THE EFFECT OF AMERICAN INTERVENTION ON COUP OCCURRENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT

This project seeks to add a layer of analysis to the study of political instability in Latin America. In previous research, much attention has been paid to economic and political factors as a cause of presidential instability in Latin America. The current research is thorough and important, but it leaves out external intervention by the United States as a key cause of presidential instability. Additionally, much of the current work focuses on impeachments as a means of terminating a presidency early, while this piece focuses on coups. My theory is that countries that experienced a successful American backed coup would see more coups than countries without a successful American intervention. Additionally, I theorize that countries that experienced intervention will have more coups after the intervention than before. My theory is based on the idea that a successful coup creates a domino effect that makes future coups more likely. This is because successful coups undermine democratic institutions, legitimize future coup attempts, and send a signal to future coup plotters that there is a better chance they will be successful. In my qualitative analysis, I found that successful coups embolden future coup plotters and normalize coups as a transfer of power. My quantitative analysis found that from 1950-2021, countries experiencing American intervention averaged .76 more coups than countries that did not experience an American intervention. Additionally, my analysis found that every country that experienced American intervention experienced as many as or more coups after the intervention than before. In all, my research suggests that American interventions in the region inadvertently created additional coups which has created leadership crises and continues to influence the political instability of the region today.

Introduction

Latin America is a region characterized by many things: beautiful landscapes, vibrant culture, and delicious food. However, in the political realm, it is much more infamous for its extreme instability. Political instability has plagued this region for the last century. Specifically, the area has experienced many instances of presidents being forced out of office before their term is completed. This is broadly referred to as "executive instability". Scholars have studied many aspects of this issue to investigate what might cause this phenomenon. One aspect that I believe is overlooked in the current literature is the role of American intervention in creating executive instability.

When examining this issue, it is important to establish some baseline definitions. When referring to "intervention" by America, I am looking at cases in which America successfully interfered with the typical transfer of power in a country to install a leader that was more "desirable" for its goals. This could be achieved by deploying U.S. troops, supporting coups with intelligence, money, or weapons, or helping opposition leaders plot a coup or create a "coup environment". Generally, intervention could be seen as something like sending aid. For this project, however, intervention only refers to actions done specifically with the intent of creating undemocratic leadership change. The dependent variable, executive instability, refers to a president being terminated from their role early. When a president leaves their role before their term is over, this is referred to as a presidential interruption. Other synonyms that are used interchangeably are executive failure or executive fall. This could result from an assassination, impeachment, coup, being exiled, or being put in jail for political reasons. While the broad academic definition of this phrase covers all these parameters, this project will focus on coups. This is because impeachments can be motivated by political ambition, but they can also

demonstrate healthy democratic institutions. Because of this, it can be difficult to identify legitimate impeachments versus unjustified removals from office. Additionally, assassinations are a shocking example of a presidential interruption. But unless it takes place in the context of a coup, it isn't always indicative of weak institutions and dysfunctional democracy. For those reasons, my analysis will focus on the role of coups in executive instability. Coups are one of the best indicators of weak democratic institutions and provide valuable insights about the democratic capabilities of a nation.

The literature on this topic is significant, but not overwhelmingly large. Most literature regarding executive stability focuses on economic factors such as GDP per capita, or political factors like level of opposition to government or regime type. Also, fortunate for this topic, much of the literature regarding executive stability focuses on Latin America. What I have not found in the literature is American intervention as a potential cause of executive instability. A reason I believe this has not been examined as much is that it is easier to compare variables like GDP per capita or regime type because every country in Latin America has a corresponding value to these variables. However, not every country in Latin America has experienced American intervention.

Literature Review

The literature surrounding this topic covers a variety of dimensions on the issue. Some authors examine economic or political factors. Authors rely on both quantitative and qualitative analysis to achieve convincing theories. While researching this, I felt that there was a gap in the literature. Most studies fail to examine the effects that United States intervention had on these governments. Generally, I think that the idea of external intervention has been overlooked. It is also important to note that most of the literature on this topic focuses on the broad academic definition of executive instability, which includes cases of impeachments. This is mainly because

coups in the region became much less frequent after the 1990's. In my literature review, I will provide an analysis of the current state of the discussion, and later in the paper, I provide a novel analysis.

Two frequently appearing schools of thought on this subject are the "Institutional" side and the "Streets" side. The Institutional side argues that the greatest threat to a president being kicked out of office early comes from within the government. This view argues that legislators pose the biggest threat to Presidents (particularly minority party presidents). The "street" view would argue that the greatest threat to a President's term is mass protest and opposition from the citizens of a country. Hochstetler finds the argument for only the institutionalist view to be unsatisfying. "While both political elites and mass publics have tried to remove presidents early, all successful mobilizations for presidential falls have included civil society actors demanding in the streets that presidents go." (Hochstetler, 2006: 403). In this same article, Hochstetler identifies three main risk factors for Latin American presidents: personal scandal, neoliberal policies, and minority status. Personal scandal is an instance where the streets and the institutions usually come together to remove the president, while it is more likely for the legislators to seek the removal of a president because of their minority status. Presidents with neoliberal economic policies were also found to be more susceptible to challenge, though Hochstetler notes that some presidents survived their term despite this risk factor.

Marstenstreidet notes that the removal of the president is not always bad and in some ways is very democratic. He highlights that some presidential removals were motivated by unconstitutional behavior from the president. In Marstenstreidet's 2013 article, "Explaining Variation of Executive Instability in Presidential Regimes: Presidential Interruptions in Latin America" he examines the motivations of the legislature for removing a president. He separates

the motivations into two categories: policy issues and legal-constitutional issues. Marstenstreidet finds that popular pressure is more important in cases where the primary motivation for removal is policy issues. “The reason is that failed, or unpopular, economic (or other) policies do not constitute constitutional grounds to remove a president.” (Marstenstreidet, 2013: 177). The author finds that there is no one answer for what causes executive instability in this region and that it must be examined case by case. While also seeking to answer the question of whether or not these presidential interruptions are good or bad for democracy, the author writes, “In my view, the answer hinges upon whether it is the president or the opposition that has demonstrated the most undemocratic behaviour prior to the interruption, but also, partly, whether or not there is a valid legal or constitutional ground for removing the president” (Marstenstreidet, 2013: 182). I think this insight is valuable because it highlights the fact that not all these situations are heterogeneous. As noted earlier, this literature provides interesting insights about the broad definition of executive instability but doesn’t necessarily focus on coups. However, I believe that a lot of the key takeaways from research regarding impeachments can be applied to coups. Coup plotters definitely consider factors like public and legislature support for a president when deciding if they should attempt a coup or not.

Another variable that offers some insight into executive instability is levels of party institutionalization. Martinez finds that countries with moderately low or moderate levels of institutionalization experience higher levels of presidential instability than countries with very high or very low levels of party institutionalization. “ruling a country with strong parties is associated with a dramatically lower hazard of presidential failure, even when facing the same number of street protests targeting the chief executive or presidential scandals.” (Martinez, 2021: 691). To explain the lower risk of presidential instability Martinez points to Guatemala as a case

study and writes, “In Guatemala, government stability was somewhat based on relative presidential strength, but, on the other hand, crises were triggered by presidential aggrandizement. Both are signs of parties being too weak to constrain or balance the power of chief executives.” (Martinez, 2021: 700). Based on Martinez’ research moderately low or moderate levels of party institutionalization are most dangerous for presidents because the legislature has the power and the coordination to remove a president, but not enough coordination to seek different routes than presidential removal.

Perez-Liñan presents a “Two Level Theory of Presidential Instability”. In this article, Perez-Liñan introduces the idea of “shields”. Shields can come from either social movements or legislators. If social movements are generally supportive of a president, they may create a “shield” that would prevent legislators from moving to impeach the president because it is so unpopular. On the other hand, if a president is very unpopular amongst social movements and average people, he may be protected by a “legislative shield” if he is a majority president or if legislators are loyal to him. The “legislative shield” in this study was coded as the president’s party controlling more than 50% in any legislative chamber and when the ruling party was not divided. This research is relevant because it provides insight into how “popular shields” and “legislative shields” interact with each other. The author also concludes that a significant amount of additional research on “popular shields” should be done, but it is difficult because of the small dataset (Perez-Liñan, 2014: 47-49). Abofarha and Nasreldein reinforce the validity of these findings in an article from 2021 that examines the case studies of Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina. This piece agrees with most of the current literature on this topic by highlighting social movements and legislative relations as being complementary variables (Abofarha and Nasreldein, 2021). This article does not provide any novel insights, instead, it relies on applying

past research to case studies to reinforce the validity of previous work. De Micheli also reinforces the idea of legislative shields and popular mobilization as complementary forces. He examines impeachment case studies in Latin America. He examines whether popular mobilization is a direct cause of impeachment, or if it offers "facilitating conditions that offer a pretext for opportunistic rivals to strike against incumbent presidents." (De Micheli, 2022: 286). Based on the case studies he does, De Micheli concludes, "Self-interested politicians retaliated against presidents who failed to defend their interests. Publics demanding removal saw their will carried out only when this was aligned with elite interests." (De Micheli, 2022: 310). This differs from other literature on this topic because it claims that an impeachment of a president does not happen solely because of mass opposition. I agree that elites likely act in their interest most of the time, however, I think there could be cases where public pressure might be too much to ignore.

While much of the literature highlights impeachments, coups are the focus of this project. Military status is an important variable that determines coup likelihood. In a 2012 quantitative analysis, Jonathan Powel finds that "Expenditures per soldier is a negative and significant determinant for coup attempts in each of the first three models." (Powell, 2012: 1029). This seems like it might be obvious, but this study does a good job of expanding the literature past basic economic variables like GDP and GDP growth. He also finds that increased military size by personnel has significant results, "Coup likelihood falls from 4.7 percent to 1.7 percent (63.4 percent reduction) when moving from the 10th to 90th percentile in military personnel, giving support to the second hypothesis." (Powell, 2012: 1029). Overall, this work adds important data to the literature that expands on the theme of coup likelihood. This article does not focus on external support for coups, but using this data, it seems likely that third parties would consider

these factors when deciding to support a coup. Other pieces examine military power and coup risk, that identify other variables. For example, a 2022 research article entitled, “How Mechanization Shapes Coups” examines “the degree to which militaries rely on armored vehicles relative to manpower, on coup risk” (Choulis and Mehrl: 267). The authors of this piece performed quantitative analysis and found that higher levels of mechanization led to a decreased likelihood of coups while controlling for military spending. Based on their results, the authors find that “This suggests that mechanization does not just represent a higher number of “toys” for the armed forces but decreases coup risk by making anticipated costs higher and, hence, cooperation failures costlier. (Choulis and Mehrl: 283). This article offers an interesting analysis that goes beyond the typical variables like military size or budget.

These articles effectively support the findings in the Martinez piece. These findings bolster the idea that leaders in countries with low levels of party institutionalization turn to autocratic tendencies to maintain power and prevent a presidential interruption. They do this by increasing the size and funding of the military. While these sources display the military and the president working together, some literature points out that sometimes the military is insubordinate, which signals the loss of power of a president. Pion Berlin writes, “Where internal order missions are legal, militaries will more easily fulfill orders to suppress civilian uprisings. If such operations are not legally authorized, then militaries are unlikely to follow such orders.” (Pion-Berlin, 2012: 235). This study by Pion-Berlin focuses on the behavior of militaries when the president asks them to suppress civilian uprisings. This study also reinforces the idea that funding is important to military cooperation. All cases where the military disobeyed orders to suppress civilian movements, experienced poor or deteriorating “material conditions (budgets, salaries, housing, equipment, and training)” (Pion-Berlin, 2012: 238). Another variable that Pion-

Berlin finds to be important is professional identity. “The disobedient militaries unequivocally rejected the role as enforcers of internal public order. This, we found, was largely based on preconceived notions about core professional purpose, itself shaped by past practices.” (Pion-Berlin, 2012: 243). A third variable that was found to be important was institutional unity. Militaries that had internal divisions did not suppress protesters, while unified militaries with minimal internal divisions did suppress protesters. This research provides valuable insight as to what variables may factor into a president’s ability to suppress opposition and avoid an early termination of their office.

Finally, an interesting piece of literature comes from Hochstetler in 2011 and reviews other works and the implications of presidential breakdowns. Are they good, bad, or somewhere in between? In short, it depends. Presidents removed because of corruption is a good thing. It is better to remove a corrupt president than leave them in power. However, a president removed for political reasons is bad for democracy. It is also important to note that most recent presidential falls have been a result of impeachment instead of coups. So, presidential breakdowns seem somewhat more democratic than they used to be (Hochstetler, 2011: 138-140). Hochstetler concludes that the literature on this topic is still relatively young, and more research needs to be done to come up with a more conclusive answer.

Theory

Based on my knowledge of the topic and background research, I expect countries that experienced American intervention will see increased coup occurrences in the future. I predict this will happen because American intervention in Latin American democracies creates presidential breakdowns that likely would not have occurred without external intervention. As a result, this weakens the office of the president and legitimizes future coups as a transfer of

power. Additionally, this normalizes executive instability within the region and makes citizens more willing to accept successful coup leaders. As other research has shown, one of the most central causes of future coups is coups (Belkin and Schofer, 2003: 611). This seems like a crude theory, but the best way for a country to prevent future coups is to not have coups in the first place. Future coup plotters may be emboldened when they see successful coups because they may have viewed coup success as unlikely previously. This supports the idea that America has created more political instability in this region by essentially "pushing the first domino". There isn't anything particularly special about "American intervention" versus interventions from another country, it's just that America has frequently taken part in these interventions while other countries have not. For these reasons I expect to see analysis that supports the following hypothesis:

1. If a country has experienced a successful American intervention, it will experience more coups after the intervention than it did before. Therefore, countries where America intervened will experience more coups than countries where America did not intervene.

Research Design

My approach to the questions I have posed is based on quantitative as well as qualitative analysis. On the qualitative side, I completed case studies on four countries which I selected through a typology set. This set is broken down by whether countries experienced American intervention or not, and if they have experienced multiple instances of coups or not. These case studies build a causal theory supporting the notion that American intervention creates future coups. Also, for my qualitative approach, I built an original data set that displays the number of coups a country had before American intervention and the number of coups they experienced after American intervention. I identified countries that experienced American intervention by

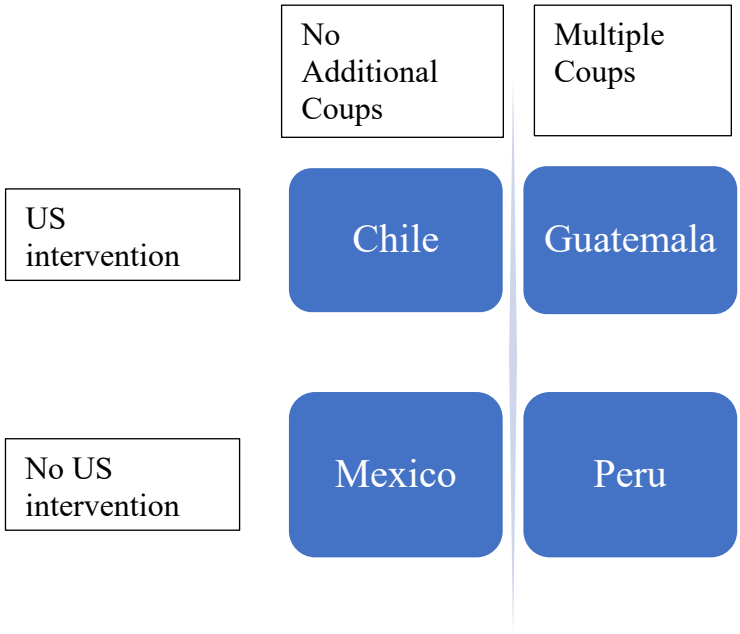
using de-classified documents from the US government as well as research from third parties that demonstrated the US showed a concerted effort in supporting a coup, whether that was through financial aid, deployment of troops, supplying weapons, or other means. This section will attempt to support the hypothesis that countries will experience more coups and assassinations after US intervention.

For my quantitative analysis, I used 19 countries from Latin America in my data set. I decided to include only cases of successful coups in my analysis, which I found from a data set created by the Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research. Since my N is so small, I decided against a multivariate analysis. Instead, I will be examining one variable at a time in contrast to coup occurrence. To do this, I selected a base year to compare the countries. I selected my base year by finding the average year of a successful coup in Latin America, which was 1965. The other variables I examined in addition to American intervention are population, gross national product (GNP) per capita, military expenditure as % of GNP, and social expenditure as % of GNP. I used GNP because it was more commonly used than GDP in 1965 and as a result, complete data on GDP from 1965 wasn't available. The data set I collected this information from was a 1965 report on worldwide military expenditures and related data from the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Case Studies

For the qualitative analysis of this project, I examined how American intervention led to created coups or didn't. The four countries I performed case study analysis on are Chile, Guatemala, Peru, and Mexico. I chose these countries to examine different situations. Chile experienced US intervention and did not see an increase in coups. Guatemala experienced US intervention and experienced multiple coups. Peru did not experience US intervention but

experienced coups. Mexico has not experienced a recent US intervention and has not had recent coups. The following figure shows the classifications of these countries.



Chile

American meddling in Chile is one of the most well-documented cases of American intervention in recent history. In the 1970 election in Chile, the leading candidate Salvador Allende sought to nationalize natural resources and make widespread reforms that would have negatively affected American corporate interests. As a result, the Nixon administration made several attempts to undermine the Allende candidacy. However, they were unsuccessful, and Allende went on to win the presidency. American intervention didn't end after the election. Intervention in Chile continued in many ways. One example is the funding of a far-right newspaper in Chile called "El Mercurio". The Nixon administration sent the newspaper money to keep them afloat so that they would publish articles that would incite fear and opposition to Allende in hopes of creating a "coup environment" (Kornbluh, 2003: 91-93). Additionally, US

operatives helped set into motion a plan to kidnap General René Schneider, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean army and staunch Allende supporter. After two failed attempts, General Schneider was killed in a botched third attempt (Korbluh, 2003: 27-29). This represented a major loss in influence for Allende within the military. Finally, the coup came to fruition on September 11, 1973. Under General Pinochet, the military staged a coup to oust Allende in which fighter jets bombed the presidential palace, and soldiers stormed the palace, killing President Allende (Kornbluh, 2003:115). After this, General Pinochet was named President of Chile and consolidated power by dismantling Congress and banning left-leaning political parties. Pinochet would rule until 1990 when he would step down.

In the case of Chile, there is a clear instance of American intervention. However, there isn't any executive instability. Quite the opposite occurs. Since Pinochet stepped down, Chile has not had a single president leave office early for any reason. There have been no coups and no assassinations. The case study goes directly against my theory that American intervention would create executive instability. However, it is necessary to add a qualifier. The 17 years with Pinochet at the helm are not seen as a positive period in Chilean history.

The Pinochet regime was a violent dictatorship that undermined democracy and set Chile back decades. Under Pinochet, there were mass human rights violations carried out by agents of the government. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, suspected dissenters were rounded up and placed in prison camps where they were tortured. These "disappearances" occurred throughout the entire Pinochet regime, but most happened in the months following the coup. Once at these camps, prisoners were interrogated and tortured. Many methods of torture were employed such as beatings, rape, simulated hangings, simulated firing squads, being held underwater until the point of drowning, and many other heinous practices (Weissbrodt and

Fraser, 1993:158). In addition to torturing prisoners, the regime instituted a "clean up" where about 3,197 Chileans were killed throughout the 17-year dictatorship (Kornbluh, 2003: 162). One of the most infamous incidents of state murders was the "Caravan of Death". After taking the presidency, Pinochet sent six officers on a mission around Chile in which they killed political prisoners. From October 16, 1973, to October 19, the officers killed a total of 68 people (Kornbluh, 2003: 164). These incidents highlight some of the ways that Chile fell short on democratic practices while maintaining executive stability. This indicates that executive stability may generally be good but doesn't guarantee success in other democratic outcomes.

Given the Pinochet experience, it makes sense that Chile has had success maintaining executive stability after he left office. Many Chileans were desperate to return to democracy and create a new status quo of peace. So how was Chile able to achieve this relative stability? Chile's transition towards democracy started in 1988 when the Pinochet regime held a plebiscite looking for support to extend authoritarian rule. However, the people unified to defeat this referendum and force the regime to host multi-party elections. This made way for the 1989 election in which the opposition party defeated Pinochet. Surprisingly, the Concertación (opposition party) was able to successfully negotiate an exit for Pinochet and grant concessions to the military which was loyal to Pinochet. This was a critical point for Chile's transition and is usually where countries experience instability. It is relatively uncommon for a dictator to leave without putting up a fight. Another strength of the Concertación is that many people originally supported the group because they desperately wanted to get rid of Pinochet. The Concertación was a coalition of parties, not necessarily a single party. Barton and Murray note that the group was "Formed as a vehicle with one purpose – to return the country to democracy - it comprises a breadth of political positions, from radical socialists to right-leaning Christian Democrats"

(Barton and Murray, 2002: 332). This is a key point for Chile that has benefitted its relative executive stability since the end of the regime. Since many Chilean political parties have shared a history of working together to protect democracy, it makes sense that they would continue this trend without forcing a president from office. While Chile has not had any coups recently, it is relevant to note that in 2021 the lower house of the Chilean legislature voted to impeach President Piñera. (Miranda Cambero, 2021). However, the Senate did not vote to remove him.

Left-wing candidates would go on to win every election in Chile from 1990 until 2010. Again, this is because Chileans were afraid to return to a right-wing candidate due to the Pinochet years. While presidential stability and peaceful transitions of power are certainly signs of a successful, healthy democracy they do not tell the whole story. Chile is still a country that has faced unrest in recent years. While executive stability can be a good tool to understand the strength of a democracy, it is not the only indicator. A strength of this variable is that it is easy to quantify, but a downfall is that it is relatively one-dimensional. On October 18, 2019, Chile started to experience mass protests which were spurred by increased metro prices, but more broadly extreme economic inequality. Up to this point, Chile had experienced peace since the Pinochet regime. These protests were widespread and intensified when President Piñera deployed the military and declared a national emergency. International rights groups visited Chile to observe and found that security forces were broadly committing mass human rights violations (Chacón and Harrington, 2020). These protests lasted until March of 2020 when Covid 19 broke out. These events highlight that executive stability is just one piece of the puzzle that is democracy.

When examining Chile, there are a few key takeaways. For one, it is very impressive that Chile has been able to maintain peaceful and frequent transitions of power in the wake of the

Pinochet dictatorship. However, another critical takeaway is that executive stability isn't everything. While it is important, and necessary for a healthy democracy and flourishing society, it doesn't guarantee either of those things. Chile experienced executive stability while Pinochet was in charge, but he was a cruel dictator. After Pinochet departed from office, Chile has maintained peaceful and frequent transitions of power but has struggled to provide for the people and combat inequality. Progress is rarely a linear journey, as is displayed by Chile.

Guatemala

Guatemala is a country that experienced American intervention and was largely unsuccessful in maintaining executive stability in its wake. American intervention in Guatemala was a response to proposed socialist reforms that would have harmed US companies. One of the biggest players in these events was the United Fruit Company (UFCO). The UFCO owned hundreds of thousands of acres of land in Guatemala, which represented a significant investment for the company. Reforms ramped up under President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, elected in 1951. Arbenz got to work on improving the economic climate and decreasing inequality through various projects. Moye highlights that UFCO controlled Guatemalan imports and exports because it owned the International Railway of Central America (IRCA), and Puerto Barrios, and the boats that would transport the goods at this port. Arbenz worked to break up this monopoly by continuing the Pan American Highway through Central America, as well as starting construction on a new port at Santo Tomas (Moye, 1998: 45). The critical change that angered the UFCO was Arbenz' Decree 900. "This decree enabled the government to expropriate uncultivated land on any farm larger than 223 acres" (Coleman, 2020). As a result, the government redistributed about 100,000 acres of land and recompensated landowners based on their taxes from the previous year. This upset the UFCO because they wanted to keep their land,

but also because they lied about the market value of the land on their taxes, so they received significantly less compensation from the government than what it was worth. Also critical to America's interest in ousting Arbenz was the perception that he was a communist and he was creating a haven for communism in the region (Moye, 1998: 47). Arbenz wasn't a communist, his "radical" reforms were perceived as communist and further strengthened the American desire to oust him. The fear of communist leadership in Latin America was the most common impetus for American intervention during the Cold War era.

When it came time to get rid of Arbenz, the CIA went to Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas to lead their coup. At the time, Castillo was in exile because of a previously failed coup. The CIA supplied Castillo with money, bomber planes, and weapons, and helped train soldiers (State Department, 1975). On June 17 and 18 1954, Castillo led his assault into Guatemala. Shortly after, on June 27, 1954, Arbenz was forced to resign and live in exile (Britannica, 2024). Castillo became president and reversed most of the reforms that Arbenz made. While Castillo was in power, there was still opposition to his rule as many Guatemalans felt that meaningful change had been stolen from them when Arbenz was exiled. This planted the seeds for the civil conflict to come. The discontent with Castillo came to a head when he was assassinated on July 26, 1957, by a presidential guard (UCA, 2024). The guard was believed to have leftist ideals and be a supporter of the reforms that Arbenz sought to make. However, his exact motivations aren't fully known because he killed himself after assassinating Castillo (TIME, 1974). This assassination set Guatemala back once again and created more uncertainty. This case of an executive interruption provides an anecdote of how coups and presidential interruption can lead to more presidential interruptions.

When a leader takes up the mantle of the executive through illegitimate means, such as the coup in the Chile case, it creates discontent among the populace. Furthermore, this establishes an environment that is typically less likely to accept the rule of the new leader. Many people still feel loyal to their previous leader. Additionally, citizens may feel justified in future assassination or coup attempts because the new leader attained their position by either exiling or killing the former president. Therefore, coup and assassination attempts are more likely to occur.

Additionally, when institutions are weak and there have been limited peaceful, regular transfers of power, it creates more uncertainty about how power should be transferred and to who. So how does the US fit into all this? Without the US intervention, Arbenz likely would have never been exiled, therefore Castillo would have never been president and would not have been assassinated. The effects of US intervention can't only be seen as the direct effects of Arbenz being exiled but also the Castillo assassination, the power vacuum it created, and the events that followed.

The assassination of Castillo and the uncertainty it created set the table for one of the darkest periods in Guatemalan history. From 1960-1996, Guatemala was plunged into an extremely violent civil war that saw the deaths of over 200,000 people. The civil war started in 1960 in response to a failed coup by left-wing military officers, which caused the military government to create a harsh counter-insurgency campaign (PBS, 2011). In response, leftist guerilla groups began fighting the military. Further issues arose in 1963 when President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes was ousted in a coup led by Defense Minister Enrique Peralta Azurdia (TIME, 1963). The main motivation in ousting Fuentes was to prevent the return of Juan Jose Arevalo who was the left-wing President of Guatemala from 1945-1951. Arevalo had been living in exile and was planning to return to Guatemala to establish himself as a candidate in the upcoming

election. Because the military rule was so unpopular, he was likely to win. To prevent this, Azurdia took over and established military rule (TIME, 1963). There was brief hope for a return to peace in 1966 when the Revolutionary Party candidate Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro was elected. However, his rule was undermined by the strength of the military which mitigated his power while in office (Stansifer and Griffith, 2023).

In 1970, things became even worse when Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio won the election and immediately restored military rule. This administration plagued the country with death squads, political oppression, and disappearances. These violent acts served as a major catalyst for citizens to join guerilla groups. Many Guatemalans saw no other option to create change. In response to the continued state violence, many left-wing guerilla groups united to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in 1982 (PBS, 2011). This resulted in even more violence between the military and citizens.

Political stability deteriorated even further in 1982 when military officers formed a junta led by General Rios Montt and completed a successful coup (Stansifer and Griffith, 2023). However, shortly after, Montt dissolved the junta and named himself leader. Only a year later, Montt was overthrown in a coup by General Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores (Stansifer and Griffith, 2023). The continued political instability in Guatemala made it common for presidents to be forced out of office. During this period there was no precedent for a fair, consistent transfer of power, so opportunistic military leaders essentially took over when they could. Guatemala continued to struggle with violence for years to come. Fortunately, the country started to move in the right direction in the 90's. The last instance of executive interruption from this period came in 1993 when President Jorge Serrano Elias tried to name himself dictator and was subsequently forced out of office (Stansifer and Griffith, 2023).

Guatemala finally ended the civil war in 1996 when the URNG and the government came to an agreement. While all these coups are unique, they are also all connected. Though the last executive interruption occurred almost 50 years after the initial American intervention, they are undoubtedly linked. The American involvement in the coup of 1954 set the table for the Guatemalan civil war, which saw high levels of violence and multiple coups. While it is impossible to know what might have happened, had America never intervened, it seems likely that its role was critical in creating the environment that led to these issues.

Mexico

Mexico is an interesting case study because in many ways it supports the idea that lack of American intervention leads to successful outcomes for executive stability. However, some issues below the surface don't reflect well on Mexico's democratic record. This case study examines Mexico as an example of a country that has not experienced US intervention. While the US has intervened in Mexico before, the most recent intervention was in 1916-1917 when President Woodrow Wilson deployed troops into Mexico to hunt Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa (Veterans Museum, 2024). However, this intervention is beyond the scope of this project, as this work focuses on the time frame from 1950-2020. Based on the facts, it appears that Mexico proves the hypothesis that countries that don't experience US intervention have fewer occurrences of executive interruptions. Since 1934, Mexico has never had a president leave office before their term was up for any reason. Under the dominant PRI party, Mexico saw no coups, no assassinations, no impeachments, and no resignations. This made it the longest-serving party in the world (Serra, 2013: 136). For context, the United States had two executive interruptions in the same period with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Based on these facts, it seems that Mexico serves as a

great example of how countries can have success with frequent, peaceful transfers of power at the executive level when they are left to their own devices.

Outside of the United States not intervening in executive leadership during this period, the most important factor for Mexico's stability at the executive level was the domination of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI was the single dominant party in Mexico for decades, winning the presidency from 1929-2000. This had many benefits for Mexican democratic society such as creating national unity and lasting institutions. The PRI was successful largely because of its extreme popularity and the way that the party platform resonated with Mexicans. "The PRI has traditionally embodied the ideals of the Mexican Revolution such as empowering landless peasants and urban workers while integrating indigenous communities. Its nationalistic ideology, which led, for example, to the expropriation of the oil industry from foreign companies, has always resonated with large sectors of the population" (Serra, 2013: 136). However, there are also some nefarious reasons that this party dominated Mexican politics for so long. The party frequently put opposing parties at a disadvantage through "heavy use of clientelism, patronage, and control of the media to boost its nominees while hampering or blocking opposition candidates. Allegations of ballot stuffing and vote-count alterations would surface recurrently" (Serra, 2013: 137). Given this additional information, one could argue that the PRI exhibited an authoritarian rule over Mexico. While elections were held every 6 years and people technically voted for candidates, it was generally known that the PRI candidate would be declared the winner. Different candidates would take over, but they came in with the same party platform and goals as their predecessors. While the party initially had widespread support, it waned increasingly after several episodes of economic mismanagement and a general lack of trust in the party.

As mentioned in the Chile case study, executive stability isn't everything. While it may be necessary to help create a healthy democracy and flourishing society, it does not guarantee those things. Mexico is infamous for its high homicide rates, as well as its political violence. While the presidential elections have been able to avoid this bloodshed for the most part (aside from the 1994 assassination of PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio), local politics are often very bloody (History, 2024). In the 2024 election cycle in Mexico, 37 candidates for regional offices were assassinated (Diaz, 2024). In the 2021 mid-term elections, 36 were killed. So why are local politics plagued by violence and frequent interruptions due to assassinations, when presidential stability has been perfect?

Central to the discussion of political stability in Mexico is the issue of regional political violence. While it's great that Mexico has had relatively peaceful transfers of power at the presidential level, it's impossible to ignore the political violence that plagues local and regional politics. So why is there such a difference? Political assassinations are so prevalent at the local level because of the regional organized crime network in Mexico. Cartels are regionally based and fight for control of land and resources against other cartels. Controlling local politicians is one of the main ways that cartels exert their power. Since there isn't a "national" cartel, cartels focus on local elections because they have more of an effect on their daily activities. Additionally, controlling local politicians doesn't just protect cartels, it also allows them to utilize state resources to go after their opponents by directing local law enforcement at them (Asmann, 2024). This leads to cartels eliminating the competition for their candidates by killing their political opponents.

Mexico is a fascinating country when comparing the contrast between widespread local political violence with its near-perfect track record of peaceful exchange of power at the

presidential level. In many ways, Mexico serves as an impressive example of how countries have the chance to create a culture of peaceful and frequent transfers of power when they are left to determine their own leaders. In other ways, Mexico draws similarities to the Chile case study. Both countries experienced long periods of executive stability because of an authoritarian rule. While the dictatorship of Pinochet differs greatly from the PRI's political domination which did involve frequent transfers of power, they result in the same phenomenon where a relatively hegemonic institution is used to make sure the same small group of people are getting what they want. For this reason, it is again important to highlight the idea that executive stability does not always guarantee positive outcomes for democracy or society at large.

Peru

Peru serves as a unique case study for a few reasons. For one, in the context of this paper, it is being examined as a country that did not experience American intervention (that we know of). However, to say that Peru and America didn't interact with each other would be false and would understate the diplomatic conflicts the two countries had with each other in the 60's and 70's. While the diplomatic interactions between the United States and Peru during this time are fascinating, they didn't result in a successful American-backed regime change (that we know of) and therefore not the focus of this project. However, Peru did experience coups during this time, which is the focus of this project. While America did not intervene in Peru, it is still relevant to examine its experience with executive interruptions to build a causal theory.

When analyzing the frame of this project of 1950-2020, the first instance of executive instability materialized in 1962 when the country was at a crossroads and faced lots of tension. In the 1962 election, none of the candidates won the 33% of the vote which was mandated by the constitution. This resulted in the vote going to Congress. But before Congress could vote, the

military took control of the government and hosted an election in 1963 in which their preferred candidate, right-wing politician Fernando Belaunde Terry, won (Moore and Kus, 2024). The military was motivated to intervene and host new elections because they were extremely opposed to Haya de la Torre and the party he founded, the American Popular Revolutionary Action (APRA). De la Torre was the candidate that won the most votes in the original election. The CIA notes that this bad blood stems from incidents in 1932 in which APRA killed 26 soldiers and the military responded by killing 6,000 Apristas (CIA, 1969: 3). In a series of internal CIA memos, the agency makes an interesting assertion. The agency notes that "The Peruvian armed forces, like those of most other Latin American countries, see themselves as the political arbiters of the country and believe it their duty to intervene in the political processes of the state when stability is threatened" (CIA, 1969: 3). This is an intriguing way to think about the way militaries view themselves and what role they believe they are playing when staging a coup. It also seems difficult to prove, because anyone staging a coup likely thinks they are doing it for "stability" or "the greater good" when they might be self-interested. However, despite this assertion by the CIA, based on the political history between the APRA and the military, it seems clear that the military did not want to cede any power to a party that it had a negative history with.

The second coup came in 1968 when the military again intervened and forced the resignation of President Belaúnde in a bloodless coup. This is ironic since the military was responsible for putting him in office. However, given the political climate, the decision seems rational, or at least rational for the military. Belaúnde's years in office were characterized by major economic issues and failure to deliver on promises. Additionally, the military was looking ahead to the 1969 elections where it seemed that the APRA would be guaranteed a victory (CIA, 1969:5). At first, the APRA tried to persuade the military that an APRA president would be

acceptable by passing favorable legislation for the military in congress (CIA,1969: 4). While it seems that the military might have accepted an APRA president at first, they completely rejected this idea after learning that Haya de la Torre would be the candidate. Maybe they could accept a new, lesser-known candidate, but not the man who founded the party. Because of this, the military went forward with their coup and installed General Juan Velasco as the president. This instance bears similarities to the Guatemala case study because, in the 1963 coup in Guatemala, the military created a coup to prevent an imminent victory from a socialist candidate. Guatemala differs from Peru in this case because the coup in Guatemala seemed to be more ideologically driven with opposition to socialist policies from the military. In Peru, the opposition is founded more on the bad blood between the two groups from previous violence (CIA, 1975: 3). However, the conflict does have roots in the inherent differences between the left-wing views of Apristas and the right-wing military.

Peru experienced another coup in 1975 when President Velasco was deposed in a bloodless coup by General Francisco Morales Bermúdea, Velasco's Premier (Hofman, 1975). The military junta was motivated to remove Velasco from office because of the economic woes that the country was experiencing. This supports the assertion made in the CIA report on the coup of 1962 that claimed the Peruvian military sees itself as necessary to maintain stability. In this case, they might have felt Velasco's failed leadership of the country provided sufficient justification for a coup. While there is always personal ambition involved in coups, it is possible that the military junta thought they were doing what was best for the country. Again, it seems less likely that these events would have occurred without precedent for similar actions. Velasco himself was installed during a coup, so why would the military have an issue removing him from office when he didn't live up to expectations? Once again, these events demonstrate the domino

effect that occurs in the wake of executive interruptions. Coups or other actions that force out leaders create perceptions of weak institutions and embolden usurpers to pursue future coups.

The final instance of a Peruvian executive failure came in 1992, though this event differs from previous cases. In April 1992, President Alberto Fujimori staged an auto golpe "self-coup", in which he dismantled Congress and a new legislature was created (Kus and Burr, 2024). This isn't the typical case of executive instability because Fujimori didn't force someone out of the office of the executive, he just consolidated power to keep himself in. Though no one was displaced from power, this was an interruption of the typical transfer of power. While this episode is about 15 years after the previous coup in Peru, it still highlights the willingness of the military to support a coup. While these actions are opportunistic to some extent, they also support the idea that continued instances of executive interruptions create more executive interruptions. Previous coups in Peru set the precedent for events like these.

Peru provides a handful of examples of how coups create tense political environments that are more likely to foster coups in the future. The first three interruptions are directly connected, and it is clear how they are all related. In 1963 the military took control to give the edge to their candidate, in 1968 the military replaced their candidate to consolidate power for the future, and in 1975 they replaced the person they installed again in order when they disapproved of his rule. Each time the military intervenes in selecting the president, it sets the country back and creates more precedent for military rule, which sets the table for future coups. While the 1992 "self-coup" differs from the other coup instances, it demonstrates another case of the military's willingness to control politics and do as it pleases. Peru's executive instability demonstrates the dangers of repeated executive interruptions and how one instance can create a domino effect. While it is outside the scope of this project, it is worth noting that on December 7,

2022, President Pedro Castillo attempted a self-coup by trying to dissolve Congress (Human Rights Watch, 2022). He was unsuccessful and subsequently removed from office.

Case Studies Summary

There are a few conclusions that can be drawn from the case studies that have been presented. For one, there seems to be some legitimacy to the idea that American intervention can cause an increased likelihood of coups. This is displayed by Guatemala, which faced a slew of coups in the wake of US intervention that likely would not have occurred if there wasn't an initial US-backed coup. While Peru was a case study of a country without US intervention, its history supports my hypothesis. Peru's history of multiple coups in reaction to each other demonstrates how coups create a fragile political environment that is likely to have more coups in the future. The Chile case study goes against my hypothesis that American intervention leads to more future coups, but it highlights an interesting point. Executive stability is not always a good thing. Sometimes, it is merely indicative of dictatorial leadership, like in Chile. While Chile didn't see an increase in coups, its democratic values suffered because of the brutal Pinochet regime, which was ushered in with US assistance. Mexico again proves that executive stability doesn't automatically translate to positive democratic outcomes. The PRI's decades-long dominance is partially attributed to corruption and stolen elections. Additionally, the presidential stability of Mexico tells a much different story than regional politics which have suffered heavily from political violence. In sum, these case studies clarify the role of US interventions and coups in executive instability. Additionally, they demonstrate the multivariate nature of democracy and how one variable can explain some things, but not everything.

Coup Map

The map above displays the number of coups per country from 1950-2021. Countries that experienced a successful American intervention are denoted by the American flag. The countries that are darker shades of blue had more coups, and the countries in light blue had fewer coups.

Coups Before vs. After Intervention

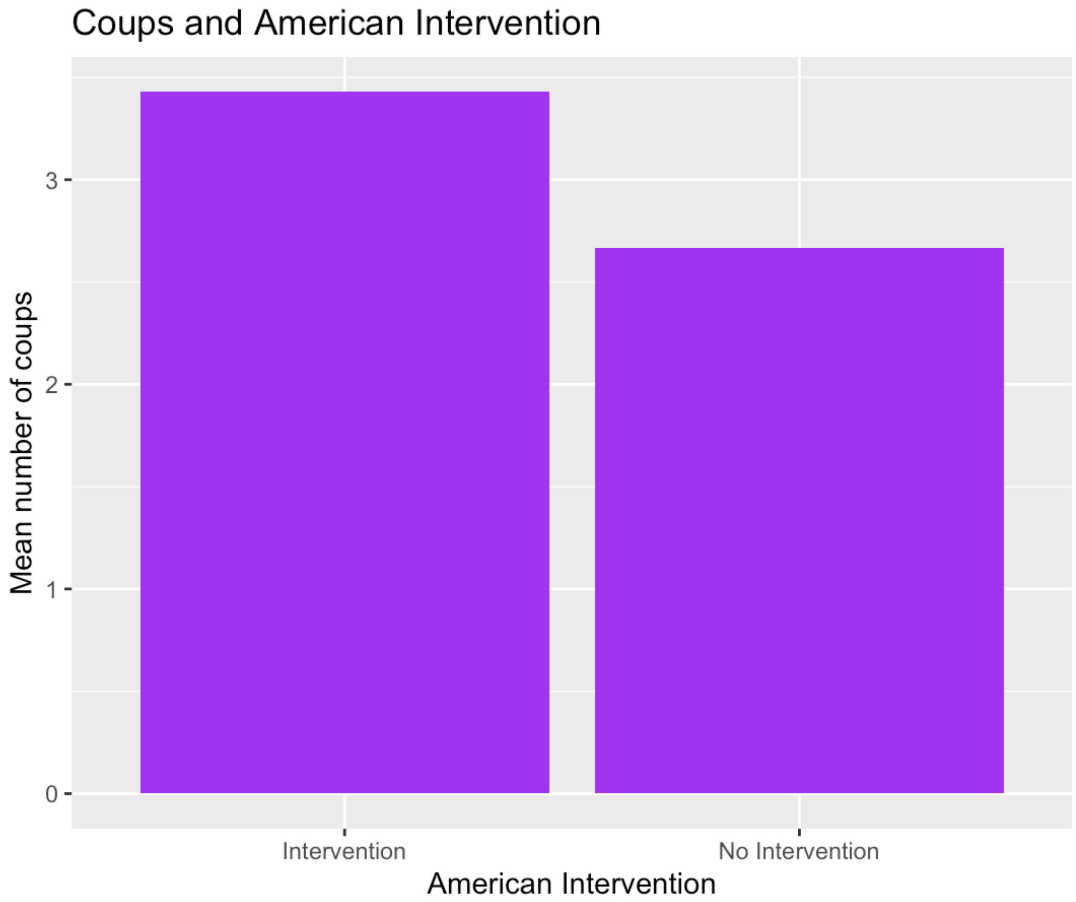
	Coups before intervention	Coups after intervention (including intervention)	American intervention year/s
Bolivia	0	8	1964, 1971
Brazil	1	1	1962-1964
Chile	0	1	1964-1973
Dominican Republic	1	1	1965
Ecuador	0	4	1960-1963,
Guatemala	0	5	1954
Panama	1	1	1989

The table above displays data that supports my hypothesis. Every country that experienced a successful, US-backed coup, either had as many, or more coups after the initial intervention. It may seem like a crude theory, but coups create more coups. Again, this phenomenon occurs because coups make peaceful, democratic transition of power less likely in the future. There are a variety of reasons that successful coups increase future coup likelihood. For one, they send a message that institutions are weak, and the only legitimate leader is the one that can forcefully take and retain power. They also create more polarization and animosity within the country. As a citizen, you would probably be dissatisfied if the democratically elected leader you voted for was kicked out of office by the military. Furthermore, this would increase support for future coups against the military junta that is seen as having illegitimate rule. As mentioned earlier in this paper, there isn't anything particularly special or unique about the ways

the United States has supported coups. The reason American intervention is used as an independent variable is simply because other countries haven't been involved in the region in the same capacity during these years. Essentially, the US government inadvertently set off a domino effect by supporting coup efforts that likely would not have succeeded without its assistance. Of course, it is necessary to qualify this argument by noting that the past can't be changed, and it is impossible to say what executive instability in these countries would have looked like without American intervention.

Quantitative Analysis

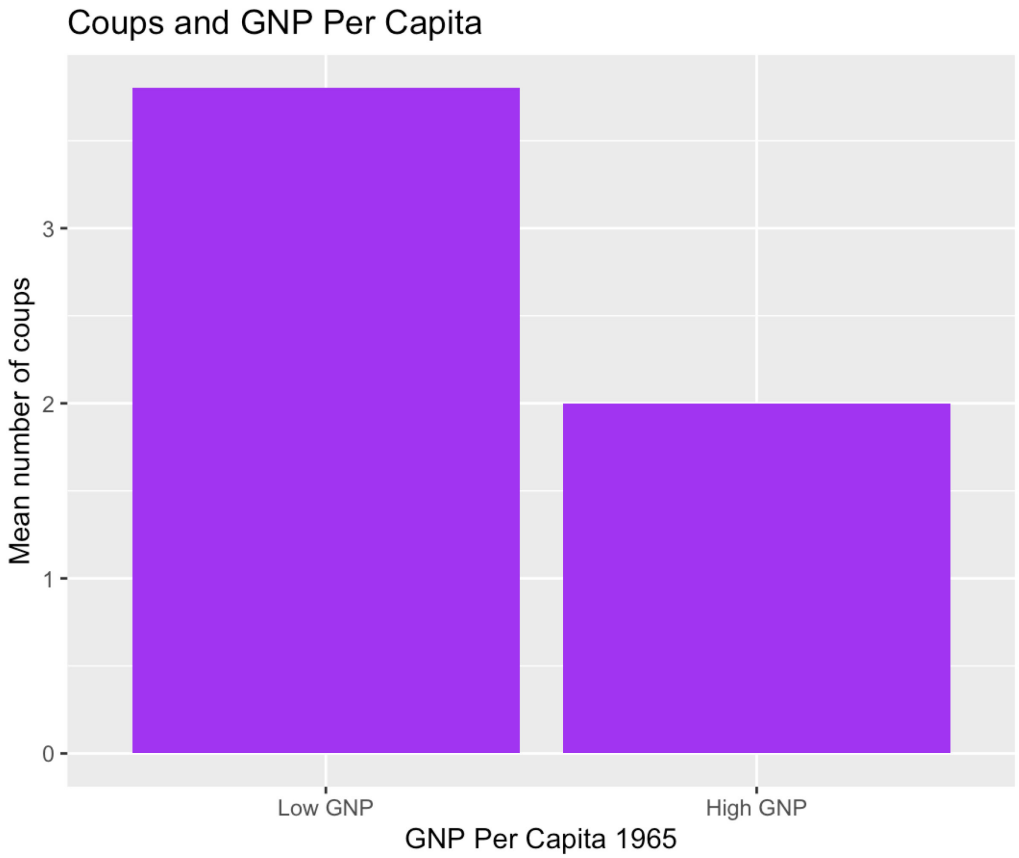
Coups and American Intervention



I created the graph above using R. This graph bolsters my hypothesis that successful American intervention leads to increased coups in the future. I sorted this data by separating the

19 countries into groups based on whether they experienced a successful American intervention from 1950-2021. From there, I calculated the mean number of successful coups these countries experienced. Countries that experienced American intervention had an average of 3.43 coups during this time frame, while countries that did not experience American intervention averaged only 2.67 coups. Based on this data, it seems that there is at least some credence to my hypothesis that American intervention would cause more coups.

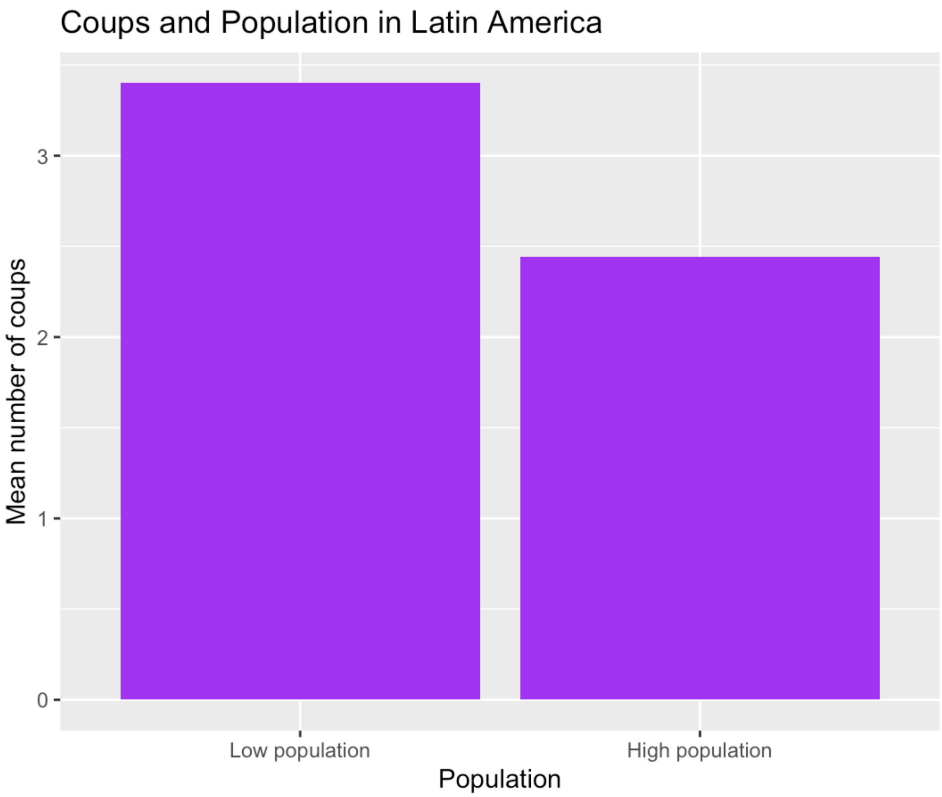
Coups and GNP Per Capita



An additional variable I tested out was GNP per capita. This variable is relevant because GNP per capita tends to be important when examining topics like political instability. I split the countries into two groups based on whether they were in the top or bottom half of the countries based on GNP per capita. Unsurprisingly, low GNP countries averaged more coups. However, the difference in average coups was a little surprising. Low GNP countries averaged 3.8 coups while High GNP countries averaged 2.0 coups. This is a much bigger difference than American

intervention as the independent variable. The difference here is 1.8 while it is about .75 when examining the effect of American intervention. The findings from this analysis aren't particularly shocking. There are a variety of reasons why poorer countries would be more inclined to experience coups. Poor economic performance tends to upset the general population and may encourage coup plotters. However, what is more likely is that political instability is causeing economic woes.

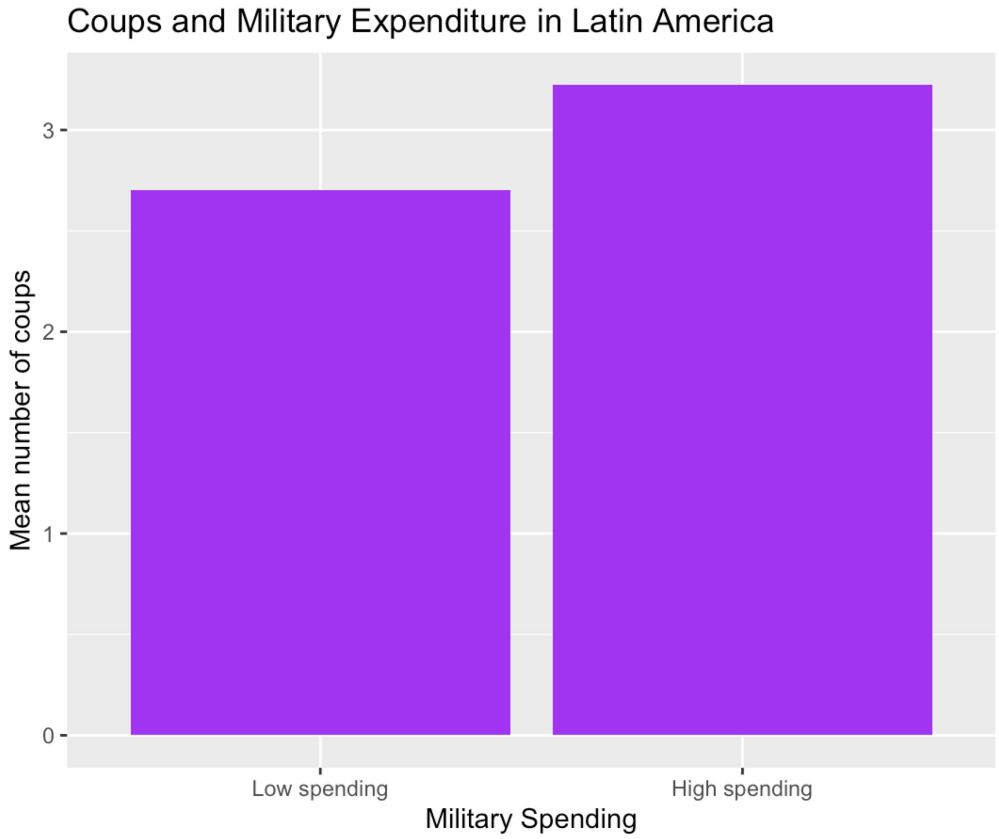
Coups and Population



Another variable I examined was population size. Again, it is typical to see population as a control variable. Countries were divided in half by low and high population. Low-population countries experienced an average of 3.4 coups while high-population countries experienced an average of 2.44 coups for a difference of .96. I theorize that this could result from population density. I would guess that lower-population countries tend to have more people living in rural areas and as a result, the military may be more likely because there likely won't be as much backlash in a country that is sparsely populated. Citizens who live far away from others and

population centers would likely find it hard to band together and push back against such an action. As a result, coup plotters in low-population countries take on less risk and are more likely to take action.

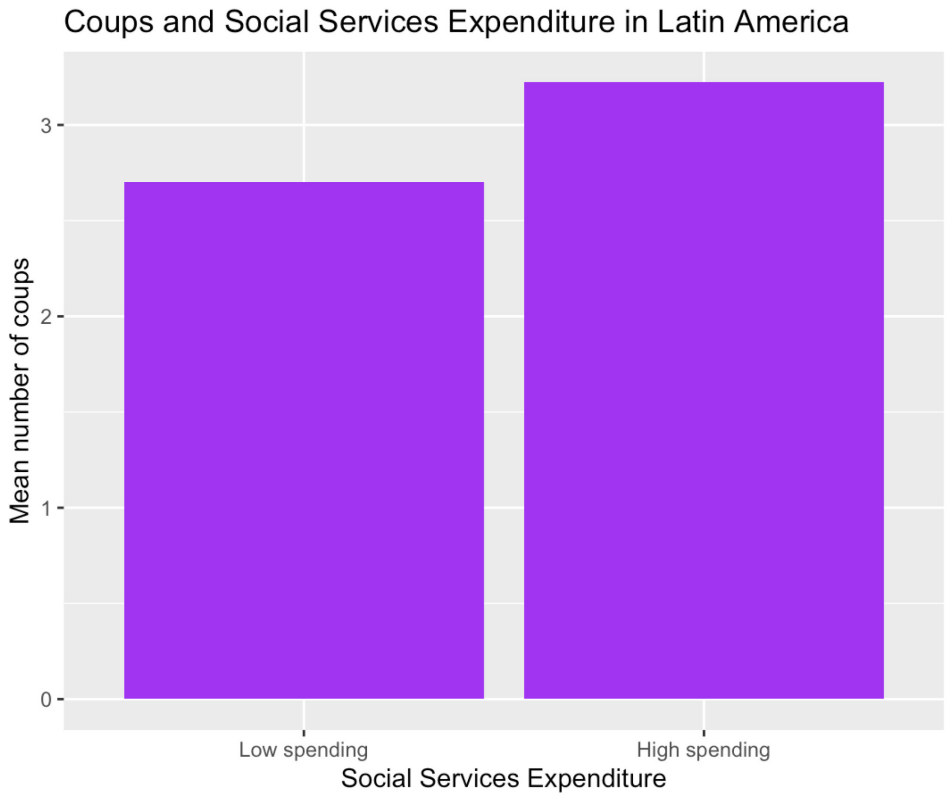
Coups and Military Expenditure



Military strength is one of the most important factors when considering coup likelihood and success. Because of this, I analyzed military expenditure as a potential cause of coups. Again, I sorted the countries by high and low spending. It is also important to note that this is based on expenditure as a % of GNP and not a dollar amount. I used % of GNP because it provides a controlled comparison of how much a country values and supports its military. Countries with higher levels of military expenditure experienced more coups. High-spending countries averaged 3.22 coups and low-spending countries averaged 2.7 coups for a difference of .52. Since the military is carrying out most coups, it seems intuitive that countries with better-funded, stronger militaries experience more coups than countries that don't spend as much on

coups. One surprising aspect of this variable is that the difference between the two groups is smaller than the other variables. This could be because once the military hits a certain level of strength or stature, there isn't any additional benefit to future coup success. At the end of the day, the military has a monopoly on weaponry and manpower, so at a certain point, more spending doesn't make the military that much more successful in coup attempts.

Coups and Social Services Spending



The final variable that I examined was social services expenditure. I took social services expenditure as a % of GNP and split the countries into high and low spending. High spending countries averaged 3.22 coups and low spending countries averaged 2.7 coups. The reason I wanted to examine this control is because I thought there might be some correlation between poor social services and increased coups. Countries with substandard access to social services might be more willing to support leadership change, even if that comes in the form of a coup. However, the data goes the other way and shows lower coup occurrence in countries that spent less on social services. I don't have a clear answer as to why that is. It could be possible that

people in high-spending countries have higher expectations of their leaders and are more disposed to get rid of them when they are unsuccessful.

Quantitative Analysis Summary

Through my quantitative research, I made interesting discoveries about coup occurrence in Latin America. While I expected GNP to be strongly correlated with coup occurrence, I was surprised that it displayed the greatest difference in successful coups out of all the variables. Population size also proved to be an intriguing variable with a relatively big difference of about 1 coup between low and high-population countries. It could be interesting to use different population-related variables in the future such as population density or indigenous population percentage. The military and social expenditure controls were slightly underwhelming and showed the least variation out of all the variables. Finally, American intervention appeared to be significant when examining coup occurrence. Though it did not have as much variation as GNP per capita or population, it still emerged as important in affecting future coup occurrence. Like all political science, this is a multivariate issue that cannot be attributed to one variable. However, my analysis suggests that American intervention is a critical factor when examining the cause of coups in Latin America during this period.

Conclusion

When I started this project, I set out to examine why Latin America seemingly experienced a disproportionate number of coups compared to other regions. While exploring the literature on this subject, I encountered lots of high-quality research that provided convincing insights about why coups and executive instability broadly plagued the area. The current literature yields valuable analysis that informed my perspective on the issue. However, I was surprised by the lack of mention of American intervention within the region as a potential cause of this phenomenon. It seems that intervening in the democratic processes of another country through the support and creation of coups would be a critical variable to consider when examining this theme. Tying in American intervention as an independent variable seemed like an

interesting way to survey this topic. After deciding upon this topic and becoming familiar with the literature, I developed the following hypothesis:

1. If a country has experienced a successful American intervention, it will experience more coups after the intervention than it did before. Therefore, countries where America intervened will experience more coups than countries where America did not intervene.

My hypothesis appears to be supported by the qualitative and quantitative analysis I performed in this project. In the Guatemala case study, it is demonstrated that American intervention can be the "first domino" that leads to a plague of coups. While Peru was not a country that experienced a successful American-backed coup, that case study supports the idea that one initial coup can create a domino effect that makes future coups more likely. Therefore, this strengthens the theory that American intervention could lead to coups that would have previously been unlikely. When examining Chile, history displays a different reality from the one I hypothesized. Instead of seeing extreme instability, Chile saw extreme stability under General Pinochet's dictatorship. Exploring this case study illustrates how executive stability is important to a flourishing democracy, but it can also be indicative of an autocracy. Similar conclusions arise from the Mexico analysis which highlights the dominance of the PRI. Additionally, the Mexico case explores regional political violence and how frequent, democratic transitions of power at the executive level don't always tell the whole story about a country. When investigating countries that experienced American intervention, the data shows that in every case, these countries had either as many or more coups after the American intervention than before.

My quantitative analysis provides a different lens to examine a causal theory. Out of all the variables tested, GNP per capita had the largest correlation on mean coup occurrence, while military and social services spending had the smallest correlation. My hypothesis was supported

by my quantitative analysis of coups and American intervention. Countries that experienced American intervention averaged .76 more coups than those that did not.

In the future, there are a few directions this project could go to examine this question further and provide new conclusions. For one, I could examine failed coup attempts in addition to successful coups and see if American intervention influenced coup success/failure rates. I also think there is a lot of potential for a game theory analysis to examine the decision making of coup plotters after witnessing a successful coup. Another route would be to expand the scope of this project to a worldwide analysis. With a broader scope, there would be more opportunities to examine different case studies and perform more advanced quantitative analysis. By expanding to a global stage, I could perform a multivariate analysis that might provide better statistics. Overall, this is a fascinating theme with lots of potential for future exploration.

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