The Coup D'etat Project

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ABSTRACT

Coup d'états are important events in the life of a country. They constitute an important subset of irregular transfers of political power that can have important and enduring consequences for a country's well-being. This notwithstanding, a comprehensive and well-documented inventory of coups has yet to be compiled. The Coup D'état Project (CDP) is an effort to fill that void. It is a two-stage project and the second stage is still in progress. The first stage involved compiling and documenting existing information on coups from various sources, as well as generating quantitative data on each coup. This white paper provides a succinct definition of a coup d'état used by the CDP, an overview of the typology that was developed to differentiate among coup types, and an outline of the quantitative data collected for each coup. Reliability checks for the coup data collected are reported in Appendix I. The CDP dataset can be accessed at: http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/documents/CoupData.xls.

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Introduction

Coup d'états are important events in the life of a country. They constitute an important subset of irregular transfers of political power that can have important and enduring consequences for a country's well-being. Despite this, social scientists have yet to compile a comprehensive and well-documented inventory of coups that is global in scope. This, of course, has adversely affected research in a number of fields. Thus, the Cline Center for Democracy, as part of its Societal Infrastructures and Development (SID) project,[1] initiated the Coup D'état Project (CDP). CDP's objective is to compile, for 165 countries in the post WWII era, a more comprehensive listing, documentation, and categorization of coups for use by researchers. The CDP is a two-stage project. The first stage involves compiling and documenting existing information on coups from various sources. The second stage involves the use of basic data science techniques to identify information on coups from a digitized news archive created by the Cline Center as part of its Social, Political and Economic Event Database (SPEED) project. SPEED is a "Big Data" project and its news archive is a global information base that includes a diverse set of news sources for every country in the world; it includes tens of millions of articles and is updated daily.[2]

The next section provides a succinct definition of a coup d'état used by the CDP and an overview of the coup categories that are used to differentiate among the diverse set of events that fall within CDP's definition of a coup. The next section describes the methodology used to implement the first stage of the CDP, as well as the type of data collected for each coup. The third section lays out the second stage of the CDP, which is still in progress.

Coups and Coup Categories

We define a coup d'état as the sudden and irregular (i.e., illegal or extra-legal) removal, or displacement, of the executive authority of an independent government.[3] Thus, we include as coups situations in which the initiators leave the incumbent chief executive in a titular position but impose a higher authority (e.g., a military junta or dictator) that is the de facto executive power. We view the overthrow of a colonial government as a regime change rather than a coup. Coups are usually, but not always, initiated by a small group of elites within the government. While coups are normally executed by the threat or use of force, they can also result from a societal paralysis generated by massive civil strife. Some coups involve violence; others are bloodless. If the initiators of a coup are successful in exercising control of government, then the coup is considered to be successful. Many coups are not successfully executed; many others are disrupted in the planning stages (i.e., before execution is even attempted).

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[1] For more information on SID see: http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/sid-project.html.

[2] For more information on SPEED's news archive see:
http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/documents/SPEEDInformationBase.pdf.

[3] The chief executive can be any individual or group that commands the executive authority of government. This includes presidents, prime ministers, dictators, members of an established executive collective (rotating presidency, collective executive councils, juntas, single-ruling party systems) or any other type of executive power arrangement.

A considerable range of events fall within our definition of a coup. Because much variation exists within situations we define as coups, various scholars have offered different coup typologies motivated by particular substantive concerns – as do we. Consistent with the objectives and reach of the CDP, and the type of information available to us, we constructed a typology that focuses on the circumstances surrounding the execution of the coup (who initiated it, the immediate setting, its resolution, etc.). Our typology includes the following eleven categories:

- Military coups
- Rebel coups
- Palace coups
- Popular revolts
- Dissident actions
- Foreign coups
- Internationally mediated transitions
- Forced resignations
- Counter coups
- Auto coups
- Attempted coups
- Coup conspiracies

Operational definitions of the coup categories are provided below.[4]

- Military coups
  - The distinguishing feature of these coups is that they are initiated by military actors who are not a formal part of the governing apparatus (i.e., a military junta).
- Rebel coups
  - In these coups the incumbent executive is removed by an organized, militarized group that is actively contesting government forces.
- Palace coups
  - These coups are executed by members of a faction within the existing government.
- Popular revolts
  - This category includes irregular regime changes that are driven by widespread popular dissatisfaction with a government that is manifested by high levels of civil unrest. This popular discontent facilitates the removal of the chief executive, often by military leaders or factions within the government.[5]

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[4] It should be emphasized that the CDP documents each coup included within its inventory and extracts basic information from the documentary materials (coup actors, weapons used, injuries, arrests, etc.). The documentary materials and the quantitative data extracted from them provide the basis for more fine-grained distinctions among coups. This information will allow other scholars to both validate CDP categorization and construct their own typology.

[5] These situations differ from democratic impeachments/no confidence/resignations driven by popular concerns because the latter actions are consistent with constitutional provisions and, hence are, "regular" removals. This category also does not include situations where "weak" leaders are removed by the military or other factions within

- Dissident actions
  - The primary movers in these actions are small groups of discontents. There are too few initiators to constitute a popular revolt and the initiators are not sufficiently organized or militarized to be considered a rebel coup.
- Foreign coups
  - The force behind these coups is a foreign power. In many instances that foreign power works in collaboration with a set of domestic actors to remove the incumbent leader and install a government that is more sympathetic to its interests.
- Internationally Mediated Transitions
  - These mediated transitions involve situations in which international actors work with countries experiencing intense civil conflict, such as a civil war, that centers on dissatisfaction with the existing regime. The objective of the mediation is to limit violence and turmoil rather than to install a sympathetic, puppet regime.
- Forced resignations
  - These are "soft coups" where there is no formal deposing of the chief executive. Instead, the chief executive withdraws from his position under the imminent threat of illegal or extra-legal removal.
- Counter coups
  - These coups involve the elimination of a usurper by members of the prior regime within a month of the initial coup.
- Auto coups
  - These coups involve the existing chief executive taking extreme measures to eliminate, or render powerless, other components of the government (the legislature, the judicial branch, etc.). It also includes situations where the chief executive simply assumes extraordinary powers in an illegal or extra-legal manner (i.e., goes beyond extraordinary measures included in the country's constitution, such as declaring a state of emergency).
- Attempted coups
  - These are coup efforts that are unsuccessful in removing the chief executive.
- Coup conspiracy
  - These coup efforts are discovered and disrupted in the planning stages (i.e., the conspirators never begin to implement their plans).

It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive and that, where warranted, a coup may be placed in more than one category. For example, a rebel coup may be facilitated by foreign governments. Also, palace coups may involve the military.

Stage I Identification and Documentation

To identify and document coups that comport with the CDP definition during the post WWII era, we drew upon five sources of information: (1) the SPEED project's Societal Stability Protocol (SSP), which generated data on political power reconfigurations reported in the New York

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the government to suppress popular uprisings and maintain the status quo, rather than to respond to popular concerns.

Times;[6] (2) the 2010 update of Government Change in Authoritarian Regimes project (Svolik and Akcinaroglu. 2007), which contains well-documented information on leader entries and exits; (3) data compiled by the Center for Systemic Peace, which provides information on coups, attempted coups, and coup conspiracies (http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/CSPCoupsCodebook2012.pdf); (4) the most recent version of the World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators (Taylor, and Jodice (1983), which reports data on irregular power transfers; and (5) Luttwak's early handbook (1979).[7]

Because of limitations in each of these sources, the time frames they cover, and the innate difficulty of identifying coups across such a large number of countries over a long period of time, none of these projects was sufficient to achieve the goals of the CDP. The SPEED project, which represents a random sample of only about 13% of relevant New York Times articles, uncovered 596 coup events; the Government Change in Authoritarian Regimes project reported 312; the Center for Systemic Peace identified 745 the World Handbook, which covers the period from 1948 to 1983, included data on 278; and Luttwak's book covered the period from 1945 to 1978 and identified 293 coups.

Because these different sources included overlapping listings, the first step in the process of identifying and documenting the coups involved screening and reconciling duplicate entries. The second step involved documenting the screened and reconciled inventory of coups. Most of the sources provided some level of documentation. Where additional information was needed, on-line sources were used. The documentation of the coups was used to resolve discrepancies between sources that included the same coup (e.g., conflicting dates). The documentary materials often identified other situations that met the CDP definition and these were added to the list. The final list included 1,058 realized and unrealized coups.

Each qualifying event was assigned a coup id# which was used in both a database file that included quantitative data and a text file, which provided documentary materials (news articles, wiki entries, etc.).[8] The documentary materials were used to extract information for the database file, which others can verify and/or augment by reviewing the on-line textual archive. In addition to the coup id#, the information extracted for the database file included: country name, cowcode, date of the coup event,[9] coup type, the incumbent chief executive(s) targeted by the coup (name and title), the leader(s) of the coup effort, the name and title of the person replacing the incumbent, the CDP coup type, the consequences for the incumbent (none, arrested, executed, etc.), the type of coup actors involved in the effort (generals, mid-level officers, government

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[6] For more information on SPEED's SSP, see: http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/publications/SPEED-An_Overview_of_the_SSP.pdf.

[7] Edward Luttwak. Coup D'état, a Practical Handbook. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1979.

[8] The coup inventory can be found at: http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/documents/Coup Inventory.xls; the documentary materials can be found at: http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/research/documents/Coup Event Descriptions.pdf.

[9] The event date for coups is the actual fall of the leader(s) in question. For attempts, the date is designated as the day the attempt ended. If this is ambiguous or not available, the documentary materials were used to estimate a date of the attempt. For conspiracies, the date corresponds to the day the conspiracy was uncovered/reported/disrupted.

officials, ordinary citizens, foreign governments, etc.), the name of foreign actors, the weapons used, injuries, and whether the event occurred during, or proximate to, an episode of civil unrest. A number of reliability coefficients (minimum pairwise agreement, Brennan and Prediger's Kappa, Krippendorf's alpha, etc.) were calculated for the coded information and, in general, the data are highly reliable. The reliability coefficients for three categories of variables (coup type, coup actors and coup effects) are reported and discussed in Appendix I.

Stage II Identification and Documentation

To augment the listing and documentation of coups that were compiled in Stage I, CDP's Stage II developed a classification algorithm to identify New York Times articles with information on coups.

[Incomplete at this time]

Appendix I
Reliability Checks

Three coders were responsible for reviewing the documentary materials and coding three sets of variables that require the exercise of some discretionary judgment: the type of coup (military coup, palace coup, popular revolt, etc.); the coup actors (military, government officials, rebels, etc.); and the proximate effects of the coup (disposition of the executive, harm done to others, weapons used). The 1,058 coups events were evenly divided between the coders for coding. The coding resulted in the generation of a series of dummy variables pertaining to the coup type, actors and effects (e.g., Was this a military coup? Were religious leaders involved in the coup? Were weapons used?). In addition to receiving a unique set of coups for coding, each coder also received a common set of 120 coups. The coders knew that they would be coding a common set of coups but they did not know which they were. Our reliability check was based on an analysis of how consistently the three sets of variables were coded for these 120 cases.

To gauge the reliability of the coding process we calculated both an average and minimum level of pairwise agreement for each dummy variable and used the minimum pairwise agreement for each item to calculate Brennan and Prediger's kappa, which subtracts a chance agreement term based on the number of coding categories in the variable being tested. In addition to kappa, we calculated Krippendorf's alpha which corrects for multiple sources of chance agreement within a covariance framework across multiple coders. We use Landis and Koch's (1977) interpretation of the kappa coefficient, where levels of agreement are assessed as follows: 0.00-0.20 slight agreement, 0.21-0.40 fair agreement, 0.41-0.60 moderate agreement, 0.61-0.80 substantial agreement, and 0.81-1.00 almost perfect agreement.

Table A1 reports the reliability coefficients for the coup type variables. Nine of the coup type variables had kappa coefficients that placed them in the "almost perfect" category; another (military coup) reveals "substantial agreement." The other two variables (dissident actions, forced resignations) reveal fair and moderate agreement, respectively. Thus, for the most part – and certainly for the most frequent and destabilizing coup events – there is a very high level of agreement across the coders. Similar results were generated for the coup actor dummy variables; they are reported in Table A2. Ten of the fifteen variables had kappa coefficients that place them in the "almost perfect" category. The other five reveal "substantial agreement."

Table A1
Intercoder Reliability Statistics for Coup Types

	Type	Average Pairwise Agreement	Minimum Pairwise Agreement	Brennan and Prediger's Kappa[a]	Krippendorf's Alpha[b]
Military coup	Nominal	86.0%	83.2%	.664	.720
Rebel coup	Nominal	95.5%	95.0%	.900	.669
Palace coup	Nominal	92.7%	90.8%	.816	.542
Popular revolt	Nominal	93.8%	93.3%	.866	.601
Dissident actions	Nominal	73.7%	64.7%	.294	.048
Foreign coup	Nominal	95.5%	94.1%	.882	.363
Internationally mediated transition	Nominal	96.1%	94.1%	.882	.398
Forced resignation or demotion	Nominal	83.2%	74.8%	.496	.076
Counter coup	Nominal	97.8%	96.6%	.932	.191
Auto coup	Nominal	97.8%	97.5%	.950	.590
Attempted coup	Nominal	93.3%	92.4%	.848	.831
Coup conspiracy	Nominal	95.0%	94.1%	.882	.878

[a]Intercoder reliability calculated from minimum pairwise agreement
[b]Intercoder reliability measured as chance-corrected covariance

Table A2
Intercoder Reliability Statistics for Actors

	Type	Average Pairwise Agreement	Minimum Pairwise Agreement	Brennan and Prediger's Kappa[a]	Krippendorf's Alpha[b]
Military involved?	Nominal	87.7%	84.9%	.698	.751
Other security officials involved?	Nominal	95.0%	93.3%	.866	.333
Rebel soldiers involved?	Nominal	95.0%	94.1%	.882	.652
Other government officials involved?	Nominal	87.1%	84.9%	.698	.381
Non-state political actors involved?	Nominal	85.4%	82.4%	.648	.341
Political radicals involved?	Nominal	92.2%	89.1%	.782	.631
Business leaders involved?	Nominal	98.9%	98.3%	.782	-.003
Organized labor activists involved?	Nominal	96.6%	95.8%	.916	.235
Academics or students involved?	Nominal	97.8%	96.6%	.950	.545
Religious leaders involved?	Nominal	98.9%	98.3%	.966	.745
Ethnic leaders involved?	Nominal	97.8%	96.6%	.932	.656
Ordinary citizens involved?	Nominal	96.6%	95.8%	.916	.722
Mercenaries involved?	Nominal	98.9%	98.3%	.966	.662
Non-state foreign actors involved?	Nominal	97.8%	97.5%	.950	.191
Foreign government actors involved?	Nominal	97.8%	97.5%	.950	.807

[a]Intercoder reliability calculated from minimum pairwise agreement
[b]Intercoder reliability measured as chance-corrected covariance
[c]Coded 1 if generals, or mid-level military, or low-level military, or soldiers = 1

Table A3 reports the reliability data for the proximate coup effects variables. The coefficients are divided into three subcategories. The first set pertains to the impact of the coup event on the targeted leader. There are seven variables in this category (no effect, house arrest, injured, killed, etc.). Four of these have kappa coefficients that place them in the "near perfect" category and one just misses (by .01), leaving two variables in the "substantial agreement" category. The other, referring to whether the targeted leader was expatriated, falls in the "fair agreement" category. The second subset in Table A3 refers to the impact of the coup event on individuals other than the target leader; it has three variables (arrested, injured, killed). The arrested variable shows fair agreement, the injured variable shows substantial agreement and the killed variable reveals near perfect agreement. Finally, the last category deals with the weapons used in the coup event. It includes five variables (no weapons, crude weapons, small arms, etc.). Three show near perfect agreement and two reveal substantial agreement

Table A3
Intercoder Reliability Statistics for Proximate Coup Effects

	Type	Average Pairwise Agreement	Minimum Pairwise Agreement	Brennan and Prediger's Kappa[a]	Krippendorf's Alpha[b]
Impact on Targeted Leader					
Leader not harmed	Nominal	88.20%	85.70%	0.71	0.301
Leader flees country	Nominal	92.70%	89.90%	0.80	0.421
Leader under house arrest	Nominal	96.10%	95.80%	0.92	0.107
Leader incarcerated	Nominal	96.60%	95.80%	0.92	0.318
Leader expatriated	Nominal	94.40%	92.40%	0.48	0.204
Leader injured	Nominal	98.90%	98.30%	0.97	0.330
Leader killed	Nominal	98.30%	97.50%	0.95	0.742
Impact on Other Individuals					
Someone arrested	Nominal	73.10%	69.70%	0.39	0.331
Someone injured	Nominal	85.40%	79.80%	0.60	0.407
Someone killed	Nominal	96.50%	91.70%	0.88	0.643
Weapons Used					
No weapon used in action	Nominal	92.70%	89.10%	0.78	-0.040
Crude weapon used	Nominal	97.80%	96.60%	0.93	0.324
Small arms used	Nominal	87.10%	83.20%	0.66	0.139
Explosives Used	Nominal	98.90%	98.30%	0.97	0.330
Military Grade Weapons Used	Nominal	92.70%	90.80%	0.82	0.513

[a]Intercoder reliability calculated from minimum pairwise agreement
[b]Intercoder reliability measured as chance-corrected covariance