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GLOBAL FLASHPOINTS

UNDERSTANDING COUPSD'ÉTAT: WHERE HAS GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW BEEN ATTEMPTED, AND WHY?

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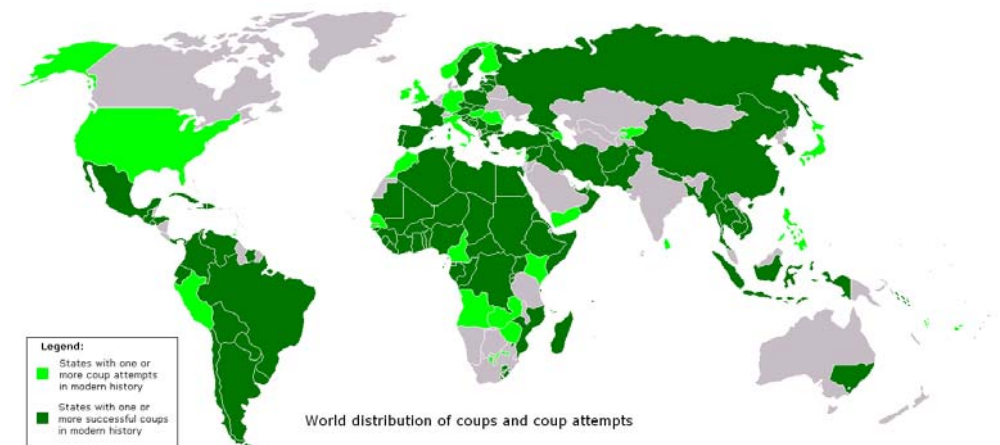
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The overthrow of a top-level government, called a coup d'état, remains the most frequently attempted method for changing government through force, and the most successful.

Translating literally to 'stroke of State' in French, this regime-displacing effort is usually perpetrated by a small group of the state establishment, most commonly, the military.

When and where have coups occurred?

Some of the most historically noteworthy coups include the overthrow of King James II of England in 1688, also known as the **Glorious Revolution** and onset of British parliamentary democracy, and the coup that brought Napoleon to power in 1799, kickstarting the Napoleonic Wars.



Map courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Between 1950 and 2010, there were coups in 94 states, most occurring in Africa and the Americas, according to a thorough study published in the *Journal of Peace Research*.

Since 2010, there have been additional coups in Tunisia (2011), Guinea-Bissau (2012), Mali (2012), and the **Central African Republic** (2013), and most notably, during the recent **Egyptian Revolution** (2011-2013).

The United States has allegedly had only one **attempted coup**, when right-wing American businessmen (with the help of half a million war veterans) plotted to seize the White House from President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933.

Success and democratic impact

According to Pew Research, since the end of World War II there have been 223 successful coups in countries with populations greater than 500,000, most during the height of the Cold War.

Since 1947, the country with most successful coups is Thailand, with nine, followed by Bolivia and Syria with eight each.

While historically coups d'état have hindered democracy and created civil wars, it has been **pointed out** that modern-day coups, though less frequent, have not only a greater success rate (**80%** in 2010), but are often followed by competitive elections.

Others see this trend as a threat to democratic stability, especially in Africa where it is currently most frequent.

What justifies a coup?

A **survey** by Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) proves that despite decline, sizable amounts of people in the Americas still believe coups are justifiable under certain circumstances.

The findings from 2008 and 2010, which focus on the Americas, show that **corruption**, **high crime**, and high levels of unemployment are considered justifiable reason for coups at varying percentages per nation.

Strangely, in the United States, which has only **one attempted coup**, 62% believe **high joblessness** a reason to justify an overthrow – the same percentage as Haiti, where there have been six successful coups since 1946.

Overthrowing a government is nothing to take lightly, however, as coups are typically the result of desperate times, and rarely without bloodshed or other significant consequences.

What are your thoughts on coups d'état as they relate to historical times and modern day? What do you think would theoretically justify government overthrow? Tweet us @curiousmatic.

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