

## Formal versus traditional institutions: evidence from Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

Citizens in Ghana have a host of options when it comes to local governance provision as a result of the government's decentralization policies. We undertake to explore and understand how Ghanaians navigate the constellation of local institutions, both formal and traditional, to solve an array of common problems. A four-constituency survey was administered during the summer of 2009 and asked respondents about their experiences interacting with four formal institutions and one traditional institution. We find that formal institutions are by and large working effectively and are enhanced by the presence of a traditional institution. We consider the implications of our results with respect to both democratization and decentralization.

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### Introduction

Ghana is one of a number of sub-Saharan African countries that in recent years actively cultivated a policy of government decentralization<sup>1</sup> against the backdrop of uneven continental democratization efforts.<sup>2</sup> The reforms were meant to sow the seeds of democratic governance through cultivation of the capacities and capabilities of local governments. Citizens, the logic goes, would come to assess the performance of these local government institutions through their experiences and hold them accountable for their actions. Decentralization of political authority in Ghana held dramatic implications for how local political institutions, both the newly empowered formal and pre-existing traditional, would interact with one another to provide services sought out by their shared constituents.

As Lentz points out, in Ghana, not unlike many countries in Africa, there are many different registers of power – economic, traditional and modern political – which creates a diverse array of businessmen, politicians, pastors, ex-patriots, and elders who can play the role of “big man” and marshal resources on behalf of concerned citizens.<sup>3</sup> With so many potential paths to goods and services perceived by the population as the “public” responsibility, Ghanaians are faced with multiple choices along an informal and fluid roadmap detailing which choices to make and in which contexts. Does one go to the chief or the police if a neighbour is suspected of stealing your property?

Should one go to the member of parliament (MP) or district assemblyman if there are not enough funds to send a promising child to a good senior secondary school? When the lights in one's neighbourhood go out for an extended period of time, is the first trip to the neighbourhood Electric Company of Ghana office or a co-worker whose brother happens to be an old schoolmate of the minister for youth and sport who has a reputation for getting things done?

In addition to formal constitutionally recognized subnational governance providers, virtually all African societies have at least residual components of their pre-colonial institutions of governance intact alongside the formal "Westphalian state". The relationship between the formal mechanisms of local governance (for example, District Assemblies) and the residuals of pre-colonial governance structures (for example, chiefs) in Ghana is complicated and varied. Just as in national politics, there seems to be a constant imagining and re-imagining of the proper role of traditional authorities at the local level.<sup>4</sup> To a greater or lesser extent, these "traditional leaders", especially in the rural hinterlands, provide citizens with an extra realm where they can make political demands and assign public responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Caliphs, kings, chiefs and elders can, and do, regularly blur the line between collaboration and competition with local representatives of the state and political leaders in the capital.<sup>6</sup> Other local "big men" who have amassed power through their political and/or economic acumen and positioned themselves well in what Schatzberg identifies as the "moral matrix of legitimate governance" coexist alongside these traditional leaders at the local level.<sup>7</sup> These businessmen, party functionaries, religious leaders, and occasional footballer or artisan who became wealthy abroad provide yet another source for citizens to draw on informal social connections outside of constitutional provisions in hopes of having needs often considered the responsibility of governments met.

The goal of this article is to explore and understand how Ghanaians navigate the constellation of local institutions, both formal and traditional, to solve an array of common problems. We employ a four-constituency survey administered during the summer of 2009 in Ghana, which asks respondents about their experiences interacting with four formal institutions and one traditional institution. We then fit a series of models to the data and find that formal institutions are by and large working effectively and where they are not it is at least partially because of a substitutive traditional institution. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our results with respect to both democratization and decentralization.

## **Democracy promotion through decentralization and institutional performance**

A key aspect of the Ghanaian transition to democracy in 1992 was in the inclusion of a constitutionally mandated decentralization programme that required parliament to transfer or devolve both power and resources to subnational units. In this respect, Ghana was one of a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa to adopt decentralization as a means of turning away from centralized governance under authoritarian rule and towards one that would encourage democratic governance from the top to the bottom of society.<sup>8</sup> The following year Local Government Act 462 was passed and shifted the responsibility for the provision of some public functions to local government bodies called District Assemblies. The intention was to increase the capacity for local decision-making and programme implementation by shifting away from the



overburdened and often congested central authorities in Accra.<sup>9</sup> The underlying assumption was that local governments and communities would be empowered to act in their own interests while the central government occupied itself with problems of national concern.<sup>10</sup> Democracy is promoted, it is argued, through decentralization by encouraging participation at the local level through which local leaders become accountable to their constituents through the electoral process.

Some scholars have, however, noted that decentralization plans often bring about more confusion than clarity in terms of the multiple components of political and fiscal organization and authority.<sup>11</sup> In Ghana, these include, for example, the election and selection of subnational officials with and without interference from central authorities as well as guarantees of revenue transfers and independent tax authority.<sup>12</sup> Claims of incompetency in local administration, including low levels of literacy among assembly members and their staffs, conflicts between central and local government officials, and delays in the transfer of funds to localities has led many studies to conclude that the policy of decentralization and the performance of the District Assemblies, in particular, have been deplorable.<sup>13</sup> Democracy promotion through decentralization can only be successful if elected officials and civil servants have the institutional capacity to respond to and deliver policies that benefit their constituents.

In recent years, District Assemblies across Ghana have undertaken a number of development projects on their own initiative, which include “the construction of small dams, the drilling of boreholes, provision of refuse containers, the operation of educational and health facilities and the rehabilitation of dilapidated facilities and equipment”.<sup>14</sup> These policy successes stand as a testament to local veracity in the face of limited capacity to undertake these initiatives. The most glaring reasons for limited institutional capacity at the local level is related to the continuing challenges of decentralization. The complex administrative relationship between the central and local governments is highlighted by the limited human resource capacity or supply of qualified civil servants to fill the myriad of positions required under a broad plan of decentralization.<sup>15</sup>

The experiment of decentralization and the empowerment of local governments are not unique to Ghana or to the African setting. There is considerable variation in both coverage and capacity across Africa in the institutionalization of local governments.<sup>16</sup> Variation and challenges are not unexpected given the continued reliance of local governments on central government actors for revenue generation, in particular. A large comparative study of 30 African countries found that local governments controlled less than 5% of overall public expenditures despite widespread use of decentralizing policies.<sup>17</sup> Despite formal decentralization policies being a continental norm, local governments have acquired few powers, limited technical competencies, and are often dependent on the centralized bureaucracies of the state to function effectively.<sup>18</sup> It should hardly be surprising that local governments with limited capacity to extract revenues have been unable to reliably deliver public services. However, as a recent study suggests, once local governments are able to secure a reliable source of revenue the delivery of public services increases as well.<sup>19</sup>

If the goal of decentralization is democracy promotion then the connection between the performance of local institutions and assessments of that performance by local constituencies becomes critical. Local institutions that are unable to deliver intended or expected services weaken the connection between citizens and their governments. Popular assessments of political responsiveness at the local level are strongly related



to instrumental concerns about whether governments live up to their promises.<sup>20</sup> If citizens cannot trust that their investment in formal democratic institutions pays a reasonable return then democracy is undermined. This may be why African citizens frequently use trust in leaders as a heuristic device in assessing institutional performance.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, a recent analysis by Bratton of 20 African countries investigated citizens' perceptions of responsiveness of local elected leaders, specifically local government councilors.<sup>22</sup> The study observes that citizens generally regard local government councils to be weak institutions capable only of performing limited functions. Dispute resolution, for example, was seen as the province of traditional leaders by more respondents than local administrators. Those few citizens that had direct contact with local councilors were most likely to attribute high levels of responsiveness to them, though it is noted that lobbying through traditional leaders is useful too.

At first blush the results of the aforementioned study suggest that decentralization is paying dividends. When citizens associate local government with a particular function they are more likely to seek out and contact local officials who then perform said function, thus reinforcing democratic governance. What do citizens do in instances where they do not associate local government with a particular function that they need performed? Where do citizens go if they need help but do not think the local government can provide it? Bratton suggests that citizens may alternatively seek out traditional leaders for help with their problems.<sup>23</sup> If citizens are pragmatic and conceive of outcomes instrumentally then we would naturally expect them to seek out alternative pathways to meet their needs when formal channels are inefficient or blocked.<sup>24</sup> In Africa, generally, and in Ghana, specifically, the confusion and missteps wrought by decentralization have created opportunities for pre-colonial or traditional institutions to reassert themselves in the everyday lives of citizens.

### **Traditional institutions in Ghanaian society**

The contemporary Ghanaian state, like many other African states, is a creation of and successor to both an imposed European colonial state as well as a pre-colonial African polity. The roots and development of the state, pre- and post-colonial, are important because they reveal that two forms of power and claims to legitimacy have co-existed and operated in parallel with one another. Traditional authorities, such as "chiefs", whose claims to legitimacy and power are rooted in the sacred and political order that predates the imposition of the colonial state are juxtaposed against the formal institutions of the post-colonial contemporary state whose legitimacy depends on democratic notions of popular consent.<sup>25</sup> The implication then is that traditional authorities, such as chiefs, and the formal institutions created by the contemporary state are drawing upon mutually exclusive bases of legitimacy and therefore are exercising power separately and independently from one another.<sup>26</sup>

The Ghanaian Constitution of the Fourth Republic formally enshrined this arrangement of power and authority exercised in parallel between the formal institutions of the state and the traditional institutions embodied by chiefs in Article 270, which declared that parliament was prohibited from having a role in the recognition of chiefs. In other words, the Ghanaian state was forbidden by the constitution from fully exercising its sovereignty over chiefs with respect to the selection of these traditional authorities because chiefs derived their legitimacy from custom or without regard to the state.<sup>27</sup> The implications for democratization are clear: formal institutions of the state can



hardly claim legitimate authority to wield power and resources on behalf of the citizenry if traditional authorities, such as chiefs, can also make overlapping claims to the use of legitimate authority.

The observation that chiefs may present challenges to the established authority of the state is particularly salient with regard to decentralization. Given that chiefs are locally based traditional institutions that are in a position to contribute to or undermine the state's noted troubled decentralization programme,<sup>28</sup> it is critical to evaluate the effects of chiefs in this context. If citizens perceive that local formal institutions are performing poorly, will this then lead citizens to seek out traditional institutions in the hope of meeting their needs? Can a programme of decentralization succeed if the state's formal institutions are not effective in responding to citizen demand? From this perspective, institutional performance of state-backed entities takes on a central role and will be determinative in the balance between formal and traditional institutions in a society where decentralization efforts are thought to be a crucial step towards democratization.

To assess the effectiveness of formal state institutions as well as the effect of traditional institutions on those institutions, we designed and carried out a survey of Ghanaian attitudes towards both types of institutions using a wide variety of everyday problems and concerns in order to uncover what factors shape perceptions of institutional performance.

### **Survey instrument, data and measurement**

A total of 400 respondents participated in a four-constituency survey that was administered in the summer of 2009. The purpose of the survey was to explore and better understand the relationships between the needs of the citizenry and the available institutional mechanisms for the delivery of public goods.<sup>29</sup> The constituencies surveyed included Odododiodoo, Ayawaso West Wuogon,<sup>30</sup> Bolgatanga and Nabdam.<sup>31</sup> These constituencies represent not a representative sample of Ghanaian constituencies, but extremes in population density, wealth, ethnic heterogeneity and geographic location. The diversity of the constituencies selected allows us to consider to what degree, if any, performance of institutions, both formal and traditional, is shaped by their respective setting. Odododiodoo is a poor, urban district while Ayawaso West Wuogon is a wealthy, urban district, both located in the Accra Metropolitan Area of southern Ghana. Bolgatanga is a smaller, regional capital in Ghana's north, while Nabdam, also in Ghana's north, is both rural and poor. The diversity of the selected constituencies (in terms of urban/rural, rich/poor, and capital/regional) allows for a most different system design – where there are similarities across the four constituencies one can be fairly certain that these similarities are representative of Ghanaian life. The survey instrument begins with a series of basic demographic questions and then asks respondents a series of questions that seek to uncover how citizens navigate the variety of formal and traditional institutions that are available to them to solve a range of common problems and public needs.<sup>32</sup> Summary statistics for all variables are included in Table 1.

The survey identifies a set of five institutions, four formal and one traditional, which operate locally and throughout Ghana. The formal institutions include district assemblyman, member of parliament, judges/magistrates, and police while the traditional institution is the chief. In order to assess how the Ghanaian public navigates between

**Table 1.** Summary statistics.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
District Assembly Performance	349	2.79	1.24	1	5
District Assembly Effectiveness	400	3.44	2.32	0	9
District Assembly Contact	400	0.32	0.47	0	1
Member of Parliament Performance	333	3.05	1.18	1	5
Member of Parliament Effectiveness	400	3.64	2.10	0	7
Member of Parliament Contact	400	0.35	0.48	0	1
Judge/Magistrate Performance	147	3.29	0.97	1	5
Judge/Magistrate Effectiveness	400	0.65	0.84	0	3
Judge/Magistrate Contact	400	0.09	0.28	0	1
Police Performance	351	3.39	1.01	1	5
Police Effectiveness	400	1.36	0.63	0	3
Police Contact	400	0.27	0.44	0	1
Chief Performance	294	3.32	1.09	1	5
Male	400	0.22	0.41	0	1
Education Level	400	3.14	1.97	1	7
Home	400	0.70	0.46	0	1
Age	398	38.27	11.14	18	75
Religion	400	1.65	0.90	1	4
Location	400	2.50	1.12	1	4

formal and traditional institutions to solve problems of daily life, the main question of interest and the dependent variable is perception of formal institutional performance. Respondents were asked to assess how well a given institution is doing its job, with responses ranging from excellent to poor on a five-point scale. For example, “How well do you think your district assemblyman is doing his job?” It is notable that the highest performing institution in terms of overall mean performance is police (3.39) followed by judges/magistrates (3.30), members of parliament (3.05) and district assemblymen (2.79) coming in last. These rankings suggest that formal, popularly elected democratic institutions perform at relatively lower levels compared to their other formal counterparts. The fact that district assemblymen and members of parliament receive the lowest performance evaluations is potentially troubling from a democratization perspective.

In order to more fully understand the determinants of performance evaluations of formal institutions, the impact of traditional institutions must be assessed. Therefore, the performance evaluation of chiefs (3.32) is included as a key explanatory variable of formal institutional performance. If a performance evaluation of the traditional institution chiefs increases the likelihood of a positive evaluation for a given formal institution then we would interpret chiefs to be acting in a complementary or cooperative manner, arguably aiding decentralization efforts. If, however, the performance evaluation of chiefs decreases the likelihood of a positive evaluation of a given formal institution then we interpret those institutions to be competing against one another and undermining decentralization.

Performance evaluations of our four formal institutions will certainly be affected by other factors, such as effectiveness and contact. Our respondents were asked about a series of problems or needs that they or their community may face and who they would seek out for assistance. These included needing a borehole (access to potable water), a school, a new road, help paying school fees, help finding a job, needing tools for a job, being in a dispute over land ownership, or a victim of theft and, finally, if someone is flirting with their spouse. For example, respondents were asked,



“If you need help finding a job, who do you think is the best person to take your concerns to?” and then asked “If the person you mentioned does not get the results you want, what do you do next?” We then created a running tally of the number of times each formal institution was identified as the respondent’s first or second choice to address a given problem. The higher (lower) the running tally the more (less) problems respondents identified with that particular formal institution as being able to help address it. This running tally is meant to capture the all-too-common possibility that a formal institution can develop a reputation as a problem-solver and become a “one-stop-shop” for all types of problems despite the fact that a given issue may be outside of their expertise or ability. We consider this phenomenon to represent formal institutional effectiveness.

For example, District Assemblymen Effectiveness has a mean of 3.44, a maximum of 9 and a mode of 6. This indicates that on average our respondents looked to their district assemblyman to solve three or more of the nine problems listed, on average, and some people listed their district assemblyman as the person they would seek out first or second for all nine problems; the modal number of problems that our respondents would bring to their district assemblyman was six.

Each formal institution is allowed the possibility of being identified as where to go to solve each problem – no matter how farfetched it may seem. Importantly, none of the formal institutions are disadvantaged, particularly the police (mean = 1.36) or judges/magistrates (mean = 0.65), based on their effectiveness score. We expect that as effectiveness increases so will the likelihood of a favourable assessment of that institution’s performance.

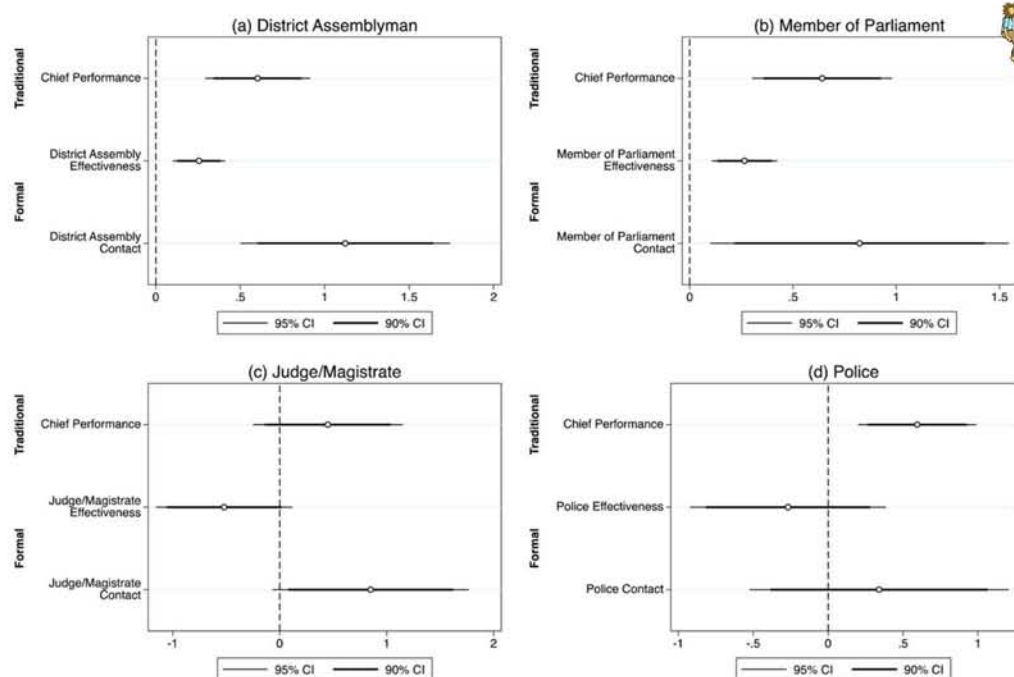
Experience or contact with a formal institution is important because it increases awareness of individual office holders as well as the services that can be provided. Respondents were asked whether they had ever spoken with each of our four formal institutions about a problem and were asked to provide a yes or no response. For example, “Have you ever spoken to your district assemblyman about a problem?” We anticipate that familiarity will increase the likelihood of a favourable performance evaluation for the respective formal institution.

Additional demographic controls include gender, education level, location (one of four areas), from the area or not, religious identification and age. We have no specific expectations for these variables in explaining institutional performance, but have included them in order to fully specify our models and account for other factors that may influence perceptions of each institution under study.

Next we fit four separate models for each formal institution using ordered logistic regression. Given that our dependent variable is ordinal in nature, this modelling approach is most appropriate. We use robust standard errors to account for any possible misspecification in our models. The results are explored in the next section.

## Results

The results are presented in [Figure 1](#) and the full tabular results are available in [Appendix Table A1](#). Each panel in the figure contains a ropeladder plot<sup>33</sup> of the key independent variables and their effects on a given formal institution’s performance as a result of an ordered logistic regression with robust standard errors. Each panel reports two sets of variables: traditional institution (chief performance) and formal institution (effectiveness and contact). Each variable’s regression coefficient is depicted as a circle



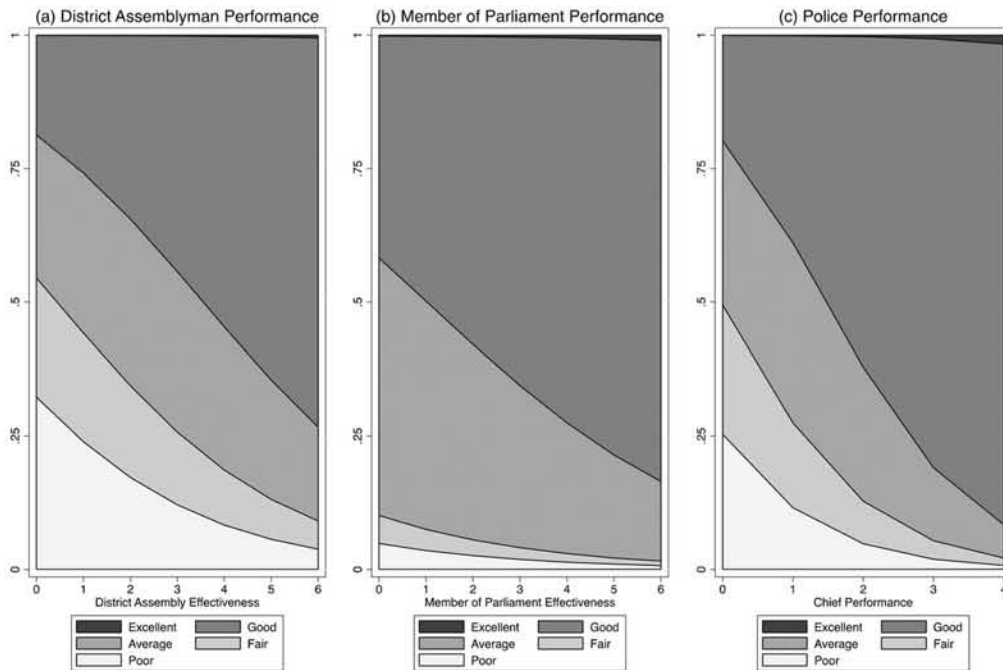
**Figure 1.** Formal institutional performance.

while the thick horizontal line represents a 90% confidence interval and the thin horizontal line represents a 95% confidence interval. Statistical significance and direction is determined by reference to the vertical zero line. Estimates to the left have a negative effect on performance while those on the right have a positive effect. Those variables whose horizontal line or confidence interval does not cross the vertical reference line are statistically significant while those confidence intervals that do cross the vertical line are not statistically significant and indistinguishable from zero.

We begin with [Figure 1\(a\)](#) institutional performance of the district assemblyman. The measure of traditional institution, chief performance, is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, which indicates that as the chief's performance evaluation increases so does the likelihood of the district assemblyman's performance evaluation. We can further interpret this result as being consistent with these two institutions, district assemblyman and chief, as being complementary and perhaps even cooperative. The measures of formal institution, effectiveness and contact, are both positive and statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, which suggests that as effectiveness and contact increase so does the likelihood of a positive performance evaluation. This is an indication that the formal institution of District Assembly is functioning properly and is responsive to its constituencies, which is worth noting, contrary to observations that have been made in the literature.<sup>34</sup>

We can gain a more substantive understanding of the effect that District Assembly effectiveness has on institutional performance by plotting the cumulative predicted probabilities in [Figure 2\(a\)](#). As the District Assembly is seen as more able to solve a number of everyday problems, the assessment of its performance increases. The cumulative probability of the District Assembly receiving a performance rating of "good"<sup>35</sup> begins at approximately 20% and balloons to nearly 75% as respondents come to believe that it can effectively solve their problems. This result indicates that performance is, in large part, guided by instrumental assessments of whether the institution,





**Figure 2.** Cumulative probabilities.

in this case the district assemblyman, has a record of effectively helping respondents confront common problems. As the perception of effectiveness increases, so does the likelihood of positive performance evaluations.

Similarly, the results from Figure 1(b), institutional performance of member of parliament, indicate a properly functioning formal institution. Again, both effectiveness and contact are statistically significant and positive at the 95% level, which indicates that as effectiveness and contact increase so likely will performance ratings. Figure 2 (b) presents cumulative probabilities of performance by members of parliament. The cumulative probability of a “good” rating begins at a staggering >40% and swells to over 80%. Consistent with Lindberg’s findings,<sup>36</sup> our results indicate that members of parliament have developed a fully functioning institution that is able to respond to its constituents and deliver services. The influence of chief performance is positive and statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Once again, as performance evaluations of chiefs increase so too does the likelihood of performance evaluations of members of parliament. As with district assemblyman, members of parliament also appear to be engaging in a collaborative and cooperative relationship with chiefs.

Turning to Figure 1(c), institutional performance of judges and magistrates, none of the key variables of interest are statistically significant at the 95% level. It should be noted that those respondents who had been in contact with a judge or magistrate, 8.5% of the total sample, met the 90% threshold for statistical significance. It does not appear that the traditional institution of the chief is taking away from or adding to the performance of judges or magistrates. Respondents appear not to view judges or magistrates as viable options for the kinds of frequently encountered problems identified in our survey.

Lastly, Figure 1(d) presents the institutional performance of police. Neither the measure of effectiveness nor contact appears to be related to evaluations of the police; however, the performance of chiefs is positive and statistically significant at



the 95% level and an important predictor of how our respondents view the police. Given the positive effect that performance evaluations of chiefs have on the police, it seems clear that a cooperative relationship has developed. When conflicts occur, our respondents appear to seek a pathway towards traditional leaders who may be more attuned to their particular needs<sup>37</sup>; however, our respondents appear to indicate that the performance of chiefs increases the likelihood of positive evaluations of police performance. Substantively, Figure 2(c) provides the cumulative effect of evaluations of chief performance on police performance evaluations. The cumulative probability of a “good” rating for the police starts at approximately 20% and increases to over 90% as the performance rating of chiefs increases. Respondents clearly see the traditional institution of chief as both viable and important, but what is interesting is that the performance of the chief does not take away from popular evaluations of the police. Chiefs are not competing with the police, but are viewed as a compatible option that solves problems and conflicts outside of formal institutional channels.

In assessing the results overall, the biggest surprise is the relationship between the performance of a traditional institution and that of formal institutions. Some have suggested that Africa suffers from an enduring institutional crisis because of the disconnect between traditional institutions rooted in the region’s history and culture and formal institutions transplanted from outside.<sup>38</sup> Our findings suggest that decentralization, a programme of empowering local leaders of both formal and traditional institutions to engage in the hard work of self-governance, is paying dividends. Contrary to expectations,<sup>39</sup> our respondents do not recognize a conflict between formal and traditional in the competition to provide services, consolidate authority and with it legitimacy. What we observe are institutions, both formal and traditional, complementing and cooperating with each other with the consequence of increasing satisfaction and overall performance. If the true roadblock to democratization in Africa has historically been a disconnect between formal and traditional institutions, the policy of decentralization may just be the missing connection.

## Conclusion

Citizens in Ghana have a host of options when it comes to local governance provision as a result of the state’s decentralization policies. They can take small problems and grievances to their neighbour in the District Assembly or bigger issues to their member of parliament who serves as their voice in Accra. Alternatively, they can circumnavigate formalized local and national channels and instead turn to traditional and/or external purveyors of governance. Afro-pessimists have regularly noted that most of these options are sub-optimal at best.<sup>40</sup> One of the enduring themes in the call for greater decentralization is a widely held belief that formal national and traditional institutions have failed the average African.<sup>41</sup>

Our findings are not nearly so pessimistic. In four very different constituencies in Ghana we find that formal (district assembly, member of parliament, judge/magistrate, and police) and traditional (chief) institutions are generally well-regarded. All institutions are viewed somewhere between average and excellent. Lest we interpret these positive evaluations too favourably, it should be noted that these findings could be just another piece of data demonstrating African citizens’ relatively low expectations of their leadership.<sup>42</sup> Were the story to stop here conventional wisdom would find yet more support, but the story does not stop here. Police, and to a lesser extent



judges, are deemed by the respondents in our study as ineffective. How effective people think they are at solving problems and whether or not people have actually contacted them do not have a statistically significant relationship with their performance evaluations. Citizens in particular see chiefs as complementary, who are filling in because they are efficient and effective mechanisms of justice delivery.

For district assemblymen and members of parliament the story is quite different. For each governance provider, the more people think they are effective, the higher they value their performance. The same thing can be said about the relationship between contact and performance. These indicators are signs of effective formal institutions. While chiefs complement district assemblymen and members of parliament, our respondents do not view them as substitutes that undermine formal institutional authority. Perhaps this finding is just another component in the case for Ghanaian democratic exceptionalism. The country which was early on declared a remarkable, though conditional, democratic success<sup>43</sup> is harder and harder to characterize conditionally.<sup>44</sup> Even if this is a case of Ghanaian exceptionalism, the policy of decentralization points to a way that relatively new democracies with heretofore weak formal institutions and a dizzying array of traditional institutions can begin to consolidate.

## Notes

1. Boone, "Decentralization as Political Strategy in West Africa"; Olowu and Wunsch, *Local Governance in Africa*; Ribot, "African Decentralization"; Ribot, "Democratic Decentralization of Natural Resources"; Wunsch, "Decentralization, Local Governance and 'Recentralization' in Africa."
2. Lynch and Crawford, "Democratization in Africa 1990–2010."
3. Lentz, "The Chief, the Mine Captain and the Politician."
4. Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*.
5. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa."
6. Ibid.; Lund, "Twilight Institutions."
7. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, 64.
8. Connerly, Eaton, and Smoke, *Making Decentralization Work*; Crook and Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa*; Grindle, *Going Local*; Ndegwa and Levy, "The Politics of Decentralization in Africa"; Olowu and Wunsch, *Local Governance in Africa*; Wunsch and Olowu, *The Failure of the Centralized State*.
9. Ahwoi, *Local Government and Decentralization in Ghana*; Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana"; Crook, "Four Years of the Ghana District Assemblies in Operation"; Debrah, "Assessing the Quality of Accountability in Ghana's District Assemblies, 1993–2008."
10. Kulipossa, "Decentralization and Democracy in Developing Countries"; Manor, *Democratic Decentralization and Sustainable Livelihoods*.
11. Fritzen and Lim, "Problems and Prospects of Decentralization in Developing Countries."
12. Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana."
13. Ahwoi, *Local Government and Decentralization in Ghana*; Ayee, *Decentralization and Conflict*; Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana"; Debrah, "Assessing the Quality of Accountability in Ghana's District Assemblies, 1993–2008"; Hoffman and Metzroth, "The Political Economy of Decentralization in Ghana."
14. Debrah, "The Politics of Decentralization in Ghana's Fourth Republic," 57.
15. Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana," 21; Debrah, "The Politics of Decentralization in Ghana's Fourth Republic."
16. For example, see Hoffman, "Assessing the Quality of Local Government in South Africa"; Van Donk, *Consolidating Developmental Local Government*, both regarding South Africa; Hussein, "Capacity Building Challenges in Malawi's Local Government Reform Program," for a Malawian case; Fjeldstad, "Taxation, Coercion and Donors," in Tanzania.
17. Ndegwa, "Decentralization in Africa."



18. Olowu and Smoke, "Determinants of Success in African Local Governments."
19. See for instance Joshi and Ayee, "Associated Taxation." It should be noted that when local institutions are reliably financed through transfers from central government authorities as opposed to local revenue extraction then they might very well be less accountable to their constituents for the decisions that they make and the services that they provide. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart*.
20. Shotton and Winter, *Delivering the Goods*.
21. Bratton, "Formal Versus Informal Institutions in Africa."
22. Bratton, "Citizen Perceptions of Local Government Responsiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa."
23. Ibid.
24. Shotton and Winter, *Delivering the Goods*.
25. Ray, "Divided Sovereignty," 184.
26. Ibid., 185.
27. Ibid., 191.
28. For example, see Ahwoi, *Local Government and Decentralization in Ghana*; Ayee, *Decentralization and Conflict*; Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana"; Debrah, "Assessing the Quality of Accountability in Ghana's District Assemblies, 1993–2008"; Hoffman and Metzroth, "The Political Economy of Decentralization in Ghana."
29. In each constituency, 100 surveys were administered. Survey respondents were selected via a multi-tiered randomization approach. First, Ghana Statistical Services provided 10 randomly generated enumeration area maps situated in each constituency. Those maps were used to conduct the 2000 national census and include between 100 and 500 households each. Both a sketch of the block or village enumerated and a written description of its boundaries were provided. At each enumeration area 10 surveys were collected by first systematically randomly selecting 10 households and then in each household randomly selecting a survey respondent. Substitutions of a neighbouring household were only made after two failed attempts to survey the randomly selected survey respondent. The sample was stratified by gender with half of the respondents for each constituency being male and the other half female.
30. Odododiodoo and Ayawaso West are both located in the Accra Metropolitan Area but the similarities largely cease there. Odododiodoo includes the traditional Ga-speaking areas of Jamestown and Ussertown where fishing and petty trade are the primary industries and boxing is the pastime that has sparked many a young man's dream but made only a few rich. Moving from the economically underprivileged and densely populated colonial era buildings near the coast, Odododiodoo constituency spans northward to Agbogbloshie. Referred to by most Ghanaians as "Sodom and Gomorrah" for its high rate of crime and difficult living conditions, Agbogbloshie consists of informal settlements populated predominantly by migrants from the north and built around an impromptu refuse dump for foreign electronic waste. Ayawaso West is a constituency with markedly more affluence than Odododiodoo. The constituency, perhaps the wealthiest in Ghana in terms of per capita income, contains the house of former President John Kufuor and the posh neighbourhoods of Airport North Residential, Dzorwulu and East Legon. Large and well-maintained walled compounds and multi-storied single family residences with luxury vehicles resting in the car park beside the driver and security guard are common sights in the constituency.
31. Situated along the Burkina Faso frontier in the Upper East region, Bolgatanga and Nabdam are about as far away as one can get from the capital city without leaving Ghana. Bolgatanga is the region's capital and, though provincial compared to Accra, has a few radio stations, regular bus service to the south, a thriving market that runs on an every third day schedule, and all the benefits associated with housing not only municipal administrators but regional representatives of all the ministries in Accra. The Bolga Municipal District mixes urban petty traders and public sector workers with agriculturalists and handicraft makers. Though just next door to the regional capital, Nabdam constituency is far more isolated from the trappings of the formal state and luxuries of the international economy. With the exception of a handful of government functionaries and teachers, the constituency is completely rural with millet farming taking up peoples' time in the short growing season and foraging in the forest reserve, illegal gold mining, and travelling south for porter work being the primary sources of revenue during the long dry season. Increasingly, the area has spotty cell phone coverage though motorbikes, electrified houses, piped water and an education beyond the primary level are luxuries enjoyed by a very select few.

32. The full survey questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.
33. This figure was generated using the `coefplot` command in STATA (January 2014).
34. Ahwoi, *Local Government and Decentralization in Ghana*; Ayee, *Decentralization and Conflict*; Ayee, "The Balance Sheet of Decentralization in Ghana"; Debrah, "Assessing the Quality of Accountability in Ghana's District Assemblies, 1993–2008"; Hoffman and Metzroth, "The Political Economy of Decentralization in Ghana."
35. A "good" rating is functionally the highest rating an institution received in our survey as only a handful of respondents rated any institution "excellent."
36. Lindberg, "What Accountability Pressures Do MPs in Africa Face and How Do They Respond?"
37. For example, see Bratton, "Citizen Perceptions of Local Government Responsiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa"; Shotton and Winter, *Delivering the Goods*.
38. Dia, *Africa's Management in the 1990s and Beyond*, 1.
39. See Ray, "Divided Sovereignty."
40. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy"; Englebert and Tull, "Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa"; Mazrui, "The Blood of Experience"; Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*.
41. Connerly, Eaton, and Smoke, *Making Decentralization Work*; Crook and Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa*; Grindle, *Going Local*; Ndegwa and Levy, "The Politics of Decentralization in Africa"; Olowu and Wunsch, *Local Governance in Africa*; Wunsch and Olowu, *The Failure of the Centralized State*.
42. Klaas, "The Curse of Low Expectations"; Bratton and Logan, "Voters But Not Yet Citizens"; VonDoepp and Ellett, "Reworking Strategic Models of Executive-Judicial Relations."
43. Haynes, "Democratic Consolidation in Africa."
44. Whitfield, "Change for a Better Ghana."

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix 1

**Table A1.** Ordered logistic regressions of institutional performance.

	<i>District Assembly</i>	<i>Member of Parliament</i>	<i>Judge/Magistrate</i>	<i>Police</i>
<i>Traditional Institutions</i>				
Chief Performance	0.60 (0.16)***	0.64 (0.17)***	0.45 (0.36)	0.60 (0.20)**
<i>Formal Institutions</i>				
Effectiveness	0.26 (0.08)***	0.27 (0.09)***	−0.52 (0.33)	−0.27 (0.33)
Contact	1.12 (0.32)***	0.82 (0.37)**	0.85 (0.47)*	0.34 (0.44)
<i>Demographics</i>				
Male	−0.44 (0.27)	0.35 (0.31)	−0.25 (0.43)	−0.18 (0.33)
Education Level	0.16 (0.09)*	0.20 (0.10)*	0.38 (0.20)*	−0.05 (0.11)
Home	−0.50 (0.36)	−1.02 (0.55)*	0.82 (0.88)	−0.43 (0.56)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
<i>Religion</i>				
Islam	−0.51 (0.42)	0.02 (0.51)	−0.78 (0.61)	−0.36 (0.44)
Traditional	−0.57 (0.39)	−0.47 (.37)	0.82 (0.58)	−0.46 (0.39)
Other	−0.53 (1.40)	0.53 (1.21)	0.19 (1.24)	−0.54 (0.57)
<i>Location</i>				
Bolgatanga	−1.95 (0.42)***	−1.54 (0.51)***	0.65 (0.53)	0.57 (0.41)***
Odododiodoo	−1.95 (0.55)***	−4.80 (0.70)***	−0.38 (1.09)	−2.70 (1.03)***
Ayawaso West	−1.75 (0.51)***	−3.58 (0.90)***	−0.37 (1.02)	−1.71 (1.32)*
Cut 1	0.23 (0.79)	−2.09 (1.21)	−1.01 (1.73)	−3.18 (1.57)
Cut 2	1.19 (0.82)	−1.15 (1.20)	−0.37 (1.77)	−2.17 (1.59)
Cut 3	2.12 (0.82)	0.98 (1.22)	2.14 (1.92)	−0.49 (1.61)
Cut 4	8.91 (1.37)	7.05 (1.34)	6.25 (2.08)	6.55 (1.55)

\* $p < 0.10$ .

\*\* $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Robust standard errors in parentheses.