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Introduction to Symposium on Critical Junctures and Historical Legacies

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Building Blocks and Methodological Challenges: A Framework for Studying Critical Junctures

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The study of critical junctures and their legacies—a tradition of research launched by Lipset and Rokkan¹—has been an abiding concern among scholars engaged in macro-comparative analysis. The critical juncture framework yields valuable insights into trajectories of political change in which major episodes of innovation are followed by the emergence of enduring institutions.

This essay introduces a symposium that explores methodological challenges faced by research in this tradition. The project originated in a roundtable at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, convened to recognize the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Shaping the Political Arena*.² However, the initiative quickly became much more than that. Discussion at the roundtable itself—and ongoing exchanges at the APSA meetings—sparked important questions and disagreements, and other scholars joined the debate. The result is the present collection of essays.

These nine contributions address diverse substantive domains, from state formation and political regimes to party systems, neoliberal transformation, religion, law, economic growth, and colonial rebellion. Most focus on Latin America, but some discuss Europe and the United States. Some analyze developments since the 1980s, while others reach back to the 19th century. Some authors reflect on their own previously published research, others present new research, and still others debate issues raised within the symposium.

The symposium has been guided by what we will call a critical juncture framework. This framework has been highly productive—for many scholars over several decades. As noted, it originated in the pioneering work of Lipset and Rokkan,³ and many years later Collier and Collier offered an approach to

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¹ Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

² Collier and Collier 1991.

³ Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

synthesis.⁴

This framework is appropriate for studying domains where institutions are self-perpetuating, as they sometimes are, for example, in the areas addressed by the two studies just cited—party systems and trade union movements. At one level, the guiding questions are straightforward: (1) Why do these institutions come into existence—i.e., what happens at the critical juncture? (2) How does their self-perpetuating character operate—i.e., the legacy of the critical juncture? The goal of the framework is to clarify the analytical claims made in explanations of this particular dynamic of discontinuity, followed by continuity. It is not intended as a general model of political change, but rather as an approach especially helpful in understanding this common—yet hardly ubiquitous—trajectory of innovation and stability.

This introduction to the symposium offers an overview of the framework. It presents the core idea of a *critical juncture* and turns next to the *antecedent conditions* and the *cleavage or shock* that precede a critical juncture. It then addresses the *mechanisms of production* that yield the legacy, and finally the *legacy* proper. The two fundamental components are the critical juncture and its legacy, and we discuss those steps in more detail than the others. For every step, the discussion explores key issues and debates, drawing attention to the distinct methodological challenges involved in assessing critical juncture hypotheses. It draws on a running example, *Shaping the Political Arena*, as well as many illustrations from the nine essays in the symposium.⁵ Table 1 summarizes key points.

Critical Juncture

A critical juncture is (1) a major episode of institutional innovation, (2) occurring in distinct ways, (3) and generating an enduring legacy. It may occur in distinct ways either in the sense of contrasts among cases in comparative analysis, or based on comparing outcomes in a single case with counterfactual alternatives. All episodes of institutional innovation are potentially of interest to social scientists, but the focus here is on those that leave an enduring legacy.

The critical juncture in *Shaping the Political Arena*, for example, is the “incorporation period” in eight Latin American countries, defined as the first sustained and at least partially successful attempt by the state to support and shape an institutionalized labor movement. Major innovations include legalization of unions, creation of an industrial relations system that structures the activities of unions, and institutionalization

⁴ Collier and Collier 1991. The study of critical junctures is one component of the larger enterprise of comparative-historical analysis. For overviews, see Skocpol 1984; Collier 1998; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; and Mahoney and Thelen 2015.

⁵ I.e., Tarrow, Roberts, Kaufman, Boas, Scully, Domínguez, Mazza, Gould, and Dunning. In the footnotes, the contributions of these authors to the symposium are all dated 2017.

Table 1: Critical Juncture Framework

	Antecedent Conditions	Cleavage or Shock	Critical Juncture	Mechanisms of Production	Legacy
Overview	Diverse features of economy, society, and politics. May include the legacy of prior critical junctures. Source of rival hypotheses for explaining outcomes attributed to subsequent critical juncture.	Critical juncture routinely seen as growing out of a fundamental societal or political <i>cleavage</i> : center-periphery, church-state, land-industry, owner-worker. In some cases should be called a shock: debt crisis of the 1980s, 9/11 attack in 2001.	Major episode of institutional innovation that generates an enduring legacy. Examples: Neoliberal transformation, innovation in legal system, restructuring of church-state relations, boundary-definition in new states, creating new institutional structures for labor unions.	Steps through which the legacy emerges. In some cases, the features of the critical juncture map directly onto legacy. In others, complex reactive sequence. Increasing returns as causal mechanism.	Durable, stable institutions. Mechanisms of reproduction. i.e., sources of stability that sustain the legacy. Relevant causal concepts include self-replicating causal structure, freezing, lock-in, stickiness, and path dependence. Rival hypotheses: "Constant causes." A distinctive kind of rival hypothesis.
Issues and Debates	(1) Contingency v. determinism. Can "critical antecedents" strongly shape the distinct forms taken by the critical juncture? Challenge to idea that critical juncture itself is characterized by contingency.	(1) Danger of conflation. Distinguishing between cleavage or shock and the critical juncture itself. E.g., not the "9/11 critical juncture" in the U.S., but the "post-9/11 critical juncture." (2) Cleavages and shocks do not necessarily produce a critical juncture. Likewise, a critical juncture could occur without a prior cleavage or shock.	(1) Contrasts in the critical juncture. What are the different ways in which a critical juncture occurs? (2) Establishing equivalence among diverse historical episodes. (3) Synoptic versus incremental change. (4) Contingency v. determinism. Contingency a defining feature of critical junctures?	(1) The question of hindsight. How much is needed to evaluate a reactive sequence? What research strategies are appropriate if hindsight is insufficient?	(1) Danger of conflation. When is a juncture "critical"? (2) The question of hindsight. How much time is needed to evaluate the legacy? (3) Can chronic political <i>instability</i> be interpreted as a <i>stable</i> legacy? (4) Contingency v. determinism. Is the self-replicating causal structure of the legacy inherently deterministic?

of distinct types of relations between unions and political parties.

Other critical junctures discussed in this symposium include neoliberal transformation in Latin America,⁶ restructuring of church-state relations in 19th century Europe,⁷ fundamental innovation in the U.S. legal system following the 9/11 attack,⁸ boundary-definition of new states in 19th century Latin America,⁹ and wars of independence in Spanish America.¹⁰

Analysis of transformations such as these raises four issues.

(1) *Contrasts in the Critical Juncture*. A key idea is that the critical juncture takes distinct forms in different cases. In analyzing the incorporation periods, *Shaping the Political Arena* compares cases that saw demobilization and control

under an authoritarian regime, as opposed to political mobilization and a progressive/left orientation under a democratic regime. Among these latter cases, key further contrasts emerged in the role of the peasantry and in traditional versus populist parties. In this symposium, Roberts contrasts conservative-led neoliberal reforms to those led by populist or center-left parties,¹¹ Gould juxtaposes liberal reforms that attacked or promoted Protestant and Catholic religious authorities,¹² and Domínguez distinguishes between insurrectionary and loyalist behavior toward the Spanish Crown. In these four studies, the contrasts are of interest in themselves and play a key role in explaining contrasts in the legacy.

(2) *Bounding the Concept of Critical Juncture*. The fact that the critical juncture occurs in distinct ways in different cases can pose a challenge to maintaining conceptual equivalence. It is essential to map out the critical juncture in a precise way, such that, notwithstanding contrasts in how it occurs, it

⁶ Roberts 2017.

⁷ Gould 2017.

⁸ Tarrow 2017.

⁹ Mazzuca 2017.

¹⁰ Domínguez 2017.

¹¹ Roberts 2017.

¹² Gould 2017.

is still plausibly the *same* critical juncture. This requires careful delineation of concepts and sensitivity to contrasting historical contexts.

The challenge of establishing equivalence among diverse historical episodes is illustrated by the comparison of incorporation periods in *Shaping the Political Arena*. Close attention must be given to definitions, and in that book many definitions are presented in a Glossary. One central issue is the difficulty of comparing episodes that occur in three different decades, depending on the country, and in quite different national contexts. Another challenge results from conflicting historical interpretations. For example, specialists in Argentine politics raise the question of whether the incorporation period actually began in the 1930s, rather than the 1940s under Perón. In parallel, the initial two years of the second Leguía administration in Peru, 1919 to 1920, also saw significant state initiatives toward labor, raising again the question of whether an incorporation period was occurring. On balance, the evidence suggested that neither of these was an incorporation period.¹³ The careful weighing of evidence in light of clearly-established conceptual boundaries again and again proves to be crucial.

In tackling these tasks, Collier and Collier employ an elaborate cross-case comparison of eight countries. However, the book also takes very seriously a large number of analyses focused on single cases, each involving only one of the eight countries. These studies make what is in effect (without using the term) a single-case critical juncture argument.¹⁴ The non-comparative studies are a key source of insight for the eight-country analysis of the critical junctures and nicely demonstrate the interconnection between single-country and multi-country work on this topic.

(3) *Synoptic versus Incremental Change*. The critical juncture may be a *concentrated* episode of “synoptic” policy innovation, as with some of the episodes of neoliberal transformation over the past few decades. Alternatively, the change may occur over a more *extended* episode and be incremental, consisting of smaller steps that eventually add up to a major transformation.¹⁵

The contrasting emphasis on change that is synoptic and concentrated, versus incremental, might appear to reflect a major analytic divide among scholars. However, unsurprisingly, this may be more a matter of gradations between these alternatives. What is essential here is close empirical attention to the direction, scope, and pace of change.

Overall, the following points can be made about synoptic versus incremental change. (a) Obviously, both are important. (b) If change is synoptic, key questions are: *when* do these policy breakthroughs occur, *why* do they occur, and *what* immediate events trigger them? (c) The goal of the critical juncture framework is to address these questions of *when*, *why*, and *what*. This is not a general model of political change, but rather a model of a particular type of change. (d) Scholars must avoid naïvely imagining that they are analyzing synoptic

change, when in fact it may be incremental. (e) The main focus of the critical juncture framework is indeed on synoptic change, as illustrated by *Shaping the Political Arena*.¹⁶ (f) However, as Tarrow and Kaufman argue,¹⁷ incremental change also opens up many possibilities for research on critical junctures, and Roberts emphasizes that the relationship between discontinuous and incremental change is an area that calls for further exploration.¹⁸

(4) *Contingency versus Determinism*.¹⁹ Some scholars view the uncertainty of outcomes and substantial degrees of freedom in actor choices as a defining feature of critical junctures.²⁰ For them, it is precisely this contingency that is seen as making the critical juncture a point of inflection. For example, in this symposium, Kaufman argues that “demonstrating the contingency of actions is central to the identification of critical junctures.”²¹ Other scholars view critical junctures more deterministically.²²

In the concluding essay of this symposium, Dunning considers these issues of contingency and determinism to be a central challenge in research on critical junctures.²³ He argues that this challenge is best addressed by avoiding preconceived notions that favor either contingency or determinism. Scholars should make inferences about these alternatives based on carefully executed comparative-historical research, using tools such as process tracing.

Leading Up to the Critical Juncture

We now examine the two steps that precede the critical juncture: the *antecedent conditions* and the *cleavage or shock*.

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent conditions encompass diverse features of economy, society, and politics that set the parameters for subsequent change. Some antecedents that are especially salient derive from earlier critical junctures. In Lipset and Rokkan²⁴ and in Scully,²⁵ this involves the structure of the party system as it evolved across multiple critical junctures. In parallel, Mazzuca’s critical juncture of state formation in the mid-19th century created antecedent conditions that are important for other scholars who study critical junctures in the 20th century.²⁶

¹⁶ Collier and Collier 1991, 11-12, 27-28, 36.

¹⁷ Tarrow 2017; Kaufman 2017.

¹⁸ Roberts 2017.

¹⁹ The meaning of contingency intended here is in key respects parallel to that of Mahoney (2000, 514). His definition encompasses both the agency of particular individuals, and also situations involving explanations of “events that are too specific to be accommodated by prevailing social theories.”

²⁰ Mahoney 2000, 507-508, 510-511; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 343, 348; Roberts 2014, 6-7; Bernhard 2015, 978; Capoccia 2015, 147-148, 150-151.

²¹ Kaufman 2017.

²² Slater and Simmons 2010.

²³ Dunning 2017.

²⁴ Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

²⁵ Scully 2017.

²⁶ Mazzuca 2017.

¹³ Collier and Collier 1991, 142-143, 155.

¹⁴ Collier and Collier 1991, 4, n. 1, cites several dozen such studies.

¹⁵ Tarrow 2017.

Mazzuca's critical juncture yields sharp contrasts in the relative predominance within each country of dynamic core areas and backward peripheries. These contrasts, in turn, have major implications for the degree to which "labor surplus" economies emerge—which is a key issue in studies by Scully, Collier and Collier, and Roberts that are concerned with trade union politics.²⁷

Antecedent conditions are an important source of rival hypotheses for explaining the outcomes attributed to the critical juncture. For example, Gould offers a detailed discussion of competing explanations vis-à-vis his critical juncture hypothesis.²⁸ In parallel, *Shaping the Political Arena* treats the structural attributes of Argentine society and economy both before and after the incorporation period as a rival explanation in explaining the legacy.

(1) *Contingency versus Determinism*. Antecedent conditions play an important role in debates about contingency versus determinism in the critical juncture. Slater and Simmons use the label "critical antecedents" to underscore the influence of this earlier phase on subsequent developments.²⁹ They argue that such critical antecedents both affect the options that are confronted during critical junctures and condition the long-term outcomes that follow. They explicitly present this suggestion as a counterweight to arguments that contingency is a defining feature of critical junctures.³⁰ Other authors, by contrast, argue against determinism, but as a substantive finding rather than a question of definition. Gould emphasizes that some analyses of critical junctures may be "overly deterministic,"³¹ and Mazzuca explores contingency in the critical juncture of state-formation and national boundary demarcation in 19th century Latin America, involving "paths not taken," yet almost taken.³²

This idea of critical antecedents can be explored by reviewing arguments in *Shaping the Political Arena* about the earlier "structure of the oligarchic state," i.e., the contrasting degree of rural elites' control over work relations in the rural sector, along with their varying leverage within the state. Some cases began to see the loss of such control and widespread peasant mobilization, whereas in others traditional control of property and work remained firmly in place. Collier and Collier found that, to a substantial degree, these contrasting antecedent conditions could be mapped onto differences in the incorporation period.³³ They make no claim of a deterministic relationship, but maintain that this is an important source of insight into why labor incorporation occurred the way it did in each country.³⁴

"Antecedent conditions" might possibly be seen as a dangerously broad category that encompasses too much. However, knowledge of antecedent conditions is essential for explaining the distinct ways the critical juncture occurs across cases, addressing debates about contingency and determinism, and identifying potential rival explanations.

Cleavage or Shock

Critical junctures are routinely seen as growing out of a fundamental societal or political *cleavage*. Lipset and Rokkan's four cleavages are center-periphery, church-state, land-industry, and owner-worker.³⁵ These cleavages are likewise important for many other authors: center-periphery is pivotal for Mazzuca,³⁶ church-state for Gould and Scully,³⁷ and owner-worker for Scully.³⁸ However, in some cases the precipitating event should be called a *shock*, as with the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s,³⁹ and the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States.⁴⁰

(1) *Danger of Conflation*. It is important not to conflate the cleavage or shock with the critical juncture itself, the latter being specifically an episode of institutional innovation. For example, one might think of 9/11 as a major critical juncture in modern U.S. history. But instead, in Tarrow's analysis,⁴¹ 9/11 is a shock the *triggers* a critical juncture, which in his view involves major innovation in the legal system. One would refer not to the "9/11 critical juncture," but rather to the "post-9/11 critical juncture."

An extended illustration of a cleavage is provided in *Shaping the Political Arena*. With varying timing across countries, we observed rising class conflict in urban areas and modernized enclaves of export production—along with the emergence of an organized labor movement and the radicalization of many worker organizations, accompanied in several countries by dramatic episodes of insurrectional strikes. These developments led to ongoing debates on the "social question," i.e., how to accommodate this new political and economic actor, and these debates laid some of the groundwork for the later initiatives of the critical juncture—i.e., the incorporation period.

Do cleavages and shocks always produce a critical juncture? Scholars might run the risk of assuming that a dramatic cleavage or a strong shock will necessarily do so. Yet this is not the case. For instance, Collier and Collier argue that the Great Depression of the 1930s—as dramatic as it was—did not directly contribute to the political dynamics analyzed in their book.⁴² Kaufman likewise suggests that the Great Recession of 2008-2009 might not have as important an impact as is sometimes imagined.⁴³

²⁷ Scully 2017; Collier and Collier 1991; Roberts 2017.

²⁸ Gould 2017.

²⁹ Slater and Simmons 2010.

³⁰ Slater and Simmons 2010, 888-892.

³¹ Gould 2017.

³² Mazzuca 2017.

³³ Collier and Collier 1991.

³⁴ Along similar lines, other scholars have argued that critical junctures combine structure and agency. See Thelen 1999, 396; Thelen 2004, 30-31; Soifer 2012; and Conran and Thelen 2016, 62.

³⁵ Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 47.

³⁶ Mazzuca 2017.

³⁷ Gould 2017; Scully 2017.

³⁸ Scully 2017. Going beyond Lipset and Rokkan's four cleavages, Scully also addresses the landlord-peasant cleavage.

³⁹ Roberts 2017.

⁴⁰ Tarrow 2017.

⁴¹ Tarrow 2017.

⁴² Collier and Collier 1991, 769-770.

⁴³ Kaufman 2017.

Overall, cleavages and shocks play a key role in this framework. They are closely connected with the critical juncture, but should not be confused with it. Dramatic shocks may or may not lead to institutional innovation that would constitute a critical juncture.

From Critical Juncture to Legacy

A key claim in the critical juncture framework is that this major episode of institutional innovation generates an enduring legacy. In short: no legacy, no critical juncture. The credibility of a critical juncture hypothesis hinges in part on how well this claim can be supported.

Mechanisms of Production

The legacy often does not emerge directly from the critical juncture. Instead, we observe steps that occur in-between and are important in shaping the legacy. The concern here is with the *mechanisms of production* that generate the legacy.

Sometimes, in fact, the character of the legacy may flow directly from the critical juncture. In the Latin American experience with state formation analyzed by Mazzuca,⁴⁴ the settling of national borders both brought the critical juncture to a close and immediately produced the legacy: distinctive territorial configurations of dynamic core regions and backward peripheries.

Yet in many cases we observe complex steps between critical juncture and legacy. As discussed in the example of labor incorporation, sometimes the critical juncture involves a move to the left or to the right of the political spectrum. This may be followed by a sequence of what Collier and Collier refer to as “reactions and counter reactions,”⁴⁵ and what Mahoney more elegantly calls a “reactive sequence.”⁴⁶ For example, a move to the left under a more-or-less democratic regime might be followed by a move to the right under an authoritarian regime, followed in turn by a move to the center or center-left under a new democratic regime.

In the literature on critical junctures, the causal mechanisms in this step have not been conceptualized as elaborately as those accounting for the ongoing stability of the legacy (see below). However, Pierson’s idea of *increasing returns* is highly relevant here, because it is specifically about change and not about stability—i.e., about the process through which patterns come to be locked in.⁴⁷

(1) *Hindsight*. A pattern of reactive sequences produces important methodological challenges. If the legacy emerges not directly but in zig-zag steps, how is one to know when the reactive sequence has been completed? Might the analyst misinterpret one step in the sequence as an enduring legacy? A major debate in this symposium, between Roberts and Boas,⁴⁸ focuses precisely on this issue: how much hindsight is needed before the analyst can conclude that an enduring legacy has

been established, and what research strategies are appropriate if hindsight is insufficient?

The issue of hindsight can be illustrated with *Shaping the Political Arena*. If the incorporation period involved authoritarian rule and is to a great degree control-oriented, it was followed by a political opening and complex changes in government and regime. These changes in turn shaped and reshaped union-party-state relations. In another pattern, if incorporation involved a move to the left and mobilization, it might be followed by a move to the right and subsequently a shift back to the center-left. Given when their book was written, Collier and Collier benefitted from extended hindsight in analyzing these shifts. By contrast, in his discussion of Roberts’ book,⁴⁹ Boas points out that Roberts has more limited hindsight in analyzing reactive sequences.⁵⁰

Overall, these reactive sequences are not found in all cases. Still, the possibility that they may exist places an extra burden on the analyst in terms of judging how much historical perspective is needed for adequate analysis.

Legacy

The legacy is an enduring, self-perpetuating institutional inheritance of the critical juncture that persists and is stable for a substantial period. If a legacy in this sense does not emerge, then the prior episode is not considered a critical juncture.

In parallel with *mechanisms of production* that generate the legacy, scholars also analyze *mechanisms of reproduction* that account for its stability. This analysis involves a distinctive conceptualization of causation. In social science, many causal factors are seen as producing a specific, often short-term, effect that occurs soon after the hypothesized cause. By contrast, in analyzing the legacy of a critical juncture scholars focus on factors that yield a self-reinforcing outcome over a longer time horizon. In a pioneering formulation of this perspective, Stinchcombe called it a *self-replicating causal structure*, involving a specific type of historical cause.⁵¹

Other scholars have used additional terms to underscore the distinctive character of this causal pattern: “freezing,”⁵² “path dependence” and “lock-in,”⁵³ “stickiness,”⁵⁴ and “sensitive dependence on initial conditions.”⁵⁵ Paul David, seeking to underscore the highly predictable unfolding of causal processes, observed that this is a pattern in which “one damn thing follows another,”⁵⁶ and Stinchcombe added the term “sunk costs.”⁵⁷

Stinchcombe contrasts these *historical causes* to *con-*

⁴⁴ Mazzuca 2017.

⁴⁵ Collier and Collier 1991, *passim*.

⁴⁶ Mahoney 2000, 509.

⁴⁷ Pierson 2000, 251.

⁴⁸ Boas 2017; Roberts 2017.

⁴⁹ Roberts 2014.

⁵⁰ Boas 2017.

⁵¹ Stinchcombe (1968, 101-129) calls these both “historical” and “historicist” causes. For present purposes, historical is more appropriate.

⁵² Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 3.

⁵³ David 1985, 332, 334.

⁵⁴ Greer 2008, 219.

⁵⁵ Gleick 1987, 8.

⁵⁶ David 1985, 332.

⁵⁷ Stinchcombe 1968, 120.

stant causes.⁵⁸ This other type of cause operates on an ongoing basis, for example year after year, with the result that one may observe relative continuity or stability in the outcome. However, this continuity is due to the ongoing effect of the constant cause, and this is *not* the pattern of causation posited by the critical juncture framework. Instead, the constant cause is a rival explanation.

It is beyond the scope of this brief introduction to probe the causal mechanisms that underlie these self-replicating causal structures. Clearly, this is a central task for scholars who wish to make claims about critical junctures.

To illustrate the idea of a legacy, in *Shaping the Political Arena* it consists of contrasting relationships among unions, parties, and regime types—relationships that grew out of the critical juncture itself and the reactive sequence that followed. Key questions concerning the partisan affiliation of unions include: Was the union movement organizationally linked to parties of the center or the left? Did these parties hold a majority position in the electoral arena? Were they allowed to win elections and to govern? These patterns were manifested in different types of party systems, including integrative, stalemated, and multi-party polarizing. These political relationships were sustained for a considerable period and had major implications for regime stability. In this example, we definitely observed an enduring legacy, and by that standard the incorporation period was indeed a critical juncture.

An example of the framing of rival hypotheses is provided by *Shaping the Political Arena*—specifically its treatment of alternative explanations for differing levels of strike-proneness and militancy within the labor movement. On the one hand, this is seen as part of the legacy of incorporation. On the other hand, a constant cause is also relevant. Latin American workers employed in isolated export “enclaves”—mines and oilfields, for example—commonly had a high propensity to strike. In some but not all countries, these enclaves were a major part of the export economy. To the degree that there was continuity in this propensity to strike, it could be hypothesized that in some countries it was in part due to the ongoing influence of the enclaves on workers’ strike behavior. This constant cause is a rival explanation vis-à-vis the hypothesis that this outcome is a legacy of the critical juncture.

Gould’s analysis of liberal reforms in 19th century Europe offers another example of this framing of rival hypotheses.⁵⁹ He shows how the strength of liberal parties and the nature of the political regime were a legacy of liberal reform, and he offers a detailed discussion of constant causes that are competing explanations for this legacy.

Additional issues also arise as scholars seek to analyze the legacy.

(1) *Danger of Conflation*. The problem of finding “too many” critical junctures is crucial. As Domínguez has noted, scholars may come up with “wannabe” critical junctures that do not fit the framework.⁶⁰ The credibility of claims about criti-

cal junctures depends on having clear criteria for bounding the concept. To reiterate, if a sustained legacy is not found, then the prior episode of change is *not* a critical juncture. It may be an interesting “juncture,” but one that is not “critical.” As Kaufman puts it, some episodes of institutional innovations might better be characterized as “great transformations” but not as “critical junctures.”⁶¹

(2) *Hindsight*. Given that an enduring legacy is a defining characteristic of a critical juncture, how much historical perspective is needed to establish that it has in fact endured? How long must the legacy last to count as the legacy of a given critical juncture? We must also consider the length of the legacy in relation to the length of the critical juncture.⁶²

The contributors to this symposium disagree about interpreting critical junctures that have occurred in the recent past. Tarrow makes the case that 9/11 triggered a critical juncture in the United States.⁶³ Roberts—advancing a parallel argument but addressing a longer time frame—defends the thesis that market reforms in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s constituted a critical juncture that shaped key features of subsequent party systems.⁶⁴

By contrast, Boas and Kaufman point out that future developments might weaken the case for Roberts’ substantive argument, and they suggest that it is too early to identify the market reforms in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s as a critical juncture.⁶⁵ These debates highlight the challenge of finding an appropriate time horizon for studying processes of change that may still be unfolding.

(3) *Chronic Instability*. Can chronic instability be stable? Given that the stability of the legacy is a key idea, how should analysts evaluate presumed legacies that entail chronic instability? Bernhard has raised this question,⁶⁶ and the issue is doubly important because finding a stable legacy is a requisite for establishing that the prior episode is in fact a critical juncture.

Insight into this issue is found in *Shaping the Political Arena*. The book’s analysis of Argentina suggests the answer can potentially be “yes.” The book draws on O’Donnell’s argument about the legacy of Peronism in Argentina—i.e., the legacy of the Peronist critical juncture. O’Donnell characterizes Argentine politics from the 1950s to the 1970s as an “impossible game.”⁶⁷ He focuses on a specific form of political instability that was highly structured and deeply embedded in political relationships entailed in the Peronist legacy. In this example, the stable legacy did indeed entail chronic instability. Certainly, this issue calls for ongoing attention.

(4) *Contingency versus Determinism*. Some researchers view the critical juncture in terms of contingency, but use a framework of determinism for studying the self-perpetuating

⁵⁸ Stinchcombe 1968, 101-103.

⁵⁹ Gould 2017.

⁶⁰ Domínguez 2017.

⁶¹ Kaufman 2017.

⁶² Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 360-363.

⁶³ Tarrow 2017.

⁶⁴ Roberts 2017.

⁶⁵ Boas 2017; Kaufman 2017.

⁶⁶ Bernhard 2015.

⁶⁷ O’Donnell 1973, Chap. 4.

character of the legacy.⁶⁸ On one level, this makes good sense, given that the ideas of causation employed in discussing the legacy—self-replicating causal structure, freezing, path dependence, and lock-in—certainly suggest a deterministic pattern.

Yet it is possible that the legacy entails causal patterns that are strong enough to yield a substantial interval of persistence, yet are not fully deterministic. Dunning's discussion of Lieberson's interesting argument about path dependence is relevant here.⁶⁹ The legacy consists of a series of self-replicating causal steps; and even if the probability of self-replication at each step is quite high, the cumulative probability quickly drops with each additional step. The field must recognize that these issues demand careful thought and, as Dunning emphasizes, require analytic frameworks that are fully open to discovering both contingency and determinism.

For illustrating these issues of contingency versus determinism *Shaping the Political Arena* can again serve as an example. The domains of trade union politics and political parties—central to the book's argument—are certainly areas where ideas of freezing and sunk costs are routinely applied. Issues of determinism are certainly relevant here, yet one might hesitate in making a strong case that the legacy operates deterministically.

The issue of contingency versus determinism also raises the question: How much is included in the legacy? In *Shaping the Political Arena*, for the purpose of delineating the legacy one might distinguish between (1) the core issues of the multifaceted political relationships involved in the partisan affiliation of unions; as opposed to (2) the implications of these relationships for regime stability during the 1960s and 1970s. Based on the large literature on this period of regime crises and coups, one should definitely hesitate in calling this second set of outcomes inevitable. Thus, No. 1 above might be treated as a central feature of the legacy that has a tighter—though probably not deterministic—causal relationship with the critical juncture, and No. 2 as a secondary feature whose connection with the legacy is of great interest, but should definitely not be treated deterministically.

Conclusion

The critical juncture framework is a road map for analyzing a familiar—but hardly ubiquitous—political phenomenon: episodes of political innovation that leave a sustained and substantial legacy.

This framework encourages a focus on sequence, specifically the steps that lead up to the period of innovation entailed by the critical juncture, and likewise the steps between the critical juncture and the legacy. The framework directs attention to rival explanations and to the possibility that there is no enduring legacy—in which case, by definition, one is not dealing with a critical juncture. The period of innovation may involve incremental change that gradually adds up to substantial innovation, and scholars debate the synoptic as opposed

to incremental character of the innovation. They also ask whether, with sufficient incrementalism, the episode of innovation is not a critical juncture, as conventionally understood. Issues of contingency versus determinism also arise: in analyzing the influence of antecedent conditions on the critical juncture; in conceptualizing the critical juncture itself; and in interpreting the mechanisms of reproduction that account for the stability of the legacy.

The overall merit of this approach can be summarized quite simply: it seeks to bring methodological rigor to the study of large-scale research questions like those addressed by the contributors to this symposium. As scholars look to the future of the critical juncture framework, sustaining and increasing methodological rigor in analyzing such questions is a central priority.

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⁶⁸ Mahoney 2000, 507-508, 510-511; Roberts 2014, 6-7; Bernhard 2015, 978.

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