

Concepts and Methods for Research in Governance: An Overview Paper for PASGR

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Concepts and Methods for Research in Governance

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**A PASGR Scoping Study
August 2010**

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Acronyms Used

APPP	Africa, Power and Politics Programme
CCM	Chama cha Mapinduzi
DFID	Department for International Development
GPE	Governance and Political Economy
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
LASDEL	Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local
NIE	New Institutional Economics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Executive Summary

This paper provides a landscape view of concepts and methods commonly used – or with high potential for use - in the study of African governance. It draws on both Africanist and non-Africanist literature, and, consistent with the Terms of Reference, pays special attention to those methods with the greatest potential for illuminating social policy issues. For ease of analysis the concepts and methods literature has been grouped under four broad headings: political science approaches, economic approaches, socio-political approaches, and ethnographic approaches. The paper concludes by advocating a pluralistic, problem-driven approach to governance research.

Political science approaches

Broadly speaking, political science tackles the study of governance-related issues in three different ways: through large-*n* quantitative studies, small-*n* studies, or, in what is a relatively new departure, experimental studies.

Examples of the first, which loom large on the landscape of African governance studies, are the Worldwide Governance Indicators Project of the World Bank, the Afro-barometer Project, and the African Legislatures Project. These tend to combine large-scale survey work with multivariate statistical analysis. To date, they have made a major contribution to our understanding of governance issues, but suffer certain limitations. Well-suited to measuring respondents' attitudes to governance-relevant phenomena, their ability to establish causal relationships between governance and other variables, such as economic growth, is hotly debated. In addition, they are ill-suited to revealing *how governance processes actually work*.

Small-*n* studies, of which the single-country case study has predominated in research on African governance, are better suited to revealing details of how governance-relevant institutions actually work, as well as to providing sophisticated causal analyses of complex phenomena. However, in most cases the absence of a standard methodology or a comparative framework makes it difficult to assess the veracity of single-case conclusions. Although such studies may be a source of insight for in-country specialists, then, their usefulness to higher-level policy makers remains uncertain.

These deficits are potentially made good when intensive case study methods are combined with a rigorous comparative framework. This allows for the isolation of causal variables and the determination of their singular and conjuncture effects, in a 'natural experiment' type way. The difficulty is that nature/history does not always furnish the necessary diversity of cases and variables to make causal testing possible. In addition, categorization of variables can be a contested affair.

A new development in political science, at least when it comes to African studies, is the field experiment or survey experiment. Such experiments have the potential to yield scientifically credible answers to questions such as, 'Do voters respond to vote-buying?' or 'Why is ethnic homogeneity associated with better provision of public goods?' One limitation is that it is difficult to see how experiments could be devised to answer many questions to which governance specialists would like answers, such as 'Does democracy increase economic investment?' Or 'Does foreign aid increase or decrease state stability?'

Economic approaches

Over the past few decades economic approaches have been gradually colonizing other disciplines in social science, including politics. Game theory, selectorate theory, the theory of collective action and public goods, public choice, new institutional economics, and principal-agent theory, all share a focus on the way in which rational individuals act when facing specific incentives, in particular strategic settings. One of the advantages of economic approaches is their ability to model these settings, and explain how the incentives individuals face result in collectively good or bad outcomes. They can also show how by manipulating the incentives, or pay-offs, different outcomes may result. Thus economic approaches possess a rare degree of analytical power, which policy makers might potentially harness to improve the quality of their interventions.

The trouble with economic approaches is that the assumptions they make about the nature of individuals and the types of incentives they face in the real world are rarely realistic. Reductive or unrealistic assumptions might be justified, if economic approaches could nevertheless be shown to have strong predictive power. However, their record to date in making non-obvious empirical predictions subsequently shown to be correct is poor.

To be useful, economic approaches need to factor non-economic phenomena like social conventions, cognitive beliefs, and cultural mores into their accounts. This has been successfully done in some of the studies that apply collective action theory to the management of common pool resources, and in a study that applies new institutional economics to the veterinary and healthcare sectors. Nevertheless, the complexification of economic models robs them of some of their unique elegance and parsimony, and places them on an epistemological par with other 'social' mechanistic models.

A plausible inference is that economic approaches are best thought of as heuristic devices with the potential to illuminate many real world governance problems, but not the capacity to solve them. Governance analysis requires an approach that is richer than economic models alone can supply.

Socio-political approaches

Many existing studies of governance employ what I call a 'socio-political' approach, focusing on politics and power, but drawing heavily on sociological theory to do so. This section discusses 'neo-patrimonial' approaches, 'power and drivers of change analyses', 'an upside down view of governance', and 'postcolonial approaches'.

The great strength of most socio-political analyses of governance is that they focus on both formal *and informal* institutions and structures of power. The latter are particularly important in Africa, but are often invisible, or only tacitly grasped by policy makers. Socio-political approaches can make them more explicit, and lay bare their implications for various types of governance intervention. The best work in this tradition - for example some of the better drivers of change analyses – succeeds in this. However, too often socio-political approaches provide only broad-brush and empirically unverified accounts of African governance structures, which undoubtedly miss some of the significant variation in phenomena like 'neo-patrimonialism'. Part of the problem is that they sometimes lack methodological rigour, or are overly-reliant on 'key-informant' data, with all the problems of bias and rehearsal of the conventional wisdom, which that entails. In addition, even at their best they tend to suffer the same problems as other small-*n* studies, namely, difficulty assessing the validity of causal hypotheses, non-generalisability of findings, etc.

Ethnographic approaches

Ethnographic approaches are perhaps better suited than any other to providing sound empirical data on informal governance processes. This section discusses a classic ethnography of civil service reform, team ethnography of local accountability, a comparative ethnography of corruption, and ethnographic training under the Africa, Power and Politics Programme. These approaches have undoubtedly provided detail, nuance, and brought new facts to light about African governance.

The main problem with ethnographic approaches is that they sometimes supply a level of detail that is beyond the capacity of policy-makers to digest. For the purposes of governance analysis, there needs to be a plausible effort to reduce complexity to a few key variables and mechanisms that can explain the most salient governance and development outcomes observed. In other words, ethnographic methods must be wedded to rigorous comparative case methods, and/or economic and social mechanism approaches, if they are to move beyond context-specific ‘insight’, to more general policy-relevance.

Conclusions

The discussion reveals that each of the four broad approaches considered here has its strengths and weaknesses. A plausible inference is that governance research ought not to be ‘method-driven’, since that would privilege a particular approach, resulting in data bias and limitations. Instead, governance research should be ‘problem-driven’, with methodological tools carefully chosen to address the problem at hand. Because most governance problems are complex, many will benefit by being attacked from a variety of methodological angles, combining the inductive and deductive strengths of different approaches or traditions.

The literature review has also revealed that certain areas of African research-capability are probably more in need of strengthening than others. African researchers and research-institutes have already made great contributions to large-*n* governance studies, and to some extent to small-*n*, and socio-political studies. However, African research-institutes (with the exception of LASDEL in Francophone West Africa) have yet to make a major contribution to economic/social mechanism or ethnographic research. It is in these two areas, perhaps, that capacity building should concentrate.

1. Introduction: defining governance

In ordinary parlance 'governance', is 'the action or manner of governing'. 'Governance' is what a 'government', or other authoritative institution, does (Wikipedia, n.d.). In European political science, the term has come to be associated with new, often neo-liberal modes of public administration and service provision (Rhodes, 1996; see also Blundo and Le Meur, 2008b). In the development industry, however, 'governance' means something else. The World Bank has defined it as 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development', and has defined 'good governance' as 'sound development management' (World Bank, 1992: , 1). For the World Bank's Governance Indicators Project, meanwhile, Governance consists of 'the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them' (<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>).

In the development policy world, 'governance' and 'good governance' are often used interchangeably. Both have come to be associated with (an idealized vision of) the types of liberal, constitutional government common in northern, industrialized countries' Governance: The World Bank's Experience', for example, tells us that: 'Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy-making (that is, transparent processes), a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law' (World Bank, 1994: , vii). The UK's Department for International Development, meanwhile, states that:

Good governance requires three things: State capability – the extent to which leaders and governments are able to get things done. Responsiveness – whether public policies and institutions respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights. Accountability – the ability of citizens, civil society and the private sector to scrutinize public institutions and governments and hold them to account. This includes, ultimately, the opportunity to change leaders by democratic means (DFID, 2006: , 20).

Academic approaches to governance, while ostensibly value-neutral, also tend to come with a liberal hue. In an influential 1992 publication, Goran Hyden defined governance as, 'the conscious management of regime structures with a view to enhancing the legitimacy of the public realm' (Hyden, 1992: , 7), and argued that effective governance depended among other things on, 'citizen influence and oversight' ; 'responsive and responsible leadership' including adherence to the rule of law (Hyden, 1992: , 14-16). In a later paper on the same topic, Hyden posited that the main empirical dimensions of governance were citizen influence and oversight, leadership behaviour, and inter-group relations (Hyden, 1996).

There has been no shortage of critiques of the liberal approach to governance (Lemarchand, 1992; Jeffries, 1993; Moore, 1993; Williams, 1993; Williams and Young, 1994). Given the controversy, it seems advisable that we adopt a less normative definition here (cf Blundo and Le Meur, 2008b: , 4-8), not to mention a more open-minded stance on what does and doesn't work developmentally. For this study, governance means 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a

country's (or project's, or organization's) economic and social resources *either for or against* development'.

This paper provides a discussion of the main social science approaches to studying governance. Approaches covered are political science techniques, economic approaches, socio-political techniques and ethnographic methods. None of these categories is completely watertight: each merges into the other, and some works are cited that could have found a place under more than one heading. Nevertheless each approach does, at its core, offer something distinctive, providing some sense to the typology adopted.

2. Political Science Approaches

By far the most common approach to researching governance issues in Africa today has its origin in mainstream North American political science. Typically it combines large-*n* quantitative data collection with multivariate statistical analysis. The Governance Indicators project at the World Bank, the Afro-barometer and African Legislatures projects loom large in this landscape, although some relevant academic monographs also exist (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997; Englebort, 2000; Lindberg, 2006). In addition there have been numerous small-*n*, single country-case studies. In a new departure, a few enterprising political scientists have in recent years begun to address governance issues by means of experimental techniques. The following paragraphs provide an overview of some of the more salient political science contributions, together with a discussion of their weaknesses and strengths.

2.1 Large-*n* studies

Probably the highest profile large-*n* approach to the study of governance is the Worldwide Governance Indicators project at the World Bank, which began in 1996. The project combines the views of a large number of survey respondents in both the industrial and developing world, to produce six aggregate governance indicators for over 200 countries. The indicators address Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption. Individual data sources underlying these aggregates are drawn from a diverse array of survey institutes, think-tanks, non-governmental organizations and international organizations (WorldBank, 2009). On the basis of this data countries are given scores and ranked for their governance qualities.

The usefulness of the indicators arises from the fact that they provide very broad country coverage, conveniently summarize a wealth of existing information, smooth out some of the idiosyncrasies of individual measures, and provide explicit margins of error for governance estimates (Kaufmann et al., 2007: , 1). Although controversial, they have been widely used by both policy-makers and academics, and have provided a data-source to support social science theorizing, in investigations of the relationship between good governance and economic growth (Kaufmann et al., 1999).

Slightly less controversial is the *Afro-barometer* project, a series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, markets, and civil society in Africa, which measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere. Its origins lie in a study of public attitudes in Zambia conducted by Michigan State University in 1993, quickly followed by surveys from the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, and the Centre for Democratic Development in Ghana. In 1999 these three organizations came together to conduct Round 1 of the Afro-barometer. This was followed in 2003, 2005, and 2007 by further Rounds in more than a dozen countries (see <http://www.afrobarometer.org>).

The Afro-barometer aims to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in sub-Saharan Africa, to strengthen the institutional capacity for survey research, and to broadly disseminate and apply survey results. Because the surveys ask a standardized set of questions, countries can be systematically compared, and trends tracked over time (see <http://www.afrobarometer.org>). The project has produced a huge volume of research and publications, with the number of working papers currently running at 116. These have covered topics from the narrow - e.g. violence and conflict resolution in Nigeria - to the broad - e.g. the degree to which African democracies have been consolidated. Although there are criticisms of the Afro barometer approach, which will be presented later, the project is undoubtedly a major achievement.

Another large-*n* governance study is the *African Legislatures Project*, a wide-ranging investigation into the changing role of African legislatures and legislators in Africa (<http://www.africanlegislaturesproject.org>). It is a comparative, quantitative, multidimensional approach, covering 18 countries. Field research, which began in 2008 and is expected to continue into 2010, is divided into four distinct modules. The first codifies formal rules that specify the role and powers of the legislature. The second collects data on the composition of legislatures, bills introduced over a five year period, etc. The third consists in a questionnaire survey of 50 legislators in each country, examining such matters as the nature of their activities, and perceptions of their role. And the fourth draws data from the Afro barometer surveys to examine the public's perception of their legislators. Data from all four modules are coded according to a common scheme with a view to facilitating comparison (Barkan et al., 2010: , i).

Among the project's first findings – based on fieldwork in six countries – are that African legislatures have made 'significant progress' in the past 10 or 15 years. Although they remain weak, most now play a larger role in scrutinizing legislation and overseeing the executive than hitherto. However, MPs' ability to play this role is compromised by pressures emanating from their constituencies, since most citizens expect MPs to devote a great proportion of their time to constituency service (Barkan et al., 2010: , ii).

2.1.1 Limitations of large-*n* studies

There have been many criticisms of quantitative political science of the type adumbrated here. Some address the way in which data has been compiled and manipulated (Arndt and Oman, 2006; Knack, 2006; Thomas, 2009). Others question the ability of social science to make meaningful comparisons across countries and cultures (MacIntyre, 1973; Chabal and Daloz, 2006). Others query the legitimacy of drawing causal inferences from multivariate regression analysis (Ragin, 1987).

We can best illustrate these criticisms with a few examples from the Afro-barometer and African Legislatures projects. Take for instance the questions on attitudes to democracy contained in the questionnaires for the former. Question 103 of the first South African questionnaire, for example, established that different people attribute different or diverse meanings to democracy.¹ However, Question 105 proceeded to ask people how satisfied they are with the way (an unspecified type of) democracy works in South Africa (Afrobarometer, 2000). Later, Afro-barometer analysts used this data to draw inferences about how consolidated 'democracy' is (Afrobarometer, 2009a). But if democracy *means* different things to different people, how meaningful is it to say that 'democracy' has or has not been consolidated?²

Another example of not comparing like with like can be found in the African Legislatures project. There, MPs were asked to rate the effectiveness of parliamentary committee clerks, a question which revealed considerable variation from the very low rating of clerks in Namibia to the high rating in Zambia (Barkan et al., 2010: , 17). This evidence would tend to suggest that Zambian clerks are better at their jobs than Namibian clerks; but to draw such a conclusion would be hasty. What if Namibian MPs had higher expectations of their clerks, because they were better educated than their Zambian counterparts? Or what if Namibian MPs were actually not sufficiently well-educated to make a valid assessment of their clerks? All the data really tells us is that

¹ The idea that democracy can have different meanings cross-culturally is also addressed by Schaffer in his masterful study of Senegal. Schaffer, Frederic C. (1998) *Democracy in Translation: Understanding politics in an unfamiliar culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

² It is rather like asking a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim if they believe in God, and then pronouncing that 100% of respondents believe that 'God' exists. The correct finding, of course, is that 100% of respondents believe 'a God' exists.

Zambians rate their clerks more highly than Namibians; it does not tell us why, and it does not tell us that Zambian clerks are in any objective sense superior.

What about causal inferences? Among other things the Afro-barometer tells us that changes in freedom (democratization) are strongly linked to changes in lived poverty (poverty reduction). Five countries apparently exhibit the link quite clearly: 'As political freedom has increased in Zambia and Ghana between 1999 and 2008, levels of poverty have come down steadily. On the other hand, as political freedom decreased in Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Madagascar, lived poverty has steadily increased'. The authors tell us that freedom and poverty reduction are 'strongly related' (Afrobarometer, 2009b: , 2). But it would be premature to infer either that there was a causal relationship between freedom and development, or that the relation ran from the former to the latter. In Zambia and Ghana there could have been factors influencing poverty that were quite unrelated to the political system - like the weather. Or, more trickily, increasing poverty may have caused Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Madagascar to take an authoritarian turn.

It is probable that the Afro-barometer and African Legislature teams have answers to these types of criticism, since they are quite standard, and can be compensated for by various survey and regression techniques. But even the most avid supporter of such methods would probably admit that large-scale opinion surveys, or the compilation of aggregate indexes, tend to produce a kind of data that is qualitatively distinct from other approaches. Knowing that a majority of respondents believe the police in their countries to be corrupt, for example, does not tell us anything about how corruption in the police actually works, why it persists, or how it can be reformed. Indeed, given the nature of survey based methodologies: formal, structured, close-questioned, it is highly unlikely that they could ever elicit this type of data. While a large survey might indicate to a policy-maker, then, that the police force should be looked at, it could not tell him how to go about addressing the specific problem at hand. As we will see in the course of this review, other methods, such as economic or anthropological techniques, are much better suited to this endeavour.

2.2 Small-n studies

A huge number of single-country case studies relevant to the study of governance have been conducted over the past twenty years. Most have appeared either as journal articles or in edited collections, although there are relevant monographs too. The majority focus on aspects of high politics, democracy, politics, administration and democracy writ large, rather than on the social sectors. Typically, they draw on a diverse range of concepts and methods, with interviews, analysis of primary sources such as newspaper archives, and small surveys, featuring prominently. Single country case studies are particularly well suited to tracing the impact of institutional changes over time, and identifying underlying causal processes. Many are rich in insight and have undoubtedly contributed to an increased understanding of governance issues in the countries concerned. However, in most cases the absence of a standard methodology or a comparative framework makes it difficult to assess the veracity of single-case conclusions. In addition, given how thinly scholarship of the African continent is spread, their findings are rarely challenged. Although such studies may be a source of insight for in-country specialists, then, their usefulness to higher-level policy makers remains uncertain.³

³ Some of the collections worthy of note are: Diamond, Larry (ed.) (1988) *Democracy in Developing Countries: sub-Saharan Africa*. Boulder CO: Westview Press, Hyden, Goran (1992) 'Governance and the study of politics' in G. Hyden and M. Bratton (eds.) *Governance and Politics in Africa*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Villalon, Leonard and Philip Huxtable (eds.) (1998) *The African State at a Critical Juncture: Between disintegration and reconfiguration*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Diamond, Larry and Marc F. Plattner (eds.) (1999) *Democratization in Africa*. Baltimore MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, Walle, Nicolas van de,

2.3 Experimental Approaches

Much better at demonstrating casual factors are experimental techniques. This section first discusses comparative case study methods then field experiments.

2.3.1 Comparative case study

Comparative case study methods not only build on the strengths of small-*n* studies (empirical richness, causal process-tracing) but go further, combining a number of such studies into a comparative framework (Ragin, 1987; George and Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007). By studying multiple cases, the researcher is able to discover which variables are consistently associated with which outcomes, and vice versa; this provides a greater degree of confidence than can single country case studies, that the causes posited are more generally applicable. At its most simple, a comparative method may involve a comparison of two cases. Imagine that a detailed study had posited that the cause of poor performance by community health workers in country 1 was low pay. To test that conclusion, a paired comparison would look for a case in which pay was known to be high. If, under inspection, it was found that staff performance in this case was indeed better, the original finding postulating a link between pay and performance would have acquired greater credibility. That credibility would be enhanced still further if all other variables that might be thought to affect performance, for example the training of health workers, the supervision of health workers, etc, could be held constant. By allowing some variables to vary, while holding others constant, this approach mimics the method of a laboratory experiment.

Matters are rarely as simple as this, however. In the real world, we can reasonably expect that in many scenarios causal variables will operate not singly, but jointly or *conjuncturally*. For example, we might expect that higher pay may induce better performance *only* in the presence of adequate staff supervision. To test this hypothesis, we would now need to look at four cases, providing maximum variation on the variables (see Figure 1).

Case Number	Staff Pay	Staff Supervision	Performance
1	High	High	Good
2	High	Low	Poor
3	Low	High	Poor
4	Low	Low	Poor

Figure 1

Figure 1 represents a scenario in which the hypothesis above is confirmed, giving it extra weight. Other results are of course conceivable. Imagine if, instead of a poor performance, Case 3 also showed good performance. That would tend to suggest that it was staff supervision, not staff pay, which was the crucial variable. Or imagine if Case 4 also showed good performance. That would tend to suggest that our theory was incomplete, and that there was some other, important causal variable lurking in the background.

Because comparative case studies involve detailed research, chances are that our researchers would already have some evidence for what that extra variable or variables might be which they could then integrate into another round of research.

As the number of variables increases, the number of cases required for a rigorous diverse case analysis rises exponentially. Three variables require eight cases, four

Nicole Ball and Vijaya Ramachandran (eds.) (2003) *Beyond Structural Adjustment: The Institutional Context of African Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

variables 16, and so on. Once a hypothesis is well established, other comparative methods ('deviant', 'extreme', 'most different' or 'most similar' cases) can be used to really confirm or disconfirm a thesis (Gerring, 2007: , 86-150).

A real example that is of some relevance to governance studies, is Catherine Boone's study of why African regimes often choose a diversity of institutional means to govern their rural areas (Boone, 2003). Her answer is that institutional choices are constrained by pre-existing structures in the countryside, namely political-economic relations (economic strength) and communal structure (social hierarchy). The details of the theory need not detain us here. What is more interesting is the method of deliberately choosing cases that vary along these two variables, producing four case studies, which, by detour of an additional variable, allow Boone to identify the determinants of local governance strategies. The argument is further tested by examining two cases where government shifted institutional strategy in response to poor results. Obviously, an analysis such as this would be potentially very helpful to a policymaker trying to understand, for example, why a particular government seemed more enthusiastic about local government decentralization in some areas of the country than in others. Another exemplary study is Lily Tsai's book on accountability and public goods in China. Tsai visits a very poor region and is lucky enough to find two villages side by side, one with excellent, and one with terrible, public goods; she does the same for a rich region, and finds a similar contrasting pair. Thus she has the foundation for a natural experiment that permits her to examine which variables influence public goods provision, while controlling for wealth and region. Her in-depth case study of the four villages leads her to conclude that public goods provision is better when officials are embedded in encompassing solitary groups that elicit moral commitment and bestow moral standing. She then completes a statistical survey of over three hundred villages in several regions, before re-visiting another twenty or so villages, to test and refine the thesis (Tsai, 2007).

2.3.2 Field experiments

Field experiments are a relatively new development in African governance studies. During the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2001, Leonard Wantchekon of New York University conducted a field experiment into the impact of clientelism on voter preferences in Benin (Wantchekon, 2002). Using a carefully controlled sample of paired villages, he persuaded candidates to run on either a 'clientelistic' or a 'public goods' policy platform. Clientelistic candidates stressed localism, ethnicity, and the provision of jobs and material benefits for the local area; public candidates stressed their participation in national political coalitions or movements and their commitment to a socio-economic project for the country-at-large. Controlling for other influences, he found that clientelist platforms gave candidates an advantage, and that this was particularly marked in the case of incumbents, candidates who shared an ethnicity with their electors, and older candidates. By contrast women, and to some extent younger voters, were more likely to be swayed by public appeals. The results are interesting, because they reveal not just what voters say about their preferences, *but what they actually do*; it is easy to imagine that the results could be extrapolated into advice for policy makers. Likewise the work of Pedro Vicente, who found that the practice of vote-buying 'energized' the electorate in Sao Tome (Vicente, 2008). These studies are part of a growing body of experimental techniques that are enriching the practice of political science in Africa. For other examples see Gibson and Habyarimana et al (Gibson, 2004; Habyarimana et al., 2007).

2.3.1 Limitations of experimental approaches

One of the limitations of comparative case study methods is that it is not always easy to find a caseload that presents the requisite diversity of variables. Where researchers do not have sufficient knowledge to hand, much time and energy must be devoted to

this task. It is a job made more difficult by the fact that variables are not always easy to define and can usually be contested. Oftentimes reality does not fit into a dichotomous system in which variables are either 'present' or 'absent', 'high' or 'low'. Approaches such as 'fuzzy set analysis' have been developed to address this problem (Ragin, 2000), but they require a significant time-investment to learn, and lack some of the parsimony and intuitive appeal of earlier methods.

Moreover, some social scientists insist that explanations drawn from a limited population of cases can never claim the status of universal causal truths; they must be tested against the entire population of cases for such a claim to be justified (Geddes, 2003). This may be fairly straightforward where the phenomenon under investigation is fairly rare (20th century states that experienced peasant revolutions, for example), but more difficult when it is widespread (20th century states that experienced peasant riots). Where the set of cases is large, the labour-intensive nature of case-study methods makes the strategy of finding proxy indicators and running regressions seem more feasible.

Turning to experimental approaches, it seems fair to say that they are unrivalled in their ability to provide definitive answers to questions such as, 'What motivates voters to back candidates they know are corrupt?' or 'What happens to staff performance when pay is increased?' However, they have their disadvantages. To begin with, finding a field in which one can conduct a satisfactory experiment is no easy matter. Wantchekon's Benin experiment would not have been possible in many African countries, where democracy is more insecure and contested. Added to that, it seems obvious that many governance questions are simply not amenable to field experiments: the one above about raising pay may be an example. More complex questions, such as 'Why do some countries respond to aid cuts by increasing democracy, while others become more authoritarian?' are probably beyond their ken.

3. Economic Approaches

In recent years the discipline of economics has provided some of the most potentially powerful concepts with which to research the problems of governance. Economic concepts can help illuminate the logic of ethnic coalitions in politics, the problem of corruption in elections, the underproduction of collective goods, and the poor performance of civil servants. The following section discusses the contributions of game theory, the theory of public goods and collective action, public choice theory, the new institutional economics, and principal-agent theory. While all these approaches bear some similarities -most notably a focus on the incentive structures that influence individuals in strategic settings - and have undoubtedly cross-fertilized one another, they are also distinguishable, and thus will be discussed in turn.

3.1 Game theory

Over the past half-century game theory has been hugely influential in the social sciences, progressively colonizing disciplines from socio-biology to political science. It was developed in the 1940s by Princeton mathematicians John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (von Neumann and Morganstern, 1953; Hardin, 1982). Its chief advantage is that it takes as the centre of its analysis the *strategic* nature of social interactions, modelling what individuals do *on the basis of what they expect other individuals to do*(Hardin, 1982). Since governance involves strategic interaction between numerous individuals, whether within a single organization or across more than one organization, it would seem to be a fertile field for the application of game theoretic techniques.

Numerous games have been developed that provide a potential insight into governance problems, but perhaps the most influential has been the 'Prisoner's Dilemma'.⁴ The Prisoner's Dilemma game has been revealed to affect many real world problems, and doubtless human societies have known about it for centuries. However, it was only formalized as a strategic game around 1950, by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher (Hardin, 1982: , 16). The game shows that when placed in certain structured situations, especially those lacking in trust, rational individuals (or groups) will choose options that are collectively sub-optimal or self-defeating (see Appendix I).

Take for example the issue of vote-rigging in a presidential election between candidates A and B. We can imagine a situation in which both candidates would prefer to have a clean election, each believing he stands a good chance of winning, and each knowing that it will be easier subsequently to govern if the elections are perceived to be clean. The problem is that neither candidate really trusts the other not to tamper with ballot boxes. A expects that if B tampers and he does nothing, he will lose. B expects the same way. Both also reason that if they themselves tamper, the playing field will be level, and they will win. Consequently, tampering is a dominant strategy – what game theorists call a Nash equilibrium - and both candidates cheat. The result is an unclean election and a difficult governance situation for the eventual winner.

Fortunately, the broad corpus of work associated with game theory also provides some clues as to how to short-circuit this unhappy dynamic. One suggestion might be to strengthen the role of third party enforcement, for example an electoral commission, or an agreement to abide by the verdict of external monitors. If commissions or monitors can disqualify or impose penalties on candidates found to have cheated, they alter the payoffs actors face, and thus their strategic decision regarding whether or not to

⁴ There are 78 games that can be reduced to a two-player model alone. Sandler, Todd (2001) *Economic Concepts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

cheat.⁵

At its best, game theory can model scenarios that are like this only more complex, and answer questions about what kinds of outcomes are likely to be achieved. It points us toward a hard-headed appraisal of political logics, as opposed to moral condemnation of political candidates.

One potentially fruitful manifestation of this is the selectorate theory developed by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita. Selectorate theory uses two key concepts – the *selectorate* and the *winning coalition* to answer questions as varied as ‘What can be done to further Tanzania’s economic performance?’ and ‘Will Iran acquire a nuclear bomb?’ (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Thompson, 2009). ‘The *selectorate* is the set of people in the polity who can take part in choosing a leader. The *winning coalition* (denoted as W) is the subset of selectors whose support the leader must retain to remain in office’ (Bueno de Mesquita, 2009: , 2). The selectorate itself can be further divided into the *nominal selectorate* (everyone with a legal say in selecting leaders) and the *true selectorate* (those people who really determine whether a leader wins power) (Bueno de Mesquita, 2009: , 2).

Readers will immediately appreciate that the approach seems well-suited to developing country contexts, because of its attention - through the idea of a *true selectorate* - to real, possibly informal, scarcely visible structures of power. Even better, Bueno de Mesquita has developed a complex mathematical model based on the theory of political coalitions, which, once sufficient data is inputted, allows prediction of real world events - apparently with startling accuracy (Thompson, 2009). It is easy to see that such an approach could be of great assistance to policy-makers trying to forecast the likely outcome of policy interventions. What is more, it apparently allows them not only to see how an event will unfold, but also how to influence the outcome (Thompson, 2009).

Selectorate theory has its drawbacks, however. The mathematical codes of Bueno de Mesquita’s model are secret, meaning that they are closed to peer scrutiny. He also conducts most of his analyses behind closed doors. Consequently there is no transparency to the frequency with which the model makes accurate predictions (Thompson, 2009). In addition, the analysis seems prone sometimes to getting the wrong end of the stick. His recent treatment of Tanzania, for example, placed the burden of analysis on the number of special parliamentary seats amenable to presidential appointment (Bueno de Mesquita, 2009). But seasoned observers of the Tanzanian political system will know that its actual centre of gravity is the Central Committee, National Executive Committee and National Conference of the CCM, which jointly determine who will be the party’s presidential candidate.

3.2 Public goods and collective action

Game theory is also embedded in the analysis of collective action problems. Collective action problems occur whenever a group of people is faced with providing a good that is public.⁶ Economic theory tells us that development depends upon the production of public goods of many types, for example public health, education, transport infrastructure, social peace, sustainable natural resource use, to name but a few. A good is public whenever it is costly to exclude someone from its enjoyment. Take for example a drainage ditch on a residential street. Once the ditch has been built, everyone who lives on that street benefits from it, and it is difficult to see how anyone

⁵ It should be noted that knowing the solution does not necessarily make the solution feasible.

⁶ Analysts differ in the extent to which they think pure public goods exist in the real world, and some prefer the term ‘collective’, ‘group’, or ‘club’ goods. For convenience’s sake, I will stick to the term ‘public goods’ here. Hardin, Russell (1982) *Collective Action*. Baltimore MA: Johns Hopkins University Press.

could be excluded from its off take of surplus water. The difficulty of exclusion raise what economists call a 'free rider problem', which presents a conundrum in respect of the good's initial supply. If I know that I cannot be excluded from the enjoyment of a drainage ditch, why should I contribute to building one? If I don't contribute and everyone else does, the ditch will still be built and I will benefit from it; but if no-one else contributes and I do, my contribution is wasted. We can see then that from the individual's point of view, non-contribution is the rational, dominant strategy, and if all individuals think like this, we can expect that no drainage ditches will ever get built, at least not by collectives of private citizens. In the sense that the exercise of individual self-interest leads to a collectively bad result here, the free rider problem has the same structure as the Prisoner's Dilemma game(Hardin, 1982).

The *locus classicus* for studies of collective action and the free rider problem is Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action*(Olson, 1965). Olson argued that free rider problems were most likely to be overcome when groups were small rather than large, and/or when its members were unequally endowed (with the resource-rich sharing more of the burden of collective provision). They could also be overcome if an institution for acting collectively could confer *selective incentives* of either a material or psychological nature on its members, if people could be organized by *political entrepreneurs*, or if their motivations for engaging in collective action were '*extra-rational*'. In Olson's study, all these propositions are algebraically and mathematically defended. I will not enter into such technicalities here but merely say a few words by way of illustration. In the case of our drainage ditch, we can understand that an individual would be more likely to feel impelled to contribute if the group of beneficiaries was small and he reasoned that his own contribution would make a significant difference to the outcome. Likewise, if one individual on the street values a ditch and is particularly wealthy, he may incur almost the whole cost of the construction himself, reasoning that if he doesn't do it, no-one else will. Another alternative is for a neighbourhood group to form, which offers certain benefits to members who contribute to ditch construction (for example invitations to beer parties), and withholds them from others. In another example, a community may be mobilized to build a ditch by a charismatic political entrepreneur who is expecting the activity to bring him some personal benefit. Finally, an individual may contribute to ditch construction simply because he thinks it is the 'morally right' thing to do. Any student or resident of Africa will know that drainage ditches do sometimes get built in each and all of these ways. What collective action theory does is to help explain why provision is sometimes sub-optimal, and what potential remedies might be found. It thus provides a useful tool for governance theory, which is focused much of the time on the question of why some areas have better roads, schools, clinics, and sanitation systems than others.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of collective action theory to understanding the problems of development to date can be found in the field of common pool resource management. According to Elinor Ostrom, the world's leading authority in this matter: 'When a use of a flow of services by one individual subtracts from what is available to others and when the flow is scarce relative to demand, users will be tempted to try to obtain as much as they can of the flow for fear that it will not be available later' (Ostrom, 2005: , 25). This situation applies to community pastures, forests, fisheries, watercourses, and the like. As can be shown both mathematically and empirically, the basic problem is that although the benefits of these resources (e.g. a net-full of fish) are enjoyed individually, the costs (declining fish stocks) are borne collectively, providing individuals with incentive to overuse resources in what analysts have termed 'a tragedy of the commons'. Because of this, sustainable use of common pool resources requires a governance solution. The team assembled around Ostrom at Indiana University has provided great theoretical and empirical advance in modelling and investigating the types of institutional structure that are best able to conserve

resources, factoring in a diversity of variables that address the payoffs to specific courses of action in diverse socio-economic contexts (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and associates, 2002). Some of these studies have been in Africa, and it seems that the scope for future expansion is large.⁷

Needless to say, one of the most common solutions to collective action problems of all types is to superimpose a government authority. This is a normal feature of governments the world over: the US spends around 39% of government income addressing market failure/collective action problems, for example (Sandler, 2001: , 58). Africa is no different, and we frequently find governments getting involved in matters such as health inspection, forestry management, school provision, and, yes, drainage construction. We will discuss some of the approaches to analyzing 'governmental governance' of these areas in a little while. For the time being, it is sufficient to note that public economics/collective choice theory can help determine the extent to which goods really are 'public' in nature, and the scope for alternatives to government provision (Sandler, 2001: , 56-76).

3.3 Public choice theory

Public choice theory examines how governments perform when controlled by rational, self-interested actors (Sandler, 2001: , 76). It has brought a distinctive approach to such traditional political science subjects as campaign strategies, platform formulation, voters' behaviour, lobbying, constitutional design, and bureaucratic decision-making, all of which seem relevant to the study of governance. Typically, public choice theory explains or predicts the behaviour of political agents when they seek to maximize some objective, subject to one or more constraining variables (Sandler, 2001: , 78). A ground-breaking application of the approach to African development issues was Robert Bates' analysis of markets and states in tropical Africa (Bates, 1981; 1988). He argued that Africa's economically irrational urban-bias policies could be explained by the fact that the best organized social actors were urban industrialists and workers, with African governments simply trying to maximize their ability to stay in power. Even after its counter-productivity had been made apparent, urban bias persisted because it created rent-seeking opportunities and thus vested interests against reform. In later work, Bates reasoned that a potential solution was to introduce multi-party elections to Africa, shifting the centre of gravity in the political system from organized urban interests to more dispersed rural ones (Bates, 1988: , 350).⁸

A cognate take on political systems can be found in the collection *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*, edited by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007b). It contrasts with Bates' work, however, in that it focuses on the distorting impact that clientelist politics can have on democratic outcomes. The books contain several powerful analytical chapters plus empirical studies encompassing countries as diverse as Mexico and Japan.⁹ The authors conceive of clientelistic exchanges as principal-

⁷ It is also interesting to note that common pool resource concepts like tragedy of the commons can be pressed into analytical service in other governance domains: the tendency in contexts where the centralized management of bribe-extraction is lacking for politicians and civil servants to extract bribes from businessmen at an *unsustainable* level is just one example. McIntyre, Andrew (2003) 'Institutions and the political economy of corruption in developing countries' *Discussion Paper. Workshop on Corruption. Stanford University. January 31 - Feb 1, 2003*. Shapiro, however, is skeptical. While lauding Ostrom's approach as an example of 'close-to-the-ground theorizing', he believes the connection between the findings and rational choice is tenuous. Shapiro, Ian and Donald Green (2005) 'Revisiting the pathologies of rational choice' in I. Shapiro (ed.) *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press..

⁸ Bates has recently claimed that the sustainability of more market-friendly policies in Africa can be explained by the shift to multi-party democracy, a claim that the present author finds to be inflated, and a good illustration of one of the pitfalls of the public choice approach http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/4.14.08/Transcript_Africa's_Economic_Growth.pdf.

⁹ The collection includes an overview study of Africa by Nicholas van de Walle. van de Walle, Nicholas (2007) 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss? The evolution of political clientelism in Africa' in H. Kitschelt and

agent relations beset by problems of collective action, free-riding, and monitoring, mediated by the degree of competition in the political system, political economy/property rights regimes, and ethno-cultural divides (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007a: , 7). The authors provide a framework that helps explain, among other things, the mixture of private, club, and programmatic goods that politicians in different systems provide, the conditions in which clientelism increases or decreases, and the role of corruption in clientelist systems. One conclusion is that, 'The current World Bank and bilateral donor focus on governance and transparency...is doomed to failure unless it takes more account of the often directly opposing incentives facing politicians charged with implementing reforms in patronage-based systems from Nairobi to Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo' (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007a: , 3).

A similar skepticism about the donor position on governance can be found in the corpus of work by Mushtaq Khan and his collaborators. Khan utilizes concepts from both classical and new political economy to analyse the governance arrangements conducive to promoting growth in developing countries. Central to this analysis is a focus on political settlements, patron-client relations, and the growth implications of different types of economic rent (Khan, 1996; Khan and Sundaram, 2000; Khan, 2005; 2006; Khan, 2009; 2010; Khan and Gray, c2006). To give just one example from what promises to be a compelling analysis, Khan argues that all developing countries entered independence with a political settlement that placed them at a specific point on a growth-stability trade-off curve (a settlement is defined by the relationship between a governing coalition and the groups both inside and outside the party that possess the simple but explanatorily powerful notion of 'holding power'). This has made it easier for some countries to maintain political stability than others, providing them the room for manoeuvre to make the sometimes difficult decisions growth demands (Khan, 2010). Knowing how a political settlement affects the growth-stability trade-off, it seems, may tell us more about a country's prospects for economic reform and development than a conventional analysis of governance indicators would do.

Another useful application of the public choice approach to Africa is Daniel Posner's analysis of institutions and ethnic politics (Posner, 2005). Posner wants to know why certain ethnic identities are mobilized at some times and different ones at others. In common with other public choice theorists (Riker, 1962), he argues, 'to the extent that access to resources is determined through a process of electoral competition, the most useful identity to mobilize will be...the one that puts one in a winning coalition (Posner, 2005: , 4). More precisely, it will be the identity that puts one in a *minimum* winning coalition, that is, a coalition which wins but in which the spoils of power are shared with as few partners as possible (Posner, 2005: , 4). Posner proceeds to show how the task of forming a winning coalition is crucially framed by the nature of political institutions, and in particular the electoral system. He then uses case materials from Zambia to demonstrate how, under conditions of single party competition individuals typically identify with tribes, while under conditions of multi-party competition, they identify with language groups. The approach, which combines both socio-political and rational choice perspectives on ethnicity, would seem to have great promise for understanding the probable patterns of coalition and conflict under different constitutional arrangements in Africa, not to mention an angle on a much wider range of governance issues.

3.4 New institutional economics

New institutional economics (NIE) has a great deal of overlap with the economic fields already discussed, with its distinctive contribution being a focus on the subject of

S.I. Wilkinson (eds.) *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 50-67.

transaction costs. New Institutional Economists established themselves by showing how the desire to minimize transaction costs could explain some puzzles neo-classical economics couldn't, for example the existence of firms and other institutions (Coase, 1937). Subsequently NIE became dedicated to institutional analysis of various sorts (Sandler, 2001: , 99). In 1993, for example, Douglass North won the Nobel Prize for his work on institutions and economic history, arguing that economic development in the more advanced countries could be explained by the way in which they had designed institutions, like property rights or patent laws, that reduced transaction costs and made markets more efficient, placing them on a path to increased prosperity and growth (North, 1990).¹⁰

Clearly, the NIE is potentially extremely relevant to issues of governance and development, especially where policy makers are on the lookout for institutional alternatives that will enhance growth, reduce poverty, and so forth. But its application to the problems of African development has been limited to date. A major exception is the collection on health and veterinary services edited by David Leonard (Leonard, 2000). Leonard uses NIE concepts to great effect to analyze issues such as why private markets for veterinary products fail, why traditional healers remain popular in Africa, and why faith-based organizations tend to supply better healthcare. Reasoning along NIE lines also provides him a font of inspiration for ideas about possible, and more suitable developmental alternatives.

3.5 Principal-agent approaches

One of concepts we have already touched upon, which is also employed by Leonard under the rubric of NIE, is the principal-agent relation. Principal-agent problems affect many types of organization, and their analysis provides a powerful tool for understanding organizational performance. If one wants to unlock why it is that African governments don't implement policies they have signed up to, or why health workers are absent from clinics, or why NGO workers rarely get out of the capital city, principal-agent approaches can supply the key (Laffont and Martimort, 2001; Miller, 2005; Belsey, 2006).

In principal-agent schemas the principal is the person or entity holding authority, and the agent is the individual or entity contracted or enjoined to undertake some specific task. Principal and agent are typically figured as having different interests. For example, the principal wants the agent to expend as much effort as possible in pursuit of his assigned task, while the agent would prefer to expend as little as possible. The principal consequently needs to find a way to provide the agent with incentives to work hard. This task is made more difficult, however, by the fact that the agent probably has a better idea of how hard he is working than does the principal (the NGO worker knows better than the donor how often he has gotten out of the capital in the past month, for example). There is an *asymmetric information* situation in which one party possesses more relevant knowledge than the other. In the language of economics this is a 'moral hazard' or 'hidden action' problem, which in this case allows the agent to exploit the principal (Sandler, 2001: , 117-122).¹¹ Some of the ways in which the interests of principal and agent can be better aligned involve introducing techniques for increased

¹⁰ North's recent work on 'open' vs. 'limited access orders' provides a schema for understanding some of the difference in governance institutions typically found between developing and developed countries. It also provides some pointers for how far governance in developing countries might realistically be expected to change. North, Douglass C., John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast (2006) 'A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history. Working Paper 12795'. Cambridge MA, National Bureau of Economic Research.

¹¹ Other difficulties arise when principals may be so uninformed that they make the wrong choices, as when a principal contracts an agent to supply a service for which he is unqualified, a situation known by economists as the 'adverse selection' problem. Sandler, Todd (2001) *Economic Concepts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

monitoring, performance related contracts, organizational *esprit de corps*, non-monetary benefits, and so on. Monitoring, however, creates its own problems, since it often raises the question of 'who monitors the monitors?'

Principal-agent approaches would thus seem to have a very wide application to governance issues, in particular as a means of understanding the performance of the organizations, be they government departments, projects, NGOs, or religious groups that are charged with pursuing developmental goals, social service provision especially. Some literature on the principal-agent approach and the problems of African development does exist, but not in great quantity. The aforementioned book by Leonard is still probably the best source. In it, he uses principal-agent analysis to show that one of the reasons traditional healers and birth attendants in Africa remain popular, is that the structure of informal contracts they provide accords well with health users' material situations. This is certainly an advance on analyses which attribute their popularity solely to factors like 'culture' or 'education', and one that should be factored into any scheme that attempts to 'modernize' healthcare. Other examples include (World Bank, 2004: , Ch. 3; Lewis, 2006: , 35-39). More generally, principal-agent analysis has undoubtedly played a role in some of the new public management techniques introduced into African civil services over the past two decades.

3.6 Some limitations of economic approaches

Economic approaches to studying governance and development issues have been much critiqued (Toye, 1995; Leys, 1996). One of the most telling criticisms is that the entire approach rests on unrealistic assumptions about human motivation. Generally speaking, economists posit that individuals are rational, self-interested, and respond to incentives in the form of material rewards. Working with such a simplified set of assumptions allows them to construct models of elegance and parsimony. The problem is that in real world situations these assumptions are often wide of the mark (Shapiro and Green, 2005). Experimental tests of the Prisoner's Dilemma, for example, show that contrary to the model's expectations, individuals choose to *cooperate* with each other in the majority of cases (Taylor, 1976; Hardin, 1982: , 24). Another issue is that many games have multiple possible equilibria, making it impossible to predict which particular equilibrium a set of individuals will gravitate toward (Greif, 2006: , 124-125). When it comes to generating non-obvious empirically substantiated findings, the record of economic-inspired political science is thus poor (Shapiro and Green, 2005).

If we turn to African contexts, a number of social features that might complicate the simplicity of economic approaches are readily apparent. People may hold strong beliefs about religion or the supernatural, they may have strong group as opposed to individualistic identities, and they may place high value on goods that are not material, such as status, or respect (Chabal, 1992; Ellis and ter Haar, 2004; Chabal, 2009). Although some existing work, such as Posner's analysis of Zambian ethnicity (Posner, 2005), has demonstrated explanatory power on the basis of very restrictive assumptions about voter motivations, this approach has not been widely tested.

Economists usually respond to such problems by factoring 'non-rational' variables such as trust, culture, and social conventions into their accounts (Binmore, 2007: , 57-71). In principle, there is no reason why factors as diverse as this cannot be accommodated by economic models. But before that can happen, research of a socio-political or anthropological nature must take place to discover what the operative values and institutions are. The common pool resource literature, for example, has been hugely enriched by way of an extended engagement with anthropologists (Harriss, 2003; Bardhan and Ray, 2008). The rub is that once qualified by these extra-rational factors,

economic models lose their parsimony and perhaps their predictive power.¹² A response to these difficulties is to view economic models only as an entry point to governance analysis. Observing the ways in which a social reality conforms to or departs from a model, can help us to see the world more clearly. It is in this spirit that researchers investigating why a civil service reform programme is not working, or why a forest conservation scheme is going well, would be assisted by knowledge of some of the concepts outlined here. Used properly, they can help illuminate aspects of a problem that seem otherwise puzzling, or provide a fresh perspective on a problem that was previously thought to be well-understood. Leonard's work on traditional healers and birth attendants is a case in point.

That being said, one can venture that only a few situations will repay high-level mathematical modelling as is common in the most advanced branches of game theory. Models are but a heuristic device. They ought not to be used mechanically or made a fetish of, divergent facts conveniently ignored or crammed unconvincingly within their bounds. It would be unwise to insist that the continued popularity of traditional healers in Africa rests *solely* on economic factors, for example. Clearly, belief in a world of illness-creating-and-curing spiritual forces is important too.

As part of a broad-based social scientific training for governance research, economic methods clearly have a role: but there is much they cannot tell us.

¹² An alternative literature views economic concepts like the free-rider problem as just a subset in the universe of different kinds of social and psychological 'mechanisms' that can drive individual behaviour and thus broader social outcomes. However, this approach suffers from a similar problem: reduce too much, and a model fails to explain; include too much, and the model becomes unwieldy. Hedström, Peter and Richard Swedberg (eds.) (1998) *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

4. Socio-Political Approaches

The diverse approaches discussed under this heading are united by an explicit interest in the phenomenon of power and authority, in both its formal and informal manifestations: hence the label 'political'. However, with their focus on authority types, social actors, cultural mores, patron-client networks, power/knowledge and political economy, they owe more to sociological theory than to mainstream political science. The subsequent sections discuss neo-patrimonial approaches, power and drivers of change analyses, 'upside-down' views of governance, and postcolonial approaches.

4.1 Neo-patrimonial approaches

Extremely popular in African political studies over the past few decades have been 'neo-patrimonial' analyses of African governance. The approach draws on Max Weber's distinction between 'patrimonial authority' - a species of traditional rule in which a leader governed on the basis of strong personal ties with a subordinate staff - and 'legal-rational' or 'bureaucratic' authority - in which leaders were merely office holders constrained by a system of impersonal rules. In patrimonial systems, staff were often hired on account of their loyalty not their competence, there was no fixed salary system, and no clear distinction between the ruler's personal possessions and those of the state. In legal-rational systems, by contrast, there was a clear separation between public and private wealth, a regular system of appointment and promotion, technical training as a regular requirement, and fixed salaries paid in money (Weber, 1947: , 315-318).

In African studies the concept of patrimonialism has evolved into the idea of 'neo-patrimonialism': a situation in which patrimonial power is either fused with, or exercised behind, a legal-rational façade. Among the stand out works in this genre are Zolberg, Jackson and Rosberg, Sandbrook, Médard, and Chabal and Daloz (Zolberg, 1966; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Médard, 1982; Sandbrook, 1985; Chabal and Daloz, 1999).¹³ Without doubt, these analyses and others like them have provided a great deal of insight into such matters as the persistence of corruption in African governance, the filling of positions with unqualified people, and the arbitrary character of much administration, not to mention the sometimes schizophrenic relation between the public face of government and its actual actions. Van de Walle explains the failure of structural adjustment reforms in Africa by reference to neo-patrimonial imperatives (van de Walle, 2001).

4.2 Power and drivers of change analyses

Recognition of the importance of politics, and in particular hidden power, to the success or failure of governance reforms prompted the collection of studies discussed next. Over the past decade, the World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development, and others donors including SIDA and the Royal Netherlands Government, have launched major research initiatives for understanding developing country politics.

In the World Bank's case, *Institutional and Governance Reviews* were begun in 1999, with a focus on formal state institutions *and* the informal practices within them, especially in the field of policy-making. The studies were consistently well coordinated and financed, though they tended to gravitate towards an analysis of formal

¹³ Closely related, in that it also draws inspiration from Weber, and highly influential, is Goran Hyden's idea of an 'economy of affection' in which government and society are organized along pre-modern, pre-scientific lines, oriented to the sustenance of kin and clan as opposed to the rational solution of development problems. Hyden, Goran (1983) *No Shortcuts to Progress: African development management in perspective*. London: Heinemann. For a recent take on this thesis, see Hyden, Goran (2008) 'Institutions, power and policy outcomes. Africa, Power, and Politics Programme. Discussion paper number 2.'. Available at <http://www.institutions-africa.org>.

institutions(Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005). Joel Barkan's report on Tanzania, for example, ultimately says little about informal institutions, and ends by recommending a familiar package of 'good governance' measures: strengthening the judicial system, providing targeted support for local governance reform, and strengthening 'watchdog organisations' (Barkan, 2000).

SIDA launched a series of 'power studies' in 2003, stimulated by their experiences in Ethiopia. They have tended to focus on the relations between rights, democracy, and poverty reduction through an analysis of informal and formal power actors. Goran Hyden's analysis of Tanzania, for example, makes much of the neo-Weberian 'economy of affection' concept, as well as providing a lucid discussion of the phenomenon of clientelism. However, the influence of these phenomena tends to be asserted rather than demonstrated, with scant empirical evidence advanced to help us understand their operation better.¹⁴

Some of the most fruitful studies of governance under this heading have come under the auspices of DFID's 'Drivers of Change' initiative. Its inspiration was a growing realization that DFID's in-country technical programmes were frequently impeded by a lack of knowledge about the underlying political systems in which they were located. In particular, it was felt that an insufficient amount was known about the formal *and informal* institutions that dictated the mechanics of pro-poor change. The Drivers approach brought together a conceptual model (developed in part by the consultancy firm Oxford Policy Management) and a set of six questions to help DFID country-teams orient their inquiries. Subsequently, over twenty country offices undertook drivers of change analyses(DFID, 2004). The result was rich accounts of the formal and informal politics of governance in several countries, with the Sierra Leone, Malawi, and Cambodia studies being particularly worthy of note(Hughes and Conway, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Booth et al., 2006). The Sierra Leone report, for example, provided a sophisticated account of the deep structures and institutions shaping the country's political economy, including the place of ethnicity, regionalism and locality in politics; the role of elites and elite networks in the political system; the significance of trust and secrecy; and the political economy of diamonds.

4.3 An upside down view of governance

Some of the most exciting new work on governance comes from the Centre for the Future State at IDS Sussex. In its recently published overview report, the authors liken most governance practitioners to inept artists. Just as the latter will attempt to draw things in the way they *expect* them to look, so the former will look at developing countries from the perspective of a developed country, 'aspiring to introduce governance reforms that would align the institutions of poor countries in the South more closely with those of an OECD state' (CentrefortheFutureState, 2010: , 1). As a corollary to this untutored view, informal relations and personalized relationships such as abound in the developing world; tend to be viewed as governance problems. The authors of *An upside down view* argue that these phenomena can also be *an important part of the solution*(Centre for the Future State, 2010: , executive summary). As their own research streams on state fragility, the investment climate, social accountability, tax bargaining, and 'traditional' authority show, new insights into productive solutions to governance problems come from adopting a new language and asking new questions, including: how are history and context shaping formal and informal institutions,

¹⁴Under this heading another 'power' approach that is gaining some traction in donor circles. This is the 'power cube' analysis pioneered by John Gaventa at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex. Drawing on his own excellent adaptation of Steven Luke's work on power, Gaventa provides a framework for analyzing the 'spaces', 'levels', and 'forms of power'. The approach, which has apparently been employed with success in countries from Sri Lanka to Uganda, seems particularly useful to understanding how actors can make political participation more meaningful in a range of concrete settings. Gaventa, John (2006) 'Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis', *IDS Bulletin* 37(6): 23-33.

interests and relationships? What is shaping the interests of political elites? Are there common interests between public and private actors that could result in 'win/win' outcomes? What might stimulate effective collective action by societal groups? (CentrefortheFutureState, 2010: , 73-74).

4.4 Postcolonial approaches

Before moving on, it is worth saying a word about 'postcolonial' approaches, which are quite popular in academic development departments. Postcolonial studies draw their inspiration from the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said. One of Foucault's pre-eminent concerns was the matter of how modern states sustained their authority by means of a diverse range of mechanisms of working on the body and working on the psyche, often propagated via non-state institutions like schools, hospitals, and prisons (Foucault, 1977; 1982; 1991). The key concepts are 'capillary power', 'bio-power', and 'governmentality', and reading Foucault can certainly provide an insight into why some African states struggle to maintain social order or achieve wider developmental goals. The collection by Blundo et al seems to be one of the first attempts to apply a Foucauldian approach to questions of African governance (Blundo and Le Meur, 2008a). The work of Said, meanwhile, which draws on Foucault, examines how structures of knowledge and power are intimately entangled, with knowledge providing the inspiration and justification for various practices of domination (Said, 1978; Abrahamsen, 2003). In African studies, Rita Abrahamsen has used this approach to show how classifying African countries as 'poorly governed' justifies continued encroachment on African sovereignty, and provides a rationale for promoting a range of liberal policies to the exclusion of more popular or bottom-up notions of democracy (Abrahamsen, 2000).

Postcolonial approaches are to be recommended for their ability to prompt radical re-examination of conventional wisdom, opening space for new thinking about development. They are less useful when it comes to providing solutions to concrete governance problems, especially day-to-day. At their least helpful, they are empirically flimsy conspiracy theories hinting that every well-intentioned donor initiative functions in reality as part of some larger plot to keep Africa downtrodden.

4.5 Some limitations of socio-political approaches

Socio-political approaches to the study of African governance tend to be afflicted by one of two problems. Either they are pitched at a rather general level of analysis that is short on empirical specifics, or they are empirically rich but methodologically idiosyncratic, making it difficult to draw more general theoretical conclusions.

Reflecting the first problem is the voluminous literature on neo-patrimonialism. This tends to rely on secondary data rather than primary fieldwork, and usually gives insufficient attention to the possibility that there are different degrees and types of neo-patrimonialism, or to what the implications of this might be for development or governance reform. Anyone familiar with the countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, for instance, knows very well that there are significant differences in governance between the three countries, even though all remain, to one degree or another, 'neo-patrimonial'. Neo-patrimonialism is thus a concept that must be used with care lest it degenerate into a kind of catch-all category with which to explain away every perceived malfunction in African governance. As Therkilsden has noted, the latter is affected by a variety of other elite motivations: 'nationalism, professional integrity, gaining a political following through service provision, public demand for accountability' as well as structural features: 'the deep fiscal stress facing public organizations; distortionary tax systems; dependence of a few primary commodities on volatile and distorted export markets; donor influence, etc (Therkilsden, 2005: , 49).

Reflecting the second problem are Drivers of Change and power analyses. Although these recorded some notable achievements: contributing to a better understanding of politics' centrality to aid effectiveness (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005: , 21), and even making some difference to aid practice, they lacked a consistent methodology and scope, meaning that their quality was uneven, and the link between higher-level theorization and policy guidance attenuated. An evaluation of the approaches commented that the lack of 'good, documented examples to illustrate how to move from high level analysis to practical action at an operational level' was particularly frustrating (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005: , 24).¹⁵ Even the IDS research on informal governance can be criticized for failing to provide a clear rationale for the different methodologies across the diverse sectors studied. This leaves an impression of ad hocery, and calls into question the generalisability of findings.

One response to problems of this nature is to develop standardized methodologies, or at least 'toolkits', for researching governance. USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance, for example, has developed a 'Patronage Toolkit' to assist programming in countries where patronage is pervasive. It is composed of six components, each addressing a different sphere of economic, political, or social life. For each, the researchers are expected to generate empirical data, interpret it, and formulate hypotheses, 'that may have explanatory value in illuminating the existence of patronage and, subsequently, informing prospective program interventions' (Inc., 2003: , 58). Unfortunately, little guidance is given on the methods adequate to generating patronage-based empirical data, leaving open the possibility of 'quick and dirty' appraisals.

Because informal practices are often not documented, tacit, taboo, and not easily observable, researchers in the socio-political tradition, especially those working in the policy sector, frequently rely heavily on interviews with so-called 'key informants'. But this raises its own problems: 'Using key informants requires creativity and recognition that their views are inevitably incomplete and biased in ways that may not be immediately obvious. Government informants engaged in quasi-legal or illegal activities are unlikely to be forthcoming in interviews with outsiders. Citizens may be reticent as well...Often informants may not have direct experience, and thus report on general perceptions, rumours, and allegations rather than verifiable facts' (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002: , 21).

¹⁵ Also noted was a constant tension between the political imperative of increasing aid disbursements with a view to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, and the message of power and drivers analyses, which was that reform was difficult, and necessarily slow.

5. Ethnographic Approaches

To date, ethnography has not been much used in the study of governance problems. This is unfortunate, since of all social science's manifold techniques, ethnographic methods are perhaps best suited to advancing our understanding of the informal institutions that play such an important role in the problems of (and solutions to) development.

What is ethnography? Even among ethnographers there is some debate. Olivier de Sardan regards it as 'the empirical, multidimensional study of contemporary social groups and their interactions, placed in a diachronic perspective, and combining the analysis of practices and of conceptions' (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: , 27). Van Donge states that, 'Ethnographic research methods attempt to study social life as it unfolds in the practices of day-to-day life' (van Donge, 2006: , 180). While for Schatz, ethnography merely implies, 'approaches that rely centrally on person-to-person contact as a way to elicit insider perspectives and meanings' (Schatz, 2007: , 2). Personally, I prefer the association of ethnography with a particular method - that of *participant observation*, by which is meant *intimate* participation in an organization or community and *close* observation of its modes of behaviour and social life (Emerson et al., 1995; Sluka and Robben, 2007). Ideally, the ethnographer should occupy a dual vantage point: able to think, see, feel, and perhaps act as a member of the study culture, and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from a social-scientific culture.¹⁶ Although today's ethnographers employ a range of tools, from archival research to semi-structured interviews, one would question whether an account is genuinely 'ethnographic' if it does not have observation at its core.

For most authors, the great advantage of ethnographic immersion is that it allows us to peer behind the façade of official representations, and 'grasp certain concepts and causal mechanisms, as well as perspectives and sentiments, that although invisible, are critical' (Schatzberg, 2008: , 1). This seems particularly relevant in governance contexts such as Africa, where 'doublespeak reigns supreme', and the "real" functioning of the state...is actually very far removed from its "official" functioning' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006: , 7, 4).

Quite how long it takes to achieve this type of 'insider knowledge' is the subject of some debate. Traditionally, ethnographic studies involved long periods of immersion, usually around two years, isolated in the target culture. It was thought that such an extended period was necessary to gain language skills, earn trust, and observe the life of the community unfold. Classical fieldwork accounts often narrate long periods of bewilderment or confusion before the ethnographer, sometimes by chance, stumbles upon a pivotal event or piece of information that helps understand the larger cultural whole (see for example Berreman, 1963/2007; van Maanen, 1988: , 73-100). Today it is accepted that much shorter periods in the field may still be profitable, especially if the researcher has a prior acquaintance with the culture concerned (van Donge, 2006). At the very least, short periods of observation can be used to triangulate and flesh out data gleaned using other methods, as well as to suggest new avenues and questions for research.

The next sections discuss some of the few examples of ethnographic governance studies available.

¹⁶ This sentence paraphrases Hortense Powder maker, cited in Sluka, Jeffrey A. and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (2007) 'Fieldwork in cultural anthropology: an introduction' in A.C.G.M. Robben and J.A. Sluka (eds.) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

5.1 A classical ethnography of civil service reform

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Gerhard Anders conducted research into good governance reforms in Malawi. He based himself among civil servants in Zomba and Lilongwe, moving from the air-conditioned offices of the World Bank, to ministerial headquarters where 'a fan was a scarce commodity', to district administrations where 'long forgotten files filled rusty cabinets' (Anders, 2005a: , 28). His method was one of 'follow the policy', which entailed moving up and down the ladder of bureaucratic hierarchy, with occasional forays into relevant localities, like church or home village(Anders, 2005a: , 28-29).

Immersion in this 'exotic' world allowed Anders to grasp some of the civil service's heterogeneity, and some of the complexities of governance reform. In his view, Malawian civil servants inhabited a pluralistic normative order comprised of official norms, social norms, and informal codes of conduct. Chameleon-like, they switched between these different norms as situations required(Anders, n.d.). They were embroiled in a complicated micro-politics of governance reform, which pitted 'Enclave' against 'Line' ministries and 'bosses' against 'juniors', resulting in a quite unanticipated politics of everyday appropriation and resistance that substantially undermined Bretton Woods initiatives. Yet resistance was not a part, thinks Anders, of primordial attachments to 'pre-modern' forms of administration as some theorists of governance would have us believe. Rather, it was a species of coping strategy in a climate characterized by volatility, crisis, and risk(Anders, 2005b).¹⁷

5.2 Team ethnography of accountability

The Drivers of Change study, *Understanding Patterns of Accountability in Tanzania* was notable for its inclusion of an ethnographic component. This set out to study the local accountability landscape in depth, shedding light on the relation between formal and informal accountability channels, building a picture of accountability from the grassroots up. It tried not only to identify the institutions and channels through which local people sought to secure accountability, but also to understand the language in which they thought and talked about it. Its aim was to come to a deeper understanding of local institutions and to observe accountability processes *in action*. In addition, it tried not just to tell, but to *show* readers how accountability functioned at local level. To this end, the text was interspersed with more than twenty vignettes from field notes, which the authors called, 'windows on accountability' (Kelsall et al., 2005).

The research team consisted of two senior and six junior researchers, three of whom originated in the case study area and spoke the local language. At the start of a four week long fieldwork exercise, the senior researchers provided training in ethnographic observation and note-taking to the junior researchers, most of whom had a background in sociology and political science. The team proceeded to base itself in a particular village and to work inductively, discovering what local people thought were the key accountability issues, following them through different levels of government or society, and seizing opportunities to observe accountability processes as and when they arose. In the first phase of fieldwork, researchers joined villagers in farm work, communal roadwork, in markets, churches, dispensaries, and bars. Focus groups with various

¹⁷ The publisher's description of Anders' book, *In the Shadow of Good Governance*, which I have been unable to obtain, tells us that it 'traces the implementation of the good governance agenda in Malawi from the loan documents signed by the representatives of the government and the Bretton Woods institutions to the individual experiences of civil servants who responded in unforeseen ways to the reform measures. Ethnographic evidence gathered in government offices, neighbourhoods and the private homes of civil servants living in Malawi's urban and peri-urban areas undermines the common perception of a disconnect between state institutions and society in Africa. Instead, the book presents a comprehensive analysis of civil servants' attempts to negotiate the effects of civil service reform and economic crisis at the turn of the 21st century' Anders, Gerhard (2010) *In the Shadow of Good Governance: An ethnography of civil service reform in Africa*. Afrika-Studiecentrum Series, 16. Leiden: Brill.

social groups, such as male elders, young men, young women and older women were also conducted. In the second phase, a number of arenas were selected for a closer follow-up: the village government, the clan council, the ward office, the district hospital, the school committee, the court, religious institutions, and the district council.

Individual researchers spent considerable time shadowing bureaucrats and politicians in their daily activities as well as observing the interactions taking place at the various institutions. They also shadowed poor people in search of health services, and participated in mourning ceremonies and traditional conflict resolution. The relatively high number of researchers meant that each could concentrate on one or two arenas. The team found that following people and institutions over a stretch of time gave more in-depth data than one-shot interviews tend to do. At the end of phase two, the team held new focus group discussions in the community to debate the specific accountability issues that had come up during the research.

One of the study's key findings was that when evaluating government performance, local people drew from diverse vocabularies of accountability. Some of this vocabulary matched that of good governance discourse, but some stemmed from a local governance tradition based on patriarchal authority in a subsistence economy. These two traditions were potentially, though not necessarily, in conflict. In addition, people used religious vocabularies, or vocabulary associated with the market place, to describe and evaluate political behaviour. These different vocabularies, the product of Tanzania's postcolonial history, could not be easily subsumed under standard polisci categories like 'transparency', 'answerability' and 'controllability'. What was more, the co-existence of sometimes contradictory accountability vocabularies injected a degree of ambiguity into relations of power, with certain types of behaviour legitimate in one 'language' but not in another.

The research also found that *the same individuals* could sometimes be heard speaking *different* languages of accountability; there was considerable mixing. Governance at local level was thus a fluid field of interpenetrating institutions and actors, informed by co-mingling cultures of accountability which placed rather loose, and not always consistent, restraints on the actions of leaders. This made predicting the outcome of governance interventions rather difficult, though the authors did speculate that there were potential opportunities for bringing patriarchal-patrimonial and liberal-good governance cultures more closely into line.

5.3 Research for the Africa, Power and Politics Programme

In 2009 the Africa, Power and Politics Programme began training courses in ethnographic methods in Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, for its own affiliated researchers. The modules have closely followed the methodology used by Kelsall et al in the Tanzania Drivers of Change exercise. Unlike the Tanzania exercise, APPP research has been focused not on the matter of accountability *per se*, but rather on the processes associated with the production and non-production of public goods. Although the Programme's published results are some distance downstream, the training exercises have generally been well-received (see eg. <http://www.institutions-africa.org/event/20100511-praise-for-appp-learning-week-in-accra-ghana-26-to-30-april-2010>). In some cases, however, they have confirmed that junior researchers require close supervision by more experienced practitioners, and repeated exposure to training, if ethnographic methods are to prove worthwhile.

5.4 A comparative ethnography of corruption

Between 1999 and 2001, a team at Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL) in Niamey conducted field and documentary studies into the phenomenon of corruption in Benin, Niger, and

Senegal, focusing on the transport and customs, legal, and procurement sectors. The study provides first-hand qualitative data on corruption, using 'carefully designed and exacting procedures' that included interviews, observation, case studies, and intensive survey procedures (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006: , 13).¹⁸ The result is an account of the semiotics and processes of corruption that is incomparably rich. The chapter on procurement, for example, provides tremendous detail on the numerous scams and ruses by which politicians and businessmen are able to subvert official tendering processes; it gives an insight into how such practices are justified and sustained; and it provides an opinion of corruption's effect on the quality and supply of public goods and services (Blundo, 2006). *The Governance of Daily Life*, a recent collection edited by Blundo and Le Meur, picks up some similar and different themes, albeit with a more eclectic methodological approach (Blundo and Le Meur, 2008a).

5.5 Some limitations of ethnographic approaches

The main strength of ethnographic approaches, their ability to generate, 'a subtle knowledge of complex situations' (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: , 4), is also the source of their greatest weakness. Immersed in the specific and the particular, anthropologists often have trouble seeing the wood for the trees, and even where they have ambitions to produce arguments of more general application, they lack the tools rigorously to do so. In some cases, anthropologists seem to collect 'types' of the phenomenon under study in the same way a lepidopterist collects butterflies. Blundo et al's extraordinarily detailed account of corruption in three West African states, for example, describes a large variety of self-sustaining 'logics of corruption'. However, because there is little systematic attempt to model these logics as 'games' between strategic actors, it becomes difficult to envision what kinds of policy intervention, if any, could possibly break their cycle.¹⁹

Part of the problem is that the analysis is disproportionately focused on the institutional and ideational level, with little serious attempt to 'drill down' to the political economy drivers below. Where this does occur, it consists in making speculative, broad-brush arguments about the legacy of colonialism or the impact of structural adjustment, which, while not implausible, are difficult to confirm or falsify (see also Olivier de Sardan, 2008). Even where, as in Kelsall et al, a more concerted attempt is made to identify the political economy drivers of observed behaviour, the lack of a comparative perspective renders such efforts largely conjectural. In addition, the amount of ideographic detail supplied makes an unpromising basis for policy intervention.

Because of these shortcomings, it seems that for ethnographic approaches to contribute more than a spicy sauce to staple investigations of governance, they must be allied to some of the more rigorous schemas for drawing causal inferences discussed in the political science section above.

¹⁸ LASDEL teaches this or a similar methodology at an annual summer school in Niger. Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre (2005) *Anthropology and Development: Understanding contemporary social change*. London: Zed Books.. LASDEL researchers have also made a major contribution to training and research under the auspices of the Africa, Power and Politics Programme.

¹⁹ In fact, the approach of Blundo et al, which involves identifying the strategic groups involved in social interactions, has much in common with game theory. But because it does not draw on game theory's rich legacy, its analytical promise cannot be realized.

6. Conclusions

The preceding review has revealed that all the current approaches to the study of governance have their strengths and limitations. It seems unwise, then, for governance-relevant research to rely on a single method alone. Obviously, some approaches are better fitted to some tasks than others. Attitudes surveys are well-adapted to finding out what an entire population – or distinct population categories – thinks about a certain problem or institution. Game-theoretic and other modelling approaches are often better equipped to explaining *why* that problem persists, or how by changing the payoffs to actors, it could change. Ethnographic study, meanwhile, might be needed to elicit the raw material on which game theorists can go to work, especially where the area is *terra incognita*. It can also provide a useful check, or empirical flesh on the bones, for facts and theory that are ostensibly well known. It can *show* readers how an institution or process works, instead of just telling them. Interview-based socio-political techniques are at a disadvantage in this regard, but they remain a useful way to get a quick picture of a research object, and can also help illuminate phenomena opaque to observation alone. Finally, in some conditions experimental field tests or diverse case analysis techniques can provide the ultimate causal test of the variables thought to determine events and processes, providing a degree of certainty that trumps that of other approaches.

A plausible implication of the foregoing is that research methods choices should not be determined a priori, but tailored to the nature of the governance problem at hand. And because many governance problems are complex, and each method provides a different strength, questions will often profit by being attacked from more than one methodological angle.

A recent publication adopting just such an approach is the World Bank's, *Problem-driven governance and political economy analysis*, perhaps the single most useful source encountered in the writing of this review. Part of a diagnostic, 'second-best' or 'good enough' approach to governance (Grindle, 2004; 2007; Rodrik, 2007; Fritz et al., 2009: , x), it supplies a framework for multi-layered Governance and Political Economy analysis (GPE). Layer One focuses on *problem identification*; Layer Two maps out the *institutional and governance arrangements and weaknesses*; while Layer Three 'drills down' to the *political economy drivers*(Fritz et al., 2009: , ix).

The framework discusses in some detail potential evidential sources for GPE analysis, and suggests analytical tools for making sense of the data, several of which we have already encountered here. Among other things, GPE is geared to providing a greater appreciation of the risks involved with development policies, and the options for managing risk; it can also shed light on whether proactive or reactive reforms are better(Fritz et al., 2009: , 16).

How well equipped are African universities, think-tanks, and consultancy firms to undertake pluralistic, problem-driven research of this nature? African research institutes have demonstrated considerable success in survey-based research, as the strong involvement of African organizations in the Afrobarometer and African Legislatures Projects testifies.²⁰ African researchers are also reasonably well represented in edited collections that contain single-country case studies of African governance. In addition, we should not forget local publications produced by African university presses, for example election and democracy studies. African researchers were also often involved in Power and Drivers of Change studies. However, when it

²⁰ These are only the stand-out examples from a vast wealth of survey-based research, much of it commissioned by donors.

comes to the other areas of this survey, it seems fair to say that African research capacity is rudimentary. Ground-breaking and even routine work in research traditions like public choice or anthropology and ethnography is predominantly conducted by Europeans and North Americans, as the comparative scarcity of African names in the bibliography to this study shows. It seems reasonable to propose then, that the greatest value a new research institute in Africa could add would be in these fields.

Appendix I

The Prisoner's Dilemma

Two men matching eye-witness accounts have been apprehended by police in the vicinity of an armed robbery, and have been found in possession of a firearm. The police have enough evidence to convict them for illegal possession, for which each will receive a light sentence of a year in jail; but to convict them for robbery, which carries the higher sentence of ten years, the police need a confession. If both men deny involvement, they each will receive only a year in prison, which represents their collective best outcome. We would consequently expect them to cooperate in staying silent about the robbery. However, matters become more complicated when the two suspects are separated by the State Attorney, who offers each a deal. 'If just one of you confesses, the confessor will go free, while the non-confessor will receive the maximum sentence of ten years; if both of you confess, you will each receive a reduced sentence of six years'. This means that if prisoner A confesses and B stays quiet, prisoner A will walk out of jail while B will get ten years; while if A stays quiet and B confesses, the opposite will happen: B will walk free and A gets ten years. Consequently we can see that in this situation, it is rational for both to confess; confessing is what game-theorists call 'the dominant strategy' in this situation. As a result both men receive a sentence of six years, while if they had cooperated they would only have had to serve one year.

Figure 2 represents the pay-offs in the Prisoner's Dilemma example above. The first number in each pair represents A's pay-off, the second B's, with the numbers representing years in prison when different strategies are chosen. In a one-shot game it is rational, given the pay-offs, for each prisoner to confess. Since both confess, each will end up with six years.

<i>Prisoner A</i>	<i>Prisoner B</i>	
	Stay silent	Confess
Stay silent	1, 1	10, 0
Confess	0, 10	6, 6

Figure 2

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