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**Article:**

Mehrl, M and Choulis, I (2021) The colonial roots of structural coup-proofing. *International Interactions*, 47 (4). pp. 750-776. ISSN: 0305-0629

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2021.1898958>

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# The Colonial Roots of Structural Coup-Proofing

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*This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published in International Interactions on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2021.1898958>*

**Abstract:** Colonially inherited institutions are a key determinant of the regime type and economic outcomes of postcolonial countries. This study extends this claim to civil-military relations, arguing that former French colonies are especially likely to invest in structural coup-proofing. France created paramilitary units throughout its colonies for which many natives were recruited. After independence, these paramilitaries proved persistent and were consequently used to counterbalance the regular armed forces. In contrast, countries without existing paramilitary organizations had stronger militaries which deterred and even forcibly prevented structural coup-proofing. Quantitative tests using global data on coup-proofing and a paired comparison of civil-military relations in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana support the claim that former French colonies are more likely to heavily invest in counterbalancing. By showing how French colonial institutions provided post-independence governments with the opportunity to coup-proof, the study contributes to our understanding of civil-military relations as well as the institutional long-term effects of colonialism and foreign rule more generally.

**Keywords:** civil-military relations; colonialism; coup-proofing, coup d'état; counterbalancing

**Number of Words:** 10,686

## **Introduction**

Governments frequently rely on paramilitary organizations to ensure their survival in office by deterring coup attempts. These paramilitaries generally exist outside the normal chain of command and act as a counterweight to the regular military (Quinlivan, 1999) but are also used to combat internal threats to the regime other than coups. However, as the 2015 coup attempt by the Presidential Guard in Burkina Faso shows (Rakotomalala & Karoui, 2015), paramilitaries can also exert significant influence within a state and may even threaten government stability. We contend that colonial history can make a state more reliant on paramilitary forces. Specifically, we suggest that the institutional structure and military doctrine a country inherited from the former colonizer lent themselves to be utilized for increased counterbalancing. To this end, we provide evidence that French colonial rule is positively associated with the greater use of paramilitary forces for coup-proofing purposes.

In doing so, we build on a host of studies which examine the origin of the armed forces and civil-military relations in former French, British, and other colonies (Adekson, 1979; Austin, 1985; Harkness, 2018; Hettne, 1980; Luckham, 1994; McGowan & Johnson, 1984; Owusu, 1989). Most of these existing studies focus on a single or few cases but are unable to make systematic claims on the relationship between colonial history and present-day security forces. In addition, most of these studies are concerned with the origins of postcolonial armies and their coup attempts. In contrast, we study how paramilitaries established during French colonialism survived and were re-purposed to counter these coup attempts. Therefore, we draw attention to how colonial era institutions may shape the contemporary security environment in post-independence states. Particularly, we demonstrate that post-independence governments have an incentive to preserve security organizations established by external rulers. This institutional “stickiness” may not necessarily be limited to former colonies but may also apply to security organizations in post-conflict countries. Our findings suggest that policymakers

need to be wary of the security institutions they establish during peace building operations to avoid the potential detrimental effects associated with paramilitaries or the fragmentation of the security apparatus. To that end, there are reports of the UN-trained militarized police forces in Mali beating civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2017) while US-backed paramilitaries in Afghanistan have acquired a reputation for extreme violence against civilians (Feroz, 2020). As these paramilitaries operate independently from and are comparatively better equipped than the army (Feroz, 2020), their continuing existence is also bound to affect civil-military relations in Afghanistan after the planned US withdrawal. Hence, policymakers need to be aware of the persistence of colonial security institutions since organizations like paramilitaries are a crucial aspect of internal security and political violence in the developing world.

We claim that in addition to more contemporaneous factors such as coup risk and regime type, a country being a former French colony makes it rely more on counterbalancing. As newly independent states inherited the institutional arrangements of their colonial rulers, they inherited a regular army whose existing soldiers were often from different ethnic groups than political elites. In turn, this threatened elites' position, especially as they had little political legitimacy to begin with. But in contrast to other former colonies, notably British-ruled ones, countries emerging from French colonial rule also inherited a fragmented security apparatus including with numerous paramilitaries (Horowitz, 1985; Blanchard, 2014; Scott, 1971; Wells, 1974). Governments emerging from French colonial rule thus had not only the motivation to engage in counterbalancing but also the opportunity to do so through the repurposing of existing paramilitaries. This leads us to expect that former French colonies invest more in structural coup-proofing. We test this expectation using global data on colonial history and structural coup-proofing. Our results are in line with expectations as former French colonies engage in above-average counterbalancing compared to other countries. Several robustness

checks and a paired comparison of civil-military relations in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana further support this claim.

This finding shines a light on a previously unappreciated effect of colonialism on present-day civil-military relations and force organization. In addition, it also has relevant implications for the externally led reform and reorganization of the state security apparatus in post-conflict countries which we further discuss in the conclusion. Before doing so, we provide a short survey of the existing literatures on counterbalancing and the long-run effects of colonialism in the following two sections. We then discuss why we expect former French colonies to especially invest in counterbalancing in section three. Section four describes our research design and section five our quantitative results. Section six provides further evidence for our claim by comparing structural coup-proofing in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire and section seven concludes.

### **Coup-proofing**

Coup-proofing is the practice of civilian governments exploiting ethnoreligious ties or rank assignments to build a loyal military, dividing the armed forces into rivalrous organizations, and tasking outside security agencies with monitoring them (Quinlivan, 1999, p. 133-134; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2011, p. 333-335; Powell, 2012). And counterbalancing or structural coup-proofing<sup>1</sup> refers to the fragmentation of the security apparatus into rival organizations that balance each other (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2011, 2012; David, 1985). Paramilitaries who are not under military command and deployed close to the capital, e.g. the Iraqi Republican Guard under Saddam Hussein, are a vital aspect of this process as they can counterbalance the regular army (De Bruin, 2018; Quinlivan, 1999). But importantly, counterbalancing does not require these forces' loyalty to the ruler but instead works via rival organizations' separation and inability to coordinate (Böhmelt & Pilster 2015). Empirical research shows that such structural coup-proofing is effective in diminishing the probability of

successful coups (Albrecht & Eibl, 2018; Böhmelt & Pilster, 2015; De Bruin, 2018) but also indicates that regular armed forces may carry out preventive coups when faced with attempts to install new counterweights (De Bruin, 2018, 2020a; Harkness, 2018).

The lack of systematic studies on the colonial origins of coup-proofing is surprising not only due to the large literature on post-colonial armies and coups but also because structural coup-proofing is a costly practice that can have negative results for countries where it is used. Existing studies argue that it decreases military effectiveness, increases the armed forces' propensity to defect, leads to a higher risk of civil war, and may result in states pursuing weapons of mass destruction (Brown et al. 2016; Lutscher, 2016; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2011; Roessler, 2011). In other words, structural coup-proofing can have severe negative consequences, making it an important subject of study. In addition, paramilitaries and militarized police forces similar to those currently used for coup-proofing often were at the heart of the colonial security apparatus (Eck, 2018; Maghraoui, 2004). And finally, a growing literature studies the determinants of structural coup-proofing and identifies factors which increase leaders' incentives to counterbalance, such as coup risk and regime type, as key predictors (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012; Böhmelt et al. 2017; Escribà-Folch et al., 2019). Following some of these studies, we focus on the effect of institutions on coup-proofing but argue that French colonial inheritances increase counterbalancing not by affecting leaders' willingness to engage in the practice but their ability to do so.

### **The Long-run Effects of Colonial Institutions**

Colonialism influences the socioeconomic conditions of countries even post-independence. Numerous studies argue that formerly British colonies and those that were more directly administered by European settlers experienced better economic outcomes after independence than other former colonies (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Easterly & Levine, 2012; Grier, 1999; Smith, 1978; Bolt & Bezemer, 2009; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017; North et al., 2000; La Porta

et al., 1997; Engerman & Sokoloff, 2002). This comparative advantage is commonly explained with reference to the low formalism and the protection of property rights under the British Common Law system, which benefit free trade, private entrepreneurship, and foreign investments (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017; Djankov et al., 2003). In contrast, France's formalized and ineffective civil law court system and mercantilist economic policy are argued to contribute to the weak economic growth observed in former French colonies (Berinzon & Briggs, 2016, p. 341; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991, p. 132; Djankov et al., 2003; Newbury 1968, p. 348). Zooming in on British administered West Cameroon and French administered East Cameroon, Lee and Schultz (2012) find evidence for this deleterious long-run effect of French institutions even when accounting for a lot of the unobserved heterogeneity usually plaguing cross-country studies. Additionally, while examining state development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Thies concludes that external and internal rivalry have a positive effect on a state's extractive capacity (2004, 2005). From this perspective, a state involved in an external or internal rivalry, like an interstate dispute, will experience an increased institutional building capacity since the dispute justifies increased extraction of resources from society (Thies 2005, Tilly 1985). However, Thies highlights that unlike early modern Europe, post-colonial state-building in sub-Saharan Africa is limited since the state's extractive capacity is low. This stems from the fact that African states are lacking the nationalistic fervour to mobilize society in support of the war effort as well as the pacifying effect of contemporary international organizations and the international credit market (2007:728). Therefore, colonialism has significantly affected the course of state-building in sub-Saharan Africa compared to Europe and as a result the state of the security apparatus is expected to vary as well. In a similar vein, there is considerable evidence that British colonies displayed a higher degree of democratization after independence (Olsson, 2009; Lee & Paine, 2019).<sup>2</sup> This is again attributed to the lasting effects of colonial institutions, namely the earlier establishment of

colonial legislative bodies (Ojwang, 1980, p. 298) and native elites being integrated into colonial governance through elected advisory councils or as middle-level administrators (Lee & Schultz, 2012, p. 11-12; Lehning, 2013). Overall, the British, under the Lugardian policy of indirect rule, preserved the traditional indigenous hierarchies and cooperated with the native authorities (Tankebe, 2008; Bauman, 1997; Woods, 1988; Geschiere, 1993, p. 159; Crowder, 1964, p. 198). As a result of this policy, chieftains in former British West Africa still hold significant socio-political capital (Owusu, 1989, p. 374). In contrast, the French created a “quasi-assimilative authority system” in West Africa as they abolished local institutions and installed the French bureaucratic model (Chappell, 1989, p. 679; Firmin-Sellers, 2000, p. 254).<sup>3</sup> Subjugation to the central administration and cultural assimilation were essential features of the French colonial order (Julien, 1950; Woods, 1988). With regards to cultural assimilation, the French staffed the colonial administration with western educated natives, the *évolués*, and even granted them French citizenship (Lee & Schultz, 2012, p. 11-12; Griffiths, 2013, p. 354). Besides being culturally patronizing, the French colonial system was also deeply centralized (Kent, 1992; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991; McNamara, 1989). This rendered local chiefs “mere agents of the central colonial government with clearly defined duties and powers” under the supervision of political officers (Crowder, 1964, p. 199).

The existing literature thus points to a significant effect of colonial institutions even after decolonization. However, the lasting effects of the colonial security apparatus have received little attention so far. Our contribution is thus to link French colonial security institutions to post-colonial governments’ efforts at structural coup-proofing.

## **The Security Apparatus of the French Colonial Empire**

The colonial security apparatus generally lacked numbers and operated in inhospitable environments with poor infrastructure (De Juan et al., 2017, p. 272). For instance, a mere 5000 Frenchmen governed a native population of 3,423,000 in Equatorial Africa (Julien, 1950, p. 487). Colonial administrators struggled to attract a sufficient number of qualified recruits from the metropole and thus often recruited natives instead (De Juan et al., 2017, p. 272). In doing so, both British and French colonial administrations targeted specific groups among the native population. The British used racial criteria and preferred to recruit members of groups they deemed to be “warrior-tribes” (Harkness, 2018, p. 39), resulting in 60 per cent of the Ghanaian and Nigerian armed forces being Northerners at independence (Adekson, 1979, p. 151). And French military conscription throughout its African colonies primarily targeted groups living in the hinterland while avoiding the residents of coastal and forest regions despite the use of population density as the general rule for recruitment (Adekson, 1979, p. 159; Echenberg, 1975, p. 174; 1991, p. 63; Harkness, 2016, p. 593). These policies were in line with Frederick Lugard’s suggestions, according to which the armed forces should be dominated by a politically weak ethnic group whereas politically strong ethnic groups should be excluded from service, thus “making the politically strong militarily weak and the politically weak militarily strong” (Adekson, 1979, p. 154, Harkness, 2018, p. 39). Hence, colonial powers did not recruit members of ethnic groups with precolonial centralized political organization to the security forces (Ray, 2012, 2019). They relied instead on ethnic groups from underdeveloped regions or groups with non-centralized political organization in the precolonial era and no military tradition (Horowitz, 1985; Ray, 2012, p. 418-419, 2019, p. 572; Geddes et al., 2018). Consequently, efforts to diversify existing ethnically homogenous armies or institute ethnically homogenous armies where they did not yet exist often triggered coups by the armed forces (Harkness, 2016, 2018). The military set-up inherited by newly independent states’ thus turned out to be difficult to change as attempting this risked coups. More generally, studies on the

effect of colonial legacies on coup risk have produced mixed results. Some researchers indicate that former French colonies are more coup prone compared to British ones (McGowan & Johnson, 1984; Tusalem, 2010). In contrast, Wang (1998) suggests that former French colonies experience fewer coups than other African states due to France's interventionist policy in the region. Since 1960, France acted as the gendarme of Africa, with the policy of unilateral interventionism only being discontinued in the mid-1990s in favour of a reduced military presence and increased multilateralism (Charbonneau, 2008; Gregory 2000).

Other parts of the colonial security apparatus proved equally resistant to change. Eck (2018) argues that former British colonies which experienced an insurgency during the colonial era continue to have a more capable police force today because of the investment in training and institutional reforms made to increase colonial counterinsurgency effectiveness. In other words, the colonial authorities established potent policing institutions to counter insurgencies which the post-colonial authorities inherited later. For instance, the modern surveillance state in Niger has its roots in the French colonial police (Göpfert, 2016, p. 41). Similarly, countries that were under British colonial rule continue to be less likely to employ conscription as the British contempt towards the practice persisted after decolonization (Asal et al., 2017; Cohn & Toronto, 2017). There is thus substantial evidence that colonial security institutions persist after independence due to passed down practices and investments and because of incumbent military elites' interest in perpetuating them. This is in line with a more general literature on the persistence of colonial institutions (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Bolt & Bezemer, 2009).

But as already implied by the differences in the use of conscription, the organization of the armed forces and military doctrines varied substantially across European colonial powers (McGowan & Johnson, 1984, p. 644). Whereas the British Empire, with its tradition of a professional military made up of volunteers, also implemented this practice in its colonies (Adekson, 1979), the French colonial security forces heavily relied on irregulars. These

included organizations such as the foreign legion but also numerous paramilitaries that were staffed with recruits from both the metropole and the colonies. In Morocco, the French recruited natives into auxiliary forces to assist them with the pacification of the newly acquired territories (Maghraoui, 2004; Gershovich, 2004). Operating under the Bureau des Affaires Indigenes, the Mokhaznis acted as intelligence officers and participated in counter-insurgency campaigns against local tribes (Maghraoui, 2004, p. 241-42). Similarly, the Goumiers functioned as a police constabulary but their experience in mountainous warfare also made them valuable assets in military campaigns across Morocco and Europe (Maghraoui, 2004, p. 238-39). In creating these units, the French colonial authorities often imported security institutions from the metropole. They employed familiar institutions and operational routines by establishing colonial equivalents of the mainland gendarmeries and conscripting natives when necessary. Importantly for our purposes, these paramilitaries did not serve counterbalancing purposes during colonial times as the metropole provided an absolute security guarantee to colonial governments, making coup-proofing unnecessary (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Roessler 2016). At independence, these paramilitary organizations proved equally persistent as ethnic stacking and conscription as they were passed down to the post-colonial states and continue to exist today. For instance, the Benin gendarmerie, responsible for policing but also “paramilitary internal security duties”, has its roots in the French colonial gendarmes and the Gardes-Cercle, the colonial urban police units (Houngnikpo & Decalo, 2012, p. 184). Crucially, these inherited French paramilitary institutions have also been a central actor in civil-military affairs ever since, being tasked not only with internal surveillance but also with counterbalancing the regular armed forces (Blanchard, 2014, p. 13; Scott, 1971; Wells, 1974). For instance, Niger’s gendarmerie arrested high ranking officers for plotting a coup against the junta leader in 2010 (France24, 2010). Likewise, gendarmes stopped a coup attempt against the Gabonese government in early 2019 (BBC, 2019). The security apparatus in former French

colonies thus emulated the institutions of its colonial predecessor, simply replacing European servicemen with African ones, and utilized them for coup-proofing.

As a general principle, post-colonial governments had no role in establishing the military apparatuses they inherited from their predecessors. Additionally, since the colonial state governed primarily over the capital and coastal cities, post-colonial governments suffered from legitimacy issues in other parts of the country (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017, p. 161; Lee & Schultz, 2012). For these reasons, governments in former colonies have generally had more incentives to coup-proof than other states. However, France's former colonies also had a specific institutional advantage to act on these incentives. At independence, these countries inherited a security apparatus that, in addition to regular police and armed forces, also consisted of one or several paramilitary organizations which lent themselves to be used as counterweights for structural coup-proofing (Horowitz, 1985). In contrast, countries that received their independence from the British Empire inherited a less fragmented security apparatus including a military with a stronger tradition of professionalism. Similarly, decolonization had a large impact on the identity and corporate interests of post-colonial armies everywhere by triggering a rapid transfer of the officer ranks from European incumbents to native successors. However, Britain had begun this transfer earlier than other colonial powers, meaning that many British colonies had at least the foundation of a native officer corps at independence (Harkness, 2018, p. 37). In contrast, France and other colonial powers lagged behind, meaning that their former colonies' postcolonial armies had to rebuild the officer corps from scratch while initially being led by an overwhelmingly European caretaker officer corps (Luckham, 1994, p. 38; McNamara, 1989, p. 143-144; Welch, 1986, p. 323). They hence had little ability to resist the continuing existence of paramilitaries and their transformation into counterbalancing forces, even if they had wanted to. In contrast, militaries in former British colonies, with their stronger history of military professionalism, larger native officer corps, and facing no existing

paramilitaries, were well able to resist attempts at structural coup proofing, e.g. in Ghana 1966 or Sierra Leone 1967 (Harkness, 2018, p. 108-152, see also De Bruin, 2020a).

In short, the set-up of the security apparatus inherited by French colonies lent itself for structural coup-proofing whereas that inherited by former British colonies did not due to a lack of existing paramilitaries and a more professionalized officer corps. As paramilitaries provided political elites in former French colonies with the means to limit the influence of the armed forces, they had little incentive to abolish them. And in addition, paramilitary forces would resist governmental efforts to disband them just as ethnically stacked militaries resist diversification policies (Harkness, 2016, 2018). For instance, multiple factions inside the presidential guard in Benin engaged in coup attempts once threatened with disbandment following president Kerekou's electoral defeat in 1991 (Banégas, 2003, p. 190). These institutions and practices passed on at independence should also have proven only more enduring as both Franco- and Anglophone countries continued sending their officers to military academies in the former metropole, thus reinforcing existing military doctrines (Blanchard, 2014, p. 13; McNamara, 1989; Hettne, 1980; Austin, 1985; Tilly, 1985, p. 186).

To summarize, we contend that the institutional arrangements of the French colonial security forces provided newly independent states with a clear opportunity to institute structural coup-proofing post-independence. To this end, the French colonial state favoured the use of a fractured security apparatus including gendarmeries and other paramilitaries such as the Mokhaznis and Goumiers. It also heavily recruited natives for these units who continued serving after independence. The newly independent governments of the former French colonies thus usually inherited existing paramilitaries which could be used for counterbalancing purposes. They also inherited a comparatively weak regular army which had difficulties resisting the institutionalisation of such counterbalancing. And finally, post-colonial political elites, having emerged from the French policy of centralized, direct rule, were often western-

educated and well assimilated to the former metropole but lacked political legitimacy at home (Crowder, 1964, p. 197-199; Greschiere, 1993, p. 154-166; Lee & Schultz, 2012, p. 11-12). Hence, they had not only the opportunity but also a clear incentive to employ structural coup-proofing (Escribà-Folch et al., 2019), especially as their inherited armed forces were often staffed by other ethnic groups (Harkness, 2018). Independent governments emerging from French colonial rule thus combined both the opportunity and willingness to counterbalance, leading us to expect that *former French colonies employ structural coup-proofing policies to a higher degree.*

### **Research Design and Methodology**

We examine this claim both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative tests, we employ a dataset that combines information on countries' coup-proofing practices with information on their colonial history. In a qualitative analysis, we further investigate the empirical implications of our claim in a paired comparison of two broadly similar countries, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, whose main difference is arguably the colonial power they had been ruled by before independence. We focus on describing the quantitative analysis here.

To measure the dependent variable, we use De Bruin's (2018) data on counterbalancing forces in 65 developing countries covering the period 1960-2010. Our sample thus includes the former colonies of France and of other colonial powers as well as countries which did not experience colonial rule. Counterbalancing forces are defined as security units whose "operational control rests with the executive, interior ministry, or other government body besides the defense ministry" and that are "deployed within sixty miles of the capital" (De Bruin, 2018, p. 1440f). In line with earlier studies, we choose a binary indicator to measure this concept because the logic of counterbalancing does not depend on the number of such forces as even relatively few units may be able to prevent a coup; this approach also minimizes potential measurement errors induced by misidentifying security units as (non-)counterbalancing ones (De Bruin, 2018;

Escriba-Folch et al., 2019). At the same time, we do not expect that countries not colonized by France exhibit no structural coup-proofing whatsoever; for instance, former British colonies were just as likely to have an ethnically unmatched military at independence, motivating their governments to counterbalance. Instead, our argument indicates that former French colonies had more opportunities to coup-proof as they inherited a more fragmented security apparatus. Our dependent variable is thus the dummy *counterbalancing* which measures whether a country has an above average number of such units ( $>1.13$ ) (Escriba-Folch et al., 2019). As *counterbalancing* is a dichotomous variable, we use logistic regression models. We cluster standard errors on the country and include the cubic polynomials of the time since a given country's last use of counterbalancing to address time dependency (Carter & Signorino 2010).

Our main independent variable is an indicator of a country's main colonial power. *French Colony* is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if France was a country's main colonizer and 0 if otherwise. The information for this variable is taken from Version 1.1 of the ICOW Colonial History Data Set (Hensel, 2018b).<sup>4</sup> We also include a number of variables in our models that may be correlated with both a country's colonial experience and its use of coup-proofing. First, we include a dummy whether a country was colonized at all which is also based on the ICOW data. We do so to differentiate between countries that were not colonized by France and countries that were not colonized at all. In one of our main specifications, we instead include measures of the time that a country spent under colonial rule and whether it was ruled directly or indirectly. Both variables vary over different colonizers due to differences in the timing of decolonization and the preferred style of rule but should also affect what institutional set-up a country had at decolonization. We take the information for both variables from Ziltener, Künzler, and Walter (2017) which means that they are only available for Africa and Asia.

In addition to these colonialism-specific controls, we also control for factors in our models that existing research has identified as relevant determinants of coup-proofing. Regime type matters as democracies seem to invest less in counterbalancing than other countries while personalist regimes appear to invest more (Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012; Escriba-Folch et al., 2019). We thus include a categorical indicator of whether a country is a democracy, anocracy or autocracy<sup>5</sup>, coded from polity IV data (Marshall et al., 2018), as well as dummy whether it is a personalist regime which is taken from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). Military spending may substitute for coup-proofing in some cases (Albrecht & Eibl, 2018), leading us to include a country's logged military expenditures, sourced from the Correlates of War National Material Capability Data (Singer et al., 1972), as control. Coup Risk determines to what extent coup-proofing is necessary but also feasible (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Sudduth, 2017) and we include a dummy indicating whether a country experienced a coup attempt in the previous ten years to capture this. The data on coups for this come from Powell and Thyne (2011). Finally, we also control for a country's logged GDP per capita and logged population, both taken from Gleditsch (2002). We do so as a country's extent of coup-proofing should be affected by its internal threat level which is heavily influenced by both its economic development and population size as well as other variables already part of our models (Roessler, 2011, 2016).

## **Empirical Results**

We estimate four main models to examine whether a country's colonial history affects its present-day use of counterbalancing. These are presented in table one. Model 1 includes only the *French Colony* dummy and time controls as independent variables while model 2 adds the dummy indicating whether a country was ever colonized. These models omit all other independent variables because including controls may induce bias (Clarke, 2005; Lenz and Sahn 2020), especially if they are potentially affected by the "treatment" French colonialism (Montgomery et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant in our case as a vast literature

summarized above argues that colonial history affects regime type and economic development, not just coup-proofing. Model 3 nonetheless adds several present-day variables that may plausibly be correlated with both colonial history and coup-proofing. Model 4 further accounts for possible cross-sectional confounders by estimating a random-effects logit. Finally, number 5 replaces the colonialism dummy with two more detailed characteristics of a country’s colonial history: whether it was directly or indirectly ruled and how long it was under colonial rule. However, these variables restrict our sample to Africa and Asia (Ziltener et al., 2017).

As expected, all five models indicate that a French colonial history positively influences counterbalancing. The *French Colony* dummy has a consistently positive effect that is also statistically different from zero in all four models. To evaluate the effects of *French Colony* more substantially, we present its first difference estimates from models one and three in figure 1. These indicate that former French colonies have a three to seven percentage points higher probability of substantial counterbalancing than other countries. The 95%-Confidence Intervals of this effect do not include zero in both models. Figure 1 also includes the corresponding first difference estimate based on the random-effects logit in model four, suggesting an even stronger effect of French colonial rule.

*Figure 1 approximately here*

Dep. Var.: Counterbalancing	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>French Colony</b>	0.658** (0.315)	0.647** (0.320)	1.496*** (0.382)	3.191*** (1.041)	1.207*** (0.441)
Colonialized		0.080 (0.520)	0.914 (0.717)	2.413 (1.469)	
Direct Colonialism					-0.116 (0.440)
Years of Colonialism					-0.001

					(0.002)
Anocracy			-0.093	-0.124	0.283
			(0.297)	(0.488)	(0.354)
Democracy			-0.750**	-1.082**	-0.049
			(0.380)	(0.536)	(0.654)
In Military Expenditures			0.544***	0.489***	0.474***
			(0.102)	(0.158)	(0.128)
Coup attempts (last 10 years)			0.121	0.374	0.529
			(0.339)	(0.581)	(0.424)
In GDP			0.027	0.641**	0.198
			(0.182)	(0.320)	(0.222)
In Population			-0.313*	-0.390	-0.523**
			(0.180)	(0.507)	(0.215)
Personalist Regime			0.509	0.473	0.107
			(0.376)	(0.667)	(0.513)
Counterbalanc. Years	-1.715***	-1.715***	-1.538***	-1.289***	-1.620***
	(0.152)	(0.152)	(0.140)	(0.126)	(0.169)
Counterbalanc. Years <sup>2</sup>	0.087***	0.087***	0.075***	0.064***	0.088***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.015)
Counterbalanc. Years <sup>3</sup>	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	1.883***	1.813***	-3.181**	-10.994***	-0.960
	(0.196)	(0.508)	(1.588)	(3.627)	(1.334)
Observations	2,940	2,940	2,802	2,802	1,690
Random-Effects	No	No	No	Yes	No

Table 1: Logit Regressions with standard errors clustered on the country in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

To further illustrate the positive effect of a French colonial history on counterbalancing, consider the case of Cote d'Ivoire. The country achieved independence from France in 1960 and immediately invested in counterbalancing, a practice its changing governments have continuously adhered to until at least 2010 (Andrade, 1985; Boutellis, 2011). Our model correctly classifies this, estimating a 73.0% probability of counterbalancing in Cote d'Ivoire at Independence. But how would this probability have changed had Cote d'Ivoire been colonized by the British like neighbouring Ghana? It turns out that this counterfactual colonial history would have turned structural coup-proofing in Cote d'Ivoire into what is essentially a coin-flip with our model indicating that little structural coup-proofing would have been more likely than severe counterbalancing ( $p_{counterbalancing}=0.446$ ). That colonial history matters for coup-proofing is also supported when assessing its predictive performance. For this, we ran a 4-fold cross validation exercise which we repeated ten times for model three with and without the

*French Colony* dummy (Ward et al., 2010). Dropping *French Colony* from the model is associated with a modest decrease of predictive out-of-sample performance of 0.02.

There are three possible key concerns with these findings. First, countries with and without a French colonial history may differ substantially on numerous control variables due to their different historical trajectories, making it difficult to compare “treated” units, i.e. those that were colonized by France, with non-treated ones. To address this and decrease the difference between treatment and control groups, we pre-process our data using Coarsened Exact Matching on a range of colonial and present-day control variables to arrive at more balanced samples (Iacus et al., 2012). We then re-run our analysis concerning the effect of French colonialism using this balanced sample; the substantive result is presented in figure 2.<sup>6</sup> Based on this analysis, French colonies have a ~12 percentage points higher probability of structural coup-proofing than other countries, this effect is also significantly different from zero.

Second, our main independent variable is time-invariant. Using time-series cross-sectional data to analyse it may thus overstate results as it only exhibits cross-sectional variation. We thus re-run our analysis in four cross-sectional models where the dependent variable is, respectively, the first observation, the maximum value, minimum value, and mean value of the counterbalancing item within a country. In the first case the controls are also from the first country-observation while they are otherwise averaged over the whole observation period.<sup>7</sup> The substantive results of this analysis are again presented in figure two and provide further support for the claim that French colonies are associated with more counterbalancing.

***Figure 2 approximately here***

Third, until now we treat the effect of French colonial institutions on counterbalancing as temporally homogenous, i.e. assume it to be the same in 1960 as in 2010. However, this assumption is potentially problematic as the political circumstances of most post-colonial

countries also underwent significant changes after independence. For our purposes, one particularly important dynamic may have been Francophone countries' changing relationship with the former colonial ruler. Beginning in the early-mid 1960s, France served as an outside guarantor of the rule of pro-French leaders by arming and training their forces, establishing military bases in these countries, and even intervening by force if necessary (Gregory 2000). Until this policy was revised in the mid-1990s, following the Rwandan genocide, the possibility of a French intervention served to deter potential coup plotters (Charbonneau 2008; Wang 1998). This raises the possibility that while former French colonies had the opportunity to coup-proof throughout this period, they had little incentive to do so as long as French interventions would deter and put down coup attempts. We thus examine whether the effect of a French colonial legacy on structural counterbalancing varies over time, expecting that its effects may be weaker or even disappear in the period of France's regime-saving interventions. To do so, we first re-estimate model 3 on six cross-sectional sub-samples respectively covering the first year of each decade in our full sample. Second, we also re-estimate model 3 while allowing the effect of *French Colony* to flexibly vary over time by interacting it with the cubic polynomials of *Year* which captures the year of observation. We present the results of these specifications in figure 3 and full results tables in the appendix.

***Figure 3 approximately here***

Together, the two panels of figure 3 are in line with the idea that French colonies counterbalanced especially when the former colonizer did not prop up their rule as we observe positive effects right after independence as well as once France had transitioned away from its interventionist policy following the events in Rwanda. The effect of inherited colonial institutions thus proved remarkably persistent as even in the 2000s, former French colonies were still able to turn pe-existing paramilitaries into counterbalancing forces. For instance, Niger's militarized gendarmerie and Mali's National Police both became independent from the

armed forces in the mid-1990s while the Nigerien National Guard, a “back-up force [...] used [...] to provide security to authorities and public buildings”, was similarly repurposed for coup-proofing purposes in 2003 (Anonymous 2011, p.181; Nimaga 2011, p.129; see also De Bruin 2020b).

Next, we summarize additional robustness checks which we report in more detail in the appendix. First, we include dummies for former British colonies as well as other colonizers our models, restrict our sample to former colonies, and account for time since independence and further attributes of a country’s colonial experience. Second, we replicate our main models with alternative measures of counterbalancing, namely the numbers of separate military organizations by Pilster and Böhmelt (2011, 2012) and of counterbalancing forces (De Bruin, 2018). Third, we include a number of additional variables that have been argued to affect coup-proofing and may potentially also be correlated to colonial history, e.g. involvement in armed conflicts, army centrality, and an unmatched officer corps. Our finding persists across all these additional specifications. Finally, we examine whether French colonies, due to their structural coup-proofing, are also less likely to suffer coup attempts and find support for this.

### **Case Evidence: Counterbalancing in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana**

We now turn to a paired comparison of counterbalancing in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana, neighbouring countries in Western Africa, to further illustrate the theoretical mechanism outlined above. They constitute a fertile ground to further examine our theory due to similarities in their population size and density, economic conditions, natural resources, and the Akans being the largest ethnic group in both cases. In both countries, the respective colonizer’s economic activities and urbanization efforts were also concentrated in the Christian-dominated South while largely eschewing the predominantly Muslim North (Clignet & Foster, 1964, p.

350). Thus, the two countries exhibit similar economic and urban development and a common ethnoreligious make-up. What distinguishes them is the origin of the colonial authority. The French rule in Cote d'Ivoire was centralized and direct whereas the British administration in Ghana was de-centralized (Clignet & Foster, 1964, p. 350). For instance, while the British preserved the Ghanaian customary land law, the French appointed colonial representatives as the final arbitrators of land disputes (Woods, 2004, p. 228). Mirroring Mill's Most Similar System Design, the two countries share very similar socioeconomic conditions but demonstrate a key differential feature, their colonial legacy (Anckar, 2008, p. 389; Landman, 2008, p. 70). This enables us to examine the effect of colonialism on counterbalancing without inducing selection bias (Landman, 2008).

Specifically, matching on values of the dependent variable or variables strongly associated with colonialism, like civil-military relations, would induce selection bias to the research. We also cannot consider the countries' difference in posttreatment variables such as their participation in peacekeeping operations as these differences may already be due to the treatment, i.e. the colonial security apparatus they inherited. As such, the case studies ignore more recent developments in the countries civil-military relations which may have been induced by, e.g., democratization, Ghana's frequent participation in peacekeeping missions or the Ivorian civil wars (Salihu 2020; Schiel et al. 2017). Therefore, the case studies focus on exploring how, despite strong political similarities, French colonial legacies resulted in counterbalancing becoming prominent in Cote d'Ivoire while British-inherited security institutions blocked such a development in post-independence Ghana.

Upon independence in 1960, Cote d'Ivoire inherited a set of French police and paramilitary organizations, including the Municipal Police, the National Security Police, the youth organization Civic Service, and the Gendarmerie National, all reporting to civilian ministries (Andrade, 1985, p. 106). Among these, the gendarmerie answers directly to the President while

technically belonging to the Ministry of Defence and Civic Service and its primary function is to patrol and defend the capital Abidjan (Andrade, 1985, p. 106; Boutellis, 2011, p. 2). It is thus closely in line with De Bruin's definition of counterbalancing units being "independent from military command" and "deployed within sixty miles of the capital, which ensures it has at least the possibility of being able to intercept a coup" (2018, p. 1440). Accordingly, the gendarmerie is also responsible for checking the power of the army and has been in open conflict with it. For instance, it opposed the armed forces after the contested elections of 2000 when it backed the removal of the incumbent military regime and instead supported Laurent Gbagbo's claim to the presidency (Boutellis, 2011, p. 4). Many of the other Ivorian security organizations, including the exceedingly militarized police, have a similarly competitive relationship with the military (Boutellis, 2011, p. 1-6). The case of Cote d'Ivoire thus demonstrates how former French colonies preserved the paramilitary organizations inherited from the colonial security apparatus and have employed them to counterbalance the armed forces.

In contrast, Ghana inherited little in terms of paramilitary organizations upon independence from Great Britain in 1957. Faithful to the professionalism of the armed forces, the British had never even established a colonial gendarmerie or conscription. And paramilitary units in Ghana continue to be limited to this day with the Border Guard Unit, an agency responsible for guarding the borders and answering in part to the Ghana Revenue Authority, being a rare exception (Chazan, 1982, p. 461; Sosuh, 2011, p. 21). Another essential internal security agency, the police, is weakly institutionalized and widely seen as corrupt (Tankebe, 2008, p. 79-82). However, independent Ghana did inherit a military which adhered to the British military tradition of a professional officership and accordingly exhibited a clear, elitist corporate identity (Hettne, 1980). In addition, the Ghanaian armed forces were ethnically stacked as Ewe and Ga dominated the officer corps, Northerners made up most of the rank-

and-file, and the largest ethnic group, the Akan, were only marginally represented (Harkness, 2018, p. 147).

The Ghanaian army and its officer corps thus had clear corporate interests and, as President Kwame Nkrumah soon found out, were ready to defend them. Shortly after independence, Nkrumah attempted to restructure the armed forces in an effort to break the dominance of Ewe and Ga over the military. This led to what Nkrumah believed to be Ewe and Ga orchestrated plots to assassinate him at two occasions and resulted in him trying to establish co-ethnic units and counterbalancing organizations to protect himself (Harkness, 2018, p. 147, Hettne, 1980). However, these actions instead had the opposing effect, as he was deposed by a pre-emptive Ewe-led military coup in 1966, an event that was the start of a series of coups and countercoups resulting from power struggles between different factions in the officer corps (Austin, 1985). While Nkrumah thus had a clear incentive to coup-proof against an ethnically stacked army, his attempts to do so fell short as he was unable to sufficiently empower his newly-created presidential guard as a counterweight to the professionalized army inherited from the British (Baynham, 1985, p. 97). And even as coup risk continued to be high in the following years, subsequent Ghanaian governments largely abandoned the idea of counterbalancing, apparently having learned from Nkrumah's experience that in the absence of readily available paramilitaries who could be used for this purpose, such actions would only risk triggering pre-emptive coups (Austin, 1985, p. 94).

So, unlike Cote d'Ivoire where auxiliary forces predated independence and could be used for coup-proofing, Ghana did not inherit paramilitaries. And government efforts to establish such forces to counterbalance triggered a harsh response from the military. In consequence, this comparison illustrates our argument that colonial history has an impact on postcolonial security agencies and civil-military relations. Cote d'Ivoire had experience with paramilitary units like the gendarmerie and inherited numerous such organizations upon independence. These

paramilitaries were tasked with counterbalancing the armed forces and, fulfilling this purpose, continue to play an important role in current politics. In contrast, the Ghanaian example shows how the governments of non-French ex-colonies, , had considerable difficulties with structural coup-proofing. Not having inherited paramilitary organizations from their colonizer, these countries could not repurpose existing forces for counterbalancing but had to establish new ones while risking deposal from a military that was ready to protect its interests through coups. As such, the comparative case studies reiterate that while numerous postcolonial governments had an incentive to coup-proof, former French colonies were uniquely positioned to act upon this incentive.

## **Conclusion**

A large literature examines the long-run effects of colonialism on post-colonial countries' economic and institutional development. We join these studies by exploring how colonialism affected structural coup-proofing. We argue that as was the case with civilian institutions, colonial rulers' security institutions proved persistent after independence. Former French colonies inherited existing paramilitary forces and a comparatively weak military upon independence, allowing their political elites to counterbalance against armed forces whose members were often from other ethnic groups and hence seen as threatening. In contrast, other colonial powers did not leave behind readily available counterweights but instead more professionalized armed forces that were better able to defend their corporate interest by resisting any attempts to institute structural coup-proofing. As a result, we suggest that former French colonies should exhibit more counterbalancing, a claim supported by both the results of statistical analyses and a paired comparison of structural coup-proofing in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.

This finding contributes to a nascent literature on the effects of colonialism on the security apparatus and civil-military relations in postcolonial countries (Asal et al., 2017; De Juan et

al., 2017; Eck, 2018; Harkness, 2016, 2018). More specifically, we find support for the claim that as colonial security institutions proved persistent, postcolonial elites employed some of these inherited institutions, i.e. paramilitaries, to secure their position against threats posed by other inheritances, i.e. an ethnically stacked military. In doing so, we also contribute to a literature on the predictors of coup-proofing which has to date mainly focused on factors driving leaders' willingness to counterbalance, for instance regime types and coup risk, while leaving the determinants of their ability to do so relatively unexplored.

However, this study can only present a starting point for understanding the long-run origins of structural coup-proofing. Colonial powers used substantially different ruling practices within their empires due to variations in e.g. the period of first colonialization, the number of European settlers, and local political structures (Olsson, 2009; Mahoney, 2010). It is likely that this also affected how the security apparatus was structured but our study is unable to uncover such within-empire variations. Future studies may thus more closely examine the colonial origins of existing paramilitary forces. For this, archival work and more extensive single country or comparative case studies may prove beneficial. Similarly, future work may also further investigate the effects of colonial legacies on coup occurrence, particularly in combination with the postcolonial countries' relationship to the former ruler.

However, the present study already points to some policy implications this research may have. Most importantly, we argue that security organizations established by an external ruler persist once that rule ends but that in the new political environment, ruling elites may repurpose them for structural coup-proofing. As it stands, there is little reason to believe that this argument is limited to organizations established under colonialism. It may also apply to post-conflict countries where the security apparatus is reformed and re-organized as part of an international peacebuilding intervention. On one hand, our research implies that such measures make sense as the resulting institutional makeup of the security apparatus tends to persist over time. But

on the other hand, they also indicate that when designing such reforms, international stakeholders must ensure that the institutions they implement cannot afterwards be used for deleterious practices such as counterbalancing. In particular, this implies that dissolving existing paramilitaries and integrating them into the regular armed forces should be a focus of security sector reform while strengthening organizations such as gendarmeries, border forces or presidential guards should not be.

## Notes

1. Though there are also alternative coup-proofing strategies, we use the terms counterbalancing and structural coup-proofing interchangeably in this paper to increase readability.
2. Additionally, the democracy levels of all former colonies have significantly converged after the Cold War ended (Lee & Paine, 2019).
3. However, European powers also ruled based on the degree of political centralization of the indigenous societies (Firmin-Sellers, 2000, p. 254). Nevertheless, others argue that direct rule

and protectionist policies were a result of the weaker international position of France compared to Britain (Smith, 1978, p. 74-75).

4. Moreover, for countries which were under the colonial rule of multiple foreign powers before achieving independence, only the one colonizer is recorded which “was most responsible for shaping the development of the entity (or entities) that became this modern state” (Hensel 2018a). This means that this colonial power controlled a country either for the longest duration or the highest share of its present-day territory. Our main analysis focuses on France as we have theoretical expectations for this colonial power. However, we also examine the long-term effects of other colonial powers on present-day counterbalancing in the appendix.
5. We differentiate between autocracies and anocracies as it is neither theoretically nor empirically clear whether these two regime types are equally likely to coup-proof.
6. A full result table can be found in the appendix.
7. As averaging the original counterbalancing dummy over a country’s observations results in a variable that is bounded between 0 and 1 but continuous, we use a fractional response logit to analyse it (see Papke & Woolridge, 1996).

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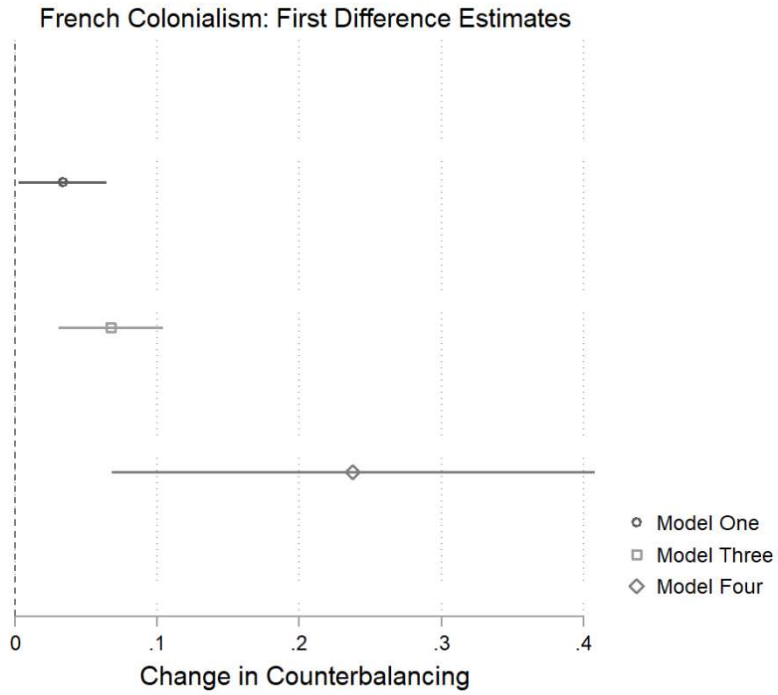


Figure 1: First Difference estimates for *French Colony*. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals; dashed line represents zero difference; effects calculated while all other variables held at observed values.

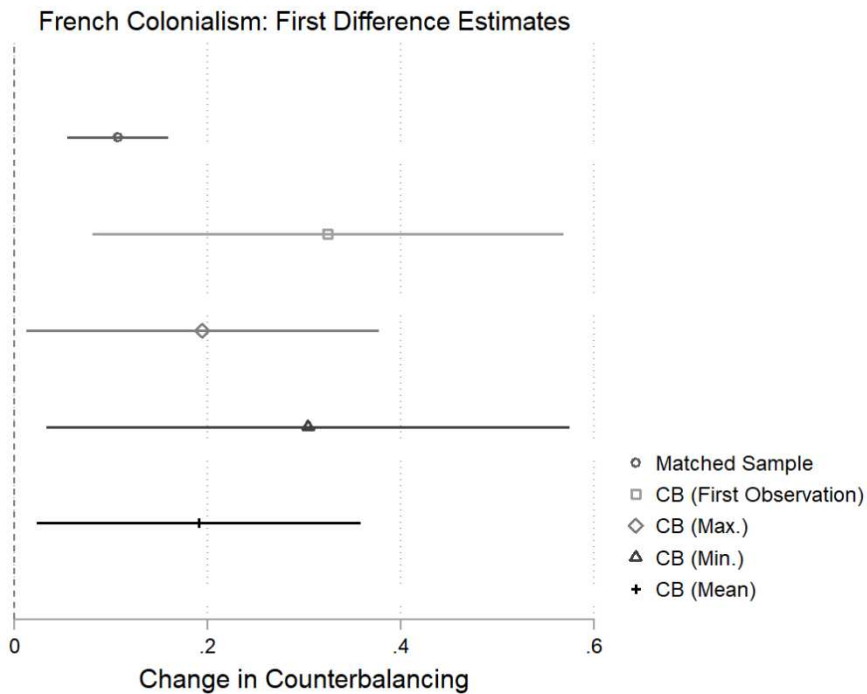


Figure 2: First Difference estimates for *French Colony*. Whiskers represent 90% confidence intervals; dashed line represents zero difference; effects calculated while all other variables held at observed values.

### French Colonialism: Time-varying Effects

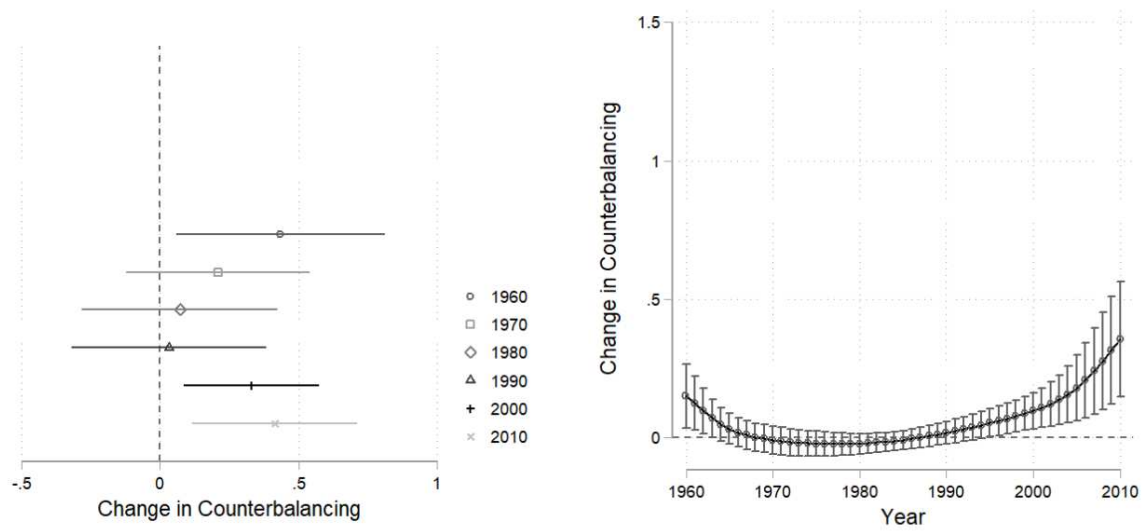


Figure 3: First Difference estimates for *French Colony*. Left panel: Effect estimates based on separate, cross-sectional models for six years. Right panel: Effect estimates based on interacting *French Colony* with the cubic polynomials of *Year*. Whiskers represent 90% confidence intervals; dashed line represents zero difference; effects calculated while all other variables held at observed values.