

A note on:

## Changes in the political system at independence

Africa and MENA

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*Abstract: The note studies the path of the polyarchy democracy index from 20 years before independence to 20 years after in 44 African and 15 MENA countries. In the African countries independence was a feast giving a democracy peak. Even when it falls later something remains. In the MENA countries the peak is very small and there is no trend after the peak.*

### 1. Introduction

The paper looks at a set of changes enforcing realignment of political groups. The case examined is independence from a former colonial master. Independence is set to year 0. The paper looks at the political system from years  $-20$  to year  $+20$ . The political indicator used is the polyarchy democracy index from the V-Dem project. Polyarchy is defined in the open interval  $]0, 1[$ . This index covers the colonial period for many countries. Two samples are used covering distinct country groups:

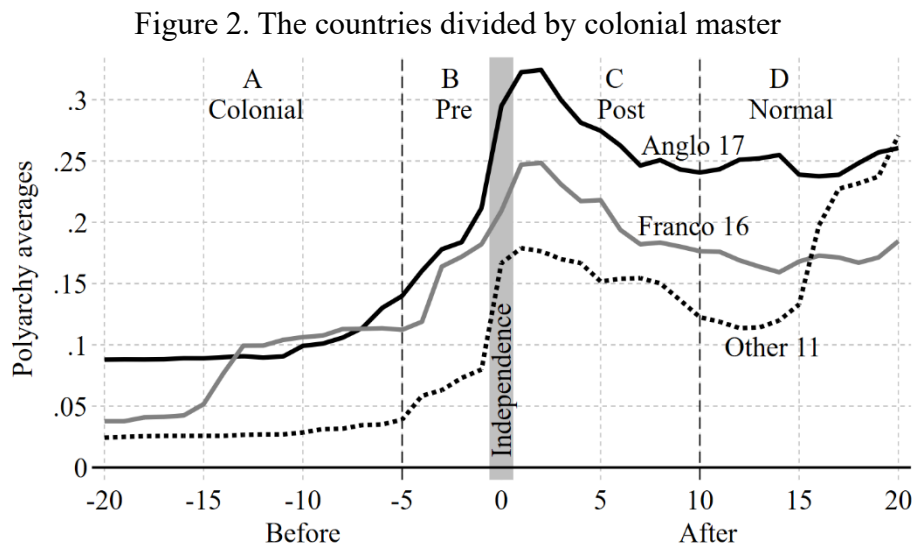
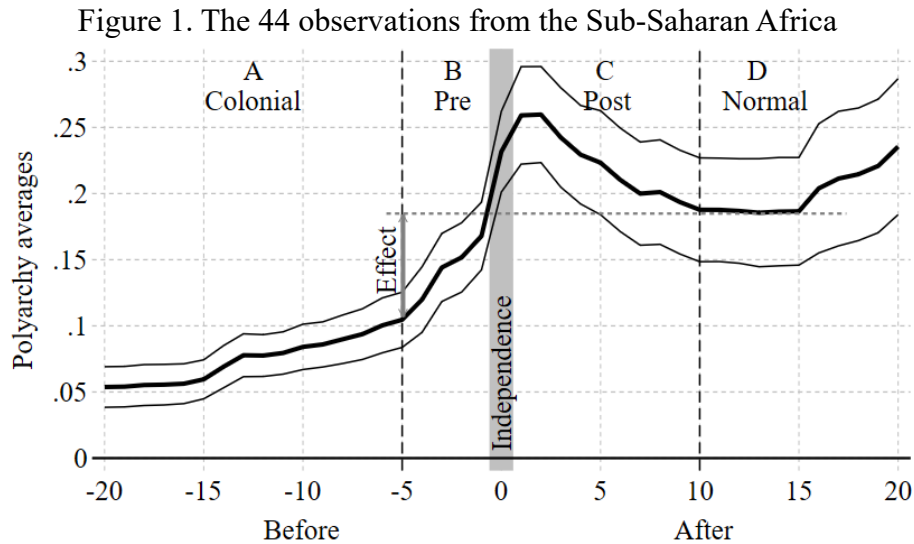
- (1) Africa (sub-Saharan): 44 cases.
- (2) MENA (Middle East and North Africa): 15 cases

On Figures 1 and 3 the average polyarchy score are surrounded by confidence intervals of  $\pm 2se$ . The intervals were quite narrow in the colonial period, where colonial ministries tried to administrate colonies alike. The confidence intervals widen by about three times after independence. The independence line is drawn as a wide gray line as the data are annual and independence happened at different dates during the year in the 44 countries. With the two dashed vertical lines the 40-year period is divided into 4 sub-periods. **A Colonial**, **B Pre** independence, **C Post** independence, **D Normalization**, where the bold word is the abbreviation used on the graphs.

In most cases the colonial master prepared independence – often in cooperation with local political actors. It took place without violence, except in countries with many settlers notably South Africa, Algeria, and in a different setting Jordan, out of which Israel and Palestine emerged. This case is excluded as it remains unsettled. Also, Isreal is not a MENA country even if it is geographically.

## 2. Sub Saharan Africa: data for 44 changes/countries

Sub-Saharan Africa consists of about 48 countries of which only 2 were independent throughout and two have missing data.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the dataset is the independence for 44 countries – mostly around 1960.



In most cases independence was prepared by the colonial master often in cooperation with the leading local politicians and took place without violence. For South Africa and Zimbabwe independence is set to the change from settler to majority rule. Figure 1 for Africa is reasonably well determined, and the four periods are clear to see:

A. The colonial period from year -20 to -15, has narrow confidence intervals. Here the political system increased slowly by 0.04 polyarchy points per year. Obviously, the level of democracy was very

<sup>1</sup> The uncertainty regards the islands, where Cape Verde, the Comoros, Madagascar, São Thomé and Zanzibar are included.

low at the central level, but there was often some ‘native’ participation at the regional or local level, and often well-defined and enforced civil liberties. The polyarchy level was between 0.05 and 0.1. As shown in Figure 2 the story is rather similar in the Anglo- and Francophone countries.<sup>2</sup>

B. The period from -5 to 0 saw an increase of 0.1 in polyarchy from 0.1 to 0.2. Thus, the colonial countries made (allowed) preparations in the last 5 years before independence.

C. Independence gave an additional jump of 0.6 polyarchy points from 2.0 to 2.6 in the index. However, as the post-colonial period progressed more than 0.6 polyarchy points vanished and the total gain of political freedom from decolonization in Africa remaining was 0.8 polyarchy points.

Thus, the full effect of independence is 0.175 points as indicated on the graph.

This all seems to indicate that the African countries is still so poor that the natural level of democracy is low. Thus, after independence the countries had to converge to the ‘natural’ level, given the income of the countries. Independence gave a wave of optimism that turned out to be a bit unrealistic.

Figure 2 shows the effect of the main colonial powers. While the “other” group is rather mixed the two big groups of Anglo and Francophone countries show a pattern. The Anglo group became independent with a somewhat more democratic system, and it has managed to keep that advantage. It has also managed to have a somewhat better economic development, see Paldam (2017).

The group of others has the same pattern though at a lower level until +15 where it shows a sudden increase in the index. This is due to the strong democratization in Cape Verde and São Thomé. A development that is unlikely to be related to independence 15 years before.

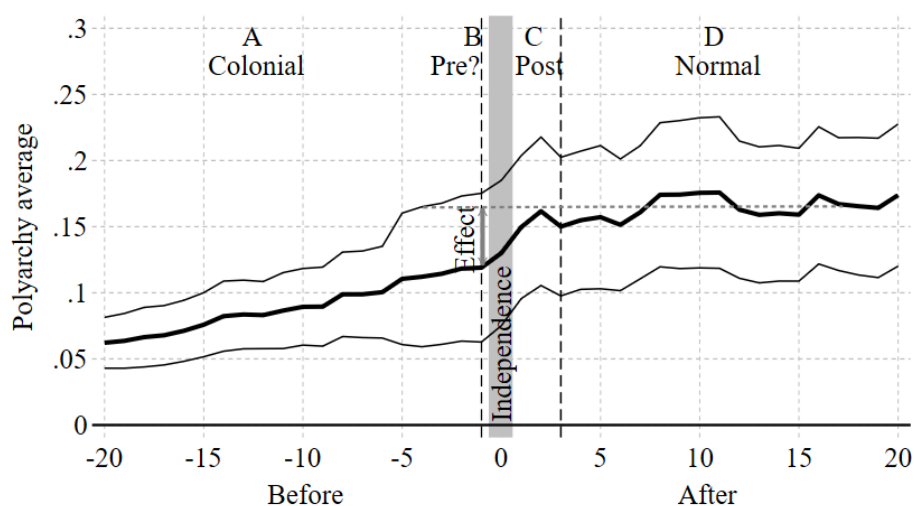
### **3. MENA: Data for 15 changes in 14 countries**

The MENA area has 18/19 countries, but 4 has been independent throughout: Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and (North) Yemen, while Palestine is not (yet?) independent. Thus, the data give 15 cases, where two are for Iraq. For Iran the case is the system change in 1979. For Yemen it is the independence of South Yemen that was a regular British colony. Tunisia, Algeri and Morocco were more traditional French colonies, and Libya was Italian. However, there were also Mandate areas under the League of Nations. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I a set of British and French mandate areas were created, with the explicit goal of preparations for independence. It happened in stages, so independence was gradual. The paper uses the final step as the date.

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<sup>2</sup> 1960 is the year of mass independence in French Africa, and 15 years before was 1945, where France became independent of Germany, and the Vichy government disappeared. The French colonies had a difficult period 1940-45. Thus, the increase in polyarchy between -15 and -17 is the normalization after World War II.

Figure 1. The 15 observations from MENA



Thus, the MENA data is more complex, and perhaps even somewhat dubious. The picture in Figure 3 is also much less clear. As the number of observations is smaller, the confidence intervals are wider though the standard deviations are similar. Figure 3 is like Figure 1 in two ways: The confidence intervals are three times wider after independence. The Colonial period A looks much as in the African case, with a slow but steady increase in the index by 0.04 points per year, but period B to D differs.

B. Pre-independence. It is unclear whether such a period occurs at all. C. The post-independence is a small wave in years 1-3. D. Normalization. There is no trend after year 2.

Thus, the full effect of independence is 0.04 polyarchy points as indicated on the graph. This is a strange conclusion, but it tallies with the missing democratic transition in the MENA countries as studied in Paldam (2024).

#### 4. Conclusion

The story told about independence in Africa makes eminent sense. Independence was a feast, but then normal life returned. In the long run, independence led to more democratic government as it certainly should! The story of independence in the MENA area is different. Here independence did not lead to more democracy after the first couple of years.

#### References:

- Paldam, M., 2017. The cycle of development in Africa. A story of the power of economic ideas. Pp 487-525 in Christensen, B.J., Kowalczyk, C., eds., *Globalization: Strategies and effects*. Springer, 2017 an earlier version in the *Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics* 147, 427-59, 2011
- Paldam, M., 2024. The OPEC/MENA/Arab nexus and the missing democratic transition. P.t. working paper