

The First Two Laws of Politics:  
Nannestad and Paldam's "Cost of Ruling" Revisited<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract

Two decades ago, Peter Nannestad and Martin Paldam (2009) published a paper in which, having analyzed 282 elections held between 1948 and 1997 in 19 developed democracies, they claimed that all incumbent parties on average incur a "cost of ruling" of approximately 2.25% points per term. They called this cost a "robust fact," "an unusually stable constant" that operates across countries, institutions and time. I evaluate how well N&P's empirical assertions hold up in a much larger set of elections held in a set of well-established democracies similar to the one they studied, as well as in other, more recent electoral democracies outside the OECD region.

**Keywords:** "cost of ruling," "laws of politics," "incumbent loss," "spell in office," parliamentary, presidential, gubernatorial, subnational, region.

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The First Two Laws of Politics:  
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Alfred G. Cuzán

Two decades ago Peter Nannestad and Martin Paldam (1999; henceforth N&P) published a paper in which they reported that the “cost of ruling,” “which is normally treated as a small sideshow—often relegated to a footnote—is a strong and robust fact that ought to be on center-stage” (1999, 21). Their “key empirical claim” is that the average cost of governing ( $\lambda$ ), calculated as the percentage point change in the share of the vote for the party or coalition in government in 282 elections held in 19 developed democracies between 1948 and 1997, is approximately 2.25% (p. 3).<sup>1</sup> They called this effect “an unusually stable constant” whose robustness “is generally not well known” (pp. 3, 21). Budge concurs, adding that “possibly the best-supported inductive ‘law’ in political science is that government parties will lose around 2%-3% of their previous vote in the following election” (Budge 2019, 321). Nannestad and Paldam made other bold pronouncements about this constant, among them being that the cost of ruling, by contributing to alternation between parties or coalitions in government, “contributes to keeping democracy viable” (N&P, 23).

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate how well N&P's empirical claims hold up in a much larger and longer set of elections held in varying institutional settings and regions of the world. First, though, some caveats are in order. To begin with, I examine a similar, but not identical set of 19 developed democracies of the OECD as that which served as the basis for N&P's claims. Firstly, I substituted Israel for Finland which, as it

happens, did not differ that much on incumbent loss during the period 1948-1998, -2.45% vs. -3.10%, respectively. (For a complete list of countries and elections used in this paper, see the Appendix). In France N&P examined elections for the National Assembly, whereas here I do so for the presidency because, with Budge et al. (2012, 275), I found that it was not always obvious to what party to attribute the cost of governing for the legislature. There were fewer French presidential than assembly elections, and this contributed to a reduction in my total elections for this period, compared to N&P's (278 vs. 283). Thirdly, in this paper the vote for the party of the head of government (prime minister, premier or president) serves as the basis for calculating incumbent loss. The recorded vote is the percentage of the total vote cast for the incumbent party candidate or list in the first or only round in elections for the lower house of the legislature or for an independently elected executive, a president or governor. My analysis computes the percentage point loss in this "raw vote" of the party of the head of government, as Paldam called it (Paldam 1991, 23).<sup>2</sup> In N&P's 1999 paper, by contrast, in parliamentary systems, in which the government frequently consists of a coalition of parties, incumbent vote consists in the combined total of all the parties included in the coalition. The rationale for doing it my way is that it is not unusual for a coalition to break up between elections. With one or more former coalition members opposing their former partners, it is unclear how to apportion the losses among them. But it is a straightforward matter to measure the loss incurred by the party of the prime minister, which, after all, probably is the most visible to the electorate and the one most likely to be held responsible. As a result, the average incumbent loss per term, calculated with the "raw vote" of pooled elections and terms of office, is lower in my case ( $\lambda = -1.77\%$  vs.  $\lambda = -2.54\%$ ). On the other hand, the standard deviation, all elections pooled, was

practically the same ( $\sigma=5.95$  vs.  $\sigma=5.97$ ).<sup>3</sup> Finally, whereas simply dividing total losses of the raw vote by the number of terms in N&P yields a mean loss of -2.54% per term, they calculated that  $\lambda=-2.25\%$  (N&P, Tables 2 and 3, pp. 3-4). They arrived at the latter figure by dividing the life of governments into quarters and computing the *annual* cost of governing in “normal elections,” then multiplying by 3.5 years, the length of a “standard” term of office. Thus, they settled on  $\lambda\approx-2.25\%$  per term (p. 9). By contrast, I weigh all terms equally regardless of their length, just as Paldam did in an earlier contribution (1991, pp. 18-19). Any government is coded as serving at least one year, even if it lost a repeat election within the same year. If a government won reelection but fell a few months later, say, because one of the parties deserted the coalition, or the government lost a vote of confidence, I retroactively coded their last election as incumbents as a loss, ending their spell in office at that point. In sum, there are some differences between the two approaches in data and coding rules. This makes the coincidence in the two sets of findings all the more remarkable.

One last caveat needs pointing out. My objective is simply to present evidence that in my judgment leaves no doubt that Nannestad and Paldam’s findings point to what might be called “The Law of Shrinking Support” and “The Law of Alternation in Office.” The latter is a necessary consequence of the former, so it requires no explanation. But I offer none for the first law, either. There are many contestants already in the field. Nannestad and Paldam devoted more than half of their paper to adjudicating among three, and several more are available (Budge et al. 2012, 275-277; Hix 1984; Paldam and Skott 1995; Thesen, Mortensen and Green-Pedersen 2020; Wlezien 2016). If the history of science is any guide, still more candidates will emerge to claim the honor.<sup>4</sup>

## Evaluating N&P's empirical claims

Nannestad and Paldam's article includes several kinds of empirical propositions. One has to do with the nature of the "the cost of ruling," another with its average magnitude,  $\lambda$ , and a third with its variation, measured by the standard deviation,  $\sigma$ . In this section, these empirical claims are serially evaluated in approximate order of importance, first with a similar set of developed democracies, described earlier, albeit over a longer time span, and then with a much larger universe of elections from around the globe.

Again, according to N&P, the cost of governing constitutes a set of "*very basic facts*" (their emphasis), "an unusually stable constant" "that does not depend upon the election system, the party-structure, or the size of the country" (pp. 6, 3). It is something in the order of "*a general law*" (Paldam 1986, 23; my emphasis) that cuts across countries and time. Measured in 282 elections held in 19 established OECD democracies between 1948 and 1998,  $\lambda \approx -2.25\%$ ,  $\sigma \approx 4.5\%$  in parliamentary democracies, with twice the variation in presidential elections (N&P, 3). In earlier papers, Paldam had posited somewhat lower estimates of  $\lambda$ , of 1.65% and 1.61% with two fewer countries, the former in the 1948-1980 period (Paldam 1986) and the latter in the 1948-1985 period (Paldam 1991). Next, N&P examined the path of incumbent losses over time and found that for two decades starting in 1948 the three-year rolling average was trendless, but then the plot took a downward turn, the vote losses doubling, on average, to around -5%.<sup>5</sup> They conjectured that the "change is connected to the economic changes in the 1990s" (p. 9), but did not pursue the point further.

Figure 1 displays the plot of incumbent loss of a pooled set of 392 elections held in 19 OECD countries between 1948 and 2021. (For all the countries included in this

study, see the Appendix at the end of the paper.) The time-path of the three-year rolling average plot through 1998 bears comparison with N&P’s own Figure 6 (p. 9). Note that it tracks theirs rather closely. It, too, dips in the mid-1990s, a behavior that recurs two decades later, beyond the period they studied. Note, too, that there is not much of a trend in the annual data (shown by the dashed blue line) or rolling three-year rolling average path ( $\beta=-0.05$ ,  $R^2=0.02$  and  $\beta=-0.04$ ,  $R^2=0.23$ , respectively). However, the 1995 dip appears to have been not simply a temporary displacement of the latter, as N&P thought, but a permanent one step-function increase in the cost of governing of  $\approx 0.80\%$ . Up through 1998,  $\lambda=-1.77\%$ ,  $\sigma=5.9$  for incumbent loss and  $-1.85\%$ ,  $\sigma=1.8$  for the three-year rolling average path; after that year, the respective statistics are  $\lambda=-2.56\%$ ,  $\sigma=7.1$  and  $\lambda=-2.64$ ,  $\sigma=1.9$ . Still, for the entire series  $\lambda=-2.00\%$ ,  $\sigma=6.3$  incumbent vote and  $\lambda=-2.13\%$ ,  $\sigma=1.9$  for the three-year rolling average path, very close to what N&P estimated with a different, more complicated method and with only 2/3 as many elections held over a shorter period.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, their core claim, that in the developed democracies on average the cost of governing is around  $-2.25\%$ , and that it is invariant or nearly so with respect to time, appears to be as solid a stone as they said it was. Only, one need not be fixated on  $-2.25\%$  per term (as we shall see, N&P were not), but accept Budge’s less stringent  $-2\%$  to  $-3\%$  range (Budge 2019, 321).

Figure 1. Incumbent Vote Loss, 19 OECD Countries, 1948-2021

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Figure 1 about here

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A second empirical claim by N&P (1999) is that the cost of governing is independent of institutions. They found that  $\lambda$  was about the same in presidential and parliamentary systems, but that the standard deviation,  $\sigma$ , in the former was approximately twice as large as in the latter (4.5% vs. 9.0%). The measurements obtained with the longer OECD data series reveal a difference of 0.75% in the cost of governing between presidential and parliamentary systems,  $\lambda=-2.7\%$  and  $\lambda=-1.95\%$ , respectively, but a smaller difference in the standard deviation,  $\sigma=9.1$  and  $\sigma=6.0$  than what N&P had found. However, recall that in present study two presidential systems are included, those of France and the U.S., whereas in N&P (1999) only the latter was.

More to the point, properly assessing institutional differences associated with the cost of governing is problematic because of the potential influence of other factors. Most presidential systems operate in Latin America, a region that only recently appears to have gained some continuity in electoral democracy and where the political history of most countries has been rather turbulent. Comparing subnational elections in Canadian provincial and Australian state governments with those in the U.S. is a way to overcome these difficulties.<sup>7</sup> In Australia and Canada, elections to the provincial or state parliament are from single-member, plurality or first-past-the-post systems. Australia uses the preferential ballot, but this difference is sidestepped in the present analysis simply by recording only the so-called “primary vote,” the equivalent of the first round of voting in systems, like the French, where a second round is held if no candidate receives at least 50%+1 of the vote. Also, U.S. governorships are, like the presidency, a single-occupant office filled by plurality vote. Thus, these subnational comparisons mimic the difference between first or only rounds elections in presidential and

parliamentary systems. Moreover, the total vote going to the largest parties is relatively high in these subnational units: 82% in Australia, 83% in Canada, and 97% in the United States. These subnational elections in three mostly English-speaking continental polities, then, provide an ideal setting in which to evaluate whatever mediating effect of institutions there may be on  $\lambda$  and  $\sigma$ .

Table 1 displays the results over the same 1948-2021 period. Observe that  $\lambda$  ranges between a low of -2.4 in Australian state and -3.5% in Canadian provincial parliamentary elections, with the U.S. state gubernatorial elections falling in-between, at -3.2% per term. Note the practically identical values between the combined pool of the former two with that of the latter. This finding is consistent with N&P’s claim that the cost of government is invariant with respect to institutions. Figure 2 shows that incumbent loss is trendless in U.S. gubernatorial and Australian state elections, and weakly negatively sloped in Canadian provincial elections ( $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $R^2=0.09$ ).

Table 1. Incumbent Loss. Subnational Elections, Australia, Canada, U.S., 1948-2021					
	Province or State				
	AUS	CAN	AUS-CAN	US	All
Incumbent Loss ( $\lambda$ )	-2.4	-3.5	-3.1	-3.2	-3.2
Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	7.1	8.4	7.9	10.9	10.2
N=	151	207	358	980	1,338

Figure 2. Incumbent Vote Loss, Subnational Elections: Australia, Canada, and the U.S., 1948-2021.

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 Figure 2 about here  
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A third empirical claim, or rather expectation, because they did not do the analysis themselves but relied on separate findings from others,<sup>8</sup> was that in countries with high economic volatility, as in Latin America during the 1980s, election results are “more volatile, and  $\lambda$  becomes larger” (N&P, 1999, 5; emphasis in the original). Calculated over 128 presidential elections in 16 Latin American countries<sup>9</sup> between 1948 and 2021, the results are:  $\lambda=-8.95\%$ ,  $\sigma=13.1$  for incumbent loss, and  $\lambda=-10.4\%$ ,  $\sigma=6.5$  for the rolling three-year average path. As shown in Figure 3, consistent with N&P’s conjecture, Latin America’s  $\lambda$  did drop in the 1980s, and then again once per decade of this century. Nevertheless, incumbent loss is trendless. The constancy in the cost of governing, albeit at a higher level in this region and with greater variation, is verified. The real difference, then, lies in the higher  $\lambda$  and  $\sigma$ . Whether that has anything to do with economic volatility or some other cause, historical, cultural, or institutional (not all presidential systems are the same—see, e.g., Shugart and Carey (1992))—is not something that can be established here. All that can be said is that in Latin America the cost of governing and its variability are high, just as N&P had expected.

Figure 3. Incumbent Vote Loss, 16 Latin American Countries, 1948-2021

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 Figure 3 about here  
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The fourth of N&D’s empirical claims is as follows: “For newly established democracies it may take half a dozen elections for the party-system to stabilize. While this happens there is likely to be big variation in” the cost of governing (N&P, 3). To evaluate this proposition, the analysis turns to regions outside of the OECD, in the

British Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the formerly Communist Party-ruled countries of Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe (CENE). Table 2 arranges the regions roughly according to the age of their respective democracies, from the youngest to the oldest. For ease of comparison, the Latin American and OECD statistics are included, as well. Outside the OECD,  $\lambda \approx -5.4\%$ ,  $\sigma = 11.4$  for parliamentary elections, and  $\lambda = -7.2\%$ ,  $\sigma = 14.0$  in presidential elections. These regions do not share any obvious characteristics except that they are relatively latecomers to democracy, although this is not the case for the British Caribbean mini-states. Therefore, this finding is largely consistent to N&P's conjecture about a larger cost and variation thereof in these polities. Also, as expected, both  $\lambda$  and  $\sigma$  are higher in presidential elections although, yet again, the difference is small within the OECD. It is true that there are only two presidential systems in that region. But recall Table 1, which shows little difference in  $\lambda$  and a smaller than expected difference in  $\sigma$  between state or provincial elections in Australia and Canada and gubernatorial elections in the U.S., the latter being equivalent to presidential contests at the subnational level.

Region	Parliamentary			Presidential			Spell <sup>b</sup>
	Percent Inc. Loss ( $\lambda$ )	Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	N <sup>a</sup>	Percent Inc. Loss ( $\lambda$ )	Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	N <sup>a</sup>	Mean ( $\sigma$ )
Africa	-5.91	11.2	5/31	-2.91	15.6	7/38	15 (12.9)
CENE	-6.26	11.2	12/87	-3.02	14.7	2/12	5.6 (2.7)
Asia	-2.24	6.4	1/16	-7.01	14.1	5/32	8.0 (4.8)
British Caribbean	-5.03	12.3	10/99				9.7 (5.9)
Lat. Am.				-8.92	13.0	16/127	6.9

							(4.5)
All Non-OECD	-5.41	11.4	28/233	-7.2	14.0	30/209	8.0 (6.5)
OECD	-1.95	6.0	17/364	-2.7	9.1	2/28	9.6 (8.8)
All regions	-3.30	8.7	45/597	-6.7	13.6	32/237	8.6 (7.5)

<sup>a</sup> N=countries/elections.

<sup>b</sup> Time incumbent party stays in office, in years. See Figure 5 and accompanying text.

Note:

The regions are ordered in rough order of the start of the series, from the most recent to the oldest. In only the OECD does the series date from before 1950. The most recent newcomers to democracy are Africa and CENE, where competitive elections initiated in the early 1990s. In Asia, only India's election series begins in the 1950s, the rest in the 1980s or 1990s. In Latin America, Costa Rica's is the oldest, its democratic elections dating from the 1950s, followed by the Dominican Republic a decade later. Most others of the region suffered intermittent dictatorships between the 1960s and 1970s, democracy being inaugurated or restored in the 1980s or 1990s. The series for most British Caribbean countries commenced in the 1960s or 1970s.

One discordant note is apparent, however: on average the countries outside the OECD have crossed the threshold of half a dozen elections conjectured by N&P beyond which the party system should have stabilized and  $\lambda$  and  $\sigma$  begun to approximate more normal values, closer to the OECD's. Presumably, then, one should expect both  $\lambda$  and  $\sigma$  to shrink over time. Yet, Figure 4 does not show this. The track of incumbent vote in non-OECD democracies is trendless. Neither is there any evidence of a shrinkage in the spread of the observations. Except in CENE, where incumbent loss has shrunk a little ( $\beta=0.38$ ,  $R^2=0.05$ ), none of the other regions shows a trend. The CENE exceptionalism may be associated with its close relations with the OECD, as many of these countries have joined the European Union. Therefore, N&P's expectation that the magnitude and variation in the cost of governing would move toward the OECD level

after half a dozen elections is almost devoid of support. Why that should be so is beyond the scope of this paper. Still, the most interesting finding is that the cost of governing is indeed a constant, even if the actual magnitude and variation seems peculiar to region.

Figure 4. Incumbent Vote Loss, 57 non-OECD Countries, 1948-2021

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Figure 4 about here

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The last of Nannestad and Paldam’s claims that I will evaluate here concerns the contribution that the cost of governing makes to partisan cycles. They put it this way: “Once there is a cost of ruling everybody knows that governments will change frequently. This is therefore a key condition for [irregular] partisan cycles to occur” (N&P 1999, 18). Curiously, though, they did not attempt empirically to ascertain whether the partisan cycles were indeed irregular, as they surmised. As it turns out, they are quite regular. This is shown in Figure 5. The panel on the right tracks elections held between 1948 and 2001 in the OECD, and the one on the left, elections outside that region. Note that in neither panel is there a discernible trend. On average, there is a change in partisan control of the government about once per decade. The same constancy is found in all but one of the individual regions, albeit at a different level, ranging from 14 years in Africa to half that long in Latin America.<sup>10</sup> The only exception is found in CENE, where the trend is up moderately, toward a longer spell ( $\beta=0.13$ ,  $R^2=0.16$ ). Since in this region on average incumbents have the shortest tenure in office (5.6 years), this may indicate some tendency toward goal-seeking in the system.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 5. Length of Spell in Office in Years, OECD vs. non-OECD, 1948-2021

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Figure 5 about here

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## **Conclusion**

As their paper wound to a close, Nannestad and Paldam expressed confidence that although new research with more data may turn up “a few deviations from perfect constancy,” in the cost of ruling, “the deviations from strict constancy will remain remarkably small” (N&P 1999, 21). Their claim, extravagant as it may have seemed at the time, has been borne out by the facts. The cost of governing is indeed a constant, albeit its magnitude varies by region,  $\approx -2\%$  to  $-3\%$  in the developed democracies of the OECD that N&P studied, to two to three times higher outside that region. Also, Nannestad and Paldam were on the right track when they surmised that the cost of governing makes for partisan cycles and thus contributes to the survival of democracy, an argument developed further in Budge et al. (2012, chap 12) and Budge (2019, chap 7). As I have demonstrated, the partisan cycles are regular: on average governing parties turn over about once per decade, whether in the OECD or in newcomers to electoral democracy.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Nannestad and Paldam’s and Paldam’s pioneering papers made two fundamental additions to the stock of knowledge of politology:<sup>13</sup> “The Law of Shrinking Support” and the “The Law of Alternation in Office.”

## **About the Author**

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Appendix. Incumbent Loss by Type, Region, and Country. N=2,172										
Country	Parliamentary					Presidential				
	AFRICA	ASIA	BRITCAR	CENE	OECD	AFRICA	ASIA	CENE	LATAM	OECD
Albania				7						
Argentina									7	
Australia					179*					
Austria					22					
Bahamas			9							
Barbados			14							
Belgium					22					
Belize			7							
Benin						4				
Bermuda			11							
Bolivia									9	
Botswana	11									
Brazil									6	
Bulgaria				8						
Canada					230**					
Cape Verde	5									
Chile									8	
Colombia									10	
Costa Rica									16	
Czech Rep				7						
Denmark					26					
Dom. Rep.									14	
Ecuador									8	
El Salvador									8	
Estonia				7						
France										9
Germany					18					
Ghana						7				
Grenada			7							
Guatemala									5	

Guyana			6						
Honduras								9	
Hungary				7					
Iceland					21				
India		16							
Indonesia						3			
Ireland					21				
Israel					20				
Italy					18				
Jamaica			12						
Japan					24				
Latvia				8					
Lesotho	3								
Lithuania				7					
Luxembourg					16				
Macedonia				8					
Madagascar						4			
Malawi						6			
Mauritius	7								
Mexico								6	
Moldova				7					
Mongolia						6			
Namibia	5								
Netherlands					20				
New Zealand					25				
Norway					18				
Panama								5	
Paraguay								5	
Peru								4	
Philippines						10			
Poland				6			5		
Romania							7		
S. Korea						6			

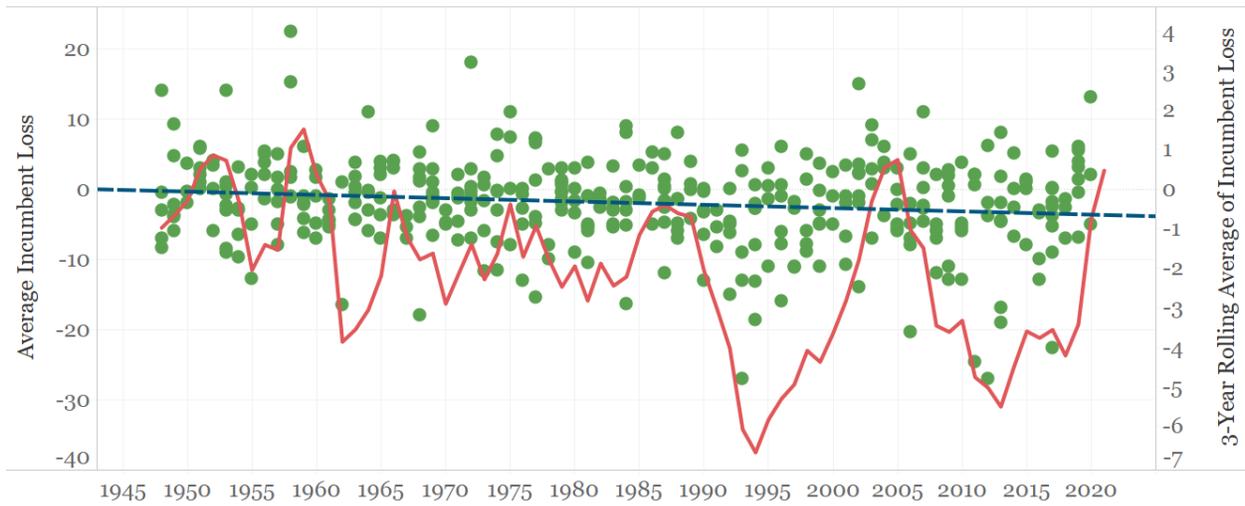
Sao Tome-P						4				
Senegal						7				
Seychelles						6				
Slovakia				8						
Slovenia				7						
St. Lucia			10							
St. Vincent G			9							
Sweden					22					
Taiwan							7			
Trinidad-Tobago			14							
United Kingdom					20					
Uruguay									7	
USA										999***
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>1008</b>
<i>Note:</i>										
*Includes 151 state elections.										
**Includes 207 provincial elections.										
*** Includes 980 state gubernatorial elections.										

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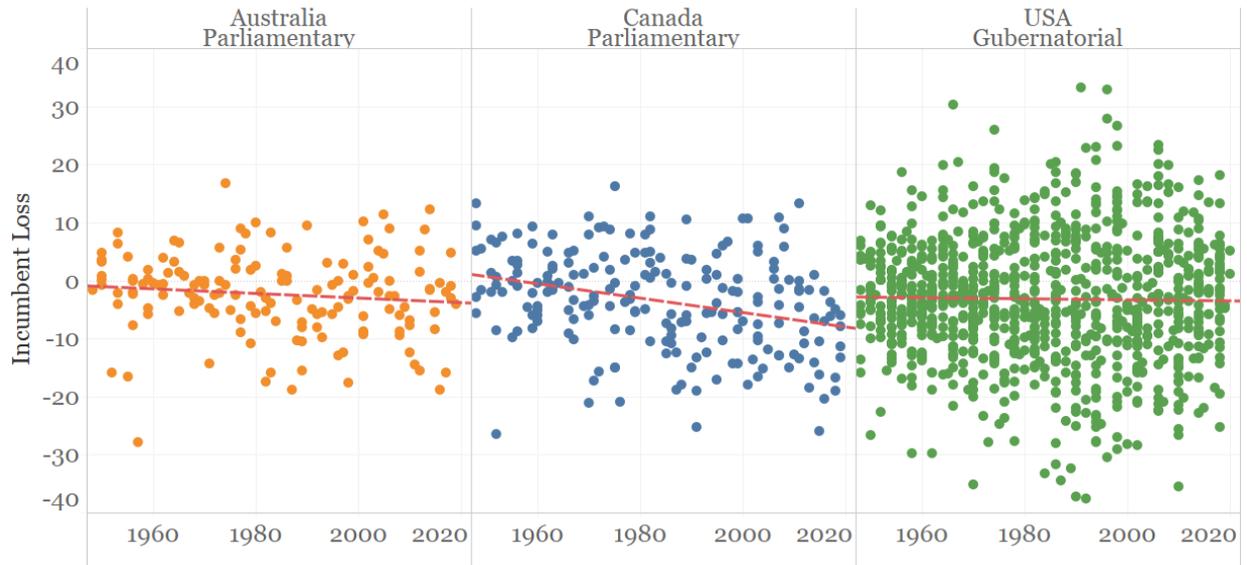
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Figure 1. Incumbent Vote Loss, 19 OECD Countries, 1948-2020



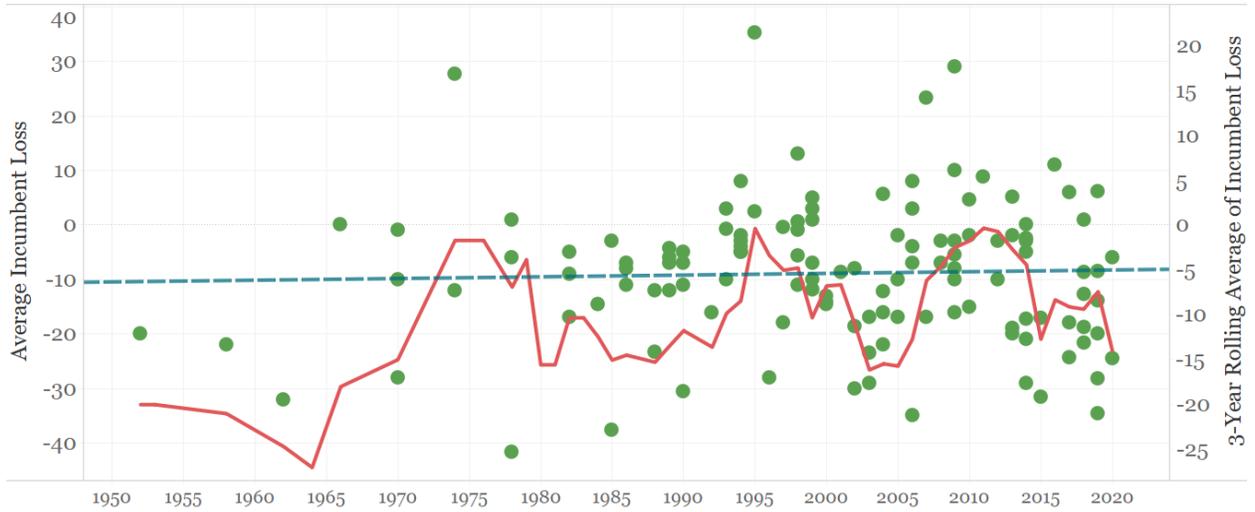
The series starts in 1948, the same year chosen by Nannestad and Paldam (1999). Nineteen OECD countries, the same as in N&P (1999), except that Israel is substituted for Finland, and in France presidential elections, not elections for the National Assembly, are included, as the incumbent is not always obvious in the latter. The dashed blue line represents the trend, which is nearly flat. Three-year rolling average path is in red, the values for which are shown on the right axis.  $N=392$  incumbent loss observations. For incumbent loss,  $\lambda=-2.00$ ,  $\sigma=6.3$ , and for the three year rolling average path,  $\lambda=-2.13$ ,  $\sigma=1.9$ .

Figure 2. Incumbent Vote Loss, Subnational Elections, Australia, Canada, and the U.S., 1948-2021



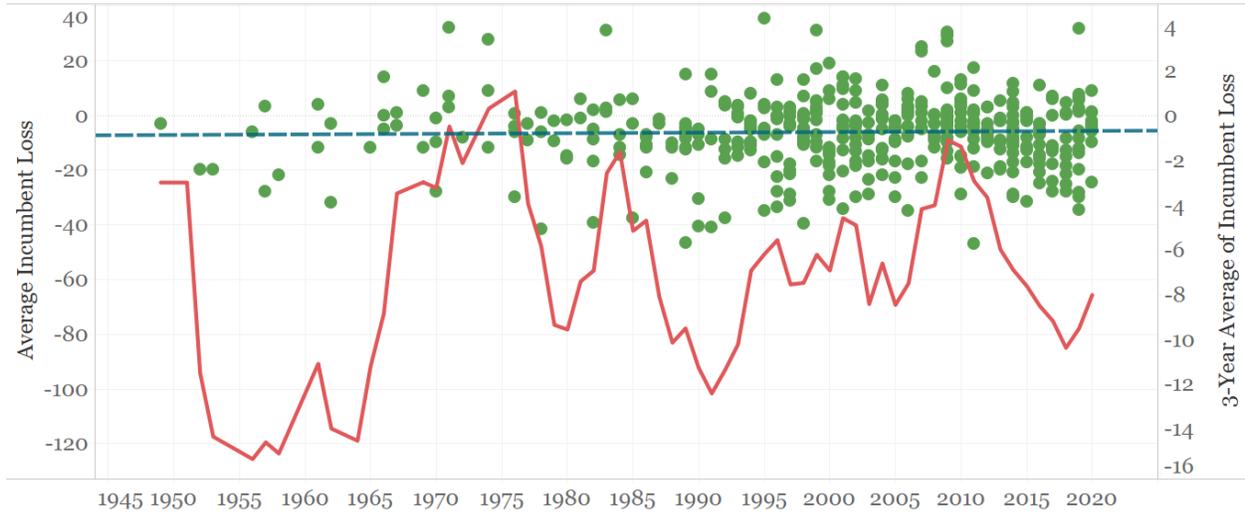
The series starts in 1948, the same year chosen by Nannestad and Paldam (1999).  $N=1338$  incumbent loss observations. In the interest of compactness, three observations among U.S. gubernatorial elections with values higher than  $\pm 40\%$  points were omitted. Dashed red lines represent trends. For incumbent loss across the three types,  $\lambda=-3.2$ ,  $\sigma=10.2$ .

Figure 3. Incumbent Vote Loss, 16 Latin American Countries, 1948-2020



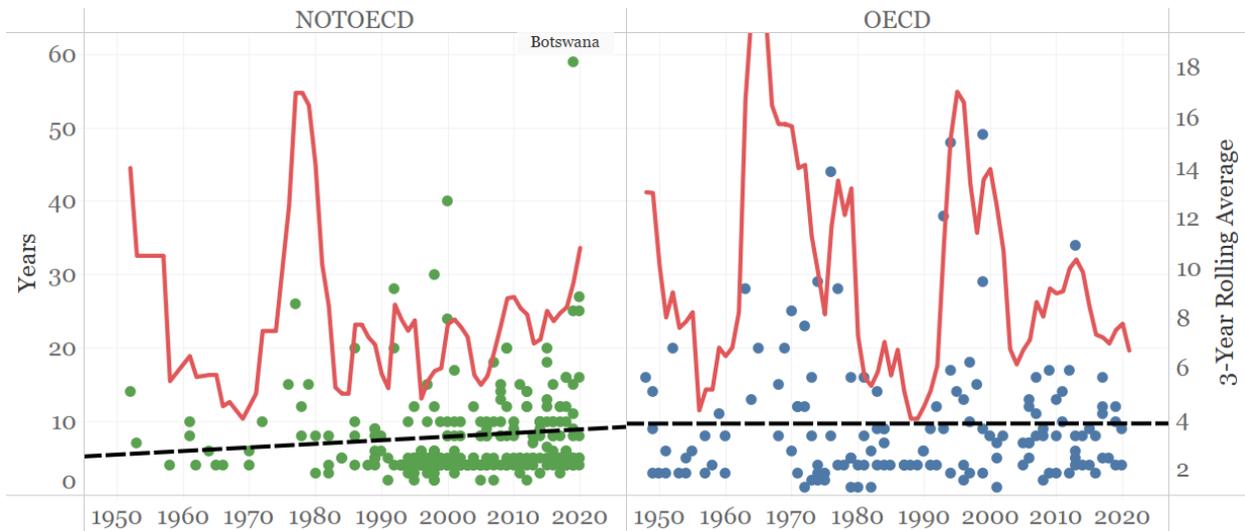
The series starts in 1948, the same year chosen by Nannestad and Paldam (1999). Included are incumbent loss data from elections in 16 countries, to wit: Argentina (7), Bolivia (9), Brazil (6), Chile (9), Colombia (10), Costa Rica (16), Dominican Republic (14), Ecuador (8), El Salvador (8), Guatemala (5), Honduras (9), Mexico (6), Panama (5), Paraguay (5), Peru (4), and Uruguay (7). Dashed blue line represents the trend in incumbent loss, which is flat. The three-year rolling average path is in red, the values for which are shown on the right axis.  $\lambda = -8.95\%$ ,  $\sigma = 13.1$  for incumbent loss and  $\lambda = -10.4$ ,  $\sigma = 6.5$  for the three-year rolling average path.

Figure 4. Incumbent Vote Loss, 57 non-OECD Countries, 1948-2021



The series starts in 1948, the same year chosen by Nannestad and Paldam (1999). 57 countries outside the OECD, 442 incumbent loss observations. The dashed blue line represents the trend, which is flat. Three-year rolling average path is in red, the values for which are shown on the right axis. For incumbent loss,  $\lambda=-6.3$ ,  $\sigma=12.8$ , and for the three year rolling average path,  $\lambda=-7.1$ ,  $\sigma=4.0$ .

Figure 5. Length of Spell in Office in Years, OECD vs. non-OECD, 1948-2021



The series starts in 1948, the same year chosen by Nannestad and Paldam (1999). 76 countries. The dashed black lines represent the trends, which are flat, and the red lines the three-year rolling average paths, the values for which are shown on the right axis. Across both panels  $\lambda=8.7$  years,  $\sigma=7.5$  for incumbent spells in office, and  $\lambda=8.9$  years,  $\sigma=3.8$ , for the rolling 3-year average paths.

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<sup>1</sup> As N&P did, the percent sign (%) is used as a shorthand for “percentage points per term.”

<sup>2</sup> To account empirically for some countries, like the U.S. and France, that include a few “extreme” elections, Paldam transformed the “raw data” into a form that is “quadratically normal in the tails, and normal in between” (Paldam 1991, 22). But the statistical results of the regression equations estimating the Vote-Popularity (V-P) function with economic and institutional variables were very similar between the two distributions, that for the raw as well as for the transformed data. See note at the bottom of Table 5 in Paldam (1991, 25). Nannestad and Paldam found that indeed most elections are “*normal elections*, determined by a sum of many issues” and hence follow “the same normal distribution,” while a few others “are *extreme elections*, dominated by one issue, where the outcome is quadratically normal” (p. 8; their emphasis). The difference not being at the core of their argument, however, they did not pursue the point further or transform the raw data as Paldam had done.

<sup>3</sup> Also, the statistics of the “raw,” untransformed data on incumbent loss are  $\lambda=-1.61$ ,  $\sigma=5.50$  (1991, 18). This is very similar to my estimate for the 1948-1998 period. See Figure 1 and discussion thereof.

<sup>4</sup> Lamenting the proliferation of weak correlations among variables across the social sciences, Budge (2019, 323) reports “the joke that any political scientist who can’t find at least ten explanations for any given correlation should leave the profession.”

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<sup>5</sup> According to another estimate, “By the 1990s incumbent parties in Europe were losing 6.28 per cent of the national vote subsequent to entering into government” (Martin 2014, 283, citing Narud and Valen 2008, 379).

<sup>6</sup> Also, Martin (2014, 288) estimated the cost of governing for government parties in Ireland between 1981 and 2011 at -3.3%, well within one standard deviation of the OECD average over the longer period.

<sup>7</sup> Another study of the costs of ruling at the subnational level, this time of parties in ruling coalitions in nearly 9,000 local Swedish elections, estimated the absolute cost at -1.3% (Karlsson and Gilljam 2016, 709).

<sup>8</sup> Remmer (1991) and Gavin and Housmann (1998).

<sup>9</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. This list is similar to Remmer’s (1991), a set of 21 elections in 12 countries that included two not included here (Nicaragua and Venezuela) but omitted several others (Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Panama, and Paraguay). Calculations based on her Table 1 (Remmer, 782) yield the following estimates with the 21 elections included:  $\lambda = -13.4$ ,  $\sigma = 8.7$ . These estimates are higher than those shown in Figure 3. It appears, then, that, at least by our measure, governing in Latin America has become less costly and less variable since Remmer’s study.

<sup>10</sup> The tendency for short-term incumbency in Latin America was apparent as early as four decades ago (Hix 1984). Again, this speaks to regional constancy.

<sup>11</sup> On goal-seeking in a system, see Ashby (1960, chap. 4).

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<sup>12</sup> This would suggest that in democracies alternation in office is something like what Ashby (1960) describes as an “essential variable” of a system, the exceeding of certain limits in either direction of which would cause the system to collapse.

<sup>13</sup> Paldam (1986, 12) refers to political scientists as “politologists.” I submit that this is a more appropriate appellation. Other disciplines adopted the suffix “ology,” from the Greek, to denote a field of study. I see no reason why the scientific study of politics should not go by the name “politology.”