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Journal of Conflict Resolution 2008; 52; 385 originally published online Feb 26, 2008;

DOI: 10.1177/0022002707310855

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The Political Consequences of Assassination

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The assassination of a political leader is among the highest-profile acts of political violence, and conventional wisdom holds that such events often have substantial political, social, and economic effects on states. We investigate the extent to which the assassination of a head of state affects political stability through an analysis of all assassinations of heads of state between 1952 and 1997. We examine the political consequences of assassination by assessing the levels of political unrest, instability, and civil war in states that experience the assassination of their head of state. Our findings support the existence of an interactive relationship among assassination, leadership succession, and political turmoil: in particular, we find that assassinations' effects on political instability are greatest in systems in which the process of leadership succession is informal and unregulated.

Keywords: *assassination; unrest; instability; domestic conflict; civil war*

Men may die, but the fabrics of free institutions remain unshaken.

Chester Arthur's inaugural address after the assassination of President Garfield,

September 22, 1881.

Introduction

Among acts of political violence, the assassination of a head of government ranks at or near the top in its perceived significance. Beyond its obvious impact on the victim him- or herself, the assassination of a head of state represents a direct assault on one of the most important political institutions of a nation. Not surprisingly, then, it is widely believed that such killings have lasting political and societal effects. In particular, the sudden death of a head of state—or head of government—is commonly

Authors' Note: A previous version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 20-23, 2006, Chicago, Illinois. Materials necessary to replicate the analyses herein are available at <http://jcr.sagepub.com/supplemental>. Please address correspondence to Zaryab Iqbal, Department of Political Science, Pennsylvania State University, 219 Pond Lab, University Park, PA 16802; e-mail: iqbal@psu.edu.

thought to affect the political efficacy of a state, proliferate terror and lack of confidence in the government, and disrupt the domestic and foreign policy initiatives of the leader.

Yet in spite of the importance of assassination as a phenomenon of political violence, relatively little attention has been paid to the causes and consequences of such acts. Particularly scarce are systematic, social scientific analyses of assassination. Here, we undertake an examination of the political consequences of assassinations of heads of states. Our theoretical perspective is neoinstitutional: in brief, we argue that while assassinations cause disruptions in the political systems of states that have significant consequences for domestic political stability—such that following the assassination of a leader, a state is likely to experience an increase in its propensity to experience various types of civil strife—the extent of that increase is mediated by characteristics of the state's institutions. More specifically, we show that the pernicious effects of an assassination are exacerbated in states that lack a regularized means of leadership succession and are muted by the presence of such institutions.

Assassination and the Political Order

Assassination is generally defined as the killing of a public figure for political reasons; although it is an attack against an individual, the motives for an assassination are necessarily of a political nature (Khatchadourian 1974). In particular, the murder of a head of state¹ often occurs as a means to bring about large-scale political change. In ancient political theory, assassination was often viewed as a viable method of ending the rule of an illegitimate ruler (Ford 1985) or to terminate the reign of a tyrant (Padover 1943; Walzer 1974); Julius Caesar's assassination, for example, was justified by many as tyrannicide. In contrast, modern societies have mostly regarded assassinations as acts of political violence that cannot be condoned on the basis of a need for political reform (see, e.g., Nielson 1974). Consistent with this modern view of assassination, we regard the act a phenomenon of political violence and therefore a negative influence on that state's political system rather than as a legitimate mechanism for causing political change. As with other acts of political violence—such as coups—the effect of assassinations is to destabilize a society, with the murder of a head of state being particularly detrimental to the sociopolitical system.

At the same time, as political events, assassinations capture the public imagination; years after the actual events, books about the assassinations of presidents Kennedy and Lincoln continue to appear in the popular press. Yet beyond some historical accounts of specific assassinations (e.g., De Witte 2001; Posner 1993; Raj 2001) or studies of psychological profiles of individual assassins (e.g., Freedman 1965; Slomich and Kantor 1969; Ben-Yehuda 1993), social scientists have paid relatively little attention to explaining assassination as a form of political violence, and even less to assessing

its social and political consequences. To the extent that social-scientific work on assassinations has been done, it has tended to examine the social impact of assassinations, most commonly through a focus on assassinations' effects on crime (Berkowitz and Macauley 1971), public opinion (Greenberg 1964; Patterson 1971; Hartnett and Libby 1972; Angermeyer and Matschinger 1995; Esaiasson and Granberg 1996; Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann 1998; Raviv et al. 1998; Peri 2000; Klingman 2001) and political socialization (Orren and Peterson 1967; Siegel 1977).²

But despite this dearth of empirical research, assassinations of national leaders are widely believed (and asserted) to have substantial social and political effects. Patterson (1971) states flatly that "the death of the central authority figure in national political systems, whether it be Louis XVI, Josef Stalin, George V, or the American president, produces a crisis of authority" (p. 269). Snitch (1982) outlines the effectiveness of assassinations in achieving a range of terrorists' goals, including broadening their base of support, "undermin[ing] the morale and prestige of the government" and prompting the government into desperate countermeasures (p. 56). More recently, Appleton (2000) claims that "the impact of assassinations on America and the world is incalculable" (p. 495) and noted that by a wide margin, Americans cite the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as the crime that had the greatest impact on American society in the last hundred years.

The predominance of such claims is, in many respects, unsurprising: in the wake of such a major assault on—in many cases—the most important political institution of a state, it would be shocking not to find at least some negative consequences. Assassination directly and severely perturbs a state's political system and thus might be expected to lead to a range of manifestations of political unrest and instability, including riots, strikes, and demonstrations. Beyond these relatively minor reflections of domestic malaise, the sudden and violent death of a leader may also embolden dissatisfied groups to push for greater political change, in extreme cases leading to coups, revolution, and even civil war.

At the same time, however, the forces that influence the occurrence of an assassination may also play a key role in mitigating its social and political impact. Recent empirical work has noted that assassinations are less likely to occur in systems that provide a regular, institutionalized means of leadership turnover (Iqbal and Zorn 2006). Those findings suggest that political systems where executive turnover is both regular and (mostly) nonviolent may also react differently to an assassination. In particular, such systems may reduce or eliminate the need for a period of political instability following such an event. Whether through constitutional succession, hereditary accession, or other means, the presence of an accepted system for selecting a subsequent executive both assuages citizens' concerns over the continuity of the regime and reduces or eliminates the opportunity for dissident groups to attempt to seize power by force.

Conversely, systems in which leadership succession occurs largely through internal struggle or guile are substantially more likely to observe a period of unrest

following such a forcible removal of the head of state. In such a system, the assassination of the head of state creates a power vacuum that is not immediately filled through institutionalized channels. This vacuum provides incentives for various factions to vie for power, often through violent means. In addition, the demise of a strong head of state may also open up opportunities for a general increase in dissent in the society. It is not unusual for highly repressive societies to experience high levels of stability due to widespread fear of extreme punishment for dissent (Hibbs 1973; Ferrara 2003). The death of that leader may give rise to (possibly violent) political demands by previously disenfranchised or repressed groups (e.g., Carey 2007). Ironically, domestic political upheavals may be facilitated by efforts at democratization following the assassination of an autocratic leader, as various groups seek representation or power. Such turmoil is unlikely in a state with a regularized system of succession.³

Taken together, these considerations lead us to expect that in general, the assassination of a head of state will lead to an increase in the extent of political unrest, ranging from expressions of dissent (such as riots and antigovernment demonstrations) to the incidence of civil war. In addition, however, we believe that the impact of assassination will be mitigated by the presence of mechanisms for the peaceful accession of the executive. That is, while assassination will in every event be destabilizing, the extent of that destabilization will be far greater in states that lack a formalized means of leadership succession. Thus, we test two main hypotheses: first, that the assassination of a head of state results in increased levels of domestic political turmoil and armed conflict, and second, that the negative effects of assassination on domestic political stability are lower in states with regular and institutionalized mechanisms for leadership succession than in states that lack such succession processes. In the analyses that follow, we examine these expectations empirically.

Data and Operationalization

To assess our expectations regarding assassination and political discord, we consider data on all countries in the international system between the end of World War II and 1997, inclusive. This yields a total of 159 nations, with an average number of years of data per country of just under twenty-eight, after exclusions due to missing data; our unit of analysis is the country-year.

Our central phenomenon of interest is the occurrence and severity of political instability following an assassination. Rather than focusing on a single indicator, we measure that instability in several ways. In its most extreme form, political unrest takes the form of open civil war; accordingly, we adopt an indicator of the presence of a civil war in a country in a given year, as coded by the Armed Conflict project at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) (Strand et al. 2005). More specifically, we utilize three indicators of civil war. *Internal Armed*

Conflict indicates the presence and severity of “conflict between the government of a state and internal opposition groups, without intervention from other states” (Strand et al. 2005, 10). Similarly, *Internationalized Internal Armed Conflict* codes for conflict between the government and rebel groups that includes interventions from other states.⁴ Both variables are ordinal indicators, coded zero in the absence of such conflict, one for minor conflict (that is, conflict with more than 25 battle deaths per year but less than 1,000 deaths total), two for intermediate conflict (those with fewer than 1,000 deaths per year but more than 1,000 total deaths), and three for severe conflicts (those with greater than 1,000 battle deaths per year). In addition, we create a third, *combined* measure by taking the sum of the internal and internationalized conflict indicators.

Of course, not all political disorder results in civil war. To operationalize lower level political unrest and instability, we draw on a group of measures created by Banks (1999). Banks codes data on a range of indicators of domestic political strife; here, we consider seven such indicators: *general strikes*, *riots*, *antigovernment demonstrations*, *revolutions*, *government crises*, *coups*, and *guerilla warfare*. All of these indicators are, by themselves, problematic in some respects: each undoubtedly contains a degree of measurement error, and while each taps, to some extent, the broader phenomena in which we are interested, no single indicator clearly dominates the others in this respect. Accordingly, we conducted a factor analysis of the seven indicators, with the goal of extracting measures of the underlying concepts in which we are interested. A principal-components analysis of the seven variables yielded two clear factors. The first, dubbed *Political Unrest*, was the one to which the *strikes*, *riots*, and *demonstrations* variables were most strongly related. The second, which we call *Political Instability*, consists predominantly of the indicators for *revolutions*, *crises*, *coups*, and *guerilla warfare*.⁵ From this analysis, we generate factor scores on each of the two factors for every country-year in our data and use the factor scores as our summary measures of the degree of political unrest and instability, respectively. As can be seen from the variables that constitute them, the indicator for *Unrest* represents lower levels/intensities of political disturbance than that for *Instability*; the latter, in turn, reflects somewhat less political upheaval than that indicated by our civil war indicators.

Our principal covariate of interest is the occurrence of an assassination, coded zero when no such event occurred and one in the presence of an assassination, by Iqbal and Zorn (2006). As in that work, we consider only assassinations of heads of states who were killed while in office. Such assassinations are, to be sure, relatively rare events; during the four-plus decades of our study, we identify roughly eighty such assassinations. In addition, prior research has shown that political unrest and instability are often proximate causes of assassinations themselves; accordingly, to deal with the potential for endogeneity in the relationship, we lag the assassination indicator one year in all our analyses.

As a general matter, our expectation is that all forms of political unrest and instability will be increased by the incidence of an assassination. As we discuss above, however, we also believe that this effect will be most strongly in evidence in those countries in which the means of leadership succession lack regularity. Accordingly, we also code an indicator variable for *Regulated Succession*. This variable is coded one in those countries in which the succession of the chief executive operates according to an accepted, institutionalized process and zero in those countries in which it does not, and draws on the widely used POLITY dataset (Marshall and Jaggers 2004). Note that we do not distinguish among the various means of succession; we thus treat as equivalent hereditary succession, regularized competitive elections, and all other standardized forms of succession.⁶ Our hypothesis is that irrespective of the manner in which that succession takes place, the existence of a regularized means of leadership replacement will serve to reduce societal levels of unrest and instability following an assassination event.

Finally, our regression models also include a number of control variables that other studies have shown to be important causes of civil war and other forms of political unrest (e.g., Gurr 1970; Londregan and Poole 1990; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; de Soysa 2002; Barbieri and Reuveny 2005). These include naturally coded measures for the *Year*, the (log of) *Population*, and the period of the *Cold War*. While we have no particularly strong a priori theoretical expectations for these variables' influence on political upheaval, prior work suggests that more populous states will experience higher levels of unrest, although the international dynamics of the Cold War will act to lower them. To these variables we add several indicators of economic performance, including *GDP per capita*, *GDP Growth* (both in constant U.S. dollars), and *Trade Openness* (defined as total imports plus exports divided by gross domestic product (GDP), as in Gleditsch 2002), all logged and lagged one year. Finally, we control for the tendency for political unrest to occur in "transitional" states that are neither highly democratic nor highly autocratic (e.g., Eyerman 1998; Hegre et al. 2001; Goemans 2000). Specifically, we include the commonly used 21-point POLITY IV measure of democracy/autocracy (Marshall and Jaggers 2004); we rescale this variable to range between zero (for the most autocratic countries) and one (for the most democratic ones), and also include a quadratic term to capture its expected curvilinear effect.

Results

We begin with some simple bivariate analyses, examining our two central hypotheses: that assassinations will increase levels of political turmoil in societies and that the magnitude of that increase will be greater in systems in which no regularized process of leadership succession is in place at the time of the event. To do so, we conduct a series of *t*-tests for the difference of means in our five response variables

Table 1
***t*-tests for Differences of Means, by Lagged**
Assassinations and Succession Type

Variable	All Country- Years	Unregulated Succession	Regulated Succession
Political Unrest	-1.38 (<i>p</i> = 0.09)	-0.99 (<i>p</i> = 0.17)	-1.29 (<i>p</i> = 0.11)
Political Instability	-1.22 (<i>p</i> = 0.11)	-1.79 (<i>p</i> = 0.04)	1.91 (<i>p</i> = 0.96)
Internal Armed Conflict	-1.86 (<i>p</i> = 0.04)	-1.08 (<i>p</i> = 0.15)	-1.73 (<i>p</i> = 0.06)
Internationalized Internal Armed Conflict	-1.68 (<i>p</i> = 0.05)	-1.38 (<i>p</i> = 0.09)	-0.70 (<i>p</i> = 0.25)
Combined Indicator	-2.39 (<i>p</i> = 0.01)	-1.58 (<i>p</i> = 0.06)	-2.00 (<i>p</i> = 0.04)

Note: *NT* = 4,296 (2,210 unregulated succession, 2,086 regulated succession). Cell entries are two-sample *t*-tests for differences of means with unequal variances; numbers in parentheses are one-tailed *p* values. See text for details.

between those countries that experienced an assassination in the previous year and those that did not, as well as conducting separate analyses for the two values of our indicator of *Regularized Succession*. These results are presented in Table 1.

Cell entries in Table 1 are actual *t*-test values; negative scores reflect instances in which the response variable in question takes on a higher value in years following an assassination than in other years. Note that fourteen of the fifteen cell entries are in the expected (negative) direction, and nine of the fourteen are statistically significant at *p* = 0.10 or greater (one-tailed). The bivariate findings in general thus support the notion that political disturbances are more likely following assassinations of chief executives. The second hypothesis, however, receives only mixed support; in only two instances—those of *Political Instability* and *Internationalized Conflict*—is the relationship between assassination and political tumult substantially stronger for states in which succession is unregulated. For the other three variables, the effects are roughly similar across the two types of succession, with the strongest evidence against our hypothesis appearing in the *Internal Conflict* variable.

Unrest and Instability

Our bivariate findings, while suggestive, fail to control for a number of key factors that influence political unrest, instability, and civil wars. Accordingly, we estimate a series of multivariate models on each of our response variables; these are presented in Tables 2 and 3. To address the time-series cross-sectional nature of the

Table 2
Random-Effects Models of Political Unrest and Instability, 1952-1997

Variables	Political Unrest	Political Instability
Constant	-3.77 (0.345)	-0.04 (0.32)
$\ln(\text{Population})$	0.21** (-0.02)	0.004 (-0.02)
Year	-0.0001 (-0.002)	-0.002 (-0.002)
Cold War	0.11 (-0.05)	-0.05 (-0.04)
$\ln(\text{GDP})_{t-1}$	0.1 (-0.04)	-0.06* (-0.03)
$\ln(\text{GDP Growth})_{t-1}$	0.013 (-0.017)	-0.01 (-0.02)
$\ln(\text{Trade Openness})_{t-1}$	-0.04* (-0.02)	-0.02 (-0.02)
POLITY_{t-1}	0.83** (-0.3)	1.93** (-0.27)
POLITY_{t-1} squared	-0.73** (-0.3)	-1.53** (-0.27)
$\text{Assassination}_{t-1}$	0.09 (-0.2)	0.36* (-0.18)
Regulated Succession	0.2 (-0.06)	-0.32* (-0.06)
$\text{Assassination}_{t-1} \times \text{Regulated Succession}$	0.41 (-0.34)	-0.64* (-0.31)
$\hat{\rho}$	0.12 (-0.02)	0.14 (-0.02)

Note: $NT = 4,296$ ($N = 157$, $\bar{T} = 27.4$). Cell entries are random-effects coefficient estimates; numbers in parentheses are estimated standard errors.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed). See text for details.

data, we estimate a series of random-effects models, treating countries as the central units of observation.⁷ Our expectations are straightforward: assassinations should increase levels of political tumult but should do so to a greater extent in systems with unregulated leadership succession. This suggests that the direct effects of the *Assassination* variable should be positive but that its interaction with *Regulated Succession* should be negative.⁸

Turning first to the two variables for *Unrest* and *Instability* in Table 3, note that the series of control variables operate mostly according to expectations: unrest and instability decline slightly over time for the period studied, while the Cold War had a small repressive effect on the more serious forms of political upheaval. While none of the economic variables exhibit any strongly consistent effect, the expected

curvilinear influence of democracy is clearly supported by the data: the greatest levels of unrest and instability are estimated to occur at roughly median levels of the POLITY indicator.

Most important, however, are the effects of our three key covariates. There, we see substantial differences between their joint effects on political *Unrest* and on *Instability*. With regard to the former, we find little net difference in levels of unrest as a result of assassinations; in fact, the estimate for the interactive term is incorrectly signed. In addition, the relatively large, positive direct effect of *Regulated Succession* on unrest suggests that countries with institutionalized processes of succession actually tend to see slightly higher mean levels of unrest than those without. To the extent that our *Unrest* variable reflects political activities—strikes, demonstrations, and so forth—that contain expressive content, this small difference likely reflects a greater willingness by citizens in such countries to engage in such expressive activity.

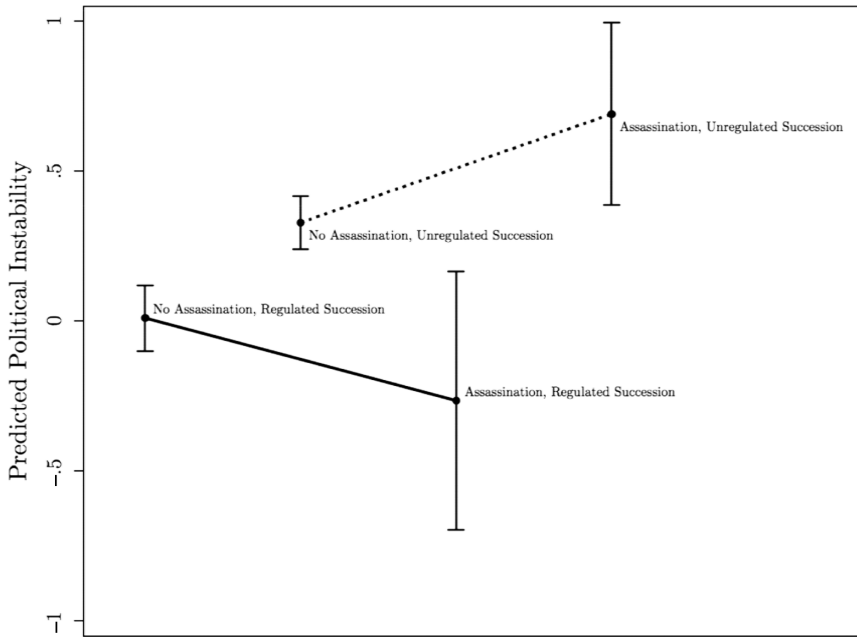
The reverse is true for the influence of these variables on *Political Instability*. There—and consistent with our bivariate findings in Table 1—we find that the estimates comport with our theory: assassinations themselves act to increase the level of political instability in a state but do so only in those countries that lack an institutionalized means of selecting the chief executive. This difference is illustrated graphically in Figure 1, which plots the predicted levels of *Political Instability* (along with 95 percent confidence intervals) at mean levels of the control variables for the four relevant conditions (presence/absence of assassination, regulated/unregulated succession).⁹ In nonregulated succession systems, the effect of an assassination is to increase generalized instability by roughly one-third of a standard deviation (dotted line). In contrast, its effect in regulated systems is actually negative: in such systems, assassinations appear to increase political stability (smooth line), albeit very slightly.

Taken together, these two sets of results suggest that the political consequences of assassinations take on very different characters in nations with different leadership selection systems. Where leadership is taken by guile or by force, the assassination of a chief executive has a profoundly destabilizing effect, increasing the occurrence of coups, guerrilla actions, and so forth. Conversely, where an accepted means for selecting the new leader exists, instability actually declines, even as other, less extreme forms of political protest increase.¹⁰

Civil War

Turning next to our indicators of violent conflict, estimates from our three models are presented in Table 3. Across all three, the effects of the control variables are relatively consistent: population exerts a positive impact on war, whereas economic prosperity (in the form of higher per capita GDP) and trade generally decrease the incidence and severity of civil war. We also once again find support for the familiar

Figure 1
Predicted Values of Political Instability,
by Assassination and Succession Type



curvilinear relationship between regime type and civil war: both highly autocratic and highly democratic countries exhibit the lowest propensity for violent internal conflict, whereas those with intermediate levels of democracy are significantly more likely to experience such conflicts.

As was the case for unrest and instability, the results for our central variables of interest are somewhat mixed. We find no significant influences for any of the three variables when examining internal conflicts alone and in fact, cannot reject the null hypothesis of no joint influence ($\chi^2_3 = 1.64$, $p = 0.65$). By contrast, our findings for civil wars that also contain an element of international involvement are both strong and in the expected direction; assassinations increase the incidence of such wars in nations lacking regulated mechanisms for political succession but have no such effect in systems where succession is regularized.¹¹ Finally, the results for the combined indicator demonstrate significant positive effects of assassinations on civil wars and also lend support to the hypothesized interactive effect. While the effect

Table 3
Random-Effects Models of Internal and
Internationalized Conflict, 1952-1997

Variables	Internal Conflict	Internationalized Conflict	Combined Indicator
Constant	-3.08 (0.36)	-0.87 (-0.34)	-3.96 (-0.49)
$\ln(\text{Population})$	0.13** (-0.02)	0.03 (-0.02)	0.16** (-0.03)
Year	0.013** (-0.001)	0.006** (-0.001)	0.02** (-0.002)
Cold War	0.12 (-0.03)	0.21 (-0.03)	0.33 (-0.04)
$\ln(\text{GDP})_{t-1}$	-0.10** (-0.03)	-0.08** (-0.03)	-0.18** (-0.04)
$\ln(\text{GDP Growth})_{t-1}$	0.02 (-0.01)	0.001 (-0.009)	0.02 (-0.01)
$\ln(\text{Trade Openness})_{t-1}$	-0.05** (-0.02)	0.01 (-0.01)	-0.05* (-0.02)
POLITY_{t-1}	0.74** (-0.18)	0.48** (-0.17)	1.22** (-0.25)
POLITY_{t-1} squared	-0.66** (-0.18)	-0.35* (-0.17)	-1.00** (-0.25)
$\text{Assassination}_{t-1}$	0.07 (-0.11)	0.27** (-0.1)	0.33* (-0.14)
Regulated Succession	-0.005 (-0.04)	-0.07* (-0.04)	-0.07 (-0.05)
$\text{Assassination}_{t-1} \times \text{Regulated Succession}$	0.1 (-0.18)	-0.24 (-0.17)	-0.15 (-0.24)
$\hat{\rho}$	0.46 (-0.03)	0.49 (-0.03)	0.46 (-0.03)

Note: $NT = 4,425$ ($N = 159$, $\bar{T} = 27.8$). Cell entries are random-effects coefficient estimates; numbers in parentheses are estimated standard errors.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed). See text for details.

of assassinations in countries where succession is unregularized is both strong and statistically differentiable from chance ($\hat{\beta} = 0.33$, $p = 0.01$), the same effect in countries with regulated succession is 0.18, with a standard error estimate of 0.20 ($p = 0.35$).¹²

We believe these final results may be suggestive of an important international dynamic in nations' responses to assassinations. The fact that we uncover our strongest results in those instances where civil conflict is accompanied by the involvement of one or more foreign nations is consistent with the idea that nations view assassinations as opportune times in which to intervene in the domestic politics of

others. Such “internationalized” conflicts most often occur when rebel groups in one country have the support—explicit or tacit—of the government of a second country, typically a rival or near neighbor. The notion that such groups may be particularly emboldened by the occurrence of an assassination of the sitting leader is a possibility that deserves further empirical investigation.

Conclusion

Former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli is said to have remarked that “assassination has never changed the history of the world.” Yet our analyses here suggest that the assassination of a state’s leader can, in fact, have serious repercussions for that state’s internal political stability. In particular, such assassinations significantly increase the likelihood of violent manifestations of dissent, such as coups, revolutions, and civil wars. Based on these findings, the assassination of a head of state is clearly an important form of political violence and one that warrants systematic study of both its causes and its consequences.

Here, we have presented an analysis of the relationship between assassination and a range of types of political instability from political unrest and protest to civil war. Our findings support a neoinstitutional view of that relationship: assassinations’ adverse political effects are generally assuaged by the presence of a standardized means for leadership succession. That conclusion is, at one level, unsurprising—the key role of such mechanisms is to ensure that the legitimacy and authority of the state lives on after the death of the leader.

The consequences of the assassination of a head of state, however, are not limited to expressions of political dissent. The termination of a political regime through assassination could have significant implications for the political institutions of a state and subsequent regimes. For instance, is the assassination of a repressive and autocratic leader followed by reform of political institutions and a democratic leadership? To the extent that assassinations often reflect a desperate need to usher in political change, it would be worthwhile to examine the kind of institutional change—if any—that is instigated after an assassination. On one hand, the demise of an autocratic leader may provide an opportunity—and the necessary environment—for setting up democratic institutions. Conversely, the political tumult and instability following an assassination may result in enabling an equally despotic leader from an opposing faction to seize power.

Beyond its political consequences, the societal shock of an assassination may also have economic effects. Both private and public enterprises rely on political and governmental stability for their efficient operations. It is likely that the assassination of a head of state affects economic and commercial policies in ways that disrupt the domestic economy and/or international trade. Thus, the relationship between assassination and aspects of domestic and international political economy

is a valuable direction for future research. Yet another dimension of the effects of assassination may be regional instability. Since assassination increases the likelihood of political instability and domestic militarized conflict in a state, is it possible that this instability could diffuse to other states in a region? As we note above, it is not unusual for neighboring states to become involved in civil wars, for instance, through troop contributions or refugee flows (see, e.g., Gleditsch 2007). The death of a state leader may also be viewed by international rivals as an opportune time for invasion, linking assassination to international conflict. In summary, a host of possible consequences of assassination remain to be explored.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, we use the generic term *head of state* to refer to the individual in whom executive power rests; this might in actuality be a president, prime minister (in a parliamentary system), or other effective chief executive. Our definition is thus similar to other contemporary studies (e.g., Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2007; Iqbal and Zorn 2006; Jones and Olken 2007). While a bit imprecise, our usage eliminates a good deal of linguistic awkwardness.

2. A notable exception, albeit one not focused on heads of state, is Zussman and Zussman (2006).

3. A somewhat different motivation for this hypothesis rests on the notion—first advanced by Schumpeter (1942) and Downs (1957)—that democratic competition leads to convergence in policy outcomes. In a recent working paper, Frey (2007) formalizes this intuition, noting that “in the extreme case of a perfectly competitive democracy . . . politicians then are perfectly substitutable, and propose and undertake identical policies” (p. 7). While Frey’s characterization focuses on the level of democracy as the key mediating variable (something we include in our analyses below), a broader implication is that the political consequences of such assassinations will be greater in systems where policy is more directly tied to the identity of individual leaders. At the same time, although democratic states are more likely to have a regularized system of succession—given that such a system is a necessary condition for a democracy—it is important to note that our argument about the mitigating effects of regularized succession is not limited to democracies. That is, in nondemocratic states that nonetheless retain an institutionalized system for replacing the head of state, we expect that the destabilizing effects of an assassination would also be mitigated.

4. We believe distinguishing between these two types of conflict is of some potential significance. If other nations—including neighbors and rivals—view assassinations as opportunities to encourage rebel groups within a country to rise up, then the effect of that international dynamic may be seen in the variable measuring internationalized conflict. We discuss this possibility at more length below.

5. The eigenvalues for this analysis are 2.16 for the *Unrest* factor and 1.43 for the *Instability* factor; uniqueness scores range from 0.28 (for *riots*) to 0.71 (for *guerilla warfare*), with an average value of 0.49.

6. More specifically, we code regulated succession equal to one if POLITY’s *xrreg* variable is equal to three, indicating that “chief executives are determined by heredity succession or in competitive elections” (Marshall and Jaggers 2004, 18). The variable receives a score of zero if executive succession is either “unregulated” (and changes in the chief executive occur through forceful seizures of power) or “designational/transitional” (where changes in the chief executive occur through noncompetitive designation by political elites). Note that this coding reflects the institutional arrangements in place in each country in each year of our data rather than any actual transitions during that year. As a result, we can be confident that our measure is both conceptually and empirically exogenous to both the incidence of assassinations and to our various measures of domestic tumult. The Pearson’s correlation between *Regulated Succession* and *Assassination* is -0.03 , whereas its correlation with our dependent variables is negative in four of the five instances and never exceeds 0.15 in absolute value. Moreover, the correlation between this variable and the aggregated POLITY score is a relatively modest 0.73.

7. Analyses using fixed effects yield statistically and substantively identical results and are available on request from the authors.

8. While we have no strong expectations regarding the direct effect of *Regulated Succession* on unrest, both our intuition as well as previous research suggest that its effect ought to be negative as well (see below).

9. Recall that the variable for *Instability* is a factor score; it therefore has a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

10. Note that this aggregate-level finding is inconsistent with some individual-level, survey-based work following specific assassinations, at least some of which have found that individuals' tolerance for antigovernment protests declines following those events (Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann 1998). This inconsistency suggests a need for more nuanced work into the possible antimobilizing effects of such events.

11. The estimated coefficient for $Assassination_{t-1}$ in the latter case is 0.02, with an estimated standard error of 0.13.

12. As an additional check on the robustness of these results, we also considered the possible effect of abrupt leadership turnover due to natural causes. Using data from the Archigos project (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2007), we reestimated our five analyses, replacing the lagged *Assassination* variable with a (similarly lagged) indicator of whether a leader died in office of natural causes (and its corresponding interaction with *Regularized Succession*). Those results, which are available in the replication archive, consistently reveal no relationship between such natural deaths and sociopolitical turmoil or of any mediating influence of succession type on that relationship. Thus, it appears, at least from these initial analyses, that assassinations are qualitatively different from other causes of leadership turnover. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this approach.

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