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RESEARCH ARTICLES
Democracy and land justice in Africa
Eduard Ceballos and Andrew Norton

The dictator's legionnaires: foreign recruitment, coups, and uprisings
Marius Mehrl and Abel Escrivà-Folch

Metaphorical bases of effective organizations? Do women
lead of diversity affect the effectiveness
of global partners?
Anika Bhatnagar and Barbara Kuehn

Countering neo-fascism: a roadmap for democratic defence
from the U.S. Center for Peace and Justice at Rutgers
Toby Bear and George Derdik

Waking our soldiers: evidence from Zambia
Bibi Accampo Pika

The quest of post-war peace: alternatives, redemptive,
and violent outcomes
Michael G. Schuman

The effects of corruption on democracy in America
Harold A. Miller

Elite polarization and democratic backsliding in Turkey
Ibrahim Kocak and Mustafa Kocak
ADRIAN B. GONZALEZ

BOOK REVIEWS

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The dictator's legionnaires: foreign recruitment, coups, and uprisings

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ABSTRACT

Several countries recruit foreign nationals into their armed forces. This is despite the norm of citizen armies and the strong idea that individuals join the military to defend their home country while military service socializes them into good citizens. We argue that foreign recruits can have very specific benefits for some authoritarian governments. Because they lack strong links to society, their loyalties lie with whoever recruited and pays them, not the nation, country, or its citizens. As such, we argue, first, that their recruitment is especially attractive for personalistic rulers. Second, we propose that foreigners' presence in the armed forces stymies these forces' ability to carry out coup attempts and deters the occurrence of mass uprisings by signalling the security forces' willingness to respond with violent repression. Empirical tests for the period 1946–2010 support these arguments. This research expands our understanding of legionnaire recruitment, civil–military relations, and comparative authoritarianism.

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Introduction

Dictators face the risk of being irregularly unseated from the inside, via coups, or from the outside, via mass uprisings.¹ Consequently, they strategically design the organization and composition of their security forces to neutralize these collective challenges. These two dimensions shape the incentives and opportunities of members of the armed forces and, hence, their behaviour. This article focuses on the second dimension and shows that manipulating the composition of the military by incorporating foreign nationals (legionnaires) into the armed forces, a strategy more likely to be pursued by personalistic rulers, helps reduce the incidence of both forms of organized threats.

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Mercenary soldiers were common during medieval and early modern times.² However, due to growing populations and territories as well as changing state-society relations, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, states moved to adopt standing citizen armies to obtain military manpower. This change led to the emergence of a new critical challenge: The guardianship dilemma, according to which a permanent army capable enough of protecting the state against foreign threats also acquires a pivotal position that it can use to seize power.³ Nondemocratic rulers' strong reliance on coercion makes this dilemma all the more important, resulting in the adoption of coup-proofing practices to guard against this inside threat.⁴

Despite the obvious sensitivity of national security issues and national identity, as well as the historical (and normative) move to adopt citizen armies, many governments continue to recruit foreigners – i.e. legionnaires – into their armed forces. Legionnaires are “uniformed personnel who serve in a state’s armed forces, but who – at the time of their service – are neither citizens of that state nor, in the days of the empire, subjects of the government”.⁵ They are foreign recruits and, hence, members of the security forces, including both “foreigners who volunteer and those whom states conscript”.⁶ As [Figure 1](#) shows, this practice has become increasingly common among authoritarian regimes; a trend that, interestingly, coincides with two other important political developments: The gradual increase in the level of personalism in dictatorships,⁷ and the emergence of coups and later mass protests as the most common method for irregular regime breakdown.⁸

Existing research suggests that there is a trade-off between tackling elite-based and mass-based threats, so that the institutional and security strategies dictators adopt to minimize one of these risks increase the other. Concerning formal political institutions, Woo and Conrad find that while coups are less likely in autocracies with co-optive institutions (i.e. a legislature with multiple parties), those same institutions make protests more frequent.⁹ Some posit that alternative designs of the security

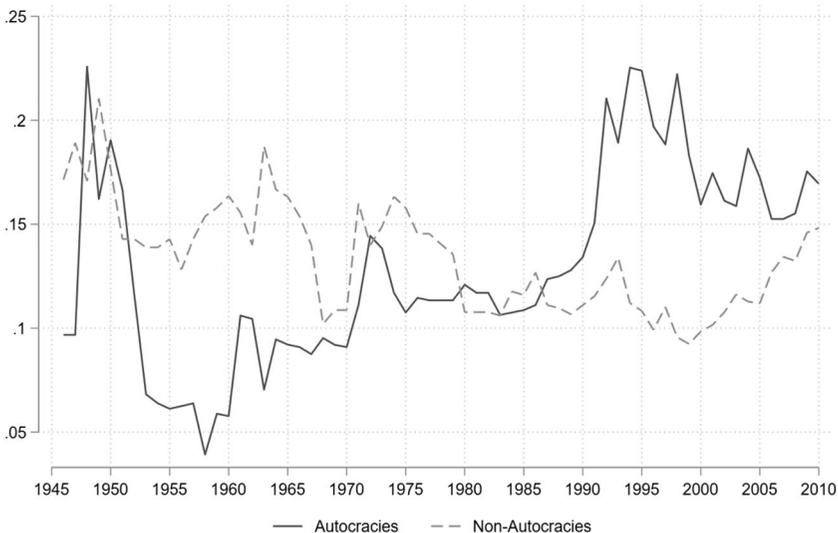


Figure 1. Share of autocracies and non-autocracies with foreign legionnaires, 1946–2010. Data Sources – [Grasmeder \(2021\)](#), [Geddes et al. \(2018\)](#).

apparatus entail a similar trade-off. Greitens, for example, contends that “Optimizing one’s internal security apparatus to defend against a coup, (...), produces precisely the opposite organizational configuration of the one that an autocrat should want if his main priority is the management of popular unrest”.¹⁰ She in turn contends that dictators interested principally in coup-proofing are likely to build fragmented and socially exclusive security forces, while those prioritizing mass control will create unitary and inclusive forces. We challenge this tenet and argue that autocrats have some compositional strategies in their toolkit that are, in fact, effective against both forms of challenges. Specifically, we examine the political determinants and consequences of one key practice determining the level of exclusivity or social ties of military members, the recruitment of foreigners.

Traditional explanations for why contemporary governments enlist legionnaires concentrate on the existence of imperial legacies and on governments’ contextual need for manpower due to ongoing (internal or interstate) armed conflicts.¹¹ For example, Gaddafi allegedly employed numerous foreigners to fight against rebels in the 2011 Libyan civil war. Yet, the presence of foreigners in authoritarian security forces goes beyond the short-term, conflict-driven need for manpower. More recent accounts of legionnaire recruitment stress structural constraints to enlisting nationals due to untrustworthy populations and domestic threats.¹² In fact, Gaddafi’s recruitment of foreigners goes back to the 1970s when he created the Islamic Legion. In Bahrain, the decision to rely on sectarianism and foreign recruits in the armed forces and exclude the Shia population was in large part a response to internal threats, namely, the 1981 coup attempt and, later, the mid-1990s popular uprising.¹³ Similarly, internal security needs after the 1979 Grand Mosque uprising and, more recently, after the 2017–19 purges of Saudi princes and other elites drove the Saudi monarch’s decision to recruit Pakistani troops to serve as royal guards and in other units.

We build on these insights to suggest that there is a strategic component to enlisting foreign nationals that is rooted in domestic security concerns and power concentration. This article’s theoretical contribution thus furthers our understanding of the interrelation between civil–military relations, authoritarian politics, and contentious politics. Particularly, our arguments link the recruitment of legionnaires to autocratic power dynamics and claim that personalization makes this practice more likely. This is so because the presence of legionnaires reduces ties between the armed forces and society at large, creates dependency ties with the leader, and serves to exclude rival groups and counterbalance the army. Accordingly, we claim that the presence of legionnaires increases autocratic stability by reducing the risk of coups and mass uprisings. This occurs because it increases the probability of coordination failure and of facing loyal counterforces for the case of coups and increases the probability of facing state-led violent repression for the case of protests. These, in turn, reduce potential inside plotters’ and opponents’ expected utility of challenging the regime. Empirically, and using new data on the recruitment of foreign nationals into countries’ armed forces, personalism, coups, and uprisings for the 1946–2010 period, we find evidence that (1) higher levels of personalism increase the likelihood of observing foreigners being recruited; and (2) that this practice is effective in reducing the risk of *both* elite- and mass-based threats. This article thus contributes theoretical insights to the literatures on civil–military relations, autocracy, and contentious politics, provides a first quantitative study on the drivers of

legionnaire recruitment, and highlights the substantive consequences this practice has for autocratic survival.

Civil–military relations and the composition of security forces

Scholars have stressed the importance of civil–military relations for understanding the military’s propensity to intervene in politics via coup and, more recently, to understand their response to popular uprisings. There are two main (and related) dimensions that structure civil–military relations in dictatorships and help explain the military’s behaviour.¹⁴ The first one is the degree of institutionalization as opposed to the patrimonialization of the armed forces. Institutionalized armies are characterized by institutional autonomy, the absence of political interference, being rule-bound, a well-defined command structure, and a promotion system based on merit, performance, and seniority.¹⁵ Conversely, a patrimonialized and fragmented security apparatus is one where the ruler establishes direct control over security institutions and decisions, controls appointments to top positions, undermines internal cohesion, relies on loyalty and cronyism as promotion and recruitment criteria, alters the army’s regular chain of command, and changes its structure by creating (competing) parallel units.¹⁶

The second dimension concerns the security apparatus’ ties to society. This feature is driven by the regime’s recruitment and promotion practices and, hence, by the resulting *composition* of the security forces’ personnel and officer corps.¹⁷ When recruitment entails broad-based conscription, such ties are broad and strong. On the contrary, drawing on specific social or ethnic groups, or foreigners, undermines these links. Autocracies strive to manipulate recruitment practices in order to ensure the military’s loyalty. A security apparatus drawn from society reflects not only the citizenry’s characteristics, but also their interests and grievances. Thus, a conscripted military may be less willing to use violence against potential protesters and may opt to side with citizens,¹⁸ and it may be more likely to stage a coup.

Existing comparative studies of dictatorships and the tactics they employ to neutralize inside and outside threats have mostly focused on formal political institutions¹⁹ or institutional coup-proofing practices such as counterbalancing,²⁰ security personalization,²¹ secret police,²² and the commissioning of political officers.²³ The practices affecting recruitment and, hence, the military’s composition have received less empirical attention. Extant literature has focused on ethnic stacking, and, to a smaller extent, on conscription. Interestingly, both strategies have been found to have contradictory effects on military’s behaviour. While ethnic exclusion and recruitment based on communal ascription may increase loyalty and reduce the risk of inside rebellions,²⁴ building or dismantling ethnic armies often sparks resistance among officers and raises the risk of pre-emptive coups in the short-term.²⁵ Further, ethnically divided forces increase the likelihood of a violent response to mass protests but also of defections and splits within the military.²⁶ As for conscription, some evidence suggests that it increases coup risk in anocracies.²⁷ Moreover, Cebul and Grewal find that nonviolent campaigns are more likely to occur in countries with conscripted armies, and Vasquez and Powell report evidence that coups by conscript-based armies are more likely to lead to democratization.²⁸ Conversely, other research shows that, historically, although conscription is positively related to franchise extensions during wars, it is unrelated to coup occurrence.²⁹

Of the different compositional strategies, the recruitment of foreigners remains comparatively understudied, especially regarding how intra-regime dynamics affect

this practice and in terms of its consequences for autocratic stability. A first set of existing works examines the historical shift towards citizen-armies – and, thus, away from often foreign-born mercenaries – which occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁰ They posit that growing populations and expanding territories necessitated the presence of larger and permanent militaries. Also, the rise of nation-states rooted in a social contract entailed a change in the relationship between citizens and the state. Military service became a key instrument for instilling (if not imposing) a shared national identity among citizens, but also a sense of obligation to the defense of the political community. Additionally, over time, international norms moved to limit and, due the UN Convention against the use of mercenaries coming into force in 2001, even ban the use of mercenaries.

A second set of studies focus on contemporary states' continued (and increasing) practice of enlisting non-nationals and the trade-offs associated with it.³¹ Recruiting foreigners entails certain risks such as undermining the military's cohesion and coordination as well as lower levels of troop discipline and motivation. As for the advantages of this policy, Hanson and Lin-Greenberg posit that some states recruit foreigners in order to import specific skills and expertise they lack, especially in the top echelons of the military structure.³² Others simply import labour and, thus, recruit foreigners when small or unwilling populations impede filling the army ranks, especially in the face of external or domestic threats. Strategic domestic motivations feature only partially in this account, so few clues are offered as to which regime types would be more likely to engage in foreign recruitment. They just highlight that some governments may face a shortage of personnel "because they face significant risks of coup or revolution" stemming from ethnic or sectarian conflicts, as a result of which "large portions of the population are potentially disloyal".³³

Alternatively, Grasmeder argues that the interaction of domestic political costs of recruiting locally and external threats explain the recruitment of legionnaires, suggesting that "as the severity of external threats, domestic constraints, or both increases, the probability that states will implement new legionnaire recruitment policies rises".³⁴ External threats boost a state's urgent need for military troops and, hence, the incentives to recruit foreigners. Domestic costs are shaped by four factors, two of which reflect the presence of domestic threats in the form of coups – due to regime insiders having independent support networks – or mass protests, respectively. Additionally, recruiting nationals is seen as less attractive when large segments of society are politically excluded based on their ethnic identity.³⁵

The argument

Drawing on the insights above, we next develop two sets of arguments aimed at further understanding the domestic determinants as well as the consequences of legionnaire recruitment in dictatorships.

Personalism and the recruitment of foreign legionnaires

We claim that the recruitment of foreigners into the armed forces is often another strategy in the toolkit of (would-be) strongmen and, therefore, more likely to be observed as personalism levels rise. Dictatorships differ from one another in the extent to which leaders manage to concentrate power in their own hands.³⁶

Personalism is a trait that varies across regimes and time. Personalist dictators come to dominate the entire state apparatus and can exercise power with little or no restraint. Doing so involves leaving the military and the ruling party (if one exists) unable to operate independently and marginalized to the point that they cannot credibly constrain the leader's choices.³⁷ Weakening the capacity of the collective institutions, especially the military, to operate independently and coordinately is therefore critical to the process of personalization. Dictators seek to do this by reshaping the organization of these institutions and, importantly, also their *composition*. As it concerns the security apparatus, autocrats aim to establish personal control and to tie it directly to themselves as opposed to society (or certain rival groups within it). A strategy of power consolidation thus taps into the two dimensions of civil–military relations discussed above: Organization and composition.³⁸ Indeed, the creation of paramilitary units – typically charged with the protection of the regime – and the promotion of loyalists are among the items used to estimate latent levels of personalism.³⁹ Using regime categories, personalist regimes have been found to rely more heavily on counterbalancing,⁴⁰ and to be more likely to resort to ethnic stacking,⁴¹ which, most often, applies to top officers and paramilitary units.

Manipulating the composition of security forces is a practice that dictators intent on accumulating power typically adopt with the aim of boosting the reliability and loyalty of officers and soldiers and of undermining rivals' support bases. As pointed out, this is often done by recruiting and promoting based on ethnic or other relevant identities in order to shape the incentive structure of members of the security apparatus.⁴² Filling command positions and rank-and-file with individuals who share the dictator's tribal, ethnic, clan, or familiar affiliation creates a divide between the security apparatus and society that boosts loyalty to the ruler.

Isolating servicemen from society and increasing ties with the ruler, we suggest, can also be achieved via the recruitment of non-citizens into the military. On one hand, this practice results in the enlistment of dependable, migrant individuals “who are relatively better off with the specific leaders in power”.⁴³ In other words, similar to co-ethnics or relatives, non-citizen enlistees have limited outside options within the country where they are employed.⁴⁴ And deemed outsiders, foreigners can more easily be identified and targeted by new ruling groups in the case of regime breakdown. Foreign servicemen ultimately owe their recruitment and livelihood directly to the dictator. They are thus directly bonded to the incumbent ruler because their positions, payroll, status, and career advancement are totally dependent on him remaining in power as they lack any other meaningful connection in the host country. That dependency translates into loyalty and, hence, into strong incentives to not join conspiracies or rebellions and to side with the incumbent in the event of existential challenges against the regime.

On the other hand, recruiting foreigners helps strongmen deepen the disconnect between the armed forces and the local population by limiting interpersonal links, social solidarity as well as the presence of distrusted ethnic groups within the army and in command positions.⁴⁵ As Horowitz and Greitens underscore, enlisting non-nationals is an alternative (or complementary) way of achieving exclusivity besides relying on ascriptive identities.⁴⁶ This comes with several advantages. For one, “recruiting foreigners reduces ties between the military and the local population, potentially increasing the willingness of troops to violently quell uprisings and coups”.⁴⁷ Secondly, policies of exclusion aim to neutralize the threat posed by security

dilemmas and competition that are likely to arise “between elites with joint access to the state’s coercive apparatus”.⁴⁸ Incorporating non-nationals reduces that access and, hence, allows rulers to dismantle power-sharing structures, exclude rival groups, and concentrate power.

Finally, besides reducing the presence of rival groups within the military, enlisting legionnaires contributes to power consolidation by – similar to counterbalancing – undermining cohesion and creating coordination obstacles between local and foreign officers and servicemen. This can be done, using Horowitz’s terms, by balancing outside or inside the army.⁴⁹ Foreigners can be used to fill the ranks of special parallel units tasked with regime protection. Alternatively, having commanders and personnel inside the regular army with dissimilar backgrounds and socialized in different norms saps the military’s capacity for coordinated collective action required for coups⁵⁰ and, ultimately, its ability to credibly constrain the autocrat’s power.⁵¹

Consider the case of Uganda under Idi Amin. After seizing power in a coup in 1971, Idi Amin proceeded to marginalize and purge from the military ethnic groups deemed disloyal – including some initial allies such as the Lugbara. To do so, he relied initially on West Nile and Nubian groups (many of whom were Sudanese), but later increasingly on foreign recruits (especially from Sudan and Zaire), some of which were elevated to the most important command positions.⁵² Amin’s security force came to be principally “composed of non-Ugandans which made up of three-quarters of the army”.⁵³

Based on these insights, *we hypothesize that higher levels of personalism in dictatorships should be associated with a higher likelihood of foreign legionnaire recruitment.*

Foreign legionnaires, coups, and uprisings

We next examine how foreign recruitment impacts the motivation and opportunities of foreign recruits, and how these, in turn, influence the expected utility of coup plotters and would-be protesters. As mentioned above, some posit that the prevention of coups and uprisings requires different security models that carry an organizational trade-off.⁵⁴ In terms of composition, it is suggested that protecting against coups calls for social exclusivity, while the best protection against mass-based threats consists of having an inclusive security apparatus. This view, however, understates the extent to which the incentives that exclusivity – based on foreign recruitment – creates among security personnel influence not only potential coup-plotters’ but also opponents’ decision to overtly challenge the regime. We argue that the presence of legionnaires reduces the expected utility of coups and uprisings, thus deterring conspirators and opponents from organizing them in the first place. Specifically, they do so by increasing the probability of coordination failure and facing loyal counter-forces for the case of coups (which reduces the likelihood of success) and by increasing the probability of facing state-led violent repression for the case of protests (which increases the costs associated with participating in anti-regime protests).

With regards to coup attempts, a first set of arguments suggest that the recruitment of legionnaires could increase their risk. Compositional strategies – such as recruiting foreigners – that aim at altering the ethnic structure of the military may aggrieve officers and soldiers who see their positions jeopardized. Indeed, the adoption of certain coup-proofing and security personalization measures have been empirically found to lead to a higher risk of pre-emptive coups.⁵⁵ Against this view, we claim that the presence of legionnaires reduces the armed forces’ overall ties to society,

shapes their loyalty, and hinders coordination, thereby decreasing these foreign recruits' motivation and the army's ability to act against the incumbent. This in turn shapes the motivation and ability of other (local) potential conspirators to move against the regime in the first place.

In short,

whether used in force or only in key command and staff positions, foreign personnel afford dual protection. They are unlikely to enter into or support conspiracies against the regime they have been employed to defend, and if for some reason foreign officers should conspire against the regime, it is most unlikely that anyone else would follow them.⁵⁶

First, as discussed above, owing their positions to the incumbent ruler, legionnaires are unlikely to turn against him and join coup plots. Moreover, foreign forces, lacking a social base and hence independent networks of support among elites and citizenry, are less prone to seize power for themselves because of their limited capacity of coordination, of mobilizing support, and of exercising power should they succeed. At the same time, introducing foreigners as a source of military recruitment, and thus reducing the reliance on local groups and elites (as well as their stand within the security apparatus), also saps insiders' ability to have a social base and to cultivate independent support networks.⁵⁷ This weakens rival elites' and groups' ability to mobilize sufficient internal and social support to overthrow the incumbent regime.

Second, from the perspective of potential plotters, the presence of legionnaires with such an incentive structure decreases officers' expected utility of launching a coup via two potential mechanisms. On one hand, when used to balance outside the army,⁵⁸ legionnaires' presence creates the expectation that some units staffed with or commanded by non-nationals will act as a counter-force and, thus, will likely remain loyal to and defend the regime against a coup attempt. By signalling to inside rivals the presence of parallel forces whose fate is tied to the leader's and who, hence, have an incentive to confront (or at least not join) takeover attempts, foreign recruitment can reduce disgruntled officers' willingness and ability to plan a coup. Moreover, the willingness to conspire can also be reduced if foreign recruits are deployed to undertake riskier and costlier missions or tasks that could cause resentment among local officers and soldiers, such as firing on protesters or fighting bloody battles in foreign military ventures.⁵⁹

On the other hand, when used to balance inside the army,⁶⁰ the presence of legionnaires reduces the military's ability to organize a putsch by creating additional communication and coordination obstacles among military members. Foreign officers in command positions can detect conspiracies from within. And coordination is often driven by officers' shared desire of avoiding intra-military bloodshed.⁶¹ Military actors thus often join a coup because they believe that others will too.⁶² Such expectations are unlikely to form, however, when military ranks are also staffed with foreigners who are less likely to have this attachment to other fellow servicemen, share their values and mission, and hold strong preferences for military's unity and discipline.⁶³

The Ugandan 1974 coup attempt, led by discontented Lugbara and fellow Kakwa officers against Idi Amin, illustrates these mechanisms. Once the Malire Regiment launched the rebellion, several units commanded and staffed by foreigners and other loyalists refused to join the coup and, despite initially capturing Kampala, plotters encountered coordination problems. Most importantly, Amin's personal guard

commanded by the Zairian Maliyamungu along with the Marine Regiment, commanded by Taban, a Sudanese, were crucial in resisting and eventually defeating the coup attempt.⁶⁴ As Nugent remarks, “Amin could only put down [the coup] by calling on Nubian troops”.⁶⁵

Concerning the occurrence of mass uprisings, some arguments suggest a positive relationship between legionnaire recruitment and the risk of mass protest in dictatorships. First, the presence of foreigners in the armed forces might be a source of grievance among the civilian population as their recruitment can be seen as a manifestation of exclusion from the state apparatus (including job opportunities). It might also exacerbate xenophobic sentiments caused by the repressive role legionnaires might be tasked with. Secondly, due to a lack of local knowledge, ethnic differences, and potential language barriers, foreigners in the security sector might have a comparative disadvantage in monitoring and/or infiltrating society and, thus, in effectively engaging in day-to-day policing as well as intelligence-based preventive repression to suppress clandestine mobilization.⁶⁶ Finally, foreign recruits may exhibit lower levels of motivation and discipline than nationals if tasked with internal coercion.⁶⁷

Contrary to these arguments, and to the view that the risk of an uprising should lead dictators to build unitary and inclusive armies,⁶⁸ we posit that an exclusive strategy consisting of enlisting foreign legionnaires can be effective in preventing popular revolts.⁶⁹ First, note that foreigners might not necessarily be less capable of preventing open dissent. Governments can recruit from neighbouring countries with which they share ethnic and/or language backgrounds. Specifically, they can recruit from ethnic groups with which leaders have affinities or that span across state borders.⁷⁰ Also, foreigners, such as ex-colonial officers,⁷¹ might be placed in advisory and command positions due to their superior experience and skills, and trusted with internal control.

However, foreign legionnaires’ ability to deter protests rests mainly on the expectation that foreign recruits are more willing to respond with violent repression should street mobilizations take place.⁷² As Hanson and Lin-Greenberg put it, “military personnel without familial or cultural ties to the domestic population may have fewer reservations about using force against local civilians”.⁷³ Foreign recruits completely lack such ties, which turns local civilians into an out-group against which violent repression is easier and more acceptable to be used.⁷⁴ This, in turn, influences would-be protesters’ willingness to mobilize, which is largely determined by their expectations for the reaction of the military – or other security organizations. The logic is, therefore, the opposite to that of states with conscripted armies, where, as Cebul and Grewal posit, conscription acts “as an especially salient signal that increases activists’ confidence that the military will not repress” should they decide to take to the streets.⁷⁵ Conscripted servicemen may identify and sympathize with the goals and demands of protesters, and thus refuse to use violence against their fellow citizens.⁷⁶ Foreign legionnaires, in contrast, are unlikely to have sympathy towards these goals and demands, resulting in an increased willingness to use violence which, in turn, may deter civilian protests in the first place by increasing the expected costs of collective action.⁷⁷ In Bahrain, for example, during the 2011 revolts that spread through several MENA countries, “migrant security forces – mostly from Pakistan, Yemen and Jordan – led the crackdown on citizen protesters”.⁷⁸

Based on these arguments, our second and third hypotheses contend that *the presence of foreign legionnaires in dictatorships lowers the likelihood of coup attempts and reduces the probability of mass protest campaign onsets*.

Research design

To test these expectations, we rely on a dataset that includes information on the employment of foreign legionnaires, regime personalization, coup attempts, and mass protests in autocracies. The dataset covers the period 1946–2010 with the country-year as unit of observation, and includes countries which Geddes, Wright, and Frantz identify as autocratic.⁷⁹ We first discuss our four main variables in detail and then describe how we test each of our three hypotheses.

To capture whether a given country employed foreign legionnaires, we use data on legionnaire recruitment policies collected by Grasmeyer.⁸⁰ They cover the universe of countries reported by the Correlates of War (CoW) project and the coding relies on a wide range of primary sources. To be included as instances of foreign recruitment, countries' policies had to be overt, last for at least six months, result in a minimum of 100 recruits, and not be exclusively aimed at foreign co-ethnics.⁸¹ These policies correspond to an actual recruitment of foreign nationals while excluding cases where this recruitment was very minimal or solely applied to foreign nationals with a shared identity, such as Israel's recruitment of foreign-born Jews or Greek nationals' service in the military of Cyprus.⁸² For our analyses, we rely on a binary indicator of legionnaire presence which takes the value 1 if there was at least one qualifying legionnaire recruitment policy in a given country-year and 0 otherwise.

To measure personalism, we follow recent studies on the subject⁸³ and employ a latent variable measure that takes into account eight indicators.⁸⁴ Specifically, it is based on items that capture whether the ruler.

makes access to office dependent on personal loyalty; creates a new support party after seizing power; controls appointments to the party executive committee; makes the party executive committee serve as a rubber stamp for his decisions; personally controls the security apparatus; promotes officers loyal to himself or from his support group, or forces officers from other groups to retire; creates paramilitaries or a new security force loyal to himself; and imprisons or kills officers from other groups without a fair trial⁸⁵

The resulting, latent measure of personalism is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate more personalized rule. It is time-varying, also within regime- or ruler-spells, as its values change whenever one of the underlying items changes. We prefer this measure of personalism over others, e.g. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz's autocratic regime typology,⁸⁶ as it allows for different degrees of personalism within personalist regimes while recognizing that regimes not coded as personalist per se may still differ substantially in how personalized they are.

Data on coup attempts comes from Powell and Thyne, who define them as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive".⁸⁷ Based on their list of qualifying events, we construct a binary variable that takes the value 1 if a given country experienced at least one coup attempt in a given year and 0 otherwise. Finally, we rely on a binary indicator to capture mass protests campaigns.⁸⁸ This measure combines data from NAVCO⁸⁹ as well two alternative datasets on mass protests, NEVER and MEC,⁹⁰ thus providing comprehensive coverage of these events. Again, it takes the value 1 if at least one mass protest campaign onset occurred in a given country-year and 0 otherwise; we set non-onset campaign years to missing.⁹¹

To investigate whether higher levels of personalism are associated with a higher likelihood of observing legionnaire recruitment (hypothesis 1), we take the binary

indicator of foreign nationals being recruited into the armed forces as dependent variable, the latent measure of personalism as main independent variable, and use logistic regression models to systematically test their relationship. As we are primarily interested in the initiation of legionnaire recruitment policies (as compared to their continuation), we again follow McGrath and set non-onset incidences to missing.⁹² As different instances of legionnaire recruitment within a country will hardly be independent, we cluster standard errors at the country-level and control for the cubic polynomials of time since the last such instance to tackle temporal dependence.⁹³ Specifically, the cubic polynomials capture to what extent a country's adoption of foreign recruitment policies is dependent on it having recruited legionnaires before, as well as the time passed since then. For instance, it might well be the case that countries which until very recently recruited legionnaires, but then stopped doing so, may re-start this earlier policy. Including the linear, squared, and cubic of the time since the last time foreigners were recruited accounts for such considerations while, importantly, making no assumptions regarding the shape of such effects.⁹⁴

We control for several alternative drivers of the military recruitment of foreigners factors. Along these lines, countries may be pushed to recruit non-citizens if their domestic pool of potential recruits, i.e. their own population, is very small,⁹⁵ but also if recruiting further citizens would entail labour trade-offs.⁹⁶ Wealthy states may recruit foreigners to lighten these trade-offs, reduce the military burden on their own population, and/or to import specialized, often technological, know-how.⁹⁷ Finally, countries will increasingly turn to foreign recruits to bolster their military power if they face security threats. The impact of these threats will depend on their acuteness and severity, but should not be limited to internal or external, realized or imminent conflict.⁹⁸ At the same time, these factors may also credibly affect a regime's extent of personalism. In smaller countries, it may be easier for the ruler to concentrate power while in wealthier ones, they will have more resources to do so. Similarly, the ease with which such personalization of power can be carried out may be affected by the domestic and international threat environment, with e.g. the military being less able to block it if it is engaged in an active armed conflict.⁹⁹ As the military presents a core constraint on the ruler's efforts at concentrating power, its political sway may influence how successful these efforts are. We thus control for countries' population size and wealth, using data on population and GDP per capita from the CoW project and Anders et al.,¹⁰⁰ respectively, and log-transform them. To account for both the labour trade-offs in recruiting more own citizens as well as the armed forces' political power, we follow Böhmelt and Clayton and control for the population share of military personnel,¹⁰¹ data for this are taken again from CoW. Finally, we control for ongoing intrastate and interstate conflicts as well as active interstate rivalries using data from, respectively, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, CoW, and Thompson's work on rivalries.¹⁰² The conflict items are binary, taking the value 1 if a conflict is ongoing, while the rivalry variable counts the number of international rivalries the state is involved in. To test the first hypothesis, we thus estimate a logistic regression model where the dependent variable is a dummy indicating the onset of legionnaire recruitment and the independent variable of theoretical interest is our measure of personalism.

Second, we test whether the presence of legionnaires in a country's armed forces reduces the risk of coups and mass uprisings (hypotheses 2 and 3). The indicator of legionnaire recruitment is now used as the main independent variable while the

coup attempt and mass protest campaign onset dummies are the dependent variables. We again use logistic regressions to investigate these relationships but, as the recruitment of foreign nationals now is an independent variable, do not code non-onset incidences of it as missing. Just like the use of these policies, both coup attempts and mass protest campaigns within the same country will be non-independent and exhibit temporal dependencies, we thus also cluster standard errors at the country-level and include the cubic polynomials of time since the last event. Again, the idea here is to flexibly account for the possibility that both coup attempts and mass uprisings are more likely to occur if such events already happened in the recent past.

Additionally, these models include controls accounting for factors which may drive coup attempts and uprisings while potentially also being related to legionnaire recruitment. We argue above that regimes with higher personalism levels have stronger incentives to recruit foreign nationals into their armed forces while existing research underlines that they also face distinct coup and mass protests risks.¹⁰³ We thus include the latent personalism measure as a control. Furthermore, we again control for population size, wealth, the population share of military personnel, as well as active armed conflict as these factors have not only been argued to influence the recruitment of foreign nationals, but also drive coup attempts and mass protests.¹⁰⁴ In addition, we control for defence spending as it influences coup propensity¹⁰⁵ and may again affect the resources the dictator can spend on recruiting foreigners, for this we use data from CoW which we log-transform before inclusion. Finally, following Powell, we also control for yearly changes in countries' wealth and military expenditures.¹⁰⁶ To test our second set of expectations, we thus estimate two sets of logistic regression models where the dependent variable is a dummy respectively indicating (1) the occurrence of a coup attempt and (2) a mass uprising onset while the independent variable of theoretical interest is legionnaire recruitment.

Empirical results

Our empirical results on the relationship between personalism and the recruitment of legionnaires are presented in [Table 1](#) while those on the relationship between legionnaires and coup attempts and uprisings are reported in [Table 2](#). In each case, we begin by estimating models that exclude all control variables except the cubic polynomials. We do so as there is a real danger of post-treatment bias, with both personalism and foreign legionnaires potentially influencing control variables such as wealth or, in particular, conflict incidence. We then add all but the indicators of the domestic and international threat environment and, finally, also include these controls to arrive at the full specifications.

Personalism and legionnaires

[Table 1](#) reports three models testing the relationship between personalism and the recruitment of foreign nationals which, respectively, exclude, include a subset of, and include all the covariates discussed above. These are logistic regression models, as such we can directly interpret the direction and statistical significance of the coefficient estimates in [Table 1](#), but not their substantive size. That being said, these results already indicate that personalism is positively associated with autocrats' recruitment of

Table 1. Personalism and the establishment of foreign legions in autocracies.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	DV: Legionnaire recruitment onset		
Personalism	1.641** (0.650)	1.893** (0.647)	1.565** (0.660)
Military share		-8.881 (19.983)	-14.212 (23.440)
GDP per capita		4.463** (2.057)	6.214** (1.961)
Population		3.382* (1.925)	-1.016 (2.175)
Intrastate conflict			1.632** (0.284)
Interstate conflict			1.157** (0.355)
Active rivalries			-0.040 (0.126)
Constant	-3.799** (0.499)	-22.421** (6.270)	-14.596** (5.855)
Observations	3979	3979	3979
AIC	336.412	334.680	313.490
Log likelihood	-163.206	-159.340	-145.745

Cubic polynomials included in models but omitted from presentation. Standard errors clustered on the country in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. Foreign legions and regime challenges in autocracies.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	DV: Coup attempt			DV: Mass uprising onset		
Foreign Legion	-0.730** (0.307)	-0.613**	-0.672** (0.308)	-0.439 (0.313)	-0.830** (0.352)	-0.797** (0.373)
Personalism		-0.595** (0.292)	-0.637** (0.289)		0.123 (0.297)	0.138 (0.300)
Military share		-26.953** (12.241)	-23.037* (11.925)		-46.111** (14.167)	-45.809** (14.293)
GDP per capita		-0.201 (0.156)	-0.128 (0.159)		-0.191 (0.282)	-0.219 (0.279)
Military spending		-0.079 (0.053)	-0.102* (0.054)		0.336** (0.063)	0.334** (0.064)
Δ GDP per capita		-39.616** (11.219)	-36.717** (10.867)		-16.017 (10.045)	-16.085 (10.200)
Δ Military spending		0.145 (0.200)	0.139 (0.192)		-0.571** (0.190)	-0.568** (0.191)
Population		-0.406 (1.265)	-0.831 (1.312)		-0.112 (1.636)	0.087 (1.762)
Intrastate conflict			0.512** (0.194)			-0.075 (0.247)
Interstate conflict			0.011 (0.185)			-0.063 (0.255)
Constant	-1.531** (0.158)	1.129 (3.231)	2.271 (3.347)	-2.593** (0.305)	-5.804 (4.327)	-6.261 (4.612)
Observations	4162	4162	4162	4085	4085	4085
AIC	1770.779	1739.496	1734.362	1257.081	1194.786	1198.548
Log likelihood	-880.390	-857.748	-853.181	-623.541	-585.393	-585.274

Cubic polynomials included in models but omitted from presentation. Standard errors clustered on the country in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$.

legionnaires at conventional levels of statistical significance. In other words, more personalist rulers are more likely to recruit foreigners into their armed forces.

Figure 2 facilitates a more substantive interpretation of this result. There, we plot the predicted probability of legionnaires being recruited into military service across different levels of our latent personalism measure, based on model 3 in Table 1, while keeping all other covariates at their observed values. The first thing to note here is that, regardless of the level of personalism, the initiation of legionnaire recruitment policies is a rare event. This is unsurprising as Grasmeyer notes that “from 1815 to 2020, ninety-one states implemented 231 such policies”¹⁰⁷ and in our sample of 3979 autocratic country-years, where non-onset observations of these policies are set to missing, we observe legionnaire recruitment onsets only in 0.75% of them. However, Figure 2 suggests that personalism has a substantively significant influence on whether autocratic regimes choose to recruit foreign nationals into their military. More specifically, highly non-personalist regimes are predicted to do so only with a probability of 0.38%, that is, half of the overall probability. Regimes at the sample mean of personalism, 0.423, still exhibit a predicted probability of initiating the recruitment of foreign legionnaires below this overall probability. In contrast, once personalism reaches levels of 0.675 or above, countries exhibit a more than 1% probability of initiating the recruitment of foreigners, with this probability reaching 1.63% for fully personalized regimes.¹⁰⁸ In total, the predicted probability of initiating the recruitment of legionnaires thus increases from half to more than double the overall average as personalism increases. This supports the idea that personalism is a

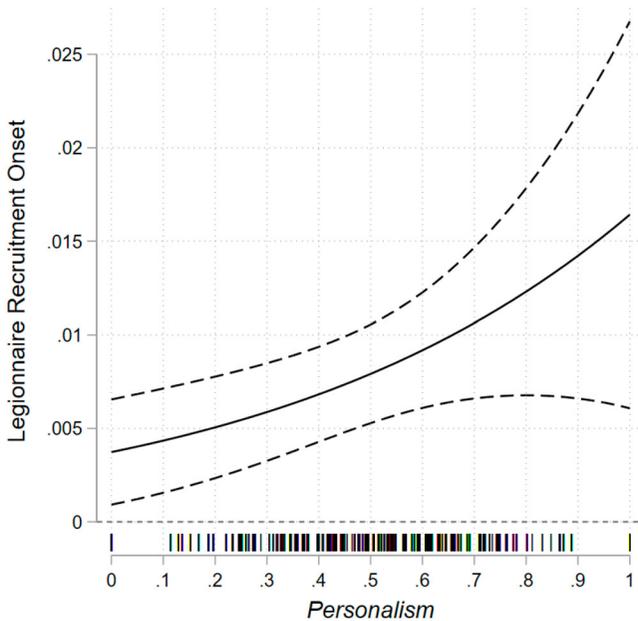


Figure 2. Personalism and the probability of recruitment of legionnaires. Graph shows the predicted probability of the recruitment of foreign nationals being initiated at different levels of Personalism, based on Model 3; black line gives point estimates, while grey dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals; rug plot at the bottom illustrates the distribution of Personalism.

substantively important driver of whether autocrats recruit foreign nationals into their armed forces.

The results presented in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 2](#) thus offer empirical support for our first hypothesis, namely that personalism is positively related to the recruitment of foreigners to secure their continued survival in office and defend their positions against challenges by rival elites. Next, we test whether this strategy is actually successful, that is, whether the presence of legionnaires in a country's armed forces is associated with a reduction in the probability of irregular challenges.

Legionnaires, coups, and mass uprisings

[Table 2](#) reports the results of six logistic regression models which test the relationship between foreign nationals serving in the armed forces and, respectively, coup attempts and mass uprisings. As above, these models differ in the included control variables and we can directly interpret only the direction and statistical significance of the reported coefficient estimates. In contrast to the models presented in [Table 1](#), however, note that now all instances of foreign recruitment are included here, not just onsets of this practice. Models 4–6 use the coup attempt indicator as dependent variable while in models 7–9, the dependent variable is mass uprising onset.

The results are in line with the expectation that legionnaires reduce coup risk, as the associated coefficient estimate is negative and statistically distinguishable from zero at the 95%-level in all three models 4–6. This implies that autocrats are less likely to suffer coup attempts if they have foreign nationals serving in their armed forces. Similarly, the results presented in [Table 2](#) indicate that autocrats are also less likely to experience the onset of a mass uprising if they employ legionnaires. The coefficient of the legionnaires variable is negative throughout models 7–9 and, while statistically insignificant in the bivariate specification, also statistically distinguishable from zero at the 95%-level once we add covariates in models 8 and 9.¹⁰⁹

To interpret these results more substantively, we present how the presence of legionnaires in autocracies changes the probability of experiencing elite- as well as mass-based challenges in [Figure 3](#). All other covariates are kept at their observed values. The first three estimates stem from models 4–6, thus showing how legionnaires affect coup risk, and indicate that regardless of the model, the recruitment of foreign nationals is associated with a sizeable decrease in the probability of coup attempts, ranging between 3.4% and 4.1%. Given that coup attempts occur in only 6.2% of the 4162 autocratic country-years we observe, this clearly is a substantially important decrease. As such, our results indicate that recruiting foreign nationals into their armed forces can serve as an effective coup-proofing strategy for autocrats. The bottom three estimates, in turn, capture the substantive impact of legionnaires on the onset of mass uprisings by showing how the predicted probability of such an event changes if the armed forces are not purely staffed by own, but also foreign, nationals. Again, foreign legionnaires are associated with a substantive decrease in the onset probability of mass protest campaigns, reducing it by approximately 2.7% in models 8 and 9. And even in model 7, where the coefficient of legionnaires is insignificant, its average marginal effect is still a 1.5% reduction in mass uprising onset probability. Mass uprisings are even rarer than coup attempts, happening in only 3.6% of the 4085 autocratic country-years in our sample, meaning that the

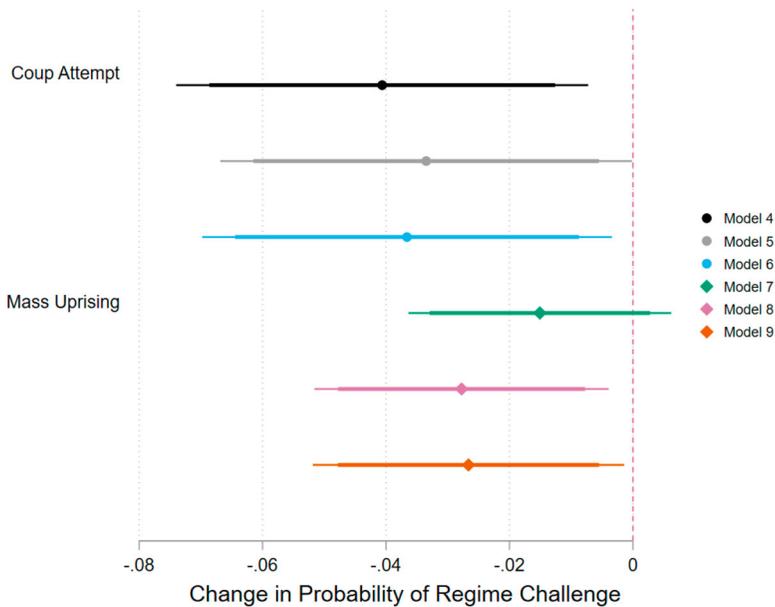


Figure 3. Legionnaires and the probability of regime challenges. Graph shows the change in the predicted probabilities of a coup attempt (models 4–6) and a mass uprising onset (models 7–9) associated with the presence of legionnaires; dots and diamonds give point estimates, while whiskers represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

presence of foreign nationals in the armed forces also reduces the probability of mass-based challenges to the regime to a substantively important degree.

Our empirical findings in Table 2 and Figure 3 are thus in line with hypotheses 2 and 3, namely, that the presence of foreigners in the armed forces reduces the risk of both elite-based challenges (coup attempts) and mass-based threats (uprisings) autocratic rulers might face. As such, they also further elucidate why personalist rulers would choose to invest in recruiting legionnaires when staffing their security forces.

Additional analyses

The results presented so far offer empirical support for all three of our theoretical expectations. We find that more personalist regimes are more likely to recruit foreigners into their armed forces and that, in turn, autocrats staffing their military forces with legionnaires are less likely to face both coup attempts and popular uprisings. We next summarize several additional analyses that further support these three main findings and are presented in full in the Supplementary material. We replicate our main models while accounting for structural heterogeneity between different countries via random effects logistic regression models (Table A.2) and employing penalized maximum-likelihood regression to reflect that both legionnaire recruitment onsets and coup attempts are rare events (A.3). Personalism, coup attempts, and mass uprisings all exhibit notable temporal trends¹¹⁰ and as can be seen in Figure 1, the same is the case for legionnaire recruitment, especially in autocracies, leading us to include time trends in our models (A.4).

We further tackle two potential concerns regarding the association between personalism and legionnaire recruitment (A.5). As it may be driven by outlier countries with anomalously severe concentrations of power on the dictator, we omit observations situated in the top decile of the personalism distribution. And because the latent personalism measure we use includes an item reflecting whether the ruler creates personal security forces,¹¹¹ we re-construct the personalism measure while dropping this specific item and use it to re-estimate model 3 as the creation of such loyalist forces is closely associated with coup-proofing and foreigners may be specifically recruited for these units.

Next, we test two additional observable implications of the arguments linking foreign legionnaires to a decrease in elite- and mass-based threats to the regime. For mass protest campaigns, we propose a protest-reducing effect due to legionnaires being “more willing to respond with violent repression should street mobilizations take place”, meaning that when mass campaigns do occur in autocracies, the presence of legionnaires should be associated with their *increased* repression. And for coup attempts, we argue that foreign legionnaires decrease coup risk by inhibiting the military’s ability to solve the coordination problem inherent in coups and to mobilize broader societal support in the case of a coup. However, these mechanisms should still work if a coup attempt is actually taking place. Then, they would lead to plotters receiving less intra-military and popular support and, as result, coup attempts being less likely to succeed when they occur in the presence of legionnaires. We find empirical evidence in line with both of these additional observable implications, this further supports our theoretical arguments (A.6–A.7).

Additionally, we acknowledge that coup attempts and mass uprisings, while distinct regime threats, can occur at the same time, may not be independent, and thus model them together within a bivariate probit model and re-estimate the fully specified separate models while controlling for the respective other threat (A.8). Inspired by Eibl, Hertog, and Slater,¹¹² we then replace the binary indicators of inter- and intrastate conflict with measures of their duration (A.9).

Next, we include several covariates that account for further potential sources of founding (A.10–A.15). We thus incorporate military expenditures and rivalries where, previously, the respective variable was not included. And we control for several additional variables that have previously been linked to regime threats and security force structure, thus also potentially driving legionnaire recruitment. These include conscription, countries’ colonial roots, the government being a military regime, leader tenure, politically excluded ethnic groups, and urban population share.¹¹³ We also control for previous protests and coup attempts in neighbouring countries, which may spill over, but also drive leaders to modify their security apparatus. And because rulers may generally seek to personalize power and adjust their ruling coalition and security forces after facing elite- or mass-based challenges,¹¹⁴ we control for previous coup attempts and mass uprisings when testing the relationship between personalism and the recruitment of foreign nationals. The substantive results of these additional analyses are in line with our theoretical expectations and the results of our main models, though we do note that in some specifications, the statistical significance of our relationships of interest drops below the 5%-threshold.

Finally, we extend our analysis to explore whether foreign legionnaires’ presence affects a third (albeit rare) way of dictators’ being removed from office: Foreign interventions. On one hand, the presence of legionnaires, similar to other coup-proofing

measures,¹¹⁵ may undermine military cohesion and effectiveness, thus increasing the probability of removal via foreign intervention. On the other, Hanson and Lin-Greenberg argue that legionnaires may also be recruited to contribute specialized military skills and expertise,¹¹⁶ which could increase military capacity and hence reduce that probability instead. The very preliminary evidence shows no association in either direction (A.16). This may be due to the rarity of dictators being removed by foreign interventions but may also speak to both potential mechanisms being at play.

Conclusion

This research finds that personalistic autocrats are more likely to recruit foreigners into their armed forces and that the presence of these legionnaires reduces the risk of the two most common anti-regime challenges, coups and mass uprisings. Based on these findings, the global increase in personalism levels across dictatorships, and the related increase in the use of foreign legionnaires could have profound implications for the prospects of democratization, peaceful political change, and human rights.

Uprisings have become the most common way through which autocracies collapse, and a large share of such breakdowns result in democratic transitions. Further, some recent research suggests that coups in non-democracies might now more likely be followed by democratization. However, our findings indicate that the increasing presence of personalistic autocrats, with a tight grip on the security apparatus and contingents of foreign legionnaires who lack links to society at large, poses a concerning impediment to these political developments. Not only that, but these factors create an incentive structure which makes it more likely that if such challenges were to unfold, the regime response would entail violent repression, which, in turn, may lead to splits within the armed forces that could escalate into civil war. Our findings point to the need for international policies that can tackle dictators' recruitment of legionnaires. These would have to substantially expand on the 1989 UN Convention against the use of mercenaries, which entered into force in 2001 and has been of little help against these challenges as it currently does not cover foreign recruits that are official members of the armed forces (see Article 1(e)).

This research also has implications for our understanding of civil–military relations and comparative authoritarianism. It identifies the recruitment of foreigners as instrumental to the process of power accumulation and a crucial tool that, unlike many other strategies, allows autocrats to tackle both elite- and mass-based threats. Legionnaires act as obstacles to coup attempts and, due to their willingness to use violence against citizens, deter mass uprisings. As such, autocrats are particularly keen to recruit these specialists of violence when concentrating power on themselves and excluding rival groups. Because legionnaires help autocrats stave off both elite- and mass-based threats, their presence in autocracies should clearly receive more attention.

Indeed, this research implies several further questions and research directions. For instance, in line with research on other components of autocratic civil–military relations, future work may further consider how foreign legionnaires affect militaries' defection during uprisings, how native soldiers respond to their presence, their performance and behaviour in international conflicts, or conflict onset.¹¹⁷ Or it may continue investigating the drivers and timing of legionnaire recruitment in a cross-national, comparative framework, exploring why, given how effective legionnaires

are in protecting the regime, their recruitment remains relatively rare. And for both the drivers and effects of foreign legionnaire recruitment, it may consider distinguishing different kinds of legionnaire integration. For instance, this may be done based on whether legionnaires are placed in specific units or throughout the military, whether they appear as elite or more expendable units, and whether incumbents seek to assimilate them to the native population or keep them away from it. Given the effects these troops have on autocrats' survival in office, the violent repression of protests, and the victimization of civilians in civil wars¹¹⁸, better understanding when governments choose to mobilize legionnaires clearly is important.

Notes

1. Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. These two failure types account for 51.6% of autocratic regime breakdowns from 1946 to 2010. The risk of being overthrown by foreign forces is far smaller: Only ca. 4%–5% of autocratic leaders and regimes were removed due to foreign interventions in the post-WWII period. See Svoblik; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions."
2. Thomson, "State Practices"; Blydes and Chaney, "The Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise."
3. McMahon and Slantchev, "The Guardianship Dilemma"; Svoblik, "Contracting on Violence."
4. Quinlivan, "Coups-Proofing."
5. Grasmeyer, "Leaning on Legionnaires," 152.
6. *Ibid.*, 153. Therefore, legionnaires should not be confounded with mercenaries or private contractors, which operate outside the military structure and are not organizationally integrated into the regular armed forces.
7. Kendall-Taylor, Frantz, and Wright, "The Global Rise of Personalized Politics."
8. Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, "How Autocracies Fall."
9. Woo and Conrad, "The Differential Effects."
10. Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*, 30.
11. Thomson, "State Practices."
12. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers"; Grasmeyer, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
13. Louër, "Sectarianism and Coups-Proofing"; Louër, "Bahrain"; Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus."
14. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Lutterbeck, *Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces*; Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings"; Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*. Although conceptually different, the two dimensions are often correlated and, hence, combined, especially where ethnicity is politically salient. Further, dictators may use strategies based on non-institutional incentives. As Powell points out, autocrats "frequently attempt to appease their militaries through excessive allowances". But this strategy presents several challenges. Rather than preventing it, it is typically the result of the military retaining the capacity to credibly threaten the regime and extract budgetary concessions. And incentive-based approaches induce commitment problems, as funding increases may boost the military's ability to coup. Thus, institutional and non-institutional measures are often combined as "coups-proofing also sees resources redirected from the regular armed forces to the paramilitary bodies that are tasked with protecting the executive". See Powell, "Leader Survival Strategies," 32.
15. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism"; Talmadge, "Different Threats"; Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*.
16. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism"; Talmadge, "Different Threats"; Song, "Dictators."
17. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings."
18. Cebul and Grewal, "Military Conscriptation and Nonviolent Resistance."
19. Bove and Rivera, "Elite Co-Optation, Repression, and Coups"; Woo and Conrad, "The Differential Effects"; Kim and Sudduth, "Political Institutions and Coups."
20. Powell, "Determinants"; Böhmelt and Pilster, "The Impact of Institutional Coups-Proofing"; Lutscher, "The More Fragmented the Better?"; Albrecht and Eibl, "How to Keep Officers in the Barracks"; De Bruin, "Preventing Coups d'état"; De Bruin, *How to Prevent Coups d'état*.

21. Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power"; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment"; Song, "Dictators."
22. Mehrl and Choulis, "Secret Police Organizations."
23. Matthews, "Don't Turn around." Other related research also considers how armed forces' mechanization and training affects their ability and willingness to stage or oppose challenges to the regime. See Böhmelt, Escribà-Folch, and Pilster, "Pitfalls of Professionalism?"; Choulis et al., "How Mechanization Shapes Coups"; Savage and Caverley, "When Human Capital Threatens."
24. Roessler, "The Enemy Within"; Roessler, *Ethnic Politics*.
25. Harkness, "The Ethnic Army"; Harkness, *When Soldiers Rebel*; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
26. Lutterbeck, *Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces*; Makara, "Coup-Proofing"; Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence"; Barany, "How Armies Respond"; Morency-Laflamme and McLauchlin, "The Efficacy of Ethnic Stacking"; Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power."
27. Choulis, "I Want You."
28. Cebul and Grewal, "Military Conscription and Nonviolent Resistance"; Vasquez and Powell, "Institutional Arsenals for Democracy?"
29. Ingesson et al., "The Martial Origins of Democracy."
30. Thomson, "State Practices"; Posen, "Nationalism"; Avant, "From Mercenary to Citizen Armies."
31. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers"; Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
32. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
33. *Ibid.*, 308.
34. Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires," 154.
35. Finally, Grasmeder highlights labor trade-offs that emerge when local citizens are better employed in other productive occupations rather than military service. Further explanations, particularly relevant for legionnaire recruitment in western democracies, highlight colonial and imperial legacies or the engagement with diasporas. See Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires"; Thomson, "State Practices"; Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
36. Wright, "The Latent Characteristics."
37. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*.
38. *Ibid.*; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment"; Song, "Dictators."
39. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*.
40. Escribà-Folch, Böhmelt, and Pilster, "Authoritarian Regimes and Civil-Military Relations."
41. Harkness, "The Ethnic Stacking."
42. McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies"; Lutterbeck, *Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces*; Makara, "Coup-Proofing"; Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence"; Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*.
43. Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power," 3.
44. As legionnaires are not mercenaries, low-rank foreign recruits may also have limited outside options elsewhere as they lack the networks and specialization facilitating mercenaries' mobility. However, this may not apply to highly reputed foreign soldiers, such as Gurkhas, or highly skilled former officers.
45. Lutterbeck, *Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces*; Blaydes and Chaney, "The Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise."
46. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*. In Bahrain, foreign recruits are housed in special compounds, ensuring that their contact to the local population is limited to their place of work and to policing. See Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus."
47. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers," 290.
48. Roessler, "The Enemy Within," 301.
49. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
50. Singh, *Seizing Power*.
51. Svobik, *The Politics*.
52. These included many Sudanese citizens, most notably Hussein Marella, head of Military Police and later Army Chief of Staff, Taban Lupayi, commander of the Marine Regiment, Farouk Minaawa, Chief of the State Research Bureau, and Ali Towelli, Chief of the Public Safety

- Unit. Also, Amin's right-hand and head of personal protection unit, Isaac Maliyamungu, was from Zaire. See Chin, Wright, and Carter, *Historical Dictionary*.
53. Nugent, *Africa since Independence*, 234.
 54. Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*. Similarly, Roessler and Powell claim that leaders face a coup-civil war trade-off in weak states, so that excluding rival ethnic groups from state institutions or using other coup-proofing practices reduces the risk of coups but increases that of insurgencies. See Roessler, "The Enemy Within"; Roessler, *Ethnic Politics*; Powell, "Trading Coups." Other studies examine the negative implications that coup-proofing practices have for combat effectiveness in confronting foreign threats, see Pilster and Böhmelt, "Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness"; Talmadge, "Different Threats"; Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*; Narang and Talmadge, "Civil-Military Pathologies"; Lyall, *Divided Armies*. This suggests that the presence of legionnaires could have implications for autocracies' vulnerability to being overthrown via a foreign intervention. We discuss this possibility and report some very preliminary evidence, summarized in Section 5.3, in the supplementary material.
 55. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Roessler, "The Enemy Within"; De Bruin, "Preventing Coups d'état"; Harkness, "The Ethnic Army"; Harkness, *When Soldiers Rebel*; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment"; Song, "Dictators."
 56. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 535.
 57. Blaydes and Chaney, "The Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise"; Choulis, "I Want You."
 58. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
 59. Finer, *The Man on Horseback*.
 60. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
 61. Geddes, "What Do We Know"; De Bruin, "Will there be Blood?"
 62. Singh, *Seizing Power*.
 63. As such, our arguments here suggest that foreign legionnaires should ultimately reduce *success* of coup attempts that occur in their presence. We test this additional expectation in the supplementary material and find empirical support for it.
 64. Chin, Wright, and Carter, *Historical Dictionary*.
 65. Nugent, *Africa since Independence*, 233.
 66. Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*; Sullivan, "Undermining Resistance"; Dragu and Przeworski, "Preventive Repression."
 67. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
 68. Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police*.
 69. There is evidence that other strategies entailing the personalization of the security apparatus are also effective against both types of organized challenge, see Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power"; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment"; Song, "Dictators."
 70. This applies, for example, to Idi Amin's own group, the Kakwa, as well as the Nubians, on which he heavily relied.
 71. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
 72. Koren, "Military Structure"; Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power."
 73. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers," 297.
 74. Moore, "When Do Ties Bind?"
 75. Cebul and Grewal, "Military Conscription and Nonviolent Resistance," 2218.
 76. Barany, "How Armies Respond."
 77. In the supplementary material, we examine this mechanism by testing whether the presence of foreign legionnaires is indeed associated with increased repression against ongoing mass uprisings. Our results indicate that this is the case.
 78. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," 153.
 79. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown."
 80. Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
 81. See *Ibid.*, 164–65.
 82. For more information, including a list of coded cases, see Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
 83. Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power"; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment"; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*.
 84. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*; Wright, "The Latent Characteristics."
 85. Wright, "The Latent Characteristics," 13.

86. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown."
87. Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups," 252.
88. Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power."
89. Chenoweth and Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns."
90. Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions"; Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power."
91. McGrath, "Estimating Onsets." Summary statistics for all variables used in the analyses below can be found in supplementary material Table A.1.
92. Ibid.
93. Carter and Signorino, "Back to the Future." We present pooled logistic regression models here and add random effects in the supplementary material. We do not employ models including unit- or regime-fixed effects as our independent variables of interest, while time-variant, are very slow-moving in the case of personalization or, for legionnaire recruitment policies, show very little within-unit variation due to such policies being infrequently put into place or repealed. We also do not employ year-fixed effects, as doing so would drop years where no coup attempt or uprising began.
94. Ibid.
95. Lutterbeck, *Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces*; Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
96. Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
97. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
98. Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires."
99. Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats and Political Survival."
100. Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey, "Capability Distribution"; Anders, Fariss, and Markowitz, "Bread Before Guns or Butter."
101. Böhmelt and Clayton, "Auxiliary Force Structure."
102. Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, "Organized Violence 1989–2021"; Palmer et al., "The MID5 Dataset"; Thompson and Dreyer, *Handbook of International Rivalries*.
103. Escribà-Folch, Böhmelt, and Pilster, "Authoritarian Regimes and Civil–Military Relations"; Chin, Song, and Wright, "Personalization of Power"; Chin et al., "Reshaping the Threat Environment."
104. See e.g. Arbatli and Arbatli, "External Threats and Political Survival"; Cebul and Grewal, "Military Conscription and Nonviolent Resistance"; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions"; Johnson and Thyne, "Squeaky Wheels"; Londregan and Poole, "Poverty, the Coup Trap"; Powell, "Determinants"; Vüllers and Krtsch, "Raise Your Voices!"
105. Leon, "Loyalty for Sale?"
106. Powell, "Determinants." See also Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions."
107. Grasmeder, "Leaning on Legionnaires," 164.
108. Our sample includes 625 observations (16.39%) with the minimal personalism value of zero and 109 (2.74%) with the maximal value 1.
109. From model 7 to model 8, the coefficient estimate of foreign legionnaires also doubles. This is due to the inclusion of military spending as a covariate.
110. Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, "How Autocracies Fall"; Kendall-Taylor, Frantz, and Wright, "The Global Rise"; Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups."
111. Wright, "The Latent Characteristics."
112. Eibl, Hertog, and Slater, "War Makes the Regime."
113. See Cebul and Grewal, "Military Conscription and Nonviolent Resistance"; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions"; Choulis, "I Want You"; Mehrl and Choulis, "The Colonial Roots"; Roessler, "The Enemy Within"; Wang, "Arms Transfers."
114. Bokobza et al., "The Morning After"; Timoneda, Escribà-Folch, and Chin, "The Rush to Personalize."
115. Pilster and Böhmelt, "Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness"; Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*.
116. Hanson and Lin-Greenberg, "Noncitizen Soldiers."
117. E.g. Pilster and Böhmelt, "Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness"; Lutscher, "The More Fragmented the Better?"; Mehrl, "Rage and the Machines?"
118. Moore, "When Do Ties Bind?"

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