Coup Research FREE

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Summary

With 28 coup attempts from 2008 through 2017, the previous decade saw the fewest coup attempts in any ten-year period since at least as far back as 1960. Though coups may well be on the decline, research on coups has burgeoned since the early 2000s. The increased scholarly interest in coups can likely be attributed to a number of factors. First, high-profile coups like the 2011 ouster of President Mubarak in Egypt during the Arab Spring uprisings and the more recent autocratic deepening after the 2016 failed coup in Turkey highlight the importance of coups in shaping global politics. Increased attention from the media and policymakers has been coupled with the rise in studies that examine the causes and consequences of coups. Second, while past research largely focused on particular cases, the introduction of new datasets has allowed scholars to examine coups across time and space to reveal more generalizable patterns. Finally, unlike topics like war, democratization, and voting behavior, coup researchers have only begun to tackle even the most basic research questions when it comes to coups. The bulk of coup literature attempts to explain why coups come about. Studies focused on predicting coups often focus on factors like coup-proofing, domestic protests and instability, and how international actors can either foment or stymie coup attempts. A smaller and growing literature considers how coups influence other processes, often focusing on outcomes like democracy, economic development, and interstate disputes.

Keywords: coup d’état, military coup, civil-military relations, coup-proofing, democratization

Subjects: Conflict Studies

What Are Coups?

Some of the earliest studies to use cross-national coup data include work from O’Kane (1987) and Londregan and Poole (1990). These scholars pointed our attention to factors like poverty, which is strongly associated with coup attempts. As other scholars continued to build on the quantitative study of coups, variations in how coups are defined conceptually and operationalized empirically also arose. Seeking to add coherence to the empirical scholarship on coups, Powell and Thyne (2011) brought together 15 previous studies that had used separate large-N datasets of coups in an attempt to provide a clear theoretical definition and empirical dataset of coups since 1950. They focus on three main characteristics to define coups: targets, perpetrators, and tactics.

Focusing on the *target* of coups, most scholars agree that coups can only be perpetrated against the chief executive. This rule differentiates coups from other processes that are theoretically distinct from coups. For instance, rebellions usually seek either to overthrow the entire regime and replace the government or to succeed and form a new state (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Sollenberg, & Strand, 2002). On the other side of the spectrum, mutinies often seek to redress grievances over things like pay but do not attempt to oust leaders (Dwyer, 2017). Though rebellions, mutinies, and other anti-regime activities like protests are often correlated with coups, isolating the target to chief executives allows scholars to study coups as the distinct processes that they are.

Next, some disagreement among scholars emerges regarding perpetrators of coups. The typical coup is perpetrated by a high-ranking officer of the military, but we have also seen chief executives ousted by rebels, civilian elites, and seemingly random assassins. Given that assassinations and civil conflicts are distinct processes, most scholars agree that coups can only be perpetrated by elites within the state apparatus. This qualification omits large-scale events like rebellions and major protests, and also captures the conspiratorial nature of coups by omitting lone-wolf attempts to end an executive's life, including efforts by members of the armed forces. The insider nature of these events is particularly distinctive, as incentives to oust a leader from those within a regime likely depart from those of politically excluded or discriminated populations that undertake rebellion.

Third, the tactics that must be used in a coup attempt are likely where we see the largest area of disagreement among how scholars, politicians, and the media define coups. Most scholars agree that a coup must be illegal and overt, which seems rather straightforward. However, three main factors lead to ambiguity. First, politicians often have an incentive to describe challenges to their rule as a coup even if they are perfectly legal, and the media often sensationalizes challenges using the same term. For example, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and her supporters repeatedly referred to her impeachment proceedings using the word "coup" in spite of its legality (Watson, 2017). Second, external actors often have an incentive to avoid using the term "coup" even when it meets all reasonable characterizations of a coup. We saw a recent case of this with the African Union's refusal to characterize the 2017 ouster of Zimbabwean President Mugabe as a coup, for example (Roessler, 2017). Third, some scholars disagree as to whether we must see overt tactics like tanks in the street to capture a coup attempt or whether plots and rumors also count. Given that executives often have an incentive to justify purges and repression through what Kebschull (1994, p. 568) has referred to as "deliberately contrived nonsense," most scholars agree that overt action must be taken for an event to count as a coup.

Finally, there is some ambiguity in the proper conceptualization of a failed versus successful coup. After ousting the executive and seizing power, most scholars are comfortable with using a threshold of maintaining control for at least one week to define a coup as successful (e.g., McGowan, 2003; Thompson, 1973). However, all recognize that the one-week threshold is clearly arbitrary. Thyne, Powell, Hayden, and VanMeter(2018) recently attempted to rectify this by coding the duration that coup leaders—or their appointed allies—maintain power following a coup, which allows success to be measured on a continuum. Others have

characterized coup outcomes by considering whether or not the putsch altered the regime. For example, Aksoy, Carter, and Wright (2015) differentiate between “successful regime change coups” and “successful reshuffling coups” by considering whether (the former) or not (the latter) the incoming coup leader replaces the regime or simply replaces the rule, in what Geddes has described as the effective equivalent of an authoritarian vote of no confidence (Geddes, 2010, p. 66).

Taken together, many scholars studying coups today use the Powell and Thyne (2011, p. 252) dataset to conceptualize coups with the following definition. Powell and Thyne conceptually define coups as “illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive.” They operationally define a successful coup as one in which “the perpetrators seize and hold power for at least seven days.” This definition has been adopted by many scholars, including, inter alia, studies on pro-government mobilization in authoritarian regimes (Hellmeier & Weidmann, in press), military schools (Bohmelt, Escribá-Folch, & Pilster, 2019), and civil war duration (Wiegand & Keels, 2019).

Moving to empirical measures, the Powell/Thyne dataset records 475 coup attempts since 1950. Roughly half of coups (49.7%) have been successful during this time period. Trends across time and space are also noteworthy. It is clear that the frequency of coups has been on the decline since the late 1960s. This is largely keeping with trends in other conflict processes of interest like interstate wars and civil conflicts (Gates, Nygård, Strand, & Urdal, 2016). However, while coup attempts are on the decline, it is notable that coups over the last decade or so have a far higher success rate than in previous periods. Regarding spatial dispersion, few regions have been immune to coups since 1950. Africa (37% of total) and Latin America (30%) have seen the highest frequency, followed by the Middle East (16%), Asia (13%), and Europe (2%). Considering both spatial and temporal trends, Latin America led the charge with coup activity until around 1970, and then Africa has largely led since. These trends are generally consistent with regions studied by coup scholars. The earliest work on coups primarily focused on Latin America, which was a hotbed of coup activity particularly during the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Fossum, 1967). More recent work often focuses on coup activity in Africa, which has seen the highest rate in coups since the turn of the century (e.g., Powell, Lasley, & Schiel, 2016).

The Causes of Coups

As one might expect, the bulk of the literature on coups focuses on why they come about. Scholars have considered a variety of factors in this vein. Some focus on individual attributes of leaders, while others broaden the scope to state institutions, mass politics, and even international factors. The subsequent sections summarize this rather broad area of work into four main categories.

Civil-Military Relations and Coups

To begin, a substantial body of work considers the relationship between the executive and the military to understand coups. The primary emphasis here is on decisions made by leaders to deter coup activity. Known as the guardianship dilemma, the basic problem for leaders is that armed forces must be strong enough to challenge threats to the regime from external actors and mass uprisings; however, the same tools used to deter threats external to the regime can be used against the regime itself in the form of a coup (Feaver, 1999; Huntington, 1957; McMahon & Slantchev, 2015; Svolik, 2012). Understanding the strategies that leaders use to solve the guardianship dilemma has produced two related sets of literatures.

First, scholars have considered how the threat environment drives executive decisions about military strength. For example, Svolik (2012) argues that executives will empower the military when threats from the population are extreme, and can avoid coups when threats are meager by weakening the military. As shown by McMahon and Slantchev (2015), however, devising the perfect balance to deter threats and assure military loyalty is easier said than done. If both the military and the executive perceive a strong internal threat, then coups are uncommon because both actors have a strong incentive to hold the regime together. When views about the threat environment diverge, however, militaries may be likely to coup. Moving beyond military empowerment, scholars have considered how elites are more generally appeased by executives. For instance, Bove and Rivera (2015) show that co-opting elites through elected authoritarian legislatures helps executives avoid coups, while Makara (2013) considers how leaders like Egypt's Mubarak provided post-retirement appointments and financial awards to military elites to assure loyalty.

The second main area of work focused on the guardianship dilemma considers coup-proofing. At the most basic level, coup-proofing includes moves by the executive to minimize the likelihood that a small group can seize power (Quinlivan, 1999). This includes a variety of tactics, including appointing and promoting military officers based on loyalty rather than merit, purging potentially disloyal officers, creating parallel and rival military structures, rotating military officers, and centralizing control of information (Albrecht, 2015; Belkin & Schofer, 2003; de Bruin, 2018; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012; Pollack, 2002; Powell, 2012; Sudduth, 2017a).

While early work from scholars like Quinlivan (1999) provided thorough descriptions of how leaders in places like the Middle East coup-proofed their regimes to maintain power for decades, more recent work explains when we should expect executives to pursue various coup-proofing tactics and the consequences that such actions might have. Strategies are varied, with some emphasizing the ability to effectively purchase loyalty with higher military expenditures (Collier & Hoeffler, 2007; Leon, 2014). Others have pointed to why might be called structural coup-proofing, which includes building up armed counterweights to the armed forces (Bohmelt & Pilster, 2015; de Bruin, 2018; Powell, 2012). Following qualitative efforts that have illustrated the importance of utilizing ethnic identity in the armed forces (e.g., Enloe, 1980; Horowitz, 2000), recent work has sought to more formally account for the manipulation of the military on ethnic lines (Roessler, 2011, 2017).

For example, Pilster and Böhmelt (2012) show that democracies engage in less coup-proofing than non-democracies, while Sudduth (2017b) shows that executives are apt to purge potential rivals immediately following coups. The efficacy of these efforts, however, is unclear. While it is generally presumed that leaders are effective in preventing coups, the empirical record demonstrates a variety of contradictions. For example, quantitative efforts to investigate “counterbalancing” noted in the previous two paragraphs have pointed to a reduction in coup activity, a non-robust effect, a curvilinear effect, and no effect (e.g., Albrecht, 2015). Further, even if promoting a coup-inhibiting trend, these same practices have also been linked to an increased likelihood of rebellion against the government (Powell, 2014b, 2019; Roessler, 2011). Future studies could follow the lead of de Bruin (2018) in providing more attention to how well data quality and operationalization allow us to make accurate inferences.

Protests, Conflict, and Coups

A second main area of work seeking to understand why coups come about looks beyond civil-military relations by considering how the broader population influences elite decisions to coup. Coup scholars have long recognized that militaries are apt to intervene when the public demonstrates against the regime (Finer, 1962; Sutter, 1999; Welch, 1970), and the correlation between protests and coups is one of the most consistent relationships shown in the empirical literature on coups. More recent work has attempted to explain the causal mechanisms that link protests and coups, and to further describe when we should expect protests to result in coups. For example, Casper and Tyson (2014) show that protests can ease coordination problems among coup plotters, especially when a free media is allowed to provide information about public discontent. Lee (2015) considered the type of regime, explaining that protests under personalist regimes are apt to result in coups, while non-personalist forms of authoritarian rule are apt to result in repression of the protesters. Meanwhile, Johnson and Thyne (2018) show that protests near the capitol city are apt to spur coups, while dispersed protests have little effect.

Moving beyond protests, a nascent body of work considers the nexus between higher forms of anti-regime activity, civil conflicts, and coup activity. For example, Bell and Sudduth (2017) show that civil wars are apt to spur coups, especially when governments face strong rebels, and Thyne (2017) demonstrates that coups during civil wars make war termination more likely. Additional dynamics—addressed in the subsequent sections—can be seen with international conflict. However, empirical scholarship is still in its infancy when attempting to explain when soldiers turn their arms away from the enemies of the state and toward the state itself.

Coups and the Economy

Similar to other processes like civil conflicts, scholars have consistently demonstrated a strong link between economic weakness and coups. Londregan and Poole (1990) were among the first to assess this link in a large-N context, and more recent evidence buttresses this relationship. Scholars have more recently attempted to refine the mechanisms linking economic factors and coups. For example, Houle (2016) considers class inequality, which is apt to incentivize people to challenge the government but also decreases the opportunity to do so with stronger militaries. The end result is fewer civil conflicts, but an increased likelihood of coups. An important study by Kim (2016) considers the dynamic nature of the economy. Differentiating between permanent and transitory shocks, Kim instruments economic shocks using rainfall and temperature variation to ease endogeneity concerns, finding that shocks indeed increase the likelihood of coups. These shocks, however, appear to be most meaningful in smaller economies. Meanwhile, Tusalem (2010) demonstrates that developing states can lower the likelihood of coups by securing property rights to ease elite concerns about expropriation of wealth, while Powell and Chacha (2016) borrow from the capitalist peace literature to argue that a range of economic dynamics can incentivize domestic and international actors to actively avoid the potentially destabilizing consequences of a coup.

A considerable amount of scholarship has investigated the association between commodity-driven economies and political instability more generally. Dubbed “the resource curse,” economies dependent on natural resources have been said to suffer from problems including economic stagnation and increased likelihood of civil war (e.g., Ross, 2012). And while notorious cases such as Nigeria point to the importance of resource wealth in the coup story, empirical scholarship on the association with coups is limited, and what exists seems contradictory. For example, explorations by Cotet and Tsui (2013), Escribà-Folch and Wright (2010), and Singh (2014) indicate that oil wealth has no association with coups, while Collier and Hoeffler (2007) report the same for natural resource rents more generally. Studies including Powell and Chacha (2016) find that higher levels of oil wealth are associated with significantly higher coup risk. These studies are at least in partial contrast to a previously demonstration association between oil wealth and the stability of authoritarian regimes (e.g., Smith, 2004), suggesting the need for more theoretical and empirical consideration.

Institutions, Politics, and Coups

As political scientists largely drive the research on coups, it should come as no surprise that plenty of scholars have sought to understand how things like elections, democratization, and institutions influence the likelihood of coups. Early research in this vein from Belkin and Schofer (2003) showed that the strength of civil society, regime legitimacy, and past coups are strong predictors of coups. These sorts of factors, particularly the exclusion of a large proportion of the population from political institutions, have been found to increase the likelihood of coups alongside civil wars and riots (Bodea, Elbadawi, & Houle, 2017). Beyond this basic level, scholars have sought to understand how variations in democracy and authoritarianism influence coups.

First, scholars have sought to understand the relationship between coups and democracy. While it is easy to assume democracies are less coup-prone, the literature has arrived at varied results. Bell (2016) explains that democracy makes it difficult for executives to repress threats from rivals, which makes coups easier to plot. However, rivals have less incentive to coup in democracies because they can address their grievances and achieve power via more legitimate processes. Bell finds evidence that democracies are less coup-prone, but coups plotted against democracies are more likely to succeed. Hiroi and Omori (2013) show an inverted-U relationship, with coups most likely to happen in semi-authoritarian regimes, mirroring the theoretical exploration of authoritarian consolidation by Svolik (2009). Taking a more dynamic approach and focusing on Africa, Lindberg and Clark (2008) seem to align most closely with Bell (2016) in demonstrating that liberalizing regimes are less likely to face coups. More recently, Powell, Faulkner, Dean, and Romano (2018) argue that these discrepancies can be attributed to conditional effects, finding that democracies are significantly more coup-prone than civil autocracies when the regime is young and when military expenditures are low but become significantly more resistant to coups once reaching the median level of these factors.

Second, given that most coups happen within authoritarian regimes, plenty of scholars have attempted to understand how variations in authoritarianism influence coups and other forms of leader removal. For example, Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) explain that authoritarian institutions lengthen a dictator’s tenure in office. While this finding led to the common argument that elections stabilize autocracies, Wig and Rød (2016) add important nuance to this argument. Considering elections in authoritarian regimes, they explain that election outcomes can reveal information about the strength of the opposition and the likelihood of a successful revolution. If this information reveals that a successful revolution is likely, coups are apt to come about as a way for elites to maintain their privileged status (see also Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001).

Coups and the International Environment

The final set of studies that seek to understand why coups come about focuses on the international environment, including studies of international conflict, international law, and economic integration.

First, several studies have sought to understand the nexus between international conflict and coups. As summarized in our earlier discussion on coup-proofing, executives face a tension in their attempts to balance military strength to deter conflict while also assuring that the military is not strong enough to coup successfully. When interstate conflicts do arise, it remains unclear whether coups will follow. Piplani and Talmadge (2016) demonstrates that war, especially prolonged wars, decrease the likelihood of coups. However, Kenwick (2017) shows that rivalries increase the likelihood of coups, while Florea (2018) argues spatial rivalries (over disputed territory) are most likely to promote coups by forcing the regime to increase the military’s capacity. While more work needs to be done in this area, two recent studies help shed light on how external threats influence coups. First, Kim (2017) aligns well

with Kenwick's study on rivalries by arguing that wars and lower-level militarized interstate disputes decrease the likelihood of coups because they are short-lived, while a threatening security environment increases coup propensity. Second, Fariss, Fariss, and McMahon (2016) move beyond the simple bivariate relationship between coups and interstate conflict. While coup-proofing likely makes militaries weaker, they argue, regimes often pursue weapons of mass destruction or forge alliances as substitutes for military strength.

Next, scholars have considered how international law influences the likelihood of coups. Since the early 1990s, international organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU, later the African Union) set in place policies to punish coup-born regimes. While these policies are clearly associated with a downturn in coups (see Figure 1), it remains unclear whether they have an independent effect. Wobig (2015) tackled this question. Though not universal, he finds that democratic, middle-income states were less likely to have coups when they fall under organizations with democratic clauses, and African states have fewer coups regardless of regime type. These findings mesh well with work on global coup responses by Shannon, Thyne, Hayden, and Dugan (2015) and Souaré's (2014) work on the African Union, both of which argue that international actors have become more likely to sanction coups in the contemporary world. However, von Soest and Wahman (2015) find that sanctions are less forthcoming against stronger states, and the lack of response to the ouster of Mugabe points to the need for more investigation of when, how, and to what effect the international community responds to coups (Roessler, 2017).

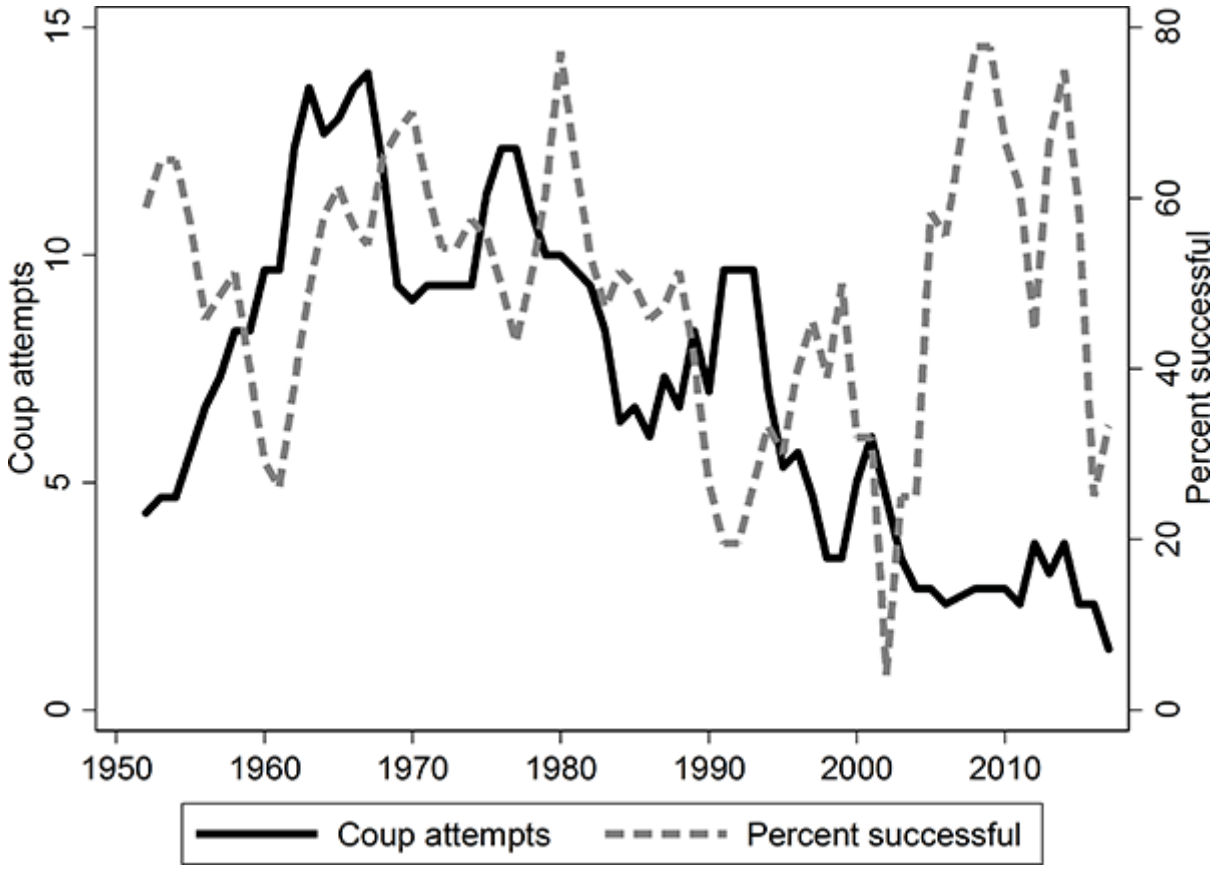

Figure 1. Coup attempts and success rate over time, 1950–present.

Finally, scholars have sought to understand how the international economic environment influences coups. At the most general level, Powell and Chacha (2016) demonstrate that economic openness indeed decreases the likelihood of coups. Similar studies focused more specifically on foreign direct investment (FDI) produce similar findings. For example, Bak and Moon (2016) show that FDI decreases coup risk. Though producing a similar finding, Tomashevskiy (2017) adds theoretical depth to this argument, explaining that FDI sent to high-risk states allows for a peaceful patronage equilibrium, thus deterring coups from potential rivals to the executive.

The Outcomes of Coups

Coups are illegal overthrows of regimes, and they are often watershed events in a country's history. Unlike the causes of coups, however, scholars have uncovered far less about how coups impact a number of potential outcomes. At the most basic level, some scholars have sought to simply explain why some coups succeed while others fail. Though it is easy to fixate on coups that successfully oust a leader or their regime, roughly half of all attempted coups fail and many more are thwarted prior to execution.

Early work by Thompson (1976) pointed to the importance of organizational cohesion. Starting from a question of whether the maneuver was planned by senior-level officers, subsequent scholarship later investigated a range of incidental or intentional efforts to create cohesion obstacles. Scholarship investigating coup-proofing, for example, has investigated efforts of leaders to "divide and conquer" their armed forces by created parallel chains of command, armed counterweights to the regular army, and other strategies (Quinlivan, 1999). Kebschull (1994) points to many coup attempts being merely "superficial" and outcomes as effectively being random but notes that failed coups are often exceptionally important events that deserve further study. Though a handful of efforts further explore whether coups succeed or fail, precious little attention specifically explores the consequences of failed coups (e.g., Powell, Chacha, & Smith, 2019).

A handful of recent studies provide a strong foundation for further study, particularly for the consequences of coups on democracy, economic development, and international relations.

Coups and the Prospects for Democracy

Beginning with democracy, scholars have long understood that coups are the primary way that democracies falter (Kieh & Agbese, 2005; Onwumechili 1998). As such, there is near universal agreement that coups against democratic regimes are bad for the global spread of democracy. However, few coups happen in democratic regimes; rather, coups are most likely to overthrow authoritarian leaders. This reality has caused many to consider whether coups may actually improve an authoritarian state's prospects for democracy. Collier (2008) argued that coups should be seen as legitimate means by which to extricate states from the rule of

dictators in places like Myanmar and Zimbabwe, and even Amnesty International (2018) pointed to the eventual coup in the latter as providing a meaningful opportunity for democratization.

Two of the earliest scholarly studies to examine the coup-democratization relationship across time and space largely draw the same conclusion. Marinov and Goemans (2014) demonstrate that coups are apt to lead to competitive elections, particularly in aid-dependent states following the Cold War. Thyne and Powell (2016) show that coups are most likely to produce democratization when they overthrow staunchly authoritarian dictators. Debate about this relationship exists, however. Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2017) claim a very low likelihood of post-coup democratization, even relative to other forms of irregular regime change. Tansey (2016) argues that few coups result in high-quality democratic rule, for example. Derpanopoulos, Frantz, and Geddes (2016) question Thyne and Powell's (2016) findings—primarily through the omission of a control for prior military regime. However, Miller (2016) subsequently argued that the findings of Derpanopoulos et al. (2016) were a product of biased sampling, and provided support for the coup/democratization nexus. Beyond a general link between coups and democratization, Miller (2012) has argued that high levels of economic development can prompt democratization following the irregular exit of leaders, while Chacha and Powell (2017) point to economic interdependence as promoting post-coup democratization.

The literature has thus reached apparently contradictory findings about how coups influence democracy. These can be reconciled in a number of respects. First, democratization skeptics overstate the claims of earlier authors, who are clear that although coups might increase the prospect of democratization in an authoritarian state, the probability of democratization is still quite low. Second, differences in operationalization of key variables can lead to wildly different conclusions. For example, Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2017) point to a post-coup democratization rate about one-fourth as high as that of Derpanopoulos et al. (2016), despite using the same data for democratization. The primary reason for this, we believe, is the former's use of a one-year window to assess whether a transition has occurred, while the latter utilizes a three-year window. We suspect when democratization does occur, it is likely to be at the end of a well-organized electoral process—which will often take years—as opposed to immediate and sweeping changes to the political system. What is clear is that democratization often occurs following coups, though in a minority of cases. More research could do substantially more to identify the role of coups in these transitions particularly in order to distinguish whether democracy follows as a result of these ousters or in spite of them.

Coups and Economic Development

Unlike democracy, there is wide consensus that coups are harmful for states' economies, both due to the event itself and to the uncertainty regarding the future investment climate (Fosu, 2002). An early study from Sala-i-Martin (1997) was one of the first to demonstrate that coups harm economic growth, which coincides with similar findings from Asiedu (2006), Barro (1991), and Levine and Renelt (1992), about the harmful influence of coups on investment.

Additional work on economic growth rates similarly finds a deleterious impact of coups (e.g., Alesina, Ozler, Roubini, & Swagel, 1996; Feng, 1997). Using updated methodological approaches, a newer study from Meyersson (2016) largely confirms these earlier assessments. One mechanism that has been used to explain the harmful effects of coups on economic growth focuses on military expenditures. According to Bove and Brauner (2016), we should expect authoritarian regimes to have higher levels of military expenditures than democracies, and military regimes should have the highest levels among all regime types. Empirical analyses from Leon (2014) and Bove and Nisticó (2014) largely support this expectation. Given that almost all coup-born regimes are led by military leaders, therefore, it should come as no surprise that coups are often harmful for economic growth.

Coups, Coup Risk, and Conflict

While scholars such as Florea (2018) and Piplani and Talmadge (2016) have investigated the role that foreign threats can have on coups, other scholars have considered how coups, and threats of coups more generally, can influence conflict behavior in the state. These efforts have largely centered on two themes. First, scholars have considered how coups can incentivize the pursuit of foreign conflicts. Second, others have considered how coup threats and coup-proofing can influence military effectiveness. Investigations of the former typically involve diversionary incentives. Diversionary theory argues that leaders will sometimes pursue foreign policy objectives—including the initiation of disputes and even war—for domestic political expediency.

Belkin and Schofer (2005) further argue that coup risk will either incentivize increased counterbalancing or low-level military disputes. Miller and Elgun (2011) find that heightened coup risk significantly increases the likelihood of conflict initiation in Latin America. A study of a global sample indicates this might be a worthwhile strategy, as interstate dispute involvement was found by Arbatli and Arbatli (2016) to reduce the likelihood of coups. Similar findings have been reported in recent literature on peacekeeping. Kathman and Melin (2017), for example, argue that countries at higher risk of a coup are more likely to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations. Meanwhile, Lundgren (2018) finds that participation in such missions does in fact reduce the likelihood of coups. This literature suggests that foreign policy behavior can be a direct product of coup fears and can indeed help stabilize a leader’s hold on power. While diversionary arguments may be applicable to unique circumstances, as suggested by Levy (1989) and Fordham (2017), states with higher coup risk indeed seem to be ripe cases where diversionary behavior is likely.

Investigations of coup-proofing have pointed to the numerous ways in which coup fears—and specifically coup-proofing—can undermine military performance in war time. Qualitative efforts pointing to the detrimental influence of a range of coup-proofing strategies abound, with Quinlivan (1999), Pollack (2002), Talmadge (2013), and Narang and Talmadge (2018) serving as notable works. Though adequately proxying coup risk presents some challenges, scholars have begun to find additional evidence quantitatively. Pilster and Bohmelt (2011), for

example, find that more heavily coup-proofed regimes suffer higher loss exchange ratios than their adversaries on the battlefield. Powell (2014a), meanwhile, argues that such weakened military capacity can reduce the diversionary incentive provided by coup risk.

Future Directions

Previous studies have addressed a wide range of research questions. However, a review of the literature suggests a number of understudied aspects of coups, as well as ways in which prior studies could be improved.

Refining Coup Data

Following the precedent of data collection efforts such as McGowan's work on Africa, cross-national data on coups has greatly advanced in the last decade. Beyond Powell and Thyne, large projects operated by the Center for Systemic Peace (Marshall & Marshall, 2018) and the Cline Center for Advanced Social Research (2013) have offered publicly available coup data on a range of coup-related actions. Other collaborative efforts include the Archigos Dataset of Political Leaders, which considers the manner leaders enter or exit office (Goemans, Gleditsch, & Chiozza, 2009.). Beyond these, individual scholars such as Svolik (2012) have pursued their own data, specific to their own needs.

Scholars such as Albrecht (2015) and Aksoy et al. (2015) have gone to great lengths to ensure the data they utilize are in fact valid measures for their conceptualization of coups, including completely re-evaluating some existing datasets in their entirety. However, as a general rule, scholars could do more to understand the differences between available datasets and how coding peculiarities could have important implications for their analyses. For example, in the Powell and Thyne data, a coup can occur in the aftermath of a leader's natural death, as seen in Togo in 2005, where power was effectively seized from a constitutionally appointed successor instead of a previously sitting head of government. Though meeting the traditional definition of a coup, an important distinction is that an established leader was not actually targeted by the military, and the coup itself could be seen as an effort to maintain the status quo rather than target it. Consequently, Archigos data would be a very useful for theory centering on when leaders are removed rather than when militaries specifically seize power.

Scholars could similarly do more to both theoretically and empirically account for the link between mass movements and coups. Coups often occur in the midst of public resentment against the regime, and classifying an event as either a coup or a popular revolt is both potentially arbitrary and potentially important in implication. The ousters of Egypt's Mubarak in 2011 and Burkina Faso's Compaoré in 2014 illustrate this ambiguity quite well. In each case, the incumbent faced substantial domestic pressure but initially refused to step down, only later to see the military come to power and the ousted leader either jailed or exiled. Popular resentment against these leaders was essential in their ousters, but ignoring the key

role the armed forces played in their removal and replacement could both omit the important role of the military and conflate what might be truly popular revolts with those who saw regime insiders preempt a larger, revolutionary-style change to the system.

Beyond Coup-ism

Relative to other aspects of civil-military relations, coups have been disproportionately represented in scholarship (Croissant, Kuehn, Chambers, & Wolf, 2010). This is unsurprising given that coup attempts—particularly those that succeed—are quite transparent events that are more likely to be documented than other actions (Feaver, 1999). However, the current fixation on coups—particularly successful ones—may come at the expense of other meaningful activities in a soldier's toolkit. It is important for scholars to both give attention to these other dynamics as well as understand how they are associated with coups.

First, failed coups themselves represent around half of all overt coup attempts, and they play important roles in different political outcomes. Failed coups are often followed by mass purges, as dramatically demonstrated in cases such as the failed 2016 Turkish coup, and as more systematically demonstrated by Easton and Siverson (2018) and Powell et al. (2018). In addition to authoritarian entrenchment, failed coups have catalyzed political events such as the onset of civil war and the termination of civil war, have both ended and promoted democratization, have prompted genocide and other mass reprisals, and have led to economic consequences like capital flight. Compared to successful coups, though, we know little about these events.

Second, there has been a lack of scholarly attention given to mutinies, despite both their consequences and their increasing frequency. Consider the three major 2017 mutinies in Cote d'Ivoire, for example, which spread to over a dozen locations and ultimately saw the government agree to pay 8,500 soldiers $19,000 each, despite being mired in a budget crisis brought on by a collapse of cocoa prices (Schiel, Faulkner, & Powell, 2017). Even case-specific analyses are lacking, and quantitative assessments virtually unheard of. The recent scholarship by Dwyer (2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2017) on West African mutinies and the dissertation by Johnson (2018) are likely to act as major catalysts for study on the subject. Though a distinct phenomenon from coups, little effort has been made to understand how these events are associated, and even why some mutinies with limited goals sometimes escalate to coups (e.g., 2012 Mali). For example, prior scholarship tells us little about what Cote d'Ivoire's tumultuous 2017 could mean for its future coup risk.

Third, still distinct from coups and mutinies are other important forms of military insubordination. For example, desertion or "staying quartered" are problems that plague many militaries, yet little systematic effort has been made to understand the phenomenon, or why soldiers would choose this course of action over mutinies or coups (e.g., Pion-Berlin, Esparza, & Grisham, 2014; Pion-Berlin & Trinkunas, 2010). This is especially true given the mass desertions seen during civil conflict in places like Syria and Libya, while coups are said

to be more likely to occur in this context. Recent contributions from Albrecht (2016), Koehler, Ohl, and Albrecht (2016), McLauchlin (2015), and Nepstad (2013) have the potential to push this agenda forward.

What Next?

The previous discussion has pointed to a number of coup trends, regarding both their causes and their consequences. Scholarship has tended to focus more on what causes coups rather than investigating their outcomes. Though coups have been argued to both end and promote democracy, specific causal mechanisms remain elusive. For the democratization argument alone, it is unclear what specific factors prompt regime insiders to act against the incumbent, whether they ultimately democratize due to their own motivations or whether these decisions are the result of exogenous pressure from other domestic or international actors.

Understanding the role of foreign actors, for example, is especially important given the policy relevance. Coups are largely clustered in a subset of the world's more economically weakest states, potentially providing the international community substantial leverage in determining a coup's ultimate fate. Though scholarship has begun to tackle the degree to which these actors respond to coups, we have little understanding of how these reactions influence a state's subsequent political trajectory.

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