

United States Intervention in Latin America: Effects on Democracy During the Cold War

Simon Kutz¹ and Scott Pierce[#]

¹Decorah High School

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

Throughout the Cold War, the United States intervened numerous times in various Latin American countries, often covertly. As a democratic intervener, the US promoted the idea that these interventions ushered in democratization. To analyze whether this idea is validated by the data, the average change in democracy is calculated across all interventions. Then, the data is disaggregated by method of intervention to evaluate whether there is any significant difference in democratization based on the method. The study finds that US intervention did lead to a significant change in democracy and, when excluding outliers, the overall change was negative. Additionally, the study finds that when a US-backed coup occurs, the overall change in democracy was negative, compared to an average increase in democracy when lower-level interference is utilized.

Introduction

United States intervention in Latin America was not a new phenomenon by the beginning of the Cold War. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, the US began aggressively asserting its control in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the early 20th century, the US often intervened to protect its interests in the region's sugar and banana industries, restore political stability, or stave off any possible European meddling (Rabe, Perez, & Rout, 1988). Examples include the 1912-1933 occupation of Nicaragua, the 1915-1934 occupation of Haiti, and the 1916-1924 occupation of the Dominican Republic (Willis, 2021). These tactics were paused by President Franklin Roosevelt, who pursued a "Good Neighbor" policy with Latin America. However, after Roosevelt's death and the conclusion of World War II, the global calculus had shifted significantly.

The United States and the Soviet Union had emerged as the world's two main superpowers after the war, and each promoted a radically different economic and governmental styles while working to limit each other's influence around the world. Early US interventions in the Greek Civil War and in Turkish and Italian politics demonstrated a commitment to containing the spread of communism around the globe (*The Truman*, n.d.; Levin, 2020). During the late 1940s and early 1950s, leftist movements in Latin America were small, leading the US to focus more on other regions (Longley, 1993, p. 152). The only two interventions in the region during this time were in Costa Rica (1948) and Guatemala (1954). But in 1959, the Cuban Revolution toppled Havana's US-backed government and replaced it with a communist government under Fidel Castro. With communism now in its "backyard," the US feared that Cuba could serve to spread communism in the region, and began reacting more severely to leftist influences it saw as threats.

Intervention can take many different forms, and the US engaged in various ones throughout the Cold War. The most overt example is an invasion, which the US used sparingly in Latin America. The only invasions in the region during the Cold War were in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989. However, since invasions often drew regional condemnation, most US activities in Latin America were more covert. One of the most common methods of intervention involved building support for and encouraging a coup d'état, or regime change. Sometimes this meant leading the effort, like in Guatemala in 1954, where the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spearheaded every step in the process by isolating Guatemala, supplying anti-government leaders, engaging in

psychological warfare, and immediately recognizing the new regime (Hove, 2007, p. 630). In addition to invasions and coups, the US supported various armed groups in numerous Latin American wars. An infamous example is 1980s Nicaragua, when the US illegally funded the Contra rebels fighting the left-wing Sandinista government (*Nicaraguan Revolution*, n.d.).

To justify these numerous tactics to effect regime change or prop up unpopular governments, the US government proclaimed that it was defending and instilling democracy in the region. President Lyndon Johnson, in remarks to Latin American representatives, said that “we must support, morally and financially, the struggle of our Latin American friends against political, economic, and social injustice...to foster the democratic way of life in every country” (Johnson, 1963). However, many famous examples of US intervention involved the backing of infamous dictators, such as August Pinochet in Chile or Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina. While these are only a couple examples, they cast doubt on the US government’s promotion of democracy in the region and beckon the question: are these infamous examples outliers or revealing of a greater trend?

While significant research is available on the subjects of US intervention and democratization, this article seeks to narrowly focus on US intervention in Latin America during the Cold War in order to contextualize US intervention in other regions and time periods. The objective of this study is to provide context and analysis to seek answers to the questions:

1. What effect on democracy, if any, did US intervention in Latin America have?
2. What difference in the effect on democracy, if any, did US overt operations (invasions) have compared to covert operations (other intervention)?

In search of the answers to these research questions, I propose two statements to examine:

Statement 1: United States intervention did not have a significant effect overall on democracy in Latin America.

Statement 2: Differences in the methods of United States intervention in Latin America did not translate to significant differences in the effect on democracy.

The rest of this article is structured with the parameters and context introduced next, followed by the methodology, results and analysis, findings and conclusions, limitations, acknowledgments, and references.

Parameters & Context

This article analyzes all successful US interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean during the Cold War (defined as 1947-1991, or from the Truman Doctrine to the fall of the Soviet Union). All types of interventions, including invasions, coups, election interference, wartime backing, and others, are measured in this research. Table 1 lays out all these events, sorted by country and year(s) of intervention.

The first two on this list occurred before the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Intervention in Costa Rica in 1948 was in response to a civil war. The US was concerned about the use of communist militias by the government to crack down on opposition, and supported the opposition diplomatically and financially (Longley, 1993). Comparatively, the scale of US intervention in Guatemala six years later dwarfed that in Costa Rica. When new left-leaning president Jacobo Árbenz began implementing a modest land distribution campaign, the US, concerned about possible Communist sympathies, organized a coup to oust Árbenz, casting a cloud over US-Latin America relations and foreshadowing the nature of many future interventions (Hove, 2007, p. 623)

The Cuban Revolution in 1959 and rise of Castro led to a new sense of the US’s alarm surrounding leftist groups and others throughout Latin America, a new sense quickly used in the Dominican Republic. Afraid that the authoritarian rule of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic could prompt a similar revolution as the one in Cuba, the CIA helped provide materials for Trujillo’s assassination, which culminated in 1961, kickstarting a political crisis

(*Rafael Trujillo*, n.d.). With Trujillo's son rushing to claim power, the US sent a warning by deploying troops off Santo Domingo's coast. After Trujillo's son fled the country, elections were held and Juan Bosch, a leftist, emerged as the victor. Bosch was overthrown in a coup seven months later in 1963, and a right-wing military dictatorship ruled the country until a counter-coup led by Bosch supporters started a civil war that led the US to invade in 1965, the first US invasion of a Latin American country during the Cold War (Lewis, 2001).

US intervention was not only present in the Dominican Republic during the 1960s, as the CIA worked to quell any possible leftist influence, motivated by paranoia of "another Cuba." The US led efforts to legitimize the new military government in El Salvador after a 1961 coup, financed the 1963 labor strikes in British Guiana that led to suspected Communist Cheddi Jagan's defeat in 1964 elections, supported a 1963 coup in Guatemala that spiraled the country further into civil war, backed a successful military coup against the Brazilian government in 1964, and ousted a military junta that had taken power in Panama during a 1968 coup (*El Salvador*, n.d.; *CIA Covert*, 2020; Geyer, 2007; Pereira, 2016; *Breve Analisis*, 2006). This frequency of intervention was new, and largely a result of fears the US was not being proactive enough to prevent leftist movements from gaining any sort of prominence in Latin America.

Further intervention continued during the 1970s, with the US endorsing the 1971 right-wing military coup in Bolivia, assisting the 1973 military coup in Chile against the first democratically elected Marxist leader in the world, and supporting the 1976 military coup in Argentina because of rising instability and threats towards American lives and property (Silverstein, n.d.; Falcoff, 1987, p. 185; *Argentina's Military*, 2021). Then, in 1979, the US supported and sent prior approval of a plan to overthrow El Salvador's military government and establish a new military junta (*El Salvador*, n.d.). With the execution of this coup, El Salvador spiraled into a civil war that would last until 1992. This was the beginning of a series of crisis in the region, collectively known as the "Central American Crisis." In nearby Nicaragua, the socialist Sandinista government had taken control in a 1979 coup, and was facing armed resistance from a collection of right-wing groups, known as the Contras. The US provided significant (illegal) military assistance to the Contras from 1981-1990, and while the results of the Contra War are inconclusive, it is included in the list of successful US interventions, as the 1990 Nicaraguan elections yielded the defeat of the Sandinistas (*Nicaraguan Revolution*, n.d.). The Guatemalan and Colombian civil wars, which had been going on with US support in phases since 1960 and 1964 respectively, both intensified severely during the 1980s (Sensamaust, 2004). After the government in Grenada was overthrown and replaced with a Cuban-backed Marxist regime, the US authorized its second invasion of a Latin American/Caribbean nation during the Cold War and deposed the regime (Waters, 1986).

As the Cold War came to an end, the anti-communist Panamanian regime began to fall out of favor with the US. As fears about the spreading influence of communism in Latin America began to subside, the US began a campaign against the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who was wanted in the US on drug charges (Yates, 2014, p. 11). After several failed and foiled coup attempts by junior Panamanian officers, the US invaded Panama in October 1989, marking the last Cold War-era intervention in Latin America (Yates, 2014, pp. 36, 70-71).

Discussed in this section but omitted from Table 1 are the Colombian, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran civil wars, as well as the invasion of Grenada. While the US did provide substantial financial and diplomatic assistance to the governments of Colombia, Guatemala, and El Salvador in battles against leftist rebels, all three do not end by 1991 (Sensamaust, 2004; *El Salvador*, n.d.). El Salvador's civil war ended in 1992, Guatemala's ended in 1996, and Colombia's is ongoing. Any possible post-war democratic progress or regress occurred outside the context of the Cold War, and therefore outside the scope of this article. Meanwhile, Grenada did not have available data in the V-Dem database, and to keep this article consistent, it has been omitted.

Table 1. List of US Interventions

Country	1 st Intervention	2 nd Intervention
Costa Rica	1948	N/A
Guatemala	1954	1963
Dominican Republic	1961	1965-66
El Salvador	1961	1979
Brazil	1964	N/A
Guyana (British Guiana)	1964	N/A
Panama	1969	1989
Bolivia	1971	N/A
Chile	1973	N/A
Argentina	1976	N/A
Nicaragua	1981-90	N/A

Methodology

The waxing or waning influence of democracy can be measured in several ways by looking at different aspects of government transparency, civil society, elections, political participation, and other factors. For this study, the evaluation of democratic change over time will focus on liberal democracy. Liberal democracy, according to University of North Carolina professor Kenneth Bollen writing in the *American Political Science Review*, is “the extent to which a political system allows political liberties and democratic rule” (Bollen, 1993, p. 1208). This means an index on liberal democracy must consider not just the presence of elections, but many other factors of democracy, including freedom of speech and the press (political liberties) and the willingness of losers to accept results (democratic rule). In addition, the concept of liberal democracy better measures the effects of democracy in a short period of time when compared to participatory democracy. Participatory democracy includes more long-term effects, measuring the presence of referendums and civil society (Coppedge et al., 2023). Referendums do not necessarily happen directly after regime change, and civil society can take long periods of time to properly develop, so the participatory democracy index is unable, in these measurements, to accurately reflect progress or regress directly after regime change.

To measure liberal democracy, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset will be utilized. The liberal democracy aggregate index in V-Dem’s dataset measures factors including freedom of expression, freedom of association, election ‘cleanness’, relationships between different branches of government, and equality before the law (Coppedge et al., 2023). A value between 0 and 1 is then assigned to each country for each year, with a value of 0 indicating no presence of liberal democracy and a value of 1 indicating the full presence of liberal democracy.

Tools of Analysis

Microsoft Excel and the V-Dem dataset were used to analyze the data. V-Dem graphing tools were utilized to visualize and track changes in the liberal democracy index and pinpoint exact values for different countries and years. Microsoft Excel was used to create figures, calculate means, and compute percentage differences.

Results and Analysis

Table 2 depicts the change in the liberal democracy index (LDI) from two years prior to the intervention to two years following. For intervention that lasted more than one year, both years are included in LDI Year+0. Since the intervention in Nicaragua lasted nine years, the data is listed below the table.

Table 2. LDI Data

Country	Year	LDI Year-2	LDI Year-1	LDI Year+0	LDI Year+1	LDI Year+2
Costa Rica	1948	0.25	0.25	0.17	0.22	0.50
Guatemala	1954	0.23	0.19	0.12	0.05	0.06
Dominican Republic	1961	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.22
El Salvador	1961	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.06	0.07
Guatemala	1963	0.16	0.16	0.10	0.09	0.09
Brazil	1964	0.28	0.27	0.14	0.07	0.07
Guyana	1964	0.22	0.22	0.21	0.20	0.20
Dominican Republic	1965-66	0.22	0.07	0.09 (1965) 0.06 (1966)	0.08	0.09
Panama	1969	0.20	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.07
Bolivia	1971	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
Chile	1973	0.54	0.53	0.19	0.03	0.03
Argentina	1976	0.34	0.32	0.07	0.05	0.05
El Salvador	1979	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04
Nicaragua	1981-90	0.02	0.08	0.12*	0.42**	0.48
Panama	1989	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.28	0.52

*the 1981-89 data for Nicaragua is (starting with 1981): 0.08, 0.07, 0.07, 0.09, 0.13, 0.16, 0.16, 0.17, 0.18; the average of these values is 0.12, which is represented in Table 2.

**LDI Year+1 for Nicaragua is 1990 data; LDI figures represent December 31, 1990, while the war concluded in April 1990.

To begin analyzing the data, the difference in LDI between different years before and after the intervention can be calculated. In Table 3 shows the change in LDI by measuring the difference in both percentage and number between [LDI Year-2, LDI Year+2], [LDI Year-1, LDI Year+2], [LDI Year-2, LDI Year+1], and [LDI Year-1, LDI Year+1] using the data from Table 2 for each event.

Table 3. Change in LDI

Country	Year	$\Delta [-2, 2]$ %-age	$\Delta [-2, 2]$ #- value	$\Delta [-1, 2]$ %-age	$\Delta [-1, 2]$ #- value	$\Delta [-2, 1]$ %-age	$\Delta [-2, 1]$ #- value	$\Delta [-1, 1]$ %-age	$\Delta [-1, 1]$ #- value
Costa Rica	1948	+100.0	+0.25	+100.0	+0.25	-12.0	-0.30	-12.0	-0.30
Guatemala	1954	-73.91	-0.17	-68.42	-0.13	-78.26	-0.18	-73.68	-0.14
Dominican Republic	1961	+633.33	+0.19	+633.33	+0.19	+133.33	+0.04	+133.33	+0.04
El Salvador	1961	+0.0	+0	+0.0	+0	-14.29	-0.01	-14.29	-0.01
Guatemala	1963	-43.75	-0.07	-43.75	-0.07	-43.75	-0.07	-43.75	-0.07
Brazil	1964	-75.0	-0.21	-74.07	-0.20	-75.0	-0.21	-74.07	-0.20
Guyana	1964	-9.09	-0.02	-9.09	-0.02	-4.55	-0.01	-4.55	-0.01
Dominican Republic	1965-66	-59.09	-0.13	+28.57	+0.02	-63.64	-0.14	+14.29	+0.01
Panama	1969	-65.0	-0.13	-41.67	-0.05	-65.0	-0.13	-41.67	-0.05
Bolivia	1971	-50.0	-0.02	-33.33	-0.01	-50.0	-0.02	-33.33	-0.01
Chile	1973	-94.44	-0.51	-94.34	-0.50	-94.44	-0.51	-94.34	-0.50
Argentina	1976	-85.29	-0.29	-84.38	-0.27	-85.29	-0.29	-84.38	-0.27
El Salvador	1979	-20.0	-0.01	-20.0	-0.01	-20.0	-0.01	-20.0	-0.01
Nicaragua	1981-90	+2300.0	+0.46	+500.0	+0.34	+2000.0	+0.40	+425.0	+0.34
Panama	1989	+642.86	+0.45	+642.86	+0.45	+300.0	+0.21	+300.0	+0.21

Evaluation of Statement 1

Table 4 calculates the means of each pairing of years. This will be done with both the LDI scores expressed in percentages and those expressed in numerical values. In Table 3, there are several notable outliers in the percentage section that skew the percentage mean significantly. Table 4 shows the means of percentages with and without the outliers, which will be defined as those percentages >1 (100%). Therefore, the outliers are all year-pairings of the Dominican Republic (1961), Nicaragua (1981-90), and Panama (1989). Any possible outliers are not omitted for numerical value data, as the LDI only varies from 0 to 1, so no one value has as outsized an influence as evident in the percentage data. From this data, Statement 1 can be evaluated.

Statement 1: United States intervention did not have a significant effect overall on democracy in Latin America.

Observing Table 4 with consideration of Statement 1, the LDI percentage mean decreased in all year-pairings when outliers were excluded, showing a particularly sharp decline of -50.52% in the change from LDI Year-2 to LDI Year+1, while showing the smallest decrease of -28.37% in the change from LDI Year-1 to LDI Year+2. When observing the change expressed in numerical values, three of the four year-pairings saw decreases in the LDI while the change from LDI Year-1 to LDI Year+2 saw an increase of the mean LDI score by 0.039. Of the three year-pairings with declines in the mean LDI score, the change from LDI Year-2 to LDI Year+1 saw the sharpest drop of -0.064. All these values, in both percentage and numerical form, deviate significantly from zero, meaning the data show that US intervention did have a significant effect overall on democracy in Latin America, rejecting Statement 1.

To further analyze whether the effect was positive or negative, the mean of the LDI means has been calculated for the percentage-change excluding outliers and the numerical change at the bottom extension of Table 4. Here, the average change for all means expressed in percentage form is -39.67% and the average change for all means expressed

in numerical form is -0.0215. Therefore, the average effect of United States intervention on democracy in Latin America was negative.

Table 4. LDI Means

	All Values	Excluding Outliers
$\Delta [-2,2]$ %-age Mean	+206.71%	-39.63%
$\Delta [-2,2]$ #-value Mean	-0.014	N/A
$\Delta [-1,2]$ %-age Mean	+95.71%	-28.37%
$\Delta [-1,2]$ #-value Mean	+0.039	N/A
$\Delta [-2,1]$ %-age Mean	+121.81%	-50.52%
$\Delta [-2,1]$ #-value Mean	-0.064	N/A
$\Delta [-1,1]$ %-age Mean	+25.10%	-40.15%
$\Delta [-1,1]$ #-value Mean	-0.047	N/A
-	-	-
Mean of %-age Means (excluding outliers)	-39.67%	-
Mean of #-value Means	-0.0215	-

Reasoning of Statement 1

By evaluating Statement 1, it was found that US intervention did have a significant overall effect on democracy in Latin America, and that the effect was, on average, negative. Contextualizing and reasoning this finding involves observing the effects of intervention in regions and time periods other than Cold War-era Latin America and the pressures foreign intervention puts on democratic systems.

The protection of American interests abroad has long been the heart of US interventionist policy, something evident from the Banana Wars of the early 20th-century intended to protect the interests of the United Fruit Company in Central America to the late Cold War-era interventions in the Middle East to protect vital oil supplies. While the idea of promoting democracy may be a way to motivate domestic political opinion, earn international backing, and possibly achieve intervention goals, examples from Nicaragua (1912-1933) and Kuwait (1991) show that the protection of US financial and security interests took higher priority over the promotion of democracy (Bueno de Mesquite & Downs, 2006). The acknowledgment of US intervention in other time frames and other regions can contextualize the data in the article by providing evidence that Cold War-era Latin America was not an outlier in the results for democracy following interference.

To reason the findings when investigating Statement 1, the nature of foreign intervention should be recognized. Foreign intervention can bring a severe shock to a country's political system. This is especially true when a regime is removed from power through foreign intervention. When this occurs, the populace often expects the new regime to act quickly on pressing domestic problems, and if it does not, the populace loses patience rapidly, leaving more opportunity for a strongman or dictator to assert control. Democracy can be one of the goals in interventions by countries like the US, but it is rarely achieved as difference in priorities between the country intervening and the one being intervened can derail the process of building trust and democracy, not to mention the factors of financial/human cost and domestic political pressure. Put together, these factors and alternative motives can explain the decrease in democracy often observed after US intervention.

Evaluation of Statement 2

Figure 1 breaks down the intervention events into categories on the level of US involvement. The three categories are invasions, coups, and interference. Invasions are the most overt action of the three, and constitute US forces landing on foreign soil. Coups are more covert, and the level of US involvement varies on a case by case basis. Interference is the most covert, and usually constitutes the CIA meddling in foreign elections, financially propping up dictators, and supplying armed groups. Table 5 categorizes each individual event, and the data is visualized in Figure 1. In Figure 1, it is observed that the most common type of intervention was the planning and backing of coups, with nine instances compared to four instances of interference and two of military action (invasion). From this categorization, the mean LDI score differences are calculated in percentage and numerical form to evaluate Statement 2.

Statement 2: Differences in the methods of United States intervention in Latin America did not translate to significant differences in the effect on democracy.

Table 6 compares the overall means of the change in LDI scores for all year-pairings for interventions involving coups or interference. Invasions are excluded due to the small sample size. Only two invasions occurred, and while the invasion of Panama increased the LDI manifold, the invasion of the Dominican Republic created mixed results. Viewing the data in Table 6, the mean change in LDI for coup events was -56.35% or -0.15 compared to +431.69% or +0.61 for interference events. Even without outliers like Nicaragua (with two values >1000%), the mean difference in LDI in events of interference is positive. Additionally, not a single year-pairing in any coup event resulted in an LDI increase. Comparing the coup and interference data, it is reasonable to reject Statement 2. The different methods of US intervention (coups versus interference) did translate into significant differences in the mean effect on democracy, with the average change being negative in the case of coup events and positive in the case of interference.

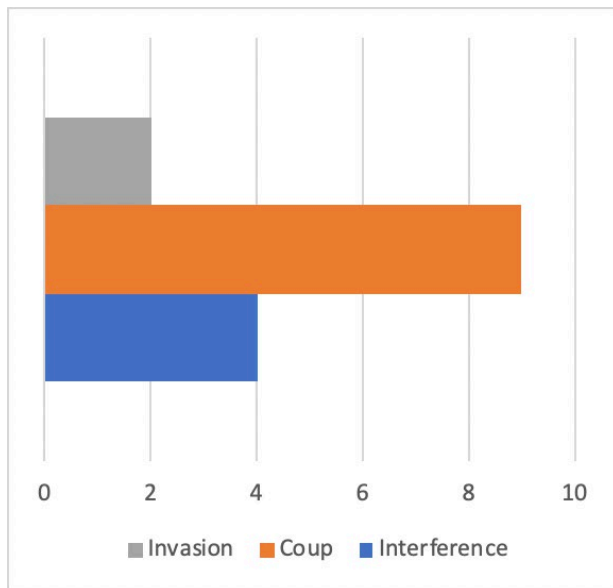


Figure 1. Categorization of US Intervention

Table 5. Categorization of US Intervention

Country	Year	Categorization
Costa Rica	1948	Interference
Guatemala	1954	Coup
Dominican Republic	1961	Interference
El Salvador	1961	Coup
Guatemala	1963	Coup
Brazil	1964	Coup
Guyana	1964	Interference
Dominican Republic	1965-66	Invasion
Panama	1969	Coup
Bolivia	1971	Coup
Chile	1973	Coup
Argentina	1976	Coup
El Salvador	1979	Coup
Nicaragua	1981-90	Interference
Panama	1989	Invasion

Table 6. Changes in LDI by Event Categorization

	Coups in %-age	Coups in #-value	Interference in %-age	Interference in #-value
$\Delta [-2,2]$	-56.38%	-0.16	+756.06%	+0.88
$\Delta [-1,2]$	-51.11%	-0.14	+306.06%	+0.82
$\Delta [-2,1]$	-58.44%	-0.16	+529.20%	+0.40
$\Delta [-1,1]$	-59.48%	-0.14	+135.45%	+0.34
Average	-56.35%	-0.15	+431.69%	+0.61

Reasoning of Statement 2

By evaluating Statement 2, it was found that there is a significant difference in the average change in LDI when comparing US-supported coups and lower level US interference. Interference, on average, produced positive changes in the LDI, while coups, on average, produced negative changes. Looking at the patterns present in the data and looking beyond both Latin America and the Cold War-era timeframe will assist in reasoning these differences.

Coup d'états, by definition, evade the democratic process. Despite this, recent research suggests that coups are often followed by competitive elections and a rebound in democracy. Scholars often point to Portugal (1974), Guinea-Bissau (2003), Niger (2010), and others as examples of coups that ended dictatorship and fostered democracy (Derpanopoulos et al., 2016; Thyne & Powell, 2016, p. 193). The data in this study do not support this idea, as none of the countries in the dataset experienced a significant increase in democracy two years after the coup. Even in the longer run, many of these coups spiraled into decades-long military dictatorships (e.g. Chile, Panama) or civil wars (e.g. El Salvador, Guatemala). These phenomena of military dictatorships and civil wars following coups are not just present in this region or time-period. Coups in Niger (1996) and Guinea (2008) are examples of one dictatorship being replaced with another, while coups in Egypt (1952) and Libya (1969) are examples of monarchies replaced with military dictatorships (Derpanopoulos et al., 2016, pp. 2-4). Then, there are examples like Egypt (2013) and Sudan (2021) of coups that replace a transitioning democracy with dictatorship (Al-Anani, 2021). During the Cold War, a full 56% of coups replaced one autocratic power with another (Derpanopoulos et al., 2016). Despite recent optimism on the prospect of democratization following a coup, the overall trend shows that coups bring repression and autocratic leaders more often than democracy.

Interference, on the other hand, is less straightforward, as it takes multiple forms. In the dataset, the types of interference used by the US (usually by the CIA) are meddling in elections, backing armed groups, financially supporting autocratic regimes, or targeting left-wing operatives, with more than one used in some instances. Election interference was evident in early 1960s British Guiana, with US efforts to prevent Cheddi Jagan from becoming the first president of the soon-to-be independent nation (*CIA Covert*, 2020). According to Don Levin of Carnegie Mellon University, one-ninth of all competitive elections from the end of World War II to 2000 were meddled in, 70% of which were instances of US interference (Matthews, 2021). A famous example is CIA meddling to prevent Communist victories in the 1948 Italian elections (Levin, 2020). The categorization of interference can also include aid to armed groups, which, in Latin America, was practiced by supporting the Contras in 1980s Nicaragua. This method was utilized in other regions, like during the Angolan Civil War or by backing the Mujahedeen fighting against the Soviet-supported government in Afghanistan (Minter, 1991, p. 136; Lowenstein, 2016, pp. 10-11). When compared to other methods of interference, aiding armed groups can cause greater levels of human and economic suffering. However, the data about interference in Cold War-era Latin America show a significant average increase in the LDI score. This may be because events of interference are less defined on regime change when compared to coups. Often, when regimes change, the new regime's legitimacy is called into question, repression becomes the answer to dealing with criticism. Interference leads to fewer regime changes, creating less instability. The increase in LDI shown in the data may also result from the specific details of the events, as one involved the assassination of a dictator (Dominican

Republic 1961), and another was the result of a regime willing to admit defeat in an election (Nicaraguan elections of 1990).

Coups and interference take many different forms, but by analyzing and contextualizing the data, the differences in the mean change in LDI scores can be explained both by the difficulty of categorizing individual events and by regime change and subsequent instability that coups bring. Invasions also bring changes to democracy, as evident in the two examples in Cold War-era Latin America, but the sample size is too small to generalize any results.

Findings and Conclusions

With foreign intervention continuing to make headlines today with events like the US occupation of Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the French military's extensive presence in West Africa, analyzing the history of past intervention can be useful in predicting whether current and future interventions will live up to the many idealistic goals set forth to justify them. By evaluating the effects on democracy of US intervention in Latin America during the Cold War, one of the regions and time periods with most frequent intervention, this article aims to provide context for future decisions. This section summarizes the article's findings and draws conclusions from previous sections.

First, we found that US intervention did lead to a significant average change in LDI scores, and that the overall trend was a drop in the LDI score. Excluding outliers, all averages across year-pairings dropped by at least 28.37%. To reason this, examples of US interventions in different regions and time-periods were acknowledged while the nature of how interventions and the inherent differences in priorities present between the parties involved complicate the process of fostering democracy.

Next, we found that US intervention supporting coups caused significantly more damage, on average, to the LDI score when compared to lower-level interference (meddling in elections, supplying armed groups, targeting left-wing operatives). Events of lower-level interference translated into an average increase in the LDI score (average of +431.69%). Meanwhile, no events involving coups in the dataset translated into an increase in the LDI score, and the average of all events showed a -56.31% decrease. To reason this, the fundamental differences of coups and lower-level interference were noted, and numerous examples were put forward to contextualize the findings.

US intervention in Cold War-era Latin America showed an overall decline in democracy, but lower-level interference does not appear to have the same negative effect that it may be perceived to have. It is interesting to find that when broken down, the differences in the method of intervention has such a significant difference in the average outcome for democratic change. However, these methods of lower-level interference were not the most utilized in the events this article analyzes, with only four such instances compared to nine coups. The overall negative effect of the coups brought the overall change in democracy (excluding outliers) into the negative.

Limitations

The current article analyzes the aggregated and disaggregated change in liberal democracy among events of US intervention in Cold War-era Latin America. Future research can expand the scope of this article to create a comparative analysis with events not in the time frame and/or region to fully evaluate the overall effect of US intervention around the world. Future research can also account for more variables that are present when comparing different countries across a large geographic region. Finally, future research can expand on changes that occur after US intervention beyond just the LDI to more fully explain the effects on different sectors of government and society.

References

- Al-Anani, K. (2021, December 11). *Sudan Coup: The regional interference behind a faltering transition*. Arab Center Washington DC. Retrieved August 21, 2023, from <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/sudan-coup-the-regional-interference-behind-a-faltering-transition/>
- Argentina's military coup of 1976: What the U.S. knew*. (2021, March 23). National Security Archive. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/southern-cone/2021-03-23/argentinas-military-coup-what-us-knew>
- Bollen, K. (1993). Liberal democracy: Validity and method factors in cross-national measures. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(4), 1207-1230. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111550>
- Breve análisis de las causas del golpe militar en Panamá (1968)* [Brief analysis of the causes of the military coup in Panama (1968)]. (2006, July 11). Adital. Retrieved August 15, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20080221192453/http://www.adital.com.br/site/noticia.asp?lang=ES&cod=23432>
- Bueno de Mesquita, B., & Downs, G. W. (2006). Intervention and Democracy. *International Organization*, 60(3), 627–649. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877822>
- CIA covert operations: The 1964 overthrow of Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana*. (2020, April 6). National Security Archive. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2020-04-06/cia-covert-operations-overthrow-cheddi-jagan-british-guiana-1964>
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Luca Uberti, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, and Daniel Ziblatt. (2023). *V-Dem Codebook v13*. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. Retrieved August 11, 2023 from https://v-dem.net/documents/24/codebook_v13.pdf
- Derpanopoulos, G., Frantz, E., Geddes, B., & Wright, J. (2016). Are coups good for democracy? *Research & Politics*, 3(1), 205316801663083. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016630837>
- El Salvador (1927-present)*. (n.d.). University of Central Arkansas. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/western-hemisphere-region/el-salvador-1927-present/>
- Falcoff, M. (1987). Chile: Pinochet, the Opposition, and the United States. *World Affairs*, 149(4), 183–194. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20672111>
- Geyer, G. A. (2007, September 25). *Miami Herald: U.S. backed Guatemala coup (1963) after vote of Kennedy aides*. NACLA. Retrieved August 17, 2023, from <https://nacla.org/article/miami-herald-us-backed-guatemala-coup-1963-after-vote-kennedy-aides>
- Hove, M. T. (2007). The Arbenz Factor: Salvador Allende, U.S.-Chilean Relations, and the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala. *Diplomatic History*, 31(4), 623–663. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916199>
- Johnson, L. B. (1963, November 26). *Remarks on the Alliance for Progress to representatives of the countries of Latin America*. [Speech transcript]. UC Santa Barbara American Presidency Project. Retrieved August 20, 2023, from <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-alliance-for-progress-representatives-the-countries-latin-america#:~:text=In%20October%20of%201960%20during,living%20but%20to%20foster%20the>
- Levin, D. (2020). Interview with Dov Levin (Interview by J. Chin). *Journal of Politics and Strategy*
- Lewis, P. (2001, November 2). Juan Bosch, 92, freely elected Dominican president, dies. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/02/world/juan-bosch-92-freely-elected-dominican-president-dies.html>
- Longley, K. (1993). Peaceful Costa Rica, the first battleground: The United States and the Costa Rican revolution of 1948. *The Americas*, 50(2), 149-175. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1007137>

- Lowenstein, Julie. (2016). US foreign policy and the Soviet-Afghan War: A revisionist history. *Harvey M. Applebaum '59 Award*. 9. https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/applebaum_award/9
- Matthews, J. T. (2021, May/June). [Review of the book *Meddling in the Ballot Box: The Causes and Effects of Partisan Electoral Interventions*, by D. H. Levin]. *Foreign Affairs*.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2021-04-20/meddling-ballot-box-causes-and-effects-partisan-electoral>
- Minter, W. (1991). The US and the war in Angola. *Review of African Political Economy*, 50, 135–144.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4005928>
- Nicaraguan Revolution (1978-1990)*. (n.d.). American Archive of Public Broadcasting. Retrieved August 19, 2023, from <https://americanarchive.org/exhibits/newshour-cold-war/nicaragua>
- Pereira, A. W. (2016). The US role in the 1964 coup in Brazil: A reassessment. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 37(1), 5-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.12518>
- Rabe, S. G., Perez, L. A., & Rout, L. B. (1988). Historic Patterns of Intervention: U.S. Relations with Latin America *Latin American Research Review*, 23(2), 206–213. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503246>
- Rafael Trujillo. (n.d.). Spartacus Educational. Retrieved August 18, 2023, from <https://spartacus-educational.com/JFKtrujillo.htm>
- Sensamaust, S. (2004). Non-State actors in Colombia, Guatemala and Nicaragua [CGI]. *Mine Action Information Center*, (8.2). <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2651&context=cisr-journal>
- Silverstein, K. (n.d.). *A trip down memory lane: U.S. financed 1971 Bolivian coup*. Harper's Magazine. Retrieved August 14, 2023, from <https://harpers.org/2010/06/a-trip-down-memory-lane-us-financed-1971-bolivian-coup/>
- Simons, T. W. (2014). [Review of *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, by M. Cox, T. J. Lynch, & N. Bouchet]. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 16(4), 289–291.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26926179>
- The Truman Doctrine, 1947*. (n.d.). United States Department of State. Retrieved August 21, 2023, from <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine>
- Thyne, C. L., & Powell, J. M. (2016). Coup d'état or coup d'autocracy? How coups impact democratization, 1950–2008. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12(2), 192–213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26168099>
- Waters, M. (1986). The invasion of Grenada, 1983 and the collapse of legal norms. *Journal of Peace Research*, 23(3), 229–246. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/423822>
- Willis, M. (2021, September 2). *Woodrow Wilson and American Empire*. JSTOR Daily. Retrieved August 21, 2023, from <https://daily.jstor.org/woodrow-wilson-and-american-empire/>
- Yates, L. A. (2014). *The US military intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause* [Google Books]. Center of Military History.
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=OTAhwk3f7J8C&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=related:6WcqFfrRQIIJ:scholar.google.com/&ots=qYfMdg20s4&sig=f72gb3JIpmVdJZwYm7pefHHhQ34#v=onepage&q&f=false>