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Coups and the International Community

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While the subjects of international and civil war have been studied extensively, coups d'état have received only passing attention. This is likely due to an absence of a clear, methodological way of examining them.

Coups have largely been considered a dependent variable, with scholars seeking to explain what conditions precipitate coups d'état. Studies that do examine the role of external actors are almost exclusively qualitative case studies (e.g., Aybar de Soto 1978; Cullather 1999). These studies make it difficult to apply concepts to different situations. Therefore, it has been difficult to examine a coherent international policy toward coups.

From a preliminary examination of active policy, the United States, the Organization of American States, and the African Union have mechanisms in place that will cripple trade, aid, and other support to a state that has undergone a coup¹. These policies are in place because coups are believed to represent a step backward from democracy. However, there is no evidence suggesting whether or not these policies are effective in promoting democracy.

This research will produce a comprehensive dataset of international reactions toward coups dating back to the early 1950s. This will provide for both analysis of the effects of coups on international reactions and analysis of the efficacy of past policy in order to suggest the best policy toward future coups d'état.

Hypotheses

Our hypotheses attempted to narrow in on what matters to states that “signal” or act toward a state that has undergone a coup. We focused on characteristics of the states that receive signals following successful coups. Factors that we examined are wealth, trade, and democracy.

We hypothesized that as wealth increases, states that have had successful coups should receive more signals. Additionally, as wealth increases, signals sent to states that have had successful coups should be more supportive. These two hypotheses represent the idea that coups in wealthy states should receive a lot of attention and, moreover, a lot of support.

We also expected that as trade increases, states that have had successful coups should receive more signals. These signals should also be more supportive. Because trade is a tie that binds states together, trade partners should be more vocal and more supportive of an advantageous coup.

¹ For relevant documentation, see Section 513 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (1993) and Section 608 of the Fiscal Year Consolidated Appropriations Act (2008). Regarding the OAS, see Resolution 1080 (1991) and the Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001). Regarding the OAU/AU, a resolution condemning coups was a product of the 1997 African Unity Summit in Harare, the 1999 Algiers declaration, and the 2002 AU charter (Piccone 2004:25; Ould-Abdallah 2006:23).

On the matter of the measure of democracy, we relied primarily on polity, which is a scale ranging from autocracy, through mixed democracy, to full democracy based on the characteristics of the political, social, and economic institutions of the state. We expected that as states fall more toward the democratic side of the polity scale, states that have had successful coups should receive more signals. Alternatively to the previous hypotheses, we expected the signals sent to successful coup states to become more hostile. This is in accordance with the aforementioned belief that coups d'état are antithetical to democracy.

Methodology

To gather international reactions, we used the academic search engine LexisNexis to span multiple publications (Agence France Presse, New York Times, Africa News, etc.) containing information on each individual coup and how various actors responded from the time of the coup through up to a year after. We summarized each news article, including relevant information that can be coded.

“Coding” in this project refers to taking the content of the actions in words and translating them into a numerical value. Joshua S. Goldstein (1992) assigned a number to certain events based on the consensus of a committee used in his study. The scale is from -10, which is direct military action against the state that has undergone a coup, to +8.3, which is direct military aid to the coup state. The “cheaper” signals include commenting (-0.2), urging or suggesting action or policy (-0.1), or meeting with leaders (1). Other common signals are warning the state (-3), withdrawing aid (-5.6), verbal support (3.4), or extending economic aid (7.4).

There are three chief limitations to our methodology. The greatest is a lack of information on some coups. Of the 226 coups, we lack information on 127 coups. It is hard to tell whether this reflects a gap in the literature or simply the international community's disinterest in that coup.

Another limitation is that, given that the scale is subjective and requires arbitrary categorization, I expect there to be some error between my coding of the signals and that of another co-worker on this project. It will be tedious to re-check my coding, as I may have a different opinion on what can be coded or what value an event should be assigned.

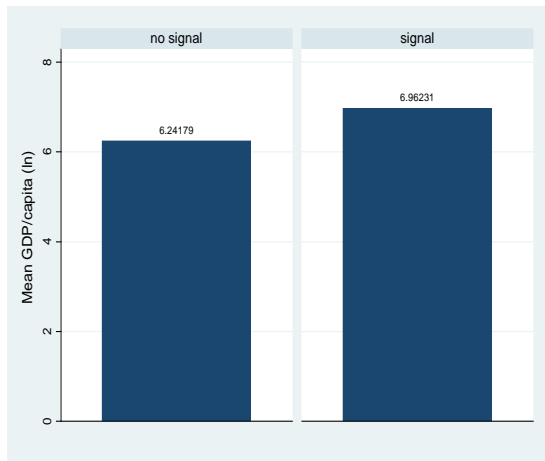
That ties into a third issue: not all important information surrounding a coup can be coded. The scale fits only for actors directing their actions or words toward the state that has undergone a coup. This ignores the interactions between states and organizations regarding the coup, such as when states or regional organizations meet to discuss how best to handle the situation. It also ignores the fact that the coup state is divided – the old government may enjoy support while the new may face condemnation, one group may meet with an international actor while another is scorned, or the outcome of the coup may be decided purely by violence within the state without regard to international comments.

Other than these three limitations, the gathering of data and construction of the dataset went approximately according to plan.

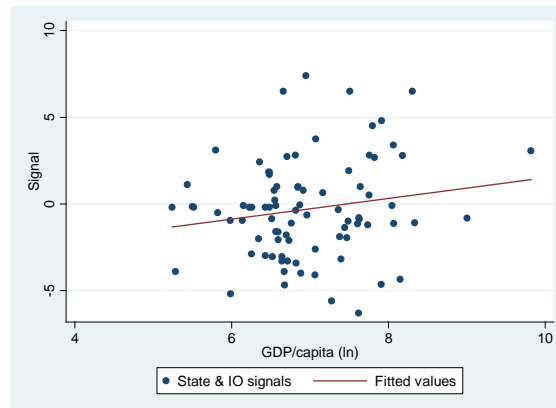
To test our hypotheses, we did a simple t-test difference of means and test for statistical significance for signals received based on factors of wealth, trade, and democracy. To determine the orientation (positive or negative) of the signals, we put them on a scatter plot and found a line of best fit. From these scatter plots we determined correlation and whether the results were statistically significant.

Results

Wealth



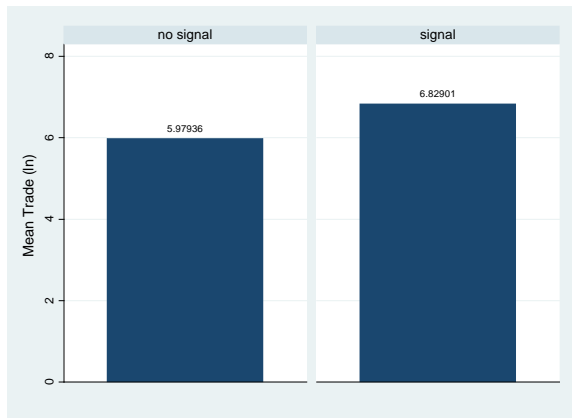
$t=-6.2069, p<.001$



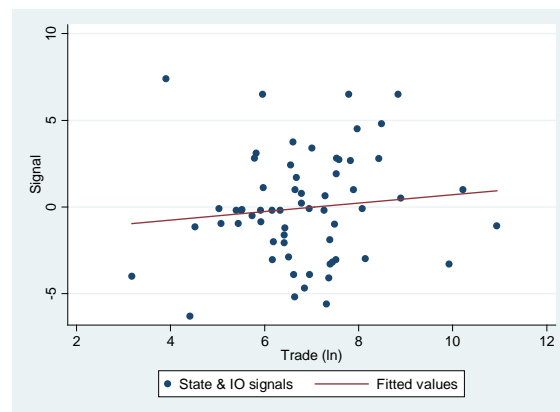
Correlation = .171, $p<.118$

The graph on the left shows that wealthier states receive more signals. The graph on the right shows that signals become more supportive as states become richer, but the relationship is statistically insignificant.

Trade



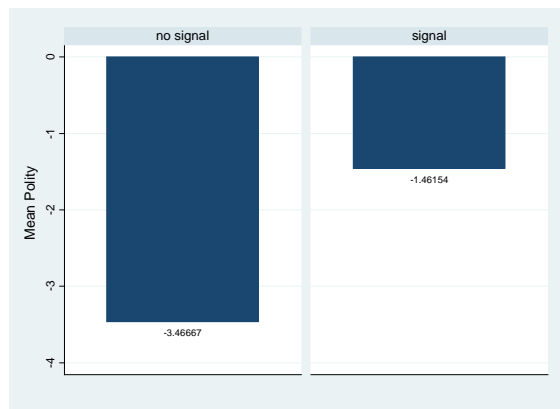
$t=3.8768, p<.001$



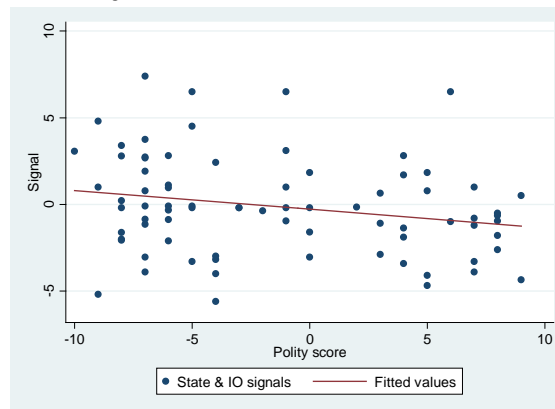
Correlation = .110, $p<.397$

The graphs on the left shows that the high trade states (consisting of total trade, imports plus exports) get more signals. The graph on the right shows that signals become more supportive as the coup state trades more, but the relationship is insignificant.

Democracy



T=-2.569, p<.011



Correlation = -.223, p<.049

The graph on the left shows that signals go to states that are higher on the polity score (-10 to +10). The graph on the right shows that signals become more hostile as the coup state becomes more democratic; the relationship is close to significant.

Conclusions

We hypothesized that wealth, trade, and democracy were characteristics of successful coup states that should receive more signals. Our results support this. However, on the orientation of the signals (positive or negative), we found a general correlation but were unable to find any significant relationships. This is likely due to the fact that signals are known for being “all over the place” (see scatter plots). Signals vary greatly depending on more factors than just the ones we examined. Historical relationships, internal issues, and policy shifts of the signaling state can also impact its reaction toward the coup state.

For future coups, we can expect international actors to react more when the coup state is wealthy, trades more, and/or is more democratic. Due to the lack of significance, we cannot make a sound prediction regarding whether or not the signals would be supportive (based on wealth or trade) or hostile (based on polity).

Due to the fact that we created a new data set, we expect to run additional tests to learn more about international reactions toward coups. We are currently looking into the characteristics of signaling states impacting signal frequency, as well as policy consistency of international organizations (such as the European Union, United Nations, African Union, etc.) over time.

References

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- Cullather, Nick (1999) *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952–1954*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
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