

Response Memo: Thesis Corrections Based on Viva Feedback

Dear Professor Böhmelt and Professor Powell,

Thank you for your insightful feedback and constructive critiques during my viva examination. I have carefully reviewed your examiner reports and our discussions, incorporating substantial revisions to address your concerns. This memo outlines the changes made, directly referencing your feedback and explaining how the revised thesis enhances focus, clarity, and analytical rigor.

The revisions include a significant restructuring of the thesis, refining its scope and strengthening its arguments. Below, I detail the new structure and specific changes made in response to your comments.

Revised Thesis Structure

To address your feedback, I have removed the chapter on classic coup determinants (original Chapter 2) to sharpen the focus on autocoups and their comparative dynamics with coups. The revised structure is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing and Analysing Autocoups (Expanded from the original Chapter 3)

Chapter 3: Determinants of Autocoup Attempts (Expanded from a section within the original Chapter 3)

Chapter 4: Power Acquisition and Leadership Survival (Revised from the original Chapter 4)

Chapter 5: Coups, Autocoups, and Democracy (New Substantive Chapter)

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Specific Revisions Addressing Examiner Feedback

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing autocoup and introducing dataset

Conceptual Clarity: I have refined the definition of autocoups, clearly distinguishing them from broader power expansion efforts and emphasizing tenure extension through unconstitutional means. Chapter 2 now includes a detailed rationale for this conceptualization to enhance theoretical precision.

Dataset Refinement (Addressing Professor Böhmelt’s Concern): Professor Böhmelt, you highlighted potential overlap between coup-installed leaders and autocoup leaders, which could introduce post-treatment bias in the survival analysis (Chapter 4). To address this, I conducted a thorough review of the autocoup dataset, excluding cases where leaders initially assumed power via a coup. This ensures that the “autocoup leader” category only includes those who entered power through constitutional means. As a result, the dataset for the survival analysis was reduced from 110 to 83 events. While this reduces the sample size,

it significantly improves analytical rigor and clarity in distinguishing coup-installed and autocoup leaders, directly addressing your concern.

Chapter 3: Determinants of autocoup attempts

Rationale for Autocoups by Personalist Leaders (Addressing Professor Powell's query):

Professor Powell, you questioned why leaders classified as “personalist” would stage autocoups to extend tenure. In the revised Chapter 3, I clarify that the GWF regime type coding reflects a leader's tenure, which often evolves over time. Many personalist leaders initially assume power within party, military, or democratic structures before consolidating a personalist regime. Autocoups often mark a critical step in this consolidation, removing constitutional barriers to extend rule and solidify personal control. I have included case studies, such as leaders in Russia and Belarus, to illustrate how autocoups facilitate the transition to personalist rule.

Chapter 4: Power acquisition and leadership survival

Regime Type as Covariate (Addressing Professor Powell's suggestion): Following your recommendation, Professor Powell, I incorporated regime type as a key covariate in the survival analysis models. The revised results indicate that, when controlling for regime type, the effect of power acquisition method (coup vs. autocoup) on leadership survival is no longer statistically significant. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing the role of institutional context in shaping political outcomes and underscores regime type as a primary determinant of leader longevity, beyond irregular mechanisms of power acquisition.

Impact of Dataset Refinement: The exclusion of overlapping cases from the autocoup dataset (noted in Chapter 2) enhances the clarity of comparisons between coup and autocoup leaders

in this analysis, ensuring robust results.

Chapter 5: Coups, autocoups, and democracy

New Substantive Chapter: This new chapter examines the comparative impact of coups and autocoups on democratic institutions and trajectories. Building on prior analyses, it provides a comprehensive assessment of how these irregular transitions affect democratic quality and stability over time, enriching the thesis's contribution to the literature.

Additional Revisions

Literature Engagement: I have strengthened engagement with existing studies, particularly in the introductory sections, ensuring comprehensive referencing to address your feedback on literature integration.

Formatting and Style: Bullet points in the main text have been converted to narrative paragraphs to improve academic flow and coherence.

Clarity and Concision: The entire manuscript has been reviewed to enhance readability, eliminate redundancy, and maintain a professional tone.

These revisions aim to address your feedback comprehensively, enhancing the thesis's coherence, analytical depth, and scholarly rigor. I am deeply grateful for your expertise and rigorous review, which have significantly strengthened this work. Please let me know if further clarifications or adjustments are needed.

Sincerely,

Zhu Qi