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An assessment of democratic vulnerability: regime type, economic development, and coups d'état

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has not established a clear relationship between democracy and insulation from coups d'état, with very few studies illustrating robust findings on the subject. I contend that the lack of attention paid to the conditional influences of democracy on coups has resulted in these mixed findings. I posit that insulation from coups occurs at higher levels of economic development in both autocracies and democracies. However, the vulnerability present at low levels of economic development is significantly greater in democracies. Poor democracies lack the coercive capacity associated with authoritarian states, suffer from relatively weaker patronage networks, and have smaller pots for public goods provision, all making them less capable of maintaining elite loyalty. An assessment of 165 states for the years 1950–2011 offers strong support for the argument. Democracies are indeed an important part of the coup story, but only when simultaneously addressing their level of economic development.

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KEYWORDS Democracy; coups d'état; civil–military relations; political economy; development

Introduction

In the last two decades, democratic states including Thailand (2006 and 2014), Madagascar (2009), Mali (2012), Honduras (2009), and Burundi (2015) have all suffered coups. Indeed, over half of all coups since 2000 targeted democracies.[1] However, the study of coups d'état has long relegated regime type to that of a control variable. I suggest that the relationship between coups and democracy has been obscured in extant research by a lack of attention paid to the conditionality of regime type.

The contributions of this work are twofold. First, I contend that regime type produces conditional influences on coup proclivity. Second, I offer an elite-led mechanism to explain the differences in vulnerability between regime types. Focusing on the conditionality of democracy, I point to the characteristics of democracy that operate differently according to the level of economic development. Here, I conceive of economic development as an indicator of resource wealth or scarcity. Scarcity provides a signal to elites that they need to ensure future resource shares such that when economic development is low, resource uncertainty may incentivize coup attempts. This mechanism is

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likely at play in all regimes, but I expect it to be most problematic in poor democracies for three reasons. First, when resources are scarce, changes or the threat of change to resource distribution should engender greater uncertainty among elites than in wealthy states where there is more to go around. Second, democracies face greater constraints on resources due to larger coalitions and greater levels of spending on public goods, each compounding resource scarcity. Finally, and in light of possible defections resulting from resource scarcity, democracies utilize lower levels of elite loyalty maintenance mechanisms (e.g. patronage and repression) making managing elite defections more difficult. Alternatively, wealthy democracies should see increased insulation from coups for two main reasons. First, they have a greater abundance of resources to meet adequate spending levels, thus better managing coalitions. Second, as described by Przeworksi, wealthy democracies enjoy the effects of democracy as an equilibrium.[2] That is, wealthier democracies sustain because the cost of reverting to autocracy increases beyond the cost of waiting out an incumbent. Importantly, increased wealth should make this the case even in circumstances characterized by resource redistribution brought about by redistributive taxation, changes to power-sharing arrangements, or budget shortfalls resulting in changes to rents. In short, I expect that at low levels of economic development democracies will face a higher rate of coup attempts than autocracies. Alternatively, at higher levels of wealth democracies will enjoy greater insulation from coups than autocracies.

The following article will proceed in five parts. First, I review the literature on democratic coup risk and regime breakdown more generally. Next, I offer an elite-led mechanism explaining the conditionality of democratic coup proclivity, followed by theoretical expectations for democracies at high and low levels of development. The third section details the data sources and methods utilized. Next, results and analysis are provided. I find that democracies at lower levels of economic development are significantly more likely to suffer coup attempts than autocracies at similar levels. Further, compared with autocracies, the rate at which economic development insulates regimes from coups is significantly more pronounced in democracies. Finally, some areas of future research will be discussed.

Coups and democracy

Of over 450 coup attempts since 1950, less than 25% targeted democratic regimes. Though low overall, this represents almost 100 coups attempted against democracies. In the last two decades this proportion has increased. My own evaluation of coup targets, provided in Figure 1, suggests that democracies do indeed have much to fear. Between 1997 and 2017, just under half (49%) of all coup attempts took place in democracies. Between 2007 and 2017, that rate increased to 66%.[3] While Figure 1 clearly shows that the majority of coup attempts took place in autocracies, it also points to an alarming number of coups in democracies relative to a tendency in the literature to assume democratic insulation from such events.

Despite of the frequency coups in democracies, prior literature has relegated regime type to that of a control variable in the study of coups. Where explored, the literature presents findings as varied, with democratic coup risk found to be similar to authoritarian risk, vastly lower, or even more pronounced.[4] Table A1 in the appendix offers a look at the extant quantitative literature examining coups (either attempts or successes) as the central dependent variable. Of the 33 studies examined, 24 either lacked robust

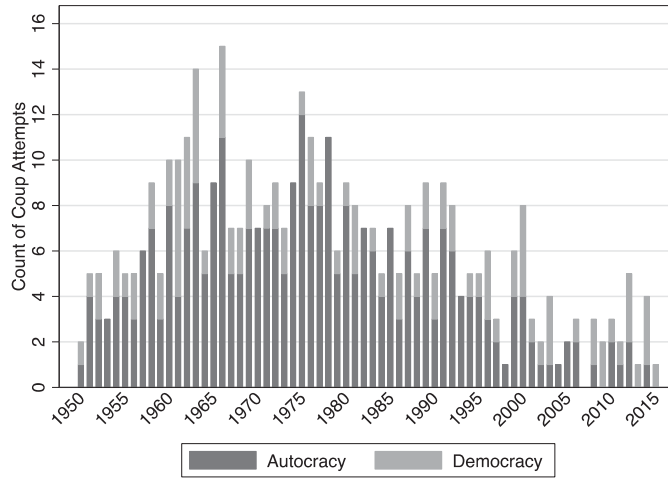

Figure 1. Coups in democracies and autocracies.

results capable of producing clear findings or lacked substantive findings related to democracy.[5] Next, the assumption that coups are largely an autocratic problem is evidenced in four studies that examine autocratic samples, conceiving of coups as authoritarian votes of no confidence.[6] Finally, the remaining results are mixed, with 10 studies reporting negative (though not robust) effects of democracy on coups and two reporting positive findings. Ultimately, the jury is out on democratic coup risk.

Recent studies have put forth two main theoretical mechanisms explaining democratic vulnerability to coups, namely, legitimacy and opportunity. First, examining military interventions on the African continent, Lindberg and Clark suggest legitimacy lies at the heart of democratic insulation from coups. Operationalizing legitimacy as political consent (i.e. liberal electoral institutions), the authors assert that insulation from military interventions occurs once a democracy has consolidated.[7] Dividing regimes into three categories including consolidated, transitioning, and non-democracies, they find regimes in the first category suffer the fewest military interventions. The mechanism contends that through the process of repeated elections citizens give political consent to the democratic system, thus de-legitimizing military interventions in politics.[8] In short, some democracies do enjoy increased insulation from military interventions, but this insulation should only be expected after repeated elections.

Second, Bell notes prior inconsistencies in the literature, claiming that while structural conditions, including repression, are relatively absent in democracies they nonetheless face coup risk due to both increased incentives and opportunities.[9] Highlighting these factors Bell asserts that we can apply the same logic of coups against autocratic regimes to democratic regimes.[10] The presence of democratic constraints makes democracies more attractive coup targets simply because they are less able to hinder them. In line with Powell, Bell ultimately finds that while democracies are less likely to experience coup attempts, those that occur are more likely to succeed.[11]

Thus far, two broad points have been asserted. First, the quantitative literature has not fully depicted coup risk in democracies, obscuring the conditional effects of democracy. Second, a more nuanced understanding of democratic coup risk can be achieved

through the inclusion of regime type with attention paid to the conditional influences of democracy. One such important conditional effect on democratic coup risk, as noted by scholars including Lindberg and Clark and Bell, is economic development.[12] A large literature has investigated the relationship between economic development and coups, and that between development and regime breakdown more generally. The discussion turns now to that literature, with special attention paid to democratic breakdown.

Wealth, coups, and regime breakdown

Global studies investigating coup risk have pointed to both a lack of economic development and/or poor growth rates as increasing coup risk.[13] Londregan and Poole echo the sentiment of earlier scholars noting that, "economic backwardness is close to being a necessary condition for coups."[14] They ultimately find that low levels of income are significant predictors of coups. Kim finds that even short-term shocks to income in the form of temporary slowed growth are positively associated with coup attempts.[15] However, Belkin and Schofer claim that economic crises and declines are bad at explaining coups and cite mixed evidence for economic development. The authors reference earlier literature asserting that wealth can be both a cause and an insulating factor.[16] In the absence of robust results concerning the effects of development on coup risk, I turn to the broader wealth and breakdown literature for insight into how economic development may insulate democracies.[17]

It has been firmly established that wealthy democracies rarely fail.[18] Przeworksi and colleagues posit that over a certain income limit (US$6055 GDP per capita) democracy is thought to be impregnable.[19] Modernization theory asserted that as states develop economically, they liberalize and establish stable, democratic regimes.[20] Outside of this literature, however, this may appear a simplification. Modernization has alternatively been described as a volatile process wherein all regimes experiencing liberalization and development would experience instability. For example, Huntington noted that "modernity breeds stability but modernization breeds instability."[21] Therefore, while the modernization debate (between the exogenous and endogenous variants of democratization) can provide some insight into the timing and development of stable democracies and liberal institutions, it does not further our understanding of democratic survival. How democracies emerge and survive may remain in question but the fact that they survive when wealthy is not.

Several mechanisms have been offered to explain why wealthy democracies survive including the notion of democracy as an equilibrium, the cultivation of democratic preferences, greater democratic ability to solve distributional conflicts, and increased perceptions of legitimacy. First, democracy may survive in wealthy states due to what Przeworksi has described as democracy as an equilibrium.[22] This refers to the relatively higher cost to elites of vetoing democracy in favour of dictatorship compared with waiting out a democratic incumbent with whom elites disagree. As states develop economically, the cost of reverting to autocracy increases beyond the cost of losing a democratic election.[23] If an incumbent adopts unpopular policies in a wealthy state (including redistributive taxation, altering power-sharing agreements, changing budget expenditures, etc.) elites may rightly decide that the cost of a coup is greater than suffering said policy until the next election.[24]

Further supporting the notion of democratic affordability, some argue that development stabilizes democracies by encouraging democratic preferences. Wealth allows the

cultivation of democratic norms, including preferences for education, equitable distribution, and liberal governance, to develop, consolidate, and become self-enforcing.[25] In the quantitative literature this has been explored in terms of both domestic and regional normative preferences for democracy such that democratic norms diffuse.[26]

Third, wealthy democracies may endure due to their ability to more equitably solve distributional conflicts.[27] Some civil conflict research has shown a positive association between distributional conflicts and civil violence, implying that the ability to peacefully manage such conflicts may increase regime stability.[28] This is likely the case in wealthy democracies for two reasons. First, wealthy democracies begin with lower levels of distributional conflicts because they both spend more on public goods, and being wealthy, have a larger pot from which to spend. Second, democracies dispense public goods in a more inclusive manner than do their autocratic counterparts, further decreasing distributional conflicts.[29]

Finally, wealthy democracies may be more insulated from breakdown due to increased perceptions of legitimacy.[30] Lindberg and Clark claim that the process of repeated elections allow democracies to consolidate, accruing legitimacy with their electorates and de-legitimizing practices including military interventions in politics.[31] Further, conceiving of goods provision as a source of legitimacy, wealthy democracies may be insulated because they are able to provide goods at an increased rate compared with poor democracies that lack similar resources, or autocracies that engage in lower levels of goods provision.[32]

Taking together expectations for wealthy democracies, I now turn to reasons why poor democracies are more vulnerable to breakdown. Przeworksi et al. remarked, "we already know that democracies never die in wealthy countries. Yet it is still striking how fragile poor democracies are."[33] To understand what makes poor democracies so fragile, the literature has posited two broad mechanisms, namely, redistributive income policies and public goods provision.

First, the notion of democracy as an equilibrium only encourages democratic survival when democracy remains the more affordable option. If beyond a certain point of wealth democracy is more affordable, we can assume that before that point it may be too costly. There are numerous scenarios that may alter elite calculations regarding the affordability of democracy in poor states including redistributive taxation, changes to power-sharing arrangements, or loss of rents/budget. Indeed, when resources are scarce, almost any change to the manner in which they are distributed may result in elite recalculations. Literature has illustrated how, in the presence of redistributive taxation policies, democracies may experience breakdown when the redistribution of wealth becomes costlier for elites than a reversion to dictatorship.[34]

However, some have questioned the occurrence of such mechanisms. Haggard and colleagues examine all reversions from democratic rule from 1980 to 2008 and find the category labelled elite-reaction reversions, those closely conforming to the redistributive conflict model, only account for about 24% of all cases (over 80% of which resulted from coups). While this nonetheless affirms the existence of the redistributive taxation mechanism in a non-negligible proportion of cases, the authors also find evidence of an opposite mechanism. These cases, labelled populist reversions, describe those where reversions result from populist promises of greater redistribution, occurring in about 16% of cases.[35] A third category, weak democracy reversions, or those resulting from disaffection with government performance, corruption, or intra-elite processes, account for 60% of all cases in this period (86% of which were coups).[36] In line with

Haggard et al., Slater and colleagues contend that coups are neither inspired by redistributive taxation nor do they result in the reversal of such policies. Instead, the authors submit that coups in developing democracies are inspired by state weakness.[37] Therefore, while these authors cast doubt on the prevalence of reversions spurred by redistributive taxation, they nonetheless identify alternative methods in these weak reversions through which changes to resource distribution may result in elite recalculations regarding the affordability of democracy. Drawing on prior literature, Powell and colleagues note that democracies consistently spend less on their militaries and that military spending is often first on the chopping block when budget shortfalls arise.[38] As one of the few tools that democracies have to pacify their militaries, changes in military spending can thus be seen as a resource reallocation that may change elite calculations about the affordability of democracy. Finally, it is important to note that a *perceived threat* of redistribution may be a critical factor. If elites are afraid of possible redistribution, they may take action to stop it before it begins.[39]

Second, democracies need to spend more on public goods to keep their larger necessary coalitions satisfied. Lake and Baum contend that in contrast to autocracies, democracies act as a regulated monopoly, engaging in greater levels of public goods provision due to their relatively low cost of leader exit and low barriers to political participation.[40] A large literature explores public goods provision in terms of the size of coalition needed to maintain power, ultimately finding that a leader beholden to a larger group will spend more on public goods.[41] Regardless of calculations concerning who needs to be satisfied to keep an incumbent in power, wealthy states have greater resources to satisfy public and private goods spending, therefore decreasing threats posed by coalition maintenance. However, in relatively poorer democracies the money needed to maintain larger coalitions may incentivize elites to change the system.

Two main trends are reiterated. First, democracies are not as free from coups as commonly thought. Since 1950, about 100 coups have targeted democracies.[42] Figure 2 examines descriptive trends in the data concerning regime type and coup attempts. Although the vast majority of coup attempts take place in autocracies, a non-negligible

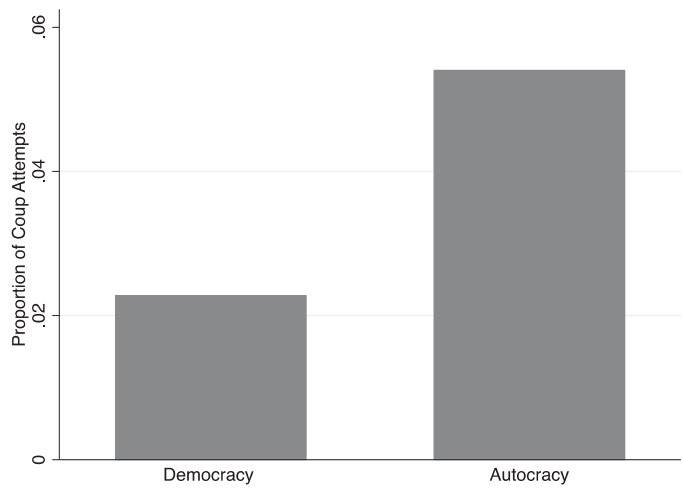

Figure 2. Coups by regime type.

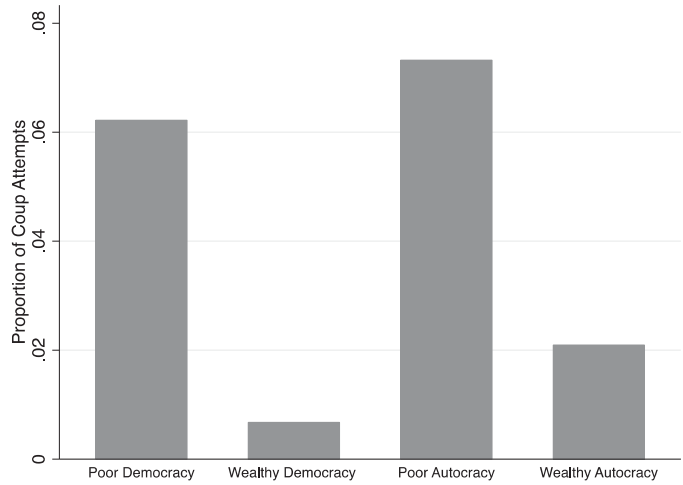

Figure 3. Coups by regime type and level of development.

proportion has occurred in democracies. Coups arise at a rate of about 5.4% in autocratic years compared with 2.1% in democratic years. Interpreting Figure 2, it appears that autocracies should suffer the highest coup proclivity. However, I contend that the conditional effects of democracy operate differently in poor and wealthy states.

Second, wealth disproportionately insulates democracies from coups as compared to either poor democracies or autocracies at any level of development. Figure 3 offers a comparison of coups across regime type and level of development, illustrating two main findings.[43] First, democracy provides significant insulation from coups when wealthy. Wealthy democracies suffer coup attempts in about .008% of country years, compared with poor democracies in about .06%. Poor autocracies suffer coups in .07% of country years compared with wealthy autocracies, at about .02%. Second, wealthy democracies enjoy greater insulation from coups than wealthy autocracies. As democracies move from below the mean of economic development to above it, their rate of coups decreases by more than 86% compared with autocracies at approximately 71%.

Causal mechanism

The causal mechanism I assert brings together economic development and regime dynamics to make the case for why poor democracies face heightened coup proclivity and wealthy democracies enjoy greater insulation from coups. In short, all democracies face greater constraints on resources due to larger coalitions and greater spending on public goods. When wealthy, democracies have the resources to maintain spending at adequate levels and can rely on elections to diffuse conflicts. However, poor democracies lack the ability to maintain coalitions through sufficient spending on public and private goods. While they nonetheless have elections to diffuse political conflicts, poor democracies will not always appear the more affordable option as changes to resource shares take on a new urgency. Compounding problems in poor democracies, they are unable to rely on repression and patronage to manage elite defections (Figure 4).

		Low Economic Development	High Economic Development
Democracy	Large coalitions & Lawful means of removing incumbent	. High resource scarcity . High goods provision burden . Few elite loyalty mechanisms	. Low resource scarcity . High goods provision burden . Few elite loyalty mechanisms
		Highest elite motivation	**Lowest elite motivation**
Autocracy	Small coalitions & Lacking lawful means of removing incumbent	. High resource scarcity . Low goods provision burden . Available elite loyalty mechanisms	. Low resource scarcity . Low goods provision burden . Available elite loyalty mechanisms

Figure 4. Theoretical expectations.

Bringing together theoretical expectations with prior work on the subject, I utilize a rational choice framework to illustrate the increased coup risk faced by poor democracies and decreased risk when wealthy. I contend that elite calculations depend upon predictions about future resource shares and the relative weight placed on these shares given the status quo. First, two conceptual points follow. Here, economic development is conceived of as an indicator of resource wealth or scarcity. When states are poor, they have less to spend on regime necessities including coalition maintenance. In practice this may result in cuts to military expenditure, public goods provision, or repression, for instance. Next, the term *elite* refers to military or other members of the state apparatus. This definition differentiates coups from other forms of irregular leader removal including removals by popular protests and rebel groups.

Rational choice theory, well suited to the understanding of coup attempts given its ability to gauge circumstances concerning a small number of actors, calculable odds, and large potential payoffs, has been utilized in the coup literature by scholars including Bell and Koga-Sudduth, Powell, and Thyne.[44] It suggests that coups are undertaken as the result of an expected utility calculation on the part of elites. This decision considers the probability of success or failure as well as the benefits of success and/or the hindrances of failure. The relative weight that elites place on consequences are influenced by the magnitude of possible payoffs and probability of success. Indeed, Bell and Koga-Sudduth argue that situations characterized by relatively increased benefits of success should see plotters undertake otherwise prohibitively risky attempts.[45]

As rational choice theory frames coup plotters' rationale in terms of probability of success and magnitude of payoffs, is the risk worth the reward in poor states? Untenability of current circumstances and uncertainty over future resource shares should inform elite calculations in poor democracies in the following ways. First, seizing control of a state, even a poor one, is a lucrative endeavour. Second, the relative utility of being in charge of resource allocation increases when resources are scarce. Third, while consequences of a failed coup vary by institutional context, they nonetheless remain severe, from imprisonment to death. However, as Bell and Koga-Sudduth suggest, otherwise prohibitively risky attempts may occur when payoffs are high. Assuming that resource

guarantees are pursued more urgently in poor states and considering a successful coup may mitigate future loss of resource shares, a coup in these circumstances may no longer seem prohibitively risky. With a rational choice framework in mind, I now set out my expectations for coup proclivity. I begin with expectations organized by level of economic development, followed by the addition of democratic conditionalities.

Beginning with level of development, elites in poor states should be most inclined to change the status quo for two reasons including the untenability of current circumstances and high levels of uncertainty concerning future resource shares. First, fewer resources mean lesser ability to pacify coalitions with private goods, public goods, and other mechanisms aimed at guaranteeing elite loyalty.[46] Second, uncertainty over future shares takes on a new urgency when present circumstances are poor. This uncertainty may come about through numerous mechanisms including changes to power-sharing arrangements, decreases in military expenditure or other rents, or redistributive income policies. Importantly, the fear of possible changes may also engender uncertainty. Therefore, a combination of fewer resources to pacify elites and the public along with greater uncertainty over future resource shares should result in the highest elite disposition to foment a coup.

Next, wealthier states should face lower coup proclivity for two main reasons. First, greater resources to go around means greater spending on coalition maintenance, public goods, and other elite loyalty maintenance mechanisms including patronage and repression. Second, changes or threats of change to resource shares in wealthy states should not engender the same level of uncertainty as a greater abundance of resources should make wealthy states better able to weather deficits. In wealthier states elites should be less inclined to remove the incumbent due to the relative security of both current circumstances and reasonable guarantees of future resource shares afforded by higher levels of development. Having set out my rationale for why poor states should be more coup-prone than wealthy states, I now turn to the dynamics of democracy that compound these conditions.

Following, I outline three characteristics of democracies that, according to level of development either predispose or insulate states from coups. First, according to Przeworksi's description of democracy as an equilibrium, past a certain level of wealth democracy becomes the more affordable option.[47] Due to the presence of liberal institutions in democracies, namely elections, a lawful mechanism for removing the incumbent exists. Here, I expect that when wealthy, elites that disagree with the incumbent will choose to utilize elections as means to remove her. However, based on this logic, we must also assume that when economic development is low democracy is not always the more affordable option. Resources to maintain coalitions are constrained in poor states such that current circumstances may be untenable and any changes resulting in fewer resource shares in the future are viewed as intolerable. While adverse changes in resource shares are likely viewed negatively at all levels of development, they take on a new urgency when a state is already facing economic hardship. In the event of budget loss for the military, changes to power-sharing arrangements, redistributive taxation, or the threat of these mechanisms in poor democracies, elites may rightly calculate that they would be better off under an autocrat.

Second, democracies have both larger coalitions to pacify and generally spend more on public goods provision. When economic development is high, there are ample resources to pacify both coalitions and the public. Elites are relatively happy with their current resource shares and should not fear overwhelming resource reductions in the event of a change, both of which lower elite disposition to foment a coup.

However, when development is low and a large portion of the pot is already earmarked for public goods provision, the inability of the incumbent to pacify her coalition may increase elite disposition to change the status quo.

Third, democracies engage in relatively less loyalty maintenance in the form of both patronage and repression than autocracies. Repression in democracies is both costlier and less feasible, making it a less attractive option for democratic incumbents.[48] In poor democracies, due to increased elite disposition, this makes coups more attractive. Alternatively, when wealthy, a lack of repressive measures should not be as problematic due to a lower elite disposition to remove the incumbent.

Finally, I outline why autocracies may not experience similar vulnerability to coups when poor or insulation from them when wealthy. First, poor autocracies do not face similar constraints on resources as they spend less on public goods and have smaller coalitions to pacify. Additionally, autocracies engage in higher levels of repression than do democracies therefore more effectively managing elite defections. Given these considerations, I expect that while poor autocracies do indeed suffer increased coup risk, they are nonetheless are more insulated than democracies at similar levels of development due to fewer factors compounding scarcity and greater means with which to manage defections. Finally, I expect that wealthy autocracies should see fewer increases in insulation from coups compared with their wealthy democratic counterparts. While wealthy autocracies can rely on greater resources and the increased use of repression to manage smaller coalitions, they nonetheless lack liberal electoral institutions. While democracy may be the more affordable option at a certain level of wealth, autocracy lacks this effect due to the absence of a lawful means of removing the incumbent.

Taking together my expectations for coup proclivity in poor and wealthy states with the interactive effect of regime type, I derive two hypotheses below.

Hypothesis 1: At low levels of economic development, democracies are more likely to suffer coup attempts than autocracies.

Hypothesis 2: At high levels of economic development, democracies are less likely to suffer coup attempts than autocracies.

Data and methods

Examining a global sample of 165 countries from 1950 to 2011, I investigate the conditional influence of democracy on coups. The unit of analysis is country year and the main dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator, therefore a logit estimator is employed. Standard errors are clustered by country in an effort to address heteroskedasticity. Finally, all independent and control variables are lagged by one year to address potential endogeneity unless otherwise noted.

The dependent variable, *coup attempt,* is derived from the Powell and Thyne dataset and accounts for both failed and successful attempts. Following Powell and Thyne, coup attempts are defined as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive."[49] The variable is dichotomous with 1 signifying a coup attempt in the given country year. Attempts were chosen to model coup activity because I aim to capture the decision to launch a coup rather than to account for the factors that may influence success. Second, measuring attempts, rather than instances of coup rumours and plots, ensures that included events do not suffer differing degrees of reporting bias.[50]

The main independent variables of interest include *democracy* and *economic development*. *Democracy* is examined utilizing a dichotomous measure derived from Bell with data available from 1950-present. The REIGN dataset codes regime types dichotomously: democracy or non-democracy. For regimes coded as democracies, Bell relies on a procedural definition, including states with "reasonably free and fair competitions for political power."[51] In contrast to the other measures utilized for the purposes of robustness, I utilize the Reign data for my primary measure due to its temporal specificity. These data are coded monthly, allowing the user to determine the correct regime type at the time of the coup and so does not introduce further bias to the model by lagging observations. For the purposes of robustness, four additional democracy datasets are utilized, and results presented in the main analysis.[52]

The second independent variable of interest, economic development, is operationalized as the natural log of *Real GDP per capita.* Next, given that the causal mechanism suggests a conditional effect of democracy on coup proclivity, an interaction term is utilized. The interaction term combines the two main independent variables, *democracy* and *economic development*.

Utilizing controls commonly found in the coup literature, I control for the *Cold War*, coded 1 in country years between 1960 and 1991. The Cold War measure is expected to have a positive effect on coup attempts as the time period saw the greatest number of coups. The effect of passage of time since a coup is controlled for with the use of *Time Since Coup,* operationalized as a count of years since the last coup. This measure is expected to have a negative effect on coup attempts in line with literature suggesting both a coup trap and the diminishing effect of poor civil–military relations over time. Squared and cubed polynomials are also included allowing for examination of an increased effect at greater intervals of time.[53] Finally, controlling for military interests, I include a measure of military expenditure per soldier to proxy possible material grievances.[54] The data are derived from Singer et al. with updates to 2012.[55] I expect military expenditure to have a negative effect on coup attempts.

Results

Table 1 examines the effects of democracy and economic development on the probability of a coup attempt. Six models are presented in Table 1 with models two through six utilizing a different democracy data source (listed above each model) for the purposes of robustness. Model 1 is a naïve model that omits the interaction term and utilizes data from Bell.[56] First, the naïve model shows a positive, though not significant, effect of democracy on coup attempts. Without considering the interaction effect, it appears that regime type does not play an important role. Next, in models two through six, the constitutive democracy term illustrates a positive and significant effect on coups. Mirroring some findings in the literature, the positive coefficient suggests that at low levels of economic development democracy has a positive effect on coup attempts.[57] Therefore, while not directly interpretable due to the lack of real-world circumstances reflecting situations where GDP per capita is zero, the results nonetheless offer support for hypothesis 1, suggesting that democracies at low levels of development have the highest coup proclivity.

Moving now to the interaction term, the coefficient is negative and significant in models 2 through 6, offering robust support for hypothesis 2, that democracies are afforded

Table 1. Country-year logit, regime type, economic development, and coups d'état, 1950–2011.

	(1) Naïve	(2) Reign	(3) Cheibub et al.	(4) Boix et al.	(5) Geddes et al.	(6) Polity
Democracy	0.01034	3.72347**	3.32119**	3.23171**	4.14540**	3.38382**
	(0.15667)	(1.07186)	(1.10771)	(1.10886)	(1.07453)	(1.25305)
GDP pc(ln)	−0.35415**	−0.20474*	−0.27207**	−0.25876**	−0.18433*	−0.21587**
	(0.08282)	(0.08356)	(0.08977)	(0.08082)	(0.08131)	(0.07994)
Democracy X GDP		−0.47518**	−0.41051**	−0.40828**	−0.52695**	−0.46246**
		(0.14093)	(0.14298)	(0.14208)	(0.13999)	(0.16333)
Cold War	0.50308**	0.56777**	0.57430**	0.57360**	0.56579**	0.51534**
	(0.14978)	(0.15322)	(0.16390)	(0.15497)	(0.17523)	(0.15131)
Time Since	−0.19494**	−0.19212**	−0.27484**	−0.20524**	−0.25075**	−0.19808**
	(0.03871)	(0.03856)	(0.04370)	(0.04758)	(0.04024)	(0.04753)
Time Since^2	0.00659*	0.00641*	0.01532**	0.00709$^+$	0.01172**	0.00685$^+$
	(0.00257)	(0.00259)	(0.00392)	(0.00374)	(0.00308)	(0.00378)
Time Since^3	−0.00008$^+$	−0.00008$^+$	−0.00029**	−0.00009	−0.00019**	−0.00009
	(0.00005)	(0.00005)	(0.00010)	(0.00007)	(0.00007)	(0.00007)
Military Exp (ln)	−0.06349*	−0.05517$^+$	−0.03183	−0.03618	−0.02087	−0.04486
	(0.03130)	(0.03134)	(0.03214)	(0.03006)	(0.04341)	(0.03243)
Constant	1.081744*	−.152276	.2470993	.142085	−.4378448	−.0208083
	(.5453247)	(.5833823)	(.6364199)	(.5842408)	(.6009256)	.5688589
ROC	.7919	.7948	.8006	.8015	.7987	.7989
Observations	7799	7799	7035	7569	6849	7363
# of Groups	175	175	164	175	151	167

Note: Standard errors clustered on country in parentheses.
$^+p < .1$.
$^*p < .05$.
$^{**}p < .01$.

insulation from coups as wealth increases. Models 2 through 6 each illustrate a negative and significant coefficient such that the positive effect of democracy on coup attempts declines as wealth increases. Finally, a ROC value is offered in Table 1 for each model 1 through 6. The ROC values range from 0.79 to 0.8 indicating a fair to good model fit.

Figure 5 examines marginal effects of the interaction term in Model 2 graphically utilizing the Grinter command with the y-axis representing the coefficient for the effect of regime type on coup attempts.[58] The x-axis, moving from left to right, illustrates how coup proclivity changes with increases in logged real GDP per capita. Beginning at the lowest level of development, we see that the coefficient for the influence of democracy on coup attempts is positive and significant, again supporting hypothesis 1. The interaction term is significant at the lowest levels of development and remains significant until a logged value of about 7.2 GDP per capita when confidence intervals begin to cross zero. The positive and significant effect of the interaction suggests that democracies are more likely to experience coups at low levels of development than are autocracies. Next, offering further support for hypothesis 2, confidence intervals gain and maintain significance past the mean of development suggesting a negative effect of democracy on coup attempts in wealthy states.

Examining the substantive effects of the interaction term, marginal effects for model 2 are depicted in Figure 6. First, at the lowest end of economic development democracies suffer an approximate .17 rate of coup attempts compared with a .05 rate in autocracies at the same level. Supporting hypothesis 1, democracies display greater coup proclivity until about logged 6.6 GDP per capita where confidence intervals begin to overlap. However, overlapping confidence intervals do not always indicate the lack of statistically significant differences at the mean. Therefore, while intervals overlap

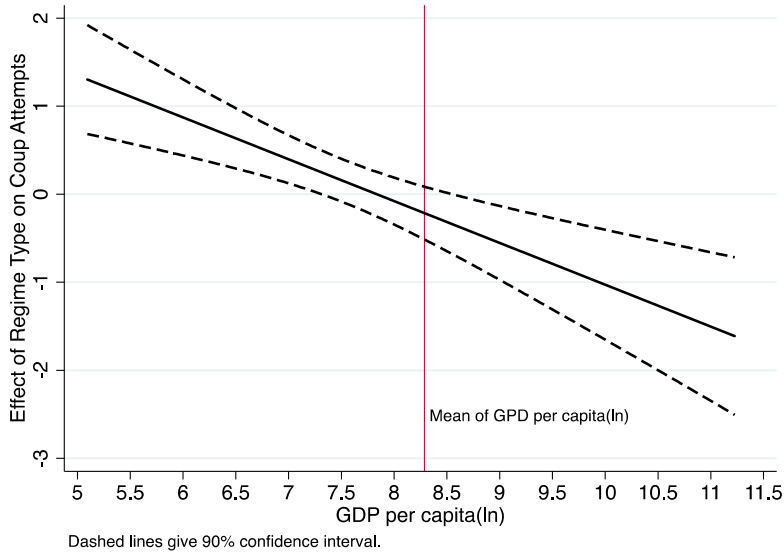

Figure 5. Marginal effects of regime type and economic development on coup attempts.

from a logged value of about 6.6 to about 10, the range where statistically significant differences exist between regime types is indeed larger (depicted in Figure 5).

Further illustrating support for hypothesis 2, Figure 6 shows significant differences in coup rates for autocracies and democracies beyond the mean of GDP per capita (8.34). Beginning at a logged value of about 10, confidence intervals show no overlap and suggest that democracies at higher levels of development enjoy greater insulation from coups than autocracies at similar levels. While the magnitude of difference

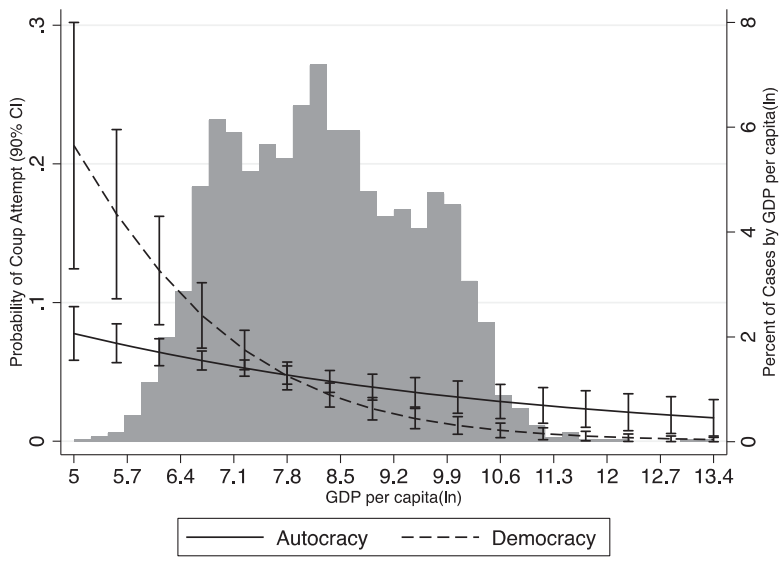

Figure 6. Marginal effects of regime type and economic development on coup attempts, with histogram.

between coup rates in democracies and autocracies at higher levels of wealth are considerably smaller than in poor states, democracies nonetheless illustrate greater insulation from coup attempts when wealthy. At 10 logged GDP per capita democracies suffer about a .005 rate of coup attempts compared with autocracies at about a .01 rate. Comparing rich and poor democracies across the spectrum of economic development, the coup rate in the poorest democracies (5 logged GDP per capita) is about .17, decreasing to .0009 in the wealthiest states (13 logged GDP per capita), about a 99.4% decrease. Compared with the change in democratic risk from poor to wealthy states, autocracies present a relatively flatter line. The poorest autocracies suffer a rate of .05 coup attempts in a county-year, decreasing to .01 in the wealthiest states, or about an 80% decrease. Illustrating the point further, the wealthiest democracy to experience a coup (Venezuela 1966) had a GDP per capita of US$14,507 compared with the wealthiest autocracy to suffer a coup (UAE 1972) with a GDP per capita of US$34,327.[59]

Finally, as suggested by Berry and colleagues, Figure 6 includes a density plot to reveal the proportion of cases existing across the spectrum of development.[60] The plot was overlaid on the figure utilizing the Marhis command developed by Hérnandez.[61] In addition to setting lower and upper limits on the margins graph that are representative of the universe of cases, the authors suggest including a density plot to address the utility of the marginal effects estimated. The very outer limits economic development, the poorest (<5.7) and wealthiest (>11.3) states, are clear outliers representing few cases. Moving beyond the very poorest and wealthiest states we can see that the significant differences in coup rates in poor and wealthy states apply to a non-negligible proportion of cases. Indeed, given that I theorize about coups in poor and wealthy states, and not those close to the mean, the density plot provides confirmation of the existence of cases in these upper and lower ranges of development.

Controls behave as expected with *Cold War* displaying a positive and significant effect of the time period on coup attempts confirming a well-established finding in the literature. Next, increasing *time since coup* displays a negative and significant impact on coup proclivity confirming findings in several studies.[62] Finally, in line with earlier findings, *Military Expenditure per Soldier* (ln) has a negative, though not robust effect on coups.[63]

Additional tests offered in an online appendix provide robust support for the findings in the main analysis. Tables A2 and 3 in the appendix re-examine the main analysis utilizing fixed and random effects, respectively. Table A4 examines the main results utilizing sub samples (excluding wealthy and consolidated democracies, separately) and a model including a control for military regimes.

Conclusion

Returning to a case that prompted this research, the recent coup in Burundi (2015) provides an illustrative example of how changing elite calculations regarding future resource shares can lead to coups. Burundi in 2015 had a per capita GDP of about US$300, placing it among the poorest states in the world.[64] The 2015 coup attempt was largely seen as a result of President Nkurunziza's attempt to run for a third term, possibly endangering the Arusha Agreement and the power-sharing arrangements it mandated.[65] Considering the dire state of the economy, coupled with the danger that a violation of the Arusha Agreement may end other provisions entailed (including both an ethnic power-sharing arrangement and the Burundi power-

sharing agreement between the state and rebels), elites decided that a third term with the incumbent was riskier than a coup.[66]

The findings of this research are threefold. First, high levels of economic development disproportionately insulate democracies from coup attempts. Second, low levels of development disproportionately expose democracies to coup attempts. Finally, these relationships are not evident in autocracies to the same degree. While outcomes are significant predictors of vulnerability and political violence, they leave out much of the story of regime vulnerability. Capturing the decision to overthrow a regime provides insight into the forces at work in regimes suffering instability that can lead to illegal interventions in politics. Illustrating the conditional vulnerability associated with poor democracies can help to make clear the threats faced by such regimes. Further research into the conditional effects of democracy are necessary and will likely result in a more comprehensive understanding of coup vulnerability.

Notes

1. Data on coup attempts are derived from Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups" and on regime type from Bell "The REIGN Dataset."
2. Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium."
3. Ibid.
4. McGowan and Johnson, "African Military Coups"; Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce Risk"; Gassebner et al., "When to Expect a Coup"; Tusalem, "Bringing the military back."
5. Table A1 (Appendix A) includes studies utilizing a measure of coups as the central dependent variable, published since 2000.
6. Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, 66; Askoy et al., "Terrorism and the Fate of Dictators"; Bove and Rivera, "Elite Co-optation, Repression, and Coups"; Galetovic and Sanhueza, "Citizens, Autocrats, and Plotters"; Wig and Rød, "Cues to Coup Plotters."
7. The authors illustrate a decrease in coups after the first democratic election is held in a country but assert that coups may continue until elections are repeated; Importantly, the authors do not utilize control measures in this study, asserting that, "while we have not controlled for any confounding factors, it seems unlikely that such a strong relationship found in this investigation … would be 'washed out' by the influence of other factors like development, education, or availability of concentrated natural resources."; Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce Risk," 100.
8. Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce Risk," 96.
9. Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy," 1174.
10. Ibid.
11. Powell, "The Determinants of Attempting,"1035; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy," 1187.
12. Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce Risk"; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy."
13. Gassebner et al., "When to Expect a Coup?"; Londregan and Poole, "Poverty, the Coup Trap"; O'Kane, "Coups d'état in Africa."
14. Londregan and Poole, "Poverty, the Coup Trap," 151.
15. Kim, "Revisiting Economic Shocks," 15.
16. Belkin and Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding," 603.
17. While there are multiple methods through which regimes experience breakdown including irregular removals and backsliding, coups account for over 65% of all irregular leader removals according to the Goemans et al. Archigos data. Furthermore, coups are disproportionately how leaders in poor countries have historically left office. Finally, while regimes might fall due to other mechanisms including civil war and popular rebellion, these means are much less common and are driven by the preferences of the masses rather than elite motivations.
18. Przeworksi et al., *Democracy and Development.*
19. Ibid., 112.

20. Lipset, "Social Requisites of Democracy"; Barro, "Government Spending"; Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium"; Przeworksi et al., *Democracy and Development.*
21. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies,* 41.
22. Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market;* Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium."
23. Lipset, "Social Requisites of Democracy"; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market;* Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium"; Przeworksi et al. *Democracy and Development;* Weingast, "Political Foundations of Democracy."
24. Importantly, however, while the logic of democracy as an equilibrium is specific to democratic sustainability, economic development has been found to insulate both democracies and autocracies from various forms of vulnerability, including breakdown; Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization"; Miller, "Economic Development."
25. Barro, "Government Spending"; Lipset, "Social Requisites of Democracy."
26. E.g. Gleditsch and Ward, "Diffusion and International Context."
27. Lipset, "Social Requisites of Democracy."
28. Ndikumana, "Distributional Conflict, the State and Peacebuilding"; Østsby et al., "Regional Inequalities and Civil Conflict."
29. Lake and Baum, "Invisible Hand of Democracy."
30. Belkin and Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding"; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy"; Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce the Risk."
31. Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce the Risk."
32. Lake and Baum, "Invisible Hand of Democracy"; Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce the Risk."
33. Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development,* 111.
34. Acemoglu and Robinson, "Theory of Political Transitions"; Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium."
35. Haggard and Kaufman, "Inequality and Regime Change"; Haggard et al., "Distributive Conflict and Regime Change," 124.
36. Haggard et al., "Distributive Conflict and Regime Change," 122; The Haggard et al. data report slightly different case distribution figures due to what appears to be a coding error in the table reported on pg. 124 of the codebook. Central African Republic (2003) is mistakenly listed in the weak democracy reversion category rather than the populist reversion category.
37. Slater et al., "Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown?" 354.
38. Powell et al., "Give them Toys," 1158.
39. All figures reported from the Haggard et al. dataset are based on Cheibub et al., "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited."
40. Lake and Baum, "Invisible Hand of Democracy," 590.
41. Bueno de Mesquita et al., *Logic of Political Survival*; Lake and Baum, "Invisible Hand of Democracy"; Lake and Baum, "Political Economy of Growth"; Ross, "Is Democracy Good for the Poor?"
42. Coup data are derived from Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups d'état" and Democracy Data from Bell, "REIGN Dataset."
43. Wealthy states are defined as those above the mean of GDP per capita in developing states (US $4000) and poor states are those below the mean; Democracy data are derived from Bell's Reign data which follow a procedural definition of democracy coding those states as democratic that have reasonably free and fair competitions for power. All those states that do not have such competitions are coded as autocracies (non-democracies).
44. Bell and Koga-Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes"; Powell, "The Determinants of Attempting"; Thyne, "Supporter of Stability."
45. Bell and Koga-Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes," 1437.
46. Importantly, though the mechanism is focused on elite actors, spending on public goods could nonetheless be the impetus for a coup. In circumstances of popular unrest, protesters may send signals to coup plotters about their support of a coup as was the case in Burkina Faso 2015, for instance.
47. Przeworski, "Democracy as an Equilibrium."
48. Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy," 1174.
49. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups," 252.
50. Ibid.

51. Bell, "REIGN Dataset," 3.
52. Bell, "REIGN Dataset"; Boix et al., "Data Set of Political Regimes"; Cheibub et al., "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited"; Geddes et al., "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions"; Marshall et al., "Polity IV Project"; The Polity democracy measure was transformed into a dichotomous variable according to the guidelines put forth by Marshall et al.
53. Carter and Signorino, "Back to the Future."
54. Bell and Koga Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes"; Powell, "The Determinants of Attempting."
55. Singer et al., "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty."
56. Bell, "REIGN Dataset."
57. Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability"; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy"; Hiroi and Omori, "Policy Change and Coups"; Gassebner et al., "When to Expect a Coup."
58. Boehmke, "Grinter: A Stata Utility."
59. Numbers reported are in constant US dollars.
60. Berry et al., "Improving Tests."
61. Hérnandez, "Marhis: Stata Module."
62. E.g. Kim, "Revisiting Economic Shocks"; Powell, "The Determinants of Attempting"; Wobig, "Defending democracy."
63. E.g. Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats and Survival"; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy"; Powell et al., "Give them toys."
64. Logged value of 5.74.
65. Jones, "There are signs"; Vandeginste, "Breifing: Burundi's Electoral Crisis."
66. Falch and Becker, "Power Sharing Agreements," iii; Vandeginste, "Breifing: Burundi's Electoral Crisis," 633.

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