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Coups and social trust: Evidence from a natural experiment in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

How do coups affect social trust? Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the prevalence of coups, in particular across West Africa. Although significant attention has been paid to the effects of other forms of political violence and instability on social trust, to date very little research has considered how social trust is affected by coups, which represent a distinctive form of intra-elite conflict. Building on insights from work in philosophy and social psychology, we conceptualise trust as an adaptive response to vulnerability. Coups represent moments of violent competition for power between elites that create uncertainty about the state as a provider of security and essential services. Consequently, we argue that social trust will increase in response to coups, as a means of offsetting this uncertainty and insecurity. We exploit a unique natural experiment in Burkina Faso to identify the causal effect of coups on social trust, using data from a survey that was in the field during September 2022, when Burkina Faso experienced its second coup of that year. This provides robust evidence that coups can increase social trust, and further analysis supports the proposed mechanism that increased social trust following the coup was a response to uncertainty and insecurity. For external validity, analysis of cross-national survey data from the Afrobarometer series suggests that the positive relationship between coup exposure and social trust holds more broadly.

Keywords: Coups, social trust, Africa

1. Introduction

In September 2022, Burkina Faso experienced its second coup of the year. Masked soldiers from the "Cobra" unit blocked major roads in the capital, Ouagadougou; gunfire was heard in the Presidential Palace and at other key sites in the city; and state television went off the air. The national government was subsequently dissolved, the Constitution was suspended, all state borders were sealed, and a strict curfew was imposed. Though the coup was ostensibly in response to the government's inability to address the increasing terrorist threat in the North of the country, the number of jihadist attacks increased considerably following the coup, and many towns became ensnared by blockades enforced by the Islamic State. Despite the increased instability for Burkina Faso's civilian population, solidarity prevailed: "I saw people cooking and inviting their neighbours to share their dishes," a resident from Djibo, a town in northern Burkina Faso, said after the coup. "We see solidarity almost everywhere and in all areas" (Gerth-Niculescu, 2023). The town, home to about 300,000 residents, many of whom are internally displaced, experienced high levels of food insecurity and violence in the wake of the coup. Similar insecurity followed the country's earlier coup in January 2022, leading one analyst to write, "There is then no guarantee for citizens' rights and their civil liberties" (Marsi, 2022).

Post-coup uncertainty and instability can manifest in various ways. Just as in September 2022, Burkina Faso's coup in January 2022 and the 2020 Malian coup were both followed by greater physical insecurity due to increases in extremist violence, as insurgents took advantage of the security vacuum generated by uncertainty over control of the state (Booty, 2022; Demuynck & Böhm, 2023). But coups are also often followed by economic insecurity, not least because international actors frequently respond with sanctions. After the coup of January 2022, for example, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) promptly suspended Burkina Faso. Writing in June 2022, Mahamoudou Savadogo (2022), a Burkina Faso-based researcher, noted "We don't know what Burkina is going to look like in six months if the situation continues like this."

Indeed, only three months later, another coup would follow.

A similar situation followed the 2023 coup in Niger, where sanctions imposed by the international community exacerbated the resulting instability and uncertainty for Nigerien citizens (International Rescue Committee, 2023). In addition to severe sanctions imposed by ECOWAS, which closed key borders to Benin and Nigeria, thereby blocking vital import and export routes for the landlocked country, Nigeria cut electricity supplies to Niger, and major donors including the European Union, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom suspended key development and budgetary aid. As a resident of Niger's southern city of Maradi said just over a week after the coup, "The days ahead are going to be very difficult. We just have to pray that things will work out" (Hairsine, 2023).

These vignettes highlight the dynamic and uncertain nature of the period immediately following a coup. On the ground, citizens may be exposed to violence as a result of the interim government's lack of control over the state. Citizens may also lose out on basic goods and services as government-run provisions falter. And international sanctions can leave individuals worse off by denying them access to finances, goods, and services. Yet in the midst of this political and economic upheaval, we see examples of solidarity and community among local populations. A large body of literature studies the effects of major crisis events, such as natural disasters, public health crises, and political violence, on levels of social trust. Within that literature, it has been asserted that times of crisis can foster greater prosocial behaviour, for a variety of reasons. Although we might also conceptualise coups as crisis events, given the insecurity and uncertainty that they generate, coups present a conceptually distinct dynamic to this existing literature. While natural disasters, public health crises, and political violence pose a direct threat to the individual, coups are elite-led events and explicitly do not involve a country's citizenry. Given this distinction, should we also expect coups to increase social trust?

This motivates our central research question: How do coups affect social trust? Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the prevalence of coups, in particular across West Africa. Although significant attention has been paid to the effects of conflict and other forms of political violence on social trust, to date very little research has considered how social trust is affected by coups. As a distinctive form of intra-elite conflict, there may be reasons to think that the impact of coups on trust will differ from that of other forms of political violence. Building on insights from work in philosophy and social psychology, we conceptualise trust as an adaptive response to vulnerability. Coups represent moments of violent competition for power between elites that create uncertainty about the state as a provider of security and essential services. Consequently, we argue that social trust will increase in response to coups as a means of offsetting this uncertainty and insecurity.

We evaluate this argument with a two-stage empirical strategy. First, we make use of a unique natural experiment in Burkina Faso to identify the causal effect of coups on social trust. Specifically, we analyse data from an Afrobarometer survey that was in the field in September 2022, when Burkina Faso experienced its second coup of that year, comparing those interviewed just after the coup took place with those interviewed just before. This provides robust evidence that coups increase social trust, and further analysis supports the proposed mechanism that increased social trust is a response to uncertainty and insecurity. Second, analysis of cross-national data from the Afrobarometer series offers external validity by providing evidence that a positive relationship between coup exposure and social trust holds more broadly.

These findings are important for a number of reasons. First, analysis of coups has focused almost exclusively on macro-level outcomes, such as economic development or regime type (Fosu, 2002; Marinov & Goemans, 2013; Derpanopoulos, Frantz, Geddes, & Wright, 2016), with little attention paid to micro-level effects. Second, this study adds to our understanding of the differential impact of crisis events on trust and prosocial behaviour. Third, the findings speak to the broader literature on the determinants of social trust.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the literature on social trust and coups, distilling these into a set of testable theories and hypotheses. Section 3 provides an overview of the political situation in Burkina Faso and uses the September 2022 coup as a natural experiment to causally test the short-term impacts on social trust. We also discuss our battery of robustness tests and present some evidence to support the theorised mechanism through which coups increase social trust by increasing uncertainty and insecurity. Section 4 presents our cross-national analysis of the relationship between coups and social trust. Section 5 summarises our argument and findings and considers avenues for future research.

2. Why should coups affect social trust?

There is by now a broad acceptance that trust and trustworthiness are not fixed quantities within a society, but instead are variable and context-dependent. Although generalised trust may be a fairly stable feature of societies (Uslaner, 2016), it is widely recognised that trust is not an unchanging attribute of individuals, but instead is influenced by personal experiences and contextual factors (Hardin, 2002; Ostrom & Walker, 2003). These factors include exposure to various types of crisis events, such as violence during conflict (Gilligan, Pasquale, & Samii, 2014), natural disasters (Cassar, Healy, & Von Kessler, 2017), and personal exposure to public health crises (Thoresen, Blix, Wentzel-Larsen, & Birkeland, 2021). Various explanations for the impact of these different types of crisis event on trust have been proposed and explored. In this section we consider these explanations and their relevance to coups. We then define and conceptualise coups and social trust to develop a theoretical framework that generates expectations about the impact of coups on trust.

2.1 Trust in a time of crisis

A substantial body of research has evaluated the impact of conflict on pro-social behaviour, including local collective action, altruistic behaviours, and trust (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Voors

et al., 2012; Gilligan et al., 2014). Much of this work has used experimental methods and lab-in-field approaches to measure the impact of exposure to violence on behavioural outcomes. Similarly, experimental work has shown an increase in trust and prosocial behaviour following exposure to natural disasters, such as the 2004 tsunami in Thailand (Cassar et al., 2017) and Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005 (Whitt & Wilson, 2007). This resonates with qualitative evidence provided by Solnit (2010), who documents numerous reports of altruistic behaviour after disasters such as the earthquakes in San Francisco in 1916 and Mexico City in 1985. The findings are also reflected in other quantitative studies investigating levels of trust and social cohesion following major earthquakes (Hommerich, 2012; Calo-Blanco, Kovářík, Mengel, & Romero, 2017), although not all such studies report positive effects (Fleming, Chong, & Bejarano, 2014).

Finally, public health crises are another type of crisis event with the potential to impact social trust. Several recent studies have investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in this regard, with mixed results (Brück, Ferguson, Justino, & Stojetz, 2020; Kye & Hwang, 2020), but overall there is evidence of a positive effect in the short term (Devine, Gaskell, Jennings, & Stoker, 2021).[1] In sum, there is good reason to think that crisis events of various types can have positive impacts on trust and prosocial behaviour. The question that follows is why that is the case.

Studies investigating the impact of crises on social trust and prosocial behaviour have highlighted several mechanisms that we can categorise into three themes. The first is a form of selective "purging" whereby the makeup of society is directly altered as a result of the crisis. This has been suggested specifically in relation to the effects of conflict, but could apply to other crisis event types also, and has been proposed as a mechanism potentially underpinning negative as well as positive effects on social trust and cohesion. By this type of mechanism, for example, negative effects could result from civic associations being destroyed as members are killed or driven away by conflict. At the same time, a positive impact on social cohesion could result if those individuals who are less socially invested in the community choose to leave to avoid the conflict, leaving behind a more pro-social population (Gilligan et al., 2014).

The second category of mechanisms can be characterised as a type of "collective coping" process. Arguments in this vein have been considered in relation to conflict and to natural disasters, and suggest that interactions between individuals during periods of crisis can change beliefs about the trustworthiness of others and can also directly change society by increasing social bonds. In times of conflict, for example, individuals may cooperate in order to survive, and these patterns of increased cooperation may persist after the conflict ends, leaving communities that were exposed to violence more cohesive than others that were not affected (Gilligan et al., 2014; Hall & Werner, 2022). At the same time, experiences of generosity or kindness during times of crisis, such as in the aftermath of a natural disaster, can change beliefs about the trustworthiness of others in general, engendering higher levels of social trust (Cassar et al., 2017).

A third category of mechanisms makes claims about changes to individuals' preferences in response to crises. While related to the process of collective coping, mechanisms in this third category fit more with arguments about "post-traumatic growth" that have been suggested in literature from psychology, whereby periods of trauma can manifest in changes to the preferences of the affected individuals (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Ramos & Leal, 2013). These ideas have been proposed as a way to understand the positive effects of conflict exposure on political participation, as operating through a psychological mechanism through which trauma changes social preferences (Blattman, 2009). They are also present in recent work in behavioural economics that investigates the impact of economic experiences on social preferences, such as preferences for investment and risk taking (Malmendier & Nagel, 2011). In relation to the effects of crises on social trust, this type of

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[1] See Aassve, Alfani, Gandolfi, and Le Moglie (2021) for evidence of long-term negative effects of Spanish flu on social trust.

mechanism might imply that preferences change because individuals perceive an increased need for help from others in the future, and so become more trustworthy themselves in response (Cassar et al., 2017).

It is worth noting the relation between this and collective coping, in that both suggest changes to trust or trustworthiness that follow from experiences during crises. But a key difference, as we see it, is that changes to trustworthiness are a more rational response leading to change in an individual's own behaviour, rather than a change in beliefs about others. This type of mechanism is also different in that it may follow directly from a crisis event itself, without necessarily requiring exposure to the behaviour of others during and in the aftermath of a crisis. Across various studies, evidence has been provided to support each of these mechanisms in different contexts. The key question of relevance to us is whether and how these arguments apply to coups, to which we turn next.

2.2   *Coups as times of crisis*

Before we consider the impact of coups on social trust, it is necessary to understand what coups are, in terms of how they are defined in the literature, the outcomes they are purported to affect, and how coups actually unfold on the ground.

Defining coups

Responding to conceptual ambiguity in the literature, Powell and Thyne (2011, p. 252) define coups as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive." This definition is useful for its clarity and parsimony, and fits with recent cross-national quantitative analyses of coups (Marshall & Marshall, 2022; Albrecht, Koehler, & Schutz, 2021).

The consequences of coups

While early empirical work focused on the causes of coups in specific countries or regions,[2] more recent larger-N quantitative studies have sought to better conceptualise different types of coups and evaluate their macro-level economic and political consequences (Fosu, 2002; Powell & Thyne, 2011). The primary focus of this recent work has been on the impact of coups on regime type, with some studies finding a positive relationship between coups and democracy (Marinov & Goemans, 2013) and others providing evidence that coups are more likely to result in autocratic rule (Derpanopoulos et al., 2016; Albrecht et al., 2021). Related work has also provided evidence that coups lead to increased state repression, with variation in this effect across coup types (Lachapelle, 2020; Bjørnskov & Pfaff, 2021).

A much smaller subset of literature has focused on the micro- or citizen-level impacts of coups. In this vein, studies have highlighted heightened levels of societal distrust as a legacy of military coups in cases such as Fiji and Thailand (Alley, 2001; Bureekul & Thananithichot, 2012). Most recently, Akkemik, Çiçek, Horioka, and Niimi (2020) found that the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey had a negative and statistically significant effect on happiness, social trust, and life satisfaction. While these studies provide useful evidence of the potentially significant social impacts of coups, they are limited to a small number of cases and are unable to causally separate the effects of coups from other aspects of the prevailing social and political contexts. As such, our understanding of the micro-level impact of coups remains limited.

The process of coups

Between 1946 and 2021, there were 870 alleged or attempted coups around the world. Of these, 230 were successful, that is, they led to the ousting of the incumbent regime (Marshall & Marshall, 2022). Although the context and available technology have changed over that

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[2] For example, in Africa (Agyeman-Duah, 1990; Kposowa &Jenkins, 1993), Latin America (Fossum, 1967; Dix, 1994), and the Middle East (Gasiorowski, 1987; Quinlivan, 1999).

time, the tactics and overall process of coups have stayed remarkably stable, with most coups unfolding according to a fairly typical playbook (Luttwak, 2016). Key aspects common to the execution of almost all coups are speed and confusion, which reduce the existing administration's ability to respond with effective countermeasures. In addition, through the process of seizing and establishing their hold on power, coup leaders attempt to limit the movement of people and the flow of information, again with the goal of undermining potential countermeasures.

What this means in practice is that in the process of seizing power, coup leaders often seek to rapidly surround the capital, closing airports and blocking roads. They also occupy and shut down national television and radio broadcasters, block telephone connections, and cut access to the Internet and social media. The lack of information limits the existing administration's ability to coordinate a response, and restrictions on movement prevent loyalist forces from coming to the administration's aid. A key goal is to sow confusion in the minds of loyalists, although as Luttwak (2016) highlights, this comes with the risk of also generating uncertainty among those forces undertaking the coup. Among other things, this can increase the possibility of the "*coup*-within-the-*coup*" (Luttwak, 2016, p. 185), increasing the instability of the situation and the uncertainty of the outcome.

Once power has been seized, the focus of the coup leaders turns to consolidating their hold on it and establishing their broader authority. This process is also aided by restrictions on movement and information, such that coups tend to be followed by strict curfews and continued controls on communication channels. Aside from the ubiquitous (and somewhat clichéd) televised address, citizens tend to have very little information during and immediately after a coup. In most cases, coups are denounced by other states and international actors, often resulting in sanctions, which can have detrimental economic effects. While these sanctions may be eased as the coup leaders establish themselves in power, coups fail as often as they succeed. Sometimes, following failed coups, countries will simply return peacefully to the status quo. In other cases, the existing administration will take the opportunity to strengthen its power and limit freedoms. While some coups end quickly, whether successfully or not, others lead to conflict, and in some cases civil war (Finer, 1974).

All this is to say that the period during and immediately after a coup is one of significant uncertainty. During this time, it is unclear to both elites and the masses precisely what is going on and how it will play out. Most importantly, it is unclear what type of regime will emerge, who will be in charge of it, and when. Like natural disasters and other crises, this generates a situation of insecurity in which one's ability to rely on the state to provide security and services is brought into question. This is reflected very clearly in survey evidence highlighting how the 2012 coup in Mali increased citizens' prioritisation of public services and was followed by widespread concerns about food and water insecurity (Bleck & Michelitch, 2015). We argue that in such contexts, individuals rationally increase social trust in response to insecurity.

2.3   *Why coups might influence trust*

We now turn to conceptualising social trust and considering why coups may affect it in ways similar to other crisis scenarios.

Conceptualising social trust

Trust in others is widely viewed as an important ingredient for an effectively functioning society, fostering desirable outcomes such as peaceful collective action, economic growth, and civic participation (Fukuyama, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 2002; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Fafchamps, 2006; Bjørnskov, 2012). Acknowledging the value of social trust, substantial scholarly effort has been directed toward understanding its determinants. This has included work on the long-run, historical determinants of trust as a form of social norm (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2008; Tabellini, 2010; Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011), as well as research on short-run influences such as education, income, and experiences (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Bellows & Miguel, 2009).

The recognition of both historical and contemporary determinants highlights two mutually inclusive perspectives on social trust. The first is that trust reflects a long-run affective disposition, influenced by historical events, cultural norms, and processes of socialisation. The second sees trust as a short-run, rational, adaptive choice that can be influenced by contemporary context and events.[3] While we recognise the importance of both, our focus here is on the second of these aspects. Specifically, we are interested in how individuals rationally alter their level of social trust in response to insecurity generated by a coup.

Understanding trust as a rational choice necessitates consideration of what it means to trust others. The seminal work of Baier (1986) highlighted the inherent vulnerability of entering into a relationship of trust.[4] But while trust is a source of vulnerability, it is also a solution to it, as "[i]n trusting others we mitigate the potential risks and insecurity arising from our vulnerability" (Mackenzie, 2020, p. 625).[5] This fits with accounts of trust as a rational choice that facilitates cooperation between agents and thereby gives access to the rewards that cooperation can generate (Hardin, 2003).

Given the inherent risk involved in trusting others, the rational-choice framework requires that one believe that the person in whom one is trusting has an incentive to fulfill one's trust. Hardin (2003) argues that this incentive comes from "encapsulated interests," whereby Person A trusts Person B because A's interests are encapsulated in B's own, such that B counts A's interests as B's interests "*just because they are [A's] interests*" (Hardin, 2003, p. 82). This encapsulation of others' interests in one's own can follow rationally from the motivation individuals have to maintain ongoing relations with others.[6] This applies both to dyadic and to thicker, group- or societal-based relationships. For both, motivation for trustworthiness, via the encapsulation of others' interests, comes from the potential sanction of the other party withdrawing from future interactions, and/or shunning from the broader community. As Hardin (2003, p. 87) summarises very clearly, "I trust you because it is in your interest to do what I trust you to do. It is in your interest primarily because you want me to continue to be both trusting and trustworthy."

Trust as a response to the uncertainty of coups

Taking this rational understanding of trust as our starting point, we argue that the likelihood of individuals trusting one another should increase in contexts of insecurity, due to the greater potential that individuals will feel a need to rely on others in such contexts. As noted above, even when they have popular support, coups represent periods of uncertainty about the continued role of the state in providing security and other basic services. Such uncertainty motivates individuals to search for alternative sources of security and assistance, other than the state. In doing so, individuals are likely to recognise their greater potential need for help from others in the future and respond by becoming more trustworthy (Cassar et al, 2017). As a result, we argue, during and immediately following a coup we should see an increase in social trust as individuals look to insure themselves against increased insecurity.

> *H1: Coups increase social trust.*

Recent scholarship on social trust has acknowledged the multidimensional nature of the concept, drawing attention to the importance of differentiating between the *level* and the

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[3] Again, these aspects are not incompatible, and a Bayesian approach might usefully take long-run determinants as establishing individual or societal trust "priors" that condition the impact of contemporary factors on trust.

[4] This approach, as is common in the literature, takes trust to be "a three-place predicate" where Person A trusts Person B with something of value C (Baier, 1986, p. 236).

[5] While philosophers have sought to differentiate between ontological and relational, context-specific forms of vulnerability, Mackenzie (2020) argues that it is a mistake to see them as opposed, because context shapes the experience and impact of vulnerability for agents. This aligns with our focus on contextual factors, in this case coups, shaping individuals' experience of vulnerability.

[6] Encapsulation of interests might also happen through friendship or love, or from a desire to build or maintain one's reputation (Hardin, 2003).

radius of trust. While the former reflects the strength of cooperative norms, the latter refers to the circle of people among whom those norms operate (Fukuyama, 2000; Delhey, Newton, & Welzel, 2011). At the individual level, the trust radius refers to the width of any individual's trusting network across types of potential trust partners with whom the individual has interpersonal ties of differential strengths (Hu, 2017). Therefore, for an individual with a wider trust radius, cooperation is possible with individuals who are more socially "remote" (Hu, 2017, p. 148).

Trust in an individual's "in-group," or those with whom individuals share the strongest interpersonal ties (i.e. family, friends, neighbours) tends to be higher on average. While the level of trust in these partners may increase further in response to insecurity, the extent of any such increase is likely to be limited by ceiling effects. At the same time, there is also likely to be scope to rationally broaden one's radius of trust to include those with whom one shares weaker interpersonal ties, such as other people one may know, or more socially distant co-ethnics. Therefore we argue that in a time of heightened insecurity, such as during or immediately after a coup, individuals will seek to widen their trust radius by increasing trust in those with whom they share weaker interpersonal ties as a means to offset uncertainty and insecurity.

> *H2a: Coups increase the radius of trust.*

> *H2b: The effect of coups on trust will be greater between those with weaker (but not the weakest) interpersonal ties.*

We evaluate these hypotheses using a two-part strategy. First, we draw on a unique natural experiment in Burkina Faso that allows us to identify the causal effect of coups on social trust. Following that, we turn to cross-national survey data from the Afrobarometer series to investigate the link between coups and social trust across a broad sample of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Evidence from a natural experiment in Burkina Faso

Our primary analysis focuses on the case of Burkina Faso, in which we make use of a natural experiment to identify the causal effect of a recent coup on social trust and to examine suggestive evidence for the proposed causal mechanism. Specifically, we use data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey series, which was being fielded in Burkina Faso when a coup took place there in September 2022. We begin by providing some brief relevant background information about Burkina Faso and the September 2022 coup. Then we explain the empirical strategy, describe the data, and present our results.

3.1 Background to the Burkina Faso case

Socioeconomic context

Burkina Faso is a very poor country, with a Human Development Index placing it at 196 out of 203 countries and territories in the world in 2021. Its population remains predominantly rural, with only 32% living in urban areas, and more than a quarter of urbanites live in slums. Nearly three-quarters of those who are employed work in agriculture, and almost 90% work outside the formal sector (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). A majority of the Burkina population belong to the Mossi group, whose history in the territory of present-day Burkina Faso dates back to the 15th century. While the population also contains numerous other ethnic groups whose precolonial histories reflect a huge diversity of social and political systems, a strong case can be made that the commonalities shared by these different "Voltaic" groups are as important as the differences between them (Englebert, 2018). This may be due, in part, to the assimilative traditions of the Mossi, which played a role in integrating and unifying Burkinabè from different ethnic groups under a shared notion of nationality (Englebert, 2018; Savonnet-Guyot, 1986).

The ethnic demography of Burkina Faso is overlaid with religious diversity. Almost two-thirds of the population are Muslim (mainly Sunni), slightly more than a quarter are Christian

(predominantly Catholic), and the remainder follow animist or traditional religions. Nevertheless, despite this ethnic and religious diversity, there is very little conflict along ethnic and religious lines in Burkina (Englebert, 2018). This may be due to the dominant size of the Mossi, the cross-cutting nature of ethnic and religious cleavages,[7] and the gradual penetration of both major religions in Burkina (McCauley & Posner, 2019). Whatever the reasons, identification along national lines largely overwhelms ethnic and religious differences, with 42% of respondents rating Burkina nationality as their top identity (McCauley & Posner, 2019).

A turbulent and militarised political history

After a relatively brief period under French colonial rule beginning in 1897, Burkina Faso (or Upper Volta, as it was then called) became independent in August 1960. Since that time, it has been no stranger to military rule. Although initially established with a multiparty system at independence, a one-party system was imposed under President Yaméogo and the ruling Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) party within just four months (Englebert, 2018). In response to Yaméogo's increasingly erratic and authoritarian rule, and with the support of the powerful trade union movement, the military took power and suspended the Constitution of the First Republic in January 1966, ushering in the country's first military regime under Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana (Harsch, 2017).

Lamizana would remain in power for 14 years, although the period of his presidency was characterised by cycles in and out of civilian government, with the Second and Third Republics established in 1974 and 1978, respectively. In 1980, Lamizana was removed from power in the same way he had come to it, overthrown by the military under the orders of Colonel Saye Zerbo. Politics under Zerbo's government became increasingly militarised, and the military became increasingly factionalised. This paved the way for a period of intense and violent political instability, with further successful military coups in 1982, 1983, and 1987 (Englebert, 2018).

The revolutionary regime of President (and former Captain) Thomas Sankara, which started with the second of these coups in 1983, ended with his assassination in October 1987 by soldiers loyal to Captain Blaise Compaoré. A friend of Sankara's since their school years and a partner of his in the revolution, Compaoré would go on to distance himself from revolutionary politics, steering the country back to civilian government under the Fourth Republic in 1991 (Englebert, 2018). He would consolidate his position and remain in power for 27 years before being ousted by a popular uprising in October 2014 after his attempt to remove term limits from the Constitution (Chouli, 2015).

After a year under a transitional government, which itself was briefly ousted from power in an attempted coup in September 2015, a new civilian government was elected in November 2015. In a departure for Burkina Faso, the new president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, had no military background, and for the first time in more than half a century, the cabinet contained no military officials (Harsch, 2017). Kaboré was re-elected to a second term in 2020, but was confronted with increasing protests about the government's failure to address the escalating security crisis resulting from Islamist attacks in the country. In January 2022, Kaboré was deposed by the military in a coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba (Engels, 2022). Although initially popular, Damiba also failed to contain the jihadist insurgency and faced rising dissatisfaction with his rule among factions within the military. Within nine months of taking power, Damiba was overthrown by a military coup led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré on 30 September 2022.

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[7] As shown in the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey data, the religious makeup of the population is reflected very closely within the Mossi and in other ethnic groups.

3.2   *The September 2022 coup*

Over the past decade, the central Sahel region in West and Central Africa has become increasingly unstable, and various competing groups and factions within groups have grown stronger. Since 2015, Burkina Faso has witnessed a continuous string of attacks committed by various non-state armed forces, often (to greater or lesser degree) tied to jihadist groups with associations with al-Qaida and the Islamic State. These attacks have displaced large numbers of Burkinabè internally (roughly 2 million, or around 10% of the population in 2021) and left thousands dead (Engels, 2022). The coups of January and September 2022 are widely regarded as direct consequences of the continued grip of jihadist groups on parts Burkina Faso and the inability of the national government to put an end to violence that these groups have perpetrated.

After the January 2022 coup, a transitional government led by Damiba made fighting terrorism its top priority. Success in this fight was slow, and violent events actually increased throughout 2022. In late September, a series of attacks on a convoy of more than 200 trucks, escorted by the military and carrying foodstuffs headed for the northern town of Djibo, killed 37 persons, including 27 military personnel (Mimault & Ndiaga, 2022). Only weeks earlier, a mine explosion on the same road had killed 35 civilians. The attacks on these important infrastructure nodes exemplified the failure of the national government in its fight against terrorism. Djibo, a town of 300,000, was now supplied with foods and medicines only by helicopter.

Four days later, early in the morning on 30 September, soldiers blocked major roads in Ouagadougou, gunfire was heard at the Presidential Palace and other key sites in the city, and state television went off the air. That evening, Traoré appeared on national television to read a declaration that the government had been dissolved, the Constitution had been suspended, all state borders were sealed, and a strict curfew was being imposed (Al Jazeera, 2022a; France 24, 2022; Wilkins, 2022).

On 2 October, after negotiating security assurances for himself and his followers as well as a schedule for a transition phase to run no longer than two years, Damiba agreed to step down. National borders were reopened, and the curfew was lifted. The following day, Damiba left for neighbouring Togo. On 5 October, Traoré was declared president and head of the armed forces. A week later (14-15 October), a national assembly consisting of representatives of political parties, traditional and religious authorities, trade unions, and civil society drafted a charter for the transition, which included a transition period of 21 months (through July 2024). On 25 October, a transitional government headed by civilian Appollinaire Joachim Kyelem de Tembela as prime minister was named, and a legislative assembly of 71 representatives (of whom 20 were directly appointed by Traoré) took up business. In both the government – consisting of 23 ministers – and the legislative assembly, the military enjoyed extensive privileges (Freedom House, 2023).

3.3   *Empirical strategy*

The September 2022 coup as a natural experiment

The second Burkina Faso coup of 2022 provides us with the opportunity for a unique natural experiment through which we can estimate the causal effect of a coup on social trust.[8] While coups are not all that unusual in Burkina Faso, by their nature and by design, coups, or successful ones at least, tend to be unexpected. That was certainly true of the coup on 30 September 2022. Moreover, and crucially for our purposes, the coup occurred while the fieldwork for the Round 9 Afrobarometer survey was being conducted in the country. As a result, we can use these data to undertake a specific type of natural experiment known as an unexpected event during survey design (UESD) (Muñoz, Falco-Gimeno, & Hernández, 2020). This approach splits respondents from the same survey into control and treatment

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[8] No other coups have occurred during fieldwork for Afrobarometer surveys.

groups depending on whether they were interviewed before or after the occurrence of a salient and unexpected event.[9] Allowing for certain assumptions related to excludability and ignorability, which we evaluate below, this design permits us to estimate the causal effect of the September 2022 coup on social trust in Burkina Faso.

The Round 9 Afrobarometer survey in Burkina Faso was in field from 20 September to 12 October 2022. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the interviews between these dates, around the date of the coup on 30 September. Three things are clear: (1) All of the fieldwork was undertaken in a relatively short space of time, centred around the occurrence of the coup; (2) fieldwork was all but halted for three days following the coup; (3) we have a relatively even distribution of interviews before and after the coup. Figure A.2 in the Appendix shows the spatial distribution of the fieldwork across the country, which demonstrates broad geographic coverage and balance across treatment and control groups.

The clear benefit of this approach is that it enables estimation of the causal effect of the coup on social trust. Moreover, it taps directly into the theoretical effect of interest here, which is the immediate impact of coups on trust as a short-run, rational response. As ever, the price of this precise and rigorous identification of the theorised causal effect is a decrease in external validity.

Figure 1: Distribution of interviews by date | Burkina Faso | 2022

Total N: 1,200
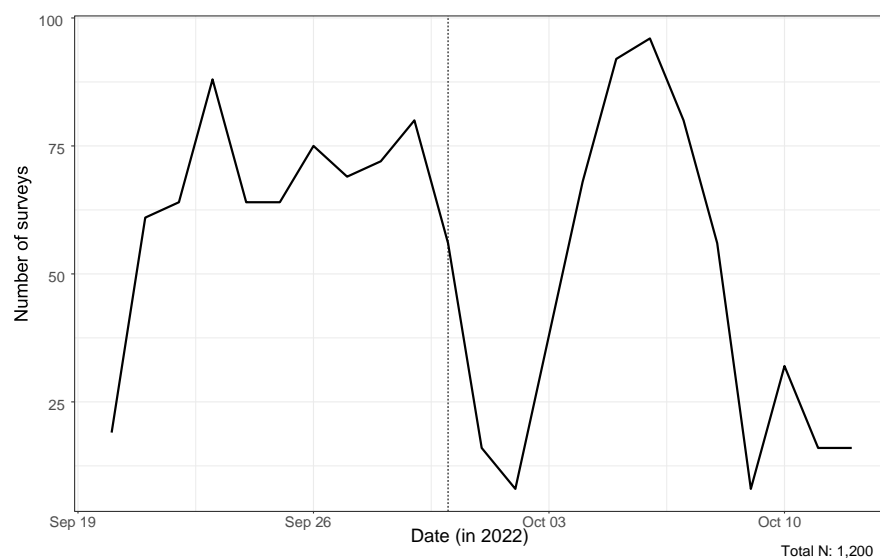
Notes: *Solid line shows the distribution of interviews over the fieldwork period. Dashed line shows the date of the coup.*

Our focus on a single country, and a single coup within that country, makes it harder to extrapolate the estimated effects to coups in general. All coups are different, despite the familiar playbook by which they tend to unfold, and all are undertaken in specific social and political contexts. Nevertheless, although we should be careful not to over-generalise the findings from the Burkina case, our cross-national results presented in Section 4 below suggest the existence of a more general relationship between coups and social trust of the type that we hypothesise. In addition, our argument about the effect of coups on social trust focuses on the impact of the uncertainty and insecurity generated by coups. While no two coups are

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[9] Several recent studies in political science have made use of this design to estimate the effects of terror attacks (Harding & Nwokolo, 2023; Holman, Merolla, & Zechmeister, 2022), as well as other unexpected events such as the results of the Brexit referendum (Schwartz, Simon, Hudson, van Heerde-Hudson, 2021), the election of Donald Trump (Giani & Méon, 2021), and the announcement of COVID-19 lockdowns (Bol, Giani, Blais, & Loewen, 2021; Eggers & Harding, 2022).

the same, we argue that this uncertainty is a characteristic of all coups, to a greater or lesser degree.

Moreover, it is worth noting several factors that suggest that the effects we estimate in this case may be a lower bound. First, Burkina Faso's storied history of coups may have desensitised Burkinabè to their effects. Second, and related, the coup of September 2022 was a "coup against a coup," undertaken to depose a leader who himself had taken power via a coup only nine months prior. As such, the coup we are examining may represent a smaller increase in insecurity than one undertaken to depose a more stable or older regime, such as the coup in Burkina Faso in January of the same year. Third, and with similar implications, the ongoing security crisis in the country may have limited the potential impact of the additional increase in insecurity and uncertainty generated by the coup. Taken together, these factors suggest that our results are likely to represent conservative estimates of the effects of coups on social trust.

Data, measures, and estimation

The Afrobarometer series undertakes regular, nationally representative public opinion surveys across a large number of countries in Africa. For the Round 9 survey in Burkina Faso, a sample of 1,200 people were interviewed. The survey included a battery of questions about trust, from which we construct the key measures of social trust that we use in our analysis. Specifically, we make use of a series of questions asking respondents "*How much do you trust each of the following types of people?*" The categories asked about are: (1) other Burkinabè, (2) your relatives, (3) your neighbours, (4) other people you know, (5) people from other religions, and (6) people from other ethnic groups. For each group, respondents were asked to say whether they trust them "not at all," "just a little," "somewhat," or "a lot."[10] We generate dummy variables for trust in each of these groups, coded as 1 if respondents trust somewhat or a lot, and 0 otherwise. We then construct an index of social trust as the average of these six measures (the final outcome is bounded between 0 and 1).

To estimate the effect of the coup on social trust, we split the respondents into control and treatment groups depending on whether they were interviewed before 30 September or after 2 October.[11] We drop respondents interviewed between those dates to guard against any impact on the survey fieldwork process resulting from the curfew and travel restrictions imposed during the coup itself, but our results are substantively unchanged if we include them in the analysis.[12] This also helps to limit the possibility that respondents were interviewed before information about the coup was available. We then estimate the ordinary least squares (OLS) model:

$$Y_{ir} = \delta Post_{ir} + \beta X_{ir} + \gamma Z_r + \epsilon_{ir} \qquad (1)$$

where Y_{ir} is either the trust index or one of the dummy variables for trust in a specific group, for Individual i in Region r. δ is our estimate of the effect of the treatment variable $Post_{ir}$, which captures whether the respondent was interviewed before or after the coup occurred. X_{ir} is a matrix of control variables including indicators for whether the respondent is female, Muslim, and lives in an urban location, as well as categorical measures of age and education. We also include an indicator for whether the respondent thought the survey was being run by the government or a political party. Z_r represents a set of region fixed effects.

We estimate the model using respondents interviewed from across the full range of fieldwork dates (excluding those interviewed between 30 September and 2 October). Power analysis presented in Appendix Figure A.4 demonstrates that by including all observations in the analysis the sample is large enough to estimate effects of one-seventh of a standard

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[10] A "Don't know" option was also available.

[11] In practice no respondents were interviewed on 3 October.

[12] Detailed information on the sampling and survey process is included in the Appendix.

deviation change in the trust index variable with 80% power.[13] In UESD studies, there can be a trade-off when limiting the analysis to a narrow bandwidth of days around the event. While doing so reduces the possibility of conflating the treatment with other factors occurring after the event of interest (which would undermine the assumption of excludability), it can also reduce balance across treatment and control groups, thereby potentially increasing bias while reducing power (Muñoz et al., 2020). Figure 1 shows that the fieldwork was completed within a short space of time, which reduces concerns about violations of the excludability assumption.

Figure 2 presents analysis of pretreatment covariate balance across treatment and control groups. Overall this shows decent balance, although we do see differences (significant at the 90% level) indicating that the treatment group is more urban, less Muslim, and more likely to report primary school as their highest level of educational attainment. This could be problematic if social trust is higher among urbanites, Christians, and respondents educated to primary level. Analysis of the correlates of social trust in the control group shows no significant relationship between trust and religion, urban residence, or education level. Nevertheless, we deal with any potential impact of this imbalance by (1) including controls for these covariates, and (2) preprocessing the data using entropy balancing.

Figure 2: Covariate balance across treatment and control groups | Burkina Faso | 2022
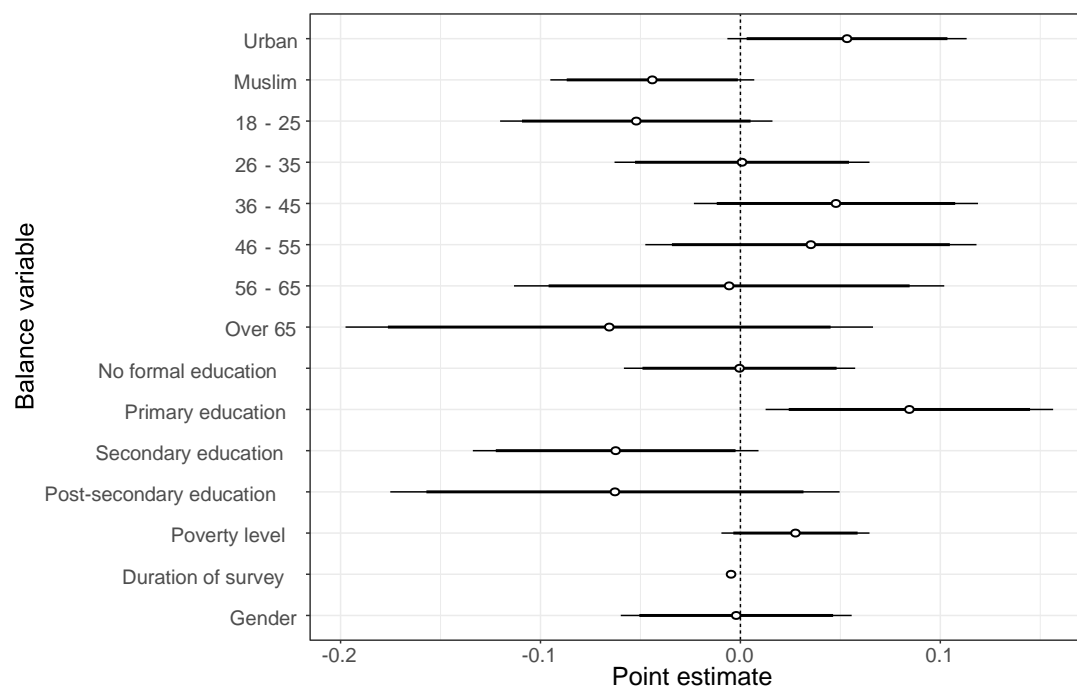
Notes: *Balance plots across treatment and control groups for the full sample. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.*

3.4   Results

Our estimates of the effect of the September 2022 coup on social trust are presented in Figure 3. Estimates are presented for models with only region fixed effects (black circles), with controls for covariates (dark gray circles), and with data preprocessed using entropy balanced weights (light gray circles). Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence

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[13] The sample is large enough to estimate effects of one-fifth of a standard deviation change in the trust index variable with 80% power when the analysis is restricted to respondents interviewed five days either side of the coup.

intervals, respectively. The estimates at the top of Figure 3 are for the effects on the social trust index.[14] Below that are estimates for each of the variables capturing trust in specific groups, which make up the components for the index.

Looking first at the effect on the trust index, the estimates show that social trust was significantly increased by exposure to the coup. For all three specifications, the estimates are positive and significant at the 95% level. Moreover, these effects are substantively meaningful, equating to about one-fifth of a standard deviation of the pretreatment mean. Building on the results of the cross-national analysis, this evidence therefore provides strong support for the hypothesis that coups increase social trust.

Figure 3: Effects of September 2022 coup on social trust | Burkina Faso | 2022
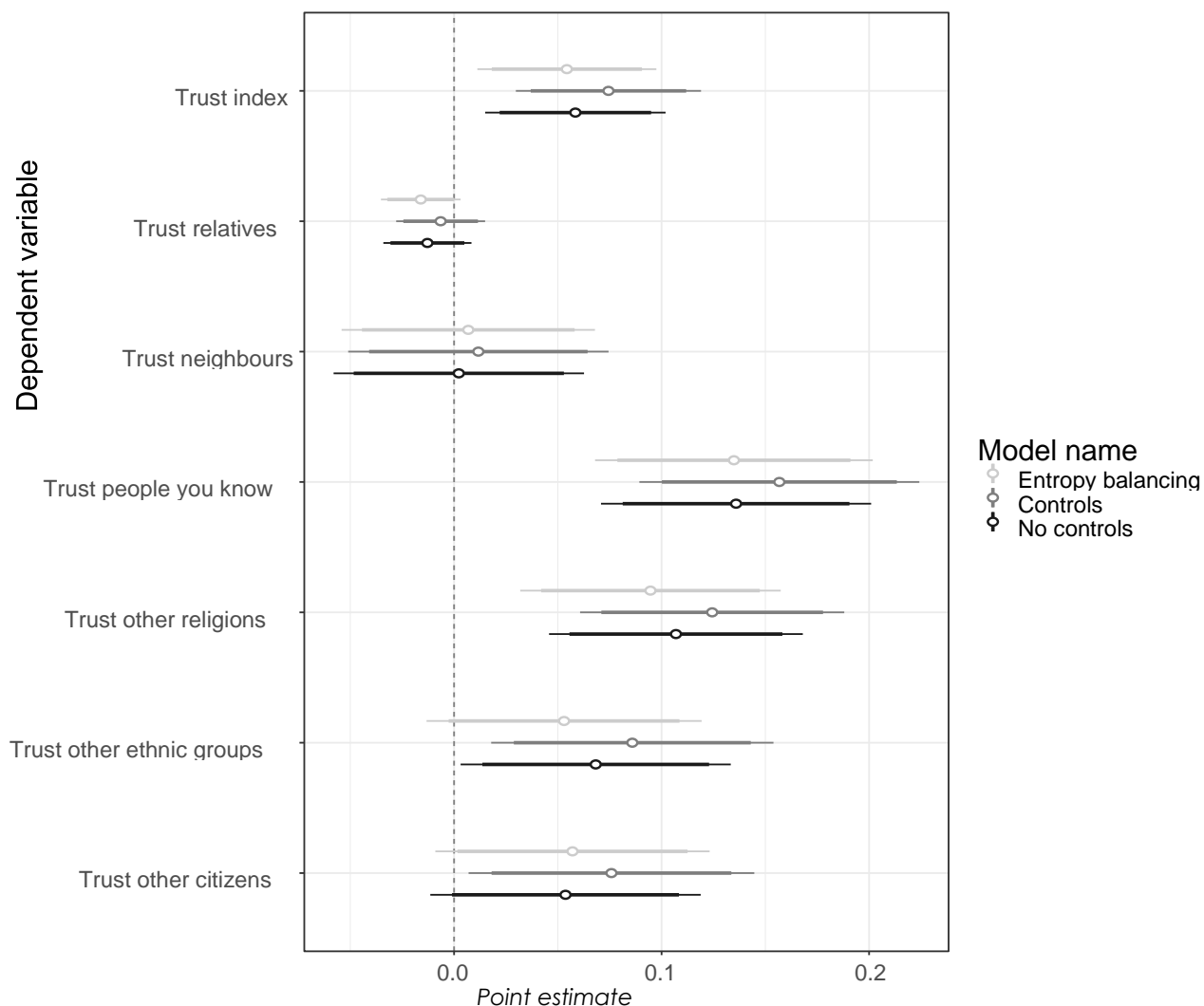
Notes: *Estimates are for OLS models with only region fixed effects (black), with controls for covariates (dark gray), and with data preprocessed using entropy balanced weights (light gray). Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.*

The estimates for the effects of the coup on the separate trust components allow us to evaluate the hypothesis that coups cause individuals to increase their radii of trust by increasing trust in those with whom they share weaker interpersonal ties. Following existing work on the radius of trust (Hu, 2017; Lim, Im, & Lee, 2021), we take interpersonal ties to

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[14] Numerical results are presented in Appendix Table A.3. Estimates across different bandwidths of days before and after the coup are presented in Figure A.5.

decrease with greater social distance, therefore being strongest with one's relatives, then neighbours, then "other people you know," and weakest with "other citizens."[15] Although locating people from "other religions" and "other ethnic groups" on this scale is somewhat harder, in the context of Burkina Faso we believe it is reasonable to assume social distance will be smaller on average with people from other religions, because religious divides are a more recent aspect of Burkinabè identity that cross-cut ethnic cleavages (Englebert, 2018). This means that one might share stronger social ties with co-ethnics from other religions. We make no assumption about the differences in social ties between non-co-ethnics and "other citizens," although the slightly vaguer nature of the latter category means that questions about trust in that group may tap more into notions of generalised rather than specific trust.

Again the results in Figure 3 support our expectations. For trust in those groups with which respondents share the strongest social ties (relatives and neighbours), we see no effect of the coup. By contrast, we see a large and significant effect on respondents' trust in other people they know, equivalent to an increase of roughly one-third of a standard deviation of the pretreatment mean. The impact on trust in people from other religions is also large and significant, in this case equivalent to around one-quarter of a standard deviation of the pretreatment mean. The effects on trust in non-co-ethnics and other citizens are also significant at standard levels (with variation over specifications), but in both cases of much smaller magnitude, equivalent to around one-seventh of a standard deviation of the pretreatment mean.

These results fit with the expectation that coups will increase an individual's radius of trust. The null effect on trust in those with whom individuals share the closest interpersonal ties (relatives and neighbours) may well stem from ceiling effects, since pretreatment trust in those groups is high.[16] At the same time, the large effects on trust in other people whom respondents know is consistent with the claim that individuals will rationally broaden their radius of trust to include these people with whom their ties are somewhat weaker, but still sufficiently strong to make them potentially useful trust objects in a time of increased insecurity. The same is true for people from other religions, who may represent more socially distant co-ethnics.

3.5   Robustness

The unexpected nature of the coup means that, conditional on covariates, we can identify its causal effect on social trust by comparing across respondents interviewed before (control) and after (treatment) it occurred. This identification relies on the assumptions of excludability and ignorability (Muñoz et al., 2020), which we evaluate in this section. In addition, the results are also robust to other versions of the key outcome variables, including alternative ways of dichotomising the trust component variables and of constructing the trust index (results in Appendix tables A.5-A.8).

Excludability

Excludability requires that any difference in social trust that we observe across the treatment and control groups be due only to the coup. This assumption could be violated in several ways. The first is through the impact of *collateral events*, i.e. events or actions occurring after and resulting from the coup itself. Qualitative searches of news reports from the days immediately following the coup suggest nothing of note in this regard. One possible candidate could be international responses to the coup, which included condemnation of the coup by ECOWAS and the African Union (Al Jazeera, 2022b). However, our theory takes condemnation of this type, and the threat of potential sanctions that often accompany it, to be part of what generates uncertainty and insecurity in the aftermath of coups, so it is not necessarily desirable to separate it out.

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[15] Numerical results are presented in Appendix Table A.4.

[16] The pretreatment mean for the binary variable capturing trust in relatives is 0.975, and for trust in neighbours it is 0.806.

A second potential concern is that the observed differences in social trust might be due to *simultaneous events*, unrelated to the coup, that may have occurred around the same time. One potential event of this type is the impact on social trust that we estimate is actually a consequence of the Djibo attacks on 26 September, which precipitated the coup. Analysing the effect of exposure to these attacks in the pretreatment sample (i.e. whether the respondent was interviewed before or after 26 September) shows no significant effect on social trust (results in Appendix Table A.12).

Another possibility is that the effect we are estimating results not from the coup but from victories by the Burkina Faso national football team. Examining data from across countries in in sub-Saharan Africa, Depetris-Chauvin, Durante, and Campante (2020) find evidence that national football team victories can increase trust in other ethnicities. The Burkina Faso national team won twice in the week prior to the coup, defeating the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1-0 on 23 September and Comoros 2-1 on 27 September.[17] As with the Djibo attacks, we see no evidence of an effect of these events in the pretreatment sample (results in Appendix Table A.12). Moreover, we make use of data from the Afrobarometer Round 4 survey in Burkina Faso to estimate the effect of victory by the national team on social trust in a different context. Burkina Faso beat Burundi on 12 October 2008, while the Round 4 survey was in the field. Estimating the impact of that victory using an equivalent UESD setup provides no evidence of an effect on social trust (results in Appendix Table A.12), giving us confidence that victory by the national football team is not driving our main results.

Finally, it is possible that our estimates may be driven by *unrelated time trends*, i.e. if social trust is increasing for some other reason over the time period we are investigating. To investigate this, we analyse a placebo treatment constructed by splitting the control group at its empirical median (by interview date) and test for the absence of an effect at that date. We see no placebo treatment effect, suggesting no pretreatment trend in social trust (results in Appendix Table A.12).

Ignorability

By the assumption of ignorability, treatment status needs to be independent of potential outcomes (i.e. that whether respondents were interviewed before or after the coup is not itself a function of social trust). This could be violated by *imbalance on observables*, so we guard against this by (a) controlling for covariates and (b) preprocessing the data and estimating the effect with entropy balance weights. Ignorability could also be violated by issues of *reachability* if certain types of respondents are harder to reach, meaning that they are interviewed later in the survey. This is less of a concern with the Afrobarometer surveys, which do not require repeated call-backs to ensure access to a very specific sample of individuals. Nevertheless, we check for this issue by running placebo population tests using data from rounds 5 and 8 of the Afrobarometer series in Burkina Faso, which used a very similar sampling and respondent-selection procedure. For these tests we split the samples for each round into control and treatment groups based on whether they were interviewed before or after a date chosen to ensure that the proportion of treated respondents matches that in the Round 9 survey. From this analysis we see no evidence of a positive "treatment" effect on trust in the placebo populations (results in Appendix Table A.12).[18] Since the surveys used very similar sampling and respondent-selection procedures, this analysis provides further confidence that the effects we estimate are not due to reachability.

Another potential threat to inference is the problem of *attrition*, which can arise if treatment status is correlated with non-response on the survey item of interest (trust). Analysis of non-response to the trust questions shows very little non-response in general, and no significant differences across treatment and control groups (see Appendix Figure A.6). Finally, inference could be undermined by *noncompliance*, if some members of the treatment group are

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[17] Both matches were international friendlies and were played in Morocco.

[18] In fact, we see negative effects of the placebos in both samples, suggesting decreasing trends in trust that if anything would downward bias our main estimates.

unaware of the coup and therefore not exposed to its effects. We find this to be unlikely given the nature of the event under examination. Nevertheless, qualitative evidence from news reports and analysis of Google trends data suggest that information about the coup was widely available and that citizens were actively searching it out.

3.6   Causal mechanism

Our argument for why coups should increase social trust rests on the following causal mechanism: Because coups are periods of extreme uncertainty in which the reliability of the state as a provider of security and services is undermined, individuals turn to society for security by rationally increasing their social trust. Key to this mechanism is the role of uncertainty and insecurity, which we seek to examine in this section. This is hard to do with the available data. Nevertheless, we consider several observable implications and heterogeneous treatment effects that are implied by the theorised mechanism, as well as possible alternatives.

Observable implications

If the impact of the coup on social trust is a rational response to increased uncertainty and insecurity, we might expect this to also manifest in a greater sense of anxiety among respondents. Although this is inherently difficult to measure, one useful proxy is provided within the survey data, which includes information about the respondents' attitudes coded by the interviewers. In particular, interviewers were asked to code whether the respondents seemed comfortable or "at ease" during the interview.[19] Results from analysis of differences across the treatment and control groups, presented in Appendix Figure A.8, show that respondents were significantly less likely to appear comfortable following the coup, which fits with the claim that the coup created a feeling of heightened uncertainty and insecurity. In addition, treated respondents were significantly less likely to consent to future surveys, which might also indicate discomfort and anxiety.

Heterogeneous treatment effects

If the proposed causal mechanism is at play, we should expect the treatment effects to vary in several ways. First, if individuals rationally increase their trust radius to offset insecurity generated by the coup, then the treatment effect should be smaller for individuals with greater social capital. This is because by virtue of social capital, these individuals already have access to more non-state sources of security. Analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects provides some suggestive evidence in support of this: The impact of the coup on social trust decreases with measures of community meeting attendance and whether respondents discuss politics with others (see Appendix Table A.9).

Second, dependence on the state should imply a larger treatment effect, because those who are more dependent on the state should experience greater insecurity as a result of uncertainty over control of state resources. Although dependence on the state is again hard to measure, we consider whether treatment effects are conditional on indicators of grid connectivity and of local "stateness" (captured by indexing measures of state presence, such as a police office, in the respondent's enumeration area). We see no evidence of heterogeneity in treatment effects by these measures (see Appendix tables A.10 and A.11), although they may not be effectively capturing dependence on the state.

Alternative mechanisms

We briefly consider three possible alternative mechanisms for the impact of the coup on social trust. The first is that the observed increase in social trust is a result of greater optimism for the future following the coup. Analysis of questions about perceptions of the economy (see Appendix Table A.13), and in particular about expectations of future improvement in

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[19] They were also asked whether respondents seemed honest, patient, cooperative, interested, and friendly.

the economy, show no impact of the coup on these potential measures of optimism. A second possibility is that the increase in social trust is simply a reflection of increased political trust. This seems unlikely, not least because social and political trust are quite distinct conceptually – political trust is commonly viewed as an expression of systemic support, or as a measure of performance evaluation (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Uslaner, 2018). Moreover, an index of political trust does not correlate strongly with the social trust index in our data. Nevertheless, we estimate the impact of the coup on political trust and see only weakly positive effects (results in Appendix Table A.14), which are inconsistent and not robust across specifications. Breaking the index down into components shows that the weakly positive impact of the coup on political trust is driven by trust in the president, a measure that is likely subject to strong response bias due to preference falsification in this context.[20]

Bleck and Michelitch (2017) provide evidence that putschist-controlled broadcasting in the wake of Mali's 2012 coup increased the importance of national identity. This suggests a third possible alternative whereby increased social trust could follow from putschist propaganda aimed at promoting social cohesion following a coup. While plausible as an explanation for part of the longer-term effect observed in the cross-national data in Section 4, it is unlikely to explain the immediate short-term effect that we identify in the 2022 Burkina Faso case, primarily because such putschist messaging would require some time to be received and take effect. Moreover, the argument made by Bleck and Michelitch (2017) refers to propaganda designed to develop support for a nondemocratic regime following the overthrow of democracy. Although coups often result in such nondemocratic transitions, that is not applicable to the context we study, which considers the impact of a "coup against a coup."

4. Cross-national analysis

For external validity, in this section we investigate the relationship between coups and social trust cross-nationally, using survey data from the Afrobarometer series. This also allows us to explore the impact of unsuccessful coups, as well as that of coup plots and alleged coups.

4.1   Analysing coups in Africa

Around the world there were 230 successful coups between 1946 and 2021 in which the incumbent regime was ousted and replaced with a new, often military, regime (Marshall & Marshall, 2022). Roughly-one third of these successful coups occurred on the African continent. Table A.1 shows the coup years for each country in the cross-national data.[21] Given their prevalence, a comparative analysis of coups in Africa is warranted. Moreover, limiting the cross-national analysis to cases in Africa holds constant any regional factors that might impact the relationship between coups and social trust.

The simplest way to evaluate our hypotheses in a more general setting is to correlate exposure to coups with levels of social trust using cross-national survey data, which we do with data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey series. As discussed above, the Afrobarometer series undertakes regular, nationally representative public opinion surveys across a large number of countries in Africa. Figure A.1 shows which countries are included in our cross-national analysis.[22] The results of our cross-national analysis may be indicative of broader trends in the impact of exposure to coups on social trust. Our theory is general enough that it should apply to all coups; although every coup is different, our theory pertains to the uncertainty and instability that is characteristic of all coups, albeit to varying degrees. As such, the cross-national analysis is valuable as a test of the external validity of our theory,

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[20] For work on preference falsification and response bias in authoritarian or conflict settings, see for example Kuran (1998); Lyall, Blair, and Imai (2013); Matanock and García-Sánchez (2018); and Truex and Tavana (2019).

[21] While Table A.1 includes all coups up through 2023, the survey data used in the cross-national analysis only covers up through 2022, so the most recent coups in Gabon and Mali are not included in the analysis.

[22] We include all countries in which surveys were undertaken in Round 9 of the Afrobarometer series.

while the natural experiment in the previous section more rigorously tests the theory's internal validity.

Two caveats with our cross-national analysis are worth noting. First, this type of analysis is prone to omitted variable bias and is not causal in nature, so while it may provide valuable evidence of broader correlations, it does not permit the identification of any causal effect of coups on social trust. Second, and related, with the cross-national analysis we are unable to tease apart the two dimensions of trust that we identified in Section 2. We are particularly interested in the effects of coups on short-term rational changes to social trust, but given the temporal scope of the data, we are unable to separate these from any relationship between coup exposure and trust as a longer-run disposition. Nonetheless, despite not being causally identified, this analysis permits a useful and more generalisable evaluation of the theorised relationship across a broad sample of cases in Africa.

4.2   Data, measures, and estimation

We begin by merging the Afrobarometer data with Marshall and Marshall's (2022) dataset on coup occurrences. We use this information to calculate the number of successful coups experienced by each individual in the Afrobarometer survey.[23] From this we generate a binary indicator that represents our primary variable of interest, coded 1 if respondents have ever experienced a coup in their lifetimes and 0 otherwise.[24] An additional benefit of undertaking this cross-national analysis is that in addition to looking at successful coups, we are able to estimate the relationship between trust and exposure to attempted coups, coup plots, and alleged coup plots, information on all of which is included in the Marshall and Marshall (2022) data set. To do so, we construct equivalent binary indicators for exposure to each of these alternative coup events.

Since our goal is to estimate the relationship between coup exposure and social trust, for our main outcome variable we use an index constructed from the battery of questions about trust included in the Afrobarometer surveys, in the same way as described above for the Burkina Faso analysis. To explore the impact of coup exposure on social trust, we estimate the linear model:

$$Y_{ict} \sim \delta Coup_{ict} + \beta X_{ict} + \gamma Z_c + \epsilon_{ict} \qquad (2)$$

where Y_{ict} is the index of social trust for Respondent i in Country c born in Year t. δ is our estimate of the binary measure of each individual's exposure to a coup. X_{ict} represents a matrix of control variables, including categorical variables for age and education, and indicators for whether the respondent is female and lives in an urban location. We also control for the number of coup events a respondent has been exposed to in their lifetime. Z_c denotes country fixed effects and ϵ_{ict} is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the country-year-of-birth level. Table A.2 presents summary statistics for the dependent and independent variables used in the analysis.

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[23] The second coup in Burkina Faso in 2022 occurred during survey fieldwork, a fact that we exploited for identification in the preceding section. For simplicity, in the cross-national analysis we incorrectly code all respondents in Burkina Faso as being exposed to the September 2022 coup, even though roughly half were interviewed prior to the coup. In practice this has no real impact, because all Burkinabè respondents are coded the same on our main binary indicator for coup exposure due to the January 2022 coup. Our results are unchanged if we drop Burkina Faso from the cross-national analysis entirely.

[24] This approach to calculating exposure to coups does not account for those who have migrated from one country to another, so in a sense this is a conservative estimate of coup exposure as some individuals may have experienced coups in other countries. At the same time, some individuals may have migrated from high- to low-coup areas, so we believe that on average our results are likely not being biased in any direction as a result of migration.

4.3 Results

If our theory is correct, we would expect to see a positive relationship between coup exposure and the social trust index. From the results presented in Figure 4, we can see that this expectation is borne out. The point estimate for the impact of exposure to successful coups on the trust index, at the top of the figure, is positive and significant at the 95% level. This provides prima facie evidence in support of our central claim, that exposure to coups has a positive impact on social trust. Again, it is important to note that these estimates do not have a causal interpretation. Nonetheless, they demonstrate a positive correlation, across a broad sample of African countries, between exposure to coups and social trust.

Figure 4: Comparison of effects of coup types on standardised trust index
| 39 African countries | 2021/2023
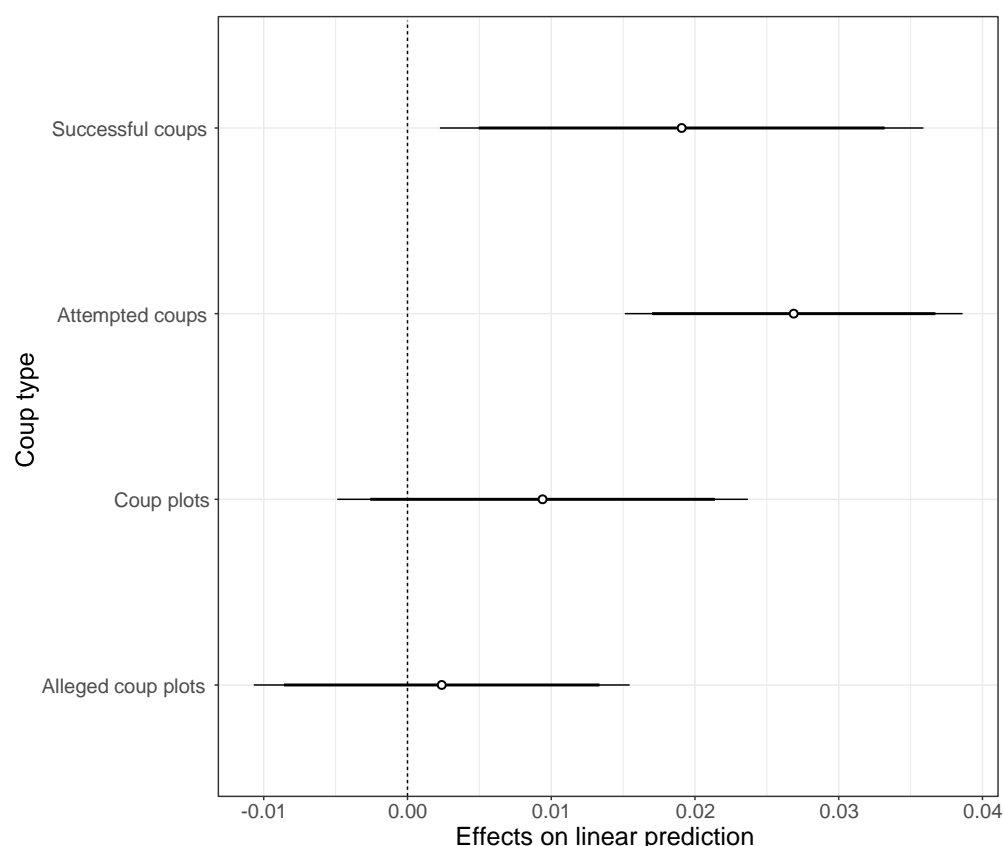
Notes: OLS estimates of effect of coup exposure on social trust index, for alleged coups, coup plots, attempted coups, and successful coups. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.

The other point estimates in Figure 4 are for the impact of other coup events on social trust, including attempted coups, coup plots, and alleged coup plots. We see no significant relationship between trust and coup plots, alleged or otherwise. However, the estimated impact of attempted coups on social trust is positive and significant. Interestingly, the point estimate here is somewhat larger than that for successful coups. This may reflect the fact that failed coups can lead to even greater insecurity and uncertainty than successful ones, for various reasons. For example, unsuccessful coups can result in extended conflict or even civil war. Even when they do not, they can leave in place insecure incumbents who may face repeated challenges to their hold on power, or who may act to prevent this by restricting individual freedoms and civil liberties.

Hypothesis 2 expects that the impact of coup exposure on trust will be greater for those groups with whom respondents share weaker interpersonal ties. As in the Burkina Faso

analysis, to evaluate this we also estimate the model separately for each of the binary trust variables that make up the components of the trust index. Again we take interpersonal ties to decrease with greater social distance, although for the cross-national analysis we make no assumptions about how interpersonal ties with these groups may differ from those with "other citizens." The results of this analysis (presented in Appendix Figure A.9) show little substantive difference in the magnitudes of the point estimates across the trust components, and no clear trend in line with the theoretical expectation.

However, it is worth reiterating the caveat that this analysis is likely to be picking up the impact of coup exposure on the longer-run dispositional aspect of trust, because what we are estimating here is the impact of any exposure to a coup in an individual's lifetime. Therefore, this analysis offers a less direct test of the theorised impact of coups on short-term rational changes to an individual's trust radius than the Burkina Faso analysis does.

5. Conclusions

Coups represent moments of significant uncertainty as competition between elites raises questions over who will emerge in control of the state. To date, research on the consequences of coups has focused predominantly on macro-level outcomes, such as the trajectory of economic development and the type and nature of regimes that follow from coups. Very little attention, however, has been paid to the consequences of coups at the micro level. How do coups affect the lives of ordinary citizens, and how do these citizens respond? These are important questions to ask, because the uncertainty generated by coups does not only reverberate at the macro level. Unconstitutional competition between elites for control of state power brings into question the continued role of the state as a source of security and a provider of essential services. Moreover, a power vacuum at the heart of the state can give rise to physical insecurity, and international reactions to coups can exacerbate economic insecurity. As the implications of elite-level competition permeate the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, how do they respond?
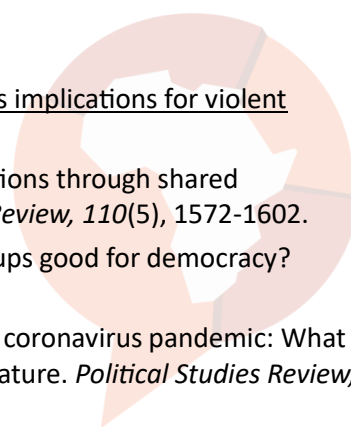
Conceptualising coups as akin to other large-scale crisis events, we argue that citizens' response will manifest, at least in part, in an increase in social trust. Drawing on work from both philosophy and social psychology, we recognise trust as a solution to vulnerability, such that increasing trust can be a rational response to the insecurity generated by a coup. This argument generates expectations about the impact of coups on social trust broadly defined, as well as more nuanced expectations about their impact on an individual's trust radius. A two-part empirical strategy gives us leverage over these expectations in a way that combines generalisability with valid causal inference. Taken together, the broad results of our cross-national analysis combined with the specific, well identified estimates from the Burkina Faso case provide compelling support for the claim that coups increase social trust.

This work makes at least three important contributions. First, it advances our understanding of the effects of coups, moving beyond the impact on macro-level outcomes to acknowledge and demonstrate their consequences at the micro level. Such understanding is increasingly important, given the recent and ongoing "epidemic of coups d'états" highlighted by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Nichols, 2021). Second, it contributes to the literature on the implications of large-scale crises by situating coups alongside more commonly studied crisis events such as terror attacks, natural disasters, and public health crises. Third, it adds to the broad body of work on the determinants of social trust. This work has long recognised the importance of social trust for general well-being, with its implications for economic and political development and stability. Our findings contribute by evidencing the use of trust as a rational response to the uncertainty and insecurity created by coups.
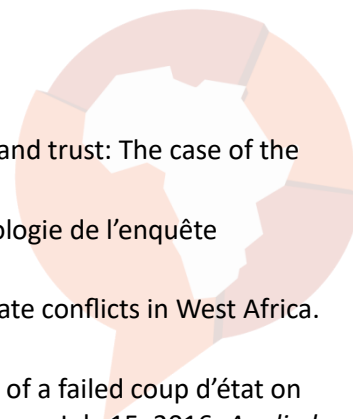
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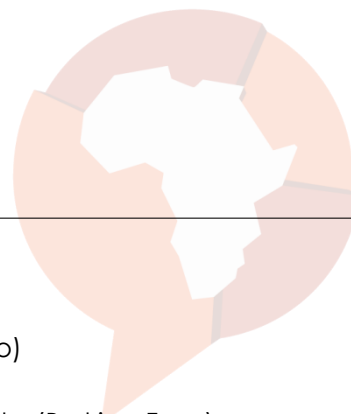
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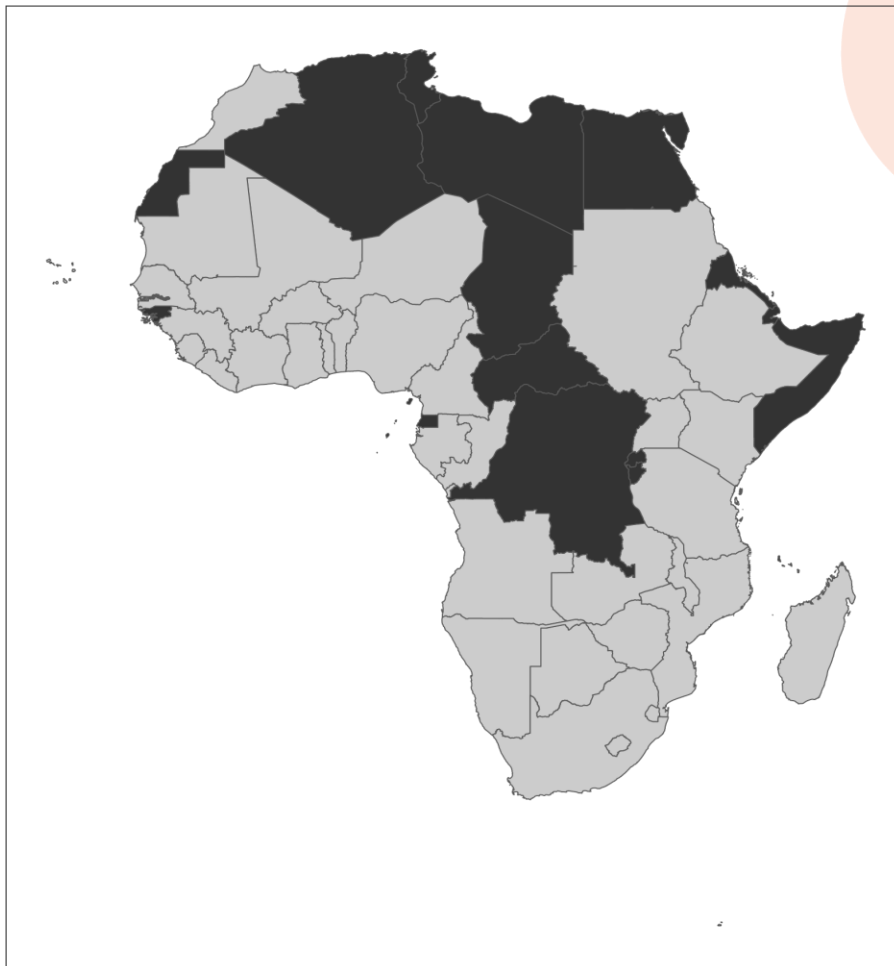
Appendix

List of figures

List of tables

Figure A.1: Sample of countries for cross-national analysis

In Sample ■ No □ Yes

Figure A.2: Distribution of interviews by location | Burkina Faso | 2022
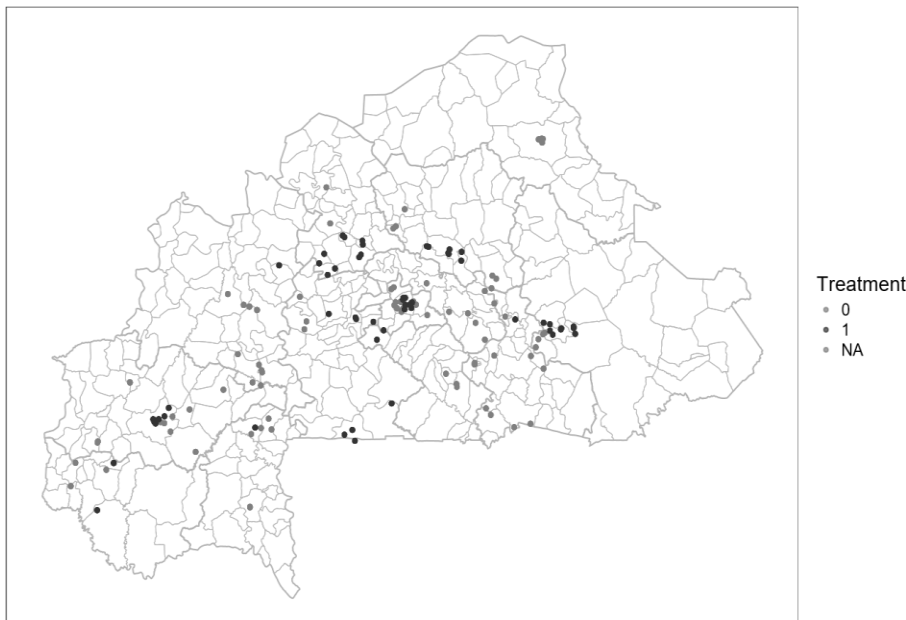

Treatment
· 0
· 1
· NA

Notes: *Dots show the location of interviews by survey cluster. Gray dots represent survey clusters in the control group, black dots those in the treatment group.*

**Figure A.3: Covariate balance by different bandwidths (Burkina Faso)**
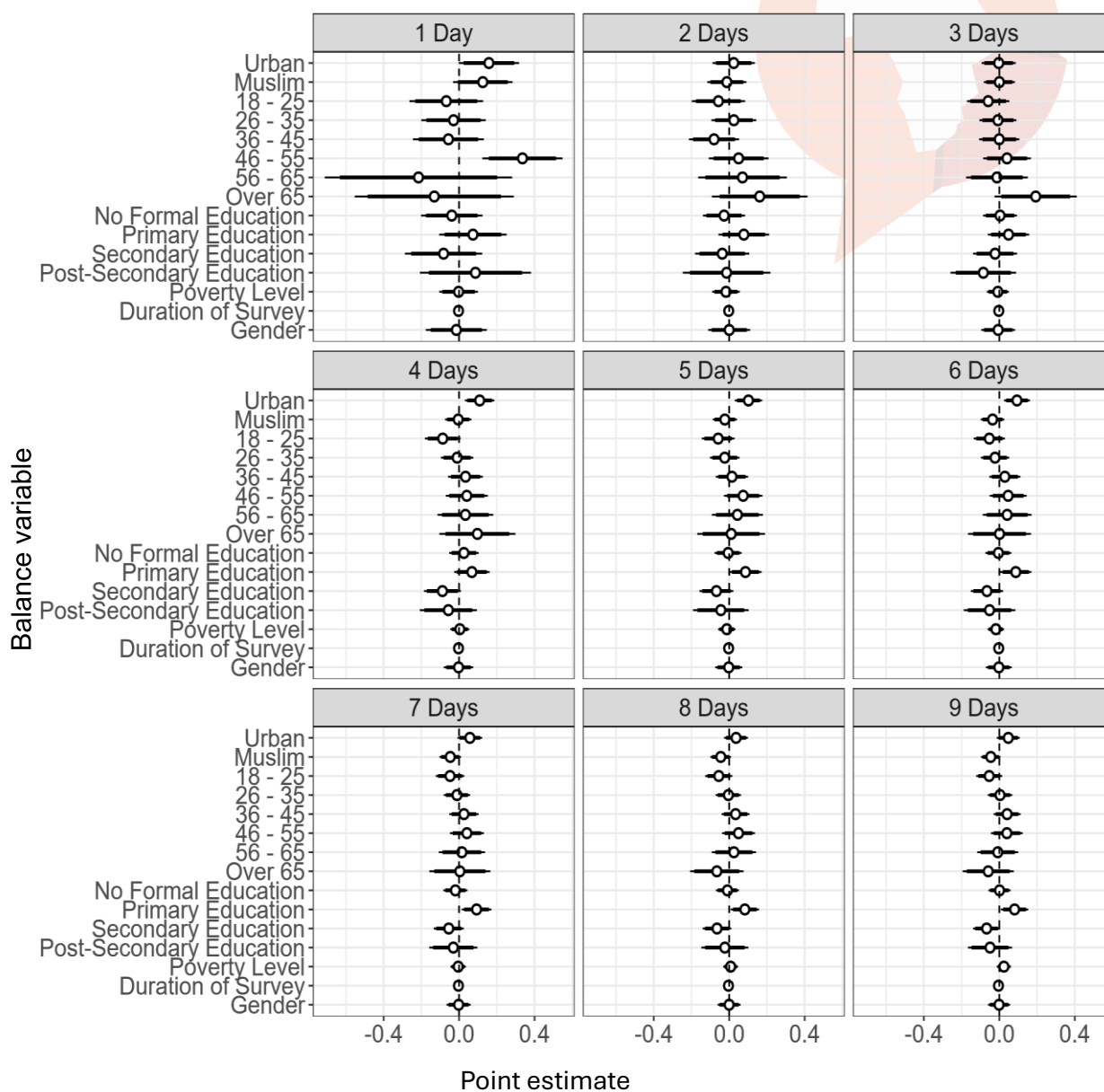
Notes: *Balance plots across treatment and control groups for different bandwidths of days around the treatment. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.*

**Figure A.4: Power analysis (Burkina Faso)**
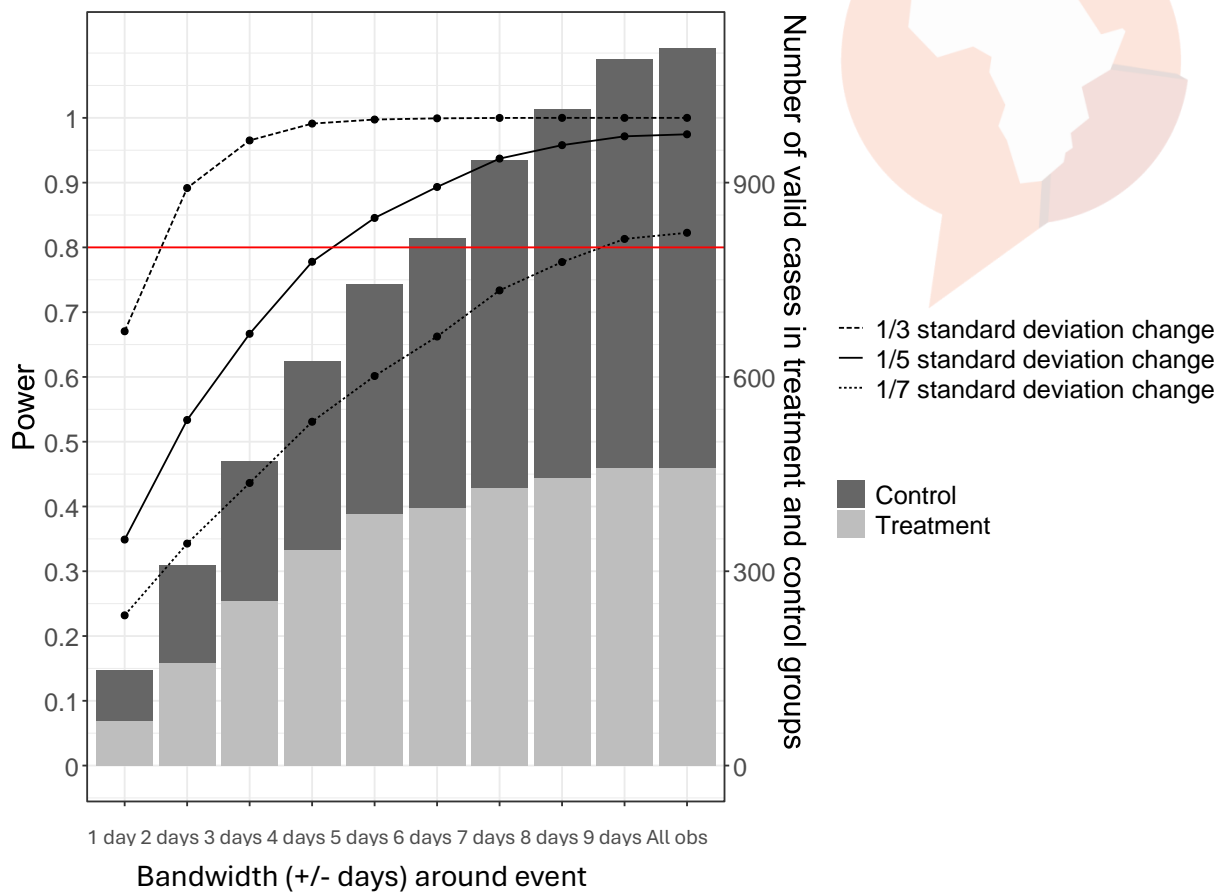
Notes: Power analysis for social trust index (0-1).

Figure A.5: Main specification point estimates by different bandwidths (Burkina Faso)
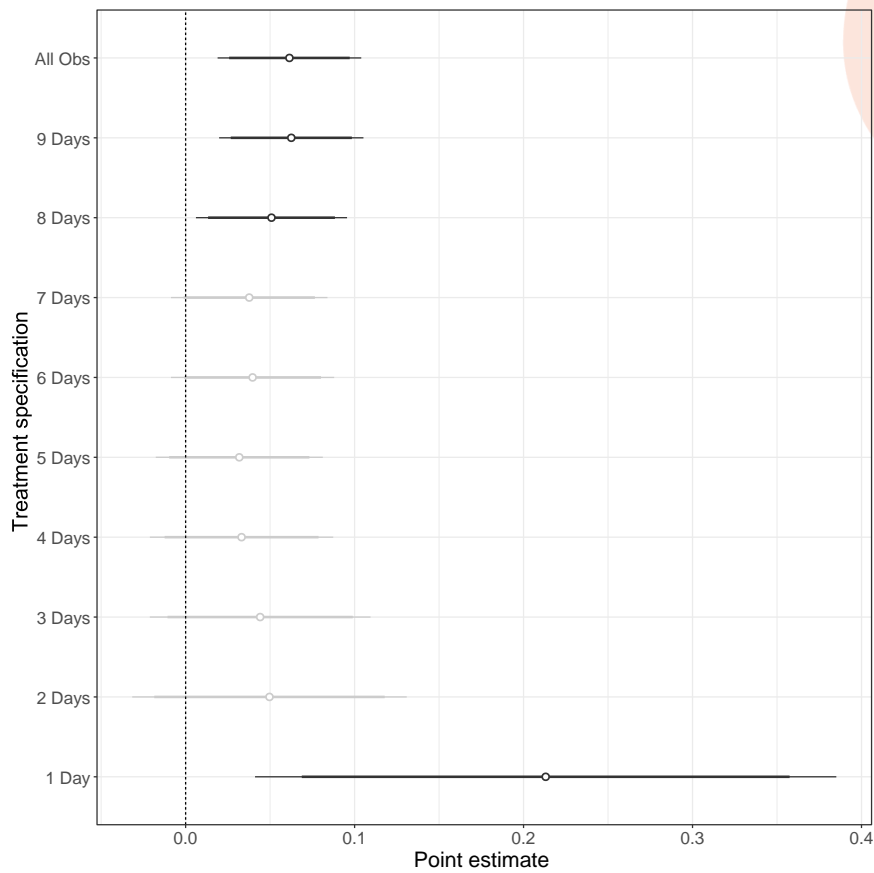
Notes: *Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively. Dark plots show estimates powered at 80% for effect size, light plots show underpowered estimates.*

Figure A.6: Effects of treatment on non-response (Burkina Faso)
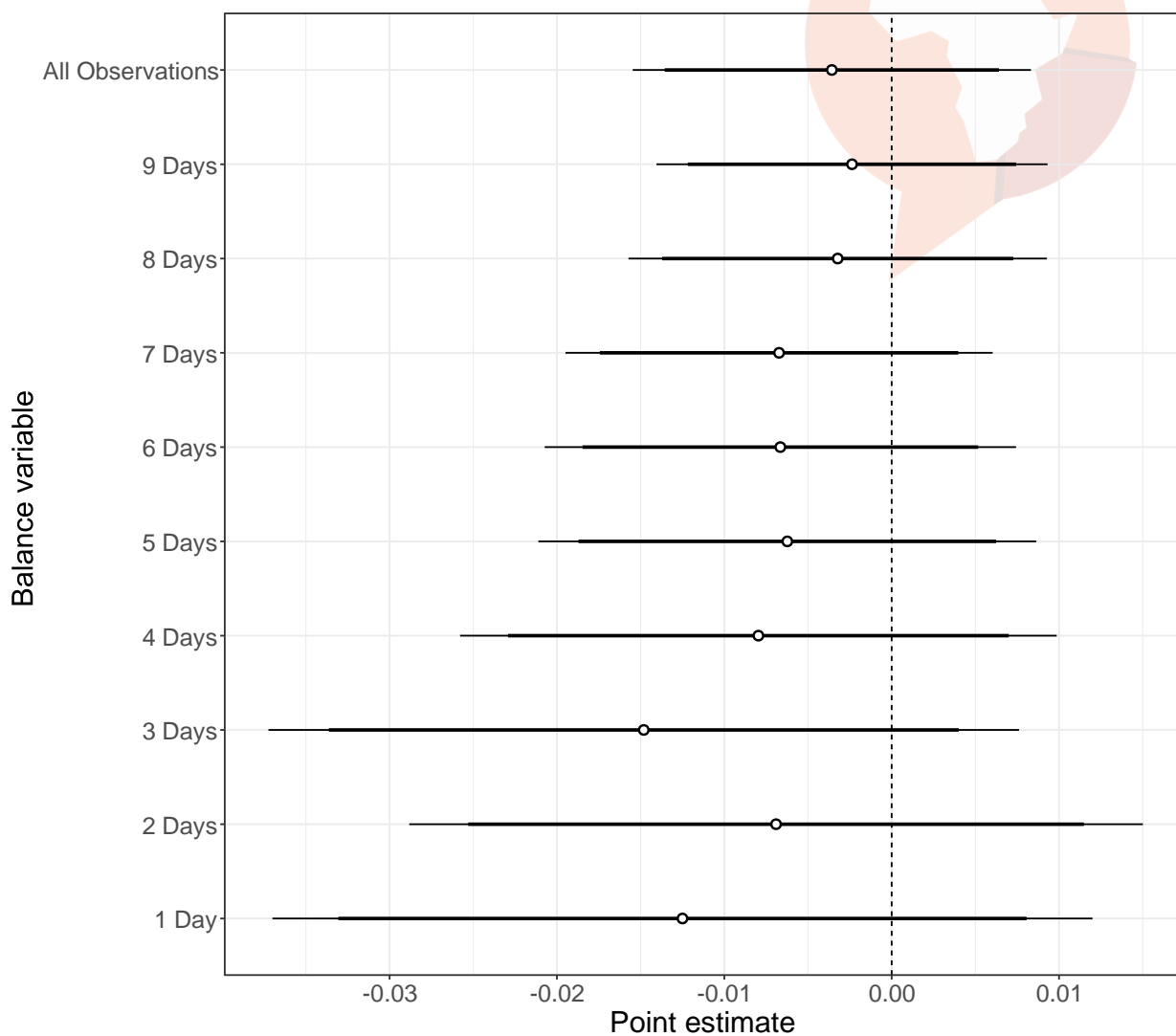
Notes: Treatment effects on the number of missing observations in our main trust index. Note that the maximum number of missing observations is 12. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.

Figure A.7: Mean levels of trust per day (Burkina Faso)
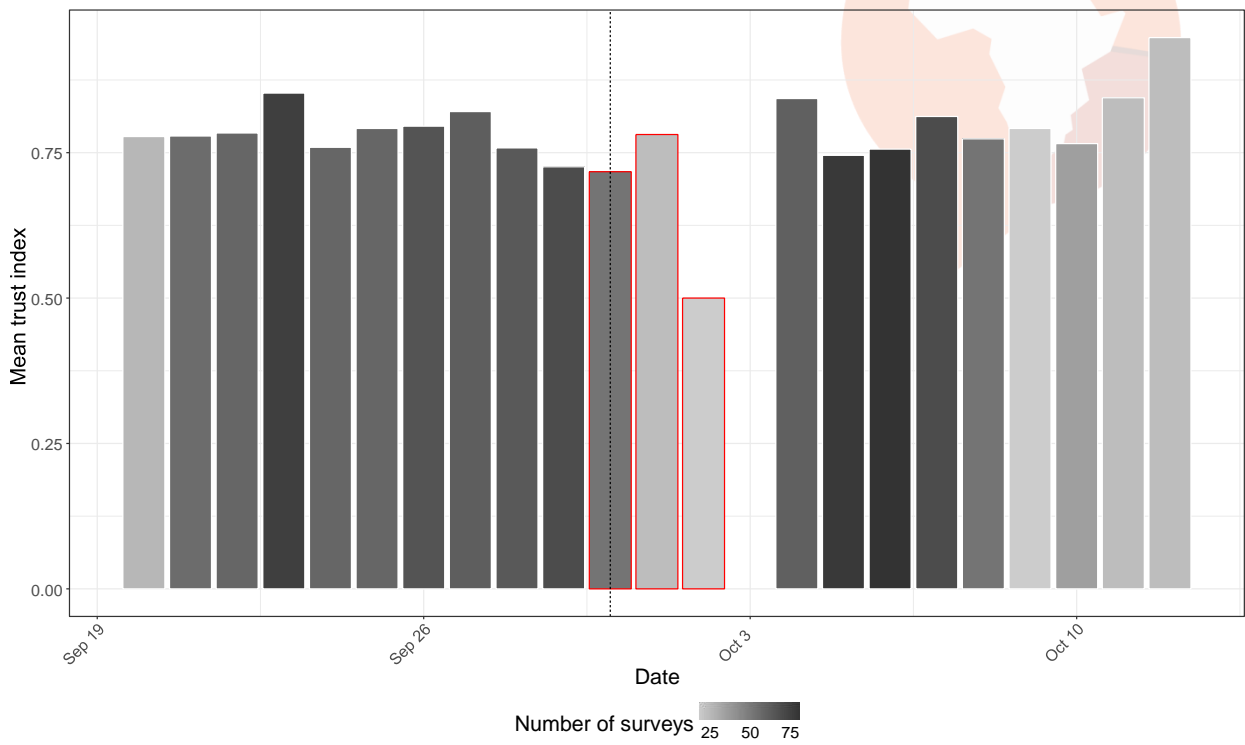
Notes: *Columns with red outlines are dropped from our analysis.*

Figure A.8: Effects of treatment on respondent characteristics (Burkina Faso)
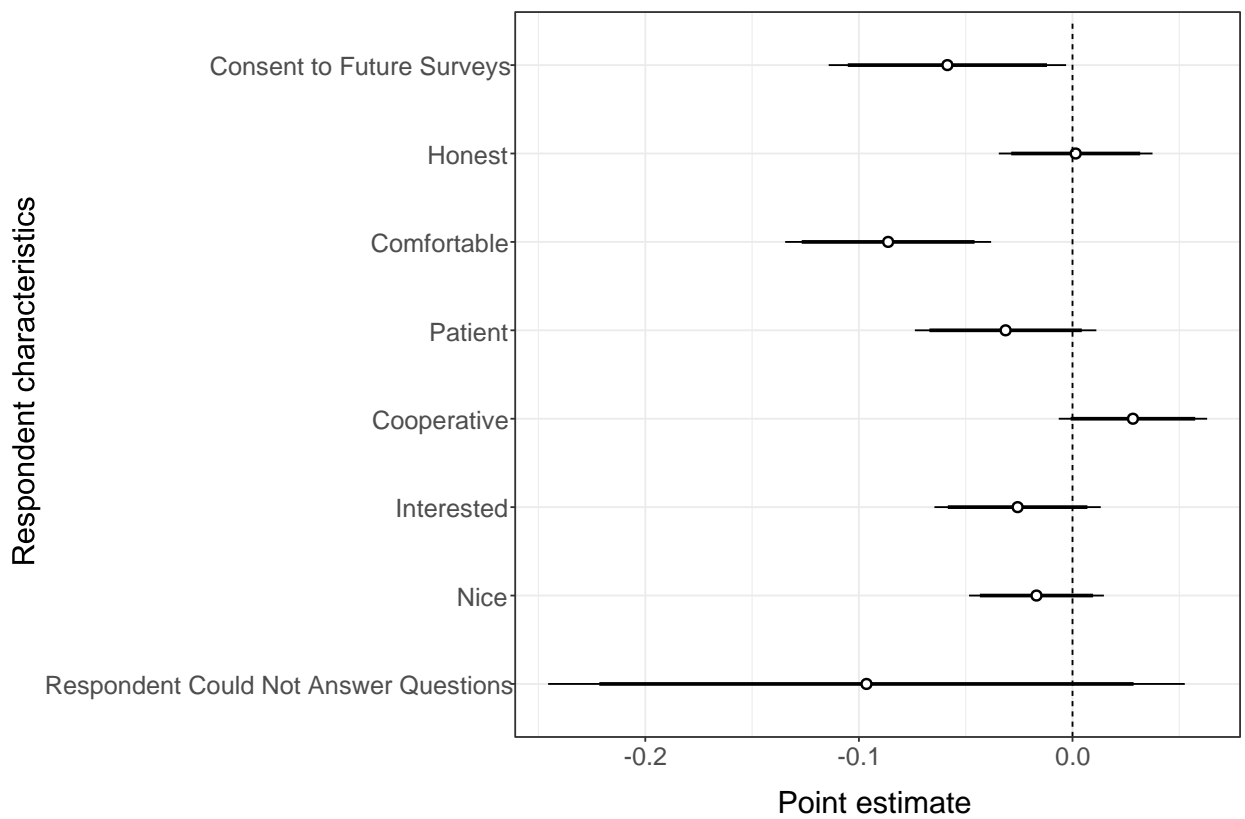
Notes: *Balance plots across treatment and control groups for respondent characteristics, as perceived by the interviewer. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.*

Figure A.9: Comparison of effects of coup types on trust index components

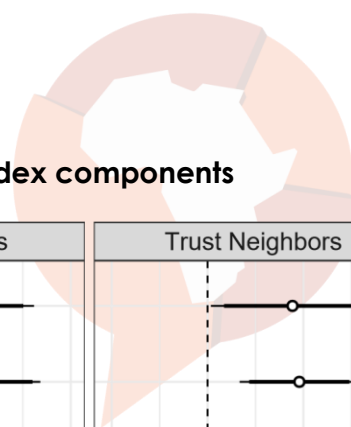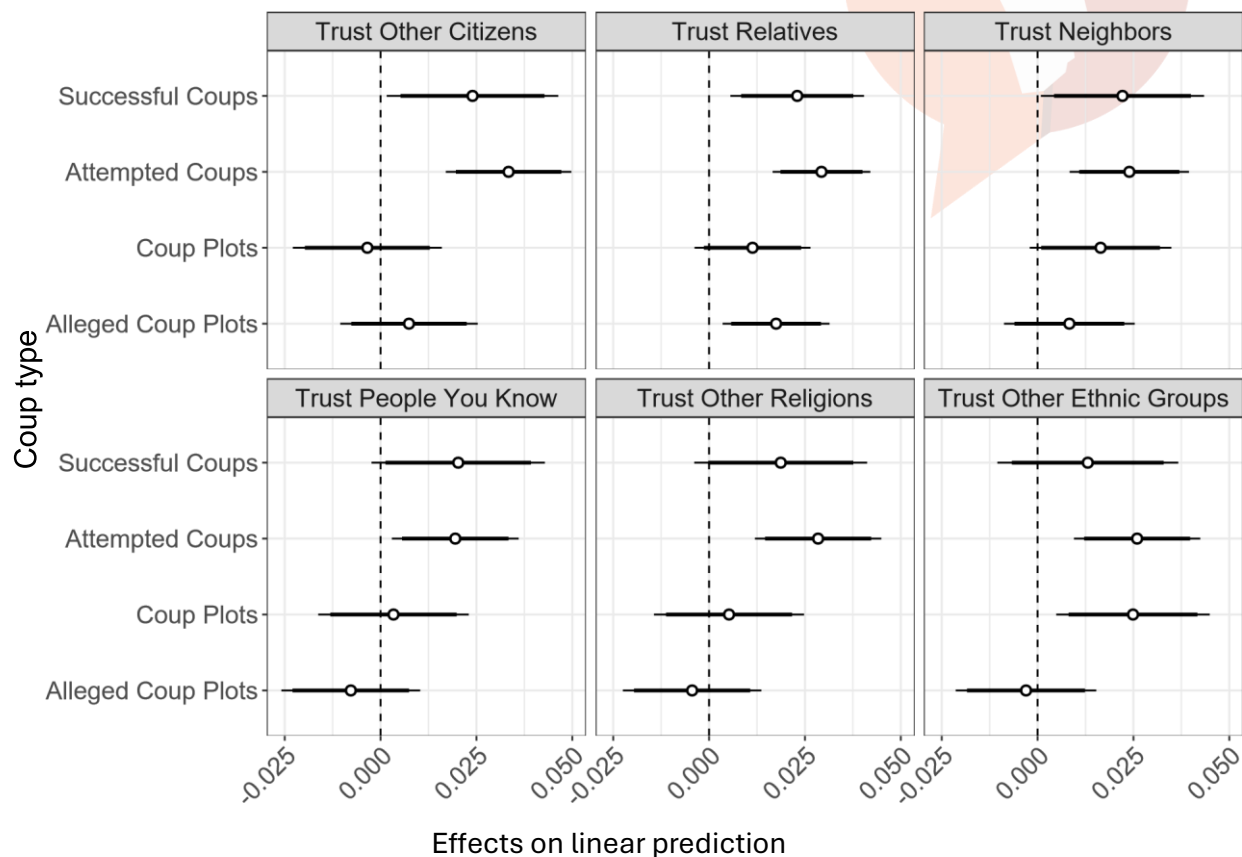*Notes: This plot breaks down the trust index presented in Figure 4. Thick and thin bars denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals, respectively.*

Table A.1: Coup years captured in the cross-national data

Country	Coups
Angola	
Benin	1963, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1972
Botswana	
Burkina Faso	1966, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1987, 2022
Cabo Verde	
Cameroon	
Congo-Brazzaville	1963, 1968, 1997
Côte d'Ivoire	1999
Eswatini	
Ethiopia	1974, 1977
Gabon	2023
Gambia	1994
Ghana	1966, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1981
Guinea	1984, 2008, 2021
Kenya	
Lesotho	1970, 1986, 1991
Liberia	1980, 1994
Madagascar	
Malawi	
Mali	1968, 2012, 2020, 2021
Mauritania	1978, 1980, 1984, 2005, 2008
Mauritius	
Morocco	
Mozambique	
Namibia	
Niger	1974, 1996, 2010, 2023
Nigeria	1966, 1975, 1983, 1985, 1993
Senegal	
Sierra Leone	1967, 1968, 1992, 1996, 1997
South Africa	
Sudan	1958, 1969, 1985, 1989, 2019, 2021
Tanzania	
Togo	1963, 1967, 2005
Tunisia	1987
Uganda	1971, 1980, 1985
Zambia	
Zimbabwe	

Note: *Data on coup occurrences come from Marshall and Marshall (2022).*

Table A.2: Cross-national data summary statistics

Statistic	Trust index	Coup exposure	Coups experienced	Age cohort	Female	Urban	Year of birth
Mean	0.62	1.33	0.76	2.67	1.5	1.46	1984.38
Median	0.67	1	0	2	1	1	1987
Min.	0	1	0	1	1	1	1909
Max.	1	2	6	6	2	2	2005
SD	0.36	0.47	1.3	1.46	0.5	0.5	14.8
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: This table presents summary statistics (described in each row of the first column) for key variables used in the cross-national analysis.

Table A.3: DV: Trust index

	Entropy weighting	Controls	No controls
Post-coup	0.05*	0.07**	0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Num. obs.	1108	1042	1108
Adj. R^2	0.08	0.10	0.07
RMSE	0.25	0.28	0.28
Effect size	6.92	9.46	7.44

*Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$.*

Table A.4: Trust index components (entropy balancing)

	Other citizens	Relatives	Neighbours	People you know	Other religions	Other ethnic groups
Post-coup	0.06	-0.02	0.01	0.13***	0.09**	0.05
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Num. obs.	1117	1113	1117	1120	1120	1120
Adj. R^2	0.07	0.01	0.04	0.09	0.03	0.07
RMSE	0.38	0.15	0.35	0.39	0.37	0.39
Effect size	7.63	-1.65	0.85	19.97	12.42	7.08

*Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$.*

Table A.5: Trust index components (0:2 = 0, 3 = 1, entropy balancing)

	Other citizens	Relatives	Neighbours	People you know	Other religions	Other ethnic groups
Post-coup	0.06	-0.03	0.01	0.09*	0.10*	0.07
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1117	1113	1117	1120	1120	1120
Adj. R^2	0.10	0.05	0.08	0.13	0.10	0.12
RMSE	0.43	0.32	0.44	0.39	0.42	0.41
Effect size	15.25	-3.95	2.30	32.92	25.16	18.14

*Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$.*

Table A.6: Trust index components (0 = 0, 1:3 = 1 entropy balancing)

	Other citizens	Relatives	Neighbours	People you know	Other religions	Other ethnic groups
Post-coup	0.03	-0.00	0.03·	0.06***	0.03·	0.04·
	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Num. obs.	1117	1113	1117	1120	1120	1120
Adj. R²	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.02
RMSE	0.22	0.08	0.19	0.22	0.19	0.23
Effect size	3.14	-0.05	2.74	7.09	2.95	4.10

Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.7: Trust index components (unadjusted, entropy balancing)

	Other citizens	Relatives	Neighbours	People you know	Other religions	Other ethnic groups
Post-coup	0.15*	-0.05	0.04	0.29***	0.22***	0.16*
	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Num. obs.	1117	1113	1117	1120	1120	1120
Adj. R²	0.09	0.04	0.06	0.14	0.06	0.10
RMSE	0.80	0.44	0.77	0.75	0.76	0.79
Effect size	7.12	-1.81	1.97	15.45	10.46	7.78

Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.8: Alternative trust index specifications (entropy balancing)

	Main trust specification	Unadjusted trust index	Trust index 0,1,2 = 0, 3 = 1	Trust index 0 = 0, 1,2,3 = 1
Post-coup	0.05*	0.13**	0.05·	0.03**
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.01)
Num. obs.	1108	1108	1108	1108
Adj. R²	0.08	0.12	0.15	0.02
RMSE	0.25	0.56	0.29	0.14
Effect size	6.92	6.07	10.28	3.26

Notes: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.9: Heterogeneity analysis: Social capital

	Attended a community meeting	Met with others to discuss a problem	Participated in a demonstration	Discussed politics with others
Post-coup	0.11***	0.11***	0.08**	0.11***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Heterogeneity variable	-0.02·	-0.03**	-0.03*	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Interaction effect	-0.02·	-0.02	-0.01	-0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Num. obs.	1107	1108	1097	1108
Adj. R²	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.10
RMSE	0.27	0.26	0.26	0.26

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.10: Heterogeneity analysis: Household characteristics

	House is connected to the grid	Received government COVID-19 assistance	Employed	Urban
Post-coup	0.08**	0.06*	0.07*	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)
Heterogeneity variable	-0.01	0.04	-0.05	
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	
Interaction effect	-0.04	-0.07	-0.02	0.04
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1108	1107	1107	1108
Adj. R²	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.09
RMSE	0.25	0.24	0.24	0.28

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.11: Heterogeneity analysis: Stateness

	Stateness index
Post-coup	0.07**
	(0.02)
Heterogeneity variable	0.00
	(0.00)
Interaction effect	0.00
	(0.01)
Num. obs.	1108
Adj. R²	0.09
RMSE	0.28

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ·p < 0.1.

Table A.12: Placebo tests on main trust specification

	Pre-treatment	Djibo attacks	Football: Comoros	Football: DRC	Afro-barometer: Round 4	Afro-barometer: Round 5	Afro-barometer: Round 8
Placebo	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.10	-0.08*	-0.06*
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Num. obs.	584	1113	1122	1101	1097	1114	1106
Adj. R^2	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.03	0.11	0.09
RMSE	0.28	0.32	0.31	0.37	1.07	0.43	0.31

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ˙p < 0.1.

Table A.13: Perceptions of the economy

	Economy better than past	Economy improve in future
Post-coup	-0.04	0.06
	(0.03)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1117	1059
Adj. R^2	0.02	0.02
RMSE	0.35	0.45
Effect size	-22.82	10.25

Notes: *Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ˙p < 0.1.*

Table A.14: Political trust index and components

	Political trust index	Trust in the president	Trust in electoral commission	Trust in council	Trust in police	Trust in military	Trust in courts
Post-coup	0.04˙	0.09*	0.07˙	-0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1040	1087	1080	1103	1120	1119	1095
Adj. R^2	0.11	0.08	0.04	0.14	0.08	0.01	0.04
RMSE	0.27	0.43	0.45	0.42	0.37	0.35	0.45
Effect size	7.18	16.50	14.90	-7.39	3.70	4.03	5.92

Note: Effect size is percentage of control mean. ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; ˙p < 0.1.

Information on Afrobarometer Round 9 sampling for Burkina Faso

It is important to note that the data-collection method itself was not influenced by the coup and thus differences in response patterns before and after the coup are substantially meaningful and not simply the result of measurement error. Based on a review of survey documentation provided by Afrobarometer and personal correspondence between the authors and the Afrobarometer manager responsible for conducting the survey in Burkina Faso in 2022, we confirm that the survey itself was not substantively affected by the coup in ways that would question our results in this paper.

Afrobarometer did not change or amend the survey method following the coup, and the fieldwork plan drawn up before the start of fieldwork (and before the coup) was completed as planned after the coup. As the fieldwork report confirms, the coup only "delayed" fieldwork (Afrobarometer, 2023). No changes to the sampling frame were made after the coup.[25] Several survey questions were dropped from the questionnaire after the coup. These questions pertained to the role of Parliament and evaluations of members of Parliament, the president, and the prime minister – all of whom were toppled in the coup. However, no survey items pertaining to our study were dropped or altered.

Of course, the wider security context in Burkina Faso and the Sahel region influenced the overall data collection in Burkina Faso in Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey. As the sampling report tells us, nine communes (municipalities) were dropped at the allocation stage due to insecurity.[26] In addition, 17 enumeration areas (EAs) were substituted during fieldwork. A majority of these substitutions were due to insecurity (although other EAs were substituted for other reasons, such as being inaccessible due to flooded rivers).[27] All 17 substitutions were in rural EAs. Fieldwork in the region of Burkina Faso called Sahel was especially impacted, as all six rural EAs required substitution with urban EAs due to insecurity. The EA substitutions due to insecurity occurred both before and after the coup.

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[25] The fieldwork report makes no reference to changes in the sampling frame due to the coup. In addition, the authors contacted Afrobarometer's project manager for francophone West Africa, who confirmed in an email dated 19 March 2024 that no changes were made following the coup.

[26] While the sampling report makes no reference to dates in this regard, the sampling frame would have been completed before fieldworker training commenced on 12 September 2022.

[27] The reason for a substitution is captured by the fieldwork supervisor, who makes the decision during the fieldworker team's attempt to reach the assigned EA. The replacement EA is however not chosen by the supervisor, but by Afrobarometer's national partner that is tasked with implementing the survey. The replacement EAs are based on the same sampling frame as the initial EA. The sampling frame is prepared by Afrobarometer's sampling consultants. Fieldworkers and fieldwork supervisors have no influence on the choice of substitution EAs. All EAs locations are verified by automatically captured geospatial information which is monitored during fieldwork by members of the Afrobarometer Data Management team.

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