SOCIAL CLASS AND ACCESS TO GOVERNANCE IN BURKINA FASO

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Abstract

In Burkina Faso, there are many overlapping options for local governance, both formal and informal. There are formal constitutionally defined institutions that theoretically offer outlets for citizens to use when trying to obtain something from their government. However, not all citizens choose these formal channels, and not all citizens obtain optimal results. This is the central focus of this research paper: how do individual differences in class and socioeconomic status influence an individual's cognitive mapping of local governance? In other words, do citizens pursue different types of institutions based on their socioeconomic class in society to satisfy their needs?

The data for this project was collected through a Large-N survey of approximately 1000 respondents. The sites for these interviews spanned from North to South in the regions Centre-Sud, Centre, Plateau Central, Centre-Nord, and Sahel. The independent variable of class and socioeconomic status is operationalized by using measures from Oxford's Multidimensional Poverty Index. For the dependent variable of cognitive mapping of local governance, the survey asks participants questions about governance, such as: who they turn to when they need something hypothetical, who they have experience going to, and evaluation of the help they received.

Keywords: local governance, Burkina Faso, formal institutions, collective action, the poor

Introduction

Formulating a working definition of governance is no easy task. At its most generic level, governance is the act of governing. But what and by whom are open questions whose answers vary substantially from discipline to

discipline and even work to work. As political scientists, we apply Laswell's (1950) broad definition of politics – "who gets what, when, how" to answer the question of what is being governed. In the modern state, people want things from the government. We are interested in exploring how they go about getting these things. This exploration is informed by the lived realities in the communities in which people reside. "To presume the presence of governance without government," Rosenau (1992, 3) writes, "is to conceive of functions that have to be performed in any viable human system irrespective of whether the system has evolved organizations and institutions explicitly charged with performing them." In other words, the "whom" question of governance is often quite complicated. Everywhere, but especially in developing countries with weak state institutions, the "inadequacy of Westphalian models of governance" leads individuals to search for alternative providers of governance (Meagher 2012, 1074). In these regions of fragile formal governments, informal or non-state organizations regularly fill the governance lacuna. These informal organizations are embedded within the local community and can complement/challenge the state by providing security, social services, and resources for community members (1075). Although they are independent of the state, these informal governance providers often carry out functions typically relegated to formal state agencies elsewhere.

Governance environments with formal, state-sanctioned organizations situated alongside informal, non-state entities give individuals a variety of options when trying to address daily needs. But what factors cause an individual to seek out one type of governance provider over the other? Research on the topic consistently points to an individual's socioeconomic status (SES) as a good predictor of their interaction with the state. SES refers to an individual's position in society based on characteristics of occupation, income, and overall prestige (Gordon 1969, 345). Higher SES leads individuals to seek out more formal governmental institutions. Low SES sends citizens in more informal directions. This relationship, though well theorized, has rarely been tested systematically. This paper tests these hypotheses using data collected in Burkina Faso in 2019. This case presents data from a relatively young state impacted by the artificiality of French colonialism and the consequences of neocolonialism (Taylor 2019). Over the last decade, terrorism picked at the already weak institutions of governance (Ariotti and Fridy 2020). These characteristics make the fragile state of Burkina Faso a ripe environment for informal governance providers to thrive (Fund for Peace 2020). Findings suggest that SES influences whether or not citizens pursue a formal or informal governance mechanism in ways predicted by the literature. High SES Burkinabé are more likely to

consult formal governance providers, and low SES Burkinabé are more likely to go informal routes.

Governance for the rich, governance for the poor

Scholarly literature is consistent in its view of class status and access to governance in Africa. Those in a higher socioeconomic class seek out formal governmental institutions to address needs, whereas their lower socioeconomic class counterparts rely on more informal, traditional institutions to address concerns. These informal institutions present themselves in different ways: sometimes as traditional or religious leaders, sometimes as "big men" who have become rich from work in the private or public sector, and sometimes as foreign-backed nongovernmental organizations.

Bratton (2007, 97) theoretically develops this contrast between formal and informal institutions in Africa by identifying formal institutions as those organized in the framework of "political democracy" with elections and legal restraints on officials, whereas informal institutions rely on patron-client relations and close family ties. This difference clarifies two competing styles of governance for citizens. In the formal sense of governance, individuals use the "proper" channels, like going to governmental officials, when they need something. While in contrast, in the informal sense of governance, individuals go to local leaders and those with whom they have close personal ties to satisfy their needs. The literature on SES as a mechanism to drive individuals toward formal or informal governance is trifurcated but all points in the same direction: 1) higher SES citizens have direct access to the government through personal connections and thereby can use the formal channels more effectively, 2) formal institutions create barriers for those of a lower socioeconomic class limiting their access to these channels, and 3) lower SES citizens rely on organization and collective action to mitigate their limited access to formal government channels.

Rich have direct access to government officials

The idea that those of higher socioeconomic status have direct access to formal government institutions has a rich history in the study of African politics that largely predates widespread survey data collection on the continent. Bayart (1993) places this relationship in historical context as he clarifies that those "indigenous elites" were able to gain access to the resources of the state following independence from European dominance.

As a result, this creates a positive feedback loop in which the relationship to the state through direct access of formal channels and resources allow individuals to "get rich and dominate the social scene" (74).

Crook (2003, 82) extends this research showing that not only do wealthier citizens have direct access to government, but this relationship works in the opposite direction as well. Government officials desire to be associated with the "well-connected, urban-based elite groups" so that they can benefit from the financial resources and the possible investment of these individuals. People occupying positions in formal institutions look to high SES individuals for resources, giving those high SES citizens access to direct contact with state representatives. Bratton (2012) emphasizes that individuals using formal channels to make in-person requests to officials see their needs reflected in government policy and have a higher overall perception of governmental responsiveness. He observes that the "most effective method of securing responsiveness" is for citizens to contact government officials directly(524),

In his study of the American electorate, Erikson (Erikson and Erickson 2015) looks at political activism through formal channels and connects it with socioeconomic class. He finds that members of the richest class have greater access to news about politics and engage in politics more often through direct interaction or participation in elections. Therefore, government officials are more aware of their needs and reflect those needs in policies more than the needs of those in the lower classes (24). Bartels (2002) shares this belief that higher SES citizens are able to contact formal institutions of government more readily due to their access to greater political knowledge. This class-biased responsiveness of government officials is linked to class-biased contacting of government officials through formal mechanisms due to greater individual access to political news and information.

Formal institutions are intimidating barriers to the poor

Another prominent theme in the literature stresses that it is not the citizens but rather the formal institutions' design that determines who uses more "proper" channels to contact the government. Olowu (1989) provides the historical basis for this argument by outlining how after independence from European colonialism, many African nations opted for systems of decentralization rather than systems privileging local self-governance. These systems favor types of local government that are tied to a central, national entity rather than the community and potential influence of the

informal rule of traditional chiefs. Within these systems, the ruling, bureaucratic classes create standard procedures, rules, and regulations that make it difficult for poorer and more rural people to seek government assistance (221).

Narayan (2000) enhances Olowu's argument by explaining that the rules and regulations of formal institutions are often designed to make it more difficult for poorer citizens to have direct access to government resources and benefits. In many countries, citizens are required to have "excessive and unreasonable documentation" to claim government services (80). This documentation bars direct access to the government for an entire subset of the population who do not have the proper resources. People of lower SES oftentimes lack the knowledge of the rules and opportunities to gain benefits from government programs and other formal channels, which, in turn, limits these benefits to only those of a higher SES (81-2). Lawless and Fox (2001) add that formal government institutions not only set up barriers to the poor through regulations but also generally favor those with more education, more political knowledge, and higher income. Lacking these attributes makes citizens less likely to participate politically, both in elections and contacting government officials (371).

Collective action is a tool for the poor

The final theme within the literature outlines how lower SES individuals are able to have their needs satisfied by the government. They achieve this through collective action by organizing into various groups and networks to make their voices heard. Schneider (2006) summarizes this strategy by stating that: "organization is the main weapon of the poor, as it allows them to utilize the one resource they have in abundant quantities, their numbers" (353). What poorer citizens lack in socioeconomic resources, they make up for in their sheer volume. Narayan (2000, 101) outlines the characteristics of organizations familiar to low SES citizens: informal groups, networks, and relationships not associated with the state. The most successful civil society institutions are Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and family and kinship networks. Lower SES individuals are heavily reliant on CBOs as they help mobilize labour, develop infrastructure, and manage relationships with other outside groups, including the government itself (111). Affluent citizens, conversely, do not need to take part in these extensive informal organizational methods as they have the personal wealth and resources to have their needs met directly by government.

Robinson (2007, 14) specifies that the mobilisation efforts of civil society organisations help poorer people to engage in public protest and thereby have their voices heard more directly as they take advantage of increased power and resources through collective efforts. Olowu (2003) expands on this research by explaining that citizens use direct voice mechanisms to hold the government accountable for the needs of the lower socioeconomic classes. These direct voice mechanisms include not only CBOs and other civil society institutions but also traditional rulers, like chiefs and other "big men" who serve as the "community voice" for local ethnic and cultural groups (49). Boone (1990) develops the significance of "Big Men" and other traditional leaders in her discussion of clientelism and the formation of a "rentier class." In this discussion, she emphasizes that access to government is not determined by belonging to a particular social class but instead is about having a direct personal connection to leaders of the political system. Clientelism creates people dependent on the state for resources, and even jobs, as this system of government often includes practices of patronage (189-190). This shows yet another informal method that lower SES citizens can take advantage of as they do not need to have direct access to formal institutions, but rather must have a personal connection, whether that be a familial tie or some other relation, to an individual leader.

Hypothesis

As the literature emphasizes via multiple mechanisms, the relationship between class status and access to governance consistently shows a bias in formal governance toward those of higher SES. Informal institutions of governance are the refuge of lower SES citizens. Therefore, the overarching hypothesis that outlines this paper is:

In comparing individuals, those of higher socioeconomic status will seek out more formal governmental institutions to address their needs than those of lower socioeconomic status, who will pursue alternatives.

Methods

The data for this project was collected through a large-N survey of 992 Burkinabé during June of 2019. The sites for these interviews span from North to South with approximately half of the respondents coming from the North (in the regions of Centre-Nord and Sahel) and half of the respondents coming from the South (in the regions Centre-Sud, Centre, and Plateau-

Central). Respondents were selected using a clustered random sampling method allowing for variation in SES, population density, and ethnic make-up so that the sample is representative of Burkinabé in these regions.

The independent variable of SES is operationalized by using an adapted version of Oxford's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). This measurement allows one to detect variance in high-poverty environments that may look more homogeneous measured by a blunter instrument. Our version of the MPI variable takes into account the three major components of poverty as clarified by Alkire and Santos (2010): education, health, and living standard. Each component of the MPI is coded to be a dichotomous dummy variable (a summary of which is provided in Table 1). Then, these variables are weighted and averaged to obtain a value that ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 as the lowest possible SES and 1 as the highest possible SES.

The education section is operationalized by looking at years of schooling. We look at primary and secondary school completion. Respondents who complete primary school are scored a 1 for the primary component, and respondents who complete secondary school are scored a 1 for the secondary component. Those who have not reached these educational milestones are coded as 0.

The health section focuses on nutrition, child loss, and medical fees. All these factors are related to poverty and economic status. For nutrition, respondents who survive on one or fewer meals less than half the days of the week are coded 1, with those who survive on one or fewer meals more than half the days of the week being coded 0. Child loss is measured at the household level to account for the differences in respondents' ages and the resultant likelihood of having a child. If a respondent's household lost a child before the age of 5, they are coded 0, and if they did not, they are coded 1. If respondents express that they worry about medical fees less than half the time, they are coded 1; all other respondents are coded 0.

Lastly, the living standard section has six parts: electricity, clean water, sanitation, household flooring, household cooking, and assets ownership. Each category is made into a dummy variable, then these values are added together and divided by 6 to equal the one-third of the overall MPI variable that represents the living standard. If the household has electricity, the respondent is given a 1 for the electricity section. The ability to access safe drinking water within a 30-minute walk scores the respondents a 1 for the water section. Households that have a toilet or latrine earn respondents a 1 for the sanitation section. For flooring and cooking, 1s are given to respondents

whose floors are finished and who cook with electricity or gas. Finally, if the respondent expresses that he or she personally owns or someone else in their household owns at least two of the following items, the respondent is given a 1 for the assets ownership section: radio, television, bicycle, motorcycle, and car/truck. The breakdown of the percentages of Burkinabé according to their MPI value can be seen in Figure 1.

For the dependent variable of cognitive mapping of local governance, the survey asks participants hypothetical open-ended questions about governance. If you need something, who do you go to? These 12 "need" questions cover three different issue areas: public goods (such as water or roads), private goods (such as jobs or medicine), and law and order (who handles thieves and robbers or other crimes). For the sake of this study, we focus on who the respondents specify that they would go to when answering the 12 "need" questions. The dependent variable is operationalized by creating a series of dummy "go to" variables in which respondents are coded 1 if they provided a response for a particular category at least once over the course of the 12 "need" questions. This means that respondents could have 1s for multiple "go to" variables as they expressed that they went to more than one governance provider. The different categories of responses include friends, traditional leader, village development council (CVD), a deputy in the national assembly, civil servant, gendarme, religious leader, mayor, self, NGO, parents/family, police, court, Koglweogo, other, and no one. These categories are constructed post hoc from open-ended responses. The "go to" variables reflect each of these categories. The percentage of Burkinabé responding that they went to these various governance providers can be seen in Figure 2.

The different "go to" variables are divided into two blunt categories of governance: informal or formal. The informal category is made up of the following governance providers: traditional leaders, Koglweogo, Religious Leaders, and NGOs. The formal category is made up of police, courts, mayor, members of the village development council (CVD), deputy in the national assembly, and civil servants. The "go to" variables of no one, friends, and parents make up another category we label "none." These "none" responses show that the individual did not actually pursue any sort of informal or formal governance and instead chose to merely rely on themselves or close friends and family to satisfy needs. Indecipherable answers are not sorted into any of these three categories. For each respondent, the total number of "go to" variables are added up to account for all the different governance providers a single individual pursued. Then, for each individual, their responses categorized as informal are totaled, and

their responses categorized as formal are totalled, separately to create two different values. Then these different totals for formal and informal categories are each divided by the total number of "go to" responses of that individual so that each individual has two values: one for informal governance and one for formal governance, with both numbers between 0 and 1. These values serve as the dependent variables for our logistic regression models of formal and informal governance.

Findings

After the "go to" variables are separated into their distinct types of governance, we run a preliminary logistic regression test, using the MPI variable as our independent variable and the informal and formal categories of governance variables as our dependent variables, to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between SES, as defined by the MPI variable, and governance preference, informal versus formal. Both the informal and formal models show statistically significant relationships at the p-value of 0.01 (See Table 2). The informal model shows a negative relationship, and the formal model shows a positive relationship. This means that as the SES of an individual increases, the likelihood that this individual will pursue a more informal governance provider decreases, while the likelihood that that individual will pursue a more formal governance provider increases.

Once this overarching relationship between SES and governance is established, we run a logistic regression test separately for each "go to" variable for a total of 15 logistic regression models (see Table 3 and Figure 3). The breakdown into the specific governance providers reveals a more comprehensive explanation of the data. Of the 15 models, 10 achieved statistical significance at the p-value of 0.05 or higher. The governance providers of Koglweogo, CVD, and religious leaders all showed a statistically significant inverse relationship with MPI, meaning that those with a higher SES are less likely to visit these sources for their needs. CVD had the largest coefficient of these negative relationships with a coefficient of -5.7. Alternately, the governance providers of police, courts, deputy, civil servant, NGO, generic, and other each showed a statistically significant positive relationship with the MPI variable, meaning that those with a higher SES are more likely to visit these sources for their needs. The coefficient for the police was highest at 5.1. There are some governance providers that appear neutral when it comes to SES. These include all the responses that

indicate self-reliance (no one, friends, and parents) as well as traditional leaders and the mayor.

If we confine our analysis to only those providers regularly identified by respondents, the picture for the poor in Burkina Faso is a grim one. In order for a provider of governance to be identified in the "go to" variables, it need only be identified once out of twelve opportunities. Despite this low bar, many providers were identified by relatively few respondents. Of those identified by at least half of the respondents, most are identified with the self-reliance answers. Of the remaining providers, mayor and traditional leader are positively correlated with wealth, though statistically insignificant, while police are strongly preferred by high SES respondents. In other words, of the providers in most Burkinabé's cognitive maps of governance, there is little help for the poor.

Conclusion

In looking at the data, the relationship between socioeconomic status and cognitive mapping of governance is undeniable. The logistic regression results reaffirm the hypothesis from the literature: the higher the socioeconomic status of the individual, the more likely that individual will be to pursue a more formal governance provider to address the individual's needs. In the data, individuals of a higher SES are less likely to pursue Koglweogo and religious leaders to address needs. These providers are generally acknowledged to be informal mechanisms of governance as they are not identified in legal documents and often require a personal connection. Additionally, the data reveals that those of a higher SES are more likely to pursue the police, the courts, deputies in the national assembly, and civil servants. All of these providers are regarded as formal governmental entities.

There are exceptions to this generic pattern. The regression results show a statistically significant negative relationship between SES and pursuing a member of the village development council (CVD). The CVD is a formally recognized institution that recruits people from villages and neighborhoods to advocate for their communal interests. However, this outlier in the data can be explained by the fact that village development councils were created in Burkina Faso to decentralise the power of the state specifically so that individuals of a low SES have more direct access to the government via neighbours. These councils mimic informal providers as they are run by individuals within the local communities who respond to the needs of those citizens within their communities.

Another anomaly in this pattern is the results show a statistically significant positive relationship between socioeconomic status and contacting an NGO. NGOs are often thought of as outlets that those of lower socioeconomic status can organize around to petition their needs to the government through an alternative channel. However, the data shows that this mechanism is used more often by those of a higher SES. This discrepancy between the data and the literature may be explained by the fact that NGOs understood by that title are often organized and funded by foreigners and political elites, whereas entities that are not associated with government and community-based are less likely to identify with the NGO label.

The findings of this study assert that an individual's socioeconomic background is a good indicator of how that individual will experience government, whether through a more formal or informal channel. The implications of this are tremendous as they suggest that the formal state is perceived as an organization that meets the needs of its more affluent citizens over its poorer citizens. A common recommendation to correct the disparity between the rich and the poor is to encourage formal institutions of governance to reach out to a more diverse array of the citizenry. This suggestion was the impetus for the CVDs, which seem to be accomplishing their assigned tasks. Another thought is to take informal governance providers more seriously. Informal governance providers are close to the citizens ignored by the formal governance sector and not only provide those citizens an outlet to voice their concerns, but also provide the necessary services to address those concerns.

Figure 1: Multidimensional Poverty Index across the Sample

Percentage of Burkinabe in Sample with Specific MPI Value
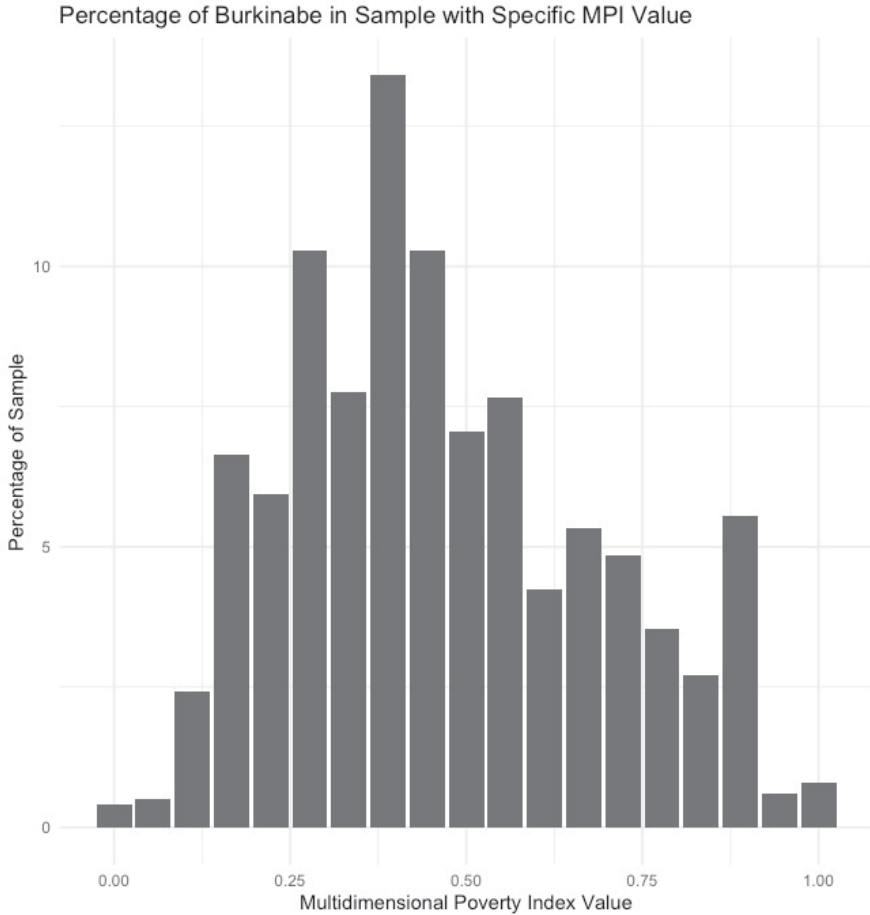
Note: The MPI Variable was comprised of three sections: education, health and living standard.
Each of these was converted into Dummy Variables which were then added together
and divided by three to get a measure from 0 to 1.
1 is the highest possible SES, while 0 is the lowest possible SES.

Figure 2: Percentage of Sample Identifying the Governance Provider at Least Once
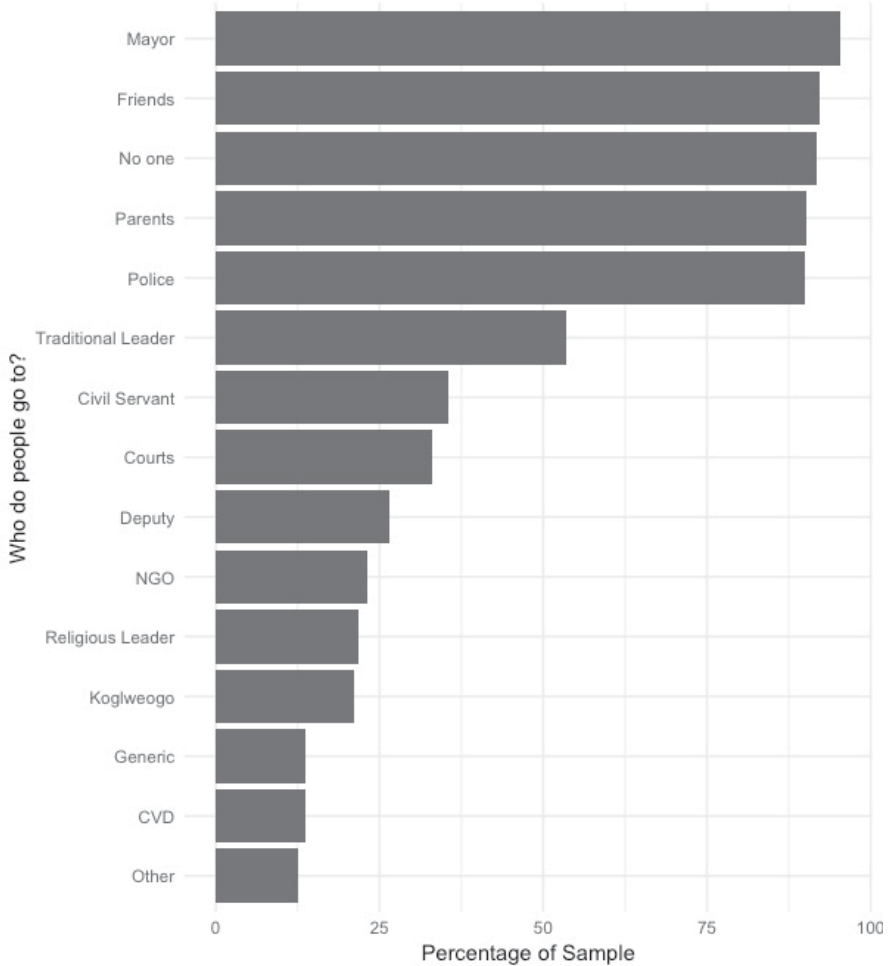
Note: Respondents were included in the percentage of contacting
a governance provider if they specified that they had contacted that provider
at least one time in the series of the 12 governance questions.
This means that respondents could have contributed to
the percentages for multiple governance providers.

Figure 3: Logged Odds of Contacting Various Governance Providers by SES as defined by MPI
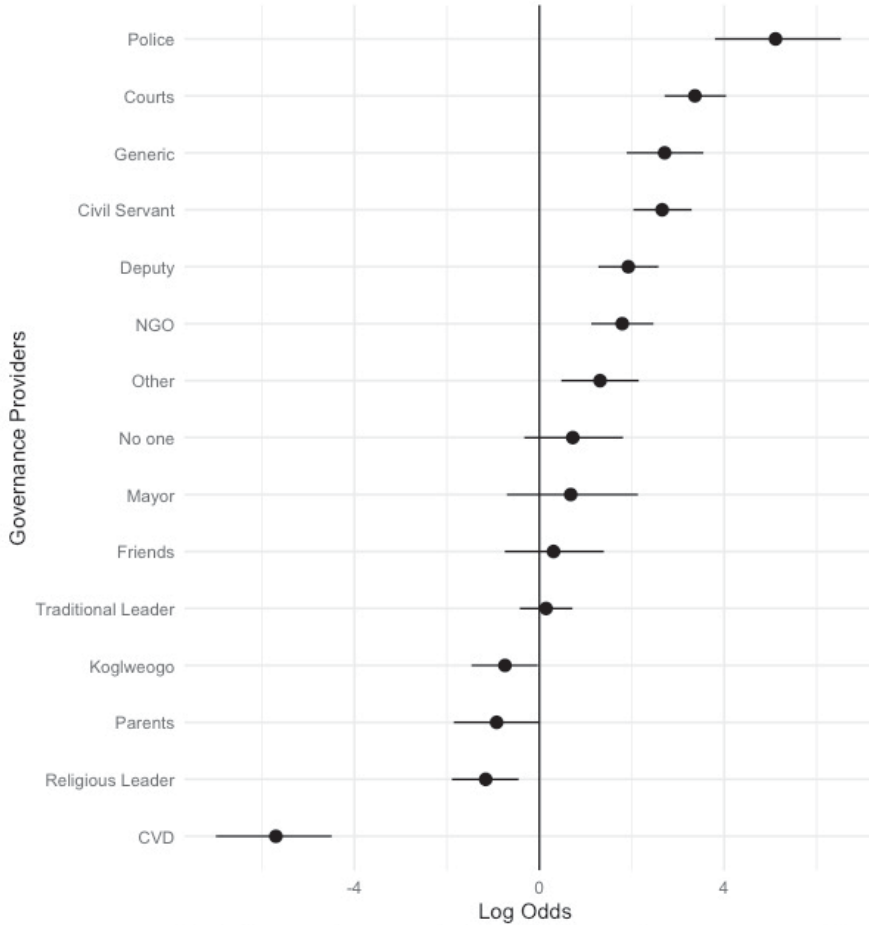
Note: Respondents were marked as contacting a various governance provider if they responded to contacting any provider at least once in the series of 12 governance questions. Positive logged odds show a positive relationship with MPI, while negative logged odds show a negative relationship with MPI. Any point, including the confidence intervals, that crosses the 0 line did not show a statistically significant relationship.

Table 1: The indicators, deprivation thresholds and weights of the MPI and survey results

	Indicator	Survey Respondent Deprived if…	Weight	Deprived
Education	Primary	(s)he has not completed primary school.	1/6	72%
	Secondary	(s)he has not completed secondary school.	1/6	87%
Health	Meals	(s)he consumes one or fewer meals at least four times a week.	1/9	65%
	Child Loss	(s)he has had a child in the household die before turning 5 years old.	1/9	23%
	Medical Fees	(s)he avoids seeking medical treatment at least half the time because of worry about fees.	1/9	16%
Living Standard	Electricity	the household has no electricity.	1/18	65%
	Sanitation	the household's sanitation facility is not improved (according to Millennium Development Goals guidelines), or it is improved but shared with other households.*	1/18	32%
	Drinking Water	the household does not have access to safe drinking water (according to Millennium Development Goals guidelines), or safe drinking water is more than a 30minute walk from home, roundtrip.**	1/18	57%
	Flooring	the household has a dirt, sand, or dung floor.	1/18	71%
	Cooking Fuel	the household cooks with dung, wood, or charcoal.	1/18	62%
	Assets Ownership	the household does not own more than one item on the list: radio, TV, telephone, bike, motorbike, car, or truck.	1/18	15%

Source: This table is adapted from Alkire and Santos (2010).

Table 2: Relationship between Multidimensional Poverty Index and the Formality of One's Governance Landscape

Infromal v. Formal Logit Regression

	Dependent variable:	
	Informal Model	Formal Model
	(1)	(2)
MPI	-0.032**	0.114***
	(0.016)	(0.017)
Constant	0.175***	0.355***
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Observations	992	992
Log Likelihood	757.413	723.462
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-1,510.826	-1,442.923
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 3: Multidimensional Poverty Index and Governance Providers[1]

Logit Regression Test Results

Dependent variable:

	Go to no one	Go to friends	Go to parents	Go to Traditional Leader	Go to police	Go to Courts	Got to Koglweogo	Go to Mayor	Go to CVD	Go to Deputy	Go to Civil Servant	Go to Religious Leader	Go to NGO	Go to Generic	Go to other
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
MPI	0.723	0.306	-0.925*	0.145	5.111***	3.366***	-0.744**	0.679	-5.701***	1.924***	2.657***	-1.161***	1.793***	2.711***	1.313***
	(0.545)	(0.547)	(0.475)	(0.292)	(0.695)	(0.340)	(0.365)	(0.721)	(0.639)	(0.332)	(0.322)	(0.369)	(0.344)	(0.423)	(0.427)
Constant	2.079***	2.320***	2.659***	0.070	0.233	-2.355***	-0.975***	2.740***	0.354	-1.963***	-1.881***	-0.761***	-2.075***	-3.233***	-2.581***
	(0.266)	(0.275)	(0.262)	(0.150)	(0.249)	(0.187)	(0.181)	(0.351)	(0.229)	(0.184)	(0.174)	(0.179)	(0.191)	(0.255)	(0.240)
Observations	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992	992
Log Likelihood	-282.040	-273.047	-317.967	-685.146	-285.814	-574.723	-509.946	-182.699	-340.352	-555.553	-608.726	-513.436	-523.394	-375.245	-371.019
Akaike Inf. Crit.	568.079	550.093	639.934	1,374.292	575.627	1,153.446	1,023.892	369.397	684.705	1,115.106	1,221.453	1,030.873	1,050.788	754.490	746.038

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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[1] In the survey, there were 12 different questions regarding who individuals go to to address needs. Respondents only had to identify a governance provider once in the series of these questions to be counted for that particular governance provider. Therefore, the same respondents may contribute to the data for multiple categories.

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