

Combating Coups d'état in Africa, 1950–2014

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Published online: 7 January 2016

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Abstract Recent years have seen African militaries attempt coups in virtually every geographic region, from Egypt to Lesotho and Guinea to Madagascar. They have targeted established democracies, infantile democratic experiments, increasingly authoritarian executives, power vacuums brought on by leader death, and—most recently in Burundi—leaders attempting to circumvent constitutional limitations on their tenure. These continuing acts perpetrated against regimes with such varied backdrops suggests that coups still afflict a wide range of states and remain a continuing threat to leader tenure. This is in contrast to the African Union's emphasis on curbing the practice. This paper explores the African Union's effectiveness to combat military coups, primarily focusing on the potential for sanctions to act as a deterrent to would-be coup plotters. The paper also considers potential limitations on the African Union's (AU's) ability to project power against certain states. Analyses for the years 1950–2014 indicate Africa has in fact witnessed a meaningful decline in coup activity, an impact even more pronounced than the end of the Cold War. Results also indicate that the AU's effectiveness in deterring coups is not constrained in cases where they are expected to lack leverage.

Keywords Africa · Coups · African Union · Regional Organizations · Leverage

The international community was stunned to witness a group of soldiers storm the presidential palace of President Amadou Toumani Touré of Mali in March 2012. The country had been seen as a democratic success story in a region which has few, and the ensuing junta was able to maintain power despite an attempted counter coup by the Red Berets Presidential Guard Unit. Another would-be democratic experiment was soon after reversed in Egypt with the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, while Burkina Faso's in-progress transition was threatened by an attempted coup in

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September 2015. While it is easy to fixate on such alarming developments, recent decades have seen a remarkable decline in the frequency of coups globally. Maneuvers such as those witnessed in these cases have become an increasing rarity, even in Africa, the world's most coup-plagued continent. However, given the increased emphasis on constitutional transfers of power, both by the greater international community since the end of the Cold War and by the African Union (AU) since its launch in 2002, it is perhaps puzzling that coups continue with such frequency.

This paper explores the reasons for the slow decline—but continued existence—of coups by focusing on the anti-coup stance adopted by the AU. Scholars traditionally explain coups by looking at internal characteristics of a state, such as wealth (Londregan and Poole 1990), level of democratization (Lindberg and Clark 2008), prior coup history, and the corporate interests of the military (Leon 2014). Others have considered international dynamics by focusing on the role of foreign powers (David 1987; Thyne 2010). Scholarship on the ability of international organizations (IOs) to influence coup plotters offers another avenue of inquiry, as some IOs have shown a strong interest in curbing the phenomenon while at the same time emphasizing a commitment to democratic rule.

Many formal efforts to combat coups coincided with the end of the US-Soviet rivalry, making it difficult to parse out the causes for coups in some regions. For example, the anti-coup framework adopted by the Organization of American States (OAS) was passed in 1991, rendering it impossible to systematically distinguish the role of the OAS from the end of the superpower rivalry. Fortunately, the AU's 2002 adoption of an anti-coup framework occurred over a decade after the close of the Cold War. This provides an invaluable opportunity to consider the role of the regional body's formal effort to reduce coups independent from more general global changes brought on by the end of the Cold War. And while recent studies have suggested that the AU has in fact responded more strongly toward coups (Shannon et al. 2015; Souaré 2014), evidence regarding the effectiveness of the AU to actually deter them is more limited (Wobig 2014).

This paper treats coup-plotters as rational actors that consider the costs and benefits of their actions given a particular environment. IOs like the AU can alter the expected utility of a coup by increasing short-term costs and decreasing long-term benefits of mounting an unconstitutional challenge. We argue regional organizations can be particularly effective at incurring costs on coup-born governments and can consequently deter coup attempts when adopting and enforcing clearly articulated penalties for transgressions. In contrast to the general normative changes seen with the close of the Cold War, we argue that explicit anti-coup frameworks in the prevailing regional organization are a necessity. Further, we build on prior literature on international norms and sanctions to hypothesize that regional organizations like the AU should be particularly effective at deterring coups when state peculiarities can enhance the organization's leverage.

Coup activity is assessed for 54 African states between 1950 and 2014. In addition to representing the most temporally and geographically comprehensive assessment of Africa's history of coups, the study also gives more attention to alternative explanations for the decline in coups, including the normative shift toward democratic norms after the end of the Cold War. Ultimately, the results suggest that the African Union has in fact witnessed a statistically meaningful decline in coup activity. This is true both in a general sense, as well as in comparison to the post-Cold War years prior to the AU's creation. Further, the AU's ability to deter coup activity is not limited by factors

commonly associated with “leverage,” such as a state’s level of wealth, trade dependence, aid dependence, or having democratic neighbors. Conversely, the end of the Cold War did not bring a statistically meaningful decline in coup activity in Africa, regardless of the amount of leverage that pro-democracy advocates in the international community might possess against individual states. These results strongly suggest that anti-coup norms are reliant on regional institutions adopting formal commitments to effectively reduce coups.

Coup Trends, 1950–2014

Coup conspirators are treated as rational actors who calculate the expected utility of action by weighing the gains and likelihood of success against the likelihood and consequences of failure (e.g., Thyne 2010; Powell 2012). The penalties for an unconstitutional challenge were primarily born at the domestic level prior to the AU’s adoption of anti-coup provisions. An unsuccessful coup may result in arrest, exile, and/or execution, but gains could be reaped if successful. International efforts to curb coups have changed this simple cost-benefit calculation by directly supporting incumbent regimes. Coups occur when regimes are weak, that is, when conspirators have a rational expectation that they can take over while suffering minimal costs (Buhaug 2006). This cost-benefit calculation is almost exclusively limited to domestic actors if formal international commitments to uphold constitutional transfers of power are lacking. Such international costs were historically limited due to the Organization of African Unity’s (OAU) adoption of an explicit non-intervention policy at its founding in 1963. The act would effectively guarantee inaction from other African states and would provide a justification for condemning interventions from other, non-African, parties. This indifference sent signals to conspirators that there would be few, if any, formal penalties to be brought upon coup conspirators, and early coups provided signals to other would-be putschists that a coup would be tolerated.¹

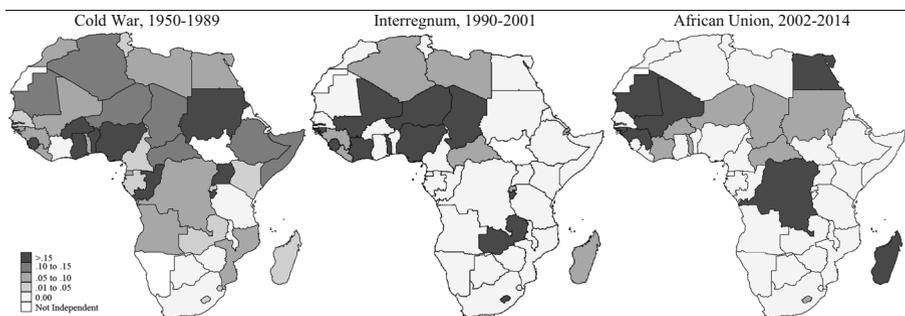
Conspirators consume information that is favorable to their predispositions and will “respond to cues in line with” them (Li and Thompson 1975, p. 81). When soldiers witness favorable events in other states, they will sometimes follow with coups of their own. Though empirical research is limited, there is substantial anecdotal support for this “contagion” theory of coups, in Africa and beyond. The removal and murder of Patrice Lumumba was pivotal in launching a coup era in Africa, as it was “the first time that the legitimacy of the colonial inheritance was defied” and this precedent was dramatically reinforced by the ouster and murder of widely popular President Sylvanus Olympio of Togo in 1963 (First 1970). By adopting a formal non-intervention policy, the OAU effectively eliminated external costs for coup-born leaders. Precedents set by Gnassingbé Eyadéma, Joseph Mobutu, and other early coup leaders would reinforce this reality. The willingness of non-African powers to support coup-born regimes not only further advertised a lack of penalties, but potential rewards. Indeed, these factors led to

¹ France has been known to intervene to help prevent a coup or attempt reversal. However, these efforts were linked more to personal arrangements with the leader rather than a clear condemnation of anti-regime activity. Further, while French intervention has succeeded in some cases, such as in 1963 Gabon, implementation of such responses is historically inconsistent, as seen with inaction in 1974 Niger (see, for example, Higgot and Fuglestad 1975).

coups becoming “the most visible and recurrent characteristic of the African political experience” (Decalo 1990, p. 1).

This trend is illustrated in Fig. 1. Coups are defined as “illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive” (Powell and Thyne 2011, p. 252). The figure shows the geographic dispersion of coup activity, disaggregated by three time periods: the Cold War (1950–1989), the period between the end of the Cold War and the launch of the AU (1990–2001), and the AU years (2002–2014). The figure reports values for the total number of coup attempts experienced by the state in the time period divided by the number of years the state was in the sample for the period. The Cold War map illustrates the wide geographic scope of coups on the continent, as every region was subjected to coup activity. The maps for the subsequent periods point to declines in both frequency and geographic scope of coups, potentially owing to efforts by international actors to curb the phenomenon.

Efforts to prevent coups have consequently involved efforts to impose costs on coup born governments. The normative shift following the close of the Cold War is often credited with ushering a new era of democracy promotion in which “an active array of governmental, quasi-governmental, and nongovernmental organizations devoted to promoting democracy abroad sprang into being” (Carothers 2002, p. 6). Individual countries such as the USA, economic blocs like the European Union, and IOs like the OAS introduced a variety of legal frameworks aimed at promoting democratic governance and keeping armies removed from politics. Most relevant to this study, OAS General Assembly Resolution 1080, passed in June 1991, required each member to be a representative democracy and to be proactive in preserving democracy among its members. Quickly put to the test, the ousting of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in September 1991 was met with universal condemnation in the region, including the implementation of both economic sanctions and an arms embargo (Boniface 2002). Ensuing economic turmoil mortally weakened the coup-born regime, and the approval of the deployment of 20,000 US Marines to Haiti convinced the junta to step down. The Haitian case is not only indicative of the pro-democracy stance taken



Notes: Data report the total number of coups experienced divided by the number of years the state was in the sample. Data are from updates by Powell and Thyne (2011) and are valid through December 31, 2014. The map reflects both successful and failed coup attempts. New states that gained independence via secession (e.g., South Sudan, Eritrea) are not assigned coup attempts experienced prior to independence.

Fig. 1 Geographic dispersion of coups d'état in Africa, 1950–2014. Cold War, 1950–1989 Interregnum, 1990–2001 African Union, 2002–2014. Notes: Data report the total number of coups experienced divided by the number of years the state was in the sample. Data are from updates by Powell and Thyne (2011) and are valid through December 31, 2014. The map reflects both successful and failed coup attempts. New states that gained independence via secession (e.g., South Sudan, Eritrea) are not assigned coup attempts experienced prior to independence

by the international community, it also illustrates the importance of *formal* mechanisms allowing for a response. We will return to this point below. In more than two decades since the Haitian precedent, the 2009 ouster of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has acted as the *only* successful coup in Latin America, a strong indication that would-be coup conspirators recognize the costs associated with the act.

The remarkable decline in post-Cold War Latin America has not been echoed in Africa. Table 1 summarizes these temporal trends. The rows report the number of country years that experience a coup, the total number of country years during the time period, an associated percentage, and a *p* value reflecting a difference of proportions test. We begin with the percentage of country-years that witnessed a coup attempt prior to the creation of the AU in the “Pre-Norm” column (158 coup-years/2043 total country years, 7.7 % rate). The “Post-Norm” column reports similar statistics for the African Union (3.2 %). Here, we see coups occur at a rate 58 % lower than the years prior to the AU, a decline that is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

It is possible, of course, that the pre-AU years include inflated coup numbers due to higher coup rates during the Cold War. We account for this by more carefully considering temporal dynamics. Africa saw a coup rate of 8.4 % during the Cold War (1950–1989) and 4.6 % following its close (1990–2014). This is again statistically significant. To isolate the influence of the Cold War, we next excluded the AU years from the sample. Here, we see a more modest 26 % drop in coup rate (8.4 to 6.2 %) when we compare the Cold War years to the interregnum period (1990–2001), but this decline is not statistically significant. This suggests the apparent influence of the Cold War is driven in part by the successes of the African Union. We follow a similar approach by excluding the Cold War years for our test of the African Union. In this set of cases (1990–2014), the coup rate drops from 6.2 % during the interregnum between the end of the Cold War and the launch of the African Union to 3.2 % under the AU, a statistically significant 48 % decline. Although not definitive, the bivariate data suggest the shift from the OAU to the AU has brought a more meaningful decline in coup activity than the end of the Cold War.

This prompts an obvious question: are these declines attributable to the actions of the African Union, or is the association between the AU and coup activity spurious? The 1990s and 2000s, for examples, have also seen an increase in wealth and

Table 1 International norms and coup activity in Africa, 1950–2014

Period	Pre-norm	Post-norm	% Δ	Sample
AU	158/2043 7.7 %	22/689 3.2 %	-58 % $p < 0.000$	1950–2014
Cold War	119/1410 8.4 %	61/1322 4.6 %	-45 % $p < 0.000$	1950–2014
Cold War, pre-AU	119/1410 8.4 %	39/633 6.2 %	-26 % $p < 0.075$	1950–2001
AU, post-Cold War	39/633 6.2 %	22/689 3.2 %	-48 % $p < 0.015$	1990–2014

p values (reported under % Δ) reflect a two-sample test of proportions (two-tailed)

democratization. We attempt to answer this by articulating the theoretical reasons for why the AU is expected to have successfully reduced coups and empirically assessing this relationship while controlling for other potentially confounding factors. The theoretical argument ultimately rests on two criteria. First, sanctions can successfully deter actors from pursuing actions they would otherwise be willing to pursue. Second, regional organizations can use the prospect of sanctions to deter would-be coup plotters from acting. We argue it is the adoption of formal provisions that specifically document the act to be sanctioned and advertise the associated penalties for transgressions that will deter coup plotters. We now draw out these assumptions by building off prior theoretical arguments in the sanctions literature.

Deterring Coups

The primary argument of this paper assumes that international sanctions can change behavior, a claim that some have found dubious. For example, Pape (1997) claims scholars have overstated the effectiveness of sanctions, calling into question the belief that sanctions should deter coup conspirators. However, Pape's treatment of sanctions as failing in any case in which the targeted regime collapsed neglects the possibility that regime change may have been a goal of those implementing the sanctions. Mohamed Mosaddeq's Iran and Salvador Allende's Chile are two obvious cases in which sanctions were enforced with a clear intent to destabilize the executive. The eventual ouster of these leaders suggests that sanctions can help lead to the fall of a regime, and there is little reason to believe coup-born leaders would not be similarly susceptible. Even if weak when implemented with other desired outcomes, Pape's criticism at the very least suggests that sanctions could be useful when attempting to unseat a head of state.² This is supported by Marinov's (2005) conclusion that sanctions can effectively destabilize leaders, while Lam (1990) and Jing et al. (2003) argue that sanctions are more successful when implemented against regimes suffering internal economic or political instability, a qualification for which coup-born regimes clearly qualify.

The argument, however, emphasizes that anti-coup frameworks can act as a deterrent, not just a response mechanism. For example, recent qualitative (Souaré 2014) and quantitative (Thyne et al. 2016) assessments of post-coup politics show that hostile international responses to coups reduce the duration of coup-born regimes. These findings, however, are limited to the post-coup environment. We posit that would-be coup conspirators are aware of the ability of international actors to reduce post-coup tenure, and those conspirators will be less likely to attempt a coup to begin with. In other words, the AU could influence coup activity in the absence of actually having to implement sanctions.

Scholars have similarly pointed to the potential for selection bias in that many sanctions critics do not consider cases in which sanctions were not implemented. Regimes hit with arms or trade embargoes, for example, would have received prior

² Another criticism of Pape's is that economic sanctions rarely succeed in the absence of an accompanying threat or use of force. While we focus primarily on economic sanctions and believe Pape's concern is overstated, we consider both economic and military coercion to be mutual parts of an IO's anti-coup arsenal. Consequently, Pape's economic versus military sanction distinction is not problematic for our argument.

signals that sanctions were eminent and the most vulnerable targets would likely acquiesce long before enforcement (Nooruddin 2002; Miers and Morgan 2002; Drezner 2003; Krustev 2010). Regimes that are most immune to sanctions are the ones that are ultimately targeted, leaving scholars to study cases in which sanctions are most likely to fail. Indeed, an in-depth effort to evaluate the robustness of sanctions effectiveness recently indicated that threats—particularly when implemented by international institutions—are effective (Bapat et al. 2013).

Sanctions threats are thus a crucial, if understudied, aspect of the story, but their influence is still potentially understated. Investigators utilizing resources such as the Threat and Imposition of Sanctions (TIES) database, for example, only look at cases of specific documented threats, just as prior studies solely considered the actual implementation of sanctions (Morgan et al. 2009). This omits cases in which would-be targets conformed to mandated standards of behavior due to the *expectation* they would be sanctioned in response to a specific proscribed action. Current policies in the AU, and especially the OAS, for example, advertise penalties long before sanctions come into place, and even long before the IO gets to the point of having to issue threats. In short, coup conspirators might “walk the line” without either being directly threatened or sanctioned since these IOs have indicated in policy and—potentially—precedent that the cost of coups will now outweigh the benefit. This dynamic is akin to deterrence from the interstate conflict literature. Deterrence is most effective when potential violators are fully convinced that violating the rules will prove too costly and thus do not even take action. The USA and Soviet Union, for example, did not need to employ force, nor did they need to convey verbal threats in order to illustrate the retaliatory consequences of a first strike. Similarly, clear-cut constitutional norms within IOs can create an atmosphere of compliance without the need for the organization to explicate verbal threats against specific officers or armed forces that might wish to seize power.

Precedents set by the OAS illustrate this mechanism. In 1996, Paraguayan president Juan Carlos Wasmosy found himself a potential coup target shortly after the resolution of the aforementioned Haitian case. Army head Lino Cesar Oviedo, who had once declared “We don’t know if the man has been born yet who can sew up the mouths of the military,” began ignoring presidential orders (Brooke 1995). Oviedo ignored Wasmosy’s attempt to remove him from his position, and instead demanded the president be the one to step down. Immediately aware of the growing crisis, OAS Secretary-General Cesar Gaviria Trujillo arrived in Paraguay within hours. News reports pointed to the organization’s anti-coup provisions providing the “legal basis for collective action” and the “machinery for making multilateral decisions” (Hakim 1996). The deterrent effect was perhaps best illustrated in Valenzuela’s (1997, p. 54) coverage of the crisis, as Oviedo reportedly lamented “with the OAS’s adoption of Resolution 1080 in Santiago, the era of Latin American coups had come to an end.”

Sanctions, then, can be seen as succeeding on three levels. First and most overt are cases in which sanctions are actually enforced against a state and the target changes their behavior. The actions of the OAS against the Cedras junta in Haiti act as a clear example of such a success. Second, sanctions succeed in cases where the *threat* of implementation causes a violator to conform. Following the 2003 coup in São Tomé and Príncipe, the conspirators were quickly threatened with economic sanctions, a ban on oil imports, and a military intervention. The ringleaders quickly succumbed to pressure and stepped down. Finally, IOs can deter violations in the absence of either

sanctions or stated threats because their adopted policies and prior precedents affect the cost-benefit calculation of potential coup plotters. These “non-events” tell an important, yet overlooked, part of the coup story.

Sanctions Effectiveness in Regional Organizations

Sanctions, of course, can be implemented by actors beyond the African Union. In this section, we briefly discuss how international organizations, especially regional organizations like the AU, are expected to be more credible and capable sanctioners than other actors (Drezner 2000; Bapat and Morgan 2009). IOs can incur higher costs on the target (Doxey 1980; Allen 2008), exercise stronger power relative to the target state, and have increased multilateral cooperation (McLean and Whang 2010). Further, our analysis is particularly interested in examining the effectiveness of a regional organization, and a number of scholarly efforts have suggested that regional IOs will be more effective than global ones.

First, regional organizations can more easily prioritize and address problems that are common to their specific region (Karns and Mingst 2004). Though coups have been a recurring problem in Africa, they might not be a priority of more geographically inclusive organizations due to the relative rarity of coups elsewhere in the world. The individual members of the AU also have a vested interest in condemning coups given a successful anti-coup framework can act as a coup-proofing mechanism for individual regimes. Indeed, Omorogbe (2011) has suggested that support for the AU’s anti-coup framework is less about a normative interest in promoting democracy and more about the practical aspect of promoting political survival via a “club of incumbents.” Revealingly, the AU itself has been headed by coup-leaders such as Muammar Gaddafi, Teodoro Obiang, and Denis Sassou-Nguesso. Second, sanctions are most effective when costs on the target state are sufficiently high and the IO can avoid limitations in the monitoring and enforcement of multilateral efforts (Morgan and Schwebach 1997). Increasing the number of sanctioners raises the costs to the coup-born regime, but IOs need to be able to easily identify and penalize “sanctions busters” who could circumvent sanctions to reap the rewards of cooperating with the target (Drezner 2000). With smaller numbers, regional IOs are in a better position to monitor member actions than global IOs. Finally, as with trade agreements, there are a number of strong economic and political motivations for maintaining good standing in regional blocs over global ones (Ravenhill 2005). Regional IOs offer protection to certain sectors that may not survive global competition, while benefiting from larger market share, and are more likely to satisfy domestic constituencies that fear global IOs like the IMF and World Bank. For these reasons, regional IOs like the AU are more credible and capable sanctioners. They offer effective enforcement mechanisms and maintain high levels of legitimacy. Anti-coup policies here should have a pronounced influence on the frequency of coups.

The effectiveness of the regional IO, however, is of course dependent on it actually possessing the formal mechanisms for responding to coups. The OAU began taking rhetorical steps toward an anti-coup framework in the late 1990s. The 1997 Harare Summit, for example, saw Robert Mugabe promise “Coup-plotters...will find it more difficult to get recognition from us...Democracy is getting stronger in Africa and we now have a definite attitude against coups” (Meldrum 1997). The OAU echoed this position two years later with the Algiers Declaration, but limitations were immediately

illustrated when General Robert Guei was allowed to attend the OAU's regional summit just months after launching a successful coup in Cote d'Ivoire. Though anti-coup language was again echoed in the Lomé Declaration of July 2000, even proclaiming that coup-born regimes would be banned from the "activities of the Union," the restrictions placed on collective action by the OAU proved insurmountable, and leaders chose to form a new organization with more power (Piccone 2004, p. 25).³ This is in stark contrast to the actions of the OAS following the adoption of Resolution 1080, where the regional body had the formal "legal basis" and "machinery" necessary for a response.

The AU's (2000, implemented in 2002) founding charter subsequently removed many of the limitations faced by OAU leadership. The Constitutive Act granted authority to immediately suspend member states that underwent unconstitutional transfers. Further, the accompanying African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance reiterated the sentiment of the Lomé Declaration and, now echoing OAS Resolution 1080, gave clear guidance on what is to be done in the event of a coup. In line with Lebow and Stein's (1990) 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" (our emphasis), we consider the anti-coup framework to have been definitively established with the launch of the African Union.

This discussion leads us to our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Coups will significantly decline following the launch of the African Union.

The Conditioning Influence of Leverage

Prior literature suggests that internal characteristics of states can also influence the effectiveness of sanctions. Among these characteristics are factors commonly summed as linkage and leverage. Linkage refers the level of ties and cross border flows between states, perhaps within a region or an IO. Similarly, linkage in this context refers to the interconnectedness of a state in trade, communications flows, and people within both AU member and non-member states. Leverage is the degree to which a state is susceptible to outside pressure; in this context, leverage is examined as the extent to which a state is susceptible to AU penalties in the form of punitive sanctions (Levitsky and Way 2006).

Consequently, the ability of the AU to deter coups could be conditional on states' characteristics in regards to vulnerability to sanctions. These state characteristics could then potentially explain why Africa continues to struggle with coups while Latin American has seen them all but disappear: the AU might simply not have the same leverage. In this section, we consider four characteristics that can influence the degree to which linkage and leverage can affect the AU's ability to combat coups: geographic proximity to other democracies, wealth, trade dependence, and aid dependence.

The first conditioning influence we consider is whether a state has a higher concentration of democracies in its vicinity or "neighborhood." International relations scholarship

³ The principles of the Lomé Declaration were reiterated in the *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, passed in 2003 and implemented in 2006. While it is not knowable if the Lomé Declaration could have successfully worked within the OAU apparatus to bring about changes in coup activity, it was one of the first clear signs that the regional organization was serious about curbing the practice.

has argued for a number of “diffusion” influences, including transnational influences on growth rates and democratization (e.g., Collier 2007; Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Pevehouse 2002; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006). In addition to states potentially emulating their neighbors, we expect democratic neighbors to be particularly likely to help further democratic norms, including in the enforcement of anti-coup provisions. In this regard, democratic neighborhoods can even be described as norm entrepreneurs independent of the IO (Souaré 2014).

Hypothesis 2a: The negative influence of the AU on coups will be stronger when states are in more democratic neighborhoods.

Contrary to arguments that sanctions will have greater efficacy in poorer states (Levitsky and Way 2010), we argue that the potential for opportunity costs will actually increase AU leverage when the potential target state is wealthier. The work of Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), for example, has suggested that elites will be less likely to accept the risks associated with coup plotting when they are better off, and more likely to act when they have less to lose. Similarly, we expect the AU will be more effective in deterring coups in states whose economies are stronger. First, larger economies are likely more closely tied to regional and global economies, increasing the amount of leverage potential sanctioners possess against them. Second, the potential costs to be borne among poor states is limited. In short, AU leverage is limited if the target’s economy is already weak.

Hypothesis 2b: The negative influence of the AU on coups will be stronger when states are wealthier.

Aid-dependent states are also theorized to be more susceptible to leverage from sanctions because the incumbent requires outside resources to operate. The theory predicts that states relying on aid to function are dependent upon regional and international donors for their prosperity and/or survival. However, while the efficacy of sanctions will be contingent upon the internal politics of the state, aid-dependent states are more likely to reform as a condition of future or continued aid. Foreign aid, in this way, can be seen as a carrot and stick approach wherein aid is the carrot to those who democratize/adopt desired norms and the suspension of aid or sanctions is used as punishment (stick) to those who do not (Wright 2009). Furthermore, equating theoretical efficacy of sanctions with high leverage, states that are aid dependent are more likely to democratize following an unconstitutional change of power (Marinov and Goemans 2014). In other words, aid-dependent states are considered more susceptible to AU sanctions in its role as a norm entrepreneur.

Hypothesis 2c: The negative influence of the AU on coups will be stronger when states are more aid dependent.

Finally, trade-dependent states are highly susceptible to leverage due to their level of linkage with outside actors. Linkage is primarily seen as the level of cross border transactions such as trade, and the effect of high degrees of linkages causes a higher degree of leverage. Indeed, the pressure to avoid international sanctions can be, in part, directly attributed to the domestic business community who may have the most to lose (Levitsky and Way 2006). Furthermore, trade dependence is utilized as a tool of conditionality; the infrastructure, in the form of transnational organizations, created at the end of the Cold War was designed to take advantage of characteristics such as trade dependence in the collective defense of democracy. In the case of sanctions efficacy on trade dependent states, this is seen as increased leverage owing to increased linkage (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Hypothesis 2d: The negative influence of the AU on coups will be stronger when states are more trade dependent.

Research design

The argument presented above resulted in three expectations. First, the adoption and enforcement of anti-coup policy represented by the creation of the African Union should decrease coups (Hypothesis 1). Second, the ability of the AU to deter coups is expected to be strongest when the organization has stronger leverage against the states of would-be coup plotters (Hypothesis 2). Third, though not a formal hypothesis, we expect that, controlling for other influences, the increase in Western-driven democratic norms following the Cold War did not have as pronounced an impact as the influence of the African Union. Our expectations regarding the necessity of formal anti-coup norms codified in formal regional frameworks also leads us to anticipate that the end of the Cold War's influence on coup activity was limited, even considering the conditional influences of linkage and leverage.

We provide a more comprehensive test of these expectations in the following sections. A strong effort has been made to incorporate data with as wide a temporal and geographic scope as possible. This is especially important due to the recent nature of the AU's creation. Probit models are used due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable and cover coup activity for 54 states from 1950–2014, though data limitations cause variability in the comprehensiveness in the analyses (reported in Tables 2 and 3).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, *coup attempt*, follows the definition of Powell and Thyne (2011, p. 252): “attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of government using unconstitutional means.” In contrast to a count variable that considers the total number of coup events per year in each state, we opt for a dichotomous measure that accounts for whether or not at least one coup was attempted in the year. Though including a dichotomous measure by year will inevitably exclude a small fraction of events, coups occurring in close succession are likely related. For example, the failed coup attempt waged by Mali's Red Berets in April 2012 was a direct response to the successful coup led by Captain Amadou Sanogo a month earlier. In other words, many coups occurring in close succession do not meet the assumption of independent events. Temporally dependent events seen with countercoups that occur in subsequent years are controlled for separately by accounting for *years since last coup attempt* and the measure's squared and cubed polynomials, as suggested by Carter and Signorino (2010).

Explanatory Variables

The independent variable of interest is the existence of an explicit anti-coup provision in the international organization. Existence of this provision—and a clear threat to punish transgressions against it—should deter potential coup plotters. All states in the

geographical range of the OAU/AU are thus coded as a “0” prior to 2002 and “1” from 2002 onward. This includes non-members of the organization and years prior to the creation of the OAU. Morocco, for example, voluntarily left the OAU in 1984 after the Sahrawi incident and other states have been periodically suspended. Though the AU obviously cannot suspend non-members, it can enact substantial pressure against coup-born regimes in these states through other sanctions. It is also worth noting that suspended members could see the perceived costs of a coup as temporarily lessened since the state is already suffering costs under the current regime. For example, Niger was already bearing the penalties of international sanctions due to the anti-democratic moves of President Mamadou Tandja when he was unseated by the military in early 2010. Contrary to IO provisions reducing the utility of a coup, soldiers in Niger could have viewed regime change as the only feasible means of freeing the country from the burden of sanctions. Revealingly, Niger did see its membership restored following its 2011 post-coup elections. Our coding ultimately ignores current suspensions, though any bias resulting from this approach would actually make the analyses a more challenging test of the argument.

We also give close attention to other normative changes in the international community. *Cold War* is a dummy variable coded 1 for years prior to 1990 and 0 for 1990 onward. The general assumption, dramatically illustrated by the decline in coups witnessed in the Americas in the 1990s, is that increased emphasis on the spread of democratic norms led to a decline in coup activity globally. While it is undeniable that some regions have seen coups effectively disappear, it is our contention that those trends are largely attributable to comprehensive commitments within the relevant regional organization to curb coup making. In other words, the emphasis placed on constitutional rule and democratic norms after the Cold War may have been far less influential in the absence of important regional organizations lacking a formal framework to penalize the activity. Though we cannot infer what Latin America’s coup activity would look like in the absence of OAS Resolution 1080, the AU’s adoption of an explicit anti-coup framework more than a decade removed from the close of the Cold War provides an invaluable opportunity to parse out these influences.

Conditioning Variables

The variables for AU and Cold War are also interacted with four different variables meant to capture international leverage. First, *democratic neighborhood* considers the proportion of states within 1000 km that are democratic. As a “neighborhood” becomes more democratic, we expect the state’s neighbors to react more adversely toward coups, thus maximizing the leverage that the AU has in penalizing any coup-born government.

⁴ Democracy data are from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010).

Next, the natural log of *real GDP per capita* captures state wealth (Gleditsch 2002). Prior scholarship has argued that countries are less likely to experience coups as they grow wealthier (e.g., Londregan and Poole 1990). We expect higher levels of wealth to reflect higher opportunity costs for coup-born governments. In short, sanctions levied

⁴ We also consider the sum of democracies within 1000 km, extend the range to 5000 km, all of Africa, and in line with prior efforts to assess the role of the global democratic community, the global proportion of democracies (e.g., Kadera et al. 2003). Substantive results for the variable do not change.

by international actors like the AU could hit richer countries the hardest, while sanctions against already poor states could have little impact.

Trade dependence refers to trade as a proportion of gross domestic product, with trade flows taken from the Correlates of War (Barbieri and Kesk 2012; Barbieri et al. 2009) and GDP data from Gleditsch (2002). Higher levels of trade dependence are expected to increase the AU's leverage against coupmakers. Similarly, we use data from the World Bank's (2014) *World Development Indicators* to account for overseas development assistance as a percentage of gross national income. AU leverage is expected to be stronger when *aid dependence* is higher.

Other Controls

Descriptive statistics offered in Table 1 provided an overview of the basic relationship between the two measures, but the omission of any potentially confounding factors limits conclusive interpretation regarding the AU's ability to combat coups. We include year-to-year percent *change in GDP per capita* (updates from Gleditsch 2002). Literature suggests coups are more likely to be tolerated "when the short-run performance of the economy is bad" (Galetovic and Sanhueza 2000, p. 194). We also include a measure for *military expenditures as a proportion of GDP* to account for potential organizational grievances, as militaries that are poorly funded are seen to be more likely to attempt a coup (e.g., Powell 2012; Leon 2014). Military expenditure data are taken from the Correlates of War's National Material Capabilities dataset, with updates from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Singer 1987; SIPRI 2014). Finally, we include a control for whether or not a state is a *democracy*, as democratization has been argued as likely to reduce coups in the context of Africa (e.g., Lindberg and Clark 2008). We utilize regime type data of Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010).

Results

Table 2 reports our base models that omit the interaction terms. We begin with a naïve model that omits the controls (Model 1), add the controls for prior coup history (Model 2), and then add the subsequent controls in Model 3. Following the lead of Table 1, the final two models omit the Cold War years (Model 4) and the AU years (Model 5) to more carefully consider the role of those time periods. African Union displays the expected negative coefficient and is significant in each specification, including when the Cold War years are omitted. This finding suggests the tendency seen in Table 1 was not spurious: the African Union has seen a significant decline in coup activity, even compared to the earlier post-Cold War years. Holding other independent variables at their median values and Cold War at 0, the shift from the pre-AU years to the AU leads to a predicted 46.6 % decline in coup activity.⁵ This mirrors the 48 % decline reported in Table 1, showing the zero-order relationship originally reported holds up quite well when controlling for other determinants of coup activity.

In contrast, the variable for the Cold War has the expected positive sign but is not significant in the full model (Model 3) or when omitting the AU years. In short, Table 2 shows that the end of the Cold War did not play a statistically meaningful role in

⁵ Predicted probabilities are computed using *Clarify* (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

Table 2 Explaining coup activity in Africa, 1950–2014

	1	2	3	4	5
African Union	-0.410** (0.128)	-0.213* (0.113)	-0.292* (0.166)	-0.342* (0.156)	
Cold War			0.173 (0.118)		0.136 (0.122)
GDP per capita _{t-1}			-0.152** (0.065)	-0.271** (0.089)	-0.129* (0.071)
Democracy _{t-1}			0.209 (0.134)	-0.129 (0.170)	0.232 (0.155)
Growth _{t-1}			-0.636 (0.446)	-1.251** (0.498)	-0.698 (0.469)
Regional democracy _{t-1}			0.244 (0.220)	0.737** (0.308)	-0.041 (0.262)
Military exp./GDP _{t-1}			-5.016 (4.280)	-7.340 (7.541)	-3.812 (4.023)
Years since coup		-0.066** (0.021)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.070 (0.044)	-0.115** (0.035)
Constant	-1.423*** (0.063)	-1.083*** (0.094)	-0.020 (0.445)	0.678 (0.592)	-0.136 (0.478)
Observations	2732	2732	2194	979	1803
Wald χ^2	10.26**	44.34***	56.63**	42.93***	44.79***
Countries	54	54	53	52	53
Years	1950–2014	1950–2014	1952–2009	1990–2009	1952–2001

Robust standard errors, clustered by country, reported in parenthesis. The squared and cubed polynomials for years since the last coup attempt are excluded for presentation purposes

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

reduced coup activity in Africa. Of course, the Cold War likely had an indirect influence in how its end influenced factors such as economic growth and democratization. As a stand-alone factor, however, the close of the Cold War was not significant. In all, the models provide strong support for the first hypothesis.

Conditional Effects

The second hypothesis predicted that the effectiveness of the AU in deterring coups would be conditional on the organization's leverage against the potential target state. Table 3 reports the interactive models. The models are grouped according to the conditional influence the models are testing. These include democratic neighborhood (Models 6 and 7), GDP per Capita (Models 8 and 9), trade dependence (Models 10 and 11), and aid dependence (Models 12 and 13). For each pair, the first model reflects the AU*leverage variable while the second considers post-Cold War*leverage variable. In this case, we flip the Cold War dummy so that a 1 refers to the post-Cold War period, in

Table 3 Anti coup-provision, international norms, leverage, and coups, 1950–2009

	Regional democracy			GDP per capita			Trade dependence			Aid dependence		
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13				
African Union	-0.934*** (0.271)		0.719 (1.129)		-0.298* (0.158)		-0.359* (0.166)					
Post-Cold War		-0.174 (0.145)		0.330 (0.752)		-0.139 (0.126)		-0.165 (0.153)				
Leverage interaction		0.266 (0.379)	-0.154 (0.163)	-0.066 (0.104)	-0.362 (0.266)	0.033 (1.254)	0.000 (0.008)	0.001 (0.009)				
Regional democracy t_{-1}		-0.180 (0.297)	0.106 (0.228)	-0.027 (0.257)	0.096 (0.229)	-0.042 (0.265)	0.098 (0.230)	-0.025 (0.280)				
GDP per capita t_{-1}		-0.145* (0.067)	-0.121* (0.071)	-0.109 (0.078)	-0.131* (0.067)	-0.123* (0.071)	-0.106 (0.069)	-0.099 (0.071)				
Trade dependence t_{-1}					0.042 (0.040)	0.007 (1.268)						
Aid dependence t_{-1}							0.004 (0.004)	0.005 (0.005)				
Democracy t_{-1}	0.171 (0.131)	0.220 (0.154)	0.171 (0.129)	0.225 (0.157)	0.177 (0.129)	0.230 (0.156)	0.181 (0.123)	0.235 (0.146)				
Growth t_{-1}	-0.577 (0.444)	-0.689 (0.470)	-0.626 (0.443)	-0.693 (0.467)	-0.603 (0.434)	-0.681 (0.447)	-0.616 (0.435)	-0.698 (0.472)				
Military exp./GDP t_{-1}	-5.270 (4.413)	-3.792 (4.000)	-5.906 (4.326)	-3.950 (4.110)	-6.626 (5.424)	-4.540 (5.220)	-5.732 (4.319)	-3.619 (3.942)				
Years since coup	-0.110*** (0.030)	-0.114** (0.035)	-0.108*** (0.030)	-0.115*** (0.036)	-0.106*** (0.030)	-0.115*** (0.036)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.113** (0.035)				

Table 3 (continued)

	Regional democracy		GDP per capita		Trade dependence		Aid dependence	
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Constant	0.112 (0.459)	0.015 (0.487)	-0.086 (0.484)	-0.139 (0.530)	-0.011 (0.454)	-0.033 (0.491)	-0.235 (0.471)	-0.267 (0.484)
Observations	2,194	1,803	2,194	1,803	2,194	1,803	2,144	1,761
Wald χ^2	59.70***	47.36***	57.46***	44.84***	134.68***	115.51***	64.92***	47.69***
Countries	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
Years	1952–2009	1952–2001	1952–2009	1952–2001	1952–2009	1952–2001	1961–2009	1961–2001

Robust standard errors, clustered by country, reported in parenthesis. The squared and cubed polynomials for years since the last coup attempt are excluded for presentation purposes

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

contrast to Table 2. We do this to keep the interpretation consistent across the AU and Post-Cold War models.

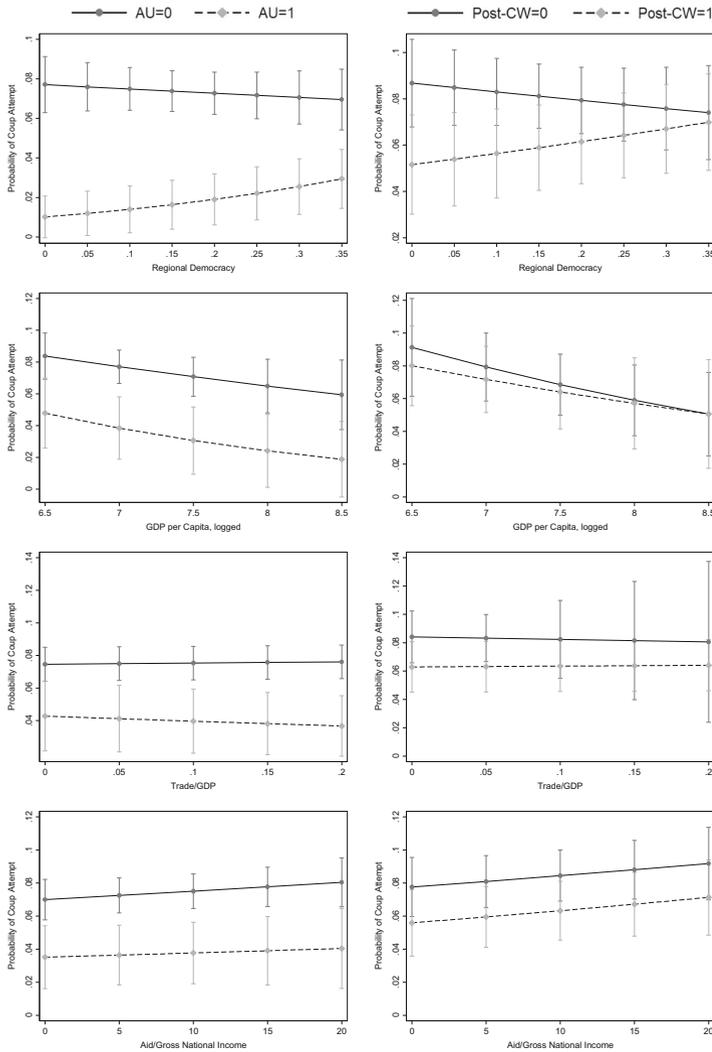
Given the interval-level nature of each of the second constitutive terms for the interaction, only limited conclusions can be drawn from the table. For example, the negative and significant signs for AU seen in three of the four AU models suggest the AU years experienced fewer coups. However, this interpretation is only true when the other constitutive term is equal to zero. We follow the suggestion of Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006; 2007) and present a graphical representation of the substantive influences in Fig. 2. The left column shows the results for the AU's interactive models while the right shows the conditional influence of the post-Cold War. The AU was expected to have the most pronounced influence on deterring coups when the organization's leverage was strongest. That is, we expect the gap between the AU years (represented by the dashed line) and the pre-AU years (represented by the solid line) to be largest when regional democracy is high, GDP per capita is low, and when either trade or aid dependence are high.

Two major trends are apparent from the AU models. First, the second hypothesis is not supported: the influence of the AU is not strengthened as our leverage indicators suggested. Instead, the ability of the AU to deter coups is not conditional on leverage. Second, we do see a significant difference between AU and pre-AU years at virtually every interval of the leverage variables. The exception is for GDP per capita, which sees the confidence intervals for the two categories slightly overlap at the highest and lowest levels of wealth. In contrast to the second hypothesis, though providing more support for the first, the interactive models provide robust support that the AU is both a strong deterrent to coup activity and the organization is neither constrained nor strengthened by a state's value on these proxies for leverage.

The second column reports similar models depicting the influence of the end of the Cold War. While Table 2 provided no evidence that the Cold War's end led to a decrease in coup activity, it could be the case that the international community was more successful in promoting democratic and anti-coup norms when leverage was high. However, the post-Cold War period did not see a significant decline in coup activity at any value of the leverage variables. This finding reiterates the decline in coups seen under the African Union, and provides strong evidence that international norms are most likely to be respected when they are clearly codified by the prevailing regional body.

Control Variables

Aside from the role of the African Union, the most consistent determinants of coup activity were, unsurprisingly, the state's prior coup history and levels of wealth. Years since the last coup was negative and significant in each of the 13 models presented, while GDP per capita displayed the expected negative coefficient and was significant in each of the non-interactive models. Again, only limited conclusions can be drawn for the measure from the interactive models, where GDP per capita was negative and significant in five of eight specifications. Other controls performed poorly, with growth rate only gaining significance in model 4 and military expenditures as a proportion of GDP being invariably insignificant.



Notes: Full lines equal the pre-norm era, meaning the pre-AU years in the left column, and the Cold War in the right. The dashed line reflects the years during the post-norm period, AU years on the left and post-Cold War on the right.

Fig. 2 The conditional influence of the African Union on coups. Notes: *full lines* equal the pre-norm era, meaning the pre-AU years in the *left column*, and the Cold War in the *right*. The *dashed line* reflects the years during the post-norm period, AU years on the *left* and post-Cold War on the *right*

Conclusion

The evidence presented here supports the theory that anti-coup provisions and international pressure can deter coup activity, specifically when codified by a prevailing regional organization such as the African Union. To be clear, we do not expect the adoption of an anti-coup legal framework to universally end the phenomenon of the coup. Rather, increased costs from such efforts lower the expected utility for would-be

plotters and should consequently make them less likely. Although there will remain cases in which plotters will calculate an expected gain from the act, coups will become less common as many would-be conspirators will have their expected utility drop below the cost-benefit threshold. And while the African Union's effort to abolish coups has not paralleled the success of the OAS, this is likely due to state-level dynamics. For example, considering the typical state's level of economic development, growth rates, and level of democratization, Powell (2014) concluded that Africa's coup rate might actually be less than what one would otherwise expect.

Further, we do not argue that IO responses to coups will be able to consistently restore fallen leaders, if even at all. Plotters are well aware of the penalties that are likely to accompany their actions and are most likely to act when confident they can withstand the repercussions or when they do not foresee holding power for long periods of time. However, even when sanctions "fail" or ousted regimes are not returned, illustrating a steadfast commitment to legal alternation of power will help send a clear, costly, and credible signal to potential coup plotters in other states.

The results presented here also speak to the literature on sanctions effectiveness. Scholars and policymakers are likewise torn as to the efficacy of sanctions. Researchers have made considerable strides in identifying bias in prior efforts to explain sanctions success, particularly in regard to sample selection (e.g., Nooruddin 2002). Beyond identifying episodes of sanctions *threats*, this study suggests that potential sanctioners can succeed in curbing transgressions in the absence of even threats. Specifically, the results here point to the role of clearly articulated frameworks that illustrate the proscribed action and outline the mechanisms for response in reducing coup activity in the absence of actual threats. The OAS substantially altered the process of political succession in Latin America by enshrining democratic and constitutional provisions in OAS General Assembly Resolution 1080. The AU emerged from a malaise of frustration following decades of a failure to deliver on the goals of the OAU. The goal to rid the region of coups had been clearly illustrated by the late 1990s, but institutional mechanisms and legitimized authority were weak. In contrast, the AU has begun to show signs of effectively combating coups.

It is also revealing that coups seem to be increasingly likely to reflect popular will. Clark (2007, p. 153), for example, suggested that military interventions were becoming more likely in states experiencing "democratic backsliding." This trend seems to grow truer over time, with recent coup attempts in Niger (2010), Burkina Faso (2014), and Burundi (2015), targeting leaders that attempted to maintain power indefinitely, in flagrant violation of their constitutions. Though the African Union still faces challenges in combating unconstitutional *maintenance* of power, efforts to combat coups d'état have significantly changed the continent's political fortunes.

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