Democratization

ISSN: 1351-0347 (Print) 1743-890X (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fdem20

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To cite this article: Jonathan Powell, Christopher Faulkner, William Dean & Kyle Romano (2018): Give them toys? Military allocations and regime stability in transitional democracies, Democratization, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2018.1450389

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1450389

Published online: 18 Apr 2018.

DEMOCRATIZATION, 2018
https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1450389

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Give them toys? Military allocations and regime stability in transitional democracies

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the conventional wisdom that democratization reduces coups, 46% of coups targeted democracies from 2000–2009, twice the rate seen in the prior half-century. Efforts to explain coups have arrived at wildly varied conclusions regarding the vulnerability of democracies. We argue that this is attributable to regime type acting as a conditional influence. We theorize that democratization incentivizes old elites to veto the process, and these vetoes are more likely to occur when the new regime cannot credibly commit to the military's corporate interests. Using cross-national data for 172 states for the years 1952–2009, we find that though young democracies are more vulnerable to coups than either civilian authoritarian regimes or older democracies, this vulnerability is mitigated when military expenditures are near or above the sample mean. We also find that commonly argued determinants of coups appear to be driven by their influence in democracies, suggesting the need for scholars to revisit commonly held assumptions regarding autocratic survival.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 17 May 2017; Accepted 7 March 2018

KEYWORDS Military coup; commitment problems; political stability; military spending; regime transition

Recent years have seen an influx in studies on coups d'état. Taking advantage of a number of new cross-national datasets, scholars have begun to elucidate a number of processes involving the causes and consequences of coups. This same period has seen an even more pronounced increase in attention to the peculiarities of non-democratic regimes, with seminal contributions from Gandhi, Svolik, and others bringing renewed vigour to the study of authoritarian institutions.[1] These bodies of work have largely converged, as scholars have tended to look at coups as a definitively authoritarian process. Geddes, for example, has referred to the act as an authoritarian vote of no confidence, while others have pointed to democratization as insulating regimes from coups.[2]

In contrast to these trends in the academic literature, the last decade has seen military coups end over 20 years of democracy in Mali and terminate fledgling democratic experiments in Mauritania and Egypt. More recently, Burkina Faso's presidential guard failed in a September 2015 plot to halt an impending election. In fact, over 100 coup attempts targeted democratic regimes between 1951 and 2009, and despite a common assumption that liberalization brings stability, especially in the post-Cold

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War era, the tendency for democracies to be targeted seems to have worsened with time. The decade of 2000–2009 saw 13 of 28 coup attempts (46%) target democracies, including 8 of the 12 of those attempts that succeeded.

In short, coups against democracies are a very real – if not surprisingly common – political phenomenon, and comparative literature has offered little in the way of an explanation. In this article we explore the causes of the military's veto of democratic transitions. We build on prior work showing that the nature of democratic regimes makes them particularly vulnerable in their first few years of existence by emphasizing the importance of organizational interests of the armed forces. Expanding on efforts by Acemoglu and Robinson, Acemoglu, Ticchi, and Vindigni, and Bell, democracies are often faced with a commitment problem in which militaries become especially sensitive to challenges to their corporate interests.[3] We argue that coups are significantly more likely to target democracies than otherwise similar civilian autocracies when military expenditures are low. This vulnerability is reduced when expenditures are higher, and higher levels of funding can even mitigate the vulnerability of regimes being young. We test our expectations with a global sample of 172 countries, ultimately finding that, *ceteris paribus*, democracies tend to be most vulnerable to coups when they are young and their militaries are poorly funded. Further, relative to civilian autocracies, democracies are far more likely to stabilize when expenditures are at moderate or high levels.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review prior literature regarding the vulnerability of democracies to coups. Second, we offer a theoretical argument for the conditions under which democracies should be more vulnerable to coups, ultimately pointing to the importance of the regime's youth. Next, we expand upon this argument to show how the organizational interests of the armed forces are especially important for young democracies. Finally, we test our argument and then conclude with a brief discussion of the policy implications of the results.

Coups and democracy

Considerable scholarly attention has been dedicated to explaining the causes of coups d'état.[4] However, few efforts have attempted to assess the implications of regime type for coup activity beyond the inclusion of control variables for democracy or military regime, with no consideration of the specific conditions under which a regime's traits might predispose it to a coup. Not coincidentally, large-N approaches to assessing the vulnerability of different regime types have resulted in quite varied results.

Looking at a global sample, Casper and Tyson do in fact find that states with higher Polity IV scores are significantly less likely to have coups, while Bell and Koga Sudduth find that democracies are less coup-prone than civilian autocracies and military regimes.[5] Results, however, are quite varied. For example, Powell and Hiroi and Omori provide limited support for a curvilinear relationship in which the most democratic and dictatorial systems have fewer coups than regimes with mixed traits.[6] Using various democracy indicators, Kim, Leon, Hiroi and Omori, and Böhmelt and Pilster all find an insignificant association between democracy and coups.[7] Disaggregating by region produces similar inconsistencies on the degree to which democracies are vulnerable to coups. Thyne, for example, finds democracy to be insignificantly associated with coup activity in Latin America, Wobig finds unified democracy scores to be unconnected to coup attempts in both Latin America and Africa, Powell et al. report no

association in their study of Africa, while Tusalem actually finds democracies to be significantly *more* coup-prone than dictatorships, both in global and Africa-specific samples.[8] Similarly, Harkness finds that the risk for coups dramatically increases when democratic elections see a change in the ethnic identity of a leader when the previous leader had ethnically stacked the military.[9] She also shows that ethnic armies embolden and even encourage leaders to challenge attempts at political liberalization.[10] More recently, Bell shows that democracies suffer coup attempts at a similar rate to non-democracies and suggests that while democratic constraints should reduce motivations for coup plotting, they increase the opportunity for coups to be successful.[11] These studies note that the influence of democracy could be conditional on other factors and that more research is needed to answer this question. Answering this question is a fundamental motivation for this project.

The discrepancies in prior findings and the lack of support for an otherwise compelling case for the legitimizing influence of democracy suggests democracies are either equally vulnerable to coups than civilian autocracies when controlling for other factors, or that these models are not adequately capturing the scenarios under which democracies are vulnerable to or insulated from them. Our reading of prior literature on political survival, and case evidence in particular, suggests that earlier studies have erred in not treating the vulnerability of democracies as conditional on other characteristics. Following earlier rationalist approaches to explaining military coups, in the next section we argue that coup vulnerability largely rests on a new democracy's ability and willingness to incentivize potential coup-plotters to adhere to the new rules of the regime.

Vetoing democracy

Recent history hints at the importance of these dynamics. Burkina Faso had made significant strides towards democratization following the October 2014 ouster of Blaise Compaoré. The longtime president's downfall was prompted by mass protests against his effort to abolish term limits, with elements of the army and then the presidential guard seizing power and promising to manage a democratic transition. This process appeared to be vetoed when interim president Michael Kafando and prime minister Isaac Zida were detained in a 16 September 2015 military coup led by members of the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP).

Gilbert Diendéré's coup against the transitional Burkinabé government came less than a year removed from the military's October 2014 seizure of power. Compaoré had himself seized power in a 1987 coup and maintained power for 27 years, enabled specifically by elements of the RSP and Diendéré himself. Coups are thus far from unusual in Burkina Faso, and the main players in the state's recent political turmoil had been around for decades. By the time of Diendéré's attempted coup, the country had already racked up seven successful coups d'état according to the Powell and Thyne dataset, just outpacing Benin (6) and Nigeria (6) as having the most in Africa.[12] But the country is unique among these in that the phenomenon is a continuing aspect of political transitions. In stark contrast, 2015 marked four coup-free decades for Benin, while Nigeria had seen over two decades since Sani Abacha's 1993 putsch. Both of these states have subsequently seen competitive multiparty elections lead to bona fide transitions of political power, while coups have become a trend associated with a bygone

era. The Burkinabé case does, however, closely parallel recent developments in failed transitions elsewhere in the region.

Mauritania's bloodless August 2005 coup against Maaouya Ould Sid-Ahmed Taya, for example, appeared to bring promising changes. The 17-member Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCJD) was established to oversee the transition and barred soldiers from contesting the ensuing parliamentary and presidential elections. The international community was delighted when a career civil servant, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, won the presidency. However, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of the Presidential Security Battalion seized power via a coup in June 2008 following Abdallahi's purge of senior army officers. Egypt similarly saw the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) take power in February 2011 with the promise to hold democratic elections. As with Burkina Faso, a longtime ruler was replaced by the armed forces following mass protests against their government. And like Mauritania, the 2012 presidential election of civilian Mohamed Morsi was heralded as an important step towards democratization. But like Abdallahi, Morsi was removed from power in his second year, while Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi would follow the path of General Abdel Aziz in winning the presidency in the subsequent election. Though the Egyptian case has a variety of confounding factors, Morsi had similarly made a number of decisions that negatively impacted the institutional interests of the military.[13] He had earlier removed the head of the military police, the minister of defense, the chief of staff, and the heads of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. More proximate to the coup, Morsi had begun to take steps that would undermine the military's traditionally privileged economic status.

Observers of these earlier cases were likely on edge following the interim Burkinabé government's decision to abolish the RSP in early September 2015. The organization's subsequent coup attempt falls in line with other recent cases of failed transitions in that elements of the security services attempted to veto democratization after their organizational interests were threatened. In contrast to these efforts reducing the influence and resources of the armed forces – frequently with the lauding of the international community – Latin America's many transitions from military rule to democracy were accompanied by deliberate attempts to appease the military, especially in the short term. For example, Uruguay's transition from military rule saw the armed forces maintain considerable de facto power over legislation in the short term. Further, the Law of Expiry disallowed the prosecution of the military for human rights violations, and members of the armed forces were allowed to maintain their positions.[14] Similar policies where later enacted in Chile, which even saw Augusto Pinochet remain as the commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army after his stepping down from the presidency. The Chilean armed forces further received a guaranteed percentage of the state's substantial copper revenues, which still has the Chilean armed forces among the world's best funded over a quarter of a century later. Post-junta Argentina, meanwhile, illustrates the potential perils of overstepping against the military. Raul Alfonsin's government purged dozens of generals and enacted cuts of over 40% to military operations, 50% for equipment, and 25% for salaries, leaving the armed forces in a "professionally moribund state".[15] The ensuing years saw multiple military mutinies. Particularly notorious was a December 1988 mutiny of over 500 soldiers that quickly spread to bases throughout the country. The effort resulted in a pay increase of 20% for the armed forces. While maintaining – or even improving – the perks of the armed forces might seem contrary to the ideal conceptualization of civilian control,

maintaining these interests in the short term has often been critical to civil–military stability and the transition's success in the long term.

The conditional vulnerability of democracy

Scholars have offered a consensus view that civilian control of the military is a necessary element for democratic consolidation.[16] While all regimes may stress the importance of military subordination to political decision makers, "new democracies face a particularly difficult and dangerous challenge" in this regard.[17] The transition from autocracy to democracy often includes a dramatic shift in the role of the military in which the armed forces go from a highly influential political entity to a more subservient one, and can further threaten the traditionally privileged position they previously held.[18] Authoritarian leaders usually "secure military support by granting them wide ranging benefits … from generous revenues up to autonomous decision-making authority," and these benefits become immediately threatened in a democratic transition.[19] Cook and Savun highlight this, showing that variation across previously authoritarian regimes impacts the likelihood of conflict for newly democratizing states.[20] Transitions thus inevitably threaten the corporate interests of the armed forces.

We illustrate post-transition instability in Figure 1, which reports the frequency of coup attempts at each year a regime was in place, distinguishing between democracies and autocracies (0 = first year as the regime type). Whereas democracies tend to see coups disproportionately target regimes that are five years or younger, autocracies see far more dispersion of coup activity. Using a different coup attempt measurement and considering incumbent takeovers, Svolik is less optimistic, contending that this democratic insulation from authoritarian reversals is really seen between the 17th and 20th year of a democracy's existence. He equates the threat of coups to a childhood disease, arguing that once a democracy survives long enough, the "disease" disappears.[21]

While there might not be a short-term cure, we contend that surviving Svolik's "childhood" will often be dependent on ongoing treatment that keeps the regime alive until maturity. Young democracies are considerably handcuffed in pursuing the "wide ranging benefits" available to autocracies. It is common for autocrats to have numerous civilian resources with which to spoil their potential adversaries, and these types of resources will be especially difficult to utilize in the name of the public good. Robert Mugabe's reforms saw Zimbabwe redistribute seized land as part of a patronage

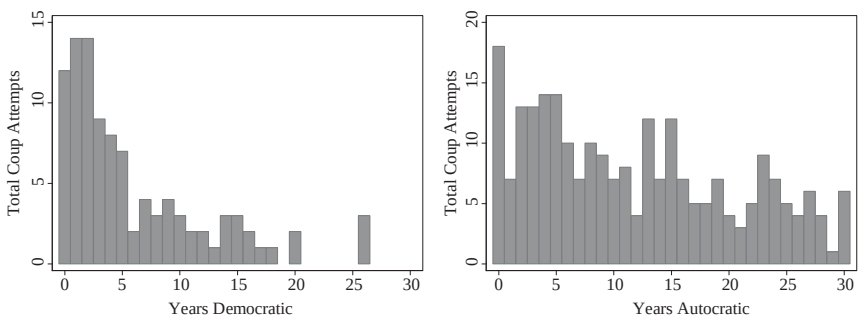

Figure 1. Regime type, regime age, and coup attempts, 1950–2009.

system that would allow the regime to survive – in some notorious cases confiscating land from farmers who supported the opposition party and turning the property over to military and police officers.[22] In similar fashion, Kenya's Daniel Arap Moi engaged in the distribution of land to enhance political support in the mid-1980s, including providing land grants to junior military officers.[23] In Côte d'Ivoire, military officers were given positions of political or economic authority in the Parti Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), while even "unreliable" officers were provided positions in state-owned corporations.[24] In Zambia, military personnel were provided subsidized food and beer under Kenneth Kaunda's 27-year presidency.[25] More systematically, Arriola demonstrated that African leaders have also used cabinet appointments as a way to lengthen their tenure by buying support from potential opponents, a trend later argued to be applicable to legislative seats.[26]

However, legal and other constraints placed on democratic leaders reduce their ability to utilize spoils in a similar manner. In their in-depth discussion of coup-proofing, Pilster and Böhmelt point to "cost efficient 'fire alarms'" that greatly reduce the ability of democrats to coup-proof.[27] News outlets, "watchdog" groups, think tanks, and public access to this information limits the ability of democratic leaders to ensure loyalty through the provision of private goods. Not surprisingly, Pilster and Böhmelt find that democracies are significantly less likely to undertake institutional coup-proofing. These dynamics make it especially important for democracies to be able to commit to the armed forces via resources that are more acceptable to the public. Perhaps most obvious is the potential for military expenditures to be directed towards ensuring loyalty more than providing security.

Numerous studies have unsurprisingly pointed to organizational interests, especially issues related to funding, as catalysts for coups, while others have pointed to governments increasing expenditures during periods in which they fear coup risk is high.[28] These studies suggest the manipulation of military expenditures is an indispensable tool for authoritarian survival. In an investigation of military capabilities in Africa, for example, Henk and Rupiya concluded that the region's leaders spend "an overwhelming and crippling proportion of their budgets on salaries and personnel allowances … and tend to serve regimes in power rather than societies at large".[29] In some cases, they report over two-thirds of military budgets going directly towards allowances. Notable exceptions to their critique include South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Ghana, and Nigeria, all of which are – not coincidentally – the continent's more democratic regimes. As Bueno de Mesquita et al. conclude, "leaders who rely on a broad-based coalition to remain in office cannot keep their supporters from defecting to a rival by offering substantial private benefits".[30] In line with Acemoglu and Robinson, we point to the challenge democratization poses for the distribution of goods amongst actors who can veto a transition.[31] Already constrained from providing private goods, new democracies face the additional challenge of having to provide a much wider array of public goods necessary for maintaining power.[32] In short, funds are both a scarcer resource and must be distributed more broadly in democracies.

Democracies consequently face a coalescence of factors that make the security apparatus see the new system as a threat to their private and organizational interests, the regime has little recourse to lower the armed forces' disposition for a coup, and they lack the tools to be able to combat one. The willingness of the armed forces to accept the constraints of democracy, then, can be seen as what Przeworski likened to

"letting go of the trapeze without knowing whether one would be caught".[33] This is perhaps an earned fear. Investigating various budget crises in Africa, for example, Gallagher found military expenditure was cut more frequently than any other type of government spending.[34] Global studies, meanwhile, commonly find that democracies tend to systematically spend less on their militaries than non-democracies.[35]

It is consequently important for the regime to signal a commitment to the interests of these potential veto players. Slater, Smith and Nair, for example, question the redistributive model as a cause of democratic breakdown and rather contend that redistribution, when targeted at those who threaten democracy, can improve prospects for democratic longevity (consolidation/insulation).[36] As they succinctly note, "if unhappy soldiers are the biggest proximate threat to democracy, then soldiers should be reasonably well paid, well treated, and well equipped to help encourage and sustain their political subservience".[37] Kuehn and Trinkunas similarly suggest that military contestation in Latin America following the Cold War was largely spurred by radical presidential policies threatening the institutional interests of key elites, including the military. Huntington's seminal *Third Wave* further notes that soldiers in democratizing states will often believe they "are badly paid, badly housed, and badly provided for – and they are probably right".[38] His solution is to "give them toys", ranging from better personal perks to fancy tanks, planes, and the like. Bell similarly argues that democracies can mitigate threats posed by military coup plotters by "improving the lives of military elites throughout [a] democratic transition".[39] He recasts threats of coups in democracies as a commitment problem between leaders and plotters. Highlighted by executive constraints, he shows that the nexus between these actors looks quite different in democracies than scholars have traditionally noted. Commitment problems ultimately lead to the inability of democracies to curtail the incentive for armies to intervene, while the nature of democracies undermines their ability to reduce obstacles to intervention.

In contrast to civil–military friction being inevitable when democracies are young, a demonstrable commitment to the corporate interests of the armed forces can potentially provide stability. Specifically, we argue that the heightened vulnerability of young democracies will be driven by cases in which the regime is unwilling or unable to demonstrate such a commitment. Conversely, democracies that do see a commitment to the corporate interest of the armed forces will see the uncertainty associated with transitions create less of a concern. This discussion leads us to the following expectations.

Hypothesis 1: When military expenditures are low, democracies are more vulnerable than civilian autocracies to coups.

Hypothesis 2: The heightened vulnerability of young democracies to coups is conditional on low levels of military expenditures.[40]

Data and research design

The argument presented in the previous section resulted in two expectations. First, democracies should be more vulnerable to coups than civilian autocracies when spending on the military is low (H1). Second, we expect that the coup-proneness of young democracies (relative to otherwise similar civilian autocracies) can be mitigated by higher levels of military expenditures (H2). While our theory is applicable to a wide

range of organizational interests, we frame our argument here in terms of military expenditures due to the availability of systematic data for the factor (as opposed to dynamics such as recruitment, promotion, and retention practices). Further, given the constraints that reduce the ability of democracies to use other resources for private goods, military expenditures are perhaps the best tool for regimes needing to demonstrate a commitment to both the corporate interest of the armed forces and to providing the public good of security. To test our expectations, we use cross-national data from 172 countries for the years 1952–2009. We employ a logistic regression due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, discussed below.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable, *coup attempt*, is drawn from Powell and Thyne, who describe coups as "attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of government using unconstitutional means".[41] We operationalize coup attempts dichotomously, distinguishing between country-years in which the unit did not experience a coup attempt (0) from those in which the country experienced at least one attempt (1). We include coup attempts that either succeeded or failed due to our theory's emphasis on the incentive to intervene. In other words, we aim to explain the decision to attempt a coup rather than the outcome of an attempt. However, additional specifications that limit the dependent variable to successful coups and utilize alternative data sources (for example, Archigos) provide results similar to – and actually substantively more pronounced – than those reported below.

We opt for a binary treatment of the dependent variable over a count model due to assumptions of the estimator. Given that coups occurring in close succession are almost invariably tied to one another, a within-year count variable would likely violate the assumption of event independence. We address temporal dependence for coups occurring between years by including temporal controls.

Explanatory variables

Our primary theoretical interests lie with regime type, spoils available to the military, and the age of the regime. We utilize democracy data from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland to account for regime type and regime age.[42] Our proxy for military spoils relies on the logged value of *military expenditures per soldier*. The *expenditures per soldier* data are taken from the Correlates of War's National Material Capabilities dataset, with updates from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.[43] We opt for expenditures per soldier over alternatives such as expenditures as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) or proportion of government spending since the latter are relative to the size of the economy and/or budget, and not relative to the per capita benefit of soldiers. For example, a decrease in GDP could lead to a spike in expenditures as a proportion of GDP even though raw or per capita expenditures are actually declining. Further, Huntington's suggestions for democratizing states explicitly encouraged a reduction in personnel precisely so that more per capita benefits can be provided to the soldiers that remain in the absence of having to actually increase military expenditures.[44] As a result, this operationalization seems especially appropriate and has previously been found to be negatively associated with coup activity.[45]

Conditional influences

Our theory argues that the influence of democracy on coup activity is best treated as conditional on military expenditures. Further, we argue that the vulnerability of young democracies to coups can be mitigated by higher military expenditures. Our models consequently introduce interaction terms in two ways: (1) we interact democracy with military expenditures, and (2) we introduce a three-way interaction that simultaneously considers the multiplicative influence of regime type, military expenditures, and regime age (in years).

Control variables

A host of control variables are also included in order to address potentially confounding factors. First we include *military regime*, again using regime type data of Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, as military regimes are known to be disproportionately more coup-prone than civilian regimes and we wish to avoid reporting an autocratic effect that is driven by the coup-proneness of military regimes.[46] Results for the measure, and for the democracy measure, are thus relative to the excluded group of civilian autocracies. Results, however, are in fact consistent when omitting the military regime control and group the category with other authoritarian regimes. Next, we capture state wealth by taking the natural log of *real GDP per capita*. *Growth* refers to year-to-year percentage fluctuations in GDP. Economic data are taken from updates from Gleditsch.[47] We anticipate higher wealth and growth to be associated with fewer coups.[48]

Cold War refers to country-years prior to 1990 and is expected to carry a positive sign. *Civil conflict* accounts for whether the state was involved in internal dispute involving at least 25 deaths, using the incidence measure available from the Armed Conflict Dataset.[49] Following the lead of scholars such as Hultquist, we recode instances of armed conflict to 0 when the case histories reveal the event to be a bloody military coup.[50] Finally, we control for temporal dependence by including a measure for the number of years since the country's last coup attempt, as well as the measure's squared and cubed polynomials.[51]

Results

Table 1 reports our logistic regressions, beginning with a base model that omits our interaction terms (model 1). We next introduce the democracy and military expenditure interaction in model 2, which clusters standard errors by country. For robustness, models 3–4 introduce country fixed and random effects. Our final models consider the three-way interaction. Our results are very consistent across these specifications, while differences amongst the control variables can be explained by the nature of the model. For example, the insignificance of military regimes in the fixed effects models is likely due to countries with no coup attempts dropping from the models. In other words, countries that never experienced a coup – a likely precursor to military rule – would not appear in the sample.

Model 1 reports an insignificant association between democracy and coup activity, a result that mirrors most prior research and was expected in the absence of the interaction. Each of the subsequent models in Table 1 report a positive and significant

Table 1. The conditional relationship between democracy and coups, 1952–2009.

	1 Country Cluster	2 Country Cluster	3 Country FE	4 Country RE	6 Country Cluster	7 Country FE	8 Country RE
Democracy	0.214	0.936***	0.770**	0.894***	1.291***	0.924*	1.133**
	(0.195)	(0.326)	(0.350)	(0.319)	(0.450)	(0.477)	(0.449)
Exp. per soldier	−0.261***	−0.134	−0.227*	−0.170	−0.095	−0.170	−0.147
	(0.093)	(0.102)	(0.122)	(0.108)	(0.182)	(0.182)	(0.167)
Dem.*Exp.		−0.493***	−0.553***	−0.538***	−0.487*	−0.565*	−0.515*
		(0.175)	(0.213)	(0.186)	(0.265)	(0.302)	(0.277)
Dem.*Reg. Yrs.					−0.058	−0.033	−0.046
					(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.040)
Exp.*Reg. Yrs.					−0.004	−0.005	−0.003
					(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Dem.*Exp.*Reg. Yrs.					0.010	0.007	0.008
					(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.018)
Regime years	−0.003	−0.004	−0.004	−0.005	0.006	0.006	0.003
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Military regime	0.300**	0.319**	−0.157	0.154	0.337***	−0.176	0.168
	(0.126)	(0.128)	(0.185)	(0.166)	(0.130)	(0.187)	(0.167)
Civil conflict	0.349**	0.346**	0.465**	0.447***	0.335**	0.456**	0.433***
	(0.163)	(0.163)	(0.184)	(0.164)	(0.164)	(0.184)	(0.164)
GDP per capita	−0.238***	−0.229***	−0.377*	−0.375***	−0.206**	−0.397**	−0.348***
	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.200)	(0.104)	(0.087)	(0.201)	(0.105)
Cold War	0.397**	0.368**	0.700***	0.493***	0.427***	0.707***	0.519***
	(0.164)	(0.160)	(0.184)	(0.170)	(0.163)	(0.185)	(0.171)
Growth rate	−1.279**	−1.263**	−1.187*	−1.242**	−1.295**	−1.205**	−1.278**
	(0.569)	(0.556)	(0.615)	(0.603)	(0.554)	(0.614)	(0.601)
Years since coup	−0.255***	−0.256***	−0.151***	−0.195***	−0.255***	−0.151***	−0.196***
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)
$Years^2$	0.013***	0.013***	0.010***	0.011***	0.013***	0.010***	0.011***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
$Years^3$	−0.000***	−0.000***	−0.000**	−0.000***	−0.000***	−0.000**	−0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	0.073	−0.138		0.418	−0.509		0.104
	(0.595)	(0.575)		(0.751)	(0.568)		(0.773)
Observations	7,334	7,334	3,985	7,334	7,334	3,985	7,334
Countries	172	172	84	172	172	84	172

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$ (two-tailed test). Robust standard errors reported in parentheses.

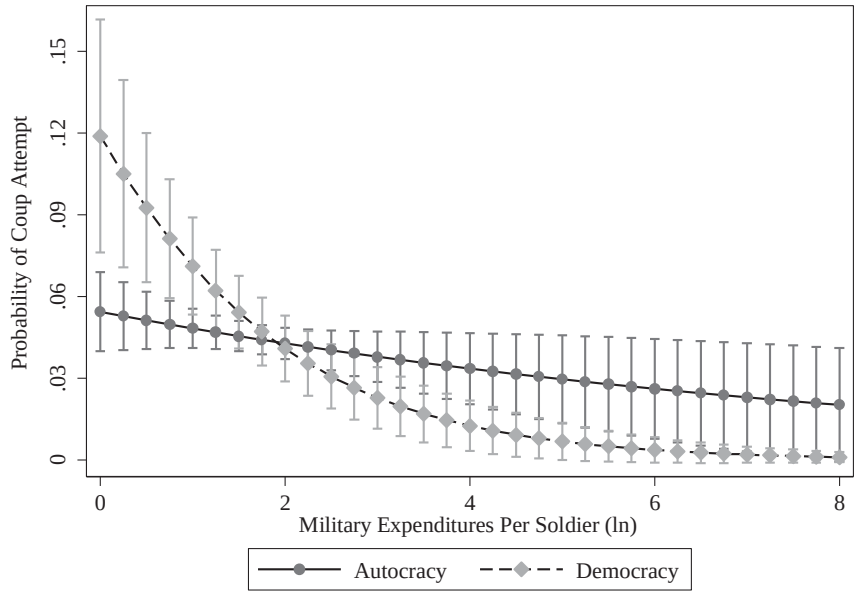

Figure 2. The conditional vulnerability of democracies, 1952–2009.

coefficient for democracy. Model 2 indicates that democracies are more coup-prone than civilian autocracies when military expenditures is 0. These results are consistent in the fixed and random effects models. While this is not a practical value, it does suggest that lower levels of expenditures make democracies more vulnerable to coups than otherwise similar non-democracies.

Following the suggestions of Braumoeller and Brambor, Clark, and Golder, the interactions are illustrated in Figure 2.[52] The figure reports the predicted probability of a coup attempt, using the average marginal effect. Three trends are apparent. First, democracies are significantly more coup-prone than civilian autocracies at lower levels of military expenditures. At the 20th percentile of expenditures (logged value of 0.14), democracies are twice as likely to see a coup attempt as civilian autocracies (0.107 vs 0.053). Second, democracies see a pronounced and significant decline in coup vulnerability as expenditures increase. Specifically, an increase in military expenditures from the 20th to 50th percentile (1.3) in democracies decreases the probability of a coup by 43% to 0.061.

Third, this trend is in contrast to that witnessed by authoritarian regimes. While authoritarian regimes also see an insulating effect from military expenditures, this is far more modest, with a move from the 20th to 50th percentile reducing the probability of a coup an insignificant 15% to 0.046. The latter trend is quite striking, as military expenditures per soldier is often cited as among the most important determinants of coup activity, and authoritarian regimes are especially likely to spoil the armed forces. Aside from the finding that a commonly attested to determinant of coups is driven more strongly by a regime type typically thought to be less vulnerable to them, these results can be explained by our theory. Autocrats have a variety of patronage strategies available outside of the military that are less available in democracies, and our argument anticipated that democracies would be disproportionately reliant on

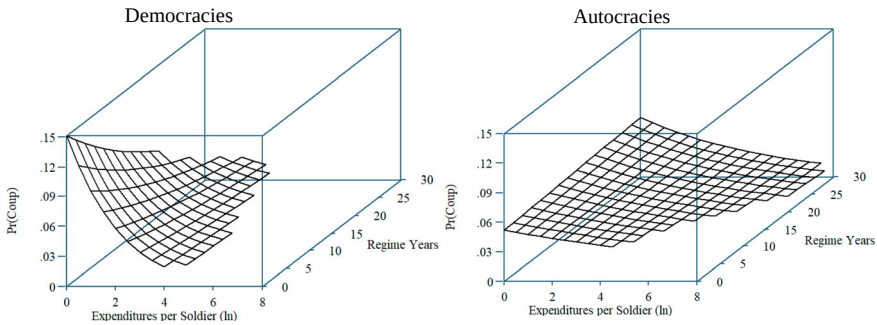

Figure 3. The conditional influence of regime type on coup attempts.

military expenditures as a tool to ensure loyalty. Though not explicitly hypothesized, it is unsurprising that the factor would be more important for democracies.

Our second hypothesis predicted that the vulnerability of young democracies, previously attested to in the literature, could be offset by higher military expenditures. Our hypotheses made specific predictions about the behaviour of the democracy coefficient at different levels of regime age and expenditures per soldier. In other words, we are interested in explaining the behaviour of democracies at specific ranges of values of our other constitutive term. The second hypothesis does not make explicit predictions about the interaction coefficients themselves. Models 6–8 show that democracies are significantly more coup-prone than civilian autocracies when both expenditures and regime years are equal to 0, precisely the type of condition anticipated by the argument. However, we must graphically illustrate how the relationship changes over different values of each constitutive term. We do this in Figure 3.

Holding military expenditures and regime age at 0, democracies are around three times more likely to experience a coup attempt than authoritarian regimes (illustrated in the bottom left corner of each graph in Figure 3). As either expenditures or regime age increase, we see declines in coup likelihood. Authoritarian regimes, meanwhile, see virtually no change in coup probability, regardless of their age or military expenditures. These results provide quite revealing evidence that military expenditures disproportionately benefit democracies, and this benefit is most pronounced when democracies are most in need of it: when they are young.

We further illustrate these trends by reporting specific scenarios in Figure 4. The figure reports "slices" of data from the three-dimensional plot, allowing us to zoom in on specific scenarios and to provide confidence intervals. In the left column, we explore how the vulnerability of young democracies can be mitigated by military expenditures. The first row considers states at the 20th percentile of expenditures. Here we can see the expected association. Democracies are significantly more coup-prone than civilian autocracies when they are younger. However, these trends subside as military expenditures increase. When expenditures are at the 50th percentile (second row), a much smaller range of only the most poorly funded states see democracies as more vulnerable. At the 80th percentile (bottom row), neither democracies nor autocracies see their vulnerability change with age, and the two categories are statistically indistinguishable. In short, to the degree youth is a problem for regime survival, it is primarily a problem for democracies with poorly funded militaries.

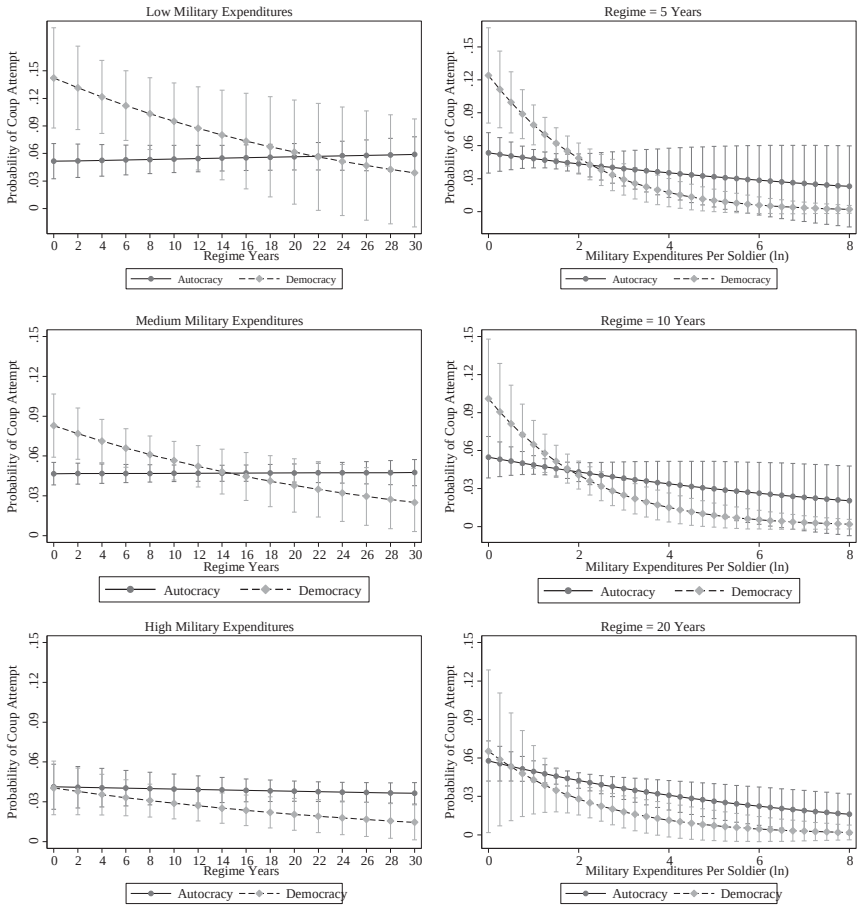

Figure 4. Conditional influence of democracy on coups.

The right column reports how the democracy and military expenditures interaction is similarly conditional on the age of the regime. Again, avoiding reporting the influence of exceptionally low values, we illustrate the interaction's effects when a regime's age is 5, 10, and 20 years, respectively. At five years, we see the association reported in our test of the first hypothesis: democracies are significantly more vulnerable to coups than civilian autocracies when expenditures are low. As expenditures increase, the vulnerability of democracies significantly drops and we see no difference between democracies and autocracies. At 10 years of age, democracies continue to see a significant drop in their own coup proclivity, but are not statistically distinguishable from their authoritarian counterparts at any level of expenditure. At 20 years, there is no discernable trend either within democracies or across regime type.

These findings suggest a coalescence of youth and poor funding are especially problematic, while an increase in either can help remedy problems associated with the other. While prioritizing the interests of the military in the short term might be unattractive in many regards, historical evidence supports the point. As noted earlier, pacts in Latin America illustrate how reassuring stakeholders that their interests would

remain intact quelled potential plotters from attempting to veto the new democracy. Although far from perfect, we agree that these " … pacts can calm military (as well as civilian) fears and dissuade the military from retaking the reins of government".[53] This "democracy by undemocratic means" may in fact be one way to suppress early threats to young democracies.[54]

Our control variables generally behaved as expected. *Military regimes* have a higher probability of a coup attempt than other autocracies in the clustered models, but are no different than civilian led autocracies in the random and fixed effects specifications. States troubled by *civil conflict* are more susceptible to coups than states where civil conflict is absent. The coefficient for our *Cold War* control variable is positive and significant. Wealthier states are less vulnerable to coup attempts and states with a positive *growth rate* can decrease the likelihood that they will experience an attempted coup. Lastly, the years since the last coup is negative and significant across all models. As the number of years increases since a state experienced a coup attempt, the probability that an attempted coup will occur decreases.

Conclusion

We began this article in an attempt to explore the causes of military vetoes of democratic transitions – notably their vulnerability to coups. While recent scholarship has accurately identified the susceptibility of democracies to coups, few have provided substantive explanations. Larry Diamond has suggested that democratization "requires a strategy by which military influence … is gradually reduced … ."[55] Our findings demonstrate the democratization process can be quite fragile and democratizing regimes should consider the transition as a delicate and slow-moving progression instead of a rapid transformation. In short, "time is needed for civilian and military elites to adapt to new structures of authority and to develop trust in one another",[56] particularly when change is likely to result in adjustments to a military's corporate interest. The attempt to disband the RSP in Burkina Faso, Morsi's purging of Egypt's military leadership – and targeting their finances – highlight these dynamics. As Agüero notes, "Guarantees, reassurances, and certainty form the crux of change … and are critical to understanding military acquiescence to democracy."[57] Our results point to military expenditures as a potentially important aspect of this acquiescence.

Our findings further illustrate that democratizing regimes face substantial threats if the military is treated as an outsider instead of as a stakeholder in the process. Huntington's *Third Wave* discusses many cases in which policymakers followed a different approach than those taken recently by Mauritania, Mali, Egypt, Burkina Faso, and others. Corazon Aquino greatly increased the pay of the Philippine army after replacing Ferdinand Marcos. Newly democratic Greece saw massive increases in military benefits under Karamanlis and, later, Andreas Papandreou. Perhaps most infamously, Augusto Pinochet was allowed to act as the head of the armed forces after Chile's transition, while the heads of the armed forces and national police received guarantees they would not be removed for seven years. To this day the Chilean military enjoys one of the world's highest rates of military allocations thanks to Pinochet-era perks.

While allowing authoritarian holdovers to remain financially privileged is likely an unattractive prospect for new democracies and the international community, case evidence of democratic successes and failures, and the results presented here, suggest that this may often be a necessary evil early in the process. Given these findings, aspiring

democracies would do well to follow the advice of Huntington and give the military toys – or at the very least some vested interest in preserving the new system, as such efforts appear to mitigate the commitment problem raised by Bell and others. While entirely rewriting the guide to successful democratization is unnecessary, considering the military as a participant rather than an obstacle appears to be a worthwhile endeavour for aspiring democratic states.

Notes

1. Gandhi, *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship*; Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.
2. Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?," 66; Lindberg and Clark, "Does Democratization Reduce the Risk."
3. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship*; Acemoglu, Ticchi, and Vindigni, "A Theory of Military Dictatorships"; Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy."
4. We ultimately defer to the definition and data described by Powell and Thyne ("Global Instances of Coups from 1950–2010," 252), which describes coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive." We opt for this definition and data source for multiple reasons. First, unlike authoritarian-regime focused efforts such as Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, Powell and Thyne include all regime types. Second, efforts that exclusively code specific episodes of power transfer (for example, Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos"; Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*) omit efforts that fail. Given our interests lie in explaining the decision to mount a coup, focusing solely on the event's outcome is likely to bias the results. Third, while Powell and Thyne and Marshall and Marshall (Center for Systemic Peace/CSP) both code successful and failed coup attempts, the latter omits many cases that fit our conceptual definition of a coup (for example, the replacement of leaders such as a Moussa Traoré, Hosni Mubarak, Blaise Compaoré, and others), but are excluded due to the presence of protests (Marshall and Marshall, "Coup d'état Events Dataset"). The dataset also includes many cases that do not fit state apparatus criteria common to most conceptualizations of coups (including our own). Cases from the most recent 10 years of the dataset include efforts led by exiles (Gambia 2014), a pastor (DRC 2013), non-state political elites (S. Sudan 2013), mutinies (Eritrea 2013; Ecuador 2010; Philippines 2007), "former" and "exiled" army officers (Guinea 2011; Ivory Coast 2012), "unspecified" actors (Philippines 2006; Chad 2006; Lesotho 2007, 2009; Burundi 2006, 2010; DRC 2011; Niger 2011; Iraq 2011; DRC 2011), "white supremacists" (South Africa 2012), foreign mercenaries (Lesotho 2009; Comoros 2013), rebel organizations attacking government forces (Sudan 2008; Chad 2006, 2008), rebel forces attacking a foreign capital (Eq. Guinea 2009), non-government militia (Central African Republic 2013); pro-democracy protestors (Bahrain 2011; UAE 2013), a dispute over party leadership (Zimbabwe 2014), and the leaders of banned political parties that by definition have no role in government (Azerbaijan 2011; Vietnam 2011). The data clearly conflate various types of activities undertaken by a range of actors that are beyond the scope of our theory. Even when looking only at the most reliable categories (successful and failed coup attempts) 40% of cases in the last decade of the CSP data cannot be definitively tied to a segment of the state apparatus.
5. Casper and Tyson, "Popular Protest and Elite Coordination"; Bell and Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes of Coup."
6. Powell, "Determinants of the Attempting and Outcome of Coups d'état"; Hiroi and Omori, "Causes and Triggers of Coups d'état."
7. Kim, "Revisiting Economic Shocks and Coups"; Leon, "Loyalty for Sale?"; Hiroi and Omori, "Policy Change and Coups"; Böhmelt and Pilster, "The Impact of Institutional Coup-Proofing."
8. Thyne, "Supporter of Stability"; Wobig, "Defending Democracy with International Law"; Powell et al., "Combating Coups"; Tusalem, "Determinants of Coup d'état."
9. Harkness, "The Ethnic Army."
10. Harkness, "Military Loyalty."
11. Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy."
12. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950–2010."

13. Nassif, "Coups and Nascent Democracies."
14. Loveman, "Protected Democracies and Military Guardianship."
15. Pion-Berlin, "Between Confrontation and Accommodation," 545.
16. Croissant et al., "Beyond the Fallacy of Coup-ism," 950.
17. Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 113.
18. See for example, Acemoglu, Ticchi, and Vindigni, "A Theory of Military Dictatorships"; Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*; Harkness, "The Ethnic Army."
19. Croissant et al., "Beyond the Fallacy of Coup-ism," 953.
20. Cook and Savun, "New Democracies and the Risk of Civil Conflict."
21. Svolik, "Which Democracies Will Last?," 753.
22. Jeter, "Storm Over Land in Zimbabwe."
23. Kanyinga, "Re-distribution From Above."
24. N'Diaye, "Ivory Coast's Civilian Control."
25. Lindeman, "The Ethnic Politics of Coup Avoidance."
26. Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability"; Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*; Powell and Chacha, "Investing in Stability."
27. Pilster and Böhmelt, "Do Democracies Engage Less," 359.
28. See for example, Mbaku, "Military Coups as Rent-Seeking Behavior"; Leon, "Loyalty for Sale?"; Collier and Hoeffler, "Military Expenditures in Post-Conflict Societies."
29. Henk and Rupiya, "Funding Defense," vii.
30. Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, 37.
31. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship*.
32. Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*.
33. Przeworski, "Acquiring the Habit of Changing," 103.
34. Gallagher, "Government Spending in Africa."
35. Hewitt, "Military Expenditures Worldwide"; Goldsmith, "Bearing the Defense Burden"; Dunne and Perlo-Freeman, "The Demand for Military Spending"; Nordhaus, Oneal, and Russett, "The Effects of the International Security Environment"; Albalate, Bel, and Elias, "Institutional Determinants of Military Spending." Albalate et al. further find that military expenditures are significantly higher in presidential democracies than in parliamentary democracies, potentially suggesting that other aspects of institutional design are important and could be driving the data. Additional tests reveal that presidential systems are in fact typically more coup-prone than parliamentary regimes. However, this is only true for non-democracies. In a sample of democracies, presidentialism is far from conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < 0.615$). Results reported in the following section remain consistent when including a presidentialism dummy variable.
36. Slater, Smith, and Nair, "Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown?"
37. Ibid., 368. This is not to say that such efforts are always successful. Salvador Allende, for example, attempted to ensure military loyalty by asking soldiers to serve as cabinet members, increasing military salaries and fringe benefits, and purchasing additional military equipment (Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*, 28, 71). While these increases were designed to mitigate the threat posed by the military, Allende was overthrown by a putsch in 1973.
38. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 252.
39. Bell, "Coup d'état and Democracy," 27.
40. Given a common overemphasis on interaction coefficients, it is worth clarifying that our expectations for the coup vulnerability of democracies (relative to autocracies) includes a significant democracy coefficient at low levels of regime years and military expenditures. Our argument does not require that the three-way interaction we adopt results in a significant interaction coefficient. It anticipates that democracy will be positive and significant at low levels of regime years, military expenditures, and the coincidence of both. We anticipate that democracies will be indistinguishable from autocracies at mid to high values of military expenditures. Stated simply, we do not specifically predict significantly interaction coefficients, just that democracy is significant and positive at low levels of the other constitutive term(s). However, as reported below, we do find significant signs in two of the three.
41. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups From 1950–2010," 252.
42. Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited."

43. Singer, "Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset"; SIPRI, "Military Expenditures Database."
44. Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
45. Bell and Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes of Coup."
46. Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited"; Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?"; Belkin and Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding."
47. Gleditsch, "Expanded Trade and GDP Data."
48. Londregan and Poole, "Poverty, the Coup Trap"; Galetovic and Sanhueza, "Citizens, Autocrats, and Plotters."
49. Themnér and Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2012."
50. Hultquist, "Power Parity and Peace?"
51. Carter and Signorino, "Back to the Future."
52. Braumoeller, "Hypothesis Testing and Multiplicative Interactions"; Brambor, Clark, and Golder, "Understanding Interaction Models."
53. Hagopian, "Democracy by Undemocratic Means," 150.
54. Ibid.
55. Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 114.
56. Ibid., 115.
57. Agüero, "Institutions, Transitions, and Bargaining," 200.

Acknowledgements

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 2015 International Studies Association South Annual Conference and the 2017 Southern Political Science Association's Annual Conference. The authors would like to thank two anonymous referees for their helpful comments as well as Timothy Rich, Vasabjit Banerjee, Curtis Bell, and Rebecca Schiel for their valuable feedback and suggestions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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