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# Informative Regress: Critical Antecedents in Comparative Politics

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## Abstract

How can political scientists best uncover historical causation without committing infinite regress? This article introduces a revised framework for historical analysis that can help systematically capture the deepest causal factors in political development. It improves on the familiar “critical juncture” framework by specifying the precise causal or noncausal status of the “antecedent conditions” preceding critical junctures. After disaggregating antecedent conditions into four logical types, the authors argue that scholars should be especially mindful of critical antecedents: factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture that combine in a causal sequence with factors operating during that juncture to produce divergent outcomes. Through analytic reviews of a wide array of major works, the authors illustrate how critical antecedents can clarify causal claims and enhance knowledge accumulation in comparative politics.

## Keywords

comparative historical analysis, historical causation, critical junctures, antecedent conditions, qualitative methods, political development

More slowly and less surely than some of its sister disciplines, political science has been undergoing a “historic turn.”<sup>1</sup> Political scientists increasingly recognize that our biggest “why” questions cannot be adequately answered

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without careful attention to the question of “when.” The historic turn is thus not strictly a descriptive turn. It entails a broadened array of approaches to political causation.<sup>2</sup>

With its empirical roots in the political histories of specific places, the subfield of comparative politics has been at the forefront of this disciplinary shift. Critics of historically oriented comparative politics often lament the inferential inefficiencies produced by excessive delving into historical details and context. In contrast, we argue that historical arguments in comparative politics often suffer from *too little* attention to history. Causal inference and knowledge accumulation can be hindered when scholars truncate their causal analysis at a “critical juncture” (Collier & Collier, 1991; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967/1990), or a specific point in history when cases began to diverge in path-dependent ways.

Temporal truncation is not our only concern, however. Even when scholars pay considerable, careful attention to conditions preceding a critical juncture, they struggle to specify in a systematic and transparent way whether these “antecedent conditions” are causally significant. Our first task in this article is to disaggregate such antecedents into four logical types to facilitate the clarification of their causal or noncausal status.

This conceptual exercise paves the way for our primary argument. In many instances, factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture combine in a causal sequence with factors during a critical juncture to produce divergent long-term outcomes. These *critical antecedents* shape the choices and changes that emerge during critical junctures in causally significant ways. Yet we currently lack a concept capturing these deepest causal forces in political development. Much as Kathleen Thelen (2003) has urged scholars to pay more attention to the “mechanisms of reproduction” that make historical pathways persist *after* a critical juncture, we call for more systematic attention to what happens *before* a critical juncture. Our point is not that critical junctures are not indeed critical. It is that not everything that is causally critical takes place at the critical juncture. Our purpose is to repair the critical juncture framework, not reject it.<sup>3</sup>

These methodological repairs promise a substantial substantive payoff. In the sections to follow, we elaborate the tangible benefits of incorporating critical antecedents into comparative research through analytical reviews of a wide range of classic historically oriented works. Incorporating critical antecedents helps uncover and clarify the powerful yet underspecified importance of long-term causal factors in these leading works. These critical antecedents hold considerable theoretical relevance for some of the most vibrant research agendas in our discipline (e.g., contentious politics,

democratization, party formation, nation building, and ethnic violence). Closer attention to critical antecedents can enhance knowledge accumulation on these vital political topics in comparative politics by (a) transcending debates over the timing of causal processes, (b) uncovering important points of agreement in otherwise contradictory causal arguments, and (c) establishing a more realistic basis for controlled comparisons in a political world where “natural experiments” are few and far between.

### **Informative Versus Infinite Regress: What’s Critical Before a Critical Juncture?**

One of the first and worst inferential pitfalls social scientists are enjoined to avoid is “infinite regress.” Every cause has a cause in its own right. To inquire into the causes of causes is to step on a slippery slope, which threatens to hurtle a scholar back in time to Marc Antony’s fateful distraction from battle by Cleopatra’s exquisitely sculpted nose. Infinite regress is clearly a logical problem in causal inference. But the real problem in historically oriented social science is not infinite regress but unsystematic regress. When conducted systematically, historical regress can prove informative rather than infinite.

How can historical regress be conducted systematically? Paul Pierson (2004, p. 89) suggests three sensible options. Scholars can break their causal chains (a) “at ‘critical junctures’ that mark a point at which their cases begin to diverge in significant ways,” (b) “at the point where causal connections become difficult to pin down,” or (c) “on the basis of the theoretical interests of the analyst.” Pierson views the third approach as the “most instructive.” But in our view constricting one’s historical purview means excluding potential causal variables. Invoking theoretical interests when truncating one’s historical analysis is thus as inferentially risky as neglecting to include a relevant control variable in a multivariate regression. Pierson’s second option is the most convenient but not the most ambitious. Historically oriented social scientists are precisely in the business of seeking out causal connections that are “difficult to pin down.”

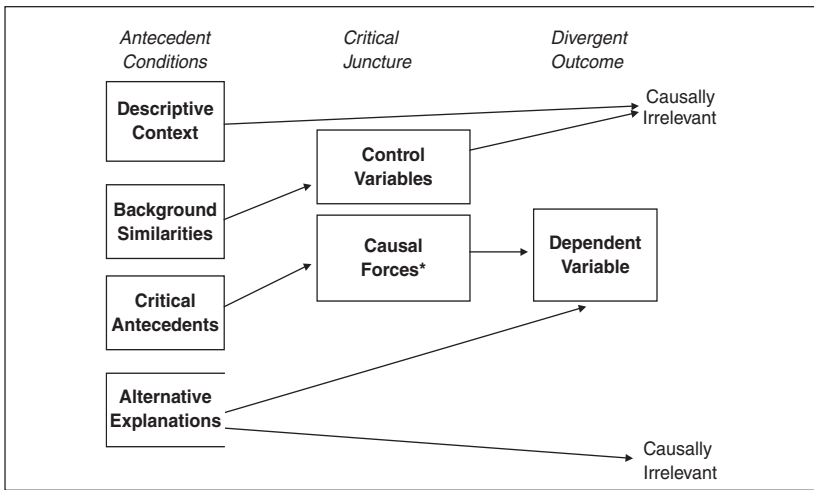
Justifiable concerns with post hoc truncation strategies often motivate researchers to use Pierson’s first option: truncating one’s historical analysis at a critical juncture. Echoing Pierson, we define critical junctures as *periods in history when the presence or absence of a specified causal force pushes multiple cases onto divergent long-term pathways, or pushes a single case onto a new political trajectory that diverges significantly from the old*. We adopt the term *causal force* because it encompasses multiple conceptualizations of causation commonly invoked in the social sciences: that is,

independent variables (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), causal mechanisms (Tilly, 2001), and transformative events (Sewell, 2005). A major benefit of the critical juncture framework, in our view, is its compatibility with experimental, eventful, and mechanism-based understandings of historical causation.<sup>4</sup> One should *truncate* one's causal analysis at a critical juncture, however, only if whatever preceded that juncture was causally unimportant. We submit that this is often—perhaps usually—untrue. Causal factors *preceding* a critical juncture can sequentially combine with causal factors *during* a critical juncture to produce divergent long-term outcomes. Scholars currently lack a concept for this common type of causation. Conditions preceding a critical juncture are typically either ignored or lumped into the capacious category of “antecedent conditions.” This leaves potential causal connections unclear or unexplored. Causal inference demands that we clearly differentiate causal from noncausal antecedents.

We see antecedent conditions falling into four logical types. First, antecedent conditions may have nothing to do with a causal process. For those seeking to uncover historical causation, attention to such *descriptive context* sacrifices parsimony without any gain in explanatory leverage. A second possibility is that factors preceding a critical juncture may be directly responsible for the outcome of interest. Antecedent conditions should always be entertained as *rival hypotheses*, especially if we have theoretical priors that they might be causally significant.<sup>5</sup> In a third scenario, antecedent conditions represent *background similarities*. Comparative scholars often spend considerable time explicating these antecedents to justify a paired comparison research design. These ultimately serve as control variables, not causal variables.<sup>6</sup> Antecedent cross-case similarities cannot logically be responsible for cross-case divergence.

This hints at a fourth possibility, which animates this article. Unlike descriptive context, *critical antecedents* help cause the outcome of interest. Unlike rival hypotheses, their causal effect is indirect and combinatory. And unlike background similarities, critical antecedents entail antecedent variation or divergence: across cases in a cross-case analysis or across time in a single case. Critical antecedents can thus be defined as *factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture that combine with causal forces during a critical juncture to produce long-term divergence in outcomes* (see Figure 1). Because a critical antecedent produces the outcome of interest in combination with the causal force or forces operative at the critical juncture, it complements a critical juncture argument. It does not contradict it.

This might seem peculiar to those who think of critical junctures as moments of extraordinary choice and contingency. If critical junctures always involved “unsettled moments of uncommon choice . . . when previous constraints on



**Figure 1.** Four types of antecedent conditions

Note: \*These can include independent variables, causal mechanisms, and transformative events.

belief and action erode” (Katznelson, 2003, 277), critical antecedents would hold limited explanatory value. Yet even the most severe crises rarely produce blank slates. Critical junctures are typically moments of expanding agency, not complete contingency. We thus find Pierson’s stress on *divergence* more analytically useful than Cappoccia and Kelemen’s (2007) emphasis on *contingency* as the defining feature of critical junctures.<sup>7</sup> Adopting a divergence-driven definition proves especially important in comparative politics, where different cases inevitably experience exogenous shocks in distinctive, historically conditioned ways.

How precisely do critical antecedents combine with causal forces operative at a critical juncture? This can occur in at least two ways. In one scenario, critical antecedents are *successive* causes: They exhibit a direct effect on the causal force (e.g., independent variable, causal mechanism, or transformative event) that emerges during the critical juncture. Such “causes of causes” are what methodologists have in mind when they warn about infinite regress, and treating successive causes as critical antecedents indeed flirts with that inferential risk.

Yet the risk is not as great and our tools for distinguishing critical from noncritical successive causes are not as arbitrary as commonly assumed. John Stuart Mill offered a useful rule of thumb nearly a century and a half ago: One

should truncate a historical analysis at the point when causes can be “understood without being expressed” (cited in Rigby, 1995, p. 236).<sup>8</sup> So long as scholars limit their attentions to nontrivial causes, this should suffice to avoid infinite regress. Furthermore, the kind of successive causes that lead to infinite regress are usually background similarities, not critical antecedents.<sup>9</sup>

Not all critical antecedents are “causes of causes,” however. Even more important in our view are *conditioning* causes. These are conditions that vary before a critical juncture and predispose (but do not predestine) cases to diverge as they ultimately do. This kind of critical antecedent does not produce its causal effect by causing the independent variable to emerge. It does so by helping to determine the differential causal effect of the independent variable across cases when the critical juncture exogenously comes about.

S. H. Rigby captures this idea with the analogy of a glass bottle being shattered by a stone. One could explain this outcome by saying that the bottle broke because the stone struck it or because the bottle was brittle. In Rigby’s view—and in ours—there is no methodological imperative to claim that one type of causal factor is more important than the other.<sup>10</sup> “In reality,” Rigby (1995) argues, “both of these conditions (the brittleness of the bottle and a stone being thrown at it) were indispensable if the outcome we are seeking to explain (the bottle breaking) was to be brought about” (p. 235).

Crafting combinatory causal arguments is both more tractable and more essential in comparative politics than in the kind of example Rigby offers. It is more tractable because comparativists typically wish to explain divergence in outcomes, not just single outcomes. Background similarities—for example, the similar brittleness of all bottles—can be safely set aside when explaining cross-case divergence. To delve into background similarities such as the brittleness of bottles is to begin to slip down the slope of infinite regress.

Yet societies are not as alike as bottles; not all background conditions are background similarities. When antecedent conditions vary across cases, it becomes essential to examine whether preexisting variation predisposed cases to diverge after the critical juncture as they did. The cases in any historical comparison might have been very different *places* before a critical juncture set them on very different *paths*. They might have *varied* in causal factors of interest before they began to *diverge* in our ultimate outcomes of interest. Distinguishing critical antecedents from descriptive context, background similarities, and rival hypotheses helps uncover and specify the causal importance of some (but not all) antecedent conditions in a critical juncture argument.

The following analytic reviews show that critical antecedents matter not only in methodological principle but also in research practice. Through

reviews of works by Doug McAdam, Anna Grzymala-Busse, and Mounira Charrad, we show how antecedent conditions in a critical juncture argument can possess causal significance. After showing how causation can indeed be antecedent, we review canonical works by Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, Gregory Luebbert, and Stathis Kalyvas to illustrate how antecedent conditions can indeed be causal. Finally, our analytic reviews of literatures on Central American democratization, ethnic violence in India, and racial politics in Brazil and South Africa elaborate how entire research agendas can be enhanced by more systematic attention to critical antecedents in comparative politics.

## **Establishing the Concept: How Causation Can Be Antecedent**

Critical antecedents are more of a silence than an absence in historically oriented comparative politics. In this section we illustrate how causal factors can precede a critical juncture by discussing three scholars who—like Moliere’s Monsieur Jourdain speaking prose his entire life—employ critical antecedents in their causal arguments without naming them such. Given the causal significance of factors and conditions preceding critical junctures in works by McAdam (1982), Grzymala-Busse (2002), and Charrad (2001), it should be evident that social scientists require a concept systematically capturing and conveying these causal forces.

McAdam (1982) is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Like other scholars, McAdam sees the *Brown v. Board* case in 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts in 1955-1956 as “watershed” moments in the emergence of the American civil rights movement (McAdam, 1982, p. 3). He goes beyond existing work in specifying the causal factors that these events helped unleash during this critical juncture. McAdam looks to political opportunities, organizational resources, and processes of cognitive liberation to explain the emergence of Black insurgency. Yet McAdam does not remain confined to the critical juncture when these three causal forces emerged and combined. One cannot adequately comprehend why Black politics changed paths without understanding a deeper, antecedent cause: the long-term decline of the cotton economy in the South (see Figure 2).

Cotton’s decline had multiple indirect, combinatory causal effects on the civil rights movement. It weakened North–South elite alliances, lowered the risks of organizing, and drove Blacks north. The move into cities increased Blacks’ organizing capacity. This increased political leverage combined with the erosion of consensus among White elites and “triggered a growing



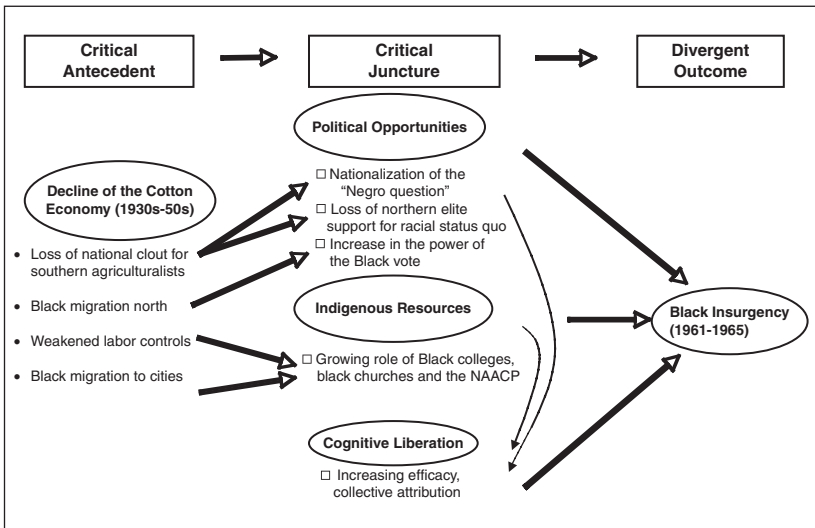
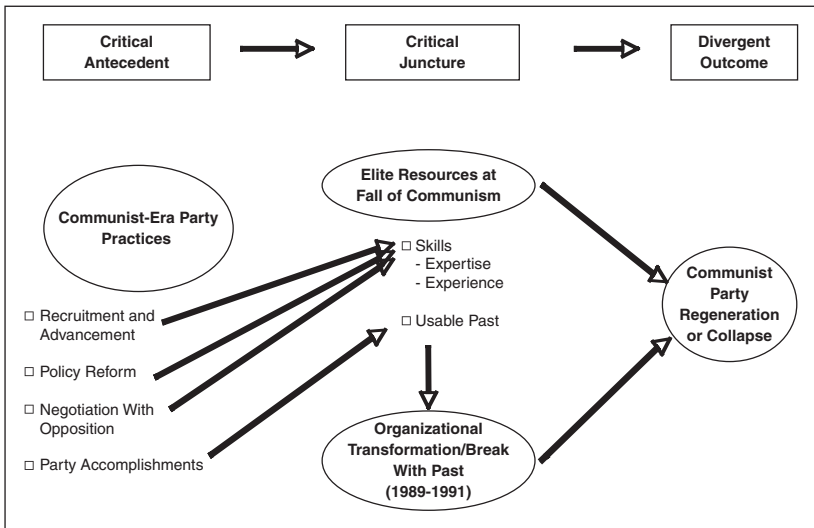


Figure 2. McAdam on King Cotton and Black insurgency

sense of political efficacy among certain segments of the black community” (McAdam, 1982, 110).

Socioeconomic change shaped the causal forces that motored the civil rights movement. The collapse of “King Cotton” was a successive cause, causing political opportunities to change, resources to be mobilized, and cognitive shifts to occur. Cotton’s decline is thus an additive rather than an alternative explanation for Black insurgency. Far from detracting from the causal importance of political opportunities, mobilizing resources, and cognitive liberation, cotton’s long-term decline is the key that opens that explanatory door. The collapse of cotton may be a “cause of a cause,” but McAdam’s analysis of it unveils a nontrivial cause that can potentially be applied in other settings. It is informative rather than infinite regress.

In a very different part of the world and on a very different topic, Grzymala-Busse (2002) posits a subtly different type of critical antecedent: what we call a conditioning cause (see Figure 3). Her analysis is animated by the puzzling regeneration of some but not all communist parties in East-Central Europe. Variation in the post-1989 success of the Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Hungarian communist parties is best explained, she argues, by variation in the resources possessed and strategies pursued by party elites. Preexisting



**Figure 3.** Grzymala-Busse on Communist Party regeneration

variation in elite resources determined the degree to which party leaders were able to implement the rapid and decisive organizational transformation necessary for resurgence.

The window for party transformation, from 1989-1991, serves as the critical juncture. If parties missed this opening, they would not have a second chance to change their stripes. Yet Grzymala-Busse (2002) looks *before* the critical juncture to explain *subsequent* party trajectories. At communism's collapse, each party had a different menu of choices available to it. The elite skills and "usable pasts" critical to transformation "did not emerge during the transition or in the months preceding it, but in decades-long practices of the communist parties" (p. 5). In Poland and Hungary but not in Czechoslovakia, longstanding practices of recruitment and advancement, policy reform, and negotiation with oppositionists "gave rise to a cohort of skilled and experienced politicians . . . with the ability to reinvent the communist parties when the regime collapsed" (pp. 5-6).

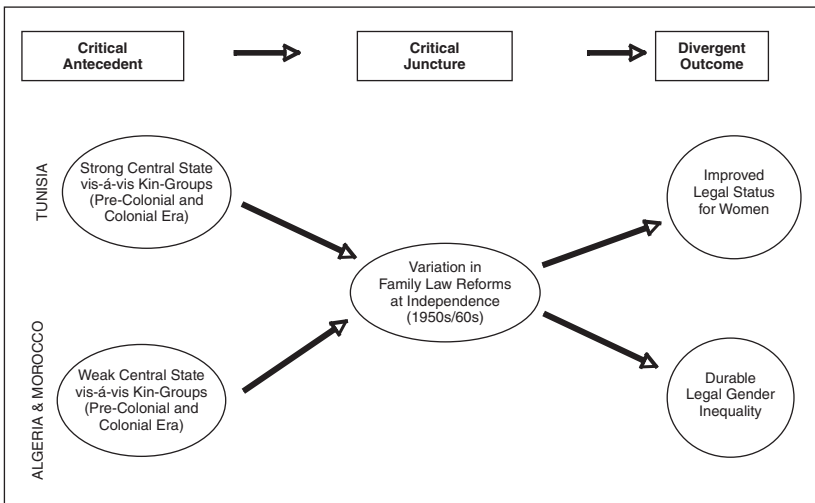
As with McAdam, critical antecedents work in tandem with the causal forces at the critical juncture in Grzymala-Busse's analysis. One cannot explain divergence in party regeneration without understanding elite strategies during the critical juncture. Yet neither can one explain cross-case

variation in those strategies, nor in these parties' ongoing divergent capacity to gain public support, without recognizing preexisting variation in their elite resources and skills. Preexisting elite resources influenced the divergent directions that party transformation would take but did not directly cause the transformation in the sense that cotton's decline directly caused political opportunities and organizational resources to shift in McAdam's work. They are thus a conditioning cause.

A third example of unspecified critical antecedents is provided by Charrad (2001). Her central puzzle is why women in contemporary Tunisia enjoy greater legal protections than their counterparts in Morocco and Algeria. Like McAdam and Grzymala-Busse, Charrad begins by tracing divergence to events transpiring and factors emerging during a critical juncture. In the North African context, the generator of change or stasis in women's legal status came with decisions by postcolonial governments on whether and how to amend family laws during "the crucial period of independence" (p. 6). Because these initial policy choices had path-dependent consequences in the form of divergent legal regimes across the Maghrib, their moment of (non) implementation was a critical juncture.

Charrad (2001) portrays these choices as highly consequential, but not highly contingent. "Long-term structural forces and short-term political strategies . . . made reform in the aftermath of independence highly unlikely in Morocco, first uncertain then improbable in Algeria, and possible in Tunisia" (p. 145). Her explanation centers on political leaders' dependence on kin groups for support (see Figure 4). Leaders reformed statutes on polygamy, divorce, and inheritance only when they were autonomous from provincial "republics of cousins" (Tunisia). When kin groups provided coalitional support, legal reforms proved politically undesirable (Morocco) or intractable (Algeria).

Yet as the bulk of Charrad's (2001) study details, state autonomy from kin groups has long diverged across the Maghrib.<sup>11</sup> Even in precolonial times, it was only in Tunisia where a relatively powerful state faced little pressure to negotiate with kin groups. Charrad traces the continuity in this critical antecedent through the French period, showing how persistent patterns of state-society relations more severely constrained choices on gender policy in Morocco and Algeria than in Tunisia. In sum, "long-term historical trajectories set the stage" for postcolonial choices, "[b]ut they set a different stage in each country [italics added]" (p. 234). One could imagine Grzymala-Busse using the same language in her discussion of Eastern European communist parties—her cases were different *places* before exogenous events at a critical juncture (i.e., the collapse of the Soviet bloc for Grzymala-Busse and the collapse of colonialism for Charrad) set them on different posttransition *paths*.



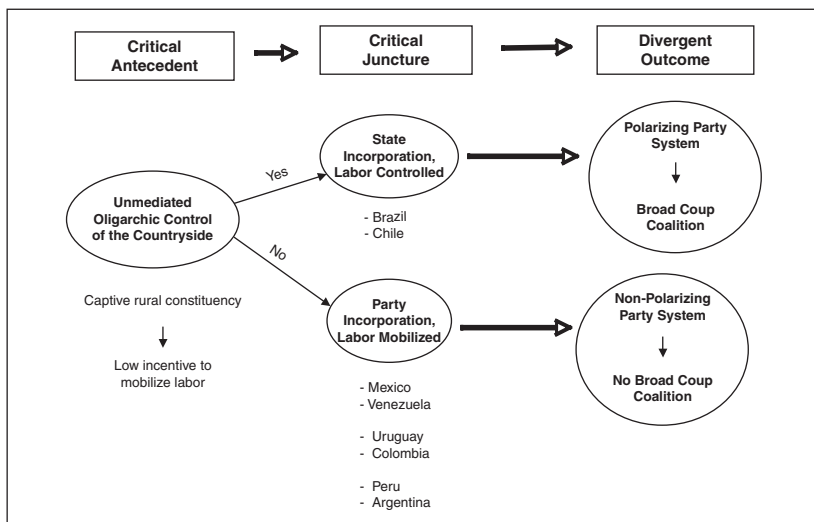
**Figure 4.** Family law and gender inequality in North Africa

Once again, deep historical structures and short-term political dynamics combine to produce long-term divergence.

## Clarifying Causal Chains: How Antecedents Can Be Causal

We have just explored examples of comparative research in which the causal importance of critical antecedents is easy to see yet difficult to define. In other instances, authors devote considerable attention to antecedent conditions, but it is more difficult for the reader to determine whether some, all, or none of these antecedents should be considered causal. Even the best historical scholarship in comparative politics struggles to clarify the causal status of “antecedent conditions” in the absence of concepts clearly differentiating causal from non-causal antecedents.

*Shaping the Political Arena* (Collier & Collier, 1991) signaled the renaissance of the critical juncture framework in comparative politics. It also offered an important example of a work that explicitly wrestles with antecedent conditions yet struggles to clarify their exact causal status. Even the Colliers’ most attentive readers send mixed signals when discussing how far back their causal argument begins. In one chapter of Mahoney and



**Figure 5.** The Colliers on labour incorporation in Latin America

Rueschemeyer's (2003) volume, Pierson (2003) calls the Colliers consummate examples of authors who "choose to break the chain at 'critical junctures' that mark a point at which their cases begin to diverge in significant ways" (p. 188). Yet in a separate chapter, Mahoney (2003) looks *before* the Colliers' critical juncture to identify what he calls "their main explanatory variable—the political strength of the oligarchy" (p. 359).

Critical antecedents clarify why these interpretations are only superficially contradictory. Patterns of labor incorporation are the main causal factor in the Colliers' explanation for divergent long-term political trajectories in Latin America. These emerged during their critical juncture, as Pierson suggests. Yet the vital contrast between state-led and party-led labor incorporation was causally influenced by the critical antecedent identified by Mahoney: preexisting variation in the power of the national oligarchy.

Figure 5 details the interaction of oligarchic power and labor incorporation as we interpret it. Brazil and Chile diverged from the Colliers' other six cases when the state rather than a party incorporated labor into politics. By contrast, the Colliers identify varieties of party-led incorporation of labor in Mexico, Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina.<sup>12</sup> State incorporation in Brazil and Chile commenced a *control to polarization* trajectory,

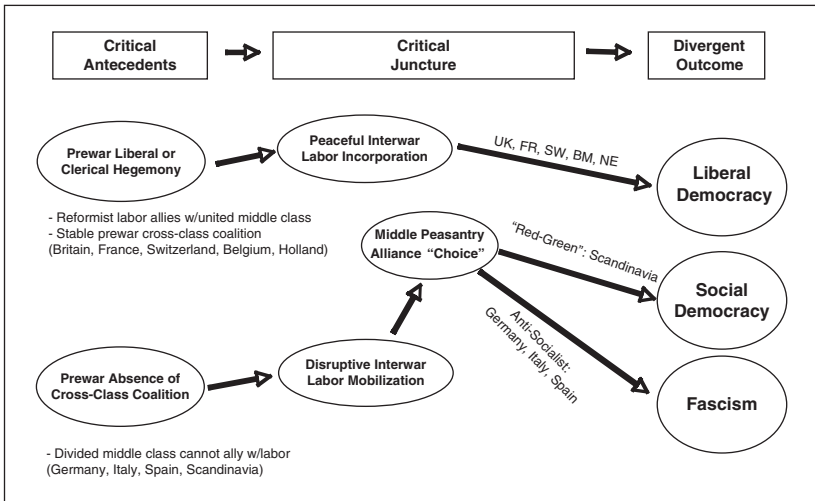
which would culminate in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of broad coup coalitions. The six cases of party incorporation experienced distinct varieties of a contrasting *mobilization to integration* trajectory, forestalling the development of broad coup coalitions in the postwar period (Collier & Collier, 1991, pp. 10, 753).

One cannot understand this divergence in how labor incorporation occurred *during* the Colliers' critical juncture without appreciating the variation in oligarchic power that *preceded* their critical juncture. The Colliers (1991) devote more than 100 pages to exploring Latin America's antecedent era of the "oligarchic state" because it reveals not only cross-case commonalities but also "differences so profound that some discussion of contrasts among cases is possible" (p. 104). In Brazil and Chile, oligarchs enjoyed unmediated control over a captive peasantry and party politicians knew that "mobilization would not be adequate to overcome oligarchic power" (pp. 170-171).<sup>13</sup> State incorporation followed. In the Colliers' other six cases, oligarchic power was more attenuated and party-led incorporation trajectories were launched.

In sum, divergent patterns of labor incorporation set Brazil and Chile on a different long-term regime trajectory than the Colliers' other six cases. But variation in preexisting patterns of oligarchic power meant that Brazil and Chile were very different *places* from their neighbors before labor incorporation set them on such different *paths*. They *varied* before they *diverged*. Because antecedent variation in oligarchic power is critical for understanding variation between state and party incorporation, it is neither a background similarity nor a rival explanation supplanting the Colliers' labor-led causal argument; it is a critical antecedent.

Labor's incorporation into national politics was not only a critical juncture in Latin America. As Luebbert (1991) shows, it shaped divergent regime outcomes in interwar Western Europe as well. In the wake of World War I and the Russian Revolution, labor incorporation in these industrialized societies became politically unavoidable.<sup>14</sup> Whether countries followed the path of liberal democracy (as in Britain, France, Switzerland, and, in a more clerical vein, Belgium), social democracy (as in Scandinavia and to some extent Czechoslovakia), or fascism (as in Germany, Italy, and Spain) depended on the cross-class coalitions that emerged in the tumultuous interwar period.

As Figure 6 indicates, the primary divergence during this critical juncture took place between liberal cases where a peaceful incorporation of labor was feasible and the "aliberal" cases where labor mobilization was more sudden and disruptive. In these latter cases, liberal democracy had already become historically impossible. Whether an aliberal country followed the fascist or



**Figure 6.** Luebbert on interwar European regime outcomes

social democratic path depended on the political positioning of the family peasantry. A “red–green” alliance of the middle peasantry with urban socialists fostered social democracy. Where socialists attempted to mobilize the rural proletariat, the middle peasantry sided with rightist forces in self-defense and labor was incorporated on fascism’s brutalizing terms.

To say that Luebbert (1991, p. 306) sees these outcomes as historically structured rather than contingent would be a colossal understatement. Yet so long as one defines critical junctures as periods of path-dependent divergence rather than contingent choice, the interwar period remains a critical juncture in Luebbert’s analysis. Like the other authors discussed thus far, Luebbert is concerned with understanding what historical factors may have influenced this critical juncture to play out so differently across Europe. This can be seen as a quest to identify critical antecedents and hence as informative rather than infinite regress.

Luebbert argues that prewar variation causally influenced interwar divergence. The critical factor was the success or failure of liberal parties (or a clerical party, in the case of Belgium) at establishing cross-class hegemony via lib-lab alliances in the late 19th century. Where Luebbert struggles is in deciding whether this variation in liberal hegemony can be read off of variation in preexisting conditions, much as the Colliers’ variation in state versus

party incorporation during their critical juncture can be partly read off of preexisting variation in the critical antecedent of oligarchic political power.

In an engrossing chapter on prewar social cleavages, Luebbert wrestles at length with the question of whether liberalism's prewar failure was largely predetermined in Western Europe's aliberal cases. His macro-historical microscope focuses on preexisting variation in levels of nation building and whether this exhibited a causal influence on his critical antecedent: prewar liberal hegemony.

Luebbert (1991) considers whether prewar liberals were hopelessly divided by "preindustrial cleavages" in what would prove to be the aliberal interwar cases. At first blush, the varying severity of such cleavages appears vital: "It seems that the distinctive nature of nation-state formation provides the most efficient explanation for the ineffectiveness of these liberal movements" (p. 63). Although the failure of belated national integration to unify liberals in Germany and Italy stands in stark contrast to the relative lack of "preindustrial conflicts" (p. 108) in late-19th-century Britain and France, Luebbert concludes that this explanation does not withstand wider comparative scrutiny:

Sweden and Denmark, after all, had longer national histories and higher levels of political integration than did Belgium, the Netherlands, or Switzerland. . . . Moreover, in Switzerland, which had a briefer history of unity and a lower level of political integration, and sufficient anti-integrationist impulses to provoke a civil war in 1848, liberals were not . . . debilitated by these divisions. Ultimately, what distinguished societies in which liberalism was weak was not the sociological presence of these cleavages. (p. 108)

Luebbert's comparative analysis exemplifies how some but not all antecedents may be causally significant in a critical juncture argument. Prewar liberal hegemony influenced interwar regime divergence in a powerful and systematic way, but prewar social cleavages did not. Whereas infinite regress piles causes on causes, informative regress sifts through historical evidence to distinguish causal from noncausal antecedents.

Antecedent cleavages attract attention in Kalyvas (1996) as well. Like Luebbert, Kalyvas crafts his historical argument in the shadow of Lipset and Rokkan's (1967/1990) hypothesis that European party systems reflect the "crystallization" of deeply rooted identity cleavages. His analysis challenges this view, showing that Christian democratic parties were an unintended consequence rather than a natural outgrowth of Catholic activism. Yet when one



reads Kalyvas's French case (his one case where no Christian democratic party emerged) with care, it becomes apparent that a preexisting cleavage helped shape France's divergence from its neighbors—but not a cleavage that Lipset and Rokkan emphasized.

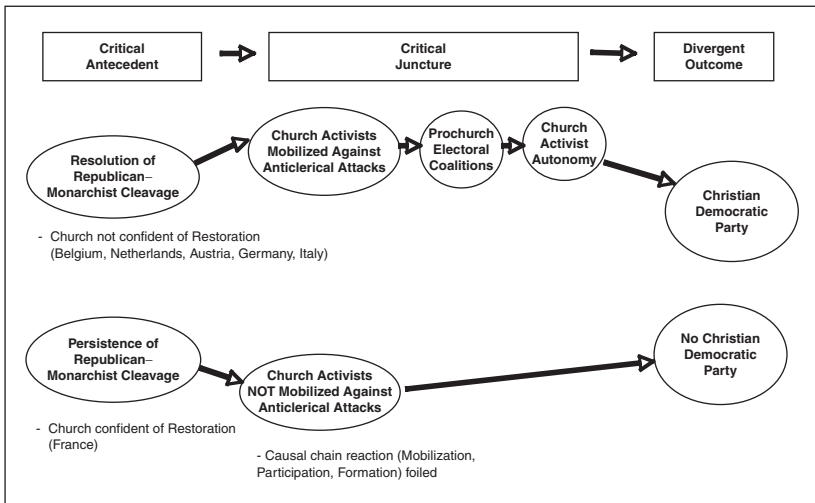
Kalyvas provides his own path-dependent argument to counter Lipset and Rokkan's. Initial choices by Church leaders to mobilize mass organizations against anticlerical attacks spawned a new group of Catholic activists with substantial autonomy from the Church. These activists joined conservative politicians in pro-Church electoral coalitions, the success of which inspired Church activists to launch Christian democratic parties—against the initial wishes of Church leaders. Kalyvas's account of contingency, strategies, and unintended consequences stands in stark contrast to the more structurally deterministic narrative of Lipset and Rokkan.

But can contingent choice explain why Christian democratic parties emerged in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—but *not* France? Kalyvas (1996) initially paints the trade-off between structural and agentic accounts in stark terms: “[E]ither the church could not organize French Catholics, or the church could but chose not to organize them. I argue the latter” (p. 131). He delves deeply into the period preceding the critical juncture of France's political divergence from its Catholic neighbors and painstakingly shows that preexisting cross-case variation in socioeconomic conditions and institutional fragmentation cannot explain the French puzzle. These are important rival explanations, but they do not outperform Kalyvas's own.

A critical antecedent *complements* Kalyvas's account, however, allowing him to blend agency and structure rather than privilege the former to the detriment of the latter. Unlike Lipset and Rokkan's *cultural* cleavages, Kalyvas pinpoints a preexisting *political* cleavage as causally significant. France was Kalyvas's (1996, p. 139) only case where the Church still perceived a credible chance that the republic would collapse when it first faced concerted anticlerical attacks. Hence, it bided its time rather than mobilizing its followers (see Figure 7).

This fatefully led French Catholic leaders to underestimate the risks of not responding to anticlerical attacks. Underscoring the point that these perceptions were not simply the product of short-term calculations, Kalyvas (1996) portrays the monarchist–republican divide as an entrenched political *cleavage*:

In France, the issue of the regime decisively altered the opportunity costs of the church. This was the case because of two cleavage overlaps: the main cleavage in the party system was a regime cleavage, which, in turn, overlapped with the state-church cleavage. (p. 139)



**Figure 7.** Kalyvas on Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe

In Kalyvas's other five cases, "the regimes associated with anticlerical attacks were rock-solid" (p. 141). Church leaders in these cases pursued their second best option—mobilizing mass organizations—which led in a path-dependent manner to the construction of Christian democratic parties decades later.

The presence or absence of a regime cleavage is not a rival explanation to Kalyvas's causal account, nor is the resolution or nonresolution of the regime cleavage the critical juncture at which divergent trajectories of party development were set in motion. The regime cleavage is a critical antecedent that structured the strategies Catholic leaders pursued during their window of opportunity to counter their secular rivals.

## Research Agendas Without Critical Antecedents: Consequences of a Nonconcept

Knowledge is ultimately accumulated at the level of research agendas, and the benefits of incorporating critical antecedents are as evident at this level as in individual works. Critical antecedents help to (a) transcend debates over causal timing, (b) uncover shared findings in competing causal arguments, and (c) establish a more realistic basis for controlled comparisons.

## *Transcending Debates on Timing: Democratization in Central America*

Historical arguments in comparative politics are arguments about *when* divergence took place. Hence, disagreements on causal timing are legion. An example can be found in Yashar (1997) and Mahoney (2001). Both seek to explain late-20th-century regime outcomes in Central America but differ in how far back they locate the critical juncture.<sup>15</sup> Incorporating critical antecedents does not resolve this debate, yet it highlights striking similarities in Mahoney and Yashar's view of long-term causal processes—a more important concern for knowledge accumulation than the timing of a critical juncture per se.

Mahoney argues that the critical juncture setting Central American countries on the path toward democracy or dictatorship is best placed in choices by liberal governments during the mid- to late 19th century. For Yashar, the critical juncture belongs in the 1940s and 1950s, immediately preceding regime consolidation. This disagreement on timing obscures as much as it reveals. Critical antecedents bring the substantial overlap between Yashar and Mahoney's arguments into sharper relief (see Figure 8).<sup>16</sup>

Although it falls long before her critical juncture, Yashar's (1997) analysis of the liberal period is systematic. Yashar describes variation in three liberal-era factors that proved critical in shaping coalitional choices during the 1940s and 1950s: (a) the kind of state (military vs. civilian dominated), (b) the organization of the market economy (labor vs. credit dependent), and (c) the institutional space available for civil society, itself a product of the other two conditions (pp. 32-33). Variation in these three factors causally influenced coalitional divergence and, subsequently, regime outcomes.

Yashar's critical antecedents significantly overlap with Mahoney's independent variables. Liberal-era reforms in Guatemala and Costa Rica, Mahoney (2001) argues, were "differentiated by the pace and scope of land privatization and by the implications of privatization policies for small producers" (p. 13). These differences in land reform patterns helped produce differences in state structures (higher vs. lower military-coercive capabilities) and agrarian profiles (larger vs. smaller landholdings). These were, in turn, related to differing levels of class conflict (extreme in Guatemala vs. moderate in Costa Rica).

Mahoney's depiction of these rural economies echoes Yashar's. In both instances, the causal work is done by agricultural elites' reliance on large versus small estates. Even more apparent are the similarities in Yashar's and Mahoney's analysis of the state: Both attribute causal influence to liberal-era militarization. Unfortunately for purposes of knowledge accumulation, their

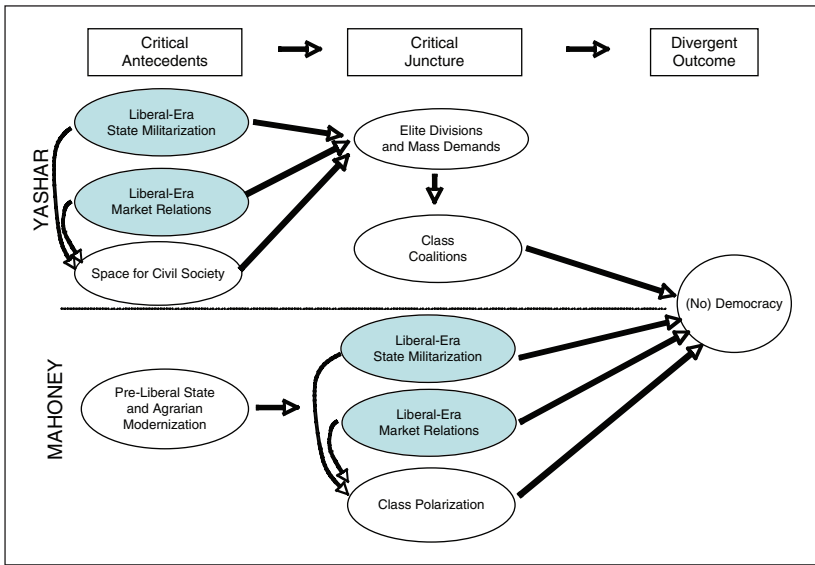


Figure 8. Regime outcomes in Central America

similar treatments of the liberal period have received less attention than their disagreement over timing. Mahoney (2001) acknowledges Yashar’s historical coverage, noting her argument that “differences in the construction of state–society relations during [the liberal period] conditioned future regime outcomes by helping to produce contrasting reform contexts during the 1940s and 1950s” (p. 26). Both authors see these liberal-era differences as causally significant. But absent the concept of critical antecedents, Yashar’s argument that the liberal era contributed in a causal sense to the divergence in Costa Rican and Guatemalan regimes stands in insufficiently sharp relief.

It is only in the 1940s that the structural elements in their causal narratives diverge in a significant way.<sup>17</sup> Although Mahoney emphasizes the lingering importance of state militarization, Yashar argues that different coalitional constraints made Guatemala less ripe for democratic consolidation than Costa Rica. But liberal legacies *predisposed* Costa Rica and Guatemala to follow different paths when political elites confronted the need to construct new coalitions in the 1940s.

Yashar and Mahoney thus inform debates on the relative weight of state versus social factors and structure versus agency in regime development, but

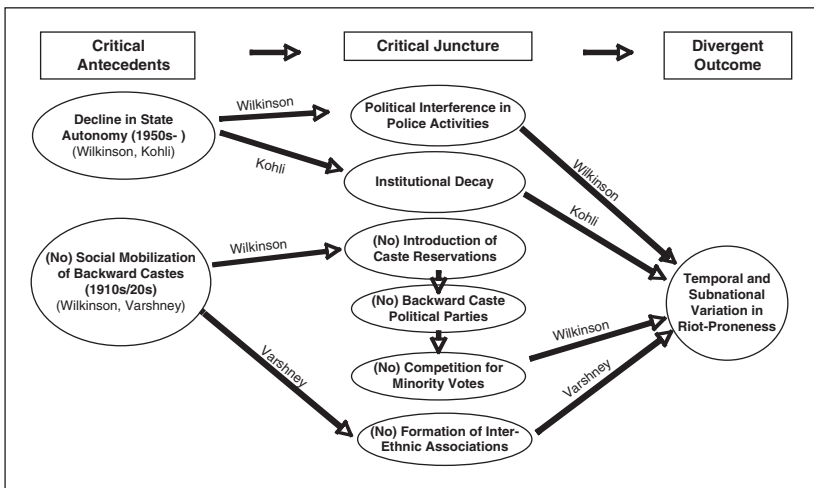
they also contribute to a growing consensus that long-term patterns of state and market formation shape contemporary regime outcomes in profound ways. Calling attention to the similar importance of these factors in their causal narratives—by aligning Yashar’s critical antecedents with Mahoney’s independent variables—enhances knowledge accumulation in democratization theory.

### *Common Ground in Competing Explanations: Violent Disorder in India*

If the literature on democratization in Central America is divided over the question of “when,” leading works on political violence in India clash over the question of “why.” Steven Wilkinson (2004), Ashutosh Varshney (2002), and Atul Kohli (1990) have debated why India began suffering more disorder in the 1970s and why some parts of the country have proven more violent than others. Although these authors’ disagreements are very real, so are their agreements. All three agree that long-term shifts in *state autonomy* and *minority mobilization* have influenced temporal and state-level patterns of political breakdown. Identifying these shared findings is facilitated by framing their causal arguments in terms of critical junctures and critical antecedents (see Figure 9).

Wilkinson (2004) concludes that regional variation in electoral incentives provides the best explanation for subnational variation in Hindu–Muslim riots. Most importantly, Wilkinson predicts that we are unlikely to see severe Hindu–Muslim riots in competitive states because politicians dare not jeopardize the minority vote by allowing ethnic violence to escalate. Because state-level variation in party competition explains state-level divergence in violence outcomes, Wilkinson seeks to account for that variation. This effort to uncover a successive causal chain flirts with infinite regress, but it bears explanatory fruit, as Wilkinson traces state-level divergence in the strength of minority parties to British colonialists’ uneven adoption of affirmative action policies for lower and backward castes. In southern India, these “reservations” were introduced in the 1920s, whereas no such programs were implemented in the north until the 1970s. This fostered the development of lower and backward caste political parties in the south, resulting in increased reliance on minority voters.

Wilkinson (2004) then asks the prior causal question: Why were reservations introduced so early only in the south? His answer: variation in caste mobilization. In the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, “powerful backward caste movements emerged in the first few decades of the 20th century” (p. 189). This increased the probability that reservations would be implemented. As a result, northern and southern Indian states became very



**Figure 9.** Ethnic violence in India

different places long before cross-regional divergence in patterns of violence took place.

It is on the terrain of critical antecedents where Wilkinson and other scholars cross paths rather than swords. Varshney (2002) argues that inter-ethnic civic associations explain why some Indian cities are more immune from anti-Muslim riots than others. This provides a very different proximate causal story than Wilkinson’s. Yet when Varshney turns his attention to India’s colonial period, he similarly emphasizes the importance of backward-caste mobilization, and the intra-Hindu cleavages that resulted, in shaping his independent variable (pp. 115, 122, 133, 187). Intra-Hindu cleavages proved favorable for interethnic associations, which constrained violence during polarizing events decades later.<sup>18</sup> Robust minority mobilization helped to create cross-communal associations *and* electoral coalitions, dampening ethnic conflict through multiple institutional mechanisms over the long term. Critical antecedents thus highlight similarities in these otherwise competing works and invite scholars of ethnic violence to pay close attention to historic patterns of minority mobilization, whether they see the proximate causes of violence as primarily political like Wilkinson or sociological like Varshney.

A careful reading of Wilkinson (2004, chap. 3) uncovers a second critical antecedent as well: state autonomy. Among the many alternative hypotheses

for ethnic violence Wilkinson disconfirms are “state capacity explanations.” Kohli (1990) serves as his primary foil. Kohli’s general argument is that the gradual decay of Indian political institutions has rendered them incapable of managing social conflict. Wilkinson targets Kohli’s hypothesis that India’s state apparatus has become less capable of preventing riots because its police force has become increasingly compromised by political interference. As Wilkinson recognizes, this conflates the issues of state autonomy and state capacity, which are “analytically distinct” (p. 70). He counters Kohli by showing that declines in state capacity and autonomy have “simply been too widespread across Indian states to account for the large degree of historical and state-level variation in levels of ethnic violence” (p. 65).

Autonomy may not vary significantly across Indian states, but its absence is a *necessary condition* for electoral incentives to influence ethnic violence. Wilkinson’s (2004) argument directly hinges on political interference, or the absence of state autonomy. He defines autonomy as “the ability of the police and local administration to take independent action to prevent Hindu-Muslim riots in accordance with established rules, procedures, and the law” (p. 73), and his core causal argument for the occurrence of violence is that “the problem is not so much state capacity . . . as the instructions given by politicians to state officials to protect or not to protect minorities” (p. 85). Electoral incentives may explain why politicians instruct police officials not to crack down on violent protesters, but whether the police follow those instructions depends on *already existing conditions* of state autonomy or capture. The Indian Leviathan’s long-term loss of autonomy stands as a critical antecedent for Wilkinson, whereas it is a key independent variable for Kohli.

Paying systematic attention to critical antecedents refines what we know about violence in India. Shared recognition of the causal significance of minority mobilization and state autonomy underscores the extent to which Wilkinson, Varshney, and Kohli provide arguments that are complementary as well as competing. To press the issue further, specifying the causal impact of state autonomy proves essential for Wilkinson’s hypotheses to be appropriately tested. A scholar may discover that, even in the face of low party competition and government ambivalence to minority support, the state intervenes to stop a riot. Such a finding would appear to disconfirm Wilkinson’s argument. Yet if this test were conducted in a society with a highly autonomous state, it would be a case of omitted variable bias. Rather than undermining or unnecessarily complicating Wilkinson’s electoral argument, critical antecedents refine our understanding of the mechanisms through which it operates and the conditions under which it can be tested.

## *Controlled Comparisons Without Natural Experiments: Race in Brazil and South Africa*

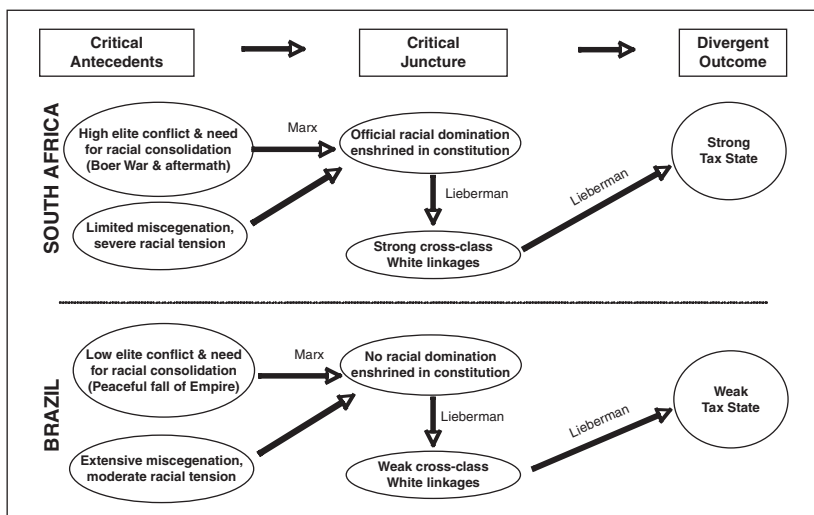
Elite political choices do not take place in a social or historical vacuum. As we have just seen, the British decision to introduce reservations in southern but not northern India in the 1920s was influenced by divergent levels of minority mobilization. The critical juncture framework struggles with such antecedent differences. Critical antecedents can help scholars embrace antecedent variation without discarding critical junctures altogether. This provides a more realistic basis for controlled comparisons than the chimerical notion of a “natural experiment,” in which cases are treated as antecedent “twins” to justify their paired comparison.<sup>19</sup>

Recent works on racial politics and nation-state formation in Brazil and South Africa by Evan Lieberman (2003) and Anthony Marx (1998) exemplify how even the best-crafted critical juncture arguments can struggle with the framework’s current limitations.<sup>20</sup> Both authors seek to uncover the origins of divergence in Brazilian and South African race regimes. Although Brazil’s official ideology of “racial democracy” promoted a relatively inclusionary, multiracial order throughout the 20th century, South Africa’s approach was far more exclusionary and biracial. Both Lieberman and Marx locate this divergence in elite political choices during constitutional conventions around the turn of the 20th century.

Lieberman convincingly argues that the different definitions of “National Political Community” (NPC) that emerged from these conventions had path-dependent effects (see Figure 10). Formal racial exclusion in South Africa consolidated a cohesive, cross-class White ruling alliance, whereas the absence of formalized biracialism in Brazil left region rather than race as the most salient cleavage. Lieberman then shows that these divergent racial orders created divergent patterns of elite tax compliance. In South Africa, government programs benefiting underprivileged Whites were seen as assistance for White elites’ own community, enhancing elite willingness to comply with the income tax. By contrast, Brazil’s racially inclusive NPC reinforced regional cleavages, creating a sentiment among White elites that government spending did not benefit their own community—state services largely benefited Blacks in the northeast. Compliance with the income tax in Brazil remained low.

Lieberman offers a refreshingly original contribution to our understanding of racial cleavages and political economy. Yet the critical juncture framework’s clumsy conceptualization of antecedent conditions presses him to overemphasize contingent choices and downplay deeper structural conditions.





**Figure 10.** Racial politics in Brazil and South Africa

In an effort to locate background similarities to justify his paired comparison, Lieberman (2003) tries to demonstrate that Brazil and South Africa faced similar antecedent conditions as they began their constitutional conventions. “Both societies had been divided by similar social and political cleavages in the late 19th century” (p. 68). Similar legacies of immigration, slavery, miscegenation, internal conflict, and racial and regional cleavages left Brazilian and South African elites facing similar “questions and options” when defining NPC (pp. 78, 70-74).

This claim strikes us as neither entirely false nor entirely true. Our concerns arise from Lieberman’s decision to assert the comparability of Brazil and South Africa on the basis that these antecedent conditions *existed*—not that they were similarly *severe*—in both cases. But what if South Africa’s constitution makers faced deeper racial cleavages and sharper elite tensions than their Brazilian counterparts? Might this have made it far more likely that exclusionary biracialism would be adopted in South Africa than Brazil?

If so, these antecedent conditions should be considered critical antecedents, not background similarities or alternative hypotheses. Consider first the issue of crisis within the White elite. As Marx (1998) argues, Brazilian and South African leaders wrote their constitutions amid a contrasting set of constraints. In the aftermath of the Boer War, South Africa’s White elite was

deeply divided and the British needed to make peace with the vanquished Afrikaners. This “pressure for reconciliation” translated into the institutionalization of White domination (p. 165). Unlike South Africa, Brazil “peacefully transformed itself from colony to empire to republic.” Slavery was abolished gradually, and “in the relative absence of major intrawhite conflict, there was little impetus to unify whites through racial exclusion.” Because “the Brazilian state and social hierarchy faced no challenges comparable to those posed by Afrikaners” (p. 181), the country’s “elites found that they could maintain their long-established social order of white privilege without enforcing racial domination” (p. 15). Lieberman is surely correct that Brazilian elites still could have tried to impose an exclusionary biracial order, but contrasting levels of antecedent elite conflict made such an outcome less likely than in South Africa. Elite crises in Brazil and South Africa do not appear to be a background similarity but a critical antecedent that helps explain long-term cross-case divergence.<sup>21</sup>

The same can be said of antecedent racial cleavages. Of particular interest is antecedent variation in patterns of miscegenation. Both Marx and Lieberman demonstrate that racial mixing took place in both Brazil and South Africa, and both argue that, as a result, miscegenation can be treated as a background similarity with no causal significance. Yet like elite crises, racial cleavages differ in degree as well as in kind. Although there was a “high degree” of miscegenation in Brazil, South Africa experienced much less racial mixing (Marx, 1998, pp. 65-76). Marx concedes that “no doubt the higher level of miscegenation in Brazil would have made a biracial order more difficult to impose than elsewhere” (p. 74). But he joins Lieberman in justifying his treatment of antecedent racial cleavages as noncausal by asserting that “miscegenation by itself did not *preclude* an official racial order” in Brazil (p. 74).

Considering the importance of probabilities in social-scientific inquiry, it is too restrictive to consider an antecedent condition noncausal unless it makes the ultimate outcome “pre-determined” (Lieberman, 2003, p. 68). Explaining historical causation requires attention both to choices during critical junctures and to the preexisting conditions that influence those choices. The problem is decidedly *not* that Lieberman and Marx are insufficiently attentive to, or knowledgeable about, the 20th-century history of Brazil and South Africa. It is that the critical juncture framework provides no systematic way for historically sensitive social scientists to show how conditions before a critical juncture might complement rather than contradict their causal arguments. Critical antecedents can thus help scholars construct controlled comparisons without being beholden to the chimerical template of the “natural experiment.”

They allow us to view antecedent variation as a welcome addition instead of an unwelcome challenge to our critical juncture arguments.

## **Conclusion: Bringing Critical Antecedents Into Comparative Politics**

Critical junctures have long stood at the center of historically oriented comparative politics. We neither expect nor hope that this will change. In none of the works just discussed have we sought to overturn or falsify a critical juncture argument. Yet important causal factors have been operative *before* the critical juncture, and this causal significance can be downplayed or missed altogether so long as we lack a concept distinguishing causal from noncausal antecedents. By introducing the concept of critical antecedents and disaggregating “antecedent conditions” into four types, we aim to provide researchers with a new framework for systematically exploring the causal power of the *longue durée* in comparative politics.

How might critical antecedents facilitate informative regress in future work? As ever, the critical juncture serves as an excellent building block for comparative research. Scholars can still commence their investigation by identifying the point when their cases began to follow different political trajectories toward their outcome of interest. What must be rethought is not the *definition* of critical junctures but their *causal weight*.

Only once a critical juncture (or divergence point) has been identified can one look for critical antecedents. It should not be considered tenable to lump discrete types of antecedent conditions together or to ignore antecedent conditions entirely. When determining what type of antecedent conditions one confronts, the vital questions to ask are, how were my cases similar before they diverged, and how were they different before they diverged? If “difference before divergence” sounds like an oxymoron, a quick recapitulation of a few of the preeminent works just discussed suggests otherwise. For Kalyvas, the absence of a regime cleavage in all of his cases except France in the mid-19th century did not start those countries on a pathway to Christian democracy; the anticlerical attacks of the late 20th century did. Similarly, liberal weakness in Luebbert’s prewar Germany and Italy did not set those countries on a path to fascism—for all intents and purposes the ideology did not yet exist. Only the disruptions of World War I and the interwar eruption of mass politics could set in train that fateful pathway for some but not all European countries.

Critical junctures share their causal significance once critical antecedents are brought into the analysis but do not surrender it entirely. This raises the

question of the relative causal importance of critical junctures and critical antecedents. In our view, the most fruitful way to think about this question is in terms of *portability* rather than *proportions*. Recalling Rigby's argument that a bottle's brittleness and its impact with a stone are equivalently indispensable for breakage, we submit that attempting to apportion the precise, partial causal weight of critical junctures and critical antecedents is not necessarily a productive approach. As James Mahoney and Gary Goertz (2006) have argued, scholars need not specify partial causal effects when explaining specific outcomes, as in each of the historical arguments discussed here.

This is not to suggest that critical antecedents are incompatible with generalizable arguments in comparative politics. To the contrary, our effort to uncover critical antecedents has been motivated by our desire to reveal causal factors of general applicability. For instance, McAdam's analysis suggests the possibility of measuring the percentage decline in a country or region's leading sector as a share of total production as a causal influence on social movements.<sup>22</sup> What makes a critical antecedent more or less important than a critical juncture in any particular causal account is not how much of the specific outcome it explains but how much it promises to inform our leading theories in comparative politics.

Studying historical causation is hard empirical work, but critical antecedents promise to ease rather than complicate the historically oriented social scientist's task. Anyone constructing a critical juncture argument should *already* be examining antecedent conditions to see if enough background similarities exist to construct a controlled comparison and to determine if rival explanations grounded in antecedent conditions might outperform one's own. Yet a third possibility has been overlooked—background conditions can combine with factors during a critical juncture to shape long-term outcomes. Historically oriented scholars already need to look before critical junctures in their *analyses*; what we provide here is a systematic and transparent way for them to bring the information they uncover into their *arguments*.

Our intention has been to offer the first rather than the final word on how critical antecedents might be used in comparative politics. In much the same sense as Lipset and Rokkan sparked methodological reflection and debate (as well as substantive analysis) with their original invocation of critical junctures, our hope is that we have introduced and elaborated a concept that social scientists will both use and struggle with, just as we have. Critical junctures are indeed critical for politics, but they are currently carrying too much of the explanatory weight in comparative historical research.

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## Notes

1. See, especially, Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) and Pierson (2004). For an earlier statement, see the collected essays in McDonald (1996).
2. Historical explanations are focused on specific cases (i.e., the "causes-of-effects" approach), not average causal effects (i.e., the "effects-of-causes" approach). See Mahoney and Goertz (2006, 229).
3. We build on the critical juncture framework because we see it as a familiar and fruitful way of analyzing historical causation—it is not necessarily the best way, and it is certainly not the only way.
4. On eventful versus experimental understandings of temporality and historical causation, see Sewell (2005, chap. 3). On mechanism-based as opposed to variable-based explanations, see Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998).
5. Scholars positing that a particular critical juncture produced a particular legacy must always consider "the rival hypothesis that important attributes of the legacy may in fact involve considerable continuity and/or direct causal links with the preexisting system that are not mediated by the critical juncture" (Collier & Collier, 1991, p. 30).
6. Control variables can be causal variables in a multivariate regression, but they are (or should be) noncausal by definition in a controlled comparison.
7. Stressing divergence rather than *choice* is consistent with Brady and Collier's (2004, p. 282) argument that the relative importance of structure and agency during critical junctures should be treated as an empirical rather than a definitional

question. Stressing divergence rather than *change* should allay Cappoccia and Kelemen's (2007) justifiable concern that an obsession with change will distract scholars from equally important cases of stability, thus sacrificing variation on the dependent variable.

8. Unlike Pierson's third truncation logic, Mill's prioritizes the theoretical knowledge of the reader, not the theoretical interests of the author.
9. As Rigby (1995) puts it, "Although my being born was a condition of my writing this article, we would not normally refer to it as the 'cause' of my doing so" (p. 234). In our terms, this is because birth is both a *trivial cause* of writing and a *background similarity* that cannot explain why some people write articles whereas others do not.
10. See Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu (2008) on the weighting of proximate versus distal causes.
11. One might object that family law is actually Charrad's dependent variable because the origins of legal reform attract the bulk of her attention. By treating state-tribe relations as a critical antecedent, we believe we better capture the importance of family law as both *explanans* and *explanandum* in her study.
12. The exceptional antecedent weakness of the Mexican and Venezuelan oligarchies also appears to help explain why party politicians only followed a "radical populist" incorporation strategy in these cases, encompassing peasants as well as workers (Collier & Collier, 1991, pp. 113-124). Critical antecedents do not seem to help explain other types of divergence among the six cases of party incorporation, in either party systems or regime outcomes.
13. Although one needs a broader appreciation of antecedent variation in oligarchic power to understand the full range of subsequent divergence across the Colliers' eight cases, their evidence suggests that it is specifically variation in the political power of the oligarchy *in the countryside* that best explains the core divergence between state and party incorporation.
14. Labor incorporation was still avoidable in the more agrarian societies of Eastern Europe, permitting the persistence of "traditional dictatorships" as a fourth regime outcome.
15. Our analysis here solely focuses on the two cases and two regime outcomes on which their analyses overlap. Mahoney's portrayal of the liberal era as the critical juncture rests on a broader, five-case comparison as well as more fine-grained regime variation.
16. We do not discuss Mahoney's (2003, chap. 3-4) own extensive treatment of antecedent conditions here because it would not shed light on the overlap in his and Yashar's arguments.
17. Mahoney places more stress than Yashar on elite choices during the liberal era in spawning new regime trajectories, even as they emphasize similar structural factors.

18. Intra-Muslim cleavages also worked in this fashion in some instances (Varshney, 2002, p. 174). Because Wilkinson also emphasizes intra-Hindu cleavages, we focus on this point of overlap.
19. Critical antecedents facilitate the construction of a controlled comparison among seven diverse Southeast Asian countries in Slater (in press, chap. 3).
20. Marx compares these cases with the United States. As with the Mahoney–Yashar pairing, we focus here on the cases where Marx and Lieberman overlap.
21. The Boer War in South Africa and the fall of the emperor are explicitly described as similar crises (Lieberman, 2003, p. 527), despite Marx's evidence to the contrary.
22. Although none of the critical antecedents analyzed here are explicitly treated as independent variables, all can be potentially recast as measurable variables by anyone seeking to conduct a quantitative test of these scholars' historical claims.

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