IO Constitutional Norms and the Decline of the Coup D’etat

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Previous literature regarding the efficacy of international sanctions is mixed. Scholars such as Pape (1997) have condemned the practice, while more recent scholarship suggests the threat of sanctions could have a meaningful role in deterring rogue actions. I go a step further by offering a theory of sanctions deterrence under which rational actors will altogether avoid actions that are all but guaranteed to result in sanctions, a behavior that will have even the threat of sanctions go unrealized. As a test, I look at coup activity in regional organizations that have adopted formal norms regarding constitutional power transfers. Rational coup plotters should avoid coups due to the high expectation of subsequent sanctions and long-term costs in these organizations. The theory is tested using global coup data from 1950-2010, multivariate analyses for the years 1963-2007, and case studies from the Organization of American States and the African Union. Secondary analyses involve the impact of U.S. military aid, which has been legally similarly tied to constitutional norms. Quantitative and historical analysis reveals strong support for the theory. Though coups are by no means obsolete in the midst of democratic norms, even failed sanctions appear to signal the high costs associated with coups to other would-be conspirators.


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In recent decades, concerted interest has been demonstrated in attempted to end the phenomenon of the coup d’etat. This interest has culminated in two major regional organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union (AU), pass provisions that promise comprehensive punishment to any regime that was born through a coup, including membership suspension, economic sanctions, and even invasion. In spite of these efforts, recent news headlines have condemned the organizations as failing, particularly for the African Union after recent coups in Mauritania and Niger, and the OAS for Honduras.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that in spite of the continued menace of the coup d’etat, these organizations have successfully reduced the likelihood of coups in their respective regions. Borrowing from the sanctions literature, I accept the contention that sanctions are only implemented in cases that are most likely to fail (Nooruddin 2002). Sanctions, then, are not expected to “roll back” or reverse coups. Instead, their utility is best illustrated by serving as a signal to other would-be coup plotters, illustrating the high costs associated with undertaking a coup. The success of these organizations is thus not demonstrated by their ability to coerce coup-born leaders to allow the return of the fallen government, rather success is best illustrated by considering the impact that their constitutional guarantees have on the attempting of coups.

This paper investigates the empirical impact of these policies for the African Union and Organization of American States, as well as the impact of U.S. military aid on coup propensity after adopted a similar democratic standard. The rest of this paper is structured as follows. First, I review relevant sanctions literature in an effort to demonstrate the potential of IOs to successfully deter coup plotters from acting. Next, I lay offer a basic rational actor model of coup activity while specifying how democratic norms first into the coup-making calculus. Finally, I test the theory with global data for the years 1950-2010, including quantitative analyses.
for 1962-2007. IO narratives are then offered in an effort to illustrate the causal mechanisms of the process. The analyses provide strong support for the theory.

**Sanctions Deterrence**

Despite considerable attention to sanctions, and despite continued sanction use, there is little consensus on their efficacy. Indeed, there is still considerable empirical work to do on the topic. Pape (1997), perhaps the foremost critic of sanctions in the empirical literature, does the sanctions scholarship a service in his re-evaluation of the analysis offered by Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot (1996, hereafter HSE) by taking a closer look at how sanction outcomes have been coded. His conclusion is that HSE have vastly overstated sanctions’ success. If sanction efficacy has truly been overstated, it would be difficult to apply sanctions logic to the demise of the coup. Military officers would view sanctions has nothing more than a slap on the wrist, an acceptable cost.

However, Pape’s portrayal misrepresents the HSE data in a manner that is of the utmost importance to the current discussion. The success standard implemented by Pape is threefold. First, the target state must concede to part of the demands of the sender. Second, the sanctions must be either threatened or implemented before a concession is made on the part of the target. Finally, there must be a lack of alternative explanations for why the sanctions may have succeeded. As Elliot (1998) points out, Pape has essentially set up a straw man that has little chance of holding up. The most egregious characterization of sanctions failures is his interpretation of sanctions failing against regimes that were toppled via a coup d'état. At best, these cases should be excluded from the analysis, since the fall of the target regimes disqualified the sanctions from having the opportunity for success based on his definition. At worst, Pape’s failure to consider ousters as a goal of the sanctions is a glaring oversight. This is particularly
revealing given his own work shows that sanctions led to coups d’etat in Iran (1953), Loas (1959), the Dominican Republic (1961), (Brazil 1962), South Vietnam (1963), Chile (1973), and Lesotho (1986). Mosaddeq’s Iran and Allende’s Chile are two obvious cases in which sanctions were enforced with the intent to destabilize the executive. Even if these coups were not the stated goal of the sanctions, they clearly illustrate the practice is a major destabilizing force for a regime, a trend that has been quantitatively supported by Marinov (2005).

More recent scholarship has made an increased effort to articulate the impact of sanctions. Morgan and Schwebach (1997) offered a rational-choice approach, claiming that they should only work when costs on the target state are sufficiently high. Drezner (2000) expands on this framework by looking at the bargaining process between the primary sender and the target, and between the primary and potential secondary senders. This is an important theoretical development, as an increase in the number of sanctioners should raise the costs that Morgan and Schwebach have discussed. However, Drezner’s portrayal shows that multilateral sanctions can be hampered by a number of enforcement difficulties. “Sanctions busters” can defect and reap the rewards of non-cooperation by trading with the target. It is therefore preferable for international organizations—who can more easily penalize defection—to levy sanctions. His multivariate analysis leads to the conclusion that IO’s increase the concession size, and that IOs are much more effective at enforcing sanctions. An analysis of sanctions, then, could consider IOs as more likely to promote a deterrent effect through their ability to bring about high ongoing costs to deviance.

A common defense of failed sanctions for IOs and states alike is that a selection issue has gone unaddressed. Regimes that are hit with arms or trade embargoes, for example, no doubt receive prior signals that sanctions were eminent. Targets that are most vulnerable to these
efforts will acquiesce before enforcement, and regimes that are most immune to sanctions are the ones that are ultimately targeted. In short, sanctions ultimately target the most difficult cases. Nooruddin (2002) offers a much-needed model that deals with this selection issue by utilizing a censored probit that first considers the conditions under which sanctions were implemented, and then analyzes whether the sanction succeeded or failed. While Nooruddin’s approach is groundbreaking for the subject, it could still be limited in a number of respects. First, he did not completely address the selection issue due to a lack of consideration given to the threat of sanctions. Second, he did not address a remaining selection issue in terms of deterrence. In regards to the former, it has been suggested (see Drezner 2003, for example) that the mere threat of sanctions will be more effective than actual sanctions. Once a sanction is threatened, vulnerable actors can conform, censoring them from the sample used by Nooruddin and others. It would be beneficial to consider these threats. This is not a failure on the part of Nooruddin, as at the time there was no available dataset from which to draw data. This limitation has been recently addressed by the Threat and Imposition of Sanctions Database (TIES) offered by Bapat, Morgan and Krustev (2009). Threats, however, do not tell the whole story.

In spite of these advances in theory and data, addressing explicit threats still does not adequately cover the issue. Another selection issue has escaped analysis from much of the sanctions literature to date: deterrence. Speaking on conflict, Lebow and Stein (1990, 336 fn. 1) note that deterrence “seeks to prevent undesired behavior by convincing those who might contemplate such action that its costs would exceed its gains.” Prevalent in conflict literature, deterrence is an important component that has yet to be adopted to the sanctions literature. Lebow and Stein go on to note that defenders must “define the behavior that is unacceptable,
publicize the commitment to punish or restrain transgressors, demonstrate the resolve to do so, and possess the capabilities to implement the threat.”

Even if sanctions fail miserably in a given case, their utility could be illustrated if their being carried out discourages other actors from committing transgressions. To best test the impact of sanctions, researchers would need to identify situations in which sanctions are highly likely, and then consider how actors’ behavior differs from expectations. The coup d’etat is one such avenue for analysis. IOs such as the OAS and AU have an explicit commitment to restoring fallen executives by means including economic sanctions or even invasion. The United States has similarly banned military aid to states following a military coup. Would-be putschists will be cognizant of the penalties of transgression and should thus avoid coups. On occasion a coup might occur, and costs incurred by an ensuing junta might not be enough to restore the previous regime. However, imposing those costs on one who can ride out the storm could send a clear and credible signal to those that cannot that a coup is futile. These IO provisions, then, clearly articulate the costs that will be associated with coups.

Consider the following model adopted from the treatment of civil conflict offered by Quinn, Mason, and Gurses (2007).

$$EU_{coup} = P_V(U_V) + (1 - P_V)(U_D) - \sum_{n=0}^{n} C_{n}$$

In the above equation we will treat $EU$ as the expected utility of a successful coup d’etat. $C_{n}$ reflects ongoing costs that result from the maneuver. Domestic factors are believed to directly influence the likelihood of a coup’s success, while ongoing costs are more likely to result from international responses to the leadership change. $P_V$ represents the probability of a coup attempt’s success, $U_V$ is the expected payoff from the coup, $(1-P_V)$ is the estimated probability of defeat and $U_D$ represents the estimated costs from a coup’s failure. The estimated
costs from a failed coup, for example, include consequences such as exile, imprisonment, or death for individuals. There are also consequences at the group level. Finer (2002, 21-32) has noted that militaries will fear that “not only their lives but the army itself will be forfeit.” Costa Rica, for example, abolished its military following an attempt within the ranks to annul the results of a national election, and Kenya dismissed virtually every Air Force officer after the service’s ill-fated 1982 coup attempt (N’Diaye 2002). Though there is an occasional granting of amnesty to plotters (see 1995 Sao Tome, for example), these cases are rare and usually come about after the conspirators have already seized power. When looking at whether the coup will succeed, $U_D$ will be treated as a high value. We can expect this factor to be constant for all coup plotters, and as a result of its high value the probability of victory and the utility of victory must be sufficiently high, while ongoing costs remain sufficiently low.

Recent decades have seen a dramatic increase in the commitment to democratic rule, commitments that could precipitously raise $C$. This is particularly strong for responding to unconstitutional seizures of executive power. The Organization of American States, for example, is bolstered by a number of international agreements, including the Universal Declaration on Democracy and OAS General Assembly Resolution 1080. The latter requires each member to be a “representative democracy” and to be proactive in preserving democracy amongst its members (Halperin & Lomasney 1996, 135). The Inter-American Democratic Charter has more recently affirmed and strengthened this position. The Organization of African Unity was long handicapped in promoting democratization after adopting a policy of non-intervention at its inception in 1963. Its influence further hampered by actions by the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, the would-be governing body was virtually non-existent during domestic security crises. With the end of the Cold War, subsequent emphasis on
democratization, and the continued specter of military coups, new efforts were put on curbing such interventions. This culminated in the July 1999 OAU summit in Algiers, which issued a “clear and unequivocal warning to the perpetrators of unconstitutional change that, under no circumstances, will their illegal action be tolerated by the OAU” (Ould-Abdallah 2006, 23). However, Henri Konan Bedie was ousted from the Presidency in the Ivory Coast only five months after the Algiers Declaration. Not only was this the first coup in the nation’s history, it proceeded to launch the West African state into prolonged domestic conflict. While the Ivory Coast lacked a pre-coup democratic tradition, it was previously an island of stability in the region. The case clearly highlights the potential fallout surrounding military intervention, raising the salience of the need to curb the practice. The case also illustrates that a stated democratic norm must be accompanied by a legitimate threat and/or precedent for repercussions to be enacted upon transgressors.

The inability of the OAU to deal with such unconstitutional changes of government was presumably addressed when the African Union was launched during the summer of 2002, with the AU committing itself to guaranteeing a “speedy return to constitutional order” (Ould-Abdallah 2006, 23). In summary, the lessons of the sanctions literature are twofold. First, sanctions can clearly destabilize country leaders by raising the costs associated with their transgressions. Pape (1997) has shown that sanctioned regimes can be destabilized to the point of collapse, a finding that has drawn empirical support from Marinov (2005). Bartilow (2000, 2001) has similarly shown that the impact of economic sanctions can lead even a stubborn coup-born leader to step down. Second, international organizations should be most effective at levying sanctions given their multilateral nature and their ability to combat sanction-busting. International organizations are thus bodies that should be capable of raising costs against
transgressors for any number of violations (Drezner 2003). Further, clearly-stated commitments to constitutional norms provide a very clear signal as to the value of $C_i$.

**H1: Coups will be less likely in members of International Organizations with a clearly stated commitment to constitutional transfers of executive power.**

**U.S. Military Aid**

A similar cost can be seen when looking at military aid. Speaking at Senate hearings on aid in the early 1960s, Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright noted that the largest third world recipients of U.S. military aid “all had military coups supplanting a civilian government,” prompting him to wonder “whether there is any relationship here between these events and the extent of our military aid” (quoted in Wolf 1965, 873). Multiple studies have sought to answer the question, though results have been mixed. Rowe (1974), for example, concluded that U.S. military aid as a general rule increases the likelihood of coups. An exception is seen in poor military regimes, where the leader seemed to be entrenched by the influx of resources. Wells (1974) found a near-zero correlation between military aid and coups in Africa, while Thyne (2010) found a negative impact.

These inconsistent findings can potentially be thought of as being due to a selection effect. In an effort to stabilize allies, military aid could be directed to countries that have heightened risk of a coup. Muller and Zimmerman (1987), for example, note that mass political violence leads to both coups and the receiving of U.S. military aid, hinting at a spurious relationship between the two. Thyne (2010) is the only such study known to this author that directly controls for domestic instability, suggesting that U.S. military aid does in fact reduce coups.
Another factor could explain these discrepant findings. While aid can help to entrench a regime by strengthening the government, as suggested by Rowe (1974), anti-regime elements could also be deterred from attempting coups due to the potential to lose rent in the form of aid. The likelihood of losing aid after a coup has changed in recent decades. Just as a handful of international organizations have made membership benefits dependent upon the respecting of constitutional norms, the United States has similarly tied military aid to constitutional governance. Following the passage of the 1988 version of the U.S. Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (FOAA), military aid is suspended to any state that undergoes a military coup. This is in stark contrast to Cold War cases such as Zaire (1965) and Chile (1973), where maintaining a stable pro-Western regime was far more preferable than ensuring progressive civil-military relations or democratization. In such cases coups actually led to much higher levels of aid.

Military aid can thus influence coup calculations in two ways. First, recipients can strengthen regime defenses, including coup-proofing paramilitary bodies such as Presidential Guard units. Doing so lowers the probability of victory ($P_v$) of an attempt coup. Second, overthrowing the government can lead to the suspension of aid, a scenario that is virtually guaranteed in terms of U.S. military aid, lowering $U_v$. This latter point is particularly meaningful, as the timing of the democratic requirement of the FOAA coincided with the twilight of the Cold War. David (1987) has pointed to a Soviet “cocoon” strategy in which the Soviet Union would insulate third world allies with a massive influx of aid, arms, and soldiers. In the event that U.S. military aid was suspended there was no longer the promise of this Soviet alternative. As a consequence, recipients of U.S. aid should be less likely to experience coup activity, especially following the passage of the 1988 version of the FOAA.
**H2a:** Coups are less likely when U.S. military aid to the state increases.

**H2b:** The substantive effect of U.S. military aid is stronger in the post-1988 era.

**Data and Methods**

**Dependent Variable**

Studies addressing successful and unsuccessful coups have largely relied on the Total Military Involvement Score (TMIS) for the dependent variable. TMIS accounts for reported plots in addition to overt coup attempts. Each event is weighted, with five points given to a successful coup, three points to a failed attempt, and one point for a coup plot. The approach is advantageous in that it accounts for all coup activity, but there are a few concerns. Coup plots are often impossible to objectively verify, and factors leading to whether or not an even verifiable plot was unraveled can differ from factors that determine whether or not the plot succeeds. Consequently, the plotting stage of a coup could be said to be a wholly different phenomenon. Wang (1998) and Jenkins and Kposowa (1990) have noted that such an index is really capturing coup “intensity,” and not its likelihood.

I chose to forego the TMIS index in exchange for a dichotomous measure for a coup attempt in a given country-year due to these concerns. Further, to test deterrence I am interested in explaining the decision-making process. The same process leads to a failed coup than a success, so all attempts must be considered equally.

It is important to use data that permits testing for the largest possible temporal and geographic scope. I thus use yearly coup data from Powell and Thyne (2011), who re-evaluated coup events reported in over a dozen earlier scholarly works as well as media outlets such as the *New York Times*. Coup attempt thus follows the definition of Powell and Thyne (2011):
“attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of government using unconstitutional means.” I have recoded the data from a count of the number of coup attempts in a country-year to a dichotomous measure that considers whether or not at least one attempt was made in that year. Coup data are available from 1950-present, accounting for 454 coup attempts, of which 225 succeeded. Availability of independent variables currently limits the multivariate analysis to the 1962-2007 timeframe. Yearly global sums of successful and failed coups are illustrated in Figure 3. While the number of coups has clearly decline since the 1960s, they remain a very real threat. While many will note that coups seem to be clustered in West Africa (McGowan 2006), recent years have seen coups in locales as diverse as Honduras (2009), Madagascar (2009), Niger (2010), and Thailand (2006).

**Explanatory Variables**

The independent variable of interest is the existence of a constitutional *norm* in the international organization. Existence of this norm—and a clear threat to punish transgressions against it—should deter potential coup plotters. To be clear, the forming of an international norm is not created overnight, or even in a single year as it is treated in the current analysis. The OAU, for example, had taken steps to deter coups as early as the Algiers Declaration in 1998, and built upon the norm with a further commitment at Lome in 1999. In line with Lebow and Stein’s belief that deterrence will be present when an entity has taken steps to “define the behavior that is unacceptable [and] publicize the commitment to punish or restrain transgressors,” I use the year of provision ratification in the international organization.

As a population of cases I will use all member-states for the OAS and OAU/AU. I choose these regions due to both organizations passing anti-coup provisions during their
existence. These regions are also the most historically coup-prone, making an investigation of these areas particularly salient. All members of the Organization of American States are coded 0 prior to 1990 and 1 afterward, given the timing of the passage of OAS Resolution 1080. Members of the AU are coded 1 following its 2002 launch. Prior membership in the OAU is coded 0. The first hypothesis predicts that coups will decline in frequency following the passage of these provisions.

_U.S. Military Aid_ will be derived from the US Agency for International Development’s “U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants” _Greenbook_. Data are available from 1946-2007. An increase in U.S. military aid is expected to negatively influence coup activity (Hypothesis 2a), while the substantive influence is expected to be stronger post-1988 (Hypothesis 2b).

To address other potential causes for coup activity, I incorporate a number of control variables that are commonly attested to contribute to their likelihood. These include _GDP per capita_ and year-to-year percent _change in GDP per capita_, with data coming from the World Bank. As a control for regime strength, I utilize _polity squared_. While polity will plot a state’s level of democratization on a 21-point scale (-10 to 10), polity squared possess a range of 0 to 100. Lower values reflect a variety of “mixed regimes,” states that share some democratic and authoritarian traits. These states are believed to lack legitimacy and are thus weaker in terms of coup activity, as they a not firmly democratic nor do they possess the tools of coercion of true dictators (Powell 2010, Svolik 2009). Polity-squared is expected to be negatively related to coup activity. Finally, I incorporated _years since last coup attempt_ and associated cubic splines to control for temporal dependence, at the suggestion of Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998).

**Analysis**
I look at the Organization of American States and the African Union in order to analyze the ability of IOs to deter coups d’etat. In addition to each organization offering pre- and post-norm periods for analysis, this pair is useful in another respect. The OAS adoption of Resolution 1080 coincided with the end of the Cold War. Skeptics could claim any decline in coup activity could be solely due to the ending of the American-Soviet Rivalry. The African Union is a useful counter since it did not adopt a constitutional norm until over a decade following the close of the Cold War.

I begin with a bivariate consideration of the relationship between pro-democracy IO provisions and coup activity. This preliminary evaluation of the OAS and AU can be seen in Table 1. These early results indicate IO norms, and the accompanying expectation of sanctions, could in fact be deterring coups. There was an 11.9% likelihood of a coup in any given state in the Americas in a given year before the adoption of OAS Resolution 1080. This plummeted to 1.6% after its passage. This bivariate relationship is statically significant ($X^2 < .000$) and Cramer’s $V$ indicates that accounting for the provision is explaining 16.5 percent of the variation in the data. We see a similar trend in Africa. Before the launching of the AU, there was an 8.5% chance that a member of the OAS would be challenged via a coup in a given year. This dropped to 3.5% after the creation of the AU, once again a statistically significant bivariate relationship ($X^2 < .023$). As an additional test I exclude the AU years from the African sample in order to test the significance of the end of the Cold War. There was only a small drop in coup propensity (8.8% to 7.8%), an insignificant bivariate relationship ($X^2 < .181$). Based on this bivariate analysis, it appears the Cold War was not a significant predictor of coup activity. To be clear, the Cold War no doubt had an important relationship on other factors that influence coups, such
as level of democratization and economic development. I now move on to controlling for such factors.

[Table 1 about here]

Descriptive statistics and bivariate relationships provide a terrific overview of the basic relationship between two measures, but the omission of any potentially confounding factors would lead to a questioning of any interpretation of the relationship. As a consequence I offer a set of multivariate logistic regressions in Table 2. Model 1 considers a sample that includes OAS and AU member states, followed by OAS- and AU-specific samples, and a final AU sample that considers the impact of the Cold War. All four models provide support to the first hypothesis. Norm (either AU or OAS), OAS norm, and AU norm are all statistically significant with the expected negative sign. Control variables behaved as expected years since the last coup attempt is significant with the expected negative sign in each specification, as is polity-squared. GDP per capita and change in GDP per capita are each significant with the expected negative sign in Models 1 and 2. Cold war fails to reach statistical significance and actually has a negative coefficient.

[Table 2 about here]

Predicted probabilities based the models can be seen in Table 3. I present the relative expected frequency of a coup in a given year of the organization. I then reiterate the actual frequency of coup activity reported in the bivariate test. The first set of rows reflects Model 2, which is specific to the Organization of American States. The first column shows the expected frequency of coups prior to the adoption of Resolution 1080, followed by the expected frequency of coups following ratification, as well as the expected change in coup propensity following the adoption. Prior to the OAS’s adoption of its formal constitutional norm, 8.89% of country-years
in the Americas were expected to experience a coup. The second line shows that this is slightly below what actually happened (11.90%). Following adoption of the constitutional provision, the likelihood of a coup dropped fourfold, to 2.06%. This is just above the expected frequency of 1.57% and reflects a drop in expectation of over 76%. This expectation is graphically illustrated in Figure 1, where the top illustrated reflects actual coup activity, while the bottom shows these predicted coup probabilities for the respective organizations by year.

[Table 3 about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

A narrative history of the organization following the adoption of Resolution 1080 is even more revealing. The intervention in Haiti can be seen as a textbook case of the ability of the OAS to re-establish a democratically-elected president (see, for example, Boniface 2002). The immediacy of Jean Bertrand Aristide’s return to Haiti in 1994 has often been seen as accomplished through Clinton’s threat and subsequent delivery of U.S. forces. Bartilow (2000, 2001), however, points out a very important flaw in this view. While General Cedras quickly conceded power after Clinton’s 15 September threat of force, he was already negotiating Aristide’s return with Jimmy Carter at the time of the threat. The negotiations, Bartilow asserts, came about after Cedras’ grip on power was eroded by three years of economic sanctions. These sanctions prevented Cedras from consolidating his rule, prompting numerous divisions within the armed forces and paramilitary. These costs, in addition to the promise of added costs in the form of U.S. military intervention, eventually convinced Cedras to step down. In retrospect, Cedras failed to identify the potential for long-term costs, \( C_t \), causing him to overestimate the coup’s expected utility (\( EU \)).
Others would learn to consider the long-term costs that would be associated with such ousters. Soon after Cedras was forced to step down, Paraguayan army commander Lino Cesar Oviedo began ignoring presidential orders and commenced to regularly interfere in government decisions. The OAS condemned his actions and offered to support the regime of President Juan Carlos Wasmosy (Halperin and Lomasney 1996, 138). After growing fears that Oviedo would launch a coup, he was forced to resign and reportedly lamented that “with the adoption of Resolution 1080, the era of the Latin American military coup is over” (Zagorsky 2003, my emphasis). Oviedo was clearly interested in influencing—if not outright controlling—government, but was aware that the costs associated with a coup under the framework of Resolution 1080 would far outweigh the payoffs.

A rational calculation can also be seen in recent years. The June 2009 Honduran coup has caught the interest for many for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it was the first successful coup in the Americas in a decade (Powell and Thyne 2011). A close look will reveal important considerations amongst the plotters, particularly in regards to the coup being a calculated endeavor. The coup leaders, for example, estimated they could “withstand the domestic and diplomatic pressure for at least six months,” ample time for them to organize a new election and return to democratic processes (NYT 7/72009). The Honduran military, we can say, accepted the long-term costs \( C_i \) of the maneuver and decided the EU of ridding themselves of President Manuel Zelaya was still sufficiently high to merit action.

The second set of rows in Table 4 shows a similar trend for member-states of the African Union, with the expected frequency of coups dropping from 8.52% prior to the launching of the AU to 3.20% after. A comparison to reality reveals that the model is right on target, with frequencies of 8.52% and 3.46% for the pre- and post-norm periods, respectively.
Before continuing to a narrative over the IO’s recent history, I will first touch on the influence of U.S. military aid. Table four reports three models regarding military aid. The first (Model 5) represents a full temporal sample, representing the years 1963-2007. The influence of military aid is insignificant. The Model 6 shows a similarly insignificant coefficient for the measure in the 1962-1987 timeframe. Model 7, however, demonstrates the expected negative and significant coefficient. Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of a coup d’état, based on model seven. Hypothesis 2a is only marginally supported. U.S. military aid does in fact have a negative influence on coup activity, but only for the post-1988 time period in which the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act mandated the suspension of military aid in the event of a coup. Hypothesis 2b is supported. It does in fact appear that flows of U.S. military aid significantly reduces the disposition to attempt a coup.

[Table 4 about here]

The illustration shows how the probability of a coup changes in response to the percentile of U.S. military aid to the host country. All else being equal, a country in the 10th percentile of military aid has a coup probability of .015, compared to .006 for those in the 90th percentile. This represents a drop of about 60%. A more modest movement from the 20th to 80th percentile brings with it a drop from .013 to .0075, while a movement from anywhere from the 30th to 70th percentiles brings with it a negligible difference. It was previously noted that U.S. aid flows might target states with a pre-existing elevated risk for a coup d’état. This trend could potentially explain the bump in coup probability between the 1st and 10th percentiles of military aid, as states in the first percentile are largely states that do not receive U.S. military aid.

[Figure 2 about here]
A review of the African Union’s responses suggests that the organization may have gotten off to a slow start in advertising high coup costs, and one contributing factor is U.S. relations with its member-states. Within months of being launched, the organization was forced to deal with a violent mutiny-turned-coup attempt in the Ivory Coast. The coup was ultimately suppressed through domestic responses but ultimately led to civil war. In the Ivorian case there was clearly no fear of costs associated with the maneuver. Without a Haiti-type response, the AU norm could have been limited.

Events in March 2003 further suggested the AU’s promises to defend constitutional regimes may have been overstated, as the organization failed to respond to a coup in the Central African Republic. Former AU Chair and then-South African President Thabo Mbeki aptly summed the response when he lamented that “although the AU had condemned the coup, it nevertheless had to deal with the political realities of that country” (Xinhua News Service, 26 March 2003). However, the organization would prove to be more forward when another coup occurred in Sao Tome and Principe four months later. President Joachim Chissano of Mozambique—at that point the AU Chairman—immediately flew to Nigeria to discuss possible military intervention in its offshore neighbor. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo promptly agreed military intervention was a suitable response, and the junta dissolved under mere threat from the Nigerian military. Such actions could send a meaningful signal to other militaries.

Unfortunately, after Guinea-Bissau President Kumba Yala was soonafter toppled by General Verissimo Correia Seabre the precedent was not revisited. Vocal international condemnation followed, but it became increasingly clear that the populace supported Yala’s ouster. The AU described the coup as “contrary to the principles enshrined in the Constitutive
Act of the African Union, as well as the Algiers Decision and Lome Declaration…” (This Day (Nigeria), 16 Sep 2003) but no formal steps were taken to restore the government.

A few years later the AU would begin to show signs that it was taking a considerably more proactive approach following the death of Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadema. The military installed the deceased leader’s son as the country’s new president, a clear violation of the state’s constitution. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the AU Chairman of the time, vowed the maneuver would not be tolerated, and the African Union took “an unusually hard line from the start” (Agence France Presse, 17 Feb 2005). An AU suspension followed, as did the organization’s encouragement for ECOWAS and other relevant parties to isolate Togo. The plea resulted in continent-wide sanctions, and the coup was successfully reversed without military force. This case demonstrates a clear success for the AU, as the organization successfully solicited cooperation from the entire continent in isolating the West African state, clearly demonstrating their ability to sufficiently raise C.

While the Togolese case shows how international cooperation can help the AU reverse a coup, the next case demonstrates how a lack of outside cooperation can severely undermine AU leverage. On 3 August 2005 Mauritanian President Ould Taya was removed from power by military head Ely Ould Mohammad Vall. The country was immediately suspended from the AU, and criticism was particularly harsh from the United States—at least initially. The military had toppled a pro-Western leader in a country that housed hundreds of American special forces soldiers as part of the Global War on Terror.

Vall took a number of steps to ensure the international community of his good intentions, efforts that would ultimately weaken international resolve in sanctioning his junta. He asked Taya’s cabinet to remain at their posts and agreed to meet with U.S. and French envoys only a
day after seizing power. He promised to hold elections within two years and suggested a referendum that would allow the people to vote on measures that would limit presidential powers. The previous regime’s political prisoners were freed and greeted by the thousands of Mauritanians who were celebrating the coup in the streets. The United States was further pleased when the Arab state vowed to uphold its positive relations with Israel and agreed with the junta’s claims the previous regime’s authoritarian practices had promoted Islamic extremism within the country. The U.S. ended its calls for Taya’s return only five days after the coup. By 2007 military aid to the junta had resumed, lowering any ongoing accumulated of costs from the loss of that resource.

After AU Chairman Obasanjo sent an AU delegation to the Mauritanian capital, the head representative acknowledged they were encouraged by the promises to hold elections and relented in their requests for Taya’s return (Timothy Othieno, *Business Day* (South Africa), 30 August 2005). The AU found itself in a no win situation. Critics of Mauritania’s suspension questioned what “constitutional order” the AU was referring to when speaking of the Taya years. He had come to power via the same means and had been allowed to remain following multiple fraudulent elections, he had detained hundreds of political opponents in the year leading up to the coup, and had exercised numerous other authoritarian abuses of his people, who were now celebrating his removal. These critics argued an alternative regime should be given consideration, especially given the promises Vall was making. However, others felt the AU failed not by doing too much, but by doing too little. The promise of elections was encouraging, but accepting a junta on its word could potentially send signals that a coup would be tolerated if certain promises were made.
Interestingly, Africa would witness only two failed coup efforts between August 2005 and August 2008 when once again, the military overthrew the government of Mauritania. This is not surprising, given the Mauritanian military had recently demonstrated its ability to withstand AU sanctions, that is, \( C \) was not sufficiently high for the country. More recent coups have occurred in Guinea following the death of the president, as well as Madagascar following continued rioting, and Niger following a number of undemocratic maneuvers by President Mamadou Tandja. These cases suggest that recent coups are not the classical “power-grabs” that are frequently cited. Guinea (and earlier, Togo) saw the military step in during a power vacuum created by the president’s death. Uncertainty of the future of any privileges could have raised their expected payoff from a coup, especially if allowing constitutional processes could have led to a loss of any organizational benefits. The Nigerien case transpired after Tandja’s dissolution of parliament, extension of his current term and his effort to abolish term limits, actions that had already led to sanctions from the African Union. This is particularly important for the current discussion. Already experiencing long-term costs due to their president, the military was left with two rational choices. First, allow Tandja to continue to embed himself as a dictator, which could lead to sanctions for an indefinite period of time, or second, remove the president and have already-imposed sanctions continue for a limited period of time. It would seem that the cost-benefit calculation of the plotters would surely have pointed to a high expected utility for a putsch.

**Discussion**

The crux of my argument is not that the OAS or AU will be universally successful in preventing coups from occurring, nor should coups expected to be reversed once undertaken. I believe that by setting an up-front expectation of and the precedent of post-coup sanctions, IOs
are sending a credible signal to potential plotters that unconstitutional seizures of power will now have lower utility, making the maneuver more costly and less likely. Looking at the above cases reveals how an IO can raise the costs of coups, as well as how some factors can minimize their efficacy. The AU has a mixed record, but even during perceived “failures” they have both illustrated the costs of coups as well as advertised their willingness to act. It is this final point that is of the most importance. Sanctions literature tells us that by the time sanctions are implemented, there is little chance they will succeed. While efforts to change the behavior of targets such as coup-leaders might be seen as futile, carrying out those commitments can be a success in deterring others from committing transgressions. The African Union got off to a slow start in this regard, but the organization appears to be increasingly dedicated to their zero-tolerance promise. The OAS, on the other hand, went above and beyond in their response to the Cedras coup, sending a clear message to others in the region, such as Paraguayan General Oviedo.

The adoption of constitutional norms in these international organizations appears to have precipitously reduced the likelihood of the coup d’etat. When it comes to reducing the military’s willingness to intervene in politics, these organizations appear to have succeeded. Some caution regarding success, however, is merited.

First, in line with other sanctions literature, once coup plotters have evaluated the likely costs of an unconstitutional seizure of power and made the ultimate decision to undertake a coup, the international response is unlikely to “roll back” the coup. IOs should not be determined to have “failed the coup” test if they fail to return a Manuel Zelaya or Mamadou Tandja to office, rather they should be credited for the many non-events in which a coup never transpired. Further, while such responses might be ineffectual against coup-born regimes, the costs inflicted
upon those who would resort to unconstitutional methods can still act to deter observers elsewhere in the IO.

Second, while militaries have begun to remain in the barracks, other forms of non-democratic power grabs in the form of an autogolpe, a “self-coup,” continue. In the recent Nigerien and Honduran cases, presidents were acting in contrast to constitutional and democratic norms of their respective states. While militaries are rarely credited with acting as agents for democratization, the fact remains that a number of high-profile historical cases have seen them act in this manner. Huntington (1989), for example, has noted in detail that the third wave of democratization was ushered in by the 1974 Portuguese coup. Under the current international framework, the new regime would have been condemned, with the return of the dictatorial Novo Estado being the number one priority. The current black and white response of these IOs, then, could act as a coup-proofing mechanism for leaders that wish to actually roll back democracy and embed themselves as dictators. Improvements on IO policy should thus be more pro-active in deterring and punishing leaders who attempt to curb their constitutions. Niger, for example, had already been sanctioned by the AU due to the actions of Tandja. Honduras, on the other hand, had endured a constitutional crisis for over six months that saw little effort at resolution from the OAS. IOs should be much more proactive to deter the undemocratic actions of presidents, actions that could prompt the military (or even the judiciary in the Honduran case) to consider a coup as the last resort to protect democratization.

Finally, Claude Welch (1970:1) once described a coup as “a sharp, clear event, easy to date and (if successful) possible to document.” This distinction is not only true for scholars wishing to classify and explain the phenomenon, it is also true for would-be regulators of coups. While a military’s removal of an elected official is easy to spot, the rolling back of democratic
processes in a country could be more difficult to identify and punish. There are, however, a number of cases that have seen the masses decide that a leader has lost their legitimacy. Trinkunas and Pion-Berlin (2010), for example, note that between 1990 and 2004 there were actually 15 Latin American leaders that were overthrown. Only two of the cases, Haiti and Ecuador, witnessed the military take an active role, with the rest being accomplished by the masses. The question remains whether these “civilian coups” indicate that Latin American democratic norms are improving, or that the coup d’état is simply being undertaken by a different actor. Whatever the case, though these organizations have been successful in deterring militaries, there is still considerable work to be done in preserving democratic processes.
Works Cited


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*I distinguish the OAU years to show that the end of the Cold War did not play a statistically significant role on coup activity in Africa between independence and the birth of the AU.*
Table 2: IO Norm Provisions and Coups d’etat, 1963-2007

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Notes: ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05 (one-tailed). Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country. Cubic splines were included in the analysis but are excluded for ease of presentation.
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<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
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<td>3.20%</td>
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<td>Actual</td>
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<td>-59.41%</td>
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Figure 1: Actual and Predicted Coup Activity in the OAS and AU, 1950-2010

- **Total Coups in Region (5-Yr Moving Average)**
  - Coups in AU States
  - Coups in OAS States

- **Predicted Probability of a Coup d'etat**
  - AU Coup Risk
  - OAS Coup Risk
Table 4: The Impact of U.S. Military Aid on Coups d’etat, 1963-2007

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<td>(0.544)</td>
<td>(0.642)</td>
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Notes: ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05 (one-tailed). Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country. Cubic splines were included in the analysis but are excluded for ease of presentation.
Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Coup, as a Function of U.S. Military Aid Flows