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# Brothers in Arms No Longer: Who Do Regime Change Coup-entry Dictators Purge?

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## Abstract

Research shows that dictators purge (military) elites following coups, while other work shows the utility of analyzing individual-level elite purges to understand the inner workings of autocracies. We therefore ask: Who do regime change coup-entry dictators purge? We argue that who dictators purge depends on costs and benefits relating to two factors. First, purging elites with coercive capacity entails higher costs due to the assistance they provide dictators in navigating outsider threats. Second, dictators benefit from purging elites who helped them seize power; the demonstrable willingness of these elites to overthrow an incumbent threatens the dictator and his ability to consolidate power. We find support for our argument from original quantitative data on 289 elites in 32 autocratic ruling institutions between 1948 and 2000. Our findings have important implications for the study of the large proportion of autocracies born of regime change coups, particularly topics on survival and state violence.

## Keywords

comparative authoritarianism, international regimes, political leadership, political survival

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Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

In July 1968, a regime change coup was launched in Iraq against President Abdul Rahman Arif, who had inherited power in 1966 from his brother (Makiya 1989). The coup against President Arif was led by ambitious military officers and members of the Ba'ath Party, primarily Brig. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Gen. Salih Ammash, and Lt. Gen. Hardan al-Tikriti (Baram 1989; Faust 2015). After seizing power, these three key plotters took the most powerful positions of the regime; al-Bakr became President and Prime Minister, Ammash was appointed Interior Minister, and al-Tikriti claimed Minister of Defense (Reich 1990). All concurrently held seats in the paramount Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), while the latter two also served as Deputy Prime Ministers.

However, their conspiratorial politicking did not end with Arif's ouster. Tensions between al-Tikriti and Saddam Hussein (another RCC member) escalated between 1969 and 1970, to the point where Hussein convinced al-Bakr that al-Tikriti was plotting a coup (Coughlin 2002; Karsh and Rautsi 1991). Convinced of the threat that al-Tikriti posed (based on his leading role in the coup and as head of the armed forces), al-Bakr purged him from his positions (Waisy 2017). General al-Tikriti was later exiled as punishment for alleged crimes against the state and one year later was assassinated in Kuwait (Jabar 2000). Another year later, al-Bakr forced Ammash out, sending him abroad as an ambassador (Baram 1989). The key military plotters of the coup were removed from power, leaving al-Bakr free of those he perceived as his most dangerous rivals.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his tenure, al-Bakr continued purging, but focused on civilian elites who were less of an immediate danger than his former military co-conspirators (Baram 1989).

Which elites do dictators purge after coming to power through a regime change coup d'état? Answering this question can improve our understanding of the noninstitutional sources of authoritarian survival and consolidation for a substantial number of dictators. Between 1946 and 2020, 147 autocratic regimes originated from regime change coups. Scholars have rightly paid significant attention to how dictators use institutions, such as parties and legislatures, to coopt key elites and ensure personal survival (e.g., Gandhi 2008; Meng 2020). However, dictators also use (or sometimes prefer) noninstitutional tactics, such as purges. Initial evidence suggests that purges help dictators extend their tenures (Easton and Siverson 2018). Understanding which elites these dictators purge therefore provides important insights into the secretive politics that are crucial to the endurance of a significant portion of the world's autocracies.

We argue that who regime change coup-entry (hereafter, RCCE) dictators tend to purge depends on the costs and benefits of purging or retaining different elites based on two characteristics. First, dictators consider the costs of purging specific elites based on the varying assistance that elites provide in helping dictators navigate outsider threats. Because RCCE dictators come to power due to support from the military and security forces (although not exclusively), they tend to populate the most important positions in their regime with elites from these constituencies. Purging these "coercive" elites, as we term them, therefore risks elevating RCCE dictators' vulnerabilities to popular or foreign threats, which these elites could otherwise help mitigate.<sup>2</sup>

However, there are risks to retaining elites who played a key role in the foundational coup that brought the dictator to power. Elites who were prominent coup co-conspirators, by merit of their involvement in the original coup, have shown the dictator that they are willing to launch a challenge against an incumbent. Although this willingness was previously leveraged to the dictator's benefit, it also signals to the dictator that these individuals cannot be trusted, and they may pose a danger in future. How these costs and benefits intersect shapes which elites are purged by dictators. Specifically, our theory suggests that RCCE dictators are most likely to purge (in order of probability): civilian key coup plotters, coercive key coup plotters or civilian non-key coup plotters, and finally coercive non-key coup plotters.

We test our argument with novel individual-level data on autocratic elites. Our sample includes 289 civilian and military elites from 32 ruling institutions that governed autocratic regimes between 1948 and 2000. Compiling this sample of elites was accomplished through consulting a wide array of sources, including government documents, intelligence reports, scholarly accounts, and many more. As our theory examines who RCCE dictators purge, the leaders of these autocratic ruling institutions and the institutions themselves were all born from regime change coups, as opposed to leader reshuffling coups (Aksoy et al., 2015; Chin et al., 2021b). These individual-level data on autocratic ruling elites build upon the works of Nyrup and Bramwell (2020), who introduce individual-level data on cabinet members throughout the world, and Goldring and Matthews (2023), who provide individual-level data on sixteen autocratic ruling institutions between 1922 and 2020.

From this sample, we also create a novel individual-level variable denoting which of the elites were "key coup plotters," meaning they played a significant role in the execution of the coup that brought the dictatorship into power. This variable was compiled from case narratives in event datasets, primary media reporting, and secondary scholarly accounts. This variable along with the identities of autocratic elites across these regimes establishes a rich, novel data sample that contributes original research findings and establishes a record of historical actors for researchers across disciplines.

Consistent with our theory, we find that RCCE dictators are more likely to purge civilian elites than coercive elites in the military and security sectors. However, if coercive elites were a key plotter of the foundational coup alongside the dictator, they are significantly more likely to be purged than other coercive elites. Surprisingly, however, we do not find evidence that dictators are most likely to purge civilian non-key coup plotters. We discuss the reasons for this finding in the Results section. Overall, the results speak to the calculations that RCCE dictators make when consolidating power, weighing who will be less risky to purge and who poses enough of a risk that purging becomes more necessary for survival.

The article provides several contributions to research on authoritarian survival. First, this is the first comparative theoretical and empirical exploration which compares a dictator's propensity to purge elites who occupy positions in the military or security forces, versus those in civilian positions. Sudduth (2017) examines when dictators are likely to

purge military elites, while several studies at the individual-level explore which elites are likely to be purged by dictators (Bokobza et al. 2022; Goldring and Matthews 2023). However, to our knowledge, no study has explored how an elite's access to organized force affects their likelihood of being purged, a factor that we assess conditional on their status as an erstwhile ally of the dictator. Second, this article builds on existing work showing that dictators are careful in their use of purges, owing to the risk of retaliation (Sudduth 2017). Our evidence suggests that dictators are prepared to tolerate coup risks in the short-term to better protect their long-term survival prospects. Third, we provide original comparative data on 289 individual elites in 32 different autocratic ruling institutions, an important contribution to a field that suffers from challenges of information availability, due to the secrecy of these subjects and issues of source availability.

The article proceeds as follows: We first review empirical literature on elite purges in dictatorships, noting how cross-leader and individual-level research has led to the important but heretofore unanswered question of who dictators purge following successful coups. We then provide our argument that RCCE dictators choose who to purge based on a consideration of the varying costs and benefits of purging different types of elites, which we close with a brief discussion of scope conditions. Next, we introduce original data on 289 elites in 32 ruling institutions between 1948 and 2000, along with the measurement of our variables. We then present our results, before concluding by considering the implications of the findings and directions for future research.

## Literature Review

Empirical research on the causes of elite purges has mainly been conducted at the cross-leader level.<sup>3</sup> In other words, scholars have examined why some dictators purge elites but others do not (e.g., Boutton, 2019; Bove and Rivera, 2015). Most notably, Sudduth (2017) argues that dictators are more likely to purge (military) elites when the risk of retaliation is temporarily low. Somewhat in contrast to Londregan and Poole's (1990, 152) finding that countries can enter 'coup traps'—they find a “successful coup continues to elevate the propensity for yet another coup for up to 6 years”—Sudduth shows that entering office via a coup temporarily reduces the likelihood of a leader being replaced by a coup at the start of their tenure.<sup>4</sup> Hence, Sudduth argues that because elites are unlikely to attempt to overthrow a dictator just after helping install him in power, dictators can take advantage of the temporarily reduced likelihood of retaliation by purging military elites (2017, 1787).

More recent work examines purges at the individual-level, exploring why dictators purge specific elites (e.g., Goldring and Matthews 2023; Wong and Chan 2021). Laure Bokobza and co-authors (2022) study which cabinet ministers dictators purge after failed coups. They show that dictators are more likely to purge higher-ranking ministers and those who occupy strategic positions—e.g., ministers of defense—while retaining more loyal and veteran ministers. This speaks to the importance of studying purges not

just at the regime level over time, but at the individual level to better understand who is at risk and why, to further our knowledge of authoritarian survival.

We integrate two strands of this existing research. [Sudduth \(2017\)](#) demonstrates that dictators are especially likely to purge (military) elites following successful coups, while others show the value of analyzing individual-level purges to understand the inner-workings of dictatorships and the dynamics of intra-elite competition and conflict ([Bokobza et al. 2022](#); [Goldring and Matthews 2023](#); [Wong and Chan 2021](#)). Bridging these prior findings, we are left with an additional important question: who do dictators purge following successful coups?

The question applies to purges following regime change and leader reshuffling coups ([Chin John et al., 2021b](#)), but we focus exclusively on the former for theoretical and empirical reasons. For clarity, regime change coups entail the replacement of the whole group of elites atop the regime, while leader reshuffling coups replace the leader but preserve the existing regime ([Aksoy et al. 2015](#), 423). Elite purges are likely especially important for the survival and power consolidation strategies of RCCE autocrats relative to other autocrats, including those who enter office via a leader reshuffling coup. RCCE autocrats should be more able than other autocrats to purge elites because they have just demonstrated their strength via their method of entry ([Sudduth and Bell 2018](#)). Unlike autocrats installed by a leader reshuffling coup, RCCE autocrats have a new set of elites to manage ([Aksoy et al. 2015](#)). Elites who played key roles in the foundational coup may be less suited to holding an important position in the new regime, or they may be too threatening for the leader to countenance their membership in the regime's top ruling institution. From a theoretical perspective, then, the expected frequency and the dictator's need to not just purge but purge the right people points to the importance of studying which elites RCCE autocrats purge to maintain power.

The importance of understanding who RCCE dictators purge is further demonstrated by the number of dictators that this category includes. Between 1946 and 2020, 147 dictators entered power through a regime change coup. Of these, 93 dictators did so following one of the 109 regime change coups that replaced an autocracy, while 54 dictators did so after one of the 60 anti-democratic regime change coups ([Chin et al., 2021a](#), 5; [Chin John et al., 2021b](#), 1045).<sup>5</sup> Purges appear to be a crucial tool that can help dictators initially survive in power and subsequently consolidate more at the expense of their elites ([Gandhi and Sumner, 2020](#); [Geddes et al., 2018](#), ch. 4; [Svolik 2012](#), ch. 3). Since regime change coups are a common way for dictators to enter (and exit) power, understanding who these dictators purge upon taking control is of fundamental importance to explaining how a significant number of autocrats ensure their longevity, both politically and personally.

## Theory

We propose that there are varying costs and benefits of purging different types of elites for RCCE dictators. Purging elites who can better help the autocrat maintain power

entails higher costs for the autocrat, while there are greater benefits for the autocrat when they purge those who have demonstrated their willingness to challenge an incumbent regime leader. How these factors intersect yields three expectations about which elites RCCE dictators are likely to purge.

### *The Varying Costs of Purging Elites*

We assume that dictators wish to maintain power. Many autocrats therefore attempt to consolidate power, executing power grabs to weaken elite members of the autocratic regime (Svolik 2012, ch. 3). Of course, some dictators pursue other strategies. Autocrats who are comparatively weaker when entering office may pursue a co-optation strategy towards elites, developing an institutionalized regime to alleviate commitment problems and extend their time in office (Gandhi 2008; Meng 2020). However, dictators who enter office via a regime change coup have demonstrated their initial strength by forcibly taking office unconstitutionally (Sudduth 2017). These leaders are in a better position to consolidate power via purges after having ousted the previous regime and can then craft a new state hierarchy around different elites.

The benefits of purging elites are clear. RCCE dictators can purge elites to shrink their ruling coalition, meaning they have to share fewer material and political spoils with regime elites (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Elite purges are therefore a crucial tool for these kinds of dictators who are interested in staying in power, by allowing them to shrink the elite and personally absorb or redistribute that individual's previous offices. For example, Egypt's current President (and former Field Marshal) Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who seized power via a regime change coup in 2013, purged several prominent top army figures to consolidate power, illustrating how elite purges continue to be relied upon by dictators who strategically aim to achieve domination over their regime (Hearst 2018).

However, even strong RCCE dictators cannot purge all elites using the same calculations. RCCE dictators are less likely to purge coercive elites than civilian elites due to the more central role that the former play in these dictators' regimes. Coercive elites are those who have access to forces of organized state violence via external or internal-facing security institutions, such as the military, secret police, or a dictator's personal bodyguards (Sudduth 2017). Most regime change coups involve the military. Indeed, 96.6 percent of coup attempts between 1946 and 2020 featured some degree of military participation (Chin John et al., 2021b, 1045). Dictators who enter power via this method tend to have strong relationships with elites from similar professional experiences; these elites therefore tend to dominate the dictator's inner circle. For example, after the 1980 Turkish coup, General Kenan Evren ruled through a junta with the support of the other branch chiefs of the armed forces (Hale 1994).

Dictators do not rule alone (Svolik 2012, 79). Elites that populate their inner circle of political supporters carry out important functions, helping the autocrat better administer the state. However, because of the important roles they play for an RCCE dictator, purging coercive elites can have a disruptive effect on the state's ability to function.

Hence, because RCCE dictators rely more on coercive elites to carry out the daily tasks of governing in regimes dominated by militarized actors, they are less likely to purge these elites. Purging coercive elites could weaken the institutions tasked with organizing security for external and internal purposes, which are a key constituency for the dictator who enters through a regime change coup. Dictators do not want to risk weakening the state and heightening their vulnerability to popular or foreign threats to their rule, which could occur when there is a perception that the regime is undergoing internal conflict (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2017). The greater costs for RCCE dictators of purging coercive elites (denoted by  $C_H$ ) rather than civilian elites ( $C_L$ ) implies that, *ceteris paribus*, these dictators are more likely to purge civilian than coercive elites.

### *The Varying Benefits of Purging Elites*

However, before stating hypotheses, we must consider how an additional factor influences whether dictators purge a particular elite. In addition to the costs described above, dictators also consider the varying benefits of purging certain elites. Specifically, dictators are more likely to purge elites who they reasonably believe may threaten them in the future. Dictators gain greater benefits from purging elites who have demonstrated their willingness to challenge an incumbent ( $B_H$ ), than they can by purging elites who have not displayed this willingness ( $B_L$ ).

Just as no dictator rules alone, no dictator seizes power alone, particularly when their entry requires organized action, like in a regime change coup. Plotting and executing a coup is a conspiratorial group effort. Plotters must coordinate with likeminded comrades to improve the coup's odds of success, working in coordination to accomplish critical goals during the execution phase, such as capturing the incumbent leader or taking control of the country's broadcasting centers (Luttwak 1968; Singh 2014). The participation of general-rank officers also provides coups with a legitimizing and strategic advantage, which may help enact a successful exchange of power (De Bruin 2018). Without dedicated and competent collaborators, these coordination games would not succeed, with plotters likely to suffer incarceration or death for their failure (Easton and Siverson 2018). Successful plotters tend to be coercive figures rather than civilians, unsurprisingly given the kind of martial skills that are necessary to carry out a coup;<sup>6</sup> however, some civilian elites play crucial roles in coups, bringing their unique advantages to the conspiracy group's ranks in exchange for post-coup rewards.

During the plotting stage, key co-conspirators often become personally close with one another. The secrecy required to plot and successfully carry out a coup can foment strong ties between top coup plotters, who gain experience with the strengths and weaknesses of their comrades. They may also develop an attitude of being brothers in arms, brought closer together by the trust required to successfully coordinate a coup in secrecy, and by the shared risk of life-threatening punishment (Easton and Siverson 2018).

However, if the regime change coup succeeds, the dynamics between the key individuals involved in the coup change. The previous bonds of trust between these individuals are undermined by the dynamics of authoritarian power sharing, as well as the dictator's interest in consolidating power and potentially pursuing a more personalized dictatorship in the future (Svolik 2012, ch. 3). Consequently, there are two reasons why dictators are likely to purge key coup plotters in the face of these changes. First, although there is risk in attempting to purge elites who already proved their willingness in attempting a successful coup, the risks of leaving them in the ruling coalition may be greater for a dictator. These elites represent a potentially existential threat to the dictator's survival, as they have already recently demonstrated their willingness to challenge an incumbent leader. Although previously this was a boon to the would-be dictator, there is no guarantee that these coercive elites will not turn on the new dictator if it is in their personal interests. Constable and Valenzuela (1991, 56) observe of Pinochet's Chile, "The coup had broken two military principles: vertical command and noninterference in politics. Although the breakdown in loyalty had brought Pinochet to power, he knew he must restore it to maintain authority. This meant moving against the architects of the coup and promoting officers known for strict adherence to institutional discipline."<sup>7</sup>

Second, key coup plotters represent a barrier to the dictator consolidating power. As prominent actors in the coup, they have the strongest claim to share power with the dictator, demanding greater rewards for their critical role in the group's seizure of the state institutions. Since these individuals tend to assume important positions in the government immediately following the regime change coup—although they do not always—they also are better positioned to populate their fiefdom, whether a branch of the armed forces or key domestic security institution, with hand-selected loyalists who rely on them for continued rewards (Leber et al., 2023).<sup>8</sup> The status of these elites with personal "armies" of supporters within the regime can become entrenched and even expand, making it harder for a dictator to oust them without potential confrontation if he seeks to consolidate power at their expense.

Relations between Pinochet and his top elites provide an illustrative case of dictators purging key coup plotters after a regime change coup to assist in maintaining, and then consolidating, personal power. Following the 1973 coup that ousted Salvador Allende, the chiefs of the armed forces formed a ruling military junta (Sigmund 1977). Each junta member originally possessed a single vote, decisions were made by unanimous consent, and the chair position was to rotate to keep one branch from becoming more powerful (Snyder 1995; Valenzuela 1991). However, Army chief Augusto Pinochet leveraged his position as the inaugural chairman to consolidate power, coercing the other chiefs to abandon rotation and changing decision-making to majority rule (Barros 2001; Ensalaco 2000).

This move upset Air Force chief of staff General Gustavo Leigh, another member of the junta (Bizzarro 2005), who began plotting to hamstring Pinochet's consolidation of power (Arriagada 1988; Remmer 1980). There were whisperings that members of the Air Force were plotting a coup to install Leigh as president (Spooner 1994). Having

witnessed Leigh's willingness to challenge an incumbent and fearing a challenge, Pinochet demanded Leigh's resignation. When Leigh refused, Pinochet had the general expelled from the Junta and the Air Force, removing him from the regime elite and physically separating him from his airmen (Bawden 2016). Pinochet saw Leigh as a threat because he had coup experience and a base of loyalists, leading to a confrontation that ended in a risky purge of a powerful ruling elite, but one that paid off for the incumbent dictator.

## Expectations

To summarize, there are varying costs and benefits to purging different kinds of elites for RCCE dictators. The preceding discussion suggests that there are greater costs to purging coercive ( $C_H$ ) than civilian elites ( $C_L$ ). However, these dictators have varying incentives to purge different kinds of civilian or coercive elites because they are more highly motivated to purge key coup plotters ( $B_H$ ) than non-key coup plotters ( $B_L$ ), due to the understood danger that these elites pose to the dictator's survival. Table 1 summarizes how these costs and benefits intersect.

This suggests, *ceteris paribus*, that RCCE dictators are most likely to purge civilian key coup plotters (*high benefits, low costs*), followed by coercive key coup plotters (*high benefits, high costs*) or civilian non-key coup plotters (*low benefits, low costs*), and finally coercive non-key coup plotters (*low benefits, high costs*). We therefore test the following hypotheses:

*Ceteris paribus*, RCCE dictators are more likely to purge:

- **H1**: Civilian key coup plotters than anyone else.
- **H2**: Coercive key coup plotters than coercive non-key coup plotters.
- **H3**: Civilian non-key coup plotters than coercive non-key coup plotters.

*Some* of our arguments initially appear to apply beyond RCCE autocrats. For instance, all dictators may be more likely to purge civilian than coercive elites (**H3**); there is a lower risk of retaliation when purging the former due to their comparative lack of access to organized violence. However, while this implication may apply to all autocrats, the logic of our arguments strictly applies to RCCE autocrats. Our argument about coercive elites being costly to purge is based on the assistance they provide dictators in dealing with threats, not whether purging them is dangerous. This logic may

**Table 1.** The Costs and Benefits of Purging Elites for Regime Change Coup-Entry Dictators.

	Civilian	Coercive
Key coup plotter	$B_H, C_L$	$B_H, C_H$
Non-key coup plotter	$B_L, C_L$	$B_L, C_H$

be true to a certain degree for all autocrats, but it is especially pertinent to RCCE autocrats who, due to the way they seize power, tend to populate their key ruling institution with coercive elites and therefore especially rely on them to navigate popular and foreign threats. Our argument about key coup plotters is also specific to RCCE autocrats, rather than autocrats who enter office via any kind of coup, because RCCE autocrats exhibited strength when they entered office, so they are more able to purge fellow key coup plotters; autocrats who enter office via a leader reshuffling coup are comparatively constrained in this regard (Sudduth and Bell 2018). In sum, although *some* similar empirical patterns in elite purges may occur under other types of autocrats, the theoretical logic of our arguments applies specifically to RCCE autocrats.

## Research Design

We test the hypotheses on the relationship between elite traits and purges in RCCE regimes with time-series cross-sectional data on 289 elites in 32 autocratic ruling institutions between 1948 and 2000. We begin the process of identifying a theoretically motivated sample by establishing the universe of autocratic regimes. Autocracies in our sample are identified through the cases developed by Geddes et al., (2018). Because we are interested in the post-coup elite dynamics of autocracies, we cross reference the Geddes et al. regime start dates with the list of regime change coup dates identified in the Colpus dataset (Chin John et al., 2021b). This allows us to identify autocracies that began via a regime change coup, rather than through other means, such as disputed elections or foreign impositions. As noted above, 147 dictators entered power following a regime change coup between 1946 and 2020.<sup>9</sup>

Once we have a full sample of autocratic regimes that entered power through regime change coups, we next identify the leader who took power at the start of these regimes. These leaders possess a range of titles after they seize power, including president, general-secretary, prime minister, or chair of a military junta. We identify these initial post-coup leaders by utilizing several leader identification datasets and cross-referencing their entry dates with our sample start dates. These include Archigos (Goemans et al., 2009), Rulers.org (Schemmel 2021), and Svulik (2012). With the post-coup leader identified, we used similar sources to establish their exit dates. This information provides a full universe of cases for our study, which focuses on the ruling periods of RCCE autocrats.

Once the sample was limited to these parameters, we identified the main ruling group of each regime, relying on an institutional approach.<sup>10</sup> Ruling institutions are formal institutions with selective membership that include the dictator and powerful individuals in the government who can be classified as “ruling elites” (Goldring and Matthews 2023).<sup>11</sup> These ruling institutions are functionally the de facto policy-making forum of the regime, to which other areas of the state, party, and military are subordinated. Most closely, these would be the very narrow group of top elites that forms what Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) refer to as the winning coalition, whereas the broader military (who plays a role in guaranteeing the regime’s survival) would be more

akin to their selectorate.<sup>12</sup> Ruling institutions were identified for the sample regime spells by drawing upon a range of sources, including encyclopedias, case narratives, scholarly books and articles, and many primary source documents from the regimes themselves.

We intentionally did not develop our sample of ruling institutions through random selection. Rather, we sought to include cases that were representative of the great diversity in autocratic regimes and their domestic conditions. We assessed inclusion to ensure adequate coverage of the ruling institution subtypes, temporal variations in regime durations, geographic location, elite group size, and ensuring our sample included cases that could be coded with adequate source materials. This process of assessing the generalizability of the sample, in combination with our findings on data availability for regime elites that could be reliably collected, led to a sample of 32 autocratic ruling institutions.<sup>13</sup> The sampled regimes cross four continents and seven decades of post-World War II history. They include states that are developed and underdeveloped, with high populations and low, and are characterized as military, personalist, and party regimes by [Geddes et al., \(2014\)](#). Given the degree of effort necessary to even identify and descriptively quantify the ruling elite of a single regime, we selected a targeted group that would best represent the universe of possible cases, rather than selecting single regions that might behave differently than a broader comparative sample.<sup>14</sup>

Once we selected the sample of coup-entry ruling institutions, we then turned to researching the names and biographies of the “elites” who held formal candidate or full membership in these institutions during the tenure of the initial leader of the regime.<sup>15</sup> These details were extracted from a wide range of source material, including (but not exclusively) political party minutes, UN office reports, newspaper articles, radio transcripts, government proclamations, and encyclopedias. Based on this wide range of sources, we were able to compile individual-level data points for each ruling institution elite, which were hand-coded by one of the authors.<sup>16</sup> We present descriptive information for our full sample of ruling institutions, which capture 289 elites, in [Table 2](#).

### *Dependent Variable*

The outcome of theoretical interest is whether an elite’s exit from the regime’s ruling institution was via a purge at the hands of the dictator. As noted in the previous sections, not all dictators purge elites. However, those who enter via regime change coups experience conditions that may make their incentives to purge greater ([Sudduth 2017](#)). This means our selected sample may be more purge-heavy than more institutionalized autocracies. We determined whether an elite was purged by studying the nature of their exit from the ruling institution. In the process of coding, we categorized elites into one of six exit types: died in office (naturally, suicide, or accident), demotion (dropped from the ruling institution but not losing other offices), expulsion, regime/leader/ruling institution change, forced resignation, and resignation (voluntarily).<sup>17</sup> Of these, only expulsion was indicative of the elite being fully purged, because it involved them

**Table 2.** Ruling Institutions.

State	Ruling Institution	Leader	Geddes et al. Type	Start Date	End Date	Elites
Afghanistan	Daoud presidential cabinet	Daoud	Personal	7/17/1973	4/27/1978	25
Afghanistan	PDPA politburo	Taraki	Party	4/29/1978	3/27/1979	8
Algeria	High committee of state	Boudiaf	Military	1/14/1992	6/29/1992	4
Argentina	Government military council	Videla	Military	3/24/1976	3/29/1981	6
Benin	Dahomey provisional executive	Soglo	Personal	10/28/ 1963	1/25/1964	3
Benin	Military directorate	de Souza	Military	12/13/ 1969	5/7/1970	2
Bolivia	Council of commanders of the armed forces	Garcia Meza	Military	7/17/1980	8/4/1981	5
Brazil	Military council	Costa e Silva	Military	4/1/1964	4/15/1964	2
Chile	Government military council	Pinochet	Military	9/11/1973	3/11/1990	11
Cote d'Ivoire	National council of public safety	Guei	Personal	12/24/ 1999	10/26/ 2000	8
Czechoslovakia	KSC presidium	Gottwald	Party	2/25/1948	3/14/1953	25
Dominican Republic	Dominican civil triumvirate	Santos	Military	9/26/1963	9/26/1963	3
Ecuador	Military council of 63	Castro Jijon	Military	7/11/1963	3/29/1966	3
Egypt	Revolutionary command council	Naguib	Party	7/23/1952	11/14/ 1954	11
El Salvador	Revolutionary government council	Cordova	Party	12/14/ 1948	1/4/1949	4
Ghana	National liberation council	Ankrah	Military	2/24/1966	4/3/1969	8
Ghana	National redemption council (1/13/1972-10/9/75); Supreme military council (10/9/75-7/9/79)	Acheampong	Military	1/13/1972	7/5/1978	23
Guatemala	Military council of 54	Diaz	Personal	6/27/1954	6/29/1954	2

*(continued)*

**Table 2.** (continued)

State	Ruling Institution	Leader	Geddes et al. Type	Start Date	End Date	Elites
Haiti	Military council of 57	Kébreau	Personal	6/14/1957	10/22/ 1957	2
Haiti	National council of Haiti	Namphy	Military	2/7/1986	2/7/1988	6
Haiti	Military council of 91	Cedras	Military	9/30/1991	10/12/ 1994	2
Iraq	Revolutionary command council	Al-Bakr	Party	7/17/1968	7/16/1979	33
Lesotho	Military council of Lesotho	Lekhanya	Military	1/20/1986	4/30/1991	9
Nigeria	Supreme military council I	Gowon	Military	7/29/1966	7/29/1975	10
Nigeria	Supreme military council II	Buhari	Military	12/31/ 1983	8/27/1985	20
Peru	Government military council II	Perez Godoy	Military	7/18/1962	3/4/1963	3
Sierra Leone	National provisional ruling council high command	Strasser	Military	4/29/1992	1/16/1996	16
South Vietnam	Executive committee of the military revolutionary council	Minh	Military	11/2/1963	1/30/1964	12
Sudan	Supreme council of the armed forces	Abboud	Military	11/17/ 1958	10/29/ 1964	15
Turkey	National security council	Evren	Military	9/12/1980	7/1/1983	6
Venezuela	Military council of Venezuela	Delgado Chalbaud	Military	11/24/ 1948	11/13/ 1950	2

simultaneously being expelled from the ruling institution and losing all other portfolios that carried political power (i.e., a cabinet position, military branch leadership, etc.). The main outcome variable is therefore *Purge*, a dichotomous variable that equals one if an elite was expelled from the ruling institution by the dictator, and zero otherwise. Of our total sample of 289 elites, 31 (or 10.73 percent) left power through being purged.<sup>18</sup> Although not extremely common, the percentage of elites purged suggests that it is a large enough sample that purges are important to study, especially considering the major consequences that often follow these events.

We also probe the robustness of our findings with a more permissive measure of purges. We categorized forced resignations separately from expulsions because in the former elites are given the “opportunity” to withdraw before being expelled, perhaps with the implication that their post-office fate will be safer than if they resisted. However, to mitigate the possibility that some of these cases match our theoretical definition of purges, we also test the hypotheses with the dependent variable *Purge (permissive)*, which equals one if an elite was expelled or forced to resign. Five elites in the sample were forced to resign, meaning that 36 of the 289 elites’ exits, or 12.46 percent, are classified as purges under this measure.

### *Independent Variables*

The first key independent variable, *Coercive*, identifies whether an elite in the ruling institution has a recent professional history in the leadership of either the armed forces or the state security sector. As described above, these elites tend to play important roles for RCCE dictators, particularly in helping them alleviate popular and foreign threats. This variable is coded dichotomously, with an outcome of one indicating that the elite has a recent professional history in leadership of a branch of the armed forces or in a state security institution (i.e., militia, secret police, etc.) and zero representing another type of professional background (i.e., party, state government, etc.). This categorization is based on the elite professional history categorical variables created by [Haggard et al. \(2014\)](#).

The second main independent variable aims to capture the “danger” that certain elites pose to the dictator, based on whether they have a recent history of challenging their leader. *Key coup plotter* identifies individuals who had a major role in formulating and/or executing the coup plot, distinguishing themselves from other participants by being the driving figures behind these events. This variable is coded dichotomously with one indicating that the individual elite was a key plotter of the coup that brought the regime to power and zero if they were either uninvolved or only played a minor role (i.e., led a smaller unit at the direction of a superior, remained strategically inactive, etc.). To illustrate, we consider Lieutenant-General Hardan al-Tikriti of Iraq to have been a key plotter in 1968 because he coordinated and led the military’s capture of the Prime Minister; we do not consider Saddam Hussein one (despite his involvement) because he did not command significant forces and only played a small support role ([Karsh and Rautsi 1991](#)).

Information for identifying “key” coup plotters were sourced from a range of materials, including primary accounts, contemporary journalism, scholarly works on the events, and comparative data sources like the Colpus coup event narratives ([Chin John et al., 2021b](#)). Key coup plotters are not always military, as a number of coups have either involved prominent civilians or been led by civilians, as were the cases in the 1978 Saur coup in Afghanistan ([Arnold 1985](#)) and the 1948 communist coup in Czechoslovakia ([Suda, 1980a](#)). To test our expectations about how an elite’s status as

coming from a coercive apparatus and being a key coup plotter interact, we include *Coercive* × *Key coup plotter* in the models, alongside the component variables.

### Control Variables

We also account for individual and regime-level factors that may affect the elite's likelihood of being purged, even when accounting for their coup plotter and coercive statuses. First, as elites remain in the ranks of the ruling institution for longer periods of time, their likelihood of removal through a purge may decrease. This could be for one of two reasons (or some combination). They have been in the ruling institution for so long that the dictator no longer deems them a threat, as they have proven their loyalty or docility (Egorov and Sonin 2011). Or they have acquired enough personal power over time that purging them versus waiting for them to die or retire is not worth the added risk to the dictator. We suspect that whatever the reason, elites with longer tenures are less likely to be purged than those who have been there for shorter stints and are possibly more ambitious or easier to force out. This is tested through *Elite tenure*, which is a continuous variable constructed by determining the difference in years between year  $i$  and the date of the elite's entry into the ruling institution. If an elite was in the ruling institution for two or more non-consecutive spells, we separate that as distinct observations and *Tenure* only captures their time during that unit's spell. We also include *Elite tenure*<sup>2</sup> and *Elite tenure*<sup>3</sup> to account for temporal dependence (Carter and Signorino 2010).

Autocratic regime-level characteristics could also affect the likelihood of purges for elites within the regime. For example, personalist leaders may be more prone to purging because elites have already been weakened vis-à-vis the dictator, who may be more empowered to purge with greater frequency (Gandhi and Sumner 2020). We therefore include Wright's (2021) leader- and time-variant measure of personalism. Next, we account for whether there was a failed coup because purges following either imagined or real failed coups are common (Bokobza et al. 2022; Easton and Siverson 2018). We include a binary indicator from Chin John et al., 2021b on whether there was a failed coup. We also include *Past purge*, a binary variable that equals one if a dictator has already purged an individual from the ruling institution. This may have a positive effect on the likelihood of a purge, since a successful purge may demonstrate the dictator's strength and make the dictator believe that elites are less likely to resist future purges. On the other hand, *Past purge* may have a negative effect because once dictators have purged threatening individuals from their ruling institution, they may have less motivation to purge elites since they would hope to have removed the individuals likely to threaten them.

Next, we account for the time-variant *Number of elites* in the ruling institution since this could influence the likelihood of an elite being purged; more elites could provide the dictator with greater opportunity to purge since elites would be more expendable. This variable is based on the sources used to identify the elites listed in Table 2; to emphasize, it varies over time as elites become a member or exit the ruling institution (whether

through a purge or some other means). Finally, we account for the dictator's *Time in office*, since there is evidence that RCCE dictators specifically are more likely to purge (military) elites at the start of their tenure (Sudduth 2017).<sup>19</sup>

### Model estimation

We test our hypotheses by estimating the following time-series cross-sectional linear probability model:<sup>20</sup>

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Purge}_{i,j,t} = & \varphi \text{Coercive}_j + \zeta \text{Key coup plotter}_j + \gamma (\text{Coercive}_j \times \text{Key coup plotter}_j) \\ & + \beta \mathbf{X}_{i,j,t} + \alpha_i + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{i,j,t} \end{aligned}$$

for  $i = 1, \dots, n$  countries,  $j = 1, \dots, n$  elites, and  $t = 1, \dots, T$  years.  $\beta \mathbf{X}_{i,j,t}$  captures the matrix of control variables described above, while  $\alpha_i$  represents leader fixed effects, and  $\lambda_t$  captures year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by individual elites.

### Analysis

We first assess the hypotheses with descriptive statistics. Table 3 shows the percentages of elites who dictators purge, based on their status as a civilian or coercive elite and whether they were a key plotter in the coup that brought the dictator to power. The top half of Table 3 uses *Purge* as the outcome variable; the bottom half uses *Purge (permissive)*. First, there is not support for **H1**. There were nine civilian key coup plotters but only one was purged. We probe the reasons for this below. Second, however, there appears to be support for **H2**. The rate at which dictators purge coercive elites is different conditional on their status as a key coup plotter. With *Purge* as the outcome, dictators purge 17.07 percent of coercive elites who were also key plotters of the founding coup, but only 3.51 percent of those who were minor players or uninvolved in the coup. Third, there is also support for **H3**. There is a stark difference in the rates at which dictators purge civilian and coercive elites who were not key coup plotters. As noted, dictators purge 3.51 percent of coercive non-key coup plotters, but they purge 14.29 percent of civilian non-key coup plotters. There are similarly divergent rates of purges that are consistent with **H2** and **H3** when *Purge (permissive)* is the outcome variable. Taking qualified support for the second and third hypotheses from this descriptive analysis, we now examine whether these findings are robust to accounting for alternative explanations.

Table 4 summarizes the results of a series of linear probability models based on the model estimation strategy described above, using *Purge* and *Purge (permissive)* as the outcome variables.<sup>21</sup> We first estimate a base model that contains the dependent variable, *Purge*, and the key independent variables of *Coercive*, *Key coup plotter*, and *Coercive*  $\times$  *Key coup plotter*. We then add the control variables in  $\beta \mathbf{X}_{i,j,t}$ , followed by leader fixed effects, and then year fixed effects to probe the robustness of our findings to different model specifications (Models 1–4). We then repeat this process with *Purge*

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics.

	Civilian	Coercive	All
DV: <i>Purge</i>			
Full sample			
Not purged	80	178	258
Purged	13	18	31
Total	93	196	289
% purged	13.98%	9.18%	10.73%
Key coup plotters			
Not purged	8	68	76
Purged	1	14	15
Total	9	82	91
% purged	11.11%	17.07%	16.48%
Non-key coup plotters			
Not purged	72	110	110
Purged	12	4	4
Total	84	114	114
% purged	14.29%	3.51%	3.51%
DV: <i>Purge (permissive)</i>			
Full sample			
Not purged	79	174	253
Purged	14	22	36
Total	93	196	289
% purged	15.05%	11.22%	12.46%
Key coup plotters			
Not purged	8	67	75
Purged	1	15	16
Total	9	82	91
% purged	11.11%	18.29%	17.58%
Non-key coup plotters			
Not purged	71	107	178
Purged	13	7	20
Total	84	114	198
% purged	15.48%	6.14%	10.10%

(*permissive*) as the dependent variable (Models 5–8). The main models are Models 4 and 8, which include all control variables, and leader and year fixed effects.

Table 4 suggests that RCCE dictators are less likely to purge coercive than civilian elites. Dictators seemingly find purging civilian elites to be more permissible. The interaction term is also positive and significant, at least at 90 percent confidence, in all models. This suggests that RCCE dictators are more likely to purge coercive key coup plotters than other coercive elites. The fact that the interaction effect is significant in the

**Table 4.** Summary of Main Results.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Purge	Purge	Purge	Purge	Purge (Permissive)	Purge (Permissive)	Purge (Permissive)	Purge (Permissive)
Coercive	-0.03 (0.01)**	-0.04 (0.02)*	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)**	-0.03 (0.01)*	-0.03 (0.02)*	-0.03 (0.02)*	-0.04 (0.02)**
Key coup plotter	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)
Coercive x Key coup plotter	0.06 (0.03)*	0.07 (0.04)*	0.08 (0.04)*	0.08 (0.04)*	0.06 (0.03)*	0.07 (0.04)*	0.08 (0.04)*	0.08 (0.04)*
Constant	0.04 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.09)	0.14 (0.16)	0.04 (0.01)***	0.01 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.09)	0.16 (0.16)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Leader FEs	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	998	763	763	763	998	763	763	763

Standard errors in parentheses. \*p < 0.10, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01.

models with leader and year fixed effects shows that RCCE dictators are more likely to purge coercive key coup plotters relative to other coercive elites across time and within their own institution. In contrast to the coercive elite finding, it appears that dictators risk the potential of a retaliatory coup to eliminate the coercive elites who pose the greatest threat to their rule. Unnecessarily purging coercive elites who did not enter office alongside them is unnecessarily provocative, perhaps leading them to lean more toward demotions as their form of removing troublesome individuals. However, for former key coup plotters, they must be eliminated in such a way that they are not left free to conspire.

We probe the substantive meaning of the findings visually due to the inclusion of the interaction term (Brambor et al., 2006). The left of Figure 1 shows the probabilities of dictators purging the four different types of elites based on their status as coercive or civilian and key coup plotter or non-key coup plotter, while the right of Figure 1 shows the first differences of those probabilities, providing clear tests of the three hypotheses. The probabilities and first differences are based on Models 4 (*Purge*) and 8 (*Purge (permissive)*) in Table 4.

The results are consistent with the findings from the descriptive statistics. First, contrary to *H1*, RCCE dictators are not more likely to purge civilian key coup plotters than any other kind of elite. In our sample, eight civilian key coup plotters were not

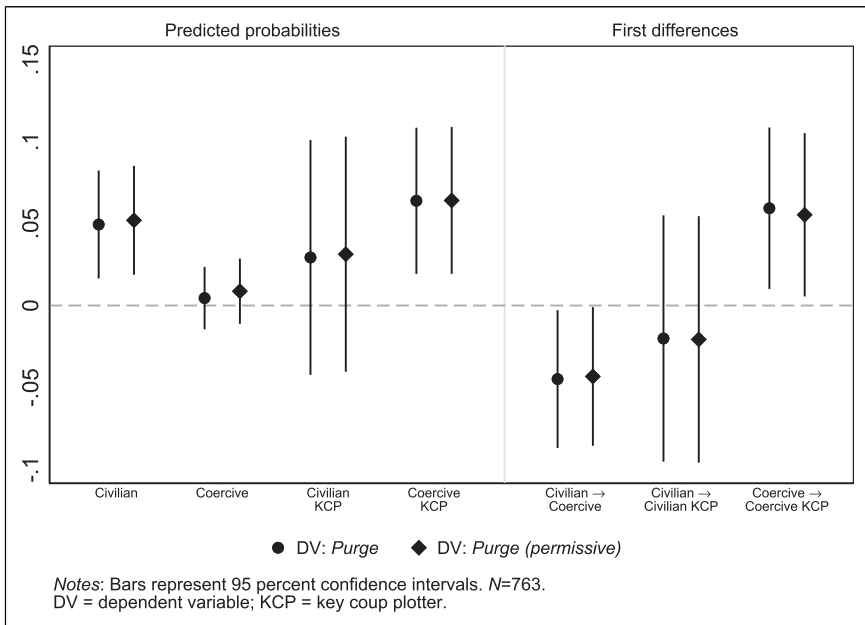


Figure 1. Probabilities of different types of elites being purged.

purged, irrespective of how purges are measured: why? Two were from Afghanistan, five from Czechoslovakia, and one from Sierra Leone. In Afghanistan, second-in-command Babrak Karmal was all but purged; he was demoted from the Politburo in a factional dispute and sent to Prague as an ambassador to keep him out of Afghanistan but he was not removed from the Central Committee (Arnold 1985). He therefore does not lose all positions that qualify him as a member of the ruling coalition, so we do not code Karmal as purged. The other elite from Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin, demonstrates the risk of failing to purge even civilian key coup plotters, as he eventually had President Nur Muhammad Taraki assassinated (Arnold 1982).

In Czechoslovakia, whereas most the coups in our sample originated in the military, the coup that brought the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia (KSC) to power in 1948 was largely a civilian-led effort fought out in the post-war coalition cabinet between the KSC and non-communist ministers (Bradley 1991). The five civilian key coup plotters were all members of the pre-coup unity cabinet and already held prominent positions in the KSC apparatus. Once the KSC took control of the country, the communist ministers transferred ruling power to the party's Presidium, leaving this as one of the rare coup regimes led and consolidated under mostly civilian plotters (Suda, 1980b). Finally, John Opanjo Benjamin was a civilian friend of Sierra Leone coup leader Capt. Valentine Strasser, who was the "lynch-pin" for managing the junta's cabinet (Zack-Williams and Riley 1993, 96). Overall, a series of idiosyncratic reasons point to why we do not find evidence that dictators are especially likely to purge civilian key coup plotters.

Second, consistent with *H2*, dictators are more likely to purge coercive key coup plotters than coercive elites who did not play a key role in the regime-founding coup. Using *Purge* as the outcome, the left of Figure 1 shows that dictators are 92.87 percent less likely to purge coercive non-key coup plotters than coercive key coup plotters ( $0.06391009 \rightarrow 0.00455429$ ). Regardless of whether *Purge* or *Purge (permissive)* is the outcome variable, the bars at the far right of Figure 1 show that the first differences of these probabilities—the changes in the probabilities of altering a coercive elite's status from key coup plotter to non-key coup plotter—are significant at 95 percent confidence.

Finally, consistent with *H3*, dictators are more likely to purge civilian non-key coup plotters than their coercive counterparts. The left of Figure 1 shows that coercive elites are 90.79 percent less likely than civilians to be purged ( $0.0494308 \rightarrow 0.00455429$ ). The left bars in the right-hand side of Figure 1 shows that the first differences of these predicted probabilities are significant at 95 percent confidence.

The findings should be interpreted as associational, but they are consistent with the hypotheses. We conduct further tests to probe the sensitivity of these findings, and their robustness to several alternative explanations. First, the selection of ruling institutions was not random. Idiosyncratic characteristics pertaining to specific ruling institutions may bias the results. We re-estimate the models, dropping each ruling institution sequentially to check that no specific ruling institution is especially influential; the results are largely unchanged.<sup>22</sup> Second, we check that our findings are robust to an

alternative estimator, logistic regression, which they are.<sup>23</sup> Third, the models may suffer from omitted variable bias. We re-estimate the models, also accounting for several time-variant country-level domestic-related factors that prior studies suggest may influence purges (Bokobza et al. 2022): population and GDP per capita. We also include a binary indicator of assassination attempts (Chin et al. 2022)---these are qualitatively different from coups d'état, but they also may make a leader more paranoid, which could influence the likelihood of elite purges---as well as a measure of pro-democracy protests (Coppedge et al. 2022) to account for the risk of popular uprising, which may also influence purges.<sup>24</sup> The coefficient for *Coercive* remains negative, albeit not significant, but importantly, the interaction term is positive and significant at 95 percent confidence.<sup>25</sup> We then also check that measures of intra- and interstate conflict do not affect the results; the findings are unchanged.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Previous work on power-sharing between dictators and their elites found that dictators are more likely to purge (military) elites after coups d'état (Sudduth 2017). However, while it has been demonstrated that studying autocratic elites at the individual-level is critical to understanding broader regime outcomes, it has remained unclear exactly *who* dictators purge once they enter power through a regime change coup. This manuscript fills that gap by arguing that dictators who enter office via a regime change coup are more likely to target civilian than coercive elites due to the lower costs of purging these individuals. However, RCCE dictators are more likely to target coercive elites if they were key conspirators in the coup that brought the dictator to power. In this instance, dictators fear that these coercive elites are future rivals and recognize that, through participation in the original coup, these elites have demonstrated their potential disloyalty and willingness to conduct regime change.

Utilizing new individual-level data on autocratic elites in ruling institutions, we find that dictators who enter power through a regime change coup are more likely to purge civilian elites than military and security elites. However, these dictators are more likely to purge their military co-conspirators than other coercive elites in their regime. This is because the severity of the threat that post-coup elites (civilian and coercive) pose is lower than coup plotters from their coercive sector. While we limit our study to individual-level observations, the associated findings may be aggregated in the future with greater data to allow for more precise time series cross-sectional explorations of purges in dictatorships, which could account for varying temporal factors associated with general purge onset and intensity.

The manuscript's findings have several implications for the study of authoritarianism. First, our findings suggest that certain types of dictatorships may experience military instability at predictable times. Caitlin Talmadge's (2015) book on dictators' militaries shows that purges can undermine battlefield performance. Relatedly, our findings suggest that armies overseen by RCCE dictators likely suffer a drop in their potential performance as the dictator addresses the coup threat posed by military and

security co-conspirators. Second, coups and purges represent major upheavals, the result of which can have implications for regional or global affairs. Further study of these subjects should interest scholars and policymakers who are concerned with better understanding the endurance or fragility of dictatorships around the world.

Although our arguments can be extended beyond the scope of our data, future studies could expand upon our findings within alternate sample states, performing deeper dives into specific leaders or regimes. Expanding the sample of elites to other areas could also present the opportunity for further study of their interactions to different outcome areas, such as conflict initiation or democratization. Individual-level elite studies in the field of authoritarianism remain uncommon, making our data and findings more valuable for the study of regime consolidation. Finally, as an inverse, our work could be shifted to examine who is promoted within dictatorships, studying the features of elites composing the ruling institutions across different regime types. Several country-specific studies provide initial evidence (Aaskoven and Nyrup, 2021) but comparative analyses are an important area worthy of future attention.

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### **Data availability statement**

The [data](#) given in this article are available through the journal and the authors' personal websites.

### **Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

1. Notably, one rival still hid in al-Bakr's shadow: Saddam Hussein. Nine years after al-Tikriti's purge, Hussein successfully forced al-Bakr to resign all positions and hand them to himself, thereby seizing power and beginning his reign of terror (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, 1987; Sassoon, 2012).
2. Although post-coup regimes often include many of these coercive elites in their ruling institutions, these groups are not exclusive to them, also co-opting key figures from civilian constituencies (party leaders, ideologues, technocrats, etc.).
3. We explicitly refer to "elite" purges (meaning those targeted against the regime's top political officials), to differentiate them from purges targeted at junior officials, often *en masse* (Montagnes and Wolton, 2019), which may have different causes and dynamics.
4. As this was prior to Chin John et al., 2021b work that delineated between regime change and leader reshuffling coups, we take Sudduth's (2017) work as referring to either type of coup. Chin et al. define a regime change coup as one in which the plotters "seek to topple the regime and change the group of elites from which leaders are chosen" (2), while reshuffle coups "aim to reshuffle the leadership while preserving the existing regime structure" (5).
5. Appendix Table A1 contains the full universe of cases. For comparison, 91 dictators entered power following a leader reshuffling coup (compared to the 109 autocrats that entered power via a regime change coup following another autocracy; Chin John et al., 2021b, 6).
6. In our sample, over 89 percent of key coup plotters are coercive elites.
7. The argument that RCCE dictators purge key coup plotters due to the threat they pose both echoes and contrasts with Bokobza et al.'s arguments (2022). Bokobza et al. (2022) contend that dictators purge high-ranking cabinet figures after failed coups similarly due to the threat they pose, but while we argue that RCCE dictators overlook the loyalty shown by key coup plotters due to their fear that these elites may act against them in future, Bokobza et al. (2022) hypothesize that a cabinet minister's history of loyalty deters a dictator from purging them despite threats they otherwise pose.
8. Key coup plotters are distinct from first-generation elites, which previous research suggests increases the likelihood of being purged (Goldring and Matthews, 2023). In our sample, 191 of the 289 elites are first-generation, but only 82 of the 191 first-generation elites are key coup plotters. Further, there are an additional nine elites who are key coup plotters but not first-generation elites.
9. See Appendix Table A1.
10. The identity of the ruling institution is not fixed over time in our sample. Some ruling institutions change names (as was the case in Ghana) or elites may move to a new institution in a restructuring.
11. Members of the ruling institution may hold offices across sectors of the regime. For example, some elites simultaneously possess a seat in a military junta and the cabinet. However, only their position in the junta, if this was the ruling institution, would qualify them as a "ruling elite"; some autocratic systems do not concentrate power in technocratic cabinets.

12. We note that we qualify our sample through institutional identification, rather than a general assessment of individuals considered powerful enough to act as veto players in their regimes (c.f. [Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003](#)).
13. [Goldring and Matthews, 2023](#) identify a sample of autocratic regimes similarly in their quantitative analysis of who dictators purge.
14. We describe various robustness tests below to ameliorate concerns that the non-random selection of our sample cases may raise questions about external validity.
15. The end dates for elites are either the date in which they left the ruling institution or the date in which the initial leader left office. Elites who survived the leader as members of the ruling institution have their exit dates locked to the leader's exit date and are assigned a "leader change" exit type.
16. The Appendix contains a sample bibliography of sources used to compile these data.
17. The regime/leader/ruling institution change exit is used to ensure that we do not miscode as purges any elites who remained in office until a major change forced the conclusion of the body as a whole.
18. This rate is comparable to rates of purges identified by other studies: [Goldring and Matthews, 2023](#) find that 15.9 percent of civilian and military elites were purged in 16 autocratic ruling institutions between 1922 and 2020, while [Sudduth's \(2021, Figure 2\)](#) cross-national data show that the average probability of a military elite purge ranges from 0.00 to just under 0.25 (across autocratic regime sub-types).
19. Summary statistics are in [Appendix Table A2](#).
20. We use a linear probability model since OLS avoids issues of separation that can occur in models with covariates that change slowly over time ([Reuter and Szakonyi, 2019, 563, fn.27](#)). The findings are robust to using logistic regression; see [Appendix Table A4](#).
21. Full results are in [Appendix Table A3](#).
22. The results for these dozens of models are in the [replication files](#).
23. See [Appendix Table A4](#).
24. We did not include these variables in our main models as doing so notably reduces the sample due to missing data.
25. See [Appendix Table A5](#).
26. See [Appendix Table A6](#).

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