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Erica De Bruin. *How to Prevent Coups d'État: Counterbalancing and Regime Survival.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020. xiv + 199 pp. $46.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-5191-2.

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The fundamental problem of civil-military relations remains how to create armed forces powerful enough to defend the state but also to ensure that a powerful military does not threaten the state itself.[1] In non-democracies and many new or transitioning democracies, the threat of an overt attempt by all or parts of the military to seize the state in a coup is a very real one. It is not surprising, then, that leaders in these regimes are preoccupied with how to both have a military and be safe from it—that is, how to "coup-proof" their regimes.

In *How to Prevent Coups d'État*, Erica De Bruin provides a comprehensive examination of one of the most prevalent strategies of coup-proofing, the creation of armed "counterweights" or "counterbalances" to the military. De Bruin answers four vital questions in this book: Do counterweights make coups less likely to succeed? Do they reduce coup attempts? How do counterweights work? And do counterweights make civil war more likely?

In the first chapter, De Bruin outlines a theory of counterbalancing and coup making. This chapter is best read with some familiarity with Naunihal Singh's 2014 *Seizing Power: The Strategic Logic of Military Coups*, which includes a theory of coups as coordination games, but De Bruin does an able job of outlining Singh's argument for the reader. De Bruin argues that counterbalancing affects the success of coups through two possible mechanisms: by making it more difficult for coup plotters to plan and coordinate or by offering armed resistance to coups.

In the next section of this chapter, coup attempts—rather than their success—are examined. De Bruin puts forward the possibility that counterbalancing may either increase or decrease coup attempts, depending on their effect on the motivation for coups. On the one hand, counterweights may decrease tension in civil-military relations: for example, if a newly created gendarmerie takes over internal security or repression missions that harmed the military's standing in society. On the other hand, the creation of a new counterweight may decrease the military's standing and share of resources, and this may serve to actually incite a coup attempt. De Bruin also puts forward expectations for the effect of counterweights on the likelihood that coups escalate to civil war. Here, she argues that the presence of armed counterweights will increase the likelihood. This is possible through two mechanisms: armed counterweights putting up a significant fight against coup makers

as the coup unfolds or counterweights becoming the nucleus of armed support for the incumbent even if the coup succeeds in ousting them, setting the stage for civil war.

Having outlined this ambitious set of hypotheses, De Bruin goes about systematically testing them in chapters 2-6. The approach here is "nested analysis" in which the author combines large-N analyses of coup attempts and counterbalancing with more in-depth case analysis of narratives of coup attempts to parse out the causal mechanisms behind the statistical associations demonstrated by the large-N analyses (p. 35).

In chapter 2, De Bruin introduces the State Security Forces Data (SSFD) and tests the hypotheses related to counterbalancing and coup success. It is worth underscoring that an additional contribution of this book—and De Bruin's work more generally—is the new data that forms the basis for the book's empirical portion. De Bruin's SSFD provides near-comprehensive coverage of state security sectors (110 countries randomly selected) from 1960 to 2010. These data provide the user with not only a count of extra-military armed organizations but also their role in the state, their potential as counterbalances to the military, and their armament and threat orientation. The SSFD addresses a long-standing weakness in data on state security sectors and coup-proofing that were derived from imperfect and potentially biased secondary sources. These new data in and of themselves make the book noteworthy. Following a discussion of the data, chapter 2 demonstrates in a series of statistical analyses that counterbalancing is significantly associated with a reduction in the likelihood that a coup attempt succeeds in overthrowing the incumbent state leader. These results are backed up by an array of alternative model specifications and robustness checks that provide added confidence in these results.

Chapter 3 shifts to qualitative analyses and examines in detail coup attempts in Kenya in 1982, Morocco in 1971, and Panama in 1989. The chapter also offers less-detailed discussion of an additional thirteen coups—four successful and nine failed. The criteria for selection of these cases is "most likely"—in that they are selected on the basis that they are likely to reveal the mechanisms behind the effect of counterbalancing on coup success, as demonstrated in chapter 2. Counterbalancing was the causal factor driving the failure of the three coups examined in detail, and this was through the "resistance" mechanism—that is, violent action against the coup once in motion was what insured its failure, not hindering coordination in the planning stages.

Chapter 4 offers quantitative analysis of coup attempts and stands as a useful complement to chapter 2. Here, De Bruin finds in line with one of the hypotheses presented in chapter 1 that in the short term, building counterbalances can actually increase the likelihood that the state sees a coup attempt. Taken together, the large-N analyses of chapters 2 and 4 demonstrate that while counterbalancing does what it is supposed to do and makes coup attempts less likely to succeed, it makes the attempts more likely.

Chapter 4 examines the mechanism behind the association between counterbalancing and increased coup attempts, while chapter 5 unpacks this and demonstrates through detailed case analyses of civil-military relations in Ghana (1960-66), Sierra Leone (1968-74), Mali (1960-68), and Cuba (1959-66) that where counterbalancing provokes coup attempts, it is due to the military's perceived loss of status and relative power in the regime as a new armed force is built up. Where leaders combine the creation of a new counterweight with other policies, such as budgetary increases and credible assurances of an important mission and role in the regime, counterbalancing needs not provoke a retaliatory coup attempt by the military. Finally, chapter 5 examines the role that counterbalancing plays in the escalation of coups to broader armed conflict and violence. Indeed, this chapter—and the related article in the ***Journal of***

Peace Research—has much to offer to scholars of civil war as well as civil-military relations.[2] A non-trivial subset of civil wars identified in commonly used quantitative datasets of armed conflict are coups that escalate to high levels of violence between putschists and defenders of the incumbent regime, and this is an under-explored population of civil wars. As De Bruin notes, these have distinctive causal pathways from civil wars that stem from challenges from outside the state, which tends to be the focus of the civil wars literature.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that counterbalancing can contribute to an escalation of violence stemming from a coup attempt to civil war. Both mechanisms proffered in chapter 1 are supported. De Bruin illustrates that the presence of counterweights during the 1965 coup attempt in the Dominican Republic led to immediate resistance and violent escalation. In contrast, the 1962 coup in Yemen spiraled into civil war because the deposed incumbent was able to turn to loyalist counterweights that were stationed outside the capital and launch longer-term resistance to the successful coup makers.

In *How to Prevent Coups d'État*, De Bruin provides a compelling narrative of the role that counterweights to the military play in civil-military relations and conflict processes more broadly. Counterweights can make coup attempts more likely as they signal decreased status for the regular military, but they do what they are supposed to do in that they make coup attempts less likely to succeed through the resistance that counterweights provide to a coup attempt. This comes with a potential downside, though, in that the violence that results from the resistance to a coup that counterweights provide can spiral into broader violence and civil war.

The contributions of this book are significant. It exemplifies the excellent work on civil-military relations produced by junior scholars in the past decade, alongside Kristen Harkness's *When Soldiers Rebel: Ethnic Armies and Political Instability in Africa* (2018), Jason Lyall's *Divided Armies: Inequality and Battlefield Performance in Modern War* (2020), Singh's *Seizing Power* (2014), and Caitlin Talmadge's *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (2015). The argument is thorough and nuanced and the quantitative and qualitative analyses rigorous and convincing. The structure of the book—the progression through three related dependent variables (coup success, coup incidence, and escalation to civil war)—is easy to follow and logical. The ample attention to counterarguments and robustness checks provides added confidence in the solidness of the argument and results. In the quantitative chapters, the progression from simple bivariate analyses to more complicated, multivariate models is welcome, making the work accessible to a nontechnical audience and providing added confidence that the patterns observed are not an artifact of a specific model specification or constellation of control variables.

De Bruin's fluid writing is peppered with anecdotes and examples in addition to her well-researched case studies. This serves to add confidence in the real-world grounding of her argument and makes her work accessible to a broad range of readers. In addition to being a must-have for scholars of civil-military relations and conflict processes more broadly, the book, due to its accessibility, should find a home in many upper-level undergraduate courses as well as graduate seminars.

The potential weaknesses in this compelling book are few, and as with any excellent work, they reveal avenues for further research for scholars to build on rather than any fundamental flaw in the book's argument or execution. One intriguing question raised by the discussion of the Cuban case in chapter 5 is the role of threat environment in conditioning the effect of counterweights on coup attempts. De Bruin rightly indicates that various policies and assurances made by the Fidel

Castro regime served to stabilize civil-military relations in the 1960s, and she discusses the role played by the United States in providing an external threat. This could be expanded. The coup reduction effect of external threats has recently been noted in the literature, as well as their ability to make credible the commitments that a regime makes to its military.[3] An additional wrinkle to the story detailed in ***How to Prevent Coups d'État*** may be that when combined with an external threat that makes clear the role and status of the regular military, counterweights need not pose the same threat to the civil-military bargain. Similarly, the role of internal threats, such as an insurgency, may exacerbate the effect of counterweights on coup attempts. Internal threats can cause militaries to lose confidence in the commitments of the regimes they serve and also make militaries more comfortable taking a role in the administration of the state.[4] On the other hand, the presence of an internal threat may ameliorate the effect of counterweights on coup attempts, as the regular military may welcome an opportunity to offload a distasteful counterinsurgency or repression mandate, as suggested by De Bruin in chapter 1. Future research should build on this book and unpack how threat environment may condition the impact of counterweights on coup dynamics.

Future research may also explicitly engage with the idea—touched on in this book and in related work by Jun Koga Sudduth[5]—that the creation of counterweights creates a commitment problem for the regime. When extra-military armed forces are created, they alter the bargaining interaction between the military and the regime in favor of the regime. The regime cannot credibly commit to not leverage its decreased fear of coups to extract concessions from or marginalize the military—thus potentially inspiring the pattern of coup attempts identified by De Bruin. Other than international threats, how else can a leader both protect themselves from a coup and credibly commit to not marginalize the military? An intriguing linkage with the literature on commitment problems in civil war is possible.

Another intriguing avenue that is unexplored in this book—and that is admittedly beyond its scope—is counterweights as a dependent variable. What structural, regime-specific, or leader-specific characteristics lead to the creation of counterweights of various types? What role does threat environment play—in addition to coup risk? How does regime type condition the creation of counterweights?

These, however, are not critical concerns and stand rather as avenues for future research stemming from this work. The book, and the data it uses, should inspire many additional studies of civil-military relations and vigorous discussion for years to come. It is highly recommended for all serious students of civil-military relations, security studies, and conflict processes more broadly.

Notes

[1]. Peter D. Feaver, "Civil-Military Relations," ***Annual Review of Political Science*** 2, no. 1 (1999): 211-41.

[2]. Erica De Bruin, "Will There Be Blood? Explaining Violence during Coups d'État," ***Journal of Peace Research*** 56, no. 6 (2019): 797-811.

[3]. Varun Piplani and Caitlin Talmadge, "When War Helps Civil-Military Relations: Prolonged Interstate Conflict and the Reduced Risk of Coups," ***Journal of Conflict Resolution*** 60, no. 8 (2016): 1368-94; and Cemal Eren Arbatli and Ekim Arbatli, "External Threats and Political Survival: Can Dispute Involvement Deter Coup Attempts?" ***Conflict Management and Peace Science*** 33, no. 2 (2016): 115-52.

[4]. Curtis Bell and Jun Koga Sudduth, "The Causes and Outcomes of Coup during Civil War," ***Journal of Conflict Resolution*** 61, no. 7 (2017): 1432-55; and Alfred C. Stepan, ***The Military in Politics*** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[5]. Jun Koga Sudduth, "Coup Risk, Coup-Proofing and Leader Survival," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 3-15.

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