

# Protection for Hire: Cooperation through Regional Organizations

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There is growing evidence that leaders cooperate through regional intergovernmental organizations (RIOs) to address domestic security challenges. What sustains this collaboration? I present a theory of regional cooperation driven by mutual interest in stability and protection for heads of state. RIOs support the development of rules and norms around contributing to regional security and can legitimize pro-government military interventions. Leaders concerned that they may need external support—particularly against members of their own military—cooperate to remain in good standing with co-members. Using original security personnel deployment data for members of four Africa-based RIOs with mutual defense pacts between 1990 and 2017, I show that leaders facing higher coup risk were more likely to deploy personnel to support co-members. I also find evidence for the underlying mechanism—that these leaders contribute because they expect RIO members to reciprocate support in the future. Leaders who contributed more personnel to support co-members, and leaders who contributed more often, were more likely to receive military support from co-members in the future. These findings shed light on the dynamics sustaining regional security cooperation.

Cada día podemos encontrar más pruebas de que los dirigentes cooperan a través de las organizaciones intergubernamentales regionales (RIOs, por sus siglas en inglés) con el fin de hacer frente a los problemas de seguridad interna. ¿Qué es lo que sostiene esta colaboración? Presentamos una teoría de la cooperación regional que está impulsada por un interés mutuo en la estabilidad y la protección de los jefes de Estado. Las RIOs apoyan el desarrollo de reglas y normas referentes a la contribución a la seguridad regional y pueden legitimar las intervenciones militares progubernamentales. Aquellos líderes que están preocupados por que puedan llegar a necesitar apoyo externo, particularmente contra miembros de sus propias fuerzas armadas, cooperan para mantenerse al día con sus homólogos. Demostramos, mediante el uso de datos originales relativos al despliegue de personal de seguridad de los miembros de cuatro RIOs con sede en África que tenían pactos de defensa mutua entre 1990 y 2017, que aquellos líderes que se enfrentaban a un mayor riesgo de golpe de Estado tenían más probabilidades de desplegar personal para apoyar a sus homólogos. También encontramos pruebas del mecanismo subyacente, es decir, que estos líderes contribuyen porque esperan que los miembros de la RIO le brinden su apoyo de manera recíproca en el futuro. Aquellos líderes que contribuyeron con más personal para apoyar a sus homólogos, y aquellos líderes que contribuyeron con más frecuencia, tenían más probabilidades de recibir apoyo militar de sus homólogos en el futuro. Estas conclusiones nos ayudan a arrojar luz sobre la dinámica que sostiene la cooperación regional en materia de seguridad.

Il apparaît de plus en plus clairement que la coopération des dirigeants passe par les organisations intergouvernementales régionales (OIR) quand il s'agit de répondre aux défis de sécurité nationaux. Comment cette collaboration se maintient-elle ? Je présente une théorie de coopération régionale fondée sur les intérêts mutuels en matière de stabilité et de protection des chefs d'État. Les OIR soutiennent le développement de règles et de normes qui contribuent de près ou de loin à la sécurité régionale et peuvent légitimer des interventions militaires pro-gouvernement. Les dirigeants qui craignent d'avoir besoin de soutiens externes, notamment contre des membres de leur propre corps militaire, coopèrent pour maintenir de bonnes relations avec les autres membres de l'organisation. À l'aide de données originales sur le déploiement du personnel de sécurité de membres de quatre OIR basées en Afrique dotés d'alliances mutuelles en matière de défense entre 1990 et 2017, je montre que les dirigeants confrontés à un risque plus élevé de coup d'État avaient plus de chances de déployer du personnel pour venir en aide aux autres membres. Je trouve également des éléments pour étayer les mécanismes sous-jacents : les dirigeants contribuent, car ils s'attendent à ce que les membres de l'OIR rendent la pareille à l'avenir. Les dirigeants qui ont offert davantage de personnel pour soutenir les autres membres, et ceux aux contributions plus fréquentes, avaient plus de chances de recevoir de l'aide militaire des autres membres à l'avenir. Ces conclusions mettent en lumière les dynamiques sur lesquelles repose la coopération régionale de sécurité.

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“Indeed, West African leaders probably meet more frequently in various councils and communicate more regularly than their counterparts in Western Europe.”  
*Former Nigerian Pres. Gowon from his PhD thesis on ECOWAS (1984, 593).*

“We worked together more in the area of security than in the area of economic cooperation...ECOWAS was important.”  
*Former Nigerian Pres. Obasanjo discussing ECOWAS, Interview (January, 2020).*

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Foundation. The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Dataverse, at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq>.

Regional intergovernmental organizations (RIOs) proliferated over the second half of the twentieth century and are now widely viewed as a central feature of the liberal international order. Particularly as the Cold War ended, many RIOs founded to promote economic integration broadened their authority into international security.<sup>1</sup> They have since been credited with promoting democratization, the responsibility to protect (R2P) norms, peaceful dispute resolution, and other international public goods.<sup>2</sup> Even as political leaders drive the expansion of RIOs' security competencies, the conventional wisdom is that regional organizations tie political leaders' hands.

Recent trends call this conventional wisdom into question. The European Union has enabled heads of state to increase executive powers.<sup>3</sup> Controlled by member state leaders, RIOs such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) often prioritize protecting heads of state above protecting civilians or democratic institutions.<sup>4</sup> Their members have intervened militarily at the request of, and with the intent to protect, incumbents facing domestic threats to their personal security.<sup>5</sup> In fact, while scholars generally associate RIO security protocols and mutual defense agreements with external threats, these agreements often obligate members to respond when a co-members' own security forces attempt coups d'état. Rather than tying leaders' hands, RIOs' security protocols and norms appear to expand members' discretion to intervene in each other's domestic security crises.<sup>6</sup> Whether and how regional cooperation evolved to address political leaders' domestic security preoccupations is not well understood.

In this article, I introduce a theory of regional cooperation driven by mutual interest in stability and protection for heads of state. I argue that particularly in regions prone to intrastate or transnational conflicts and coups d'état, regional organizations function as mutual protection clubs. Member state leaders are more willing to deploy troops and other security personnel as needed to assist co-members who are in good standing. This mutual aid is especially important for leaders facing a high risk of irregular removal—including through coups d'état—who cannot always count on their own military for protection and are more likely to suffer imprisonment, death, or exile.<sup>7</sup> When leaders expect that they may need to draw on RIO co-members for support, but that they will only reliably be able to do so if they have contributed in the past, they pursue self-interested reciprocity with co-members.

I theorize that norms of reciprocity and willingness to punish non-contributors enable RIO members to sustain cooperation.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, co-members are more likely to exclude non-contributors than contributors from mutual security aid. While RIO members cannot credibly threaten to ignore security crises that endanger uncooperative leaders because these crises generate negative externalities, they can choose whether to intervene on the side of the incumbent

or threaten to side with their opposition. Leaders who anticipate that co-members may be their last line of defense against threats to their safety therefore have good reason to maintain their good standing through contributions instead of free riding. So long as their security objectives are congruous and heads of state are willing to condition future cooperation on current behavior, self-interested concern for political survival, and personal safety can cause members to increase their regional and bilateral security cooperation.

I test two implications of the theory for fifty African and Middle Eastern co-members from the four RIOs with mutual defense pacts that are headquartered in Africa: the ECOWAS, SADC, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and League of Arab States (LAS). Each obligates their members to coordinate their responses to security crises, but members vary in their intensity of cooperation. Each organization also includes multiple states historically prone to coups d'état. If my theory is correct, I would expect that leaders who are more concerned about coup risk are more likely to contribute personnel to support RIO co-members. They do so in part because they may need to call on co-members to reciprocate in the future. I use an original data set of supportive deployments of troops and police reported in the International Institute for Strategic Studies' annual Military Balance Reports (The Military Balance 1990–2017) to examine whether this expectation bears out. Results from linear regression at the RIO-state-year level of analysis from 1990 to 2017 indicate that leaders with higher expectations of coup risk are more likely to deploy troops and police to support RIO co-members. Further, results from robustness tests and from a placebo test show that when leaders face higher coup risk they are *not* any more likely to deploy personnel outside of the region and that the results are not driven by deployments to UN operations.

I also expect to observe that RIO members are more likely to intervene in support of contributors. Analyzing the likelihood of pro-government security interventions in Africa and the Middle East at the directed dyad-RIO-year level of analysis from 1990 to 2015, I find that leaders who deployed more security personnel to support regional organization co-members in the past were in fact more likely to receive pro-government interventions from co-members. All quantitative results are robust across logistic regressions and linear probability models (LPMs). Results from an auxiliary test also suggest that reciprocity generalizes within RIOs rather than exclusively for dyads that have assisted each other in the past. The article also references corroborating evidence from elite interviews and diplomatic records.

The argument of this article regarding reciprocity and conditional cooperation is general—I do not focus exclusively on cooperation between autocracies or democracies. However, the normative implications differ when countries cooperating are led by autocrats. Rather than supporting duly elected leaders, regional cooperation between autocrats can have the pernicious effect of supporting authoritarian survival. Because my sample includes numerous authoritarian RIO members, the findings of this article do contribute to a growing body of research that analyzes how autocrats use regional organizations to improve their odds of remaining in power.<sup>9</sup> Much of this work presents comparative case studies at the organization level, examining how

<sup>1</sup>Haftel and Hofmann (2017).

<sup>2</sup>Aning and Edu-Afful (2016); Haftel (2007); Mansfield and Pevehouse (2008); Pevehouse (2005); Poast and Urpelainen (2018); and Powers (2006).

<sup>3</sup>For example, in Hungary and Poland (Kelemen 2020; Meyerrose 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Taylor and Williams (2008).

<sup>5</sup>For example, see the invocation of ECOWAS' authority to intervene in Sierra Leone and SADC's in Lesotho.

<sup>6</sup>Regarding the growth of RIO security competencies, see Bah (2009) and Haftel and Hofmann (2017, 2019).

<sup>7</sup>Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018) and Goemans (2008).

<sup>8</sup>I use reciprocity here to mean both responding proportionately in kind to a partner's behavior and conforming to generally accepted standards of behavior (Keohane 1986, 4).

<sup>9</sup>For example, Cottiero and Haggard (2023); Debre (2020, 2022); Ginsburg (2020); Kneuer et al. (2019); Oby-denkova and Libman (2019); Palmateer and Clark (2018); Russo and Stoddard (2018); Stoddard (2017); and Vinokurov and Libman (2017).

authoritarian-led RIOs support regime stability, “illiberal solidarism,”<sup>10</sup> and collective ontological security. In this paper, I focus more systematically on the country level, considering how RIOs enable leaders to carry out pro-incumbent security interventions in the name of public goods like “regional stability.”

This article also revises established wisdom about the drivers and consequences of regional cooperation by providing evidence suggesting that leaders’ desire for security assistance can explain significant variation in regional cooperation. I argue that threats to leaders’ survival also play an important role in the development and persistence of RIOs. Contributing to security operations can signal a leader’s desire to keep RIO co-members on their side and willing to underwrite their security. This complements recent research indicating that domestic security concerns motivated the formation of numerous alliances with consultation pacts.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, this article has implications for the comparative politics literature on coup-proofing. The majority of work in this area focuses on domestic coup-proofing strategies, and the importance of RIOs has received less attention.<sup>12</sup> I argue that leaders contribute to regional security efforts in part to secure co-members’ support against domestic challengers. Qualitative and quantitative evidence indicate that there are *patterns* to where at-risk leaders send personnel that cannot simply be regarded as efforts to keep soldiers busy. While these leaders are more likely to deploy personnel to support co-members, higher perceived coup risk is not associated with them deploying personnel outside their regions. International relations scholars are often skeptical about the ability or inclination of leaders to cooperate despite domestic threats to their security, but in fact, regional cooperation is a tool for promoting their survival.

### Theory: RIOs and Security Cooperation

I begin with the observation that heads of state have significant discretion over regional security cooperation. Whereas international organizations such as the European Union have strong supranational components, and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund exercise some discretion, regional organizations with security competencies typically are more intergovernmental in nature. Heads of state coordinate how the group should respond to evolving security crises behind closed doors and take formal decisions by consensus, with limited decision-making delegated to RIO staff.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, pledges of security personnel are decided by heads of state and their defense ministers. These tendencies have led some scholars to question whether RIOs are not “clubs of incumbents.”<sup>14</sup> One senior RIO military official observed that “in some summits the heads of state will push everyone out, even the interpreters and President of the Commission. They will talk among them without witnesses ... 15 minutes or so and then the Chair says what to put in the report but we don’t know how the decision was made.”<sup>15</sup> Even during crises where members intend to inter-

vene militarily on a more bilateral basis, RIOs with defense pacts obligate members to coordinate their responses and often organize emergency regional summits to facilitate coordination.

I make the relatively uncontroversial assumption that heads of state are motivated foremost to protect themselves, and they evaluate the usefulness of security cooperation with RIO co-members in relation to that goal. In fact, the potential for RIOs to boost leaders’ security has never been lost on vulnerable incumbents. Across Africa and Asia, RIOs created in the wake of decolonization ostensibly to promote pan-regional solidarity were co-opted by insecure heads of state who were more interested in promoting regime security and intergovernmental solidarity. Rather than advancing political integration, RIOs reinforced the sovereignty of member states, including members not fully in control of their own territories.<sup>16</sup>

The first wave of RIOs and more recently created organizations became vehicles for organizing and legitimizing militarized interventions.<sup>17</sup> RIO co-members were empowered by the international community—through the United Nations—to initiate peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. In 2015, United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, noted that “The United Nations increasingly shares responsibility for peace and security with regional organizations.”<sup>18</sup> RIO members intervene as coalitions or individual members cite the responsibilities of co-membership when intervening to address varied security threats.

Insofar as security interventions limit the spread of conflicts, RIO members provide a public good. However, RIO members are not impartial interveners. As the UN and wealthier western states became more reliant on RIOs to manage peacekeeping and counter-insurgency efforts in the 1990s and 2000s, RIOs gained sufficient authority to reframe domestic threats to individual leaders as threats to regional stability.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, RIO members created justifications for assisting fellow heads of state in domestic conflicts where intervening on the government’s side might otherwise be viewed as inappropriate. Importantly for leaders concerned about survival, RIOs can legitimize and coordinate interventions to support members facing aggression from insurgents, foreign actors, or coup leaders.<sup>20</sup>

Although security benefits encourage leaders to cooperate, the temptation to free ride remains an inevitable challenge for regional security arrangements and alliances. Less powerful RIO members may be tempted to let powerful states assume the full costs of managing crises.<sup>21</sup> Leaders know that because regional powers like Russia, Nigeria, and South Africa face serious negative externalities when local conflicts escalate, they cannot credibly threaten to do nothing. If a member state leader does not anticipate that they will personally need security assistance, they will be even more likely to disengage.

Nonetheless, some leaders consistently deploy more troops to support RIO co-members than the number they allotted to regional standby forces. In West Africa, Togo’s President, Faure Gnassingbé, is one such example. President Gnassingbé maintained a contingent of gendarmes in

<sup>10</sup>Costa Buranelli (2020).

<sup>11</sup>Edry, Johnson, and Leeds (2021).

<sup>12</sup>However, see Omorogbe (2011); Souaré (2014); Stoddard (2017); Derso (2017); Boutton (2019); and Genna and Hiroi (2023) on RIOs and the anti-coup regime.

<sup>13</sup>Leaders avoid pooling decision-making with respect to security policy (Hooghe and Marks 2015).

<sup>14</sup>Debre (2022) and Omorogbe (2011).

<sup>15</sup>Interview with senior ECOWAS military official on January 10, 2020, at ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. The “Chair” refers to a head of state and government chosen by fellow heads of state to oversee ECOWAS affairs each year. The President of the Commission is the top bureaucrat at ECOWAS.

<sup>16</sup>Aniche (2020) and Getachew (2019).

<sup>17</sup>Bah (2009) and Haftel and Hofmann (2017, 2019).

<sup>18</sup>United Nations Shares Responsibility for Peace with Regional Organizations, Says Secretary-General, *Opening All-Day Security Council Debate* (2015, 1).

<sup>19</sup>Jourde (2007). See Williams (2017) on the trend toward regional peacekeeping.

<sup>20</sup>Boutton (2019).

<sup>21</sup>Lake (2009).

ECOWAS co-member Guinea-Bissau for stabilization purposes starting in 2012. Despite not receiving remuneration owed from ECOWAS for that deployment, Gnassingbé sent additional personnel to Guinea-Bissau in 2019.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Togo also fully remits its annual dues to ECOWAS's primary funding mechanism—the Community Levy—while awaiting repayment.<sup>23</sup> Given that Guinea-Bissau and Togo are physically separated by five countries, it is difficult to imagine that Gnassingbé contributes personnel to prevent conflict spillover from Guinea-Bissau into Togo. Instead, I expect that Gnassingbé, who came to power with military backing, is influenced by perceived coup risk. On the one hand, it is unlikely that Gnassingbé expects to eliminate the risk of coups d'état at home by maintaining some personnel in Guinea-Bissau; experience in peacekeeping deployments is viewed as currency for officers seeking increased authority within many African armed forces, rather than a permanent solution to their ambitions.<sup>24</sup> Rather, I expect that leaders concerned about coups d'état are less likely to free ride in their neighborhood due to concerns about benefiting from security relationships with RIO co-members. Gnassingbé himself benefited from ECOWAS co-members sending military observers to help deter violent protests in the capitol during Togo's tense 2010 presidential elections.<sup>25</sup> As leaders like Gnassingbé decide whether to assist RIO co-members, they consider the value of benefits associated with cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Reciprocity among Co-Members*

For RIOs to sustain security cooperation they must alter co-members' incentives to contribute. They do so by conditioning access to excludable benefits—including biased security interventions—on leaders' behavior and by emphasizing reciprocity. Member state leaders must be willing to follow through with assisting contributors and excluding non-contributors; these are the core mechanisms sustaining mutual aid. If RIO members are equally likely to support uncooperative and cooperative leaders militarily, then even leaders who value RIO benefits will be tempted to stop contributing.<sup>27</sup> For cooperation to survive, in other words, it must generally be in members' best interests to assist cooperative co-members and withhold support for non-contributors. In particular, RIO members can withhold military support when a non-cooperator faces security threats, increasing the likelihood of that leader falling from power.

RIOs create common knowledge about expected contributions through protocols and repeated interaction among leaders in summits. Aside from formal rules about paying one's dues, for example, member states have pledged personnel with various capabilities to regional standby brigades in ECCAS, ECOWAS, SADC, and other RIOs. During crises,

co-members are able to observe who adheres to RIO rules and norms by offering their support, including through deployments of troops or police. Whether leaders lend support or remain uninvolved influences co-members' views of whether they are entitled to request support in the future. Leaders who honor agreed-upon protocols and norms remain in what I refer to as “good standing.”

Some scholars believe that we are unlikely to observe reciprocity among leaders in less secure neighborhoods because these leaders may have short time horizons. Leaders with short time horizons are thought to place reduced value on cooperation that will result in future gains in favor of pursuing short-term survival tactics. And coups d'état certainly threaten leaders' survival; post-1990, coups are the top cause for autocratic regimes ending (35 percent), and leaders removed through coups d'état are at greater risk of ending up dead, imprisoned, or blocked out of politics.<sup>28</sup> We might expect that coup risk shortens a leader's time horizon, such that they will renege on RIO security commitments.

However, this perspective on time horizons overlooks the fact that for the last several decades, RIOs have become the international community's first responders to coups. If leaders are preoccupied with coup risk, they will note that RIO co-members are likely to be in a position to intervene or negotiate for their safety. Therefore, the potential payoffs of cooperation are not only large—potentially the difference between life or death—but the benefits of one's cooperative record could also be fairly immediate, rather than far in the future. Insecure leaders' concerns for their safety even if they *are* detained in a coup may actually lengthen their time horizons with respect to co-members. This need for backup supports cycles of reciprocity among heads of state, including those who request and receive security assistance from co-members.

Cooperation among ECCAS member states has illustrated the dynamics of reciprocity, or quid pro quo security interactions. In 2007, ECCAS took over control of the Force Multinationale en Centrafrique (FOMUC) peacekeeping and stabilization mission in the Central African Republic from the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and rehatted the mission as Mission de consolidation de la paix en République Centrafricaine (MICOPAX). All but three member states in ECCAS provided troops to MICOPAX under the leadership of a Gabonese General, with contingents varying in size.<sup>29</sup> The mandate of MICOPAX was broad and included disarming rebels, implementing security sector reforms, and coordinating humanitarian aid. In reality, many personnel were concentrated in the capitol and focused on protecting the government of President Bozizé from rebel groups.<sup>30</sup> General Claude Reglat, the senior French military officer in Central Africa, told an American official that the Chadian contingent “constitute a kind of presidential guard for CAR President Bozizé.”<sup>31</sup>

In the same year that French General Reglat observed Chadian soldiers in MICOPAX assuming presidential guard duties in CAR, Chadian President Idriss Déby called an emergency ECCAS summit. He asked ECCAS members to issue statements denouncing Chadian rebels, and

<sup>22</sup>Interview with senior West African police official on January 21, 2020, at ECOWAS offices in Abuja, Nigeria. Interview with senior ECOWAS military official on January 10, 2020, at ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria.

<sup>23</sup>An internal report obtained from an ECOWAS accountant states that “Togo community levy proceeds channeled through the Treasury are transferred on time to Community Levy bank account in central bank.” As of September 2019, Togo had no outstanding debts to the ECOWAS Community Levy (*The Economic Community of West African States Commission* 2019, 24).

<sup>24</sup>Adhikari (2020); Cunliffe (2018); Kenkel (2021); and Levin et al. (2020) argue that experience from peace-keeping deployments can embolden military officials at the expense of civilian leaders.

<sup>25</sup>Kohnert (2011).

<sup>26</sup>On protective benefits of African RIOs, see Boutton (2019); Palmateer and Clark (2018); Söderbaum (2004); Souaré (2014); Stoddard (2017); and Warner (2016).

<sup>27</sup>Keohane (1984).

<sup>28</sup>Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018) and Goemans (2008).

<sup>29</sup>MICOPAX troops came from Cameroon, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Equatorial Guinea. Angola, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe did not contribute troops.

<sup>30</sup>Meyer (2011).

<sup>31</sup>Reddick (2008, 2). Bozizé's own presidency was a reminder that support is conditional; Central African heads of state had allowed Bozizé to overthrow his predecessor Patassé after Patassé's relationships with co-members soured (Palmateer and Clark 2018).

confirming his leadership in response to several attempts by rebel groups to remove him from office.<sup>32</sup> Déby hoped that support from ECCAS would reinforce the perceived legitimacy of his regime—which had already faced several coup attempts—and deter rebels by indicating that co-members were willing to come to his defense. Other scholars have noted that Déby was very conscious of the need to maintain relationships with co-members so that they would cooperate against the rebel groups plaguing his government.<sup>33</sup> To Déby and other heads of state, ECCAS was an important vehicle for legitimating pro-government security interventions and enhancing their personal security, and one where prior cooperation with co-members influenced the likelihood that leaders would receive support. Ultimately, ECCAS forces could not prevent Bozizé's ouster in CAR, though ECCAS leaders helped Bozizé find safety and asylum in Cameroon. ECCAS heads of state resisted the subsequent transfer of authority in CAR from MICOPAX to the African Union and United Nations but continued to be the mission's main troop contributors.<sup>34</sup>

Some attempts to explain cooperation and the appearance of reciprocity in sub-optimal circumstances focus on immediate economic, prestige, or security-related benefits causing co-members to send support.<sup>35</sup> However, prioritizing sending security personnel to support co-members is not costless and in many cases is not lucrative. Contributing security personnel is particularly costly outside of United Nations-led operations, as states are more likely to pay up-front costs associated with deploying security personnel. It is also costly to deploy where resolution is unlikely to be quick and casualties are likely to result in domestic backlash against the contributor. In more dangerous or inhospitable environments, costs weigh heavily against the payoffs of contributing personnel. Other explanations also do not distinguish why, in organizations where all members are covered equally by a mutual defense or anti-coup agreement, leaders would be more likely to assist *some* co-members and abandon others. And while some scholars have taken positive reciprocity seriously with respect to conflict intervention, they have not assessed whether the security benefits of reciprocity accrue for individual leaders, rather than states.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, several observable implications follow from the theory of regional cooperation for mutual protection. If RIO members believe that co-members will reciprocate support for contributors and condition support on good standing, leaders who anticipate that they are likely to need protection will be more likely to contribute. In particular, leaders who are more concerned about irregular removal from office should be more motivated to cooperate through RIOS if doing so increases their odds of receiving external support. And if this explanation is plausible, we should observe that contributors in good standing are more likely to benefit from co-members' support during crises. Therefore, I test the following hypotheses regarding RIO cooperation:

**Hypothesis 1:** Leaders with high coup risk will be more likely to send security personnel to regional organization co-members.

**Hypothesis 2:** Leaders who previously deployed to co-members will be more likely to receive pro-government military support from co-members.

### Research Design and Data

To evaluate hypothesis 1, I use original data on security personnel contributions from fifty African and Middle Eastern states to co-members in four regional organizations—ECCAS, ECOWAS, SADC, and LAS—spanning 1990–2017 at the country-RIO-year level of analysis. Each RIO developed security protocols to intervene in domestic and international conflicts, and each obligates members to coordinate responses during co-members' security crises.<sup>37</sup> I use linear regression to test whether leaders anticipating greater coup risk deploy more security personnel to co-member states. The dependent variable is a count of the personnel deployed to co-members in each RIO-year. I also present results with the dependent variable normalized by the size of the contributing country's military to account for state's capacity to deploy personnel. This is not a perfect method of representing capacity to contribute, as the lack of data availability prevents me from including the size of police forces.

For the main independent variable relevant to hypothesis 1, I operationalize perceived coup risk as the number of years since a country's last coup attempt. As I discuss in great detail below, leaders in countries that experienced coups more recently are more likely to be preoccupied with coup risk. Using this simple but predictive heuristic avoids subjectivity in selecting factors that contribute to coup risk, which may or may not all be salient to leaders. Because past treatment with coup risk could affect willingness to deploy, I also present specifications where the explanatory variable is lagged and include results from a multilevel model in the [Online Appendix](#). All models corresponding with hypothesis 1 in the main text include country-fixed effects, with standard errors clustered by country. Covariates are standardized due to measurement on very different scales.

To evaluate hypothesis 2, I test whether a leader's record of cooperation—in particular, sending security personnel—is associated with a greater likelihood of pro-government intervention by co-members. The unit of analysis is the directed dyad-RIO-year where given that at least one state or organization intervenes in State A, State B can choose whether or not to intervene on the side of State A's government. The dependent variable of interest is a binary variable that equals one if State B intervenes to support State A's government. Directed dyads are constructed between each state experiencing third-party intervention and all of that state's RIO co-members for as long as outside intervention is ongoing. A full list of states subject to third-party intervention by at least one co-member is presented in [Online Appendix A](#). Events prompting interventions are diverse; co-members typically decide whether to intervene when governments face coups or insurgencies and when governments are engaged in civil or inter-state wars. In addition to explicitly pro-government interventions, I include participation in peace enforcement operations if they are clearly biased in favor of the government or their opponent.

The independent variable of interest for hypothesis 2 is the prior contributions of security personnel to co-members by the incumbent. I operationalize this first as a running count of the number of years in which the target state's

<sup>32</sup>Meyer (2009).

<sup>33</sup>Gnanguoenon (2021) and Welz (2014).

<sup>34</sup>Welz (2014).

<sup>35</sup>Bellamy and Williams (2013) provide an overview in the peacekeeping context.

<sup>36</sup>Corbetta (2013) identifies "networks of solidarity" among states in conflict joining behavior.

<sup>37</sup>ECCAS was largely inactive in the 1990s, but its members concluded a mutual defense pact in 2000 and revived the organization; I include its members from 2000 onward.

**Table 1.** RIOs with mutual defense pacts in Africa

<i>RIO name</i>	<i>Year founded</i>	<i>Number of members</i>	<i>Avg GDP/capita</i>
Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)	1983	11	3,196
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	1975	15	945
Southern African Development Community (SADC)	1981	16	2,935
League of Arab States (LAS)	1948	22	13,518

incumbent leader contributed military or police personnel to support at least one co-member from the dyad's shared RIO; second, as the cumulative number of personnel that the leader deployed to co-members; and third, as the cumulative number of personnel that the leader deployed to co-members *excluding* personnel deployed to the dyad partner under consideration. The last version of the explanatory variable helps to assess whether reciprocity is more generalized among RIO members, and not only the dyad under consideration. The main text includes results from logistic regressions with standard errors clustered for dyads. Linear probability models are included in [Online Appendix B](#) as alternative specifications. All covariates are again standardized due to variable measurement on very different scales.

In subsequent sections, I describe the sample and data in greater detail before presenting results.

#### *RIO Member States Sample*

Many African RIOs or their predecessors were launched following decolonization with plans to reduce economic dependency but evolved to help African leaders resolve conflicts and negotiate as blocs at the UN and other global institutions. Humanitarian disasters in Rwanda and Liberia are often credited with prompting African RIOs to develop military intervention protocols and deepen security cooperation during and after the 1990s.<sup>38</sup> Contributing toward efforts to address co-members' security crises became an expectation of RIO members, formalized through commitments to regional standby forces.<sup>39</sup> Each member is supposed to have their pledged troops available to respond as crises arise in co-member states.

African RIOs now intervene militarily for peacekeeping, counterinsurgency operations, and even to protect political leaders. Intervention can occur in more formalized operations under shared command *or* through more ad hoc assistance provided by one or more RIO members on behalf of the group. When they deploy, RIO members can decide whether to bias interventions in the government's favor. While many scholars have recognized that African RIOs generally advance the interests of heads of state, they do not explore whether members condition support for individual leaders on prior behavior in a consistent manner. [Table 1](#) presents summary statistics for my RIO sample. Based on treaties and other publicly available documents, I identified these four RIOs as the only Africa-based RIOs with defense pacts and security cooperation protocols. I select organizations with defense pacts and protocols because these legal

<sup>38</sup>Sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS already had defense pacts, but regional security cooperation and conflict resolution mechanisms were largely nonexistent prior to the 1990s (Bah 2009; Coleman 2011; Hanson and Tang 2015).

<sup>39</sup>Sub-continental RIO standby forces in Africa have deployed in numerous instances (such as SADC's recent deployment in Mozambique), but the continent-wide African Union standby force has never deployed.

instruments ensure that all co-members are empowered and obligated to coordinate during any member's security crisis. These four RIOs currently include 61 member states from Africa and the Middle East. Three of the RIOs only include member states located in Africa, whereas the fourth, the LAS, is split between African and Middle Eastern members. Small island states such as the Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Comoros are excluded due to limited data availability.

The concern that leaders fearful of coups d'état might select into joining additional RIOs or that less worried leaders will opt out is mitigated by the fact that membership is largely geographically determined, and thus coup risk is not highly correlated with a number of RIO memberships. The RIOs cover states with more and less coup history and the memberships of these organizations were mostly determined before RIOs became involved in addressing coups.

#### **Who Deploys Security Personnel to Support Co-Members?**

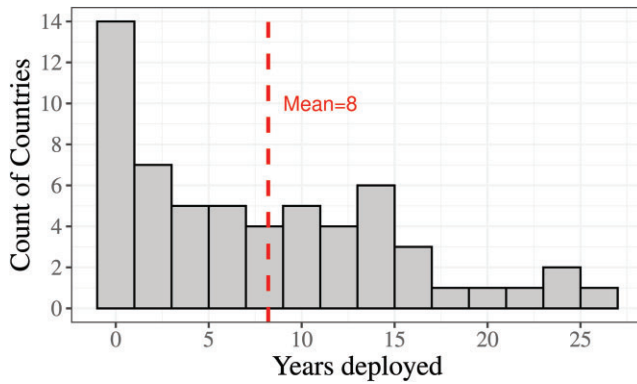
To assess whether leaders concerned about high coup risk are more likely to contribute to regional co-members (hypothesis 1), I examine deployments of security personnel. I record data on security personnel deployments from the International Institute for Strategic Studies' annual *Military Balance* reports spanning 1990–2017. I include consensual deployments, whether bilateral or part of multilateral missions, as well as police for security and peace-keeping missions.<sup>40</sup> The dependent variable *Number deployed* is continuous. I also include a version of the dependent variable normalized by the number of personnel serving in the country's armed forces. This data is provided by the World Bank, which also relies on the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance* reports. Each variable is observed at the country-RIO-year level.

The choice of both continuous and normalized dependent variables reflects the fact that states receive credit for contributing, but with recognition that not all states have equal capacity to contribute. Co-members understand that some countries are more limited in the number of personnel they can deploy. Regarding ECOWAS deployments, for example, former Nigerian President, Obasanjo, stated that “we know that some people don't have much. There was a place where one contributed a company, another contributed a brigade. It's all right.”<sup>41</sup>

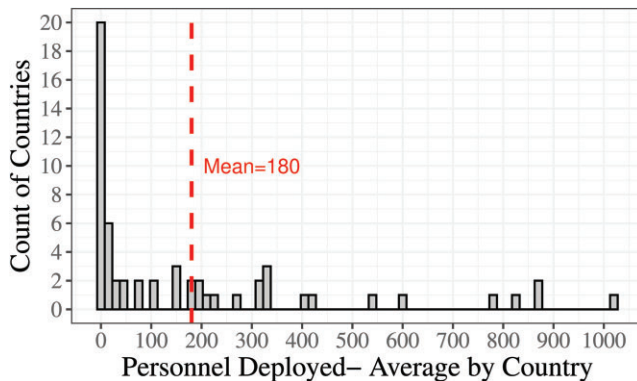
[Figure 1](#) presents counts of states according to the proportion of years where they sent troops or police to support RIO co-members. There is a great deal of variation; some states almost never contribute security personnel to

<sup>40</sup>Though Military Balance reports are imperfect, there are no comprehensive alternative data sources that cover my sample.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with President Olusegun Obasanjo in Abeokuta, Nigeria, January 13, 2020.



**Figure 1.** The proportion of years where states in the sample sent personnel to co-members, 1990–2017.



**Figure 2.** Average number of personnel sent to co-members for states in sample, 1990–2017.

co-members and others almost always do. Between 1990 and 2017, the average state sent troops or police to co-members in about 8 years, or nearly a third of the time (marked with a dashed line). Figure 2 shows the average number of personnel states sent in those deployments. Across all states, the average deployment size included one hundred eighty personnel (marked with a dashed line).<sup>42</sup> The proportion of personnel contributed to peacekeeping and security missions by “neighborhood” or contiguous states has increased in the last ten years.<sup>43</sup>

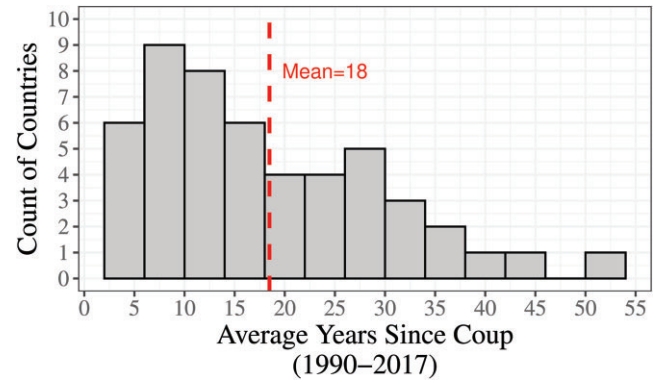
### Coup Risk

The most common cause of irregular removal for African leaders is the military coup, and irregular removal through other means also typically depends on acquiescence from the military. Though we can observe when leaders are forcibly removed from office, each leader’s perception of their underlying vulnerability is unobservable. Domestic and international factors contribute to coup risk in different contexts and their relative importance is debated, but one consistent finding from the coup risk literature is that coups tend to cluster in time within countries. Whether a country recently experienced a coup attempt is a good predictor of whether more coups are likely to follow.<sup>44</sup> This was

<sup>42</sup>One outlier, Nigeria, is removed from the plot. The average number of personnel deployed by Nigeria from 1990 to 2017 was about 2750.

<sup>43</sup>Williams and Nguyen (2018).

<sup>44</sup>Belkin and Schofer (2003); Goemans (2008); and Londregan and Poole (1990).



**Figure 3.** Average years since the previous coup for countries in the sample, 1990–2017.

an early finding from the coup risk literature that has held up over time.<sup>45</sup> Africa has both the most individual countries with coup attempts and the most coup attempt clustering per country.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly for my purposes, the correspondence between history of coups and future coups is common knowledge among heads of state. Because I am particularly interested in these leaders’ perceptions, I operationalize coup risk based on this commonly cited heuristic, the number of years since a country’s last coup attempt. This variable counts years since the country’s last coup attempt regardless of whether the attempt succeeded. Data on coup attempts comes from Albrecht, Koehler and Schutz (2021), who define coups d’état as attempts by military personnel to overthrow the government.<sup>47</sup> Figure 3 presents the average number of years since a previous coup attempt for the countries in the sample, where fewer years indicate a higher perceived coup risk. Between 1990 and 2017, the average number of years since a previous coup was 18 years.

### Control Variables

I focus on confounding factors that might affect coup risk as well as capacity or willingness to deploy security personnel to co-members. At the regional level, I control for the extent of rivalries among co-members, the number of violent conflicts in RIO member states, and the age of the RIO defense pact. Where incumbents have undermined each other’s political stability and developed rivalries, co-members’ baseline willingness to cooperate may be lower and perceived coup risk could be higher. The quality of relationships among incumbents varies across RIOs and over time within RIOs. I therefore use data from Diehl, Goertz and Gallegos (2021) to control for the average level of rivalry (or non-rivalry) a state has with its RIO co-members each RIO-state-year.<sup>48</sup> The “peace score” in Diehl, Goertz and Gallegos (2021) can take a value of 0 (serious rivalry), 0.25 (lesser rivalry), 0.50 (negative peace), 0.75 (warm peace), and 1.0 (security community). The *non-rivalrous* variable is the annual average of rivalry scores with all of a state’s RIO co-members, where higher scores indicate less rivalry.

<sup>45</sup>Besaw et al. (2019).

<sup>46</sup>Besaw et al. (2019).

<sup>47</sup>Coup data from Albrecht, Koehler, and Schutz (2021) agrees with the widely used Powell and Thyne (2011) dataset 92 percent of the time in my sample, with the main differences caused by Albrecht, Koehler, and Schutz (2021) having somewhat stricter inclusion criteria. Results are consistent if I use coup data from Powell and Thyne (2011).

<sup>48</sup>Goertz, Diehl, and Balas (2016). The version is 2.01.

Demand for RIO members to deploy security personnel is also partially determined by how many conflicts are ongoing. In a more peaceful region, there is likely to be less need for a state to deploy personnel to co-members, and regional peace may also have knock-on effects on reducing their fear of coups. While coups are not typically thought to be “contagious,” conflict spillovers from neighboring states have the potential to increase grievances that contribute more directly to coup risk. I use data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) to count the number of intrastate or interstate conflicts ongoing in a RIO each year. Lastly with respect to the RIO level, I control for the age of the RIO’s defense pact. Co-members with more well-established security protocols, whose military personnel have cooperated over longer periods of time, may be more likely to deploy to support co-members. Concern regarding coup risk may also be directly affected by how well-institutionalized security ties are.

I control for several potential confounding variables at the country level: whether the incumbent is a personalist leader, whether the country is in an election year and the size of the country’s population. Studies considering the role of regime type in international cooperation have found that personalist leaders are the least cooperative, particularly in the realm of international security.<sup>49</sup> In addition to being less likely to deploy personnel to support co-members, they are likely to pursue alternative coup-proofing strategies. I control for whether a leader is a personalist using data on leaders’ sources of authority from the Varieties of Democracy project.<sup>50</sup>

Elections are increasingly studied as focal points where the risk of civil conflict is exacerbated.<sup>51</sup> If a leader is concerned about members of their security forces coordinating a coup in response to a contentious election, some scholars would predict that they might deploy additional security personnel abroad to neutralize the threat. On the other hand, if leaders perceive that domestic security risks are heightened around an election, they might deploy more personnel throughout their own country to prevent protests from escalating. This would reduce the number of personnel available for them to deploy abroad. As a result, I control for whether countries are in election years using data from [Bjørnskov and Rode \(2020\)](#).

Lastly, the size of a country’s population affects the capacity to deploy personnel and the perceived coup risk. Scholars have found that, in general, coups d’état occur more often in countries with larger populations.<sup>52</sup> African and Middle Eastern leaders presiding over large populations also may face greater pressure to deploy personnel in peacekeeping operations to profit from reimbursements, but may find personnel more stretched to cover their own territory.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, I control for the size of a country’s population using data from the World Bank. As mentioned above, I also present specifications where the dependent variable is normalized by the size of the country’s military.<sup>54</sup> Sum-

mary statistics for all covariates are presented in [Online Appendix A](#).

### Results: Hypothesis 1

The results of linear regressions presented in [table 2](#) broadly support hypothesis 1. When leaders perceive a greater risk of coups d’état, they are more likely to contribute security personnel to RIO co-members. This finding is consistent in specifications where coup risk is lagged by 1 year (Models two and four). Substantively, every additional year since the last coup attempt is associated with a reduction of about twelve security personnel deployed. It is helpful to contextualize this with the distribution of time since the last coup for countries in the sample. The average length of time since a country’s last coup is about 18 years, and the maximum length of time is 67 years. Increasing the length of time since a country’s last coup by one standard deviation (14 years) is associated with leaders deploying about 169 fewer personnel, as indicated in column one of [table 2](#).

Models three and four present results where the dependent variable, the number of security personnel deployed to co-members, is normalized by the contributing country’s military size. This normalized dependent variable attempts to proxy for differences in state capacity to deploy personnel. It is not a perfect proxy for capacity, in part because it does not reflect the capacity to deploy police. Several countries drop out of the panel due to a lack of data on their military force sizes. Nonetheless, the results from the third and fourth models are consistent with results from models one and two. Higher perceived coup risk is associated with deploying more security personnel to co-members.

The first additional robustness tests in [Online Appendix B](#) present results from multilevel models with random effects at the country level. The multilevel models allow for correlation in the dependent variable within countries over time, assuming some idiosyncratic variation is not accounted for by fixed effects. Findings remain consistent within the multilevel model framework. [Online Appendix B](#) also presents consistent results where the explanatory variable, perceived coup risk, resets every time a new leader enters the office. This alternative measure more clearly takes leaders as the unit of analysis, though I believe it reasonable to assume as I have done here that leaders’ perceptions of coup risk account for their recent predecessors’ experiences.

Additional robustness checks in the [Online Appendix](#) assess alternative explanations for the positive relationship between coup risk and sending security personnel to co-members. In particular, I address the arguments of [Lundgren \(2018\)](#), [Albrecht \(2020\)](#), and [Kathman and Melin \(2017\)](#), who link coup risk and leaders’ motives to contribute to peacekeeping. They argue that UN support eases leaders’ guns-versus-butter trade-off and that leaders deploy soldiers, especially troublemakers, with the expectation that soldiers who are well compensated by the UN will avoid engaging in acts of insubordination. Opposing this view, [Cunliffe \(2018\)](#), [Adhikari \(2020\)](#), [Kenkel \(2021\)](#), and [Levin et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that peacekeeping deployments empower the military at the expense of civilian oversight, particularly in autocracies and as peacekeeping becomes more heavily militarized. These mixed results leave us without clear predictions as to whether leaders by and large deploy personnel to directly reduce coup risk or do so as a costly commitment in spite of the potential to increase coup risk. I carry out two related robustness tests.

First, if the results are driven by the desire to reduce coup risk or profit, the association between coup risk and

<sup>49</sup>Chykh (2014) and Mattes and Rodríguez (2014).

<sup>50</sup>Other measures of democracy are more likely to be post-treatment variables, and not suitable to include in the model.

<sup>51</sup>Donno, Morrison, and Savun (2022).

<sup>52</sup>Besaw et al. (2019).

<sup>53</sup>Boutton and D’Orazio (2019); Bove and Elia (2011); Coleman and Nyblade (2018); and Passmore, Shannon, and Hart (2018).

<sup>54</sup>Data on the number of armed forces personnel at the country-year level comes from the World Bank, which also relies on the IISS Military Balance reports.



**Table 2.** Statistical models: hypothesis 1

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	<i>Number deployed</i> (1)	<i>Number deployed</i> (2)	<i>Number deployed/military size</i> (3)	<i>Number deployed/military size</i> (4)
Years since coup	-169.68** (71.93)		-146.13* (81.07)	
Years since coup (lag 1)		-126.36** (55.68)		-126.05* (74.76)
Non-rivalrous (RIO)	43.04 (34.07)	39.57 (32.96)	35.44 (26.21)	33.58 (26.35)
Personalist leader	134.52 (85.21)	133.43 (87.91)	20.01* (10.37)	19.17* (11.13)
Population	-551.03* (321.83)	-531.64 (354.81)	-1031.03** (470.52)	-1024.84** (489.55)
Election year	-12.36 (11.64)	-12.87 (11.91)	6.77 (10.87)	6.77 (11.06)
Conflicts in region	85.95** (36.44)	85.79** (36.86)	1.67 (31.64)	1.57 (32.54)
Age of defense pact	125.78 (168.54)	93.68 (169.67)	428.09** (182.83)	416.30** (188.96)
Country-fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country clustered se.s	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.39	0.39	0.68	0.69
Adjusted $R^2$	0.36	0.36	0.66	0.67
Number of observations	1170	1170	923	923
Number of groups:	50	50	47	47
Country				

\*  $p < 0.1$ ,\*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

security personnel deployments would likely be driven by deployments under the UN. Personnel in UN missions are better compensated and given better equipment than those in non-UN interventions, where contributing states typically pay up-front costs to deploy. When deploying with a RIO, contributors often face years-long delays before receiving reimbursement.<sup>55</sup> These delays in reimbursement often lead to delays in soldiers' pay and inadequate supplies.<sup>56</sup> RIO officials indicate that some members are still quick to pledge personnel for non-UN missions despite these risks.<sup>57</sup> When intervening informally, rather than with the UN or RIO, contributors often have no expectation of reimbursements. In [Online Appendix B](#), I therefore address the possibility that the results are driven by contributions to UN operations by omitting these contributions. I find that leaders facing greater coup risk still deploy more security personnel to co-members using the count of non-UN personnel deployed. "Diversionary" deployments seem less likely to explain leaders sending personnel for these non-UN operations. Increasing the length of time since a country's last coup by one standard deviation (14 years) is associated with leaders deploying about 130 fewer personnel to non-UN operations among RIO co-members.

Second, [Online Appendix B](#) includes a placebo test using security personnel deployments to peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and support operations in states where leaders in

the sample share no RIO co-memberships.<sup>58</sup> If leaders just deploy personnel to prevent them from coordinating coups, without regard to RIO co-members, coup risk should also be associated with more deployments to non-co-members. On the other hand, the theory presented here would *not* suggest that coup risk is associated with the likelihood that leaders deploy to security operations outside of co-member states at a higher rate. Rather, they should prioritize supporting co-members with whom they share defense pacts. Results from the placebo test presented in [Online Appendix B](#) indeed indicate that the countries in my sample are not more likely to deploy personnel to non-co-members in response to coup risk. This provides additional evidence that leaders are not simply deploying "trouble-making" personnel or seeking UN peacekeeping wages at every opportunity.

#### *Who Receives Pro-Government Interventions?*

I now turn to the second implication of the theory. If at-risk leaders cooperate with RIO co-members to gain protection, we should observe not only that leaders in need of protection contribute, but also that they subsequently receive support from co-members. For hypothesis 2, I therefore consider whether leaders who have deployed more personnel to co-members in the past are more likely to receive military support. The dependent variable, *Pro-government intervention* is equal to one if co-member State A joins an intervention on the side of State B. As mentioned above, directed dyads are constructed between each state experiencing third-party

<sup>55</sup>Interview with ECOWAS official, Abuja, Nigeria, August 30, 2018; Interview with ECOWAS military official, Abuja, Nigeria, January 10, 2020.

<sup>56</sup>See [Dwyer \(2015\)](#) for examples of how this can increase the risk of soldiers mutinying.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with ECOWAS official, Abuja, Nigeria, August 30, 2018; Interview with ECOWAS military official, Abuja, Nigeria, January 10, 2020.

<sup>58</sup>Data on peacekeeping deployments outside Africa come from the International Peace Institute's Peace-keeping Database ([Perry and Smith 2013](#)).

intervention and all of that state's RIO co-members. I include overt conflict-joining behavior on the side of the government as well as participation in peace enforcement operations that experts have deemed to be clearly biased in favor of supporting the government. Information on conflict-joining behavior is drawn from Sousa (2015), Kisangani and Pickering (2008), and UCDP/PRIO (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Pettersson and Öberg 2020). The full list of twenty-two countries that are members of ECOWAS, SADC, LAS, or ECCAS and experience pro-government intervention from at least one co-member between 1990 and 2015 is presented in [Online Appendix A](#).

The main explanatory variable is the target state leader's record with respect to regional security cooperation. I operationalize this variable in three ways. First, prior contributions are measured as the number of years where the targeted incumbent previously deployed security personnel to co-member states. Second, a leader's record is measured as the cumulative number of security personnel they deployed in previous years. These capture the consistency and volume of support a leader has provided, respectively. Third, a leader's record is measured as the cumulative number of security personnel they deployed in previous years, excluding personnel deployed to the other members of the dyad in the observation. This measure can speak to whether leaders experience reciprocity generalized to the RIO level, rather than direct reciprocity from the other dyad member. Deployment data from the IISS Military Balance reports are used again to construct these explanatory variables.

#### *Control Variables*

I control for monadic and dyadic factors that might significantly influence a leader's choice of whether or not to assist their co-member, as well as the likelihood that the co-member state leader deployed personnel in the past. Leaders with shared foreign policy commitments and similarly (un)democratic institutions may be inclined to support each other militarily due to congruous interests.<sup>59</sup> At the dyad level, I therefore control for the 'S Score' measure of foreign policy similarity and the difference between the pair's V-Dem Polyarchy Scores.<sup>60</sup> The latter indicates whether each state has similarly democratic or undemocratic institutions based on the minimalist electoral definition of democracy.

Within dyads, it is possible that the target leader deployed more personnel to co-members in the past because of shared ethnic groups, and that the presently intervening co-member is similarly motivated by co-ethnic groups.<sup>61</sup> For instance, if a leader's co-ethnics are in a neighboring state's ruling coalition and they face rebellion by non-co-ethnics, that leader could face domestic pressure to support the target government. To account for such possibilities, I control for the number of ethnic groups shared between the pair.<sup>62</sup>

At the monadic level, I control for battle-related deaths in the target state. This may proxy for greater costs associated with helping the target state government. Being involved in a deadlier domestic conflict also could have limited the target leader's capacity to deploy to co-members in previous years. I control for GDP per capita because leaders of higher income states may have a higher capacity to deploy to co-members, and co-members may be keener to get in the good

graces of wealthy country's leaders.<sup>63</sup> Lastly, I control for the amount of fuel (including oil, coal, and natural gas) produced by the target state.<sup>64</sup> There is some precedent of states intervening in resource-rich countries for the purposes of looting, rather than supporting the government. And it is also possible that the leader of a resource-exporting country would have felt secure in their ability to invest in domestic coup-proofing tactics, rather than focusing on relationships with co-members. Summary statistics for all covariates are presented in [Online Appendix A](#).

#### **Results: Hypothesis 2**

[Table 3](#) presents three models estimating the relationship between prior contributions and pro-government interventions between 1990 and 2015. As discussed above, the unit of analysis is the directed dyad-RIO-year, where co-members decide whether to intervene on the side of the target state's government. Model five presents results where the independent variable, contributions, is operationalized as the number of years where the targeted incumbent previously deployed security personnel to co-member states. Model six presents results where a leader's record is operationalized as the cumulative number of security personnel they deployed in previous years. Model seven presents results where a leader's record is operationalized as the cumulative number of security personnel they deployed in previous years, excluding deployments to the dyad partner (potential intervener) under consideration. Controlling for RIO fixed effects, I consider differences within RIOs.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that leaders who previously deployed security personnel to support at least one co-member in a RIO will be more likely to receive military support from other members of that RIO. As indicated in [table 3](#), there is a positive and statistically significant association between a leader's record of deploying to co-members and the likelihood that their co-member will intervene on their side, given that an intervention occurs. Substantively, every one standard deviation increase in the cumulative number of security personnel a leader previously deployed (1,585) is associated with a 63 percent increase in the likelihood that co-members will intervene on their side. Robustness tests using LPMs, rather than logistic regression, are included in [Online Appendix B](#). The findings from models five and seven are robust to the alternative specification. Results associated with cumulative personnel deployed within the RIO are not statistically significant in the LPM specification.

These results provide evidence to suggest that reciprocity—and affinity that develops for contributors—plays an unspoken role in biased interventions. When they intervene in domestic crises, RIOs and member states often claim to be neutral parties interested in protecting civilians and restoring stability—a framing that provides cover for protecting incumbents in good standing. Leaders do support RIO interventions to stem instability and externalities, hoping to avoid spillover of refugees and combatants. Still, the military interventions conducted by RIOs to support governments under attack from within make the term "solidarity deployment" more appropriate than peace operation or democracy restoration mission in many cases. I

<sup>59</sup>Gartzke and Weisiger (2013) and Joyce, Ghosn, and Bayer (2014).

<sup>60</sup>Chiba, Johnson, and Leeds (2015) and Teorell et al. (2016).

<sup>61</sup>Saideman (2002).

<sup>62</sup>Data on shared ethnic groups are from Vogt et al. (2015).

<sup>63</sup>The World Bank provides battle-related deaths and GDP per capita data, though the World Bank relies on UCDP for its conflict data ([The World Bank Group 2019](#)).

<sup>64</sup>The value of fuel exported comes from the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive ([Banks and Wilson 2020](#)).

**Table 3.** Statistical models: hypothesis 2

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	<i>Pro-government intervention (5)</i>	<i>Pro-government intervention (6)</i>	<i>Pro-government intervention (7)</i>
Times previously deployed (target leader)	1.14** (0.48)		
Cumulative personnel previously deployed (target leader)		0.51** (0.21)	
Cumulative personnel previously deployed, outside dyad (target leader)			0.61*** (0.21)
Foreign policy	0.40	0.24	0.23
Similarity	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Difference in V-Dem	-0.31	-0.25	-0.26
Polyarchy scores	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Battle-related deaths (target)	-0.10 (0.19)	0.01 (0.15)	0.01
Number shared ethnic groups	0.38** (0.14)	0.30** (0.13)	0.30** (0.13)
GDP/capita (target)	1.24 (0.84)	1.30 (0.87)	1.35 (0.90)
Fuel, energy production (thousand metric tons)	-1.11 (0.64)	-1.19* (0.68)	-1.30 (0.72)
RIO fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dyad clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	382.00	401.94	398.92
BIC	428.85	448.80	445.78
Log Likelihood	-180.00	-189.97	-188.46
Deviance	360.00	379.94	376.92
Number of observations	523	523	523
Number of groups: RIO	4	4	4

\* $p < 0.1$ ,\*\* $p < 0.05$ , and\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

find that solidarity deployments are more likely to benefit contributors.<sup>65</sup>

### Conclusion

This article presents a new perspective on how and why leaders cooperate through regional organizations, linking domestic vulnerability and survival concerns to leaders' incentives to cooperate. I argue that RIOs with less stable members are nonetheless capable of developing norms to sustain cooperation and mutual aid. In a sample of member states in four Africa-based RIOs with mutual defense pacts, I test two implications of the mutual aid theory and find that evidence is consistent with both. At-risk leaders are more likely to contribute to RIO security cooperation and if they do so, they are more likely to receive support in the future. Other scholars typically predict that leaders are more likely to cooperate when they have a "long shadow of the future." I demonstrate that leaders cooperate with RIO co-members on security issues when their own safety is in question.

By increasing their cooperation and generating goodwill with RIO co-members who could be "first responders" in future crises, leaders raise the likelihood that co-members will intervene militarily on their side. This phenomenon informs the interventions undertaken by RIOs, which often proclaim their neutrality during interventions but focus

much of their energy on protecting heads of state. Cooperation does not require that all leaders in each RIO are close allies who see eye-to-eye at all times or support their co-members remaining in office in perpetuity, but that leaders are pragmatic in managing their interactions. And although some intraregional rivalries and conflicts persist in Africa, this framework helps to explain why cooperation typically predominates over conflict among leaders in the four RIOs I consider here.

Though I test the argument with leaders in Africa and the Middle East, the general concepts of elite solidarity and mutual aid organized through regional organizations could apply more broadly to other regions. In Europe, leaders may invest more effort in personally assisting European Union co-members if they expect they will need the favor repaid in the future. For example, EU leaders may prefer to bail out co-members who have more consistently cooperated with regional initiatives in the past. However, I expect regional organization size to be a scope condition for the argument. Maintaining reciprocity and solidarity is challenging in macro-regional groupings like the African Union, whose fifty-four member states identify more with their sub-regional blocs.<sup>66</sup> The extent of quid pro quo security cooperation described in this article also seems less likely to pertain in contexts where leaders are required to be more transparent in their foreign policy decision-making and where they

<sup>65</sup>Coleman (2011).

<sup>66</sup>Warner (2018) describes the prevailing wisdom among African officials that security issues are better handled at the sub-regional level in most instances.

are less concerned about the professionalism of their own armed forces.

The findings in this article are also relevant for a new body of work that grapples with the question of why even nominally democratic RIOs tolerate the illiberal politics of some member states.<sup>67</sup> Leaders benefit from introducing incentives for RIO co-members to cooperate on security issues, even if those co-members are illiberal. Larger regional powers also gain from bringing diverse co-members into security operations, as they seek to avoid the perception that they are unilaterally intervening.<sup>68</sup> While the average members of organizations considered here are electoral autocracies, ECOWAS and SADC have adopted democracy clauses. Still, their democratic members are complicit in supporting illiberal co-members who have contributed to regional security cooperation. Through these channels, RIOs may inadvertently strengthen authoritarian rule.

Leaders should face more difficulty coordinating self-serving mutual security aid through regional organizations when bureaucrats retain significant authority and institutionalized protections prevent political interference by leaders. To the extent that leaders erode the independence of regional organizations during an era of democratic backsliding, scholars should anticipate a move toward self-serving regional cooperation among vulnerable leaders. International relations scholars are likely to find that international organizations increasingly generate perverse outcomes counter to the presumptions of liberal international order.

### Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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<sup>67</sup>For example, Meyertose (2020).

<sup>68</sup>This is evident in the coalition-building behavior of Nigeria and South Africa.

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