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

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Abstract

This thesis undertakes a comprehensive examination of the dynamics of irregular leadership transitions, focusing on coups and autocoups, to understand their impact on leader survival and democratic resilience. Utilizing innovative analytical techniques and a novel comparative framework, this study investigates the factors influencing the likelihood and frequency of these events, as well as their consequences for democratic erosion and political stability.

My research first explores the key determinants of classic coups, emphasizing the critical balance of power between incumbent leaders and coup plotters. Employing a double probit model with sample selection, the analysis reveals that the anticipated probability of coup success is a significant driver of coup attempts. Notably, the findings show that military regimes are about 277.7% more likely and personalist regimes 94% more likely to experience coups compared to dominant-party regimes. This heightened vulnerability of military regimes can be attributed to the inherent power structures within these types of political systems.

I then investigate the understudied phenomenon of autocoups, where incumbents manipulate institutions to extend their power beyond constitutional limits. I propose a refined definition of autocoups and develop a novel dataset covering 1945-2023. Through case studies and empirical analysis, I enable nuanced comparisons between coups and autocoups.

Employing survival analysis, I examine the relationship between power acquisition methods and leadership tenure. My findings show that at any given time during their tenure, coup-installed leaders are 2.23 times more likely to be ousted from power compared to autocoup leaders, all else being equal. This disparity suggests autocoups as a potential catalyst

for power personalization and democratic erosion.

This thesis contributes to political science through:

- A precise definition of autocoups, addressing a critical literature gap.

- A new longitudinal dataset on autocoups, enabling robust quantitative analyses.

- A unified approach for studying coups and autocoups, offering comparative insights.

These findings have significant implications for scholars and policy-makers concerned with democratic stability and leadership transitions. Future research could explore strategies to fortify democratic institutions against erosion and examine the long-term impacts of coups and autocoups on political stability.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A seamless leadership transition is crucial in political life, as it underpins the stability of the political system to a significant extent. Conversely, social unrest and violence often erupt when conventional leadership transitions are disrupted. Furthermore, unorthodox leadership transfers can have profound and lasting consequences for political systems, democratic resilience, and overall societal stability. Consequently, the study of irregular leadership transitions has long been a vital area of research in political science.

Among the various forms of irregular leadership transitions, **coups and autocoups** stand out as the two most prevalent and impactful types. This thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of coups and autocoups, as well as their far-reaching implications for leadership survival, regime stability, and democratic resilience. By examining these phenomena through a unified theoretical framework, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between power dynamics, institutional structures, and political outcomes in contemporary governance.

1.1 Motivation and research questions

This research is motivated by the question: **What factors determine whether leaders are ousted prematurely or manage to extend their tenure beyond constitutionally prescribed limits?** This inquiry is particularly pertinent in today's global landscape, where democratic erosion and the resurgence of authoritarianism are increasingly evident. By investigating the factors that influence leadership survival following unconstitutional power transitions, this study seeks to illuminate the intricate relationships between power transitions, leadership longevity, political stability, and democratic resilience.

This study tackles three primary research questions, which are addressed in the main chapters:

- How do power dynamics and regime types shape the likelihood and success of coup attempts, and what are the implications for leadership survival?

- Can autocoups be effectively analyzed within a comparative framework alongside traditional coups, and what insights can be gleaned from such an approach?

- Does the method of power acquisition (coup versus autocoup) have a significant impact on a leader's tenure and risk of removal, and if so, what are the underlying mechanisms driving this relationship?

1.2 Comparative framework: coups and autocoups

Coups have traditionally dominated the academic discourse on irregular leadership transitions, owing to their frequency and visibility. The well-established definition of coups—the forcible removal of incumbent leaders by elites within the existing power structure—has facilitated the development of comprehensive datasets and rigorous quantitative analyses.

However, another form of irregular leadership transition has been largely overlooked: instances where incumbent leaders refuse to relinquish power and extend their mandated terms. This phenomenon, which is termed "autocoups" in this thesis, has received comparatively less attention, resulting in a lack of consensus on terminology, definition, and data collection.

To address this gap, this study proposes a unified framework for analysing both coups and autocoups. By conceptualizing these as related yet distinct forms of irregular leadership transitions, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of the factors that shape leadership survival following unconstitutional changes in power. This comparative approach is crucial for several reasons:

- **Significance and Frequency**: Both coups and autocoups are the most prevalent means of irregular leadership transitions and have a profound impact on democratic resilience. Understanding their dynamics is essential for assessing the stability and sustainability of democratic systems.

- **Conceptual Similarities**: Despite their differences, coups and autocoups share a fundamental similarity: while a coup aims to replace the incumbent leader, an autocoup seeks to prevent the succession of a future leader. This parallel highlights the shared underlying motivations related to power retention and control.

- **Comprehensive Analysis**: Integrating these phenomena within a unified analytical framework can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership transition, leadership longevity, and their impact on political systems across various regime types. This approach allows for a more holistic analysis of the interplay between power dynamics, institutional structures, and political outcomes, thereby enriching our understanding of contemporary governance.

1.3 Research objectives and contributions

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by presenting a unified framework for analysing coups and autocoups. The key contributions of this research are threefold, aiming to enhance our understanding of irregular leadership transitions and their impact on political systems.

- **Emphasis on power dynamics and regime types:** This study centres on the pivotal factor determining the success or failure of coup attempts: the delicate balance of power between the incumbent leader and power challengers. By underscoring the crucial role of power dynamics, particularly the influence of regime types, this research reveals how institutional structures and power distribution within diverse regime types shape the likelihood and outcomes of irregular power transitions. The analysis focuses on the intricate balance of power between incumbents and potential challengers, offering novel insights into the strategic calculations that underlie coup attempts and their consequences. This contribution significantly advances our understanding of the complex interplay between power dynamics, institutional structures, and political outcomes, illuminating the nuanced mechanisms that govern the success or failure of coup attempts.

- **Refined definition and novel dataset for autocoups:** This study introduces a refined definition of autocoups and develops a novel dataset covering events from 1945 to 2024, filling a significant gap in the existing literature and enabling a comparative analysis with classic coups. The dataset provides a valuable resource for future research on autocoups and their impact on leadership survival. By offering a clear conceptualization of autocoups and a new dataset, this study lays the groundwork for more rigorous quantitative analyses of this understudied phenomenon, paving the way for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of autocoups and their consequences.

- **Survival analysis of leaders from different entry modes:** The research applies sur-

vival analysis to existing coup data and the new autocoup dataset, demonstrating how different modes of entry into power significantly affect leadership survival. This analysis offers insights into the long-term consequences of irregular leadership transitions on leadership tenure and political stability. By comparing the longevity of coup-installed leaders versus autocoup leaders, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between power acquisition methods and leadership survival, shedding light on the implications of different entry modes for leadership duration and regime stability.

These contributions collectively advance the field by providing a more holistic understanding of irregular power transitions, offering new tools and data for quantitative analysis of autocoups, and demonstrating the interconnectedness of power acquisition methods and leadership survival. The findings have important implications for understanding democratic backsliding, regime stability, and the dynamics of political power, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms that shape political stability and democratic resilience.

1.4   Policy implications

The findings of this study offer critical insights into the interconnected phenomena of democratic backsliding, breakdown, and autocratic intensification, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics that underlie these trends.

- **Regression of global democracy levels**: The examination of irregular leadership transitions and leadership survival sheds light on the alarming decline in global freedom levels, which have been steadily decreasing for 18 consecutive years (Freedom House 2024). This regression can be attributed, in part, to the proliferation of coups and autocoups, which inevitably violate democratic norms and disrupt the trajectory towards stable democracies.

- **Within-regime democratic erosion**: This research elucidates the phenomenon of democratic backsliding within regimes (Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017), where democracies become increasingly illiberal and autocracies less competitive. The prevalence of autocoups since 2000 (Bermeo 2016) has contributed significantly to this trend, as incumbents exploit their strategic advantages to extend their rule and undermine democratic institutions.

- **Prevalence of autocoups since 2000**: The analyses in this study explain the rise of autocoups since 2000, highlighting the strategic advantages that incumbents possess, including a higher probability of success and relatively milder consequences in the event of failure. Furthermore, leaders who manage to extend their rule through an autocoup enjoy significantly longer tenures compared to those who come to power through a coup.

- **Addressing the challenge**: Given the difficulties of mounting internal challenges against autocoups, external pressure from regional or international communities may play a crucial role in promoting democratic accountability and preventing the erosion of democratic norms.

1.5   Limitations and future research

This research makes a valuable contribution to understanding irregular power transitions and leadership survival, particularly their impact on political stability and democratic backsliding. However, several limitations highlight avenues for future research:

- **Data refinement:** The attempt to define and classify autocoups represents a novel approach in this field. However, both the definition and the dataset can be further refined through additional quantitative studies that critically evaluate and analyze the existing dataset. Future research should aim to refine these definitions to enhance clarity, applicability, and generalizability.

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- **Data harmonization:** The current analysis is hindered by the mismatch between the units of analysis (country-year versus leader) in the coup and autocoup datasets. Future research should explore data harmonization techniques to facilitate more robust comparisons and address these discrepancies, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of analyses concerning leadership transitions.

- **Democratic backsliding:** While this study establishes a connection between irregular power transitions and democratic backsliding, further empirical evidence is needed to solidify this link. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies that can track the long-term impacts of coups and autocoups on democratic health across various regimes. Moreover, in-depth case studies of democratic erosion following transitions could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of this relationship.

1.6 Overview of the thesis

This thesis delves into the intricate dynamics of irregular power transitions, examining their implications for leadership survival and democratic processes. The study focuses on three key areas: the determinants of classic coup attempts, the conceptualization and analysis of autocoups, and the impact of power acquisition methods on leadership longevity.

Chapter 2: Determinants of classic coup attempts

While coups have garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly since the early 2000s (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2019), a consensus on the key factors driving coup attempts and their outcomes remains elusive despite extensive research (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016). This chapter addresses this ongoing debate by shifting the focus from pre-conditions to the strategic calculations of coup plotters.

Prior literature has emphasized the willingness and conditions necessary for launching a

coup, yet similar conditions in different contexts may encounter varying levels of resistance due to differences in the incumbent's authority and power. Therefore, coup plotters must consider not only their own resources and conditions but also the strength of their opponent, potential reactions from other political forces, and the overall balance of power.

This chapter posits that coup plotters engage in a cost-benefit analysis, evaluating the balance of power against the incumbent and calculating their chances of success before staging a coup. Given the severe consequences of failure, they are unlikely to act unless success is highly probable. To operationalize this concept, the study utilizes regime types as a proxy for the balance of power between coup perpetrators and incumbent leaders. This approach stems from the understanding that regime types are inherently defined by power structures and dynamics (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014).

Recognizing that observed coup attempts are not random events but rather self-selected by coup plotters, this chapter employs a double probit model with sample selection to address inherent selection bias. This sophisticated methodology allows for a more accurate assessment of the factors influencing both coup attempts and their likelihood of success. The analysis supports the argument and reveals that expected success rates significantly influence coup attempts, providing strong evidence for the role of power balance in shaping coup decisions. A key finding highlights the vulnerability of military regimes compared to dominant-party regimes, offering valuable insights into the relationship between institutional structures and political stability.

Chapter 3: Conceptualising and analysing autocoups

While autocoups have gained increased scholarly attention since the 2000s, previous research has been hindered by conceptual ambiguities and a lack of systematic data. This chapter seeks to address the significant gaps in the literature by refining the concept of autocoups and developing a comprehensive dataset for quantitative analysis.

The chapter begins by addressing two key issues in the existing literature: the conflation of

power expansion and power extension[1], and the misalignment between definitions of autocoups and traditional coups. Coups are clearly defined as the unconstitutional removal of the incumbent leader, whereas autocoups have been used to denote both power expansion and power extension by incumbents. Since autocoups are a specific type of coup, their definition should be conceptually consistent. As traditional coups inherently shorten the incumbent's tenure, autocoups should be defined by their potential to extend the tenure of the incumbents. Given that coups shorten the tenure of the incumbent, autocoups should focus on the illegitimate extension of an incumbent leader's term in office beyond the originally mandated limits through unconstitutional means.

This study proposes a more precise and theoretically consistent definition of autocoups: **the illegitimate extension of an incumbent leader's term in office beyond the originally mandated limits through unconstitutional means.** By focusing on power extension, this definition clearly distinguishes autocoups from other forms of power consolidation while maintaining consistency with the concept of classic coups, which inherently involve removing an incumbent from power.

Building on this refined conceptualization, the chapter introduces a novel dataset encompassing autocoup events from 1945 to 2024, recording 110 attempts and 87 successes. This comprehensive dataset represents a significant contribution to the field, enabling more robust quantitative analysis of autocoups and their consequences. The chapter also demonstrates the dataset's utility through case studies and empirical analyses, highlighting the role of autocoups in driving democratic backsliding and power personalization.

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[1]The definitions and concepts of power expansion and power extension can often be ambiguous. In this study, we define power expansion as an incumbent acquiring additional authority from other branches or apparatuses of the state. Conversely, power extension refers to an incumbent prolonging their tenure beyond the originally mandated term in office.

Chapter 4: Impact of power acquisition methods on leadership longevity

Building upon the analyses of classic coups and autocoups established in previous chapters, this chapter presents a comparative analysis of these two forms of irregular power transitions within a unified framework. The focus is on examining the impact of power acquisition methods on leadership survival, comparing the tenure of leaders installed by successful coups against the extended tenures of autocoup leaders.

This chapter argues that leaders installed via autocoups and coups face distinct challenges in consolidating their power, primarily due to differences in the intensity of issues related to illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability. These disparities create an uneven playing field in terms of power dynamics, with coup-installed leaders at a significant disadvantage. Consequently, the chapter argues that autocoup leaders are more likely to survive longer in their extended tenure compared to coup-installed leaders.

To test this hypothesis, the study employs sophisticated statistical techniques, including Cox proportional hazards models and time-dependent Cox models. These methods provide a nuanced examination of how different modes of power acquisition affect leadership longevity. The findings support the central argument, revealing a significant impact of power acquisition methods on leader tenure. Specifically, the results demonstrate that autocoup leaders generally enjoy longer extended tenures than those of coup-installed leaders.

This insight contributes significantly to our understanding of the strategic incentives for different forms of irregular power transitions and their long-term consequences for political stability. By elucidating the relationship between power acquisition methods and leadership survival, this chapter offers valuable perspectives on the dynamics of authoritarian persistence and the challenges of democratic consolidation in regimes that have experienced irregular power transitions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and future research directions

This concluding chapter synthesizes the key findings from each preceding chapter, weaving together the insights gleaned from the analyses of coups, autocoups, and leadership survival. It reflects on the broader implications of these findings for understanding the interconnected challenges of democratic backsliding, power personalization, and political stability across diverse regime types.

The study's findings underscore the complex interplay between irregular power transitions, leadership tenure, and regime stability. By demonstrating the distinct dynamics and consequences of coups and autocoups, this research provides valuable insights into the motivations of political actors seeking to seize or maintain power through extra-constitutional means. Moreover, by highlighting the significant differences in leadership survival rates between these two forms of power acquisition, this study sheds light on the factors that contribute to the persistence or collapse of authoritarian regimes.

Recognizing the limitations inherent in any single study, this chapter also outlines promising avenues for future research. It emphasizes the need for continued exploration of irregular power transitions, particularly in light of evolving global political dynamics characterized by rising populism, democratic decline, and technological advancements that empower both authoritarian actors and pro-democracy movements.

By highlighting the significance of this research for understanding contemporary challenges to democratic governance, the conclusion underscores the broader relevance of the study's findings for both scholars and policy-makers concerned with promoting political stability, democratic resilience, and accountable governance.

Chapter 2

Power Dynamics and Coup Attempts: A Selection Mechanism Analysis

Abstract

This chapter introduces a novel approach to the study of coup attempts by prioritizing determinants based on their impact on coup outcomes, with a particular emphasis on the expected probability of success as a critical factor in the decision-making calculus of potential coup plotters. Using a double probit model with sample selection, the study investigates the relationship between regime types and coup attempts, focusing on the balance of power between coup plotters and incumbent leaders. The findings reveal that regime type is a significant determinant of coup attempts. Notably, compared to dominant-party regimes, military regimes are approximately 277.7% more likely, and personalist regimes are 94% more likely to experience coups. This heightened vulnerability can be attributed to the weaker institutional frameworks and internal power struggles characteristic of these regimes.

Keywords: Coups, Power transitions, Regime types, Sample selection

2.1 Introduction

Coups d'état, defined as "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), represent a critical threat to constitutional leadership transitions and political stability. The frequency and success of these attempts vary significantly across countries and regions, prompting essential questions about **why coups are more prevalent in certain contexts and why some coups succeed while others fail**.

For instance, according to the Global Instances of Coups dataset (GIC) (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011), Latin America and Africa have seen notable variation in coup activity. Bolivia experienced 23 coups between 1950 and 1984, and Argentina saw 20 coups during a similar period. In Africa, Sudan endured 17 coups between 1955 and 2023. In stark contrast, countries such as Mexico and South Africa have remained coup-free since 1950.

Despite decades of scholarly inquiry and the identification of over 100 potential determinants (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016), a consensus on the key factors driving coup attempts and their outcomes remains elusive. The proliferation of variables presents a significant challenge: Is there a more effective analytical framework that prioritizes the most relevant factors of coups, rather than sifting through an ever-expanding list of possibilities?

This study proposes a different perspective on understanding coup dynamics by shifting the focus from pre-coup conditions to the strategic calculations of potential coup plotters. Central to this approach is the consideration of the expected probability of coup success as a key determinant of coup initiation. Several observations support this perspective:

This chapter proposes a novel perspective on understanding coup dynamics by shifting the focus from pre-coup conditions to the strategic calculations of potential coup plotters. I argue that the expected probability of success is a key determinant in the decision to initiate a coup. This argument is supported by several observations:

- **High stakes of coups**: Failed coup attempts often result in severe consequences for par-

ticipants, including imprisonment, exile, or even death. This underscores the critical
importance of success for potential plotters.

- **Selectivity of Coup Attempts**: Despite 491 recorded attempts since 1950, these repre-
sent a small fraction (approximately 4%) of over 12,000 country-years during the same
period (GIC). This suggests that coups are not impulsive acts but rather carefully calcu-
lated gambles.

- **Relatively high success rates**: Approximately half of all coup attempts succeed (GIC).
This further suggests that plotters are selective, choosing to act only when they perceive
a significant likelihood of success.

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

Given the difficulty in directly observing the probability of coup success, this study proposes using regime type as a crucial proxy for predicting coup outcomes. The underlying premise is that the balance of power within a regime, which is significantly influenced by its type, ultimately shapes the outcomes of coups. By analysing power dynamics across various regime types, we can gain more profound insights into the structural factors that affect both the likelihood of coup attempts and their success.

To address the inherent selection bias in studying coup attempts, this research employs a double probit model with sample selection, building on the methodological approaches used by J. Powell (2012) and Böhmelt and Pilster (2014). This method enables the simultaneous analysis of factors influencing both the initiation and success of coups.

This study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse and practical efforts in two key ways:

Given the inherent challenges in directly observing the probability of coup success, this study proposes utilizing regime type as a crucial proxy for predicting coup outcomes. The underlying premise is that the balance of power within a regime, which is significantly influenced by its type, plays a pivotal role in shaping the outcomes of coups. By examining power dynamics across various regime types, we can gain more nuanced insights into the structural factors that affect both the likelihood of coup attempts and their success.

To mitigate the inherent selection bias in studying coup attempts, this research employs a double probit model with sample selection, building on the methodological approaches pioneered by J. Powell (2012) and Böhmelt and Pilster (2014). This method enables the simultaneous analysis of factors influencing both the initiation and success of coups, providing a more comprehensive understanding of coup dynamics.

This study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse and practical efforts in two key ways:

- **Reframing coup dynamics through the lens of expected success**: By emphasizing the expected chances of success as a driver of coup attempts, this research offers a more targeted approach to understanding coup dynamics. Specifically, it highlights the selective

effect of anticipated outcomes on coup initiation, providing a more nuanced understanding of the strategic calculations underlying coup attempts.

- **Illuminating the role of regime type in shaping coup outcomes**: In the absence of perfect knowledge of internal power balances, this study leverages regime types as a proxy for power structures. By examining the relationship between regime type and anticipated coup outcomes, this research sheds light on how these structures influence the likelihood of coup success, thereby informing strategies for coup prevention and mitigation.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 delves into the complexities of coup attempts and their outcomes, providing a nuanced examination of the underlying dynamics. Section 3 outlines the research design, methodology, and variables employed in this study, providing a transparent and detailed account of the analytical framework. Section 4 presents and interprets the empirical findings, highlighting the key patterns and trends that emerge from the data. Section 5 concludes the chapter by distilling the main insights and implications of the study, and exploring their potential applications in understanding and mitigating coup risks.

2.2 Dynamics of coup attempts and outcomes

Coup attempts represent a critical juncture in the political landscape of regimes, driven by a complex interplay of factors that can be broadly categorized into two main components: the **disposition** of potential challengers (their motivations and willingness to act) and their **capability** (the resources and opportunities available to them). This analysis delves into the intricate dynamics of coup attempts, examining the underlying motivations, factors influencing their success, and the role of regime types in shaping a country's susceptibility to coups.

2.2.1 Motivations for coups

Coup plotters are driven by a range of motivations, which can be distilled into three primary categories: personal ambition, purported national interest, and self-preservation.

- **Personal ambition:** The allure of absolute power is a potent motivator for many coup plotters. The prospect of seizing control offers the ability to shape national policies without constraint, command significant resources and wealth, make impactful decisions that affect millions, and bask in the prestige and recognition that comes with holding power. The opportunity to leave a lasting historical legacy is also a powerful draw.

- **Purported national interest:** Coup leaders often justify their actions as necessary interventions for the greater good of the nation. While such claims should be scrutinized, some examples demonstrate genuine attempts to address critical issues, such as resolving constitutional crises, facilitating transitions to democracy, or addressing severe economic downturns or social unrest. The 2010 coup in Niger, which ousted President Tandja after he sought an unconstitutional third term, is a notable example (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019).

- **Self-preservation:** In some instances, coups serve as pre-emptive strikes against perceived existential threats. Motivations in this category include preventing elimination or political persecution by incumbent leaders, protecting the interests of specific military or political factions, and safeguarding ideological or ethnic groups from marginalization. The 1971 coup led by Idi Amin against Ugandan President Obote exemplifies this motivation, as Amin acted to prevent his removal from a key military command position (Sudduth 2017).

Despite these potential motivations, it is crucial to note that coups remain relatively uncommon events. Since 1950, coups have occurred in only about 4% of country-years. This rarity

underscores the importance of the capability factor – even the most motivated actors require substantial resources and favourable circumstances to successfully execute a coup.

2.2.2 Capability for coups

While motivations may spark coup attempts, the capability to launch a successful coup is often more decisive. This capability is pivotal in determining whether potential coup plotters transition from mere contemplation to concrete action. Several key factors influence this capability, which can be broadly categorized into five main areas:

- **Military strength**: A significant advantage in military capabilities over the incumbent regime substantially increases the odds of a successful coup (J. Powell et al. 2018; Choulis et al. 2022). This factor encompasses control over elite military units or special forces, access to advanced weaponry and technology, loyalty of key military commanders, and strategic positioning of supportive military units. The balance of military power is often the most critical determinant of coup success, as it directly affects the ability to seize and hold key government installations.

- **Internal divisions within the regime**: Exploiting existing fractures within the government's power structure can provide coup plotters with a critical advantage. These divisions may manifest as ideological disagreements among ruling elites, competing centers of power within the government, ethnic or regional tensions in the political leadership, or dissatisfaction among mid-level bureaucrats or military officers. Coup plotters can leverage these divisions to build a coalition of support, promising benefits or addressing grievances of marginalized factions within the regime.

- **Public support**: Widespread discontent with the incumbent leaders, particularly within the military or key sectors of society, can create a fertile environment for a successful coup. Factors contributing to public support include economic hardship or inequality,

perceived corruption or mismanagement by the government, human rights abuses or po-

litical repression, and failure to address critical national issues. While public support

alone may not be sufficient for coup success, it can provide legitimacy to the coup plot-

ters and reduce resistance from the general population.

- **Foreign backing**: External support from powerful nations can provide resources, legiti-
  macy, and even direct military intervention to tip the scales in favor of the coup plotters.
  This support may take various forms, including financial assistance, intelligence sharing,
  diplomatic recognition, covert military aid or training, and threats of intervention against
  the incumbent regime. The role of foreign backing in coups has been particularly sig-
  nificant during the Cold War era and continues to shape geopolitical dynamics in many
  regions.

- **Timing and opportunity**: Identifying and exploiting moments of vulnerability in the
  incumbent leaders is crucial for coup success. Opportune moments may include national
  crises or emergencies, periods of political transition or uncertainty, major public events
  or celebrations, and times of internal conflict within the regime. Coup plotters must
  carefully assess these windows of opportunity and time their actions to maximize their
  chances of success.

2.2.3   The selection mechanism in staging coups

While historical data may suggest a high success rate for coups, it is crucial to consider the

inherent selection bias when interpreting this information. Observers are limited to studying

only attempted coups, neglecting the numerous plots that never materialize. This limitation

presents a significant challenge in accurately assessing the true likelihood of coup success.

Several factors contribute to this selection bias:

- **Unobserved deterrence**: ncumbent regimes may implement preemptive measures that

effectively deter potential coups before they reach the planning stage, thus remaining undetected in statistical analyses.

- **Self-selection of capable plotters**: Those who attempt coups are likely to do so only when they perceive a reasonable chance of success, leading to an overestimation of the overall success rate in observed data.

- **Unreported failed attempts**: Many unsuccessful coup attempts, particularly those in the early planning stages, may go unreported or remain undetected, further skewing the available data.

- **Varying definitions of "coup attempt"**: Inconsistencies in how researchers define and classify coup attempts can introduce additional bias into the data, complicating cross-study comparisons.

To address these challenges and understand coup attempts more comprehensively, a theoretical framework is needed to account for this selection bias. A frequently cited framework (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016; Aidt and Leon 2019) offers a structured approach to assess the disposition and capability of coup attempts by evaluating the anticipated benefits for coup plotters.

The expected pay-off of a coup can be represented by the equation:

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

Where:

- $E(U)$: Expected utility or pay-off of the coup attempt;
- B represents the return of a successful coup;
- C signifies the cost of a failed coup;
- p represents the probability of coup success.

The condition for staging a coup is when the expected benefit is positive ($E(U) > 0$). Rearranging the equation, we get:

$$p \times B > (1 - p) \times C \qquad (2.2)$$

This implies that for a coup to be attempted, the expected benefits of success must outweigh the expected costs of failure.

However, quantifying B and C is inherently difficult due to several factors. The intangible nature of some costs and benefits (e.g., loss of life, personal freedom). The variability of outcomes across different contexts. The subjective valuation of power and risk by individual coup plotters.

Given the difficulty in precisely quantifying B and C, we can treat them as roughly equal for analytical purposes. This allows us to shift our focus to the probability of success (p). The simplified equation becomes:

$$p > (1 - p) \qquad (2.3)$$

This suggests that a success probability greater than 50% is necessary for a coup to be attempted. While empirical data shows a slightly lower overall success rate for coups since 1950 (49.9%, as shown in Table 2.1), it is crucial to remember that this is an average and does not reflect the specific probabilities assessed by coup plotters beforehand.

Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2-1: *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 hypothesis fundamentally shifts the focus of coup research from the prerequisites for triggering a coup to the expected coup outcome as the primary determinant. By doing so, it underscores the importance of understanding the factors that influence coup plotters' percep-

tions of success probability, thereby highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach to coup analysis.

A natural follow-up question arises: What factors determine coup success and, subsequently, influence the decision to attempt one? The answer lies in understanding the complex balance of power inherent in the diverse power dynamics across various regime types.

2.2.4   Regime types and coup susceptibility

Existing research on coup plotting often concentrates on the dispositions and capabilities of potential perpetrators, overlooking a crucial factor: the dynamic balance of power between those initiating a coup and the incumbent regime. Even when dispositions and capabilities are similar, coup outcomes can vary significantly depending on this balance, underscoring the mediating role of power dynamics in influencing the strategic calculus of potential coup plotters.

For instance, solely attributing coup attempts to military strength oversimplifies the complex reality of these events (Singh 2016). In a highly centralized personalist regime, control over the military may be concentrated in the hands of a small, loyalist faction, making it difficult for potential rivals to garner the necessary support for a successful coup. Conversely, in a more fragmented military regime, internal divisions and competing power centres can create opportunities for ambitious officers to mobilize support and challenge the ruling junta. As Geddes (1999) notes, a coup's success often hinges on the reactions of these other factions, creating a complex decision-making environment for potential plotters. Furthermore, incumbents frequently employ strategic division within the military as a coup-proofing measure (Böhmelt and Pilster 2014). This involves intentionally creating rival groups within the armed forces, establishing an artificial balance and structural obstacles to coup attempts. Additionally, factors beyond military force, such as internal divisions among ruling elites, public support, and foreign backing, significantly shape the balance of power.

Consequently, a more comprehensive approach involves analyzing the overall balance of

power within a political system. However, as noted in the introduction, directly observing this balance presents significant challenges for outside observers, including policy-makers, international organizations, and even potential coup plotters themselves. An alternative approach, and the one adopted in this study, is to analyze factors that decisively shape power dynamics. This method aligns more closely with academic research goals, which focus on understanding the patterns and underlying factors of coup attempts rather than identifying specific power challengers capable of launching successful coups.

Among the various factors influencing power dynamics, regime type emerges as one of the most crucial and observable. Regime types are fundamentally classifications based on power structures within a political system, and different regime types allocate authority differently for critical decisions such as the deployment of military forces, appointment of key officials and military officers, and formulation and implementation of main policies. This allocation of authority, in turn, shapes the incentives and opportunities for potential coup plotters, influencing their likelihood of success.

Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) provides a classification of autocratic regime types based on their power structures, offering valuable insights into the power dynamics within different autocracies and their relative susceptibility to coups. The three main types of autocratic regimes, their characteristics, and their vulnerability to coup attempts are explored as follows (see Table 2.2):

- **Military regimes:** These are characterized by a junta – a group of military officers controlling leadership selection and policy formulation. Examples include regimes in Brazil (1964-1985), Argentina (1976-1983), and El Salvador (1948-1984) (Geddes 1999). Despite their military nature, these regimes are surprisingly unstable due to internal power struggles within the junta. The absence of a clear final authority and the presence of multiple military factions increase the likelihood of resorting to force to resolve disputes, making these regimes the most vulnerable to coups.

- **Personalist regimes:** In these regimes, power is concentrated in a single, charismatic leader who controls the military, policy, and succession. Examples include Rafael Trujillo's regime in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961), Idi Amin's regime in Uganda (1971-1979), and Jean-Bédel Bokassa's regime in the Central African Republic (1966-1979) (Geddes 1999). Personalist regimes are relatively stable during the leader's tenure. However, they face a higher risk of coups due to unclear succession plans and vulnerabilities associated with the leader's personal weaknesses, health, and mortality.

- **Dominant-rarty regimes:** In these systems, power resides 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). Dominant-party regimes exhibit the greatest resilience against coups due to their institutionalized structures, unified leadership, clear ideology, and internal discipline.

Empirical data supports the theoretical framework that different regime types exhibit varying levels of susceptibility to coups. Military regimes, constituting only 5.6% of country-years since 1950, experience a disproportionate share of coups (over 22%). In contrast, dominant-party regimes, representing 22.6% of country-years, account for only 16.7% of coups (see Table 2.3). These statistics demonstrate the disproportionate vulnerability of military and personalist regimes to coups, while highlighting the relative stability of dominant-party regimes.

The distinct power dynamics exhibited by these regime types significantly influence their susceptibility to coups. This analysis leads to the second hypothesis:

H2-2: *The susceptibility to coups varies significantly among different types of autocratic regimes, with military regimes being the most vulnerable, followed by personalist regimes, and dominant-party regimes being the least susceptible.*

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Table 2.2: Main features of different types of regimes

Regime Type	Power Concentration	Succession	Military Alignment	Stability	Examples
Military	Junta	Unclear	May have significant influence	Low	Brazil (1964-1985), Argentina (1976-1983)
Personalist	Single Leader	Unclear or dependent on leader's will	Subordinated to leader	Moderate (initially), Low (long-term)	Dominican Republic (Trujillo, 1930-1961)
Dominant-Party	Party Leadership	Institutionalized	Aligned with the party	High	Mexico (PRI), China (CPC)

Source: GWF & Author

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Table 2.3: Regime types and coups since 1950

Regime Type	Country Year	Share	Coups	Coups Percent	Success Rate	Likelihood
Democracy	5312	46.7%	122	24.8%	51.6%	2.3%
Dominant-Party	2569	22.6%	82	16.7%	53.7%	3.2%
Personal	1476	13.0%	113	23.0%	44.2%	7.7%
Monarchy	1056	9.3%	25	5.1%	56.0%	2.4%
Military	638	5.6%	110	22.4%	48.2%	17.2%
Other	322	2.8%	39	7.9%	53.8%	12.1%
Total	11373	100.0%	491	100.0%	49.9%	4.3%

Source: REIGN and GIC Datasets

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, 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 double probit with sample selection model, similar to the approach used by J. Powell (2012) and Böhmelt and Pilster (2014). This model, known as a Heckman probit model or bivariate probit model with sample selection, consists of two parts:

- **Selection equation (Stage 1)**: This stage analyses the factors influencing whether a coup attempt occurs in a particular country-year.

- **Outcome equation (Stage 2)**: This stage focuses on the probability of success for those coup attempts that actually take place.

The selection equation (first stage) models the probability that a coup attempt occurs:

$$y_{1i}^* = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{X}_i A + \mu_{1i}$$

$$y_{1i} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_{1i}^* > 0 \text{ (coup attempt occurs)} \\ \\ 0 & \text{if } y_{1i}^* \leq 0 \text{ (no coup attempt)} \end{cases} \tag{2.4}$$

The outcome equation (second stage) models the probability of a coup attempt succeeding, given it occurs.

$$y_{2i}^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Regime_i + \mathbf{Z}_i B + \mu_{2i}$$

$$y_{2i} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_{2i}^* > 0 \text{ (coup succeeds)} \\\\ 0 & \text{if } y_{2i}^* \leq 0 \text{ (coup failes)} \end{cases} \tag{2.5}$$

Where:

- y_{1i}^* *and* y_{2i}^* are latent variables

- $Regime_i$ is a categorical variable (military, personalist, or dominant-party)

- $\mathbf{X}_i$ and $\mathbf{Z}_i$ are vectors of control variables

- μ_{1i} and μ_{2i} are error terms, assumed to follow a bivariate normal distribution with correlation ρ

The model assumes:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \mu_{1i} \\ \mu_{2i} \end{pmatrix} \sim N \left(\begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right)$$

The probability equations are:

$$P(y_{1i} = 1) = \Phi(\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \, \text{Regime}_i + \mathbf{X}_i A) \tag{2.6}$$

$$P(y_{2i} = 1 \mid y_{1i} = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \, \text{Regime}_i + \mathbf{Z}_i B) \tag{2.7}$$

Where $\Phi(\cdot)$ is the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distribution.

2.3.2 Variables

2.3.2.1 Dependent variable

The 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.

- **Coup attempt**: Binary variable indicating whether a coup attempt occurred (1) or not (0) in a given country-year.

- **Coup success**: Binary variable indicating whether a coup attempt was successful (1) or failed (0), conditional on a coup attempt occurring.

2.3.2.2 Key independent variable: regime type

I categorize regime types following Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) (GWF), focusing 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

The control variables are chosen based on the research of Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt (2016). They analysed 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 Level:** Represented by GDP per capita. This measure provides an indication of the overall economic health and standard of living in a country. We use GDP per capita

data (in constant 2017 international 1000 dollars, PPP) from the V-Dem dataset by Fariss et al. (2022).

- **Economic Performance:** Measured 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. For a country i at year t, the CT ratio is calculated as follows:

$$CT_{i,t} = \frac{GDP/cap_{i,t}}{\frac{1}{5}\sum_{k=1}^{5} GDP/cap_{i,t-k}} \tag{2.8}$$

- **Political stability:** This variable captures overall regime stability by including a violence index that encompasses all types of internal and interstate wars and violence. The data for this index is sourced from the variable "actotal" in the Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset (Marshall 2005), with 0 representing the most stable conditions (no violence at all) and 18 representing the most unstable.

- **Previous coups:** Included in the selection equation as either: a) The number of previous coups in a country (Model 1), or b) The time since the last coup attempt (Model 2 for robustness check).

2.4 Results and discussion

The double probit model with sample selection, estimated using the ***sampleSelection*** package (Toomet and Henningsen 2008) in R, provides valuable insights into the factors influencing coup attempts and their outcomes across different regime types from 1950 to 2019 (Table 2.4). I present two models that differ slightly in their treatment of previous coups: Model 1 incorporates the number of previous coups, while Model 2 utilizes the time elapsed since the last coup.

Table 2.4: Sample Selection Model of Regime Type and Coup Success, 1950-2019

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
| | Coup Attempts | Coup Outcome | Coup Attempts | Coup Outcome |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	−1.774***	−1.803***	−1.663***	−0.654
	(0.058)	(0.360)	(0.088)	(0.518)
Regime: Democracy	0.056	0.068	0.043	0.042
	(0.072)	(0.121)	(0.075)	(0.192)
Military	0.687***	0.596***	0.345***	0.247
	(0.084)	(0.170)	(0.091)	(0.229)
Monarchy	0.282**	0.178	0.233*	0.088
	(0.118)	(0.201)	(0.123)	(0.310)
Personalist	0.319***	0.128	0.134*	−0.145
	(0.075)	(0.170)	(0.080)	(0.205)
Economic trend	−0.015***	−0.004	−0.014***	0.009
	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.008)
GDP per capita	−0.028***	−0.028***	−0.016***	−0.016
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.010)
Political violence	0.033**	0.033*	0.038***	0.025
	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.013)	(0.031)
Previous coups (P)	0.030***		0.448***	
	(0.010)		(0.086)	
Yrs since coup (Y)			−0.018***	
			(0.004)	
Interaction term: P * Y			−0.013***	
			(0.005)	
Observations	9,606	9,606	9,606	9,606
Log Likelihood	−1,663.683	−1,663.683	−1,598.656	−1,598.656
ρ	0.898*** (0.158)	0.898*** (0.158)	0.386* (0.234)	0.386* (0.234)
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 2.5: Average marginal effects of coup attempts (Selection of Model 1)

Term	Contrast	AME[1]	Ratio Percent
Democracy	mean(democracy - dominant-party)	0.003	13.040
Military	mean(military - dominant-party)	0.070	277.730
Monarchy	mean(monarchy - dominant-party)	0.020	80.280
Personal	mean(personal - dominant-party)	0.024	93.980
Economic trend	mean(+1)	−0.001	−2.850
GDP per capita	mean(+1)	−0.002	−5.400
Political violence	mean(+1)	0.003	6.550
Previous coups	mean(+1)	0.002	5.930

[1] AME: Average Marginal Effect

2.4.1 Selection model: coup attempts

The selection model (Column 1) reveals that military and personalist regimes exhibit significant positive coefficients at the 1% level, indicating a higher likelihood of experiencing coup attempts compared to dominant-party regimes. This aligns with the theoretical expectations regarding internal power struggles within military juntas and succession vulnerabilities in personalist regimes.

Table 2.5 presents the Average Marginal Effects (AME) and ratio percentages to clarify the regime effects. The military regime's marginal effect of 0.07 indicates that the probability of coup attempts in military regimes is 7 percentage points (pp) higher than in dominant-party regimes, ceteris paribus. This translates to military regimes being about 277.7% more likely to encounter coups than dominant-party regimes. Similarly, personalist regimes show a 2.4 pp higher probability, about 94% more likely compared to dominant-party regimes.

The control variables show effects in expected directions but with weaker magnitudes.

Stronger economic performance, indicated by higher economic growth trends and GDP per capita levels, correlates with a lower risk of coup attempts. Political violence shows a positive effect, indicating that higher levels of instability increase the likelihood of coups. The positive coefficient for the number of previous coups suggests a "copycat" effect from earlier incidents.

2.4.2   Outcome model: coup success

Turning to the outcome model (Columns 2 and 4 in Table 2.4), the results reveal determinants of coup success. Military regimes demonstrate a higher probability of coup success compared to dominant-party regimes, aligning with expectations that military regimes face higher coup risks due to their increased chances of success. Personalist and monarchical regimes show slight positive effects on coup success, but these effects are not statistically significant.

The control variables exhibit different patterns in the outcome model compared to the selection model. Both GDP per capita and political violence maintain a weak influence, similar to their effects in the selection model. However, the economic trend shows a less significant negative effect on coup success.

2.4.3   Model comparison (model 1 versus model 2)

Comparing the two models, Model 2 employs years since the last coup instead of the number of previous coups, with an interaction term between previous coups (as a binary variable) and years since the last coup. Generally, Model 2 shows results in the same direction as Model 1, albeit with relatively lower coefficients (see Table 2.6).

The differences between Model 1 and Model 2 suggest that while the recency of coups matters, the overall history of coups in a country may have a stronger influence on future coup attempts.

Table 2.6: Average marginal effects of coup attempts (Selection of Model 2)

Term	Contrast	AME[1]	Ratio Percent
Democracy	mean(democracy - dominant-party)	0.003	8.920
Military	mean(military - dominant-party)	0.028	91.630
Monarchy	mean(monarchy - dominant-party)	0.018	56.730
Personal	mean(personal - dominant-party)	0.009	30.080
Economic trend	mean(+1)	−0.001	−2.530
GDP per capita	mean(+1)	−0.001	−2.890
Political violence	mean(+1)	0.003	7.330
Previous coups (P)	mean(1 - 0)	0.023	92.090
Yrs since coup (Y)	mean(+1)	−0.002	−5.050

[1] AME: Average Marginal Effect

2.4.4 Discussion of key findings

The ρ values of 0.898 in Model 1 and 0.386 in Model 2, significant at 1% and 10% levels respectively, indicate strong correlation between unobserved factors influencing coup attempts and coup success. This supports the appropriateness of the sample selection model and underscores the importance of considering both stages in the analysis.

The significant coefficients with theoretically consistent directions suggest the model effectively captures key aspects of coup dynamics. 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.

2.4.5   Implications

The results of this study strongly corroborate the theoretical framework delineated in this chapter, highlighting the critical role that regime structure and the anticipated probability of coup success play in determining a regime's susceptibility to overthrow. These findings underscore that coups are strategic actions undertaken when circumstances appear favourable, rather than random occurrences.

The implications of these results for real-world politics are profound. Given that the perceived likelihood of successful coup execution is pivotal in coup attempts, incumbent leaders—particularly those in autocratic regimes—will be strongly motivated to concentrate their efforts on diminishing the capabilities of potential coup plotters, rather than merely addressing the underlying dispositions toward staging a coup.

In practice, this implies that autocratic leaders are likely to prioritize "coup-proofing" strategies. These may include appointing loyal generals and officials over competent ones, fostering factional divisions within the elite, and removing capable or popular military officers and government officials—even those who remain loyal. However, this approach can precipitate a vicious cycle.

The adage, "New levels, new devils," aptly captures the cyclical nature of coup risk mitigation. Incumbents, often lulled into a false sense of security after neutralizing immediate threats, may find themselves facing new challenges as a direct consequence of their actions. The very act of suppressing potential rivals, while seemingly strengthening their grip on power, inevitably fosters resentment and grievances among those disenfranchised. This, in turn, makes the prospect of a coup increasingly enticing, shifting the calculus of risk for potential plotters. While capability remains paramount in determining the success of any coup attempt, the disposition for such an undertaking, fuelled by discontent and perceptions of vulnerability, cannot be disregarded. Paradoxically, heavy-handed crackdowns on opposition, intended to deter challenges, can inadvertently lower the perceived costs of staging a coup, creating a fertile ground

for future instability.

Moreover, if incumbent leaders devote excessive attention to coup-proofing at the expense of economic growth and social development, they are likely to resort to increasingly autocratic forms of governance. This, in turn, can lead to democratic backsliding or even outright breakdown, as well as the entrenchment of authoritarian and personalistic rule.

In conclusion, the findings of this study offer critical insights into the complex dynamics underlying coup attempts and the strategic calculus of incumbent regimes. Navigating these challenges will require a delicate balance between addressing the capabilities and dispositions of potential coup plotters while maintaining a focus on broader governance, economic, and social priorities. Future research should explore the long-term consequences of coup-proofing strategies on regime stability and societal well-being, as well as potential alternative approaches to mitigating coup risks without compromising democratic values and institutions.

2.5 Summary

This chapter explores the most frequent irregular leadership transition, coups, that destabilize political systems and disrupt democratic transitions worldwide, a phenomenon that has garnered extensive scholarly attention yet remains a challenging puzzle. To shed new light on this issue, this study introduces a novel perspective by emphasizing the determinants that impact coup success, moving beyond the mere capability to launch a coup and focusing on the expected probability of success. This approach highlights the critical role played by the perceived balance of power between coup plotters and the incumbents in determining outcomes.

The study employs a double probit model with sample selection, which enables a nuanced analysis of the relationship between regime types and coup likelihood. The results affirm that regime type significantly influences coup vulnerability, with military and personalist regimes exhibiting higher susceptibility to coups compared to dominant-party regimes. This finding is corroborated by historical examples, such as the frequent instability and coup attempts ex-

perienced by military regimes in Latin America during the 20th century and various African personalist regimes. The study underscores the importance of building regimes with strong constitutional institutions, as those reliant on military or personal authority prove to be more prone to coups.

A key contribution of this study is its exploration of the paradox faced by autocratic rulers, such as dictators and military juntas. While institutional strengthening could promote regime longevity and reduce the risk of coups, many autocrats resist such reforms due to the potential limitations they might impose on their power. Institutionalization, while beneficial for the regime's long-term stability, may not align with the short-term interests of individual leaders who prioritize their personal control and authority over broader regime security.

The study also identifies policy implications for enhancing political stability, including promoting economic development, strengthening institutional frameworks, and encouraging political inclusivity. This shift towards institutionalization could help reduce the volatility that often accompanies military and personalist regimes.

Furthermore, this research opens several avenues for further inquiry, including:

- Examining the long-term effects of regime types on political stability, including trends toward democratization or authoritarian personalization.
- Investigating the role of international factors in influencing regime types and coup dynamics, especially when internal mechanisms are insufficient to prevent coups.

In conclusion, this chapter provides empirical evidence confirming that regime type plays a decisive role in determining coup risk. It also acknowledges the complex interplay of power dynamics within regimes, offering insights for both scholars and policy-makers focused on promoting democratic transitions and political stability. By shedding light on the strategic decisions behind coup attempts, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of political instability and its potential solutions, ultimately informing strategies for promoting more stable and resilient political systems.

Chapter 3

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

Abstract

This study aims to clarify the concept of autocoups, specifically focusing on power extensions by incumbent leaders. By distinguishing autocoups from the broader and more ambiguous concepts of self-coups or executive takeovers, which encompass both executive power aggrandizement and power extension, this research redefines the concept of autocoups. Based on this refined definition, I introduce a novel dataset of autocoup events from 1945 to 2024. Using this newly compiled dataset, the research includes three types of case studies that provide qualitative insights into the dynamics of autocoups. Additionally, an empirical analysis of the determinants of autocoup attempts and success is offered to demonstrate how the autocoup dataset can be employed for more quantitative research. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a clearer conceptual framework and a novel dataset of autocoups. It enhances our understanding of the mechanisms and motivations behind power extensions by incumbent

leaders and examines the implications for democratic backsliding, democratic breakdown, and autocratic deterioration. The insights gained from this study could draw more attention to the effects of autocoups on power transitions, political stability, and democratic resilience.

3.1 Introduction

The study of irregular power transitions has predominantly focused on coups due to their frequency and significant impact. This emphasis has led to substantial scholarly attention and the creation of comprehensive datasets. However, as noted by Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt (2016), the multitude of potential factors proposed to explain coups has often resulted in increased confusion rather than a clearer understanding of coup dynamics.

In contrast, another form of irregular power transition—the incumbent leader's refusal to relinquish power—has received relatively less attention despite its significance. Recent decades have witnessed a decline in traditional coups and a rise in this "incumbent retention or overstay" type of irregular power transition, particularly since the end of the Cold War (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins (2010); Baturo (2014); Versteeg et al. (2020)).

This chapter will redefine and clarify this type of irregular power transition, where leaders overstay their mandated term limits, as "autocoup." Although analyses related to autocoups are not rare, the existing literature exhibits several notable shortcomings:

- **Terminological ambiguity:** Terms such as self-coups, autocoups, autogolpes, incumbent takeovers, executive aggrandizement, overstay, and continuismo are used without a clear, universally accepted definition. This lack of standardization leads to confusion and inconsistent application (Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019; Baturo and Tolstrup 2022).

- **Limited data:** Due to the conceptual ambiguity surrounding autocoups, data collection remains in its early stages compared to the rich datasets available for traditional coups.

- **Methodological gaps:** Research on autocoups has largely relied on case studies (Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b; Antonio 2021; Pion-Berlin, Bruneau, and Goetze 2022), with few studies employing quantitative analysis.

Moreover, analyses of autocoups are often not integrated with those of traditional coups. As a distinct category of coup, autocoups lack a corresponding definition in relation to classic coups.

Consequently, traditional coups and autocoups are frequently analysed separately, despite their related nature, and there is a paucity of comparative analyses.

Studying autocoups is important for several reasons. Firstly, autocoups can undermine the rule of law, weaken institutions, and contribute to democratic backsliding or authoritarian personalization. Secondly, like traditional coups, successful autocoups increase the likelihood of future irregular power transitions. For example, since 1945, approximately 62% of leaders who extended their terms through autocoups in non-democratic countries were either ousted or assassinated while in office (Baturo 2019). Thirdly, failed autocoups often lead to instability, inciting protests, violence, and even civil wars.

This chapter aims to address these gaps by focusing on autocoups, aiming to clarify terminology, refine concepts and definitions, enhance data collection, and explore determinants through empirical analysis, contributing in three key areas:

- **Conceptual clarification:** The term "autocoup" will be redefined and clarified, with a focus on power extension.

- **Data collection:** A new dataset of autocoups since 1945 will be introduced based on this refined definition.

- **Empirical analysis:** Utilizing this dataset, a quantitative analysis of the factors influencing leaders' decisions to attempt autocoups will be conducted.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: Section 2 will review definitions related to power expansions and extensions, leading to a precise definition of autocoups. Section 3 will present the new autocoup dataset. Sections 4 and 5 will explore the determinants of autocoup attempts through case studies and demonstrate the application of the dataset in empirical analysis. The conclusion will summarize key findings and suggest directions for future research.

Definitions of power expansion and power extension in political science can often be ambiguous or overlapping. To ensure clarity in this study, we propose distinct definitions for these

concepts:

- Power Expansion: This refers to the process by which an incumbent leader acquires additional authority or control over state apparatuses beyond their original mandate. This may involve centralizing power, reducing checks and balances, or assuming roles typically held by other branches of government.

- Power Extension: This concept specifically relates to the temporal aspect of an incumbent's rule. It describes situations where a leader prolongs their tenure beyond the originally mandated term in office, often through constitutional amendments, cancellation of elections, or other means of circumventing term limits.

By distinguishing between these two concepts, we aim to provide a more nuanced analysis of how leaders consolidate and maintain their positions. While power expansion and extension can often occur simultaneously, differentiating between them allows for a more precise examination of the strategies employed by leaders to entrench their rule.

This distinction is crucial for our study as it enables us to: 1. Analyze the different mechanisms leaders use to solidify their power 2. Examine the potential consequences of each type of power consolidation 3. Explore the relationship between power expansion and extension in various political contexts

Understanding these nuances is essential for comprehending the complex dynamics of political power and leadership longevity in both democratic and authoritarian systems."

3.2 Autocoups: A literature review and clarification of definitions

The concept of autocoups, or the illegitimate seizure of power by incumbent leaders, remains a complex and contested area of study. Unlike coups, which are generally understood as illegal

attempts by elites to overthrow the government, autocoups lack a clear and consistent definition. This ambiguity hinders our ability to accurately identify, analyze, and compare instances of this phenomenon.

3.2.1 Terminology

The most common term in autocoup literature 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 academic prominence after Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori dissolved Congress, temporarily suspended the constitution, and ruled by decree in 1992 (Mauceri 1995; Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b). However, as Marsteintredet and Malamud (2019) point out, the term "self-coup" can be misleading, as it implies a coup against oneself, which is inaccurate since it targets other state institutions or apparatus.

Another approach to describe coups staged by incumbents is to use terms with adjectives or modifiers, 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 terms can be helpful in specific contexts, their proliferation often adds to the overall confusion rather than providing clarification. Most of these terms focus on the specific methods used by coup perpetrators but fail to clearly identify the perpetrator, necessitating further explanation. In fact, many of these methods could be employed either by or against executive leaders.

A third alternative involves terms like "incumbent takeover," "executive takeover," or "overstay." Incumbent takeover refers to "an event perpetuated by a ruling executive that significantly reduces the formal and/or informal constraints on his/her power" (Baturo and Tolstrup 2022, 374), based on earlier research (Svolik 2014). Meanwhile, overstay is defined as "staying longer than the maximum term as it stood when the candidate originally came into office" (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins 2011, 1844). These terms identify the perpetrator (the

incumbent) and/or the nature of the event (overstaying/extending power). However, they do not highlight the illegality or illegitimacy of these actions. Therefore, they cannot serve as a direct counterpart to "coup," which clearly denotes the illegality of leadership ousters, while "takeover" or "overstay" diminish the severity.

As these terms often lack precision, focusing on specific methods rather than the core act of power usurpation, this study proposes "autocoup" as the most suitable term for this phenomenon. Unlike other terms, 'autocoup' clearly identifies the perpetrator and the illegitimate nature of the power grab, distinguishing it from traditional coups.

3.2.2 Definition

While terminology is important, another issue arises with the previous definition of autocoups: What is the emphasis of an autocoup—power expansion, power extension, or both?

Definitions of power expansion and power extension in political science can often be ambiguous or overlapping. To ensure clarity in the study of autocoups, I propose distinct definitions for these concepts:

- **Power expansion:** This refers to the process by which an incumbent leader acquires additional authority or control over state apparatuses beyond their original mandate. This may involve centralizing power, reducing checks and balances, or encroaching on the authority of other branches like the legislature or judiciary.

- **Power extension:** This describes situations where a leader prolongs their tenure beyond the originally mandated term in office, often through constitutional amendments, cancellation of elections, or other means of circumventing term limits.

Existing definitions of autocoups or related concepts often either are ambiguous between power expansion and extension, or focus more on power expansion, which has several drawbacks.

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Firstly, defining autocoups primarily in terms of power expansion does not align well with the definition of a coup. The focus of a classical coup is clearly on the ouster of the current leader, not merely a limitation or restriction on their power. Using the same logic, a more appropriate definition of an autocoup should prioritize the tenure extension of executive leadership. Power restriction on incumbents would not be coded as a coup as long as they remain in office. Similarly, an executive leader acquiring more power from other branches could be coded as power aggrandizement, but not an autocoup, as long as they step down when their term expires.

Secondly, emphasizing power expansion in autocoups often neglects the ultimate purpose of incumbents. It is irrational for an incumbent to expand executive power and then pass the powerful role to future leaders. Although the term "self-coup" gained prominence from the 1992 Fujimori case in Peru, which initially involved seizing power from other institutions, it is important to note that Fujimori ultimately extended his term limits through constitutional amendments. The 1993 Constitution allowed Fujimori to run for a second term, which he won with popularity in April 1995. Shortly after Fujimori began his second term, his supporters in Congress passed a law of "authentic interpretation" which effectively allowed him to run for another term in 2000, which he won amid suspicions and rumors. However, he did not survive the third term. In 2000, facing charges of corruption and human rights abuses, Fujimori fled Peru and took refuge in Japan (Ezrow 2019).

Thirdly, measuring the extent of power expansion to qualify as an autocoup can be challenging. As Maxwell A. Cameron (1998a) defined, a self-coup is "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). "Broader executive power" is difficult to define, and it would be problematic and disputable no matter how it is defined.

Therefore, this study argues that a more accurate definition of autocoups should prioritize power extension as the core characteristic. It is easy to identify the event and the outcome in the first place. In most cases, autocoups in terms of power extension involve power expansions

as their prerequisite and foreshadowing.

Based on these criteria, I define **an autocoup as the illegitimate extension of an incumbent leader's term in office beyond the originally mandated limits through unconstitutional means**. This definition emphasizes the core characteristic of power extension while acknowledging the potential for power expansion as a related phenomenon. Three key points need to be highlighted for this definition.

Firstly, this definition refers to the actual leaders of the country, regardless of their official titles. Typically, this would be the president; however, in some cases, such as in Germany, the primary leader is the premier, as the president is a nominal head of state.

Secondly, while the primary characteristic of an autocoup is extending the term in office, this definition does not exclude instances of power expansion. Both aspects can coexist, but the extension of the term is the central element.

Thirdly, autocoups, by their nature, subvert legal norms and established power transfer mechanisms. No matter how legitimate they claim to be, their illegitimacy is not beyond a reasonable doubt as long as the incumbents are the direct beneficiaries. This critical aspect will be explored further in Section 3.

3.3 Introduction to the autocoup dataset

3.3.1 Defining the scope

Categorizing political events as autocoups inevitably involves challenging borderline cases. To maintain consistency and avoid ambiguity, this study adopts a broad coding approach: All instances of incumbents extending their original mandated term in office are coded as autocoups, regardless of the apparent legality of the extension.

This approach is justified because truly legitimate amendments to power transition institutions should apply only to subsequent leaders, not the incumbent. Even when extension proce-

dures appear legal, the legitimacy is questionable when the incumbent is the direct beneficiary.

3.3.2   Classifying autocoups

Autocoups manifest in various forms. I categorize them based on several key factors:

- **Methods employed**: Specific strategies used by incumbents (e.g., constitutional amendments, election cancellation).

- **Degree of legality**: Extent of deviation from established legal norms.

- **Duration of extension**: Length of time the incumbent remains in office beyond designated term limits.

- **Outcomes**: Whether the autocoup attempt succeeds or fails.

This study primarily focuses on the methods employed, while coding for other aspects when information is available.

Evasion of term limits

Evasion of term limits is a common tactic employed in autocoups. Incumbents often resort to seemingly legal manoeuvres to extend their hold on power. These manoeuvres primarily involve manipulating constitutional provisions through various means. The incumbents may pressure legislative bodies (congress) or judicial institutions (Supreme Court) to reinterpret existing term limits, amend the constitution to extend terms, or even replace the constitution altogether. This might also involve popular vote through referendums, or a combination of these approaches. The extension can range from a single term to indefinite rule.

These manoeuvres primarily involve manipulating constitutional provisions through various means.

- **Changing term length:** Incumbents might lengthen the official term duration (e.g., from 4 to 6 years) to stay in office longer, even if the number of allowed terms remains unchanged. Examples, in the dataset, include Presidents Dacko (CAR, 1962), Kayibanda (Rwanda, 1973), and Pinochet (Chile, 1988).

- **Enabling re-election:** This approach involves incumbents modifying legal or constitutional frameworks to permit themselves to run for leadership again, despite initial restrictions. These restrictions might include prohibitions on re-election, bans on immediate re-election, or term limits that the incumbents have already reached. An illustrative example is President Menem of Argentina in 1993, who leveraged this tactic to extend his tenure.

- **Removing term limits altogether:** This approach, as seen with President Xi Jinping of China in 2018, technically allows the leader to rule for life, although they may still need to participate in elections (a formality in such cases).

- **Declaring leader for life:** This differs from removing term limits as the leader still faces elections (although potentially rigged or uncontested). An example is Indonesia's President Sukarno, who attempted to declare himself president for life in 1963 (ultimately unsuccessful).

These methods are often used in combination. Initially, the duration of a term is extended, followed by amendments to allow re-election, then the removal of term limits, and finally, the declaration of the leader for life. For example, Haitian President François Duvalier amended the constitution in 1961 to permit immediate re-election and then declared himself president for life in 1964.

Election manipulation or rigging

Election manipulation or rigging is the second most commonly used tactic to extend an incumbent's tenure.

- **Delaying or removing elections:** Delaying or removing scheduled elections without legitimate justification is a frequent method used by incumbents to maintain power. For instance, Chadian President François Tombalbaye delayed general elections until 1969 after assuming power in 1960. Similarly, Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos suspended elections throughout his rule from 1979 to 2017.

- **Refusing unfavourable election results:** Incumbents may refuse to accept unfavourable election results and attempt to overturn them through illegitimate means. For example, President Donald Trump of the United States refused to accept the results of the 2020 election and tried to overturn them.

- **Rigging elections:** Winning elections with an extraordinarily high percentage of votes is highly questionable. This study will code elections where the incumbent wins more than 90% of the vote as autocoups. For instance, President Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea has consistently won elections with over 95% of the vote in multi-party elections since 1996, indicating election rigging.

- **Excluding opposition in elections:** Manipulating the electoral process by excluding opposition parties or candidates from participation, effectively creating a one-candidate race, clearly signifies an autocoup.

Use of figurehead

To circumvent term limits, some incumbents might choose a close associate to act as a figurehead, taking the office publicly while the incumbent retains real power behind the scenes. This can be achieved through seemingly subordinate positions.

One example is Russia in 2008. Facing term limits, President Putin selected Dmitry Medvedev to run for president. After the election, Medvedev appointed Putin as Prime Minister. However, most analysts believe Putin wielded the true power throughout this period.

Reassigning supreme authority to a new role

This tactic involves an incumbent leader manipulating the constitution or legal framework to create a new position of power, or elevate an existing one, before stepping down from their current role. They then strategically take on this new position, effectively retaining significant control despite appearing to relinquish power. For example, in 2017, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, spearheaded a constitutional referendum that transitioned the country from a parliamentary system to a presidential one. This new system concentrated significant executive power in the presidency. Following the referendum's approval, Erdoğan successfully ran for the newly established presidency, effectively retaining control under a different title.

One-time arrangement for current leaders

This strategy involves special arrangements that extend the term or tenure of current leaders without altering the underlying institutions. For example, Lebanon extended President Émile Lahoud's term by three years in 2004 through a one-time arrangement.

3.3.3   Data coding

The autocoup dataset is built upon existing studies and datasets, ensuring a comprehensive and reliable foundation. Table 3.1 outlines the main sources used for coding the autocoup dataset.

The Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009) and the Political Leaders' Affiliation Database (PLAD) (Bomprezzi et al. 2024) provide comprehensive data on all leaders from 1875 to 2023, although our coding only includes autocoups since 1945. These datasets are invaluable for identifying actual rulers, distinguishing them from nominal heads of state.

The Incumbent Takeover dataset (Baturo and Tolstrup 2022) integrates data from 11 related datasets, offering a broad spectrum of cases where leaders significantly reduced constraints on their power. This dataset includes both power expansions and extensions, necessitating cross-referencing with Archigos to verify qualifications for autocoups.

Table 3.1: Main Data Sources for Coding the Autocoup Dataset

Dataset	Authors	Coverage	Obervations
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, 110 observations were coded, with 95 overlapping with the candidate data from Incumbent Takeover. The remaining 15 events were newly coded by the author through verification with other sources such as Archigos, PLAD and news reports.

The main deviation from the Incumbent Takeover dataset arises from excluding power expansions that do not involve attempts to extend tenure.

The dataset encompasses a total of 14 variables along with the *notes* field.

- **Country identification:** Country code (*ccode*) and country name (*country*) from Correlates of War project (Stinnett et al. 2002).

- **Leader information:** Name of the de facto leader (*leader_name*,coded following Archigos and PLAD datasets).

- **Timeline variables:** Date the leader assumed power (*entry_date*), date the leader left office(*exit_date*), date of the significant event marking the autocoup (*autocoup_date*), and Start date of the leader's additional term acquired through the autocoup (*extending_date*).

- **Power transition methods:** Categorical variable for how the leader entered power (*entry_method*), categorical variable for how the leader exited power (*exit_method*), dummy

variable indicating regular (1) or irregular (0) entry (*entry_regular*), and dummy variable indicating regular (1) or irregular (0) exit (*exit_regular*).

- **Autocoup details:** Key variable capturing methods used to extend power (*autocoup_method*) and outcome of the autocoup attempt (*autocoup_outcome*, "fail and lose power", "fail but complete original tenure", or "successful"). For successful coups, the additional term length can be calculated from the difference between *exit_date* and *extending_date*.

- **Data source:** Identifies the dataset source used for coding (*source*).

- **Additional notes:** Provides context for exceptional cases (*notes*).

There are a few coding challenges and decisions worth mention. For cases where extensions happen incrementally, the *autocoup_date* reflects a significant event marking the extension, such as a legislative vote or successful referendum. In cases where a leader undertook multiple autocoup attempts, details are recorded in the notes field. Care was taken to differentiate between cases of power expansion and actual attempts to extend tenure, which required cross-referencing multiple sources. Determining the success or failure of an autocoup attempt often required in-depth research, especially for less documented cases.

3.3.4 Data descriptions

The primary coding has identified 110 autocoup cases from 1945 to 2024, involving 73 countries. This comprehensive dataset provides a rich source of information for analysing trends and patterns in autocoup attempts across different political contexts.

Table 3.2 presents a breakdown of the autocoup methods employed by leaders:

The most common autocoup method is "enabling re-election", accounting for 46 events. This is followed by "removing term limits altogether" (14 cases), and then "delaying elections" and "declaring the leader for life" (each with 9 cases).

Table 3.2: Autocoup methods and success rates (1945-2021)

Autocoup Method	Attempted	Succeeded	Success Rate
Enabling re-election	46	33	71.7%
Removing term limits	14	14	100.0%
Delaying elections	9	9	100.0%
Leader for life	9	9	100.0%
Changing term length	7	5	71.4%
Figurehead	6	5	83.3%
One-time arrangement	5	4	80.0%
Refusing election results	4	1	25.0%
Reassigning power role	4	2	50.0%
Rigging elections	3	2	66.7%
Cancelling elections	3	3	100.0%
Total	110	87	79.1%

Source: Autocoup dataset

The overall success rate of autocoups is 79%, which is significantly higher than the approximately 50% success rate of classical coups. This high success rate can be attributed to several factors:

- Incumbent Advantage: Leaders already in power have access to resources and institutional mechanisms that can be leveraged to their advantage.

- Gradual Implementation: Unlike sudden coups, autocoups can be implemented gradually, allowing leaders to build support and legitimacy over time.

- Legal Facade: Many autocoup methods operate within a veneer of legality, making them harder to oppose openly.

- Control of State Apparatus: Incumbents often have significant control over state institutions, which can be used to facilitate their autocoup attempts.

However, success rates vary significantly across different methods.

- **100% success rate**: Removing term limits, delaying elections, declaring the leader for life, and cancelling elections all have perfect success rates. This suggests that once these processes are set in motion, they are difficult to reverse.

- **Lower success rates:** Refusing to accept election results has the lowest success rate, with only 1 out of 4 attempts succeeding. Although the sample size is limited (only 4 cases in total), this trend might suggest several factors at play. These include greater democratic resilience in systems where general elections are regularly held, heightened international scrutiny and pressure in response to blatant manipulation of election results, and stronger domestic opposition to such overt power grabs.

3.4 Determinants of autocoup attempts: Case studies

3.4.1 High frequency and success rate of autocoups in post-communist countries

Analysis of our dataset reveals a notably high frequency and success rate of autocoups in post-communist countries. These nations, formerly communist regimes prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, have largely evolved into 'hybrid regimes' (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019), with only a few retaining their communist status. The data documents 12 cases of autocoups aimed at prolonging incumbency in these countries, with only two attempts failing. Examination of these cases highlights several distinctive characteristics:

- **Inherited authoritarian systems**: Despite most of these 12 countries transitioning from communist to non-communist governments (with the exception of China), they retained many authoritarian systems from their communist past.

- **Continuity of former elites**: The transitions did not result in the removal or overthrow of previous ruling groups. Instead, former communist elites often maintained their positions

of power.

- **Subverted democratic processes**: While general elections and term limits were introduced in most of these countries, the legacy of former communist regimes frequently led to the circumvention of term limits and manipulation of elections (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019).

Case 1: Lifelong ruler–Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus

Alexander Lukashenko, a former member of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, became the head of the interim anti-corruption committee of the Supreme Council of Belarus following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Elected as Belarus's first president in 1994, he has maintained this position ever since. Initially, the 1994 constitution limited presidents to two successive terms. However, Lukashenko removed this restriction in 2004. International monitors have not regarded Belarusian elections as free and fair since his initial victory. Despite significant protests, Lukashenko has consistently claimed to win with a high vote share, often exceeding 80% in each election. This pattern is evident across all five Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union, where post-dissolution leaders were typically high officials or heads of the former Soviet republics who continued their leadership in the presidency.

Case 2: Transferring power to a handpicked successor–Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan

Nursultan Nazarbayev served as the first president of Kazakhstan from 1991 until 2019. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he held de facto leadership as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Following independence, he was elected as the first president and retained office until 2019 through various means, including resetting term limits due to the implementation of new constitutions. Notably, Nazarbayev did not officially eliminate term

limits but instead created an exemption for the "First President" (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019). Unlike Lukashenko, who remains the incumbent of Belarus, Nazarbayev transferred the presidency to a designated successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in 2019. However, he retained significant influence as the Chairman of the Security Council of Kazakhstan until 2022.

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

Latin America has a long-standing tradition of maintaining term limit conventions. Simón Bolívar, the founding father of Bolivia, was initially a strong advocate for term limits, stating in 1819, "Nothing is as dangerous as allowing the same citizen to remain in power for a long time… That's the origin of usurpation and tyranny" (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019, 38). Although Bolívar eventually modified his stance, arguing in his 1826 Constitution Assembly speech that "a president for life with the right to choose the successor is the most sublime inspiration for the republican order," term limits became a convention in Latin America. Approximately 81% of Latin American constitutions between independence and 1985 imposed some form of term limits on the presidency (Marsteintredet 2019).

An analysis of cases in Latin American countries reveals two notable patterns.

Often successful at breaking non-re-election or non-immediate re-election restrictions

Unlike other presidential systems where two terms are more common, non-re-election or non-immediate re-election used to be prevalent in Latin America. According to Marsteintredet (2019), non-consecutive re-election was mandated in about 64.9% of all constitutions between independence and 1985, while 5.9% banned re-election entirely.

However, adherence to these conventions has varied across the region. Since Mexico introduced non-re-election institutions in 1911 at the start of the Mexican Revolution, they have remained inviolate (Klesner 2019). Similarly, Panama and Uruguay have never altered their re-election rules, and Costa Rica has only experienced a brief period (1897-1913) permitting

immediate presidential re-election since prohibiting it in 1859 (Marsteintredet 2019). In many other countries, however, constitutions have been frequently amended or violated.

The pursuit of re-election or consecutive re-election, therefore, has been a significant trigger for autocoups aimed at power extension in this region. Our research documents 32 autocoup cases, with over 50% (17 cases) attempting to enable re-election or immediate re-election, and about 59% (10 cases out of 17) being successful.

Unlike those who attempt to overstay in office indefinitely, many Latin American leaders exit after their second term expires. Examples include President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil (1995-2003), President Danilo Medina of the Dominican Republic (2012-2020), and President Juan Orlando Hernández of Honduras (2014-2022) (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019; Marsteintredet 2019; Landau, Roznai, and Dixon 2019; Baturo 2019; Neto and Acácio 2019).

Failing to further extend tenure

This trend does not imply that none of these leaders attempted further extensions, but rather that most accepted their unsuccessful outcomes without abusing their power to manipulate the process. While autocoups aimed at securing one additional term are often successful, attempts to overstay beyond this are frequently unsuccessful.

Two contrasting cases illustrate the varied outcomes of term limit challenges:

- **Unsuccessful extension – Carlos Menem (Argentina)**: President Menem successfully extended his tenure by one term through a 1994 constitutional amendment allowing one executive re-election. He was subsequently re-elected in 1995. However, his attempt to reset his term count, arguing that his first term (1988-1995) should not count as it was under previous constitutions, was unanimously rejected by the Supreme Court in March 1999 (Llanos 2019). A similar scenario unfolded with President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia (2002-2010) (Baturo 2019).

- **Successful extension – Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua)**: In contrast, Daniel Ortega, the

incumbent president of Nicaragua, successfully extended his presidency. In 2009, the Supreme Court of Justice of Nicaragua permitted his re-election in 2011. Subsequently, in 2014, the National Assembly of Nicaragua approved constitutional amendments abolishing presidential term limits, allowing Ortega to run for an unlimited number of five-year terms. As a result, he has held the presidency since 2007 (Close 2019).

3.4.3   As common as classical coups: Cases of African countries

Classical coups have been prevalent in Africa, accounting for approximately 45% of all global coups (219 out of 491 cases) since 1950, involving 45 out of 54 African countries (GIC dataset). While autocoups are less frequent compared to traditional coups, they maintain a significant presence in Africa. Among 110 documented autocoup cases globally, 46% (51 cases) occurred in Africa, involving 36 countries. Notably, the success rate of autocoups in Africa is over 84% (43 out of 51 attempts), which surpasses both the success rate of classical coups in the region (roughly 50%) and the global average success rate of autocoups (79%).

Identifying a clear pattern of autocoups in Africa is challenging, mirroring the complexity observed with classical coups. Various factors have been proposed to explain this phenomenon:

- **Natural Resources**: Countries rich in natural resources, particularly oil or diamonds, may see leaders more likely to attempt and succeed in extending their terms (Posner and Young, n.d.; Cheeseman 2015; Cheeseman and Klaas 2019).

- **Quality of democracy**: The quality of democracy is a critical factor influencing respect for term limits (Reyntjens 2016).

- **International influence**: International aid or donor influence can play a significant role in discouraging attempts at power extension (Brown 2001; Tangri and Mwenda 2010).

- **Organized opposition and party unity**: The extent of organized opposition and the president's ability to enforce unity within the ruling party are crucial factors (Cheeseman

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2019).

Utilizing the Africa Executive Term Limits (AETL) dataset, Cassani (2020) highlights human rights abuses and the desire for impunity as main drivers for incumbents to cling to power. The more authoritarian a leader, the more likely they are to attempt to break term limits and overstay in office. A leader's ability to secure the loyalty of the armed forces through public investment increases the chances of success in overstaying.

Despite both coups and autocoups being prevalent, there has been a noticeable shift since the end of the Cold War in 1991: Traditional coups have decreased in frequency while autocoups have become more prevalent.

This trend can be partially attributed to the introduction of multi-party elections in Africa in the 1990s, which also brought in term limits for executives (Cassani 2020; Cheeseman 2019). Before 1991, personal or military rule was more common, and term limits were less frequent. Post-1991, with more term limits introduced, challenges to these limits have increased. However, it is crucial to note that this increase in challenges does not necessarily imply that violations are more common than adherence to term limits, because total power transitions have increased compared to the past.

3.5   Empirical analysis: An example of utilizing the autocoup dataset

The availability of the autocoup dataset has made it feasible to conduct quantitative analyses that extend beyond traditional case studies. This section provides a straightforward example of how to utilize this dataset effectively. To analyze the determinants of autocoup attempts, I employ a probit regression model. This approach differs from the double probit model with sample selection used in Chapter 2 for coup attempts and success analyses. Instead, I use two separate probit models. Due to the high probability of success in autocoups, they do not exhibit

the typical sample selection characteristics that necessitated the use of a sample selection model in our earlier analysis of traditional coups.

3.5.1 Dependent variables

- **Autocoup attempt**: Binary variable indicating whether an autocoup attempt occurred (1) or not (0) during the tenure of an incumbent leader.

- **Autocoup success**: Binary variable indicating whether an autocoup attempt was successful (1) or failed (0), conditional on an autocoup attempt occurring.

3.5.2 Independent variables

The selection of independent variables are consistent with the coup analysis in Chapter 2, plus the population size and the leader's age.

- **Population size:** To account for its potential impact on leaders' tenures, we consider the log of the population size. This transformation helps in managing the wide range of population sizes across different countries. The data is sourced from the V-Dem dataset and is evaluated to understand its influence on power transitions. Larger populations may present more governance challenges and potential sources of opposition, thereby affecting the stability and longevity of a leader's tenure.

- **Leader's age:** The age of the leader is included as an additional variable in the analysis, offering insights into potential correlations with leadership strength. Older leaders may have different experiences, networks, and health considerations that could influence their ability to maintain power. This data is sourced from Archigos and PLAD datasets.

Unlike the analysis of coup determinants, which could theoretically occur in any given year, I assume that an autocoup happens only once during an incumbent leader's tenure, as

a successful autocoup negates the need for another attempt. However, this assumption does not always reflect reality, as leaders might attempt further extensions or try again after a failed attempt. For simplicity, I overlook these possibilities in our analysis.

Therefore, in our probit model, the unit of analysis for autocoups is the entire tenure of a leader, rather than a country-year. I establish a base year for the variables: for leaders who staged an autocoup, we use the year of their first attempt as the base year; for leaders who did not attempt to overstay, I use the middle year of their tenure as the base year.

3.5.3 Results and discussions

Table 3.3 summarizes the findings from the probit regression models based on our analysis of the determinants of autocoup attempts and their success.

Model 1, which examines autocoup attempts, reveals only one significant predictor besides the constant term. Among the regime types, personalist regimes significantly increase the likelihood of autocoup attempts, all else being equal. This suggests that leaders in personalist regimes are more prone to attempt to extend their power through autocoups compared to leaders in democratic regimes (reference regime). Leaders in dominant-party and military regimes, however, show no significant difference in the likelihood of attempting an autocoup compared to democratic leaders.

The model for autocoup success (Model 2) shows similar dynamics. Personalist regimes again have a strong positive and significant effect on the success of autocoups compared to democratic leaders. Dominant-party regimes also show a positive and marginally significant effect. However, a detailed examination reveals that about half of the successful autocoups in dominant-party regimes (9 out of 20) exhibit a personalist style, such as "party-personal-military" regimes.

This outcome is logical since personalist leaders are typically much more powerful than other types of leaders, making them more inclined and capable of overstaying in power.

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Table 3.3: Determinants of autocoup attempts and success (1945-2018)

	Autocoup Attempts	Autocoup Outcome
	(1)	(2)
Constant	−1.674***	−0.888
	(0.624)	(1.935)
Regime: Dominant-party	0.070	0.672*
	(0.145)	(0.402)
Military	−0.255	0.615
	(0.189)	(0.541)
Personalist	0.737***	1.609***
	(0.157)	(0.448)
GDP per capita	−0.009	0.064
	(0.011)	(0.045)
Economic trend	0.653	0.197
	(0.533)	(1.772)
Political stability	−0.044	0.126
	(0.036)	(0.130)
Age	−0.001	0.004
	(0.001)	(0.017)
Population(log)	−0.048	0.029
	(0.042)	(0.144)
Observations	1,028	102
Log Likelihood	−308.494	−43.651
Akaike Inf. Crit.	634.988	105.302

Note: *p$<$0.1; **p$<$0.05; ***p$<$0.01

Other factors play an insignificant role in determining the attempts and outcomes of auto-coups. This aligns with our conclusions on the determinants of classic coups. Both coups and autocoups are significantly affected by power dynamics. As power transitions involve the struggle between seizing and maintaining power, the balance of power status quo inevitably matters in both coups and autocoups. This also explains the high success rate of autocoups. Compared to power challengers, incumbents are in an obviously advantageous position. Incumbent leaders can use state power to their benefit, which is difficult to counteract. Even the abuse of power is often unchecked under a powerful leader's rule.

The empirical analysis of autocoups yields significant implications for real-world politics. In particular, the high overall success rate of autocoups highlights the vulnerability of democratic institutions to gradual erosion by incumbent leaders. The threshold for ousting or impeaching an incumbent leader through constitutional means is exceptionally high, with success often requiring more than a simple majority and substantial support across various sectors. Resorting to illegal means, such as a coup, presents even greater challenges due to high costs, severe consequences, and a low likelihood of success.

Conversely, political dynamics, whether in democracies or autocracies, tend to favour incumbents even when they act unconstitutionally. Incumbents can leverage state resources to achieve their political ambitions, benefiting from a high probability of success and minimal consequences in case of failure. This asymmetry in power and risk creates a concerning scenario: for incumbents who do not respect constitutional institutions, the opportunity to launch an autocoup appears sufficiently low-risk to warrant an attempt.

3.6   Summary

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of autocoups, focusing specifically on political events where incumbent leaders illegitimately extend their tenure in power. By refining the concept and distinguishing it from broader definitions such as 'self-coups', 'autogolpes', and

'executive takeovers', I introduce a novel dataset of autocoups spanning from 1945 to 2024. Through this more precise definition and dataset, this research expands the analysis of irregular power dynamics from irregular transition to irregular retention, offering a broader and more nuanced review of the phenomenon.

The findings reveal that personalist regimes are significantly more likely to experience autocoup attempts and succeed in these attempts compared to democracies. Dominant-party systems, often exhibiting personalist characteristics, also show an association with successful autocoups. While regime type significantly influences autocoups, other factors appear less impactful, mirroring classic coups where the balance of power is a more essential determinant. The high success rate of autocoups can be attributed to the inherent advantages incumbents possess, such as control over or abuse of state power and the difficulty of removing or impeaching them through legal or illegal means.

However, several limitations warrant consideration for future research. Firstly, the definition of an autocoup requires further commentary and discussion to gain wider acceptance in the academic community. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, some coding decisions may involve subjective judgements, particularly in borderline cases. Secondly, due to the nature of autocoups, which are less frequent than classic coups (491 coups versus 110 autocoups during the same period), the quantitative analysis cannot be conducted as a country-year variable as in coup studies. This raises the issue of choosing an appropriate base year. For instance, when analysing how GDP level or growth rate, political stability, or the age of the leader affects autocoup attempts, we must decide which year's value should be used. In this study, I chose the middle year of a leader's tenure or the year they staged the autocoup, but determining the most appropriate year requires further discussion and potentially sensitivity analyses.

Despite these limitations, this research significantly enhances our understanding of the mechanisms and motivations behind autocoups, contributing to the literature on political stability and democratic resilience. The findings highlight the vulnerability of political systems, particularly democracies, to erosion from within by incumbent leaders.

Future studies could build on this work by employing the dataset to explore more nuanced power dynamics or examine the long-term impacts of these events on political systems. Particularly fruitful areas for investigation include the relationship between autocoups and democratic backsliding, democratic breakdown, and the personalization of power. Additionally, comparative analyses between autocoups and traditional coups could yield insights into the evolving nature of power consolidation strategies in different political contexts.

In conclusion, this study not only provides a valuable resource for future research but also contributes to our understanding of the complex interplay between leadership, institutional structures, and political stability. As autocratic tendencies continue to challenge democratic norms globally, the insights gained from this analysis of autocoups become increasingly relevant for both scholars and policy-makers concerned with preserving and strengthening democratic institutions.

Chapter 4

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

Abstract

This chapter examines the relationship between methods of power acquisition and the longevity of leaders who assume power through irregular means, specifically coup-installed and autocoup leaders. The central hypothesis posits that the mode of accession significantly influences leader tenure. Employing Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models, this study provides robust evidence of divergent survival times between these two leader types. Findings reveal that coup-installed leaders face a substantially higher risk of removal from office compared to their autocoup counterparts. These results have significant implications for political stability and democratic processes, suggesting that the perceived low costs and high rewards associated with autocoups may incentivize incumbents to extend their tenure through this mechanism, potentially contributing to democratic backsliding. This research makes a notable contribution to the academic literature by leveraging a newly developed dataset on autocoups. By doing so,

it offers valuable insights into the dynamics of irregular leadership transitions and enhances our understanding of the complex interplay between power acquisition methods and political longevity.

4.1 Introduction

The longevity of political leaders has long captivated scholars and observers. Why do some rulers endure for decades while others are ousted within months or even days? This question has spurred extensive research in political science, primarily focusing on the survival of political leaders. However, within this broader framework, a specific subset of leaders—those who ascend to power through coups or extend their tenure through autocoups—has received comparatively less attention. Examining the tenures of these leaders is crucial, as it illuminates the dynamics of irregular leadership transitions and their implications for political stability and democratic processes.

Leaders who attain power through conventional means often follow predictable patterns of ascension, tenure, and departure. In contrast, those who rise through irregular channels, such as coups or autocoups, present more complex and intriguing cases for study. Archigos dataset underscores the prevalence of such irregular transitions: between 1945 and 2015, over half of leaders who assumed power irregularly (158 out of 308) also exited irregularly. This rate significantly surpasses that of leaders who accessed office through regular channels, of whom only 14.5% (213 out of 1,472) experienced irregular departures.

Coup-installed and autocoup leaders constitute a substantial portion of these irregular cases. Archigos dataset notes that of 374 leaders who exited irregularly, 246 (65.8%) were ousted through coups. Frantz and Stein (2016) further demonstrate 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 2024, of which 87 were successful.

Measuring the survival tenure of coup-installed and autocoup leaders presents 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 11 years) compared to coup-installed leaders (approxi-

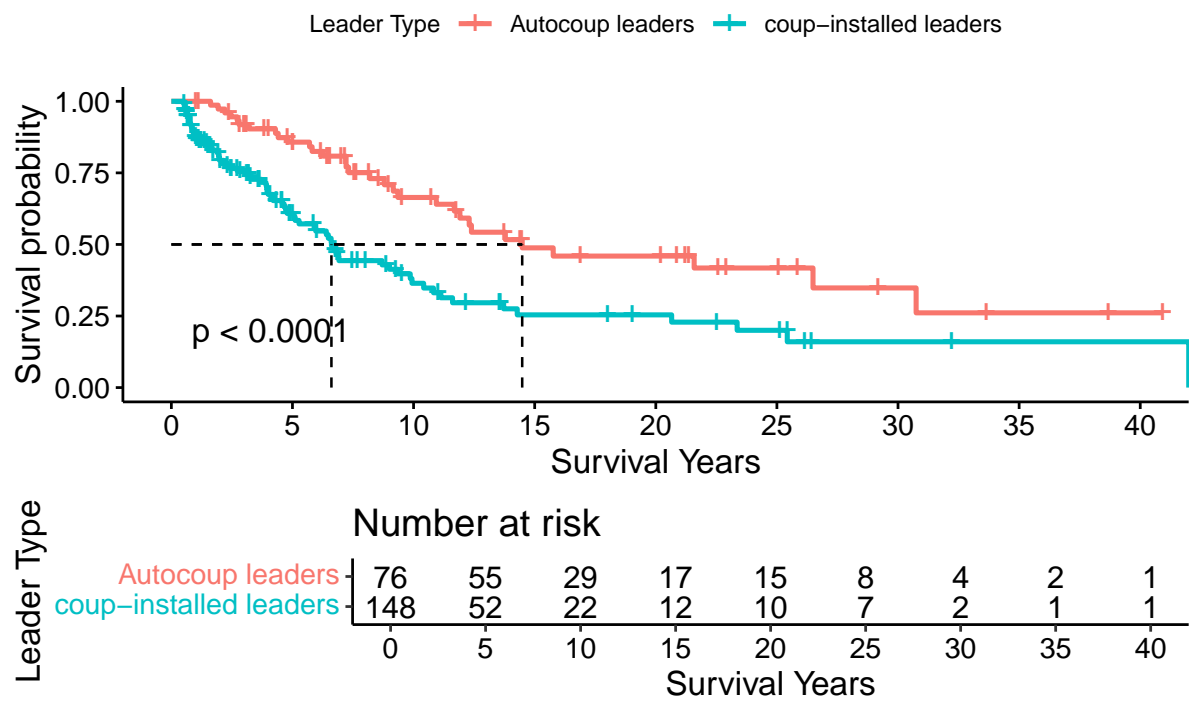mately 5.7 years), suggesting a potential tenure gap of over five years.

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

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 leaders. The survival curve for autocoup leaders consistently exceeds that of coup-installed leaders, indicating longer survival times and a reduced risk of ouster for autocoup 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 autocoup leaders. The analysis, employing Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models, supports this hypothesis, demonstrating that autocoup 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. My 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 autocoup 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 analyse 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 has been a central focus in political science research for decades, driven by the wide-ranging variations observed across regimes, countries, and historical periods. This field encompasses two interconnected aspects: regime survival and individual leader survival. 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.

These concepts often exhibit contrasting patterns. For instance, parliamentary democracies like Japan or the United Kingdom may experience prolonged periods of party dominance coupled with frequent leadership changes, whereas communist regimes typically demonstrate enduring party rule with more frequent leadership transitions. Presidential systems, such as the United States or many military regimes, tend to exhibit more frequent changes in both ruling party or junta and leader. This study specifically investigates the dynamics of individual leader

survival, focusing on factors influencing the duration of leaders' time in office.

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), while others aim to develop more generalizable theoretical frameworks explaining leader survival across different political systems (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Although 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 regimes, particularly between democracies and autocracies. Autocratic systems often feature closed leadership selection processes, restricted to a narrow pool of individuals such as royal families, military elites, or ruling party members. While some autocracies may hold elections, significant barriers to entry for legitimate challengers typically persist. Potential rivals may face threats like assassination, imprisonment, or exile. Moreover, the opacity of selection processes makes it difficult to assess genuine levels of public support compared to democracies. Consequently, 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. While regular leadership changes offer valuable insights, they provide limited opportunities to explore the dynamics of leader survival. In contrast, the study of irregular leaders, such as those who ascend to power through coups or overstay in office through autocoups, offers a more 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 have received considerable scholarly attention, with research examining coup prevention strategies, the impact of coups on leadership, and the subsequent actions of coup leaders. Existing research delves into strategies for thwarting coups (J. Powell 2017; Sudduth 2017; De Bruin 2020) and how leaders extend their tenures after surviving coup attempts (Easton and Siverson 2018). Sudduth (2017) examines post-coup actions of dictators, focusing on purge strategies, while Sudduth and Bell (2018) investigates how leaders' entry methods affect their removal in dictatorships.

However, a significant gap exists 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, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political survival in irregular leadership transitions.

4.3 Survival dynamics of autocoup and coup-installed leaders

The study of leadership survival in political systems presents inherent challenges due to the opacity and diverse mechanisms of power transitions. However, these challenges underscore the significance of this research, as it illuminates understudied dynamics in political leadership. While the survival of political leaders exhibits complexity and variation, it is not entirely devoid of patterns. Leaders of similar types often display significant comparability.

4.3.1 Key definitions and scope

Before delving into the comparison, it is essential to clarify several key terminologies:

- **Coup and autocoup**: These terms adhere to the definitions established in previous chapters.

- **Tenure length threshold**: To ensure meaningful analysis, this study focuses on leaders with substantial periods in power, applying a six-month threshold to both autocoup and coup-installed leaders.

- **Autocoup leader**: An incumbent leader who successfully uses illegitimate or unconstitutional means to extend their tenure in power.

- **Coup-installed leader**: The individual who assumes power after a successful coup, regardless of their role in the coup itself.

This study focuses on comparing the post-autocoup tenure of autocoup leaders with the post-coup tenure of coup-installed leaders, motivated by the relevance and similarity of these leader types in terms of illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability.

4.3.2 Challenges in power consolidation

Both autocoup and coup-installed leaders face distinct challenges in consolidating their power, primarily due to differences in the intensity of issues related to illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability. This disparity creates an uneven playing field in terms of power dynamics, with coup-installed leaders at a significant disadvantage. Table 4.1 compares the main features between autocoup and coup-installed leaders.

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 of this deficit differs:

- **Coup-installed leaders**: Their illegitimacy is explicit due to the open seizure of power.

- **Autocoup leaders**: They employ a deceptive strategy, manipulating legal processes to create a façade of democratic legitimacy.

Uncertainty

The irregular paths to power create uncertainty regarding their reigns and eventual departures. However, the levels of uncertainty differ.

Coup-installed leaders face three major uncertainties: Unclear who will assume leadership after the coup, uncertain tenure length, and ambiguity regarding future successors.

Autocoup leaders present a clearer picture: No ambiguity about who will rule after an autocoup, many seek to extend their rule indefinitely or incrementally.

Instability

The awareness of shaky legitimacy and persistent uncertainty breeds insecurity and a sense of crisis.

Coup-installed leaders must reshape power dynamics and often purge potential adversaries. They need to create a new equilibrium, often disrupting established structures. They also face potential backlash even from close allies and hence must compromise with internal or external power challengers.

Autocoup leaders encounter fewer abrupt changes in their regimes. They face less pressure to dismantle existing ruling paradigms and have more time to implement changes gradually.

4.3.3 Empirical evidence and hypothesis

Empirical evidence supports the disadvantage faced by coup-installed leaders. Data reveals a correlation between the frequency of coup attempts in a country and the likelihood of future coups. Over a third of coups occur in the top ten countries with the most attempts since 1950 (Table 2.1). The average survival period following an autocoup is approximately five years longer than that of coup-installed leaders (Figure 4.1).

The distinct challenges faced by autocoup leaders and coup-installed leaders in consolidating power create a self-perpetuating cycle that influences their tenure length. Coup-installed leaders, facing greater challenges, struggle to attract and retain strong support, making them more vulnerable to internal and external challenges. Conversely, autocoup leaders, often benefiting from a veneer of legitimacy and a stronger initial position, are better able to consolidate power and attract supporters, leading to potentially longer tenures.

Based on these observations, 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.

4.4 Research design

This study employs survival analysis to test the hypothesis that autocoup leaders have longer survival times in office compared to coup-installed leaders. The research design utilizes Cox models to analyze the survival tenures of these two types of leaders, accounting for multiple factors that may influence their time in power.

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 as it allows for the estimation of multiple factors' impacts. While it does not directly estimate the duration of tenure in office, it evaluates 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:** 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, Xi Jinping assumed power in 2013 and removed term limits in 2018. His original legitimate tenure was set to end in 2023, so his survival time begins in 2023, marking the start of his post-autocoup tenure. The survival time concludes on the day the leader exits office, applicable to both coup-installed and autocoup leaders.

- **End point status:** This variable 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.

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

Control variables include economic performance, political stability, population size, and the leader's age, which are consistent with the autocoup analysis in Chapter 3.

4.5   Results and discussion

4.5.1   Model results

Using the `survival` package in R (Therneau 2024), I present the regression results for both the Cox Proportional Hazards (Cox PH) model and the time-dependent Cox model in Table 4.2.

Both the Cox PH model and the time-dependent Cox model analyses revealed a statistically significant association between leadership type and the hazard of removal from power. Since time-dependent Cox model use the control variables which change over time, I interpret the main findings based on time-dependent model.

Coup-installed leaders were found to have a hazard ratio of 2.23 in the time-dependent model compared to autocoup leaders (reference group), assuming all other variables in the

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[1,2]	SE[2]	N	Event N	HR[1,2]	SE[2]
Leader Type								
Autocoup leaders	76	31	1.00	—	737	29	1.00	—
Coup-installed leaders	148	73	2.71***	0.252	853	73	2.23***	0.246
GDP Growth Trend	224	104	1.94	1.08	1,590	102	0.20*	0.981
GDP per capita	224	104	0.97*	0.020	1,590	102	0.95**	0.023
Population: log	224	104	0.98	0.083	1,590	102	0.90	0.079
Polity 5	224	104	0.99	0.025	1,590	102	1.01	0.023
Political stability	224	104	1.00	0.053	1,590	102	1.11*	0.049
Age	224	104	1.01	0.010	1,590	102	1.00	0.011

[1]*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
[2]HR = Hazard Ratio, SE = Standard Error

model are held constant. This suggests that coup-installed leaders face a significantly greater risk of removal from power compared to autocoup leaders. At any given time during their tenure, coup-installed leaders are 2.23 times more likely to be ousted from power compared to autocoup leaders, all else being equal in the model.

The control variables perform differently in the two models. Economic level (GDP per capita) exhibits statistically significant effects in both models. In the time-dependent model, the hazard ratio of 0.95 indicates that for each unit increase in GDP per capita (measured in units of $10,000), the hazard (or risk) of being ousted at any given time is reduced by 5%, assuming all other variables in the model are held constant.

GDP growth trend demonstrates a more substantial effect in reducing the risk of coups. Specifically, a 1 percentage point higher economic growth trend is associated with an 80% reduction in the risk of being ousted, although this effect is only statistically significant at the 10% level. This suggests a possible trend where positive economic performance might mitigate the risk of removal from power, but the evidence is not robust enough to confirm this conclusively.

Political stability, as measured by the violence index, shows that a 1-point increase in the

index correlates with an 11% higher risk of being ousted. However, this effect is also only statistically significant at the 10% level, indicating a weaker but potentially important relationship between increased violence and the risk of removal from office.

4.5.2 Discussion

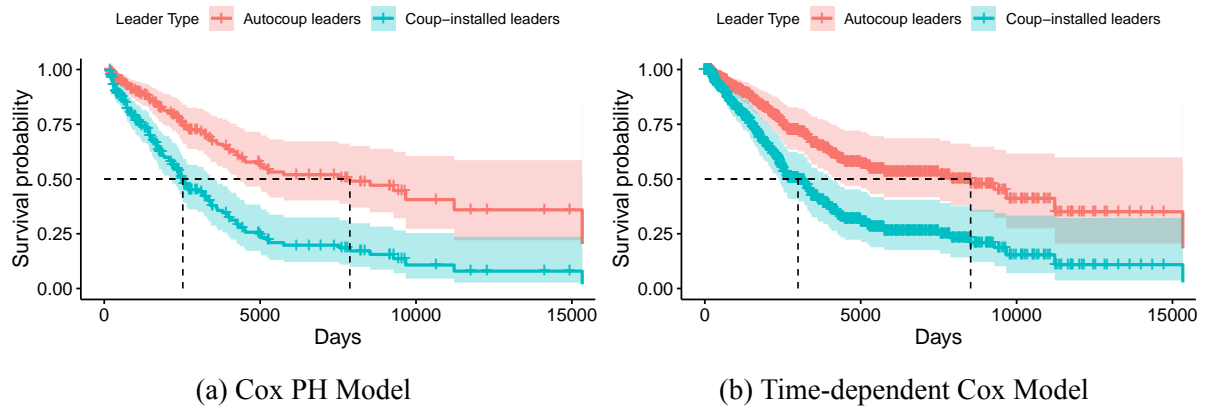(a) Cox PH Model

(b) Time-dependent Cox Model

Figure 4.2: Survival curves for Cox Model

The survival curves depicted in Figure 4.2 illustrate the survival rates for leaders of both types. Both the Cox PH model and the time-dependent Cox model produce similar plots. Notably, the survival curve for coup-installed leaders exhibits a significantly lower trajectory compared to that of autocoup leaders. The steeper drop at the early stage for coup-installed leaders indicates they are more likely to be ousted shortly after assuming power. Additionally, the survival curve for coup-installed leaders crosses the median survival line much earlier (about 3,000 days) than that of autocoup leaders (about 8,500 days). This disparity suggests that autocoup leaders tend to remain in power for longer durations than their coup-installed counterparts.

Figure 4.3 displays the hazard ratios and corresponding 95% confidence intervals for the variables incorporated in the Cox model. Both the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model and the time-dependent model produce similar plots, reinforcing the robustness of the findings. Key points to note include:

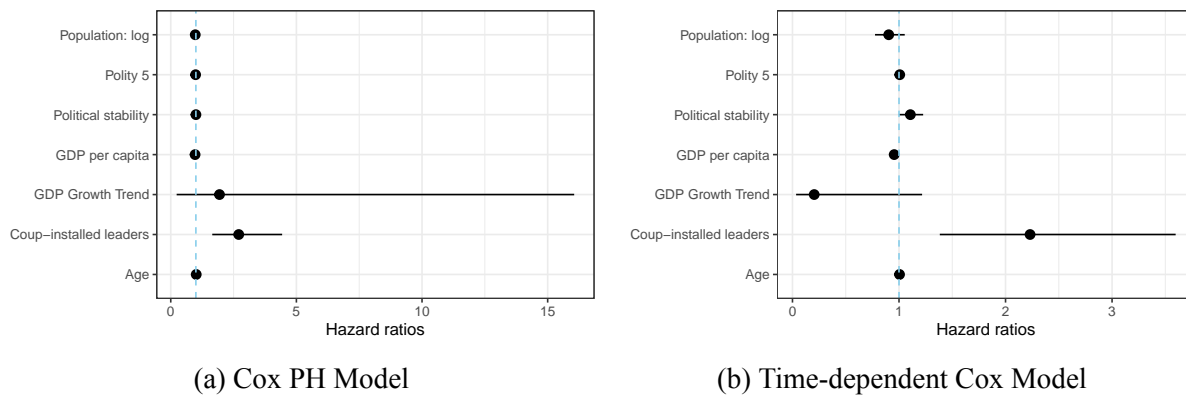(a) Cox PH Model   (b) Time-dependent Cox Model

Figure 4.3: Hazard ratios and 95% CIs for Leader Ousting

- The closer the hazard ratio (represented by the dots) is to 1, the less impact the variable has on the risk of being ousted. A hazard ratio of 1 indicates no effect.

- The whiskers extending from the dots represent the 95% confidence intervals. If these whiskers cross the vertical blue line at 1, it indicates that the variable is not statistically significant at the 5% level.

- The hazard ratio for coup-installed leaders is significantly greater than 1 and statistically significant at the 5% level. This indicates that coup-installed leaders face a substantially higher risk of being ousted compared to autocoup leaders.

- Most other variables have hazard ratios close to 1, suggesting that a one-unit increase in these variables does not significantly affect the risk of being ousted.

- Although the hazard ratio for GDP growth trend is considerably less than 1 in the time-dependent model, indicating a potential protective effect, it is not statistically significant at the 5% level. However, it is statistically significant at the 10% level, suggesting that better economic performance may help to consolidate the rule of the incumbents to some extent, albeit the evidence is not as strong.

4.5.3 Assessing the proportional hazards assumption

Assessing the proportional hazards assumption is crucial for the validity of the Cox model results. To evaluate this, we used the chi-square test based on Schoenfeld residuals to determine whether the covariate effects remain constant (proportional) over time. Although the Cox PH model violates the proportional hazards assumption, our primary analysis relies on the time-dependent Cox model, which does not show strong evidence of violating the proportional hazards assumption for any covariate. The global p-value of 0.416 is much greater than the 5% significance level, indicating that the proportional hazards assumption is reasonably met for the time-dependent Cox model.

4.6 Summary

This chapter examined the survival durations of political leaders who come to power through irregular means, specifically coups and autocoups. I hypothesized that the mode of accession significantly influences leader tenure. Employing survival analysis techniques, including the Cox proportional hazards model and a time-dependent Cox model, I found strong evidence that autocoup leaders generally enjoy longer tenures than coup-installed leaders.

The findings revealed a significant difference in average tenure, with post-autocoup leaders averaging approximately 11 years in power compared to 5.6 years for coup-installed leaders. The time-dependent Cox model further indicated that coup-installed leaders are 2.23 times more likely to be ousted from power at any given time compared to autocoup leaders, all else being equal.

These results highlight the importance of understanding the phenomenon of autocoups, where leaders extend their rule by manipulating legal frameworks. Due to the relative ease and potential benefits of autocoups, this method of power retention might incentivize more leaders to employ it. Consequently, democratic backsliding could become more prevalent as autocoups

weaken democratic institutions and constitutional norms, particularly in nascent democracies or those transitioning from autocracy.

This study contributes to the field of leadership survival by demonstrating that the mode of accession significantly impacts leader tenure, a factor previously under-explored in the literature. By utilizing both Cox models, the research offers robust analytical techniques for studying political leadership survival and provides strong evidence of divergent tenure lengths between these two types of irregular-entry leaders.

However, limitations exist. The study relies heavily on the autocoup dataset collected and coded by the author. The concept and data itself are relatively novel within academia. Future research should refine and establish wider recognition for the term "autocoup," leading to more accurate and comprehensive data collection efforts. Expanding the dataset to include more cases and integrating it with data on other irregular leadership transitions could yield a more holistic understanding of political survival in such contexts.

Overall, this chapter underscores the need for more nuanced approaches to studying political tenure and the mechanisms of irregular power retention, contributing valuable insights into the dynamics of political stability and the risks associated with different forms of non-democratic leadership succession.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Main findings

This study delves into the dynamics and implications of irregular power transitions, with a particular focus on coups and autocoups, illuminating the complex interplay between incumbents and challengers vying for power.

Firstly, the analyses reveal 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 leaders and power challengers, which is largely determined by the regime type. I find that military regimes, despite having more control over their own military forces, face a higher risk of coups compared to dominant-party regimes.

Secondly, the study introduces a refined concept: the autocoup. Defined as an incumbent leader's refusal to relinquish power as mandated, this research distinguishes autocoups from relevant terms like self-coups or incumbent takeover. Based on this definition, I 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 coup-installed leaders and autocoup leaders. The results indicate that coup-installed leaders face a significantly higher risk of removal compared to autocoup leaders who enjoy a longer extended tenure.

5.2 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:

- **Regression of global democracy levels:** This study elucidates why global freedom has declined for the 18th consecutive year (Freedom House 2024). 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.

- **Prevalence 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 dialogue[1]. Although this pressure might not be effective in every case, it showcases the potential influence of the international community in discouraging future autocoup attempts.

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 explore data harmonization techniques for more robust comparisons.

- **Democratic backsliding:** While this study establishes a connection between irregular

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[1]While 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.

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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