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ESID Working Paper No. 47

Investigating the political economy of social protection expansion in Africa:
At the intersection of transnational ideas and domestic politics

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March, 2015

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Abstract

The growing literature on social protection in Africa has tended to focus on conceptual debates, policy design issues and impact evaluations. To date, there has been relatively little systematic analysis of the ways in which politics and political economy shape policy. This paper outlines a conceptual and methodological framework for investigating the politics of social protection, with a particular focus on explaining the variation in progress made by African countries in adopting and implementing social protection programmes. We propose that an adapted 'political settlements' framework that incorporates insights from the literatures on the politics of welfare state development and discursive institutionalism can help frame elite commitment to social protection as an outcome of the interaction of domestic political economy and transnational ideas. This approach has the advantage of situating social protection within a broader policy context, as well as highlighting the influence of underlying power relations in society. Finally, the paper suggests a research methodology that can be employed to operationalise this approach, with a particular focus on process tracing and comparative case study research.

Keywords:

Social protection, political settlements, ideas, donor agencies, Africa.

Introduction and rationale

Recent years have seen increasing interest in social protection as a means of reducing poverty and promoting development within the development industry and among growing numbers of developing countries (Barrientos and Hulme 2008, Ellis *et al.* 2009). This trend is reflected in: the adoption of social protection strategies by both international organisations and bilateral donors and attempts to integrate social protection into their organisational activities; the identification and promotion of particular developing country social protection programmes as models for others to follow; and even a proposal that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should include social protection, either as a standalone goal or as targets within several other goals.

Increased interest in social protection has already been influential, with numerous African countries adopting different forms of pilot and large-scale social transfer programmes, several countries having formulated national social protection strategies and many more in the process of producing them. There is, however, huge variation in the experiences of African countries. While some countries have shown little interest in social protection, others have made rapid progress in adopting and implementing policies, frequently incorporating ideas promoted by international actors, while still others have struggled to achieve a consensus on policy details and implementation, despite an apparent interest in the idea of social protection. In line with recent thinking on social protection, and international development more broadly, we hypothesise that politics holds the key to explaining much of this variation. More specifically, we suggest that elite commitment to the expansion of social protection is closely related to domestic political economy and transnational ideas and their interplay in specific contexts. From this perspective, the success of attempts by transnational actors to promote social protection expansion in developing countries will depend on the compatibility of these ideas with existing political settlements, their underlying interests and, we suggest, the ideas of powerful factions therein. This paper outlines a theoretical and methodological framework that can guide research into the political economy of social protection expansion in Africa, and elsewhere, and that will seek to explain this variation in national experiences.

The framework outlined below builds on and incorporates insights from three distinct academic literatures. First, is the small but growing literature on the politics of social protection in developing countries. There is a growing recognition within development studies that politics matters for social protection in general (Graham 2002, Pritchett 2005, Hickey 2009) and with specific reference to sub-Saharan Africa (Hickey 2008, Niño-Zarazúa *et al.* 2011). This existing research has convincingly argued both that politics shapes social protection processes (Graham 1995, 2002, Barrientos and Pellissery 2012) and that causal links run in both directions; social protection can also transform politics, potentially building social cohesion (Mkandawire 2004, 2005) and social contracts (Hickey 2011). However, while this research has identified broad political factors that influence social protection – namely institutions, actors,

socioeconomic change and global processes (Hickey 2008, 2009) – there is, as yet, little agreement as to which specific forms of politics matter most, or how these factors interact with one another.

Second, there is a vast literature on the politics of the expansion and retrenchment of the welfare state in advanced economies. This literature advances four main explanations for patterns of welfare state development related to: economic growth and structural transformation (Wilensky 1975); class-based political mobilisation for redistribution (Korpi 1978, 1983, Stephens 1979, Huber and Stephens 2001); institutionalist explanations that highlight how institutional design structures political decision making and results in path dependence (Esping-Andersen 1990, Skocpol 1992, Pierson 1994); and the role of ideas in shaping preferences and influencing policy change (Schmidt 2002, Béland 2005, Weyland 2009). While there is certainly need for caution in translating these theories from the analysis of welfare states to the very different contexts of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa, the political factors at play remain highly relevant to the analysis of social policy in Africa (Kpessa and Béland 2013).

Third is the growing literature on political settlements that focuses on the implications of political bargaining between elite and non-elite factions for institutional design and distribution of resources within society (North 2007, Di John and Putzel 2009, Khan 2010, Robinson and Acemoglu 2012). While these frameworks have thus far been used primarily to analyse the politics of economic growth, we argue that they also have important implications for the politics of social protection. Indeed, there is a considerable overlap between the political settlements approach and some existing theories of welfare state development. A political settlements framework actually offers one means of adapting the insights of this welfare state literature to the political and economic contexts of contemporary developing countries. We contend, therefore, that a political settlements approach, if adapted in certain respects, has the potential to deepen understanding of the politics of social protection , particularly if mobilised through the kind of comparative case-study design associated with theory testing and the generation of causal explanations (George and Bennett 2004).

The paper next outlines the relevance of the political settlements framework for the study of social protection, and, second, extends this political settlements framework to incorporate a focus on the role of ideas in politics and policy change. The third section brings this discussion together to present the conceptual framework and hypotheses that can guide future research in this field. The fourth section outlines a methodological approach that can operationalise this framework, before the final section concludes.

Political settlements and social protection

Recent works that focus on the political determinants of growth-enhancing institutions have attracted a great deal of attention within international development and beyond

(North 2007, Di John and Putzel 2009, Khan 2010, Robinson and Acemoglu 2012). While there are important differences between these approaches, they are united in focusing on the politics that underpin particular institutional configurations. These institutions reflect the balance of power between contending factions, securing access to rents for elite factions in line with their relative strength. As such, the 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). From this reading, institutions constitute not only the 'rules of the game' that influence individual behaviour, but also mechanisms for distributing rents within society (Khan 2010, p. 19, Di John and Putzel 2009). Where these institutions produce a distribution of rents that is not in line with the relative power of elite factions, institutions will be resisted through various strategies of negotiation and conflict until key interest groups settle upon a stable set of institutions that delivers an acceptable distribution of rents: a political settlement.

Much of the emerging literature on political settlements focuses specifically on the adoption of the institutions required for long-run economic growth. However, these frameworks also have clear relevance for other policy areas, including the study of social policy (Levy and Walton 2013). In several important respects, there are strong similarities between the use of a political settlements approach to study social policy and some existing theories of welfare state development in industrialised countries, namely the *power resources* (Korpi 1978, 1983, Stephens 1979) and in particular the *power constellations* approach (Huber and Stephens 2001, 2012), which views social policy expansion as the outcome of a re/distributive conflict among contending political groups. This shared focus on the interaction of resource distribution within society and political stability necessitates the examination of social protection in a broader context. Social protection is but one means of distributing resources in society and a full understanding of the role of social protection therefore requires analysis of how these policies relate to the broader 'distributional regime': the national growth path, industrial policy and agrarian reforms, and public spending on social services (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, Huber and Stephens 2001, UNRISD 2010).

A political settlements framework offers a means of extending the power constellations approach beyond its roots in the analysis of welfare state development in advanced economies to contemporary developing countries. Khan (2010, p. 24) argues that structural transformation– namely, a shift in the economic basis of production and exchange from largely informal to largely formalised modes– is necessary to generate a sufficient tax base to distribute the resources needed to support the political settlement through the formal budgetary process. In the absence of such structural transformation, political elites will need to generate and distribute sufficient off-budget rents to keep powerful actors and groups bought into the political settlement. The result is that in developing countries, informal institutions, notably clientelism, are likely to prevail in the political realm – leading Khan (2010) to characterise all developing countries' political settlements as 'clientelist'. As such, the political settlements approach highlights the importance of informal, as well as formal

institutions, and extends our analytical focus beyond class-based political mobilisation and formal political organisations operating in democratic contexts.

Second, just as the welfare state literature has highlighted the links between economic development, industrialisation and the extension of social policy (Wilensky 1975, Skocpol and Amenta 1986, Huber and Stephens 2001, Polanyi 2001), political settlements analysis draws attention to the relationship between structural transformation and governance. Khan (2010) argues that political settlements are likely to enable a wider, more equitable and effective distribution of public goods where a degree of structural transformation has taken place. The main causal mechanism that he invokes, namely the growing power of capitalist producers with a strong interest in growth-enhancing institutions, has little direct relevance to our focus on social protection. However, there is a resonance here with Polanyi's (2001) assertion that the political impulse for social protection has its roots in the urge to re-embed processes of capitalist development within a more social logic, something that comparative research has identified as related to the adoption and extension of social protection in the Global South also (Hickey 2009). Several drivers may be at play here, including: the tendency of urbanisation to generate higher levels of collective action around public goods provision (Huber and Stephens 2001); the tendency of growing levels of inequality to inspire a political response to maintain social stability (Polanyi 2001); and the possibility of funding social protection from increased tax revenues generated by economic growth and the expansion of formal sector employment (Wilensky 1975).

Despite the overlap between the welfare state literature and the political settlements framework, existing political settlements analyses have paid little to no attention to social policy. Where social policy has figured at all, such programmes are viewed exclusively in terms of the distribution of patronage: elite factions manipulate public funds to buy political support, with the result that resources are diverted away from the poorest groups (North 2007, pp. 26-27).[1] This tendency to view social policy solely through the lens of patronage – shared with the literature on neo-patrimonialism (Mkandawire 2013) – risks missing the diverse political motivations that governments have for introducing social programmes. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that different types of political settlement are likely to have very different orientations towards social protection policy and capacity for implementation.

Types of political settlement and their orientation to social protection

In seeking to identify the developmental character of different types of political settlement, Khan (2010) focuses on how the horizontal and vertical distribution of power shapes the incentives of political elites to act in the long-term public interest. Horizontal distribution of power refers to the relative power of the elite factions excluded from the ruling coalition, while vertical distribution of power is the strength

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[1] Acemoglu and Robinson (2008) also include educational provision as one of the key institutions that contributes to enhanced economic growth.

of lower-level factions compared to elites (see Figure 1). This typology highlights four ideal-type political settlements. At one extreme, *potential developmental coalitions*, are characterised by weak excluded elite factions and weak lower-level factions, providing the political stability required for ruling coalitions to have a long-term perspective and to develop strong implementation capacity. At the other extreme, a situation of *competitive clientelism* is presented, where the only effective means of maintaining political stability between competing elite factions is to cycle power between them, resulting in short time horizons, while strong lower-level factions are likely to result in weak implementation capacities.

Figure 1: The developmental characteristics of different types of clientelist political settlement
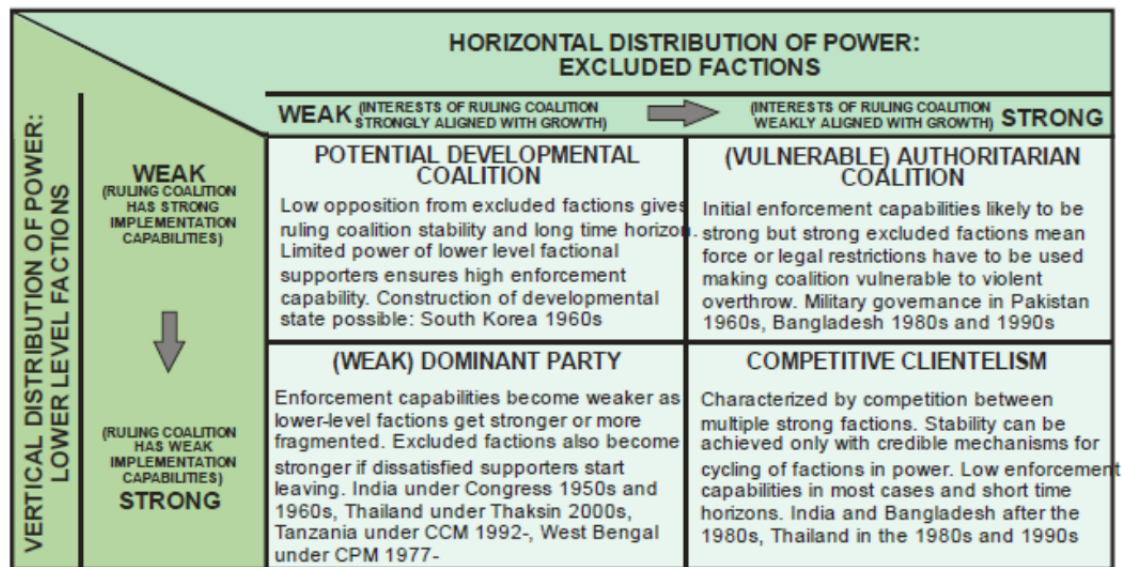
Source: Khan (2010, p. 65).

In order to examine the links between political settlements and their orientation towards social protection, it is also helpful to distinguish between two levels of analysis with respect to political settlements (Khan 2010, pp. 21-22). At the higher level, *political bargains and/or conflicts result in a political settlement* involving the creation of informal and formal institutions that solve the problem of violence and provide the minimum required level of political stability and economic performance for a society to function. At a second, lower level of analysis, *within the context of an existing settlement*, the adoption and operation of particular institutions and policies is contingent upon their compatibility with the prevailing distribution of power.[2]

Social protection and the establishment of political settlements

Research on the politics of social policy provides ample examples of the use of social policy to achieve the political stability required to establish a political settlement. The

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[2] In practice, this useful conceptual distinction will be a matter of degree rather than a clear dichotomy: at what point does a particular policy become sufficiently important to move from being subject to negotiation and compromise *within a political settlement*, to require *re-negotiation of the political settlement itself*?

impetus for this introduction of social policies can be either *top-down* – with elites introducing reforms as a means of pre-empting societal demands or undermining potential political opposition, or *bottom-up*– with elites responding to the demands of societal groups (Weyland 1996).

Perhaps the leading example of the use of social policy to establish a political settlement is the democratic class compromise that was the foundation of European welfare states (Melling 1991, Stephens 2007). In these countries redistributive social protection in the context of capitalist development was a central feature of the political settlement between labour and capital that brought stability to post-World War II Europe. In particular, through a largely bottom-up process, trade unions and political parties representing the interests of the working class, middle class and, in some cases, rural populations, made redistributive demands that ultimately led to the incorporation of social protection policies as part of the political settlement (Huber and Stephens 2001).

The political and socioeconomic context faced by contemporary developing countries is, of course, very different to that in which European welfare states emerged. Indeed, several authors have noted the growing challenge of achieving the cross-class solidarity that underpinned welfare state expansion in a globalised world, both in advanced economies and, especially, in developing countries (Standing 2010, Deacon and Cohen 2011). In particular, elites and middle income groups are increasingly seeking protection in global markets, in doing so, limiting the potential for cross-class domestic political settlements focused on redistributive social policy (Standing 2010, Deacon and Cohen 2011). It would therefore be unreasonable to expect the politics of social protection in developing countries to mirror that of welfare state development. Nevertheless, an important factor influencing social protection expansion in countries enjoying some degree of democratic freedom will be the ability of disadvantaged groups to overcome collective action problems and mobilise around common class, ethnic, gender or other interests to demand social protection expansion, and the nature of their relationships to elite factions within the ruling coalition. The institutionalisation of elections in many African countries in recent decades may well constitute one mechanism by which disadvantaged groups are able to voice such bottom-up demands, perhaps through an intensification of patron-client politics within what Khan refers to as competitive clientelism, rather than as a result of agenda setting by programmatic political parties.

In less inclusive political contexts, where political settlements are largely the outcome of intra-elite bargaining and there is less potential for bottom-up mobilisation by disadvantaged groups, there remains the possibility that elites pursue social protection expansion in a top-down fashion. Indeed, in all cases there remains a need for ruling coalitions to legitimate the political settlement and to ensure the acquiescence of lower-level groups. One possibility is that ruling coalitions manipulate social spending to buy the allegiance of powerful lower-level factions, with likely negative implications for programme effectiveness and poverty targeting (Weyland 1996, North 2007). However, the incentives to provide patronage in this

way will not be uniform across different types of political settlement. Rather, the inclination to use social spending to buy the support of lower-level factions is likely to be strongest in competitive clientelist systems, where strong lower-level factions are able to make demands of ruling elites and strong political opponents offer a viable alternative patron, and in weak dominant party coalitions, where competitive pressures are growing.

In contrast, in the potential developmental coalitions described by Khan (2010) there is less need for ruling elites to buy the support of weak lower-level factions through patronage. Historically, however, there are numerous examples of dominant coalitions initiating the expansion of social protection as a means of securing the acquiescence of groups that might otherwise threaten political stability and economic growth in the future or to undermine political opponents. Examples include the introduction of social insurance schemes, first in Bismarck's Germany (Rimlinger 1971) and then in Latin America (Weyland 1996, Mares and Carnes 2009, Huber and Stephens 2012), and the rapid expansion of social protection in contemporary China (Cook and Kwon 2007, Hsiao *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, in South Africa generous social assistance spending has been introduced in a top-down fashion as compensation for a capital-intensive growth strategy that results in high inequality and unemployment (Seekings and Nattrass 2005).

Of course, political settlements are often unfavourable to the expansion and effective implementation of social protection. Wherever social protection programmes are at least partly financed through domestic taxation,[3] elite commitment to social protection expansion will require transformation of the underlying political settlement and a change in the existing distribution of rents– transferring resources away from powerful factions in order to provide resources for social programmes. In many cases, elites may be able to form a ruling coalition and establish the basic institutions required for political stability and economic growth without providing any form of social protection. In such circumstances, there will be few incentives for elites to agree to reduced rents through increased taxation and redistributive social spending, and the political settlement may constitute a barrier to expanding to social protection.

Existing political settlements and incentives for social protection

At the lower level of analysis identified by Khan (2010) – within the context of an existing political settlement – the incentives flowing from the political settlement have important implications, both for the types of policies adopted and capacity for implementation of social protection.

Regarding the formulation and adoption of policies, a key distinction between potential developmental coalitions and competitive clientelist settlements is likely to be the time horizon of the ruling coalition. The stability of potential developmental

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[3] Although many social protection programmes are largely donor funded, there are many examples of at least partly tax-financed schemes, including social pensions in several southern African countries, the *Programa Subsídio de Alimentos* in Mozambique, and health insurance and cash transfer schemes in Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda.

coalitions provides the conditions for elites to take a long-term perspective, including the potential consideration of social protection policies that may take time to design and implement, and that deliver benefits in the medium to long term. In contrast, competitive clientelist settlements provide strong incentives for ruling coalitions to pursue policies that deliver quick wins to maximise immediate political returns and secure electoral support for the coalition. The long-term perspective of dominant party coalitions was evident in the use of pensions and other insurance schemes by the East Asian developmental states, not only to provide protection to those covered, but also as a means of enforcing savings and mobilising revenues for long-run investment in economic development (Kwon 2004, Kpessa and Béland 2013, Yi and Mkandawire 2014). It also seems likely that such a long-term perspective is necessary for ruling coalitions to invest in integrated and sustainable social protection systems that take time to construct, so as to exploit synergies between policy areas (Mkandawire 2004) or that anticipate future structural economic changes – pursuing policies that do not just meet the social needs of today, but the likely needs of a more advanced economy in the future. In contrast, the incentives of a competitive clientelist settlement would point towards an ad hoc approach to policy choice resulting in policies that deliver quick benefits – for example through cash benefits or short-term employment – to politically important groups.

There is also the possibility, where social protection is assigned low political importance by domestic factions, that transnational actors– international organisations, bilateral donors and INGOs– become the main driving force in policymaking. Transnational actors may be able to promote the expansion of social protection in a particular country in the face of the opposition, or, perhaps, ambivalence of ruling elites, particularly where the donors involved have a relatively high level of holding power in relation to the ruling coalition. However, it seems unlikely that social protection will become institutionalized, as opposed to merely project-based (Niño-Zarazúa *et al.* 2011), in contexts where there is little to no national elite commitment.

The political settlements framework also has important implications for the implementation of social protection policies once they are adopted. Whatever the motivations of the original adoption of particular policies, the process of implementation is likely to be subject to pressures resulting from the nature of the political settlement. So, for example, even where social protection policies are adopted, the implementation of social protection may become embroiled within the heavily personalised and patronage-based workings of public sector delivery systems, which are characteristic of all clientelist forms of political settlement (Levy 2014). Although elites in potential developmental coalitions may be able to exercise sufficient discipline over and within the bureaucracy to ensure that it delivers effectively, the political incentives within weak dominant party and competitive clientelist settings are more likely to lead to social protection becoming heavily politicised and distributed according to the logic of patronage, rather than according to needs or rights.

The central hypothesis arising from this discussion of the existing literature is, therefore, that there are likely to be multiple combinations of causal factors that can lead to elite commitment to social protection expansion, and that these combinations will vary in important respects between types of political settlement. In competitive clientelistic systems, and perhaps also weak dominant parties, ruling coalitions will be more likely to use social protection as a form of patronage to secure the support of relatively powerful lower-level factions that could otherwise defect to powerful opposition groups. It would also be expected that policy announcements and investments would be released in relation to key moments in the electoral cycle where competitive pressures and the demands of lower-level factions are at their strongest. In contrast, potential developmental coalitions face relatively little pressure from weak opposition and weak lower-level factions and consequently little incentive to use social spending as patronage. More likely incentives to expand social protection in these dominant party settings include regime legitimisation, as a productive investment in growth and as a counter-balance to a growth strategy that otherwise offers little security for vulnerable groups. However, it is also important to recognise that political settlements are dynamic, and real world political settlements will lie somewhere on the continuum between the ideal types of Khan's typology. Where potential developmental coalitions are subject to increased competitive pressures and demands from lower-level factions, then some patronage tendencies may also be apparent. Likewise in competitive clientelist settlements characterised by instability and rent seeking, there may be moments of relative stability or instances of serious threat to the political settlement that enable or force ruling coalitions to take a longer-term perspective.

Political settlements and ideas

Ideas are only explicitly considered in existing political settlements frameworks, if at all, as a tool used by elite factions to mobilise support as a means of achieving their pre-defined interests (Khan 2010, pp. 20, 61). Beyond this, the main assumption within this literature is that a developmental 'vision' will only emerge when particular coalitions produce stable institutional arrangements and ruling coalitions with a long time horizon (Kelsall *et al.* 2010, Khan 2010). As such, political settlements analysis tends to treat the role of ideas as a subordinate outcome of the incentives that flow from the political settlement and its resultant institutional arrangements. However, this approach both offers a reductive reading of political behaviour (Hickey 2013) and is unable to predict which policies (economic or social) will actually be selected by a particular coalition (Sen 2012). Any political settlement is actually likely to be compatible with several different policy approaches. There is therefore a degree of policy space within which key actors can promote favoured approaches (Grindle and Thomas 1991), perhaps particularly so in policy domains that are deemed less central to the core concerns of regime survival and legitimacy.

Incorporating insights from ideational analysis could improve our understanding of elite behaviour and of why certain policies are adopted and others neglected (Béland 2005, Schmidt 2008, Brady 2009). However, to incorporate ideas into a political

settlements approach requires us to re-examine core ontological assumptions within existing frameworks, namely that actors are aware of their material interests and that they act rationally to secure these interests in the form of maximising their control of economic rents. While such assumptions enable the formulation of a powerful predictive model, they are nonetheless problematic. Political actors rarely, if ever, know for certain ex-ante the outcomes of different strategies. Instead, in making decisions, actors 'rely on perceptions of … [a] context that are, at best, incomplete and that might often prove to have been inaccurate after the event' (Hay 2011, p. 67). As such, interests, rather than being defined by the material context in which actors find themselves, are 'irredeemably ideational, reflecting a normative … orientation toward the context in which they will have to be realized' (Hay 2011, p. 67, Blyth 2002).

A focus on ideas and agency also offers a counterbalance to the emphasis on path dependency apparent in the work of North *et al* (2012). This focus on stability and continuity risks overlooking the dynamism that can characterise political contexts in developing countries. As Schmidt (2010, p. 2) notes, a focus on ideas and discourse may be required to help explain change within a context of institutional stability, enabling us to 'go beyond 'politics as usual' to explain the 'politics of change'. One way of doing this is to draw on insights from the emerging school of discursive institutionalism, 'which is concerned with both the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context' and can be used alongside other institutionalist approaches to provide 'insights into the dynamics of institutional change by explaining the actual preferences, strategies, and normative orientations of actor' (Schmidt 2010, p. 1).

The remainder of this section discusses the relevance of ideas to the analysis of social protection within a political settlements framework. The discussion focuses on: types of idea in relation to social protection; change and stability in ideas; and the openness of different types of political settlement to ideational change.

Types of ideas on social protection

Discursive institutionalism, and the literature on ideas in political analysis more broadly, identifies three main types of idea: *policy ideas* that provide potential solutions to pre-defined social problems; *problem definitions* that provide ways of framing and understanding particular social issues, in doing so favouring certain types of policy solution and foreclosing the possibility of other types of intervention; and *overarching paradigms* that serve as road maps, providing 'a relatively coherent set of assumptions about the functioning of economic, social and political institutions' (Béland 2005, p. 8, Schmidt 2008). A further distinction can be made between ideas that are *cognitive*, which 'elucidate "what is and what to do"', and those that are *normative*, 'which indicate "what is good or bad about what is" in light of "what one ought to do"' (Schmidt 2008, p. 306). The relevance of each of these levels and types of ideas for social protection is mapped out below (see Table 1).

Importantly, ideas also need to be mobilised and communicated in particular ways if they are to gain political salience. This means that we also need to consider the role of discourse and discursive processes, that is 'the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed (which may be carried by different agents in different spheres)', not least as 'discursive processes alone help explain why certain ideas succeed and others fail because of the ways in which they are projected to whom and where' (Schmidt 2008, p. 309). In relation to the political settlement, then, we could assume that the ideas of actors with greater holding power within ruling coalitions will have more sway, and that those promoting new programmatic and policy solutions will have to find ways of either aligning their ideas with dominant perspectives and/or seeking to persuade dominant actors that the new solution is actually in line with what is or should be their perceived interests.

Different types of ideas about social protection (and, indeed, other issues) are relevant to the two levels of Khan's (2010) conceptual distinction between the negotiation of the political settlement itself and consideration of policy issues within the context of an existing settlement. Starting with the former, political settlements frameworks regard instability as the natural order of the social world, contending that the institutions that underpin political settlements are created to promote stability to enable civilisation and economic growth (North 2007, Khan 2010). According to ideational institutionalism, it is ideas, proposed by particular political actors, that provide the blueprints for these institutions (Blyth 2002, Schmidt 2008, Hay 2011). The ideational blueprints that underpin political settlements, and provide the basis for consensus between contending factions, can take many different forms, but may include paradigmatic ideas on social policy, from the welfare state to rights-based approaches to different forms of social contract between a state and its citizens (Hickey 2011).

Within the context of an existing political settlement, ideas can also influence social protection policy, both by changing the way in which social problems are framed and by providing ideas about how such problems might be resolved. Different ideas about the framing of social problems could lead to the same social issue being regarded in terms of economic poverty, inequality or food insecurity, for example, while different framings of social protection itself can present it either as a productive investment in economic development or as a source of welfare dependency (see Table 1).

Similarly, social protection policy ideas have recently been extremely influential in policy design in many developing countries. These ideas include both aspects of policy design – such as targeting mechanisms or smart cards to deliver payments – and particular policy models that are identified and promoted internationally as success stories – including Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, India's MGNREGA and Ethiopia's PSNP (Slater and McCord 2013).

Table 1: The politics of ideas about social protection

Level of idea	Type of idea	Ideas around social protection
Paradigm/ philosophy	*Normative*	How is 'development' understood and who is held responsible for ensuring it? Who deserves assistance, in what circumstances and on what terms?
	Cognitive	What legitimating ideas enable these normative philosophies to mesh with the programmes and policy ideas below?
Problem definition/ programmes	*Normative*	What are seen as the main social problems to be solved/goals to be achieved,(e.g. poverty reduction, vulnerability, inequality, economic development)? How is this legitimated?
	Cognitive	How are these problems/goals identified? What mechanisms/programmatic responses are considered to be effective in addressing these key problems/goals?
Policy ideas/ solutions	*Normative*	What ideas are used to legitimate/delegitimate different policy responses to the above problems? If adopted, how are policies framed (e.g. conditionality; targeted or universal)?
	Cognitive	Is social protection seen as a credible solution to the above problems? What sources of ideas and evidence are relevant here (e.g. policy design, targeting mechanisms, poverty and vulnerability assessments, policy evaluations)?

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Ideational stability and change

Researchers analysing ideational change contend that there is path dependency in ideas as well as in institutions. During periods of institutional stability within established political settlements, agents' perceptions of their interests are also likely to be stable. At these times, ideational influence may be limited to proposing policy solutions to problems that arise in the context of a stable settlement or, perhaps, influencing the framing of relatively minor problems that arise. It is only during periods of institutional instability or 'Knightian uncertainty' – when agents are not just unsure of how to achieve their interests, but also unsure of what their interests are– that actors re-evaluate the core paradigms that guide their decision making and seek new approaches (Blyth 2002). Consequently, a focus on ideas reinforces previous calls to examine political settlements in historical and dynamic perspective (Di John and Putzel 2009, Khan 2010, Hickey 2013), given that the paradigmatic ideas

underpinning settlements are likely to change relatively infrequently at moments of instability in ruling coalitions.

Ideas can be transferred through a wide variety of mechanisms, including the exertion of hard power – both the threat of sanction and opportunity of rewards for adoption – and soft power – the shaping of actors' agendas and preferences (Dion 2008). Perhaps the clearest example of the use of hard power to transfer ideas on social protection was the structural adjustment reforms pursued by the World Bank and IMF in the 1980s and 1990s across the developing world. These programmes made the reform of social protection policy, including removal of food subsidies, privatisation of pension funds and user fees for healthcare, a pre-requisite for lending. However, social protection ideas are also frequently transferred through forms of soft power. For example, a policy innovation in one particular context that is perceived to be a policy success may be actively promoted by national or international actors as a model for others to follow (Weyland 2005, Dion 2008, Orenstein 2008, Béland 2014). Equally, policymakers in one country can seek to learn directly from the experiences of other, often neighbouring, countries who have found solutions to what are seen to be similar problems (Weyland 2005). Soft laws or recommendations at the global level, though not legally binding, can also provide incentives for action at the national level by establishing global norms, contributing to peer pressure or creating competition between countries (Dion 2008).

In many cases, successful ideational influence is dependent on the actions of policy entrepreneurs who lead domestic debate, advocate for change and build advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1988, Béland 2014). Such policy entrepreneurs might be: individuals within the ruling coalition; multilateral or bilateral donor representatives who exert influence through discussions with national policymakers, financial incentives or technical assistance; or civil society actors, including INGOs, that campaign for policy changes.

In certain cases, ideational change may occur through the wholesale adoption of an idea by policymakers, as is implied by some work on policy diffusion. More commonly, however, ideational change is likely to involve processes of *bricolage*, whereby 'ideas borrowed from various sources are combined and recombined to create something new' (Béland 2014, p. 6) or *translation*, 'the ways in which actors adapt foreign or global policy ideas to make them fit into the dominant categories and institutions of their jurisdiction' (Béland 2014, p. 11, Lendvai and Stubbs 2007). For example, research on the adoption of social pensions in South Africa shows that although European contributory pension schemes were influential on South African policymakers, this policy idea was adapted to the very different social and political context of South Africa (Devereux 2007, Seekings 2009). Furthermore, ideas may also be used as framing devices, used as a means of justifying policy choices to particular domestic or international audiences, perhaps for reasons other than those that influenced the original decision making of the policymakers (Schmidt 2008). As such, attention to processes of bricolage, translation and framing necessarily points

analysis in the direction of the key actors who interpret, frame and re/create policy meanings through these actions (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007).

This literature suggests that timing is essential in the promotion of ideational change. During periods of stability, outside actors will have relatively little opportunity to influence the core, paradigmatic ideas that underpin political settlements; instead they must take advantage of moments of uncertainty and perceived crisis when elites seek to re-negotiate the terms of the settlement with citizens (Hickey 2009) to influence the framing of problems and perhaps even to alter the paradigms upon which political settlements are based. These windows of opportunity may originate in upheaval and conflict within the ruling coalition itself, or be the result of exogenous shocks, for example from the global economy. One important example is the ongoing influence of the debt crisis and IFI-promoted structural adjustment programmes from the 1980s and 1990s. In many cases, structural adjustment helped to establish key ideas underpinning contemporary political settlements, including a focus on a minimalist state and, consequently, a limited state role in social protection. [4] Conversely, however, research has shown that the Asian financial crisis led political elites to realise that citizens required institutionalised forms of protection from the damage wrought by unfettered neoliberalism, resulting in the expansion of social protection (Haggard and Birdsall 2002, Kwon 2004).

Opportunities to influence the framing of policy issues and to provide policy solutions are likely to be more frequent than those to transform foundational ideologies of political settlements, but will still depend on timing. Where new problems arise, there will be some room for actors to shape the interpretation and framing of these issues. Equally, where existing policy solutions are no longer deemed adequate to address important social problems, actors will seek new policy ideas. A notable example here would be the food crisis of 2002-03 in Ethiopia, during which some 14 million people required assistance, highlighting the inadequacy of existing ad hoc food distribution programmes and opening space for donor ideas regarding a longer-term approach, culminating in the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (The IDL Group n.d.). The importance of timing and the unpredictable nature of opportunities for influence suggest that external actors may well require longstanding engagement to build up networks and trust with key policymakers, in order to be able to take advantage of these windows of opportunities as and when they arise. This point is well demonstrated by Leutelt's (2012) study that examines the strategies employed by HelpAge to influence social protection policy in Africa.

Political settlements and ideational influence

Not only are diverse types of ruling coalition likely to have a different orientation towards social protection, but, as and when windows of opportunity arise, there are also good reasons to believe, first, that different types of ruling coalition are likely to

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[4] The extent to which the post-Washington Consensus or 'inclusive liberalism' constitutes a significant and influential paradigmatic shift is a similarly important consideration (Porter and Craig 2004, UNRISD 2010).

be more or less open to ideological influence and change, and, second. that they are likely to have varying relations with foreign donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and other transnational actors seeking to influence social protection ideas.

Regarding the former, potential developmental coalitions with high elite cohesion and longer timeframes are more likely to have strong ideological perspectives underpinning their settlements and development strategies. Nevertheless, in narrow dominant party coalitions, ideational change relating to policy solutions and problem framing could be achieved relatively straightforwardly if a small number of powerful decision makers are convinced of the need for change. Where, as seems likely, these coalitions have stronger ideological commitments, attempts to influence policy by external actors will, at the least, need to be compatible with the foundational paradigms of the settlement.

In contrast, competitive clientelist settlements – characterised by fragmented elite coalitions representing multiple interest groups and ideological perspectives, and a strong emphasis on maintaining power through distribution of rents – are unlikely to be able to commit strongly to a particular ideology. In this respect, very broad dominant party coalitions may share important characteristics with competitive clientelistic ones, since they comprise diverse interest groups and perspectives, which can block policy change (Khan 2010, p. 67). In such settings, ideational influence by external actors is less likely to be constrained by fit with the ideology of the ruling coalition, but must be framed broadly to appeal to diverse interest groups.

There are also good reasons to suggest that these different types of political settlement will also have differing relations with their foreign donors, leading to variation in the potential for ideational influence. In competitive clientelist systems, within which it is difficult for programmatic approaches to flourish, ruling coalitions have considerable incentives to adopt donor ideas (or at least policy framing) as a means of securing funding which can be distributed as rents to support the settlement, and to ensure donor support for their factions, rather than their political opponents. As such, ruling coalitions in competitive clientelist systems may well make promises to secure donor funding to use as patronage, albeit that they are likely to face significant implementation challenges.

In comparison, in potential developmental coalitions, where elites have a longer time horizon, there is likely to be more space to pursue an ideological programme, and ruling elites are more likely to try to protect their decision making autonomy from donor influence. Again, this is especially the case in a narrow dominant party coalition, where the range of interest groups is relatively small, resulting in high elite cohesion, rather than a broad coalition made up of many factions with diverse interests and ideological positions.[5] In potential developmental coalitions, the ruling

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[5] The comparison between the narrow EPRDF coalition in Ethiopia and the broad Frelimo regime in Mozambique is instructive here. While Frelimo has largely followed donor trends without outlining a clear strategy of its own (De Renzio and Hanlon 2009), the EPRDF has

elite also face little in the way of competition from political opponents. Consequently, donors do not have the option of bestowing support on an alternative faction, but instead must either rely on convincing ruling elites of the worth of their favoured approaches or make credible threats to withdraw support altogether. However, when potential developmental coalitions are convinced of the worth of donor ideas, they are likely to have greater capacity for implementation.

All of these propositions suggest, just as Schmidt (2002, 2011) has argued that different types of formal political institutions require different forms of discursive communication of policy ideas, that influencing policy in different types of political settlement may require different discursive strategies. Broad coalitions with diverse interests may require more ambiguous framing of policy ideas that can appeal to a wider audience, while narrow ruling coalitions may be convinced by more direct, targeted framings.

Towards an adapted political settlements approach to the analysis of social protection

This section synthesises the preceding discussion regarding the relevance of a political settlements framework to social protection and the role of ideas within political settlements in order to outline the conceptual framework and a set of hypotheses that will guide the research project. The conceptual framework (see Figure 2, below) builds on key elements of the political settlements approach laid out by Khan (2010) and Di John and Putzel (2009), namely: the power relations between (domestic) elite and non-elite factions; the formal and informal institutions that constitute the political settlement; and the resultant distribution of resources.

However, in light of the previous discussion and our focus on social protection, this basic framework has been adapted in several important respects. First, we incorporate the concept of a policy coalition, in line with the ESID conceptual framework (Hickey 2013), as a means of analysing how political forces come together around particular policy issues in acknowledgement of the likely variation in the political importance assigned to social protection in different political settlements. This is intended to address a weakness in the political settlements literature; namely how the policy process plays out in specific domains within the context of a given political settlement. Where social protection is deemed key to political stability or thick enough with rents to support the distributive requirements of the ruling coalition, the interests and ideas of the ruling coalition are likely to be strongly reflected in social protection policy. However, where social protection is seen as marginal to regime survival, social protection expansion may be limited or the policy coalition will be driven by foreign donors, rather than government officials with close ties to the settlement.

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been assertive in protecting its autonomy from donors and has strong ownership of its development strategy.

Second, and again in acknowledgement that social protection is just one of many means of distributing resources in society, and not necessarily the most important, we set the resources distributed through social protection in the context of a distributional regime consisting of a development strategy, industrial policy, taxation and social services (Huber and Stephens 2001, Seekings and Nattrass 2005, UNRISD 2010).

Third, we incorporate a focus on global actors and processes, a notable gap in current political settlements frameworks (Hickey 2013). These global factors include global economic factors that affect the domestic economy, and thereby the distributional regime, directly. However, when considering social protection in developing countries, key omissions in this respect are multilateral and bilateral donors. Donors in our adapted political settlements framework are conceptualised as a distinct faction or set of factions with their own holding power, interests and ideas, and with the capacity to destabilise the domestic settlement if dissatisfied. The degree of influence donors are able to exert over policymaking is related to the extent of aid dependence of the ruling coalition and the importance of aid, for example as a source of rents to support the political settlement (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013). However, aid relationships are also the outcome of longstanding processes of negotiation and contention between the actors involved (Whitfield 2009). In certain cases, aid-dependent coalitions have been able to maintain considerable separation between government policymakers and donor agencies, and thereby policy autonomy. At the other end of the spectrum, donor agencies in some countries have become embedded within what Harrison (2004) calls the 'sovereign frontier', with the result that all aspects of the policymaking process are thrown open to donor scrutiny and influence, through the provision of technical assistance, budgetary oversight and sectoral reviews.

Finally, our adapted political settlements framework incorporates an analytical focus on the role of ideas in shaping the perceived interests of actors, driving policy change and as frames actors use to justify decisions. Within the framework, the most general ideas – paradigms and political philosophies – are more likely to be associated with the political settlement as a whole, while deliberations within policy coalitions are likely to be more directly influenced by specific problem frames and policy ideas.

The preceding discussion on political settlements, ideational change and social protection also gives rise to a set of hypotheses regarding the interaction between the key variables outlined in this conceptual framework (see Table 2), which can be tested through the kind of comparative research design we argue for in the next section.
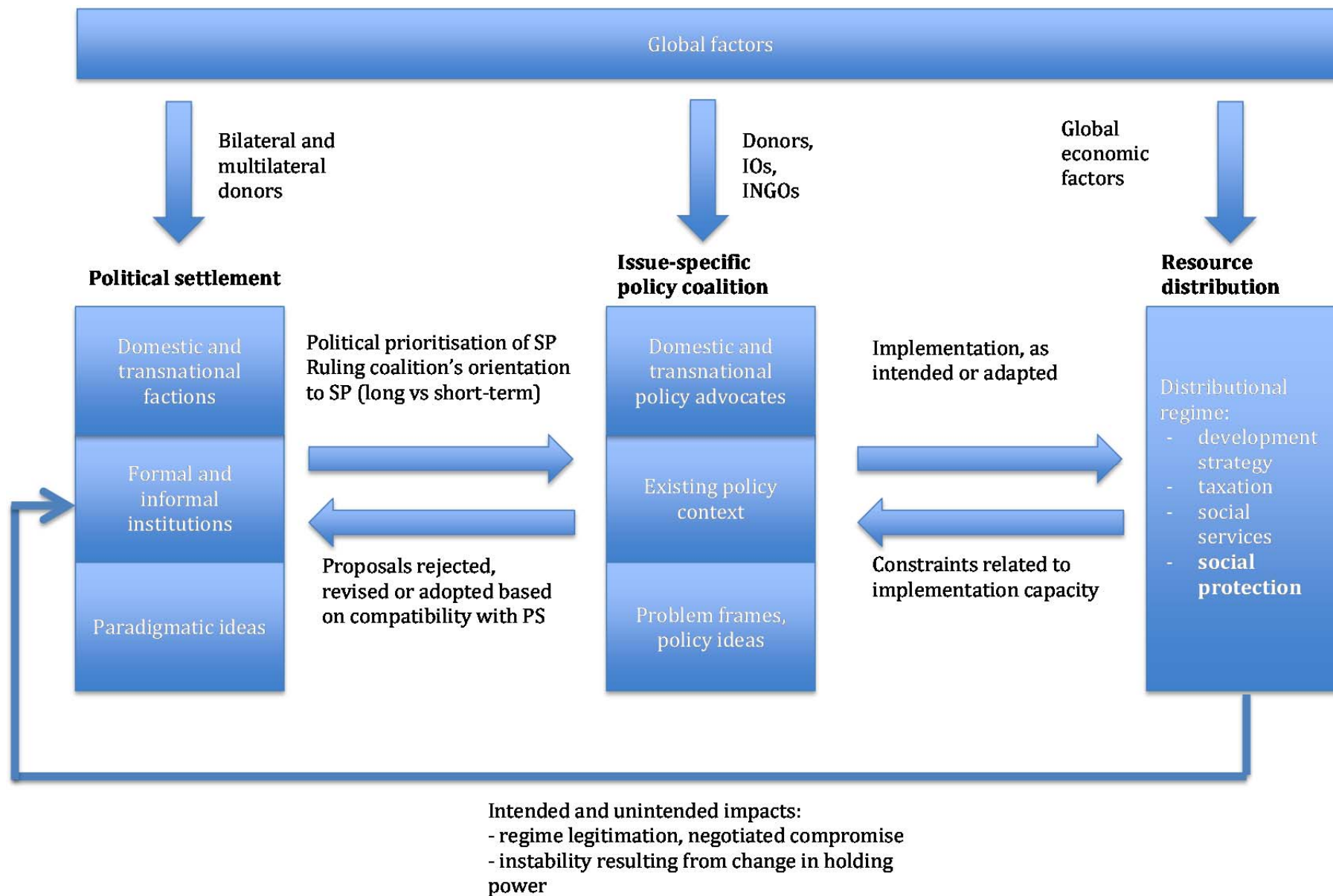
Figure 2: Conceptual framework

Table 2: Hypotheses on the relationship between political settlements, ideas and social protection

Issue	Hypotheses
Ruling coalition's motivation for social protection expansion	Competitive clientelist settlements are more likely to use social protection as patronage, particularly around elections.
	Potential developmental coalitions are more likely to use social protection for regime legitimation or to prevent emergence of political opposition.
The political importance a ruling coalition attaches to social protection	Where social protection is perceived to play key a political role in promoting stability, the *policy coalition on social protection* is likely to be closely aligned with the *ruling coalition*, resulting in greater elite ownership of the social protection agenda.
	Where social protection is not a high political priority, there is likely to be little overlap between the *ruling* and *policy coalitions*, and the social protection agenda is more likely to be donor driven or there will be inaction on social protection expansion.
The time horizon of the ruling coalition	Competitive clientelist settlements are more likely to be focused on the short-term benefits of social protection, leading to an ad hoc collection of policies that serves short-term political interests.
	The stability provided by potential developmental coalitions is more likely to give rise to a long-term perspective and moves towards an integrated social protection system focused on long-run social and economic benefits.
Institutional stability and ideational change	Moments of instability, including the renegotiation of the political settlement, open space for policy change and ideational influence, with social protection ideas potentially providing a means of addressing new problems and/or promoting stability.
Political settlements and ideational change	Narrow ruling coalitions are more likely to commit to ideational change, if key actors are convinced that policies serve their perceived interests.
	Broad ruling coalitions will struggle to find consensus for ideational change, requiring policy proposals to be framed so as to appeal to diverse constituencies, slowing the process of policy adoption and implementation.
Political settlements, ideological commitment and policy change	Potential developmental coalitions are more likely to have strong ideological commitments, requiring social protection ideas to be framed in ways that fit with these ideologies.
	Competitive clientelist or broad dominant party settlements are less likely to have clear ideological commitments, with the result that ideological fit is less important.

Methodology

To examine which types of political settlement and ideational influences are more or less favourable to the adoption and implementation of social protection requires a research design based on the comparison of social protection policy processes in and across a range of country case studies selected according to the previously discussed typologies of political settlements. More specifically, we suggest that

process tracing in a comparative case study design (Hall 2003, George and Bennett 2004, Yin 2008) offers the best way forward in terms of identifying the causal mechanisms at play in relation to these analytical requirements. Process tracing, through theoretically based historical explanation of a sequence of events, aims to understand causal relationships by examining the mechanisms through which they are produced. Process tracing is a form of within-case analysis that is particularly suited to searching for causal mechanisms (Bennett and Elman 2006). Furthermore, George and Bennett emphasise the importance of enhancing the validity of causal explanations by seriously considering and ruling out other competing hypotheses that might explain a phenomenon (George and Bennett 2004).

This form of comparative case study design needs to identify a common set of questions, drawn from a coherent conceptual framework, to ask of each case (George and Bennett 2004). These questions can be grouped under four main research activities. The first is to analyse the country's political settlements over time. Drawing on the conceptual discussion above, key factors to consider are: the relative strength of factions excluded from the ruling coalition relative to the coalition itself and the relative strength of lower-level factions compared to the ruling elites. These factors enable settlements to be classified in terms of Khan's (2010) typology. The analysis also needs to specify the key factions included within the ruling coalition and which are excluded, as well as the breadth of interests represented within the ruling coalition. Finally, all political settlements involve some degree of shared ideas and values between the factions involved. Research needs to specify which political, economic and social ideas form the basis of cooperation and consensus between contending factions and underpin formal and informal institutions.

The second research activity involves an analysis of where social protection fits within a broader social policy context and in relation to the distributional regime. This involves, first, an historical analysis of social policy and social protection within the specific national context, so as to be able to set recent policy developments in the context of past initiatives and legacies. Key concerns include: the main groups that have favoured social policy expansion and those that have resisted, and how each relates to the underlying political settlement; the ideas that have been used to frame the social policy debate – paradigms, problem frames and policy ideas; and the ways in which social policy has been used– for example, as patronage, to limit political opposition, as an investment in economic development, or as a means of legitimating the authority of the regime. Furthermore, analysis should consider what roles social policy is expected to play within a broader development strategy, and how these have combined to produce patterns of economic growth and structural transformation, poverty and inequality.

The third research activity involves process tracing of debates on the expansion of specific social protection policies and programmes in the country and the evolution of policy coalitions. This involves mapping the leading actors and coalitions within the social protection domain, including those responsible for policy *adoption* as against those responsible for policy *implementation* (see the fourth research activity below).

22

One of the aims of this analysis is to link this decision-making process to the first and second research activities regarding the nature of the political settlements and the distributional regime. In cases in which governments have already taken significant steps towards formulating a national social protection strategy or a specific policy, this will involve tracing backwards from a particular decision (e.g. the announcement of a reform or adoption of a strategy) through various stages of decision making and re/formulation of policy proposals. In negative cases, where ruling coalitions have made little to no meaningful attempts to introduce national policies, analysis can start from what might be expected to be the most likely actors to promote social protection expansion – for example, relevant government departments, donor agencies, civil society organisations – and trace forward, examining what activities they have undertaken and what barriers they have faced

The fourth activity concerns implementation, with a particular focus on the politics of the process, rather than on undertaking a systematic evaluation of whether the various inputs, outputs and outcomes are being delivered and achieved. A focus on implementation serves two purposes: first, to provide a stronger indication of political commitment than policy adoption alone; and, second, to examine whether the nature of the political settlement and the particular incentives that flow from it influence policy implementation and how. Important issues to focus on here are the extent to which governments have actively developed the capacity of the agencies required to deliver social protection; the extent to which targeting is being done on the basis of need as opposed to other imperatives; whether the public goods involved are being delivered, and are understood by recipients to be delivered, as a form of patronage or as of right; and also whether there is any evidence of political feedback loops, e.g. recipients/non-recipients putting pressure on government for improved/extended coverage or greater support for the regime .

Data sources

This research strategy requires a range of different data sources. The first two research activities – analysis of political settlements and the distributional regime – can draw on secondary literature, including a growing body of work on political settlements in the countries selected below, as well as government and donor policy documents and laws, existing statistics and key informant interviews with relevant respondents. For process tracing in the third research activity, documentary and archival evidence may provide useful inputs. However, key informant interviews will be vital to the research objectives. Key informant interviews are an important tool for process tracing, since they provide access to respondents that directly witnessed events and can therefore be used either to confirm information revealed by documentary evidence or to reconstruct an undocumented sequence of events (George and Bennett 2004, Tansey 2007). These interviews will need to cover a wide range of respondents who are, or might have been, involved in discussions, public debates and decision-making. These are likely to include: government policymakers in key ministries and departments, and the executive; representatives of international organisations, bilateral donors and INGOs with an interest in social protection; and

other elites – business leaders, union leaders, political opposition, and local NGOs. It may also be helpful to include a mixture of both senior and lower-level officials from these organisations. While senior officials may have a good idea of the big picture, they frequently do not have a clear recollection of, or may not have even been involved in making, detailed decisions. In contrast, lower-level officials may have better information on the detailed decision-making process, but no sense of the broader context within which decisions were taken (George and Bennett 2004). The fourth activity, on implementation, will draw on a similar mix of key informant interviews and examination of policy documents, particularly existing policy evaluation work. It will likely involve going beyond the national level to generate insights into how policies are functioning at the local level.

All data constitute imperfect representations of social reality. As such, all data should be carefully scrutinised and assessed for their reliability. For example, interviews can be a very useful way of getting information on a series of events. However, the accuracy of interview responses will be affected by respondents' memory of events and their desire to overstate or minimise, depending on the circumstances, their role in decision-making (Tansey 2007). Similarly, it is essential to critically examine evidence from archival sources, asking whether the author of the document is in a position to have detailed knowledge of an event. This is likely to include asking questions such as: what was their intention in creating the document? how closely involved was the person in the events that they are describing? how long after the event did they document it? would they have any interest in misrepresenting their own involvement in the event (Milligan 1979, George and Bennett 2004)?

Case selection

The first step in case selection is to define the realm of social protection and to select the forms of social protection that will be the focus of the study. Although there is considerable debate regarding definitions of social protection, there is a common core focus on: contributory social insurance; non-contributory social assistance; and labour market regulation policies (UNRISD 2010). The conceptual framework outlined above combines a focus on transnational ideas and domestic political economy. As such, there is a good case for focusing on different types of social protection, e.g. social insurance and social assistance, as there is some *a priori* evidence that different domestic political drivers may lie behind the expansion of different types of social protection (Mares and Carnes 2009).

Country case selection, meanwhile, reflects variation in the different types of political settlement identified in the previous discussion, and variation in progress in the adoption and implementation of social protection programmes (see Table 3 for some potential exemplars with respect to social assistance and health insurance). Comparative analysis of these types of countries would enable research to test the hypotheses that variation in the type of political settlement is related to the orientation of the ruling coalition towards social protection, the relationship between ruling coalitions and their donors, and the ruling coalition's openness to ideational

influence, as well as the proposition that different combinations of factors will contribute to elite commitment to social protection in different types of political settlement. This may enable research to indicate whether particular kinds of political settlement are more conducive to the expansion of social protection than others, or to identify whether the same kinds of settlement are achieving different levels and rates of progress, in which case the variation may be explicable by other factors, including the role of ideas and transnational players.

Table 3: Case selection; types of political settlement and progress in the expansion of social protection (some examples)

Country	Political settlement	Progress in social assistance	Progress in health insurance
Ethiopia	Potential developmental coalition	**Advanced** (Productive Safety Net Programme)	**Moderate** (large-scale Community-Based Health Insurance pilot)
Rwanda	Potential developmental coalition	**Advanced** (Vision 2020 Umurenge)	**Advanced** (Mutuelles de santé)
Uganda	Weak dominant party	**Slow**	**Slow**
Kenya	Competitive clientelist	**Advanced** (Various categorical cash transfer schemes)[6]	**Slow**
Zambia	Competitive clientelist[7]	**Slow**	**Slow**

Finally, case selection is not just about picking countries, but also determining the time period to be covered by the analysis. Although many policy developments relevant to the current progress of social protection in Africa have taken place within the last ten years or so, the broader policy legacy and the power dynamics within society have a much longer history. In particular, the roots of many of the key institutions and power relations at the heart of contemporary political settlements can be traced at least as far back as the colonial era (Hickey 2013), as can the initiation of what is now termed social protection in Africa (e.g. including formal sector pensions and public welfare schemes). Even research focused on contemporary

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[6] Namely, the Orphans and Vulnerable Children's Cash Transfer (OVC-CT), the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) and the Persons with Severe Disabilities Cash Transfer (PWSD-CT) Programmes.
[7] Since at least the 2006 elections, when Zambia transitioned from being a weak dominant party settlement.

developments will therefore need to set these events in the context of political settlements and social policy developments since the late colonial era.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that an adapted political settlements framework can offer important insights into the recent expansion of social protection in Africa. In particular, the concern of the political settlements literature with contention and negotiation over the distribution of resources within society is of direct relevance to the analysis of the political economy of social protection. This analytical focus echoes past work on social policy based on the power constellations approach. However, Khan's (2010) emphasis on informal as well as formal institutions and the power relations between contending factions, offers the possibility of extending the insights of this welfare state literature from advanced economies and democratic politics to the contexts of contemporary Africa. A political settlements approach promises not only to offer a deeper perspective on the politics of social protection, including a move from conceptual framing to the generation of hypotheses and theoretical explanation, but also a move beyond a normative to a more realist framing of the politics of social protection, particularly by reframing social protection as a political strategy for maintaining regime stability and legitimacy, rather than as a means of achieving development per se.

Nonetheless, mainstream political settlements thinking suffers from a number of important limitations, in particular when re-directed to focus on the political economy of social protection. First, political settlements frameworks tend to downplay the importance of transnational actors in favour of detailed analysis of domestic politics. While questionable in any policy area, this is particularly problematic when considering the expansion of social protection, given the central role played by multilateral and many bilateral donors in promoting this agenda. Second, political settlements frameworks tend to pay little attention to the different activities involved in policymaking, with Khan focusing particularly on the enforcement rather than adoption of institutions, and operating at a general level, rather than focusing on particular policy domains (especially the social). Different policy domains or sectors are likely to be both constituted in different ways in relation to the overall political settlement, and also characterised by particular kinds of internal politics and governance arrangements which help shape outcomes. Third, and closely related to these previous points, the incorporation of insights from the literature on ideational influence over policymaking can complement many of the central insights of the political settlements literature. The adoption of a social protection programme by a national government is always likely to involve some degree of policy learning from the experiences of other countries, albeit frequently with substantial adaptation based on local circumstances. Ideational research has already developed many important insights into the nature of ideas and the mechanisms of ideational influence. The framework outlined above proposes that ruling coalitions are likely to vary in important ways regarding their ideological cohesion, their openness to ideational

influence and their relationships with transnational actors seeking to influence policy choices.

Finally, this paper has proposed a methodology that can be used to study ideational influence on social protection policy formulation in particular political settlements. This methodology employs process tracing within a comparative case study design as a means of focusing on the key actors involved in decision-making processes and the ideas and interests which influenced their choices. Process tracing therefore offers the potential to be able to link discussions, disagreements and negotiations within the policy formulation process to aspects of the domestic political settlement and the activities of external actors seeking to promote ideational change.

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