Article

Coup d'État and Democracy

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Abstract

This article explains coup activity in democracies by adapting insights from the literature on commitment problems and framing coup around the threats leaders and potential coup plotters pose to each other. I claim democratic constraints on executive power inhibit a leader's ability to repress threats from political rivals. Though this decreases motivations for coup attempts, it also makes democracies more vulnerable should a coup attempt occur. Consequently, democratic constraints on executive power do not reduce the frequency of coup attempts, but coups attempted against democracies are much more likely to succeed. Using several data sets of coup activity and democratic constraints, I find significant differences in coup activity in democracies and non-democracies. Relative to civilian non-democracies, democracies are about half as likely to use coup-related repression, but they face a similar frequency of coup attempts. Plots against democracies are nearly twice as likely to succeed.

Keywords

coup, democratization and regime change, military and politics, repression

Twenty-five years ago the end of the Cold War, rapid democratization, and a sharp global decline in coup events inspired hope for a more democratic future. This optimism persisted throughout the 1990s as the number of

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democratic states continued to rise and the global frequency of coups fell by nearly 50%.[1] But following this initial wave of democratization and the corresponding decline in coup activity, neither trend continued. The share of the world's states classified as "free" by *Freedom House* has been stalled near 45% since the turn of the century and there were more successful coups over the last decade (17 from 2005 to 2014) than there were in the decade before that (15 from 1995 to 2004). Events in Thailand (2014), Mali (2012), Egypt (2013), Honduras (2009), and elsewhere show recent coups have not been confined to non-democracies. In fact, the majority of leaders removed by coups over the last decade governed democracies.

The frequency with which coups overturn transitional democracies raises important questions about the relationship between coup activity and democratic institutions. The literatures on coup activity and leader survival generally expect coup risk to decline with democratization because democratic elections offer a low-risk alternative for leader replacement and inclusive governments provide more benefits for those outside the immediate ruling clique. This argument about coup motivations and political inclusion, prominent since the writings of Niccoló Machiavelli, is foundational in contemporary research on political survival and elite placation.[2] Although this view is widely held, the empirical evidence linking democracy to decreased coup activity is surprisingly ambiguous. This article addresses this ambiguity with a new theoretical approach to understanding coups in democracies and a thorough statistical analysis of the coup–democracy relationship.

I argue we can understand coups against democracies by conceptualizing coup as a commitment problem between leaders and viable potential coup plotters. Potential plotters and leaders pose mutual threats to each other; the former can forcibly remove the leader from power and the latter can use coup-proofing and repression to preemptively insulate their governments. A coup-free and repression-free status quo is possible only when this commitment problem can be resolved by reduced incentives for both plotting and coup-related repression. Below, I show democratic constraints on executive power do not resolve this problem and, as a result, democratization is unlikely to reduce coup activity.

Very briefly, I claim meaningful democratic constraints on executive power make coup-related repression costly or infeasible. The high cost of repression allows leaders of democracies to credibly commit to not purging elites, preemptively arresting political rivals, or taking other actions that may adversely affect the welfare of potential coup plotters.[3] This reduces coup motivations, which suggests democracies should see fewer coup attempts. But unfortunately, these constraints on coup-proofing also reduce the risk of plots being contested and foiled, thus leaving leaders more vulnerable to

attempts that are especially likely to succeed. I draw four implications from this logic. (a) Coup-related repression, including explicit allegations of unrealized coup plots, is less frequent in democracies. (b) The risk of coup attempts is not significantly different in democracies because democratic constraints simultaneously increase opportunities for coups while decreasing motivations for them. (c) Constraints on coup-proofing cause coups attempted against democracies to be more likely to succeed than coups against relatively unconstrained non-democratic leaders. (d) The effects of democratic constraints on coup activity are more pronounced among weaker states where coup plots are viable methods of regime change.

I test these hypotheses with a comprehensive statistical analysis of coup allegations, attempts, and success rates. The analysis uses three coup data sets, three measures of democratic constraints, and two separate samples (global 1945-2011 and sub-Saharan 1960-2011) to ensure the reliability of the findings and highlight any sensitivities related to sample characteristics and discrepancies in measurement. I find democracies to be approximately 50% less likely to accuse elites of unrealized coup plotting, but no less likely to suffer coup attempts. Although democracies and non-democracies suffer coup attempts with similar frequencies, coups against democracies are roughly twice as likely to be successful. There are some nuances to these general conclusions, but a preponderant share of the tests support the argument and highlight how the logic of commitment problems can improve our understanding of coup activity in democratic states. This framework also suggests some strategies for making transitional democratic governments less coup-prone.

Literature Review: Democratic Rule and the Causes of Coup d'État

Most research on coup d'état draws from the rational choice approach. In this framework, a potential coup plotter anticipates the costs and benefits to be derived from a coup attempt and compares this expectation with continued life under the incumbent. This understanding of coup directs attention to two concepts that form the theoretical cornerstones of the coup literature: the plotter's *satisfaction* with the status quo and plotter *opportunity*, conceptualized as the probability with which a coup attempt might succeed.[4] Scholars disagree about the relative importance of satisfaction and opportunity, but there is broad consensus that coup risk largely reflects a plotter's interests as codetermined by these concepts. Arguments linking a country's coup risk to the democratic character of its institutions are typically framed around the effect of democracy on satisfaction, opportunity, or both.

Work on plotter satisfaction focuses on the interests of the military elite and assumes that because militaries always have greater coercive capacity than civilian leaders, coup must be understood as the failure of civilians to satisfy their armed counterparts (Finer, 1988; Huntington, 1957; Nordlinger, 1977; Thompson, 1973).[5] Special attention is given to military corporate interests and the pacifying role of satisfaction-increasing placation strategies such as increased military spending, arms acquisitions, and civilian–military power sharing (Bove & Brauner, 2014; Leon, 2014; McMahon & Slantchev, 2015). Many of these co-opting strategies are at odds with the principles of democratic rule, but civil–military "pacting" was essential to the survival of transitional democracies in Latin America, Southern Europe, and elsewhere (Éncarnacion, 2001; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Rasler, 1996; Roskin, 1978-1979).

Others claim dreams of power always provide sufficient motivation for a coup, so coup risk must be determined by the ease with which a coup plot could succeed. These studies of plotter opportunity focus on signs of leader vulnerability, including ethnic factionalism (Jackman, 1978; Johnson, Slater, and McGowan, 1984; Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993), supportive foreign governments (Thyne, 2010), increased public support for coups following coups in other states (Li & Thompson, 1975), leader inexperience (Huntington, 1957, 1968; Little, 2015), and well-funded militaries (Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993). Conditions related to economic crisis, such as slow growth (Johnson et al., 1984; Kim, 2014; Luttwak, 1969; O'Kane, 1993), commodity price shocks (O'Kane, 1981, 1993), and poverty (Londregan & Poole, 1990; Powell, 2012), are prominent in this vein of research. This argument, derived largely from Luttwak's (1969) "handbook" on coup d'état, links coup to economic performance via public opinion. Coups are more likely to succeed when the public will accept the new regime and acceptance is more easily achieved when the public lacks strong allegiance to the ousted incumbent (Casper & Tyson, 2014; Galetovic & Sanhueza, 2000; Wig & Rod, 2014). Many have used an identical logic to claim democratically elected leaders should be less vulnerable to coups because they are perceived to be more legitimate than non-democratic leaders (Finer, 1988; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Lindberg & Clark, 2008; Luttwak, 1969).[6]

This literature proposes both positive and negative causal links between democratic rule and incentives for coup plotting, though most work emphasizes pacifying conditions. Democratic states are less likely to purge or "coup-proof" their militaries (Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012) or deploy soldiers in conflicts they are unlikely to win (Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Desch, 2002; Reiter & Stam, 1998). Military elites who see themselves as "guardians" of the state sometimes express an interest in democratization

(Nordlinger, 1977) and the occasional organization of free-and-fair elections immediately following a successful coup implies elites may be less motivated to overthrow democratically elected governments (Marinov & Goemans, 2014; Thyne & Powell, 2014). Common soldiers' welfare is usually greater under democracies, which provide more public goods to those outside the ruling circle of elites (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003). However, these plausible sources of military satisfaction may be offset by the greater separation of civilian and military institutions, which can increase fears of marginalization where militaries have had a larger governing role in living memory. Democracies also allocate a smaller percentage of their budgets toward defense spending (Albalate, Bel, & Elias, 2012; Bove & Nisticò, 2014) and it is not clear that the generals and high-level elites with the greatest capacity to organize coups are better off in democratic systems where transparency and institutionalization inhibit the private goods and rent-seeking enjoyed by those in non-democracies (see Slater, Smith, & Nair, 2014).

Statistical analyses of the historical record do not bring much clarity to the democracy–coup relationship. Much of the literature treats coup as a problem for dictators and studies coup in the context of non-democratic states (Bove & Rivera, 2015; Svolik, 2009, 2012; Wig & Rod, 2014), and the cross-national quantitative literature on democracy and coup has yet to reach any consensus. Lindberg and Clark (2008) examine Africa from 1990 to 2004 and argue democracies face a lower risk of suffering a coup attempt, but their analysis includes no control variables for other plausible explanations for this correlation, including disparate levels of economic development and political stability. In a more expansive analysis of global coup activity spanning 1950 to 2010, Powell (2012) evaluates regime type with *Polity IV* scores and finds democratic states to be only slightly less prone to coup attempts than semi-democratic or "anocratic" states, but *no less likely* to suffer a coup than full-fledged autocracies. Vreeland (2008), among others, warns that findings based on this popular regime type index could be driven by the fact that it arbitrarily codes anocratic regime scores for states suffering major political crises and severe political instability. Consequently, a statistically significant relationship between coup and anocracy/semi-democracy could evince a relevant regime type effect, or it could simply reveal that states embroiled in turmoil are more likely to suffer coup attempts. In a large global sample, effects attributed to democracy could also be caused by any of several latent factors that differentiate the well-developed industrialized democracies from the large group of non-democracies that tend to be poorer, less stable, and more prone to foreign intervention and political interference.

Below, I claim we can improve our understanding of how democracy may influence the potential for coup activity by extending previous research on how dictators resolve one of the central paradoxes in governance: The conditions that improve political opponents' satisfaction are among the same conditions that increase their strength and subsequently the viability of their coup attempts. There is a large literature on how dictators balance the satisfaction and power of potential opponents, both military and civilian (Feaver, 1999; Gandhi, 2008; Magaloni, 2008; McMahon & Slantchev, 2015; Svolik, 2012; Wright, 2008), and many studies provide empirical evidence of this trade-off.[7] The next section draws from this literature to argue democratic constraints on executive power compel leaders of democracies to manage the satisfaction-vulnerability paradox differently than non-democratic leaders, and this causes patterns of coup activity in democracies to diverge with the level of democratization.

The Argument: Democratic Constraints, Leader Credibility, and Coup

Research on leader survival has made rapid theoretical advances by adapting insights from formal games of non-cooperative bargaining. Work in this genre includes Svolik's (2012) foundational book on dictator survival, Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2003) selectorate theory, and several scholars' research on the causes of autocratic concessions and democratization (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003; Gandhi, 2008; Reuter & Remington, 2009). Some of this work examines how dictators manage coup threats, focusing on how they resolve the satisfaction-vulnerability paradox discussed above by creating incentives for loyalty and disincentives for conspiring with other potential defectors (Galetovic & Sanhueza, 2000; Geddes, 2003; Sutter, 2000). My argument extends this approach to consider how democracies confront the problem of viable potential coup plots and gives special attention to the consequences of democratic constraints on executive power.

Suppose incumbent leaders and potential coup plotters pose threats to each other; potential plotters can threaten leaders with coup attempts while leaders can threaten potential plotters with repression, purges, coup-proofing measures, and worse. The prevalence of both coup attempts and coup-related repression provides some support for the validity of this basic framework for understanding coup behavior. If we accept this as a starting point, then we can understand coup activity as a consequence of leader–plotter strategic interaction that closely resembles simple formal models of cooperation and defection (i.e., Prisoner's Dilemma, Chicken, Battle of the Sexes, etc.). Incumbent leaders and potential plotters may "cooperate" by maintaining a coup-free

Table 1. Coup as a Commitment Problem.

	No repression	Repression
No plot	Status quo *No coup activity*	Baseless repression *Arrests/allegations*
Plot	Uncontested attempt *Attempted coups with a higher probability of success*	Contested attempt *Foiled plots and attempts with a lower probability of success*

and repression-free status quo, but they may also "defect" by acting against the other. Each actor's decision is driven by expectations over what the other might do, so this becomes a classic commitment problem.[8]

Table 1 illustrates this theoretical framework. Leaders and potential coup plotters must decide whether to cooperate or defect, but they must do so without perfect knowledge of the other's intentions. If neither leader nor plotter defects, then no coup activity occurs and the *status quo* is maintained. However, coup activity is possible when commitments to the status quo are not credible. From the leader's perspective, the possibility of a coup can incentivize preemptive repression (i.e., coup-proofing) because leaders would rather face *contested coup attempts*, for which they are relatively prepared, than suffer *uncontested coup attempts* that catch them off-guard. Potential plotters are similarly concerned about the threat of repression. If potential plotters fear the possibility of *baseless repression*, then they may plot a coup even when they would otherwise be satisfied in the status quo. This framework clearly draws out the satisfaction-vulnerability paradox that has been discussed since Machiavelli's classic writings on the relative strengths of rule by fear and rule by love. Leaders hoping to avoid coup attempts with coup-proofing repression risk reducing rivals' satisfaction to the point that repression can motivate coup attempts. Those striving to avoid coup attempts with benevolence and restraint leave themselves more vulnerable to uncontested coup attempts should rivals decide to act.

Anecdotes of past coup attempts illustrate the dynamics portrayed in this stylized model of coup decision-making. General Idi Amin's 1971 overthrow of Ugandan President Milton Obote was among the most consequential of the many coups that occurred in sub-Saharan Africa during the Cold War. Although tensions between the two men were rising in the years preceding the 1971 coup—Obote had worked to marginalize Amin with accusations of corruption and reassignment to a less influential position—Amin claimed he had no interest in staging a coup until he heard rumors of an upcoming military purge. In effect, fear of baseless repression increased Amin's incentives

for coup plotting. Obote later said he was only planning to purge the military because he feared a coup attempt. These statements suggest the coup attempt was driven by the mutual distrust fostered by each actor's inability to credibly commit to the coup-free and purge-free status quo.[9]

We witnessed a similar dynamic in Pakistan in the weeks preceding General Pervez Musharraf's October 1999 overthrow of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In this case, Sharif's civilian government was becoming increasingly wary of a coup plot and began working to replace the top military commanders who posed the greatest threats. These efforts culminated with a bizarre incident in which the government waited for Musharraf to board an international flight, announced his ouster while the plane was airborne, and then refused to let the plane land even as it was running out of fuel. The army learned of this plot, seized the airport tower in Karachi, and permitted the plane to land shortly before it would have exhausted its fuel. Musharraf was able to move very quickly—most evidence suggests a coup plot was in fact in the works—and he took power shortly thereafter. This incident clearly shows that mutual distrust greatly increased motivations for both coup plotting and coup-related repression. The opening sentence of the *New York Times* article on this event captures this perfectly: "For months, Pakistan's Prime Minister and its top general were like two scorpions in a bottle. This week, both struck" (Weiner, 1999).

Previous research on non-cooperative bargaining teaches us commitment problems are exacerbated when the costs of defection are low; commitments to cooperation (or in this case, the status quo) are made credible when the cost of defection is substantial for all actors.[10] For potential coup plotters, these costs of defection are determined by *leader vulnerability*, or the likelihood that an attempted coup will succeed. Coups against vulnerable leaders pose lower risks to potential plotters, and this incentivizes attempts and leaves potential plotters unable to credibly commit to a coup-free status quo. The consequence is coup attempts become more likely against vulnerable leaders for two reasons: Increased leader vulnerability directly increases the risk of coup because it not only makes an attempt more attractive to potential plotters, but it also indirectly increases the risk of coup by raising leaders' fears that a coup attempt is imminent, which in turn incentivizes preemptive repression and creates further incentives for coup plotting. In the language of the model, a vulnerable leader's fear of suffering an uncontested coup attempt drives her toward coup-proofing repression, which only strengthens the potential plotter's incentives for a coup.

Turning to incumbent leaders, leader credibility is bolstered when the cost of coup-related repression is very high, as it is when leaders are bound by *democratic constraints on executive power*. Leaders suffer greater penalties for making baseless accusations when their decisions are constrained by

institutionalized checks on power, such as an independent legislature or judiciary that can investigate claims of illegal persecution and sanction leaders who abuse their authority. For this reason, potential coup plotters living under the rule of a democratically constrained leader can expect a lower likelihood of repression compared with those living under non-democratic leaders who can repress with impunity. Constraints become a source of credibility. This argument parallels international bargaining research on democratic audience costs (Fearon, 1994; Schultz, 2001; Tomz, 2007).

It would seem that this reassurance against repression would reduce incentives for coup plotting, but a lower threat of repression also means any coup attempted would be more likely to be uncontested, and therefore more likely to succeed. Leaders who do not engage in coup-related repression are softer targets than those who do, all else being equal, so democratic constraints make coup attempts all the more attractive to potential coup plotters. In this way, democratic constraints have contradictory effects on plotter interests: Guarantees against repression reduce motivations for plotting but increase the opportunity for a coup to be successful. This is especially true in democracies where leaders are not so strong as to make coup attempts completely unviable.

This logic is substantially different in dictatorships where constraints on executive power are lower or nonexistent. Low barriers to repression render a leader's commitment to the status quo incredible, thus increasing incentives for coup plotting. The plausibility of baseless repression reduces the opportunity costs of a coup attempt, making plotters more willing to plot much riskier coups than they might plot if they could trust incumbents to refrain from repression. Lower barriers to coup-proofing and repression also mean these leaders are better able to contest coup attempts, which increases their chances of survival should an attempt occur. Unable to credibly commit to lowering motivations for coup activity, non-democratic leaders are compelled to rely on repression that not only motivates coup attempts but also makes them less likely to succeed. This argument suggests four hypotheses about how coup activity in democracies differs from coup activity in non-democracies:

Hypothesis 1: Repression—First, constrained democratic leaders should use coup-related repression less frequently than unconstrained non-democratic leaders.

Hypothesis 2: Attempts—Second, the contradictory effects of constraints on plotting imply democracies should not face a much different risk of suffering a coup attempt.

Hypothesis 3: Success—Third, as democratic leaders face higher barriers to coup-proofing, the chance of a coup attempt succeeding should be greater in democracies.

Hypothesis 4: Vulnerability—Finally, these effects should be strongest where leaders are not too invulnerable to render all coup attempts futile.[11]

Data Analysis

I test the hypotheses on two time-series cross-sectional data sets at the leader-month level-of-analysis. First, to support the generalizability of the argument, I use a global sample that includes all of the state leaders recorded by the *Archigos* data set (v. 3.0; Goemans, Gleditsch, & Chiozza, 2009) for the years 1945 to 2011. This data set includes leaders from 178 states and contains nearly 110,000 leader-month observations. Because I expect the hypothesized effects to be more pronounced when the sample is limited to states where coup activity is plausible, I also analyze an original data set of coup-related repression in 43 sub-Saharan states[12] for the years 1960 to 2011. This subsample of nearly 25,000 leader-months includes more than 250 leaders who held power over this period. The sub-Saharan data set is important for both theoretical and methodological reasons. The subcontinent is the world's most coup-prone region and several of the area's democratic experiments have been threatened by coups over the last several years (e.g., Burundi, 2015; Mali, 2012). It also provides an ideal most-similar-systems design, as the majority of its states became independent over a very short period and suffered similar economic shocks and foreign influence, yet developed very diverse political systems. The economic and cultural differences separating democratic and non-democratic states in this region are less extreme than they are in the global universe of cases. A greater share of sub-Saharan leaders have suffered coup activity, so retesting the hypotheses on this subsample should also alleviate concerns about how the infrequency of coup activity in the global sample could bias the results by inflating statistical significance.[13]

The leader-month unit-of-analysis has many advantages over the country-year panels used in most coup research. First, it is amenable to the inclusion of leader-specific sources of variation, such as length of tenure in office, methods of leader entry and exit, and leader-specific regime type. Second, coups are precisely timed events and a focus on monthly variation captures the intra-annual changes in leadership, ongoing conflicts, political reforms, tenure duration, and so forth. Third, because multiple coup allegations and attempts frequently occur in the same calendar year, this finer unit-of-analysis allows for more observations of distinct coup events and more accurate representations of each event. The recent political instability in Guinea-Bissau illustrates the strength of this approach. In 2012, Guinea-Bissau had four executive leaders (three transitions), one successful coup (April), and one failed coup (October). Leaders left office by natural death (Sanha), voluntary transition

(Kuruma), and coup (Pereira). Three leaders were civilians, while one was from the military (Kuruma). Only two of the four led democratic governments (Sanha and Pereira). Leader-months allow all of this variation to be represented in the data.

Coup data are notoriously inconsistent across data sets, and this is mostly attributable to differences in concept definition and ambiguity resulting from the secrecy that envelops most coup attempts.[14] To test the reliability of the results across data sets, I evaluate the hypotheses using three records of coup activity: The Center for Systemic Peace (CSP) data for 1946 to 2014 (Marshall & Marshall, 2012), the Powell and Thyne (PT; 2011) data for 1950 to 2015, and an original data set on sub-Saharan coup allegations for 1960 to 2012. Coup attempts require clear and uncontroversial signs of overt execution, such as attacks, intercepted arms or mercenaries, or plotter announcements broadcast in the media. Following convention, attempts are successful if the event culminates in the successor regime of the plotters' choice holding power for at least 7 days. All other coup attempts are failed. The two global data sets generally agree when successful coups occur (Pearson's $R = .844$), though sometimes disagree about failed coup attempts ($R = .746$). The PT criteria are more strictly defined, causing the PT data to include around 15% fewer coup attempts.

I evaluate coup-related repression with data on alleged coup plots from the CSP data set and original data covering sub-Saharan Africa. Although alleged coup plots are secretive and unverifiable by nature, public accusations of coup plotting are frequently used as pretenses to repress potential plotters who pose viable threats. Public statements and arrests more directly gauge a leader's efforts to preempt coup activity than more general policies that could also serve that purpose, such as the reappointment of influential officers or dramatic military reorganization. Some allegations are surely true foils of planned coup attempts rather than false pretenses used for repression, so when any evidence of weapons caches, troop movements, or efforts to usurp radio or television stations is reported, these incidents are coded as failed attempts instead of allegations. Surely some allegations and arrests go unreported, though secret allegations that evade media coverage and public awareness are more likely to occur in non-democracies and would therefore strengthen the magnitude of the predicted effects and increase support for the argument.

The global CSP data set includes 272 alleged plots, though admittedly the codebook acknowledges there was no standard coding procedure and expresses concerns about data quality.[15] To allay concerns about data quality and bias, I systematically collected an alternate allegation data set for sub-Saharan Africa by searching the online archives of *Keesing's Record of World*

Events and *The New York Times*. I identified relevant articles for further examination by pairing every search term from an identifying group (leader name, country name, capital city name) with the following terms from a second group: coup, attempt*, arrest*, alleg*, and plot*.[16] Alleged coups are recorded when events are best described by one of two conditions. First, an alleged coup occurs when a leader or her representative publicly claims to have uncovered a plot meeting the conditions for a coup, but no clear and overt signs of a plot occurred. If there is any evidence to suggest plotters actually moved against the leader, the event is recorded as a failed attempt. Second, a coup allegation occurs when a leader or her representative responds to a non-coup event, such as a protest, with allegations that nest the action in the context of a greater unverifiable coup plot. For example, leaders may respond to public demonstrations by asserting—often without any evidence whatsoever—that these demonstrations were orchestrated by elite dissidents to create disorder for a coup attempt. The result is a list of 311 allegations in the sub-Saharan sample, compared with 133 reported by CSP for the same leader-months. A complete list of allegations, the names of the accused (when available), and source material for each allegation or arrest is included in the supplementary appendix.

I use three measures to capture democratic constraints. One set of models measures democratic constraints with an adaptation of the Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (GWF; 2012) typology, which differentiates between democracies, interim governments, and several types of dictatorship. This is an indicator of the de facto regime in place, rather than the de jure constitutional constraints that may or may not exist in practice. The literature suggests military and interim regimes may be uniquely prone to coup attempts, so these models classify all leader-months into one of four categories: *Democracy*, *Interim*, *Military Non-Democracy*, and *Civilian Non-Democracy*.[17] The GWF data are neither month-variant nor leader-specific, but the most recent codebook provides specific transition dates that were used to assign types to leaders who served during transitional periods.

Another set of models uses *XCONST*, which is the executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index (Marshall & Jaggers, 2002). This seven-value ordinal scale classifies regimes on a continuum from "unlimited executive authority" (*XCONST* = 1) to "executive parity or subordination" (*XCONST* = 7). This scale provides more variation than dichotomous regime indicators, though there are disadvantages to consider. First, it does not differentiate between democratic and non-democratic constraints on power. A leader facing a democratically elected legislature could receive the same constraints score as a party member who answers to a politburo or a general representing an insular military junta. Second, the *Polity* components also conflate

semi-democratic and interim governments by scoring both types of regimes around the median value, and this could make internal instability endogenous to the *XCONST* score (Vreeland, 2008). Third, these are de jure indicators of legal constraints that may not reflect actual practice. Finally, *XCONST* is also missing during periods of severe instability. Missing values constitute 7.8% of the overall sample but around 11% of the leader-months in which coups were attempted.[18] A third measure of democratic constraints, *XCONST-D*, addresses some of these shortcomings by focusing solely on the *XCONST* score in democracies. De jure constraints on dictators may not inhibit repression and coup-proofing to the same degree that constitutional constraints limit the leaders of democracies. Differences in the results of the models using *XCONST* and *XCONST-D* would provide evidence of the more meaningful nature of constraints in democracies. This modified variable is equal to *XCONST* in states determined by GWF to be democracies and is zero otherwise.

The models include monthly, yearly, and time-invariant control variables that capture leader vulnerability and severe grievances against the government (see Table 2). *Leader Duration* is the number of months that have passed since the leader initially took power and *Logged Peace Years* counts the time since independence or the last civil war that claimed at least 25 lives.[19] *Leader Duration* amounts to a *t* variable for each leader-panel, so squared and cubed terms are included to address concerns about serial autocorrelation (Carter & Signorino, 2010). *Logged gross domestic product (GDP) per capita* and *Annual per capita GDP growth* are recorded annually by the Penn World Table, Version 8.1 (Heston, Summers, & Aten, 2012). *Ethnic Fractionalization*, a widely used index of ethnic diversity, is the only time-invariant control variable. This index is the calculated probability of two randomly selected citizens belonging to different ethnic groups (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003).[20] Finally, I address military interests and professionalization. *Spend/Soldier* is military expenditures divided by the number of military personnel (Powell, 2012). This figure separates large but poorly compensated militaries from those that are better funded and more professionalized. This measure is taken from the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities data set, 4.0 (Singer, 1987).

Democratic Constraints and Coup-Related Repression

Coup activity is incredibly rare to the point that predictions using conventional estimators could be biased, so I use complementary log-log (cloglog) models. This estimator is a variation of a standard logit model that permits the "s-curve" to be asymmetric, allowing it to better estimate dichotomous dependent variables with a very high proportion of zeroes (Long, 1997). The CSP data on

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

	Global sample, n = 109,755					Sub-Saharan sample, n = 25,068				
Variable	*M*	σ	Non-democracy	Democracy	*t*	*M*	σ	Non-dem	Dem	*t*
Coup Attempts (PT)	0.003	0.000	0.004	0.002	4.95	0.006	0.001	0.006	0.007	−1.18
Coup Success (PT)	0.498	0.030	0.470	0.556	−1.33	0.506	0.533	0.474	0.783	−2.73
Coup Attempts (CSP)	0.004	0.000	0.005	0.002	7.56	0.008	0.001	0.007	0.010	−1.76
Coup Success (CSP)	0.382	0.026	0.337	0.500	−2.76	0.366	0.039	0.320	0.548	−2.39
Coup Allegations (CSP)	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.001	6.11	0.006	0.001	0.006	0.006	0.16
Coup Allegations (Bell)	—	—	—	—	—	0.013	0.001	0.014	0.009	2.26
Democracy	0.415	0.493	—	—	—	0.131	0.337	—	—	—
Military Dictatorship	0.113	0.317	—	—	—	0.117	0.321	—	—	—
Civilian Dictatorship	0.455	0.498	—	—	—	0.732	0.443	—	—	—
Interim Government	0.005	0.068	—	—	—	0.008	0.092	—	—	—
XCONST	0.554	0.001	0.246	0.900	−440	0.343	0.002	0.264	0.787	−100
XCONST-D	0.424	0.002	0.000	0.900	−1,100	0.118	0.002	0.000	0.787	−620
Leader Duration	82.18	0.316	121.12	39.49	143.4	107.93	0.66	119.64	42.48	43.94
Logged Peace Years	2.46	0.005	2.19	2.76	−57.72	2.00	0.010	2.00	2.00	−0.09
Logged GDP pc	8.34	1.18	7.79	8.97	−150	7.27	0.75	7.31	7.17	9.62
Economic Growth	1.043	0.000	1.048	1.039	12.68	1.045	0.001	1.044	1.051	−3.04
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.438	0.002	0.519	0.350	98.22	0.715	0.001	0.715	0.716	−0.21
Spending per Soldier	19,612	425	12,087	28,589	−38.7	5,882	57.86	5,439	8,656	−19.4

Note. Columns provide the overall mean and standard deviation, mean for civilian non-democracies, mean for democracies, and the significance of a *t* test comparing the democracy and civilian subsamples. PT = Powell and Thyne; CSP = Center for Systemic Peace; *XCONST* = executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index; GDP = gross domestic product.

coup allegations records allegations in only 0.2% of the leader-months in the global sample. Results produced using the standard logit model are provided in the supplementary appendix, though the differences are negligible.

I test the relationship between democratic constraints and coup allegations with nine models: The three measures of democracy are paired with CSP global allegation data, CSP data for the sub-Saharan sample, and the original sub-Saharan allegation data set described above. I provide the estimated coefficients in Table 3 and illustrate the marginal effects produced by all nine models below the table. The cumulative results of this analysis indicate a negative relationship between democratic constraints and the frequency of coup allegation. When control variables are held constant at their means, the difference in the rate of coup allegations between democracies and civilian non-democracies is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ (95%, two-tailed) level for five of the nine models. Two others miss the arbitrary 95% threshold, but are negative with p values of .053 and .093. On average, the models estimate democracies to be 60% less likely to report alleged coups.

The models with the weakest results are those that examined CSP-recorded allegations in the sub-Saharan subsample. One plausible explanation for these weaker results is that the less stringent coding rules used by CSP may have undercounted allegations in a group of states that systematically receives less media coverage: sub-Saharan dictatorships. In fact, CSP records the exact same frequency of coup allegation in democracies and civilian non-democracies (0.55% of leader-months) in this region, while the frequencies in the data I collected are 0.89% and 1.38%, respectively. Another interesting insight generated by this analysis is that *XCONST*, which measures constraints on power in both democracies and non-democracies, has much stronger effects than *XCONST-D*, which captures variation in democratic constraints but assumes constraints on dictators are not meaningful. The weaker findings for *XCONST-D*, both in magnitude and significance, suggest constraints against dictators also reduce the frequency of coup allegation. More constrained dictators, such as those ruling in strong single-party systems (Botswana and apartheid-era South Africa, for example), are much less likely to accuse political rivals of coup plotting. This finding supports extant research on the constraining role of authoritarian institutions and implies these constraints can reduce some forms of repression.

The estimated effects of the control variables are inconsistent across samples and data sets (Figure 1). In the global sample, wealth decreases the likelihood of a coup allegation, though this relationship does not exist within sub-Saharan Africa, which has less variation. Instead, within sub-Saharan Africa, characteristics of the military are stronger predictors of coup allegation. Either the measure for military regime (negative) or military spending

Table 3. Complementary Log–Log Models of Coup Allegations.

	CSP global			CSP SS Africa		
	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 1.3	Model 1.4	Model 1.5	Model 1.6
Democracy	−0.79***			−0.17		
XCONST		−1.35***			−1.12**	
XCONST-D			−0.83**			−0.15
Military	−0.20	−0.30	−0.15	−0.41	−0.63*	−0.42
Interim	−0.19	0.02	−0.29	−0.61	0.03	−0.23
ln(pc GDP)	−0.37***	−0.38***	−0.43***	0.02	0.001	−0.04
pc GDP Growth	−1.40	−1.59	−1.70	−1.16	−1.35	−1.50
Spend/Soldier	-7×10^{-6}	-4×10^{-6}	-4×10^{-6}	-2×10^{-5}	-5×10^{-6}	-2×10^{-5}
Peace Years	−0.09	−0.12	−0.11	−0.02	−0.07	−0.07
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.46	0.46	0.52	−0.56	−0.64	−0.66
Lead Tenure	−0.01*	−0.01*	−0.01*	−0.02**	−0.02***	−0.02***
Constant	−0.90	−0.16	−0.12	−2.77	−1.90	−1.73
n (months)	68,878	66,998	66,998	19,125	18,064	18,064
Pseudo-log likelihood	−1,249	−1,203	−1,211	−689	−6,671	−675

	Bell SS Africa		
	Model 1.7	Model 1.8	Model 1.9
Democracy	−0.59*		
XCONST		−1.51***	
XCONST-D			−0.64*
Military	−0.32	−0.52**	−0.31
ln(pc GDP)	0.25*	0.23	0.18
pc GDP Growth	−1.27	−1.43*	−1.60*
Spend/Soldier	-3×10^{-5}	-2×10^{-5}	-3×10^{-6}
Peace Years	−0.13	−0.18**	−0.17**
Ethnic Fractionalization	−0.46	−0.61	−0.59
Lead Tenure	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.02***
Constant	−3.09**	−2.32	−2.11
n (months)	18,756	17,767	17,767
Pseudo-log likelihood	−1,330	−1,265	−1,279

Note. Excluded regime category (GWF Only): *Civilian Non-Democracy*. Robust standard errors are clustered by leader. Squared and cubed *Tenure* not shown. *Interim* does not vary (no allegations) in Models 1.7 to 1.9, so it is omitted. Large black points indicate effects are significant at $p < .05$ when *Military* and *Interim* are 0 and all other variables are at means. Small black points indicate $p < .1$. White points indicate insignificant effects. All effects are standardized across models so that each estimate is equal to $\frac{\hat{y}_{Dem=1}}{\hat{y}_{Dem=0}} - 1$. Whiskers illustrate the 95% confidence intervals. CSP = Center for Systemic Peace; SS = sub-Saharan; *XCONST* = executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index; GDP = gross domestic product; GWF = Geddes, Wright, and Frantz.
*p = 10%. **p = 5%. ***p = 1% (two-tailed).

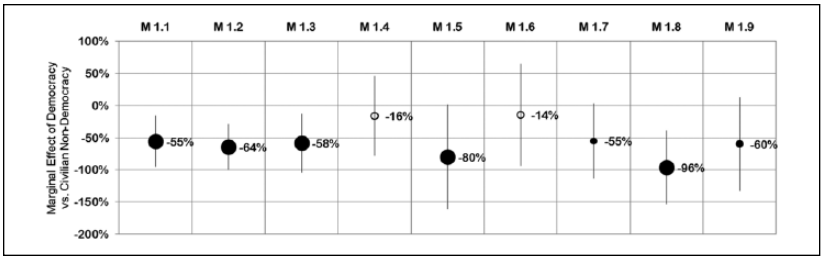

Figure 1.

Note. Large black points indicate effects are significant at $p < .05$ when *Military* and *Interim* are 0 and all other variables are at means. Small black points indicate $p < .1$. White points indicate insignificant effects. All effects are standardized across models so that each estimate is equal to $\frac{\hat{y}_{Dem=1}}{\hat{y}_{Dem=0}} - 1$. Whiskers illustrate the 95% confidence intervals.

(also negative) is statistically significant in most of the sub-Saharan models. Two models also show effects for economic growth and peace years decrease rates of coup allegation. The only variable that reliably reduces the rate of coup allegation across all models is leader tenure, with longer serving leaders being less likely to allege coups.

Undoubtedly, the absence of overt, verifiable, and explicit coup activity makes data on coup allegations more vulnerable to inconsistent reporting, and this is evinced by the low correlation between the two allegation data sets used in this analysis (the Pearson's *R* in the sub-Saharan sample is .562). However, two points are worth noting. The first is that analyses of both data sets support the prediction that democratically constrained leaders allege coup plotting less often. Second, if we assume unsubstantiated allegations of coup plotting are more likely to go unreported in less transparent non-democratic states, then coding unreliability should bias the results *against* these findings. Omitted instances of arrests in dictatorships would cause these tests to underestimate the difference in coup allegation rates between democracies and non-democracies. If this is true, then the hypothesized relationship between democracy and coup allegation exists and has an even greater magnitude than is reported here.

Democratic Constraints and Coup Attempts

Turning next to coup attempts, I use the same estimators to evaluate two coup data sets (CSP, and Powell and Thyne [PT]) over two samples (global and sub-Saharan). The results show a very stark difference between the global and sub-Saharan sets of cases (Table 4). Five of the six global models (three measures of democracy by two coup data sets) report a negative democracy–coup relationship that is significant at $p < .01$, and some models estimate

Table 4. Complementary Log–Log Models of Coup Attempts.

	CSP global			CSP SS Africa			PT global			PT SS Africa		
	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3	Model 2.4	Model 2.5	Model 2.6	Model 2.7	Model 2.8	Model 2.9	Model 2.10	Model 2.11	Model 2.12
Democracy	−0.64***			−0.05			−0.30			−0.23		
XCONST		−1.32***			−0.55			−1.06***			−0.41	
XCONST-D			−0.94***			−0.15			−0.78***			−0.22
Military	0.45***	0.32*	0.44**	0.60***	0.50**	0.60***	0.75***	0.57***	0.67***	0.64***	0.67***	0.73***
Interim	0.50	0.91**	0.58	0.53	0.95*	0.84*	0.80*	0.94**	0.69	0.61	1.09**	0.97
ln(pc GDP)	−0.26***	−0.23***	−0.25***	−0.05	0.04	0.02	−0.22***	−0.17*	−0.17*	−0.13	−0.05	−0.06
pc GDP Growth	−1.60**	−1.49*	−1.59**	−0.91	−1.03	−1.10	−1.10	−1.00	−1.07	−1.0	−1.10	−1.14
Spend/Soldier	-3×10^{-5}***	-3×10^{-5} ***	-3×10^{-5}***	-4×10^{-5} **	-3×10^{-5} *	-4×10^{-5}**	-5×10^{-5}***	-4×10^{-5}***	-5×10^{-5}***	-3×10^{-5}	-3×10^{-5}	-3×10^{-5}
Peace Years	−0.19***	−0.17***	−0.16***	−0.12*	−0.09	−0.09	−0.09*	−0.06	−0.05	−0.20***	−0.19**	−0.18**
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.60*	0.65*	0.73**	0.62	0.94*	0.98*	0.84***	0.82***	0.89***	0.33	0.51	0.54
Lead Tenure	−0.01**	−0.01*	−0.01*	−0.01*	−0.01	−0.01	−0.01***	−0.01**	−0.01**	−0.01*	−0.01	−0.01
Constant	−0.79	−0.85	−1.04	−3.13**	−3.83***	−3.81***	−2.03**	−2.24**	−2.44**	−2.35*	−2.95*	−2.92*
n (months)	68,878	66,998	66,998	19,125	18,064	18,064	68,878	66,998	66,998	19,125	18,064	18,064
Pseudo-log likelihood	−2,004	−1,806	−1,814	−946	−842	−843	−1,891	−1,719	−1,723	−796	−704	−705

Note. Excluded category (GWF Only): *Civilian Non-Democracy*. Squared and cubed *Tenure* not shown. Robust standard errors are clustered by leader. These probabilities are calculated using the confidence interval method. First, the marginal effect of *Democracy* is calculated when *Military* and *Interim* are zero and other variables are at their mean values. Then, z scores around these marginal effects are used to calculate the percentage of the normally distributed estimates of $\hat{y}_{Dem=1}$ that fall between $\frac{2\hat{y}_{Dem=0}}{3}$ and $\frac{4\hat{y}_{Dem=0}}{3}$. CSP = Center for Systemic Peace; SS = sub-Saharan; *XCONST* = executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index; GDP = gross domestic product; GWF = Geddes, Wright, and Frantz.

*p = 10%. **p = 5%. ***p = 1% (two-tailed).

democracies to be many times less likely to suffer coup attempts than civilian dictatorships. Conversely, none of the six sub-Saharan models reveals a significant effect. This apparent ambiguity can be explained with a closer look at the data. In sub-Saharan Africa, democracies and non-democracies have similar per capita gross domestic products (US$1,720 and US$1,958), but outside this region democracies are more than twice as wealthy (US$12,814 to US$5,635). Sub-Saharan democracies spend about US$3,000 more per solider on their militaries, but outside sub-Saharan Africa the gap between democratic and non-democratic military spending per soldier is nearly 6 times this wide. In light of these vast differences between democracies and non-democracies outside of this region, the divergent results in the global and sub-Saharan samples are unsurprising. In sub-Saharan Africa, measures of political institutions are less likely to be conflated with unobserved economic, cultural, and historical factors that make consolidated, wealthy democracies virtually immune to coup activity. Tests on the subsample better isolate the concept of interest—institutional constraints on executive power—and suggest it does not predict the risk of coup attempts. This is consistent with the expectation that democratic constraints have negligible effects on the risk of coup attempts and that this will be especially true where leaders are somewhat vulnerable.

Rainey (2014) argues hypotheses for negligible effects require more verification than large *p* statistics provide. As stated by Altman and Bland (1995), "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" (p. 485). A very wide confidence interval typically indicates high *p* statistics and statistical insignificance but these wide intervals often contain effects with large magnitudes. To more rigorously test for the absence of a relationship between democracy and coup attempts, I follow Rainey and use two one-sided tests (TOST) and the confidence interval method to assess the likelihood with which the marginal effect of democracy on coup attempts reaches arbitrary magnitude thresholds. I use this approach to determine the estimated chance that democracy raises or lowers the risk of a coup attempt by at least one third, relative to civilian non-democracies.[21]

Figure 2 illustrates the likelihood with which democracy significantly influences coup risk, based on the confidence intervals around the marginal effect. The top six bars represent the global models and in all but two models, there is a greater than 90% chance that democratic constraints *reduce* the likelihood of a coup attempt by at least one third relative to civilian non-democracies. Based on these results, we cannot reject the possibility that democracy substantially reduces the risk of a coup attempt in the global sample. But most of the sub-Saharan models estimate a greater than 50% chance that democracy neither increases nor decreases the risk

of coup by more than one third (dark bars). This supports the expectation that democracy's effect on the frequency of coup attempts—at least in coup-prone regions—is negligible.

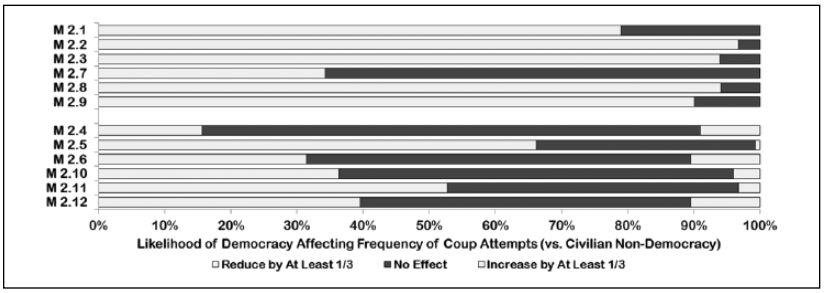

Figure 2.

Note. These probabilities are calculated using the confidence interval method. First, the marginal effect of *Democracy* is calculated when *Military* and *Interim* are zero and other variables are at their mean values. Then, z-scores around these marginal effects are used to calculate the percentage of the normally distributed estimates of $\hat{y}_{Dem=1}$ that fall between $\frac{2\hat{y}_{Dem=0}}{3}$ and $\frac{4\hat{y}_{Dem=0}}{3}$.

These results are consistent with an argument derived from the commitment problem framework. In weaker states (as in the sub-Saharan sample), greater plotter opportunity makes leaders vulnerable to coup attempts, thus undermining a potential plotter's ability to credibly commit to the status quo. We expect more plots regardless of regime type, though plots against democracies should be more likely to be uncontested. But in the larger global sample that includes stronger states (and especially strong democracies), low chances of coup success deter potential plotters. Democratically constrained leaders can also commit to peace because the costs of coup-related repression are high. This reduces incentives for coup plotting and we see fewer coup attempts as a result. But unconstrained non-democratic leaders cannot similarly commit to not using repression. The fear of baseless or preemptive repression creates incentives for coup plotting, despite plots being more likely to be contested and fail. As a result, regime type differences emerge in a sample where leaders are, on average, much more secure (both leaders and plotters can commit in democracies, but not in non-democracies). Regime type differences are not as relevant where leaders are less secure because neither democratic nor non-democratic governments can resolve the plotter satisfaction-vulnerability paradox to avoid coup. If this argument is correct, however, democracies should face more

uncontested attempts than non-democracies and this should result in large differences in coup success rates.

Democratic Constraints and Coup Success

Approximately 40% of the coup attempts recorded by the Center of Systemic Peace (1946-2010) were successful. However, more than half of those attempted against democracies succeeded while two of every three attempts against civilian non-democracies failed. This section explores the robustness of differences across regime type using two strategies. First, I estimate logit models on the subsample of leader-months that experienced coup attempts. As limiting the sample to states that suffered a coup may introduce sample selection bias, I follow Powell (2012) by using Heckman probit selection models to better separate the causes of attempts from those of outcomes. In these two-stage models, the probability of an attempt is estimated in a selection equation and a second stage estimates the chance of an attempt being successful, given that one occurred.

The logit models include several variables thought to influence the likelihood with which an attempted coup will succeed, including the professionalization of the military (as measured by spending per soldier), the leader's time in power, recent economic growth, ethnic fractionalization, and time since the last war.[22] The results (Table 5) show few variables have a consistent and statistically significant effect on coup success. This supports previous work by Powell (2012), who also finds surprisingly few robust correlations with coup outcomes. Higher military spending per soldier reduces the likelihood of attempts succeeding in the global sample, though this effect is not significant in sub-Saharan Africa, where variation in military spending is smaller. There, recent economic growth is a very strong predictor of coup success. This finding supports legitimacy-based arguments that claim coups are more likely to gain public support and succeed if the ousted incumbent is overseeing a period of economic turmoil.

The strongest predictor of coup success in both samples is democracy. Democracy has a statistically significant positive effect on the chances of a coup succeeding in nine of the 12 logit models, with an average magnitude of approximately 80% (or 30 percentage points) vis-á-vis civilian non-democracies. As expected, we also see a much stronger effect in models using *XCONST-D*, which focuses on democratic constraints, relative to models using *XCONST*, which also considers de jure constraints on non-democratic leaders (see Figure 3). This difference is consistent with the argument, which claims constraints on dictatorial power do not reduce the efficacy of coup-proofing repression to the same extent as democratic constraints. Constrained dictators may be less able to coup-proof than unconstrained dictators—and

Table 5. Logit and Heckman Probit Outcome Results, Coup Success.

Logit models, CSP data						
	Global			SS Africa		
CSP success	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3	Model 3.4	Model 3.5	Model 3.6
Democracy	1.11***			1.45***		
XCONST		0.81**			1.06	
XCONST-D			0.83**			1.91***
Military	0.55*	0.29	0.29	0.24	0.16	0.23
pc GDP Growth	1.03	1.64	1.62	−2.67	−1.65	−1.73
Spend/Soldier	-8×10^{-5} **	-6×10^{-5} **	-7×10^{-5} **	-2×10^{-6}	-2×10^{-5}	-5×10^{-6}
Logged Peace Years	0.16**	0.16*	0.16*	−0.12	−0.13	−0.13
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.32	0.05	0.08	0.88	0.29	0.33
Lead Tenure	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003
Constant	−2.21*	−2.58**	−2.47**	1.30	0.63	0.79
n (attempts)	337	304	304	166	147	147
Pseudo-log likelihood	−212	−197	−197	−104	−95	−93

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Heckman probit success stage, CSP data						
CSP success	Model 3.1h	Model 3.2h	Model 3.3h	Model 3.4h	Model 3.5h	Model 3.6h
Democracy	0.72***			0.81		
XCONST		0.68**			0.69*	
XCONST-D			0.64**			1.02
Military	0.26	0.16	0.15	0.02	−0.001	−0.01
pc GDP Growth				−1.37	−0.70	−0.60
Spend/Soldier	-4×10^{-5}	-3×10^{-5}	-4×10^{-5}			
Logged Peace Years	0.13**	0.12**	0.12**			
Lead Tenure	0.002**	0.002**	0.002**	0.002	0.002*	0.002**
Constant	0.55	0.48	0.50	2.05	1.64	1.82
Logit models, PT data						
	Global			SS Africa		
PT success	Model 3.7	Model 3.8	Model 3.9	Model 3.10	Model 3.11	Model 3.12
Democracy	0.61*			2.69**		
XCONST		0.33		1.21*		
XCONST-D			0.51			3.35**
Military	0.28	0.11	0.17	−0.16	0.01	0.04
pc GDP Growth	0.08	0.32	0.28	−4.41**	−4.44*	−4.16*
Spend/Soldier	-7×10^{-5} **	-6×10^{-5} **	-7×10^{-5} **	-4×10^{-5}	-6×10^{-6}	-3×10^{-5}

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Peace Years	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.11
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.28	0.14	0.21	−1.31	−1.64	−1.55
Lead Tenure	0.003	0.003	0.003*	0.001	0.003	0.003
Constant	−0.46	−0.60	−0.60	5.29**	5.30*	5.08*
n (attempts)	314	287	287	135	119	119
Pseudo-log likelihood	−212	−195	−194	−84	−77	−74
			Heckman probit success stage, PT data			
PT success	Model 3.7h	Model 3.8h	Model 3.9h	Model 3.10h	Model 3.11h	Model 3.12h
Democracy	0.34**			1.47***		
XCONST		0.46***			0.65	
XCONST-D			0.44**			1.86***
Military	−0.08	−.12	−0.12	0.06	0.15	0.11
pc GDP Growth				−2.77*	−2.68*	−2.54
Spend/Soldier	-1×10^{-5}	-7×10^{-6}	-8×10^{-6}			
Logged Peace Years	0.05	0.05	0.05			
Lead Tenure	0.002**	0.002***	0.002***	0.001	0.002	0.002
Constant	2.05***	2.10***	2.21***	2.32	1.47	2.04

Note. Excluded regime category (GWF Only): *Civilian Non-Democracy*. Heckman attempt stages in the supplementary appendix. Squared and cubed *Tenure* not shown. *Interim* does not vary in many models so interim observations are dropped. CSP = Center for Systemic Peace; *XCONST* = executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index; GDP = gross domestic product; PT = Powell and Thyne; SS = sub-Saharan; GWF = Geddes, Wright, and Frantz.
*p = 10%. **p = 5%. ***p = 1% (two-tailed).

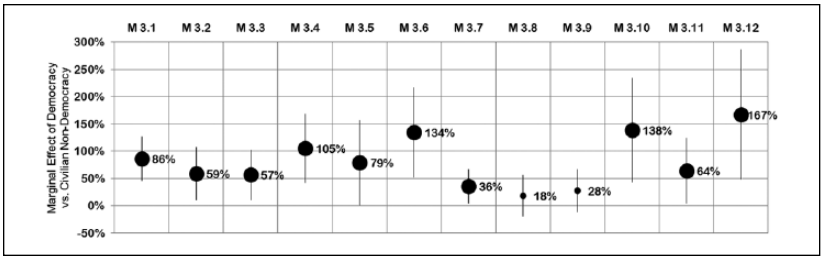

Figure 3. Marginal effect of democracy on coup success, logit estimates.
Note. Large points indicate effects are significant at $p < .10$ (two-tailed) when *Military* and *Interim* are 0 and all other variables are at their mean values. Small points indicate the effects are not statistically significant. These effects are standardized across models so that each estimate is equal to $\frac{\hat{y}_{Dem=1}}{\hat{y}_{Dem=0}} - 1$. Whiskers illustrate the 90% confidence intervals.

therefore more likely to suffer dangerous uncontested attempts—but democratic constraints impose additional barriers on coup-proofing that make attempts against these regimes uniquely likely to succeed. This theoretical explanation for these correlations reaffirms work by Pilster and Böhmelt (2012) that highlights democratic states' relative inability to preemptively coup-proof their governments.

Coup success data constitute an obvious instance of sample selection by incidental truncation; coup success can occur only if a coup is attempted and attempts do not occur at random. I address this with a series of Heckman probit selection models, though this approach also has some weaknesses. This strategy provides the advantage of explicitly modeling the selection problem, but estimates can be biased if the selection and outcome equations contain similar sets of independent variables. Given this problem and the weak results for the control variables in the logit models of coup success, I estimate the success stage of the models using a limited list of control variables. In the global sample, success is modeled using the regime type indicators, leader tenure, and both peace years and military spending per soldier as these were the only control variables to reliably predict coup success in the logit models. Tests on the sub-Saharan sample include leader tenure and the predictors of coup success that emerged in the logit models on that sample: regime type and economic growth.

The selection (coup attempt) stage produces results that are very complementary to those presented above (see the supplementary appendix). Measures of democratic constraints fail to predict coup attempts in all of the models using the sub-Saharan sample, though democracy is negatively correlated with the risk of a coup attempt in most global models. In the outcome

stage, however, democracy is a reliable predictor of coup success. The positive effect of democratic constraints on coup success is significant at the $p <$ .1 level in most of the models, and the results are stronger in the sub-Saharan subsample and when only democratic constraints are measured (*XCONST-D* and *GWF*, rather than *XCONST*). Two of the three models of the relationship between democratic constraints (*XCONST-D* and *GWF*) and CSP coup success fail to reach this threshold for significance, though the p statistics for these models are .113 and .117, respectively (two-tailed). Cumulatively, these findings provide very strong evidence of a positive relationship between democratic constraints and coup success even after sample bias is addressed using selection models.

Conclusion

For decades now, coup d'état has been the primary means by which transitional democracies have failed and reverted to authoritarianism. This has occurred not only in sub-Saharan Africa (Mali, 2012) but also in Europe (Ukraine, 2014), Southeast Asia (Thailand, 2014), Latin America (Honduras, 2009), and the Middle East (Egypt, 2013). Although coup persists as a common form of regime change in these regions, our understanding of coup activity against democracies is limited. Most theoretical work on this topic focuses on non-democratic governments and recent cross-national studies of the democracy–coup relationship produce contradictory results. This article constitutes one step toward understanding this problem and resolving the discordant results generated by the recent quantitative coup literature. Hopefully, future work will continue to elucidate the problem of democratic coup and provide strategies for less coup-prone democratic transitions.

Recasting coup as a commitment problem between leaders and potential plotters who pose threats to each other highlights the ways in which democracy—and specifically democratic constraints on executive power—alters a potential coup plotter's calculus. Constraints reassure potential plotters that repression is unlikely, but this simultaneously reduces motivations for coup while increasing the likelihood with which a coup will succeed if attempted. This suggests a pattern of coup activity that is contrary to many previous arguments linking democratization to lower rates of coup. Leader–plotter commitment problems both prevent democratization from reducing the occurrence of coup attempts and result in coup attempts that are exceptionally likely to succeed. These claims are supported with a thorough empirical analysis that employs two large leader-month samples, three measures of coup, three types of coup activity (allegations, attempts, and successes), and three measures of democratic constraints.

Importantly, the findings cannot be dismissed for simply reflecting weakened state capacity in transitional democracies. Were this the case, we would observe more coup attempts in democracies and comparable patterns of coup activity in democratic and interim regimes. Nor can this be explained by democracies more effectively detecting and preempting coup plots. This mechanism would predict more coup allegations and fewer overt coup attempts in democracies. Instead, I argue the institutional constraints that keep democratic leaders from making brash accusations against potential rivals also reduce the government's ability to foil plots.

The scope of the analysis uncovered several other relationships that complement this characterization of coups against democracies. It finds constraints against autocrats also reduce some kinds of coup activity, though democracies remain less likely to allege coup and more likely to suffer successful coups than non-democracies with constrained executives. It also shows how sample choice influences the findings produced by statistical models of coup behavior and regime type. The inclusion of very consolidated and effectively coup-proof democracies in the large global sample produces findings that frequently diverge from those drawn from analyses of comparably wealthy, stable, and institutionalized democracies and non-democracies. Fortunately, this supports the expectation that democratic consolidation alleviates this commitment problem. Potential plotters will no longer exploit the absence of coup-proofing repression once states strengthen to the point that coup plots are unviable, even if they are uncontested. As a result, we can expect few coup attempts against invulnerable democracies and much less coup-related repression.

Given these findings, how might vulnerable democracies best avoid coups while they consolidate? Answering this question will require more research, but the commitment framework introduced above suggests several possible solutions. Credible guarantees against repression decrease motivations for coup, but motivations could be further reduced by improving life for military elites throughout the democratic transition. This is what we saw in the "pacted" democracies that institutionalized the military's role in governance during successful Southern European and Latin American transitions. Such strategies reduce incentives for plots by giving military elites more to lose should they fail. Democracies could also explore strategies for reducing plotter opportunity that do not directly threaten the interests of military elites to the same extent as repression, explicit allegation/arrest, or dramatic reorganization. Much more research is needed on how democracies might do this and how international actors could play a vital role. If coups against democracies result in dramatic international economic and diplomatic consequences, then it will be even more difficult for military elites to justify attempts to overthrow their governments. Coups against

democracies already receive a greater international response than those against non-democracies (Shannon, Thyne, Hayden, & Dugan, 2014). The persistence of coups against democracies suggests the international community will need to more aggressively condemn such actions if they are to have the desired deterrent effect.

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Notes

1. The Powell and Thyne (2011) coup data set lists 21 coup attempts for 1995 to 1999, versus 38 for 1985 to 1989.
2. See Arriola (2009), Finer (1988), Galetovic and Sanhueza (2000), Gandhi (2008), Lindberg and Clark (2008), Luttwak (1969), Svolik (2008, 2012), Waymon (1975), and Welch and Smith (1974).
3. This claim is supported by recent research by Pilster and Böhmelt (2012), who document democracies' relative inability to coup-proof. I operationalize this concept more narrowly with a data set on explicit coup allegations and arrests of leading military and civilian elites.
4. Previous research that organizes the coup literature in this way includes work by Belkin and Schofer (2003), Finer (1988), and Powell (2012).
5. This focus on military elites is justified by the fact that approximately 95% of the coups initiated since 1950 were led by members of the armed forces (Bell & Sudduth, 2015).
6. The public's willingness to support coup efforts against governments that have yet to gain legitimacy, including transitional "anocracies" and military juntas, makes many non-democratic states especially vulnerable to cyclical "coup traps" (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Finer, 1988; Hiroi & Omori, 2013; Huntington, 1957, 1968; Jackman, 1978; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993; Londregan & Poole, 1990; Waymon, 1975).

7. "Coup-proofing" strategies, such as the creation of a parallel, loyal militarized secret service (Powell, 2012; Quinlivan, 1999) or ethnic homogenization of the armed forces (Harkness, 2012; Horowitz, 1985), can backfire if the decreased opportunity for coup is overshadowed by increased resentment and motivation for coup. Appeasement strategies, whether by increased political access and representation (Arriola, 2009; Bove & Rivera, 2015; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Svolik, 2012) or by reallocated government spending (Bell, 2011; Conrad, 2011; Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993), could decrease motivation but empower and legitimize potential coup plotters. Roessler (2011) and Powell (2014) find aggressive coup-proofing can also cause targeted elites to form rebel groups, thus greatly increasing the chances of civil war. Pilster and Böhmelt (2011) warn coup-proofing can make militaries less effective, which negatively influences performance during war. Böhmelt and Pilster (2015) identify many conditions under which coup-proofing does not insulate leaders from coup threat.
8. Although coups are not typically framed in this way, Reuter and Remington (2009) use a very similar commitment argument to explain leader–elite interactions in the context of single-party political systems.
9. For more on the rationale for the 1971 coup, see Escribá-Folsch and Wright (2015).
10. See, among others, Haggard and Simmons (1987), Lipson (1984), and Oye (1985).
11. If leaders are invulnerable, then potential coup plotters can always credibly commit to not plotting, even if there is some chance that they could suffer repression.
12. The 43 states include Madagascar and all of the states on the African continent, with the exceptions of the Mahgreb states of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. The sample also excludes South Sudan, which did not exist as an independent state until the very end of the time period studied.
13. Note that the analysis also uses estimators that are designed to minimize bias in the analysis of rare events data.
14. Variation in coup data has been well documented by Powell (2012) and Powell and Thyne (2011).
15. This data set further disaggregates these events into unverified, unrealized plots and allegations, but I collapse these categories for this analysis.
16. Note that when * is appended to the end of the search term, results will include any word start with the letters preceding the *. For example, a search for "alleg*" will return allege, alleged, allegation, and so forth. More coding details and references to source material are included in the supplementary appendix.
17. *Civilian Non-Democracy* is the base group for comparison in the statistical models presented below. I drop leader-months coded as warlords and foreign-imposed because the extent to which they are constrained is unclear, there is little coup activity in these states, and low variation causes estimation problems, such as models not reaching convergence. *Military* also includes hybrid military regimes.
18. The *Polity* data set is in a country-year format, but the data include specific regime transition dates that were used to convert the *XCONST* (executive constraints component of the *Polity IV* index) score to the leader-month unit-of-analysis.

To ease comparison with the GWF (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz) indicators, *XCONST* is rescaled to take a range of 0 to 1.

19. This information is from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Actor data. This is an annual data set, and this is why I code time since conflict in years rather than months. To create the measure for states that have not suffered war since 1945, I use *Polity IV* data on independence.
20. For this purpose, ethnic fractionalization is preferable to the Ethnic Power Relations data and other measures that conflate diversity and political exclusion, which is closely related to regime type.
21. I document this method step-by-step in the supplementary appendix. The basic approach is to calculate the point estimate when variables are set at their means and *Democracy* is equal to zero. Then, I calculate the marginal effect of *Democracy* when controls are at the same values, and use *z* scores to compute the likelihoods that (a) the marginal effect is lower than −33%, (b) between −33% and 33%, and (c) above 33%.
22. As very few coups were attempted against interim governments, I remove these leader-months from the sample in all models of coup success.

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