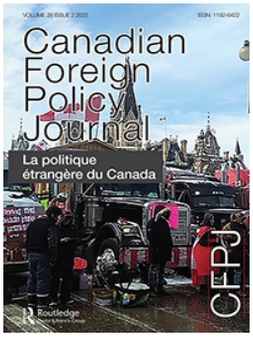

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Political shocks in foreign policy and international politics: an alternative approach

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ABSTRACT

Political shocks are used extensively in research on foreign policy and international politics yet the analysis of political shocks, as its own topic of study, remains underdeveloped, and especially so when compared to analyses of other key concepts in the field. What we do know about shocks primarily comes from work where the focus is typically on other phenomena driving the inquiry. In this effort we reconceptualize what is meant by political shocks, focusing on actual versus potential shocks, create a methodology for identifying actual political shocks, based on a punctuated equilibrium approach to foreign policy change, illustrate its utility with application to human rights violations by countries, and suggest at the conclusion a theoretical framework that may help to spur a more comprehensive approach to explaining political shocks effects for both interstate and intrastate politics.

RÉSUMÉ

Les chocs politiques sont largement utilisés dans la recherche sur la politique étrangère et la politique internationale. Pourtant, l'analyse des chocs politiques, en tant que sujet d'étude à part entière, reste sous-développée, en particulier si on la compare aux analyses d'autres concepts clés dans ce domaine. Ce que nous savons sur les chocs politiques provient principalement de travaux où l'accent est généralement mis sur d'autres phénomènes à l'origine de l'étude. Dans cet effort, nous reconceptualisons ce que l'on entend par chocs politiques, en nous concentrant sur les chocs réels par rapport aux chocs potentiels ; nous créons une méthodologie pour identifier les chocs politiques réels, basée sur une approche d'équilibre ponctué du changement de politique étrangère ; nous illustrons son utilité en l'appliquant aux violations des droits de l'homme par les pays, et ; nous suggérons en conclusion un cadre théorique qui pourrait aider à stimuler une approche plus complète pour expliquer les effets des chocs politiques à la fois pour la politique interétatique et intra-étatique.

KEYWORDS

Political shocks; foreign policy; interstate conflict; human rights

Introduction

Consider the following events: the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States; the British decision to exit the European Union; the sudden end of the Cold War and the

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disintegration of the Soviet Union; the 2016 election of Donald Trump; the Russian invasion of the Crimea; the Haitian earthquake of 2010; genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia; the Covid-19 pandemic; the Iranian revolution of 1978; the economic meltdown of 2008. Together they constitute a few of the cases that are typically addressed in the international relations (IR) literature[1] as political shocks that have changed the course of interstate and intrastate relations and may have altered the nature of regional or global international politics.

Understandably then political shocks have come to be considered highly salient for explaining major changes to interstate relations. Yet, the analysis of political shocks, as its own topic of study, remains underdeveloped. No overarching study of political shocks currently exists, and with very few exceptions, what we do know primarily comes from work (as we note below) where the focus is typically on other phenomena driving the inquiry.

Our purpose is to offer a new conceptualization and measurement strategy to address some of the extant problems in the large-N quantitative IR literature that utilize the concept of political shocks. We focus on the large-N literature for two reasons. First, a large-N approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of a broad variety of political shocks occurring under a large variety of domestic political and international circumstances and allows for rigorous hypothesis testing. Second, as we note below a) the quantitative literature has focused extensively on political shocks; and b) the journals with the highest exposure among IR scholars have published overwhelmingly articles that focus on political shocks using large-N quantitative analysis.[2] Thus we hope to remedy key conceptual and empirical issues for scholars using this approach.

We proceed as follows: First, we provide a brief review of the relevant literature. Second, we offer a new strategy for defining and measuring political shocks. Finally, we provide one illustration of our approach's application. We consider this effort as only the first step towards a more systematic identification of political shocks and their effects on international and intrastate politics; we hope that it will lead to additional debate, discussion, and more systematic analyses of this phenomenon.

A brief review of the literature

Political shocks may constitute an underdeveloped area of inquiry, but they have certainly not been ignored. A quick glance at an N-gram of mentions of political shocks in books indicates that, if anything, references to political shocks have dramatically increased over time, [3] and especially in the post-Cold War era (Figure 1).

Our review of the journals literature across 14 academic journals,[4] underscores the general interest in political shocks: approximately 1575 articles published between 1990 and 2020 included the term "shock". Over half of these articles either casually referred to shocks or included them by default in methodological decisions (e.g. the specification of shocks via yearly fixed effects) and did not include a substantive discussion of the concept. We focus instead on those works that discussed political shocks in some detail, including concept development, operationalization and/or detailed steps for process tracing among mixed-method designs.[5]

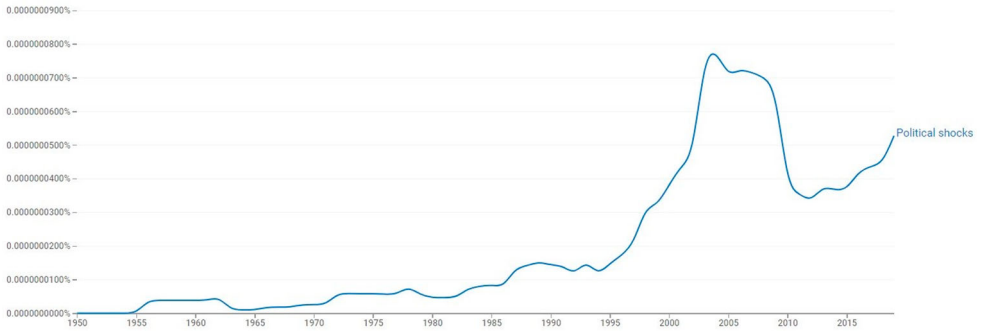

Figure 1. References to Political Shocks, 1950–2018 (Source: Google N-Gram).[52]

What is a political shock?

While there is no consensus on what constitutes a political shock, there are several properties that have been identified in the literature. Nearly all work on the phenomenon suggests that a political shock is an *event* with a set of attributes. One attribute is that the event is *unanticipated or unexpected* by the actors involved. Second, that the event manifests a *dramatic or major disruption* to current conditions. Third, that the event occurs *suddenly* and thus is different from evolving or slow-moving processes of change.

Additionally, most of the literature characterizes political shocks as occurring across *all levels of analysis* and emanating either endogenously or exogenously (e.g. Goertz & Diehl, 1995; Rasler, 2000).[6] Furthermore, there appears to be some consensus that political shocks appear to be *reasonably common occurrences* in international politics (Hensel 2001; McNamee & Zhang, 2019; Weber, 2019; Miller et al., 2016; Simmons & Elkins, 2004).[7] There is far less agreement over whether political shock events can be addressed as objective or perceptual phenomena.

What types of events are classified in the literature as political shocks? Tables 1 and 2 (online)[8] provide an illustration of the range of events that are labelled as political shocks. The overarching commonality shared by most of these events is their *potential* to disrupt the ongoing stability of a state's policies or political processes (Lazarev, 2019; Imerman, 2018; Colgan & Lucas, 2017). Whether or not they *actually* disrupt ongoing political processes and outcomes, however, depends on a wide range of factors involving both the nature of the event and the vulnerability of the actors impacted by the event.

For instance, the sudden end of the Cold War was clearly a political shock for those actors deeply involved in the conflict but less so for many other states. The global financial crisis of 2007–2008 or the oil "shocks" of the 1970s also have had differential effects on states, with some experiencing substantial shocks to their economies while others experienced minimal effects. Intrastate or civil wars have been identified by various studies as political shocks (Hegre et al., 2017; Bruck et al., 2012; Morey, 2009), yet some intrastate conflicts are protracted while others are not; some carry a high death toll while others exhibit limited casualties; some recur within the same state while others occur only once within some countries. Similar arguments can be made about interstate wars and militarized disputes, acts of terrorism, or executive turnover.

Our point here is that the extent to which an actual event constitutes a political shock may very much depend on both the nature of the event and the actor's circumstances at

the time.[9] It is unlikely that all such events have a uniform "shock" effect on all states experiencing them. We return to this point below in our reconceptualization of political shocks.

Theorizing the effects of political shocks in the literature

We concur with Maoz and Jones's (2016, p. 294) critique of this literature: not only are the causal mechanisms underspecified and poorly understood, but research in the field also has failed to specify whether identified causal mechanisms are uniformly applicable across various political shocks. To this critique we add another: it is unclear whether the effects attributed to political shocks in the literature are unique to the nature of political shocks, or, part of causal dynamics involved with other phenomena. When researchers treat interstate and intrastate wars, regime changes, or acts of terrorism as political shocks, are they focusing on a political shock-based explanation or are they simply renaming these dynamics as political shocks? [10]

Of the few works that develop political shock-specific explanations, the most useful theoretical approach comes from studies utilizing a punctuated equilibrium (PE) model[11] for studying major change in the foreign policies of states (Diehl & Goertz, 2001; Goertz & Diehl, 1995; Joly & Richter, 2019; Lee, Mitchell, Schmidt, & Yang, 2020 Rasler, 2000; Rasler, Thompson, & Ganguly, 2013;). Stripped to its essentials, the PE approach argues that once policies are adopted, for reasons related to both political dynamics and the policy processes of states, policymakers continue down the same general policy path until a major disruption occurs (a punctuation in the state's equilibrium), opening a "window of opportunity" for a major change in policy direction. Political shocks, including unanticipated major policy failures, are prime candidates for puncturing a state's equilibrium. In this sense a punctuated equilibrium model is highly useful for assessing nature and salience of political shocks.

The PE approach is consistent with much of our understanding of international politics. For those who work with large-N research designs,[12] by far the best predictor of the dependent variable of interest is the lag of the dependent variable in the empirical model, suggesting a very high level of path dependency[13] in state behaviour. When dramatic change does occur, it is likely associated with political shocks that punctuate the stability in relationships. For example, using a punctuated equilibrium approach, Goertz and Diehl (1995; Diehl & Goertz, 2001) demonstrate that political shocks temporarily open a "policy window" of opportunity to change policy, which can result in either the initiation and/or the termination of enduring rivalries.[14]

Similarly, Rasler (2000) focuses on the salience of political shocks in explaining the termination of the protracted rivalry between Egypt and Israel. She demonstrates that ongoing rivalries reflect much continuity in relationships until one or more political shocks play a "critical role in transforming intractable conflicts if they influence the adversaries to re-evaluate their prior expectations" (p. 701). Political shocks also appear to be necessary conditions, and she concurs that such shocks can have either escalatory or de-escalatory effects, depending on "context, timing, and leader expectations." In this version of PE, a political shock not only impacts policymakers' expectations about ongoing relationships, but the policy window is also opened for policy entrepreneurs who seek to overcome extant commitments to old strategies, and as well to possible external third-party pressures.[15]

Thus, the punctuated equilibrium model appears to be not only useful for explaining conditions under which foreign policies and state behaviour continues or changes, but

also for providing additional insight into how to reconceptualize and identify political shocks. To that task we now turn.

Reconceptualizing political shocks

There is substantial consensus in the literature that political shocks entail events with the following attributes: unanticipated or unexpected by the actors involved; occurring suddenly; and creating a major disruption to current conditions. Yet the empirical approach to identifying political shocks is based on classes of events that may not meet at least two of these three criteria (unanticipated and highly disruptive). Typically, interstate and intrastate wars, along with irregular transfers of power, major disasters, rapid changes in power distributions, terrorist activity, or loss of external patronage (e.g. Goertz & Diehl, 1995; Rasler, 2000) are used to identify a political shock. However, some wars are unexpected/unanticipated while others are not; the same is the case with changes in power distributions, intrastate wars, terrorist activity[16] or loss of external patronage.

Even more problematic in the use of classes of events is the requirement that events be of sufficient magnitude to punctuate the ongoing equilibrium in the policy process.[17] How can researchers identify the appropriate magnitude of an event being experienced in order to consider it a shock? One way of doing so is to identify policymakers' claims about these events in order to gauge perceptions about magnitude. This is a sound approach for case studies but is virtually impossible to accomplish if the scholar is engaged in large-N empirical analysis.[18] Thus, most of the large-N research has simply *assumed* that certain classes of events (e.g. wars, civil wars, major acts of terror) carry sufficient magnitude to be categorized as political shocks. At best, this is an overly generous assumption.

Therefore, we offer an alternative conceptualization, suggesting that classes of events, in and of themselves, constitute an inadequate conceptualization of political shocks, consistent with the theoretical perspective of punctuated equilibrium. The classes of events generally described in the literature are unanticipated/unexpected, occur with some immediacy, and have the *potential* for dramatically altering the status quo. However, they may or may not meet what is at the heart of studies focusing on political shocks: the actual, substantial alteration to a critical aspect of the status quo being experienced by the impacted state.[19]

Thus, we focus on the concept of political shocks that in addition to being unexpected and occurring rapidly, also must meet the criterion of demonstrating an *actual*, dramatic impact on the status quo within a state, separate from the dependent variable of interest. If we cannot show a major disturbance to the ongoing stability within the state, then the state has not experienced a political shock, consistent with the theoretical direction of the punctuated equilibrium model. Therefore, we move beyond the literature's emphasis on classes of events by requiring an actual empirical demonstration of a dramatic change in a state's stability shortly[20] after a potential political shock event has occurred.

Operationalizing political shocks

Rather than operationalizing political shocks by events type, our approach to operationalization begins by first identifying instances of disruptions to a state's equilibrium, and then second, by asking if such disruptions are related to events that are typically and

immediately associated with such changes. What types of disruptions should occur in the context of political shocks? The general international relations literature is heavily populated with works that focus on conditions associated with state instability; space limitations preclude their enumeration here.[21] Previous work however suggests two critical dimensions involving the stability of states. One is a major change to a state's economic resource base (e.g. Alesina, Ozler, Roubini, & Swagel, 1996; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Jong-A-Pin, 2009). The second is a major change to a state's governance process (e.g. Alesina & Perotti, 1996; Hegre & Sambanis, 2006; Jong-A-Pin, 2009). Major changes to a state's economic resource base and as well to its governance process should create substantial uncertainty for policy makers in addressing external security threats, ongoing foreign policy commitments, and internal threats to leadership survival. Therefore, we empirically identify short-term,[22] major changes to a state's economy and/or its governance process as measures of disruptions to a state's stability.[23]

We operationalize major change to a state's economic resource base by first calculating annual growth in GDP, and then identifying cases where there is a dramatic change from normal patterns for each state. If the change in growth rate in a year is equal to or greater than one standard deviation beyond its mean rate of change, we consider the change a punctuation in the normal growth rate in a state's economy. Using this procedure, we identified every case of punctuation in the economic stability of every state (when data were available) between 1961 and 2019.[24] This procedure yielded 766 cases for roughly 177 states.[25]

Are these large deviations from the normal ebb and flow of states' economic growth processes accompanied by events typically classified as shocks in the literature? To answer this question we generated a sample of over 100 cases from the 766 we had uncovered.[26] Then, we linked these sampled changes to sets of event categories that the literature indicates are events reflecting political shocks but in our formulation are only considered events that may create political shocks. These include economic shocks; natural disasters; regime changes and coups; major interstate and intrastate conflicts; sudden changes in global power distributions, and large terrorist events.[27] Additionally we consulted event history sources when they were available. [28]

Event tracing is a difficult and arduous process and can create numerous potential biases regarding both reliability and validity issues. While reliability issues can be addressed through inter-coder reliability checks, the validity issue is more problematic: many of the 177 states included in this effort have had insufficient attention to them either in the academic literature or in current events sources. Creating event histories around all 766 cases of major economic change would be highly problematic and likely yield both many false positives and negatives.

Therefore, we limited event tracing[29] to the sample we generated. Two coders reviewed the information associated with each major change in the sample, searching for qualifying events. To qualify as the appropriate event, it needed to meet the criteria of being unanticipated, occurring quickly, and adjacent or immediately prior to the time the state's economy was experiencing a major change. As noted in (online) Table 2, the two coders disagreed on only three cases where major economic change may not have been accompanied by events normally associated with political shocks. Two of these cases (these cases are Russia and Poland, both occurring in 1992) include circumstances where the accompanying event was a policy change *intended* to restructure the

state's economy *and* resulted in substantial economic damage.[30] Whether or not policymakers expected the economic consequence of their actions (e.g. major policy failure) is very much unclear, and if it was expected, then it would violate the criterion of being an "unanticipated" event.[31] Thus, even if we classify these three cases as false positives, there still appears to be over 97 percent concurrence between the cases in our sample of major economic change and potential political shock events, giving us substantial confidence in our empirical approach.

Using the same approach to calculate disruptions in the stability of a state's governance is far more problematic. Both the academic literature and applied work offer a large variety of approaches to measuring political instability. Unfortunately, most depend on classes of events to signal instability, and we have the same concerns and questions using classes of events to measure disruption as we did with equating potential political shocks with actual political shocks.

The measure we propose is one that can consistently reflect major breaks in a state's governance process, akin to the fluctuations in the state's economy: the relative political extraction (RPE) measure pioneered by Kugler and associates (Arbetman & Kugler, 2018 Kugler & Tammen, 2012;).[32] Political extraction of resources for governmental purposes is clearly a political process; it reflects the extent to which governments are able and willing to utilize societal resources for public policy. Substantial "under-extraction" reflects either the inability or unwillingness of the government to generate the typical amount of resources it usually does for both domestic and foreign policy pursuits. Substantial "over-extraction" indicates that the government is generating unusual amounts of additional revenue for policy purposes. While trends in over or under extraction may be due to a variety of political dynamics, both immediate major downward and upward changes in political extraction in a year should indicate punctuations in the political equilibrium, as a function of actual shocks to its political system.[33]

As with economic disruption, we generate a set of cases, using the Kugler et al. RPE data to identify instances across states (and time) when a state dramatically "under" or "over" extracts resources from its economy at a rate that is one standard deviation beyond its normal (mean) rate of extraction. This exercise yields 823 cases across 177 states for the 1961–2017 timeframe. Essentially these cases constitute a dimension separate from cases based on major economic change; the correlation between the two dimensions is quite low at .25. Since economic and RPE change appear to constitute separate dimensions, we suggest that political shocks manifested on either dimension constitute two different types of punctuations to a state's stability.

To illustrate a sense of face validity for the cases using RPE-based punctuations, we offer two examples,[34] using two very dissimilar states: the United States and Sierra Leone. Figure 2, demonstrating RPE-based punctuations to the political equilibrium of the United States, [35] illustrates well the difference between very similar events that do and do not become political shocks. Between 1961and 2017 there are six instances[36] of punctuations in the political equilibrium; these are the cases that surpass the mean rate of change in political extraction by one standard deviation. All of these major changes are accompanied by well-known events considered to be major political shocks: the 1964–65 case follows immediately after the assassination of President Kennedy; the 1969 case is associated with the shock of the Tet offensive; the 1971 case parallels the first major oil shock of the 1970s; the 1983 case is associated with the

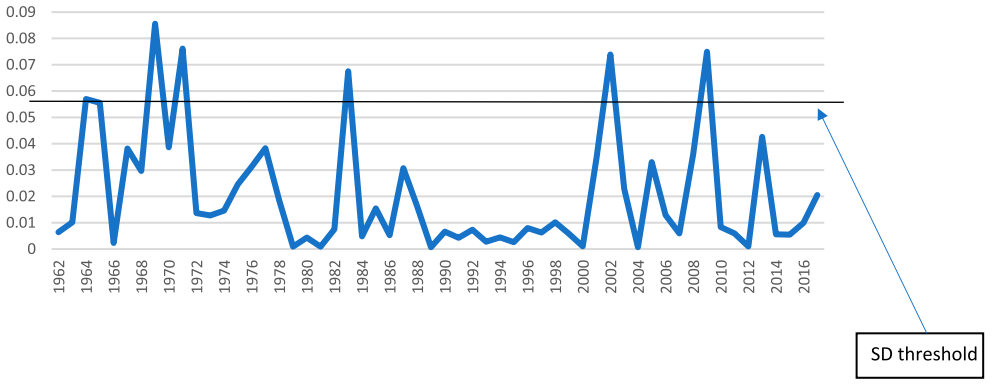

Figure 2. United States, Changes in RPE from Previous Year, 1961-2017.

bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon; the 2002 case is immediately preceded by 9/11; and the 2009 case is virtually in tandem with the global economic crisis of 2008.

The U.S. case also illustrates, consistent with our argument, that not all potential shocks events translate into political shocks. For instance, the second oil crisis at the end of the 1970s does not have the impact that the first one registered; there is no punctuation in the political equilibrium. Likewise, while the attacks on U.S. marines in Beirut and the 9/11 attack on the U.S. mainland clearly register, none of the other 2,600 terrorist attacks on U.S. targets[37] appear to create the punctuated equilibrium in political extraction that would be associated with actual political shocks.[38]

That very similar events do not necessarily translate into political shocks is not surprising. Repeated encounters with certain events eliminate the uniqueness of the event. Additionally, as a classic example of "fighting the last war", policymakers who have once encountered a political shock will seek to prepare for a repeat of the event. Thus, scholars should use much caution in identifying classes of events as political shocks unless they can demonstrate that specific events precipitate disruption to a state's stability.

It is clear as well that political shocks that are regional or global in nature (compared to shocks unique to a single state actor) are likely to have differential impacts on states, depending on state circumstances. For example, in the North American region, the 1971 oil crisis constituted a political shock for the US but not for Canada or Mexico, two major oil producers. Likewise, as noted on the relative political extraction measure, the 2008 economic crisis was a political shock for both the U.S. and Canada but not for Mexico.

As a second illustration, we offer the case of Sierra Leone's major changes in RPE, noted in Figure 3. Sierra Leone demonstrates five cases of dramatic RPE change between 1961 and 2017. Each of these cases are accompanied by major events that are considered as political shocks in the extant literature.[39] As with the U.S. case, we find complete correspondence between these dramatic changes to processes of political extraction and what the literature typically notes to be events that would create political shocks.

Illustrating the use of political shocks: respect for human rights

There are numerous ways to use these two measures of political shocks to probe a variety of phenomena of interest to scholars. We present one example, probing the effects of

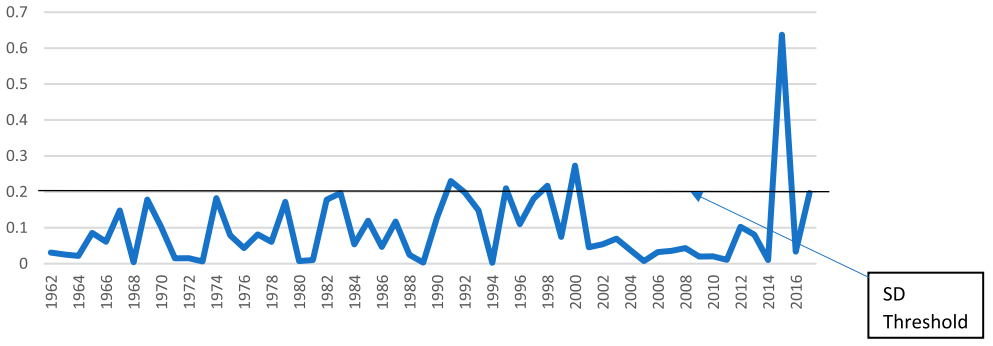

Figure 3. Sierra Leone, Changes in RPE from Previous Year, 1962-2017.

political shocks on respect for human rights by states. The issue of human rights has been a major concern for scholars in the field: it has been a contentious issue between states; abuse of human rights is a source of migration that often becomes a catalyst for interstate conflict within regions; and considerations around human rights has been a source of substantial dispute regarding global and regional norms.

How are political shocks related to human rights issues? We suggest that political shocks create for policy-makers substantial new uncertainties regarding both their external[40] and domestic security environments. Uncertainty regarding the domestic environment often translates for policymakers to concerns regarding leadership survival both in democratic and non- democratic states. In democratic polities leaders may be punished for failing to anticipate dramatic disruptions, and/or if the government's ability to provide public goods is hampered as a result. In authoritarian regimes economic shocks likely decrease even further the provision of public goods and decrease the ability to provide sufficient private goods to smaller selectorates, jeopardizing the coalitions that keep the leader in office.[41]

Under such circumstances we anticipate two possible outcomes. One possibility is that political shocks, especially in non-democracies, could yield higher levels of governmental repression of human rights as political leaders seek to dampen or pre-empt protests over failure to deliver public and private goods during periods of dramatic economic change. The second possibility is that, as political shocks create a "policy window" through which policymakers reconsider extant policies, governments may allow political reform and less repression. While the second option is plausible, we would bet on the first possibility since engaging in such reforms in non-democratic polities following a political shock creates greater risks for leadership survival then more familiar methods of political control. To test these competing possibilities, we delineate in Table 1 a base model typically used in the literature on human rights and compare it with one which adds the political shock dimension to the model.

The dependent variable in the model is the Physical Integrity Rights Index; the index is ordinal and ranges from 0 (*no government respect for rights*) to 8 (*full government respect for rights*). The index is comprised of data regarding four different rights, including disappearances, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and torture.[42] The index is available for most countries from 1981-2011.

The base model contains a set of variables typically used in the literature to predict levels of human rights in countries (e.g. Davenport, 2007; Murdie & Bhasin, 2011 Poe &

Table 1. Logit Regressions and Odds Ratios for Base and Political Shock Models on Levels of Human Rights.

	PANEL 1		PANEL 2	
	(1) Base Model	(2) Shock Model	(1) Base Model	(2) Shock Model
Political Shock		**−0.032****		**0.555****
		(0.013)		**(0.132)**
Neighbourhood Unrest	−0.106**	−0.101**	0.899**	0.904**
	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.041)	(0.042)
Internal Unrest	−0.231***	−0.236***	0.794***	0.789***
	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.058)	(0.059)
Executive Constraints	0.339***	0.325***	1.403***	1.384***
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.064)	(0.063)
lnGDP Per Capita	0.201**	0.189**	1.223**	1.208**
	(0.094)	(0.095)	(0.115)	(0.152)
lnPopulation	−0.610***	−0.624***	0.543***	0.536***
	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.034)	(0.034)
lnAid Received	−0.090***	−0.094***	0.914***	0.910***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.029)
Third Party Presence	−0.892***	−0.837***	0.410***	0.433***
	(0.203)	(0.206)	(0.083)	(0.089)
Cold War	0.717***	0.748***	2.048***	2.112***
	(0.174)	(0.177)	(0.356)	(0.375)
Observations	3,881	3,827	3,881	3,827
AIC	13674.1	13424.6	13674.1	13424.6
BIC	13774.3	13530.9	13774.3	13530.9

Tate, 1994;). These include internal unrest (Davenport 1995),[43] neighbourhood unrest (Danneman & Ritter, 2013),[44] executive constraint (Marshall & Gurr, 2020), population size (Richards, Webb, & Chad Clay, 2015),[45] state wealth (Richards et al., 2015),[46] net aid assistance (O'hare & Southall, 2007),[47] presence of peacekeeping missions (Murdie & Davis, 2010),[48] and a dummy variable for the Cold War era. Independent variables are lagged by one year. The second model replicates the base model and adds the economic-based political shock variable (also lagged). [49]

Since the dependent variable of interest is ordinal, we use an ordered logistic regression, with clustered robust standard errors as the observations are independent across countries, but not within them (Cameron & Trivedi, 2009 Long, 1997;). We present the results in two panels in the table; the first panel shows the results of the regression while the second panel show the odds ratios for a clearer interpretation of the regression results.

As the base model in Table 1 illustrates, all the standard predictors of levels of human rights behave consistently with the extant literature. Neighbourhood unrest, internal unrest, population size, aid received, and third-party presence are—as expected—correlate with higher levels of repression, while executive constraints, the Cold War,[50] and GDP/capita correlate with lower levels of repression. When the political shock variable is added to the base model, consistent with our prediction, the negative value produced indicates that political shocks are significantly associated with higher levels of human rights repression.

Apart from statistical significance, how much does the political shock variable add to this multicausal accounting for human rights levels across states? To answer this question, we restructure the models to create proportional odds ratios that can be utilized for the type of ordinal data that constitutes the human rights index. This transformation is

represented in Panel B of Table 1. With all other independent variables in the model held constant, the political shock variable accounts for a 44.5% negative change in the odds that a state is in the highest category of human rights protections, compared to any of the other lower categories, after a political shock occurs. These findings provide support for the argument that political shocks, all else equal, will be associated with substantially higher levels of human rights repression especially in non-democratic polities (those with limited executive constraints).

Qualifications, implications, and conclusions

We began with highlighting a series of weaknesses in approaches to the conceptualization, measurement, and explanations surrounding political shocks in the extant literature. Then we generated an alternative approach for identifying political shocks based on major changes to either the economic or political processes of the state and highlighted the link between these disturbance and event that may create political shocks. Finally, we offered one illustration of how economic resource-based political shocks can help account for levels of human rights oppression within states.

We consider this effort to be a first step in addressing more systematically the salience of political shocks for interstate and intrastate politics. In that spirit, we offer four caveats to our approach. First, with respect to the type of punctuations in state equilibrium that we had identified: we focused on sudden, major changes to the growth in state economies and to similar changes in state political extraction. While we are confident that these two dimensions are highly salient for policymakers, we are less sanguine about whether they represent all the relevant dimensions for identifying punctuations in a state's equilibrium. For instance, dramatic changes in the bureaucratic efficiency of states may represent another salient dimension, albeit we lack quality longitudinal data for this assessment. Likewise, it is possible that immediate, major changes in states' military spending may demonstrate another dimension of punctuated equilibrium. Further research however may uncover that such changes march in tandem with changes in political extraction and/or major changes to economic growth patterns. We anticipate conducting further analysis on these dimensions.

Second, we noted that our two dimensions of punctuated equilibria are relatively independent of each other, but they share some 20 percent of cases. Should these cases that are identified on both dimensions be treated differently? Do they represent a fundamentally greater shock than the other cases with perhaps far greater implications for domestic and foreign policies? Our preliminary exploration of these cases yielded inconsistent findings and therefore we have kept this issue on our research agenda.

Third, we caution that empirically we had identified two different types of punctuations: sharp *decreases* and sharp *increases* to both economic growth and political extraction, albeit we treated them as roughly similar. We assume, however, that these two types of punctuations may not impact in the same way on the effected states, or on interested outside parties. For example, a dramatic *decrease* in political extraction can signal a state's vulnerability to other states and within the polity, to non-state actors. A dramatic *increase* in political extraction may signal to other states a growing threat consistent with what scholars identify as a classic security dilemma (e.g. Glaser, 1997 Jervis, 1978;), while for policymakers experiencing the event, they may provide greater flexibility and policy options than previously.

Fourth, we are aware that some scholars will be uncomfortable with the operationalization strategy employed in identifying political shocks. Scholars are used to conceptualizing these shocks mostly in terms of classes of events. We are also aware that our strategy of linking cases of punctuations to events can be problematic given the enormous variety of candidate events and limited inventories of event histories. We have made a "good faith" effort to link these punctuations to classes of events through a sampling process on the economic dimension and through an illustration of cases on the political extraction dimension. While we find extremely few cases where one cannot link a punctuation in equilibrium to a dramatic event, it is quite possible that we have some "false positives" in our data. This is a significant potential validity issue and we will continue to search for cases where punctuations occur but without an unaccompanied triggering event.[51]

Finally, we close with a call to examine the variety of consequences of political shocks, especially for interstate relations. Our approach suggests that political shocks, by creating uncertainties regarding domestic and external security issues, provide opportunities for policymakers to reconsider and to substantially alter the direction of their foreign policies. As rivalry researchers have noted, such reconsiderations can initiate or terminate rivalries and bring about either substantially greater conflict or greater efforts at cooperation between states (e.g. Lee et al., 2020). What is clearly missing in this work, and in the literature as well, is a theory of political shocks that identifies the variety of causal mechanisms that may induce or restrain major policy change (and therefore state behaviour) once the state has experienced an actual political shock. Along with previous efforts (e.g. Goertz and Diehl, Rasler, 2000), we recognize that political shocks constitute a necessary but insufficient condition for major policy change. The next steps should involve a more rigorous theoretical (and empirical) approach to identifying conditions under which shocks, in combination with other causal drivers, create hostility-inducing policy changes and shocks that may drive policymakers towards more cooperative relations with their antagonists. In Appendix A (online) we offer a theoretical framework suggesting a range of causal drivers that may address some of these concerns.

In doing so, however, we caution that a strictly monadic approach to this question is problematic. External parties are also aware of these punctuations and may cease the initiative as well for seeking new relationships with the effected state. Either way, a long research road awaits those seeking to account for fundamental changes in interstate relations. Hopefully this work has taken a few of those steps.

Notes

1. Students of domestic and comparative politics focus as well on political shocks. However, our attention here is primarily on the treatment of political shocks in the IR literature.
2. We are not suggesting that mixed-methods or qualitative approaches, including rigorous case studies are inappropriate for analyses of political shocks. For one excellent example of such work, see Gunitsky, 2017. However, much of the scholarly exposure to the effects of political shocks appears to have come from journals focused on quantitative analysis; over 72 percent of the articles we reviewed focusing on political shocks had a large-N, quantitative methodology (see the review of the literature in the online appendix).

3. References to political shocks increase roughly five-fold after the Cold War's end, although as Figure 1 indicates, the post-Cold War literature has come in two waves, a larger wave after the end of the Cold War and a second, smaller wave following the global economic shock of 2007-2008.
4. The journals reviewed were consistent with TRIP's evaluation of primary IR research sources: *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *International Interactions*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Studies Review*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Politics*, *Security Studies*, and *World Politics*. Our review also includes additional references we consulted whenever relevant.
5. A large portion of even these articles, while more detailed in their discussion and general use of political shocks, were nonetheless focused on some other overarching concept or process as the main topic of the research.
6. Note that we are not requiring a political shock to occur across all levels of analysis; we are simply indicating that a political shock *can* occur at any level of analysis, consistent with the literature on the subject. However, we look at the consequences of such shocks at the level of the state; even a global "shock" may impact some states and not others, depending on state circumstances, as we discuss below.
7. As these works suggest, there are large numbers of political shocks that, in the aggregate, occur across the global political system, albeit they appear as unique events to state policy makers experiencing them.
8. Given tight space limitations, we offer the reader a series of tables and charts online, retrievable at: kellygordell.com/research
9. And some would argue, policymakers' perceptions of the consequences of these events (e.g. Rasler, 2000).
10. For a similar argument regarding domestic policy, see Jones et al. 1998.
11. The PE model was initially pioneered in the field of U.S. domestic public policy (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Brummer, Harnisch, Oppermann, & Panke, 2019) with eventual applications to comparative public policy and foreign policy analysis. Political scientists and public policy scholars in turn had adopted much of this approach from evolutionary biologists (Eldredge, 1985; Gould & Eldredge, 1993).
12. Numerous qualitative studies of foreign policies and inter-state interactions have also noted similar stability in relationships.
13. For discussions of path dependency in both domestic and foreign policy see Schieder, 2019; Sarigil, 2015.
14. They emphasize as well that political shocks are a necessary but not sufficient condition for dramatic changes to ongoing relationships between states.
15. Rasler's work also suggests that "the more entrenched the expectations and the deeper the strategic inertia, the stronger the shocks must be in order to tip expectations into a new direction" (Rasler, 2000, p. 702).
16. By one account France has experienced no fewer than 65 terrorist attacks between 1958 and 2020. Twenty-two of those incidents occurred between 2012 and 2019, averaging over three incidents per year. According to one research consortium, nearly 80 percent of those involved with the attacks were on a terror watch list and 97 percent were on the "radar" of authorities. See NBC News (2019), "Report: Nearly all terror attacks in France carried out by radicals already known to police." Retrieved at: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/report-nearly-all-terror-attacks-france-carried-out-radicals-already-n955276 (May 25, 2011).
17. This is not only a threshold issue (is it a shock or not), but as Rasler (2000) notes some contexts will need stronger shocks than others in order to dislodge extant commitments to ongoing policies.
18. We are not denying that there is a very strong perceptual component involved with political shocks. Our position however is that a certain set of outcomes associated with political shocks

should link very strongly to policymakers' perceptions. In this sense we may not cover all political shocks that meet our objective criteria as some policymakers will perceive certain events to be a shock even when they fail to cross our objective threshold. Thus, our conceptualization and measurement strategy will not fully encapsulate all such shocks. However, the approach should approximate the existence of most cases.

19. We assume that a high magnitude impact by an event, creating a political shock, should be noticeable as well by outside observers, including both state actors and scholars.
20. We conceptualize actual political shocks as produced by an event that creates a punctuation to the normal political process *immediately* following the event. We recognize that In the policy literature such disturbances may take some time to unfold; some events have immediate consequences while others involve a longer trajectory.
21. For a discussion of these works see Gordell (2021, Chapter 3).
22. Shocks, by definition, appear very quickly.
23. We are classifying both negative (e.g., major reduction in economic growth) and positive changes (major increase in economic growth) as punctuations in a state's equilibrium. As one example, in 1996 Equatorial Guinea experienced a positive punctuation in its economy in the form of dramatic economic growth resulting from the discovery of oil.
24. World Bank data on GDP, available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD
25. Unfortunately, the World Bank does not calculate GDP figures for the socialist economies of the USSR and its European allies during the Cold War.
26. The sample reflects longitudinal variation (including Cold War and post-Cold War time frames), geographical diversity (sampling all regions), and diversity of state characteristics (including age of countries, wealth levels, and regime types).
27. The following databases were used: Centre for Systemic Peace's *Coup D'état Events Dataset* and Political Instability Task Force (PITF) *State Failure Problem Se*t, Correlates of War *Intra-state War Data v5.1* and *Inter-state War Data v4.0*, EM-DAT *International Disasters Database*, *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)*, *Harvard Behavioural Finance and Financial Stability (BFFS) Project*, International Monetary Fund (IMF*) Financial Development Index Database*, and the UCDP/PRIO *Armed Conflict Dataset version 20.1*. In addition, where we found no clear linkages between event and disruption, we consulted current events chronologies (when available) for each country during and the year immediately prior to the disruption.
28. Our observations are annual. Therefore, to qualify as a precipitating event, each PPS must occur either during the year of the economic disruption, or the year immediately preceding the economic disruption.
29. Event tracing involved not only the identification of an event, but as well whether the event would appear to fit the criteria for being a potential political shock. For example, a war between country A and B would not meet the "unanticipated" criterion for country A if it had initiated the event. However, a major, costly surprise during the war, such as the Tet offensive, could be a shock to the side experiencing the surprise.
30. We are being quite conservative here since the public policy literature suggests that major policy failure is a political shock that would punctuate the political equilibrium.
31. The third case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1996 is accompanied by the termination of the Bosnian war in 1995, which one coder did not consider to be "unanticipated".
32. Relative political extraction refers to the extraction of resources from the economy by government, based on the difference between "expected" and actual extraction, controlling for level of development. RPE data are available at: http://transresearchconsortium.com/data.
33. There are numerous other possibilities that exist for measuring punctuations in the political equilibrium. An excellent candidate would be major changes in governmental efficiency. Unfortunately, the most valid measure of such efficiency, produced by the World Bank, is unavailable on an annual basis until 2000.
34. Elsewhere, we have used a validation process virtually identical to that used for economic change, uncovering major RPE changes accompanied by classes of events (see Gordell,

2021). Here we offer an example of how such a punctuation in a state's equilibrium is accompanied by disruptive events.

35. We use the US here as an example since its dominant position in international politics over the last century has been accompanied by extensive event histories; the instances we indicate below for the US are well known.
36. We have no theoretical reason to suggest that a punctuation in the equilibrium will last only one year. Therefore, when we have cases (for example, the 1964–65 cases in Figure 3) when a punctuation is detected in two consecutive years, it is treated as one case.
37. Reported by Start's Global terrorism Database at https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/access/
38. The Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, claimed by the FBI to be the deadliest case of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, does not register either, perhaps due to the fact that domestic terrorism during the mid-1990s was perceived as a one-off aberration and not seen as a case of major policy failure.
39. The 1991 change is accompanied by the outbreak of civil war; 1995 corresponds to a major shift in tactics by the RUF and massacres of large populations; the 1998 case was immediately preceded by the overthrow of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah by SLA soldiers; the 2000 case corresponds to the military intervention into Sierra Leone by the United Kingdom and Guinea and the reorganization of the UN Mission operating in the country; the 2015 case reflects the explosive outbreak of Ebola in 2014 and 2015.
40. APS-generated uncertainty about the external environment has been well discussed in the literature. When the stability of the state is substantially disrupted, ongoing assessments regarding exogenous security threats may undergo substantial re-evaluation and may pose immediate quandaries for policy makers. Will potential adversaries seek to take advantage of the disruption? Will the state be able to continue to respond to external adversaries? Does the shock generate new environmental threats or eliminate existing ones?
41. For a discussion of selectorate theory and its application, see De Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003; Siverson and Bueno de Mesquita 2017.
42. The data are from the CIRI Human Rights Data Project. For further information on the index see Cingranelli and Richards (1999), and Cingranelli, Richards, and Chad Clay (2014).
43. The data are from Varieties of Democracy Dataset, using the mass mobilization variable.
44. The data are from CSP/INSCR Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) Dataset, using the MEPV scores for armed conflict in neighbouring states annually (CSP/INSCR, 2019).
45. The data source is the UN Statistics and Population Division; we use the natural log of the variable to compensate for the highly skewed data.
46. Data are from the World Bank, using GDP per capita in constant US dollars; using the natural log of the variable.
47. Aid data are from World Bank—Net Aid received in constant 2015 US dollars, with the variable logged.
48. This variable measures the presence of an active peacekeeping mission; data are from the Third-party Peacekeeping Missions Dataset (Mullenbach, 2013).
49. Ideally we would have also contrasted a base model that contains a different measurement approach to political shocks and its impact on human rights, compared to ours, but we are not aware of any empirical model in the literature that has done so. We had initially also included the RPE dimension to the analysis but in the case of human rights concerns it did not significantly impact the dependent variable. We discuss this point further in the conclusion.
50. Caution: the dependent variable has data only for the last eight years of the Cold War; thus, the Cold War variable is not likely to represent well the entire era's association with human rights.
51. We expect continued refinement and updating of the database. We hope that those interested in political shocks will assist in informing us when they encounter either punctuations without the catalytic event, or, when they have evidence of a political shock without a major punctuation in our two dimensions of state stability.
52. Retrieved May 22, 2021, at: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Political±Shocks&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2CPolitical%20Shocks%3B%2Cc0.

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