



Coups, Justification, and Democracy

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Taku Yukawa*

Associate Professor, Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP)

Kaori Kushima

Ph.D. Student, Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP)

Kaoru Hidaka

Specially Appointed Assistant Professor, Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP)

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【Abstract】 Coups are inherently illegal actions and are outside the conventional rules of political engagement. How, then, have the military organizations that staged coups justified their actions? What were the objectives cited for these coups? We have created a unique dataset of justifications for all the successful coups that had occurred between 1975 and 2014. The results show that while “democracy” began to be cited as a justification for coups after the Cold War, this justification became redundant in the latter half of the 2000s. This article demonstrates how the rise and fall of the anti-coup sentiment in the international community led to the redundancy of the aforementioned justification. These findings may support the existence of “democratic coups,” an issue that has been debated vigorously in recent years, although such coups have already become less frequent.

* Corresponding Author. Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University,
Address: 1-31 Machikaneyama, Toyonaka, Osaka 560-0043, JAPAN.
Email: yukawa@osipp.osaka-u.ac.jp

1. Introduction

Research on coups have traditionally focused on the causes that gave rise to them (Johnson et al. 1984; Finer 1988; Belkin and Schofer 2003; Roessler 2011). In recent years, however, there have emerged numerous studies that also deal with the success and failures (Powell 2012), as well as the consequences (Marinov and Goemans 2014; Thyne and Powell 2016), of coups. Datasets have been created to support such studies (Powell and Thyne 2011; Marshall and Marshall 2016), further enhancing their quantitative analysis.

However, the contention of this article is on the failure of prior research to systematically analyze an important aspect of coups, that is, the manner in which coups have been justified by their perpetrators. In other words, prior studies have not systematically examined the justifications and objectives of the perpetrators of coups. Coups are defined as “illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive” (Powell and Thyne 2011: 252). This definition indicates that coups are inherently illegal and outside the conventional rules of political engagement. For this reason, the perpetrators of coups – usually the military – must justify their usage of such illegal means to achieve power transfer before an audience both inside and outside the country. In fact, the military, in many cases, seeks to justify its action by releasing a statement on radio and television, holding a news conference, or speaking directly to people, following an overthrow of the government.

How, then, have these coups been justified? The most common cause that has been identified for coups includes a feud between the government and the military, particularly a conflict resulting from the government’s infringement on the military’s vested interests (Needler 1975; Leon 2014). The military, for instance, would stage a coup to protest a budget cut or an interference in personnel matters. Typical examples include the 1982 coup in Bangladesh, in which Army Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad overthrew the government in a protest against President Abdus Sattar’s decision to minimize the authority of the military (Bertocci 1982: 1000-1001). Likewise, the 1997 coup in Sierra Leone was executed by the military on account of their discontent with President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah’s favorable treatment of a paramilitary group (Riley 1997: 287). However, the government’s infringement on the military’s vested interests or a conflict between the government and the military are not acceptable justifications. The military must prove that, through these coups, it will pursue the interest of the entire nation and not its own by using a rhetoric that appeals to both national and international communities. In fact, the justifications cited for the coups in Bangladesh and Sierra Leone were democracy and removal of political corruption. There was no involvement of personal interests of the military nor any confrontation between the government and the military.

What objectives are cited and what kind of rhetoric is used in justifying a coup? Do justifications include economic performance, corruption, national defense, ideology, or democracy? We have created a unique dataset for all the 106 successful coups that had occurred between 1975 and 2014 to examine how these coups were justified.

Why is it even necessary to build such a dataset and conduct a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the justifications? One reason is that the objective cited at the time of a coup strongly dictates the political process that follows. The 1985 coup in Sudan can be examined to understand this point. Field Marshal Abdel

Rahman Suwar al-Dahab, who organized the coup, became the chairman of the Transitional Military Council and pledged to transfer power to a civilian government by April 1986 (*The Associated Press*, Jun.9, 1985), although some individuals within the government opposed the idea of an election on the grounds that the council was slow to facilitate the power transfer (*The Associated Press*, Jul.14, 1985). However, the council delivered on its pledge and held a parliamentary election to transfer power to a civilian government because people's protests had begun to grow. Meanwhile, Captain Valentine Strasser, who had seized power in the 1992 Sierra Leone coup, sought to justify the move by pledging that he would "sincerely pursue the process of returning our country to true multiparty democracy." (*The Associated Press*, May.1, 1992). This promise invited heavy criticisms for Strasser from both inside and outside the nation due to a delay in making the transition to a civilian government (*IPS-Inter Press Service*, Apr.27, 1993), as a result of which he ended up holding an election (*Africa News*, Jan.10, 1994). In that sense, justification goes beyond a mere matter of rhetoric; it enables the understanding of the political process that follows.

Furthermore, this article aims to conduct a fresh empirical analysis on the relationship between coups and democracy by using a dataset that has been created to document justifications for coups. As will be explained in the next section, there has emerged an argument in recent years that coups promote democratization, a claim that has spurred vigorous debate. The dataset created for this article makes a significant contribution to the debate. This article, in particular, will systematically analyze the rhetoric used in justifying coups, and observe – in a more direct manner – the relationship between coups and democracy, thereby suggesting that the end of the Cold War has drastically transformed the relationship between coups and democracy. For additional analysis, a newly created dataset regarding international criticisms toward coups will also be used to identify the pressure exerted by the international community on the transformation in the way that coups are justified. It has been observed that the tide has begun to shift again in the latter half of the 2000s. "Democracy" is now being used less frequently as a justification for coups since criticism toward coups in the international community has subsided. These fresh insights have been obtained with respect to the relationship between coups and democracy by approaching the issue from an entirely new angle – by examining how coups are justified.

2. Coups and Democracy

In the past, coups were widely regarded as anti-democratic. In recent years, however, some people have started to believe that coups can trigger democratization by overthrowing the dictators who have been refusing to relinquish their power (Collier 2008; Marinov and Goemans 2014; Thyne and Powell 2016; M. Miller 2012). This is the argument for the existence of "democratic coups" (Varol 2012).

To prove this argument, as pointed by Collier (2008), the only actor that could topple powerful dictators such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe is the military. For this reason, the argument that coups provide a window of opportunity for democratization possesses a certain degree of validity. Moreover, Thyne and Powell (2016: 194) pointed out that only 16.9% of the coups that had occurred between 1950 and 2008 were intended to replace democratic governments.

However, even if a coup removes a dictator, democratization cannot take place if another dictator takes

over afterward. In order for a coup to create democracy, the military regime must hold an election to transfer power. It is often argued that such a process requires international pressure (Marinov and Goemans 2014: 804-806). Unlike the situation prevalent during the Cold War, democracy has become a norm in the current era. The international community has begun to take hardline positions against coups, issuing sanctions and condemnations against the perpetrators (Shannon et al. 2015). As a result, any military that seizes power through a coup will be subject to strong international pressure and will have no choice but to hold an election and yield to a democratic government.

Even so, the thesis that a coup leads to democracy is still a subject of debate for the following reasons. First, there is much uncertainty while identifying the impact of the end of the Cold War. Marinov and Goemans (2014), who had emphasized a mechanism through which international pressure is applied, argued that it was only after the Cold War that coups began to promote democratization. However, Thyne and Powell (2016) wrote that democratization was brought about by coups during the entire period between 1950 and 2008. Thus, there is a disagreement as to whether the end of the Cold War was a turning point. Did the end of the Cold War change the relationship between coups and democracy?

Second, there is a fundamental argument that almost no relationship exists between coups and democracy (even after the Cold War) and that any influence that coups may have on democratization is extremely limited (Derpanopoulos et al. 2016; A. Miller 2012). The effectiveness of international pressure, as compared to coups, in promoting democracy is doubtful since the response of the international community is usually inconsistent (Shannon et al. 2015: 364; Tansey 2018). These criticisms are directly aimed at the thesis that coups promote democratization. Whether coups have had any impact on democratization is a controversial question in and of itself because establishing a causal relationship between them is extremely difficult. In a quantitative analysis of empirical data on democratic coups, the proxy to measure democratization – the dependent variable – is usually either the Polity score for several years after the coup or whether the regime plans to hold a competitive election within five years after the coup. However, the occurrence of a coup has a strong correlation with the legitimacy of the regime, the capabilities of the nation, and the political stability (Masaki 2016: 52). Such variables also influence the proxy. Thus, it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between coups and democracy and make an accurate analysis.

The approach of this article – creating a systematic and comprehensive dataset for the justification of coups – has a great advantage in dealing with the aforesaid debate, which is the ability to analyze the situation immediately as and when a coup occurs, instead of analyzing the political process that follows. This approach, for one, makes it possible to examine the relationship between a coup and democracy without involving other variables. When creating a dependent variable on whether an election was held within five years after the coup, it is difficult to analyze any causal relationship because there are other variables involved in the process. However, this article seeks to find out whether democracy was used as a means of justifying a coup at the time of its occurrence. This method allows for direct observations to determine the possibility of a relationship between the coup and democracy.

This method also makes it possible to identify, on an empirical basis, any causal mechanism between a coup and democratization. In the event that democratization follows a coup, with an election held at a

relatively early stage, one scenario would be that the military had pledged beforehand that it would hold an election. Another scenario would be that the military had not made any promise of democratization but, as a result of miscalculations, had to hold an election anyway. These two scenarios greatly differ with respect to the mechanism through which the situation unfolds. Such a difference could not have been detected under prior research, as it only observed whether elections were held several years after a coup. The analysis of this article, however, allows for such a determination.

Thus, the main thrust of this article is to examine the situation during a coup's occurrence. This makes it possible to provide fresh insights on coups and democracy.

3. Coding Rules and Procedures

In our dataset, the definition of coup is limited to those which were successful, defined here as those in which “the perpetrators [seized] and [held] power for at least seven days” (Powell and Thyne 2011: 252). This is because unsuccessful coups rarely have the opportunity to put forth public justifications of their acts. Using this definition, successful coups were collected by using Powell (2012) for the data from 1975 to 2006 and then supplementing this with Powell and Thyne (2011) for the period from 2007 to 2014.

Next, “justification” in the context of this dataset refers to the goals put forward by a coup after it successfully seized power. These are not necessarily consistent with the coup's actual objectives; a democratic justification may be claimed by a coup actually motivated by the vested interests of the military or specific individuals, for example. Similarly, it is not uncommon for the perpetrators of coups now regarded as “democratic” by some scholars to not have actually used that justification themselves. For example, while the Carnation Revolution (the 1974 coup in Portugal) has been regarded as a democratic coup that promoted the country's democratization (Varol 2012: 322), the military in that case did not appeal to democratic values at all. Thus, our dataset focuses on what the perpetrators themselves appealed to when justifying their coup.

A coup's justification is generally provided through the release of a statement via radio and/or television, or through a press conference. In addition to these kinds of official justifications, this article also collected as much in the way of unofficial justifications as possible, such as those voiced in interviews conducted by the international media with military leaders and the personal views of military commanders that appeared in news programs. In the data collection, only those statements of justification which met the following criteria were selected: (1) the statement contained words which matched the coding rules (described later) – for example, “democra-” for the category of *democracy*-; (2) the context of the statement could be interpreted as providing the justification of a coup; and (3) the statement was expressed by the coup's perpetrators, such as the military or paramilitary organizations such as presidential bodyguards. The data was thus not collected mechanically; even if a statement contained a specific word (e.g. “democra-”), it was excluded if the word's usage did not match the intent of the coding. That meant, for example, that statements critical of democracy, that used the word only in proper nouns (such as a reference to the Democratic Party), or were made by opposition leaders or activists who supported a coup (but were not perpetrators) were excluded from the dataset. However, if a civilian leader seated following a coup released a justification for the political change, that *was* included in our dataset. This is because such civilian actors were often in collusion with the military

and could thus be regarded as *de facto* perpetrators, as observed in the case of Vice President Mohammed Waheed who succeeded to the presidency after the 2012 Maldives coup. Additionally, since the main focus of this article is on the justification given for the illegitimate power shift of a coup itself, policy speeches about the future governance of the state by the new regime were not regarded as statements of justification. The data was compiled from public sources including *Lexis/Nexis (Lexis Advance)*, press sources such as *the New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *the Guardian*, *the Independent*, *Al Jazeera*, and other case-specific local press sources and secondary documents.

The data was classified into the following eight specific forms of justification, each of which were referred to in the literature as potential motivations behind coups. Although actual motivations might differ from those articulated, drawing on them is a reasonable way to categorize statements of justification. First, *democracy* (our main focus) was coded based on whether perpetrators stated that they conducted their coup in order to promote democratization. In addition to words including “democra-” itself, our dataset also regards the phrases “rule of law,” “human rights,” and words indicating opposition to dictatorships as equally pointing to a democracy-oriented justification¹. The second is *economic performance*. It has been pointed out that poverty, economic stagnation, and economic crises tend to trigger coups (Londregan and Poole 1990; Hoadley 1973). Therefore, it is quite possible for a military to justify a coup by referencing poverty or economic stagnation caused by the poor economic policies of the incumbent regime. Third, *governance*. Coups tend to occur when an incumbent has lost political legitimacy due to corruption (Sutter 1999). Thus, poor governance by the incumbent could be a source of justification for a coup. A typical example is the 2006 coup in Thailand which was justified by then-president Thaksin Shinawatra’s corruption. Fourth, *domestic instability* (Finer 1988). Coups can be caused by an incumbent’s inability to maintain domestic stability and order (by failing to resolve a civil war, uprisings, or protest demonstrations, for example). Fifth, *international threats*. The military may plot a coup when the incumbent cannot provide security against foreign threats (Feaver 1999; Svolik 2013). Sixth, *ideology*. Ideologies such as communism or liberalism are also cited to justify coups. This was particularly prominent during the Cold War. Seventh, *civil-military conflict*, or dissatisfaction on the part of the military regarding its position and the respect given to it. That is, any policy that went against the organizational interests of the military (such as a reduction in their budget or interference in personnel matters) or the interests of particular individuals in military could provide the motivation to stage a coup. Although it seems unlikely that the military would openly appeal to these interests, whether or not and how the military cites these parochial interests in justification is worth paying attention to. Finally, *other reasons*; these include power vacuums (caused by the sudden death of an incumbent), religious reasons, resistance to exploitation, neocolonialism, or neoimperialism, and so forth. Naturally, the justifications described above are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is quite possible that perpetrators will cite multiple objectives.

In addition to the construction of the justification dataset described above, this article also collected supplementary data. As mentioned, the major contribution of this article is to analyze the situation at the very

¹ For a further discussion of components of democracy, see Diamond 1999; Dahl 1971.

moment a coup occurs rather than the political process that follows. In this regard, we collected additional data on whether the name given to the new regimes installed after successful coups contain a word related to “democracy.” The names chosen by the new regimes that emerge following coups tend to have elements in common with the rationale used to justify the military’s acts. For example, the “Revolutionary Military Council” (1983 Grenada) and the “National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy” (2012 Mali). That is, militaries have to provide a favorable framing for their behavior in order to gain legitimacy for the illegal act of coups. This framing is not limited solely to the statements issued after a coup but also to the naming of the new regimes. Therefore, whether the new regimes used the word “democratic” as part of its name is something that certainly deserves attention, just as the rhetoric of justification does.

4. Results

There were 106 successful coups from 1975 until 2014, which is the period under study. However, no attempts were made to justify 7 (6.6%) of these coups. In other words, no statements were issued, or news conferences held, to justify these 11 coups. Conversely, this means that justifications were attempted for 93.4% of the coups that occurred during the period, indicating that providing justifications for coups was extremely common.

Fig.1 and Fig.2 show how these coups have been justified. Fig.1 shows chronological changes, percentage-wise, in the type of justifications offered. Fig.2 shows changes in the number of coups that had cited democracy as a justification – the subject of this article – as well as changes in the overall number of coups that have occurred.

The results bear out this article’s intuitive assumption that confrontations between the government and military were rarely cited as the reason for staging a coup. Preservation of one’s own interest is not acceptable as a justification either domestically or internationally.

Likewise, no attempts were made after the Cold War to justify coups from an ideological standpoint, a finding that is also in accord with this article’s assumption. This, too, seems to be a reasonable outcome. On the other hand, it may come as a surprise that international threats, or efforts to deal with such threats, have rarely been used as a justification. Prior studies have occasionally pointed out certain connections between international threats and coups. However, such connections have not been observed in case of justification of coups.

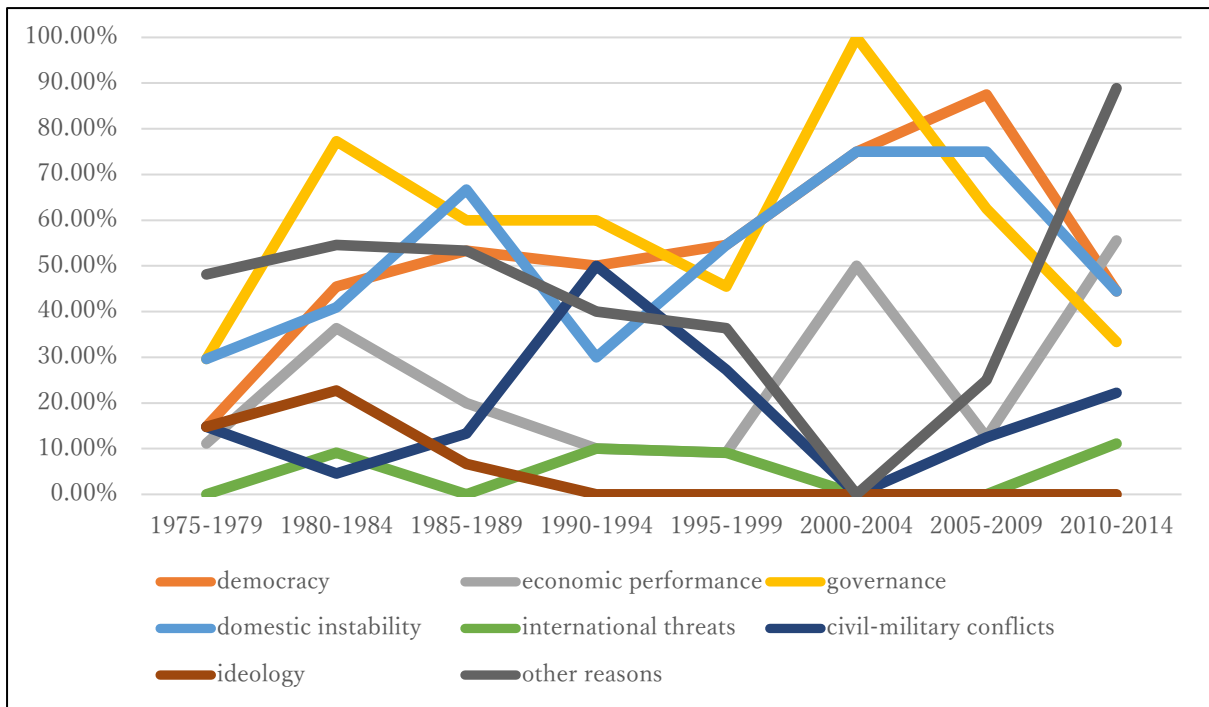


Fig.1 Justifications for Coups (1975-2014)

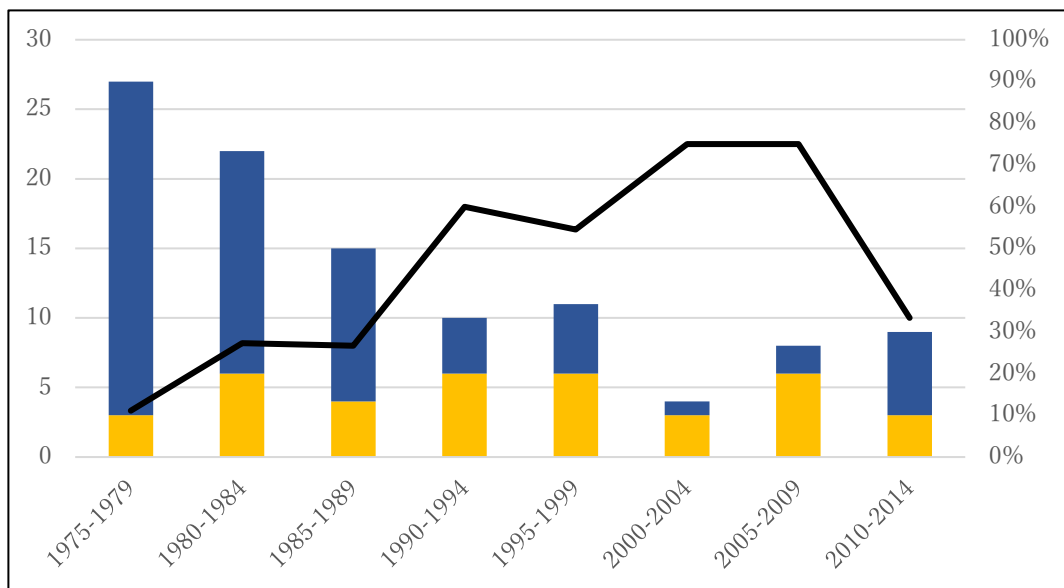


Fig.2 The Total Number of Coups and the Number and Percentage of Coups that Have Cited Democracy as a Justification

4.1 Increased Use of Democracy as Justification after the Cold War

What follows is an analysis of the relationship between coups and democracy, which is the primary subject of this article. Two important observations have been made with respect to the use of democracy in justifying a coup. First, the turning point was the end of the Cold War. As is clear from Fig.2, which shows changes in the use of democracy as a justification over the years, the military organizations that staged a coup after the

Cold War argued frequently that the coup was for the sake of democracy.

For example, in the 1991 coup that took place in the Republic of Mali, the coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, stated: “One of the essential aims of our arrival (is) to install multi-party politics, real democracy in the style of certain other countries.” (*Los Angeles Times*, Mar.27, 1991). Likewise, Major Daouda Malam Wanke, the head of the security force who assassinated President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara in the 1999 coup in Niger, sought to justify his action by saying that he would “reintroduce democracy to Niger.” (*World Markets Analysis*, Apr.20, 1999). In addition, in the 2003 Guinea-Bissau coup that occurred following the political instabilities surrounding military personnel policies, the military regime stated on radio that the coup was intended to protect democracy (*Associated Press Online*, Sep.15, 2003).

What is interesting is that the justifications for coups that occurred before the end of the Cold War and justifications for those that occurred afterward were different even though they took place in the same country and in a similar context. The coups in Nigeria can be used as examples to understand this point. In Nigeria, Commander Sani Abacha, who was frustrated with the government of President Muhammadu Buhari and Major General Tunde Idiagbon, staged a coup with Major General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985. Abacha stated: “the mismanagement of the economy, lack of public accountability, insensitivity of the political leadership and a general deterioration in the standard of living” and justified his action by citing instances of mismanagement, economic failure, and a lack of governance of the previous administration (*The Associated Press*, Aug.27, 1985). However, Babangida subsequently gained power, and Abacha executed a coup again, in 1993, in protest. As a dictator, Abacha cited democracy as a justification for the political transition, saying: “We must lay a very solid foundation for the growth of true democracy” “This government is a child of necessity with a strong determination to (...) enthrone a lasting and true democracy” (Daramola 2008: 371, 374). These two coups, which can be traced to power struggles among high-ranking military officials, were carried out by the same individual. Even so, one took place during the Cold War, and the other afterward. Consequently, there was a significant difference in the language used to justify these two coups.

The coups in Sudan are another useful example. The country experienced coups in 1985 and 1989, both of which were triggered by anti-government demonstrations related to an internal conflict between the northern and southern parts of the nation, economic downturns, and people’s frustration toward the government’s handling of the conflict. However, a huge difference can be observed with respect to how these two coups were justified. Field Marshal Abdel Rahman Suwar al-Dahab, who took power in the 1985 coup, emphasized that he made the move for the sake of peace and stability for the country, citing the slogan: “The armed forces in order to save bloodshed, secure the liberation of the country and unity of its lands, decided unilaterally to stand by the people (...) to seize power and transfer it to the people after a limited transitional period.” (*United Press International*, Apr.6, 1985). However, in the 1989 coup, which occurred in the same context, coup leader Colonel Omar Hassan al-Bashir sought to convey that the coup was intended to achieve democracy, saying: “O heroic Sudanese people! Today is the day for emancipation from the false democracy. Today is the day of liberation.” (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Jul.7, 1989).

The above data constitute direct evidence of how coups have been justified, indicating that the relationship between democracy and coups has undergone a drastic transformation after the Cold War. These data support

the assertion made by Marinov and Goemans (2014) regarding the debate over the existence of democratic coups.

This can also be confirmed by the name given to the regimes that were established after these coups. New regimes that emerged following coups began to bear the word “democratic.” During the period examined in this article – from 1975 until 2014 – the word “democratic” did not appear as part of the name of a regime until around 2003. More specifically, between 2000 and 2004, one in four regimes (25.0%) that was created as a result of a coup used the word “democratic” as part of its name. These figures changed to three in eight (37.5%) from 2005 to 2009, and two in nine (22.2%) from 2010 to 2014. However, there was no single instance prior to 2000 in which the word was used as part of a regime name. This, too, may indicate that the military regimes established as a result of a coup around that time had begun to cite democracy to justify their action.

4.2 Retreat of Democracy

Another noteworthy finding is that in the 2010s, the use of democracy as a justification for coups began to decline. Fig.1 shows that the use of democracy as a justification fell to 44.4% from 75% and has been replaced by “economic performance” and “governance.” This means that those executing coups are now appealing to people’s sense of pragmatism, rather than an abstract value such as democracy. For example, in a 2014 incident that took place in Ukraine, Oleksandr Turchynov, who took power as interim president, did not cite democracy as a justification. Instead, Turchynov denounced the previous administration’s economic failure by stating that “Yanukovich had 'driven the economy to the brink of a catastrophe,” “While the economy is improving in the world, Ukraine is tripping into the abyss and is in a pre-default condition.” (*BBC*, Feb.23, 2014; *Moscow News*, Feb.24, 2014). This was also the case during a 2013 coup in Egypt and a 2014 coup in Thailand. In both cases, the military cited economic reasons to justify its action. This is a trend that has emerged only recently, and there is no guarantee if it will continue. Thus, it could be argued that this is only an aberration. However, this article is of the view that democracy did begin to recede and that there were solid reasons and circumstances behind the development. This will be further discussed in the next section.

5. Background: Response of the International Community

5.1 End of the Cold War and Increased Criticism on Coups

Why was “democracy” increasingly used to attempt to justify coups following the end of the Cold War? In addressing this question, this article emphasizes the international community’s reaction to coups. In other words, the diffusion of democratic norms in the post-Cold War world led to coups becoming the target of international criticism and sanctions; this thus caused “democracy” to be more commonly cited as a justification

Such a shift in the international community has already been pointed out in the literature (Marinov and Goemans 2014; Shannon et al. 2015; McCoy 2006), but none of these have systematically and comprehensively investigated whether coups in fact came to be criticized after the end of the Cold War.

While Shannon et al. (2015) created a dataset of the international community's reactions to coups, their definition of “reaction” contains both positive and negative reactions, thus limiting its usefulness in determining the international unacceptance of coups after the Cold War. Previous research has also overlooked the reasons why the international community criticized coups (was it because they were damaging to democracy, or for other reasons?). Since a coup *per se* is nothing more than a kind of domestic power transition, there seems to be no reason to problematize it in the international community given the principle of non-intervention. Therefore, it is worth attempting to analyze the arguments used to criticize coups in other countries. On the basis of the above considerations, this article constructed an original dataset of the international criticisms as well. The coding procedure is as follows: First, the international criticisms of each coup were divided into two major groups depending on whether they originated from the international community -both states such as the US and former colonial powers, and international organizations such as the UN, IMF and EU- or from major regional organizations to which the country where the coup occurred belonged². Not only explicit words of criticism but also certain accusatory behaviors such as imposition of sanctions or breaking diplomatic ties were considered. Then the language and behavior of international criticism observed within two months of each coup were collected. This time period of analysis was chosen so as not to overlook international criticism released after the post-coup unrest calmed down. Finally, the languages of accusation were coded based on whether the reason for the criticism included word containing “democra-” using the same criteria as the justification dataset. Data were in principle obtained from the same sources as that dataset as well.

The results shown in Fig.3 confirm a clear difference between criticism made before and after the end of the Cold War. The international community's criticisms of coups began to increase in the late 1980s; this was followed by a sudden rise in criticisms by regional organizations. These are thought to be caused by the diffusion of democratic norms and the maturation of anti-coup norms; both of these were promoted from the late 1980s and the beginning of the post-Cold War period. In fact it was from that time (particularly after the end of the Cold War) that the international community began to regard democracy as a specific type of domestic regime to be favored and started to promote democratization by supporting or monitoring elections and tailoring assistance and sanctions to the targeted country's regime type (McFaul 2004; Dunning 2004). Likewise, a major turning point for the development of anti-coup norms was the accusation levied by the UNDA and UNSC against the 1991 Haiti coup and the 1997 Sierra Leone coup (Tansey 2018: 292). Regional organizations also institutionalized anti-coup norms in this period; the OAS agreed on a non-permissive policy toward coups and defined sanctions on them through Resolution 1080 in 1991, the revision of Article 9 of the Charter in 1992, and the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001; the OAU also stipulated in the 1999 Algiers Declaration that coups were never to be permitted (Shannon et al. 2015: 366-367). Thus, since the late 1980s, democratic norms have become consolidated and anti-coup norms have spread within the international community. Therefore, the post-Cold War increase in the frequency of democratic

² Following organizations are included ; OAS, MERCOSUR, CARICOM, CACM, AU (OAU), ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, EAC, SCO, GCC, League of Arab States, ASEAN, SAARC, PIF.

objectives being used as justification for coups (as confirmed in the previous section) could be interpreted as an adaptation to this transformation of international tides. Also, with this trend in mind, it is understandable that the international community's criticisms of coups began earlier than that by regional organizations.

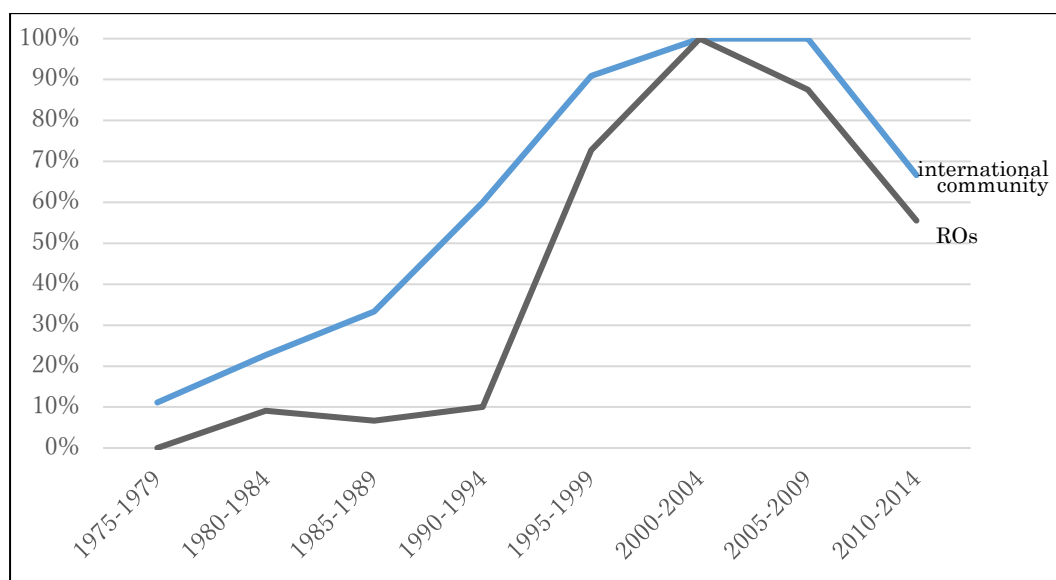


Fig.3 International Criticisms toward Coups

Next, we have examined the content of levied criticism to see whether disrespect for democratic values was used as an accusation. First, of a total of 47 coups criticized by the international community, 39 (83.0%) were denounced as undemocratic. The reasons for denouncing coups were therefore primarily derived from their undemocratic nature; this confirms that criticisms have increased in tandem with the diffusion of democratic norms in the international community. On the other hand, criticisms by regional organization of their member countries show a somewhat different pattern: of a total of 28 such criticisms, 15 (53.6%) were based on their undemocratic nature, lower than that from the international community. This can be potentially interpreted as being due to the fact that such regional organizations often include developing countries whose leaders came to power by coups as member states; they therefore have a tendency to defend incumbent leaders over democratic regimes, even though coups are illegal in these countries as they are in the West.

Although the international community's response has clearly changed as described above, it is not clear whether the perpetrators of the coups have perceived and put weight on this change. In other words, we have not fully examined the causal relationship between the normative change in the international community and the domestic shift in the justification of coups. In this regard, it would be necessary to look at specific cases rather than conducting a macroscopic data analysis. As early as immediately following the end of the Cold War, the perpetrator of the 1991 Haitian coup, General Raoul Cédras, expressed his view that seizing the power by coup had already come to be regarded as unacceptable by the international community, stating:

“Under this new world order, an elected President cannot be forced out like this. I can understand that (...)”³ Likewise, in the 1996 Niger coup, coup leader Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara appealed to the legitimacy of their act and referred to the anti-coup trend in the international community; “We knew that our intervention would not win us applause internationally,” “It doesn't go with the winds of these times. But we could not watch while our country became another Somalia” (*The New York Times*, Feb.3, 1996). Next year, when Sierra Leone was affected by a coup, Zimbabwe President Mugabe described the change in the international tide regarding coups as “a new attitude to coups and illegal governments,” and said that “[f]uture coups will have it the hard way. They won't be entertained.” (*IPS-Inter Press Service*, Jun.9, 1997). In the Burundi coup that same year, the mastermind of the coup Pierre Buyoya also revealed a similar understanding: “We hear coups are no longer acceptable to change situations. I fully understand this principle because, as everyone knows, I am among those who fought for democracy in Burundi” (*The Guardian*, Jul.27, 1996). These statements by perpetrators reflect the perception that anti-coup norms began to emerge in this period, something that is not found in justifications put forth before the end of the Cold War.

The trend described above could be observed in those coups enacted against democratic regimes (Polity score ≥ 5) as well. For example, Yahya Jammeh, who organized the 1994 coup in Gambia, justified the coup by criticizing Dawda Jawara's former government as not having truly been democratic (Wiseman 2004: 456). Similarly, in the 2003 Central African Republic coup, the military gave the objective of their coup as correcting “democratic errors” (*IHS Global Insight*, Mar.17, 2003). These trends reflect the fact that anti-coup norms have prevailed to such an extent that even when the toppled government had been a democratic one, a coup needs to be justified in democratic terms.

Based on the above consideration, it is clear that the international community came to criticize coups after the end of the Cold War, leading perpetrators to also uphold democracy as a justification for their coups.

5.2 Recession of Anti-coup Norms in the International Community

Next we take up the retreat of democracy. The literature has pointed out the inconsistency of the international community's reaction to coups as well as the recession of anti-coup norms from the 2010s (von Soest and Wahman 2015; Tansey 2017). Behind this trend is not only the rising tide of forces like China who stand against the promotion of democracy and assert the principle of non-intervention but also a shift in the international community (who had previously promoted democratization) towards emphasizing strategic interests rather than the normative value of democracy.

This trend of democratic retreat can also be seen in our dataset of the international responses to coups: criticism of coups has clearly decreased since 2005. This pattern is robust and can be observed both in the international community and among regional organizations.

And the transformation in the international community's responses can be seen by looking at actual cases. For example, in the 2011 Egyptian coup, the overthrow of the regime was well-received not only by US

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/04/world/haitian-general-says-misdeeds-prompted-the-coup.html>

(accessed on December 15, 2018)

President Barack Obama and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, but also by China and Russia. For instance, the warnings by Mikhail Margelov, the Russian head of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee, about the danger of the rapid democratization indicate the recession of anti-coup norms based on the principle of democracy: "If, let's say, European models of democracy are introduced into this sort of archaic society without it being thought through, (...) we will see the sort of results that are unlikely to please our European and American partners," "whenever democratic models arrive in an unmodernized society, they don't work" (*BBC Monitoring*, Feb.11, 2011). Another case is the recent 2017 Zimbabwe coup, which stemmed from the issue of President Mugabe's succession and ultimately provoked a military uprising that supported dismissed Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Although it followed the classical pattern of military coups, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson applauded the political transition by saying that "[w]e congratulate all Zimbabweans who raised their voices and stated peacefully and clearly that the time for change was overdue"⁴. Likewise, China emphasized its position that "China and Zimbabwe are all-weather friends"⁵.

These changes in international trends led to the retreat of the use of democratic goals in the justifications for coups. In fact, military organizations that staged coups began to cast doubt on value of democracy during this period. For example, following the 2006 Fiji coup, perpetrator Frank Bainimarama expressed his view that democracy could not be espoused without reservation, saying that "[d]emocracy is a good thing but democracy must not be used to hide corruption or used as a means to divide this nation" (*The Southland Times*, Dec.8, 2006). Also, in a 2014 coup in Thailand, the military justified its coup by appealing to more pragmatic values, stating that "interests" were the most significant factor in country relationships and that "[i]f they know us well, they will not hesitate to praise the [coup]" (*BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Sep.21, 2014). Thus, with the receding international tide of anti-coup norms from the latter half of the 2000s, the perpetrators of coups also gradually came to distance themselves from the use of "democracy" as a justification.

In sum, it is clear that changes in how the international community reacts to coups are behind the shifts in the justifications for coups raised in the previous section.

6. Conclusion

This article has created a unique dataset regarding the rhetoric used in justifying coups; a subject that had not been analyzed in a systematic or comprehensive manner in prior research. An analysis of these justifications goes beyond merely observing the use of language. This endeavor has a substantive significance in that justification has a strong influence on the political process that follows. Further, an analysis of justification, which is an analysis of the situation at the very moment of a coup, has made it

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/secretary/20172018tillerson/remarks/2017/11/275839.htm> (accessed on December 15, 2018)

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/16/zimbabwe-army-chief-trip-china-last-week-questions-coup> (accessed on December 15, 2018)

possible to directly conduct an empirical analysis of the relationship between coups and democracy without using other variable factors.

Our dataset has demonstrated three main points. First, the relationship between coups and democracy has drastically changed after the Cold War. While this has conventionally been a matter of debate, an analysis of justifications has shown that the end of the Cold War was a turning point. Second, coups and democracy were separated again in the latter half of the 2000s, with military organizations citing democracy less frequently as a justification for coups. With regard to the influence of coups on democratization, prior studies had argued that there had been changes since the end of the Cold War. However, they had not argued that democracy was retreating. This is a unique insight provided by this article. Third, this article has demonstrated empirically, by creating an original dataset, an existence of the reaction of the international community to these trends. The anti-coup norm in the international community, which peaked after the end of the Cold War, has begun to recede in the latter half of the 2000s.

Thus, this article has demonstrated that the occurrence of so-called democratic coups did increase after the Cold War, and that this increase proved to be only a temporary phenomenon.

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