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Democratic versus Authoritarian Coups: The Influence of External Actors on States' Postcoup Political Trajectories

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Abstract

Once considered artifacts of history, research on coups has burgeoned recently. Most studies focus on decisions to stage coups, considering factors like individual benefits, organizational interests, and government legitimacy. Less work considers what happens following coups. This article considers the political trajectory of states following coups. We argue that external reactions to coups play important roles in whether coup leaders move toward authoritarianism or democratic governance. When supported by external democratic actors, coup leaders have an incentive to push for elections to retain external support and consolidate domestic legitimacy. When condemned, coup leaders are apt to trend toward authoritarianism to assure their survival. We test our argument by considering how international responses to coups from states and international organizations influence coup states' political trajectories. Our findings indicate that international actors play key roles in determining democracy levels of coup-born regimes.

Keywords

democratization, domestic politics, legitimacy, military intervention

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The world watched when Egyptian President Morsi was removed from power by the military in 2013. As Egypt's first democratic-elected president, many Western countries were disappointed with the undemocratic nature of Morsi's government leading up to the coup (Hamid 2015). Nevertheless, most Western states swiftly condemned the coup and urged return to civilian governance (Tansey 2016, 168-73). Not all states agreed. Anticoup hardliners like Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham called for the United States to halt aid to Egypt (Chulov 2013). In contrast, leading members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee like Chairman Ed Royce urged President Obama to forge even tighter relationships with Egypt, arguing that continued support will give the United States leverage over Egypt's future political trajectory. As explained by the Committee's top-ranking Democrat, Eliot Engel, "If you're . . . pulling away, then their attitude is going to be, 'Well, why do we have to listen to you?'" (Zengerle 2013). President Obama largely agreed with the latter viewpoint. He avoided labeling the incident as a "coup," aid continued, and democracy derailed (Pecquet 2013).

The Egyptian case presents more puzzles than lessons. Condemning the coup may have shocked Egypt back to the democratic path as implied by McCain and Graham. It may have pushed Egypt even further toward authoritarianism as suggested by Royce and Engel. Or, signals from external actors may not matter in determining states' postcoup political trajectories especially for strategically important states like Egypt. Unfortunately, current research does little to inform policy makers about appropriate stances to shape democracy following coups. We know that coups are one of the biggest threats to democracy (Kieh and Agbese 2005). However, coups also provide windows for democratization (Goemans and Marinov 2014; Thyne and Powell 2016; Miller 2016). Focusing on international relations, scholars have shown that international actors influence the onset of coups (Thyne 2010). We also have some idea about when and why international actors respond to coups (Shannon et al. 2015). However, we know little about what international actors can do to take advantage on the window of opportunity to move toward democracy following coups.

Given the dearth of policy-relevant work that might influence postcoup decision-making, it is unsurprising that even democratic actors respond to coups haphazardly (Morey et al. 2012). US laws include specific rules to guide actions when coups arise, which is that all aid should be restricted until civilian government is restored. Other states and international organizations (IOs) have instituted similar policies. However, these policies are rarely applied consistently. As demonstrated by the Morsi incident, Obama prolonged policy decisions on foreign aid by avoiding using the term "coup" to describe the overthrow. Although states and IOs often have clear positions in writing, coup leaders are left to guess how external actors will apply these policies. If external actors consistently took paths shown to promote democracy, juntas would have clearer pictures of the support they should receive. The result could be more coups leading to democracy.

Actors and Puzzles

We begin by laying out the key players who are decisive in whether coups are attempted and the political decisions made afterward. Our argument draws on the elite bargaining framework, focusing on how militaries adjust behaviors based on external signals.

Early scholarship on civil–military relations deemed militaries to be important political actors, particularly within authoritarian regimes. Over forty years ago, Finer (1975) explained that ruling elites face key dilemmas in dealing with their armed forces: they must be able to secure loyalty while also maintaining military effectiveness. Democracies followed unique and effective paths in accomplishing these dual goals. Aligning with Huntington's (1957) argument that the professional soldier was expected to accept civilian control, the "Western" or "Democratic" model is one in which soldiers obey civilians (Desch 2001). This framework, which largely removes the military as an elite bargaining actor, has become a hallmark of established democracies. However, even within established democracies, we have seen the civil–military democratic model come to screeching halts via military coups, which continue to be the modal manner in which democracies fail.

Incorporating the military into the elite bargaining discussion provides leverage in understanding how coups come about and the long-term political outcomes afterward. Rulers within nondemocracies have taken several clever paths to build the strength of the military while securing its loyalty. Sharing political power with generals, often as appointed ministers or governors, is one common route. Likewise, rulers have provided economic benefits to soldiers, including high salaries, privileged access to goods, and toleration of corruption (Siddiqa 2007). Although these solutions lack many of the benefits we see from the strict civil–military separation in democratic regimes, the solutions are not without benefits. Early studies explained that military influence can provide a modernizing force (Pye 1961; Lieuwen 1962), helping align ruler preferences with those of the masses. More recent work shows that militaries often push for elections and democratization upon seizing power (Goemans and Marinov 2014; Thyne and Powell 2016), further justifying the idea that militaries are actors that can shape the long-term political trajectories of states.

Although previous discussions of militaries' roles in elite bargains provide a solid foundation, two factors warrant further exploration to understand how coups might bring about democracy. First, militaries rarely think or act in a monolithic manner. This has been noticed elsewhere, as recent studies have pointed to the collective action problem faced by those seeking regime change (Frantz and Ezrow 2011; Weeks 2008; Casper and Tyson 2014). Moreover, governments often orchestrate divisions within the military as coup-proofing efforts (Belkin and Schofer 2003). Thus, we must consider militaries as important actors within the elite bargaining framework while also recognizing militaries themselves to be comprised of multiple actors who bargain over a state's political trajectory.

Second, scholarship only indirectly considers a role for international actors in the postcoup environment. This contrasts with an impressive body of work analyzing how external actors influence democracy more generally, providing an opportunity for extensions. Such studies include Levitsky and Way's (2006) "linkage" and "leverage" discussion of the international determinants of democratization. More recent work has gone further in supporting our understanding of how international actors influence politics, including studies on interventions (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2006), foreign-imposed regime changes (FIRCs; Downes and Monten 2013; Enterline and Grieg 2008; Pickering and Peceny 2006), and covert efforts like assassinations and coups (O'Rourke 2018). This work does not find direct efforts to foment regime changes to be particularly successful at promoting democracy or meeting other goals of external actors. This is consistent with work showing weakened democracy levels following both direct interventions (Berger et al. 2013) and partisan electoral interventions (Levin 2019). Likewise, scholars have shown that both direct interventions and sanctions often destabilize regimes (Escribá-Folch and Wright 2010). Although these studies provide a rather bleak picture regarding external democratic actors' abilities to shape democracy, scholars like Narizny (2012) and Gunitsky (2017) provide a more favorable outlook, highlighting the need for further scholarship of how and when external actors can promote democracy.

Coups and Military Interests

Coups come about for a variety of reasons and have a variety of outcomes. The primary way in which scholars frame the decision to coup is by focusing on militaries' *dispositions* and *abilities*. Disposition is determined by coup plotters' expected payoffs from staging a successful coup (Powell 2012, 1021-22), such as increased power and prestige (Decalo 1990), military resources (Huntington 1991), or legitimacy (Belkin and Schofer 2003; Lindberg and Clark 2008). In terms of ability, scholars have focused on how governments "coup-proof" their regimes by creating structural obstacles that increase coordination costs (Pilster and Böhmelt 2011). Such maneuvers include building counterforces (Kposowa and Jenkins 1993), rotating military officers (Pollack 2002), increasing specialization (Quinlivan 1999), and impairing coordination (Frantz and Ezrow 2011; Weeks 2008; Casper and Tyson 2014). Considering why coups happen in the first place provides leverage in understanding the postcoup political trajectory because precoup conditions have implications for postcoup decision-making. Two factors are critical.

First, the coup itself reveals that the elite bargain between rulers the militaries broke down, but the myriad factors that influence militaries' dispositions to intervene leave exactly why it broke down unclear. This is particularly problematic because coup leaders almost inevitably point to the same motivations: desire to replace corrupt governments and give power to the people. Given that all coup leaders have incentives to couch their behaviors in this manner to gain legitimacy, determining whether these declarations are window dressing or true desires for

reform are simply unobservable. The only safe conclusion is that coup leaders have varieties of causes behind their actions and diverse goals upon seizing power.

Second, the structural obstacles to coup-proof regimes mean that fully coordinated coups comprised of all relevant, like-minded military actors are nearly impossible. Widespread plots are easily uncovered and plotters can expect severe punishment when plots are foiled. Thus, information about potential coups is held by as few people as possible, and many (if not most) military actors are as surprised by coup attempts as anyone else (Singh 2014). The important implication from these lines of reasoning is that even successful coups produce situations where the new rulers, and the military elites they must bargain with, have wide varieties of interests.

Postcoup Bargaining

Our discussion presents a precarious picture for coup leaders. Overthrowing the incumbent is difficult, but it may be the easiest step toward long-term goals. The immediate postcoup environment is likely run by a small cadre with divergent interests and tenuous support from military elites who were not part of the coup attempt. Although the ruling junta may have clear and cohesive preferences for how to build the postcoup state, three main sources of uncertainty play critical roles in the political trajectory. First, powerful members of the military may not agree with junta preferences because powerful actors are commonly left out of coups to keep plots secret. Second, publics may react to coups in uncertain ways. Even when precoup protests signal support for regime change, protesters will not necessarily be placated with coups due to their inherently illegal nature. Third, international actors vary considerably in how they respond to coups. Although they may signal (dis)pleasure with the incumbent government in the precoup phase, perhaps via sanctions or preferential trading arrangements, these precoup stances rarely provide precise information about support for a postcoup junta.

We develop predictions about these three types of postcoup uncertainty by couching the postcoup environment in a bargaining framework. Given that the military will ultimately decide the political path the state will take, we focus on the military as the primary bargaining actors. We then consider how postcoup signals from international audiences influence intra-military bargaining.

We begin with two simplifying assumptions. First, we assume survival to be the first priority of military leaders following a coup. This may literally mean survival, as coup leaders might face countercoups, assassination, or invasions by external actors. This may also mean survival in less literal terms, where leaders seek to assure the integrity of the military institution by avoiding large-scale rebellions. Either way, we assume that survival will trump all other motivations that initially influenced coup leaders' dispositions to overthrow the regime, including personal prestige and, most importantly, democratic reforms. Second, we consider two "ideal" types of military actors: those who wish to transition to democracies and those who wish to solidify power into full-fledged military regimes. History is replete with both

ideal types. The Malian (1991) and Chilean (1973) coups provide two rather famous examples. Within days of overthrowing President Moussa Traoré of Mali in 1991, Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Touré appointed a senior official from the United Nations Development Program as interim prime minister and announced a national conference to craft a new constitution. These efforts reveal no interest in long-term military rule (*The New York Times* 1991a, 1991b). In contrast, the junta that overthrew Chilean President Salvador Allende, eventually to be led by General Augusto Pinochet's brutal regime, outlawed opposition parties and stymied all political activity immediately after seizing power (Stern 2004).

The intuition behind the postcoup bargaining framework mimics what we see in a variety of literatures rooted in bargaining. Because interstate war is costly, competing sides seek to avoid conflict by making demands and/or concessions (Fearon 1995; Morrow 1989; Powell 2002). War becomes unlikely if competing actors agree on the likely outcome of a war and are able to credibly commit to refrain from fighting. Similarly, disagreements among military actors in the postcoup environment can prove quite costly. Failure to solidify power or transition to legitimate governance can spur widespread rebellions, countercoups, or even invasions from external actors. Each outcome is apt to crush individual-, organizational- or state-level interests that inspired coups in the first place. Thus, even military leaders with extreme positions have incentives to settle for less than their ideal points to avoid complete breakdowns of postcoup regimes. This results in stable settlement zones reflected by the postcoup political trajectory.

Our primary departure from most bargaining models lies in our outcome of interest. Work on interstate conflict cited above combined with similar work from the civil conflict (Cetinyan 2002) and coup literatures (Frantz and Ezrow 2011; Weeks 2008; Casper and Tyson 2014) focuses on factors that cause a divergence in the settlement zone. For instance, Casper and Tyson (2014) argue that protests provide information to elites, which supports their abilities to coordinate actions that might lead to coup attempts. Instead of focusing on breakdowns settlements, which would point to countercoups or some other type of regime breakdown, we focus on the factors that cause the settlement zone to shift toward authoritarianism or democracy. We focus on signals from external democratic actors as the primary source behind such shifts.

Democratic Signals and Postcoup Bargaining

Early work explaining democratic transitions largely focused on characteristics internal to the state like economic development (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Feng and Zak 1999) and history of democracy (Huntington 1991). More recent work includes influences of external actors. Noting that the spread of democracies benefits other democracies' security and economic growth, Levitsky and Way (2006) explain that external democratic states can push regimes toward democratization with punishments or inducements like sanctions and aid (leverage) and interdependent

networks that connect governments, economies, and societies to Western communities (linkage). Similar work focuses on how support from the democratic community helps nascent democracies survive (Pevehouse 2002; Kadera, Crescenzi, and Shannon 2003) and how democratic powers shape democracy elsewhere (Narizny 2012; Gunitsky 2017). This work is important because it paints a clear picture about the importance of support from external democratic actors for establishing and consolidating democracy. Rather than being reactive bystanders, external democratic actors have incentives to actively shape democracy (Hegre, Christiansen, and Petter Gleditsch 2007; Smith 2012).

When we relate this work to the postcoup environment, at first glance, it appears that military leaders with democratic-leaning preferences would have the advantage in pushing democratic reforms. Not only do such maneuvers match preferences, but they also support more widespread goals. Democracies have been found to trade more with each other (Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2000), are more reliable alliance partners (Leeds 2003), have greater domestic legitimacy (Chu et al. 2008), and are less likely to face both coups and civil wars (Lindberg and Clark 2008). Moreover, recent studies on the democratization–coup relationship show that pressure from external actors is integral in pushing postcoup regimes toward democracy (Goemans and Marinov 2014; Miller 2016). Based on this evidence, one might expect the postcoup democratization path to be simple: if the junta desires democracy, then they will find a democratic community ready and willing to welcome them to the fold.

Unfortunately (and perhaps even strangely), external actors behave unpredictably toward postcoup governments. Even in the post–Cold War environment, where democratic actors should presumably focus on democracy promotion, we see erratic behavior in how democratic actors respond to coups. One recent study by Shannon et al. (2015) shows that state wealth and democracy are apt to draw international attention, though volume of trade and oil production explain little. This work coincides well with Morey et al.'s (2012) analysis of external reactions to the Arab Spring uprisings, which again showed little consistency in how democratic actors responded to the unrest. The causes of such inconsistency are likely twofold. First, laws meant to punish coups are geared toward coups that overthrow democratically elected regimes. When coups overthrow authoritarian leaders, the rulebook does not apply. Second, even though the coup may have overthrown an authoritarian leader, there is no guarantee that the replacement will be better in terms of democracy promotion. Thus, external democratic actors often vary wildly in their response to coups.

The erratic way in which democratic actors respond to coups has two important implications for our discussion. First, unlike domestic reactions that can be predicted easily and are, thus, readily accounted for in the decision to coup, external reactions should have a strong, exogenous effect on postcoup political trajectories. Second, external reactions should play key roles in pushing settlement zones either toward or

away from democracy. We expect support from external democratic actors to foster democracy for three primary reasons.

We begin by recalling that the junta's first priority is to maintain the settlement zone, meaning that they will make choices that, above all, decrease the likelihoods of countercoups and rebellions. Loyalty to the junta is enhanced by aligning preferences or increasing the costs of defection. Focusing on the latter, juntas are in a precarious position following the putsch. Coups often lead to countercoups or civil wars, and increasing internal military strength overnight is quite difficult. Thus, coup leaders must reach out to external actors to improve their short-term security. Democratic actors provide preferable partners for such endeavors. This is true regardless of whether the actors in the postcoup bargaining phase prefer democracy because democracies have superior military strength to deter antiregime activity, and they have enhanced abilities to make credible commitments of regime support (Fearon 1994). When external democratic actors signal support for postcoup regimes, therefore, we expect shifts in settlement zones toward democracy. In contrast, condemnation from external democratic actors will force even democratic-oriented juntas to reach out to external authoritarian actors for support.

Second, support from external democratic actors makes it easier for democratic-oriented juntas to signal their intentions to domestic audiences. Given that coups are inherently undemocratic, domestic populations are apt to view promises of democracy as cheap talk even when juntas overthrow authoritarian regimes. Populations understand that coups rarely lead to democratization, and coup leaders almost inevitably promise democracy. Thus, support from external democratic actors bestows legitimacy upon promises for democratization. Signals supporting juntas reveal that external democratic actors view coup-born regimes as legitimate, and votes from democratic members in IOs like the United Nations can formalize such legitimacy.

Third, while support from external democratic actors provides some information to elites who are part of the postcoup bargaining process, the information revealed is likely to be minimal. Because they are part of postcoup deliberations, these actors likely have near-complete information about preferences of other junta members. Therefore, they key factor among those bargaining over the state's postcoup political trajectory is not what preference other actors hold but whether they can deliver on promises once settlements are reached. In bargaining terms, signals of support from external actors allow democratic-oriented members of juntas to credibly commit to democratization.

For actors preferring continued control, committing to authoritarianism is simple. Coups are not democratic, and they usually overthrow authoritarian regimes (Derpanopoulos et al. 2016). The natural move—one usually aligned with precoup governance—is continued authoritarianism, albeit modified to align with whatever factors inspired the coup. In contrast, actors who seek democracy have incredibly difficult tasks on their hands. One of the foremost predictors of whether democracy can take hold is whether the state has a past history of democracy (Huntington 1991). Given that most coups happen in authoritarian regimes, few states will have an

immediate (or any) democratic history. Likewise, instituting democracy is a headache. Doing so likely requires rewriting constitutions and installing systems for fair elections. Both tasks are fraught with difficulty especially in states with little experience with democracy. Moreover, states in the early stages of democracy are the most susceptible to attacks from within (Cederman, Hug, and Krebs 2010) and conflict abroad (Mansfield and Snyder 2005). Either could stymie the process.

Given that shifts toward democracy are so difficult, democratic-leaning members of juntas must be able to credibly convince other elites that, if taken, such a path will not fail and lead to their collective demise. Support from external democratic actors can go a long way in achieving this objective. Such actors have been integral in helping states like Namibia write constitutions en route to democratization, for example (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2011). Likewise, in places like East Timor, both democratic states and the IOs they influence played critical roles in establishing fair elections (Ndulo and Lulo 2010). In short, support from external democratic actors borders on a necessary condition for democratic reforms. When reactions from such actors are supportive, democratic-leaning members of juntas should be able to credibly argue that they can deliver on their goal of democratization. When coupled with the aforementioned benefits of forging ties with other democracies, such arguments are likely to win the day, convincing even authoritarian-minded members of the junta that that democracy is in their best interest.

This discussion leads to the following hypothesis: *As support from external democratic actors increases/decreases, postcoup states should be more likely to trend toward democracy/authoritarianism*.

Two theoretical issues warrant further discussion before moving to empirical tests. First, we argue that supportive signals from external democratic actors will support coup-born regimes' moves toward democracy. Doing so helps assure continued support from wealthy, powerful actors, assuring the survivability of militaries' long-term interests. This argument aligns with previous research showing that coup states' democracy levels outperform economic and strategic interest in explaining whether states react to coups (Shannon et al. 2015). However, it is likely that many external democracies have little interest in democracy levels when reacting to coups, being guided instead by strategic interests. Moreover, juntas that feel secure in their importance to democratic actors will feel little (if any) incentive to democratize, instead leveraging their strategic importance to consolidate their power.[1] This comes down to an empirical question. If strategic interests trump democracy promotion as determinants for postcoup support from external democratic actors, we should find a negative (or at least null) relationship between democratic support and postcoup democracy levels. At a minimum, the strategic logic should understate any observed relationship.

Second, we have argued that postcoup signals should be exogenous to junta decisions to move toward or away from democracy, drawing on studies that show erratic reactions to coups from external actors to justify this claim (Shannon et al.

2015; Morey et al. 2012). However, it is unsafe to assume that decisions to coup happen in a vacuum. Instead, plotters often seek information about potential responses to coups from external actors and use this information to decide whether to coup. Such a viewpoint is consistent with case-level evidence on particular coups and large-*N* analyses showing how international actors influence coup attempts (Thyne 2010; Savage and Caverley 2017; Wobig 2015). If coup plotters can easily predict postcoup responses, then any observed relationship between postcoup signals and democracy levels might not be due to exogenous effects but because we observe only a unique set of coups—those where plotters chose to coup and move toward democracy because they already expected external support from democratic actors. We address this empirically in the next section by estimating a selection model and controlling for precoup signals from external actors.

Data, Methods, and Measurement

Our theory predicts that moves toward democracy will become more likely as external democratic actors show support to postcoup governments. We begin by defining our unit of analysis as the postcoup period for states that underwent a successful coup since 1950. Coups are captured following Powell and Thyne (2011, 252), who define coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive." After losing cases due to missing data, we are left with 180 postcoup periods in our final sample.[2]

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable captures the political trajectory of states following coups. This is complex for a number of reasons. To aid our discussion, we provide examples of democratic trajectories for four states in Figure 1. Our primarily analyses report the measure that we feel has the highest construct validity; we report alternatives in the Online Appendix.

First, we are interested in trends toward or away from democracy, which we capture by calculating the difference between states' pre- and postcoup democracy levels. We use the V-Dem "electoral democracy index" to capture democracy levels, which ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values capturing increased democracy (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019).[3] Regarding its 1981 coup, for example, Bolivia transitioned from a precoup score of .131 to a postcoup democracy score of .329, showing a positive postcoup democracy trend. In contrast, Sudan's 1958 coup dropped its score from a precoup .299 to a postcoup .072. We are interested not in immediate changes, which often drop immediately due to coders' reactions to coups. Rather, we seek to capture longer-term trajectories. After analyzing all trends, most scores settle down from the postcoup shock within three years. Thus, our dependent variable captures the difference in scores from the precoup levels to three years afterward.

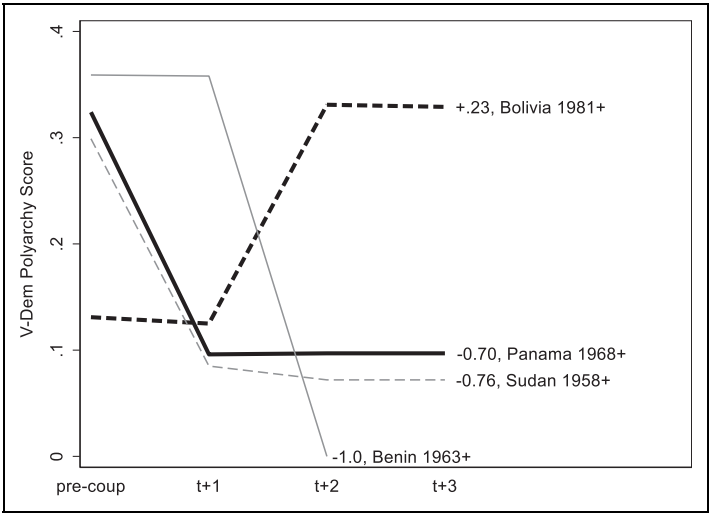

Figure 1. Illustrating the dependent variable (postcoup political trajectories).

Second, we modified the raw differences because the V-Dem measure is bounded between 0 and 1 and because not all states start at the same level. Conceptually, we are interested in how much democracy levels changed taking into account how much they *could have* changed. For example, Sudan and Panama dropped the same distance (.227) following their coups in 1958 and 1968, respectively. Given that Sudan began at .299 while Panama began at .324, the drop for Sudan was more abrupt than the drop for Panama (i.e., Sudan dropped 76 percent of what it could have dropped, while Panama dropped 70 percent). We capture this difference by calculating the change as a percent of the possible change.

Third, there are forty-six cases where states' postcoup political trajectories were interrupted within three years by subsequent coups. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 with Benin, which had a coup in 1963 and 1965. Given that coups are inherently undemocratic, we code these cases as maximum drops in democracy levels (-1). The final measure ranges from -1 (maximum decrease) to $+1$ (maximum increase) and has a mean of $-.365$ ($SD = .454$). This represents 46 cases where democracy improved following coups (mean $= .154$), 131 cases where democracy declined (mean $= -.596$), and 3 cases where democracy levels remained unchanged. Given that our final measure is continuous, we estimate our main models using ordinary least squares. We cluster standard errors by country and lag independent variables at $t - 1$.

Primary Independent Variables

We expect democratic coups to become more likely as signals from external democratic actors show increasing support for postcoup regimes. We rely on data from

Shannon et al. (2015) to capture these signals. These authors code official reactions from states during the six-month postcoup period.[4] Information came primarily from the *Historical New York Times* and LexisNexis databases, including 1,259 signals to 98 of 219 successful coups from 1950 to 2013. Each signal was given a weight by referencing the World Events Interaction Survey scale (Goldstein 1992); values range from −10 (most hostile) to +8.3 (most supportive).

We refine the Shannon et al. (2015) data in two ways to provide the best test of our theory. First, our initial analysis examines postcoup signals from all states and IOs. Because we are primarily interested in signals from democratic states, our subsequent models break down signals into three categories: signals from IOs, democratic states, and nondemocratic states. We define a signaler as democratic if it is coded as an "electoral democracy" or "liberal democracy" on the V-Dem "Regime of the World" indicator (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019).[5] Second, when multiple signals were sent from external actors, our measure takes the mean of signals for each postcoup period.[6]

We present descriptive statistics for our final measure in Figure 2. The left panel presents a stacked histogram of postcoup signals from our three actor categories, while the right figure shows the same data broken down over time.[7]

Three points revealed in Figure 2 are noteworthy. First, the left figure shows wide variation in postcoup signals for all signaler types, further highlighting the seemingly unpredictable ways in which even democracies respond to coups. Second, the right figure reveals that signals from democracies and IOs have steadily become more hostile over time. However, in contrast to the notion that an anticoup norm has emerged since the end of the Cold War (Goemans and Marinov 2014; Thyne et al. 2018), an abrupt change is difficult to discern. Third, postcoup signals from democracies took a negative turn in the late 1970s at the precise time that the third wave of democratization got underway (Huntington 1991). This divergent trends provide particularly difficult conditions to test our hypothesis.

Control Variables

Our primary concern with control variable is capturing strategic behavior among external actors.[8] Descriptive statistics on international signals presented in Figure 2 indicate that external actors vary widely in how they respond to coups, which is consistent with more sophisticated analyses of coup responses (Shannon et al. 2015; Morey et al. 2012). However, it is still likely that external actors signal their preferences about regime change prior to a coup taking place. We address this later with a selection model. At this point, we include control variables for precoup signals from external actors. Drawn from the Cline Center Historical Phoenix Event Data (Althaus et al. 2017), precoup signals capture signals sent from official actors of states and IOs from 1945 to 2005 on the same Goldstein (1992) scale used with our measure to capture postcoup international reactions. As with our postcoup signal

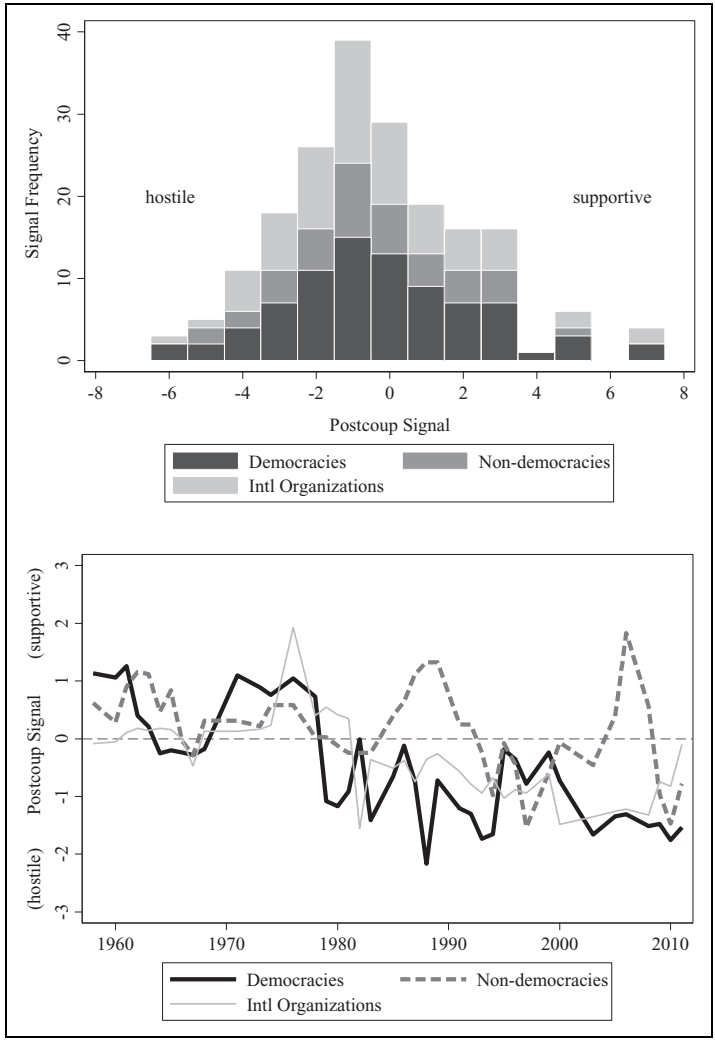

Figure 2. Postcoup signals from external actors.

measure, we consider a state to be a democracy if it is coded as an "electoral democracy" or "liberal democracy" (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019).

Next, our analyses include several measures that capture the primary mechanisms that increase the likelihood of political transitions. *Domestic protests* capture how domestic populations responded to coups. Previous work has shown that domestic protests are likely to precipitate coups (Casper and Tyson 2014; Johnson and Thyne 2018), while postcoup protests decrease the time that juntas remain in power (Thyne

et al. 2018). We follow Thyne et al. (2018) in capturing postcoup protests using data from the Social, Political, and Economic Event Database project (Nardulli and Hayes 2013). Ranging from 0 (71 percent) to 9, these data capture the number of "human-initiated destabilizing events" from nonstate, domestic actors directed toward the government in the six-month, postcoup period (mean = .556, $SD = 1.28$).

Our second control variable, wealth, has been found to lead to democratic transitions (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Feng and Zak 1999) and democratic consolidation (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Thus, we include gross domestic product (*GDP*) *per capita* (*ln*) from James et al. (2012).[9] Third, we expect democracy-producing coups to be less likely during the *Cold War* because the US/Soviet rivalry caused democratic states like the United States to support rightist-authoritarian regimes within its sphere of influence. This variable is coded 1 for years prior to 1989.[10] Consistent with Goemans and Marinov (2014), we expect moves toward democracy to be less likely during the Cold War. Fourth, we expect postcoup increases in democracy levels to be more likely if the coup state borders another democracy (Rød, Knutsen, and Hegre 2019), which we capture with the count of democratic neighbors (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019; Stinnett et al. 2002). Finally, we include *regional dummy variables* to capture spatial variation, leaving Europe as the excluded category.

Analyses and Discussion

We present our primary findings in Table 1, models 1 to 4. Model 1 is a baseline model that excludes external actors. As expected, we see that postcoup democracy levels increase as levels of wealth increase and if the state neighbors a democracy, while levels decrease during the Cold War period. Model 2 considers postcoup signals from all actors, finding a significant influence on coup states' political trajectories ($p < .032$). This indicates that postcoup democracy levels are apt to increase with positive external signals in general. When separating IOs from states in model 3, we see that signals from states remain significant and in the predicted direction ($p < .049$), while signals from IOs have an insignificant effect ($p < .515$). The best test of our hypothesis comes in model 4 where we separate state signals between democracies and nondemocracies. Here, we see that supportive signals from democracies are significantly associated with upward trends in postcoup democracy scores ($p < .044$), which provide strong support for our primary theoretical expectation. In contrast, signals from nondemocracies have an insignificant effect.

We further examine our findings by calculating substantive effects using the observed values approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). Estimations come from Table 1, model 4. When all covariates are kept fixed at the observed values, we find a baseline decrease of 39.2 percent in the postcoup democracy trend, which is consistent with past work that notes the overall negative effect of coups on democracy (Derpanopoulos et al. 2016). As expected, we see steeper drops in postcoup

Table 1. Influence of External Signals on Postcoup Democracy Levels (1951 to 2005).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	
					Selection	Outcome
Intl signals, all		0.042* (0.019)				
Intl signals, states			0.038* (0.019)			
Intl signals, IOs			0.021 (0.032)	0.025 (0.031)		0.013 (0.029)
Intl signals, democracies				0.040* (0.020)		0.044* (0.021)
Intl signals, nondemocracies				0.001 (0.017)		0.001 (0.025)
GDP per capita, ln[a]	0.056+ (0.029)	0.049+ (0.025)	0.050+ (0.026)	0.046+ (0.026)	−0.138** (0.047)	0.075 (0.054)
Cold War[a]	−0.180* (0.074)	−0.246** (0.084)	−0.260** (0.086)	−0.274** (0.091)	0.212* (0.106)	−0.290** (0.107)
Domestic protests[a]	0.010 (0.025)	0.013 (0.024)	0.013 (0.025)	0.014 (0.025)	0.403** (0.081)	0.007 (0.027)
Precoup trade					−0.025 (0.024)	
Precoup junta					0.252** (0.087)	
Precoup democracy					−1.278** (0.276)	
Neighbor democracy	0.051+ (0.027)	0.026 (0.034)	0.022 (0.034)	0.024 (0.034)		0.032 (0.049)
Constant	−0.315 (0.368)	−0.068 (0.335)	−0.031 (0.352)	0.046 (0.351)	−1.073* (0.428)	0.197 (0.524)
Observations	192	180	180	180		7,029
States	64	63	63	63		164
R^2, ρ	.097	.120	.128	.133		−.346
F, χ^2	3.824**	4.412**	3.521**	3.616**		23.15*

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. Controls for region and precoup signals are omitted to save space (see Online Appendix Table 1 for full results). IOs = international organizations; GDP = gross domestic product.

[a]Values in selection model are precoup values, $t - 1$.

+$p < .1$ (two-tailed).

*$p < .05$ (two-tailed).

**$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

trends following negative democratic signals, with a decline of 51.3 percent when democratic signals are set at a moderately negative value of −3. The drop is appreciably attenuated to 26.7 percent when moderately positive signals (+3) are sent from democratic actors.

The 2003 coup in Central African Republic (CAR) is useful to help illustrate our findings. This case is reasonably typical. Like 29 percent of other cases, the coup followed domestic protests and took place in Africa (39 percent); likewise, CAR's GDP per capita is similar to the entire sample (5.9 logged; .64 *SD*s below the mean of 6.6). As with many cases following the Cold War, the junta led by François Bozizé was condemned by democratic actors following the overthrow of democratically elected Ange-Félix Patassé, including swift condemnation from IOs like African Union, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund and similar responses from states like South Africa and Nigeria (*The Economist* 2003). The case played out in a manner that is consistent with our theory. Condemnation from democratic actors left the junta with little incentive or support to instill democracy. Soon after seizing power, the junta dissolved the government, the national assembly, the constitution, and the constitutional court (Marshall 2011). Instead of following his commitment not to run in the 2005 elections, Bozizé reneged and won the second-round runoff with 65 percent of the vote.

The 1985 coup in Sudan provides a contrasting case. Like CAR, the Sudanese coup was rather typical. Sudan's GDP per capita was slightly higher than CAR (6.13 logged; .41 *SD*s below the mean). The coup took place in Africa, during the Cold War, amid protests and with calls to enact democratic reforms as soon as possible by the coup leaders. Unlike CAR, overtures from democratic powers, particularly the United States, were far more positive. Rather than cutoff aid, the Reagan administration allowed Sudan to remain the second largest recipient of US aid in Africa (following only Egypt) with a senior US official claiming that "We don't want to cause [the new leaders] additional headaches" (*The New York Times* 1985b). The United States even sent high-level officials to meet with Sudanese leaders to "reaffirm the Reagan Administration's interest in good relations with Sudan" (Gwertzman 1985). This support allowed the coup leaders to follow through on their promises to hold free and fair elections less than a year after the coup (Rule 1986).

Looking more specifically at the data, the coup dropped CAR's V-Dem score by .16 points (from .353 to .193), which represents a 45 percent decline in how far it could have dropped. When we run our model at observed values, we get a similar prediction of −38 percent. In a hypothetical scenario where the coup received a moderately supportive signal of +3, our model predicts a smaller decline of 28 percent, helping to demonstrate how supportive signals in this instance might have pushed and encouraged Bozizé to follow through with his promised democratic reforms. In contrast, democracy levels increased by .167 points (from .209 to .376) after the 1985 coup in Sudan, which is what we should expect due to positive postcoup signals from democratic actors (+2.58). Had these signals been moderately

negative (−3), our model predicts a clear move in the other direction with a 53.6 percent decline.

The insignificant coefficient for external signals from nondemocracies warrants discussion. Just as supportive signals from external democratic actors are expected to push postcoup states toward democracy, we might also expect supportive signals from nondemocracies to support authoritarianism. The primary reason we are unsurprised by the null findings for the latter relationship aligns with the focus on democratic actors in our theory. That is, we expect external signals from democratic actors to simply matter more to postcoup regimes. This is for two main reasons. First, due to their heightened audience costs, democracies have enhanced abilities to send credible signals to juntas, which should result in stronger effects on postcoup policy decisions (Fearon 1994). Second, due to their superior military strength, higher resolve, and enhanced abilities to work collectively, democracies can more effectively reinforce signals with military might (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Reiter and Stam 2002; Valentino, Huth, and Croco 2010; Graham, Gartzke, and Fariss 2015). Returning to the Sudanese illustration, it is notable that supportive overtures from the Reagan administration coincided with thawing relations with Qaddafi's regime in Libya, including an early trip by members of the Transitional Military Council to Libya in a robust effort to build relations (*The New York Times* 1985a). Much to the ire of Qaddafi, continued support and aid from the United States pushed the postcoup government to continually reassure the Reagan administration that its promise for elections would come to fruition (Kamm 1985; May 1985). Ultimately, superior support from the United States allowed the coup leaders to follow through on their promises to hold free and fair elections less than a year after the coup (Rule 1986), demonstrating the enhanced importance the postcoup regime placed on placating the United States in spite of similar support from the authoritarian Qaddafi regime.

Regarding the control variables, our models are largely consistent with our theoretical expectations. Measures for precoup signals from external actors are insignificant across models, helping assure that we capture the exogenous effect of postcoup signals. As expected, higher levels of GDP per capita are associated with increased democracy levels. Our models predict an appreciable decrease of 42.7 percent for poorer states (twenty-fifth percentile) and a smaller decline of 36.7 percent for more wealthy states (seventy-fifth percentile). Consistent with past work, postcoup democracy levels are much weaker during the Cold War with an average decline of 43.2 percent compared to 16.6 percent in the post–Cold War period. As expected, all regions are worse off compared to Europe in postcoup democracy levels.

Selection Concerns

Although our findings provide strong support for our hypothesis, several concerns remain. First, it is possible that our sample contains a unique set of coups—those that took place because the coup plotters anticipated that supportive signals from external democracies would assist their ability to institute democracy. Our measures for

precoup signals help ameliorate this concern by accounting for observed precoup signals; however, these controls do not address selection bias. One way to address this is to consider postcoup democracy changes as a two-step process. First, plotters must decide whether to coup; second, they must decide to move toward or away from democracy. The key to such a model is to capture observable factors that might lead coup plotters to anticipate support from external democratic actors. We take this approach in Table 1, model 5. We first predict whether a successful coup took place. The most important measures include those that capture whether coup leaders should be able to anticipate external support following a putsch. Following Powell and Chacha (2016), we include precoup total trade (Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins 2009) to predict coup attempts. We also add a dummy variable for whether the incumbent regime was being run by a junta that was installed via a coup (Powell and Thyne 2011) and whether the incumbent was democratic (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019). We also include precoup measures for external signals, domestic protests, GDP per capita, and the Cold War, which are also consistent predictors of coups (Powell 2012; Johnson and Thyne 2018). We retain regional dummy variables in both the selection and outcome phases of our models. We expect these measures to provide fair estimates to plotters about their potential to receive support from democratic actors if they were to coup.

The second stage of our model mimics our primary analysis that predicts postcoup regime changes. We simultaneously estimate each stage using a Heckman (1979) model. As expected, the first stage shows that factors like domestic protests, precoup juntas, and the Cold War make successful coups more likely, while precoup democracy and wealth decrease the likelihood of successful coups. Most importantly, we see that the coefficient for external democratic signals remains positive and significant ($p < .035$) in the second stage. This indicates that positive signals from external democratic actors during the postcoup period indeed have a strong, exogenous, and supportive influence on postcoup democracy.

Robustness Checks

Beyond selection concerns, our estimation technique and variable selection may influence our results. First, our theory and analyses consider changes in democracy levels. However, our argument should also be able to capture more major shifts in regime types (i.e., autocratization and democratization). We test this by altering the dependent variable to capture the time from the coup to a regime shift using the V-Dem "Regimes of the World" categories of closed autocracy, electoral autocracy, electoral democracy, and liberal democracy to code regime types. Time to autocratization is a count in years between the coup and a shift downward to either closed or electoral autocracy, while democratization is a shift upward to either electoral or liberal democracy. In Online Appendix Table 10, we replicate our primary analyses from Table 1, model 4 using a competing risk approach, employing a Cox proportional hazards model with time-varying covariates. Consistent with our theory, we

find that positive postcoup signals from democracies decrease the hazard of autocratization ($p < .017$) and increase the hazard of democratization ($p < .014$).

Second, our analyses implicitly assume that all democratic actors are equal in their abilities to influence postcoup leaders. If our causal mechanism is sound, then we should expect more influential external actors to have the strongest effects on postcoup democracy levels. One way to get at this is to consider which signalers should be most influential. As shown in Online Appendix Table 11, we attempt to capture these varying levels of influence by splitting signalers between neighbors (Stinnett et al. 2002), major powers (Correlates of War Project 2017), and allies (Leeds et al. 2002). As expected, the influence of signals from major power democracies ($p < .088$) and allies ($p < .077$) is stronger in terms of statistical significance and substantive effect than their counterparts, though both are borderline significant using traditional standards. However, signals from non-neighboring democracies have stronger effects than neighboring democracies. This counterintuitive result is likely due to the low number of coup states that neighbor democratic signalers (only 8 among the sample of 180 coups).

Finally, we dealt with endogeneity concerns by controlling for precoup signals and presenting a selection model. However, rather famous cases remain where powerful democratic actors targeted regimes for overthrow (e.g., the United States against Chile's Allende). Controlling for these cases helps assure that the influence of postcoup signals has an independent effect on postcoup democracy levels. We do this by including a dummy variable that captures covert and successful FIRCs from Downes and O'Rourke (2016). Analyses presented in Online Appendix Table 12 demonstrate that the effect of postcoup signals from democracies is stronger in terms of substantive effect and statistical significance ($p < .005$) when FIRCs are taken into account.

Conclusion and Implications

This study attempts to explain how reactions from external democratic states influence states' postcoup political trajectories. While coup leaders' preferences vary, they invariably couch their activities in terms of democracy promotion. Thus, these statements reveal little about actual tendencies. Likewise, given that juntas usually include only small segments of military leadership and likely have divergent preferences in themselves, factors within the coup state provide little leverage in understanding the route that a postcoup regime might follow. Given this, we looked outward to understand what might explain postcoup political trajectories. Couching our argument in the elite bargaining framework, we argued that support from external democratic actors should make democratic trends more likely because they help ensure the survivability of the coup-born government. Our analyses examined how signals from external democratic actors in the immediate postcoup environment influence intra-junta bargaining, finding that positive signals from democratic actors are associated with more democratic-leaning postcoup regimes.

This work aligns well with previous research and helps move the literature forward in important ways. First, previous work largely considers postcoup governments to be monolithic actors. Instead, we present a bargaining framework to better understand how external actors can influence intra-junta bargaining. Such a framework could be applied beyond the state's political trajectory, perhaps revealing why coups sometimes result in large-scale rebellions or interstate conflict. Second, previous empirical work has shown that coups can promote democratization (Thyne and Powell 2016), and previous theoretical work argues that the influence of the democratic community is critical in pushing postcoup regimes toward democracy (Goemans and Marinov 2014). However, no work that we know of directly captures how postcoup signals influence states' long-term political outlooks. This helps extend a growing body of research on how external actors influence regime changes more generally (Berger et al. 2013; Levin 2019).

In terms of policy, our study sheds light on how democratic actors should behave toward juntas. Previous work has shown that signals from external democratic actors in these cases are haphazard (Shannon et al. 2015). We agree and add that they are also consequential. Rather than being interested audiences, we demonstrate that external actors play key roles in *shaping* democratic coups. This study also highlights a remaining puzzle that has immediate policy implications. Consistent with past work, our analyses demonstrate that postcoup signals from external actors are difficult for coup plotters to predict and, thus, have an exogenous effect on postcoup political trajectories. Given the robust resources that states pour into foreign policies, one would think that coup plotters—who usually come from elite levels of the state apparatus—would be able to derive accurate predictions about postcoup signals before deciding to coup. Their apparent inability to do so indicates either a failure of external actors to signal their preferences or a failure of plotters to read signals correctly. Either way, the disconnect between precoup preferences from external actors and decisions to coup has important policy implications that warrant further research.

Ultimately, this study connects several dots in our understanding of how external actors influence the coup–democracy relationship. Signals from external actors are influential in causing coups to happen (Thyne 2010). The coup itself is consequential in determining whether a state transitions to democracy (Goemans and Marinov 2014; Thyne and Powell 2016). We add that external actors play a critical role in this determination by helping push postcoup regimes to promising political trajectories.

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Notes

1. Returning to the Egypt example, the United States made important moves to condemn the coup-born al-Sisi regime, even withholding US$95.7 million in aid due to human rights concerns. However, Egypt's strategic importance trumped its miserable human rights record, assuring that US$195 million in military aid previously withheld returned again in 2018 (Clingan 2018).
2. We also ran analyses using coup data from Marshall and Marshall (2019). Results are substantively identical to our analyses presented in Table 1 (see Online Appendix Table 2). We also tested our findings after removing "leader reshuffles," which change leadership but leave the regime structure intact (Aksoy, Carter, and Wright 2015). Results are stronger in terms of substantive effect and statistical significance than the primary analyses (see Online Appendix Table 3).
3. We also used the Polity IV "polity2" measure (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2019) to capture democracy levels. Results are substantively identical to those presented in Table 1, though the coefficient for "Intl signal, all" drops from significance ($p < .107$; see Online Appendix Table 4).
4. "Official reaction" means statements from representatives authorized to speak on behalf of the entire state (e.g., presidents, prime ministers, and secretaries of state).
5. We tested two alternative definitions to code signalers as democratic. These include (1) those scored above +5 on the Polity IV "polity2" indicator (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2019) and (2) those coded as "democracy" by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). Results are substantively identical using these alternatives (see Online Appendix Table 5).
6. We also examined whether variance in signals among each set of actors mattered by interacting the mean with the standard deviation of postcoup signals. These results produced little of interest (large p values on interactive terms).
7. We reduce noise in the date on the right panel in Figure 2 by presenting five-year moving averages.

8. We attempt to keep our models as parsimonious as possible. However, we tested a number of measures to capture historical/cultural reasons that might explain changes in democracy levels, precoup external signals, and postcoup bargaining between domestic actors. In Online Appendix Table 6, we add additional controls for (1) cases where the coup state was the target of a militarized interstate dispute (Maoz et al. 2019), (2) political party strength using the "v2psbars" measure (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019), (3) history of electoral or liberal democracy (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019), (4) former British colony (Hensel 2019), and (4) previous coup attempts (Powell and Thyne 2011). Results remain largely consistent when using these alternative indicators, though measures for "Intl signals, all" ($p < .054$) and "Intl signals, democracies" ($p < .081$) become borderline significant in these models. We also ran models controlling for precoup coup-proofing using the counterbalancing measure developed by DeBruin (2018). While our primary measure for democratic signals remains in the expected direction, it becomes insignificant ($p < .334$; see Online Appendix Table 7). We attribute the drop in significance in these models to a dramatic loss in observations (65 to 83 percent decrease). Given that the main models already tap into these concepts, we remain confident in our primary findings.
9. We also tested an alternative measure of GDP per capita from Gleditsch (2002). Results remain substantively identical with this measure (see Online Appendix Table 8).
10. We also ran analyses after splitting the sample between Cold War and post–Cold War periods (see Online Appendix Table 9). Results during the Cold War are substantively identical to those presented in Table 1. However, the coefficient on external democratic signalers becomes insignificant ($p < .571$) when looking exclusively at the post–Cold War and period. We suspect two causes. First, isolating the discussion to the post–Cold War period reduces our sample size by 89 percent (from 180 to 22). Second, it is notable that precoup signals are significant in the samples limited to the post–Cold War period. This indicates that external actors have perhaps become more credible over time in their abilities to credibly signal how they would respond to a coup, which is consistent with arguments elsewhere (e.g., Goemans and Marinov 2014).

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