

MY READATHON 2020: BOOK 3

WHY NATIONS FAIL—Daron Acemoglu & James Robinson

Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marraah Esq.

April 4, 2020

Today marks the second anniversary of the election of President Bio into office. What a coincidence to share with readers my perspectives on my third monthly reading. *Why Nations Fail* will for a long time remain one of my favorite all time book. As a democracy enthusiast, it has tremendously expanded my horizon on nation building or destruction, statehood or state failure and leadership or dictatorship. This book debunked with both historical references and demonstrably credible evidence that *history and geography do not determine the destiny of any nation*. The authors chronicle the development path of Sierra Leone since independence and narrate how colonial leadership laid the foundation stones for extractive political institutions which the sons of the motherland who took over from the colonialists constructed. The social scientist cum economist explained why America, Britain and Botswana are developing every second while Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, North Korea and much of Sub-Saharan Africa are pathetically descending into new levels of impoverishment. They posit that extractive political institutions are largely responsible for the woes of poverty-stricken nations while inclusive political institutions sustain both political and economic successes of leading nations. This is so good a read that I'd recommend that, even if just the portion that relates to Sierra Leone, it be mandatory to be read by every young person from at least 15 to 18 in school.

Personally, I have always held the view that our leadership since independence has done very little to erect strong institutions on which the edifice of nationhood can be etched. Regime after regime has been focused on filling their pockets, giving jobs to their cronies, expanding their political base and sidelining opposition groups, critical voices and shrinking political space for political pluralism. We are still wondering why we are so poor on top of a ground which holds mineral resources enough to transform us and earn us a spot in the league of first nations? It is simply because we have lacked the right leadership. And by leadership, I do not mean the Head of State, in an exclusive sense. We have folks who occupy offices without vision, folks whose only desire is how cut a deal, court their constituents and pander to the desires of their political bases. Since independence our leaders have either killed our best

minds (not literally) or driven them away to foreign nations by their over-indulgence in corruption, nepotism and sheer wanton vandalism of any component of institutionalism and replacing them with only the rituals and paraphernalia of government. Political parties can't fix a nation, only strong institutions can. Democracy is much more than regular or periodic elections, it is about inclusive governance, building and regulating institutions by the rule of law to inspire investor confidence and stimulate creative destruction, innovation and cause rapid social mobility. In essence, where there is a dearth of strong institutions, meritocracy is put to flight. That is why, hardly would one hear about disruptive inventions or ground-breaking innovations of global scale in societies with weak institutions or repressive regimes. This is because in those places, creativity and innovation, fair competition and fundamental rights including property or proprietary rights are suppressed or rebuffed or violated with impunity.

In Sierra Leone, what we need more than anything are institutions stronger than political parties—which are regulated by law and are not subject to the whims and caprices of any political group. That is the only way our development can be sustainable and one regime would not succeed in reversing the gains made by the institutions.

I agree with the authors that radical change in any society does not emerge from the skies, it is a product of dedicated activism, unyielding agitation, persistent demands by either the elites or the masses or a synergy of both.