Exploring the Effects of Foreign Partisan Election Intervention on Corruption

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ABSTRACT

Foreign partisan election intervention is a persistent tactic that may become increasingly prevalent as technological advancements and the growth of social media facilitate new low-cost, yet effective mechanisms for intervention. Despite expansive documentation of numerous cases of foreign partisan election intervention, there has been little systematic research on its effects, largely due to lack of sufficient data. This paper leverages the recently published Partisan Electoral Interventions by the Great Powers dataset to contribute to filling this gap. Specifically, this paper is an exploration of the effects of foreign partisan election intervention on changes in corruption levels. I hypothesize that because elections are important accountability mechanisms, tampering with them via foreign partisan intervention can facilitate the growth of corruption in targeted states. In particular, covert interventions typically require cooperation between the intervener and the beneficiary, and so they support politicians who are willing to engage in illicit activity to attain power who may be more likely to engage in corruption once in office. Election interventions can propel these candidates into office as challengers or shield corrupt incumbents from consequences and allow them to retain power. I find that successful covert intervention slightly increases the likelihood of corruption growth, with larger effects when the intervention benefits a challenger, and when the targeted state has a relatively low level of democracy.

Keywords: elections, election intervention, corruption, democracy, accountability

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign partisan election intervention is a recurrent tactic. The Partisan Electoral Intervention by the Great Powers (PEIG) dataset documents that the United States and Russia intervened in one of every nine competitive elections between 1946 and 2000 (Levin, 2019). These data only represent two intervening countries; cases of election intervention carried out by many other states have also been documented, suggesting it is a common tool. And election interference is likely to become increasingly popular for several reasons. First, opportunity to manipulate states in this fashion has grown as elections have become a more ubiquitous feature of governance. Second, military interventions have proven financially and politically costly and often ineffective, leaving states looking for other options (Denison, 2020). Finally, the advent of new technologies, particularly the explosive growth of social media, has lengthened the menu of election interference mechanisms. Some of these new methods have low implementation costs and high payoff potential (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Numerous recent allegations of election meddling[1] indicate this tactic has persisted in the 21st century. It is therefore increasingly critical to understand the consequences of election intervention, which thus far we know relatively little about.

Findings from the PEIG dataset indicate that, at least when applied by a great power, election intervention achieves its intended effect. It is estimated that the intervention increases the vote share of the preferred side by an average of three percent (Levin, 2016). Interference does not only affect the immediate election outcome; it has indirect effects that have been explored in a few single country case studies, such as increased political polarization and negative attitudes toward the intervener (Tomz & Weeks, 2020; Shulman & Bloom, 2012; Corstange & Marinov, 2012). But until recently there has been a dearth of systematic data on foreign election intervention, thwarting larger-scale examination of its consequences.

The creator of the PEIG produced two studies that began to fill this void. The first drew out a secondary consequence of intervention, finding that successful electoral intervention is tied to an increase in domestic terrorism and greater probability of the emergence of new terrorist groups in targeted states (Levin, 2018b). The theory behind these findings links election intervention to terrorism via the weakening of democracy based on research that terrorism increases when the efficacy of peaceful political activities declines. The second study supports this theory by demonstrating the connection between covert election interference and declining quality of democracy (Levin, 2018a). Levin's theory to explain this effect includes the idea that election intervention would facilitate the growth of corruption, which can weaken democratic institutions.

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[1] A sample of recent allegations of election intervention: Russia in the United States' 2016 election (Parks, 2019), India in Sri Lanka's 2015 election (Chalmers & Miglani, 2015), and Libya in France's 2007 election (Matamoros, 2018).

Discovering whether corruption is indeed the mechanism explaining Levin's findings on declining democratic quality is an important endeavor, and corruption also stands on its own as a critical concept outside of this specific question. Along with and connected to concerns about the effects on the quality of democracy, corruption is linked to a host of adverse effects that tie it firmly to broader security issues. To list a few, corruption has been linked with poorer health outcomes and higher child mortality, bureaucratic inefficiency and fiscal deficits, and declining government legitimacy (Bruckner, 2019; Dimant & Tosato, 2018; Factor & Kang, 2015; Hanf et al., 2011). The negligence associated with corruption can easily become deadly. For example, in 2013 a construction firm with mafia connections won a contract to retrofit an elementary school in Italy for earthquake safety. The construction firm embezzled the money and never did the work, and to complete this classic example of corruption the local inspector accepted payment in exchange for approving work that was never done. Three years later, five children were killed when an earthquake caused the school to collapse (Kleinfeld, 2018). This is a singular example of the suffering that can result from the dysfunction of corrupt governments.

Corruption has also been identified as a threat multiplier in larger scale events. For example, corruption is an important part of a landscape of issues that contributes to states' inability to control infectious disease outbreaks, first by weakening health systems, and then by causing the mismanagement of funds allocated for crisis response. To name some examples, direct evidence of the impact of corruption has been synthesized in the case of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone and is already surfacing in the United States' response to the presently unfolding COVID-19 pandemic (Mellman & Eisen, 2020; Vittori, 2020; Anderson & Beresford, 2016). Another case that demonstrates explicit security implications is that some analysts name corruption as a contributing cause of the Syrian Civil War. Amidst great suffering resulting from the government's mismanagement of the drought, corrupt officials abused water management legislation that required farmers to annually renew licenses for wells on their property by forcing them to pay bribes for license approval. Among other issues, these acts of corruption provoked protests that were violently repressed and eventually bloomed into armed rebellion and full-scale civil war (De Châtel, 2014).

As critical as suppressing corruption evidently is, potential contributors to its growth are deserving of thorough examination. As such, Levin's theory that partisan foreign election intervention causes growth of corruption is worthy of investigation. Democracy and corruption are both complex multi-dimensional concepts, but Levin's study implicating election interference in the growth of corruption focused on the outcome of resulting regime type, and consequently relied on aggregate measures of democracy and tested no specific measure of corruption. The aim of this paper is therefore to contribute to knowledge of the effects of election interference by exploring this research question:

Does partisan foreign election intervention affect the level of corruption in targeted states?

This question is addressed in the remainder of this paper, beginning with a review of relevant literature on corruption and accountability, an outline of general theory and construction of testable hypotheses about how election interference may affect corruption levels in targeted states, then detailed accounting of the methods and results of testing employed in this study, and finally concluding thoughts and discussion, along with directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Levin's theory follows the general logic that election intervention tampers with a component of democracy that controls corruption, and that resulting growth in corruption in turn further degrades the strength of democracy. The multistep nature of this theory reveals that the relationships between these concepts is not simple or unidirectional. The connection between election intervention and corruption is yet to be tested, but the second part of Levin's equation that connects growth in corruption to decline in democratic quality is based on a solid foundation of literature exploring the connections between various elements of democratic governance and corruption.

Corruption can be considered a constituent or reflective metric of democracy, and the relationships between elements of the two can be conceived in either direction. Rising corruption may cause democracy to weaken, or the crumbling of democracy may allow corruption to flourish. Likely both are true; and generally, corruption is higher in countries with weaker democratic norms and institutions (Sandholtz and Koetzel, 2000). Democracy has a cyclical relationship with corruption. The latter can undermine democratic institutions, weakening their ability to combat further corruption. Similarly, strong democratic institutions can protect against the emergence and growth of corruption (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010; Sung, 2004).

2.1 Accountability in Governance

Disaggregating the concept of democracy clarifies the mechanics of its relationship with corruption, revealing components of particular relevance. These components can be categorized by how they exercise **accountability**, or effect constraints on power through transparency and sanctions. Researchers who have investigated accountability within democracies have defined three general directions based on the 'spatial relationship' between the actors involved: horizontal, diagonal, and vertical (McMann et al., 2019; Lührmann, Marquardt, & Mechkova, 2017). Horizontal accountability refers to governments policing themselves, typically through an independent judiciary and prosecutors, and/or legislative checks on executive power (Fish, Michel, & Lindberg, 2015; Van Aaken, Feld, & Voigt, 2010). Diagonal accountability refers to the ability of non-state actors, such as the media and civil society organizations, to amplify information about the government through the media to voters or to other parts of the government, and the ability of larger institutions to directly lobby for action (Bhattacharyya & Hodler, 2015; Camaj, 2013; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). The third accountability direction is vertical, or

the governed people themselves holding the government accountable. This is principally attempted through participation in elections. Elections are an element of democracy deemed particularly important for dealing with corruption (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). As elections are the element of democracy affected by the independent variable in this study, the following section provides more detail on what is presently known about the relationship between elections and corruption.

2.2 Elections and Corruption

Regular and fair elections are an aspect of democracy considered especially important for combating corruption because they facilitate the public's ability to remove corrupt officials from office. The threat of this accountability may also deter corruption. Multi-country analyses and several single-country case studies have demonstrated that voters can effectively use elections to punish allegations of corruption (Krause & Méndez, 2009; Ferraz & Finan, 2008; Change & Golden, 2004). However, researchers have demonstrated that elections have an inverted curvilinear relationship with corruption; the mere presence of elections is associated with higher corruption, potentially due to the incentive elections create for politicians to take action to secure their electoral prospects to retain power. But when elections are high quality, or free and fair, countries tend to achieve lower levels of corruption (McMann et al., 2019). In short, the quality of elections appears to be an important determinant of a state's ability to control corruption. As foreign partisan election intervention directly touches this element of democracy with close connections to corruption, and specifically tampers with the necessary quality component, it may well contribute to corruption in affected states. The following section outlines general theory around the relationship between election interference and corruption and builds specific hypotheses that will be tested in this paper.

3. HYPOTHESES

Election intervention could facilitate the growth of corruption through several major pathways. First, *election intervention could help politicians more likely to commit corruption to gain office.* According to the PEIG, the bulk of election interventions are conducted covertly (Levin, 2016). Covert intervention typically requires substantial cooperation between the intervener and the supported side, and the type of politicians willing to engage in this behavior and commit illegal acts to gain power may be more likely to commit further corruption once in office (Levin, 2013). In office, these actors may remain beholden to the intervener, and the intervener can remain active in the target's affairs. This can put more distance between the government and direct control by citizens by reducing elected officials' reliance on providing good governance to maintain the support of their constituents. Having not gained victory legitimately, the supported actor may continue to rely on foreign support to stay in power and turn to illegal domestic means of shoring up their finances and prospects in subsequent elections. The election of a corrupt leader can provoke the growth and spread of corruption throughout a government. Corrupt practices have been found to proliferate through institutions from the top down, and corruption among

leadership is a key driver in the transition from instances of corruption to systemic corruption (Khan, 2008; Della Porta & Mény, 1997).

Second, *election intervention can enable corrupt incumbents to escape consequences by diminishing the public's ability to remove these officials from office through legitimate elections*. As previously noted, research shows that voters can effectively use elections to punish allegations of corruption. But when an election is tampered with or entirely rigged, voters' ability to exercise vertical accountability is diminished or destroyed. Plus, some types of intervention provide training to the aided party that can be carried forward to protect incumbents in future elections, an example of which Levin documents in his work on the effects of election intervention on regime type. In the 1968 election in Guyana, the United States helped Prime Minister Burnham rig the election by registering fake oversees voters, a tactic which Burnham then mimicked in successive elections to retain power and eventually transform Guyana into a dictatorship (Levin, 2018a; Rabe 2005). However, elected officials who choose to collaborate with covert partisan intervention to retain their power may well have already been engaging in corrupt acts in office before the intervention. As such, even if corrupt officials are protected by election interventions that benefit incumbents, changes in corruption levels may be more perceptible if the intervention propels a challenger into office. Therefore, the first set of hypotheses are:

> *H1a: Successful covert partisan election intervention increases government corruption in targeted states.*

> *H1b: Successful covert partisan election intervention increases government corruption in targeted states when a challenger is helped into office.*

Elections do not occur in identical circumstances, and these two pathways from election intervention to corruption growth could unfold in varying conditions that could either exacerbate corruption or mitigate the effects of the intervention. There are many other factors that affect corruption levels, particularly the institutional strength of the other facets of democratic governance that enact accountability. The horizontal accountability from judicial and legislative constraints on executive power, and the diagonal accountability from media and civil society institutions can also contribute to controlling corruption (Dimant, 2018; Aidt, 2011; Pellegrini, 2011; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Consequently, states with low to moderate levels of democracy that are lacking in other protective factors and are already more likely to have higher levels of corruption relative to stronger democracies may be more vulnerable to its growth. Conversely, states with generally stronger democratic institutions may be more resistant to the development of corruption, even when their elections are subject to intervention. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is:

> *H2: Successful covert partisan election intervention increases government corruption in targeted states with lower quality of democracy at the time of intervention.*

Characteristics of the targeted state are not the only important consideration; some research also suggests that features of the intervening state could affect the outcomes of election interference. As various intervening states have fundamentally different goals and interests, their interventions may have different effects. For example, survey data regarding the 2004 elections in Ukraine found that while intervention by all parties was resented, actions of Western governments (including the United States), international organizations, and non-governmental organizations were more alienating than intervention by Russia. Even in the most pro-West parts of Ukraine where the candidate benefited by Western intervention matched the voters' preferences, the intervention still resulted in a high level of resentment (Shulman & Bloom, 2012). Likewise, the United States' intervention in Lebanon produced more polarization in opinions, but intervention by Iran in the same election had a lesser effect, possibly because opinions about the more familiar regional power whose goals were more transparent were less malleable (Corstange & Marinov, 2012). Levin's use of the PEIG to examine the effect of election intervention on the resulting level of democracy found that intervention by the United States had weaker negative effects on democratic strength than intervention by the USSR/Russia, but not to the extent that they produced different likelihoods of the targets experiencing democratic breakdown. Levin found no evidence that intervention by the United States improved targets' level of democracy, and the best case was overt interventions by the United States were "mostly harmless" in terms of democracy level (Levin, 2018a).

Whether the intervention was conducted by the United States or the USSR/Russia may also impact corruption outcomes. Constructivist and democratic peace theory perspectives would suggest that liberal democracies would prefer other countries to match their structure and values. Therefore, they may prefer to engage in process intervention that supports democratic institutions, which would shore up protective factors against corruption. And they may reserve engaging in partisan intervention for candidates that match their values who may be less prone to engaging in corruption in office. The United States indeed conducts a great deal of process intervention to bolster the quality of democratic institutions and systems, which may moderate the effects of their many partisan interventions (Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, & Seligson, 2006). Further, the PEIG is constructed to only include elections that are competitive to a high standard, indicating that if the United States was interested in intervening in the election they likely had multiple candidates or parties to choose from and would be more likely to find a side to support that both aligned with their material and security interests and would inflict minimal damage to the target. Meanwhile, autocratic Russia may be less likely to have any interest in the quality of the candidates or parties they support beyond alignment with their preferred policies. Accordingly, the third hypothesis is:

> *H3: Successful covert partisan election intervention increases government corruption in targeted states with a greater effect attributable to intervention by the USSR/Russia than intervention by the United States.*

4. METHODS

The following sections contain definitions of the concepts pertinent to the study, descriptions of how they were operationalized, an outline of the analysis plan that was utilized to test each hypothesis, and a summary of the main limitations of this design.

4.1 Concept Definitions and Operationalization

The applicable concepts defined and operationalized below are foreign partisan election interventions, corruption, democracy, and accountability. Each subsection provides justification for the data selected and the variables constructed to operationalize the concept. For a brief overview of variables and data sources see Table 1.

Foreign Partisan Electoral Intervention

A **foreign partisan electoral intervention** is a state's attempt to determine the results of another state's election by aiding or impeding one of the candidates or parties. Intervention can be overt or covert and incurs or risks incurring significant costs (e.g. financial or reputational) to the intervener or the target (Levin, 2019). Actions that meet this definition can be further grouped by their specific nature into campaign funding, non-financial campaign assistance, 'dirty tricks' (e.g. disseminating harmful disinformation), threats or promises to the target, giving or taking aid from the target, or other costly concessions. *Partisan* intervention is specifically distinct from *process* intervention, the latter of which includes involvement in elections with aims and means to support democratic processes and without a specific candidate or party to support or undermine. This definition reflects the construction of the PEIG dataset, which will be used for this study. The PEIG includes an observation for each intervenable national-level election in the period 1946-2000. An election is only considered intervenable if it was competitive, defined as reception of a perfect score from the Database of Political Institutions' executive electoral competitiveness index (Levin, 2018a). An intervention is covert when either the intervention actions or the connections between the actions and the election were not known to the typical voter in the target state (Levin, 2016). In addition to the publicly available PEIG, this study will leverage a yet to be published metric of intervention 'success' also created by Levin and generously provided for the purpose of this study. Levin's metric considers an intervention a **success** if the aided candidate or party retained the main executive office if they were an incumbent or gained it if they were a challenger (Levin, 2018a).

Data availability restricts consideration of alternate definitions and metrics. A similar source exists, created by Berger, Easterly, Nunn, and Satyanath (hereafter BENS) to capture foreign influence more generally, including overt military interventions and violent covert coups (2013). The PEIG dataset is preferable for this study because it focuses specifically on elections and offers more fine-grain measures related to those events. The PEIG also includes multiple instances of election intervention from the

overlapping time period that do not appear in the BENS dataset, and includes eleven additional years, offering more comprehensive coverage of relevant events (Levin, 2019). For a complete account of the creation of the PEIG please see Levin's introductory documentation 'Partisan electoral interventions by the great powers: Introducing the PEIG Dataset' and the associated supplementary materials (2019).

Change in Corruption

Corruption is defined as the use of public office for private gain, with public office including executives, legislators, judges, and other public servants. Actions constituting corruption include embezzlement, theft, and bribery. The definition and metrics are drawn directly from the data that will be leveraged, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Corruption Index, which contains ratings of the extent of corrupt actions undertaken by elected and public sector officials (McMann et al., 2016). V-Dem was selected because other datasets that measure democracy such as Polity and Freedom House do not include measures of corruption, and datasets that focus on corruption, like the Transparency Index, do not provide the necessary temporal coverage.

The dependent variable will be calculated as the Corruption Index score the year before the election subtracted from the Corruption Index score three years after the election. The year prior to each election is utilized as the baseline to exclude changes rendered based on the election activity itself. Three years post-election is selected to allow inaugurations and power transfers to take place, which often occur in the year following an election, and then to allow some time for any effects to proliferate and/or become apparent. Measurements past three years are not considered in order to ensure the aided party is still in power, as many executives face reelection after four or five years (Castella Andreu et al., 2018).

Prior Corruption Growth

To account for whether corruption was already growing before the election occurred, the Corruption Index was also used to create a control variable. This variable reflects calculations for change in corruption at three points: the year prior to the election minus two years prior, two years prior minus three years prior, and three years prior minus four years prior. These calculations are reflected in a binary variable set to zero if either decrease or no change is recorded at all three points, and set to one if an increase is recorded at any of these three points prior to the election.

Strength of Democracy and Accountability

A variety of factors affect whether corruption is controlled or allowed to flourish. Using the PEIG already provides some control by only including those elections considered highly competitive, but there is still plenty of variation within the sample that could substantially affect corruption outcomes. Two additional concepts, strength of **democracy** and **accountability**, will be leveraged as controls.

This study will conceive of **democracy** from an electoral framework, meaning governments are made responsible to governed people through competitive elections. In the V-Dem framework, and in the common understanding of many scholars of democracy, the electoral element is considered the essential core of other conceptualizations of democracy (i.e. liberal, participatory, deliberative, etc.). This study will focus solely on the electoral conception with the intention of avoiding other conceptions that can be understood or perceived as having an ideological basis. The foundational elements of electoral democracy are elections and the institutions which uphold the democratic qualities of elections (Teorell et al., 2016). The specifics of this definition and the corresponding metrics are drawn from the data selected for this study, the V-Dem Polyarchy Index, which includes detailed measures for five elements: elected executive, free and fair elections, freedom of organization, inclusive citizenship, and freedom of expression. The former two indicate the existence and extent of elections and the latter three comprise the elements necessary for elections to be considered democratic, such as the ability for political parties to form and compete for office, the ability of major media outlets to criticize the ruling party, and the extent of suffrage.

V-Dem was selected over other datasets that measure democracy, such as Polity, because it offers a greater number of more specific data points, therefore facilitating focus on the electoral conception of democracy. The Polyarchy Index will be used to create a binary variable indicating whether the strength of democracy was in the lowest tertile (<.402) relative to the rest of the sample the year before the intervention took place. This variable will be used as a control in all models to account for selection effects, as well as an independent variable to check for interaction effects when states with lower levels of democracy are targeted for election intervention to test hypothesis 2.

Accountability refers to constraints on government power. As accountability mechanisms are considered critical to the control of corruption, additional control variables measuring accountability levels will be taken from Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova's new Accountability Index. The Accountability Index is created from V-Dem data to reflect the extent of states' vertical, horizontal, and diagonal accountability, reflected by "de facto constraints on the government's use of political power through requirements for justification of its actions and potential sanctions" (2020). A baseline accountability control variable will be constructed by taking the Accountability Index score the year prior to the election to account for selection effects regarding the capacity of states to control corruption. A post-election control variable will be constructed by taking the Accountability Index score three years after the election to control for variations in the conditions in the states the year the final corruption measures are taken. The aggregate measure, rather than the measures disaggregated by horizontal, vertical, and diagonal, is taken to limit the number of independent variables in the models and with consideration that literature on accountability shows that the interaction between the directional elements is critical. For example, transparency and media freedom are less effective alone than when

accompanied by sanctions that can be enacted through an independent judiciary or free elections (Camaj, 2013; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010).

Table 1. Summary of Variables and Data Sources

Concept	Description	Source
Successful Foreign Partisan Election Intervention *Independent variable*	Binary indicator of whether the election was subject to successful foreign partisan intervention; variations disaggregated by overt or covert, aid to challenger or incumbent, intervention by the United States or USSR/Russia	PEIG dataset and additional success indicator also created by Levin
Change in Corruption *Dependent variable*	Corruption score 3 years after election minus corruption score 1 year before election	V-Dem V10 Corruption Index
Prior Corruption Growth *Control*	Binary variable indicating whether corruption growth was recorded in any of the three years prior to the election	V-Dem V10 Corruption Index
Baseline Low Polyarchy *Control & Interaction*	Binary variable indicating whether the polyarchy score the year prior to the election was in the lowest tertile (<.402) of the sample	V-Dem V10 Polyarchy Index
Baseline Accountability *Control*	Accountability Index score the year prior to the election	Accountability Index (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova, 2020)
Post-Election Accountability *Control*	Accountability Index score three years after the election occurred (the year the final Corruption Index score is taken)	Accountability Index
GDP Growth Per Capita *Control*	GDP growth per capita the year prior to the election	V-Dem V10, originally from The Maddison Project Database

Some elections present in the PEIG are excluded from analyses in this paper. Some are omitted due to lack of V-Dem data pertaining to the countries, while others are due to lack of requisite pre- or post-election data to construct the dependent variable in cases of state founding, reunification, or division. Only three of the excluded cases pertain to interventions: San Marino in 1959, Grenada in 1984 and the Czech Republic in 1990. Thus, while the PEIG includes 110 interventions, the analyses in this study include 107.

4.2 Analysis Plan

The analysis dataset was constructed by merging the publicly available PEIG data with the additional PEIG success metric, the V-Dem Polyarchy and Corruption Indices, and the Accountability Index. The dataset retains each country-election year observation from 1946 to 2000 that is included in the PEIG, as well as the year preceding and three years following each election for construction of the dependent and control variables. Exploratory analyses included a thorough examination of descriptive statistics such as the distribution of cases recording decrease, no change, or increase in corruption based on the previously defined dependent variable to capture trends in changes to corruption levels. These distributions were disaggregated by whether the election was subject to successful intervention, successful covert intervention, whether the intervention benefited a challenger or incumbent, whether the case had baseline low polyarchy, and by the identity of the intervener to uncover patterns in the relationship between election intervention and changes in corruption.

The hypotheses were tested with a series of regression models using the independent, dependent, and control variables described in Table 1 above. Each hypothesis was tested with several configurations of the accountability control variables. The first includes the baseline accountability measure to account for possible selection effects of states with lower accountability, and therefore lower capacity to correct corruption, being targeted for intervention. The second specification includes the post-election accountability measure to account for variation in states' capacity to control corruption the final year the corruption measure was taken to determine whether the effects of election intervention hold across disparities in the resulting condition of the states in the sample. The final model configuration includes both the baseline and post-election accountability metrics. All models control for prior corruption growth, gross domestic product growth per capita the year before the election to account for baseline variation in economic conditions, and baseline low polyarchy to additionally account for whether the state was on the lower end of variation in democratic quality within the already controlled sample of competitive elections.

As the data includes the entire universe of competitive elections represented in the PEIG, with each observation representing one election, these models test differences between-subjects, or by comparison of those elections that suffered various types of interventions and those that did not. All models were

subjected to standard validation and robustness checks. All data preparation, analysis, and visualization for this paper was conducted using R Studio.

4.3 Limitations

This design suffers a number of limitations, some of which are mitigated. First, the evidently complex relationship between accountability, elements of democratic governance including elections, and corruption suggest potential for reverse causality. This research design mitigates many substantial concerns by accounting for whether corruption was already growing prior to each election case, the baseline level of democracy, and the baseline and resulting strength of accountability mechanisms. Yet the complete range of factors that have been found to influence corruption cannot be accounted for in a single study, so the unknown effects of these omitted variables also limit the strength of the analysis.

Second, the number of observations limits the specificity of the analyses. The larger sample of elections and interventions is acceptable for general analysis and some disaggregation. However, groups become too small for acceptable statistical power when interventions are separated by various overlapping conditions of intervention type, conditions in the target states, and the type of intervener. For example, the sample is not presently large enough to effectively investigate the effect of successful covert intervention that benefited a challenger conducted by a non-democratic intervener in a target with a low level of democracy. Based on the theories outlined for this study and existing literature on relevant topics, those conditions are likely to produce the most adverse effects on corruption. In time, data on more recent interventions can be added to the PEIG to increase the sample size. Additionally, cases of intervention by other great power interveners like China could be retroactively included. The scope of the PEIG could also be broadened to include cases of intervention by lesser or regional powers as well. Any of these would increase the sample size and coverage and allow for more disaggregation. Presently, the effects of more specific conditions can only be theorized.

This study also does not account for possible effects of overlap in election intervention type. Some evidence indicates that partisan intervention is often partnered with process intervention intended to support the quality of democratic procedures and institutions, which could alleviate negative effects on corruption (Bubeck & Marinov, 2017). This issue is somewhat mitigated by conducting analyses that separate cases by the intervener. While this proxy is imperfect, the United States has stated interest in democracy promotion and a well-documented track record of engaging in pro-democracy process intervention. As such, it could be assumed that findings indicating different effects on corruption may be the result of mitigation by successful process intervention.

Finally, Levin's metric of success is based on the results of executive contests. It is possible that gaining or retaining legislative majority may have similar effects on corruption that are not ascertainable using this metric. Unfortunately, due to the typically secretive nature of election intervention, it can be extremely difficult, and in some cases impossible, to trace exactly where support was directed.

Hypothetically, aid could be directed to specific legislative candidates that caused the supported side to gain or retain legislative majority but not prevail in the executive contest. In such a case the intervention would not be coded as a success, yet these cases could also result in the growth of corruption. Without systematized information on the details of each case of election intervention it is not presently possible to analyze effects with greater precision. This may be a promising direction for the future of the PEIG and subsequent research, but at present the executive success metric is an appropriate option given the data limitations.

5. RESULTS

The following sections contain descriptive findings on the volume of competitive elections and the share of them that are subject to intervention, the global trends in corruption levels, the distributions of cases by change in corruption and intervention type, and the results of the regression models employed for hypothesis testing.

5.1 General Trends in Election Intervention

Of the 942 elections included in the PEIG, 110 (~11.7%) were subject to foreign partisan intervention. The interventions span sixty countries, largely in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The United States intervened in eighty-one cases, the USSR/Russia in thirty-six, and both in seven. The majority of interventions (seventy-two cases) were conducted covertly. Many interventions (~59%) were successful. Of the sixty-five successful interventions, over two thirds were conducted covertly.

As displayed in Figure 1 below, cases of election intervention are spread somewhat evenly throughout the years covered by the PEIG, with an average of two interventions per year. Spikes with five or more interventions in a single year occurred in 1958, 1960, 1990, and 1992. The number of competitive elections held each year has grown over time, with an average of around thirteen per year through 1980 and an average of twenty-four per year after.

**Figure 1. Number of Elections and Interventions**
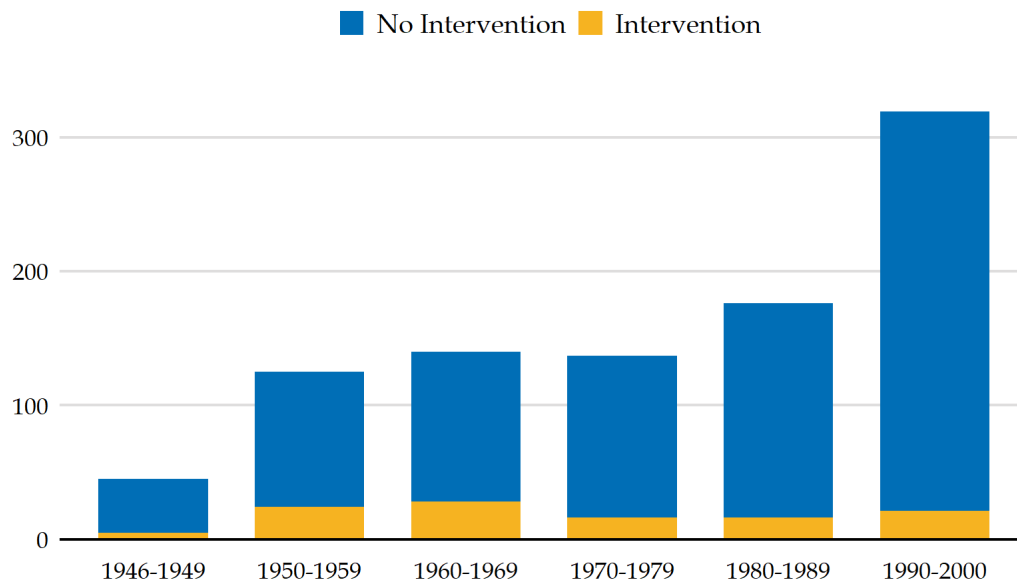
Source: original visualization of the Partisan Electoral Intervention by the Great Powers dataset

While the number of competitive elections has increased, incidents of election intervention recorded in the PEIG have not. However, this does not indicate that the phenomenon has stabilized. Rather, a plausible explanation for this is the relatively declined power of Russia in the period immediately following the Cold War and the exclusion of other rising powers that may intervene frequently such as China. As previously discussed, this dataset also does not account for interference committed by regional powers that have been documented engaging in election intervention such as Iran and Brazil (Corstange & Marinov, 2012; Osario, 2002).

5.2 General Trends in Corruption

The V-Dem Corruption Index scores the extent of executive, legislative, judicial, and public sector corruption in each given state and year from zero (lowest corruption) to one (highest corruption). Figure 2 below displays the annual global average and median Corruption Index score across the approximately five decades included in the PEIG. The global mean rose by roughly .15 during this period while the median rose by about .23.

Figure 2. Yearly Global Corruption Index Mean and Median
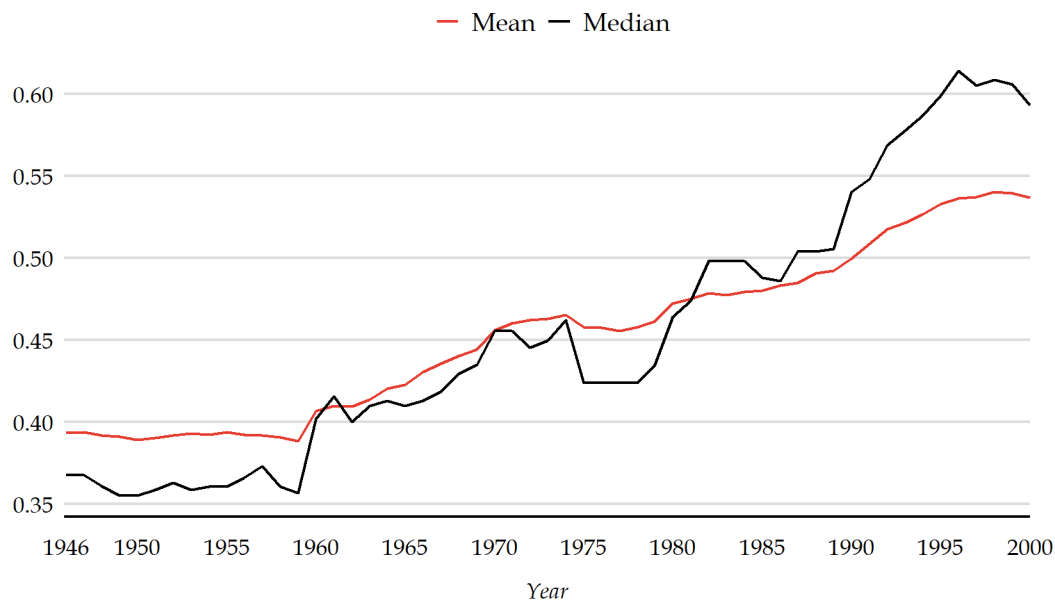
Source: original visualization of Varieties of Democracy Version 10 data

Year to year changes in the V-Dem Corruption Index are not common; in the majority of cases there is no change from one year to the next within states. The dependent variable for this study observes changes between the year before an election and three years after the election, in other words change over four years. A positive score indicates growth in corruption while a negative score indicates decline. As the Corruption Index ranges from zero to one, the change variable ranges from negative one to positive one. The minimum value would indicate the highest possible corruption score before the election that falls to no corruption three years after. The maximum value would indicate change from zero corruption before the election to the highest corruption score three years later. The distribution of the changes over four years is more spread out than year to year changes, but still the largest share of cases records no change, reflected by a value of zero in the dependent variable. This indicates that changes in corruption are either genuinely infrequent or difficult to observe. The effects of election intervention may be small and pertain to slight rather than seismic shifts in observable corruption.

5.3 Relationships Between Election Intervention and Corruption

Descriptive analyses reveal association between election intervention and growth in corruption. Table 2 below shows the share of cases disaggregated by intervention type that recorded decline, no change, or growth in corruption based on the previously specified dependent variable. In general, cases subject to successful intervention are more likely to record growth in corruption than cases without intervention. Within all cases subject to intervention, a greater share experienced corruption growth rather than decline.

In cases without intervention, the shares recording increase or decrease in corruption are nearly evenly balanced, with slight preference to decrease in corruption. This balance shifts in the group of cases with successful intervention, with a greater share experiencing growth in corruption. The share recording growth increases markedly when narrowed down further to cases of successful covert intervention, forty percent of which recorded growth in corruption while only 7.5 percent recorded decline. Among all cases that did experience growth in corruption, those that involved successful intervention saw a slightly larger growth on average (+.09) than those without intervention (+.06).

Table 2. Share of Cases Recording Change in Corruption by Intervention Type

	Decrease	No Change	Growth
No Intervention *n = 802*	29.3 %	44.1 %	26.6 %
Successful Intervention *n = 62*	17.7 %	51.6 %	30.6 %
Successful Covert Intervention *n = 40*	7.5 %	52.5 %	40.0 %

Hypothesis 1a expected that successful covert intervention would contribute to growth in corruption. The regression models displayed in Table 3 below predict that the change in corruption will be about .025 higher in cases of successful covert intervention. Note that the nature of the dependent variable as a change score ranging from negative one to one means that these coefficients do not directly represent growth in corruption. Rather, positive coefficients indicate that intervention contributes to a greater likelihood that a state will record an increase in corruption represented by a change score greater than zero. These models predict a very small shift in the score associated with successful covert intervention, which is unsurprising given the aforementioned assessment that changes in the V-Dem Corruption Index are infrequent and typically small. Many factors beyond those represented here can affect corruption; correspondingly, the r-squared values indicate these models only predict between 3.5 and 8.3 percent of variation.

Table 3. Regression Results for Hypothesis 1A

	Baseline Accountability	Post-Election Accountability	Baseline & Post-Election Accountability
Successful Overt Intervention	-0.025	-0.018	-0.014
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Successful Covert Intervention	0.030*	0.022[+]	0.023*
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Prior Corruption Growth	0.027***	0.021***	0.024***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Baseline Accountability	0.004		0.034***
	(0.006)		(0.007)
Post-Election Accountability		-0.023***	-0.040***
		(0.005)	(0.006)
Baseline Low Polyarchy	0.008	-0.025**	0.003
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.009)
GDP Growth Per Capita	-0.048	-0.035	-0.043
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Adjusted R-Squared	.035	.060	.083

Note: Standard errors are shown in parentheses

Significance levels indicated by: [+] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

When the dependent variable is modified to calculate growth of corruption two years after the election instead of three, the coefficients are slightly smaller and only statistically significant in one model.

Hypothesis 1b expected a greater likelihood of corruption growth when election interventions helped challengers take office than when they protected incumbents. This pattern is present in the data, displayed in Table 4 below. A third of successful interventions that benefited challengers precipitated growth in corruption relative to a quarter that aided incumbents. The same is true for successful covert interventions, a larger share of which result in corruption growth; 41.7 percent of successful covert

interventions that benefit challengers are followed by growth in corruption relative to 36.4 percent that aid incumbents.

Larger shares of interventions that benefit incumbents record no change in corruption relative to those that aided challengers, while maintaining nearly equal or smaller shares recording decrease in corruption. Though they less often result in corruption growth, this greater share of cases recording no change could still indicate that interventions protecting incumbents also tamper with vertical accountability to the detriment of controlling corruption. Had these incumbents not benefited from intervention and lost their elections, their departure from office may have resulted in the decline of corruption. But these interventions do not necessarily precipitate growth in corruption as the supported party is already in office and the propagation of corruption would have already taken place.

Table 4. Share of Cases Recording Change in Corruption by Intervention Type and Support for Incumbent or Challenger

	Decrease	No Change	Growth
Successful Intervention for Incumbents *n = 32*	18.8 %	56.2 %	25 %
Successful Intervention for Challengers *n = 21*	23.8 %	42.9 %	33.3 %
Successful Covert Intervention for Incumbents *n = 22*	9.1 %	54.5 %	36.4 %
Successful Covert Intervention for Challengers *n = 12*	8.3 %	50 %	41.7 %

Note: multiple cases of intervention are not categorized in the PEIG as benefiting a challenger or incumbent due to the lack of a clear incumbent candidate or party in the election.

Of the successful interventions that benefited challengers, sixteen were carried out by the United States and five were carried out by the USSR/Russia. The sample of successful covert interventions that benefited challengers includes ten carried out by the United States and two carried out by the USSR/Russia.

H1b is also supported by the regression results, displayed in Table 5 below. The coefficients for aided challengers indicate that successful covert intervention for a challenger adds an average .055 to the

corruption change score. This is the largest average coefficient across all hypotheses tested for this study, indicating these conditions are the most likely to produce adverse effects on corruption.

Table 5. Regression Results for Hypothesis 1B

	Baseline Accountability	Post-Election Accountability	Baseline & Post-Election Accountability
Successful Covert Intervention for an Incumbent	0.010	-0.001	-0.004
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Successful Covert Intervention for a Challenger	0.054**	0.051*	0.059**
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Prior Corruption Growth	0.027***	0.020***	0.024***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Baseline Accountability	0.004		0.036***
	(0.005)		(0.007)
Post-Election Accountability		-0.024***	-0.042***
		(0.005)	(0.006)
Baseline Low Polyarchy	0.008	-0.026**	0.003
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.009)
GDP Growth Per Capita	-0.046	-0.032	-0.040
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Adjusted R-Squared	.032	.060	.086

Note: Standard errors are shown in parentheses

Significance levels indicated by: $^+$ p < .1, * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

When the dependent variable is modified to calculate growth of corruption two years after the election instead of three, the coefficients are statistically significant at $p < .01$ across all three models with a slightly smaller average of .05.

H2 predicted that the effects of successful covert intervention would be particularly pronounced in states with the weakest democracies at the time of intervention. The analysis dataset includes twenty-five cases of successful election intervention in states with baseline low polyarchy. Eighteen of these were conducted covertly, sixteen by the United States and two by the USSR/Russia. In cases with baseline low polyarchy, fifty-two percent of successful interventions and nearly sixty-seven percent of successful covert interventions precipitated growth in corruption. The regression results, shown in Table 6 below,

also support this hypothesis. The coefficients of the interaction terms show that successful covert election intervention is expected to add an average .049 to the corruption change score of cases in the lowest tertile (<.402) of baseline polyarchy. These models have slightly more explanatory power than the models for the other hypotheses; the r-squared values indicate they predict between 3.7 and 8.7 percent of the variation in the change in corruption score.

Table 6. Regression Results for Hypothesis 2

	Baseline Accountability	Post-Election Accountability	Baseline & Post-Election Accountability
Successful Covert Intervention	0.010	0.002	0.003
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Baseline Low Polyarchy	0.006	-0.027***	0.001
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Interaction of Successful Covert Intervention & Baseline Low Polyarchy	0.049*	0.049*	0.049*
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Prior Corruption Growth	0.027***	0.020***	0.023***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Baseline Accountability	0.004		0.034***
	(0.006)		(0.007)
Post-Election Accountability		-0.024***	-0.041***
		(0.005)	(0.006)
GDP Growth Per Capita	-0.046	-0.034	-0.042
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Adjusted R-Squared	.037	.063	.087

Note: Standard errors are shown in parentheses

Significance levels indicated by: [+] p < .1, * p < .05, ** p< .01, *** p < .001

When the dependent variable is modified to calculate growth of corruption two years after the election instead of three, the coefficients are statistically significant at p < .05 across all three models with a slightly smaller average of .048.

Finally, H3 expected that intervention by the USSR/Russia was more likely to produce growth in corruption than intervention by the United States. Table 7 below presents this pattern in the data. Across all successful interventions, relatively even shares of cases by each intervener recorded growth. Considering only successful covert interventions reveals a much larger difference, however the sample of successful covert interventions conducted by the USSR/Russia is quite small. Much smaller shares of intervention by the USSR/Russia recorded decline in corruption relative to interventions by the United States.

Table 7. Share of Cases Recording Change in Corruption by Intervention Type and Intervener Identity

	Decrease	No Change	Growth
Successful Intervention by the United States *n = 50*	20 %	50 %	30 %
Successful Intervention by Russia *n = 12*	8.3 %	58.3 %	33.3 %
Successful Covert Intervention by the United States *n = 34*	8.8 %	52.9 %	38.2 %
Successful Covert Intervention by Russia *n = 6*	0 %	50 %	50 %

Due to the insufficient sample size of successful covert interventions by Russia, the regression models for hypothesis 3 included both covert and overt interventions. Robustness checks revealed that the models were considerably influenced by a single outlier more than four standard deviations away from the mean. As this outlier was one of the cases of successful intervention by the USSR/Russia that resulted in growth in corruption, its removal altered the regression results substantially. The coefficients for intervention by the USSR/Russia remained in the expected direction but were no longer statistically

significant. The models for the previous hypotheses were not similarly invalidated by the removal of observations at this distance from the mean. If the sample group was sufficiently large to observe greater variation or accommodate further disaggregation by whether intervention was overt or covert, and/or by whether support benefited a challenger or incumbent, the results may differ.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 General Results

The results of these analyses are generally supportive of the hypotheses presented in this paper. Successful covert election interventions are statistically associated with increased likelihood of corruption growth in targeted states, particularly if a challenger is aided into office or the intervention targets a state with weaker democratic institutions and is therefore lacking important protective factors. However, the coefficients and explanatory power of each of the models presented in this paper are rather small; there are many other factors that influence whether corruption is stifled or allowed to grow. Election intervention is part of a landscape of issues that contributes to changes in corruption levels, but it is not likely the sole or central cause in most cases.

In addition to limited explanatory power, the nature of these data and analyses require that the results be considered preliminary, and not conclusive. The complex cyclical relationship between accountability, elements of democracy, and corruption expose these findings to concerns of reverse causality. In the absence of data to a degree of specificity that is likely impossible to construct, concrete directional and causal relationships cannot be established. However, this study mitigates many substantial concerns by accounting for whether corruption was already growing before elections, the baseline level of democracy, and the starting and resulting strength of accountability mechanisms. Minimally, these results further justify continued research on the effects of partisan election intervention on corruption and other outcomes.

6.2 Context of Election Intervention by Democracies

The regression results for hypothesis 3 were inconclusive, but descriptive statistics showed larger shares of cases that involved successful intervention by the USSR/Russia recorded growth in corruption than cases of intervention by the United States. This hypothesis and these results require further articulation of their context. There are some possible explanations for these disparities that do not necessarily indicate that it is generally less detrimental for democratic states to intervene in elections. First, it is important to note the small sample size of interventions by the USSR/Russia under consideration. Second, as outlined previously, the nature of the PEIG's construction means that only elections considered competitive to a very high standard are included in the analyses which could produce a selection effect. Elections this competitive are more likely to include multiple options of candidates or parties for interveners to choose to support, so a democratic intervener such as the United States can

support an option that both advances their material and security interests and maintains their preference for supporting pro-democracy candidates that could be less prone to provoking growth in corruption.

Overlap in intervention type could also mitigate corruption growth. Researchers have unpacked motivations and strategies behind election intervention and found that the United States does select candidates to support based on alignment with their interests, but is also more likely to leverage pro-democracy process intervention if opposition parties have policies more favorable to the United States than the incumbent government (Bubeck et al., 2020). In other words, the United States will support democracy to attempt to stop an unfriendly incumbent government from retaining or entrenching power. When overlapped with partisan intervention, this specific use of pro-democracy process intervention to undermine incumbents may mitigate the growth of corruption associated with supporting challengers. This logic governing how the United States behaves towards fellow democracies is mirrored by research indicating how it treats non-democratic states. While professing desire to spread democracy, the United States opts to maintain support for client dictators if the credible alternative to the dictator is not supportive of the United States' hegemony (Owen & Poznansky, 2014). This evident ranking of priorities may result in different behavior when intervening in elections with somewhat lower standards of competitiveness. In these cases, the United States' prioritization of self-interest over the democratic quality of other states could result in the reduction of protective process intervention and/or election intervention benefiting candidates or parties that may be equally prone to corruption as those supported by non-democratic interveners. As the PEIG does not include such elections, analyses in this paper cannot account for this theory.

6.3 Election Intervention in Contemporary Context

Amid rising nationalism and disenchantment with globalism, scholars tracking trends in regime types warn that the world is at a precipice of what could be a "third-wave of autocracy," which includes a resurgence in pro-democracy protest movements (Lührmann et al., 2020). In this context where sovereignty and self-governance hold a central place in global discourse, election intervention is a sensitive flashpoint. Though it remains understudied, the existing body of research on the effects of election intervention outlines sufficient avenues for long-term damage to suggest that it may be a profoundly destabilizing force in an already volatile world. Case studies and multi-country analyses have found that it can provoke nationalism and resentment toward interveners, exacerbate political polarization among domestic factions, increase incidents of domestic terrorism and the risk of terrorist group formation, weaken democratic institutions, and increase the risk of democratic breakdown (Tomz & Weeks, 2020; Bubeck et al., 2020; Levin, 2018a; Levin, 2018b; Shulman & Bloom 2012; Corstange & Marinov, 2012). Corruption is also a destabilizing and dangerous force that is especially important to address in the context of contemporary issues. In particular, the enormous strain of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely being exacerbated by corruption that has weakened health systems and is almost

certainly hampering response efforts. Thus, the implications in this study that election intervention can increase the risk of corruption growth, along with the apparent diversity of consequences outlined in existing research, reinforce that election intervention is deserving of continued thorough interrogation.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

This research points to several promising avenues for future studies. Repetition of these analyses when data is eventually available on more recent cases that have unfolded in the early decades of the twenty-first century may allow for further disaggregation by intervention type, intervener identity, and conditions in targeted states. Retroactively adding data on interventions in the PEIG's current time period by interveners other than the USSR/Russia and the United States may also sufficiently increase the sample size. The requisite research would be a significant undertaking and would alter the scope of the dataset beyond its present focus on 'great powers.' States with more power were a sensible starting point for this dataset as it could be inferred that their superior access to resources may result in a greater intervention frequency and a higher success rate. However, case studies of interventions by states of lesser power have documented an array of consequences akin to interventions carried out by the United States and the USSR/Russia, indicating the future inclusion of interventions by other states is well warranted. It would also be beneficial to conduct additional in-depth case studies that document the precise history of specific cases of intervention and their subsequent consequences to shed more light on possible mechanisms for growth in corruption and other consequences by mapping the exact details of intervention and the actions of the resulting governments.

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