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Research Article

The Limits of the "Democratic Coup" Thesis: International Politics and Post-Coup Authoritarianism

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Abstract

Recent studies have suggested that post–Cold War coups are more likely to be followed by democratic elections than their Cold War predecessors; analysts attribute this trend to international policies of democratic conditionality. Some go so far as to argue that we live in an age of the "democratic coup." This paper raises questions over any optimistic view of the capacity of coups to contribute to long-term democratization. An analysis of countries' post-coup trajectories after 1991 demonstrates that there is, consistent with previous studies, a clear trend of holding elections within five years of the coup. However, I show that most countries experiencing coups fail to go on to establish high-quality democratic rule. Instead, they often consolidate into some form of authoritarian rule. The paper ratifies the importance of the international political environment but highlights the role of international *autocratic* sponsors. When states are strategically important or have strong linkages to non-Western autocracies, coup leaders are likely to receive international support and protection rather than condemnation and sanctions. The article illustrates these arguments by examining post-coup authoritarian consolidation in Egypt and Fiji.

Keywords: coups, democracy, authoritarianism

Recent research has pointed to the emergence of "democratic coups" in the post–Cold War era—unconstitutional seizures of power that act as the midwife of democratic rule due to the swift holding of post-coup elections (Varol 2012; Powell 2014; Trithart 2013). This pattern has in turn been attributed to the increasing use of democratic conditionality in the post–Cold War era, as (mostly) Western states and international organizations use democratic enforcement measures to pressure coup leaders to give up the reins of power (Marinov and Goemans 2014). In this article, I argue that these recent accounts oversell the "democratic coup" thesis. In particular, they fail to acknowledge both the extent of authoritarian resilience after coups and the role played by international autocratic sponsors in underwriting post-coup autocracy. Focusing on these two insights, I shed light on the politics of post-coup trajectories.

I begin with an analysis of the post-coup trajectories of coup countries after 1991 and show that there are a number of problems with the recent narrative that coups are increasingly associated with democracy. While coups are increasingly followed by the introduction of some of the institutional trappings of democracy, this trend has not been universal. Many of the states that have held elections have done so as part of a process of introducing some form of competitive authoritarian regime. The recent research on the relationship between coups and democracy has focused excessively on the role of electoral politics. Yet, elections, even competitive ones, are compatible with forms of autocratic as well as democratic rule (Schedler 2006; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Several regimes that held elections shortly after experiencing coups continued to exhibit strong authoritarian tendencies, as incumbents worked to resist genuine democratic rule (e.g.,

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Cambodia after its 1997 coup). Other regimes, such as Pakistan after 1999 and Egypt after 2013, held deeply flawed elections, and a number of regimes held no post-coup elections within five years (e.g., Fiji after 2006). On average, coup-stricken countries experience only a negligible increase in democracy levels (less than one point on the Polity scale), and many experience steep reductions. The association of coups and democracy is thus one that should be treated with caution. There is ample evidence that authoritarian resilience remains a core feature of post-coup politics in the contemporary world. Overall, coups are not a force for democratic change.

In this article, I also identify the role played by international sponsors of autocratic regimes in accounting for patterns of post-coup authoritarian resilience. Recent approaches to explaining post-coup trajectories have focused excessively on the actions and influence of pro-democratic international actors. While international democratizing pressures have undoubtedly played a role in increasing the rates of initial post-coup elections, two factors contribute to a supportive international environment for continued authoritarianism. First, if a state is strategically important, Western actors may refrain from enforcing their democratic conditionality provisions and instead offer assistance. Coup leaders that seize power in strategically important states, even if they are highly dependent on external donors, may thus receive an easy ride. Second, many states enjoy ties to autocratic powers as well as Western democracies. Even when Western actors impose costly sanctions, non-Western autocracies can sponsor coup leaders in diplomatic and material ways that compensate for other losses.

In this article, I illustrate these dynamics with reference to events in the wake of coups in Egypt and Fiji, both of which enjoyed supportive international environments for post-coup authoritarian consolidation. General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's 2013 coup in Egypt was greeted by its allies with either mild criticism or fulsome praise, and with a range of diplomatic and economic responses that provided a permissive, and at certain points a highly supportive, international environment for the consolidation of post-coup authoritarianism. The Fijian coup of 2006 was led by army leader Frank Bainimarama, who refused to hold post-coup elections despite intense pressure from neighboring democracies. His freedom to maneuver in a context of Western condemnation and sanctions was crucially enhanced by robust diplomatic and material support from China. Both Egypt and Fiji benefited from their regional strategic importance and a diverse spectrum of international linkages.

Post-Coup Authoritarian Consolidation

Analysis of coups has focused more on the sources of coup risk, and the factors that make coups more or less likely, than on post-coup politics (Johnson, Slater, and McGowan 1984; Londregan and Poole 1990; Belkin and Schofer 2003; Roessler 2011; Quinlivan 1999). Only in recent years have scholars sought to systematically analyze the political trajectory following coups (Marinov and Goemans 2014; Powell 2014). The long-term outcomes of coups vary widely across cases, not least because post-coup leaders vary in their capacity to retain power. Although scholars increasingly recognize the international determinants of post-coup trajectories, to date they have emphasized the democracy-supporting influences of Western democracies and under-appreciated the actions of international sponsors of post-coup autocracies.

Coup plotters face a number of challenges to their efforts to consolidate their rule. As Svolik has shown, most autocratic rulers are dislodged by coups, and coups are more likely to take place in the early years of an autocrat's rule (2012, 5, 77). Ironically, then, coup leaders have to be fearful of being targets of a coup themselves. They must also be wary of threats from the masses. While some coups are welcomed by large sectors of the public (e.g., Suharto's 1965 coup in Indonesia), coups are often associated with an increased risk of mass pro-democracy protests (Brancati 2014, 1520). After the Thai army removed the elected government in May 2014, protestors took to the streets to demand a return to civilian rule, and similar demonstrations took place on the first anniversary of the coup (Sridharan 2015; BBC News 2014). Even though the 2013 coup in Egypt was supported by large sections of Egyptian society, followers of the ousted President Morsi mobilized to denounce the coup, prompting a brutal and violent crackdown by the army (BBC News 2015).

The ability of coup plotters to successfully navigate these challenges and consolidate their power rests on a number of diverse factors, many of them rooted in domestic politics. Although there is little dedicated scholarship on the sources of post-coup authoritarian resilience, insights from the wider literature on authoritarianism shed light on these cases. Elite cohesion reduces the risk from rivals and encourages coup leaders to incorporate potential rivals into the new regime. For cases of military coups, military unity is obviously crucial. Military coups are frequently spearheaded by a single branch of the military, rather than the institution as a whole, and it is by no means guaranteed that the other branches of the military will support the coup leaders (Singh 2014). Military cleavages often result in failed coups, but even when coups are successful, factionalism can undermine the prospects for consolidating power. For example, endemic military factionalism in Thailand led to a succession of short-lived military regimes punctuated by coups in the

decades after World War II. By contrast, military unity in Indonesia (fostered by communist mobilization) contributed to prolonged rule after Suharto's 1966 coup (Slater 2010, 241).

Particular political institutions can also foster post-coup regime stability (Svolik 2012, 111–12; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). The creation of ruling political parties can channel public support and facilitate both the co-option and oversight of potential elite rivals. The endurance of post-coup autocratic regimes in countries such as Egypt and Iraq rested in significant part on the establishment of ruling political parties (Brownlee 2007). Coup leaders often combine institutional innovations with political repression, outlawing opposition parties, imprisoning rival elites, and using violence against the public. For example, Suharto did not rely on military unity alone; he also engaged in the large-scale and brutal repression of his communist rivals (Boudreau 2009).

Yet, the fate of post-coup regimes does not rest exclusively on domestic politics. International forces can lower the prospects for authoritarian consolidation. Powell and Thyne define a coup as entailing "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive" (2011, 252). Thus, coups are distinguished from efforts to introduce or consolidate authoritarianism initiated by sitting incumbents, such as electoral fraud or violent repression. Since the end of the Cold War, an emerging normative agenda in favor of democratic rule has placed a special emphasis on countering political coups, and an "anti-coup norm" has been increasingly institutionalized (Shannon et al. 2015). In the realm of international democracy enforcement, coups are often treated differently from other breaches of democratic norms and practices. Coups are highly visible, and cannot easily be concealed in the ways that some forms of electoral fraud and political repression can be obscured (Beaulieu and Hyde 2009). When a coup takes place, there is little room for doubt about what has happened and who is responsible. Decisions about democratic enforcement are made by leaders, and it is not surprising that they are more interested in punishing coup behavior that might threaten their own rule. For example, while the African Union (AU) has suspended several member states in the wake of political coups, including Togo in 2005, Guinea in 2008, and Egypt in 2013, it has tended to be much more lenient in response to election irregularities and other forms of democratic backsliding (Magliveras 2011; Williams 2007, 274). Coup plotters are thus often subject to unusually high levels of international punishment compared to leaders who maintain power through non-democratic means. This dynamic contributes to the striking nature of the "democratic coup" thesis, which emphasizes the democratizing effects of these brazen practices, while making no claims about other forms of autocratic behavior carried out by incumbents.

Insights from the literature on the international dimensions of democratization highlight how external actors can pressure post-coup regimes, and increase the prospects for democratic transition rather than autocratic consolidation. There are two broad mechanisms through which international actors can affect post-coup regimes. First, international actors can enhance the domestic competition that post-coup regimes face from both rival elites and the masses. External actors can support the ousted government and work to restore the former authorities to power, thus increasing the risk that the coup leaders will themselves be ousted. For example, the international community played a major role in supporting the return to power of political leaders ousted by coups in Haiti (1991) and Sierra Leone (1997) (Halperin and Lomasney 1998). International attention and condemnation can also inform and embolden domestic opposition actors, and contribute to domestic protests.[1] Second, international actors can reduce the capacity of the new regime. Punishments, such as trade sanctions or reductions in financial aid, can materially affect the capacity of the ruling government. Several international organizations have introduced provisions to sanction member states whose leaders have acquired power by overthrowing elected governments (Wobig 2015; Legler and Tieku 2010).

Marinov and Goemans offer a well-developed account of international pressure supporting democracy and subverting autocracy. The authors both identify a post–Cold War trend away from post-coup authoritarian consolidation and offer a new theory to explain it. Prior to 1991, most coups were followed by the consolidation of enduring authoritarian regimes. In contrast, after 1991 most coups have been followed by free and fair elections within five years (Marinov and Goemans 2014). Other recent research supports these findings (Thyne and Powell 2014; Varol 2012; Powell 2014; Trithart 2013). This association between coups and democracy has given rise to the "democratic coup" thesis.

Marinov and Goemans argue that the increase in international democracy promotion explains the shift away from post-coup authoritarian consolidation. With the end of the Cold War, Western states and international organizations developed a strong normative preference for democracy, and increasingly used their material leverage

1 For a discussion of similar dynamics regarding election monitoring, *cf.* Kelley 2012, 103; Tucker 2007, 541.

to promote democratic development abroad. In particular, the rise of democratic conditionality created a new incentive structure for coup leaders who come to power in countries that rely on international donors for significant national income. Countries dependent on aid are more vulnerable to democratic conditionality clauses applied by their donors, and thus more likely to conduct elections in response. In this account, the combination of aid dependence and international democratic conditionality explains the decline of post-coup authoritarian resilience (Marinov and Goemans 2014).

International Politics and Post-Coup Authoritarianism

While international politics undoubtedly plays a role in encouraging elections in the wake of political coups, analysts have neglected the diversity of international influences on coup leaders. Marinov and Goemans (2014) explore only the Western, pro-democratic international influences on coup leaders. However, a growing literature on the international politics of authoritarian rule points to the crucial role of international supporters of autocratic incumbents (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010; Tolstrup 2013a; Vanderhill 2013). So-called "black knights" (including both democratic and autocratic states) support and protect autocratic regimes under a wide range of circumstances, often motivated by a desire to keep compliant elites in place and avoid the instability associated with regime change (Ambrosio 2014; Tolstrup 2015; Levitsky and Way 2010, 41; von Soest 2015; Whitehead 2014). In order to understand the variation in post-coup trajectories, and in particular the resilience of authoritarianism in many coup countries, it is essential to examine not only the pro-democracy pressure that coup leaders are subjected to from Western states and international organizations, but also the active sponsorship for authoritarianism from more autocratic regimes (Tansey 2016a). Furthermore, while "linkage to the West" can create pressures for democratization, strategic interests can sometimes override Western democracies' willingness to apply this pressure (Levitsky and Way 2010; Tolstrup 2013b; Vanderhill 2013). Some of these considerations have been incorporated into studies of the *causes* of coups (Thyne 2010), but the scholarship on the consequences of coups has yet to adequately consider them.

To fully appreciate the international influences on post-coup trajectories, it is therefore necessary to examine the full "linkage spectrum" that each country has with external actors (Tansey 2016a). Historical and deep-rooted linkages with autocratic countries can generate international support for post-coup governments, and coup leaders often appeal to a state's historical allies to support their actions. Coups that take place in strategically important countries may even receive external support from Western democracies if they further the strategic interests of these powers (e.g., US support for the doomed 2002 coup in Venezuela).[2] Consequently, many coup plotters operate in an international environment that is either unconstraining or supportive.

For various reasons, democratically-inclined international actors may sometimes refrain from punishing coup behavior, contrary to what Marinov and Goemans expect. Many post–Cold War coup countries have been economically dependent on external donors, but escaped the kind of conditionality that would create incentives for democratic reform. Recent research by von Soest and Wahman (2015) demonstrates both the uneven international response to coups and the variation in democratic sanctions by Western powers. Their data set also shows that multiple post–Cold War coup countries, including aid-dependent countries such as Burundi, Mali, and Mauritania, evaded democratic sanctions in the years after their coups (von Soest and Wahman 2015a). Elsewhere, democratic enforcement was relatively half-hearted or short-lived. In the wake of the 1997 coup in Cambodia, Japan (Cambodia's largest donor) temporarily cut off aid. Yet, it resumed aid within a matter of weeks based on verbal guarantees of reform (Refworld 2015). Cambodia did go on to hold elections in 1998, but these contributed only to the consolidation of competitive authoritarianism. Freedom House has classified Cambodia as "Not Free" every year since those elections. Similarly, although the United States has a legal obligation to cut off aid to countries where democratic leaders have been removed through a coup, it is often cautious in applying the rule and regularly avoids using the word "coup" for purely political purposes (Fisher 2013).

Many coup leaders, however, receive active and intentional international support. International sponsorship can help consolidate post-coup authoritarianism in a number of ways. International sponsors can offer clear signals of support that can help consolidate the position of post-coup incumbents.[3] Swift recognition of the new government lends international legitimacy to the new

2 On the strategic logic behind international reactions to authoritarian regimes and practices, see for example Brownlee 2012; Donno 2010; von Soest and Wahman 2015b. On the US greenlight to Venezuelan coup plotters, see Sikkink 2004, 209.

3 On the role of signals prior to coups, see Thyne 2010.

regime. Recognition of the new authorities sends a clear signal of external support that can reassure elite actors and increase the prospects for elite cohesion.[4] It can also signal to the public the strength of the regime, and thus dampen the appetite for public protests. Vocal diplomatic support of this kind can also reinforce the narrative of the coup plotters, as external actors endorse their stated reasons for undertaking the coup and denounce their critics (see the discussion of Saudi Arabia and Egypt's 2013 coup, below).

International sponsors can also provide newly installed coup leaders with financial and security support to assist their efforts to consolidate power. Such actions bolster the prospects of authoritarian consolidation by boosting the capacity of the new authorities to fend off potential challenges. Several authors have linked authoritarian resilience to the capacity of state institutions (Levitsky and Way 2010; Way 2005; Slater 2010). International sponsorship that contributes to state capacity can thus facilitate regime consolidation. External supporters can also serve to counter the negative effects of sanctions that may be applied by more critical international actors, as new loans or aid compensate for the losses incurred by democratic enforcement measures. Such sanction-busting behaviors can protect the new incumbents from the most damaging material effects of international censure (Early 2011).

Supportive external sponsorship of autocratic elites should be particularly critical in post-coup scenarios. Autocratic actors often experience surges of international scrutiny after coups. Coup plotters are in a particularly fragile position, as they have just seized power and must scramble to establish rule over state institutions and the wider society, often in the face of considerable opposition (Roessler 2011). Their position thus contrasts with elites who already enjoy the advantages of incumbency and commit election fraud, for example, to prolong their rule (Hyde 2011; Lehoucq 2003). International sponsors of newly installed coup leaders thus play a more critical role in solidifying their rule by protecting and shielding them during a particularly vulnerable period.

In sum, advocates of the "democratic coup" thesis are correct to suggest that coups are not the same as other forms of authoritarian practice (such as fraud or repression), and that the international politics of coups are distinct from the international politics of these other practices. However, there are holes in the logic suggesting that the particularities of post-coup politics are favorable for democracy. It is not clear that we should expect coups to be the midwife of democracy even in countries that are economically dependent on Western powers. Strategic importance may interrupt a Western democracy's commitment to sanction the leaders of a coup. But these countries also often enjoy ties to autocratic states supportive of authoritarian strategies. We should thus question whether coups lead to democracy, and examine the full range of international influences on those who illegally seize the power of the state. In the sections that follow, I offer empirical analysis that demonstrates these questions are well founded. The next section presents descriptive statistics that show the limits of the association between coups and democracy, and highlights the regularity of post-coup authoritarian consolidation. The subsequent sections examine the international sources of post-coup authoritarian resilience in the Egyptian and Fijian cases.

4 For a similar argument regarding the politics of repression, *cf.* Nepstad 2013.

The Diversity of Post-Coup Trajectories

Accounts of the relationship between coups and democracy have neglected the patterns of authoritarian resilience in many post-coup settings. While increasing rates of post-coup elections are not in doubt, the contribution of these elections to processes of genuine democratization has so far been taken too much at face value. One of the problems with current treatments of the relationship between coups and post-coup regime trajectories is that elections are often equated with the attainment of democracy. Although elections are a central element of democracy and are a crucial step for successful democratization (Lindberg 2009), they are not a sufficient condition for the successful emergence of democracy itself. The spread of elections in the post–Cold War period is not a reliable indicator of the spread of democracy, as many rulers have found ways to use elections to preserve their autocracies even while keeping Western international actors satisfied (Levitsky and Way 2010; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Even where transitional elections are free and fair, democratic consolidation is far from guaranteed. Many countries struggle to build upon the promise of initial free and fair elections and quickly relapse into some form of authoritarianism (Kapstein and Converse 2008). Consequently, findings about the relationship between coups and elections cannot easily be translated into findings about coups and democracy. Once we look beyond elections, the language of "democratic coups" proves highly misleading. While there has been a clear post–Cold War shift away from universal post-coup authoritarianism, coups frequently still give rise to closed autocratic regimes and often pave the way for electoral forms of autocracy that fall short of the minimum standards of democracy.

Taking the analysis of Marinov and Goemans as a starting point, in this section I examine the post-coup political trajectory of all coup countries after 1991, and use descriptive statistics to highlight the extent of post-coup authoritarian resilience. Marinov and Goemans' central argument is that post-1991 coup countries have had a much greater likelihood of being followed by competitive elections rather than durable authoritarian rule, and that consequently the "new generation of coups has been far less harmful for democracy than their historical predecessors" (Marinov and Goemans 2014). I do not contradict the claim that there has been a shift in the post-Cold War period, but I show that authoritarian rule remains a common outcome in countries that experience coups despite the trend toward elections. Examination of the post-coup politics in all post-1991 cases suggests that coups are not associated with transitions to durable and high-quality democracies in most cases, and that coups still regularly give rise to autocratic regimes.

Table 1 shows the post-1991 coup cases listed in Powell and Thyne's (2011) data set updated to 2015, as well as a series of measures on their post-coup political trajectories—including the presence or absence of free and fair elections, and levels of political freedom. Two measures are used to capture the extent of democracy or autocracy, based on both Polity and Freedom House data. If the "democratic coup" thesis is correct, we should expect to see a clear relationship between the occurrence of coups and the establishment of democratic regimes. However, no such relationship is apparent, and the evidence presented in the table suggests a number of important findings that raise questions concerning any simple findings about "democratic coups."

While the table demonstrates a clear pattern of post-coup elections across most cases, the trend is not universal. Since 1991, there have been 43 successful coups distributed across 29 countries. While most of these coups were followed by free and fair elections, a significant minority (i.e., 12) held either no or flawed elections. For example, the post-coup regimes in Afghanistan (1992), Rwanda (1994), and Fiji (2006) all refrained from holding elections. Pakistan after the Musharraf coup of 1999 and Mauritania after its 2005 coup were followed by flawed elections in 2002 and 2006, respectively. The evidence shows that post–Cold War coups have thus given rise to many closed authoritarian regimes.

A second feature of the data concerns the levels of political freedom that can be found in the set of coup cases. Using both Polity and Freedom House data, it is possible to determine whether post-1991 coup countries have experienced transitions to democratic regimes, or have instead consolidated into authoritarian forms of rule. An analysis of the Freedom House status for each country five years after the coup is not particularly encouraging. I restrict the sample to coups between 1991 and 2009 in order to allow a five-year gap in assessing the Freedom House outcome.[5] Of the 34 coups that took place between 1991 and 2009, in only two cases was the country rated as "Free" within five years of the coup. In 20 cases, the country was rated as "Partly Free" after five years, and 12 were rated "Not Free." Even taking a longer perspective, the pattern is remarkably similar and not particularly encouraging. Of the 29 countries that experienced coups between 1991 and 2014, and are thus included in the 2015 Freedom in the World report, only two were rated as "Free" (Lesotho and Sao Tome and Principe). Sixteen were rated as "Partly Free," and 11 were rated as "Not Free."

The evidence from Polity presents a more optimistic picture, but still shows a clear trend in which most countries that experience a coup struggle to achieve stable democratic rule and instead consolidate into some form of autocratic regime. Polity scores are available only until 2014, and no Polity scores are available for two small island countries that experienced coups (the Maldives and Sao Tome and Principe). The Polity scale runs from –10 to 10, and Polity recommends scoring cases from –10 to –6 as autocracies, –5 to 5 as anocracies, and 6–10 as democracies. Of the 33 countries with coups between 1991 and 2009 for which Polity has scores, only 11 (one-third) achieve scores of 6 or above (representing democracy) within five years. Three were autocratic, and the remaining 19 were anocracies. Just under half (16) were scored at 0 or below at five years post-coup. Examining available 2014 Polity scores for these countries, the picture remains broadly similar—9 are democracies, 1 is an autocracy, and 18 are anocracies. Polity data thus suggest a pattern in which the majority of countries that experience coups do not move beyond limited levels of democratic rule, and many fall far short of the threshold of democracy. While Polity offers a slightly more encouraging picture than Freedom House (more countries in the top category, and fewer in the bottom), both sets of data suggest that the post-1991 coup experience has clearly not helped usher in a wave of stable democracies.

Comparison of Polity figures before and after each coup reinforces the limits of the "democratic coup"

5 Freedom House's 2015 scores cover the 2014 calendar year.

Table 1. Post-coup trajectories, 1991–2015

Country	Year of Coup	Polity 1yr before	Polity 5yrs after	Polity 2014	Freedom House 5yrs after	Freedom House 2014	Elections within 5yrs	Election Year
Lesotho	1991	–7	8	8	PF	F	Fair	1993
Mali	1991	–7	7	5	F	PF	Fair	1992
Haiti	1991	7	7	0	PF	PF	Fair	1995
Thailand	1991	3	9	–3	PF	NF	Fair	1992
Afghanistan	1992	–8	–7	–1	NF	NF	No election	
Sierra Leone	1992	–6	0	7	NF	PF	Fair	1996
Algeria	1992	–2	–3	2	NF	NF	Fair	1995
Nigeria	1993	–5	–1	4	PF	PF	Unfair	1998
Lesotho	1994	8	2	8	PF	F	Fair	1998
Rwanda	1994	–7	–6	–3	NF	NF	No election	
Gambia	1994	8	–5	–5	NF	NF	Fair	1996
Qatar	1995	–10	–10	–10	NF	NF	No election	
Burundi	1996	0	0	6	NF	NF	No election	
Sierra Leone	1996	–7	2	7	PF	PF	Fair	1996
Niger	1996	8	5	4	PF	PF	Fair	1996
Cambodia	1997	1	2	2	NF	NF	Fair	1998
Sierra Leone	1997	4	5	7	PF	PF	Fair	2002
Guinea-Bissau	1999	0	–1	6	PF	PF	Fair	1999
Ivory Coast	1999	–6	0	4	NF	PF	Fair	2000
Comoros	1999	4	6	9	PF	PF	Unfair	2002
Niger	1999	–6	6	4	PF	PF	Fair	1999
Pakistan	1999	7	–5	7	NF	PF	Unfair	2002
Fiji	2000	6	6	2	PF	PF	Fair	2001
Sao Tome	2003	–	–	–	F	F	No election	
Central Afr Rep	2003	5	–1	0	PF	NF	Fair	2005
Guinea-Bissau	2003	5	6	6	PF	PF	Unfair	2004
Mauritania	2005	–6	–2	–2	NF	NF	Unfair	2006
Togo	2005	–2	–2	–2	PF	PF	Fair	2005
Thailand	2006	9	7	–3	PF	NF	Fair	2007
Fiji	2006	6	–4	2	PF	PF	No election	
Guinea	2008	–1	4	4	PF	PF	Fair	2010
Mauritania	2008	4	–2	–2	NF	NF	Fair	2009
Honduras	2009	7	7	7	PF	PF	Fair	2009
Madagascar	2009	7	6	6	PF	PF	Fair	2013
Niger	2010	–3	n/a	4	n/a	PF	Fair	2011
Egypt	2011	–3	n/a	–4	n/a	NF	Fair	2012
Maldives	2012	–	n/a	–	n/a	PF	Fair	2013
Mali	2012	7	n/a	5	n/a	PF	Fair	2013
Guinea-Bissau	2012	6	n/a	6	n/a	PF	Fair	2014
Egypt	2013	–3	n/a	–4	n/a	NF	Unfair	2014
Ukraine	2014	6	n/a	4	n/a	PF	Fair	2014
Thailand	2014	7	n/a	–3	n/a	NF	No election	
Burkina Faso	2014	0	n/a	0	n/a	PF	Fair	2015

Data Sources: Polity IV 2014 (Polity 2 score); Freedom House Freedom in the World 2015 report; Data on coup countries and years based on "successful coups" from Powell and Thyne's "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset." Data on election fairness until 2009 based on Marinov and Goemans's "Coups and Democracy," and coded by the author after 2009. Scores are "–" for missing data and "n/a" if not applicable.

thesis. While several countries registered significant positive changes in their Polity scores when comparing one year prior to the coup with the five years after (e.g., Lesotho and Mali after their 1991 coups), many countries experienced significant decreases (e.g., Gambia after 1994 and Fiji after 2006). Many others registered little or no change. On average, the countries that experienced coups between 1991 and 2009 only experienced a rise of

0.8 in Polity levels after five years.[6] This result does not support the contention that coups are a force for democratization. The pre- and post-coup trends also suggest that while some countries would not have achieved their subsequent levels of democracy without the catalyzing effects of their coups, many others would have been better off (or largely unchanged) in democratic terms had coups never taken place. This lack of any clear evidence of post-coup democratic gain is contrary to the expectations raised by the "democratic coup" thesis.

A striking feature of the Table 1 is that several countries appear multiple times. New regimes are often highly fragile, and the figures show that experiencing a coup can exacerbate this fragility. Nine countries that held post-coup elections after 1991 went on to experience at least one more coups in the wake of those elections. These multiple-coup cases were (with coup years in parentheses): Egypt (2011 and 2013), Fiji (2000 and 2006), Guinea-Bissau (1999, 2003, and 2012), Lesotho (1991 and 1994), Mali (1991 and 2012), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Niger (1996, 1999, and 2010), Sierra Leone (1992, 1996, and 1997), and Thailand (1991, 2006, and 2014). Far from ushering in stable democracy, the initial coups in the nine repeat offenders failed to usher in stable regimes of any kind.

Overall, therefore, the trends in post-coup politics after 1991 do not suggest that we live in an age of "democratic coups." While many coups are followed within five years by some form of free and fair election, the trend is far from universal. Coup leaders still often cling to power, and coups regularly give rise to new forms of autocratic rule, often with the use of facade elections. Coups are no longer the near-certain death sentence for democracy that they were during the Cold War years, but authoritarian resilience still remains a common feature of post-coup politics. The following sections examine two case studies to illustrate the role that international politics plays in fostering post-coup authoritarian consolidation: the 2013 coup in Egypt and the 2006 coup in Fiji. The former was characterized by shallow enforcement by the United States, as well as robust sponsorship by powerful states within the region. The latter case featured intense enforcement efforts by Western powers that were nonetheless offset by a surge in Chinese economic and diplomatic sponsorship. Both cases highlight the ways in which permissive and supportive international environments can reinforce the position of authoritarian rulers.

6 A *t*-test of the "1 year before" and "5 years after" Polity scores also finds that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean of these two samples, suggesting that the coups do not give rise to meaningful democratic change over time.

US Policy and Egypt's 2013 Coup

The role that international sponsorship plays in the consolidation of post-coup regimes is illustrated by the case of Egypt in 2013. The 2011 Arab uprisings in Egypt led to the swift collapse of President Hosni Mubarak's regime, after almost 30 years in power. In 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi was elected as the new president in the country's first free and fair election, but he quickly clashed with both the military and the judiciary (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2015). After public protests mobilized against Morsi, the military intervened and forcefully removed him from office in July 2013. The post-coup regime in Egypt subsequently banned the Muslim Brotherhood's main political party and arrested its key leaders (Kirkpatrick 2013). Presidential elections in 2014 brought to power the man who led the coup, former head of the armed forces General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The international response to the 2013 coup varied, reflecting a spectrum of linkages between Egypt and the actors on the international stage. Within Africa, there was widespread condemnation, and Egypt was suspended from the AU under its rules governing the unconstitutional removal of leaders from power (it was readmitted one year later) (Reuters 2013a). Yet, the international reaction elsewhere was more sanguine. Egypt's most influential international partners and donors largely backed the Sisi regime. For example, the United States, one of Egypt's biggest donors and a long-standing political ally, offered only limited criticism and punitive measures in response to the coup. In broad terms, overall US policy was supportive of the military's actions. Egypt had long been a strategically important partner in furthering several of the United States' interests in the region, including the security of Israel and containment of Islamist political movements (Chase, Hill, and Kennedy 1996; Sharp 2014). Over time, the two countries had developed extensive linkages at the highest levels of the government, forming "a network of common interests, values and practices" (Brownlee 2012, 9). The militaries of both countries also formed close ties, and many of Egypt's senior military figures, including Sisi, were trained or educated in the United States (Agence France-Presse 2013; Carlstrom 2014).

As a result of these close ties and interests, the United States remained a largely supportive ally to Egypt in the wake of the coup. Top US officials made a series of diplomatic statements designed to send clear signals of sup-

port, and also carefully framed the issue in ways that avoided triggering automatic US sanctions. Under US law, US aid money cannot be "expended to finance directly any assistance to any country whose duly elected Head of Government is deposed by military coup or decree" (Foreign Operations Appropriations Act 2000). As a result, in the wake of Morsi's forced removal from office, there was an intense debate within Washington about whether to characterize the events as a "coup" (*New York Times* 2013). Ultimately, the US administration avoided characterizing Morsi's overthrow as a coup, and thus shielded the regime from automatic and wide-ranging sanctions. US Secretary of State John Kerry described the issue as "complex and difficult," and argued that the law should be viewed in context—that is, balanced against the threat of "civil war and enormous violence" that was building before the regime change (Reuters 2013b). The White House Press Secretary explicitly cited US interests in explaining its policy response, stating that "it would not be in the best interests of the United States to immediately change our assistance programs to Egypt" (ABC News 2013).

In the weeks after Morsi's ousting, US senior officials continued sending supportive signals. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel made regular calls to Sisi to reassure him of the United States' commitment to the relationship between the two countries (Carlstrom 2014). In some of the most striking language from the US government during this period, Secretary Kerry commented on the military that "in effect, they were restoring democracy" (Bradley 2013). Kerry's public rationalization that Sisi's forceful overthrow of the elected government was necessary for the restoration of democratic rule constituted one of the clearest endorsements of the military's coup.

After the extent of the post-coup crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood became clear, including the brutal assault on protesters in Rabaa Square in August 2013, the United States did restrict some military assistance. Yet, these actions were primarily based on criticism of the use of repressive violence post-coup, rather than a reaction to the coup itself. The United States withheld delivery of military hardware, including helicopters and warplanes, as well as aid in the amount of US$260 million (while leaving counterterrorism assistance and financial support for border security and military training in place). However, the administration also clearly signaled the temporary nature of these restrictions, with one senior official quoted as saying, "this is not meant to be permanent; this is meant to be the opposite" (Gordon and Lander 2013). In November 2013, a month after the restrictions were put in place, Kerry made a high-profile visit to Cairo, where he met with General Sisi and praised the military for pursuing its declared "roadmap" to democracy. Kerry also signaled the US's sympathetic position, stating that the cut in assistance "is not a punishment," and calling it a "small issue" compared to the two countries' common interests (DeYoung 2013).

In March 2015, a year after Sisi assumed power through flawed elections, the United States lifted its sanctions on arms transfers. The United States made no effort to suggest that Egypt had made the kind of democratic progress stipulated in the conditions for lifting the sanctions. Rather, the decision was justified by reference to national security interests—that is, the timing coincided with deteriorating security conditions in the region, including violence in the Sinai, the rise of the Islamic State (IS), and the decline of security in Libya (Baker 2015). In sum, US policy toward Egypt, which included numerous signals in support of the coup's leaders, fell far short of democratic enforcement.

Egypt's post-coup trajectory was also influenced by the unconditional diplomatic and material sponsorship of other important actors in the region. Saudi Arabia quickly commended the Egyptian military for managing to "save Egypt" while also issuing a statement of congratulations to the new interim leader, Adly Mansour (Stuster 2016). Saudi Arabia had been a long-standing supporter of the Mubarak regime, and viewed the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to the Saudi's preferred model of political control both domestically and within the region. A strong Muslim Brotherhood administration in Egypt challenged Saudi Arabia's desire to be the leading power in the Middle East, and also offered an alternative model of election-based Islamist rule that was viewed in Riyadh as a potential threat to monarchical rule at home (Hassan 2015; Ennis and Momani 2013).

Within a week of the coup, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates jointly pledged a total of US$12 billion to Egypt (Khan and Lebaron 2015). The Saudi regime had significantly reduced aid to Egypt during Morsi's presidency, so the swift offer of a new and generous economic package starkly illustrated the political nature of the assistance (Worth 2013). Furthermore, the countries attached no conditionality to the aid package, and redoubled their efforts after Sisi's election to president, offering another US$12 billion package in 2015 (Kirkpatrick 2015). In the two years after the coup, total Gulf aid to Egypt amounted to US$24 billion, compared to US$2.8 billion from the United States (Wehrey 2015, 76). The package offered crucial support at a time when Egypt was struggling economically and sought to finance its expensive public subsidies despite limited domestic economic productivity (Malik and McCormick 2013). Yet, while the eco-

nomic support from the Gulf helped address Egypt's chronic economic problems, it also sent a clear message to the international community—that is, any punitive action taken by Egypt's Western donors (including the United States) would be offset by its regional allies. Thus, the Gulf aid also served to undercut any leverage that Western actors may have wished to apply to Egypt's early post-coup trajectory.

Egypt thus received a broad range of diplomatic and material support from its most important and influential allies in the wake of the 2013 coup. Even though it was subjected to some enforcement measures, they were temporary and mostly either half-hearted (e.g., US policies) or relatively pain-free (e.g., AU's year-long suspension). By contrast, Egypt received influential diplomatic and material sponsorship from its Gulf allies in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Furthermore, Egypt's post-coup leaders were praised and kept afloat by its most influential donors, facilitating the consolidation of authoritarian rule in the ensuing months and years. The following section explores a similar dynamic in external support for post-coup authoritarianism in Fiji.

Election-Free Politics in Post-Coup Fiji

In 2006, the head of the armed forces, Commodore Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama, implemented a successful coup to overthrow the Fijian government. Bainimarama's post-coup actions were unique in Fiji's coup-laden history in that he resisted domestic and international pressures for democratic transition and refused to hold elections until 2014 (elections he comfortably won). The analysis below explores Fiji's post-coup political trajectory, and highlights, in particular, the ways in which supportive international influences helped Bainimarama consolidate power even in the face of vocal and costly international condemnation.

Formerly a British colony, Fiji achieved independence in 1970 but struggled to form a stable political system due to tensions between the country's indigenous community and Fiji Indian population. Fiji's earlier coups reflected unease within the indigenous Fijian community at the prospect of Fiji Indian involvement in the government; both the 1987 and 2000 coups removed Fiji Indian leaders (Firth 2012). The 2006 coup differed from the earlier instances in that the military stepped in to remove a government that was led and supported by the indigenous Fijian community. The rationale for the coup was predicated on a stated desire to move beyond the traditional ethnic tensions within the country. Bainimarama justified the coup on the basis that Fijian politics needed to be transformed to eradicate ethnic-based politics and lead to a new political culture based on multiracialism, good governance, and freedom from corruption. It was presented as a coup to end the "coup culture" and usher in a new political landscape free of ethnic divisions (Fraenkel and Firth 2009).

However, despite initial promises of a "roadmap" to free and fair elections, Bainimarama retained his position as prime minister, without elections, until 2014 (Fraenkel 2009a). This eight-year abrogation of democratic rule occurred in spite of extensive domestic and international pressures for reform. The international reaction to the coup was swift and decisive. Fiji's largest international donors—Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union—all were forceful critics of the coup. Australia and New Zealand both quickly imposed a range of sanctions, including robust travel bans on key governmental officials, as well as the suspension of new development aid. New Zealand imposed visa restrictions on Fijian workers, canceled military training for Fijian soldiers, and halted the approval of new development assistance schemes (Lal 2007). In April 2007, the European Union (EU), under the auspices of the ACP-EC Contonou Agreement,[7] opened consultations with the post-coup Fijian government. The EU sought assurances that there would be democratic elections before March 2009, as well as evidence of respect for human rights, rule of law, and judicial independence. In response to sustained international pressure, Bainimarama made a public commitment in October 2007 that elections would be held in March 2009, in line with international demands. However, by mid-2008, he abandoned this commitment, and in doing so, Fiji became one of the few countries in the post–Cold War period to eschew elections after a coup (Fraenkel and Firth 2009).

Fiji's experience suggests both domestic and international sources of post-coup authoritarian resilience. In domestic terms, the new regime sought to combine its efforts at co-optation with strategies designed to marginalize critical voices and institutions. Bainimarama relied in part on the acquiescence of the Fijian president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, who addressed the nation and endorsed the coup. Iloilo stated that Bainimarama acted in the interests of the nation and that the coup was "valid in law" (Fraenkel 2006, 57). Bainimarama also succeeded in recruiting senior figures in the Fijian Labour Party, which largely represented the Fiji Indian community. They were

7 The Contonou Agreement is a development and poverty reduction agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States.

willing to support Bainimarama on the grounds that his coup ousted a government that was deeply antagonistic to Fiji Indian interests (Fraenkel 2006, 45).

The regime also moved against potential threats emanating from both the elites and the larger public. It marginalized and ultimately disbanded the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), one of the major institutions of political authority and legitimacy for the ethnic Fijian chieftain system (Norton 2009, 97–98; Pearlman 2012). It also significantly increased the use of repression on civil and political liberties. The constitution was abrogated and a state of emergency was introduced that lasted until 2012, all under the guise of "Public Emergency Regulations" (Fraenkel 2009b: Fraenkel 2012). Media freedom was strictly curtailed, the right to assembly was restricted, and opposition actors were targeted with politically motivated court cases. Over time, efforts at elite co-optation were abandoned, and two former prime ministers were pursued in the courts, sending a clear signal of the limits of political opposition (Human Rights Watch 2012; Fiji One 2014; *The Telegraph* 2012).

Bainimarama's domestically focused efforts to consolidate power were not pursued in isolation, as he also sought to leverage the international environment in support of his rule. Fiji's authoritarian resilience can, in part, be explained by the diversity of its international linkage spectrum, which included ties to both its close Western donors and also non-Western powers, especially China. Fiji's links with China provided it with a diplomatic lifeline when Western actors began to exert democratizing pressure. Fiji was the first Pacific Island country to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (in 1975). Additionally, Fiji is a public advocate of the "One China" policy, although it retains some diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Yang 2011). Fiji also sought to strengthen ties with China after each of its previous coups. This strategy—dubbed the "Look North" policy—complemented China's increasing interests in acting as a regional power within the Asia Pacific (Tarte 2010).

After the 2006 coup, Fiji actively sought to cultivate Chinese assistance, and Bainimarama immediately moved to reinvigorate its Look North policy (*New York Times* 2007). China responded by offering support rather than condemnation, and used a combination of tools to bolster and shield the post-coup regime in Fiji. The Chinese Foreign Ministry's Deputy Director General, Deng Hongbo, not only explicitly supported the post-coup government but also offered a barely disguised criticism of Fiji's Western critics: "We have always respected Fiji's status as an independent nation and we have called on the other countries to do the same and reconsider their attitudes towards Fiji and the current situation in the country" (*Fiji Times* 2007).

China supplemented diplomatic support with increased economic assistance. In 2005, the year before the coup, China pledged only US$1 million to Fiji. In 2007, the year after the coup, aid and loan pledges jumped to US$167 million (Hanson 2008). The overall shift in Chinese financial support to Fiji after 2006 fundamentally changed Fiji's international economic relations. In the years leading up to and including 2006, Australia and the EU alternated as Fiji's largest donor; China was a negligible player. Between 2006 and 2013, however, China was Fiji's largest donor, pushing Australia into second place (Lowy Institute 2015; *The Australian* 2015). China thus helped "fill the donor void" created by Western sanctions (*The Australian* 2009). Consistent with Beijing's global aid and development policy, China refrained from publicly criticizing the Fijian government for its lack of democracy and did not make economic support conditional on election-related progress (Halper 2010).

Fiji's diplomatic sponsorship in the wake of the coup was also significant. Fiji received a significant and high-profile visit from Vice President Xi Jinping in February 2009. At the time, Xi was widely (and correctly) expected to become China's next leader, and his visit thus amounted to an endorsement of the post-coup regime from the Chinese government. Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks show that the Australian government sought to prevent Xi's visit as part of a larger appeal to jointly isolate the Bainimarama regime. Instead, Xi met directly with Bainimarama and signed off on a number of development assistance deals (McLean 2011). Although the diplomatic reports suggest that Xi did urge Bainimarama to hold elections, no conditions were placed on the finalized assistance deals (WikiLeaks 2009a, 2009b). By 2013, Bainimarama was publicly expressing gratitude to China for development assistance in a wide range of areas (Bainimarama 2014).

Chinese motives were not purely altruistic or normative. Fiji became a focal point in the "soft balancing" policies at work in the South Pacific region. China carefully cultivated economic and diplomatic relations with Fiji to balance against US, Australian, and New Zealand influence in the region (Lanteigne 2012). Consequently, China's support for the Bainimarama regime should not be seen as an exercise in ideologically driven autocracy promotion (Tansey 2016b). Yet, China's unconditional and increasing support for Fiji during the crucial years after the 2006 coup was highly significant for authoritarian resilience. By giving Bainimarama diplomatic and material assistance, China bolstered the regime at precisely the time when its Western partners were seeking to put

pressure on it. Chinese policy both reinforced Bainimarama's claims of legitimacy by pointing to the support of a powerful international ally and softened the economic pain associated with Western sanctions. Consequently, the story of post-coup authoritarian resilience in Fiji is not purely a story of "strong-man rule" and domestic political maneuvering. Fiji benefited from robust international sponsorship in a way that compensated for its dependence on Western actors, and Bainimarama's post-coup tenure was bolstered and shielded by his non-Western international allies.

Conclusion

The politics of post–Cold War coups are systematically different from what had gone before. During the Cold War, coups were highly likely to initiate long-term and closed authoritarian rule. By contrast, recent coups are much more likely to be followed by competitive elections. Yet, authoritarian resilience remains a feature of post-coup politics, and international sponsorship plays an important role in facilitating post-coup authoritarianism.

In this article, I explored the relationship between coups and autocracy in greater detail, finding evidence that questions the likelihood that coups contribute to long-term democratization. My findings do not contradict existing studies that demonstrate that post–Cold War coups are more likely to be followed by competitive elections. Rather, I showed that while most post-1991 coups are indeed followed by competitive elections within five years, many struggle to solidify the necessary democratic institutions. Furthermore, the move toward post-coup elections is not universal. Post-coup authoritarianism is a common feature, and it is thus a mistake to think we live in an age of "democratic coups."

I also argued that the variation in post-coup trajectories can be explained in significant part by the variation in the international environment. Although there has been a considerable increase in democratizing pressures from Western countries since the end of the Cold War, even Western countries are willing to relax democratic conditionality policies in pursuit of alternative interests. Western democracies sometimes refrain from using their leverage, and support autocratic post-coup regimes when such actions best align with their strategic goals. Thus, even post-coup states that are economically dependent on Western democracies do not necessarily face pro-democratic pressures in the wake of unconstitutional seizures of power.

I also showed that international autocratic sponsors help consolidate authoritarianism in a number of ways—for example, legitimizing coup leaders and their actions, blocking international sanctions, and offering direct material assistance to bolster the capacity of post-coup authorities. The post-coup authoritarian consolidation in Fiji also illustrates how autocratic sponsorship (e.g., from China) can significantly constrain, or even offset, the influence of democracy promoters. Acknowledging and addressing the role of international autocratic sponsors is essential if we are to gain a full and proper understanding of the variety of post-coup political trajectories in the post–Cold War world.

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