

I. Author, title, source

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III. Summary

In this paper an approach to the phenomenon of violent regime change and, in particular, of the coup in sub-Saharan Africa is undertaken in an empirical way. A combination of description and literare-analysis is taken as basis, insofar as such a survey is possible in the case of a historical or politic-ethnological research topic. The study begins dealing with the question which types of violent regime change can be distinguished in Africa and what is meant by an accumulation of such violent regime changes, as well as establishing that such an accumulation actually exists in sub-Saharan Africa. The author, who is limiting the investigation in this paper to successful regime changes (a total of 127 violent regime changes in the whole of Africa in the period of 1952-2005), assumes four “basic types” of violent regime change: 1. transition of power in the course of war or outside intervention, 2. coup d'état, 3. revolution, 4. palace revolution and relates them to one another, whereby the “forms of transition” between the individual “basic types” are taken into consideration. In the course of the enumerations, the author here discovers that, among the violent forms of regime change in sub-Saharan Africa and across the entire continent, the “basic type” 2 (coup) occurs most frequently (70%), and an accumulation of this phenomenon compared with other wide geographical areas (1. Latin- and Meso-America, 2. West-Asia and North-Africa, 3. Central-, South- and Southeast-Asia) can be observed during the same period of time (even after statistical “adjustment”).

Furthermore, in this paper the explanatory models for the cumulative incidence of violent regime changes presented in previous studies on the phenomenon of the coup in sub-Saharan Africa are investigated and analyzed as to their “validity” against the background of today’s level of knowledge and the developments since the end of the Cold War. The investigation here is, on the one hand, of socio-political explanatory models ascribing the accumulation to either internal factors or external ones (1. “wave theory” and “contagion or diffusion thesis”, 2. emphasis on the role of external “veto powers”, 3. interstate wars) and, on the other hand, of those which rather emphasize the role of the military (1. correlation with force levels, 2. professionalism, 3. dissatisfaction of the military, 4. differences in rank and promotion structure, 5. fractionalism of the military). Concerning these aspects the author comes to the conclusion that most explanatory models have either been superseded (e. g. emphasis to the role of Cold War) or proven wrong (e. g. “wave theory” and “contagion or diffusion thesis”).

An additional topic investigated in the study is the representation of violent regime change in the media, as well as in literature tending towards popularization. In both cases, particular clichés are fostered which, as proven in the course of the author’s case-studies, barely can stand any serious investigation. In this study, it is stated, for example, that in sub-Saharan Africa more one-party dictatorships have been brought down by violent regime change than have emerged from the same (as frequently claimed in the media) and that self-promotion of the military after seizing power, in keeping with the cliché, is a rather seldom occurrence, while “presidencies for life” are only an exception (not even half of the few cases of a “presidency for life” [less than a dozen] arose from violent forms of regime change).

Regarding the significance of ethnicity to the accumulation of violent regime changes, the author comes to the conclusion that, although it can be empirically verified that it plays a significant role in the accumulation, the ethnicities do not constitute the cause. Rather, they are one of several components of a more complex fabric at the centre of which lie the possibilities of access that competing groups have to the positions and resources within a country. The fact is that the majority of ruling powers following a violent regime change belong to different ethnic groups to their predecessors deprived of power.

The paper concludes with an extensive appendix in which the results of the case studies are listed, along with a bibliographical section in which articles on the topic of research known to the author are recorded.