Protecting the Regime Against an Unconstitutional Removal of Power: What are the Determinants of Success for Coup-Proofing Efforts in the Global South?

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What are the Determinants of Success for Coup-Proofing Efforts in the Global South?

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Abstract

Coups d'état and the Global South often go hand in hand. To understand the causes of coups and the determinants of success of coup-proofing efforts, this thesis uses an MSSD comparative analysis to analyse what institutions have been successful at safeguarding the Al-Assad family's rule in Syria, and what caused the fall of Mubarak in Egypt during the 2011 Arab Spring. The findings suggest that while both integrative and segregative measures provide coup-risk mitigation, integrative measures are more successful at decreasing the general motivation of staging a coup, while segregative measures are more successful at reducing the opportunity of staging a coup. Between the two rationales, integrative measures are deemed more important as they provide loyalty bonds between the officer corps and the incumbent government.

Key words: Coup-proofing, coup-risk, integrative, segregative, Syria, Egypt

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Introduction

‘Coup d'état’, an occurrence which has been around for decades in the past, and in all likelihood will remain to challenge incumbents for decades to come. For some countries, like Syria, they seem to have been the norm — particularly between 1949 and 1970. For others, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, they are a method to influence governments abroad. Whether triggered by a foreign government, domestic military, or a single person’s actions, coups (and coup attempts) are an abundantly researched topic within the field of political science. That said, there are some gaps and limitations in the current literature on coup-proofing in the Global South. Limitations which this thesis covers by building on existing literature, discussing relevant historical factors, suggesting possible causative factors of coup-proofing success, and also exploring possible avenues for further research.

With coups predominantly being targeted at authoritarian leaders, incumbents of these states are kept on the edge of their seats. Even more so because “80 percent of leaders who lost their office in an irregular fashion suffered such [exile, jail, or death] punishment.” (Goemans, 2008, p. 772). While constantly having to ensure that their military officers are not plotting against them, that their political challengers are kept at bay, and that their citizens are not planning a revolution, various coup-proofing methods have been employed by different leaders. For some countries these attempts at coup-proofing have been successful, while for others they have not. For this reason, this thesis aims to answer the question: “What are the determinants of success for coup-proofing efforts in the Global South?”.

Within the topic of coup-proofing there are two overarching rationales: integrative coup-proofing measures, and segregative measures. The hypothesis is that between the two,

integrative measures of coup-proofing are more effective at minimizing coup-risk than segregative ones. The reason for this prediction is that integrative measures build loyalty between the regime and the military, and thus decrease the *motivation*. On the other hand segregative measures attempt to reduce the *opportunity* of such coups. Between opportunity and motivation, motivation is considered the more important aspect. This is because when the motivation is low, but the opportunity is high, the lack of motivation will de facto minimize the likelihood of a coup.

This thesis will first provide background information as to the definition of coups and their triggers. From there the case selection and justification will be explained, after which a brief history of the subject countries is provided. This will be followed by the theoretical framing, an explanation of the different rationales and their specific measures, and limitations of these measures. That is followed by the detailed hypothesis, an explanation of the research design and variables, and the responses of the regimes to the emanating pressures of the 2011 Arab Spring. After the analysis of coup-proofing is given for both countries, the findings are presented in the conclusion, and avenues for further research are explained.

Background

What are Coups

While there are minor differences in the ways that scholars classify coups, the general consensus is that a coup's aim "is to detach the permanent employees of the state from the political leadership" (Luttwak, 2016, p. 2) to then remove the incumbent from power and install a successor, whose policies better align with the will of the perpetrator of the coup (Zald & Berger, 1978, p. 833). This infiltration is often targeted against "a small but critical segment of the state

apparatus, which is then used to displace the government from its control" (Luttwak, 1969, p. 12). Although coups *can* be supported by the masses, their plot is often only known by a small number of people. The reason for this is that the authoritarian nature of the incumbent government will often attempt to suppress any opposition which endangers their power.

On a micro-level analysis, coups can be found to carry traits of other power-seizing methods — like liberation, insurgency, putsches, civil wars, and revolutions. However, unlike these methods, coups in general lack a specific political orientation (Luttwak, 2016, p. 11). For example, while they are often assumed to give rise to a right wing regime, the Yemeni coup of 1962 (Gandy, 1998, p. 272), the Iraqi coup of 1958 (Romero, 2011, p. 16), and the Greek coup of 1967 (Kassimeris, 2006, p. 62) show that they can also result in a leftist government.

The Triggers of Coups

To understand coups, coup-proofing, and coup-risk in more detail it is important to look at their triggers. More often than not their seeds are sown by domestic military officers and generals who want to take over personally (like Gamal Abd al-Nasser in 1952 Egypt).

However, as the 1953 Iranian coup shows, they can also be induced by foreign governments. In a joint operation named the TPAJAX Project (also called Operation Ajax, or Operation Boot), the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) removed the democratically elected premier Mossadeq of Iran (Abrahamian, 2013). The main reason was "to re-establish the power of the Shah, and to replace the Mossadeq government with one which would govern Iran according to constructive policies. … to reach the equitable oil settlement … which would [also] vigorously prosecute the

dangerously strong Communist Party" (Wilber, 1969, p. 90) — essentially an effort used by foreign powers to establish a favourable governing party for their policies.

On the other hand, in a more recent wave of uprisings the 2011 Arab Spring comes to mind. After the self-immolation of Tarek el-Tayeb Mohammed Bouazizi on December 17th 2010, many Tunisians took to the streets to protest the corruption and political discontent in the country (Owonibi & Okechukwu, 2017). Within a few weeks of Bouazizi's actions, the pressures of the Tunisian population were so high that long-time dictatorial president Zein al-Abidin Ben Ali was forced to flee the country and step down (Campante & Chor, 2012). Shortly thereafter, the wave of uprisings spread to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and led to the fall of multiple regimes. Egypt's Mubarak was forced to step down, Libya's Quadaffi was removed from power, and Yemen's Ali Abdullah al-Saleh was deposed. While the Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Assad managed to retain power, he too suffered a significant blow to his rule (Nassig, 2014, p. 1).

This gives rise to the question of how Mubarak lost control after successfully ruling Egypt for 30 years, while Al-Assad managed to retain his power. How was he able to reinforce his incumbency so well that he is one of the few dictators who has not only managed to withstand the immense political pressures of the Arab Spring, but also protect his power from the numerous coup attempts that have occurred since his accession in 2000 (Leverett, 2007, p. 101)?

Case Selection and Justification

The MENA region has proven to be fertile ground for coups. So fertile, in fact, that scholars such as Be'Eri (1982) have argued that "the quasi-ordinary form of change of a regime or a

government in the Arab states had become the military coup" (p. 69). Quinlivan's (1999) research complements this argument, as he finds that "between March 1949 … and the end of 1980, 55 coups were attempted in Arab states — of which half of them successful" (p. 133). In addition to the extreme frequency of coups between 1949 and 1980, MENA countries also have similar contextual factors like culture, religion, and diversity of ethnicities. This similarity in contextual factors provides the perfect framework for a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) comparative analysis, which will be discussed in further detail in the section on 'research design'.

The Egyptian and Syrian cases, in particular, were selected as both countries have employed extensive coup-proofing strategies, which fall under a rationale which is either predominantly integrative (Syria), or predominantly segregative (Egypt). While each country focuses on a different rationale, it is important to note that they both also use the 'other' rationale as well — i.e. Syria also uses segregative measures, and Egypt also uses integrative measures.

Although these measures have been successful in securing their (former) presidents' 30 year incumbency, the pressures that 2011 and 2013 brought proved to be too high for the Egyptian regime (Albrecht, 2014a). While these two years were fundamental turning points in recent Egyptian history, this thesis maintains a broader scope: the tenure of Hosni Mubarak from 1981-2011, and that of the Al-Assad family from 1971-present.

To offer general background details about the two subject countries, their political past, their presidents, and a brief overview of Syrian and Egyptian history is essential.

Brief Syrian History

In the brief 21 years "between 1949 and 1970, Syria was the subject of 15 successful coups of which three took place in 1949 alone" (Quinlivan, 1999, p. 134). When Hafez Al-Assad acceded to power by means of a bloodless coup in 1971, he inherited an arsenal of state owned media outlets that his predecessors had amassed. Whether it was "radio, television, or newspaper … it reported whatever the state requested" (Zahler, 2010). While maintaining a tight grip on the information the public received through his reports, Hafez exercized a firm control over the Ba'th party and the Syrian military. By reserving higher ranks for Alawites — his religious counterparts — he managed to secure loyal units of armed forces (Qaddour, 2013).

In addition to allocating general and officer ranks to his family, friends, and religious peers, Hafez set up a Stasi-like internal espionage system which reported directly back to him. Through this method he managed to suppress and control any internal threat to his regime (Rathmell, 1996), while using the State of Emergency Law to "restrict meetings or travel, make arrests, censor speech or writing, seize property, or evacuate entire neighborhoods at any time in the name of national security" (Zahler, 2010, p. 61).

Throughout the years of Hafez's incumbency he set up institutions like the system of internal espionage, to prevent others from reenacting his method of coming to power and replacing him — a coup. These tactics were recognized by incumbents from other states, and they, too, decided to set similar methods in place. Böhmelt & Pilster (2014) argue that as a result of methods like these there was a general decrease in the number of coup attempts, while the relative success of them increased "due to better training and equipment" (p. 171). Aside from

other leaders implementing similar measures, the mere fact that Hafez was able to maintain power from 1971 till his death in 2000 goes to show that the institutions he set up were evidently successful at safeguarding his incumbency.

Since 2000, Bashar Al-Assad, Hafez's son, has been the incumbent president of Syria. While criticized by some for slow decision making (Zisser, 2005, p. 116), his father's ability to maintain control of Syria and deflect any attempts at coups is a skill that he too has mastered.

Brief Egyptian History

When Gamal Abd al-Nasser took control of Egypt through the 1952 coup, the status quo in which the military had a large amount of economic and political power was installed (Beinin, 1989). This stayed in effect until Anwar Sadat succeeded Abd al-Nasser, and decided to gradually decrease the level of power and influence that the military had. Throughout the course of Sadat's tenure a "divided pattern of political–military relations emerged" (Koehler, 2016, p. 372), which were further pursued by Mubarak (Cooper, 1982; Koehler, 2016). The military's power was decreased by gradually demilitarizing the cabinet, and increasing the funding for the internal security services (Stacher, 2012, p. 7). However, to prevent the increasing regime resentment from the military (because of their decreasing power) to lead to a coup, both Sadat and Mubarak employed integrative measures to bind the military to the regime.

While Syria's Bashar inherited the presidential role from his father, Mubarak took a more traditional route. After having served in the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) as an officer, Mubarak rose to the rank of Air Chief Marshal (commander of the air force) which he led from 1972 to 1975. In April of 1975 the then president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, appointed Mubarak to be his

vice-president (McDermott, 2013, p. 42). In the following years, Mubarak proved to be a powerful asset as he managed to improve Saudi-Egyptian relations by re-opening discussions with the Saudi Crown Prince, Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud — something that Sadat was unable to do (Merriam, 1983). He was also successful in building friendships with Oman's Sultan Qaboos al Said, Sudan's president Jafar Nimeiry, and Morocco's king Hassan II.

Following Sadat's assassination on the 6th of October 1981, Mubarak became president, which he remained to be for 30 years. Throughout Mubarak's tenure he followed similar steps to that of Al-Assad senior, and managed to gradually reinforce his incumbency. This proved to be successful until the pressures of the 2011 Arab Spring forced him to step down (Hassan, 2011). Although Hosni Mubarak's tenure ended before his son Gamal was able to take control, the threat of Gamal's liberalization of Egyptian politics and the economy was widely detested within the military corps, as that would likely decrease the strong position of the military further.

Although president Hafez Al-Assad and Hosni Mubarak became presidents in vastly different ways, both hold the title of longest serving presidents in their countries' histories.

General Theoretical Framing

The intellectual framework that is applied in the context of coup-proofing is Game Theory. The reason that this is most applicable is that it offers a compelling explanation into the decision-making of incumbents, depending on the competing actors (opposition forces) within their political setting (Anderson, 2016). As such, the logic of Game Theory suggests that when an incumbent feels that their power is being tested, they will (usually) set-up coup-proofing institutions in an attempt to fortify their power.

Scholars like Singh (2014) have devised various ways of looking at coups, for example (i) “miniature invasions of the country by its own armed forces whose outcomes are determined by tactical dominance” (p. 15), or (ii) “referendums on the continued rule of the incumbent, a metaphorical plebiscite or vote of no confidence taken within the military” (p. 15). While it is important to recognize that these different explanations exist, this thesis focuses on coups in general as the differentiation in explanations falls outside of the scope of this paper. That being said, it could be an interesting avenue for further research to investigate whether explanations which are linked to ‘tactical dominance’ are more related to opportunity (the segregative rationale), while a ‘vote of no confidence’ is more related to motive (the integrative rationale).

Theory Behind Coup Proofing

Sudduth (2017) argues that because the unconstitutional removal of an incumbent is likely to result in their imprisonment, exile, or death, leaders have even more incentives (other than to merely stay in power) to minimize the likeliness of a successful coup — this process is called *coup-proofing*. Others, like Bou Nassif (2015), believe that as soon as coup-proofing methods have been put into place, they become “self-reinforcing: [as] they create networks of powerful military actors whose influence and interests are dependent on making the reversal of the established pattern of civil-military relations difficult” (p. 259).

While there seems to be a general consensus over the idea that coup proofing methods have at least some effect, Albrecht (2014a) argues that coup-proofing only “works to buy incumbents time in office but does not reduce the general risk of falling to coups” (p. 660). As a result, coup-proofing is essentially a costly, and endless financial burden to the state, as long as

the incumbent maintains their coup-proofing efforts, says Cranston-Cuebas (2018). This thesis is of the opinion that Cranston-Cuebas' (2018) argument is often correct, but not always. In the case of Syria's Alawite composition of the armed forces, for example, the 'endless financial burden' is not a noteworthy issue, as Alawite soldiers are no more expensive than their non-Alawite counterparts.

Aside from the financially exhaustive nature of (most) measures, coup-proofing can also be considered strategically challenging with the constant seesaw-like balancing game that is entertained. If, for instance, an incumbent were to weaken their coercive branch to limit the coup-risk, they would also forgo a level of security against external threats. To understand the nature of coup-proofing better, the next section explains the different components, rationales, and methods to it.

Coup-Proofing Versus Coup-Risk

The fundamental aim of coup-proofing is to prevent a replacement of power. However, in actuality the process through which this is done is by decreasing the *coup-risk*, says Albrecht (2014a, p. 660). Belkin & Schofer (2003) more specifically outline coup-risk as "the probability of a coup attempt (whether or not successful), not to the probability of a successful coup" (p. 595). In other words, even if the coup attempt is unsuccessful, the more important issue is whether or not the attempt is made in the first place — and the *risk* that this presents.

The coup-risk probability can be divided into two main pillars: (i) motive (whether or not the military *wants to* stage a coup), and (ii) opportunity (is the military *able to* stage the coup) (Croissant, 2013, p. 269; Finer, 1988). This is an important distinction since the different

rationales behind coup-proofing build on each pillar. This thesis agrees with scholars like Cottiero (2020) and Aslan (2017) on the idea that the motivation behind a coup attempt is of a greater importance than the opportunity. The reason for this is that if the motivation is high and the opportunity is low, the risk of a coup happening is still substantial. On the other hand, if the motivation is low but the opportunity is high, the lack of motivation will lower the likelihood of the coup from happening — even if it were to be easy to stage a coup.

Segregation Versus Integration

Albrecht (2014b) distinguishes between two rationales in relation to coup-proofing; integration and segregation of the military. He argues that "some measures are designed to bind officers closer to incumbents (*integration*), while others to move the officer corps out of the political arena (*segregation*)" (p. 41). The integrative measure of Albrecht's (2014b) distinction aims to reduce the 'motive' pillar of coup-risk by creating loyalty bonds. The latter measure, segregation, focuses on the minimization of coup-staging opportunity — by moving the military arena as far as possible away from the political arena. Although the two rationales seem to be on opposite ends of the coup-proofing spectrum, their specific tactics are often combined in practice. An example of this can be found in Al-Assad's use of integrative coup-proofing methods, which include building 'communities of trust' and 'sect-based loyalty', while also using segratative measures like the creation of 'parallel institutions', and 'internal espionage'.

Coup Proofing Strategies

When looking at coup-proofing from a segratative approach, one of the most literal methods of segregation is to not only remove the link between the coercive-branch and politics, but to also remove (part of) the coercive-branch from the coercive-branch. By using the method that Brown, Fariss, & Mcmahon (2015) call 'divide-and-conquer', incumbents can create various "intelligence organizations … to not spy on external threats, but spy on each other and potential domestic opponents" (p. 4) — this includes the intelligence agencies themselves. While this is an extremely financially inefficient way to organize intelligence agencies, it is successful in ensuring that the incumbent is informed if one of them is planning a coup. Although Brown, Fariss, & Mcmahon (2015) call this 'divide-and-conquer', the same tactic is also known as "counter espionage" (Schofield & Zekulin, 2011), or "internal espionage" (Albrecht, Croissant, & Lawson, 2016).

A somewhat similar approach is that of counterbalancing. Here, instead of having internal espionage, the *military* is divided into various parallel factions. These factions maintain a similar mandate, but work as independent bodies. As a result of the lacking unitary command, they are 'structurally coup-proofed' (Powell, 2012, p. 175). In other words, if a state has four different factions of the military and one of them decides to defect and stage a coup, the three others can protect the incumbent regime from the coup-staging faction (Andreski, 1968).

While the methods of internal espionage and counterbalancing divide and segregate the coercive branches, integrative measures do the opposite. Material incentives — an integrative approach — are usually limited to high-ranking officers, where they receive benefits and favours in exchange for their loyalty. As such, the officers are better off with the incumbent president as

they reap the benefits of their tenure. Since staging a coup would only jeopardize their personal wealth, the motivation is reduced (Sudduth, 2016, p. 7). These benefits can vary from managerial positions in state-owned factories, to free land, medicare access, housing, and economic opportunities say Prina (2017, p. 40) and Grewal (2017).

Aside from entertaining integrative measures through nepotism and patronage, incumbents can exploit social bonds through creating what Makara (2013) calls "communities of trust". Such communities have a "shared identity with a ruling regime, which differentiates them from the rest of society" (Makara, 2013, p. 337). As a result of the shared background and the beneficial treatment over others, loyalty to the president is built. This communal sentiment can be enhanced by creating the perception of an impending threat to the community. Due to this perceived threat, the community comes together and rallies behind the president. A similar tactic was used post-WWII, by "former colonial masters, to build legitimacy on the basis of national militancy and struggle against hegemonic imperialism" (Bou Nassif, 2015, p. 256).

The underlying logic of internal espionage is to ensure that if an intelligence agency finds out that their counterpart is planning a coup, that the incumbent will be informed. As such, another coup-proofing method is to reduce inter-branch communication between the different sections of the coercive organizations of the state. By reducing the inter-branch communication and routing it past the incumbent's regime, the collaboration in coup staging efforts can be reduced and uncovered quicker (Brown, Fariss, & Mcmahon, 2015, p. 6).

The Limitations to Coup-Proofing Measures

Despite the positive effects that coup-proofing measures can have on the reduction of coup-risk, they also have limitations. For instance, in the case of internal espionage, the marginalized status of different intelligence organizations and military factions can lead to the resentment of the incumbent. If different organizations or factions end up with the same anti-regime sentiment because they feel marginalized, it can backfire against the regime — particularly in loyalty-testing times, such as a civilian uprisings or other domestic crises (Bou Nassif, 2015, p. 254).

While nepotism and (material) benefits have proven to build high-ranked officer loyalty, it provides no extra benefits to lower-ranking officers or soldiers. As such, when an incumbent is threatened and the high-ranking officers receive the directives to suppress the demonstration, the loyalty between the low-ranking officers and soldiers, and the incumbent can be insufficiently strong to follow their orders. Bou Nassif (2015) argues that there is the possibility that the soldiers will not only defect and ignore their orders, but that they may actually join in the protests — "rather than slaughter their country men" (p. 248). Moreover, he argues that while the material incentives build a significant level of loyalty, there is a tipping point in which the motivation to maintain control of their subordinates supersedes the high-ranking officers' material benefits (Bou Nassif, 2015, p. 255). Furthermore, such benefits can also have an opposite effect to the one that is intended and cause grievances in rank-and-file. These grievances can further increase regime resentment in lower ranks, which can ultimately lead to a

'splinter' of the armed forces staging a coup (Croissant, Keuhn, & Eschenauer, 2018; Mushkat, 1992)

As is the case with other coup-proofing measures, there is a flipside to the positive effect the reduction in inter-branch communication can bring: the inability to quickly relay information between coercive branches in times of crisis. As a result of the indirect communication between different coercive institutions in times of crisis, the likelihood of loss of control is higher.

The above examples show that while coup-proofing methods have potential to be effective, they also carry risks with them. Not only does an incumbent therefore need to take cautious steps with what type of methods are implemented, but as Suddeth (2017) explains whether or not they want to implement them in the first place. He argues that "political leaders are less likely to take actions to reduce the military's coup-making capabilities when they already face a high risk of a coup, because such actions in themselves are likely to spark a coup" (p. 4). Essentially balancing the dilemma of risking a coup by not having coup-risk mitigating institutions in place, and risking a coup by setting these institutions in place.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that integrative coup-proofing measures are better at mitigating coup-risk than segregative measures are. This assumption does not mean that segregative methods provide no extra reinforcement to the incumbent's tenure, but rather that they simply have less of an effect. This hypothesis is based on the distinction between opportunity and motive.

While segregative measures like internal-espionage, counterbalancing, and the reduction of inter-branch communication are successful at minimizing the *opportunity* of coups, they are

likely to increase military and intelligence-agency resentment towards the regime, and can thus cause soldiers to "defect from embattled incumbents" (Koehler, 2016, p. 364). The reason for this hypothesis is that these segregative measures do not show particular trust in the coercive apparatus of the state, from the incumbent's side. So despite the aforementioned measures being successful at reducing the coup opportunity, they are likely to increase the motive (Arafat, 2017).

On the other hand, integrative measures are expected to be more successful at mitigating coup-risk as they decrease the general *motivation* of staging one, rather than the opportunity. With the exploitation of social bonds; the building of communities of trust, and the purchase of officer loyalty through benefits, the general coup-motivation is decreased. That being said, measures like buying officer loyalty are limited in their reach. For officer loyalty to be successful on a regime-level, the bond between the high-ranking officers and the rest of the corps needs to be strong. If it is not, the officers will likely lose power over their subordinates as soldiers realize that they are drawing the short end of the benefit stick — all while their superiors are reaping the benefits. This means that providing (material) benefits to officers may increase their loyalty to the regime, but it is likely to increase grievances among the rank-and-file.

Since the defection of soldiers takes away the foundation of the 'officer' title (an officer needs an army to command), it is further hypothesized that the bought loyalty between officers and the incumbent is weaker than the fear of the officers' soldiers defecting. So the (material) benefit aspect of the integrative measure comes down to the idea that 'the chain is only as strong as its weakest link' — if the bond between the officers and soldiers is weak, the added benefit of material incentives is increasingly limited in its coup-proofing scope. The importance of maintaining loyalty between the officers and soldiers is not only rooted in the ability to suppress

mass-uprisings through a strong, loyal military, but rather it also maintains the bond between the incumbent and low ranking soldiers — a bond which limits the likelihood of small, low-ranking splinter groups attempting to stage a coup.

Ideally the coup-proofing measures that a regime sets in place are both integrative as well as segregative, since that combination reduces both the motive, as well as the opportunity.

Research Design/ Methodology

As is briefly outlined in the case selection and justification, the focus on Syria and Egypt lays the solid groundwork for a MSSD comparative approach. In both cases similar regional pressures challenged the regimes' incumbents, and both countries entertained extensive coup-proofing measures. With the major difference being the rationale (segregation and integration) behind the specific institutions set in place, it becomes possible to hint at the likely causative reasons for success. However, as a result of the real-life nature of political scientific analyses, one of the weaknesses is that *ceteris paribus* cannot be attained (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Therefore, it is not possible to say with absolute certainty that there are no spurious or confounding variables that influenced the survival, or the fall, of the subject regimes (Caramani, 2020). That being said, in a real-life context, the case selection is as good as any for a MSSD approach — even if it is not possible to completely rule out other potential influential factors (Anckar, 2008). Even without the absolute certainty of the findings being influenced by other factors, they are still relevant as they offer important insights into the real-life implications for incumbents of regimes in a similar (MENA) setting.

Furthermore, due to the real-life nature of the analysis, this thesis is limited to making assumptions based on the combination of applied coup proofing strategies, rather than independent methods. Not being able to independently assess each coup-proofing institution means that it is not possible to relate a specific empirical value of success (for example: 'counterbalancing improves coup-proofing success by 15%') to each individual measure, as it would largely be based on normative conjecture.

While these are downsides, the successes and failures of coup-proofing as a whole are evident through the replacement of an incumbent — or the lack thereof.

Variables

For this study, the independent variables are the coup-risk mitigating institutions that are explained in the 'coup proofing strategies' section of the theoretical framework. The dependent variable is the binary outcome of either the successful implementation of these institutions (no coup taking place), or the unsuccessful implementation (which results in the removal of the incumbent).

The Emanating Pressures of the Arab Spring

The 2011 Arab Spring was a major turning point for many countries in the MENA region. It is thus important to look at the initial, and successive responses that the Egyptian and Syrian regime had to these pressures, as this provides important insights into the effectiveness of coup-proofing institutions in times of domestic unrest.

Mubarak's Response

After the self immolation spark in Tunisia, the wave of mass uprisings quickly spread to other countries in the region. When it arrived in Egypt on the 25th of January 2011 it was largely targeted towards Mubarak and his regime, as he was seen as the reason for Egypt's mismanagement. This mismanagement was in part related to electoral fraud and political censorship, but also corruption and unemployment levels in the country (Anderson, 2011). The low wages, increase in food prices, and police brutality also played a significant role (Halverson, Ruston, & Trethewey, 2013; Nepstad, 2013). While they were less on the forefront of the protests, the demographic structural factors, and the long lasting state-of-emergency law that had been in place for the last couple decades was also a subject of the protests (Liguori, 2012). Aside from the mass protest at Tahrir Square in Cairo, numerous cases of civil resistance demonstrations, civil disobedience, and strike actions occurred. While limited in number, there were some who followed in Bouazizi's footsteps by self-immolating in front of the Egyptian parliament (Akvani & Moosavinezhad, 2012, p. 62).

With the country in turmoil, Mubarak decided to make use of the institutions that he had put in place to prevent such uprisings: his internal security services. Having limited the military's power and mandate to external threats, he solely relied on the Central Security Force (CSF) and secret police to repress internal protests and protect his incumbency (Burns, 2019, p. 107). This quickly proved to be too meager of a regime fortification to withstand the tens of thousands of protestors. Along with his CSF losing control over the protests, Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) broke down (Heiss, 2012). In an attempt to temper his population's anger towards

him, he announced that he would not run for president in the next election and that he would offer concessions to the opposition party (Khasyi'in, 2019, p. 76). This too proved to have no effect on decreasing the population's animosity, so the Egyptian military was ordered to intervene (Makara, 2013, p. 345). However, as a result of having limited the military's economic and political power, and the soldiers having friends and family members at the protests, they refused to suppress the demonstration and were welcomed by protestors (Varol, 2012, p. 434).

Having lost his CSF, secret police, and military loyalty, the coup-risk mitigating institutions proved to be utterly unsuccessful at protecting him. With the *volonté générale* still demanding his immediate removal, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) agreed to become the interim leadership of the country, after Mubarak and his vice president Omar Suleiman were deposed one month after the protest began (Martini & Taylor, 2011, p. 127). Over the successive months the SCAF managed to successfully consolidate power and restore relative peace to Egypt (Albrecht, 2014b).

Bahsar's Response

In the Syrian case, the civil protests that emerged in early 2011 were only in part connected to the self-immolation of Bouazizi. While this event, and the recent deposition of Mubarak increased the domestic pressures in Syria, the spark that ignited the mass uprisings (which would later turn into a civil war) is based on the arrest of a group of school children in the city of Dar'ā. Although the reports of whether or not they were tortured vary, the civilian response is well documented. Those who responded to the arrest by publicly demonstrating against it were

violently repressed, leaving numerous dead. This repression, in turn led to larger anti-government protests, which also took place in cities outside of Dar'ā (Morgan, 2013, p. 1).

Similarly to Mubarak's goal of tempering his population, Bashar attempted to provide concessions as well — such as releasing dozens of anti-regime political prisoners (Provence, 2012, p. 155). However, as the reach of the protests grew to other cities, so did the reasons for demonstration. Within weeks the protests became the embodiment of the anti-regime sentiment which demanded change in the country's unemployment rates, state-of-emergency law, and human rights violations (Güçtürk, 2014, p. 91). The self-enrichment systems that the Al-Assad family entertained in the early 2000's were also subject of the protests (Heydemann, 2013, p. 68). As the country descended into chaos and hundreds of thousands joined in on the protests, Bashar, like Mubarak, ordered his military to repress the uprisings. The main difference between the two states is the execution of orders. While the Egyptian military had high defection rates, Al-Assad's snipers and tanks remained loyal. Throughout the successive months, the level of violence gradually increased as various rebel groups also took to arms.

Although the coup-proofing institutions that were set in place managed to fulfil their aim — to safeguard Al-Assad's incumbency, the country descended into a civil war mid-2011. Throughout the course of the (currently ongoing) civil war, the Al-Assad regime has taken hard hits with the loss of landmass, alliances, and soldiers. The loyalty of generals, officers, and many soldiers, however, has remained (Albrecht, 2014b) — and he has thus managed to maintain his presidential title.

Analysis

Having detailed different coup-proofing methods, the history and responses of both Syria and Egypt to uprisings, and the different rationales that each country has employed, the analysis section aims to answer the hypothesis of whether or not "integrative coup-proofing measures are better at mitigating coup-risk than segregative measures".

Coup-Proofing in Syria

In the successful case of coup-proofing in Syria it becomes clear that a single method of coup-risk minimization is not enough. Instead, both Hafez and Bashar have used a compilation of various measures (Refaie, 2015) — measures which minimize *both* coup opportunity and coup motivation.

The arguably most important coup-proofing method used is the exploitation of social bonds. This thesis takes the opinion that within the exploitation of such bonds, the allocation of jobs within the armed forces is what makes or breaks the regimes' coup-proofing success in times of crisis. The reason for this position is that when the composition of Syria's armed forces is analysed, the percentage of high ranking officers who have an Alawite background is astonishingly high (Van Dam, 2017). Of "the entire military command ... 65 percent is composed of Alwaites" (Qaddour, 2013, p. 69), while they only "make up 10 - 12 percent of the total population" (Heydemann, 2013, p. 64). This is of particular importance as the Alawites are a minority group within Syria — a group which both Al-Assad presidents belong to (Dagher, 2013). As such, when generals, officers, and soldiers with an Alawite background are recruited

to the armed forces, they have a sect-based loyalty to the regime. With the fear of becoming the suppressed minority group they once were, they will protect their sect's ruling position within the country at all costs. If they were to be unsuccessful at protecting the Al-Assad family's rule it would not only mean the end of Bashar's power, but also the end of their representation on the national level (Clausen, 2015, p. 4).

In addition to the Alawite background of most members of the officer corps, Bashar has successfully built communities of trust. In such communities resentment against the opposition or 'the other' is formed, and the community is motivated to protect the regime (Makara, 2013). With the fear of 'the other' becoming the ruling party and the community losing its beneficial tie to the regime, a personal incentive is formed. With this measure largely being targeted towards the lower-ranked officers and soldiers within the armed forces, Syria's regime has managed to build loyalty in the upper, middle, and lower ranks. As a result of the loyalty created through both methods, the general *motivation* of staging a coup has decreased significantly (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005, p. 9).

In addition to the Alawite support for the regime, Phillips (2013) and Lesch (2012) argue that there is also significant support for the Al-Assad family rule from the Christian community, as they "fear the Islamist-dominated oppision coming to power" (Phillips, 2013, p. 539). So aside from the Alwaites having a direct stake in the Al-Assad rule, the Christian community also supports Bashar's incumbency, as he is a better option than the Islamist opposition in their eyes. This means that the small percentage of Christian military personnel also supports the Al-Assad regime.

From a coup *opportunity* minimization approach, Bashar has further improved the functioning of the internal espionage systems and the counterbalancing measures that his father put in place. When Hafez set-up the first parallel military structure he put his brother Rifaat in command (Quinlivan, 1999, p. 147). This ensured family-based loyalty between the parallel structure and the regime. Soon after, other counterbalancing institutions were put in place which still remain in effect today. These parallel structures are "[also] in charge of the regime security. … [They] include the Defense Companies, the Republican Guard, the Special Forces, the Third Armored Division, and Unit 549, all headed by the president's close family members" (Bou Nassif, 2015, p. 268). Although these structures have so far been successful in preventing coups, one downside is that it marginalizes the military response capabilities, and that it creates regime resentment (as the military's power is limited).

As a result of the sizable funding that Hafez devoted towards internal and external security, an approximated 35 percent of the national budget was spent on the military (Belkin, 2005, p. 72). Of that 35 percent, it is approximated that one third of it went to counterbalancing in particular, which is equivalent to 11 percent of the total annual government budget (Belkin, 2005, p. 73). Due to this high spending, the Al-Assads are limited in the material benefits they can offer to high-ranking officers and other military elite. However, in an effort to further boost military loyalty they allow selected officers to have a (limited) stake in regional companies. As such, they ensure that the officers' survival is tied to the survival of the regime. While such systems can be found in Syria, it is important to note that they are much more scarce than their counterparts in Mubarak's Egypt. Unlike Mubarak's military-business crossover institution

which functions through established channels, Bashar only grants such positions on a case-to-case basis.

Coup Proofing in Egypt

Although the Egyptian case of coup-proofing was successful for most of Mubarak's 30 year tenure, it became evident through his 2011 deposition that something went wrong. Mubarak, like Bashar Al-Assad further solidified coup proofing institutions that his predecessor put in place, albeit he focused more on the segregative approach, rather than the (Syrian) integrative one. That said, Mubarak did maintain some integrative measures like buying corps loyalty through (material) benefits, but the segregative measures played a larger role. By gradually decreasing the number of military officers and generals in the composition of the cabinet, and disproportionately increasing the budget of the internal security services vis-à-vis the military, the influential position that the military entertained was threatened (Stacher, 2012, p. 7; Koehler, 2016). Furthermore, the prospects of Gamal potentially succeeding his father meant that this would likely be at the cost of the military, as it would almost certainly mean economic and political liberalization (Rutherford, 2014).

While the segregative approach played a large role, one of the major differences with Egypt is the way that the national Egyptian economy is led. While the Syrian economy — and for that matter most other national economies in the world — is kept largely separate from military leadership, the Egyptian economy is heavily intertwined with the armed forces. With the "military-industrial complex having an overarching influence on the most vital sectors of the economy, including education, health, and the provision of employment to an unskilled labor

force" (Ali, 2011, p. 1) it wields a lot of power on the domestic level. The strong military-industrial complex also means that there are plenty of secondary-job job opportunities that high ranking officers have access to. These managerial positions often give a high income, with a lot of extra benefits.

In addition to the multitude of benefits that such positions provide, Mubarak has turned the occupational title of 'military officer' into a prestigious, rewarding profession. The expansion of patronage networks has led to not only heavily subsidized housing opportunities, but it has also given soldiers access to "military consumer "cooperatives" [which] cater to the day-to-day requirements of officers and their families. … [These stores] sell domestic and imported goods, generally unavailable elsewhere in Egypt" (Springborg, 1989, p. 142). Furthermore, the access to healthcare and education is easier, and cheaper for military-related personnel than it is for civilians (Hinnebusch, 1982, p. 535; Krieg, 2011, p. 13).

By providing managerial positions of state-owned companies to the military elite, and ensuring (limited) benefits (such as access to otherwise scarce or expensive goods) for lower-ranked personnel, Mubarak managed to build a benefit-based loyalty between the armed forces and the regime. The self-enrichment opportunities for the military elite were further enhanced when Mubarak deemed the institution for the military-economy oversight the Ministry of Defence. Essentially rendering the military responsible for its own economic actions (Albrecht, 2015b).

In spite of the fact that Mubarak was successful at buying the loyalty of almost all ranks within the corps, these same methods are what (in part) led to his military deposing him in 2011. Having increasingly yielded resources and oversight to the military, the prospects of having his

son Gamal take over became widely unpopular within the corps. The main reason being that if his son — a 'young' liberal economist (Zahid, 2010) — were to take over, that Egypt would likely economically and politically liberalize, at the expense of the hegemonic power that the military have gotten so used to enjoying (Abdul Aziz & Hussein, 2002, p. 78; Battera, 2014). In addition to the fear of economic and political liberalization, others opposed Gamal because he had never been part of the power-brokering military establishment — not as a soldier, nor as a general (Smith, 2010, p. 80).

The prospects of Gamal's influence on Egyptian politics and the economy was a mere addition to the negative sentiment that had grown within the military as a result of the disproportional budgetary increase of the internal security services vis-a-vis the military. In the period between the 1990s and the late 2000s, the budget of "the ministry of interior … grew more than six-fold … [while] by contrast, the military budget only doubled" (Koehler, 2016, p. 372). Not only did the budget of the military's internally-focused rival grow, but so did its size. In fact, the internal security services grew so large, that by the time the Arab Spring started in Egypt, it amounted to 150% of the size of the military (Sayigh, 2012, p. 6).

While Mubarak was an advocate for the military economy, the regime resentment that had built up because of the gradual demilitarization of the cabinet, the expansion of parallel security institutions, and the disproportionate budgetary increase of the internal security forces, proved to be too strong to be suppressed by the material benefits that he provided to the military elite. By having largely focused on segregative measures, and not having exploited social bonds in the same way that the Al-Assads did, Mubarak's coup-proofing institutions were unsuccessful at protecting his incumbency when domestic pressures grew. Although he announced that he

would not run for another term in office (Khasyi'in, 2019), the prospects of the military losing more power with the possible accession of his liberal son made the removal of Mubarak the logical choice.

Conclusion

Coup-proofing institutions, more accurately described as coup-risk mitigating institutions have been employed for numerous decades, and they will in all likelihood continue to exist for decades to come. Within the general scope of coup-proofing there are two main rationales; segregation and integration. While they function in vastly different ways, their end goal — to ensure the incumbent stays in power — is the same. The segregative rationale attempts to minimize coup-risk by making it harder to stage a coup by decreasing the *opportunity*, whereas the integrative rationale tries to minimize coup-risk by reducing the military's *motivation* to stage one in the first place. The MSSD comparative analysis between Egypt and Syria has shown that both methods have been successful at protecting the incumbent's tenure, as both countries have had presidents who have maintained power for 30 years. The findings however also show that integrative measures yield a higher level of coup-risk minimization than segregative measures do, particularly during domestic crises in which loyalty bonds are tested.

In the Syrian case, the coup-risk reduction is derived through a multitude of methods, including the exploitation of social bonds; building of communities of trust, the Alawite composition of the armed forces, (limited) material benefits, internal espionage, and counterbalancing. While the latter two methods are in reality segregative institutions, this thesis takes the opinion that the integrative methods are more successful at prolonging an incumbency

than segregative ones are, and that they are the main reason that the Al-Assad family still rules Syria today. The reason for this is that the loyalty derived from the integrative (social-bond) measures is extremely effective at tying the Alawite representation to the regime's survival. Although the Al-Assad family, like Mubarak, offer material benefits, these are of a much lower loyalty-providing level than sect-based bonds. The cases of these select benefits are also much more scarce in the Syrian case than they are in the Egyptian setting.

In the case of Egypt, the hegemonic dominance of the military in the political and economic realm can largely be attributed to the 1952 coup staged by Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Since Abd al-Nasser came to power, the political and economic status quo almost always included the military. However, over the course of the tenures of Abd al-Nasser's successors, this military dominance was challenged and gradually reduced, as the cabinet was demilitarized and a disproportionately large budgetary increase was allocated to the internal security forces. These counterbalancing institutions increased regime resentment from the military towards Mubarak. To prevent this regime resentment from taking an active role, Mubarak offered (material) benefits to the military elite, and named the Ministry of Defence the economic oversight institution. While this bought the loyalty of the elite members of the corps, it also led to grievances in the rank-and-file as they were not able to reap the benefits of his tenure. When domestic pressures grew during the 2011 Arab Spring, the lacking (strong) loyalty bonds proved to not be sufficient to protect his incumbency. Furthermore, with the prospect of his son Gamal potentially taking over and liberalizing the Egyptian economy and political realm, the military decided to depose him — even after he made political concessions.

While Syria, like Egypt, has entertained both integrative and segregative measures, a large part of the Al-Assad family's success can be attributed to the sect-based loyalty, since that has tied the Alawite representation to the survival of the regime. Although there is still regime resentment in Syria (in part) as a result of the counterbalancing and internal espionage measures, the sect-based loyalty has proven to trump this. On the other hand, Egypt lacks this sect-based loyalty as the armed forces are of a relatively homogeneous composition. Furthermore, while Mubarak has used some integrative measures, his demilitarization of the cabinet, and allocation of funding to the internal security forces, led to the loyalty-bonds ceding in times of domestic unrest.

The findings suggest that the determinants of success for coup-proofing efforts in the Global South, particularly in Egypt and Syria, are predominantly rooted in the presence of (sect-based) loyalty bonds. While measures like internal espionage, and counterbalancing reduce the opportunity of the military staging a coup, the findings suggest that it is more effective to reduce the motivation — particularly by creating personal incentives for the soldiers to protect their regime. Furthermore, it has been found that while loyalty can be bought with material benefits, this can also increase grievances in the rank-and-file, which can, in some instances, lead to low-ranking splinter groups turning against the regime.

Although the findings are clear and accept the hypothesis that "integrative coup-proofing measures are better at mitigating coup-risk than segregative measures", an interesting avenue for further research could explore Singh's (2014) way for looking at coups. It could specifically analyse whether 'tactical dominance' is more related to opportunity (the segregative rationale), while a 'vote of no confidence' is more related to motive (integrative rationale). While the main

weakness of this research is that *ceteris paribus* cannot be attained, this is not an issue which can be solved with further research, in a real-life political scientific context.

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