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ABSTRACT

Dictators' survival depends on the effectiveness of their coup-proofing tactics. Yet coup-proofing strategies can become ineffective in the presence of certain structural conditions that enhance the resources, organizational power, and coordination capacity of the army. One such structural condition is the presence of spatial rivalry, international rivalry over disputed territory. Autocratic incumbents invested in spatial rivalries need to strengthen the military in order to compete with a foreign adversary. The imperative of developing a strong army puts dictators in a paradoxical situation: to compete with a rival state, they must empower the very agency—the military—that is most likely to threaten their own survival in office. This logic suggests that authoritarian regimes engaged in spatial rivalries will be more vulnerable to coups. Indeed, relying on the most comprehensive coup dataset to date, this article reveals that rivalry over territory is a robust predictor of coups against autocrats. The findings carry implications for research on civil–military relations, international rivalries, and organizational dynamics within authoritarian regimes.

Introduction

Contrary to the folk view, being a dictator is no easy feat. Unlike leaders of consolidated democracies, tyrants need to constantly watch their backs and keep their militaries in check to avoid being ousted in a coup d'état.[1] To make themselves less vulnerable to coups, authoritarian leaders adopt three main strategies: counterbalancing (the creation of multiple coercive agencies that compete with one another for influence and resources); loyalty buy-off (the distribution of private benefits to the army top-brass); and ethnic stacking (the appointment of loyal co-ethnics/co-religionists at the helm of the security apparatus). Yet coup-proofing can be ineffective in the presence of certain structural conditions that increase the organizational power of the military establishment and decrease officers' coordination costs.[2]

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[1]Military coups are the most frequent form of irregular exit from office for dictators. See Giacomo Chiozza and Hein E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Hein E. Goemans, "Which Way Out? The Manner and Consequences of Losing Office," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (December 2008): 771–94.

[2]Structural conditions typically encompass situations that facilitate collective action. See Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding of Coup Risk," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 5 (October 2003): 594–620; Sidney Tarrow, *Strangers at the Gates: Movements and States in Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Existing studies overwhelmingly focus on domestic conditions—such as protest, repression, or civil war—that impinge on autocrats' ability to insulate themselves from coups.[3] Less attention has been given to external structural conditions that can increase plotter capacity and undercut a dictator's efforts to keep the armed forces in check. One such external structural condition is *spatial rivalry*—international rivalry over territory.

Given the high salience of territory for domestic audiences (a disputed area can hold symbolic, strategic, or material value), autocrats are compelled to empower the army in order to compete successfully with a foreign adversary. Because few domestic actors can question the need to defend contested territory, dictators' coup-proofing efforts can be undermined by the exigency of responding to external threats. Spatial rivalry helps the military consolidate resources, fosters officer professionalization, and reduces the costs of coordinated action against a despot. Therefore, international rivalry over territory can erode a dictator's coup-proofing tactics and can increase the army's ability to supply coups. If spatial rivalry is structural to the regime, coup-proofing is likely to be less effective. When the army is needed to compete with a foreign rival, an autocrat will be more constrained in implementing coup-proofing measures. In essence, spatial rivalry creates a fundamental moral hazard in authoritarian regimes: the very resources that enable the army to compete internationally can also strengthen its position as a domestic player and can empower it to act against a dictator.[4]

For a quick illustration of this process, consider the removal of the first Algerian president, Ahmed Ben Bella, in a coup orchestrated on June 19, 1965 by his defense minister and former associate, Houari Boumediene. After gaining independence in 1962, Algeria became enmeshed in a long-running rivalry with Morocco over disputed territories.[5] In 1963, the two rivals fought a short conflict, the Sands War (Guerre des Sables), during which Rabat displayed superior military strength. In Algiers, this outcome led to the realization that a military build-up was imperative for national survival.[6] With Moscow's assistance, Algeria embarked on a military modernization program which transformed the army into the most influential domestic player. At the end of the war with Morocco, relations between Ben Bella and Boumediene soured over the president's efforts to neutralize the growing influence of the army in the nascent government architecture. In particular, Ben Bella attempted to

[3]Curtis Bell and Jun Koga Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes of Coup during Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming); Abel Escribà-Folch, "Repression, Political Threats, and Survival under Autocracy," *International Political Science Review* 34, no. 5 (July 2013): 543–60; Sharon E. Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence in the Arab Spring: Exploring Military Defections and Loyalty in Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 337–49; Philip Roessler, "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil Wars in Africa," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (April 2011): 300–346; Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Thorin Wright, "Territorial Revision and State Repression," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 3 (May 2014): 375–87.

[4]Milan W. Svolik, "Contracting on Violence: The Moral Hazard in Authoritarian Repression and Military Intervention in Politics," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 5 (October 2013): 765–94.

[5]The dispute started before Morocco and Algeria became independent. The two countries remain locked in a strategic rivalry over border territories and the status of Western Sahara.

[6]David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway, *Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Philip C. Naylor, *Historical Dictionary of Algeria*, 3rd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

establish stronger security forces and political organizations (a counterbalancing strategy) to bolster his position vis-à-vis the army.[7] These efforts to build up political and security institutions as counterweights to the armed forces drew the ire of the military establishment, which felt both empowered by the rivalry-driven militarization program and threatened by Ben Bella's efforts to marginalize it.[8] Fearing encroachment on the army's reserved role in Algerian politics, on June 19, 1965, defense minister Boumediene ousted Ben Bella in a bloodless coup.[9]

The removal of Ben Bella is a prototypical case of an autocratic coup executed in the shadow of spatial rivalry. Rather than an isolated event, however, the 1965 Algerian coup is indicative of a more systematic pattern. Relying on the most comprehensive coups dataset to date,[10] this study finds that, controlling for other domestic and external structural conditions, spatial rivalry is a significant predictor of both coup attempts and coup successes. The evidence suggests that autocrats engaged in international competition over disputed territories are more likely to be ousted in coups d'état.

This finding is important because it challenges the conventional wisdom, which holds that interstate conflict—or, more generally, the presence of external threat—can enhance state capacity and centralization of domestic power.[11] Several studies examining patterns of authoritarian leader survival suggest that interstate wars, militarized interstate disputes, or international threats can foster regime consolidation and can inhibit coups. In particular, some consensus seems to have emerged around the idea that foreign conflicts, disputes, or threats foreclose key pathways through which generals might conspire to overthrow a nondemocratic leader.[12] For example, Michael N. Desch contends that external threats make states more cohesive because they "reduce what Albert Hirshman labeled the 'exit' option and

[7]Ottaway and Ottaway, *Algeria*, 123; Naylor, *Historical Dictionary*, 183.

[8]Anthony H. Cordesman, *A Tragedy of Arms: Military and Security Developments in the Maghreb* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 151.

[9]Officially, Boumediene declared that Ben Bella's poor management of the economy was the major reason behind the latter's removal. In a revelatory radio address, however, Boumediene stated that Ben Bella's "government by the whim" pushed the military to act. "Map Treason Case Against Ben Bella," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 June 1965, page 2.

[10]Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2 (March 2011): 249–59.

[11]Michael N. Desch, "War and Strong States, Peace and Weak States?," *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 237–68; Douglas M. Gibler, "Outside-In: The Effects of External Threat on State Centralization," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 4 (August 2010): 519–42; Douglas M. Gibler and Steven V. Miller, "External Territorial Threat, State Capacity, and Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 5 (September 2014): 634–46; Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson, *War and State Making: The Shaping of Global Powers* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Cameron Thies, "War, Rivalry, and State Building in Latin America," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (July 2005): 451–65; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[12]Cemal Eren Arbatli and Ekim Arbatli, "External Threats and Political Survival: Can Dispute Involvement Deter Coup Attempts?," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33, no. 2 (April 2016): 115–52; Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, "Coup Risk, Counterbalancing, and International Conflict," *Security Studies* 14, no. 1 (January-March 2005): 140–77; R. Blake McMahon and Branislav L. Slantchev, "The Guardianship Dilemma: Regime Security through and from the Armed Forces," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (May 2015): 297–313; Ulrich Pilster and Tobias Böhmelt, "Do Democracies Engage Less in Coup-Proofing? On the Relationship between Regime Type and Civil–Military Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 4 (October 2012): 355–71; Varun Piplani and Caitlin Talmadge, "When War Helps Civil–military Relations: Prolonged Interstate Conflict and the Reduced Risk of Coups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming).

tend to suppress the 'voice' option, thus leaving only the 'loyalty' option,"[13] while R. Blake McMahon and Branislav L. Slantchev argue that external threats help induce military loyalty and thus lower the probability of a coup.[14] Some suggest that a highly militarized international environment allows dictators to deploy potential coup plotters into the war zone, create rifts among officers and, hence, secure control of the military establishment.[15] Others contend that wars, or even militarized interstate disputes, complicate coup plotting or execution and focus officers' attention outward.[16] A common diversionary war argument posits that conflict generates coup-inhibiting rally-around-the-flag effects and unifies the civilian leadership with the military, as the public tends to be averse to coups during periods of international instability.[17] A more recent claim holds that during high-hostility crises, leaders can more credibly commit to substantial resource transfers to the military top-brass, which is likely to be appeased and therefore less inclined to contemplate ousting the ruler.[18] Moreover, Ulrich Pilster and Tobias Böhmelt argue that a challenging international environment "reduces the probability of agency drifts in the form of military coups and increases the political costs from a loss of military effectiveness. External threats can therefore be expected to reduce the need for and attractiveness of institutional coup-proofing as an ex-ante control mechanism."[19] Finally, McMahon conjectures that external threats tend to induce regime loyalty within the military establishment. In his view, when external threats are particularly severe, officers "prefer to remain loyal rather than undertake the risks and assume the costs associated with a coup."[20]

This study reveals that it is not the mere presence—but the nature or type—of external threat that seems to matter for autocratic leader survival. Different types of external threats have different kinds of domestic consequences. In the presence of territorial rivalries, dictators may be less successful at implementing coup-proofing measures. When the regime is locked in international competition over territory, authoritarian leaders are compelled to allocate greater resources to the army even when domestic incentives to undermine the power of the military establishment—for instance through the creation of parallel coercive units—are quite

[13]Desch, "War and Strong States," 241.

[14]McMahon and Slantchev, "Guardianship Dilemma," 307. According to McMahon and Slantchev, the military's willingness to remain loyal to the leader is complicated by uncertainty about the external threat environment. In their view, rulers are able to strengthen their militaries without triggering a coup only when there is common knowledge about threat severity. McMahon and Slantchev embrace a broader understanding of external threats as threats originating from outside the government; hence, external threats can be domestic or foreign.

[15]Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk," 151; Chiozza and Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict*; Goemans, "Which Way Out?," 775.

[16]Piplani and Talmadge, "When War Helps," 18.

[17]On leaders' diversionary incentives, see Amy Oakes, *Diversionary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[18]Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats." As discussed below, the credible commitment mechanism can also produce an expectation in the opposite direction: during times of external hostility, leaders can commit to resource disbursements toward the military, but the substantial resources allocated can also be used to topple a dictator.

[19]Pilster and Böhmelt, "Do Democracies Engage," 363.

[20]R. Blake McMahon, "Circling the Wagons: Civil–Military Relations and International Disputes," (working paper, 2015, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2592711), 3.

pressing. Because of its symbolic, strategic, or material value, nondemocratic regimes cannot avoid placing high value on contested territory and endowing the military with the resources needed to compete with foreign opponents. The same organizational practices that dictators adopt to enhance military preparedness leave the army organizationally empowered to launch and successfully execute a coup. Therein lies a harrowing dilemma for the autocrat entangled in spatial rivalries: a strong and competent army is needed to successfully manage territorial disputes; at the same time, an army strong enough to compete with foreign enemies is also strong enough to threaten a dictator's tenure.[21] Authoritarian regimes embroiled in territorial disputes with external foes are pushed to adopt organizational practices that increase the chances of military success;[22] yet these practices likely undermine the effectiveness of coup-proofing measures and fundamentally shape the army's ability to carry out a coup.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The first section discusses how autocrats' coup-proofing strategies (counterbalancing, loyalty buy-off, ethnic stacking) can be eroded by both domestic and external structural conditions. The second section examines the mechanisms through which spatial rivalry can create favorable circumstances for the army to attempt and successfully execute a coup against a dictator. Following that, the third section tests empirically the key proposition, which anticipates a higher incidence of coups against autocrats in the presence of spatial rivalry. The final section concludes and offers suggestions for further research.

Autocrats and Coup-Proofing

Dictators' survival in power is insecure. Threats of irregular removal from office can come either from outside or inside the country. From the outside, an autocrat's tenure can be affected by economic sanctions,[23] military intervention,[24] or international disputes.[25] From the inside, survival in office can be imperilled by economic shocks,[26] violent or nonviolent protests,[27] and rogue elements within the autocrat's selectorate (the set of individuals and institutions that guarantee a regime's survival).[28] Autocrats rule in the shadow of potential military coups d'état—their survival

[21]See the discussion in Caitlin Talmadge, "Different Threats, Different Militaries: Explaining Organizational Practices in Authoritarian Armies," *Security Studies* 25, no. 1 (January-March 2016): 111–41.
[22]Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).
[23]Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph Wright, "Dealing with Tyranny: International Sanctions and the Survival of Authoritarian Rulers," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (June 2010): 335–59; Nikolay Marinov, "Do Sanctions Destabilize Country Leaders?," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (July 2005): 564–76.
[24]Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 90–131.
[25]Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats"; Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk."
[26]Nam Kyu Kim, "Revisiting Economic Shocks and Coups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 1 (February 2016): 3–31.
[27]Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Jeff Goodwin, *No Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence."
[28]Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

in power ultimately depends on the extent to which they keep the military weak or subservient.[29] The longevity of a dictator's tenure is a function of the effectiveness of coup-proofing measures, the set of actions taken to prevent a military coup.[30]

The imperative of surviving in office often compels despots to weaken the army and erode the state building project.[31] Autocrats regularly adopt three coup-proofing measures—counterbalancing, loyalty buy-off, and ethnic stacking—in an effort to reduce the army's organizational effectiveness and minimize coup risk. Counterbalancing involves building parallel military and security forces that are loyal to the ruler rather than the state. Peter D. Feaver notes that dictators typically counterbalance by setting various branches of the military against each other, using parallel chains of command, and establishing alternative coercive structures (such as paramilitary forces, secret police, or presidential guards) as counterweights to the regular army.[32] Where counterbalancing is present, the military is often underfunded, undermanned, neglected, and isolated from the ruling coalition. In this kind of environment, the military finds itself under institutional siege: resources for training and organizational efficiency are meager; generals are excluded from the regime's patronage networks; the officer corps is closely monitored by the security services; and the military branches are ignored at the expense of better-funded and better-trained paramilitary forces.[33] In sum, counterbalancing reduces the army's resources and creates coordination obstacles within the military branch. The quintessential example of counterbalancing was Libya under Muammar Gaddafi, where the national army was sidelined by the Revolutionary Guard and other paramilitary forces that pledged allegiance directly to the dictator.[34]

Loyalty buy-off involves securing the allegiance of the army top-brass by providing material incentives and thus ensuring that they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo (regime survival). When top officers are lavished with private goods, they are more likely to protect tyrannical regimes to guarantee that their benefits continue. Loyalty buy-off bonds the regime and the army top-brass in a relationship of mutual dependence. Material incentives vary greatly, including managerial positions in state enterprises or corporations owned by members of the ruling coalition, partnerships with private capital, kickbacks on arms trade, or land appropriations from top figures in the opposition. This strategy was visible in Egypt under Hosni Mubarak's rule (1981–2011), where high-ranking officers were wedded to the dictator through the distribution of much-coveted private benefits.

[29]This study does not focus on when autocrats are more likely to lose power but, rather, on when coups are more likely to be executed. A coup d'état is just one possible type of irregular exit in authoritarian regimes. See Goemans, "Which Way Out?"

[30]James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 131–65.

[31]Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk," 596.

[32]Peter D. Feaver, "Civil–Military Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 211–41.

[33]Holger Albrecht and Dorothy Ohl, "Exit, Resistance, Loyalty: Military Behavior During Unrest in Authoritarian Regimes," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 1 (March 2016): 38–52; Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk," 596; Hicham Bou Nassif, "Generals and Autocrats: How Coup-proofing Predetermined the Military Elite's Behavior in the Arab Spring," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 2 (June 2015): 245–75; Erica De Bruin, "Preventing Coups d'état: How Counterbalancing Works," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming).

[34]Notably, there was no separate Libyan defense ministry under Gaddafi.

Ethnic stacking involves staffing the coercive agencies—the army, as well as security and intelligence services—with members of the ruler's family, clan, or ethno-religious group. This strategy is fairly common in societies where communal identities are salient and form the basis of political mobilization.[35] By appointing loyal co-ethnics, autocrats address two key principal–agent issues: monitoring and defection.[36] Co-ethnics appointed at higher echelons of power tend to be "more loyal due to trust developed over years of repeated interactions, embeddedness within the same social networks that facilitates information exchange and makes plotting more difficult, and stronger in-group norms of reciprocity."[37] Ethnic stacking tends to be prevalent in countries such as Bahrain or Syria where ethnic exclusion lies at the core of the state building project.

The three types of coup-proofing strategies are fairly common in authoritarian regimes spanning different regions and time periods. In countries from Iraq (1979–2003) or the Philippines (1965–1986) to Romania (1965–1989) or Egypt (1981–2011), autocrats relied on counterbalancing, loyalty buy-off, or ethnic stacking to reduce the capacity and motivation of the army to execute a coup d'état. Despite their prevalence, these tactics are not fail-proof because they require certain conditions to produce the desired outcome (coup prevention). In fact, coup-proofing strategies can be ineffective in the presence of internal or external structural conditions that create problems of moral hazard. Put otherwise, the efforts aimed at keeping the army subservient will likely be unsuccessful when certain domestic or international conditions work to cement the organizational strength of the military.

Structural Conditions and Coup-proofing

Domestically, popular protest against the regime and ensuing repression can bolster the power of the army. When they rule under the shadow of mass rebellion, autocrats find themselves in an unenviable position: coup-proofing measures undermine the army's effectiveness as a coercive machine, but using the military to repress the opposition strengthens the military apparatus and lowers officers' coordination costs for staging a coup. Milan W. Svolik argues that heavy reliance on the military to suppress internal dissent produces moral hazard because the resources used to stifle the opposition can also empower the generals to act against an autocrat. Once the officers become necessary "for a regime's survival, [they] acquire political leverage that they can exploit. Militaries frequently do so by demanding privileges, perks, and policy concessions that go beyond what is necessary for suppressing the regime's opposition—they claim a seat at the table when the spoils of their complicity are divided."[38]

[35]Kristen A. Harkness, "The Ethnic Army and the State: Explaining Coup Traps and the Difficulties of Democratization in Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 4 (June 2016): 587–616; Michael A. Makara, "Coup-proofing, Military Defection, and the Arab Spring," *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 4 (October 2013): 334–59.

[36]Theodore McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion," *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 3 (April 2010): 333–50; Idean Salehyan, "The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 3 (June 2010): 493–515.

[37]Roessler, "Enemy Within," 309.

[38]Svolik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 10.

When indispensable for quelling domestic unrest, the army can quickly morph from supporter into rival. It is true that many authoritarian regimes rely on the security services rather than the military to deal with quotidian dissent. It is also true that the army is organizationally hardwired to regard repression as falling outside its core institutional mission.[39] Nevertheless, in most dictatorships, the army remains the repressor of last resort. Authoritarian regimes faced with "mass, organized, and violent opposition must integrate their militaries within their repressive apparatus by granting them corresponding material and institutional resources. It is these resources—especially the autonomy over personnel decisions and legal impunity for internal repression—combined with their political pivotalness that empower militaries to intervene in politics."[40]

Coup-proofing measures might also be largely ineffective in the context of civil warfare.[41] Autocrats fighting internal rebellions are faced with a dilemma: to safeguard their hold on power they need to marginalize the armed forces, but doing so leaves them exposed to overthrow at the hands of rebel forces. A revolving door strategy—whereby top army officers are regularly shuffled to separate the wheat from the chaff (loyalists from disloyalists)—does not necessarily solve this dilemma because the need to fight insurgents may still leave the army empowered as an institutional player that can alter the domestic power distribution. Additionally, exclusionary coup-proofing techniques might result in a critical mass of alienated officers who could join the rebel forces or help organize a rebel group themselves.[42]

Just as domestic conditions, such as protest and civil war, can undercut autocrats' efforts to insulate themselves from coups, coup-proofing strategies can be rendered ineffective by outside forces as well. Certain external structural conditions can empower the military and make a dictator's political survival more tenuous. Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer suggest that some despots strategically use international conflict to create and exacerbate competition among military branches. According to this diversionary logic, dictators who feel threatened domestically might engage in foreign disputes in order to promote divisions within the armed forces and, thus, make themselves less vulnerable to a coup d'état.[43] Belkin and Schofer identify three main mechanisms connecting external conflict with military divisiveness: first, army branches can offer different assessments of capability which may hamper the country's effectiveness in combat; second, military units

[39]David Pion-Berlin, Diego Esparza, and Kevin Grisham, "Staying Quartered: Civilian Uprisings and Military Disobedience in the Twenty-First Century," *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 2 (February 2014): 230–59.
[40]Svolik, Politics of Authoritarian Rule, 125.
[41]Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes"; Jonathan Powell, "Leader Survival Strategies and the Onset of Civil Conflict: The Paradox of Coup-proofing," (working paper, 15 February 2015, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2443741).
[42]Roessler, "Enemy Within," 315.
[43]Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk." Other works suggest that, wary of conflict improving the army's standing, autocrats are more willing to make concessions to an adversary in order to keep the military weak, or that autocrats are more open to concessions after being in power for some time because they are no longer constrained by domestic audiences. See Giacomo Chiozza and Ajin Choi, "Guess Who Did What: Political Leaders and the Management of Territorial Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 3 (June 2003): 251–78; Scott Wolford, "Threats at Home, Threats Abroad: Bargaining and War in the Shadow of Coups and Revolutions," *International Interactions* 40, no. 4 (October 2014): 506–32.

can have divergent preferences over tactics; third, various services can have a hard time allocating credit for success or blame for defeat.

Belkin and Schofer's argument is theoretically attractive but runs counter to at least three strands of the literature. A long tradition in sociology posits that conflict tends to bolster organizational cohesion.[44] Additionally, the war making–state making literature demonstrates clear links between the presence of interstate warfare and the centralization of power, including the military aspect.[45] Finally, more recent research finds a robust, positive relationship between the presence of external threat and the consolidation of the bureaucratic and coercive state apparatus.[46] I argue that a specific type of external threat—the presence of spatial rivalry—is especially prone to pressure autocrats to maintain a powerful army and hinder their coup-proofing efforts. When authoritarian regimes are embroiled in territorial disputes with international competitors, strategies designed to prevent coups are less likely to be successfully implemented. As a result, a dictator facing foreign rivals will be more vulnerable to being overthrown in a coup d'état.

How Spatial Rivalry Can Threaten an Autocrat's Tenure

Rivalries are distinct international phenomena whereby two countries share perceptions of threat and hostility.[47] States engaged in rivalry relationships compete over material or nonmaterial ends and are more prone to experience militarized interstate disputes. For example, Greece and Turkey, two NATO-member countries, have been entangled in an uneasy rivalry relationship since 1955, primarily over the delimitation of territorial waters and the status of Northern Cyprus. The constant possibility of conflict is a key characteristic of rivalries. Rivalries account for a great deal of variation in the onset, escalation, and duration of interstate disputes,[48] but their implications are not limited to the international arena. Rivalry can generate a fundamental moral hazard in authoritarian regimes: the very resources that enable the military to compete internationally can also empower it to act against a dictator. All else equal, autocrats who are immune from international competition can afford to keep their armies small, underfunded, and out of politics. By contrast, dictators who are invested in international rivalries must keep the military ready for combat, even if that means empowering a player that can threaten their survival in office.

Coup-wary autocrats involved in rivalries find themselves trapped in a vortex of irreconcilable interests. To ensure their political survival, authoritarian leaders need to keep the army weak or subservient. However, international competition increases

[44]Lewis A. Coser, *The Function of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956).
[45]Tilly, *Coercion*.
[46]Gibler, "Outside-in"; Thies, "War, Rivalry, and State Building."
[47]William R. Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 2001): 557–86. According to Thompson, rivalries exist independently of conflict. This conceptualization of rivalry avoids the tautology inherent in the alternative, dispute density approach which requires a certain number of militarized interstate disputes (six) to occur over a certain period (twenty years). See James P. Klein, Gary Goertz, and Paul F. Diehl, "The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 3 (May 2006): 331–48.
[48]Michael Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space, and Conflict Escalation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the need for a strong military.[49] Uncertainty over the evolution of the external threat environment creates disincentives for weakening the armed forces, even among coup-phobic despots who cannot afford to keep their armies unprepared to withstand a foreign rival. Autocrats need the specialized skills of the military to compete internationally even if this competition might be perilous for the regime. Given its core institutional mission as the guardian of the state, the army is uniquely equipped to deal with external threats.[50] Not only is it better informed about the strategic environment than the executive, it is also the repository of the country's hard power and, therefore, the ultimate guarantor of the state's existence. The words of a retired Egyptian general are emblematic of how the army perceives its core mission: "The backbone of [the country] is its armed forces. If they break, so does [the country]. They are the state's protector, and, if they fail, the state will collapse."[51]

Authoritarian regimes engaged in international rivalries cannot afford a loyal but poorly equipped and incompetent military. The need to empower the armed forces in order to deal with foreign rivals places dictators in a tenuous position. Autocrats face a trade-off: to compete successfully with a rival state, they must empower the domestic player that is most likely to threaten their tenure – the armed forces. Rivalry provides the opportunity for the military to maximize its material well-being, achieve greater autonomy, and increase its leverage among domestic actors. When rivalry persists, we are likely to see the military establishment acquiring greater institutional power and securing a reserved role in the affairs of the country. International competition transforms the generals into veto players to be reckoned with. Facing powerful external rivals, dictators have little choice but to endow the military with resources and concede to officers' institutional demands.

Rivalry makes the army an autocrat's indispensable foe.[52] Paradoxical as it may seem at first sight, coup-proofed armies are in an autocrat's best and worst interest. Dictators are caught in a vicious cycle. To fend off army challengers, they must subdue the military establishment; at the same time, they need a powerful army to navigate through a potentially treacherous international environment. Unlike the army top-brass, civilian rulers operate with incomplete information about the nature of external threats. Because of this informational asymmetry (and because officers often have rational incentives to withhold information from civilian

[49]For experimental evidence of the impact of coup-proofing on military effectiveness, see Andrew W. Bausch, "Coup-proofing and Military Inefficiencies: An Experiment," *International Interactions* (forthcoming).

[50]Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977).

[51]Retired Egyptian general quoted in Hicham Bou Nassif, "Coups and Nascent Democracies: The Military and Egypt's Failed Consolidation," *Democratization* 24, no. 1 (January 2017): 157–74.

[52]Some argue that leaders who coup-proof their militaries can strategically resort to substitution policies in order to offset their military weakness when faced with external threats. See Cameron S. Brown, Christopher J. Fariss, and R. Blake McMahon, "Recouping after Coup-Proofing: Compromised Military Effectiveness and Strategic Substitution," *International Interactions* 42, no. 1 (February 2016): 1–30. According to Brown, Farris, and McMahon, regimes contemplate two strategic substitutes to compensate for military weakness induced by coup-proofing measures: development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and alliances. Neither of these tools are readily available to autocrats. Pursuing WMDs is a costly undertaking, materially and strategically, as it can increase the number of rivals (thus inflaming the external threat environment) or raise the prospect of foreign intervention. Dictators are walking a fine line with regard to alliances as well, because autocratic states tend to democratize within alliance systems. See Douglas M. Gibler and Scott Wolford, "Alliances, then Democracy: An Examination of the Relationship between Regime Type and Alliance Formation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 1 (February 2006): 129–53.

rulers), dictators cannot afford to underestimate the nature of the external threat and expose themselves to foreign rivals.[53] Hence, they cannot afford to keep the army weak. Uncertainty about external threats compels dictators to maintain a strong military, one that could also turn against the regime.

Some may argue that authoritarian leaders are mainly concerned with domestic matters and care less about the international environment. According to this logic, the organizational effects of rivalry on the armed forces are limited or nonexistent. Yet international behavior has important consequences for autocrats' tenure. An authoritarian leader can be overthrown when a rival state intervenes against the regime, as it happened in 1990 when the Chadian dictator Hissène Habré was deposed following direct involvement from the newly-formed Islamic government in Sudan. Poor international performance also has audience costs and may erode a strongman's legitimacy with the population or with key actors within the selectorate.[54] Finally, feeble resistance against a rival state has reputational consequences as it signals regime weakness and can encourage external and internal challengers.[55] Therefore, a despot cannot remain impassive to the international milieu.

Rivalry is an aggregate concept encompassing several types of competitive relationships that have varying implications for the institutional strength of the military and, thus, different consequences for its ability to execute a coup. William R. Thompson identifies four types of rivalries: *spatial* rivalries which pertain to disputes over territory (for example, Algeria and Morocco, 1962–ongoing); *positional* rivalries which capture contention over relative influence and status (for example, Egypt and Syria between 1961 and 1990); *ideological* rivalries which relate to disputes over ideology (for example, Colombia and Venezuela, 1831–ongoing); and *interventionist* rivalries which refer to external intervention in the internal affairs of one country by the other state in the rivalry dyad (for example, Ethiopia and Somalia, 1960– ongoing).[56]

I argue that, of the four types of rivalry relationships, those over contested territory are more likely to exacerbate the problem of moral hazard in authoritarian regimes. Spatial rivalry is likely to be more salient than other types of rivalries due to the symbolic, strategic, or material qualities of the territory contested with a foreign adversary.[57] Symbolically, a disputed territory may be imbued with nationalist

[53]This rationale is elegantly laid out in R. Blake McMahon, "Circling the Wagons." See also Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil–Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[54]Jessica L. Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 326–47.

[55]Regimes with coup-proofed armies tend to be less effective in interstate conflicts. See Ulrich Pilster and Tobias Böhmelt, "Coup-proofing and Military Effectiveness in Interstate Wars, 1967–99," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28, no. 4 (September 2011): 331–50.

[56]Michael Colaresi and William R. Thompson, "Strategic Rivalries, Protracted Conflict, and Crisis Escalation," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 3 (May 2002): 263–87. The four types of rivalries are not mutually exclusive; a dyad can experience more than one type of rivalry at the same time. For example, the Russo–Chinese strategic rivalry between 1958 and 1989 was simultaneously positional, spatial, and ideological.

[57]On the symbolic, strategic, and material value of territory, see, inter alia, Stacie E. Goddard, "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy," *International Organization*, 60, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 35–68; Friederike L. Kelle, "To Claim or Not to Claim? How Territorial Value Shapes Demands for Self-Determination," *Comparative Political Studies* (forthcoming); David S. Siroky and John Cuffe, "Lost Autonomy, Nationalism and Separatism," *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2015): 3–34.

overtones and regarded as the source of group identity and survival: an ancestral homeland, a reservoir of national identity, or a place of belonging that harbors widespread symbolic appeal with elites and masses alike. Strategically, the geographical location of a territory—for example, its proximity to a rival's capital city or to international shipping lanes—imparts considerable military value. Materially, a disputed landmass can be economically valuable if it contains mineral resources or other types of taxable assets, such as an industrial infrastructure or large population. Because of its symbolic, strategic, and material value, authoritarian regimes cannot avoid placing high value on contested territory and endowing the military with the resources needed to compete with foreign adversaries.

The resources allocated for international competition over disputed territory are organizationally rewarding for the military establishment and can enable it to successfully orchestrate a coup against an autocratic leader. Hence, resource allocation is the main mechanism through which spatial rivalry exacerbates the problem of moral hazard in dictatorial regimes and increases the army's ability to supply coups. In the presence of territorial disputes, autocrats are compelled to make substantial investments in their militaries. External threat bolsters generals' domestic bargaining power and often ensures that the military budget remains robust.[58] Overall, external threat "drives leaders to boost military spending, increase the role of the military in society, elevate military elites to more prominent public positions, and grant the military rights and privileges (e.g., instituting martial law) that are not afforded during peace-time."[59]

Besides the consolidation of organizational resources, there are additional pathways through which spatial rivalry can affect the military's ability to supply coups. Rivalry contributes to the professionalization of the officer corps, reinforces the role of the military as the guardian of the state, and puts it in a unique position to challenge an autocrat's tenure. The country's involvement in territorial disputes can shape recruitment processes, training protocols, operational know-how, and even socialization experiences.[60] Operational procedures aimed at countering external threats foster not only rank-and-file subordination, rigor, and discipline, but also an esprit de corps that habituates top officers and lower-ranked cadres into a common institutional culture. This has important implications for the ability of the military establishment to oust a tyrant, since the same professional skills and operational procedures that allow the army to compete with foreign rivals can be deployed against a dictator as well.

Furthermore, spatial rivalry can foster improved coordination of collective action efforts across various army units. External threats can increase group cohesion, facilitate monitoring, and ease mobilization for collective action.[61] Successful coups often require horizontal and vertical coordination—coordination within and

[58]Vincenzo Bove and Roberto Nisticò, "Military in Politics and Budgetary Allocations," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 42, no. 4 (December 2014): 1065–78.
[59]Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes," 7.
[60]Amelia H. Green, "The Commander's Dilemma: Creating and Controlling Armed Group Violence Against Civilians," *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 5 (September 2016): 619–32.
[61]Gibler and Miller, "External Territorial Threat."

across various branches of the military branch.[62] Spatial rivalry facilitates inter-branch communication and operational coordination: to successfully compete with a foreign adversary, the army needs to achieve high levels of inter-unit cooperation. Once seamless coordination among the top-brass and between the top-brass and the rank-and-file is achieved, the military will be more confident in its efforts to maintain a strong posture vis-à-vis an international rival. At the same time, with greater inter-branch coordination, the military will also gain greater confidence in its ability to overthrow a nondemocratic ruler.

In general, coups are most likely to be initiated—and succeed—at higher thresholds of plotter capacity. Because of territory's salience for domestic audiences, spatial rivalry consolidates the army's capacity, in terms of resources and inter-branch communication, not only to withstand a foreign opponent but also to plot a coup against an authoritarian leader. These arguments do not imply that spatial rivalry invariably fosters homogeneous preferences within the military establishment regarding the institution's corporate interests and strategy towards a domestic authoritarian leader. The armed forces are not organizational monoliths; in fact, many—especially those in nondemocratic countries—display some degree of factionalism within the officer corps, not least because of rulers' coup-proofing efforts.[63] While spatial rivalry may not automatically encourage preference homogenization regarding the army's domestic posture, the resources allocated to the military and the level of inter-branch coordination needed to confront a foreign adversary can be strategically utilized by segments of the top brass to oust an autocratic leader.

The high levels of resources, professionalization, and coordination that can be achieved by the armed forces in spatial rivalry situations exacerbate the problem of credible commitment in authoritarian regimes. In dictatorships, civilian leaders have a hard time committing that they will safeguard the army's corporate interests while officers have a hard time committing that they will not plot regime overthrow.[64] Particularly pernicious is the informational asymmetry between the ruler and the military: officers are rarely fully informed about autocrats' true intentions, whereas dictators can never be certain that an organizationally endowed army will remain quartered and refrain from intervening in domestic politics. Spatial rivalry can reduce the uncertainty about resource allocations, but can also leave the army structurally empowered to scheme against a dictator. As a result, autocrats have further incentives to engage in coup-proofing; this, in turn, can lead to a spiral of domestic uncertainty since the military will feel directly threatened by rival agencies. Coup-proofing measures infringe into the army's corporate interests and might push officers to contemplate regime overthrow, especially when the military

[62]Andrew T. Little, "Coordination, Learning, and Coups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming); Naunihal Singh, *Seizing Power: The Strategic Logic of Military Coups* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
[63]Terence Lee, "The Military's Corporate Interests," *Armed Forces and Society* 34, no. 3 (April 2008): 491–502.
[64]Daron Acemoglu, Davide Ticchi, and Andrea Vindigni, "A Theory of Military Dictatorships," *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 2, no. 1 (February 2010): 1–42; Philip Keefer, "Insurgency and Credible Commitment in Autocracies and Democracies," *World Bank Economic Review* 22, no. 1 (February 2008): 33–61; McMahon and Slantchev, "Guardianship Dilemma."

establishment enjoys resources allocated to compete with an international rival. Essentially, coup-proofing efforts, coupled with the army's ability to safeguard institutional resources under a spatial rivalry scenario, can lead to domestic bargaining failures and can undermine rulers' and officers' commitment to the status quo.

Credible commitment problems are less salient in established democracies where the civil–military bargain is self-reinforcing.[65] The system of checks and balances in consolidated democratic regimes serves to enforce the social contract between the army and the civilian authorities. Democratic leaders can make more credible promises to the military establishment than their nondemocratic counterparts (reneging on the domestic power distribution bargain can result in electoral loss), which is likely to reduce officers' appetite for coup plotting. Unlike despots who have leverage over resource allocation and incentives to engage in rent-seeking behavior, democratic rulers are compelled to allocate military expenditures to provide the public good of national security.[66] Some scholars argue that democratizing regimes may be uniquely prone to coups because leaders cannot fully commit to safeguard the army's interests while the military cannot fully commit to reform and accept civilian control.[67] Nonetheless, leaders of democratizing countries facing international rivals are better positioned to credibly commit to the domestic political bargain that safeguards the army's corporate interests. This is so for at least two reasons: first, democratizing leaders are domestically constrained to implement coup-proofing measures; and, second, "when there is an international threat, concessions from democratic regimes to the military become more credible because democracy also needs the military."[68]

In summary, spatial rivalry widens the credibility gap between officers and dictators because it strengthens the army's organizational power and, hence, provides further incentives for authoritarian rulers to expand their coup-proofing tactics. The deepening credible commitment predicament can provide a fertile ground for a coup d'état. By consolidating army resources, fostering officer professionalization, and reducing coordination costs, spatial rivalry can undermine a dictator's coup-proofing tactics and can increase the army's ability to supply coups. Therefore, the main theoretical expectation to be tested holds that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Coups against autocrats are more likely to be initiated and to be successful when the regime is engaged in spatial rivalry.

Dictators need strong armies to guard against external threats, but a strong military can undermine their coup-proofing strategies and leave them prone to being ousted. There are various processes through which spatial rivalry can undercut

[65]Singh, *Seizing Power*, 55.
[66]Jonathan M. Powell, "Regime Vulnerability and the Diversionary Threat of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 1 (February 2014): 169–96.
[67]Acemoglu, Ticchi, and Vindigni, "A Theory of Military Dictatorships"; Curtis Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy," *Comparative Political Studies* 49, no. 9 (August 2016): 1167–1200.
[68]Acemoglu, Ticchi, and Vindigni, "Military Dictatorships," 37.

autocrats' coup-proofing plans. As argued above, the high salience of territorial competition may leave authoritarian leaders reluctant or unable to sideline the military establishment. Counterbalancing—the creation of paramilitary units or alternative coercive structures that compete with one another for resources and influence—might sap military morale and reduce the country's ability to mobilize effectively against an external adversary. Erica De Bruin suggests that counterbalancing exacerbates tensions with the military top-brass and can even provoke the coups it is designed to prevent.[69] Spatial rivalry might also temper an autocrat's appetite to stack the army with co-ethnics or co-religionists. Despots who attempt to build ethnic armies risk provoking violent resistance from a rivalry-empowered military establishment.[70] While dictators prefer loyal generals, loading the armed forces with loyalists may decrease army preparedness in dealing with external threats. When confronted with the insecurity of the external realm, rulers want to hire the most competent generals who may not be the most loyal ones. Even loyalty buy-off measures can be compromised. Generals included in an autocrat's inner circle might be showered with private benefits; however, there is no guarantee that they will not defect to the opposition or aspire to higher positions of authority, particularly when their domestic standing is solidified by a rivalry-driven militarization program.

Spatial rivalry creates demand for organizational effectiveness of the military, but an organizationally effective army can also mount a successful coup against an authoritarian incumbent. This is not to say that officers execute coups because of rivalry dynamics. Rather, the argument advanced herein holds that, much like protest, civil warfare, or international conflict,[71] spatial rivalry can emerge as a structural cause of coups d'état because it can empower the military, reduce officers' coordination costs, and compromise an autocrat's coup-proofing measures. The coup event itself can be induced by a proximate or triggering factor, by a "spark that sets the prairie fire."[72] The spark can be a personal antagonism like the removal of Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria (1965),[73] a power-sharing disagreement like the ouster of Juan María Bordaberry in Uruguay (1983), a spontaneous popular revolt like the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania (1989), or a more organized campaign of nonviolent resistance like the downfall of Hosni Mubarak (2011) in Egypt.[74] Therefore, spatial rivalry can

[69]De Bruin, "Preventing Coups."
[70]Harkness, "Ethnic Army," 6.
[71]Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk"; Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes"; Roessler, "Enemy Within"; Svolik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.
[72]Belkin and Schofer, "Structural Understanding"; Timur Kuran, "Sparks and Prairie Fires: A Theory of Unanticipated Political Revolution," *Public Choice* 61, no. 1 (April 1989): 41–74. Proximate or triggering factors can be more idiosyncratic than structural drivers of coup d'état like protest, civil war, interstate conflict, or spatial rivalry.
[73]On the acrimony between Ben Bella and Boumediene, see Ottaway and Ottaway, *Algeria*. After assuming power, Boumediene banned the use of Ben Bella's name in state-controlled media outlets.
[74]The latter three events are conventionally described as revolutions but are more accurately understood as popular coups—military coups executed in the background of mass unrest. See Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Dictators and Dictatorships* (New York: Continuum, 2011); Goodwin, *No Way Out*. In Romania, the military refused to repress the uprising and summarily executed Ceaușescu along with his wife on December 25, 1989. In February 2011, the Egyptian army swiftly changed its strategy away from repression, remained quartered, and finally forced Mubarak out of office.

operate as a structural condition that allows the army to orchestrate and successfully carry out coup plots. The consensus in the literature on civil–military relations is that the perceived likelihood that a coup will succeed is a key consideration that motivates coup plotters. When deciding whether to initiate a coup, officers carefully weigh the prospects of success; failure can be institutionally and personally devastating. If, as argued herein, spatial rivalry enhances the army's organizational effectiveness and lowers coordination costs, then the military top brass will be more confident in their chances of overthrowing a dictator. Hence, the presence of spatial rivalry would shape both the desire to launch coups as well as the ability to carry them out successfully. The next section provides an empirical test of the key theoretical expectation.

Empirical Approach

The main hypothesis is tested using a time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) dataset for all non-democratic regimes during the 1960–2006 period. The unit of analysis is the country-year. Because of endogeneity problems and the rather arbitrary thresholds for regime type in the Polity IV data, I use the alternative measure for autocratic regimes developed by Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz.[75] Coup attempt and coup success are nonrandomly distributed events; consequently, I estimate them simultaneously. Since I am assessing the impact of spatial rivalry on both coup attempt and coup success, I rely on a two-stage Heckman selection model.[76] Given the dichotomous nature of the outcomes of interest—coup attempt and coup success—I employ the probit-probit variation of Heckman's two-stage selection model which is appropriate for ascertaining the impact of predictors on coup success by incorporating the predicted probability of a coup attempt taking place.[77] Running a two-stage probit-probit selection model implies obtaining estimates for the first stage of the process (coup attempt), saving a selection bias term, and using it to correct the estimates in the outcome stage (coup success). If coup attempt and coup success are interdependent processes, the probit-probit selection model would account for this interdependence. To address the problem of country-specific error correlations, I report robust standard errors clustered at the country level. One remaining challenge with this type of analysis is that the occurrence of a coup is unlikely to be independent of previous coups. To account for

[75]Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2014): 313–31. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz code for autocratic regime onset when any of the following occurs: a government assumes power through non-competitive elections; a government assumes power through competitive elections but subsequently changes the formal or informal rules such that competition in subsequent elections is limited; or a government assumes power through competitive elections, but the military either prevents one or more parties that substantial numbers of citizens would be expected to vote for from competing, or dictates policy choice in important policy areas. The Polity IV index includes a category of extreme factionalism, characterized by domestic competition that is "intense, hostile, and frequently violent." This is particularly problematic for coup- and civil war-prone countries because the Polity IV regime measure is not independent of the outcome of interest. See the discussion in James R. Vreeland, "The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 3 (June 2008): 401–25.

[76]James J. Heckman. "Sample Selection Bias as a Specification Error," *Econometrica* 47, no. 1 (January 1979): 153–61.

[77]This is also known as the bivariate probit model with selection or the censored probit model. Censored probit is equivalent to running two probit models with correlated errors.

temporal dependence and structural coup risk (recurrent coups in the same country), I include a measure of the number of years since the previous coup with associated cubic splines.[78]

Variables

The dependent variables of interest, *coup attempt* and *coup success*, are taken from the most comprehensive coups dataset to date.[79] Coup attempt refers to an attempt "by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of government using unconstitutional means." A coup attempt is considered to be successful "if the perpetrators seize and hold power for at least seven days."[80]

The main hypothesis states that spatial rivalry is positively associated with coups. Spatial rivalry is coded 1 for each year an authoritarian regime was engaged in rivalry over territory and 0 otherwise, with (updated) data taken from Thompson.[81] According to Thompson's conceptualization, the onset of rivalry is marked by "explicit threat, competitor, and enemy perceptions on the part of decision-makers," while the termination of rivalry occurs when there is historical "evidence of some explicit kind of a significant de-escalation in threat perception and hostility."[82] To assess the veracity of main theoretical expectation, I also include binary indicators for other rivalry subtypes—*positional, ideological*, and *interventionist*—with information taken again from Thompson's updated dataset. The key argument holds that spatial rivalries are likely to produce organizationally coherent armies that can also act against the ruler when they find it politically expedient to do so. By contrast, positional and ideological rivalries could plausibly be maintained without necessarily endowing the army with disproportionately large amounts of resources. These types of confrontations are less intense and frequently unfold in the political rather than the military realm. Given their reduced escalatory potential, they may not create the same level of demand for organizationally efficient armies as is the case with spatial rivalries. In the case of interventionist rivalries, the army tends to be weakened by the intervening state, so we might expect these types of rivalries to reduce the incidence of coups. Because a country can experience multiple types of rivalry at the same time, dichotomous indicators for all types are included simultaneously in the model specifications.

In addition to the presence of spatial rivalry, the theoretical discussion referenced three other structural conditions that can produce problems of moral

[78]Nathaniel Beck, Jonathan N. Katz, and Richard Tucker, "Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (October 1998): 1260–88. Past coup is one of the most robust predictors of future coup. See McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies"; Powell, "Regime Vulnerability."
[79]Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances."
[80]Ibid., 252.
[81]Thompson, "Identifying Rivals."
[82]Ibid.," 563–66.

hazard: domestic protests or instability, civil war, and interstate conflict. Since each of these provides avenues for the military to consolidate its institutional power and carry out a coup, they need to be taken into consideration. To capture the impact of *domestic instability* on the army's institutional power, I rely on the anti-government resistance campaign variable from the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset.[83] With an increase in domestic instability, an autocrat may be compelled to appeal to the armed forces to quell uprisings. By doing so, however, the dictator may be exposed to the possibility of a coup.[84]

The impact of internal conflict on military consolidation is factored in through the *civil war* covariate taken from the Correlates of War (COW) project. COW defines civil war as a conflict fought within state borders between a government and non-government forces where at least one thousand battle-related deaths are recorded per year.[85] The COW dataset is also utilized to capture the presence of *interstate war* in any given year. COW defines interstate war as a conflict fought by two states, involving organized forces, and resulting in a minimum of one thousand combatant fatalities within a twelve-month period.[86] To gauge the impact of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) on the power consolidation of the military establishment, I include three covariates: the country's involvement in *MIDs* (coded dichotomously); the *number of MIDs* in each observed country-year (count variable); and *the time from last MID to coup attempt* (in years). A militarized action can be the threat to use force, the display of force, or the actual use of force. MID data are also taken from the Correlates of War project.

Further, I factor in four control variables that account for the military's and population's dissatisfaction with the regime.[87] An autocrat's survival in office is likely to be more fragile when the rank-and-file are poorly funded: aggrieved soldiers and officers tend to be less invested in the maintenance of the status quo. Hence, the first control variable is the *change (Δ) in military expenditures* as percentage of the GDP (percent year-to-year differences). The expectation is that a

[83]Erica Chenoweth and Orion A. Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns: Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 415–23. I use the NAVCO 2.0 indicator for the size of anti-government campaigns which I recode according to the following categories: 1 < 1,000 protestors; 2 < 10,000 protestors; 3 < 100,000 protestors; 4 < 500,000 protestors; 5 < 1 million protestors; 6 > 1 million protestors.

[84]Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes"; Powell, "Leader Survival Strategies"; Svolik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.

[85]The COW civil war variable is more appropriate than alternative categorizations (such as UCDP) because it captures high-intensity conflict—episodes of civil strife characterized by full involvement of the armed forces. See Pion-Berlin, Esparza, and Grisham, "Staying Quartered." Low-intensity insurgencies (captured by the UCDP categorization, which requires at least twenty-five battle-related deaths) often involve the security services rather than the military; by contrast, high-intensity civil wars typically require the army's involvement, which may have important implications for an autocrat's survival. Another problem with the UCDP twenty-five battle-casualty threshold is that it may capture forms of political contention other than civil war. See Adrian Florea, "Where Do We Go From Here: Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological Gaps in the Large-N Civil War Research Program," *International Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (March 2012): 78–98. It is worth noting that models with the UCDP civil war variable produce comparable results.

[86]Meredith R. Sarkees, "The Correlates of War Data on War," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 18, no. 1 (January 2000): 123–44.

[87]Data on these four control variables are taken from Jonathan M. Powell, "Determinants of the Attempting and Outcome of Coups d'état," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 6 (December 2012): 1017–40.

positive change in military expenditures is likely to reduce the likelihood of coups.[88] The second control variable, *military expenditures per soldier* (logged), gauges military grievances as well, more precisely contentment with the allocation of resources to the armed forces. This covariate also captures indirectly the quality of the military equipment since "states that spend more money per soldier are likely to have soldiers with more training and better equipment."[89] Intuitively, the expectation is that coups are less likely with higher military expenditures.

Two other controls function as barometers for an authoritarian regime's legitimacy in the eyes of the population. The country's general economic performance is thought to temper the citizenry's coup spirit: the populace may not be as welcoming to coups when the economy is doing well and personal welfare is improving.[90] To assess citizens' predisposition towards coups, I include two variables that capture the country's overall economic performance: *change (Δ) in GDP* and *GDP per capita* (logged). The rationale here holds that coups are less welcomed by the average individual when the country registers increases in both measures of economic performance.

Additionally, I take into account three other potential confounders: a measure of dictators' *coup-proofing* strategy; a measure of military organization (whether authoritarian armies rely on *conscription* or voluntary recruitment); and a measure of *alliances*.[91] For the coup-proofing variable, I rely on the measure developed by Pilster and Böhmelt.[92] Specifically, Pilster and Böhmelt estimate a regime's degree of coup-proofing by its level of counterbalancing. To come up with an accurate measure of counterbalancing, the authors construct an index which includes not only the number of rival paramilitary organizations within a state but also their relative power.[93] It is worth noting that this index measures the extent of counterbalancing that is taking place within a country's military by focusing on "ground-combat compatible military organizations," which are most likely to be used against domestic opponents. The conscription variable is coded dichotomously and comes from the Toronto dataset.[94] The intuition here is that, with draft armies, the rank-and-file may be less inclined to partake in coup attempts for fear of losing a privileged domestic status. As for alliances, dictators who operate under the protective umbrella of defense pacts may be more confident in maintaining weaker armed forces. Hence, they may engage in more extensive coup-proofing, which would decrease coup prospects. The presence of defensive alliances in a

[88]Scholars have consistently argued that low military spending might encourage coups. See Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*; Vincenzo Bove and Roberto Nisticò, "Coups d'état and Defense Spending: A Counterfactual Analysis," *Public Choice* 161, no. 3–4 (December 2014): 321–44; and Gabriel Leon, "Loyalty for Sale? Military Spending and Coups d'état," *Public Choice* 159, no. 3–4 (June 2014): 363–83.

[89]Powell, "Determinants," 1027.

[90]Belkin and Schofer, "Structural Understanding."

[91]I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for suggesting these additional controls.

[92]Pilster and Böhmelt, "Coup-proofing and Military Effectiveness."

[93]The construction of the counterbalancing index is described at length in Pilster and Böhmelt, "Do Democracies Engage," 360–61.

[94]Victor Asal, Justin Conrad, and Nathan Toronto, "I Want You! The Determinants of Military Conscription," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming).

given country-year is coded from the Correlates of War dataset. Finally, I control for whether a *military regime* is in power with data taken from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz.[95] Past research has consistently found that military regimes are particularly vulnerable to coups; moreover, it is worth examining whether armies might rally around the military leader in the presence of territorial disputes.

Results

Table 1 displays the results from the two-stage Heckman selection model for attempted and successful coups against autocrats.[96] All models report probit coefficients. As argued in the recent literature, the covariates, with the exception of those capturing time since last coup or time since last MID, can be theoretically linked to both coup attempts and coup outcomes;[97] therefore, they enter both the selection and the outcome equations. For those variables that appear in both the selection and outcome equations, the coefficients in the outcome equations are affected by the coefficients in the selection equation. The outcome coefficients estimate the probability of a coup succeeding conditional on a putsch having been attempted in the first place.

The main hypothesis posited that the presence of spatial rivalry is likely to increase the probability of coups. As we can see from Models 1 through 3, the results are congruent with the key theoretical expectation: autocrats invested in territorial disputes with foreign rivals are more prone to be ousted in a coup d'état. Spatial rivalry is consistently associated with coup attempts and successes across alternative specifications that account for factors conventionally associated with coups. To assess the substantive impact of territorial rivalry on the outcome of interest, I estimated the conditional marginal effects of spatial rivalry on coup success.[98] Holding all other variables constant, we can notice an increase of 33.4 percent in the likelihood of coup success in the presence of spatial rivalry for the full model (Model 3).[99] To further illustrate how spatial rivalry influences the outcome of interest, Figure 1 displays the effect of spatial rivalry on the change in the predicted probability of coups at different levels of GDP per capita (logged).[100] Altogether, it can be observed that the probability of a coup against dictators increases when authoritarian regimes are embroiled in territorial disputes. The effect of spatial rivalry on the change in the predicted probability of coups is positive and statistically different from 0. At the same time, the impact of spatial rivalry is greater

[95]Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown."
[96]Supplementary tests (available from the author) show that the results are robust to the inclusion of additional controls such as the presence of coups in a neighboring country (to account for spatial dependence) or oil revenues, the exclusion of the interstate war and MID variables due to collinearity concerns with the rivalry covariate, the use of alternative coding for the civil war variable, and the substitution of cubic splines with a cubic polynomial of duration.
[97]See, for instance, the modeling strategy in Powell, "Determinants."
[98]Beyond their sign and statistical significance, Heckman coefficients do not fully convey substantive effects. Heckman post-estimation commands in Stata 13 were used to derive conditional marginal effects of spatial rivalry on coup success.
[99]The baseline probability of coup success with no spatial rivalry stands at 0.09. The probability of a successful putsch increases to 0.13 when the regime is engaged in a territorial dispute with a foreign rival.
[100]As can be seen in Table 1, GDP per capita (logged) is a consistent inhibitor of coups.

Table 1. Rivalry and coups.

	MODEL 1				MODEL 2				MODEL 3			
	Coup attempt		Coup Success		Coup Attempt		Coup Success		Coup Attempt		Coup Success	
Spatial rivalry	0.213*	(0.117)	0.400**	(0.168)	0.236**	(0.119)	0.441***	(0.166)	0.338**	(0.140)	0.416**	(0.203)
Positional rivalry	0.063	(0.125)	−0.280	(0.247)	0.052	(0.130)	−0.295	(0.226)	0.062	(0.145)	−0.261	(0.290)
Ideological rivalry	−0.145	(0.141)	−0.217	(0.211)	−0.136	(0.150)	−0.094	(0.220)	−0.030	(0.157)	0.029	(0.286)
Interventionist rivalry	−0.330*	(0.156)	−0.270	(0.341)	−0.336**	(0.157)	−0.421	(0.312)	−0.278*	(0.165)	−0.324	(0.379)
Instability	0.103**	(0.040)	0.016	(0.066)	0.102**	(0.040)	0.010	(0.068)	0.105***	(0.041)	0.001	(0.078)
Civil war	0.127	(0.127)	0.038	(0.268)	0.105	(0.127)	−0.020	(0.256)	0.230	(0.140)	−0.091	(0.318)
Interstate war	0.441**	(0.215)	−0.450	(*0.538*)	0.474**	(0.215)	−0.325	(0.486)	0.481**	(0.228)	−0.096	(0.572)
MID presence									−0.038	(0.120)	0.066	(0.341)
MID number									0.008	(0.055)	−0.237	(0.156)
Δ military exp.	−0.012	(0.083)	−0.423**	(0.198)	−0.001	(0.054)	−0.367**	(0.183)	−0.000	(0.000)	−0.497**	(0.217)
Mil. exp./soldier[a]	−0.086***	(0.031)	0.047	(0.085)	−0.091***	(0.033)	0.040	(0.088)	−0.056	(0.038)	0.069	(0.106)
Δ GDP	−0.927*	(0.503)	0.420	(1.649)	−0.964*	(0.528)	0.244	(1.611)	−0.749	(0.565)	0.654	(1.813)
GDP/capita[a]	−0.200***	(0.043)	−0,353***	(0.134)	−0.187***	(0.045)	−0.339***	(0.130)	−0.148**	(0.058)	−0.271*	(0.158)
Yrs since last coup	0.003	(0.004)			0.004	(0.004)			0.008	(0.005)		
Yrs since last MID									0.062***	(0.018)		
Coup-proofing	0.004	(0.085)	−0.249	(0.174)	0.031	(0.087)	−0.171	(0.168)	0.017	(0.099)	−0.186	(0.191)
Conscription					−0.020	(0.109)	−0.104	(0.202)	−0.190	(0.128)	−0.081	(0.246)
Alliance									0.166	(0.136)	−0.188	(0.306)
Military regime					0.200*	(0.116)	0.409**	(0.205)	0.175	(0.130)	0.321	(0.238)
Constant	0.368	(0.339)	1.921*	(0.987)	0.191	(0.362)	1.501	(1.041)	−0.519	(0.503)	1.883*	(1.140)
N	3,779		163		3,727		156		3,650		155	
Athrho	0.558	(0.429)			0.671	(0.457)			0.217	(0.375)		

Two-stage Heckman probit coefficients are reported with robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses.
[a]Logged.
*p < .10
**p < .05
***p < .01, Cubic splines included in all specifications but not reported.

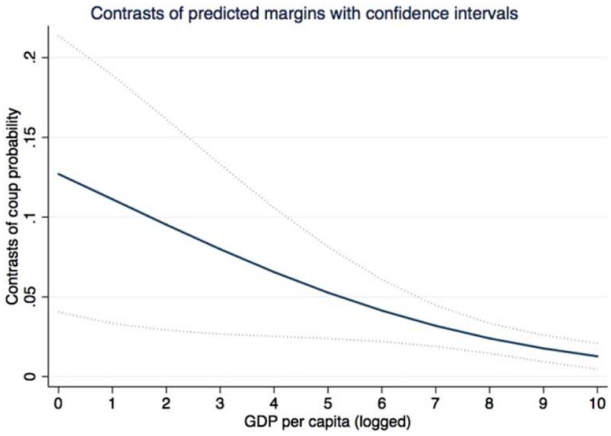

Figure 1. The effect of spatial rivalry on the change in the predicted probability of coups at different levels of GDP per capita (logged).

at lower levels of GDP per capita such that, all else equal, a dispute over territory can increase the overall probability of a coup happening by at least 5 percent. At higher levels of GDP per capita, the effect of spatial rivalry is more modest, although it does remain statistically significant. These trends suggest that, where dictators manage to maintain a relatively high standard of living (an example is Singapore during the 'benevolent' dictatorship of Lee Kuan Yew, 1965–1990), the impact of spatial rivalry on the likelihood of a coup is significantly lower.

Overall, the relationship between spatial rivalry and coups exhibits robust statistical significance and empirically corroborates the mechanisms that link the presence of territorial disputes to greater organizational power, coordination, and political leverage for the military establishment. Autocrats have much to fear when the country is involved in territorial disputes. As shown consistently in the rivalry literature, these types of disputes are more likely to escalate to outright warfare;[101] additionally, the presence of external threat is likely to produce an organizationally effective military, one that may find itself in an auspicious position to attempt and successfully carry out a coup. The empirical patterns revealed across Models 1 through 3 present an alternative to the conventional view in the civil–military literature which posits that the presence of external threat makes the military less likely to challenge the executive's authority. Foundational studies on civil–military relations hold that increasing resources, autonomy, and organizational power of the army produces congenial or positive civil–military relations.[102] The findings herein suggest that this is not always the case. Rather than coalesce domestic actors

[101]Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries*; Senese and Vasquez, *Steps to War*.

[102]The conventional view holds that 'happy' armies—organizationally endowed militaries—are less likely to challenge civilian leaders. See, inter alia, Stanislav Andreski, *Military Organization and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Feaver, "Civil–Military Relations"; Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil–Military Relations* (New York: Vintage, 1975); William R. Thompson, "Regime Vulnerability and the Military Coup," *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 4 (July 1975): 459–87.

against a common enemy, external threats—territorial disputes, in particular—can create opportunities for the army to consolidate its organizational leverage and can enhance its ability to successfully depose an authoritarian leader.[103]

While there is ample evidence pointing to a strong connection between spatial rivalry and coups, the estimates for the other types of rivalry (positional, ideological, and interventionist) are less promising. As Models 1 through 3 show, the coefficients for positional and ideological rivalries fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. At the same time, suggestive evidence indicates that, all else equal, coups are less likely to be attempted in the presence of interventionist rivalries. This is an expected pattern since foreign interventions weaken national armies and leave them incapacitated to coordinate a coup.[104]

When looking at the other structural coup-drivers—domestic instability, interstate conflict, and civil war— the results are mixed. Internal instability emerges as a strong predictor of coup attempts across all specifications, a trend that is consistent with prior scholarship.[105] With an increase in the number of domestic protestors, an authoritarian regime becomes more vulnerable to putsches. Nevertheless, domestic turmoil is not significantly related with coup success. The coefficients display the expected sign, but fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. This pattern requires further inquiry. It could be the case that internal strife may provide the opportunity for the army to intervene and attempt to overthrow an unpopular dictator, but the success of such an endeavor has more to do with the level of coordination among officers than with the motivation to intervene in the first place. The impact of other structural conditions is equally variegated. As mentioned above, recent works have established clear links between interstate warfare or militarized interstate disputes and a lower coup risk.[106] The estimates across all models presented in Table 1 suggest that interstate war is positively associated with coup attempts but not with coup successes. Again, this finding necessitates a more elaborate investigation. Speculatively, while a certain faction of the army may seize the opportunity to initiate a coup attempt while the regime fights a war, the remaining officers may be reluctant to participate out of fear of potential defeat and subsequent loss of status within the military establishment. It is also worth mentioning that the presence or number of MIDs are not systematically related to coup outcomes, even in alternative specifications where the rivalry covariates are dropped due to collinearity concerns with the MID variables.[107]

The empirical results also leave us circumspect about the connection between the presence of internal conflict and coups. The civil war covariate fails to reach

[103]Note that the logic here applies to the presence of external threat, not to the presence of war. Autocrats might use territorial disputes to initiate conflict and rally the population around the war effort.
[104]Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph Wright, *Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Autocratic Survival* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[105]Belkin and Schofer, "Structural Understanding"; Powell, "Determinants."
[106]Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats and Political Survival"; Piplani and Talmadge, "When War Helps Civil–Military Relations."
[107]These additional tests are available from the author.

conventional levels of statistical significance. Civil war remains insignificant across all models, which suggests that its impact may be marginal once we account for the wider palette of structural coup-drivers. When it comes to the other variables, we observe that the covariate capturing the change in military expenditures is consistently significant in the outcome equations, suggesting a lower likelihood of coup success when greater resources are allocated for the army. This finding is intuitive given that the covariate for military expenditures proxies for resources funnelled into buying the satisfaction and loyalty of army officers. Hence, while a certain segment of the military establishment might attempt regime overthrow for political reasons, the coup ploy is likely to unravel if the larger officer corps is satisfied with the level of resource allocations to the armed forces. Another consistent inhibitor of coups is the level of economic development, measured by logged GDP per capita. The estimates across all specifications indicate that both coup attempt and coup success are less likely to occur when an authoritarian regime manages to maintain relatively high levels of economic development. As argued in the existing literature, good economic performance lowers the general public's appetite for a coup.[108] Model 2 offers some suggestive evidence that military regimes are more prone to coup attempts and coup successes compared to other types of regimes. This finding is consonant with current scholarship. For example, Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph Wright claim that "the preference for military unity and against factionalism make military regimes particularly vulnerable to elite divisions. As a result, elites in these regimes are more likely to bargain with civilian elites to negotiate a transition to democracy, especially when the military has a credible guarantee that their corporate interests will be protected."[109] However, the effect dissipates in the full model (Model 3): the military regime variable maintains its positive sign but is no longer statistically significant. Finally, the remaining controls do not seem to significantly affect the outcomes. One exception is the number of years since last MID, a variable which is strongly associated with coup attempts. This pattern might suggest that an unresolved international dispute could enable the army to accumulate greater institutional resources over time, which would leave it in a propitious position to initiate a coup.

Implications

To the unseasoned observer, dictators may look like carefree individuals fully absorbed by the mirage of power. Upon closer scrutiny, autocrats live a far more precarious life. This is because they need to permanently look over their shoulder and be mindful of potential coups d'état orchestrated by the army. To ensure their political survival, authoritarian leaders generally adopt three types of coup-proofing measures: counterbalancing (divide-and-rule tactic pitting coercive agencies

[108]Recent scholarship suggests that coups can be reversed if the general public is satisfied with the status quo. See Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes," 3.
[109]Escribà-Folch and Wright, *Foreign Pressure*, 35.

against one another), loyalty buy-off (distribution of private benefits to loyalists), and ethnic stacking (appointment of co-ethnics or co-religionists at higher echelons of power). However, these measures might be unsuccessful in the presence of certain structural conditions that bolster the organizational power of the military. This article examined the impact of one such structural condition: spatial rivalry, international competition over territory. Spatial rivalry can undercut coup-proofing measures by increasing the autonomy, strength, and organizational resources of the army. In essence, territorial disputes with foreign rivals create a fundamental moral hazard in authoritarian regimes: the very resources that enable the armed forces to compete internationally also consolidate its domestic leverage and empower it to act against a dictator. The empirical evidence presented in this study demonstrates that the presence of an external territorial rival is associated with a higher likelihood of coups.

This conclusion does not imply that military leaders undertake coups because of spatial rivalry dynamics. Rather, the argument advanced herein is more nuanced: rivalry operates as a structural condition that enhances the army's ability to supply coups. International competition over territory provides avenues for the military to consolidate its institutional power, coordinate collective action efforts, undermine an autocrat's coup-proofing strategies, and execute a coup when propitious conditions arise. In addition to spatial rivalry, this study also investigated the effect of three other structural coup-drivers—internal instability, civil war, and international conflict. Both domestic instability and interstate war are systematically associated with coup attempts but not with coup outcomes, a pattern that warrants further analysis. The results regarding the impact of civil war were inconclusive, particularly in light of existing studies in which internal conflict emerges as a significant coup-driver.[110] Therefore, more attention needs to be given to the relationship between war—both intrastate and interstate—and coups.

The findings have theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that examines the link between international competition and coups. In particular, there seems to be some consensus around the idea that interstate conflicts or disputes foreclose key pathways through which generals might conspire to overthrow a leader. Some scholars contend that a highly militarized international environment allows dictators to create rifts among officers and, thus, strengthen control of the military establishment.[111] Others argue that wars, or even militarized interstate disputes, "may actually facilitate more harmonious, or at least less dangerous, civil–military relations. Simply put, wars physically complicate the tasks of coup plotting and execution. More broadly, they also focus military attention outward and reduce the likelihood that military officers will turn their ambitions inward."[112] Another argument posits that conflict generates coup-inhibiting rally-around-the-flag effects and bonds the

[110]Bell and Koga Sudduth, "Causes and Outcomes"; Roessler, "Enemy Within."
[111]Belkin and Schofer, "Coup Risk," 151; Chiozza and Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict*; Goemans, "Which Way Out?," 775.
[112]Piplani and Talmadge, "When War Helps," 18.

civilian leadership with the military.[113] Finally, a more recent claim holds that, during high-hostility crises, leaders are able to commit more credibly to resource transfers towards the military establishment, which is likely to decrease officers' appetite for ousting the leader.[114]

The findings presented in this study suggest that these mechanisms may not necessarily operate when an authoritarian regime is engaged in spatial rivalry. Unlike war, external threat in the form of a territorial dispute may exhibit different dynamics. Because a spatial rivalry relationship can persist for a longer period of time without escalating into outright warfare, the coup-inhibiting pathways might be absent in this type of scenario. The presence of an external threat environment short of actual conflict may not hinder officers' ability to act collectively and may not provide the autocrat with the opportunity to divert public opinion or divide the armed forces. Instead, spatial rivalry places fewer restrictions on the military's ability to supply coups and empowers the generals to challenge the ruler. Because territorial contests are extremely salient compared to other types of international disputes, spatial rivalry is organizationally rewarding for the army, resulting in greater resources, autonomy, and leverage, and, thus, in a greater ability to orchestrate a successful coup against an autocrat.

If authoritarian leaders have much to fear from the intricate effects of spatial rivalry on their political survival, then a few questions arise: Do authoritarian regimes have less of an incentive to initiate a territorial contest and more of an incentive to terminate one? Does spatial rivalry incentivize dictators to act in a less conciliatory manner and escalate ongoing disputes? These questions are ripe for further exploration.

This study holds practical importance as well, because it highlights an underexplored mechanism linking international forces to domestic political instability. The consequences of interstate rivalry are far-ranging and transcend the international realm. A number of non-democratic states systemically troubled by contentious civil–military interactions face external challenges. The findings herein indicate that these external challenges create behavioral incentives that are likely to produce, or exacerbate, both domestic and international instability. Discerning the pathways through which a competitive international environment impacts coup risk in non-democratic countries will allow policy-makers to gain a deeper understanding of authoritarian breakdown or consolidation.

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[113]Oakes, *Diversionary War*.
[114]Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats."