Coup agency and prospects for democracy

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Coup Agency and Prospects for Democracy

RESEARCH NOTE

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This research note introduces new global data on military coups. Conventional aggregate data so far have conflated two distinct types of coups. Military interventions by leading officers are coups "from above," characterized by political power struggles within authoritarian elite coalitions where officers move against civilian elites, executive incumbents, and their loyal security personnel. By contrast, power grabs by officers from the lower and middle ranks are coups "from below," where military personnel outside of the political elite challenge sitting incumbents, their loyalists, and the regime itself. Disaggregating coup types offers leverage to revise important questions about the causes and consequences of military intervention in politics. This research note illustrates that coup attempts from the top of the military hierarchy are much more likely to be successful than coups from the lower and middle ranks of the military hierarchy. Moreover, coups from the top recalibrate authoritarian elite coalitions and serve to sustain autocratic rule; they rarely produce an opening for a democratic transition. Successful coups from below, by contrast, can result in the breakdown of authoritarian regimes and generate an opening for democratic transitions.

Esta nota de investigación presenta nuevos datos globales sobre los golpes militares. Hasta el momento, los datos agregados convencionales han combinado dos tipos distintos de golpes de Estado. Las intervenciones militares de los principales oficiales son golpes "desde arriba," caracterizados por luchas de poder político dentro de coaliciones de élite autoritarias donde los oficiales actúan contra las élites civiles, los jefes del poder ejecutivo y su personal de seguridad leal. Por el contrario, las tomas de poder por parte de los oficiales de los rangos inferiores y medios son golpes "desde abajo," en los que el personal militar ajeno a la élite política desafía a los titulares en ejercicio, a sus leales y al propio régimen. El desglose de los tipos de golpe ofrece una ventaja para analizar cuestiones importantes sobre las causas y las consecuencias de la intervención militar en la política. Esta nota de investigación ilustra que los intentos de golpe de Estado desde la cúspide de la jerarquía militar tienen muchas más probabilidades de éxito que los golpes desde los rangos inferiores y medios. Además, los golpes de Estado desde la cúspide recalibran las coaliciones autoritarias de la élite y sirven para sostener un gobierno autocrático; rara vez, producen una apertura para una transición democrática. Por el contrario, los golpes de Estado "desde abajo" pueden provocar el colapso de los regímenes autoritarios y generar una apertura para las transiciones democráticas.

Cet exposé de recherche introduit de nouvelles données mondiales sur les coups d'État militaires. Les données agrégées conventionnelles faisaient jusqu'ici un amalgame entre deux types distincts de coups d'État. Les interventions militaires menées par des officiers de haut rang sont des coups d'État « par le haut », qui sont caractérisés par des luttes de pouvoir politique au sein de coalitions d'élites autoritaires où les officiers agissent contre les élites civiles, les dirigeants en place et le personnel de sécurité qui leur est loyal. En revanche, les prises de pouvoir par des officiers des rangs inférieurs et intermédiaires sont des coups d'État « par le bas » dans le cadre desquels des militaires n'appartenant pas à l'élite politique, s'opposent aux personnes en place, à celles qui leur sont loyales et au régime en lui-même. La désagrégation de ces différents types de coups d'État offre l'avantage de pouvoir réétudier d'importantes questions sur les causes et les conséquences de l'intervention militaire en politique. Cet exposé de recherche illustre le fait que les tentatives de coup d'État par les hauts rangs de la hiérarchie militaire sont bien plus susceptibles de réussir que les tentatives de coup d'État par les rangs inférieurs et intermédiaires de cette hiérarchie. De plus, les coups d'État par le haut recalibrent les coalitions d'élites autoritaires et contribuent à maintenir le régime autocratique; ils produisent rarement d'ouverture pour une transition démocratique. À l'inverse, les tentatives de coup d'État par le bas qui réussissent peuvent entraîner l'effondrement du régime autoritaire et générer une ouverture pour des transitions démocratiques.

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The past decade has seen a substantial surge in research on military coups d'état. This lively research agenda focuses primarily on the causes and consequences of military intervention in politics. Systematic studies have been made possible by major advances in cross-national data collection that have expanded the empirical playing field across time and beyond regional clusters of countries. This research note introduces new data on military coups. Building on prior data collection efforts, the *Coup Agency and Mechanisms* (CAM) dataset covers all countries in the period 1950–2017.[1] In addition to cross-validating the overall universe of coups and coup attempts reported in existing datasets (primarily Powell and Thyne 2011), CAM specifically aims for a greater level of granularity and detail with respect to information on specific coup events, including on coup agents, the level of violence associated with coup attempts, post-coup incumbent trajectories, and the mechanisms and resources used for coup plots. Such an internal expansion of coup data gives scholars of military intervention important leverage in addressing ongoing debates in the study of the causes and consequences of military coups.

This research note makes two contributions. First, we discuss our data collection process, describing how CAM builds on—and differs from—existing coup data. We particularly focus on a key innovation in the CAM data, namely an agency variable which identifies the position of coup plotters in the military and political hierarchy and systematically differentiates between what we refer to as *combat officer* vs. *elite officer* coups. Second, we illustrate the theoretical value and empirical validity of this agency variable by exploring the effects of different coup agents on the prospects of post-coup regime change. We show that agency matters not only for the likelihood of coup success, but also for post-coup regime trajectories.

Typically, when conventional accounts of military coups have invoked the military hierarchy, it has been to aggregate the interests of "the" military along assumed interests of the organization's leadership (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2009; Bove and Rivera 2015; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2017). We believe these accounts conflate two distinct types of coups: elite officer coups plotted by senior officers who are part of the political elite, and combat officer coups attempted by members of militaries in the middle and lower ranks. Drawing on prior analyses of coup agency (Kandeh 2004; Singh 2014; Albrecht and Eibl 2018; De Bruin 2018, 2020), the CAM data help sharpen the perspective on different coup agents and hence different driving forces, causes, and consequences of military coups d'état.

Military interventions by elite officers are coups "from above," characterized by power struggles within elite coalitions. In such power grabs, coup-plotting senior officers move against civilian elites, executive incumbents, and security personnel loyal to the incumbent leader. If they occur in autocratic regimes, elite officer coups recalibrate authoritarian elite coalitions and serve to sustain authoritarian rule; they rarely produce an opening for a democratic transition. By contrast, interventions by officers from outside of the political elite coalition—what we conceptualize as combat officer coups—are coups "from below," where military personnel typically from lower and middle officer ranks not only challenge sitting incumbents and their loyalists, but the regime coalition itself. Successful combat officer coups in autocracies result in the breakdown of regimes rather than their recalibration. This may lead to the establishment of a new authoritarian regime coalition but might also generate an opening for a democratic transition.

The remainder of this research note is organized in three parts. We first introduce the CAM dataset and discuss our coding strategies, differences with existing datasets, and some illustrative observations. The subsequent section provides the background against which we develop our argument and advances our expectations about the relationship between coup agency and the prospects of democratization. In the third part, we test these propositions by modelling the likelihood of post-coup democratic and adverse regime change. An online appendix contains additional robustness tests based on our reanalysis of prior models in the debate on coups and democratization which support our contention that coup agency matters.[2] We conclude by spelling out some broader implications of our findings.

Coup Agency and Mechanisms: The Data

This section introduces the CAM dataset and discusses its core features, definitions, and selective descriptive statistics. The CAM data comprise global episodes of military coups and coup attempts, covering all countries in the period 1950–2017. Military coups d'état are *unconstitutional and overt attempts by officers from regular armed forces to replace sitting executive incumbents.*[3] We make available these new data on coup incidents in the context of a recent surge in scholarly research on military coups largely catalyzed by improvements in systematic data collection.

The work by Powell and Thyne (2011)—in the following PT11—has been groundbreaking for global coup research in that it has offered an *external expansion* of prior data collections.[4] PT11 has improved our empirical understanding of military coups in two meaningful ways: first, PT11 has contributed to a temporal and regional expansion to include coup incidents since 1950 across the globe. This has allowed scholars to make broad arguments about military coups and offers an advancement over studies using a limited time frame (Jackman 1987; Johnson, Slater, and McGowan 1984) or regional samples of countries in Africa (Jackman 1978; Johnson, Slater, and McGowan 1984; Jenkins and Kposowa 1992; Roessler 2011), Latin America (Thyne 2010; Rittinger and Cleary 2013; Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán 2014), and the Middle East (Albrecht 2015; Albrecht and Eibl 2018). A second major contribution is the increased validity of global coup data accomplished by the PT11 dataset, consolidating fourteen prior datasets (Luttwak 1969; Thompson 1973; Kennedy 1974; Janowitz 1977; Taylor and Jodice 1983; Ferguson 1987; O'Kane 1987; Finer 1988; Lunde 1991; Banks 2001; Moreno et al. 2004; Belkin and Schofer 2005; Marshall and Marshall 2007; McGowan 2003).

The CAM dataset builds on the efforts of PT11 and other data collections to catalyze the *internal expansion* of systematic coup episode data. The ultimate aim is to generate insights into the characteristics of individual coup incidents beyond what has been coded in previous efforts, namely coup occurrence and outcome (success vs. failure regarding the attempted overthrow of a sitting incumbent). We begin our effort with the whodunnit-question to generate

ful comments. All remaining errors are ours. The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Dataverse at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq and at https://militarycoups.org

[1] The data are available at https://militarycoups.org and are updated as new coups occur.

[2] The Online Appendix is available here: https://militarycoups.org/OA.pdf.

[3] Such military organizations include the functional units (ground forces, navy, air force) of regular standing armies and standing militarized special forces—such as national guards or presidential guards. We exclude reserve officers and members of irregular pro-government militias.

[4] We use the updated data of Powell and Thyne 2011, available here: www.jonathanmpowell.com/coup-detat-dataset.html.

Table 1. Coup Datasets Compared[5]

CAM (1950–2017)	
Coups	477
Combat officer	286
Success	229
Powell and Thyne (1950–2017)	
Coups	475
Success	235
Marshall and Marshall (1950–2017)	
Coups	530
Success	210
Cline Center (1946–2005)	
Military coups	511
Successful/realized	227
Singh (1950–2000)	
Coups	471
Combat officer[6]	197
Success	238
De Bruin (1950–2017)	
Coups	409
Combat officer[7]	189
Success	207

knowledge on the agents behind specific coup plots. CAM identifies the leaders of coup plots and systematically codes coup plotters' relationship to the existing political regime. Moreover, CAM will include additional information on the identity of plotters—such as their ideological orientations, ethnic background, and military branch affiliation—along with insights on the mechanics of coup plots, including incumbent trajectories after successful coup attempts, the level of violence, and the organizational and material resources deployed for coup attempts even though we do not discuss these features in this note.

For our initial coding effort, we began with a candidate list taken from PT11 and cross-compared these data with the Systemic Peace dataset (Marshall and Marshall 2019) to identify an initial list of candidates for each country (based on the 2018 versions of each dataset). Where the PT11 candidate list excluded a specific incident in the Systematic Peace data, we generally followed PT11 unless other sources contradicted their decision and corroborating evidence could be found. We then performed keyword searches in the ProQuest Newspaper Archive and Google to identify possible coups not appearing in the original candidate list for each country within the relevant time period. To corroborate coup events, investigators relied on the ProQuest Newspaper Archive and other search engines and databases to find contemporaneous news accounts and, where news articles were unavailable or additional information was needed, academic books and journal articles. From these sources, we hand-coded an agency variable distinguishing between elite officers from the upper echelons of the military hierarchy who are part of the political elite, and combat officers primarily from the middle and lower ranks who are political outsiders. Our coding rationale is explained in greater detail below.

Table 1 compares CAM to five existing datasets. While the CAM data show significant overlap with PT11, the overall numbers disguise some differences. Taken together, our coding process led us to exclude 34 coups from the PT11 list and to include 37 other events not contained in the data (see table A1 in the appendix).[8]

Variation in coding decisions between CAM and PT11 stems from several factors. For one, we added several coup episodes where we had enough evidence to suggest they met our operating definition of *military coups d'état as unconstitutional and overt attempts by military officers to replace sitting executive incumbents*.[9] For another, we dismissed a small number of coup events coded in PT11 owing to the lack of sources providing evidence for reported episodes—in particular, where we have been unable to verify the identity of coup plotters. Third, a few incidents were dismissed where the event was not directed at overthrowing the government and thus constituted a mutiny—an uprising within the military typically directed against senior officers—rather than a coup attempt, where plotters are motivated to take over political power. Fourth, we are interested in *military* coups and therefore dismissed events led by nonmilitary personnel. Fifth, we coded as successful coups only those episodes where plotters held power for ten days rather than seven. This is to recognize the often uncertain transition period in the immediate aftermath of coup attempts, where not only domestic political dynamics but also international reactions influence coup success. Our aim was to make sure we coded only successful coups where plotters have been able to consolidate their take-over of power.

We proceeded to generate an agency variable to identify plotters according to the nature of their relationship with the political incumbency. We believe there is value in disaggregating the military apparatus, assuming significant differences regarding both motivations and capacities for plotters to engage in coup attempts. Our attempt was inspired by previous works interested in disaggregating plotters by their position within the military hierarchy, including by Kandeh (2004), Singh (2014), Albrecht (2015), and De Bruin (2018, 2020). Naunihal Singh's (2014) work has been particularly instructive in that he reflects on different motivations and capacities of coup plotters. In his coding strategy, Singh uses three levels of coup agency. These are "challengers from the top (usually generals)," challengers from the middle "mounted by majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels, the officers in charge of the actual fighting units in the military," and challengers from the bottom "mounted by enlisted men, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers up to the rank of captain" (Singh 2014, 9–10).

In contrast to these efforts, we utilize a dichotomous measure of coup agency, which relies on coup leaders' relationship with the political elite. Based on these criteria, we distinguish between *elite officers* and *combat officers*. Elite officer coups are conducted by leading military officers and government officials hailing from the military including ministers of defense, general chiefs-of-staff, chiefs-of-staff and/or leaders of armed force branches or functional military units (army, air force, navy, republican guard), as well as members of ruling military councils and juntas. All other coups constitute combat officer coups. The core difference between elite and combat officer coups is that the first category is led by *political insiders* of high military rank. Combat officer coups, in turn, are attempted by *political outsiders* for whom military service remains a professional job rather

[5] PT11 and Systemic Peace are updated beyond 2017. For the sake of comparability, we limit the comparison to cases before 2017. The CAM data will be updated periodically as new information becomes available.

[6] Singh uses the terminology of coups from the "top," "middle," and "bottom" of the military. This number reflects the sum of coups from the bottom and middle (Singh 2014, 66).

[7] De Bruin (2019) exclusively relies on rank to code coup agency. The number reflects all coups by colonels, majors, and below, and is tabulated from her dataset.

[8] See also the Coup Agency and Mechanisms (CAM) Codebook, version 03/2020, and the Coup Agency and Mechanisms (CAM) Coup Episodes Guide, version 03/2020 at https://militarycoups.org

[9] Individual incumbents include presidents, prime ministers, monarchs, or junta leaders. For our coding decision, we determined whether office holders had the power to make executive decisions at the time of the coup attempt.

than a stake in political power. Those officers may still enjoy social and economic privileges compared to the majority of a country's population, which prevents us from adopting terminology associated with socio-economic outsiders, such as "subaltern coups" (Kandeh 2004). As a consequence of our coding strategy, combat officer coups may feature higher-ranking officers, including in the ranks of colonel and general, as long as they are not political insiders. Our coding decision is thus different from previous works that have used military rank as the sole criterion to code coup agency (Singh 2014; De Bruin 2020).

Empirically, for instance, forty-nine of the coups we classified as combat officer coups included a general among the plotters according to De Bruin's (2020) data; conversely, forty coups we coded as elite officer coups did not include a general officer among the plotters according to the same data. Examples of such cases include the 1952 coup in Egypt (which included General Naguib, but was led by Colonel Nasser), as well as the 1954 coup in the same country (which was led by Colonel Nasser to marginalize General Naguib). We code the first as a combat officer coup (despite the presence of a general), and the second as an elite officer coup (despite being led by a colonel) because Nasser in 1954 was a member of the military junta despite his lower rank in the military hierarchy.[10]

Our rationale to depart from exclusively rank-based differences between officers is straightforward. Empirically, many developing countries have experienced inflationary tendencies in promotion patterns, with military apparatuses featuring a large number of senior officers in higher ranks. Yet, we remain ultimately interested in distinguishing between coup attempts by officers from within political elites and coup plots by officers for whom military service is primarily a job, defined by a monthly salary rather than a stake in political power. This is the distinction reflected in our coding of coup agents. Elite officer coups are staged by military officers who are simultaneously part of the political elite, while combat officer coups are executed by members of the military who remain excluded from political power.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographic distribution of military coup attempts across the globe. Not surprisingly, our data corroborate previous findings that coups have been most prevalent in Sub-Sahara Africa and Latin America, while Asia and the Middle East and North Africa have also experienced a substantial number of coups. Europe has experienced comparatively fewer coups after World War II. The data also reveal some interesting similarities and differences across world regions. While success rates of coup attempts are remarkably similar, world regions show significant differences regarding coup agents. Chances of coups by combat officers are particularly high in sub-Sahara Africa (65.7 percent) followed by the MENA region (61.5 percent) and the Americas and Caribbean (57.8 percent). In turn, Asian countries appear to be at a higher risk of coups from within the political elite, with a mere 45.2 percent of coup attempts originating from within the lower ranks.

Figure 2 illustrates success rates of coup attempts across time and agency. The data reveal intriguing insights into the chance that coups will lead to the ousting of political incumbents. Aggregate success rates give rise to the expectation that coup plotters have a roughly 50 percent chance to succeed (Lachapelle 2020). Yet, success in coup plots is not random. As our data show, elite officers are significantly more likely to prove victorious (in 76.4 percent of coup attempts) than combat officers (29 percent). Another observation from our data is that, despite meager success rates, the share of combat-officer coups among all coups has increased in the past two decades. Since 2000, combat officers have attempted 36 of 54 coups (66.7 percent), compared to a share of 59.9 percent of all coups.

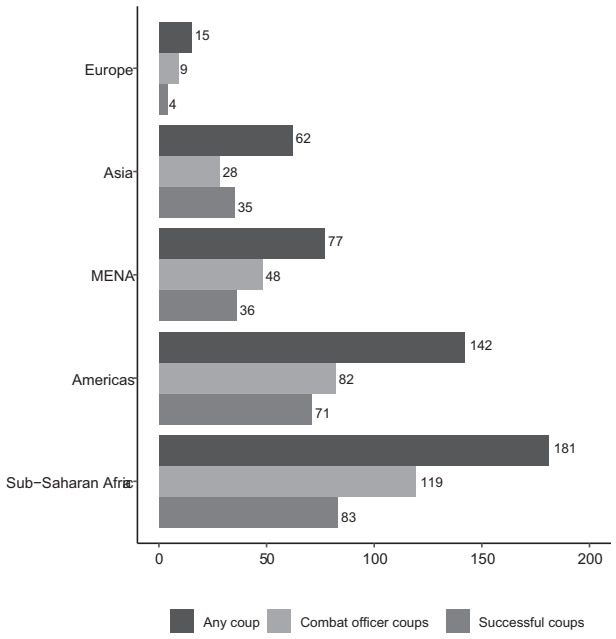

Figure 1. Coups by Region.

These findings remind us that elite officers have superior capacities to coordinate for coup plots compared to their junior colleagues (Albrecht and Eibl 2018). In that same vein, Singh (2014) has argued before that coups attempted by low-ranking officers are less successful because they lack the "soft power" to make a coup appear a fait accompli. The differences in success rates support these suggestions about the mechanisms of military coups and encourage us to review accounts about the causes and driving forces of military coup attempts, but also our understanding of the consequences of military coups for political change.

The Effects of Coup Agency on Regime Trajectories

Does coup agency matter in terms of the consequences of military intervention? Are coups plotted and executed by combat officers different from those perpetrated by elite officers? In this section, we explore our data to show that coup agency does indeed make a difference empirically. We illustrate the effects of coup agency by drawing on a central discussion in the extant literature on military coups, namely the debate on the regime-level outcomes of military intervention in terms of democratization and regime change more generally (Marinov and Goemans 2014; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; Miller 2016; Thyne and Powell 2016). We show that, while successful combat officer coups are sometimes associated with democratization, elite officer coups promote adverse regime change. These initial findings strongly suggest that taking agency systematically into account will have a major impact on the direction of ongoing discussions in the study of military coups.

Coup Agency and Regime Change

The research program on military coups has generated distinct perspectives on coups' likely outcomes for political regimes. Case-study research has produced mixed

[10] In total, De Bruin's (2020) data contain information on 381 of our 477 coups. Table A2 in the appendix lists the coding differences between CAM and De Bruin when it comes to coup agency.

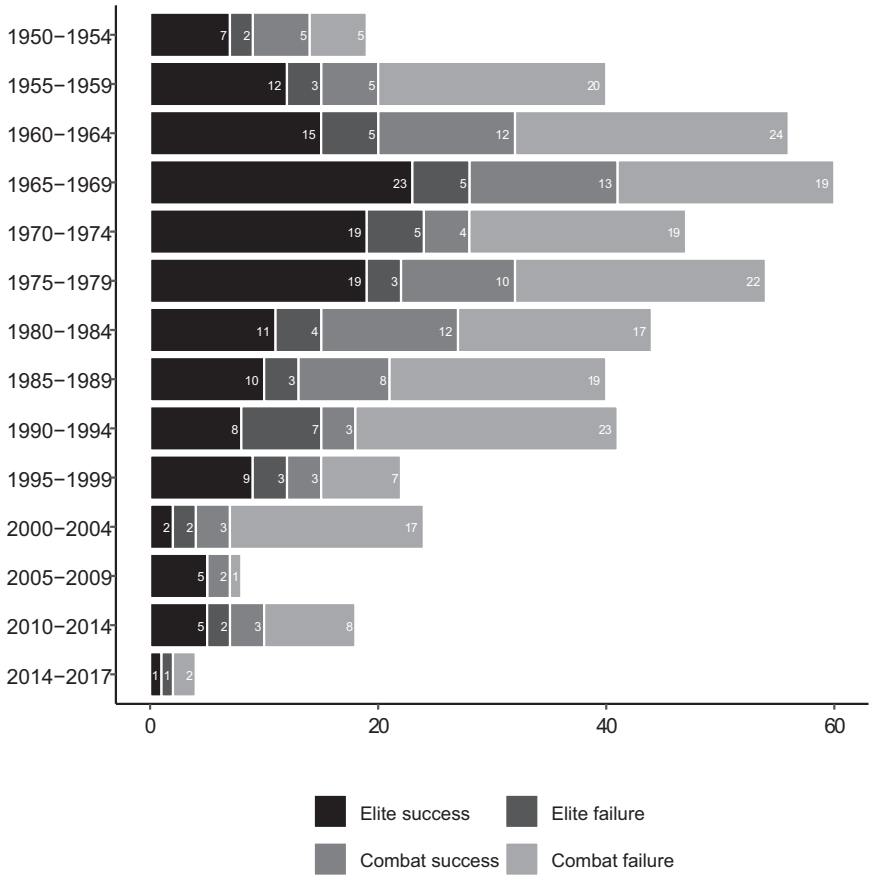

Figure 2. Success Rates for Different Coup Types.

results on the question whether coups serve as "midwives" or "gravediggers" of democratic transition and consolidation (Kuehn 2017; see also Bou Nassif 2017). Some scholars have been inspired by the simultaneous occurrence of coups and popular mass uprisings, exemplified in historical examples, such as the 1974 "Carnation Revolution" in Portugal, and more recent events during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in Egypt (Varol 2012), or the 2019 protests in Algeria and Sudan. In this argument, military restraint in the face of mass mobilization is a necessary condition for the success of revolutions (Pion-Berlin, Esparza, and Grisham 2012; Barany 2016; Koehler 2017). The argument also often rests, at least implicitly, on the premise of "military-opposition alliances" (Nepstad 2011, 485) and hence a congruence of preferences among pro-democracy protestors and coup plotters, rendering the latter a force for pro-democracy regime trajectories.

Other scholars, however, have emphasized the unruly, unconstitutional nature of military power grabs. Marcos Degaut (2019) cautions that, in revolutionary situations, the interests of revolutionaries and officers do not necessarily align. Similarly, Amy Austin Holmes and Kevin Koehler (2020) use public opinion data to show that even in cases where the military overthrows an unpopular ruler in the context of wide-spread opposition against the regime, rejection of the status quo does not necessarily imply popular support for military intervention. Andrew Miller (2010) argued that coups in sub-Sahara Africa may have led to a phase of political opening immediately after the take-over by military officers; yet, they failed to produce political stability, economic development, and democratic consolidation. Albert Trithart (2013) hints at the erosion of democratic procedures and institutions as a precursor of coups. Oisín Tansey (2016) most forcefully argues that successful coup plotters may in fact respond to international calls for democracy to establish democratic elections, only to reemerge as authoritarian leaders in the long run.

Systematic studies drawing on large-N coup event data have also produced somewhat inconclusive findings. Paul Collier (2009) established the contention that "coups and the threat of coups can be a significant weapon in fostering democracy." Empirically examining this contention, Clayton Thyne and Jonathan Powell show that coups can present a "window of opportunity for the promotion of democratization" (Thyne and Powell 2016, 194; see also Chacha and Powell 2017), even though they are careful to highlight the negative consequences of coups in terms of democratic stability. Nikolay Marinov and Hein Goemans (2014) hint at a possible mechanism linking coups to democracy by evoking increased Western pressure to comply with the strong democracy norm in the post-Cold War international order. At the same time, their study introduces a caveat to the proposition that coups promote democracy. They find support for the period after 1991, while coups during the Cold War era do not appear to generate democracy-promoting effects.[11]

[11] It is difficult to compare the findings of Marinov and Goemans (2014) directly to the arguments advanced by others in the literature since their definition of a coup diverges substantially. In particular, Marinov and Goemans find that

Somewhat counterintuitively, however, Grewal and Kureshi (2019) find that successful coup plotters against democratically elected incumbents are less likely to justify their power grabs through democratic elections, echoing Nancy Bermeo's finding that "promissory coups"—where plotters promise to defend democracy—rarely ever lead to democracy (Bermeo 2016). Michael Miller (2012) also reaches beyond simplistic explanations by arguing that coups can make democratization more likely, in particular if they were preceded by a period of economic development. Derpanopoulos et al. (2016) most directly dismiss the democracy-hypothesis and suggest that post-coup regimes tend to be characterized by increased repression and authoritarianism.[12] And finally, Koehler and Albrecht (2021) find that coups triggered by popular uprisings tend to be authoritarian "roll-back coups" in that they are less likely to lead to democratization than coups occurring without prior mass mobilization.

Taking coup agency into account systematically can help reconcile these inconclusive findings. As we will show, the democratizing effect of military coups is exclusively due to combat officer coups, while elite officer coups are associated with adverse regime change, that is, the replacement of one autocratic regime by another. We thus suggest empirically disaggregating the phenomenon of military coups to analyze what are discrete types of coups with distinct effects for regime types: low- and mid-ranking military officers perform coup attempts from outside of the established political elite. Such low-ranking officers differ from elite officers regarding both their motivations and capacities to execute coup plots (Singh 2014; Albrecht and Eibl 2018). Most importantly for the puzzle at hand, combat officers remain embedded in the military hierarchy and develop a professional identity along group cohesion and combat effectiveness. For them, military service may come with economic perks and privileges; but it remains a professional job, rather than a position that would place them in the center of an authoritarian elite coalition. Such combat officers typically represent the lower and middle ranks of military apparatuses, but they may also include higher-ranking officers, particularly in armies where politicized promotion schemes have contributed to the inflationary promotion of officers into the ranks of colonel and general.

Regardless of specific military rank, combat officers are political outsiders and hence more representative of ordinary people in their societies. While not necessarily economically disenfranchised, these officers' preferences and grievances are more likely to align with those of society at large than the preferences of upper-level officers who are members of the political elite in addition to being leaders in the military apparatus. We would expect coups executed by low- and mid-ranking military agents to target political incumbents but also the political procedures and elite coalitions of the authoritarian regimes concerned. Coups by combat officers represent attempts at genuine regime change, rather than a mere power grab from within elite coalitions.

To be clear, we do not suggest that combat officers necessarily hold pro-democratic priorities for future regime change. Quite to the contrary, they attempt unconstitutional, sometimes violent power grabs much like their senior colleagues among the military leadership. And yet, since combat officers are political outsiders, their interventions in domestic politics are likely to aim at a reconfiguration of elite coalitions and the underlying recruitment processes. Even if democratization might not be their actual purpose, such attempts at triggering fundamental political change are more likely to prompt periods of protracted uncertainty and open avenues for democratization than more status-quo oriented interventions by elite officers. A successful combat officer coup by definition implies the rise to power of elite outsiders.

The logic of elite officer coups is quite different. They emerge from within authoritarian elite coalitions, are driven by the preferences of political elites, and set in motion post-coup dynamics different from combat-officer coups. As coups "from above," they represent conflicts *within* elite coalitions, rather than between political elites and outside challengers. Two principal reasons might lead elite officers to coordinate among themselves and to stage a military takeover. For one, they might aim at altering elite arrangements to their advantage, that is, to monopolize political power among themselves and oust rivaling elite segments, both from the military and civilian political institutions (Casper and Tyson 2014; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2017). Examples include Nasser's coup against General Naguib in Egypt in 1954, the take-over of power by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussain in Iraq in 1968, and Hafez al-Assad's "Corrective Movement" in Syria in 1970.

For another, elite officers may plot to replace incumbents in order to forestall processes of political liberalization aimed at curtailing the influence of the military elite. Interventions by the Burmese military following the 1988 uprising and again in February 2021, the military ousting of Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand in 2006, and the removal of Mohammed Morsi in Egypt in 2013 are vivid examples of such roll-back coups ultimately designed to keep authoritarian regimes intact in the face of popular demands for political liberalization (Koehler and Albrecht 2021). In sum, coup plotters from among authoritarian elite coalitions have no interest in democratic transitions and should work to avoid such post-coup political trajectories.

Empirical Analysis

We draw on the agency variable in the CAM data to subject this theoretical intuition to an empirical test. In particular, we examine whether there are systematic differences between combat officer and elite officer coups in terms of their mid-term effects on the likelihood of regime change. We analyze all coups in authoritarian regimes since 1950 and differentiate between democratization or adverse regime change—regime change from one authoritarian regime to another—as potential effects of coups (Derpanopoulos et al. 2016). Following accepted practice in the field (Thyne and Powell 2016; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016), we capture the mid-term effects of coups by creating coup variables that are coded one if a coup occurred in the current year or the two years prior. We create separate variables following this pattern for all coups, combat officer coups, and elite officer coups. In addition, we also distinguish between successful and attempted coups in each of these categories.

In table 2, we display the results of four logit models analyzing the impact of coups on different forms of regime change. These models are based on all autocratic country-years in the *Autocratic Regime Data* (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014) and model the likelihood of a democratic transition (Models 1 and 2) and adverse regime change (Models 3 and 4) given the occurrence of any coup (Models 1 and 3) or coups differentiated by agency type (Models 2

military coups (the category we are interested in here) actually decrease the likelihood of post-coup elections (Marinov and Goemans 2014, 816).

[12] These different findings are partially due to modelling choices, in particular to the fact that Derpanopoulos et al. (2016) include regime-case fixed effects, which might bias their results (Miller 2016). As we show in the online appendix, our findings are robust to these modelling choices.

Table 2. Coup Agency and Regime Trajectories

	(1) *Democratization*	*(2)* *Democratization*	*(3)* *Adverse Regime Change*	*(4)* *Adverse Regime Change*
Any successful coup	0.974***		3.145***	
	(0.283)		(0.344)	
Combat officer coup		0.800*		2.063***
		(0.332)		(0.297)
Elite officer coup		0.495		2.590***
		(0.366)		(0.317)
Military regime	3.439***	3.476***	0.441	0.487
	(1.010)	(1.009)	(0.547)	(0.593)
Personalist regime	2.106*	2.104*	0.571	0.602
	(0.981)	(0.979)	(0.495)	(0.531)
Party regime	0.732	0.728	0.083	0.019
	(0.914)	(0.910)	(0.469)	(0.491)
Leader duration (log)	−0.439**	−0.440**	0.176	0.269
	(0.159)	(0.163)	(0.202)	(0.213)
Prior democracy	0.737**	0.738**	−0.242	−0.206
	(0.262)	(0.266)	(0.247)	(0.266)
Proportion of democracies	0.057	−0.353	0.994	0.255
	(2.202)	(2.235)	(1.811)	(1.962)
GDP/capita (log)	0.483	0.456	−0.827**	−0.917**
	(0.316)	(0.317)	(0.291)	(0.304)
Ch. GDP/capita	−3.463**	−3.462**	−3.007**	−3.426***
	(1.131)	(1.106)	(1.045)	(1.020)
Cold War	−1.089	−1.142*	0.731	0.655
	(0.573)	(0.577)	(0.467)	(0.526)
Time	0.090	0.075	0.064	0.045
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.067)	(0.066)
Time^2	−0.001	−0.001	−0.002	−0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Time^3	0.00,001	0.00,000	0.00,001	0.00,001
	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)
Constant	−7.281***	−6.819**	−4.417**	−3.428*
	(2.105)	(2.096)	(1.586)	(1.643)
Observations	4009	4009	4009	4009
Chi^2	159.36***	155.06***	232.65***	209.99***

Standard errors clustered in regime spells are reported in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

and 4). The dependent variables are drawn from the same data, follow the operationalization there, and capture a total of 116 instances of democratization and 114 episodes of adverse regime change (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). We report results for all coups, attempted and successful, in table 2. We also ran the analysis separately for successful coups only and report these results in the appendix (table A3). In all models, we cluster standard errors in regime spells to correct for potential within-cluster dependence of the residuals. The substantive results, however, are not sensitive to this modeling choice.

For each dependent variable, we first display a model including a general coup variable (Models 1 and 3) and then a model differentiating between combat and elite officer coups (Models 2 and 4). In all models we also include regime type controls and (logged) leader duration to account for potential effects of prior autocratic regime characteristics; variables measuring a country's democratic history and the global proportion of democracies help control for the impact of democratic experience and potential diffusion effects; (logged) per capita GDP and annual change in GDP per capita account for the effect of economic development; a Cold War dummy and simple, squared, and cubed versions of regime duration, finally, control for different forms of temporal dependence.

The results clearly show that elite and combat officer coups have different effects for prospects of regime change. Model 1 shows the positive effect of coups on the likelihood of democratic transitions which has been reported in prior research (Thyne and Powell 2016); Model 2, however, makes clear that this effect is exclusively due to a specific type of coups: while combat officer coups increase the likelihood of a democratic transition by about 105 percent, elite officer coups do not exert a significant effect. Turning to adverse regime change, both combat and elite officer coups significantly increase the likelihood of a transition from one authoritarian regime to another. The probability of adverse regime change increases seven-fold if a combat officer coup took place in the same year or the two years prior and even more than ten-fold if an elite officer coup occurred.

To further test the robustness of our findings on the differential effects of discrete coup types on the likelihood of democratization, we also reproduced the most prominent analyses on this question in the existing literature (namely the models by Thyne and Powell 2016; Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; and Marinov and Goemans 2014). Across these different specifications, we consistently

find that any democratizing effects of military intervention are due to combat officer coups, not coups plotted by elite officers (see tables OA1-3 in the Online Appendix). Taken together, military coups do indeed break down into causally homogenous categories along the dimension of coup agency. As we demonstrated above, we cannot hope to understand the actual effects of coups on regime change unless we differentiate between different coups based on agency type. The CAM data allow scholars to do just that.

Conclusion

In this research note, we develop on the notion that elite and combat officer coups are distinct subtypes of military coups d'état. Further fine-tuning agency-based research of military coups will reveal specific dynamics between coup plotters, including episodes where senior and junior officers collaborate—a phenomenon poorly understood from existing studies using binary coding choices, including in this research note. Our main conceptual contention remains that coup agency matters when it comes to the effects of military take-overs on the development of political regime characteristics. Novel empirical insights from the CAM dataset, which we presented in this research note, provide leverage on such inquiries in that it allows us to disaggregate the military as a unitary actor. Further research on the identity of coup plotters will provide better knowledge of these agents and allow for individual-level research on such episodes of violent regime change.

Our empirical tests demonstrate that the conceptual difference between elite and combat officer coups is robust across different empirical research strategies and model specifications. Our main empirical finding is that combat officer coups can result in openings for democratic transitions, whereas elite officer coups support authoritarianism and the political status quo. The lack of attention to coup agency in the existing literature therefore is an important factor in explaining the inconsistent findings on the relationship between coups and democratization. Rather than treating all coups as a homogenous category, scholars interested in the effects of military coups should pay careful attention to the agents of such plots.

We thus urge scholars interested in uncovering the regime-level effects of military coups to pay careful attention to the type of actors plotting for the overthrow of an autocratic regime. If a military take-over is driven largely by elite-level conflicts and led by longstanding members of that political elite, the chances of post-coup democratic development are slim indeed. If, on the other hand, a coup is plotted by officers who had not previously been part of political elite circles, a window of opportunity for democratic transitions might exist, particularly if the international environment sets the right incentives. This finding not only goes a long way toward reconciling inconsistent results in the extant literature, it also has important consequences for policy makers interested in supporting democracy worldwide.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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Appendix

Table A1. Coding Differences between Powell and Thyne (2011) and CAM

Country	PT11		CAM		
Country	*Date*	*Type*	*Date*	*Type*	*Reason*
Argentina	19-Sep-62	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Argentina	23-Dec-75	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Argentina	02-Dec-88	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Azerbaijan	NA	NA	04-Jun-93	combat (f)	Not in PT
Bahrain	NA	NA	23-Dec-81	elite (f)	Not in PT
Benin	NA	NA	26-Mar-88	combat (f)	Not in PT
Bolivia	21-Oct-58	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Bolivia	19-Apr-59	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Bolivia	NA	NA	07-Nov-74	combat (f)	Not in PT
Brazil	01-Apr-64	success	NA	NA	No coup
Brazil	NA	NA	19-Jan-56	combat (f)	Not in PT
Burkina Faso	08-Feb-74	success	NA	NA	Agency unclear
Cambodia	15-May-78	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Cambodia	NA	NA	02-Jul-94	combat (f)	Not in PT
Central African Republic	NA	NA	20-Sep-79	combat (s)	Not in PT
Central African Republic	NA	NA	25-Oct-02	combat (f)	Not in PT
Chad	13-Mar-06	failure	NA	NA	No evidence
Chad	NA	NA	15-May-04	combat (f)	Not in PT
Chad	NA	NA	01-May-13	combat (f)	Not in PT
Colombia	11-Oct-61	failure	NA	NA	No evidence
Comoros	03-Aug-75	success	NA	NA	Agency unclear
Comoros	30-Nov-87	failure	NA	NA	No evidence
Comoros	NA	NA	05-Jun-77	combat (f)	Not in PT
Comoros	NA	NA	20-Dec-01	combat (f)	Not in PT
Congo	15-Aug-63	success	NA	NA	No coup
Ecuador	03-Mar-52	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Ethiopia	14-Dec-61	failure	NA	NA	No evidence
Fiji	NA	NA	25-Sep-87	elite (s)	Not in PT
Fiji	NA	NA	29-May-00	elite (s)	Not in PT
Gambia	NA	NA	30-Dec-14	combat (f)	Not in PT
Grenada	13-Mar-79	success	NA	NA	No coup
Guatemala	NA	NA	01-Jun-93	elite (s)	Not in PT
Guinea-Bissau	NA	NA	12-Dec-11	elite (f)	Not in PT
Haiti	NA	NA	03-Jul-58	combat (f)	Not in PT
Haiti	NA	NA	14-Oct-88	combat (f)	Not in PT
Honduras	21-Oct-77	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Honduras	30-Jul-99	failure	NA	NA	Agency unclear
Iraq	23-Sep-91	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Iraq	15-Jun-92	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Jordan	NA	NA	27-Nov-72	combat (f)	Not in PT
Laos	31-Jan-65	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Laos	16-Apr-65	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Libya	NA	NA	07-Dec-69	combat (f)	Not in PT
Madagascar	NA	NA	13-May-90	combat (f)	Not in PT
Mauritania	NA	NA	03-Jun-79	elite (s)	Not in PT
Pakistan	NA	NA	25-Mar-69	elite (s)	Not in PT
Panama	09-May-51	success	NA	NA	No coup
Paraguay	NA	NA	24-Apr-96	elite (f)	Not in PT
Philippines	04-Oct-90	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Portugal	NA	NA	25-Apr-74	combat (s)	Not in PT
Romania	NA	NA	25-Dec-89	elite (s)	Not in PT
Seychelles	NA	NA	18-Nov-81	combat (f)	Not in PT
Seychelles	NA	NA	18-Aug-82	combat (f)	Not in PT
South Sudan	NA	NA	16-Dec-13	combat (f)	Not in PT
Sudan	18-Aug-55	failure	NA	NA	No evidence
Sudan	18-Dec-66	failure	NA	NA	No coup*
Sudan	22-Nov-12	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Sudan	NA	NA	09-Nov-59	combat (f)	Not in PT
Suriname	NA	NA	05-Feb-82	elite (s)	Not in PT
Suriname	NA	NA	27-Dec-90	elite (s)	Not in PT
Syria	11-Aug-68	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Syria	01-Mar-69	success	NA	NA	No coup
Syria	31-Jan-82	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Syria	NA	NA	01-Nov-83	elite (f)	Not in PT
Togo	15-Dec-91	failure	NA	NA	No coup
Togo	05-Feb-05	success	NA	NA	No coup
Turkey	NA	NA	28-Feb-97	elite (s)	Not in PT
Ukraine	22-Feb-14	success	NA	NA	No coup
Uruguay	10-Feb-73	success	NA	NA	No coup
Venezuela	NA	NA	07-Sep-58	combat (f)	Not in PT
Yemen People's Republic	NA	NA	22-Jun-69	elite (s)	Not in PT
Total:	**37 coup events added** **34 events removed**				

*The 18 December 1966 event in Sudan is identical with the 28 December 1966 event; we removed the earlier instance.

Table A2. Coding Differences between De Bruin (2020) and CAM

Country	*Date*	*CAM Type*	*De Bruin Rank*	*Comparison*
Haiti	20/06/88	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Honduras	07/08/78	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Venezuela	01/01/58	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Venezuela	12/04/02	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Peru	16/02/56	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Peru	13/11/92	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Brazil	30/03/64	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Bolivia	21/07/78	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Bolivia	11/10/79	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Bolivia	15/05/81	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Paraguay	05/05/54	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Paraguay	03/02/89	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Paraguay	18/05/00	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	28/09/51	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	16/06/55	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	10/06/56	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	13/06/60	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	02/04/63	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Argentina	18/12/75	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Guinea-Bissau	14/09/03	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Guinea-Bissau	01/04/10	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Burkina Faso	17/09/15	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Ghana	24/02/66	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Uganda	11/05/80	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Uganda	27/07/85	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Djibouti	07/12/00	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Ethiopia	16/05/89	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Madagascar	17/11/10	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Comoros	26/11/89	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Sudan	21/05/59	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Sudan	30/06/89	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Iran	13/08/53	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Turkey	27/05/60	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Turkey	15/07/16	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Iraq	14/07/58	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Iraq	16/09/65	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Iraq	30/06/66	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Iraq	15/06/95	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Egypt	23/07/52	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Syria	08/03/63	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Lebanon	12/03/76	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Yemen People's Republic	20/03/68	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Afghanistan	17/07/73	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Bangladesh	30/05/81	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Thailand	29/06/51	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Laos	19/04/64	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Laos	20/08/73	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Republic of Vietnam	01/11/63	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Republic of Vietnam	30/01/64	combat	General	CAM combat w/General
Haiti	10/05/50	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Haiti	02/04/89	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Guatemala	30/03/63	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Honduras	03/10/63	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Panama	12/10/68	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Ecuador	11/07/63	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Ecuador	21/01/00	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Greece	21/04/67	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Azerbaijan	04/10/94	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Equatorial Guinea	03/08/79	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Benin	10/12/69	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Mauritania	10/07/78	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Mauritania	04/01/80	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Niger	15/04/74	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Niger	27/01/96	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Niger	09/04/99	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Burkina Faso	03/01/66	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General

Table A2. Continued

Country	*Date*	*CAM Type*	*De Bruin Rank*	*Comparison*
Burkina Faso	25/11/80	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Ghana	13/01/72	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Togo	13/01/67	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Central African Republic	01/01/66	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Chad	13/10/91	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Congo—Kinshasa	14/09/60	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Burundi	01/11/76	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Burundi	25/07/96	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Ethiopia	03/02/77	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Comoros	30/04/99	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Algeria	19/06/65	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Algeria	14/12/67	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Libya	04/08/75	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Egypt	27/02/54	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Syria	29/11/51	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Yemen Arab Republic	13/06/74	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Yemen People's Republic	13/01/86	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Papua New Guinea	14/03/90	elite	Colonel/Major	CAM elite w/o General
Haiti	24/04/70	elite	Low Rank	CAM elite w/o General
Bolivia	09/04/52	elite	Low Rank	CAM elite w/o General
Burkina Faso	15/10/87	elite	Low Rank	CAM elite w/o General
Burundi	08/07/66	elite	Low Rank	CAM elite w/o General
Jordan	13/04/57	elite	Low Rank	CAM elite w/o General

Table A3. Coup Agency and Regime Change (successful coups only)

	(1) *Democratization*	*(2)* *Democratization*	*(3)* *Adverse Regime Change*	*(4)* *Adverse Regime Change*
Any successful coup	1.288***		4.100***	
	(0.333)		(0.401)	
Successful combat officer coup		1.339**		3.913***
		(0.421)		(0.439)
Successful elite officer coup		0.563		3.820***
		(0.398)		(0.421)
Military regime	3.457***	3.513***	0.157	−0.012
	(1.016)	(1.018)	(0.541)	(0.567)
Personalist regime	2.182*	2.148*	0.616	0.536
	(0.987)	(0.986)	(0.476)	(0.470)
Party regime	0.764	0.745	−0.224	−0.226
	(0.916)	(0.913)	(0.425)	(0.416)
Leader duration (log)	−0.383*	−0.401*	0.508*	0.571*
	(0.166)	(0.166)	(0.236)	(0.264)
Prior democracy	0.697**	0.723**	−0.209	−0.007
	(0.267)	(0.271)	(0.253)	(0.259)
Proportion of democracies	−0.282	−0.310	0.620	1.380
	(2.257)	(2.277)	(1.996)	(2.161)
GDP/capita (log)	0.479	0.448	−0.847**	−0.884**
	(0.321)	(0.317)	(0.307)	(0.320)
Ch. GDP/capita	−3.620***	−3.645***	−3.697**	−3.684**
	(1.076)	(1.056)	(1.186)	(1.165)
Cold War	−1.183*	−1.155	0.364	0.463
	(0.595)	(0.595)	(0.524)	(0.578)
Time	0.102	0.082	0.090	0.062
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.070)	(0.078)
$Time^2$	−0.002	−0.001	−0.003	−0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
$Time^3$	0.00,001	0.00,001	0.00,002	0.00,002
	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)	(0.00,002)
Constant	−7.222***	−6.892**	−4.431**	−4.451*
	(2.155)	(2.136)	(1.640)	(1.815)
Observations	4009	4009	4009	4009
Chi^2	163.89***	158.28***	302.07***	298.15***

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.
Standard errors clustered in regime spells are reported in parentheses.