

# Security aid, civil-military crises, and the escalation of political violence

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## Abstract

Why do the United States and other Western countries find some states to be efficient and cooperative counterterrorism partners, while others only seem to exacerbate the problem, despite vast sums of equipment, training, and other forms of support? We often hear that "political realities on the ground" in these countries prevent these regimes from controlling violent instability within their borders, but we lack a precise understanding of what this means. I argue that taking into consideration the types of civil-military threats faced by the recipient governments can move us a long way toward answering this question. I discuss and incorporate relevant political and civil-military characteristics of recipient countries into a theory of military aid effectiveness. Drawing upon recent insights in the literature on regime survival and using a principal-agent framework, I examine the effect of US security assistance on levels of local violence in recipient countries, conditional upon these characteristics. Findings suggest that while security aid can reduce instability in established democracies, it worsens political violence in new regimes, regimes transitioning from military or personalist dictatorships, and in cases in which the temporary coup threat is abnormally high. This paper contributes to the aid literature by uncovering an important link in the relationship between military aid and conflict. I also speak to research on comparative regime types by theorizing about how regime characteristics condition responses to both external assistance and domestic political violence.

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## Introduction

The often unstated assumption underpinning decades of U.S. foreign aid policy and counterinsurgency doctrine is that the strategic priorities of recipients of assistance will be closely aligned with those of the United States and, moreover, that this is *because* of the aid they receive. In situations in which the United States wishes to gain more cooperation or compliance from another country, more aid is presumed to be the answer. Put more generally, this presumes that one country can alter the security interests of another—or even control their behavior—simply by providing money, equipment, and training, both to equip the host country and to “coerce” its strategic preferences into closer alignment with those of the U.S.. When a counterinsurgency partnership with a foreign country fails to meet its aims, the conclusion flowing from this premise is that more aid is the answer. However, from U.S. efforts to support the South Vietnamese government against the Viet Cong insurgency to the post-2012 Sunni insurgency in Iraq, examples abound of conflict intensifying despite increasing levels of assistance meant to overcome these problems.

Why is this the case? While this question has puzzled researchers and policymakers for many years, scholarly efforts to address it—particularly from the empirical side—have largely neglected to sufficiently incorporate the politics of the recipient country into theories of the effectiveness of aid at reducing violence. This is an important oversight, as both foreign aid and violent domestic instability and the methods used to combat the latter have important, but distinct, implications for regime survival depending on the political structure of the besieged recipient regime.

This study rests on the assumption that one of the foremost goals of U.S. security aid—particularly since 9/11—is to reduce instability in the recipient country or, perhaps more narrowly, to prevent American interests from being endangered by instability. We have, however, numerous instances of such assistance programs failing to train security forces to be even minimally competent at confronting terrorist and insurgent campaigns, and apparently leading to even greater destabilization. In September 2015, no more than 500 Taliban fighters were able to occupy the city of Kunduz as 7,000 U.S.-trained Afghan troops fled to the nearby airport ([Goldstein and Mashal, 2015](#)). This occurred despite the Afghan government receiving well over \$1 billion in U.S. security aid annually for the past decade ([Security Assistance](#)

[Monitor, 2017](#)). This is not a unique post-2001 phenomenon; rather, we can point to countless examples throughout the history of U.S. foreign policy and across geographical contexts, in cases as diverse as El Salvador, Yemen, Mali, Greece, and the Philippines, to name just a few. While explanations have been offered to account for such failures, they are often post-hoc, context specific, and lacking in empirical evidence. As a result, scholars and policymakers are left with an incomplete understanding of why security assistance appears to be moderately effective in some cases, but disastrous in others.

To address this gap, I examine the macro-level<sup>1</sup> effects of U.S. security aid on levels of local violence in the recipient country, while accounting for the domestic threat environment facing the recipient government. Consistent with the principal-agent framework, I assume that aid can only be effective when the preferences of the donor and recipient are sufficiently aligned over the issue at hand; otherwise, aid will be not only ineffective, but actively destabilizing. I argue that these preferences flow from the nature of the domestic threats to survival facing the recipient regime. These threats, in turn, stem from factors such as the regime type; the age of the regime; the nature of the prior regime; and the overall relative coup risk. Results demonstrate that U.S. security assistance leads to increased local violence when the recipient government has reason to fear a coup.

In the following section, I introduce the principal-agent framework through which it is helpful to view the United States' relationships with its partner countries. Next is an overview of the factors that contribute to the partner/host regime's domestic security priorities, and the extent to which they will favor effective counterinsurgency. I then present and discuss the results of a series of count models examining how each of these features conditions the effects of security assistance. I conclude by offering some implications for policy and future research.

## **Counterinsurgency aid and the principal-agent problem**

To ensure the safety of its security interests around the world from terrorism and instability, the United States and other major powers must delegate protection to the governments of the countries in which these

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<sup>1</sup>Although some may argue that the effects of security assistance on political violence should be studied at the regional- or village-level, I believe the country-level is most appropriate level of analysis for this question. If the survival needs of the recipient government are at odds with the strategic priorities of U.S. assistance, any micro-level security assistance, training, or equipment—no matter how well-intentioned—can be rendered ineffective or counterproductive. In other words, as [Blaufarb \(1977\)](#) says in his study of early U.S. counterinsurgency, “good tactics cannot prevail when embedded in bad strategy.”

interests are present. These countries often receive foreign aid, which can act simultaneously as both a tool to boost capacity, and also as a form of payment in exchange for making efforts to reduce instability. These efforts can include security measures or political and economic reforms (e.g., [Morgenthau \(1962\)](#); [Bapat \(2011\)](#), among others). However, as noted above, while aid has proven to be effective at eliciting reforms and cooperation in some contexts, many governments appear unwilling or unable to do anything at all to reduce insurgent activity within their borders, even after receiving billions in aid. In this section I argue that Western efforts and failure to delegate counterinsurgency to other countries are best understood in the principal-agent framework.

In the canonical formulation, a principal contracts with an agent to complete some task on its behalf, while having limited information about how the task is performed. The principal-agent relationship only becomes a *problem* when a) the principal cannot reliably monitor the agent's actions; and b) the agent's preferences differ substantially from those of the principal over the relevant task ([Laffont and Martimort, 2002](#)). The first criterion is nearly always true of donor-recipient relationships, but particularly so with respect to counterinsurgency partnerships. Counterinsurgency effort consists of partially observable, often unobservable, covert measures, and the agent has much greater knowledge of the insurgent group's activities and capabilities than does the principal. Moreover, donor attempts to monitor the recipient state's counterinsurgency efforts risk violating the recipient state's sovereignty and jeopardizing the overall relationship.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, even if the principal suspects the agent of not taking sufficient action against the relevant groups, the agent can still plausibly claim that its efforts are sincere. Finally, even if we do assume that the donor has complete information about the recipient's actions, any threats by the donor to withhold security assistance would not be credible, since the donor's own vital security interests are what prompted the security aid in the first place ([Svensson, 2000b](#); [Dunning, 2004](#); [Bearce and Tirone, 2010](#)). Donors can allocate more aid in an attempt to force recipients' preferences into alignment with their own, but due to the donor's enforcement problem, the recipient is still essentially free to act as it wishes without fear of punishment.

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<sup>2</sup>This describes, in essence, the 2011 Raymond Davis affair in Pakistan. Davis was arrested after a traffic incident in Lahore in which he shot and killed two people. The U.S. initially claimed that Davis was a diplomat. However, it was eventually revealed that he was in fact a CIA contractor, and was part of a broader, long-term CIA effort to build a massive human intelligence network in Pakistan, aimed at monitoring Pakistani counterinsurgency efforts and the ties between the ISI and Pakistani Taliban. U.S.-Pakistan relations were severely damaged as a result of this incident ([Mazzetti, 2013](#)).

This information asymmetry would be inconsequential if the agent's preferences were sufficiently similar to those of the principal. In this case, the principal's inability to monitor the agent's actions would not significantly hinder the partnership, as the agent would prioritize counterinsurgency even without the supervision of the principal, and assistance would lead the agent to be more efficient.

The United States appears to recognize that interests often diverge, and thus one of the primary motivations for the allocation of large amounts of military assistance is to compensate the recipient government for cooperating *despite* having such divergent interests (Bapat, 2011; Jadoon, 2017). This logic is similar to the rationale behind the provision of development assistance: economic aid in exchange for political and economic reforms. Aid scholars are in near universal agreement, however, that for this model to work, credible conditions must be placed on aid packages (e.g., Easterly (2001); Collier and Dollar (2002)). In other words, recipients must believe that if they do not implement the agreed-upon reforms, aid will be cut or withdrawn.

The same should be true of military assistance, although the nature of these security relationships renders credibly conditionality nearly impossible. The fact that the assistance was prompted by the strategic interests of the United States renders non-credible any threat to suspend that aid, reducing the recipients' incentive to cooperate unless its own interests call for it. Recipient governments are fully aware of their strategic position, and often seek to exploit it. In one example, U.S. officials had great difficulty gaining cooperation from former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh. According to Stephen Seche, U.S. ambassador to Yemen from 2007-2010, "[Saleh] was an extraordinary manipulator. He was continuously sounding the alarm, warning that al Qaeda was encroaching further in territory that was thought to be secured. That captured the imagination of CIA and Department of Defense officials who would go back to Washington with a firm determination to provide more assistance, more training" (Watling and Shabibi, 2016). Speaking about Saleh's possible replacement, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admitted that "if that government collapses, or is replaced by one who is dramatically more weak, then I think we'd face some additional challenges out of Yemen, there's no question about it. It's a real problem" (Agence France Presse, 2011). This dynamic is also what enabled former Afghan president Hamid Karzai to continue to receive military assistance (including literal sacks of cash delivered to his

office ([Rosenberg, 2013](#)) even after threatening to join the Taliban, and making resistance to the U.S.-led ISAF a central platform of his electoral campaign. In Karzai's view, any threats by donors to cut ties with his regime were transparent bluffs ([Associated Press, 2013](#)).

The inability to enforce conditionality is further undermined by the prescriptions of current U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, which advocates making strong, unambiguous public statements of support for the besieged partner regime. Lest a partner country fear abandonment, the U.S. Army's counterinsurgency field manual states that "Constant reaffirmations of commitment, backed by deeds, can overcome that perception and bolster faith in the steadfastness of U.S. support" ([Department of the Army, 2006](#), 1-24).

The essential impossibility of imposing credible conditions on military assistance means that the principal-agent problem cannot be overcome with aid alone. Moreover, I argue that the nature of the preference divergence (intra-regime threat) can actually cause the incumbent to behave in ways that lead to further destabilization. Below, I discuss the features of states that are most important in determining the extent to which their security priorities align with those of the United States, and thus the likelihood that these regimes can use external assistance effectively and act as efficient counterinsurgents. The factors that, in my view, bear most heavily on this question, and which are explained later in more detail, are 1) regime type; 2) the age of the regime; 3) the prior regime type; and 4) the overall coup threat facing an incumbent<sup>3</sup>. Intra-regime security threats in the host country are the key to this argument because it is these threats to which the regime is most vulnerable, and thus have the biggest impact on regime survival. Therefore, it is the presence or absence of these threats that play a large role in determining how the regime structures its security forces, and thus how foreign assistance will be employed to combat extra-regime threats, such as terrorism and insurgency. In other words, in cases in which the host regime faces acute threats to its survival from its security forces, donor-recipient preference alignment with

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<sup>3</sup>Note that neither ideology nor anti-American sentiment—on the part of either the public or regime—plays a role in this model. It is possible that these factors may have some effect at the margins—mainly by influencing the public statements of leaders—but these factors are unlikely to shift fundamental security interests. In fact, as [Whitaker \(2008\)](#) notes, what we often see from democratic or semi-democratic countries in the realm of counterinsurgency cooperation is public bluster and defiance coupled with close cooperation in private. Officials in host states characterized by institutions of accountability will not wish to be seen as American "stooges," as this may adversely affect their political standing/esteem among the population. However, I argue that the primary factor in determining material cooperation and counterinsurgency efficiency is the recipient regime's survival needs.

respect to counterinsurgency will be low. In this context, the principal-agent problem produces a moral hazard in which foreign aid may not only be ineffective, but may actually encourage the leader to act in ways that worsen the insurgency. On the other hand, when the regime is less threatened, preference alignment will be higher, and thus security assistance can help the host state pursue a goal that was likely high on its priority list anyway.

## **Politics, violence, & aid effectiveness**

The goals of military assistance can be grouped into three broad categories: 1) to increase recipient capacity; 2) to gain influence over the recipient; and 3) to increase access to recipient territory. The goals most relevant to my argument are the first two; the latter is arguably the easiest to achieve, and relates mostly to permission for the U.S. to do things like station troops and military facilities on territory, gain access to airspace, and to strike at targets within the territory of the recipient state.

A common theme throughout the literature on aid effectiveness is the notion that aid is more likely to have a productive impact when the political environment in the recipient country is favorable. In particular, scholars have focused on variables such as coalition size (e.g., [Boone \(1996\)](#); [Smith \(2008\)](#); [Bueno de Mesquita and Smith \(2009\)](#)) and institutional quality (e.g., [Svensson, 1999](#); [Burnside and Dollar, 2000](#)). While each of these scholars proposes a different theoretical mechanism linking aid effectiveness to domestic politics, their arguments are similar in that they revolve around political institutions creating incentives for recipient regimes to use aid to survive in office, rather than toward the purpose for which it was intended. Scholars have found that this is indeed often the case. Both [Morrison \(2009\)](#) and [Licht \(2010\)](#) find that authoritarian governments channel aid toward strategies that will enhance their long-term survival, such as the funding of subsidies, social programs, or patronage networks. Another common finding is that aid actually *reduces* public good provision and institutional quality in some contexts ([Svensson, 2000a](#); [Djankov, Montalvo and Reynol-Querol, 2008](#); [Moss and van de Walle, 2006](#)).

Unlike development aid, security aid is meant to help the recipient deliver stability by directly combating terrorism and insurgency with force. We should expect similar results with this type of aid,

although because security assistance involves the strengthening of the recipient state's coercive apparatus (Jadoon, 2017), there are additional implications here. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary objectives of security assistance is to build the capacity of the security forces in the recipient country through training, education, and the provision of equipment. In cases of instability, however, the most significant threat to regime survival in these contexts is often the military itself. When a regime is faced with a violent insurgency or terrorist campaign, the military is likely to be the only organization capable of effectively combating the threat. But when empowered to protect the regime, the military now also knows its services are essential to regime survival. This generates a moral hazard in which the military can capitalize upon their pivotal role in protecting the regime by demanding a larger role in political affairs in return (Svolik, 2012). Failing to accede to these demands, or falling out of favor with the military more generally, can result in a government being removed in a coup.

Recipient governments have reason to fear security forces that receive aid in particular. This aid can increase the ability and willingness of security forces to mount a coup by either increasing their capacity and professional confidence to do so (e.g., Savage and Caverley (2017)) or through the transmission of democratic norms (e.g., Shafer (1988, 92-95), Powell and Schiel (2018)). In fact, this fear may be well-founded, as a motivation that was baked-in to the original rationale for IMET and other U.S. military training programs initiated during the Cold War was to tacitly encourage foreign security forces to (temporarily) take power and act as a steady hand on the tiller until democracy could take hold in order to prevent communist encroachment during turbulent periods of economic and political development (Shafer, 1988, 90-92). While overtly advocating for military coups in foreign countries is not typically part of U.S. foreign policy, it may be an unintended side effect of the instillation of democratic norms and the empowerment of security forces during military training programs in countries with weak institutions (Atkinson, 2006).

In the end, the takeaway from this discussion is that the host regime will prioritize threats to its own survival over other security threats. Typically, attacks from terrorists or insurgents do not pose direct existential threats to a regime's hold on power, particularly when the regime has the support of an external power such as the United States. These types of political violence occasionally do present

serious problems for the regime, but only after escalating over the course of months or years. This gives the defender the edge, and leaves time for the regime to delay, negotiate, strategize, adapt, and learn from mistakes. By contrast, there is a huge first-mover advantage in coups. They occur quickly, and a successful one can remove a leader from power—and possibly imprison him or worse—within hours or minutes. Coups offer little room for miscalculation, as there is may be no opportunity to recover from underestimating a threat from within the military. This means that constant vigilance and prevention is the best strategy. Leaders in regimes in which coups are a real possibility have every incentive to channel all their resources and efforts toward preventing them, despite the potentially destabilizing consequences of doing so. Thus, the goals of foreign actors providing security assistance (the construction of a well-equipped, competent security force) and the recipient regime (remaining in power) are often incompatible with one another, and sometimes may be in direct conflict.

### **Coup-proofing and military capacity**

Even when faced simultaneously with both an insurgency and a risk of removal from within, regimes will seek to insulate themselves first and foremost from the latter risk. For a variety of reasons that will become clear in this section, however, efforts by the regime to insulate itself from threats from other elites will hamper its ability to protect against threats from outside the regime. Indeed, this often exacerbates anti-regime violence.

Protecting against intra-regime threats entails a variety of tactics collectively referred to as “coup-proofing”. This can include reshuffling the military officer corps to prevent commanders from gaining too large a following (e.g., [Quinlivan \(1999\)](#)); purging competent but potentially disloyal officers (e.g., [Sudduth \(2017a,b\)](#)), promotion based on loyalty rather than merit (e.g., [Talmadge \(2015\)](#)), the creation of overlapping and competing security institutions (e.g., [Pilster and Böhmelt \(2011\)](#), [DeBruin \(2017\)](#)), the frequent rotation of political or military leadership, and ethnic “stacking” ([Harkness, 2016](#)) or exclusion ([Roessler, 2016](#)).

The choice of tactics will vary depending on the context, but scholars are in general agreement that coup-proofing negatively impacts the quality of the armed forces for a variety of reasons. Many of these are described in detail by [Pilster and Böhmelt \(2011\)](#) and [Talmadge \(2015\)](#) in relation to conven-

tional war, but which also apply to domestic counterinsurgency or counterterrorism operations. First, the promotion of political loyalists in place of officers who rose to their positions through merit necessarily degrades the competence and leadership of these units, impairing combat capability (Talmadge, 2015). In fact, coup-fearing leaders will often punish the most competent officers and instead reward incompetence in promotion. The most skilled commanders are also the ones most likely to develop an independent power base, and thus are the most capable of conspiring to threaten the regime. Such reshuffling also reduces morale among soldiers, who typically resent the replacement of popular officers who rose through the ranks with less competent loyalists (Pilster and Böhmelt, 2011). This can also create the perception among the rank-and-file that their career prospects are blocked, and that political loyalty, rather than competence, is the only path to advancement. Soldiers who do not respect their officers, or who feel that the regime is politicizing the military and promotion process, do not have incentive to risk their lives defending that regime.

Talmadge notes several other ways in which threatened regimes undermine their militaries' operational effectiveness. Training exercises are often limited, as this provides prevents the development of skills, cooperation, and mastery of logistics that are useful in overthrowing a regime, but also in counterinsurgency. Coup-fearing regimes also tend to centralize the command structure. Rather than devolving authority to commanders in the field, both strategic and tactical command may be concentrated at the top, with leaders even seeking to take personal control of critical units. Command arrangements are also related to promotion and personnel patterns, as officers are frequently rotated between posts, confusing the chain of command. Even small-unit actions are rendered cumbersome when decisions and approval must flow through a central headquarters and a complicated chain of command. This also inhibits the sharing and flow of information between security agencies. Given the importance of information during civil conflict (e.g., Kalyvas (2006)), this represents an additional mechanism through which coup-proofing undermines counterinsurgency effectiveness.

Regimes in coup-fearing states often create “two-speed” militaries in which the national army is weak and under-resourced, but with certain units receiving special treatment. Membership in the latter is reserved for those who are ethnically or personally tied to the leader, or who have otherwise demon-

strated political loyalty. They are often headed by a relative or close ally of the leader. These units are narrowly tasked with protecting the regime from domestic political opponents—sometimes including other factions of the military. In many cases, these units are the ones who receive training and equipment from the United States (Kedo and Goodman, 2015). For instance, the United States spent nearly \$600 million to train Yemen’s Special Operations Forces, Counter Terrorism Unit, Republican Guard, and Political Security Organization to pursue al-Qaeda between 2001 and 2012 (Department of Defense and Department of State, 2012; Department of Defense, 2012). Each of these units were headed by a family member of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and were used primarily against internal political opposition, rather than against AQAP, as the U.S. had intended (Johnsen, 2013). Similarly, the United States provides millions to train the Ugandan Special Forces Command in counterterrorism tactics, although they are also assigned primarily as personal protection for President Yoweri Museveni, under the command of his son, Major General Muhoozi Kainerugaba (BBC, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, such favoritism creates grievances within the security forces that may lead to mutinies, rebellions, or coup attempts. A leader whose favorite military units are receiving training from the United States may engage in more aggressive coup-proofing tactics, as any resulting instability or unrest can be countered by his well-trained praetorian guard. This can accelerate divisions within the armed forces and thus make instability even more likely. The leader will feel safer with the knowledge that his loyal units are U.S.-trained, and that the U.S. may continue to provide assistance in the event that continued coup-proofing escalates into large-scale political violence.

These factors mean that security forces in coup-prone regimes are likely to be less useful against violent domestic groups. This also explains why we often see militaries trained and equipped by the United States collapse or withdraw in the face of far smaller insurgent armies—the units deployed against insurgents are often *not* the well-trained and highly equipped units, but rather the poorly-resourced portions of the army. After all, a coup-fearing leader would be reluctant to deploy professional, well-trained forces for internal defense, as this leads to the dangerous balancing act described by Svoblik (2012) and mentioned above.

## Coup threat, political reform, and violence

We can expect other behaviors by coup-fearing governments—in addition to what we recognize as “coup-proofing”—that will have destabilizing ripple effects reaching beyond elite and military politics and extend to the broader population. Addressing broader social or political problems is typically a key component of effective counterinsurgency, but a government that is pre-occupied with threats to its own survival is less likely to have the ability or willingness to accomplish this. State resources will instead be channeled toward insulating the regime rather than toward the broad provision of public goods. For instance, the inability and unwillingness of the Malian and Nigerien governments to do anything to manage conflicts over land pasturage and water has created space for a major escalation of the conflict along the Mali-Niger border. In turn, jihadist groups arrive to find local conflicts that are ripe for exploitation which, in the presence of a well-governed state, they would not (Cocks and Lewis, 2017; Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018). Tahir (2017) has found this to be the case in Pakistan as well. The host state, with the knowledge that the United States is ready with more assistance if conflict escalates, has little incentive to undertake efforts that are necessary to prevent the emergence of such conflicts if such measures jeopardize their ability to hold onto power. In other words, by serving as a form of insurance, security assistance provides room for coup-fearing governments to focus their efforts on regime security, rather than on governance and the provision of services.

Insecure regimes are similarly reluctant to open the political process to broad-based participation so as to avoid empowering opposing forces, even though doing so is typically a condition of U.S. security assistance programs. According to a U.S. foreign service officer in Vietnam, “Many of the original participants in the NLF [insurgency] had turned to it because they had been denied participation in South Vietnam’s political process even in the role of loyal opposition” (Chapman, 2013, 189). Diem’s resistance to liberalization assured that challenges to his regime would be violent. In fact, Hanoi’s decision to establish the insurgency in the South was based largely on the volume of complaints and pleas they heard from southerners eager to take up arms. Diem was able to resist reform not despite U.S. military support, but *because* of it. Governments receiving security aid are confident that the donor will help support them against any domestic instability resulting from their ruinous policies, and thus have little

incentive to reform. This is a rather straightforward adaptation of intuition from the development literature arguing that foreign development aid facilitates corruption and a *decrease* in public good provision in already unfavorable policy environments (e.g. [Svensson \(2000a\)](#); [Moss and van de Walle \(2006\)](#); [Easterly \(2006\)](#)).

### **Security aid, coup-proofing, & moral hazard**

Coup-proofing and power consolidation can also worsen instability via channels other than through the weakening of the military. As [Roessler \(2011\)](#) and [Sudduth \(2017b\)](#) explain, power consolidation necessarily creates disaffected group(s) with grievances against the regime. [Roessler \(2011\)](#) shows that this can cause or worsen insurgencies, which, while perhaps preferable to a coup, still entails tremendous risks for political survival. The receipt of security assistance, however, may reduce these risks in the eyes of the incumbent. Whereas without assistance, the government might be left to face these rebellions alone, the flow of security assistance may lead to a moral hazard in which the regime believes that it can coup-proof with the backing of the military aid donor. In fact, [Song and Wright \(2018\)](#) argue that Soviet and Chinese military backing are what enabled Kim Il-Sung to centralize personal control over his party and armed forces without fear of possible consequences. Military assistance can therefore worsen local instability by encouraging insecure regimes to coup-proof more aggressively, without having to bear the full cost of doing so. This would explain why some U.S. allies take actions that seem deliberately designed to fan the flames of insurgency. Examples abound throughout the history of U.S. foreign policy of recipients of U.S. military assistance offering little or no resistance in the face of smaller insurgent adversaries. Events in Iraq between 2012 and 2014 provide a useful example. Fearing a violent overthrow, Iraqi president Nouri al-Maliki purposely degraded the military while empowering his special forces to act as a personal guard and sectarian militia ([Dodge, 2012](#); [Keating, 2014](#)). At the same time, he targeted powerful Sunni regime officials and tribal leaders for arrest, knowing this would provoke violence but also gambling that the United States would offer him support in order to protect their investment in Iraqi stability.

To sum up, the most serious threat to many regimes' ability to survive in office originates from within the security forces. Measures used by regimes to protect against these threats, moreover, often lead to or

worsen instability (e.g., [Roessler \(2011\)](#); [Powell \(2014\)](#); [Sudduth \(2017b\)](#)). Security assistance can lead a regime to believe that it can pursue these measures more aggressively while receiving the support of a partner country, causing moral hazard. In cases in which the regime feels threatened, therefore, we should expect security assistance to be not only ineffective, but violence-inducing. In the abstract, the host regime may share the United States' goal of upholding stability or ending an insurgency. However, many of the elements necessary for effective counterinsurgency—such as political reforms, power-sharing, and well-equipped, capable security forces—are directly anathema to political survival from the perspective of coup-fearing regimes. In cases in which the biggest threat to the regime is located within the armed forces, therefore, the regime cannot be expected to sacrifice its own survival to pursue the security goals of a foreign power. The provision of security assistance creates a moral hazard which only serves to further destabilize these regimes. In the following section, I describe the factors that should make such a moral hazard more likely, and thus when security assistance should have its most destabilizing effects.

### **Regime type & regime age**

Some regime types<sup>4</sup> are more vulnerable to removal from within than others. As [Figure 1](#) shows, military juntas and personalist regimes each experience coups—both successful and failed—at at least twice the rate of other regimes. Personalist regimes should be particularly wary of intra-regime threats, owing to the nature of legitimacy and political order in such systems. Power in these regimes is, by definition, founded upon the interpersonal patronage networks among elites. As [Jackson and Rosberg \(1984, 421\)](#) put it, “the rivalries and struggles of powerful and willful men, rather than impersonal institutions, ideologies, public policies, or class interests, are fundamental in shaping political life”. As a result of the lack of formal institutions, regimes base their legitimacy on the distribution of selective incentives to elites in exchange for regime support ([Bratton and van de Walle, 1997](#)). As [Acemoglu, Robinson and Verdier \(2004, 162\)](#) note, a central feature of personalist rule is the presence of extractive institutions that enable “an individual, or a small group [to] use their power to transfer a large fraction of society’s re-

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<sup>4</sup>Although I include monarchies in the illustrative plots in this section, I exclude them from the empirical analysis for a couple of reasons. First, there simply are not many in the data to begin with. Second, of the few that do exist, most are quite old and well-established, and there simply is not enough developmental variation for these regimes. This is why the confidence intervals on new monarchies are too wide to include in the plots in [Figures 2 and 3](#). Moreover, because most monarchies were established so long ago, the GWF data do not contain information about the prior regimes. Thus, for the sake of consistency, I exclude them from the theoretical discussion and analysis.

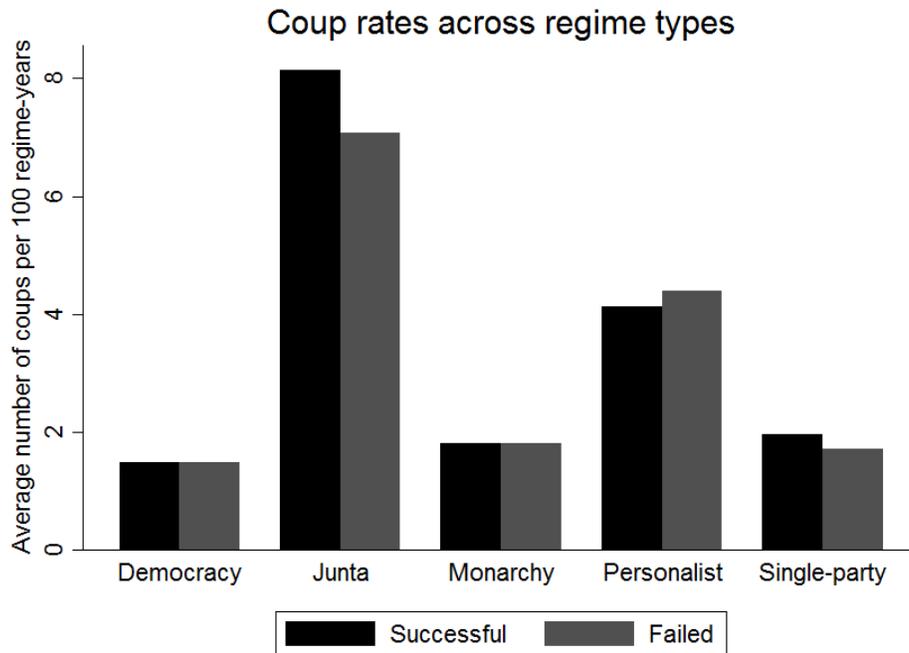


Figure 1: Coup occurrence across regime type

sources to themselves.” I note above that this type of government behavior is often the source of political violence; an external source of military support may generate a moral hazard and exacerbate such tendencies among personalist regimes. The material basis of loyalty, personalist leaders’ often kleptocratic policies, combined with the lack of institutions, make these regimes especially vulnerable to overthrow, not just at the outset, but throughout their tenure. In fact, [Escriba-Folch \(2013\)](#) shows that the political careers of a remarkable 61% of personalist dictators culminate in imprisonment, exile, or death.

While [Figure 1](#) shows military juntas to be significantly more susceptible to coups than other regime types, the types of coups they typically experience are distinct in important ways. As I note below, nearly all coups in military juntas are leader-replacement coups, rather than coups in which the entire regime is ousted (see [Figure 2](#)). By definition, these pose less of a threat to the regime—in fact, they are undertaken by members of the regime as a means to *preserve* regime stability ([Aksoy, Carter and Wright, 2015](#)). In fact, as [Aksoy, Carter and Wright \(2015\)](#) show, these coups often occur *because* the leader has failed to adequately address a domestic terrorist campaign or insurgency. The desire to avoid being replaced by their colleagues gives leaders in these regimes added incentive to reduce political violence. These

<sup>6</sup>Probabilities based on models presented in Table A4 of the appendix.

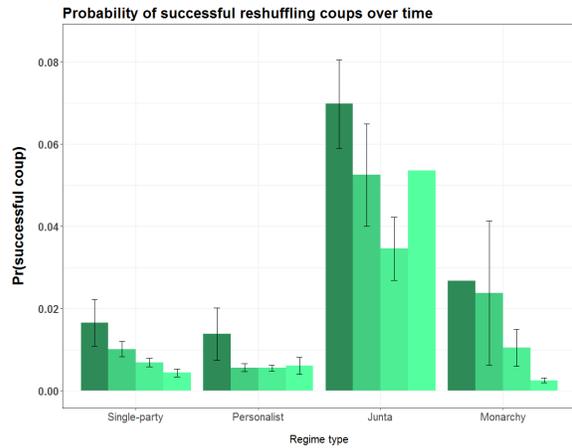


Figure 2: Probability of successful reshuffling coups by regime type & age

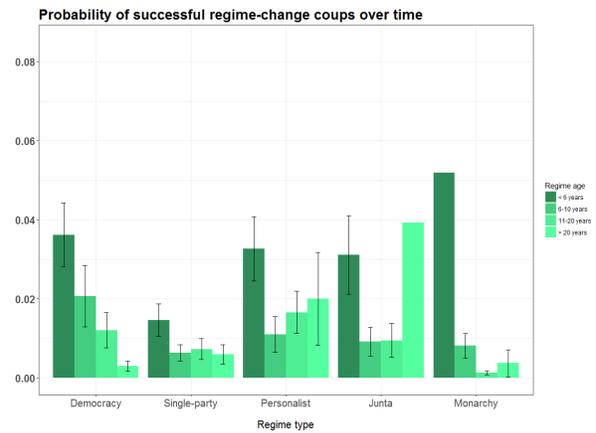


Figure 3: Probability of successful regime-change coups by regime type & age<sup>6</sup>

types of coups also do not represent a crisis of civil-military relations. Here, the military as an institution governs directly, and thus has control over both the regime and the military. As such, these coups entail—with a few exceptions—members of a military junta replacing one another, rather than one entire autocratic faction removing and replacing another. Thus, from a civil-military relations perspective, there is less reason to expect security assistance to lead to greater political violence in military regimes.

However, coup frequency varies even more within regimes over time than across them. According to [Huntington \(1968, 1\)](#), the most important characteristic of any regime is not its type but its strength, and the age of an institution is a reliable proxy of its strength. During transitions between discrete regimes, the new regime faces a period of uncertainty over issues such as policy reforms, the role of the military in the new regime, and *ancien régime* loyalists attempting to retake power (e.g., [Mansfield and Pevehouse \(2006\)](#); [Keefer \(2007\)](#)). This is true in both autocracies—when one group of autocratic elites seizes power from another—as well as in regimes transitioning from autocracy to democracy. New regimes are therefore weak and especially vulnerable to challenges during this initial period.

Consistent with research on authoritarian power consolidation (e.g., [Sudduth \(2017b\)](#); [Svolik \(2012\)](#)), we should therefore expect new regimes generally to be especially wary of their security forces. Rather than combating insurgents or terrorists, they will instead be focused primarily on coup-proofing, consolidating power, and marginalizing potential threats. Since coup-proofing can be quite destabilizing, as mentioned above, the receipt of security aid may give such regimes a freer hand to do so, leading to

greater instability.

**Hypothesis 1.** *U.S. security aid will increase political violence in new regimes.*

As is standard in the literature on regime transitions, I consider regimes less than six years old to be *new regimes* (e.g., [Mansfield and Snyder \(1995\)](#); [Mansfield and Pevehouse \(2006\)](#); [Cook and Savun \(2016\)](#)). The plots in Figures 2 and 3, which display estimates for *successful* coup probabilities in regimes at various stages of development,<sup>7</sup> more or less validate this distinction. They suggest that in most cases, the first five-year period is significantly more coup-prone than any of the other periods. After the first five years, coup probability drops precipitously, but remains relatively stable as regimes age beyond five years.

I further expect to find these effects in democracies and single-party regimes in particular. Extant research (e.g., [Keefer \(2007\)](#)) suggests that new democracies are particularly fragile, as they must contend with military or other autocratic elites who may be dissatisfied with a diminished role under democracy and wish to reclaim power. During the initial post-Suharto era between 1999 and roughly 2004, for instance, the nascent Indonesian democratic government was fearful of a return to military rule, and was thus reluctant to grant the military any responsibility for internal security ([Mietzner, 2013](#)). This resulted in little U.S.-Indonesian counterterrorism cooperation until 2005, when reforms were implemented completely removing the military from politics.

Once democracies and single-party regimes are consolidated, however, they tend to be particularly stable and immune to collapse. [Huntington \(1968, 91\)](#) noted the durability of one-party regimes decades ago, and this has been confirmed by recent research as well (e.g., [Brownlee \(2004\)](#), [Smith \(2005\)](#), [Magaloni \(2008\)](#), among others). Strong parties facilitate more credible power-sharing, which enables these regimes to inspire loyalty without the need for coercion, co-opt political opposition and prevent elite defections ([Geddes, 2003](#); [Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007](#)). This has resulted in relative durability and invulnerability to collapse. As Figures 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate, they experience coups at a low rate, comparable to democracies and monarchies, particularly once they are established. Democracies, as well, typically feel the need to engage in less coup-proofing (e.g., [Pilster and Böhmelt \(2012\)](#)), and have been

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<sup>7</sup>Models used to estimate these probabilities are presented in the appendix. Democracies are not featured in the reshuffling coup plot because all coups in democracies are, by definition, regime-change coups ([Aksoy, Carter and Wright, 2015](#)).

found to be more militarily effective in interstate wars (Reiter and Stam, 2002). This should extend to domestic conflicts as well. By 2010, the Indonesian security forces—with significant assistance from the U.S. and Australia—had arrested or killed nearly the entire leadership of Jemaah Islamiya, such that the group has ceased to exist in its original form (International Crisis Group, 2011).

**Hypothesis 2.** (a) *U.S. security aid will increase political violence in new democracies and single-party regimes.*

(b) *U.S. security aid will decrease political violence in established democracies and single-party regimes.*

Since personalist regimes are particularly prone to violent overthrow, we might expect incumbents in these types of regimes to be singularly focused on consolidating power. Personalist leaders are, by definition, the end product of an extended process of power consolidation (Svolik, 2012; Wright, 2017), and we should expect these regimes to be focused on internal enemies throughout their time in power, not just at the beginning. In comparison, based on the discussion above, leaders of military juntas should be motivated to disarm violent groups at all stages of regime development. In fact, this was often their *raison d'être* during the Cold War (e.g., (Shafer, 1988; Schmitz, 1999)).

**Hypothesis 3.** (a) *U.S. security aid will increase political violence in new personalist regimes, regardless of regime age.*

(b) *U.S. security aid will decrease political violence in military juntas, regardless of regime age.*

### **Prior regime type**

Personalist regimes and military juntas have lasting effects even after they leave power by hindering democratic consolidation (Svolik, 2008) and making authoritarian reversals more likely (Cheibub, 2007). As the Indonesia example above demonstrates, transitions away from military-dominated regimes to civilian regimes necessarily entails stripping the military of privileges they had enjoyed while in power. This risks incurring the wrath of the military, perhaps to the point of provoking a coup. Likewise, regimes succeeding a personalist dictatorship should be similarly concerned with elites and military officers loyal to the previous leader attempting to regain power. Song (2018) finds that coup risk in autocratic regimes is elevated when the security forces in the prior regime were personally tied to the previous leader, as is the case in most personalist regimes.

Niger offers a recent example of this. Niger democratized (again) in 2011 following a brief period of military rule. In 2015, President Mahamadou Issoufou survived a coup attempt, and subsequently purged nearly his entire senior officer corps—including the commanders of two elite counterterrorism units—accusing them of collaborating with a former prime minister to reclaim power ([Jeune Afrique, 2017](#)). While defense spending has risen substantially, much of the increase has gone to the president’s personal guard ([Bigot, 2016](#)). This has severely hampered U.S. efforts to train that country’s security forces. Despite Niger being one of the top recipients of U.S. security assistance in the region, the military as a whole remains ill-equipped and under-paid ([International Crisis Group, 2017](#)).

**Hypothesis 4.** *(a) U.S. security aid will increase political violence in regimes immediately following either a personalist regime or military junta.*  
*(b) This effect will be larger in new regimes.*

Although forces loyal to previous regimes can pose threats to the following regime well into its tenure, this effect should, on average, be more acute in the initial, unstable years after a regime transition. Thus, Hypothesis 4(b) states that this effect will be larger in new regimes.

### **Overall coup threat**

The above discussion makes clear that security assistance should exacerbate instability when the threat of a coup is higher. According to previous research on authoritarian regimes, leaders base their military organizational practices upon the degree of threat they perceive from their security forces. In fact, [Talmadge \(2015\)](#) argues that leaders can shift between adopting coup-prevention practices when the threat is high, and revert back to efficient, capacity-building practices quite quickly when the threat decreases. But as recent research has shown, it is useful to distinguish between two distinct types of coups: those in which the entire ruling elite is replaced (regime change coups), and *reshuffling* coups in which only the leader is replaced, leaving the regime itself intact ([Aksoy, Carter and Wright, 2015](#)).

The latter types of coups are more common in military juntas, in which the ruling group of military officers can act collectively to hold the leader accountable. These also tend to result in less violence; indeed, they are intended to forestall violent escalation. By construction, regime-change coups pose a greater threat to the regime than do reshuffling coups. A reshuffling coup occurs when elites within the regime act to replace the leader while leaving the regime itself intact. The threat of regime-change coup

implies that an entire faction of elites is mobilized and able to credibly threaten to remove the regime and claim power and access to state resources. Leaders are likely to be more wary of their security forces in the latter scenario than in the former, and thus to consolidate power more ambitiously. I therefore expect security assistance to worsen local conflict when the relative risk of a regime change coup—but not a reshuffling coup—is high.

**Hypothesis 5.** (a) *U.S. security aid will increase political violence in recipient states when the threat of a regime-change coup is higher.*  
(b) *U.S. security assistance will have no effect on the level of political violence as the risk of a reshuffling coup increases.*

## **Empirical analysis**

### ***Dependent Variable: Host country attacks***

The theory predicts that security assistance will, in some contexts, encourage certain actions by the recipient regime which provoke or facilitate anti-regime violence. Therefore, I use as my dependent variable *domestic attacks against the host country*, as this captures the perverse effects of U.S. security aid on the stability of the recipient country. Data for this are taken from the Global Terrorism Database (START, 2012), which is useful as it contains information on the location, year, and primary target of over 80,000 terrorist attacks from 1970 onward. I classify each attack according to whether its primary or secondary target was the host country.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Independent Variables***

#### **U.S. security aid**

The theoretical argument above points to the potentially adverse effects of security assistance in particular. By better equipping and training the security forces of the recipient country, this type of assistance give the recipient leader incentive to coup-proof his regime, and to survive the fallout of doing so.

Data for security assistance are only available for the United States,<sup>9</sup> and were collected from [Security Assistance Monitor \(2017\)](#) in the dollar amount spend on each program in each recipient country-

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<sup>8</sup>The appendix contains replications of the main analysis looking separately at attacks against civilian and military/policy targets. Results do not fundamentally change when these alternative measures are used.

<sup>9</sup>Unfortunately, data on military aid given by other major or regional powers are not currently available. China, for one, does not “officially” give such aid, while others do not supply information on security aid apart from their broader military expenditures.

year. “Security aid” is an umbrella category consisting of a variety military and police training programs, such as IMET and Section 1206 and 1207 Defense Department assistance, and programs such as the Coalition Support Fund or foreign military financing, which basically provide grants to foreign governments to spend on their militaries. More formally, my “security aid” variable is a combination of *military aid* (i.e., foreign military financing, loans, grants, and training programs); *Anti-Terrorism Assistance* (part of the Department of State’s Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs); *Department of Defense Security Assistance*; and Defense Department funding under *sections 1206 and 1207*.<sup>10</sup> Data on military aid, Anti-Terrorism Assistance, and Defense Department security assistance come from the U.S. Agency for International Development Greenbook ([United States Agency for International Development, 2014](#)).

I make a couple of adjustments to the security aid variable. First, there is considerable quasi-random fluctuation in aid levels from one year to the next. In order to smooth out the year-to-year “noise”, I calculate a moving average of the previous three years ( $\frac{Aid_{t-1}+Aid_{t-2}+Aid_{t-3}}{3}$ ). Second, I take the natural log of  $(1 + \text{moving average of aid})$  for each category to ameliorate the right-skew of the aid variables, and also allow for the decreasing marginal returns to aid. Summaries of the aid variables are presented in the appendix.

### **Regime age**

Using information in [Geddes, Wright and Frantz \(2014\)](#), I calculate the age of each discrete regime. I classify as a *new regime* any regime less than six years old. Although this may seem to be an arbitrary cutoff, it has been widely used in past research on new regimes (e.g., [Mansfield and Pevehouse \(2006\)](#); [Cook and Savun \(2016\)](#)). Moreover, as Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate, regimes are significantly more vulnerable to coups during this period than at other stages, as healthy civil-military relations are, in part, a function of time ([Kenwick, 2018](#)).

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<sup>10</sup>Section 1206 and 1207 funding programs began in 2007. Both operate through the Department of Defense, and are broadly meant to bolster the security forces of a smaller set of recipient countries. While the aims of the two programs overlap, they differ in that section 1206 is targeted toward counterterrorism specifically, while section 1207 is intended for reconstruction and “restoring or maintaining peace and security” generally ([U.S. General Accounting Office, 2010](#)). A significant advantage of using U.S. security assistance for this particular research question is the more direct link between the donor’s allocation of the aid and its intended purpose. Such aid can be assumed to be aimed at a single general goal: the reduction of instability in the host country. I gathered data on these programs separately from [Security Assistance Monitor \(2017\)](#), as they are not listed in the Greenbook.

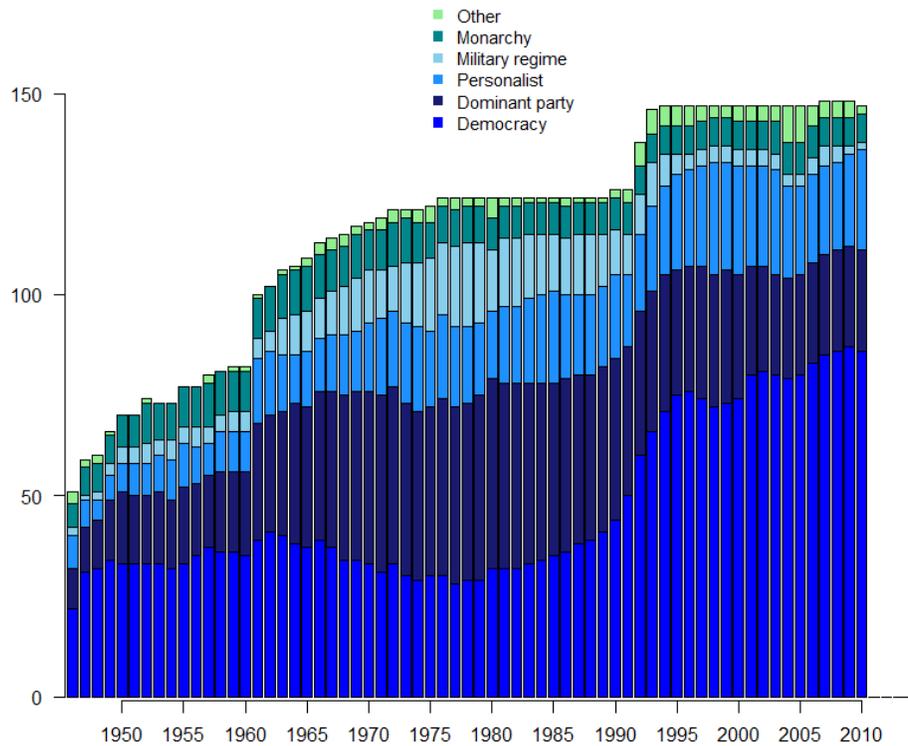


Figure 4: Regime typologies, 1950-2010 (based on data from [Geddes, Wright and Frantz \(2014\)](#))

### Regime types

To classify democratic and authoritarian regimes, I draw upon regime type data recently assembled by [Geddes, Wright and Frantz \(2014\)](#), who roughly follow the classification scheme presented in [Geddes \(2003\)](#), updated to 2010. I opt to use this classification because it does a particularly good job at coding each regime based on the features that are theoretically important for this argument (see [Geddes, Wright and Frantz \(2014\)](#) and the corresponding codebook for details on the coding procedure). Figure 4 displays the distribution of regime types over time since 1950. Each regime type indicator is interacted with U.S. security aid and the *new regime* indicator to obtain the conditional effects of each.

### Previous military/personalist regime

I code whether the regime type immediately prior to the current one was either personalist or military using [Geddes, Wright and Frantz \(2014\)](#). Also included here are regimes which featured an interregnum or transition period between a previous personalist or military regime. For instance, Iraq was coded as

*foreign-occupied* between 2004 and 2010 after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s personalist regime. Yet because of the U.S. occupation, PM Nouri al-Maliki was unable to coup-proof unabated until 2011, after U.S. forces withdrew. Thus, he remained paranoid of Saddam loyalists even after 2010 as his new regime attempted to consolidate power and survive without direct foreign military backing.

### **Coup threat**

As discussed above, leaders structure their security forces according to the degree of threat they pose to the survival of the regime. When the threat of a coup is high, as [Talmadge \(2015\)](#) argues, regimes may adopt organizational practices geared toward coup-prevention rather than combat. When the threat is low, they may revert back to more efficient practices, rendering them more useful for defense ([Talmadge, 2013](#)).

I capture this fleeting, momentary threat by estimating—for each country-year—the *probability of a successful coup* using a logistic regression model containing a variety of coup-relevant covariates and using three different dependent variables: 1) all successful coups; 2) successful reshuffling coups; and 3) successful regime change coups. I then calculate the country mean of each probability. The temporary, relative threat of each coup type is then calculated by subtracting the annual coup probability from the country mean ( $Relative\ coup\ threat = Pr(successful\ coup)_{it} - \overline{Pr(successful\ coup)_i}$ ).

### **Other independent variables**

Each model includes a variety of additional independent variables that are known from past studies to influence levels of terrorism<sup>11</sup>. I also control for salient time periods, and include country- and year-fixed effects to control for unobserved time and cross-national heterogeneity. I report the coefficient estimates for the auxiliary covariates in the full results tables in the appendix.

### **Endogeneity**

Research on aid effectiveness has long been plagued by issues of endogeneity. Specifically, aid may be allocated to countries that are already experiencing high levels of the very thing that aid is meant to

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<sup>11</sup>These include a lag of the dependent variable, GDP per capita, population, a categorical press censorship measure, and binary indicators for regime type, interstate rivalry, ongoing civil war, Cold War, and post-2001 time periods.

address. Thus, positive correlations between aid and some outcome may lead to the erroneous conclusion that aid makes things worse. While this may be the case for development aid, which is often allocated based on need (among other reasons), it is less of a concern for U.S. security aid. This is because the United States tends to allocate aid—security aid in particular—based on the presence of threats to U.S. interests specifically, rather than on local levels of political violence (my outcome of interest here). On the contrary, aid patterns indicate that the U.S. is relatively unconcerned with local political violence, unless it poses a direct threat to U.S. interests. This has been true of U.S. aid allocation since the Cold War, but the trend has accelerated since 2001 ([Fleck and Kilby, 2010](#); [Boutton and Carter, 2014](#)). Moreover, local violence tends not to be highly correlated with anti-U.S. violence.

In fact, anecdotal evidence even suggests U.S. reluctance to allocate military aid to countries battling their own insurgencies out of fear that the aid might be used by recipient security forces to commit human rights abuses against domestic insurgents. For instance, in one well-known case, the U.S. suspended military aid to Indonesia due to human rights concerns during that country's conflicts in East Timor and Aceh. [Tankel \(2018\)](#) notes the U.S. dramatically reduced its security assistance to Mali in 2012 after the onset of the Tuareg rebellion. If this is true more broadly, this would make it more difficult to find a positive relationship between security aid and political violence.

Still, I take several steps to ensure that my findings are not driven by simultaneity or endogeneity between security aid and political violence. First, as discussed above, I use as my primary independent variable a moving average of U.S. security aid over the previous three years. I also implement a set of country- and year-fixed effects in the main analysis, which helps to account for unobserved spatial and temporal factors that may influence security aid allocation. Second, I present in the appendix results of analyses using a restricted post-2001 sample and a set of simultaneous equations models. While I do not present these results in the main text, the results are, for the most part, unchanged.

## **Results**

Coefficients in models with three-way interaction terms are not straightforward to interpret, particularly when the dependent variable is a count process. For this reason, I present in the main text only graph-

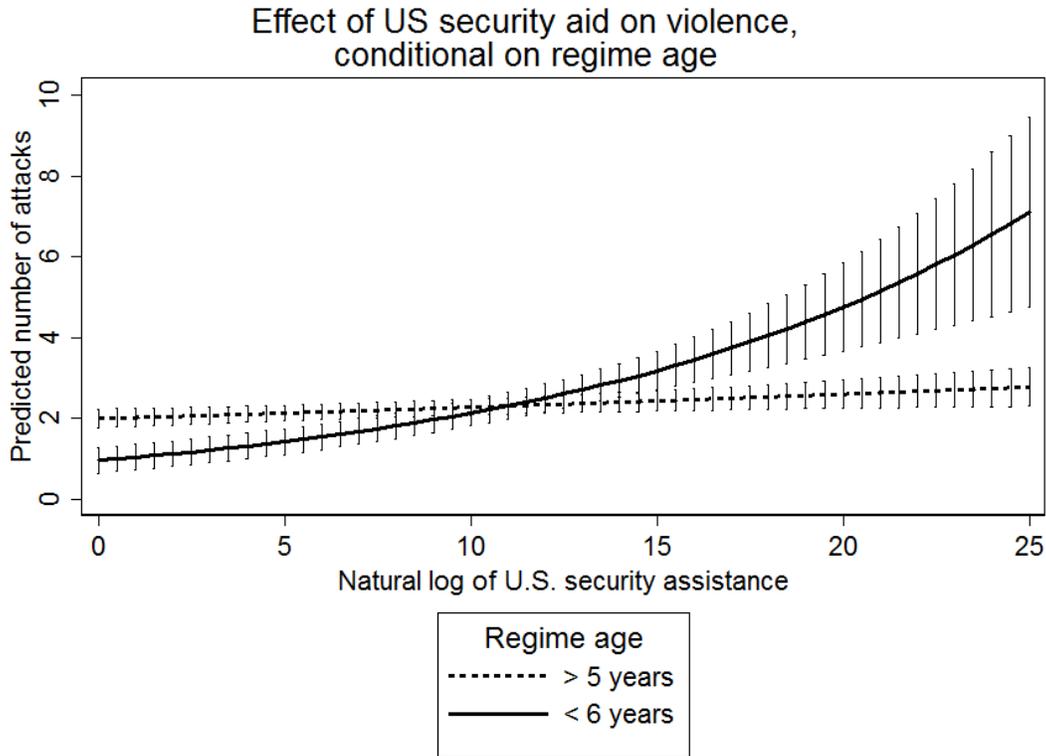


Figure 5: U.S. security aid, new regimes, and political violence

ical results for the primary independent variables of interest. Full results tables containing regression coefficients for all covariates can be found in the appendix.

### Security aid, regime type, & regime age

Each plot in Figure 6 displays the changes in the predicted count of attacks in each regime type across the range of U.S. security aid, and for regimes at different stages of development. The orange line represents the predicted count of attacks in *new regimes* (i.e., those five years old or younger), while the blue line represents regimes older than 5 years. Again, past research views the five-year threshold as analytically useful, which is why I adopt it here.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that security aid would increase political violence in new regimes. Figure 5 displays the main results of the count model evaluating H1. The plot shows, separately, the predicted counts of attacks in new regimes (i.e., five years old or less) and in established regimes (in place six years or longer). At low levels of security aid, new regimes experience up to 50% less political violence than do established regimes.

This difference becomes insignificant as the natural log of security assistance (moving average) increases toward the midpoint of the data. As security aid increases past the median level of security assistance (13.2, or about \$540 million), however, new regimes begin to experience more political violence than older regimes. The most important takeaway from Figure 5 is that while expected levels of political violence remain roughly flat in “established” regimes (i.e., those more than 5 years old) across the full range of U.S. security aid, new regimes see a distinct increase in local political violence as security aid increases. This provides evidence in support of H1, suggesting that while more established regimes are able to employ security assistance to prevent violence from increasing, newer regimes are less able to do so. In fact, the predictions suggest that military assistance may exacerbate instability.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 proposed that, rather than being generally true, this relationship may be conditional upon the regime type of the recipient. Figure 6 displays graphically the results of a series of count models employing a three-way interaction term between regime type, regime age, and U.S. security assistance.

The dotted line in each plot represents the effects of security assistance on local political violence in “established” regimes, while the solid line shows these effects in new regimes. These expected counts are based on simulations using the coefficients from the count models, the full results of which are presented in tables in the appendix.

The theoretical argument presented above produced a range of expectations across regime type. Hypothesis 2(a) predicted that because civil-military relations are particularly fraught in new democracies and single-party regimes, security assistance should lead to an increase in political violence in these cases. We see from the top left plot in Figure 6 that this is indeed the case in new democracies: they experience a rise in violence as security assistance rises.<sup>12</sup> I also find that this is the case in new single-party regimes, which corroborates H2(a).

I do not find strong evidence in support of Hypothesis 2(b), which predicted that security aid would decrease political violence in democracies and single-party dictatorships. The top left plot indicates that rates of violence remain approximately the same as security assistance increases in “established” democracies, which, while not evidence against H2(b), does not support it. While the expected level

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<sup>12</sup>I show in a section of the appendix that these results are robust to the exclusion of outlier cases.

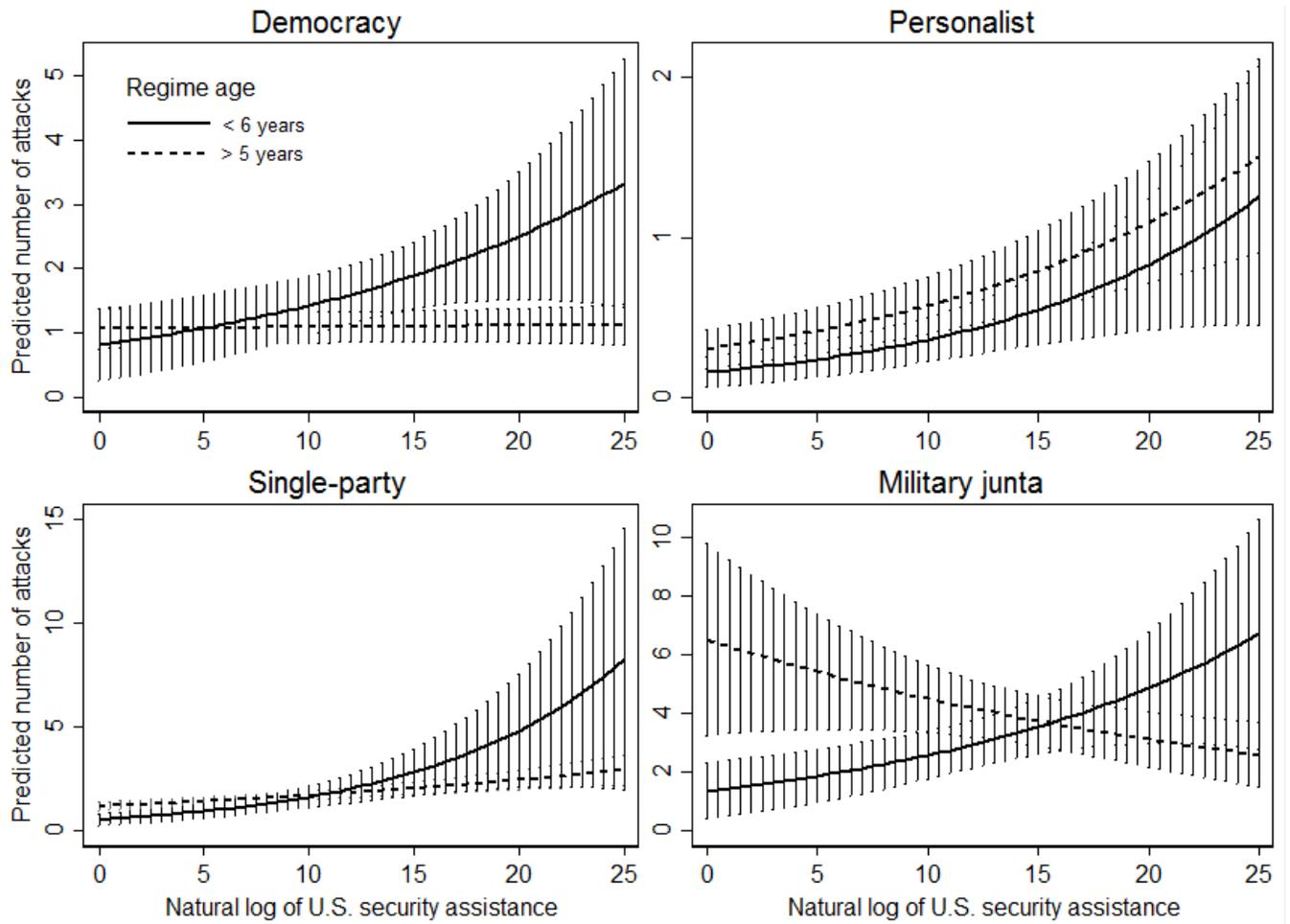


Figure 6: The effects of U.S. security assistance on political violence by regime type & regime age

of political violence in “established” democracies remains flat, however, I do find that new democracies experience significantly more violence than their more established counterparts at high levels of security aid.

In older single-party regimes, U.S. security assistance is associated with an *increase* in expected levels of political violence, contrary to my expectations. The effect is not as striking in established regimes as in new regimes, however. Moreover, the difference between predicted levels of violence in new relative to established single-party regimes never reaches statistical significance after security aid increases beyond zero.

Hypothesis 3, which predicted that increasing security assistance would result in increased political violence in personalist regimes, but that it would reduce violence in military juntas, receives partial support. Results show that new personalist regimes and military juntas each experience a rise in expected level of violence as security assistance increases. While the former is expected theoretically, the latter is unexpected but perhaps not entirely surprising, given the findings for new regimes overall.

In established personalist regimes and juntas, results are in line with expectations. Security assistance to established personalist regimes leads to an increase in expected violence of roughly the same rate as in new personalist dictatorships. By contrast, we see a significant decrease in expected attacks across the range of security assistance in established military juntas. This comports with the civil-military relations intuition: In these regimes, the leadership is less wary of the military precisely because *they are members of the military*. This is reflected in the fact that these regimes are far less vulnerable to regime-change coups than are other regimes. In fact, of the 16 regime change-coup attempts that have occurred in military juntas in the data, all but 3 happened within the first five years of a junta taking power. This suggests that juntas are relatively secure in power once established, and that the power-struggle and uncertainty described by scholars of authoritarian politics may be less acute here. Moreover, military juntas have, in the past, removed civilian regimes specifically because of the latter’s failure to adequately address domestic security challenges. That is, they often exist with the specific motivation to defeat violent non-state actors.

## Security aid & the legacy of prior military & personalist regimes

This section evaluates the lasting effects of previous regimes on the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance. As discussed in the theory above, leaders' fear of their security forces is in part a function of the presence of factions which may be personally tied, or otherwise harbor loyalties to, the previous regime. This is more likely to occur when a regime assumes power from either a personalist regime (in which the leader maintains personal control over the security forces) or a military junta (in which one faction of the military exercises political power directly). In addition, militaries may be particularly wary of losing privileges under a successor regime that they had enjoyed while in power. The results testing this intuition are displayed in Figure 7 below.

At low levels of security aid, cases in which the regime immediately prior was either a personalist regime or military junta experience significantly lower levels of political violence. This difference diminishes as security assistance increases toward the median and ultimately reverses. While it appears that security aid has a slight positive effect regardless of the nature of the prior regime, the effect is stronger when the preceding regime was personalist or military.

Theoretically, one would expect the effects of prior regimes to be more pronounced in newly-established regimes, since uncertainty is higher and the new regime has had less time to consolidate power and shed the legacy of the previous regime. This line of thinking is represented in Hypothesis 4(b). To test this, I again introduce to the count models a three-way interaction term between U.S. security aid and indicators for new regimes and cases in which the regime immediately prior was either a junta or personalist regime. Graphical results of the three-way interaction are shown below in Figure 8.

Contrary to H4(b), we do not find a significantly greater positive effect on local violence in new regimes whose predecessors were personalist regimes or military juntas relative to established regimes with the same history. It appears that, based on these findings, the legacy of prior military or personalist dictatorships is not necessarily limited to the first five years of the following regime. Despite recent findings that the development of healthy civil-military relations is a naturally self-reinforcing process (e.g., [Kenwick \(2018\)](#)), these findings suggest this may not always be the case. Although Mali—a major recipient of U.S. and French military aid—transitioned from a personalist regime to a democracy in 1992,

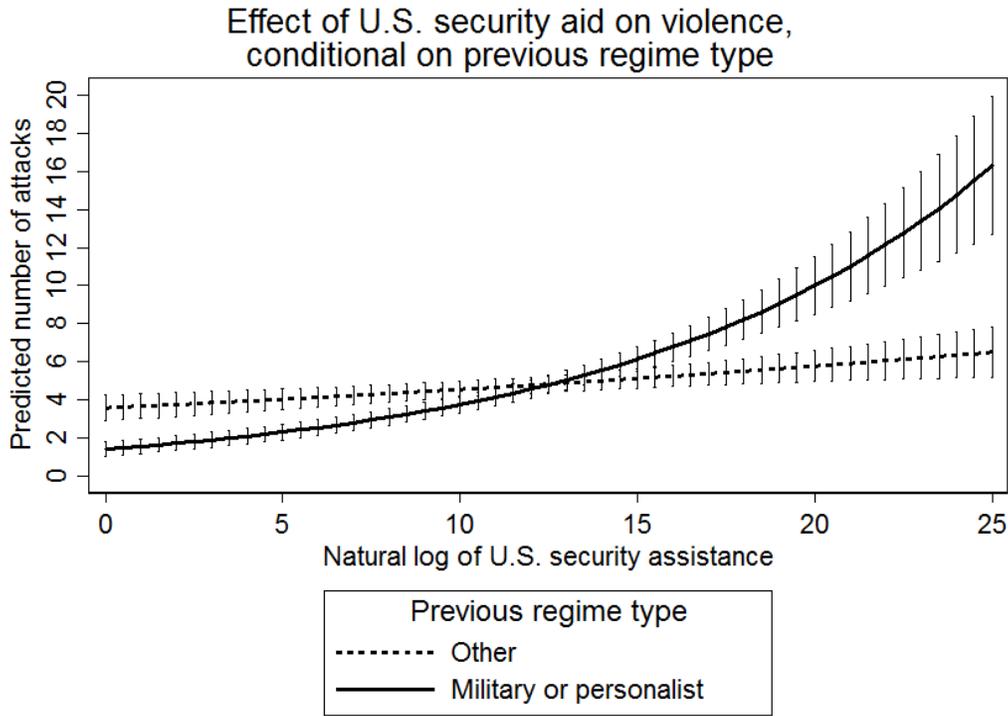


Figure 7: Effects of U.S. security aid and prior regimes on political violence

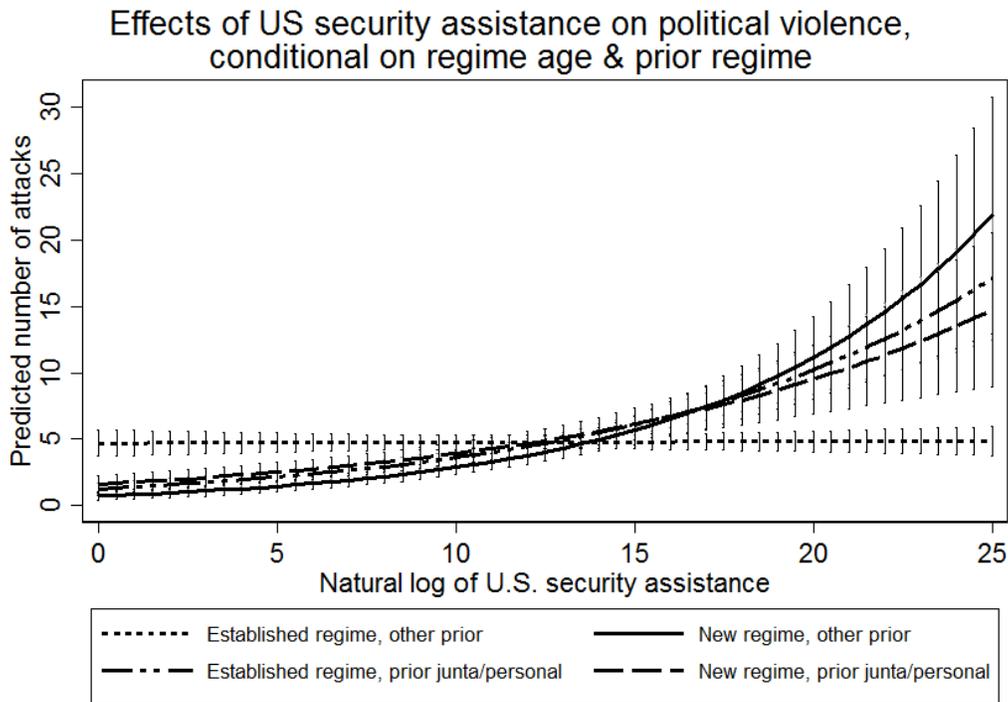


Figure 8: Effects of U.S. security aid, regime age, and prior regimes on political violence

fear of another coup prompted a series of civilian governments to adopt corrupt and inefficient domestic security policies, which played a large role in ongoing instability (Tankel, 2018, 249-258). This not only hindered the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance, but arguably led to the Tuareg rebellion, the 2012 military coup against Amadou Toumani Touré, and the subsequent Islamist insurgency that remains ongoing.

### **Overall coup threat and the effects of U.S. security assistance**

As a final test of the theoretical argument, I use a novel measure<sup>13</sup> of two different types of coup threats: the threat of regime-change coups and leader reshuffles. To briefly recap the basis for this measure, I first estimate the annual probabilities of each type of coup (successful coups only) using logistic regression and a set of coup-relevant covariates. After calculating the country means of each probability, I then arrive at the temporary relative coup threat by calculating the deviation between the annual probability and the country mean ( $Relative\ coup\ threat = Pr(successful\ coup)_{it} - \overline{Pr(successful\ coup)_i}$ ). The full results tables of the models used to calculate this measure are presented in the appendix. To test Hypothesis 5, I interact the natural log of U.S. security assistance with the relative coup probability variable. As before, I present in Figure 9 only graphical results for the primary variables of interest; full results can be found in the appendix.

The plots in Figure 9 display the marginal effect of U.S. security assistance on political violence across levels of relative coup threat. The plot on the left shows marginal effects across relative probability of leader reshuffles, while the plot on the right displays the same thing across relative regime-change coup probability. Hypothesis 5 predicted that U.S. security assistance should worsen political violence as the relative likelihood of regime-change coup rises, but that it would have no effect across relative leader reshuffling probability.

This is precisely what I find. U.S. security assistance has no effect on local political violence as we move across the full range of relative leader reshuffle probability. The reference line indicating zero effect falls firmly within the 95% confidence interval at all levels. This contrasts sharply with the marginal effects as relative regime-change coup threat changes. When the probability of regime-change coups is

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<sup>13</sup>Drawing upon (Sudduth, 2017b).

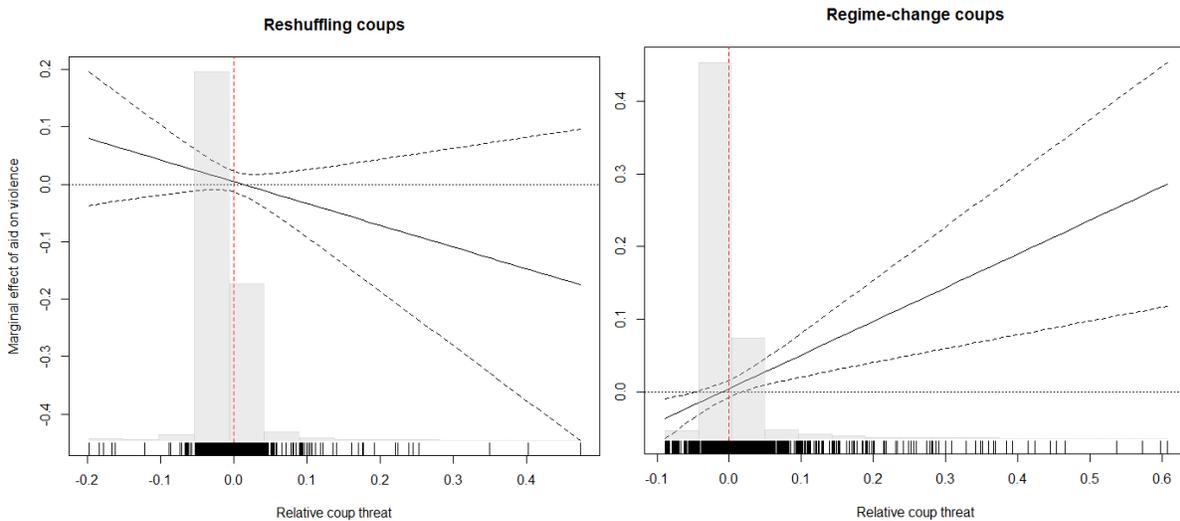


Figure 9: Effect of U.S. security assistance across levels of coup threat

below the country mean, security aid appears to have a slight negative effect on political violence. As relative coup threat increases to the mean and beyond, however, security aid begins to have a significant positive effect on local violence.

Figure 10 plots average substantive effects of security aid at levels of coup threat slightly below (left graph) and above (right graph) country means. On the left, we see that U.S. security aid leads to a slight (albeit statistically insignificant) decrease in predicted levels of violence when the level of coup threat is below average for a given country. This effect is reversed in the right-hand plot, in which relative coup threat is set at 0.1 greater than the country mean, a realistic increase given the distribution of the deviations variable. At this level of relative coup threat, moving one standard deviation below the mean to one above yields an increase in expected attacks from 2.77 to 6.2.

## Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to evaluate the effects of U.S. security assistance on political violence in various contexts. This type of aid is a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy, and is used to signal support for recipient countries, elicit and cooperation, compensate for policy changes, and to train and equip their security forces to disarm violent domestic groups. Despite apparently laudable goals, these programs have met with only limited success; more often, results have been disastrous.

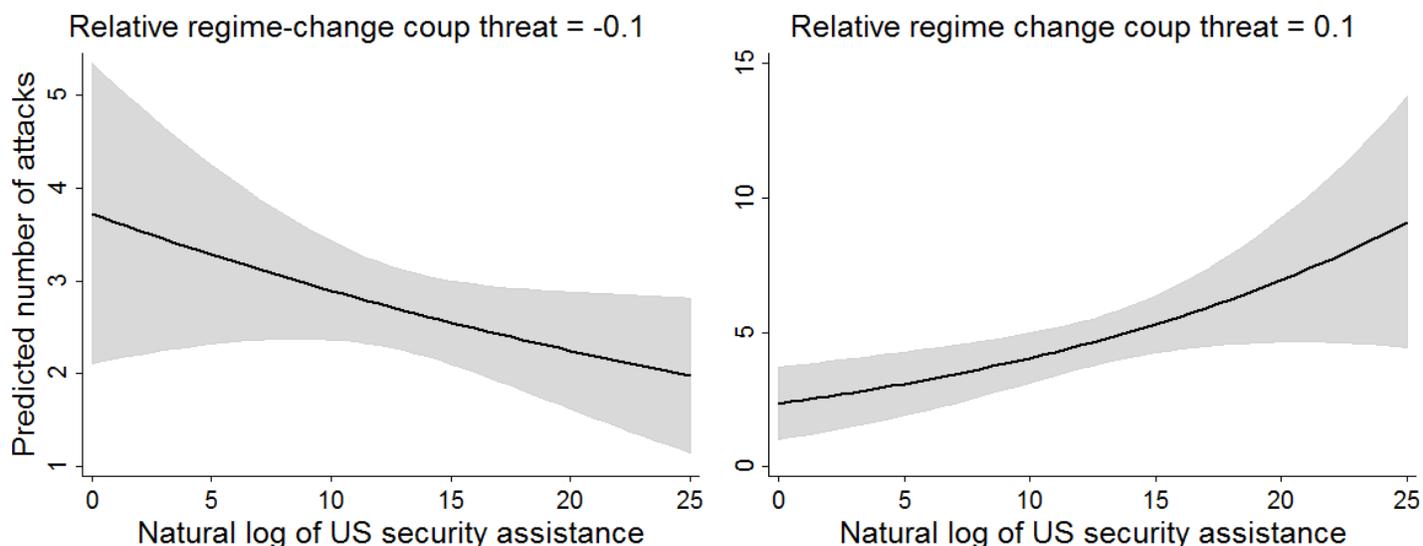


Figure 10: Effects of U.S. security aid and prior regimes on political violence

I propose that the explanation for these failures lies in the nature of the security threats facing the recipient regime. Previous research on authoritarian regimes and democratization shows that when an incumbent regime has reason to fear being overthrown in a coup, that regime will (naturally) take measures to guard against that possibility. These efforts typically consist of weakening and dividing the security forces, consolidating power, and restricting access to state resources and the political process. I argue that the provision of security assistance to fragile regimes creates a moral hazard in which the regime adopts more exclusionary policies and coup-proofs even more aggressively than it normally would. This, in turn, results in higher levels of violence. Thus, the military aid meant to maintain or bring about stability can often have the paradoxical effect of directly undermining it. I show that this is the case in new regimes; in personalist regimes; in regimes immediately succeeding personalist or military regimes, and when the threat of a regime-change coup is abnormally high. On the other hand, security aid prevents violence from escalating in established democracies, and lowers violence in established military regimes. These results are robust to endogeneity corrections and a variety of alternative specifications.

This has stark implications for many ongoing U.S. security aid programs to weak states with underdeveloped institutions, particularly those regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa that have recently become recipients of increasingly large amounts of military aid. Over thirty years ago, [Tilly \(1985\)](#) warned that

the provision of foreign military aid could aggravate civil-military tensions, thus sparking instability and hindering the political development of the recipient state. These findings substantiate Tilly's concern. Likewise, [Herbst \(1997\)](#) argued that providing support to failed states can perpetuate instability by obviating the need for elites to form strong, coherent states capable of surviving without such aid.

Another implication of the theoretical argument and results is that more care should be taken when delivering security assistance to fragile states. [Ladwig \(2016\)](#) has argued, correctly in my view, that productive counterinsurgency partnerships between the United States and its "partner" countries must be based on conditional *ex post* support for efforts already undertaken, rather than on the current practice of *ex ante* provision of military and financial support in the hope that this will bring the partner's preferences into alignment with those of the U.S.. Forcing the recipient country to adopt efficient policies *before* receiving aid—instead of promising unconditional assistance—may reduce or eliminate the moral hazard.

The findings suggest a couple of potentially valuable paths for future research. First, beyond a handful of case studies, we lack a good idea of when the United States has been able to effectively place conditions on military aid, to monitor compliance with those conditions, and to withdraw aid if conditions are not met. Information on this would permit additional tests of the principal-agent logic. Second, it is worth taking a closer look at how the military organizational practices in a country change in response to U.S. military assistance. For instance, it would be useful to examine the specific *types* of coup-proofing practices security aid-receiving regimes engage in. Again, given how little we know about how military aid affects the politics of recipient states, these are promising avenues for additional research.

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