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Elites, Ideas and the Politics of Inclusive Development

*Tom Lavers
University of Manchester
UK*

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UNRISD ▪ Palais des Nations ▪ 1211 Geneva 10 ▪ Switzerland
info.unrisd@un.org ▪ www.unrisd.org

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Abstract

Recent work on the politics of development and, in particular, the role of political settlements in shaping development outcomes have provided important insights into how power relations that contribute to developmental successes and failures. However, important questions remain regarding how political settlements are formed and maintained over time, as well as the extent to which political settlements determine particular policy choices within policy domains. This paper considers the role that ideas can play in studying the politics of development and the extent to which an analytical focus on ideas might address some of these gaps. Work on political settlements has, for the most part, emphasised explanations based on the material interests of elites, paying little to no attention to the causal role of ideas. This paper first examines the compatibility between Khan's political settlements framework and theoretical work on ideas, arguing that taking ideas seriously requires questioning some of the core ontological assumptions underpinning the political settlements framework. The paper proposes an adapted framework that responds to this challenge and, drawing on three of Manchester's Effective States and Inclusive Development research centre's (ESID) comparative projects, highlights how a focus on elite ideas can deepen our understanding of the dynamics within particular political settlements and policy domains.

Keywords

Ideas; discursive institutionalism; power relations; political settlements

Bio

Tom Lavers is a lecturer in politics and development at the Global Development Institute at the University of Manchester and a researcher in Manchester's Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Research Centre. His research focuses on comparative political economy of development.¹

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Introduction

Ideas or ‘causal beliefs’ (Béland and Cox 2011) – along with material interests, institutions and psychology – are one of the four main modes of explanation in political analysis (Parsons 2007). While political science has been dominated by materialist and institutionalist approaches, those who would deny the causal role of ideas in the social world nonetheless face something of an uphill battle. As Mehta (2011) argues, if ideas were not influential, then the entire professions of marketing, communication and advocacy, and political spin doctors would be obsolete. Likewise,

‘asserting that ideas do not matter would mean that shifting ideals about science, religion, democracy, slavery, colonization, gender, race, and homosexuality, to pick just a few salient examples, either have not appreciably affected how people act or were themselves the product of technological, economic, or other material forces’ (Mehta 2011, p. 24).

The challenge therefore is not really to prove that ideas are important, but to show how ideas can be analysed and to demonstrate the added value of a focus on ideas. This paper aims to make a modest contribution to this debate by assessing how an analytical focus on ideas might be integrated into recent work in the politics of development – particularly the political settlements framework that has attracted much attention of late – and how this deepens our understanding of how political settlements are built and maintained, and in turn shape policy choices and outcomes across different policy domains.

A political settlement ‘refers to the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based’ (Di John and Putzel 2009, p. 4). More precisely, Khan (2010) defines a political settlement in terms of the compatibility between the relative holding power of different elite and non-elite factions, and the distribution of resources resulting from formal and informal institutions. Holding power, meanwhile, is relatively narrowly defined as ‘the capability of an individual or group to engage and survive in conflicts’ and is a product of diverse factors including economic resources, organisational capacity and the ability to absorb costs (Khan 2010:6).

The Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Research Centre’s research programme has sought to test the explanatory power of ‘political settlements’ across a range of sectors and, in doing so, has extended this basic framework in three main areas (Hickey 2013). First, ESID’s framework complements the concept of the political settlement itself, with an analytical focus on particular *policy domains*, examining to what extent the political settlement influences policymaking and implementation in different policy areas and how the political settlement interacts with sector specific political dynamics. Second, ESID’s work includes a stronger focus on the interaction between political settlements – which focus attention almost exclusively on domestic politics – and transnational processes. Third, and most important for this paper, ESID seeks to expand beyond the interests-based focus of the political settlements framework to include a focus on ideas.

The addition of the policy domain extends the framework to enable more fine-grained, sector-specific policy analysis and the transnational dimension addresses a notable oversight of the original political settlements framework. However, the incorporation of ideas involves a more fundamental re-think of the concept of a political settlement and the ontological assumptions that underpin it. The aim of this paper is not just to add on ideas to the existing framework so as to ‘mop up some unexplained

variance in a particular outcome of interest’, but rather to re-think political settlements in acknowledgement that ideas ‘are simultaneously the media through which agents understand the world and the material that constitutes it’ (Blyth 2011:84).

Following this introduction, section 2 examines different theoretical approaches to the analysis of ideas and highlights how these theories necessitate a re-think of the political settlements framework. Section 3 then assesses the potential of this ‘adapted political settlements framework’ to add to our understanding based on three ESID projects, namely those examining natural resources, social protection and gender. Finally, section four concludes.

Conceptualising ideas, elites and politics

The political settlements framework (Khan 2010) and other related approaches to analysing the politics of development (North et al. 2009; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) have been highly influential over the past decade. Though distinct in many ways, these works have a common focus on intra-elite power relations that shape the formal and informal institutions that govern society. This is not to say – as some critics suggest – that the sole analytical focus is on elite politics since the mobilisation of non-elites and the distribution of power within society as a whole remains a central part of these theories. Rather, a focus on elites is justified in terms of these actors’ disproportionate influence on the political system and, ultimately their ‘disruptive potential’ (Kelsall 2018), should they feel that their preferences are not met. Following Di John and Putzel (2009:15), elites principally comprise: the main capitalists in agriculture, manufacturing and services; traditional chiefs, landlords, regional political leaders; traditional and religious leaders; and political party leaders.

Khan and North et al’s work pursue interest-based analyses and pay little to no attention to the causal role of ideas. Khan’s (2010) Political Settlements framework and North’s (2009) Access Orders were conceived as responses to new institutional economics and the limitations that result from focusing exclusively on how institutions shape human behaviour. Thus, the political settlements framework highlights the importance of the power relations that underpin these institutional configurations, but maintain the rational choice and materialist underpinnings of new institutional economics (Hickey 2013; Gray 2016). The result has been described as ‘a mechanical and bloodless view of political life’ based on the ‘economics of politics’, which neglects questions of ideas, actors and legitimacy (Hudson and Leftwich 2014:48).

To the extent that ideas are considered at all, Khan (2010:20, 61) highlights their potential to be used by elites as tools to mobilise political support as a means of achieving their pre-defined interests, but does not acknowledge the potential for ideas to shape those interests. North, Wallis and Weingast (2007:3), meanwhile, do acknowledge that ‘beliefs’ are one constitutive element of the ‘access orders’ that are the focus of their work. Nonetheless, the main analytical use of beliefs in their work is to show particular beliefs can support or hinder institutional enforcement – a usage that fits well in the category of *mopping up unexplained variance*, noted above. This is despite the fact that past work by North has previously argued that the ‘hodgepodge of beliefs, dogmas, sound theories and myths’ (North 1991:485) constrain rationality and provide a potential explanation as to why formal institutions operate differently in different country settings (North 1990; Denzau and North 1994). The explanatory role of ideas has been pushed into the background in North’s later work, it would

seem, as a result of the problematic ontological dilemmas that arose, namely that it is very difficult to maintain the assumptions that underpin a rational choice approach when taking ideas seriously (Blyth 2011).

While these various approaches to studying the politics of development have made significant contributions, there are also clearly gaps. Notably, Khan's (2010) typology of political settlements proposes *Potential Developmental Coalitions* – where power is centralised within the ruling coalition, enabling long time horizons and strong implementation capacities – as the most favourable to economic development. However, the inclusion of 'potential' is a clear acknowledgement that the structural focus of the political settlements framework is not deterministic. While the balance of power between competing interest groups may be a necessary condition for the emergence of a developmental state, it is quite plausible that a Potential Developmental Coalition could ultimately turn out to be predatory. Ultimately, the political settlements framework provides an explanation for some of the constraints faced by political elites, but offers little insight as to why particular policies are chosen over other plausible alternatives (Sen 2012). The proposition analysed in this paper is that taking ideas seriously can not only fill this gap regarding policy choices, but also deepen our understanding of how political settlements are negotiated, maintained and contested. Both Khan (2010) and North et al (2009) focus on the circumstances under which contending interest groups construct institutions that provide social order and stability. However, for ideational analysts it is rather,

'Ideas, whether in the form of free trade doctrines, religious worldviews, schools of legal pedagogy, or laws of the road, [that] are the bases of all such constructions ... [they are] the fundamental media through which agents interpret the world and construct stability in it' (Blyth 2011:96; also Campbell 2004).

Approaches to ideational analysis

Anyone attempting to take the analysis of ideas seriously will very quickly find themselves in tension with the rational choice assumptions that underpin the political settlements framework. Rational choice theories tend to adopt a number of simplifying assumptions that render social actors predictable and thereby enable the creation of a social science modelled on the natural sciences. These assumptions are that actors act rationally in pursuit of their own self-interest and that these interests can be derived from the material context within which they operate (Hay 2011). Individual agency is effectively assumed away, with the result that actors' behaviour becomes a logical consequence of their environment and therefore predictable (Hay 2002). While these simplifying assumptions might be justified as a means to constructing parsimonious theories, they are evidently a major simplification. Most obviously, individuals never have perfect information about the consequences of their actions, but instead must rely on some degree of guesswork in their decision making. If this is accepted, then individuals can never be totally sure what their material interests are or, indeed, how to realise them.

Theorists have responded in different ways to the evident limitations of rational choice theory. A common approach has been – either explicitly or implicitly – to relax some of the assumptions of the rational choice model, but without entirely rejecting them. Such a 'thin variant' of rational choice has

led to ideas and beliefs being incorporated into theories and modelled as cognitive filters that limit or bound rationality and the information available to actors at any one point in time.² Nonetheless, there is a tendency to maintain that ‘real’, material interests do exist and can be identified (by the researcher, if not the individuals themselves), thereby protecting the core assumptions of the model and the potential for predictive, parsimonious theories that they bring. While some research has gone further in integrating ethical commitments, individual beliefs and their interpretation into analysis, this nonetheless necessitates confronting an inevitable trade-off: the more complex the modelling of human motivation, the less parsimonious the resulting analysis (Levi 2009).

From a very different theoretical perspective, critical theorists from Gramsci (1998) to Lukes (2004) have focused on the role that ideas play in manufacturing consent through ideological hegemony. Gramsci argued that while political society rules through force, civil society rules through consent, with bourgeois ideas reproduced and normalised through the media, education and religious institutions, achieving ‘cultural hegemony’. For Gramsci, therefore, prior to revolutionary struggle it is necessary to conduct a ‘war of position’ that will contest hegemonic ideas and reveal to the working class their true interests. While very different in many respects to theories of bounded rationality, this critical approach rests on somewhat similar ontological foundations, namely that real, material interests exist and can be identified, and that ideas limit individuals’ perception of these true interests. This juxtaposition of real and perceived interests raises major epistemological questions regarding how a researcher can step outside the hegemonic ideas of the time to identify a subject’s real interests, as well as ethical questions regarding how to proceed in the face of ‘false consciousness’. A constructivist approach offers an alternative. From this constructivist perspective, there is no such thing as material interests, rather interests are only ever perceived interests that are based on an individual’s subjective interpretation of material reality based on a set of causal beliefs (Hay 2011; Schmidt 2011). This is, broadly speaking, the common thread underpinning the ‘fourth institutionalism’³ that has variously been labelled discursive, ideational or constructivist institutionalism.⁴

One of the logical implications of this constructivist approach is to give a central role in analysis to agency, since an analytical focus on ideas cannot be separated from the actors that formulate and promote ideas and whose perceptions are, in turn, shaped by them (Campbell 2004, Béland 2014). While offering – arguably – a more ontologically consistent approach than the artificial division between real and perceived interests, this constructivist standpoint and the emphasis on individual agency undermines the possibility of a political science modelled on the natural sciences. To many, therefore, this discursive institutionalism ‘risks appearing highly voluntaristic unless the structural constraints derived from the three new institutionalisms are included’ (Schmidt 2011, p. 60). Thus Hay (2011) attempts to find a balance between structure and agency in arguing that,

‘Actors are strategic, seeking to realize certain complex, contingent, and constantly changing goals ... They do so in a context that favors certain strategies over others and must rely on perceptions of that context that are, at best, incomplete and that might often prove to have been inaccurate after the event. Moreover, ideas in the form of perceptions “matter” in a

² Levi 2009:127; Simon 1972; North 1990; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999; Weyland 2009.

³ An addition to the original three: rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996).

⁴ Blyth 2002, 2011; Campbell 2004; Hay 2011; Schmidt 2011.

second sense, for actors are oriented normatively toward their environment. Their desires, preferences, and motivations are not a contextually given fact ... but are irredeemably ideational' (Hay 2011, p. 67).

Ideas, ideational stability and change

One of the common critiques of ideational analysis has been that ideas are vague concepts and, as such, not amenable to analytical usage. It is therefore essential that any attempt to take ideas seriously within the politics of development must clearly differentiate between the many different types of ideas. Several theorists have proposed typologies of ideas, particularly focusing on the level of generality of the ideas.

To take an influential example, Kingdon (1984) proposes three main levels of ideas: policy ideas that offer potential solutions to pre-defined problems; problem definitions that define how a particular social issue should be understood, in the process limiting the scope for potential policy ideas; and public philosophies and the zeitgeist. Here, public philosophies 'are broader ideas that cut across substantive areas', in particular, 'how to understand the purpose of government or public policy in light of a certain set of assumptions about the society and the market' (Mehta 2011, p. 27). Meanwhile, the zeitgeist is 'a set of assumptions that are widely shared [within society] and not open to criticism in a particular historical moment' (Mehta 2011, p. 27).⁵ Though differing in terminology, Hall (1993), Sabatier (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999) and Schmidt (2008) propose largely compatible typologies that highlight the scope or breadth of different types of ideas.

Just as institutions are 'sticky', so ideas or causal beliefs tend to be resistant to change and path dependent.⁶ However, there is likely to be considerable difference in the degree of path dependence between different levels of ideas. While lower level ideas – such as policy ideas – may be relatively amenable to change over a short period of time, changes to philosophies or paradigmatic ideas are akin to religious conversions and are only likely to occur very infrequently. Research has frequently identified shocks and uncertainty as key drivers of ideational change (Blyth 2002). During periods of relative stability, ideas – particularly paradigmatic ideas – are likely to be relatively stable, leading to stability also in actors' perceived interests. However, during episodes of extreme or 'Knightian' uncertainty – for example, during economic crises in which dominant theory fails to provide an explanation of current events – actors are not just unsure about how to achieve their perceived interests, but also about what their interests actually are (Blyth 2002). It is during these periods of extreme uncertainty that paradigmatic ideas are open to revision and actors seek out alternative paradigms that can provide a guide. These rare paradigmatic shifts are, in turn, likely to bring significant institutional changes (Hay 2011).

Much ideational research has examined change in lower level ideas, in particular those influencing policy choices. Kingdon (1984), for example, conceptualises the policy process as comprising a policy stream, a problem stream and a political stream. He suggests that policy change occurs when a policy entrepreneur is able to join together these three streams, providing a politically acceptable policy solution to an existing problem. In a similar vein, Hall (1989) argues that policy change

⁵ Resonating in important respects with Gramsci's concept of hegemonic ideas.

⁶ (Hall 1993, Cox 2001, Blyth 2002).

requires that new ideas combine policy viability, administrative viability and political viability; emphasising that while technical criteria may influence policymaking, politics is also vital.

Integrating ideas into an extended political settlements framework

Based on the preceding discussion, ideas are inherently intertwined with the interests and institutions that are the key elements of Khan's (2010) Political Settlements framework and ESID's extended framework that incorporates the role of policy coalitions within particular policy domains. In this section, I outline the key elements of an *ideational approach* to political settlements analysis. In doing so, the framework necessarily broadens the conception of power from the focus on holding power in Khan's work – the ability of actors and groups to survive in conflict – to incorporate forms of ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, Parsons 2016). Ideational power can be understood as the capacity of actors to shape the beliefs and actions of others, by using ideas as tools of persuasion; imposing preferred ideas and limiting space for alternatives; and by shaping structures and institutions that, in turn, influence the behaviour of other actors (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). As with other forms of power, elites – by definition – have disproportionate control of – though far from a monopoly on – this ideational power.

At the level of the political settlement itself, the formal and informal institutions that are subject to negotiation and contestation between contending factions 'are built on ideational foundations' (Hay 2011, p. 69). Not only do ideas provide the blueprints for these institutions (Schmidt 2008), but ideas continue to exert an independent influence on their development and enforcement (Hay 2011). In this sense, a political settlement is not just defined by a set of institutions that deliver an acceptable distribution of resources, but by some degree of shared ideas between factions that form a constitutive component of the political settlement itself. In turn, the forging of political settlements is also a discursive process involving processes of framing and ideational influence that are used to secure the support of contending factions and shape perceptions of the legitimacy of the political settlement. This point mirrors recent discussion of the role ideas can play as 'coalition magnets', providing a shared sense of meaning and purpose to groups that would otherwise have distinct interests (Béland and Cox 2016). Of particular relevance to the stability and dynamics of political settlements as a whole are likely to be the broadest level of ideas, including: public philosophies and paradigmatic ideas that provide an overarching road map or 'a relatively coherent set of assumptions about the functioning of economic, social and political institutions' (Béland 2005, p. 8). Indeed, research has frequently noted that a key virtue of ideas that act as coalition magnets can be their ambiguity (Béland and Cox 2016) or multi-vocality (Parsons 2016, p. 456) that allows groups with otherwise diverse interests to see value in the same idea.

From an ideational perspective, the interests of the contending factions within a political settlement are not material interests, but perceived interests that are the product of ideational influence (Hay 2011). While these perceived interests may be relatively stable for considerable periods – and as a result may appear to approximate the assumptions of material interests – they are open to change and critical re-evaluation during periods of severe crisis or extreme uncertainty (Blyth 2002). Furthermore, not only do ideas shape interests, but ideas can also be actively used by actors to achieve their perceived interests, for example, with political elites securing the support or acquiescence of

lower level factions through appeals to ideas such as nationalism, development, social justice or religion (Blyth 2002, Schmidt 2008, Khan 2010).⁷

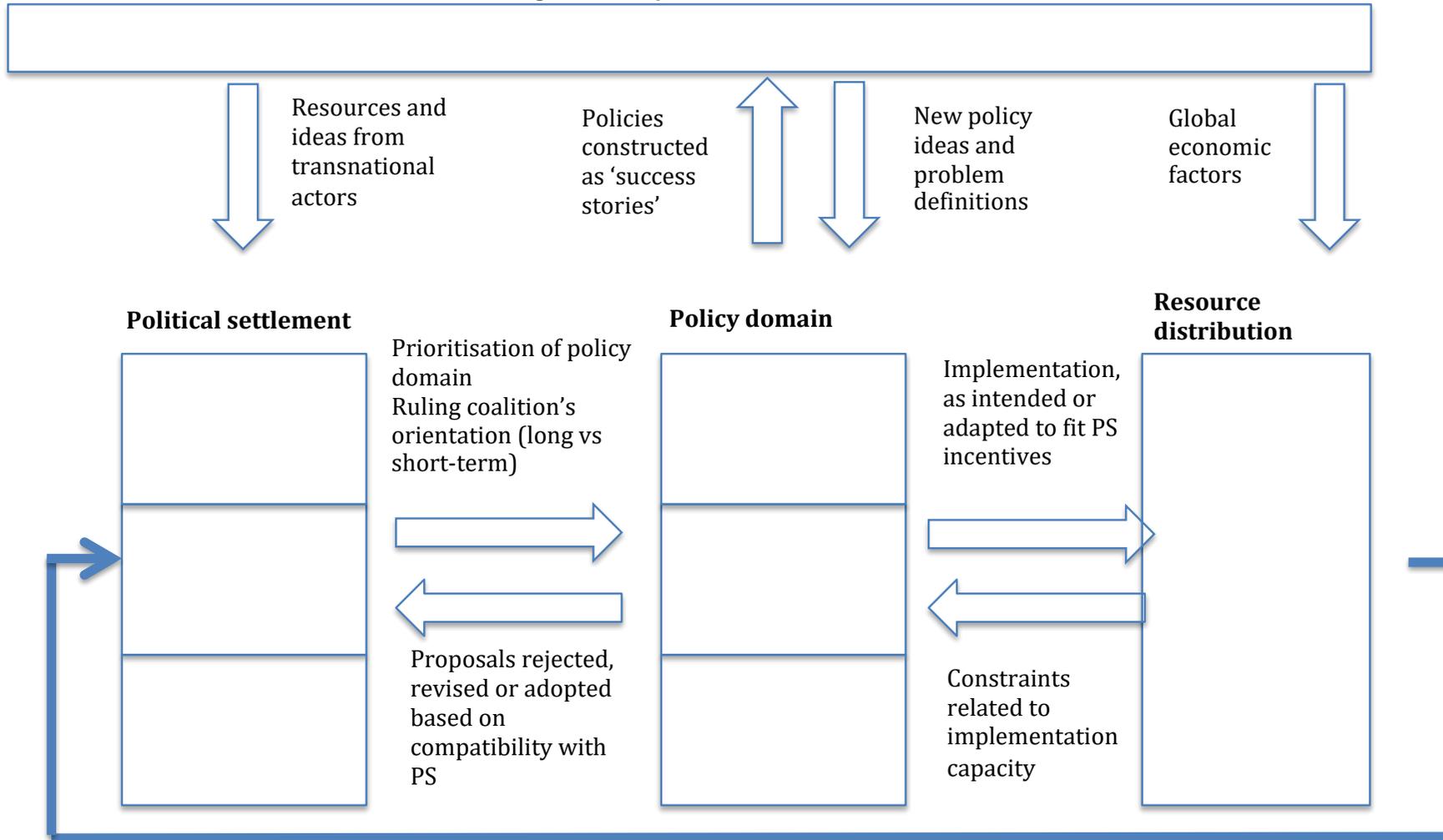
Ideas are likely to be just as influential at the level of the policy domain. Here Sabatier's (1988) Advocacy Coalition Framework provides some useful insights. Advocacy or policy coalitions operate within a particular policy domain and comprise a network of individuals and groups that 'share a set of normative and causal beliefs' and 'engage in a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, p. 120). Sabatier hypothesises that it is what he calls 'policy core' ideas – roughly equivalent to problem definitions, as defined above – that provide 'the fundamental glue of coalitions' within a particular policy domain (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, p. 122), just as paradigmatic ideas have the potential to play a similar role in national level political settlements.

This discussion highlights the importance of a number of key actors that promote new ideas and secure support for policy change. Most obviously, this includes the members of the policy coalitions themselves, who may include politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders, civil society representatives and, in the context of an increasingly transnationalised policy process, key transnational actors such as representatives of international organisations, bilateral donors and international NGOs. This transnational element of domestic policy coalitions in turn provides a link to broader 'epistemic communities' that play important roles as ideas brokers, developing new policy ideas and introducing these ideas into the national level policy domain (Haas 2000, Stone 2008). Furthermore, there remains a vital role within this framework for policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1984) who are able to make the linkages between the policy domain and the political settlement, linking policy debates to pressing political problems, ensuring the political acceptability of new proposals and ensuring that policy coalitions have access to political elites.

Figure 1 summarises these insights and proposes an adapted version of the political settlements framework.

⁷ Blyth 2002; Schmidt 2008; Khan 2010.

Figure 1: Adapted Political Settlements Framework



Intended and unintended impacts:
 - regime legitimisation, negotiated compromise
 - in/stability resulting from change in resource distribution
 - re-interpretation of ideas, perhaps re-evaluation of paradigmatic ideas

Source: revised based on an earlier version in Lavers and Hickey (2016)

Insights into the role of ideas: Research findings

This section synthesises the results of three ESID projects and situates them with respect to this ‘adapted political settlements’ framework, focusing on the insights provided by an analytical focus on ideas. These projects examine: the political drivers of institutional change in mineral and hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia, Ghana, Peru and Zambia (Bebbington *et al.* 2018); the politics of the adoption and expansion of social assistance and health insurance programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia (Lavers and Hickey Forthcoming); and the politics of gender equality, with a focus on domestic violence legislation and girls’ access to basic education in Bangladesh, Ghana, Rwanda and Uganda (Nazneen and Hickey Forthcoming).

The discussion is structured around the three main components of the framework in which ideas play a major role, namely: the political settlement, the transnational sphere and the policy domain.

Ideas within the political settlement

The causal role of ideas in negotiating and sustaining a political settlement is perhaps most clearly apparent in dominant party settings. In Ethiopia and Rwanda – two dominant coalitions – a set of paradigmatic ideas are widely shared and uncontested within the ruling elite, and, arguably, form part of the basis of the political settlements themselves (Lavers 2016a, 2016b).⁸ In both cases, these paradigmatic ideas concern the need for rapid socioeconomic development as a means of ensuring peace and stability. By implication in Rwanda and explicitly in Ethiopia, rapid development is also considered to be a means of ensuring the political legitimacy of the ruling coalition. In each case, some degree of upheaval within the ruling coalition was necessary to achieve this ideational coherence within the ruling coalition and commitment to a programmatic agenda that subsequently emerged. In Rwanda this occurred through a series of defections and expulsions of elites from the ruling coalition in the early 2000s, alongside a series of debates on the future of the country and the national development strategy. In Ethiopia the key event was a split in the ruling party in 2001, which was followed by an explicit attempt by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi – unrivalled in his influence after the split – to make developmentalism ‘a hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense’ (Zenawi 2012, p. 167).

In Bolivia, Ghana, Peru and Zambia bargaining over natural resource rents is a central feature of the political settlement. As such, competing ideas regarding the management of natural resources and, in particular, normative justifications for different revenue sharing arrangements between national, transnational and sub-national groups are key influences on elite bargains and institutional design. One of the most prominent paradigmatic ideas has been that of resource nationalism, which justifies the management and utilisation of natural resources for the benefit of the nation and the people, in direct response to transnational influences of colonialism and post-colonialism (discussed below). Ideas of resource nationalism have clearly influenced institutional design and thereby the political settlement itself through, for example, the inclusion of provisions in national constitutions stipulating that the state is the owner of sub-soil mineral resources and the nationalisation of extractive industries. These ideas have also provided the justification for policies such as channelling natural resource revenues to finance anti-poverty programmes and for tax increases in all four countries during the recent commodity boom.

⁸ The dramatic events of 2018 in Ethiopia, though not covered here, involve questioning many of these core paradigmatic ideas and have contributed to considerable uncertainty and instability.

Resource nationalism has been influential in all of the four cases, but has particularly been employed by elites during periods of dominant party rule in Kaunda's Zambia in the late 1960s and early 1970s and in Peru under the nationalist revolutionary government of 1969-74. More recently, resource nationalism has been a key element of the Movimiento al Socialismo that brought Evo Morales to power in Bolivia in 2006 and indeed a driver of policy under the ruling coalition as it has increasingly moved towards a position of dominance within a competitive setting.

Ideas have also been influential in the contestation over revenue sharing between national and sub-national elites. Discourses of national unity have been deployed by the Bolivian and Ghanaian governments in an attempt to counter sub-national claims and secure a greater proportion of the rents for the national government. In contrast, there are examples in Peru and Bolivia where indigenous groups and their leaders in new areas of resource extraction have contested this focus on national unity with competing ideas on indigenous rights and the need to overcome histories of marginalisation and exclusion. These ideational battles are the basis of institutional agreements regarding the bargains over natural resource rents and, indeed, the terms under which excluded factions are brought into the ruling coalition.

Ideas relating to the governance of natural resources are a major influence on rent allocation and therefore the political settlement itself. In contrast, the findings from the projects on social protection and gender suggest that paradigmatic ideas on either issue had yet to become central features of political settlements, reflecting the comparatively marginal status of these policy domains in elite politics. Arguably one exception here is Rwanda, where the particular history of extreme conflict and gender-based violence has resulted in a strong commitment within the executive to paradigmatic ideas on gender equality. Gender equality has been supported and promoted by the President – by far the most powerful actor in the dominant coalition – resulting in legislation on quotas for female MPs, co-ownership of land and domestic violence legislation. Even here though, while gender equality does appear to enjoy widespread support within the ruling coalition, it is unclear whether ideas on gender equality constitute an integral feature of the political settlement in the sense that a loss of consensus would threaten the legitimacy or stability of the settlement itself. As such, there is a difference between gender equality and the dominant narrative on the need to transcend ethnicity and promote national unity, which is very much an integral feature of the current Rwandan political settlement.

In both Ethiopia and Rwanda, while specific ideas on social protection do not form an integral part of the political settlement,⁹ core paradigmatic ideas regarding the need for rapid and broad-based socioeconomic development did provide part of the justification for the adoption and expansion of health insurance and social assistance programmes. In each country, these paradigmatic ideas are a central reference point for all government policy and exerted a strong influence on the types of policy that are deemed acceptable (see below). Furthermore, commitment to social assistance in Ethiopia and Rwanda can be traced to distributional crises that were perceived by ruling elites as threats to the stability and legitimacy of the ruling coalition itself. While ideas on social protection may not yet be an integral feature of the political settlement, social protection has nonetheless been used to reinforce or protect the settlement.

⁹ In the same way that, for example, a consensus on the welfare state constituted a central feature of the post-Second World War political settlement in western Europe (Melling 1991).

The case studies highlight something of a difference in the types of ideas that underpin different types of political settlement. The paradigmatic ideas underpinning the dominant coalitions in Ethiopia and Rwanda are primarily programmatic in nature. Here a shared commitment to rapid development and an interventionist role for the state in directing this development is central to each political settlement. Bangladesh is somewhat unusual among the competitive settlements in that here also certain shared paradigmatic ideas around modernity and national building have at times overcome the dominant incentives flowing from the competitive clientelist settlement, contributing to a shared elite commitment to raising educational quality.

For the most part, however, the competitive clientelist settlements are perhaps more typical of the ‘modal’ picture of African politics, where politics tends to be based on personality, ethnicity or region, rather than strong programmatic commitments (Van de Walle 2007). Here, as Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 5) have argued, regular elections have become embedded and ‘widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power’, even if there is an extremely unequal playing field between incumbents and opposition. To paraphrase Linz and Stepan (1996) slightly, while elections may not be the ‘only game in town’, they are at least one of the important ones. As such, the idea of electoral competition is one of the defining features of competitive clientelism, whereby elections are seen as a viable means of cycling competing coalitions of elite factions in and out of power, providing a degree of stability within the political settlement (Khan 2010).

The influence of transnational ideas

Transnational ideas have helped shape political settlements in several of the country cases. For example, the ruling coalition in Ethiopia has explicitly sought to emulate developmental states in East Asia, adopting ‘developmentalism’ as a central focus of the political settlement. To a lesser degree, Rwanda has also modelled its approach on Singapore, while Stalinist ideas are among the key ideational commitments of the ruling coalition in Bolivia.

Transnational ideas have been an important influence on all of the policy domains and all of the country cases covered by the research. Over the last 15 years, a range of international organisations, bilateral donors and international NGOs have been involved in a Gramscian ‘war of position’ promoting competing models of social protection (Deacon 2007). The result of these ideational battles has been a growing body of transnational norms, standards and forums on social protection, including the ILO’s Recommendation on National Social Protection Floors (SPF), the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union Social Policy Framework and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Coordination Board (SPIAC-B).

These transnational ideas enter national level policymaking through diverse mechanisms, including direct advocacy, the provision of resources to finance social protection, technical assistance and training workshops, and study tours to see favoured programmes in action. These activities thereby incorporate an epistemic community of academics, think tanks and consultants involved in the generation of evidence and dissemination of ideas about social protection. While the case studies found very little evidence that global standards such as the SPF had been directly influential on national policymaking, arguably they shaped the activities of key transnational actors and provided legitimacy for their advocacy of social protection. Indeed, it is through the activities of these transnational actors – proposing policy ideas, campaigning to

establish pilot programmes and providing resources to finance social protection – that the influence of transnational ideas was most directly apparent.

Likewise, global agreements – from the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women onwards – and evolving transnational norms have been an important influence on the adoption of domestic violence legislation in all the four countries studied. Nonetheless, the pace of the passage of legislation and the extent to which laws were actually enforced are instead shaped primarily by domestic political factors, not transnational influence. Transnational ideas were especially influential in the expansion of girls' access to basic education. Here the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) and the MDGs were of particular importance. Influential transnational ideas – focused on universal access to education, rather than a specific focus on gender equality – alongside transnational finance for education expansion, fit with government concerns relating to the provision of patronage and securing electoral support.

Transnational ideas have also proven to be important influences on the governance of natural resources in all of the case studies. In all four cases – but especially Bolivia and Zambia – the management of extractive industries is tied up with narratives of colonialism and truncated post-colonial transitions, with the result that politicians have sought to frame natural resource governance as a means of asserting sovereignty and limiting dependence. Furthermore, while episodes of nationalisation and privatisation of extractive industries have clearly been linked to national political processes, they have also been influenced by shifts in the dominant economic paradigm at the global level. This is particularly the case with the shift from state-led development to liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s with a particular focus on the privatisation of mining, not least thanks to World Bank advocacy.

The strong role of transnational capital in extractive industries that resulted from this wave of privatisation has meant that natural resource governance is also increasingly influenced by transnational problem definitions and policy ideas. For example, corporate social responsibility has been promoted across the case studies as a policy response to the negative social and environmental effects of mining and one that is consistent with the dominant neoliberal paradigm. This transnational idea, nonetheless, is implemented very differently in different settings depending on its intersection with national political dynamics.

Finally, the research provides valuable insights into the processes through which policy ideas are transferred from one country to another. There is evidence that regional frontrunners in domestic violence legislation influenced legislation in case study countries, with India and Malaysia proving influential in Bangladesh, and South Africa serving as a reference point in Ghana, Rwanda and Uganda. There is also some indication that Bolivia's resource nationalism may have influenced other developing countries in terms of natural resource governance.

Two social assistance policies were particularly influential as they were constructed by influential donors and, to some degree, also governments as success stories that could be replicated in other countries. These are Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and the Kalomo social cash transfer pilot programme in Zambia. Meanwhile, Rwanda's Mutuelles de Santé was proposed by a consultancy firm as a potential policy model for Ethiopia's health insurance scheme. These are, however, quite distinct examples of policy transfer. In the dominant coalitions, while external policy models were clearly influential –

Rwanda's VUP drew heavily on Ethiopia's PSNP, Ethiopia's CBHI scheme is based on Rwanda's Mutuelles de Santé – the government made considerable efforts to integrate these policy models with existing policies and context-specific requirements. In contrast, in Kenya and Uganda where cash transfer pilots were – initially at least – strongly donor-driven, donors drew heavily on Zambia's Kalomo pilot with relatively little adaption of the basic model.

Ideas within the policy coalition

Policy coalitions and the discursive strategies that they employ to secure support for their policy agendas have been particularly influential in the domains of social protection and gender. The relevance of policy coalitions to the natural resources sector is less clear, however. Given how central ideas and agreements over natural resource governance are to the political settlement itself, it is frequently hard to distinguish a policy domain that is distinct from the political settlement. This may reflect Khan's (2010, pp. 21–22) distinction between the negotiation and contestation that occurs in the formation of the political settlement itself (natural resources) and that which occurs within the context of an existing political settlement (social protection and gender).

In Kenya, Uganda and Zambia social assistance policy coalitions closely resemble Sabatier's advocacy coalitions. While these were undoubtedly donor initiated and led in each country, they also comprised politicians, bureaucrats and some civil society representatives. Moreover, they appear to have been held together by some common set of problem definitions and policy ideas. In each case, a key influence was what some respondents described as an almost 'messianic' belief on the part of DFID headquarters regarding the potential of cash transfers. In an attempt to broaden participation and secure the support of key decision makers within government, however, these policy coalitions have frequently adapted their preferred policies and the framing used to justify them.

There are several examples in which incompatibility between ideas and framings acted as a barrier to policy adoption, while shifting the problem framing was vital to securing some degree of elite commitment to social protection programmes. In all of the countries concerns about the dangers of dependency and the deservingness of the poor are extremely influential. These ideas can be seen as part of the zeitgeist or as social norms and are linked to particular problem definitions whereby poor people are considered to be poor, in part, because they are lazy. In Uganda, the conscious switch by the DFID-led policy coalition from defining the problem as one of poverty to one of vulnerability was vital to circumvent government concerns about dependency and secure approval for a pilot programme. In contrast, the attempts of some advocates of social health insurance to frame such schemes in terms of social solidarity in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia have proven to be a poor fit for dominant ideas and perceived interests within clientelist settlements. For the time being this has stalled the expansion of health insurance in those countries.

Likewise, policy coalitions promoting domestic violence legislation have adapted their discursive framing as a key part of their strategies for securing political support. Legislation on domestic violence has been seen by many as an encroachment on patriarchal social norms and has, therefore, been resisted, for example by conservative religious groups. As such, policy coalitions in Ghana and Uganda identified key actors and groups that they needed to win over and adapted their discursive strategy as a means of doing so, watering down their approach as a

result.¹⁰ Policy coalitions have also sought to fit problem frames to dominant social norms in order to expand their coalition and circumvent powerful potential opponents. Examples include a focus on the role of men as protectors in Rwanda, the need to support family values and stability in Bangladesh and the need to protect men as well as women, rather than focusing on women's rights in Ghana and Uganda. Furthermore, in some cases domestic policy advocates sought to downplay the influence of transnational ideas to avoid the problematic perception that domestic violence legislation was a western agenda. While these discursive strategies have helped to secure support for legislation, they have proven to be insufficient to create commitment to implementation in Bangladesh, Ghana and Uganda.

Policy coalitions appear to play very different roles in dominant coalitions compared to other types of political settlement, with important implications for the influence of ideas. In Ethiopia and Rwanda, a strong emphasis is placed on maintaining a unified front to the outside world, whatever internal debates may be taking place within the ruling coalition. In these circumstances there is no space for government officials to join donor-led policy coalitions advocating for change. For example, the policy coalition advocating a safety net in Ethiopia in the early 2000s initially comprised exclusively external actors to the ruling coalition – development partners and international NGOs. It is only once key elites within the ruling coalition have accepted that a problem exists and that a policy response is required that a policy coalition can work with government officials. At this point, elite approval creates the space for government officials, development partners and, sometimes, NGOs to work together and design policy interventions. In Ethiopia and Rwanda social assistance only secured this elite approval following perceived existential crises that threatened the ruling coalition. It is the process of securing elite support and in detailed design that paradigmatic ideas on development that underpin political settlements in Ethiopia and Rwanda have been highly influential in shaping the design of social protection programmes, necessitating a focus on productive economic contributions, as well as protecting the poor and vulnerable.

However, these working groups fall short of the advocacy coalitions as defined by Sabatier (1988). In particular, the participants in these working groups do not necessarily share any paradigmatic ideas or problem definitions, but frequently see quite different advantages to the promotion of a particular, shared policy model. This highlights the potential compatibility of any one policy model with multiple problem definitions and paradigmatic ideas. For example, while donors framed the public works and social transfer programmes in Ethiopia and Rwanda (the PSNP and VUP respectively) as examples of social protection, the governments in each case were, at best, ambivalent about the term social protection, instead viewing these policies as part of integrated rural development strategies that had a much broader range of objectives, including infrastructure development, environmental protection and villagisation.

A somewhat similar pattern is evident in the passage of domestic violence legislation in Rwanda. Here there was no clear policy coalition advocating for change. Instead, strong Presidential support had already legitimised gender equality as a policy agenda and framed the debate in terms of rights, leading to the adoption of potentially contentious legislation on the co-ownership of land and laws on rape and sexual violence. This policy legacy smoothed the way for the passage of domestic violence legislation when it was proposed by women MPs.

¹⁰ For example, excluding politically sensitive issues such as marital rape.

Conclusions

Ideas are central features of political settlements and not just a useful add on that helps fill in the gaps of a primarily interests-based framework. Ideas provide the blueprints for institutions that are subject to negotiation and contestation between competing factions. Ideas also constitute individuals' perceptions of what their interests are and how they might best be achieved. As such, both the interests and institutions that are the focus of Khan's (2010) political settlements framework are constructed through ideational processes. Furthermore, this paper proposes that it is overly simplistic to suggest that political settlements rest solely on the balance of power between contending interest groups. Instead such settlements must also rest on some set of shared ideas between these contending factions. These ideas may take the form of the zeitgeist or hegemonic ideas that are unquestioned norms within society at a certain point in time, and which provide the background context within which settlements are formed. However, ideas may play a more fundamental, explicit role in political settlement dynamics. Arguably this is the case in dominant coalitions such as Ethiopia and Rwanda where the idea that delivering rapid socioeconomic development is necessary for regime survival is subject to consensus among political elites and, arguably, is also part of what binds them together.

Ideas are equally relevant at the level of the policy domain. Self-interest alone is rarely sufficient to explain actors' motivation to build and sustain policy coalitions. Instead shared ideas – frequently problem definitions or policy ideas – are the glue that binds together diverse actors and provide the motivation to coordinate their activities. Based on the discussion above, it seems that the political importance of a sector – determined particularly, but not exclusively, by the size of the rents involved – may influence the extent to which the policy domain can be viewed as distinct from the political settlement or an integral part of the political settlement itself. This has direct implications for the role that ideas play in the framework. Where a sector – such as natural resources – is rich with rents, ideas about the governance of natural resource revenues are essentially ideas about the functioning of the political settlement itself. Ideational contestation implies the contestation and re/negotiation of the political settlement. In contrast, in less politically important sectors – for the moment this seems to apply to social protection and gender in the case studies – there is a distinct policy domain. Within this policy domain, policy coalitions promoting particular problem definitions and policy ideas are constrained or influenced by the degree to which these ideas fit with dominant paradigmatic ideas that underpin the political settlement, but ideational contestation within these policy domains rarely challenges the political settlement itself.

The analysis in this paper has also highlighted that ideational processes in particular national contexts are inherently intertwined with transnational ideas. Political settlements themselves may be shaped by attempts to emulate foreign development models – such as the East Asian developmental states – or in response to post-colonial exploitation, as with ideas of resource nationalism. The influence of transnational ideas is perhaps most clearly evident, however, within the policy domain, where the activities of policy coalitions are shaped by shifting global paradigms – for example, regarding economic management; global and regional norms and standards; and the activities of epistemic communities that create and share policy success stories, organise training events and participate in national level advocacy.

While this paper has presented theoretical arguments as to why ideas are central features of political settlements, as well as examples of when this has proven to be the case, much more

research is needed to investigate the process by which ideas become influential in political settlements. Indeed, the paper raises questions regarding the circumstances under which ideas interact with institutions and contribute to dynamism and stability in relations between contending factions. Under what circumstances do competing ideas form the basis of negotiation and contestation and when is ideational influence limited to hegemonic ideas that operate in the background? When do ideas exert a direct and independent influence on the in/stability of political settlements, in addition to the roles they play in shaping institutions and perceived interests? Finally, while most ideational analysis has focused on the role that ideas play in policy adoption, a potentially important line of enquiry concerns the process by which ideas shape the process of policy implementation.

These findings suggest a number of important implications for policymakers and policy advocates. A solid understanding of the politics of the policy domain and how these relate to the political settlement is essential to enable advocates of policy change to adapt their advocacy strategies to the ideational commitments and perceived interests of key decision makers. One plausible response to this analysis may be to adapt policy proposals, with advocates advocating ‘second-best’ policies that are more politically feasible than their preferred option. However, there are also instances in which adapting the framing of policies in particular ways can be sufficient to secure support for favoured approaches without any real change in policy content. Vitality, the dominant form of ideas to which policy proposals must fit is likely to vary by the type of political settlement. Where a dominant coalition is committed to particular programmatic, paradigmatic ideas these are likely to exert a strong influence on policy. These paradigmatic ideas are likely to be resistant to change in the short-run at least. Policy advocacy will need to take this into account and adapt policy design and problem framings for consistency with these paradigmatic ideas. In competitive clientelist settings ruling coalitions are less likely to have strong programmatic commitments, but advocates of policy change will still need to adapt framings to social norms, such as those related to dependency. In all settings, meanwhile, periods of instability are likely to offer windows of opportunity for ideational change. Indeed, rare periods of extreme uncertainty may provide opportunities for transformation of paradigmatic ideas, beyond the more limited potential for ideational influence that occurs during ‘business as usual’.

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