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A Wave of Global Sociopolitical Destabilization of the 2010s: A Quantitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

After the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, explosive global growth was observed for the majority of indicators of sociopolitical destabilization in all parts of the World System. In order to identify the structure of this destabilization wave, we apply a series of statistical techniques such as trend analysis and *t*-tests to study the degrees of intensification of various instability indicators (as recorded by the Cross National Time Series database). We reveal explosive global growth in anti-government demonstrations, riots, general strikes, terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare, and purges, as well as in the global integral index of sociopolitical destabilization. On the other hand, no statistically significant growth has been detected for assassinations and major government crises, whereas for such an important indicator of global sociopolitical destabilization, as the global number of coups and coup attempts, we find a statistically significant decrease.

KEYWORDS

Arab Spring; Phase transition; Protest activity; Sociopolitical destabilization; World System

The Arab spring and its global echo: The chronicle of events

There are grounds to maintain that after 2011 the World System experienced, to some extent, a new state of global protest activity. The bulk of the protests in 2011 occurred in the Middle East, especially in the Arab countries. Despite the fact that protests in Algeria began earlier than in Tunisia, the description of the Arab Spring generally begins with December 17, 2010, when young unemployed Mohammed Boazizi committed self-immolation in the provincial Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid. This event launched a growing wave of protests in Tunisia, leading to the unexpectedly rapid collapse of the Ben Ali regime as a result of an intra-elite conflict between the underprivileged army and the privileged security forces that were under the special care of the president.¹ Eventually, the army came down on the side of the protesters, which led to a rapid fall of the authoritarian regime in Tunisia. This surprisingly rapid (and relatively bloodless) fall of Ben Ali's authoritarian regime encouraged some leaders of secular youth pro-democracy movements in

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Egypt and other Arab countries to try to organize (with the help of the extensive use of social networks) large-scale protests in their countries. These attempts therefore provoked internal destabilization processes in Egypt that led to the fall of the Mubarak regime² and raised a wave of destabilization throughout the Arab world (the signs of which, however, were already visible immediately after the rapid victory of the Tunisian revolution). The scale of destabilization in specific countries depended, first of all, on the extent to which there were conditions for it, such as internal conflict among the elites, a regime of inconsistently authoritarian type, the presence of unprivileged categories of the population (except labor migrants), high unemployment among youth (especially with higher education), and so on.³ In some cases (especially in Libya and Syria), an important role was played by external destabilizing factors.

However, the uprisings in the Tahrir Square in Egypt and other Arab Spring countries also had serious repercussions outside the Arab World. The rest of the world also experienced a very nontrivial upsurge of protest activity. Indeed, “in February 2011, Adbusters Media Foundation [a Canadian anti-consumerism web group] published a blog authored by Konos Matsu entitled ‘A million man march on Wall Street: how to spark a people’s revolt in the West,’ the first of a series of posts inspired by the spectacle of Tahrir Square.” This “initial call to action and subsequent blog-posts are frequently credited with initiating the Occupy Wall Street [movement],”⁴ which initiated numerous other “Occupies” worldwide. The Occupy protest actions in 2011–2012 took place in the United States (New York, Detroit, Harvard University, etc.), Great Britain (London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, etc.), Germany (Berlin and other major cities), Norway (Oslo), many cities of Canada, Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), Australia (Melbourne and Sydney), New Zealand (Auckland and other cities), Nepal (Kathmandu), Cyprus, Ghana (Accra), Nigeria (Kano, Lagos, Abuja), Iceland (Reykjavik), South Africa (Johannesburg and Cape Town), Japan, Russia, and so on.

In addition to the Occupy campaigns, so-called anti-austerity movements rapidly spread starting from 2011 in various European countries.⁵ Anti-government demonstrators protested against economic stagnation, high unemployment, and harsh austerity measures. Thus in May 2011, people of 15-M Movement (“the Indignados Movement”) took to the streets in major Spanish cities, which influenced protests in many other parts of the world: “Inspired by the Arab Spring, these demonstrations led to the idea of occupying squares not only in Spain, Greece, and other cities across Europe, as well as the USA, Israel, and Chile.”⁶ In Greece, in May 2011, “the outraged Greek youth has taken its lead from the Arab Spring and Spanish protests over unemployment.”⁷ Anti-austerity activists demonstrated in big cities across Greece. “Similar square takeovers were organized in May 2011 through online social networks in at least 10 Italian cities. The nature of

the protests, including Twitter messages to alert supporters, echoed the pro-democracy uprisings that revolutionized Egypt.”⁸ Anti-cuts marches were also held in 2011 in Portugal (“12th March Movement”), Great Britain (“The March for the Alternative”), and so on.⁹ “The year 2011 also saw some of the UK’s largest public-sector strikes in decades over proposed pension reforms. Elsewhere, popular movements, uprisings, and revolutions erupted around the world: from the ‘Arab Spring’, over the Spain’s indignados, and Israel’s social justice protests, through to Occupy.”¹⁰ In Israel, the largest street demonstrations were organized by a Facebook protest group in the summer and autumn of 2011. Some scholars and media outlets tried to make direct connections between the Israeli protests and the Arab Spring, even titling their research and reports as “Has the Arab Spring Arrived in Israel?” or “Is the Arab Spring Spreading to the Jewish State?”¹¹

In February, Armenia was shaken by largest opposition protests. “The speakers, including the former president, referred to the success of the protests in Tunisia and Egypt and the wave of revolutionary movements in the countries of the Middle East, and accused the government of corruption and lacking a democratic mandate.”¹² Some clashes between protesters and security forces occurred in Iran in February 2011.¹³ It was reported that marches were organized in Tehran “under the umbrella of the country’s Green movement, apparently inspired by recent demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia.”¹⁴

In April 2011, rallies took place in Azerbaijan: “more than 200 protesters, youth activists and opposition leaders, hoping to emulate the mass protest movements sweeping the Arab world, were arrested during an anti-government demonstration in the capital, Baku.”¹⁵ Major protests in 2011 were recorded also in Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Belarus, Mexico, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Malawi, China, India, and so on.¹⁶

Note that we consider the Arab Spring to be a trigger of the global destabilization wave, but not its cause (see the Conclusion to this article for detail).

The wave of protests increased in 2012. In February, due to the protracted political crisis and after weeks of opposition-led protests, the president of the Maldives, Muhammad Nasheed, resigned. At the same time, resistance in the Syrian Kurdistan started, connected with the formation of the Kurdish Supreme Council. In 2012, protracted protests and civil manifestations took place in some cities in Romania. In addition, some countries of Africa, such as South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali, were seriously destabilized. For example, in January 2012 the Tuareg uprising flared up against a background of the Libyan crisis, during which the rebels took control of the entire northern part of the country.¹⁷

The next two years were defined by a new wave of anti-government protests.¹⁸ First, there was a powerful wave of anti-government protests in Egypt in 2013 (concluded by a military coup that cost the democratically

elected president Mohammed Morsi his presidency), protests around Taksim Park in Istanbul and in Ankara, protests in Tunisia against a government controlled by the moderate Islamist movement “al-Nahda,” and “EuroMaidan” in Ukraine in 2013–2014 against President Yanukovich and the Party of Regions, which was highly influenced by anti-government demonstrations in Arab countries in 2011 and served as a trigger for the armed conflict in Donbass.¹⁹ Abkhazia was another state in the post-Soviet space encompassed by protests.²⁰ In less than a week, protesters in Sukhumi managed to dissolve the Cabinet and President Alexander Ankvab resigned. Protests occurred in the capitals of Venezuela, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Thailand.²¹

Another striking echo of the Arab spring was the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong in late 2014 and early 2015 directed against electoral reform initiated by the Chinese government. Instability also increased in sub-Saharan Africa.²² In this case, the events of the Arab Spring that led to the growth of political instability in the Middle East and North Africa provoked an aggravation of the conflicts that had existed before. An example of this is the political crisis in one of the youngest countries in the world, Southern Sudan, in 2013; subsequently, this resulted in a full-scale civil war between two ethnic groups, the Nuer and the Dinka.²³

The situation has deteriorated in some countries affected by the events of the Arab Spring. In 2014, a civil conflict erupted in Libya, which ultimately led to the disruption of the process of national reconciliation and a power vacuum.²⁴ The next political crisis in 2014 occurred in Yemen, where the traditional problems of the North and the South²⁵ again increased, and the Houthi revolution in September 2014 took place on the model of “peripheral advance.”²⁶ As a result, in September 2014, the Ansar Allah movement seized power in Sana’a, leading to the flight of President Mansour Hadi from the country to Riyadh and the beginning of military intervention by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia.

The most “unwanted child” of the Arab Spring was the emergence of the radical jihadist state “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL/Daesh). However, the activities of ISIL were far from being limited to the territories of Syria and Iraq: terrorist groups both in the Arab world (Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan) and beyond it (Nigeria, Mali, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines) pledged allegiance to ISIL/Daesh.²⁷

The area of destabilization spread in 2015. The demonstrations in Brazil took place in 2015 and led to the resignation of President Dilma Rousseff. Eventually, in August 2016, the Brazilian Senate announced the impeachment of Rousseff. Anti-government demonstrations broke out in Burundi in late April 2015 after incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would run for a third term in the upcoming presidential elections. In the summer of 2015, the conflict in southeastern Turkey between the Turkish

army and the Kurdistan Workers Party also escalated. It led de facto to the civil conflict, as well as the start of the Turkey's "Operation Euphrates Shield" in neighboring Syria. Thus in Turkey the situation destabilized, leading in July 2016 to an attempt of military coup, which the Turkish authorities managed to suppress. In 2016 situation worsened in two unstable regions: Kashmir (India) and the Niger Delta (Nigeria).²⁸

The next years, 2015 and 2016, were mostly characterized by a wave of terrorist attacks around the world. Among the most notorious were terrorist attacks in France (Paris, Nice, Bordeaux), Turkey (Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Diyarbakir), Yemen (Sana'a, Aden, Taiz), Iraq (Baghdad, Sharaban, Abu Ghraib, Ramadi, Mosul, Sadr City), Germany (Berlin, Munich), Libya (Zliten, Tripoli, Benghazi, Ras Lanuf), Pakistan (Jalalabad, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar), Egypt (Cairo, Sharm El Sheikh, Al-Arish), Indonesia (Jakarta), Somalia (El Adda, Mogadishu, Baidoa), Burkina Faso (Ouagadougou), Syria (Deir az-Zour, Homs, Damascus, Tartus, Aleppo, Dara'a, Palmyra), Cameroon (Keravé, Bodo), Nigeria (Gombi, Dalory, Diqwa), Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahsa, Jeddah, Medina), Chad (Gye), Israel (Jerusalem), Burundi (Bujumbura), Afghanistan (Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, Kandahar, Balch), Mali (Timbuktu), Russia (Derbent, Makhachkala, Stavropol), India (Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar), the Philippines (Esperanza, Al-Barca), Peru (Hatun Asha), Thailand (Pattani, Chanaye), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Ntomby, Virunga), Bangladesh (Dhaka), Armenia (Yerevan), Ukraine (Donetsk, Lugansk), Kazakhstan (Almaty), Uruguay (Paysandu), Tunisia (Ben Gerdane), Cote d'Ivoire (Grand Bassam), Angola (Cabinda), Belgium (Brussels), Great Britain (London), Australia (Minto, Home Hill), and so on.²⁹

As for the riots, their number has also increased markedly throughout the world. In 2013–2016 riots were observed in Egypt (Cairo, Port Said, Suez), Bahrain (Manama), Nigeria, Saudi Arabia (Qatif), Mexico (Apodaca), Peru (Puerto Maldonado), Honduras (San Pedro Sula), Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan), India (Delhi), Venezuela, South Africa (Cape Town), Sudan (Nuala), Guinea (Zogota), Argentina (Buenos Aires, Tucuman), Australia (Sydney, Melbourne), the Netherlands (Groningen), Bulgaria (Varna, Sofia), China, Kenya (Mombasa), the United States (Ferguson, Tampa, Baltimore, Salt Lake City, Washington, San Jose, Portland), Singapore, Sweden (Stockholm), Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), Macedonia, Chile, Afghanistan, and so on.³⁰

A wave of global sociopolitical destabilization in 2011 and the subsequent years: A quantitative analysis

It is hardly possible to estimate the true scale of the unusually intensive surge of the wave of destabilization in 2011–2015 without involving quantitative empirical data.³¹ Figure 1, for example, allows a better understanding of the scale of the Arab Spring events and their global echo.

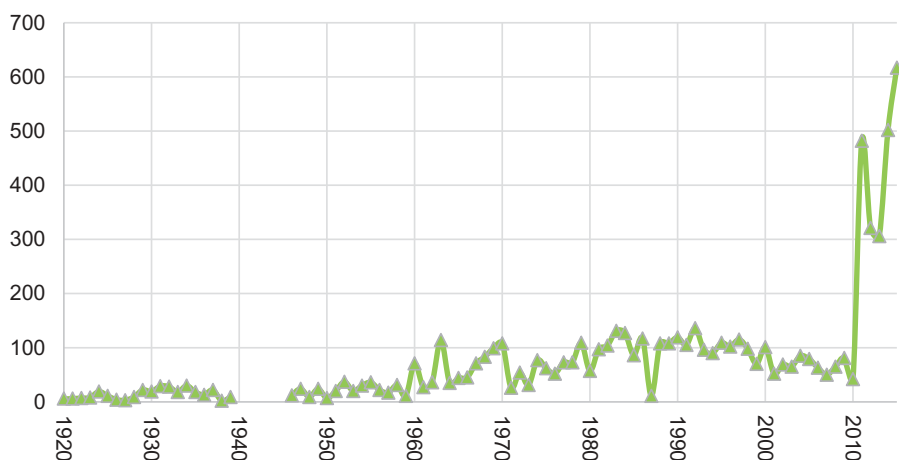


Figure 1. The total number of major anti-government demonstrations recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.³²

The dynamics of the global number of major anti-government demonstrations and the “phase transition” that this indicator experienced in 2011–2012, have already been the subject of some analysis.³³ However, these studies analyzed the period of 2011–2012. Since then, we have had data for 2013–2015, which confirmed the conclusions of these works. Indeed, a formal *t*-test shows that the number of anti-government demonstrations in 2011–2015 was statistically significantly higher than in the previous period of 2001–2010 (see Figure 2).

This histogram shows that in the period 2001–2010, on average, there were 0.33 anti-government demonstrations per country per year, and in the period 2011–2015 this value increased to 2.26. This growth of more than six times shows a big increase in the number of anti-government demonstrations in the world after the beginning of the Arab Spring. The *t*-test for equality of means indicates the unequivocal statistical significance of these changes. In 2011, the number of major anti-government demonstrations broke all historical records, many times exceeding the previous peak values of 1963, 1970, 1983, and 1992. However, in 2014, the record of 2011 was also broken, and in 2015 a new historic record was set.

However, after 2010 there was a rapid growth not only in the global number of anti-government demonstrations. There has been a no less significant growth in the global number of riots, for example (see Figure 3). As shown above, in 2011 the number of riots recorded by the CNTS database increased almost six-fold, and in 2013 the previous record for the global intensity of riots of 1967–1968 was broken. Such a number of riots as in 2013–2015 has never been recorded (at least for the period of observations of the CNTS database). A formal *t*-test demonstrates that the number of riots in

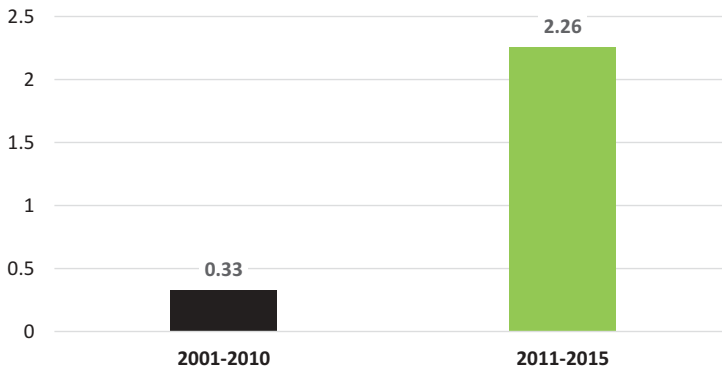


Figure 2. Mean global intensity of anti-government demonstrations before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -11.539$, $p < 0.0001$.

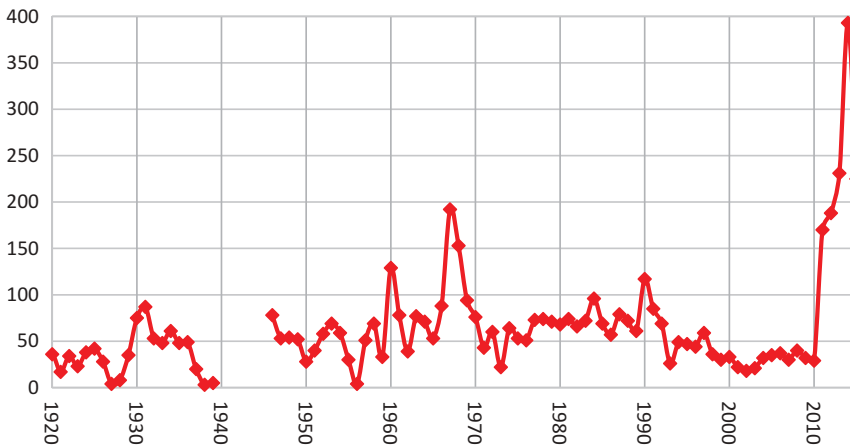


Figure 3. The total number of riots recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.³⁴

2011–2015 was undeniably statistically significantly higher than in the previous period of 2001–2010 (see Figure 4).

This histogram illustrates that in the period up to 2010, there were 0.15 riots per country per year, while for the period from 2011 to 2015 this value increased to 1.22. Thus the average intensity of the riots increased more than eight-fold. Together with the results of the *t*-test, which demonstrate the statistical significance, this shows an extremely significant change in the global level of riots after the beginning of the Arab Spring.

The number of general strikes also increased very noticeably in 2011–2015. This number had been steadily decreasing from the late 1980s and up to the 2000s. However, in 2011 the number of general strikes registered by the CNTS database increased more than three-fold, and in 2015 the previous

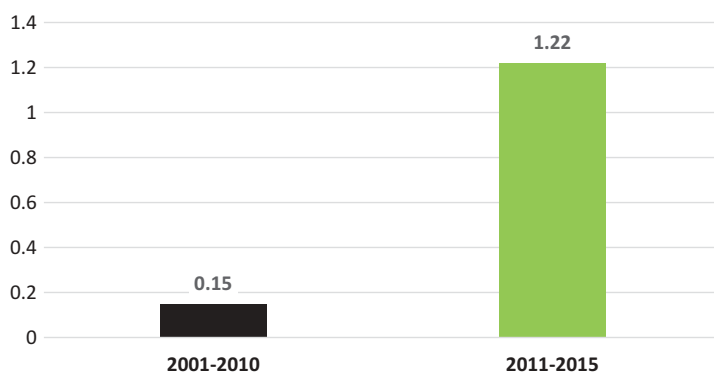


Figure 4. Mean global intensity of riots before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -14.688$, $p < 0.0001$.

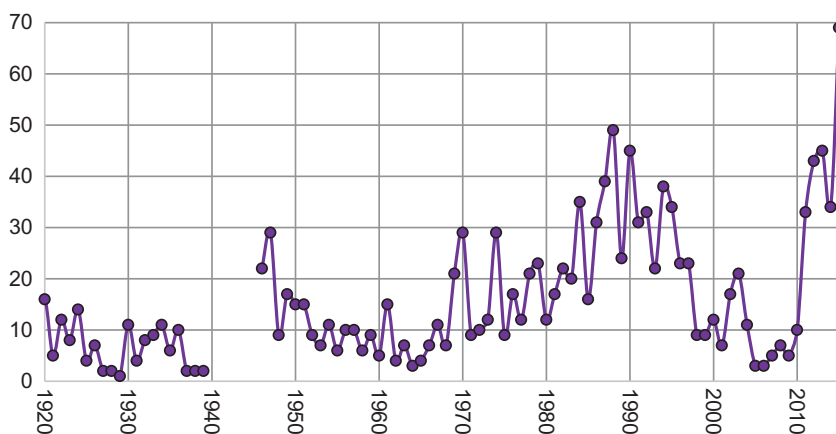


Figure 5. The total number of general strikes recorded by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.³⁵

record of 1988 was broken (see [Figure 5](#)). In this case, the *t*-test yields the following results (see [Figure 6](#)).

This histogram shows that in the period of 2001–2010, on average, there were 0.05 strikes per country per year, but after 2011 this number increased to 0.23 strikes. Thus during this time the intensity of strikes increased more than four-fold. Our *t*-test thus shows that the changes that occurred in the level of global strike activity after 2011 are certainly statistically significant. Consequently, after the beginning of the Arab Spring, there was a very noticeable and statistically significant increase in the intensity of general strikes.

The global values of the integral CNTS index of the sociopolitical destabilization of CNTS³⁶ have also exploded after 2010 (see [Figure 7](#)).

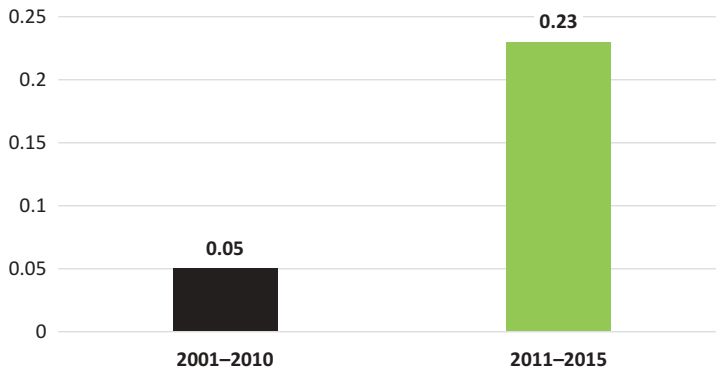


Figure 6. Mean global intensity of general strikes before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -7.198$, $p < 0.0001$.

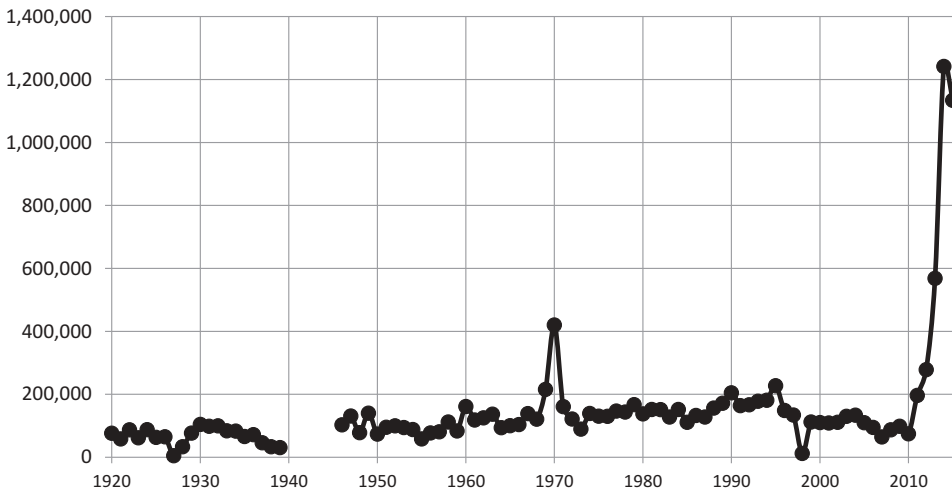


Figure 7. The global values of the integral CNTS index of sociopolitical destabilization, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.³⁷

Between 2010 and 2014, the global integral index of sociopolitical destabilization grew almost 17-fold, and in 2013–2015 these values were the highest for the entire period recorded by the CNTS database. In this case, a *t*-test yields the following results (see Figure 8).

Thus our *t*-test shows that changes in the values of the global integral index after 2011 are statistically significant. However, the number of world terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare³⁸ recorded in the CNTS database increased in 2010–2014 in a particularly dramatic way (see Figure 9).

From 2011 to 2014, the number of large terrorist attacks recorded by the CNTS database in the world has increased from 13 to 809—that is, almost two orders of magnitude. In this case, a *t*-test yields the following results (see Figure 10).

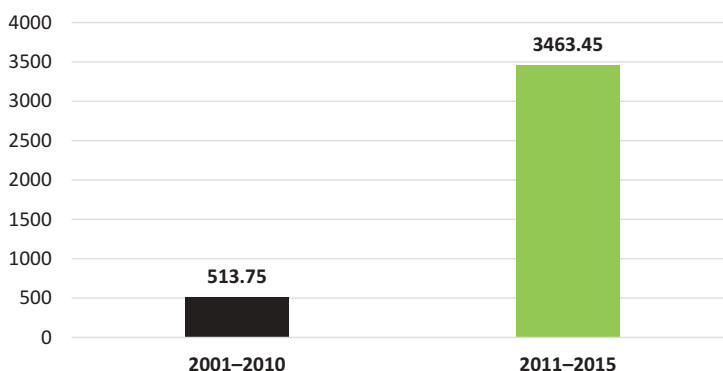


Figure 8. Mean global values of the integral CNTS index of sociopolitical destabilization before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -8.589$, $p < 0.0001$.

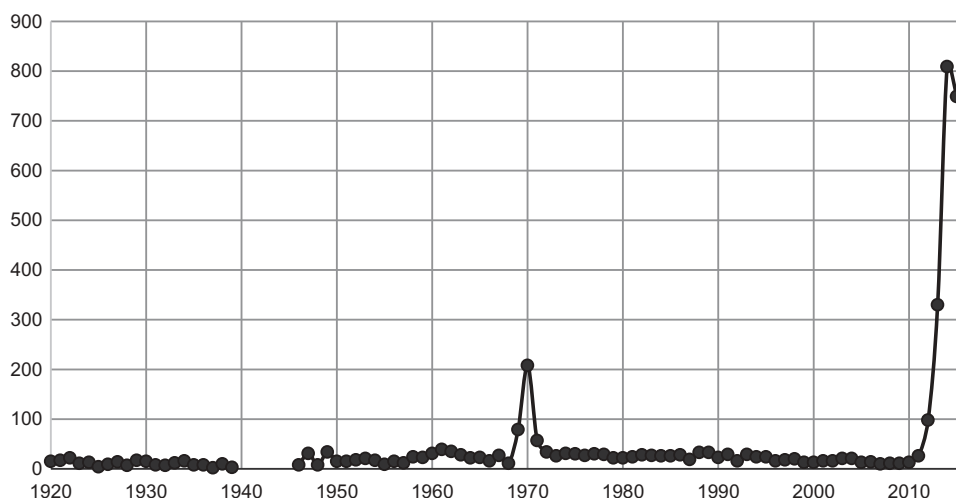


Figure 9. The total number of terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare, recorded by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.³⁹

This histogram shows that in 2001–2010, there were 0.07 major terrorist attacks on average per country per year, whereas in the period between 2011 and 2015, there were 2.04 terrorist attacks per country per year. It follows that during this time the number of major terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare actions in the world increased almost 30-fold. Until 2011, every year a major terrorist attack took place in every fourteenth country, but after the beginning of the Arab Spring, on average, each country in the world experienced more than two terrorist attacks per year. At the same time, our *t*-test shows that these differences are certainly statistically significant. We can talk about the colossal increase in the number of major terrorist attacks after the beginning of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, a careful analysis suggests



Figure 10. Mean global intensity of guerilla warfare/terrorist attacks before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -7.437$, $p < 0.0001$.

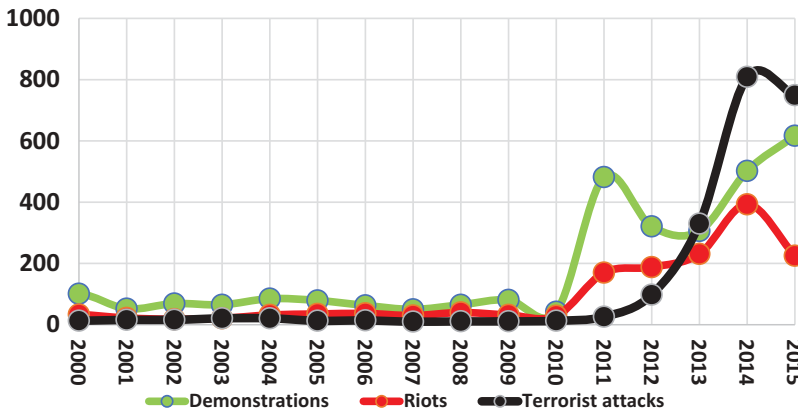


Figure 11. The total number of anti-government demonstrations, riots, and terrorist attacks/ guerilla warfare in the world recorded by the CNTS database, 2000–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.⁴⁰

that the increase in global destabilization proceeded rather asynchronously with respect to its different indicators (see Figure 11).

In 2011 the number of large anti-government demonstrations in the world increased particularly strongly (by 11.5-fold, that is, more than an order of magnitude). At the same time, there was a noticeably less intensive (approximately six-fold) increase in riots, while the number of major terrorist attacks/guerilla warfare actions increased only two-fold this year. The number of major anti-government demonstrations in 2011–2013 slightly decreased, while the global intensity of riots continued to grow, coming very close to the intensity of anti-government demonstrations. The global number of major terrorist attacks in 2011–2014 grew exponentially, exceeding in 2014 the number of both indicators. In general, the growth of the global number of anti-government demonstrations

was accompanied by a global increase in riots with a certain lag, whereas the increase in the global number of terrorist attacks lagged relative to both.

Such a dramatic growth of the number of anti-government demonstrations, riots, and terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare makes one assume that the events under consideration should have been accompanied by an increase in purges. In addition, a particularly strong growth in the number of anti-government demonstrations in 2011 was observed in authoritarian regimes⁴¹ that could not help but react with purges and repressions. Indeed, in 2011–2014 there was a noticeable increase in the intensity of purges (see Figure 12).

In this case, a *t*-test yields the following results (see Figure 13).

This histogram shows that between 2001 and 2010, there were 0.01 repressions per country per year—that is, their number was negligible. Then, between 2011 and 2015, this figure increased to 0.14, which means that in this period, on average, purges occurred every year in every seventh country. In general, the intensity of purges after the beginning of the Arab Spring grew 14-fold compared with the period of 2001–2010. This growth is statistically significant according to the results of our *t*-test.

However, in contrast to all previous indicators, the intensity of purges in 2011–2015 did not break historical records. During the Cold War, there was a sufficient number of years with a higher global intensity of purges. But in 2011–2015 there was a statistically significant growth of not all indicators of sociopolitical destabilization. Namely, this growth was not registered for the global number of assassinations⁴⁴ or major government crises⁴⁵ recorded by the CNTS database (see Figure 14).

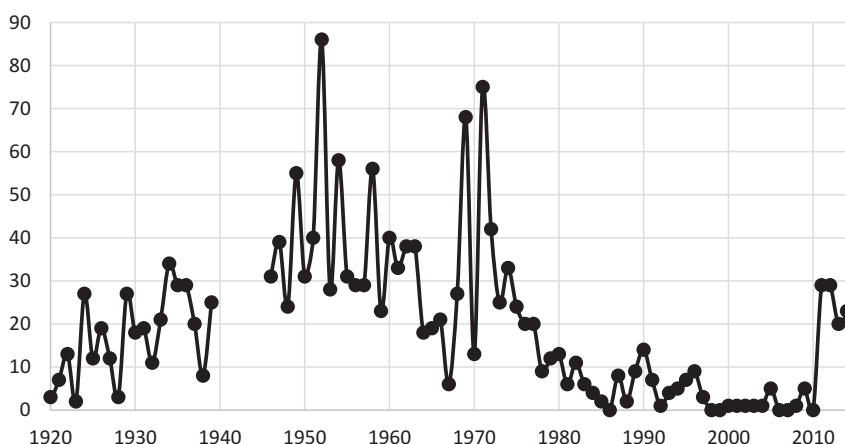


Figure 12. The total number of purges⁴² recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.⁴³

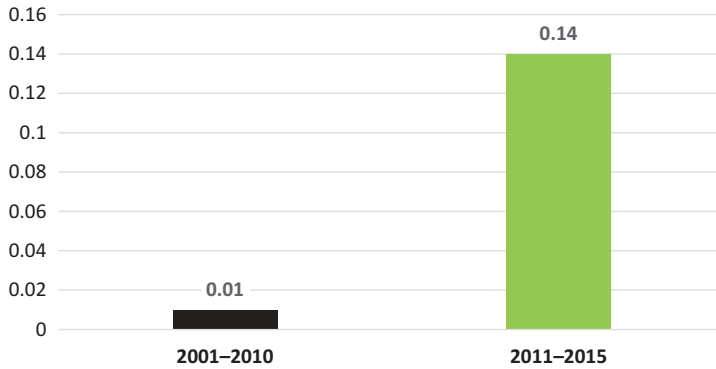


Figure 13. Mean global intensity of purges before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a *t*-test.

Note: $t = -11.209$, $p < 0.0001$.

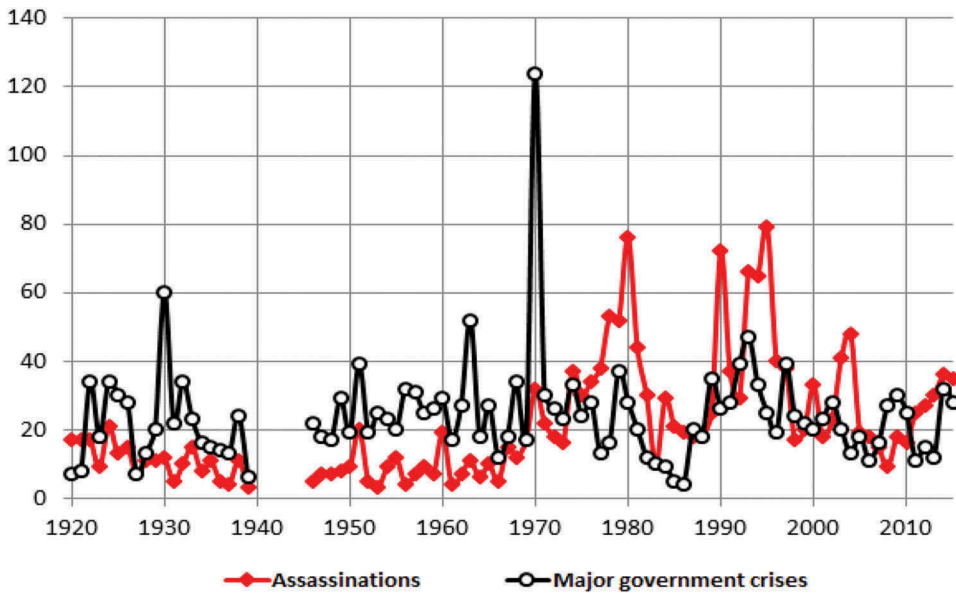


Figure 14. The total number of major government crises and assassinations recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage. *Databank International*. <http://www.databanksinternational.com/> (accessed 10.02.2017).

Finally, there is an exceptionally important indicator for which in 2011–2015 there was no growth, but a statistically significant decrease was observed. This is coups and coup attempts⁴⁶ (see Figure 15).

As shown above, in 2011–2015 there was no growth in the global number of coups and coup attempts, and there was even a reduction. Moreover, there is a continuation of the statistically significant trend of 1995–2010 toward a decrease in the global number of coups and coup attempts (see Figure 16a).

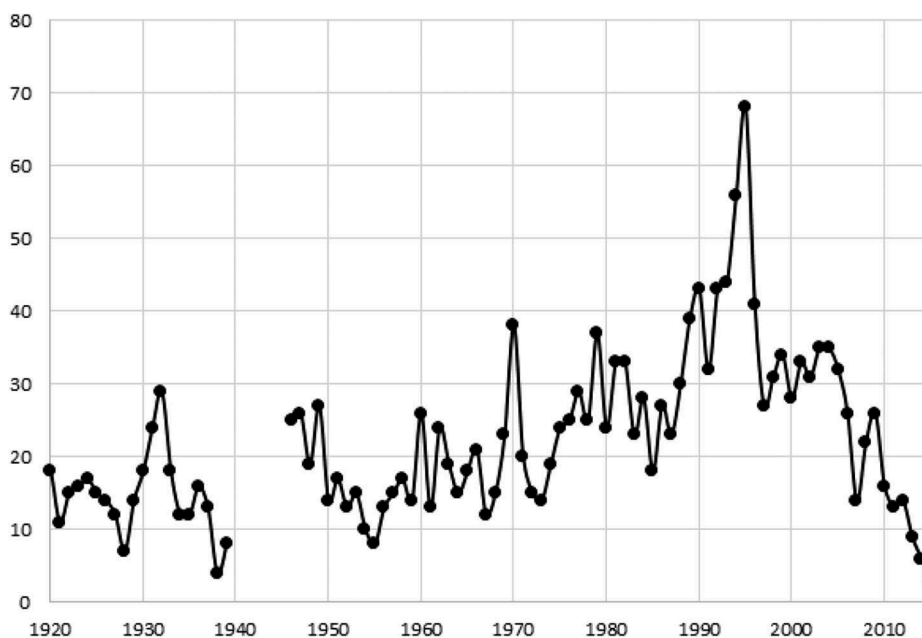


Figure 15. The total number of coups and coup attempts recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1920–2015.

Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive Coverage.⁴⁷

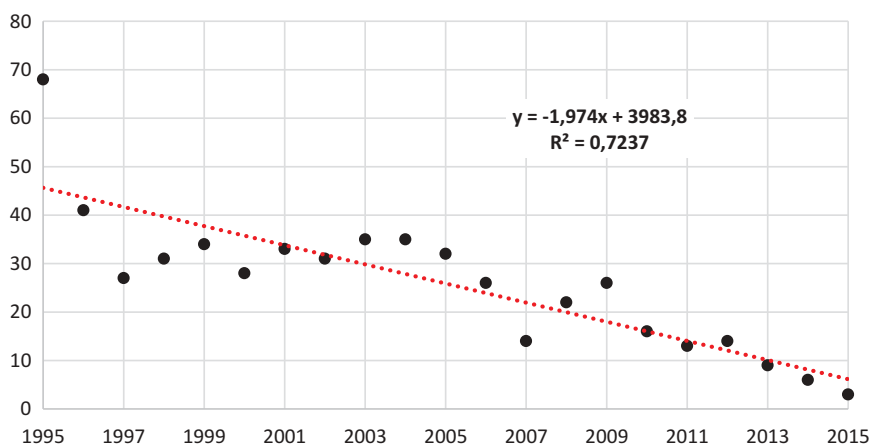


Figure 16a. Trend toward the decrease of the number of coups and coup attempts recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1995–2015. Scatterplot with a fitted regression line.

Note: $r = -0.851$; $p < 0.0001$.

The continuation of the trend of the recent decades toward the reduction of the global number of coups and coup attempts is also traced after 2010 through the specialized database of the Center for Systemic Peace (see [Figure 16b](#)).

In this case, a t -test yields the following results (see [Figure 17](#)).

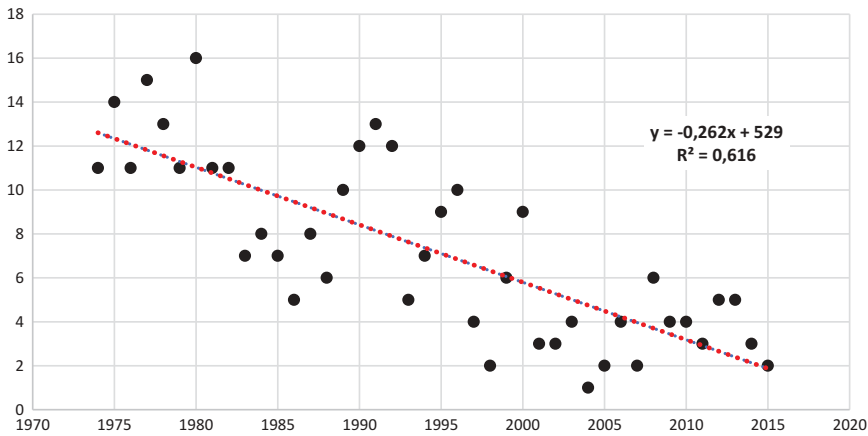


Figure 16b. Trend toward the decrease of the number of coups and coup attempts recorded in the world by the Center for Systemic Peace, 1975–2015. Scatterplot with a fitted regression line. Note: $r = -0.785$; $p < 0.0001$. Source: Center for Systemic Peace, 2016.⁴⁸

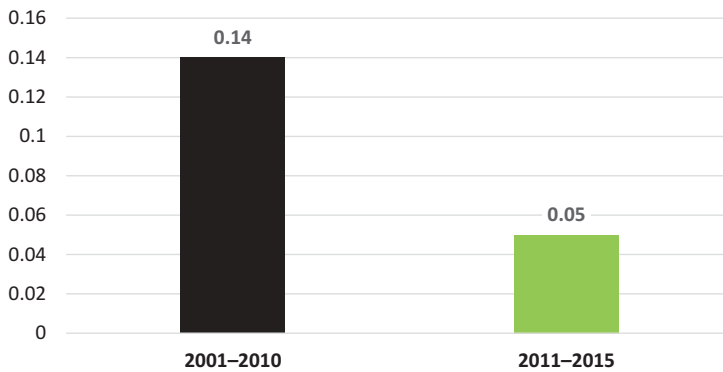


Figure 17. Mean global intensity of coups and coup attempts before and after the beginning of the Arab Spring, a t -test. Note: $t = 6.839$, $p < 0.0001$.

In 2001–2010 on average, per 100 countries, there were 14 coups and coup attempts, whereas during the 2011–2015 there were on average five coups and coup attempts per 100 countries. Thus in 2011–2015 the average intensity of coups and coup attempts was almost three-fold lower than in the previous period (2001–2010). Moreover, the t -test shows that this difference is statistically significant.

In this respect, coups and coup attempts (which after 2011 continued the trend toward the reduction of their global intensity attested at least since the mid-1990s) are in sharp contrast to almost all the other indicators of socio-political destabilization, with respect to which in 2011 one could observe a reversal of the trend from negative to positive: the tendency to a fairly gradual decline observed in the previous period was replaced by a sharp

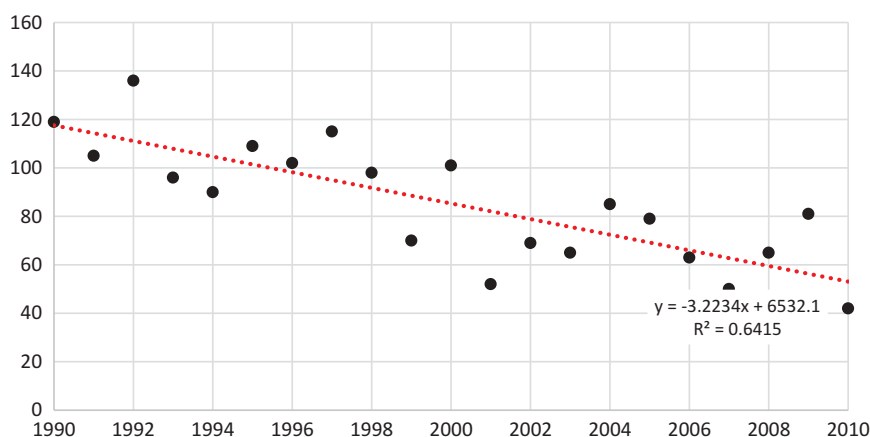


Figure 18. Trend toward the decrease of the number of anti-government demonstrations recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1990–2010. Scatterplot with a fitted regression line. Note: $r = -0.801$; $p < 0.0001$.

increase in the corresponding indicators (compare Figures 18–20 with Figures 1–12).

In 2011, we observe a more than eleven-fold growth of protests to a level that had never been recorded in the CNTS database before (see Figures 1 and 2). In the same two decades, there was also a clear statistically significant tendency toward a reduction of the number of riots recorded in the world by the CNTS database (see Figure 19).

Notably, the trend toward the reduction of the global number of riots in 1990–2010 was not as pronounced as we could see it with reference to the global number of anti-government demonstrations. It is difficult to say whether this is a

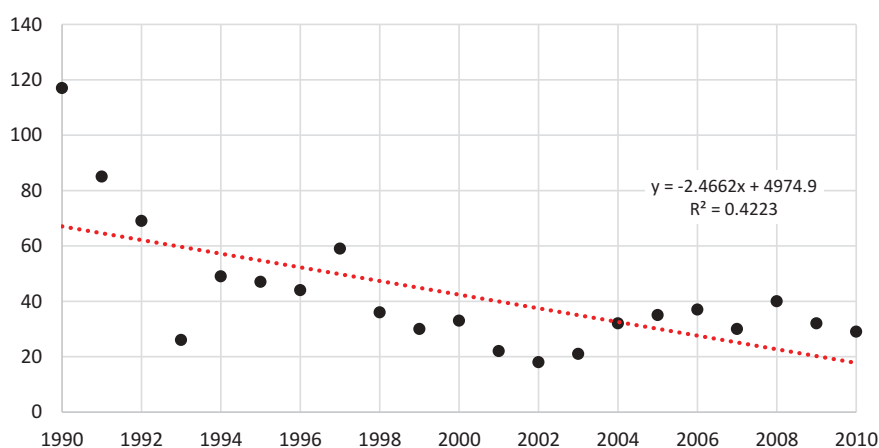


Figure 19. Trend toward the decrease of the number of riots recorded in the world by the CNTS database, 1990–2010. Scatterplot with a fitted regression line. Note: $r = -0.650$; $p = 0.001$.

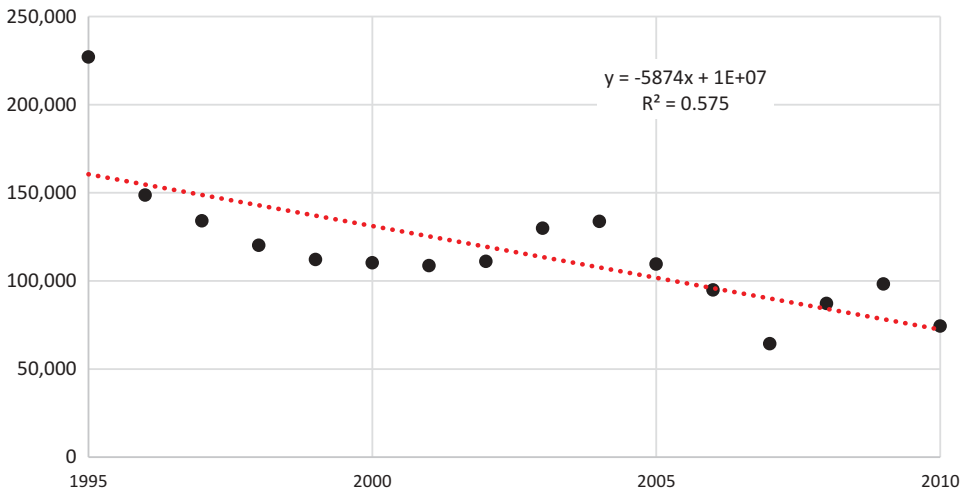


Figure 20. Trend toward the decrease of the value of the global integral CNTS index of socio-political destabilization, 1995–2010. Scatterplot with a fitted regression line.

Note: $r = -0.758$; $p = 0.001$.

coincidence or not, but the growth of the number of riots during the Arab Spring (see Figure 3) was not as pronounced as the number of anti-government demonstrations either (see Figure 1). But all the same, it was a very impressive growth: in 2011, the number of riots increased almost six-fold, and between 2010 and 2015 grew almost eight-fold (for comparison, the global number of anti-government demonstrations between 2010 and 2015 increased 14.5-fold). And this, one should keep in mind, was observed after two decades of steady decline in the global number of both anti-government demonstrations and riots.

In the years leading up to the Arab Spring, one can observe a stable linear trend toward a reduction of the recorded global values of the integral CNTS index of sociopolitical destabilization (see Figure 20). As shown above, in 2011 this steady downward trend of 1995–2010 was replaced by an explosive (almost 17-fold) growth of this integral index after the beginning of the Arab Spring (see also Figure 7).

Below there is a summary table reflecting the dynamics of various indicators of sociopolitical destabilization before the Arab Spring (2001–2010) and after its beginning (2011–2015; see Table 1).

Conclusion

There are grounds to suggest that the Arab Spring acted as a trigger for a global wave of sociopolitical destabilization, which significantly exceeded the scale of the Arab Spring itself and affected absolutely all the World System zones. After the beginning of the Arab Spring, explosive global growth was observed for the overwhelming majority of indicators of sociopolitical

Table 1. Indicators of sociopolitical destabilization before the Arab Spring (2001–2010) and after its beginning (2011–2015): Summary table.

Variable	Mean value, 2001–2010	Mean value, 2011–2015	How many times it has grown	t	Statistical significance (p)	Notes
Terrorist attacks/ guerilla warfare	0.07	2.04	29.14	−7.44	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
Purges	0.01	0.14	14	−11.21	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
Riots	0.15	1.22	8.13	−14.69	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
Anti-government demonstrations	0.33	2.26	6.85	−11.54	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
Integral index of destabilization	513.75	3463.45	6.74	−8.59	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
General Strikes	0.05	0.23	4.6	−7.20	< 0.0001	<i>Statistically significant growth</i>
Assassinations	0.11	0.16	1.45	−1.32	0.19	<i>Statistically insignificant growth</i>
Major Government Crises	0.11	0.10	0.91	0.56	0.579	<i>Statistically insignificant decrease</i>
Coups and Coup Attempts	0.14	0.05	0.36	6.84	<0.0001	<i>Statistically significant decrease</i>

destabilization: anti-government demonstrations, riots, general strikes, terrorist attacks/guerrilla warfare, and purges, as well as for the global integral index of sociopolitical destabilization. On the other hand, no statistically significant growth has been detected for assassinations and major government crises. Moreover, for such an important indicator of global sociopolitical destabilization as the number of coups and coup attempts, there was a statistically significant decrease.

In 2011, the number of major anti-government demonstrations increased in a particularly dramatic way (11.5-fold, that is, by more than an order of magnitude). At the same time, there was a noticeably less intensive (approximately six-fold) increase in the global number of riots, while the number of major terrorist attacks in this year “only” doubled. The global number of major anti-government demonstrations in 2012–2013 slightly decreased, while the global intensity of riots continued to grow, coming close to the intensity of anti-government demonstrations. The global number of major terrorist attacks in 2011–2014 grew exponentially, exceeding in 2014 the number of both major anti-government demonstrations and riots. In general,

the growth of the global number of riots followed the growth of the number of anti-government demonstrations with a certain lag, and the increase in the number of terrorist attacks lagged relative to both.

There are grounds to suggest that the Arab Spring played a role as the trigger for an unusually intensive wave of global sociopolitical destabilization that began in 2011. We would like to emphasize that we consider the Arab Spring to be a trigger for the global destabilizing wave after 2011, but in no way its cause. The systematic consideration of the fundamental causes of both the global wave itself and its trigger is beyond the scope of this article. We limit ourselves to mentioning some of them. One of these causes appears to be the neoliberal monetarist economic policy, which the world's leading countries have systematically pursued since the 1980s. This policy has led to a significant increase in economic inequality and socio-structural tension in the countries of the World System core, which caused in many ways the global destabilizing wave in 2011.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the explosive growth of financial capital associated with this policy, coupled with its progressive deregulation, led to the financial and economic crisis in 2008–2009. This crisis had a global destabilizing impact, but not so much direct as through the attempts (in some ways, quite reasonable) in the spirit of neoliberal monetarist theories to get out of it through a policy of quantitative easing. The consequence was an unprecedented global increase in food prices, which, in turn, destabilized the World System periphery and semi-periphery.⁵⁰ At the same time the phase transition of the early 2010s was prepared by a new wave of growth of global informational connectivity, as well as the improvement of the means of protest self-organization due to the spread of various technologies of the Fifth Kondratieff cycle (the Internet, satellite television, Twitter and other social networks, mobile telephony, YouTube, etc.)⁵¹

Taking into account the fundamental factors that led to the global wave of sociopolitical destabilization at the beginning of 2010, it is not surprising that it was realized mainly in the form of mass destabilization (such as demonstrations, riots, general strikes) rather than in elite destabilization forms (such as coups and political assassinations).

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 38. In CNTS, this variable (*domestic 3*) is designated as *Guerrilla Warfare*, which, of course, literally should be understood as "guerrilla actions." However, the CNTS database user manual gives the following definition of this variable: "any armed activity, sabotage, or bombings carried on by independent bands of citizens or irregular forces and aimed at the overthrow of the present regime" (see Kenneth Wilson, *User's Manual: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Jerusalem, 2017. Databanks International). A closer analysis shows that in most cases the related numbers in the database correspond primarily to the numbers of major terrorist attacks.

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42. In the CNTS database, this variable (*domestic 5*) is designated as *Purges*. The CNTS database user manual defines this variable as follows: “any systematic elimination by jailing or execution of political opposition within the ranks of the regime or the opposition” (see Kenneth Wilson, *User’s Manual: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Jerusalem, 2017. Databanks International, p. 13).
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44. In the CNTS database, this variable (*domestic 1*) is designated as *Assassinations*. The CNTS database user manual defines this variable as follows: “any politically motivated murder or attempted murder of a high government official or politician” (see Kenneth Wilson, *User’s Manual: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Jerusalem, 2017. Databanks International, p. 12).
45. In the CNTS database, this variable (*domestic 4*) is designated as *Major Government Crises*. The CNTS database user manual defines this variable as follows: “any rapidly developing situation that threatens to bring the downfall of the present regime—excluding situations of revolt aimed at such overthrow” (see Kenneth Wilson, *User’s Manual: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Jerusalem, 2017. Databanks International, p. 12).
46. Note that in the CNTS database this indicator (*domestic 7*) is denoted as *Revolutions*. However, the database developers supply for it the following definition: “any illegal or forced change in the top government elite, any attempt at such a change, or any successful or unsuccessful armed rebellion whose aim is independence from the central government” (see Kenneth Wilson, *User’s Manual: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Jerusalem, 2017. Databanks International, p. 13). It is not difficult to see that this definition covers not only and not so much the actual revolution, but coups and coup attempts, and the analysis of specific events included in the CNTS under this heading clearly shows that the number of coups and coup attempts recorded there is many times greater than the number of not only actual revolutions, but also national liberation uprisings/separatist riots. Thus the dynamics of the CNTS variable *domestic7* reflects primarily the dynamics of upheavals and coup attempts.
47. Databank International. <http://www.databanksinternational.com/> (accessed December 10, 2017).
48. *Coup d’État Events, 1946–2015* (Vienna: Center for Systemic Peace, 2016). <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/CSPCoupsAnnualv2015.xls> (accessed December 12, 2017).
49. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Oscar Ortman, Elisabetta Mazzeo, Kira Mescherina, and Andrey Korotayev, “Modeling Social Pressures toward Political Instability in the United Kingdom after 1960: A Demographic Structural Analysis,” *Cliodynamics* 8, no. 2 (2017): 113–58; Peter Turchin, Sergey Gavrillets, and Jack A. Goldstone, “Linking

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50. Askar Akaev, Viktor Sadovnichy, and Andrey Korotayev, “On the Dynamics of the World Demographic Transition and Financial-Economic Crises Forecasts,” *European Physical Journal Special Topics* 205, no. 1 (2012): 355–73.
 51. Askar Akaev, Andrey Korotayev, Leonid Issaev, and Julia Zinkina, “Technological Development and Protest Waves: Arab Spring as a Trigger of the Global Phase Transition?” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 116 (2017): 316–21.
 52. Arthur Banks and Kenneth K. Wilson, *Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Databanks International. Jerusalem, Israel, 2017. <http://www.databanksinternational.com>.

Appendix

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Cross-National Time Series (CNTS)

The Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) database is the result of data compilation and systematization started by Arthur Banks⁵² in 1968 at the State University of New York–Binghamton. The work was based on generalizing the archive of data from *The Statesman’s Yearbooks*, published since 1864. It also contains approximately 200 indicators for more than 200 countries. The database contains yearly values of indicators starting from 1815 excluding the periods of World Wars I and II (1914–1918 and 1939–1945).

The CNTS database is structured by sections, such as territory and population, technology, economic and electoral data, internal conflicts, energy use, industry, military expenditures, international trade, urbanization, education, employment, and legislative activity.

In our research, we take a close look at the data describing internal conflicts (*domestic*). This section includes data starting from 1919 based on the analysis of events in eight various subcategories, which are used to compile a general Index of Sociopolitical Destabilization (*domestic9*). In building the general index, the compilers of the CNTS database give each category a certain weight (see Table A1).

Table A1. Weights of subcategories used in compiling the index of sociopolitical destabilization.

Subcategory	Variable name	Weight in the Index of Sociopolitical Destabilization (domestic9)
Assassinations	domestic1	25
General Strikes	domestic2	20
Guerrilla Warfare	domestic3	100
Government Crises	domestic4	20
Purges	domestic5	20
Riots	domestic6	25
Coups and coup attempts	domestic7	150
Anti-Government Demonstrations	domestic8	10

To calculate the Index of Sociopolitical Destabilization (*Weighted Conflict Measure*, domestic9), the numerical values of each subcategory are multiplied by their corresponding weights, the results of the multiplications are summed up, and then the sum is multiplied by 100 and divided by 8; see formula (1).

$$\text{domestic9} = \frac{25 \text{ domestic1} + 20 \text{ domestic2} + 100 \text{ domestic3} + 20 \text{ domestic4} + 20 \text{ domestic5} + 25 \text{ domestic6} + 150 \text{ domestic7} + 10 \text{ domestic8}}{8} * 100 \quad (1)$$