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

Zhu Qi

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Abstract

This study examines political leader survival following irregular transitions, comparing classic coups d'état with autocoup (incumbent power extension). Employing a rigorous time-dependent Cox model on a new dataset, I test if the mode of accession affects tenure length. The analysis reveals that the initial hypothesis—that autocoup leaders survive longer—is rejected. Once dynamic contextual variables are controlled for, the method of irregular entry (coup vs. autocoup) does not independently predict survival. Instead, longevity is overwhelmingly determined by regime type and economic performance. Military and personalist regimes exhibit high instability, while GDP growth provides a strong protective effect. The research concludes that the institutional and economic environment, not the specific method of power seizure, is the principal determinant of political longevity following irregular transitions.

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

1 Introduction

Why some political leaders achieve lasting longevity while others are quickly removed remains a central question in political science. While general theories of political survival are rare, existing scholarship has emphasized a broad spectrum of factors, ranging from objective conditions—such as economic performance (Palmer and Whitten 1999; Williams 2011), natural resource wealth (Smith 2004), and societal stability (Arriola 2009)—to strategic behaviours, including elite co-optation, repression, and institutional manipulation (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Morrison 2009; Davenport, RezaeeDaryakenari, and Wood 2021).

Among the mechanisms of leadership turnover, coups d'état are the most consequential and, consequently, the most studied form of irregular transition (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009; Svolik 2014). Coup-driven exits account for nearly two-thirds of all irregular leader removals between 1945 and 2015 (Frantz and Stein 2016).

Yet, despite extensive research on classic coups, a crucial and growing subset of irregular transitions remains systematically underexamined: the autocoup. Defined as an incumbent leader dismantling institutional constraints to illegally entrench or extend their rule, this form of self-engineered power extension has received far less attention than traditional coups, even as its empirical relevance rises. Since 1945, at least 64 successful autocoups have been identified, constituting a substantial share of irregular leadership trajectories (Zhu 2024). Crucially, the success rate of autocoups (77 percent) significantly exceeds that of traditional coups (approximately 50 percent) (Powell and Thyne 2011), suggesting they represent a uniquely effective pathway to prolonged power.

Comparative analysis of coup-installed and autocoup leaders is particularly scarce. This omission is surprising because preliminary evidence suggests fundamentally different survival dynamics. Despite the shared challenge of irregular accession, leaders who achieved power via autocoups exhibit significantly longer average post-event tenures—a gap that can exceed five years—compared to those installed by coups. A log-rank survival test confirms a statistically

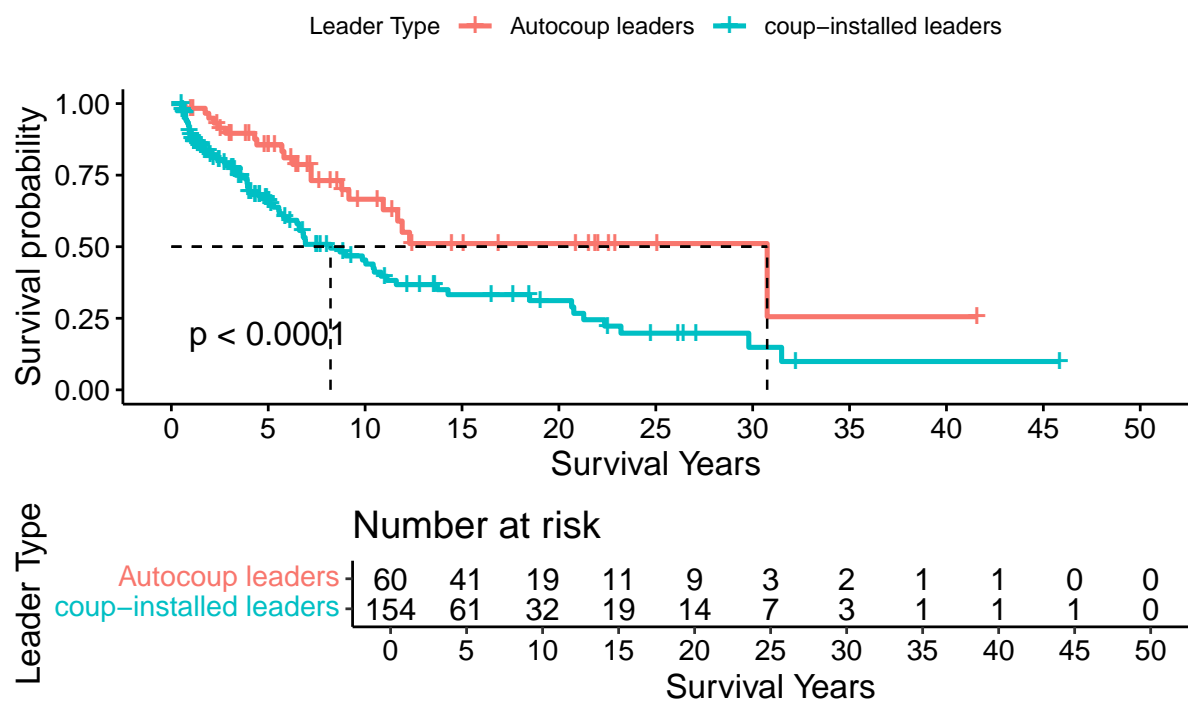significant divergence, with autocoup leaders consistently facing lower hazards of removal (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Survival curves of autocoup and coup-installed leaders

Building on these observations, this article argues that the mode of irregular accession is a fundamental determinant of leadership survival. Coup-installed leaders typically confront heightened and immediate challenges from competing military factions and entrenched societal forces. In stark contrast, autocoup leaders consolidate control from a position of incumbency, allowing them to neutralize institutional veto players and rivals *before* the irregular transition is complete.

Using Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models, this study tests this claim. While preliminary models suggested that the method of accession impacted longevity, the more robust analysis reveals no statistically significant difference in survival risk between autocoup leaders and coup-installed leaders. This finding indicates that the institutional and economic context, rather than the initial mode of irregular entry, is the crucial factor shaping

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post-accession tenure.

This study makes two core contributions. First, methodologically, it provides a rigorous systematic empirical investigation into the survival of autocoup leaders, a crucial but understudied subset of irregular transitions, by employing superior time-dependent survival models. Second, substantively, by showing that the initial method of accession is subsumed by contextual factors (regime type and economic dynamics), this research refines our understanding of authoritarian durability. It redirects scholarly focus from the specific event of the coup or autocoup toward the structural conditions that truly enable or curtail political longevity in the 21st century.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces the definition and data coding of autocoups. Section 3 reviews the theoretical foundations of political survival. Section 4 details the research design and methodology. Section 5 presents and interprets the empirical findings. Section 6 concludes by discussing how the method of accession reshapes our understanding of authoritarian durability and the future of irregular transitions.

2 Autocoup: Definition and Dataset

While studies of irregular leadership transitions traditionally focus on coups d'état due to their frequency and impact, this article examines a distinct form: an incumbent leader's refusal to relinquish power. This phenomenon has received comparatively less scholarly attention, despite its growing importance. Since the end of the Cold War, classic coups have declined, while these "incumbent retention" or "overstay" strategies have become more frequent (Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins 2010; Baturo 2014; Versteeg et al. 2020).

2.1 Terminology

The literature employs a diverse terminology for this phenomenon. The most prevalent term is 'self-coup' (or its Spanish equivalent, autogolpe) (Przeworski et al. 2000; Maxwell A. Cameron 1998a; Bermeo 2016; Helmke 2017; Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019). This term gained

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prominence after Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori dissolved Congress and suspended the constitution in 1992 (Mauceri 1995; Maxwell A. Cameron 1998b). However, 'self-coup' can be misleading; as Marsteintredet and Malamud (2019) observes, the leader acts against state institutions, not against themselves.

Other terms use modifiers to specify the mechanism, such as "presidential," "executive," "constitutional," or "judicial" coups, while others describe the process, like "slow-motion" or "soft" coups (Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019). Another prominent concept is 'incumbent takeover', defined as "an event perpetuated by a ruling executive that significantly reduces the formal and/or informal constraints on his/her power" (Svolik 2014; Baturo and Tolstrup 2022, 374).

These varying terms often create conceptual ambiguity, focusing on procedural mechanisms or conflating legal and extra-legal actions. This study adopts the term '**autocoup**' as the most analytically coherent. It precisely identifies both the actor (the incumbent, auto-) and the act (a coup), clearly conveys the illegitimate nature of the behaviour, and establishes a theoretical link to conventional coups. It thus provides a robust term for the unified analytical framework this study seeks to establish.

2.2   Definition

Existing definitions of irregular power retention, particularly the encompassing term 'self-coup', often fail to adequately distinguish between two fundamentally different concepts: *power expansion* and *tenure extension*. Power expansion refers to an incumbent's acquisition of greater authority or control over state apparatuses during their mandated term. In contrast, Tenure extension specifically denotes a leader's illegitimate act of prolonging their time in office beyond the originally mandated constitutional limit.

Most previous research on autocoups does not sufficiently distinguish between two related but fundamentally distinct concepts: power expansion and tenure extension. However, this

study contends that a precise definition of the autocoup must prioritize tenure extension as its defining characteristic. This focus offers greater conceptual clarity and is more easily operationalised. While power expansion frequently serves as a prerequisite for or accompaniment to tenure extension, it is the extension itself, not the expansion of authority, that constitutes the autocoup event.

I therefore define an autocoup as *the extension of an incumbent leader's tenure in office beyond the originally mandated limit, achieved through extra-constitutional means*.

This definition places the violation or evasion of mandated term limits at the centre of the concept, providing a more precise and consistent framework for analysis.

2.3   Data coding

The autocoup dataset is constructed by integrating and refining several established political science datasets to ensure reliability and comprehensiveness (see Table 1).

I use the Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009) and the Political Leaders' Affiliation Database (PLAD) (Bomprezzi et al. 2024) to identify de facto national leaders and their precise time in office from 1945 to 2023. These sources are essential for distinguishing de facto rulers from nominal heads of state.

The Incumbent Takeover dataset (Baturo and Tolstrup 2022), which synthesizes eleven sources, serves as my primary inventory of potential events. This dataset catalogs a broad range of cases where executives curtailed institutional constraints on their authority. However, because that dataset includes both power expansion and tenure extension cases, I cross-referenced its entries with Archigos and PLAD to isolate only those events that meet our specific definition of an autocoup (i.e., those involving tenure extension).

In total, I identified and coded 83 autocoup events: 50 were adapted from cases within the Incumbent Takeover dataset and 33 were newly identified by the author through cross-verification of Archigos, PLAD, and contemporary news sources.

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Table 1: Main Data Sources for Coding the Autocoup Dataset

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

While the dataset builds on the valuable Incumbent Takeover project, it is not a replication. The principal point of departure is conceptual: of the 279 cases catalogued in the Incumbent Takeover dataset, I excluded 229 because they entailed power consolidation without an accompanying attempt to extend the leader's tenure. Such events fall outside our operational definition of an autocoup.

3 Theoretical Framework: Survival Dynamics of Autocoup and Coup-Installed Leaders

While the literature on leadership survival is extensive, studies of irregular transitions often either focus heavily on coup-installed leaders or aggregate various types of non-constitutional rulers. This article addresses a critical gap by disaggregating these categories, conducting a focused comparison between two distinct types of irregular leaders: those installed by a coup and those who execute an autocoup. Based on preliminary evidence from Figure 1, I argue that despite both paths representing an irregular transition, the method of entry or retention fundamentally alters a leader's subsequent survival prospects. This section establishes the theoretical framework for this comparison, beginning with key definitions, then analyzing the divergent challenges these leaders face, and concluding with a testable hypothesis.

3.1 Key definitions and scope

To ensure conceptual clarity, I first operationalise key terms. Following Powell and Thyne (2011), a coup is defined as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive." As defined previously, an autocoup is "the extension of an incumbent leader's tenure in office beyond the originally mandated limit, achieved through extra-constitutional means."

From these definitions, I also identify two leader types. Coup-Installed Leader is the individual who assumes power *following* a successful coup, regardless of their direct role in its execution. This broad definition includes both the primary instigators and those selected to lead the post-coup regime. Autocoup Leader is an incumbent leader who successfully uses extra-constitutional means to extend their tenure, effectively beginning a new, irregular term in office.

This study compares the post-autocoup tenure of autocoup leaders with the post-coup tenure of coup-installed leaders. To ensure a meaningful analysis of survival dynamics and filter out ephemeral episodes, I apply a six-month tenure threshold to both groups. This comparative focus is motivated by the distinct challenges of illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability that both leader types face, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how their different starting positions influence longevity.

3.2 Challenges in power consolidation

Both autocoup and coup-installed leaders must consolidate power in the face of significant challenges. However, the nature and intensity of these challenges differ markedly across the three key domains of illegitimacy, uncertainty, and instability. As Table 2 outlines, these differences place coup-installed leaders at a significant relative disadvantage.

Table 2: Main features of autocoup and coup-installed leaders

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

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Illegitimacy

While both leaders lack democratic legitimacy, its manifestation differs significantly. Coup-Installed Leaders face immediate and unambiguous illegitimacy. Their power originates from an overt, often violent, rupture of the established order. This act generates immediate domestic and international condemnation, undermining pre-existing norms and institutions.

Autocoup Leaders, in contrast, typically employ a strategy of manipulation. They leverage a procedural façade, bending or breaking legal institutions to create a veneer of constitutionality. While this "democratic" cover may be thin, it obscures the irregular nature of the transition, mitigates immediate backlash, and buys the leader critical time to consolidate power.

Uncertainty

The irregular path to power creates uncertainty regarding tenure and succession for both types. Coup-Installed Leaders confront a threefold uncertainty. First, the immediate aftermath involves a power struggle within the new ruling coalition or junta. Second, their tenure is inherently precarious, subject to internal rivalries, popular unrest, or counter-coups. Third, the lack of established succession mechanisms amplifies this ambiguity.

Autocoup Leaders present a more certain picture. The central question of *who* rules is already settled: the incumbent. By retaining power, the autocoup leader signals an intention to rule indefinitely or on an extended timeline, which can, in itself, create a perception of stability and predictability, at least in the short term.

Instability

Precarious legitimacy and uncertainty breed instability, but the stabilization tasks for each leader type are distinct. Coup-Installed Leaders must rapidly reshape the state's power dynamics. This often requires purges of the old elite and crackdowns on opponents, generating significant instability and alienating potential allies. They must simultaneously build a new

support structure while managing domestic and international pressures, limiting their options and undermining long-term stability.

Autocoup Leaders benefit from institutional and personnel continuity. Because they are already in power, they can implement changes more gradually, minimizing disruption and mitigating backlash. They face opposition, but they are less likely to confront an immediate, existential threat, affording them more time and leverage to solidify their new grip on power.

3.3 Hypothesis Development

Preliminary empirical evidence supports this theoretical distinction. Analysis of survival data, as depicted in Figure 1, illustrates that the average survival period following an autocoup is approximately five years longer than that of a leader installed by a conventional coup.

This survival gap can be explained by the self-perpetuating cycles created by their differing consolidation challenges. Coup-installed leaders begin from a position of profound weakness. Their overt illegitimacy and the instability from the coup itself make it difficult to attract reliable support. This environment of persistent uncertainty is compounded by historical precedent; as Powell and Thyne (2011) notes, coups often occur in cycles, with over a third of all attempts since 1950 occurring in the ten most coup-prone countries. This history reinforces the leader's precarity, inviting further challenges and shortening their expected tenure.

Autocoup leaders, conversely, leverage their initial advantages. The veneer of legality and the continuity of state institutions provide a stronger foundation. They are better positioned to attract and maintain support, consolidate power incrementally, and face fewer immediate threats of overthrow. This initial stability contributes to longer tenures, which in turn reinforces the perception of their durability.

Based on this theoretical framework and the divergent challenges identified, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Political leaders who successfully extend their tenure through autocoups

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will have a longer post-event tenure than leaders who are installed by a coup d'état.

Testing this hypothesis will quantify the impact of the method of irregular power acquisition on leadership longevity, offering a more nuanced understanding of political survival.

4 Research design

To test the central hypothesis that autocoup leaders exhibit longer survival in office than coup-installed leaders, I utilize survival analysis—a set of statistical methods designed to model the time until an event occurs (in this case, the time until a leader is removed from office). Specifically, I employ Cox proportional hazards and time-dependent Cox models to estimate the effect of the primary explanatory factor (leader type) on tenure length while controlling for relevant covariates.

4.1 Methodology: Survival analysis

I employ two variants of the Cox model to analyse leadership survival. Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model incorporates time-invariant covariates (e.g., leader's age, country's coup history) measured at the *start* of the irregular tenure. It assumes the covariates have a constant proportional effect on the hazard rate over time.

Time-dependent Cox model allows for the inclusion of covariates whose values vary over time, such as annual economic performance or levels of political violence. This approach offers a more dynamic and robust analysis of survival.

The Cox model is preferred over the Kaplan-Meier estimator due to its capacity to account for multiple explanatory variables simultaneously. The model estimates the hazard ratio, which reflects the relative risk of a tenure-ending event (ouster) at any given time. A higher hazard ratio corresponds to a lower probability of survival, thus capturing the critical dynamics of

leadership vulnerability.

4.2 Data and Variables

The analysis relies on the following operationalised variables.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable for survival analysis consists of two components:

Survival Time: This measures the duration of the leader's tenure in days.

- For coup-installed leaders, this period begins on their day of accession.

- For autocoup leaders, it begins on the date their original, legitimate term was set to expire, marking the start of their irregular tenure.

End Point Status (Event): This is a binary variable indicating how the tenure concluded:

- **0 = Censored:** The leader's tenure ended through regular or 'natural' means (e.g., term expiration, natural death, electoral loss, voluntary retirement).

- **1 = Ousted (Event):** The leader was forcibly removed from office (e.g., via a subsequent coup, popular uprising, resignation under pressure, or assassination).

Key independent variable

The primary independent variable of interest is **Leader Type**, a categorical variable with three levels:

- Regular Leader (Reference Group): A leader who assumed power through regular, constitutional means.

- Autocoup Leader: An incumbent who extended their tenure through extra-constitutional means.

- Coup-Installed Leader: A leader who assumed power following a coup d'état.

Control variables

To isolate the effect of leader type, the models control for key covariates as influencing leadership stability.

Regime Type: A categorical variable (democracy, hybrid, autocracy) to account for broad institutional differences in leadership stability and turnover norms.

Polity V Score: Used to control for the specific institutional characteristics and degree of democratic or autocratic constraints on the executive.

Economic Performance: Measured by macroeconomic indicators (e.g., GDP growth) that influence a leader's resource base and popular support.

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

Political Violence: Accounts for the extent of civil conflict or unrest that can directly threaten a leader's tenure.

Population Size: Included (often in log form) to control for structural differences and governance challenges across states.

Data Sources

Data for all variables are compiled from several sources:

The Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009) and the Political Leaders' Affiliation Database (PLAD) (Bomprezzi et al. 2024) provide the core data on leader tenure and exit types.

The Autocoup Dataset (introduced in this study) is used to identify autocoup leaders and the start date of their irregular tenure.

Table 3: Cox Models for Survival Time of Different Types of Leaders

Characteristic	Cox PH Model				Time-dependent Cox Model			
	N	Event N	HR[1]	SE	N	Event N	HR[1]	SE
Leader Type								
Non-coup leaders	1,506	195	1.00	—	8,039	196	1.00	—
Autocoup leaders	58	20	1.21	0.247	507	20	1.22	0.244
Coup-installed leaders	152	75	1.77***	0.155	998	75	1.26	0.170
Regime Types								
Dominant-party	267	68	1.00	—	2,610	63	1.00	—
Military	138	51	2.64***	0.194	656	60	3.17***	0.213
Personal	137	61	1.70***	0.181	1,551	82	1.78***	0.175
Presidential	346	42	1.42	0.229	1,819	39	1.31	0.269
Parliamentary	711	35	1.29	0.245	2,555	31	1.28	0.292
Other	117	33	2.27***	0.226	353	16	2.10**	0.302
GDP Growth Trend	1,716	290	0.62	0.984	9,544	291	0.13***	0.782
GDP per capita	1,716	290	0.96***	0.008	9,544	291	0.96***	0.007
Population: log	1,716	290	0.99	0.043	9,544	291	0.96	0.044
Polity V score	1,716	290	0.98*	0.013	9,544	291	0.99	0.015
Political violence	1,716	290	0.98	0.030	9,544	291	1.06**	0.027

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

Control variable data is sourced from standard datasets (e.g., Polity V, World Bank, and datasets on political violence).

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Model results

The regression estimates from both the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model and the time-dependent Cox model are presented in Table 3. The two specifications yield divergent findings regarding this study's central hypothesis.

The standard Cox PH model, which uses only time-fixed covariates, identifies a statistically significant difference in removal risk. In this model, coup-installed leaders face a 77% higher hazard of removal compared to non-coup leaders (HR = 1.77, p < 0.01). The hazard ratio for autocoup leaders (1.21) is not statistically significant.

However, the time-dependent Cox model, which is theoretically superior as it accounts for evolving conditions (like economic performance and political violence), contradicts this finding. In this more robust model, no statistically significant difference in removal risk is found between leader types. The hazard ratios for both autocoup (HR = 1.22) and coup-installed (HR = 1.26) leaders are statistically indistinguishable from the non-coup baseline.

Given the superior specification of the time-dependent model, we base our principal interpretation on its results. This leads to a clear rejection of the initial hypothesis (H1). Once key time-varying contextual factors are controlled for, the manner of power acquisition (coup vs. autocoup) does not appear to have an independent, statistically significant effect on leader survival.

Instead, the results indicate that survival is primarily determined by institutional and contextual factors:

- Regime Type: This emerges as the most powerful predictor. Compared to the baseline of dominant-party regimes, leaders in military regimes face a 217% higher risk of removal (HR = 3.17, $p < 0.01$). Leaders in personalist regimes (HR = 1.78, $p < 0.01$) and "Other" regimes (often transitional or provisional) (HR = 2.10, $p < 0.05$) are also significantly more vulnerable.

- Economic Performance: Economic conditions are strongly associated with survival. Sustained GDP growth provides a powerful protective effect; a one-unit increase (e.g., 1% growth above the 5-year average) is associated with an 87% reduction in the hazard of removal (HR = 0.13, $p < 0.01$). Higher GDP per capita also has a modest but significant protective effect (HR = 0.96, $p < 0.01$).

- Political Instability: Political violence is a destabilising force. A one-unit increase in the political violence index is associated with a 6% increase in the removal hazard (HR = 1.06, $p < 0.05$).

Other variables, including population size (log-transformed) and Polity V scores, did not achieve statistical significance in the time-dependent model.

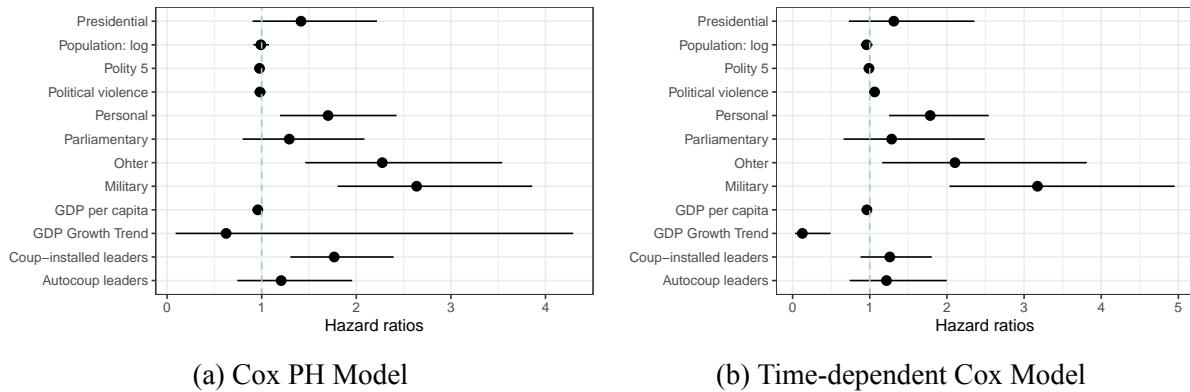(a) Cox PH Model   (b) Time-dependent Cox Model

Figure 2: Hazard Ratios and 95% CIs for Leader Ousting

Figure 2 displays the hazard ratios (HRs) with 95% confidence intervals for all covariates in the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model (left panel) and the time-dependent Cox model (right panel). Dots represent estimated HRs, and horizontal bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals. A value of 1 denotes no effect on the hazard of removal. Covariates whose intervals cross the vertical reference line at 1 are not statistically significant at the 5% level. Because it captures time-varying conditions, the time-dependent Cox model forms the primary basis for interpretation.

5.2 Discussion

This result carries an important theoretical implication: after an irregular seizure of power, the initial symbolic or procedural differences between coups (external overthrow) and autocoups (internal institutional manipulation) lose explanatory leverage. Both leader types immediately confront similar structural vulnerabilities—contested legitimacy, heightened elite uncertainty, and limited institutionalized authority. Their subsequent survival depends less on how they entered office and more on how effectively they navigate this shared environment of instability.

The rejection of the initial hypothesis, however, does not diminish the study's value; rather, it shifts the focus to the proximate political and economic contexts that truly dictate longevity. The analysis underscores that institutional and economic conditions—not accession type—are the primary determinants of survival. Regime type stands out as the strongest predictor: leaders in military, personalist, and transitional regimes face substantially higher risks of removal. This finding is consistent with theories linking high turnover to weak institutions and poorly regulated elite competition. In these settings, authority rests on fragile bargains and coercive capacity rather than stable rules of succession, leaving leaders highly exposed to internal rivals.

Two important contextual notes must be clarified regarding the findings. First, these results are conditional on the exclusion of leaders who survived for fewer than 180 days. This methodological choice is analytically justified, as short-lived leaders (disproportionately found among coup-installed regimes) often fail to achieve even minimal consolidation and would artificially skew the hazard rates. Second, the statistical finding that accession type is not a predictive factor does not negate the observational reality that autocoup leaders still enjoy longer average tenures than coup-installed leaders. The result simply excludes the mode of accession as the causal predictive factor once time-varying structural and performance variables are introduced into the model.

5.3 Methodological Validation

As a final methodological check, the proportional hazards assumption was validated using Schoenfeld residuals. The test results confirm that the assumption is satisfied in both the standard Cox PH model (Global $p = 0.12$) and the time-dependent Cox model (Global $p = 0.23$), ensuring the reliability of the hazard ratio estimates.

6 Conclusion

This study provided a systematic analysis of the survival prospects of political leaders who assumed office through irregular transitions (coups and autocoups), employing robust survival analysis techniques, including the time-dependent Cox model.

The principal finding of this study is that the mode of power acquisition does not independently predict leadership duration once dynamic contextual variables are considered. Although the simpler standard Cox model suggested a higher risk of removal for coup-installed leaders, this effect dissipated in the more rigorous time-dependent model. This result indicates that leadership type itself is not a significant determinant of political survival, challenging the initial hypothesis.

Instead, leader survival is overwhelmingly determined by structural and performance-based factors:

- Regime Type: This emerged as the most influential predictor. Leaders in military, personalist, and transitional ("other") regimes face significantly higher hazards of removal than those in dominant-party systems. This highlights the profound institutional instability and elite factionalism associated with less consolidated political structures.

- Economic Performance: Economic development is critically linked to stability. While higher GDP per capita is associated with greater leadership stability, GDP growth exerts an especially strong protective effect. Even modest increases in growth rates substantially reduce the risk of removal, reinforcing the link between performance-based legitimacy and political tenure.

- Political Violence: Conversely, political violence consistently increases the likelihood of ousting, underscoring the destabilising impact of societal unrest and conflict on a leader's ability to maintain control.

Other structural variables, such as population size and Polity V scores, did not attain statistical significance, suggesting that under conditions of irregular accession, proximate and dynamic factors are more consequential than long-term institutional attributes.

The robust findings regarding the factors that truly predict leadership survival—or removal—carry clear policy implications for all leaders, regardless of their path to power. The results show unequivocally that personalist rule, military regimes, and poor economic management significantly heighten the risk of violent overthrow. Therefore, for any leader seeking long-term stability and reduced risk of removal, the evidence strongly suggests two key priorities:

- Promote Institutionalized Governance: Leaders should strive to move away from highly personalist rule or military governance, as these regimes inherently raise the hazard of removal. Even under non-democratic conditions, fostering more rules-based, inclusive, and institutionalized governance systems can reduce the elite uncertainty and factionalism that fuel coups.

- Prioritize Economic Performance: Maintaining high economic growth and improving GDP per capita is paramount. Leaders must prioritize policies that deliver tangible economic benefits, as sustained poor economic performance is one of the clearest signals that significantly raises the probability of them being violently ousted. The study suggests that focusing on these structural and performance metrics is far more effective for ensuring political longevity than attempting to manipulate the initial accession process.

In sum, this study concludes that regime characteristics and economic dynamics, rather than the mode of accession, are the principal determinants of political survival following irregular transitions to power.

Methodologically, this work advances the field by demonstrating the analytical necessity of time-dependent survival models in leadership research. Substantively, it provides one of the first systematic empirical investigations into the survival of autocoup leaders, contributing

valuable data to the growing literature on irregular leadership transitions, while also pointing to the necessity of future refinement and expansion of the newly constructed autocoup dataset. These findings contribute to broader debates on authoritarian resilience, executive instability, and the structural foundations of political longevity.

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