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## What's in a name? Experimental evidence of the coup taboo

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# What's in a name? Experimental evidence of the coup taboo

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## ABSTRACT

Leaders of military coups routinely deny that their actions amount to a coup, often labelling them as revolutions or even constitutional successions. These attempts to muddy the waters occasionally succeed in prompting discussions over whether the military's actions truly amount to a coup. But does the label matter? Does public support for military intervention decrease when it is labelled a coup? If so, how large is this “coup taboo”? In this article, we provide the first empirical evidence of the coup taboo across three large-scale survey experiments in Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia. Across all three countries, we find that the coup taboo is substantial, with support for the military hypothetically removing the president falling by 15–50 percentage points when labelled as a coup. These results underscore the importance of labels, and suggest that anti-coup norms may be superficial, decreasing support for military interventions only when labelled as coups.


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**KEYWORDS** Military; Coup d'État; Middle East; public opinion; survey experiment

## Introduction

In August 2020, Malian soldiers arrested President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and installed in his place an all-military National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP). Despite appearances, the CNSP spokesman denied that their actions amounted to a coup: “I do not agree with the use of the term ‘coup’. [...] The constitutional order is in force because the Constitution is still in force”.<sup>1</sup> In Egypt and Algeria, military leaders went even further to avoid the “coup” label. To overthrow elected President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, Egypt's General Abdelfattah al-Sisi helped to organize mass protests and then insisted his actions represented a “popular revolution”, not a coup.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, in Algeria in 2019, army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah invoked Article 102 of the country's constitution in order to declare President Abdelaziz Bouteflika unfit for office, shrouding the removal in a veneer of constitutionality.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the majority of coup leaders today deny that their actions are coups.<sup>4</sup>

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These attempts to muddy the waters often succeed in prompting discussions among journalists, policymakers, and academics about whether the military's actions truly represent a coup.<sup>5</sup> But why do coup leaders go to such great lengths to avoid the "coup" label? And do these attempts to re-frame their actions actually matter? Existing scholarship suggests that coup leaders try to muddy the waters primarily to avoid the international consequences of the coup label, such as African Union (AU) sanctions or a suspension of US military aid.<sup>6</sup> In this article by contrast, we posit that coup leaders may also be concerned about their domestic audiences.

In particular, we argue that public opinion toward the military's removal of a president fluctuates considerably by whether those actions are labelled a coup. Populations who are otherwise supportive of military intervention may balk when that action is called a coup. This "coup taboo" – or the stigma surrounding the word coup – thus adds to the international considerations to push coup leaders to legitimize their interventions as anything other than a coup.

We provide the first empirical evidence of this coup taboo through three large-scale survey experiments ( $N = 15,000$ ) in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. The three countries provide variation across a number of theoretically important characteristics, such as their history with coups, their level of development, and their ties to the West. Despite these differences, we find consistent evidence of a coup taboo across all three countries. Survey respondents were significantly less supportive of the military hypothetically "staging a coup" against a president than they were of the military "removing" a president. The coup taboo is also substantial, reducing support for the military's actions by anywhere from 15 to 50 percentage points.

Beyond providing an explanation for why coup leaders avoid the word, the coup taboo also holds a number of important implications for civil-military relations scholarship. First, the results demonstrate the existence of a substantively large anti-coup norm outside of Western countries, and outside of countries with civilian control of the armed forces. Even in countries run directly or indirectly by the military, like Egypt and Algeria, we uncover evidence that everyday citizens do view coups as normatively wrong.

However, second, the results also suggest that these global anti-coup norms may only be superficial, or "in name only".<sup>7</sup> Respondents do appear to support the military's removal of a president, just not when they are labelled a coup. That latent support provides coup leaders with some flexibility in justifying their actions in ways that avoid the coup penalty. We also do not believe that this superficial quality of anti-coup norms is limited to North Africa. We present survey data in the conclusion suggesting that it may apply in the United States as well.

## The anti-coup norm

Much of the scholarship on anti-coup norms suggest that they emerged with the end of the Cold War, the dominance of the democratic model, and their subsequent institutionalization into international and regional organizations. Since 1986, the United States Congress has routinely stipulated in its annual budget Appropriations Act that the US Government suspend military aid to "any country whose duly-elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree".<sup>8</sup> In 1991, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Santiago Commitment to Democracy, and in turn the 1992 Protocol of Washington, permitting the organization to suspend its

members after a “sudden or irregular interruption” of democratic rule, such as Honduras in 2009.<sup>9</sup> The African Union has likewise emerged as a “norm entrepreneur”<sup>10</sup> through its 2002 Constitutive Act and 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, prompting post-coup membership suspensions of Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), Egypt (2013), Burkina Faso (2015), Mali (2020 and 2021), Guinea (2021), and Sudan (2021).<sup>11</sup> For its part, the UN Security Council in the post-Cold War era has also typically condemned military coups, even reversing Haiti’s 1991 coup and restoring the elected president through a foreign military intervention in 1994. In turn, scholars have suggested that the fear of these international sanctions and suspensions might underlie both the decline in coups post-Cold War, as well as the increasing attempts by coup-makers to legitimize their takeovers to international audiences.<sup>12</sup>

Yet while foreign actors might today be strengthening anti-coup norms, they did not invent this taboo. “I have never been comfortable with the army’s involvement in politics”, wrote Iraqi Chief of Staff Taha al-Hashimi in 1936 after Hikmat Suleyman and General Bakr al-Sidqi’s coup d’état.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of global anti-coup norms likely predated these international organizations by decades. Indeed, coup scholars in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, at the height of the Cold War, were cognizant that coup leaders face enormous challenges in legitimizing their coups in the eyes of their domestic publics, suggesting that a strong domestic anti-coup norm already existed.<sup>14</sup>

However, both domestically and internationally, anti-coup norms have typically been superficial in nature.<sup>15</sup> Domestic publics and international audiences are often less critical of military interventions when they are not clear-cut, textbook definition military coups. Few criticized the Egyptian military’s removal of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 in the face of the Arab Spring uprisings. When the military two years later removed President Morsi, against the backdrop of mass protests, domestic and international audiences were divided over whether it amounted to a coup. The National Salvation Front, led by Nobel laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, argued the day after the coup that “what Egypt is witnessing now is not a military coup by any standards. It was a necessary decision that the Armed Forces’ leadership took to protect democracy”.<sup>16</sup> Activists on the ground who had consciously encouraged the military to respond to the people’s will and remove Morsi likewise had not realized at the time that that would amount to a coup: “A lot of people woke up to the fact that they participated in the coup, but didn’t understand it that way ... when they were demonstrating”.<sup>17</sup>

Such interventions, occurring with the seeming support of the public, are often viewed as the military simply facilitating a popular revolution, and hence not amounting to a coup. Even in Tunisia, when mass protests emerged to try to topple their democratically-elected government in 2013, one of the civil society leaders in the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Quartet claimed that “the army should play a role in crises”. While it should not stage a coup, it should “have helped to change the government”.<sup>18</sup> As these brief examples from Egypt and Tunisia illustrate, the anti-coup norm thus appears to be specifically and superficially about military interventions that are labelled coups, and not a broader norm against all military interventions into politics.

Coup leaders are likewise cognizant of this superficial nature of anti-coup norms. Nigerian General Ibrahim Babangida admitted that:

We could have toppled that government in 1982, before the [1983] elections. But then, we said no, because the people might go against us. [...] We waited for the right time. You see, to stage

a coup, there is one basic element that everybody looks for; there must be frustration in the society. [...] We found the coup easier when there was frustration in the land.<sup>19</sup>

Coup leaders might therefore intentionally time their removals of the president to co-occur with economic crises, mass protests, or divisive elections,<sup>20</sup> knowing that these factors may help them re-frame their coups as popular revolutions and thus avoid domestic and international criticism.

Building off of this discussion, we theorize that public opinion toward military interventions should be shaped by whether those interventions are labelled coups. If, as we argue, the anti-coup norm is only superficial, then domestic publics might generally support the military's removal of the president, but not when that same action is labelled a coup. A "coup taboo" might thus undergird public opinion toward military interventions.

### Surveys in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria

To measure the coup taboo, we conduct survey experiments in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. The three countries provide important variation in their history with military coups. Of the three, Egypt has had the most overt cases of military intervention. In 2011, the military in the face of mass protests ousted President Mubarak, and then governed the country directly in the form of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) for over a year. The Egyptian military subsequently staged another coup in July 2013, ousting the democratically-elected President Morsi, while the coup-leader, Abdelfattah Sisi, then legitimized his coup by running in elections.<sup>21</sup>

In Algeria, the military has instead pursued a more subtle approach. In 2019, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned immediately after army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah called for his removal, shrouding the coup in constitutional terms regarding the president's incapacity to govern. Subsequently, Gaid Salah emerged as the de facto power broker, but likewise eschewed a formal political position. In Tunisia, by contrast, the military has stayed far from politics. It did not seize power after protests toppled President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, and likewise ignored calls for a military coup in the summer of 2013.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these differences, we find support for our theory in all three countries. That cross-national support suggests that the coup taboo exists regardless of how their militaries have behaved in the recent past: a desire to avoid a "coup" is not simply a function of having experienced a recent military takeover, whether overt as in Egypt or more covert as in Algeria.

The three countries are also diverse in other ways. Several argue that Tunisia is an "Arab anomaly", with its modern, educated population averse to all forms of military intervention, whether framed as a coup or not.<sup>23</sup> It is thus a hard case for finding evidence of the coup taboo. Likewise, if the coup taboo has spread post-Cold War through interactions with Western democracies, then it may be difficult to find support for it in Algeria, a relatively closed country and historically more oriented toward the Soviet Union than the West. Evidence that it holds in all three countries would thus suggest that the coup taboo might generalize across a diverse set of countries.

### Survey methodology

We conducted surveys in all three countries, recruiting respondents through advertisements on Facebook. The Facebook advertisements were shown to all adult Facebook

users in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, and advertised a survey about politics in their country. Clicking on the advertisement took users out of Facebook and into Qualtrics, where they first agreed to a consent form, and then viewed the survey. Due to their low cost, Facebook ads have become an increasingly common tool for survey research in political science.<sup>24</sup>

Facebook ads boast a number of advantages for our purposes. First, they allow us to survey populations in closed, repressive countries like Egypt and Algeria. Attempting to contract a survey firm to conduct a face-to-face poll in one of these countries is likely to get shut down, and potentially put the survey enumerators at risk of arrest. Government approval, moreover, would require considerable censorship: a sensitive topic like support for a military coup would simply be out of the question. While repressive governments increasingly target public posts on Facebook, our approach only requires a respondent to click on an advertisement, not to post anything publicly.<sup>25</sup> Second, the low cost of Facebook ads allows us to generate massive samples: 15,000 respondents in total. This large sample size in turn facilitates survey experiments, permitting us to divide up each sample into several sufficiently large bins.

That said, there are also important limitations to recruiting survey samples on Facebook. Most importantly, they are not nationally representative: only 41% of Egyptians, 63% of Tunisians, and 43% of Algerians have Facebook accounts.<sup>26</sup> Those who do tend to skew younger, more urban, more male, and better educated. However, a representative sample is theoretically less important for a survey experiment: our goal in this article is not to conclude that X% of Egyptians support a coup, but instead to uncover evidence of the coup taboo, a task that random assignment of even non-representative samples achieves. Nevertheless, we demonstrate that our results are not driven by any sample biases. We show in the appendix that all results hold when sub-setting to the older, rural, female, and lesser educated respondents that we under-represent in our survey samples.

We fielded Facebook advertisements in Egypt and Tunisia between 7 July–19 August 2018, reaching 874 respondents in Tunisia and 2837 in Egypt. We then updated the survey and fielded it in Algeria from 1 April 2019 to 12 February 2020, a much longer period, reaching 11,247 Algerians. Additional details on methodology, demographics, and validation of the samples can be found in the appendix.

### *Experimental design*

Correlational approaches would be insufficient for testing the coup taboo. Even if respondents were more supportive of military interventions that they do not label as coups, we would not be able to distinguish whether the label is shaping public opinion, or public opinion is shaping the label. It may simply be that supporters of coups, cognizant of the negative connotations surrounding the word, claim that the intervention is not a coup. To show instead that the label itself can shape public opinion, we chose to implement survey experiments.

In these experiments, we randomize whether, in a hypothetical scenario, the military's removal of the president is phrased as a "coup", and then gauge respondents' level of support for that action. In Egypt and Tunisia, fielded in 2018, we asked respondents: "How appropriate would it be for someone in the military to perform the following actions?" As part of a list of actions, respondents were randomly shown either: 1. "Stage a coup" or 2. "Remove a corrupt president who is undermining the country's security". If respondents truly opposed military intervention, they should

oppose both options. If, on the other hand, anti-coup norms are only superficial, they should oppose the first but be more supportive of the second. Respondents answered each question on a 5-point scale from “very inappropriate” to “very appropriate”.

However, one limitation of the above experimental design is that the two scenarios are not perfectly parallel: if there is less support for “staging a coup” compared to “removing a corrupt president who is undermining the country’s security”, it not clear whether it is the invocation of the word “coup” that is depressing support, or if it is simply the lack of details about the target (“corrupt”, “undermining security”). In Algeria, fielded in 2019, we therefore improved upon this experimental design by adding two additional options: 1. Stage a coup against a president, 2. Remove a president, 3. Stage a coup against a corrupt president who is undermining the country’s security, or 4. Remove a corrupt president who is undermining the country’s security. The four options therefore permit a direct comparison of staging a coup and removing a president (1 v. 2) as well as both options with the additional details about the target (3 v. 4). Algerians were also randomly shown 2 out of the 4 options, permitting both between-subject and within-subject comparisons.

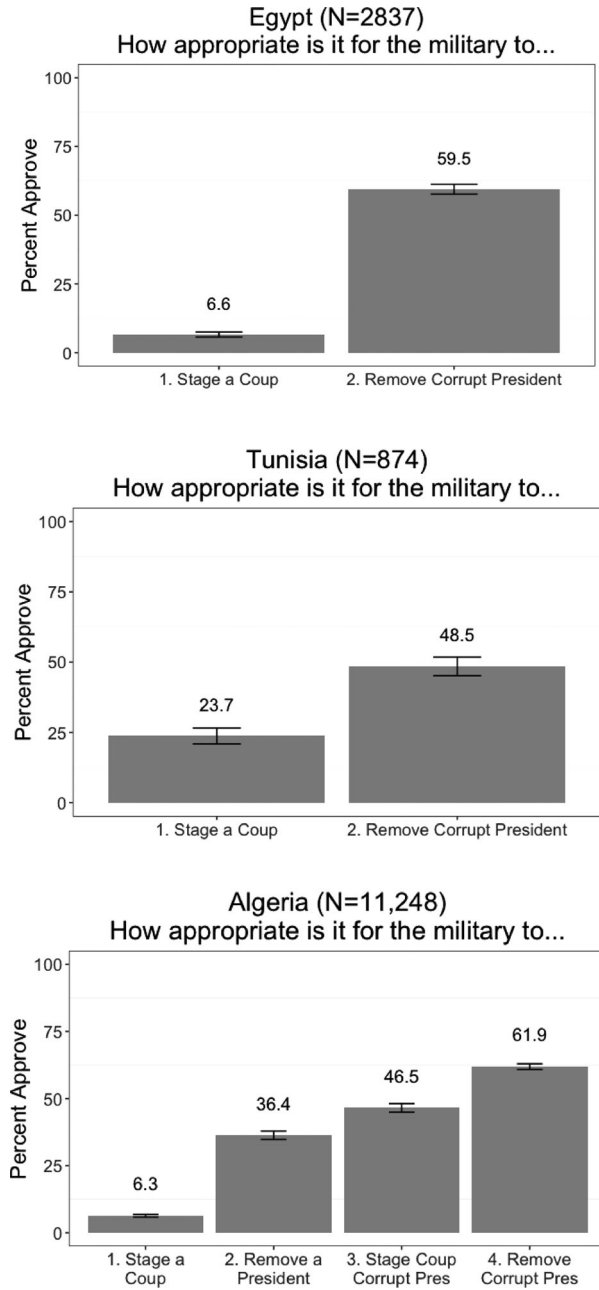
## Findings

**Figure 1** plots the percent of respondents stating that the military’s intervention would be “appropriate” or “very appropriate” in Egypt (top), Tunisia (middle), and Algeria (bottom). In all three countries, there is a massive coup taboo. In Egypt, 60% of respondents supported the military removing a corrupt president, but only 7% supported a military coup (a 53-point difference,  $p < 0.001$ ). Likewise, in Tunisia, 49% supported the military removing a corrupt president, but only 24% supported a military coup (a 25-point difference,  $p < 0.001$ ).

There is similarly a massive coup taboo in Algeria, with or without the details about the president. While 36% of respondents supported the military “removing a president”, only 6% supported “staging a coup” (30-point difference,  $p < 0.001$ ). Providing the details about the target increased support for each action, but the coup taboo remains: 62% supported removing a corrupt president, but only 46% supported staging a coup against a corrupt president (16-point difference,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In all three countries, the coup taboo holds, at roughly the same magnitude, when controlling for a variety of covariates. Demographically, we include controls for age, gender, rural, employed, education, and religiosity. We also include several variables relevant to military interventions, including level of trust in the military, knowing someone in the military, support for the president, and support for democracy. **Table 1** shows that all results hold when controlling for these covariates.

However, there may also be unobserved differences between treatment groups not captured in these control variables. To rule out this possibility, we can examine the within-subjects comparison in the Algeria survey. Among respondents who saw both “staging a coup” and “removing” a president, the average levels of support was 10% v. 37%, a 27-point difference ( $p < 0.001$ ). Likewise, among respondents who saw both “staging a coup” and “removing” a corrupt president who is undermining the country’s security, the average levels of support was 46% v. 66%, a 20-point difference ( $p < 0.001$ ). These within-subject comparisons suggest that the results in **Figure 1** and **Table 1** were not driven by some unobserved difference between treatment groups, but rather hold even among the same set of respondents.



**Figure 1.** Coup taboo in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria.

The existence of a coup taboo in our surveys does not appear to be driven by any sample biases. As previously mentioned, our online survey samples skew younger, more male, more urban, less employed, and better educated than the general population. However, in the appendix, we show that the coup taboo exists, and at a



**Table 1.** The coup taboo with controls.

	Dependent variable: support for military invention (%)							
	Egypt		Tunisia		Algeria (no details)		Algeria (with details)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Coup label	-52.90*** (1.45)	-55.93*** (1.67)	-24.78*** (3.16)	-27.24*** (4.05)	-31.01*** (0.68)	-31.49*** (0.71)	-14.33*** (1.00)	-13.43*** (1.02)
Age		5.32 (3.58)		11.19 (7.32)		2.88* (1.69)		11.11*** (2.43)
Female		3.01 (3.24)		-0.35 (5.28)		4.03*** (0.71)		4.16*** (1.02)
Rural		-1.09 (1.78)		3.17 (4.95)		-1.89** (0.95)		-0.60 (1.37)
Employed		-2.24 (1.90)		-2.03 (4.41)		-1.59** (0.79)		-1.13 (1.13)
Education		-3.48 (3.61)		0.14 (6.71)		-5.78** (2.08)		-3.21 (2.98)
Prayer		-3.42 (2.13)		-8.85* (4.65)		-0.44 (1.05)		-0.17 (1.50)
Know military		5.96*** (1.71)		12.00*** (4.31)		2.72*** (0.70)		7.44*** (1.10)
Trust military		11.61*** (3.17)		10.45 (8.92)		2.43** (1.24)		23.94*** (1.77)
Support president		-0.79 (2.66)		-20.32*** (7.24)		-8.27*** (1.27)		-24.95*** (1.82)
Support democracy		-4.67* (2.56)		-8.88 (6.59)		-1.80 (1.23)		6.90*** (1.76)
Constant	59.48*** (1.04)	56.53*** (3.71)	48.46*** (2.18)	45.75*** (10.60)	36.37*** (0.55)	38.48*** (2.06)	60.87*** (0.59)	37.66*** (2.86)
Observation	2,837	2,043	874	499	10,695	10,019	10,701	10,019
R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.37	0.07	0.13	0.16	0.17	0.02	0.06
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.37	0.06	0.11	0.16	0.17	0.02	0.06

Notes: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . For Algeria, these results represent the between-subjects design.

similar magnitude, even among the groups that our online survey under-represents: the elderly, women, rural, employed, and lesser-educated respondents. While not conclusive, these results suggest that the coup taboo may generalize beyond our survey samples to the population as a whole.

One explanation for why the coup taboo appears to be considerably larger in Egypt than Tunisia might be social desirability bias.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that there, our treatment condition of the military removing a corrupt president who is undermining the country's security might have echoed Sisi's narrative for the 2013 coup, in turn leading to inflated agreement out of fear that Sisi's regime might discover their answers. However, we do not find any other signs of social desirability bias, namely no respondents dropped out of the survey due to this question nor were they any more likely to select the neutral, middle category. However, we acknowledge that we have no way of definitively ruling out social desirability bias in this case. We instead reiterate that the effects in Tunisia suggest that a coup taboo exists, even if it might be inflated in Egypt.

Another potential limitation to these survey experiments is that respondents may not be viewing a "coup" and "removing" the president as synonyms. For some, a coup may instead entail removing the president *and* subsequently governing the country, and it may be the latter that is depressing support, not the coup label per se. We acknowledge that some respondents may hold this more expansive definition of a coup. However, other, nationally representative, surveys in these countries suggest that that expansive definition does not depress support. All three of these countries actually see a substantial degree of public support for the military governing the country. The Afrobarometer has found that 47% of Tunisians, 50% of Egyptians, and 18% of Algerians "approve" or "strongly approve" of "the army coming in to govern the country".<sup>28</sup> Our survey's low support for a coup thus does not appear to be driven by a reluctance to let the military run the country, but rather by the word "coup".

Likewise, a related possibility might be that respondents view "staging a coup" as violent, evocative of tanks and gunfire, while "removing" a president might seem more anodyne. We admit that we cannot rule out this possibility, or control for every connotation respondents may have with these two words – and indeed, that is the point: that "coups" carry baggage that delegitimize military interventions. However, we would underscore two additional points: first, that coup leaders routinely deny that their takeovers were coups (Yukawa et al 2020), even when their takeovers were purely nonviolent, suggesting that they recognize a coup taboo even when there is no bloodshed.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, we emphasize that our results still demonstrate the superficiality of anti-coup norms. For respondents to endorse the military even nonviolently removing the president is still a marked violation of civilian control. If respondents truly internalized the anti-coup norm, they would oppose both nonviolent removals and violent coups.

In short, across all three countries, we find significant support for the coup taboo. Labelling the military's actions as a "coup" appears to depress support by anywhere from 16 to 53 percentage points, depending on the country and context provided. The consistent results across these three very different countries suggest that wording indeed matters: that labelling a military intervention as a coup has profound impacts over public opinion toward it.

## Conclusion

Across surveys in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, we uncover considerable evidence of a “coup taboo”: a major reduction in public support for the military removing the president when that action is labelled a coup. These findings hold a number of important implications. First and foremost, they suggest that survey researchers should avoid the word “coup” when asking about military interventions to estimate “true” public support. At a time when public opinion researchers are increasingly studying public support for military takeovers,<sup>30</sup> our results caution that survey questions that frame coups qua coups will considerably underestimate levels of support.

Second, they suggest that militaries face considerable domestic legitimacy costs if they are unable to justify their interventions as not being coups. They thus help to explain why militaries go to such great lengths to avoid the coup label – it is not purely for international consumption, but also domestic. Even in countries where the military has directly or indirectly governed the country for decades, citizens still appear to harbour an instinctive aversion to the word “coup”.

Third, they suggest that journalists and observers may wield tremendous influence in choosing how to label a military intervention. If they choose to use the coup label, our surveys suggest it may have considerable effects on public support for the intervention. At the same time, we caution that our experiments do not examine which actors are able to credibly attach a coup label to the military’s intervention. While we might expect, for instance, that a coup label emanating from a domestic journalist may have more credibility than from a foreign one, it would be worth examining this explicitly in future research.

Fourth, our results also suggest that the public’s internalization of the anti-coup norm is only superficial, or “in name only”. Respondents *do* support the military removing the president, just not when labelled a coup. While beyond the scope of this article, we do not believe this superficial embrace of the anti-coup norm is limited to North Africa, or even the developing world. In the United States, for instance, LAPOP surveys estimate that about 25% of Americans support a “coup d’état”, explicitly, if there is a lot of crime or corruption.<sup>31</sup> While that is already relatively high, surveys find even higher support when not explicitly using the word coup. A 2015 YouGov survey, for instance, found that 43% of Americans would support “the military stepping in to take control of the federal government ... if elected leaders of the federal government began to violate the Constitution”.<sup>32</sup> The multiple calls ahead of the 2020 elections for the military to remove former President Donald Trump if he refused to accept electoral defeat<sup>33</sup> likewise suggests that for some Americans, the taboo of military intervention is only superficially a taboo on coups.

In that vein, our findings also add to a growing public discussion about whether and why the coup label matters. Over the past few years, the US saw considerable debate over whether some of the actions taken by former President Trump amounted to a coup. Erica De Bruin and Naunihal Singh, for instance, publicly argued that these are not merely arcane definitional debates, but that the wording matters for how to respond to and prevent each type of power grab.<sup>34</sup> We add to this policy discussion by suggesting that labelling – or naming and shaming – an action as a coup can have profound consequences for delegitimizing that action in the eyes of the public.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Ahmed, “There Has Been No Coup.”
2. Ketchley, *Egypt in a time of Revolution*.
3. Grewal, “Algeria’s Army Calls for President’s Removal.”
4. Yukawa, Hidaka, and Kushima, “Coups and Framing.”
5. See, e.g. recent debates over Zimbabwe (see Asuelime, “A Coup or Not a Coup”) and Bolivia (see Armario, “Did a Coup Force Morales Out?” and Fisher, “Bolivia Crisis”). See also discussions by Powell, “The Man Who Would Be King?” and Ulfelder, “Schrodinger’s Coup” on difficulties in coding earlier coups.
6. Souaré, “The African Union”; Powell, Lasley, and Schiel, “Combating Coups in Africa”; Tansey, “Fading of the Anti-Coup Norm”; Grewal and Kureshi, “How to Sell a Coup.”
7. We are indebted to Risa Brooks for this phrase.
8. Arieff, Lawson, and Chesser, “Coup-Related Restrictions.” For the original 1985 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, see 99 Stat 1305, Section 513. In more recent Consolidated Appropriations Acts, the relevant section is 7008.
9. Tansey, “Fading of the Anti-Coup Norm,” 146–7.
10. Souaré, “The African Union.” See also Onwumehili, *African Democratization and Military Coups*; Ikome, “Good Coups and Bad Coups”; Williams, “From Non-Intervention to Non-Indifference”; Witt, “Convergence on Whose Terms?”
11. Tansey, “Fading of the Anti-Coup Norm,” 148.
12. Souaré, “The African Union”; Powell et al., “Combating Coups in Africa”; Grewal and Kureshi, “How to Sell a Coup”; Yukawa et al., “Coups and Framing.”
13. Hashimi, *Mudhakarāt Taha al-Hashimi*, 138.
14. Finer, *Man on Horseback*; Roberts, “Civil Resistance to Military Coups”; Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*; Luttwak, *Coup d’état*; Be’eri, “Waning of the Military Coup”; Wiking, *Military Coups in Sub-Saharan Africa*; Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics*.
15. For the international community’s inconsistent responses to coups, see Tansey, “Fading of the Anti-Coup Norm” and “Lowest Common Denominator Norm Institutionalization.”
16. Quoted in Ahram Online, “Egypt’s National Salvation Front.”
17. Interview with anonymous activist, 10 September 2020.
18. Interview with Tunisian “Quartet” leader, 30 June 2020.
19. Quoted in Siollun, *Soldiers of Fortune*, 2.
20. Coups indeed are more likely to occur during these events. See Londregan and Poole, “Poverty, the Coup Trap”; Seligson and Carrion, “Political Support, Political Skepticism, and Political Stability”; Belkin and Schofer, “Toward a Structural Understanding”; Powell, “Determinants of Coups d’état”; Whitehouse, “The Force of Action”; Casper and Tyson, “Popular Protest and Elite Coordination”; Singh, *Seizing Power*, 45; Kinney, “Politicians at Arms” and “Sharing Saddles.”
21. Grewal and Kureshi, “How to Sell a Coup.”
22. Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism”; Brooks, “Abandoned at the Palace”; Grewal, “A Quiet Revolution.”
23. See, e.g. Masri, *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly*.
24. Cassese et al., “Socially-Mediated Internet Surveys”; Samuels and Zucco, “Power of Partisanship in Brazil”; Boas, Christenson, and Glick, “Recruiting Large Online Samples”; Sances, “Ideology and Vote Choice”; and Guiler, “From Prison to Parliament.”
25. There are important ethical questions about the data Facebook gathers on its users. Because our study is conducted in Qualtrics, all Facebook learns is whether users engaged with or clicked on the advertisement. Facebook does not learn their answers to the survey.
26. See: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>.
27. We thank one anonymous reviewer for raising this possibility.
28. For Egypt and Algeria, see Afrobarometer Round 5; for Tunisia, Round 6: <https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>.
29. See De Bruin, “Will There Be Blood?” for an analysis of when coups are more likely to have bloodshed.

30. E.g. Zechmeister, “Should We Be Alarmed?”; Feierherd, Lupu and Stokes, “A Significant Minority of Americans.” Assessing support for the military in general might also be a sensitive topic: see Koehler, Grewal, and Albrecht, “Who Fakes Support?”
31. Feierherd et al., “A Significant Minority of Americans” and Zechmeister, “Should We Be Alarmed?”
32. Moore, “Could a Coup Really Happen?”
33. Nagl and Yingling, “... All Enemies, Foreign and Domestic” and Crosbie, “Six Scenarios for Military Intervention.”
34. For examples on how to prevent coups, see De Bruin, “Trump Is Not Attempting a ‘Coup’” and Harkness, *When Soldiers Rebel*.

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