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Alternative routes to the institutionalisation of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa: Political survival strategies and transnational policy coalitions

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Abstract

The new phase of social protection expansion in the Global South remains poorly understood. Current interpretations use problematic evidence and analysis to emphasise the influence of elections and donor pressure on the spread of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa. We seek a more nuanced explanation, testing an alternative theoretical and methodological framework that traces the actual process through which countries have not just adopted but *institutionalised* social transfers. Two main pathways emerge: one involves less electorally competitive countries, where the primary motivation is elite perceptions of vulnerability in the face of distributional crises, augmented by ideas and resources from transnational policy coalitions. The other entails a primary role for transnational policy coalitions in adoption, before competitive elections and the need for visible distribution drive institutionalisation. Consequently, the latest phase of social transfer development results from the interplay of political survival strategies and transnational policy coalitions.

Keywords: social transfers, sub-Saharan Africa, politics, political settlements, transnational policy coalition.

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Introduction

Research on the comparative political economy of social policy has increasingly had to confront a new challenge: explaining social protection expansion in the Global South, including sub-Saharan Africa. The last 20 years have seen growing efforts to promote social protection by global, regional and national actors. In developing countries, where informal labour markets predominate and extreme poverty remains a serious challenge, these efforts have focused on social transfers to reduce poverty.[1] The United Nation's Social Protection Floor Initiative launched in 2009, the International Labour Organization's Recommendation 202 on National Social Protection Floors in 2012, the African Union's 2009 Social Policy Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals, with targets on social protection systems, all require governments to expand provision.

The move to establish social transfers as a new global social policy differs markedly from the spread of social protection in Europe, Latin America and East Asia, most notably in terms of the role played by international actors. This suggests the need to rethink the basis on which research on the political economy of social protection should proceed at the current juncture. The challenge is further complicated by diversity of the current expansion, which varies between countries. In some cases governments have rapidly moved to adopt and expand new programmes, while in others the principle of providing social transfers has been fiercely resisted by political elites. The challenge therefore is to understand why governments have responded in diverse ways, what the drivers of adoption and expansion are and what implications this has for the institutionalisation of social transfers. This paper presents comparative research on the political economy of the institutionalisation of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In doing so, the paper proposes a new definition of the *institutionalisation* of social transfers, focusing on the extent to which social transfer programmes are implemented and financed by national governments, grounded in legislation, national in reach and the proportion of qualified beneficiaries that they reach (see below).

The expansion of social transfers is subject to growing debate. For some, the turn to social transfers constitutes a 'revolution from the Global South' (Hanlon et al., 2010), tracing new policy models to innovations in Brazil, Mexico and India in the 1990s. While not disputing these origins, other work highlights the importance of an epistemic community of international organisations, bilateral donors, international NGOs and consultants in formulating social transfers as a global policy agenda and promoting it within developing countries (Deacon, 2013; Hickey & Seekings, 2019; Von Gliszczynski, 2015). Some have argued that donor pressure is the main cause of policy change in developing countries (Cherrier, 2016; Ouma and Adésínà, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Finally, other analysis situates the expansion of social programmes, including social transfers, in the context of the third wave of democratisation and the

[1] We take social protection to include social insurance, social transfers and labour regulation. Social transfers comprise various programmes that, unlike social insurance, do not require payroll contributions for participants to access support.

necessity for politicians to reach out to previously marginalised populations to secure votes (Brooks, 2015; Seekings, 2012; Van de Walle, 2014). Social transfers constitute a potentially useful tool for this purpose.

Each perspective has some validity. This paper, however, seeks a deeper theoretical and empirical engagement to understand how multiple causal processes have combined to produce distinct patterns of reform. The research constitutes an engagement between the welfare state literature – notably the 'power resources' approach (Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1979); discursive institutionalism (Blyth, 2002; Schmidt, 2008); and recent work on the power relations that underpin development processes (Doner et al., 2005; Khan, 2018). The paper demonstrates that a fuller understanding of the evolution of social transfers requires analysis of how transnational processes combine with domestic political dynamics. For example, focusing on the role of transnational actors provides no insights as to why comparable donor efforts to promote social transfers in different countries have produced contrasting outcomes. Nor does a focus on democratisation provide an explanation as to why governments with questionable democratic credentials, such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania, have significant social transfers programmes.

We conceptualise social transfers as a resource that is subject to competition regarding its distribution between societal groups. Consequently, social transfer programmes are one tool within the broader political survival strategies employed by ruling elites to maintain power (Migdal, 2001). In the context of constrained state resources and growing political competition, donor willingness to help finance social transfer programmes offers a potentially valuable resource. While donors pursue their own organisational priorities, national political elites can take advantage of these resource flows, utilising the international sphere to maintain domestic power (Bayart, 2000; Whitfield, 2009). Despite donor pressure to expand social transfers, it is notable that ideological opposition to 'state handouts' is widespread across Africa (as in many other regions). It is only when donors form coherent policy coalitions with politicians and bureaucrats domestically, and where the social transfer programmes advocated by these coalitions align with the political survival strategies of elites, that institutionalisation occurs. Depending on the context, we argue that these survival strategies may entail winning elections, for which the visible distribution of social transfers is seen as valuable, or addressing distributional crises, perceived as threats to dominant party rule.

Methodologically, the paper employs a comparative case study design, comparing and contrasting eight country case studies (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), each of which applies a process-tracing methodology (George and Bennett, 2004). This approach employs the strengths of two analytical approaches, reducing the risk of mistaken inferences through within-case analysis, while building contingent explanations through comparative analysis (George and Bennett, 2004).

The next two sections lay out the theoretical framework and methodological approach taken. The following sections present the case studies, comparative analysis and conclusion.

Explaining the expansion of social protection

This section briefly reviews theories of the expansion of social protection – in established welfare states and developing countries – in order to situate our own theoretical approach in the second sub-section.

The state of the current literature

Perhaps the most influential theory of welfare state development is the power resources approach (Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1979). From this perspective, social protection is the outcome of the political mobilisation and redistributive demands of the working class through unions and leftist political parties, often in coalition with other classes. Class mobilisation is central to comparative studies of welfare reform in Europe (Huber and Stephens, 2001) and Latin America (Huber and Stephens, 2012). The power resources approach offers the important insight that social protection is the outcome of a distributional struggle between interest groups. However, as originally formulated, power resources faces limitations regarding the politics of social transfers in developing countries (Lavers and Hickey, 2016). 'The poor' – the focus of most social transfer programmes – do not constitute a social class, but a heterogeneous and politically fragmented grouping. Consequently, it is unclear what interest group would mobilise to campaign for narrowly targeted social transfers. Moreover, in the absence of large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation, class is not the main political cleavage in most African societies, with ethnicity, region and religion frequently more salient.

Other influential work focuses on institutions, particularly the distribution of veto points, and the degree to which this impedes or enables social reforms (Pierson, 1994; Skocpol, 1992). While the welfare state literature takes democratic institutions for granted (Huber and Stephens, 2012), when focusing on sub-Saharan Africa democratisation has become an important focus of discussion (Brooks, 2015; Van de Walle, 2014). For some, democratic institutions mean that political elites can no longer maintain power solely through distributing rents to elite actors, but must expand social provisioning to broader swathes of the population, leading to the 'democratisation of clientelism' (Gay, 1998; Van de Walle, 2014). However, the mere establishment of multi-party elections is insufficient to spur redistribution. Critics have highlighted the variable outcomes of this 'third wave', from meaningful steps towards democratisation to the establishment of 'competitive authoritarianism', where elections offer little possibility of regime change (Levitsky and Way, 2010). The key is to move beyond a focus on formal electoral institutions, to examine how these operate in practice as a result of the distribution of political power and the informal institutions which can undermine or complement formal 'rules of the game' (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Khan, 2018). Elections can entail meaningful political competition

– potentially leading to the politicisation of social transfers – but they can be no more than a façade.

Research on social protection in developing countries highlights the importance of transnational actors, including multilateral and bilateral donors. Various authors have argued that donors dominate the social transfer decision-making process in Africa (Cherrier, 2016; Ouma and Adésínà, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Donors are clearly important, employing material and ideational resources to promote favoured policies. However, donors are not all powerful. Even at the peak of donor influence during debt crises of the 1980s and 1990s, donors were more successful in securing policy commitments than implementation (van de Walle, 2001). Moreover, donor influence has declined with new natural resource finds and Chinese investment as alternate sources of finance, and large-scale debt cancellation that has limited donor leverage. Donors may be able to implement small pilots (Ouma and Adésínà, 2018), but they have never had the capacity to implement large-scale national programmes without government support.

Finally, other work has emphasised the causal role of ideas, either as a supplement to or causally prior to institutional factors (Schmidt, 2008). One common theme is to highlight how negative perceptions of the ‘undeserving poor’ and the dangers of ‘welfare dependency’ limit state support (Katz, 2013). Yet, the ideational literature also identifies ideas as positive drivers of policy change (Schmidt, 2002). Notably, where advocacy coalitions are bound together by a ‘shared a set of normative and causal beliefs’ they can place policy proposals on the political agenda and drive reform (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999: 120). Ideas are also the medium through which policy models are transferred from one setting to another (Orenstein, 2008; Weyland, 2009), with the recent spread of social transfers constituting a notable example (Hickey and Seekings, 2019; Leisering and Barrientos, 2013; Von Gliszczynski, 2015).

Social transfers as a tool for political survival

This paper builds on these valuable contributions and our extended discussion of the literature (Lavers and Hickey, 2016). We analyse social transfers as an important distributional resource and thereby one of the tools available to political elites to be used as part of the political survival strategies they employ to maintain power (Migdal, 2001).

The rise of social transfers on the global development agenda has taken place at a particular political and economic moment. Historically, many African governments deferred responsibility for social provisioning to idealised community and family support mechanisms, with access to land and agricultural livelihoods seen as the principle means of support (Seekings, 2012). Yet rapid population growth and land shortages have progressively undermined these ‘agrarian’ regimes (Boone, 2014; Seekings, 2012). Structural adjustment and good governance reforms from the 1980s onwards limited government tools for resource distribution by reducing subsidies and agricultural marketing boards, at the same time as increasing pressure on governments to hold multi-party elections and compete for voters' support. In this context, the active promotion of social transfers by many donors from the early 2000s and their willingness to finance significant proportions of programme costs constitute a significant new resource. National governments can seek to influence the distribution of social transfers in line with their political survival strategy, whether that entails delivering resources to increasingly important voters or dealing with other threats.

However, the political incentives to expand social transfers clash with the common ideological resistance amongst ruling elites to the principle of providing state support to the 'undeserving' poor (Reis and Moore, 2005). This is the result of concern about the risk of 'welfare dependency', the continued resonance of the idea of the community, extended family and agricultural economy as the main support mechanisms, however unrealistic this may be (Seekings, 2012), as well as more recently established and largely neoliberal concerns about the role of the state. For governments to institutionalise social transfer programmes, therefore, additional political drivers are required.

The first potential driver is ***the existence of meaningful political competition***. This goes beyond the existence of electoral institutions or a straightforward classification of regimes as democratic or authoritarian. Rather, the key distinguishing feature is whether incumbents face a realistic possibility of losing elections. In such circumstances, the ruling party is likely to use all the tools at its disposal to build support amongst the electorate. Social transfers can be one such tool, especially where social transfer advocates are able to frame such programmes as feasible means of securing support. This is less likely to occur where ruling coalitions face little prospect of losing elections – because opposition is weak or the electoral system is easily manipulated – and therefore have little incentive to secure additional votes. Political competition is distinct from a focus on regime type, since a democratic regime that faces a weak or fragmented political opposition and is confident of electoral success has little incentive to pursue reforms to secure short-run political support. Equally, however, a competitive authoritarian regime concerned about strengthening opposition could resort to such strategies to consolidate its position. Where electoral competition drives adoption, expansion and institutionalisation, we would expect announcements to fit closely with the electoral cycle, as pre-election giveaways or electoral promises enacted once in power.

The second potential driver is ***a distributional crisis that is perceived as a threat to regime survival or the political system as a whole.*** Existing literature provides numerous examples of distributional crises that prompted significant social protection expansion, including the Great Depression and the New Deal in the US (Skocpol, 1992) and the East Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s (Haggard and Birdsall, 2002). Ruling coalitions facing crises commonly resort to 'side-payments' in the form of goods and services, where resources are available (Doner et al., 2005). Distributional crises could originate in domestic processes (e.g. inflation, indebtedness, inequality, agricultural production failures) or global economic processes (e.g. global economic recession, trade shocks). Such crises may manifest in contentious politics (Slater, 2010) or be based on elites' assessment of the potential for instability. Such crises may be particularly influential where they challenge existing ways of thinking and necessitate openness to new ideas (Blyth, 2002). The key is that ruling elites perceive a distributional crisis to constitute a threat to their rule. For a crisis to prompt the expansion of social transfers, the crisis must be distributional in nature and advocates must be able to present social transfers as a plausible solution.[2]

Distributional crises could prompt the expansion of social transfers in either competitive or dominant political settings. Yet there are good reasons why such crises could more commonly affect dominant coalitions. In a competitive setting, a likely outcome of distributional crisis would be an electoral turnover. For a dominant coalition, a distributional crisis is more likely to constitute an existential threat to their authority and rule, particularly where an extended period of rule has fused party and state structures and where the provision of economic security and development has been central to the legitimacy of the dominant coalition. There are numerous examples in which dominant ruling coalitions have indeed extended social protection in response to such perceived threats, from the introduction of the first social insurance schemes in Bismarck's Germany in response to the threat of socialism (Rimlinger, 1971), to more recent expansion of social protection in China and Zhang, 2017).

The third driver is the ***existence of a coherent, transnational policy coalition that advocates for reform***. While political competition and distributional crises may provide motivation for politicians to seek solutions to the problems they face, policy coalitions are important in framing policy ideas as plausible solutions. Following Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999: 120), a coherent coalition necessitates that actors 'engage in a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time'. Under globalisation, the advocacy coalition framework needs to acknowledge the transnationalised nature of policymaking (Stone, 2008). This is of particular importance in developing countries where multilateral and bilateral donors have long held an influential place in politics and policymaking, despite the limits noted above. Focusing on transnational policy coalitions moves beyond simplistic notions of 'donor pressure' and captures the more negotiated nature of global policy transfer (Hickey and Seekings, 2019). An important requirement of a policy coalition is that it makes policy proposals that have some degree of 'ideational fit' with the beliefs held by key political figures. This insight builds on discursive institutionalism that highlights different types of ideas –

[2] Distributional crises are only one route to elite vulnerability (internal and/or external conflict could be others, according to Doner et al. (2005)) and not all economic crises will be strongly (or immediately) distributional in character. Distributional crises matter here because social transfers constitute a relevant response to this particular form of crisis. Following the Cambridge Dictionary, we define a crisis as 'a time of great difficulty, danger, or suffering'and a distributional crisis as one that directly pertains to the socioeconomic security of a society or a significant constituency thereof.

from policy ideas to problem framings and paradigmatic ideas (Schmidt, 2008). Ideational fit can be achieved in different ways. On the one hand, policy coalitions can adapt preferred policy models to fit with the paradigmatic ideas that underpin the ruling coalition. On the other hand, serious crisis may force politicians to re-evaluate core paradigmatic ideas, opening up space to consider policy models previously considered impossibilities (Blyth, 2002).

To summarise, then, we hypothesise that in low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where national governments face significant budget constraints and where an initial bias against state provision of social transfers is common, the formation of a coherent transnational policy coalition – including donors, bureaucrats and politicians – is a necessary, but insufficient step in the institutionalisation of social transfers. Progress towards institutionalisation depends on social tranfers presenting a plausible solution to the political challenges faced by ruling elites. As such, the presence of a coherent transnational policy coalition will only spur adoption and institutionalisation when combined with either (a) genuine electoral competition that threatens the incumbent's hold on power or (b) a serious distributional crisis that makes the same threat or even threatens the political system itself. We would further anticipate that the extent of the perceived threats identified above, whether through competition or distributional crisis, would also shape the extent of the response.

The analysis that follows tests these predictions against prominent ones in the existing literature. These are that social transfers are driven by donor influence not domestic politics and, alternatively, that democratisation is the main driver of social transfers.

Methodology

Investigating the spread of social transfers presents methodological challenges, particularly regarding the dependent variable and the causal complexity involved. This section addresses these problems in turn: having argued that existing methodological approaches struggle to address these challenges, we set out an alternative approach, which seeks to draw on the strengths both of comparative analysis and within-case analysis. The final sub-section discusses case selection.

Beyond adoption: The institutionalisation of social transfers

The 'dependent variable problem' is well acknowledged in social policy studies (Clasen and Siegel, 2007). Most existing studies either explain the level of social spending (e.g. Rudra and Haggard, 2005) or the moment of programme adoption (Brooks, 2015; Ouma and Adésínà, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Both have limitations. Social spending is a notoriously unreliable measure of the commitment to social programmes (Esping-Andersen, 1990), given that total spending tells us little about the nature of social programmes and the forms of protection provided. These challenges are compounded in SSA, where programmes have expanded only recently, and lack regular reporting requirements. The common focus on programme adoption is no less problematic. Many programmes began as tiny, donor-funded and operated pilots, only subsequently securing meaningful government support. A focus on adoption, for example, equates Ethiopia's 2005 adoption of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), which from the beginning was implemented through government structures and covered 5 million people, with Kenya's Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), which began in 2004 as a UNICEF funded and implemented 'pre-pilot' covering 500 households (Simpson, 2017). Furthermore, analyses of adoption make no attempt to explain why some pilots grow rapidly into large, national programmes (as with Kenya), while others remain insignificant (as in Uganda, see below) or peter out entirely.

This paper takes a different approach, by focusing on the *institutionalisation* of social transfers (Barrientos, 2018). Within the process of institutionalisation, programme adoption is one moment worthy of attention, but is not necessarily the most important. Equally, while social spending is one aspect of institutionalisation, it is by no means the only one. The focus on institutionalisation is important, given the external origins of many programmes and the continued reliance on external funding.

A social transfer programme can only be considered fully institutionalised when it is sustained – in terms of implementation and finance – through domestic resources, rather than external support. Moreover, a fully institutionalised programme will be grounded in legislation, enabling potential participants to claim state support, if state obligations are not fulfilled. Another core dimension of institutionalisation concerns the reach (or coverage) of the programme. Given the reality that in sub-Saharan Africa poverty remains widespread, we consider an institutionalised social transfer programme should cover 10 percent of the population at a minimum.[3] An institutionalised programme should also be national in scope, with all people within a country who qualify for support having a chance to be included in the programme. This does not preclude the use of geographic targeting to focus on the poorest parts of a country, but that a programme should not be constrained by definition to only certain provinces or districts.

Table 1 below provides details of the coding and data sources for each component of our institutionalisation measure. Each component is scored between 0 and 1 and then aggregated to produce a single measure, also scaled to the range 0 (no institutionalisation) and 1 (fully institutionalised). The reach of the programme is triple weighted in the calculation of the overall institutionalisation measure, reflecting the importance of programme size.[4]

[3] The existence of a programme covering 10 percent of the population does not, of course, necessarily mean that the poorest 10 percent are covered. Programme design may focus on other features of vulnerability other than income poverty, while targeting is widely acknowledged to be poor.

[4] In this paper, the index is used to illustrate the relative institutionalisation of particular programmes over time. It is not used as part of a statistical analysis. As such, while we believe that the additional weighting given to programme reach is justifiable, given the distributional goals of social transfers, for our purposes an unweighted index would not materially alter our classification or interpretation of the cases on which our arguments are based.

Table 1: Components of the institutionalisation of social transfers

Component	Description	Data sources	Weight
Statutory	The grounding of particular programmes in legislation and/or strategies: • 0: none • 0.25: pilot programme • 0.5: full programme • 0.75: Programme grounded in Social Protection Strategy or national development strategy • 1: specific legal basis	ISSA/SSA social protection programmes around the world; country case studies	1
Reach	The reach of the programme as a proportion of 10 percent of the population	Reach: Social Assistance Explorer;[5] Population: World Development Indicators	3
Finance	The proportion of government financing of the programme	Country case studies	1
Implementation	Whether the programme is implemented through government structures (coded: 1) or through NGOs / contractors / project implementation units (coded: 0)	Country case studies	1
Scope	Whether the programme is national in its scope. Geographically targeted programmes, where the whole country is potentially included would score 1. Pilots or programmes that are in the process of rolling out would score lower, depending on the proportion of the country covered.	Country case studies	1

Source: Authors.

[5] Available at: http://www.social-assistance.manchester.ac.uk/data

Causality and dealing with complexity

The theoretical discussion above suggests that the institutionalisation of social transfers is characterised by several important features (Amenta, 2003; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Pierson, 1994):

- configurational causation – there is rarely one single cause, but rather multiple causes working in conjunction;
- equifinality – there are multiple pathways to institutionalisation;
- long-term processes – changes often take years to unfold;
- incremental change – institutionalisation can happen in one-off reforms, but usually results from multiple reforms; and
- ratchet effects – reforms are politically difficult to roll back once implemented.

Existing research is dominated by cross-sectional regression analyses and single country case studies. Though each of these bodies of work has contributed to our understanding of the factors that drive institutionalisation of social transfers, neither is well placed to capture this causal complexity (George and Bennett, 2004; Ragin, 2008). In terms of cross-sectional, quantitative analyses, comparable studies include Brooks (2015), who analyses the determinants of the adoption of conditional cash transfer programmes in low- and middle-income countries, and Simpson (2017), who analyses the determinants of cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond these, many studies examine the determinants of social spending, including on social insurance (e.g. Rudra and Haggard, 2005). These studies explain variation using general political and economic indicators such as Polity IV, World Governance Indicators, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and trade openness. Such analysis provides a means of identifying broad patterns of association, rather than clear causal stories. Since the aim of this study is to explain complex causal pathways, we use a different approach. Another body of research on SSA has employed detailed country case studies, implicitly or explicitly employing variants of process tracing (e.g. Chinsinga, 2007; Hamer, 2016; Pelham, 2007). These studies have highlighted important factors shaping reforms, including electoral pressures, donor influence and patronage. Yet case selection is based on empirical interest, rather than theoretical advancement (Eckstein, 1975).

In this paper, we build on the strengths of detailed case studies (within-case analysis) *and* comparative analysis (between-case analysis), minimising some of these problems (George and Bennett, 2004). We draw on eight country case studies that trace the historical processes leading to the adoption and institutionalisation of particular programmes over time.[6] Each case study is based on a common theoretical framework and research protocol. A process-tracing approach was used to identify the origins of key turning points (George and Bennett, 2004), whereby a

[6] The peer-reviewed country papers were commissioned by the Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre: Ghana (Abdulai, 2019), Ethiopia (Lavers, 2019a), Kenya (Wanyama and McCord, 2017), Mozambique (Buur and Salimo, 2018), Rwanda (Lavers, 2019b), Tanzania (Jacob and Pedersen, 2018), Uganda (Hickey and Bukenya, 2016) and Zambia (Pruce and Hickey, 2019).

new policy announcement, budgetary allocation or programme expansion presented a shift in the level of institutionalisation. Research involved key informant interviews with all actors (politicians, donor agencies, members of parliament, programme officials and civil society actors) and mapping these changes onto an analysis of our key variables: competitive elections, elite perceptions of crises and transnational policy coalitions.

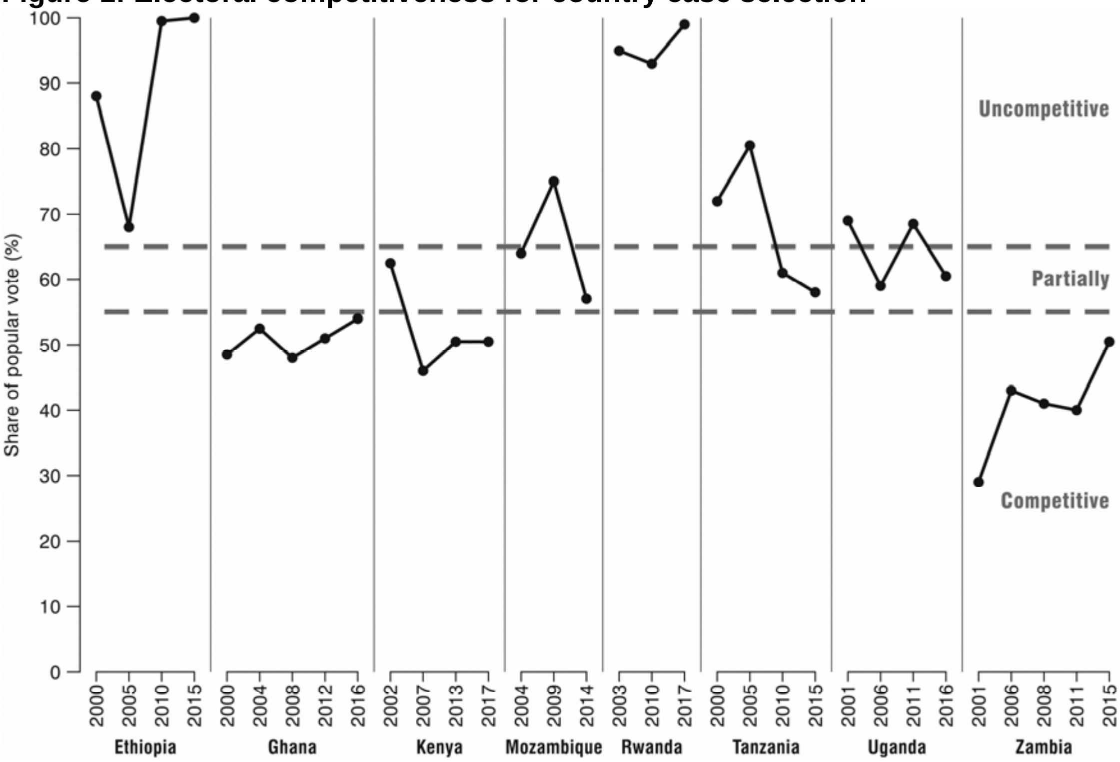
This comparative methodological approach focuses on developing contingent explanations, rather than general explanatory theory, and identifying different causal pathways to the institutionalisation of social transfers in acknowledgement of equifinality. The intention is 'to identify the variety of causal patterns that can lead to the outcome of interest and determine the conditions under which these patterns occur', rather than the frequency of their occurrence which would be more suited to a large-N study (George and& Bennett, 2004: 244). Complementing comparative analysis with within-case analysis reduces 'the risks of mistaken inferences' to which cross-case comparisons are vulnerable (George and Bennett, 2004: 254). This approach offers the advantage of identifying and examining causal processes leading to programme adoption and institutionalisation, while assessing historical sequences for their consistency with theoretical claims (Amenta, 2003: 103-104). Furthermore, in-depth case studies enable the analysis of problems for which no datasets currently exist.

Case selection

Case selection was shaped to explore our theoretical framework. First, it comprises countries in which a similar set of transnational actors – notably, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and UNICEF – have promoted social transfers over several years. Consequently, the sample enables us to hold transnational influence relatively constant, focusing analysis on domestic processes and how they intersect with these transnational dynamics. Importantly, we capture variation around this independent variable through our in-depth historical analysis of each case, which enables us to identify the specific points in time at which transnational policy coalitions in support of social transfers were present or not. Second, we were keen to have a sample of countries where electoral competitiveness varied, to enable us to test whether this made a difference. Furthermore, a number of countries are excluded from the population of SSA. First, countries with a strong settler colony legacy (e.g. South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana) that produced historically specific social protection systems that have already been analysed elsewhere (Devereux, 2007; Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). Second, conflict-affected countries, since instability inhibits the development of state institutions and social programmes (e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan). Third, heavily resource dependent economies that are frequently insulated from donor influence and pressures to cater to popular interests (e.g. Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan). Based on these criteria we selected eight cases: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Figure 1 shows wide variation in electoral competitiveness between cases and over time. We focus on competitiveness at the executive rather than legislative level, because of the strong influence the executive wields over policymaking in SSA.[7] We classify countries as: 'competitive' if the executive gains 55 percent or less of the popular vote in the first round of voting; 'partly competitive' if the executive gains 55-65 percent; and 'uncompetitive' where the executive gains more than 65 percent. For the period since 2000, which covers the adoption and institutionalisation of social transfers, our sample includes three consistently competitive systems (Ghana, Kenya and Zambia), two consistently 'uncompetitive' systems (Ethiopia, Rwanda) and three that vary between 'uncompetitive' and 'partly competitive' (Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda). Within the latter, intermediate grouping, Tanzania has shown a marked turn towards partly competitive elections in the last two rounds, while Mozambique and Uganda have oscillated between partly and uncompetitive. In our analysis below, we compare this statistical evidence with our qualitative process-tracing accounts to highlight when and how electoral competition is influential.

Figure 1: Electoral competitiveness for country case selection



Source: Database of Political Institutions.
Note: All figures are for the first round of presidential elections, with the exception of Ethiopia, a parliamentary system, where the proportion of parliamentary seats won by the ruling party is used.

[7] All the countries in our sample have presidential systems, with the exception of Ethiopia, which has a parliamentary system and a ceremonial president. Data for Ethiopia comprise the proportion of parliamentary seats won by the largest party.

The eight country cases also provide examples of somewhat distinct models of social transfers:

- unconditional cash transfers to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children or disabled, as in Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia;
- conditional cash transfers linked to education or healthcare attendance, as in Ghana; and
- cash or food-for-work, supplemented with unconditional transfers for those who are unable to work and links to livelihoods programmes, as in Ethiopia and Rwanda.[8]

Tanzania's Productive Social Safety Nets programme combines elements of all three: conditional and unconditional cash transfers and public works. Despite this variation, we argue that the cases are comparable. Each model has been actively promoted by competing communities of donor, academic and policy actors across the continent. As such, these policy designs have been presented to national governments as alternatives, rather than complementary policy options. In most cases, governments and donors considered two or all three of these policy models before settling on a particular design. Though not the immediate focus of this paper, the choice of policy is in itself an interesting subject of analysis, reflecting not only the preferences of influential donors, but also the interests and ideology of the government.

Analysing the drivers of the institutionalisation of social transfers

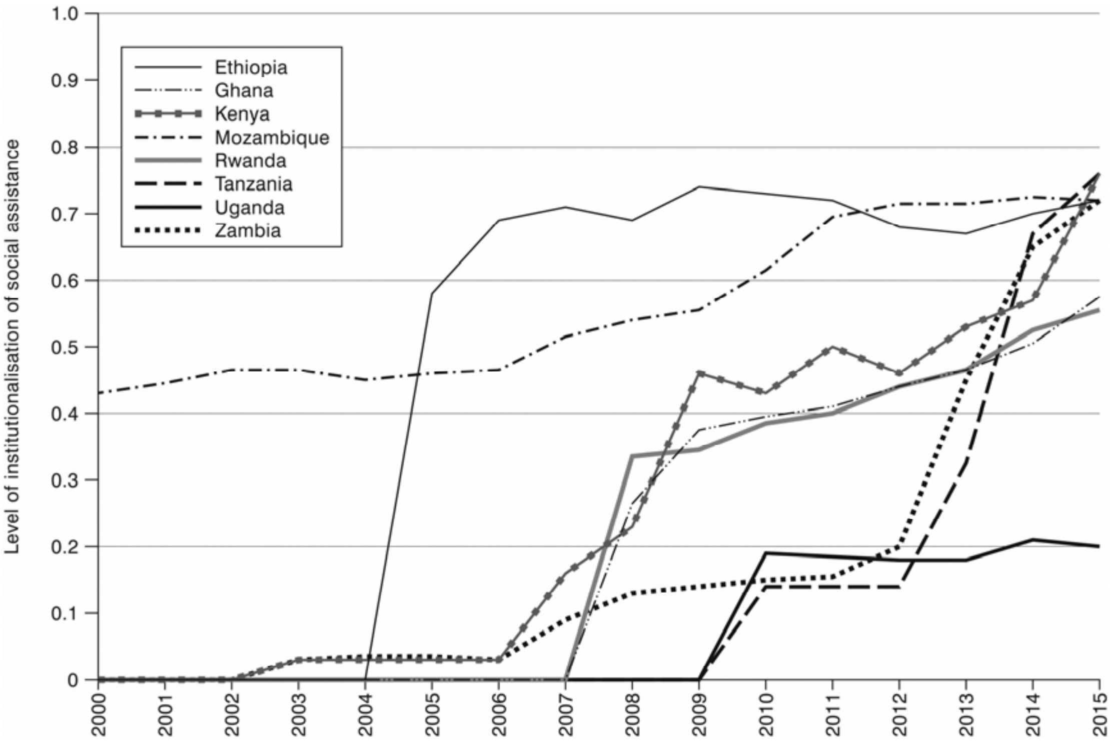
Figure 2 presents the progress in institutionalising social transfers for the eight cases. Several points are worthy of immediate discussion. First, in only very few cases – notably Ethiopia – was adoption the most important moment. In many countries, notably Kenya and Zambia, adoption is a moment at which there is little to no government support for donor-driven, funded and operated pilots. It is only later that the pilot develops into a meaningful programme. As such, to focus exclusively on 2004 in Kenya or 2003 in Zambia would be highly misleading.[9] Second, the institutionalisation of social transfers is still a work in progress. None of the programmes is clearly grounded in legislation[10] and all receive donor finance as project funding or budget support with specific targets related to social transfers. Third, by the end of the period covered, the variation across cases is modest, with all except Uganda scoring between 0.55 and 0.75. What varies more significantly, we argue below, are the routes or causal processes through which institutionalisation advanced. Finally, and with the exception of Mozambique, all the programmes

[8] The public works component of Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) is excluded from the Social Assistance Database we use for coverage data. This is because the VUP does not provide *guaranteed* employment for VUP participants, with any support provided dependent on state organisation of public works. Arguably, therefore, VUP public works fall short of providing reliable and predictable support (McCord, 2008).

[9] With the acknowledgement that important aspects of programme design were established at this point, with modest changes during subsequent institutionalisation.

[10] Kenya's Social Assistance Act of 2013 comes closest, but this does not mention specific cash transfer programmes and identifies donor funding as the source of expenditure.

Figure 2: Institutionalisation of social transfers in case study countries



Source: Author calculations.

originate in a condensed time period in the mid- to late 2000s; this seems unlikely to be coincidental and strongly suggests the important role played by transnational actors and ideas in the initial adoption of programmes. As discussed later, it is important to note that Mozambique was the only case in our sample that experienced an early (1990s) coincidence of both transnational support for social transfers and a distributional crisis.

Our analysis addresses the role of transnational policy coalitions first, before turning to the roles played by the key domestic political factors identified in our conceptual approach, namely competitive politics and elite perceptions of vulnerability. The findings for each case are summarised in the annex at the end of the paper.

Transnational policy coalitions

The next two sections will show that domestic politics, including political competition and distributional crises, played a key role in securing political support for institutionalisation of social transfers. Yet there are lots of possible government responses to competitive pressures and distributional crises, including the tried and tested routes of providing broad-based social services and agricultural subsidies. This section highlights the importance of transnational policy coalitions in the expansion of social transfers. Not only do such coalitions provide the link to donor finance, but these coalitions also are vital in framing policy ideas in ways that present social transfers as a plausible solution to the challenges that politicians face.

Perhaps the clearest example of this was the creation of the VUP in Rwanda. The impulse for the VUP came from domestic politics, with a government retreat identifying rising inequality and slow rates of poverty reduction as a serious problem that needed to be addressed. However, it was only through the formation of a policy coalition involving government officials, DFID and the World Bank that social transfers were identified as the preferred policy option.

In many cases, the formation of an effective policy coalition has proven challenging, limiting progress in the institutionalisation of social transfers. The first common challenge concerns competition between donors operating within a country, mirroring the broader ‘war of position’ in global social policy debates (Deacon, 2013). This includes contestation between DFID and the World Bank in Uganda and Zambia in the early to mid-2000s: such coalitions became much more influential once one lead agency emerged to work with government. A second limitation has been the tendency of some transnational actors to form coalitions with weak and under-resourced counterparts in government – usually social welfare departments – which were initially unable to overcome opposition from powerful ministries of finance and even the presidency. Policy coalitions have been more influential when powerful ministries have been involved, such as Ethiopia’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rwanda’s Ministry of Local Government. However, even coherent policy coalitions must present policy ideas that fit with the dominant ideas and interests of key political decision makers. Coalitions sought to overcome opposition by either directly countering concerns about deservingness and cost by sending officials on foreign study tours, funding evaluations of pilot projects or by shifting their approach to fit with elite concerns. In Uganda, initial efforts to promote social transfers as a challenge to ‘poverty’ clashed with elite perceptions of deservingness and were only successful once reframed to focus on vulnerable and ‘deserving’ groups, such as the elderly.

Analysis shows that at some point in each of the eight cases, a relatively coherent transnational policy coalition formed, comprising both donors and key political and bureaucratic figures within government (see Table 2). These coalitions played important roles linking political challenges to plausible policy solutions. Within-case analysis also highlights that such policy coalitions were particularly important to policy adoption, which was preceded by the formation of a policy coalition in most cases. In Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, initially donor-dominated policy coalitions expended considerable energy and resources promoting social transfers as a policy idea and securing the adoption of pilot programmes in the face of resistance or ambivalence from ruling elites. It was only subsequently that politicians began to see political benefits to the further expansion and institutionalisation of these programmes.

Table 2: Transnational policy coalitions for social transfers in the study countries

Country	Approximate date coalition formed	Key actors in coalition
Ethiopia	2003	Ministry of Agriculture, Prime Minister's Office, World Bank, DFID, USAID, WFP
Ghana	2005-07	DFID, UNICEF, Brazilian Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, Vulnerability and Exclusion Sector Working Group, Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare
Kenya	2002-03	UNICEF, Ministry of Home Affairs, parliamentarians
Mozambique	2006-07	DFID, UNICEF, Ministry of Women and Social Action
Rwanda	2007	Ministry of Local Government, presidency, World Bank, DFID
Tanzania	2007-08	World Bank, Tanzanian Social Action Fund
Uganda	2005-06	World Bank, DFID, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
Zambia	2003	GTZ, DFID, UNICEF, Ministry of Community Development

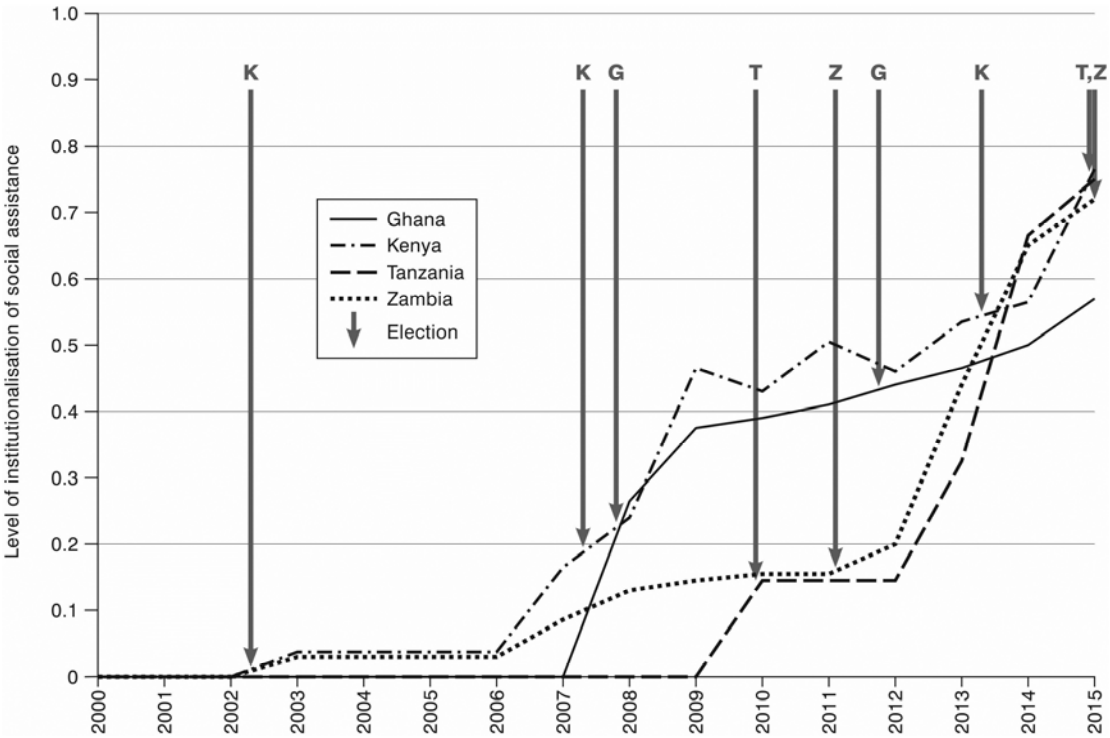
The Uganda case is also important in demonstrating the limits of policy coalitions in the absence of other important political drivers. The coalition that emerged expended considerable effort promoting cash transfers for more than a decade, funding study tours for politicians and bureaucrats, supporting a parliamentary forum and civil society campaigns, funding pilots and a well resourced project delivery unit. Despite this, Uganda lags behind the other countries in institutionalisation, as a result of the failure to secure political support from key figures within government. While coalitions have been important in pushing the adoption of programmes, their ability to drive institutionalisation is much more limited.

As such, within-case analysis shows that additional political factors are required to overcome this common resistance to initial donor attempts to establish social transfer programmes. We turn first to the role of political competition.

Political competition

The degree of political competition faced by incumbents emerges as an important source of variation within our sample. Institutionalisation of social transfers is driven by political competition in those cases identified in Figure 1 above as 'competitive', namely Ghana, Kenya and, to some extent, Zambia. The shift towards partial competitiveness in Tanzania in the past decade also had a direct influence over the institutionalisation of social transfers there. Figure 3 below shows how close the relationship has been between competitive elections and moves to institutionalise social transfers in these cases. Our within-case process tracing reveals how this causal mechanism actually played out in practice.

Figure 3: Elections and institutionalisation of social tranfers in competitive contexts



Source: Author calculations.[11]

In Ghana, the return of multi-party politics from 1992 led to the consolidation of an extremely competitive two-party system, a key feature of which has been the highly visible and broad-based distribution of resources as a means of securing and

[11] To aid visibility of the figure, we only draw attention to competitive elections that were held after coherent policy coalitions in favour of social transfers had been formed. Our case study investigations suggest that this took place in 2005-07 for Ghana, and in 2007-08 for both Tanzania and Zambia. .

retaining power. Donor finance and ideas were important to the adoption of the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme, but the subsequent implementation and expansion of the programme has been fundamentally shaped by these political dynamics. Having bowed to the advocacy of efforts of the transnational policy coalition and adopted LEAP in November 2007, the incumbent New Patriotic Party raced to ensure that the programme started operating before the 2008 elections. The opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) won those elections and, despite arguing against LEAP while in opposition, retained the programme once in office. Indeed, the NDC tripled LEAP payment rates in a re-launch of the programme just prior to the 2012 elections and then oversaw the largest annual expansion of the programme in the run-up to the 2016 elections.

The return of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1992 also led to extremely competitive politics. During the 2002 electoral campaign, UNICEF Kenya challenged parliamentary candidates to pledge to address the issues of orphans and HIV/AIDS by introducing a child grant. President Kibaki and many of his National Rainbow Coalition cabinet who took power in 2002 signed this pledge and UNICEF pushed them to act on taking office. The result was the launch of a pre-pilot scheme, covering 500 households, with financial and technical support from UNICEF. The next major shift in commitment to social transfers followed the 2007 elections, which was narrowly won by Kibaki again, now representing the Party of National Unity, just ahead of Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement. A further stimulus may have come from the post-election violence of early 2008, with politicians undertaking a number of reforms seeking to redraw the social contract between state and citizens, most notably constitutional reforms that included a commitment to social protection. Government funding for and coverage of social transfers increased significantly between 2007 and 2010, with MPs directly pushing for the expansion of the programme to their constituencies. This pattern of election-driven expansion continued after the 2013 elections, which were again highly competitive, with Kenyatta's Jubilee Alliance securing 50.5 percent of the vote. Budgetary allocations to social transfers quadrupled between 2011–12 and 2015–06, with the main financial boost received in 2013–2014 to enable the rapid expansion of the three main social transfer programmes. Government contributions doubled annually between 2013–2014 and 2016–17.[12] More recently, the lead-up to the 2017 elections saw the government announcement of a universal social pension and a push to enrol participants prior to election day.

In Tanzania, social transfers originate in the World Bank-supported Tanzanian Social Action Fund (TASAF), established in 2000, and a small-scale cash transfer pilot carried out as part of TASAF from 2010. However, the rapid scale-up of the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) from 2013 aligns with the closest election in Tanzanian history, and a period within which the long-term dominance of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) faced an unprecedented threat. The CCM won presidential

[12] Data from Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services; Institute of Economic Affairs (2014; 2015) and National Drought Management Authority (2014).

and parliamentary elections in 2010, but with significantly reduced vote shares, dropping from 83 percent to a much more competitive 60 percent (see Figure 1). This rang alarm bells amongst CCM's leadership and, in the context of this heightened political competition leading up to 2015, and the loss of support in urban areas, the CCM returned to its long-run strategy of focusing on service delivery to the rural majority as a means of securing electoral support. PSSN fitted the bill as a popular policy that would provide a highly visible mechanism for distributing resources in rural areas, paving the way for a rapid expansion of the programme, with an emphasis on ensuring that recipients were registered and paid in advance of the 2015 election. As such, all three cases of Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania strongly suggest that, once a coherent transnational policy coalition has been established, meaningfully competitive elections can directly encourage the institutionalisation of social transfers.

As in Ghana and Kenya, the return of multi-party politics in Zambia has produced a highly competitive political setting, with a series of closely fought elections since 2001. Donors established the first social transfer pilot in 2003 and subsequently advocated for their expansion. Despite the intense political competition between the ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) and the opposition Patriotic Front (PF) at the 2006 and 2008 presidential elections, social transfers were not identified as a significant electoral issue. The minister of finance at the time was ideologically opposed to the principle of government 'handouts' and the policy coalition advocating for social transfers lacked coherence and had not gathered significant evidence to prove that the social transfer pilots were succeeding in reducing poverty. In was only in the run-up to the 2011 elections, won narrowly by the PF, that social transfers started to gain political attention. The PF included a commitment to expanding social transfers in its manifesto, albeit against the preferences of the leader, Michael Sata, who had struck out the reference to social transfers in an earlier draft. On taking office, Sata did not initially prioritise social transfers, only doing so in the wake of a corruption scandal related to agricultural subsidies, as discussed below, by which time the policy coalition had become more coherent and produced compelling evidence that social transfers offered a cost-effective means of reducing poverty in Zambia. Zambia's social transfer programme has since taken on progressively greater electoral importance. Sata's successor, Edward Lungu, won elections in 2015 and 2016, with a majority of a few thousand votes, having placed a particularly strong emphasis on his commitment to the social transfer programme during the 2016 campaign.

In contrast to Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and, to some extent, Zambia, political competition does not provide a convincing explanation for the institutionalisation of social transfers in our other four cases. In Rwanda, President Kagame has secured 90 percent or more of the vote in elections in 2003, 2010 and 2017, and has never faced any meaningful political challenge. In Ethiopia, the EPRDF has dominated parliament ever since coming to power in 1991. By far the closest election was in 2005, when the EPRDF won with 60 percent of parliamentary seats, compared to more than 80 percent of seats in 2000, 2010 and 2015. This raises the legitimate question as to whether the relative competitive elections in May 2005 contributed to the adoption of the PSNP, four months prior. Detailed within-case analysis casts doubt on this. The PSNP design process had been underway since the formation of a policy coalition in 2003, in response to a major food crisis, while the EPRDF was confident of electoral victory until the very last moment. It was only in the weeks prior to the vote that the EPRDF was surprised by the degree of support for the opposition. There is no convincing evidence that the PSNP was in any way shaped by the elections. In Mozambique, FRELIMO, which has ruled since independence in 1975, did face growing political competition in the 1990s and early 2000s from the opposition RENAMO. Yet, the reform and expansion of the longstanding Food Subsidy Programme actually took place in the period leading up to, and particularly following, landslide elections in 2009, which the ruling FRELIMO won far more easily than they had done the previous elections of 1999 and 2004.

The case of Uganda is somewhat more equivocal. The decision to move to a national roll-out occurred in 2013, two years after the president had secured an increased electoral majority of 68 percent. The 2016 elections, however, were predicted to be much more competitive, and this eventually informed the government's decision to increase its budgetary allocation to the social pension that year and expand the programme from 15 to 40 districts. Nonetheless, this was only done under considerable pressure from politicians keen to maintain their seats, and amidst a highly visible donor-financed media campaign calling for government to increase its commitment to the scheme. Even then, the level of support announced was piecemeal: budgetary commitments for the social pension were much lower than more politically salient programmes (e.g. for the youth) and the decision to target the oldest 100 people in each district lacked any basis in a pro-poor or technocratic decision-making process. The key difference here may be that the government in Uganda knew that it could rely on other means to win the 2016 elections, including repression and other forms of co-optation. As such, and whilst the degree of political competition faced by incumbents emerges as an important source of variation within social transfer institutionalisation in our 'competitive', cases, we need to identify alternative drivers in our less competitive examples.

Distributional crises

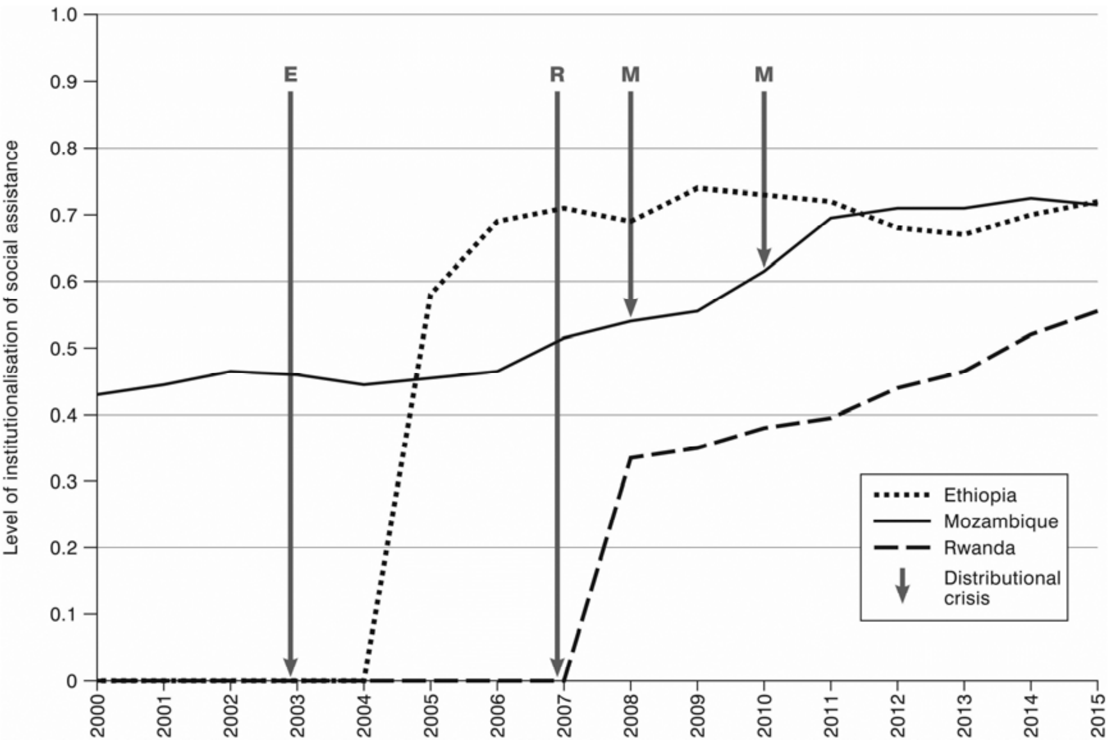
Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda have taken significant steps towards the institutionalisation of social transfers, despite facing few competitive pressures. In these cases, the ruling party has been in power for several decades[13] and came to power through military victory. In each case, albeit to varying degrees, these dominant ruling coalitions have sought to build popular legitimacy through projects of national development. However, for the most part, the objective has been to address problems through agricultural productivity, economic growth and the provision of employment, rather than targeted social transfers. This was most clearly stated in

[13] FRELIMO in Mozambique since 1975, the EPRDF in Ethiopia since 1991 and the RPF in Rwanda since 1994.

Ethiopia, shortly before adopting the PSNP, when the government directly argued against targeted programmes in favour of a broader pro-poor strategy.

In each of Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda, significant progress regarding the institutionalisation of social transfers only followed when the dominant ruling coalition felt threatened by a serious distributional crisis. Figure 4 shows how close the relationship has been between such crises and moves to institutionalise social transfers in these three cases. In Ethiopia, the EPRDF experienced a series of crises in the early 2000s that were explicitly framed by the leadership as 'Armageddons', perceived to threaten EPRDF rule and, indeed, the existence of the country. These were a split in the leadership of the party in 2001, riots in Addis Ababa in 2002 and a major food crisis in 2002–03, in which some 14 million people required emergency assistance. It was the food crisis that most directly precipitated the design of the PSNP from 2003 and its launch in 2005, and was interpreted by government as a distributional crisis to which a more direct response was required.

Figure 4: Distributional crises and institutionalisation of social transfers in uncompetitive contexts



Source: Author calculations.[14]

In Rwanda, the distributional crisis arose during a 2007 government evaluation of the national development strategy, which showed that both inequality and the number of people classified as poor had actually increased. Furthermore, sub-national variation

[14] As with Figure 3, we only draw attention to distributional crises that occurred in close proximity to when coherent policy coalitions in favour of social transfers had been formed in each country. Our case study investigations suggest that this took place in 2003 for Ethiopia, in 2006-07 for Mozambique (following an incipient effort in 1990) and from 2007 in Rwanda.

was also problematic, with poverty reducing significantly in the east, but increasing in the south. This was viewed by elites as a distributional crisis, because it threatened the legitimising narrative that the RPF had sought to construct since taking power in 1994. The RPF's stated aim has been to build a post-ethnic society through rapid and broad-based socioeconomic progress that gives everyone a stake in the country's future and thereby overcome the ethnic and regional divisions that contributed to the genocide and civil war. Clearly, a pattern of growth that enhanced income and regional inequality presented a challenge to this narrative and the VUP was launched by the RPF as a direct response.

Finally, in Mozambique, the introduction of the Food Subsidy Programme (PSA) in 1990, and its re-design and expansion as the Basic Social Security Programme (PSSB) from 2010, have been closely linked to riots and distributional crises. The original PSA was introduced as an urban programme, in response to riots against structural adjustment reforms imposed by the World Bank and IMF during the late 1980s, albeit with some financial and technical assistance from international actors (Massingarela and Nhate 2006). In both 2008 and 2010, riots began in Maputo and spread to other urban centres, in response to rising food and fuel prices driven by high global prices and the reduction of subsidies in Mozambique under donor pressure. This distributional crisis was also manifest in official assessments, which FRELIMO initially suppressed, showing that despite rapid economic growth, inequality had increased and poverty reduction had stagnated. Even though FRELIMO was able to engineer a landslide victory at the 2009 elections, this distributional crisis was viewed as a serious threat by FRELIMO elites (Buur and Salimo 2018). The result was the embrace of social transfers, with the PSSB expanding on and replacing the PSA. The coverage of PSSB increased from 630,000 in 2008 to 1,370,000 by 2014, with over 90 percent of financing coming from government. Donors were influential in providing these policy ideas to address domestic political challenges, but it was a study tour to South Africa that highlighted to Mozambican government officials the potential of social transfers as a means of suppressing political dissent.

In addition to the within-case evidence for distributional crises precipitating adoption and institutionalisation of social transfers amongst dominant coalitions, the comparative experience of another dominant coalition, Uganda's NRM, provides a useful counterfactual. One of the successes of NRM rule since it came into power in 1986 has been to put an end to the recurrent economic crises of the past, with the government often praised in international circles for its macroeconomic management. The relative stability and absence of distributional crises since 1986 has meant that the principal driver of institutionalisation in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda has not been operational in Uganda.

Distributional crises have had the greatest impact in the uncompetitive cases of Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda, yet distributional crises also influence the institutionalisation of social transfers in politically competitive settings. In Zambia, a more minor distributional crisis played an important role in the increase in government funding and coverage of the social transfer programme. As discussed above, the Patriotic Front government that came to power in 2011 had included social transfers in its manifesto. However, this appeared to be a relatively low political priority at first: it was only when a corruption scandal related to overspending on agricultural subsidies arose in 2013, thus threatening a key mechanism of rent distribution to rural areas, that priorities shifted. The government announced a 700 percent increase in government funding for social transfers in 2013, channelling a proportion of the funding for agricultural subsidies to social transfers, far in excess of the planned expansion for that year. Another example concerns the disputed 2007 Kenyan elections and the post-electoral violence that ensued thereafter. The violence was in part a distributional crisis, concerning land rights in the Rift Valley (Boone, 2014), and according to some involved in the policy process, the planned expansion of the social transfer programme was extended and fast-tracked in 2008 and 2009 as part of the post-conflict response (Alviar and Pearson, 2009). However, our own research did not directly support this claim, in part, we would argue, because 2008 involved a primarily political, rather than distributional, crisis. As such, and whilst this crisis did help to further institutionalise social assistance within Kenya via constitutional reforms, meaningful electoral competition emerges as the more regular and direct driver of increased social assistance provision in Kenya since 2002.

Table 3 summarises the causal factors driving the institutionalisation of social transfers, as identified through within-case analysis. Our comparative and within-case analysis shows that, within this sample, a transnational policy coalition is a necessary but insufficient condition for the institutionalisation of social transfers; in particular, our within-case analysis over time shows that there are no examples of social transfers becoming institutionalised without the presence of such a coalition (i.e. Mozambique in 1990). However, our comparative analysis shows that institutionalisation requires that one of two further conditions needs to be present alongside a transnational policy coalition: the first is meaningfully competitive elections (as with Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia); or, alternatively, and in the absence of political competition, a dominant ruling coalition facing a distributional crisis (with Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda as the examples). Where a coherent transnational policy coalition exists in the absence of either meaningful political competition or a distributional crisis, as in Uganda to date and for significant periods of time in most other countries, there has been little progress towards institutionalisation.

Table 3: Summary of causal analysis of case studies, 2002-2015

	Competitive politics	Distributional crisis	Transnational policy coalition	Institutionalisation of social transfers (2015)
Ethiopia	Absent	Present	Present	Partial (0.7)
Ghana	Present	Absent	Present	Partial (0.6)
Kenya	Present	Partial	Present	Partial (0.8)
Mozambique	Partial	Present	Present	Partial (0.7)
Rwanda	Absent	Present	Present	Partial (0.6)
Tanzania	Present	Absent	Present	Partial (0.8)
Uganda	Partial	Absent	Present	Absent (0.2)
Zambia	Present	Partial	Present	Partial (0.7)

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

Conclusions

Our comparative analysis of the institutionalisation of social transfers in SSA suggests the need to rethink the political economy of welfare state expansion at the current juncture. Our testing of a new conceptual approach through eight detailed cases suggests two distinct pathways to the institutionalisation of social transfers. One involves less democratic countries, where the primary role is played by elite perceptions of vulnerability in the face of a distributional crises, augmented by pressure from a transnational policy coalition. The second initially involves an initial role for transnational policy coalitions, before the influence of competitive elections drives the process of institutionalisation. Our within-case analysis shows that, whilst transnational policy coalitions remained active supporters of the social transfers after adoption, and often sought to use elections as windows of opportunity through which to promote expansion, the main momentum towards institutionalisation was driven by domestic political dynamics. These findings suggest a number of important conclusions in relation to the existing literature.

First, we debunk the argument that donors are solely responsible for the spread of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa and show that progress results from the intersection of transnational and domestic politics. Our focus on institutionalisation demonstrates that adoption, which is often donor-driven, is only one moment in a longer process and not necessarily the most important. Indeed, there is no case amongst those covered here in which donor influence and transnational ideas alone have been enough to drive institutionalisation. In each of the country cases, a coherent transnational policy coalition that brings together transnational actors and domestic politicians and bureaucrats is present and plays an important role. Vitally, however, such policy coalitions were only successful when they promote policy ideas that fitted with dominant ideas and interests of key political figures and which addressed the important political problems that they faced at specific moments, whether these are serious distributional crises, electoral competition or others.

Second, our analysis also raises questions about the common claim that the return of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa is the main driver of social transfers. Elections have clearly been important drivers of institutionalisation in some cases – notably Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania. Yet, elections have not been sufficient on their own, and need to be both meaningfully competitive and work in combination with transnational policy coalitions and, sometimes, distributional crises, as in Zambia. For example, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia all had competitive elections before social transfers were adopted in each of them, but none of these led to the onset of social transfers until a transnational policy coalition had been established in each case. Furthermore, there is a distinct, uncompetitive pathway to the institutionalisation of social transfers that is evident in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda, where electoral pressures have been irrelevant to date. In these cases, elite perceptions of distributional crises, to which social transfers seemed to present a plausible solution, were a far more significant driver.

Our paper therefore suggests significant new directions for the comparative political economy of social protection, at least in relation to the spread of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa. The first is to move beyond a focus on the adoption of social transfer programmes, to the degree to which social transfer programmes are becoming *institutionalised*. Subject to further refinement, we propose an index for this that can be extended to other cases and used to track progress in the cases examined here. Second, we confirm the significance of equifinality when seeking to explain the spread of social transfers, whereby different combinations of variables, or pathways, can explain similar types and levels of outcome. Third, we move beyond single-shot explanations in favour of an approach that can capture complexity, whilst maintaining a reasonable degree of parsimony. Our focus on three distinct causal factors – competitive politics, elite perceptions of distributional crises and transnational policy coalitions – challenges approaches that exaggerate the importance of any one factor. Given that the institutionalisation of social transfers in sub-Saharan Africa remains very much a work in progress, there is a great deal of scope to further test these propositions in future years and in a wider range of cases.

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Annex: Summary of case studies

	Prog-ramme (s)	**Main donors involved**	**Political competition**	**Distributional crisis**	**Trans. policy coalition**
Ethiopia	PSNP, UPSNP	DFID, EC, UNICEF, USAID, WFP, World Bank	Uncompetitive elections in 2000, 2010 and 2015. Relatively open elections in 2005 that EPRDF won with reduced majority. EPRDF surprised by coherence and support of opposition. But no evidence that this contributed to PSNP adoption earlier in the year.	Major food crisis in 2002-03 that called national development strategy into question. Crisis forced reconsideration of previous government opposition to ‘safety nets’. Further crises included urban riots in Addis Ababa and a leadership split in 2001.	Large number of uncoordinated and sometimes antagonistic donors and government actors in 1990s. Food crisis prompted coordination of donors, pushing government to reform.
Ghana	LEAP	DFID, UNICEF, World Bank	Highly competitive two-party system throughout. LEAP launch rushed to start prior to 2008 elections; subsequent expansions and increase in payment rates timed with election campaigns in 2012 and 2016.	None.	A strong coalition between DFID and UNICEF, augmented by support from Brazil’s Ministry of Social Development, plays a key role in promoting LEAP in 2007. Linked to direct budget support. Major financial support throughout.
Kenya	SCTs	DFID, UNICEF and World Bank	Strong political competition throughout. NARC figures pledged to address child poverty under pressure from UNICEF as part of 2002 election campaign,	2007 election and post-election violence was partly distributional in nature, concerning land rights in the Rift Valley. Some suggestions that CT-OVC rollout	UNICEF-led policy coalition pushed for introduction of CT-OVC pilot in 2004. Subsequent entry of DFID and WB led to competition

	Prog-ramme (s)	**Main donors involved**	**Political competition**	**Distributional crisis**	**Trans. policy coalition**
			and then introduce CT-OVC. CT-OVC expanded prior to and after disputed 2007 elections and all three cash transfer programmes expanded after 2012 poll. Universal social pension announced prior to 2017 election.	was fast-tracked as part of conflict response.	over programme design.
Mozambique	PSSB, PASP	DFID, ILO, Netherlands, UNICEF, World Bank	Institutionalisation took place from 2007 to 2013, in a period of limited competition. FRELIMO won 2009 elections in a landslide, following close elections in 1999 and 2004.	Urban riots in response to rising food and fuel prices in 2008 and 2010. Broader crisis of rising inequality and stagnant poverty reduction apparent to ruling elites in 2009. Crisis motivates government embrace of PSSB and PSAP.	DFID and World Bank push for increased focus on social protection from mid-2000s onwards, later joined by the IMF.
Rwanda	VUP	DFID, EU, SIDA, UNICEF, World Bank	No meaningful competition. Presidential elections won with 90 percent+ vote share.	Rising income and regional inequality and slow rates of poverty reduction challenges RPF narrative of post-ethnic nation-building at 2007 leadership retreat. VUP developed as response.	Coalition comprising RPF politicians, bureaucrats, DFID and World Bank formed in response to identification of crisis, as a means of identifying policy models and designing programme.
Tanzania	PSSN	DFID, SIDA, UNICEF, World	Ruling CCM faced unprecedented competition from	None.	World Bank uses close links with MoF officials to gain

	Prog-ramme (s)	**Main donors involved**	**Political competition**	**Distributional crisis**	**Trans. policy coalition**
		Bank	2010, prompting rapid, large-scale expansion of PSSN to help recapture rural base. Further expansion after 2015 poll.		support for TASAF.
Uganda	SAGE	DFID, Irish Aid, UNICEF, World Bank	Return of multi-party politics in early 2000s brought increased political competition. Museveni/NRM resorted to pre-election giveaways – free education, health – and suppression of opposition to retain power. The 2011 elections that precede 2013 presidential commitment to expansion are not competitive. Modest national rollout announced ahead of the more competitive 2016 elections.	None.	DFID form coherent coalition with UNICEF, Irish Aid (after WB leave the sector in 2005), plus Ministry of Gender and parliamentary forum Advocacy reframed in terms of vulnerability, to bypass government concerns about poverty focus. Opposition or limited support from Ministry of Finance and presidency restricts progress for many years.
Zambia	*SCT*	*DFID, GIZ, Irish Aid, UNICEF, World Bank*	*Very competitive elections throughout 2000s. Despite donor promotion of social transfers, does not become politicised until 2011. PF eventually includes social*	*Low-level distributional crisis in 2013. Corruption scandal in agricultural subsidies threatens important mechanism for distributing resources to rural areas. Funding diverted to SCTs*	*Initial donor competition between GIZ, DFID and WB. Donors worked with weak ministry and faced opposition from Ministry of Finance. WB withdrawal led to greater*

	Prog-ramme (s)	Main donors involved	Political competition	Distributional crisis	Trans. policy coalition
			transfers in manifesto, but inconsistent commitment initially on taking power.	*instead.*	*cohesion of DFID/UNICEF-led coalition, while reshuffle in 2008 resulted in a more favourable minister of finance. Sought to build evidence base for SCTs and targeted key political figures.*

Source: Authors, based on country case studies.

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