**Political Shocks in International Politics: An Alternative Approach**

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**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 disintegration of the Soviet Union; the 2016 election of Donald Trump; the Russian invasion of the Crimea; the devastating Haitian earthquake of 2010; the genocide in Rwanda; the Covid-19 pandemic; the Iranian revolution that replaced the Shah with an Islamist regime; the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the genocide that resulted; the economic meltdown of 2008.

These events range across domestic and/or international political, economic, and ecological phenomena. All of them were unanticipated, occurred quickly and were judged to have had deep impacts on those effected. Each appear to be unique in its own way, but together they constitute a few of a wide range of cases that are typically addressed in the international relations (IR) literature[[1]](#footnote-1) as political shocks that have changed the course of interstate and intrastate relations and many of them have been judged to 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, and especially so when compared to analyses of other key concepts in the field. 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 proceed as follows: First, we provide a brief literature review of approaches to the conceptualization and the empirical identification of political shocks, along with their presumed effects. Second, we provide a new strategy to defining and measuring what we label as “actual” political shocks. Finally, we offer 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 towards a better understanding of their effects on international and intrastate politics and we hope that it will lead to additional debate, discussion, and more systematic analyses of this phenomenon in the field.

**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, and especially in the post-Cold War era (Figure 1).

 The journals literature further underscores the general interest in political shocks. A recent survey (Gordell, 2021) across 14 academic journals,[[2]](#footnote-2) identifies approximately 1575 articles published between 1990 and 2020, that included the term “shock”.[[3]](#footnote-3) 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 in quantitative models). Virtually none of these articles included a substantive discussion of the concept and are not the focus of this review. Instead, we focus on those works that explicitly discussed political shocks in some detail, often including the elaboration of events, operationalization for empirical testing, and/or detailed steps for process tracing among qualitative and mixed-method designs.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Figure 1: References to Political Shocks, 1950-2018 (Source: Google N-Gram)[[5]](#footnote-5).**



*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.

Apart from these attributes most of the literature characterizes political shocks as occurring across *all levels of analysis*: at the systemic, regional, dyadic, or monadic levels, and can emanate either endogenously or exogenously (e.g., Goertz and Diehl 1995, Rasler 2000). Furthermore, there appears to be some consensus that while political shocks appear to be unique to the actors experiencing them, they appear to be *reasonably common occurrences* across the population of actors involved in international politics.[[6]](#footnote-6) There is far less agreement over whether political shock events can be addressed as objective or perceptual phenomena (see Appendix A for a list of various characteristics emphasized in the literature).

What types of events are classified in the literature as political shocks? Table 1, while not an exhaustive list of authors or types, provides an illustrative snapshot from the literature regarding the range of events that are labeled as political shocks.

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| **Table 1: Examples of Events Considered to be Political Shocks in International Relations Research.** |
| **General Topics:** |  | **Sample Citations:[[7]](#footnote-7)** |
| **Conflict & Violence** |  |  |
| General reference | Reuveny & Li (2003) |
| Battle dynamicsMilitary defeat unexpected losses/wins | Lavelle (2011); Maoz (2009); Verdier (1998) |
| Interstate/Intrastate WarCivil WarWars (in general)World War I/II | Bruck et al. (2012); Carson et al. (2011); Collins (2007); Finkel (2015); Fordham & Kleinberg (2012); Goertz & Diehl (1995); Hegre et al. (2017); Holmes & Traven (2015); Iversen & Soskice (2009); Kang & Meernik (2005); King & Lieberman (2009); Krebs (2015); Maoz & Siverson (2008); Morey (2011); Sears & Funk (1999); Sinha (2018); Streeck & Thelen (2005); Thies (2004); White (2017) |
| Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) | Arbatli & Arbatli (2014); Crescenzi & Enterline (2001); Crescenzi et al. (2008); Rooney (2018) |
| TerrorismGeneral referenceSpecific events; 9/11 attacks | Byman & Kroenig (2016); Koch (2009); Larsen et al. (2019); Snyder et al. (2009) |
| Coup d’états  | Mattli (2000); Thyne (2017)  |
|  |  |  |
| **Economic & Resource Related** |  |
| DepressionsGeneral reference; 1930s Great Depression | Carson et al. (2011); Iversen & Soskice (2009); Morin & Orsini (2013) |
| Economic ReformEconomic liberalization; Liberalism; Shock Therapy | Arbatov (1998); Barnett (2006); Barnett et al. (2014); Betts (1992); Bunce (2003); Chandra & Rudra (2013); Chwieroth (2008); Fang & Stone (2012); Horowitz (2004); Paris (1997); Schimmelfenning (2005); Solingen (1994)  |
| Financial Crises & RecessionsGeneral reference to financial crises; recessions; debt crisis; economic crises; global economic recessionSpecific events: 1997 Asian financial crisis; 2008 financial crisis; US collapse of housing prices | Brooks & Kurtz (2012); Broz (1998); Drezner (2009); Florea (2012); Hafner-Burton et al. (2017); Koga (2018); Krebs (2015); Nelson & Katzenstein (2014); Verdier (1998); Welch Larson (2018); Zhang (2020) |
| Foreign AidAid provision and termination; “aid shocks”; bilateral aid dynamics | Alexander & Rooney (2019); Karell & Schutte (2018); Narang (2015); Sobek & Payne (2010) |
| Price/Supply ChangesGeneral referenceOil Shocks (1970s; 1980s) | Bennett et al. (1994); Betz & Kerner (2016); Clark et al. (1998); Colgan (2010); Crisp & Kelly (1999); Darnton (2014); Fordham (2007); Garrett (1992); Goodman et al. (1996); Kang (1997); Kaufman (1997); Lavelle (2011); Nayar (1995); Talmadge (2008); Tilton (1994); Verdier (1998); Wigley (2018) |
|  |  |  |
| **Natural Disasters** |  |  |
| General reference; extreme weather events; “shocks of nature”; natural catastrophesClimatic shocks; climate related shocks | Bagozzi et al. (2017); Bhavanani & Lacina (2015); Beardsley & McQuinn (2009); Busby (2008); Carson et al. (2011); Hafner-Burton et al. (2017); Krebs (2015); Lazarev et al. (2014); Meierding (2013); Raleigh & Kniveton (2012); Reuveny & Thompson (2007) |
| Specific events; Cyclones; drought based/water shortages; excessive heat; floods; rainfall; rising sea levels; storms; tsunamis; wildfires  |
|  |  |
| **Policy Related & Miscellaneous** |  |
| General reference  | Allen (2010); Anievas & Saull (2019); Byman & Kroenig (2016); Duffy Toft (2007); Hafner-Burton et al., 2017 (*unexpected policy/political events*); Hagen (2001); Johansson & Sarwari (2017); Kahler (2018); Knutsen et al. (2017); Koch (2009); Linke et al. (2015); Parkinson (2013); Peters (2019); Reus-Smit (2011); Sambanis & Shavo (2013); Sobek & Payne (2010) |
| Policy failures (e.g., Iraq) |
| Controversial, Negative, Unexpected Electoral Outcomes; Brexit Victory; Trump victory |
| Immigration flight; refugee influx; Demographic shocks  |
| Interventions |
| InvasionsGeneral referenceNapoleon taking of Spain; Falklands Invasion; Israeli Defenses in Lebanon 1982 |
|  |  |  |
| **Power/State/System** |  |  |
| General power distribution changes | Carlin & Love (2016); Christensen (2006); Fettweis (2004); Florea (2012); Goddard (2006); Goertz & Diehl (1995); Hudson & Vore (1995); Iqbal & Zorn (2008); Kalyvas & Balcells (2010); Licht & Allen (2018); Maoz (2009); Maoz & Somer-Topcu (2010); Sinha (2018); Streeck & Thelen (2005) |
| End of the Cold War |
| State collapse/formation; independenceMilosevic regime; Soviet collapse; territorial changes |
| Regime Change Dramatic political & leadership changeDeath of leaders (incl. assassinations)Executive turnover  |
|  |  |  |

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; Horowitz 2006; Imerman 2018; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Kaufman 1997). Whether or not they actually disrupt ongoing political processes and outcomes, however, may depend on a wide range of factors involving both the nature of the event and the vulnerability of the actors impacted by the event.

 The events listed in Table 1 fit virtually all the characteristics of political shocks that we have noted above, yet, they constitute a political shock to some actors and not others. 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 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. Additionally, intrastate or civil wars have been identified by various studies as political shocks (Hegre et al. 2017; Bruck et al. 2012; Morey 2011; Kang and Meernik 2005; Sears and Funk 1999), yet some intrastate conflicts are protracted while others are not; some carry a high death toll while other exhibit limited casualties; some recur within the same state while others occur only once within some countries. Thus, some civil wars do not fit the definition of a political shock; 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[[8]](#footnote-8), and 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*

 With respect to the literature’s approach to explaining the effects of political shocks, we concur with Maoz and Joyce’s (2016: 294) critique: not only are the causal mechanisms underspecified and poorly understood, but research in the field also has failed to specify whether or not identified causal mechanisms are uniformly applicable across different types of 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, if these are 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 dynamics related to wars, regardless of whether those classes of events constitute political shocks? These concerns remain largely unaddressed in the literature.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 Of the few works that develop political shock-specific explanations, the most useful theoretical approach in the literature comes from studies utilizing a punctuated equilibrium (PE) model[[10]](#footnote-10) for studying both continuity and major change in the foreign policies (Joly and Richter 2019) and the behavior of states (Goertz and Diehl 1995, Rasler 2000, Diehl and Goertz 2001). Stripped to its essentials, the PE approach argues that once policies are adopted, for a variety of 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, would be 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 punctuated equilibrium approach is consistent with much of our understanding of international politics. For those who work with large-N research designs, it will come as no surprise that state behavior is relatively stable over time.[[11]](#footnote-11) Typically, 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[[12]](#footnote-12) in state behavior, reflecting much stability and mostly incremental changes from the immediate past. 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 and Goertz 2001) demonstrate that political shocks—either occurring in the environment of states or endogeneously—temporarily open a “policy window” of opportunity to change policy, which can result in either the initiation and/or the termination of enduring rivalries.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In a similar vein, Rasler (2000) focuses on the salience of political shocks in explaining the termination of the protracted rivalry involving Egypt and Israel. As with Goertz and Diehl, 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). In this sense political shocks also appear to be necessary conditions, and she also 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 can impact policy makers’ 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.[[14]](#footnote-14)

 Thus, the punctuated equilibrium model appears to be not only useful for explaining conditions under which foreign policies and state behavior continues or changes, but as well gives us additional insight into how to reconceptualize and identify political shocks. To that task we now turn.

**Reconceptualizing Political Shocks**

 As our brief discussion of the literature suggests, there are numerous weaknesses in the extant conceptualization of political shocks that makes it difficult to advance knowledge on this topic. However, the primary weakness centers around the problem that virtually all definitions and operationalization of the concept are events based: scholars typically identify a certain set of events that would likely create a political shock to states and policy makers. Goertz and Diehl (1995) for instance offer the following categories of events: world wars, “dramatic” changes in territorial sovereignty, rapid shifts in power distributions, civil wars, and the achievement of independence/sovereignty by non-state units. Rasler (2000) suggests a four-fold typology of political shock events: the emergence of an external threat by a new actor that downgrades the threat from old adversaries; changes in political institutions or new domestic political leadership that alters policy preferences; significant decreases in the availability of economic resources; and “catalytic events” such as military defeat, occupation, loss of external patronage, and civil war.

 We have no quarrel with these types of events; all of them *may* create political shocks. Other scholars have identified these and other events that may constitute a political shock (see Table 1). However, in and of themselves, these events are simply events; whether they actually create the type of disturbance to the ongoing stability of the state that is required from the standpoint of punctuated equilibrium theory is very much an empirical question.

 Consider our earlier discussion of the shock literature: there is substantial consensus 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. If these attributes constitute what a shock entails, then classes of events may be inappropriate for identifying whether a shock has occurred. Given the surprising aspect of political shocks, broad classes of events may not meet this criterion: some wars are unexpected/unanticipated while others are not; the same is the case with civil wars or the loss of external patronage. Some argue that terrorist attacks constitute political shocks; certainly few would argue that the terror attack on 9/11 was not a political shock in the United States. However, at some point terrorist events can become routinized and may no longer meet the criterion of being unexpected, unanticipated, and therefore unique.[[15]](#footnote-15)

There appears to be little issue with the second criterion involving these events: political shocks occur suddenly as opposed to manifesting over a long period of time. Virtually all the events associated with the idea of political shocks in the literature are consistent with this criterion. It is the third criterion, however, that is most problematic for many events: having a large enough magnitude to be able to punctuate the ongoing equilibrium or stability in a state’s policy.[[16]](#footnote-16) How can researchers identify the appropriate magnitude of an event being experienced in order to consider it as a shock? One way of doing so is to identify policymakers’ claims about these events in order to gauge their perceptions of such 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.[[17]](#footnote-17) 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, as our comments regarding terrorist activity suggests, this is an overly generous assumption.

Therefore, we offer an alternative conceptualization. We suggest that there are *potential* political shocks (PPS’s) and *actual* political shocks (APS’s), consistent with the theoretical perspective of punctuated equilibrium. Potential political shocks are the events generally described in the literature: they 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.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Thus, we focus on the concept of actual political shocks. APS’s, in addition to being unexpected and occurring rapidly, also need to 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 disturbance to the ongoing stability within the state, then the state has not experienced an actual political shock in our conceptualization. In this sense our approach is consistent with the theoretical direction of the punctuated equilibrium model gleaned from the literature. At the same time, 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[[19]](#footnote-19) after a potential political shock event has occurred.

**Operationalizing Actual Political Shocks**

Rather than operationalizing actual political shocks by events type, we propose an approach to operationalization that 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.[[20]](#footnote-20) Previous work however suggests two critical dimensions involving the stability of states. One is a major change to a state’s economic process and thus its resource base (e.g., Alesina et. al. 1996, Jong-A-Pin 2009, Blanco and Grier 2008, Fearon and Laitin 2003). The second is a major change to a state’s governance process (e.g., Hegre and Sambanis 2006, Alesina & Perotti 1996, 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 potential external security threats, ongoing foreign policy commitments, and internal threats to leadership survival. Therefore, we empirically identify short-term,[[21]](#footnote-21) major changes to a state’s economy and/or its governance process as measures of disruptions to a state’s stability. [[22]](#footnote-22)

 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 the normal annual patterns for each state. If the change in growth rate in a given year is equal to or greater than one standard deviation[[23]](#footnote-23) 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]](#footnote-24) This procedure yielded 766 cases for roughly 177 states.[[25]](#footnote-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, or can such changes occur without such shocks? To try to answer this question we generated a sample of over 100 cases from the 766 we had uncovered.[[26]](#footnote-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 potential political shocks. These would include the following unanticipated events: economic shocks; natural disasters; regime changes and coups; major interstate and intrastate conflicts; sudden changes in global power distributions, and large terrorist events.[[27]](#footnote-27) Additionally we consulted event history sources when they were available. [[28]](#footnote-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]](#footnote-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 both unanticipated and occurring quickly as well and adjacent or immediately prior to the time the state’s economy was experiencing a major change. As noted in Appendix B, 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 (noted in Appendix B) include circumstances (Russia and Poland, 1992) where the accompanying event was a policy change *intended* to restructure the state’s economy *and* resulted in substantial economic damage.[[30]](#footnote-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]](#footnote-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 are populated with 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[[32]](#footnote-32) 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 (Kugler and Tammen 2012, Arbetman and Kugler 2018).[[33]](#footnote-33) Political extraction of resources for governmental purposes is clearly a political process; 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 likely responding to some immediate stimulus by generating unusual amounts of additional revenue for policy purposes. Both major downward and upward changes in political extraction in a given year should indicate punctuations in the political equilibrium, as a function of actual shocks to its political system.[[34]](#footnote-34)

 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. While there is some overlap, the correlation between the two dimensions is quite low at .25.

To illustrate a sense of face validity for the cases using RPE-based punctuations, we offer two examples, using two very dissimilar states: the U.S. and Sierra Leone. Figure 3, demonstrating RPE-based punctuations to the political equilibrium of the United States, [[35]](#footnote-35) illustrates well the difference between potential versus actual political shocks. Between 1961and 2017 there are six instances[[36]](#footnote-36) of punctuations in the political equilibrium; these are the six 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 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.

 As we had argued earlier, the U.S. case also illustrates that not all potential political shock events translate into actual ones. 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, apparently none of the other 2,600 terrorist attacks on U.S. targets—reported by START’s[[37]](#footnote-37) Global Terrorism Database—appear to create the punctuated equilibrium in political extraction that would be associated with actual political shocks.[[38]](#footnote-38)

SD threshold

That some potential political shock events do not translate into actual 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, as we have argued earlier, 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, as noted in Figure 4. Sierra Leone demonstrates five cases between 1961 and 2017 when its RPE dramatically changes by at least one standard deviation from its mean rate of change. Each of these cases are accompanied by major events that are considered to be political shocks in the extant literature.[[39]](#footnote-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 cases of political shocks. Thus, we have confidence that our two dimensions of punctuated equilibrium reflect political shocks for states experiencing them.

SD threshold

**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. Here, we present one example, probing the effects of political shocks on variation in respect for human rights across states in international politics. 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 neighborhoods and 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 actual political shocks create for policy-makers substantial new uncertainties regarding both their external[[40]](#footnote-40) and their domestic security environments. Uncertainty regarding the domestic environment often translates for policymakers to concerns regarding leadership survival both in democratic and non- democratic states. [[41]](#footnote-41) 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 as well decrease the ability to provide sufficient private goods to smaller selectorates, jeopardizing the coalitions that keep the leader in office.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Under such circumstances we anticipate two possible outcomes. One possibility is that political shocks, and especially in non-democracies, could yield high levels of governmental repression of human rights as political leaders seek to dampen or preempt protests over failure to deliver public and private goods during periods of turmoil. The second possibility is that, as political shocks create a “policy window” through which policymakers reconsider extant policies, governments may allow political reform, greater political participation, and ultimately 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 substantially greater risks for leadership survival then more familiar methods of political control. To test these competing possibilities, we delineate in Table 2 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*). It is an additive index, comprised of data regarding four different rights, including disappearances, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and torture.[[43]](#footnote-43) The variable captures the extent of government involvement with these activities and 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., Poe and Tate 1994, Davenport 2007, Murdie and Bhasin 2011, Meernik et al. 2012). These include internal unrest (Davenport 1995),[[44]](#footnote-44) neighborhood unrest (Danneman and Ritter 2013),[[45]](#footnote-45) executive constraint (Marshall and Gurr, 2020), population size (Richards et al. 2015),[[46]](#footnote-46) state wealth (Richards et al. 2015),[[47]](#footnote-47) net aid assistance (O’Hare and Southall 2007),[[48]](#footnote-48) presence of peacekeeping missions (Murdie and Davis 2010),[[49]](#footnote-49) and a dummy variable for the Cold War/post-Cold War eras. All independent variables are lagged by one year.

**TABLE 2: 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)** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Neighborhood 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 |

The second model replicates the base model and adds the economic-based political shock variable, indicating whether a political shock has occurred. This variable is also lagged.

Since the dependent variable of interest—physical integrity rights—is ordinal, we use an ordered logistic regression, including clustered robust standard errors as the observations are independent across countries, but not within them (Long 1997, Cameron and Trivedi 2009). 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. The unit of analysis in all models is the country-year. The negative coefficients in the first panel reflect higher levels of repression and positive values indicate the converse.

As the base model in Table 2 illustrates, all the standard predictors of levels of human rights behave consistently with the extant literature. Neighborhood 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]](#footnote-50) and GDP/capita correlate with lower levels of repression. When we add the political shock variable to the base model (Shock Model, Panel 1), 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 2. It suggests the following impact: 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 conditions under which potential political shocks can become actual shocks through their impact on a state’s equilibrium, and operationalized actual political shocks as disturbance to either the economic or political processes of the state. We then sought to link these disturbances to a range of potential political shocks in the literature. Finally, we offered one illustration of how economic resource-based political shocks can help account for levels of human rights oppression within states.

 As noted earlier, 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. The first is with respect to the type of punctuations in state equilibrium that we had identified; we had focused exclusively on major changes to the growth in state economies and to major 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 of possible disruptions to state stability.

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 do not impact in the same way on the states effected, nor 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., Jervis 1978, Glaser 1997), while for policymakers experiencing the event, they may provide greater flexibility and policy options than previously.

That the two types of disturbances may have very different policy and behavioral effects is suggested by our analysis of the impact of economic punctuations. Although we treated both major decreases and increases as the same in Table 2, when we disaggregate these changes, we find that it is sharp *increases* in economic growth that are associated with higher levels of repression for mostly non-democratic governments.[[51]](#footnote-51) We conjecture that this may be the case as these governments, under conditions of substantial uncertainty to their domestic political survival created by a major political shock, are now able to generate more resources to ramp up repression against potential and actual foes in the political system. Further research needs to probe the possible diverging consequences of these two types of political shocks.

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 in terms of events rather than punctuated equilibria that are likely related to 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 potential political shock 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 potential shock event,[[52]](#footnote-52) as an ongoing exercise in cleaning our data.

Finally, we close with a call to examine the variety of consequences of political shocks, especially for interstate relations. Our approach suggests that actual 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. 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 behavior) 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 such 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 C we offer a theoretical framework suggesting a range of causal drivers that may help to 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.

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| **APPENDIX A: Characteristics of Political Shocks Across the Literature** |
| **Discussed as:** | **Sample Citations:** |
|  |  |  |
| rapidly occurring; sudden | Salehyan, 2018; Koren & Bagozzi, 2017; Haim, 2016; Mansfield et al., 2016; Jenkins et al., 2014 (*rapid change*); McDoom, 2013; Grigorescu, 2010; Carment et al., 2008; Dewan & Shepsle, 2008; Voeten & Brewer, 2006; Collins, 2004; Yang, 1996 |
| unanticipated; unexpected; unpredictable | Barbera et al., 2019/Birkland, 1998; Benton & Philips, 2019; Lyall, 2019; Imerman, 2018; Johnson & Tierney, 2018/2019; Hafner-Burton et al., 2017; Jones, Mattiacci, & Braumoeller, 2017; Haim, 2016; Wood & Wright, 2016; Allee & Peinhardt, 2014; Renshon, 2008; Duffy Toft, 2007; Elhefnawy, 2004; Levy & Gochal, 2001  |
| temporary; transitory; transitional; short run; short-term | Frye & Borisova, 2019; Colgan & Lucas, 2017 (*finite-duration events*); Houle & Bodea, 2017; Zakharov, 2016; Little, 2015; Arbatli & Arbatli, 2014; Enns et al., 2014; Pfutze, 2014; Rasler & Thompson, 2011; Iversen & Soskice, 2010; Busby, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Fearon, 2004; Krause, 2003; Nicholson et al., 2002; Rasler, 2000; Wallerstein, 1999; Green et al., 1998; Segura & Nicholson, 1995; Meernik & Poe, 1996 |
| being negative or positive | Tollefson, 2020; Beber et al., 2019; Braithwaite & Licht, 2020; Lundgren, 2018; Rooney, 2018; Bagozzi et al., 2017; Knutsen et al., 2017; Betz & Kerner, 2016; Weintraub, 2016; Zakharov, 2016; Brooks, 2014; Pfutze, 2014; Bausch et al., 2013; Hall & Shepsle, 2013; Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Bateson, 2012; Blomberg et al., 2011; Bohmelt, 2011; Nielsen et al., 2011; Murshed & Mamoon, 2010; Pop-Eleches, 2007; Rasler, 2000; Tussie, 1998 |
|  |
| occurring repeatedly; successive occurrence; clustered; discrete; discontinuous; discontinuities | Ahmad, 2019; Drezner, 2019; Grieg et al., 2018; Byman & Kroenig, 2016; Miller et al., 2016; Menaldo, 2012; Bozzoli & Bruck, 2009; Paul, 2008; Duffy Toft, 2007; Reuveny & Thompson, 2007; Creswell, 2002; Nincic & Nincic, 2002 |
| a matter of size: large; small | van der Maat, 2018; Thurner et al., 2018; Philips et al., 2016; Bausch et al., 2013; Serneels & Verpoorten, 2013; Aksoy et al., 2015; Dancygier & Donnelly, 2012; Callander, 2011; Bendor & Swistak, 1997; Bercovitch & Diehl, 1997 |
| critical; catalytic; major; massive | Demirel-Pegg, 2017; Hall & Ross, 2015; Parkinson, 2013; Akturk, 2011; Morey, 2011; Beardsley & McQuinn, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Iversen & Soskice, 2009; Paul, 2006; DeRouen Jr., 2000; Hampton, 2000; Liberman, 2000; Hudson & Vore, 1995 |
| momentous | Meernik & Poe, 1996 |
| profound; significant | Imerman, 2018; Lavelle, 2011; Murshed & Mamoon, 2010; Hampton, 2000; Meernik & Poe, 1996 |
| extreme; radical | Linebarger, 2016; Broz & Plouffe, 2010; Bozzoli & Bruck, 2009 |
| catastrophic; traumatic | Whitlark, 2017; Renshon, 2008; Farrell, 2005 |
| dramatic | Renshon, 2008/Tetlock, 2005; Nincic & Nincic, 2002 |
|  |  |
|  |

**APPENDIX B. Sample (N =103) of Economic Punctuations with Associated Events (PPS’s)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Country** | **Shock Year** |  | **Event Notes** |
|  | United States of America | 1974 |  | Resignation of President Richard Nixon; financial recession; unemployment rate increase |
|  | United States of America | 1976 |  | Withdrawal from Vietnam War in 1975; end of financial crisis from 1975 |
|  | Canada | 1997 |  | Red River flood (Manitoba; 1 of 2 worst natural disasters (floods) in Canada's history) |
|  | Haiti | 2010 |  | Natural disaster - earthquake (January 2010); collapse of central governance; limited general elections in November 2010  |
|  | Dominican Republic | 1965 |  | Dominican Civil War (started April 1965) |
|  | Mexico | 1995 |  | 1994 - Mexican Peso Crisis; Tequila Shock/Crisis; sudden devaluation of the Mexican peso causing currency crisis;  |
|  | Guatemala | 1963 |  | CIA instigated and supported coup overthrowing President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes;  |
|  | Guatemala | 1981 |  | Guatemalan Civil War; largest insurgency mounted/largest offensive for the conflict in 1981; 1981 genocide;  |
|  | Honduras | 1969 |  | Football War - El Salvador severed diplomatic ties with Honduras, border skirmishes took place; El Salvador forces invade Honduras, warplanes bombed country  |
|  | El Salvador | 1979 |  | Salvadoran coup overthrowing President Carlos Humberto Romero; beginning of Salvadoran Civil War |
|  | El Salvador | 1982 |  | 1982 saw the installation of an interim government; heightened killing by government forces;  |
|  | Colombia | 1975 |  | 1974 - challenge to state authority via April Movement (M-19) starting new phase of conflict; end of National Front governments  |
|  | Ecuador | 1973 |  | President Velasco suspends constitution, dissolves legislature, assumes dictatorial powers. Military deposes Velasco's authoritarian-democratic regime (total polity change of -10) |
|  | Chile | 1974 |  | September 1973 - Chilean coup deposing President Salvador Allende by General Augusto Pinochet; ongoing social unrest;  |
|  | Argentina | 1995 |  | 1994 - Mexican Peso Crisis; Tequila Shock/Crisis; |
|  | Argentina | 1966 |  | Civilian government ousted by a military coup |
|  | United Kingdom | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Netherlands | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | France | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Spain | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Portugal | 1974 |  | Carnation Revolution; April 1974 military coup overthrowing authoritarian Estado Novo; civil resistance campaign |
|  | Germany | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Germany | 2012 |  | Eurozone economy crisis -  |
| X | Poland | 1992 |  | 1991 Polish government implemented “shock” economic reforms |
|  | Hungary | 2009 |  | Hungarian Financial Crisis; large external debt prior to Global economic crisis, then global economic crisis hit |
|  | Italy | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Albania | 1997 |  | Albanian Civil War 1997 |
|  | Macedonia | 2001 |  | 2001 insurgency in Macedonia; ethnic militant groups attacked Macedonian security forces early 2001 - lasted entire year |
|  | Yugoslavia/Serbia | 1999 |  | Yugoslav wars: Kosovo War (1998-1999); Insurgency in Presevo Valley (1999); NATO bombing 1999; Yugoslavia home to highest number of refugees and IDPs in Europe at that time |
| X | Bosnia & Herzegovina | 1996 |  | 1995 - end of the Bosnian War (December 1995); case of prior State Failure (1992-1995) |
|  | Greece | 1974 |  | 1973 Athens Polytechnic uprising rejecting the Greek military junta; subsequent coup via Junta against George Papadopoulos/Spyros Markezinis; reinstating military law; further 1974 coup attempt against Archbishop Makarios III led to invasion of Cyprus and fall of the Greek military regime during 1974 |
|  | Bulgaria | 1989 |  | 1989 - Leader Todor Zhivkov ousted by Politburo following fall of Berlin Wal; political unrest during 1989 |
| X | Russia | 1992 |  | Yeltsin transition to market economy (announced in October 1991; market-oriented reform along lines of shock therapy; resulting in hyperinflation) |
|  | Russia | 2009 |  | Great Recession in Russia (2008-2009); 2008 Russo-Georgian War; 2008 energy crisis (crude oil prices) |
|  | Ukraine | 2005 |  | Orange Revolution; Viktor F. Yanukovych resignation as PM |
|  | Ukraine | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009); Russian gas disputes  |
|  | Belarus | 1996 |  | 1995-1996; referendum allows President to rule by decree, legislature disbanded; (total polity change of -14) |
|  | Armenia | 1992 |  | First Nagorno-Karabakh War; massive displacement of Azerbaijanis and Armenians  |
|  | Georgia | 1992 |  | Georgian Civil War; coup in December 1991 of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia; de facto secession of regions of Georgia |
|  | Azerbaijan | 1992 |  | First Nagorno-Karabakh War; massive displacement of Azerbaijanis and Armenians; |
|  | Finland | 1994 |  | Finnish banking crisis;  |
|  | Sweden | 2008 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Norway | 2008 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009) |
|  | Guinea-Bissau | 1998 |  | Guinea-Bissau Civil War - 1998; coup of President Joao Bernardo Vieira by Brigadier-General Ansumane Mane;  |
|  | Ivory Coast | 2012 |  | Ivorian Crisis; started November 2010 through 2011; President Laurent Gbagbo captured and extradited to ICC; opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara took power after conflict throughout months of crisis  |
|  | Burkina Faso | 1987 |  | Burkinabe coup by Captain Blaise Compaore of President Captain Thomas Sankara; armed resistance; Agacher Strip War with Mali |
|  | Liberia | 2003 |  | Civil war leading to large movement of refugees; UN banned exports of timber and diamonds |
|  | Sierra Leone | 1992 |  | 1991 - Sierra Leone Civil War; 1992 coup by Captain Valentine Strasser overthrows President Joseph Saidu Momoh |
|  | Togo | 2006 |  | 2005 Togo protests and riots following presidential election; military installed President’s son after President’s death |
|  | Nigeria | 1967 |  | 1966 Nigerian coup; assassination of senior leaders; General Officer of Nigerian Army then takes control countercoups and subsequent Nigerian Civil War  |
|  | Central African Republic | 2013 |  | Central African Republic Civil War; started at the end of 2012 (December 2012); coalition of rebel groups took over territory and capital in 2013.  |
|  | Chad | 1979 |  | Chadian-Libyan conflict; began 1979; Libyan intervention into Chad; in conjunction with civil war |
|  | Congo | 1995 |  |  Republic of the Congo civil war;ends in December 1994; tens of thousands displaced during and following |
|  | DR Congo | 1962 |  | Congo Crisis; Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba executed in 1961; Soviet and UN involvement by 1962 |
|  | Somalia | 1964 |  | 1964 Ethiopian-Somali Border War |
|  | Ethiopia | 1983 |  | 1982 Ethiopian-Somali Border War |
|  | Angola | 1993 |  | 1992 rekindled civil war after Jonas Savimbi multiparty election; 1993 saw massive change in the ongoing fighting as UNITA gained control over 70% of Angola |
|  | Mozambique | 1992 |  | Culmination of fighting in Civil War |
|  | Mozambique | 2000 |  | Natural disaster - Mozambique 2000 flood; worst flood in Mozambique's last 50 years |
|  | South Africa | 2009 |  | Global financial crisis (2008-2009);  |
|  | Comoros | 1990 |  | Assassination of President Ahmed Abdallah |
|  | Tunisia | 2011 |  |  Arab Spring; uprisings; removal of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali |
|  | Libya | 2012 |  | January 2011 - armed insurrection against Muammar Gaddafi's regime; Regime collapse; Gaddafi killed;  |
|  | South Sudan | 2013 |  | Heglig Crisis; aerial bombardment, shelling, tanks by Sudanese Army/Air Force |
|  | Turkey | 1981 |  | September 1980 Turkish coup of Chief of the General Staff Kenan Evren overthrowing 43rd government led by Suleyman Demirel;  |
|  | Iraq | 2004 |  | Foreign ouster of leadership by foreign forces; invasion of a country by foreign armed forces; 2003 Iraq War  |
|  | Egypt | 2011 |  | January Revolution; President Hosni Mubarak resignation; suspension of constitution and dissolution of parliament  |
|  | Syria | 1963 |  | 1961-62 Syrian coup by Syrian Army; breakup of the United Arab Republic;  |
|  | Egypt | 1991 |  | Financial/banking crisis in 1991 |
|  | Lebanon | 1990 |  | 1989 - Lebanese Civil War; rejection of new government by Lebanese Army; President Rene Moawad assassinated |
|  | Israel | 1973 |  | Yom Kippur War |
|  | Saudi Arabia | 1975 |  | March 1975 - King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud assassinated  |
|  | Yemen | 2015 |  | Yemen Civil War (2014-ongoing); ouster of leadership by rebel forces; 2015 overthrow of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi |
|  | Yemen | 2011 |  | Arab Spring protests; uprisings;  |
|  | Tajikistan | 1992 |  | Tajikistani Civil War begins 1992; President Rahmon Nabiyev ousted; Safarali Kendzhayev Communist speaker of parliament ousted; coups and countercoups during 1992  |
|  | China | 1967 |  | Cultural Revolution |
|  | South Korea | 1980 |  | 1979 Assassination of President Park Chung Hee; Coup December 1979 following elections  |
|  | South Korea | 1998 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | Pakistan | 1979 |  | Democratic government overthrown in military coup as political violence escalates due to elections. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq dissolves the legislature, declares martial law (total polity change of -15) |
|  | Myanmar | 1963 |  | 1962 Burmese coup marking beginning of 1 party rule; Military replaced AFPFL government Prime Minister U Nu, with Union Revolutionary Council General Ne Win; martial law  |
|  | Myanmar | 1989 |  | 8888 Uprising; nationwide protests and civil unrest  |
|  | Maldives | 2005 |  | Natural disaster - Indian Ocean earthquake; additional tsunami caused by earthquake; damages estimated at 62% of GDP |
|  | Thailand | 1997 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | Malaysia | 1998 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | Singapore | 1998 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | Singapore | 1964 |  | 1964 race riots and civil disturbances  |
|  | Philippines | 1974 |  | Ferdinand Marcos institutes martial law among class and ethnic conflicts; total polity change of -14) |
|  | Philippines | 1984 |  | Assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr. 1983 |
|  | Philippines | 1986 |  | People Power Revolution; Yellow Revolution; sustained campaign of civil resistance against regime violence and electoral fraud;  |
|  | Philippines | 1998 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | Indonesia | 1998 |  | Asian Financial Crisis |
|  | East Timor | 2007 |  | East Timorese Crisis - conflict and coup attempt; external military intervention; resignation of Prime Minister  |
|  | Papua New Guinea | 1991 |  | 1990 dubbed "Year of Crisis"; secessionists proclaimed independence |

**X** indicates the three cases over which the coders were in disagreement regarding whether the event associated with the case was consistent with the definition of a potential political shock.

**Appendix C. A Framework for assessing the impact of political shocks on the actions of states.**

 **A Potential Political Shock Event**

Endogenous Exogeneous

**B** No major disturbance to status quo **C** Major disturbance to status quo

 = =

 No actual political shock **Actual Political Shock**

 **D**

 Uncertainties created regarding state’s

 Security environment

 (both external and internal security)

 **E** Policymakers reassess evaluation of extant policies;

 Policymakers’ evaluations of changing political conditions;

 Increased role of policy entrepreneurs;

 External third-party pressures;

 Internal pressures by salient political groups;

 Governmental capacity to change

 **G** Principal/actor problems **F**

 Major Policy Change(s)

  **H** **Change in State Behavior**

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1. Political shocks aren’t the sole province of IR scholars. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 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*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The timeframe of 1990-2020 provides enough material to complete a thorough evaluation of the literature while also ensuring a contemporary understanding of the topic. However, our review also includes additional resources that were consulted whenever relevant. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A large portion of these articles, while more detailed in their discussion and general use of political shocks, were nonetheless typically focused on some other overarching concept or process as the main topic of the research. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 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>. Restricting this search to only “political shocks”, the result understates the attention to this phenomenon since in the journals literature (below) authors often refer to these types of events simply as “shocks” rather than political shocks explicitly. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For some of the literature arguing this point, see Hensel,2001; McNamee & Zhang, 2019; Olar, 2019; Weber, 2019; Miller et al., 2016; Philips et al., 2016; Baccini & Koenig-Archibugi, 2014; Chwieroth, 2014; Davis and Meunier, 2011; Leblang, 2010; Neumayer & Plumper, 2010; Pepinsky, 2008; Elkins et al., 2006; Simmons and Elkins, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Due to space limitations, the full citations of these works are listed online at: kellygordell.com/research

 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. And some would argue, policymakers’ perceptions of the consequences of these events (e.g. Rasler, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a similar argument regarding domestic policy, see Jones et al. 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The punctuated equilibrium (PE) model was initially pioneered in the field of U.S. domestic public policy (e.g., Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2002, Green-Pedersen and Princen 2016, Brummer et al. 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, Eldredge 1995, Eldredge and Gould 1972, Gould and Eldredge 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Of course, numerous qualitative studies of foreign policies and inter-state interactions have also noted similar stability in relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For discussions of path dependency in both domestic and foreign policy see Schieder 2019, Pierson 2000, Sarigil, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. They emphasize as well that political shocks are a necessary but not sufficient condition for dramatic changes to ongoing relationships between states. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rasler’s work also suggests that not all shocks have the same impact: “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 2000:702). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 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, and 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. We are not denying that there is a very strong perceptual component involved with political shocks. Nevertheless, we take the position that a certain set of outcomes associated with political shocks should link very strongly to policy makers’ perceptions. We recognize that in this sense we may not cover all political shocks that meet our objective threshold as some policymakers will perceive certain events to be a shock even when they fail to cross our designated threshold. In this sense our conceptualization and measurement strategy will not fully encapsulate all such shocks. However, the approach should approximate the existence of most cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. We assume that such a high magnitude impact by an event that creates a political shock should be noticeable as well by outside observers, including both state actors and scholars. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In one way we depart from the theoretical framing produced by the punctuated equilibrium model: we conceptualize actual political shocks as produced by an unanticipated, rapidly occurring event that creates a punctuation to the normal political process *immediately* following the event. In the policy literature such disturbances may take some time to unfold and some shocks have immediate consequences while others may have a longer impact trajectory. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a discussion of these works and alternative measures for operationalizing state instability, see Gordell (2021, Chapter 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Shocks, by definition, appear very quickly. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Note that 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. For 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 and the immediate oil boom that resulted. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The use of standard deviations to distinguish shocks and shock effects is quite common in the literature (e.g. Sprecher and DeRouen 2002, Dreher et al. 2012). Likewise, many works also focus on GDP growth as measures of economic performance (e.g., Gleditsch and Ward 2006, see also the discussion by Meierding 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Using World Bank data on GDP; available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The number of states varies due to changes in state membership (e.g., independence, splits, unifications, etc.) through the timeframe. In addition, the World Bank does not calculate GDP figures for the socialist economies of the USSR and its European allies during the Cold War. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. We created the sample to reflect longitudinal variation (including Cold War and post-Cold War time frames), geographical diversity (sampling all regions), and diversity across types of states (including age of countries, wealth levels, and regime types). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The following databases are used for linking PPS events to disruptions: Center 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 Behavioral 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Our observations are annual. Therefore, to qualify as a precipitating event, each PPS has to occur either during the year of the economic disruption, or the year immediately preceding the economic disruption. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
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 criteria for country A if it had initiated the event. However, a major, costly surprise during a war, such as the Tet offensive in Vietnam, could be a shock to the side experiencing the surprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
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. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
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”. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Do all irregular transfers of power, or all increases in societal violence lead to the same consequences for governance? Do these events all automatically create punctuations in the political equilibrium? [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Relative political extraction refersto 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>. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. There are numerous other possibilities that exist for measuring punctuations in political equilibrium and we encourage researchers to offer viable other alternatives. One which we had entertained as an excellent candidate involved major changes in the governmental efficiency of states. Unfortunately, the most valid measure of such efficiency, produced by the World Bank, is unavailable on an annual basis until 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
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 and the instances we indicate below for the US are well known. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
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) where such a punctuation is detected in two consecutive years, it is treated as one case. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The database is available at <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/access/> [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Another illustration between potential versus actual political shocks: 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The 1991 change is accompanied by the outbreak of civil war; 1995 corresponds to a major shift in tactics by the RUF, while engaging in 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
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? These questions reflect some of the uncertainties likely to face policy makers. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For an example of such a political shock leading to a reassessment of policy in the context of domestic leadership survival consideration, see Blavoukos’s (2019:31) analysis of the effect of the Palestinian uprising creating the policy window for the Oslo Accords. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For a discussion of selectorate theory and its application, see Bueno de Mesquita et. al. 2003; Siverson and Bueno de Mesquita 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The data are from the CIRI Human Rights Data Project. Further information on construction and source data of the Physical Integrity Rights Index can be located at Cingranelli & Richards (1999), and Cingranelli et al. (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The data are from the V-Dem – Varieties of Democracy Dataset (Pemstein et al., 2021; Coppedge et al., 2021), using their mass mobilization variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The data are from the CSP/INSCR Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) Dataset, using the MEPV scores for armed conflict in neighboring states, reflecting the aggregate number of varied types of unrest neighboring countries experience in a given year (CSP/INSCR, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The data source is the UN Statistics and Population Division; we use the natural log of the variable to compensate for the highly skewed nature of the data. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Data are from the World Bank, using GDP per capita in constant US dollars; the natural log of the variable is used to compensate for the skewed nature of the data. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Aid data are from World Bank—Net Aid received in constant 2015 US dollars, with the variable logged. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. This is a dichotomous variable for the presence of an active peacekeeping mission; data are generated from the Third-party Peacekeeping Missions Dataset (Mullenbach 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Care needs to be taken with the interpretation of this variable: 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The results are available from the authors on request. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Our punctuated database is expected to undergo constant refinement and updating. In that sense we ask those interested who may uncover clear cases where a punctuation is not related to a potential political shock to notify the authors. We also urge readers to notify us when they consider an event to have been a political shock but is somehow not linked to any punctuations on our two dimensions of state stability. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)