



Lakruwan Wanniarachchi / AFP / Getty Images. SRI LANKA.

CHAPTER 3

Trends in Armed Conflict and Coups d'État

This chapter reviews the global and regional trends in two types of armed conflict: “state-based” conflicts, those in which a state is one of the warring parties, and “non-state” conflicts, those between non-state groups.

The new data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reveal that there has been no change in the aggregate number of state-based conflicts between 2005 and 2006, although there have been significant changes at the regional level between 2002 and 2006.¹²² By contrast, the number of non-state conflicts has continued to fall since 2003, though here, too, there are notable differences between the world’s six regions. In addition to tracking conflict trends, we also report on the death tolls from both state-based and non-state conflict.

The chapter ends with a review of global and regional trends in coups d'état. It finds that the average number of coups per decade has halved since the 1980s.

State-Based Armed Conflict

In 2006 the dramatic decline in state-based armed conflicts that started in 1993 appears to have stalled. The number of state-based conflicts around the world has remained unchanged at 32 for the past three years.¹²³ Early indications from UCDP suggest that there was little change in 2007.

Two of the drivers of the threefold increase in the number of armed conflicts between 1960 and 1992 no longer exist.

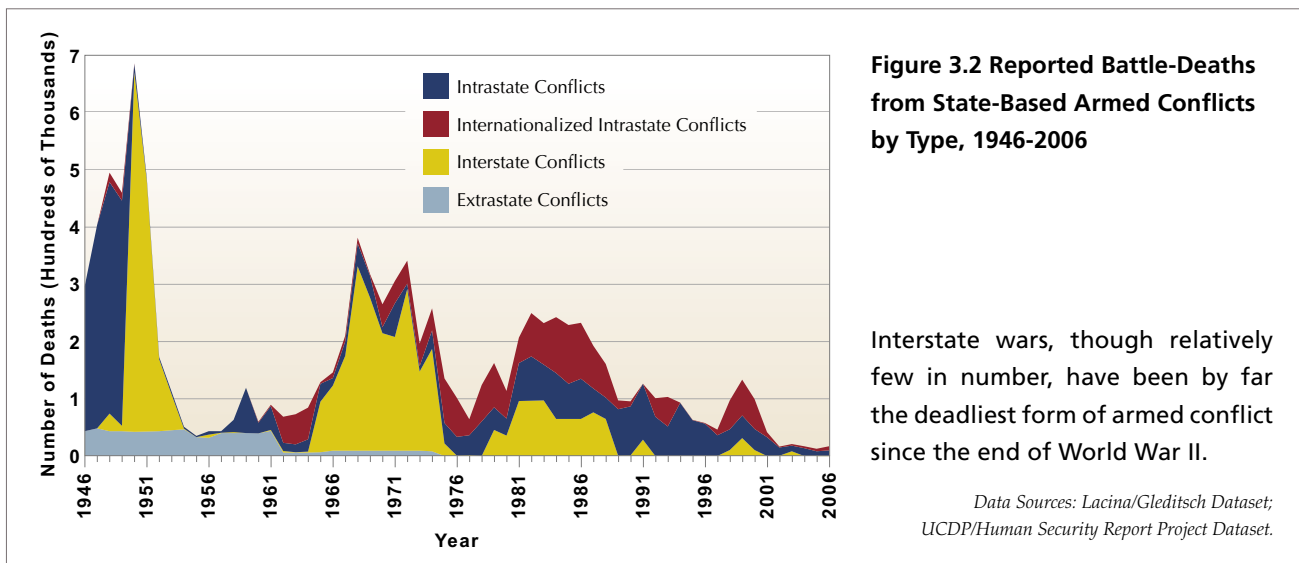
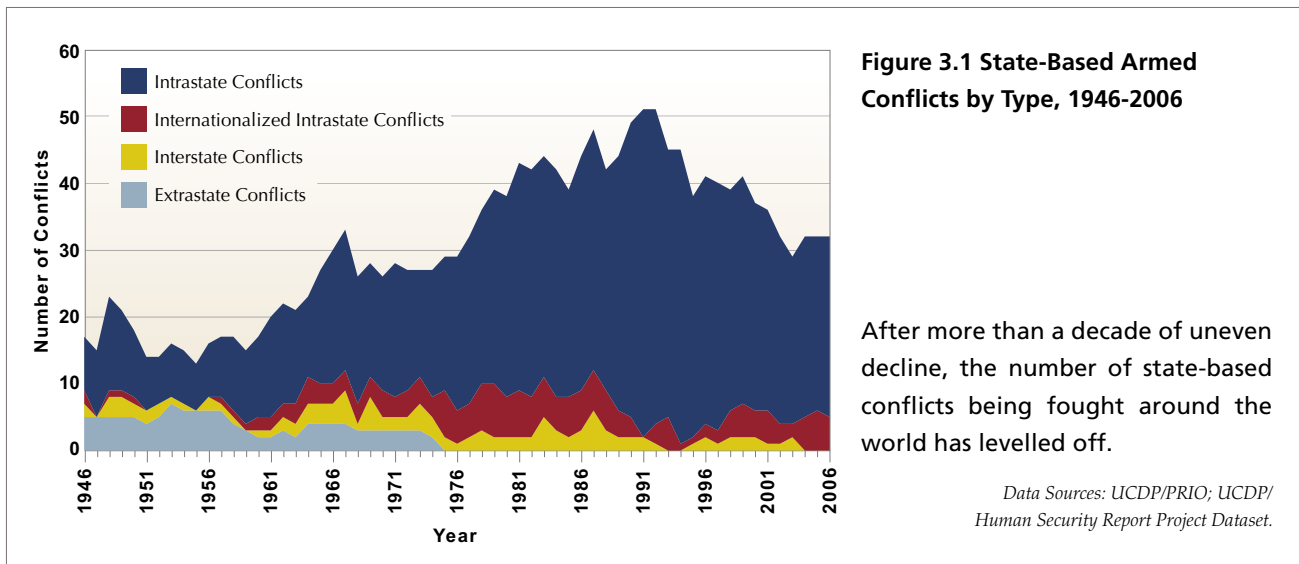
First, the struggle against colonialism effectively ended when the last two colonial conflicts—UCDP uses the term “extrastate” conflict—terminated in 1974.¹²⁴ The end of the Cold War removed a second cause of conflict from the international system—and meant that the US and the USSR (now Russia) ceased to support one side or the other in so-called proxy wars in the developing world.

All of today’s conflicts are fought within states—as Figure 3.1 reveals, there has not been an interstate conflict since 2003. Iraq and Afghanistan, which many people might think of as interstate conflicts, are what UCDP calls “internationalized intrastate conflicts”—i.e., conflicts that take place within a country but which involve foreign military forces. Iraq and Afghanistan would only be interstate conflicts if the US and its allies were fighting *against*, rather in support of, the governments of these countries.¹²⁵

With a few exceptions—notably Iraq—conflicts in the post-Cold War period, sometimes called “new wars,” have mostly been fought in low-income countries by small, poorly trained, and poorly equipped armies that tend to avoid major military engagements.

Recent Changes at the Regional Level

The levelling off of the global state-based conflict count over the past few years obscures some significant changes that have taken place at the regional level. The number of state-based conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa declined by 46 percent between 2002 and 2006. In 2002 the region accounted



for 40 percent of the world’s state-based conflicts; by 2006 it accounted for just 22 percent.

For four years out of the five between 2002 and 2006, Central and South Asia was the most conflict-prone region in the world. It has experienced a net increase in conflicts—going from seven in 2002, to 10 in 2006. The number of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa also increased, rising from four in 2002, to seven in 2006.

There has been just one state-based conflict in Europe since 2002—that in Russia’s Chechnya. Meanwhile, in both the Americas, and in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania there were the same number of conflicts in 2006 as in 2002: two in the case of the Americas, and five in the case of East and Southeast Asia and Oceania. However, in both regions the numbers fluctuated slightly in the intervening years.

Deaths from State-Based Conflicts

Figure 3.2 shows the number of reported battle-deaths from state-based armed conflicts between 1946 and 2006. The overall trend reveals a striking, but very uneven, decline in the death toll from the peak caused by the Korean War in 1950 to the present day. The most telling indicator of the changing deadliness of warfare over time is the average number of battle-deaths incurred per conflict per year. Using this metric, we find that in 1950 the average state-based conflict killed some 38,000 people, but by 2006 the toll had shrunk to just over 500, a decline of 99 percent.

Figure 3.2 also shows the share of battle-deaths by type of conflict. Two things stand out: first, just how large the death toll has been from the relatively small number of interstate conflicts; and second, how the share of interstate deaths has

declined over recent decades, while that of intrastate and internationalized intrastate conflicts has increased.

Intrastate conflicts have been by far the most common form of conflict over the past 60 years; they have also been the least deadly. Between 1946 and 2006:

- The average interstate conflict killed 34,677 people per year.
- The average internationalized intrastate conflict killed 8,609 people per year.
- The average intrastate conflict killed 2,430 people per year.

In 2006 just five of the conflicts being waged around the world qualified as “wars”—i.e., they resulted in 1,000 or more battle-deaths. Two of these were internationalized intrastate conflicts (Afghanistan and Iraq), while three were intrastate conflicts (Chad, Sri Lanka, and Sudan).

In the Americas, 2006 saw a sharp reduction in the death toll in Colombia’s long-running civil war. Indeed, 2006 is only the second year since 1990 in which the fighting in that country resulted in fewer than 1,000 battle-deaths.¹²⁶ Colombia’s lower death toll was responsible for the 54 percent drop in battle-deaths across the region from 2005 to 2006.

Battle-deaths in Central and South Asia increased significantly between 2002 and 2006. The 36 percent increase during this period was mostly due to increased fighting in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The death toll in the Middle East and North Africa (primarily in Iraq) rose even more sharply (by 93 percent). Together, these two regions accounted for over three-quarters of the world’s reported battle-deaths from state-based conflict in 2006.

In 2006 we saw a sharp reduction in the death toll in Colombia’s civil war.

Europe’s sole conflict, that in Chechnya, has been active for 10 of the 12 years between 1994 and 2006, and has resulted in the deaths of almost 100,000 people. However, the number of fatalities has declined sharply since 2004—in 2006 the estimated death toll was less than 300.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the decrease in the number of state-based conflicts between 2002 and 2006 is reflected in the battle-death toll that declined by more than half over this period. In 2002 the region accounted for some 30 percent of global fatalities: by 2006 its share was just 13 percent. However, the trend has not been consistently downwards—increased fighting in Chad and Somalia pushed the region’s battle-death toll for 2006 above that for 2005.

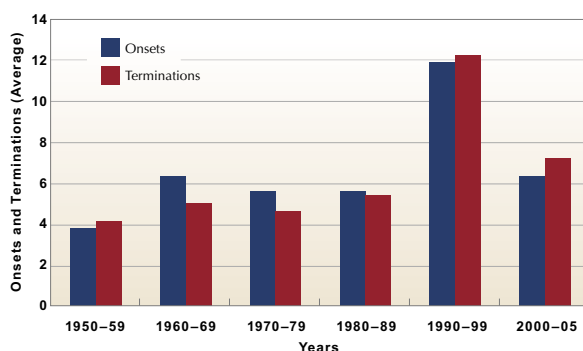
The decline in battle-deaths in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania has been uneven, though there has been a small net decline between 2002 and 2006.

State-Based Conflict Onsets and Terminations

The 1990s was an extraordinary decade. On average there were more than twice as many state-based conflict onsets each year as in the 1980s. However, the average number of conflicts ending each year increased even more dramatically. The 1990s was the first decade since the 1950s in which there were more terminations than onsets, which explains the net decline in state-based conflict numbers over the decade.¹²⁷

In the new millennium, as Figure 3.3 shows, the average number of conflict onsets per year dropped by 47 percent, although the rate of conflict onsets is still higher than in the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s. Similarly, while the rate of conflict terminations per year in the new millennium is lower than in the 1990s, it is still higher than every previous decade back to the 1950s.

Figure 3.3 State-Based Armed Conflict Onsets and Terminations per Year, 1950-2005



Data Source: UCDP/Human Security Report Project Dataset.

Following the end of the Cold War, the average number of conflict onsets per year more than doubled. There was an even greater increase in the number of terminations.

How Wars End

Figure 3.3 tells us about the average number of state-based conflicts terminating per year by decade, but it does not tell us how those conflicts were terminating—whether by victories, negotiated settlements, or a third catch-all category known as “Other.” Nor does it tell us anything about the stability of the terminations—i.e., the probability that the conflicts that had stopped would restart.

In every decade from the 1950s to the 1980s there were many more victories than negotiated settlements. But as Figure 3.4 demonstrates, there was a striking change in this pattern in the 1990s. For the first time there were greater numbers of negotiated settlements than there were victories. The numbers of negotiated settlements in the 1990s also increased in absolute terms—indeed, there were more than three times as many negotiated settlements in the 1990s as in any previous decade.

This pattern appears to have continued into the new millennium, and has become even more pronounced. From 2000 to 2005, there were more than three times as many negotiated settlements as victories.¹²⁸ And even though we have data for only six years, there have already been more negotiated settlements in the new millennium than in any previous decade, bar the anomalous 1990s.

Both the reduction in the number of victories and the increase in the number of negotiated settlements reflect the sharp increase in peacemaking—the practice of seeking to end wars via negotiation rather than on the battlefield. In the 1990s negotiated settlements were far more likely to restart within five years than conflicts that ended in victories: during this decade, 44 percent of negotiated settlements broke down within five years.

In the new millennium negotiated settlements seem to be far more stable than was the case previously. Seventeen conflicts were ended by negotiation between 2000 and 2005, and thus far just two of them—12 percent—have broken down. Over the equivalent period in the previous decade (1990 to 1995), 48 percent of the negotiated settlements had failed. The increased stability of these settlements is very likely the result of the international community’s increased support for post-conflict peacebuilding in recent years.

While negotiated settlements have become more common and more stable, the reverse appears to be the case with victories, which have become less common and somewhat less stable. The least stable type of conflict termination is that labelled “Other” in Figure 3.4. This category includes conflicts that terminate because the fighting peters out completely, or because the death toll drops below the 25-battle-deaths-per-year threshold. There were 21 conflict terminations in this category between 2000 and 2005. Fourteen of them—67 percent—have already broken down. “Other” terminations are generally not supported by the international community. Given this, that neither of the warring parties has been defeated, and that there are rarely any negotiations to resolve the disputes that drove the conflict in the first place, it is not surprising that they are so unstable.

Figure 3.4 State-Based Armed Conflict Terminations, 1950-2005

| Years | VICTORIES | | | NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS | | | OTHER | | | TOTAL TERMINATIONS | | |
|---------------|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Total No. | No. Restarted in under 5 Years | % Restarted in under 5 Years | Total No. | No. Restarted in under 5 Years | % Restarted in under 5 Years | Total No. | No. Restarted in under 5 Years | % Restarted in under 5 Years | Total No. | No. Restarted in under 5 years | % Restarted in under 5 Years |
| 1950-59 | 16 | 3 | 18.8 | 9 | 0 | 0.0 | 16 | 5 | 31.3 | 41 | 8 | 19.5 |
| 1960-69 | 23 | 2 | 8.7 | 11 | 1 | 9.1 | 16 | 3 | 18.8 | 50 | 6 | 12.0 |
| 1970-79 | 22 | 7 | 31.8 | 13 | 2 | 15.4 | 11 | 0 | 0.0 | 46 | 9 | 19.6 |
| 1980-89 | 20 | 3 | 15.0 | 8 | 1 | 12.5 | 26 | 15 | 57.7 | 54 | 19 | 35.2 |
| 1990-99 | 23 | 2 | 8.7 | 41 | 18 | 43.9 | 58 | 32 | 55.2 | 122 | 52 | 42.6 |
| Total 1950-99 | 104 | 17 | 16.3 | 82 | 22 | 26.8 | 127 | 55 | 43.3 | 313 | 94 | 30.0 |
| 2000-05 | 5* | 1 | 20.0 | 17* | 2 | 11.8 | 21* | 14 | 66.7 | 43* | 17 | 39.5 |
| Total 1950-05 | 109 | 18 | 16.5 | 99 | 24 | 24.2 | 148 | 69 | 46.6 | 356 | 111 | 31.2 |

Data Source: UCDP/Human Security Report Project Dataset.

In the new millennium, the number of conflicts ending in victory has declined, while the number ending in negotiated settlements has increased.

*Includes terminations for which it is too early to determine a failure rate over the five-year period.

Because we only have data on terminations for the first six years of the new millennium, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the stability of the terminations at this point. However, the increase in negotiated settlements and decline in the number breaking down are grounds for modest optimism.

The findings of the terminations’ dataset contain important messages for policy-makers—particularly with respect to conflict prevention. Since the point of conflict prevention is to reduce the number of new conflicts breaking out, the huge increase in conflict onsets in the 1990s tells us that if conflict prevention initiatives were being attempted during this period, they were decidedly unsuccessful. Given the huge amount of attention paid to conflict prevention at the UN and elsewhere, this finding is sobering.

In the new millennium, the reduction in the number of conflict onsets could mean that preventive diplomacy activities were having a positive effect, but it could also mean that whatever forces were driving the onset of conflicts in the 1990s have attenuated. The one area in which conflict prevention has clearly had a positive recent impact is in helping to prevent conflicts that have stopped from restarting. There is no doubt that the major increase in postconflict peacebuilding initiatives has had an important preventive effect.

The sharp increase in the number of conflicts ending in negotiated settlements provides further grounds for cautious optimism. It suggests that what the UN calls “peacemak-

ing”—using third party mediation to help bring conflicts to an end—has been increasingly effective. Given the extremely limited resources that the international community devotes to peacemaking and to conflict resolution more generally, this finding is encouraging.

Non-State Armed Conflict

Until 2002 armed conflicts that did not involve a government were almost completely ignored by the conflict research community, an omission that created a misleading picture of the incidence of conflicts around the world.¹²⁹ Five years ago the Human Security Report Project commissioned the UCDP to collect data on a range of non-state conflicts—intercommunal conflicts and conflicts between rebels groups and warlords. The *Human Security Report* published the initial findings of this dataset in 2005. It revealed that in both 2002 and 2003 there were more of these hitherto uncounted “non-state conflicts” than state-based conflicts.

The majority of non-state conflicts have occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, in each of the five years for which there are data, the number of non-state conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa has been equal to, or greater than, the number of non-state conflicts in all of the other regions of the world combined. But as discussed in Chapter 2, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a 54 percent decline in non-state conflicts between 2002 and 2006. This decline helped drive the global non-state conflict total down from 36 conflicts in 2002, to 24 in 2006.

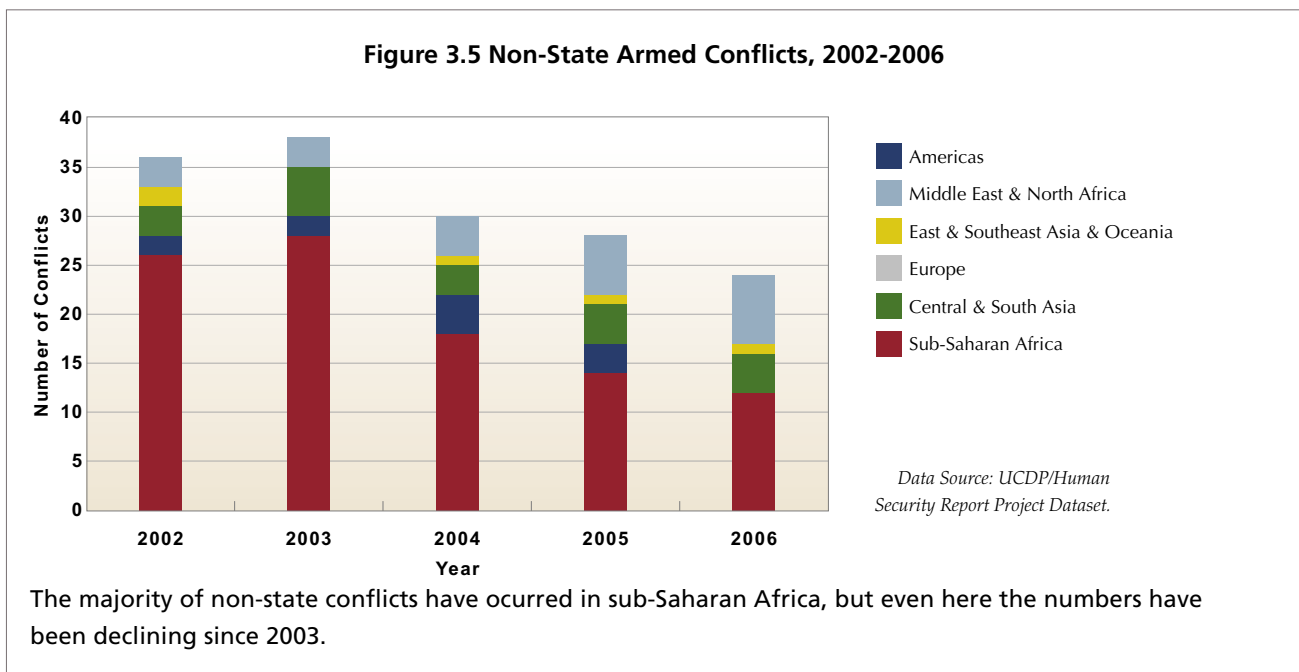
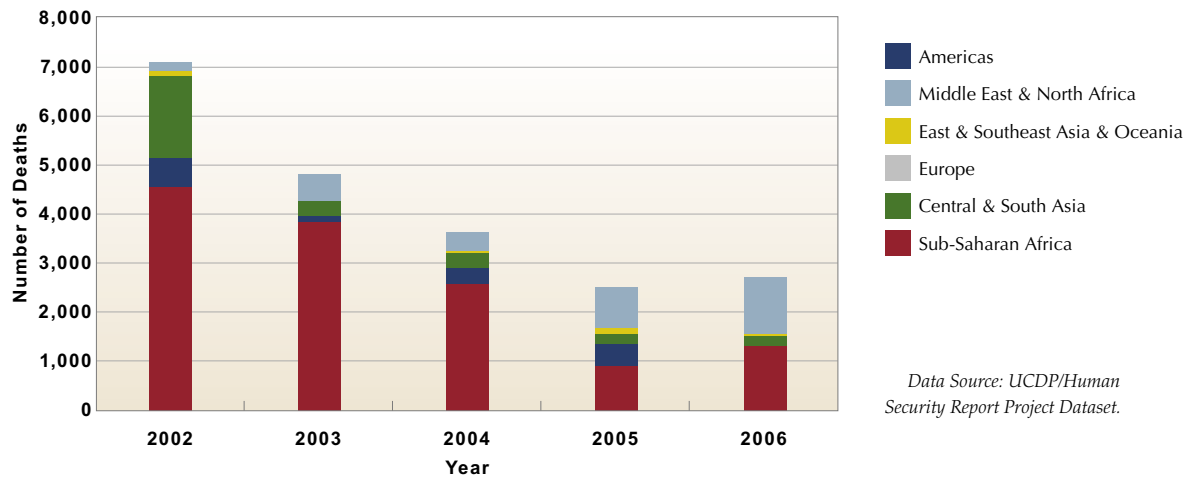


Figure 3.6 Reported Battle-Deaths from Non-State Armed Conflicts, 2002-2006



The overall decline in deaths from non-state conflicts has been driven by lower death tolls in sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South Asia, and the Americas.

The Middle East and North Africa is the second most conflict-prone region and has experienced the greatest increase in the number of non-state conflicts—with numbers more than doubling during the same period.

As Figure 3.5 reveals, while the trend in non-state conflicts in Central and South Asia has been uneven, the region experienced a modest increase in the number of these conflicts during the period under review. The trends in non-state conflicts in the Americas, and East and Southeast Asia and Oceania have been similarly uneven. However, both regions experienced a net decline in the number of conflicts between 2002 and 2006. Europe is the only region that has been free of non-state conflict between 2002 and 2006.

Deaths from Non-State Conflicts

Although non-state conflicts have, on average, been as numerous as state-based conflicts over the past five years, they are not nearly as deadly. Between 2002 and 2006, state-based conflicts killed an average of some 17,000 people per year. Non-state conflicts killed less than a quarter of that number.¹³⁰ Figure 3.6 reveals the 62 percent decline in the number of reported non-state battle-deaths around the world between 2002 and 2006—notwithstanding the slight increase in the global death toll between 2005 and 2006. This decline is quite remarkable over such a short period of time.

The Middle East and North Africa is the only region to have experienced a net increase in the number of battle-deaths from non-state conflict between 2002 and 2006. Most

of the increase was accounted for by fighting in two countries: Iraq and Sudan.

Despite an increase in the death toll in 2006, sub-Saharan Africa actually experienced a 71 percent decline in the number of deaths from non-state conflict between 2002 and 2006. A reduction in the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was largely responsible for the long-term decline, while increases in fighting in Somalia, Chad, and Senegal drove the modest increase in fatalities in 2006.

Although Central and South Asia experienced a net increase in the number of non-state conflicts between 2002 and 2006, the region experienced an 87 percent decline in the number of battle-deaths over the same period. This was due mainly to a decline in violence in India, and to a lesser degree, Afghanistan.¹³¹

The trends in the death tolls in the Americas, and East and Southeast Asia and Oceania reflect the uneven decline in the number of non-state conflicts in these two regions.

Coups d'État

Conflicts are not the only indicator of state instability. Coups d'état are characterized by the swift illegal seizure of state power by part of the state apparatus—almost always the military. They are localized events—usually taking place in the capital. While governments can defend themselves against rebels by increasing the size, firepower, and efficiency of their armed forces, this strategy is quite irrelevant when it comes to protecting against coups. Here, what matters is the loyalty

of the armed forces, not their size or effectiveness. Although coups are premised on the potential threat of violence, as the phrase “bloodless coup” suggests, they do not necessarily have to involve the actual use of force.¹³²

The University of Heidelberg’s Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) publishes data that record not only successful coups—those in which there is a change of leadership at the top—but also coup attempts that fail.¹³³ HIIK researchers stress the difficulties involved in obtaining reliable data, particularly for the early years of the dataset.¹³⁴ Information is not always available, reports may be contradictory, and the veracity of claims questionable—governments, for example, sometimes use the discovery of an alleged coup plot as a pretext for detaining—and in some cases executing—political enemies. These caveats aside, the overall trends are not in dispute.

As Figure 3.7 indicates, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the number of coups around the world increased rapidly. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, coup numbers fluctuated unevenly, but averaged about 12 per year. In the 1990s the global average dropped to between eight and nine coups per year, while in the new millennium the annual average has dropped still further—to six.

As Figure 3.8 illustrates, all of the coups between 1946 and 1959 occurred in just three of the world’s six regions. In fact, all but one of the 36 coups during this period were in the Americas, and the Middle East and North Africa. The one coup that took place outside of the Americas, and the Middle East and North Africa was unsuccessful and was led by three renegade French generals in 1958. Although this coup actually

took place in Algeria, because Algeria was still a department of metropolitan France at that time, the coup attempt is coded as having taken place in France.¹³⁵

By 1969 all six regions of the world had experienced coups, with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing by far the greatest increase in number. The continent had been coup-free during the colonial period, but following independence, coups became a common feature of the intense struggles for control over the post-colonial state. During the 1960s, sub-Saharan Africa established itself as the world’s most coup-prone region, a dubious distinction that remains true today. According to one recent study, only three countries in the region—Botswana, Cape Verde, and Mauritius—have been independent for more than 25 years and have remained completely coup-free to 2001.¹³⁶

The number of coups in the Middle East and North Africa peaked in the 1960s, when there were 36 coups in the region, and then started to decline. In the Americas there were, on average, some three coups per year between 1960 and 1989, but in the 1990s the number dropped significantly, and in the new millennium the region has averaged fewer than one coup per year.

Coup numbers peaked in Central and South Asia in the 1970s—reflecting the political instability in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Coups in these three countries, as well as in the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, pushed the regional total up again in the 1990s.

There is no consistent trend in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, although it is the only region to have experi-

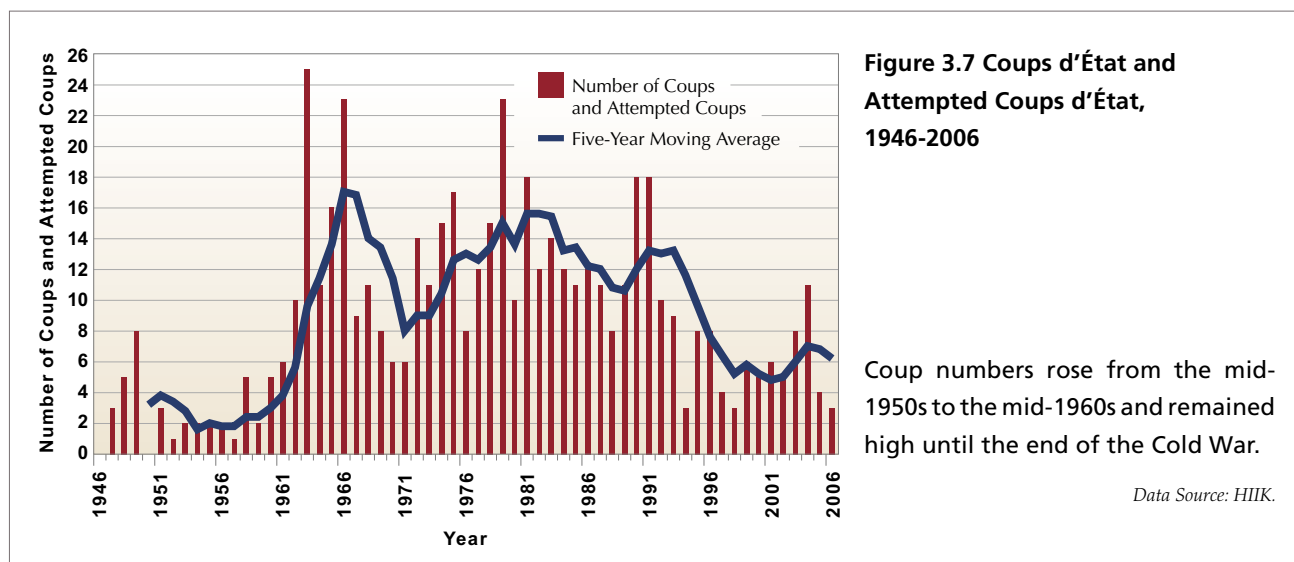
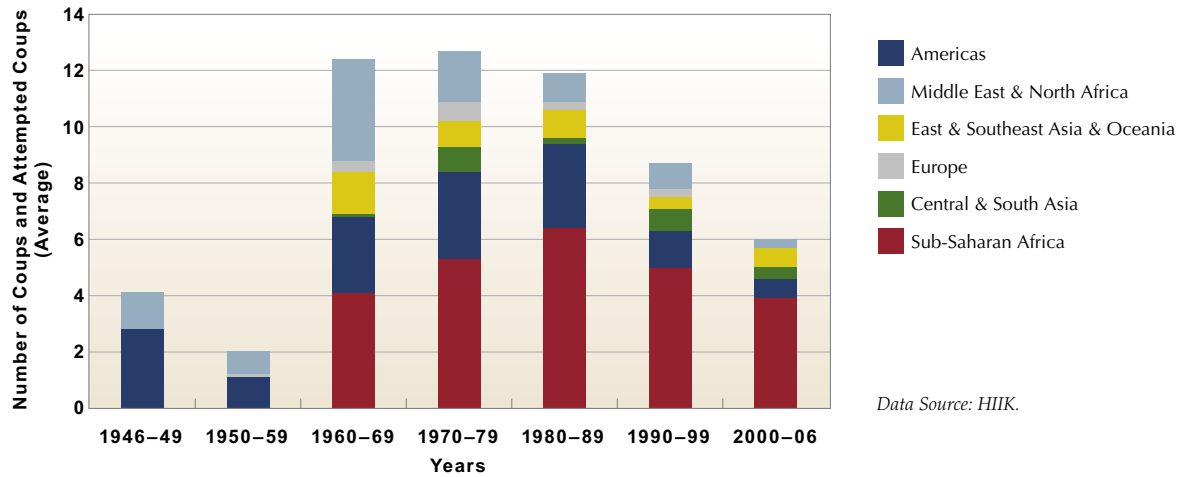


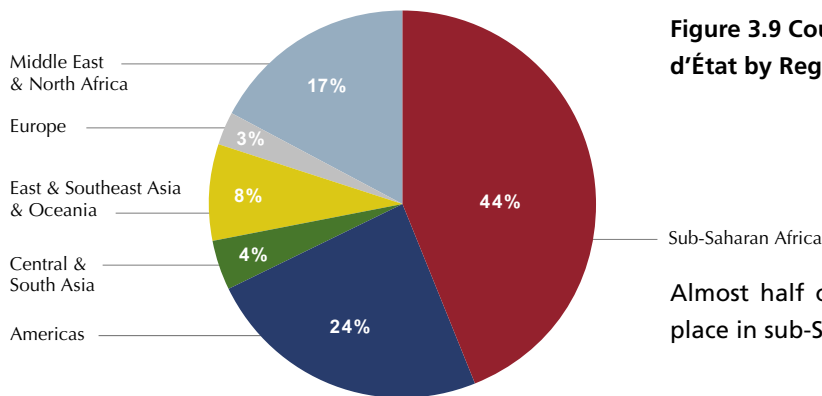
Figure 3.8 Coups d'État and Attempted Coups d'État per Year, 1946-2006



Data Source: HIIK.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's most coup-prone region.

Figure 3.9 Coups d'État and Attempted Coups d'État by Region, 1946-2006



Almost half of the world's coups have taken place in sub-Saharan Africa.

Data Source: HIIK.

enced more coups between 2000 and 2006 than in the previous decade. The five coups in the new millennium took place in Fiji (2000 and 2006), the Solomon Islands (2000), the Philippines (2006), and Thailand (2006).

Europe, the region that has been home to the greatest number of consistently democratic states for the longest period of time, is also the region that has experienced the fewest coups. Just eight countries account for Europe's 18 coups (Greece had seven, Albania two, France two, Portugal two, Russia/USSR two, Bulgaria one, Cyprus one, and Spain one). The region's three coups in the 1990s took place in the newly independent Russian Republic (1991), the Russian Federation (1993), and Albania (1998). There have been no coups in Europe in the new millennium.

As noted earlier, a history of armed conflict increases the risk of future conflicts. The evidence indicates that the same is true for coups. Seventy-eight percent of countries that experienced a coup between 1946 and 2006 experienced more than one. Sub-Saharan Africa not only accounted for the majority (44 percent) of the world's coups between 1946 and 2006, but was also home to four of the world's eight most coup-prone countries (Nigeria with 15 coups, Comoros with 13, Mauritania with 12, and Benin with 12). The Americas experienced 24 percent of the world's coups, and was home to the world's most coup-prone country—Bolivia—which experienced 22 coups during the period 1946 to 2006. The Middle East and North Africa accounted for 17 percent of the world's coups between 1946 and 2006, and was home to three

of the world's eight most coup-prone countries (Syria with 20 coups, Sudan with 18, and Iraq with 15).

Figure 3.9 provides information on each region's share of the global coup total between 1946 and 2006, but it does not take into account the fact that the number of countries per region varies greatly. While sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 44 percent of the world's coups over the time period in question, it also contains many more states than most other regions. It should be remembered, however, that the number of states in the world increased considerably over the last 60 years as a consequence of the end of colonialism.¹³⁷

The decline in the average number of coups per decade since the 1970s is not only encouraging but, as argued in Chapter 2, is not accidental. The decline is strongly associated with a range of economic and political changes, including rising incomes; an increasingly entrenched norm against the usurpation of government by the military; and a greater willingness on behalf of the international community and regional organizations to seek to prevent or reverse coups, and to sanction coup leaders. Whether this positive change—and the factors that have driven it—can be sustained remains to be seen.