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## From Pawn to President

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# From Pawn to President: The Causes and Strategy of Coups d'Etat

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Public Policy Program



## Overview

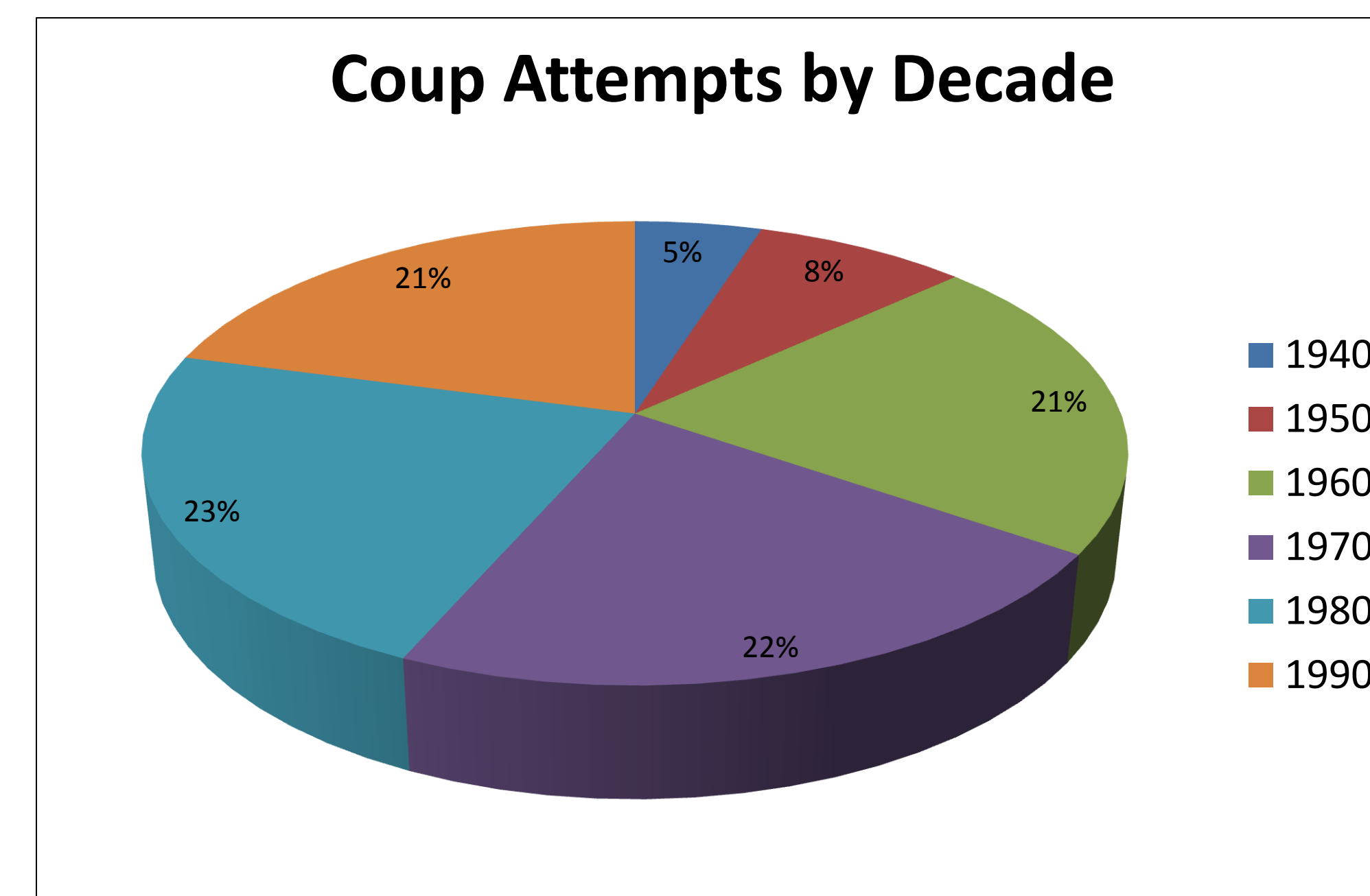
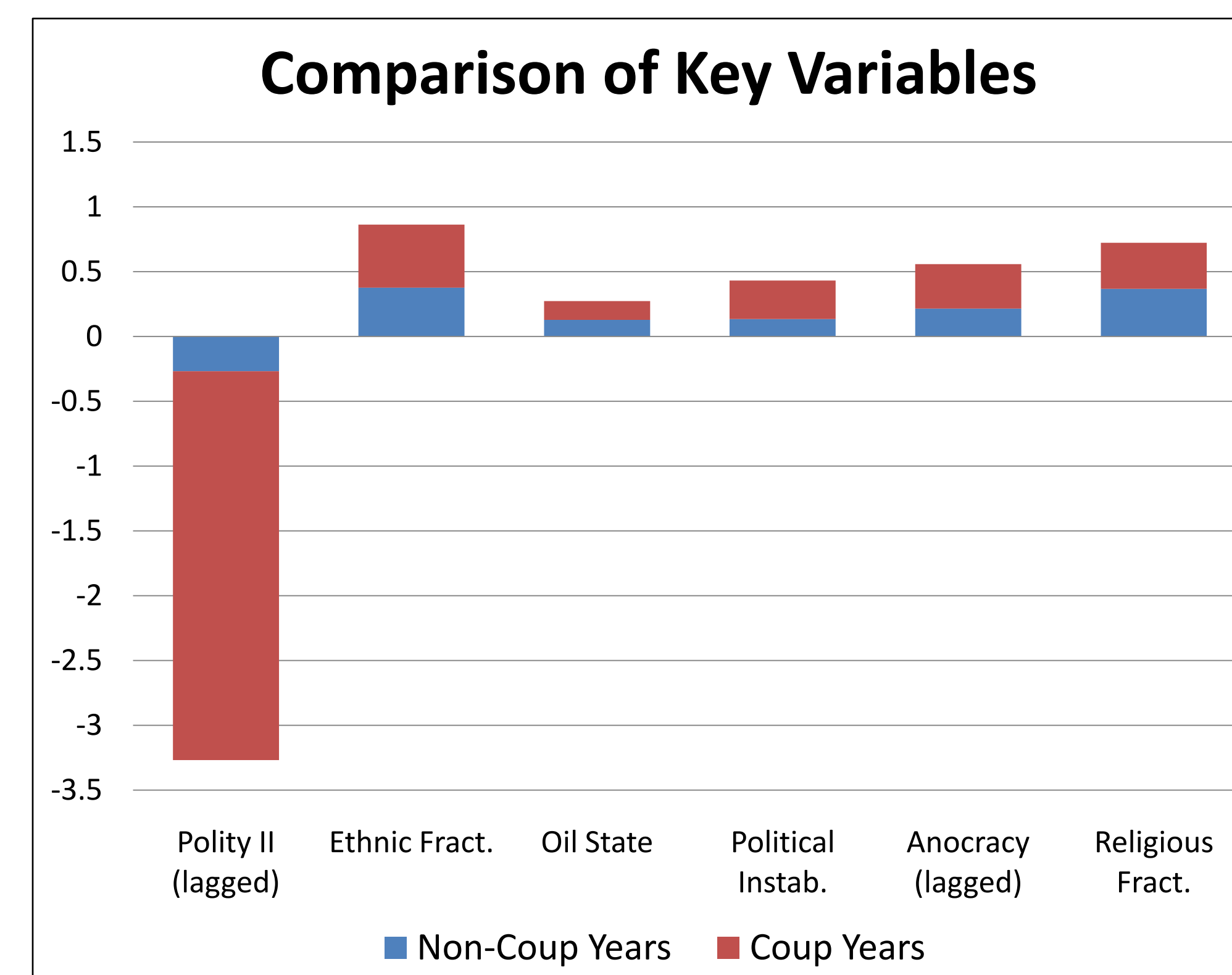
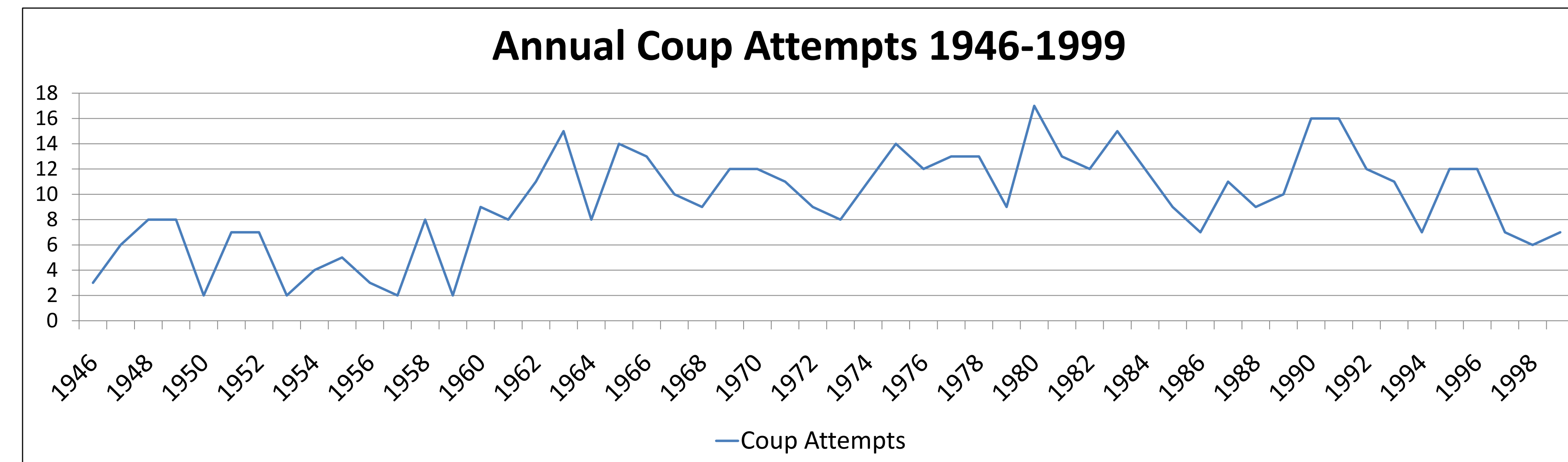
- This study attempts to clarify the causes of coups d'Etat, which still occur at alarming rates within less-developed nations.
- Previous research has focused on three potential motivations: greed, grievance, and feasibility.
- Greed: High levels of natural resources such as oil can easily be diverted into personal accounts, making a successful coup more profitable.
- Grievance: Repression or poor governance may lead to rebellion.
- Feasibility: A game-theoretic explanation in which coups are attempted simply because their success seems likely.

## Theoretical Framework

1. Mean levels of key independent variables measuring greed, grievance, and feasibility are compared for coup and non-coup country-years.
2. A more rigorous statistical analysis employs three probit regression models with panel data for over 150 countries from 1945-1999.
  - a) Control variables for economic, demographic, political and geographic factors are included for robustness; several key variables are lagged to account for endogeneity.

## Data

- Data on coup attempts was obtained from the Center for Systemic Peace's comprehensive list for the years 1945-2008.
- Independent and control variables were obtained from Fearon and Laitin's "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War" article which appeared in *American Political Science Review* vol. 97(1) in 2003.



Variable	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Polity II (lagged)	-0.0157115 (.01427)	-0.0211971 (.01443)	-0.020445 (.01433)
Ethnic Fract.	.4534582** (.1779)	.4423393** (.178)	.2282415 (.18458)
Oil State	.0347547 (.11032)	.0193549 (.11062)	.0552296 (.10855)
War (lagged)	.0074402 (.08692)	.0175073 (.08707)	.040447 (.08656)
Log of Population (Lagged)	-.0496446 (.03179)	-.0503988 (.03186)	-.0059543 (.03338)
Log of GDP per Capita (lagged)	-.296129*** (.04951)	-.2876652*** (.0498)	-.2382353*** (.05373)
Political Instability (lagged)	.2109555*** (.06666)	.2549784*** (.06863)	.2613866*** (.06845)
Anocracy (lagged)	.276086** (.11601)	.2694373** (.11633)	.2701811** (.11602)
Democracy (lagged)	.0713923 (.23177)	.0434038 (.23197)	.0397288 (.23104)
Religious Fract.	-.709979*** (.22742)	-.6867244*** (.22805)	-.7861949*** (.22728)
New State	-.6233796*** (.21263)	-.6147613*** (.2124)	-.609342*** (.21312)
Polity II*Instab.		.0288836 (.01079)	.0282402*** (.01077)
Log of Mountain Coverage			-.0206376 (.03421)
Sub Saharan Africa			.4191893*** (.13775)
Latin America			.2280038* (.12369)
Year	.0035833 (.00221)	.0030192 (.00222)	.0007876 (.00233)

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significance at 10%, 5%, 1% levels.

## Results

- Greed: No significant impact on the likelihood of a coup attempt was found.
- Grievance: Mixed results as ethnic fractionization positively affects coup risk while religious fractionization decreases coup risk.
  - Polity II measures for repression only affect risk when instability measures are high.
- Feasibility: Instability and anocracy positively affect coup risk in each model specification.
  - When controlling for other factors, unstable regimes are between 21% and 26% more likely to experience a coup attempt.

## Policy Implications

- Attempts to prevent attempted coups d'Etat should focus on reducing the likelihood that an attempted coup would be successful. Two possible ways of limiting the chances of coup success are:
  1. Foreign aid targeted to improve the quality and strength of central governments.
  2. Agreements with vulnerable governments to guarantee their return to power if a coup attempt should succeed at their removal (Collier 2009).

## References

Collier, Paul *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.

McGowan, Patrick J. *African Military coups d'état, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution*. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep. 2003) pp. 339-370.

"[T]he coup d'Etat can pre-empt revolution, or lead to it. It can install a military, or an alternative civilian government. It can maintain, or change, social policy."

-Ruth First