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A study of triggering events

When do political regimes change?

Martin Paldam, Aarhus University, Denmark¹

Erich Gundlach, Universität Hamburg and GIGA, Germany²

Abstract: Political regimes are stable most years, but sometimes they *jump*. The stable years are periods in political status quo equilibrium. To break out of a status quo requires a triggering event. The study tries to identify and classify the triggering events leading to all 262 larger regime changes between 1960 and 2015 in 169 countries. The source for the regime jumps is the Polity index, while the triggering event is our assessment based on the relevant articles in the *Economist*. Both the scoring of the index and our assessment are inevitably judgmental, but it should reduce subjectivity to combine two independent sources. The events are classified in a (2 x 2) table with four cells: (1: Domestic, Political), (2: Domestic, Economic), (3: External, Political), and (4: External, Economic). By far the most common is (1), while (4) is empty. Thus, most jumps are exogenous in an economic perspective.

Note: This paper is a sequence to Paldam and Gundlach (2017), but we have tried to make it independently readable. Tobias Moser has been a fine research assistant.

1. Department of Economics and Business, *Fuglesangs Allé 4, DK-8210 Aarhus V, Denmark*.
E-mail: mpaldam@econ.au.dk. URL: <http://www.martin.paldam.dk>. *Corresponding author*.

2. Department of Economics, Von-Melle-Park 5, D-20146 Hamburg.
E-mail: erich.gundlach@wiso.uni-hamburg.de. URL: <http://www.erichgundlach.de>

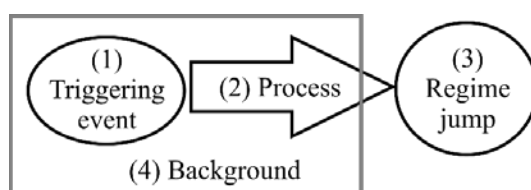
1. The puzzle: Are triggering events random?

This paper looks at the triggering events causing changes in the political regime. It is an offshoot of a paper showing that the path of the long-run Democratic Transition is an attractor for the jumps caused by random triggering events (Paldam and Gundlach 2017). It is puzzling that the triggering events appear almost randomly – the puzzle has prompted this paper.

It is notoriously difficult to prove a negative, so the present goes the other way and start by identifying all larger regime jumps in a big data sample, and confront each of them with *the assessment by close observers* as to what the triggering event were.

Political regimes have highly variable stability spells, which in average is about 15 years.³ The stability spells represents *political status quo equilibria*. However, from time to time regimes change in the form of jumps that may be quite large. To explain why the jumps occur requires an answer at four levels as shown on Figure 1:

Figure 1. The concepts used



- (1) To break out of a status quo equilibrium requires a *triggering event*. The paper tries to identify and classify the triggering events for all 262 larger regime jumps in our sample.
- (2) Triggering event lead to a *political process* that may run for months, sometimes more than a year.
- (3) Finally the *regime jump* occurs. The analysis is limited to jumps that are so large that the change of the political system is clearly visible.
- (4) *Background* conditions in the country, such as the strength of the system counts especially for the process (2).

Triggering events are a fraction of a broader class of events, but the only registered non-triggering events in our data are the ones going to anarchy and back. Thus, it is hard to know

3. The average spell is 10 years only, but many spells are truncated at the two ends of the time period. The 15 years mentioned are reached by correcting for the truncation. (Appendix to Paldam and Gundlach 2017).

how triggering events differ from all events. All political systems can absorb some events without changing, but the absorption may require a minor adjustment of the regime. We suspect that triggering events are relatively large events, but from casual observation, it is clear that the random element is large.

The political ability and the power of the political players are crucial elements in (2) the process of change. During the process, background factors (4) come into play. If a regime is weak, a small event is enough. Sometimes events leads to a period of anarchy before the jump. The lag between the triggering event and the jump often contains additional events.

Our data sample for the *system jumps* is the Polity index; see section 2.1. A regime jump is defined as a non-zero observation for the first difference of the index. The sample contain 637 *jumps*, of which 262 are *larger* than three Polity points. Negative jumps are towards less democracy, while positive jumps are towards more democracy.

Our data for *triggering events* are from reading and coding the relevant articles in *The Economist*. It gives no authorship to the articles, so they are the joint responsibility of a group that, even though it changes over time, keeps some homogeneity.

Both the journalistic coverage of the events by the Economist (and our coding of these events), and the scoring of country regimes by the Polity-group are judgmental. It is important that the two sources are institutionally independent. All (but 5) of the large jumps in the Polity index are also covered by the Economist. Even if one may discuss what a regime jump is, it thus clear that the two groups of independent observers nearly always agree in practice.

The triggering events are classified into a 2 x 2 table, where the four cells are: (1: Domestic, Political), (2: Domestic, Economic), (3: External, Political), and (4: External, Economic). Table 8 at the end of the paper reports this table. A number of borderline cases that fit in several boxes appear, but most of the triggering events fall in cell (1), and few events has to do with the economy (2) and notably (4).

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 looks at the Polity data, and show why there is a puzzle. It also show that regime changes have a grievance asymmetry. Section 4 discusses measurement problems and give some examples of the classification used. Section 5 brings the list of the triggering events for 262 regime jumps. Section 6 concludes.

2. Events and jumps in the Polity data

Section 2.1 defines variables. Section 2.2 is a brief overview of macro story told by the Polity data. Section 2.3 and section 2.4 replicates our prior finding. Section 2.5 show the grievance hypothesis for system jumps, while section 2.6 compares discrete jumps and sequences.

Table 1. Some counts of the Polity data, 1960-2015

Number	Observations		Small jumps: $\Delta P \leq 3$		Large jumps: $\Delta P > 3$		All	
Countries	Available	Missing	Zeroes	Discrete	Sequence	Discrete	Sequence	jumps
170	7,992	1,305	223	358	17	179	83	637

Notes: (a) Missing observations are from countries, which are dependent. They cover 170 countries, and the time span is the 56 years from 1960 to 2015, so ideally there should be $170 \times 56 = 9'520 = 7992 + 1305 + 223$ observations. The missing data are for dependent countries.

2.1 Defining the variables: Changes in the Polity index

The Polity index is P_{it} , where i is the country and t is the year.⁴ Table 1 gives some counts of the data. P_{it} is an integer in the interval $[-10, +10]$, where a perfect autocracy (as Saudi Arabia) scores -10 , and a perfect democracy (as most Western countries) scores $+10$. The use of integers has two explanations: (i) The P -index is inevitably judgmental, and there are limits to the precision of judgement. (ii) Political regimes are constant most of the time. Small shifts may escape registration – especially in autarchies. However, shifts over a certain threshold are normally observable. This certainly applies to larger changes.

From the P_{it} -data panel the zeroes are deleted leaving 7,992 observations. From these follow the $\Delta P_{it} = P_{it} - P_{it-1}$, where t and $t-1$ may not be in strict calendar time as the zeros have been omitted. To calculate ΔP_{i1960} , the available observations for 1959 are used.

If $\Delta P_{it} \neq 0$ a triggering event occurs in that year, with the size ΔP_{it} that is termed a jump. Thus, triggering events is a binary (0, 1) variable, while the jump is an integer in the interval $[-20, +20]$. Jumps to the same side consecutive years are counted as a *sequence*, which is registered as the sum of the jumps the first year. Most sequences are just two years, but a sequence may continue for three or even four years.

The larger jumps are in 113 countries only, so 57 countries have no larger jumps. This group of stable countries include almost all the developed countries; see section 3.5 in Paldam and Gundlach (2017).

4. See Polity in references. Marshall *et al.* (2016) is a fine manual. We use Polity2 and delete blanks and zeroes.

Figure 2. The number of countries covered by the Polity data 1920-2015

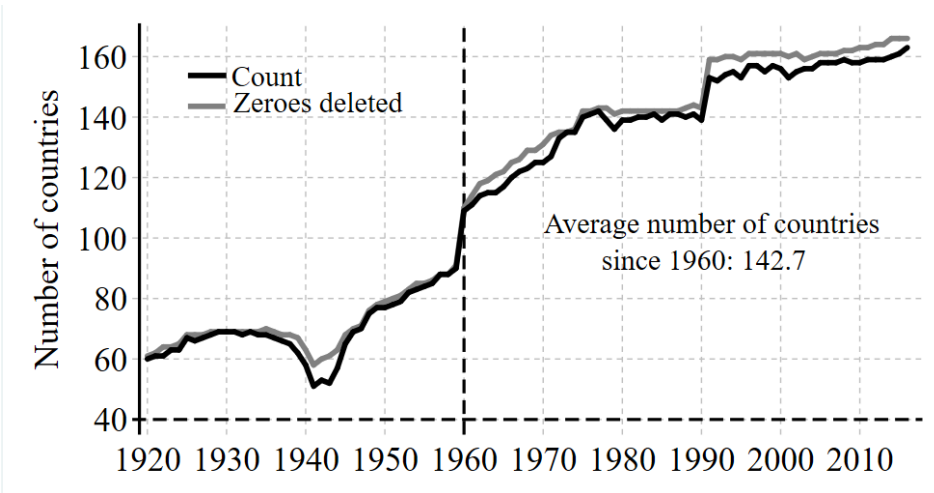


Figure 3. The number of triggering events per year, adjusted

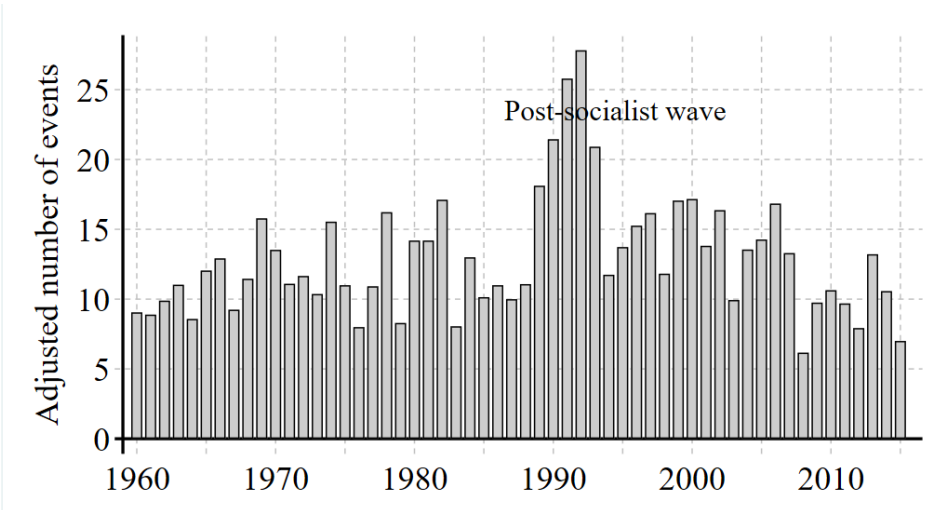
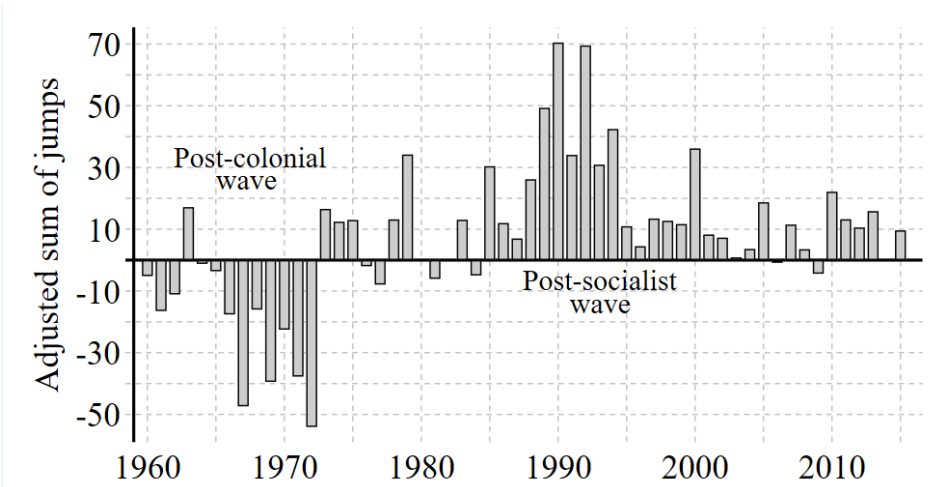


Figure 4. The direction of the changes as the annual sum of jumps, adjusted



Note: The adjustment is to the same average number of countries for all years.

Table 2. Some statistics for the number of triggering events and the sum of jumps

	Triggering events (Fig 3)		Sum of jumps (Fig 4)	
	Number	Adjusted	Sum	Adjusted
Average	13.20	12.94	7.29	8.45
Std	4.92	4.27	23.49	23.14
Median	12	11.8	9.0	10
Trend	1.01 (2.6)	0.029(0.8)	0.579 (3.2)	0.576 (3.2)

Note: The trends are the coefficient on time in a simple regression. Parentheses hold t-ratios. The bolded slopes are significant.

2.2 A macro-story told by the Polity data told by three graphs

The polity index tells stories about the more or less successful democratization of countries: Table 2 gives some statistics for the triggering events and the jumps.

Figure 2 reports the number of countries from 1920 to 2015. It has a strong upward trend that taper off in 1960 and becomes almost stationary after 1990. We want a reasonable balanced sample, and to cover all countries available within the sample period, so our sample starts in 1960. The average number of years per country is 47.3 of the potential 56 years, and the average number of countries is 142.7 since 1960. Figures 3 and 4 are adjusted to an imputed number of 142.7 countries in all years.

Figure 3 shows the number of triggering events analyzed in the rest of the paper. This allows us to see that the frequency of the adjusted triggering events are trendless (Table 2), but has a strong post-socialist peak with about 100 extra jumps compared to the average.

Figure 4 shows the sum of the jumps. As jumps may be positive or negative, many years have a small sum, though the standard deviation is large (Table 2). Since 1972, nearly all years have seen a positive value of the sum, so democracy is increasing.⁵ Two peaks appear:

The negative *post-colonial peak*, 1966/72: The colonial powers liberated many poor colonies in 1960, and gave them a democratic constitution well above the path of the Democratic Transition. During the next 15 years, many of these countries saw one or more triggering event that caused the regime to jump towards less democracy. This was particularly relevant in the poorest continent, Africa.⁶

5. Diamond *et al.* (2016) claims that annual rise in democracy in the world has turned down in the last 5 years. This is not the case for the Polity index – it keeps raising. We have also looked for other international political events. The Arab Spring has a large effect in Tunisia only. Andersen and Jensen (2017) suggest the change in the recommended political regime by the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) is an exogenous external factor. The effect is at best small.

6. The negative jumps in Africa in the 1960s are: Senegal -6 (1962/64), Congo (Br) -11 (1963), Benin -9 (1963/66), Congo (Ki) -6 (1964/66), Burundi -4 (1965/67) Nigeria -14 (1966), Sierra Leone -13 (1967), Uganda -13 (1967), Somalia -14 (1969), Equatorial Guinea -9 (1969), Kenya -7 (1969), Sudan -14 (1969/72). This decade saw only two large positive jumps: Sudan +14 (1965) and Sierra Leone +8 (1968).

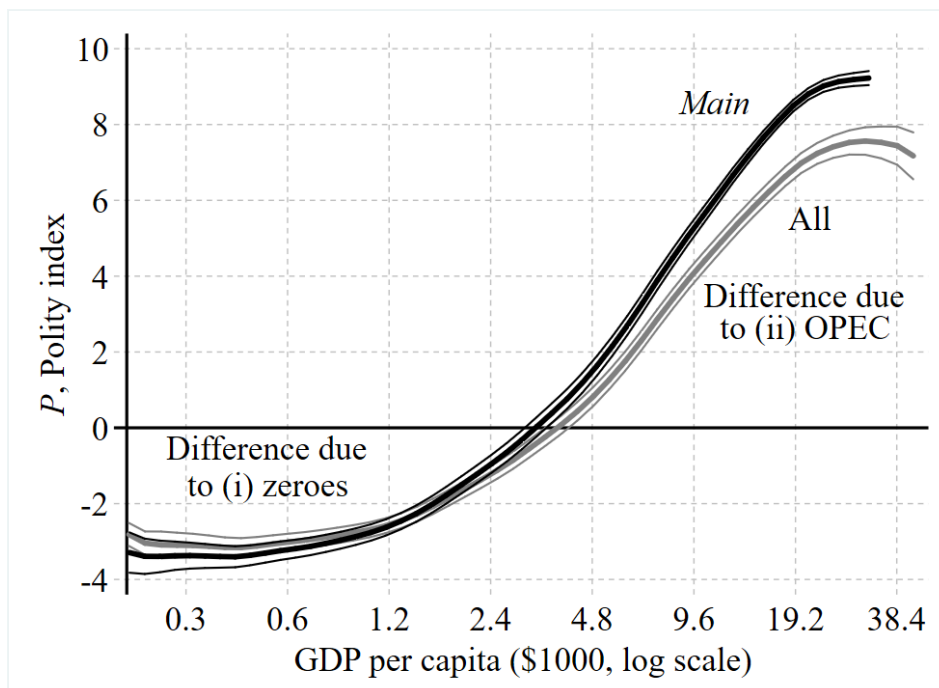
The positive *post-socialist peak*, 1989/93: Polity scores most socialist countries at -7 that were below that transition curve for most of the countries. Thus, socialist countries had too little democracy for their level of development, so most jumps were positive; see section 3.3.

In addition, note that the two main international economic crises – the Oil-crisis 1973/80 and Banking/debt crisis 2009/14 – did not cause peaks in the data. If anything, they caused small drops in the frequency of regime jumps. The stability of political regimes to international economic events for will reappear below.

2.3 Background to the puzzle: The Democratic Transition

Figure 5 shows the Democratic transition from kernel regressions on all the 6,997 observations for the Polity data, where a corresponding income observation is available from the Maddison Project.⁷ The curve represents the long-run connection. It is only flat (with a zero slope) at the two ends. Thus, the only political systems with long-run stability are traditional systems and modern democracy. Countries above/below the transition curve has *too* much/little democracy.

Figure 5. Kernel regressions showing the Democratic Transition for all observations ($N = 6,997$) and the *Main* group ($N = 6,211$)



Note: Kernel regression with the bandwidth 0.5. The *Main* group is reached by deleting two sets of observations: (i) the 237 zeroes has a small effect; (ii) the 561 observation from OPEC countries makes the top end higher.

7. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 combine the Polity data with income data from the Maddison Project. This reduces the sample by about 22%. We assume that robust results generalize to the larger data set used in the rest of the paper.

This finding corresponds to a couple of observations: (1) Political systems at intermediate Polity levels (such as $P = -2$ to 7) are often build around one ruler. When he changes the whole system change. (2) System changes tend to overshoot the Transition path.⁸

Part of the cyclicalty of the adjustment is due to the fact that the Polity score – by its very nature – is limited to the interval $[-10, 10]$. If the country has a military dictatorship that appears to have failed (such as in 1983 in Argentina, where the economy was in crisis and a war was lost) it has to cause a jump in the direction of democracy and vice versa.

2.4 The puzzle: The weak short-run relation between economic development and events

Figure 6 show the relation between (6a) events and the income level, and (6b) income and the growth rate. The two relations use two probit regressions to analyze the four relations.

$$(1) \quad E_i = a + by_{i+k} \quad \text{or} \quad E_i = a + bg_{i+k} \quad \text{for } k = 3, 2, 1, 0, -1, -2, -3$$

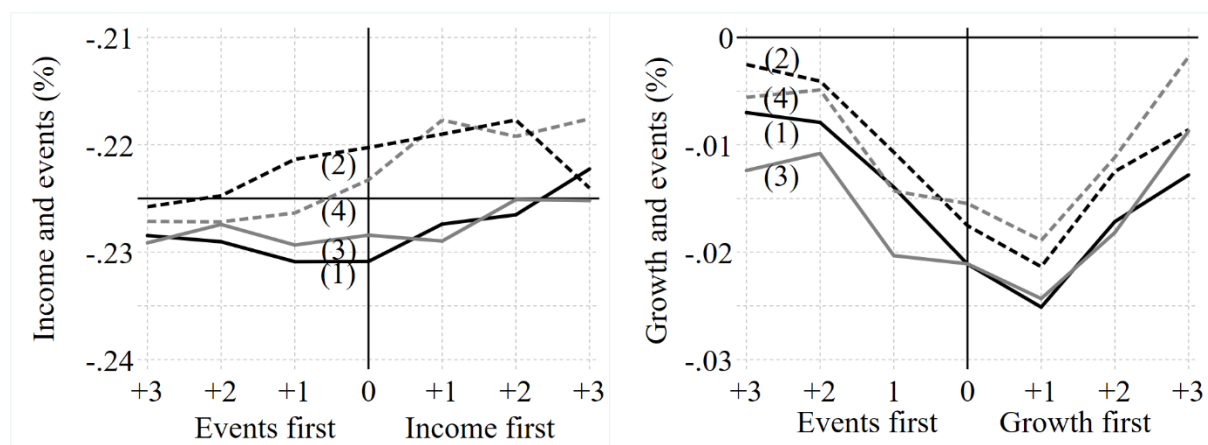
$$(2) \quad E_i = a + bg_{i+k} + cy_{i+k} \quad \text{for } k = 3, 2, 1, 0, -1, -2, -3$$

Where E is events (90% are zero), y is income (ln to GDP per capita), g is the real per capita growth rate. (3) and (4) are the same regressions for data truncated to non-extreme growth rates, where $-20 < g < 20$. Paldam and Gundlach (2017) report that both regressions are robust to the inclusion of fixed effects for countries and time.

Figure 6. Four sets of coefficients from seven lagged probit regressions explaining events

Figure 6a. Relation of events and income

Figure 6b. Relation of events and growth



Note: Calculated for the Main sample also used for Figure 5.

8. Thailand provides an extreme cyclical case, with the following jumps: 1968 +9, 1971 -9, 1973 +10, 1976 -10, 1977 +9, 1991 -4, 1992 +10, 2006 -14, 2007 +9, and 2014 -10. See also note 9 on Argentina.

Figure 6a deals with the relation between income and events. The four lines are all within -0.218 and -0.232 and even when they have trends the slope is only 0.001, so for all practical purposes they are flat, and similar. This indicates that the relation between events and income is of a long-run nature. That is, they are due to the Democratic Transition.

Figure 6b deals with the relation between growth and events. Once again, the four lines are rather similar, but none of the slopes is significant. The important point to note is that a distinct peak appears when the growth is one year before the event. The areas between the four curves and the horizontal axis (for the effect zero) gives a simple causality test. It is clear that the main causal direction is from growth to events.

Table 3 shows that the size of the effect analyzed of Figure 6b is tiny: It is largest at the peak for $E = E(g_{-1})$ the effect is between -0.02 and -0.025 and the marginal R^2 is just 0.004.

Table 3. The marginal pseudo R^2 of regressions (2) minus (1)

Pure effect of	Events before income or growth				Income or growth before events		
	+3	+2	+1	0	+1	+2	+3
Income	0.029	0.029	0.028	0.028	0.027	0.026	0.027
Growth	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.003	0.004	0.001	0.000

2.5 *The grievance asymmetry for system changes*

The literature on vote and popularity normally finds a grievance asymmetry: A negative event causes a loss of government popularity that is about twice the gain the government obtains from a positive event of the same size (see Nannestad and Paldam 1994 and 1997).

Table 4 shows that the grievance-hypothesis generalizes to regime jumps. It gives the number of events for each growth rate ($E = E(g_{-1})$) correspond to Figure 6b. The gray area, from row (r8) to (r11), represent normal growth. It is used to calculate the normal number of events: $226/1943 = 0.0849$. Thus, the excess number of events in the gray area sums to zero.

The top panel, from (r1) to (r7) gives the effect of growth below average. Here countries have too many events, as they should if the regime is held responsible for the poor growth performance. In all but one cell, the excess events are significantly positive, but the excess events are only 6.4%, so the effect is moderate.

Table 4. Number of events at different growth rates

	(c1)	(c2)	(c3)	(c4)	(c5)	(c6)	(c7)	(c8)	(c9)
	Growth rates		Observations	Fraction	Binominal test, p%		Excess events		
	From	To	Events	All	(c3)/(c4)	(c3) $\geq x$	(c3) $\leq x$	Number	Fraction
(r1)	$-\infty$	-10	32	150	0.213	0.0		19.3	0.129
(r2)	-10	-8	17	75	0.227	0.0		10.6	0.141
(r3)	-8	-6	12	118	0.102	30.0		2.0	0.017
(r4)	-6	-4	34	205	0.166	0.0		16.6	0.081
(r5)	-4	-2	47	360	0.131	0.2		16.4	0.046
(r6)	-2	-1	41	289	0.142	0.1		16.5	0.057
(r7)	-1	0	56	413	0.136	0.0		20.9	0.051
Below average			239	1619	0.148	0.0		102.3	0.064
(r8)	0	1	59	569	0.104	6.6	95.0	10.7	0.019
(r9)	1	2	48	690	0.070	93.8	8.1	-10.6	0.015
(r10)	2	3	62	770	0.081		36.1	-3.4	0.004
(r11)	3	4	57	634	0.090		70.5	3.2	0.005
Average growth			226	2663	0.085		43.0	-0.1	0.000
(r12)	4	5	47	526	0.089		67.8	2.3	0.004
(r13)	5	6	33	379	0.087		60.6	0.8	0.002
(r14)	6	7	17	253	0.067		18.6	-4.5	-0.018
(r15)	7	8	12	171	0.070		29.9	-2.5	-0.015
(r16)	8	10	17	215	0.079		44.0	-1.3	-0.006
(r17)	10	∞	23	299	0.080		2.6	-10.9	0.027
Above average			149	1943	0.077		10.3	-16.0	-0.008

Note: The gray cells are for average growth used to calculate the normal frequency for events 0.0848. In rows (r9) and (r10) the binominal test are the one sided test for too many events relative to this norm. Under the line the one sided test is for too few events. Significant tests results are bolded. The excess events are calculated as (c4) 0.0849 – (c3). The fraction in column (c9) is calculated as (c8)/(c4).

The bottom panel from (r12) to (r17) gives the effect of above average growth. More than half are negative, as they should, if the regime is rewarded for the good growth performance, but the excess events are less than -1%. Only the last cell is significant, so the positive effect of high growth is small, and of dubious significance.

2.6 *The difference between discrete jumps and sequences*

A highly significant difference in time the duration of the process between the triggering event and the jump appears when steps toward a more democratic and a more authoritarian political regime are compared.

Steps towards democracy normally requires a sequential process, which often has four steps: (i) A government of national conciliation is appointed; (ii) it proposes a new constitution; (iii) it is approved by a referendum; (iv) a general election takes place. This normally takes two years, but it may be as many as four years.

Table 5. A comparison of the discrete jumps and the sequences

	Discrete		Sequences	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
4	7	12	4	4
5	9	13	4	4
6	8	4	1	5
7	3	8		6
8	5	10		2
9	10	7	3	7
10	5	7	1	9
11	8	14		4
12	7	6		2
13	5	4	1	4
14	9	4	2	5
15	4	5	2	8
16		3	1	2
17		1		1
18	1			1
Sum	81	98	19	64
Average		0.65		5.88
Std		9.83		8.87
t-ratio = 4.13 for same mean, $p < 0.005\%$				

A military coup typically takes one day, and the preparations are secret, for good reasons. As secrecy is essential, we imagine that the time for preparations is made as short as possible. Most coups are rather peaceful, and the Economist often reports that peoples first noted that a coup has taken place when they woke up in the morning and saw tanks in the streets.

The difference between the duration of the process is reflected in the difference between the discrete jumps and the sequences shown in Table 5. The sequences are significantly more positive.

3. The classification scheme: Examples and criteria

To help understanding the classification made, we give examples that fit into three of the four cells of the (2 x 2)-table. The examples look at well-known cases.

3.1 *Some problems*

The short stories given in sections 3.2 to 3.5 are parts of the systematic analysis given in section 4. Recall Figure 1 in the introduction: It distinguishes between (1) the triggering event, and (2) the process it starts that leads to (3) the regime jump, which may take place as a sequence. The process depends upon (4) background factors. Items (1), (2) and (4) causing the jump are increasingly difficult to sort out when the process lasts longer.

It is often possible to identify (1) the triggering event, but the process (2) can only be sketched. The main problem is that the process is conditional on (4) background factors such as the strength of the regime – both as regards its legitimacy and its instruments of oppression. In some cases, several similar events that did not lead to a jump before the triggering event. That this event became the trigger may be due to something that went wrong in the process, or due to background changes, weakening the regime.

A well-organized political regime can absorb even large popular demonstrations and riots. In France *P* stayed constant during the large wave of demonstrations and strikes of 1968, and the French voters reelected President de Gaulle after the demonstrations were over, but one year later, he lost a constitutional reform referendum and resigned. In the same way, the military dictatorship of President Pinochet (in Chile) absorbed the large wave of popular unrest in connection with the breakdown of the fixed exchange rate policy in 1982/83.⁹ He only resigned (peacefully) in 1988 after having lost a plebiscite on the extension of this rule.

The main classification of triggering events is whether they are economic or political in nature and for each of the two whether they are internal or external. Some of the crises that caused the system jump have a complex history of economic and political interaction – here the pivotal event has to be chosen as the triggering event.

Think of Argentina in the two decades from 1965 to 85, where the regime experienced four large jumps.¹⁰ The country has a long history of unrealistic economic policies fueled by populism, and in the two decades mentioned the country experienced the return and subsequent

9. The fixing of the peso-rate to the US \$ was an attempt to eradicate the high residual inflation after the big inflation 1972-75 was stopped by standard monetary means.

10. As usual the large jumps were of a cyclical nature: -8 in 1966, +15 in 1973, -15 in 1976 and +16 in 1983.

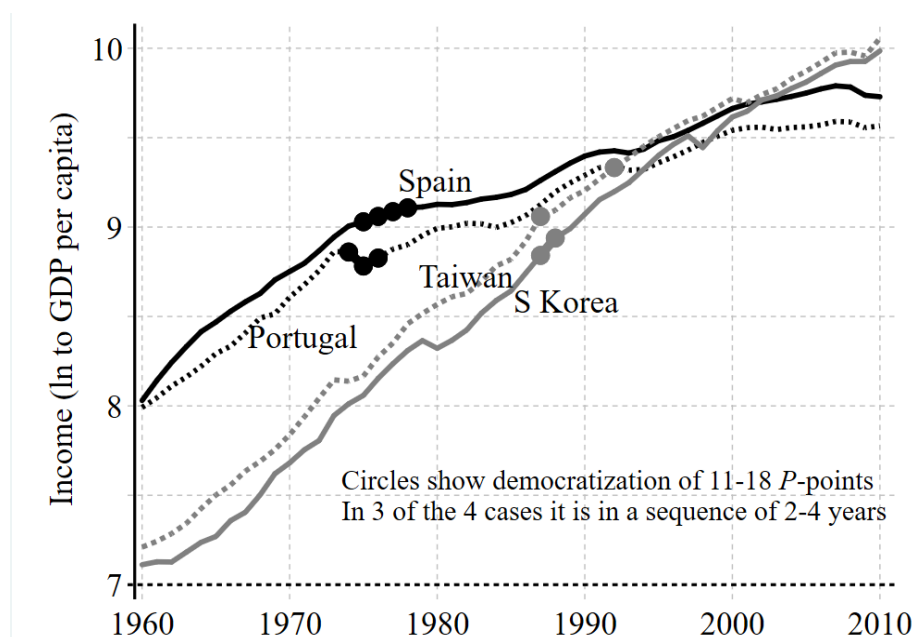
death of Juan Peron, the dirty (civil) war, repeated waves of high inflation, default on the national debt, several military coups, and the Falkland War with the UK. These events did follow from each other, but it is impossible to claim that everything was endogenous, so that the tragic path of events were inevitable given the state of the country in 1965. We have tried to identify four triggering events while recognizing the background factors of economic mismanagement were favorable for large regime jumps – it is actually quite easy in three of the four cases.

3.2 The internal-political cell: Four cases of countries joining the West:

Portugal, Spain, Taiwan and South Korea are countries, which first had a strong economic development and then came a jump when the old dictator died. Figure 7 shows where the triggering events happened relative to the economic development. The death caused a process to start, during which popular pressures emerged. In these cases, the jump seems to be unconnected to short-run economic development. Thus, the triggering events are classify as internal and political.

However, when the jump occurred the country had reached an income level of $y \approx 9 \pm 0.5$, where the countries were a long way below the transition path, and a large positive jump resulted.

Figure 7. Four cases of countries that has joined the group of wealthy countries



Note: The increases in P -points are: (i) 1974-76 in Portugal 18 points; (ii) 1975-78 in Spain 16 points; (iii) 1987-88 in South Korea 11 points; and (iv) 1987 and 1992 in Taiwan 14 points, which is treated as two jumps.

The four countries all had *too* little democracy with *P*-scores well below the transition curve when the jumps occurred, and the jumps were in the direction reducing the tension. In two of the cases – Portugal and Spain – the jump overshoot the curve, to make the countries *too* democratic for a while until income caught up, suggesting a spatial effect.¹¹

3.3 *The external-political cell: The post-socialist wave*

The data contains nine old socialist countries that left socialism, and became 28 countries. Table 6 is a condensed version of the process of their regime jump.

A large literature deals with collapse of socialism in these countries. The key event was that the Communist Party of the USSR ‘imploded’ during 1988/89, due to internal political events. With a large reduction in central power, a process started that spread throughout the socialist world, both in the countries under Soviet patronage, and in Yugoslavia and Albania that were outside the Soviet sphere. It involved large popular demonstrations in most countries, and in the next few year a serious economic setback occurred. The economic downturn did not cause the political regime jump – it was a consequence of the collapse of the old regime notably in the management regime for the state owned firms that dominated the economy.

Table 6. The jumps 1988-92 in the 28 countries – most changes have one big jump

Country	Jump/sequence	Country	Jump/sequence	Country	Jump/sequence
USSR, 1989, $P = -4$		Kazakhstan	3, stable	Countries created (long) before 1988	
Lithuania	16, stable	Kirgizstan	3, fairly stable	Hungary	17, stable
Latvia	14, stable	Tajikistan	0, unstable	Mongolia	16, stable
Armenia	13, unstable	Turkmenistan	-3, stable	Bulgaria	15, stable
Belarus	13, unstable	Uzbekistan	-3, stable	Poland	15, fairly stable
Estonia	12, fairly stable	Yugoslavia, 1988, $P = -5$		Czechoslovakia	15, stable
Ukraine	12, fairly unstable	Slovenia	15, stable	Czech Republic	Stable since 1993
Moldova	11, fairly stable	Macedonia	11, fairly stable	Slovak Republic	Stable since 1993
Russia	11, unstable	Croatia	2, unstable	Albania	14, fairly stable
Georgia	10, fairly stable	Serbia	0, unstable	Romania	13, fairly stable
Azerbaijan	7, unstable and back	Montenegro	Stable since 2006		

Note a) In 1993 Czechoslovakia broke into two countries. The two big countries of Ex-Yugoslavia Croatia and Serbia had their democratization (of a jump of 13 points) in 1999/2000 after the wars between Serbia and Croatia and in Bosnia and Kosovo were finally over. Montenegro broke with Serbia in 2006. Belarus has experienced a major step back into totalitarianism in 1996. Armenia has seen a major zigzag in 1995-1998. Finally, Azerbaijan has gradually turned more authoritarian. In addition to the countries listed various small countries, which are not internationally recognized, exists, of which Kosovo is closest to general recognition. The year 1990 has $P = 0$ in the USSR, as it was a rather chaotic year.

11. This paper does not analyze spatial effects, even when it is obvious that there are such effects.

The initial triggering event for all the large jumps listed in Table 6 is thus a political shock that came from the center, and spread throughout the socialist world.¹² Only a few East Asian Communist countries and Cuba managed to protect their regime against the political wave. All the European (or near-European countries) saw large jumps toward democracy and only a few jumped back later on, while the six poor central Asian countries, listed at the end of the new Ex-USSR group, stayed authoritarian. The events are classified as foreign political shocks, except in Russia, where it was an internal political shock.

3.1 The internal-economic cell: Reactions to economic mismanagement:

The coup in Chile 1973 gave a jump of the Polity index of -13 points. Much has been written about the coup, and since it had a strong Left/Right dimension, rather different explanations have been given involving various conspiracies. It is clear that Allende's Unidad Popular government had created both high hopes and a severe crisis due to mismanagement of the economy:¹³ Real GDP was falling and the inflation rate was fast approaching hyperinflation. This caused a major wave of demonstrations, and counter-demonstrations organized by the parties of the ruling block.

The coup-makers were the heads of the army, navy and air force, and the stated purpose of the coup was to save the nation from the economic chaos. There is no reason to believe that the coup-makers did not mean what they said, so the triggering event was the economic mismanagement of the democratically elected government. Thus, it is classified as an internal economic trigger.¹⁴

From our reading of the cases it appears that external economic events have caused no regime changes.

12. Table 5 uses the last year of the USSR and Yugoslavia to calculate the difference in the first year for the new countries. Thus, the post-socialist peak shown on Figures 3 and 4 include the initial events and jumps, but the two peaks are much higher.

13. Chile has many fine economists, but none of these was associated with the Allende government, which was very critical of economic theory in general and neo-classical theory in particular.

14. When Chile changed back to democracy in 1988/89 by a two-year sequence of two upward jumps of +5 and +9 polity-points it was due to internal political events.

4. The triggering events

Section 4.1 deals with the problems and the domestic-political bias in the stories. Section 4.2 gives the main table, while sections 4.3 and 4.4 considers some cases.

4.1 Problems in in interpretation

The articles in Economist may be a note of one paragraph or an article up to two pages. The later often describe the process leading to the change. If there is more than one months between the trigger and the eventual change, as is normally the case, the story told is often quite involved, and it is frequently difficult to point to the crucial event starting the process. This is particularly true, when there is a lull in the process. Fortunately we only have to choose between the four cells: (1: Domestic, Political), (2: Domestic, Economic), (3: External, Political), and (4: External, Economic).

It is a strong impression when reading the 250 articles that they deal with *domestic politics* that tells newsworthy stories. Even when the journal is called ‘Economist’, it is obvious that that the journalists writing the articles are concentrating on the stories and rarely discuss if the economy mattered. This might, of course, mean that they did not. It is even possible from a first reading to argue that all changes are due to internal politics. We think that this is somewhat misleading. Therefore, we have noted all cases where the economy or external events are mentioned.

Think of the wave of system changes around 1990. In most cases, the government did nothing when the USSR collapsed, but then students and other active citizen picked up that collapse. This led to demonstrations that induced governments to make some reforms to pre-empt the protests, but then things got out of control and a new political system resulted.

It is clear what happened in the cases covered by Table 6, but it is more difficult in countries that was far from the USSR. Congo (Brazzaville) and Nicaragua are such cases. Between 1963 and 1990 Congo (Br) was the *People's Republic of the Congo* that was a one-party country with a Marxist-Leninist ideology.¹⁵ Then the ideology and many policies were quickly changed and a free election took place in 1991. The article describe the new parties and the peacefulness of the process from the regime change to the election, but it does not mention the collapse of the socialist word. However, it is clear the triggering event must have

15. The two Congos have had several names: Congo (Br) has been the Republic of Congo before 1963 then it was the Peoples Republic of Congo to 1990, whereupon it returned to its old name. Congo (Ki) was the Democratic Republic of the Congo until 1971 where it became Zaire until 1997 when it reverted to its old name.

been external. Even more puzzling is the article about Nicaragua, where the Sandinista government allowed a free election in 1990. It did mention the economic chaos (that included hyperinflation and a debt burden of 10 times GDP), and it did mention pressures from the USA, but there is only a brief remark about the collapse of the USSR in the last paragraph.

In order to get the perspective right all country stories in Wikipedia has been used for a check, and the economic data are used as well. The advantage of the Wikipedia is that it tells the history drawing longer lines, so it gives a nice check on the short-run stories in the Economist.

4.2 *Coding the stories about system changes*

Table 7 covers the main coding of the stories about the 262 larger jumps. The stories normally cover some of the process leading from the triggering event to the change. The table list the types of events reported to be important for the jumps. In average 2.5 such events are listed.

Table 7. Types of events mentioned as important for the 262 jumps

	Countries	113
	Jump	262
	Of which sequences	83
Domestic political	Demonstrations/riots	69
	Fight within government	16
	Ruler takes steps toward democracy	93
	Ruler takes steps toward autocracy	46
	New constitution	41
	Collapse of policy	17
	Election unfree	51
	Election free	108
	Coup non violent	63
	Coup violent	19
	Natural death of ruler	11
	Murder of ruler	8
	Civil war won	10
	Civil war lost	3
Peace accord ending civil war	8	
Domestic economic	Negative growth	10
	High inflation	9
	Other	4
External political	Collapse of USSR and Yugoslavia	24
	Pressure from abroad	28
	War won	1
	War lost	7
External economic	International economic crisis	0
	Changes in commodity prices	0
Number of events	(average per jump 2.5)	646

We are looking for the primary event triggering the process. Obviously, the promulgation of a new constitution is not primary, but part of the process leading to the change, while the first free election after a period exceeding the normal election period without a (free) election is the jump itself. So, is a coup, or a ruler tightening his rule, e.g., by jailing the leaders of the opposition or canceling the next election.

None of the stories claims that external economic events are important for the jump. They are rarely mentioned, also in 1973/80, where commodity prices did exhibit dramatic swings and 2009/14 during the international banking/debt crisis. We know that, e.g., the copper-price drop after the Vietnam War did affect the economic development of Zambia and Chile, but it appears to have had no influence of the regimes in the two countries.

Most coup-makers issue a proclamation after they have occupied the national broadcasting center. This proclamation may reflect what the coup-makers think, but it is normally a great deal more lofty than the actual goals of new men in power. It never says that the coup-makers have used a lucky situation to conquer the gravy train! The articles in the Economist often give the announced motives and some speculation about the true motives, where a gap seems obvious.

The most common declared motive is to reduce the wheeling and dealing of corrupt politicians. It is part of the military ethos that officers are upright and honest. We characterize such declarations as domestic/political in nature. However, if the motive is declared to be the economic crisis (and the country does have a crisis) we say that they have an economic trigger.

Often the Economist mention the triggering events happened on the background of an unsatisfactory economic development, but then it has typically lasted for a long time. It is common that economists note that the gradual slowing down of growth in the USSR may have had some causal relation to the big collapse. But here the process took about 20 years before the actual collapse that lasted only 2-3 years.

The key point to note as regards Table 7 is the big variation of the domestic political events. It is easy to further subdivide the list – triggering events are most diverse.

4.3 At long last: The (2x2) classification of the 262 triggering events

Table 8 reports the final count in the four cells (1: Domestic, Political), (2: Domestic, Economic), (3: External, Political), and (4: External, Economic). If the chain of events going from the triggering event to the jump are all within the domestic political sphere, as is often the case, there is no doubt that the triggering event is in cell (1).

Table 8. The 262 triggering events

	Political	Economic
Domestic	215	11
External	40	0

We have found six cases of a successful foreign military intervention made with the explicit purpose of changing a political system.¹⁶ About 50 large changes happened 1989-92 in connection with the collapse of the USSR. In some of these cases, the USSR (or Yugoslavia) were the protector of the government that promptly collapsed without the protection. In other cases, the connection is rather weak, as the government decided that it had to make a reorientation to adjust to the changing world order. In such cases, the government did not announce that the reorientation was for international reasons. We take such cases to be due to the background factor of the international ‘climate’.

16. Two foreign military interventions were made by France; one by Tanzania; two by the USA; and one by Vietnam. In addition 3-4 cases exists where some foreign interference took place, but where it is unclear if it was crucial. Finally, there are 3-4 cases where foreign mercenaries were involved. They may or may not have worked partly for some public agency in their country of origin (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Denard).

5. Conclusion

Above we have identified 262 larger political system changes in 170 countries between 1960 and 2015. The fact that the two main sources – the Polity index and the Economist – largely agree that such changes occurred, must mean that it is clear *when* the larger changes occurred.

The paper has attempted to identify – within broad classes – what the triggering event was in the 262 cases. In many cases, it is quite difficult. One reason that it is difficult is because the events are rather different and soon enters into a complex process of events. Also some of them are purely documented in our sources. In some smaller countries, such as Burundi, military coups are common, and little is written about each of them, in others, such as Chile there has been one two, and a lot has been written about them.

For now, it seems that we can draw one conclusion: Seen from the perspective of economics triggering events are largely random. However, once a triggering event occurs the path of the Democratic Transition is an attractor for the resulting jump. This is why the democratic Transition is so strong in the long-run data.

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