

Irregular Leadership Transitions and Political Stability: A Survival Analysis of Coups and Autocoups

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Abstract

This study explores and compares the survival time of two categories of irregular-entry political leaders: those who ascend to power through coups and those who overstay their legitimate term limits (autocoups). The central hypothesis posits that the mode of accession to power influences the duration of their tenures. Utilizing survival analysis, the results indicate that leaders who overstay their terms through autocoups generally remain in power longer than those who come to power through coups.

Keywords: Coups, Autocoups, Survival, Political Leadership

1 Introduction

The survival of political leaders has been a well-studied topic in political science. However, two specific types of leaders - those who come to power through coups and those who overstay their legitimate terms (autocoup leaders) - have received comparatively less attention. Examining the tenures of these irregularly ascended leaders holds particular significance for two main reasons.

Firstly, leaders who ascend through irregular means constitute the majority of irregular exits from power. According to GOEMANS, GLEDITSCH, and CHIOZZA (2009), between 1945 and 2015, out of 1,472 leaders who assumed office through regular channels, approximately 213 exited irregularly (14.5%). Conversely, out of 308 leaders who assumed office through irregular means, roughly 158 (51.3%) experienced irregular exits.

Secondly, among irregularly ascended leaders, the majority gained power through launching coups or overstaying in office. As per GOEMANS, GLEDITSCH, and CHIOZZA (2009), out of 374 leaders who exited irregularly, 246 were ousted through coups, constituting 65.8% of these cases. Additionally, between 1945 and 2020, there were 106 attempts to overstay in power, of which 86 were successful (?). Leaders who extend their legitimate term limits essentially stage coups against legitimate successors, thereby qualifying as autocoup leaders. Hence, it is both relevant and insightful to delve into and compare the tenures of coup-entry leaders and autocoup leaders.

While it is expected that autocoup leaders survive longer than coup-entry leaders when considering their total tenures, a more insightful comparison arises when examining the tenures following autocoups in contrast to those of coup-entry leaders. Conducting a log-rank test in survival analysis on the leaders dataset (GOEMANS, GLEDITSCH, and CHIOZZA 2009) and the author's autocoup dataset Zhu (2024)] reveals a distinct contrast between autocoup leaders and coup-entry leaders.

Preliminary findings from survival analysis (see Figure 1) indicate a significant difference. Leaders who consolidate power through autocoups appear to have a longer average tenure after the autocoup itself (approximately 10.9) compared to coup leaders (approximately 5.3). This suggests a potential shortfall of 5 years in the average tenure of coup leaders.

Thus, we hypothesize that the method of accession significantly influences leadership longevity.

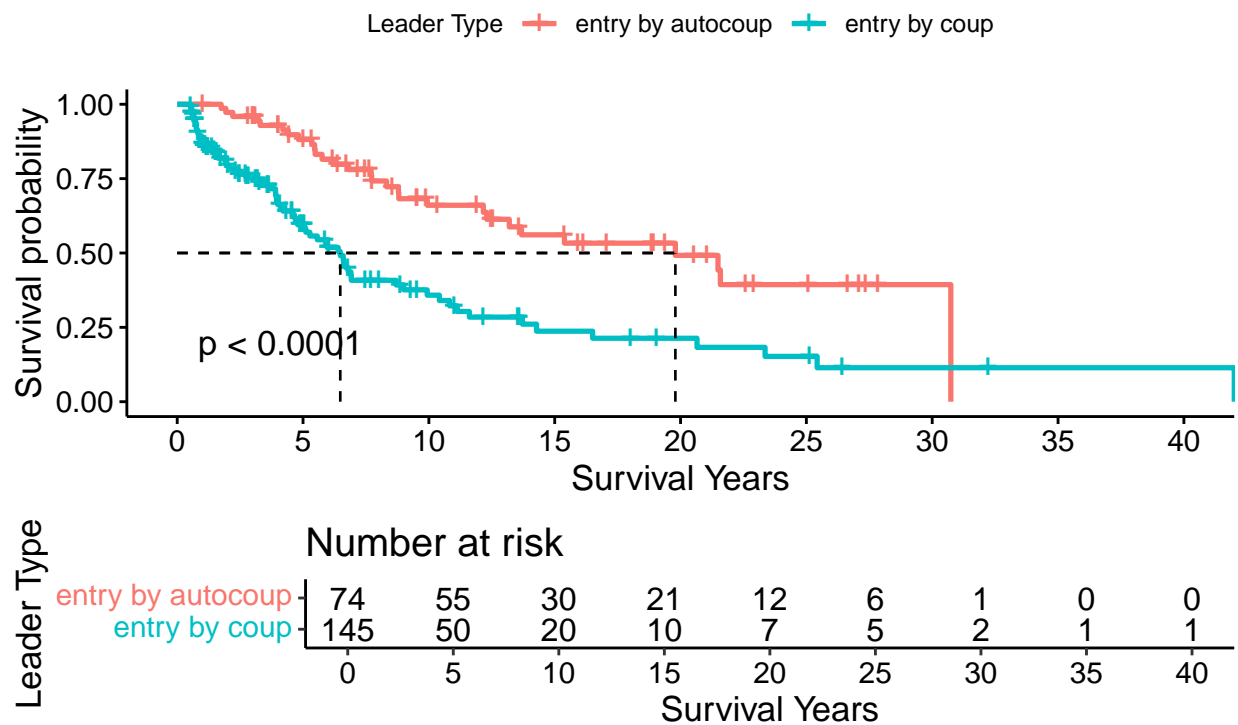


Figure 1: Survival curves of overstaying and coup-entry leaders

Coup leaders likely face greater challenges to their legitimacy, leading to a more precarious initial period in power. They may encounter higher levels of uncertainty, instability, and pressure to share power, all of which could contribute to a shorter average tenure compared to autoup leaders.

By employing the Cox proportional hazards model and the extended Cox model, the results suggest that leaders who exceed their term limits generally experience longer tenures compared to those who come to power through coups.

This study offers two key contributions. First, it highlights a critical factor often overlooked in leadership survival studies: the impact of accession method. Leaders' survival is not solely determined by their actions after taking power, but also by the way they acquired power in the first place. This research underscores the significant difference in tenure duration between autoup and coup leaders. Second, it provides empirical measurements to compare the tenure duration of these two irregularly ascended leaders, offering insights into their distinct impacts on leadership longevity.

The remainder of the paper delves deeper into this topic. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review on political survival, establishing the context for this research. Chapter 3 explores the factors influencing the survival of coup and autocoup leaders. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and data used, including the application of survival models to analyze the determinants of leadership longevity. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the analysis and a detailed discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by synthesizing the key takeaways and exploring their broader implications.

References

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