



ANNUAL
RISK *of* **COUP**
REPORT

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OEF Research
Informing Change for Peace
a program of One Earth Future

ANNUAL RISK *of* COUP REPORT

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Cover Image: A school boy looks at a burning barricade during a shutdown demonstration on January 14, 2019 in Bulawayo after the president announced a more than hundred percent hike in fuel prices. (ZINYANGE AUNTONY/AFP/Getty Images)

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In 2016, Curtis Bell and the One Earth Future Research team created CoupCast to dynamically estimate the risk each country faces for a potential coup attempt every month. Coup d'état remains the most common form of unconstitutional regime change globally. While coup attempts and successes have steadily declined globally over the past two decades¹, their potential impact remains in the shadow of strained global economic development and democratic backsliding. Coup events continue to have a negative effect on institutional democratic norms, worsen civil conflict, trigger political violence, and reverse economic development and growth.

The goals of this first ever Annual Risk of Coup Report are two-fold. First, it provides an in-depth global and regional look at the likelihood of coup events for 2019 based on a combination of quantitative forecasting and qualitative analysis of specific coup-prone states. Examining historical trends, it provides analyses on the risk of coup events and the geographic hotspots for the coming year. This information is further broken down regionally by examining Asia, the Americas, and Africa individually. These regions represent the most recent hotspots for coup events, thus warranting a closer look at the most coup prone countries for 2019 and the reasons why they are more likely to face a coup attempt.

Second, our forecast and analysis are not meant to supplant incredibly important regional and political expertise surrounding coups and political instability, but to add to it by using a different kind of tool-kit for forecasting future coup risk. Coups, and political instability broadly, are unique, and no single quantitative forecast will provide perfect information about the risk governments face going into the future. Knowing this, we can still utilize historical trends in coup events alongside social, environmental, political, and economic data to identify the conditions in which individual coup plotters will make decisions.

Combining our continually updated analysis with domain expertise is key to leveraging these predictions in a way that can help to reduce coup risk. With an early warning about the risk of coup, peace and security actors may better allocate attention and resources to those countries that may need it the most. Coups are only one factor in a complex environment of political instability, but they remain powerful drivers of political violence and economic underdevelopment when they occur.

KEY FINDINGS

- *Coup events (both attempts and successes) have declined considerably over the past two decades.*
- *Even though coup events have declined globally, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a disproportionate number of coup events in the post-2000 time period. Roughly 70 percent of all coup events since 2000 have taken place in this region.*
- *Greater democratization has changed the nature of coups. Less consolidated democracies face higher forecasted risks for a coup attempt, while elections were found to be triggers of coup risk.*
- *The global forecasted risk of at least one coup attempt in 2019 fell to nearly 80 percent, compared to more than 90 percent in 2018.*
- *Sub-Saharan Africa saw a decrease in the forecasted risk of at least one coup attempt in 2019 but remains comparatively high at roughly a 55 percent probability of at least one coup attempt.*
- *Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Burundi, Mauritania, and Somalia are forecasted to be the top 5 most at risk countries for at least one coup attempt in 2019.*
- *Across Asia, the Americas, and Africa, a history of coups, infant mortality rate, GDP per capita, and length of democracy, time since last incumbent electoral loss, and population size were found to be the biggest drivers of coup risk.*

- *Qualitative assessment of at-risk countries within Asia, the Americas, and Africa found that each region contained diverse causes of political instability and unique drivers of coup-risk. Consequently, each region requires a tailored approach to mitigating coup risk for the most at-risk countries.*
- *Given the unexpected failed coup in Gabon on January 7th 2019, quantitative forecasting alone may not capture the full extent to which countries may risk a coup. The analysis of three low-risk African countries highlights that expert knowledge is necessary to bridge the gap between macro-quantitative forecasting and the potential micro-dynamics driving coup risk.*

GLOBAL COUP TRENDS AND FORECAST

Before diving into regional outlooks for 2019, we first provide a global overview of our CoupCast forecast for 2019 and global trends found in our data. This chapter provides the following information: First, it explores trends in coup attempts since 1950 in terms of yearly rates and geographic setting; Second, it details the forecasted risk of at least one coup attempt in 2019 both globally and regionally. It then provides insight into the countries forecasted to be at most risk of experiencing a coup attempt in 2019.



TEMPORAL AND GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS IN COUPS (1980 – 2018)

There have been 463 coup attempts since 1950. Two hundred and thirty-three of these attempts, or roughly 50 percent, have successfully overthrown their intended target. Yet, this does not tell the entire story about the manifestation of attempted and successful coups. Attempted coups are rare events, and successful ones even more so. Spanning into December 2019, our data captures 134,654 unique month observations. More simply, this means that for every month in which a leader faced a coup attempt, leaders enjoyed on average roughly 290 coup free months (24 years) since January 1950. This gap is even starker for successful coups. For every month that a successful coup ousted a leader, leaders enjoyed on average around 577 months (48 years) without experiencing a successful coup event.

What explains the general sparseness of forced leadership change? Several explanations may be at play. While observed odds of coup success are not grim (50/50), attempting one is costly and full of risk. If you fail, you are likely to face loss of life, liberty, or to be forced into exile. Another explanation may be an increase in the general stability of the state system. Authoritarian leaders likely have better means to protect themselves, and democratic states may be experiencing a more robust civil-military divide. Regardless, two things are clear in the data. First, coup attempts are rare and successes rarer. Second, coup attempts have seen a steady decline since the 1960s.

FIGURE I: GLOBAL NUMBER OF COUP ATTEMPTS (1950 – 2018)

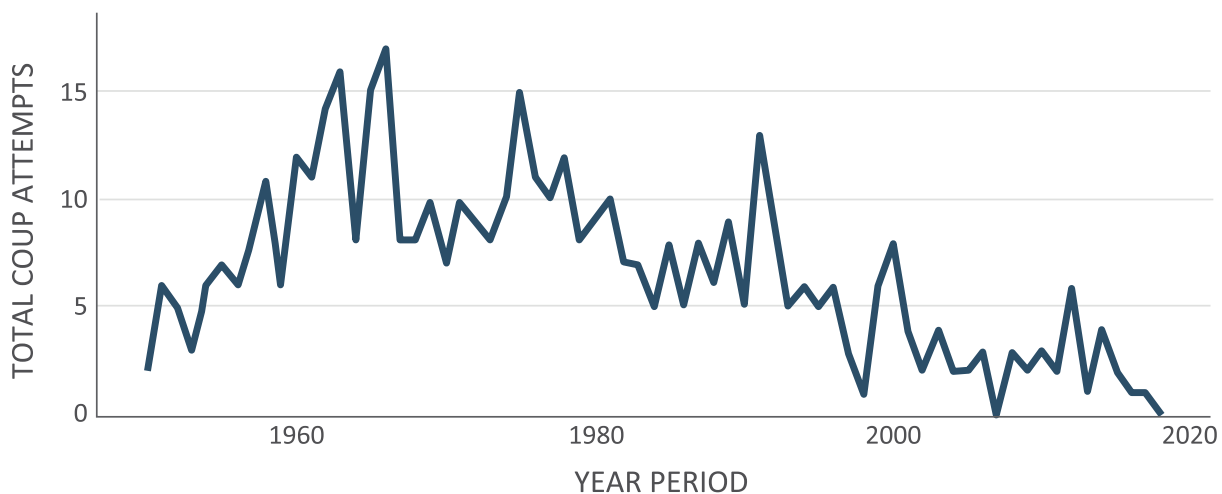
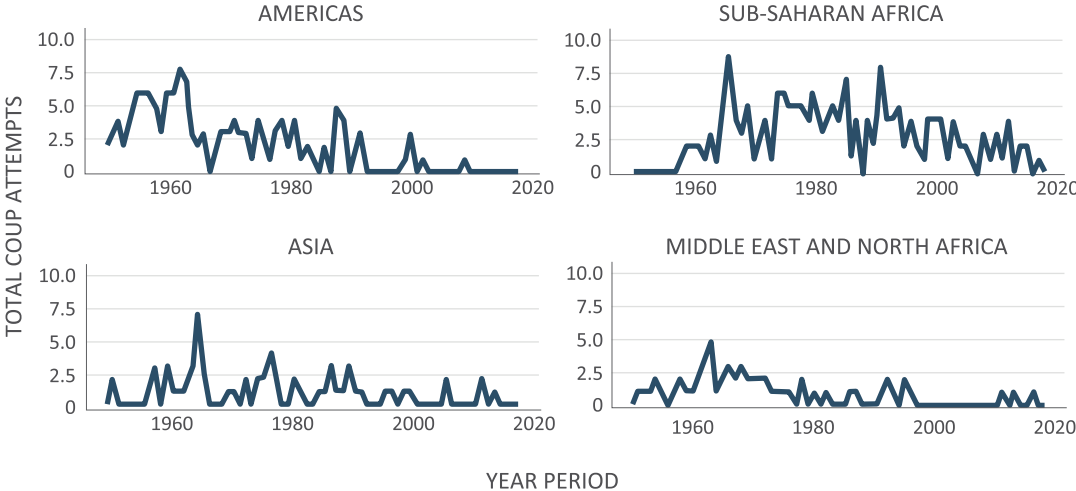


Figure 1 displays a yearly trend line of the total number of coup attempts since 1950. According to our data, one should expect $\sim 7 \pm 4$ coup attempts per year. Yet the number of coup attempts has been steadily declining below this expectation in recent years. 279 (60 percent) of all attempts occurred before 1980, and 184 attempts (40 percent) have occurred since. Alongside this absolute decline, the volatility between years is also diminishing. Before 1980, one could expect $\sim 9 \pm 4$ attempts. After 1980, this expectation decreases to $\sim 5 \pm 3$ attempts per year. This trend becomes even more acute in the post-2000 period. Only 50 attempts (11 percent) have taken place since the year 2000, with the yearly expectation diminishing to $\sim 3 \pm 2$ attempts.

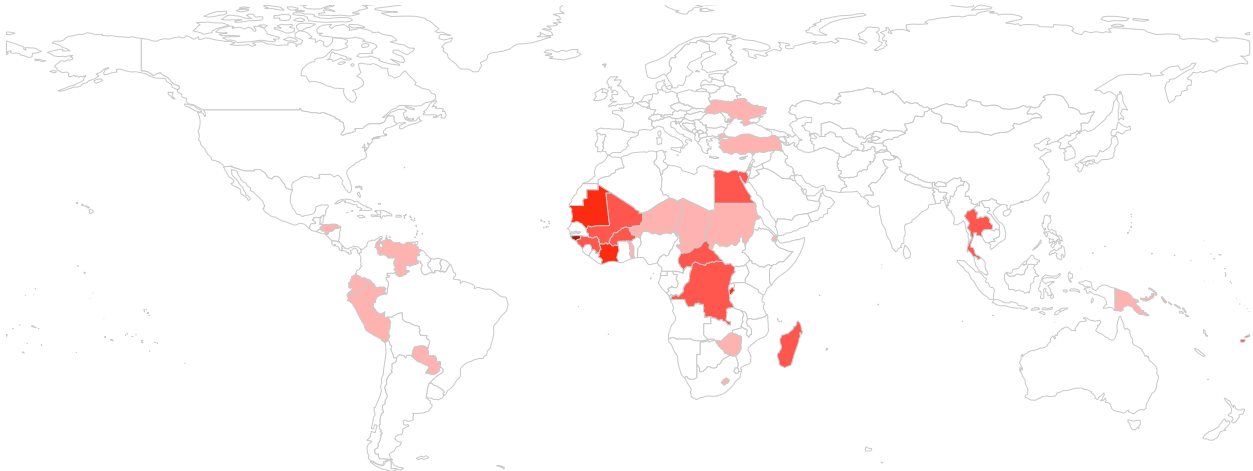
This trend is further illustrated by the fact that 2007 and 2018 are the only two years to experience zero coup attempts in the last century. While coup attempts are rare at the country-level, they have been a steadily declining fixture of global politics and stability.

FIGURE 2: REGIONAL NUMBER OF COUP ATTEMPTS (1950 – 2018)



When broken down into regions, this global decline in coup attempts seems to be taking place in different ways across the globe. Figure 2 displays the time series of yearly coup attempts by region. Overall, the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa have experienced more coup attempts since 1950. In this time period, the Americas have experienced 142 total coup attempts while sub-Saharan Africa has experienced 186. To put these numbers in perspective, these two regions account for 71 percent of all coup attempts globally in the same period while Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region account for 13 percent each. More recently, this asymmetry becomes even more acute. Of the 50 coup attempts to take place since the year 2000, 70 percent have taken place exclusively in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the other regions, 12 percent have taken place in Asia, 10 percent in the Americas and 6 percent in MENA.

FIGURE 3: GLOBAL COUP ATTEMPTS (2000 – 2018)



Darker shades of red indicate more attempts.

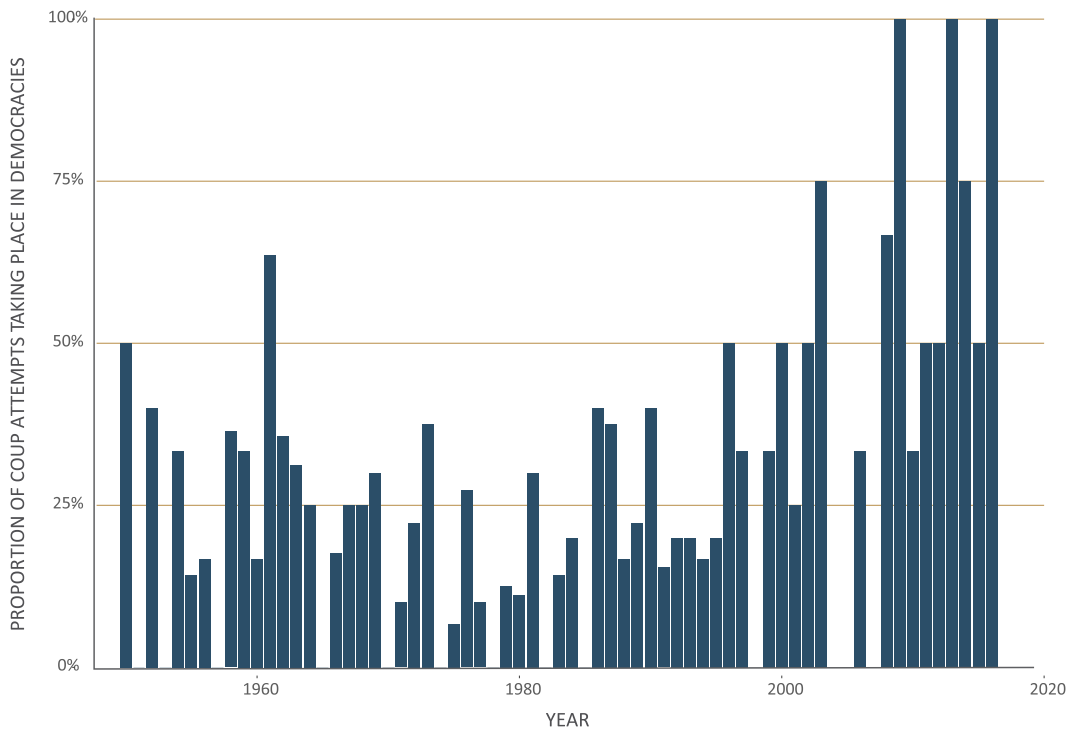
The map above shows the geographic clustering of coup attempts between 2000 to 2018 across the globe. The darker the shade of red, the more coup attempts a country has experienced. As outlined in the time series trends, sub-Saharan Africa has not only the most individual countries with coup attempts, but also the most clustering of attempts within a country. The Americas and Asia experienced sparser coup attempt clustering but had higher rates than Europe and the MENA regions in comparison.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF COUP RISK

Since the mid-1970s and the third-wave of democratization, the community of states has seen an expansion in the number of democratic institutions adopted.² The adoption of democracies in fragile contexts and the increasing use of elections for power transitions have influenced trends in coup attempts in several ways. First, while coups take place predominately in authoritarian states³, there has been an increase in the number of coup attempts that take place in democracies in the post-2000 time period.⁴ Figure 4 shows the proportion of coup attempts that took place in democracies from 1950 to 2018. Since 1950, around 30 percent of coup attempts have taken place in democracies. While this may seem low overall, it fails to capture contemporary trends regarding the risk of coup attempts in nascent democracies. Before 1980, only 20 percent of coup attempts took place in democracies. As democratization began to solidify in South America, Asia, and Africa, the threat that coup attempts posed shifted. While the proportion of coup attempts taking place in democracies increased only modestly during this democratization period, this percentage more than doubles post-2000. From 2000 to 2018, 45 percent of coup attempts took place in democracies in an almost structural break from previous trends.

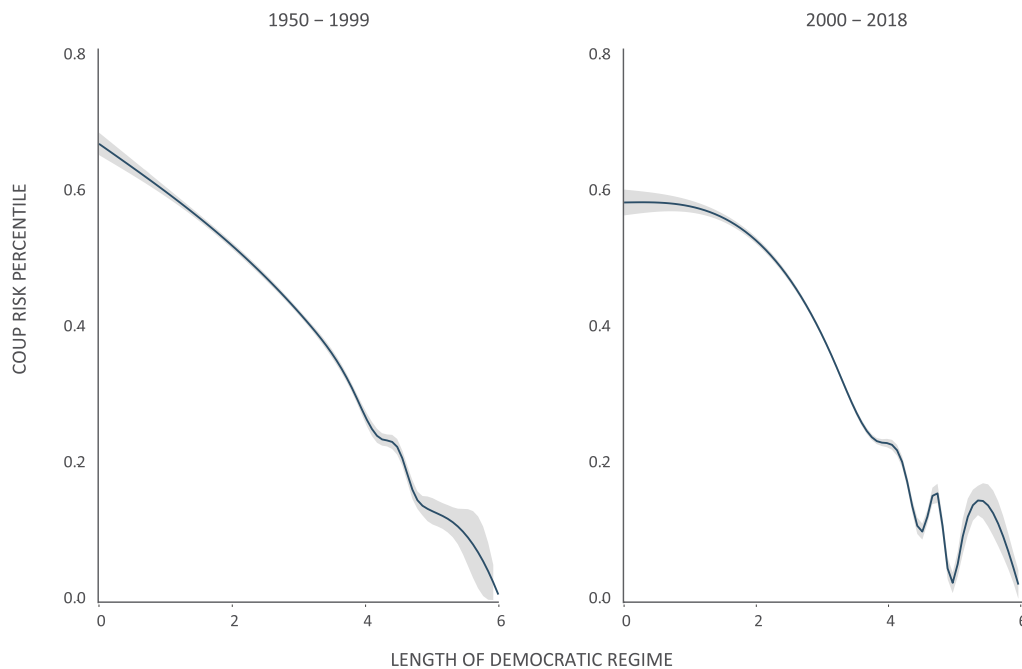
While coup attempts are in decline in absolute terms, those that are taking place seem to be increasingly targeting democratic states.

FIGURE 4: COUP ATTEMPTS IN DEMOCRACIES (1950 – 2018)



While coup attempts are in decline in absolute terms, those that are taking place seem to be increasingly targeting democratic states. Democracies may be vulnerable for several reasons.⁵ First, democracies are less prone to using coup-proofing behaviors in the form of repression against political rivals and military elites. Since these forms of regime protection are not as strong in democracies, would-be coup plotters may see their chances of success as being greater than would be otherwise. Second, young democracies seem to be particularly vulnerable due to weak democratic institutions and norms. Figure 5 shows the average expected coup risk percentile based on the length a democratic regime has existed. As expected, newly transitioned democratic regimes face the highest percentile risk. The figures below are separated by time periods to illustrate how democracies have experienced higher coup risk in the post-2000 era. From 1950 to 1999, coup risk almost linearly declines with increasing regime tenure. In the year 2000 onward, coup risk starts smaller but declines.

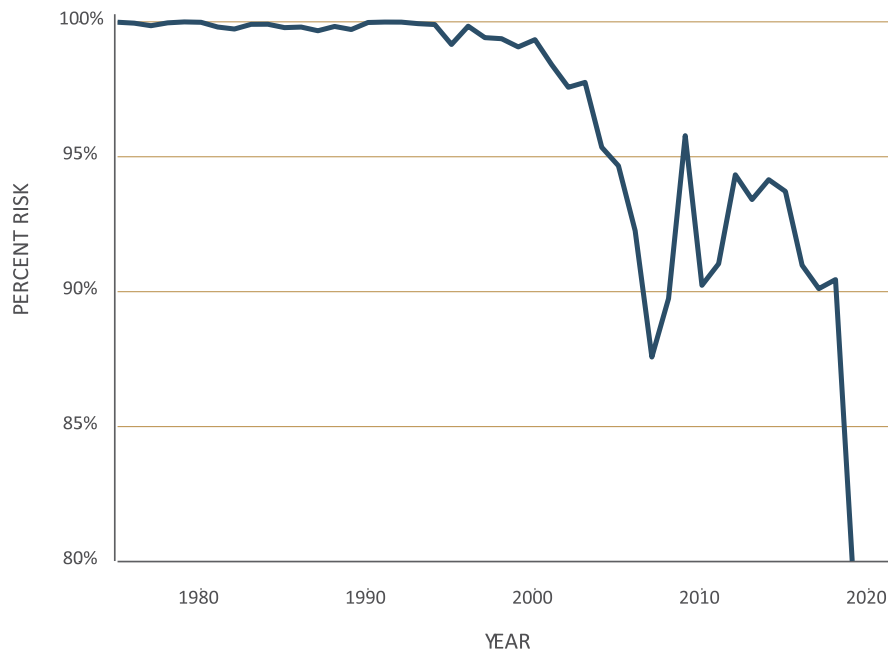
FIGURE 5: COUP RISK AND LENGTH OF DEMOCRATIC REGIME



Looking into past coup attempt trends, there are two takeaways concerning what one should expect in the future. First, it appears that coup attempts, and by extension successes, have steadily declined in magnitude over the past century and especially so in the new millennium. Secondly, recent coup trends have been more highly asymmetric than in the past. While attempts have declined absolutely, sub-Saharan Africa has become the disproportionate recipient of them even more so in the contemporary context.

FORECASTED RISK OF AT LEAST ONE COUP ATTEMPT IN 2019

While the estimated annual risk of coup attempts has fluctuated in the period after 2007, it is forecasted to drop by slightly over 10 percent in 2019, from 90.4 percent to 80 percent. This would be the largest year on year change in coup risk and would make 2019 the year with the lowest risk of coup attempts on record.

FIGURE 6: ANNUAL RISK OF AT LEAST ONE COUP ATTEMPT OCCURRING GLOBALLY (1975-2019)

This forecasted drop in coup risk follows an overall drop in coup risk since 2001, when the estimated risk of coup attempts dropped below 99 percent for the first time. After 2001, the global risk of coup attempts steadily decreased until 2007, the first coup-free year on record, having decreased 10.8 percent. However, following 2007, the persistent decrease in coup risk halted, and there began to be greater fluctuation between each year. Nevertheless, a more consistent downward trend has begun to emerge since 2014, though the estimated risk of coup attempt increased slightly in 2018, the second coup-free year on record.

Several interrelated factors account for this overall drop. First, the overall number of coup attempts has begun to decrease. Indeed, the average number of coup attempts each year has declined from 8.26 before 2000 to 2.63 after 2000. This absence of coups can help to lower the risk of coups in the future as coups tend to create self-reinforcing patterns that exacerbate economic and political conditions and lead to further coup attempts.⁶ For instance, while poor economic conditions are themselves one cause of coups,⁷ coups can lead to further economic deterioration by, as an example, causing private investors to flee unstable political conditions.⁸ Meanwhile, the occurrence of coups can normalize irregular transfers of power as just another way in which politics in the country are carried out. Taken together these two factors allow coups to create a momentum in which one coup sets the conditions for the next.

Three other factors have helped to lower the risk of coup attempts globally. First, poverty has dramatically declined⁹ worldwide, meaning that the dire economic conditions which lead to coups have become less prevalent. Second, international organizations such as the African Union and United Nations have helped to foster norms¹⁰ against coups by offering public condemnations¹¹ and sanctioning¹² individual coup-plotters. Third, norms against coups and greater economic interdependence between nations have come together to deter coup plotters by offering economic sanctions and withdrawal of aid as typical punishments for coup-installed regimes.¹³

Nevertheless, the period after 2007 should be a reminder to not take sustained drops in coup risk for granted. Indeed, there are at least two potential trends which could turn back the global decrease in coup risk we have seen since

2000. First, there has been a notable democratic backsliding¹⁴ in established democracies around the world, a trend which was most recently manifested in Brazil with the election of Jair Bolsonaro. While illiberal leaders can function^a within democratic institutional constraints, the presence of executives which are generally hostile towards democratic principles does raise the possibility that they may refuse to hand over power upon losing an election or reaching their term limits. Such a crisis could precipitate intervention on the part of the military, either for or against the incumbent. Illiberal political parties seeking to introduce a one-party system could take similar steps were the party leader to lose an executive election or if the party were to lose a majority in parliament. However, in addition to precipitating crises, such backsliding also requires the weakening and reformation of state institutions. During transition periods away from democracy, coups can become more likely as institutional legitimacy and the rule of law are called into question. Indeed, coups in countries experiencing democratic backsliding may constitute a new category of “anocracy coups,” contrasting coups which take place primarily due to economic conditions.¹⁵

Second, increasing global competition and a potential hegemonic transition between the US and China could increase incentives for both countries to foment coups in strategically important regions. During its rise to hegemony, the United States benefitted greatly from the presence of countries with domestic political systems similar to its own and sought to shape the domestic institutions and norms of other countries in order to make them better potential partners.¹⁶ Were China to adopt a similar approach, it would likely find itself in conflict with the United States as it sought to reshape countries and institutions in its own image and in ways that privilege its own interests. As it did during the Cold War, this could result in a number of coups either directly or indirectly provoked by foreign powers. While some have argued that the US and China may be able to avoid conflict¹⁷, the historic record on hegemonic transitions suggests this is unlikely,¹⁸ while the vast differences in terms of domestic norms and values between the two countries is similarly discouraging.¹⁹

The period after 2007 should be a reminder to not take sustained drops in coup risk for granted.

REGIONAL RISK OF A LEAST ONE COUP ATTEMPT IN 2019

Examining the estimated risk of at least one coup attempt occurring by region, three regions are forecasted to have significant decreases in their coup risks in 2019: sub-Saharan Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East and North Africa. These regions are forecasted to have decreases of 14.8 percent, 11.8 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, the Americas and Europe are forecasted to have very slight changes in their estimated coup risks, with Europe increasing and the Americas decreasing by less than 1 percent each.

In contrast to other aspects of the region’s instability, the MENA is forecasted to have a coup risk of 13.2 percent, the lowest regional coup risk in 2019. Meanwhile, the Americas, the Asia-Pacific, and Europe are all forecasted to have very similar coup risks, each converging within one percentage point of 20 percent. Despite its almost 15 percent forecasted drop in coup risk, sub-Saharan Africa is forecasted to continue having the greatest regional risk of coup attempt, 54.7 percent.

While sub-Saharan Africa does have a much higher coup risk than any other single region, comparing sub-Saharan Africa’s forecasted coup risk to an aggregation of all other regions’ coup risks does provide some reason for cautious optimism. Sub-Saharan Africa’s estimated risk of coup attempt is forecasted to be lower than that of all non-African regions in 2019 for the first time since 1992. While sub-Saharan Africa’s estimated risk is forecasted to be just 1.2 percent lower than all non-African regions, the only other two times sub-Saharan Africa came close to this since 1992 were in the only two coup-free years on record, 2007 and 2018. The years following 2007 saw a sharp increase in estimated coup risk for both sub-

^a In such cases, illiberal leaders of democracies may also utilize coup-proofing strategies and crackdowns in order to deter coups. Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s post-coup crackdowns in Turkey are an example of this, but also call into question at which point such countries transition from democracy to dictatorship.

Saharan Africa and all non-African regions; however, the year following 2018 is forecasted to have a significant decrease for both. Although this is no guarantee that a sustained downward trend will continue, it does offer some optimism that Africa may avoid the same uptick in coup risk and activity that followed 2007.

FIGURE 7: RISK OF COUP ATTEMPT BY REGION (1975-2019)

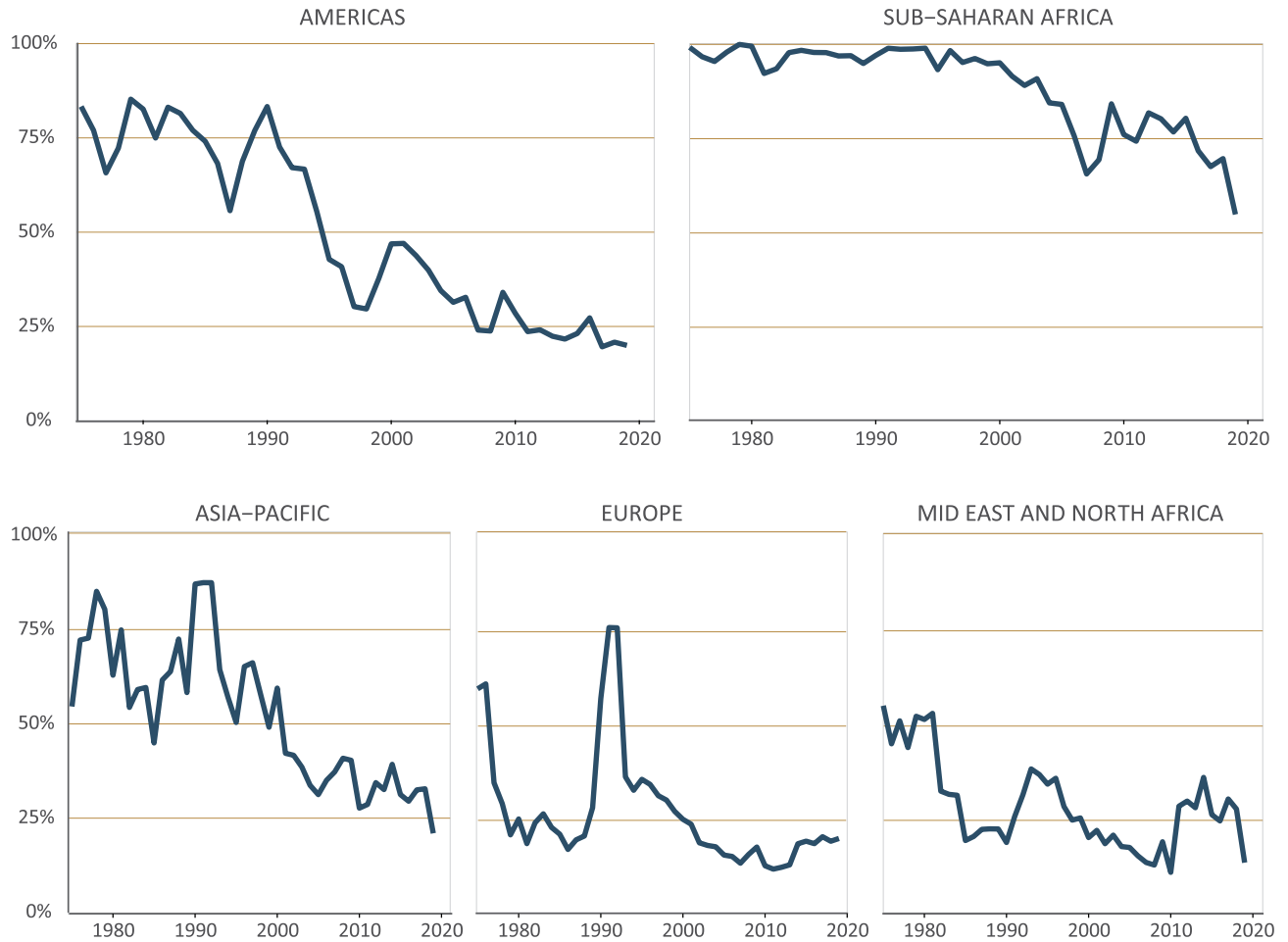
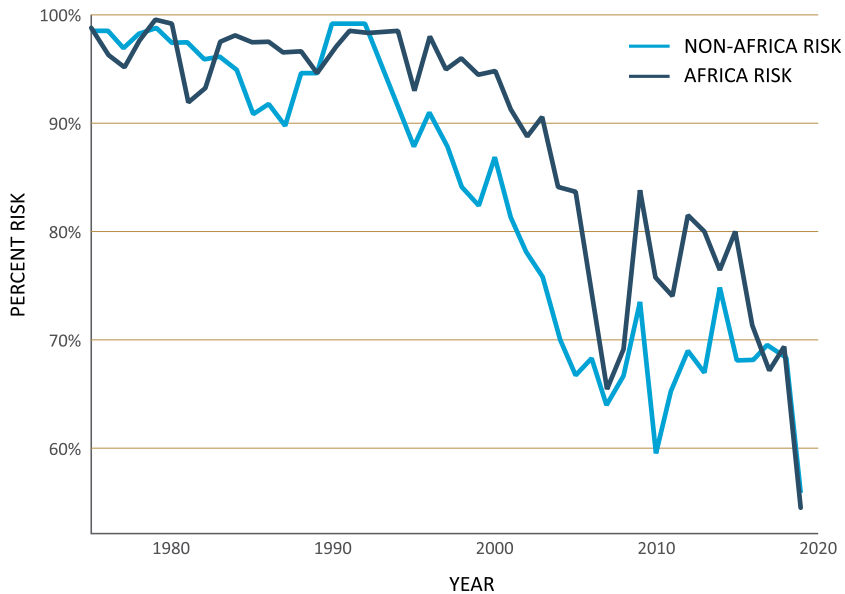


FIGURE 8: AFRICA VS. NON-AFRICA ANNUAL RISK OF COUP ATTEMPT (1975-2019)

The Americas has had the most impressive overall drop in coup risk since 1975, having decreased 63.3 percent between then and its forecasted 2019 risk. However, the region's most impressive drop in coup risk occurred between 1990 and 1998 when the risk of coup attempt dropped an average of 6.7 percent each year, culminating in a total decrease of 53.7 percent. This drop in coup risk predicted a major shift in coup activity, as between 1975 and 1998 there were 41 coup attempts in the Americas while there were only 6 after 1998. Since then, the estimated risk of coup attempt has slowly decreased an additional 17.8 percent, at an average of less than 1 percent per year. In this sense, the forecasted slight decrease in coup risk for 2019 fits with the region's current pattern.

The Asia-Pacific has also had an impressive overall drop in coup risk, having dropped 33.6 percent between 1975 and its forecasted 2019 risk. Interestingly, the risk of coup in the Asia-Pacific decreased substantially, by 40.2 percent, between 1978 and 1985 before again increasing to its peak in 1991. Since then, the region's risk of coup has steadily decreased 64.1 percent at an average pace of 2.4 percent each year. This steady decrease can, in part, be attributed to the region's improved economic growth since the mid-1990's, as well as the end of the Cold War. The region's forecasted decrease in coup risk of 11.8 percent would be a great deal larger than this average, although not extreme given that the standard deviation for year-to-year change in this period is 8 percent.

Europe has for the most part maintained a coup risk of less than 25 percent from 1975-2019, except for two sustained periods between 1975-1978 and 1989-1999, reaching a peak of 75.5 percent estimated coup risk during the latter period. While Europe's forecasted coup risk for 2019 continues to be low and its increase over 2018 is less than 1 percent, it is part of a pattern of increasing coup risk the region has seen since 2011. Between 2011 and the forecast for 2019, the risk of coup in Europe will have increased 8.1 percent, with most of the increase, 5.6 percent, having occurred between 2013-2014. The top 5 countries with the greatest increasing coup risk between 2011 and 2019 are Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Italy and Germany. However, every country in the region had an increase in coup risk between 2011 and 2019.

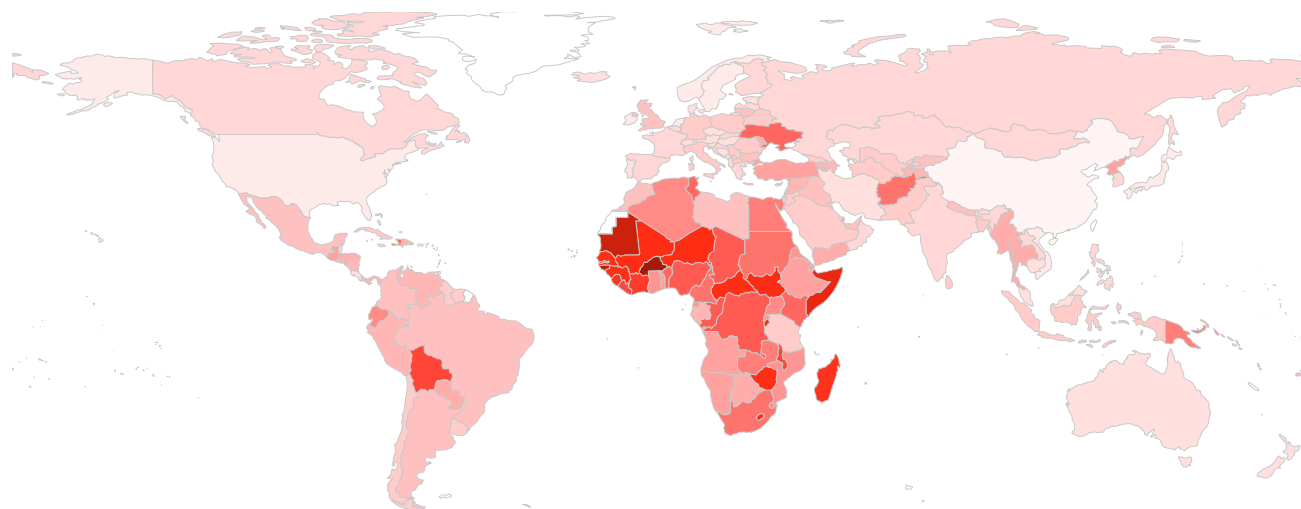
The Middle East and North Africa has also maintained a relatively low estimated risk of coup attempt since 1975, though the region has seen several spikes in risk during this time. Most recently, the region saw a 17.5 percent spike in

risk after 2010, likely driven by the events of the Arab Spring, following a sustained decrease in coup risk between 1993 and 2010. Between 2011 and 2018 the risk of coup attempt fluctuated although it remained at a relatively higher level of risk, roughly between 25 percent and 35 percent. However, the region's forecasted decrease in coup risk for 2019 suggests the regional risk of coup attempt may begin to return to its pre-2010 levels.

TOP COUNTRIES FOR RISK IN 2019

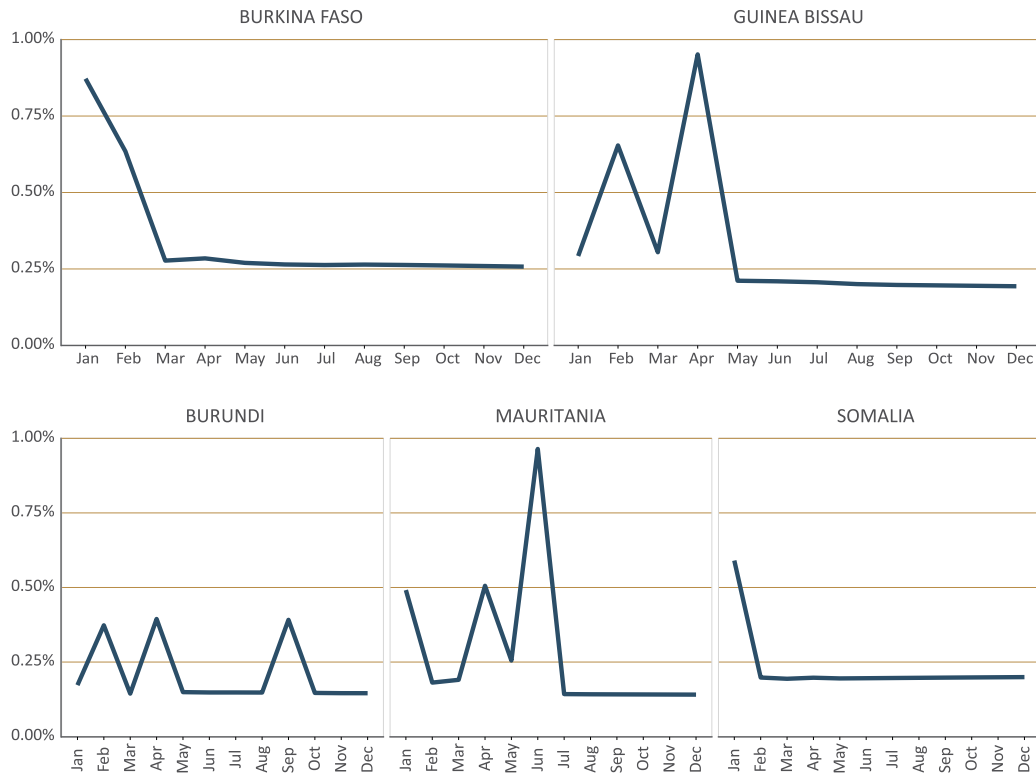
Underscoring the concentration of risk in sub-Saharan Africa seen at the regional level, the individual countries with the greatest forecasted risk of coup attempts are heavily clustered within the region. While there are several countries outside sub-Saharan Africa that continue to have relatively high risks of coup forecasted for 2019, of the top 50 countries with the highest forecasted risk of coup attempt for 2019, only 12 are outside sub-Saharan Africa.

FIGURE 9: FORECASTED RISK OF COUP ATTEMPT IN 2019



Darker shades of red indicate higher forecasted risk of coup attempt.

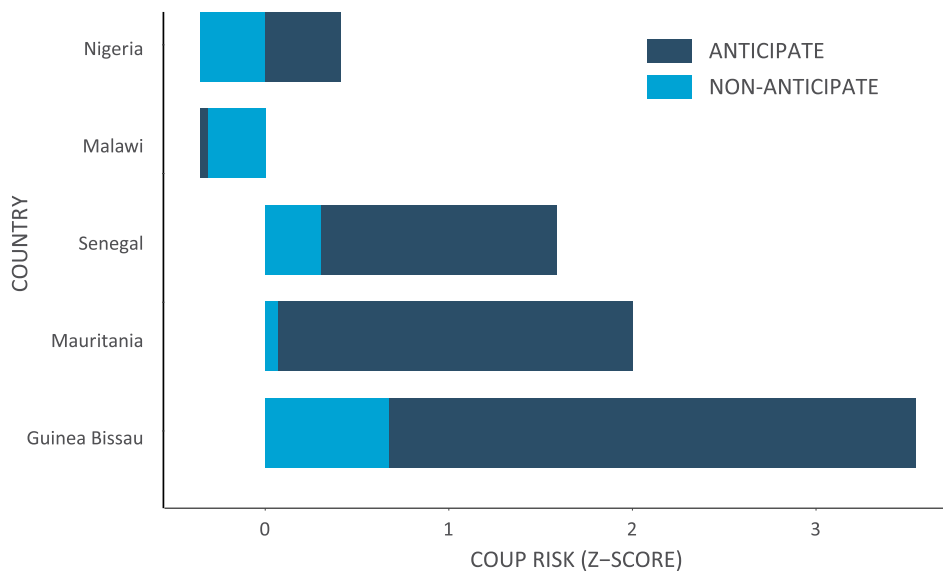
Looking at the top five countries individually, both Burkina Faso and Somalia are forecasted to have spikes in coup risk early in 2019 before levelling out for the rest of the year. In contrast, Guinea Bissau, Burundi and Mauritania all have several different forecasted spikes in risk throughout the year. Guinea Bissau, for instance, is forecasted to have spikes in risk in February and April before levelling out for the rest of the year, beginning in May. Likewise, Mauritania is forecasted to have spikes in January, April and June, while Burundi is forecasted to have three roughly equivalent spikes in risk in February, April and September.

FIGURE 10: RISK OF COUP BY MONTH IN TOP FIVE COUNTRIES IN 2019

In looking at individual countries, those which have upcoming elections in 2019 are especially of interest as elections can serve as triggers for coups. Figure 10 examines the countries with presidential elections in 2019 that are forecasted to have the highest risk of coup. It displays the average z-scored risk for the months in which a country is anticipating a presidential election and compares this to the average z-scored risk for the months in which a country is not anticipating an election. Comparing the average z-scores for these groups of months, the months in which a country is anticipating an election generally have much higher risk of coup. However, Malawi is an exception here, and while Nigeria's risk is higher in anticipatory months, the difference is less pronounced than in Senegal, Mauritania, and Guinea Bissau. Part of this may have to do with each country's relative general level of risk. Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, and Malawi are all within the top five countries with the highest forecasted risks for 2019, while Malawi and Nigeria are ranked 18 and 24, respectively. Such a divergence conforms with expectations that triggering factors, such as elections, will have greater impact in the presence of greater structural risks for coup.²⁰

The months in which a country is anticipating an election generally have much higher risk of coup.

FIGURE 11: COUP RISK IN ANTICIPATORY AND NON-ANTICIPATORY MONTHS (2019)



People rally in the Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou on September 29, 2018 during the first large protest by supporters of the opposition against the government's policy. (OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP/Getty Images)



ASIA REGIONAL RISK AND OVERVIEW FOR 2019

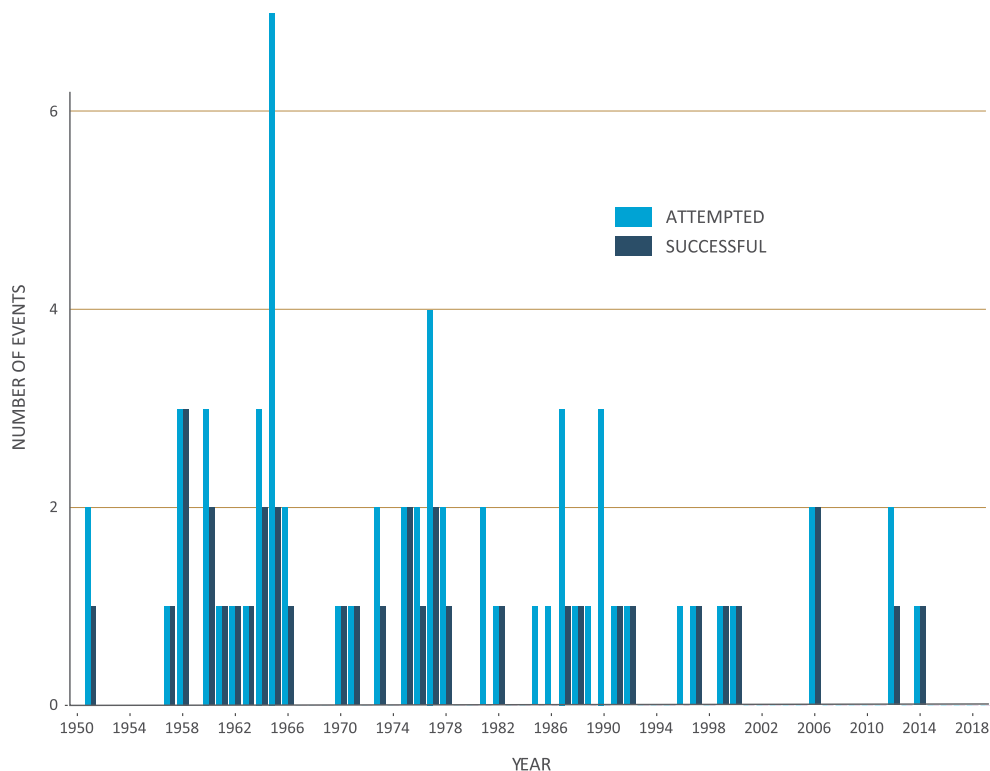
BACKGROUND AND RECENT TRENDS

Examining coup risk in Asia for 2019, we offer insight into the risks that face Thailand, Papua New Guinea, and Tajikistan. These cases highlight the geographic diversity of the region while simultaneously touching on how different factors may drive coup risk across countries. Though the likelihood of a coup attempt within the region is relatively low, we identify factors that may increase the relative risk of a coup taking place in Asia. Escalating Sino-U.S. tensions as well as domestic unrest serve as drivers of coup risk in 2019.

Since 1980 there have been 24 coup attempts and 12 successful coups. These events have occurred in 10 of the region's 43 countries and 8 countries have seen successful coups. During this period, 6 different countries have experienced multiple coup attempts and Fiji and Thailand have seen multiple successful coups. Thailand and the Philippines have seen the highest rates of coup activity with 5 attempts in each country since 1980. This is a significant amount of activity for a relatively rare event, but Asia is a vast geographic region with extremely diverse political contexts. As such, it is useful to look more closely at interregional variation in coup activity. Equally, most coup attempts occurred near the end of the Cold War period. This seems to fit with the general experience of Asian countries noted earlier, with Cold War politics playing a critical role in the decision of military leaders to use force to consolidate their control.



FIGURE 12: COUP EVENTS IN ASIA (1950 – 2018)



Coup activity in Asia is concentrated in three subregions: Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific. Southeast Asia accounts for 50 percent of coup activity with South Asia and the Pacific accounting for all other coup activity in the larger region at 29 percent and 21 percent respectively. Rates of success across the three subregions are surprisingly similar with South Asia seeing 57 percent success, Southeast Asia seeing 42 percent success, and the Pacific seeing 60 percent success.

The data underscores that attempts seem to cluster around the same countries. For instance, since 1951, Thailand has experienced 12 coup attempts. Between 1980 and 2000, Bangladesh experienced 3 coup attempts while the Philippines suffered through 5 attempts. As noted by Staniland, the norms surrounding coups may shift following the first military intervention into politics.²¹ For example, India and Pakistan have remarkably similar histories, yet Pakistan has suffered through four coups since independence, while India has largely avoided dealing with incursions by the military into the political sphere.

Looking at coup history through time, we see cause for both optimism and concern. The 1980's saw a total of 10 coup attempts. The number of coups declined in the following decades, with 8 attempts in the 1990's and 3 in the first decade of the 2000's. However, this downward trend has importunately leveled off in the years since 2010. Whether these more recent events will be a momentary relapse or a sign of reversal towards increased coup activity in the region is yet to be seen.

Whether more recent events will be a momentary relapse or a sign of reversal towards increased coup activity in the region is yet to be seen.

Recent coups within this region have occurred in Thailand, Papua New Guinea, and the Maldives. In 2012, the Maldives and Papua New Guinea both experienced a military coup attempt. In 2014,

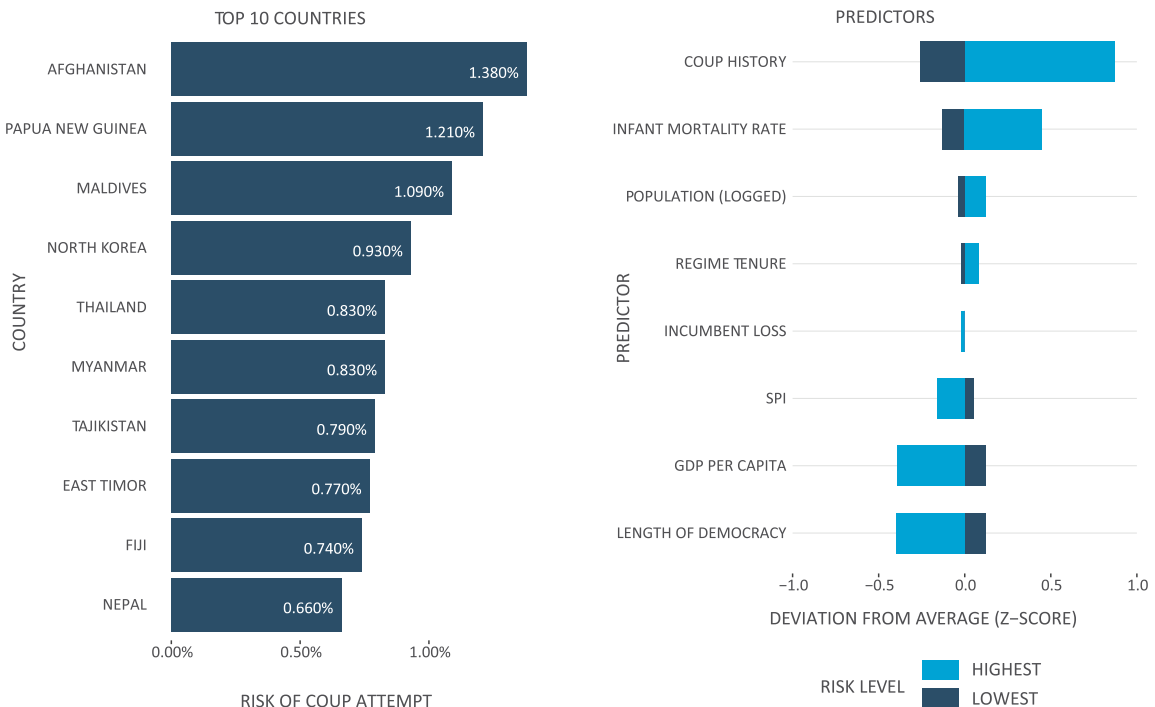
Thailand's military took hold of the government following rising tensions between segments of society that backed the Royalist Factions within the government and the populist political party of Yingluck Shinawatra.²² Following Shinawatra's rise to power, the upper-middle class in Thailand began a massive series of protests that shut down large portions of the capital.²³ The political instability that emerged offered the military an opportunity to take over the government under the guise of restoring order. The subsequent years have allowed the military to consolidate their control on state power.²⁴

2019 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Despite the significant role coups have played in Asia's modern history, our models forecast very little risk of coup d'états for the region in 2019. This follows a global pattern where coup attempts are decreasingly common in the international system. For 2019, the cumulative regional risk of one coup attempt for Asia is roughly 23.5 percent. Individually, most Asian countries have less than a 1 percent chance that a coup attempt will take place. Of all countries included in this analysis, Afghanistan has the highest risk of a coup for 2019 (1.38 percent). Papua New Guinea (1.21 percent) and the Maldives (1.09 percent) face the second and third highest risk of a coup attempt respectively.

Looking at historical trends to inform predictions for 2019, we see several significant patterns. First, the Asian countries in the top ten for risk of a coup attempt in 2019 have 1) more recent history of a coup attempt, 2) a greater infant mortality rate, 3) lower GDP per capita, and 4) a shorter history of democracy. The countries at most risk of a coup also have a greater level of predicted drought, larger populations, and longer regimes compared to all other Asian countries.

FIGURE 13: TOP 10 ASIAN COUNTRIES AT RISK FOR A COUP ATTEMPT IN 2019 AND THEIR PREDICTORS

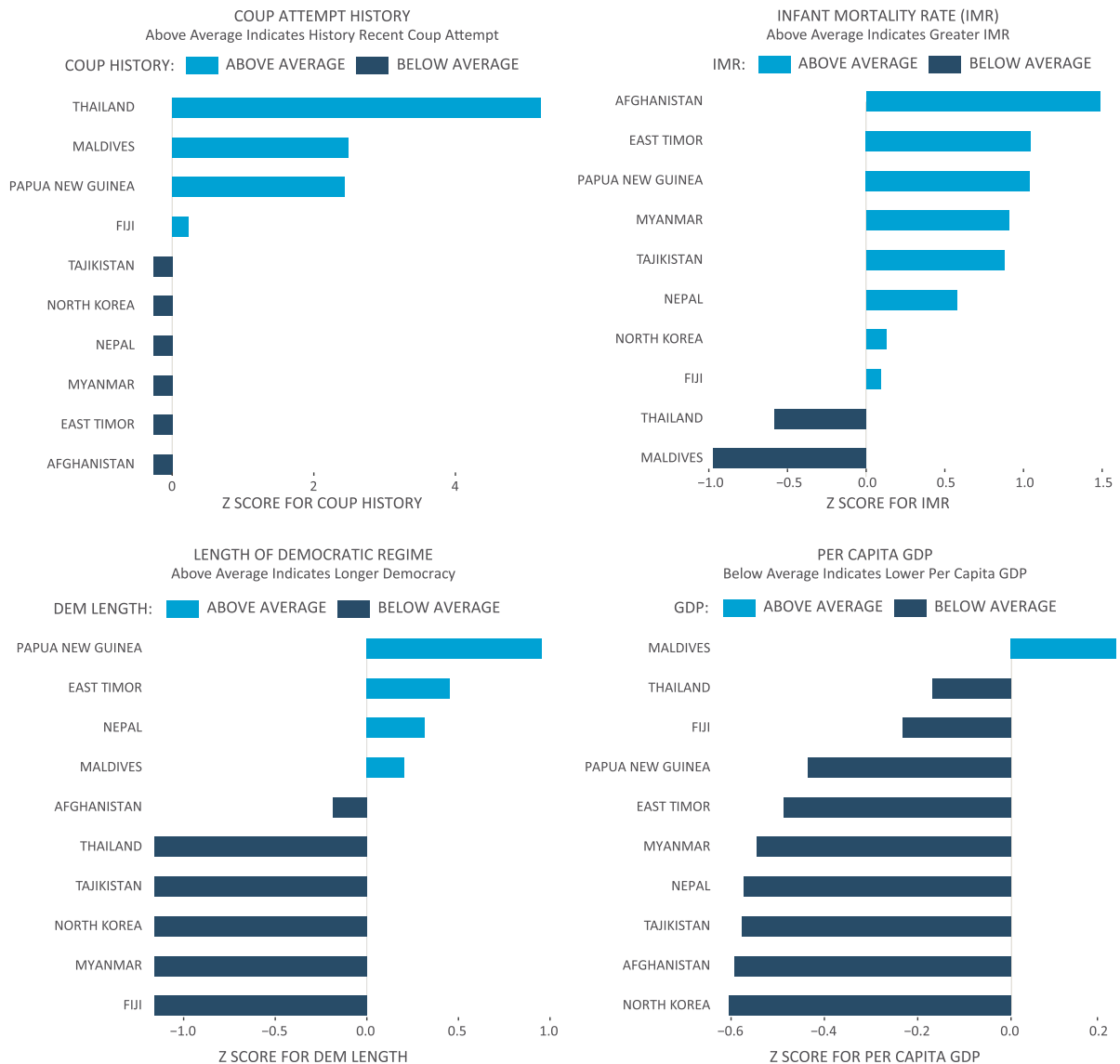


Examining the top ten most at risk countries in more detail, interesting patterns emerge. Thailand has the most prevalent history of coup events followed by the Maldives and Papua New Guinea. When examining Infant Mortality Rate,

Afghanistan, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea have the most problems. Looking at democracy, Papua New Guinea has had the longest length of democracy while six of the top ten have had very below average experience with democratic governance. Finally, most countries within the top ten perform relatively poorer on GDP per capita with only the Maldives performing above the regional average.

Digging further into 2019 coup risk for Asia, this analysis highlights three countries to explain their risk and how it may be mitigated or exacerbated in the coming year. We chose 1) Papua New Guinea, 2) Thailand, and 3) Tajikistan to represent the diversity of potential coup risk in the Asia region.

FIGURE 14: TOP PREDICTORS OF COUP RISK IN 2019 FOR THE MOST AT-RISK COUNTRIES IN ASIA



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FOR ASIA IN 2019

Papua New Guinea

Background

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been characterized by often-unstable domestic politics. Political coalitions are fragile and political parties are highly personalized. Every government since independence has been a coalition, and MPs and political parties frequently switch allegiances.²⁵ Votes of no confidence have been extremely common. This political instability, along with corruption and weak capacity, has compromised the state's ability to consistently implement policy over the long-term. This has created an atmosphere in which state security forces have periodically intervened in national politics over the last few decades.

In recent years PNG politics have seen a series of political crises. In 2011 parliament removed PM Sir Michael Somare while he was receiving medical treatment in Singapore and replaced him with current PM Peter O'Neill. Somare claimed his removal for office was unconstitutional and the Supreme Court ruled in his favor, but the ruling was ignored, and O'Neill remained in power. This disputed authority led to a failed coup attempt in January of the following year. Troops stormed a barracks in the capital and briefly held the head of the defense forces, demanding O'Neill's resignation.²⁶ The coup leader claimed the action was not a coup attempt, but that he had been appointed head of the defense forces by Somare, who still claimed to be in control of the country.²⁷ In 2016 O'Neil survived protests and a vote of no confidence and won a controversial re-election the following year for an additional five year term.²⁸

2019 Coup Risk

Despite its turbulent political history, recent years have seen a good deal of stability under O'Neill and its ranking in the 2019 coup risk forecast may be surprising to some PNG watchers. PNG's relatively high coup risk in 2019 in the model is driven primarily by three factors: its recent history of coup attempts, its relatively short history of democracy, and low socio-economic development, all of which contribute to the risk of coup. Looking beyond quantitative prediction, three additional factors may increase the country's risk of coup activity in 2019 and the years to come.

Looking beyond quantitative prediction, three additional factors may increase the country's risk of coup activity in 2019 and the years to come.

The first is the politicization of the armed forces and the securitization of politics more broadly. Experts have noted that the police are increasingly linked to politicians and that this has led to factionalism within the force.²⁹ This increases the potential for factions of the police force to intervene in the political process in favor of their political patrons, including coup attempts. In addition, the political process has become more violent. Recent elections have seen isolated violence, particularly in the Highlands region.³⁰ This violent contention around elections is also happening in a state where private security forces are proliferating. Private security companies have grown rapidly in recent years. By some estimates private security firms employ more than 30,000 people in PNG, more than the nation's armed forces and police combined.³¹ Many of these firms are controlled by the country's political and business elite. The size of these firms relative to the official security services, as well as their links to the nation's elite, raise the risk they could be used to intervene in the political process.

2019 also has the potential to be a volatile year in PNG due to a scheduled referendum on Bougainville autonomy/independence.³² This is a highly contentious issue and the PM has already suggested that he may not accept a vote to separate from the country.³³ The vote has the potential to be particularly salient to the armed forces; the 1990 coup attempt was reportedly motivated by its leader's desire to see a harder line taken on the Bougainville issue.³⁴ Additionally,

the vote has the potential to accelerate an emerging trend of demanding greater autonomy from Port Moresby.³⁵ Their level of success, or frustration, with this process could lead to greater political competition and institutional instability.

Finally, the increase in geopolitical tensions in the Pacific has the potential to impact coup risk in states across the region, including PNG. China's growing influence across the region has increased the geostrategic importance of island nations in the Pacific. China, the U.S., and Australia all view the region as one in which they need to exercise a certain degree of influence over political and security matters as a matter of strategy. As these tensions grow, the potential for outside powers to intervene in the politics of Pacific states increases as well, coups being one of many forms such intervention could entail.

Policy Recommendations

For actors in the international community seeking to mitigate the risk of coups and instability in PNG, there are a few courses of action that should be considered. First, more should be done to ensure the professionalization of the armed forces and police force. Training from Interpol, Australia, the U.S. and others on civil military relations could help reduce the risk of a coup attempt. Second, assistance in the form of expertise in the regulation of private security companies may help mitigate their potential to be used as a tool for the violent contestation of political power. While PNG has legislation on the regulation of private security companies, implementation is challenging.³⁶ Expertise from multilateral and international civil society organizations could help provide guidance on implementation. Finally, and perhaps most pressing, is the provision of election monitoring expertise for the upcoming Bougainville referendum. Elections result in heightened coup risk, and an impartial military alongside a fair electoral process may help to curb a potential coup in response to the referendum.

Tajikistan

Background

Tajikistan became independent during the tumultuous Soviet breakup in 1991. Independence was quickly followed by the eruption of a violent civil war that raged from 1992 to 1997. Current President Emomali Rahmon has been the head of state since 1992 and president since 1994.³⁷ Tajikistan's recent

Tajikistan's recent political history is largely a story of Emomali Rahmon's complete centralization of power.

political history is largely a story of his complete centralization of power. His rule has been characterized by widespread suppression of political dissent including abductions, imprisonment and assassinations.³⁸ More recently, in 2016, a constitutional referendum passed which allowed him to run for reelection indefinitely and possibly paved the way for his son to assume power.³⁹ Regardless, Tajikistan has been relatively free from violent opposition and has been successful in suppressing perceived challengers. This includes violent purges that the government frames as coup attempts or acts of terrorism.⁴⁰ Yet, the country faces one of the highest risks of a coup attempt relative to other central Asian states.

2019 Coup Risk

Looking ahead to 2019, our model gives Tajikistan a 0.79 percent chance of coup, placing it the seventh highest out of the 43 countries in the region. The risk of coup activity in the year to come is explained by the lack of democracy, predicted decline in rainfall, and Rahmon's long tenure. Looking beyond the quantitative model, there are several factors which may contribute to the risk of coup activity in the near future.

The first and most gradual of these factors are demographic trends in the country. 40 percent of the country's population is under the age of 18 and has no personal memory of the civil war of the 1990's. The intense violence of this conflict is often cited as facilitating Rahmon's ability to consolidate power in exchange for stability.⁴¹ As this younger cohort ages,

they may be less willing than previous generations to accept the loss of political freedom, raising the risks of political instability generally.

The second risk factor is the emergence of a nascent Islamist insurgency. Claims of terrorist acts by Rahmon's government are largely a pretext for the removal of political opponents and perhaps an attempt to maintain outside security assistance. However, the porous border with Afghanistan and the repressive political atmosphere, particularly the state's crackdown on any public expression of Islam,⁴² may create the conditions for a genuine discontent across challengers and supporters. While true violent opposition would be destabilizing, it would also threaten the security interests on Tajikistan's two powerful regional neighbors Russia and China. Russia and China appear to support, or at least tolerate, Rahmon because he provides stability.⁴³ Any indication that his repressive policies are undermining regional stability would severely challenge that strategic calculus. If militancy or instability begins to increase, it may soften foreign support of Rahmon, potentially emboldening elites within Tajikistan to consider a violent contestation of power, including potential coup activity.

The final and most immediate risk factor for coup activity is the upcoming 2020 presidential election. It is not yet known if Rahmon will seek reelection. However, if he chooses not to, he has already begun setting the stage for his son Rustam to succeed him. Rustam has held a variety of high government posts⁴⁴ and the previously mentioned 2016 referendum lowered the minimum age for presidential candidates, making Rustam eligible to run in 2020.⁴⁵ Despite Rustam appearing to be Rahmon's preferred successor, there are other centers of power within the elite.⁴⁶ One such rival for power may be Rohman's daughter Ozada, a high ranking official, and her husband, a prominent banker-businessman. Outside the family there are other members of the country's political and economic elite who may see Rustman's ascension to the presidency as a step too far in the consolidation of power. Due to potential conflicts of interest, and Rustman's inexperience, this election creates a window of opportunity for those who may seek to seize power through a coup.

Policy Recommendations

The international community has limited options in influencing the course of political developments in Tajikistan. Rahmon's regime is deeply entrenched and unlikely to willingly cede any level of control. That said, one option may be greater conditionality for economic and security assistance from both state and private financial entities. Tajikistan's geostrategic position means the Rahmon regime benefits from significant security assistance. Increased conditionality on such assistance has the potential to compel limited governance improvements, providing a partial outlet for some of the country's growing political tensions. The international community should also make efforts where possible to push the Tajik government towards holding a more open election in 2020. Holding legitimate elections that strengthen power sharing and transition may help to curb the potential for violent changes in leadership by allowing for greater elite representation and more gradual political and economic inclusion.

Thailand

Background

No country has as troubled a history of coups in Asia as Thailand. Since 1980, there have been five coup attempts, three of which have been successful, accounting for more than a fifth of the regional total. Thailand's history has been characterized by long periods of military rule, but recent decades had seen a degree of democratic consolidation. However, this trend has been seriously eroded by two coups over the last twelve years.

In 2006, the military intervened to depose the democratically elected PM Thaksin Shinawatra. Shinawatra was a wealthy telecoms conglomerate owner who was catapulted into power by eschewing traditional centers of political power and rallying the country's poor, rural majority at the polls. His brand of populist politics isolated the traditional economic and political elites consisting of royalists, the military, the business community, and the country's urban middle class. After reelection to a second term in 2005, accusations of corruption and protests prompted the military to remove him in 2006.



A soldier of the 2006 Thailand coup stands guard outside the Palace area. (David Yttervik Seetiangtham/Flicker)

In 2011 Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra was elected as PM. After several years in office, Yingluck's government attempted to pass an amnesty bill which was largely seen as an attempt to pardon her brother who had been living in exile. This promoted a second military coup against the Shinawatra family in 2014. The junta from the 2014 coup remains in power.

2019 Coup Risk

Thailand has a 2019 coup risk of .83 percent. Thailand's risk in the model is driven primarily by its frequent and recent history of coup. Frequent coups tend to normalize them as a method of political contestation both among the political elite and the general public. As coups become more commonplace and accepted in a society, the perceived risk of backlash by potential coup leaders declines, making it an increasingly attractive option and fueling a cycle of repeated coups.⁴⁷ Other predictors of Thailand's 2019 risk is an estimated above average amount of rain fall and an increasingly long tenure without a democratic regime. Beyond the quantitative model, two additional factors are likely to drive the risk of coup in Thailand in 2019.

The first is the unique nature of the current junta. As mentioned previously, most previous Thai coups have been momentary interventions into politics to restore stability and push through political deadlock, with most coup leaders organizing elections and returning political power back to the civilian leadership relatively quickly. However, the current junta appears to have longer lasting goals that seek to permanently transform the balance of political power within the Thai state. The junta has held on to power for much longer than was initially anticipated. In that time, they have introduced a new constitution which weakens civilian political parties and institutionalizes the military's role in politics.⁴⁸ The current regime's rule has also been more repressive, with dissidents being sent to "attitude adjustment camps."⁴⁹ Though there is little evidence of factionalism within the Thai military, there is the potential for elements of the armed forces to decide that the current leadership has gone too far. Feelings that the current junta has gone beyond the traditional role of briefly intervening to restore stability have the potential to lead to a potential "counter coup".

Another potential catalyst for coup risk is the upcoming February election. Though the military has closely orchestrated the election process,⁵⁰ the election still poses a risk. First, the military may quickly move against an elected government it

does not feel represents its interests. If a party like Shinawatra's populist platform were to form a government, Thailand's military may feel the need to intervene again. Another risk is that the election result could lead to protests, instability, and deadlock, which would serve as a pretext for resuming military control. The new commander-in-chief of the Thai military has already stated that he would consider retaking power from newly elected civilian leaders in the case of unrest.⁵¹ What's more, the constitutional changes made by the junta, which weaken political parties, increases the chance of deadlock and protests, paving the way for their return.

Policy Recommendations

Thailand may be the most difficult of the cases examined here because it is not a matter of preventing a coup, but of convincing a military regime already in power to show restraint. That is no simple task. Perhaps the best option in the short term is to place pressure on the junta to ensure that, despite the structural hurdles to real representative democracy, the 2019 vote goes forward on schedule and without further intervention. This may, at least, ensure that civilian political parties have an institutional check on the military. In the longer term, the new constitution will need to be significantly overhauled to ensure a return to true civilian authority. However, such a step will be incredibly difficult given the restraints present in the current system.

REGIONAL RISK FACTORS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The three country overviews above highlight the diverse sources of coup risk that the region faces in 2019, yet two broad factors predominately shape the risk of a coup event in the coming year. This concluding section highlights the roles of Sino-US relations and political instability in shaping potential coup risk and provides key policy takeaways for addressing these regional push factors.

Cold War politics played a significant role in shaping the use of coups in Asia. Though the Cold War is over, United States rivalries within this region may spur similar dynamics. Rising Pacific tensions between the United States Government and the Chinese

Two broad factors predominately shape the risk of a coup event in the coming year.

Government may generate similar incentives for militaries to step in and ensure strong US or Chinese Alliances.⁵² The government of the United States has historically maintained strong regional interests throughout South and East Asia and strategic infrastructure throughout. At the same time, China has begun expanding its influence, contesting territorial claims and building stronger economic alliances. As regional governments begin to move closer to China, there may be a risk that military apparatuses that have historically maintained close US alliances may feel it necessary to step in and remove elected leaders as political factions attempt to realign or maintain the course.

Countries within the region may face a greater risk of coups if ongoing political instability spurs militaries to step in and attempt to restore order. As noted by Bell and Sudduth, civil war dynamics often play a critical role in the emergence of coups.⁵³ Militaries may step in during civil wars to reshape the bargaining environment, creating opportunities for settlements.⁵⁴ This should be particularly salient in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Philippines. As the Taliban gain greater advantage in the war in Afghanistan, they may push closer to the capital. This will generate an incentive for military leaders to step in as part of an effort to restore order and preserve the status quo. Equally, ongoing conflicts in Pakistan and the Philippines may escalate, thereby fostering similar concerns on the part of the military in these two countries.

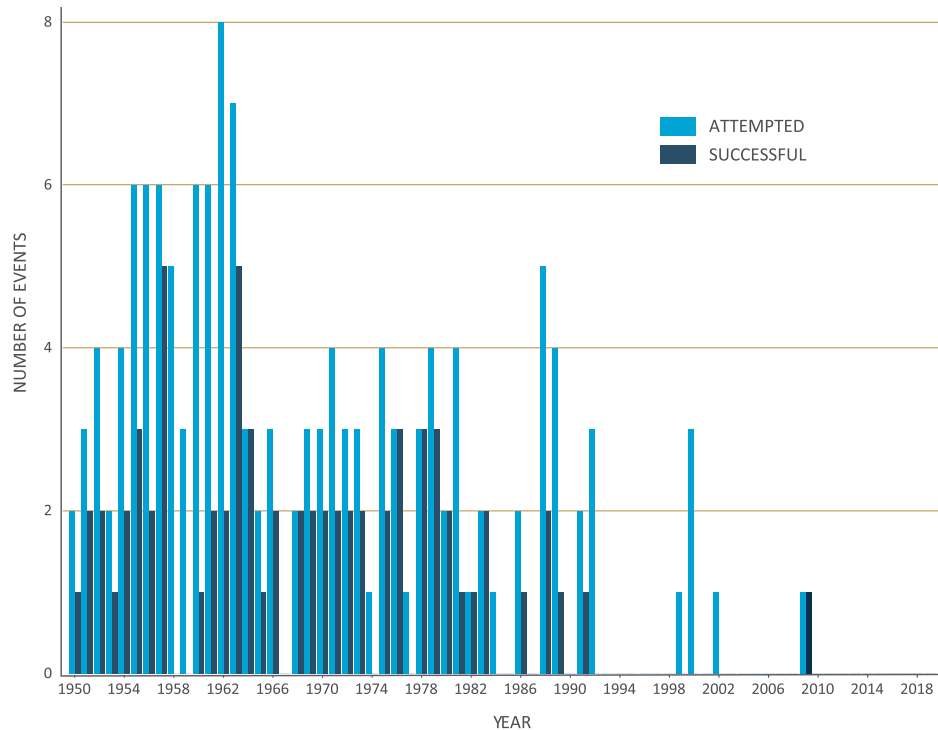
It is advised that the international community seek to resolve ongoing maritime disputes and deescalate current trade tensions between the US and China to reduce the risk that militaries will intervene on contentious political politics related to great power relationships. In addition to this focus on regional power politics, the international community should expand peacebuilding operations within the region to prevent the incentive for militaries to step in and attempt to restore order, while continuing support for economic and social development in more fragile states.

AMERICAS REGIONAL RISK AND OVERVIEW FOR 2019

BACKGROUND AND RECENT TRENDS

Since 1980, the regional risk of at least one coup attempt has dropped by 62.6 percent. This dramatic drop in risk is reflected in the impressive gains made by the region when it comes to the frequency of coup attempts. While there were 24 coup attempts in the region between 1980-1999, only 5 attempts have taken place since the year 2000. In order to explain this large drop, we explore three broad trends in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): broad economic growth, especially during the region's so-called "golden decade"⁵⁵ between 2003 and 2013; widespread democratization during the third wave of democratization⁵⁶ in the late 1970's and 1980's; and an end to the Cold War, an era in which the United States intervened heavily in the domestic politics of LAC countries. While the United States continues to play a prominent role in this regard, regime change has been replaced with a diplomatic position of non-intervention.⁵⁷

Regarding economic growth, while GDP growth in LAC averaged less than 2.5 percent annually between 1980 and 2002, this average increased to 4 percent for the period between 2003 and 2012.⁵⁸ This increase in growth can be attributed in large part to a boom in commodity prices due to industrialization in China and India.⁵⁹ In addition, the benefits of this increased growth in GDP were enjoyed by a broad segment of the region's population, as poverty⁶⁰ was cut in half and the middle class surged, largely due to income gains⁶¹ for low-skilled workers and targeted poverty reduction programs⁶². Given the large influence that poverty and overall development levels have on support for potential regime change, these economic factors may have had a strong impact on the overall decline in coup risk in LAC.

FIGURE 15: COUP EVENTS IN THE AMERICAS (1950 – 2018)

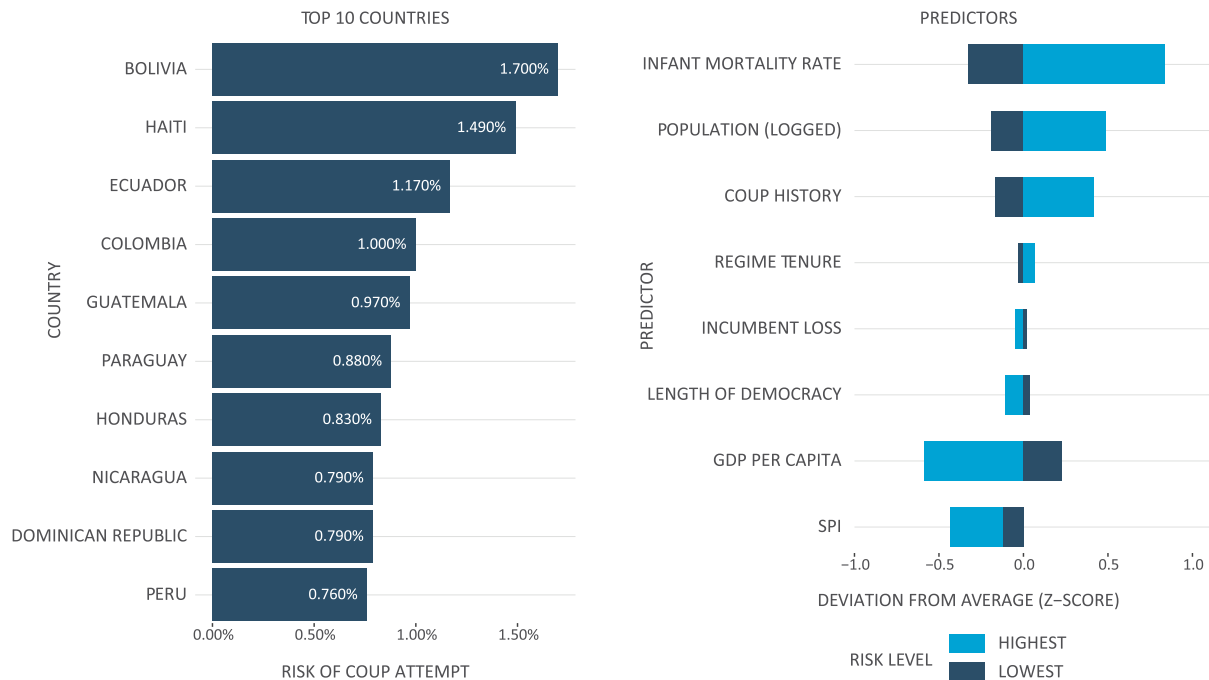
A regional democratic transition in the 1980s helped to reinforce the economic growth of the 90s, resulting in stronger norms for peaceful, democratic transitions of power. While few countries in the region met the traditional preconditions⁶³ for democratization in the 1980s, by 1994 only Cuba retained the status of Not Free.⁶⁴ A variety of international and domestic factors explains this shift. Oil price shocks in the 1970s badly damaged many LAC economies, leading business elites to turn against existing authoritarian regimes. Authoritarianism was eschewed in favor of democracy with the hope of achieving greater political stability, while an international environment more favorable to democracy helped to ensure the durability of newly democratic governments in LAC.⁶⁵ While democratic governance does not guarantee political stability, the newly democratic regimes in LAC were remarkably stable, thus decreasing the relative likelihood of coup attempts.

In addition, the end of the Cold War brought an end to foreign intervention into the internal politics of LAC nations. The most infamous examples of this are the coups that the US supported to varying degrees in the region, for example, the overthrows of President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 in Guatemala and of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. These coups brought to power horrendous human rights violators and precipitated bloody civil wars.⁶⁶ However, as previously noted, coups can be cyclical in nature. For example, in the 10 years after Guatemala's 1954 coup, there were five additional coup attempts. Furthermore, costly signals (sanctions, mobilizing troops, etc.) sent by the US to countries in LAC have proven to be significant explanatory variables affecting the likelihood of coups in LAC under certain conditions.⁶⁷ However, the end of the Cold War removed the strategic logic for US meddling in the region. With a new default policy of non-intervention, US involvement ceased to be a factor exacerbating regional coup risk.

With a new default policy of non-intervention, US involvement ceased to be a factor exacerbating regional coup risk.

2019 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

FIGURE 16: TOP 10 COUNTRIES IN THE AMERICAS AT RISK FOR A COUP IN 2019 AND THEIR PREDICTORS



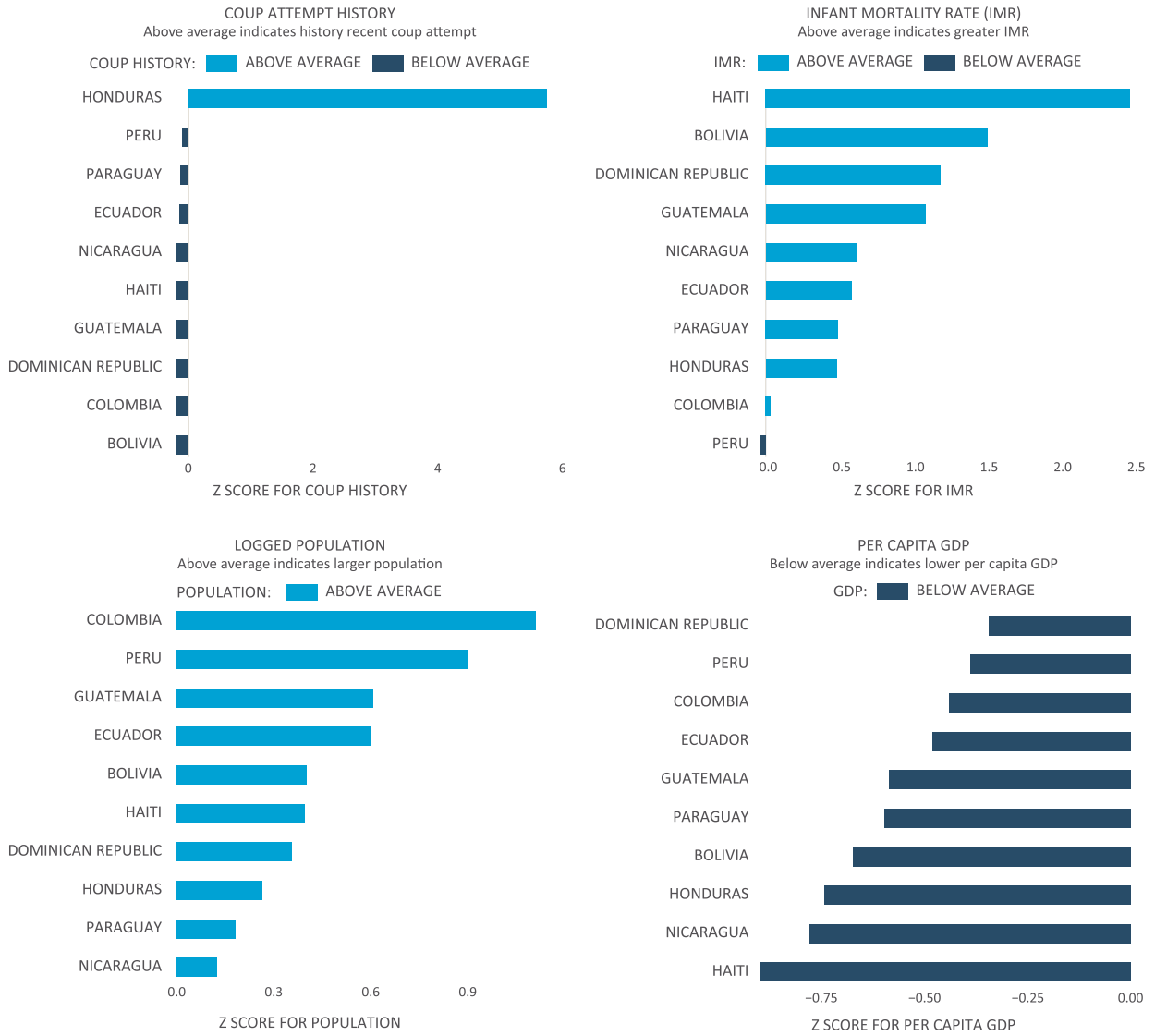
Looking at regional risk for 2019, Bolivia, Haiti, and Ecuador are estimated to have the three highest risks of at least one coup attempt for this year. Looking at four salient drivers of coup risk based on historical data, a few regional trends emerge. Historical coup activity, as discussed above has declined significantly. Only Honduras has above average trends in recent coup attempts.

In terms of infant mortality rate and GDP per Capita (Figure 17), all of the top-10 countries at risk demonstrate more vulnerable contexts than the average. They typically have higher infant mortality rate per 1000 births than normal and have lower median GDP per Capita than normal for the region.

Finally, all of the top-10 most at-risk countries have above average have a larger population than the average country in the region.

While there are numerous ongoing political and/or economic crises in LAC, including in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras,⁶⁸ we chose to highlight the top-three most vulnerable countries as determined by CoupCast. Bolivia, Haiti, and Ecuador represent a diverse cross-section of the Americas and have all had a recent history of political upheaval and coup related activity.

FIGURE 17: TOP PREDICTORS OF COUP RISK IN 2019 FOR THE MOST AT-RISK COUNTRIES IN THE AMERICAS



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE AMERICAS IN 2019

Bolivia

Background

The center of gravity in Bolivian politics for the past two years has been president Evo Morales' decision to run for reelection in 2019. After Bolivians rejected a referendum in February 2016 that would have allowed Morales to seek a fourth term in 2019, he and his Movement to Socialism (MAS) party successfully convinced the country's courts that term limits violate "essential rights" as articulated in the American Convention on Human Rights and have further argued the results of the referendum are not binding.⁶⁹ After a final ruling by Bolivia's electoral court in December 2018, Morales was officially allowed on the ticket, a decision which sparked protests throughout the country.⁷⁰

This abrogation of term limits was the most recent step in a long process to ensure Morales and MAS retain power⁷¹ that has in parallel seen Morales turn to a more authoritarian style of governing. For instance, Morales and his party have adopted an increasingly hostile tone towards the press, characterizing specific news outlets as members of a "cartel of lies" acting on behalf of foreign governments.⁷² This characterization has been used to intimidate journalists; however, it has also been an important instrument for delegitimizing the results of the February 2016 referendum. The government's argument is that the press' coverage of a scandal surrounding Morales, his former inamorata Gabriela Zapata, a supposed child between them, and inappropriate state contracts, was intentionally used to swing the results of the referendum in the opposition's favor.⁷³ Within this climate at least two journalists have fled the country after the government threatened them for their unfavorable coverage.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Morales has utilized other classic strongman tactics such as consolidating decision-making authority to himself and a small inner-circle, and regularly reshuffling top cabinet positions to prevent the rise of any challengers to his authority.⁷⁵

Far from ensuring general acquiescence to his rule, Morales' increasing authoritarianism has produced backlash amongst the Bolivian population.⁷⁶ MAS has lost several important mayoral races, including in the politically influential city of El Alto, while polling suggests that, though support for Morales may be enough to push him to victory in 2019, it is has significantly dropped.⁷⁷ All of this is in spite of the unprecedented economic progress Morales has overseen in the country. Though the country remains the poorest in the region and has an above-average infant mortality rate^b, annual GDP growth has averaged 4.87 percent under his rule, while 97 percent of Bolivian municipalities have experienced reductions in poverty.⁷⁸

However, Morales' authoritarian turn is a sharp break from his past governing style, which centered around promises to "lead by obeying" the will of the people.⁷⁹ His decision to ignore the results of the February 2016 referendum are a direct blow to this pillar of legitimacy, as are his attacks on the press and consolidation of power. Meanwhile, the economic gains made under Morales have produced an economically and politically empowered middle class that is unsupportive of his aspirations for indefinite rule.⁸⁰ Likewise, his efforts to expand mineral and gas extraction into national parks has alienated some of his indigenous bases of support.⁸¹ Overall, Morales' political appetite continues to grow while his popular support is waning.

Morales' decision to ignore the results of the February 2016 referendum are a direct blow to this pillar of legitimacy.

2019 Coup Risk

Within this context, the risk of a coup in Bolivia may largely hinge on Morales' performance in October's elections. If he is to win by a healthy margin, his rule will likely be solidified without exacerbating coup risk. Meanwhile, though a

^b Bolivia's infant mortality rate is roughly 1.5 standard deviations above the regional mean.



Evo Morales in 2008. (Joel Alvarez/Wikimedia Commons)

narrow victory can in some cases endanger incumbents by exposing their weakness to potential challengers,⁸² Morales has worked to ensure no such challengers exist in his party, while the opposition is fractured and ineffective. However, if Morales loses, it is possible he and his party will work to annul the election results as they did with the referendum, in the face of what would be massive protests. In such a scenario, the military might be incentivized to intervene against Morales and restore order.^c

Policy Recommendations

In mitigating such an outcome, external actors are unfortunately quite constrained. Any interventions by non-LAC countries will likely be delegitimized as actions by “imperialist” actors and actually could harm pro-democratic efforts. Meanwhile, actors within LAC, such as Brazil, Argentina and Peru, have shown little willingness to mitigate against democratic backsliding in the country up

to this point.⁸³ Similarly, the Organization of American States has a very limited toolkit to proactively deal with internal political issues of member countries due to principles of non-intervention.⁸⁴

Ideally, countries such as Brazil and Argentina would either publicly or privately express to Morales their concern regarding October’s election, while encouraging him to request OAS election monitors and communicating that any attempt by him to undermine the results would create instability that might put at risk their ability to continue investing in exploration and industrialization of Bolivia’s natural gas industry.⁸⁵ However, this seems unlikely given Bolsonaro’s own hostility toward democracy and the ongoing recession facing Argentinian president Mauricio Macri.⁸⁶

Haiti

Background

Haiti has a long history of internal and external crises. The underlying factors explaining the tumultuous Haitian political economy are largely due to historically weak state institutions, resulting in high regime turnover, often by way of coup. Since the end of the 30-year Duvalier ruling dynasty which culminated in 1986, there have been three successful coups forcing the ouster of three sitting presidents, and popular discontent inducing the resignations of one sitting president and three prime ministers. The most recent saw the resignation of Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant on July 14, 2018, in response to the government backing an International Monetary Fund proposal to end fuel subsidies.

The weak state environment is compounded by a dire socio-economic environment, with a near stagnant economy and significant dependence on foreign aid.⁸⁷ With a population of 11 million people, Haiti is classified in the Low Development category by the United Nations Development Program. It ranks 168 out of 189 countries, with a national poverty rate of 50.7 percent (PPP \$3.10).⁸⁸ Significant governance challenges include rule of law enforcement and addressing endemic corruption. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) (2017), Haiti is ranked 157 out of 180 countries, with a score of 22 out of 100 (0=highly corrupt, 100=very clean).⁸⁹

^c Evidence from non-democracies shows that coup risk rises when leaders lose non-democratic elections. While Bolivia is still a democracy, given Morales’ authoritarian governing style and the questionable legitimacy of the upcoming election, he may incur some of the same risk if he loses. See: “Violence and Votes: are Noncompetitive Elections in Dictatorships Worth the Risk?” One Earth Future Research, April 3, 2018: <https://oefresearch.org/think-peace/noncompetitive-elections-dictatorships-egypt>

The island nation is also extremely vulnerable to reoccurring devastating natural disasters in the form of tropical storms and earthquakes that take place on a near yearly basis. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 98 percent of Haiti's population has been exposed to two or more types of natural disasters.⁹⁰ Some of the more recent significant natural disasters include over 5,000 people killed and over 300,000 displaced in flooding from tropical storms in 2004, and in 2010 over 300,000 killed in a magnitude 7.0 earthquake that hit the capital Port-au-Prince. This was followed by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, affecting 1.4 million people, displacing 175,509 people and resulting in over 500 fatalities.⁹¹ Hurricane Matthew also reduced 30 percent of Haiti's GDP in 2016, as vital infrastructure and crops were destroyed.⁹²

2019 Coup Risk

Haiti is yet to fully recover from the devastating impact of the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew in 2016. The country entered a period of protracted political instability in 2015 following an undecided and contested national election, with widespread allegations of electoral fraud. Political newcomer Jovenel Moïse, chosen by incumbent President Michel Martelly to succeed him and represent the ruling Bald Head Party (PHTK), failed to secure an outright majority in the 2015 election.⁹³ President Martelly ended his term in January 2016, leaving the country without a president and with the prospect of a runoff suspended indefinitely. After sustained violent protests, a new election was called in November 2016, with Jovenel Moïse receiving 55.6 percent of the votes. Only 21 percent of the electorate turned out to vote.⁹⁴ Moïse was elected as president in February 2017 bringing the impasse to an end.⁹⁵ Since then Haiti experienced a period of relative political stability until the July 2018 anti-austerity protests that saw the resignation of Prime Minister Lafontant. Despite this recent political instability, the Fragile States Index (2018) ranks Haiti along with Iraq as the most improved countries for 2018. The Fragile States Index notes the relatively peaceful resolution of the disputed 2015 and 2016 elections, as well as the continued progress made on the 2010 earthquake recovery efforts. This progress noted by the Fragile States Index must be situated in the necessary context of state fragility: Haiti is ranked the 12th most fragile state after Iraq.⁹⁶

According to the CoupCast Index, Haiti is considered the second most at risk for a coup in 2019 for the Americas. This assessment is premised on several statistically significant factors that include: first, above regional average infant mortality, of which can be inferred lower than the regional average in socio-economic development; second, the limited duration of democracy in the country relative to the regional average; and finally, the country has been suffering from unusually below average annual precipitation. Although the whole Caribbean has been affected by a sustained drought since 2015, Haiti was particularly hard hit by the drought, with 3.8 million Haitians considered food insecure in 2015.⁹⁷ The situation has since improved marginally, with the UN noting that 2.7 million Haitians would require "humanitarian, protection or early recovery assistance" in the 2017 to 2018 period.⁹⁸

Key governance challenges remain for the country. Member of the ruling Bald Head Party (PHTK), President Moïse is considered relatively inexperienced politically. The resignation of Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant in July 2018 amidst violent anti-austerity protests too adds to his woes. The government has since suspended the economic reforms, with opposition members of parliament threatening violence and protests if any future reforms are introduced. In October and November 2018 President Moïse has been met with sustained and violent protests calling for his government to step down. The calls for his resignation come amid allegations of widespread corruption and state revenue embezzlement from the PetroCaribe program – an earthquake recovery fund. Other challenges include dealing with well-entrenched and organized criminal groups and narcotics traffickers that routinely use violence to ply their trade. The law enforcement agencies and the judiciary are deemed corrupt, with the country yet to have a successful narcotics trafficking or corruption-related conviction.⁹⁹

In October and November 2018 President Moïse has been met with sustained and violent protests calling for his government to step down.

Policy Recommendations

The Haitian state remains extremely fragile and enters 2019 with a significant risk of political instability. There is a growing sense of disillusionment with the current government led by President Moïse and growing public anger over allegations of corruption. To mitigate the risk of potential coup, there is a need to sustain capacity building efforts particularly focusing on rule of law, civil society development, and the creation of economic opportunities to address the systemic unemployment and poverty. In this regard, the work being done by the UN's Mission for Justice Support in Haiti that replaced the prior UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti should be supported.¹⁰⁰ Addressing corruption and organized crime challenges should receive priority by international community. Further efforts are needed to build capacity among civil society to consolidate democratic norms. Of concern is a growing sense of apathy by the Haitian people represented by the low voter turnout in the 2016 elections. Finally, viable economic opportunities are needed to improve conditions for Haitian people, improve food security, build resilience against natural disasters, and reduce the dependence on foreign aid.

Ecuador

Background

Ecuadorian politics have recently undergone a large transition. After a decade of rule, Rafael Correa stepped down as Ecuador's president in 2017. However, far from retiring from politics, it appeared Correa was attempting a Putin-Medvedev style shuffle. Before the end of his tenure, Correa had passed a law abolishing presidential term limits, though this applied only to future presidents.¹⁰¹ His apparent plan was to have one of his former vice presidents ascend to the presidency and serve as a placeholder for him until 2021.¹⁰² After this, he could return to the presidency unencumbered by term limits.

However, after Correa's hand-picked successor, Lenin Moreno, narrowly won the 2017 race, he has acted as anything but a placeholder. After casting aside his vice president and Correa loyalist, Jorge Glas, when he was implicated in the massive Odebrecht scandal, Moreno held a referendum in February 2018 which reinstated term limits, barring Correa from returning to the presidency.¹⁰³ Also

After Correa's hand-picked successor, Lenin Moreno, narrowly won the 2017 race, he has acted as anything but a placeholder.

approved by the referendum was an item to reorganize the Citizens' Participation and Social Control Council (CPCCS), a body with power to make judicial appointments.¹⁰⁴ Now headed by lawyer and former presidential candidate Julio Cesar Trujillo, the council has purged Correa loyalists throughout the government, going so far as to sack all nine judges from the country's constitutional court.¹⁰⁵ Moreno has also reversed his predecessor's repressive posture towards the press, having eliminated the body put in place during Correa's tenure that monitored and investigated the media.¹⁰⁶

These moves have earned Moreno praise and, at least for a time, wildly high approval ratings.¹⁰⁷ After taking office in May 2017, Moreno's approval rating reached a peak of 77 percent in August 2017 and slowly declined before dropping 23.5 percent between January and April 2018 to 45.5 percent.¹⁰⁸ This suggests that, while Moreno's initial rebukes of Correa were very popular initially,¹⁰⁹ the honeymoon is over. The majority of Ecuadorans list economic problems and unemployment as their principal national concerns,¹¹⁰ which may provide an explanation for why Moreno's popularity has begun to stagnate.

Ecuador's economy was hit especially hard by the downturn in commodity prices in 2014 and continues to feel these effects. The country's economy is heavily reliant on oil; however, specific decisions made by Correa exacerbated the challenges the country would face after oil prices fell. The windfall of oil-related revenues led to a significant increase in public spending in the form of investments, wages, and social transfers; however, the sustainability of this increase was heavily dependent on oil prices remaining high.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, public savings were insufficient during the boom in oil

prices, leaving the country without much of a fiscal buffer when prices fell, while the country's dollarized economy left it without monetary policy tools.¹¹² This has left Moreno in the position of having to increase borrowing in order to sustain public spending levels and avoid economic recession.¹¹³ Public debt is forecasted to reach 50.2 percent of GDP in 2019 (up from 17.6 percent in 2010), while economic growth is forecasted to decrease by 0.4 percent in 2019 to 0.7 percent.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, Ecuador's relative precipitation is expected to be significantly lower than the regional average,¹¹⁵ which could bode poorly for the country's agricultural sector. Agriculture represents 13 percent of Ecuador's GDP and more than a quarter of employment.¹¹⁶ Were low precipitation to damage agricultural outputs, economic growth could be damaged further, while unemployment could also increase.

2019 Coup risk

Moreno's ability to thread the needle of making necessary fiscal adjustments without jeopardizing the socioeconomic gains made during the boom years will likely be the major factor affecting the stability of his regime. While there have been encouraging signs in 2018 that Moreno's government has gotten serious about lowering the fiscal deficit while simultaneously attempting to attract greater private investment,¹¹⁷ the political costs of this austerity may accumulate the longer such policies stay in place.¹¹⁸

However, even if Moreno himself is able to sustain the political will necessary to tighten the country's belt, he may still face obstacles in the legislature. As Moreno's party, Country Alliance (AP), does not hold a majority in the legislature, it has to rely on opposition parties to support its proposed economic policies.¹¹⁹ Because it will take time for the benefits of Moreno's structural reforms to be felt, in the meantime opposition parties may feel the heat from their constituents' dissatisfaction with the government's austerity policies and block further necessary adjustments.

A more fragmented legislature that creates government paralysis could potentially lead to economic crisis. In such a case, we could see conditions somewhat similar to those which precipitated the country's most recent coup in 2000. Faced with severe economic crisis and an ineffective leader, a coalition of indigenous farmers and junior military officers overthrew Jamil Mahuad in January 2000.¹²⁰ However, the will to carry out a coup could also be limited by a recognition by elites that such an action would negatively affect the country's ability to attract foreign investment and therefore recover economically.¹²¹

Policy Recommendations

In addition, external actors can take concrete steps to help prevent such an outcome. Ecuador already secured \$400 million dollars in additional financing from the World Bank, bringing total loans and assistance from the organization to \$1.4 billion, and is expected to secure even larger loan from the IMF in 2019.¹²² Continued access to these more favorable sources of financing will help cover the country's liquidity needs and mitigate against domestic political paralysis. With this assistance, it will then fall on Moreno to continue putting the country on more solid economic footing and thus avoid a potentially destabilizing crisis.

REGIONAL RISK FACTORS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking forward to 2019, the region's forecasted risk of at least one coup attempt is 19.98 percent, the second lowest risk for the region on record, with 2017 having been only 0.37 percent lower. As such, the region's forecasted 2019 risk is quite low when compared to its historic levels, while it is also relatively low when compared to other regions in the world, as discussed in Chapter 2. All of this being said, the region's risk yields about a 1 in 5 chance that the region will experience at least one coup attempt in 2019, a non-negligible risk. Meanwhile, the forecasted drop in risk for 2019 of less than 1 percent is part of a general slowing of the region's decline in coup risk, which may have been driven by rollbacks in two of the factors discussed above: economic growth and democratic consolidation. Looking towards 2019, there is a potential mixed bag in economic and political terms that may help explain this somewhat muted change in coup risk.

While LAC enjoyed considerable growth in GDP between 2003 and 2013, the region's average annual growth in GDP between 2014 and 2017 was merely 0.58 percent.¹²³ This significant drop in growth can be explained in large part by slowdown in China's growth along with decreased commodity prices, which together have left LAC with less favorable terms of trade.¹²⁴ This contracted growth has put the region's reductions of poverty and inequality at risk, as countries are finding themselves in tighter fiscal situations due to decreased commodity-related revenues.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for cautious optimism in 2019. Regional GDP growth is forecasted to reach 2.8 percent in 2019 (3 percent excluding Venezuela), a recovery which has been driven by a rebound in commodity prices, increased global demand and trade, as well as increased domestic private investment.¹²⁵ While this improved near-term outlook may help countries maintain their socioeconomic gains, it is still relatively modest, while its sustainability is qualified by a variety of political risks, many of which are related to issues regarding democratic backsliding and a resurgence in populism.¹²⁶

Both internal and external political swings toward populism could put LAC's economic recovery at risk in 2019. Internally, more erratic policymaking and governing styles based on a populist political appeal could create greater uncertainty for investors. For instance, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's (AMLO) decision to cancel Mexico City's new airport project in the middle of its construction caused the country's currency and bonds to plunge.¹²⁷ More broadly, external factors such as the risk of escalation in the trade war between the US and China threaten to depress the upswing in global trade¹²⁸ and slow global economic growth in the coming year and beyond¹²⁹, both of which would have large repercussions for the region.

Both internal and external political swings toward populism could put LAC's economic recovery at risk in 2019.

A parallel development to the region's contraction in economic growth after 2013 has been a growing dissatisfaction with democracy and current political systems. Between 2012 and 2016/17,¹³⁰ support for democracy in LAC declined 11.2 percent, from 69 percent to 57.8 percent.¹³¹ Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents who support their current political system in LAC declined from a peak of 53.2 percent in 2010 to 49.3 percent in 2016/17, a drop of nearly 4 percent.¹³² While contraction in economic growth may have been one driver of these trends, corruption and violence may also have played important roles given their stubbornly high levels in the region.¹³³

Within this context, candidates seen as outsiders or reformers have found more room to operate politically.¹³⁴ In some cases, these candidates are moderates, such as Argentinian television host Marcelo Tinelli, who has been floated as an outside challenger for the country's 2019 presidential elections.¹³⁵ In others, the candidates are much more extreme, as is the case with Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, who has lavishly praised the country's 1964-1985 military dictatorship.¹³⁶ In yet other cases, the candidate is arguably somewhere in the middle. For instance, AMLO may not generally respect Mexico's institutions, but he is unlikely to become another Hugo Chavez.¹³⁷ However, in the cases in which extreme, illiberal candidates do rise to power, coups may become more likely if they transition the country towards autocracy. When confronted with challenges to their power or tenure, such leaders may take actions that sharply break with democratic norms and thus precipitate crises. These actions, such as rejecting election results, dissolving legislatures, or violent crackdowns, could lead to military intervention either for or against the incumbent.

This general change in the region's political landscape, coupled with modest and uncertain economic growth, provides an ambivalent outlook for the region's 2019 risk of coup attempt. If economic growth for 2019 follows current projections, countries in the region may be able to continue with the socioeconomic gains made in 2003-2013. However, this may not be enough. Chronically high levels of violence and corruption have likely had an independent role in the growing dissatisfaction with the region's traditional political actors and will likely keep the door open for more extreme candidates in 2019 and beyond. What this means for the future is more uncertainty. Political outsiders need not be autocrats, and autocrats will not necessarily trigger coups. However, less support for democratic norms on the part of leaders and populations can set background conditions in which irregular transfers of power become more acceptable in the event of economic or political crises.

While democratic institutions and norms are in many places being stretched, the focus should be on ensuring they do not break. One part of this is ensuring that economic catastrophes that could translate to political crises do not take place. To that end, the World Bank and IMF are already aiding numerous countries to adapt to lower growth rates and new fiscal restraints. However, more proactive work could be done in the political realm. Regional bodies such as the Organization of American States (OAS) have traditionally been hamstrung by principles of non-intervention into the internal affairs of member states. For example, OAS election monitors can only be deployed when requested by member states.¹³⁸ OAS and other regional bodies should work to become more preventive by convening in the run-up to potential inflection points for coups such as contentious elections or judicial decisions which repeal term limits. Meanwhile, NGO's such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Carter Center should partner with local civil society organizations in LAC to provide election observers assistance and training. This will provide transparency surrounding the outcomes of contentious elections and referendums, and potentially lower the ability of would-be autocratic leaders to ignore results.

AFRICA REGIONAL RISK AND OVERVIEW FOR 2019

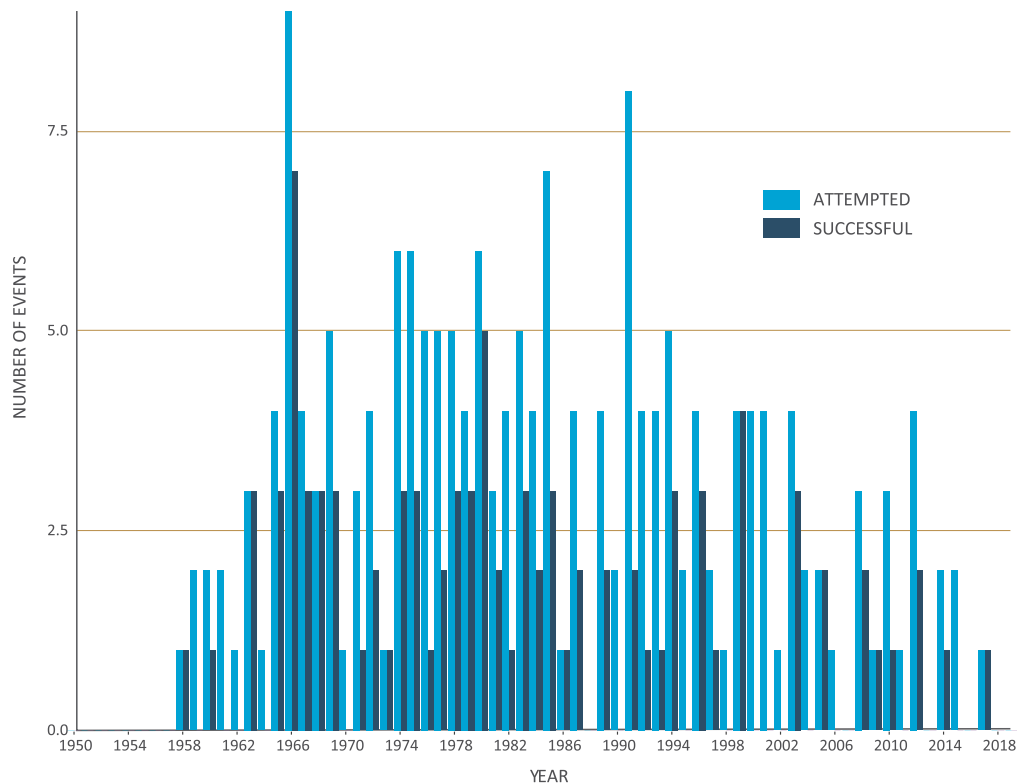
BACKGROUND AND RECENT TRENDS

Samuel Decalo once described coups as the “most visible and recurrent characteristic of the African political experience...”¹³⁹ Though referring specifically to the rapid rise of coups in the 1960s, the phenomenon would long plague the continent. And while recent decades have seen a large decline in the number of coups, they have remained a significant threat to the region’s political leadership.

Recent years have seen coups target leaders in established democracies like Mali, transitioning countries like Burkina Faso, and long-established dictatorships as in Zimbabwe. Below we briefly review this history, while noting important trends on the continent. We then go on to discuss six countries. These include three countries determined to be high risk in the model (Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Zimbabwe), and three low risk countries that we believe deserve additional attention (Togo, Ethiopia, and Gabon).

The first coup in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa occurred in Sudan on November 17, 1958. The ouster of Khalil illustrates one hazard of coups, as Sudan was afflicted with multiple coup attempts over the following two years. Subsequent events would illustrate coups becoming a larger challenge for the region. Joseph Mobutu’s “neutralization” of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo (1960) and the ouster of Sylvanus Olympio in Togo (1963) would set the stage for a cascade of coups. By the end of the 1960s, Sub-Saharan Africa had experienced 34 coups in the decade, 23 of them successful, and 17 states experienced at least one coup attempt. The practice would not soon go away. The region experienced another 40 during the 1970s, 10 new countries were afflicted, and fully half of the region’s original post-colonial leaders were eventually removed through coups.¹⁴⁰ Leaders of non-colonized states such as Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and William Tolbert of Liberia were also removed by their militaries.

By the end of the Cold War, 36 countries had been targeted in 121 coups, 66 of them successful. Between Sudan’s 1958 coup and the collapse of Soviet Union, only 1988 was without a coup attempt. The explosion of coups in the period can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as the inherent instability of new countries, substantial economic and demographic challenges, and of course foreign meddling. Aside from former colonial powers, the United States and Soviet Union in particular attempted to foment coups in favor of supportive governments and economic benefits.¹⁴¹

FIGURE 18: COUP EVENTS IN AFRICA (1950 – 2018)

The end of the superpower rivalry is widely considered to have had an important influence on global coup activity. With very few exceptions, coups have become virtually extinct in Latin America, previously the most coup-plagued region. The same cannot be said for Sub-Saharan Africa. The early 1990s actually saw a jump in coup attempts, and the decade overall saw 36 attempts, rates similar to that seen during the Cold War.¹⁴² The continued occurrence of coups in the region is likely due to a number of peculiarities. First, the loss of substantial military aid from the superpowers put a financial burden on governments that were already being tasked with austerity cuts. The 1985 coup against Buhari, dubbed the “first IMF coup in Africa” would act as an initial glimpse of the growing economic challenges in the period.¹⁴³ Second, and related, the demands of structural adjustment ended numerous popular expenditures, including food subsidies. Resentment at these cuts resulted in mass mobilization against numerous regimes, and helped prompt coup attempts in previously stable places such as Zambia.¹⁴⁴ Third, underfunded and poorly equipped militaries tasked with fighting civil wars saw militaries intervene against their governments in places such as Sierra Leone.¹⁴⁵ Finally, though the wave of democratization that swept through Africa in the 1990s was widely celebrated, mass movements both prompted popular coups as well as efforts to forestall transitions. Mali, for example, saw a pro-democracy element of the Malian armed forces remove President Moussa Traoré following the killing of as many as 300-plus protesters.¹⁴⁶ The planned democratic transition itself, however, prompted a failed anti-democratic counter-coup attempt just months later.¹⁴⁷

Coups, however, did begin to subside towards the end of the decade, and witnessed a noticeable drop after the launch of the African Union in summer 2002. The AU departed from its predecessor in a number of ways. Most meaningful in the context of coups, the Organization of African Unity adopted

Coups witnessed a noticeable drop after the launch of the African Union in summer 2002.

an explicit non-intervention doctrine that proscribed member states from interfering in the internal affairs of other member states. Though motivated by concerns of continued foreign meddling from colonial powers, the norm effectively guaranteed a muted regional response against coups.

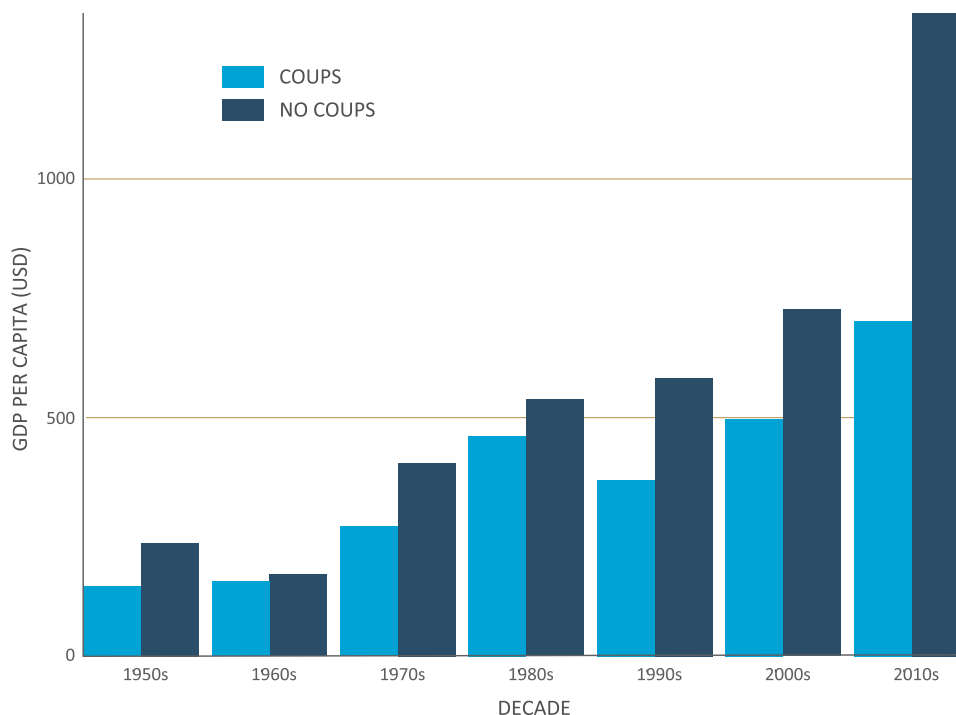
The groundwork for moving away from this norm began—at least rhetorically—at the OAU summits in Harare in June 1997 and Algiers in July 1999. The organization vowed to exclude coup leaders from the organization, a goal more formally espoused in Lomé in July 2000.¹⁴⁸ The framework more directly defined unconstitutional changes of government as any of the following:

- i) military coup d'état against a democratically elected Government;
- ii) intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected Government;
- iii) replacement of democratically elected Governments by armed dissident groups and rebel movements;
- iv) the refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party after free, fair and regular elections.¹⁴⁹

What Lomé possessed in ambition it lacked in practicality, with the OAU heavily constrained from acting against violators. Such constraints prompted member states to move toward the adoption of a new framework for regional governance. The Constitutive Act of the African Union (2001) would reify prior commitments to suspend violators, while the organization would be freer to enact penalties. Next, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (2007, the “Addis Charter”) later added a prohibition on leaders revising their constitutions and other legal instruments in a manner inconsistent with democratic alternation of power.

The organization’s rhetoric was increasingly supported by demonstrable condemnation of coups, particularly after the 2006 launch of the AU’s Peace and Security Council.¹⁵⁰ It has been argued that the anti-coup norm has acted as a deterrent to coups in the region. However, the continent has had a number of other factors that could also contribute to the decline. Most obvious are the economic fortunes of the AU’s members. Long mired in economic turmoil, the continent has seen pronounced economic growth since 2000. This echoes an interesting historic peculiarity in which wealth appears to be increasingly tied to coups over time.

The 1950s and 1960s saw virtually no difference in terms of GDP per capita when comparing states that experienced coups to those that did not. The following two decades would see wealth increase, with coup-free states generally 20-30 percent wealthier. This wealth grew substantially wider in the 1990s (\$576 vs. \$364), and dramatically increased in the new century. Since 2010, coup-free states have had a GDP per capita roughly twice that of states that have experienced coups (\$1262 vs. \$637). Over time, coups have become more limited to the region’s poorest states, suggesting the importance of continued economic growth.

FIGURE 19: MEDIAN GDP PER CAPITA BY COUP STATUS

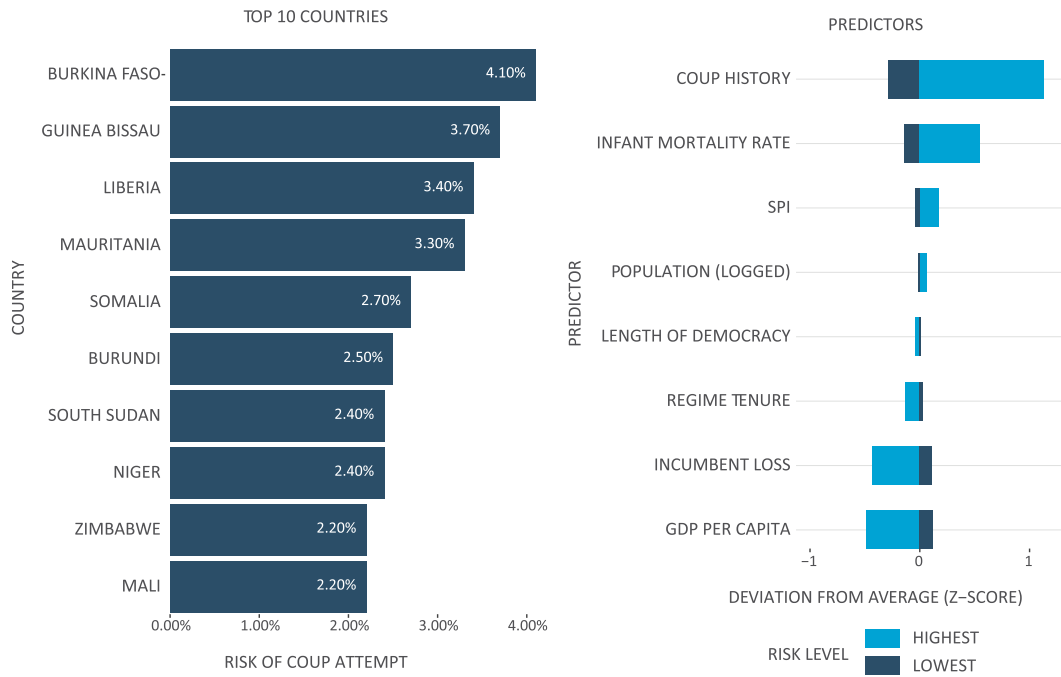
2019 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

To date, Africa south of the Sahara had experienced at least 186 verifiable coup attempts, with 92 of those succeeding. Of 50 countries, only nine have avoided a coup attempt. Events have historically been most common in West Africa.¹⁵¹ Primarily clustered in that sub-region in recent years, since 2010 they have occurred in places as varied as Niger, Burundi, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe. Though the region has seen only two successful coups over the last five years, they remain a very real threat to the region's governments and people.

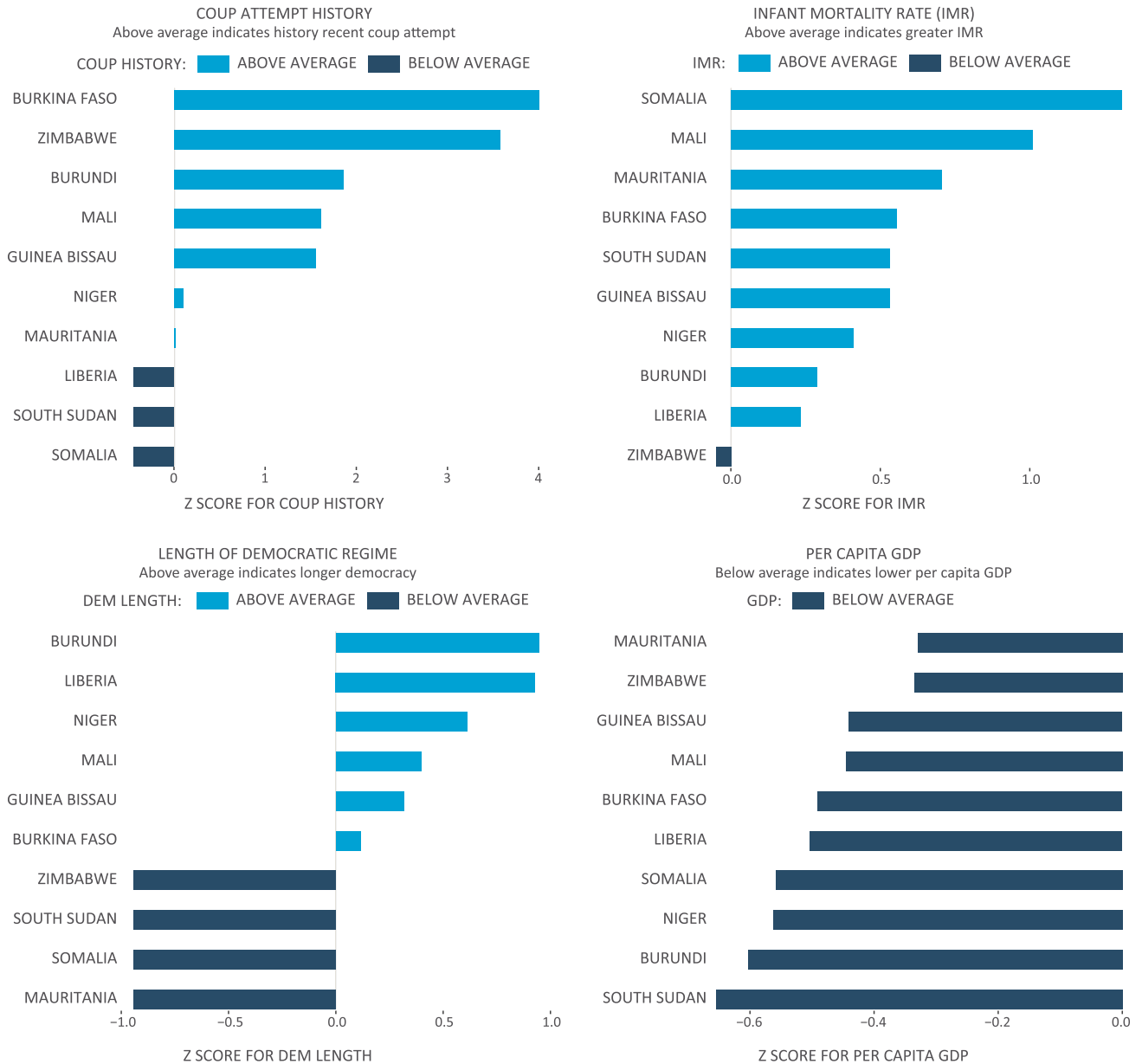
The region's leading candidates for a coup in 2019 are generally unsurprising. Seven of the ten most likely cases have experienced coups since 2010. Of those that have not, South Sudan and Somalia rank among the poorest states globally and have seen protracted conflict result in the killing of hundreds of thousands and displacement of millions. Perhaps the only surprise is Liberia, which ranks third. Though not having experienced a coup attempt since 1994 and being now 15 years removed from its civil war, Liberia has several factors that coalesce to push it up the rankings. Low economic development combined with a change in political leadership during the 2017 presidential election are likely driving its relatively high estimated risk of a coup attempt in 2019. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Unity party led the country from 2005 to 2017, with Unity experiencing a landslide defeat to famous footballer George Weah and his Coalition for Democratic Change. Elections can be triggers for potential coups, and this risk may extend years after the election following an opposition win.

Below we explore six cases in more detail. These include three of the most likely cases, including Burkina Faso (1), Guinea-Bissau (2), and Zimbabwe (10). We also explore three cases ranking in the bottom ten, Togo, Ethiopia, and Gabon. Though measuring low in the CoupCast model, we discuss these cases due to ongoing developments that are not captured in the data. We believe these countries are seeing their coup likelihood understated based on current political realities.

FIGURE 20: TOP 10 AFRICAN COUNTRIES AT RISK FOR A COUP ATTEMPT IN 2019 AND THEIR PREDICTORS



152 **FIGURE 21: TOP PREDICTORS OF COUP RISK IN 2019 FOR THE MOST AT-RISK COUNTRIES IN AFRICA**



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FOR AFRICA IN 2019

Burkina Faso

Background

Burkina Faso's place at the top of this ranking is perhaps appropriate, given that the country has seen as many leaders ousted through coups as any other African country. Burkina Faso's coup history began in 1966, with the removal of its first president, Maurice Yaméogo. Faced with a growing budget deficit, austerity measures that included a 20 percent reduction in civil service salaries, and growing perceptions of the regime's corruption, Yaméogo's government began facing resentment in 1964. A January 1966 strike saw protesters attack different government centers of power, and soldiers ultimately defected from the regime. Army Chief of Staff Sangoulé Lamizana would take over as the head of a military junta.

Lamizana himself would fall to Saye Zerbo in a 1970 coup, an event that would lead to a rapid succession of military interventions. Facing similar pressure from trade unions, Zerbo was replaced by Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo two years later. Unable to balance various political and military factions, Zerbo fell deeper into a dispute with then-Prime Minister Thomas Sankara, leading to the latter's dismissal and arrest. Zerbo's regime would end after just nine months, when soldiers under Blaise Compaoré, loyal to Sankara, removed him from the presidency.

The resulting government was to be led by Sankara, who was infamously killed in an October 15, 1987 coup led by his former friend and bandmate Compaoré. The latter managed to do what prior leaders had not by stabilizing the government. A series of elections, mired by boycotts and irregularities, allowed him to retain power through the 1990s. Though Burkina Faso adopted term limits in 2000, a 2005 court ruling limited its applicability due to Compaoré's incumbency. Facing the end of his eligibility with the impending 2015 poll, he pushed a referendum that would allow him to continue in office. The effort resulted in mass protests; on October 30 protesters stormed the parliament, and by the next day General Honoré Nabéré Traoré had announced a transitional government. Traoré, seen as a henchman of the now-deposed president, was promptly replaced by the Deputy Commander of the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP), Isaac Zida.

Zida would quickly turn power over to an interim regime led by Michael Kafando, with an election scheduled for October 2015. The RSP would attempt a preemptive coup September 16, just days after a report to interim Prime Minister Zida recommended the unit's dissolution. Met with immediate resistance, particularly from the Burkinabe army, the coup failed within a week. The October poll would see the election of Kaboré.



A man holds up a sign that reads in French, 'The country is going badly' during a rally in the Burkinabe capital Ouagadougou on September 29, 2018, in the first large protest by opposition supporters against the current government's policy. (OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP/Getty Images)

2019 Coup Risk

Beyond the country's coup-plagued history, Burkina Faso continues to face a variety of political, economic, and social challenges. The country remains among the world's poorest and continues to struggle against extremism. The threat of terrorism has increased steadily since 2015, dramatically illustrated with the killing of dozens in an attack in Ouagadougou in January 2016. The last year saw increased activity in the east and an al-Qaida announcement that it had formed a new cell in the country. Attacks have occasionally targeted members of the military and gendarmes.

March 2019 will see a referendum on Kaboré's campaign pledges to adopt a constitution providing more restraints on the president. This includes an inflexible two-term limit and the transition to a semi-presidential regime that would allow for the president to be removed by the Constitutional Court. Though promoting further democratization, the government's allowing of protests will likely see activity prior to the poll.

Policy Recommendations

The 2014 uprising that unseated president Compaoré was not a stand-alone action. The event largely paralleled actions three years earlier, when protests erupted after student Justin Zongo died while in police custody. The 2011 protests transformed to riots, with demonstrators targeting state institutions including police stations, party headquarters, and municipal offices.¹⁵³ The crisis was worsened by sporadic army mutinies, which saw soldiers protesting delayed salaries. Mutinies were by no means limited to this instance. Maggie Dwyer's assessment of West African mutinies, for example, noted Burkina Faso as the region's most mutiny-prone country since the end of the Cold War.¹⁵⁴ Security sector reform will be a priority for the government for the foreseeable future. The swift and comprehensive response of international actors against the 2015 coup should act as a lesson for would be coup plotters. However, the continued political stability of Burkina Faso will likely be dependent on a range of both domestic and foreign stakeholders.

The 2014 uprising that unseated president Compaoré was not a stand-alone action.

Guinea-Bissau

Background

Few countries have seen coups shape political fates more than in Guinea Bissau. Even before independence, Portugal's 1974 coups, dubbed the Carnation Revolution, was the direct catalyst for the independence of its colonies. Following a decade plus of anticolonial struggle, the country gained independence in September 1974. Its founding leader, Luis Cabral, was ousted in a 1980 coup led by then-Prime Minister Joao Bernado Vieira. Following the dismissal of Army Chief of Staff Ansumane Mané in 1998, the latter and his supporters would attempt to oust Vieira. Though their initial coup failed, Mané's supporters continued in open rebellion until Vieira was toppled in May of 1999.

A transitional period would see the democratic election of Kumba Ialá in 2000. Perhaps unsurprising, given the military junta's professed support of losing African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) candidate Malam Bacai Sanhá, the military would re-intervene. A bloodless coup against Ialá in September 2003 would lead to another caretaker government, this time seeing a 2005 election restore Vieira to the presidency. His second time in power, however, would be tumultuous. After surviving a coup attempt in November 2008, Vieira was killed in his home by elements of the armed forces in 2009. The killing reflected deeper problems. Vieira had found himself in a feud with the Army Chief of Staff General Batista Tagme Na Waie. After a bomb exploded in Na Waie's office, many (incorrectly) assumed it was Vieira's work. After storming the president's residence and killing him, the soldiers promptly returned to the barracks and allowed his constitutional successor to take power.



An electoral worker holds up a voting slip as he counts ballots at a polling station set up in the street in Bissau on March 10, 2019, during Guinea-Bissau's legislative elections (SEYLOU/AFP/Getty Images)

The subsequent election saw Sanhá win the presidency. Sanhá himself would survive a coup attempt before succumbing to failing health in January 2012. His constitutional successor Raimundo Pereira, would himself be overthrown just weeks before a presidential run off between Carlos Gomes Júnior and Ialá. The timing was not a coincidence.¹⁵⁵ The military was believed to be fearful of a Júnior victory, given his vows to downsize and reform the armed forces.¹⁵⁶ The ensuing 2014 election saw José Mário Vaz prevail over Nuno Gomes Nabiam, who was favored by the military.

2019 Coup Risk

Guinea-Bissau ranks high on a number of indicators that are closely tied with coups. The country remains one of the world's least developed, both in terms of per capita GDP and infant mortality. The regime is still in its infancy, and Vaz still a short-tenured leader who has clashed with both the opposition and members of his own party. Regional history and Guinea-Bissau's own prior experience with coups all point to background characteristics conducive to higher coup likelihood. Perhaps most importantly for 2019, Guinea-Bissau's history of coups has been intimately tied to elections and their outcomes. Legislative elections, originally scheduled for last October, are to be held on January 27, and the presidential election is to be held later in the year. These factors lead to a 4.1 percent likelihood of a coup in 2019, the second highest in the world.

Policy Recommendations

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed its Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) following the 2012 coup. The mission, comprised of soldiers from Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire, peaked at over 800 personnel for the 2014 presidential poll and currently sits at over 600. Though far less conspicuous than other ECOWAS missions, such as the intervention to remove Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, ECOMIB's presence is indisputably a coup deterrent. ECOWAS has shown a commitment to follow through on anti-coup stances. This includes restoring the ousted regime of Kabbah in Sierra Leone (1997) and contributing to the demise of what would otherwise have been successful coups in places like Sao Tome and Principe (2003), and Burkina Faso (2015).

ECOMIB's presence could thus have been instrumental in the stability of the Vaz government, as prior losses by military-backed candidates (or perceptions of an impending loss) previously prompted military intervention. The mission's mandate has been extended multiple times to coincide with the legislative election, most recently to September 2019. This will certainly help provide stability for January's poll, at least in the sense of preventing coups. It would be beneficial for ECOWAS, once presidential election dates are set, to commit to maintaining a presence throughout the election period.

Togo

Background

Togo has seen increasing domestic instability, including mass protests that have included as many as 800,000 participants in a country of less than eight million. The roots of Togo's current problems can be traced to one of the region's formative coups, the 1963 removal and killing of Sylvanus Olympio. Olympio's purported killer, Etienne Eyadema would seize power in 1967, and would rule for nearly four decades until dying from heart failure in 2005. The Togolese army quickly acted to install his son in the presidency, and while the initial effort was rebuffed by numerous foreign parties, Faure Gnassingbé's ascendance to the presidency was later legitimized via election. Olympio's son Gilchrist, on the other hand, long acted as the head of the opposition.

The roots of Togo's current problems can be traced to one of the region's formative coups, the 1963 removal and killing of Sylvanus Olympio.

2019 Coup Risk

Togo has seen increased disaffection over the last two years. This has resulted in numerous protests, multiple episodes of protestors being killed by the security services, and a general strike. Among the demands are the reintroduction of term limits. Legislation introduced in 2017 proposed two five-year limits, but would not have been retroactive to include Faure's time already served in office. While CoupCast does not necessarily rank Togo in a relatively high-risk percentile, the growing dissatisfaction within the country with the political process may make a coup more likely than is estimated.

Policy Recommendations

Though the military has long been loyal to the family, a number of dynamics could undermine Faure's power in the near future. Repressive acts such as firing on protesters clearly signals loyalty to a regime, but such actions have frequently been followed by soldiers turning on the leaders they initially protected. This includes long-entrenched West African leaders such as Traoré and Blaise Compaoré, and other regional leaders such as Ravalomanana.

Originally scheduled for July, Togo's parliamentary elections were scheduled for December 20. The poll was boycotted by over a dozen opposition parties and will be unlikely to resolve the continuing political crisis.

Regional and global actors should encourage meaningful political reform and peaceful electoral politics if they wish to decrease the risk of future military intervention.

Gabon

Background

Gabon has not experienced a coup attempt since the 1964 effort to unseat Leon M'ba. The swift and decisive French intervention both restored M'ba to the presidency and would act as a deterrent against future efforts to seize power. Omar Bongo, current president Ali's father, ascended to the presidency following M'ba's death in 1967. The elder Bongo held power for over 40 years prior to his own 2009 death. Following a heavily contested election, Ali Bongo gained the presidency.

2019 Coup Risk

Traditionally stable, and forecasted at a very low probability of a coup, Gabon could act as a surprise case due to uncertainty of over Bongo's health. After falling ill at an economic forum in Saudi Arabia in October, speculation increased when no details were forthcoming. Rumors that Bongo had suffered a stroke were eventually confirmed by the vice president in early December. Leadership vacuums arising from leader deaths have occasionally resulted in military intervention. Aside from the aforementioned cases of 2005 Togo and 2012 Guinea-Bissau, 2008 Guinea similarly saw the military step in following the passing of Lansana Conte.¹⁵⁷ Cases like Togo and Guinea in particular were previously stable and unlikely to experience coups, but as with Gabon a sudden power vacuum can prompt the military and other regime insiders to unconstitutionally determine succession.

Policy Recommendations

Coups fears were quite widespread following the death of Omar Bongo, though 2009 ultimately saw constitutional processes lead to the younger Bongo's election.¹⁵⁸ It remains important that regional actors continue to encourage restraint by the military when it comes to the electoral process and to pay close attention to potential drivers of dissatisfaction related to economic stagnation.

Ethiopia

Background

The sudden 2018 resignation of Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn prompted many observers to hope for improvements in Ethiopia's domestic and foreign policy. Abiy has gone beyond even the most hopeful speculation. In his first year, Abiy was lauded for pardoning thousands of Oromo prisoners, ending the state of emergency, ending the border dispute with Eritrea, appointing women to a range of influential position in his government, and promising a range of constitutional, economic, and security reforms.

Lauded by many domestic and international observers, such efforts can also be seen as potentially alienating regime insiders. This may have been realized within months of his tenure, when he was the target of an assassination attempt after a rally in Addis Ababa's Meskel Square. Though Abiy was unharmed, the grenade attack killed at least two, wounded scores, and led to increased scrutiny of the Federal Police. Nine officials were promptly arrested, including Deputy Police Commissioner Girma Kassa.¹⁵⁹

Abiy's reforms subsequently targeted the intelligence services. November saw the arrest of 60 figures in an anti-corruption sweep. Reforms have been dramatic and welcomed, and they have acted as a major threat to many elite interests in the country. This is particularly true for the military and security services, which have seen much of their upper ranks replaced or arrested, and promises of reform likely to target a range of privileges, especially for ethnic Tigrayans, who have long dominated the officer ranks.

2019 Coup Risk

Additional concerns were raised during a large scale army mutiny in October. Over 200 soldiers from the Agazi Commandos abandoned their posts and fell on the Prime Minister's office, demanding a meeting. Soldiers raised a number of complaints, largely centered around pay and the conduct of military operations. Though PM Abiy diffused the mutiny by—among other things—doing pushups with the mutineers, the event signals discord in the ranks. Though ranking low in the CoupCast model, our subjective assessments of the case suggest that unmeasured dynamics could act as a substantial influence on Ethiopia's 2019 coup risk.

Policy Recommendations

The international community has generally responded to coup-related crises in two ways. First, and most obviously, international organizations and individual states have used a variety of interventions against coup-born regimes. This can be traced as far back as the French intervention in 1966 Gabon, was seen with regional organizations such as ECOWAS's incursion into Sierra Leone after Johnny Paul Koroma's ouster of President Ahmad Kabbah's government in 1997. More common are political and economic sanctions.

Second, the creation of an anti-coup framework, and a demonstrable commitment to upholding it, can create compliance in the absence of coups. In other words, the existence of the framework itself—and assumed penalties associated with violating it—are believed to reduce the benefits of seizing power and to reduce the willingness to attempt coups. While regional actors have been lauded for becoming increasingly committed toward punishing regimes born through coups, virtually every meaningful actor avoided condemning the November 2017 ouster of Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe's first coup was welcomed by many, who hoped a change in political leadership could allow the addressing of the country's many problems. While a tempered response might have been desired in order to avoid worsening a domestic political situation, the failure to condemn the ZAF's coup could act as a precedent in the region.

The creation of an anti-coup framework, and a demonstrable commitment to upholding it, can create compliance in the absence of coups.

This precedent is directly related to two areas in which regional and global actors should be more proactive.

Though debate continues on the effectiveness of the AU's UCG framework regarding coups, the organization has come substantially short when dealing with other aspects of the framework. This is especially the case for Article 23 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. Passed in 2007 and entering into force following ratification by the requisite number of members in 2012, Chapter 8 of The Charter follows the previous UCG framework, but with one important addition. Beyond condemning coups, mercenary activities, rebels seizing power, and refusal to honor election results, Article 23 includes language against "Any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government." Regional leaders have successfully modified or altogether eliminated term limits in 10 other cases.

Since the Charter's passing, however, leaders have modified or altogether abolished term limits in Uganda (2018), Cameroon (2008), Djibouti (2010), Rwanda (2015), Burundi (2015), Republic of Congo (2015), and the DRC (2016). Earlier efforts succeeded under the AU in Togo, Gabon, Uganda, and Chad. The trend away from checks on power and toward more entrenched leaders marks a return to the continent's prior history, where coups could ultimately be the only feasible method of leadership alternation.¹⁶⁰

Acquiescence to these efforts allows the undermining of democracy in these states, creates a regional norm in which such actions can be done without penalty, and can create conditions under which coups may be the only feasible manner to remove a leader. In fact, of all African leaders who have successfully manipulated term limits after 2000, only the leader's death has resulted in their eventual replacement. It is too early to reach any conclusions regarding the long-term consequences of term limit changes adopted under the AU, but it is clear that those overseeing these changes will not leave soon or voluntarily.

The lack of a proactive regional response also allows the festering of constitutional crises. A demonstrable precedent that such moves will not be tolerated may have deterred leaders such as Compaoré. And while this example was prevented from doing so, it took considerable mass mobilization, destruction of property, and—ultimately—the loss of human life to retain the limit. In other cases, leaders such as Pierre Nkurunziza's widely unpopular move to pursue an additional

term in 2015 both prompted an attempted coup against him and the deterioration of human rights, with hundreds killed in subsequent violence. Nigerien president Mamadou Tandja was removed in December 2010 after Tandja's efforts to increase his power were sanctioned by the international community. The incurred costs eventually prompted his military to unseat him. Each of these coups was the direct consequence of incumbent efforts to manipulate their constitutions.

The Addis Charter also includes a prohibition on coup leaders standing for election. This has not prevented soldiers such as Mauritania's Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and Egypt's Abdel Fatah al-Sisi from legitimating their power through post-coup elections. In other cases, non-military leaders who were directly installed by military allies following coups, such as Mnangagwa, have done the same. In each case, whatever sanctions had been implemented were quickly removed. The lack of commitment to this aspect of the Addis Charter further undermines regional democracy and incentivizes coups by signaling that regimes can be legitimized by holding an election, however much flawed in favor of leaders already installed by the coup.

Top-down mediation is unlikely to be successful in revolutionary situations and may even undermine the legitimacy of the mediators.¹⁶¹

REGIONAL RISK FACTORS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional risk for Africa in 2019 is distinctly tied to three broad trends. First, Africa continues to disproportionately experience coup events relative to the rest of the globe and as a result has a much more recent history of coup activity in the collective memory of African politics. Also, coups often follow coups and the greater proportion of coup events is likely to continue this trend until Africa sees gains comparable to Asia and Latin America.

Another factor concern continued problems in conflict and development. Most of the African countries highlighted in the CoupCast estimates and in the country profiles above all continue to deal with armed conflict, political violence, poor economic performance, poor socio-economic development, or all the above.

Finally, democratic consolidation and authoritarian backsliding may be strongest in the African context. Elections are often plagued by political violence by both state and non-state actors alike. Elections are also often canceled or used to further consolidate already existing authoritarian institutions. As long as elections continue to be volatile and held in unstable conditions, they are likely to result in a higher risk of coup as militaries seek to intervene in problematic electoral processes.

Taken together, these factors all result in Africa having the highest regional risk of a coup event in 2019. Regional and global actors should seek to do the following. First, they should continue to strengthen the taboo against coup activity.

GABON AND COUPCAST GOING FORWARD

On January 7th, 2019 a small group of junior military officers took over a state radio station in an effort to catalyze a coup against the Gabon's incumbent president Ali Bongo. The plot was ultimately a failure, but it illustrates an important limitation of relying on quantitative forecasting alone. The figure below shows the relationship between GDP per Capita and the forecasted probability of a coup attempt in 2019 for all Sub-Saharan African countries. While Dr. Jonathan Powell's analysis of risk in Africa pointed out that Gabon's true risk of a coup attempt may be underestimated by the CoupCast model, the event remains surprising.

While GDP per capita, a sign of wealth and power, can give us information about the stability of a country and the ability of leaders to buy off and coerce challengers to power, Gabon, in many respects, did not fit the likely profile of a country at risk of a coup when compared to relative risk in the region. Compared to the historical record of all coups in Africa since 1950, this becomes even more apparent. When comparing the relative risk of a coup attempt preceding the coup event with GDP, Gabon is a clear outlier.

FIGURE 22: 2019 COUP RISK AND GDP PER CAPITA FOR AFRICAN STATES

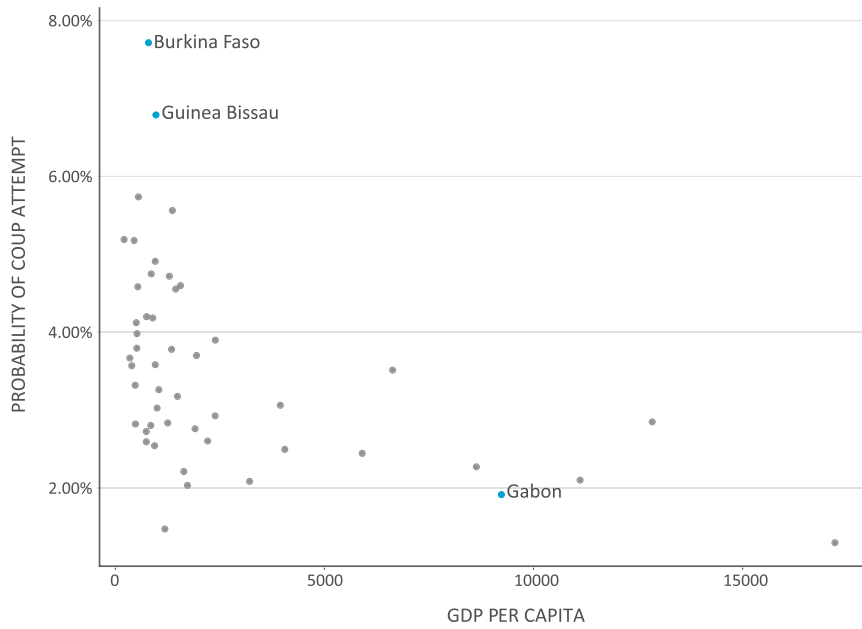
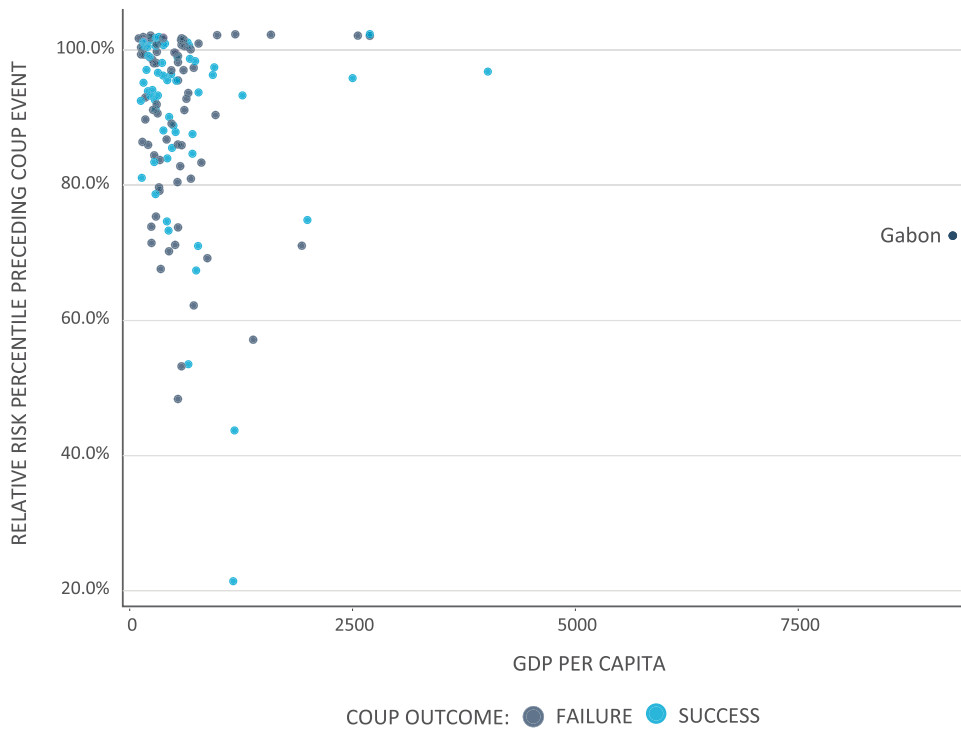


FIGURE 23: COMPARING GABON TO ALL COUP EVENTS IN AFRICA (1950 – 2019)



The events in Gabon can help to put this report into perspective. CoupCast can provide systematic and dynamic estimates of coup risk at the country-level in a useful and actionable way, but it remains imperfect. Coups are rare and complex events and have serious consequences when they manifest. Our forecasts can approximate the conditions in which coup plotters may risk their lives to use military means to force leadership change, but it cannot ascertain the exact individual psychological dispositions and strategic thinking that drives them to act.

Knowing this, it is important that the reader takes away from this report the importance of synergy between rigorous quantitative forecasting and domain expertise. Combining the broad, albeit imperfect, signals towards future coup risk with in-depth knowledge about those countries that may face illegal seizures of power is likely to be a powerful combination for ringing the early warning alarm for potential coup activity going into the future. This is especially important as coup events continue to decline as socio-economic and political realities change on the ground in the developing world.

Our data suggests that coups like Gabon are likely to continue to surprise, but more likely to also fail. While our models are unable to ascertain those micro-causes that drive coup-plotters, it effectively captures the relative risk percentile of most coup events. When unexpected events happen, like in Gabon, it appears that they often occur in an environment that is not readily conducive to coup success. While there will be surprises, it is clear that the combination of many macro-level economic and social predictors can provide clear insight into the opportunities in which risk of coups may be more or less high.

Acknowledging the need for integrated predictions based on qualitative expertise and systematic quantitative risk estimates, CoupCast can serve as a useful tool to those that seek an early warning system for future coup activity across the globe. Given the importance of factors such as those outlined in both the broad quantitative drivers of risk and country expertise, this report has outlined the expected risk trajectory of global and regional coup risk while highlighting several factors that can actively be addressed by governments and non-governmental organizations alike in an effort to mitigate the risk of coup events well into the future.

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