

# THE POLITICS OF DEVELOP MENT

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# Preface

Welcome to *The Politics of Development*. This book is for anyone who wants to understand how power, interests, rules and ideas have shaped and continue to shape who gets what, when, and how. It is an academic book, written in a non-academic style. It contains theories, but not for the sake of them; rather, to better understand the diversity of global challenges facing the world, from the perspective of everyday lived realities. It sees politics as both the obstacle and the way to solving these challenges.

Our aim is to equip readers with the curiosity, knowledge, and analytical tools needed to make sense of some of the critical questions facing our planet today – from rising inequality, to exclusion from vital goods and services, to the climate crisis, to violent conflict.

Why do we need a book about the politics of development? There are many great books about development in print, and many great books on the politics of development – many of which we cite in our chapters. None, however, brings together both in the way we do here – by defining the politics of development as a process of contestation and the movement towards people’s desired futures – and providing readers with a framework not only for thinking about politics as a barrier to development, but analysing it as the way development happens.

The book comes out of our experience of teaching and working together at the International Development Department (IDD), in the School of Government, University of Birmingham. We are a collaborative department, with a diversity of methodological, regional and country expertise but, most of all, a commitment to making research speak to real-world issues. Since the department was formed in 1964, we have been learning from our students, past and present, about how to teach development, and how to encourage critical thinking. In turn, students continue to share and enrich our own critical thinking about the political dynamics behind some of the world’s most pressing problems. In this sense, you could say that *The Politics of Development* has been 60 years in the making.

Most of us in the department work on some aspect of the politics of development, whether in our research or teaching, but also as practitioners, engaged with communities, organisations, governments, NGOs, or donors working in development. We are often all individually and collectively trying to convey that so many of the outcomes, decisions, failures, and successes are down to politics. In order to understand development, we have to understand politics. Politics isn’t everything, but everything is political.

We purposefully ground the book in individual lived realities of inequality and injustice to encourage readers to connect with the topic on a human level and reflect on their own positionality and starting assumptions. By foregrounding the ‘everyday’ challenges people around the world face in accessing the vital resources they need to survive and thrive, we aim to show that politics is not detached from reality or something that happens only in formal

arenas. Rather, politics happens everywhere, from Birmingham to Bandung. It is happening as much in hidden spaces as on national stages and global arenas.

Many readers will want more than to learn about the realities of the challenges that affect billions of lives, though: they want to get into the practicalities of ‘doing development’ or how to address them. We hope to facilitate this, in this book, by applying a problem-driven approach. In each chapter, we introduce a puzzle, or question that ordinary people living in any country around the world might ask. Sometimes these questions are provocative, but they are also everyday – for example, ‘Why doesn’t everyone get the same?’ or ‘How can I jump this queue?’ and ‘Can the planet cope with development?’ These questions are deceptively simple, but intellectually, and in the real world, challenging to answer.

Understanding is not going to give you the answers, nor a guide on how to do development, but it is the basis of action. And in this book, we aim to show readers how to unpack these questions politically. From a political perspective, any development issue can be explained by understanding how institutions, interests, and ideas interact and intersect. The benefit of this approach to analysis is that it is simple, memorable, and accessible, yet intellectually robust. It allows us to bring the best disciplinary insights from the fields of economics, sociology, and politics to bear on the questions we pose, appealing to students trained within these disciplines, while also challenging them to think beyond disciplinary siloes.

A lot is at stake in this learning journey. Development challenges are everywhere, and increasingly pressing – including in supposedly ‘developed’ countries. But whether you are learning in a classroom, a lecture theatre, as a professional, a journalist, or in your bedroom, wherever you are, we hope this textbook will push you to question and contest something. We do not pretend there are any easy answers to the politics of development – instead, we aim to give you the analytical tools to understand why getting development right can be so hard, and how you can positively respond to some of the critical challenges facing governments, societies, and citizens around the world.

# Acknowledgements

This book has been the result of the collective effort of a team of scholars in and around the International Development Department (IDD). The process of imagining, planning, and writing it has been as rewarding as the content. Our five-member editorial team, led by lead editor Claire Mcloughlin, have been so proud of and grateful to our co-authors in and around the IDD – all sixteen of them! The process of developing the book involved lively meetings, writing retreats, editorial feedback, reviewers' comments, revisions, and numerous requests for further edits. The fact that we hit our deadlines, with so many moving parts, was a miracle. And we thank all the authors for their respect, collegiality and brilliance.

We have had the great fortune of working with a stellar team at Sage publishers. Andrew Malvern, our commissioning editor, has been the human embodiment of enthusiasm. His interest and encouragement from the very start, through to his careful shepherding of the project through all stages, from concept, to structure, to advice on covers, has always been positive, joyful, and constructive. Daniel Price's calm and clear guidance and positive feedback on earlier drafts helped make the process of refining the text run smoothly. We are grateful to Jen Crisp, Sage's design director, for her striking cover. We would also like to thank the Board of Directors for their support for all our requests to make the book as inclusive as possible.

Finally, but also most importantly, we would like to thank our students, who, through their curiosity and thirst for knowledge, provided both the inspiration for the book, and in many practical ways made it better – not least through focus groups and trial read-throughs, during which, in the spirit of contestation, they told us exactly what they liked, did/didn't understand, and thought was right or wrong about what we had written. We hope that this book will inspire many more lively classroom interactions.

Sincerely,  
**The Editors**







# Part 1

## Understanding the politics of development

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- 2 **Whose knowledge counts?** Global inequalities, knowledge production  
and the need for decolonisation ..... 33



# 1 Why is development political?

Claire Mcloughlin, David Hudson, Nic Cheeseman, Sameen Ali, and Kailing Xie

Image 1.1 Australian students protest in Sydney, 2019, to demand urgent action on climate change. Image by Holli via Shutterstock.





### Learning outcomes

- Define the politics of development as a process of contestation.
- Critically assess how diversity, scarcity and colonial legacies drive the politics of development.
- Begin to understand how institutions, interests and ideas shape lived realities.

## Connecting politics to lived realities

*We have reached a defining moment in human history.*

*The people of the world have asked us to shine a light on a future of promise and opportunity.*

Ban Ki-moon, New York, 25 September 2015

When United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon spoke these words at the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it marked the culmination of four years of intergovernmental deliberation and contestation. A new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 associated targets, was adopted as the world's 'to do list' for ending poverty and hunger, tackling inequalities, empowering women, and protecting the planet (see Figure 1.1). Achieving them, the Secretary General remarked, was a promise made by all leaders, to all people, everywhere.



**Figure 1.1** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Source: un.org

Decisions made in high-profile global arenas may seem a distant concern for many ordinary people. Yet in theory at least, these goals were forged from lived realities. In the process of setting them, the UN had led an extensive consultation with a million people around the world in order to understand their everyday challenges and priorities. The resulting report, 'A Million Voices: The World We Want' (2013), revealed a common sense of injustice, insecurity, and poverty. People expressed deeply felt inequalities – between men and women, rich and poor, class and caste, ethnicity, and across urban and rural divides – in access to vital resources such as land, health, water or housing. Younger generations were losing livelihoods, facing precarious employment, and missing out on access to quality educational opportunities. Many women and girls felt acutely vulnerable to violence, both inside and outside of their homes, and blocked from accessing the necessary justice to redress discriminations against them. All of this was compounded by pressures from unplanned migration, fragile ecosystems, and the rising frequency of extreme weather events.

The great promise of the SDGs lay in closing the gap between 'the world we want' and the actions of some of the most powerful people and organisations capable of enabling or blocking its attainment. In practice, though, as witnessed in the intervening decade, the connection between what people need, value or are entitled to, and what they get, is always, everywhere, mediated by politics. In the broadest sense, politics is a universal and pervasive feature of all collective human activity. Its function, as one of the leading political thinkers, Adrian Leftwich, put it, is to 'organise and express the interaction of people, resources and power' (2004: 101). As such, politics has profoundly shaped lived experiences around the world. The deprivations, insecurities, and injustices reported in the UN consultation were not inevitable, nor did they occur by chance. They are the result of choices, made by people, holding unequal power and control over resources. The rules that shape decision-making often benefit and protect those in power and embed these inequalities, meaning that some are simply better positioned to protect their interests, and their share of wealth and opportunity, than others. And in contexts of scarcity and diversity, where there is never enough to go around, opposing views on how resources *should* be allocated inevitably have to be negotiated or contested. This is the stuff of politics. This is the stuff of development.

Everything about development is political. The Sustainable Development Goals themselves could not have been adopted without politics – the process of contestation between interests, rules, choices, decisions, and non-decisions. The outcomes of politics left its mark on which indicators were chosen, and how they are phrased. Take Goal 10, for example. It aims to 'reduce inequality within and among countries' but avoids committing countries to any action to address arguably the more insidious problem of 'extreme inequality'. The targets set, and measured, in relation to this goal relate to 'economic inclusion', rather than the distribution of wealth between the top and bottom of the economic ladder. Although argued on a technicality (precision of measurement), the real reason behind this is political. As a target, 'economic inclusion' avoids challenging the powerful vested interests of the very elites who have accumulated extreme wealth, many of whom were present or represented at the negotiations (Fukuda-Parr, 2019).

Explicitly recognising that everything about development is political encourages us to *analyse* it politically. Imagine, for example, the range of processes, reforms, choices, actions, and investments that could be undertaken to tackle SDG 1: No poverty. You might think of improving the opportunities for decent employment or eradicating precarious jobs, but trade unions are not always as powerful as private sector interests who use money, lobbying, unfair contracts, and new laws to tame the power of workers. Think of the design and building of roads to enable people to trade goods and travel between urban centres – an engineering task? Yes, but also deeply political. Where does the investment come from (World Bank or China)? Who wins the contracts (the best bidder or the one with political connections)? Where does the road go and who does it serve (near the local MP's house)? Think of the risks of being affected by climate-related disasters; while this is partly geographically determined, it is also fundamentally caused by some of the world's largest economies and energy companies not taking responsibility for climate change, or properly funding the 'loss and damage' suffered by the world's most vulnerable countries and peoples. Hence, when we apply political thinking to such developments, we get closer to the reasons why they do or do not happen, and in whose interests.

This book is about why all development is political. It is about the effects of politics on the distribution of resources, rights, and freedoms that people need and value. It is about the political dynamics behind the everyday lived realities that prevent people from realising their version of 'the world we want'.

In this chapter, we set out the fundamental what, why, where and how of the politics of development. By defining our key terms and concepts (itself a product of contestation), we lay the foundations of what is to come. We begin to explore some of the fundamental reasons why politics is unavoidable, how it is shaped by past and present power dynamics, and the expansive nature of the spaces where it happens. We introduce our approach to analysing the politics of development – what we call our three 'I's: institutions, interests, and ideas – that form the book's intellectual framework. Contrary to the universalising tendencies of the SDGs, there is, of course, not one development 'to do list' for the world, but many. But this book, and this chapter, aim to show that politics is both the obstacle and the way to address it.

## Defining the politics of development

Everyone has a view on how decisions *should* be made, how people *should* behave or think, and ultimately, as coined in the classic political science work of Harold Lasswell (1936), 'who should get what, when, how'. But studying the politics of development is not about normatively judging the relative merits of different perspectives on what is right, wrong, good, bad or unfair for society. Instead, it is about critically analysing the *processes behind these outcomes*. That is, what goes on inside the pervasive and ubiquitous struggles that hold the potential to alter the human condition: whether it's legislating to combat discrimination and exclusion, building and maintaining vital social or physical infrastructure, enforcing land rights

and property ownership, recognising identity, or indeed, agreeing indicators and targets for measuring progress towards the SDGs.

In this book, we define the politics of development as a process of *contesting alternative desired futures* (see Box 1.1). By alternative desired futures, we simply mean different versions of the way things are and should be – what people believe is right or wrong for themselves or for society, what they need or value, how they believe certain goods should be distributed, and how they contest that allocation. In practice, as we come to explain later in this chapter, the ‘things’ that are contested under the banner of ‘development’ could be physical or social, material or non-material, but they are always desired by someone, because they satisfy or further their basic needs and wants.

### Box 1.1 Defining the politics of development

The politics of development is the *unavoidable process of contestation over alternative desired futures*.

- **What is contested?** The desired distribution of material or non-material resources such as authority, rights, and freedoms in a society.
- **Why is it unavoidable?** Contestation is unavoidable due to the universal facts of diversity of interests, goals and identities, scarcity and inequality, and colonial legacies.
- **Where does it happen?** Contestation happens everywhere and anywhere that decisions are made over the allocation of resources that are valued or needed.
- **How does it happen?** Formal and informal rules for resource allocation are contested by more (or less) rational actors with competing interests, holding a range of ideas about what is right and fair.

What does it mean to contest such things? When we think about *how* individuals or collectives ‘contest’ anything, it implies resistance or rejection, agitation, or dissent. We might imagine, for example, villagers mobilising against environmentally harmful deforestation by sabotaging the equipment of logging companies, or disenfranchised groups tapping into the oil pipes laid by multinational corporations to claim what they perceive as their fair share of wealth. These are contestations, but they are acute manifestations of it. More routinely, contestation is not necessarily antagonistic. And it is much broader in its scope. In this book, we understand contestation as the exercise of human agency – or the capacity to act – in ways that we want to achieve what we want. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen called this ‘well-being freedom’, or ‘what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important’ (Sen, 1985, 2000).

Wherever resources are claimed or allocated, some form of contestation is unavoidable. Rarely is the exercise of power and decision-making unrivalled. There will always be diversity

of interests, goals and preferences between groups, societies or indeed nations about who should get what, when, how. Some will want to maintain the status quo, others to modify or overturn it. This competitive struggle for power and influence is exacerbated by scarcity of vital resources, whether fresh water, arable land, clean air, or quality education. Scarcity is not only naturally occurring, but human-made. Inequalities in distributions of the things people need to survive and prosper were baked into lived realities through colonial injustices and their continuing legacies. These histories also explain why contestation over resources continues to be dominated by powerful individuals, groups and corporations that hold more power and influence to secure their interests.

Contestation happens everywhere and anywhere – wealthy as much as poorer countries, homes as much as parliaments. As we shall see in this book, its prevalence and form does not fit with outdated categories of ‘developing’ versus ‘developed’ countries. But what is common is that wherever it occurs, it is shaped by three social forces – what we call in this book our ‘three I’s of the politics of development: institutions, interests and ideas’. What we mean by this is that anywhere there is contestation over alternative desired futures, there are:

- formal structures and informal rules or institutions in place;
- being contested by more (or less) rational actors with competing power and interests;
- driven by underpinning ideas about what is right and fair.

This definition of the politics of development is distinct, in two senses. First, we do not approach politics as an add-on or a discrete academic angle on development, but rather, as *the way development happens*. In effect, there can be *no development without politics*. In contrast to the development ‘canon’ – a collection of key theories, concepts, and works that have historically shaped the field of development studies – our approach places politics more squarely *within* the definition of development (see Table 1.1). Early development theories critically analysed politics as an *outcome* of development or a *cause* of underdevelopment and inequality. Post-development theory was critical in foregrounding the political *effects* of development interventions and encouraging more inclusive, contextually sensitive, and socially just approaches to addressing development challenges (Ferguson, 1994; Kothari, 2001). It directly challenged the discourse of ‘development’ as *depoliticising* the conflicts and divisions in society (Ziai, 2017). While these theories were foundational, they did not analyse politics, or contestation, as the active *means of* development, in the way we do in this book.

### Reflective question

What factors shaped the evolution of ideas about the place of politics in development?

**Table 1.1** The place of politics in the development 'canon'

'Canon' theory	Place of politics	Classic text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Modernisation theory</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Modernisation' – a linear and technologically driven progression from traditional society to a modern industrialised economy – would inevitably lead to political change as countries democratised and political participation deepened.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walt Whitman Rostow's <i>The Stages of Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto</i> (1960)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dependency theory</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European colonial powers hindered Africa's economic and social progress through politics – specifically, exploitation, extraction of resources, and unequal trade relationships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walter Rodney's <i>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</i> (1972)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Post-development theory</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The very idea of development is political – it perpetuates unequal power dynamics and cultural imperialism. Development interventions reinforce existing power structures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arturo Escobar's <i>Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World</i> (2011)</li> </ul>

Second, while we cannot and should not deny or sanitise the damage that politics has inflicted on desired futures, our point of departure in this book is to analyse politics as an empirical phenomenon, rather than lament or deplore it. In many ways, politics has something of a bad reputation. People assume that it is to do with self-interested and self-serving power, corruption, venality, or opportunism that is anti-social and corrosive of the common good and social justice. And much of this, as we will see in the book, is true. But this is also a partial view. Politics, as Otto van Bismarck famously said, is also 'the art of the possible'. It is also about working to bring about change through pragmatism, leadership and compromise. Politics is not just an obstacle to progress; it is also the way change happens. Indeed, we hope to show that the point of understanding how politics can block development, is to also understand how progress can be unlocked *through* it.

The above summary of the what, why, where and how of the politics of development provides the impetus and intellectual scaffolding for this book. In the rest of this chapter, we unpack, justify, and illustrate it.

## What 'development' is contested?

You will not be surprised to read that there is contestation over the very meaning of the term 'development'. Is it a process or an outcome? Ends or means? And what is the end goal? To some extent, to use the well-known idiom, 'where you stand depends on where you sit'. Different perspectives on development depend on disciplinary biases and subjectivities that shape vantage points. Economists may see the *end goal* of development as growth and wealth, and the *means* as commodities, labour, extractive industries, trade relations. Political scientists may see the *end goal* as the maturity and stability of political systems, and the *resources* as participatory institutions or democratic values. Sociologists may see *the end goal* as human well-being, and the *resources* as rights, freedoms, or social capital. Development can mean any or all these things, but crucially, bracketing it as one or the other is reductive in the sense that it may not coincide with what people themselves need or want in any given setting. In effect, the more important question is *who* should define development?

Our answer is those who seek it. Not all people, societies or countries aspire towards a common end-point – or ‘Getting to Denmark’, as the famous metaphor for an ostensibly ‘well-functioning’ society goes (Fukuyama, 2014). Rather than focus on universalised and instrumentalised benchmarks of growth or advancement, we apply a people-centred lens on development in this book. We align with the more holistic view of well-being advanced by the human development approach, pioneered in the works of Amartya Sen, Mahbub ul Haq and Martha Nussbaum. For Sen (1999), the Nobel Laureate economist, development means an expansion of capabilities, freedoms and choice; for ul Haq (1995), the fulfilment of human potential; for Nussbaum (2011), the process of creating conditions that enable humans to lead lives they value. We use the term ‘alternative desired futures’ to capture these intrinsic, people-centred meanings (see Box 1.2).

### Box 1.2 Development as alternative desired futures

From a people-centred perspective, development is the *process* of pursuing goals that people define as *desirable* and beneficial to their life prospects, wellbeing, or dignity. People interpret what is desirable differently because they are rooted in different lived realities, hence, there is not one desired future, but *alternative* versions of it.

Achieving alternative desired futures requires resources, of course. By resources, we mean the production, supply and distribution of something tangible or intangible, material or ideational, that enables individuals or collectives to achieve their goals and aspirations. But, as Abraham Maslow (1943) famously noted with his hierarchy of needs, there are many layers to this. There may be immediate material needs, such as access to food, shelter, or medicines. There are also the less tangible resources that may need to be in place for people to provide for their needs. These non-material resources, such as power, autonomy, rights, authority, representation, and freedoms, are gateways to achieving material resources, but they may also be valued as intrinsic end-goals, in and of themselves (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2** Resources to achieve desired futures

Material	Non-material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health, education, housing, access to clean water, money, minerals, natural resources, land, weapons, guns and ammunition, books, technology, oil, wind, sea, fisheries, agriculture, food.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Power, knowledge, skills, agency, authority, representation, rights, social capital, participation, voice, inclusion, recognition, freedom, decision-making power, trust, legitimacy.</li> </ul>

### Reflective question

How do non-material resources enable access to material resources?



Notice we jettison the normative framings of ‘progress’ or ‘good change’ (Rostow, 1960; Chambers, 1997) as synonyms for development. Development is not synonymous with these terms because it is rarely an unqualified and universally good thing. This was powerfully, and famously, captured by James Ferguson, a leading post-development scholar, in his 1990 book *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. It demonstrated how seemingly ‘technical’ investments in infrastructure and resources benefit those in power who can control and manipulate them, while marginalising and harming others. In effect, there are always winners and losers: one version of a desired future is often achieved at the cost of another. At worst, this results in deliberate exclusions, at best unintended trade-offs and consequences. For instance, in Pakistan, citizens’ receptiveness to essential childhood vaccinations – for polio, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis – provided free at their doorstep is shaped by their prior experience of the state meeting their needs – or not (Ali and Altaf, 2021). China’s prioritisation of GDP growth through privatisation of state-owned enterprise in the 1990s has led to the drastic degradation of the living standard of the socialist workforce who were forced into redundancy and urban poverty.

The crucial point is that the very process of development *produces* trade-offs: the uneven distribution of resources unavoidably affects the ability of different individuals or groups to meet their needs. This potential for trade-offs in development is part of the reason why contestation is unavoidable, which we elaborate on next.

## Why is contestation unavoidable?

Wherever there is a felt deprivation or experience that does not conform to individual or societal expectations, needs or wants, there is potential for contestation. Unmet needs, undesirable distributions, and felt injustices – as expressed in ‘the world we want’ – are part of lived realities. What we need to ask now, is why do these gaps exist in the first place? Are they natural or human made? Our answer is that they are socially, politically, and historically constructed. More specifically, *scarcity and inequality* mean the supply of resources and opportunities results in contestation. The *diversity of interests, goals, and identities* means that



Image 1.2 A Sotho shepherd in Lesotho, the research site of James Ferguson’s ‘The Anti-Politics Machine’. Image by Matthias Kestel, via Shutterstock.

the demand for alternative distributions amplifies this. All of this is undeniably rooted in colonialism, which is not only a legacy, but a continued lived reality.

## Diversity of interests, goals, and identities

Even if the planet had infinite resources, there would still be contestation. Why? Because, of course, people, societies and nations have varied goals, needs, identities and values. In other words, there is not one 'desired future', but many.

Diversity of interests and preferences is a product of identity and lived experience (which includes, among other things, a person's age, gender, caste, ethnicity, tribal affiliations, mental and physical health, capability, education, and income). Identity, as we shall see in Chapter 10, is not fixed, but transient; not singular but intersectional (people hold multiple identities at the same time). Values and preferences are socially constructed through exposure to different belief systems, media, cultures and customs, ideologies, norms, and ideas.

Diversity is a key driver of contestation because it means that when faced with the same options, people may make different choices. Indeed, they may even *conceive* of their choices differently. Not everyone needs, wants, prioritises, or is willing to pay for the same resources. The process of pursuing development requires understanding and navigating this divergence. In a small municipality in Eastern Nepal, for example, a household survey was conducted to determine whether and how much people would be willing to pay for municipal solid waste-collection services (Rai et al., 2019). Waste collection is a major challenge in crowded urban environments all over the world, but is often unfunded and deprioritised by councils, relying instead on citizen contributions. In this municipality, though, older respondents were more eager to pay to change the status quo compared to younger people who migrate for work, larger families (who produce more waste) more so than smaller ones, families with more space to store waste, more so than those who did not. The fate of this reform effort – the degree to which it is resisted or accepted – rests on the council arbitrating between these diverse needs and preferences.

Heterogeneity of preferences may seem like something confined to people's heads, but even at the micro level, it can have much wider social ramifications for the *collective* achievement of alternative desired futures. To illustrate, briefly, a simple choice experiment was conducted among sheep smallholder keepers in Burkina Faso. Their collective goal is to selectively breed sheep to maintain disease resistance. Each farmer is presented with cards that depict a ram-purchasing scenario, where the attributes of the ram are displayed alongside the purchasing price. The results reveal that some groups are more willing to take risks than others: purchasing larger but less disease-resistant sheep (Tindano et al., 2017). These farmers can only achieve their collective goal by adhering to a common framework, but this hinges on their ability to contest, coordinate and resolve their divergent choices. In turn, this ability is influenced by scarcity of resources, and inequality in access to them.

## Scarcity and inequality

Contestation is *inevitable* wherever there are competing claims to a finite or fixed set of resources. Humankind faces the stark reality that the resources upon which we depend for

our survival – whether housing, energy, food, water, fuel – are unevenly distributed between nations and peoples, and in some cases are dwindling in supply. Geographies of uneven distribution can be natural – such as Bolivia’s coastline – or manmade – such as access to life-saving vaccines. This scarcity and inequality fuels competing interests in accumulating and controlling access to them.

Scarcity permeates spaces of contestation from the global to the local level. Viewed through a political economy lens (how the economic marketplace affects politics (Ravenhill, 2017)), we see the influence of scarcity in the clamouring of major powers for influence in resource-rich regions – for example, why China’s enthusiasm to deepen its diplomatic and security ties with the Pacific – a region rich with fisheries, timber, maritime resources, trade, and shipping routes – has provoked alarm and counter-posturing by the US, Australia, and the UK. Within countries, discourses of scarcity have been manipulated to legitimise water, land and green ‘grabs’, in which large swathes of agricultural land and productive resources are traded in deals between private investors and governments. Ostensibly, this is to provide for future needs more equitably, but in practice, it has pernicious effects on local livelihoods (Mehta, 2019). And between groups, competing claims to sought-after resources drive protracted contestations. For example, in the oil politics of the Niger Delta, competing claims over ownership and the distribution of revenues has escalated into protracted, violent conflict between the people of the Niger Delta, the Federal Government, and multinational corporations (Onah, 2022).

These examples keenly illustrate that scarcity is not just a natural phenomenon, but a politically constructed reality. Resources are scarce because people, groups and nations hoard and compete over them. As Amartya Sen (1982: 1) famously remarked, ‘starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat’. Scarcity is both a product of politics, and a cause of it. Consider, for example, the urgent crisis of the world’s food systems being unsustainable. Food production (e.g., rearing cattle) produces carbon emissions, environmental degradation, and has devastating effects on biodiversity. Yet the political economy of food is resistant to change: powerful transnational corporations (seed producers, agrichemical and agri-food corporations and retailers) are resisting policy reform, and individuals are unwilling to adapt consumption (e.g., for red meat) in the collective interest (Béné, 2022). In these ways, scarcity is created and (re-)produced through interests, choices, and power relations.

The acute conundrum of scarcity prompts us to reflect on whether it is even possible, or desirable, to achieve development – that is, whether the planet has infinite capacity to realise all of humanity’s wants and needs. In the current ecological crisis, the unfettered pursuit of capitalist production may ultimately be self-defeating because it will destroy our habitat in the process. This is the central premise of ‘sustainable development’ – a framing of development that urges meeting the needs of people in the present without jeopardising the needs of future generations. In recognition of the earth’s environmental ceiling, development is recast as ‘meeting the needs of all people within the means of the living planet’ (Raworth, 2017).

Politically constructed scarcity and inequality ensures that the distribution and supply of resources will always be contested. The diversity of interests, goals, and identities ensures

alternative demands for distribution of resources and opportunities. When the two come together, contestation becomes inevitable. But politics is also the exercise of power, in its various forms (see Box 1.3). Inequalities of power and locked-in legacies of colonialism mean that most of the world's population does not even get to fully contest, on fair terms, what they need or are entitled to. Inequality in the capacity of different nations or peoples to exercise power over the processes that determine their needs and wants is entrenched, and rising. The gap between rich and poor is widening: The average disposable income of the richest 10 per cent in OECD countries is around 10 times higher than that of the poorest 10 per cent, compared to 7 times higher a quarter of a century ago. The inevitability of contestation reflects this uneven power. And unequal power, in turn, begets unequal outcomes.

### Box 1.3 Politics as the exercise of power

*Power as control and influence:* to Robert A. Dahl, a prominent political theorist, power is the ability of an individual or a group to influence the choices and behaviours of others. 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (Dahl, 1957: 202–3). In this reading, power is a social relationship – a behavioural outcome of human interaction.

*Power as the ability to act in concert:* the German–American historian and philosopher, Hannah Arendt, argued that power is the capacity of people to influence and shape the course of events through shared action (Arendt, 1970). In this reading, power is not an individual attribute, but arises from people acting together via cooperation, persuasion, and collective deliberation.

*Power as diffuse:* in contrast to Dahl, the French philosopher Michel Foucault was concerned with how power is exercised through various social institutions, practices, and discourses (Foucault, 1982). In this reading, power doesn't just restrict or control – it creates knowledge, shapes subjectivities, and establishes norms.

## Colonial legacies

There has never been a level playing field in the process of contesting power or resources due to the history and enduring legacies of colonisation. From more than five hundred years – between the early fifteenth-century conquests, to the 'scramble for Africa' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – a vast number of countries, spanning almost every region of the world, experienced some form of direct or indirect rule, economic exploitation, influence, or intervention, by European colonisers. The lived experience of being colonised was violent and dehumanising in numerous ways, depending on whether the colonisers' primary interest was in the dispossession of land, the extraction of resources, or the exploitation of labour (see Kothari and Klein, 2023). The harms inflicted ranged from suppression of languages and

traditions, to loss of livelihoods and cultural heritage, to discrimination, segregation, forced displacement, murder and ethnic cleansing.

Colonisation underlies contemporary global, structural inequality. In crude terms, some countries are rich and others are poor because rich countries use their power and wealth to create the conditions under which it is harder for poor countries to transform their situation. The conditions that enabled growth in some of the world's largest economies no longer exist because those countries 'kicked away the ladder' (Chang, 2002). Britain, for example, exploited colonies by plundering their natural resources while preventing those countries from growing their own export industries. For instance, Patnaik (2019) concluded that in colonising India, Britain drained approximately US \$45 trillion from the region between 1765 and 1938. More broadly, Britain and the US benefitted from free trade, then turned to protectionism (introducing customs tariffs, banning exports of raw materials) to grow their manufacturing industries, and then moved back to free trade to open up markets to sell their goods to, as discussed in Chapter 7.

As we will show throughout this book, legacies of the trauma and injustices of colonial rule continue to shape contemporary contestations. A major reason for this is that colonisation embedded egregious and discriminatory systems for allocating 'who gets what, when, how', to facilitate extraction and domination. Pillage and social engineering left deep scars in communities, carried across time through intergenerational trauma, continued marginalisation, the denial of rights and identities, and embedded structural inequalities. This is evident in the impact of colonisation on Australia's first peoples who, like many indigenous communities, suffered collective marginalisation and suppression. In Australia, this included the brutal removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and later policies of assimilation. Collective traumas continue to have adverse effects on educational outcomes, employment, livelihoods, and well-being, including the higher prevalence of ill health in indigenous communities (Menzies, 2019). In these and many other ways, colonialism is not history, but lived reality (see Box 1.4).

#### Box 1.4 Why colonialism is not history

In the early 1900s, European countries including Belgium, France, the UK and Portugal presided over empires in which a small number of colonial officials governed the lives of millions of African, Asian and Caribbean people. Following the Second World War, an upsurge in nationalism and a desire for self-determination saw successive waves of countries gaining independence – from Belgian, British, and French rule in the 1950–1960s, and from Portuguese rule in the 1970s – but this did not mark the end of colonialism as a set of institutions, ideas and interests (Kothari and Klien, 2023).

As we will examine in chapters of this book, colonialism lives on through various enduring effects, including how it interacted with 'traditional' governance structures and created a duality of ideas and rules; stratified access to education in ways that reproduced inequalities; created lop-sided economies dependent on the export of raw materials, and laid the foundations for authoritarian and often violent political systems and social orders.

Postcolonial scholars continue to critically analyse these legacies of colonial rule, including in the contemporary works of Argentine professor Walter D. Mignolo in his 2021 book, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*, and in *On the Postcolony*, a book written by Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist, Achille Mbembe, published in 2001. In these and similar works, authors explore the complexities of postcolonial societies, examining the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape them after the end of formal colonial rule. In doing so, they stress both the exploitative and authoritarian legacy of empire – which typically constructed highly repressive systems of government – but also the agency of colonised people to subvert and resist colonial expectations. Mignolo, for example, argues that ‘the combination of the self-fashioned narratives of Western civilisation and the hegemony of Eurocentric thought served to eradicate all knowledges in non-European languages and praxes of living and being’, but also that ‘coloniality has provoked the emergence of decolonial politics’, which creates the potential for ‘overcoming of the long-lasting hegemony of the West and its distorted legacies’.

Mbembe, meanwhile, coined the term ‘necropolitics’ to refer to ‘the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die’. In other words, who governments consider of greater or lesser value shapes our experiences every day, both domestically and internationally. A good contemporary example of the latter is access to vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines for COVID-19 were developed in the West and were then hoarded by countries like the US and Canada, while the rest of the world waited months before the vaccines reached their populations (Khetpal, 2021), as discussed in Chapter 7.

Colonial power relations also continue to structure the international system, shaping the flow of ideas, money, trade, and even migration. For instance, the leadership of international organisations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are drawn from Western states – most notably, the US – and so their policies are shaped by the understanding of politics and economics that is dominant in Western capitals. As we show in Chapters 7 and 10, these policies impact the lives and livelihoods of billions of citizens living in the rest of the world.

The present-day impacts of colonialism reach into every aspect of our lives, including the social and personal. Nathan Nunn and Leonard Wantchekon (2011), for example, have found that the transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade – which forcibly transported 12–13 million Africans across the Atlantic in the most terrible conditions over a span of 400 years – continues to shape how societies operate today. Remarkably, writing over a hundred years later, they use ‘individual-level survey data with historical data on slave shipments by ethnic group’ to show that individuals whose ancestors were heavily raided during the slave trade are less trusting today’.

For her part, Durba Mitra (2020) argues that British colonisers and their Indian collaborators used their ideas of what was socially acceptable and what was not to shape and control women’s sexuality in the subcontinent, with continuing impacts on contemporary notions of sexuality in South Asian countries. Mitra’s work is particularly valuable because it demonstrates the insidious and often subconscious way that colonial ideas and institutions continue to shape how we think today.



Although it was experienced in diverse ways, colonialism often engineered fault lines of contestation between spaces, castes, and ethnic groups *within* countries by privileging certain groups over others. It also denied inclusive and accountable political systems to most colonised peoples until close to independence, laying foundations for the authoritarian governments that would later emerge in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Opalo, 2019; Cheeseman and Fisher, 2019). Contestation emerges from tensions within the so-called ‘hybrid’ forms of governance left behind: systems that blend traditional and customary authority, such as, chiefly, systems with formal government institutions. Traditional leaders, for example, retain considerable legitimacy in settling local disputes sub-Saharan Africa, but do not always make decisions in ways that recognise women’s formal rights to inherit land. In tribal regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, decisions on disputes are often controversial due to disagreements on values and norms between informal conflict resolution forums that operate parallel to the formal structures of justice of the state.

### Reflective question

In what ways did colonisation make contemporary contestation inevitable?

## Where does contestation happen?

By virtue of their visibility (to social scientists, at least), the most obvious spaces to examine contemporary, political contestation are *formal* decision-making forums and arenas. Such formal arenas exist at all levels, from the transnational to local: global summits, national legislatures, high-level political dialogues, town councils, village gatherings. However, in this book we adopt a perspective that invites readers to observe politics in arenas not conventionally described as ‘political’. Agency is also alive, habitual even, in the micropolitics of everyday life – whether it be in schools, churches, hospitals, police stations, in homes or on street corners. As Hay (2002: 3) puts it, ‘all events, processes and practices which occur within the social sphere have the potential to be political’.

Spaces of contestation are vast because the social sphere is vast and, indeed, expanding. Especially in this digital age, we observe contemporary contestations in familiar and new spaces: in Kenya, where a fictional superhero became a hashtag phenomenon – #Makmende – providing a viral platform to contest the quality of governance and leadership in the lead up to the 2017 election (Mukhongo, 2020). In Nigeria, where the prolific use of WhatsApp by influencers, political parties and ordinary people is simultaneously strengthening and undermining democratic consolidation (Cheeseman et al., 2020). On street corners of shantytowns in Argentina, where goods and services are traded for political favours (Auyero, 2001).

What these examples illustrate is that politics is not confined to the sphere of government, or to the processes of representation or accountability that occur within them. Formalised spaces where policies are made, elections are held, or interest groups formally compete for

influence – the focus of the traditional ‘arena view’ of politics (Dahl, 1957) – are valid sites of enquiry, but they are merely the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, by the time politics is rendered visible in formal arenas, there was likely a more hidden history of contestation leading up to it. If we focus only on how politics reveals itself in formal spaces, we will overlook the underlying dynamics operating beneath the surface: such as the back-room deals, and agenda setting and lobbying from private companies, or, within the household, the informal politics of the care provided by women that allows men to be overrepresented in formal spaces.

Contestation is multilayered, from transnational, to national, to local. A quick appraisal of the contestation around SDG 6 – clean sanitation and water – illustrates the point. At the transnational level, this goal is the outcome of negotiated frameworks and agenda-setting, reflected and revived through campaigns such as the UN General Assembly’s Water Action Decade (2018–2028), which Antonio Guterres described as ‘a roadmap to enhance the water agenda’. At the national level, as in Chile, the distribution of access to water is influenced by contestations between the state and powerful agribusinesses who fund political parties and have control over the media narratives around water scarcity (Madariaga, 2021). And at the local level, people experiencing scarcity and unequal distributions mobilise their agency to contest access. For example, after 21 days without drinking water, more than 10,000 people gathered in Kafr el Borollos, rural Egypt, to block access to the coastal highway, sparking a series of popular protests known as the ‘thirst revolution’ (El Nour, 2021).

These layers of contestation may appear dispersed, even fragmented, but they can also be viewed as interconnected parts of an overall political ecosystem. In theory, at least, there may be feedback loops operating between transnational, national, and local action: if political actors are responsive to public pressure, if high-level bureaucrats faithfully implement global normative frameworks, and if civil society use on-the-ground investigations and research to inform policy advocacy.

## Does ‘development’ occur only in ‘developing’ countries?

It should be evident from this pluralist, multilayered definition that development is not a phenomenon that occurs only or even largely in so-called ‘developing’ countries. Artificial and normatively constructed binaries between ‘North’ and ‘South’ or ‘Developed’ and ‘Developing’ perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatise countries. The terms ‘global south’ and ‘developing country’ reflect colonial notions of ‘advanced’ and ‘primitive’ societies (Dados and Connell, 2012). Post-colonial scholars, including Achille Mbembe (2001), and Walter Dignolo (2021), have extensively critiqued the construction of these Western and Eurocentric categorisations for reproducing these power dynamics.

Aside from the intrinsic reasons to jettison archaic labels, the categories simply no longer hold empirically. Several middle-income countries, notably Indonesia and India, have significant numbers of people living in poverty, due to income inequality, regional disparities, and rapid urbanisation. In India, for example, just over 10 per cent of the population fall below the International Poverty Line of US \$2.15 per day – a measure set by the World Bank and used by the UN to monitor extreme poverty around the world (see [ourworldindata.org](https://ourworldindata.org)).



This is an extreme illustration, certainly, but it shows how national classification systems mask wide income inequalities *within* countries, including in terms of vulnerability to climate change, and exclusions from vital public services such as health and education, which, as we will see throughout this book, intersects with identity.

No level of development can buffer countries from the effects of the climate crisis on ecosystems, or infectious diseases that travel across borders, or managing access to vital energy or water supply. Think about the global challenge of contaminated water sources – an issue that, according to the World Health Organization, affects around one in four people on the planet, exposing them to risk of preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio (WHO and UNICEF, 2021). This is a problem not only in resource-poor cities, such as Dhaka in Bangladesh, or Nairobi in Kenya, but was also the lived reality for residents of the US city of Flint, the poorest city in the US, whose water was contaminated with dangerous levels of lead between 2014 and 2019, exposing up to 12,000 children to poisoning. Here, as in the cities in Africa, the underlying drivers include insufficient political commitment or investment in the vital infrastructure that could make water safe.

The blurring of boundaries between North/South or Developed/Developing has prompted a lively debate about whether we can now say that development is truly ‘global’, in the sense that challenges are increasingly shared and therefore demand shared solutions (Horner and Hulme, 2019; Horner, 2020). Critics of the idea of ‘global’ or universal development argue that it flattens lived realities and obscures the injustices of some countries, groups and individuals being more adversely affected by global challenges than others as a result of colonial legacies and inequality (Kothari and Klein, 2023). In this book, we navigate this line between universality and specificity by offering an approach to analysing the politics of development that can be applied universally to *reveal* the diversity and injustices of lived experience. Our starting point is that contestation is universally possible, because deprivation is universally possible. This does not mean, of course, that the scale or nature of deprivation looks the same everywhere. However, by analysing contestation, we may get closer to understanding, empirically, the gap between people’s lived realities and desired futures and the historical legacies and power relations that have (re-)produced this. To this end, we now turn to the approach we advocate, and which we apply throughout this book, for analysing *how* contestation happens.

### Reflective question

To what extent do you agree it is problematic to approach development as a ‘global’ challenge?

## How does contestation happen?

Anywhere that resources, rights or power are contested, whether in the backstreet markets of Doha or the corridors of the G7 summit, institutions, interests, and ideas are involved. This means that there are formal structures and informal *rules* in place, being contested by more

(or less) rational actors with competing *interests*, holding a range of *ideas* about what is right and fair. In this section, we introduce these three I's of the politics of development.

These are not conceptual abstractions, but a framework for thinking and analysis. To illustrate this, we show below how the three 'I's help us to understand the politics behind one of the most pressing contemporary global challenges: the learning crisis (Box 1.5). Here, as throughout this book, we do not discuss theory for theory's sake, but show how theories can be applied in the real world.

### Box 1.5 The learning crisis

The World Development Report, 2018, 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise', was highly significant in raising awareness of a critical challenge: in spite of increased access to education, a large number of children around the world are still not acquiring foundational skills and knowledge. In many low- and middle-income countries, students are going to school, but not actually learning. The Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2 revealed, for example, that at least 80 per cent of students in Cambodia, Myanmar and the Philippines leave school without minimum proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This crisis is a stark illustration of inequality of opportunity, exacerbated by prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remedying it is the focus of SDG 4: 'Ensure inclusive and quality education for all by promoting lifelong learning'.

## Institutions

Institutions are the rules that shape people's behaviour (see Chapter 3). Nobel prize-winning economist Douglass North (1990) defined them as 'the rules of the game in society'. Just as the rules of the game influence how players play a game of chess or a sports match, so do they influence behaviour and outcomes in society. If one were to change the rules of the game – for example, having two Queens in chess or the goalkeeper in a football match being able to use their hands in all the pitch – it would fundamentally change how people would play.

The same goes for society: if the institutions are changed, then people behave differently. For example, think of the institutions of property rights or criminal justice – these rules produce more or less stable and predictable patterns of behaviour when people make investment or business decisions, or when they decide to follow or break the law. The institutions, or rules of the game in society, produce incentives for individuals to do or not to do certain things; pay taxes, cooperate with the police, or open a shop. If there were no or very weak institutions protecting property rights or criminal justice, we might expect a lot less investment and entrepreneurship, and a lot more crime and disorder.

Another important distinction is between formal and informal institutions. The rules that shape society are not just formal (e.g., constitutions, laws, regulations), but can also be informal (unwritten) social norms around gender roles, queuing, or deferring to traditional

authority such as elders (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). Even though they are not formalised or written down, these rules are often just as powerful in shaping who gets what, when, how. For example, in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, international aid agencies widely distributed fishing boats to revive local livelihoods. They neglected to appreciate, though, that social institutions based on ethnicity or caste determine who can legitimately fish. In some cases, as a result, boats were left unused because their distribution did not conform to these norms (Blaikie, 2010).

What this shows is that informal rules and institutions are just as essential as formal rules in understanding how things really work. Informal institutions can be just as powerful as formal institutions, because although they are not codified, they can still be enforced. Think of how a close-knit community can punish an individual who breaks their rules – for example, by marrying an outsider, they are ostracised. The effect of punishments like this may be just as great as the effect of the punishment the government levies or breaking formal rules, such as financial or material sanctions, or even incarceration.

Finally, and crucially, institutions are not fixed. While institutions are often ‘sticky’ and tend to be stable over time – which academics refer to as path dependency – they are ultimately humanly designed and maintained, meaning that change can and does happen (Thelen, 2003; Pierson, 2004). And when people contest development, this is what they are seeking to do: create, maintain, shape, add to, avoid, undermine, or demolish the existing rules. Indeed, contestation might be necessitated by a clash of formal and informal rules.

From an institutional perspective, then, can we analyse the learning crisis as a problem of insufficiently strong *rules*? For example, we might ask why there are no monitoring systems around teacher attendance or performance, or accountability for results. Why don’t governments, line ministries, teacher–parent groups, ordinary citizens, effectively exercise oversight of the quality of what is delivered in the classroom (see Box 1.6)?

### Box 1.6 Institutions and the learning crisis

The rules that (re)produce the learning crisis include everything from state-society relations, to school-level management, to household choices:

- **At the societal level**, the historical dynamics of state-society relations, or ‘social contract’ (see Chapter 14), can determine whether the right to education is embedded in laws or constitutions, and whether people are, in practice, free to claim it.
- **At the management level**, school management systems are supposed to ensure effective monitoring, training, and professional development.
- **At the household level**, household hierarchies and systems of authority may influence homework routines, or norms around deference to teachers, which in turn influence the likelihood that parents will seek to hold teachers to account for underperformance.

Many key thinkers over the past few decades, such as Francis Fukuyama (2014), Elinor Ostrom (1990), Dani Rodrik (2000), and others, see the primary challenge of development as building strong, stable, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and accountable institutions. While compelling, there are limits to this approach. An important one is that while institutions are good at explaining continuity, they are notoriously bad at accounting for change. This is why we also need to consider interests.

## Interests

Rules do not make rules, people do (see Chapter 4). To return to the metaphor of the rules of the game, Adrian Leftwich coined the idea of people ‘playing games within the rules’ – i.e., that the rules of chess or football do not determine outcomes but shape them. To understand this, we need to understand agency and where interests come from.

From an interests perspective, another way we might approach the problem of the learning crisis is to ask: Why haven’t people taken more direct action to address it? Why haven’t politicians invested more effort into solving the problem? Why don’t people protest about it? In other words, why aren’t people acting in what seems like everyone’s interests?

When we think about contestation, we can always ask what differing interests people have in certain outcomes. Some people have vested interests in maintaining the status quo because it provides them with benefits. Those who have power will seek to defend their advantage, and those who are disadvantaged will be marginalised. So how does this play out in relation to the learning crisis (see Box 1.7)?

### Box 1.7 Interests and the learning crisis

Who are the key players, what are their interests, and what influence or power do they have?

- **Unions** Achieving quality education requires governments to adopt and implement reforms that go against the vested interests of powerful teachers’ unions (Hossain and Hickey, 2019).
- **Politicians** The popularity of ‘free education’ was a vote winner after the reintroduction of multiparty politics in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s, helping political parties win elections in Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique. But politicians usually show greater interest in expanding access than improving quality: politicians love a ribbon-cutting ceremony, but less so challenging unions (Batley and Mcloughlin, 2015). The results of quality improvements are likely to extend beyond a single electoral term, making it a much murkier investment from the perspective of winning electoral support.
- **Bureaucrats** Facing different metrics of their own performance, they might also find it easier to increase *attendance* in schools than battle unions over teachers’ performance.
- **Teachers** Improving quality means making teachers subject to greater scrutiny and performance measurement, which may not be in their short-term interests.

As we can see from the box, even those with interests in challenging the status quo may fail to act on these interests. If people were always, everywhere, collectively rational, humanity would have achieved much more in terms of the common good (Weale, 2004). But many global challenges – from climate change denial to political apathy over policy reforms – are often the result of *collective action dilemmas*, where people do not act in the common interest (Olson, 1965). For communities to achieve a common interest or purpose, people have to work together, but the benefits of co-operation depend on the co-operation of others. There is always a risk that individuals will ‘free-ride’ on the benefits, without contributing to them (Olson, 1965). So, for example, if a school has many teachers, some teachers may choose to ‘free-ride’, or coast on, the hard work of others to achieve results (Bruns et al., 2011). Or if a group of parents decide to mobilise to demand improvements in the quality of teaching, classrooms, or provision of textbooks, other parents observing this may themselves fail to mobilise, thereby undermining the collective movement – the common fate of so many parent-led initiatives.

But simply understanding interests is not enough. People do not act freely without the opportunities and constraints that institutions, as the rules of the game, provide. Where institutions and interests come together is the concept of incentives. Incentives are created by institutions: the rewards and punishments associated with different actions (Ostrom et al., 2002). Good institutions incentivise coordination, and missing or bad institutions incentivise the kind of self-seeking and negative outcomes such as teacher absenteeism detailed above. The limits with just looking at institutions, interests and incentives is that self-interest is assumed to be obvious – self-interested and utility maximising actors will respond consistently and predictably to incentive structures. However, they do not (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014).

Instead, people typically face many overlapping sets of rules, and sometimes must interpret which ones to follow and why. This is not always an open choice, and they can – as the previous section suggested – play games within the rules. This is what the political scientist Mark Blyth (2003) means when he says that institutions do not come with an instruction sheet. Instead, people must interpret the opportunities and risks facing them, often in a situation of uncertainty. This means that people need to engage in ‘an internal conversation’ to understand what their interests are, and why and how to act (Archer, 2003). Therefore, people’s ideas, beliefs, and values – both in their heads and in society – are also vitally important for understanding the politics of development.

## Ideas

While it is essential to ask *what* different interests people have in certain outcomes, this leaves open the question of *why*. Why do people have preferences in the first instance? Why do they make certain choices about which rules to follow or not?

Human behaviours are influenced by more than material interests. They are also shaped by ideas (see Chapter 5). Ideas are the values, philosophies, ideologies, norms, and beliefs that people hold. For at least 20 years, scholars have been proving that ‘ideas matter’ for

development, because they shape how political problems are understood, define solutions, and inform what people think is right and fair (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014). Much of this discussion falls under the umbrella of ‘discursive institutionalism’, first coined by Vivien A. Schmidt (2008). She argued that understanding how change happens requires ideational analysis: investigating the people who carry ideas, the content of ideas, and the discourses through which they are conveyed.

Everything contains ideas. Discursive institutionalists argue all institutions are sustained by normative ideas and beliefs, because the actors involved think they are the right ones or the natural way of the world. Tax systems, for example, contain ideas about reciprocity, entitlements, and what it means to be a productive citizen. The National Health Service in the UK is etched into national identity because of the idea that healthcare should be free at the point of delivery, regardless of ability to pay (see Chapter 5).

Ideas are not just embedded into the rules (institutions), they are the active ingredient in making them. It is no coincidence that whenever there is a need to persuade, legitimise, or mobilise collective action, people in power tell stories that convey ideas. Through plots with ‘drama, heroes and villains’, stories provide a dramatic imperative behind a certain course of action, and cast people as actors within it (Mayer, 2014, 3). Stories and narratives can motivate co-operation or incite violence.

Ideas also influence contestation because they shape behaviours, and choices at the individual, collective and national level. Individually, people obey the law not only because of threat or fear of punishment, but because the rules are considered ‘legitimate’, meaning normatively fair and right (Tyler, 2011). They decide whether to take up potentially life-saving vaccinations because of ideas, myths and stories surrounding them. They can also mobilise agency. When people were protesting in Egypt’s thirteenth revolution mentioned earlier, this was not only a distributional conflict, but a symbolic struggle for the value of human dignity (El Nour, 2021). At the national level, ideas can change the course of nations. Sarah Phillips (2020) convincingly shows that Somaliland’s post-conflict peace is less sustained by the power of its institutions than a discourse about the country’s proximity and propensity to war that motivated the maintenance of order.

Another way of examining the learning crisis, then, would be to examine how ideas at individual, collective and national levels are shaping whether quality education is available, valued, or prioritised. Critically, what ideas or discourses are driving demand for change or perpetuating the status quo (see Box 1.8)?

### Box 1.8 Ideas and the learning crisis

In the case of the learning crisis, it might be less immediately obvious what role ideas play, but once you focus on them, they are everywhere you look.

- **Education contains ideas** Education can become associated with normative ideas about the rights of the people or social justice at critical junctures of crisis and change

(McCloughlin, 2024). Such ideas can become tied to the social contract because they are intimately bound up with national identity (Paglayan, 2021).

- **Elite attitudes shape policy choices** Whether elites see investment in quality education as beneficial may depend on the ideas they hold about the value of education and people's entitlement to it. In some cases, political commitment to education is bolstered when it is framed as essential to nation-building or the realisation of national identity (Hossain, 2005).
- **International norms and frameworks, including the SDGs** These are normative ideas around which local civil society can mobilise collective action and pressure politicians.
- **Education is a symbol of social prestige** This is deeply rooted in many cultures around the world, where people make tremendous sacrifices to send their children to school.

Despite their pervasiveness, it can be challenging for social scientists to isolate and prove that ideas have explanatory power because they are very hard to quantify and measure. For this reason, ideas, much like other intangible variables, such as leadership, have often been neglected. This problem has been compounded by colonial legacies and the flawed assumption that politics in some parts of the world, such as Africa, are not 'ideological' and hence are not shaped by the power of ideas. All development processes, wherever they take place, are shaped by how people understand politics and what they think about the appropriate distribution of resources. Berman (2001) argues that to understand ideational transformations, we must consider the context in which ideas lose their traction, who advocates for new ideas to replace them, and what factors explain why some ideas resonate where others do not.

## Summary and conclusion

The politics of development is the process of contestation that happens wherever there are competing visions of, or motivation for, changes in the allocation of resources as well as inequalities of power. Contestation is intrinsic to the pursuit of alternative desired futures. In this process, different institutions, interests and ideas compete with one another and through compromise or domination, differences are resolved or not, and the outcomes are accepted as more or less legitimate. Everyone participates in the politics of development; the question is how. There is no universal set of expectations, or indeed opportunities, to contest change.

We can better understand how contestation happens if we examine its core ingredients: the formal and informal rules set by institutions, the interests and incentives of people, leaders, and elites and who stand to win or lose, and the underpinning beliefs and ideas that drive people's thoughts and behaviour. Sometimes, as we shall see in the book, these three 'I's are obstacles to progress. But they are also levers to work *through* politics. An institutional perspective on the learning crisis, for example, might suggest changing the rules by tweaking incentives, sanctioning or rewarding good performance at individual or school level. A focus

on interests might call for negotiating with powerful unions to dampen opposition. An ideational lens might suggest informational campaigns to promote the right to education.

The borders between these levers are porous, of course. The point is, there is not one blueprint. While diagnosing the political causes of underdevelopment is a vital element of the book, we also want to show that progress can be made, often against the odds. The book will not provide ‘implications for policy’, which are often trite and unrealistic, but rather focus on stories of change. It is not a prescription. It is not a ‘how to’. It aims, instead, to facilitate critical reflection and understanding, as a basis for action. And we do this by starting not from lofty theories, but from lived realities. Because in the same vein as the Million Voices campaign, understanding how the politics of development is already connected with our lives is the basis for understanding how we can work through it to achieve a fairer future for everyone.

## How to use this book

Readers will have their own starting points, life histories, identities, and ideas that will in turn, influence their positionality and perspectives on the very serious issues we address in this book. This diversity is precisely why in the real world, the politics of development is contested. It is why it is complex, unpredictable, and non-linear.

We aim to carve a path through this complexity by providing the raw elements of a social scientific approach to the politics of development. We apply insights from a range of disciplinary perspectives and methodological dispositions, from the fields of anthropology, economics, sociology, political economy, and geography, to examine the lived realities of politics. In doing so, we aim to challenge readers to think beyond disciplinary siloes that, in the real world, do not exist anyway.

In the spirit of contestation, we invite readers to engage with, reflect on, accept, or object to the propositions made in this book. Our aim is not to impart a true version of reality, itself a fiction, but to stimulate critical thinking and enquiry-based learning about its contestability. That is why you will encounter *Reflective Questions* throughout the text, prompting you to critically consider our arguments and examples, and how far they apply to your existence and experiences, and confirm or refute your prior assumptions about how the world works.

The book is written so that it makes sense whether read as a whole or in parts, in a linear or non-linear way. Nevertheless, there is a logic behind the structure. To help orient readers and educators towards specific ideas, concepts, theories and puzzles they may be looking to explore, in whichever order, we have included an tour of the book (see page 28). This sets out the learning outcomes of each chapter, key concepts and theories it explains, and the reflective questions raised. In sum, though, the book is split into three parts:

*In Part I: Foundations: Interests, Institutions, Ideas*, we explore the three ‘I’s’ of the politics of development in greater depth, analysing and illustrating the strengths and limitations of their explanatory power and why we need all three to appreciate how contestation works.



In *Part II: Change-makers: Government, Market, People Donors*, we scrutinise the interests and ideas held by some of the primary political actors engaged in contesting development and ask whether they have the motivations, power, and opportunities to enable or constrain it.

In *Part III: Challenges: The Politics of Development from the Ground Up*, we apply our three I's to analyse the processes of contestation around the everyday challenges facing people all over the world, as they seek to get by and get ahead, ending with what happens when contestation fails and turns violent.

Before we begin this endeavour, though, we must first situate the book in a critical assessment of how scholars can even claim to know these things, who holds power in this claim-making, and why. In other words, whose knowledge counts. It would be inexcusable not to ground a book about politics in an appreciation of the politics of knowledge, because historical legacies and global inequalities generated knowledge asymmetries that have profoundly shaped whose everyday lived realities are represented, and on whose terms. If any part of this book is compulsory reading, it is this (next) one.

## Discussion questions

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- What does a political approach reveal about who gets what, when, how that a purely technical approach cannot?
- *Why* is development political? Which of the three underlying drivers – diversity, scarcity and colonial legacies – do you think are most significant, and why?
- Think of another global development challenge, like the learning crisis. What are the underlying institutions, interests or ideas that (re)produce it?

# Tour of the book

Chapter	Learning outcomes	Theories and concepts	Reflective questions	
<b>Understanding the politics of development</b>				
1	Why is all development political?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define the politics of development as a process of contestation.</li> <li>Critically assess how diversity, scarcity and colonial legacies drive the politics of development.</li> <li>Begin to understand how institutions, interests and ideas shape lived realities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development as 'alternative desired futures'</li> <li>The place of politics in the "canon" of development studies</li> <li>Power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What factors shaped the evolution of ideas about the place of politics in development?</li> <li>How do non-material resources enable access to material resources?</li> <li>In what ways did colonisation make contemporary contestation inevitable?</li> <li>To what extent do you agree it is problematic to approach development as a 'global' challenge?</li> </ul>
2	Whose knowledge counts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critically evaluate the social construction of knowledge about development.</li> <li>Analyse how knowledge production is contested via ideas, interests, and institutions.</li> <li>Understand some of the key barriers to, and levers for, decolonising knowledge about development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Western "canon" of development studies (modernisation and dependency)</li> <li>Decolonisation</li> <li>Postcolonialism</li> <li>Orientalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does power shape the construction of 'facts' about development?</li> <li>Do you agree that colonial influence allowed for theories to be privileged above lived realities in 'doing development'?</li> <li>Is having a control group fair in the context of development interventions?</li> <li>To what extent has colonial influence on knowledge production shaped the reading lists of your courses, especially but not exclusively those that aim to study development?</li> </ul>
<b>Foundations: institutions, interests, and ideas</b>				
3	Do institutions rule?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define institutions, and distinguish between different types of institutions (formal, informal, inclusive, extractive) and their functions in society.</li> <li>Assess the mechanisms via which institutions shape contestations over desired futures.</li> <li>Critically evaluate the debates about the role of institutions in development.</li> <li>Assess key enablers and constraints to institutional reform.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The state as an institution</li> <li>Rational choice institutionalism</li> <li>Historical institutionalism</li> <li>Sociological institutionalism</li> <li>Formal institutions</li> <li>Informal institutions</li> <li>Social norms</li> <li>Path dependence</li> <li>Critical junctures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think of an institution. How and why does it have consequences for who gets what, when, how?</li> <li>Do you agree that inequalities can be explained by studying patterns of institutional development during colonial rule?</li> <li>Think of an important institution that affects freedoms or capabilities in your world. Has it been contested or changed? Why/why not?</li> <li>What comes first, the 'right' rules or inclusive development?</li> </ul>

Chapter	Learning outcomes	Theories and concepts	Reflective questions	
4	Development in whose interest?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define interests and the critical role they play in shaping institutions in development.</li> <li>• Understand how interests are formed, beyond purely rational choice explanations, through ideas and power.</li> <li>• Describe mechanisms for aligning interests towards desired futures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The structure-agency problem</li> <li>• Elite capture versus elite control</li> <li>• Political settlements</li> <li>• Collective action</li> <li>• Rational fools</li> <li>• Power to pursue interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do rules control people or do people control rules?</li> <li>• How do agreements between ruling political elites shape everyday lived realities?</li> <li>• To what extent could desired futures be achieved if everyone always acted exclusively in their own self-interest?</li> <li>• What mechanisms can align individual and collective interests?</li> </ul>
5	What's the big idea?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how ideas matter in our everyday lives and become developmentally consequential.</li> <li>• Analyse the emergence and dominance of ideas as a function of institutions, interests, and power.</li> <li>• Understand how ideas are manufactured and deployed within processes of contestation over who gets what, when and how.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normative ideas</li> <li>• Ideologies</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Discursive institutionalism</li> <li>• Nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does an ideational perspective encourage us to think differently about the world around us?</li> <li>• What ideas are most consequential in your life? Why?</li> <li>• What new ideas have emerged and gained traction in your lifetime? What explains this change?</li> <li>• To what extent can nationalism be the driving force behind economic development?</li> <li>• Do you agree that institutions (rules) can only legitimately change when ideas change?</li> </ul>
<b>Change-makers: state, people, market, aid</b>				
6	Are some governments better than others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the difference between democracy and authoritarianism, and what it means for a country to become more and less democratic.</li> <li>• Critically evaluate whether these terms are useful when explaining development outcomes.</li> <li>• Assess the extent to which states are able to shape development outcomes in the modern world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authoritarianism</li> <li>• Democracy</li> <li>• The developmental state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are states less powerful today than they were in the past?</li> <li>• What aspect of democracy is most important to you? Free speech? Multiparty elections? The right to join any organization you choose to?</li> <li>• Do you agree that at times it can be legitimate to prioritise building state capacity over democratic processes?</li> <li>• Do you agree that the effectiveness of the East Asian model could not be replicated in a democracy?</li> <li>• Has your country moved towards or away from democracy in the last five years?</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Chapter	Learning outcomes	Theories and concepts	Reflective questions	
7	Should markets rule?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trace the historical development of the concept of free trade and the contestation between free trade and interventionist policies.</li> <li>Examine the influential ideas, interests, and institutions behind the promotion of the market by global institutions.</li> <li>Evaluate the rationale behind the implementation of interventionist policies for economic development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparative advantage</li> <li>Opportunity cost</li> <li>Absolute advantage</li> <li>Mercantilism</li> <li>Free trade</li> <li>Washington Consensus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do imbalances in the global economy produced by colonial power dynamics shape lived realities?</li> <li>Do you think that you are based in a country that was disadvantaged or advantaged by the Washington Consensus?</li> <li>Do you think promoting global trade relationships through trade liberalization is worth compromising on to support for local industries through protectionist policies?</li> <li>In what ways can state intervention promote more equitable market outcomes?</li> </ul>
8	Power to the people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critically evaluate the extent to which people power can shape the pursuit of desired futures.</li> <li>Understand the political dynamics of social movements, participation, and deepening democracy.</li> <li>Analyse how power is claimed and contested by people through ideas, interests and institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social movements</li> <li>Contentious politics</li> <li>Popular participation</li> <li>Deepening democracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is participation intrinsically valuable or only instrumentally valuable for development?</li> <li>What would motivate you to join a social movement? why?</li> <li>Is grassroots participation always helpful in achieving desired futures? Why/why not?</li> <li>What conditions are needed for participation and deeper democracy to work?</li> </ul>
9	Follow the money?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the diversity of development donors and how their interests can shape who gets what, when how.</li> <li>Understand how donors' ideas, values, and beliefs influence development policy and practice.</li> <li>Discuss how the global aid architecture is being contested, including through localization and reparations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development donors</li> <li>Institutional donors</li> <li>Philanthrocapitalism</li> <li>Remittances</li> <li>Political conditionality</li> <li>Localisation</li> <li>Reparations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the wealthy qualified to decide people's futures simply because they have accumulated wealth?</li> <li>Why is the influence of 'emerging donors', many of which were previously classed as 'developing countries', growing?</li> <li>What does the nature of conditionalities reveal about donor interests in giving aid?</li> <li>Can we shift the power in the global aid architecture?</li> </ul>

Chapter	Learning outcomes	Theories and concepts	Reflective questions
<b>Challenges: The politics of development from the ground up</b>			
10	How does my identity matter?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand what identity is, how it is socially constructed, and how this is shaped by colonial legacies.</li> <li>• Critically evaluate what positionality and intersectionality add to the analysis of identity.</li> <li>• Analyse how the contestation of identities becomes developmentally consequential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity as practice</li> <li>• Identity as a category of analysis</li> <li>• Intersectionality</li> <li>• Positionality</li> </ul>
11	Why doesn't everyone get the same?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social inclusion and exclusion</li> <li>• Sen's Capability approach</li> <li>• Distributive politics</li> <li>• Spatial exclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you agree that identity is not static? Why or why not?</li> <li>• Can you think of a real-life example where individuals have little control over how they are categorised into certain identity groups that significantly affects their life chances?</li> <li>• Should all identities be protected by the state? Why?</li> <li>• Do you agree that identity motivates political participation?</li> <li>• Can political participation transform people's identity?</li> </ul>
12	How can I jump this queue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically evaluate the politics of inequality and inclusion</li> <li>• Define vertical and horizontal inequalities and the constitutive and instrumental case for social inclusion</li> <li>• Understand the role of interests, institutions, and ideas in driving exclusions, particularly the uneven distribution of public goods.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petty corruption</li> <li>• Street level bureaucracy</li> <li>• Clientelism</li> <li>• The Weberian state ideal</li> <li>• Principal-agent theory</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a range of 'games within the rules' and evaluate their developmental impacts.</li> <li>• Critically analyse the interests, institutions, and ideas behind two such games - bribery and clientelism.</li> <li>• Analyse what motivates politicians, bureaucrats and citizens to engage in games within the rules.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you agree that the SDGs and the LNOB agenda are an inadequate means of addressing inequality?</li> <li>• In what ways does social exclusion prevent people from pursuing their desired futures?</li> <li>• Can you think of exclusions in your context that have both constitutive and instrumental elements?</li> <li>• How do the characteristics of public goods influence political elites' interests to allocate them and to whom?</li> <li>• How does identity influence people's power to address exclusions?</li> <li>• Thinking about an exclusion you are familiar with, what policies do you think could work to address this?</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is there a difference between official rules and how they get implemented in practice?</li> <li>• Do you think corporate lobbying of governments is a form of rent-seeking?</li> <li>• How does power influence which groups are more or less susceptible to bribery?</li> <li>• Do you agree that clientelist systems can supplement democratic processes?</li> <li>• Should bribery be analysed as a principal agent problem or a collective action problem?</li> </ul>	

(Continued)

Chapter	Learning outcomes	Theories and concepts	Reflective questions	
13	Can the planet cope with development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse who pays the price of environmental degradation from a political perspective.</li> <li>Understand the interests, institutions, and ideas behind the commodification of nature.</li> <li>Evaluate how environmental protection and justice are contested.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability and sustainable development</li> <li>Political ecology</li> <li>Environmental justice</li> <li>Commodification of nature</li> <li>Mitigation and adaptation</li> <li>Doughnut Economics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is environmental protection a constraint on development for the world's poorest countries?</li> <li>Why are politicians attracted to neoliberal solutions to environmental challenges?</li> <li>Could an environmental justice lens inform fairer and more effective political decisions on environment and development dilemmas?</li> <li>Could the ideas of post-growth, planetary boundaries and doughnut economics challenge entrenched interests, institutions and ideas for a fairer, greener future?</li> </ul>
14	When do people accept authority?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define authority and explain why compliance with authority matters for development.</li> <li>Analyse how interests, institutions, and ideas affect whether people accept authority, or not.</li> <li>Critically evaluate what drives contestation over authority beyond the state.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legitimate authority</li> <li>Social contract theory</li> <li>The virtuous circle of governance</li> <li>Procedural justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is 'good' authority always 'legitimate' – and is 'bad' authority always illegitimate?</li> <li>Why is coercive authority experienced unevenly within countries?</li> <li>Do the services on your doorstep influence whether you think the state is legitimate or not?</li> <li>Does the idea of the social contract apply beyond the Western context?</li> </ul>
15	When does contestation turn violent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critically evaluate the politics of defining and analysing conflict</li> <li>Understand major reasons why contestation turns violent, including the impact of ideas, institutions, and interests of domestic and international actors in shaping conflict dynamics.</li> <li>Evaluate the roles that identity and inequalities play in sustaining conflict and undermining the chances of peace.</li> <li>Assess the evolving politics of peacebuilding and evaluate how power and interests underlie prospects for resolving conflict and addressing its underlying causes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greed versus grievance</li> <li>Rational choice theory, interests and conflict</li> <li>Communalising colonial policies</li> <li>Identity-inequality nexus</li> <li>Peacebuilding and the 'local turn'</li> <li>Hybridity in peacebuilding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the differences between a "terrorist", a "criminal", and a "revolutionary"?</li> <li>Is every contemporary conflict "international" to some extent?</li> <li>What leads civilians to take up arms and participate in violent conflict?</li> <li>Whose interests operate for or against peacebuilding, and how?</li> <li>Is what ways is the language and practice of 'peacebuilding' political?</li> </ul>