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Abstract

We study the effect of military factionalization on the likelihood of military coups. Thailand's military is characterized by the internal power struggle between factions for control of leadership positions an annual reshuffle. Utilizing a unique largescale dataset of all changes in Thai military leadership positions from 1968 to 2018, we identify key factions within the military and examine their potential role in military coups. Factional strength as measured by control of top military positions is positively associated with the likelihood of a military coup. Moreover, factional strength when measured by senior-level positions is also positively related to the likelihood of a military coup. By estimating a panel vector autoregression it is shown that the relationship between military factional strength and coups is unidirectional. We argue that these findings reflect the importance of understanding the dynamic mechanisms within the structure of the armed forces when examining the likelihood of a new coups d'état in countries characterized by recurring military power grabs.

JEL Classification: H56, N40, D72
Keywords: military, military coup, coup d'état, factions, Thailand

1 Introduction

Political transitions and leadership changes taking place through coups d'état are still a common feature in many countries (Peyton et al, 2021). However, the motives for a military to overstep its role as the protector of a country's national territorial integrity to seizing political power are not yet well understood. Scholars in various disciplines have often emphasized various economic drivers such as individual or collective incentives including wealth grabs by coup makers, the ability to increase military spending after taking power, or macro-economic factors such as economic underdevelopment or economic crises as drivers behind coups. In fact, a large body of literature in political science has focused on the economic self-interest of soldiers and the corporate self-interest of the military. Early contributions to this literature include Finer, (1976) and Nordlinger (1977). Several studies have also examined how regime type affects the risk for and outcome of coups (e.g., Lindberg and Clark, 2008; Geddes, 2009; Pilster and Böhmelt, 2012). Others have looked at the existence of path dependence in terms of how previous military power grabs affect the likelihood of new coups taking place (e.g., Putnam, 1967; Londregan and Poole, 1990; Powell, 2012). Recognizing that the military as an institution itself is critical, some scholars have also studied the organizational behavior within the military (e.g., Thompson, 1976; Böhmelt et al., 2018). However, as noted by Böhmelt et al. (2018), previous research has had limited success when it comes to identifying potential factors that help shape preferences and facilitate coordination within the military. This study contributes to this emerging literature of mechanisms and process within the military that may end up driving the likelihood of future coups. More specifically, we examine an under-researched but potentially very important factor behind coups, namely that of the strength of military factions.

In this paper, we exploit the phenomenon of frequently occurring military coups in Thailand to study how the relative strength of a faction within the country's powerful army affects the likelihood of a coup. In 1932, a revolution ended Thailand's absolute monarchy.

Since then, Thailand has experienced frequent military interventions in its domestic politics. If we include the event in 1932, there have been no less than 32 overt and indirect coups and coup attempts in Thailand, with the last one taking place in 2014 (Chambers, 2013; Prasirtsuk, 2015). These events include coups and coups during various political regimes including dictatorship (party or military) and variations of democracy (electoral, deconsolidated, and semi-democracy). This political context makes Thailand particularly suitable for an analysis of the relationship between military factional power and coups d'état. A unique dataset on annual changes to military positions makes it possible to derive measures for factional strength. Moreover, the frequent occurrence of coups enables us to perform an empirical analysis of determinants of coups in a single country. Sound measures for military factional strength and the frequent occurrence of coups thus allows us to better understand the role of military faction power and make a novel contribution to the literature on military internal characteristics and coups d'état.

We hypothesize that the greater the number of high-level positions controlled by a faction within the army, the greater their extent of power and the larger the likelihood of that fraction carrying out a coup. As noted by Böhmelt et al. (2018) trust-based relationships among military officers enable within-group coordination and dissemination of information, both of which are necessary conditions for plotting and executing a coup. It is therefore a plausible assumption that, as individuals from a faction take up an increasing number of senior positions within the military, they are increasingly well-positioned to plan, execute, and succeed in overthrowing existing political leaders, regardless of whether it is civilian or military in nature. It is important to note the direction in the relationship inherent in this hypothesis. It could be argued that coups in themselves are followed by an increase in factional strength. However, we do not believe that this is necessary the case due to four distinct mechanisms leading to a *pre-coup peak of power*; (i) A faction that has amassed enough influence within the military to take

over state power, has already reached the ultimate objective of their climb to power rendering additional control within the military a less important objective. . (ii) Following a coup, key factional members move out from military positions to executive arm positions often including those of Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior. This weakens the faction's position within the military. (iii) Another important factor is the mandatory retirement age from the military at 60. It is often only possible to reach the highest position within the military in the final years before retirement and coup makers commonly must retire from the military following the coup. (iv) possibly the most important reason for factional decline after a coup stem from the need to consolidate the military before and after a coup to prevent other factions from protecting the incumbent government. This consolidation includes a bargaining process whereby the faction preparing for a coup chose to offer key positions in the military to leaders of other factions to get their support in the run-up to the coup. The post-coup period is then marked by a division of spoils where these factions gain positions within the military in exchange for their support to the coup makers. These four factors all contribute to a process of factional within military weakening in the post-coup situation. This is consistent with a strengthened control of national politics of the same faction.

To examine the relationship between military factional strength and the likelihood of a coup, we first collect annual reshuffles in the Thai military during the period 1968-2018. We also identify eight factions that have wielded significant power over the Thai military at one time or another during the sample period. We use this information to identify individuals who belong to one of the factions and were promoted to positions at the top or senior military levels, respectively. We then compute the number of top military positions that are taken up by the faction in question as a fraction of all positions at that level. This gives us a suitable measurement of relative factional strength at the top and senior levels in the Thai military.

In the empirical analysis, we first find a highly significant and positive

relationship between military factional strength and the likelihood of a coup. This result holds when we run standard pooled regressions as well as when using penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE) for the logistic regression. Given the relatively few top leadership positions in the Thai military, we also run robustness tests in which we alternatively define military factional strength as the ratio of a faction's total number of senior military positions to the total number of positions at that level. We again find a strong and positive relationship between military factional strength and coup likelihood. As mentioned earlier, our working hypothesis is that military factional strength drives coup risk. However, a case could be made for reversed causality; where military coups result in increased factional strength. To better understand the dynamics between the two, we also run a panel least square dummy variable (LSDV) vector autoregression for coups and military factional strength. The results show that military factional strength at the top level has a significant and positive lagged effect on coups, while coups themselves do not affect subsequent factional strength. Our findings thus provide ample support for the argument that the likelihood of a coup is strongly related to a faction's relative inside military strength.

This study contributes to a larger strand of literature that examines determinants of coups d'état, and, more importantly, to a small but burgeoning and important part of that literature on within military dynamics. We believe that our findings are relevant for understanding the consequences of one of the most crucial parts of the inner workings of the military, namely factional power concentration. As we discuss in the concluding remarks, military interventions are common in both civil and military-ruled societies, and the limited understanding we have of the mechanisms behind coups is still confined to more general cross-country studies. More specifically, this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first empirical study that examines the role of military factional power and coups d'état using data on a single country.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. The following section provides an analysis of the Thai institutional context. It discusses the country's frequent military coups, career paths, and positions in the Thai military. Section 3 introduces the empirical framework by introducing the data that has been collected, the empirical model, variables, and descriptive statistics. Section 4 then presents the empirical results. It begins with a conceptual understanding of how fractional strength within the military relates to coup likelihood. It then examines the relationship between top military leadership and coups as well as the senior military leadership and coup likelihood. It ends with an analysis of the relationship of military factional strength and coup likelihood from a dynamic time-varying perspective. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study.

2 Institutional Context

2.1 The Dynamics of Thailand's Coup Culture

Military takeovers of power have played a central role in Thai politics for almost a century, often seen in terms of a distinctive "coup culture". It is evident that substantial sections of the Thai political, economic and technocratic elite, have not embraced a democratic culture similar to other countries in the region, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. As Farrelly (2013) notes, the distinctive coup culture that has evolved in Thailand could be considered one of, if not the most important contribution to comparative studies on military intervention as a challenge to existing political leadership.

The coup culture is further reinforced by the close relationship between the military and the royal institution. While the military serves to reinforce royalism, the palace commonly also lends legitimacy to military power grabs (Chambers and Waitoolkiat, 2016). A popular view of the reoccurring military coups taking place in Thailand is that they are not

primarily driven by economic or security reasons. For example, Neher (1992) claims that they are instead ad hoc events that come about because of the complex interplay between various groups within the Thai elite. These groups are composed of royals, politicians and bureaucrats, business leaders, and commanding officers from the military. As Farrelly (2013) states, this leads to an apparent lack of pattern that has frustrated scholars seeking to understand the nature of Thailand's coup culture throughout the years. McCargo (2005) similarly notes that it has long been difficult to classify the Thai political order. However, seemingly random coup events are possible to understand and a closer examination of the history of coups in Thailand can assist in this understanding, and perhaps even help predict future coup attempts.

The first modern coup attempt in Thailand took place in 1912, two years after the death of popular King Chulalongkorn (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014). The rebellion led by a group of security officials was unsuccessful but came to serve as a preamble to the 1932 revolution during which a coup against the monarchy was initiated by mid-level commanding officers. The coups d'état was successful and resulted in an end to the absolute monarchy in Thailand. However, the overthrow did not render the monarchy obsolete in Thai society. Instead, scholars have repeatedly argued that simply focusing too much on material interests among commanding officers and the military at large leads to a misrepresentation of Thailand's military. For example, Chambers and Waitoolkiat (2016) argue that it is important to examine the Thai military through the lens of its connection with the monarchy. What they call the monarchized military can be seen as representing a parallel state in which order centered at the palace is sustained to ensure that the military upholds its legitimacy.

Since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1932, there have been a large number of military interventions in Thai politics. Farrelly (2013) and others count up to 20 military coups and coup attempts including the 2014 coup. However, Chambers (2013) provides a more detailed account of no less than 31 events, including what he calls overt and indirect coup

attempts, in Thailand between 1932 and 2013 (32 events if we include the 2014 coup). These military interventions took place during various political regimes, including absolute monarchy (the 1932 revolution), party dictatorship, electoral democracy, deconsolidated democracy, dictatorship, and half-democracy. With such many coup events and transitions between political regimes, Thailand provides a both perplexing and highly interesting case study of coup dynamics.

2.2 The Thai Military and Positions of Power

The Royal Thai Armed Forces are composed of three main services branches: the Army, Navy, Air Force, and paramilitary forces. The Royal Thai Army has large resources as it controls a majority of the country's defense budget. It is also in the possession of large landholdings. It has been estimated that the Royal Thai Army owns more land than the Crown Property Bureau, the administrative agency that manages land and other property holdings on behalf of the king of Thailand (Naknoi, 2021). In addition, it contains many troops, including around 100,000 new conscripts each year (Hookway, 2019).

The Thai military has a limited experience of battle beyond border skirmishes with neighboring countries, support to US wars in the Asia Pacific, and suppression of domestic insurgencies. The Army has a long history of interfering in both politics and business (Chambers and Waitoolkiat, 2017). At the same time, recent decades have seen an increased professionalization of the Armed Forces and a scaling back of some of the military's illicit business interests.

While the formally highest position within the Armed Forces is the Chief of the Defense forces, the most powerful position is the Commander in Chief of the Army. This stems from the Army Commander having ultimate control of the line of command over the forces able to take swift control over the center of power in the capital Bangkok. Any coup in Thailand

involves the rapid mobilization of infantry and mechanized units within the First Army region, many of which are stationed within or in proximity to the Bangkok city limits. From this follows those key positions beyond the Commander in Chief of the Army is his deputies and the commander of the First Army Region.

Command over the second, third and fourth army regions covering the provincial areas in the northeast, north, and south, respectively, does not have any major importance for the ability to launch a coup. The same holds for specialized units or any positions within the Navy or Air Force.

Based on this, we arrive on the shortlist of key positions defined as the Army Commander and his deputies and those in the Army's top command as well as commanders of the First Army Region.

3 Assessing Empirical Effects

Examining the relationship between military factional strength and coups d'état requires data from several different sources. For data on military reshuffles, we draw on information on annual reshuffles of commanding officers in the Thai Military that is made public in the Royal Gazette. We build thus build a unique database on military reshuffles in Thailand by manually collecting information on commanding officers taking up new positions during 1968-2018. We also need data on coup events and therefore collect that from various sources and in particular Chambers' (2013) detailed study on the Thai military and police. We also include a set of control variables, for which we collect data from the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund. The following sections explain the data and the variables in detail.

3.1 The Dependent Variable: Military Coups

The data on coups d'état come from Chambers (2013). Short descriptions of the coup events that are included in the empirical analysis can be found in Table 1. We select the coups to include in the analysis based on the actual mobilization of military forces to bring about a takeover of political power. We do not include the behind-the-scenes regime change brought about through so-called silent coups or judicial coups. In these, influential elite groups force about the fall of a government and take power by using extraordinary means including parliamentary actions or judicial involvement. These events commonly also involve the action of key military commanders extending threats, but not any actual use of force.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

3.2 The Main Explanatory Variable: Factional Strength

To construct a suitable measure for factional strength, we first collect annual reshuffles of commanding officers within the Thai military. Commanding officers taking up new military positions are made public in the Royal Thai Government Gazette, commonly abbreviated to the Royal Gazette. It is the public journal and newspaper of record and as such serves as an important channel for various types of official announcements. First issued back in 1858, it is the first Thai-language newspaper ever published and one of the oldest newspapers still in existence in Asia.

We collect announcements of new positions of commanding officers during the period 1968-2018. To construct measures for factional strength, we identify eight major military factions that were active during the sample period. These eight factions are presented in Table 2. We identify all commanding officers at the senior and top levels who belong to one of the factions. We then construct an index for each faction by taking the ratio of the number of

members in that faction over the total number of positions at the senior- or top-level, respectively. We do this for each year, which gives us a time series for the measure of factional strength for each of the eight major military factions.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Early Thai military factions were centered around single strongmen and were not institutionalized but were rather small groups at the very highest ranks of the Army. The most important factions of this character were the Soi Ratchakru group centered around Phin Choonhavan formed in the 1940s and the 1950s to 1970s Sisao Thewes faction formed around General Sarit Thanarat.

Later decades saw the emergence of more institutionalized factions with larger membership. These did not rely on a single strongman but were rather formed among pre-cadets of each class at the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School, among Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy classes, or when serving together in the early stages of the military careers. As these factions were more institutionalized, they were more stable over time. Increased stability also made the factions more effective organizational bases for carrying out military power grabs.

One example of how these institutionalized factions reinforced the Thai pattern of recurring coups, is the 1991 coup against the Chatichai Choonhavan government. General Chatchai served as a civilian, elected Prime Minister, but his government was plagued by conflict between members of Class 5 and Class 7 from the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy. The factions exerted control over different parts of the government and military and the factional conflict led to the eventual coup on 23 February 1991.

Another example of a highly stable faction is the still dominant Buraphaphayak

grouping. This was formed by junior officers serving at the Queen's Guard of the 2nd Infantry Division in areas to the east of Bangkok. This group has been central in the two most recent coups, in 2006 and 2014. More recently it has seen its influence wane as more and more key positions have been taken over by the Wongthewan faction with strong connections with the Royal Palace. Wongthewan is a faction among officers that have served at the King's Guard of the 1st Infantry Division in Bangkok.

3.3 Model Specification

To measure the relationship between military factional strength and the likelihood of a coup d'état, we use a logistic regression model with coup likelihood as the dependent variable. Since we are working with a panel dataset, we first ran a panel logistic regression estimation. However, the panel-level variance component turned out to be unimportant, which means that the panel estimator does not differ from a standard pooled estimator. We, therefore, estimated pooled regressions with robust standard errors for the different model specifications. It has been argued that using conventional logistic regressions for data characterized by rare events may result in misleading results (King and Zeng, 2001). Various solutions to this potential problem have been suggested, including exact logistic regression, a bias correction method, and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE). Leitgöb performs comprehensive tests on the modeling of rare events using maximum likelihood-based logistic regression estimations and finds that PMLE performs better than alternatives. Based on this, we complement the baseline pooled logistic regressions with PMLE regressions using the approach developed by Firth (1993) to account for the fact that the dependent variable in our analysis can be classified as a rare event. Finally, to better understand the intertemporal relationship between military factions and coups, we also estimate a panel vector autoregressive (VAR) model.

In the logistic regressions, we control for several additional factors that are likely

to have an impact on the likelihood of a coup d'état. Previous research on coups has argued that regime types may have an impact on the likelihood and outcome of a coup. A democratic government could have stronger claims to power based on the legitimacy stemming from popular support from the electorate, making it more difficult to build support from within the military for a coup (Lindberg and Clark, 2008; Schiel, 2019). There is also a possibility of an opposite relationship. For example, Pilster and Böhmelt (2012) discuss how democracies are less likely to build up protection against coups. In a similar vein, Geddes (2009) notes that less repressive political systems like electoral democracies make it safer to plot and coordinate a coup. These arguments would suggest that there could be a positive relationship between democracy and the likelihood of a coup. The relationship between democracy and the likelihood of a coup thus needs to be examined empirically and we include a dummy variable *electoral democracy* that takes the value of 1 when the country is governed by democratically elected leaders and 0 otherwise. An autocratic rule can also be directly related to coup likelihood. Dictatorships need actual or potential repression to remain in power, making them reliant on support from the military and thus vulnerable to a potential deterioration of that support. As Geddes (2009) notes, dictators from more professionalized militaries use authoritarian institutions that result in power-sharing or rotation among their military rivals as the best survival strategy. However, this is often challenging and military autocrats tend to be vulnerable to new military interventions. To take this into account, we include a dummy variable *dictatorship* that takes the value of 1 when the political regime is characterized as a dictatorship and 0 otherwise. A previous history of military coups may also affect the likelihood that a new coup will occur. Previous empirical studies have identified a significant relationship between previous and subsequent coups (e.g., Putnam, 1967; O'Kane, 1981; Londregan and Poole, 1990; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1992; Powell, 2012). Londregan and Pool (1990) have referred to this as the "coup trap". To consider the potential impact of previous coups, we include a dummy

recent military coup that takes the value of 1 if there has been a coup with the previous three years and 0 otherwise.

One important determinant of military coups that has been found in several studies is economic conditions and development. Böhmelt et al. (2018) note that positive economic conditions raise the legitimacy of the ruling regime, which in turn makes it less likely that there will be support for an irregular change in government. Along with that reasoning, studies have shown that coups are more likely to occur in poorer countries (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler, 2007; Londregan and Poole, 1990). Moreover, sudden sharp economic downturns or crises have also been shown to increase the likelihood of a coup (De Bruin, 2018). For example, Galetovic and Sanhueza (2000) find a significant link between economic recession and the likelihood of a coup. To control for the level of economic development and change, we include a lagged *log GDP/capita* and the *change in GDP/capita* as control variables.

Finally, we must not ignore the role of military spending. A number of studies have examined the link between military budget and coups (e.g., Zuk and Thompson, 1982; Collier and Hoeffler, 2007; Bove and Nisticò, 2014; Leon, 2014). It has long been argued that military budgets are well known to cause conflict between military and political leaders ultimately acting as a driver of coups (see early work by, e.g., Thompson, 1975; Nordlinger, 1977). To control for the potential effect of military budgets, we follow the literature and include a variable for the *change in military expenditure*. (e.g., De Bruin, 2018).

3.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent and explanatory variables. We have a total of 51 annual observations. Military coups are classified as events if the faction in question were part of the coup and top and senior military leadership for each faction. This means that we have a total of 408 observations for dependent and main explanatory variables. Military

coups for each faction are rare events, with a low average of 0.022 and a high standard deviation for the coup dummy variable. The indices that measure the top and senior factional strength are also low at 0.032 and 0.038, respectively. This is to be expected as most factions typically are in a position of factional power for a limited period. Dictatorship and electoral democracy have a mean of 0.294 and 0.627, respectively, showing that electoral democracy has been the most common type of political regime throughout the sample period. Overall, the descriptive statistics for the variables are as expected.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

Table 4 presents a simple correlation matrix for all variables that are included in the empirical analysis. Correlation between explanatory variables is relatively modest, suggesting that the risk of multicollinearity is low. The only correlation between explanatory variables that is somewhat noticeable is that between top military leadership factional power and senior military leadership factional power, respectively. At 0.584 it may be a cause for concern. However, in the empirical analysis, we avoid this potential issue by estimating separate models for each of these explanatory variables.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

4 Empirical Results

4.1 An Overview of Military Factional Strength and Coups

In this section, we first introduce the relationship between the two main variables in our analysis and give a conceptual understanding of how factional strengths relate to coup likelihood. To

get a better understanding of how factional strength relates to coups, we examine the relative strength of military factions around the time of coup events. To do this, we construct two different indices. The first one is composed of the strength of the factions that carried out the coups. The second index is composed of an average of the strength of all other factions during the time of the coup event. These indices are constructed for both top and senior commanding officers in the Thai military. The new indices allow us to visualize relative factional strength at the time surrounding the coup events in our sample. For each coup, we use the two factional strength indices to examine factional strength from five years before to five years after the coup d'état.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the factional strengths for top military leaders and senior military leaders in the sample. An index level of 1 means that all positions at the top or senior level respectively are taken up by the faction in question. Looking at the figure, it is clear that the factions that carried out coups exhibited much higher levels of factional strength compared to the other factions inside the Thai military. This finding is similar for both top commanding officers and senior commanding officers. The preliminary findings also support the existence of a *pre-coup peak of power*, as the strength of factions that carried out coups begins to decrease relatively soon after coup events. In fact, their strength as measured by the number of top- and senior-level positions within the military rapidly deteriorates to the average strength level of all factions.

These preliminary findings suggest that military factional strength is indeed positively associated with coups d'état and coup events are followed by a decrease in the influence factions that carry out coups wield within the military.

[FIGURE 1]

4.2 Top-Level Military Factional Strength and Coups

Table 5 shows the results of two model specifications we use to examine the relationship between top-leader military factional strength and coups d'état. In the first specification, we only include the main explanatory variable (top leadership) and the institutional context variables on recent military coups, dictatorship, and electoral democracy. In the second specification, we also add the economic variables log GDP/capita, change GDP/capita, and change military expenditure. The table presents the results of pooled logit regressions as well as PMLE logit regressions. All four estimations support our hypotheses and the preliminary empirical results in the previous section: the estimated coefficient on top leadership is positive and statistically significant at the 5% level. A higher concentration of factional power within the military is thus positively associated with coup events.

Several other variables are also significant predictors of military coups. The coefficient on recent military coup is positive and significant. This supports findings in previous studies on military coups and indicates the existence of "coup-traps". Dictatorship is positively associated with military coups, lending support to the argument that autocratic leaders exhibit lower levels of legitimacy and therefore are more prone to experience challenges to their regimes. As expected, a lower level of economic development is negatively related to military coups, thus supporting the argument that poorer countries are more likely to experience coups d'état. Interestingly, even though we find a negative relationship between military budgets and coups, the coefficient for military expenditure is not significant.

[TABLE 5 HERE]

4.3 Senior-level Military Factional Strength and Coups

Overall, the baseline results above provide empirical evidence in support of our argument that

military factional strength is important to understand micro-level factors that determine coups d'état. But what if these results are driven by the fact that the number of top-level commanding officer positions is so low? To look at the robustness of the initial results, and to better understand how senior commanding officers at the broader level can build up factional strength that then impacts the likelihood of coups, we continue with an analysis of senior-level rather than top-level commanding officers.

We run the same pooled logit and PMLE logit regressions as in the previous section, this time with senior-level factional strength as the main explanatory variable. The results are presented in Table 6. Like in the analysis on top military leadership, we first run models in which we only include the main explanatory variable (top leadership) and the institutional context variables (recent military coup, dictatorship, and electoral democracy). In the second specification, we then add the economic variables (log GDP/capita, change GDP/capita, and change military expenditure). As seen, all four model estimations again show that the estimated coefficient on senior-level leadership is positive and statistically significant, although the significance is somewhat weaker in the estimations where we leave out the economic variables. This finding once again supports the hypothesis that concentration of factional power within the military is positively associated with coups d'état.

In addition to the main explanatory variable senior military leadership, the same explanatory variables as in the previous section are significantly associated with military coups. The coefficient on the variable recent military coup is positive and significant in all four model estimations, again supporting previous studies and the so-called "coup-traps". The coefficient on dictatorship is again positively significant, suggesting that dictatorial regimes are characterized by less legitimacy and more likely to face regime challenges. Lower economic development is again negatively associated with coup events. Change in GDP/capita is also negatively related to coups d'état, suggesting that downturns in the economy are positively

associated with military coups. However, this variable is only significant in the pooled regression estimation. Finally, the coefficient on military expenditures is once again negative but statistically insignificant.

These second series of estimations lend further support to the hypothesis that military factional strength is closely related to coup events. The somewhat weaker relationship between factional strength at the senior level and coups d'état is not a surprise as it can be expected that factional strength at the very highest level in the military is needed for a coup attempt to be successful.

[TABLE 6 HERE]

4.4 Dynamic Relationship between Military Factional Strength and Coups

The previous sections provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that military factional strength is closely and positively related to coups d'état. However, these results do not necessarily mean that military factional strength is driving the likelihood of subsequent coups. It could be that what we are observing is a case of reverse causality. For example, coups d'état could be a way for commanding officers in leading positions to strengthen their control of the military and society. A successful coup may result in more credibility in the eyes of their peers within the military.

To further examine the relationship between military factional strength and coup events, we perform a time series analysis on the two variables. More specifically, we estimate a panel least-square dummy variable vector autoregression (LSDV-VAR). In this, we allow for lagged variables of both variables to affect current military factional strength and military coup, respectively. To shed light on how past events affect current ones, we include five lags for the two variables. The estimation results are presented in Table 7. If we look at the first column,

we find that military coups in the past are a significant determinant of future coups as the fourth lag is positive and highly significant. This is an expected result as our previous logit regressions have identified a positive relationship between previous coups and the likelihood that a coup d'état will take place. More importantly, lagged military factional strength at the top level is significantly related to coup events. The relationship between lagged top leaders and military coups is positive for all lags except the fourth. Both the second and fifth lags are positive and significant at the 1% level. These results suggest that military factional strength is a determining factor for future coup events.

How about military factional strength? Is it affected by coup events? To answer this question, we look at the results in the second column where factional strength at the top level is the dependent variable. The first lag of military factional strength is significant at the 1% level, suggesting that influence within the military depends on the previous level of strength. If we instead focus on our main question, we find that the coefficients on lagged values of military coups are very small and far from statistically significant. These results suggest that military coups do not drive a significant change in military factional strength. Taken together, the findings in this section support the hypothesis that it is the build-up of military factional strength that increases the likelihood of a future coup d'état, not the other way around.

[TABLE 7 HERE]

5 Concluding Remarks

Is military factional strength positively associated with coups d'état? And if so, is it factional strength that determines coups d'état? In this paper, we investigate this relationship using new measures of factional strength drawn from a unique dataset that we collected on annual shuffles of commanding officers in the Thai military. We posit that Thailand constitutes a particularly

suitable case study as it allows us not only to collect comprehensive data on military promotions. Since the early 1930s, Thailand has also experienced frequent coup attempts, both under dictatorship and electoral democracy. Using this institutional context as the basis for our empirical analysis, we provide evidence in support of the hypothesis that the likelihood of coups d'état is positively linked to the relative strength of military factions. Using time series analysis, we also show that this relationship is unidirectional, with military factional strength driving coups d'état.

Macro-level economic determinants of coups d'état such as the level of economic development, recent economic growth, and political and geopolitical determinants such as type of political regime, coup history, coups in the nearby regions, etc., are common features in the literature on military coups. When examining military-linked features, researchers often focus on the military budget and the role it plays in the decision by military leaders to instigate an attempt to bring about regime change. Intra-military factors are so far severely under-researched, even though there is a small emerging literature on this subject (e.g., Böhmelt et al, 2018). We believe this paper makes an important contribution to this strand of literature as it sheds light on factional strength and coups d'état, a hitherto unexplored area of research.

Our findings suggest several areas of future inquiry. One natural question is if there are breakpoints in terms of factional strength at which the likelihood of a coup drastically changes. If so, a study of such breakpoints could make important contributions to the literature on counterbalancing or coup-proofing (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Quinlivan, 1999; Belkin and Schofer, 2005; Powell, 2012; Böhmelt and Pilster, 2015). Another area of research is that of factional power across levels within the military. In this study, we focused on senior and top military positions. Factional strength may play out at more levels and that strength at the, for example, middle, senior, and top levels interact and influence the impact factional strength has on the likelihood of coups d'état. A third area of potential future research is how factional

strength interacts with other determining factors. While the focus on one country allowed us to extract detailed information on military factions, it did not leave room for a much broader set of explanatory variables. This data limitation could be mitigated by using a cross-country panel if such was made available. Finally, we believe there is merit in going deeper into the inner workings of military factions and examining how their interactions affect outcomes such as coups d'état.

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Table 1. Coup Events in Thailand 1968-2018

Year	Date	Regime Type	Events
1976	October 6	Electoral democracy	Following a massacre of university students in Bangkok, Admiral Sangad Chaloryu led a coup that brought a reactionary and anti-communist regime to power.
1977	October 20	Dictatorship	Following the coup in 1976, Admiral Sangad Chaloryu led a second coup, this time against the reactionary regime of Thanin Kraivixien. The coup brought General Kriangsak Chamanand to power.
1981	August 1	Half-democracy	The military faction called the "Young Turks" and General Sant Chitpatima attempted a coup against Prime Minister Prem Tinasulanonda. The coup attempt failed after heavy fighting in Bangkok
1985	September 9	Half-democracy	Elements of the military faction the "Young Turks", including Colonel Manoon Rupkachorn, attempted another coup against Prime Minister Prem Tinasulanonda. The coup attempt quickly failed.
1991	February 23	Electoral democracy	Generals Sunthorn Kongsompong and Suchinda Kraprayoon led a successful coup against Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. Anand Panyarachun was appointed new Prime Minister; a new constitution was promulgated and elections were scheduled for the following year.
2006	September 19	Electoral democracy	After a year-long political crisis, General Sonthi Boonyratglin led a royalist coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. It was widely reported that General Prem Tinsulanonda, Chairman of the Privy Council, was the mastermind of the coup. Elections were canceled and martial law was introduced.
2014	May 22	Electoral democracy	After six months of political crisis the Royal Thai Armed Forces, led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Commander of the Royal Thai Army, launched a coup d'état against the caretaker government.

Table 2. Thai Military Factions

Military Faction Name	Faction Membership Formation	Key Members	Coups
Soi Ratchakru	Family relations and patronage links with Phin	Phin Choonhavan	1947
Sisao Thewes	Patronage links with Sarit	Sarit Thanarat	1957
Chulachomklao Class 5	Studying at Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy Class 5	Suchinda Kraprayoon	1992
Chulachomklao Class 7 "Young Turks"	Studying at Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy Class 7	Manoonkrit Roop-kachorn	1981 and 1985
Chulachomklao Class 12	Studying at Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy Class 12	Surayuth Chulanond	2006
Pre Cadet Class 10	Studying at Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School Class 10	Thaksin Shinawatra	-
Wongthewan	Serving at 1st King's Own Bodyguard Regiment or 1st Army Division, King's Guard	Apirat Kongsompong	-
Buraphaphayak	Serving at 2nd Infantry Division, Queen's Guard	Prayuth Chan-ocha	2006 and 2014

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	Observations	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Military Coup	408	0.022	0.147	0	1
Top Leadership	408	0.032	0.090	0	0.400
Senior Leadership	408	0.038	0.096	0	0.571
Dictatorship	51	0.294	0.460	0	1
Electoral Democracy	51	0.627	0.488	0	1
Recent Military Coup	51	0.373	0.488	0	1
Log GDP	51	7.792	0.647	6.673	8.721
Change GDP per capita	51	4.231	3.442	-8.741	11.336
Change Military Expenditure	51	0.052	0.100	-0.211	0.286

Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Table 4. Correlation

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Military Coup	1.000								
(2) Top Leadership	0.132	1.000							
(3) Senior Leadership	0.040	0.584	1.000						
(4) Dictatorship	0.159	0.082	-0.059	1.000					
(5) Electoral Democracy	-0.057	0.081	0.203	-0.126	1.000				
(6) Recent Military Coup	0.160	-0.036	-0.125	0.304	-0.413	1.000			
(7) Log GDP	-0.038	0.196	0.244	0.131	0.497	-0.070	1.000		
(8) Change GDP per capita	0.004	-0.040	-0.065	0.038	0.017	0.073	-0.213	1.000	
(9) Change Military Expenditure	0.038	-0.034	-0.164	0.158	-0.472	0.293	-0.323	0.103	1.000

Table 5. The Relationship between Military Coups and Top Military Leadership

	Pooled Logit Regression		PMLE Logit Regression	
	1	2	3	4
Top Leadership	4.550**	6.996**	4.544**	6.351**
	(2.280)	(3.180)	(2.152)	(2.526)
Recent military coup	2.110*	4.081***	1.744**	2.923**
	(1.252)	(1.302)	(0.935)	(1.363)
Dictatorship	1.472*	3.057***	1.338*	2.217**
	(0.873)	(0.905)	(0.787)	(1.072)
Electoral Democracy	-0.363	-0.299	-0.335	0.013
	(0.767)	(0.747)	(0.682)	(0.770)
log GDP/capita		-2.585**		-1.955**
		(1.117)		(0.916)
Change GDP/capita		-0.376**		-0.283
		(0.151)		(0.180)
Change military expenditure		-5.534		-3.355
		(4.964)		(5.377)
Constant	-6.063***	12.890	-5.438***	9.403
	(1.186)	(8.123)	(0.956)	(6.542)
Pseudo log likelihood	-33.855	-29.975		
Penalized likelihood			-32.876	-28.497
Wald chi-square	30.15	25.64	15.51	13.58
Prob > chi-square	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.059
Pseudo R2	0.217	0.307		
Observations	408	408	408	408

Table 6. The Relationship between Military Coups and Senior Military Leadership

	Pooled Logit Regression		PMLE Logit Regression	
	1	2	3	4
Senior Leadership	4.330*	6.801***	4.778*	6.482**
	(2.587)	(2.624)	(2.688)	(3.030)
Recent military coup	2.190*	3.907***	1.805*	2.823**
	(1.307)	(1.262)	(0.946)	(1.259)
Dictatorship	1.653*	3.209***	1.478*	2.390**
	(0.913)	(0.965)	(0.764)	(1.046)
Electoral Democracy	-0.351	-0.37	-0.327	-0.103
	(0.729)	(0.756)	0.674	(0.751)
log GDP/capita		-2.273***		-1.738**
		(0.782)		(0.833)
Change GDP/capita		-0.328***		-0.236
		(0.126)		(0.164)
Change military expenditure		-5.462		-3.436
		(5.272)		(5.712)
Constant	-6.166***	10.545*	-5.517***	7.684
	(1.309)	(5.990)	(0.985)	(6.009)
Pseudo log likelihood	-34.749	-31.304		
Penalized likelihood			-33.965	-29.839
Wald chi-square	25.10	29.81	12.39	11.29
Prob > chi-square	0.000	0.000	0.015	0.126
Pseudo R2	0.196	0.276		
Observations	408	408	408	408

Table 7. Panel LSDV Vector Autoregression: Military Coup – Top Military Leadership

	Military Coup	Top Leadership
Top Leadership$_{t-1}$	-0.124	0.684***
	(0.121)	(0.055)
Top Leadership$_{t-2}$	0.463***	0.036
	(0.150)	(0.068)
Top Leadership$_{t-3}$	-0.074	0.005
	(0.156)	(0.070)
Top Leadership$_{t-4}$	-0.326**	0.075
	(0.157)	(0.070)
Top Leadership$_{t-5}$	0.416***	-0.060
	(0.130)	(0.058)
Military Coup$_{t-1}$	-0.046	0.012
	(0.053)	(0.024)
Military Coup$_{t-2}$	-0.059	0.013
	(0.049)	(0.022)
Military Coup$_{t-3}$	-0.093	-0.003
	(0.050)	(0.022)
Military Coup$_{t-4}$	0.146***	-0.013
	(0.049)	(0.022)
Military Coup$_{t-5}$	-0.057	-0.010
	(0.052)	(0.023)

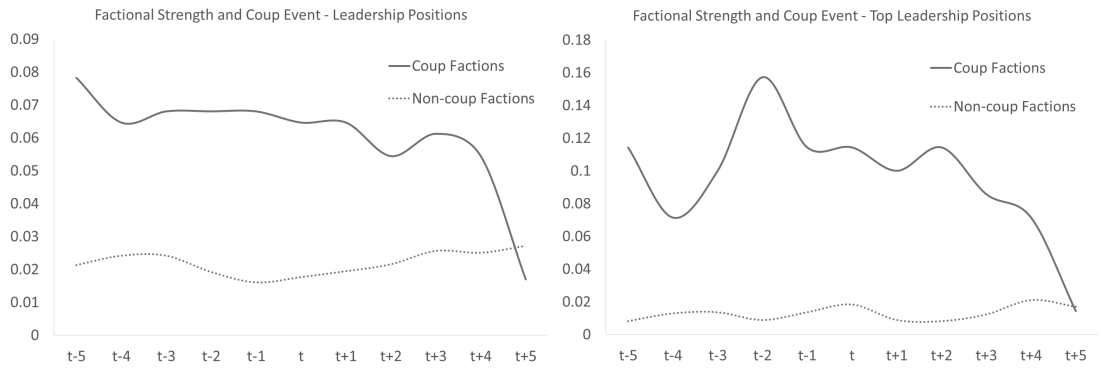

Figure 1. Temporal patterns of military factional strength. The graphs show the average relative level of factional influence in the senior and top leadership positions, respectively. Strength level 1 indicates that all positions in the senior or top positions are taken up by members of the faction in question. Coup factions are military factions that carried out a coup at time *t*, while non-coup factions are an average of the other military factions.