

POOR EXPLORATION OF CRITICAL JUNCTURE AS THE BANE OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Critical juncture is a confluence of factors that disrupts the existing political and economic balance in a state. It is a double edged-sword that can cause a sharp turn in the trajectory of a nation. That is, it can cause a radical break from extractive institution that causes underdevelopment and poverty to inclusive institutions that favours growth and development in a state and vice versa. Africa is a continent least able to explore world's major critical junctures, and her independence cum elections for over 6 (six) decades, and remain a poverty striking continent owing to the re-creation of extractive institutions by her leaders. It is against this backdrop, that this work adopts a hermeneutic method and thus, identified lack of political centralization and elitism as the bane of institutional development in Africa. It is our conclusion that political centralization and an overthrow of the elite by the common people would be the springboard for institutional development in Africa.

Keywords: Exploration, Critical Juncture, Institution, Development

Introduction

Critical juncture is a double-edged sword that can cause a sharp turn in the trajectory of a state. In other words, it can cause or open the way for breaking the circle of extractive institutions that cause poverty and stagnation and enable more inclusive ones that engineers prosperity and growth to emerge. On the other hand, it can even intensify the growth and development of more extractive ones to emerge as is the case among African states. Thus, understanding the role of history and critical junctures in shaping the path and way of economic and political institutions enables us to have a more complete and comprehensive theory of the imports of the discrepancies in the paucity and prosperity; that is, many states make the transition to inclusive institutions as many in Europe and America while others do not, as in Africa. It is on record as an undeniable fact that England was unique among other countries when it had the break from extractive institutions to inclusive ones in the 17th century through the instrumentality of its major critical junctures like; the Glorious Revolution which limited the power of the king and the executive and relocated to the parliament the power to determine economic institutions. It emphatically opened up the political system to a broad cross section of society, which was able to exert considerable influence over the way the state functioned. Affirming this, Acemoglu and Robinson hold thus, "...the Glorious Revolution was the foundation for creating a pluralistic society, and it built on and accelerated a process of political centralization. It created the world's first set of inclusive political institutions" (102).

Furthermore, the inclusive institutional development in England was made possible by two major factors. First were the political institutions, including a centralized state that enabled her to take the preceding radical step toward inclusive institutions made possible with the onset of the Glorious Revolution. The second factor, was the events that gave rise to the Glorious Revolution which in turn laid the foundations for pluralistic political and economic institutions hence the logic of virtuous circle. Another critical juncture that led the institutions of Western Europe to converge with that of England, was the French Revolution which was the rise by the common people against the divine rights of the king and thus, created a more pluralistic society.

Unfortunately, Africa is part of the world's major critical juncture to break the circle of her extractive institutions causing her poverty, civil unrest and stagnation in perpetuity. Acemoglu and Robinson were not silent about this, when they opined that:

Africa was the part of the world with the institutions least able to take advantage of the opportunities made available by the Industrial Revolution. For at least the last one thousand years, outside of small pockets and during limited periods of time, Africa has lagged behind the rest of the world in terms of technology, political development, and prosperity. It is the part of the world where centralized states formed very late and very tenuously. Africa shares this trajectory of lack of state centralization with countries such as Afghanistan, Haiti, and Nepal, which have also failed to impose order over their territories and create anything resembling stability to achieve even a modicum of economic progress (115).

Consequently, this is how African institutions developed into her present-day extractive institutions, that even during the wake of most African nations' independence in the 1960s, which presented to her ample opportunity to evolve and break the circle of extractive institutions, unfortunately, all her independence leaders consolidated and adopted a page of the erstwhile colonial masters. Acemoglu and Robinson write thus, "... Africa took hold with extractive colonial institutions taken over by independent elites" (125). Africa's poor exploration and approach to her critical junctures in history and at present still, is the bane of the persistent institutionalization of extractive institutions and until she learns to effectively explore her critical junctures, Africa will continue to be gripped with extractive institutions which is an obstacle to development and growth.

Concept of Critical Juncture

The critical juncture is synonymous with words like 'crisis', 'turning point', 'unsettled times', etc. It is said to have a long pedigree in historical institutionalism. Thus, the first of its appearance is traced or found in the classical work of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, tracing the roots of the origins of Western European party systems to three 'crucial juncture' in the history of each

nation. They write that, "... the variety of party systems in Western European democracies that existed in the 1960s was the outcome of a set of ordered consequences of decisions and developments which occurred in crucial junctures, located much earlier in history" (Lipset and Rokkan 37-38). Consequently, the concept of critical juncture became a crucial part of the toolbox of scholars interested in the study of institutional development with respect to Lipset and Rokkan's seminal volume. A crucial theoretical innovation of these is that they explicitly cast their studies as a clear cut of a more robust approach to the analysis of institutional development, in which critical juncture give rise to path-dependent processes. Thus, the explicit connection of the critical juncture approach to the theory of path-dependence provided powerful theoretical tools for the analysis of distal historical causation. The emphasis placed in path dependence theory on mechanisms of institutional reproduction, dynamics of increasing returns, and network effects lent powerful theoretical support to the thesis that decisions and developments located in the distant past can have a long-lasting effect on institutional developments.

Mahoney in "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology", opines that "the insight drawn from path dependence in economics and sociology that 'small and contingent events' although generally of insignificant influence during period of institutional reproduction, can instead play a crucial role at the beginning of institutional path" (Mahoney 36).

In another of his masterpiece, *Legacies of Liberalism*, Mahoney explicitly and unequivocally echoes that:

... critical junctures as 'choice points' when a particular option is adopted among two or more alternatives given by antecedent of historical conditions. Critical junctures are moments of relative structural indeterminism when willful actors shape outcomes in a more voluntaristic fashion than normal circumstances permit... these choices demonstrate the power of agency by revealing how long-term development patterns can hinge on distant actor decisions of the past (Mahoney, *Legacies of Liberalism* 8).

Taking stock of these debates, Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt offer a more systematic theorization of critical juncture in historical institutionalism, underscoring that analogies to economic processes in which a series of small events leads to a state of "lock in" are often inadequate for capturing processes of institutional creation in politics. In their words, "even in moments of social and political fluidity, the decisions of some actors are often more influential than those of others in steering institutional development, rather than a focus on cumulative small events, a focus on decision-making by powerful actors is likely to be more useful in the analysis of critical junctures" (Capoccia and Ziblatt 931). These scholars however, anchor the discussion of critical junctures in the analysis of institutions more broadly by arguing that scholars should try to specify precisely

the unit of analysis with respect to which of the “juncture” is argued to be “critical”.

The approach however, in the literature has been to identify relatively brief periods of momentous political, social or economic upheaval and to assert in a general sense, that these constitute critical junctures. This discussion provides the foundation for a political and economic action. For Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Kelemen, “critical juncture are defined as relatively short periods of time during which there is substantially heightened probability that agents choices will affect the outcome of interest” (Capoccia and Kelemen 341). The reference “short period” captures the fact that the duration of the critical juncture must be brief as the duration of a critical juncture has an impact on the ability of actors to behave freely and to affect future institutional arrangements: the longer the juncture, the higher the probability that political decisions will be constrained by a re-emerging structural constraint. Acemoglu and Robinson in their masterpiece, *Why Nations Fail*, argue that “there is strong synergy between economic and political institutions. Extractive institutions concentrate power in the hands of a narrow elite and place few constraints on the exercise of this power. Economic institutions are often structured by this elite to extract resources from the rest of the society” (152). On the contrary, they write, “... inclusive institutions are forged on foundations laid by inclusive political institutions, which makes power broadly distributed in society and constrains its arbitrary exercise” (153).

Interestingly, on what is critical juncture and how they inform institutional development, Acemoglu and Robinson as cited in Oginyi write that: “why some societies develop inclusive institutions (which favour growth), while others develop extractive institutions (which favour predatory elites growth), defined critical juncture as a major event or confluence of factors which disrupts the existing balance of political and economic power in a nation” (Oginyi 11). They argue that critical juncture is a double-edged sword that can cause a sharp turn in the trajectory of a nation. A double-edged sword in the sense that it can open the way for breaking the circle of extractive institutions and allow more inclusive ones to emerge or perpetuate extractive institutions the more. The duo, assert that critical juncture remains critical and crucial in shaping the path of economic and political institutions in a nation; it can navigate the socio-economic trend either in the positive or negative direction. They argue that:

Understanding how history and critical junctures shape the path of economic and political institutions enables us to have a more complete theory of the origins of difference in poverty and prosperity. In addition, it enables us to account for the lay of the land today and why some nations make the transition to inclusive economic and political institutions while others do not (Acemoglu and Robinson 101).

It is however, explicit here to state unequivocally that there should be no conviction that just any critical juncture would lead to inclusive institutional

development as history is replete with instances where autocratic regimes overthrow each other in a bid to control and strengthen extractive institutions. In other words, a subscription to the iron laws of oligarchy. On this, Acemoglu and Robinson write:

There should be no presumption that any critical juncture will lead to a successful political revolution or to change for the better. History is full of examples of revolutions and radical movements replacing one tyranny with another, in a pattern that the German Sociologist Robert Michael dubbed the iron law of oligarchy, a particularly pernicious form of vicious circle. The end of colonialism in the decades following the Second World War created critical juncture for former colonies. However, in most cases in Sub-Saharan Africa and many in Asia, the post-independence governments, simply took a page out of Robert Michael's book and repeated and intensified the abuses of their predecessors, often severely narrowing the distribution of political power, dismantling constraints, and undermining the already meager incentives that economic institutions provided for investment and economic progress (111-113).

Thus, critical junctures are very significant since there are formidable barriers against gradual improvements, emanating from the close ties that exist between extractive political and her counterpart economic institutions and how they aid each other. The logic of the vicious circle of extractive institutions plays a vital role here. The drivers of these institutions (the elites), are always armed to fight major changes that will snatch off their economic and political opportunities. We have so far, made attempt to conceptualize the term "critical juncture", it is also needful for us to conceptualize the idea of institutional development, as it will enable us marry the two concepts.

Conceptualizing Institutional Development

Understanding the concept of "institution", will aid us to know how they are formed or developed in a human society. Acemoglu and Robinson define institutions as "rules influencing how the economy works, and the incentives that motivate people" (102). In other words, institutions are simply, the governmental structures, the organogram and the machineries through which the state operate and govern its people. Now, the important questions this paper attempts to ask are: how are these structures and machineries formed in a state? Why are some countries with inclusive institutions and others with extractive institutions, thus having different path of development? It is an indubitable fact that there is no human society that have ever existed or existing which have not at some point in history punctuated by critical junctures, that "was" or "is" without crisis and turning point. These structures called institutions develop during critical junctures which could be turning points like: elections, revolutions, war or independence as is the case in Europe, America and Eastern Asia. Institutional development is

simply how institutions are formed in a society. The emergence of institutions in different parts of the world today was all by-products of critical junctures. For instance, in the West, institutions began to develop to its present inclusiveness through the foundations laid by the Glorious, Industrial and French Revolutions respectively, starting from their revolutions against the divine rights of the king. While in Africa and many parts of Asia, these critical junctures made their institutions even more extractive. The process through which these institutions emerge are not automatic and pre-determined, rather during these periods, options are available for the major drivers of this critical juncture to adopt and intensify, hence a double-edged sword as earlier explained.

Thus, in historical institutionalism, critical junctures are conceptualized as moments, choice point, period, time, chance, opportunity and option of structural indeterminacy and fluidity during which several options for radical institutional innovation are available, one option is however selected as consequences of political and economic interactions and decision-making, and this initial selection carries a long-lasting institutional and structural legacy. It was Greif Avner in his work *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy* that argues that “institutional analysis is about situations in which more than behaviour is physically and technologically possible” (33). With this, he underscores the point made of critical juncture above. More so, the study of critical junctures consists of theory-driven analysis of the politics of institutional formation in moments of political openness and fluidity: strategic interaction, coalition building, and norm-generating strategies aimed at influencing the perception of the legitimacy of institutional formations by the major drivers of the juncture. These processes however, untold in a well-defined context in which several options for institutional changes and innovations are politically, economically and systematically potent.

We conclude here, by saying that institutions, be it inclusive or extractive, are not pre-societal, that is, are not before the individuals or the civil state in both pre and post-independent state, rather, are by-products and outcome of different critical junctures in the trajectory of nations. Having known this, we shall now proceed to present in sharp-focus the failures of the African nations to effectively explore her various critical junctures in its historical epochs.

The Failures of Different Critical Junctures in Africa

Post Independent Leadership in the 1960s presented to African states the best and the most critical window to re-write her history and chart a new course for the development of the continent, but this unfortunately was a tall dream as all her independence leaders saw in it an opportunity to create and re-create extractive institutions which her erstwhile colonial leadership developed and strengthened. In the early 1950s when many of the African nations were still under the colonial rule of the British, the African nationalists struggled for self-rule with the argument to better the living standard of her people but unfortunately landed the continent in a prison without a wall, as Africa has been enlisted as the most poverty stricken continent in the world as many of her citizens try to cross the Mediterranean sea

illegally in order to experience the living standard of these countries. In affirmation of this, M. F. Asiegbu writes: “nearly all African states are listed among the HIPC (Highly Indebted Countries), where the poverty line is staggering. It is the reality of these gloomy situations that pushes them to cross the Mediterranean Sea illegally in order to experience their living standard” (15). The problem of African migrants, unemployment, collapsed economy (ies) and huge disparities have continued to face the continent in spite of the post independent leadership.

As a result of selfish regional, ethnic and religious political parties floated by the post-independence leadership in Africa, crisis and conflict erupted and engulfed most of these nascent independent states in the 1960s. As Mbaegbu rightly captures it, “...the failure of the First Republic was due to some major factors ranging from the inadequacies of the parliamentary system of government, the Western Nigerian crisis of 1963, the census crisis and the 1964 General Election crisis” (55). Unfortunately, at this point in the African history, many African states could have utilized this rare opportunity and window of self-democratic governance to chart a new course for her development.

Consequently, the history of the military incursion in Africa dates back to 1952 during which Gamel Abdel Nasser overthrew King Farouk on the 23rd of July, 1952. Followed by the 1958 incursion in Sudan during which Ibrahim Abboud took over a Republican government. In 1963, it made its history in Togo, and subsequently followed by the incursion of Christopher Soglo against the government of Herbert Maga which earned him his life in the Republic of Benin. This will be incomplete without that of Nigeria. It made its history in Nigeria on 15th of January 1966, during which the government of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was overthrown by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzogwu. This continued from one military intervention to the other, until 1979 when Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) emerged the winner of the presidential election. Unfortunately, most of the key players of the First Republic found their way into some elective positions and not long after the election, conflict and crisis erupted in the country as all the five political parties struggled for power. G. I. Oginyi reacting to this writes: “...things began to degenerate into the principle of ‘myselfism’. Corruption engulfed the country and became the bane of the Shagari-led government” (Oginyi, “Rousseau’s General Will”, 55). Shagari reacting to the criticisms leveled against his administration has this to say as captured in Chinua Achebe, “though there is corruption in Nigeria, but it has not reached alarming proportion” (Achebe 49). Against this backdrop, Achebe on his own part reacts thus: “my frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country. Shagari is neither a fool nor a crook. So, I must assume that he lives abroad, which is not as strange or fanciful as some might think” (50).

Similarly, C. C. Mbaegbu also reacts to this when he says that, “...corruption among the government officials was the bane of this democratic governance and this led to another military incursion in governance in 1983 by General Buhari” (Mbaegbu 55). Thus, this backdrop is a testimony that the second republic was an

aberration and a true rape of democracy. Consequently, the August 1983 election which claimed that the re-election of Shagari was the birth of tragedy in the country's polity as massive rigging, violence and many political offences greeted the election. In reacting to this still, Mbaegbu argues that:

The failure of the second republic was as a result of the imminent political crisis arising from the interpretation of the meaning of two-third of 19 by the Supreme Court in its ruling in an action brought to it by Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Awolowo disputed the declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as the winner. Next was the 1983 general election which was alleged to have been heavily rigged in favour of the ruling party, NPN. Corruption among the government officials was the bane of this democracy and this led to another military incursion in governance in 1983 by General Buhari (56).

Again, the most recent in Africa is the military incursion in Zimbabwe that removed Mugabe in 2017. Be that as it may, the military incursions in all its attempts are usually seen as an attempt to improve and develop a model for African development. Unfortunately, this has been a tall dream as military in politics in Africa has been described by many scholars as the bane of African development. To this, O. G. Onwuka reacts, saying that: "... although the military purportedly came in to correct the supposed ills in the society and contributed to the development in several ways, the military rather than solve the problem of Africa have compounded it. Precisely, through the abuse of power, corruption and blatant abuse of fundamental human rights of the citizens, created political instability" (Onwuka 30). G. I. Oginyi is not quite on this as he writes:

Though it is arguable to say that military in its little way has contributed to African development in the areas of defending of national unity, state creation, establishment of secondary institutions, hospitals, etc, the African experience of military incursion undoubtedly has shown in the high places that, it is not capable of solving the dilemma under which the civilian regimes failed, rather they have in no little measure aided the problem they ab initio came to solve (Oginyi, "Acemoglu and Robinson's Inclusive Institutions", 18).

However, the rationale for this paper is to interrogate why in spite of all these conflicting stances and efforts, Africa has remained a special case study on the issue of development. It posits that the masses have not been opportune to be the key drivers in the different critical junctures in her trajectory as it has always been a radical movement of a group of elites against another.

Conclusion

In historical institutionalism, critical junctures are conceptualized as moments of structural indeterminacy and fluidity during which several options for radical institutional innovation are available. One is selected as consequences of political interactions and decision-making, and this initial selection carries a long-lasting institutional legacy. It was Greif Avner in his work *Institutions and the Path to Modern Economy* that argued that “institutional analysis is about situations in which more than behavior is physically and technologically possible” (Avner 33). To this, he underscores the point made of critical juncture above. Thus, the study of critical juncture consists of theory-driven analysis of the politics of institutional formation in moments of political openness and fluidity, strategic interaction, coalition building and norm-generating strategies aimed at influencing the perception of the legitimacy of institutional innovations by the rule-takers. These processes unfold in a well-defined context in which several options for institutional formations are politically and systematically viable. Africa has not been able to develop institutions friendly to development because of her unfortunate trajectory (ies) where many of the key drivers of her critical junctures have actually been shrouded with the radical movement of one particular elite against another, hence the persistence of extractive institutions that favour only the cabals.

It is our conclusion however, that the failure of critical junctures in Africa is the bane of institutional development, and unless there is a conscious struggle and efforts on the side of the common people to be the key drivers of her critical junctures, the continent would keep hold on extractive institutions and hence remain in perpetual underdevelopment.

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