

From Drivers of Change to the Politics of Development:

Refining the Analytical Framework to understand the politics of the places where we work

Part 3: Final Report

'If we don't as donors understand the politics of the places where we work, then our task will be all the more difficult ... I think making progress is about making politics work. Politics determines the choices we make. Politics determines what kind of society we wish to live in and create and hand on to the next generation. And it will be politics that will help to make poverty history'. (The Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn, 2nd February 2006).

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Argument and Summary

The original Drivers of Change (DoC) initiative started in 2002/3 to sharpen understanding of the deeper structural and institutional factors which frame the political context within which individuals and organisations act. Evaluation of the first generation of studies suggests that as we move forward it is appropriate to place greater emphasis on analyzing the *political processes* which drive or restrain change and development. This is because there is now widespread recognition that politics is fundamental, if not primary, in shaping development choices, strategies, trajectories and outcomes. For development is an unavoidably transformative process affecting social, economic and political relationships and institutions. It thus involves change that must inevitably challenge established interests and prevailing structures of power and hence the dominant institutional arrangements (or rules of the game).

The challenge which DoC faces, however, is how to conceptualise and analyse politics, and especially the politics of development. What is needed therefore is a framework for the political analysis of the prospects and possibilities of development in very different societies. The approach adopted here¹ addresses this challenge through its conceptualization of the *political system* as the set of linked formal and informal political processes by which decisions are made concerning the use, production and distribution of resources in any society or part of one. This framework helps to identify the dynamic elements which drive politics, whether developmentally successfully or not.

The framework has the following additional advantages:

- It helps to disaggregate the rather large (and sometimes unwieldy) concept of the *state* by highlighting the political and institutional relationships which constitute it, and the rules which underpin it.
- It can contribute to our understanding of the idea of '*political will*' by suggesting that this often-used and puzzling concept is best thought of in institutional and not individual terms.

¹ I am grateful to Piers Harrison of DFID for perceptive and constructive comments. The usual disclaimer applies in that I remain responsible for the contents.

- It helps to unpack the notion of ‘*governance*’ as a set of institutions sustained by a set of political processes.
- It provides a sound basis for exploring relations between politics and economics by offering a framework that enables political processes to be conceptualized independently of economic ones, precisely in order to explain better the relations between them.
- It can be applied to sub-national politics, major institutions or sectors within a society.
- It helps to explain the context and conditions under which the rules of democracy and market economies come to be embedded (democratic consolidation).

The approach developed in this paper is not a theory of how change happens. Rather it is a framework for identifying and analysing the political processes whereby it occurs. However, it can both accommodate different theories of politics and change and, when integrated with appropriate comparative and historical work, it offers the basis for classifying past, present and future paths of development in rapidly changing geo-political circumstances.

The underlying argument can be stated quite simply:

- Politics, as conceptualized here, consists of all the activities of conflict, negotiation and cooperation in decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources.
- And politics has two fundamental levels. The first concerns the *rules of the game*, that is the procedures and processes which underpin and structure political life, which distribute power and authorise its use in particular ways. The second concerns the *games within the rules*, that is the ‘normal’ contestations over policy and power.
- Stable polities – whether historical, ‘traditional’ or contemporary - are typically characterised by a high degree of consensus about the ‘rules’ and by normally ordered political life in relation to the ‘games’.
- However, in many developing societies, the fundamental rules of the game are not (as yet) well-established. This absence of agreed rules, where the winners often take all and the losers often get nothing (or fear that), can induce pervasive unpredictability and lack of both coherent and consistent policy with the almost inevitable outcome of slow or minimal developmental momentum.

- But most theories and frameworks for the analysis of politics have been developed in and for stable polities where the rules of the game are established and agreed, that is they are widely considered to be legitimate.
- As a consequence, most conventional frameworks for the analysis of politics do not engage effectively with the socio-economic and political realities of many developing societies. For instance in some developing societies many decisions are taken through informal political processes.
- The degree of importance of informal political processes is an indication of the degree to which the rules of the game are agreed.
- What is therefore required is a framework for political analysis which can interpret both levels of politics (rules of the game and games within the rules), which can incorporate both formal and informal institutional interactions, and which is also sensitive to formal and informal sources, forms and expressions of power.
- The implications for both development and for DFID of situations where the rules of the game are more or less agreed and established, or not, as the case be, are many and varied but include cases such as the following:
 - The prospects for growth are likely to be good where the rules of the political game are agreed, *and* the major players are committed to promoting and sustaining a consistent developmental strategy. DoC helps us understand what those rules are, how they work and how they are sustained.
 - In sharp contrast, where there is little agreement – indeed deep conflict - about the rules of the game, the intensity of the political struggle is likely to be severe and developmental momentum will be seriously compromised.
 - Between such extremes is a range of situations. For instance, there are instances where the rules of the game are broadly agreed but are not articulated with a development orientation. Drivers of Change work, adopting the framework outlined in this and previous papers (Leftwich 2006a and 2006b) may help us understand what will persuade a government to pursue development as the best strategy of political survival and achievement.
 - Or, there are places where the rules of the game are not broadly agreed but there is a development orientation. This presents donors with a dilemma – whether to work for greater agreement on the rules of the game or support the achievement of better development outcomes.

A summary version of the framework is provided below on page 20. This adapts and modifies David Easton's notion of the *political system* as a framework for political analysis (Easton, 1953, 1957, 1965a and 1965b, 1992). In developing that framework, the paper sets out an analytical scheme which refocuses our conception of politics

away from its conventional association with the formal apparatus of state and government. Rather, it stresses that politics is an essential and unavoidable process in *all* human collectivities, formal and informal, public and private. This conception of politics enables us to make more nuanced analyses of political processes at national, sub-national and local levels of the polity, and can be applied equally to sectors such as education, agriculture or health – or to organizations such as firms, factories and colleges - where issues to do with the use and distribution of resources are also central.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 1 deals with the evaluation of the first *tranche* of DoC studies. Section 2 elaborates the ideas about politics, and the politics of development, as outlined above, while Section 3 introduces and explains the conceptual framework of the political system, with diagrammatic help. Section 4 spells out the strengths of the model while Section 5 explores in greater detail the idea and implications of ‘the rules of the game’ for the politics of development and the manner in which formal and informal institutions and expressions of power interact. Section 6 suggests that important work needs yet to be done in showing how this analytical tool, combined with informed comparative and historical work, can help DFID to build a classification of paths of development and to develop more robust theories and analyses of the politics of change and development.

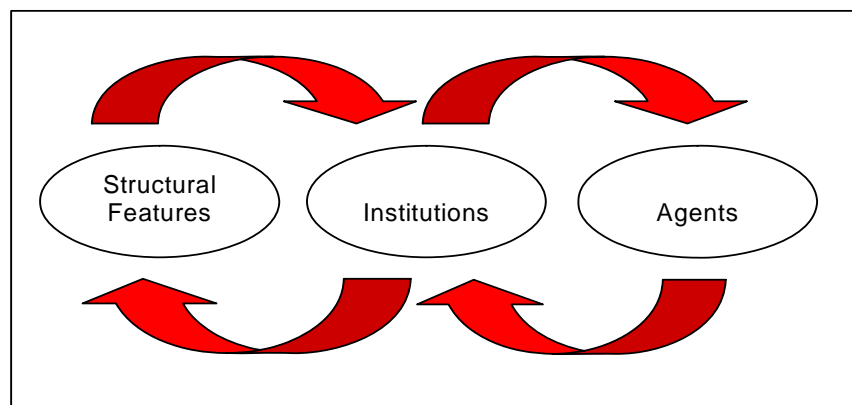
1 Evaluating the DoC Studies

This section outlines briefly the methodological approach and substantive contribution of the first generation of DoC studies and describes their findings and limitations. Fuller accounts may be found in previous papers (Leftwich, 2006a and 2006b; McLeod, 2005; Dahl-Østergaard et al, 2005). The central argument of this section is that while the studies provided rich detail of the structural and institutional characteristics of many countries, we need to move forward to deepen and extend the political analysis so as to identify and trace the dynamic processes of politics which so clearly shape the prospects and possibilities of development.

1.1 *The Original Conceptual Framework*

More than 20 studies have been commissioned and completed by country offices and more are being prepared. Although there were no explicit guidelines, a broad set of assumptions *did* inform and influence DoC work and a basic conceptual framework was established early on. There were three main elements in this framework.

- First, a distinction was made between two broad sets of factors which were collectively called ‘drivers of change’. They were conceptualised as: (i) deep, long-term structural or institutional processes of social, economic, technological change (the context); and (ii) ‘reform minded organizations and individuals’, the agents or champions of change (DFID, June 2003: 20). The Ghana study (Booth et al, 2004) was particularly clear in distinguishing between the influence of ‘deep institutional patterns’ in Ghanaian society and politics, on the one hand, and the room for manoeuvre and change by agents, on the other hand.
- Second, a stylized diagrammatic framework was formulated which sought to offer three main conceptual categories (structural features, institutions and agents) for organizing information, with causal relations running in both directions between these categories, thus:



- *Structural features* were understood here as natural and human resources, economic and social structure and other non-institutional factors; *institutions* were understood in standard Northian terms (North, 1990) as rules of the game structuring behaviour; and *agents* were understood as organizations or individuals pursuing particular interests
- In addition, the DoC work sought to deepen understanding of ‘the political economy of change’. (DFID, April 2004). Though never defined clearly and seldom made explicit in the studies, an early DFID paper suggested that ‘political economy’ meant ‘vested interests and power in a given country and the incentives that exist for powerful groups to act in ways that will lead to poverty reduction’ (DFID, April 2004: 2).

The first *tranche* of DoC studies identified the following features in some or all of the countries studied.

- More or less pervasive forms of patron-client relations, neo-patrimonialism and prebendalism, systemic patronage or cronyism, ‘big man-ism’ and the Latin American phenomenon known as *caciquismo* (Pansters, 2005).
- ‘Corruption’, state capture, wealthy and/or dominant elites determined to hold on to state power, the politicization of businesses and the phenomenon of ‘shadow states’ (or polities).
- Personalistic political parties (80 registered in Kyrgyzstan, 30 in the 2003 Nigerian election, for instance); weak, divided, deferential (Malawi) or impotent civil society organizations, (though some show potential for exercising pressure).
- Limited or weak political ‘demand’ for rapid or realistic institutional reform to improve conditions for growth, governance and service delivery.
- Minimal or non-existent ‘political will’ although the notion of ‘political will’ is not adequately defined.
- The relative absence in many cases of any clear and agreed overarching national economic strategy, project or set of socio-economic goals (other than in rhetoric) (especially noticeable in the Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malawian and Ghanaian studies)
- Low levels of ‘stateness’ (Fukuyama, 2004), and hence, governance, with demoralised and politicised bureaucracies, dubiously independent judiciaries and (sometimes) militaries.

1.2 *Evaluating the Conceptual Framework*

Though many of the studies yielded important information, there were a number of limitations which included the following:

- Although all studies addressed the political issues in very direct and revealing ways, few grappled with the meanings, forms and dynamics of politics based on a coherent framework of analysis.
- The absence of consistent objectives, as expressed in the various terms of reference, produced rich descriptive variety without contributing consistently to comparative generalizations or deepening theoretical understanding.
- The initial specification of the meaning of the central concepts (change, drivers, agents, structural features and institutions) was perhaps inadequate for the complexity of the tasks involved (DFID, n.d. but possibly 2004?).
- In giving less attention to possible political *dynamics of change*, the recommendations in the studies tended to focus more on specific agents or agencies as possible sources of change (media, civil society organizations, parts of the bureaucracy, private sector, etc), without always tracing their origins or links back to structural features and without explaining how and where they would or could act to alter institutional arrangements.
- The absence of a consistent methodology and common conceptual structure created problems when it came to deriving comparative generalizations for theory and further analysis. As a result, those who were tasked with reviewing the whole stable of studies have had obvious (perhaps insuperable) difficulties in drawing wider conclusions of a theoretical, comparative or analytical kind (McLeod, 2005; Dahl-Østergaard et al, 2005).

The first generation of DoC studies thus have brought us to a point where new work needs to begin, especially in defining and deploying a conceptual framework for political analysis which can help to reveal the central dynamics of the political process and hence indicate where and how both internal and external agents of change do and can act. But if we are to do this seriously, what are we to understand ‘politics’ to be?

2 Politics and the politics of development

This section advances a view of politics which goes well beyond its conventional identification with a set of highly differentiated and largely *formal* activities, institutions and sites of government and the state (Moore, August 2002). The approach adopted here stresses that politics is an essential and unavoidable *process* (or set of processes) in all human collectivities, formal and informal, public and private, concerned with decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources. This understanding of politics encourages us to explore the interaction of both formal and informal institutions as well as formal and informal sources and forms of power, a situation which is much more typical of many developing countries. By widening our focus in this way, and by recognizing the centrality of politics in all collective human activity, we are able to make more nuanced analyses of political processes not only at national levels but also at sub-national and local levels of the polity, across sectors such as education, agriculture or health, and in organizations such as firms, factories and colleges, where issues to do with the use and distribution of resources are always central. The section starts by defining politics but goes on to argue that we need to think about politics at two distinct but related levels: the rules of the political ‘game’ on the one hand, and the ‘games’ which occur within those rules. It concludes by arguing that because the politics of development is a special – and complicated - case of politics in general, we need a framework of analysis which can help to identify the factors and forces which promote or hinder development and which enables us to trace the dynamics of the process involved.

2.1 *Defining politics*

It is of course the case that the forms and particulars of political processes in different societies (or parts of them) vary widely. These forms and their outcomes are both shaped by, and shape, the structural environment, internal and external, the distributions and balances of power, ideas, ideologies, interests and, crucially, the formal and informal institutions through which they all work. Nonetheless, wherever human groups form there are necessary and universal processes which constitute what politics is everywhere.

- If it is to survive and prosper, any human community – whether a family or a federation - must have a means for making binding collective decisions: that's politics. Politics is thus best conceptualised as consisting of *all the activities of cooperation, conflict and negotiation involved in decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources*, whether these activities are formal or informal, public or private, or a mixture of all. Such a basic conception facilitates ways of integrating both conventional ideas about *politics* (power, authority and collective decision-making) and *economics* (allocation of scarce resources) into a broader understanding of the relations between them.
- In this light, politics is therefore best understood as a *process*, or linked set of processes, which is not confined to certain sites or venues (parliaments, courts, congresses or bureaucracies) or specialists (such as princes, politicians or civil servants). Like 'economics', it is, rather, a universal and *necessary* process entailed in all collective human activity and does not presuppose *formal* institutions of rule and governance. While formal decision-making in and around public institutions *may* be the most important expression of politics (especially in established, stable and modern polities), it is nonetheless a process found in all human groups and organizations - and must be.

2.2 *Levels of politics*

However, of fundamental importance in understanding politics and its implications for development, is the recognition that there are *two distinct but related levels* at which politics and political contestation occurs (Lindner and Rittenberger, 2003).

- (a) The level which concerns *rules of the game* (institutions); and
- (b) The level at which *games within the rules* occurs.

(a) *Rules of the game*

- The rules of the game, and agreement about the rules, are fundamental for any on-going political activity. Stable polities are characterised by lasting consensus about the central rules of politics (which have seldom been established without intense contestation over long periods of time). As one study has pointed out, for example, a 'consolidated democracy' is a political regime in which a 'complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, "the only game in town"' (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 15).
- In the modern world, these rules are normally expressed in *formal* institutional agreements, that is in constitutions, which specify formally the rules governing competition for, distribution, use and control of power and the procedures for decision-making and accountability. These may be federal or unitary, presidential or parliamentary; they may specify terms of office and timing of elections; and they may include Bills of Rights and the like. But all such *formal* institutions are always sustained by wider *informal* institutional aspects

expressed in the culture, political culture and ideology which can have a critical part to play in maintaining both the consensus and adherence to the rules.

- Such rules and processes need not be formal or stipulated in written constitutions. Indeed, before the emergence of modern states, most human societies - from hunting and gathering bands through to complex feudal and imperial systems – had stable if often undifferentiated polities, for long periods, based on agreed and understood processes, embedded in structures of power, expressed in cultural institutions and legitimated by a variety of ideologies and beliefs – and no constitution.
- Moreover, in all stable polities – whether past or present, traditional or modern - consensus about the *political* rules of the game has normally been part of a wider and more or less explicit consensus about socio-economic goals, policies and practices. Reaching such a settled consensus has seldom been easy or conflict free, as struggles in the course of industrialization in the West between left and right through the 19th and 20th centuries illustrate precisely. Even in some developing societies today where political and economic consensus has been reached, and sustained growth has occurred (such as Mauritius in the last 25 years), it has usually happened after periods of intense and threatening conflict (Bräutigam, 1997).
- Each ‘settlement’, and its institutional form, has differed interestingly between various democratic capitalist societies, as well as in the East Asian developmental states, as shown in the studies on ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Hall and Soskice, 2001) and varieties of East Asian institutional arrangements in developmental states (Haggard, 2004). This is not to suggest that settlements about socio-economic goals and institutions are unchanging, but that the agreement about political rules of the game enables change to occur without a fundamental challenge to the stability of politics.
- Indeed – and critically - under-girding democratic politics is normally an *un-written* political contract, or set of informal rules, which consists of two balancing elements. The first is that losers must accept the outcome of elections (provided legitimate), knowing that they can try again 4 or 5 years later (which winners must of course acknowledge, too). But the second element, and just as important, is that winners know that they cannot use their power (where allowed to do so by the constitution) to so undermine or threaten the interests of the losers that they (the losers) would not abide by the contract as a result. Of course there is more to the democratic compact than this implied zero-sum game. There are probably only degrees of winning and losing, but although outright winners can, in theory, ‘take all’, they would in practice be ill-advised to do so to the extent that losers’ fundamental interests or opportunities are eliminated.
- One illustration of this is that, over time, the developmental shift to formally democratic capitalist politics is also a move to an increasingly consensual structure of political and economic relations in which both the *benefits of winning* and the *costs of losing* are both steadily decreased. But early on that is

not the case and hence the stakes are high and the politics can be more confrontational and, often, violent.

(b) *Games within the rules*

- This second level of politics – which might be understood as the level at which ‘normal’ politics happens - is where the daily debates and contestations over policy and practice occur. By ‘normal’ I do not mean that such politics is morally correct, proper and appropriate, and that other forms of politics are abnormal or ‘wrong’, but only that ‘normal’ politics is in some sense *predictable* in that outcomes are very unlikely to produce radical shifts in the structure of wealth or power, and is only *unpredictable* within a limited but acceptable range of possibilities.
- In ‘normal’ politics in stable polities, the fundamental rules of the game are seldom seriously threatened (as indicated above), even when they are changed (devolution, constitutional reform). Disagreement, debate and change all occur – both in political and economic terms – but through the medium of the institutional settlements and operating procedures which remain stable while changing.

It is important to recognise that the critical level of politics is the first level which, in essence, establishes the ‘regime’ type. It is there that the basic processes are constituted which pertain to the formation, maintenance and enforcement of the institutions and standard procedures for conducting politics, for setting socio-economic goals, and for establishing the economic, administrative and judicial institutions which will facilitate growth and development. ‘Normal’ politics can not be played out where there is no effective consensus about the legitimacy of established institutions, just as a game of, say, hockey is unintelligible, unpredictable and rather difficult (if not dangerous) to play without established rules.

What are the implications of this for the politics of development?

2.3 *The politics of development*

The critical point here is that development, fast or slow, is a transformative process. It is inescapably about change – economic growth, social transformation and political transition. And, in practice, it is commonly a radical and turbulent transformation which is concerned with often far-reaching change in the structure and use of wealth

and power, and which - if successful – must transform it. That makes it quintessentially political and potentially deeply conflictual.

Thus if politics – as defined above – consists of all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict in decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources, then *the politics of development* is about changing not only *how* resources are used, produced and distributed, but also about how decisions are taken about such changes and about the politics which sustain, implement and extend them.

The political nature of development, therefore, can be summed up in two simple propositions:

(a) When people change the way they use, produce and distribute resources, they also change their (social and political) relations – relations of power - with each other; and

(b) When people change their political and social (power) relations with each other, they usually change the way they use, produce and distribute resources.

What this means is that, on the one hand, the extension of the franchise, the recognition of the rights of trades unions, the provision of formal legal equality for women and the abolition of slavery are all examples of how political change can affect the distribution of economic power and resources. On the other hand it means that economic change can, in turn, induce political change. Technological change, the development of trade and the emergence of an independent entrepreneurial class investing capital in new ways are just some sources of such social and political change. Land reform is another example of how the changed use and distribution of resources can alter the balance of rural wealth but also rural power. Causal processes clearly can and do flow in both directions and often loop back and re-enforce each other over time.

However, in many developing countries agreed and enforceable formal rules of the political game are less common. Indeed, there are often multiple sets of overlapping or conflicting rules (formal and informal). As a consequence, ‘normal’ politics is much more difficult and much less likely. And this absence of agreed rules (or conflict between sets of rules), the consequential uncertainty, the fear of serious loss

by some interests, and the control of military power by others can induce constant unpredictability. The implications for sustained developmental momentum are not particularly good.

So the problem in such countries (and certainly in many of those covered by DoC studies) is not only that there are seldom agreed and established rules of the game in place which can provide a stable context for developmental coalitions to emerge and for developmental choices and strategies to be made. It is also that the existing institutions of political and economic governance (or the mixture of them) do *not* promote growth and development – and certainly not pro-poor growth. Hence what is needed for transformative developmental activity is not only a set of agreed, consistent and coherent institutional rules of the political game, but rules which both encourage and allow a politics of development to gather pace and to be sustained.

Each country is different in terms of its historical legacies, its socio-economic and political structures, cultural patterns and ideologies. A conceptual framework for the analysis of politics in developing countries is needed which will enable us to analyse and compare such differences and at the same time be sensitive to the varying patterns and interactions of formal and informal institutions and forms of power which together shape or hinder the emergence of developmentally-oriented rules of the game.

2.4 *Frameworks of political analysis*

In developing a conceptual framework we need to draw on the contributions of political science. However, most established frameworks of analysis in the discipline tend to assume that the rules of the game are in place and hence focus largely on the games within the rules, even where these games may be about changing the rules. Crick's view of *politics as a form of rule* where '... people act together through institutionalised procedures to resolve differences, to conciliate diverse interests and values and to make public policies in the pursuit of common interests' (Crick, 2004:67) is a classic example of the point. But *pluralist* accounts, too, for example (Smith, 1995; Held, 1996), focus essentially on how diverse interest groups, disposing of different forms and degrees of power and influence, contribute to the making of

public policy in established polities with established rules. Even *Marxism*, with its relentless focus on class and class conflict as the essence of politics (Callinicos, 2004), assumes that the political rules of capitalist democracy will only be transformed and replaced by revolutionary action, though Marx appears to have recognised that, in established democracies at least, socialist transformation might come through the rules of the parliamentary political game (Miliband, 1977). That view was certainly central to the tradition of democratic socialism which grew out of Marxism and in opposition to it from the late 19th century (Gay, 1962).

Rational choice in political science, ‘the economic study of non-market decision-making, or simply the application of economics to political science’ (Mueller, 1979:1), is now firmly embedded in rational choice institutionalism (Staniland, 1985; Levi, 1997; Peters, 1999; Weingast, 2002; Weale, 2004). With its micro-focus on individual behaviour, it explores rational action within given institutional contexts, but tells us little about behaviour where there is a conflict of institutional rules or about the structures of power or dynamics of politics which shape how dominant rules emerge or change. *Historical institutionalists* in political science, on the other hand, are much more sensitive to historical legacies, path dependency and structures of power, and they are aware that all institutional arrangements express a ‘mobilization of bias’ in one particular way or another, to borrow a famous phrase of Schattschneider’s (1960:71). However this approach explains much less about the dynamics of politics and change, how institutional rules emerge and how compliance is ensured.

2.5 *Limitations of standard approaches*

Each of these approaches has something to offer in explanatory and conceptual terms, but only in some rather than all circumstances, and all have limitations.

Class, for instance may be a relevant category and political force in much of Latin America, but not where the salience of ethnic or religious identity is uppermost. Moreover, as Richard Sklar argued for Africa, ‘class relations, at bottom are determined by relations of *power*, not production’ (Sklar, 1979: 537, my emphasis, AL), though that may change. In Africa, as elsewhere, it is not economic power that

has given rise to political power, as Marxists would argue, but the other way around, where those in control of state power, that is formal and authorised political power, have been able to use that control to expand their wealth and that of their followers. Furthermore, the absence, mix or overlap of agreed institutional rules for politics means that whatever plurality of organized interests there may be tends to degenerate into what Thomas Carothers has described as ‘feckless pluralism’ (Carothers, 2002). By this he means a situation (graphically portrayed in the Bangladesh DoC, but also clear in Bolivia) in which dominant elites – in coalition, in competition or one after each other – circulate at the apex of power (maybe rural and regional power as well), collaring and siphoning scarce state and social resources in a vacuum of pervasive societal poverty.

But the major analytical limitation is that these approaches do not readily offer a way of identifying the *dynamics of change*, or what holds it up. What is needed is a framework that will allow us to trace the flow of politics between society and state and back again in very different historical, structural and institutional contexts, whether in Bolivia, Burundi or Bangladesh. For all these reasons, future DoC studies would benefit from a conceptual framework for the analysis of politics that is both *regime neutral* and *politically, or ideologically, neutral* in that: (i) it does not presuppose a given type of polity or level of socio-economic development; and that (ii) can accommodate a wide range of explanatory traditions, such as those above, according to the prevailing circumstances

This paper suggests that an analytical framework based on the idea of the political system provides an effective tool for meeting those requirements. The next section outlines the basic characteristics and utility of the ‘political system’ as an organizing concept.

3 The Political System

This section outlines the idea of the political system as a useful framework for political analysis, and it sets out its main elements. The central argument here is that this framework is less a theory of how change happens, and more a conceptual structure for thinking about politics and for specifying and analysing the political processes through which change proceeds or is restrained. It provides a method for exploring the institutional arrangements through which decisions are made; it offers ways by which ‘drivers’ of change can be identified; and it helps to locate and map the various sources and forces of resistance, where they have power or influence on decision-making and on policy implementation.

Moreover, the framework helps to answer at least the following questions: (1) What structure of economic, social and political relations prevails in the national and international environment? (2) What potential agents or agencies, or drivers (and blockers), of change has this environment generated? (3) Where are they situated in the political structure and what power do they command? (4) What circumstances and incentives are conducive to the formation of coalitions of such agents of change? And (5) where and how are such agents most likely to be effective in the promotion of change?

3.1 *The idea of the political system*

The idea of the ‘political system’ is essentially a stylized conceptual construct to facilitate thinking about the political processes which are found in any society (but which can also be adapted and applied to make sense of the political processes found in small and more local units of analysis, whether local governments, organizations or sectors). In other words, it identifies and conceptualizes a specifically *political* function that must be present in all societies and institutions, whether formal or informal, large or small. The conceptual framework also helps to trace the dynamic interaction of the different elements of the political processes which flow through and constitute the political system. In short, the political system is that set of dynamic, formal and informal institutionally-shaped interactions, practices and processes which

express the activities of cooperation, conflict and negotiation involved in decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources.

This is not to suggest that the ‘political system’ is an independent, isolated and autonomous set of differentiated public institutions and processes in all societies. It is not. And although these may be more prevalent in complex industrial societies – where differentiation of institutions has progressed a long way - in simple hunting and gathering societies, for instance, they are barely distinguishable from other social and economic activities and institutions. And everywhere the political system is deeply implicated in and influenced by the wider economic, social and cultural systems which are its environment, and from which emerge agents with demands, influences and opposition, as well as support for, and withdrawal from, the system. However, framing the *specifically* political processes and functions involved in decision-making by using the conceptual abstraction we refer to as the political system enables one to explore in sharper detail the relations between these political processes and other – especially economic - activities.

3.2 *Elements and functioning of the political system*

There are a number of basic elements, or processes, that make up any political system, though the contribution and the operation of each varies greatly between different polities, organizations and sectors. There is a summary of these in Appendix 1 and further elaboration in the previous paper (Leftwich, 2006b). A number of main categories define the basic elements of the ‘political system’. These are shown in Diagram 1 (below). Diagram 2 focuses on each of these in greater detail. I then go on to illustrate how they interact.

3.3 *How do these relate to each other in a dynamic manner?*

Policies (for example to undertake land reform, reduce import tariffs or eliminate corruption) may originate in *demands, influences and oppositions* emerging from the wider society or abroad (the *environment*). Alternatively, they may originate in and reflect the interests, intentions and goals of the elite, or policy-makers (*withinputs*).

The *modes* in which the demands or oppositions are expressed may vary widely from petitions to riots (bread riots, for instance, demanding lower staple food prices). Where they can (and they always exist, even within organizations pressing for change – such as political parties or NGOs), *gatekeepers* will allow some *demands and oppositions* to get through but not others. And *lobbyists*, both legal and illegal and internal and external, may seek to influence both the substance and detail of policies, plans and programmes. The final *decisions* and *outputs* will reflect all this and the balance of power within the decision-making processes.

The political process that underpins the political system and the quality of governance may also shape the *implementation of the output*. It may, for instance, be distorted by the bureaucracy, slowed down or applied patchily, unevenly or unequally. Groups or individuals with power or influence (within or beyond the administration) may subvert or undermine implementation. The character – or net effect - of the implementation may well, in turn, trigger new or repeated *demands and oppositions*.

Throughout, the formation and expression of both *political will* and the building of effective governance are not treated as separate and independent institutional strengths or virtues. Rather, they are a direct function of how political processes work through the political system, the nature and extent of its *legitimacy* and the level of support (or withdrawal of that support), internal and external, for a government and its policies and programmes.

In a nutshell, conceptualising and tracking political processes through the framework provided by the idea of the political system enables one to identify and trace the dynamics of change or resistance within and beyond it.

The diagrams below show each of the major elements in the system.

Diagram 1

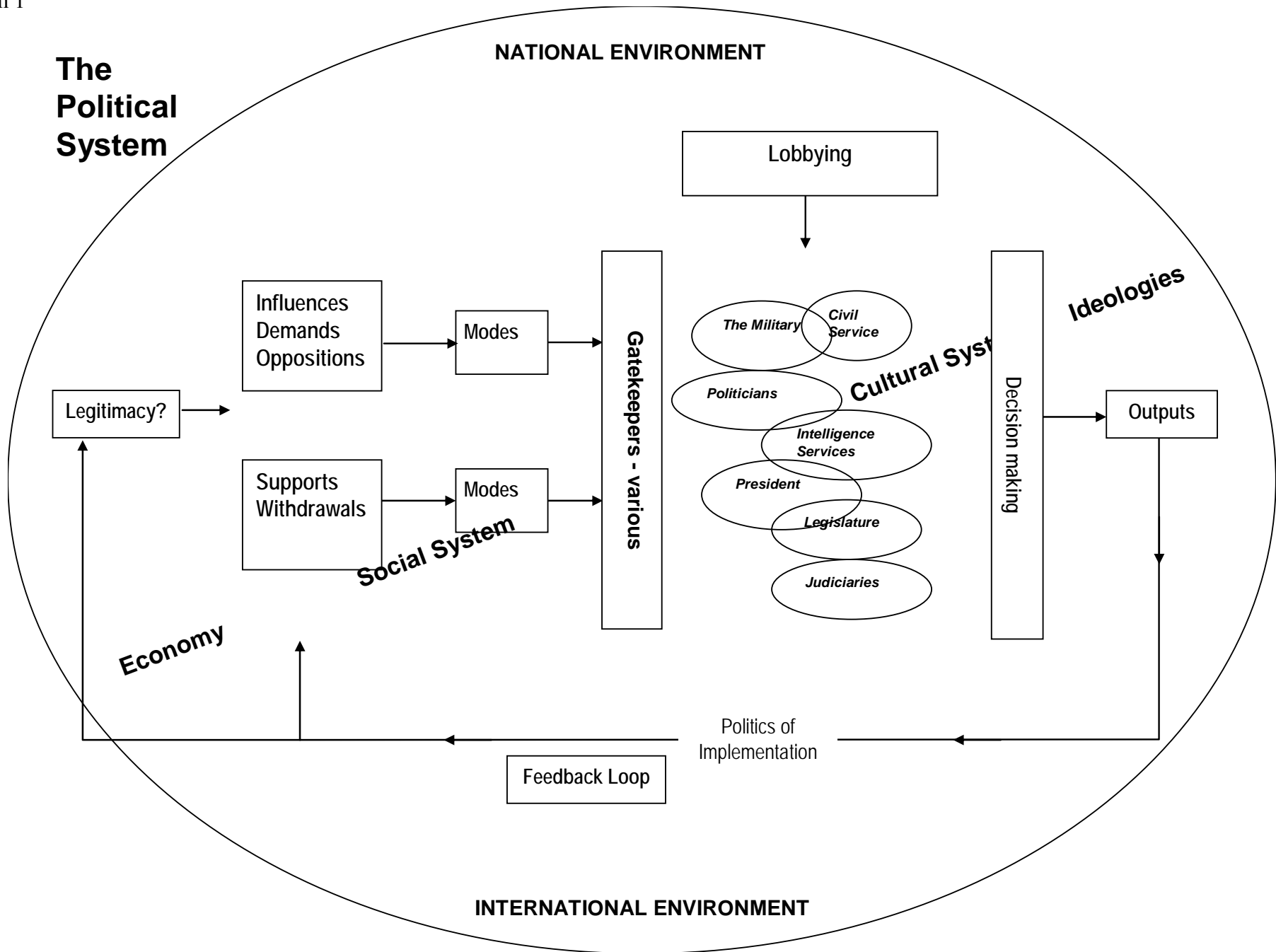
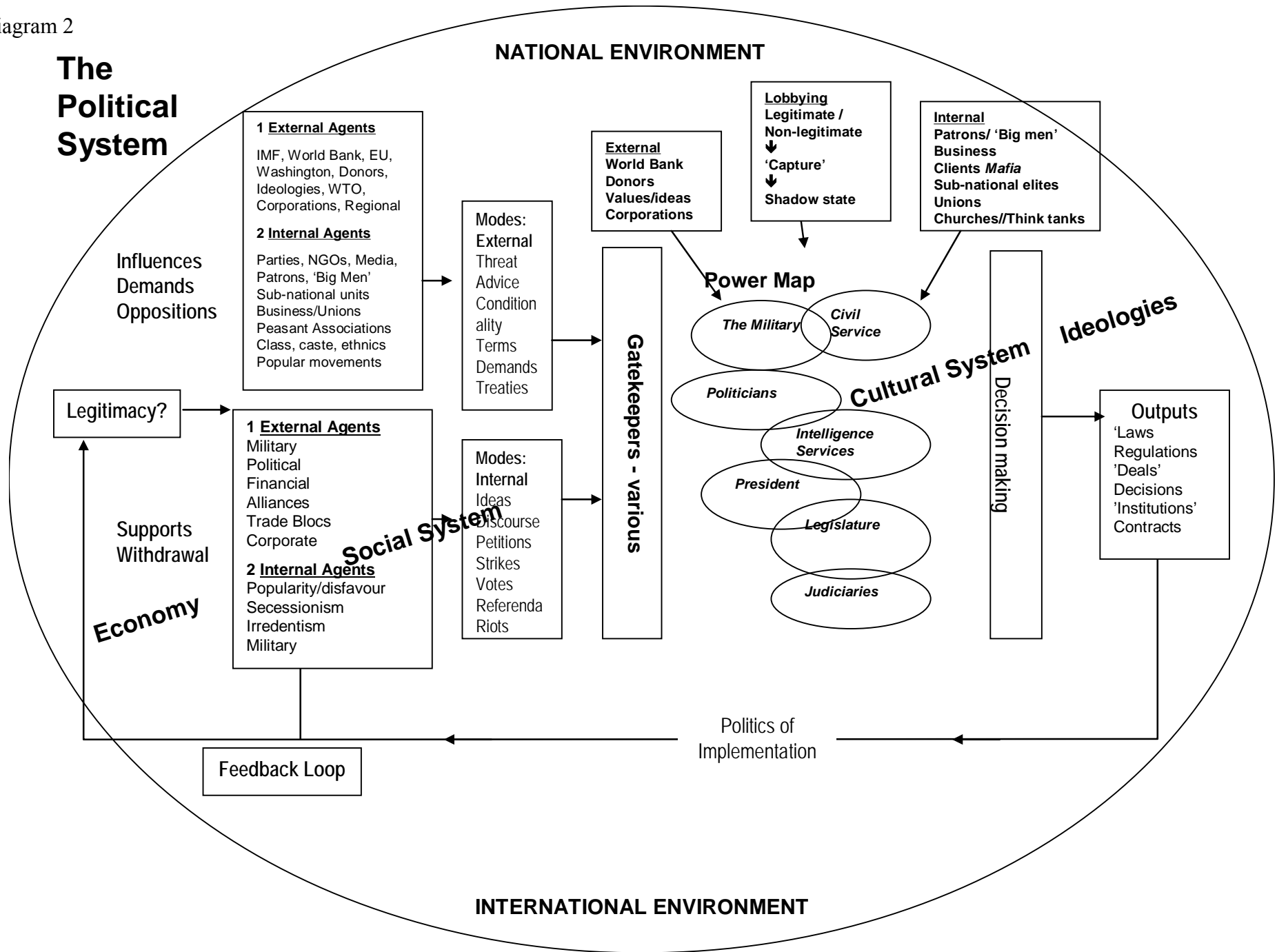


Diagram 2

The Political System



4 Strengths of the framework and implications for some central governance concepts

This framework of analysis offers a number of advantages for DFID in addressing key issues and concepts in the political analysis of change and development and in enriching its vocabulary and understanding of governance.

- Perhaps the first and most important advantage of the framework is that it ‘rescues’ a distinctly political realm (and distinctly political processes) from recent approaches which often dissolve and then reconstitute them as forms of economic behaviour. In particular, it reminds us of the salience of power, and the variety of its sources and forms, both formal and informal, which are brought to bear on decision-making. It also underlines the fundamental importance of the *political* processes which shape or prevent the emergence of agreed institutional rules of the game which, in turn, determine the kind of politics and the prospects for development. I return to this in the next section.
- It helps, too, to unpack a number of major governance concepts. For instance, the notion of ‘*governance*’ itself is often presented and used as if the practice consisted of a set of specific institutional rules and standard operating procedures. But viewed through the lens of political analysis provided by this framework, it soon becomes apparent that governance is a profoundly political matter, established and maintained by political processes which the model helps to identify and track.
- The notion of ‘*political will*’, so often identified as the missing element in the promotion of both good governance and development, is also deepened and rendered less ‘personal’ than its normal usage by thinking through the approach suggested here. For although the personal attributes of individuals do count (consider Mandela or Fidel or Churchill), it may be more useful to start thinking of political will as essentially an institutional question. Political will might thus be thought of not as an individual or group asset, but as a *function of the way in which the political system works*; that is of how the political processes that constitute the political system are orchestrated in a particular direction, with particular goals and outcomes in mind, by a sufficiently inclusive coalition of interests which together command the power and capacity to do so at each stage in the political process.
- The concept of the *state*, too, is strengthened by thinking of it through the framework of the political system. The modern state, in all its forms and manifestations, has been the product of lengthy contestations and negotiations between subjects and rulers (Bates, 2001; Tilly, 1992). It is characterised not only by its monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force, but by the rules of the game which constitute it. When the state is conceptualised, rather woodenly, as a set of public institutions, it is sometimes thought that strengthening those institutions is the way to enhance it or make it more effective. In one respect that is self-evidently true. But an effective state is best thought of as the product of the way in which the political processes described

here operate together, dynamically, to forge fundamental rules and agreements about the use and distribution of power and the political practices which are the necessary basis for the establishment and maintenance of public institutions. In the absence of such agreements, there is every incentive and probability that institutions will flounder because rules will be short-circuited, broken or ignored. Ultimately, an *effective state* consists of a set of public institutions, underpinned by widespread legitimacy, and which is authorised, limited and held in place by agreed institutional rules and maintained by dedicated political and juridical processes. Thinking of the state in terms of the way the political system functions to produce such outcomes helps to deepening our understanding of strong states, weak states and failed states.

- Finally, though a number of the studies refer to regional or external factors, including donor influence, not many situate these factors in the context of wider geo-politics, shifting balances of power, security issues and intellectual/ideological orthodoxies. Yet it is clear that not only regional influences but wider geopolitical factors can have significant influence on agents and agencies of change and hence on the politics of development and governance. These include not only the formal requirements of the WTO, the IMF, World Bank conditionalities and bilateral donor influences (as in the *Zambian case*); but they also reflect increasingly strong security concerns of western powers, as expressed for instance in a DFID publication on *The Causes of Conflict in Africa*, which argued for a ‘greater coherence between foreign policy, security and development objectives’ (DFID, 2001: 20). This is precisely the theme taken up in a recent report of The Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, entitled *Investing in Prevention* (2005). Where and how such external influences work, the options they encourage or exclude, the forms of pressure they bring to bear and the points of access which they use will be matters which this framework for further DoC work can easily accommodate.

5 The rules of the game, political systems and the prospects for development

The central point of this paper has been that developmental outcomes are *politically determined* and that the framework of the political system is a useful starting point for understanding how political processes generate different outcomes. But it has also been central to the argument here that it is important to think of politics at two levels: the first concerns the fundamental rules of the game (institutions) which govern and shape political life; the other concerns the politics (games) that takes place within such rules. And it is difficult if not impossible to understand how the latter work without first knowing the former. However, in the context of many developing (or transitional) countries there is often no single agreed and established set of rules but conflicting sets which pull people in different directions and structure politics in different, often contradictory, and sometimes anti-developmental ways. Conventionally, the ‘formal’ rules are the constitutional rules, and the standards laid down for civil service and judicial behaviour. The ‘informal’ rules are commonly those derived from ‘traditional’ political and social values and practices (loosely categorised as patrimonial or neo-patrimonial) and are often associated with relations of kin, region, ethnicity and patronage and not with the individualism and assumption of individual rights which most formal constitutionalism presupposes.

Different development choices and outcomes therefore depend largely on the nature and interaction of:

- The rules of the game (one or competing sets of rules; established or forming)
- The games which the rules allow
- The relative adherence of individuals and groups to different sets of rules, and
- The compatibility and strength of such formal and informal institutional rules
- The political and developmental commitments, interests and goals of incumbent governments or regimes
- The relative strength and dispositions of formal and informal forms of power of different interests (internal and external).

Such interactions produce very different political structures of developmental opportunity and outcome and include the following:

- Where there are no agreed rules of the political game governing how decisions are made about the use and distribution of resources, where the rules are sharply contested or ignored, where there are competing sets of rules, and where there is no predictable application of the rules, outcomes will always be uncertain. The resolution of the many collective action problems which are

required for developmental institutions to emerge and prosper is unlikely, and coherent developmental prospects are somewhat bleak. The political conditions which allow national developmental strategies to be formed and implemented are unlikely to exist. Local initiatives and support may be all that is possible.

- By sharp contrast, where the rules of the game *are* agreed, where governments come to power or are legitimated in terms of those rules, where the political conditions (internal *and* external) are supportive of the regime and where it has a strongly developmental orientation, one might well expect to see the formation and functioning of developmental states (as in Japan at the end of the 19th century and in Singapore, Botswana and Mauritius from the 1970s).
- But even where there is agreement about the rules of the game, it does not follow that a regime so constituted will be able to adopt or implement the developmental strategies of its choice. The games within the rules may constrain that. That is to say, the political settlement may be such as to exclude or limit certain developmental choices as was arguably the case in India for the first 40 years after independence (Herring, 1999; Kohli, 2004) and may well now be the case in South Africa post-1994 (Bond, 2000).
- This links to a wider point. There has been much debate about the relative merits of democratic and non-democratic regimes as promoters of development. But the issue here is *not* which is ‘better’ at it (the evidence is quite inconclusive and outcomes seem to depend more on character and capacity of the *state*, not the type of regime). Rather the issue for present purposes in relation to this discussion about the rules of the political game is that there may be a very profound tension between the political institutions which enable and sustain *stable* democratic politics, on the one hand, and the political institutions and politics which engender or promote *transformative* development and change, on the other (Leftwich, 2005).
- Equally, where regimes, parties or leaders come to power through formally agreed electoral processes and seek (or claim to seek) to pursue strongly developmental (or pro-poor) programmes, it may well be the case that such efforts are compromised or defeated by the power and organization of opposing interests, informal institutions and/or external influence (a not uncommon pattern in Latin America).
- Finally, there is a common assumption that the institutional rules and politics of patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism have strongly anti-developmental implications and consequences for states and state institutions. And it is also widely argued (supported by some good evidence) that politics and state institutions (whether democratic or not) underpinned by Weberian bureaucratic rules have generated better developmental outcomes (Evans and Rauch, 1999). Yet it is not altogether clear that some of the states which have had most developmental success – Botswana, Mauritius, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Korea, for instance – did not use the levers of patronage to promote, monitor, discipline and reward economic agents. A similar point is made by Mushtaq Khan (2005) in his review of DFID’s Governance Target

Strategy Paper'. Using the model may thus help us, also, to differentiate *non-developmental* patrimonial political systems from *developmental* patrimonial political systems and to understand the dynamics of their politics in shaping quite startlingly different results.

There are many more permutations of these interactions. But there are four points which are worth making about this.

- First the framework advanced here should help to make greater sense of the politics of developmental possibilities and limitations in the countries where DFID works.
- Second, there is much contemporary discussion about how to forge '*common interests*' (but not collusive rent-seeking), or 'synergy' (Lange and Rueschemeyer, 2005: 240), notably between states and markets but also amongst business communities and others as well. Often, this discussion is couched in terms of constructing common *policies*, that is policies which meet the interests of both the state and private sector. But if the argument advanced in this paper is correct, then the most fundamental problem that has to be solved in many countries is not forging common interests around *policies*, but around the fundamental institutions in terms of which decisions are to be made, whatever the policy area may be. Where rules are agreed, there is greater incentive to focus on common interest around policies.
- Third, the cry that 'institutions matter' or that it is important to get institutions 'right' (Rodrik, 2003, 2004) is indubitably true. But it is also very easy to forget that institutions cannot be had to order, and that their formation, maintenance and change are fundamentally and unavoidably political questions. For just that reason, some of our 'institution-building' endeavours of the 1990s may well have flopped precisely because the political circumstances which alone can sustain and protect them were overlooked. And it should come as no surprise that attempts to export, if not impose, the same institution or set of institutions on different countries - what Peter Evans (2004) refers to as 'institutional mono-cropping' - has met with such diverse results. Again, the framework suggested here should enable us to analyse better the disposition of political forces and the likely flow and direction of political processes around both fundamental rules of the game as well as around decisions concerning specific institutional matters, whether to do with the registration of political parties, land tenure, property rights or education.

These considerations highlight another issue of great importance. Even the most cursory glance at history tells us that there has been no single 'path of development', but many. Can the framework for political analysis outlined here help to understand what those paths have been, why they have been as they have, and what paths are open to individual countries today? Those questions are the subject of the next and final section.

6 Political systems and the paths of development

Historically, the politics of development has not followed a single path. Different historical and structural contexts – economic, social, political, regional and international – have led to different trajectories and different paces of change, driven by different kinds of agents working through or modifying different institutional arrangements.

Although the emphatically country-specific focus of the DoC studies did not encourage it, there is room for future studies to draw insights from the comparative political analysis of earlier periods and processes of change in the recent modern history of Europe, the Americas and East Asia. Although time and circumstance are much changed, it is important to recognise that what is at issue in contemporary development practice is a transformation in developing countries which is just as great as that which Polanyi sketched for the west in his *The Great Transformation* (1944/1957).

One of the great challenges of development theory and practice is to understand how and why such varied developmental paths have been taken by societies in different places and at different times and what openings there now are. In his study of *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore Jr. (1966) outlined four major paths of development to the modern world, each of which expressed a particular structure of political relations and was conditioned by that structure. I briefly summarise those paths here.

- The first, he suggested, was the ‘bourgeois’ path in which the development of a powerful group in society, with an *independent* economic base, attacked over time the institutional conditions and arrangements which hampered the further expansion of their activities and wealth. None of the major examples of this – England, France and the United States – achieved this breakthrough without violence and bloodshed at some point, as in the English Civil War (or Puritan Revolution) of the 17th century; the French Revolution, and both the American Revolution and subsequent Civil War).
- The second path, discussed in greater detail by Trimberger (1978), was what he referred to as ‘revolution from above’. Here, where the ‘bourgeois’ class was small and weak, varying coalitions of bureaucrats, modernising militaries and intellectual reformers – within the institutions of the state - pushed

through radical political and especially economic change from above, *actively using state instruments to promote rapid development*. The classic model is that of Japan, after the Meiji restoration of 1868/1870. A more recent and similar path, perhaps representing a sub-category of the pattern, has been expressed in the form of the ‘developmental state’ (Woo-Cumings, 1999). Examples of this are of course Taiwan and South Korea. One key trigger in all these countries was external threat, or the perception of it, and an articulated nationalist determination to ‘catch up’, especially with the west, or to protect themselves from possible loss of independence.

- The third path which Moore identified was ‘revolution from below’ and the empirical examples of this are of course the Russian and Chinese revolutions which unleashed a developmental determination by modernising radicals. Here both commercial classes and bureaucratic-military reformers were unwilling, too weak or non-existent to push through modernising change, and it was left mainly to the peasantries, led by vanguardist parties with limited working class support, to topple the intransigent ‘agrarian bureaucracies’, sweep aside the rules and institutions of the old order and establish an entirely new set of rules of the game, embedded in post-revolution institutions which shaped the politics of development which followed.
- The fourth path, argued Moore, accounts for the ‘weak impulse toward modernization’ (Moore, 1966: xvi) and hence slow rates of transformative growth. This path was characterised neither by a thorough-going capitalist transformation nor by revolution from above or below because the appropriate agencies of change (independent bourgeoisie, revolutionary peasants or modernising military-bureaucrats) were simply not present. The ‘failed developmental state’ in India (Herring, 1999) remains a good example of this path in the first 40 years of independence, conceptualised recently by Kohli as a ‘fragmented multi-class state’, and characterised by a ‘considerable gap’ between the leadership’s promises and their achievements, given the inability of the state to deliver them (Kohli, 2004: 399 and *passim*).

Moore’s account is aimed primarily at sketching paths to democracy and dictatorship, but it serves well to illustrate broad models or paths of development, too. Of course, they are not the only ones and there are many variations within each. Moreover, we need to recognise that the twentieth century gave rise to new agencies and to a new politics of development, also rare, and in particular the agency of *politically and nationalistically driven elites* who built and commanded developmental or quasi-developmental states of varying strength, capacity and endurance. Turkey in 1923, Thailand in 1932 and, later, Singapore, Malaysia and even Botswana and Mauritius are examples where Moore’s agencies were not really in evidence at all. But even in those cases – of politically and nationalistically driven elites – some serious external or internal threat or anticipated threat has always been a major factor galvanizing

developmental political momentum, and in all cases the role played by political forces and the state was fundamental.

All these models are useful reminders of the deep and historically specific socio-economic and institutional circumstances which have given rise to different agencies or drivers of change and hence to distinctive paths to the modern world. Different paths can also be found *within* societies, especially the larger (and sometimes federal) ones such as Brazil, Nigeria, India and China. This means, moreover, that transformative change which can lift poverty can not be had to order. If we consider Moore's paths, it is probable that few developing societies (certainly in Africa) have (as yet) had the strong and independent bourgeoisies, the determined modernising military bureaucrats or the revolutionary social forces which served as the critical agents of change in the macro-transformations described by him. Fewer still have as yet built the nationalistic states capable of emulating the Korean or Singaporean model.

Yet all these examples of paths of development can be usefully interpreted (or re-interpreted) through the model outlined in this paper. Against the background of their distinctive histories, their very different social, economic and political structures and varying regional or international environments, they have all been *politically driven* (and opposed) by agents and agencies located at distinctive and strategic points in the political systems of their countries and disposing of varying form and kinds of power in pursuit of their interests and aims. And in thinking through how new DoC work is to be done, it may be possible to use the model to develop a classification, or map, of paths of development, to locate different countries within it and to draw conclusions about the possibilities and limits of such paths, or potential paths, for policy and programme purposes. Much work needs to be done on that.

7 Conclusion

The diagrams on pages 20 & 21 are intended to depict in a stylized manner the conceptual framework called ‘the political system’. And these have been used here to facilitate thinking about politics and to standardise political analysis across very different countries for further DoC work. However, it is important to stress that the various boxes are not there to be filled and ticked in a wooden manner. Each box or section is intended to represent, conceptually, a political process which is part of a dynamic sequence of linked political practices which together constitute the political system and which determine developmental outcomes. The dynamic is fluid and there is much overlap in respect of both personnel and agents as well as activities within the model. To give but one example, the gatekeepers may well be part of the decision-making process, may be engaged in lobbying activity and may also be at the heart of certain demands or oppositions. But it is useful for conceptual purposes to think of these processes and personas as distinct.

The framework is meant as an aid for identifying and analysing political processes and especially developmental processes (or their absence). Ultimately, its utility will be measured by how much it is able to reveal about these processes and by what it can tell us about the prospects for developmental outcomes in specific countries, regions or sectors within them.

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Appendix 1

Elements of the political system: a brief elaboration

- The *environment* refers to the wider (internal and external) economic, social and political environment (systems) in which any political system is situated. It is within and from this environment that social and political groups and agents emerge and seek to promote their or the collective interest. So although the 'political system' *appears* as an isolated and autonomous sphere it is in fact deeply implicated in the wider social and economic (and political) systems of which it is a part. The interaction between the political system – the decision-making processes – and other social, cultural and economic systems which constitute its environment is active and continuous. No political system, whether democracy, autocracy or theocracy is exempt from demands, oppositions and lobbying – whether licit or illicit - that impact upon it, whether these emanate from wider society, or abroad, or from a narrow elite. Conceptualised in this way, the political system is, of course, part of the environment of the economic, social and cultural systems.
- *Legitimacy*. While always hard to measure (especially in non-democratic polities), legitimacy refers to the general level of acceptance of the rules of the political game. Legitimacy is not the exclusive monopoly of democratic polities, but is a property found in many political systems, past and present, ranging from African chiefdoms, to absolutist European polities based on the divine right of kings, to the Mandate of Heaven which was the basis of royal legitimacy in China for close to 2000 years. Legitimacy is the glue which sustains the rules of political game and their operation through the political system. There are a number of dimensions of legitimacy which need not be spelled out in detail here, but some are worth mentioning briefly. *Geographical* legitimacy refers to acceptance by people of the boundaries within which they live (that is they do not wish to secede or be part of another state); *constitutional* legitimacy refers to acceptance of the rules of the political game, formal or informal; and *political* legitimacy refers to acceptance that the rules are fairly and properly applied. Secessionist or irredentist movements indicate low or zero legitimacy for the basic rules of the game amongst some communities (for example in former Yugoslavia, Northern Spain, Chechnya, Northern Sri Lanka) and maintaining control may sap the political authority and resources of a regime.
- The *inputs* refer to two of the dynamic elements (internal and external) which, in part, drive the political process. On the one hand are the *demands* (for better schools, lower taxes, clean water, more autonomy for regions etc.), the *influences* (perhaps external) and the *oppositions* to particular demands. On the other hand there is the fluctuating level of *support* for a government and its policies which, in democratic polities at least, is theoretically supposed to influence how governments behave; and actions and strategies of *withdrawal* (of support, aid, recognition). There is overlap in activity and personnel with the *lobbying* activity.

- The *decision-making power map* refers to that critical process – somewhat stylized in this presentation – through which all the different interests, influences, demands, oppositions and ideas (plus, sometimes, calculations of impact on support) interact in the contestation over policy decisions. It includes the ‘withinputs’, that is ideas, interests, goals, policies and objectives of the decision-makers themselves – formal holders of power and authority - which can be very important and which get fed into the process. Much will depend in each case on the distribution of power in the policy making arena, as expressed, for instance, in the relations between executives, legislatures, bureaucracies, militaries and in some polities, the judiciaries.
- Finally, there are the *output* processes, involving – schematically – the *decisions* made (in the form of laws, regulations, deals, contracts, institutional rules and more), the manner (and politics) of their *implementation* and the impact of that – the feedback - on both general levels of legitimacy and support for, or its withdrawal from, government and regime. Certain outputs may, for instance, trigger further demands or oppositions, lower or raise support and deepen or damage legitimacy.