# The Colpus Dataset Codebook

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**Abstract**

This codebook (1) introduces our definition of coup d'état events (with particular emphasis on the distinction between autocratic **leader reshuffling** (*coup de chef*), autocratic **regime change** (*coup de regime*), and **anti-democratic** coups), (2) details our coding rules for distinguishing these coup events from other forms of political instability or political violence, and (3) summarizes the updated regime and leader data underlying the Colpus dataset. See the accompanying document of coup event narratives for our coding justification for 1,172 candidate coup events identified by prior coup datasets and literature. See the accompanying appendix of summary figures and tables to see various patterns in the 550 coup attempts in our data across 94 countries over the 1946 to 2020 period, of which 402 target autocratic leaders or regimes, 121 target democratic leaders or regimes, 24 target provisional leaders or regimes, and 3 target warlord leaders or regimes.

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# 1 Coding rules for coup events

In this section we: (1) outline the coding rules used to define a **coup attempt**; (2) outline a typology of non-coup events that some other coup datasets code as coups; (3) outline the coding rules used to categorize both successes and failures as either **regime change** or **reshuffling** coup attempts; and (3) compare our definition and coding rules with those of the existing major datasets from which we draw candidate coup attempts.

## 1.1 Coup Event Definition

A **coup détat** occurs whenever *the incumbent ruling regime or regime leader is ousted from power (or a presumptive regime leader is prevented from taking power) as a result of concrete, observable, and unconstitutional actions by one or more civilian members of the incumbent ruling regime and/or one or more members of the military or security apparatus.* A **military coup attempt** is an attempted coup détat involving at least one member of the regime's current military or coercive apparatus. A **non-military coup attempt** is an attempted coup détat involving only civilian members of the governmental apparatus (i.e. cabinet members, the Vice President, the Crown Prince) but involved no concrete actions by military actors. According to our definition, therefore, military coup attempts may be civilian-led, but non-military coup attempts are never military-led.

To qualify as a coup attempt, the event must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Target the *incumbent regime leader*
  - Incumbent autocratic regime leaders as of January 1 each year are identified primarily by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).[1]
  - Incumbent non-autocratic regime leaders as well as autocratic regime leaders who never ruled as of January 1 (because their tenure in power was less than a year) are identified primarily by version 4.1 of Archigos (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).[2]
- Target the *presumptive regime leader*
  - The presumptive regime leader is the legal or constitutional successor following the regular exit of an incumbent regime leader (e.g. due to natural death or voluntary resignation). For example, in the United States, the presumptive regime leader following a presidential election but before inauguration would be the President-Elect. Between inauguration and the next presidential election, the presumptive

1. For a detailed summary and explanation of the Colpus regime leader data, and a comparison to alternative leader datasets such as Archigos, see our Colpus Regime Leader Data document.

2. However, in some instances we disagree with their coding of the effective regime leader, and in these cases we explain why in the coding rationale for our alternative coding of regime leader consistent with Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). We also adjust start and end dates for leader entry and exit for such leaders to be consistent with the Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) regime leader coding whenever it differs with Archigos.

regime leader in the event the President were not able to carry out their full term in office would be the Vice President per the constitutional line of succession.[3]

  - In other words, a military coup may target leader *entry*, not just a leader *exit*. For example, even if a leader does not exit due to a military a coup, a new leader may still enter due to one, if the military preempts the constitutional or "regular" succession procedures. This means that "coups by invitation" in which the incumbent regime leader is complicit in their own removal by the military to prevent the presumptive regime leader from taking office qualify as a coup event.

- Target the incumbent *regime*, that is, the group from which leaders can be drawn

  - Incumbent authoritarian and non-authoritarian regimes are identified by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).[4]
  - Whenever Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) code an indirect military regime, the executive is a civilian even though the regime leader is the top military officer.[5] Events that meet the other criteria for a coup but target the nominal executive under indirect military regimes are still considered coup events.[6]

The event must also meet *all* of the following criteria:

- Involve a concrete, observable, and unconstitutional *action*

  - A *concrete* action includes one of the following:
    - the movement of troops, soldiers, or weapons in an effort to oust the regime leader and install a new leader or set of leaders
    - a public announcement (radio, television, newspaper, etc.) by coup plotters that the regime leader has been ousted from power and replaced by a new leader or set of leaders
    - a public announcement (e.g. radio, television, newspaper) by the regime leader stepping down due to behind-the-scene action
  - An action is *observable* in one of two ways:
    - The action is *directly* observed by the public and reported contemporaneously in a publicly available source such as a newspaper article or radio broadcast
    - The action is *indirectly* observed by the public but directly observed by participants and regime insiders during the event and reported contemporaneously or in a secondary history.

3. To the best of our knowledge, there is no off-the-shelf cross-national dataset identifying presumptive regime leaders or specifying the constitutional line of succession in each country. We therefore rely on reporting and secondary scholarship to indicate who the presumptive regime leader was at the time.

4. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) define a regime as "a set of formal and/or informal rules for choosing leaders and policies." For more on how they identify regime change, see Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).

5. Indirect military regimes account for a quarter (17 of 79) of all the candidate cases in which Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) and Archigos have different leader codings over the 1946-2010 period.

6. This coding rule potentially affects 25 candidate events in our dataset that target one of six indirect military regimes: Guatemala 85-95, Argentina 58-66, Guinea Bissau 12-14, Mali 12-13, Syria 49-51, and Syria 62-63.

- An action is *unconstitutional* if it violates constitutional, legal, or similarly institutionalized "regular" and voluntary procedures for leadership succession.[7]
  - The threat or use of military force to oust a civilian leader or regime is always assumed to be unconstitutional, illegal, or "irregular" actions.
  - In cases where there is no public threat or use of military force, as in the case of forced resignations that result from behind-the-scenes actions, evidence of unconstitutional force or pressure must include a claim by (a) the regime leader or (b) a publicly available source, that the resignation was not voluntary but was the result of concrete actions by regime insiders, the military, or security forces.[8]

- To qualify as a military coup, one of the individuals who pursues the attempted coup must be a *current active member of the regime's military or security apparatus*:
  - the individuals who threaten or attempt to use armed force to oust the regime leader cannot be members of the military or security apparatus who either were: (a) retired, (b) dismissed, (c) defected from the regime at a prior date, or (d) members of a foreign military unit stationed in the target country (e.g. Soviet forces in Eastern Europe)
  - actions by a ruling group such as a cabinet or party executive committee (e.g. Politburo) that contains active members of the military (e.g. Defense Minister) are not considered actions by an individual member of the military; if the military member of these bodies executes a concrete observable action to threaten or use force separately from this body we use this evidence to code a coup attempt; but if the body makes a statement or decision (i.e. no troop movements) to oust the incumbent – with no evidence that the military member made a threat or statement apart from the body – then we do not interpret this as evidence of a military coup attempt but instead code the event as a non-military coup attempt
  - a member of the current active military must have a publicly acknowledged rank or title in the current regime's military or security organizations
  - A civilian with an *honorary* military rank or title is NOT considered a current active member of the military because they are not professional soldiers. Such military titles may be awarded to civilians as part of a spoils system, so that the civilian may draw a military pension despite never having been a soldier.

7. According to Polity data on executive regulation (*xrreg*), the vast majority (about 84%) of country-years under dictatorship (as defined by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014)) have established regulated or otherwise "designational" procedures for the selection of chief executives. For the remaining "unregulated" dictatorships, there is theoretically no distinction between legal / constitutional and illegal / unconstitutional actions. In practice, however, the Polity variable is a rough indicator of whether there were any the leader in a country-year had come to power in a coup. The Polity *xrreg* variable is thus endogenous to the coups we are trying to capture.

8. To be clear, we only take into account an ousted leader's words pertaining to "regularity" of (non-)military actions. We do not use the leaders' words to help determine the motivations of the (non-)military actors.

- the leader or member of an allied warlord group is NOT considered a member of the military UNLESS the individual also has a publicly known rank in the country's military or security organizations[9]
- a formal position in the regime leader's cabinet does NOT necessarily constitute being a member of the regime's military with a publicly acknowledged rank or position
- a soldier or rebel unit commander who is currently (nominally, not necessarily de facto) integrated into the regime's military ranks during a peace process is considered a member of the regime's military if both of the following are met:
  1. someone from the former rebels/warlord group is given a formal position in the regime's government (e.g. cabinet portfolios or vice presidencies)
  2. the former rebel soldier or unit commander had been a part of the rebel/warlord group that has been nominally incorporated into the regime's government in (1)

To generate our final list of coup attempts which met all the criteria of the definition just outlined, we first examined every event that we identified from our own research or was listed as a successful or failed coup attempt in one or more of the following data sets: "GWF" (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014)[10], version 4.1 of Archigos (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009) and Svolik (2012)[11], "PT" (Powell and Thyne 2011), "CSP" (Marshall and Marshall 2018), Singh (2014), "CCD" (Nardulli et al. 2013), Luttwak (2016), Thompson (1973), Latin American coup lists by Fossum (1967) and "LPL" (Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán 2014), African coup lists by McGowan (2007) and Morrison, Mitchell, and Paden (1989), Middle Eastern coup lists by Be'eri (1982), and the World Handbook of Political Indicators ("WHIV") (Jenkins et al. 2012).[12]

## 1.2 Non-(Military) Coup Events

We compiled and reviewed qualitative evidence for each of 1,172 candidate cases in order to determine whether the candidate event was in fact a coup event according to our definition. Our first step in determining whether a candidate event was a coup attempt was to determine whether we could observe was any concrete action on the dates of the event. If we do find evidence of a concrete action, then our variable *action* equals 1. However, there are three categories of event for which we code our variable *action* as equal to 0:

9. For example, in referring to Afghan tribal militias during the Najibullah regime, Oliker (2011, 55) explains, "[i]n all cases, including whether or not they were former Mujahedin, tribal militia groups continued, in theory, to be commanded by Afghan Army officers. In practice, they retained their own commanders, who were given military rank and reported to army or KhAD leaders."

10. The GWF autocratic regime data includes military coups as one value of the "howend" variable coding how autocratic regimes end. Naturally, the GWF data do not include failed coup attempts or any "leader reshuffling" coups.

11. Naturally, these leader datasets do not include any failed coup attempts where there was no leader change.

12. This event dataset, covering the 1990-2004 period only, did not provide a coding for whether reported coups on the dates coded were successful or failed. We infer this from our leader coding, assuming WHIV codes failed coups when there is no leader change.

- **not exist**: we find no evidence of a coup plot let alone coup attempt on the alleged dates, or the event actually occurs in a country other than the alleged country

- **coup plot**: we find evidence that a coup was planned, but not actually executed such that no concrete action to oust regime leader is reported. This may be because conspirators abandon the plan or are preempted by loyal security or intelligence agents before a concrete action to oust the executive occurs

- **combined**: the actions are not considered part of a distinct event, but are considered part of a coup event that succeeds or fails on another calendar date. [13]

  - If a successful coup occurs in stages and when the precise date a regime leader is overthrown or replaced is in dispute among sources, we only record a the coup event once and code any other associated events as combined.
  - If the regime leader is overthrown but restored to power in a counter-coup within seven days, then code the first coup event as a failed coup and the subsequent counter-coup as combined.[14]

If we find evidence of a concrete action, our second step in determining whether a candidate event was a coup attempt was to determine whether that action was constitutional or "regular" (in Archigos terms). If it was not, then we code our variable *legal* as equal to 0. If it was, then we code our variable *legal* as equal to 1 and the event category as:

- **legal**: concrete and observable actions are taken to replace the regime leader, but these actions are constitutional or follow "regular" procedures or norms for leadership change (e.g. a president resigns in accord with prescribed term limits, steps down following elections without incident, or consensually turns over power to a fellow regime elite).

If we find evidence of an illegal concrete action, our third step in determining whether a candidate event was a coup attempt was to determine whether that action involved an attempt to seize power or not. If it did, then we code our variable *seize* as equal to 1. There are two categories of event for which we code our variable *seize* as equal to 0:

- **assassination**: perpetrators take concrete illegal actions to attempt to kill the regime leader, but we find no evidence that the assassins took concrete actions to hold and seize power for themselves or their affiliates; if the assassination attempt is part of accompanying concrete and observable actions to replace the regime leader, then code as a coup attempt (or exclude on other grounds)

- **mutiny**: perpetrators take concrete illegal actions, but we have no evidence that the perpetrators sought to oust the regime leader or regime as a whole

13. We have done our best to harmonize prior datasets which give slightly different dates but which we conclude refer to the same event. However, this process does not purge our dataset of all potentially overlapping events.

14. By contrast, some datasets such as Archigos and CCD record each event as a successful coup event.

- If the target is unclear, but the perpetrators grievances appear to be limited to economic or policy demands (e.g. over pay or promotions) but not a change in regime leadership, then code as a mutiny
- If the target(s) is limited to other elites (e.g. cabinet ministers, Vice President, junta members, etc.) and the perpetrators do not demand a new regime leader (or frame their actions in support of the regime leader), then code as a mutiny

If we find evidence of an illegal concrete action designed to seize power, our fourth step in determining whether a candidate event was a coup attempt was to more precisely determine who was the *target* of that action. There are two categories of event which we exclude as coups because the candidate event did not target the regime leader (or the nominal executive of an indirect military regime):

- **autogolpe**: the perpetrator or sponsor of the coup is the regime leader himself or herself, while the target of coup is the nominal executive (and Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) do not code an indirect military regime), a non-executive government branch (e.g. the legislature or the Supreme Court), the monarch, other regime elites such as a cabinet member or subordinate, an election winner, or the opposition[15]
  - An autogolpe is coded as succeeding if the regime leader remains in office for at least seven days following the event
  - An autogolpe is coded as failing if the regime leader loses power within seven days following their purge, whether in a military coup or otherwise
- **not regime leader**: the target of coup was either the nominal executive of the national government (and Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) do not code an indirect military regime), executive of a sub-national or regional government, a non-executive branch, or other regime elite; unlike an autogolpe, the perpetrator is not the regime leader

If we find evidence of an illegal concrete action designed to seize power which targeted the regime leader and was not perpetrated by the regime leader, our fifth step in determining whether a candidate event was a military coup attempt was to determine who was the *perpetrator* of that action. There are four categories of event which we exclude as military coups because the candidate event's perpetrators were not current active military members:

- **non-military coup**: coup perpetrators were members of the royal family, governmental actors, civilian elites, and/or other "regime insiders", but no current active members of the military participated in the coup attempt
  - If the coup leaders who were non-military regime insiders use any current military soldiers or security personnel in the planning and execution of the coup attempt, then these cases should be included as (military) coup attempts.

15. The regime leader may thus use the military in the process of purging potential rival elites. Such 'self-coups' often entail declaring martial law, annulling election results, and/or abrogating of the constitution.

  - If the coup leaders who were current active military members use any non-military actors in the planning and execution of the coup attempt, then these cases should still be included as (military) coup attempts.

- **prior defection**: coup perpetrators were rebels, insurgents, or violent revolutionaries

  - If the coup leaders used to be members of the military or other official security forces, but retired and/or defected earlier from the regime to start a rebellion at an earlier date, then code these as cases of prior defection.
  - If the coup leaders who were prior defectors use current military soldiers or security personnel in the planning and execution of the coup attempt, then this means a current member of the military took part in the coup attempt. Include these cases as (military) coup attempts.
  - If the coup leaders are prior defectors and current military units join only *after* the event is under way, then this should be coded as prior defection.
  - If the coup leaders are prior defectors and they use current military personnel to execute the coup attempt, who had not publicly defected prior to the coup event, then this does *not* constitute prior defection.

- **protest**: civilian actors take concrete and observable actions to oust the regime leader (e.g. organizing mass protests, a general strike, or other forms of civil disobedience)

  - Do not code as a military coup attempt if (a) military actors fail to defend the regime or repress protestors (via military quartering) but otherwise takes no concrete, observable, and unconstitutional actions to oust the regime leader, and/or (b) military actors recommend that the regime leader step down in order to end the protests and resolve the crisis, but make no active effort supporting protesters or threatening to remove the leader by unconstitutional means.
  - If the military goes beyond passive abandonment of the regime leader (military quartering or constitutional recommendations), and instead also actively takes concrete, observable, and unconstitutional actions to oust the regime leader, then code the event as a military coup attempt.
  - Treat the incumbent as the regime leader even after an election in which the incumbent loses up to the point when the newly elected leader is inaugurated if the (losing) incumbent is unwilling to step down immediately after the election.

- **foreign**: foreign actors (troops or mercenaries) rather than domestic actors take concrete actions to oust the regime leader (e.g. threaten force or actually invade).

The above coding rules are summarized in Figure 1.

By process of elimination, then, we code a candidate event as a military coup attempt if we find evidence of ALL of the following:

- a concrete action ($action = 1$) that was
- both illegal ($legal = 0$) and was

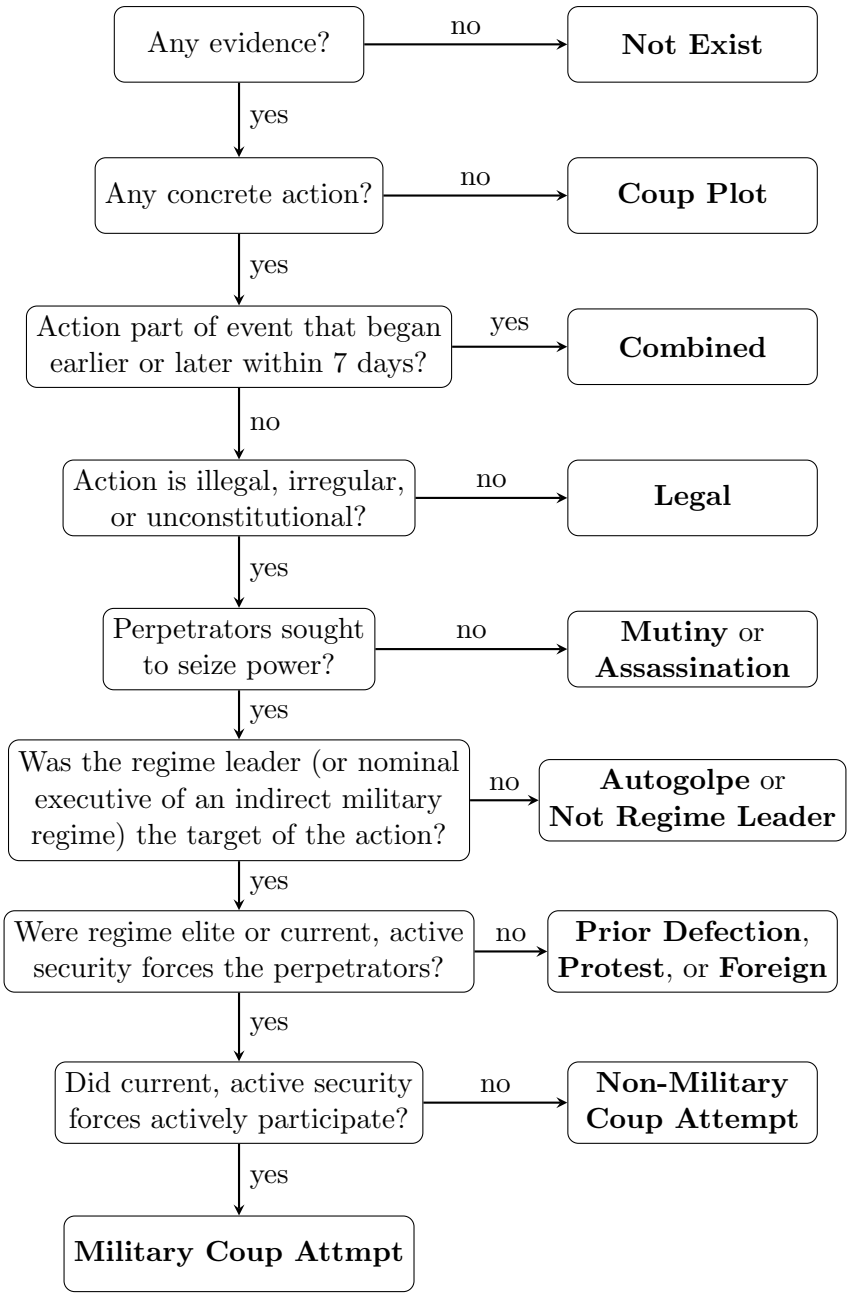


Figure 1: Coding Criteria Distinguishing Coup and Non-Coup Events

- designed to seize power (*seize* = 1) and which
- targeted the regime leader (*target* = "Regime Leader") or the nominal executive of an indirect military regime (*target* = "Nominal Executive" and *indmilitary* = 1) and was
- perpetrated by or with the participation of some current and active military actors (*perpetrator* = "Military Actors +").

## 1.3 Successful Coup Attempts

A **successful coup attempt** is a coup event in which the incumbent regime leader loses power during the calendar dates of the events (the "leader change rule") and which meets at least ONE of the following conditions:

1. the post-coup leader seizes power for at least *one* week (the "one week rule"), and/or
2. the coup results in regime change, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) (the "regime change rule")

Given the "leader change rule", all successful coups must entail leader change. If the coup event fails to unseat the incumbent regime leader during the dates of the event, but the event is the start of a successful rebellion, unarmed uprising, or civil war that later ousts the regime leader from power, the coup event is still coded as a failed coup attempt.

Given the "one week rule", even if the regime leader is removed during the dates of the event, we consider the coup as a failure if the post-coup leader(s) do not hold and seize power for at least seven days *and the coup does not result in regime change.* This rule effectively excludes assassination attempts against a regime leader as being a successful coup unless it is also accompanied by a *minimally* successful bid to replace that leader and install their replacement. Thus, when a regime leader appears to be briefly ousted from power but is restored in a counter-coup within a week, we combine the counter-coup as part of a failed coup attempt earlier in the week (rather than coding two successful coups, as often happens in the Archigos, Svolik, and CCD data). Although a week is a somewhat arbitrary cut off date, this rule maximizes consistency with the literature and existing data sets (e.g. PT and McGowan, although CSP uses a longer one-month rule).[16]

Given the "regime change rule", we code a coup attempt as a success if it fails the "one week rule" but is still successful in ousting the incumbent regime. This rule is distinct and more theoretically informed than prior coup datasets which rely on the "one week rule" or a similar time cutoff alone. Operationally, then, the "regime change rule" trumps the "one

16. Most leaders that enter office after a coup remain in power for more than week. According to Archigos leader data, only 19 of 300 (6.33%) de facto leaders who entered office by "irregular" means since 1950 remained in power for less than seven days. Thus, the vast majority of coup events fail because they fail to replace the regime leader for any length of time. Nevertheless, although rare, the one-week rule does affect how one codes coup attempt events which happen within a one week period. We therefore also note whenever a case would be coded successful using a minimal one-day rule as well, which is the smallest unit of observation for Archigos and Svolik leader data.

week rule". Only if the old regime were reinstated within seven days would we code a failed regime change coup.

We use autocratic regime data from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) to identify coups that occur during the lifetime of an autocratic or non-autocratic regime. Because the dynamics of coups that occur under non-autocracies are potentially distinct from those that occur under autocratic regimes, we principally code coups against non-autocratic leaders and regimes according to the three type of regime that they target:

- **Anti-Democratic coup attempts** are coup attempts which target democratic leaders or regimes, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).
  - **Successful Anti-Democratic Reshuffling coups** are successful coups that oust democratic leaders but do not result in regime change or a transition to autocracy, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014)
  - **Successful Anti-Democratic Regime Change coups** are successful coups that oust democratic leaders and result in regime change and a transition to autocracy, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014)
- **Provisional coup attempts** are coup attempts which target provisional leaders or regimes, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).
- **Warlord coup attempts** are coup attempts which target warlord leaders or regimes, according to Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).

We also use this data to identify the subset of all successful coup events that entail autocratic regime change. We code successful coup attempts that oust the entire autocratic regime as **successful regime change coups**. All other successful coup attempts under authoritarian rule are coded as **successful reshuffling coups**. Note that we code the success of a regime change coups based on the collapse of the sitting regime, regardless of the nature or duration of the subsequent regime. In some cases, the post-coup leaders may not succeed in maintaining power long enough to establish or consolidate their own distinctive regime, even though they hold and seize power for at least a week.[17]

Successful coups that occur under autocratic rule and in which one military officer replaces another as the regime leader BUT during which the autocratic regime does not collapse are coded as reshuffling coups EVEN IF the coup leader calls for new elections. We do this because at the time of the coup (and despite promising fresh elections) we do not know if and when new elections will be held. However, when a successful coup leader promises fresh elections AND the coup entails the transfer of power to a civilian group, the event is coded as a regime collapse (usually followed by a provisional regime) by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). We code these coup events as successful regime change coups.

We also note the following distinction between successful reshuffling and successful regime change coups:

17. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) only codes regimes which hold power over January 1. Thus, brief regimes which are themselves deposed before January 1 of the next year do not enter the GWF data.

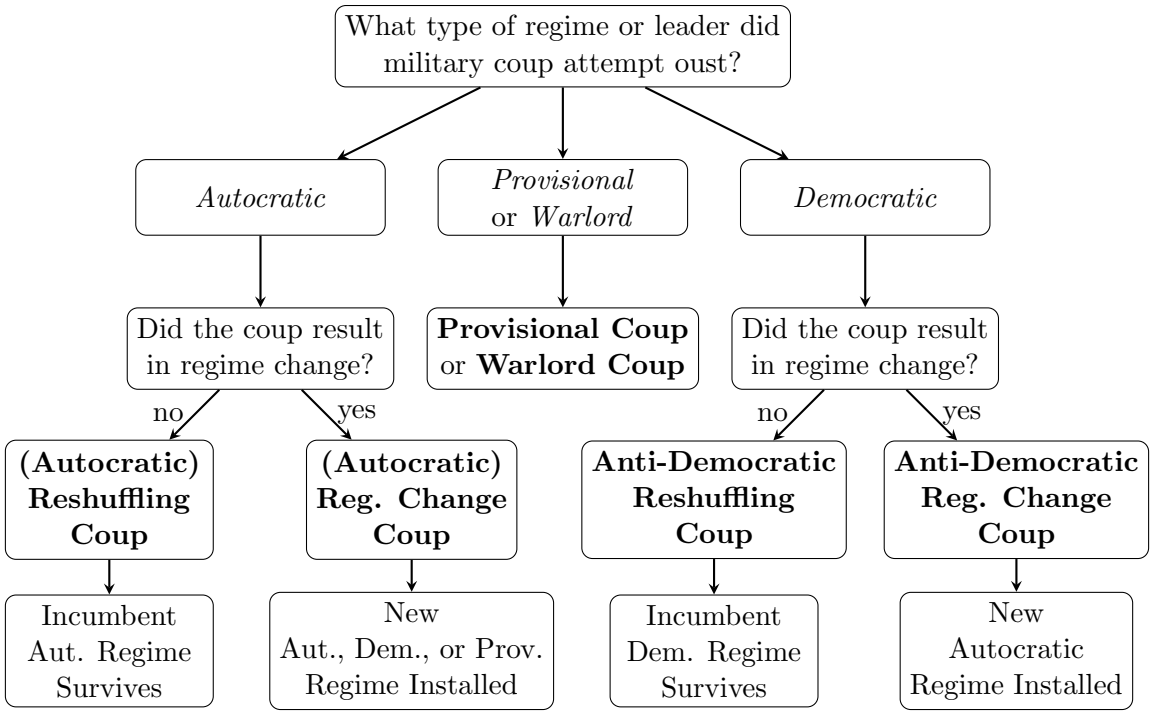


Figure 2: Coding Criteria Distinguishing Types of Successful Coup

- A successful coup that prevents personalization but results in a *change in the support coalition* (e.g. different parties or new ethnic groups) is coded as a successful *regime change* coup.
- A successful coup that prevents personalization but *preserves the military junta intact* is a successful *reshuffling* coup.

Thus successful coups with similar motives – preventing the incumbent leader from grabbing power for himself and in the process taking power from the military – can result in different outcomes, depending on whether the incumbent military junta remains largely intact or is forced to share power with a civilian party or new ethnic group due to the coup.

Figure 2 summarizes the key differences in different types of successful military coups. Figure 2 shows how our coup typology reflects both the heterogeneity in the target of the coup (autocratic versus non-autocratic regimes and leaders) and in the immediate outcome of the coup (regime change or not). It is worth noting that there is an asymmetry between autocratic regime change coups and anti-democratic regime change coups insofar as the latter always entails installation of a new autocratic regime, whereas the former may also entail installation of a provisional or democratic regime.

## 1.4 Failed Coup Attempts

A **failed coup attempt** is a coup event in which the regime leader does NOT lose power during the calendar dates of the events (fails "leader change rule"), or a coup event in which

the regime leader does lose power but the post-coup leader (a) fails to seize and hold power for at least one week (fails the "one week rule") and (b) fails to oust the incumbent regime (fails the "regime change rule"). Once we determined that a candidate event under an autocratic regime was a failed coup by our definition, we compiled evidence on the identity and intentions of the coup perpetrators to determine whether the failed coup was a **failed regime change coup** or a **failed reshuffling coup**.[18]

Because the decisions for distinguishing failed regime change coup attempts from failed reshuffling coup attempts can entail some subjective judgements, we provide a summary of the coding provided by existing datasets, a brief description of the event, and the rationale for the coding decision.

At heart, distinguishing failed regime change attempts from failed reshuffling attempts entails a counterfactual exercise. We assess whether a coup success in these cases *would have* led to a reshuffling of elites within the regime or if it would have established a new regime, as defined by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). To aid this assessment, we collected *objective* information for each failed coup attempt on whether the main coup actors were:

- junior officers, defined as officers with the rank of major or below [following the threshold used by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) to code collapse of a military regime led by "incumbents with the rank of general or colonel"];
- regime insiders, where a regime is "the identity of the group from which leaders can be chosen", including
  - blood relatives (family members) of the regime leader, as blood relations are often an important shared identity characteristic of a ruling group;
  - senior officials such as government ministers; personal body guards; and other regime elites.
- part of the same politically relevant ethnic group[19] as the regime leader, as Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) code regime change when a coup "replaces the government with one supported by different regions, religions, *ethnicities*, or tribes" [emphasis added]; or
- from a group outside the regime elite, such as an opposition politician, supporter of a banned or marginalized political group or party, or military officers who defected and started an insurgency at a prior date.

Using this information on the identity of the main coup actors as well as news reports and case study evidence on the purported grievances and motivations behind the coup attempt, we *subjectively* assess whether the coup attempt, had it been successful, would have entailed a reshuffling of leaders within a regime or whether it would have entailed regime change. A successful coup is coded as seeking regime change as follows:

18. By assumption, we code all failed anti-democratic coups as seeking regime change. Reshuffling coup attempts are extremely rare under democratic regimes

19. We use the *Ethnic Power Relations* data base for distinguishing the main ethnic groups. For more on the EPR data, see Cederman, Wimmer, and Min (2010).

- We code as *failed leader reshuffling coups* all coup attempts in which the coup plotters identity and/or preferences are such that we can infer that had they succeeded in seizing and holding power that they would *not* have significantly changed the group from which leaders can be chosen. The following indicators are employed to code leader reshuffling coup attempts:
  - the coup plotters' aim is to restore military officers' power vis-a-vis the regime leader, unless there is evidence that the military coup plotters (had they been successful) would rule in accordance with at least one of the following:
    - either *without* members of regime leader's family (in cases of observed father-to-son or brother-to-brother leadership transitions) or *without* the leader's ethnic group; thus attempts to prevent personalization of the regime are coded as attempted regime change coups under the assumption that had the coup succeeded the new leader would rule *without* the deposed leader's family and/or main group of ethnic supporters
    - *with* a newly elected civilian leader in cases where the incumbent regime leader nullified a prior election result
    - *with* an opposition party[20] leader in cases where the regime leader ruled without an executive from that opposition party
    - *without* the incumbent civilian leader's support party
    - *with* an election that would allow previously excluded opposition political parties to participate or exclude the prior regime leader (or his family) from participating
    - *with* a new group of ethnic elites who were previously excluded from the regime or junior partners
  - the coup perpetrators strive to preserve the incumbent ruling coalition by preventing new groups from being included in the government (e.g. after a peace agreement to end a civil war), because the coup leaders want to replace the incumbent regime leader with a new leader who will preserve the de facto incumbent coalition (including the regime leader's ethnic group). However, when the de facto incumbent coalition is comprised of multiple ethnic groups, and there is evidence that the coup attempt leaders would exclude the regime leader's ethnic group from power (even if the coup attempt leaders do not want the regime leader to expand the coalition to include excluded groups) code the case as regime change coup attempt. The key difference between these two scenarios is whether the coup leaders would exclude the targeted regime leader's ethnic group in addition to preventing the inclusion of excluded groups.
- We code as *failed regime change coups* all coup attempts in which the coup leader's identity and/or preferences are such that we can infer that had they succeeded in seizing and holding power that they would have significantly changed the group from

20. An opposition party is defined as a recognized political party that is not allied with the regime leader *at the time of the coup attempt.*

which leaders can be chosen. The following rules are employed to code regime change coup attempts:

- the coup attempt is led by military officers from an excluded or junior partner ethnic group (as defined by EPR), *unless*: (a) the regime leader is a member of the junior partner ethnic group (e.g. Musharraf in Pakistan); or (b) we find direct evidence from case studies that indicates ethnicity did not play a role in the military cleavages underpinning the coup attempt.[21] In countries such as Libya, where EPR does not capture salient clan/tribe/ethnic cleavages, we attempt to replicate the idea behind EPR's categories of excluded, junior, and senior groups. For example, we treat the Warfalla in Libya as a junior partner and the Qaddafa as the senior partner because while the Warfalla were one of the tribes loyal to Gaddafi, they did not hold key positions in the air force or the internal security apparatus.
- the coup attempt is led by military officers attempting to oust a monarchy, *so long as* the military officers were not allied with a faction of the monarchical family.
- the coup perpetrators plan to hold multiparty elections in which opposition parties would be allowed, *so long* the opposition parties are observed to be independent from the ruling party – that is, not funded by the regime leader or his family members; and not part of the regime front coalition.
- coup attempts by junior officers against a civilian regime leader; a civilian leader is defined as a regime leader who was not a member of the military prior to becoming the regime leader.
- coup attempts by junior officers against a senior officer regime leader AND the plotters do not include senior officers in the plot but plan to replace the senior officer group.
- coup attempts by officers of any rank targeting a civilian leader installed by the military who attempts to extend his term in office by changing (or ignoring) constitutional executive term limit rules.
- the coup leaders sought to merge the country with another, since such a merger would change the group from which rulers can be chosen (e.g. the union of Egypt and Syria in the U.A.R.).

We also construct a second variable, **staged attempt**, which is coded "1" if BOTH of the following are true and "0" otherwise. This allows users to treat these alleged coup attempts as non-coup events in applied research.

- the only evidence for the coup attempt is provided by the regime leader
- we find evidence that regime opponents accuse the regime leader of orchestrating the coup attempt in a bid to oust "suspected" coup plotters and other potential rivals

21. For example, if the case study literature identifies a generational or ideological cleavage in the military underpinning the coup attempt AND the generational or ideological cleavage does not fall along ethnic lines, then we use this as evidence that ethnic-narrowing was not part of the coup attempt, even if the coup leader is from a junior partner ethnic group.

We also construct a third variable, **ambiguous evidence**, which is coded "1" if EITHER of the following are true and "0" otherwise. This allows users to treat these ambiguous coup attempts as non-coup events in applied research.

- the only evidence for the coup attempt is secondary, that is, provided after the events transpire, i.e. there is no public reporting of an alleged coup attempt during the dates of the attempt
- we find conflicting or ambiguous evidence over whether current active military members actually took concrete actions to oust the regime leader, or we are only able to find of evidence of such concrete actions from one source (and cannot find a confirming source)

## 1.5 Comparison with Other Definitions and Sources

Some operational differences among coup datasets arises from conflicting definitions of what constitutes a coup d'état. To situate our definition, we list the principal definitions used in the existing datasets and coup lists from which we identify coup event candidates:

- Powell and Thyne (2011, 252), or "PT", define coup attempts as "illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive".
- Marshall and Marshall (2018, 1), or "CSP", define a coup d'état as "a forceful seizure of executive authority and office by a dissident/opposition faction within the country's ruling or political elites that results in a substantial change in the executive leadership and the policies of the prior regime (although not necessarily in the nature of regime authority or mode of governance)." By their definition, "Social revolutions, victories by oppositional forces in civil wars, and popular uprisings, while they may lead to substantial changes in central authority, are not considered coups d'état. Voluntary transfers of executive authority or transfers of office due to the death or incapacitance of a ruling executive are, likewise, not considered coups d'état. The forcible ouster of a regime accomplished by, or with the crucial support of, invading foreign forces is not here considered a coup d'état."
- Nardulli et al. (2013), or "CCD", 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." Their typology includes eleven non-exclusive categories of "coup": military coups, rebel coups, palace coups, popular revolts, dissident actions, foreign coups. internationally mediated transitions, forced resignations, counter coups, auto coups, attempted coups, and coup conspiracies.
- Singh (2014) defines a coup attempt as "an explicit action, involving some portion of the state military, police, or security forces, undertaken with intent to overthrow the government."

- Luttwak (2016, 12) defines a coup d'état as "the infiltration of a small but critical segment of the state apparatus, which is then used to displace the government from its control of the remainder." In Chapter 1 of his classic handbook, Luttwak distinguishes similarities and differences between the coup and related concepts of revolution, civil war, prununciamento, putsch, and liberation or insurgency.

- Thompson (1973, 6) defines military coups as "the removal or the attempted removal of a state's chief executive by the regular armed forces through the use or the threat of force."

- Fossum (1967, 228) defines a coup d'état as "any successful deposition of incumbent head of state, civilian or military, by the military forces, or parts of them, with, or without civilian participation."

- McGowan (2007, 2) defines a coup d'état as an event "in which the existing political regime (national government) is suddenly and illegally displaced by the actions of a relatively small group in which the military, security and/or police forces of the state play a significant role."

- Be'eri (1982, 81) defines a coup attempt as "actions of conspiratory groups of [] army officers, carried out by surprise and utilization, or threat of utilization, of military force, calculated to overthrow the existing government and to seize power, whether these attempts succeeded or failed."

Our definition of a coup event is similar to others but differs operationally in several key respects (for each case, we also note coding disagreements with the candidate datasets):

- **Target**: In our definition, every coup attempt must target the *regime leader* of the national government or the nominal executive if Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) code an indirect military regime. Operationally, we identify the *regime leader* or *de facto executive* of each autocratic regime using the leader data of Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), supplemented as necessary with Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009), Svolik (2012), or our own coding. For some cases, we specify a regime leader that does not match the leader in these leader data sets, and document why in our coding rationale. As far as we can tell, no prior coup dataset has similarly precisely identified the leader that must be targeted to qualify as a coup attempt. As a result, we exclude some candidate coup events from other datasets that target the *nominal executive*, other regime elites, or sub-national executives. Our coup definition, like Powell and Thyne (2011), differs from Marshall and Marshall (2018) in particular because we explicitly exclude autogolpes or self-coups in which the regime leader unconstitutionally dismisses other regime elites.

  While all coup attempts must target the *regime leader* or nominal executive in the case of indirect military regimes, only *regime change coup attempts* also promote the overthrow of the entire regime and its replacement with a different ruling group and/or institutions. By contrast, the Archigos data defines a military coup to include "changing institutional features such as a military council or junta", and thus they code

separately "irregular" exits that result from "a power struggle in the military short of a military coup, i.e. without changing institutional features such as a military council or junta" (exit code 16). By our definition, such exits often correspond with *leader reshuffling coups*.

- **Perpetrators**: In our definition of military coups, the perpetrators must include current active members of the coercive apparatus; that is, the military, para-military, national police, or other official security force. Thus, our definition is narrower than that of Powell and Thyne (2011, 250), Marshall and Marshall (2018), Luttwak (2016), and Nardulli et al. (2013), whom permit perpetrators to be "any elite who is part of the state apparatus" (PT), any ruling or political elite (CSP), any "small but critical segment of the state apparatus" (Luttwak), or anyone at all (CCD). We code the very few coups which are exclusively led by civilians or other members of the governmental apparatus that lack the participation of at least one current member of the coercive apparatus in its planning and execution as non-military coups. Our definition of military coups is closest to those of Thompson (1973), Singh (2014), McGowan (2007), and Be'eri (1970).

  To quote Thompson (1973, 53), "The definition of a military coup does not require that the coup effort be executed exclusively by regular military personnel; only that some regular military personnel participate." Likewise, our coding of a military coup does not mean that military actors necessarily *led* the coup, only that they participated. Our approach therefore differs from the Archigos distinction between "irregular" exits removed by domestic military actors (exit codes 5 and 6) and "irregular" exits removed by domestic government actors (exit codes 7 and 8). Archigos codes a military coup when the *coup leader* is a military actor, and similarly codes as a governmental coup when the *coup leader* is a governmental (civilian) actor. However, we include coup events which are led by civilians as military coups so long as there is *any* military participation, making our approach closer to Svolik in this respect, who simply codes whether there was any military participation in a coup or not.

- **Tactics**: In our definition, a coup attempt event entails a substantiated concrete unconstitutional action and thus not simply an abandoned or preempted plot. Our distinction here is consistent with distinct codings for coup plots and alleged coup plots by Marshall and Marshall (2018), coup plots by McGowan (2007), and exclusion of coup plots and rumors by Powell and Thyne (2011) and Be'eri (1982). In theory, all actual coup attempts are clear events that should be easy to date. However, in some cases, a lack of access makes it difficult for media, diplomats, or scholars to observe coup attempts when they actually occur (e.g. think of isolated countries like North Korea). In other cases, governments allege a coup attempt occurred, and this is only observed with arrests, trials, or imprisonments and executions of alleged coup perpetrators. We include such cases if there is evidence to believe the coup attempt actually took place, but we also flag the increased uncertainty around alleged or covert coup cases which may be staged. Despite definitional similarity, some other datasets include preempted coup plots as coup attempts even though no substantiated concrete action took place.

- **Success**: Among prior coup datasets, Thompson (1973) is somewhat unique in distinguishing between successful coups which "requires the removal of the chief executive and a postcoup ruling arrangement satisfactory to the coup makers" for at least a weak, failed coups, and an intermediate outcome of "compromise" in which a leader is ousted but the post-coup arrangement is not quite as envisioned by the coup makers. Marshall and Marshall (2018) uses the most difficult-to-obtain definition of success, a "one month" rule requiring the new executive to rule for at least one month before a coup is considered successful. All other candidate coup datasets employed a "one week" rule to determine success from failure. Powell and Thyne (2011, 252) requires the perpetrators to "seize and hold power for at least seven days." McGowan (2007) requires "the displacement of persons or constitutional forms" for at least seven days; McGowan explicitly considers all other coup attempts as failed, even if the conspirators succeed in the assassination or arrest of some members of the political elite. Singh (2014) likewise codes a coup as successful if it "displaces the government of the country for at least one week and the new government that takes control is substantively different."

  Our one-week rule is closer to that of Thompson, McGowan, and Singh in that we do not require the perpetrators to seize and hold power themselves necessarily, only that an acceptable post-coup leader (even if not a coup participant themselves) remains in power a week. Our dataset is unique in that we allow for an alternative rule to code success based on regime change that relaxes strict application of our "one week rule."

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