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

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Department of Government

University of Essex

September 2024

(Word count: 40,000 words)

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Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis has been a significant journey, filled with hard work, learning, and moments of joy. Throughout this time, I have received support and encouragement from many individuals, without whom this dissertation would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my great supervisor, Professor Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, for his invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and insightful feedback throughout this journey. His expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the chair of my board panel, Professor Han Dorussen, for his continuous support and constructive criticism, which have significantly enhanced the quality of my research.

I am profoundly grateful for the comments, advice, and suggestions from several esteemed scholars who have contributed to this work. Dr. Brian J Phillips, Dr. Prabin Khadka, and Dr. Winnie Xia, their expertise and thoughtful input have been greatly appreciated and have enriched this dissertation.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their unwavering support and love. To my beloved wife, Ji Zhi, who has been my rock throughout this journey, and to my dear daughter, Siyan, and son, Sisheng, who have been my source of joy and motivation. I am deeply thankful to my father for his enduring support, and to the memory of my late mother, whose love and guidance continue to inspire me.

All errors and faults are my own.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the dynamics of irregular power transitions, particularly coups and autocoups, and their influence on leader survival. It highlights the critical role of power dynamics, shaped by regime types, in determining coup success rates and attempt frequency. Utilizing Heckman's two-stage selection model, the study reveals that expected coup success significantly influences attempts, with military regimes facing a heightened vulnerability due to their power structure.

While often understudied, autocoups are shown to have a substantial impact on democratic trends. This research introduces a refined definition of autocoups alongside a novel dataset encompassing events from 1945 to 2022, enabling a more robust quantitative analysis.

Employing survival analysis, the study compares the longevity of leaders who rise to power through coups versus autocoups. The findings demonstrate that coup-installed leaders face a significantly shorter tenure and higher risk of removal. This contrasts with autocoup leaders who manipulate the system to extend their rule, suggesting the potential for autocoups to incentivize power grabs and contribute to democratic backsliding.

This work contributes significantly to the political science literature by:

- Defining key concepts: It establishes a clear definition of autocoups, a previously understudied phenomenon.
- Introducing a novel dataset: This dataset enables researchers to conduct more comprehensive quantitative analyses of autocoups.

- Establishing a general framework: The framework provides a comparative approach to studying the dynamics of irregular power transitions and their impact on democratic stability.

keywords: *Coups, Autocoups, Power transitions, Leadership Survival*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research question

Irregular power transitions, marked by a disregard for constitutional procedures, are a critical area of study in political science. They not only disrupt established rules but often require unconstitutional tactics to secure power. Furthermore, these transitions can inspire copycat behaviour among other ambitious leaders.

Despite their central role in political science and the extensive research conducted on irregular power transitions, a long-standing question continues to intrigue political scientists: ***Why are some leaders ousted before their terms expire, while others complete their full terms or even overstay beyond their originally mandated limits?*** In other words, why do some leaders survive for decades while others last for only years, months, or even days? This dissertation focuses on this question and seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis, dedicated to understanding how leaders come to power through unconstitutional means and what factors determine the duration of a leader's rule following an irregular ascent.

1.2 Analyses on coups and autocoups in a general framework

When discussing irregular power transitions, the concepts that often come to mind are irregular entries or exits, such as coups, assassinations, rebellions, protests, and foreign interventions. Among these methods, coups hold a prominent position due to their frequent occurrence. According to the Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009), from 1945 to 2015, there were approximately 145 instances of irregular leader exits, with coups[1] accounting for more than half (79 leaders). The often-cited Global Instances of Coups (GIC)[2] dataset (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011) records even more leaders (245 cases) removed by coups from 1950 to 2023.

Given their prevalence and substantial influence on political systems, coups have been extensively studied, particularly since 2000 (Thyne and Powell 2019). Consequently, the concept of a coup is comparatively clear and widely accepted in academic circles. Many scholars, including this study, follow the definition by J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011), which describes coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive… [a coup is successful] if the perpetrators seize and hold power for at least seven days" (p. 252). Although debates persist, two elements are clear: first, the perpetrators are elites within the ruling group, and the victims of coups are incumbent executive leaders. Second, the strategy or aim of a coup involves completely removing the incumbents, not merely seizing part of their power or forcing them to concede on specific policies. Beyond defining coups, several datasets have been developed for quantitative analyses, such as the Global Instances of Coups (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011), the Cline Centre Coup d'État Project Dataset (Peyton et al. 2024), and the Colpus Dataset (Chin, Carter, and Wright 2021). These datasets are well-developed and frequently used in political science research.

However, irregular power transitions are not limited to irregular entries and exits but should

[1] According to the Archigos dataset, "Removed by Military, without Foreign Support" and "Removed by Other Government Actors, without Foreign Support" in the variable `exitcode` are classified as coups.

[2] According to the Archigos dataset, "Removed by Military, without Foreign Support" and "Removed by Other Government Actors, without Foreign Support" in the variable `exitcode` are classified as coups.

also include irregular "overstays." Using illegal means to overthrow an incumbent leader before their term expires is undoubtedly an irregular power transition. Similarly, an incumbent using illegitimate means to extend their term beyond term limits is also an irregular power transition.

Although academic attention to irregular retention of power has increased since the 1990s, especially after Peru's President Alberto Fujimori's self-coup in 1992, it remains comparatively understudied and has several shortcomings. First, there is no universally accepted terminology for this "overstaying in power" type of irregular power transition, unlike the clear term "coup." Consequently, various terms such as self-coup, autogolpe, and executive coup are used by different scholars. This dissertation will use 'autocoup' to refer to this type of irregular power transition, which will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3. Second, there is no consensus on the definition of an autocoup. Existing definitions remain vague, often conflating power expansions and power extensions[3]. For example, Cameron (1998) defines an autogolpe as a temporary suspension of the constitution and dissolution of Congress by the executive, who then rules by decree. This definition focuses on power expansion instead of power extension, leading to conceptual confusion and misalignment with the definition of a classic coup. Third, a consensus autocoup dataset is lacking. While several related datasets exist, as discussed by Baturo and Tolstrup (2022) in coding their Incumbent Takeover dataset, the terminologies, definitions, and coverage years vary, lacking wide acknowledgement and extensive academic exploration. In summary, autocoup has not been analysed in a comparative manner connected with coups.

Analysing coups and autocoups separately is less problematic. However, from a comprehensive framework perspective on irregular power transitions and leader survival, coups and autocoups should be, and can be, analysed within the same framework. Both coup and autocoup significantly influence democratic backsliding and are the most frequent means of irregular power transition. Furthermore, as both are called "coups," classic coups and autocoups are very similar since a coup is launched to replace the current leader, while an autocoup is staged

[3]The definitions and concepts of power expansion and power extension can be vague. In this study, we define power expansion as an incumbent acquiring additional authority from other state apparatuses, whereas power extension refers to an incumbent prolonging their tenure beyond the designated term in office.

to replace the future leader.

1.3 Academic Contributions

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive framework for analysing both coups and autocoups, which are the most common forms of irregular power transitions. While existing research often examines these topics separately with varying terminologies, definitions, methods, and datasets, this dissertation integrates these elements to provide a unified perspective on irregular power transitions and leader survival.

Our contributions are threefold:

- **Emphasis on power dynamics and regime types**: We highlight the significant role of power dynamics, particularly the influence of regime types, in determining the success and frequency of coup attempts. Our analysis underscores how the expected chances of coup success motivate such attempts, with military regimes being notably susceptible.
- **Refined definition and novel dataset for autocoups:** We introduce a refined definition of autocoups and develop a novel dataset covering events from 1945 to 2022. This enables a comparative analysis with classic coups, providing clearer insights into the nature and impact of autocoups on political systems.
- **Survival analysis of leaders from different entry modes:** By applying survival analysis to existing coup data and our new autocoup dataset, we demonstrate how different modes of entry into power significantly affect leader survival. Our findings reveal that leaders who come to power through coups typically have shorter tenures and face higher removal risks compared to those who extend their rule through autocoups.

Our analysis of irregular power transitions is particularly relevant to understanding democratic backsliding. These transitions violate democratic norms and disrupt the path towards

stable democracy. Leaders who gain power through irregular means often employ undemocratic tactics, such as suppressing opposition, to consolidate their illegitimate hold on power. This creates a vicious cycle where the erosion of democratic institutions is both a cause and consequence of efforts to maintain power.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

This study is structured into three main chapters beyond the introduction, each addressing key aspects of irregular power transitions and their implications for political stability and democratic processes.

Chapter 2 examines the determinants of classic coup attempts. While extensive research exists on coups, most studies focus on observable factors such as economic performance, political stability, previous coups, and coup-proofing strategies. This chapter, however, emphasizes the less observable but crucial factor of expected coup success chances, which has been often overlooked. Utilizing Heckman's two-staged sample selection model, the analysis reveals that expected success rates significantly influence coup attempts. These success rates are primarily shaped by the balance of power between incumbents and challengers, which is largely determined by regime types. The findings indicate that military regimes face a much higher risk of coups compared to dominant-party regimes.

Chapter 3 focuses on the concept of autocoups, specifically on power extensions by incumbent leaders. It distinguishes autocoups from broader concepts like self-coups or executive coups by redefining them as instances where incumbent leaders refuse to transition power as mandated, thereby overstaying in office. Based on this refined definition, a novel dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2022 is introduced, encompassing 110 attempts and 87 successes. The chapter includes case studies and empirical analyses that demonstrate the utility of this dataset for quantitative research, providing a basis for empirical analysis on autocoups.

Chapter 4 investigates how the method of power acquisition impacts the longevity of lead-

ers who come to power through coups versus those who extend their rule through autocoups. The hypothesis is that the method of accession significantly affects leader tenure. Using the Cox proportional hazards model and a time-dependent Cox model, the chapter provides evidence of differing survival times between these two types of leaders. The results indicate that leaders who come to power through coups face a significantly higher risk of removal compared to those who extend their rule through autocoups. This finding highlights the implications for political stability and democratic processes, suggesting that the relatively low cost and high returns of autocoups could incentivize incumbents to seize power in this manner, potentially leading to democratic backsliding and the personalization of power.

In **Chapter 5**, the study concludes by summarizing the main findings, discussing policy implications, and acknowledging the limitations of the research. It also outlines directions for future research, emphasizing the need for further exploration of irregular power transitions, particularly coups and autocoups.

Chapter 2

Power Dynamics and Coup Attempts: A Selection Mechanism Analysis

2.1 Introduction

Coups occur with varying frequency across different countries, with some experiencing them more frequently than others. According to GIC dataset, Latin American countries such as Bolivia witnessed 23 coups between 1950 and 1984, while Argentina experienced 20 during a similar time frame. However, Mexico's authoritarian period from 1917 to 2000 saw no coups at all. In Africa, Sudan endured 17 coups between 1955 and 2023, whereas South Africa has not experienced any coup since 1950. Similar patterns are observed in the Middle East and South Asia.

The varying frequency of coup attempts has captivated political scientists for decades, leading to extensive research on the subject. As highlighted by Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt (2016), despite approximately one hundred potential determinants of coups being suggested, no consensus has been reached. In an effort to address this issue, Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt (2016) tested 66 factors proposed in previous literature using three million model permutations in an extreme bounds analysis.

Examining previous research, which has tested around 100 variables as potential determinants of coups, raises an important question beyond simply understanding why coups are more frequent in some countries than others. The critical question is: Can we establish a method to help scholars focus on the most relevant factors of coups, rather than sifting through over 100 variables without reaching a consensus?

Reviewing previously proposed variables of coups, it is evident that all focus on pre-coup conditions, with no consideration given to post-coup factors. However, coups are high-stakes gambles with an all-or-nothing nature. As defined by J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011), coups are "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive" (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011, 252). Due to their illegality, the consequences of a failed coup can be severe, with perpetrators risking imprisonment, exile, or even death. In some instances, repercussions extend to the families of the coup perpetrators. Therefore, no coup plotters would stage a coup without some assurance of success.

Historical coup attempts and their success rates provide valuable insights. Despite the significant risks associated with coups since 1950, as shown in Table 2.1, there have been 491 coups worldwide. Importantly, about half of these coups have been successful. At first glance, coups appear to be a high-success-rate political venture. However, compared to over 12,000 country-years since 1950, the occurrence of 491 coups is relatively rare, accounting for about 4% (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011).

The low occurrence rate and high success rate clearly indicate that the initiation of coups is highly selective. In other words, the likelihood of a coup occurring depends greatly on its potential success rate. Since coup plotters meticulously assess potential outcomes, we should also analyze what factors most affect these outcomes when discussing the key determinants of coups. This approach allows us to focus on the most relevant factors and disregard those less related.

Table 2.1: Top 10 countries with the most coup attempts

Country	Coup Attempted	Coup Succeeded	Success Rate
Bolivia	23	11	47.8%
Argentina	20	7	35.0%
Sudan	17	6	35.3%
Haiti	13	9	69.2%
Venezuela	13	0	0.0%
Iraq	12	4	33.3%
Syria	12	8	66.7%
Thailand	12	8	66.7%
Ecuador	11	5	45.5%
Burundi	11	5	45.5%
Guatemala	10	5	50.0%
Total	491	245	49.9%

Source: GIC dataset

When considering the factors that most affect the outcomes of coups, the current literature predominantly identifies military power as the decisive factor in the success of coups. This necessitates an analysis of power dynamics within regimes, as military power is ultimately shaped by power dynamics.

Because coup attempts are self-selective rather than random, this study employs a double `probit` model with sample selection to examine factors influencing coup success rates and, consequently, the likelihood of coup attempts. I posit that regime type, by shaping internal power dynamics among coup plotters, incumbents, and other ruling elites, is a crucial determinant of coup likelihood.

This study makes two key contributions to the existing literature. First, it underscores the

importance of regime type as a crucial determinant of coup attempts. Previous studies often treat regime type as a control variable, overlooking that variations in many other variables are fundamentally rooted in different regime types. More importantly, this study establishes a systematic approach for identifying the most relevant factors, thereby avoiding sifting through over 100 variables.

The subsequent section explores the dynamics of coup attempts and their outcomes. In section 3, I detail the research design, outlining the methodology and variables used in the analysis. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings. Section 5 concludes this chapter, summarizing the key insights and their implications.

2.2 Dynamics of coup attempts and outcomes

Coup attempts are driven by a complex interplay of factors, with two key elements attracting significant scholarly attention: **disposition** (the motivations behind the attempt) and **capability** (the resources and opportunities to succeed).

2.2.1 Motivations for coups

This section focuses on disposition, exploring the primary motivations that compel individuals to undertake the significant risks associated with a coup. We can categorize coup motivations into three main types:

Personal Ambition: The allure of absolute power, prestige, and wealth is a significant motivator for some coup plotters. For example, Wintrobe (2019) distinguishes between totalitarian and tinpot dictators based on their use of power. While both prioritize personal gain, totalitarian leaders seek complete control over every aspect of society, whereas tinpot leaders focus on enriching themselves through extravagant lifestyles.

Purported National Interest: Coups are sometimes justified as necessary interventions to save a nation from crisis, uphold the constitution, or facilitate a transition to democracy. While

scepticism is warranted due to the potential for self-serving justifications, legitimate cases do exist. For instance, the 2010 coup in Niger ousted President Tandja, who attempted an unconstitutional third term by dissolving the opposing court and calling a self-serving referendum (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019).

Self-Preservation: In some instances, coups are pre-emptive strikes against imminent political persecution or repression. Coup leaders might not be motivated by a desire for power, but rather a fear of elimination by the incumbent regime. A notable example is Idi Amin's 1971 coup against Ugandan President Obote, who was attempting to remove Amin from his military command position (Sudduth 2017).

These motivations can arise in any regime, but autocracies are particularly susceptible, especially for coups framed under the guise of national interest or self-preservation. Stable democracies, on the other hand, rarely face the same level of constitutional crises or political persecution that might necessitate a coup. However, new democracies can be vulnerable to instability, economic downturns, and democratic backsliding, creating opportunities for coup plotters to exploit these weaknesses and justify their actions.

Despite the potential motivations outlined above, coups remain relatively uncommon events, occurring in only about 4% of country-years since 1950. This low frequency highlights the importance of the second key element – capability. Even the most motivated plotters require the resources and opportunities to succeed. No rational actor attempts a guaranteed failure; the next section will explore the concept of capability in greater detail.

2.2.2 Capability for coups

While many ambitious individuals may covet supreme power, only a select few possess the capability to orchestrate a successful coup. This capability hinges not just on their desire, but on overcoming inherent disadvantages compared to the incumbent leaders.

Firstly, coups are inherently clandestine operations due to their illegality. Plotters require a

tight-knit group to minimize leaks and maximize the element of surprise. This secrecy restricts their ability to openly recruit supporters, a privilege enjoyed by incumbents who can implement "coup-proofing" measures.

Secondly, coup plotters face uncertainty about the reactions of other powerful factions within the regime, those who could tip the scales of power. Incumbents, however, have a deeper understanding of these dynamics and proactively work to solidify their own position. While they may not know who exactly might attempt a coup, they are attuned to potential threats and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Thirdly, coup plotters face a significant challenge in securing unwavering loyalty from potential co-conspirators. The risks associated with a coup are substantial, with uncertain rewards even in the event of success. Promises made by coup leaders might not be kept, and post-coup purges are a common tactic to eliminate future coup threats. Defecting to the incumbent leader can often be a safer option, offering predictable rewards and less risk.

Given these inherent obstacles, rational coup plotters are unlikely to gamble on a low-probability attempt. They may choose to abandon their plans altogether or bide their time for a more opportune timing. Therefore, when coup plotters do take action, it is because they have meticulously assessed their chances of success and believe the risks are outweighed by the potential gains.

But what is the threshold for a "good enough" chance of success? Before diving into a theoretical framework, let's examine historical data to gain some perspective. Surprisingly, coups since 1950 boast a rather high success rate, with nearly half ending in victory (as shown in Table 2.1).

2.2.3 Framework of coup success

An oft-cited framework (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016; Aidt and Leon 2019) provides a structured approach to assess the disposition and capability of coup attempts by evaluating

the anticipated benefits for coup plotters. The expected payoff of coups can be represented by the equation:

$$E(U) = p \times B + (1 - p) \times (-C) \tag{2.1}$$

Here, **B** represents the return of a successful coup, **C** signifies the cost of a failed coup, and p represents the probability of coup success. The condition for staging a coup is when the expected benefit is positive, meaning that the expected pay-off is greater than 0. Rearranging the equation, we get:

$$p \times B > (1 - p) \times C \tag{2.2}$$

Equation 2.2 implies that for Equation 2.1 to hold, the expected benefits earned from successful coups must outweigh the expected cost of failed coups.

While seemingly clear, the equation faces practical challenges. Quantifying **B** (the value of a successful coup) and **C** (the cost of failure) is difficult. The loss of life, freedom, or loved ones after a failed coup, as well as the value of assuming leadership after a successful coup, are intangible concepts that defy precise measurement. As evidenced by the 1979 coup in Ghana[1], the fate of the coup leader(s) hangs in the balance; they are high likely to be killed if the coup fails, or to execute others if the coup succeeds.

However, these challenges do not render the framework useless. Firstly, its core logic remains valuable, offering insights into how coup plotters might assess the return and cost of their actions. Secondly, given the significant and elusive nature of precise values for **B** and **C**, they can be treated as roughly equal. Consequently, there is no need to fret over how to measure and compare these values precisely. Instead, we can shift our focus from **B** and **C**, to the probability of success (p), simplifying Equation 2.2 to:

[1] According to the Archigos dataset, "Removed by Military, without Foreign Support" and "Removed by Other Government Actors, without Foreign Support" in the variable `exitcode` are classified as coups.

$$p > (1 - p) \tag{2.3}$$

Equation 2.3 suggests that, to hold Equation 2.2 true, a success probability greater than 50% is necessary. Interestingly, empirical data on coups since 1950 somewhat supports this notion. As shown in Table 2.1, the overall success rate is 49.9%. While this falls short of the 50% threshold, it's important to consider two factors. Firstly, this is an average rate, not necessarily reflective of the probabilities assessed by coup plotters beforehand. Secondly, outliers such as irrational actors and coups driven by self-preservation may not prioritize success probabilities. Taking these points into account, we can propose our first hypothesis:

> ***H1: The fundamental determinant of a coup attempt is the perceived chance of success. Coup plotters likely require a success threshold of at least 50%.***

This leads us to the next crucial question: what factors determine a coup's success, influencing the very decision to attempt one? While specifics may vary, the core element hinges on the power dynamic between coup plotters and the incumbent leaders. Logically, the more powerful entity holds a greater advantage in this high-stakes struggle for control.

2.2.4 Regime types and power dynamics

Military strength undeniably plays a critical role in coup attempts. Control of the armed forces offers a significant advantage, explaining why military coups dominate discussions on the topic. Much of the literature treats "coup" and "military coup" interchangeably, with scholars like J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011) finding half of 14 studies attribute coups solely to the military. Consequently, significant focus, from both researchers and policymakers, centers on the balance of power between civilian and military authorities, or among military factions themselves. Strategies like "keeping the military content" (Aidt and Leon 2019) or "providing them with resources" (Huntington 1991) aim to reduce military intervention. Empirical research informs

coup-proofing strategies that either decrease the military's desire for coups or raise barriers to success (Leon 2013; J. Powell et al. 2018).

However, while military power is decisive, previous literature often oversimplifies its nature. As Table 2.3 will demonstrate, military regimes, despite concentrated military control, exhibit surprising instability. Military regimes experience most frequent coup attempts. This highlights a crucial oversight: the intra-military component. Treating the military as a monolithic entity ignores the complex internal dynamics (Singh 2016). Regardless of size, any military comprises diverse groups with their own hierarchies, fostering suspicion, competition, and vigilance rather than unity. The clandestine nature of coups necessitates small, secretive groups. Plotters are unsure of other factions' stances and fear their opposition or intervention, as exemplified by the swiftly thwarted 2021 Niger coup[2]. The success of a coup hinges heavily on other military factions' reactions (Geddes 1999).

Furthermore, the relationship between government and military varies across regimes. In democracies, civilian authority reigns supreme. The military is a national institution bound by the constitution, not individual leaders, ensuring political neutrality (e.g., the U.S. Armed Forces). Conversely, non-democracies display a less clear power structure. Identifying the true leader of the military depends on the regime type. We will leverage framework of Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) to categorize autocracies based on leadership origin and decision-making. This framework classifies regimes into three main categories: military, personalist, and dominant-party.

Military regimes are characterized by the dominance of a junta – a group of military officers who control the regime's power structure, including leadership selection and policy formulation. Examples include the Brazilian regime (1964-1985), the Argentine regime (1976-1983), and the Salvadoran regime (1948-1984) (Geddes 1999). In **personalist regimes**, power resides with a single, charismatic leader who controls policy, the military, and succession. Regimes like

[2]The definitions and concepts of power expansion and power extension can be vague. In this study, we define power expansion as an incumbent acquiring additional authority from other state apparatuses, whereas power extension refers to an incumbent prolonging their tenure beyond the designated term in office.

Rafael Trujillo's in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961), Idi Amin's in Uganda (1971-1979), and Jean-Bédel Bokassa's in the Central African Republic (1966-1979) exemplify personalist rule (Geddes 1999). In **dominant-party regimes,** power rests within a well-organized ruling party, with leaders acting as its representatives. The party structure and ideology foster internal cohesion and a long-term vision. Examples include the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico, the Revolutionary Party of Tanzania (CCM), and Leninist parties in various Eastern European countries (Geddes 1999).

The critical distinction between regime types lies in the unique power balance established during the initial power seizure. The most competent group, be it a military junta, a political party, or a strongman, typically prevails due to the challenges of seizing control. This power grab is often accompanied by purges of potential rivals, solidifying the newly established regime (Sudduth 2017; Roessler 2011).

Following these internal purges and external challenges, a new power dynamic emerges, typically solidifying into one of three main structures: military regimes, personalist regimes, or dominant-party regimes.

- **Dominant-Party Regimes:** These regimes boast the greatest stability due to their institutionalized structure. A dominant party, with its shared ideology and goals, fosters internal cohesion and a long-term vision. Power resides within the party, not with any single individual, and the military aligns with the party itself, contributing to greater stability. Formalized succession rules further bolster stability by ensuring a smooth transfer of power (Frantz and Stein 2016).

- **Personalist Regimes:** These regimes exhibit a degree of initial stability as dictators, having emerged from intense competition, are typically tough and competent. The purging of rivals creates a temporary status quo within the dictator's inner circle. However, the lack of a clear succession plan creates a vulnerability. The dictator's sudden death can plunge the regime into chaos, as potential successors scramble for power, creating a prime

opportunity for coups.

- **Military Regimes:** These regimes are often the least stable. Power is typically shared among a junta, leading to mistrust and internal conflicts over benefits and policies. The absence of a single authority figure hinders decisive action, as exemplified by the power struggles within the Chilean junta after the 1973 coup (Arriagada Herrera 1988).

Table 2.2: Main features of different types of regimes

Regime Type	Center of Power	Institutionalized Leadership Succession	Power Transition
Military	Junta	59%	Based on agreement among junta members
Personalist	Dictator	77%	Dependent on dictator's health or lifepan
Dominant-party	Party	97%	Structured by the party's institutional frameworks

Source: GWF & Author

These contrasting power dynamics significantly influence a regime's susceptibility to coups. As Table 2.3 confirms, military regimes, despite representing only 5.6% of country-years, experience a disproportionate share of coups (over 22%). Personalist regimes follow a similar pattern, facing a higher coup risk (23% of coups) despite constituting only 13% of country-years. Conversely, dominant-party regimes, with their institutionalized structures and unified leadership, exhibit the greatest resilience. They represent 22.6% of country-years but experience a lower incidence of coups (only 16.7%).

Table 2.3: Regime types and coups since 1950

Regime Type	Country Year	Share	Num of Coups	Percent of Coups	Success Rate
Democracy	5303	46.7%	122	24.8%	51.6%
Dominant-Party	2569	22.6%	82	16.7%	53.7%
Personal	1477	13.0%	113	23.0%	44.2%
Monarchy	1056	9.3%	25	5.1%	56.0%
Military	638	5.6%	110	22.4%	48.2%
Other	322	2.8%	39	7.9%	53.8%
Total	11365	100.0%	491	100.0%	49.9%

Source: REIGN and GIC Datasets

H2: Due to their balance of power dynamics, military regimes are more prone to coups, followed by personalist regimes, while dominant-party regimes are the least likely to experience coups among the three.

2.3 Research Design

2.3.1 Double probit with sample selection model

This study employs a sophisticated statistical approach to account for the selective nature of coup attempts. While coup attempt rates vary across regimes (as discussed previously), success rates tend to be surprisingly consistent, hovering around 50% (as shown in Table 2.3). This suggests that coup attempts are not random acts, but rather strategically planned and undertaken only when the odds of success appear favourable. A standard statistical model would not account for this selectivity, potentially leading to biased results.

To address this issue, we utilize a two-stage sample selection model, similar to the approach used by J. Powell (2012). This model has two parts:

- **Selection Equation (Stage 1):** This stage analyzes the factors influencing whether a coup attempt occurs in a particular regime. The primary explanatory variable here is regime type, as previously discussed. Additional control variables may also be included, denoted by **XB**.
- **Outcome Equation (Stage 2):** This stage focuses on the probability of success for those coup attempts that actually take place.

The primary explanatory variables are regime types, as previously discussed. Control variables are included in **XB**. The selection equation (first stage) models the probability that a coup attempt occurs and can be expressed as follows:

$$y_1^* = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{XA} + \mu_{1i} \tag{2.4}$$

Here, $y_1{}^*$ is an unobserved variable, which may be known to coup plotters. $Regime_i$ is a categorical variable (*military*, *personalist*, or *dominant-party*). **XB** captures other control variables, such as the economic crisis index, previous coups, military expenditure, etc.

The observed binary outcome $\mathbf{y_1}$ is:

$$y_1 = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_1^* > 0 \text{ (coup attempt occurs)} \\ 0 & \text{if } y_1^* \leq 0 \text{ (no coup attempt)} \end{cases}$$

In the first stage, if $y_1^* \leq 0$, no coup attempt occurs in a given country-year, indicating that the unobserved variable does not reach the threshold. If $y_1^* > 0$, at least one coup attempt is made in a country-year, indicating that the unobserved variable surpasses the threshold. The probability is expressed as:

$$\begin{aligned} Prob(y_1 = 1) &= Prob(y_1^* > 0) \\ &= \Phi(\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{XA}) \end{aligned} \tag{2.5}$$

Similarly, the outcome equation (second stage) models the probability that a coup attempt is successful, given that it occurs:

$$y_2^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{XB} + \mu_{2i} \tag{2.6}$$

The observed outcome y_2 is:

$$y_2 = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_2^* > 0 \text{ (coup succeeds)} \\ 0 & \text{if } y_2^* \leq 0 \text{ (coup fails)} \end{cases}$$

The probability equations is:

$$Prob(y_2 = 1 | y_1 = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{XB}) \tag{2.7}$$

2.3.2 Variables

- Dependent variable

Our analysis utilizes data on coup attempts and outcomes from J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011). A successful coup is defined as one where the incumbent leader is removed from power for more than seven days. The dataset covers the period from 1950 to 2023 and includes information on 491 coup attempts, with roughly half (245) being successful. Descriptive statistics for these coup attempts and regime types can be found in Table 2.1 and Table 2.3.

- Key Independent Variable: Regime Type

The core variable of interest is regime type, categorized following the classification system of Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) (GWF). We focus on military, personalist, and dominant-party regimes, with democracies and monarchies included for comparison. Descriptive statistics for regime types are presented in Table 2.3.

- Control variables

Our control variables are chosen based on the research of Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt (2016). They analyzed 66 factors potentially influencing coups and found that slow economic growth, prior coup attempts, and other forms of political violence are particularly significant factors. Therefore, we include economic performance, political violence, and the number of previous coups as our main control variables.

Economic Performance: We measure economic performance using the current-trend (CT) ratio developed by Krishnarajan (2019). This ratio compares a country's current GDP per capita to the average GDP per capita over the previous five years. A higher CT ratio indicates stronger economic performance. We use GDP per capita data (in constant 2017 international dollars, PPP) from the V-Dem dataset by Fariss et al. (2022), lagged by one year to reflect the prior year's economic impact. For a country i at year t, the CT ratio is calculated as follows:

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

Political Violence: We capture overall regime stability by including a violence index that encompasses all types of internal and interstate wars and violence. This data comes from the Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset by Marshall (Marshall 2005).

Previous coups: The number of previous coups in a country is included in the first-stage (selection) model to assess its influence on the likelihood of a coup attempt. However, it is excluded from the second-stage model (outcome) because the number of past coups may not directly impact the outcome of a specific coup attempt.

2.4 Results and Discussion

The double `probit` model with sample selection, estimated using the `sampleSelection` package in R, offers valuable insights into the factors influencing coup attempts and their out-

Table 2.4: Sample Selection Model of Regime Types and Coups, 1950-2019

	Coup Attempts	Coup Outcome
	(1)	(2)
Constant	−0.303	−1.397***
	(0.236)	(0.513)
Regime: Democracy	0.056	0.068
	(0.072)	(0.121)
Military	0.687***	0.596***
	(0.084)	(0.170)
Monarchy	0.282**	0.178
	(0.118)	(0.201)
Personalist	0.319***	0.128
	(0.075)	(0.170)
Economic trend	−1.471***	−0.406
	(0.222)	(0.714)
GDP per capita	−0.028***	−0.028***
	(0.003)	(0.006)
Political violence	0.033**	0.033*
	(0.013)	(0.020)
Previous coups	0.030***	
	(0.010)	
Observations	9,606	9,606
Log Likelihood	−1,663.646	−1,663.646
ρ	0.898*** (0.158)	0.898*** (0.158)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

comes across different regime types from 1950 to 2019 (Table 2.4).

2.4.1 The Selection Model: Coup Attempts

In the selection model (Model 1), military and personalist regimes show significant positive coefficients at the 1% level, indicating they are more likely to experience coup attempts compared to dominant-party regimes, holding other factors constant. Military regimes have a stronger positive effect on coup attempts than personalist regimes. Monarch regimes also display a similar effect to personalist regimes, as monarchies are a subset of personalist regimes with royal titles. This finding aligns with theoretical expectations regarding the internal power struggles within military juntas and the succession vulnerabilities in personalist regimes, highlighting the importance of regime structure in understanding coup likelihood.

Control variables also exhibit expected effects. Stronger economic performance, indicated by higher economic growth rates and GDP per capita levels, correlates with a lower risk of coup attempts, suggesting that economic stability reduces coup incentives. Among these, the economic trend has a more pronounced negative effect on coup attempts than GDP per capita.

Political violence has a positive and significant effect on coup attempts, indicating that higher levels of instability increase the likelihood of coups. The positive coefficient for previous coups suggests an copycat effect from earlier examples. However, the significance of political violence and previous coups is less substantial.

2.4.2 The Outcome Model: Coup Success

The outcome model (Model 2) reveals determinants of coup success. Military regimes have a higher probability of coup success compared to dominant-party regimes, meeting expectations that military regimes face higher coup risks due to their better chances of success. Personalist and monarch regimes show a slight positive effect on coup success, but these are not statistically significant.

Control variables exhibit different effects in the outcome model. Both GDP per capita and political violence maintain a weak influence similar to the selection model, while the economic trend shows a less significant negative effect.

These results indicate that regime type remains a significant determinant of coup attempts and successes, even after controlling for other factors, strongly supporting the theoretical framework.

2.4.3 Discussion

The ρ value of 0.898, which is highly significant ($p < 0.01$), is a crucial parameter in the sample selection model. This value represents the correlation between the error terms of the selection equation (coup attempts) and the outcome equation (coup outcomes). A high and significant ρ suggests that unobserved factors influencing the likelihood of a coup attempt are strongly correlated with those influencing the likelihood of a successful coup. In practical terms, this means that the selection model is appropriate and that accounting for the selection bias (i.e., the fact that only coups with high chances of success will be attempted) is critical to obtaining unbiased estimates. The high ρ value indicates that the same underlying conditions that lead to a coup attempt also affect the success of the coup, underscoring the importance of considering both stages in the analysis.

The results strongly support the choice of the sample selection model. Significant coefficients with theoretically consistent directions suggest the model effectively captures key aspects of coup dynamics. Regimes with weaker institutional structures are more vulnerable to coup attempts, while better economic conditions make coups less likely overall. The model effectively addresses the non-random nature of coup attempts by treating selection and outcome as separate processes.

The observed disparity between coup attempt rates and success rates across regimes points towards selection bias, further validating the use of the sample selection model. This model

acknowledges that coups are not random events, but rather strategic actions undertaken when the odds appear favorable.

In summary, the double `probit` model with sample selection proves to be a well-suited approach for this research. It provides robust insights into the factors influencing both the likelihood of coup attempts and their success rates across different regime types. The findings highlight the crucial role of regime structure and the selective nature of coup attempts, supporting the theoretical framework and empirical strategy employed in this study.

2.5 Conclusion

Motivated by the lack of consensus despite numerous empirical studies on the determinants of coups, this study introduces a novel approach that prioritizes determinants based on their impact on coup success. By analysing coup success rates, the study hypothesizes that the expected outcomes of coups are critical determinants of their occurrence. Utilizing a double `probit` model with sample selection, I investigate and confirm the relationship between regime types and coup attempts.

The findings suggest that regime type plays a significant role in the likelihood of coup attempts. Military and personalist regimes, characterized by weaker institutional frameworks and higher vulnerability during power transitions, are more susceptible to coups. This underscores the importance of supporting initiatives that strengthen constitutional institutions within these regimes.

The research also finds that stronger economic performance is associated with a lower risk of coups, suggesting that policies promoting economic development can be effective in reducing coup risk.

The study shows that the most efficient coup-proofing strategies involve the establishment of strong institutions. In contrast, purges, random shifting of military officers, or increased military expenditures are less effective. However, few autocratic leaders, particularly dictators

or military juntas, are willing to institutionalize their regimes, as such reforms may constrain their power or shorten their terms. While institutions benefit the regime, they do not necessarily benefit the leaders themselves.

Future research could explore specific institutional reforms that are most effective in improving stability across different regimes.

Chapter 3

Autocoups: Conceptual Clarification and Analysis of Power Extensions by Incumbent Leaders

Chapter 4

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

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

This study delves into the dynamics and implications of irregular power transitions, focusing on coups and autocoups. The findings illuminate the complex interplay between incumbents and challengers fighting for power.

Firstly, our analysis reveals that the expected success rate of a coup attempt significantly influences its likelihood. This success rate is heavily influenced by the balance of power between the incumbent regime and challengers, which is largely determined by regime type. We find that military regimes, although with more control over their own military forces, face a higher risk of coups compared to dominant-party regimes.

Secondly, the study introduces a redefined concept: the autocoup. Defined as an incumbent leader's refusal to relinquish power as mandated, this research distinguishes autocoups from broader terms like self-coups. Based on this definition, we present the first publicly available dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2022, encompassing 110 attempts and 87 successful autocoups. Case studies and empirical analyses demonstrate the dataset's utility for quantitative research, providing a robust foundation for further analysis on autocoups.

Thirdly, employing survival analysis techniques, the study finds clear differences in leader

longevity between those who come to power through coups and those who extend their rule through autocoups. The results indicate that coup-installed leaders face a significantly higher risk of removal compared to autocoup leaders who manipulate the system to extend their rule.

5.2 Policy Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for policy-makers concerned with promoting and protecting global democracy, which has faced increasing challenges despite a general post-WWII trend towards democratization. Notably, the "third wave" of democratization (Huntington 1991) witnessed a surge in democratic transitions in the late 20th century. Since the Cold War's end, democratic nations have outnumbered non-democratic ones (Figure 5.1) with the gap widening.

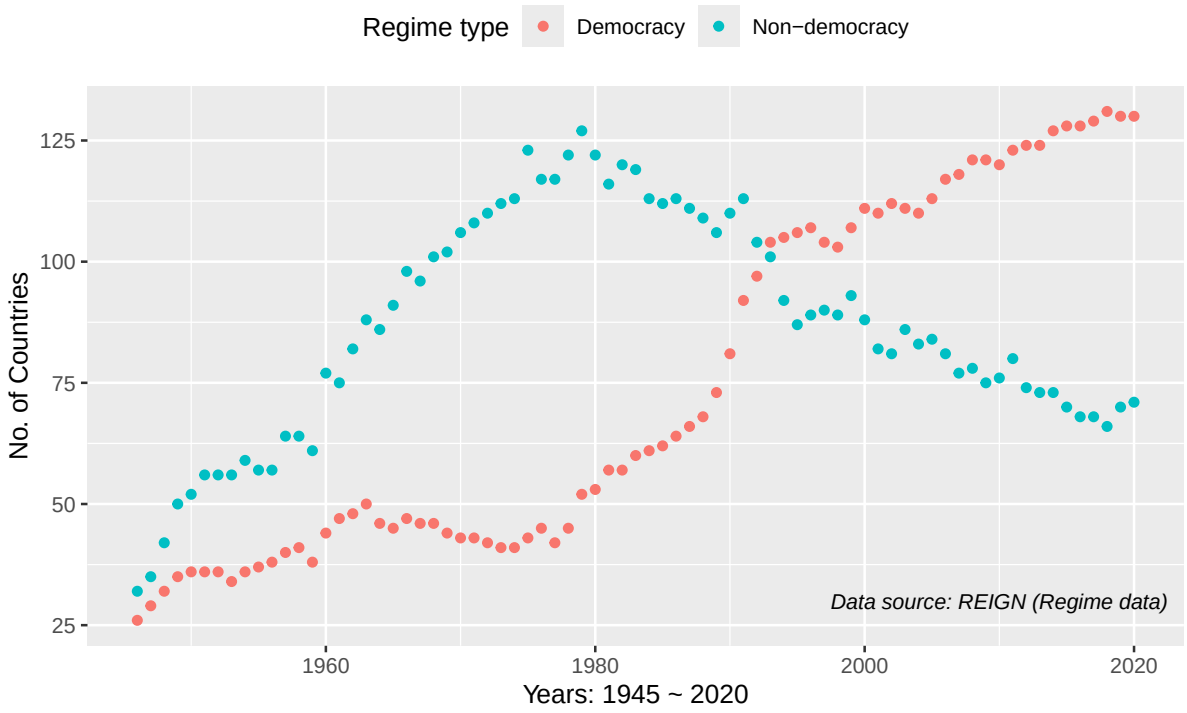

Figure 5.1: Comparison of the number of democratic and non-democratic countries (1945-2020)

However, a "democratic recession" has emerged in recent years (Diamond 2008). Freedom House reports an 18th consecutive year of global freedom decline in 2023 (Freedom House 2024). While few countries have completely regressed to autocracy, the average global democracy level has fallen back to pre-2000 levels. Notably, democratic backsliding often occurs within regimes, with democracies becoming less liberal and autocracies becoming less competitive (Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017).

This research highlights irregular power transitions as a significant factor in democratic backsliding within regimes. These transitions, often coups or autocoups, violate democratic norms and disrupt the path towards stable democracies. Leaders who gain power through irregular means often resort to undemocratic tactics to maintain control, creating a vicious cycle of eroding democratic institutions.

Our findings suggest that the shorter lifespans and potentially severe consequences associated with coups may deter potential coup leaders. Conversely, autocoups appear to be a more tempting option for power-hungry leaders due to their higher success rates, seemingly moderate consequences, and extended leader tenure after the autocoup. This trend may explain the decline in classic coups since the 1990s alongside the rise of autocoups (Bermeo 2016).

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This study offers a novel framework for analysing irregular power transitions, but some 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 ex-

plore data harmonization techniques for more robust comparisons.

- **Democratic backsliding:** While this study establishes a connection between irregular power transitions and democratic backsliding, further empirical evidence is needed to solidify this link.

Several avenues exist for future research:

- **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 sheds light on the dynamics of irregular power transitions, specifically focusing on coups and autocoups. By redefining autocoups, classifying the dataset, analysing determinants, and comparing leader longevity, we establish a framework for understanding irregular transitions and leader survival. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of democratic resilience and political stability. Future research can build upon this foundation by conducting further empirical analyses based on the novel autocoup dataset and continuing to refine the framework.

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