

Power Play: Elite Networks and Authoritarian Leadership Challenges*

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Abstract

Under what conditions do challenge entry dictators consolidate power and when do they fail? I propose a network theory of authoritarian leadership challenges where leaders recruit their personal contacts, and identify two complementary commitment problems. The post-challenge commitment problem occurs because coalition members may be ambitious; it is ameliorated when the challenger is a bridge between otherwise disconnected groups, because these coalitions are unlikely to mobilize against them. However, solving this commitment problem exacerbates the pre-challenge commitment problem: because a bridge elite expects to be secure after seizing power, they cannot credibly commit to not challenging. Thus, bridge elites are more likely to consolidate power after challenge, but are also more likely to be purged. I test the theorized mechanisms using network data covering Nigeria’s 1983 and 1985 military coups, and show that network structure explains these coup leaders’ divergent regime consolidation outcomes including leadership tenure and institutional coup-proofing.

1 Introduction

In early 1985, Major-General Ibrahim Babangida distributed the 1978 political thriller *Power Play* to a coalition of Nigerian officers (Omoigui, n.d.[c]; The Sun 2018). In the film, Colonel Narriman deposes a repressive civilian dictatorship only to be arrested and executed by his co-conspirator, Colonel Zeller. Echoing the film, Babangida led his coalition to depose Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, only 20 months after they had placed him into power (Siollun 2025, 62). Naming himself president, Babangida reminded his conspirators: “congratulations, we made it but remember one thing, just like we took up guns and toppled a government, we also have to watch because somebody would one day want to topple us [...]” (83).

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Babangida’s coup demonstrates a stark reality: Dictators must systematically eliminate threats to their rule because they can never be certain that other elites lack power ambitions. This imperative is particularly acute for challenge entry dictators who take power by mobilizing elites to depose an incumbent leader.¹ By joining a leadership challenge, elites gain rare experience forcefully deposing a leader and are often elevated in rank (Goldring and Matthews 2023a, 1920). Successful challenges also bolster coalition members’ belief that future challenges will succeed, increasing the probability that coalition members join future challenges (Singh 2014). Indeed, challenges initiated by high ranking regime insiders succeed nearly 70% of the time (Peyton et al. 2026). This vulnerability leads to the following research question: under what conditions do challenge entry dictators consolidate power and when do they fail?

To answer this question, I theorize leadership challenges from a network perspective. In the theory, challengers leverage their personal contacts to recruit a coalition strong enough to depose the incumbent. Prospective challengers face complementary pre- and post-challenge commitment problems, both of which arise because some elites have hidden dictatorial ambitions. The *post-challenge commitment problem* concerns a prospective challengers’ security after taking power: because they may be ambitious, coalition members cannot credibly commit to not deposing their leader in the future. To overcome this problem, the challenger must mobilize a coalition of elites that is unlikely to mobilize without the challenger’s participation. A prospective challenger only expects to be secure when they are a “bridge” between members of their coalition, because the coalitions can only be recruited through the network. However, bridge elites’ higher expected security in office exacerbates their *pre-challenge commitment problem* vis-a-vis the dictator. Expecting greater security as dictators, bridge elites cannot credibly commit to not challenging the incumbent. Thus, the dictator has an incentive to purge bridge elites in case they have power ambitions, while unambitious bridge elites may lead a challenge to preempt a purge. The theory implies that bridge elites are more likely to consolidate power after a leadership challenge, but also that these elites are more likely to be purged.

To illustrate the theory’s insights, I collect an original network dataset of Nigerian military elites. I use this dataset in a process tracing study of two military coups in Nigeria in 1983 and 1985. I argue that the military head of state after the 1983 coup, Muhammadu Buhari, was incapable of securing his regime because his coup coalition was capable of mobilizing without his participation. Less than two years later, Ibrahim Babangida deposed Buhari. In contrast to Buhari, Babangida was a bridge node in the Nigerian military elite network. As a result, his coalition could not mobilize against him and he quickly consolidated power. Close temporal proximity between the two coups holds time invariant confounders constant across the two cases.

I contribute to several important literatures on autocratic politics. As I argue, challenge entry

1. I use the term “leadership challenge” to describe irregular replacement of leaders via threatened or actual use of force (Jost and Mattingly 2025). When referring to leadership challenges by military officers, I use the more specific term coup.

dictators that “bridge” multiple groups of elites should be more likely to consolidate power because they are unlikely to be deposed by their own coalition, a highly threatening set of actors. As such, I contribute novel hypotheses to the core literature on autocratic leadership survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Bueno De Mesquita and Smith 2017; Svolik 2012; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018; Sudduth and Bell 2018). Furthermore, bridge elites’ greater initial security should allow them to implement more coup-proofing measures, a contribution to the literature on coup-proofing strategies (Sudduth 2017a, 2017b; De Bruin 2018; Kyzym 2025). Finally, my theory suggests that autocrats should manage their elite networks to suppress bridge elites, with implications for studies of cadre rotation, promotion, and elite repression (Woldense 2018; Bokobza et al. 2022; Goldring and Matthews 2023a, 2023b; Jost and Mattingly 2025; Saijo 2025).

2 Literature Review

Irregular leader removals are of central interest to comparative politics scholars, who have long observed that elite coordinated leader removals (often called military and non-military coups) are dictators’ modal non-constitutional exit pathway (Svolik 2009, 478). Structural factors such as a country’s wealth or regime type predict military coup attempts, while coup success is predicted primarily by the outcome of past military coups and coup makers’ rank (Singh 2014). While some scholarship considers how a leader’s entry mode predicts their mode of exit (Sudduth and Bell 2018), less attention has been paid to how challenge entry dictators protect themselves from their own coalition.

There is good reason to expect that challenge entry leaders are particularly vulnerable to their own coalition. Successfully executing a leadership challenge gives coalition members practice at removing an incumbent by irregular means. Singh (2014)’s study of military coups in Ghana documents the art of coup-making, where officers strategically manipulate public information to create the impression that coups are *faits accomplis*. In addition to gaining experience, coalition members also demonstrate to the challenger entry leader that they are untrustworthy precisely because they are willing to depose an incumbent (Goldring and Matthews 2023a, 1915). Further, coalition members are often elevated to greater positions of power that may increase their ability to launch subsequent challenges (1920).

Existing scholarship documents many ways that a dictator can mitigate challenge risk including cadre rotation, counterbalancing, and purges. Woldense (2018) argues that cadre rotation prevents elites from forming connected groups that can challenge the dictator. However, cadre rotation cannot mitigate the threat posed by a challenge entry dictator’s coalition because coalition members’ relationships predate the regime. Counterbalancing and purges are more viable in comparison. Counterbalancing—the creation of additional paramilitary organizations—creates incentives for officers to resist a coup attempt (De Bruin 2018) while purges remove threatening rivals (Sudduth 2017b; Goldring and Matthews 2023b; Saijo

2025). However, both strategies pose a dilemma: if a dictator’s risk of irregular removal is already high, coup-proofing risks triggering a leadership challenge (Sudduth 2017b). In fact, De Bruin (2018) finds that the creation of additional paramilitary units increases the incidence of coup attempts. As a result, both counterbalancing and purges are most likely when coup risk is temporarily low (Sudduth 2017a, 2017b). Counterbalancing and purges increase following failed coups for similar reasons (Kyzym 2025; Bokobza et al. 2022).

However, counterbalancing and purges are a risky strategy when used against a challenge entry leaders’ own challenge coalition (hereafter, their coalition) precisely because the coalition is particularly capable of removing their own leader. Because the challenge coalition mobilized together to depose the previous incumbent, they may already be organized into informal groups that can mobilize against their challenge entry leader. Like cadre rotation, counterbalancing will be ineffective if elites’ informal connections bridge across nominally independent coercive organizations. A challenge entry leader can prevent collusion across counterbalanced coercive organs by appointing non-coalition members to lead them. However, the coalition may decide to rebel rather than allow their power to be eroded. The same is true of purges, which are theorized to have a delayed effect on challenge risk (Sudduth 2017b, 1773).

Finally, successful challenges are also theorized to increase challenge entry leaders security in the short term by signalling strength. Here, elites’ willingness to rebel temporarily decreases after a challenge because a large number of elites demonstrated that they were willing to use force to place the challenger into power (1779). However, this signalling mechanism is less likely to discourage challenges from within the coalition because coalition members are more likely to have private information about dissatisfaction within the coalition. Similarly, coalition members observe intra-coalition power struggles before the challenge entry dictator takes power. Thus, while challenge entry leaders face a temporary decrease in challenge risk from elites in general, the same cannot be expected for threats from the challenge coalition.

3 Theory

I theorize an elite’s decision to lead a challenge as shaped by two considerations: the risk of targeted purges under the current dictator, and their expected security as dictator. Thus, leadership challenges have two stages: the mobilization stage and the post-challenge stage. In the mobilization stage, challengers must recruit powerful elites without exposing the plot to the incumbent. To do so, challengers mobilize elites that are in their network of personal contacts. The mobilization stage is analogous to Singh’s (2014, 79–80) conspiracy phase, or Jost and Mattingly’s (2025, 3) civil-military coordination problem.²

2. I use the term mobilization to distinguish this phase from Singh’s (2014) execution phase, where he theorizes coups as a formal coordination game where manipulation of public information is key to coup success. By contrast, mobilizing conspirators in the lead up to a challenge requires that elites make choices about joining or opposing coups under a near total dearth of public information. As I argue below, elites use their network of personal contacts to screen potential

However, mobilization is only half of the story. Expected post-challenge security should also influence an elite's decision to take power. From any elite's perspective, challenging is preferable only if they expect to be secure in office. At its core, the problem is that dictators and prospective challengers are always uncertain about whether other elites harbour dictatorial ambitions (Egorov and Sonin 2011, 906). For instance, Paraguay's dictator Alfredo Stroessner was deposed by Andrés Rodríguez, an ally who played a key role in the coup that installed Stroessner 35 years earlier. Similarly, Nicolas Grunitzky became Togo's second President in 1963 after a coup organized by Gnassingbé Eyadéma. Four years later, Eyadéma deposed Grunitzky, who fled into exile. Loyalty can never be taken for granted because ambitious elites always have an incentive to misrepresent their true preferences; they cannot credibly commit to remaining loyal in the future.

Elite network structure is the solution to this commitment problem: because mobilizing a challenge requires that elites leverage their personal contacts, network structure influences whether elites can depose the dictator, and by extension, whether a challenger can be deposed after taking power. A prospective challenger cannot know whether members of their coalition have their own dictatorial ambitions, but they can assess whether their coalition will be capable of mobilizing against them. As I argue, challengers expect to be more secure in office when they are a unique bridge between two or more otherwise disconnected groups of elites in the network, because this means that there are few alternative pathways through which the coalition can mobilize. As shorthand, bridge elites can mobilize what I term a "unique coalition:" a coalition that is unlikely to mobilize without the bridge node's participation. Because a unique coalition lacks alternative pathways to mobilize against their challenge leader, they can credibly commit to remaining loyal in the future. For the same reason, challengers with a unique coalition can credibly commit to not purging their coalition members because these purges are not security enhancing.

Crucially, the very fact that bridge elites have credible commitment with their unique coalition exacerbates their pre-challenge commitment problem with the incumbent dictator. Like all elites, bridge elites cannot credibly signal their lack of ambition. Unlike other elites, however, they expect to be more secure after taking power. For this reason, bridge elites cannot credibly commit to not challenging the dictator. It follows that the dictator cannot credibly commit to not purging bridge elites. Thus, regardless of their true ambitions, bridge elites are likely to be purged. They may decide to depose the incumbent not out of ambition, but to preempt a purge.

3.1 Setup

I assume that dictators seek to remain in office and are only removed from power when a challenger mobilizes a coalition against them. However, because dictators cannot rule alone, there are elites that control resources in society (troops, state owned and private enterprises, etc). Elites' support for the

co-conspirators and use leverage to induce cooperation precisely because there is no public information to inform elites' choice to join or resist a challenge.

dictator is passive; the dictator continues to rule as long as the elites do not actively mobilize against the dictator. Challengers depose the dictator when they mobilize enough elites to overcome the threshold τ^* . Elites are mobilized into challenges through their network contacts (discussed in Section 3.2 below).

At the same time, the dictator can attempt to secure themselves by purging those they perceive as threatening. The dictator chooses to purge and elites choose whether to mobilize a challenge; if both choose challenge and purge respectively, the purges occur before a challenge with some probability p . If the challenge succeeds, the incumbent is removed, and the challenge leader becomes the incumbent. If a purge succeeds, the target elite is removed and the dictator remains in power.

I assume that all elites have a strict preference to be an elite rather than be excluded, but only some prefer to be the dictator rather than an elite. That is, most elites are a satisfied type, meaning that they are indifferent to being a dictator rather than an elite. By contrast, ambitious types prefer to be the dictator rather than an elite. Crucially, elites cannot observe each other's type. Thus, neither the dictator or elites know with certainty whether other elites are satisfied or ambitious types. Furthermore, it follows that elites are uncertain about whether the dictator thinks that they are satisfied or ambitious.

3.2 Coalition Mobilization

I start from the premise that elites join challenges primarily to obtain rewards and avoid punishment by successful challengers. That is, they are not motivated by loyalty or trust. Nonetheless, network connections are necessary for coalition recruitment because the challenger and recruits must choose who to cooperate with and how to induce participation. In a word, challenger and recruits must be legible to one another, where legibility means that elite A can assess whether elite B's action (actual or proposed) is consistent with elite A's past behaviour. When elites have significant personal histories of direct interaction, they gain legibility by accumulating information that allows them to make inferences about each other's idiosyncratic preferences, risk-acceptance, and capabilities.

Legibility is distinct from close ties often described as loyalty. Loyalty can be understood as a preference for cooperation with one actor over another, even where this cooperation entails additional costs (see Hirschman 1970). Alternatively, loyalty can be understood as a rational strategy where repeated exchange increases the certainty of payoffs for cooperating with one actor over another (see e.g. Shih 2008, 52; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, 66). Legibility is closer to this rationalist understanding of loyalty, but is less stringent because it does not require repeated exchange in the sense of active cooperation; legibility may be gained simply by spending time in contact with someone.³

Legibility makes recruitment possible by two mechanisms: screening and leverage. Screening facili-

3. Because legibility does not require repeated exchange, it is logically prior to rationalist loyalty. Put differently, loyalty relations in the rationalist sense are a subset of legible relations. Similarly, trust may be defined such that "An individual (A) trusts another individual (B) whenever A is confident in some degree that B will undertake to do what he (B) has promised to do" (Breton and Wintrobe 1982, 5). Legibility is a necessary condition for a type of qualified trust, where A trusts B because A has judged that B's action is consistent with B's preferences and capabilities.

tates recruitment because the challenger must choose who to recruit knowing that some elites are more likely to defect to the incumbent. Additionally, the challenger can use information gained through prior interaction to infer whether an elite is willing and able to depose the incumbent. By contrast, leverage operates through persuasion. The challenger can leverage elites' idiosyncratic preferences by offering them a tailored package of rewards (or punishments) conditional on (non-) cooperation. Put differently, legibility with an elite gives the challenger knowledge of which selective rewards and punishments will induce cooperation.

From the perspective of a potential recruit, screening and leverage mitigate two risks: entrapment and bluffs. Entrapment is a risk precisely because of the low trust autocratic environment, where elites may attempt to eliminate one another by informing the dictator of a possible challenge. Entrapment was exactly what Lt-Colonel Ibrahim Babangida first feared when Lt-Colonel Shehu Yar'Adua first broached the topic of ousting Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon in 1975 (Agbese 2012, 109). When a challenger is legible to an elite, that elite can screen genuine recruitment efforts from disingenuous recruitment. From the recruit's perspective, leverage allows the elite to estimate whether promises or threats made by the challenger are within the challenger's expected capabilities. For example, does the challenger have other contacts that are more likely choices for the lucrative appointment? Similarly, has the challenger previously demonstrated a willingness to follow through on threats?

To summarize, screening allows elites to choose who to cooperate with, while leverage gives elites the ability to make offers that are appropriate and believable for the other elite. Legibility is required for both screening and leverage. As a result, legibility within a pair of elites is a necessary but not sufficient condition for coalition recruitment. More formally, an elite joins the challenge with probability $0 < c \leq 1$ *iff* they are connected to the challenge leader (they are mutually legible). In the toy examples below (Figures 1 and 2), I allow $c = 1$ to simplify the theory's illustration. In practice, however, c will always be less than 1 because information gained through prior interaction allows elites to screen allies. In many cases, legibility reveals that an elite is unreliable or duplicitous. Despite this, elites should prefer not to initiate or cooperate with recruitment attempts when they are not mutually legible, because they have no leverage and cannot screen the other elite. Finally, lower values of c can reflect idiosyncratic factors such as overall satisfaction with the incumbent or measurement error. Where elites are more satisfied with the incumbent, c will be closer to 1. In studies where connections are measured using elites' organizational co-appearances as a proxy, c will be closer to 0 because many observed connections will capture superficial or non-existent relationships.

3.3 Complementary Commitment Problems

I now explain why bridge elites' network position generates credible commitment with their prospective coalitions, while exacerbating their pre-challenge commitment problem with the dictator. Recall that

most elites are satisfied types, meaning that their only real preference is to avoid being purged. However, because it is always possible to be purged, ambitious type elites always have an incentive to conceal their true ambitions. Thus, any elite's promise to not challenge a dictator—either in the present period or the future—is inherently untrustworthy if that elite has the capacity to mobilize $\tau > \tau^*$ elites. Similarly, satisfied types cannot credibly commit to not join future challenge coalitions because they primarily wish to avoid punishment by joining the winning side. For this reason, coalitions that are capable of removing their challenge leader have a post-challenge commitment problem: they cannot credibly commit to leaving the challenger in power in the future. Because coalitions are recruited through the network, credible commitment requires that the challenger has a unique coalition: a coalition that is unlikely to be mobilized without the challenger's participation.

Figure 1 illustrates why a challenger needs a unique coalition, which is only possible when the challenger is a bridge between otherwise disconnected groups in the network. As laid out above, nodes are elites and the connections between them indicate that the two elites are mutually legible, meaning that they can recruit each other into coalitions with probability c . For these simplified illustrations, I use $c = 1$ and $\tau^* = .5$. Node position remains fixed across periods. Although the challenger in T1 has enough connections to recruit three out of five elites ($\tau = .6$), the same coalition can also be mobilized by a new challenger in the next round: thus, the coalition is not unique.

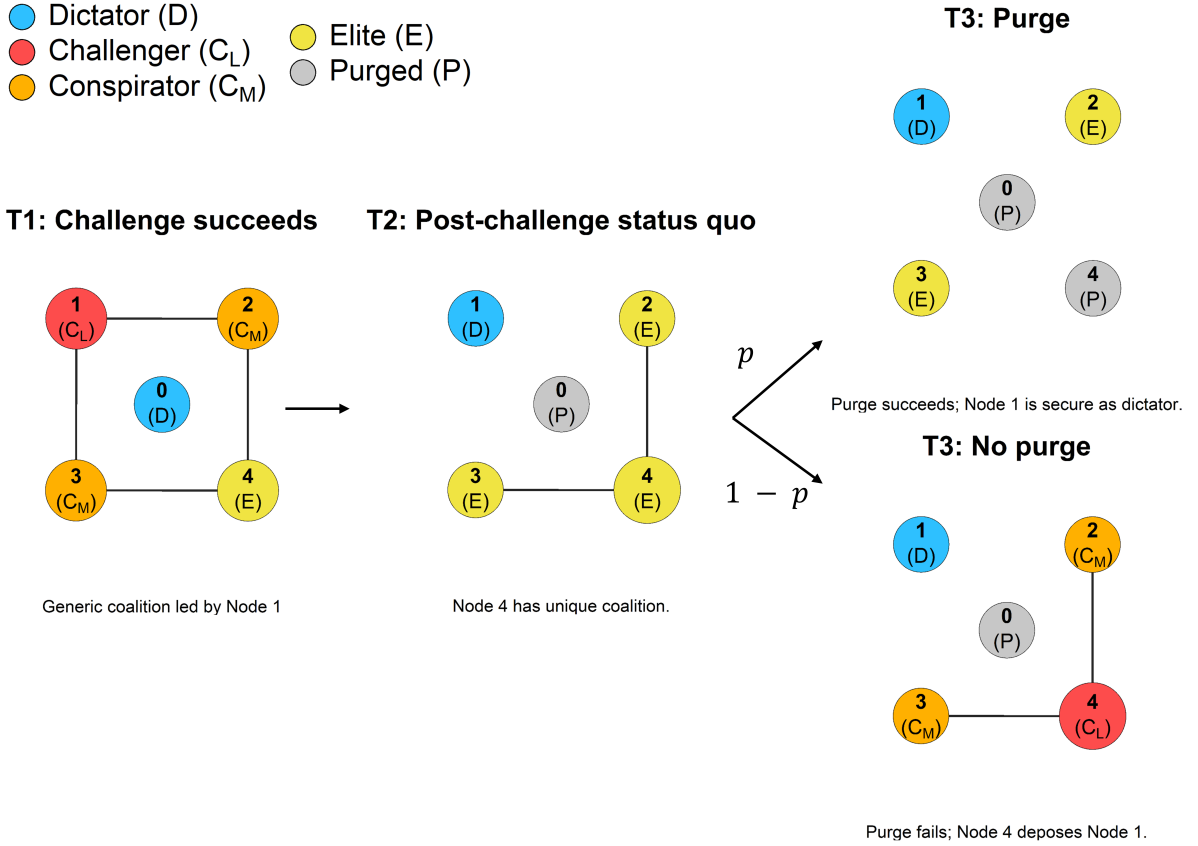
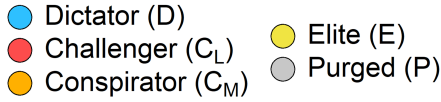


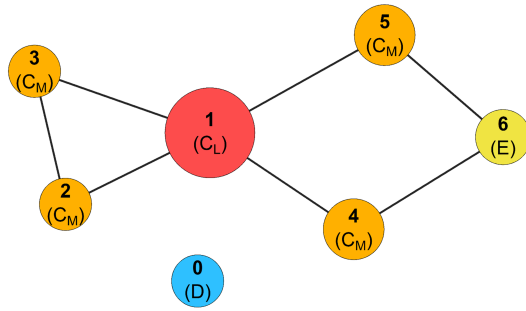
Figure 1: Node position remains fixed across periods. Nodes scaled by betweenness centrality. The incumbent's edges are removed because elites support the incumbent by default.

In fact, no elite in T1 has a unique coalition. As a result, any elite that leads a challenge in T1 risks being removed in the post-challenge period. In fact, Node 1 faces both commitment problems in T2. The post-challenge commitment problem arises because they do not have a unique coalition; Node 4 can re-mobilize their coalition in T2 and cannot credibly signal that they are satisfied. Thus, Node 1 can only secure themselves by purging Node 4. However, Node 1's security is further threatened by the fact that Node 4 has a unique coalition in T2. While Node 4 cannot credibly signal a lack of ambition, they do expect to be secure after taking power. This induces the pre-challenge commitment problem because even a satisfied Node 4 prefers to challenge rather than risk being purged.

In this example, whether Node 1 (or any other elite node) should lead a challenge in T1 depends on their type and the value of p . If they are an ambitious type and p is high, they should depose Node 0 because they can most likely satisfy their ambitions by taking power and swiftly purging their (possible) rival. If p is low, an ambitious type elite may still prefer the status quo because the risk of taking power and failing to purge is worse than the status quo. By contrast, satisfied type elites are unlikely to lead a challenge in T1 even if p is high. Satisfied types prefer the T1 status quo because purges are not security enhancing for the T1 dictator (Node 0): if Node 0 purges in T1, they induce the pre-challenge commitment problem for whichever node can still lead a challenge in T2. Hence, a satisfied type elite knows that they will not be purged given the T1 status quo and therefore has no incentive to challenge.

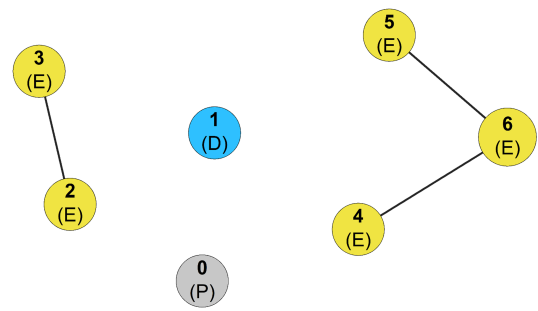


T1: Pre-challenge commitment problem



Unique coalition led by Node 1

T2: Post-challenge status quo



Node 1 is secure as dictator.

Figure 2: Node 1 has a unique coalition and therefore has a pre-challenge commitment problem. Nodes scaled by betweenness centrality. The incumbent's edges are removed because elites support the incumbent by default.

Figure 2 shows a network configuration where the challenger has a unique coalition by virtue of their position as a bridge. In network terms, they have high betweenness centrality, meaning that they are the shortest path between a large proportion of unique pairs of nodes in the network. Nodes with high

betweenness centrality are well positioned to fracture the network into disconnected groups. Once the network fractures, the remaining connected groups are too small to meet the coalition’s win threshold τ^* . After a successful coup with a unique coalition, no challenger is capable of mobilizing the absolute majority required to depose the new incumbent.⁴

Thus, high betweenness centrality mitigates the post-coup commitment problem for any prospective challenger because it prevents their coalition from mobilizing against them. For this reason, the challenger in T1 does not need to purge any elites to secure their rule. Moreover, this property is unique to betweenness centrality. For instance, degree centrality captures the total quantity of an elite’s connections in the network. In my theory as well as others (e.g. Jost and Mattingly 2025), degree centrality allows challengers to mobilize strong coalitions. However, a strong coalition is not necessarily unique to the challenger; strong coalitions may occur in densely connected networks with many redundant pathways between elites. Coalitions are only unique when the challenger has high betweenness.

High betweenness elites are therefore highly threatening to an incumbent dictator precisely because they have a unique coalition. Similar to Figure 1’s T2 dictator, the Figure 2 dictator in T1 has a pre-challenge commitment problem vis-a-vis the challenger. Because the dictator does not know whether the challenger is an ambitious or satisfied type, they have a strong incentive to preempt the threat by purging first. This in turn motivates the high betweenness elite in T1 to challenge even if they are a satisfied type. In this way, high betweenness induces the pre-commitment problem between a viable challenger and the dictator: neither can credibly commit to not striking first, because a first strike is security enhancing for both the challenger and dictator. Failing to strike first risks permanent elimination for both dictators and high betweenness elites.

4 Observable Implications

This theory produces numerous observable implications. Here I choose to highlight three observable implications related to why some challenge entry leaders are more likely to consolidate their regime than others. First, challenge entry dictators with high betweenness centrality should be less likely to face subsequent challenges from the coalition that placed them into power. Instead, high betweenness challenge entry leaders face challenges from outside of their coalition or at most one subgroup of their coalition, which should be less likely to succeed. Related to the first, the second implication is that dictators should be more likely to purge high betweenness elites, particularly those that link powerful elites with a history of joining leadership challenges.

Third, high betweenness challenge entry dictators should be more able to use coup-proofing strategies such as counterbalancing or surveillance for two reasons. First, as Sudduth (2017a) argues, coup proofing

4. This mechanism is similar to Padgett and Ansell (1993), who argue that the Medici’s betweenness centrality prevented other elite families from coordinating against them.

risks triggering a challenge by making future challenges less likely to succeed. A higher betweenness challenge entry dictator is relatively protected from this logic because high betweenness implies that challenges in the current period must come from a smaller or less experienced coalition that are less likely to succeed (as in the first observable implication). Second, coup-proofing efforts may create a perception of insecurity, for instance by making an elite suspect that the dictator is planning a purge (akin to a security dilemma, e.g.; Tang 2009). Such perceptions are particularly likely to trigger a preemptive challenge if there are other high betweenness elites in the network, because these elites have a pre-challenge commitment problem. However, challenge entry dictators with high betweenness are protected from this threat because their betweenness mechanically implies that other elites have lower betweenness.

5 Research Design

To test the theorized mechanisms, I combine process-tracing with an original network dataset to compare two Nigerian coup episodes (1983, 1985) in a temporal design. The 1983 coup placed Major-General Muhammadu Buhari into office. However, he was removed in 1985 in a coup led by Major-General Ibrahim Babangida. Crucially, Babangida’s coup was executed by nearly the same coalition that placed Buhari into office 20 months earlier. By contrast, Babangida was not vulnerable to his own coalition; he would step down after eight years under general popular pressure to end military rule. Taken together, the two cases offer differing outcomes separated by a relatively short period of 20 months. Temporal proximity allows for a “loosely controlled” comparison between the two leaders’ coups and resulting regimes by holding slow-moving temporal confounders constant (Chyzh 2026). Table 1 compares both cases across the independent variable (betweenness centrality) and three dependent variables that capture each leaders’ consolidation of power (coup proofing, mode of exit, leadership tenure).

Table 1: Comparison of Network Metrics and Outcomes: Buhari vs. Babangida

Leader	Outcomes			
	Betweenness	Counterbalancing	Mode of exit	Tenure
Maj.-Gen. Buhari	Low	Low	Removed by own coalition	1.7 years
Maj.-Gen. Babangida	High	High	Voluntary resignation	8 years

I pair an original network dataset of Nigerian military elites with process-tracing to demonstrate the mechanism linking each leaders’ betweenness and security (or insecurity) from removal by their own coalition. In a most similar design, process tracing leverages within-case observations to show that differences on a key independent variable are related to differences in outcomes (Brady, Collier, and Bennett 2010, 208). To do this, I first show that connections observed in the data are consistent with my

argument that network connections are a necessary condition for coalition recruitment (Sections 7.2 and 8.2). I then show (Section 7.3) that Buhari’s low betweenness meant that he faced the post-challenge commitment problem, meaning that his coalition was capable of mobilizing against him. At the same time, Buhari’s insecurity was exacerbated by Babangida’s high betweenness centrality, which induced a pre-challenge commitment problem—Buhari and Babangida were effectively in T2 of Figure 1. Taken together, these two factors meant that Buhari’s limited coup proofing efforts were plausible triggers for Babangida’s challenge. Finally, I show that betweenness (and the resulting pre-challenge commitment problem) best explains who Babangida chose to purge, and that Babangida only began to implement his aggressive counterbalancing strategy after he had resolved remaining pre-challenge commitment problems by eliminating alternative bridge elites (Section 8.3).

5.1 Network Data

I leverage recent advances in natural language processing (NLP) to collect data on Nigerian military elite networks from 1980 to 1990. To begin, I collected a text corpus of Wikipedia articles about Nigerian military officers. To collect the text corpus, I identified relevant articles iteratively through their Wikipedia categories, expanding the list of categories as new articles were identified. This process yielded 2521 unique articles that were filtered to 1048 articles, excluding articles which did not mention Nigeria or a birth date later than 1890. Articles were cleaned and split into individual raw text paragraphs.

Using a self-hosted and version-controlled open-weights language model (Qwen-3.5-27b), I extracted biographical data consisting of actor names, their organizational affiliations, and direct relationships with other actors. Metadata linked to organizations and direct relationships such as job titles, geographic locations, and dates were also extracted. As a final step in the NLP pipeline, I classified organizations and direct relationships using a pre-defined set of categories. Text extraction and classification performance was measured on a random sample of article chunks, the results of which are reported in Appendix A. Additionally, I validated and corrected source materials for theoretically important actors as a part of the case-study research process (see Appendix B).

In total, this process yielded a structured biographical dataset of 32420 rows for actor’s organizational affiliations, and 8288 for actor’s direct relationships. Actor names were linked to a canonical form using the article’s title and birth year as the master list. Biographical data that could not be linked to a Wikipedia article were dropped. Next, incomplete observations (e.g. organizational affiliations without start or end dates) were dropped, as were state leadership organizations (e.g. the senate), political parties, and associations where actors tend to interact sporadically.

After obtaining structured biographical data, I coded connections between actors via organizational overlaps and direct ties. For organizational overlaps, actors must have overlapped at the same organization with another actor in the same year. Criteria for a direct relationship to be coded as a connection

varied by category of direct relationship. For direct familial relationships, I coded connections from the beginning of the actor’s life. For relationships such as coworker, friend, or spouse, connections were coded for every year after the relationship started. All connections persist until the year that the actor dies and is removed from the network.

The resulting network represents an actor’s cumulative contacts over the course of their lifetime. The connected component—actors which were connected to at least one other actor—included 428 actors. When subset to include only actors that appeared in an organization classified as military (including civilian officials in military governments) that reachable from Ibrahim Babangida or Muhammadu Buhari, the connected component consisted of 153 actors (Figure 3).

6 Network Formation in Nigeria’s Military Elite

Babangida and Buhari’s respective betweenness centralities resulted from the interaction between their career trajectories and Nigeria’s officer training program. Since 1960, officers began their training at the Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) in cohorts of approximately 50-60 cadets (after 1964, the Nigerian Defence Academy; Agbese 2012, 42). Due to their size, NMTC training cohorts allowed cadets to develop a large number of relationships. By contrast, there were relatively few opportunities for officers to gain connections *outside* of their NMTC cohort, because these connections primarily formed through the chain of command or idiosyncratic personal relationships. Babangida was a key exception: by serving as an instructor at the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) from 1970-72, he gained betweenness by forming connections with many cadets. These cadets would later execute the 1983 and 1985 coups (Siollun 2025, 154). By contrast, Buhari’s low betweenness was typical because he never served as an instructor.

7 The Buhari Coup (1983)

7.1 Background

Nigeria’s second republic was short-lived. Although the previous military head of state had stepped down willingly, most of the army’s top leadership had served in the federal military government (9). Despite the senior officer’s politicization, President Shagari considered himself safe from a military coup because most top officers shared his ethnicity or home region (14). However, a group of officers centred on Ibrahim Babangida was plotting his removal as early as 1982 (11). The plotters initially planned the coup for May 1983, but delayed on Obasanjo’s advice (Iliffe 2011, 104). The officers struck four months into Shagari’s second term (Agbese 2012, 173).

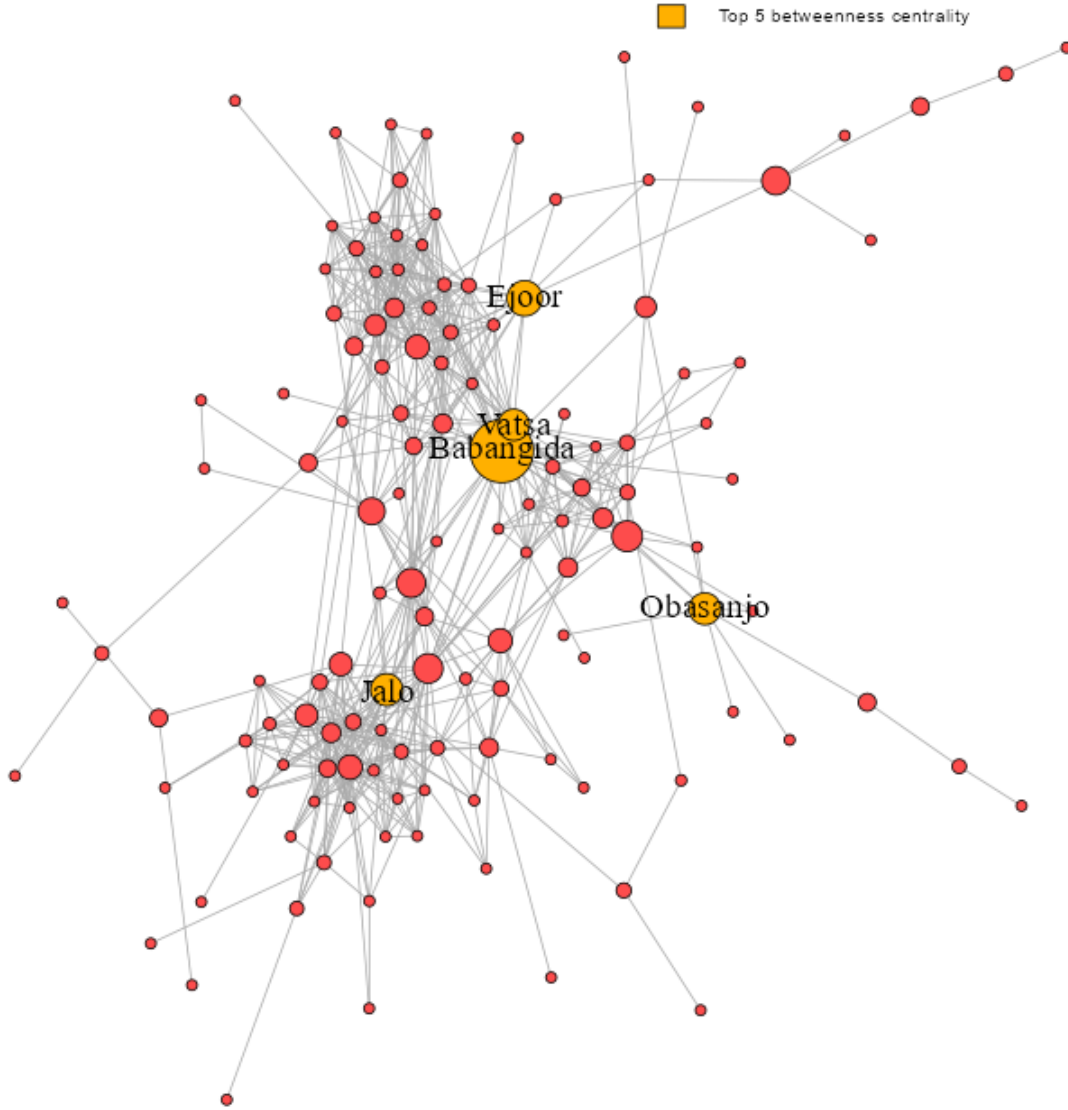


Figure 3: The military network's connected component in 1982. Top 5 betweenness are highlighted. With the exception of Olusegun Obasanjo, each of the top 5 betweenness officers served as an NDA instructor or commandant.

7.2 Coalition Recruitment

Although recruitment is difficult to observe, it is still possible to use available information about the coup plotters, their personal histories, and their descriptions of recruitment efforts to validate the theory's core premise that network connections are a necessary condition for coalition recruitment. As a starting point, this premise implies that coup coalitions should form a single connected sub-graph, meaning that every officer is reachable from one another. Figure 4 shows the network of active and retired officers who were briefed on the 1983 plot. Consistent with the theory, the 1983 coup coalition forms a single connected sub-graph (Figure 4); it is therefore possible that each member of the coalition was recruited through the network.

Further support comes from accounts of individual recruitment efforts, which began with Major

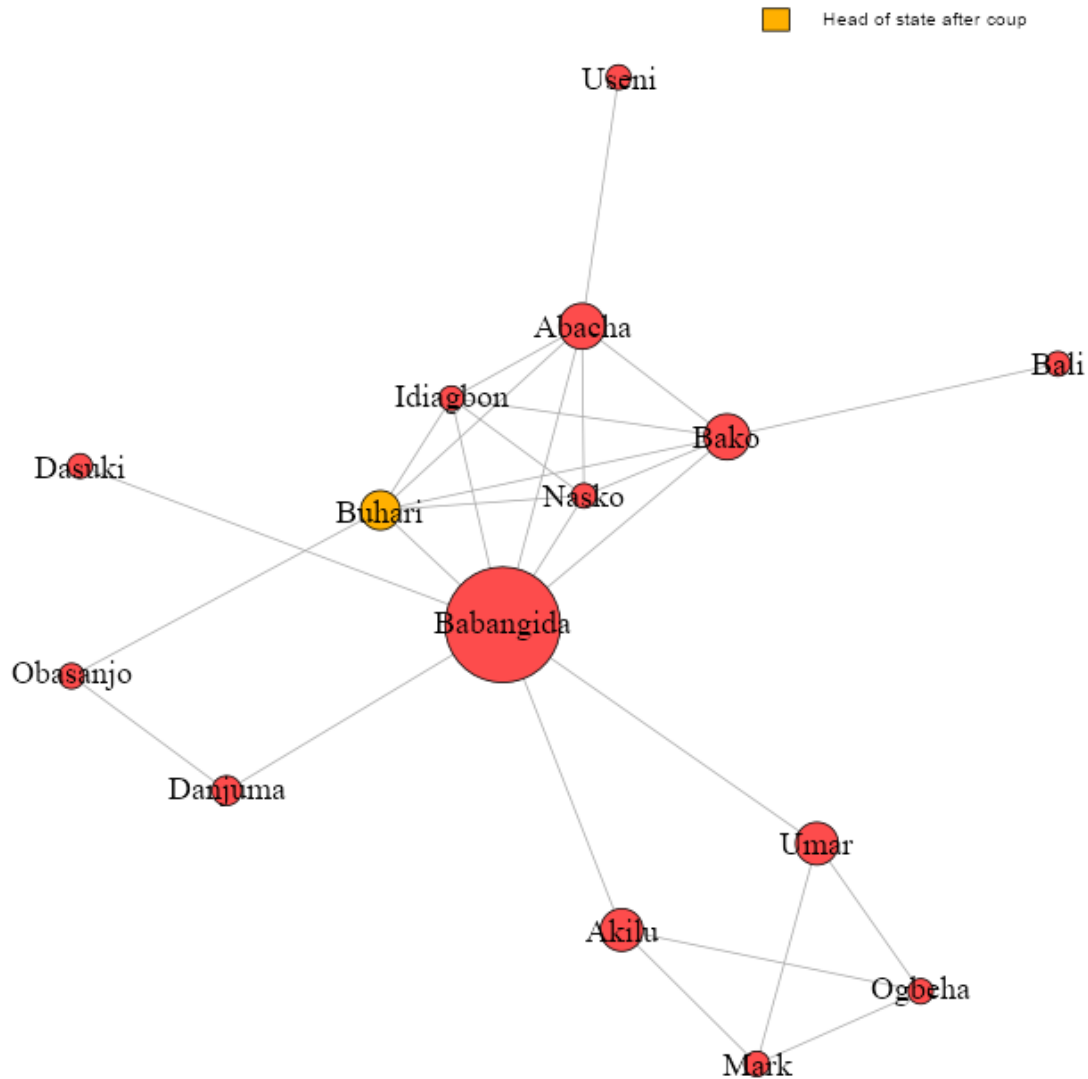


Figure 4: Active and retired officers briefed on the 1983 coup plot. Membership taken from Siollun (2025, 15–17) Node size scaled by betweenness centrality within the coalition.

Mustapha Jokolo. According to Jokolo, his initial attempt to recruit Buhari was brushed aside (The Sun 2018). Jokolo then approached Major Sambo Dasuki, and the two successfully convinced Buhari to support the plot. Jokolo was Buhari’s aide-de-camp in 1975, and also overlapped with Dasuki for one year at the NDA (Siollun 2025, 66; The Sun 2018). Furthermore, Jokolo claims to have recruited other former course mates such as Lawan Gwadabe and Abdulmumini Aminu (The Sun 2018). Crucially however, Jokolo claims to have asked Dasuki to make the initial approach to Babangida (The Sun 2018). While Jokolo overlapped with Babangida at the NDA, Dasuki may have had more direct contact with Babangida because Dasuki’s father was Babangida’s godfather (Siollun 2025, 150). Thus, Dasuki may have been more legible (and potentially more trustworthy) to Babangida than Jokolo.

Consistent with the screening mechanism, there were several officers that the coup conspirators had direct personal relationships with but deliberately kept outside of the plot. Dasuki was military assistant to the Chief of Army Staff Inuwa Wushishi (who was also Domkat Bali’s coursemate at the NMTC; Siollun

2025, 16; Omoigui, n.d.[a]). Nonetheless, rather than bringing Wushishi into the plot, the coup plotters chose to divert resources to arresting him (Siollun 2025, 21). Another was Gibson Jalo, Shagari's Chief of Defence Staff (25). Jalo was also connected to Dasuki because Jalo was deputy commandant at the NDA during Dasuki's course. Apparently, the coup plotters had good reason to believe that Jalo would oppose the coup: in an interview, Jokolo describes asking why his cousin Mohammed Jega had not been brought into the plot (The Sun 2018). His conspirators replied that Jega would inform Jalo of the plot (The Sun 2018), clearly implying that the conspirators knew that Jalo would not support the coup.⁵ Jalo and Wushishi were both detained and forcibly retired immediately following the coup (Siollun 2025, 25).

Finally, events on the day of the coup illustrate why attempting to recruit without mutual legibility is risky. To avoid bloodshed, the plotters wanted to arrange for Shagari's guards to stand down. The Brigade of Guards commander was Colonel Bello Kaliel, who was Aliyu Mohammed Gusau and Joshua Dogonyaro's NDA coursemate from 1964-1967 (153). However, the plotters sent Lt-Colonel Tunde Ogbeha (who was commissioned in the 1967-1970 NDA cohort) to approach Kaliel rather than either of Kaliel's classmates.⁶ Nonetheless, the choice proved inconsequential: on arriving in Abuja, Ogbeha learned that Kaliel was on leave in Lagos (18). Unable to reach Kaliel, Ogbeha ordered the much more junior Captain Anyogo to arrest Shagari (Siollun 2025, 19; Agbese 2012, 170; Shagari 2001, 459-460). Anyogo refused, replying that he would only take orders from his own commander (Siollun 2025, 19; Shagari 2001, 460). He then warned President Shagari, and additional troops were put on alert (Siollun 2025, 19; Shagari 2001, 460). This misstep had dire consequences: Brigadier Ibrahim Bako arrived at the State House to arrest Shagari expecting no resistance, only to be shot by loyal troops (Siollun 2025, 19).

Approaching Anyogo in this way was a mistake, because Anyogo had no way to assess *ex ante* whether the coup would succeed. Ogbeha approached Anyogo before the coup was made public; the coup plotters had not begun to "make a fact" (Singh 2014). Hence, legibility between Captain Anyogo and Ogbeha would have been key, because Anyogo needed to assess *ex ante* whether it was safer to cooperate with Ogbeha than remaining loyal to Shagari. While biographical data for Captain Anyogo are not publicly available, as a captain in 1983 he most likely graduated from the NDA in 1976. By contrast, the junior most plotters were ranked major or above and graduated from the NDA by 1974 at the latest. For this reason, it is unlikely that the coup plotters had interacted with Ogbeha enough to gain legibility. Without a personal history together, Ogbeha had little leverage over Captain Anyogo, while Anyogo could not screen Ogbeha. *Ex ante*, it would have been unclear to Anyogo how likely the coup was to

5. Here, Jokolo is probably referring to Dasuki, but he does not specify.

6. It is unclear why the plotters sent Ogbeha rather than Gusau or Dogonyaro. One possibility is that the coup plotters expected Shagari to be in Lagos rather than Abuja: he was regularly flying between Lagos and Abuja at the time, and arrived in Abuja just before 4pm on December 31st. Shagari claims that his pilot had requested turning the flight back to Lagos due to poor visibility in Abuja, but landed in Abuja on Shagari's insistence (Shagari 2001, 458).

succeed. In this way, Anyogo's refusal to join the plotters was consistent with the theory.

7.3 Pre- and Post-Coup Commitment Problems

The accounts of coalition recruitment above support my claim that challenge recruitment requires that conspirators are mutually legible. This constraint benefits challengers with high betweenness centrality, because it implies that their coalition is unique and therefore cannot mobilize against them. Buhari had low betweenness, and therefore lacked a unique coalition. Furthermore, Babangida had high betweenness centrality which generated a pre-challenge commitment problem (see Figure 4). Buhari and Babangida were in an uncomfortable position: both could be eliminated if the other chose to strike first. As I show, even if Babangida was a satisfied type, his ability to depose Buhari plausibly generated a security dilemma that motivated him to depose Buhari in a first strike. Even without an intention to replace Buhari, Babangida understood that he was a potential threat to Buhari, and therefore expected Buhari to treat him as a threat. This led Babangida to interpret Buhari's coup-proofing efforts as threatening, which pushed Babangida to launch the 1985 coup. In this way, Buhari's limited efforts at coup-proofing hastened his downfall because they strengthened Babangida's belief that Buhari was moving to purge him.

The danger that Babangida posed for Buhari was illustrated in the run-up to the 1983 coup. Babangida sought the Chief of Army Staff appointment, while Buhari preferred to give the role to Domkat Bali (The Sun 2018; Agbese 2012, 167). According to Jokolo, Buhari's desire to appoint Bali as Chief of Army Staff almost derailed the coup, as the plotters threatened to sabotage Buhari if he did not give the job to Babangida (The Sun 2018). Buhari was deterred; Babangida was appointed Chief of Army Staff while Bali was given Chief of Defence Staff (Agbese 2012, 175; Siollun 2025, 26). This episode may have reinforced Buhari's perception that Babangida posed a serious threat. Nonetheless, other accounts suggest that Buhari took the threat less seriously. Colonel Chris Alli claims to have warned Buhari and his second in command Tunde Idiagbon that there were rumours of a coup (Alli 2001, 76). The two generals appeared blasé to Alli (76). Bali approached Buhari with a similar warning and also received a casual response (Ahmed 1993, 140). Buhari himself reportedly claimed that he had no intention of retiring Babangida and did not view him as a threat (Omoigui, n.d.[c]).

Nonetheless, Babangida did not share Buhari's apparent nonchalance. The greatest contributor of Babangida's sense of insecurity was how Buhari appeared to be isolating his security services from Babangida. After the coup, Gusau (Director of Military Intelligence) was sent to a course in the UK. Initially, Gusau was replaced by Chris Alli—a graduate of the NDA's first Short Service Commission in 1967 with no direct connections to Babangida (Alli 2001, 37). Alli was briefly sent abroad to connect with US Army intelligence staff, but on his return found his office occupied by Haliru Akilu (another

1983 coalition member; Alli 2001, 73–4; Omoigui, n.d.[c]).⁷ Through this maneuver, Babangida managed to keep control of the Directorate of Military Intelligence. Further, Babangida reportedly wanted Buhari to put Gusau in charge of the National Security Organization (NSO), the other security service. Buhari refused, apparently because he did not want Babangida’s allies in control of both intelligence agencies (The Sun 2018).⁸ Instead, Buhari appointed Lawal Rafindadi, a civilian with no military background.⁹ Rafandidi’s appointment was one of the key events that led Babangida to view Buhari in adversarial terms. In Jokolo’s words, “Rafindadi became a problem to us because he didn’t know [any] of us and we didn’t know him” (The Sun 2018).

Under Rafindadi, Buhari used the NSO to surveil the generals that brought him to power, particularly Babangida (Siollun 2025, 65; Omoigui, n.d.[e]). This surveillance frightened Babangida and others (Ahmed 1993, 141; Agbese 2012, 191). Believing that his home had been bugged, Babangida refused to speak candidly about the regime in his own home (Agbese 2012, 205). This intense surveillance may also explain Buhari’s failure to purge Babangida: because Babangida was watched carefully by the NSO (an independent security service), Buhari may have considered him to be neutralized as a threat.

From Babangida’s perspective, however, Buhari’s actions appeared highly threatening. At the time, there were widespread rumours that Babangida’s retirement was imminent (189). Babangida’s insecurity boiled over in 1985 when Gusau—already removed from the intelligence services but still a high ranking officer—became the target of anti-corruption investigations at the ministry of defence. The investigations uncovered financial irregularities and an alleged corrupt import license scheme during the Shagari administration (Siollun 2025, 56; Agbese 2012, 189). Buhari wanted to retire Gusau over the matter; several sources claim that Babangida felt threatened because of his close relationship with Gusau (Agbese 2012, 190; Siollun 2025, 65; Omoigui, n.d.[c]). However, Babangida was also directly threatened by the investigations (Siollun 2025, 56). The consequences for being caught up in the anti-corruption investigations were potentially very severe. At the time, Buhari was pursuing an extremely draconian anti-corruption campaign with few procedural safeguards and extremely long minimum sentences (34–5).¹⁰ The campaign targeted civilians and military officers alike (36). If Buhari investigated Babangida, the punishment could be extremely severe.

Babangida very nearly retired preemptively over the anti-corruption investigations and Gusau’s dismissal (Agbese 2012, 191). Instead, however, Babangida chose to fight. His former press secretary as well as Buhari himself claim that Gusau’s dismissal was a key trigger (Siollun 2025, 65; Omoigui, n.d.[c]). This is plausible, because Babangida’s coup was executed shortly after Gusau’s retirement was ordered,

7. Akilu and Babangida were cousins by marriage, and Akilu was frequently in Babangida’s home (Agbese 2012, 104).

8. Gusau was reportedly very close friends with Babangida (189). However, I was unable to document how Babangida and Gusau became acquainted.

9. Rafindadi and Buhari both attended Provincial Secondary School in Katsina separated by only two years. As such, Buhari and Rafindadi most likely had overlapping networks; Rafindadi was reportedly very close to Buhari (Omoigui, n.d.[e]). By contrast, it is very unlikely that Babangida had a personal history with Rafindadi, making him an ideal candidate for NSO head if Buhari’s intention was to insulate the NSO from Babangida’s influence.

10. The minimum sentence for a corruption charge was 21 years (Siollun 2025, 35).

but before the retirement was made public; Babangida immediately reversed the order on taking power (Omoigui, n.d.[c]).

Babangida’s choice to challenge Buhari rather than retire is consistent with the proposition that he understood himself as threatening to Buhari specifically because he could re-mobilize the 1983 coup coalition. As Chief of Army Staff, Babangida did not directly control any fighting units. He would retain his network connections to the coup coalition in retirement, many of whom still controlled fighting units. Thus, if Buhari wanted to eliminate Babangida as a threat, he would need to assassinate him. Alternatively, Buhari could purge most or all of Babangida’s contacts. Either way, Babangida’s voluntary retirement would not resolve Babangida’s pre-challenge commitment problem with Buhari.

Thus, Buhari and Babangida were in an uncomfortable position: because both faced potential elimination if the other struck first, neither could credibly commit to not removing the other (as in preventative war; Fearon 1995, 402). Moreover, it did not matter if neither actually wanted to eliminate the other. As in a security dilemma (Tang 2009), the fact that each could remove the other combined with the actions they took to secure themselves—e.g. Buhari’s surveillance of Babangida—made each more certain that the other was planning their removal. Challenge entry leaders without a unique coalition are more constrained in their ability to implement coup-proofing strategies even in cases where elites (in this case, Babangida) are not interested in taking power for its own sake. In particular, coup proofing strategies that threaten to eliminate elites such as purges may convince high betweenness elites that the new incumbent plans to remove them.

8 The Babangida Coup (1985)

8.1 Background

With his increasing sense of insecurity, Babangida began planning for his coup in May 1985; the coup was executed on August 26th (Agbese 2012, 204; Siollun 2025, 61). The plot involved most of the younger officers that participated in the 1983 coup. On the day of the coup, Majors Abdulumuni Aminu, Abubakar Dangiwa Umar, Lawan Gwadabe, and Sambo Dasuki were tasked with arresting Buhari (Omoigui, n.d.[d]; Siollun 2025, 61). The coup was perfectly executed: Buhari gave himself up without a fight, while Idagbon (Buhari’s second in command) was out of the country (Omoigui, n.d.[d]). In the aftermath of the coup, Buhari, Idiagbon, Rafandidi, and Jokolo were retired and detained for several years.

8.2 Coalition Recruitment

Compared to the 1983 coup, recruitment efforts for Babangida’s coup are significantly less documented, most likely because his regime was never overthrown. Nonetheless, consistent with the theory, the 1985

coup coalition is a fully connected sub-graph (Figure 5). Thus, even though most recruitment efforts are undocumented, it is in principle possible that each member of the coalition was recruited through a network connection.¹¹ Beyond the coalition’s connected subgraph, a congruence of evidence supports the premise that recruitment requires legibility.

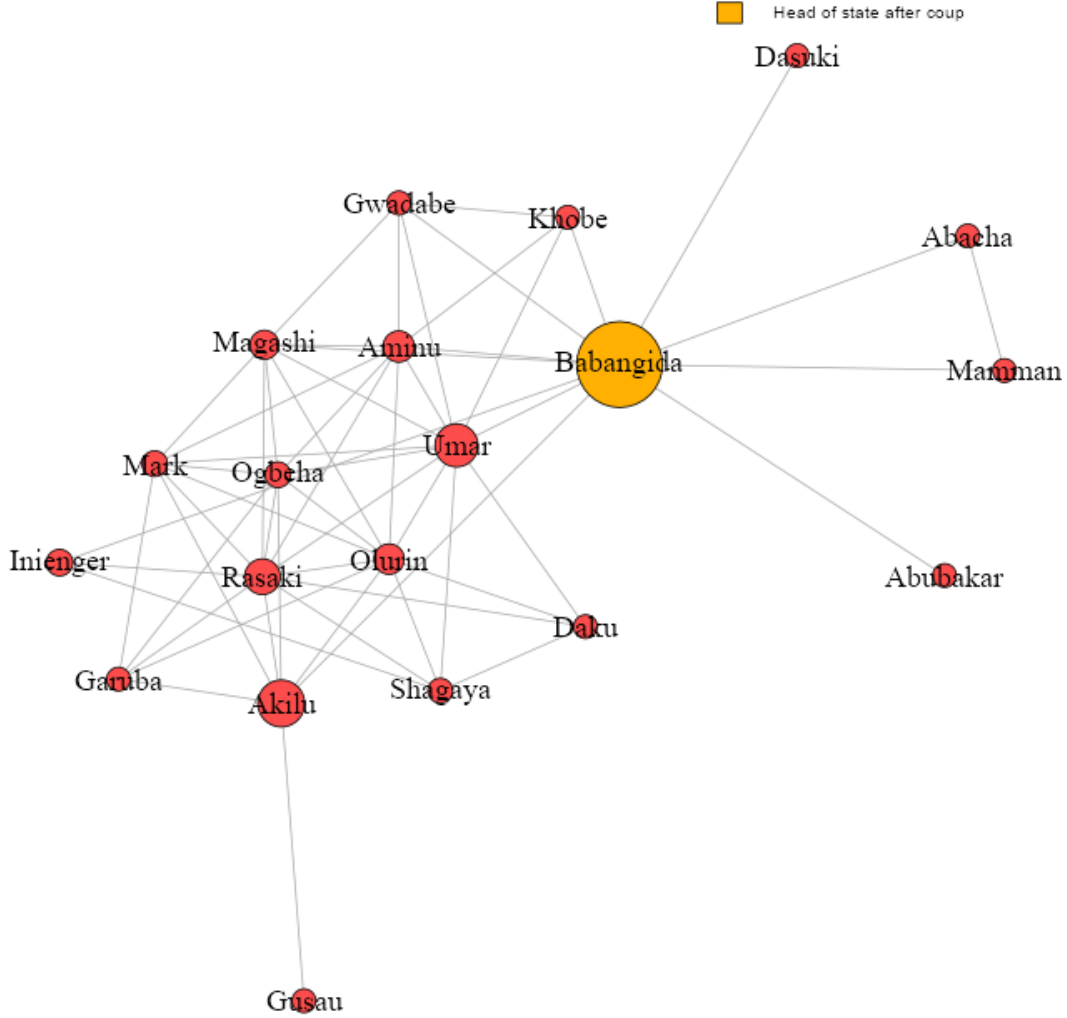


Figure 5: Active and retired officers briefed on the 1985 coup plot. Membership taken from Omoigui (n.d.[c]). Node size scaled by betweenness centrality within the coalition.

Minister of Defence Domkat Bali’s non-recruitment offers an illustrative negative case: while he briefed on the 1983 coup, he had no direct connections to the 1985 conspirators and was left out of the plot. Nonetheless, Bali and Babangida were not enemies. Babangida had previously consulted Bali on the 1983 coup (Siollun 2025, 17).¹² Bali was also critical of Buhari’s draconian anti-corruption

11. However, it is worth noting that Babangida’s coalition was significantly larger than Buhari’s. The larger size of his coalition means that a fully connected sub-graph is more likely to occur by chance. Of the 37 commissioned officers briefed on the plot (according to Omoigui, n.d.[c]), 20 had sufficient biodata to place them in the network. In the current dataset, three officers had high quality wikipedia articles with sufficient biodata, but were nonetheless missed in the article sample. These officers were: Lt. Colonel Abubakur Tanko Ayuba, Colonel Stephen Anthony Ukpo, and Brigadier Yohanna Kure. The majority of officers without sufficient biodata were ranked Major or below. Only two officers ranked above Major had insufficient biodata to place them in the network: these were Lt. Colonel Abubakar Dada and Brigadier Peter Adomoka.

12. This episode demonstrates a crucial distinction between recruitment and simple cooperation: recruitment refers specifically to the first time an actor is informed of a leadership challenge. This requires mutual legibility for the reasons argued in Section 3.2. By contrast, cooperation does not necessarily require mutual legibility once the actor has already

campaign (Siollun 2025, 56). Further demonstrating their good relations, Babangida would keep (and even promote) Bali as both Secretary of Defence and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until 1990 (79, 122–3). Despite this, Bali was excluded from the 1985 coup coalition.

Although no reason for Bali’s exclusion has been given in available historical sources, a lack of mutual legibility between Bali and any member of the 1985 coup coalition is plausible. No one in Babangida’s coalition had a personal history that would plausibly create mutual legibility with Bali. Bali was one year older than Babangida and Buhari, and at the time NMTC courses only lasted one year before cadets were sent to other Commonwealth academies. Bali had completed his commission at the Royal Military Academy (RMA), Sandhurst UK between 1962 and 1964 before serving in the artillery corps (by contrast, most coalition members were from the armoured corps). As a result, Ibrahim Bako was only officer in the 1983 coup coalition that Bali had overlapped with in a significant way. Although Bako had been in the same NMTC cohort as Babangida and Buhari, Bako also completed his commission at RMA Sandhurst. Crucially, however, Bako was killed during the 1983 coup. Other possible connections include John Shagaya and Joshua Dogonyaro, both of whom were Bali’s “Langtang kinsmen” (58). However, both Shagaya and Dogonyaro received secondary schooling in the towns of Langtang and Gidiri respectively, each of which is approximately a 3.5 hour drive (in 2026) from Kuru, where Bali received his secondary education. As such, neither Shagaya or Dogonyaro were likely to have the personal histories required for mutual legibility with Bali. Thus, Bako was the only network pathway through which Bali could be recruited; the exogenous event of Bako’s death led to Bali’s network isolation from the 1985 coup coalition. It is therefore consistent with the theory that he was excluded from the 1985 coup coalition.

In contrast, Brigadier Sani Abacha’s participation provides a positive example of coalition recruitment. Abacha was in control of the 2nd Division in Idaban, the closest armoured division to Lagos and therefore the officer best positioned to crush the coup (61). However, Abacha was notoriously opaque (Omoigui, n.d.[b]; Siollun 2019, 37). Nonetheless, Babangida had known Abacha since their NMTC course and knew Abacha well enough to recruit him: “If it were any other person, he would have gone to the side of Buhari” (Maier 2000, 62). Crucially, Babangida’s account should not be interpreted as evidence that Abacha was loyal to Babangida in the non-rationalist sense that he had an inherent preference for cooperation with Babangida.¹³ Rather, Babangida and Abacha’s legibility gave Babangida leverage to incentivize Abacha’s participation. In exchange for his support, Abacha allegedly negotiated for the powerful Chief of Army Staff appointment (Omoigui, n.d.[b]).

demonstrated a willingness to participate in the challenge coalition. It is unclear when Bali was first informed of the 1983 plot.

13. Abacha took power after Babangida retired in 1993, and quickly purged many of Babangida’s allies. By 1998, Abacha was reportedly seriously considering assassinating Babangida (Maier 2000, 73). Abacha also lured Moshood Abiola (the 1993 election winner) out of exile by promising to install him into power (Siollun 2019, 46). Abiola was imprisoned by Abacha shortly after. All available evidence indicates that Abacha was an opportunist.

8.3 Post Coup (in) Credible Commitment

Babangida demonstrated ample awareness of coup threat even before he took office. However, Babangida's betweenness centrality meant that his coalition was nearly unique; there were effectively no pathways between Sani Abacha and Babangida's less senior conspirators (Figure 5). The key exception came from outside of Babangida's coalition: Major-General Mamman Vatsa was connected to both parts of Babangida's coalition. Babangida quickly purged Vatsa, after which he exhibited clear indicators of credible commitment with his coalition. As a result, Babangida managed to pursue much more aggressive coup proofing than Buhari without provoking a preemptive challenge from within his coalition. At the same time, he never attempted to purge members of his own coalition, and conflict with his coalition did not generate a spiralling sense of insecurity for Babangida or his coalition members.

8.3.1 Commitment Problems and Childhood Friends

Although Babangida had high betweenness centrality within his coalition, there was still one alternative bridge node between Sani Abacha (the key senior conspirator) and the more junior officers: Babangida's childhood friend Mamman Vatsa. Vatsa was practically Babangida's network doppelganger: the two had been classmates since their youth in both Bida Middle School and the Nigerian Military Training College, and the Indian Military Academy. During the civil war, Vatsa and Babangida's units were side-by-side on the front line (Agbese 2012, 97). Finally, Vatsa was an instructor at the NDA at the exact same time as Babangida. The cumulative result was that Babangida and Vatsa's networks overlapped significantly. Figure 6 shows Babangida and Vatsa's combined ego networks. Like Babangida, Vatsa had high betweenness; he was a bridge node between the two groups that formed Babangida's coup coalition. Thus, if any officer was capable of mobilizing the officers empowered by Babangida, it was Vatsa. As I will argue, the resulting commitment problem culminated in Vatsa's execution.

Conflict between Babangida and Vatsa surfaced shortly after Babangida took power. By December 1985, Babangida was informed of rumours of a coup plot. Many names were mentioned in the rumours, including Vatsa's ("IBB justifies Mamman Vatsa's execution" 2025; Siollun 2025, 85–6; Agbese 2012, 213–14). The rumours also mentioned Gado Nasko, another childhood friend of Babangida and Vatsa from Government College Bida; Babangida refused to believe that Nasko could be involved (Siollun 2025, 86; Agbese 2012, 214). Vatsa approached Babangida directly about the rumours, at which point Babangida insisted that he did not suspect Vatsa (Agbese 2012, 214). Nonetheless, 14 alleged coup plotters were arrested in late December, including Vatsa and his former deputy Lt-Colonel Musa Bitiyong (Siollun 2025, 89).¹⁴ Nasko was not arrested.

14. The full list included: Major-General Mamman Vatsa, Brigadier Malami Nassarawa, Group Captain Ita David Ikpeke, Group Captain Salaudeen Latinwo, Lt-Colonel Musa Bitiyong, Lt-Colonel Moses Effiong, Lt-Colonel Michael Iyorshe, Lt-Colonel Emmanuel Obeya, Lt-Colonel Christian Oche, Major Daniel Bamidele, Major D. Edwin-West, Wing Commander Ben Ekele, Wing Commander Adamu Sakaba, and Squadron Leader Martin Luther (Siollun 2025, 89). Several other officers were brought in for questioning but not charged, including Babangida's coalition members David Mark and Tunde Ogbeha

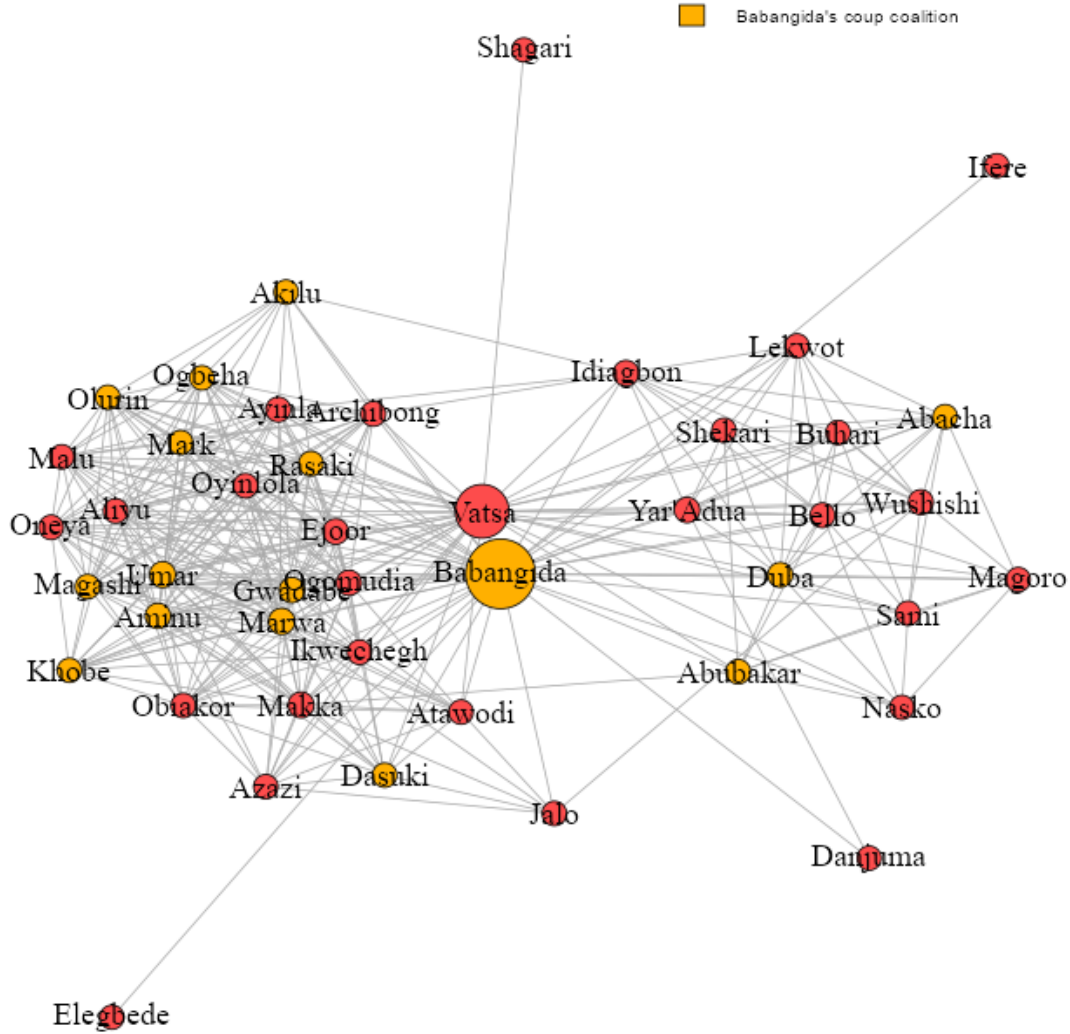


Figure 6: The combined ego networks for Babangida and Vatsa (edges as of 1984). Node size scaled by betweenness centrality.

Vatsa was implicated in the plot by Mike Iyorshe's testimony, who alleged that Bitiyong was tasked with contacting Vatsa for financial support because the two were close (Siollun 2025, 92). In fact, Bitiyong did receive N10,000 from Vatsa, but Vatsa insisted that the money was given as a farming loan to Bitiyong (Siollun 2025, 93; Agbese 2012, 215). Further, the prosecutors asserted that Vatsa was using his authority as minister of the Federal Capital Territory to reward the conspirators with lucrative land in Abuja (Siollun 2025, 93). Babangida himself claims that he was convinced of Vatsa's guilt after he attempted to escape from his house arrest (Siollun 2025, 105; "IBB justifies Mamman Vatsa's execution" 2025). Because no evidence directly implicated Vatsa, the prosecution devoted considerable effort to proving that Vatsa held personal animosity towards Babangida (Siollun 2025, 104). In the end, Vatsa and nine others were executed by firing squad (100).

It is unclear whether Vatsa was actually involved in the plot. Although the prosecution had an

(Siollun 2025, 89).

informant among the conspirators (Siollun 2025, 86), none of the evidence presented indicated that Vatsa was aware of the plot.¹⁵ The defendants claimed that Vatsa never attended any of their meetings and the prosecution produced no evidence to the contrary (94, 104). In fact, Vatsa's son still has a receipt for the loan issued to Bitiyong (93), an unusual choice if Vatsa knew that the funds would be used to finance a coup plot. Regarding the land plots, Vatsa had issued occupancy permits to many members of the military government, not just the coup plotters (104). Finally, the question of rivalry between Vatsa and Babangida is contested by those close to both officers (Agbese 2012, 217–18; 2012, 105). In 2006, Domkat Bali publicly claimed that Vatsa's execution was a mistake because there was insufficient evidence linking him to the coup plot (Siollun 2025, 107).

Regardless of whether Vatsa was truly involved in the conspiracy, the crucial point is that Babangida was unusually predisposed to distrust Vatsa. This is surprising, because the two had always been very close friends: Babangida was Vatsa's best man (71), and Babangida himself described how they shared shirts as roommates ("IBB justifies Mamman Vatsa's execution" 2025). Babangida's wife Maryam even pleaded for him to spare Vatsa (Siollun 2025, 99). Moreover, Vatsa was one of the only senior officers with no significant history of coup plotting (Omoigui, n.d.[f]).¹⁶ In fact, Vatsa had a history of opposing coups: he was the first officer to publicly denounce the 1976 coup attempt against Murtala Mohammed (Agbese 2012, 138), and he was excluded from the 1983 coup coalition because he had previously served as a brigade commander in the Guards Brigade (217). By contrast, Babangida demonstrated significantly more skepticism towards the possible implication of other officers, including those who had a history of coup intrigues. Gado Nasko was mentioned in the rumours but failed to arouse any suspicion from Babangida (214). Similarly, David Mark and Tunde Ogbeha were both arrested and questioned, but not prosecuted (Siollun 2025, 89). Shehu Musa Yar'Adua—a retired officer who was part of the 1976–79 military regime—was nearly arrested when one of the coup plotters mentioned playing squash with him, but this possibility was dismissed (90). Unlike Vatsa, none of these officers had a network position that would allow them to mobilize the two groups of officers that made up Babangida's coup coalition.

One possible explanation is that while the evidence linking Vatsa to the plot was weak, evidence linking either Nasko, Mark, Ogbeha, or Yar'Adua to the plot was nonexistent. While true, this argument does not explain why Babangida was threatened enough by Vatsa to execute a childhood friend. In Babangida's own words: "Despite the fact that he was my friend, playmate and course mate, he had to be executed. Vatsa was like a scorpion in one's pocket. If he had been retired he could have still planned a coup from the outside" (105). Vatsa's network position is a strong explanation: because Vatsa could potentially mobilize members of Babangida's coalition, Vatsa could not be trusted even in prison or exile. This is demonstrated most clearly by contrasting Babangida's treatment of Buhari to Vatsa: Buhari was

15. Further, it is reasonable to assume that the prosecution presented the strongest case against Vatsa, and therefore did not withhold more convincing evidence.

16. To my knowledge, Vatsa's name is not mentioned in any credible accounting of specific events from the 6 coup attempts between 1967 and 1985.

released from prison after two years despite the fact that Buhari would have held obvious resentments against Babangida for his ouster (Siollun 2025, 61–2).¹⁷ Unlike Vatsa, Buhari was primarily connected to the senior side of Babangida’s coalition and therefore could not mobilize a powerful coalition against Babangida. Thus, Vatsa’s execution demonstrates the commitment problem between high betweenness elites and the dictator: because Vatsa was capable of mobilizing a unique coalition against Babangida while Babangida could not observe Vatsa’s type with any certainty, Babangida found himself unable to trust Vatsa. Vatsa’s network position therefore led Babangida to purge Vatsa pre-emptively.

8.3.2 The Quiet Kitchen Cabinet: Babangida’s Credible Commitment

After purging Vatsa, Babangida’s coalition had no remaining pathways through which they could mobilize. Consistent with the theory, Babangida never faced a threat from within his coalition over his eight year tenure. In this section, I argue that Babangida’s coalition exhibited indicators of credible commitment: because they could no longer mobilize against him, Babangida could implement aggressive coup proofing efforts than Buhari without triggering a preemptive challenge. Likewise, when conflicts within his coalition inevitably emerged, those conflicts failed to escalate to the point of a purge or leadership challenge. Thus, while Babangida could have been deposed in a challenges from outside his coalition—indeed, he very nearly was—his coalition was itself incapable of removing him.

As argued above, Buhari’s attempts to insulate the NSO from his coup coalition combined with his surveillance of key coalition members likely contributed to Babangida’s decision to depose him. This did not stop Babangida from pursuing even more aggressive coup proofing reforms. Three months after eliminating Vatsa as an alternative mobilization pathway for his coalition, Babangida significantly expanded Buhari’s policy of insulating the security services from his coalition without provoking a challenge. In June 1986, Babangida dissolved the National Security Organization and created three new organizations in their place: the State Security Service (domestic intelligence), the National Intelligence Agency (external intelligence), and the Defence Intelligence Agency (military intelligence; Omoigui, n.d.[e]; Siollun 2025, 151). Thus, including the Directorate of Military Intelligence under Akilu, Babangida had four independent intelligence services at his disposal. As Buhari had done, Babangida staffed many of the security services with actors that were unconnected to his coup coalition. Additionally, he created an independent national guard as well as the Security and Civil Defence Force under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Omoigui, n.d.[e]), although these were managed by coalition members.

Of course, Buhari’s appointment of Rafindadi as an independent NSO chief was only part of the trigger for Babangida’s coup. Equally important was Buhari’s surveillance of Babangida as well as the

17. The difference in treatment between Vatsa and Buhari can also be explained by the fact that Buhari was ousted, while Vatsa was accused of coup plotting which had historically been punished with execution (Siollun 2025, 101). Indeed, officers from Plateau State—the home of many officers executed after the 1976 coup attempt—allegedly lobbied for the conspirators’ execution (99). While this would explain why the officers clearly implicated in the 1986 plot were executed, it is a poor explanation for Vatsa’s execution: It seems perfectly plausible that Vatsa could have been retired or exiled given the lack of direct evidence linking him to the abortive conspiracy.

Gusau’s dismissal. At least one unconfirmed account claims that the DMI under Akilu was carrying out surveillance of Babangida’s own coup coalition (Omoigui, n.d.[e]), while Babangida’s security services were apparently making officers insecure (Siollun 2025, 152). While the true extent to which Babangida was surveilling his own coalition is unknown (in part because he was never overthrown), both high- and low-surveillance against the coalition are consistent with credible commitment. If Babangida was not spying on his coalition, it would imply that Babangida was highly confident that his coalition was incapable of mobilizing against him, or that he simply trusted them not to. The former is consistent with credible commitment, while the latter seems particularly unlikely given Babangida’s demonstrated preoccupation with regime security. Moreover, if Babangida was spying on his own coalition, it did not escalate into a preemptive challenge. This is consistent with credible commitment: purging low betweenness elites is not security enhancing for the dictator because the purge does not remove a key mobilization pathway. As a result, coalition members would not have a strong reason to expect that targeted surveillance would lead to a purge; even if they did, they could mobilize a strong coalition because the coalition was fractured after Babangida took power.

Consistent with credible commitment, conflicts within Babangida’s coalition never escalated to preemptive challenges or purges, even when they involved Sani Abacha, a seasoned coup plotter who nonetheless lacked connections to the rest of Babangida’s coalition (see Figure 5). For example, Babangida’s junior coalition members were pushing to have Abacha removed as Chief of Army Staff and replaced with Joshua Dogonyaro (Omoigui, n.d.[b]). In reaction, Abacha accused Babangida of deliberately underfunding the army to undermine Abacha’s popularity with the troops (Omoigui, n.d.[b]). As the Buhari episode demonstrates, these kinds of conflicts easily spiral into a preemptive coup when a high betweenness officer believes that they are being purged. At other times, Abacha made choices that could have triggered a pre-emptive purge by Babangida. For instance, Abacha apparently exercised informal control of Babangida’s Brigade of Guards (Siollun 2025, 183), an action that could easily be interpreted as a sign that Abacha was planning a coup. Nonetheless, Abacha and Babangida somehow maintained their peace.

Babangida and Abacha’s peace persisted, even once there were clear signals that Babangida was attempting reduce Abacha’s coup making ability by shifting Abacha from his coveted position as Chief of Army Staff (Omoigui, n.d.[b]).¹⁸ However, he took a delicate approach rather than moving quickly as in a preemptive purge. The plan was convoluted: In the first step, Domkat Bali’s concurrent roles were divided between Babangida and Abacha: Babangida became Minister of Defence, while Abacha served as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Chief of Army Staff concurrently (Omoigui, n.d.[b]). The next step was delayed by a failed coup attempt that came from outside of Babangida’s coalition (the “Orkar coup”). Nonetheless, the swap was completed in September of 1990: Abacha took over as Minister

18. Chief of Army Staff had been both Babangida and Abacha’s rewards for participating in the 1983 and 1985 coups (Siollun 2025, 26; Omoigui, n.d.[b]). Hence, removing Abacha from the position was a sensitive matter.

of Defence, and was replaced as Chief of Army Staff by Salihu Ibrahim, an officer with no history of coup plotting (Omoigui, n.d.[b]).) While delicate, Babangida’s approach nonetheless indicated credible commitment with Abacha: if Abacha was capable of mobilizing Babangida’s coalition, the rotation would give Abacha the chance to organize a preemptive coup. If a preemptive coup was the primary concern, Babangida’s optimal strategy would be to move swiftly by arresting or assassinating Abacha. At that point, however, Abacha lacked the network connections required to mobilize a strong coalition. As a result, Babangida could afford to move slowly because his coalition was incapable of mobilizing against him.

8.4 Conclusion

Why are some challenge entry dictators more or less capable of consolidating power after taking power via leadership challenge? To answer this question, I introduced a network theory of authoritarian leadership challenges. The theory predicts that a challenger’s position within the regime’s elite network makes them more or less vulnerable to subsequent challenges by their coalition. Specifically, I argued that high betweenness “bridge” challengers—those that connect otherwise disconnected elite groups—are more likely to consolidate power because their position between disconnected elites prevents their coalition from mobilizing in the post-challenge period. In doing so, the theory contributes to the core literature on autocratic consolidation and survival (e.g. Svolik 2012; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Furthermore, the theory offers predictions about which elites dictators are most likely to target in purges, contributing to the literature on elite purges as a tool for regime survival (Sudduth 2017b; Goldring and Matthews 2023b, 2023a; Saijo 2025).

I illustrated the theory’s insights by pairing a novel network dataset of Nigerian military elites with a process tracing study of two Nigerian coup episodes. While the theory’s predictions are applicable to all challenge entry dictators, future studies must evaluate whether the theory can explain events outside of the two case studies presented. The case studies face limitations inherent to the study of opaque autocratic politics: due to limited information about key events, all conclusions may be contested by newer or higher quality sources. Finally, while the temporal design holds many slow moving variables constant, there may be alternative explanations that better explain variation between and within the two case studies.

Nonetheless, my theory is consistent with variation between and within these two coup episodes. For instance, the theory explains why Muhammadu Buhari (low betweenness) was quickly removed by his own coalition while Ibrahim Babangida (high betweenness) was not. The theory also explains why Babangida managed to implement greater coup proofing reforms than Buhari: Babangida’s coalition was incapable of mobilizing against him, which meant that his coalition could not mobilize in response to the creation of isolated security services. Regarding within-case variation, the theory provides a plausible

explanation for why Babangida decided to challenge Buhari, and why Babangida took the drastic measure of executing his childhood friend when only weak evidence linked him to an abortive coup conspiracy.

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A Extraction performance

Extraction performance was measured on a random sample of 200 article chunks using a procedure known as pre-annotation grading (Mikulová et al. 2022; Felt et al. 2014; Lingren et al. 2014). Rather than comparing the LLM’s extractions to a human coder’s independent extractions, pre-annotation supplies the human coder with the LLM’s extractions to be graded and corrected. Thus, for each article chunk, an undergraduate RA evaluated LLM extracted data against a code book, adding missing data where necessary.

There are several reasons to prefer pre-annotation grading for the present application. Because each article chunk contains an arbitrary number and ordering of polymorphic extractions (e.g. “Nigerian Presidential Administration”, “Presidential Administration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”), comparing model generated data to human coded data would require a fuzzy matching extractions to their corresponding human generated extraction. This matching is prone to failure, and hence risks underestimating model performance. Pre-annotation avoids this failure point. Further, the number of linked variables—nine in total—means that independent manual extraction by a human coder is error prone and should not be treated as a gold standard. Hence, it is more appropriate for the human coder to directly grade model generated extractions, which can increase annotator speed and accuracy when pre-annotations are at least moderately accurate (Felt et al. 2014; Lingren et al. 2014).

The undergraduate coder graded LLM outputs, producing three statistics: precision, recall, and another indicator for “data leakage”. Here, it is important to note that these statistics have slight differences compared to standard data annotation tasks. Because decoder based LLMs are generative, meaning that they generate new tokens and the extracted data are not constrained by the source text.

As a result, there is an ambiguity as to whether extracted data are evaluated purely against the source text or whether the model can supplement the source text using its training data. While it is possible to grade LLM outputs solely for their conformity to the source text, this limits the usefulness of a decoder model by preventing the model from making reasonable inferences related to but beyond the source text’s literal interpretation.

Hence, in the present case, precision is interpreted as whether the model generated data are consistent with the coding criteria, which in some cases allows for extra-textual inference (for instance, inferring an organization’s region when the organization’s town is directly stated in the text). By contrast, the data leakage statistic measures whether the data are explicitly contained in the source text. Crucially, data leakage is distinct from “hallucination”, which are “overconfident, plausible falsehoods” (Kalai et al. 2025). A model may have been trained on source materials that contained the data, even if the data were not contained in the source text. In cases of data leakage, the undergraduate RA was instructed to perform a cursory internet search to validate whether the model had correctly inferred beyond the source text (e.g. “Is the Nigerian Defence Academy located in Kaduna?”), which affects precision. By distinguishing between data validity (precision) and data leakage, I am able to leverage the model’s training data to impute certain kinds of missing data (e.g. organization locations) while constraining other data points more closely to the source text (e.g. what organizations an actor was associated with).

Table 2: Qwen 3.5-27B-FP8

Variable	Precision (95% CI)	Recall (95% CI)	Leakage (95% CI)
Parent Org	0.815 (0.726, 0.88)	0.978 (0.931, 0.993)	0.000 (0, 0)
Org	0.848 (0.805, 0.883)	0.906 (0.87, 0.932)	0.001 (0, 0.011)
Org Class	0.941 (0.932, 1)	0.939 (0.93, 1)	-
Title	0.990 (0.966, 0.997)	0.730 (0.668, 0.784)	0.000 (0, 0)
Start	0.954 (0.914, 0.976)	0.958 (0.92, 0.978)	0.007 (0.002, 0.028)
End	0.956 (0.906, 0.98)	0.956 (0.91, 0.979)	0.005 (0.001, 0.035)
Country	1.000 (1, 1)	0.871 (0.829, 0.904)	0.000 (0, 0)
Region	0.983 (0.939, 0.995)	0.924 (0.871, 0.957)	0.185 (0.126, 0.265)
Town/City	0.981 (0.938, 0.994)	0.981 (0.951, 0.993)	0.062 (0.03, 0.124)

Note: 200 article chunks, 740 Org rows. 95% CIs clustered on the text chunk level.

Although both models leave room for improvement, overall extraction performance is highly satisfactory. The organization variable is particularly important, because organizational overlaps are the primary indicator used to code relationships between actors. Both models achieve good precision and excellent recall on organizational extractions. Additionally, data leakage is well controlled by prompt design: as instructed by the prompt (Section C), both models rarely (less than .4% of the time) generated organizations that were not directly mentioned in the source text. This ensures that primary edge coding variables closely correspond to the text corpus. By contrast, imputing missing region data is desirable as these data are rarely mentioned explicitly but can be reliably inferred. Here, models infer beyond the

Table 3: Gemma4-31B-it-FP8

Variable	Precision (95% CI)	Recall (95% CI)	Leakage (95% CI)
Parent Org	0.949 (0.877, 0.98)	0.963 (0.893, 0.988)	0.022 (0.005, 0.094)
Org	0.864 (0.824, 0.897)	0.984 (0.968, 0.992)	0.004 (0.001, 0.013)
Org Class	0.998 (0.996, 1)	0.995 (0.989, 0.999)	-
Title	0.995 (0.982, 0.999)	0.799 (0.726, 0.857)	0.000 (0, 0)
Start	0.953 (0.916, 0.974)	0.991 (0.972, 0.997)	0.000 (0, 0)
End	0.973 (0.944, 0.987)	0.996 (0.971, 0.999)	0.000 (0, 0)
Country	0.998 (0.983, 1)	0.934 (0.893, 0.96)	0.000 (0, 0)
Region	0.983 (0.949, 0.994)	0.934 (0.855, 0.972)	0.161 (0.101, 0.247)
Town/City	0.994 (0.959, 0.999)	0.932 (0.865, 0.967)	0.045 (0.021, 0.093)

Note: 200 article chunks, 717 Org rows. 95% CIs clustered on the text chunk level.

source text approximately 16% of the time. Nonetheless, generated region data were valid over 98% of the time.

B Manual corrections to bio data due to incomplete or incorrect source materials

Article Title	Summary of Changes
Gado Nasko	Corrected the name of NMTC.
Aliyu Mohammed Gusau	Added information about relationship direct tie with Babangida.
Anthony Ukpo	Added missing education institutions.
Yohanna Kure	Corrected birth date and added missing education institutions.
Abubakar Tanko Ayuba	Added education institutions.
Chris Abutu Garuba	Added missing education institutions.
Bagudu Mamman	Corrected name of education institution and added missing dates.
Fidelis Makka	Corrected the institution for his senior staff course.
John Mark Inienger	Corrected education dates and added his units during the Nigerian civil war.
Mohammed Kaliel	Corrected attendance dates for the NDA.
Inua Wushishi	Added missing education organizations.
Abdulumuni Aminu	Added missing education organizations.
Tunde Ogbeha	Corrected birth date and education dates.
Mohammed Jega	Added missing education institutions, added information about direct tie with Shehu Musa Yar'Adua.
Sambo Dasuki	Added information about direct tie with Babangida.
Shehu Musa Yar'Adua	Corrected attendance dates for the NMTC.
David Mark	Added dates for education institutions.

C Selected prompts

Organizational Extraction

Identify **all** specific organizations and associations with which <name> was directly involved, i.e., the structure in whose activities <name> was directly involved.

An organization is a stable social entity with a collective identity and, typically, a name. In addition to government, educational, and commercial structures, this includes clubs, communities, cooperatives, parties, creative unions, and other forms of association.

For each organization, also extract the specific structural divisions to which <name> belonged. These can be any internal groups: departments, faculties, branches, sections, clubs, etc. Record them in the `sub_organizations` field within the corresponding organization.

Examples:

Principle of Hierarchy and Atomicity:

- **Separation:** Never combine names of different levels into a single string. Each division must be a separate object in the `sub_organizations` array.
- **Incorrect:** `"org_name": "Physics Department, Moscow State University"`
- **Correct:** `"org_name": "MSU" → sub_organizations: [{"org_name": "Physics Department"}]`
- **Top-Down:** Start with the highest organization level.

Filling Rules:

- **Strict Filter:** Include only organizations where <name> is directly related to `org_name`.
- **Recursion:** If a division has its own departments, nest them recursively. If there are no nested departments, use `[]`.
- **Names Only:** The `org_name` field should contain only the name of the organization. Titles (e.g., "Deputy Minister") are not included in the JSON, and do not repeat the name of the parent organization.

Output Format: Return ONLY valid JSON.

```
[
  {
    "org_name": "TOP_LEVEL_ORGANIZATION",
    "sub_organizations": [
      {
        "org_name": "SEPARATE_DIVISION",
        "sub_organizations": []
      }
    ]
  }
]
```

If the text does not specify an organization or division for <name>, return **null** in the corresponding field. If the organization's name is not clearly stated, do not attempt to guess its official name.

Be careful: only include an organization if the text clearly states that <name> was a member of it or was directly involved with it. If the text mentions other people, list **ONLY** the organizations with which <name> was directly involved.

Organization Classification

Based on the provided text, classify each organization using the following categories:

EDU: Educational institutions of all types, including universities and other post-secondary institutions.

RLG: Faith-related organizations, including religious administrative structures, religious education institutions, churches, etc.

MIL: Military units of all types.

LAW: Law enforcement agencies (e.g., the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor's Office).

INT: Intelligence organizations (e.g., the FSB, the KGB).

PTY: Political parties (e.g., United Russia).

GOS: The aggregate of government bodies at all levels and state institutions (from federal ministries to local services) that ensure the functioning of the state through the work of civil servants and public sector employees.

GLD: The aggregate of the highest institutions of state power at the federal and regional levels, vested with the authority to determine policy and make strategic decisions. These include the Presidential Administration, the Executive Office of the Government of the Russian Federation, federal ministries, as well as the administrations of heads of constituent entities (governors), and regional governments.

IGO: Intergovernmental Organizations (e.g., the European Union, the United Nations).

SOE: Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) are commercial organizations in which the state holds ownership or decisive control. These include both wholly state-owned corporations and joint-stock companies with state participation (e.g., Rostec or Rosatom).

COM: Private Sector Enterprises (PSEs) are commercial organizations owned by private individuals or non-state shareholders. These include both private (closed) firms and public corporations whose shares are traded on stock exchanges (e.g., Digital Sky Technologies or Yandex).

ASS: Professional Associations or Unions (e.g., the Union of Writers, the Union of Lawyers).

ART: Organizations related to the arts, including music, theater, etc. (e.g., the Bolshoi Theater).

CIV: Civil society organizations created to achieve specific goals.

CAS: Citizens' recreational associations are voluntary, non-profit organizations (or clubs) created by individuals based on shared interests to meet needs in recreation, sports, arts, or gardening.

SPT: Sports teams, clubs, and other athletic organizations.

INF: Informal organizations, such as gangs or other groups of people (e.g., the "Cambridge Five" or "Kadyrovites").

Fill in and return only the following JSON, placing all relevant categories in the "categories" list. Do not add or rearrange the **org_name** values:

```
<json_here>
```

If the organization does not fit into any of these categories, return an empty list [].

Categories are not mutually exclusive; please select **ALL** relevant categories.

Dates

Based on the provided text, determine the earliest and latest years of <name>'s relationship with the corresponding **org_name**. Record the earliest year in the **start_year** field, and the latest year in the **end_year** field. If the text indicates that <name> left **org_name** on a specific date, record this in the **end_year** field.

Fill in and return only the following JSON, replacing **ONLY** the default value -1. Do not add or rearrange the **org_name** values:

```
<json_here>
```

If the text does not specify the earliest or latest year of <name>'s relationship with **org_name**,

replace -1 with null for the appropriate year.

Make sure you only specify the start and end years for <name>'s relationship with **org_name**, and not years associated with another person or organization.

Direct Relationship Extraction

Identify **all** clearly specified relationships between <name> and any other person (**relation_name**) mentioned in the text. A relationship is clearly specified if the text clearly implies that <name> and **relation_name** clearly knew each other and had regular direct contact. Single events together does not imply a relationship.

Output Format: Return ONLY valid JSON.

```
[
  {
    "relation_name": "TARGET_PERSON_NAME", # Do not add formal titles or
      other descriptors to target_name.
  }
]
```

Be careful: only include a relationship if the text clearly states that <name> had a direct relationship with that person. If the text mentions other people, list **ONLY** the people with which <name> had a direct relationship.

Direct Relationship Classification

Based on the provided text, classify the relationship between <name> and <target_name> (**relation_name**).

Use the most appropriate label from the following list:

SUB (Subordinate): <name> reports to <target_name>. <target_name> is the boss/-manager. <name> answers to <target_name> and they have regular, sustained direct contact.

SUP (Superior): <name> is the boss/manager of <target_name>. <target_name> reports to <name>. <name> has authority over <target_name> and they have regular, sustained direct contact.

COW (Coworkers/Classmates): <name> and <target_name> work or study together in the same formal organization for a sustained time. They are peers; neither person answers

to the other.

APT (Appointment): <name> officially appointed or hired <target_name>, but they do not necessarily have regular direct contact or work together daily.

FAM (Direct Family): <name> is related to <target_name> by birth. <target_name> must be <name>'s mother, father, brother, sister, or cousin.

SPS (Spouse): <name> is married to <target_name>.

FRD (Friends): <name> and <target_name> are clearly implied to be friends.

OTH (Other): The relationship exists but is not accurately described by any of the categories above.

Guidelines:

- Labels are mutually exclusive. Fill **tie_type** with only the most relevant label.
- If you are unsure of the most relevant label based on the text, return **null**.
- Do not change the value of **relation_name**.

Fill and return ONLY the following JSON.

```
<json_here>
```

SOURCE TEXT: