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# How do governments become great?

Ten cases, two competing explanations, one large research agenda

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**Abstract**

Governments can play great roles in their countries, regions, and cities; facilitating or leading the resolution of festering problems and opening new pathways for progress. Examples are more numerous than one might imagine and raise an important question: 'how do governments become great?'. This paper identifies ten cases of great governments to answer four dimensions of this question: What kinds of interventions or changes help governments achieve greatness? Who leads these interventions or changes, and how? When do the interventions occur, and why? How are these changes sustained and implemented to ensure they yield results? The paper suggests two sets of answers to these concerns, combining such into rival theories that could explain how governments get great: 'solution- and leader-driven change' and 'problem-driven iterative adaptation'. It proposes using these two theories in …

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future research about *how* governments foster the kinds of achievements one could call great and argues this research should employ a version of theory-guided process tracking (TGPT) called 'systematic process analysis'.

# 1    Introduction

Governments can play great roles in their countries, regions, and cities; facilitating or leading the resolution of festering problems and opening new pathways for progress. Examples are more numerous than one might imagine; where governments led the process of economic development, built mind-boggling infrastructure, ensured safety and security for citizens, and beyond. Academics and development experts have distilled lessons from such cases, typically focused on *what* good government or governance looks like. Studies suggest that countries should deregulate to foster growth, for instance, create a robust procurement system to ensure successful capital projects, and establish a modernized judicial system to promote law and order. Many governments that try to replicate these 'what solutions' struggle to achieve the same levels of greatness, however.[1] They deregulate but do not see economic growth, employ new procurement systems but still struggle with mission-destroying corruption in infrastructure projects, and establish modern judicial systems on paper that are dysfunctional (at best) in practice. These experiences raise an important question that is different to the commonly asked 'what' question: 'how do governments become great?'. This paper broaches such question, not to provide final answers but rather to suggest a research agenda that promises to do so.

The paper starts by identifying cases of great governments, to answer sceptics who might argue that there is no such thing. These are instances where public organizations have been clearly involved in achieving amazing feats. These include the stories of economic growth in South Korea and Singapore after 1963/5; Turkey's post-2002 economic recovery; India's 2012 eradication of polio; South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994; civil rights reforms in the United States; the establishment of the United States' aeronautical industry (and successful lunar expedition); Medellín, Colombia's recent revival after decades of violence; Botswana's outstanding anticorruption record; and Sweden's emergence from 1992 crisis to have one of the most sought after public finance systems in the world a decade later. Although they differ in many respects, these eight cases are commonly called 'miracles' by observers. Stories and studies have already been written about them as a result, often focusing on the policies or personalities that seemed to yield success. Lessons from South Korea and Singapore often center on the importance of having an effective planning mechanism and civil service regime in government, for instance, and the roles played by Park Chung Hee and Lee Kuan Yew. These lessons seldom explain *how* such governance and leadership solutions emerged, however, which leaves many unanswered questions about the way great governments actually come about.

After raising a variety of these questions while introducing the cases, a second section suggests four key concerns that need attention to better understand *how* governments transform into entities that facilitate and promote great achievements:

- What kinds of interventions or changes help governments achieve greatness?

- Who leads these interventions or changes, and how?

- When do the interventions occur, and why?

- How are these changes sustained and implemented to ensure they yield results?

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[1] See Andrews (2003, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013); Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012).

The section suggests two sets of answers to these concerns, combining such into two potential theories to explain how governments become great. The first theory is called 'solution- and leader-driven change' (SLDC). This is arguably dominant in the international development field and emerges particularly in the recent Growth Commission studies led by Michael Spence.[2] It posits that great governments emerge when the right policies are introduced in times of crisis by top-down leaders who then have stable power for a long enough period to drive implementation. A second theory is called 'problem-driven iterative adaptation' (PDIA), which is a new approach to thinking about development and change.[3] It holds that great governments emerge when agents interact in new ways—led by distributed groups—in gradual, iterative processes that yield locally determined responses to problems (that mature with time as more agents get engaged and buy in to the changes).

A conclusion proposes using these two theories in future research about *how* governments foster the kinds of achievements one could call great. It suggests that this research employ a version of 'theory-guided process tracking (TGPT) called systematic process analysis (as introduced by Harvard University's Peter Hall).[4] This approach requires building narratives about how change processes emerge and progress in each case, based on historical analyses of documents that are explicitly structured to test the competing theories. A comparative set of these commonly-structured narratives could go a long way to understanding which theory—or which parts of each theory—helps most in explaining past experiences of great government and thinking about how more governments might pursue greatness in future.

## 2      Ten cases

One may ask why a paper is needed about *how* governments get great. One may even ask if any governments are great enough to study in such a research agenda. In response to such questions, this section aims to show that there are many stories to tell about governments that defy odds as positive outliers or examples of what other countries might also achieve. These stories have been told to some degree in work like Dani Rodrik's 2006 compilation of growth narratives and the 2008 Growth Commission's study of successful economic development experiences. The focus of such studies is typically on *what* governments did and not *how* they did it, however.[5] For instance, the Growth Commission study tells a lot about the kinds of policies that governments in high-growth countries employed, but is less insightful on how these policies came about. When the commission broaches the *how* question by asking about leadership it offers a similarly simplistic answer, identifying high profile individuals as the key to getting things done.

The current section aims to draw attention to brief stories behind ten cases like those discussed by Rodrik and the Growth Commission but with a broader ambit (not just focused on growth). These are cases where governments led or facilitated an impressive transformation for their people. The cases represent areas where governments commonly struggle to effect change and ramp up performance—fostering growth, political transition, advances in industrial development and social service provision, and facilitating clean and stable public sector operations.

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[2] Brady and Spence (2010).

[3] Andrews (2013); Andrews, McConnelll and Wescott (2010); Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012).

[4] Falleti and Lynch (2009); Hall (2006).

[5] Rodrik (2003); Brady and Spence (2010).

The first two cases focus on economic growth miracles in South Korea and Singapore. Both experiences symbolize the potential developing countries have to grow and progress, often against the odds. South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1950s, coming out of a nasty war with per capita incomes below US$200 a year—equal at the time to Sierra Leone and lower than Bolivia, El Salvador, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The country grew rapidly over the next few decades, however, and in 2012 the average income of a South Korean was above US$20,000, rivaling countries in the European Union. Singapore's economy grew similarly from a low base, with average incomes of about US$500 in 1965. The country was expelled from the Malay Federation in 1965, vulnerable to all sorts of development disasters, given intractable challenges that included 'a hodgepodge of mutually antagonistic ethnic groups pressed together on an island with insufficient arable land, no significant natural resources, a dearth of potable water, and potentially hostile neighbors on all sides'.[6] The country has overcome these hurdles and its citizens now enjoy per capita incomes of over US$40,000—one of the world's highest. These incredible results are the envy of countries across the world. There are many festering questions, however, about the kinds of processes that led to the achievement of these results, and the role government played in such processes. Was the growth simply a result of good policy decisions? Do you need to have strong top-down autocratic leadership to make such achievements possible? Do you need a crisis to prompt the change?

One could ask similar questions about the more recent story of Turkey, which provides a third case about the economic growth possible in developing nations and the way countries can recover from crisis. The country experienced a two-part financial meltdown between August 2000 and early 2001. A low point came on 19 February 2001, when Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit told journalists there were problems at the heart of government. Markets responded dramatically, causing an overnight interest rate hike from 43 per cent to 2,057 per cent. The crisis saw Turkey's economy contract by 3.5 per cent in 2001, spawned political upheaval, and generated a spike in unemployment. Turkey came out of this hole quickly and strongly, however, recording sustained economic growth of about six per cent per annum between 2002 and 2007, surviving the 2008 global crisis, and rebounding recently to achieve growth rates of above seven per cent in 2010 and 2011. Simple but powerful questions abound about how this was achieved, and how Turkey's government emerged as an important part of the story. Who leads such transition? What do they do? How do they start the change process and how do they sustain it over more than a decade?

India provides a fourth case for discussion. While the country has its own informative and inspirational economic growth story, the focus here is on the nationwide eradication of polio between 1990 and 2012. Officially reported annual cases of polio stood at 24,000 in 1988, making India one of relatively few countries where this disease was still especially prevalent. India was removed from this list of countries on 25 February 2012, a date that marked twelve months in which no Indian child was paralyzed by polio. The achievement of zero infections was remarkable, given what has been described as 'a unique combination of biologic and epidemiological challenges, as well as the classic speed bumps of India's bureaucracy'.[7] One wonders how these challenges were overcome to foster success, and how government facilitated such process. These kinds of questions are particularly salient given that there are

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[6] This is from Andrew Jensen's article in the *World Poverty and Human Rights online report*, on 7 March 2010, entitled 'Building Capabilities: The Singapore Success Story'.

[7] Schaffer (2012: 1).

many areas of social service delivery where such constraints still hinder Indian government performance—and that in other countries.

The fifth case is of how the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) led a seemingly impossible mission to put a man on the moon in the 1960s, sparking various new industries in the process. The achievement was particularly noteworthy given that it was the product of only an eight-year project. When President John F. Kennedy proposed the goal of 'landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth' NASA was hardly even in existence as an agency. It took an amazing model of administrative and political engagement to achieve the president's goal. The Apollo programme ultimately succeeded in six lunar missions that saw twelve astronauts walk on the moon's surface. The mission also spawned a multi-billion dollar aerospace industry in the United States and stimulated many technological breakthroughs (the flight computer design influenced early research into integrated circuits, for instance, and computer-controlled machining was pioneered in the programme). As with other cases, the questions posed in this case are simple: How was this was achieved? How was government involved? What did it take to create a government that could foster such great achievements?

A sixth case, also from the United States, focuses on the role government played in facilitating and leading civil rights reforms between 1945 and 1975. The period saw far reaching social change often credited solely to the work of non-government movements led by people like Martin Luther King. However, political, bureaucratic and judicial agents played key roles in pushing the agenda ahead throughout the period. These agents ensured that laws were changed and that new laws were enforced, for instance, including the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act. This and other government-led interventions furthered social transformation goals that were introduced in the 1860s and 1870s but had subsequently been undermined by other social and political objectives. The process by which reform was reinvigorated is important to understand for many countries. A variety of questions are relevant beyond the borders of the United States: How do movements like this emerge and prevail? How can government be positively engaged in fostering and implementing the resulting change? How do government and non-government agents collaborate to foster change?

The seventh case reflects on South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid and civil war to constitutional democracy. The apartheid system had disempowered the country's majority black population for many decades. Efforts to replace this system resulted in an armed struggle that started accelerating in the late 1970s. The 1980s saw growing casualties of soldiers and civilians, and many observers felt that all-out civil war or violent revolution was inevitable. Amazingly, the country had escaped such calamity by 1994, when a new non-racial democracy was established that brought the rule of law to all South Africans. This achievement would have been considered highly unlikely five years earlier, when national elections were still race-based and black citizens had no voting power. Interestingly, however, 1989 is commonly seen as the starting point of South Africa's peace process, given that it marked the first meeting between then-President F.W. de Klerk and future President Nelson Mandela. Both men received a Nobel Peace Prize for the way they led the nation to peace, but Mandela's example is particularly emphasized in countries attempting to deal with recurrent conflict. While many might be satisfied with an explanation that says 'Mandela and de Klerk made the change happen' others might ask more penetrating questions: were there more pieces to the puzzle—people, processes and events—that finally led to South Africa's 1994 elections? Did parts of the apartheid government actually help in the process of

transformation? What kinds of collaborative structures existed between those in power and those out of power to ultimately facilitate a transfer of such power through peaceful means?

The final case comes from Medellín, Colombia. The city had been a violent cauldron since the 1980s, when it was home to the internationally notorious drug cartel run by Pablo Escobar. Even though crime had declined since the early 1990s, there were still 185 homicides per 100,000 people in 2002 (nearly four times the rate in New Orleans, then the United States' murder capital).[8] Paramilitary groups and gangs now held sway, causing Robert Lamb to call the city 'Fallujah before Fallujah was Fallujah'.[9] Things began changing in 2003, however, and by 2006 the city's murder rate was 32.5 per 100,000; lower than that in Washington DC and Miami.[10] Such successful transformation was rapidly termed the 'Medellín Miracle' and credited to policies of the city's mayor, Sergio Fajardo. This miracle is the outcome of interest, and the question this article asks is simply how such miracle was achieved, and with what governmental role? Surely city leaders around the world, especially those beset by violence and crime, are interested in the answer.

Two final cases center on the way Botswana and Sweden introduced reforms that made parts of their public administrations the envy of other countries. Botswana's story is about the way it achieved the status of 'Africa's least corrupt nation'. The government introduced a range of reforms in years following major corruption scandals in 1991 and 1992. These included a new anti-corruption law, commission, and ombudsmen. Botswana commonly scores as high as many Western countries on corruption indexes because (it appears) these mechanisms are actually functioning effectively and corruption is being effectively addressed. One wonders how such success was achieved—especially given that the performance of these mechanisms is different from that in many other African countries,where they often prove dysfunctional. Similarly, one wonders how Sweden's public finances have been stable through the 2008 financial crisis that wrought havoc on many developed countries' budget regimes. Governments in countries like the United States have recently been examining the Swedish model because its recent stability is so unique. The focus is often on fiscal rules and other mechanisms the Swedes adopted between 1997- and2008, all of which are rapidly being seen as potential 'best practices' other countries should adopt. It is important to understand that these mechanisms emerged from a multi-year process of change, however, that many data to responses following a 1992 financial crisis. The question that many studies fail to answer is *how* the Swedish solutions did emerge in this period, if crises are required to foster far-reaching change, and if the story about how reforms emerged in Sweden is similar to the stories about how governments achieved greatness in other areas.

## 3      Two competing explanations

The ten cases are presented here in extremely short form, as tasters of the full stories of governments that achieved amazing things in bounded periods of time. All of the stories start with a poor performing government and end with a high performing government. The challenge for researchers is to examine what happened in between these points and to identify—within and across the cases—if there are generally relevant lessons about how governments change into leaders or facilitators of great achievements. The variety of cases

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[8] Cerdá, et al. (2012: 1046).

[9] Lamb (2010: 1).

[10] See Forrest Hylton's commentary entitled 'Medellin's Makeover' in *The New Left Review*, accessed in June 2013, http://newleftreview.org/II/44/forrest-hylton-remaking-medellin

may lead one to think that there are no possible generalizeable lessons to learn; the processes of change and solutions in different contexts and areas of interest surely look different? The question is whether one can get past policy-specific answers and peculiar, situation-specific explanations for the outstanding achievements in these cases. Are there common patterns across the cases about the way change emerge that stand out as strong evidence for any research conclusions about *how* governments can foster dramatic change (of any kind) and achieve great things?[11]

Interestingly, many explicit and implicit theories of change are offered in just such a general fashion. Theories of organizational change seldom specify if they pertain to changes in mission or just organizational structure, for instance, and theories of movement based change often employ similar ideas as the theories about organizational change (suggesting that explanations of how change happens do have some generic quality). Further, it is hard to discern different implicit theories of change when one looks at the way development organizations like the World Bank work. These organizations are in the business of change and use the same project and management mechanisms to foster change in extremely different areas of governmental engagement—including governance reform, infrastructure creation, agricultural innovation, health and education improvement, and beyond. The implicit application by such organizations of the same change model across different areas of engagement suggests that models of change can be generalized and that we should expect that the factors explaining successful change in one context would overlap with those explaining change in very different contexts.

This is not to say that there is no variation in the explanations of successful change. In fact, the literature on change in organizations, societies and governments can be frustrating because of the many different theories proposed about how change happens. Two such theories are offered here as potential explanations about how governments get great. The first is called 'solution- and leader-driven change' (SLDC) and the second is called 'problem-driven iterative adaptation' (PDIA). Both arguments are presented in simplified form, emphasizing the differences between perspectives and allowing clear, contrasting predictions of what one would expect to see if either theory were strongly supported in any given case.[12] The perspectives and predictions center on four key questions:

- What kinds of interventions or changes help governments achieve greatness?

- Who leads these interventions or changes, and how?

- When do the interventions occur, and why?

- How are these changes sustained and implemented to ensure they yield results?

### 3.1 What kinds of interventions or changes help governments achieve greatness?

It is logical to ask 'what' causes any great achievement and, as already mentioned, many studies focus on such question when explaining successful change experiences in governments. Many development theorists and practitioners have a common answer to this

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[11] Aminzade (1993:, 108).

[12] The exercise is meant to provide simplified versions of these existing theories that emphasize their differences, with simplified and 'brittle' predictions that can be 'shown to be false by available data and that are distinguishable from the predictions of rival theories' (Hall 2006: 27).

question as well: The change emerged because the right policy solutions were introduced. The 2008 Growth Commission represents this view when explaining that rapid and sustained growth in countries like Singapore and Korea resulted from 'the choice of a correct model'.[13] The Commission uses Turkey's post-2002 growth experience as an example, arguing that government became a facilitator of great growth after adopting 19 new policies in 2002.[14] South Korea's five-year development plans are similarly identified as the mechanism through which government fostered its growth miracle; given that the plans embodied many policy solutions considered necessary to foster growth (like economic openness, savings, and responsive government).

The idea that great governments emerge because the right policies are adopted and implemented has driven many scholars and development experts and organizations to identify 'solutions' for governments to adopt. The solutions are technical, hatched outside of target governments, and presented as largely generic and widely applicable. For instance, governments are commonly told to promote business and industry by adopting policies that yield better scores on *Doing Business* indicators. An example comes from East Africa, where donor agencies recently advised governments that such policies could help foster growth like that seen in countries like Malaysia (a country that has made great strides).[15] The solutions come from outside and (apparently) need only to be adopted and implemented according to plan, by technically-savvy managers, to facilitate transformation. Similarly, the World Bank's *Country Policy and Institutional Assessment* indicator identifies "policy and institutional dimensions of an effective poverty reduction and growth strategy'.[16] The act of constructing this indicator implies that these are the solutions governments should adopt to foster great achievements (such as reducing poverty, or promoting growth).[17] Governments are rewarded for getting high scores on the indicators, bolstering the message that the indicators embed relevant solutions necessary to foster effectiveness. Such thinking leads to the prediction that any great achievement by government would be predicated by some 'right' policy solution which researchers should be able to clearly identify as the basis of change.

Various authors have criticized this belief and message and would offer a different prediction as to what one would find in stories of great achievements by governments. They question the existence of routine 'solutions' and 'right policies' and point to many instances where governments have adopted these kinds of solutions without seeing positive results.[18] They argue that routine, externally designed 'solutions' often create new problems in many contexts or prove un-implementable because they do not fit local realities. They emphasize the importance of understanding where successful solutions—that address real problems and are implementable—come from in the first place. They argue that the processes through which these policies emerge are 'what' turns poor performing governments into high performing, great governments. According to such thinking, Singapore did not become great because it did the right thing but because it introduced processes that helped it find and fit the right thing to do (which often was not the thing that outsiders deemed 'right').

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[13] Brady and Spence (2010: 6).

[14] Brady and Spence (2010).

[15] See full report: http://www.doingbusiness.org/~/media/FPDKM/Doing%20Business/Documents/Special-Reports/DB11-EAC.pdf. Media reference:, http://www.vijana.fm/2011/08/22/report-doing-business-in-east-africa/

[16] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/IDA/Resources/CPIA2007Questionnaire.pdf, 1.

[17] Andrews (2008a).

[18] Andrews (2013); Pritchett and Woolcock (2004); Rodrik (2003).

Advocates of this approach often draw (implicitly or explicitly) from complexity theory. This portrays governments (and broader governance mechanisms) as complex systems comprised of multiple, diverse agents that interact in non-linear ways.[19] Many problems and challenges in this kind of system are also considered complex—involving multiple moving parts and interdependent players and defying technical solutions. Theorists argue that the degree and type of interaction between agents determines how creative these systems are and what potential they have to solve their complex problems and become facilitators or leaders of great, transformative achievements.[20] More controlled systems (that are smaller or more contained, less heterogeneous, and have rules limiting internal and external interaction) provide fewer opportunities for agents to engage in new ways.[21] They are hence less adaptive or capable of tackling complex problems or producing necessary change. Observers hold that many governments look like this, and are actually organized to be controlled in this manner.[22] This strategy has its costs however, especially in the way it limits creativity needed in complex settings. The cost of such control is particularly problematic when the status quo is one of non-performance in the face of complex problems.

According to this theory, transformative change emerges when such systems open up, foster heterogeneity, and adopt rules that promote new forms of interaction between agents. Agents in these more open systems start to engage in new combinations and ways, often around locally defined problems; to create opportunities for learning, distributing knowledge, and expanding capabilities. The new interaction mechanisms range from teams to networks to meetings in which agents explore problems, identify new options for change, experiment with these options, and learn about what works and why.[23] Novelty that emerges from these interactive processes makes the system more adaptive and capable of dealing with pressing problems and meeting new opportunities. This novelty is seen as a hallmark of great governments. The novelty could include fresh policy or organizational solutions, but these solutions are not 'what' foster the great governments. The processes through which these solutions consistently emerge are what really make the difference.

In a practical reference to this line of thinking, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill is famously quoted as saying that, '[p]lans are of little importance, but planning is essential'.[24] Given such sentiment, one would not look at South Korea's plans as the key to its growth records, but rather at its planning processes. Theory would lead one to expect that these processes facilitated new interaction, generated new ideas, learning, action and results. Similarly, one would expect that Turkey's 19 policy solutions were not 'what' got the country out of financial crisis. One should rather look at the processes by which these and other solutions emerged. One would expect to find new ways of interaction in these processes, fostering new ideas, lessons, and creative, locally relevant interventions. One would also expect this to be a continuous process, not a one off event. The product would be a stream of new ideas and policies (not singular solutions), reflecting a new adaptive quality in the government affected. This improved adaptiveness would be central to explaining how the government got to foster great achievements.

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[19] Cilliers (1998); Lichtenstein et al. (2006).

[20] Andrews (2008b) discusses this approach in explaining why South African business lacks creativity.

[21] Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000); Goldstein (1994); Lichtenstein et al. (2006).

[22] Andrews (2013).

[23] Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000); Goldstein (1994); Lichtenstein et al. (2006).

[24] Dwight D. Eisenhower is similarly quoted as saying that, 'Plans are nothing; planning is everything.'

## 3.2    Who leads these interventions or changes, and how?

Whether one argues that great governments come about because of changes in plans or because of planning processes, it is clear that people are involved. As a result, it is important to think about who leads these people. As with the discussion to date, this section proposes two extreme answers: High-level individuals; or groups of distributed agents.

Adherents of the 'right policy' approach often argue that change is driven by high-level individuals in positions of authority and influence. The perspective is reflected in Benjamin Jones and Benjamin Olken's reference to 'individual leaders' making a difference in high-growth experiences.[25] It is also explicit in the Growth Commission's work, which notes that such leaders are central in most of the instances where governments have fostered high levels of growth over sustained periods. According to the commission, such individuals facilitate these achievements when they make decisions that introduce the right policies and then ensure that the policies get implemented.[26] Leaders responsible for doing these things are portrayed as having the vision to adopt the right policies and the presence, knowledge and skill to ensure these policies are implemented and diffused. They are also commonly presented as benevolent, focused on producing value for the broader public over multiple generations (not short-term private interest). They are also seen as enjoying the authority and power of high-level position that Growth Commission authors imply is required to make change happen in governments. This authority and influence has horizontal and vertical effects, shaping behaviors across and within the many public and private organizations and political interest groups needed to support change and implement new policies.

One does not have to look far to find examples of these leaders in prominent stories about great governments. The Growth Commission points to Park Chung Hee as the undisputed leader of Korea's growth story, for instance. Similarly, Lee Kuan Yew is considered the founding father of Singapore.[27] Both are credited with introducing growth-enhancing policies in top-down ways, and forcing implementation by edict. The Growth Commission identifies another individual—Kermal Derviş—as the influential top-down leader of Turkey's growth narrative.[28] Appointed Minister of Economic Affairs in March 2001, Derviş is recognized for leading the country's revival by introducing new economic policies. Stories of the 'Medellin Miracle' in Colombia also credit one man as the transformational leader. He was the city's mayor between 2003-08, Sergio Fajardo.[29] Called the 'Mathematician of Medellin' because of his professorial background, Fajardo is regularly cited as the one who introduced the new policies that revitalized the city.[30]

Complexity theorists question various assumptions underlying this picture of top-down, individual-driven leadership.[31] They note that entities like governments are too complex to

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[25] Jones and Olken (2005: 835).

[26] Brady and Spence (2010: 7).

[27] Lee (2000).

[28] Brady and Spence (2010).

[29] See Anthony Faiola's article in the Washington Post, entitled, 'Sustaining the Medellin Miracle', accessed June 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/10/AR2008071002746.html. See also Forrest Hylton's commentary entitled 'Medellin's Makeover in The New Left Review', accessed June 2013, http://newleftreview.org/II/44/forrest-hylton-remaking-medellin

[30] Taken from Daniel Kurtz-Phelan's blog post entitled, Good Times in Medellin, accessed June 2013, http://medellin-colombia.blogspot.com/2008/11/former-mayor-of-medelln-sergio-fajardo.html.

[31] Lichtenstein et al. (2006).

function according to the linear model of 'top down' organizing implied in such approach. They also argue that social complexity defies leadership by one individual. This resonates with a new institutionalist critique that 'single leader' models assume the existence of 'supermuscular' agents who seldom (if ever) exist.[32] According to such theory, few agents can provide both the ideas required for change and the power and resources to get these implemented. New ideas are argued to emerge more commonly from disempowered agents at the periphery of social networks, who have no power. Power and authority are argued to emanate from powerful agents in more central positions of the network who should not be expected to 'see' the need for change (given that the system works for them). Leadership in such settings emerges when one connects the different—and differently located—agents together, allowing adaptive creativity and change to emerge from the interaction.[33]

Reflecting this thinking, complexity theorist Charles Heckscher argues that 'change has its own dynamic, a process that cannot simply follow strategic shifts and that is longer and subtler than can be managed by any single leader'.[34] As a result, when complexity is considered, theorists hold that '[l]eadership does not mean getting followers to follow the leader's wishes; rather, leadership occurs when interacting agents generate adaptive outcomes'.[35] As such, 'leadership can occur anywhere in a social system. It need not be authority- or position-based, but is instead a complex interactive dynamic sparked by adaptive challenges. Individuals act as leaders in this dynamic when they mobilize people to seize new opportunities and tackle tough problems. As the situation changes, different people may act as leaders by leveraging their differing skills and experiences'.[36]

When applied to the current topic, this argument suggests that changes required to foster great governments would involve multiple agents distributed across a social context; not in one organization or position of power. Accordingly, one should expect that many agents played leadership roles in South Korea's growth story—not just Park Chung Hee. Similarly, one should expect that Lee Kuan Yew, Kermal Derviş, and Sergio Fajardo were not the only ones who led change in Singapore, Turkey and Medellin. One would expect to find groups of agents involved in providing leadership in these and other settings, all providing different functional contributions. Some would have been motivating the need to change, others offering the ideas for change, others providing the money and power to implement, others authorizing the access needed to ensure implementation, and others mobilizing the entire group by convening, connecting and co-ordination.

### 3.3    When do the interventions occur, and why?

Regardless of 'who' one believes leads transformative change, it is apparent that this leadership and change is not common. Great governments are frustratingly rare and many governments that try to copy more successful examples do not see the same results. This calls one to ask when leadership and change needed to generate great governments actually occur, and why. As with the prior discussion, two competing answers are offered to this question. The first proposes that one-off crises induce the interventions that promote great governments. The second posits that the leadership and change required to promote great

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[32] Greenwood and Suddaby (2006).

[33] Andrews (2013); Andrews, McConnell and Wescott (2008); Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000).

[34] Heckscher (1994: 14).

[35] Lichtenstein et al. (2006: 4).

[36] Lichtenstein et al. (2006: 4).

governments emerges gradually, as agents in a system unearth and address their most complex problems.

The first answer is arguably most dominant in conventional thinking. For instance, organizational change theorists commonly view crises as key to motivating a sense of urgency needed to foster change.[37] Such perspective is also common amongst practitioners in business and politics. It is echoed in a statement made by Rahm Emanual, President Obama's first Chief of Staff, at the height of the 2008 financial crisis, 'You never want a serious crisis to go to waste'.[38] The sentiment also features prominently in the 2008 Growth Commission study, which suggests that crises create opportunities for change because they destabilize contexts and threaten those who are in the contexts.[39] In this way, crises can reveal weaknesses in the pre-existing policy, political and organizational order. They can also spark a discussion about—and search for—alternative approaches to organizing people or doing policy. In concert, these effects can simultaneously reduce the opposition to change and increase the willingness to change. The Growth Commission authors note that such effect was critical in fostering adjustments necessary to put countries and governments onto high-growth trajectories, 'Crises gave leaders from Deng Xiaoping to President Park an opportunity to change course with a reduced level of resistance'.[40]

The crises referenced in Growth Commission studies, and beyond, are typically specific moments in time, or focal events (similar to what are called critical junctures in path dependence theory). These events are seen to spawn, almost immediately, the 'right decisions' that ultimately foster great achievements. For example, the key crisis many cite in Singapore's story relates to the day in 1965 where the country was expelled from the Malay Federation. Prominent versions of the country's success story start with this crisis, and the way a tearful Lee Kuan Yew responded to such.[41] As the story goes, Lee moved to ramp up his export policies at this point and called his nation to work hard, save, and prove their detractors wrong. Similarly, Kermal Derviş is said to have emerged as a leader of Turkey's growth story in the midst of financial crises in 2001 and 2002. According to David Brady and Michael Spence, Derviş 'used the crises as an opportunity to get legislation through the Turkish parliament, which probably could not have been passed under normal circumstances. The 19 major reforms that were passed during and immediately after the crisis have helped Turkey grow its economy''[42]

The argument is not that crises always result in leaders making the 'right choices' and the emergence of great governments. Rather, 'the more modest hypothesis is that crises create conditions where leaders have fewer constraints on their choice over both economic policy and structural and institutional reform'.[43] One would thus not expect every crisis to facilitate better leadership and development. One could, however, expect a correlation between experiences of improved leadership and development and a facilitating crisis. Great governments need a crisis to emerge, but not all crises produce great governments.

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[37] Kotter (1995).
[38] Seib (2008).
[39] Brady and Spence (2010).
[40] Brady and Spence (2010: 7).
[41] Lee (2000).
[42] Brady and Spence (2010: 7).
[43] Brady and Spence (2010: 7).

Critics of this thinking question the idea that change emerges from specific, isolated events. They argue that crises may be important moments where change becomes apparent, but that the crises only prove important in contexts that have been readied for change through prior events.[44] This is because change is argued to require more than a shock or disruption to the system. Such disruptions only foster fundamental change if extant policies, power structures and the like are already being questioned, alternatives exist to give agents something to change towards, and agents are in place (and legitimate enough) to push for change.[45]

Path dependence theorists call the processes by which these conditions emerge—and a context becomes ready for change—'generative cleavages' that emerge from antecedent conditions.[46] Events in this cleavage period can create new actors and groups and raise issues that compel the reorganization of political relationships. This can lead to often unseen and latent adjustments in norms, power relations and cognition over long interludes. Crisis events or critical junctures bring such latent adjustments to light, but are only the trigger of change. Indeed, crises reveal the change that has been emerging. If there is no emerging change in a cleavage period—establishing readiness—crises reveal nothing. This, one could argue, is why many crises do not foster change.

When applied to the paper's subject matter, this argument proposes that great government emerges gradually, as agents in a system unearth and address their most complex problems and make the context ready for change. Focal moments of crisis only spawn change when the context has been made ready by this gradual process. On the basis of this argument one would expect to see a variety of important, though under-appreciated events leading up to the crises commonly credited as starting points of change. One would expect to see events and interventions before 1965 in Singapore, for instance, where agents would have been identifying the future city-state's problems and crafting interactive mechanisms and capabilities needed to solve such problems. One would expect to find similar roots of change in Turkey before 2001 and the entrance of Kermal Derviş. One would similarly anticipate that the conditions required for civil rights reform in the United States emerged gradually in the decades leading up to focal crises on the late 1950s and early 1960s. It would be apparent that crises commonly credited for sparking change in these contexts only had such effect because prior events had readied the contexts for change.

### 3.4    How is the change sustained and implemented to ensure that it yields results?

It is important to examine where the change that produces great governments comes from. It is equally important to understand how these changes are sustained and implemented. This is crucial in the development field, where unimplemented or unsustained policy interventions are common. Given the frequent implementation failures one observes, it is important to ask why others succeed. In particular, it is important to ask how the change that yields great governments is sustained and implemented to ensure that it yields results? As with prior discussion, this section provides two potential, conflicting answers.

A first answer comes from the Growth Commission study on leadership by David Brady and Michael Spence.[47] The authors examined how governments had implemented difficult

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[44] Andrews (2008a); Cinite, Duxbury, and Higgins (2009).

[45] Andrews (2013).

[46] Collier and Collier (1991).

[47] Brady and Spence, 2010.

policies after crises were resolved—when political conditions had settled down and created opportunities for reform backtracking. In addressing the issue, the authors make an observation many might find commonplace and sensible: High-level leaders who introduced the changes centralized their power and influence for sufficient periods to push the changes through. In making such observation, the authors imply that implementation requires stable, centralized and controlling leadership that shepherds new policies and other changes to completion. The 'greatest political stability', they argue, comes in the form of a 'purely autocratic, one-person, absolute rule' where there is 'only one person to consult, convince, decide' over long periods.[48]

Brady and Spence note that no country has such a system in reality, but point to ways in which countries attempt to mimic second best solutions that ensure consistency in leadership and provide sufficient centralization to facilitate control over implementation decisions and actions. Dimensions of this approach include ensuring consistent leadership by the same agent, bolstering the power and influence of such agent through the creation of one-party states, and reshaping political processes to lock-in policy choices. The implicit assumption is that stable, high-level individual leaders can enjoy authority and influence over all the horizontal and vertical dimensions of social, political and organizational mechanisms involved in implementing policy—even over time. Oft-cited examples of this include Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Park Chung Hee in South Korea, who both held power for long periods, often by fostering the kind of second-best solutions proposed. Brady and Spence argue that these long spells of authoritarian rule provided the discipline needed to get things done. Given such argument, one would expect to find all experiences of great government resulting from extended-tenure high-level leadership—where one policy idea that emerged in crisis is pushed through a government by the authority at its head.

There are many critics of this perspective. Authors like Bill Easterly note that the experience with extended-term authoritarians is commonly not positive.[49] These leaders are prone to use their power for personal gain and leave their governments dysfunctional when they die or are forced out. Complexity theorists offer an explanation for why governments might become less functional under such rule (even if leaders are not corrupt). Their argument is that overly-controlled entities become impotent in the face of complex challenges that typically face governments.[50] Top-down 'implementation by edict' might foster implementation and sustainability where one knows the solution to a problem and the path to execution is linear and predictable (as is the case with simple or even complicated problems). Top-down rule does not work if the problems are complex, however, involving many unreliable dimensions and defying easy solutions. These kinds of problems are what great governments address effectively. They require interaction, creativity and adaptability throughout implementation, such that solutions can be found and fitted to the context.

Given such observation, complexity theorists would suggest that governments fully implement and sustain great achievements by fostering structured adaptation in the execution process. Reformers would set a direction in which to move but allow flexible processes to get there, engaging multiple agents in the journey, and inviting constant feedback about how the process is progressing, what is being learned, and what needs to be adjusted given the lessons. Theorists call this implementing at 'the edge of chaos' which is a "constantly shifting

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[48] Brady and Spence (2010: 8).

[49] Easterly (2011).

[50] Cilliers (1998); Lichtenstein et al. (2006).

battle zone between stagnation and anarchy'[51] where organizations are simultaneously creative and adaptive but also have sufficient focus, commitment and grit to complete the task at hand (and not flitter from idea to idea). Leadership plays an important role in these situations, coaching and shaping the process and ensuring that the system does not descend into chaos or become rigidly ordered.[52]

One would expect these leadership solutions to involve many agents, with multiple leaders fostering implementation in countries like Singapore and South Korea. Some (like Lee Kuan Yew and Park Chung Hee) would have been providing stable authority to the overall process in these stories. These agents may be the same for long periods as they appear to have been in Singapore and South Korea. Their function is to allow and protect the process of finding and fitting the solutions that ultimately make government great, which often involves providing cover for iterative experimentation, failure and learning. Other agents would be expected to have driven experimentation, implementation and learning itself. Others would be providing frontline lessons or resources for implementation. The number and variation in this last group should grow with time, as governments scale up or expand activities to yield, sustain or diffuse great achievements. One would expect these achievements to unfold iteratively over time, as multi-agent leadership groups take shape and expand the reach of the change process. In practice, this would manifest in the emergence of dynamic processes that typify adaptive organizations. These processes would allow experimentation to find solutions, the adaptation of solutions to context, identification of new problems, and expansion of engagement.


## 4      One large research agenda

The different answers offered above combine into two theories of how governments come to be great. The first is shown in the center column of Table 1. Called 'solution- and leader-driven change (SLDC)', it posits that great governments emerge when the right policies are introduced in times of crisis, by top-down leaders who then drive implementation. The second theory is shown to the right. Called 'problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA)', it holds that great governments emerge when agents interact in new ways—led by distributed groups—in gradual, iterative processes that yield locally determined responses to problems (that mature as more agents get engaged, adapt, diffuse and implement the changes).

The two theories are presented as extremes, and in highly simplified forms, as competing explanations about how governments change to achieve great things. They set up two different sets of expectations of what one might find when analyzing the achievements noted in the ten cases introduced earlier (or other examples of governments facilitating great achievements). This kind of analysis is urgently needed, especially in the development domain, to establish which set of expectations is most valid; or if some parts of the different explanations are more important than others; or if different explanations have different validity when looking at different types of change. (An SLDC explanation might better explain rapid growth events whilst a more messy PDIA explanation might better explain social and political transformations, for instance).

Table 1: Two competing explanations of how governments become great

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[51] Mitchell Waldrop in *Complexity* http://saass.wikia.com/wiki/Waldrop,_M._Mitchell,_Complexity_(XXI)
[52] Goldstein (1994); Lichtenstein et al. (2006); Linsky and Heifetz (2002).

| Key question | Solution- and leader-driven change (SLDC) | Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) |
|---|---|---|
| What changes help governments achieve greatness? | Solutions, in the form of the 'right' policies needed for development | New interaction, around locally defined problems |
| Who leads these interventions or changes, and how? | Influential, authorized top-down leaders | Groups of distributed agents, all providing specific functional contributions |
| When do the interventions occur, and why? | In times of crisis, when there are more opportunities for change | Emerge gradually, as agents ready the context for change (drawing focus on problems, introducing alternatives, building support for change) |
| How are changes sustained and implemented to ensure results? | Influential, authorized top-down leaders hold power for enough time to drive implementation | Groups find and fit solutions to context, foster implementation through diffusion and expanded engagement |

Source: Adapted from Andrews (2013), and Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012).


Research that helps better understand which of these approaches holds most is important in theoretical and practical terms:

- It matters because one of the two explanations—SLDC—is arguably dominant as an implicit theory of change in development literature; even though it has not really been tested to a meaningful degree (or against an alternative explanation). Various forms of SLDC thinking is arguable reflected in prominent publications like the Spence Growth Commission reports,[53] and is also arguably dominant in the way most development organizations pursue their interventions (through linear projects intended to introduce 'best practice'). The influence of economists fosters a belief in 'right policies' and solutions in such organizations. The traditional bureaucratic structures of such organizations reinforce ideals of top-down leadership.

- It also matters because the two explanations inform different strategies for countries to pursue in their efforts to achieve great government; and following the incorrect one could lead to limited success. The SLDC story is simple, with a specific solution introduced by a specific individual at a specific time, and then forced through the system by the individual. The PDIA story is more complex, involving gradual and iterative changes in the way agents interact. These new interactions are argued to generate new ideas and interventions that grow in influence over time, fostered by an expanding set of leaders. A PDIA strategy thus requires more engagement over longer periods (especially preceding crises), with more interaction than SLDC, broader engagement, and a higher degree of flexibility. If the PDIA explanation is valid and SLDC is not, then countries pursuing SLDC strategies are unlikely to experience great governments.

Doing research that tests which theory better explains the kind of change that yields great government is not easy. Typical case studies alone do not provide enough structured

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[53] Brady and Spence (2010).

information to test theory.[54] An example is Lee Kuan Yew's autobiographical book about Singapore, *From Third World to First*.[55] Although it yields detailed insights, this kind of work is about a specific set of experiences and it is hard to know what is generalize-able and how one should generalize lessons from such; let alone test theory. A response to this problem is to do large-sample quantitative analysis, testing whether one or other factor explains positive or negative performance across a range of experiences. An example of such research is a 2005 article by Benjamin Jones and Benjamin Olken, which examined whether high-profile leaders like Lee influence growth records.[56] Finding this to be the case, the authors conclude that leaders do matter. However, the study gives none of Lee's detail about how such leaders emerge or what they do, how they come up with ideas for change, build support for change, or maintain support for change. The lesson that strong leaders matter may seem general but has limited value because of the weak detail about what they do and how they foster transformation.

What one needs is a research method that blends the benefits of detailed qualitative stories (like Lee's autobiography) with the generalize-ability of large sample analysis (like the Jones and Olken study). This paper proposes just such a method for researchers working on international development; theory-guided process tracing (TGPT).[57] The method requires first proposing theories (like those offered here) expected to explain outcomes of interest (like the great achievements in the ten cases). One then scrutinizes the causal chain of events that generated the outcomes in each case; to test how evidence supports the proposed theories.[58] The intention is not to provide a full historical rendition of any experience but to examine how key causal factors interact to facilitate the outcomes of interest in each story and across the stories. Research findings are strengthened by using the same approach to look at a varied sample of stories—like the ten cases introduced in this paper.[59] Many would expect different explanations for the outstanding achievements in these cases. Common patterns across the cases should therefore stand out as strong evidence for any research conclusions, suggesting these as broadly relevant lessons.[60]

This paper proposes using Peter Hall's approach to TGPT,[61] called systematic process analysis, which actually suggests that two theories should be used for this purpose, both intended to explain how governments become great. Having two theories adds a robustness check to the analysis by forcing researchers to reflect on how well the details in particular stories support ideas in each theory. Hall suggests that this leads to a more nuanced view of the evidence, which is not used to simply support or negate one particular theory. Instead, the evidence is used to show how different parts of different theories might have different kinds of evidentiary support which could result in creative and insightful hybrid explanations. This approach could help inform which of the two theories—SLDC or PDIA—helps best in thinking about how great governments become reality. It is a disciplined and constructive

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[54] Various cases show this limit, including Andrews and Hill (2003); Montes and Andrews (2005); Ronsholt and Andrews (2005).

[55] Lee (2000).

[56] Jones and Olken (2005).

[57] Aminzade (1993); Collier and Collier (1991); Falleti and Lynch (2009); George and McKeown (1985); Mahoney (2001).

[58] Hall (2006).

[59] This varied set of experiences approximates a randomization of factors that could potentially influence success in the change process.

[60] Aminzade (1993: 108).

[61] Hall (2006).

approach to telling positive stories that could contribute powerfully to those currently asking about how political economy factors impact development, what a 'science of delivery' might involve, and how the many struggling governments of the world might strategize to achieve greatness in future.

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