

CIVILIAN DEFIANCE AND RESISTANCE TO COUPS

The Power of Noncooperation in
Reversing the Illegitimate Overthrow
of Governments

Definition of a Coup

Coup d'état

koō/

Noun

a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.

golpe de estado (golpe)

putsch



Golpistas must be denied:

- Legitimacy
- Cooperation

It's important to distinguish between the physical control of government facilities and the political control of the state

- If government employees — including bureaucrats and civil servants — along with security services, refuse to cooperate with the golpistas, they deny the golpistas control of the state apparatus.
- Even if the golpistas do manage to control much of the state apparatus, if local governments, independent social institutions, and the general population refuse to cooperate, the golpistas don't have control of the country either



To defeat a coup, the resisters need to:

- Repudiate the golpistas as illegitimate with no rightful claim to become the government
- Make the attacked society unrulable by the attackers
- Block the imposition of a viable government by the golpistas
- Encourage dissension and opposition among the golpistas' supporters
- Maintain control and self-direction of their society
- Make the institutions of the society into omnipresent resistance organizations against the coup

(Gene Sharp & Bruce Jenkins, *The Anti-Coup*, 2003)

Germany, 1920

A right-wing coup defeated in just four days through a general strike and massive noncooperation.



Bolivia, July 1979

Resistance to the coup by General Alberto Natusch Busch forces his resignation and return to civilian rule in just fifteen days, despite severe repression



El pueblo frente a los tanques (foto Félix Valdivia)

Argentina, April 1987

Popular nonviolent resistance stops a coup in progress and successfully defends the civilian government.



Soviet Union, 1991

Hundreds of thousands rally around the country, with support of regional leaders, to defeat a hardline Communist coup.



Venezuela, April 2002

Chavistas on the streets join a divided security services in reversing a coup in four days



Other coups facing challenges

either through popular uprising and/or noncooperation by security forces and other elite elements

Successful:

- ▣ France (1961)
- ▣ Spain (1981)
- ▣ Haiti (1991)
- ▣ Thailand (1992)
- ▣ Guatemala (1993)
- ▣ Paraguay (1996)
- ▣ Ecuador (2010)
- ▣ Mali (2012)

Unsuccessful:

- ▣ Honduras (2009)
- ▣ Maldives (2012)



When is the ouster of a ruler by the military not a coup?

When the following conditions are met:

- The ruler was not elected or is otherwise considered illegitimate
- When the move by the military is a direct result of a popular nonviolent uprising
- When the military allows for civil liberties and launches a relatively speedy process towards democratic civilian rule

Coup d'état or Coup de grace?

When a popular nonviolent civil insurrection leads the military to depose a leader.

- ▣ Sudan, 1985
- ▣ Mali, 1991
- ▣ Indonesia, 1999
- ▣ Egypt, 2011
- ▣ Egypt, 2013



Coup Attempts that Became Nonviolent Insurrections

▣ Portugal,
1974

▣ Philippines,
1986

