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7 April 2025

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the occurrence of a military coup on the democratic attitudes of citizens in neighboring countries. Using nationally representative survey from multiple countries and the identification strategy of the unexpected event during survey design, we show that those exposed to the information about coup are more likely to support democracy. The effect size is comparable across countries—whose economic and ethno-linguistic conditions considerably differ—and respondent characteristics. The results cannot be explained by citizens' concern about their future economic instability, learning about poor performance of military regimes, or media bias. These results could make an important contribution to our understanding of the diffusion of coups across countries that has long been discussed in the literature.

Keywords: Coup; Media report; Democracy; Coup contagion hypothesis

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1. Introduction

Military coups are a major cause of political instability. They deprive citizens' opportunity for political participation, and in many cases, post-coup military regimes gradually become dictatorships, hindering democratization. Consequently, coups are often internationally condemned and lead to aid suspensions, economic sanctions, and isolation from the global community. However, they remain prevalent particularly in developing countries. The Coup Agency and Mechanisms (CAM) Data indicates that 488 attempts occurred between 1950 and 2022, of which 237 resulted in a successful seizure of power.

Previous studies demonstrate the negative political and economic consequences of coups for both the affected country and its citizens (Bell, 2016; Bleck and Michelitch 2017; Grier et al. 2024; Lachapelle 2020; Thyne and Powell, 2016), while other studies highlight the spillover effects on neighboring countries (Ades and Chua 1997; Sakstrup 2021). In particular, scholars have long argued the coup contagion: i.e., diffusion of coups to other countries (Caruso et al. 2018; Li and Thompson 1975; Miller et al. 2018; Saine 2008). Although insightful, how people in neighboring countries react to a coup has scarcely been explored in the literature. This is crucial because their supportive reactions to coup and military regimes may trigger the coup contagion (Casper and Tyson 2014; Thyne et al. 2017).

This study bridges this gap by examining the impact of exposure to information about the 2008 Guinean coup on democratic attitudes of citizens in two neighboring countries: Liberia and Mali. Existing literature suggests that exposure to information on political shocks in neighboring countries, such as terrorism, raises individuals' beliefs about the occurrence of similar events in their own country, affecting their attitude and subjective well-being (Finseraas and Listhaug 2013; Metcalfe et al., 2011).[1] Since coups that change national leaders without elections are a severe violation of democracy, coups in neighboring countries can affect citizens' democratic attitude. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the impact of a coup on political attitude in neighboring countries.

To answer this question, this study exploits a quasi-experimental situation, where the Guinean coup occurred during the Afrobarometer survey period in Mali and Liberia, allowing us to use the Unexpected Event during Survey Design methodology. Specifically, we restrict the sample to the respondents interviewed within nine days before and after the coup. Given the plausibly exogenous timing of coup and survey interviews, we

[1] This assumption is particularly plausible within the context of coups, considering the spatiotemporal correlation of their occurrence (Caruso et al. 2018; Li and Thompson 1975; Miller et al. 2018; Saine 2008).

estimate the changes in respondents' attitudes to democracy between those who were interviewed just before and after the coup.[2] The respondent characteristics are balanced between the groups except that the latter group was exposed to information about the coup, enabling us to identify the immediate impact of exposure to the information on the coup.

Analyzing the impact of a coup on citizens in other countries also has methodological advantages. Identifying the causal impact of a coup on domestic citizens is challenging, given the endogenous nature of coup timing and difficulty of obtaining honest opinions from representative respondents during a coup. Additionally, public opinion within the affected country is likely influenced by media capture by the coup actor, as well as by increased political and economic uncertainty (Enikolopov and Petrova 2015). In contrast, in neighboring countries, public opinion is less likely to be influenced by the media capture or fear of military retaliation. Furthermore, the timing of the coup is exogenous, and representative data are available.

The results show that respondents interviewed after the coup exhibit greater support for democracy. These results are robust to changes in the definition of the outcome variable, sample, and model specification. The subsample analyses show that the effect size is comparable between Mali and Liberia—despite their significant differences in economic and ethno-linguistic conditions—and across respondent characteristics. We also show that our findings cannot be explained by respondents' concern about future economic instability, learning about poor performance of military regimes, or media bias.

We believe that our results are generalizable for three reasons. First, West Africa is one of the most coup-prone regions in Africa (McGowan 2003), and key characteristics—such as the level of democracy, military expenditure, and citizens' political attitudes and behaviors—are comparable between our study countries and other West African countries, supporting the representativeness of our data. Second, despite considerable socioeconomic and ethno-linguistic differences between Mali and Liberia, we observe consistent impacts across countries and respondent characteristics, including languages, geographical proximity to Guinea, and past political behavior. This suggests that our results are not driven by particular sample. Third, theoretically the impact of a coup on democratic attitudes can be either positive or negative, depending on factors, such as dictatorship of incumbent president and the possibility of coup actor becoming a dictator (Grewal and Kureshi 2019; Lachapelle 2020). In this context, the Guinean coup

[2] The coup took place just five hours following the then-president's death from health complications.

had potential to gain support in neighboring countries. For example, the incumbent president in Guinea was widely viewed as dictatorial, and mass media initially reported Guinean citizens' positive reactions to the coup. In addition, the coup was bloodless, and the coup actor promised to hold presidential elections within two years. Nonetheless, we find robust positive impacts on democratic attitudes, suggesting that our results are a conservative estimate of the impact of coups in general.

These findings contribute to the broad literature on the diffusion of democratic and autocratic regimes across countries. Previous studies have long argued the hypothesis of coup contagion, and this idea is widely believed by political leaders (Miller et al. 2018). However, there is no empirical consensus on its validity. Although some studies suggest the possibility of contagion (Li and Thompson 1975; Saine 2008), Miller et al. (2018) argue that the key assumptions underlying this hypothesis do not apply to coups and that previous empirical studies suffer from identification issues, such as common shocks. Using a spatial dependence model, they find insignificant impacts. Furthermore, Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán (2014) show that the occurrence of a coup is *negatively* associated with the coup prevalence in neighboring countries. Therefore, existing evidence remains mixed at best, particularly because the mechanisms driving insignificant or negative spillover effects are not well understood (Miller et al. 2018).[3] Our findings provide a potential explanation for this. The probability of coup's success and the survival of the post-coup regime likely increase with citizens' support for the coup actor (Casper and Tyson 2014; Thyne et al. 2017). However, our findings suggest that the occurrence of a coup in a neighboring country strengthens citizens' democratic attitudes, thereby reducing incentive for coup attempts. Hence, this study provides novel evidence that challenges the coup contagion hypothesis.

This study also contributes to the literature on the formation of public opinion. Previous studies have demonstrated the impact on individuals' political attitudes of negative shocks that occurred in their and other countries, such as terrorism (Akay et al., 2020; Amarasinghe, 2023; Finseraas and Listhaug, 2013; Malásquez and Salgado, 2023; Metcalfe et al., 2011; Rehman and Vanin, 2017; Schüller, 2016), corruption (Ares and Hernández, 2017), crime (Blanco and Ruiz, 2013), natural disaster (Goebel et al., 2015), and conflict (Adhvaryu and Fenske, 2023). For example, Rehman and Vanin (2017) find that terrorist attacks reduce support for democracy in Pakistan, while Malásquez and Salgado (2023) show that exposure to conflicts negatively affects political beliefs regarding the importance and works of democracy. This study contributes to this literature

[3] Miller et al. (2018) show that the insignificant spillover effects cannot be explained by an increase in coup-proofing strategies in neighboring countries.

by examining the impact of media reports about a political shock directly related to democratic violation and finding that it rather reinforces the democratic attitude.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 summarizes the background of the 2008 Guinean coup. Sections 3 and 4 describe the dataset and the identification strategy, respectively. Section 5 presents the results, and Section 6 interprets the results. Finally, Section 7 concludes.

2. Context

2.1. Definition and Trend of Coups

The definition of a coup has long been discussed in the literature, and Souaré (2014) highlights three common features across studies.[4] First, there is a consensus that any seizure of power is illegitimate unless it occurs through constitutional means, such as impeachment. Second, the deposed leader must hold supreme authority, meaning that in Guinea, the targeted individual must be the president. Third, the actions of a coup should be sudden and covert, or contrived. In line with these features, we adopt Powell and Thyne's (2011) definition of coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive".

The Coup Agency and Mechanisms Data (CAM) provides a global comprehensive dataset of all military coups since 1950.[5] The data show that 488 attempts occurred between 1950 and 2022 in the world, of which 188 were in sub-Saharan Africa. The dataset also reports 237 successful coups worldwide (48.6% of attempts) and 88 in sub-Saharan Africa (46.8%), defining a successful coup as one in which the coup actor seizes power and retains control for at least 10 days.

Figure 1 illustrates the trend of coups from 1950 to 2022. The upper graph represents coup attempts, while the lower graph shows successful coups. Unlike the global trend, which shows a decline in coups following a peak in the 1960s, sub-Saharan Africa experienced continuous successful coups. In response, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted Lomé Declaration in July 2000, prohibiting coups and imposing sanctions on countries that experience them. However, despite these measures, coup attempts have occurred in sub-Saharan Africa almost every year since then, with 17

[4] For example, First (1970) indicates "In its essence, the coup is a lightning action at the top, in which violence is the ultimate determinant, even if it is not used." McGowan and Johnson (1984) define coups as "events in which existing regimes are suddenly and illegally displaced by the action of relatively small groups".

[5] The CAM data also align with Powell and Thyne's (2011) definition. The data is available at https://www.militarycoups.org.

resulting in successful power seizures.

Figure 2 presents the geographical distribution of successful coups in Africa during the same period. West Africa—including Guinea—appears particularly coup-prone. While the average number of coup attempts among sub-Saharan African countries with at least one recorded attempt is 4.8 (with a median of 4), Guinea has experienced six coup attempts, three of which were successful (1984, 1985, 1996, 2008, 2011, 2021). However, Guinea is not as coup-prone as countries such as Ghana, Burundi, and Sierra Leone, each of which has experienced more than ten coup attempts.

2.2. The 2008 Guinean Coup

The coup in Guinea occurred on December 23, 2008, triggered by the death of former President Lansana Conté. His death was announced at approximately 2 a.m. on December 23 by Aboubacar Somparé, the speaker of the national assembly. While the official cause of death remains unknown, Conté had long suffered from health issues, particularly diabetes. Just five hours later, at around 7 a.m., a military group, led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, announced via state radio and television that they had seized power and established a new governing body, the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD). Following this announcement, the prime minister and other officials initially declared their refusal to recognize the new government.[6] However, after internal negotiations, the Congressional Research Service reported that Dadis Camara was officially approved as Guinea's president on December 24 (Arieff and Cook, 2009).

On December 25, Dadis Camara stated in an interview that the coup was necessary to prevent political stagnation and to block the transfer of power to Diarra Camara, with whom he had strained relations. He also accused the former Conté's corruption. Importantly, he pledged to hold presidential elections within two years and assured the public that he would not run for office himself.

However, concerns regarding the CNDD government persisted. First, even without the coup, presidential elections had already been scheduled for May 2009. Although the coup was bloodless, power was seized by force rather than through constitutional means. Second, the new government was heavily dominated by military

[6] Without the coup, a presidential election was expected to be held within 60 days after Lansana Conté's death, and Aboubacar Sompare was to take temporary leadership until then. Therefore, Prime Minister Ahmed Tidian Suare denied the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the government as announced by CNDD. Diarra Camara, the Military chief of staff, also emphasized that the coup was just an attempt, not complete.

personnel—9 out of 29 members were from the military, occupying key positions such as defense, finance, and justice (Souaré, 2009).

Indeed, the new government deviated significantly from democratic principles and further deepened Guinea's political instability. Notably, despite his earlier pledge, Dadis Camara announced his candidacy for the presidency in late 2009. This decision sparked widespread protests on September 28, which were violently suppressed by Guinean security forces. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 150 people were killed, and dozens of women were subjected to sexual violence. As public resentment toward him grew, an assassination attempt was carried out against him in December 2009.

2.3. International and Domestic Reactions to the Coup

The international response to the coup was overwhelmingly condemnatory of the CNDD. On December 29, 2008, the African Union suspended Guinea's membership, citing an "unconstitutional change" of government, which is explicitly prohibited by the Lomé Declaration. Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States suspended Guinea's membership in January 2009. However, neither organization imposed direct sanctions, such as visa restrictions or asset freezes (Arieff and Cook, 2009). In addition, the United States, a key donor country, reviewed its bilateral aid to Guinea in January 2009 and suspended all security assistance. While continuing to provide bilateral aid, France strongly urged the CNDD to hold early elections.

In contrast to the strong international condemnation, early media reports suggested that the CNDD initially received a positive response from Guinean citizens. In a BBC interview conducted in Conakry on December 23, a resident expressed cautious optimism, stating, "We are looking to the military because they said that they will set up a meeting with the civilians to try and set up an interim government until we can have elections." Another interviewee highlighted dissatisfaction with the previous regime, stating, "We have suffered from much insecurity, especially those of us who live in the suburbs... it was because of this past regime."

Several factors contributed to these initial positive reactions. Specifically, the CNDD's pledge to hold democratic elections and the fact that the coup was bloodless may have generated optimism. More importantly, widespread dissatisfaction with the previous administration under Lansana Conté likely played a crucial role. Conté, who came to power through Guinea's first coup following its independence from France in 1984, ruled the country for 24 years. Although he won three presidential elections, these were widely suspected of fraud. In the third election, he faced only one opponent, an obscure politician. Furthermore, he extended the presidential term from five to seven years, reinforcing

public perceptions of corruption and political opacity. In January 2007, large-scale strikes erupted, resulting in nearly 60 deaths during protests. According to the V-Dem dataset, Guinea ranked 146th out of 178 countries in the Liberal Democracy Index as of 2007. In his later years, Conté's deteriorating health became increasingly evident, prompting concerns among experts that his eventual death could lead to political instability (Arieff and Cook, 2009). The CNDD's swift takeover validated these fears. Given the widespread dissatisfaction with Conté's prolonged and authoritarian rule, many Guinean citizens may have initially perceived the CNDD as a revolutionary force or a heroic entity that had overthrown a dictatorial government.

3. Data

3.1. Sample

Our data come from Afrobarometer, a nationally representative repeated cross-sectional survey conducted in sub-Saharan Africa. Nine survey rounds were conducted between 1999 and 2023 in 42 countries, collecting information on respondents' political opinions—such as their assessments of national and local government and their views on governance—from approximately 1,200 or 2,400 citizens aged 18 years or older.

For this study, we focus on data from Mali and Liberia in 2008, as they are the only countries where a coup occurred in a neighboring country during the survey period. Like the other West African countries, these countries also experienced coups. Mali has had eight coup attempts, including four successful cases (1968, 1978, March 1991, July 1991, March 2012, May 2012, 2020, and 2021). Liberia has experienced four coup attempts, with one successful case (1980, April 1985, November 1985, and 1994). However, both countries were still more democratic than Guinea at the time. According to V-Dem data, as of 2007, Mali and Liberia ranked 79th and 64th, respectively, on the Liberal Democracy Index out of 178 countries, while Guinea ranked 146th. An important political distinction is that Liberia had Africa's first female president at the time.[7] Linguistic factors also suggest potential differences in media exposure. French is the official or working language in Guinea and Mali, while English is Liberia's official language. This implies that Malian citizens may have had greater access to Guinean media, which could have influenced their perceptions of the coup. However, multiple languages are spoken in practice across all three countries.

The surveys were conducted in Mali from December 15 to 31 and Liberia from

[7] Although Mali also had its first female candidate in the 2007 presidential election, she did not win.

December 9 to 31. In Liberia, eight respondents were added in February 2009 from a new survey area. Response rates were 99% in Liberia and 89% in Mali. Although the total number of respondents is 2,432, we restrict the sample to those interviewed within nine days before and after the coup (i.e., between December 14 and 31). After excluding the observations with missing values, the final sample consists of 1,898 respondents, of which 60.9% (1,155) are from Mali and 39.1% (743) are from Liberia. Among them, 63.1% (1,197) were surveyed before the coup, while 36.9% (701) were surveyed afterward.

The surveys employed a stratified random sampling method with five levels of stratification: secondary sampling units (SSUs), primary sampling units (PSUs), sampling starting points, households, and individual respondents. Eight households per PSU were interviewed, and within each household, one respondent was selected to ensure gender balance of respondents.

3.2. Democratic Attitude

For our dependent variable, we construct a composite index of democratic attitude using three questions that gauge support for democracy. First, the respondents are asked the following question: *Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? (1) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. (2) In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. (3) For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.* We create a variable on the support for democracy that takes three for those selecting (1), two for (3), and one for (2). The second question is regarding elections: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections. Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.* The answer options are *(1) Agree very strongly with Statement 1, (2) Agree with Statement 1, (3) Agree with Statement 2, (4) Agree very strongly with Statement 2, and (5) Agree with neither.* As the first question, we create a variable ranging from one to five where stronger agreement with Statement 1 corresponds to a higher value, and stronger agreement with Statement 2 corresponds to a lower value. The third question asks about the support for military government: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: The army comes in to govern the country?* The answer options are similar to the previous question. We generate a variable which takes a higher value for those who support military government more strongly.

Subsequently, we conduct the principal component analysis (PCA) and create a

composite index of democratic attitude. Table A1 shows the results of PCA. The first principal component explains 50% of the variation and its eigenvalue is 1.49. The factor loadings for the first principal component are 0.75, 0.61, and -0.74 for support for democracy, elections, and military rule, respectively. We use this composite index as the proxy for democratic attitude. It takes a higher value for the respondents who support democracy more strongly. We also confirm the robustness to the use of alternative measures in Section 5.2.

3.3. Summary Statistics

We first discuss the representativeness of our study countries. Panel A of Table A2 compares key country-level characteristics between Mali, Liberia, and other West African countries (excluding Guinea). It shows that our study countries are broadly similar to the others regarding democracy level and military expenditure, while their GDP is relatively lower. In Panel B, we compare the past political behavior and democratic attitude among the Round-4 Afrobarometer respondents between Mali and Liberia to other West African countries. Again, we do not find significant differences, reinforcing the representativeness of our sample.

Table 1 shows the summary statistics of the final sample used in our estimations. Notable differences emerge between Mali and Liberia. Liberia has lower rates of TV/radio ownership and poorer access to piped water and the electricity grid but exhibits higher educational attainment. In this country, citizens demonstrate a stronger democratic attitude and are more likely to vote, whereas Malians are more inclined to participate in demonstrations and protest marches instead of voting.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of democratic attitude. Overall, the majority of respondents express strong support for democracy. It appears that 75% strictly support a democratic regime, and over 50% strongly prefer electing political leaders. The data also show that 70% of respondents disapprove of military rule. These statistics align closely with those observed in other West African countries (Table A2), further validating our sample's representativeness.

4. Identification Strategy

4.1. Estimation Model

This study uses the unexpected event during survey design by exploiting the quasi-experimental situation where the coup coincided with the Afrobarometer survey (Muñoz et al. 2020). The basic idea behind this design is that respondents interviewed just before and after the coup should have similar characteristics, except for the fact that the latter

group was exposed to information about the occurrence of the coup. To ensure comparability, we restrict the sample to respondents surveyed within nine days before and after the coup and estimate the following OLS model:

$$Democracy_{i,j,t} = \beta Post_t + \gamma' X_{i,j,t} + \theta_j + \varepsilon_{i,j,t}, \quad \text{Eq. (1)}$$

where $Democracy_{i,j,t}$ denotes the composite index of democratic attitude of respondent i, interviewed on day t in region j. $Post_t$ takes unity for the respondent interviewed after the coup, and zero otherwise. $X_{i,j,t}$ includes gender, age, educational attainment (primary, secondary, and post-secondary education), employment with cash income, the ownership of radio and TV, an indicator for living in an urban area, and indicators for living in a PSU with electricity, piped water, and military presence. Finally, θ_j denotes the regional fixed effects. Mali has 9 regions and Liberia has 15 regions. These fixed effects enable us to compare the democratic attitude between those interviewed just before and after the coup in the same region.

4.2. Threats to Identification

Our identification strategy relies on two underlying assumptions (Muñoz et al. 2020): excludability and ignorability. Excludability assumes that the timing of interviews should affect democratic attitude only through exposure to the news of the coup. This assumption can be violated if the timing of the coup was endogenous to respondents. However, this concern is unlikely to be serious for two reasons. First, this study examines the impact of the Guinean coup on citizens in Mali and Liberia, not the impact on Guinean citizens. The priority for CNDD to determine the timing of the coup is the probability of success. Therefore, CNDD does not have strong incentive to consider the political and economic conditions in these neighboring countries, given that there was little political pressure from these countries to affect the probability of success. Second, the coup occurred immediately after the death of the former President Lansana Conté. Even if people were aware that he would pass away shortly and this would trigger political instability in Guinea, it is impossible to predict the date of death exactly. From these two reasons, it is reasonable to assume that the coup's timing in Guinea is exogenous for respondents.

Other potential threats to excludability may exist, such as collateral events, simultaneous events, and unrelated time trends (Muñoz et al. 2020). First, collateral events are responses that incidentally occur after the event of interest. Second, simultaneous events indicate events that occur simultaneously but unrelated to the event

of interest. Such events make it difficult to distinguish the impact of the event of interest on outcomes from the impact of other events. To our knowledge, no notable events occurred on December 23, 2008, in these or the surrounding countries. Although Christmas can be a simultaneous event for Christians, we address this concern in Section 5.2. Hence, the collateral and simultaneous events are not potential threats. Third, the problem of unrelated time trends occurs when the outcome changes with some trend over continuous time. Thus it is possible to obtain statistically significant results even if the event does not affect the outcome. Again, we address this issue in the robustness checks in Section 5.2.

Ignorability assumes that respondents' potential outcomes are independent of the interview timing—meaning that whether a respondent was interviewed before or after the coup was effectively random. It can be violated if the respondents are non-randomly selected or the response rate is low. Another potential cause of violation is the possibility that the respondent characteristics change following the coup. For example, the response rate of those interested in politics may increase after the coup, if they consider that the survey is an opportunity to express their political opinion. However, these issues are unlikely to be severe because, as discussed in the data section, the respondents were selected randomly, and the response rate was remarkably high in both countries.

Furthermore, we conduct the balancing test to compare respondent and community characteristics between those surveyed before and after the coup. Table A3 shows that these characteristics are balanced overall, particularly between those surveyed immediately before and after the coup. To further test the differences in PSU characteristics, we also perform the additional balancing test on the PSU characteristics at the bottom panel of the table. It demonstrates robust patterns.

5. Results

5.1. Main results

Table 2 shows the estimation result of Equation (1). The dependent variable is the standardized composite index of democratic attitude. Column (1) controls only for regional fixed effects, while the other columns include respondent and PSU characteristics. Column (2) demonstrates that those exposed to information about the coup are 0.228 standard deviation (SD) more likely to support democracy, suggesting significant spillover effects of the coup on democratic attitude in neighboring countries. The result remains robust to changes in the bandwidth of sample restriction (Columns (3) and (4)).

Figure 4 examines changes in treatment effects over time by regressing

democratic attitudes on binary indicators for the interview date (three-day spans), instead of using an indicator for interviews conducted after the coup. Figure A1 illustrates the number of respondents per day, suggesting approximately 300 observations in each span. The reference group consists of those interviewed one to three days before the coup (i.e., December 20th, 21st, and 22nd). We find that the coefficients are close to zero and statistically insignificant before the coup, supporting the validity of our identification strategy. Democratic attitudes increase immediately after the coup by nearly 0.2 SD, and one week later, the impact of exposure rises to 0.3 SD.

Figure 5 examines the impact heterogeneity across different areas and respondent characteristics. First, it is intriguing to explore the heterogeneity across countries, because they differ in socioeconomic and ethno-linguistic characteristics. In particular, given the differences in official languages, Liberian citizens are less likely to access Guinean mass media, enabling us to assess the role of media bias indirectly. Second, to further explore the role of information sources, we test heterogeneity across languages and ownership of TV and radio. Since multiple languages are spoken in these three countries, we split the sample by whether the respondent's primary language is commonly used in Guinea. Third, respondents residing close to Guinea may be more affected by Guinean economic and political instability and may react more sensitively to the information. Fourth, since coups deprive citizens of the opportunity to vote, the impact may be greater among those who participated in the previous election. Finally, heterogeneity by basic respondent characteristics, such as gender and educational attainment, is tested.

Figure 5 demonstrates that the impacts remain robust and comparable regardless of sample restrictions. This suggests that reinforcing democratic attitudes is a common response across types of citizens and areas. These results are important for assessing the external validity of our findings.

5.2. Robustness Checks

5.2.1. Alternative Measures of Democratic Attitude

First, we use the original three variables related to democratic attitudes as the dependent variable: support for democratic regime, election, and military rule. Columns (1) to (3) of Table A4 present results consistent with the main results.

Second, we construct an alternative composite index of democratic attitude using seven items—support for one-man rule, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of publication, in addition to the three measures used in the main specification—and re-estimate Equation (1). The additional variables are elicited as follows: Support for

one-man rule: *Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Elections and Parliament/National Assembly are abolished so that the President/Prime Minister can decide everything?*; Freedom of assembly: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies. Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it*; Freedom of expression: *Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority. Statement 2: People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be*; Freedom of publication: *Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should be able to close newspapers that print stories it does not like. Statement 2: The news media should be free to publish any story that they see fit without fear of being shut down*. The PCA result is reported in Table A5. The results in Column (4) of Table A4 do not differ qualitatively.

5.2.2. Unobserved Heterogeneity

First, since the coup occurred on December 23rd, Christmas can be a simultaneous event. Christians interviewed after the coup may temporarily exhibit greater religiosity than other respondents due to the approaching holiday. If religiosity affects their democratic attitudes, the estimated coefficient may be biased especially in Liberia, where the proportion of Christians in the population is high.

However, we believe that this issue is unlikely to be severe for three reasons. First, we find a significant and even larger impact in Mali in Figure 5. Second, we additionally control for 31 religion fixed effects and interviewer fixed effects to rule out the effects of the religion of respondents and interviewers. Columns (1) and (2) of Table A6 show that the results do not change qualitatively. Third, in Column (3) we estimate the change in religiosity after the coup conditional on the religion, confirming the insignificant impact.

Second, while we verify that most respondent characteristics are balanced between those interviewed just before and after the coup, some exhibit significant differences (Table A3). To address this, we estimate Equation (1) using the entropy balancing model (Hainmueller 2012). This is a weighted least square model where the weights are computed to ensure that the first and second moments of the observed covariates are balanced. Column (4) of Table A6 shows robust results.

5.2.3. Further Robustness Tests

Finally, we conduct two additional tests. First, we estimate a weighted least squares model that accounts for sampling weights. Second, 2 out of 9 regions in Mali and 6 out of 11 regions in Liberia were surveyed only either before or after the coup. Therefore, we restrict the sample to regions surveyed both before and after the coup, where we can exploit the within-region variations in exposure to information about the coup. The results in Columns (5) and (6) of Table A6 do not differ qualitatively.

6. Discussion: Alternative Interpretations

How does exposure to information about the coup reinforce citizens' democratic attitudes? The literature suggests the channel through an increase in risk perception about the occurrence of a coup in their own country (Finseraas and Listhaug 2013; Metcalfe et al., 2011). This interpretation is reasonable within our context, because coups tend to be spatiotemporally correlated (Caruso et al. 2018; Li and Thompson 1975; Miller et al. 2018; Saine 2008).

However, this subsection discusses three alternative interpretations. First, people exposed to information about the Guinean coup may anticipate a deterioration in their future economic conditions, particularly if their country and industry have close economic ties with Guinea. This may lead to opposition to the coup. However, counter to this conjecture, Figure 5 shows that the impact of exposure does not vary with geographical proximity to Guinea. To further test the validity of this channel, we use the same specification as Equation (1) and estimate the impact of exposure on respondents' expectations about the future economic situation of their country and household. The dependent variables are measured on a Likert scale: "1. much worse", "2. worse", "3. same", "4. better", "5. much better", and "9. don't know". Respondents who answered "don't know" are excluded from the sample to ensure that a higher score indicates a more optimistic outlook. Table A7 demonstrates that respondents' expectations do not change after exposure, contradicting this explanation.

The second alternative interpretation is that citizens may infer from Guinea's experience that military regimes perform poorly, reinforcing the preference for democracy. However, this channel is also unlikely, as initial media reports suggested that Guinean citizens reacted positively to the coup. As discussed in Section 2, people were dissatisfied with the previous dictatorial president, and the coup was bloodless. In addition, the CNDD initially promised future elections. Although the post-coup regime later exacerbated political instability by withdrawing its pledge to hold presidential elections, this occurred in 2009—after the period covered by our analysis.

Third, citizens' reactions may depend on their information sources due to media bias (Puglisi and Snyder Jr. 2015). Specifically, some respondents speak a language used in Guinea, which may give them access to potentially biased coverage from Guinean mass media. However, as shown in Figure 5, the impact of exposure to information is comparable regardless of respondents' language or ownership of a TV or radio.

Overall, none of these alternative interpretations fully explain our findings.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of exposure to information about the 2008 Guinean coup on the democratic attitudes of citizens in Liberia and Mali. Exploiting the overlap between the exogenous timing of the coup and Afrobarometer surveys, we showed that exposure to this information reinforces citizens' support for democracy. The results are robust to the changes in definition of outcome variable, sample restriction, and model specifications. These results cannot be explained by changes in citizens' expectation about future economic instability, learning about the poor performance of military regimes, or media bias. Given these arguments, a plausible mechanism is an increased risk perception about a coup in their own countries.

Given that mass media initially reported Guinean citizens' positive reaction to the coup, it is intriguing that people in neighboring countries responded in the opposite way. Although Guinean citizens were dissatisfied with their previous government, citizens of Mali and Liberia had no direct stake in Guinea's past regime. Therefore, the coup may have heightened concerns about the unconstitutionality of the transition process rather than being viewed as merely the removal of a corrupt government.

Although this study focused on only two countries, our findings are likely generalizable to other neighboring countries. The estimated impacts are comparable across Mali and Liberia—despite their considerable socioeconomic and ethno-linguistic differences—and across different respondent characteristics. Furthermore, our estimation results are likely to be a conservative estimate of the impact of a coup for neighboring countries. Finally, West Africa is one of the most coup-prone regions in Africa, and Mali and Liberia share key characteristics with other West African countries, such as the democracy level and military expenditure.

Finally, the following policy implication can be derived. The concept of coup contagion is widely recognized among political leaders. Consequently, governments often implement costly coup-proofing strategies following a coup in a neighboring country, such as monitoring potential coup plotters (Miller et al. 2018; Pilster and Böhmelt 2012). However, this study suggests that the potential coup plotters may, in fact, have less

incentive to attempt a coup in such periods, as public support for democracy increases. Coup attempts under these conditions are less likely to succeed, and even if they do, the post-coup regime may not be sustainable (Casper and Tyson 2014; Thyne et al. 2017). Thus, excessive coup-proofing strategies could lead to inefficient resource allocation for governments.

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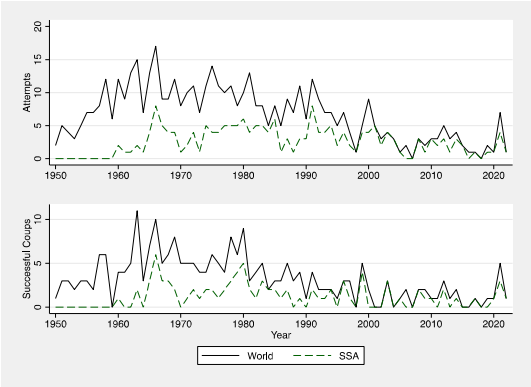


Source: The Coup Agency and Mechanisms Data

Figure 1: Global Trend of Coups: 1950-2022

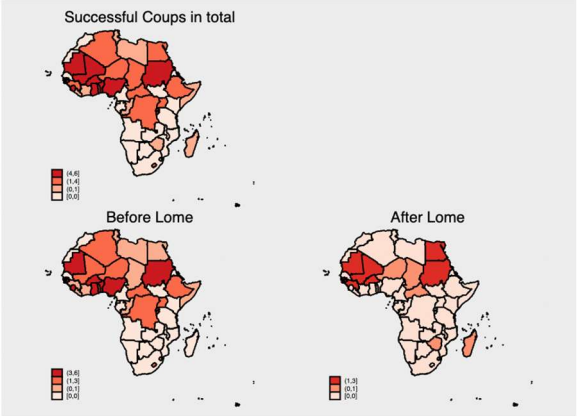
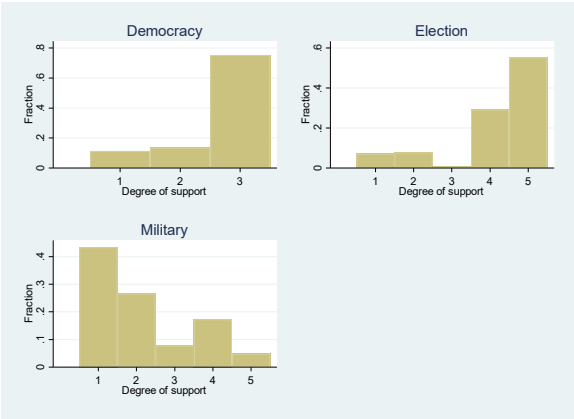
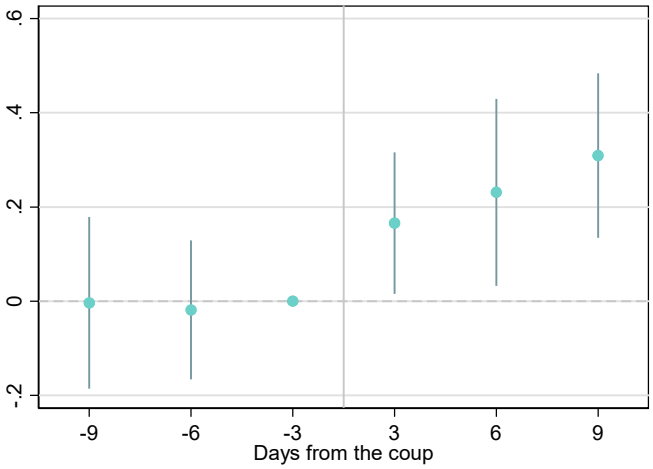


Figure 2: Geographical Distribution of Successful Coups in Africa: 1950-2022



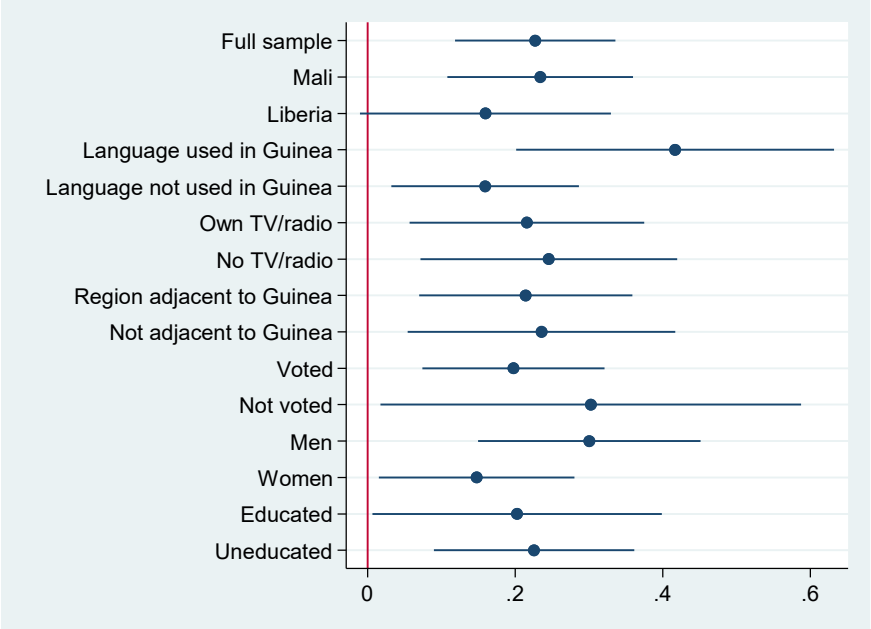
The sample is restricted to the respondents used in our estimations.

Figure 3: The Distribution of Support for Democracy, Election, and Military Rule



OLS estimates of lags and leads and corresponding 95% confidence intervals are reported. The reference point is 1-3 days before the coup. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses.

Figure 4: Change in the Treatment Effects over Time



The specifications of Column (2) in Table 2 are used. The OLS coefficients and corresponding 95% confidence intervals are reported. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses.

Figure 5: The Heterogeneous Impact

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mali		Liberia		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Respondent characteristics					
Male	0.521	0.500	0.520	0.500	
Age	39.099	14.119	35.424	12.480	***
Job with cash income	0.163	0.369	0.183	0.387	
No formal education completed	0.678	0.467	0.233	0.423	***
Primary education completed	0.205	0.404	0.265	0.442	**
Secondary education completed	0.057	0.232	0.396	0.489	***
Post secondary education completed	0.060	0.237	0.106	0.308	**
TV/radio ownership	0.660	0.474	0.588	0.492	**
Urban PSU	0.280	0.449	0.431	0.496	*
Electricity grid in the PSU	0.245	0.430	0.104	0.305	***
Piped water in the PSU	0.365	0.482	0.221	0.415	**
Soldiers or army vehicles in the PSU	0.054	0.225	0.022	0.145	
Past political behavior					
Ever attended a demonstration or protest march	0.173	0.378	0.099	0.299	***
Voted in the last election	0.784	0.412	0.832	0.375	**
Democratic Attitude					
Support for democracy	2.629	0.689	2.659	0.651	
Support for election	4.089	1.270	4.308	1.132	***
Support for military rule	2.279	1.301	1.911	1.192	***
N	1,155		743		

The sample is restricted to the respondents used in our estimations: those interviewed between December 14 and 31, 2008.

Table 2: The Impact of Coup on Democratic Attitude

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Interviewed after the Coup	0.192***	0.228***	0.213***	0.179**
	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.066)	(0.079)
Regional FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	±9 days	±9 days	±6 days	±3 days
Observations	1,898	1,898	1,422	703
R-squared	0.061	0.087	0.096	0.123

The OLS coefficients are reported. Controls are listed in Table 1. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Online Appendix

Table A1: Principal Component Analysis

	Eigenvalues	Proportion		Factor Loadings of Factor 1
Factor 1	1.49	0.50	Democracy	0.75
Factor 2	0.84	0.28	Election	0.61
Factor 3	0.67	0.22	Military rule	-0.74

Table A2: Representativeness of Analyzed Countries

	Mali and Liberia			Other West African countries			Ranking in West Africa		
	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mali	Liberia	Guinea
Panel A: Country									
Liberal democracy index	0.46	0.07	2	0.40	0.16	12	7/15	5/15	15/15
Military Exp (% GDP)	0.83	0.74	2	0.82	0.52	7	3/8	8/8	N.A.
GDP per capita (PPP)	1807	525	2	3179	1804	12	9/15	13/15	7/15
Panel B: Afrobarometer									
Ever attended a demonstration or protest march	0.14	0.35	2371	0.15	0.35	6869			
Voted in the last election	0.78	0.41	2423	0.75	0.44	7097			
Support for democracy	2.65	0.67	2319	2.65	0.69	6559			
Support for election	4.20	1.20	2418	4.02	1.35	7020	*		
Support for military rule	2.13	1.28	2393	2.06	1.27	6811			

Other West African countries include the following countries. The liberal democracy index: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The military expenditure: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. GDP: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Panel B: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Table A3: Balancing Test

Bandwidth:	±9 days					±6 days					±3 days				
Interview date:	Dec 14-22		Dec 23-31			Dec 17-22		Dec 23-28			Dec 20-22		Dec 23-25		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Male	0.52	0.50	0.52	0.50		0.52	0.50	0.52	0.50		0.53	0.50	0.52	0.50	**
Age	36.92	13.49	38.92	13.75		36.98	13.41	38.13	13.27		36.57	13.79	37.91	12.93	
Job with cash income	0.18	0.38	0.16	0.36		0.18	0.38	0.17	0.37		0.18	0.39	0.16	0.37	
Primary education completed	0.25	0.43	0.20	0.40		0.25	0.44	0.21	0.41		0.26	0.44	0.21	0.41	
Secondary education completed	0.24	0.43	0.10	0.30		0.21	0.41	0.11	0.31		0.16	0.37	0.14	0.35	
Post secondary education completed	0.10	0.30	0.04	0.21		0.09	0.29	0.05	0.23		0.08	0.28	0.06	0.23	
TV/radio ownership	0.61	0.49	0.67	0.47	**	0.60	0.49	0.67	0.47		0.59	0.49	0.68	0.47	
Urban PSU	0.39	0.49	0.26	0.44		0.37	0.48	0.26	0.44		0.35	0.48	0.26	0.44	
Electricity grid in the PSU	0.16	0.37	0.23	0.42	**	0.16	0.37	0.25	0.43	***	0.19	0.39	0.24	0.43	
Piped water in the PSU	0.29	0.45	0.34	0.47	**	0.29	0.45	0.33	0.47	*	0.28	0.45	0.35	0.48	
Soldiers or army vehicles in the PSU	0.02	0.14	0.08	0.27		0.03	0.16	0.10	0.30	*	0.02	0.14	0.12	0.33	
Ever attended a demonstration or protest march	0.13	0.34	0.16	0.37		0.14	0.35	0.15	0.36		0.15	0.35	0.16	0.36	
Voted in the last election	0.81	0.39	0.79	0.41		0.80	0.40	0.79	0.41		0.78	0.41	0.80	0.40	
Additional PSU-level characteristics															
Sewage system	0.13	0.33	0.09	0.28		0.12	0.32	0.10	0.30		0.15	0.35	0.10	0.29	
Cell phone service	0.50	0.50	0.44	0.50		0.48	0.50	0.46	0.50		0.42	0.49	0.55	0.50	
Post office	0.09	0.29	0.04	0.20		0.10	0.30	0.05	0.22		0.12	0.33	0.02	0.15	
School	0.77	0.42	0.91	0.29	*	0.74	0.44	0.93	0.25	***	0.72	0.45	0.91	0.29	

Police station	0.18	0.39	0.10	0.31	0.19	0.39	0.12	0.33	0.20	0.40	0.11	0.31	
Health clinic	0.40	0.49	0.63	0.48	0.42	0.49	0.66	0.48	0.46	0.50	0.71	0.45	
Market stall	0.43	0.50	0.57	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.59	0.49	0.54	0.50	0.63	0.48	
Policemen/vehicle	0.13	0.34	0.07	0.26	0.12	0.32	0.08	0.27	0.14	0.35	0.09	0.29	**
N	1,197		701		865		557		377		326		

The OLS coefficients are reported. All specifications control for the regional fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the interview date and regional level are in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A4: Alternative Measures of Democratic Attitude

	Support for democracy	Support for election	Support for military rule	PCA with additional items
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Interviewed after the Coup	0.095**	0.180**	-0.244***	0.236***
	(0.036)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.046)
Regional FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days
Observations	1,898	1,898	1,898	1,867
R-squared	0.062	0.066	0.099	0.067

The OLS coefficients are reported. Controls are listed in Table 1. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A5: Principal Component Analysis with Additional Measures

	Eigenvalues	Proportion		Factor Loadings of Factor 1
Factor1	1.95	0.28	Democracy	0.56
Factor2	1.35	0.19	Election	0.44
Factor3	0.92	0.13	Military rule	-0.72
Factor4	0.85	0.12	Assembly	0.42
Factor5	0.79	0.11	Publication	0.45
Factor6	0.65	0.09	Expression	0.39
Factor7	0.49	0.07	One man rule	-0.63

Table A6: Unobserved Heterogeneity and Further Robustness Tests

Dep. Var.:	Democratic attitude	Democratic attitude	Religiosity	Democratic attitude	Democratic attitude	Democratic attitude
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Interviewed after the Coup	0.232***	0.190***	0.053	0.215***	0.227***	0.225***
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.038)	(0.056)	(0.064)	(0.054)
Regional FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Additional FE	Religion	Interviewer	-	-	-	-
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Weight	-	-	-	Entropy balancing	Sampling weight	-
Bandwidth	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days	±9 days
Observations	1,893	1,898	1,879	1,898	1,898	1,520
R-squared	0.109	0.357	0.171	0.110	0.077	0.089

The OLS coefficients are reported. Columns (6) includes the respondents from the regions surveyed both before and after the coup. Controls are listed in Table 1. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A7: The Impact on Expectation about Economic Conditions in 12 Months

	Country	Household
	(1)	(2)
Interviewed after the Coup	0.064	0.071
	(0.059)	(0.051)
Regional FE	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	±9 days	±9 days
Observations	1,648	1,666
R-squared	0.102	0.106

The OLS coefficients are reported. Controls are listed in Table 1. Standard errors clustered at the level of interview date and region are in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

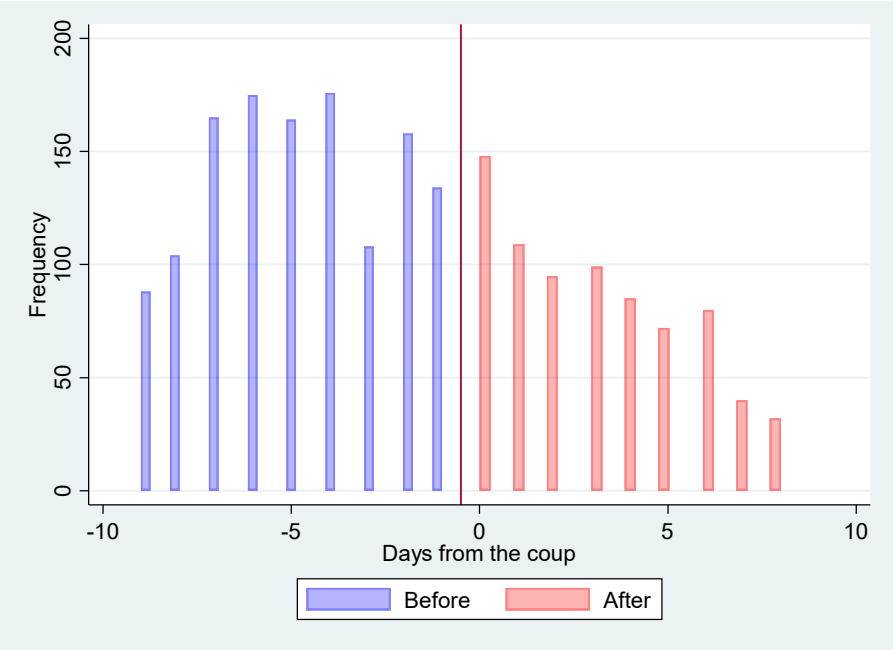


Figure A1: Sample size by interview date