*A note to instructors for the Archival Methods Lab:*

After providing instruction to students on archival research methods, we provided the attached handout to give students some substantive background on the hypotheses the lab asks them to evaluate. The handout, which is lightly adapted from material in O’Rourke’s book, explains each hypothesis and provides brief background on the politics of the Dominican Republic (see the supplemental materials). The hypotheses listed were drawn from among a larger number that O’Rourke considers. We found this worked well, but instructors might instead choose to assign the full chapter on the Dominican Republic (chapter 8); in that case, the debriefing could draw attention to the extent to which conclusions that can be drawn from the FRUS documents alone match those O’Rourke comes to using to drawing upon a more diverse set of sources.

We put students into groups of 4-5, and assigned each group a specific set of documents from the FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XII, or FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXII. We found that assigning groups about 60-80 documents worked well. We divided the documents as follows:

* Group 1: Documents 300-364 from FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v12>
* Group 2: Documents 1-70 FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32>
* Group 3: Documents 71-141, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32>
* Group 4: Documents 142-222, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32>

In courses with larger enrollments, multiple groups could be assigned to the same set of documents.

**Handout: Background information for the Archival Methods Lab[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The United States undertook a number of regime change operations in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s, including:

* 1960-1961 covert operation to assassination Trujillo
* 1961-1962 covert operation to influence elections
* 1965 overt operation to prevent leftist government from taking power
* 1965-1868 covert operation to influence elections

In this methods lab, your task is to evaluate competing hypotheses about what motivated these regime change efforts. Consider the following 4 hypotheses.

*1. Protecting economic interests of corporations*

Numerous studies contend that states use regime change to protect the interests of powerful corporations. Proponents of this theory point to three high profile examples. The first is the joint Anglo-American operation that toppled Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, allegedly for having nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. After the coup, Iranian oil was managed by an international consortium, which granted five US companies (Esso/Exxon, Gulf, Mobil, Standard Oil of California, and Texaco) 40 percent of Iranian oil royalties. The second case is America’s 1954 intervention in Guatemala, allegedly to protect the interests of a powerful American multinational corporation known as the United Fruit Company (UFCO). The third is the 1973 Chilean coup, which proponents claim aimed to protect the interests of an American firm, International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT). According to Stephen Kinzer, these cases show that Washington “acted mainly for economic reasons—specifically to establish, promote, and defend the right of Americans to do business around the world without interference.” Scholars have also found some empirical support for this theory. Dube, Kaplan, and Naidu, for instance, show how coups and coup authorizations increased the stock returns of partially nationalized US corporations on five occasions during the Cold War. They conclude “that there were substantial economic incentives for firms to lobby for these operations…regime changes led to significant economic gains for corporations that stood to benefit from U.S. interventions in developing countries.”

*2. Preserving global or regional hegemony*

States might also seek regime change in order to preserve global or regional hegemony—a position that offers many important military, political, and economic benefits. A hegemon is a state “so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system. No other state has the military wherewithal to put up a serious fight against it.” Hegemonic regime changes include missions in pursuit of this goal. They can be either offensive in nature—as an aspiring hegemon works to achieve a dominant position over weaker states within a certain geographic region—or defensive in nature—as an established regional hegemon works to protect its dominion from internal or external threats. The states targeted in hegemonic missions do not need to pose a current or future threat to the intervening state. Instead, the defining feature of a hegemonic regime change is the desire to maintain a hierarchical relationship between the intervener and the target state as part of the former’s effort to establish regional hegemony.

*3. Countering the Soviet Union*

Regime change might also be pursued in order to prevent foreign countries from joining rival alliances. In these cases, the target country may be comparatively weak and nonthreatening on its own, but the concern is about a potential shift in power is toward a rival military alliance. To maintain the status quo and prevent this from happening, the intervening state attempts to install a foreign leader who will, at the very least, refuse to join their rival’s alliance, and in the best-case scenario, become a reliable ally to the intervener, thereby eliminating a future threat and bolstering their own alliance’s power. Preventive regime changes frequently occur in competitive bipolar systems because both great powers fear that a small number of defections could upset the tenuous balance of power or cause a cascade of defections favoring their rival.

*4. An Overzealous CIA*

Another possibility is that an overzealous Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) conducted covert operations recklessly and often without executive approval. In the famous words of Senator Frank Church (D-ID), chairman of a Senate investigation into US government covert operations that began in 1975, “The CIA was behaving during those years like a rogue elephant rampaging out of control.” Supporting this claim, the Church Committee investigation found that only 14 percent of the CIA’s covert actions between 1961 and 1975 had been vetted and approved by the National Security Council (NSC). Although Church himself later disowned the “rogue elephant” metaphor, the image has stuck, and popular accounts continue to repeat this theme. For instance, Tim Weiner argues, “The CIA’s covert operations were by and large blind stabs in the dark. The agency’s only course was to learn by doing— by making mistakes in battle. The CIA concealed its failures abroad by lying.” The general picture painted in these accounts is of an incompetent CIA predisposed toward meddling in the domestic politics of foreign powers.

**Case Background: The Dominican Republic**

From its independence in 1844 until 1930, Dominican politics were a remarkably violent and volatile affair. Indeed, the country had 123 separate rulers during its first eighty-six years of existence. Throughout this time, Washington’s relationship with Santo Domingo was guided by two principles. First was the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which stated that any European effort to colonize or interfere with any state in the Western Hemisphere would be considered an act of aggression by the United States and would warrant a military response. The second, known as the “Roosevelt Corollary,” was introduced by Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 and granted the United States the authority to intervene to enforce legitimate contractual claims made by European powers and to combat domestic political disturbances within Latin American countries.

In keeping with these principles, US forces intervened in the Dominican Republic in 1904 to establish a Customs’ Receivership after the Dominican government failed to repay its significant debt to European and American creditors. Ten years later, amid a bloody civil war, President Wilson again ordered US Marines to occupy and stabilize the country. As a part of this mission, US forces dissolved the Dominican Army and established a national guard, known as the Dominican National Police (*Policia Nacional Dominicana* —PND). In 1918, an ambitious twenty-five-year-old named Rafael Trujillo joined the PND. Despite his criminal record and having been court-martialed in 1920 (and later acquitted) for holding a man hostage and raping his teenage daughter, Trujillo made a favorable impression on the Marines who trained him. Reports from the period describe him as “calm, even-tempered, forceful, active, bold, and painstaking . . . one of the best in the service.” By the time US forces withdrew following the election of President Horacio Vásquez in 1924, Trujillo had been promoted to the rank of major. In 1927, Vásquez reorganized the PND as the National Army and put Trujillo in command as a brigadier general. With this new authority, Trujillo soon found himself in position to challenge Vásquez to become the most powerful man in the country.

Trujillo grasped his opportunity to gain power during a 1930 uprising against Vásquez. Early in the uprising, Trujillo made a deal with the rebel leader, Rafael Estrella Ureña, that his forces would not defend Vásquez’s regime if Trujillo could run for president in the May 1930 elections. The deal worked as planned. For his part, Estrella Ureña captured Santo Domingo in February. After Vásquez fled, however, Trujillo sidelined his opponents and won the sham election in May with over 95 percent of the vote. After taking office, Trujillo soon assumed dictatorial powers. He adopted titles like “Generalissimo,” “the Benefactor,” and “El Jefe.” He renamed the country’s capital Ciudad Trujillo and embezzled billions of dollars into family bank accounts. For many years, Trujillo’s political party, the Dominican Party (*Partido Dominicano*—PD) was the only party allowed to compete in elections, and the PD received 100 percent of the vote in nearly every election between 1936 and 1957.

Through all of this, Washington reluctantly accepted Trujillo’s rule because of his strong opposition to communism and, in 1954, even worked with the dictator to covertly overthrow Jacobo Arbenz’s leftist regime in Guatemala CIA Station Chief Henry Dearborn explained the feeling during this time: “He had his torture chambers, he had his political assassinations, but he kept law and order, cleaned the place up, made it sanitary, built public works and he didn’t bother the United States. So that was fine with us.” By the late 1950s, however, officials in the Eisenhower administration began to question America’s relationship with Trujillo. “About the time I got there,” Dearborn continued, “his iniquities had gotten so bad that there was a lot of pressure from various political groups, civil rights groups and others, not only in the United States, but throughout the hemisphere, that something just had to be done about this man.”

…Eisenhower authorized a covert campaign to overthrow Trujillo in 1960, but the operation misfired. In an effort to appease the United States, Trujillo announced that he would hold democratic elections in 1961. He also forced his notoriously cruel brother Héctor to resign as president, and replaced him with a moderate cabinet minister, Joaquín Balaguer. These efforts were in vain. Consul General and de facto CIA Station Chief Henry Dearborn, who had become America’s primary source within the Dominican Republic after the US ambassador was recalled, wrote to Washington that Trujillo would continue “his political domination whether he is President or dogcatcher” and that there was no indication that the regime would “abolish arbitrary arrests, prison tortures, or reprisals against its political opposition.” Trujillo ended up being assassinated in 1961, but his fall brought his equally cruel son Ramfis to power. In the following years, Kennedy and Johnson launched multiple covert and one overt regime change operation in the Dominican Republic.

1. Adapted from Lindsey A. O’Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America’s Secret Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)