



2.4 Political science-influenced approaches

Political science uses a number of broad theoretical approaches and methodologies, including: normative theory; institutional approaches; behavioural analysis; rational choice theory; feminist perspectives; Marxist theory; critical theory; discourse theory; qualitative analysis; quantitative methods; comparative approaches and structure and agency debates. Certain aspects of each of these theoretical schools can be found in documents produced *about* chronic poverty, and it is important for the researcher to recognise these underlying assumptions. They can cause development projects to fail or succeed.

- Normative theory: describes how something should be, its ideal type and properties. Normative work covers, for example, the mode of theoretical analysis we might use to conceptualise how a democracy should work. Some research on governance in the south has included normative assumptions about western liberal democracy which may not have been relevant, and sought to test a political structure by whether it had recognisable 'good' features, such as an independent judiciary or multi-party elections. The advantages of normative approaches are that a particular institution, political system or set of social relationships can be judged or measured against an ideal type, which may serve to clarify weaknesses. The disadvantages of this approach are that it is ahistorical, inevitably judgmental and can cause offence.
- Institutional approaches: an example would be the widely used institutional appraisals which seek to test the efficiencies or otherwise of governmental systems. The weaknesses of institutional appraisal are that fundamental power relationships can be obscured in states which have been 'hollowed out' (Holloway), or where an institutional façade (Richards, 1996) hides other, often patrimonial types of resource allocation.
- Rational choice theory: this asserts that individuals behave in ways which are determined by their own self-interest, based in cost-benefit analysis of how they believe they will materially benefit from a choice of option open to them. However, the weaknesses of this approach as it relates to chronic poverty analysis is that people make more complex choices based in assessment of other collective identities such as family and community. They may not choose an option which represents the maximisation of material reward, or might make an inaccurate assessment of what that might be.
- Feminist perspectives: have been particularly important in demonstrating the weaknesses of assuming that individuals are motivated by self-interest and material concerns and have also shown that household-based quantitative research is particularly



inaccurate in terms of significant intra-household differences in income and consumption between the genders

- Marxist theory: stresses the role of classes in historical change, whereby capitalist accumulation leads to contradictory interests held by different groups in a society. Stakeholder analysis is used in poverty research to reflect the idea that different groups have competing interests and that unless these can be analysed and negotiated certain groups may harbour reasons to prevent particular outcomes of poverty reduction policy.
- Discourse theory: has established that people's identities are critical to their forms of behaviour and participation in development. Identities are also actively constructed for them by power-holders seeking to recruit political support by appealing to a particular collectivity: a region, ethnicity or historical identity. Ideas of participation, empowerment and ownership by the subjects of research are partly a response to the writings of discourse theorists.
- Structure and agency debates: are at the core of much political science analysis although more obviously prominent in Marxian accounts. These remind us that the process of political change and the positioning of the poor are a complex outcome of how different people(s), or agents, relate to and within institutions, or structures. Institutions are formed at particular times by an expressed need of a group of human agents. Over time they can develop 'institutional interests' which prevent them from changing to meet the requirements of a new circumstance. This is important to bear in mind when, for example, a governmental institution is failing to deliver services or perform its role. This could be because the function it actually serves, (such as providing livelihoods for its employees), prevents it performing its 'proper' governance function, (since there is then, perhaps, insufficient resources left to provide services).
- Political economy: this is an important theoretical tool since it recognises the intimate relationship between economic and political factors in processes of change and development. At an international level political and economic factors shape the boundaries of what is feasible and possible in the context of poverty reduction.

Political scientists also share many of their tools for political enquiry with social scientists more generally, including ways of designing research projects, the use of hypotheses and argument, literature reviews and content analysis, interviewing and participant observation, survey research, case studies and data analysis through the use of descriptive statistics, cross tabulation and regression analysis. Qualitative analysis; quantitative methods; and comparative approaches are also shared with other social scientists.



As well as these tools and forms of analysis, political scientists also use more complex concepts which describe the subjects of, types, and patterns of historical political change. However, most of these 'big' ideas are contested. Using concepts can, however, allow us to explore historical questions and development trajectories. For example, the concepts of 'nationalism', 'socialism', 'democracy' and 'secularism' have contested, but constructed meanings in political theory. However, when applied to processes in India, as in Box 4, it becomes clear that they can be used in widely different contexts and from different points of view to describe what a commentator might think has happened.

Source for above section: Morris Szeftel, course materials, 'Government and Politics in India' (University of Leeds, 2001)

**Box 4: How key concepts can have differing meanings**

Compare the following alternative arguments. To what extent are any of them accurate?

- Nationalism: **either** provided a nation-building ideology to unite India's disparate societies **or** legitimised state-led industrialisation and the fostering of an indigenous capitalist class.
- Socialism: **either** expressed an Indian commitment to greater equality, abolishing poverty and removing social discrimination **or** provided a rhetorical smokescreen behind which new privileged classes could develop and consolidate.
- Democracy: **either** reflected a commitment to parliamentarism and multi-party electoral competition **or** represented the reality of trying to meet local and regional demands through the use of government patronage.
- Secularism: **either** represented a commitment to religious tolerance and cultural pluralism within a united nation **or** was a means of suppressing and excluding a whole range of legitimate traditional and local interests.

Source: Szeftel (2001)



2.4.1 Political capital

‘Political capital’ is increasingly recognised as the missing dimension of livelihoods approaches, and as one potential remedy to the limited use of political analysis in studies of development and poverty. To a large extent, political capital is proposed as a means of overcoming some of the problems of using ‘social capital’ as a catch-all concept for explaining the importance of non-material factors in poverty. For example, John Booth and Patricia Richard (1998: 782) argue that in order for associational activism to have political significance, it needs to go beyond social capital and ‘foster attitudes and behaviors that actually influence regimes in some way’. Carole Rakodi (1999: 334) makes a case for political capital because of ‘the significance attached to powerlessness in the poor’s own definitions of poverty’ and defines it as ‘based on access to decision-making’ in the political process (ibid 318).

In a strongly argued paper, Pari Baumann (2000: 6) states that political capital ‘is one of the key capital assets on which people draw to build their livelihoods’. Claims and assets are defined as ‘rights’ that are politically defended, and that ‘how people access these assets depends on their political capital’ (op. cit.). As such, political capital acts ‘as a gatekeeper asset, permitting or preventing the accumulation of other assets upon which successful poverty-reducing growth depends’ (Booth *et al.*, 1998: 79 cited in Rakodi, 1999: 318). Political capital also helps to explain where local people are situated in terms of the balance of power in relation to other groups (Baumann, 2000: 6).

The most extensive elaboration of political capital as an operational concept comes from Regina Birner and Heidi Wittner (2000: 6), who propose a distinction between ‘instrumental’ and ‘structural’ political capital.

- Structural political capital ‘refers to the structural variables of the political system which influence the possibilities of diverse actors to accumulate instrumental political capital and condition the effectiveness of different types of political capital’. This includes not only democratic political institutions, political openness, devolution, and civil rights, but also ‘perverse political capital’ such as institutions of repression (which can catalyse activism and demand-making).
- Instrumental political capital ‘consists of the resources which an actor...can dispose of and use to influence policy formation processes and realise outcomes which are in an actor’s perceived interest’.



As yet, studies of political capital have tended to dwell on the links between political capital and poverty reduction, rather than those between low levels of political capital and poverty itself, chronic or otherwise. Research has so far focused on the transformation of social into political capital, particularly in terms of how local communities and groups can influence policy (Birner and Wittner 2000, Booth and Richards, 1998), on the links between political capital and levels of democracy (Booth and Richards 1998), and also on elaborating the analytical, conceptual and practical relationship of political capital to other capital assets within the sustainable livelihoods framework (Baumann 2000; Rakodi, 1999).

Following the distinction between structural and instrumental types of political capital, a number of key researchable variables emerge (Box 5). Rakodi (1999: 318) notes that levels of political capital are highly gendered at the local level, a finding that reinforces the need to examine political capital in terms of its relationship to key dimensions of social difference, including age, ethnicity, class and caste.

Box 5: Researchable variables for political capital**Structural political capital**

- Political party system/level of competitiveness
- Political ideologies
- Freedom/presence of the press
- Political openness
- Devolution/decentralisation
- Political relevance of poverty problems in political decision-making
- Participatory elements in political decision-making
- Level of state institutionalisation
- Discretionary administrative authority
- 'Perverse political capital': institutions of repression, 'money-politics', vote-buying, patron-client links
- The political settlement: the balance of power that enables the definition of a structure of rights
- Political accountability and political leadership

Instrumental political capital/political capital as an asset

- Political and civil rights (e.g. of association, voting)
- Rights over natural resources
- Disruptive leverage (rallies, protests, cultural 'weapons of the weak')
- Access to press
- Access to decision-making processes
- Use of scientific knowledge and ideological resources in political discourse
- Level of associational participation
- Contacts/links with public officials
- International resources that can be used in local and national political processes (financial resources, international conventions)

Source: adapted from Birner and Wittner (2000: 20, 24), Booth and Richard (1998: 785) and Baumann (2000)

Macro- and meso-level research is clearly required at the level of 'structural' political capital. One study of political capital uses large-scale cross-sectional survey data of six Central American countries, focusing on items relating to political participation, political attitudes and values, and democratic norms (Booth and Richard, 1998: 784-5). The UNDP's 'Political freedom index' (2000) could also be of use here, as could its work on making the links between human rights and development.

One community level study uses newspaper-based and documentary research, along with key informant interviews, in the context of specific case-studies (Birner and Wittner, 2000). Some of the methods used to explore levels of social capital at community level may also be appropriate. For example, social mapping could be adapted to 'political mapping' of people's access to decision-making institutions, while timelines could be used to track changing levels of political capital, particularly in relation to wider events (e.g. elections, constitutional change). Participatory approaches have also been used to explore people's rights over resources (Slocum *et al.*, 1995).



Researching the politics of chronic poverty

This section includes a series of suggested themes and questions to investigate how politics relates to the reduction and reproduction of poverty. It is not intended to be a universal toolbox as politics needs to be understood within particular contexts and in relation to specific historical and socioeconomic trajectories. However, it does provide entry points for more detailed investigations into how politics relates to the causes, characteristics and eradication of chronic poverty.

'Politics' is considered here at a number of levels within the boundaries of the state, and as pertaining to aspects of political science, political sociology, and, to a lesser extent, political economy. There are at least three different ways to approach politics in this context;

1. Examine the key features of national level political systems. This pays particular attention to aspects of the political system that have proven relevance to poverty (Table 4).
2. A 'bottom-up' perspective investigating the political assets, and the agency, that is required for poor people to influence policy, and politics more broadly, in ways that increase their capacity to accumulate assets and devise sustainable livelihood strategies.
3. A 'citizenship' approach, arising from a particular strand within the growing terrain of politics and poverty research, which suggests that poverty and poverty reduction can be conceived of in terms of 'citizenship', as defined within the parameters of a social and political contract between state and citizen in particular contexts.

Table 1: The political system

Themes	Key questions	Potential links to chronic poverty
Authority	Does the government:	
	Have a monopoly over violence and coercion?	Conflict; instability; respect for govt will influence citizen mobilisation
	Control its borders?	Illegal trade, migration
	Levy taxes widely?	Connection between state and citizens; accountability
	Do any groups benefit from 'disorder'?	Does impoverishment suit certain groups?
Geo-strategic and territorial features	How much confidence do people have in the ability of government to solve the main problems confronting society?	Influences extent to which citizens will pressurise state for pro-poor policy change
	Population size and distribution/density?	Affects capacity of state to reach people, achieve economies of scale, convert economic resources into human development, pool of human resources to draw on
Internal distribution of power	How is policy-making influenced by external actors? (Other governments, regional bodies, aid donors)	Locate intervention points
	Where does authority reside within the political system? (e.g. balance of powers between legislature and executive; role of the military; level of decentralisation)	Influences accountability, restraint on predatory government
	To what extent does legislation originate in the legislature rather than executive?	Scope for wider representation of interests/ideas; breadth of political debate; control over corruption.
	Does the judiciary have the authority to challenge the executive?	e.g. social movements have achieved success by targeting courts; land
	Do sub-national levels of government have significant levels of autonomy?	Complex links between decentralisation and poverty (see below)
Institutionalisation	What role do leaders play at different levels of the system? What is their social background?	
	What mode of operation typifies government conduct? (e.g. do institutional or clientelistic imperatives govern the distribution of resources, appointments etc?)	Influences (mis)use of public resources; shapes political action; scope for reciprocity
	To what extent is politics and policy-making either informal or routine?	
Responsiveness	What are the procedures for recruitment, promotion, and remuneration of staff?	State efficiency; access to different groups; reflects contract
	How accessible are elected representatives to their constituents?	Extent to which poor groups can influence politicians
	How systematic is consultation with users over service delivery?	Relevance, appropriateness of services
Representation/	What degree of political priority is given to issues relating to poverty?	
	What is the constituent basis of each of	



Competition	the main parties? (socioeconomic, ethnic, caste, region, urban/rural)	
	To what extent are poor groups represented within the main political parties?	Strongly informs likelihood of a pro-poor political agenda
	How accessible are the main parties?	Informs possibility of broad pro-poor coalitions
	How broad is the ideological spectrum?	Room for 'alternative' social projects
	How is political competition organised?	
	Are their fair electoral laws?	
	Is there a realistic opportunity for opposition parties to gain power through elections?	
Participation	Are any parties interested of taking ownership of a poverty reduction agenda?	For long-term, cumulative poverty reduction
	What are the main axes of participation/inclusion in system? (e.g. regionality, religion, ethnicity)	Cross-reference with spatial and social distribution of poverty
	How far do women participate in political life and public office at all levels?	Women as over-represented among chronically poor
Resource base	How equal is access for all social groups to public office?	
	To what extent does the state depend on its citizenry for its fiscal base?	Increased responsiveness, social contract
	Is the state heavily dependent on oil/mineral resources?	Politicians reluctant to lose control of access to resources, linked to military rule, disconnect
Accountability	Is the government a recipient of large amounts of aid from multiple donors?	Aid dependency reduces connection with citizens; donor competition can reduce policy-making coherence
	To what extent can the government be held to account by (a) other aspects of the system, (b) its citizens?	
Constitutionality	Are different parts of the state apparatus accountable to each other?	
	To what degree are the actions of the political executive constrained by law and constitution?	
Rule of law	How easily can the government amend the constitution to suit its own purposes?	
	Does the rule of law generally prevail/what are crime levels?	Impact on economic activity, electoral behaviour, protection of physical assets etc.
	How reliable, effective and lawful are the police?	Security as key aspect of poverty
Capacity	How affordable, impartial, and consistent are the courts?	Can poor protect themselves?
	How accessible and reliable are public services for those who need them?	
	What capacity does the state have to formulate and implement national policy initiatives?	
	Can the state raise, manage and deploy public revenue?	
	Does it have the capacity to monitor socioeconomic trends and activities	



	within its borders?	
	How high is the quality of personnel and organisation in the civil service?	
	How high is the quality of personnel and organisation in the military?	
Political elites	How is poverty conceptualised (e.g. are different categories of the poor identified) and prioritised amongst elite groups?	Extent of action on poverty; which poor groups targeted and how.
	What is the character and level of interdependence between elite and poor groups (e.g. exploitative, few links, reciprocity)?	Extent to which political power relations cause and/or reproduce poverty; constraints on elites
	What are the key modes of economic accumulation employed by elite groups? What resources do they rely on?	Poor less likely to be represented where economic and political power is closely entwined
	Is there a culture/code of reciprocity that could catalyse pro-poor action?	e.g. nationalist, ethnic, religious, regional obligations
	In what ways might elites perceive themselves as benefiting from poverty reduction?	e.g. fear of cholera in C19 th European cities generated elite action
	How do politicians interact with market actors?	If ec & pol elites are entwined, less scope for 'progressive' politics
	What is the degree of inter-elite conflict? (e.g. low/medium/high)	Greater conflict / less cohesion allows other groups access
Decentralisation and poverty	How far do sub-central tiers of government have the powers and resources to carry out their responsibilities?	
	How far are these levels of government subject to free and fair electoral authorisation, and to the criteria of openness, accountability and responsiveness in their operation?	
	Is the ruling party at local level 'owned' by an elite group? Does it represent the interests of poor groups?	Strongly informs likelihood of a pro-poor political agenda
	Does the poverty in the decentralised zone result from internal/local or external/national inequalities?	If local inequalities, then decent. is unlikely to benefit poor.
	Which groups are best placed to take advantage of resources and decision-making powers that are devolved?	

Source: Hickey (2002) *The Politics of Chronic Poverty: Towards a Research Agenda*

The themes and variables in Table 4 are compiled from two types of sources: existing governance and/or democracy indexes, and lessons drawn from wider literature on the links between politics and poverty. The most useful sources have been the *International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment* (Beetham et al. 2002) and Mick Moore's (2001b) paper on political systems.



2.4.2 *Social exclusion and poverty*

At its broadest level, social exclusion is defined as ‘the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from the society in which they live’ (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1995 cited in de Haan and Maxwell, 1998: 2). Social exclusion is not coterminous with poverty (e.g. it is possible to be excluded without being poor), but seeks to provide a broader view of deprivation and disadvantage than poverty. More specifically, social exclusion can be viewed as an analytical concept which directs us to the way in which social structures can generate poverty, but which extends beyond explanations of social or material deprivation to include an analysis of the way in which social institutions function and develop (Gore and Figueiredo, 1997: 41).

In comparison to other poverty debates, social exclusion can be strongly linked to notions of ‘relative poverty’, Amartya Sen’s work on ‘entitlements’ and the ‘vulnerability’ approach forwarded by Robert Chambers (de Haan, 1998: 14-15). There are also links to social and political capital, particularly in terms of working towards policies and programmes for challenging socially-related aspects of poverty. However, social exclusion is more firmly focused on deprivation than either of these concepts [op. cit.]. The World Bank (2000: 117) has adopted the discourse of social exclusion, explicitly recognising the importance of sociopolitical factors in causing poverty – including chronic poverty: ‘Discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, or social status can lead to social exclusion and lock people into long-term poverty traps’.

In economic terms, exclusion from labour markets, credit and other forms of ‘capital asset’ are the key processes. Socially, exclusion may take the form of discrimination along a number of dimensions – gender, ethnicity, age – which effectively reduces the opportunity for such groups to gain access to social services and limits their participation in the labour market (See Box 6).

Box 6: Dimensions of exclusion

People might be excluded from:

- land and other natural resources (because of scarcity, landlessness and lack of legal entitlement)
- agricultural livelihood (due to lack of access to inputs or labour availability)
- formal and informal employment (relating to patterns of labour absorption, education and social identity)
- organisation and representation (due to patterns of political inclusion)
- social services (distance, usage costs)
- physical infrastructure (distance, usage costs)
- credit
- family and sociability
- housing

'Women', the 'elderly' and the 'young' might be considered to be particularly at risk from exclusion along some or all of these dimensions.

Source: Adapted from Silver (1994) and Gore (1994).

However, in terms of politics, the discourse of social exclusion has been criticised for being apolitical, in that it allows politicians and other officials to avoid discussing 'poverty', a somewhat harsher term (Gore and Figueredo, 1997: 44). Against this, it can be argued that it is arguably social exclusion's incorporation of the political dimension that makes it distinctive. Social exclusion attempts to analyse the political nature of deprivation, in that it examines the links between people's exclusion from political communities – i.e. a lack of citizenship status – and their levels of poverty. 'Political' aspects of exclusion include the denial of political rights such as political participation and the right to organise, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity (Bhalla and Lapeyere, 1997: 420). More broadly, however, social exclusion is better understood not as a specifically political concept, but as an attempt to 'ground the understanding of deprivation firmly in traditions of social science analyses' (de Haan, 1999: 1).

Social exclusion has also been criticised for emphasising the residual rather than relational aspects of poverty, and thus detaching the study of poverty from a more political understanding of how power relations within society relate to and cause poverty. This is a valid criticism to the extent that a key argument implied by the concept of social exclusion is that exclusion has replaced exploitation as the main process by which people are impoverished, or 'actively underdeveloped' (Byrne, 1999: 44-59). However, other research within the social exclusion paradigm stresses that exclusion is part and parcel of social relations (de Haan, 1999), and needs to be analysed alongside the terms of incorporation



(e.g. adverse incorporation, subordinate inclusion, domination). For Silver (1994: 543), 'exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status and political power' in a way that benefits the included. An example of research that explores this approach would be a study of the Sans in Botswana, who have been conceptualised as being in 'extreme' long-term poverty as a result of being both excluded and structurally incorporated at a low level of socioeconomic reproduction (Good, 1999).

Further criticisms of social exclusion include that in societies where deprivation and political exclusion are mass phenomena that there is little value in labeling the majority of the population as 'excluded'. Social exclusion is also a too broad a notion of deprivation.

Researching social exclusion

Regional studies of social exclusion include sub-Saharan Africa (Gore, 1994) and South Asia (de Haan, 1995). Country studies have been carried out on India (Nayak, 1994; Appasamy *et al.* 1996) and Tanzania (Kaijage and Tibaijuka, 1996), and also Brazil, Yemen and Peru (ILO 1996). Three methodological approaches have so far been adopted in the country case-studies, focusing on *rights*, *groups*, and *institutions* respectively (ILO 1996: 17).

1. Rights-focused studies examine the factors or events which determine whether people are able to secure those rights which affect livelihoods. For instance, the study of social exclusion in India focuses explicitly on T.H. Marshall's concept of 'social' rights, specifying the dimensions of health, education, housing and social security (Appasamy *et al.*, 1996: 2-3). Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) suggest that the political dimensions of social exclusion can be explored in terms of Marshall's trilogy of citizenship rights (civil, political and socioeconomic).
2. Group-based investigations identify specific social categories and detail their relative deprivation (ILO, 1996: 17). This involves examining the:
 - links between the group's relative deprivation, the working of social institutions and personal attribute's/social identity;
 - relationship of these links to national development trajectories.
3. Institutional approaches seek to draw links between: 'the ability of certain categories of persons to participate in social life (and) the evolving nature of:
 - the economic organization of production and exchange;



- the political order which regulates the exercise of power, lays down standards and duties, and guarantees rights, and
- culture – codes values and aspirations by means of which people communicate amongst themselves, interpret reality and direct practices, and which are transmitted through primary relationships, education, religion and the various means of communication’ (ILO, 1996: 19).

It is possible to merge approaches. For example, the group- and institution-based approaches can be pursued at the same time by examining the participation and interaction of a particular social group in and with a series of institutions.

Social exclusion can be measured through using both quantitative and qualitative methods. De Haan (1999: 11-12) argues that social exclusion can be measured in quantitative terms, while so far the following quantitative approaches have been taken:

- Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997: 426) suggest using the UNDP’s political freedom index, which incorporates personal security, rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation and equality of opportunity, may serve as a proxy indicator for the political dimension of exclusion. Quantitative measures of participation and citizenship rights (voter registration, educational enrolment, land ownership) are sometimes available.
- The UNDP 1998 *Human Development Report* operationalised social exclusion as a key concept for its study of high-income countries, and examined levels of unemployment.

More generally, Silver (1998) suggests a number of approaches to monitoring social exclusion. Also see Room (1995) and Lee and Murie (1999).