Developmental Crises:  
A Comparative-Historical Analysis of the Effects of Crisis on State Building in Botswana, Malaysia, and Uganda

By Matthew Lange

ABSTRACT: The construction of states with the capacity to provide public goods is a common developmental goal, yet state building is a very difficult process that cannot be accomplished at will. Through a comparative-historical analysis of Botswana, Malaysia, and Uganda, this article provides evidence that crises have the potential to break institutional inertia and thereby create openings for relatively rapid and extensive state building. In particular, crises can promote reforms by transforming incentives, readjusting power relations, and forging a political consensus. The latter is particularly vital if crises are to be developmental, as its absence promotes divisions and violence and therefore can obstruct state-building reforms.
According to the 2003 Human Development Report, several countries in the world experienced worsening economic, educational, and health performances throughout the 1990s. The authors therefore suggest that much of the world is facing a “development crisis,” a concept referring to the widespread inability of people to meet their basic needs. The term could also be employed to describe a different situation where the crisis is not underdevelopment itself but a situation that directly impedes development. The Great Depression in the United States, the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa, and violence in Darfur provide different examples of this second type of development crisis.

In this article, I investigate a different and more positive type of crisis, what I call a developmental crisis. Specifically, I recognize that states are vital to broad-based development and that several historical analyses find that periods of extensive state building frequently follow severe political crisis. Combining both, I argue that crises have the potential to have positive and long-term effects on development.

My analysis of developmental crises proceeds in three parts. First, I provide a framework proposing that crises potentially promote punctuated and extensive state building by adjusting costs, transforming power relations, and forging political consensus. The framework also proposes, however, that only some crises have these effects. Next, I analyze Botswana and Malaysia, two cases that have experienced successful state building over the past half century, and use comparative-historical methods to explore causal mechanisms linking crises and state
building. Finally, I analyze Uganda, which experienced a crisis similar to that in Botswana but which ultimately had more negative effects on state building and development. In comparison to Botswana and Malaysia, the Ugandan case therefore provides insight into why some crises are developmental and others more destructive.

**Crises, State Building, and Development**

Despite considerable disagreement over the causes of development and underdevelopment, there is a growing consensus that state institutions have profound effects on developmental processes. So strong is the consensus that a diverse group of scholars claim that the major goal of development policy must be the construction of effective state institutions. 2 Unfortunately, building effective states is a difficult process that cannot be implemented at will. The organization and coordination of thousands of state officials within dozens of departments and the construction of effective lines of communication and exchange between state and society require tremendous monetary, organizational, and normative resources. 3 In addition, rapid population growth, extreme poverty, ethnic diversity, environmental degradation, and domestic conflict create social environments that complicate state-building efforts. Such daunting logistical and social impediments cause some experts to question the very possibility of constructing effective states in many regions of the world. 4

Although state building is difficult, the 20th century produced a handful of extremely successful cases, and these transformed states made possible impressive state-led development. Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, for example, have arguably been the most successful state builders over the past century, and all three countries have subsequently been among the world’s most dynamic developers. Similarly, Botswana and Malaysia built much larger, more
bureaucratic, and more infrastructurally powerful states over the past half century, and both states proved vital to each country’s developmental success. Although shaped by a number of factors, one similarity among all five cases is that state building occurred during and shortly after periods of political conflict and violence. In fact, state building in all cases appears to have been spurred by political crises, suggesting that the latter might create openings for punctuated state transformation.

“Crisis” has several related connotations but most generally refers to a condition of punctuated instability, hardship, deadlock, or danger. Given the breadth of the concept, crises can take a number of forms—psychological, environmental, economic, developmental, and political—and can occur at different units of analysis—individual, communal, national, and global. In order to make the concept more amenable to empirical analysis, I use a more specific definition that focuses on institutions and conflict: a crisis is a period of intense opposition during which institutional elites experience a heightened risk of losing their authority and positions. In a capitalist society, an economic crisis therefore occurs when the capital-owning classes are attacked by some social group, be it subordinate classes, political elite, or a foreign power. Similarly, a political crisis involves conflict that threatens the authority of state elites and thereby destabilizes the political order.

Based on the above definition, numerous social scientific analyses of crises exist. These works usually analyze revolutions, economic breakdowns, and other particular examples of institutional crises but fail to discuss crisis as a sociological concept. Antonio Gramsci is a notable exception. Gramsci’s discussion of crisis is shaped by his desire to establish a new socialist order and is an important component of his theory of hegemony. His work points to crises as political in nature and suggests they occur when dominant elites lose legitimacy—the
crisis of authority or hegemony—and are forced to resort to open coercion in order to maintain their positions.5

Gramsci’s work focuses on crisis because he thinks it is sociologically important. Most obviously, crises can severely impede the functioning of institutions and thereby the ability of individuals to pursue their well-beings. As such, crises can be very destructive and hardly desirable. In addition, he claims crises can promote constructive periods of radical institutional change. For example, he believes the post-World-War-I Italian crisis of authority weakened the hegemonic powers of the bourgeoisie and the state, thereby creating an opening for revolutionary change and the construction of a socialist order. In this way, Gramsci supports subsequent institutional theories of punctuated equilibrium, which claim that institutional change occurs during moments of openness that make possible rapid transformation, and suggests that crises play an important role in causing punctuated institutional transformation.6

Gramsci’s work provides an important starting-point for a theoretical framework on crisis and institutional change. Yet, he does not describe the actual causal mechanisms that link crises to institutional change. Similarly, recent works on critical junctures recognize that key events such as crises can have profound effects on institutional change and long-term social processes but do not focus on why certain events are transformative, instead only recognizing that some cause change and are therefore by definition critical. Any theory about how crises might cause rapid institutional change is therefore underdeveloped.

Despite the absence of any general discussion of the transformative aspects of crises, several analyses of particular instances of institutional change provide different explanations for why crises cause transformation. In particular, diverse works on state building highlight three
general mechanisms linking crisis to state-institutional change: rational choice, consensus, and power.

First, crises might promote institutional change by either increasing the cost of not reforming institutions or decreasing the cost of reform. Several analyses of state building focus on the former, finding that crises heighten the risk of state collapse, threaten the positions of state elite, and therefore increase elite incentives to implement reforms. Wade and Woo-Cumings, for example, claim that crises of national security provided state elites with the impetus to implement radical state reforms in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. These crises threatened the very existence of the countries, thereby creating a political will for more effective states that could fend off external aggressors. Tilly makes a similar argument in his analysis of war-making and state-making in Early Modern Europe, finding that constant warfare forced political elites to build large states that were capable of collecting revenue and organizing a large army. Doner, Ritchie, and Slater also recognize that external threats can create incentives for state-building reforms but argue that two additional threats create the political need to construct a developmental state: domestic unrest and budget constraints.

Although this literature on crisis-induced state building focuses on how crises increase the cost of not reforming states, it is also possible that crises promote institutional change by reducing the cost of reform. Recent works on path dependence, for example, propose that institutions normally have increasing returns and therefore create cost-based incentives for their own reproduction. Most importantly, institutions have large start-up costs, making reform very expensive relative to institutional reproduction. In addition, participation within institutions requires both institutional learning and the coordination of many people, and learning and coordination effects increase the cost of reforming institutions. Crises, however, have the
potential of severely weakening or even ending increasing returns: when crises break down or destabilize institutions, they impede increasing-return mechanisms and therefore promote institutional change.

Besides increasing incentives for change, crises can also promote major institutional transformation by increasing political consensus. According to this mechanism, crises force past rivals into one another’s arms to confront a new and common threat. For example, the 9/11 attacks helped patch political disagreement between Democrats and Republicans, allowing the Bush administration to quickly implement extensive institutional reforms dealing with domestic security that would have been impossible prior to the crisis. Similarly, World War II helped mend differences between Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Parties in the United Kingdom, something that was exemplified by Churchill’s coalition government between 1940 and 1945. This crisis-induced political unity, in turn, made possible the rapid expansion of the British welfare state.\textsuperscript{10}

Finally, crises potentially promote institutional change through their effects on the distribution of societal power. According to the definition used in this paper, crises are inherently conflictual, and conflict can result in winners and losers and thereby the transformation of relative power. And, when a crisis empowers actors in favor of institutional reform, weakens actors opposed to reform, or both, crisis can promote institutional change. In an extreme example, Becker and Goldstone find that revolutionary crises create opportunities to vanquish political foes and that the removal of opposition facilitates state institutional change. “Since the biggest obstacle to building new regimes (or making substantial changes in old ones) is opposition from entrenched autonomous elites,” they write, “revolutions can utilize popular mobilization to either eliminate those elites, or their autonomy.”\textsuperscript{11}
Thus, crises can promote state institutional change by creating incentives, forging a consensus, and transforming power relations. At the same time, one cannot help but recognize—as Gramsci and Rueschemeyer do—that crises do not always cause constructive institutional reforms: they only provide an opening. For one thing, crisis might simply destabilize institutions for a period of time and then end without any major institutional changes. Moreover, institutional change is not equivalent to the construction of better and more effective institutions. In their analysis of revolutions and state building, for example, Becker and Goldstone find that revolutions can promote state building but can also have devastating effects on state effectiveness when they are long, drawn-out affairs without any victor. These examples provide evidence that the institutional impact of crises depends on how they are resolved, and any analysis of the developmental impact of crisis must therefore pay attention to the conditions and characteristics that cause some crises to be constructive and others destructive.

**State Building and Development in Botswana, Malaysia, and Uganda**

Botswana, Malaysia, and Uganda all experienced severe political crises in the 1950s, and all three countries therefore provide an opportunity to explore the effects of crisis on state building. At the time of their respective crises, all three appeared to have chronically ineffective states and to face dire developmental problems. For one thing, all three were indirectly ruled British colonies, and several studies find that indirect colonial rule institutionalized decentralized and divided states lacking the capacity to promote development. Mamdani, for example, provides a general analysis of sub-Saharan Africa and maintains that indirect rule was the common form of colonial rule throughout the region, that postcolonial rule continued to be indirect, and that the continuation of indirect forms of rule has had devastating effects on political and social development. Using statistical methods, Lange supports Mamdani’s claims
by showing that the extent of indirect colonial rule among former British colonies is strongly and negatively related to present levels of state effectiveness and development.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to their histories of indirect rule, the respective crises of each case did not bode well for either state building or development. In Botswana and Uganda, the chiefs of the largest and most powerful chiefdoms were exiled, thereby causing institutional breakdown and violence. Even more detrimental, Malaysia experienced a long and deadly communist insurgency that brought the colony’s economy to a standstill and threatened to topple the government.

Despite such inauspicious circumstances, several institutional analyses provide evidence that state officials in both Botswana and Malaysia successfully implemented extensive state reforms that ultimately constructed larger, more centralized, and more bureaucratic states.\textsuperscript{16} Even more, they find that these reforms increased each state’s capacity to act corporately, regulate society, and implement state policy. Quantitative evidence supports these qualitative claims. Table 1 lists both Botswana’s and Malaysia’s global percentile ranking for three indicators of state governance compiled by the World Bank: government effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption.\textsuperscript{17} These indicators provide proxies for state effectiveness and show that both countries have scores that place them near the 75\textsuperscript{th} percentile of all countries in the world. Their rankings are even more impressive when compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia (see Table 1). Indeed, out of all 60 countries in both regions, Botswana has the third highest average percentile for the three indicators and Malaysia has the fourth, with Singapore and Taiwan holding the top two positions.
Table 1. State Governance Indicators, Average Global Percentile, 1996-2005

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<th>Government Effectiveness&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Rule of Law&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Control of Corruption&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<td>Botswana</td>
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<sup>a</sup> Government Effectiveness measures “the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of the civil service from political pressures, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies” (World Bank 2007).

<sup>b</sup> Rule of law measures the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society.

<sup>c</sup> Control of corruption measures the absence of political corruption, defined as the exercise of public power for private gain.

Several analyses, in turn, find that effective states in both Botswana and Malaysia have made possible successful state-led development over the past 40 years, allowing each to be among the world’s most dynamic developers. Indeed, the economies of both Botswana and Malaysia have quickly and consistently expanded: Botswana’s per capital GDP increased by an average annual rate of 6.8 percent between 1960 and 2005, Malaysia’s by 4.0 percent, while the average growth rate of the world was only 1.9 percent (World Bank 2007a). Similarly, both have made phenomenal advances in the realm of education. By 2003, the literacy rate among adolescents was 94 percent in Botswana and 97 percent in Malaysia. These figures are remarkable when one considers where Botswana and Malaysia began: Botswana had only 33 established posts within the Department of Education in 1950 and less than 200 students attending secondary school, and only 1.8 percent of school-aged ethnic Malays attended government or government-aided schools in Malaysia just prior to World War II.
Unlike Botswana and Malaysia, Uganda has been neither an exceptional state builder nor a successful developer. Table 1 shows that Uganda’s levels of state governance are far less than those of either Botswana or Malaysia and in the bottom third of all countries in the world. Similarly, Uganda’s 2004 Human Development Index score places it at only the 18th percentile globally.

Given Botswana’s and Malaysia’s unlikely yet successful state-led development, the question arises how such states were constructed. In the following section, I apply the framework on crises to both cases and explore the possibility that crises created openings for rapid institutional change. In addition, I analyze Uganda and compare all three countries to investigate possible conditions that affect whether a crisis is developmental or destructive.

**Botswana**

The Bechuanaland Protectorate was proclaimed by the British in 1885 over present-day Botswana in an attempt to protect a transportation route between South Africa and Britain’s Central and East African colonies. The first permanent administration in Botswana was built after the writing of the 1895 Agreement, which served as the ad hoc constitution of the Bechuanaland Protectorate until 1959 (Otlhogile 1975: 4).²¹ It set aside tribal territories for the five Tswana chiefdoms (eventually eight after the recognition of three minor Tswana chiefdoms in Southern Botswana) and maintained the precolonial socio-political institutions by stating that the chiefs were to “rule their own people much as at present.”²²

Throughout most of the colonial period, the British had only a weak presence in the Protectorate. For example, in 1915/16—30 years after the proclamation of the Protectorate—Botswana had only 277 staff, representing one administrator per 1,000 square miles.²³ Yet, this force was limited almost exclusively to a police force guarding the border: nine out of ten
administrators were members of the police, demonstrating the colonial focus on the prevention of foreign occupation and the administrative disregard for domestic affairs. Even by the mid-1930s, just thirty years before independence, Botswana had only 22 non-police administrators stationed within the Protectorate. As such, officials in Botswana had little control over the day-to-day affairs of the people and were extremely dependent on regional chiefs for the maintenance of colonial rule.

The colonial state in Botswana began to transform from a skeleton administration that ruled through chiefs into a centralized bureaucratic state in the 1950s and 1960s. The state building reforms continued over the next three decades and created a much larger state and a new configuration of power within Botswana. These reforms included a complete overhaul of the Protectorate’s particular form of indirect rule only a few years before independence, the extent of which was quite unparalleled in other indirectly ruled colonies in regards to the bureaucratization of central, district, and local government. In the end, both the capacity of the state to implement policy and its presence throughout the territory increased dramatically while the powers of the chiefs plummeted.

With these changes, the snail-like pace of state expansion that existed up until the mid-1950s accelerated rapidly: the total establishment increased by less than a thousand personnel between 1905 and 1957 yet increased by 2,500 over the next decade. After independence, the administration continued to expand at a rate of 20 percent per year, reaching 9,000 staff in 1975—a 45-fold increase in only 70 years and an 800 percent increase in less than two decades.

The expansion in personnel coincided with a restructuring of departmental organization as well. In 1945, there were 13 departments in charge of only a few general activities, and the
Resident Commissioner and Secretariat formed the administrative core of the state apparatus.26 By the mid-1960s, a ministerial system with an elected President had been introduced, and the number of government departments jumped to over 40.27 The new departmental organization, in turn, coincided with the expansion of state activities and services that increasingly affected the lives of all Batswana.28 29

Although the focus of administrative expansion was on the construction and bureaucratization of central state departments and ministries during late colonialism and early independence, local government and the ties linking District Councils and the central administration were increasingly bureaucratized in the early 1970s. This began after the central administration became unsatisfied with their ability to work through chiefs and District Councils. Consequently, the Government increased central representation locally and expanded administrative interaction with and control of local councils. In addition, the Government expanded and formalized the ties among central and local government actors through “the bureaucratization of village-district communications,” thereby increasing information and resource flows between the central administration and local district and villages and decreasing the possibility of rent-seeking by intermediary brokers.30 The construction of a bureaucratic structure linking local and central government, in turn, required that the legislative, judicial and executive powers of chiefs were reduced or removed.

Political Crisis

The extent, uniqueness, and success of Botswana’s state building reforms had many causes, yet one event kick-started the process. In 1948 a succession crisis with racial intrigue occurred in the Ngwato Territory over the marriage of the future chief, Seretse Khama, to a white woman while he was studying law in England. As a result of the marriage, Seretse was exiled
for six years and the system of indirect rule broke down in the Ngwato Territory. “In the context of the Southern African social fabric,” writes Robertson, “the marriage set off a chain of events which plunged Bechuanaland into an era of unprecedented confrontation with the British and fomented dramatic political reorganization among the Ngwato and subsequently among the other chieftaincies.”

In the fall of 1948, Seretse married Ruth Williams while living in London but failed to discuss the marriage with his relatives back in Botswana. News of the marriage infuriated his uncle, Tshekedi, who viewed Seretse’s failure to ask for tribal consent as a grave sign of disrespect and feared that a racially mixed heir to the chieftainship would destroy the institution. After Seretse returned to the Ngwato Territory and was scolded by the tribe at two chiefdom assemblies, chiefdom members decided that Tshekedi was using the marriage as an excuse to usurp the chieftainship from Seretse—the rightful heir—and overwhelmingly supported Seretse’s chiefly claims at the third meeting. Before Seretse could be sworn in as chief, however, a British Commission reported that the marriage would obstruct British relations with South Africa and might provoke South African economic sanctions that would cripple Botswana’s economy. Consequently, the British Government banished Seretse from Botswana in 1950.

Seretse’s exile had profound effects on the Protectorate. The tribe refused to collaborate with the colonial administration, and the position of Tribal Authority was left vacant, requiring the improvisation of a more direct form of administration dependent on British officers and unpopular collaborators. The six-year period resulted in non-cooperation and overt conflict between the Ngwato and the administration and included demonstrations, riots, and even murder. The crisis also brought the possibility of transferring Botswana to South Africa back into the
public sphere. In doing so, the crisis caused South Africa to menacingly demand the transfer of Botswana and severely strained relations between Great Britain—not to mention Botswana—and South Africa.

In September 1956, however, the British ended Seretse’s exile on the condition that he renounce the chieftaincy for himself and for his children. The crisis ended with great jubilation as Seretse returned home, yet the ‘native’ administration was irreparable since the strongly supported and rightful heir could no longer be chief. Seretse’s return with a white wife also brought relations with South Africa to a new low.

*Increasing Incentives for Change*

According to Picard, the Ngwato crisis “effectively terminated the indirect rule experiment in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.” And, with the previous system of rule in shambles, the crisis weakened increasing-return mechanisms and therefore decreased the costs of political reforms. In addition, the crisis aggravated relations between Botswana and South Africa, which increased elite incentives to reform the state.

Prior to the crisis, many economic, cultural, and political institutions depended on indirect rule; and individuals therefore participated in and supported the maintenance of preexisting state structures. Increasing-return mechanisms also reinforced the state’s indirect structure, as the costs of major institutional reforms were enormous relative to maintaining preexisting institutions. With the breakdown of state institutions in the Ngwato Territory, however, a functional need for new state institutions emerged. Indeed, because of Seretse Khama’s exile and subsequent denunciation of the chieftainship, previous state structures based on indirect rule were no longer possible, and the relative costs of reforms diminished.
Although the reforms could have been limited to the Ngwato Territory, colonial officials and politicians chose instead to build a centralized state with direct control over the entire colony. The decision to overhaul the system of rule throughout Botswana was influenced by concerns that a two-tiered structure treating the Ngwato Territory differently would cause jealousy and animosity between the different regions. Of equal or greater importance, the crisis heightened South African animosity toward both Botswana and Great Britain, and this international threat further increased incentives for extensive state reforms.

From its inception, colonial Botswana was at risk of being incorporated into one of its neighbors, and Botswana chiefs vigorously fought British attempts to transfer Botswana to either Southern Rhodesia or South Africa until it became a dead-issue in the 1930s. The Seretse Khama crisis brought the issue of transfer back onto the political table. South Africa viewed the marriage of a powerful chief to a white woman as a threat to its segregation policies and therefore pressured Britain to remove Seretse from power. Their pressure tactics included renewed demands that Botswana be given to South Africa. This external dimension to the crisis caused Botswanan political elite and British officials to consider ways of preventing transfer to South Africa. Economic self-dependence was one means. In addition, the construction of a direct form of rule hindered incorporation, thereby creating strong incentives to implement state reforms. For one thing, the construction of a powerful central state was necessary for the reduction of Botswana’s political dependence on South Africa. In addition, because South Africa wanted to take over Botswana and use it as a Bantustan (African reserve), and because the latter required an indirect system of rule through chiefs, major centralizing reforms were a sign that Botswana would not and could not be transferred to South Africa.
Growing pressure from the British public also increased incentives for colonial officials to pursue more direct forms of rule. Unlike most events in colonial Africa, the Ngwato crisis was closely followed by the British public. In fact, the crisis was a major political issue and contributed to the fall of the British Labour Party and Winston Churchill’s return to power. Such public interest was sparked by popular intrigue over an inter-racial marriage between a middle-class English woman and an African chief. In addition, Britain’s response to the crisis caused moral outrage among many and was condemned for sacrificing the well-being of colonial subjects in order to comply with the nefarious interests of a racist regime in South Africa. Thus, in order to placate public opinion in Great Britain, British officials and politicians chose to implement extensive political reforms that reinforced the colony’s political autonomy during the final decades of colonialism. Although the monetary costs of the reforms were considerable, they were largely offset by the political costs of not implementing them.

*The Transformation of Domestic Power Relations*

The Ngwato Crisis also had important effects on domestic power relations, and the latter was necessary for the successful implementation of extensive state-building reforms. The crisis ultimately reduced the power of chiefs and strengthened central administrators and politicians. As a result, politicians and administrative elite were able to implement centralizing and expansionary reforms without strong opposition from entrenched interests.

Although Seretse Khama initially lost considerable power because of the succession crisis, he and his political and administrative supporters ultimately gained power in its wake. Upon his return from exile, Seretse relinquished any claim to the chieftainship and became active in both regional and national politics. At the national level, he founded the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (later Botswana Democratic Party, or BDP) in 1962 and actively fought to
bureaucratize and democratize the political system in Botswana. Even more, the succession crisis made Khama a popular national symbol and thereby gave him a large following, and most Batswana accepted and supported Seretse as a political leader because they viewed him as the legitimate chief of Botswana’s largest and most powerful chiefdom and because Seretse continued to ‘play the royal card’ whenever it suited his interests.\(^{37}\)

While the power of the BDP waxed, the power of the chiefs waned thanks in no small part to the Ngwato crisis. Because the ‘native’ system of administration was destroyed during Seretse Khama’s exile and because Seretse and his children were forbidden from becoming chief as a condition of his return, a federated system of rule based on autonomous chiefdom institutions therefore became extremely problematic. In addition, the Ngwato Chiefdom was the largest and most powerful in colonial Botswana, and its chiefs had been the informal leaders of the five main Tswana chiefdoms. As a result, chiefly power, which had been extremely high throughout the colonial period, declined markedly.

With the rise of the BDP and the fall of the chiefs, the central state successfully usurped chiefly powers. Between 1961 and 1970, the chiefs were systematically weakened until their primary political powers were reduced to running customary courts, performing traditional ceremonies, and acting as the spokesman of the tribe. Indeed, the power to appoint and remove chiefs was given to the government; and the chiefs lost the right to regulate local social relations, control mineral resources on tribal lands, collect stray cattle, control the allocation of tribal land, and collect taxes.\(^{38}\) Moreover, the central government regulated customary courts more strictly and forced them to conform to the codes of the Magistrates’ Courts.\(^{39}\)

\textit{The Forging of a Political Alliance}
With the relative cost of reforms lowered and the weakening of conservative elites, mechanisms of institutional reproduction were no longer imposing obstacles to extensive state reforms. Yet, state building poses great logistical problems and requires more than just the removal of impediments: it requires a concerted and long-term effort to build new institutions. In Botswana, the Ngwato crisis promoted just this by forcing colonial officials, indigenous politicians, and chiefs to collaborate, thereby creating a high degree of consensus over state reforms.

Even in their weakened state, it is feasible that the chiefs could have successfully opposed the reforms. Yet, most chiefs accepted the new institutions and thereby enhanced state-building efforts. For instance, chiefs allowed state administrators to use chiefdom assemblies as “the platform for announcements, financial statements, progress reports and the discussion of future and ongoing projects.” As a consequence, the assemblies became an important means of educating the public about political reforms and engaging them within the new institutions. In addition, chiefs were given ex officio positions within the new local councils and administration, and Village Development Committees used chiefdom assembly meetings as a forum to elect its members and recruit locals to help implement their programs. This interaction of the new Botswana state institutions with the traditional, in effect, imparted some of the deep-rooted legitimacy of the chieftaincy and the tribal assembly to the modern institutions.

The fact that the chiefs assisted state reforms is therefore an anomaly with great implications that requires explanation. Importantly, the crisis rejuvenated South African demands for Botswana, and the possible incorporation with South Africa both limited chiefly opposition and caused them to participate—often grudgingly—in the reforms. Indeed, the late colonial reforms were a sign of commitment on the side of the British that Botswana would not
be given to apartheid South Africa, and chiefs therefore usually viewed reforms as the lesser of two evils. Chief Batheon of the Ngwaketse was an exception that clarifies the link between the political reforms and the South Africa question. For a brief period, he became an outspoken critic of the reforms, wedded his critique with statements about the superiority of the apartheid system of rule, and showed interest in the transfer of Botswana to South Africa. Not surprisingly, this view did not receive much support, and Batheon reversed his position and eventually renounced his chieftaincy in order to enter national politics.

Besides causing the chiefs to tacitly support the reforms, the crisis also drove Seretse Khama and his Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP) and the colonial administration into one another’s arms, and the combined effort of both facilitated extensive state reforms. Upon Khama’s return to Botswana, the British administration was worried about his potential militancy. Yet, because of the potential threat posed by South Africa and British public pressure, Khama, the BDP, and colonial officials overlooked past differences and collaborated to implement state reforms. As a consequence, the BDP and the colonial administration established very close relations, thereby allowing both colonial officials and BDP politician to combine their efforts to reform the state.

In addition to simply allowing the combination of resources and effort, active collaboration also helped keep state-building efforts on track. When a new Resident Commissioner was appointed in 1963 and began to disrupt previous policy, for example, the expatriate administration refused to work closely with him and instead turned to BDP officials for support and leadership. Similarly, BDP officials refused to give in to pressure to localize the administration at independence. Instead, the Government stood by expatriate administrators
and dogmatically emphasized that the construction and running of an effective state would never be jeopardized by localization efforts.  

Malaysia

The British first colonized Penang (1786), Malacca (1795), and Singapore (1819); combined all three into one administrative unit (the Straits Settlements); and ruled them through a direct form of rule that focused on the control of regional trade. The remainder of the Malay Peninsula was colonized during the final decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. This expansion occurred in two stages and took two basic forms. First, the British gained influence over the West coast of the Malay Peninsula in the 1870s and proclaimed a system of federated rule over four states in 1895. In these states (Selangor, Perak, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang), the sultans either allied with the British or were deposed and replaced by new ones. The sultans were allowed to maintain their titles and some privileges, but the colonial powers usurped most of their legal-administrative powers and ruled their territories through a centralized and bureaucratic state based in Kuala Lumpur. Alternatively, the British colonized the remainder of the Malay Peninsula between 1909 and 1914. Although these five Unfederated Malay States (Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Trengganu) were also ruled through collaborative relations between British officials and indigenous sultans, the latter maintained greater autonomy than sultans in the federated states, resulting in a less bureaucratic and more indirect form of colonial rule. In 1957, the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, and Unfederated Malay States merged and gained their independence.  

Compared to Botswana, colonial Malaysia had a relatively large administration before World War II. Yet, this administration was abandoned during the Japanese occupation. In addition, the region’s administration was hardly integrated, being divided between Straits
Settlements, Federated Malay States, and Unfederated Malay States. By the late 1940s, however, the British had reconstructed a state and begun a "complete overhaul of the system of administration." The end result—although taking decades to achieve—was a much more centralized and territory-wide state with high capacities to maintain law and order and implement development policy.

Upon their return after World War II, the British established a short-lived military regime to restore order and then unilaterally declared the Malayan Union in 1946, which outlined their intention to reform the state. Over the next several decades, a much larger state institutional structure was built. Between 1948 and 1959, for example, the total number of administrative employees expanded from 48,000 to 140,000. This expansion continued until state privatization reduced the size of the civil administration in the late-1980s, at which time it numbered 880,000 employees.

Although occurring at all levels of government, this spectacular growth coincided with the expansion of the central state’s infrastructural power. Law-enforcement institutions expanded throughout the territory, and colonial officials increased the powers of the central administration. The latter allowed the central government to implement its policies throughout the territory and proved vital to subsequent state-led development efforts. This political centralization maintained a federal system of rule that recognized regional states. Overall, however, the reforms weakened the powers of both sultans and regional states and created a much more integrated political system with a powerful “administrative state” at the center.

Political Crisis

Similar to Botswana, the remarkable growth and centralization of the Malaysian state was sparked by crisis. In Malaysia, however, two crises occurred. First, the Japanese occupation of
colonial Malaysia between 1942 and 1945 caused the complete breakdown of British rule. Then, three years after British rule was restored, communist guerillas began a 12-year civil war.

During World War II, Japan began an aggressive campaign to take over Southeast Asia and conquered all of modern-day Malaysia by 1942. Besides causing a breakdown in British colonial rule, Japanese conquest also had devastating effects on economic production. Before either fleeing or being captured, colonial officials and settlers destroyed much of the colony’s infrastructure, and a guerilla resistance movement disrupted economic production throughout Japanese rule. The occupation also sparked ethnic violence between Chinese and Malay communities. The Japanese killed tens of thousands of people during their control of Malaysia, and the overwhelming majority of these were Chinese. Due to such brutal treatment and Japanese aggressions in mainland China, Chinese Malaysians organized a guerrilla movement against Japanese rule. After the Japanese left in 1945, the guerrillas emerged from hiding and began killing known collaborators. Because most of the guerrillas were Chinese and many of the collaborators were Malay, this retribution gained an ethnic dimension and soon turned into widespread ethnic violence, leaving hundreds if not thousands dead and tens of thousands displaced.

Upon their return, the British began to reestablish political control and rejuvenate the economy. Three years later, however, the communist guerrillas who had previously fought the Japanese with the aid of the Allies now began an anti-colonial war. The “Emergency,” as it was called, lasted from 1948 until 1960, during which time approximately 11,000 people were killed. Using hit-and-run tactics, the guerrillas destroyed 10 percent of the Malay Peninsula’s rubber plantations; killed 10 percent of plantation managers; and blew up tin dredges, bridges, and railroads.
To combat the communist threat, the British organized a large military and security force. At its peak, it consisted of 23 infantry battalions with over 9,000 active soldiers, 30,000 additional soldiers in supporting and administrative units, 40,000 police officers, and 250,000 Home Guards who were trained and armed to protect their villages. The British also expanded government services at the local level as part of the “hearts and minds” campaign, which attempted to turn potential communist sympathizers into government supporters. Finally, more than half a million rural inhabitants were resettled in new and protected villages during the war in order to limit both local support of the guerrillas and guerrilla attacks on rural farmers.

**Increasing Incentives for Change**

Both Japanese occupation and the Emergency caused the British to reconsider their system of colonial rule and initiate extensive political reforms. While the occupation lowered the relative costs of reform and weakened increasing-return mechanisms, the Emergency created strong incentives to centralize and expand the state. Together, they sparked a complete overhaul of the colonial state.

The British Government viewed Japanese occupation of Malaysia as a national disgrace, and the British Colonial Office therefore began planning extensive state reforms before they had actually regained control of the colony. The reforms were influenced by British Government desires to better protect important economic and military interests on the Malay Peninsula and focused on the construction of a powerful and centralized state. Notably, Japanese conquest caused the costs of extensive reforms to decrease in two ways. For one thing, three years of Japanese occupation destroyed preexisting institutions and therefore limited increasing-return mechanisms. In addition, the Japanese occupation exposed the high costs of not having a powerful state.
The reforms were first introduced in 1946 as part of the Malay Union Constitution. As soon as the Union reforms were made public, however, they faced stiff opposition because they weakened sultans and were therefore perceived by many as anti-Malay. In addition to mass protests and opposition from ethnic Malays, a few British officials spoke out against the reforms as a betrayal of British obligations to protect Malay interests. As a consequence, the Union was scrapped and replaced by the Federation of Malaya in 1948. The Federation retained a federal structure similar to the previous Union, but it made important concessions to sultans and their regional governments and left the division of power between the center and the regions unclear. In addition, the Malay backlash against the Malay Union caused even the more reform-minded Malay political elites within the central administration to question centralizing policy because it was viewed as anti-Malay. The future expansion and centralization of the state therefore faced difficulties and uncertainties despite British colonial desires.

With the outbreak of the Emergency shortly thereafter, however, the centralizing and expansionary aspects of the Federation clearly won out. British economic interests now absolutely required a more powerful, territory-wide state to defend against and eliminate the communist guerrillas. As a consequence, the British government was willing to incur great costs--both economic and political--to revamp the state and fight the guerrillas. Of equal importance, the Emergency posed a severe threat to the Colony’s Malay population. Indeed, the rebels were overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese, threatened the survival of Malay social institutions, and therefore reduced Malay opposition to the construction of a larger, more centralized, territory-wide state.

*The Transformation of Domestic Power Relations*
Throughout colonialism, the sultans were arguably the most powerful domestic actors in Malaysia and strongly opposed state reforms that reduced local autonomy. The Emergency strengthened the Malay administrative elite in the central state, allowing their power to surpass that of the sultans. Similar to Botswana, this readjustment of power in favor of more reform-oriented elite made possible the implementation of extensive state-building reforms both during and after the crisis.

In their attempt to apply indirect rule to Malaysia, British colonial officials allowed the sultans to retain their positions if they accepted British rule. As a consequence, the sultans remained the symbolic leaders of the Malays throughout colonialism and retained considerable formal powers within their regional state governments. Indirect rule therefore helped sultans remain the most powerful indigenous figures in colonial Malaysia.

Malay administrators in the central administration were a second group of indigenous elite during the colonial period. Unlike the sultans, the administrators lacked precolonial precursors and emerged in the early 1900s as a result of British efforts to cultivate a modernizing administrative class from among the Malay aristocracy. To do so, the British established the Malay College, an exclusive administrative school for talented children of the Malay nobility, and the graduates of the College held a near monopoly on the Malay Administrative Service (MAS). Because of their elite background, their high occupational status vis-à-vis other Malays, and their common education at an elite school, MAS members had a strong *esprit de corps* and emerged as a modernizing elite separate from the sultans.68

The Emergency transformed the relative and absolute power of both the sultans and the Malay administrators.69 Most importantly, British support was the primary basis of power in colonial Malaysia, and they shifted their support from sultans to administrators. As a
consequence, the absolute power of the sultans declined, and Malays within the MAS quickly advanced up the administrative hierarchy and gained control of the central state. The newfound power of the administrative elites allowed them to implement reforms that further centralized and bureaucratized the state and that further marginalized the sultans. Showing the objectives of this new elite, Tunku Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia and an elite administrator during the late colonial period, proclaimed during the reforms:

[Sultans] are decorations of the country and they do help to keep steady the different elements in their States. . . . [We are] prepared to uphold the prestige of the Rulers as Heads of their States. They will become constitutional Rulers in that they will be more like figureheads. Their position will be such that they will not get mixed up in politics or the administration.\(^{70}\)

Although the sultans never became mere figureheads, they depended on the central state’s military operations for their survival, were not capable of obstructing the reforms, and were therefore forced to grudgingly accept Rahman’s political reforms that effectively institutionalized central dominance over regional government and thereby completed the transfer of power to a new political elite.\(^{71}\)

\textit{The Forging of a Political Alliance}

Besides instigating reforms and empowering Malay administrators, the Emergency promoted extensive state building in a third way: it forged a broad and pro-reformist alliance. Due to common opposition to the communist guerrillas, British and Malay administrative officials overlooked past differences and actively collaborated to implement centralizing state reforms after 1948.\(^{72}\) This collaboration made possible the combination of resources,
information, and effort and proved vital to the successful implementation of state-building reforms both during colonialism and afterwards.

When the British first attempted to implement state reforms in 1946, they faced mass protests and very strong opposition from ethnic Malays, including the Malay administrative elite. After 1948, however, the Malay administrators actively collaborated with British officials in their attempt to build a larger and more effective state. The Emergency helps explain this warming of relations, as communist guerrillas threatened both British and Malay administrators and therefore drove them into collaborative relations. Malay administrators discovered that they absolutely depended on British support in order to vanquish the guerrillas and therefore willingly accepted and participated in British-led state reforms. As Tilman claims, “To many Malays the Emergency represented a predominantly Malay fight that Malaya could win only with external assistance. It could not have escaped the notice of any but the most fanatical agitators that independence for Malaya without continued British support of the Emergency would be a hollow victory”.74

On the British side, many officials resented Malay collaboration with the Japanese during World War II but realized that the Malay administrators had similar interests and posed less of a threat than either the guerrillas or the sultans. As a consequence, the British supported the administrators and their political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).75 As one commentator claims, the British “regarded UMNO as their natural ally against the forces of subversion—the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party and the extreme Malay radicals—and did all that was in their power to allow the movement to emerge as the major political party in Malaya.”76 Demonstrating this support, British officials actively encouraged civil servants to run for office despite rules that forbid civil servants from doing so. Thus, of
UMNO’s 35 candidates in the 1955 election, 28 were civil servants, and the first two Prime Ministers of independent Malaysia were career administrators.77

Although this alliance was dominated by the British during the early years of the Emergency, British officials began to actively involve Malay politicians and civil servants as independence approached. By independence in 1957, UMNO politicians and civil servants had gained control of the state but continued to collaborate with the British in their military and state-building efforts. The British remained in charge of the Commonwealth military force, which continued to wage war against the communist guerrillas until 1960. In addition, British officials provided technical and administrative support to Malaysia. At independence, 83 percent of senior civil service posts were still held by Europeans, a total that remained over 53 percent three years later and was not reduced to zero until the tenth anniversary of independence.78 In this way, the strong alliance between British and Malay officials helped enforce a long-term and concerted effort to reform and strengthen the state even after independence.

Uganda

Both Botswana and Malaysia provide evidence that political crises can create openings for the successful implementation of state-building reforms by transforming the cost of reform, readjusting domestic power relations, and creating consensus. Yet, other cases clearly show that crises need not be developmental and can in fact prove very detrimental to the well-beings of the population. In an attempt to shed light on the factors that shape the impact of crises, this final section briefly investigates one case in which crisis failed to spur state-building reforms: Uganda.

While exiled in London, Seretse Khama befriended another exiled chief, Edward Mutesa II of Uganda. Similar to Botswana, the vacancy left by Mutesa’s forced absence prompted a
political crisis during which the largest and most powerful chiefdom of colonial Uganda lacked a system of government for two years. Unlike Botswana, however, the crisis did not instigate state building but instead institutionalized a deadlock and ultimately led to destructive violence.

Mutesa II, the Kabaka (king) of the Buganda, was exiled from colonial Uganda in 1953 for openly opposing colonial proposals to merge Uganda with Kenya and Tanganyika. Africans in Uganda feared that they would lose power to Kenya’s white settlers if such a merger occurred, thereby becoming another Rhodesia or South Africa. While using the merger issue as the point of departure for his critique, the Kabaka’s protests also demanded greater Bugandian autonomy from the rest of colonial Uganda. Indeed, the Kabaka demanded independence for Buganda as a way of avoiding the merger, thereby placing the prospect of a unified Uganda in jeopardy.\(^79\) After two years of forced exile, an agreement was reached between the British and the Kabaka that allowed the latter to return and take up his official functions. By this time, the possible merger of Britain’s East African states was no longer under consideration, and the agreement left Buganda considerable political autonomy within a unified Ugandan state.\(^80\) In the end, the 1955 agreement did not prove to be much of a resolution, as conflict over Buganda’s special autonomy fueled conflict and violence for decades afterwards.\(^81\)

Although similar to the Ngwato crisis, the Buganda crisis differed from that in colonial Botswana in two important ways, and both highlight potential reasons why the crisis in Botswana promoted state building while that in Uganda created a deadlock that failed to increase the state’s developmental capacity. First, the Buganda crisis did not transform power relations to the same extent because it sparked a movement and a powerful party in support of the Buganda monarchy. The party, the Kabaka Yekka, dominated Buganda politics and fought to maintain the monarchy and feudal elements within the traditional system of rule. Even more, the formal
resolution of the crisis strengthened the rights of traditional elites within Buganda and therefore caused chiefs in other regions to demand similar rights.\textsuperscript{82} As such, one outcome of the crisis was the reassertion of chiefly rights, which worked against the construction of a larger, more bureaucratic, and more infrastructurally powerful state.

Second, the resolution of the Buganda crisis did not promote broad consensus in favor of state reforms. As mentioned previously, the crisis mobilized conservative elements within Buganda and caused them to demand that Buganda increase its political autonomy from the rest of Uganda. Although many non-Buganda were sympathetic to Buganda demands for the return of Mutesa II during his exile, they strongly resented the push to increase the power and autonomy of Buganda’s regional government, as they already disliked the special position that Buganda had maintained within the colonial system of rule since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. In fact, Uganda’s first political parties organized partially in opposition to Buganda’s demands for autonomy and actively sought the construction of a stronger, more centralized state that would usurp all powers from Buganda.\textsuperscript{83} In this way, the crisis actually increased tension between competing camps instead of forging greater political consensus at the national level as in Botswana.

All in all, because the Buganda crisis mobilized both modernizing and traditional factions and because it decreased political consensus, the crisis made Mutesa II a powerful symbol of traditionalism and Buganda autonomy, the reverse of Seretse Khama, who helped orchestrate the demise of rule through chiefs and the construction of a unified Botswana. Although many particular factors help to explain this outcome, the lack of a common threat appears to be among the most influential. Indeed, the proposal to merge Britain’s East African colonies never got off the ground, and the crisis therefore transformed into one that simply pitted national modernizers
against regional traditionalists without providing any common need for collaboration. Alternatively, the South African threat in Botswana and the communist insurgency in Malaya pushed formerly oppositional groups into the same camp and created a common need for a powerful and centralized state.

Conclusion

In this article, I provide a theoretical framework on crisis and institutional change and propose that crises have the potential to promote radical and rapid institutional change by transforming the relative cost of institutional reform, promoting political consensus, and readjusting power relations. Using this framework, I explore whether or not these crisis-induced mechanisms help to explain relatively rapid and successful state building in Botswana and Malaysia. I find that extensive state-building reforms began during crises and that these crises sparked political reforms by transforming the relative costs of institutional reform. In Botswana, a succession crisis caused the breakdown of chieftain administration. As a consequence, the colony required a new form of rule, and increasing-return mechanisms broke down. In addition, fear of possible transfer to South Africa and British public opinion increased the interests of both British officials and Botswana elites to create a larger, more centralized, and more effective state. The Malaysian crisis began with Japanese occupation during World War II and erupted into a communist guerrilla war. The Japanese occupation destroyed state institutions and thereby decreased the relative costs of radical state reforms. In addition, it demonstrated Britain’s inability to control key economic and political interests and therefore created incentives for the colonizers to construct a more powerful state. The Emergency, in turn, reinforced these reforms by making a powerful state necessary for the survival of a non-communist Malaysia.
I also find that the crises adjusted power relations and thereby facilitated state reform by empowering actors in favor of state reforms while weakening conservative regional elites with entrenched interests in the status quo. In Botswana, the chiefdom succession crisis weakened chiefs and empowered Seretse Khama and his BDP. During both colonialism and afterwards, Khama and BDP politicians implemented reforms that placed ultimate power within the central state institutions. The Malaysian crises also empowered modernizing political elites and weakened more conservative regional elites. Because the Emergency required legal-administrative expansion and centralization and because the British desired such reforms, British colonial officials shifted their support from sultans to administrators, and the administrative elites used their new-found powers to force through reforms that they supported but that the sultans disliked.

Finally, the crises promoted extensive state building in both Botswana and Malaysia by creating a greater consensus in favor of reform. The cases provide evidence that crises helped forge a consensus among colonial officials and reformist indigenous elites. This consensus, in turn, caused active collaboration and allowed the combination of resources, effort, and know-how for the implementation of state-building reforms.

Overall, both cases provide evidence that crises can break institutional inertia, provoke reform, and thereby cause institutional change. The findings support past claims about punctuated equilibrium and critical junctures. Moreover, they make important contributions to the literature by showing that crises are specific events that can spark rapid institutional change and, in particular, by highlighting crisis-induced mechanisms that help explain why critical events actually promote change. Because the analysis is limited to Botswana and Malaysia, the findings are not broadly generalizable. Yet, past works suggest that these findings are widely
applicable: state building in Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—arguably the most spectacular cases of state building and state-led development in the 20th century—also were spurred by crises.

Despite evidence that crises promoted state building and development in Botswana, Malaysia, and East Asia, crises need not be constructive and can have very negative effects on state building and development. I analyze Uganda in an attempt to investigate conditions that produced a destructive crisis. In comparison to the other cases, the crisis in Uganda failed to produce any sort of political consensus and actually worsened divisions between different factions. In addition, the crisis did not redistribute power in favor of groups who desired state reforms. One factor that helps to explain these different outcomes is the extent to which the crises posed common threats: unlike Botswana and Malaysia, no external aggressor or internal rebellion simultaneously threatened colonial officials, national politicians, and traditional elites. As a consequence, the crisis neither drove opposing groups to pursue a common goal nor created an impetus to create a more effective state. The comparison therefore suggests that a threat to national existence is the main condition separating developmental crises from their more destructive counterparts.

Notes


Lange and D. Rueschemeyer. *States and Development*.


Becker and Goldstone, How Fast Can you Build a State?


The World Bank has compiled the data on governance between 1996 and 2005 by combining data from 31 sources. Several of their data sources are surveys of individuals and domestic firms with first-hand knowledge of the governance situation in the country. They also use the perceptions of country analysts at the major multilateral development agencies. Other data sources from NGOs, as well as commercial risk rating agencies, base their assessments on a global network of correspondents typically living in the country they are rating. Detailed information about these indicators is available at:


and Cultural Change among the Malays, 1900-1940. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, p. 79.


23 Hermans, Towards Budgetary Independence, pp. 102.


28 “Batswana” is a noun referring to people from Botswana.


33 Picard, Administration Reorganisation, pp. 90.


35 In 1956, Tshekedi Khama began interviews with Anglo-American for mineral concessions in order to make the colony financially independent and thereby “to resist transfer to the Union [of
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Singapore did not join Malaya until 1961, when the term Malaysia was formulated. In 1965, Singapore separated from the rest of Malaysia and remains an independent country. Outside of the Malay Peninsula and on the northwest coast of the island of Borneo, the British also controlled Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah), both of which merged with Malaya at their independence from Great Britain in 1963, thereby forming present-day Malaysia.


Stubbs, Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare, pp. 16.


70 Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers from Decentralization to Malayan Independence, 1930-1957,* pp. 204.


74 Tilman, *The Public Services of the Federation of Malaya*, pp. 56.


