

**STRUCTURES AND MEANINGS  
A WAY TO INTRODUCE  
ARGUMENTATION ANALYSIS IN POLICY STUDIES EDUCATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The well-known Toulmin-Dunn model for considering structure in policy arguments has to be subordinated to a more general method, such as Scriven's, for case-by-case examination of texts: to reflect on meanings, flexibly identify the linkages between elements, and carefully draw out unstated conclusions and assumptions. The paper presents some simple supplementary methods to help do this: a tabular format for examining the components of an argument and their meanings; second, attention to the use of terms that convey praise or criticism and hence hint at conclusions but also, as one becomes conscious of the linguistic choices made, point towards possible counter-arguments; and thirdly, a simpler tabular version of the Toulmin-Dunn categories, to describe an argument's logical structure and the possible rebuttals. Detailed worked examples analyse speeches of the Zimbabwe Minister of Local Government, a diagnosis of the phases of local government formation in independent India, and a South African editorial on population growth.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are many aspects of 'doing policy things with words'. I focus here on policy wording as *argumentation*, where policy talk and writing are supposed to make logically reasoned claims. Policy analysis centrally involves the assessment and preparation of arguments in which ideas about values/objectives/priorities are combined with claims about facts and cause-effect linkages, to produce valuations about past or possible future actions by agents operating in the public arena. Each approach in policy analysis can be seen as a particular style of building arguments, which selects and handles ideas and data in its own distinctive way.

In presenting policy analysis as argumentation I want to avoid excessive contrasts between argument analysis and (other) discourse analysis, and between text-focused and context-focused types of analysis.<sup>1</sup> The structural approach in argument analysis only proves fruitful when combined with a careful attention to words and meanings, and these depend on contexts. When students, and practitioners and academics, of policy and planning use standard structure formats to analyse its texts, but without a primary focus on meanings and messages, the result is often confusion. The standard formats such as Toulmin-Dunn's or the 'logical framework' can then quieten fears but breed thoughtless errors (Gasper & George 1998; Gasper 1997, 2000). Similarly, argument evaluation conducted by reference to a standard list of fallacies in inference (such as in Thouless 1974, or Sillince 1986) can go astray if users seek to imitate and reproduce the examples without close attention to the meanings and context of their particular text.

We need an approach that gives balanced attention to elucidation of meanings, analysis of structure, and evaluation of cogency. I propose Scriven's format for argument analysis as helpful here. I further suggest how to operationalize its search for meanings in a fashion accessible to ordinary students of policy analysis, through an analytic table plus attention in particular to language of praise and condemnation; and how to link this to a user-friendly tabular version of the Toulmin-Dunn format, to organize ideas about argument components into a picture of argument structure.

The paper then illustrates how these tools – post-Scriven tables to investigate meanings and a post-Dunn table to record structure -- can provide insights into a series

of policy-related texts, mainly from Southern Africa. We will look at four texts. First, a relatively straightforward defence of a controversial policy by a government minister -- which yet on examination proves more complex than it first appears. Second, a more elusive statement by the minister, in which all the conclusions are hinted at, conditional, not explicit and definite. Third, another elusive, allusive text, an attempt to describe and interpret enormous, multi-faceted, unpredictable historical movements. Finally, a longer text, to show how the tools of close examination remain workable and helpful at a greater scale, given some degree of selectivity.

## **2. CONTRIBUTIONS AND DANGERS OF THE TOULMIN-DUNN FORMAT FOR ANALYSING POLICY ARGUMENTS**

Policy reasoning involves far more extended argumentation than the brief syllogisms in logic texts or even than utilitarianism's identification and summation of effects. Which effects are relevant, in terms of which values and responsibilities, and judged by which comparisons? Which rights and duties must be respected, besides future consequences? Which constraints have been considered and how? Which issues demand attention in the first place? How are conclusions to be drawn from varied and typically incomplete information? Tools of argumentation complement the standard emphases in policy analysis and planning on measurement and calculation. They are vital when there is no time or capacity for new empirical investigations, and important in every case.

Teaching and learning about any type of argumentation face the complexities of trying to identify the structures from the meanings and understand the meanings from the structures. Besides the clarification of terms and of how words combine in single sentences, we have to look at how single propositions link up in broader discourses. Teaching and learning about argumentation in a specialist area like policy discourse face further issues. Policy analysts and planners lack the time, background and interest to immerse themselves in complex approaches from logic or linguistics. Formal logic has anyway not been concerned with ongoing practical and policy debates and is instead a fundamental discipline with its own concerns. Nor is discourse theory yet very helpful here; it requires a considerable investment of learning but fails to go into the specifics

of public policy. We need some serviceable approaches that even though imperfect will allow average analysts to do better when they consider and prepare arguments. Thus more relevant and less abstruse are some studies in the past generation oriented to practical argumentation (e.g. Scriven 1976). In America they are called "informal logic" and are part of the work on "critical thinking". Some authors have gone on to apply this to understanding policy and planning arguments (Gasper 1996a gives a survey).

The Toulmin model of argumentation, created by the British-American philosopher Stephen Toulmin (1958, 1979) has had great influence in a variety of specialist fields outside philosophy, as one such serviceable approach. It is intended to apply to any argument, and contains nothing specific to policy arguments. However, a large proportion of the attempts to formalize argumentation analysis in planning and policy analysis have used his model, especially as adapted by the University of Pittsburgh policy theorist William Dunn (1981, 1994). It highlights how policy arguments have structures, and the range of types of justification used.

In the classical syllogism a conclusion follows inexorably from the combination of premises: typically a premise that states a contingent circumstance and another that states a general principle. Toulmin expresses these three central elements in an argument as follows:

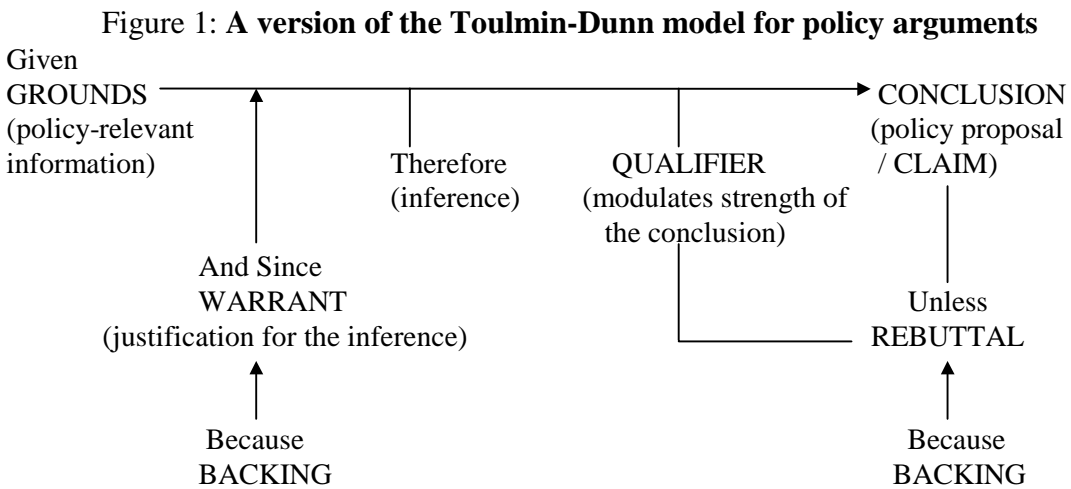
- the *Claim*, the proposed conclusion. This label captures that a Claim is debatable; hence the need for the argument.
- *Grounds* (Toulmin et al. 1979; called Data in Toulmin 1958), which are presented as supporting the Claim; there may be one or more;
- the *Warrant*. If the truth of the Claim does not automatically follow from the Ground(s), then a linking statement, a warrant for the inference, must be given. Typically the Warrant is seen as a rule or principle relevant to a number of cases.

Toulmin's schema then adds some categories needed for practical argumentation but not found in the classical syllogism: layers of back up, non-definitive inferences, exceptions and counter arguments.

- The Warrant itself may be debatable and require justification by a *Backing* statement or statements.

- Often a *Qualifier* is used to modulate the Claim: a word like ‘probably’ or ‘apparently’, or a marker of exceptions like ‘unless’. For not only can Warrants be debatable in terms of relevance or their own validity, other counterconsiderations may exist.
- A *Rebuttal* is such a counterconsideration. It may concern any of the elements of the argument; for example it may directly concern the Claim. It may itself require Backing.

Figure 1 indicates the relationships of these components within a policy argument, largely following Dunn’s adaptation of Toulmin. A horizontal chain runs from Grounds to the Claim, via an inference (‘So’/‘Therefore’) and a Qualifier. In one vertical chain, this inference is supported by a Warrant, supported in turn by Backing. In another vertical chain, the Qualifier is supported by a Rebuttal which could weaken the force of the Claim.



While both Rebuttal and Warrant could themselves often be seen as Claims, resting on Grounds, a Warrant and so on, in the Toulmin-Dunn diagram this is only referred to by use of Backing elements for them. This is to retain a clear focus on a particular Claim, while recognising the presence typically of a system of arguments more complex than the simple syllogism. Similarly, though Rebuttals may concern any element of the argument, Fig. 1 visually links Rebuttals only to the categories of Qualifier and Claim, rather than complicate the diagram and risk loss of focus. The central Claim



must remain highlighted, because it is only by reference to this that the other elements can be identified: they derive their roles in relation to it.

The Toulmin-Dunn format helps us to see that:

- arguments have functionally distinct components (e.g. warrants);
- arguments are diverse (e.g. there are many types of warrant; Dunn 1994, Ch.4);
- arguments have structures, including, often, layers (e.g. warrants may need backing);
- most arguments are not certain; they concern 'open systems', and are vulnerable to counter-arguments (potential 'rebuttals'); hence the need for 'qualifiers';
- the same data/grounds can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the warrants and other propositions with which it is combined; argumentation is creative, interpretive (Dunn 1994).<sup>2</sup>

#### *Limitations of the Toulmin-Dunn model, and some responses*

While the format serves to make several important general points, it cannot be used as a template to specify the shape of every argument that one encounters. Unfortunately it is often handled as if it could. Gasper & George (1998) note that not only do beginner students tend to misuse the format as a template, so do several published pieces on policy argumentation (e.g. Bozeman & Landsbergen 1989; Ray 1990; even Dunn 1994).

- Frequently, complex arguments that involve multiple steps and require multiple diagrams are squeezed into a single diagram copied from the introductory statements and examples given by Dunn or Toulmin.
- The classification ('coding') of argument components in terms of Toulmin's categories becomes very erratic when the contours of the particular argument being considered are overshadowed by the authority of those exemplars.
- The Toulmin diagram appears to cow many users, even some with computer skills, who find it difficult to draw and re-draw, and hence seem content to imitate a standard layout regardless of the specific content of the argument concerned. Further, the Claim's location at the top-right does not promote its identification as the first step; yet correct identification of all other components depends on that step.

Figure 2 summarizes Gasper & George’s findings and corresponding suggestions. In this paper I take up in particular the following ideas:

- to break texts into multiple arguments, which requires a layered presentation;
- to use a tabular presentation, rather than the Toulmin-Dunn (T-D) diagram; and
- to prepare that presentation by use of an argument specification procedure that concentrates on meanings, not on pre-specified labels or a standardized structure diagram.

**Figure 2: Failings in use of the Toulmin-Dunn format; and some relevant responses**

<i>COMMON WEAKNESSES IN USE OF T-D FORMAT</i>	<i>INTERNAL RESPONSE (staying inside T-D format)</i>	<i>EXTERNAL RESPONSE (going beyond T-D format)</i>
1. Oversimplification, e.g. by sticking to single diagram and thus excluding too much	Multiple diagrams	E.g. Add a picture of multiple levels of discourse (e.g. Fischer-Taylor format)
2. Slow and unreliable ‘coding’ of components (i.e. classification as claim/data/warrant/backing...)	Provide procedural advice on ‘coding’	Represent arguments without first labelling components (e.g. as in Scriven’s approach)
3. Use of same diagrammatic layout for all cases	Vary the shape of the diagram, according to content of the case	Adopt/teach an argument specification procedure (e.g. Scriven’s), not a standard layout
4. Difficulty in using diagram, as it does not highlight the starting point for analysis and if it is found hard to modify	Use a system of columns; and/or master computer graphics tools.	Concentrate on other methods of argument specification

### 3. A MORE FLEXIBLE AND BALANCED APPROACH: GUIDING TOULMIN-DUNN BY SCRIVEN’S SEVEN STEPS OF ARGUMENT ANALYSIS

The Toulmin/Dunn format is only an introduction. We need also, first, more complex formats that highlight the specifics of policy--the characteristic nature of warrants, backings, rebuttals, and qualifiers in policy arguments. Hambrick (1974) provided a useful listing of standard components of a well-designed policy argument, which can be grouped into three stages (Gasper 1996a). The first stage, elaboration of cause-effect links (similar to problem analysis in the logical framework approach), stresses the background role of world-views ("grounding propositions"). It seeks to es-

establish that action on a particular policy instrument will lead to increase of another variable taken as a goal. Hambrick's second stage covers normative inputs to the argument, to turn cause-and-effect into means-and-end: what justifies the specified goal? why is something considered a problem and its reverse a desirable end? why are certain types of action considered acceptable? This type of normative analysis is elaborated in Fischer's model, which looks at the basis of the normative and grounding propositions. The third stage that one can discern in Hambrick contains necessary tests of a policy argument, i.e. of a claim that specified actions will lead to desirable ends and should be done. It includes especially questions about constraints and alternatives.

All such formats have dangers if seen as a universally valid template into which any argument can be forced. So they must, secondly, be complemented by a flexible and exploratory approach, such as that of Michael Scriven (1976). Scriven highlights how both identifying an argument's content and structure, and then assessing them, are complex activities and require systematic and separate handling. He allows for the likelihood that the structure (the system of links between components, and their respective roles). will differ from case to case. Figure 3 outlines his model of good argument analysis, which contains seven distinct steps. Almost any step can lead back to earlier ones.

Figure 3: **Scriven's seven-step model for argument analysis**

ARGUMENT SPECIFICATION	ARGUMENT EVALUATION
1. Clarify meanings [of terms]	5. Criticize inferences and premises
2. Identify conclusions, stated and unstated	6. Consider other relevant arguments [including possible counter-arguments]
3. Portray structure [the relation of conclusions to grounds and warrants]	7. Overall evaluation [based on the balance of strengths and weaknesses, and in comparison to the alternative stance(s) one could instead adopt]
4. Formulate unstated assumptions [i.e. those required to move from the grounds to the claims]	

- Scriven presents identification of components as part of step 3, portrayal of structure. In my experience an initial identification of component parts is a necessary preliminary--step 0, important for focussing attention, deciding which terms require

semantic investigation, and asking about their roles. It may be revised later in step 3, when the system of roles is posited.

- In Section 4 below we consider one simple tool in step 1's clarification of meanings of terms: identification of praise-language and criticism-language, which provides hints about unstated conclusions (step 2). In Sections 5 and 6 I illustrate how paraphrasing a text into language with a different slant (praise/neutrality/criticism) can also help in this.
- Toulmin's model concerns Scriven's steps 2 to 4, identification of premises and inferences. That work is a prerequisite for argument evaluation. In addition the attention to possible rebuttals connects to step 6, consideration of other relevant arguments.
- Within argument evaluation, step 5 includes checking the strength of both the logic and the assumptions/premises, stated and unstated. For while an argument can always be made logical by adding assumptions that would make its parts correctly link, if those assumptions fail then the argument fails.
- Step 6 checks on possible counterarguments. This is again a way of checking logic. Often we can restate a counterargument as a required but unrealistic unstated assumption. Paraphrasing into language with a different slant helps in this identification of counterarguments too.

In this paper I concentrate on Scriven's steps 1 to 4, argument specification, the necessary prelude to argument evaluation; but with attention also to step 6 on possible counterarguments.

I suggest that a three-fold combination can be effective:

- Scriven's procedure of step-wise analysis. It gives a framework for investigating meanings and structure without preconceived and possibly distorting notions about what are the components in a given text and their roles and linkages.
- The identification of praise- and criticism-language, for use in Scriven's step 1, as one way to focus attention on meanings.
- George's tabular version of the Toulmin-Dunn format for summarizing argument structure (step 3). The T-D format gives one way to tidily present the results from the necessary careful, open-minded examination of possible components, roles and

linkages. The standard option for portraying structure is a diagram, but an easier and effective option is to organize the components identified in steps 1 and 2, including the unstated conclusions, into a set of columns: RV George's alternative format. The columns lead to a clear grouping of components. This in turn can help the step 4 activity of identifying unstated but required assumptions and can thus enrich the picture of an argument's structure.

The next section illustrates this three-fold combination with an example from Zimbabwe. One could ask students to do their own analysis of the given text before studying the analysis below.

#### **4. CENTRALIZATION IS DECENTRALIZATION ? MINISTER CHIKOWORE ON SUPERVISION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ZIMBABWE**

Speaking at the 1989 Urban Councils Association meeting, the Zimbabwean Minister of Local Government defended his acquisition and exercise of sweeping powers to intervene in local Councils. The Minister rejected

"claims at your previous conferences and other fora that Central Government have tended to centralise power instead of decentralising... much of your contention arises from the 1986 amendment to the Urban Councils Act which gives the minister the power to approve the appointment and discharge of senior officials... This was done... [after] serious problems regarding staff harassment by mayors or councillors who were...wanting to get rid of officials whose faces they dislike or those who do not come from where they come from" (Chikowore 1989b: 3-4).

To examine this text:

- We first divide it into components (step 0): in this case the three sentences, each of which has a distinct message. Possibly the last sentence could be divided into two, but its second part provides an explanation and definition of the first part's allegation of harassment.
- We next look word-by-word at each component. This allows us to see aspects we could otherwise easily overlook. Here we find that the Minister has acquired powers over both appointment and discharge, though he only gives as explanation a point concerning discharges. It also leads us to identify and reflect on the choice of some

key terms (step 1). In particular the label ‘harassment’ is a central choice, a description which is at the same time a condemnation.

- We can thus impute an unstated conclusion (step 2): that the Minister was right to acquire such sweeping powers.
- We can then further impute two unstated assumptions (step 4): that the Minister will do better in appointments than the Councils, and that there will not be major undesirable side-effects such as demoralization of local government. The inverse of those assumptions could alternatively be stated as proposed rebuttals to the Minister’s position.

A table of the type used in Figure 4 helps to ensure that we do not skip steps or segments of text. Even if we carry out the examination initially without it, the table helps us to later check and clearly present our analysis.

**Figure 4: A step-wise analysis of Minister Chikowore’s defence of his powers**

<i>Step 0. Identify components</i>	<i>Step 1. Clarify meanings of terms</i>	<i>Step 2. Identify conclusions Step 4. Identify assumptions</i>
<i>a) [I reject] claims at your previous conferences and other fora that Central Government have tended to centralise power instead of decentralising</i>	‘claims’ can be an anti-term, compared to ‘proposals’, ‘contentions’, ‘statements’, etc.	<i>Half-stated conclusion:</i> Central Government has decentralised power
<i>b) ...much of your contention arises from the 1986 amendment to the Urban Councils Act which gives the minister the power to approve the appointment and discharge of senior officials...</i>	A neutral descriptive clause  <i>NB: Both</i> appointment and discharge	
<i>c) This was done... [after] serious problems regarding staff harassment by mayors or councillors who were...wanting to get rid of officials whose faces they dislike or those who do not come where they come from.</i>	‘harassment’ is typically an unfavourable term, compared to e.g. ‘demanding efficiency’  ‘whose faces they dislike’ is an unfavourable term suggesting petty personal conflicts	<i>[Unstated assumption:</i> Overriding powers for the Minister do not constitute harassment of mayors and councillors.] <i>[Unstated assumption:</i> staffing must not be on ascriptive or affective grounds.]
	Nothing is said about problematic new appointments	<i>[Unstated assumptions:</i> mayors and councillors brought ascriptive and affective criteria also into appointments - this is why they sought to get rid of other staff and why the centre took powers over new appointments too.]
		<i>[Unstated conclusion:</i> government was right to pass the amendment] <i>[Unstated assumptions:</i> - central government will do better in staffing decisions than would local politicians - there are no important negative effects like loss of legitimacy and motivation of local politicians.]

Some of the unstated assumptions listed in Figure 4 might only emerge from doing a structure analysis like the one in Figure 5. It corresponds to Scriven’s step 3 (a sketch of structure) but also goes further to consider possible counterarguments. Since we found two implied conclusions in the text we require two argument structures. Figure 5 gives attention first to the one which probably represents the major focus, defence of the 1986 amendment.

The re-formatting of the Toulmin model in terms of columns allows a very clear presentation, that matches the rhythms of everyday language and also reflects Scriven’s logical sequence of analysis: first look for the Claim, then for the proposed supporting Grounds (Data), then for the proposed principle that is supposed to bridge the move from Grounds to Claim, and then for possible counter-arguments. Figure 5 uses four columns but one could use more, e.g. also have a column for backing of warrants.

**Figure 5: The structure of Minister Chikowore’s two claims about (de)centralization**

<b>I PROPOSE THAT [CLAIM],</b>	<b>GIVEN THAT [DATA]</b>	<b>AND THE PRINCIPLE THAT [WARRANT],</b>	<b>UNLESS [REBUTTAL]</b>
<p>[<i>Unstated conclusions</i>]</p> <p>Government was right to pass the amendment, acquiring a veto over appts. and dismissals</p>	<p>There were serious problems regarding staff harassment by mayors or councillors who were wanting to get rid of officials whose faces they dislike or those who do not come where they come from; and [unstated assumptions] mayors and councillors brought ascriptive and affective criteria also into appointments</p>	<p>[<i>Unstated assumption:</i>] Staffing must not be on ascriptive or affective grounds</p> <p>[<i>Unstated assumption:</i>] Overriding powers for the minister do not constitute harassment of mayors and councillors (or are excusable)</p>	<p>[<i>Unstated possible counter-arguments:</i>]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central government will not do better in staffing decisions than would local politicians.</li> <li>- There are important negative effects like loss of the legitimacy and motivation of local politicians</li> </ul>
<p>[<i>Half-stated conclusion:</i>]</p> <p>Central Government has decentralised power, even though [<i>potential rebuttal:</i>] it has centralised power;</p>	<p><i>and implied unstated</i></p> <p>the measure seeks to counter a weakness in decentralization (namely that Councillors and mayors harass staff),</p>	<p><i>arguments for it]</i></p> <p>good centralisation is not ‘really’ centralisation, and bad de-centralisation is not ‘real’ decentralisation; so this legislation is not anti-decentralisation</p>	



Teaching of policy argumentation seems to have concentrated on description of structure, such as by a Toulmin-Dunn diagram or logical framework, and assessment of logic, aided for example by a warning list of fallacies. These are steps 3 and 5 in Scriven's model. Unless matched by careful handling of the earlier steps, especially step 1's reflection on meanings, the structure analysis and logic check are liable to miss the point. A key part of our analysis of Minister Chikowore's statement on local government was identification of terms that convey praise or criticism, leading to suggestions of some implied or hinted conclusions. This provides a workable starting point for students. One can ask them to identify partners for praise-terms or criticism-terms, such as listed in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Examples of praise terms and corresponding criticism terms**

PRAISE TERMS	CRITICISM TERMS
Coordination	Bureaucracy
Participation	Anarchy
Democracy	Populism; dissidents, deviants
Decentralization	Disintegration
Full coordination	Centralization

These examples come from a study of the discourses of decentralization in Zimbabwe in the 1980s (Gasper 1991, 1997). Some other terms seen there, while not quite praise, did sweeten messages. The exotic labels 'chef' and 'povo' dignified the positions of the new bosses and the bossed, those who spoke and those who listened (Gasper 1997: 52).

Examination of praise-terms and criticism-terms can lead on to broader examination of normative versus neutral language. In development discourse the most basic term to examine is 'development'. It is a *normative* praise term; yet is typically also treated as neutrally *descriptive*. (The same applies to 'efficiency', 'decentralization', or the other praise terms mentioned above.) Unless we try to distinguish these two aspects in our minds, our normative choices become veiled and confused; and particular policy strategies which become defined as 'development' can then be immune to criticism, able to dismiss real cases of failure as not 'real' cases of themselves (see e.g. Apthorpe & Gasper 1982, Gasper 1996b).

Methods for investigating meanings form a huge topic. For purposes of sharpening the appreciation of policy students, the two devices illustrated above are a worthwhile start: a column for line-by-line and where necessary word-by-word reflection on meanings; and identification of praise- and criticism-terms.<sup>3</sup>

Our next extended example goes further into the meanings of terms and phrases than has our look at Minister Chikowore's defence of his powers over local governments. This time we meet the Minister when he turned his attention to NGOs.

## **5. VEILED CONCLUSIONS: MINISTER CHIKOWORE ON NGOS IN ZIMBABWE**

In a 1986 speech the Minister of Local Government in Zimbabwe declared that, while "we all want the work of NGOs to increase", some NGOs ignored the local government machinery.

"[They act] as if they were unguided missiles... could it be that they have sinister motives to distort our development process? Could it be that their actions are an effort to impose a different development philosophy other than that chosen by our people through their party and government? Or could it be that they just do not wish to work in harmony with government?" (Chikowore 1986).

Figure 7's analytic table differs from the one used earlier. The first column still consists of a classification of the text into component sections. To leave space for an exercise in alternative wordings, as in the third column, all comments that correspond to Scriven's steps 1 through 4 (on meanings, roles, implications and assumptions) have been placed in the middle column. The third column then builds from the middle column's comments on praise terms and criticism terms, to note how the behaviour those terms refer to could be described with a different tone. This exercise gives contrasts which help us to identify unstated conclusions and thus the overall meaning and structure of the argument-system, and also possible counter-arguments.

**Figure 7: Step-wise analysis and paraphrase of Minister Chikowore’s comments on NGOs**

THE TEXT, Divided into sections	COMMENTS, on meanings and logic	IN MORE NEUTRAL OR FAVOURABLE LANGUAGE
<p>".. we all want the work of NGOs to increase..</p> <p>[But some NGOs act] as if they were unguided missiles...</p> <p>...could it be that they have sinister motives to distort our development process?</p> <p>Could it be that their actions are an effort to impose a different development philosophy[...] other than that chosen by our people through their party and government?</p> <p>Or could it be that they just do not wish to work in harmony with government?" (Chikowore 1986)</p>	<p>Unstated conclusion: so you cannot say I am anti-NGOs</p> <p>‘unguided missiles’ is 1. an analogy, 2. Unfavourable</p> <p>‘sinister motives’ is unfavourable;</p> <p>‘distort’ is also unfavourable;</p> <p>‘our’ suggests there are outsiders interfering</p> <p>‘impose’ is unfavourable</p> <p>‘chosen’ is favourable; so is ‘our people’ and therefore so too is ‘their party’</p> <p>[Unstated assumption: our people have only one party]</p> <p>‘just do not wish to’ suggests closed minds; ‘work in harmony’ is favourable, so rejecting it is bad</p> <p>Unstated suggested conclusions: Either – Yes, some NGOs have sinister motives, to impose an alien philosophy; Or – Yes, they are just uncooperative, ‘dissidents’; So: Either - We should impose greater controls on them; Or - to bring them into line with us we might use allegations of sinister alien plans</p>	<p>Some NGOs act as if they are not branches of government but instead have independent sources of legitimacy.</p> <p>Do they wish to influence the development process?</p> <p>Are they advocating and undertaking actions not identical with those advocated by the present government ? - actions which are chosen by the party leaders, formally accepted by the party, and hardly known by our people.</p> <p>They do not automatically agree with what government proposes</p>

This text has less emphasis on a logical argument where one step builds from previous ones, and more on conveying unstated conclusions by a series of rhetorical questions for which the conclusions are implied by the choices of favourable/unfavourable words. Attention to the meanings of words used is therefore centrally important. Scriven’s format remains very relevant for the questions it generates about unstated assumptions and conclusions.

Figure 8 transfers Figure 7’s insights about conclusions and assumptions, across to a George columns diagram. There are three conclusions and so we need to map three structures. The first row of the table indicates for each column a corresponding Scriven step.

**Figure 8: The logical structure of Minister Chikowore’s comments on NGOs**

<i>(Scriven step 2: find conclusions)</i>	<i>(part of step 3: find basic structure)</i>	<i>(Step 4: identify assumptions)</i>	<i>(Step 6: consider other arguments)</i>
<p><b>I PROPOSE THAT [CLAIM],</b></p> <p>[1] Some NGOs have sinister motives, to impose an alien philosophy, or are simply uncooperative</p> <p><i>[Unstated, but strongly hinted-at, conclusion]</i></p>	<p><b>GIVEN THAT [DATA]</b></p> <p>They act like missiles unguided by our people through their party and government</p>	<p><b>AND THE PRINCIPLE THAT [WARRANT],</b></p> <p>NGOs should be subordinate [in the disputed spheres] to the national and local governments <i>[Unstated assumption]</i></p>	<p><b>UNLESS [REBUTTAL]</b></p> <p>The NGOs are guided by our people in other ways; and. ‘guidance’ is not the same as control. <i>[Conceivable counter-arguments, against the claim or the supposed data.]</i></p>
<p>[2] I am pro-NGOs <i>[Unstated conclusion]</i></p>	<p>I want the work of NGOs to increase</p>		<p>I want to dominate NGOs and that goes against their basic rationale and justification <i>[Conceivable counter-argument to the claim]</i></p>
<p>[3] Government would be right to impose greater controls upon NGOs, or to intimidate them by allegations of sinister motives and/or threats to impose controls <i>[Unstated conclusion]</i></p>	<p>I am well-intentioned towards NGOs (conclusion [2] above)</p> <p>And yet</p> <p>Some have sinister motives or are uncooperative (conclusion [1] above)</p>	<p>Government has the right to control NGOs <i>[Unstated assumption]</i></p>	<p>The ruling party and government are not the sole repository of legitimacy (e.g. since our people are not homogeneous). Attempts to guide all NGO action by others are counter-productive. <i>[Conceivable counter-arguments, against the warrant or directly against the claim]</i></p>

Why are so many conclusions and assumptions unstated? Vagueness and veiled communication are important in political language. The Minister can insinuate and hint at threats, without committing himself irrevocably to either a definite action or even a diagnosis. He can always later add counterarguments to the implied answers to his own rhetorical questions, if and when that serves his purposes. He retains room for manoeuvre.

## **6. MIXED AND QUALIFIED MESSAGES: HARRY BLAIR ON RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA**

Harry Blair has a longer, multi-stage, more ambiguous story to tell.

"At first these elected local councils [in India after independence] were...taken over by the traditional local elites, who used them to turn rural development programmes into patronage for themselves. But as time went on...the more numerous middle-level peasants began to...win control [via] the ballot-box...[and to] demand a larger rural development commitment from government... This whole process in turn has led to a further awakening, as sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers have begun to demand government help... gentry and kulaks struggle between themselves for power while trying simultaneously to co-opt and beat back the...challenge from below" (Blair 1985: 455-6).

Blair gives suggestive descriptions of three stages in evolution and then of the resulting situation. Figure 9 tries to clarify his interpretations, by looking closely at his choices of terms in these four sentences. We use the same format as when investigating Minister Chikowore on NGOs: a column for dividing the text into sections, a column for examining the choices of terms and their implications, and a column for alternative possible formulations of the same data, in order to highlight the judgements made by this text and some of the counter arguments it will have to deal with.

**Figure 9: Step-wise analysis and paraphrase of Blair’s description of historical stages**

THE TEXT, divided into sections (steps 0, 1: components, meanings; & part of 3: structure)	COMMENTS, On language (step 1) and implied conclusions (step 2)	THE TEXT IN ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE (step 1, step 6)
[1] “At first these elected local councils [in India after independence] were...taken over by the traditional local elites	‘elected’ and ‘local councils’ are both relatively favourable terms; ‘traditional local elites’ and ‘taken over by’ are not, therefore there is an implied criticism of phase 1	At first these local committees elected by the largely illiterate electorate relied for leadership on the experience of leading local families who enjoyed local people’s trust and so were able to win elections.
who used them to turn rural development programmes into patronage for themselves.	‘rural development programmes’ is a relatively favourable term, and ‘patronage’ is generally negative, so the implied criticism of phase 1 becomes stronger, perhaps even explicit	These leaders were frequently amongst those best placed to benefit from the rural development programmes (and naturally also gave priority to their close supporters)
[2] But as time went on...the more numerous middle-level peasants began to...win control [via] the ballot-box...[and to] demand a larger rural development commitment from government ...	‘middle-level peasants’ sounds good compared to ‘traditional local elites’; similarly, winning via the ballot-box carries kudos, and so does ‘larger rural development commitment’; so there is implied praise of phase 2	Decentralization worked even better in its second phase, after understanding of local government had grown, and leaders from larger population groups, oriented to farming, began to win elections.
[3] This whole process in turn has led to a further awakening, as sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers have begun to demand government help...	‘awakening’ (which is a metaphor) sounds favourable; thus there is some implied praise of phase 3	In time, the democratic spirit has spread and appeared even in the poorest groups, who have become politically mobilized, vocal and active.
[4] ..gentry and kulaks struggle between themselves for power while trying simultaneously to co-opt and beat back the...challenge from below” (Blair 1985:455-6).	‘gentry’ (French gentil = gentle) may have negative connotations now; ‘kulak’ (Russian for fist, tight-fisted person; those peasants in pre-1930 Russia who could generate substantial surplus) has clear anti- connotations; and ‘co-opt’ and ‘struggle for power’ are slightly negative; whereas ‘challenge from below’ sounds progressive. Hence aspects of the current phase are viewed with distaste and the implied praise of phase 3 is strengthened.	The traditional local leading families and the upcoming farmer groups inevitably compete, within the democratic system. Both groups try to win support in the elections and to hold on to key positions.

Figure 10 now brings together the elements in Blair’s text, manifest or hinted at, to see how they function as arguments, as well as some possible counter-arguments. Why are the conclusions hinted at, rather than explicit? Commenting on massive, multi-faceted, multi-potential, historical trends and contestations across a sub-continent, Blair may not want to commit himself to highly emphatic claims.

**Figure 10: Analysis of the structures of Blair’s suggestions**

<i>(Scriven’s Step 2: find conclusions;</i>	<i>Step (1 and) 3: find support offered;</i>	<i>Step (1, 3,) 4: find un-stated assumptions;</i>	<i>Step 6: consider alternative arguments)</i>
<p><b>I PROPOSE THAT [CLAIM],</b></p> <p>Phase 1 of elected local government in India was unfortunate [<i>Unstated conclusion</i>]</p>	<p><b>GIVEN THAT [DATA]</b></p> <p>It was dominated by traditional local elites who unfairly monopolized programme resources</p>	<p><b>AND THE PRINCIPLE THAT [WARRANT],</b></p> <p>1. Equity implies disadvantaged groups should be able to come forward. 2. Democracy implies that political office should not be held for reasons other than [x, y, z]; and should not be used for one’s own narrow advantage [<i>Unstated assumptions</i>]</p>	<p><b>UNLESS [REBUTTAL]</b></p> <p>Traditional local elites enjoyed full local acceptance [<i>Conceivable counter-argument</i>]</p>
<p>Phase 2 was an improvement, by comparison [<i>Unstated conclusion</i>]</p>	<p>Larger groups mobilized to win power by electoral means and campaigned for programmes of relatively wide benefit</p>	<p>[See 1. above]</p>	<p>[Unless these middle-peasant groups at the same time used political power to increasingly exploit bottom groups] [<i>Conceivable counter-argument</i>]</p>
<p>Phase 3 is a further improvement [<i>Unstated conclusion</i>]</p>	<p>The poorest groups have become aware and mobilized</p>	<p>[See 1. above]</p>	
<p>Overall rural local government is moving in the right direction, even if the process is not fast or smooth or pleasant [<i>Unstated conclusion</i>]</p>	<p>The trend noted earlier, from phase 1 to phase 2 to phase 3</p>	<p>The underlying logic that the access to political office and the benefits available through winning elections lead to more power for the numerically important poorer and disadvantaged groups [<i>Unstated assumption</i>]</p>	<p>The poorer groups are ignorant and vulnerable and hence can be manipulated and bought by the nasty gentry and kulaks [<i>Counter argument that is hinted at</i>]</p>

## 7. A MORE EXTENDED ARGUMENT: ‘THE STAR’ ON POPULATION GROWTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Can the method presented above for close analysis of arguments cope with longer texts? Let us look at an editorial from ‘The Star’ of Johannesburg from the mid 1990s. It is almost four times as long as the extracts we analysed earlier, which already proved quite intricate. We need to identify its main conclusion(s), and then place in perspective any sub-arguments, minor conclusions and digressions.

### **The China Syndrome**

*South Africa’s economy is being crippled by overpopulation*

Our population is, almost Chinese style, increasing by 1-million a year – a rate of growth that is entirely unsustainable and which is already defeating measures to uplift South Africa’s black masses.

It is doubtful that *any* country, given our size and resources, could cope in such circumstances. Ironically, it is often the very people who have no jobs and who daily demand State assistance that are producing the most children – children whom they can neither feed adequately nor clothe.

The reasons for the explosive population growth are well known: for a start, the only assurance many rural people have of an income in old age, is children – children who, they hope, will grow up to look after them. There are other factors but one of the most serious is the mindless chauvinistic attitude of unsophisticated males who father children, not because they care about children, but simply to prove their own virility. The mothers and the children are too often abandoned to live off the State.

We have reached a stage where there are fewer and fewer workers having to keep more and more non-workers. It is a recipe for disaster and one that could reduce us to the level of just another African “beggar state” dependent on foreign charity.

The Government is about to issue a position paper regarding population growth. It will then seek public input and follow up with a conference to find



solutions. One hopes the Green Paper, and the conference, will not balk at frank discussion.

There are divisive cultural prejudices involved but unless we curb our birthrate South Africa will not be able to survive within its environmental income. We should note though, how the people of Italy and Ireland – countries with ostensibly deeply rooted official prejudice against birth control – are in fact attaining zero population growth.

As usual, one can start by trying to identify the different bits in the argument. One needs to use a fairly fine-toothed comb in this first step. Here is my attempt. Element [20] was separated out later than the others, when I started to order the elements into asserted causes and effects.

### **[1] The China Syndrome**

*South Africa's economy is being crippled by overpopulation*

[2] Our population is, almost Chinese style, increasing by 1-million a year – [3] a rate of growth that is entirely unsustainable [4] and which is already defeating measures to uplift South Africa's black masses.

[5] It is doubtful that *any* country, given our size and resources, could cope in such circumstances. [6] Ironically, it is often the very people who have no jobs and [20] who daily demand State assistance [6 cont.] that are producing the most children – [7] children whom they can neither feed adequately nor clothe.

[8] The reasons for the explosive population growth are well known: [9] for a start, the only assurance many rural people have of an income in old age, is children – children who, they hope, will grow up to look after them. [10] There are other factors but one of the most serious is the mindless chauvinistic attitude of unsophisticated males who father children, not because they care about children, but simply to prove their own virility. [11] The mothers and the children are too often abandoned to live off the State.

[12] We have reached a stage where there are fewer and fewer workers having to keep more and more non-workers. [13] It is a recipe for disaster and one that could reduce us to the level of just another African “beggar state” dependent on foreign charity.

[14] The Government is about to issue a position paper regarding population growth. It will then seek public input and follow up with a conference to find solutions. [15] One hopes the Green Paper, and the conference, will not balk at frank discussion.

[16] There are divisive cultural prejudices involved but [17] unless we curb our birthrate South Africa will not be able to survive within its environmental income. [18] We should note though, how the people of Italy and Ireland – [19] countries with ostensibly deeply rooted official prejudice against birth control – [18 cont.] are in fact attaining zero population growth.

Second, one can examine the language in each part -- rich with value-laden terms, often tendentious -- but more selectively in this case, given the much longer text. That exercise is left for the reader. Third, we can draw a diagram or figure which shows relations between the different parts. One may have to draw this two or three times to reach what seems a coherent and balanced picture of the argument. The posited cause-effect chains in some cases link six elements, but in Figure 11 I have summarized them in four columns. Italicized elements are those unstated but implied in the editorial. While a table lacks the exact indication of linkages given in a diagram by arrows, the linkages are made sufficiently clear by the location of elements, and a table is far easier to draw.

I judge that the main conclusion is implied by the editorial’s italicized subtitle: ‘*South Africa’s economy is being crippled by over-population*’. The editorial clearly not only laments this but urges a policy response. Certain policy steps seem strongly implied by the editorial’s listing of proposed causes and its strong, emotive, language -- ‘crippled’, ‘mindless’, ‘divisive cultural prejudices’ [belonging to others, never to *Star* editorial writers], and so on. But it is far less explicit here; it adopts, like Minister Chikowore on NGOs, a politic cautiousness on specific measures.

**Figure 11: An informal structure diagram of the ‘China Syndrome’ editorial**

POSITED CAUSES [8: ‘well-known’]	POSITED DATA	POSITED EFFECTS (Earlier stages)	POSITED EFFECTS (Later stages )	POSITED POLICY IMPLICATIONS
<p>[9] ‘the only assurance many rural people have of an income in old age, is children’ [10] Male chauvinism to prove virility [16] (Other) ‘divisive cultural prejudices’</p>	<p>[2] Population growth of 1-million per year  [11] Mothers and children (too) often abandoned [6] Jobless often produce most children; &amp; [7] cannot adequately care for them  [14] Govt. is about to issue a position paper, etc. [18] Italy &amp; Ireland are attaining zero popn. growth [19] despite official prejudices against birth control</p>	<p><i>[21] Impacts on environment- affecting activities</i>  [12] Rising dependency ratio <i>[22] Higher tax rates and less investment]</i>  [20] Demands for State assistance</p>	<p>[17] Environmentally unsustainable effects  [3] Generally unsustainable effects <b>[1] South Africa’s economy is being crippled by over-population]</b> [13] SA can become a beggar state [4] Measures for black uplift are undermined</p>	<p><i>[24] Government must act [Unstated conclusion]</i>  [15] Government must be frank and bold  <i>[23] Something can be done despite cultural prejudices</i></p>

Fourthly, one can clarify and focus this China Syndrome text by use of an RV George table, as in Figure 12. Two stages are required: to show the cause-effect chain (in fact one could use several stages for this if one wanted to trace the proposed cause-effect analysis in more detail); and to show the implied subsidiary policy claim about the desirability and feasibility of action.

**Figure 12: The argumentative structure of ‘The China Syndrome’'s main claims**

<b>I PROPOSE THAT [CLAIM],</b>	<b>GIVEN THAT [DATA]</b>	<b>AND SINCE THE RULE/PRINCIPLE THAT [WARRANT],</b>	<b>UNLESS [REBUTTAL]</b>
i) SA economy will be crippled [and other claimed final effects]	SA population is growing at 1 million p.a. [and the other Data]	The various posited intermediate effects/ linkages connecting data to claim	Government takes a bold lead with a new policy [or - counterargument - unless the problem will solve itself; examples of Italy & Ireland]
ii) Government should act on the underlying causes [and/or the intermediate links]	Claim from part i., <i>and</i> the encouraging examples of Italy and Ireland  [ <i>and</i> tacit normative warrants]	The posited underlying causes [and intermediate linkages]	[ <i>The proposed action would fail tests of feasibility, efficacy, acceptability, etc., and/or of comparison with alternatives, including the do-nothing alternative</i> ]

The Toulmin format's prompt to examine possible counter-arguments is helpful. In this case it leads us to examine the brandished examples of Italy and Ireland, and to ask: but did government act in those cases? Are they not examples of demographic transition occurring in the absence of government policy?

## 8. CONCLUSION

The three main tools I have presented -- Scriven's seven step model for investigating an argument; the Toulmin model for describing structure, in the format provided by George; and the study of praise/criticism language -- are relevant for examining arguments from many types of field. Each however has some policy flavour or affinity: Scriven is a leading theorist of program evaluation; the Toulmin model as adopted by Dunn and other policy studies writers has been relatively influential; and the bestowal of praise and criticism are central in policy language. A study module on policy argumentation, and on policy discourse more broadly, should indeed though cover far more than these three tools.

As mentioned at the outset, methods for analyzing *complex* systems of argumentation (and other discourse) are out of reach for virtually all policy analysis practitioners or students -- even for example the outstanding survey by van Eemeren et al. (1996) and its Amsterdam siblings, the journal 'Discourse and Society' and van Dijk (1997). Within reach, and essential, are methods for analyzing and assessing policy arguments in par-

ticular: both more elementary methods, such as Hambrick's schema, the logical framework, and Dunn's checklist for a policy issue paper (1981: 364-7); and some methods for more complex policy discourses and 'policy frames', such as the work of Frank Fischer (1995) and Emery Roe (1994, 1999). Roe's work on 'policy narratives' and counter-narratives is accessible and helpful: on the dangers of negativity in problem-oriented policy analysis and the strong forces behind simplified policy stories (such as *The Star's* Malthusianism), and on suggestions for how to do better despite those forces, by creating better even if still simplified stories (see e.g. Pain 1996). There are certainly further relevant areas too (see e.g. other papers in Apthorpe & Gasper, eds. 1996). I hope here to have whetted readers' appetites, and to have at least provided some workable introductory tools to help students in their investigation of structures and meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> In English, 'argument' can be 1. a single move from premises to conclusion, or 2. a whole series of moves, or 3. a dispute. 'Argumentation' is a) the activity of arguing, making arguments, or b) a linked set of single arguments. The latter can also be called a 'discourse'. 'Discourse' in linguistics means any stretch of language longer than a sentence. Not all stretches have an argument, e.g. they may be purely descriptive. On other uses of the terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis', see Gasper & Aphorpe (1996).

<sup>2</sup> These last two roles are best indicated through illustrations, for example an exercise in structuring a new argument such as this one: "Using all six elements described in the [Toulmin-Dunn model], diagram a policy argument that results in a normative claim. Begin your argument with the following policy-relevant information: 'In larger municipalities (over 25,000 persons), the greater the number of families below the poverty line, the greater the number of reported criminal offences'. Be sure to include a rebuttal in your argument and pay careful attention to the way you formulate the problem." (Dunn 1994:87).

<sup>3</sup> The study drawn on for this section and the next, Gasper (1991 & 1997), provides illustrations from decentralization discourse of: (a) examining meanings by a dimensions analysis, rather than just listing variants, since many important concepts are vectors not scalars; and (b) examining metaphors and images, and how they can mislead (e.g., 'decentralization' is not just the opposite of centralization, and 'bottom-up' is not just the inverse of 'top-down'). In his attack on NGOs (Section 5 here) Minister Chikowore tends towards corporatist language: 'our people through their party'; a society is discussed using the underlying image of a body; to be ruled of course by its one head.