

Proposed title: ‘The growth effects of elite involvement in post-colonial institutional formation in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda’

I propose to research whether certain types of elites, or certain parameters for their involvement in institutional formation, have produced better long-run developmental results in post-independence Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Amid an increasingly vociferous debate on the unequal distribution of power and wealth in the Global South, I believe there would be value in exploring whether and how some types of elites are more helpful than others for the dual processes of institutional formation and national development, particularly in the African context, where such processes are ongoing. I propose to structure this research through case studies of the post-independence experiences of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Although their factor endowments differ, and each underwent a different mode of colonisation, similar economic institutions were imposed on all three of these countries under British rule. The East African High Commission (EAHC), established in 1948, provided for a customs union, a common currency and postage, and cross-border transportation and communications infrastructure. Its post-independence successor, the East African Common Services Organisation (EACSO) became the East African Community (EAC), which broke down in 1977, and was formally dissolved in 1984, by which point structural adjustment had begun.

From a point of convergence for some economic institutions, and a European expectation that newly-independent Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda might choose to form a political union, the paths of these countries diverged. I would like to understand the role of national elites in pushing this divergence, and the extent to which they were able to adapt events to suit their own needs, given the evidence that Africans exercised some agency in the construction of their institutional surroundings, even during the colonial period (Bayart, 2000). I am also interested in whether particular types or groupings of elites were more closely associated with long-run economic development. Given the differing strategies of these three countries in dealing with their inherited set of merchants at independence (for example, the experience of the Asian trading class), and the wide variation in the ideological and sociological characteristics of the political leaders who emerged during the struggle for independence, I believe this would be a fruitful avenue for research.

It is difficult to divorce institutions from the broader cultural contexts in which they are formed, and it is therefore challenging to state with certainty that any individual components of institutions have been causally responsible for economic outcomes. Nevertheless, a wide body of academic literature exists which suggests that both political and economic institutions can have a significant impact on economic growth. Aspects of political institutions found to have such an impact include the presence of political competition (Besley, Persson, and Sturm, 2010), a history of ‘democratic capital’ (Persson and Tabellini, 2009), and the constitutional rules governing elections and legislatures (Persson and Tabellini, 2005; Kohlscheen, 2010). Economic institutions have also been found, perhaps unsurprisingly, to have a significant impact on long-run economic growth (Acemoglu, 2008; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2008; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2005; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2001), although caution is merited in applying these findings to the modern institutional outcomes of African states, given the differentiated periods of colonialism and the institutions associated therewith, and the unreliability of the available data and methods for demonstrating persistence (Austin, 2008; Kelly, 2019).

Moving beyond the question of whether institutions can have an impact on long-run developmental outcomes, does it matter who is involved in creating those institutions? And does the form of their involvement matter? The early work of Mancur Olson, formative for rational-choice theory, suggests that individual motivation can be significant for the formation of institutions (Olson, 1965). Avner Greif has also published on the role of individual motivation in the enforcement of rules, once institutions have been settled (Greif, 2006). Robert Bates' extensive work on public choice theory, as applied to agricultural policy in post-independence Africa, details how the continent's urban elite set up institutions which advantaged themselves, and had the effect of disadvantaging the rural poor, who constituted the majority of citizens at that time (Bates, 1981). The composition and choices of the national elite of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have also been explored in historical accounts, including John Iliffe's *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, Daniel Branch's *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011*, Richard Reid's *A History of Modern Uganda*, and E.A. Brett's *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa*.

I have spent the past two years leading a research project which aims to find commonalities in the policy choices of nations which reduced poverty and improved the well-being of their citizens over the last sixty years. This project has consisted primarily of desk research and expert interviews, and has been expanded to include case studies of countries which began in a similar position, but whose outcomes deteriorated over the same time period. My preliminary research has yielded some evidence for the notion that economic and political institutions tend to be more stable in countries where, at the point of independence, there existed a coterie of elites whose own interests were tied into productive, non-rent-seeking sectors of the economy. This has prompted my interest in pursuing this research question in a more thorough and structured fashion.

I explored similar themes as an undergraduate, using my [REDACTED] thesis to compare the experiences of Francophone African countries who had significant Chinese investment in commodities-based sectors, specifically looking at the effect of the proliferation of monopsonies. I adapted, and translated into English, a portion of that thesis for the [REDACTED] annual conference, examining popular representations of the African experience with global markets.

I have spent my professional life writing about, and seeking to inform, the policy choices of national governments in the developing world. While I have greatly enjoyed this work and the challenges which it presented, I now plan to return to academia, where I hope to broaden the depth and rigour of my research. It is my intention to complete a doctorate in economic history and then become a full-time lecturer.

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A proposed bibliography:

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