

COVERT ACTION, DEMOCRATIC PEACE, AND THE COLD WAR

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Abstract

Is the practice of *covert foreign regime change* by one democracy against another consistent with theories of democratic peace (DP)? Critics (and some proponents) of DP argue that instances of such covert action contradict democratic peace theory, whereas defenders have come up with a variety of reasons for why covert intervention is consistent with DP. Existing analyses, however, have failed to acknowledge that there are multiple democratic peace *theories*, and that inter-democratic covert action might have different implications for different theories. In this paper, we first distill hypotheses regarding covert foreign regime change from different norms and institutions theories of DP. Relying primarily on declassified government documents, we then investigate these hypotheses in the context of two cases of U.S. covert intervention in the Cold War: Guatemala (1954), and Chile (1970-73). The evidence suggests that covert action is highly inconsistent with norms and checks-and-balances theories of DP. American policymakers perceived these two countries to be democratic, but intervened anyway; intervention was covert because of international reputational reasons rather than domestic constraints; and these operations conspicuously did not spread democracy. Selectorate theory—based in leaders' accountability to a large constituency and the incentives this creates to provide successful public policy—performs better, but American presidents persisted in covert interventions in these cases even though the likelihood of failure was high and the probability of American involvement being revealed contingent upon failure was also high. Why democratic leaders would gamble on risky actions when policy failure was sure to be revealed is an important question for the theory. Given that leaders were acting to prevent the spread of communism and Soviet influence in Guatemala and Chile, we explore the implications of our analysis for the argument that democracies do not wage preventive wars.

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INTRODUCTION

Democracies, as is now widely known, rarely if ever go to war with one another. Yet there are a number of instances in which democracies have covertly used forceful means short of war to remove elected governments from power, a phenomenon we label *covert foreign regime change*. The United States and Great Britain, for example, engineered the downfall of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1953. The United States then helped topple the Guatemalan leader Jacobo Arbenz the following year, and assisted rebels in Indonesia hoping to overthrow Sukarno in 1957-58. President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the elimination of Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister of the Congo, in 1960, although the Belgians ended up playing the more important role in his death. The United States also played an important role in the removal of Cheddi Jagan in British Guyana and Joao Goulart in Brazil in the 1960s. Most famously, perhaps, the United States attempted to prevent the Chilean socialist Salvador Allende from taking office in 1970 and later encouraged the Chilean military to depose him in 1973.

What are the implications of covert regime change by one democracy against another for theories of democratic peace? Critics like Rosato (2003, 590) argue that actions like these by one democracy against another demonstrate that democracies do not treat each other with trust and respect when their interests clash and thus offer evidence against norms-based explanations. Proponents of theories grounded in democratic institutions also point to these cases as providing ammunition against norms arguments, which predict that “democracies would not use any means, overt or covert, to subvert or overthrow another democratically elected government” (Reiter and Stam 2002, 160). Otherwise staunch defenders of democratic peace concede that “instances of American military interventions against other, weaker democratic regimes” are “among the starkest empirical anomalies for democratic peace theory” (Kinsella 2005, 455).

Yet this conclusion is far from universal. Scholars of the democratic peace have offered three reasons why covert interventions against democratic or quasi-democratic governments are consistent with democratic peace. First, they maintain that the states targeted by democracies for covert intervention were not actually democratic, and thus the restraints imposed by joint democracy did not operate. Second, DP’s defenders assert that because intervention was covert, it in fact offers evidence of democratic restraints at work: leaders were forced to pursue their interests hidden from view for fear of public disapproval of the overt use of force against another democracy. Third, advocates of DP argue that covert interventions fail to cross the threshold of 1,000 battle deaths to qualify as a war, and as a rule do not pit combat forces from the two states against one another.

In this paper, we investigate the veracity of these counterarguments and the compatibility of covert intervention with normative and institutional theories of democratic peace in the context of two cases of U.S. covert intervention in Latin America. Relying primarily on declassified government documents, we trace the decision-making processes of U.S. elites involved in coups in Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973). There is no doubt that the involvement of the United States in these cases remained well below the level of open warfare. Other aspects of these interventions, however, raise serious questions regarding the extent to which they are consistent with different theories of DP. We find, for example, that the governmental institutions of Guatemala and Chile were objectively democratic, and—more importantly—U.S. government officials *perceived* the regimes in these countries to be legitimate and democratic. Moreover, we

find little evidence that American officials feared domestic disapproval for overthrowing democratic governments. On the contrary, officials worried far more about the reaction of other states, particularly in Latin America, and the potential damage these actions could cause to the U.S.'s reputation should American involvement become publicly known. Finally, repressive dictators were installed in both Guatemala and Chile that set back the cause of democracy in these nations for years.

We conclude from this analysis that covert foreign regime change by democracies against other democracies is inconsistent with explanations of democratic peace based in liberal/democratic norms. These theories contend that democracies externalize their domestic norms of peaceful conflict resolution in their relations with other democracies, leading to relations characterized by trust and respect. It is incompatible with norms arguments for a democracy to support the violent overthrow of another democratic regime, particularly when decision-makers recognize that the target state is a democracy. Covert operations are more compatible with newer institutional arguments that emphasize how the accountability of leaders to a large selectorate causes leaders to seek public policy success abroad. The main constraint this imposes on leaders is the need for their foreign policy ventures to be victorious. Covert interventions, however, are often undertaken despite low likelihoods of success, and failed interventions—as exemplified by the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961—sometimes fail publicly and spectacularly, representing just the type of policy failure democratic leaders seek to avoid. It is also unclear why powerful democracies like the United States or Great Britain would view weak democratic states as a threat warranting intervention in the first place.

Why, then, did the United States seek to overthrow the Guatemalan and Chilean regimes? We argue that although economic motives existed, ultimately regime change in these cases was a form of preventive action to forestall the possibility that populist, leftist leaders in Guatemala and Chile would go communist. Whether these were realistic fears is debatable, but the evidence indicates that the key decision-makers viewed themselves as acting to prevent these countries from falling into the Soviet camp. This argument has interesting implications for the common view that democracies do not wage preventive wars (Schweller 1992).¹

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we define how we use the term covert action and discuss the various forms that it takes. Second, we summarize the norms and institutions explanations for democratic peace and draw out the implications of these arguments for covert action by one democracy against another. Third, we present case studies of covert regime change by the United States in Guatemala and Chile using the process-tracing method to assess the norms and institutions hypotheses. The final section summarizes our arguments and discusses their implications.

¹ Although we criticize the notion that covert foreign regime change is consistent with theories of democratic peace and argue that such are essentially cases of democracies taking forceful preventive action against other democracies, we are not opposed to covert action per se. Acting secretly is sometimes necessary for democracies to neutralize threats and maintain security, but covert interventions are in tension with democracy because they are concealed from the body politic. The immediate and long-term consequences of covertly overthrowing foreign governments have also been troubling, involving democratic support for murderous dictators. For these reasons, democratic elites should think long and hard before authorizing the use of covert methods.

COVERT ACTION, INTERVENTION, AND REGIME CHANGE

Covert action is defined by the 1991 Intelligence Authorization Act as “an activity or activities conducted by an element of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad so that the role of the United States Government is not intended to be apparent or acknowledged publicly.”² More generally, covert action is “the attempt by a government to influence events in another state or territory without revealing its involvement” (Kim 2002, 63). Covert action can include a range of activities from “efforts to overthrow certain foreign governments, and to provide others with economic and military assistance ... supporting political parties, disseminating deceptive propaganda, and organizing strikes, demonstrations, and riots ... bribery or blackmail of foreign officials, to provisions for the physical security of heads of state and others, and even (until barred by executive order) to assassination plots” (Goodman 1992, 4). Although Forsythe (1992, 385) contends that “covert interventions, by their very nature, are difficult to pinpoint in time, place, and detail,” the cases examined in this paper are well-documented. Large numbers of formerly classified documents have been released confirming and detailing much of the American role in the ouster of Arbenz and Allende. Several valuable secondary works have also appeared, and thus there is no doubt that these were indeed cases of U.S. covert action.

This paper focuses on a particular type of covert action: covert attempts by one country to overthrow the government of another, or what we call *covert foreign regime change*. These are cases in which agents of a foreign government—particularly the intelligence services, but also members of the diplomatic corps, foreign service officers, and the military—work with local actors in the target state to overthrow the leader and replace him with someone else. The aggressor rarely employs its own military forces directly against the target, instead inducing and/or assisting indigenous elements in the targeted state’s military to topple their leader; arming and sponsoring rebel forces outside the military to launch a rebellion; or hiring mercenaries to do the job. In Guatemala, for example, the CIA armed, trained, and sponsored mercenary forces under the leadership of exiled former Guatemalan army officer Carlos Castillo Armas. American pilots under contract to the CIA also bombed Guatemala City. Similarly, the CIA employed a small army of 1,500 Cuban exiles backed by American airpower to land at the Bay of Pigs to topple Fidel Castro. American pilots also bombed targets in Indonesia in support of the uprising against Sukarno in 1958.

In other cases, covert attempts to bring about regime change in a target state employ non-violent means, such as diplomatic support, cash, or anti-regime propagandizing. In South Vietnam, for example, U.S. support for the generals working to overthrow Diem in November 1963 was limited to diplomatic encouragement, especially from the U.S. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Financial support almost always plays a role in covert operations. The CIA spent millions to bankroll the Christian Democrats and keep the communists out of power in Italy in the years after World War II. Similarly, in Chile a major part of the CIA’s effort to prevent Allende from gaining the presidency and then oust him after he took office was to provide substantial funds to Chilean opposition political parties like the Christian Democrats and media outlets such as the newspaper *El Mercurio*. Finally, the intervener’s intelligence assets often invest heavily in producing and spreading anti-regime propaganda in order to turn the local

² Available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/congress/1990_cr/900803-ia.htm.

population against its leadership, sometimes going so far as to organize anti-government demonstrations or even riots. The CIA, for example, produced and disseminated large amounts of propaganda against the government of Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, as well as employing Iranians to organize demonstrations and riots in Tehran and generally foment chaos (Wilber 1954). The next year the CIA set up a phony radio station in Nicaragua (supposedly located in the Guatemalan jungle) to warn Guatemalans against the dangers of the Arbenz regime and keep them apprised of rebel progress and “victories.”

Covert foreign regime change is not promulgated by intelligence agencies run amok, however. In each of these cases, there was a decision at the presidential level to depose the targeted regime. According to the author of a new history of the CIA, for example, President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the agency to overthrow Indonesian President Sukarno on September 25, 1957 (Weiner 2007, 147). On August 18, 1960, Eisenhower issued the same order regarding Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (Weiner 2007, 162).³ Fidel Castro first became a target late in the Eisenhower administration, and his ouster became the number one priority of the Kennedy administration. Kennedy also authorized coups against Diem in Vietnam, “Papa Doc” Duvalier in Haiti, and Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, among others. In a meeting with top aides on September 15, 1970, President Nixon directed the CIA “to prevent [Chilean president-elect] Allende from coming to power or to unseat him.”⁴ Covert action to topple foreign leaders is thus a policy debated and decided at the highest levels of government, although it is not shared widely *within* the government or with the public. The short-hand terms “covert action” and “covert intervention” in this paper should be understood to refer to covert foreign regime change.

THEORIES OF DEMOCRATIC PEACE & IMPLICATIONS FOR COVERT ACTION

The democratic peace proposition maintains that democracies have never, or rarely, fought each other. Theories purporting to explain the DP generally fall into two categories depending on whether they cite norms or institutions characteristic of democracies as explanatory variables. This next two sub-sections unpack the norms model and its implications for covert intervention, while the following sections do the same for the institutions model.

THE NORMS MODEL

Normative models of democratic peace argue that democracies externalize certain domestic norms in their foreign relations, which lead to peace among democracies but can bring about conflict between democracies and non-democracies. One such norm is the norm of non-violent conflict resolution, thought to be inherent to the democratic process. It is considered illegitimate in a democracy, for example, to threaten or use violence against the political opposition. Instead, conflicts are resolved by negotiation and compromise. Parties agree to leave office when defeated in elections provided their opponents do likewise, a facet of democracy Dixon (1994) calls “contingent consent.” In their dealings with other states, “the culture, perceptions, and

³ Belgium ended up playing a larger role in Lumumba’s demise (de Witte 2001).

⁴ CIA, Memorandum, “Genesis of Project FUBELT,” September 16, 1970. See also Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms’s handwritten notes of the President’s directive. Both documents are reproduced in Kornbluh (2003).

practices that permit compromise and the peaceful resolution of conflicts without the threat of violence within countries come to apply across national boundaries toward other democratic countries” (Russett 1993, 33). Given that a democracy can expect the same diplomatic approach from fellow democracies, it is unlikely that conflicts will escalate to war.

A second norm thought by some to keep the peace among democracies is the liberal norm of respect for individual autonomy and rights. Liberal institutions are designed to protect these rights from undue infringement by the state. Just as the basic postulate of liberal theory domestically is that individuals have the right to be free from arbitrary authority, the basic postulate of liberal international theory, according to Michael Doyle, is that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention. “In short, domestically just republics, which rest on consent, presume foreign republics to be also consensual, just, and therefore deserving of accommodation” (Doyle 1996, 26). Governments that repress their citizens, however, are not deserving of trust and respect because they are at war with their own people, and liberal states may very well find themselves at war with such states.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NORMS MODEL FOR COVERT INTERVENTION

Peaceful norms of conflict resolution and non-intervention in the affairs of republics would seem to prohibit not only open warfare, but lower levels of aggressive action between democracies as well. The model predicts that democracies should be able to resolve conflicts with other democracies diplomatically via negotiations, concessions, and accommodation. In fact, Layne—in a critique leveled primarily at norms arguments—contends that “policymaking elites should refrain from making military threats against other democracies and should refrain from making preparations to carry out threats” (Layne 1996, 165). Furthermore, even small-scale aggression among democracies is unacceptable to normative explanations of the DP in two ways. First, Doyle argues that “the basic postulate of liberal international theory holds that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention” (Doyle 1996, 10). Democracies clearly violate this liberal injunction if they pursue covert action, especially against other democratic states. Second, normative theories of DP rely heavily on externalization of domestic norms. Russett points out in reference to democracies that “the same structures and behaviors that ‘we’ assume will limit our aggression, both internally and externally, may be expected similarly to limit similarly governed people in other polities” (Russett 1993, 31; see also Layne 1996, 160). Covert action against other democracies fails to respect their rights to autonomy and also fails to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner. Indeed, some DP theorists have accepted Rosato’s critique that “at least some ... American interventions are at odds with the normative logic of the theory” (Kinsella 2005, 455). The most basic prediction of the norms approach, therefore, is that democracies should not conspire to overthrow the governments of other democracies.

Counterargument 1: Target Not a Democracy. Defenders of the normative logic maintain that covert intervention by one democracy against other seemingly democratic states in the past does not contradict the norms model because the states targeted by democracies have either been non-democracies, or—at best—weak, unconsolidated democracies (Forsythe 1992, Kinsella 2005, Doyle 2005). According to Russett, for example, targets of covert action by democracies have not been “fully democratic according to the criteria that have been applied here for late twentieth-century regimes; rather, they were all anocracies” (Russett 1993, 121). Similarly,

Doyle (2005, 465) notes that while many of the regimes targeted for intervention by the U.S. during the Cold War “were more progressive and popular than any previous regime in those countries (and, in some cases, since),” that fact “did not make them well-established liberal democracies. Many U.S. officials doubted their stability as democracies.” For this reason, Russett and Doyle claim that covert action does not undermine norms explanations, which do not require democracies to refrain from aggression against non-democratic states. It follows that targets of regime change by democracies are not objectively democratic.

- Norms Hypothesis 1: If a democracy intervenes covertly to overthrow another government, the target state is not a democracy.

Scholars, of course, often disagree regarding the degree to which certain states are democratic. Arguably it is more important what the key participants themselves thought about the regime type of the target state. John Owen (1994, 1997), for instance, argues that decision-makers will only treat a foreign state in the ways predicted by democratic peace theory if they perceive it to be a democracy. A second norms hypothesis would thus stipulate that elites in the intervening states describe the target as a non-democracy, which would reinforce the assertion that “target states were not democratic enough to be trusted and respected” (Rosato 2003, 591). Evidence that decision-makers believed that the target was a democracy would undermine the argument that democracies only go after non-democracies.

- Norms Hypothesis 2: Democratic policymakers should describe targets of covert intervention as non-democratic.⁵

Counterargument 2: Internal Constraint. A second defense of the norms argument assumes the existence of some interventions by democracies against other elected governments, and seeks to explain why these interventions take the form that they do. This so-called “internal constraint” argument claims that the covert nature of the intervention is proof of DP because an overt attack on another democracy would provoke a public furor. Democratic leaders are thus acting strategically by going behind the backs of the public to avoid disapproval. According to Harvey Starr, for example, “the fact that covert operations against democracies would be roundly denounced across the political spectrum, would lead democratic leaders to hide such activities” (Starr 1997, 158; see also Kim 2002, 68). Similarly, Russett (1993, 124) argues that covert action is actually evidence of democratic processes at work: “The normative restraints of democracy were sufficient to drive the operations under-ground amid circumstances when the administration

⁵ This should be a fairly easy test for the argument given the tendency, observed by Ido Oren, for American leaders to re-define the regime types of other countries based not on their actual institutions, which may remain unchanged, but on the adversarial quality of relations with the state in question. Oren argues that judgments of democracy are determined by “normative benchmarks” rather than institutions and that “what is special about the benchmarks represented by the coding rules of ‘democracy’ is that they are American. They represent ‘our kind’” (Oren 1996, 267). He goes on to argue that “our kind” also varies over time: the United States constantly redefines itself to remain close to its friends and different from its enemies. When relations with another country take a turn for the worse, in other words, as they did with Germany in the years prior to World War I, leaders emphasize the differences rather than the similarities between us and them, inevitably assigning the new adversary to the non-democratic camp. If we fail to observe such a rhetorical shift in the face of deteriorating relations, but rather a bald-faced acknowledgement that the other state is a democracy, this would constitute especially strong evidence against the norms argument.

otherwise might well have undertaken an overt intervention.” According to these arguments, the leadership’s need to undertake intervention covertly validates the normative constraints posited by DP theorists. Liberal and democratic norms make it illegitimate to take military action against another democracy, and the public—imbued with these norms—would oppose such a move.⁶

- Norms Hypothesis 3: Democratic leaders target other democracies covertly because they fear their domestic audience opposes overt intervention.

This hypothesis, however, begs the question: if democratic norms (and institutions) force elites to act covertly against other democracies, why would leaders also act covertly against autocracies? This question raises the possibility that the decision to use clandestine action may result from pressures other than domestic constraints. For example, leaders could decide to act covertly based on international rather than domestic pressures.⁷ Policymakers may worry about the reaction of third parties to their actions. Kinzer (2006, 5), for example, argues that the presence of another superpower in the international system during the Cold War that could respond militarily to its actions explains Washington’s penchant for acting covertly. Leaders may also fear for their state’s reputation abroad should they violate norms of non-intervention in general or particular non-intervention pacts. Internal U.S. government documents reflect policymakers’ concern that revelations of American involvement in overthrowing governments in the Western hemisphere would harm the U.S. reputation in the wider world as well as in Latin America, where Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy and the Rio Pact of 1947 ruled out intervention in other states’ internal affairs. Acting covertly thus provides democratic leaders with deniability and the opportunity to preserve their reputations abroad for peaceful and upright behavior.⁸

Counterargument 3: Covert Intervention is not War. A third defense of the norms model contends that covert intervention is consistent with DP because even if the targets were democratic, the outcome of the action was not war as it is commonly defined: “these were not wars, openly fought by military units of the United States. They were low-cost operations designed to minimize public attention” (Russett 1993, 123). Russett makes it clear that in past covert operations, “American military units did not fight in an organized fashion” (Russett 1993, 123). The claim here is that regardless of what policies the U.S. pursued, in the end no large-scale war resulted; soldiers of the democratic state did not participate in any direct combat on the ground, thereby generating little risk of casualties for the democracy.

The absence of large-scale war as a result of covert intervention does not necessarily vindicate the norms model, as discussed above, because the argument stipulates that democracies are able to resolve conflicts of interest by negotiation and compromise and refrain from intervention in each others’ internal affairs. What other predictions about outcomes of covert action flow from normative explanations? Another such outcome concerns the regime type of the government that results in the target state. Since democracies respect the rights of their citizens

⁶ The checks and balances of democratic institutions would also restrict an open attack on a fellow democracy, forcing such aggression underground. We discuss this in the next section.

⁷ Kim (2002) terms this the “external constraint” argument.

⁸ If we observe democracies using covert force against democracies and non-democracies, this would undermine NH3 that there is a special prohibition in democracies against targeting other democracies.

and are peaceful in their relations with each other, the common practice of replacing an elected regime with a dictator that occurs in covert intervention also appears to challenge norms arguments. Spreading democracy in the international system also decreases the likelihood of war, so one would anticipate that the regimes installed by democratic intervention be at a minimum more democratic than their predecessors, if not full-fledged democracies. Democratic leaders know that establishing autocratic regimes will simply lead to trouble down the road since such governments are inherently aggressive. States governed by democratic institutions are peaceful towards other democracies, and thus democratic interveners should leave new democracies in their wake.

- Norms Hypothesis 4: New regimes established in the wake of democratic covert intervention should at a minimum be more democratic than their predecessors, and at a maximum be full democracies.⁹

Norms arguments for democratic peace imply that covert action by a democracy should occur only if the target of intervention is non-democratic. Furthermore, if an intervention against a democratic target should for some reason take place, it should be concealed because of the fear that leaders' domestic audiences disapprove of intervening against other democracies. Covert interventions should also bring to power a democratic regime. We turn in the next section to the implications for covert action of institutional arguments.

INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Institutional explanations for democratic peace look at facets of democratic structures for answers to the puzzle of inter-democratic peace.

Checks and Balances. The first wave of institutional explanations, which was popular through the mid-1990s, argued that democracies were constrained from pursuing wars against other democracies by features of democratic government, such as checks and balances, separation of powers, transparency, and the need to enlist the support of the public. These institutional facets of democracy make preparing for war a complex, laborious, and time-consuming process "as the leaders of various institutions are convinced and formal approval is obtained" (Russett 1993). The mobilization process is not only slow but also very public, ensuring that other states will not fear a surprise attack by a democracy. Thus, if two democracies experience a clash of interests, there should be plenty of time to resolve the dispute via negotiations since neither country can quickly or secretly resort to force (Rosato 2003).

Selectorate Theory. A second wave of theorizing about the institutional sources of democratic peace de-emphasizes veto points and slow mobilization in favor of leaders' accountability to the public. In democracies, the portion of the citizenry that participates in selecting national leaders in elections is typically very large, too large for any leader to reward each individual who votes for him with money, property, or some other private benefit. Leaders

⁹ Owing to space constraints, we omit discussion of another hypothesis: that covert intervention by democracies should not result in widespread violence against civilians within the target state. Large-scale persecution, detention, torture, disappearances, or murder of civilians are incompatible with liberal and democratic values (Rummel 1995; Harff 2003; Merom 2003; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay 2004; Downes 2006).

must rely on delivering public policy successes to keep their supporters happy and prevent them from defecting to an opposition party or candidate. In non-democracies, by contrast, the absence of elections or legislative processes means that the number of people whose support is required to keep the leader in power is quite small, making it possible to buy them off with private goods. Policy success is thus not very important for autocratic leaders to remain in power. These institutional incentives have consequences for foreign policy. Losing a war—or fighting a costly, stalemated war—is a public policy failure that sharply increases leaders' risk of losing office. To avoid the possibility of this outcome, democratic leaders exercise extreme caution in the sorts of wars they initiate, choosing only those conflicts they believe they are likely to win. Moreover, once engaged in a military conflict, leaders in democracies pour greater resources into the war to ensure that they prevail. Given that democracies invest large amounts of resources and are highly selective in choosing their targets, democracies avoid picking fights with other democracies because each knows that the resulting war is likely to be costly and victory is by no means guaranteed (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, 2003).

IMPLICATIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES FOR COVERT ACTION

Checks and Balances. The ability of democracies to act covertly to overthrow other democratic governments violates institutional constraint arguments that emphasize checks and balances and separation of powers. These arguments assume that decisions for war are made openly and the executive must therefore gain the backing of much of the public. Acknowledging that presidents and prime ministers can act in secret, though, is to admit that democratic institutions simply do not apply in some undetermined percentage of cases. As Goodman (1992, 10) puts it, “Because covert action is secret, deceptive, and intended as deniable, it carries an inherent risk: an administration could—without the knowledge of citizens or even Congress—bypass procedures of accountability in the conduct of foreign policies and military activities.” This secrecy may be quite frequent: Weiner (2007, 180) asserts that Eisenhower ordered 170 major covert operations during his presidency, and Kennedy followed with 163 more in his three years in office.

Defenders of the checks and balances proposition might reply—similarly to the norms theorists—that democratic separation of powers is what drives interventions aimed at other democracies into the covert realm: veto players in Congress or the judiciary would block actions targeting democratic regimes.

- Checks and Balances Hypothesis 1: Leaders act covertly against other democracies to avoid the checks and balances inherent in democratic institutions.

Selectorate Theory. What does the selectorate model of democratic politics imply for covert intervention by one democracy against another? According to this argument, the peace that exists between democracies is a relatively cold peace of deterrence: since all regimes with large selectorates have incentives to fight hard in war, targeting another democracy is likely to result in a costly war. But this rule only applies when the other democracy has the ability to pour large amounts of resources into a conflict. Democracies that are small and/or poor are unable to put up much resistance and thus powerful democracies should not be deterred from targeting them overtly or covertly.

- Selectorate Hypothesis 1: Targets of covert intervention by democracies should be relatively weak states.

The selectorate theory also posits a powerful selection effect whereby fear of the policy failure of losing a war induces leaders to exercise caution when selecting which wars to fight. This implies that democratic leaders need a high threshold of confidence in victory before they will authorize intervention. This requirement is mediated in cases of covert action, however, by the possibility that failures will go undiscovered. When intervention is undertaken secretly, leaders can engage in riskier behavior because it is not certain that failed operations will become public. However, there is always a non-trivial chance that covert operations will blow up in policymakers' faces. The most famous example is the Bay of Pigs fiasco, which proved highly embarrassing to the newly-inaugurated John F. Kennedy. The potential invasion of Cuba by CIA-supported exiles, in fact, was front page news well before the operation was ever launched. During the invasion itself, the president's ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, was shown to be a liar after evidence he used to deny American involvement—a photograph of a B-26 bomber supposedly flown to Miami by a Cuban defector and used in the attack on Castro's air force—turned out to be an American aircraft. Similarly, during the American-supported uprising in Indonesia in 1958, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles each asserted publicly that the United States was not involved only to be confronted with the capture of Allen Pope, an Air Force pilot under contract with the CIA—complete with his identification—by the Indonesian military (Prados 1996, 188-91, 202, 143-44). The Iran-Contra scandal—a covert attempt to free American hostages in the Middle East by selling missiles to Tehran and funneling the proceeds to the *contras* in Nicaragua—was also quickly exposed, tarnishing Ronald Reagan's reputation and leading to the indictment and prosecution of the president's National Security Adviser. Moreover, targets of covert intervention have major incentives to publicize failed attempts by outside powers to overthrow their regimes in the hope that exposure of the nefarious plot will force the intervener to back off.

It follows that democratic leaders will authorize covert interventions if they are highly confident of success or very confident that failure will remain secret.

- Selectorate Hypothesis 2: Democratic leaders will intervene covertly if success is very likely or if failure is very likely to be undiscovered.

A third implication of the selectorate model is that rather than leaving new democracies in their wake, democratic interveners install autocracies instead. No two states have exactly the same interests. The difference between democracies and autocracies is that leaders in the former have no choice but to be responsive to the wishes of their electorates if they hope to remain in power, whereas autocrats are under no such compulsion and may act as they wish since their rule does not depend on meeting public demands. In the wake of war or intervention, the victorious state wants its defeated adversary to follow policies dictated by the intervener rather than its own preferences. In order to assure that the defeated state follows orders, democratic victors will place dictators in power who are not bound by the will of their citizens (Buono de Mesquita and Downs 2005; Morrow et al., 2006). This logic implies the following hypothesis:

- Selectorate Hypothesis 3: New regimes established in the wake of democratic covert intervention should be no more democratic than the previous regime. When the target is a democracy, the new regime will be less democratic than the preceding regime.

What is left unclear by this argument is why democracies would install the type of government they sometimes fight as opposed to the type with which they remain at peace. It is true that a pliable dictator would be more likely to implement policies compatible with the intervener's national interests, but it is also more likely that any dispute between the two countries would escalate to war. A democratic regime might be less likely to do precisely what the intervener wants, but disputes should not escalate to a level where force is threatened or used. Why a democracy would create a potential threat to its own security is not readily clear or explained.¹⁰

Finally, the selectorate model assumes that democratic leaders strive to deliver public goods to benefit the democratic majority. When acting covertly, however, leaders are not bound by this requirement because the public remains unaware of intervention while it is taking place. Given this protection from the voting public, democratic leaders can essentially act in the interest of private actors. Interventions undertaken to salvage the investments of private corporations in foreign countries, for example, would be incompatible with this view of democracy.

- Selectorate Hypothesis 4: When democratic leaders intervene covertly, they are more likely to act on behalf of private actors than when they intervene openly.

The remainder of the paper is devoted to testing these hypotheses—summarized in Table 1—in a series of case studies of covert foreign regime change in Guatemala and Chile. These cases were chosen largely because of the wealth of information that has become available about them in recent years owing to declassification of U.S. government documents. The cases also provide for variation in outcomes, as the coup in Guatemala succeeded, whereas the 1970 attempts to topple Allende failed. The norms and checks and balances hypotheses (NH3 and CBH1) regarding the domestic reasons for intervening covertly are discussed together since they make the same basic prediction. We also discuss the two hypotheses regarding the outcome of intervention (NH4 and SH3) together because one is simply the opposite of the other. Overall, the evidence contradicts norms arguments for DP. The governments overturned by the U.S. were perceived by American policymakers as democratic, there was no concern for domestic restraints when choosing to act covertly, and the regimes that took power in their aftermath were dictatorial, not democratic.¹¹ Only Allende's regime in Chile is judged as objectively democratic by political science datasets, but much evidence indicates that Guatemala was just as democratic as Chile. The selectorate model fares better: Guatemala and Chile were much weaker than the United States, and the regimes that replaced Arbenz and Allende were much more repressive. In each case the plight of private corporations helped instigate U.S. involvement, but the main reason articulated by policymakers for intervening was the threat of communism and Soviet influence in crucial

¹⁰ The answer could have to do with short- vs. long-term time horizons. Democratic leaders focus on short-term consequences, since that is what matters for their political survival. The threat created by installing a dictator in another country may only be realized over the longer term, though, and thus will be someone else's problem.

¹¹ There were also major human rights abuses in each instance.

regions. Finally, and cutting against the selectorate model, American leaders were pessimistic that these interventions would succeed *and* pessimistic that failed efforts could be kept secret.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES		
LABEL	HYPOTHESIS	TARGET SELECTION, PROCESS, OR OUTCOME HYPOTHESIS?
NH1	Targets of democratic intervention are not objectively democratic	Target Selection
NH2	Targets of democratic intervention are not perceived to be democratic by policymakers in the intervening state	Target Selection
NH3/CB1	Democracies intervene covertly against other democracies because their domestic audience or veto players in society disapproves of targeting elected regimes	Process
NH4	Covert interventions by democracies should result in a democratic regime in the target	Outcome
SH1	Democracies target relatively weak states	Target Selection
SH2	Democracies will intervene covertly if the likelihood of success is high or the probability that failure will be exposed is low	Target Selection
SH3	Democratic covert interventions will not increase the level of the democracy in the target; if the target is already a democracy, intervention will make it less democratic	Outcome
SH4	When intervening covertly, democratic leaders are more likely to provide private benefits than public goods	Process

GUATEMALA, 1953-1954: OPERATION PBSUCCESS

In the summer of 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower and his top aides decided to overthrow the left-leaning government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. The president authorized PBSUCCESS, a covert operation by the CIA to topple the Guatemalan leader in two steps. First, the CIA began a massive propaganda and psychological warfare campaign designed to convince Guatemalans—but particularly the officer corps—that the United States, as the new ambassador to Guatemala John Peurifoy put it, might have to “take some measures to prevent Guatemala from falling into the lap of international Communism. We cannot permit a Soviet republic to be established between Texas and the Panama Canal” (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 257). Second, the CIA armed and trained a small invasion force under the leadership of former Guatemalan army officer Carlos Castillo Armas and provided pivotal air support to the invaders which helped demoralize the government. Although the invasion itself posed only a small military threat, Arbenz resigned ten days after it began when he lost the support of the Army leadership, which became convinced that defeating Castillo Armas would trigger an attack by the United States. Castillo Armas was eventually installed in power, and Guatemala’s short experiment with democracy ended.

DEMOCRACY OR NON-DEMOCRACY?

According to norms arguments, a democracy would only intervene against a non-democracy. Thus, in line with NH1 and NH2, the evidence should show that Guatemala was not democratic, and/or that American policymakers did not perceive the country to be a democracy. The evidence shows these predictions to be wrong on both counts.

Guatemala's Institutions. In December 1945, Juan José Arévalo was elected President of Guatemala, ending over one hundred years of dictatorial rule in that country. Arévalo's rhetoric "revealed him to be a modern liberal of socialist bent who believed that government could play a vital role in improving the lives of people" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 32). Arévalo was "quick to distance himself from radical ideologies," particularly communism, which he argued was "contrary to human nature." Most officials in the U.S. State Department thought that Arévalo "desired a moderately liberal and constitutionally stable form of government" that would be compatible with U.S. interests (quoted in Immerman 1982, 86).

Arévalo's rule was an era of moderate reform. His most important piece of legislation, the Labor Code, became law on May 1, 1947. The Labor Code attempted to redress the massive imbalance of power in Guatemala in favor of employers, mostly large landholders like the United Fruit Company (UFCO).¹² Contrary to charges that foreign communist influences were behind the new law, a U.S. embassy official in Guatemala noted that the legislation was radical only in the sense that it was Guatemala's first labor law (Gleijeses 1991, 97). Another contemporary assessment of Arévalo's reforms stated that they were "not as radical as those of the New Deal in the U.S. or the Labor Government in Great Britain."¹³ In the next general elections in 1951, Jacobo Arbenz—one of the heroes of the October Revolution, now resigned from the Army—won an easy victory with 65 percent of the vote. The campaign itself, according to one of the defeated candidates, was "'fair,' and the elections were free, 'as free as they could be in Guatemala'" (Marroquin Rojas, quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 84).

While Guatemala had a long history of dictatorship, the time between the overthrow of General Ubico in 1944 and the coup against Arbenz ten years later marked Guatemala's longest period of democracy and showed promise for continued improvement. The Polity IV project ranks Guatemala prior to 1950, during the administration of Arévalo, at a 5 (on a scale of -10 to +10), a rating which Guatemala did not exceed until the late 1990s. Arévalo was elected in free and fair elections. Although it did not fully enfranchise the Guatemalan citizenry, the 1945 constitution established a highly democratic set of institutions complete with extensive rights for citizens.¹⁴ Government was divided into the familiar three branches (executive, legislative, and judicial); "Individual rights were guaranteed in no less than thirty-four separate articles and the Jeffersonian principle of popular sovereignty was dominant" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 33). Freedom of the press and freedom of speech flourished under Arévalo and Arbenz, even when opposition publications virulently attacked the regime. As Gleijeses (1991, 215) remarks, "Even unsympathetic American journalists were struck by the degree of freedom that existed in Guatemala" under Arbenz.¹⁵

¹² The Code guaranteed a number of rights to workers, including the right to unionize and strike, protection against arbitrary termination, established a 48-hour work week, and set rules to prevent the exploitation of female and adolescent workers.

¹³ Samuel Inman, writing in 1951, quoted in Jonas (1991, 25).

¹⁴ The constitution fully enfranchised only literate men and women, who voted by secret ballot. Illiterate men could cast their votes publicly; illiterate women could not vote (Jonas 1991, 23). It should be noted that the U.S. receives scores of 8, 9, or 10 on the Polity index during the time when women and blacks were unable to vote.

¹⁵ Civilian control of the military, however, was not firmly established by the constitution, which granted the military great autonomy (Schirmer 1998, 9-13).

Polity's rating of Guatemala's regime type drops to 2 (non-democratic) at the end of Arévalo's administration, but a close look at the factors that contributed to this decline show that it stemmed from illegal violent opposition to the regime rather than government repression or institutional change. Arévalo lacked a coherent political agenda, and Guatemala's new parties—which had united around his candidacy but agreed on little else—soon began squabbling among themselves. Liberals faulted Arévalo for not implementing land reform quickly enough, and labor unrest—much of it directed against UFCO—proliferated in 1948-49. Meanwhile, conservatives criticized the President for threatening business interests, and right-wing parties sought a strong-handed caudillo to protect their economic interests (Glejeses 1991, 49). Arévalo declared a state of emergency in late 1948 when a shipment of arms was discovered at Puerto Barrios, the end of the rail line in Guatemala owned by UFCO.

The probable cause of the drop in Guatemala's Polity score, however, is the unsuccessful coup launched by Major Araña in 1949. Arbenz and Major Francisco Araña jockeyed to replace Arévalo in the next election when Araña gave up on the democratic process and decided to seize power in a coup.¹⁶ Arbenz sent the police to arrest Araña, who was killed in a shootout while resisting arrest. Araña's death triggered an uprising by his followers in the Guardia de Honor, but the rebellion was quickly defeated by government forces. Castillo Armas, having failed to join Araña's revolt despite his sympathy with it, then launched his own uprising five days before the Presidential election in November 1950. This insurrection was also snuffed out. Castillo Armas was arrested, but later escaped.

The decline in Guatemala's democracy score recorded by Polity IV thus does not appear to have been caused by a change in Guatemala's institutions nor by undemocratic actions taken by Arévalo or unfair elections. Rather, conservative forces centered around Araña attempted to overthrow the government, which led to unrest, instability, and violence that brought into question whether Guatemala could survive as a democracy. Nor did Guatemala's governing institutions or the extent of the country's political freedoms regress under Arbenz. As one Guatemalan political commentator noted in the wake of the January 1953 congressional elections, "Now that this most recent election is behind us, we can state with confidence that democracy has taken root" (quoted in Glejeses 1991, 215). Historians largely endorse this view. According to Schlesinger and Kinzer (1999, 49), by the time Arbenz took office "democracy had been introduced, and the country's political leadership had publicly committed itself to altering existing economic structures." In his previously classified history of the Guatemalan coup, CIA historian Nicholas Cullather notes that "the overthrown Arbenz government was not, many contend, a Communist regime but a reformist government that offered perhaps the last chance for progressive, democratic change in the region" (Cullather 2006, 8).

Additionally, all evidence indicates that far from controlling Guatemala, the communists lacked a serious following in the country and had no ties to the Soviet Union. Although Arbenz legalized the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) in December 1952 and made some of the party's members his closest advisers, the PGT's influence countrywide was severely limited: in 1954 the party had approximately 5,000 members in a country of 3 million, few of whom could

¹⁶ On July 16, 1949, Araña demanded that Arévalo dismiss the Cabinet as well as Arbenz and his supporters from the Army or else be overthrown. Arévalo alerted Arbenz, and the Permanent Committee of the Guatemalan Congress voted the next day to dismiss Araña.

be called experts in Marxism-Leninism.¹⁷ The PGT never held a Cabinet post, and had only four deputies in Congress in 1953-54. Arbenz was deeply sympathetic to communist ideals, but he believed that Guatemala first had to pass through a capitalist phase and that communism could not take root in the country in the near future. There is no indication that Arbenz or the PGT were preparing to subvert the coming elections, nor had Arbenz taken obvious steps toward violent revolution, such as providing arms to communist cells.¹⁸ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Henry Holland each acknowledged in May 1954 that there was no hard evidence tying communism in Guatemala to Moscow, although both nevertheless assumed that Moscow was involved.¹⁹ Indeed, so little evidence to this effect existed that the United States Information Agency had to fabricate articles claiming to reveal the guiding hand of the Kremlin in the Guatemalan government's reaction to U.S. pressure.²⁰

U.S. Perceptions of Guatemala's Regime Type. More importantly, documents and correspondence by American policymakers and officials knowledgeable about Guatemala and/or involved in Operation PBSUCCESS demonstrate that they believed themselves to be toppling a democratic regime. American officials, for example, never questioned the procedural fairness of Guatemalan elections. Reports compiled by the U.S. embassy in Guatemala cited by Gleijeses (1991, 215) "highlighted the lack of violence in the elections that were held under Arbenz; these reports include no allegations of government pressure on the people or of restrictions on the opposition's freedom to campaign in the rural areas." Nor did the United States assert (until after American actions had forced Arbenz to act) that Arbenz's regime repressed its political opponents. Although the Guatemalan opposition cried foul when the government arrested dozens in 1953, the embassy reported the truth: "Most of the people arrested subsequent to the [Salamá] uprising were actually involved in the group seeking to overthrow the Government" (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 216).

One measure pursued by Arbenz that raised suspicions in Washington was his continuation and extension of Arévalo's nascent attempts at land reform in the form of Decree

¹⁷ The figure of 5,000 is from former PGT leader José Manuel Fortuny (in Gleijeses 1991, 195). American officials actually put PGT membership at only 2,000 to 3,000 in April 1954. See John W. Fisher, "Briefing on Guatemala," April 19, 1954, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, Doc. 25, online at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/ike/>. This was up from 500 in 1952 and 1,000 in 1953, one-third to one-half of who were militants. NIE-62, "Present Political Situation in Guatemala and Possible Developments during 1952," March 11, 1952, in *ibid.*, Doc. 6; and NIE-84, "Probable Developments in Guatemala," May 19, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume IV, American Republics (Guatemalan Compilation)*: 15, also available online (same url as above).

¹⁸ "Personal Political Orientation of President Arbenz/Possibility of a Left-Wing Coup," Central Intelligence Agency Information Report No. 00-B-57327, October 10, 1952, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 27

¹⁹ As Dulles told the Brazilian ambassador to the United States, "we must realize that it will be impossible to produce evidence clearly tying the Guatemalan Government to Moscow ... the decision [for a coup] must be a political one and based on our deep conviction that such a tie must exist." Memorandum of a Conversation, "Situation in Guatemala," May 11, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 4: 30. See also Henry Holland, "Recommendation that the U.S. Invoke Consultative Procedure under Rio Treaty to Consider Problem of International Communism in Guatemala," May 14, 1954, in *ibid.*, 31. Guatemala did not have diplomatic relations nor trade treaties with the Soviet Union.

²⁰ Telegram, "Kremlin Coordination of Guatemalan Moves," June 25, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 236. An investigation of Guatemalan government documents seized immediately following the overthrow of Arbenz showed no evidence of PGT ties to foreign communist parties (Cullather 2006, 107).

900, passed by Guatemala's Congress on June 17, 1952. This measure allowed the government to expropriate all uncultivated land on estates larger than 672 acres, and land on estates between 224 and 672 acres that were less than two-thirds cultivated. Given the highly skewed distribution of land ownership in Guatemala—in 1945, 72 percent of agricultural land was owned by 2 percent of the landowners—only 1,710 of Guatemala's 341,191 private holdings were affected by the law, but those affected lost large amounts of land. UFCO alone lost 386,901 of its 550,000 acres to expropriation by February 1954 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 76). The government compensated all those who lost property with 3 percent bonds maturing in 25 years, but only reimbursed the owners for the value they had declared on their tax returns. UFCO, like many other large landowners in Guatemala, radically undervalued its land so as to avoid paying high taxes, and thus stood to get only about \$1.1 million. Roughly 100,000 Guatemalan families received some of the 1.4 million acres expropriated by June 1954.

American officials unanimously viewed Decree 900 as further opening Guatemala to communist influence, but a CIA assessment of Arbenz's political orientation made in October 1952 noted his moderate goals, which seemed extreme only in the context of Guatemala's acute backwardness:

Rather than setting up a Communist state, Arbenz desires to establish a 'modern democracy' which would improve the lot of its people through paternalistic social reforms. Arbenz' [sic] personal idol is FDR and his reforms are patterned after New Deal reforms and adjusted to the backward economy and social structure of Guatemala. None of the reforms is substantially extreme as compared to many of those in the US, Europe, and even in other Latin American countries. The extremities are relative and seem radical in Guatemala only because of the backward feudal situation they are meant to remedy.²¹

Although American officials seem to have understood that "the communists were not in control of Guatemala," they worried about the future (Gleijeses 1991, 365). Indeed, a March 1952 CIA report on the political situation in Guatemala expressed exactly these sentiments:

In present circumstances the Army is loyal to President Arbenz, although increasingly disturbed by the growth of Communist influence. If it appeared that the Communists were about to come to power in Guatemala, the Army would probably prevent that development. In the longer view, continued Communist influence and action in Guatemala will gradually reduce the capabilities of the potentially powerful anti-Communist forces to produce a change. The Communists will also attempt to subvert or neutralize the Army in order to reduce its capability to prevent them from eventually taking full control of the Government.²²

This trepidation about future trends lends the U.S. intervention in Guatemala a preventive quality, a recurring theme in America's Cold War interventions. It was not that the Arbenz regime was *itself* communist, but the growing influence of communists and the possibility that they would take power eventually drove the U.S. to intervene. As the State Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs noted in a 1953 memo, "Communist strength grows, while opposition

²¹ "Personal Political Orientation of President Arbenz/Possibility of a Left-Wing Coup."

²² NIE-62, "Present Political Situation in Guatemala and Possible Developments during 1952." For a similar view in 1953, see Office of Intelligence Research, "Communism in the Free World: Capabilities of the Communist Party, Guatemala," January 1, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 33; and NIE-84, "Probable Developments in Guatemala."

forces are disintegrating ... Ultimate Communist control of the country and elimination of American economic interests is the logical outcome, and unless the trend is reversed, is merely a question of time (quoted in Cullather 2006, 35).

WHY WAS INTERVENTION IN GUATEMALA COVERT?

If NH3/CBH3 is correct, documentation concerning U.S. motives for pursuing intervention in Guatemala covertly should reflect anxiety regarding the public's disapproval of more overt action against another democracy. American policymakers, however, appear not to have worried about U.S. domestic opinion in deciding to act secretly. Repeatedly, these officials focused their attention on the international repercussions for the United States of publicly working to overthrow the Guatemalan government. The evidence thus decisively favors external over internal constraints.

The anxiety of American officials regarding international discovery of their efforts against Guatemala became apparent when the new Eisenhower administration took office in 1953.²³ In late March, Adolph Berle, a former diplomat and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, passed a memo to White House official C.D. Jackson in which he contended that although a communist Guatemala was unacceptable, direct intervention with U.S. military forces was undesirable "except as an extremely bad last resort, because of the immense complications which it would raise all over the hemisphere" (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 241). Berle received no response to his note, but it turned out Eisenhower and his top associates were already thinking along these lines. According to Gleijeses, "President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles wanted to protect the image of the United States abroad, particularly in Latin America ... NSC 144/1 stated that the United States must 'avoid the appearance of unilateral action' in the internal affairs of the Latin American republics" (Gleijeses 1991, 247).

Once Eisenhower gave the go-ahead for removing Arbenz in August 1953, U.S. officials were concerned to keep PBSUCCESS quiet for fear of the ramifications its discovery would have in Latin America. Unsurprisingly, this view was articulated most commonly and forcefully by State Department officials, but also affected how the CIA conducted the operation. A draft options paper for the NSC from mid-August 1953, for example, noted that a "policy of direct intervention.... would violate solemn United States commitments and under present circumstances would endanger the entire fund of good will the United States has built up in the other American Republics through its policies of non-intervention.... Loss of this good will would be a disaster to the United States far outweighing the advantage of any success gained in Guatemala."²⁴ The new U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, John Peurifoy, while advocating action against Arbenz, cautioned that "a misfired attempt to change the present Guatemalan Government would most probably greatly strengthen the Communists here and damage our

²³ Worries about international repercussions also torpedoed an earlier operation against Arbenz known as PBFORTUNE in September 1952. Secretary of State Dean Acheson discovered PBFORTUNE and demanded it be canceled. As CIA historian Nick Cullather writes, "The appearance that the United States was supporting the invasion of an OAS member state in retaliation for expropriating American property would set US policy back 20 years" (Cullather 2006, 31).

²⁴ Draft Policy Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, August 19, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 4: 17.

standing everywhere if our part in a failure became generally accepted.”²⁵ A report in March 1954 warned that “many of the Latin American countries are more afraid of the possibility of American intervention than they are of what they consider the vague threat of international communism ... That is why Mr. [excised] is so concerned about the possible disastrous effect on our Latin American relations if PBSUCCESS is pinned on the United States government.”²⁶ A CIA report from about the same time also expressed concern for U.S. anonymity: “if it [PBSUCCESS] is the way to handle it are we using all possible means not attributable to the United States to carry the operation to a successful conclusion. If attributable to the United States, it should not be done. High level State thinking is that an act which can be pinned on the United States will set up back in our relations with Latin American countries by fifty years.”²⁷ Moreover, as President Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs, Henry F. Holland, then Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and “a real expert in Latin American affairs” according to Eisenhower, “made no secret of his conviction that the United States should keep hands off, insisting that other Latin American republics would, if our action became known, interpret our shipment of planes as intervention in Guatemala’s internal affairs” (Eisenhower 1963, 425).²⁸

The desire to avoid an external backlash also affected operational considerations. CIA Director of Plans Frank Wisner, for example, warned PBSUCCESS headquarters in Florida against the use of American aircraft to bomb Guatemala because doing so would “almost inevitably set upon this operation the seal of a non-Latin product.... the conclusion would nevertheless be drawn by our friends and foes alike in the United Nations, etc. that this could not be anything other than what it in fact is, and certainly could not be an indigenous uprising.”²⁹ American decision-makers were clearly worried that overt intervention in Guatemala ran “the risk of turning all of Latin America against the United States and patently violating the Good Neighbor policy of Franklin Roosevelt as well as the OAS and UN charters” (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 111).

As the coup against him drew nearer, it became increasingly clear to Arbenz that the internal constraint of American public opinion would not restrain the U.S. government and protect his regime. On January 29, 1954, the Guatemalan government published several documents it had intercepted detailing Castillo Armas’s plot and the involvement of the “Government of the North.” Rather than investigate the veracity of these allegations, “Every American publication within the liberal-conservative arc blithely dismissed the charge that the United States was plotting against Arbenz.” The *New York Times* haughtily warned the

²⁵ Letter from Peurifoy to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, December 28, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 79.

²⁶ Memorandum for the Record, “Report by Mr. [excised] on OAS Conference,” March 29, 1954, in *Digital National Security Archive*, Item no. GU0005.

²⁷ Memorandum for the Record, “Weekly PBSUCCESS Meeting with DD/P,” March 9, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 113.

²⁸ Indeed, Holland had endeavored to convince Latin American diplomats that the United States would not intervene unilaterally because he felt moving openly against Guatemala “would be inconsistent with our treaty obligations and the firm policy which we have followed in this hemisphere for more than 20 years.” Holland, “Recommendation that the U.S. Invoke Consultative Procedure under Rio Treaty.”

²⁹ Telegram from CIA to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters, April 30, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 138.

Guatemalans that in “railing against ‘Yankee Imperialism’ it is fighting a ghost of the dead past, resurrected only in the imagination of extreme nationalists and Communists.” Senator William Fulbright accused the “Communist-dominated Government of Guatemala” of conducting a “vicious propaganda attack” (Gleijeses 1991, 262).³⁰ According to Gleijeses (1991, 266), “the threats and abuse of the United States press and Congress in response to the plot revelations dashed the hope that American public opinion might restrain Eisenhower’s hand.” During the coup, Arbenz could only hope that “the formidable mobilization of the peoples of Latin America and the outcry of the whole world”—not pacific public opinion in the U.S.—“would stop the United States from intervening in an even more flagrant manner” (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 323).

American officials were in fact quite concerned about the bellicosity of domestic public opinion. Far from viewing public opinion as a constraint that forced them to act covertly, top U.S. officials feared the public would demand action, which would then make it much harder to hide the U.S.’s hand in any operation. In a weekly meeting on PBSUCCESS in March 1954, one participant worried that events in Guatemala might be turning against U.S. interests so quickly that “PBSUCCESS as it now stands may not be enough. Consideration must be given to the much greater pressure which may come from Congress and public opinion on the present Administration if the situation in Guatemala does deteriorate. It may be necessary to take more calculated risks than [sic] before.”³¹ Similarly, a CIA memo to Holland in April—which referred to Eisenhower administration and Congressional pressures that “something must be done” about Guatemala—also noted mentioned “the question of public opinion, with noticeable indications of a rising feeling of concern about Guatemala and the ever-present possibility that this will crystallize in terms of a demand for action.” The memo’s author also warned that “action taken after a public clamor would be much more demonstrably attributable to us than action taken prior to such public debate and demand.”³² The threat of an international backlash thus pushed American officials to act covertly; U.S. officials feared domestic opinion because it might force them to act precipitously—and openly—leading to all the undesirable consequences thereof.

OUTCOMES: FROM DEMOCRACY TO DICTATORSHIP

The evidence from Guatemala also disconfirms NH4, the contention that interventions should spread democracy.³³ Guatemala’s Polity IV rating plummeted from a 2 to a -6 following the

³⁰ Other members of Congress demanded the removal of the U.S. military mission in Guatemala, the implementation of economic sanctions, and a coffee boycott.

³¹ Weekly PBSUCCESS Meeting with DD/P, March 9, 1954.

³² CIA, “Disadvantages and Damages Resulting from a Decision to Discontinue or Substantially Modify PBSUCCESS,” April 15, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 127. Holland, in discussions with the CIA in June, stated that he planned to use “growing pressure for unilateral action” among the American public to coerce Latin American states to support an OAS meeting “before the domestic pressure should become too heavy,” presumably forcing U.S. unilateral action against Guatemala.

³³ Although only about 150 people died in Castillo Armas’s brief “invasion,” as many as 1,000 were killed in the ensuing anti-communist witch hunt (Streeter 2000, 31; Schirmer 1998, 14). CIA officers compiled “hit lists” of individuals to be eliminated in an anti-communist coup, but these plans went largely unimplemented: most important officials—including Arbenz and his top advisors—were granted safe passage out of the country in a deal with the new regime. The end of democracy in Guatemala had disastrous long-term human rights effects, however, as roughly 200,000 people died in 36 years of civil war; the military was responsible for over 90 percent of the

overthrow of Arbenz. In public, American officials claimed they were intervening to save Guatemalan democracy from the danger of communist dictatorship, but the United States fully expected the democratic Arbenz administration to be replaced by authoritarian rule. A State Department memo from October 1952 noted that “the Department must ... face up to the probability that an ‘undemocratic’ regime is the only one which in the near future could hope to succeed the present one. There will be no immediate ‘salvaging of the original aims of the revolution’” (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 382). Similarly, one of the coup plotters told a CIA agent in February 1954 that “with circumstances as they are today, government of and by the people of Guatemala would be virtually impossible.”³⁴ The main qualification that American policymakers looked for in a successor to Arbenz was fervent anti-communism, not commitment to democracy. This is the main quality Castillo Armas possessed. The evidence thus supports the institutional hypothesis (SH2) that democracies prefer to install dictatorships when they overthrow foreign governments because autocratic leaders are more pliable and likely to implement the democratic intervener’s policy preferences.

In sum, Guatemala under Arévalo and Arbenz was quite democratic, and was perceived as such by U.S. officials, who understood that communists were not yet in control but might take over in the future. NH1 and NH2 are thus not supported. Furthermore, there is no evidence that policymakers decided to act covertly because they feared a domestic backlash. Rather, they worried that overtly overthrowing an elected regime in Latin America would have tremendous consequences for the reputation of the U.S. abroad. This evidence disconfirms NH3 and CBH1. Finally, the U.S. cared little about spreading democracy, contradicting NH4.

SELECTORATE HYPOTHESES AND GUATEMALA

Two of the selectorate hypotheses can be discussed quickly. First, SH1 posited that targets of democratic covert intervention would be weak states. This hypothesis is obviously supported. Guatemala in 1954 was a country of 3 million people defended by a military of 7,000 men with virtually no air power. The U.S. population was nearly 52 times larger than Guatemala’s, and the U.S. military was about 471 times larger than Guatemala’s. The United States also spent roughly 6,434 times more on its military establishment.³⁵ Second, SH3 held that democracies tend to install autocratic governments that are likely to follow policies that are in the intervener’s interests. The discussion above also clearly supports this hypothesis.

Likelihood of Success Versus Exposure. The second selectorate hypothesis maintained that for leaders to sanction covert action, they had to be confident it would succeed, thereby producing policy success and enhancing their prospects for remaining in office, *or* confident that their role in a failed action would not be revealed. An examination of the evidence in the case of PBSUCCESS suggests that Eisenhower administration officials were not confident of success *and* believed that failure would expose their involvement.

deaths (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 265; see also Schirmer 1998, Falla 1994, Valentino 2004). On CIA assassination lists, see Gerald K. Haines, “CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals 1952-1954,” June 1995.

³⁴ CIA, Contact Report, “Discussion of Political Matters with [excised],” February 10, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 97.

³⁵ Figures are from Correlates of War, National Material Capabilities Data, version 3.02.

Several CIA documents indicate that the agency was not sanguine regarding the prospects that PBSUCCESS would in fact succeed. In a review of the original plans in September 1953, Hans Tofte wrote that the “position of the indigenous P/A [Castillo Armas] is weak. His available assets outside the target country are negligible. His plan of action is based entirely on expected popular support. There is no evidence that such popular support would be forthcoming.... The military plan ... is highly questionable in view of the fact that the main forces would consist of untrained irregulars. It appears that the P/A’s military plan grossly underestimates the attitude and defensive capabilities of the regular army.”³⁶ A week later an agency memo on the Guatemalan plan acknowledged a “growing realization ... that existing operational assets do not permit any optimistic viewpoints relative to speedy success within a relatively short period of time.”³⁷ An August 1953 paper produced in the State Department took an even more pessimistic view, essentially arguing that keeping a covert action secret was nearly impossible and that public revelation would have the same catastrophic consequences as an overt intervention: “Our secret stimulation and material support of the overthrow of the Arbenz Government would subject us to serious hazards. Experience has shown that no such operation could be carried on secretly without great risk of its leadership and backers being fully known. Were it to become evident that the United States has tried a Czechoslovakia in reverse in Guatemala, the effects on our relations in this hemisphere, and probably in the world at large, could be disastrous as those produced by open intervention.”³⁸ Even on the eve of the operation, a senior CIA official advocated staging a series of provocations against Guatemala’s neighbors and using them as a pretext for action on the grounds that it appeared “unlikely that the Project objective can be achieved by the means originally provided, i.e. primarily by CALLIGERIS’ invading forces.”³⁹

Despite these doubts, the operation went forward. Castillo Armas, described by one CIA officer as “bold but incompetent” led his “extremely small and ill-trained” rebels across the Guatemalan border on June 18 behind the wheel of a beat-up station wagon (Weiner 2007, 96). The defining moment for SH2 occurred on June 22, with Castillo Armas’s diminutive invasion force stalemated and most of his American-provided-and-piloted aircraft out of commission. Allen Dulles went to the president and asked for authorization to provide the rebels with more planes. As Weiner recounts the episode, “Eisenhower asked what the rebellion’s chances of success were at the moment. Zero, Dulles confessed. And if the CIA had more planes and bombs? Maybe 20 percent, Dulles guessed” (Weiner 2007, 102; see also Eisenhower 1963, 425-26). Ike approved the request knowing full well that it increased the likelihood of success from none at all to extremely low, and conscious of the near impossibility of keeping failure secret. This evidence contradicts SH2.

Private Economic Interests? Most scholars who have closely studied why the United States sponsored the coup against Arbenz conclude that the most important factor was

³⁶ Memorandum for the Record, “Impressions of PBFORTUNE,” September 4, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 47.

³⁷ Memorandum for the Record, “Guatemala,” September 11, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*: 51.

³⁸ Draft Policy Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, August 19, 1953, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 4: 17. Ironically, CIA Chief of Plans Frank Wisner agreed that the U.S. role in Guatemala stood no chance of staying secret, nor that any attempt at covert regime change could remain hidden. The difference is that this did not bother him (Weiner 2007, 95).

³⁹ CIA, “Provocation Plans,” June 1, 1954, in *Digital National Security Archive*, Doc. GU00010.

communist infiltration in Guatemala and the danger that the Soviet Union would gain a foothold in the Western hemisphere, thereby undermining U.S. security. The role of private American economic interests—most importantly the deleterious effect on United Fruit of the Labor Code under Arévalo and land expropriation under Arbenz—played a relatively minor role. According to the CIA's own history of PBSUCCESS, for example, "American commercial interests, particularly United Fruit, intensified conflict between the United States and the Arbenz regime ... but played only a contributing role in shaping policy. Truman and Eisenhower saw Guatemala as succumbing to Communist pressures emanating ultimately from Moscow. The threat to American business was a minor part of the larger danger to the United States' overall security" (Cullather 2006, 37). Similarly, Gleijeses (1991, 362) views UFCO's complaints about supposed persecution under the Arévalo regime as the factor that initially brought Guatemala to the attention of the Truman administration, but he argues that economic factors receded in importance under Arbenz and fear of communism rose to the fore. According to Peurifoy's summary of a meeting between him and Arbenz on December 16, 1953, when Arbenz tried to depict the problem as being between UFCO and his government, Peurifoy "interrupted the President at this point to tell him that I thought we should consider first things first and that it seemed to me that as long as the Communists exercised the influence which they presently do in the Government, I did not see any real hope of bringing about better relations" (quoted in Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 137). Richard Immerman (1982, 82) concurs with these assessments, arguing that the "United States did not ultimately intervene in Guatemala to protect United Fruit. It intervened to halt what it believed to be the spread of the international communist conspiracy." As Secretary of State John Foster Dulles put it in a news conference shortly before the coup began, "If the United Fruit matter were settled, if they gave a gold piece for every banana, the problem would remain just as it is today as far as the presence of communist infiltration in Guatemala is concerned. That is the problem, not United Fruit" (quoted in Immerman 1982, 82). In short, communism, not UFCO profits, motivated the U.S. to move against Arbenz. As former PGT leader José Manuel Fortuny put it years later, "They would have overthrown us even if we had grown no bananas" (quoted in Gleijeses 1991, 366).

Some scholars, however, attribute a stronger role to private U.S. economic interests, namely those of the United Fruit Company. Jonas (1991) and Schlesinger and Kinzer (1999), for example, note the extensive ties between UFCO and the highest levels of the U.S. government. The company's pleas for help in Guatemala thus fell on receptive ears. UFCO also hired Edward Bernays, a public relations expert, to launch a propaganda blitz to burnish the company's image and portray Guatemala as a communist stronghold. These efforts had by early 1954 "created an atmosphere of deep suspicion and fear in the United States about the nature and intentions of the Guatemalan government" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1999, 90). UFCO went further and hired ex-Roosevelt staffer Thomas Corcoran, former Senator Robert La Follette, and Spruille Braden, a Truman administration State Department official, to lobby their powerful friends in Washington. As Schlesinger and Kinzer (1999, 97) summarize, "With intimidating financial resources and shrewd planning, the United Fruit Company thus deployed a platoon of lobbyists and publicists at the cost of over a half million dollars a year to convince Americans that something evil was afoot in Guatemala ... This campaign ... had a remarkable impact on the U.S. government." In fact, Schlesinger and Kinzer argue that the U.S. government essentially acted as "an agent for the private corporation [UFCO]" in its dispute with the Guatemalan government (1999, 105). Jonas, without fully accepting the economic argument, still maintains that "[t]he overthrow of Arbenz is

one of the clearest examples in modern history of U.S. policy being affected by direct ties of public officials to private interests” (Jonas 1991, 32).

Still, the weight of the evidence suggests that Eisenhower administration officials acted to prevent what they perceived to be the imminent takeover of Guatemala by communists rather than to protect the private economic interests of a few influential constituents. This evidence contradicts SH4, which contends that covert intervention offers politicians opportunities to act at the behest of private interests.

CHILE: ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW SALVADOR ALLENDE

The United States intervened in Chile in three stages of varying intensity from 1963 to 1973. In the first stage, the United States used money and propaganda to support Christian Democrat Party candidate Eduardo Frei in the 1964 presidential elections against his socialist adversary, Salvador Allende. Frei won in 1964, but presidents in Chile are limited to one six-year term, and Allende entered the race again in 1970. Allende received the largest number of votes in the September election but did not obtain a majority, which required the Chilean Congress to choose between the top two vote-getters. There was a strong norm in Chile that Congress should select the winner of the popular vote; however, the second stage of U.S. intervention used various techniques to try to delay or block Allende’s formal election by Congress, including both non-violent (known as Track I) and violent (Track II) means. When the second stage efforts failed to prevent Allende from taking office, the United States provided financial support to Chilean opposition parties and encouraged the Chilean military to mount a coup against Allende. On September 11, 1973, Allende was overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet. Allende died in midst of the coup.

This section focuses on American efforts to prevent Allende from assuming the presidency and then to topple him from when he gained office in September 1970 until the coup. On September 15, ten days after Allende won a plurality of the presidential vote, President Richard Nixon ordered the CIA to “prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him.”⁴⁰ For the next six weeks, CIA operatives worked frantically to induce Chile’s politicians and political parties to defeat Allende in the Congressional vote. This enterprise was doomed from the start because of Chileans’ fidelity to democratic procedures (described below), and few put much stock in it. David Atlee Phillips, head of the Chilean Task Force, later recalled: “Anyone who had lived in Chile, as I had, and knew Chileans, knew that you might get away with bribing one Chilean Senator, but two? Never. And three? Not a chance.... They would blow the whistle. They were democrats and had been for a very long time” (quoted in Weiner 2007, 310).

Because of the low probability of a non-violent solution, the focus of U.S. efforts against Allende shifted to the military sphere. On orders from Kissinger, CIA headquarters cabled the Santiago station on October 7: “[excised] instructs you to contact the military and let them know USG wants a military solution, and that we will support them now and later.” These orders were

⁴⁰ William V. Broe, “Genesis of Project FUBELT,” September 16, 1970. Most of the documents on Chile cited in this section are available on the State Department’s Chile Declassification Project website: <http://foia.state.gov/SearchColls/CIA.asp>. Some others may be found on the website of the National Security Archive: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>, or reproduced in Kornbluh (2003).

confirmed a week later in another cable: “It is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup.”⁴¹ Although Kissinger shut down one plot by retired General Roberto Viaux, another plot involving Viaux and several other officers took shape to set off a coup by assassinating the Army chief of staff René Schneider. The CIA provided the plotters with several machine guns, but these weapons were not used in the attempt on Schneider’s life. The chief of staff was killed, but rather than sparking a coup as intended, the Chilean military stayed out of politics and Allende was confirmed as scheduled a few days later.

Kissinger would subsequently claim that he terminated Track II when he shut off Viaux’s original plot on October 15. Declassified documents and the testimony of others contradict this claim. According to Tom Karamessines, chief of covert operations at the time, “Track Two never really ended” (quoted in Weiner 2007, 315). The goal of overthrowing Allende certainly did not change. At a meeting of President Nixon and his top advisers on November 6, a few days after Allende was inaugurated, there was a consensus that, as the Secretaries of State and Defense each put it, the United States had “to bring him [Allende] down.”⁴² One year later, the chief of station in Santiago cabled headquarters that “the ... end objective” of U.S. policy in Chile was “a military solution to the Chilean problem.... we conceive our [excised] mission as one in which we work consciously and deliberately in the direction of a coup.”⁴³ The Nixon administration cut off all bilateral U.S. economic assistance to Chile, and blocked aid to the country from international institutions like the International Development Bank and the World Bank while refusing to reschedule Chile’s foreign debt. The CIA also gave large sums to Chilean opposition parties and media outlets (Kornbluh 2003, 82-94). The CIA played no role in the coup itself: it had already been determined that the Chilean military did not need U.S. assistance and that revelation of U.S. involvement would not be worth the price.⁴⁴

CHILE: DEMOCRACY OR AUTOCRACY?

The first two hypotheses from the norms perspective contend that Chile was not a democracy, and that U.S. policymakers did not perceive the country to be democratic. These arguments as applied to Chile, however, are belied by the facts.

Chilean Democracy. During the time leading up to the coup on September 11, 1973, Chile was categorized as a democratic state along numerous measures. The Polity IV Project ranks Chile as a +6 on its 21-point (-10 to +10) scale of democratic institutions from 1965 to the coup in 1973 (Marshall and Jaggers 2005), meaning Chile met the same democratic requirements under Allende that it did under the administration of Frei, the previous president favored by the United States. Chile had a history of more than a century of democratic rule, and public participation tended to be high because voting was compulsory (turnout in 1964 was 88 percent; Sigmund 1977, 5, 35). According to Paul Sigmund, Chile “had a long history of democracy and a tradition of social reform going back to the 1920s, when it first adopted social security programs and a labor code” (Sigmund 1993, 15). Kinsella, otherwise an ardent defender of DP,

⁴¹ CIA Cable to Santiago, October 7, 1973; and Cable to Santiago, October 16, 1973.

⁴² Memorandum of Conversation, “NSC Meeting—Chile (NSSM 97),” November 6, 1970.

⁴³ Cable, Santiago to Chief, Western Hemisphere Division, November 12, 1971.

⁴⁴ Memorandum for the Record, “Minutes on the Current Chilean Situation at Department of State, 1630-1830, 17 October 1972,” October 18, 1972, in Kornbluh (2003).

acknowledges that “U.S. intervention in a democratic Chile in 1973 is beyond dispute” (Kinsella 2005, 455). Chile, in other words, was a democracy in objective terms.

The process by which Allende was elected confirms the strength of both democratic norms and institutions in Chile. As noted above, Allende received only a plurality of the popular vote (36.6 percent), and thus it fell to Congress to choose among the candidates. In such circumstances, the Congress always ratified the public’s choice by electing the candidate who received the largest share of the popular vote. Radomiro Tomic, the candidate of the Christian Democrats, the party of outgoing President Eduardo Frei, quickly recognized Allende as president-elect based on his vote share, and the party decided to support Allende’s election in Congress. In fact, the day after the election, Tomic visited Allende and said “I have come to greet the President-elect of Chile, my grand old friend, Salvador Allende” (quoted in Sigmund 1977, 110). The second-leading vote-getter, former President Jorge Alessandri, planned at first to mount a challenge to Allende, but changed his mind after the Christian Democrats’ decision to back Allende, asking his supporters not to vote for him (Alessandri). The Christian Democrats rejected an overture from Alessandri that would have resulted in new elections (and a probable Christian Democratic victory) because it would in effect disenfranchise socialist voters. “This would amount to telling 35 percent of the electorate that you may participate in elections, but you cannot win,” remarked Sen. Benjamin Prado, president of the Christian Democrats. “You can come in second or third, but not first” (quoted in Sigmund 1977, 118). When Congress met on October 24, 1970, Allende received 153 votes out of 195 cast (seven were abstentions, 35 were for Alessandri), 74 of which came from the Christian Democrats.⁴⁵ The Chilean system thus exemplifies one of the hallmark norms of democracy, what Dixon (1994) has called “contingent consent,” whereby losing parties agree to leave office and form a loyal opposition because the winners agree to respect their rights and vacate office should they be defeated.

Perceptions of Chilean Democracy. In confirmation of Chile’s democratic status, and in contradiction to NH2, several documents circulating within the U.S. government at the time suggest that American policymakers perceived Chile to be a long-standing democracy. In 1964, anticipating a split election (like that which would occur in 1970), J.C. King, chief of the Western Hemisphere Division of the CIA, sent a memorandum on January 3, 1964, to Director of Central Intelligence John McCone regarding the possibility of persuading the Chilean Congress to vote for the runner-up candidate instead of Allende if the latter were to receive the most votes. In this memorandum, however, King acknowledged that persuading the Chilean Congress would be difficult because of Chile’s democratic tradition: “it is unlikely that many parliamentarians will conclude that their reelection will be best assured by going against the will of the people by flouting Chile’s proud democratic spirit and by assuming the responsibility for the civil unrest that would follow such a decision.”⁴⁶

Shortly after Allende’s victory in 1970, President Nixon’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger wrote a memorandum on the Chilean situation to the President on November 5, 1970. In that memo, Kissinger acknowledged Chile’s democratic status: “Allende was elected legally.... He has legitimacy in the eyes of the Chileans and most of the world; there is nothing

⁴⁵ CIA, Briefing by Richard Helms for the National Security Council, “Chile,” November 6, 1970.

⁴⁶ “Memorandum from the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division (King) to Director of Central Intelligence McCone,” January 3, 1964.

we can do to deny him that legitimacy or claim that he does not have it.”⁴⁷ Even at this high level of decision-making, key political figures acknowledged that pursuing their plans to intervene would undermine a legitimate democracy. In the same memorandum, Kissinger went on to explain to the President the dilemma the U.S. would face by intervening in the Chilean democratic process:

We are strongly on record in support of self-determination and respect for free election; you are firmly on record for non-intervention in the internal affairs of this hemisphere and of accepting nations “as they are.” It would therefore be very costly for us to act in ways that appear to violate those principles, and Latin Americans and others in the world will view our policy as a test of the credibility of our rhetoric.⁴⁸

Later that month, on November 16, the CIA Chilean task force reported on the progress of their propaganda campaign to promote concern for Chile’s future under Allende’s rule among the “Chilean political equation,” consisting of former President Frei, the Chilean political elite, and the Chilean military. In this memo, the task force reported that each of these Chilean political figures “hastened to rationalize its acceptance of an Allende presidency” because of “the built-in checks and balances of Chile’s demonstrated reverence for democracy and constitutionality, sweetened by Allende’s promise to honor these traditions.”⁴⁹ Frei, upon whom any gambit to block Allende’s ascension to office depended, rebuffed CIA blandishments to appoint an all-military cabinet, resign, and leave the country in the military’s hands (Kornbluh 2003, 13). Moreover, with regard to the Chilean military, “anti-Allende currents did exist in the military and the Carabineros [riflemen], but were immobilized by ... the tradition of military respect for the Constitution” as well as “the public and private stance of General Schneider, Commander in Chief of the Army, who advocated strict adherence to the Constitution.”⁵⁰

After the attempts to keep Allende from being confirmed failed and the socialist leader took office, U.S. perceptions of Chilean democracy did not change much. The CIA Office of National Estimates analyzed the political situation in Chile in April 1972 and concluded that despite rising tensions over the 18 months since Allende assumed office, “the Chilean tradition of accommodative politics has survived.... The strength and resiliency of the Chilean political system is seen in the willingness of most of the chief political actors to turn to conciliation and compromise to defuse potentially explosive situations, rather than let the advocates of political violence carry the day.” “The willingness of seemingly implacable political foes to engage in behind-the-scenes bargaining,” the report continued, “is a crucial element in preserving the essentially democratic character of the existing Chilean system.” The report also noted how most of Chile’s leading political figures had been socialized to norms of “conciliation and compromise” by serving in the Chilean Senate. The analysis also rated the likelihood of a direct military seizure of power as quite low because military officers, “Like most Chileans ... generally take great pride in the national heritage of respect for legality and constitutional order.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Memorandum for the President from Kissinger, “NSC Meeting, November 6 – Chile,” November 5, 1970.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ “Report on CIA Chilean Task Force Activities, 15 September to 3 November 1970,” November 16, 1970.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ CIA Office of National Estimates, “Chile: Conciliation, Confrontation, or Coup?” April 4, 1972.

Based on these documents, there is little doubt that American policymakers perceived Chile to be a democracy. In fact, there was great concern among Chilean political elites and the Chilean military about violating long-standing democratic norms. Moreover, widely used databases in political science code Chile as a democracy. The evidence thus contradicts NH1 and NH2 because Chile is considered a democracy by objective sources as well as in the subjective estimates of U.S. officials.

WHY WAS INTERVENTION IN CHILE COVERT?

According to NH3/CBH1, intervention against other democracies is undertaken covertly because policymakers understand that public opinion would oppose more explicit action. If this proposition were true, we should expect key government documents to reflect democratic elites' fear of domestic public disapproval when making their decisions regarding intervention in Chile. The documents, in fact, show no such thing; instead, they are filled with discussions of the negative repercussions for the U.S.'s reputation in Latin America and the wider world of openly working to overthrow the Allende regime.

An assessment of the possibility that Allende could be removed by political action prepared in early September 1970, for example, noted that the United States was contemplating "Political action designed to thwart the victory of a legally elected candidate," and cautioned that "if the USG's role in such an activity were exposed, it could seriously damage US prestige and credibility both in Chile and elsewhere in the hemisphere."⁵² A memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon in November referenced a variety of concerns motivating the U.S. to act covertly, none of which include domestic public opinion:

What all of this boils down to is a fundamental dilemma and issue ... Do we wait and try to protect our interests in the context of dealing with Allende because ... we do not want to risk turning nationalism against us and damaging our image, credibility, and position in the world ... Do we decide to do something to prevent him from consolidating himself ... AND thereby risk: ... damaging our credibility in the eyes of the rest of the world as interventionist ... turning nationalism and latent fear of US domination in the rest of Latin America into violent and intense opposition to us.⁵³

A memo prepared at about the same time by the State Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs echoed many of these concerns. Its authors cautioned that if the administration were to contravene its official policy of "respect for the outcome of democratic elections," the consequences could be to

Reduce our credibility throughout the world ... increase nationalism directed against us ... be used by the Allende Government to consolidate its position with the Chilean people and to gain influence in the rest of the hemisphere ... and move the Allende Government to seek even closer relations with the USSR than it might have initially contemplated (quoted in Kornbluh 2003, 81).

⁵² Memorandum, "Chile/Prospects for Political Action to Deny Salvador Allende the Presidency," September 8, 1970

⁵³ Kissinger, "NSC Meeting, November 6 – Chile."

Clearly, many officials in the U.S. government understood that moving forcefully against Chile could backfire, serving “Allende’s purpose of rallying the Chilean people around him in the face of the ‘foreign devil.’”⁵⁴ An October 1970 CIA memo entitled “The Coup That Failed” was dedicated to assessing the possible negative consequences in Chile of an unsuccessful coup by the leading candidate at that time, retired General Roberto Viaux. The document concluded that a failed coup would greatly strengthen Allende’s hold on power. Not only would “U.S. prestige in Chile, Latin America, and the free world ... be diminished,” but the “Communist power-base would increase significantly” as “Allende would attempt to consolidate his position within the military” and “exploit this situation by pressuring the political opposition ... to support his nationalization program.”⁵⁵

Moreover, according to a secret annex to National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 97, the prospects for success of any potential intervention were highly uncertain, and failure could have negative consequences: “There is almost no way to evaluate the likelihood that such an attempt would be successful even if it were made. An unsuccessful attempt, involving as it probably would revelation of U.S. participation, would have grave consequences for our relations with Chile, in the hemisphere, in the United States and elsewhere in the world.”⁵⁶ Although this passage references domestic consequences of failure and revelation of American involvement, elsewhere NSSM 97 notes that opinion in the United States at the time was more of a spur to intervene than a restraint:

To date, coast to coast editorial comment has generally supported the manner in which the United States has handled developments in Chile. As the actions of the Allende government become more overtly hostile to U.S. interests, however, we may expect adverse reaction to some sectors of the U.S. public, press, and Congress to the “establishment of another communist government in the hemisphere,” which consequent pressures on U.S. policy.⁵⁷

In deciding whether to pursue intervention against Allende, therefore, it is apparent that domestic public opinion did not act as a restraint on U.S. decision-makers causing them to use covert as opposed to overt methods. This evidence does not square with Russett’s explanation that “the normative restraints of democracy were sufficient to drive the operations underground amid circumstances when the administration might otherwise have undertaken an overt intervention” (Russett 1993, 124). In fact, it seems it was not normative pressure at all, but concern for how the global audience would perceive U.S. intervention in Chile that caused American leaders to act covertly. On the domestic front, if anything leaders worried that they would face public pressure to act openly to prevent a communist regime from emerging in the Western hemisphere. NH3 is thus not supported by the evidence.

⁵⁴ Briefing paper for Kissinger, quoted in Kornbluh (2003, 81).

⁵⁵ CIA, “The Coup That Failed: The Effects on Allende and his Political Posture, With Special Emphasis on his Stance Before U.S. Positions, Moderate or Tough,” October 15, 1970, reproduced in Kornbluh (2003).

⁵⁶ Quoted in Kornbluh (2003, 9). The revised version of NSSM 97 is dated November 3, 1970, but the annex was probably written for the first draft of the document in August.

⁵⁷ “Options Paper for NSC: Chile (NSSM 97),” November 3, 1970.

OUTCOME: KILLING DEMOCRACY

Far from helping Chile to become a stronger democracy, the coup against Allende was followed by large-scale repression by the U.S.-backed military junta and sixteen years of military dictatorship. To express numerically the negative effect Pinochet's takeover had on democracy, Chile went from a Polity IV score of 6 during Allende's administration to -7 under Pinochet. American leaders knew that Pinochet's coup would bring an end to Chilean democracy. As the CIA reported on September 21, 1973, "Severe repression is planned.... There is no indication whatever that the military plans any early relinquishment of full political power in Chile."⁵⁸ Yet the Nixon administration rushed to embrace the military junta, writing in a cable two days after the coup: "The USG wishes to make clear its desire to cooperate with the military Junta and to assist in any appropriate way." Almost immediately the United States resumed economic and military aid to Chile that had been interrupted under Allende, extending agricultural credits and food aid, allowing lucrative loans to pass through international lending institutions, and selling the military regime \$100 million worth of American weaponry. Kissinger's State Department then ended all covert financial support to Chile's political parties, while the CIA helped establish the Directorate of National Intelligence, the new regime's secret police. The United States also used both overt and covert means to defend Pinochet against charges of human rights abuses. All of this evidence supports the view that the U.S. government cared far more about securing a pliable regime in Santiago than promoting democracy.

To summarize, Chile during the time of U.S. covert intervention was an established democracy and was recognized as such by the American officials who directed attempts to overthrow the Allende government. Intervention was covert because these policymakers feared the international repercussions of overthrowing another democratic regime, not the domestic political backlash that might ensue. When the coup occurred, American policymakers were aware that democratic governance would not return anytime soon. This evidence contradicts the norms hypotheses.

SELECTORATE HYPOTHESES AND CHILE

Again, as in the Guatemala case, it is clear that the United States picked on a much weaker state in Chile, and that the regime which replaced Allende's was a non-democratic military dictatorship. Indeed, the United States from the moment Allende was elected put most of its efforts into fomenting a military coup, and over the course of the years after Allende came to power, gradually lost faith in the ability of the Chilean political parties to displace the socialists

⁵⁸ CIA, "Death Tolls." See also Kornbluh (2003, 154). A few months after the coup, the CIA noted Pinochet's estimate that civilian rule would probably not return to Chile for "at least five years." CIA, "Aspects of the Situation in Chile," March 22, 1974. Policymakers also had evidence that a coup in 1970 would be bloody. As Santiago Station reported on October 10, in the event of a coup, "Carnage could be considerable and prolonged, i.e. civil war." Cable to Headquarters, October 10, 1970. In the 1973 coup 1,500 civilians died in the first four weeks of military rule, and 13,500 were detained. CIA, "Estimate of No Deaths and Detentions from Coup," October 27, 1973. For Kissinger, this collateral damage was acceptable: as he put it in early October, "I agree that we should not knock down stories that later prove to be true, nor should we be in the position of defending what they're doing in Santiago. But I think we should understand our policy—that however unpleasant they act, the government is better for us than Allende was." "Secretary's Staff Meeting, October 1, 1973," October 4, 1973.

and communists.⁵⁹ The U.S.'s rush to recognize and provide aid to the military junta also makes clear that Washington had no problem with an autocratic government in Chile.

Likelihood of Success versus Exposure. Nixon and Kissinger proceeded with plans to overthrow Allende in the autumn of 1970 even in the face of strong evidence that their plot would fail. As noted above, the authors of NSSM 97 opined in mid-August 1970 that an “unsuccessful attempt” to topple Allende would probably reveal American participation (quoted in Kornbluh 2003, 9). Kissinger’s aide Viron Vaky wrote to his boss on September 14, 1970: “We have no capability to motivate or instigate a coup ... any covert effort to stimulate a military takeover is a nonstarter” (quoted in Kornbluh 2003, 11). As a CIA cable put it in September, “It is reasonably clear, in exploring avenues to prevent an Allende government from exercising power, that (a) the political/constitutional route in any form is a non-starter and (b) the only prospect with any chance of success whatsoever is a military golpe either before or immediately after Allende’s assumption of power.”⁶⁰ Another CIA assessment from about the same time similarly judged the political route as unlikely to succeed: “Political action to deny Allende the presidency in the congressional run-off is a very dim prospect at this particular time.”⁶¹ On October 10, the CIA reported to another Kissinger aide, Alexander Haig, that “the situation looked dimmer now than at any time before,” and that the agency “had received pessimistic reactions from all” the military officers it had approached. The Santiago station also “stressed bleakness of military picture and improbability of any af forces intervention originating with or condoned by high command.”⁶²

By early October, the only option the CIA had was not a good one: a plot led by retired General Roberto Viaux to touch off a coup by kidnapping or killing chief of staff René Schneider. Santiago station judged the “Viaux solution” to be very risky and possibly quite bloody, and added that “U.S. involvement will clearly be impossible” to hide.⁶³ In Washington, Tom Karamessines and Henry Kissinger rated Viaux’s chances of success at one in twenty. Kissinger decided to postpone this particular approach, but “instructed Mr. Karamessines to preserve Agency assets in Chile, working clandestinely and securely to maintain the capability for Agency operations against Allende in the future.”⁶⁴ Kissinger came away from this meeting highly dispirited regarding the likelihood that Allende could be kept out of power: as he wrote to Nixon a few days later, “Our capacity to engineer Allende’s overthrow quickly has been demonstrated to be sharply limited” (quoted in Kornbluh 2003, 27). A few days later, however, the CIA sent machine guns and ammunition to another set of plotters—which also included Viaux—led by General Valenzuela, chief of the Santiago garrison. Santiago station was more hopeful about this scheme, the goal of which was also to eliminate Schneider, but most of the

⁵⁹ This disenchantment, particularly with the Christian Democrats, is visible in Memorandum for Chief, Western Hemisphere Division, “Chile—What Now?” June 30, 1973. Also evident is the increasing realization that the Christian Democrats’ political program was not that different from Allende’s.

⁶⁰ CIA Cable, September 9, 1970.

⁶¹ “Chile/Prospects for Political Action to Deny Salvador Allende the Presidency.” See also “Report on Chilean Task Force Activities,” p. 2.

⁶² William V. Broe, Memorandum for the Record, October 10, 1970; and Cable, Santiago to Headquarters, October 13, 1970.

⁶³ Cable, Santiago to Headquarters, October 10, 1970.

⁶⁴ Kissinger also wished to preserve the option to reactive Viaux in the future when prospects for success brightened. Memorandum of Conversation, October 15, 1970.

CIA's contacts in the Chilean military were "not at all sanguine re chances of preventing Allende from taking office."⁶⁵ After two bungled attempts to kidnap Schneider, Santiago Station concluded that because "Valenzuela's group is apparently having considerable difficulty executing even the first step of its coup plan, the prospect for a coup succeeding or even occurring before 24 October now appears remote."⁶⁶ Despite this pessimism, Headquarters at the same time assured Valenzuela of U.S. support "now or in the future," and continued pushing for a coup despite the fact that it was widely known what the U.S.'s position had become widely known.⁶⁷ The authors of the secret annex to NSSM 97 had similarly opined that an "unsuccessful attempt" to topple Allende would probably reveal American participation (quoted in Kornbluh 2003, 9). The plotters did eventually kill Schneider, but failed to spark a coup, and Allende was confirmed by Congress. The evidence thus indicates that although Kissinger defused one plot that was particularly unlikely to succeed, the overall effort to provoke a coup against Allende was characterized by the view that it would not succeed and U.S. involvement would probably be revealed.

Private versus Public Goods? Selectorate hypothesis 4 leads us to expect that democratic leaders are able to provide private goods when they act covertly. In fact, the documents show what appears to be a genuine concern for U.S. security in planning actions in Chile. NSSM 97, for example, discussed the security threat U.S. policymakers perceived from a possible communist takeover in Chile; officials were concerned that a "Marxist-Allende government in power would represent a potential danger to Western Hemisphere security, to the extent that it develops military ties with Communist powers, and is actively hostile to inter-American security organizations. Full realization of these potentials could threaten U.S. security interests specifically."⁶⁸ Indeed, Kissinger seemed fully convinced that Allende's ascension to power spelled impending doom for the United States when he told President Nixon in November 1970 that "the election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere ... for what happens in Chile over the next six to twelve months will have ramifications that will go far beyond just US-Chilean relations."⁶⁹ These documents point to a strong preoccupation with the security threat, whether inflated or not, posed to the U.S. if Allende was to take office.

Objectively, however, the threat to U.S. interests posed by Allende's rise was negligible. The authors of NSSM 97, for example, concluded: "The U.S. has no vital national interests within Chile ... The world military balance of power would not be significantly altered by an Allende government."⁷⁰ Similarly, a memo for Kissinger written by his top aide for Latin America, Viron Vaky, while pointing out how felling Allende violated American moral values, also deprecated the stakes involved in Chile: "What we propose is patently a violation of our

⁶⁵ For the Station's optimism, see Headquarters to Santiago, October 18, 1970; Santiago to Headquarters, October 19, 1970; and Intelligence Report, "Track II," October 20, 1970. Pessimism by military contacts is conveyed in Santiago to Headquarters, October 19, 1970. The Station also noted that the Chilean public "would overwhelmingly reject military intervention." Station to Headquarters, October 20, 1970.

⁶⁶ Intelligence Report, "Track II," October 22, 1970.

⁶⁷ Quote is from *ibid.* For evidence that Washington's support for a coup was widely known, see Headquarters to Santiago, October 20, 1970; and Santiago to Headquarters, October 20, 1970.

⁶⁸ "Options Paper on Chile (NSSM 97)," November 3, 1970.

⁶⁹ Kissinger, "NSC Meeting, November 6 - Chile."

⁷⁰ "Options Paper on Chile (NSSM 97)."

own principles and policy tenets. Moralism aside, this has practical operational consequences.... If these principles have any meaning, we normally depart from them only to meet the gravest threat to us, e.g., to our survival. Is Allende a mortal threat to the U.S.? It is hard to argue this.”⁷¹

The costs to the United States were more psychological than material, and officials worried more about the message that a socialist state in Latin America might send to onlookers than the actual present security threat posed by Allende’s regime. This concern is reflected in President Nixon’s remarks in a meeting of the NSC on November 6, 1970. Nixon worried about the effect that the successful establishment of a leftist regime would have on other states in the region. “If Chile moves as we expect and is able to get away with it,” the President remarked, “... it gives courage to others who are sitting on the fence in Latin America,” important countries like Brazil and Argentina. “If we let the potential leaders in South America think they can move like Chile and have it both ways, we will be in trouble.... Latin America is not gone, and we want to keep it.”⁷² Nixon thus subscribed to a version of the domino theory, whereby the fall of one country to communism in South America would inexorably lead to more, and the United States had to head off that eventuality by preventing the first domino from falling. Again, as in the Guatemalan case, the preventive motive is present.

Amid these security concerns, however, economic concerns also surfaced as a possible motivating factor for U.S. covert intervention. The very fear of Allende nationalizing basic industries could be considered a concern of private U.S. corporations, therefore not reflecting a democratic regard for national security interests above all. Regarding Chile’s ability to repay U.S. multinational corporations following nationalization of several industries, NSSM 97 also mentioned economic doubts: “It is unlikely, however, that it [the Allende government] can complete its announced program of nationalization with ‘fair compensation’ to U.S. investors.” Indeed, the assertion has been made elsewhere that “at least some of the impetus for intervention” in Chile was a response to the fact that “Allende’s efforts to nationalize the copper industry fueled demands that the Nixon administration destabilize his government” (Rosato 2003, 591).

Protection of U.S. private economic interests, however, was probably not the main reason that the Nixon administration decided to overthrow Allende. The president, as noted, was much more fixated on the effect that a communist regime in Latin America would have on other countries in the region. The evidence indicates that rather than corporate interests driving administration policy, after Allende’s victory in the popular vote on September 4, 1970, government officials began to pressure U.S. businesses with interests in Chile to curtail their operations to cause an economic crisis in the country. The American ambassador to Santiago, Edward Korry, recommended putting pressure on companies like Ford, Anaconda Copper, and Bank of America to pull out of Chile, and the State Department met with executives from some of these companies “to enlist their support” (Kornbluh 2003, 18). Officials from International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), one of the largest foreign companies operating in Chile, volunteered to provide \$1 million in a meeting with Kissinger and DCI Richard Helms on September 11, 1970, “for the purpose of assisting any [U.S.] government plan ... to stop

⁷¹ Vaky to Kissinger, NSC Action Memo [Non Log], “Chile—40 Committee Meeting, Monday—September 14,” September 14, 1970, quoted in Kornbluh (2003, 11).

⁷² The White House, Memorandum of Conversation, “NSC Meeting—Chile (NSSM 97),” November 6, 1970.

Allende.”⁷³ Once the president had decided that Allende had to go, in other words, ITT offered to help implement the policy, and policymakers started to lean on other businesses as well. The main impetus thus seems to have come from the government side rather than the private sector.

In Chile, the United States targeted a much weaker power and came to prefer an authoritarian regime that would fight communism and was not susceptible to leftist influence. The Nixon administration also was motivated mainly by a perceived threat to U.S. national interests rather than the private interests of U.S. corporations. This evidence is consistent with the selectorate argument. What is less clear, though, is how policymakers weighed the value of overthrowing Allende versus the value of not getting caught. Nixon was adamant that Allende be overthrown, and was furious when the CIA failed to keep him out of office. Kissinger, however, tried to veto the Viaux plot because of its low likelihood of success and the consequences of a failed coup, but kept alive the general possibility of a coup. There are also repeated remonstrances in the cable traffic to keep the American hand hidden. Almost everyone on the CIA side thought there was hardly any chance of blocking Allende, and no chance at all of hiding U.S. involvement, since everyone in the Chilean military knew what the United States wanted. Most of the evidence thus supports the view that the Nixon administration pushed for a coup in 1970 despite low odds of success and a high likelihood that American involvement would be exposed.

CONCLUSION

A close examination of two cases of attempted covert foreign regime change by the United States offers little support for norms and first generation institutional arguments proposed by democratic peace scholars suggesting that covert operations to overthrow the Guatemalan and Chilean governments were consistent with the democratic peace. In contradiction to NH1 and NH2, Guatemala and Chile in large part met the objective institutional requirements for democracy, and American leaders perceived Arbenz and Allende to be democratically elected. NH3/CBH1 also fared poorly, as we were unable to find evidence that policymakers were constrained from taking explicit action against the Guatemalan or Chilean governments by dovish American public opinion. Instead, officials cited fears of an international backlash, particularly in Latin America. Finally, both coups installed dictatorial regimes, contradicting NH4 (but supporting SH3) that democracies care little about fostering their own regime type when they undertake regime change; what they care most about is installing pliable governments that will follow the intervening democracy’s national interests. The evidence largely supported the selectorate hypotheses, as democracies targeted weak states and acted for reasons of national security. Democratic leaders contradicted the dictates of the selectorate model, however, by persisting in interventions with low likelihoods of success that were quite likely to become public.

Our findings are more damaging to normative and first-wave institutional explanations of democratic peace than later institutional ones. Norms arguments contend that democracies externalize their internal norms of peaceful conflict resolution and/or respect for individual autonomy and rights. Especially if leaders in one democracy recognize another country as

⁷³ The Report of the Subcommittee on Multinational Corporations, *The International Telephone and Telegraph Company in Chile, 1970-1971*, quoted in Kornbluh (2003, 18). Former DCI John McCone happened to be on ITT’s board of directors.

democratic, it is hard to reconcile aggressive and violent actions by one against the other with norms arguments. Furthermore, democracies should not replace the foreign governments they overthrow with repressive dictators. Nor is knowledge of and acquiescence in large-scale human rights violations compatible with liberal or democratic norms.

The institutional constraints argument about checks and balances flunks an early test because covert intervention demonstrates that democratic institutions do not always constrict the actions of democratic governments. If leaders can simply do an end-run around institutional limitations whenever they want to act secretly and avoid discovery by the voters or their elected representatives, then it is hard to argue that checks and balances are very constraining. The number of covert actions undertaken by the United States alone during the Cold War supports this view. Moreover, the evidence from Guatemala and Chile shows that U.S. leaders were not worried about the domestic consequences of discovery when choosing to act covertly. Fear that the public would disapprove of targeting another democracy, in other words, did not prevent U.S. elites from taking action nor did it force them to act secretly.

Matters are more complicated with the selectorate model of democratic institutions. On the one hand, the evidence from Guatemala and Chile surely supports the argument that democracies may actually prefer to install autocrats when they overthrow foreign governments. The only constraint on choices to use force by democratic leaders in this model is that the likelihood of prevailing must be high. That would have been true had the U.S. acted overtly against Arbenz or Allende, whose nations had small militaries that could have been easily crushed by American military might. But the U.S. did not act overtly; it chose to overthrow these regimes by covert means, with a much smaller likelihood of success. Policymakers in neither case were confident their coups would succeed, yet they went ahead with them anyway.

Our findings also have implications for arguments about democracy and preventive war. To date, the debate about whether democracies refrain from acting preventively has focused on interstate wars. Schweller (1992), for example, found no instances of democracies launching preventive wars in the historical record through the 1980s, and argued that attacking a country now because it might develop into a threat later violated the moral norms in democracies and could also be tremendously costly if the adversary was relatively powerful. The U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003 sparked a reevaluation of Schweller's argument because it appeared to be a preventive war initiated by a democracy. Silverstone (2004), for example, contends that there is no universal moral disapproval of preventive war in democracies, and finds that party identification/political ideology and respondents' beliefs about Saddam Hussein's complicity in the 9/11 terrorist attacks determined support for war against Iraq. Levy and Gochal (2003), moreover, argue that Israel's attack on Egypt in 1956 was a preventive war, and explore the conditions under which a democracy might act preventively. They maintain that democracies are not constrained from starting such wars when the costs promise to be low. In the case of the Sinai War, Israel entered into an alliance with two powerful states, Britain and France, and obtained guarantees that these allies would attack Egypt a few days after Israel did as well as provide air defenses against Egyptian bombers which might attack Israel.

What is striking about the cases of U.S. covert regime change examined in this paper is the degree to which policymakers expressed preventive motivations for overthrowing Arbenz

and Allende. On the one hand, U.S. officials understood that communists were not yet dominant in these countries, but worried that they would take over in the future. On the other hand, leaders feared that more and more countries would go communist if the United States did not act to stop it. In other words, the U.S. acted to avert the possibility of communist takeovers in currently democratic countries and the longer-term possibility that more regimes might go communist and possibly threaten American security. These cases provide further evidence against the view that democracies do not act preventively. Moreover, they were undertaken despite low confidence in success, and if they had failed, more costly U.S. invasions might have resulted.

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