

Just transition and regional socio-political characteristics in the EU

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This paper aims to examine regional socio-economic and electoral characteristics with respect to the vulnerability of regional societies to digital and green transition. Better understanding regional societal and political sensitivities is, in our opinion, crucial for devising policies related to the green transition, especially when the goal is to achieve carbon-neutral goals with social justice in mind. The second research aim is to include digital transition under the umbrella of just transition (JT). These trends are usually not conceptually tied together, however, the intertwined nature of both processes and the fact that they impact societies simultaneously and similarly. For the purposes of this paper, the team of authors utilized an integrated digital data environment AIDTWIGLOW¹ (see below).

In particular, this proposed paper examines the socioeconomic positions of all political parties and regional election results during the period 2014 – 2020. These results will be put into the context of regional socioeconomic characteristics with special attention to socioeconomic vulnerabilities related to the twin transition. The paper thus identifies regional political sensitivities as well as socioeconomic vulnerabilities toward the twin transition.

Inclusion of the political domain is, in our opinion, critical because a just - and efficient - twin transition requires adequate political legitimacy. Our approach to the cross-regional study of voting behavior was hugely helped by utilizing data gathered and coded by Manifesto Project Database². This project includes programs of all political parties across Europe (with varying degree of time coverage), these programs are in a very detailed coded so that they reflect various policy and political cleavages.

¹ This integrated digital data environment is a result of a project TL05000690 AIDTWIGLOW supported by the Czech Technology Agency.

² Online:

https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/download/data/2022a/codebooks/codebook_MPDataset_MPDS2022a.pdf

We have partially recoded the data from the MPD database to fit a modified custom concept of political cleavages. In doing so, political developments are incorporated into the data environment in such a way that they work with the electoral outcomes of *programmatic theses* rather than *political parties* or movements. In other words, if two political parties support the same thesis, say in the area of economic centralization vs. decentralization, then their electoral outcome will be aggregated, while in another area, say foreign policy, the same two parties will already belong to two different categories. The aim of this procedure was to pave way for a more plastic picture of political support in both policy agendas and electoral outcomes for a diverse range of policy agendas.

One of the advantages of this approach is that the researcher cannot influence the process of assigning particular codes to parties which can – and usually is – affected by individual perceptions. The research team only established the general coding design for programmatic documents and the algorithm then assigned values to the individual parties based on their programs. By following this logic, a higher degree of neutrality was achieved.

Specifically, we have identified nine separate categories:

- 1) economy (centralized vs. decentralized economy axis);
- 2) state strength (strong state vs. weak state axis);
- 3) social justice and social issues (emphasize vs. de-emphasize axis);
- 4) freedom, human rights and democracy (emphasize vs. de-emphasize axis);
- 5) socio-cultural issues (conservative vs. progressive axis), security and defense (emphasize vs. neglects);
- 6) business development (axis business support vs. protection and regulation);
- 7) attitudes towards the European and international agenda (axis sovereignty/nationalism - internationalism/Europeanism);
- 8) specific categories - "environment" and "populism", which by the nature of the available data and conceptualization are only considered on a continuum from minimum to maximum intensity (0 – 100). (visualizations – histograms – at the end of this document show the relative distribution of preferences along these axis).

The third pillar of the research lies in its regional perspective. Our previous findings show that adopting a regional perspective is crucial. Regional divergence in Europe grew over the past eight years across many sectors. On the one hand, several regional “champions” emerged, like regions around Paris, Munich, Utrecht, Dublin or Prague. On the other, most regions stagnated and many even declined in structural aspects such as education, research and development, business development, social issues, or structure of economy. Similarly, the impact of both transitions will be felt differently in different regions. Especially in regions that find themselves in a less overall developed economy, the impact might be significant.

In order to achieve the regional perspective, the paper makes the connection between socio-economic indicators in European Union NUTS2 regions and their election behavior, assessing the development in both areas over the past years. By analyzing more than 800 variables from Eurostat data, we have synthesized 16 key indicators and subsequently characterized the regions based on these indicators.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW: SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

Although there is a significant amount of research on voting behaviour, the literature on the impact of various socioeconomic indicators on electoral decisions is relatively scarce. Existing studies primarily focus on the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout, rather than the electoral choices themselves. Numerous authors have examined the relationship between educational attainment and voting behaviour (e.g. Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017; Burden, 2009; Gallego, 2010; Hansen & Tyner, 2021; Hoskins et al., 2016) while others (for instance Huijsmans et al., 2022; Kasara & Suryanarayan, 2015; Schafer et al., 2021) the connection between voter turnout and voters' income background. Contrary to the popular assumption that wealthier people are more politically active in elections than those with lower income levels, Kasara & Suryanarayan (2015) find no conclusive evidence for such a link. Rooduijn and Burgoon (2018), on the other hand, suggest a correlation between unfavourable economic circumstances and radical political preferences, either left or right. This phenomenon is most visible when individuals' economic hardship coincides with favourable conditions at the aggregate level. Gingrich and Häusermann (2015), for instance, utilize the conventional division of the working class and middle class to examine the changes in class voting patterns. This approach captures the left-wing parties' loss of support from the

historically strong working-class electorate while simultaneously attracting an increasing number of voters from the middle class.

When discussing income background, there is a significant correlation with employment status that can greatly influence not only voting behaviour but also an electoral choice.

Nevertheless, the current research does not neglect either two other factors with a potential influence on voting behaviour, namely gender, and age of voters. Regarding the initial factor, a number of authors focus on the gender gap, which encompasses not only the discrepancy in voter turnout between men and women (Kostelka et al., 2019) but also the variations in their electoral choices. These choices reflect not only political affiliation (Harteveld et al., 2015) but also the preference for a candidate's gender (Giger et al., 2014).

A strong position in research on the impact of socio-economic development on voting behaviour is occupied by the topic of migration, as it encompasses many of the factors mentioned above. Academics and politicians alike consider the migrant background of voters to be a determining factor in voting behaviour, which could potentially represent a new electoral force (Rozo & Vargas, 2021; Strijbis, 2014). Indeed, migration can influence other socio-economic indicators and impact the higher versus lower social status divide. This impact is not limited to voting behaviour within states but is also evident in the voting preferences of diasporas (Burgess, 2014; Koinova & Tsourapas, 2018). Researchers are not only interested in understanding the motivations behind voting behaviour in the country of origin but also in exploring overall political choices (Szulecki et al., 2021; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2022).

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW: JUST TWIN TRANSITION

The "twin transition" is the simultaneous processes of digital and green transition. The digital transition refers to the widespread adoption and integration of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the internet of things, into various sectors of the economy and society. The green transition, refers to the shift towards a more sustainable, low-carbon economy and society, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating the impacts of climate change. The twin transition refers to the fact that these two processes are happening simultaneously and are interconnected. For example, digital technologies can be used to improve energy efficiency and optimize resource use, while the green transition can

provide opportunities for new business models and economic growth. On the other hand, the twin transition is likely to simultaneously affect sectors or regions that, given prevailing economic structures (agriculture, industry) find it very difficult to digitalize or adapt to low-carbon policies.

To maintain social justice during and after such an undertaking, according to the just transition (JT) scholars it's necessary to alter the way of thinking about the green transition not only in managerial and technological way, but also take into account the socio-economic impact, which low-carbon future will bring. (Abram et al, 2022) The shift from fossil fuels to renewables could increase environmental and social injustice. In Thus, according to proponents of JT, the green transition needs to be accompanied with an approach of fairness and inclusiveness as possible to everyone to ensure to not leave anybody behind in the way of recognizing socioeconomic costs and benefits of the change to low-carbon economy and allocating them in the proper manner. (Heffron and McCauley, 2021)

There is no universal definition of just transition, however there are essential elements and principles that constitute what a just transition looks like. At its core, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2022), a just transition is about “principle, process and practice.” Its purpose is to ensure “environmental sustainability, decent work, social inclusion and poverty eradication” (OECD, 2017) whilst the world moves towards a greener future. Nevertheless, the conceptualization of JT is also continuously contested by labor unions, environmentalists, governments, and others, while the most used meaning of JT in the public space, which is primarily focused on the “job creation” aspect, is nowadays being opposed by many of the JT scholars. (Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC), 2018; Morena et al., 2020).

The term “just transition” itself was firstly introduced during the 1980s and for the majority of its history it was used to promote green jobs as an indivisible part of green transition, which was formally anchored by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement (Abraham 2017, Abram 2022). However over the years this narrow focus on the ‘job creation’ raised rigorous criticism, because this simplified meaning of JT ignores many other dimensions of negative societal impacts. Besides that the job creation focus in combination with conclusions of several studies that “green job creators” do not bring any relevant beneficial positive impact for former employees in fossil fuels sector also oftentimes led to the opposition’s narrow argumentation of “jobs versus climate”.

Thereby academics such as McCauley and Heffron argue that the strategic meaning of just transition should stand for a more comprehensive framework for analysis and promotion of fairness and equity during the green transition. According to critics of this narrow ‘job aspect’ approach, there are many far more perspectives of JT. The line of the arguments derives heavily from the academic literature of ‘socio-technical transition’, which include more than ‘job creation’ dimension.

A useful distinction of five approaches to just transition is provided by Wang and Lo (2021):

(1) just transition as a labor-oriented concept, (2) just transition as an integrated framework for justice, (3) just transition as a theory of socio-technical transition, (4) just transition as a governance strategy, and (5) just transition as public perception.

Overall, the scholar literature on just transition leans toward conceptual rather than empirical approach. The aim of this paper is to fill the existing concepts with regional socio-economic and voting behavior data. Thus, it empirically demonstrates specifically which regions – and clusters of regions – are particularly vulnerable to some or all aspects of the twin transition. This data-based understanding will be further enhanced by the inclusion of the political sensitivities towards both transitions.

VISUALISATIONS: Histograms of distribution of political preferences along axis

Chart – histogram “nationalism – internationalism

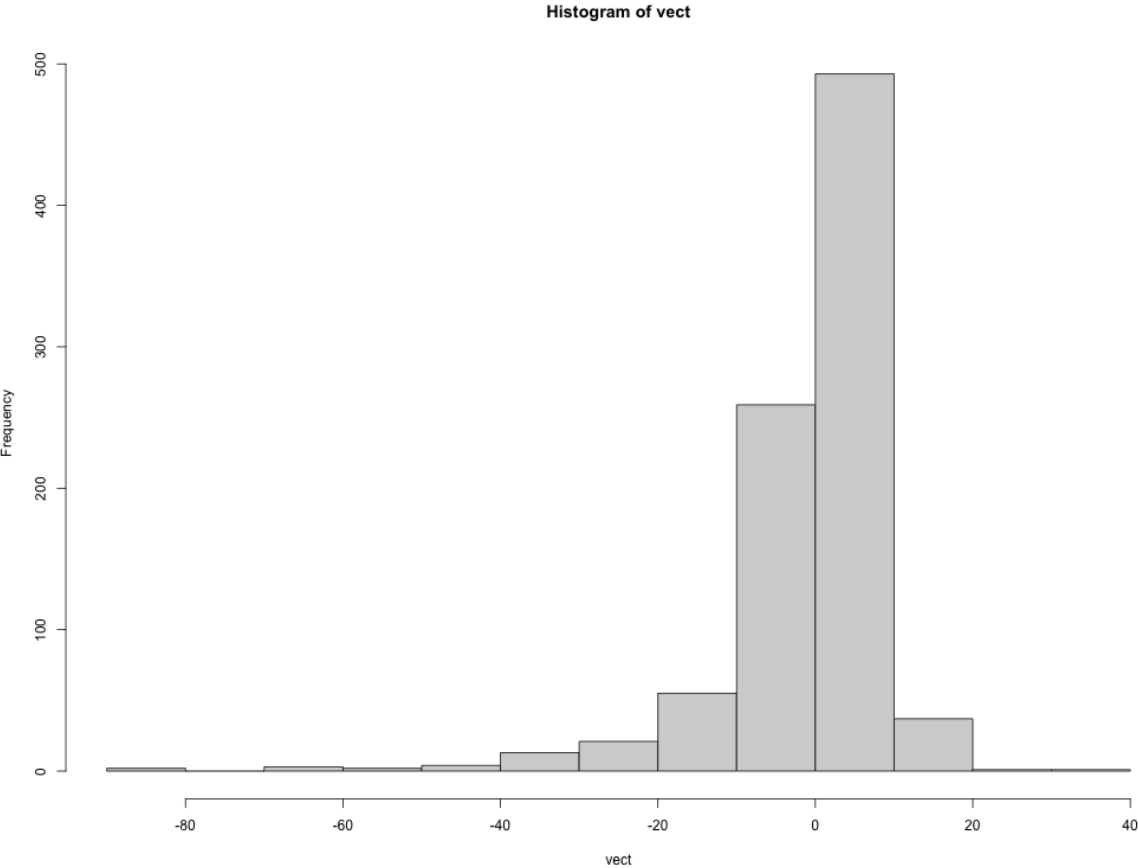


Chart – histogram: statism

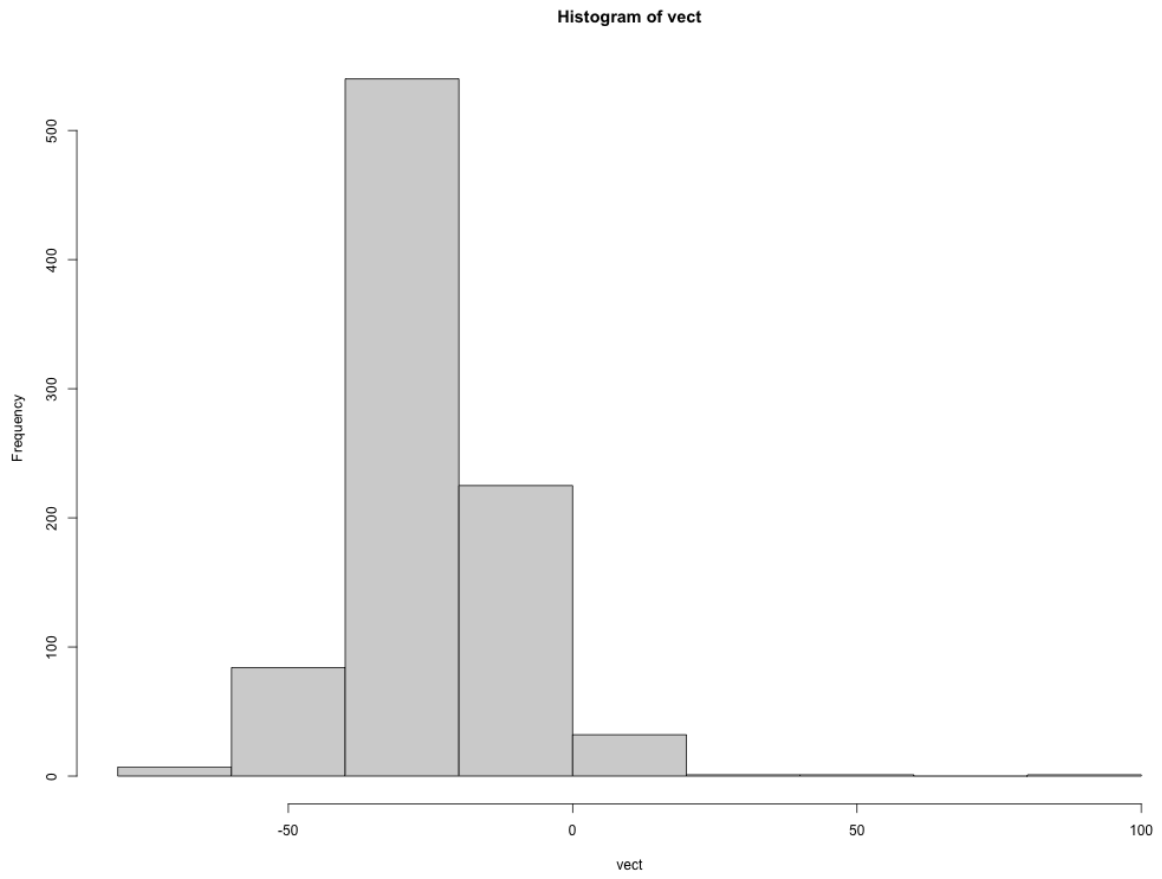


Chart – histogram: socio-cultural

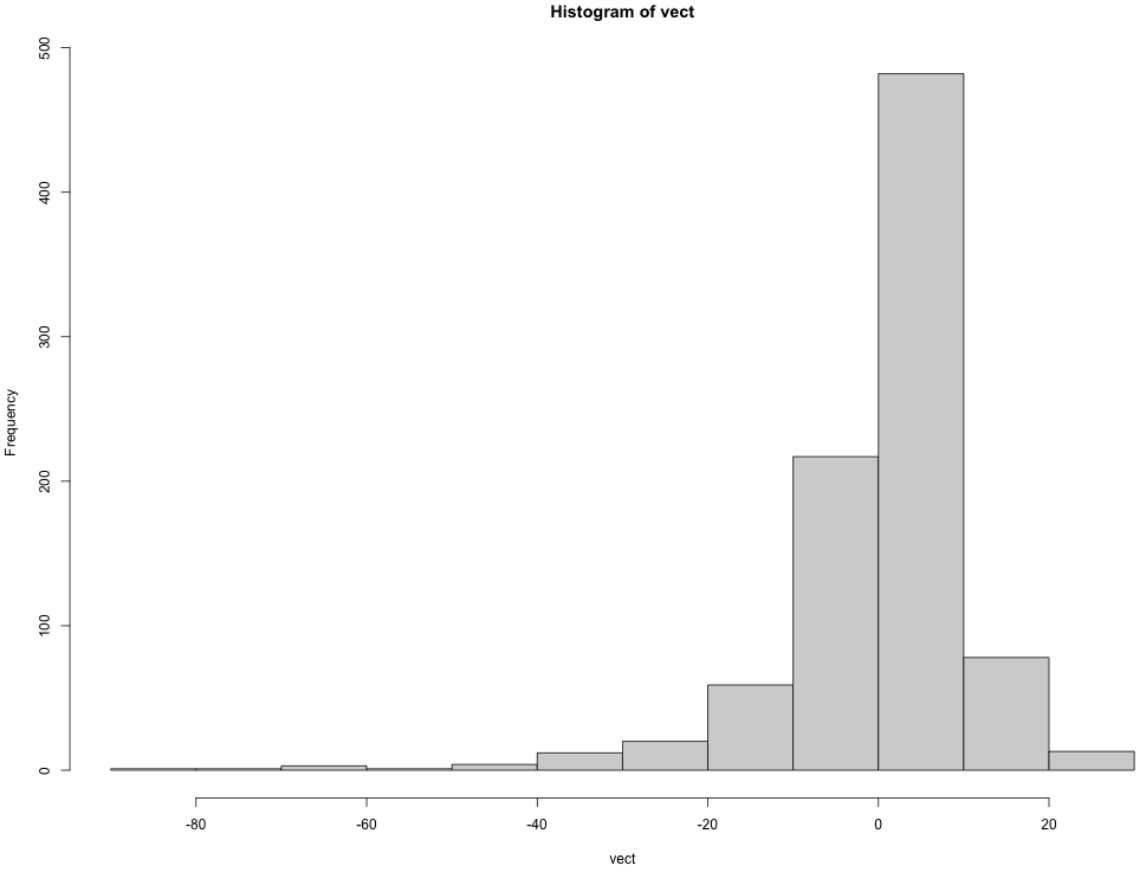


Chart – histogram: environment

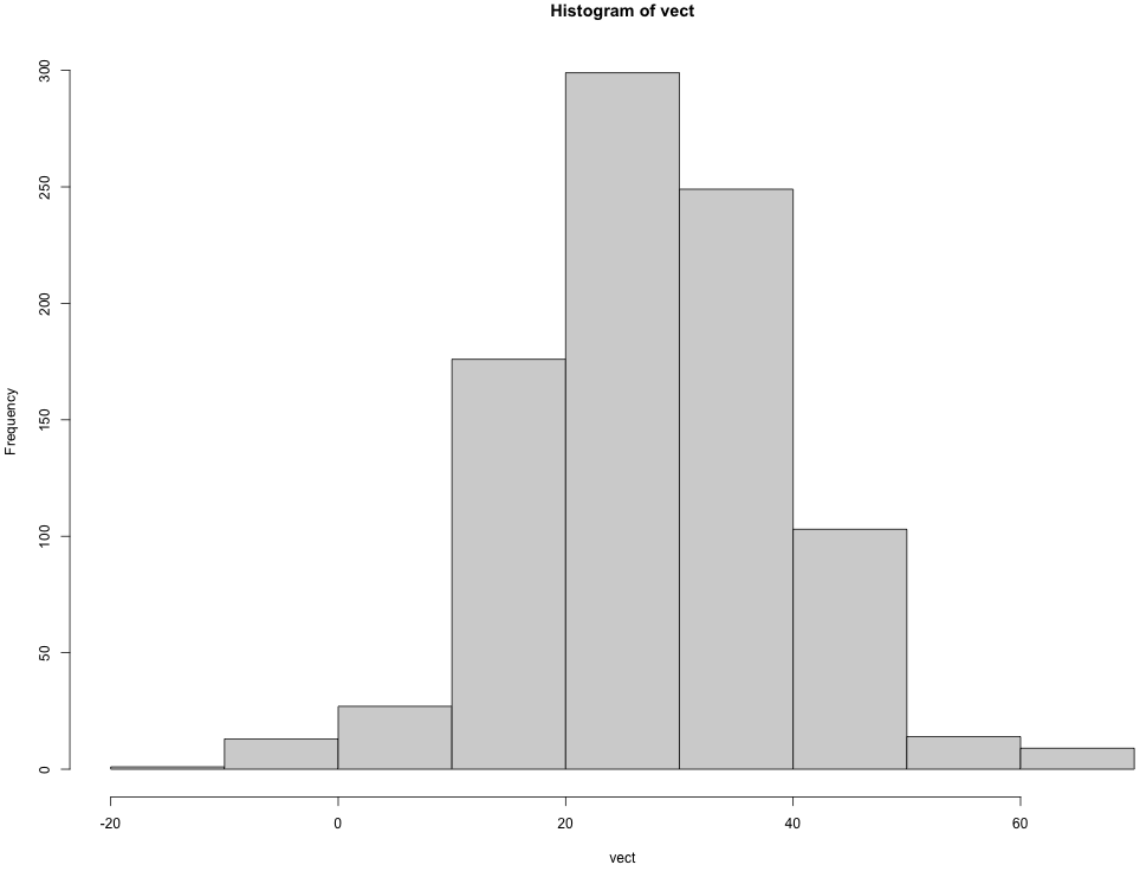


Chart - histogram: security and safety

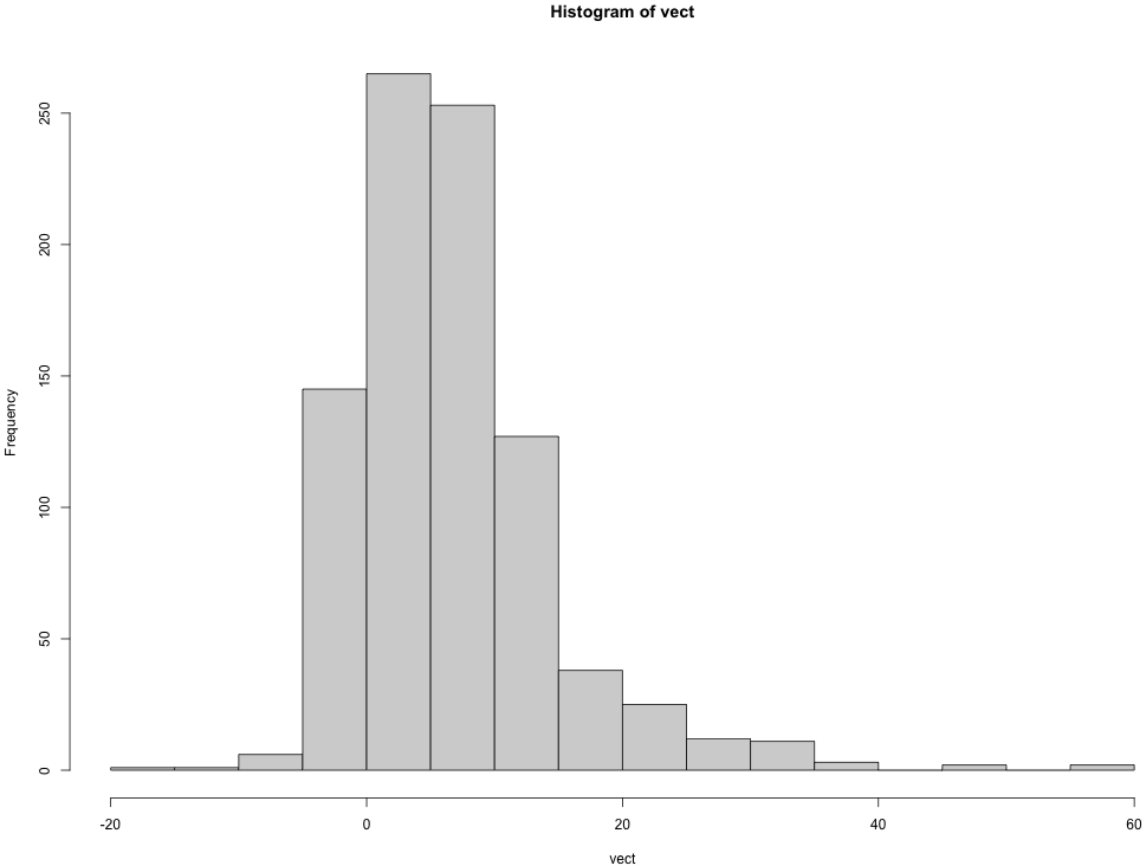


Chart – histogram: Freedom, democracy and human rights

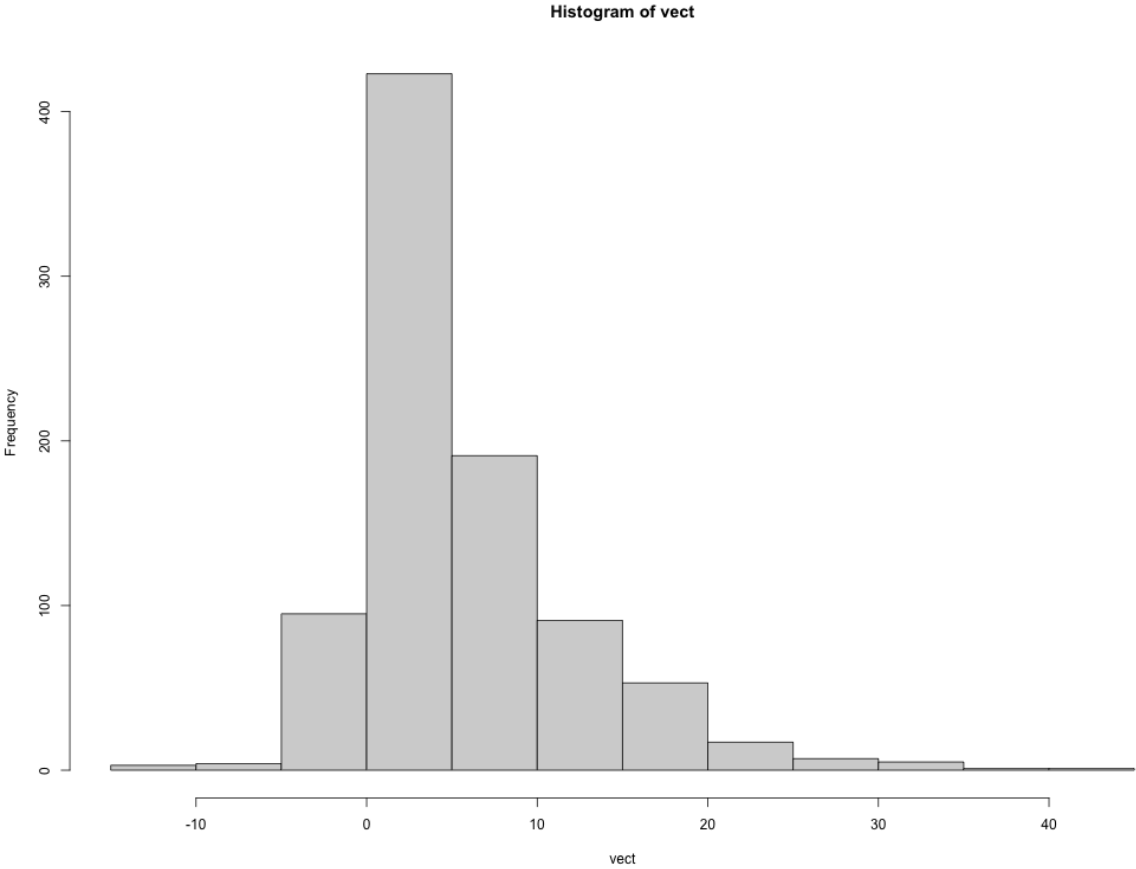
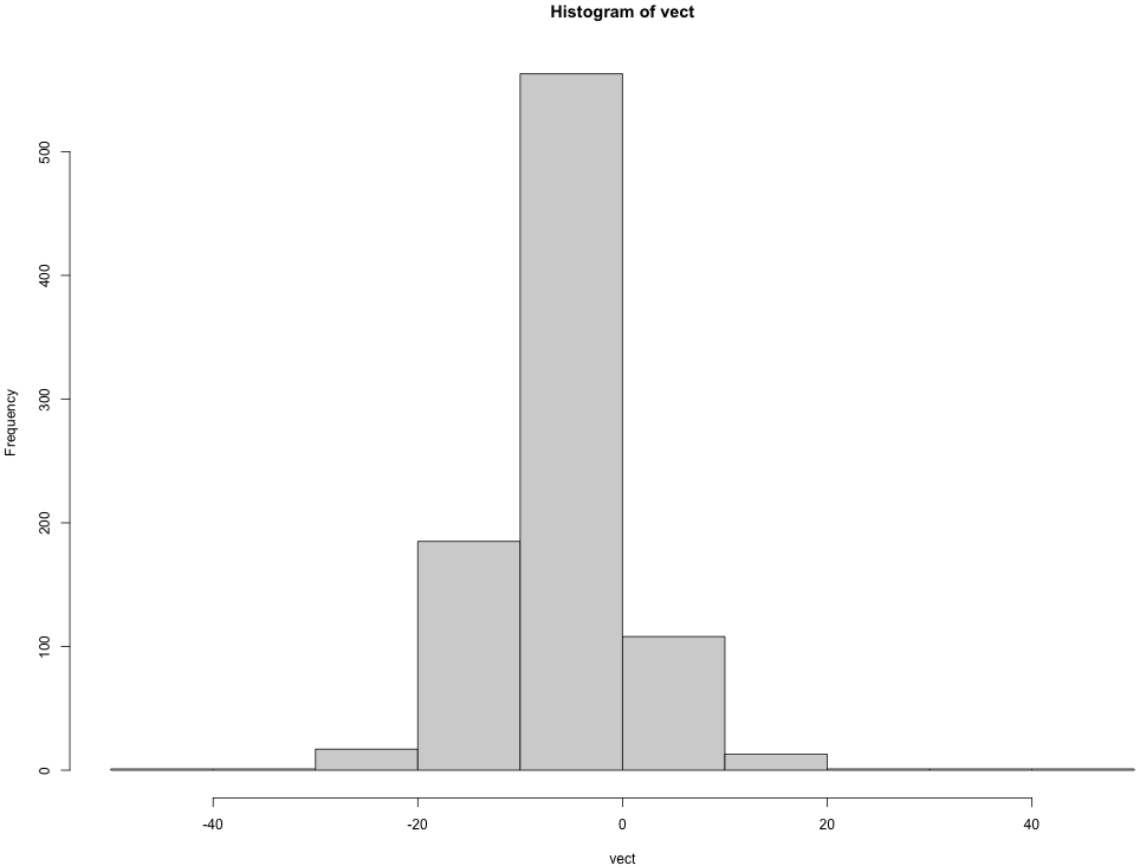


Chart – histogram: Economy



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