

The Canary in the Coal Mine: Mythical Institutions and Nonlinear Political Dynamics*

Moshe Maor
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

March 2020

9452 words (all inclusive)

Abstract

Studies examining nonlinear political dynamics focus on micro- and macro-level variables. Tipping points are pitched solely at these levels, and, therefore, no attention is devoted to institutional tipping points. This paper develops an analytical framework to explain the nonlinear political dynamics that occur when the collapse of a mythical institution triggers a political cascade, and when the deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution leads to a breakdown of authority. *A mythical institution* enjoys a mythical reputation for power and influence in public perception, relying on stereotypical beliefs that are generally false yet widespread and persistent. The breakdown or deliberate dissolution of such institutions constitute the first *visible* indication that events are spiraling out of control, and this, in turn, can destroy confidence in previously stable (albeit sometimes falsified) political valuations. This process is illustrated herein through an examination of the collapse of East Germany's system of emigration restrictions in September 1989 and the deliberate dissolution of the tsarist police by the Russian Provisional Government after the 1917 February Revolution. These illustrations support the argument advanced herein, according to which mythical institutions reflect shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities and are, therefore, the canary in the coal mine.

Keywords tipping points, mythical institutions, cascades, nonlinear political dynamics

* Paper prepared for presentation at the 48th ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Toulouse, 14-17 April, 2020. The paper is part of the Research Group on *Exceptional Political Dynamics: Temporality, Turbulence, Transformation*, led by Klaus H. Goetz, Center for Advanced Studies, LMU Munich.

Studies examining *nonlinear political dynamics*—when a change in the value of one variable leads to discontinuity in the entire political system—focus on micro- and macro-level variables (e.g., Ansell and Trondal 2018; Baumgartner 2017; Jones 2017; Geyer and Rihani 2010; Kiel 2000; Lamberson and Page 2012; Margetts et al. 2016; Richards 2000). The macro-level involves large political entities and forces, while the micro-level concerns individuals’ preferences and constraints, as well as their interactions with other individuals. Macro-level properties and dynamics are explained in terms of micro-level behavior and interactions, and micro-level behavior is explained by the nonlinear nature of human behavior (Simon 1957), and the basic nonlinearity of human attention (Jones, 1994). Nonlinear dynamics emerge due to shocks and as a result of the population’s response to the new information and surrounding conditions. Tipping points—“discontinuities between current and future states of a system” (Lamberson and Page 2012, 176)—are pitched solely at these levels, and, therefore, no attention is devoted to meso-level variables, which are significant because of what they signal about regime’s stability.

Seeking to bridge this gap, the current paper focuses on institutional tipping points, directing attention to changes in institutional variables that set the stage for micro-level dynamics and, at the same time, can produce their own dynamics. Alongside the potential for meso-to-micro dynamics in political domains, the paper highlights the possibility for meso-to-meso dynamics, which rely on the existence of a certain type of institution and emergent properties that cannot exist at the micro-level. Specifically, the paper concentrates on the collapse or deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution¹—an event that sets the stage for (spontaneous) collective behavior or *direct tips* (Schelling 1971, 1978), triggering meso-level interactions and meso-to-micro effects that accelerate such behavior. The rationale for selecting institutional

tipping points is twofold: (i) the potential to detect mythical reputations, meso-level interactions, and meso-to-micro interactions; and (ii) the strong likelihood that the collapse or deliberate dissolution of mythical institutions will resonate emotionally, because such institutions possess a relatively high symbolic capital and therefore may be more likely to generate informational and emotional cascades as well as behavioral convergence. To capture this dynamic, the paper draws on research that has convincingly demonstrated the essential role played by emotions in most decision-making realms (e.g., Damasio 1999; Lodge and Taber 2000).

This paper develops an analytical framework that addresses the role of mythical institutions in nonlinear dynamics. A *mythical institution* enjoys a mythical reputation for power and influence among the public, relying on stereotypical beliefs that are generally false yet are widespread and persistent. Such institutions are significant because they offer a unique indication of a regime's stability. They likewise assume a social function—by interpreting and constructing reality regarding the regime's stability for laypeople and elites—which may, in turn, shape expectations and values as well as direct political action. Classic examples of mythical institutions in authoritarian countries include institutions of regime control and surveillance, such as secret (internal security) police (e.g., the Soviet Union's KGB), state censorship, and emigration restrictions, while in democratic countries facing serious security threats they include the military and intelligence services (e.g., the Israeli Mossad).²

The argument advanced here is that nonlinear political dynamics occur when the collapse of a mythical institution triggers a political cascade, and when the deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution leads to a breakdown of authority. The breakdown or deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution imparts a credible negative public signal regarding the stability of the regime at hand. This signal constitutes the

first *visible* indication that events are spiraling out of control. A larger discrepancy between the event, on the one hand, and previous experience and individual perceptions, on the other, is accompanied by more intense feelings of surprise, panic, or other strong emotions and its derived motivational and informational effects. This signal generates a direct tip, accelerated by public perceptions concerning the ineffective response of other institutions in the policy domain to the new information and surrounding conditions. This ineffective response by government institutions, which may occur in a tight temporal sequence or unfold over a relatively short period, destroys confidence in previously stable (albeit sometimes falsified) political valuations (Kuran 1989). The ensuing nonlinear dynamics and/or the derived changes in the core attributes of the polity can thereafter generate an exogenous shock for populations and elites in other polities.

Two plausibility probes support this argument: (i) the mass-led breakdown of East Germany's system of emigration restrictions in September 1989, and (ii) the deliberate dissolution of the tsarist police by the Russian Provisional Government following the 1917 February Revolution, which led to the collapse of authority and the rise of anarchy in the capital city of Petrograd, and ultimately to the establishment of an extraordinary terror machine—the Cheka, and the development of the authoritarian Stalinist police state. These illustrations support the argument advanced herein, according to which mythical institutions reflect shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities and are, therefore, the canary in the coal mine.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section presents a review of the literature, which is divided into two sub-sections: tipping points and myths. The second section defines the concept of a mythical institution; the third discusses the analytical value of these institutions in explaining sparks that ignite turbulence in such systems,

and the fourth develops the verbal model and elaborates on the “informativeness” of the collapse and deliberate dissolution of mythical institutions. The fifth section briefly expounds on the methodological considerations, and the sixth presents the plausibility probes. The final section draws conclusions.

Related Literature

Tipping Points

At first glance, nonlinear political dynamics appears an unruly subject. This is because a small disruption can trigger *political turbulence* when “events, demands, and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways” (Ansell and Trondal 2018, 43; see also Margetts et al. 2016). A second look, however, improves our understanding by capitalizing on insights originating from formal tipping point models. One example is Schelling’s (1978) tipping model, wherein tipping points are all direct tips that require an individual being exposed to a defined amount of other people in the network before switching states (e.g., revolutionary thresholds; see also Granovetter 1978). Another example is Lamberson and Page’s (2012, 2) distinction between tips that result directly from a change in the variable of interest (*direct tips*) and those resulting from changes in the context surrounding that variable (*contextual tips*). Lamberson and Page suggest that contextual tips often explain direct tipping and therefore deserve special attention. They also note that contextual tipping points are widespread in game-theoretic models because scholars tend to classify a binding condition for the existence of a particular equilibrium as a contextual tipping point.

A recent addition to the definitional landscape emerged from the work of agent-based modelers who define a “political cascade” as “a radiating pattern of transformation in behavior across a large population involving an accelerating change

in the reliability of available information about the future condition of the population,” and refer to a “tip” as “a cascade that leads to uniformity in the state of all agents on the parameter value involved” (Lustick and Miodownik 2019, 4). Past research demonstrates that tips may follow each other in a tight temporal sequence or over a longer period, making it possible for tipping effects to unfold (Grzymala-Busse 2011, 1279; McAdam 1982; for a review, see Pierson 2004, 83-86). Also, evolving tipping effects need not align with micro-level preferences and behavior (Schelling 1971).

The past few decades have produced sustained progress in assessments of the likelihood that cascading processes will result in disruptive change. A dominant contribution established important regularities in the behavior of large populations when confronted with opportunities to innovate (e.g., Rogers 2003). Others have focused on the micro-foundations of mass protests while relying on assumptions about how individuals monitor others’ behavior (e.g., Olson 1990; Kuran 1991; Lohmman 1994; Hirschman 1993; Weyland 2014). These contributions established that the way in which individuals learn, whether by mimicry, experimentation, or other methods, “determines the dynamics of the systems, which in turn influences what happens next” (Golman and Page 2009).

The original analysis by Timur Kuran furthermore revealed that exogenous shocks are sometimes successful in breaking through prevailing conventions of “preference falsification,” that is, “the selection of a public preference that differs from one’s private preference” (Kuran 1995, 17; see also Kuran 1991). An impoverished public sphere stunts the development of critical thought, which is necessary in order to recognize a polity’s fundamental flaws (Kuran 1995, 205). Recently, Lustick and Miodownik (2019) employed computer-assisted agent-based modeling to test Kuran’s preference falsification model. They found that the theory indeed explains the pattern

of rare but sweeping revolutionary political cascades and that an actor's "zones of knowledge", that is, the amount of knowledge individuals possess about the behavior of the population, are critical in influencing the probability of a cascade.

The importance of "zones of knowledge" in explaining the conditions that increase or decrease the likelihood of political cascades, or tipping, sheds light on the tendency of standard rational choice and game theoretic approaches to substantially overpredict tipping. This is due to the assumption underlying these approaches, according to which each individual receives the same information about the state of the world as all other individuals (Lustick and Miodownik 2019). Predominantly, this overprediction charge is leveled at the theory of critical mass, according to which, when a committed minority reaches a critical group size, the social system crosses a tipping point. Subsequently, the actions of a minority group trigger a cascade of behavioral change that rapidly increases the acceptance of the minority view (Schelling 1978; Granovetter 1978).

Also relevant here is punctuated equilibrium theory, which focuses on the power of disproportionate information processing as a concept linking decision-makers' micro cognitive processes to system-level output (Jones 2017). The theory suggests a measure of the internal decision-making structure of the system, namely stick-slip friction (Jones and Baumgartner 2012), which is common in the study of earthquakes when sudden, large-scale changes occur sporadically. Focusing on two sources of friction, namely institutional and cognitive friction (e.g., Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Jones et al. 2003), it demonstrates that past erroneous decisions or error accumulation often lead to dramatic policy shifts. The theory proposes the term disproportionate information processing to capture the oscillation of policy between periods of underreaction to the flow of information from the environment into the system and overreaction to the flow

of information (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Policymaking systems can also overreact via reinforcing processes, leading to policy bubbles (Jones et al. 2014; Maor 2014, 2016, forthcoming). A related study links the micro cognitive processes of decision-makers to massive levels of attention (Thomas 2017).

Tipping, especially revolutionary tipping, involves an interplay between exit, voice, and loyalty (Hirschman 1970). This theory is used as a heuristic device to generate theoretical scenarios (Dowding et al. 2000), or as a guide for gathering empirical data on these separate phenomena in the same episode of collective action (e.g., Pfaff 2006). Hirschman's central insight is that exit and voice are contrasting responses to grievances that may fail to advance the same end. Yet, "[i]n the case of any one particular firm or organization and its deterioration, either exit or voice will ordinarily have the role of the dominant reaction mode. The subsidiary mode is then likely to show up in such a limited volume that it will never become destructive [...] The job of destruction is accomplished single-handedly by the dominant mode" (Hirschman 1970, 30).

Recently, an additional item was added to the tipping repertoire, namely, an affective tipping point. At the outset, recent research demonstrated that emotions play an essential part in most decision-making realms, that emotion is necessarily an integral part of political decision-making processes (Damasio, 1999; Lodge and Taber, 2000, 2005; Marcus et al. 2000), and that existing affective evaluations color how people think about issues (Lodge and Taber 2000, 2005). Drawing on these insights, Redlawsk et al. (2010) identified an *affective tipping point* at which, once reached, anxiety increases and consequently people can no longer ignore the incongruence of new information (Redlawsk et al. 2010, 581). Increased anxiety leads to more difficulty in making the decision and less confidence in it. Consequently, individuals pay closer

attention to new information that potentially overrides existing affective expectations (Redlawsk et al. 2010).

Overall, there is no silver-bullet approach to unraveling tipping points and nonlinear political dynamics. Furthermore, it is unlikely that such an approach, if developed, can explain the majority of cases, let alone predict future ones. A substantial reason for this is that direct tips may shift radically over days and hours, and even tiny changes, such as amorphous rumors and heightened emotions, can make a big difference to the outcome. This problem should not stop us from addressing the topic at hand. However, instead of focusing on direct tips, we concentrate on the variables that set the stage for these tips.

Myths

A *myth* refers to “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone [...] *especially*: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society” (Merriam-Webster Online 2020; italics in original). “Old” institutionalism, for example, explores the existence of “myths” in institutions and the leader’s role in creating them (Selznick 1957). Neo-institutionalism, however, uses the term “myth” to denote something that is divorced from reality and imposed on organizations from outside. According to a foundational claim advanced by neo-institutionalists, individuals’ motivations are made subordinate to shared norms that, once institutionalized, assume rule-like status. This foundational argument goes hand in hand with the claim that organizations “dramatically reflect the myths of their institutional environment” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 341).

Myths are also relevant when individuals live by, and live for, their “value-impregnated beliefs and notions” (MacIver 1947, 4). Focusing on the political function

of mythical narratives (Flood 2002; MacIver 1947), scholars claim that myths defy rational arguments as the dominant form of political expression (Sorel 1999; Bottici 2007). Relatedly, it is commonly recognized that the power and influence of myths exceed facts (read, political reality), and therefore they are highly relevant in processes of sense-making (Weick 1995). This notion of sense-making is grounded in (organizational) reality, which is based on how individuals interpret their collective experience. Individuals' interpretations of events—selected out of the ongoing flow of (organizational) experiences and interpreted through processes that occur at the level of groups, organizations, and broader social contexts (e.g., Friedland and Alford 1991)—are often privileged over the “brute facts” of reality (Weick 1995, 13).

Lastly, theories of judicial legitimacy argue that this legitimacy derives from public myths of judicial supremacy that are rooted in the perceived “impartiality,” “morality,” “professionalism,” and other characteristics of the justice system (e.g., Lerner 1937; Marshall 1989). These attributes are combined to create “mythical legitimacy (Tudir 1972). Overall, the concept of ‘myth’ has much to offer when dealing with institutional tipping points, especially when one wishes to understand the effect of institutional disintegration on regime stability. This is because “[...] myths may exceed facts” (read, myths may have some truth), and, at the same time, they “are not illusions, because [they] are demonstrable historical forces [...]” (Gourgouris 2000, 1500).

Defining mythical institutions

Some institutions are significant not because of what they do but because of what they signal about the particular regime in their country. This symbolic aspect opens wide the

window of opportunity for myth to mesh with an institution's reputation. Reputation refers to external perceptions of roles, capabilities, and performance (Carpenter 2010; see also Maor 2015).

Mythical institutions enjoy a mythical reputation in public perception due to stereotypical beliefs concerning their power and influence, which are generally false yet are widespread and persistent and which serve to minimize, deny, or justify the institutions' actions. Institutions may enjoy a mythical reputation in public perception despite their outdated and obsolete structures or processes. Consequently, these institutions suffer a loss of resilience that goes unnoticed by the public. Mythical reputation evolves, therefore, due to the very high level of symbolic capital that such institutions can captivate independently of any other objective attributes (e.g., size, location, sector of operation, and others).

Mythical institutions perform a political function—by interpreting and constructing a reality that reflects on regime stability for laypeople and elites—which may, in turn, shape expectations and values as well as direct political action. This constructed reality, especially related to fundamentals, is perceived as enabling a perfect grasp of the objective situation. Among other reasons, the reputations of mythical institutions are sustained by the difficulties that key challengers and the media face in detecting inconsistencies and other negative characteristics in these institutions. Such difficulties undermine the potential to find stories “behind the scenes” that challenge and question the fundamentals of mythical institutions. Unsurprisingly, secrecy (Glennon 2014a, 2014b; Rittberger and Goetz 2018) is the primary mechanism responsible for these difficulties, thereby sustaining the myth.

Institutions become *mythical* when they serve as cognitive heuristics or symbolic anchors in the country within which they operate. Such institutions are widely

seen as powerful (icons), acting as trendsetters—spreading strategies, tactics, styles, and narratives—as well as norms-setters. They drive cascading expectations as to likely scenarios in a regime (read, its endurance or demise) among the people upon whose behavior and confidence the regime’s survival depends. The common strategies, tactics, styles, and narratives produced by mythical institutions span the entire regime. Furthermore, there is universal agreement that the actions of mythical institutions and the cultural norms they set constitute focal points for imitation and learning. Mythical institutions shape how events are commonly understood. Individuals, groups, and collectives view mythical institutions as empirical and normative models and examples, finding safety within the mental map such institutions advance.

Mythical institutions operate, therefore, as a source of linearity by communicating explicit and implicit signals that people perceive as reliable. They do so by countering peoples’ tendency to generate disjointed interpretations of affairs and to complicate whatever they think other think they think of a situation (Schelling 1960). Mythical institutions create and sustain interdependencies between their preferences, on the one hand, and individuals’ stated, public preferences as well as perceived private preferences (Kuran 1995), on the other. These interdependencies are mostly hidden from view, as is the mechanism of social acceptability among those holding similar beliefs and opinions, which are planted by mythical institutions in a context wherein people think they share certain fundamentals with these institutions. Peoples’ views, impressions, understandings, and associations, which are intentionally or unintentionally shaped by mythical institutions, bridge individuals’ public preferences and perceived private preferences. Mythical institutions mediate reality for the relevant individuals, thereby maintaining an overlap between individuals’ public preferences and perceived private ones. In addition to peoples’ attempts to create and maintain

reputations, they adhere to mythical institutions' fundamentals to follow their ethical views and build self-respect. Mythical institutions therefore reflect socio-psychological vulnerabilities shared with those who adhere to their fundamentals.

How costly is the acquisition of information derived from a mythical institution? The existence of a mythical institution in a country implies that there is no need for individuals operating there to search for information about the objective state of fundamentals. Each signal derived from a mythical institution is considered a fact. Signals that convey information about the fundamental of a regime are not perceived as noisy. If they are regarded as incomplete, they are self-completed by individuals in a way that relies on socially accepted premises shaped by the mythical institution in that particular regime. In other words, each possible realization of the signal solidifies a prior belief, which accords with those set by the mythical institution. Individuals perceive the extraction of a signal from a mythical institution as facilitating a more informed choice.

Furthermore, these signals often point to low risk even though, at times, they are in fact signs of high risk. As long as these institutions appear strong and strikingly stable, they project an impression that they can be challenged only at very high risk. As long as they seem healthy and durable, the signal that they convey concerning other institutions in the same regime is also one of strength and stability. Mythical institutions are not significant because of what they do but because of what they signal about the regime. Mythical institutions are, therefore, a class.

A Verbal Model

Figure 1 presents a verbal model of nonlinear political dynamics triggered by a mass-led breakdown of a mythical institution (i.e., micro-to-meso-to-macro), as well as

interactions amongst institutions in the policy domain (i.e., meso-to-meso) and between these institutions and the population (meso-to-micro). In other words, both individuals and institutions respond to the new information and surrounding conditions as the breakdown of a mythical institution unfolds, and this response accelerates spontaneous collective action. Meso-level causal relations at time t may, therefore, be involved in shaping the macro phenomena at time $t+1$. Figure 2 presents a similar process that differs from the first one in only one aspect: spontaneous collective action is triggered by the deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution and thereafter accelerated by the institutions' response to the new information and surrounding conditions. In other words, political explanation proceeds from the meso-level, to the derived reaction of individuals and institutions to new information and surrounding conditions, to the reaction by the authorities, and to the derived nonlinear political dynamic.

FIGURE 1 & 2 ABOUT HERE

In general, the collapse of a mythical institution is the first *visible* sign that events are spiraling out of control (i.e., that the political system is tipping). These events may have an electric effect. Given that emotions are an integral part of political decision-making processes, they create an environment in which a critical number of individuals, or all of them, can cross a direct tip, influencing the states the system will enter. The collapse of such an institution may create a massive feeling of surprise amongst the general public and elites (e.g., Clarke and Chess 2008), dramatically facilitating the breakdown of emotional and/or ideological commitment to the regime (read, loyalty). It may also create panic, fear, and other strong emotions. Such emotions augment individuals' assessments regarding the likely efficacy of one form of dissent

over others (or, at the level of elite, the likely efficacy of one form of dissent suppression over others), and, consequently, the willingness to act on that assessment. The validity of this assessment may furthermore be confirmed by the fragility or weakness apparent in the interaction between the mythical institution and other institutions in the policy domain, and amongst the latter institutions as they respond to the unfolding breakdown. Inaction or ineffective actions by other institutions bring to the fore the regime's inability to grasp the enormity of the challenge and to take drastic steps to protect itself. This, in turn, solidifies and deepens direct tips. Direct tips at the mass-level may trigger direct tips at elite-level, and vice versa (e.g., defections of political leaders from the inner establishment).

Specifically, according to the model advanced herein, the effect of the collapse or deliberate elimination of a mythical institution is determined by the “informativeness” of this event. At the emotional level, anything that individuals do not expect constitutes a surprise, a feeling that varies in its valence and intensity and is experienced by individuals when they encounter a discrepancy between the expected and the actual outcome (Ekman 2003; Horstmann 2006; Gerten and Topolinski 2019; Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer et al. 1991; Noordewier et al. 2016; Noordewier and Breugelmans 2013; Noordewier and van Dijk 2019; Smedslund 1990). Our interest lies in surprises generated by completely unexpected events that produce a shock of a major nature (e.g., Kuran 1991). These are defined here as situations in which human expectations or predictions regarding the stability of an institution completely contradict the observed reality. Such situations can arise when people face the breakdown or deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution—an event that runs counter to conventional expectations. This definition inherently acknowledges that in order for it to be surprising, the breakdown or elimination of a mythical institution must

include human observers with drastically different expectations concerning the stability of this institution and the regime it represents in the public perception. Such a surprise results from the unwillingness to believe or to imagine that such an event could ever occur.

The fall of a mythical institution creates primarily conceptual surprise. It introduces the objective reality into peoples' cognitive maps and explosively invalidates premises regarding fundamentals, thereby preventing effective applications of peoples' capabilities, mental and material resources, and plans. The breakdown or elimination of a mythical institution falls completely outside the range of probable events ever envisioned. Likewise, the surprising fall or removal of a mythical institution entails the knowledge that this experience is shared by all those in the polity. It is striking because it is (wholly or partly) witnessed by everybody directly. The vivid impression it makes, with its rapid progression and drama, stuns individuals and confounds prior expectations. It invalidates the essence of their fundamentals, making them instantaneously obsolete.

Moreover, the importance of perceptions and impressions implies that the signaling effect of such an event is what matters. The breakdown or removal of a mythical institution that is perceived as a political crisis can transmit an unmistakable signal of regime vulnerability. The same applies to institutions in the same policy domain that respond ineffectively to the new information and surrounding conditions, thus reflecting badly on the prospects for regime stability. Once this message is clear and straightforward, it becomes "common knowledge" and, consequently, facilitates behavioral convergence in the form of grievance manifestation. The breakdown or removal of a mythical institution operates, therefore, as an uncertainty multiplier,

generating significant psychological and emotional effects and radically altering incentives and constraints, as well as costs and benefits.

When a mythical institution breaks down, people must develop and embrace new ideas. Therefore, the striking, vivid, sudden, and dramatic breakdown or deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution threatens to turn a polity upside down. The greater the magnitude of surprise experienced by individuals—over the dimensions of perceived event extremity, vividness, and rapidity—the more informative the signal becomes. The ensuing nonlinear political dynamics and/or the derived changes in the core attributes of the polity can thereafter generate an exogenous shock for populations and elites in other polities. Following the collapse of a mythical institution, the regime, as well as related institutions in a given polity and even other related regimes (e.g., Communist regimes), suddenly appear weak and strikingly fragile, and in cases of oppressive regimes, the authorities can, subsequently, be challenged at low risk. Mythical institutions reflect shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities and are, therefore, the canary in the coal mine.

The ‘informativeness’ of the collapse or the deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution leads to the following hypotheses:

The collapse of a mythical institution is likely to generate a direct tip at the mass- and/or elite levels, which is accelerated by the interaction between institutions in the same policy domain, thus resulting in nonlinear political dynamics.

The deliberate dissolution of a mythical institution is likely to generate a direct tip at the mass-level, which is accelerated by the interaction between institutions in the same policy domain and thereafter contained by a fundamental institutional shift that is an integral part of a nonlinear political process.

These hypotheses reflect the view that institutions may not only operate as constraints or enablers but also as a potentially explosive stressor. If their real and mythical power is not continuously sustained, even a tiny sign of breakdown, let alone deliberate dissolution, can spark a chain reaction of exceptional political dynamics by triggering individuals, groups, and collectives to reveal their political discontent, emboldening others in turn. The emergence of shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities creates receptivity to events that—if the breakdown or elimination of a mythological institution occurs—propels an information cascade (e.g., Lohmann 1994) as well as a burst of cascading interactions among protestors, dissenters, and the like (Granovetter 1978), which are accelerated by the interaction between institutions in the same policy domain. To ground the conceptual discussion in reality, attention now turns to the methodological considerations and plausibility probes.

Methodological Considerations

The next section probes the ‘plausibility’ of the verbal model advanced here and establishes that this model is worth considering—that is, empirical instances of it exist (Eckstein 1992; George and Bennett 2005). For this conceptual exercise, it is not relevant whether the cases in question yielded successful outcomes, because the focus here is not the outcomes themselves but the presence and importance of the generic properties of institutional tipping points in the polities under consideration. Therefore, the next section attempts to establish that the collapse of mythical institutions or their deliberate elimination implies a breakdown of mediated reality. The first case is the collapse of the GDR’s system of coercive surveillance during 1989–90, which represents the mass-led breakdown of a mythical institution. The second is the collapse of authority and the rise of anarchy in the capital of Petrograd after the Russian Provisional Government dismantled the highly effective tsarist police in the wake of

the February Revolution in 1917. We employ plausibility probes for three purposes: to disaggregate the components of the model presented here; to acquire insights as to how the breakdown or elimination of such institutions look in practice; and to alert readers to similarities and differences among types of institutional tipping points. The illustrations presented herein were selected because they are extreme examples of the phenomenon under consideration. These cases bring to the fore—dramatically and surprisingly—a new objective reality that unleashes waves of cognitive inferences and emotions that boost the willingness of individuals to act, deviating from precedents.

Illustrations

The collapse of the GDR's system of coercive surveillance, 1989–90

The collapse of the GDR's system of emigration control—a mythic institution in post-1961 East Germany—was a watershed event that led to the demise of the Communist regime in that country. This system evolved following the mass exodus of some 2.7 million East Germans to West Germany, where they were offered citizenship and resettlement benefits, prior to 1961. This emigration occurred despite Soviet leaders' recognition, as early as 1953, that mass migration suggested “huge dissatisfaction” and armed force was necessary to protect the GDR (Adomeit 1998, 93). To block discontinuities in the relationship between pre-1961 conditions and future states of the GDR system, the GDR government blocked emigration by introducing coercive restraints on individual mobility. It banned emigration, made unapproved exit a state offense, and in August 1961 erected the Berlin Wall. Illegal emigration was considered a crime of a counter-revolutionary nature. Consequently, whereas in 1960 nearly 200,000 people exited the GDR, in 1962 only about 20,000 people left with state permission (Hertle 1996, 320; quoted in Pfaff and Kim 2003). Emigration was

permitted solely on exceptional “humanitarian” grounds and in the cases of the expulsion or ransoming of dissidents to West Germany. This policy enabled the GDR authorities to maintain control and effectively undermine the opposition. Although selective emigration created a higher demand for exit among young, working-age citizens, these applications were mostly rejected (Pfaff 2006, 79). The totality of the authorities’ actions defined the system of emigration control as an institutional tipping point. Sustainment of this system blocked tipping dynamics by nullifying peoples’ expectations for future changes in these restrictions.

Most scholars agree that emigration played a critical role in the collapse of the GDR (Hirschman 1993; Kotkin 2009; Offe 1997; Mueller 1999; Naimark 1992; Pfaff 2006). An event elsewhere—the liberalization of the regime in Hungary, which resulted in the opening of its border with Austria in May 1989—precipitated a collapse of the GDR’s emigration restrictions and, consequently, a direct tip dynamic, which manifested in an immediate and substantial emigration wave (Naimark 1992). The direct tip was accelerated by the ineffective response of government institutions. As Turan (1991, 11) noted: “[i]n the ensuing days it acceded to a series of face-saving arrangements by which the vacationers could depart for the West, but only after first returning home. Each new concession prompted further waves of emigrants, however, confusing the government’s expectation that the exodus would taper off quickly.” Also, “excessive media censorship on the GDR refugee crisis fueled major dissatisfaction” (Glassel and Paula 2019). The acceleration in the behavior spread was apparent during May and June, when tens of thousands of East Germans traveled through Czechoslovakia to Hungary, hoping to enter the West. It was also apparent during July and August, with more than 30,000 GDR citizens fleeing to West Germany after they understood that Hungary’s borders had become porous. An alternative route to escape

the GDR was the occupation of West German embassies in neighboring socialist countries (Mueller 1999).

Once the mass exodus became a “political phenomenon” and assumed the political character of a “crisis” (Pfaff 2006, 111), rather than representing a few scattered incidents of exit, a direct tipping point was crossed, and an unmistakable signal of generalized discontent began to spread. Details regarding the progress of this mass exodus were available through Western television and radio reports, bringing the reality of the regime’s situation to a broad audience of East Germans, as well as audiences outside the country, who rewarded the regime’s intransigence by joining urban protests. Pfaff’s (2006) quantitative study discerned the interplay between exits and voice, noting that during the protest wave of September 1989–March 1990 there was a positive relationship between emigration and protest in the counties and municipalities where emigration remained below a certain threshold. However, the relationship became negative where emigration occurred en masse. In the face of mass flight and urban protest, the regime’s resolve began to waver, and, subsequently, in the space of just a few months, the GDR collapsed.

Overall, there is compelling evidence that an institutional tipping point was crossed, triggering the crossing of a direct tipping point. Combined with the ineffective response of various government institutions, the direct tip resulted in nonlinear political dynamics.

The deliberate dissolution of the czar police and the creation of the Communist dictatorship

The breakdown of institutions of law and order in the first year of the Russian Revolution—from March 1917 to March 1918 in Petrograd, the capital of the Russian

Empire and the epicenter of the revolution—and the catastrophic social breakdown that ensued, especially the turn to mob justice, subsequently led the Bolsheviks to entrust crime mitigation with the Cheka, embrace authoritarianism, and develop the Communist dictatorship (Hasegawa 2017, 265, 272).

Specifically, the February Revolution in Russia began as a bread riot and led to Nicholas II's abdication. "Immediately after the February Revolution, there was euphoria about the idealized world" (Hasegawa 2017, 95). The Provisional Government assumed power and begun instituting liberal reform. A major reform included the dismantlement of the criminal justice system and, most importantly, the elimination of the tsar's "impressively effective" police (Hasegawa 2017, 115), which also responsible for a variety of municipal government functions, and its replacement with a new municipal police force. In so doing, the Provincial Government reduced the capital's security and contributed to the paralysis of city services (Hasegawa 2017, 8).

The tsar's *police* has been a mythical institution in Russia due to its effectiveness in both maintaining law and order, and performing administrative and judicial functions. In addition to a wide network of informants, its "greatest asset was its meticulous filing system, which tracked photographs, fingerprints, biological and psychological data, personal connections, arrests, and convictions" (Hasegawa 2017, 113). The elimination of the tsar's *police* shifted the policing burden to institutions at the local level (Lohr and Sanborn 2017, 706). However, the Provisional Government failed to create a centralized police force due to resistance from the city militia, and the city *duma* failed to establish a municipal police force due to resistance from the workers' militia (Hasegawa 2017, 15; see also Badcock 2007, 181; Badcock 2015). "This led to more erosion of police power" (Hasegawa 2017, 65). Local initiatives, local militias, and popular authority suddenly became responsible for enforcing law and

order. In addition to this, the Provisional Government instituted “lenient reforms even as crime overwhelmed Petrograd” (Hasegawa 2017, 68); abolished (temporary) courts; and replaced specially trained prison personnel with untrained amateurs. Leaky prisons furthermore accentuated the law and order problem.

As a result, a discontinuity emerged in the relationship between the conditions prevalent before the elimination of the police force and future states of the system. “Crime, desertion, hooliganism, prostitution, gambling, and drug abuse in Petrograd were all connected. They spread together and fed off one another, sinkin the population into despair. The inability of authorities to address metastasizing problems weakened popular support for civic institutions and political parties, resulting in vigilante mentality that would only result in more crime as mob justice swept the city” (Hasegawa 2017, 66). The destruction of the tsarist police and the failure to replace it with an effective police capable of ensuring the security of ordinary citizens broke a critical link between the central government and citizens (Hasegawa 2017, 261).

The massive wave of violence, mob justice, and crime that swept through Petrograd immediately, eventually spreading to the rest of the country, signaled the triumph of competing institutions of public order—the city дума, the city militia, Red Guards, workers’ militia, the committee for public safety, to name only a few—as well as the Provisional Government’s failure to curb the increasing lawlessness. The inability of the Provisional Government to control the increasing lawlessness deepened following its decision to dissolve temporary courts in late summer 1917, thereby eliminating the central institution for the resolution of regular daily conflicts, particularly those between home owners and renters (Hasegawa 2017). This, in turn, increased peoples’ inclination to seek justice via violent means, primarily mob violence. Consequently, a feedback process developed between March and October: “[...] social

breakdown produced mob violence, which produced further social breakdown” (Hasegawa 2017, 260). The daily struggle for survival led Petrograd citizens to largely ignore the Bolshevik seizure of power during the October Revolution (Hasegawa 2017).

The October Revolution did not improve the situation of people with regard to law and order because the Bolsheviks had no practical plans to reestablish order (Hasegawa 2017). After the October Revolution, the frequency and intensity of mob violence in Petrograd increased considerably (Hasegawa 2017, 206). The riots over alcohol in late 2017 and early 1918, and the alcohol pogroms throughout Petrograd, forced the Bolsheviks to resort to harsh measures in order to reduce the ensuing violence and destruction. Consequently, state control was reasserted by redefining crime as a counterrevolutionary act committed by “enemies of the people” and by employing summary justice, primarily executing criminals on the spot. Understanding that this mode of action was insufficient vis-à-vis the severity of the lawlessness in Petrograd, an extraordinary terror machine—the Cheka—was established on December 5, 1917. By September 1918, this had grown to become a large institutional network encompassing the entire country (Pipes 1986; Rendle 2011). The Bolsheviks’ legitimacy was, therefore, sacrificed in favor of coercive control (Hasegawa 2017).

In sum, the breakdown and deliberate dissolution of mythical institutions constitutes the first *visible* indication that events are spiraling out of control, and this, in turn, can trigger a political and/or social direct tip, manifested in indiscriminate behavior and the destruction of confidence in previously stable (albeit sometimes falsified) political valuations, leading consequently to nonlinear political dynamics.

Conclusions

Among the panoply of competing explanations for political turbulence, some invoke class conflicts, economic reversals, and ideology; while others focus on foreign intervention and mass dissatisfaction (e.g., Kalyvas 1999). Yet deep causes that prepare the ground and set the scene differ from tipping points. While deep causes may bring about a shift in public preferences and sentiments, these new preferences and sentiments become explosive, effectively feeding off themselves, at a particular moment—turbulent moments or tipping points (e.g., Gladwell 2000). Such moments occur, for example, when a mythical institution collapses or is deliberately dissolved. Warning signs remain cloudy, but once a mythical institution breaks down or is eliminated, all clouds disappear.

Current models fail to capture persuasively the fundamental non-linearity and associated feedback effects at the core of the dynamics of political turbulence. Describing an event as “nonlinear” or as a “milestone” does not advance an explanation. On this background, we argue here that although each episode of nonlinear dynamics reflects a unique combination of different factors, some instances are propelled by contextual tipping points that share the generic properties of mythical institutions. The breakdown or the elimination of a mythical institution operates as an information cascade. It publicizes some of the hidden information about the state of the institution, subsequently projecting on the perceived ability of government institutions to control the situation. The breakdown or elimination of a mythical institution is therefore nonlinearly related to shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities. A massive change in private preferences may leave the status quo unchanged, only to be followed by political turbulence once a mythical institution breaks down, setting off a bandwagon that will culminate in a very different state of affairs (Wolfram 2002).

The verbal model developed here is a modest attempt to select, among the many determinants of nonlinear political dynamics, those institutions whose breakdown or elimination dramatically conveys to the public and elites that matters are spiraling out of control. Mythical institutions are the canary in the coal mine because of what they signal for society and elites. Therefore, they should be categorized by political executives as shared socio-psychological vulnerabilities and treated accordingly. The longer it takes decision-makers to understand that a mythical institution is about to collapse, the more dramatic, spectacular, extraordinary, and disproportionate the protection of such an institution will need to be in order to moderate the ensuing nonlinear dynamics (Maor 2019). A late response, culminating in the collapse of such an institution, is bound to signal a loss of control over the system, propelling it into a state of a deep systemic crisis. The breakdown or elimination of mythical institutions causes individuals to revise their beliefs regarding the ability of the government or the regime to withstand the crisis. In the modern era, political turbulence invariably involves expectations that the government will intervene in some way. Inaction, as well as ineffective actions by government institutions, sends a clear message that the government is weak and can be challenged at a relatively low risk.

The analysis provided herein should encourage scholars to move away from focusing on direct tipping points and towards institutional tipping points in explaining how nonlinear dynamics unfold. This is because institutional tips, especially the breakdown or elimination of mythical institutions, may be more critical given that they often make direct tips possible. Furthermore, the identification of mythical institutions and the potential consequences of their breakdown or deliberate dissolution should modify common perceptions regarding government intervention aimed at maintaining regime stability. Political executives wishing to prevent protests that may lead to the

demise of their regime cannot do so effectively by focusing solely on avoiding direct tips. If a mythical institution collapses or is deliberately eliminated, this sets the stage for a direct tip. Similarly, opposition leaders hoping to cause a tip, rather than focusing on finding key actors to create a direct tip, as is often believed, might do better to try and break down a mythical institution in order to create the conditions for a direct tip. Mythical institutions must, therefore, be at the heart of future scholarship on tipping points in political science.

References

- Adomeit, H. (1998). *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Baden-Baden: Nomos
- Ansell, C., and Trondal, J. (2018). Governing Turbulence: An Organizational-Institutional Agenda. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 1, 43-57.
- Badcock, S. (2007). *Politics and People in Revolutionary Russia: A Provincial History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Badcock, S. (2015). Structures and Practices of Power: 1917 in Nizhegorod and Kazan Provinces. In S. Badcock, G., L. G. Novikova, and A. B. Retish (Eds.), *Russia's Homefront in War and Revolution, 1914–1921, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective, 1914–1921*, (pp. 355–381). Bloomington: Slavica.
- Baumgartner, F. R. (2017). Endogeneous Disjoint Change. *Cognitive Systems Research*, 44, 69-73.
- Bottici, C. (2007). *A Philosophy of Political Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carpenter, D. P. (2010). *Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Clarke, L., and Chess, C. (2008). Elites and panic. *Social Forces*, 87, 993-1014.
- Damasio, A. R. (1999). *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. New York: Harcourt.
- De la Sablonnière, R., Lina, J., and Cárdenas, D. (2019). Rethinking Current Models in Social Psychology: A Bayesian Framework to Understand Dramatic Social Change. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. 58, 175-195.
- Dowding, K., John, P., Mergoupis, T., and Vugt, M. (2000). Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Analytic and Empirical Developments. *European Journal of Political Research*, 37, 469–95.
- Eckstein, H. (1992). *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ekman, P. (2003). *Emotions Revealed. Understanding Faces and Feelings*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Flood, C. G. (2002). *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Friedland, R., and Alford, R. R. (1991). Bringing society back in. In W. W. Powell and P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (pp. 232-263). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- George, A. L., and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Gerten, J., and Topolinski, S. (2019). Shades of Surprise: Assessing Surprise as a Function of Degree of Deviance and Expectation Constraints. *Cognition*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2019.05.023>
- Geyer, R., and Rihani, S. (2010). *Complexity and public policy*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gladwell, M (2000). *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Glassel, C. and Paula, K. (2019). Sometimes Less is More: Censorship, News Falsification, and Disapproval in 1989 East Germany. *American Journal of Political Science*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12501>.
- Glennon, M. J. (2014a). National Security and Double Government, *Harvard National Security Journal*, 5, 1–114.
- Glennon, M. J. (2014b). *National Security and Double Governmen*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Goodwin, J. (1997). State-Centered Approaches to Social Revolutions. In J. Foran (Ed.) *Theorizing Revolutions* (pp. 11-37). New York: Routledge.
- Gourgouris, S. (2000). The Concept of the Mythical (Schmitt with Sorel), *Cardozo Law Review*, 21, 1487–1514.
- Granovetter, M. (1978). Threshold Models of Collective Behavior. *American Journal of Sociology* 83, 1420-1443.
- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2011). Time Will Tell? Temporality and the Analysis of Causal Mechanisms and Processes. *Comparative Political Studies* 44, 1267-1297.
- Hasegawa, T. (2017). *Crime and Punishment in the Russian Revolution: Mob Justice and Police in Petrograd*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1993). Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History. *World Politics*, 45, 173–202.
- Horstmann, G. (2006). Latency and Duration of the Action Interruption in Surprise. *Cognition and Emotion*, 20, 242–273.
- Jervis, R. (1997). *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jones, B. D. (1994). *Reconceiving decision-making in democratic politics. Attention, choice and public policy*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Jones, B. D. (2017). Behavioral Rationality as a Foundation for Public Policy Studies. *Cognitive Systems Research*, 43, 63-75.

- Jones, B. D., and Baumgartner F. R. (2005). *The Politics of Attention*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jones, B. D., and Baumgartner F. R. (2012). From There to Here: Punctuated Equilibrium to the General Punctuation Thesis to a Theory of Government Information Processing. *Policy Studies Journal*, 40, 1-19.
- Jones, B. D., Thomas H. III, and Wolfe, M. (2014). Policy Bubbles. *Policy Studies Journal*, 42, 146–171.
- Jones, B. D., Sulkin, T., and Larsen, H. (2003). Policy Punctuations in American Political Institutions. *American Political Science Review*, 97, 151-170.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (1999). The Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2, 323-343.
- Kiel, L. D. (2000). The evolution of nonlinear dynamics in political science and public administration: Methods, modeling and momentum. *Discrete Dynamics in nature and society*, 5, 265-279.
- Kotkin, S. (2009). *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Kuran, T. (1989). Sparks and Prairie Fires: A Theory of Unanticipated Political Revolution. *Public Choice*, 61, 41-74.
- Kuran, T. (1991). Now Our of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989. *World Politics*, 44, 7-48.
- Kuran T. (1995). *Private Truths, Public Lies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press
- Kuran, T. (1998). Social Mechanisms of Dissonance Reduction. In P. Hedström and R. Swedberg (Eds.), *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*, (pp. 147-171). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lamberson, P. J., and Page S. E. (2012). Tipping Points. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 7, 175–208.
- Lerner, M. (1937). Constitution and Court as Symbols. *Yale Law Journal*, 46, 1290-1319.
- Lodge, M., and Taber, C. S. (2000). Three Steps Toward a Theory of Motivated Political Reasoning. In A. Lupia, M. McCubbins, & S. Popkin (Eds.), *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* (pp. 182–213). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Lodge, M., and Taber, C. S. (2005). The Primacy of Affect for Political Candidates, Groups, and Issues: An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis. *Political Psychology*, 26, 455–482.
- Lohr, E., and Sanborn, J. (2017). 1917: Revolution as Demobilization and State Collapse. *Slavic Review* 76, 703-709.

- Lohmann, S. (1994). The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91. *World Politics*, 47, 42-101.
- Lustick, I, and Miodownik, D. (2019). When Do Institutions Suddenly Collapse? Zones of Knowledge and the Likelihood of Political Cascades. *Quality & Quantity* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00883-9>
- MacIver, R. M. (1947). *The Web of Government*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Maor, M. (2014). Policy Bubbles: Policy Overreaction and Positive Feedback. *Governance*, 27, 469–487.
- Maor, M. (2015). Theorizing Bureaucratic Reputation. In A. Wæraas and M. Maor (Ed.), *Organizational Reputation in the Public Sector* (pp. 17-36). New York, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Maor, M. (2016). Emotion-Driven Negative Policy Bubbles. *Policy Sciences*, 49, 191–210.
- Maor, M. (2019). Deliberate Disproportionate Policy Response: Towards a Conceptual Turn. *Journal of Public Policy*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X19000278>
- Maor, M. (forthcoming). A Social Network Perspective on the Interaction between Policy Bubbles, *International Review of Public Policy*.
- Marcus, G. E., Newman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. (2000). *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Margetts, H., John, P., Hale, S., et al. (2015). *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action*. London: Princeton University Press.
- Marshall, T.R. (1989). *Public Opinion and the Supreme Court*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merriam-Webster Online (2020)
- Meyer, W. U., Niepel, M., Rudolph, U., and Schützwohl, A. (1991). An Experimental Analysis of Surprise. *Cognition and Emotion*, 5, 295–311.
- Meyer, W. U., Reisenzein, R., and Schützwohl, A. (1997). Towards a Process Analysis of Emotions: The Case of Surprise. *Motivation and Emotion*, 21, 251–274.
- Meyer, J. W., and Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 340-63.

- Milkoreit, M., Hodbod, J., Baggio, J., et al. (2018) Defining tipping points for social-ecological systems scholarship—An interdisciplinary literature review. *Environmental Research Letters*, 13, 033005, 1-12.
- Mueller, C. (1999). Escape from the GDR, 1961–1989: Hybrid Exit Repertoires in a Disintegrating Leninist Regime. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 697–735.
- Naimark, N. (1992). “‘Ich will hier raus’: Emigration and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic, In I. Banac (Ed.), *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (pp. 72-95). Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Noordewier, M. K., and Breugelmans, S. M. (2013). On the Valence of Surprise. *Cognition and Emotion*, 27, 1326–1334.
- Noordewier, M. K., Topolinski, S., and van Dijk, E. (2016). The Temporal Dynamics of Surprise. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 10, 136–149
- Noordewier, M. K., & van Dijk, E. (2019). Surprise: Unfolding of Facial Expressions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 33, 915-930.
- Offe, C. (1997). *Varieties of Transition*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Olson, M. (1990). The Logic of Collective Action in Soviet-type Societies. *Journal of Soviet Nationalism*, 1, 8-27.
- Pfaff, S. (2006). *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Pfaff, S., and Kim, H. (2003). Exit-Voice Dynamics in Collective Action: An Analysis of Emigration and Protest in the East German Revolution, *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 401–44.
- Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pipes, R. (1986). *Legalized Lawlessness: Soviet Revolutionary Justice*, London: Institute for European Defence & Strategic Studies.
- Redlawsk, D. P., Civettini, A. J. W. and Emmerson, K. M. (2010). The Affective Tipping Point: Do Motivated Reasoners Ever “Get It”? *Political Psychology*, 31, 563–593.
- Rendle, M. (2011), Revolutionary Tribunals and the Origins of Terror in Early Soviet Russia, *Historical Research*, 84, 693–271.
- Richards, D. (Eds.) (2000). *Political Complexity: Nonlinear Models of Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Rittberger, B. and Goetz, K. H. (2018) Secrecy in Europe, *West European Politics*, 41:4, 825- 845.

- Saideman, S. M. (2012). When conflict spreads: Arab Spring and the Limits of Diffusion, *International Interactions*, 38, 713–722.
- Schelling, T. C. (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schelling, T. C. (1971). Dynamic Models of Segregation. *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 1, 143-186.
- Schelling, T. C. (1978) *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Smedslund, J. (1990). A Critique of Tversky and Kahneman's Distinction Between Fallacy and Misunderstanding. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 31, 110–120.
- Smedslund, J. (1990). Psychology and Psychologic: Characterization of the Difference. In Semin, G. R., and Gergen, K. J. (Eds.), *Everyday Understanding, Social and Scientific Implications* (pp. 45-63). London: Sage.
- Sorel, G. (1999). *Reflections on Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steinert-Threlkeld, Z. C. (2017). Spontaneous Collective Action: Peripheral Mobilization during the Arab Spring. *American Political Science Review* 111, 379-403
- Thomas, H. F. (2017). Modeling Contagion in Policy Systems. *Cognitive Systems Research*, 43, 74-88.
- Tudir, H. (1972). *Political Myth*. New York: Praeger.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Weyland, K. (2014). *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfram, S. (2002). *A New Kind of Science*. Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media, Inc.

Figure 1. The Breakdown of a Mythical Institution and Potential Tipping Processes

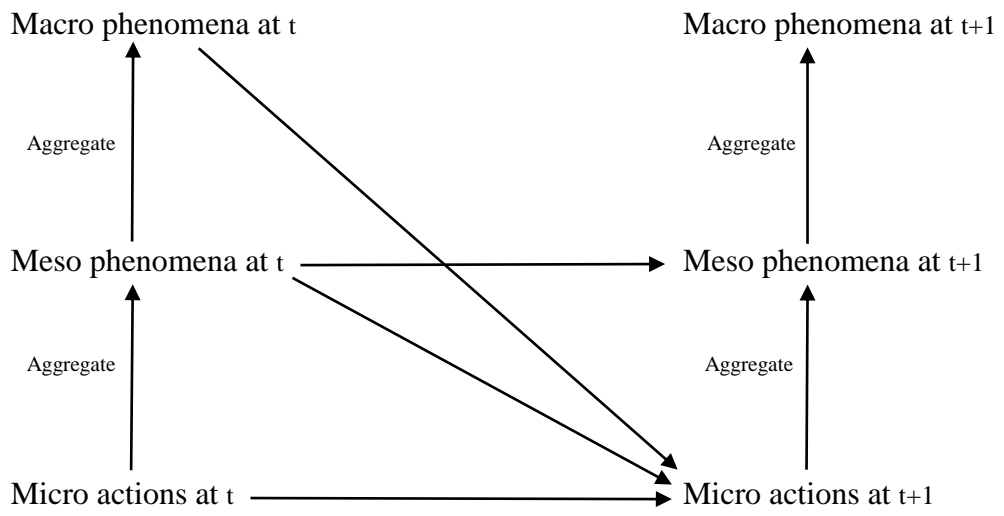
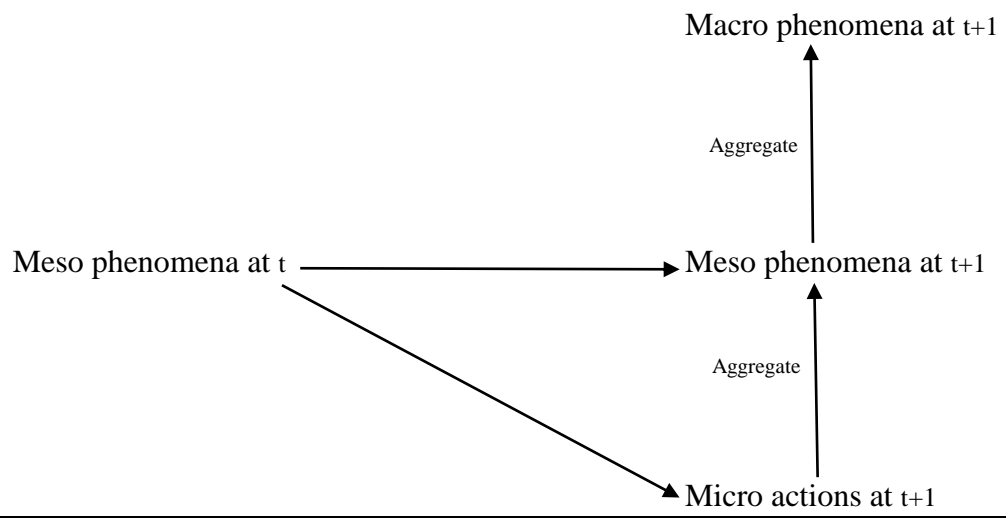


Figure 2. The Deliberate Dissolution of a Mythical Institution and Potential Tipping Processes



¹ I thank Arjen Boin and Paul 't Hart for bringing this term to my attention.

² Examples of mythical institutions reflecting the stability of the financial system are large financial institutions (e.g., Lehman Brothers before the 2007–2008 financial crisis).