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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Coups and framing: how do militavnries justify the illegal seizure of power?

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ABSTRACT

Since coups are essentially illegal acts that occur outside the bounds of political systems, militaries must justify their actions in some form after a successful coup. However, the methods militaries use to justify coups have not been systematically analysed. Therefore, this article focuses on framing as a method of obtaining legitimacy. An original dataset has been constructed that targets every successful coup that occurred between 1975 and 2014; this dataset is used to answer the question of how militaries have framed coups by examining the statements that militaries make after a coup. The results reveal two changes since the Cold War. The first is a change in label framing, in which the military asserts that an action is not a coup and the resultant regime is not a military government, thereby attempting to weaken the impression of the military's participation in the government itself. The second is a change in value framing in which militaries attempt to contend that their acts are democratic. The existence of these dynamics indicates that it is necessary to adapt to the normative environment of a given time, and the best method of doing so varies depending on the period.

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KEYWORDS coups; framing; democracy; legitimacy; democratic coups

Introduction

Research on coups has traditionally focused on the causes that gave rise to them.[1] In recent years, however, numerous studies have also addressed the successes and failures,[2] as well as the consequences,[3] of coups. Datasets have been created to support such studies,[4] further enhancing the power of their quantitative analyses. However, the contention of this article is that previous studies have been limited in its analysis of the manner in which coups have been justified by their perpetrators, usually the military. In other words, previous studies have not systematically examined the justifications of the perpetrators of coups.

Although various definitions of coup are available, this article adopts Powell and Thyne's definition as representative: coups are defined as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive".[5] This definition indicates that coups are inherently illegal and outside the conventional

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rules of political engagement. Whether a coup can be sufficiently justified to secure domestic and international legitimacy is therefore dependent not only on whether the coup itself will succeed but also, in considerable measure, on whether the new regime that follows can be politically legitimized. In fact, following the overthrow of a government, the military, in many cases, seeks to justify its action by releasing a statement on radio and television, holding a news conference, or speaking directly to people.

In addition, the choice of what statement to make in justifying a coup is also extremely important. That is, regardless of what rhetoric is used, it is not necessarily preferable to seek to justify the coup when it occurs. This is because the actions of the military will be restricted by the statements made when justifying the coup. For example, Captain Valentine Strasser, who seized power in the 1992 Sierra Leone coup, sought to justify the move by pledging that he would "sincerely pursue the process of returning our country to true multiparty democracy" (*The Associated Press*, May 1, 1992). Although it seemed as if he had never really intended to implement this promise (*The Guardian* [London], October 26, 1993), his delay in making the transition to a civilian government (*IPS-Inter Press Service*, April 27, 1993) invited heavy criticisms from both inside and outside the nation. As a result of this criticism, he ultimately declared that he would produce "a detailed transition programme that will guide my government's action in its bid to return this country to democratic rule" (*Africa News*, January 10, 1994). In this sense, a military will certainly not pursue a means of justifying their acts without thinking it through beforehand, as it faces a number of important choices in doing so.

When a military attempts to justify the coup that put it in power, what claims does it make? That is, in what way do militaries attempt to justify their own illegal seizure of power? In this article, we have attempted to take an approach to the questions stated above from the perspective of the military attempting to frame its coup. Here, "framing" refers to "the way in which issues are presented, what underlying narratives and what solutions are offered".[6] Framing can be extremely important for overcoming situations in which the government is facing the dissatisfaction of the people, and in this sense, has a close relationship with the act of legitimization.[7] Accordingly, in posing the question of how militaries have framed coups in this article, we have constructed a dataset that looks at framing by targeting every successful coup that occurred between 1975 and 2014 – a total of 106 coups. In particular, framing has been broadly divided into two categories, and data have been collected from such statements as those made during public declarations following a coup or the names chosen for the new political regime. The first category of statements are answers to the question of what the illegal seizure of power shall itself be called (label framing). Even events that academics categorize as coups based on their own definitions may be referred to differently by the parties involved. For example, what academics call a "coup" may be labelled a "revolution". The second category of statements refers to answers to the question of what the military touts as the goal of its coup (value framing). What objectives are cited and what rhetoric is used in justifying a coup? Do justifications include economic performance, corruption, national defence, ideology, or democracy?

We constructed a dataset for the two framing categories described above, and time series changes were observed. The results reveal that a significant change took place in both framing categories at the end of the Cold War. In other words, with the rise of democracy promotion and an increase in sanctions against coup makers after the end of the Cold War, coup perpetrators came to frame their acts differently in an

attempt to adapt to the changes in the international environment. For the former category of label framing, cases of the military asserting that an action was not a coup increased after the Cold War. That is, even for cases categorized as coups by academics, the number of instances in which the parties involved denied that a coup had occurred increased. This could be regarded as a response to the delegitimization of coups themselves after the Cold War.[8] Moreover, regarding the latter category of value framing, of all the choices of values that could be proclaimed for the purpose of justifying a coup, following the Cold War, a significant increase was observed in the number of coups justifying themselves through democratic values. It has been observed that the tide began to shift again in the latter half of the 2000s. "Democracy" has come to be used less frequently as a justification for coups since that time, as criticism of coups within the international community has subsided.[9] This may be said to describe the rise and fall of the so-called democratic coup.[10]

This article makes two contributions to the literature. The first is a contribution to research on coups. Systematic and comprehensive research on the justification of coups has been lacking and limited to the description of individual cases, with the exception of existing research on the legitimation of coups by holding elections a number of years afterward.[11] In contrast, the framing of coups in this article will fill this research gap by using an approach that includes the construction of a dataset. The second is a contribution to research on the effect that international factors have on domestic political regimes. From this new perspective on the framing of coups and changes in said framing, we have been able to empirically demonstrate the important effects that the shift in international structures at the end of the Cold War had on the domestic events of coups. Further, we also infer that militaries that conduct coups are extremely sensitive to reactions from the international community.

Coups, justification, and framing

Although it has been noted for many years that legitimacy is important for the continuity of political systems,[12] little analysis has been conducted regarding the acquisition of legitimacy by authoritarian systems. Even for such systems, as it is not possible to accomplish long term continuity solely through repression and co-optation, it is necessary to obtain legitimacy in some form or another.[13]

Viewed from this perspective, it is especially difficult for military governments to obtain legitimacy.[14] It has been noted that this is because a technical inability to govern leads to poor administrative performance.[15] The most significant reason, however, is the challenge of dual legitimation as, in addition to the normal challenges of showing that such a body is qualified to govern the country, the method of obtaining power must also be legitimized.[16] That is, since the method of seizing power is essentially illegal, it requires some kind of justification.

Whether or not perpetrators can successfully establish legitimacy for their seizure of power through a coup has a significant influence on the political process. First, support from citizens and the international community affects whether or not a coup is a success in the first place.[17] Even if a coup succeeds, a lack of legitimacy can invite pro-democracy demonstrations;[18] but more fundamentally, it is difficult to perpetuate a new post-coup regime without support from citizens.[19]

The military, therefore, adopts framing as a method of justifying the coup. Framing is a schema of interpretation that provides a specific interpretation of a single issue; in

this case a coup.[20] In framing within democratic systems, the question of how the media communicates information about an issue tends to become the focal point; but within authoritarian systems, the question of how the government itself expresses an issue ("governmental framing") is important.[21] In the context of this article, the military adopts framing in order to make the act of the coup justifiable for both the citizenry and the international community. In terms of the media used to conduct the framing of coups, the most typical methods include issuing statements, holding press conferences over radio or television, and having the leader of the military give speeches to the public. Other methods can also fulfil the function of framing, such as the name given to the new regime and whether the regime tries to put itself forward as a merely temporary government.

But what sort of framing have militaries adopted to justify their coups? Why and under what conditions have these various types of framings been chosen? In other words, what are the factors that determine their choice of framing? Although little systematic research on the framing of coups exists, it has been noted that militaries have framed coups with the appearance of a patriotic spirit by touting such goals as national defence, economic development, a return to political order, and so forth.[22] However, these have ultimately been limited to descriptions of individual cases or intuitive discussions, and no studies exist that systematically and comprehensively investigate the kind of framing that has actually been conducted.

This article, however, assumes that the logic applied in the justification of coups is not always the same; that the most effective framing for procuring legitimacy varies significantly in accordance with circumstances. The end of the Cold War not only fundamentally transformed the whole concept of norms and violence within global politics[23] but also the environment surrounding coups and their very concept. This may be the cause of the drastic change in the framing of coups. In particular, it has been noted that, following the Cold War, coups were readily connected to democratization.[24] That is, the number of coups in which the military implemented competitive elections and transitions to a civilian government after several years of a temporary military government increased. Such democratic coups can trigger democratization by overthrowing a dictator who had refused to relinquish power.[25] Part of this context involves several changes to the international environment, such as the normalization of democracy within the international community after the Cold War, less tolerance of coups by the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), and a greater willingness by these countries to criticize coups, withdraw aid, or impose economic sanctions.[26]

In order to quantitatively capture this change in the international environment, this article conducted exhaustive research on the degree of international criticism of successful coups from 1975 to 2014. Not only were explicit words of criticism considered but so were certain accusatory behaviours such as the imposition of sanctions and the breaking of diplomatic ties. International criticism of each coup was divided into two major groups depending on whether it originated with Western countries or international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the EU or with the major regional organizations to which the country where the coup occurred belonged.[27] The language and behaviour observed within a two-month period following each coup was then collected. The results shown in Figure 1 confirm that international criticism of coups did indeed increase after the end of the Cold War.

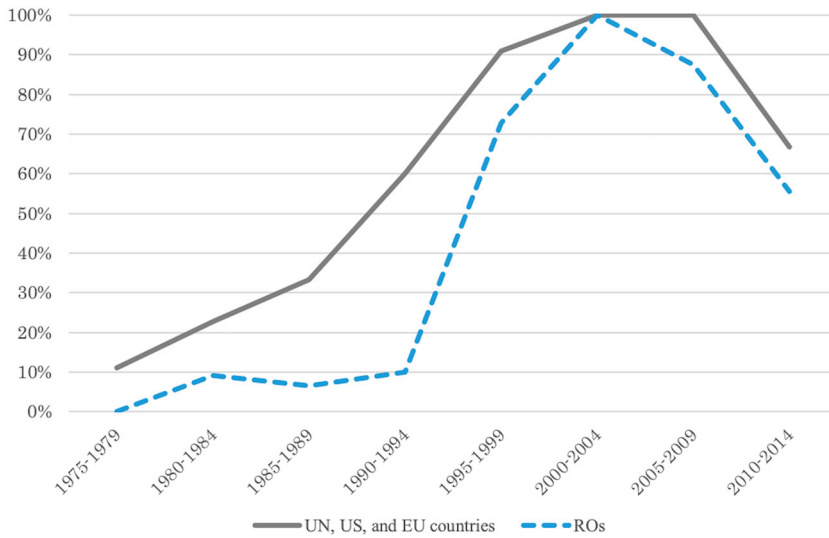

Figure 1. International criticism of coups.

This article argues that, since coups and the environment surrounding them have drastically changed in the way outlined above, the ways in which justifications have been framed have also changed to match these new conditions. In order to empirically demonstrate this argument, it is necessary to construct a comprehensive dataset covering a lengthy time period so as to capture temporal changes in framing.

In constructing the dataset used in this article, framing has been broadly divided into two categories. The first is label framing, that is, how the military identifies its own seizure of power and the new regime set up as a result of that act. For example, in the case of Egypt in 2013, the coup's ringleader, Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, asserted that, "they [the Egyptian people] have called on us to perform public service and to secure essential protection of the demands of their *revolution*", (*BBC*, July 4, 2013; emphasis added) and that "[t]he Egyptian military does not make *coup d'états*. The last coup was in the fifties" (*Washington Post*, August 5, 2013; emphasis added). Along with the place that the change of government had in the context of the revolution, he thus emphasized that it was not in fact a coup. In contrast, ousted president Mohamed Morsi criticized the actions of the military by saying that "[t]he *revolution* is being stolen from us", and labelling the takeover as "a complete military *coup*" (*The New York Times*, July 3, 2013; emphasis added). In this sense, a label has real importance. The name given to the coup is an issue of life and death for the parties involved.

The second is value framing, that is, the question of what the goal of the coup is claimed to be or of what values the military asserts that the coup was conducted in order to protect. The most common cause that has been identified for coups is a feud between the government and the military, particularly a conflict resulting from the government's infringement on the military's vested interests.[28] The military, for instance, stages a coup to protest a budget cut or interference in personnel matters. However, the government's infringement upon the military's vested interests or a conflict between the government and the military are not acceptable justifications.

The military must prove that, through such a coup, it will pursue the interest of the entire nation and not its own, using the rhetoric that appeals to both national and international communities. What values should then be upheld by the military? We have prepared an exhaustive collection of such values.

Items, coding rules, and procedures

This article empirically examines the question of how militaries have framed their justifications for coups. From the above perspective, we constructed a dataset on the framing of coups that targets all 106 successful coups[29] that occurred between 1975 and 2014. Unsuccessful coups rarely have the opportunity to offer public justifications for their acts. Successful coups were collected using Powell for the data from 1975 to 2006 and supplementing this with Powell and Thyne's dataset covering the period of 2007–2014.[30]

We set the period at 1975 and onwards primarily because of constraints on material. Certainly, many coups occurred in the 1950s and 1960s; indeed, they were particularly common in those decades. However, due to a lack of material such as news sources or direct quotations of statements made by coup leaders, including coups from this period in the dataset would mean including instances in which the full text of statements made after the coup were not known. Thus, while there are many prominent case studies of individual coups that took place before the 1970s, it would have been difficult to collect the data on such coups in a way sufficiently systematic for the purposes of this article. Moreover, considering that this article emphasizes changes in and after the Cold War, there are no problems for analysis if only the years 1975 and onwards are used.

One source of a coup's framing is generally provided through the release of a statement via radio and/or television or through a press conference. This article collected all such official statements, which, in most cases, were issued multiple times by coup leaders or the military during the first few days after the coup. In addition to these official justifications, this article also collected unofficial justifications, including those voiced by military leaders in interviews conducted by the international media, as well as the personal views of military commanders that appeared on news programmes. The sources of the target statements were fundamentally the actors implementing the coup itself (that is, the military or a paramilitary organization, such as elite guards or people in similar positions). The data were compiled from public sources, including Lexis/Nexis (Lexis Advance), press agencies such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Al Jazeera*, and other case-specific local press sources and secondary documents. Furthermore, considering that the focus of this article is the justification of a coup, target statements were limited to those made within two months of the coup.

Below, the specific kinds of collected data items are explained in terms of both label framing and value framing.

Label framing

First, we will discuss the items examined for label framing.

Labelling the seizure of power: is it called a "coup"?

This is the most direct form of label framing. Instances in which the military itself asserted that its act was not a coup were systematically collected. The focus here is

on an empirical examination of the general legitimacy of the coup and changes to this legitimacy.

Labelling the new regime: is it called a "military government"?

In particular, this item systematically collects instances in which the military identifies its regime as a "military government" or "rule by the military". This clarifies whether the government explicitly claims that it is governing or instead attempts to deny this fact. This data indicates changes in the legitimacy of military government as a form of government.

In this item, determinations about framing are made based on the naming of the new regime. Framing methods are not limited to statements made after the coup. The names chosen by a new regime that emerge following a coup tend to share common elements with the rationale used to frame the coup. The Revolutionary Military Council (1983 Grenada) and the National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy (2012 Mali) are examples that support this statement. In the case of the Grenada example, as "Military" is used in the name, this is considered a case of self-proclaimed military rule.

Is the government presented as temporary?

As all coups are illegal seizures of power, whether or not the military asserts that the regime established by the coup is a strictly temporary government that will transition to a civilian government at some point causes considerable variation in the interpretation of the coup and the impression it gives.

It has been noted that military governments generally have no clear vision, consider it impossible to legitimize permanent rule, and return power to civilians at an early stage following the coup.[31] Per Thyne and Powell, "There is little systematic evidence that coup leaders [that is, military officers] have an interest in running the country".[32] However, as no previous studies empirically verify how militaries assert the provisional nature of their government directly following the stages after a successful coup, we have examined whether the military makes such promises.

Value framing

In value framing, the question of what kind of values or goals were upheld at the time of the coup are converted into data. Standards were established for determining whether terms (such as "democra-" in democracy) that conformed to coding (described later) were included in the text of statements made by a coup leader. However, the words were not mechanically selected and were strictly limited to individual cases in which such phrases were used in the context of justifying the change in government. Even if a statement contained a specific word (e.g. "democra-"), it was excluded if the word's usage did not match the intent of the coding. This means that, for example, statements critical of democracy that used the word only in proper nouns (such as "the Democratic Party") or statements that were made by opposition leaders or activists who supported a coup (but were not perpetrators) were excluded from the dataset. The data were classified into the following eight specific forms of justification, each of which were referred to in the literature as potential motivations for coups: democracy, economic performance, governance, internal stability, international threats, ideology, organizational interest, and others.[33]

Label framing: the delegitimization of coups and how militaries have adapted

Table 1 shows a summary of the results of temporal changes in label framing. In each item, both in terms of raw numbers and percentages, a clear difference was observed in the label framing used before and after the end of the Cold War. Below, each item is explained with anecdotes.

Figure 2 shows the shift in how militaries have described their seizures of power since the end of the Cold War. Notably, references to "coups" have declined and denials have increased. More specifically, while there was an increase in the raw number of denials after the Cold War (from six cases to 14), the proportional increase was even greater (from 9% to 67%; $p = 0.0025 < 0.01$) due to the overall decline in the total number of coups.

It is noteworthy that militaries have increasingly expended the effort to emphasize that their takeovers were not coups. For instance, after the 2012 Maldives coup, the perpetrator, Mohammed Waheed, repeatedly claimed that "[i]t wasn't a coup. It's been portrayed in the Western media as a coup d'état", and asserted that "calling the day's events a coup was a 'misrepresentation'" (*Reuters*, February 7, 2012; *The Independent* [London], February 9, 2012; *BBC*, March 3, 2012). Likewise, in the case of the 2014 Thailand coup, despite the situation obviously displaying every sign of being a coup, the military declared on a television broadcast that "[t]he imposition of martial law is not a coup d'état" (*National Post* [Canada], May 21, 2014). Given that all of the cases examined in this article have, as previously noted, been treated as "coups" by academics, the above trend indicates that the gap between identifications by scholars and the self-definitions provided by perpetrators has begun to widen.

How, then, do militaries describe their seizure of power when they deny that they are carrying out a coup? A common way is to frame the action as "a response to the popular will". For example, in the 1999 Guinea-Bissau coup, Malam Sanhá, who was installed as

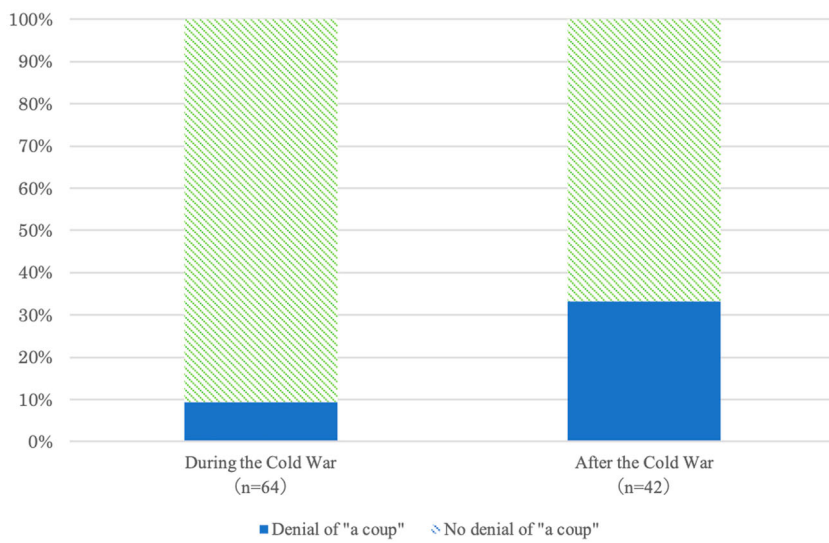

Figure 2. Whether the seizure of power is asserted to be "not a coup".

Table 1. Temporal changes in label framing.

	1975–1979	1980–1984	1985–1989	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–2014
Total number of coups	27	22	15	10	11	4	8	9
Denial of a "coup"	1	4	1	0	5	1	3	5
	(0.037)	(0.182)	(0.067)	(0.000)	(0.455)	(0.250)	(0.375)	(0.556)
Term "military government" used	17	18	6	3	2	2	2	2
	(0.630)	(0.818)	(0.400)	(0.300)	(0.182)	(0.500)	(0.250)	(0.222)
Presented as temporary	14	12	9	8	8	3	6	9
	(0.519)	(0.545)	(0.600)	(0.800)	(0.727)	(0.750)	(0.750)	(0.100)

an interim president under the military government, emphasized in a radio announcement that "[t]his was not a coup. It was the clear will of the people" (*The Associated Press*, May 11, 1999).

This article argues that it was the end of the Cold War that changed the framing of coups and led militaries to increasingly deny that their own acts were coups. The specific mechanism behind the trend is the international community's rejection of coups following the Cold War. In other words, there was a growing norm within the international community that criticized coups as being immoral and illegitimate. Behind this shift are the changes that the international environment has experienced since the end of the Cold War. As mentioned above, democracy was normalized within the international community following the Cold War, and the US and the EU became less tolerant of coups.[34] In fact, as has been pointed out and quantitatively investigated by the literature, the end of the Cold War has significantly increased the threat and imposition of economic sanctions,[35] and that applies for sanctions on coups as well.[36]

However, Figure 2 is insufficient to demonstrate the causal relationship between the end of the Cold War and the change in the framing of coups. With the total number of coups relatively limited, a detailed look at specific cases is a useful way to demonstrate the aforementioned causality. In fact, many cases do show that the military recognized the change in the international environment surrounding coups discussed above. As early as 1991, immediately following the end of the Cold War, the perpetrator of the 1991 Haitian coup, General Raoul Cédras, expressed his view that seizing power via coup had already come to be regarded as unacceptable by the international community, stating "Under this new world order, an elected President cannot be forced out like this. I can understand that" (*The New York Times*, November 4, 1991). Likewise, in the 1996 Niger coup, coup leader Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara appealed to the legitimacy of his act and referenced the trend against coups in the international community: "We knew that our intervention would not win us applause internationally. […] It doesn't go with the winds of these times. But we could not watch while our country became another Somalia" (*The New York Times*, February 3, 1996). When Sierra Leone was affected by a coup the following year, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe described the change in the international view of coups as "a new attitude to coups and illegal governments" and said that "[f]uture coups will have it the hard way. They won't be entertained" (*IPS-Inter Press Service*, June 9, 1997). In the Burundi coup of the same year, the mastermind of the coup, Pierre Buyoya, also revealed a similar understanding: "We hear coups are no longer acceptable to change situations. I fully understand this principle because, as everyone knows, I am among those who fought for democracy in Burundi" (*The Guardian*, July 27, 1996). These statements by perpetrators reflect a prominent feature of justifications offered after the end of the Cold War: the perception that an anti-coup norm had begun to emerge. Having entered an age of backlash against coups, it became necessary for perpetrators bold enough to stage a coup to frame their acts as something else.

Next, we take up the question of whether or not the military itself referred to its new regime as a military government. Figure 3 shows the results. Again, a significant change took place following the end of the Cold War: self-proclamations of a military government declined from 34 cases (53%) to eight (19%), and denials increased from 30 cases (47%) to 34 (81%) ($p = 0.0000 < 0.01$).

In the 1991 Haitian coup, General Cédras explicitly stated, "I am not the President of a military government. I refuse to form one" (*The Guardian* [London], October 4,

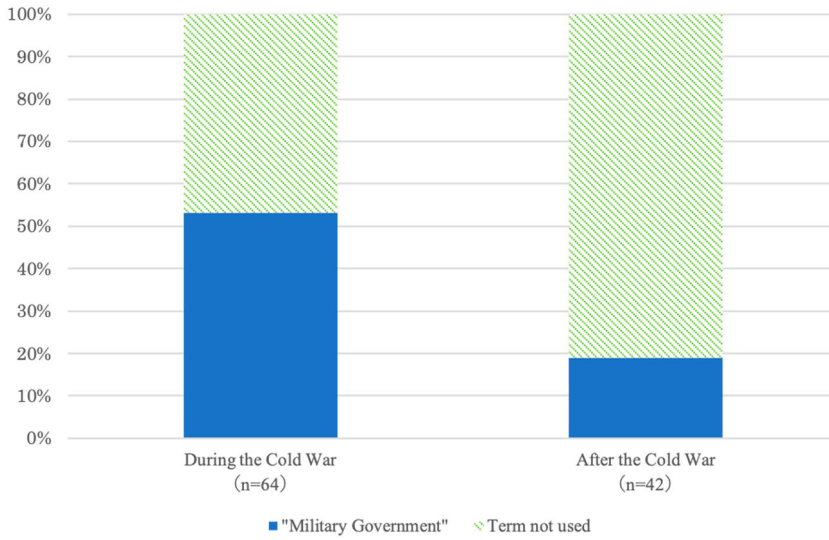

Figure 3. Whether the new regime is called a "military government".

1991). Likewise, after the 1992 Sierra Leone coup, Strasser expressed concerns about the growing criticism from the international community, saying, "I know I will come under pressure here, but I think it's just that military governments are not fashionable anymore" (*The Independent* [London], October 21, 1993). The above trend shows that not only had coups become illegitimate but that the political system of military governments had themselves become unacceptable to the international community. Militaries, therefore, had to frame their new regimes as non-military in nature.

Lastly, there has also been an increase following the end of the Cold War in attempts by militaries to portray their new regimes as being merely transitional rather than perpetual; that is, to present a new government as being only temporary (Figure 4). The proportion of governments presented as temporary increased from 35 cases (55%) during the Cold War to 34 cases (81%) thereafter ($p = 0.0026 < 0.01$).

In sum, the overall trend in label framing shows a decline in the legitimation of coups and militaries' adaptation to these circumstances. In other words, there was a normative change where coups and military governments came to be regarded as inherently unacceptable; in order to adapt to this shift, militaries came to increasingly deny that they had carried out a coup or installed a military government, and excuse their rule as being only temporary.

Value framing: the ebb and flow of democratic coups

Figure 5 shows values that have been invoked when justifying coups. The results bear out this article's intuitive assumption that confrontations between the government and military were rarely cited as a reason for staging a coup. Preservation of one's own interests is not acceptable as a justification either domestically or internationally. Likewise, no attempts were made following the end of the Cold War to justify coups from an ideological standpoint, a finding that is also in accord with this article's assumption. This, too, seems to be a reasonable outcome.

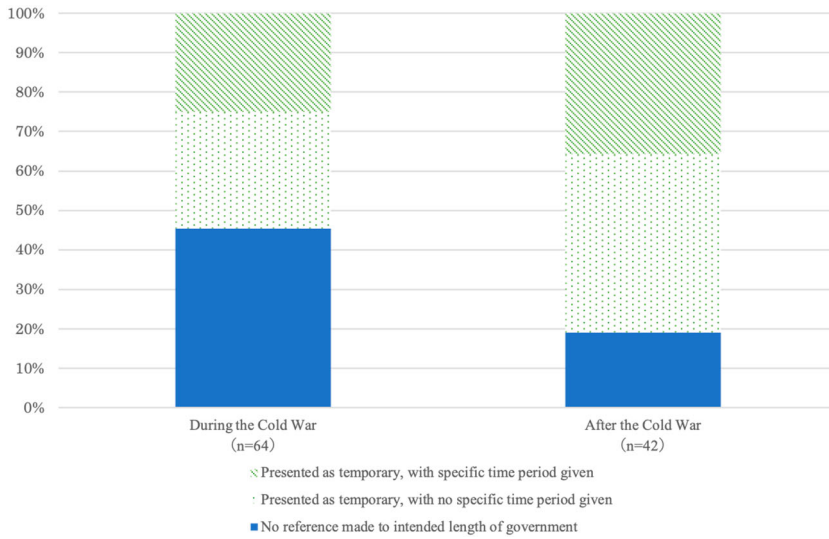

Figure 4. Whether the government is presented as temporary.

On the other hand, it may come as a surprise that international threats and efforts to address such threats have also rarely been used as justification. Previous studies have occasionally indicated certain connections between international threats and coups, but Svolik pointed out that interstate war does not have any effect on the likelihood of military intervention in political matters.[37] The results of this article support his argument.

What draws the most attention in Figure 5 is the change in the frequency with which democracy has been invoked (from 19 cases [30%] during the Cold War to 25 cases [60%] after the Cold War [$p = 0.0013 < 0.01$]). While the Cold War period was characterized by frequent appeals to such values as governance and internal stability – values that could be seen in some ways as the most natural for justifying a coup – these were overtaken in frequency by democracy following the end of the Cold War. In other words, the military increasingly came to use rhetoric that claimed that a coup was staged for the sake of democracy after the Cold War (see Figure 6, which shows the quinquennial trend of claims based on democracy). For example, in the 1991 coup that occurred in the Republic of Mali, the coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, stated, "One of the essential aims of our arrival [is] to install multiparty politics, real democracy in the style of certain other countries" (*Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1991). Likewise, Major Daouda Malam Wanke, the head of the security force who assassinated President Maïnassara in the 1999 coup in Niger, sought to justify his act by saying that he would "reintroduce democracy to Niger" (*World Markets Analysis*, April 20, 1999). Additionally, in the 2003 Guinea-Bissau coup that occurred following political instability over military personnel policies, the military regime stated on the radio that the coup was intended to protect democracy (Associated Press Online, September 15, 2003).

Interestingly, the justifications given for coups before and after the end of the Cold War differ even when they occur in the same country and in similar contexts. The Nigerian coups can be used as an illustrative example of this point as the ending of

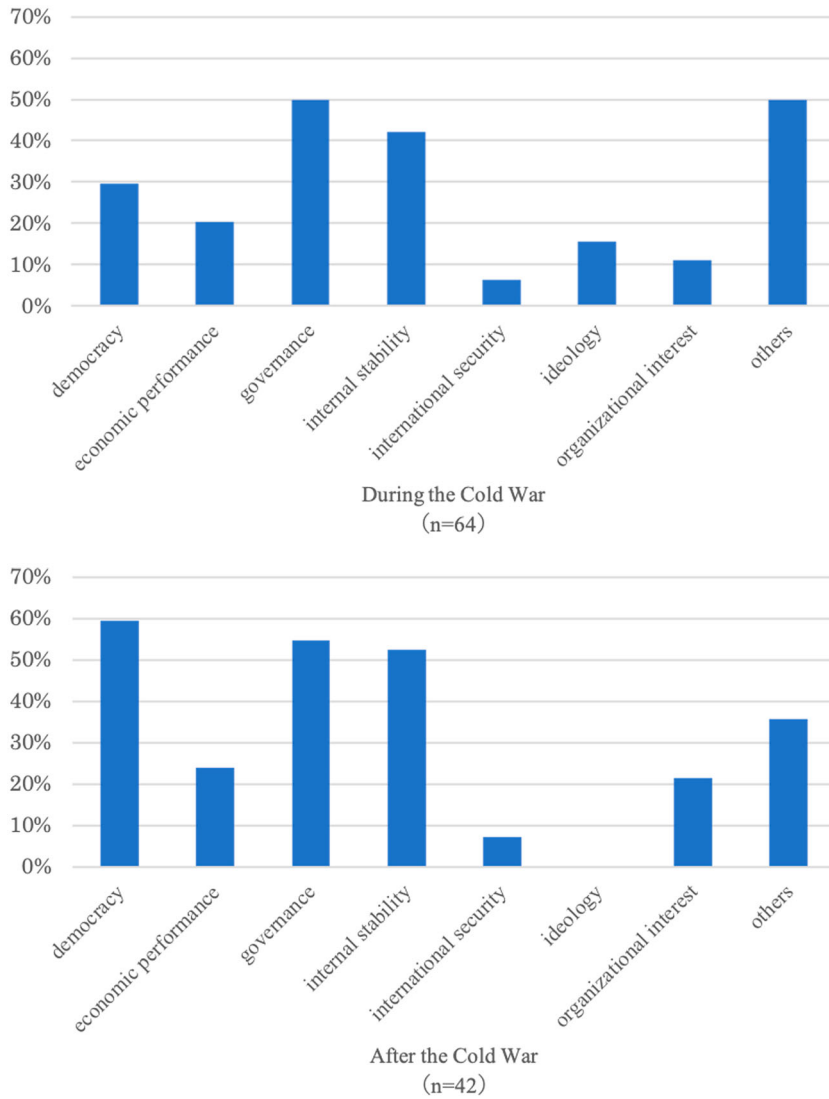

Figure 5. Values cited at the time of the coup.

the Cold War did not have a major medium- or short-term impact on Nigeria's domestic political and economic indices, such as the proportion of the middle class, GDP per capita, and the impact of the Structural Adjustment Program.[38] Commander Sani Abacha, who was frustrated with the government of President Muhammadu Buhari and Major General Tunde Idiagbon, staged a coup with Major General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985. Abacha justified his actions by citing instances of mismanagement, economic failure, and the previous administration's lack of governance, mentioning "the mismanagement of the economy, lack of public accountability, insensitivity of the political leadership and a general deterioration in the standard of living" (*The Associated Press*, August 27, 1985). However, Babangida subsequently gained power,

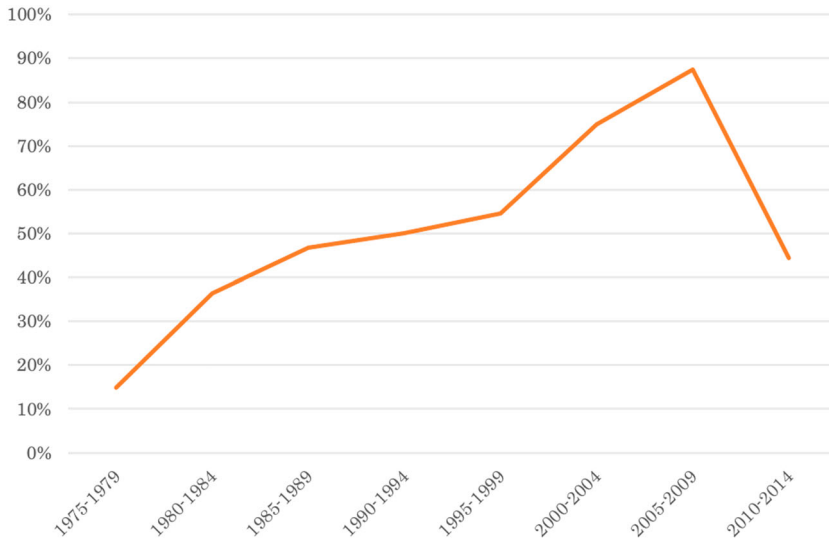

Figure 6. Invocation of democracy.

and in 1993, Abacha executed another coup in protest. As dictator, Abacha cited the establishment of democracy as one of the justifications for the political transition, referring to the concern for international legitimacy:

> Many have expressed fears about the apparent return of the military. Many have talked about the concern of the international community. However, under the present circumstances the survival of our beloved country is far above any other consideration. […] We must lay a very solid foundation for the growth of true democracy. […] For the International Community, we ask that you suspend judgment while we grapple with the onerous task of nation building, reconciliation and repairs. This government is a child of necessity with a strong determination to […] enthrone a lasting and true democracy.[39]

These two coups, which can be traced to power struggles among high-ranking military officials, were carried out by the same individual and thus can be categorized as the same type of coup. Even so, one took place during the Cold War and the other afterwards. Consequently, there was a significant difference in the language used to justify them.

The end of the Cold War thus significantly increased the use of democracy as a means of justifying a coup. Pressure from the international community was, once again, behind this change. For instance, the 1991 Haitian coup was criticized by US Ambassador Thomas Pickering based on the recognition that coups were no longer acceptable in the post-Cold War world. He asserted at the United Nations General Assembly that "[t]he armed men who illegally seized power in Haiti are marching against the tide of history" (*The Associated Press*, October 11, 1991). Likewise, following the 1999 Pakistan coup, the EU emphasized that it "profoundly deplores the developments in Pakistan and condemns the military coup dismissing the *democratically* elected government" (*Associated Press International*, October 13, 1999; emphasis added). In addition, the United Nations also came to issue a number of statements on coups after the Cold War. In the case of the 2008 Mauritanian coup, the United Nations Security Council condemned "the Mauritanian military's overthrow on 6

August of the *democratically* elected Government of Mauritania" and demanded "the immediate restoration of the legitimate, constitutional, *democratic* institutions" (*United Nations*, August 19, 2008; emphasis added).

However, there is an important reservation to be made; as shown in Figure 6, the use of democracy as a justification for coups began to decline again in the 2010s, falling to 44.4% in 2010–2014 from 75% in 2005–2009, a trend which is consistent with the recession of anti-coup norms from the 2010s suggested by the literature.[40] Behind this trend was a rising tide of forces, including China's stand against the promotion of democracy and its advocacy of the principles of non-intervention; the decrease in the necessity for democratic appeal, particularly, for those states with strong "autocratic linkages" to China and Russia; and a shift by the international community toward emphasizing strategic interests rather than the normative value of democracy.[41] In fact, as shown in Figure 1 above, international criticism of coups has clearly decreased since the 2010s. This pattern is robust and can be observed in Western countries and international organizations, as well as among regional organizations. Additionally, perpetrators of coups that occurred from 2010 onwards have become aware of such trends. For example, after the 2014 Thailand coup, the military issued a series of statements against democracy, indicating the influence of the ideological apparatus of Chinese anti-democratic governance.[42] Immediately after the coup, military spokesman Colonel Winthai Suvaree said that "[f]or international issues, another difference is that democracy in Thailand has resulted in losses, which is definitely different from other countries and which is another detail we will clarify" (*Canadian Press*, May 25, 2014). In the same vein, the military leader Prayuth declared in his televised speech that "[m]any people still try to destabilize the situation by using the words 'democracy' and 'election.' These people do not see that an incomplete democracy is not safe".[43] Then, after China dismissed the coup as an internal affair of Thailand, General Chan-ocha publicly announced that Thailand was now a "partner of China at every level" (*Eurasia Review*, August 28, 2014). Thus, the changes in international trends led to a retreat from the use of democratic goals to justify coups. Based on this understanding, it could be further generalized that the justifications for post-Cold War coups have depended on the strength of a particular country's ties to either Western nations or to China and Russia.

Additionally, the use of democracy as a justification was overtaken by economic performance and governance from 2010 to 2014. This means coup leaders were appealing to people's pragmatic sensibilities rather than abstract values such as democracy. The literature on autocratic legitimation has indicated that autocrats who once relied on ideology and tradition to obtain legitimacy have increasingly come to tout material needs,[44] a finding which is consistent with the above results.

In sum, the transition in value framing indicates an interesting trajectory regarding democracy: the number of coups that framed their endeavours as undertaken for democracy increased following the end of the Cold War but has begun to decrease in recent years. This trend empirically demonstrates the rise and fall of democratic coups from the perspective of how coups are framed.

Conclusion

This article has comprehensively and systematically analysed how militaries have framed their illegal takeovers via coups. The results show that the way militaries frame their coups has drastically changed since the end of the Cold War. First, in

terms of label framing – how militaries name their coups or post-coup regimes – this article has revealed that the legitimacy of military intervention in politics declined following the Cold War and that the choice of framing has also adapted to this transition. That is, the denial that a coup has occurred and that the post-coup regime is a military government have both increased. Second, regarding value framing – the objectives cited for coups – democratic values were increasingly invoked after the end of the Cold War, but this trend began to recede in the latter half of the 2000s.

The main contribution of this article is its empirical demonstration of the time series variation in the framing of coups. The way coups have been justified varies greatly depending on the time period; in other words, because of the international situation at the end of the Cold War and as a result of the pursuit of democratic values by Western countries, the framing of coups and the manner of justifying them drastically changed over time.

Lastly, our dataset itself has made a unique contribution as well. The dataset, which catalogues justifications for coups constructed for this article, opens up the possibility of further research. First, quantitative analysis that treats the framing of coups as a dependent variable could be promising. For example, the question of which situations lead militaries to justify coups using the rhetoric of *democracy* could be perhaps addressed by examining the effect of dependence on Western aid or the type of coup,[45] that is, whether the coup was carried out by the military as an institution or by an individual military leader.[46] Furthermore, the literature has indicated that there are regional differences in reactions to coups,[47] something which has not been examined in this article. If that is the case, then there might be regional differences in the framing of coups as well. Second, the framing of coups could also be treated as an independent variable. Although this article has focused on the acquisition of legitimacy by military regimes, our dataset could also be connected to, for example, the analysis of actual political changes in post-coup periods. This can be achieved by examining, for example, how the justification provided for a coup influenced popular protest or perpetuated post-coup regimes, and to what extent the objectives cited in justifying the coup were actually carried out afterward. Our dataset thus enables future research in the quantitative analysis of how the justification for coups have influenced post-coup political processes. Third, the construction of a dataset on the framing of unsuccessful coups is another potential future direction. In this article, we targeted our analysis on successful coups out of consideration for the exhaustiveness and comprehensiveness of the research. However, as militaries issue statements in unsuccessful cases as well, it would be possible to expand analysis to also incorporate these cases, enabling analysis of the effect of framing on the outcome of coups.

Notes

1. Finer, *The Man on Horseback*; Roessler, "The Enemy within."
2. Powell, "Determinants of the Attempting."
3. Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Thyne and Powell, "Coup d'etat."
4. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups"; Marshall and Marshall, "Coup d'etat Events."
5. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups," 252.
6. Edel and Josua, "How Authoritarian Rulers Seek," 883.
7. Snow and Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance."
8. Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Shannon et al., "The International Community's Reaction."
9. Tansey, "The Fading."

10. Varol, "The Democratic Coup d'e ´tat."
11. Grewal and Kureshi, "How to Sell a Coup."
12. Easton, *A Systems Analysis*.
13. Geddes, "What Do We Know," 125; Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars," 21; von Soest and Grauvogel, "Identity, Procedures and Performance."
14. Geddes, "What Do We Know"; Lai and Slator, "Institutions of the Offensive."
15. Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, 12.
16. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 232; Grewal and Kureshi, "How to Sell a Coup."
17. Barracca, "Military Coups."
18. Brancati, "Pocketbook Protests," 1520.
19. Thyne et al., "Coup d'état."
20. Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes"; Chong and Druckman, "Framing Theory."
21. Edel and Josua, "How Authoritarian Rulers Seek"; Dukalskis, *Authoritarian Public Sphere*.
22. Finer, *The Man on Horseback*; Huntington, *The Soldier*; Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*; Dukalskis and Gerschewski, "What Autocracies Say."
23. Straus, "Wars Do End!"
24. Collier, "Let Us Now Praise"; Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Thyne and Powell, "Coup d'état"; A. Miller, "Debunking the Myth."
25. Collier, "Let Us Now Praise"; Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Thyne and Powell, "Coup d'état"; M. Miller, "Economic Development."
26. Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Shannon et al., "The International Community's Reaction."
27. Regional organizations refers to major regional organizations to which the country where the coup occurred belonged. Specifically, the following organizations were included; the Organization of American States (OAS), the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central American Common Market (CACM), the African Union (AU/OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East Asian Community (EAC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).
28. Needler, "Military Motivations"; Leon, "Loyalty for Sale?"
29. A successful coup is defined here as those in which "the perpetrators [seized] and [held] power for at least seven days" (Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups," 252).
30. Powell, Coups in the World [dataset].
31. Kailitz, "Classifying Political Regimes Revisited," 44.
32. Thyne and Powell, "Coup d'état," 197.
33. Londregan and Poole, "Poverty"; Hoadley, "Social Complexity"; Sutter, "Legitimacy and Military Intervention"; Finer, *The Man on Horseback*; Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations"; Svolik, "Contracting on Violence."
34. Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy"; Shannon et al., "The International Community's Reaction"; McCoy, "International Response."
35. Morgan et al., "Threat and Imposition," 549–50.
36. Shannon et al., "The International Community's Reaction."
37. Svolik, "Contracting on Violence."
38. Faruqee, "Nigeria: Ownership Abandoned."
39. Obotetukudo, *The Inaugural Addresses*, 117–8.
40. Tansey, "The Fading."
41. Levitsky and Way, "Linkage versus Leverage"; Tansey et al., "Ties to the Rest."
42. Sopranzetti, "Thailand's Relapse."
43. Ibid., 12.
44. Cassani, "Social Services."
45. Marinov and Goemans, "Coups and Democracy."
46. Geddes, "What Do We Know," 124–7.
47. Tansey, "The Fading."

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