engagement, conditional aid adjustments, public condemnation, or targeted sanctions. Such measures would enable the international community to act before constitutional frameworks are irreparably degraded.

In sum, this thesis underscores the evolving nature of threats to democratic governance. While coups remain a visible and disruptive threat to political order, autocoups represent a more insidious form of democratic erosion—one that proceeds incrementally and often under the guise of legality. To safeguard constitutional rule in an era marked by creeping authoritarianism, both domestic institutions and international mechanisms must be reconfigured to detect and counteract the gradual unraveling of democratic norms, not merely their sudden collapse.

1.4 Limitations and future research

Whilst this study proposes a novel analytical framework for understanding coups and autocoups, their effects on leadership survival, and their broader institutional implications, several limitations remain, indicating important directions for future research and refinement.

First, although the definition and classification of autocoups advanced herein represent a meaningful conceptual contribution, broader scholarly consensus on these parameters remains underdeveloped. The definitional boundaries and the empirical dataset introduced in this study serve as foundational contributions; nonetheless, they are necessarily preliminary. Future research should seek to further elaborate and refine these components to enhance the reliability, validity, and comparability of findings across different analytical contexts.

A core challenge concerns the conceptual ambiguity that surrounds the very definition of autocoups—particularly in borderline cases where incumbents extend their authority through legal or quasi-legal mechanisms. Future work might explore the normative and analytical trade-offs involved in including such cases within the autocoup category. Comparative analyses of ‘unconstitutional’ versus ‘extra-constitutional’ extensions of executive tenure may assist in clarifying whether these actions constitute variants of the same phenomenon or represent analyti-

cally distinct processes.

This ambiguity in conceptual boundaries directly affects the construction of empirical datasets. Minor alterations in inclusion criteria may lead to substantial variation in the number and classification of identified cases, particularly where intentions, timing, and legal interpretations are contested. A case in point is that of President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009. Zelaya proposed a referendum to amend the 1965 Constitution, which prohibited presidential re-election, ostensibly to allow future leaders to seek an additional term. As the referendum was scheduled for the same day as the national election, its immediate passage would not have benefited Zelaya directly. Nevertheless, questions persist regarding his underlying intent: by promoting a reform that appeared not to advantage him personally, Zelaya may have sought to cultivate public support for a subsequent reinterpretation or further amendment aimed at extending his own rule. Ultimately, he was removed by a military coup, precipitating a severe constitutional crisis ([Muñoz-Portillo and Treminio 2019](#)). This case illustrates the analytical complexity of identifying autocoups and underscores the necessity of refining coding criteria and interpretive clarity in future data collection efforts.

Accordingly, both the conceptual framework and empirical foundation developed in this study would benefit from sustained theoretical debate and methodological refinement. Several promising avenues for future inquiry emerge.

Given the long-term decline in traditional coups and the parallel rise of autocoups, increased scholarly attention to the latter is imperative. While this study focuses on tenure extension as the defining feature of autocoups, broader forms of executive power expansion—whether within or beyond the formal constitutional framework—merit systematic investigation. These dynamics are both frequent and damaging to institutional resilience, yet remain comparatively under-explored in the literature on regime change and executive aggrandisement. To capture the full range of such practices, the development of a dedicated dataset on executive power expansion represents a crucial next step.

Moreover, the decreasing frequency of overt and dramatic regime transitions since the early

2000s has coincided with a decline in unambiguous shifts between democracy and autocracy. This trend highlights the necessity of more sensitive instruments capable of detecting incremental changes within regimes. Future empirical research should focus on identifying and measuring such subtler transformations, including minor but sustained variations in Polity scores or other disaggregated institutional indicators. By doing so, scholars will be better equipped to monitor the gradual erosion—or potential recovery—of democratic governance in contexts where abrupt regime change is no longer the dominant mode of political transformation.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

This thesis examines the complex power dynamics underlying coups and autoups, with a particular focus on their consequences for leadership survival and the democratisation or authoritarian transformation of political regimes. It develops a unified analytical framework to study these phenomena as distinct yet interconnected forms of irregular power transition. Each chapter contributes to this overarching inquiry by offering conceptual clarifications, empirical innovations, and comparative insights.

Chapter 2: Conceptualising autoups and data introduction

Despite the increasing incidence of autoups—particularly in the post-Cold War era—their systematic study remains underdeveloped. Existing scholarship suffers from conceptual fragmentation, characterised by a proliferation of overlapping and inconsistently defined terms (‘self-coup’, autogolpe, ‘executive aggrandisement’, etc.) ([Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019](#); [Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)). This conceptual ambiguity complicates empirical analysis, as many datasets fail to distinguish between tenure extension and other forms of executive power consolidation—an essential distinction for this study. As a result, methodological progress has been hindered, with most existing research relying on qualitative case studies ([Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b](#); [Antonio 2021](#); [Pion-Berlin, Bruneau, and Goetze 2022](#)), rather than large-N

analyses.

This chapter addresses these limitations by proposing a more precise and theoretically grounded definition of the autocoup. It contends that autocoups should be defined as attempts by incumbents to extend their constitutionally mandated terms of office. By centring the definition on tenure extension, the concept excludes broader forms of executive aggrandisement that occur within existing constitutional time-frames, and aligns autocoups conceptually with classic coups, both of which involve disruptions to constitutionally prescribed leadership succession. Accordingly, this study defines **an autocoup as the extension of an incumbent leader's tenure beyond its original constitutional limit, achieved through extra-constitutional means.**

Based on this refined definition, the chapter presents a significant empirical contribution: a newly compiled global dataset of autocoups spanning the period 1945 to 2023, identifying 83 distinct events, of which 64 were successful. This dataset facilitates systematic quantitative analysis and opens new avenues for comparative research on irregular retention of power.

Chapter 3: Determinants of autocoup attempts

Due to long-standing conceptual and empirical constraints, existing discussions of autocoups have relied largely on case-based approaches ([Baturu and Elgie, n.d.](#); [Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019](#); [Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)). The dataset introduced in Chapter 2 enables, for the first time, a large-N analysis of the structural conditions underpinning autocoup attempts.

Drawing upon insights from the coup literature, this chapter investigates a range of potential predictors—including economic performance, succession rules, military influence, protest activity, and media freedom. While these variables have been analysed in the context of traditional coups, they often fail to account for persistent cross-regime variation or the limited efficacy of so-called ‘coup-proofing’ strategies ([Albrecht 2014b](#); [Reiter 2020](#)). Moreover, many studies adopt overly simplistic regime typologies (e.g. democracy vs. autocracy, or civilian vs. mili-

tary), thereby obscuring important variation within regime types (Hiroi and Omori 2013; Schiel 2019).

This chapter advances the argument that autocoup risk is shaped fundamentally by the structural balance of power embedded in a regime's founding configuration. Specifically, the likelihood of an autocoup is determined by the equilibrium between incumbents and potential institutional challengers—a balance largely set at regime inception (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). To test this proposition, regime typologies are employed as proxies for internal power structures.

Using both a standard logit model and a bias-reduced logit model (Firth's penalised maximum likelihood estimation), the analysis reveals that presidential democracies and personalist regimes are significantly more prone to autocoup attempts than dominant-party regimes, when other variables are held constant. Leaders in dominant-party and military regimes, by contrast, do not significantly differ in their likelihood of attempting an autocoup. These findings underscore the centrality of regime type in shaping elite incentives for irregular tenure extension.

Chapter 4: Power acquisition methods and leadership survival

Although a substantial body of literature has explored the tenure survival of leaders who come to power through coups (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Sudduth 2017; Easton and Siverson 2018), the absence of comparable data on autocoups has long precluded systematic comparisons between coup-installed leaders and those who prolong their rule via autocoups. This chapter addresses that gap by offering the first comparative survival analysis of these two categories within a unified theoretical framework.

It argues that coup leaders typically face heightened legitimacy deficits, political uncertainty, and institutional instability, whereas autocoup leaders benefit from institutional continuity while simultaneously removing key constraints. These distinct conditions shape divergent pathways to political consolidation.

Surprisingly, the time-dependent Cox model shows no statistically significant difference in survival risk between coup-installed and aut coup leaders once relevant covariates—especially regime type—are taken into account. Rather, regime characteristics exert a decisive influence on leadership tenure: leaders in military and transitional regimes face significantly higher risks of removal than those in dominant-party regimes.

Chapter 5: Coups, aut coups, and democracy

While the impact of coups on democratisation has received considerable scholarly attention ([Clayton and Onwumechili 2000](#); [Jonathan M. Powell 2014](#); [C. Thyne and Hitch 2020](#)), the consequences of aut coups remain understudied due to the historical absence of relevant data. This chapter addresses this lacuna through a quantitative analysis of how coups and aut coups affect democratic institutions.

Whereas coups may produce leadership turnover or even regime change, aut coups typically involve incumbents dismantling institutional constraints without altering the core ruling coalition. Consequently, their effects are best assessed not by regime-type transitions, but by shifts in continuous measures of democratic quality, such as Polity V scores.

Two key claims are advanced. First, leaders often begin to erode institutional checks in anticipation of an aut coup, resulting in declines in Polity scores prior to the event itself. Second, while coups exhibit mixed outcomes—sometimes enabling democratisation—aut coups almost invariably result in democratic erosion or deeper authoritarian consolidation.

Empirical analysis using a country-fixed effects model confirms that aut coups are associated with consistent declines in democratic quality both before and after the event. By contrast, coups tend to cause an immediate drop in Polity scores, although in some cases democratic recovery follows. These findings highlight the uniquely insidious nature of aut coups, which often proceed incrementally and under a legalistic façade.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and future research directions

The concluding chapter synthesises the findings of the preceding chapters, drawing attention to the structural, strategic, and institutional dynamics that underpin irregular leadership transitions. It contends that coups and autocoups are not simply disruptive events, but strategic tools employed by elites to recalibrate or entrench political authority. Their institutional legacies diverge: while coups often destabilise regimes, autocoups typically consolidate autocratic rule.

This chapter outlines the broader implications of these findings for understanding the resilience of autocracy, the vulnerability of democratic institutions, and the strategic calculus of political leaders. It also proposes several directions for future research.

First, the broader phenomenon of executive power expansion—whether or not it involves tenure extension—warrants systematic investigation. Given its increasing frequency and corrosive institutional effects, the development of a dedicated dataset on power expansions is strongly recommended.

Second, as full regime transitions become less common, future research should focus on detecting subtle, incremental changes in political quality. Fine-grained indicators—such as modest shifts in Polity scores—will be essential for monitoring democratic backsliding and institutional recovery in hybrid or semi-authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 2

Autocoups: Conceptual Clarification and Dataset Introduction

Abstract

This chapter presents a refined conceptualisation of autocoups, defined as instances in which incumbent leaders extend their constitutionally mandated tenure through extra-constitutional means, typically by circumventing or violating term limits. By critically reviewing and synthesising overlapping terms—such as self-coup, autogolpe, and executive takeover—the chapter delineates the conceptual boundaries of the phenomenon, identifying tenure extension as its defining characteristic. In distinguishing autocoups from broader and more ambiguous forms of executive aggrandisement, it advances a more analytically precise framework for studying irregular power extensions. Building on this conceptual foundation, the chapter introduces a novel global dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2023, identifying 83 distinct cases, of which 64 were successful. This empirical contribution enables systematic, large-N analysis of an increasingly salient mode of authoritarian consolidation.

keywords: *Autocoups, Coups, Irregular Power Transitions, Leadership Tenure, Dataset*

2.1 Introduction

The stability and resilience of political systems rest fundamentally on the orderly transfer of power. When leadership succession takes place within established constitutional frameworks, it reinforces the legitimacy and durability of governing institutions. Conversely, the breakdown of these norms and mechanisms often precipitates political violence, institutional erosion, and prolonged instability.

While many leadership transitions occur without disruption, a considerable proportion do not. In particular, authoritarian regimes and fragile democracies frequently experience two principal forms of irregular leadership outcomes: the premature removal of incumbents and the extension of power beyond constitutional limits.

The former—forced removals of leaders prior to the completion of their terms—has been extensively examined under the broader category of irregular leadership transitions. These events have profound consequences for regime stability, democratic legitimacy, and institutional development. Accordingly, understanding their causes and implications remains a core concern within political science.

The extant literature identifies a range of precipitating factors, including civil war ([Kokkonen and Sundell 2019](#)), international conflict ([Mesquita and Siverson 1995](#)), ethnic cleavages ([Londregan, Bienen, and Walle 1995](#)), poor economic performance ([Miller 2012](#); [Krishnarajan 2019](#)), and natural disasters ([Quiroz Flores and Smith 2012](#)). Among these, however, coups d'état—typically defined as illegal and overt attempts by the military or state elites to depose a sitting executive ([Powell and Thyne 2011](#))—stand out as the most frequent and consequential source of leadership change. In autocratic contexts, they account for approximately one-third of all leader exits, surpassing even regular transitions ([Frantz and Stein 2016](#)), while roughly two-thirds of non-constitutional removals in dictatorships are attributable to coups ([Svolik 2009](#)). Unsurprisingly, coups have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Researchers have explored their structural determinants, proximate triggers, aftermath, and effects on democratic

consolidation and economic development ([Thyne and Powell 2019](#)).

Yet this focus on traditional coups risks overlooking a distinct and increasingly salient form of irregular transition: the autocoup. In this chapter, an autocoup is defined as an instance in which an incumbent leader extends their tenure by subverting or bypassing constitutional term limits through extra-constitutional means. Despite their rising incidence—particularly since the end of the Cold War—autocoups remain under-theorised and under-examined. Conceptual fragmentation has impeded progress, with a proliferation of overlapping and inconsistently applied terms such as self-coup, autogolpe, and executive aggrandisement ([Marsteintreidet and Malamud 2019](#); [Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)). This lack of definitional precision complicates data collection and comparative analysis. Existing datasets often conflate tenure extensions with broader forms of executive power consolidation, thereby failing to isolate the specific mechanisms this study seeks to analyse ([Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)). Consequently, scholarship has tended to rely on qualitative case studies ([Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b](#); [Antonio 2021](#); [Pion-Berlin, Bruneau, and Goetze 2022](#)), limiting the field’s capacity for broader generalisation.

This chapter contends that these conceptual and empirical limitations obscure a crucial dimension of contemporary politics. It thus proposes a unified analytical framework for examining coups and autocoups as distinct yet comparable strategies for undermining constitutional norms governing leadership succession. This comparative approach is warranted on three grounds.

First, both coups and autocoups constitute fundamental breaches of constitutional order, with significant implications for democratic resilience, political legitimacy, and institutional integrity. Analysing them in tandem facilitates a systematic examination of how different forms of irregular power transition shape trajectories of political development and democratisation.

Second, while both disrupt established norms of succession, they operate in opposite directions relative to the incumbent: coups terminate leadership prematurely, whereas autocoups extend it beyond its constitutionally mandated limit. This contrast offers a valuable lens through which to explore the mechanisms of political survival and authoritarian consolidation.

Third, a comparative framework helps to illuminate pressing contemporary puzzles. For instance, how can the marked decline in coup frequency since the 1990s ([Bermeo 2016](#)) be reconciled with the sustained erosion of democratic governance—now in its eighteenth consecutive year ([Freedom House 2024](#))? By incorporating autocoups into the analytical schema, this study highlights the growing significance of incremental, procedural subversions of democracy, often orchestrated from within the existing legal and institutional architecture.

To address these gaps, the chapter makes two principal contributions. First, it offers conceptual clarification by redefining autocoups as a subtype of irregular leadership transition centred specifically on extra-constitutional tenure extension. This refined definition distinguishes autocoups from broader, more diffuse forms of executive aggrandisement. Second, it introduces a novel global dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2023, compiled in accordance with this reconceptualised framework, thereby enabling the first systematic large-N analysis of the phenomenon.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews existing definitions related to power extension and executive aggrandisement, culminating in a revised conceptualisation of autocoups. Section 3 introduces the new dataset, detailing its scope, coding criteria, and methodological foundations. Section 4 presents an initial analysis through descriptive statistics and illustrative case studies. The conclusion synthesises the chapter’s key contributions and outlines directions for future research.

2.2 literature review and clarification of definitions

A significant limitation in the study of irregular leadership transitions lies in the insufficient integration of research on conventional coups and autocoups. While both constitute critical mechanisms of extra-constitutional power transfer, they have typically been examined in isolation, with limited attention paid to their conceptual and empirical intersections.

This disjunction primarily arises from two factors: the historical under-recognition of au-

tocoups as a distinct subtype of irregular transition, and the enduring conceptual ambiguity surrounding their definition. Whereas classic coups are generally characterised by the abrupt removal of incumbents, autocoups typically involve incumbent-led efforts to retain or expand power by circumventing constitutional constraints. However, the inconsistent usage of overlapping terms—such as ‘self-coup’, autogolpe, and ‘executive aggrandisement’—has further muddled these distinctions.

Clarifying the definition of autocoups is thus a necessary step towards constructing a comparative framework capable of capturing the full spectrum of irregular power transitions. This section undertakes that task by distinguishing autocoups from broader forms of executive power consolidation, and by conceptually aligning them with traditional coups through their shared transgression of constitutional norms.

Terminology

Studies of autocoups employ a wide range of terms to describe the extension of power or tenure by incumbent leaders. The most commonly used is ‘self-coup’, or autogolpe in Spanish ([Przeworski et al. 2000](#); [Maxwell A. Cameron 1998a](#); [Bermeo 2016](#); [Helmke 2017](#); [Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019](#)). This term gained scholarly prominence following the actions of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori in 1992, who dissolved Congress, temporarily suspended the constitution, and ruled by decree ([Mauceri 1995](#); [Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b](#)). However, as Marsteintredet and Malamud (2019) rightly notes, ‘self-coup’ is a potentially misleading label, as it implies that the leader acts against themselves, whereas such moves are typically aimed at other state institutions or constitutional constraints.

A second category of terminology includes expressions such as ‘presidential coup’, ‘executive coup’, ‘constitutional coup’, ‘electoral coup’, ‘judicial coup’, ‘slow-motion coup’, ‘soft coup’, and ‘parliamentary coup’ ([Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019](#)). While these descriptors may offer insights into specific mechanisms or contexts, their proliferation often leads to

conceptual confusion. Many centre on the method of power acquisition but fail to consistently identify the perpetrator. Moreover, such mechanisms—judicial rulings, legislative manoeuvres, or administrative decrees—may be employed either by or against executive actors, further complicating classification.

A third group of terms includes phrases such as ‘incumbent takeover’, ‘executive takeover’, and ‘overstay’. For instance, incumbent takeover refers to “an event perpetuated by a ruling executive that significantly reduces the formal and/or informal constraints on his/her power” (Baturu and Tolstrup 2022, 374), drawing on earlier work by Svolik (2014). Similarly, overstay denotes “staying longer than the maximum term as it stood when the candidate originally came into office” (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins 2011, 1844). These terms help to clarify the identity of the actor (the incumbent) and the nature of the action (power consolidation or term extension), yet they often fail to convey the illegality or unconstitutionality of such actions. In contrast to ‘coup’, which inherently implies an unlawful seizure of power, labels such as ‘takeover’ or ‘overstay’ may inadvertently understate the normative gravity of the events they describe.

Given that many existing terms tend to prioritise procedural mechanisms over normative considerations, or indeed conflate legal and extra-legal practices, this study posits ‘autocoup’ as the most precise and analytically coherent term. This term offers several key advantages.

Definitional clarity and addressing the core essence: ‘Autocoup’ precisely denotes an incumbent leader’s extension of their political tenure through extra-constitutional means. This definition clearly distinguishes it from conventional coups, typically initiated by external actors such as the military, and from other, more diffuse or ill-defined instances of executive aggrandisement.

Emphasis on severity and normative implications: The suffix ‘-coup’ powerfully signifies the grave breach of constitutional order inherent in such actions. In both academic research and policy assessment contexts, the level of disruption and impact is no less than, and may even exceed, that of conventional coups, thereby imbuing the term with appropriate normative and critical weight.

Accurate identification of the perpetrator: The prefix ‘auto-’ directly identifies the incumbent leader as the instigator of such events. This stands in stark contrast to conventional coups, which are typically orchestrated by actors external to the incumbent’s immediate circle, such as the military or opposition factions, thereby facilitating precise attribution.

Promotion of conceptual coherence and comparative analysis: ‘Autocoup’ shares an etymological root with ‘coup’, ensuring an intrinsic conceptual link and logical consistency. This enables systematic comparative analysis of different yet related forms of irregular leadership transition within a unified analytical framework, thereby deepening the understanding of these phenomena.

In summary, the term ‘autocoup’ not only pinpoints with precision both the actor and the act itself but also clearly reveals the illegitimacy and gravity of the behaviour, alongside its intrinsic theoretical connections to conventional coups. It therefore stands as the most accurate and analytically potent conceptual tool for capturing and analysing such political phenomena, aligning perfectly with the unified analytical framework this study seeks to establish.

Definition

While the use of precise terminology is undoubtedly important, a further significant issue in previous definitions of autocoups lies in the identification of their primary characteristic: is the central feature the expansion of power, the extension of tenure, or a combination of both? This question arises from the marked ambiguity surrounding existing definitions of autocoups and related concepts.

Within political science, the notions of power expansion and tenure extension frequently overlap or are applied ambiguously, thereby contributing to conceptual confusion. To promote greater clarity, it is essential to delineate these two frameworks more rigorously. Power expansion refers to the process by which an incumbent accrues authority beyond their original constitutional remit—typically through centralisation, the weakening of institutional checks

and balances, or encroachments upon other branches of the state, such as the legislature or judiciary. Tenure extension, by contrast, concerns efforts by a leader to remain in office beyond the term originally prescribed, often via constitutional amendments, the postponement or manipulation of elections, or other mechanisms intended to bypass term limits.

Many existing definitions of autoucoups conflate these dynamics or disproportionately emphasise power expansion. For instance, Maxwell A. Cameron (1998a) defines a self-coup as “a temporary suspension of the constitution and dissolution of congress by the executive, who rules by decree until new legislative elections and a referendum can be held to ratify a political system with broader executive power” (p. 220). Yet the concept of “broader executive power” is inherently vague and open to contestation. Similarly, the term incumbent takeover, defined as “an event perpetuated by a ruling executive that significantly reduces the formal and/or informal constraints on his/her power” (Baturu and Tolstrup 2022, 374), builds on earlier work by Svulik (2014) and centres on power expansion as well. However, the dataset employing this definition encompasses both power expansion and tenure extension. By contrast, the term overstay is clearly defined as “staying longer than the maximum term as it stood when the candidate originally came into office” (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins 2011, 1844), thereby focusing specifically on tenure extension.

This thesis contends that tenure extension ought to be regarded as the primary and defining characteristic of an autoucoup, for several reasons. First, this focus aligns autoucoups conceptually with traditional coups. A classic coup is typically characterised by the forcible and premature removal of a sitting executive; it does not necessarily entail a reduction in the leader’s powers, but rather a disruption of their tenure. By the same logic, an autoucoup should be defined by the prolongation of tenure, not solely by the expansion of executive authority. An incumbent may experience a diminution of power while remaining in office—such an instance would not be coded as a coup. Similarly, a leader who consolidates authority without exceeding term limits would fall under the category of executive aggrandisement, but not that of an autoucoup.

Second, in practice, power expansion often functions as a strategic means to enable tenure

extension. The widely cited case of President Alberto Fujimori in Peru exemplifies this dynamic. Although his 1992 actions involved the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of Congress, the ultimate objective was to ensure continued rule. The 1993 Constitution permitted him to seek a second term, which he won in 1995. Subsequently, a law of “authentic interpretation” passed by his congressional allies enabled him to run again in 2000—a move steeped in controversy. Although he secured re-election, his regime collapsed in 2000 amidst corruption and human rights scandals, prompting his flight to Japan ([Ezrow 2019](#)). In this light, it is illogical for incumbents to consolidate power unless they intend to overstay in office; such actions merely strengthen their successors, whose interests may diverge from their own.

Third, the measurement of power expansion presents greater methodological challenges than the identification of tenure extension. For example, Maxwell A. Cameron ([1998a](#)) defines a self-coup as involving both constitutional suspension and congressional dissolution. Yet it remains unclear whether either act alone constitutes an autocoup, whether both are required, or whether they should be treated as distinct events. While the complexity of measurement ought not to preclude the consideration of power expansion, a clear point of departure is required. This study therefore designates tenure extension as the definitional core of autocoups, leaving the broader discussion of power expansion (and its inverse, power contraction) to future research.

Based on these considerations, this study defines an autocoup as:

The extension of an incumbent leader’s tenure in office beyond the originally mandated limit, achieved through extra-constitutional means.

This definition places tenure extension at the centre of the concept, while acknowledging that power expansion may coexist. First, the term incumbent leader refers to the de facto national leader, irrespective of their formal title. For instance, although Vladimir Putin formally stepped down as President of Russia in 2008 and assumed the premiership, effective political power remained in his hands. During this period, the presidency—held by Dmitry Medvedev—functioned largely as a symbolic office under Putin’s continued control ([Chaisty 2019](#)). To en-

sure consistency and minimise arbitrariness, this study employs the Archigos dataset ([Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009](#)) to determine whether an incumbent has effectively remained in power.

Second, although tenure extension is the definitional cornerstone, this framework does not exclude simultaneous power expansion. Both may occur in tandem, but the decisive criterion remains the act of exceeding one's original time in office. In the Fujimori case, for example, the 1992 actions were not coded as an autocoup until the adoption of the 1993 constitutional amendment enabling his re-election.

Third, autocoups may be executed through both legal and illegal means. For instance, Chadian President François Tombalbaye postponed general elections until 1969 after coming to power in 1960. Similarly, Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos suspended elections during much of his nearly four-decade rule ([Baturu and Elgie, n.d.](#)). These represent clear violations of constitutional norms. Other instances—such as Putin's 2008 manoeuvre—may not be overtly illegal but nonetheless undermine the constitutional spirit intended to limit consecutive terms. Consequently, this definition emphasises the functional illegitimacy of such actions, regardless of their formal legality, particularly where the incumbent is the direct and principal beneficiary.

Finally, an incumbent who seeks re-election in accordance with the existing constitution is not engaging in an autocoup. However, should they subsequently refuse to concede defeat and remain in power beyond their lawful mandate, such conduct would indeed constitute an autocoup.

By clarifying these definitional boundaries, this chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for the autocoup dataset introduced in the following section.

2.3 Introduction to the autocoup dataset

Defining the scope

Classifying political events as autocoups often necessitates addressing ambiguous or borderline cases. To ensure consistency and minimise interpretive uncertainty, this study adopts a coding strategy grounded in the definition articulated in the preceding section. Specifically, only those instances in which incumbent leaders extend their originally mandated term in office are coded as autocoups. Cases involving power consolidation in the absence of tenure extension are excluded from the dataset.

The temporal scope of the dataset spans the period from 1945 to the end of 2023, reflecting the most recent data available at the time of compilation. The geographical scope is global, encompassing leaders from all countries and regions.

Classifying autocoups

In categorising autocoups, this study prioritises the methods employed by incumbents, while outcomes constitute a secondary classificatory dimension. Additional features are recorded where relevant information is available.

Evasion of term limits

One of the most prevalent tactics in autocoups is the evasion of term limits. Incumbents deploy ostensibly legal mechanisms to prolong their hold on power, primarily through the manipulation of constitutional provisions. Such manoeuvres may include pressuring legislatures or courts to reinterpret term limits, amending the constitution to allow extended terms, or replacing the constitution entirely. In some instances, referendums are employed to confer a veneer of democratic legitimacy. These extensions may range from the addition of a single term to indefinite tenure.

Changing the length of a term: Incumbents may increase the duration of a single term (e.g., from four to six years) without altering the number of terms permitted. Examples include President David Dacko (Central African Republic, 1962), President Grégoire Kayibanda (Rwanda, 1973), and President Augusto Pinochet (Chile, 1988).

Enabling re-election: This involves modifying constitutional or legal frameworks to permit re-election where it was previously barred. For instance, President Carlos Menem of Argentina amended the constitution in 1993 to allow himself to seek re-election, thereby extending his tenure.

Abolishing term limits: President Paul Biya of Cameroon successfully removed presidential term limits in 2008, thereby enabling indefinite re-election.

Declaring leadership for life: This approach retains the semblance of electoral competition, albeit often through manipulated or uncontested elections. President Sukarno of Indonesia attempted to declare himself president for life in 1963, although this effort ultimately failed.

These strategies are frequently deployed in combination. For example, President François Duvalier of Haiti first amended the constitution in 1961 to permit immediate re-election and subsequently declared himself president for life in 1964.

Electoral manipulation and rigging

The second most frequently observed strategy in autocrats involves the manipulation of electoral processes to ensure the incumbent remains in office.

Delaying or cancelling elections: The postponement of scheduled elections without legitimate justification is a recurrent tactic. President François Tombalbaye of Chad delayed general elections until 1969, having come to power in 1960. Similarly, President José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola suspended elections throughout his tenure from 1979 to 2017.

Rejecting unfavourable electoral outcomes: Incumbents may refuse to concede defeat and attempt to remain in office by unconstitutional means. A prominent example is President Donald Trump of the United States, who declined to accept the results of the 2020 presidential

election and sought to overturn them.

Electoral rigging: Securing implausibly high vote shares is a key indicator of electoral manipulation. This study codes elections in which incumbents receive over 90 per cent of the vote as indicative of an autocoup. President Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea has consistently achieved over 95 per cent in multiparty elections since 1996.

Exclusion of opposition: Preventing opposition parties or candidates from contesting elections—thereby converting them into de facto uncontested contests—is considered a clear indicator of an autocoup.

Installation of a figurehead

Some incumbents seek to circumvent term limits by installing a trusted proxy or figurehead, thereby retaining de facto control over state affairs while relinquishing formal office.

A paradigmatic example is the 2008 presidential transition in Russia. Confronted with constitutional term limits, President Vladimir Putin endorsed Dmitry Medvedev as his successor, who was duly elected. Medvedev then appointed Putin as Prime Minister. Despite the formal shift in roles, most analysts agree that Putin retained substantial influence, effectively rendering Medvedev a figurehead.

It is important that the identification of such cases be grounded in objective criteria to avoid arbitrary classification. Accordingly, this study relies on the Archigos dataset to determine leadership status. If a former officeholder is not recorded in Archigos as the country's leader—despite wielding informal power—they are not coded as engaging in a figurehead-style autocoup within this dataset.

Reassignment of supreme authority

This strategy entails restructuring the constitutional or legal framework to create a new, more powerful office, which the incumbent subsequently assumes after formally leaving their original post.

In 2017, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan orchestrated a constitutional referendum that transformed Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system. The newly empowered presidency carried significantly enhanced executive authority. Erdoğan then ran for, and won, the redefined presidency, thereby maintaining control under a revised institutional arrangement.

One-time extension arrangements

In certain cases, bespoke arrangements are enacted to extend an incumbent's tenure without altering the broader constitutional framework. These arrangements are explicitly tailored to the current officeholder, with institutional rules on tenure or term limits intended to resume their standard application for future leaders. For example, in 2004, Lebanon extended President Émile Lahoud's term by three years through a one-off legal provision applying solely to his incumbency.

Data coding

The autocoup dataset is constructed on the basis of established datasets and scholarly literature, thereby ensuring both reliability and comprehensiveness. The principal sources employed for coding are listed in Table Table 2.1.

The Archigos dataset ([Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009](#)) and the Political Leaders' Affiliation Database (PLAD) ([Bomprezzi et al. 2024](#)) offer detailed records of national leaders from 1875 to 2023. Although the temporal focus of this study is limited to events occurring from 1945 onwards, these datasets are essential for identifying de facto leaders and distinguishing them from nominal heads of state.

The Incumbent Takeover dataset ([Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)), which synthesises information from eleven separate sources, provides a broad inventory of cases wherein executive actors significantly curtailed institutional constraints on their authority. As this dataset encompasses both

power consolidation and tenure extension cases, cross-referencing with Archigos and PLAD was necessary to determine whether individual cases satisfied the definitional criteria for an autocoup.

Table 2.1: Main Data Sources for Coding the Autocoup Dataset

Dataset	Authors	Coverage	Observations
Archigos	Goemans et al (2009)	1875-2015	3409
PLAD	Bomprezzi et al. (2024)	1989-2023	1334
Incumbent Takeover	Baturo and Tolstrup (2022)	1913-2019	279

In total, 83 events were identified and coded as autocoups. Of these, 50 correspond to entries within the Incumbent Takeover dataset, while the remaining 33 were newly identified and coded by the author through cross-verification with supplementary materials, including Archigos, PLAD, and contemporary news sources.

Although a majority of cases originate from the Incumbent Takeover dataset, the present study does not constitute a replication of that work. Of the 279 cases catalogued in Incumbent Takeover, 229 were excluded from the current analysis on the grounds that they entailed power consolidation without any accompanying attempt to extend the leader’s tenure. Such instances lie beyond the definitional scope of autocoups as operationalised in this thesis. This conceptual refinement constitutes the principal point of departure from the Incumbent Takeover framework.

The final dataset comprises 14 structured variables, in addition to a free-text field for supplementary notes. The variables are as follows:

- **Country identification:** Country code (ccode) and country name (country), following the standards of the Correlates of War project ([Stinnett et al. 2002](#)).
- **Leader information:** Name of the de facto leader (leader_name), coded in accordance with the conventions employed in the Archigos and PLAD datasets.

- **Timeline variables:** Date the leader assumed office (`entry_date`), date of departure (`exit_date`), date of the autocoup-defining event (`autocoup_date`), and commencement date of the extended term (`extending_date`).
- **Power transition methods:** Mode of accession (`entry_method`), mode of departure (`exit_method`), and binary indicators for regular or irregular entry (`entry_regular`) and exit (`exit_regular`).
- **Autocoup characteristics:** Method of tenure extension (`autocoup_method`) and outcome of the attempt (`autocoup_outcome`), categorised as: “failed and removed from office”, “failed but completed original tenure”, or “successful”. For successful cases, the duration of the additional term is calculated as the interval between `extending_date` and `exit_date`.
- **Data source:** The principal dataset from which the case was coded (`source`).
- **Additional notes:** Contextual commentary on exceptional or borderline cases (`notes`).

Several coding challenges and methodological decisions warrant further elaboration. In instances where tenure extensions occurred incrementally, the `autocoup_date` corresponds to a pivotal event—such as the passage of a constitutional amendment, a legislative vote, or the outcome of a referendum. Where leaders attempted multiple autocoups, details are consolidated in the notes field. Particular care was taken to distinguish between mere power consolidation and explicit efforts to prolong tenure, which necessitated triangulation across multiple sources. Furthermore, assessing the success or failure of an autocoup—particularly in under-reported contexts—frequently required extensive background research and qualitative judgment.

Data descriptions

The primary coding process identified 83 instances of autocoups between 1945 and 2023, spanning 63 countries. This comprehensive dataset provides a robust empirical foundation for

Table 2.2: Autocoup methods and success rates (1945-2023)

Autocoup Method	Attempted	Succeeded	Success Rate
Enabling re-election	37	26	70.3%
Removing term limits	10	10	100.0%
Leader for life	7	7	100.0%
Delaying elections	5	5	100.0%
One-time arrangement	5	4	80.0%
Changing term length	5	4	80.0%
Reassigning power role	4	2	50.0%
Refusing election results	3	0	0.0%
Figurehead	3	3	100.0%
Cancelling elections	3	3	100.0%
Rigging elections	1	0	0.0%
Total	83	64	77.1%

Source: Autocoup dataset

analysing trends and patterns in autocoup attempts across a wide array of political and institutional contexts.

A breakdown of the methods employed by incumbents to extend their tenure is presented in Table 2.2. The most prevalent strategy is the legalisation or reintroduction of re-election, accounting for 37 cases. This is followed by the removal of term limits (10 cases) and the declaration of the leader as president for life (7 cases). Other tactics, such as the cancellation of scheduled elections or the refusal to concede electoral defeat, appear less frequently. Electoral rigging is recorded in only one case—primarily because it is often difficult to verify with certainty, despite strong indications in many instances.

Autocoups exhibit a notably high overall success rate of 77%, in sharp contrast to the approximate 50% success rate observed in classical military coups. Several factors may explain this discrepancy. First, incumbents possess direct access to state resources and institutional mechanisms, which can be deployed strategically to their advantage. Second, in contrast to the abrupt and confrontational nature of traditional coups, autocoups tend to unfold gradually and deliberately, affording incumbents time to consolidate elite support and cultivate public

legitimacy. Third, many autocoup strategies are implemented under the guise of legality—via constitutional amendments or judicial rulings—which reduces overt resistance and complicates efforts to mobilise effective opposition. Finally, incumbents typically exercise considerable influence over key state institutions, including the judiciary, legislature, and security services, which facilitates the planning and consolidation of such actions.

However, success rates differ markedly depending on the method employed. Certain strategies appear to be consistently effective. For example, removing term limits, cancelling elections, declaring oneself leader for life, delaying elections, and installing figurehead successors all exhibit a 100% success rate within the dataset. Notably, these approaches represent some of the most flagrant violations of constitutional norms concerning executive succession. This pattern suggests that outcomes are shaped less by the degree of legal or constitutional transgression than by the underlying distribution of political power. In other words, the success of an autocoup is determined not by the legality of the act, but by the incumbent's capacity to control coercive, judicial, and legislative institutions. Leaders who command overwhelming authority are both willing and able to disregard constitutional constraints precisely because their dominance insulates them from meaningful resistance.

By contrast, refusal to accept electoral defeat exhibits the lowest success rate, with only one of four such attempts proving successful. Although the sample is limited, this pattern may reflect the greater institutional resilience of electoral democracies, stronger civil society mobilisation, more intensive international scrutiny, and the inherently high-risk nature of overturning electoral outcomes. These factors may increase the probability of failure for incumbents who pursue this path.

Notably, in contrast to classical coups, which predominantly occur in autocratic regimes, a substantial proportion of autocoups are carried out within democratic settings. Of the 83 identified autocoup attempts, 30 took place in democracies—of which 29 occurred in presidential democracies—constituting approximately 36% of the total. By comparison, traditional coups have been significantly less frequent in democratic contexts, with only 99 out of 493 cases (

20%) taking place in such regimes. This marked disparity will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 3.

2.4 Case studies

2.4.1 High frequency and success rate of autocoups in post-communist regimes

The dataset reveals a notably high incidence and success rate of autocoup attempts in post-communist states. These countries, which were governed under communist rule prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, have predominantly transitioned into so-called ‘hybrid regimes’ (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019), with only a few—most notably China—retaining an overtly communist political identity. Within these contexts, the dataset records 12 attempts by incumbents to extend their tenure, of which only two were unsuccessful. A closer examination of these cases reveals several shared structural and political characteristics.

Firstly, many post-communist regimes inherited authoritarian institutional legacies. While they formally transitioned away from communism, these states often preserved core authoritarian features, particularly the centralisation of executive authority.

Secondly, elite continuity has been a hallmark of post-communist transitions. Rather than a clear break with the previous regime, many transitions saw the retention of former communist elites, who reconstituted themselves within ostensibly democratic frameworks, frequently dominating newly formed political institutions.

Thirdly, democratic procedures have frequently been subverted in post-communist contexts. Although democratic reforms introduced elections and constitutional term limits, the enduring institutional structures of communist rule have often facilitated the manipulation of electoral processes and the circumvention of formal constraints on executive power (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019).

Lifelong ruler: Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus

Alexander Lukashenko, a former member of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR, rose to national prominence as the head of Belarus's interim anti-corruption committee following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1994, he was elected as the country's first president, a position he has held continuously throughout the period under examination. The original 1994 constitution imposed a two-term limit on the presidency; however, this restriction was repealed in 2004 through a constitutional amendment.

Since his initial election, international observers have consistently found that Belarusian elections fall short of democratic standards. Despite sustained domestic opposition and recurrent mass protests, Lukashenko has claimed repeated re-election victories, frequently with vote shares exceeding 80 per cent. This trajectory is emblematic of a broader pattern across the post-Soviet space, particularly in Central Asia, where former high-ranking communist officials transitioned into presidential office and have retained power with limited institutional constraints.

Dynastic succession: Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan

Nursultan Nazarbayev served as the first president of independent Kazakhstan from 1991 until 2019. Prior to independence, he was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, thereby exercising *de facto* leadership both before and after the Soviet collapse. Following independence, Nazarbayev was elected president and remained in power through a series of constitutional and legal modifications, including the adoption of new constitutions that effectively reset term limits.

Importantly, Nazarbayev did not formally abolish term limits. Rather, a constitutional exemption was created specifically for the "First President", allowing him to circumvent term restrictions while maintaining a veneer of legal continuity ([Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019](#)). Unlike Lukashenko, who has remained in office continuously since 1994 up to the time of this study, Nazarbayev formally resigned in 2019, designating Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as his suc-

cessor. However, Nazarbayev continued to exercise significant influence through his position as Chairman of the Security Council, a role he retained until 2022. This illustrates the persistence of informal executive dominance even after nominal power has been relinquished.

2.4.2 Autocoups for immediate re-election: Cases of Latin America

Latin America has a longstanding tradition of imposing constitutional term limits on executive authority. Simón Bolívar, often regarded as a founding father of several Latin American republics, initially endorsed this principle, declaring in 1819 that “nothing is as dangerous as allowing the same citizen to remain in power for a long time... That is the origin of usurpation and tyranny” (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019, 38). Although Bolívar later revised his stance—asserting in his 1826 address to the Constitutional Assembly that “a president for life with the right to choose the successor is the most sublime inspiration for the republican order”—the concept of term limitation became deeply ingrained in the region’s political culture. Indeed, approximately 81% of Latin American constitutions adopted between independence and 1985 included some form of presidential term limit (Marsteintredet 2019).

An analysis of autocoup cases in the region reveals two noteworthy patterns regarding re-election dynamics.

Frequent success in breaking non-re-election rules

Unlike many presidential systems in which two consecutive terms are the norm, Latin American constitutions have historically favoured more restrictive arrangements. According to Marsteintredet (2019), 64.9% of constitutions in the region between independence and 1985 prohibited immediate re-election, while 5.9% forbade re-election altogether.

Nevertheless, adherence to these rules has varied. Countries such as Mexico, which enshrined a strict non-re-election clause in 1911 at the outset of the Mexican Revolution, have consistently upheld this restriction (Klesner 2019). Panama and Uruguay have similarly re-

frained from amending their re-election provisions, while Costa Rica has permitted immediate re-election only briefly (1897–1913) since its initial prohibition in 1859 ([Marsteintredet 2019](#)). In contrast, several states have frequently amended or circumvented their constitutional term limits.

The pursuit of re-election or immediate re-election has often served as a central motive for autocoup attempts aimed at consolidating executive power. This study identifies 22 autocoup cases in Latin America, of which 14 (over 63%) involved efforts to enable re-election or immediate re-election. Of these, 9 were successful, yielding a success rate exceeding 64%.

Importantly, not all such leaders sought indefinite tenure. Many stepped down after securing and completing a second term. Notable examples include Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil, 1995–2003), Danilo Medina (Dominican Republic, 2012–2020), and Juan Orlando Hernández (Honduras, 2014–2022) ([Ginsburg and Elkins 2019](#); [Marsteintredet 2019](#); [Landau, Roznai, and Dixon 2019](#); [Baturó 2019](#); [Neto and Acácio 2019](#)).

Resistance to further extensions

The relative restraint exhibited by many leaders should not be interpreted as a lack of ambition for further tenure. Rather, it reflects the fact that additional extension attempts often failed, and incumbents acquiesced to these outcomes without resorting to overt manipulation or repression.

While autocoups that enable a single additional term tend to be relatively successful, efforts to prolong tenure beyond two terms encounter greater resistance and are more likely to fail. Two contrasting cases illustrate these divergent trajectories.

Unsuccessful extension—Carlos Menem (Argentina): President Menem secured a second term following a 1994 constitutional amendment permitting one re-election, and he was re-elected in 1995. However, his subsequent attempt to reset the term count—arguing that his first term (1988–1995) had occurred under a previous constitutional framework—was unanimously rejected by the Supreme Court in 1999 ([Llanos 2019](#)). A comparable outcome was observed in the case of President Álvaro Uribe in Colombia (2002–2010) ([Baturó 2019](#)).

Successful extension—Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua): In contrast, President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua succeeded in extending his tenure through a series of judicial and legislative manoeuvres. In 2009, the Supreme Court of Justice authorised his candidacy for the 2011 election. Subsequently, in 2014, the National Assembly passed constitutional amendments abolishing presidential term limits, thereby enabling Ortega to pursue indefinite five-year terms. He has remained in office continuously since 2007 ([Close 2019](#)).

2.4.3 As common as classical coups: Autocoups in African countries

Classical coups have historically been widespread across the African continent, accounting for approximately 45% of all coups globally—219 out of 493 recorded incidents since 1950—affecting 45 of the 54 African states ([Powell and Thyne 2011](#)). While autocoups occur less frequently than traditional coups, they nonetheless represent a significant political phenomenon within Africa. Of the 83 documented cases of autocoups worldwide, 43% (36 cases) have taken place on the continent, spanning 29 countries. Notably, the success rate of African autocoups exceeds 77% (28 out of 36), a figure that significantly surpasses the regional success rate for classical coups (approximately 50%) and aligns with the global average success rate for autocoups (77%).

Identifying a clear and consistent pattern underlying autocoups in Africa proves challenging—reflecting the broader analytical complexity associated with classical coups. Several explanatory factors have been proposed in the literature.

Natural resource wealth: States endowed with oil, diamonds, or other strategic commodities often witness greater incentives and capacities among incumbents to seek term extensions and consolidate power ([Posner and Young, n.d.](#); [Cheeseman 2015](#); [Cheeseman and Klaas 2019](#)).

Democratic quality: The degree of democratic consolidation strongly influences respect for constitutional term limits ([Reyntjens 2016](#)).

International influence: External actors, including bilateral donors and international or-

ganisations, may exert diplomatic or economic pressure to dissuade leaders from subverting term limits ([S. Brown 2001](#); [Tangri and Mwenda 2010](#)).

Opposition strength and party cohesion: The ability of opposition forces to coordinate effectively, as well as the incumbent's success in maintaining unity within the ruling party, are critical factors shaping the feasibility of term extension efforts ([Cheeseman 2019](#)).

Drawing on the Africa Executive Term Limits (AETL) dataset, Cassani ([2020](#)) identifies human rights abuses and the desire to evade legal or political accountability as key motivations behind efforts to overstay in power. The more authoritarian a leader's governing style, the more likely they are to challenge constitutional constraints. Moreover, incumbents who can secure the loyalty of the military—often through strategic use of public investment—are significantly more likely to succeed in extending their tenure.

Although both classical coups and autocoups continue to be features of African politics, a marked shift has occurred since the end of the Cold War in 1991. While the incidence of traditional coups has declined, autocoups have become increasingly prevalent. This trend is partly attributable to the widespread adoption of multiparty electoral systems in the 1990s, often accompanied by the formal institutionalisation of presidential term limits ([Cassani 2020](#); [Cheeseman 2019](#)).

Prior to 1991, personalist and military regimes predominated across much of the continent, and constitutional term limits were seldom enshrined. The post-Cold War expansion of democratic frameworks contributed to a rise in the adoption of such provisions, and, correspondingly, in attempts to circumvent them. However, it is important to stress that this increase in challenges to term limits should not be interpreted as indicative of declining compliance. On the contrary, overall turnover in executive leadership has increased compared to earlier decades, suggesting that while violations continue to attract attention, adherence to constitutional rules has become more widespread.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has offered a comprehensive analysis of autocoups, focusing on political episodes in which incumbent leaders extend their tenure beyond constitutionally prescribed limits. By refining existing definitions and distinguishing autocoups from related concepts—such as self-coups, autogolpes, and executive takeovers—the study introduces a novel dataset cataloguing 83 cases of autocoups from 1945 to 2023, of which 64 were successful.

The revised conceptual framework, combined with the newly assembled dataset, enables a more expansive and systematic analysis of irregular leadership transitions. Whereas traditional scholarship has primarily centred on the premature termination of leadership through coups, this study broadens the analytical scope to encompass irregular tenure extensions. This approach yields a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which incumbents may subvert constitutional norms and democratic procedures to consolidate their authority.

Nonetheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the proposed definition of an autocoup warrants further scholarly scrutiny and debate before it can achieve broader consensus. Despite rigorous efforts to ensure consistency, certain coding decisions—particularly in ambiguous or borderline cases—may inevitably entail an element of subjective judgement. Second, while this thesis concentrates on tenure extensions, instances involving the expansion of executive power without a formal extension of tenure also deserve deeper conceptual and empirical investigation.

Despite these constraints, the research makes a substantive contribution to the literature on political stability, leadership dynamics, and democratic resilience. The dataset provides a valuable empirical foundation for future inquiries into the mechanisms and motivations underpinning autocoups.

Several promising directions for further research emerge. Subsequent studies could utilise the dataset to examine the long-term institutional consequences of autocoups, including their role in democratic backsliding, authoritarian entrenchment, and the personalisation of executive

power. Additionally, comparative analyses between autocoups and classical coups may illuminate the evolving strategies employed by incumbents to consolidate authority across diverse regime types and political environments.

Chapter 3

Power Dynamics and Autocoup Attempts

Abstract

This chapter investigates the determinants of autocoup attempts, seeking to enhance understanding of the political dynamics underpinning tenure extensions by incumbent leaders. Addressing a gap in the literature, the study employs a quantitative approach, utilising a bias-reduced logit model to explore the relationship between regime type and the likelihood of autocoup occurrence. Particular attention is paid to how regime type reflects the structural balance of power between incumbents and potential institutional constraints or elite challengers. The findings indicate that regime type is a significant predictor of autocoup attempts. Specifically, personalist autocracies and presidential democracies are shown to be substantially more likely to experience autocoups compared to dominant party regimes. This increased propensity is discussed in relation to the varying degrees of institutional constraints and power configurations characteristic of different regime types, offering insights into the structural conditions that facilitate or constrain such irregular power consolidations.

Keywords: *Autocoups, Coup, Regime types, Tenure Extension, Authoritarianism*

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, the study of autocoups has been hindered by conceptual ambiguity and a lack of systematic data, resulting in limited empirical analysis of this phenomenon. To address this gap, the present chapter seeks to make a substantive contribution by offering a quantitative analysis of the determinants of autocoup attempts. Following the precedent set by empirical research on classic coups, which has primarily focused on the factors precipitating coup attempts (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016), this chapter similarly investigates why some incumbent leaders choose to extend their tenure through autocoups, while others do not.

The rationale for investigating the determinants of autocoups is threefold. First, autocoups represent one of the most frequent forms of irregular leadership transition, with over 100 documented cases since 1945 (as detailed in Chapter 2). Their prevalence has increased notably since 2000, coinciding with the apparent global decline in classic coups (Bermeo 2016; Thyne and Powell 2019). Second, autocoups play a critical role in shaping political stability and democratic trajectories, frequently resulting in long-term institutional erosion. Third, understanding the factors that drive autocoup attempts constitutes a foundational step for further enquiry into their consequences. Without identifying the conditions under which autocoups occur, it is difficult to assess how to prevent them or mitigate their negative effects.

While autocoups differ fundamentally from classic coups—primarily in terms of the actor initiating the event (the incumbent, rather than a power challenger)—the two forms of power disruption share important features. Consequently, methods commonly applied to the study of traditional coups can be usefully adapted for the analysis of autocoups. Nevertheless, despite an extensive literature on coup dynamics (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016), many studies treat regime type as a mere background condition or control variable, rather than as a central determinant of power disruptions.

This chapter advances the argument that the risk of autocoup attempts is significantly shaped by the structural balance of power embedded within a regime's foundational type. It contends

that the likelihood of an autocoup is determined by the perceived power equilibrium between the incumbent leader and potential institutional or elite challengers. This power configuration is relatively stable over time, as it is both shaped by and constitutive of the regime type itself (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). Accordingly, this study employs regime type as a proxy for underlying power dynamics, enabling a more systematic investigation of the structural conditions that facilitate or constrain autocoup attempts.

To empirically test this proposition, the chapter employs a probit regression model to examine the strategic calculus of incumbent leaders. It argues that the balance of power, as inferred from regime typology, is a key determinant of whether an incumbent will initiate an autocoup.

Given the inherent difficulty in directly measuring the internal balance of power within regimes, regime type is used as an operational proxy. The premise underpinning this approach is that regime type fundamentally conditions the distribution of authority, the strength of institutional constraints, and the capacity of incumbents to subvert constitutional norms. By analysing variation across regime types, this study provides deeper insight into the structural factors that influence both the occurrence and outcome of autocoup attempts.

In light of the limited quantitative research on autocoups in the existing literature, this thesis aims to make a pioneering contribution to their empirical study by offering a theoretically grounded and methodologically robust analysis of their determinants.

The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 2 examines the dynamics and patterns of autocoup attempts and their outcomes. Section 3 outlines the research design, methodology, and variables used in the analysis, offering a clear account of the empirical strategy. Section 4 presents and interprets the findings, identifying key trends and implications. Section 5 concludes the chapter by summarising the main insights and considering their relevance for understanding and mitigating the risks of autocoups.

3.2 Dynamics of autocoup attempts

Much like traditional coup attempts, autocoups are driven by two fundamental factors: the disposition of incumbent leaders—namely, their motivations and willingness to act—and their capability, referring to the resources and opportunities available to them. However, autocoups exhibit two notable features that distinguish them from classical coups. First, whereas coups predominantly occur in autocracies (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014), approximately one-third of recorded autocoups have taken place in democracies, as documented in Chapter 2. Second, while the success rate of traditional coups hovers around 50%, more than 80% of autocoup attempts have succeeded, according to the autocoup dataset introduced in Chapter 2. These distinctions suggest that the disposition and capability dynamics underpinning autocoups differ substantially from those governing traditional coups. This section examines the complex dynamics of autocoup attempts, focusing particularly on how the motivations of incumbents, the factors influencing success, and the institutional structures of regime types shape a state's vulnerability to such actions.

Motivations for autocoups

Incumbent leaders seeking to extend their tenure may be motivated by a variety of considerations, which can broadly be categorised into three principal domains: personal ambition, purported national interest, and self-preservation.

First, the pursuit of personal power serves as a powerful incentive for many leaders. The ability to govern without institutional constraints grants them control over national policy, access to significant state resources, influence over the judiciary and legislature, and the prestige associated with continued office. For some, the desire to secure a lasting political legacy—to be remembered as a transformative figure in national history—further reinforces the appeal of prolonged rule.

Second, incumbents often justify tenure extensions as being in the national interest. A com-

mon argument posits that a single term is insufficient to complete long-term reform or development agendas. In this framing, remaining in office is presented as necessary for the successful realisation of ongoing projects, thereby positioning the autocoup as a sacrifice for the greater good rather than a personal power grab.

Third, autocoups can function as a mechanism for self-preservation. Leaders who face potential prosecution for corruption, human rights abuses, or other crimes may view tenure extension as a means of maintaining immunity. Moreover, those who have accumulated significant political enemies during their time in power may fear retaliation upon stepping down. In such cases, extending one's rule is not only about ambition but also about survival—shielding oneself from legal or political retribution.

Power dynamics and autocoups

While motivations may spark an incumbent's decision to initiate an autocoup, it is often the capability to execute and sustain such an action that proves more decisive. The relatively high frequency and strikingly high success rate of autocoups—over 80%, compared to around 50% for traditional coups—suggest that incumbents enjoy structural advantages when seeking to extend their tenure. These advantages are not confined to autocracies but are also observable in democracies, highlighting that the resources and institutional leverage available to incumbents vary significantly across regimes.

This observation necessitates a closer examination of state power structures—particularly the distribution of control over the armed forces. Military allegiance is a critical determinant of autocoup success. If the armed forces remain loyal to the incumbent, opposition—whether from civil society, the judiciary, or the legislature—can be neutralised or marginalised. Conversely, open defiance by military leaders or a refusal to intervene on behalf of the executive can render an autocoup untenable.

However, it would be reductive to assume that nominal authority as commander-in-chief

translates into uncontested control. Just as it is simplistic to attribute the occurrence of traditional coups solely to military power (Singh 2016), it is equally misleading to presume that incumbents uniformly wield the loyalty of the armed forces. Formal titles belie the often complex and fragile relationships that underpin military loyalty.

In autocratic contexts, the military may not adhere to constitutional norms, but nor is it inherently loyal to the head of state. Executives rely on military officers to implement commands, yet those officers may possess their own ambitions or rival loyalties. For example, in 1971, Ugandan President Milton Obote attempted to dismiss General Idi Amin. In response, Amin capitalised on his influence within the armed forces to stage a successful coup, ousting Obote (Sudduth 2017).

In contrast, consolidated democracies typically institutionalise military allegiance to the constitution rather than to individual officeholders. In the United States, following the 2020 presidential election, General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, publicly reaffirmed the military's commitment to constitutional principles:

“We are unique among militaries. We do not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual. We take an oath to the Constitution.”

— (US Army Museum, 12 November 2020¹)

In hybrid or fragile democracies, attempts to extend executive tenure can carry higher risks. For example, in Niger (2009), President Mamadou Tandja's efforts to amend the constitution and secure a third term provoked a military coup in 2010 (Miller 2016). Similarly, in Honduras (2009), President Manuel Zelaya was removed from office by the military after attempting to modify the constitution to allow immediate re-election (Muñoz-Portillo and Treminio 2019).

¹CNN. *Top US General Stands Firm Amid Pentagon Turmoil*. 12 November 2020. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/12/politics/mark-milley-pentagon-turmoil/index.html> [Accessed 24 April 2025].

Regime types and autocoups

Given these complexities, a more effective analytical strategy involves assessing the broader balance of power within political systems. Direct observation of this balance is inherently difficult, so this study employs regime type as a proxy—a method consistent with established approaches in comparative politics. Regime types reflect the institutional architecture of power distribution, especially regarding authority over military command, political appointments, and policy-making.

Drawing on the classification by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), autocratic regimes can be divided as follows:

Military regimes are governed by a junta, typically composed of senior military officers who collectively determine leadership and policy. Examples include Brazil (1964–1985), Argentina (1976–1983), and El Salvador (1948–1984) (Geddes 1999).

Personalist regimes are centred around a dominant individual who exercises unchecked authority over military, policy, and succession processes. Notable cases include Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic (1930–1961), Idi Amin in Uganda (1971–1979), and Jean-Bédél Bokassa in the Central African Republic (1966–1979) (Geddes 1999).

Dominant-party regimes entrust authority to a structured political party, with the leader operating within, or as the head of, that organisation. Prominent examples include the PRI in Mexico, CCM in Tanzania, and Leninist parties in Eastern Europe (Geddes 1999).

Among these, personalist regimes are particularly conducive to autocoups. The concentration of power reduces institutional resistance, and loyalty from the armed forces is often cultivated through personal patronage. Military regimes, though rooted in armed power, frequently experience internal instability, making them more vulnerable to traditional coups than to autocoups. Dominant-party regimes are more ambiguous: while the leader may be constrained by party structures, exceptionally strong party leaders may nonetheless initiate autocoups—as evidenced by Xi Jinping (2018), operating under dominant-party regimes.

Monarchies, though classified as autocracies, typically render autocoups irrelevant, as monarchs usually serve for life by design.

An important clarification arises at this point: why would leaders in personalist regimes feel compelled to extend their tenure, given the extensive authority they already wield? The answer lies in the distinction between the scope of power and its duration. While personalist rulers often exercise substantial control over state institutions, many originally assume office through constitutional or legal means and must incrementally consolidate power. In this context, autocoups serve as formal mechanisms to institutionalise their dominance, converting de facto authority into de jure permanence. This dynamic is exemplified by the multiple tenure extensions pursued by Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko.

In post-Soviet Russia, President Boris Yeltsin oversaw the transformation of a parliamentary system into a personalist regime. However, Yeltsin himself did not overstay his term; instead, he selected Vladimir Putin as his successor. Upon assuming office in 2000, Putin progressively extended his rule and has remained in power since, utilising constitutional amendments and legal manoeuvres to circumvent term limits.

Similarly, in Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko was elected president in 1994 under a party-based regime. Within a year, he dismantled the existing political structure and established a personalist system. Since then, Lukashenko has remained in power through successive extensions of his tenure, further entrenching his authority over time.

In democracies, autocoups exclusively occur in presidential systems. This reflects the institutional leverage enjoyed by presidents, who are directly elected, often command the armed forces, and may override or bypass legislative decisions. Prime ministers in parliamentary systems, by contrast, are more constrained. They are typically beholden to legislative confidence and may be dismissed via no-confidence votes. Military command is often institutionally separated from their authority. Consequently, prime ministers face more frequent leadership turnover and fewer opportunities to extend their terms. For example, in the UK, three prime ministers served in 2022; in Japan, there have been 36 prime ministers since 1945—an aver-

age of one every two years. By contrast, only 14 presidents have served in the United States over the same period, reflecting greater institutional stability. Given these distinctions, presidential systems provide a more conducive environment for autocoups—even in established democracies—due to their centralised executive authority and command over the military.

From this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3-1: *The likelihood of autoup attempts varies significantly by regime type, with personalist autocracies and presidential democracies being the most susceptible, relative to other regime types.*

3.3 Research design

Methodology

Given the binary nature of the dependent variable—whether an autoup is staged or not—this section initially employs a logit regression model to analyse the determinants of autoup attempts. This approach enables the identification of statistically significant factors influencing the likelihood of such events, as well as the direction and magnitude of their effects.

However, since the dataset comprises over 9,000 observations with only approximately 80 instances of autoups, the dependent variable qualifies as a rare event. Standard maximum likelihood estimation methods such as probit or logit may underestimate the probability of occurrence in such cases. To address this issue and ensure more reliable inference, the analysis additionally applies Firth’s Bias-Reduced Penalised Maximum Likelihood Estimation (Bias-Reduced Logit), as proposed by FIRTH (1993).

Data and variables

The principal dataset, covering autoups and regime types, spans the period from 1945 to 2023. However, due to issues in data matching, there is some truncation, and the actual range of usable

data extends from 1945 to 2018. The dataset encompasses approximately 9400 observations, of which 78 are instances of autocoup attempts.

Dependent variable

The analysis utilises the autocoup dataset introduced in Chapter 2. This dataset covers the period from 1945 to 2023 and records information on 107 autocoup attempts. Descriptive statistics for these attempts, along with regime classifications, are presented in Chapter 2.

Autocoup attempt: A binary variable indicating whether an autocoup attempt occurred (coded as 1) or did not occur (coded as 0) in each country-year observation.

Independent variables

As discussed, regime type constitutes the primary explanatory focus of the model. Regimes are categorised according to the typology developed by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) (GWF dataset), distinguishing between military, personalist, and dominant-party regimes, with democracies serving as the reference category.

Control variables are selected based on previous research into coup determinants, predominantly encompassing factors such as economic performance, political violence, and tenure in office. In addition, democratic level, population size and a Cold War dummy variable are included as further controls.

Economic Level: Measured by GDP per capita, representing the general economic wellbeing of a country. Data are sourced from the V-Dem dataset by Fariss et al. (2022), expressed in constant 2017 international dollars (PPP, per thousand).

Economic Performance: Assessed through the current-trend (*CT*) ratio, as developed by Krishnarajan (2019). This metric compares a country's current GDP per capita with the average GDP per capita over the preceding five years. A higher *CT* ratio signifies stronger economic growth. Formally:

$$CT_{i,t} = \frac{GDP/cap_{i,t}}{\frac{1}{5} \sum_{k=1}^5 GDP/cap_{i,t-k}}$$

Political stability: Captured by a violence index reflecting the incidence of internal and interstate conflict, derived from the “actotal” variable in the Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset ([Monty G. Marshall 2005](#)). Scores range from 0 (complete stability) to 18 (maximum instability).

Days in office (log): This variable records the natural logarithm of an incumbent leader’s cumulative days in office in each year. Longer tenure is posited to facilitate power consolidation, thereby making autocoup attempts more feasible. Data are drawn from the Archigos dataset ([Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009](#)) and the Political Leaders’ Affiliation Database (PLAD) ([Bomprezzi et al. 2024](#)).

Democratic level: This variable employs the Polity V score to assess the degree of democracy or autocracy in a given country. Developed by the Center for Systemic Peace, the Polity V score evaluates regime authority characteristics on a scale ranging from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic), based on indicators such as the competitiveness of political participation, the process of executive recruitment, and the extent of constraints on executive authority ([Monty G. Marshall, n.d.](#)).

Population size: The natural logarithm of national population is included to control for the potential impact of population size on leadership stability. Larger populations may pose greater governance challenges and amplify opposition. Population data are sourced from the V-Dem dataset.

Cold War: Following the approach of prior studies ([C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014](#); [Derpanopoulos et al. 2016](#); [Dahl and Gleditsch 2023](#)), a dummy variable, Cold War, is included to capture differences across historical periods. This variable reflects the relative scarcity of autocoup events between the 1960s and 1990, with a notable increase thereafter.

Table 3.1: Determinants of autocoup attempts(1945-2018)

Characteristic	Standard Logit				Bias-reduced Logit	
	N	Event N	log(OR) ^l	OR ^l	log(OR) ^l	OR ^l
Constant	9,434	78	-4.7**	0.01**	-4.6***	0.01***
Regime Type						
Dominant Party	2,312	19	—	—	—	—
Personal	1,308	26	0.74**	2.10**	0.73**	2.08**
Presidential Democracy	1,642	27	1.6***	5.01***	1.6***	4.87***
Military	630	2	-0.80	0.45	-0.62	0.54
Parliamentary Democracy	2,368	1	-1.7	0.18	-1.4	0.26
Other	1,174	3	-1.2*	0.30*	-1.1*	0.34*
GDP per capita	9,434	78	-0.01	0.99	-0.01	0.99
GDP growth trend	9,434	78	0.91	2.49	0.97	2.64
Political stability	9,434	78	0.01	1.01	0.03	1.03
Log of Population	9,434	78	-0.14	0.87	-0.15*	0.86*
Polity 5 scores	9,434	78	-0.09***	0.91***	-0.09***	0.91***
Log of days in office	9,434	78	0.01	1.01	0.00	1.00
Cold war			-0.80***	0.45***	-0.79***	0.45***

^l*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Abbreviation: OR = Odds Ratio

Results and discussions

This analysis utilizes a logistic regression model to examine the factors influencing the likelihood of autocoup attempts. Given the nature of the dependent variable (a binary outcome, autocoup attempt occurring or not) and potentially rare events in certain categories, a bias-reduced logit model is employed alongside the standard logit model. The bias-reduced logit approach is generally considered more appropriate when dealing with datasets where the outcome of interest is infrequent, as it helps to mitigate potential biases in the coefficient estimates that can arise in standard maximum likelihood estimation. Therefore, the following discussion of the results will primarily focus on the estimates obtained from the bias-reduced logit model, presenting the findings in terms of Odds Ratios (ORs) for ease of interpretation. Odds Ratios provide a more intuitive understanding of the relationship between predictors and the likelihood of the outcome compared to log odds.

The results from the bias-reduced logit model are presented in Table 3.1. The primary hypothesis posits that the likelihood of autoup attempts varies significantly by regime type, with personalist autocracies and presidential democracies being particularly susceptible relative to other regime types. The model uses “Dominant Party” regimes as the reference category.

An examination of the regime type variables reveals strong empirical support for key aspects of the hypothesis. Compared to dominant-party regimes, personalist autocracies exhibit an estimated odds ratio of 2.07, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the odds of an autoup attempt are just over twice as high in personalist autocracies, holding all other variables constant. Presidential democracies also display a markedly increased likelihood of autoup attempts, with an estimated odds ratio of 4.83 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the odds are approximately 3.8 times higher than in dominant-party regimes, *ceteris paribus*. By contrast, military regimes, parliamentary democracies, and those classified as “other” exhibit lower odds of experiencing an autoup relative to dominant-party regimes. However, of these, only the “other” category achieves marginal statistical significance within the model.

These findings strongly support the assertion that both personalist autocracies and presidential democracies face a substantially higher risk of autoup attempts compared to dominant party regimes. The odds ratios for personalist autocracies (2.13) and presidential democracies (4.83) are notably larger than those for military, parliamentary democracy, and other regime types, providing evidence that these two regime types are indeed more susceptible. This lends considerable support to hypothesis.

Turning to the control variables in the bias-reduced logit model, several exhibit statistically significant associations with the likelihood of autoup attempts. The logged Polity V score, a measure of democratic quality, is negatively associated with autoup occurrence ($OR = 0.91$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that more democratic regimes are less likely to experience such events. The Cold War variable is likewise associated with a significantly reduced odds of autoup attempts ($OR = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that such incidents were less prevalent during the Cold War period. The logarithm of population demonstrates marginal statistical significance

and appears to have a negative relationship with the likelihood of autocalps. By contrast, other variables—including GDP per capita, GDP growth trend, political stability, and the log of days in office—do not display statistically significant associations with the probability of autocalp attempts within this model.

In summary, the bias-reduced logit model reveals that regime type is a crucial determinant of autocalp attempts. Consistent with the hypothesis, personalist autocracies and presidential democracies exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing autocalp attempts compared to dominant party regimes, and appear more vulnerable than other regime types examined. This highlights the particular fragility within these political systems concerning attempts by incumbents to extend their tenures through extra-constitutional means. The analysis also confirms the importance of economic development (GDP per capita), level of democracy (Polity 5 scores), and the historical context of the Cold War in influencing the probability of autocalp attempts.

3.4 Summary

This chapter presents a quantitative investigation into the determinants of autocalp attempts, addressing a recognised gap in the existing literature often hindered by conceptual ambiguity and limited systematic data. The study posits that the risk of autocalp attempts is significantly shaped by the underlying structural balance of power within a regime, operationalised here through regime type. Employing both a standard logit model and a bias-reduced logit model, the analysis reveals that personalist autocracies and presidential democracies exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing autocalp attempts when compared to dominant party regimes. Specifically, the odds of an autocalp are estimated to be approximately three times greater in personalist autocracies and four times greater in presidential democracies, relative to the reference category.

This finding lends support to the hypothesis that these specific regime types are particularly

vulnerable to autocalups, suggesting a clear link between their structural characteristics and the propensity of incumbent leaders to extend their tenures extra legally. Beyond regime type, the study also identifies economic development, the level of democracy, and the historical context of the Cold War as influential factors. By examining the strategic calculus of incumbent leaders across different regime types, this research provides valuable empirical insights into the conditions that either facilitate or constrain autocalup attempts, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political instability and democratic trajectories.

It is important to acknowledge certain complexities inherent in the analysis of autocalups that warrant further study. Unlike traditional calups, which can theoretically occur at any point and potentially multiple times within a short period, autocalups initiated by incumbents appear to follow different temporal patterns. For instance, an autocalup attempt may be less likely during the initial phase of a leader's term compared to the period preceding the term's scheduled expiry. Furthermore, while a leader successfully extending their tenure may reduce the immediate likelihood of a subsequent attempt, particularly if a life-long term is secured, it is also true that some leaders have successfully extended their rule on multiple occasions (e.g., Presidents Putin and Lukashenko). To render the analysis manageable within the scope of this study, a simplifying assumption was made that an autocalup attempt occurs only once during an incumbent leader's tenure. These temporal dynamics and the possibility of repeat attempts by the same leader represent important avenues for future research to build upon the foundational analysis presented here.

Chapter 4

Power Acquisition and Leadership Survival: A Comparative Analysis of Coup-installed and Autocoup Leaders

Abstract

This chapter examines how the mode of power acquisition affects the tenure of political leaders who rise to office through irregular means, with a particular focus on those installed via coups and autocoups. It argues that political leaders who successfully extend their tenure through autocoups are more likely to survive in office longer than those who are installed by coups. Contrary to this initial hypothesis, the time-dependent Cox model reveals no statistically significant difference in the risk of removal between coup-installed and autocoup leaders once key covariates—particularly regime type—are accounted for. Instead, the analysis highlights the decisive influence of regime characteristics on leadership survival. Leaders in military, parliamentary, and transitional regimes face significantly higher hazards of removal compared to those in dominant-party systems. Additionally, higher levels of GDP per capita are associated with greater leadership stability, while increased political violence correlates with elevated risks

of ousting. These findings suggest that structural and institutional contexts, rather than the specific mechanism of accession, more strongly shape the durability of irregular leadership. This study contributes to the literature on political survival by emphasising the role of regime type and political context in explaining leadership longevity following unconventional accessions to power.

keywords: *Coups, Autocoups, Leadership Survival, Cox Model*

4.1 Introduction

The enduring fascination with the longevity of political leaders has sparked extensive research in political science, with scholars seeking to understand why some leaders maintain power for decades while others are ousted in a matter of months or even days. However, a specific subset of leaders—those who ascend to power through coups or extend their tenure through autocoups—has received relatively limited attention. Examining the tenures of these leaders is crucial, as it sheds light on the dynamics of irregular leadership transitions and their implications for political stability and democratic processes.

In contrast to leaders who attain power through conventional means, those who rise through irregular channels, such as coups or autocoups, present more complex and intriguing cases for study. The Archigos dataset highlights the prevalence of irregular power transitions. Between 1945 and 2015, over half of leaders who assumed power irregularly also exited irregularly, a rate significantly higher than that of leaders who accessed office through regular channels.

Coup-installed and autocoup leaders constitute a substantial portion of these irregular cases. The Archigos dataset notes that of 374 leaders who exited irregularly, 246 (65.8%) were ousted through coups. Furthermore, research by Frantz and Stein (2016) demonstrates that coup-related exits account for approximately one-third of all exits in autocracies, surpassing any other transition type. Additionally, the autocoup dataset, introduced in Chapter 3, documents 110 autocoup attempts between 1945 and 2023, of which 87 were successful.

Measuring the tenure of coup-installed and autocoup leaders poses challenges due to the inherent irregularity and uncertainty of their positions. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis reveals that leaders who extend power through autocoups tend to have longer average post-autocoup tenures (approximately 6.8 years) compared to coup-installed leaders (approximately 9.8 years), suggesting a potential tenure gap of over five years.

A preliminary log-rank test in survival analysis, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, demonstrates a statistically significant difference between the tenures of autocoup and coup-installed lead-

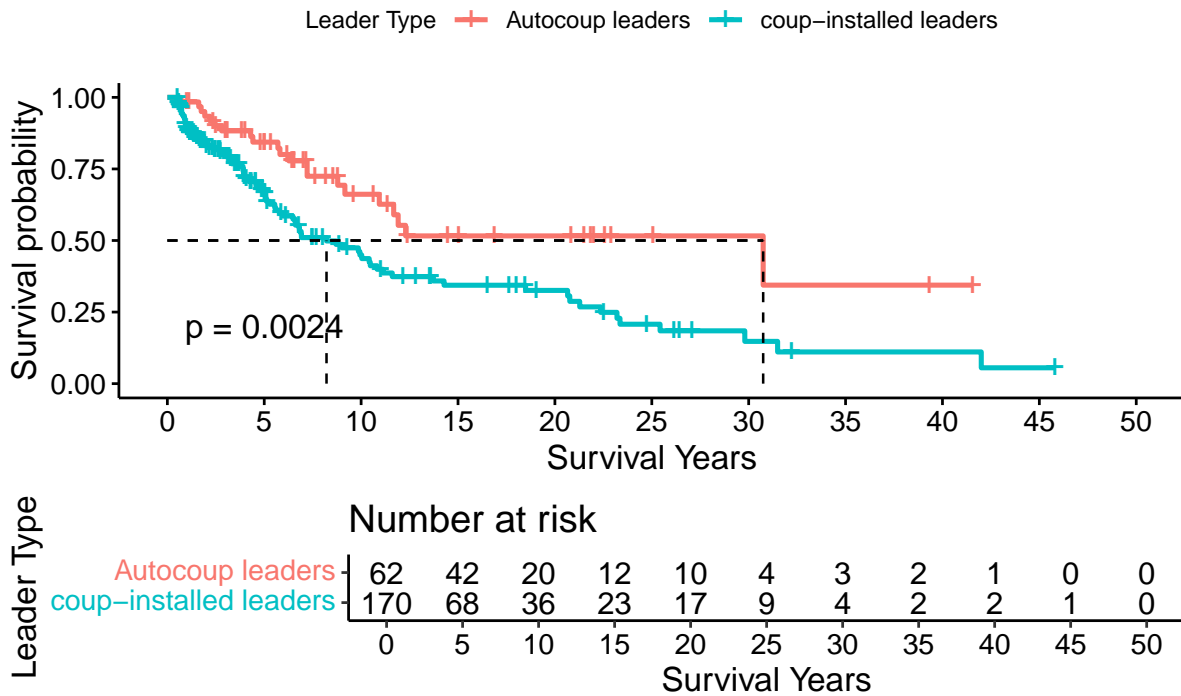


Figure 4.1: Survival curves of autoup and coup-installed leaders

ers. The survival curve for autoup leaders consistently exceeds that of coup-installed leaders, indicating longer survival times and a reduced risk of ouster for autoup leaders.

This study posits that the method of accession significantly influences leadership longevity. Coup-installed leaders likely confront greater challenges to their rule, resulting in shorter average tenures compared to autoup leaders. The analysis, employing Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models, supports this hypothesis, demonstrating that autoup leaders generally experience longer tenures than coup-installed leaders.

This research offers two primary contributions to the field. First, it highlights an understudied factor in leadership survival analysis: the impact of the method of accession to power. The findings suggest that leader survival is influenced not only by ruling strategies but also by the initial method of acquiring power. Second, by employing survival models, this study provides empirical evidence of the significant difference in tenure duration between autoup and coup-installed leaders. This insight may explain the increasing prevalence of tenure extensions

through autocoups since 2000, as more incumbents observe and potentially emulate successful precedents.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive literature review on political survival, establishing the context for this research. Section 3 explores the factors influencing the survival of coup and autocoup leaders. Section 4 outlines the methodology and data used, including the application of survival models to analyze the determinants of leadership longevity. Section 5 presents the analysis findings and a detailed discussion of the results. Finally, Section 6 concludes by synthesizing key takeaways and exploring their broader implications for political stability and democratic processes.

4.2 Literature review

The longevity of political leaders, which varies widely across different regimes, countries, and historical periods, has been a long-standing focus of research in political science. This field can be divided into two interconnected areas: regime survival and individual leader survival, which are distinct but related concepts. Regime survival focuses on the endurance of political systems, such as monarchies, political parties, or specific ideological structures, while leader survival concerns the duration of individual leaders' time in office.

Political survival patterns vary widely across different systems. Parliamentary democracies (e.g., Japan, United Kingdom) often experience prolonged periods of party dominance coupled with frequent leadership changes. Similarly, communist regimes (e.g., China) typically demonstrate enduring party rule with more frequent leadership transitions. Presidential systems (e.g., United States) and many military regimes tend to exhibit more frequent changes in both ruling party or junta and leader.

The existing literature on leader survival is extensive and multifaceted. Some studies explore specific mechanisms influencing leadership longevity within particular regimes, such as democracies ([Svolik 2014](#)) or autocracies ([Davenport, RezaeeDaryakenari, and Wood 2021](#)).

Others aim to develop more generalizable theoretical frameworks explaining leader survival across different political systems (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). While a universal theory remains an aspirational goal, the complexities of leadership survival across diverse regime types present significant challenges.

Power transition mechanisms vary substantially across different types of regimes, particularly between democracies and autocracies. Autocratic systems often feature closed leadership selection processes, restricted to a narrow pool of individuals. While some autocracies may hold elections, significant barriers to entry for legitimate challengers typically persist. The opacity of selection processes in autocracies makes it difficult to assess genuine levels of public support compared to democracies. Conceptualizing selectorates or winning coalitions, as proposed by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003), becomes problematic in many autocratic contexts.

Given these complexities, focusing research on specific regimes or leader types may be more fruitful. The study of irregular leaders, such as those who ascend to power through coups or extend their tenures through autocoups, offers a compelling avenue for research due to the inherent complexities and uncertainties surrounding their leadership trajectories.

Two primary perspectives have emerged to explain the dynamics of leader survival. The first emphasizes objective factors and resources, such as personal competence (Yu and Jong-A-Pin 2016), societal stability (Arriola 2009), economic development (Palmer and Whitten 1999; Williams 2011), natural resource endowments (Smith 2004; Quiroz Flores and Smith 2012; Wright, Frantz, and Geddes 2013), and external support (Licht 2009; Wright 2008; C. Thyne et al. 2017). The second focuses on subjective factors and strategies, including political policies, responses to opposition, and tactics for consolidating power (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Morrison 2009; Escribà-Folch 2013; Davenport, RezaeeDaryakenari, and Wood 2021).

Coups, a significant aspect of irregular leadership transitions, have received considerable scholarly attention. Research has examined coup prevention strategies (J. Powell 2017; Suduth 2017; De Bruin 2020). Studies have explored the impact of coups on leadership and the subsequent actions of coup leaders Easton and Siverson (2018).

However, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the comparison of leadership survival between coup-installed and autocoup leaders. This study aims to address this gap by investigating and comparing the duration of leadership survival for these two leader types.

By focusing on the comparison between coup-installed and autocoup leaders, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of political survival in irregular leadership transitions. This approach may offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of leader longevity across different political contexts.

4.3 Survival dynamics of autocoup and coup-installed leaders

The study of leadership survival within political systems presents considerable challenges due to the opacity and complexity of power transitions. These challenges, however, highlight the importance of such research, as it sheds light on the often-overlooked dynamics of political leadership. While the survival trajectories of political leaders are complex and varied, certain patterns do emerge. Leaders of similar origin or regime type frequently exhibit comparable characteristics, thereby enabling systematic and meaningful analysis.

4.3.1 Key definitions and scope

Before proceeding to a comparative analysis, it is essential to clarify several key terms.

Firstly, coups and autocoups are defined in a manner consistent with Chapter 2 to ensure conceptual clarity and analytical coherence throughout the study.

Autocoup leaders are defined as incumbent rulers who employ extra-constitutional means to extend their tenure in office. Coup-installed leaders, by contrast, are those who assume power following a successful coup, irrespective of whether they personally participated in or instigated the coup. This inclusive definition allows for the consideration of both coup perpetrators and

those appointed to lead in the aftermath, offering a comprehensive understanding of leadership following regime change by force.

Three important clarifications are required. First, to facilitate a meaningful analysis, this study focuses on leaders who remained in power for a significant period, applying a minimum threshold of six months to both autocoup and coup-installed leaders. This criterion serves to exclude brief or transitional episodes of leadership, thereby enhancing the robustness of the findings concerning survival dynamics.

Second, some overlap between these two leadership categories is possible. For instance, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of Tunisia from 1987 to 2011, assumed power through a bloodless coup that ousted President Habib Bourguiba on grounds of alleged incompetence. Subsequently, in 2002, a constitutional referendum—the first of its kind in Tunisia—enabled the president to seek an unlimited number of five-year terms and raised the maximum age limit for presidential candidates from 70 to 75 ([Bonci and Cavatorta 2019](#)). Technically, this latter manoeuvre might be classified as an autocoup. Thus, President Ben Ali could be viewed as both a coup-installed and an autocoup leader. However, since Ben Ali originally came to power through the 1987 coup and retained office continuously thereafter, this study classifies him solely as a coup-installed leader. This rule—namely, that a leader who initially assumes power via a coup shall be categorised as coup-installed, even if they subsequently extend their rule by general elections or extra-constitutional means—ensures analytical consistency and prevents overlap between leadership types.

Third, this study focuses on comparing the post-autocoup tenure of autocoup leaders with the post-coup tenure of coup-installed leaders. That is, any tenure served by autocoup leaders prior to their tenure extension is excluded from the analysis. This comparative approach is motivated by the relevance and shared characteristics of these leadership types, particularly in terms of their legitimacy deficits, uncertainty, and susceptibility to instability. By examining these parallel yet distinct pathways to power, the study aims to elucidate the factors that influence the longevity of leaders who rise to power through irregular means.

4.3.2 Challenges in power consolidation

Both autocoup and coup-installed leaders confront distinct challenges in consolidating their power, primarily stemming from the varying intensity of issues related to illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability. This disparity creates an uneven playing field in terms of power dynamics, placing coup-installed leaders at a significant disadvantage. Table [4.1](#) provides a comparative overview of the main features of autocoup and coup-installed leaders, highlighting these key differences.

Table 4.1: Main features of autocoup and coup-installed leaders

Feature	Autocoup Leader	Coup Entry Leader
Illegitimacy	Normally attained through lawful procedures, but lacking consensus legitimacy	Blatantly illegal
Uncertainty	Initially with some certainty, but decreases as the leader's age grows or health worsens	Significant uncertainty initially
Instability	Relatively stable	Unstable except when a strongman emerges or constitutional institutions are established
Balance of Power	Generally in a better position of power	Initially unclear and challenging to establish a balance

Illegitimacy

While both types of leaders suffer from a legitimacy deficit, the nature and perception of this deficit differ significantly.

The illegitimacy coup-installed leaders is blatant and unambiguous, stemming from the overt and often violent seizure of power. This overt act undermines pre-existing norms and institutions, generating immediate domestic and international condemnation.

In contrast, autocoup leaders employ a more subtle and deceptive strategy, manipulating legal processes and institutions to create a façade of democratic legitimacy. This veneer of legality, while often thin, can provide a degree of cover and buy time for consolidating power.

Uncertainty

The irregular paths to power for both types of leaders create uncertainty about the longevity of their rule and the mechanisms of their eventual departure. However, the levels and sources of this uncertainty differ significantly.

Coup-installed leaders face a trifecta of uncertainties. First, the immediate aftermath of a coup often involves a struggle for power within the junta or ruling coalition, creating ambiguity about who will ultimately consolidate control. Second, the tenure of coup-installed leaders is inherently precarious, subject to internal rivalries, popular uprisings, or counter-coups. Third, the lack of established succession mechanisms further amplifies uncertainty, making it difficult to predict the transfer of power and potentially triggering future instability.

While not immune to uncertainty, autocoup leaders generally present a clearer picture. The question of who will rule post-autocoup is largely settled, as the incumbent retains power. Furthermore, many autocoup leaders openly aspire to extend their rule indefinitely or incrementally, attempting to establish a sense of permanence. This perceived stability, whether real or manufactured, can contribute to a more predictable political environment, at least in the short term.

Instability

The awareness of shaky legitimacy and persistent uncertainty inevitably breeds insecurity and a sense of crisis, forcing both autocoup and coup-installed leaders to prioritize stabilization measures. However, the nature and intensity of these challenges differ:

Coup-installed leaders face the daunting task of rapidly reshaping power dynamics, often resorting to purges and crackdowns to eliminate potential adversaries and consolidate control. This process of dismantling existing structures and building new ones generates significant instability, potentially alienating former allies and triggering resistance from various segments of society. The need to appease powerful actors both domestically and internationally further limits their options, forcing them into compromises that can undermine their authority and long-term stability.

In contrast, autocoup leaders often benefit from a degree of continuity in regime personnel and institutions. This relative stability allows them to implement changes gradually, minimizing disruptions and mitigating potential backlash. While they may still face opposition, they are less likely to confront immediate and existential threats to their rule, providing them with more time and leverage to consolidate power.

By understanding these contrasting challenges, we can better appreciate the relative advantages and disadvantages faced by autocoup and coup-installed leaders. This comparative perspective provides a nuanced framework for analyzing the strategies these leaders employ to consolidate power and navigate the perilous terrain of irregular leadership transitions.

4.3.3 Empirical evidence and hypothesis

Empirical evidence substantiates the disadvantage faced by coup-installed leaders, revealing a complex interplay between historical precedent, power consolidation challenges, and leadership longevity. This section presents key data points and introduces the central hypothesis guiding this study.

Data analysis shows a significant correlation between the frequency of coup attempts in a country and the likelihood of future coups. Notably, over a third of coups have occurred in the top ten countries with the most attempts since 1950 (Powell and Thyne 2011). This pattern suggests a self-reinforcing cycle of political instability, where each successful coup increases the probability of subsequent attempts, creating an environment of persistent uncertainty for coup-installed leaders.

The disparity in leadership longevity between autocoup and coup-installed leaders is starkly illustrated by survival data. As depicted in Figure 4.1, the average survival period following an autocoup is approximately five years longer than that of coup-installed leaders. This substantial difference in tenure length underscores the divergent challenges faced by these two types of leaders in maintaining their grip on power.

The distinct challenges faced by autocoup leaders and coup-installed leaders in consolidating power create a self-perpetuating cycle that significantly influences their tenure length.

Coup-installed leaders face greater legitimacy challenges and internal instability; Struggle to attract and retain strong support; More vulnerable to internal and external challenges; Shorter average tenures reinforce perception of instability.

Autocoup leaders often benefit from a veneer of legitimacy and a stronger initial position; Better able to consolidate power and attract supporters; Face less immediate threat of overthrow; Longer average tenures contribute to perception of stability.

This cycle suggests that the initial method of power acquisition or extension has far-reaching consequences for a leader's ability to maintain their position over time.

Based on these observations and the theoretical framework outlined earlier, I propose the following hypothesis:

H4-1: Political leaders who successfully extend their tenure through autocoups are more likely to survive longer extended tenure compared to coup-installed leaders.

This hypothesis encapsulates the expected outcome of the divergent challenges and advantages faced by autocoup and coup-installed leaders. By testing this hypothesis, I aim to quantify

the impact of the method of power acquisition or extension on leadership longevity, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political survival in contexts of irregular transitions.

4.4 Research design

This section employs survival analysis to test the hypothesis that autocoup leaders have longer survival times in office compared to coup-installed leaders. This study uses Cox models to analyze the survival tenures of autocoup and coup-installed leaders, controlling for various factors that may affect their time in office.

4.4.1 Methodology: Survival analysis

Two Cox models will be employed to analyze the survival tenures of coup-installed and autocoup leaders:

Cox proportional hazards (PH) model: This model uses only the variables present at the entry year, without considering changes over time.

Time-dependent Cox model: This model accounts for variations in time-dependent control variables such as economic performance and political stability.

The Cox model is preferred over the Kaplan-Meier model because it enables the estimation of the impact of multiple factors. Although it does not directly estimate the duration of tenure, it assesses the hazard rate associated with being ousted from power. This approach captures different facets of the same phenomenon: as a leader's cumulative hazard of being ousted increases, their probability of survival in office decreases.

4.4.2 Data and variables

The dependent variables include survival time and end point status:

Survival time refers to the duration of a leader's tenure, measured in days. For coup-installed leaders, the survival time begins on the day they assume power through a coup. For autocoup leaders, the survival time starts on the expiration date of their original legitimate term. For example, Russia's president Vladimir Putin assumed power in 2000 and, after serving two terms, stepped down in 2008. However, he remained in a powerful position as the prime minister and hand-picked Dmitry Medvedev to succeed him as president, while continuing to control the power behind the scenes. In this case, Putin's survival time begins in 2008, marking the start of his post-autocoup tenure. The survival time concludes on the day the leader finally exits office, applicable to both coup-installed and autocoup leaders.

End point status indicates the manner in which the leader's tenure concluded, categorized as follows:

- **0 = Censored:** This status is assigned to leaders who leave office through regular means other than being ousted. This includes leaders transferring power to their designated successors, leaving office as their terms expire, losing in general elections, voluntarily leaving office due to health issues, or dying of natural causes.
- **1 = Ousted:** This status is assigned to leaders who are forced to leave office. This includes leaders resigning under pressure, being ousted by coups or other forces, or being assassinated.

The key independent variable is the leader type, which categorizes leaders into two distinct groups:

- **Group A = Autocoup leader:** Leaders who extend their tenure through autocoups.
- **Group B = Coup-installed leader:** Leaders who assume power through coups.

This variable is the primary independent variable of interest, serving as the basis for comparing the survival time between these two types of leaders.

Table 4.2: Cox models for survival time of different types of leaders

Characteristic	Cox PH Model				Time-dependent Cox Model			
	N	Event N	HR ^I	SE	N	Event N	HR ^I	SE
Leader Type								
Autocoup leaders	61	21	1.00	—	559	21	1.00	—
Coup-installed leaders	167	84	1.76**	0.274	1,171	80	1.31	0.275
Regime Types								
dominant-party	48	20	1.00	—	395	13	1.00	—
military	38	19	2.26**	0.351	356	36	2.06**	0.356
personal	64	30	1.67*	0.296	749	43	1.55	0.327
presidential	36	13	1.55	0.396	98	3	1.40	0.713
parliamentary	18	9	2.00	0.448	27	1	1.91	1.07
other	24	14	1.86*	0.374	105	5	2.59**	0.557
GDP Growth Trend	228	105	0.91	1.86	1,730	101	0.07*	1.72
GDP per capita	228	105	0.98	0.010	1,730	101	0.98***	0.010
Population: log	228	105	1.00	0.079	1,730	101	0.92	0.080
Polity 5	228	105	1.00	0.031	1,730	101	1.01	0.027
Political stability	228	105	0.95	0.051	1,730	101	1.09**	0.046

^I*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Abbreviations: HR = Hazard Ratio, SE = Standard Error

The data for both dependent and independent variables are sourced from the autocoup dataset introduced in this study, Archigos, and PLAD.

Control variables include regime types, economic performance, political stability, population size, and Polity V scores which are consistent with the autocoup analysis in Chapter 3.

4.5 Results and discussion

4.5.1 Model results

Regression results for both the Cox Proportional Hazards (Cox PH) model and the time-dependent Cox model, estimated using the survival package in R ([Therneau 2024](#)), are presented in Table 4.2.

The two models yield divergent findings concerning the central question of this study. The Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model indicates a marginally statistically significant relationship between leadership type and the risk of removal from power ($p < 0.1$). This result supports the hypothesis that leaders installed via coups face a 1.78 times greater hazard of removal compared to those who came to power through autocalups. However, the time-dependent Cox model finds no statistically significant association in this regard. As the time-dependent model incorporates covariates that vary over time, the subsequent interpretation of the primary findings is grounded in this more refined specification.

According to the time-dependent Cox model, and contrary to the initial hypothesis and earlier analysis, the mode of accession to power does not significantly affect the tenure of irregularly inaugurated political leaders once relevant covariates—particularly regime type—are accounted for. Nevertheless, the findings derived from survival modelling reinforce the conclusions drawn in Chapter 3: the balance of power, fundamentally shaped by regime characteristics, is central to both the seizure and maintenance of political authority.

More specifically, regime type significantly influences the hazard of removal. Leaders within military regimes exhibit a hazard ratio of 2.06 relative to their counterparts in dominant-party regimes, all else being equal. This suggests that military leaders face a notably greater risk of being ousted. At any given time during their rule, military regime leaders are 1.06 times more likely to be removed than those in dominant-party regimes, under the same model conditions. Leaders under “other” regimes—typically provisional or transitional—display a hazard ratio of 2.57, a statistically significant result that aligns with their inherently unstable nature.

Economic development, proxied by GDP per capita, exerts a statistically significant influence in the time-dependent model. A hazard ratio of 0.95 implies that each additional \$10,000 in GDP per capita reduces the risk of removal by 5%, holding all other variables constant. Political stability, as measured by the violence index, indicates that a one-unit increase in the index corresponds to an 9% rise in the hazard of removal from office.

Other control variables—namely GDP growth trends, the logarithm of population size, and

Polity V scores—do not exhibit statistically significant effects on the likelihood of political removal in the time-dependent Cox model. Although these variables are theoretically relevant and commonly included in models of political survival, their lack of significance suggests that, within the context of irregular leadership transitions, structural economic growth, demographic scale, and broader democratic indicators may exert less immediate influence on leader vulnerability than more proximate factors such as regime type and political stability. It is possible that their effects are either mediated by other included variables or require a longer time horizon to manifest in measurable political outcomes. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between long-term institutional features and short-term political dynamics when assessing leader survival.

4.5.2 Discussion

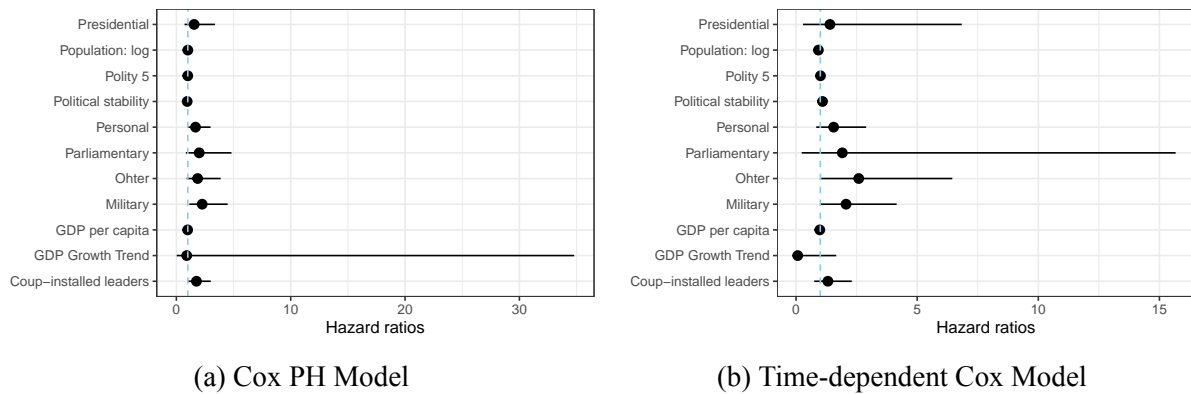


Figure 4.2: Hazard ratios and 95% CIs for Leader Ousting

Figure Figure 4.2 presents the hazard ratios and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals for the variables included in the Cox proportional hazards model. The proximity of a hazard ratio (depicted as dots) to 1 indicates a minimal effect of that variable on the risk of removal from power; a hazard ratio of 1 denotes no effect. The horizontal lines extending from the dots represent the 95% confidence intervals. If these intervals intersect the vertical blue line at 1, the variable is not statistically significant at the 5% level.

As previously discussed, the hazard ratios for leaders in military regimes and those classified under “Other” coup-installed regimes are significantly greater than 1 and are statistically significant at the 5% threshold. Although GDP per capita is also statistically significant at this level, its hazard ratio is very close to 1, indicating a limited substantive effect.

While the hazard ratios for GDP growth trend and for parliamentary and presidential regimes appear visually distant from 1, they are not statistically significant at the 5% level, as their confidence intervals cross the vertical reference line.

Most other variables exhibit hazard ratios near 1, suggesting that a one-unit change in these variables does not meaningfully influence the likelihood of a leader being ousted.

4.5.3 Assessing the proportional hazards assumption

Evaluating the proportional hazards assumption is essential for ensuring the validity of the Cox model estimates. This assumption is tested using a chi-square test based on Schoenfeld residuals, which assesses whether the effects of covariates remain constant over time. The results indicate that neither the standard Cox proportional hazards model nor the time-dependent Cox model violates this assumption. The global p-values—0.12 for the standard model and 0.23 for the time-dependent model—both exceed the conventional 5% significance threshold, suggesting that the proportional hazards assumption is reasonably upheld in both cases.

4.6 Summary

This chapter examined the survival durations of political leaders who assumed office through irregular means—specifically coups and autoucoups—using survival analysis techniques, including the Cox proportional hazards model and a time-dependent Cox model. While the standard Cox model suggested a marginally significant difference in tenure risk between autoucoup and coup-installed leaders, this association was not statistically significant in the time-dependent model, which offers a more robust specification by accounting for time-varying covariates.

The findings indicate that, once regime type and other relevant covariates are controlled for, the method of accession—whether by coup or autocoup—does not independently predict leader survival. Instead, regime type emerged as a key determinant. Leaders operating within military and transitional (“other”) regimes faced significantly higher risks of removal compared to those in dominant-party systems. Additionally, economic development, proxied by GDP per capita, and political stability, measured by a violence index, were found to significantly influence tenure length, whereas GDP growth, population size, and democratic scores (Polity V) were not statistically significant.

These results reinforce the central argument that the institutional context—particularly regime characteristics—plays a more decisive role in determining political longevity than the initial mode of power seizure. This finding aligns with earlier qualitative assessments and underscores the necessity of incorporating institutional and structural variables when analysing political survival.

Methodologically, the chapter demonstrates the value of time-dependent modelling in political science, especially when covariates evolve over time. It also contributes to the emerging literature on autocoups by offering one of the first systematic analyses of their implications for political survival. However, the reliance on a newly constructed dataset for autocoups presents limitations, highlighting the need for continued refinement and expansion in future research.

In sum, this chapter provides empirical support for the proposition that regime characteristics, more than the method of accession alone, shape the durability of irregular political leadership. These insights contribute to broader debates on authoritarian resilience, democratic backsliding, and the institutional foundations of political power.

Chapter 5

Coups, Autocoups, and Democracy

Abstract

This chapter explores the impact of autocoups on political institutions, drawing comparisons with traditional coups through an analysis of changes in Polity scores. I contend that, first, incumbent leaders frequently consolidate power by undermining established institutions in anticipation of an autocoup, resulting in a decline in Polity scores even prior to the event. Second, unlike coups, which produce mixed outcomes regarding democratization, autocoups almost invariably lead to democratic backsliding or authoritarian entrenchment, as they are specifically designed to dismantle institutional checks, enabling leaders to maintain power for significantly longer periods than those installed via coups.

Employing a country-fixed effects model and utilizing datasets on both autocoups and coups, this study reveals that Polity scores decline both preceding and following an autocoup, while coups tend to trigger an immediate decrease that may allow for some degree of democratic recovery over time. These findings underscore the divergent political trajectories associated with coups and autocoups. This research not only addresses a critical gap in the empirical analysis of autocoups but also significantly raises awareness within academic and policy-making circles regarding their potential adverse effects, including democratic backsliding and further

authoritarian deterioration.

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I clarified the definition of an autocoup, introduced a novel dataset on autocoups, conducted empirical analyses on the determinants of autocoup attempts, and compared the post-event survival times of leaders established through coups versus autocoup leaders. A natural follow-up question emerges: What are the broader impacts of autocoups? Specifically, from a political science perspective, how do autocoups affect the process of democratization?

As previously noted, due to the absence of a widely recognized dataset on autocoups, most existing discussions on their impact have relied on case studies ([Baturu and Elgie, n.d.](#); [Baturu and Tolstrup 2022](#)). To move beyond case-specific analyses and adopt a more systematic and comparative approach, this chapter aims to pioneer empirical research on the democratic consequences of autocoups. The first objective of this chapter, therefore, is to examine whether autocoups reinforce authoritarianism, promote democratization, or have no significant effect on political regimes.

Given the conceptual and empirical connections between coups and autocoups, another key objective is to compare their respective effects on democratization. While both events disrupt existing political orders, their immediate and long-term consequences may vary significantly. Understanding these distinctions is essential for evaluating their broader implications.

To address these questions, this study leverages data from a widely recognized coup dataset alongside a newly compiled dataset on autocoups. Employing a fixed-effects model, it evaluates their effects on democracy, as measured by the Polity Index. The findings reveal that both coups and autocoups lead to an immediate decline in democratic levels. However, coups have a more pronounced negative short-term impact. Notably, three years after these events, democracies affected by coups tend to show significant recovery, whereas those experiencing autocoups

exhibit no meaningful improvement.

This study offers two significant contributions to the field of political science. First, it provides the inaugural empirical analysis of the impact of autocoups on democratization, effectively addressing a critical gap in the existing literature. Second, by directly comparing the effects of coups and autocoups, this research highlights autocoups as a distinct phenomenon that demands increased scholarly inquiry and policy focus.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 analyzes the impact of autocoups on democratization, by comparing the effects with traditional coups. Section 3 outlines the research design, methodology, and variables used in this study. Section 4 presents and interprets the empirical findings, followed by a discussion of their implications. Finally, Section 5 concludes by summarizing the key results and exploring their significance for understanding and mitigating the occurrence of autocoups.

5.2 Impact of autocoups on political change

According to the definition in Chapter 2, an autocoup refers to an incumbent leader extending their tenure in power beyond the originally mandated limits, whether through legal or illegal means. While the leader may assume a different title or position, the individual in power remains unchanged. Therefore, unlike traditional coups, an autocoup does not result in real leadership turnover, elite restructuring, or regime change. In other words, the fundamental ruling structure remains intact.

This distinction has important implications. Since regime change rarely occurs following an autocoup, its impact on politics cannot be assessed using conventional methods. Typically, studies on coups and democratization measure their effects by estimating the probability of regime transition—either from autocracy to democracy or vice versa—as seen in previous research on coup outcomes (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; Miller 2016). However, this approach is not suitable for autocoups, as they do not directly trigger

regime transfers.

Although autcoups rarely lead to formal regime change, this does not mean they have no impact on political dynamics. In fact, they inevitably shape political trajectories in various ways and, on occasion, can even lead to significant transformations. Therefore, a more appropriate method for assessing the political impact of autcoups is to analyze democratic indices, such as those measured by Polity5 ([Monty G. Marshall and Gurr 2020](#)). The Polity Score, ranging from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy), captures gradual shifts in political regime characteristics rather than abrupt transitions. Thus, even if an autcoup does not result in a formal regime change, subtle shifts in political openness and institutional constraints can still be assessed by examining variations in Polity scores before and after the event. This approach has also been employed in previous studies ([Dahl and Gleditsch 2023](#)).

Although autcoups may not lead to significant regime change, their impact on democratization should not be overlooked. However, their influence differs from that of traditional coups in at least two key ways.

5.2.1 The pre-emptive effects of autcoups on political dynamics

First and foremost, unlike coups, which are marked by clear, decisive events—such as the removal of a leader—autcoups typically unfold gradually, through incremental steps rather than a singular, dramatic event. Incumbent leaders seeking to extend their tenure often lay the groundwork well in advance before executing their final move to remain in power. To reduce resistance and opposition, they engage in extensive preparation, which may include purging officials, suppressing political opposition, cracking down on dissent and protests, and restricting press freedom. Without such measures, an autcoup might face strong internal resistance, and in the worst case, provoke a backlash that not only derails the leader’s attempt to extend their rule but also results in their immediate removal from office.

However, once an incumbent successfully secures an extension of their rule, continued re-

pression is not always necessary. On the contrary, some leaders relax political pressure to ease internal dissent and mitigate opposition from external actors. This adaptive approach helps maintain stability after the autocoup is complete.

As a result, the primary impact of autocoups on political change is often reflected in shifts in political scores before the final stage of the autocoup is enacted. Once the process is completed, further shifts may be minimal. In contrast, coup plotters, unlike incumbents, lack the ability to influence political institutions beforehand, meaning their impact on politics is often felt in the aftermath rather than before the event.

This distinction is evident in empirical cases of autocoups.

One of the most frequently cited examples of an autocoup is Peru's 1992 case, in which President Alberto Fujimori dissolved Congress, temporarily suspended the 1979 Constitution, and ruled by decree until November of that year, when a *Democratic Constituent Congress* was elected to draft a new constitution ([Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b](#)). However, these moves did not immediately grant Fujimori a longer tenure in office.

Under the 1979 Peruvian Constitution, immediate presidential re-election was prohibited. To bypass this restriction, Fujimori initiated a constitutional overhaul, leading to the adoption of a new constitution in 1993, which permitted re-election. Consequently, he secured a second term in 1995 ([Baturu 2019](#)).

An analysis of Peru's Polity5 scores during this process reflects these political changes. Upon taking office in 1990, Peru's Polity score was 8, remaining unchanged in 1991. However, a dramatic shift occurred in 1992, when Fujimori dissolved Congress, causing the Polity score to plummet from 8 to -4. Interestingly, when he formally extended his rule by amending the constitution in 1993, the score rebounded slightly to -1. This -1 score remained unchanged throughout Fujimori's tenure until 2000, indicating a lack of further institutional transformation after the constitutional amendment.

A similar pattern emerges in Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko. Upon assuming office as president in 1994, Belarus had a Polity5 score of 8. However, in 1995, when Lukashenko

moved to hold a referendum—defying opposition in the Supreme Council and threatening to suspend its activities—the score dropped sharply to 0. Following the 1996 referendum, which extended his term by two additional years, Lukashenko officially overstayed his tenure. Consequently, the Polity5 score further declined to -7 in 1996, where it has remained ever since, despite two additional term extensions ([Ash 2014](#); [Baturu and Elgie, n.d.](#)).

These cases illustrate a broader pattern: the impact of autocoups on political change is often reflected before the final stage of the autocoup is enacted, whereas the impact of coups tends to materialize afterwards, as have been fully discussed by previous studies.

Based on this analysis, I propose the first hypothesis:

H1: Autocoups primarily shape political change in advance, whereas coups typically drive political change only after they are executed.

5.2.2 The singular nature of autocoups

Secondly, in contrast to the ambiguous nature of coups ([Dahl and Gleditsch 2023](#)), the impact of autocoups on political change rarely contributes to democratization.

The influence of coups on democratization has been extensively examined in existing literature. Some scholars argue that coups—and even the mere threat of them—can act as catalysts for democratization. One argument suggests that coups deliver a political “shock” that may create opportunities for liberalization that would not have otherwise materialized ([C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014](#)). In a critical examination, Derpanopoulos et al. (2016) questioned the role of coups in promoting democracy, engaging in multiple rounds of debate with Miller (2016). More recently, Dahl and Gleditsch (2023) further explored this ongoing discussion, arguing that both democratic and autocratic transitions are likely to follow a coup, with popular mobilization playing a decisive role in shaping post-coup trajectories.

A frequently cited example of a “pro-democracy coup” occurred in February 2010, when Nigerien troops ousted President Mamadou Tandja after he extended his rule autocratically.

The Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD) took control, pledging democratic reforms. Their actions were widely celebrated, with both citizens and political opposition viewing the coup as an opportunity to restore democracy. The CSRD fulfilled its commitment by overseeing free and fair elections in 2011, resulting in Mahamadou Issoufou assuming the presidency (Miller 2016).

While the debate on the democratic consequences of coups remains ongoing, it is evident that their impact is not uniform. In contrast, autocoups almost never lead to democratic transitions, nor do they even marginally enhance political freedoms. This stems from the intrinsic nature of autocoups, which disrupt the established process of political leadership transition, particularly term limits.

Term limits are constitutional provisions that restrict the maximum duration a leader can remain in office. They play a crucial role in both democracies and autocracies by preventing the excessive concentration of power and ensuring political stability. In democracies, term limits promote accountability, leadership renewal, and reduce the risks of corruption and authoritarian entrenchment. In autocracies, when enforced, they can curb indefinite rule, mitigate succession crises, and provide rare opportunities for political transitions. However, without term limits, leaders can entrench themselves in power, undermining institutions and hindering political progress.

As shown in Table 2.2 in Chapter 3, autocoups are executed through either façade legal mechanisms or blatantly illegal methods. This includes amending or disregarding term limits, delaying or cancelling elections, rigging electoral outcomes, or outright refusing to accept election results. While many autocoups maintain a veneer of legality, their defining characteristic is the violation of term limits, which are intended as safeguards against prolonged and unchecked rule.

As previously discussed, before an incumbent leader formally overstays their term, they often inflict significant damage on political institutions. Furthermore, to secure their prolonged rule, they are unlikely to fully restore political freedoms even if they temporarily ease political

repression once they have consolidated power.

Case studies from Peru and Belarus illustrate how autocoups lead to a decline in Polity scores, reflecting democratic backsliding. However, most autocoups occur in already autocratic regimes where Polity scores are low. This aligns with trends observed in coups, which also primarily occur in autocracies.

For instance, in China's 2018 constitutional amendment, Xi Jinping abolished presidential term limits, effectively allowing himself to remain in power indefinitely¹. However, China's Polity score remained unchanged at -7 before and after the amendment. This pattern is common in autocratic regimes with Polity scores below -6, as they already lack significant democratic features, leaving little room for further decline.

While most autocoups occur in low-Polity-score countries, some have taken place in relatively democratic settings, where the Polity score remains stable despite term limit extensions. This is particularly evident in Latin America, where presidents have amended “no immediate re-election” rules to allow for a second consecutive term, but voluntarily stepped down afterwards. Examples include: Argentina (1993), Polity score remained at 7; Brazil (1997), Polity score remained at 8, Colombia (2004), Polity score remained at 7. In these cases, leaders extended their tenure within a structured political framework without further dismantling democratic institutions (Baturó 2019).

Across all cases—whether in Peru, Belarus, China, Argentina, Brazil, or Colombia—there is no instance where a Polity score increased following an autocoup. In the autocoup dataset which I introduced in Chapter 3, only four cases—Guinea-Bissau (1988), Burkina Faso (1997), Congo-Brazzaville (2001), and Lebanon (2004)—saw minor increases in Polity scores, but the changes were insignificant.

Thus, unlike some coup leaders who justify their actions by claiming to restore democracy (as seen in Niger's 2010 case), leaders who execute autocoups lack any democratic justification.

¹**BBC News**, “China's Xi Allowed to Remain ‘President for Life’ as Term Limits Removed,” *BBC News*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-43361276>, accessed March 14, 2025.

If their true intention were to advance democracy, they would transfer power peacefully rather than violate term limits.

Based on this analysis, I propose the second hypothesis:

H2: Autocoups are more likely to entrench autocracy than coups.

5.3 Methodology and variables

5.3.1 Methodology

As discussed earlier, autocoups are less likely to result in full regime transitions—either from democracy to autocracy or vice versa. Therefore, it is inappropriate to assess their effects solely based on regime transitions or changes that cross a critical threshold. Instead, this study examines political changes through fluctuations in Polity5 scores.

Unlike coup analysis, which primarily focuses on post-event effects, this study examines both pre-event and post-event impacts of autocoups. Specifically, pre-event effects are measured by the change in Polity5 scores three years before the autocoup compared to the year of the autocoup, expressed as:

$$Polity_t - Polity_{t-3}$$

Post-event effects are measured by the change in Polity5 scores three years after the autocoup compared to the year of the autocoup, expressed as:

$$Polity_{t+3} - Polity_t$$

The three-year window is chosen for two key reasons. Pre-event political changes typically occur incrementally, as incumbents consolidate power gradually over several years rather than through a single, abrupt action. Post-event analysis focuses on medium-term effects rather than short-term shocks, as autocoups rarely trigger immediate regime transitions and instead reinforce existing political structures. Short-term fluctuations may be too minor to capture meaningful institutional change empirically.

To estimate how political institutions change before and after autoucoups, I employ a linear model with country-case fixed effects. For pre-event effects, I analyze attempted autoucoups, since before the event, no one knows whether the autoucoup will succeed or fail.

For post-event effects, I analyze only successful autoucoups for three reasons: The majority of autoucoups succeed (87 out of 110 cases); failed autoucoups tend to produce immediate political shocks, rather than medium- or long-term effects; failed autoucoups are often followed by major disruptive events, such as coups, insurrections, or mass protests, making it difficult to isolate their impact. For example, in Niger's case, a failed autoucoup in 2009 was followed by a coup in 2010, creating overlapping political effects. In contrast, successful autoucoups provide a clearer analytical framework, as their effects are less entangled with other disruptions, allowing for a more systematic assessment of institutional change.

5.3.2 Variables

This study uses a global sample of all country-year data from 1950 to 2020, applying a linear model to examine the effects of autoucoups on political change. The dependent variable is the change in Polity scores, while the main independent variable is autoucoups. The dataset includes approximately 7,500 observations.

The dependent variable measures political change using three-year differences in Polity scores. Model 1 (Pre-event effects): $Polity_t - Polity_{t-3}$. Model 2 (Post-event effects): $Polity_{t+3} - Polity_t$.

The Polity score ranges from -10 (full autocracy) to 10 (full democracy). Some values in the dataset, such as -66, -77, and -88, represent transitional regimes or special periods. To prevent excessive data loss, I replace these values with the closest valid Polity scores. This approach ensures that the model captures all changes in Polity scores, rather than focusing solely on transitions that cross a democratic threshold.

The main independent variable is autoucoups, as introduced in Chapter 3. The dataset in-

cludes 110 attempted autocoops (used for pre-event analysis) and 87 successful autocoops (used for post-event analysis). For pre-event analysis, the autocoop variable is binary, where: 1 indicates the presence of an attempted autocoop and 0 indicates no autocoop event.

For post-event analysis, I apply decay functions to account for both immediate and delayed effects, following the methodology of Dahl and Gleditsch (2023). To assess the persistence of autocoop effects, I consider a half-life specification of five years, analysing the impact from the autocoop year (y_t) to four years after (y_{t+4}).

I also include traditional coups as a secondary independent variable for two reasons. Comparative significance: It is essential to compare the effects of autocoops and coups. Overlapping events: In many cases, coups and autocoops are interconnected, as autocoops can trigger coups. Distinguishing their effects is necessary for a clear empirical analysis.

As in previous chapters, I use the coup dataset from Powell and Thyne (2011). To maintain consistency, I apply the same methodological approach to coups as to autocoops: Binary coding for pre-event effects and decay function coding for post-event effects.

Control variables include economic performance, political stability, and population size, all of which have been analysed in previous chapters. Additionally, I incorporate two dummy variables. The first, “**non_democracy**,” accounts for regime type, recognizing that non-democratic regimes with Polity scores below -6 have limited room for further decline, while democracies with scores above 6 are less likely to experience significant increases. The second, “**cold_war**,” follows the approach used in prior studies on the impact of coups on democratization (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2014; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; Dahl and Gleditsch 2023) and accounts for the Cold War period. This variable captures the observable trend of declining Polity scores from the 1960s to 1990, followed by an upward shift after 1990.

5.4 Results and discussion

5.4.1 Pre-event effects

Initially, I analyse the trajectory of Polity scores leading up to these events. As presented in Table 5.1, columns 1 and 2 display the empirical results for pre-event effects, examining changes over two years (model 1) and three years (model 2) prior to the event. Consistent with the first hypothesis, Polity scores exhibit a significant decline in the 2–3 years preceding an autocoup. Notably, this downward trend is both more pronounced and statistically significant for autocoups compared to traditional coups.

Column 1 examines the pre-event changes, specifically the difference between Polity scores at time $t - 1$ and $t - 3$ ($Polity_{t-1} - Polity_{t-3}$). The results reveal a statistically significant decrease in Polity scores prior to autocoups. On average, Polity scores decline by 0.45 in the two years before an autocoup, holding other factors constant. In contrast, no significant changes are observed before traditional coups, indicating that pre-coup periods do not measurably affect democratization levels.

Column 2 assesses the cumulative impact from three years prior to the event year, calculated as $Polity_t - Polity_{t-3}$. As previously discussed, the year of an autocoup or coup witnesses a substantial shock to political institutions. Consequently, both types of events result in a decline in Polity scores relative to three years earlier. However, the negative effect of autocoups is more severe. Polity scores decline by an average of 1.53 in the three years leading up to an autocoup, compared to 1.27 for coups, all else being equal. This disparity reinforces our hypothesis that autocoups have a more detrimental pre-event effect on democratic institutions as incumbents overextend their legitimate tenure.

Table 5.1: The Impact of Autocoups on Democratization(1950–2018): OLS with country-fixed effects

	Dependent variable: Differences of Polity scores			
	Pre-event effects		Post-event effects	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Autocoup	−0.487* (0.286)	−1.802*** (0.340)	−0.109 (0.176)	−0.168 (0.198)
Coup	0.011 (0.129)	−1.276*** (0.153)	0.479*** (0.077)	0.715*** (0.104)
GDP per Capita	−0.005*** (0.002)	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.007*** (0.002)
Economic Trend	−0.703* (0.388)	−1.240*** (0.462)	−0.942** (0.464)	−1.030** (0.463)
Log Population	0.682*** (0.099)	1.013*** (0.119)	1.163*** (0.119)	1.154*** (0.119)
Political Violence	0.016 (0.020)	0.028 (0.023)	0.020 (0.023)	0.021 (0.023)
Non-Democracy	1.682*** (0.087)	2.443*** (0.104)	2.411*** (0.105)	2.428*** (0.105)
Cold War	−0.256*** (0.088)	−0.261** (0.104)	−0.250** (0.104)	−0.259** (0.104)
Observations	8,926	8,761	8,761	8,761
R ²	0.049	0.082	0.076	0.077
Adjusted R ²	0.030	0.063	0.057	0.058
F Statistic	56.188***	96.025***	87.952***	89.142***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.4.2 Post-event effects

Columns 3 and 4 present the empirical results for post-event effects, analysing changes in Polity scores following attempted (column 3) and successful (column 4) autocracies.

Column 3 examines the impact of attempted autocracies. The results indicate that attempted autocracies do not have a statistically significant effect on Polity scores. This contrasts with coup attempts, which lead to an average increase of 0.48 in Polity scores over three years, all else being equal.

Column 4 evaluates the impact of successful autocracies. In contrast to attempted autocracies, successful autocracies demonstrate a significant negative effect on Polity scores, with an average decline of 0.33 over three years, holding other factors constant. Conversely, successful coups continue to exhibit positive effects on democratization, resulting in an average increase of 0.72.

These findings yield several key insights. First, while both successful and attempted coups influence Polity scores, only successful autocracies produce statistically significant effects—and exclusively in a negative direction. Second, the impact of coups on democratization is more nuanced. Although post-coup Polity scores may improve, the pre-coup period often involves significant democratic backsliding. My models indicate that, on average, the democratic gains following a coup fail to offset the losses incurred before it.

5.4.3 Effects of control variables

To ensure robust results, I incorporated several control variables into the models. While economic trends and political violence do not exhibit statistically significant effects on Polity scores, other factors warrant further discussion.

The impact of the Cold War is relatively straightforward. As outlined in the research design section, global democracy experienced a general decline during the Cold War period. Consistent with this trend, all four models indicate that the Cold War era is associated with an average decrease of 0.23 in Polity scores.

The effects of GDP per capita, population size, and regime type, however, present a more complex pattern. Counter-intuitively, higher GDP per capita correlates with lower Polity scores, whereas non-democratic regimes and larger populations correspond with positive changes in Polity scores. This pattern may be explained by considering baseline differences between democracies and non-democracies. In established democracies, Polity scores are already high, leaving limited room for further increases. These countries also tend to have higher GDP per capita and lower birth rates, further reinforcing stability in their democratic scores. In contrast, non-democracies start from lower Polity scores, providing greater potential for upward movement. Given that authoritarian regimes often exhibit weaker economic performance and higher population growth rates, their Polity scores may increase as they undergo political transitions or reforms.

Taken together, these results support both hypotheses. First, the primary effects of autocrats on Polity scores manifest before the events occur. Second, whereas coups have ambiguous consequences for democratization, the effects of autocrats are unidirectional—consistently negative.

5.4.4 Robustness tests

To assess the sensitivity of my key findings to model specifications, I conduct a series of robustness tests. The results indicate that the findings remain consistent across these variations.

First, I compare the effects of autocrats over a period ranging from one to five years after the event. The results show that the effects of coups are positive and statistically significant throughout all five years, with a general trend of increasing magnitude as time progresses. In contrast, the effects of autocrats are negative across all five years but reach statistical significance only three years after the event. This finding aligns with the earlier hypothesis: autocrats never contribute to an increase in Polity scores.

Second, I refine the treatment of autocrats by replacing the decay effects of autocrats

Table 5.2: The Impact of Autocoups on Democratization: one to five years

	Dependent variable: Differences of Polity scores				
	Years after the event				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Autocoup	−0.082 (0.119)	−0.101 (0.165)	−0.168 (0.198)	−0.284 (0.227)	−0.355 (0.247)
Coup	0.192*** (0.064)	0.436*** (0.088)	0.715*** (0.104)	0.778*** (0.116)	0.861*** (0.128)
GDP per Capita	−0.003** (0.001)	−0.006*** (0.002)	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.008*** (0.003)	−0.009*** (0.003)
Economic Trend	−0.289 (0.279)	−0.658* (0.387)	−1.030** (0.463)	−1.197** (0.522)	−1.125** (0.573)
Log Population	0.331*** (0.071)	0.714*** (0.099)	1.154*** (0.119)	1.608*** (0.135)	2.063*** (0.150)
Political Violence	0.004 (0.014)	0.012 (0.020)	0.021 (0.023)	0.030 (0.026)	0.048* (0.029)
Non-Democracy	0.883*** (0.063)	1.686*** (0.087)	2.428*** (0.105)	3.165*** (0.118)	3.798*** (0.130)
Cold War	−0.179*** (0.063)	−0.258*** (0.088)	−0.259** (0.104)	−0.216* (0.117)	−0.133 (0.128)
Observations	9,098	8,930	8,761	8,592	8,424
R ²	0.026	0.051	0.077	0.101	0.122
Adjusted R ²	0.007	0.032	0.058	0.083	0.104
F Statistic	30.222***	59.099***	89.142***	118.720***	143.451***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5.3: The Impact of Autocoups on Democratization: Dummy autocoups

	Dependent variable: Differences of Polity scores			
	Attempted		Succeeded	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Autocoup	−0.144 (0.287)	−0.199 (0.344)	−0.111 (0.321)	−0.209 (0.385)
Coup	0.710*** (0.133)	0.832*** (0.158)	0.952*** (0.182)	1.361*** (0.216)
GDP per Capita	−0.006*** (0.002)	−0.008*** (0.003)	−0.006*** (0.002)	−0.008*** (0.003)
Economic Trend	−0.937** (0.447)	−1.718*** (0.536)	−1.014** (0.446)	−1.793*** (0.535)
Log Population	0.814*** (0.119)	1.280*** (0.144)	0.803*** (0.119)	1.278*** (0.144)
Political Violence	−0.001 (0.022)	0.012 (0.026)	−0.0003 (0.021)	0.012 (0.026)
Regime: Dominant-party	1.547*** (0.144)	2.020*** (0.173)	1.570*** (0.144)	2.041*** (0.172)
Military	−1.324*** (0.152)	−1.929*** (0.183)	−1.323*** (0.152)	−1.933*** (0.183)
Monarchy	0.180 (0.135)	0.344** (0.162)	0.194 (0.135)	0.359** (0.162)
Personal	−1.114*** (0.133)	−1.663*** (0.161)	−1.117*** (0.133)	−1.670*** (0.161)
Cold War	−0.215** (0.097)	−0.208* (0.116)	−0.219** (0.097)	−0.214* (0.115)
Observations	7,808	7,653	7,808	7,653
R ²	0.071	0.099	0.071	0.100
Adjusted R ²	0.051	0.079	0.051	0.080
F Statistic	53.437***	74.637***	53.336***	75.875***

Note:

with a dummy variable that distinguishes between attempted and successful autocalps. Additionally, I disaggregate the ‘Non-democracy’ category into specific regime types—democracy, dominant-party, military, monarchy, and personal—consistent with the analysis of coup determinants, setting democracy as the reference category.

Columns 1 and 2 in Table 5.3 examine the effects of attempted autocalps, measured two and three years after the event, respectively, while Columns 3 and 4 focus on successful autocalps. As in previous models, these adjustments do not alter the core findings across all four models. However, while they lead to differences in regression coefficients, the results consistently show that Polity scores decline following autocalps in all models, in contrast to the increase observed after coups.

Comparing Columns 3 and 4 in Table 5.3 and Table 5.1, it becomes evident that replacing the decay factor for autocalps and coups with a dummy variable significantly amplifies the estimated effects—nearly doubling them. This result aligns with expectations, as the decay factor distributes the influence of events over subsequent years, whereas the event dummy captures their impact exclusively in the year of occurrence.

Furthermore, Table 5.3 reveals distinct regime-specific variations. Military regimes exhibit the largest increase in Polity scores, followed by monarchies and personalist regimes, with dominant-party regimes showing the smallest but still statistically significant positive effect compared to democracies. This finding corroborates the results in Chapter 2, which indicate that military and personalist regimes are more prone to coups. The analysis in this chapter proves that Polity scores increase significantly following coups.

5.5 Summary

This chapter examines the impact of autocalps on political institutions, particularly in contrast to coups, by analysing their effects on changes in Polity scores. It tests two central hypotheses: first, that unlike coups, the effects of autocalps on Polity scores manifest primarily before the

event, indicating that leaders consolidate power in anticipation of their autocoups; and second, that while coups produce ambiguous effects—sometimes leading to democratization and other times reinforcing authoritarianism, as suggested by previous literature—autocoups consistently result in democratic backsliding or authoritarian entrenchment.

To evaluate these hypotheses, the chapter employs multiple robustness checks, including varying time horizons, alternative model specifications, and different variable treatments. A key finding is that Polity scores begin to decline in the years leading up to an autocoup, underscoring a pre-emptive process of authorization. In contrast, coups initially cause a sharp drop in Polity scores due to the shock of leadership change, but over time, scores often rise, suggesting that in some cases, coups can contribute to an improvement in the level of democracy. These findings highlight the fundamentally different political trajectories triggered by coups and autocoups.

The implications of these results are significant for both academic research and political practice. While coups have long been a focal point of democratization studies, this chapter argues that autocoups demand equal, if not greater, attention due to their systematic role in reversing democratic progress. Unlike coups, which can sometimes serve as catalysts for political reform, autocoups almost always reinforce authoritarianism, weakening institutions and eroding democratic governance. This underscores the urgent need for scholars and policy-makers to closely monitor the conditions that enable autocoups and their broader consequences for democratic stability.

Methodologically, this chapter contributes to the study of political transitions by demonstrating the importance of pre-event trends in analysing regime change. It also highlights the necessity of distinguishing between different types of irregular power transitions when assessing their long-term effects. While the findings reinforce the study's core arguments, they also raise questions for future research—particularly regarding leader survival. As shown in Chapter 4, autocoup leaders tend to survive in power for nearly 11 years on average, while coup-installed leaders last only about 5 years. This suggests that coups and autocoups not only differ in their immediate effects but also have distinct long-term political consequences.

In conclusion, this chapter strengthens the argument that autocoops are a critical yet under-explored mechanism of authoritarian survival, one that warrants further investigation to fully understand its implications for global democratization and authoritarian resilience.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Main findings

This study provides critical insights into the dynamics and implications of irregular power transitions, with a specific focus on coups and autcoups. The research illuminates the complex interplay between incumbents and challengers vying for power, yielding three key findings.

- **Coup attempt determinant:** The expected success rate significantly influences the likelihood of a coup attempt. This success rate is largely determined by the balance of power between incumbent leaders and challengers, which varies by regime type. Notably, the findings show that military regimes are approximately 277.7% more likely, and personalist regimes 94% more likely, to experience coups compared to dominant-party regimes, all else being equal.
- **Autocoup concept and dataset:** I introduce a refined concept of “autocoup”, defined as an incumbent leader’s refusal to relinquish power as mandated. We present the first publicly available dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2023, encompassing 110 attempts and 87 successful autcoups. Case studies and empirical analyses demonstrate the dataset’s utility for quantitative research.

- **Leader longevity:** Survival analysis techniques reveal clear differences in leader longevity between coup-installed leaders and autocoup leaders. The findings reveal that, on average, coup-installed leaders are 2.23 times more likely to be ousted from power than autocoup leaders, all else being equal.

6.2 Policy implications

The examination of irregular power transitions and leadership survival offers a crucial perspective on the interrelated phenomena of democratic backsliding, breakdown, and autocratic intensification. The findings of this study provide logical explanations for several political trends:

- **Global democracy regression:** This study elucidates why global freedom has declined for the 18th consecutive year. Irregular power transitions, whether through coups or autocoups, inherently violate democratic norms and disrupt the trajectory toward stable democracies.
- **Within-regime democratic erosion:** The research explains why democratic backsliding often occurs within regimes ([Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017](#)), rather than through regime change. Democracies are becoming less liberal and autocracies less competitive, particularly due to the prevalence of autocoups since 2000 ([Bermeo 2016](#)). As discussed in Chapter 3, autocoups extend the tenure of incumbent leaders without overturning the regime itself.
- **Rise of autocoups since 2000:** The analysis also clarifies why autocoups have been on the rise since 2000. Incumbent leaders possess several strategic advantages: firstly, they have a significantly higher probability of success due to their incumbent vantages compared to coup plotters. Secondly, the consequences of failed autocoups are relatively milder than those for failed coup plotters, resulting in lower costs even if they fail. Lastly,

leaders who manage to extend their rule through an autocoup often enjoy considerably longer tenures compared to coup-installed leaders, thus benefiting more substantially.

- **Role of external pressure:** Due to the challenges of internal opposition to autocoups, where power is concentrated in the hands of incumbent leaders, external pressure from regional or international communities may play a vital role in encouraging adherence to constitutional processes of power transition. For instance, after the general election in Venezuela on July 29, 2024, at least nine Latin American countries rejected the election results and called for dialogue¹. Although this pressure might not be effective in every case, it showcases the potential influence of the international community in discouraging future autocoup attempts.

6.3 Limitations and directions for future research

While the study offers a novel framework for analysing irregular leadership transitions, several limitations require further exploration:

- **Data refinement:** Defining and classifying autocoups is a new approach. Future research should validate this classification system through additional studies and expert evaluations.
- **Data harmonization:** The current analysis faces challenges due to mismatched units (country-year vs. leader) between coup and autocoup datasets. Future efforts should explore data harmonization techniques for more robust comparisons.
- **Democratic backsliding:** While this study establishes a connection between irregular

¹While the world waited for the outcome, nine Latin American countries released a joint statement urging transparency and recognition of the voters' will. The nine countries are Argentina, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. On the morning after the election, the same group released a second statement demanding a complete review of the results in the presence of independent electoral observers ([AS/COA](#), accessed on September 9, 2024).

power transitions and democratic backsliding, further empirical evidence is needed to solidify this link.

Future research avenues include:

- **Terminology and data collection:** Refining the “autocoup” concept and achieving wider recognition will facilitate more accurate and comprehensive data collection.
- **Dataset expansion:** Expanding the autocoup dataset with more cases and integrating it with data on other irregular leadership transitions can provide a more holistic view of political survival after these events.
- **Power dynamics and long-term impacts:** Utilizing this dataset, future studies can delve deeper into power dynamics at play and explore the long-term consequences of irregular transitions on political systems, particularly regarding democratic backsliding, breakdown, and personalization of power.

In conclusion, this study significantly contributes to our understanding of irregular leadership transitions, focusing on coups and autocoups. By redefining autocoups, classifying the dataset, analysing determinants, and comparing leader longevity, I establish a robust framework for understanding irregular power transitions and leadership survival. This work deepens our comprehension of democratic resilience and political stability, providing a foundation for future research to conduct further empirical analyses based on the novel autocoup dataset and continue refining the framework.

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Appendix: Datasets

- **Coup Model Dataset**

- **Dataset Name:** `coup_model.csv`
- **Description:** This dataset is specifically cleaned for the coup model and contains the relevant data points necessary for analysis.

- **Autocoup Dataset**

- **Dataset Name:** `autocoup.csv`
- **Description:** This dataset is an original contribution of this thesis, compiled and curated by the author to support the research objectives.

- **Autocoup Model Dataset**

- **Dataset Name:** `autocoup_model.csv`
- **Description:** This dataset is cleaned for the autocoup model and includes the data required for the modelling process.

- **Cox Proportional Hazards (Cox PH) Model Dataset**

- **Dataset Name:** `survival_cox_ph_model.csv`
- **Description:** This dataset is used for the Cox Proportional Hazards model and contains the data necessary for analysing survival rates and hazard ratios.

- **Time-Dependent Cox Model Dataset**
 - **Dataset Name:** `survival_cox_td_model.csv`
 - **Description:** This dataset is cleaned for the time-dependent Cox model, incorporating variables that account for time-dependent effects in survival analysis.