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

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All errors and faults are my own.

Abstract

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

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

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

This work contributes significantly to the political science literature by:

- Defining key concepts: It establishes a clear definition of autocoups, a previously understudied phenomenon.

- Introducing a novel dataset: This dataset enables researchers to conduct more comprehensive quantitative analyses of autocoups.

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

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

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research question

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

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

1.2 Analyses on coups and autocoups in a general framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

very similar since a coup is launched to replace the current leader, while an autocoup is staged to replace the future leader.

1.3   Academic Contributions

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

Our contributions are threefold:

- **Emphasis on power dynamics and regime types**: We highlight the significant role of power dynamics, particularly the influence of regime types, in determining the success and frequency of coup attempts. Our analysis underscores how the expected chances of coup success motivate such attempts, with military regimes being notably susceptible.

- **Refined definition and novel dataset for autocoups:** We introduce a refined definition of autocoups and develop a novel dataset covering events from 1945 to 2022. This enables a comparative analysis with classic coups, providing clearer insights into the nature and impact of autocoups on political systems.

- **Survival analysis of leaders from different entry modes:** By applying survival analysis to existing coup data and our new autocoup dataset, we demonstrate how different modes of entry into power significantly affect leader survival. Our findings reveal that leaders who come to power through coups typically have shorter tenures and face higher removal risks compared to those who extend their rule through autocoups.

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

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

1.4 Overview of the thesis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

Power Dynamics and Coup Attempts: A Selection Mechanism Analysis

2.1 Introduction

Coups, 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, 252), occur with varying frequency across countries, with some experiencing them more often than others. According to GIC dataset, Latin American countries such as Bolivia witnessed 23 coups between 1950 and 1984, while Argentina experienced 20 during a similar time frame. However, Mexico's authoritarian period from 1917 to 2000 saw no coups at all. In Africa, Sudan endured 17 coups between 1955 and 2023, whereas South Africa has not experienced any coup since 1950. Similar patterns are observed in the Middle East and South Asia.

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

analysis (ibid.).

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

Reviewing previously proposed variables of coups, it is evident that all focus on pre-coup conditions, with no consideration given to post-coup factors. This means more attention is paid to factors observable before a coup, such as military force or spending, economic performance, political stability, and previous coups.

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

However, coups are high-stakes gambles with an all-or-nothing nature. Due to its illegality, the consequences of a failed coup can be severe, with perpetrators risking imprisonment, exile, or even death. In some instances, repercussions extend to their families, which means coup plotters would not take the risk without some assurance of success.

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

The low occurrence rate and high success rate clearly indicate that the initiation of coups is highly selective. In other words, the likelihood of a coup occurring depends greatly on its probability of success. However, the probability of success is not a factor that can be observed before a coup, at least not to outsiders and researchers, but coup plotters surely have more information on the possible outcome of coups.

Since coup plotters meticulously assess potential outcomes before staging a coup, coup researchers should also analyse what factors might affect the outcome of coups. Otherwise, we ran the risk of selection bias. When considering the factors that most affect the outcomes of coups, the current literature predominantly identifies military power as the decisive factor in the success of coups. Ultimately, military power is determined by the power structure within the regime.

Unlike coup plotters, who have a clearer understanding of power structures and dynamics, including their supporters, followers, bystanders, and opponents, researchers are not able to accurately observe this information. However, we can analyse the most relevant factors which determine the balance of power and are observable to us. This leads us to **regime type**, which reflects the distribution of power within a government, encompassing who controls the military, sets policy, and appoints officials. Since coup plotters consider the balance of power within

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the regime before acting, this study argues that regime type plays a crucial role in shaping coup attempts. Analysing which regime types are more susceptible to coups can offer valuable insights.

We employ a **double probit model with sample selection** to address the selection bias. This model allows us to analyze both the factors influencing coup success and the factors related to the decision to initiate a coup attempt in the first place.

This study contributes to the literature in two key ways. First, it emphasizes the importance of focusing on expected success rates as a driver of coup attempts, offering a more targeted approach compared to past studies. Second, it highlights the significance of regime type as a factor influencing coup likelihood, even when researchers lack perfect knowledge of a regime's internal power dynamics.

The subsequent section (Section 2) explores the dynamics of coup attempts and their outcomes. Section 3 delves into the research design, outlining the methodology and variables used in the analysis. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings. Finally, Section 5 concludes the chapter by summarizing the key insights and their implications.

2.2 Dynamics of coup attempts and outcomes

Coup attempts are driven by a complex interplay of factors, including motivations (**disposition**) and the resources and opportunities available to succeed (**capability**).

2.2.1 Motivations for coups

This section focuses on the motivations that compel challengers to undertake coups. We can categorize coup motivations into three main types:

Personal Ambition: Personal ambition is a significant motivator for the majority of coup plotters, driven by the allure of absolute power, prestige, and wealth. The prospect of seizing absolute power provides an unparalleled opportunity to shape national policies, control resources,

and make significant decisions without constraints. The pursuit of prestige and recognition, along with the potential for immense economic gain and wealth, further incentivizes individuals. Additionally, the desire to leave a lasting legacy and make a historical impact can compel individuals to undertake the risky venture of staging a coup.

Purported National Interest: Sometimes coups are justified as necessary interventions to address national crises, uphold the constitution, or facilitate a transition to democracy. While the motivations behind such claims require scrutiny, genuine examples do exist. For instance, the 2010 coup in Niger ousted President Tandja, who attempted an unconstitutional third term by dissolving the opposing court and calling a self-serving referendum (Ginsburg and Elkins 2019).

Self-Preservation: In some cases, coups serve as pre-emptive strikes against perceived threats. Coup leaders might not necessarily seek power, but rather fear elimination or political persecution by the incumbent regime. An example is Idi Amin's 1971 coup against Ugandan President Obote, who was attempting to remove Amin from his military command position (Sudduth 2017).

These motivations are often most prevalent in autocratic regimes, where justifications under the guise of national interest or self-preservation can be used to mask personal agendas. Stable democracies rarely face the same level of constitutional crises or political persecution that might necessitate a coup. However, new established democracies can be vulnerable to instability, economic downturns, and democratic backsliding, creating opportunities for coup plotters to exploit these weaknesses and justify their actions.

Despite the potential motivations outlined above, coups remain relatively uncommon, occurring in only about 4% of country-years since 1950. The main reason is that coup perpetrators face inherent disadvantages compared to incumbent leaders, highlighting the importance of capability. Even the most motivated plotters need the resources and opportunities to succeed. The next section will explore the concept of capability in greater detail.

2.2.2   Capability for coups

For coup plotters, the decision to act hinges not only on their motivations but also on a calculated assessment of their chances of success. Several factors can influence this threshold:

- **Military Strength**: A clear advantage in military capabilities compared to the incumbent regime significantly increases the odds of a successful coup.

- **Internal Divisions within the Regime**: Existing fractures within the government's power structure can present opportunities for coup plotters to exploit weaknesses and gain support from disgruntled factions.

- **Public Support**: Widespread discontent with the incumbent regime, especially within the military or key sectors of society, can create an environment ripe for a successful coup.

- **Foreign Backing**: External support from powerful nations can provide resources, legitimacy, and even direct military intervention to tip the scales in favour of the coup plotters.

The high success rate of coups since 1950, as shown in Table 2.1, might suggest that coups are not particularly difficult to succeed. However, it is important to consider selection bias. We only observe attempted coups, not the numerous dispositions and conspiracies that never came to light. Analysing launched coup data alone can be misleading.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of coup attempts and their likelihood, we need to move beyond historical data and employ a theoretical framework that accounts for selection bias. This framework will allow us to analyze the factors influencing both the success of coups and the decision to attempt a coup in the first place. The next section will delve into such a framework and its implications for our understanding of coup attempts.

2.2.3 Framework of coup success

An oft-cited framework (Gassebner, Gutmann, and Voigt 2016; Aidt and Leon 2019) provides a structured approach to assess the disposition and capability of coup attempts by evaluating the anticipated benefits for coup plotters. The expected pay-off of coups can be represented by the equation:

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

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

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

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

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

However, these challenges do not render the framework useless. Firstly, its core logic remains valuable, offering insights into how coup plotters might assess the return and cost of their actions. Secondly, given the significant and elusive nature of precise values for **B** and **C**, they

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

can be treated as roughly equal. Consequently, there is no need to fret over how to measure and compare these values precisely. Instead, we can shift our focus from **B** and **C**, to the probability of success (p), simplifying Equation 2.2 to:

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

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

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

This leads us to the next crucial question: What factors determine coup success, influencing the very decision to attempt one? We will discuss it in the next section.

2.2.4   Regime types and power dynamics

The high success rate in historical data is merely a post-event statistical description, not indicative of the probability of any specific coup. Importantly, coup plotters do not rely on past success rates as their guide; instead, they assess their chances based on their unique context.

Military strength undeniably plays a critical role in coup attempts. Control of the armed forces offers a significant advantage, explaining why military coups dominate discussions on the topic. Much of the literature treats "coup" and "military coup" interchangeably, with scholars like J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011) finding that half of 14 studies attribute coups solely to

the military. Consequently, significant focus, from both researchers and policy-makers, centres on the balance of power between civilian and military authorities, or among military factions themselves. Strategies like "keeping the military content" (Aidt and Leon 2019) or "providing them with resources" (Huntington 1991) aim to reduce military intervention. Empirical research informs coup-proofing strategies that either decrease the military's desire for coups or raise barriers to success (Leon 2013; J. Powell et al. 2018).

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

Moreover, military force is not the only factor shaping the balance of power. Internal divisions within the ruling elites, public support, and foreign backing also play important roles. Since the balance of power is not a clearly observable variable, especially difficult to measure for outsiders and academic scholars, we can shift our focus from who controls power in a specific context to what factors shape the balance of power. This leads us to regime type, as the classification of regime type is based mainly on the power structure. For example, "…definition of regimes emphasizes the rules that identify the group from which leaders can come and determine who influences leadership choice and policy" (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014, 314). We will leverage this framework to categorize autocracies based on leadership origin and decision-making, classifying regimes into three main categories: military, personalist, and

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

dominant-party.

- **Military Regimes:** Characterized by the dominance of a junta—a group of military officers who control the regime's power structure, including leadership selection and policy formulation. Examples include the Brazilian regime (1964-1985), the Argentine regime (1976-1983), and the Salvadoran regime (1948-1984) (Geddes 1999).

- **Personalist Regimes:** Power resides with a single, charismatic leader who controls policy, the military, and succession. Regimes like Rafael Trujillo's in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961), Idi Amin's in Uganda (1971-1979), and Jean-Bédel Bokassa's in the Central African Republic (1966-1979) exemplify personalist rule (ibid.).

- **Dominant-Party Regimes:** Power rests within a well-organized ruling party, with leaders acting as its representatives. The party structure and ideology foster internal cohesion and a long-term vision. Examples include the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico, the Revolutionary Party of Tanzania (CCM), and Leninist parties in various Eastern European countries (ibid.).

The critical distinction between regime types lies in the unique power balance established during their seizure of power, often through irregular and violent means, frequently involving military confrontations. This power struggle typically results in the emergence of the most competent group—be it a military junta, a political party, or a strongman—as the core leadership. Furthermore, the early stages of new regimes are often marked by internal purges to consolidate power and eliminate potential rivals (Sudduth 2017; Roessler 2011).

Following these external challenges and internal purges, new power dynamics emerge in three primary forms: dominant-party regimes, personalist regimes, and military regimes. These contrasting power dynamics significantly influence a regime's susceptibility to coups. Dominant-party regimes, characterized by a well-organized party with clear ideology, hierarchy, and discipline, exhibit the greatest resilience against coups due to their institutionalized

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structures and unified leadership. Personalist regimes, where power centers around a single strong leader, are relatively stable during the leader's tenure. However, they face a higher risk of coups, particularly due to the lack of clear succession plans and vulnerabilities associated with the leader's personal weaknesses, health issues, and finite lifespan. Military regimes, characterized by power struggles within a junta, are the most vulnerable to coups. The absence of a clear final authority in military regimes often leads to internal conflicts, and the presence of multiple military factions increases the likelihood of resolving disputes through force, making these regimes the least stable. Table 2.2 summarises the key characteristics of the three main regime types.

These contrasting power dynamics significantly influence a regime's susceptibility to coups. As Table 2.3 confirms, military regimes, despite representing only 5.6% of country-years, experience a disproportionate share of coups, accounting for over 22% of all occurrences. Personalist regimes face a similarly high coup risk, constituting 23% of coups while representing only 13% of country-years. Conversely, dominant-party regimes, with their institutionalized structures and unified leadership, exhibit the greatest resilience. They represent 22.6% of country-years but account for only 16.7% of coups. The column "Coup Likelihood" clearly illustrates the varying risks: military regimes have the highest likelihood at 17.2%, followed by personalist regimes at 7.7%, and dominant-party regimes at 3.2% (excluding *Other* regime types).

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

Table 2.2: Main features of different types of regimes

Regime Type	Power Con-centration	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

Table 2.3: Regime types and coups since 1950

Regime Type	Country Year	Share	Num of Coups	Percent of Coups	Success Rate	Coup 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 (as discussed previously), success rates tend to be surprisingly consistent, hovering around 50% (as shown in Table 2.3). This suggests that coup attempts are not random acts, but rather strategically planned and undertaken only when the odds of success appear favourable. A standard statistical model would not account for this selectivity, potentially leading to biased results.

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

- **Selection Equation (Stage 1):** This stage analyses the factors influencing whether a coup attempt occurs in a particular regime. The primary explanatory variable here is regime type, as previously discussed. Additional control variables may also be included, denoted by **XB**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The observed outcome y_2 is:

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

The probability equations is:

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

2.3.2   Variables

- Dependent variable

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

- Key Independent Variable: Regime Type

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

- Control variables

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

Economic Performance: We measure economic performance using the current-trend (CT) ratio developed by Krishnarajan (2019). This ratio compares a country's current GDP per capita to the average GDP per capita over the previous five years. A higher CT ratio indicates stronger economic performance. We use GDP per capita data (in constant 2017 international 1000 dollars, PPP) from the V-Dem dataset by Fariss et al. (2022), lagged by one year to reflect the prior year's economic impact. For a country i at year t, the CT ratio is calculated as follows:

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

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

Previous coups: The number of previous coups in a country is included in the first-stage (selection) model to assess its influence on the likelihood of a coup attempt. However, it is excluded from the second-stage model (outcome) because the number of past coups may not directly impact the outcome of a specific coup attempt. Recognizing that previous coups from a long time ago might not significantly affect the current situation, I ran another regression using the time distance since the last coup instead of the number of previous coups for comparison. This approach accounts for the diminishing impact of past events over time, providing a potentially more accurate assessment of how historical coup activity influences the likelihood of current coup attempts.

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). We 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.

2.4.1 The Selection Model: Coup Attempts

In the selection model (Column 1), 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. Control variables also exhibit effects in expected directions. Stronger economic performance, indicated by higher economic growth trends and GDP per

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

capita levels, correlates with a lower risk of coup attempts. This suggests that better economic conditions and relatively higher living standards reduce incentives for coups. Political violence shows a positive and significant effect on coup attempts, 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.

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

Term	Contrast	AME[1]	Ratio Percent
Regime: 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

While interpreting probit model results directly is not intuitive, Table 2.5, generated using the `marginaleffects` package (Arel-Bundock, Greifer, and Heiss NaN), helps clarify the regime effects. The Average Marginal Effect (AME) column shows changes in probability when a variable increases by one unit (for numeric variables) or compared to a reference category (for categorical variables). In the selection equation of Model 1, 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. For GDP per capita, the marginal effect of -0.002 suggests that a unit increase ($1000) reduces the probability of coup attempts by 0.2 pp under average conditions.

The Ratio Percent column displays the relative change in percentage terms. While a 7 pp increase might seem modest, it is actually substantial. Given that the average probability of a coup attempt in dominant-party regimes is approximately 2.53%, the 7 pp increase means military regimes are about 277.7% more likely to encounter coups than dominant-party regimes—more than two times higher. Similarly, personalist regimes show a 2.4 pp higher probability, about 94% more likely compared to dominant-party regimes, nearly doubling the risk. Monarchies display a positive effect similar to personalist regimes, reflecting that monarchies are essentially a subset of personalist regimes with royal titles.

Control variables, however, show weak effects in predicting coup attempts. None of their marginal effects reach 1 pp in probability, and all are less than 7% in ratio, which is negligible given the baseline probabilities.

These results align with our theoretical expectations regarding internal power struggles within military juntas and succession vulnerabilities in personalist regimes, underscoring the importance of regime structure in understanding coup likelihood.

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

Term	Contrast	AME[1]	Ratio Percent
Regime: 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
NA	mean(+1)	-0.002	-5.050

Model 2 employs years since the last coup instead of the number of previous coups. Due to most countries not experiencing coups, an interaction term between previous coups (as a binary variable indicating presence or absence of coups) and years since the last coup is used. Generally, Model 2 shows results in the same direction as Model 1, albeit with relatively lower coefficients (Table 2.6).

2.4.2 The Outcome Model: Coup Success

The outcome model (Columns 2 and 4 in Table 2.4) reveals 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.

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.

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

2.4.3 Discussion

The ρ values of 0.898 in Model 1 and 0.386 in Model 2, significant at 1% and 10% levels respectively, are crucial parameters in the sample selection model. These values represent the correlation between the error terms of the selection equation (coup attempts) and the outcome equation (coup outcomes). A high and significant ρ suggests that unobserved factors influenc-

ing the likelihood of a coup attempt are strongly correlated with those influencing the likelihood of a successful coup. Practically, this indicates that the selection model is appropriate and that accounting for selection bias (i.e., the fact that only coups with high chances of success will be attempted) is critical for obtaining unbiased estimates. The high ρ value indicates that the same underlying conditions that lead to a coup attempt also affect its success, underscoring the importance of considering both stages in the analysis.

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

The observed disparity between coup attempt rates and success rates across regimes points towards selection bias, further validating the use of the sample selection model. This model acknowledges that coups are not random events, but rather strategic actions undertaken when the odds appear favourable.

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

2.4.4 Implications

The finding that regime type plays a crucial role in determining coup attempts, while not surprising, has received relatively little attention as a primary research focus. However, even if this result is acknowledged more widely by academics or politicians, it is unlikely to be imple-

mented as a coup-proofing strategy.

Firstly, regime type is not a policy that can be easily altered. It is largely established during the formation of the regime, resulting from power struggles within the ruling group. As previously discussed, there are specific reasons why one regime type is chosen over another. Regimes established through irregular means are unlikely to transition to a more stable regime type peacefully and smoothly.

Secondly, even if a particular regime type is more effective at preventing coups, this may hold little significance for those in power. Autocratic leaders often prioritize personal power and survival over long-term regime stability, as more stable systems may not benefit them personally. Democratic norms and constraints may be seen as obstacles to their goals rather than as safeguards against instability.

While this conclusion might seem discouraging, it is not entirely pessimistic. The power game involves not only the top leaders but also the majority of other elites. While top leaders may prioritize personal gains, other elites, including the military, economic elites, and civil society, have a vested interest in a stable political environment. Therefore, it is possible to reach a consensus for a political system that is less susceptible to coups, potentially benefiting a broader spectrum of society.

2.5   Conclusion

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

The findings suggest that regime type plays a significant role in the likelihood of coup at-

tempts. Military and personalist regimes, characterized by weaker institutional frameworks and higher vulnerability during power transitions, are more susceptible to coups. This underscores the importance of supporting initiatives that strengthen constitutional institutions within these regimes.

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

The study shows that the most efficient coup-proofing strategies involve the establishment of strong institutions. In contrast, purges, random shifting of military officers, or increased military expenditures are less effective. However, few autocratic leaders, particularly dictators or military juntas, are willing to institutionalize their regimes, as such reforms may constrain their power or shorten their terms. While institutions benefit the regime, they do not necessarily benefit the leaders themselves.

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

Chapter 3

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

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 takeover, 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 2022. Using the newly compiled dataset, the research includes three types of case studies that provide qualitative insights into the dynamics of autocoups. Additionally, an empirical analysis on 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, personalization, 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, encompassing both irregular entries and exits from office, has long been a central topic in political science. However, one form of irregular power transition - the incumbent leader's refusal to relinquish power - remains relatively understudied. This scenario, where leaders overstay their mandated term limits for one or more terms, or even indefinitely, lacks a universally accepted term in the existing literature. To address this gap, this study adopts the term "autocoup" to denote this phenomenon.

Coups, being the primary form of irregular power transitions, have received significant scholarly attention. Research by Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009) indicate that coups account for a substantial portion of such transitions, with roughly two-thirds (65.8%) of 374 irregular exits occurring through coups. Additionally, Frantz and Stein (2016) demonstrate that coups are the most common form of exit in autocracies, surpassing regular transitions by a third.

However, while coups were once frequent, recent decades have witnessed a decline in their occurrence (Bermeo 2016; C. L. Thyne and Powell 2019). Conversely, autocoups appear to be on the rise, particularly since the Cold War's end (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins 2010; Baturo 2014; Versteeg et al. 2020). Despite the significant political impact and rising prevalence of autocoups, their study lags behind that of classical coups, which are extensively documented due to their historical frequency (C. L. Thyne and Powell 2019).

This research aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the understudied phenomenon of autocoups as they are at least equally important and warrant comprehensive analysis. Firstly, autocoups are typically accompanied by a disregard for the rule of law, weakened institutions, and potential democratic backsliding or authoritarian personalization. Secondly, like traditional coups, successful autocoups increase the risk of future irregular power transitions. Research indicates that since 1945, approximately 62 percent of leaders who overstayed their term limits through autocoups in non-democratic countries were either ousted or assassinated while in office (Baturo 2019). Thirdly, failed autocoups often trigger instability that fuels protests, vio-

lence, and even civil wars.

Despite their significance, autocoups are understudied compared to traditional coups. Although several relevant concepts and terminologies such as self-coups, autocoups, autogolpes, incumbent takeovers, executive aggrandizement, overstay, and continuismo have been proposed and discussed (Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019; Baturo and Tolstrup 2022), there is no clear and widely accepted term to describe these events. Different terms are often used interchangeably or inconsistently, leading to confusion. Moreover, due to the lack of clear concepts, the collection of autocoup datasets is still in its early stages compared to the rich datasets of traditional coups. Hence, the limited existing studies on autocoups have primarily relied on case studies (Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b; Antonio 2021; Pion-Berlin, Bruneau, and Goetze 2022), with few focusing on quantitative analyses.

To fully understand irregular political leadership transitions and survival, we need to redefine and clarify the term "autocoup" first. Based on a clear definition, we can introduce an autocoup dataset that can be used for further empirical analysis. This study aims to address these knowledge gap surrounding autocoups and contribute in three areas. First, it clarifies the terminology by defining autocoups based mainly on power extension. Second, it introduces a new dataset of autocoups since 1945 based on this refined definition. Finally, the research utilizes this dataset for a quantitative analysis of the factors that influence leaders' decisions to attempt autocoups.

The subsequent section, based on a comprehensive review of the definitions of power expansions and power extensions, proposes a precise definition of autocoups. This will be followed by an introduction to the new autocoup dataset in Section 3. In Section 4 and 5, I will explain the determinants of autocoup attempts through two case studies and demonstrate how the novel autocoup dataset collected in this study can be used in empirical analysis. Finally, I will conclude this chapter in Section, summarizing the key insights gained from the study and suggesting avenues for future research.

3.2 Autocoups: A literature review and clarification of definitions

Compared to coups, which are clearly defined and widely accepted as illegal attempts by elites within the ruling group to overthrow the leadership (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011), the concept of autocoups (also known as self-coups or autogolpes) suffers from a lack of consistency and clarity. This ambiguity hinders our understanding and study of a critical phenomenon in irregular power transitions. To address this gap, we need to tackle two key issues: terminology and definition.

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 is not self-directed but 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" or "overstay". Incumbent takeover referrs 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). While overstay is defined as "staying longer than the maximum term as it stood when the candidate originally came in 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.

Therefore, this study strongly advocates for "autocoup" as the most accurate and appropriate term. It avoids the pitfalls of other terms by clearly conveying the essence of the phenomenon as a coup-like power grab and effectively distinguishing autocoups from classical coups by highlighting the perpetrator.

3.2.2 Definition

While terminology is important, another issue arises with the previous definition of autocoups: should we emphasize power expansion or power extension? Power Expansion refers to situations where an executive branch expands its power beyond its original boundaries, often by encroaching on the authority of other branches like the legislature or judiciary. Power Extension, on the other hand, refers to situations where a leader extends their tenure in office beyond the originally mandated term limits. Existing definitions of self-coup or autocoup sometimes touch upon power extensions, but they primarily focus on power expansions, which has several drawbacks.

Firstly, defining autocoups primarily in terms of power expansion does not align well with the definition of a coup. When we define a classical coup, the focus 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 extension of executive leadership. We would not classify an event as a coup if a vice president seizes some power from the president, as long as the president remains in office. Similarly, an executive leader acquiring more power from other branches should not automatically qualify as an autocoup if their term limits remain unchanged.

Secondly, emphasizing power expansion raises issues regarding the purpose of launching an autocoup. 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" (Maxwell A. Cameron 1998a, 220). However, without extending their time in office, the leader faces significant risks once their term expires, as they could face legal or political repercussions for the autocoup itself, leaving behind an overly powerful executive branch for the successor. 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. Power expansion might occur as a sudden, significant event, as seen with Fujimori in 1992, or it could be gradual and incremental, as in the case of Putin since assuming power in 1999 (Chaisty 2019). In the latter case, it is unclear whether each step should be considered an autocoup or if the entire process together should be labelled as such. If the latter, determining the point at which it becomes an autocoup is again problematic.

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Therefore, this study argues that a more accurate definition of autocoups should prioritize power extension as the core characteristic.

In light of this discussion, we formally define an autocoup as ***the practice of current political leaders extending their time in office beyond their originally mandated term limits through illegitimate means.*** 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. While they may employ seemingly legal tactics, their essence is illegitimacy. This critical aspect will be explored further in Section 3.

3.3 Introduction to the Autocoup Dataset

3.3.1 Defining the scope

Defining any concept or term inevitably involves borderline cases that are difficult to categorize. In the context of autocoups, it is particularly challenging to determine whether a specific instance of overstaying should be coded as an autocoup. To avoid ambiguity and dilemmas, we will code all instances of incumbents extending their original mandated term in office as autocoups, regardless of whether the extension is patently illegal or superficially legal.

This approach is taken because a truly legitimate amendment to power transition institutions should only apply to subsequent leaders, not the incumbent. If the incumbent changes the rules to their own benefit, the legitimacy of such changes is questionable, even if the amendment procedures appear legal. We have valid reasons to question their motivations since they are the

beneficiaries of these reforms.

Even so, some cases remain unclear. For example, consider a two-term limit presidency where the leader wins a second term. Allegations of election rigging might surface, raising suspicions about the fairness of the election results. If such suspicions can be verified with evidence or judicial verdict, the case would undoubtedly be coded as an autocoup. However, proving election rigging in countries with powerful executives can be difficult. In such instances, we will not classify it as an autocoup unless a formal judicial verdict confirms the rigging.

Even in contexts where leaders lack clear term limits or the constitution allows indefinite terms, identifying autocoups remains possible. We will discuss and explain this in the next section.

3.3.2   Classifying autocoups

Autocoups can manifest in various forms. To understand this phenomenon better, we can categorize them based on several key factors:

- **Methods Employed:** This refers to the specific strategies incumbents use to extend their hold on power. Examples include constitution amending or reinterpreting, election cancelling, delaying or rigging.

- **Degree of Legality:** This dimension captures the extent to which an autocoup deviates from established legal norms. It can range from minor rule-bending to outright constitutional violations.

- **Duration of Extension:** This category focuses on the length of time the incumbent leader remains in office beyond their designated term limits. It could be a single additional term, multiple terms, or even a lifetime hold on power.

- **Outcomes:** This factor examines whether the autocoup attempt is successful or ultimately fails.

This study will primarily focus on the **methods** employed by incumbents to stage autocoups. However, we will also code for other relevant aspects like the degree of legality, duration of extension, and outcomes whenever information is available. This multifaceted approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the variations within autocoups.

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

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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).

- **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.

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

Table 3.1: Sources of coding autocoup dataset

Source	Years	Unit of Research	Obervations	Authors
Archigos	1875-2015	Leaders	3409	Hein Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Giacomo Chiozza (2009)
PLAD	1989-2023	Leaders	1334	Pietro Bomprezzi et al. (2024)
Incumbent Takeover	1913-2019	Incumbent takeovers	279	Alexander Baturo, Jakob Tolstrup (2022)

The autocoup dataset, like most dataset coding procedures, is based on existing studies and datasets. Table 3.1 outlines the main sources for coding the autocoup dataset. The Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009) and the Political Leaders' Affiliation Database (PLAD) dataset (Bomprezzi et al. 2024) provide comprehensive data on all leaders from 1875 to 2023, although our coding only includes autocoups since 1945. These datasets help identify the actual rulers of countries, saving time in distinguishing real leaders from nominal heads of state.

The Incumbent Takeover dataset (Baturo and Tolstrup 2022), which integrates data from

11 related datasets, offers a broad spectrum of cases where leaders significantly reduce the constraints on their power, encompassing both power expansions and extensions. Since some executive takeovers do not qualify as autocoups due to the lack of term extensions, I cross-referenced the Archigos dataset, which includes detailed trajectories of leaders' entries and exits from power, to verify the qualifications for autocoups.

In total, I coded 110 observations, 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, 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 main variables included in the autocoup dataset are:

- **Country Identification:**

    – `ccode` and `country`: These variables come from the Correlates of War project (Stinnett et al. 2002) and identify the countries included in the dataset, which are widely used in political science datasets, ensuring consistency and compatibility across different studies and datasets.

- **Leader Information:**

    – `leader_name`: This variable follows the Archigos dataset's coding and records the name of the de facto leader who wielded power in the country.

- **Timeline Variables:**

    – `entry_date`: Captures the date the leader assumed power.

    – `exit_date`: Records the date the leader left office.

- `autocoup_date`: Indicates the date the autocoup is considered to have occurred. Since extensions often happen incrementally, this date reflects a significant event marking the extension, such as a legislative vote or successful referendum.

- `extending_date`: Represents the start date of the leader's additional term acquired through the autocoup.

The `entry_date` and `exit_date` come from the Archigos and PLAD datasets, while the other two dates are coded by the dataset creator.

- **Power Transition Methods:**

  - `entry_method` and `exit_method`: These categorical variables record how the leader entered and exited power (e.g., election, coup, death).

  - `entry_regular` and `exit_regular`: These dummy variables indicate whether the entry and exit methods were regular (e.g., election) or irregular (e.g., coup).

- **Autocoup Details:**

  - `autocoup_method`: This key variable captures the various methods leaders use to extend their stay in power (see Section 3.3.2 for details).

  - `autocoup_outcome`: This variable indicates the outcome of the autocoup attempt: "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:**

  - `source`: This variable identifies the dataset source used for coding, primarily differentiating among "Incumbent Takeovers" or other sources.

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- **Additional Notes:**

  - `notes`: This variable provides context for exceptional cases. For instance, if a
    leader undertook multiple autocoup attempts, details are recorded here.

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

3.3.4 Data descriptions

According to our primary coding, we have identified 110 autocoup cases from 1945 to 2022,
involving 73 countries. As shown in Table 3.2, the most common autocoup method is enabling
re-election, accounting for 46 events. This is followed by removing term limits altogether, with
14 cases, and then delaying elections and declaring the leader for life, each with 9 cases.

Examining the success rates of autocoups, the total success rate is 79%, which is signifi-
cantly higher than the roughly 50% success rate of classical coups. This suggests that incum-
bents are in an advantageous position to expand or extend their powers as executive leaders.
They can do so openly and gradually, whereas coup plotters must operate in secrecy and face
numerous challenges such as promissory issues and the risk of betrayal or exposure.

However, the success rates vary significantly across different methods. Removing term
limits, delaying elections, declaring the leader for life, and cancelling elections are all 100%
successful. In contrast, there are only 4 cases of refusing election results, with just one suc-
ceeding. Although this sample is small, it suggests that in regimes where general elections are
held and incumbents lose, the system is relatively more democratic. In such cases, incumbents
must run for office without the ability to rig elections, making it less likely for them to overturn
election results.

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

Autocoup Method	Autocoup Attempted	Autocoup Succeeded	Success Rate
Enabling re-election	46	33	71.74%
Removing term limits	14	14	100.00%
Delaying elections	9	9	100.00%
Leader for life	9	9	100.00%
Changing term length	7	5	71.43%
Figurehead	6	5	83.33%
One-time arrangement	5	4	80.00%
Refusing election results	4	1	25.00%
Reassigning power role	4	2	50.00%
Rigging elections	3	2	66.67%
Cancelling elections	3	3	100.00%
Total	110	87	79.09%

3.4 Determinants of Autocoup Attempts: Case Studies

3.4.1 High Frequency and Success Rate of Autocoups in Post-Communist Countries

From the dataset, we observe that in post-communist countries, both the frequency and success rate of autocoups are notably high. Post-communist countries refer to those that were communist regimes before the collapse of the Soviet Union, while most of them developed into 'hybrid regimes' (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019) and only a few remain communist regimes after the collapse. In these countries, there are 12 documented cases of autocoups aimed at prolonging incumbency, with only 2 of these attempts failing. Examining the cases in post-communist

countries, several characteristics stand out:

- **Inherited Authoritarian Systems**: Although most of these countries transitioned from communist regimes to non-communist governments (with the exception of China), they inherited the authoritarian systems of their communist past.

- **Continuity of Former Elites**: The transitions did not result in the removal or overthrow of the previous ruling groups. Instead, the former communist elites remained in power.

- **Subverted Democratic Processes**: Despite the introduction of general elections and term limits in most of these countries, the legacy of the former communist regimes often led to term limits being ignored and elections being rigged (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019).

For example, Alexander Lukashenko was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After the dissolution, he became head of the interim anti-corruption committee of the Supreme Council of Belarus. Elected as the first president of Belarus in 1994, he has held the office ever since. Initially, the 1994 constitution set a maximum of two successive presidential terms, but Lukashenko removed this limit in 2004. Furthermore, international monitors have not regarded Belarusian elections as free and fair, except for his initial win. Despite significant protests against him, Lukashenko claimed to win with a high vote share, often exceeding 80% in each election. This pattern is evident in all five Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union. Similarly, the post-dissolution leaders of these countries were high officials or heads of the former Soviet republics who continued their leadership in the presidency.

Another long-ruling example is Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was the first president of Kazakhstan from 1991 until 2019. He had been the real leader as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After independence, he was elected as the first president and held the office until 2019, through various means like resetting

the term limits due to the implementation of new constitutions. However, he did not officially eliminate the term limits but made an exemption for the First President, Nazarbayev (Nurumov and Vashchanka 2019). Unlike Lukashenko, who is still the incumbent of Belarus, Nazarbayev passed the presidency to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, a specially designated successor, 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 American countries

Latin America has a long history of maintaining term limit conventions. Simón Bolívar, the founding father of Bolivia, was 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). Although Bolívar eventually changed 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).

Reviewing the cases in Latin American countries, we notice that:

- **Striving for Re-election:** Non-re-election or non-immediate re-election has been common in Latin America, unlike other presidential countries where two terms are more popular. Autocoup leaders in Latin America often attempt to overstay a consecutive term.

- **Resisting long extensions:** Autocoups for one more term are often successful, while attempts to overstay beyond this are frequently unsuccessful.

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 never been violated since then (Klesner 2019). Panama, along with Uruguay, has never changed the rules of re-election, and since Costa Rica prohibited immediate presidential re-election in 1859, the country has only experienced a brief period between 1897 and 1913 in which the incumbent president could be re-elected (Marsteintredet 2019). In many other countries, however, constitutions have been frequently amended or violated. The pursuit of re-election or consecutive re-election has been a significant trigger for autocoups aimed at power extension in Latin American countries. There are 32 documented autocoup cases, with over 50% (17 cases) attempting to enable re-election.

Unlike those who attempt to overstay in office indefinitely, many Latin American leaders exit after their second term expires. Examples include President Menem of Argentina (1988-1999), President Fernando 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). This does not mean none of them tried to extend even longer, but most did not manipulate the process by abusing their power and accepted their unsuccessful outcomes soon.

For instance, President Menem of Argentina successfully extended one term by amending the constitution in 1994 to allow one executive re-election and was re-elected in 1995. However, when he attempted to reset his term, arguing that his first term from 1988 to 1995 did not count since it was under previous constitutions, his appeal was unanimously ruled out by the Supreme Court in March 1999 (Llanos 2019). A similar scenario occurred with President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia (2002-2010) (Baturo 2019). In contrast, Daniel Ortega, the incumbent president of Nicaragua, successfully extended his presidency. In 2009, the Supreme Court of Justice of Nicaragua allowed his re-running in 2011. In 2014, the National Assembly of Nicaragua

approved constitutional amendments that abolished term limits for the presidency, allowing Ortega to run for an unlimited number of five-year terms, making him president since 2007 (Close 2019).

3.4.3   As common as classical coups: Cases of African countries

Classical coups have been very common in Africa, accounting for about 45% of all coups (219 out of 491) globally since 1950, involving 45 out of 54 African countries (J. M. Powell and Thyne 2011). Autocoups, although less common compared to coups, still have a significant presence in Africa. Among 113 documented autocoup cases, 46% (52 cases) occurred in Africa, involving 36 countries. The success rate of coups in Africa is roughly 50%, while the success rate of autocoups is about 83%, which is higher than both the success rate of coups and the average global success rate of autocoups, approximately 78%.

Identifying a clear pattern of autocoups in Africa is challenging, similar to the case with coups. Various factors have been proposed:

- **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 2019).

Using 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. Additionally, 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. Coups have decreased, while autocoups have increased. This trend is partly due 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, this does not imply that violations are more common than adherence to term limits.

3.5 Empirical Analysis: A Simple Example of Utilizing the Autocoup Dataset

With the availability of the autocoup dataset, we can now conduct quantitative analyses that extend beyond traditional case studies. This section provides a straightforward example of how to utilize this dataset effectively. To analyse the determinants of autocoup attempts, we employ a probit regression model. This model is particularly appropriate for binary dependent variables, allowing us to estimate the probability of an autocoup attempt given a set of independent variables.

However, our approach here differs from the double probit model with sample selection used in Chapter 2 for coup attempts and success analyses. Instead, we use two separate probit models. This methodological choice is justified by several factors specific to autocoups:

- **Incumbent Advantage**: Autocoups have a significantly higher success rate compared to

traditional coups, often exceeding 80%. This high probability of success fundamentally alters the decision-making calculus for potential perpetrators.

- **Reduced Risk**: Even in cases where autocoup attempts fail, the consequences for the instigators are typically less severe than those faced by leaders of failed traditional coups. This lower risk profile further distinguishes autocoups from other types of coup attempts.

Due to these unique features, autocoup attempts do not exhibit the typical sample selection characteristics that necessitated the use of a sample selection model in our earlier analysis of traditional coups. Given these considerations, a sample selection model might not be appropriate in this context. By using separate probit models, we can independently examine the factors that influence autocoup attempts and their outcomes, without assuming a strong selection effect.

3.5.1 Dependent Variable

- **Autocoup Attempts**: This binary variable indicates whether an autocoup was attempted during the tenure of an incumbent leader, based on the data introduced in this study.

- **Autocoup Success:** This binary variable indicates whether an attempted autocoup of the incumbent leader succeeded, based on the data introduced in this study.

3.5.2 Independent Variables

- **Economic Performance:** This variable is measured using two indicators: economic level and economic growth trend.

  Economic Level: Represented by GDP per capita. This measure provides an indication of the overall economic health and standard of living in a country.

  Economic Growth Trend: Assessed using the current-trend (CT) ratio, developed by Krishnarajan (2019), which is consistent with Equation 2.8.

The GDP per capita data, expressed in constant 2017 international dollars (PPP) and measured in units of $10,000, is sourced from the *V-Dem* dataset by Fariss et al. (2022). To account for the economic impact of the previous year, this data is lagged by one year.

- **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 Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset by Marshall. This index provides a comprehensive measure of the level of violence and conflict within a country, which can significantly impact power transitions. (Marshall 2005).

- **Degree of Democracy:** The level of democracy is gauged using Polity 5 scores at the entry year for each respective country. These scores range from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic), capturing the extent of democratic versus autocratic governance. This dataset is sourced from the Centre for Systemic Peace (CSP)[1] and provides an essential measure of political regime type, which might influence the political stability and power transitions.

- **Population Size:** To account for its potential impact on leaders' tenures, the log of the population size is considered. 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 the leaders dataset by (Goemans,

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[1]Center for Systemic Peace: https://www.systemicpeace.org. Accessed on 2024-08-01.

Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).

Different from analysing the determinants of coups, which theoretically could happen in each year, we assume that autocoup happens only once during the tenure of the incumbent. Because once the incumbent succeeds an autocoup, there is no necessary to stage another one. Of course, this is not the case in real time. A leader who successfully overstayed one term could try to overstay additional term, or even strive for leadership for life. A leader who failed in the first attempt might make another try if they are not removed due the first failure. To simplify the analysis, we overlook those possibilities.

Therefore, in the $probit$ model, the unit of analysis in autocoups is the whole tenure of the leader, not country-year. So, we need to settle a base-year for the variables. For leaders who staged an autocoup, we take the year of their first attempts as the base-year, while for leaders who did not attempt to overstay, we take the middle year of their tenure as the base-year.

Unlike the analysis of coup determinants, which could theoretically occur in any given year, we assume that an autocoup happens only once during an incumbent leader's tenure. Once an incumbent succeeds in staging an autocoup, there is no need for another attempt. However, this assumption does not always reflect reality. A leader who successfully extends their term might attempt further extensions, striving for lifelong leadership. Conversely, a leader who fails in their first attempt may try again if they are not removed from power after the initial failure. For simplicity, we 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. We 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, we use the middle year of their tenure as the base year.

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

	Coup Attempts	Coup Outcome
	(1)	(2)
Constant	−1.457**	−1.094
	(0.650)	(1.984)
Regime: Dominant-party	−0.594***	0.501
	(0.209)	(0.494)
Military	−0.901***	0.490
	(0.238)	(0.579)
Personalist	0.114	1.468***
	(0.203)	(0.519)
GDP per capita	0.004	0.069
	(0.011)	(0.047)
Economic trend	0.725	0.345
	(0.557)	(1.807)
Political 5	−0.074***	−0.022
	(0.014)	(0.036)
Political violence	−0.053	0.114
	(0.037)	(0.131)
Age	−0.0004	0.006
	(0.001)	(0.017)
Population(log)	−0.041	0.028
	(0.046)	(0.146)
Observations	970	102
Log Likelihood	−288.173	−43.454
Akaike Inf. Crit.	596.346	106.908

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

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. 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 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.

Other factors play an insignificant role in determining the attempts and outcomes of autocoups. 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.

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The threshold for removing or impeaching an incumbent leader is very high. Without more than a majority or even greater support, it is very difficult to succeed. Using illegal means such as a coup is even more challenging, as the costs are high, the consequences are severe, and the likelihood of success is very low.

3.6   Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of autocoups, specifically focusing 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', 'executive takeover', we introduce a novel dataset of autocoups (1945-2022). Through this more precise definition and dataset, we enhance the understanding and methods of analyzing the dynamics of irregular power transitions and the survival of political leaders.

Our findings reveal that personalist regimes are far more likely to experience autocoup attempts and are more likely to succeed 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, there are several limitations that future research could address. Firstly, the definition of an autocoup requires further commentary and discussion to gain wider acceptance. Accordingly, the dataset of autocoups requires further case-by-case verification to improve accuracy, although debates on some ambiguous cases will likely persist. 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 coups. This raises the issue of choosing a base year. For example, when analysing how GDP level or growth rate, the democratic index (such as Polity 5), or the age of the leader affect autocoup attempts, we need to decide which year's value should be used. In this study, we 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.

Despite these limitations, this research enhances our understanding of the mechanisms and motivations behind autocoups, contributing to the literature on political stability and democratic resilience. Future studies could build on this work by employing the dataset to explore more power dynamics or examine the long-term impacts of these events on political systems, particularly on democratic backsliding, democratic breakdown, and personalization of power.

Chapter 4

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

Abstract

This chapter investigates the relationship between methods of power acquisition and the longevity of irregular-entry political leaders, focusing on coup-entry 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-entry leaders face a substantially higher risk of removal compared to their autocoup counterparts. These results have significant implications for political stability and democratic processes, suggesting that the relatively low costs and high returns associated with autocoups may incentivise 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. In 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.

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

4.1 Introduction

The longevity of political leaders has long intrigued scholars and observers alike. Why do some rulers maintain power for decades while others fall within months or even days? This question has driven extensive research in political science, focusing on the survival of political leaders. However, within this broad framework, certain types of leaders—specifically those who ascend through coups (coup-entry leaders) or extend tenure through autocoups—have received less attention. Examining the tenures of these leaders is crucial, as it illuminates the dynamics of irregular leadership transitions and their impact on political stability and democratic processes.

Leaders who assume power through regular channels often follow more predictable patterns of entry, tenure, and exit. In contrast, those who rise through irregular means, such as coups or autocoups, present more complex and compelling cases for study. Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009) highlight the prevalence of such irregular transitions: between 1945 and 2015, over half of leaders who entered power irregularly (158 out of 308) also exited irregularly. This rate far exceeds that of leaders who assumed office through regular channels, of whom only 14.5% (213 out of 1,472) experienced irregular exits.

Coup-entry and autocoup leaders constitute a significant portion of these irregular cases. Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009) note that out 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 type of transition. Additionally, the autocoup dataset, introduced in Chapter 3, documents 110 autocoup attempts between 1945 and 2020, of which 87 were successful.

Measuring the survival tenure of coup-entry and autocoup leaders presents challenges due to the inherent irregularity and uncertainty of their positions. However, a comparative analysis reveals that leaders who extend power through autocoups tend to have longer average tenures post-autocoup (approximately 11 years) compared to coup-entry leaders (approximately 5.6 years). This suggests a potential tenure gap of more than 5 years between these two groups.
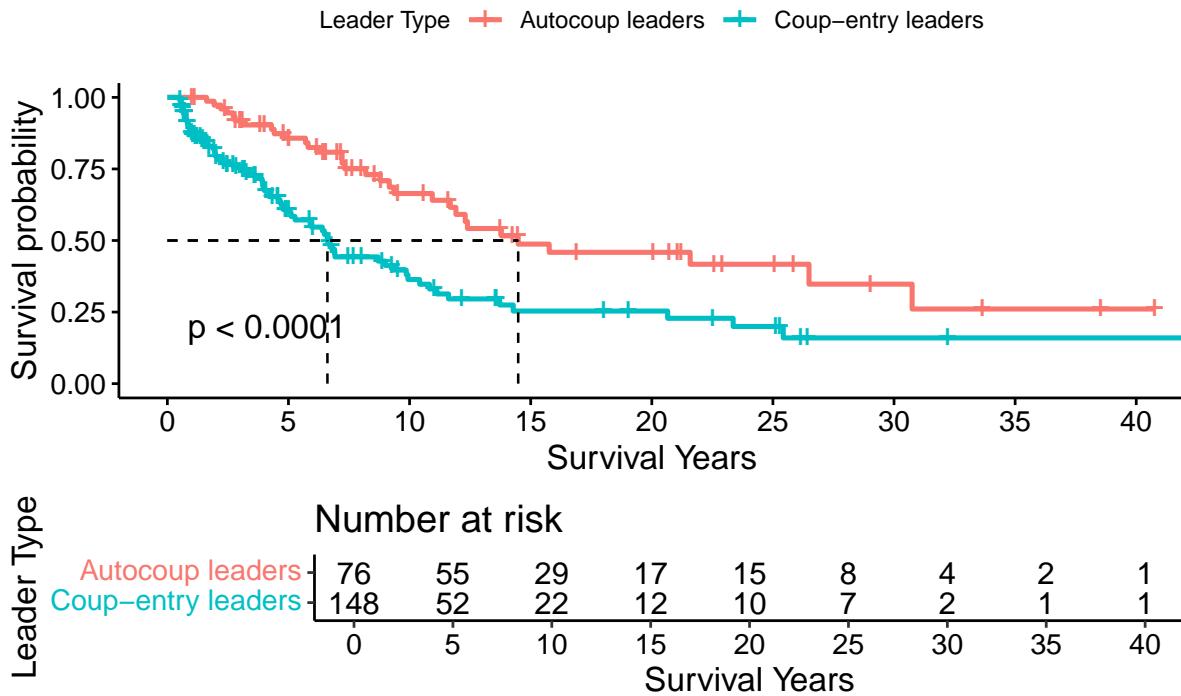
Figure 4.1: Survival curves of overstaying and coup-entry leaders

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-entry leaders. The survival curve for autocoup leaders consistently surpasses that of coup-entry leaders, indicating longer survival tenures and a lower risk of ouster for autocoup leaders.

I posit that the method of accession significantly influences leadership longevity. Coup-entry leaders likely face greater challenges to their rule, resulting in shorter average tenures compared to autocoup leaders. The analysis, using Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models, supports this hypothesis, showing that autocoup leaders generally experience longer tenures than coup-entry leaders.

This study offers two key contributions to the field. First, it highlights an understudied factor in leadership survival analysis: the impact of the method of accession to power. Our findings suggest that leaders' survival is influenced not only by their ruling strategies after taking power but also by how they initially acquired it. Second, by employing survival models, this research

provides empirical evidence of the significant difference in tenure duration between autocoup and coup-entry leaders. This insight may help explain the increasing prevalence of power extensions through autocoups since 2000, as more incumbents observe and potentially emulate successful precedents.

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

4.2   Literature review

Political survival has been a cornerstone of political science research for decades, driven by the wide-ranging variations observed across regimes, countries, and historical periods. This field of study encompasses two crucial and interconnected aspects: regime survival and individual leader survival.

Regime survival focuses on the longevity of political systems, such as monarchies, political parties, or specific ideological structures. In contrast, leader survival concerns the duration of individual leaders' time in office. These concepts often exhibit contrasting patterns. For instance, in parliamentary democracies like Japan or the UK, specific political parties may hold power for extended periods while individual leaders (Prime Ministers) change frequently. Similarly, communist regimes typically see long-lasting parties in power, with more frequent leadership transitions. Presidential systems like the United States or some military regimes experience more frequent changes in both the ruling party or junta and the country's leader. This study specifically investigates the dynamics of individual leader survival, focusing on the factors in-

fluencing how long leaders remain in power.

The existing literature on leader survival is vast and multifaceted. Some studies explore specific mechanisms influencing leadership longevity within particular regimes, such as democracies (Svolik 2014) or autocracies (Davenport, RezaeeDaryakenari, and Wood 2021). Others aim to develop more generalizable theoretical frameworks explaining leader survival across diverse political systems (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). While the development of a universal theory remains an alluring goal, it is important to acknowledge the inherent challenges in creating a single model that encompasses the complexities of leadership survival across all regime types.

Power transition mechanisms vary significantly across different regimes, particularly between democracies and autocracies. In many autocratic systems, leadership selection is a closed affair, often restricted to a narrow pool such as royal families, military elites, or ruling party members. While political competition and elections may exist in some autocracies, significant barriers to entry for legitimate challengers often persist. Potential rivals may face threats such as assassination, imprisonment, or exile. Moreover, selection processes are often shrouded in secrecy, making it challenging to gauge true levels of public support compared to democracies. Consequently, calculating selectorates or winning coalitions, as explored by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003), becomes nearly impossible in many autocracies.

Given these complexities, focusing research on more specific regimes or types of leaders may be more appropriate. While regular and anticipated leadership changes are important, they offer less fertile ground for exploring the dynamics of leader longevity, as the vast majority of leaders who assume power through established channels also exit power through established mechanisms (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009). In contrast, the study of political survival among irregular leaders is particularly captivating due to the intricacies and uncertainties associated with irregular leadership transitions.

Two primary perspectives have emerged to explain the dynamics of leader survival:

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- **Objective factors and resources:** This perspective considers elements such as personal competence (Yu and Jong-A-Pin 2016), societal stability (Arriola 2009), economic development (Palmer and Whitten 1999; Williams 2011), access to natural resources (Smith 2004; Quiroz Flores and Smith 2012; Wright, Frantz, and Geddes 2013), and external support networks (Licht 2009; Wright 2008; C. Thyne et al. 2017).

- **Subjective factors and strategies:** This approach explores the strategies leaders employ to consolidate their power, encompassing both the formulation and implementation of political policies and leaders' responses to opposition, challenges, or even coups and rebellions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Morrison 2009; Escribà-Folch 2013; Davenport, RezaeeDaryakenari, and Wood 2021).

Coups have garnered significant scholarly attention due to their pivotal role in removing leaders (Svolik 2009; Frantz and Stein 2016). 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.

Despite the extensive research on leader survival across various contexts, a significant gap persists. There is a lack of research specifically exploring and comparing the survival tenures of leaders who extend their reigns through autocoups compared to coup-entry leaders. This study aims to address this gap by investigating and comparing the duration of leadership survival between these two distinct leader types, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political survival in irregular leadership transitions.

4.3 Survival dynamics of autocoup and coup-entry leaders

4.3.1 Autocoup leaders versus coup-entry leaders

As highlighted in the previous section, investigating leadership survival presents inherent challenges due to factors such as 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. Before delving into this comparison, it is essential to clarify several key terminologies.

Firstly, the concepts of coup and autocoup adhere to the definitions established in Section 2 and Section 3 respectively. However, a significant disparity exists in the tenure lengths of coup-entry leaders and autocoup leaders. Many coup-entry leaders rule for only a few months or even days, while autocoup leaders typically enjoy longer tenures after their power grab. To ensure meaningful analysis, this chpater focuses on leaders with more substantial periods in power. As defined in Section 3, an autocoup is considered successful if the power extension lasts for at least six months. For consistency and to allow for more robust comparison, this chapter applies the same six-month threshold to both autocoup and coup-entry leaders. This approach differs from the seven-day duration used by J. M. Powell and Thyne (2011) for traditional coups, allowing us to examine more established leadership periods and their associated dynamics.

Secondly, it is crucial to distinguish between an autocoup leader and a coup-entry leader, as leadership survival is the primary focus of this study:

- **Autocoup leader:** This refers to an incumbent leader who successfully uses illegitimate or unconstitutional means to extend their tenure in power. In an autocoup, the leader orchestrates the power grab and continues to rule afterwards.

- **Coup-entry leader:** This term designates the individual who assumes power after a suc-

cessful coup. The coup leader and the coup-entry leader may or may not be the same person. Unlike autocoups, coups often involve multiple leaders (individuals or groups) who overthrow the incumbent leader, but typically only one of them assumes supreme power. In some instances, coup leaders may support someone outside the coup plot to become the new leader, such as military officers returning power to civilians or supporting a new general election. Regardless of the specific scenario, a coup-entry leader in this study refers to the individual who assumes formal leadership following a successful coup.

Given that autocoup leaders typically exhibit longer overall tenures compared to coup-entry leaders, this study focuses on a more nuanced comparison. Specifically, we will analyse the **post-autocoup** tenure of autocoup leaders and contrast it with the **post-coup** tenure of coup-entry leaders. This examination is motivated by the relevance and similarity of these leader types in terms of illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability.

4.3.2 Different challenges and tactics to consolidate power

Previous research has established that the ability to skillfully retain power is the primary determinant of leader longevity. Leaders who can maintain control or manipulate the balance of power tend to have longer tenures. However, coup-entry and autocoup 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-entry leaders at a significant disadvantage. The following analysis examines these challenges and their impact on leader tenure.

4.3.2.1 Illegitimacy: Both coup-entry and autocoup leaders suffer from a legitimacy deficit, but the nature of this deficit differs

While both coup-entry and autocoup leaders suffer from a legitimacy deficit, the nature of this deficit differs. Coup leaders openly seize power, making their illegitimacy explicit. Conversely, autocoup leaders employ a deceptive strategy, manipulating legal processes to create a facade of democratic legitimacy. Despite this veneer, their actions fundamentally undermine democratic principles. Scholars have suggested alternative terms like "incumbent overstay" or "executive takeover" to reflect the less overt nature of power grabs in these cases. This perceived legitimacy can provide autocoup leaders with a temporary advantage as opponents are often restricted to legal challenges.

4.3.2.2 Uncertainty: The irregular paths to power taken by both types of leaders create uncertainty regarding their reigns and eventual departures

The irregular paths to power taken by coup-initiators and autocoup leaders create uncertainty regarding their reigns and eventual departures. Their ascension through irregular means undermines established power transition norms, leaving doubts about their commitment to constitutional succession protocols. This uncertainty not only unsettles elites and citizens but also plagues the leaders themselves, who grapple with the ambiguity surrounding the transfer of power – when, how, and to whom. Historical analyses underscore this predicament, with data revealing that more than two-thirds of irregular exits from leadership stem from coup-related upheavals (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).

Coup-entry and autocoup leaders face different levels of uncertainty following their rise to power. After a coup, three major uncertainties arise:

- **Leadership Assumption**: It is unclear who will assume leadership. Although coup leaders often take power, some may return or promise to return power to civilian leaders. Even among coup leaders, determining who will lead can be problematic, as coup plot-

ters are sometimes a group without a clear core leader. For instance, following the 1973 Chilean coup, the initial plan for a rotating presidency among military leaders was abandoned when General Pinochet consolidated control and remained in power until 1990 (Svolik 2014).

- **Duration of Rule**: The duration of the coup leader's rule is uncertain. Leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt (1954 coup), Muammar Gaddafi in Libya (1969 coup), and Idi Amin in Uganda (1971 coup) aimed to retain power for life [Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018)], but their ability to do so was uncertain. Others promise to transfer power to civilian authorities, but the timing and fulfilment of these promises are unclear. For example, Myanmar's military junta (2021 coup) has repeatedly extended a state of emergency, clinging to power beyond the promised time-frame[1]. Conversely, after the 2010 coup in Niger, the military honoured their promise by restoring civilian rule within the same year [Ginsburg and Elkins (2019)].

- **Succession**: The successors of coup leaders are uncertain. Some may designate successors from their inner circle, including family members, while others may support general elections, though whether this will be fulfilled as intended remains uncertain.

In contrast, autocoup leaders present a clearer picture regarding leadership and tenure. There is no ambiguity about who will rule after an autocoup. In the medium term, autocoup leaders typically hold office themselves. Many, like Putin in Russia and Xi Jinping in China, seek to extend their rule indefinitely and are unlikely to relinquish power voluntarily. Others attempt to extend their terms incrementally, such as President Menem of Argentina, who overstayed successfully in 1993 but failed in his bid for another term in 1999 (Llanos 2019).

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[1]https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/myanmar-junta-extends-state-of-emergency-for-fourth-time/: Myanmar Junta Extends State of Emergency for Fourth Time. Accessed on 2024-08-01.

4.3.2.3 Instability: The awareness of shaky legitimacy and persistent uncertainty breeds insecurity and a sense of crisis

The awareness of their shaky legitimacy and the persistent uncertainty breeds insecurity and a perpetual sense of crisis among coup-entry and autocoup leaders. In a bid to solidify their grip on power, they often resort to reshaping power dynamics or purging potential adversaries. Paradoxically, these attempts to bolster stability frequently backfire, unleashing greater turmoil and instability.

The stability of a regime, particularly in an autocracy, hinges on maintaining a balance of power. Coups, however, inevitably disrupt this balance, even when they are bloodless, necessitating the creation of a new equilibrium. The ousting of previous rulers requires dismantling the established governing structure and reshuffling high-ranking officials, actions that inherently generate instability and create adversaries for the new leadership. This makes restoring order and establishing a balanced power structure notably challenging. Studies show that new leaders often purge rival elite groups to consolidate their power at the outset of their tenure (Sudduth 2017; Roessler 2011).

Such actions can provoke backlash even from close allies. For instance, in Uganda, President Obote's attempt to undermine the army commander-in-chief, Idi Amin, led to Amin gaining the army's support and ultimately ousting Obote in a 1971 coup. Similarly, in Pakistan in 1999, shortly after Prime Minister Sharif dismissed powerful army chief General Pervez Musharraf, Sharif himself was ousted in a coup orchestrated by Musharraf and his supporters (Sudduth 2017).

To consolidate power, coup-entry leaders often have to compromise with internal or external power challengers. However, these compromises are frequently unstable and easily broken. The situation becomes even more complex when there is a risk of civil war. Leaders may attempt to reduce the likelihood of subsequent coups, potentially increasing the chances of societal rebellions and civil wars (Roessler 2011).

Moreover, instability extends beyond leadership to policies. A new leadership group often brings new policies, and coups are sometimes triggered by disagreements over significant policies. Major policy shifts can instigate dissent or grievances from various ruling factions, communities, regions, ethnicities, or religions. In contrast, autocoup leaders encounter fewer of these issues, as their regimes experience fewer abrupt changes. They face less pressure to dismantle the existing ruling paradigm and establish a new order. Even when adjustments are necessary, they have more time to implement changes gradually.

Table 4.1: Main features of autocoup and coup-entry 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

Coup-entry leaders face significantly greater challenges in consolidating power compared to autocoup leaders. This disadvantage creates a self-perpetuating cycle. Weaker leaders struggle to attract and retain strong support, making them more vulnerable to internal and external challenges. The perception of risk discourages potential allies, further eroding their power base.

Empirical evidence supports this dynamic. Data reveals a correlation between the frequency

of coup attempts in a country and the likelihood of future coups. For example, Table 2.1 shows over a third of coups occurring in the top ten countries with the most attempts since 1950. This suggests that the more coups occur in a country, the more likely additional coups are to happen in the future.

Conversely, autocoup leaders, often benefiting from a veneer of legitimacy and a stronger initial position, are better able to consolidate power and attract supporters. This advantage can be self-reinforcing, as a strong power base discourages challenges and fosters loyalty. This dynamic is evident in cases like China (2018), where the National People's Congress granted Xi Jinping the potential to rule for life[2], and Russia (2020), where constitutional changes allow Putin to potentially remain in power until 2036[3].

These factors contribute to a shorter expected tenure for coup-entry leaders compared to the relatively longer tenures of autocoup leaders. The average survival period following an autocoup is approximately five years longer than that of coup-entry leaders (Figure 4.1). Based on these observations, I propose the following hypothesis:

> **H1: Political leaders who successfully extend their tenure through autocoups are more likely to survive longer compared to coup-entry leaders.**

4.4   Research Design

4.4.1   Methodology: Survival analysis

To test the hypothesis, I will employ two Cox models to analyse the survival tenures of coup-entry leaders and autocoup leaders. Unlike the Kaplan-Meier model, the Cox model enables the estimation of the impacts of multiple factors. Although it does not directly estimate the

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[2]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-43361276: China's Xi allowed to remain 'president for life' as term limits removed. Accessed on 2024-08-01.

[3]https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/jul/analysis-vladimir-putin-secures-constitutional-changes-allowing-him-rule-until-2036: Analysis: Vladimir Putin secures constitutional changes allowing him to rule until 2036. Accessed on 2024-08-01.

duration of tenure in office, it evaluates the hazard rate associated with being ousted from power. Essentially, this represents different facets of the same phenomenon: as a leader's cumulative hazard of being ousted increases, their probability of survival in office decreases.

The first model will utilize the Cox proportional hazards model (referred to as the Cox PH model), where I will only use the variables present at the entry year, without considering the changes in these variables over the leaders' survival times.

However, apart from the primary variable of interest in this research—the leader type—control variables such as economic performance, Polity5 scores, and political stability do change over time. Therefore, the second model will account for these variations by using the time-dependent Cox model.

4.4.2   Dependent variables

- **Survival Time:** The duration of a leader's tenure, measured in days. For coup-entry 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, not 2013 or 2018, marking the start of his post-autocoup tenure. The survival time concludes on the day the leader exits office, applicable to both coup-entry 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 means other than being ousted. This includes leaders who appoint their successors, opt for democratic transitions, or leave office due to health issues or natural death.

    - **1 = Ousted:** This status is assigned to leaders who are forced out of office. This

includes cases where leaders "voluntarily" resign under pressure, reflecting a de facto ousting by force.

4.4.3 Key Independent variable: Leader type

This variable categorizes leaders into two distinct groups:

- Group A = Autocoup Leader: Leaders who extend their tenure through autocoups.
- Group B = Coup-Entry 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 Zhu (2024) and Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009).

4.4.4 Control variables

- **Economic Performance:** This variable is measured using two indicators: economic level and economic growth rate.

    - **Economic Level:** Represented by GDP per capita. This measure provides an indication of the overall economic health and standard of living in a country.
    - **Economic Growth Trend:** Assessed using the current-trend (CT) ratio, developed by Krishnarajan (2019), which is consistent with Equation 2.8.

The GDP per capita data, expressed in constant 2017 international dollars (PPP) and measured in units of $10,000, is sourced from the V-Dem dataset by Fariss et al. (2022). To account for the economic impact of the previous year, this data is lagged by one year.

- **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 Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset by Marshall. This index provides a comprehensive measure of the level of violence and conflict within a country, which can significantly impact leadership survival. (Marshall 2005).

- **Degree of Democracy:** The level of democracy is gauged using Polity 5 scores at the entry year for each respective country. These scores range from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic), capturing the extent of democratic versus autocratic governance. This dataset is sourced from the Center for Systemic Peace (CSP) and provides an essential measure of political regime type, which can influence the stability and survival of leaders in power.

- **Population Size:** To account for its potential impact on leaders' tenures, the log of the population size is considered. 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 leadership survival. 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 at the entry year is included as an additional variable in the analysis, offering insights into potential correlations with leadership survival. Older leaders may have different experiences, networks, and health considerations that could influence their ability to maintain power. This data is sourced from the leaders dataset by (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).

4.5 Results and discussion

4.5.1 Model results

Using the Therneau (2024) package in R, we present the regression results for both the Cox PH model and the Time-dependent Cox model in Table Table 4.2.

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-entry leaders	148	73	2.71***	0.252	853	73	2.23**	0.246
GDP Growth Trend	224	104	1.95	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<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

[2]HR = Hazard Ratio, SE = Standard Error

Generally speaking, both the Cox PH model and time-dependent Cox model analyses revealed a statistically significant association between leadership type and the hazard of removal from power. Coup-entry leaders were found to have a hazard ratio of 2.42 (in time-dependent Cox model) compared to autocoup leaders (reference group), assuming all other variables in the model are held constant. The analysis suggests that coup-entry leaders face a significantly greater risk of removal from power compared to autocoup leaders. At any given time during

their tenure, coup-entry leaders are 2.42 times more likely to be ousted from power compared to autocoup leaders, all else being equal in the model.

All other control variables in Cox PH model are not statistically significant. In time-dependent Cox model, however, GDP per capita and the log of population are both statistically significant at 5% level.

- **GDP per capita:** The hazard ratio of 0.94 indicates that for each unit increase in GDP per capita (measured in constant 2017 international dollars, PPP, in units of $10,000), the hazard (or risk) of being ousted at any given time is reduced by 6%, assuming all other variables in the model are held constant. Similarly, it indicates that for each unit increase in the log of population, the hazard (or risk) of being oustedat any given time is reduced by 14%, assuming all other variables in the model are held constant.

- **Population:** The hazard ratio of 0.86 indicates that for each unit increase in the logarithm of the population (one percent increase of population), the hazard (or risk) of being ousted at any given time decreases by 14%, assuming all other variables in the model are held constant.

4.5.2 Discussion

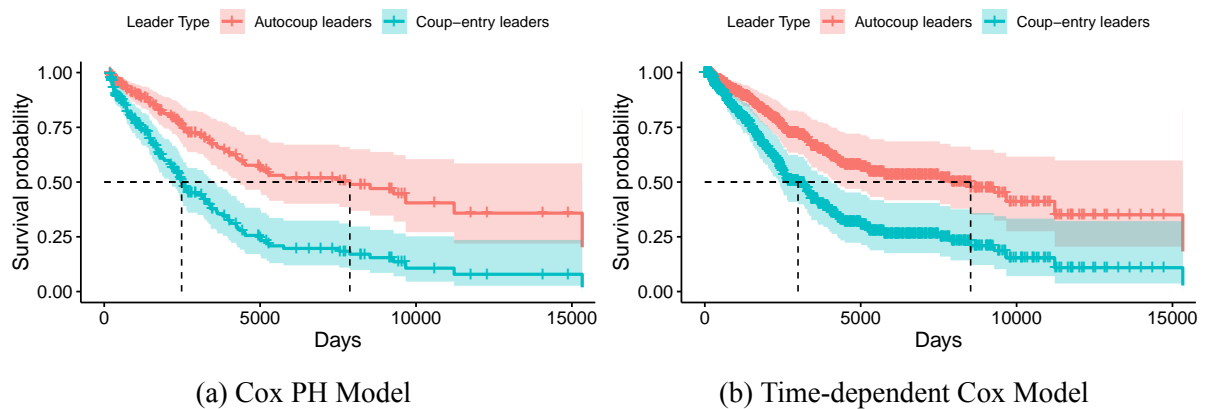(a) Cox PH Model   (b) Time-dependent Cox Model

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 Proportional Hazards (Cox PH) model and the time-dependent model produce similar plots. Notably, the survival curve for coup-entry leaders exhibits a significantly lower trajectory compared to that of autocoup leaders. The steeper drop at the early stage for coup-entry leaders indicates they are more likely to be ousted shortly after assuming power. Additionally, the survival curve for coup-entry leaders crosses the median survival line much earlier than that of autocoup leaders. This disparity suggests that autocoup leaders tend to remain in power for longer durations than their coup-entry counterparts.

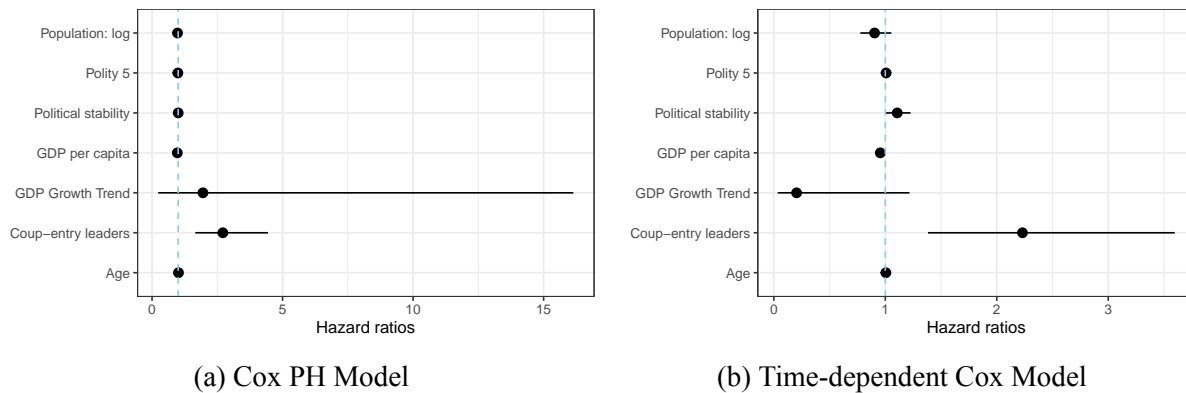(a) Cox PH Model   (b) Time-dependent Cox Model

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

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 yield nearly identical plots. The hazard ratio for coup-entry leaders compared to autocoup leaders is significantly greater than 1 and statistically significant, indicating that coup-entry leaders are at a higher risk of being ousted. 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, 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.

Figure 4.3 presents the hazard ratios (HRs) and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the variables included in the Cox proportional hazards model (Cox PH) and the time-dependent model. The HR for coup-entry leaders compared to autocoup leaders is significantly greater than 1, indicating a substantially higher risk of removal from power for coup-entry leaders. Most other variables have HRs close to 1, suggesting that a one-unit increase in those variables has minimal impact on the risk of removal.

The HR for GDP growth trend is noteworthy. While it is considerably less than 1, it is statistically significant at the 10% level ($0.10 > $ p-value $ > 0.05$). This suggests a possible trend where positive economic performance might reduce the risk of removal from power for the incumbents, although the evidence is not conclusive.

4.5.3   Assessing the Proportional Hazards Assumption

The validity of the model assumptions significantly influences our confidence in the results. To assess the proportional hazards assumption of the Cox model, we use 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 0.382 is much greater than the 5% significance level, indicating that the proportional hazards assumption is reasonably met for the time-dependent Cox model.

4.5.4   Conclusion

This study examined the survival durations of political leaders who come to power through irregular means, specifically coups and autocoups. We 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, we found strong evidence

that autocoup leaders generally enjoy longer tenures than coup-entry leaders.

Our findings revealed a significant difference in average tenure, with post-autocoup leaders averaging approximately 10.8 years in power compared to 5.4 years for coup-entry leaders. The time-dependent Cox model further indicated that coup-entry leaders are 2.42 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.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

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

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

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

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

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

5.2   Policy Implications

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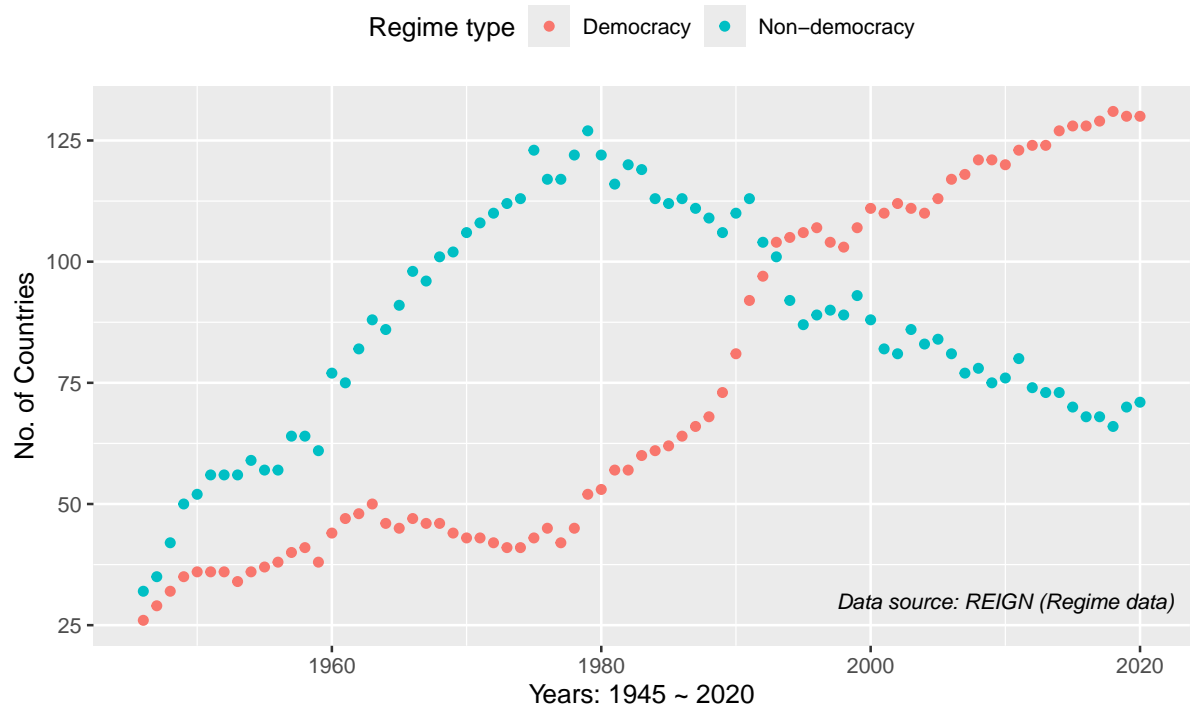

Figure 5.1: Comparison of the number of democratic and non-democratic countries (1945-2020)

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

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

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

5.3   Limitations and directions for future research

This study offers a novel framework for analysing irregular power transitions, but some limitations require further exploration:

- **Data refinement:** Defining and classifying autocoups is a new approach. Future research should validate this classification system through additional studies and expert evaluations.

- **Data harmonization:** The current analysis faces challenges due to mismatched units (country-year vs. leader) between coup and autocoup datasets. Future efforts should ex-

plore data harmonization techniques for more robust comparisons.

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

Several avenues exist for future research:

- **Terminology and data collection:** Refining the "autocoup" concept and achieving wider recognition will facilitate more accurate and comprehensive data collection.

- **Dataset expansion:** Expanding the autocoup dataset with more cases and integrating it with data on other irregular leadership transitions can provide a more holistic view of political survival after these events.

- **Power dynamics and long-term impacts:** Utilizing this dataset, future studies can delve deeper into power dynamics at play and explore the long-term consequences of irregular transitions on political systems, particularly regarding democratic backsliding, breakdown, and personalization of power.

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

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