Introduction

Governance is the action of governing. It is how power is exercised by those in control. Usually, the state government is the one exercising power over its citizens, however, in some places, the formal institutions of the state inhabit the same universe as many local, more informal organizations. This phenomenon is prevalent in developing countries, especially countries in Africa, where state failure has revealed the “inadequacy of Westphalian models of governance” leading individuals to search for alternative forms of governance (Meagher 2012, 1074). In these regions of fragile, formalized state governments, informal or non-state organizations often fill the governance vacuum. These informal organizations are embedded within the local community and can complement/challenge the state by providing security, social services, and resources for the individuals of the community (1075). Although, they are independent of the state, these more informal governance providers often carry out the functions of formal state entities where there is a clear absence of order.

The difference in governance providers between formal, state-sanctioned organizations and informal, non-state entities allows individuals to have a variety of options when trying to address their needs. But what factors cause an individual to seek out one type of governance provider over the other? Research on the topic has consistently shown that the Socioeconomic Status (SES) of an individual is a fairly good predictor of that individual’s interaction with the state. SES refers to an individual’s position in society based on certain characteristics, namely their occupation, income, and overall prestige (Gordon 1969, 345). According to the literature, which will be reviewed in the following section, a higher SES leads to an individual seeking out
formal governmental institutions. This, in turn, has implications for what policy preferences the
government will respond to.

These distinctions in governance interactions between socioeconomic classes are
especially glaring when it comes to developing countries where state failure has led to the rise of
more informal organizations. The West African nation of Burkina Faso is no exception. With its
independence celebrated only 60 years ago and the overthrow of the Compaoré government in
2014, the state itself is highly unstable (Ariotti and Singh 2015). Terrorism too has contributed to
Burkina Faso’s instability. Between 2016 and 2019, terrorism’s toll went from 80 lives per year
to more than 1800 (“UN Envoy” 2020). This heightened government instability creates a sense
of uncertainty surrounding the true extent of the assistance the formal state institutions can
provide. This causes individuals, specifically those of the lower socioeconomic classes, to seek
more informal governance providers when asking for help as these more informal mechanisms
were in place prior to the new constitutional governments.

Therefore, this paper explores how, in the fragile state of Burkina Faso that has seen a
rise in non-state organizations, individual differences in socioeconomic status can influence an
individual’s cognitive mapping of governance, that is whether they pursue a formal or informal
mechanism of governance.

**Literature Review**

Research has been fairly 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: as “Big Men” who are chiefs or other informal community leaders and through patronage from family members or political alliances. No matter the method, the underlying theme for those in a lower socioeconomic class is a lack of direct contact with formalized government authorities.

Bratton (2007) 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 (97). 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) the higher socioeconomic class has direct access to the government through personal connections and thereby can use the formal channels more effectively, 2) the formal institutions themselves create barriers for those of a lower socioeconomic class limiting their access to these channels, and 3) those of a lower socioeconomic class rely on organization and collective action to mitigate their limited access to formal government channels.

**Direct Access to the State by High SES**

The idea that those of higher socioeconomic status have direct access to formal institutions of government has been well considered. 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 (74). As a result, this created a positive feedback loop in which the relationship to the state through direct access of formal channels and resources allowed individuals to “get rich and dominate the social scene” (87).

Crook (2003) extends this research as he shows that not only do the wealthier citizens have direct access to government, but also electors and government officials have a 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 (82). People occupying positions in formal institutions look to the higher socioeconomic class for resources giving those high socioeconomic status citizens access to a direct line of contact with representatives of the state.

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 directly contact governmental officials (524).

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

**Formal Institutions Limit Access to Government**

Another prominent theme in the literature stresses that it is not the citizens but rather the design of the formal institutions themselves that determines who uses these more “proper” channels to contact government. Olowu (1989) provides the historical basis for this argument by outlining how after independence from European imperialism, 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 tied to 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 help due to the ruling class’ contempt of this lower class (221).

Narayan (1999) 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 make a claim to the government to satisfy their needs (80). This documentation essentially bars direct access to the government to an entire subset of the population who do not have the resources or information. Furthermore, people of lower socioeconomic status 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 socioeconomic class (81-2).
Lawless and Fox (2001) add to this by showing that formal institutions of government not only set up barriers to the poor through regulations, but also generally favor those with more education, more political knowledge, and higher income. The lack of these attributes makes citizens less likely to participate politically, both in elections and in contacting government officials (371).

Lower SES Organize through Informal Channels

The final theme within the literature outlines how those in lower socioeconomic classes 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 the poorer citizens lack in socioeconomic resources, they make up for in their sheer volume of like citizens.

Narayan (1999) goes on to outline the various organizations of the lower socioeconomic class as civil society institutions which are informal groups, networks, and relationships not associated with the state (101). Within these civil society institutions, the most successful are Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and family and kinship networks. People of a lower socioeconomic status are heavily reliant on CBOs as they help to mobilize labor, develop infrastructure, and manage relationships with other outside groups, including the government itself (111). Conversely, affluent citizens do not need to take part in these extensive organizational methods as they have the personal wealth and resources to have their needs met directly by government.
Robinson (2007) agrees with this by specifying that the mobilization efforts of civil society organizations 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 (14). 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 ethnicities and cultural groups (49).

Boone (1990) further 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 the leader of the political system. Clientelism creates people who are dependent on the state for resources, and even jobs, as this system of government oftentimes includes practices of patronage (189-190). This shows yet another informal method that those in the lower socioeconomic class 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 has emphasized, the relationship between class status and access to governance has consistently shown a bias toward those of a higher socioeconomic status. The institutions of formal governance are biased toward addressing their needs. Therefore, the overarching hypothesis that outlines this paper is:
In comparing individuals, those of a higher socioeconomic status will seek out more formal governmental institutions to address their needs than those of a lower socioeconomic status, who will pursue alternatives.

Methods

The data for this project was collected through a Large-N survey of 992 local Burkinabé during June of 2019. The sites for these interviews spanned 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 of Centre-Sud, Centre, and Plateau-Central). The specific sites where respondents were obtained was selected using a clustered random sampling method allowing for variation in development, population density, and ethnic make-up so that population of respondents formed a representative sample of the Burkinabé.

The independent variable of socioeconomic status was operationalized by using an adapted version of Oxford’s Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). I created an MPI variable that took into account the three major components of poverty as clarified by Alkire and Santos (2010): education, health, and living standard. Each component of poverty was coded to be a dichotomous variable. Then, these three separate variables reflecting each component of poverty were added together and divided by 3 to obtain a value that ranged from 0 to 1, with 0 as the lowest possible socioeconomic status and 1 as the highest possible socioeconomic status.

The education section was operationalized by looking at the years of schooling. Any participant who responded that they had completed primary schooling and any additional schooling thereafter (this includes intermediate, secondary, post-secondary, university, and post-graduate) was coded as a “1”. All other respondents, those who never completed primary
schooling or only completed informal schooling, were coded as a “0”. ¹ The health section focused on the medical fees question. If respondents expressed that they never worried about medical fees they were coded as a “1,” all other respondents were coded as a “0”.² Lastly, the living standard section had four parts to it: electricity, sanitation, clean water, and assets ownership. Each category was made into a dummy variable, then these values were added together and divided by 4 to equal the one-third of the overall MPI variable that represented living standard. If the household had electricity, the respondent was given a “1” for the electricity section.³ If the household had a toilet or latrine, the respondent was given a “1” for the sanitation section.⁴ If the household had access to clean water for drinking or bathing less than 15 minutes away, the respondent was given a “1” for the clean water section.⁵ Finally, if the respondent expressed that he or she personally owned or someone else in their household owned a car or truck, the respondent was given a “1” for the assets ownership section.⁶ The breakdown of the percentages of Burkinabe according to their MPI value can be seen in Figure 1.

For the dependent variable of cognitive mapping of local governance, the survey asked participants open-ended questions about governance. The questionnaire asked respondents about

¹ The breakdown of the education variable was as follows: 712 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that they had not completed primary schooling or only received informal schooling and 280 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that they had completed at least primary schooling.
² The breakdown of the health variable was as follows: 632 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that they expressed some variation of worry over medical fees and 360 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that they responded never being worried about medical fees.
³ The breakdown of the electricity component of the living standard variable was as follows: 643 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that there was no electricity in their household and 349 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that there was electricity in their household.
⁴ The breakdown of the sanitation component of the living standard variable was as follows: 315 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that their household did not have a toilet or latrine and 677 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that their household had a toilet or latrine.
⁵ The breakdown of the clean water component of the living standard variable was as follows: 315 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that their household did not have access to clean water less than 15 minutes away and 677 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that their household had access to clean water less than 15 minutes away.
⁶ The breakdown of the assets ownership component of the living standard variable was as follows: 864 respondents were coded as a “0” meaning that they or someone in their household did not personally own a car or truck and 128 respondents were coded as a “1” meaning that they personally owned or someone in their household owned a car or truck.
their personal experience pursuing the help of various governance providers, starting with whether or not they sought out government entities, who they went to, and finally asking for their evaluation of the performance of these providers in the abstract and in the practical. The survey contained 12 of these “need” questions covering 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, I focused on who the respondents specified that they went to when answering the 12 “need” questions. The dependent variable was operationalized by creating a series of dummy “go to” variables in which respondents were coded as a “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 available as options were friends, traditional leader, village development council (CVD), deputy in the national assembly, civil servant, gendarme, religious leader, mayor, self, NGO, parents/family, police, court, Koglweogo, other, or no one. The “go to” variables reflected each of these categories. The percentage of Burkinabe responding that they went to these various governance providers can be seen in Figure 2.

Initially, I divided the different “go to” variables into two different categories of governance: informal or formal. The informal category was made up of the following governance providers: traditional leaders, Koglweogo, Religious Leaders, and NGOs. While the formal category was made up of the following governance providers: police, courts, mayor, member of the village development council (CVD), deputy in the national assembly, and civil servant. The “go to” variables of no one, friends, and parents made up another category known as none-state entities as these governance providers show that the individual did not actually
pursue any sort of state governance mechanism, informal or formal, as they chose to merely rely on themselves or close friends and family. Additionally, generic and other were not sorted into any of these three categories. For each respondent, the total number of “go to” variables were added up to account for all the different governance providers a single individual pursued. Then, those responses categorized as non-state were totaled, those responses categorized as formal were totaled, and those responses categorized as informal were totaled. Then the formal and informal categories were divided by the total number of “go to” responses of each individual so that each individual had two values: one for informal governance and one for formal governance, with both numbers between 0 and 1. These values served as the dependent variables for my logistic regression models of formal and informal governance.

Findings

After the “go to” variables were separated into their distinct types of governance, I ran a preliminary logistic regression test, using the MPI variable as my independent variable and the informal and formal categories of governance variables as my dependent variables, to see if there was a statistically significant relationship between SES, as defined by the MPI variable, and governance style, informal vs. formal. Both the informal and formal models showed statistically significant relationships at the p-value of 0.01 (See Table 1 and Figure 3). The informal model showed a negative relationship and the formal model showed a positive relationship. This means that as the SES of an individual increases, the likelihood that that 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 was established, I ran a logistic regression test separately for each “go to” variable for a total of 15 logistic regression models (See Table 2 and Figure 4). The breakdown into the specific governance providers revealed a more comprehensive explanation of the data. Of the 15 models, 10 achieved statistical significance at the p-value of 0.05 or higher with an 11th model (traditional leader) at the p-value of 0.1. The governance providers of traditional leaders, Koglweogo, CVD, and religious leaders all showed a statistically significant inverse relationship with the MPI variable, meaning that those with a higher SES were less likely to visit these sources for their needs. CVD had the largest coefficient of these negative relationships with a coefficient of -2.953.

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 were more likely to visit these sources for their needs. The coefficient for the police was highest at 4.436. This coefficient was well larger than the other models because even though the data showed people of all socioeconomic backgrounds going to the police for help, of the 99 respondents who never went to the police, the majority were of an extremely low socioeconomic status, including 51 respondents who received a 0 for the MPI variable.

**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 socioeconomic class were less likely to pursue traditional leaders, Koglweogo, and religious leaders to address their needs. These governance providers are generally acknowledged to be more informal mechanisms of governance as they often have a personal connection to the common people who make up the community and are in a lower socioeconomic class. Additionally, the data revealed that those of a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to pursue the police, the courts, deputies in the national assembly, and civil servants. All of these providers are regarded as more formal governmental entities.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this generic pattern. The logistic regression results show that there is a statistically significant negative relationship, at the p-value of 0.01, between socioeconomic status and pursuing a member of the village development council (CVD) as the coefficient is -2.953. The CVD is generally regarded as a more formal method of governance as it is an entity of the state. However, this outlier in the data can be explained by the fact that village development councils were created in Burkina Faso as a means of decentralizing the power of the state so that individuals could have a more direct access to the government. Therefore, these councils are more informal 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, at the p-value of 0.01, between socioeconomic status and contacting an NGO. According to the literature, NGOs are outlets that those of a lower socioeconomic status can organize around so they can 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 socioeconomic status. This discrepancy between the data and the literature can be explained by the fact that NGOs are commonly organized and funded by political elites and therefore, these
organizations are utilized by those of a higher socioeconomic status to pursue their needs as opposed to their lower socioeconomic status counterparts.

Although the literature suggests that the relationship between socioeconomic status and cognitive mapping of governance, that is pursuing a formal vs. informal governance provider, can be explained by three different mechanisms, the results of this study fail to address these distinctions. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a decisive conclusion on how exactly the cognitive mapping of individuals lead them to a formal or informal governance provider, it is evident that those of different socioeconomic classes interact differently with the state and achieve their ultimate goals for governance through varying means.

The findings of this study assert that the socioeconomic background of an individual is a good indicator of the way in which that individual will experience government, whether through a more formal or informal channel. The implications of this are tremendous as they suggest that despite its best efforts, the state, unknowingly, has a tendency to respond to the needs of its more affluent citizens over its poorer citizens as those are the needs they are exposed to through direct contact. This may partially be the fault of the state in failing to directly interact with those in the lower socioeconomic classes; however, when given the choice, individuals of those lower classes pursue help from the informal governance providers, while their wealthier counterparts utilize state-controlled, formalized mechanisms.

This phenomenon is not unique to Burkina Faso and the region of West Africa. Even the most established and industrialized nations show a class bias when it comes to interactions with government; the higher socioeconomic class consistently pursues more formal methods of governance compared to the lower socioeconomic class. This relationship introduces questions about governance, especially for more democratic societies. It challenges the assumption of
equality and fair representation by revealing a clear prejudice in what type of citizen has access to the formal institutions of the state. This prejudice can only be mitigated by the state actively making efforts to be inclusive and provide a more direct line of contact with its less affluent citizens, so that they feel comfortable approaching these more formal channels and feel as though their needs will be sufficiently met regardless of their socioeconomic status.

It is in the absence of direct contact with the state that individuals pursue alternative means to address their concerns. Until those of a lower socioeconomic status view the formal state entities as viable means of addressing their personal needs, informal governance providers will continue to carry out the functions of the state for these individuals. For this reason, the state should incorporate these informal agencies into the governance environment as they provide important administrative services to the people who the formal institutions of the state struggle to reach the most. The informal channels of governance are not a challenge to the authority of the state, but rather are a complement to that authority. Additionally, this has implications for foreign aid. When foreign governments or other aid agencies, like NGOs, are offering financial support to struggling state governments, they should consider that the state government itself might be inefficient in aiding everyone in the community. It could be counterproductive to intervene through the formal channels of the state as the formal channels do not help everyone. If the aid agencies or foreign powers truly want to impact the people of a certain state, they need to understand the value of the informal channels of governance. These channels are not an obstacle to the state in preforming its functions of providing security, social services, and resources for its citizens. Instead, informal governance providers help bring more people, oftentimes those neglected by the state, into the scope of the state’s power and support.
References


FIGURE 1: Multidimensional Poverty Index across the Sample

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

Who do people go to?

- Mayor
- Friends
- No one
- Parents
- Police
- Traditional Leader
- Civil Servant
- Courts
- Deputy
- NGO
- Religious Leader
- Kogliweogo
- Generic
- CVD
- Other

Percentage of Sample

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 either a Formal or an Informal Governance Provider by SES as defined by MPI

Note: The Informal Model was comprised of the governance providers of Traditional Leaders, Kogleweogo, Religious Leaders, and NGOs. The Formal Model was comprised of the governance providers Police, Courts, Mayor, CVD, Deputy in National Assembly, and Civil Servants. The informal model’s logistic coefficient is negative showing a negative relationship between MPI and informal governance, whereas the formal model’s logistic coefficient is positive showing a positive relationship between MPI and Formal governance.
FIGURE 4: 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: Relationship between Multidimensional Poverty Index and the Formality of One’s Governance Landscape

**Informal v. Formal Logit Regression**

<table>
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<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>Informal Model</th>
<th>Formal Model</th>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPIindex</td>
<td>-0.049***</td>
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<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.381***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>992</td>
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<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
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<td>719.083</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akaike Inf. Crit.</td>
<td>-1,524.321</td>
<td>-1,434.165</td>
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*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
TABLE 2: Multidimensional Poverty Index and Governance Providers

Logit Regression Tests Results

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>go to no one</th>
<th>go to friends</th>
<th>go to parents</th>
<th>go to traditional leader</th>
<th>go to police</th>
<th>go to courts</th>
<th>go to koglweogo</th>
<th>go to mayor</th>
<th>go to cvd</th>
<th>go to deputy</th>
<th>go to civil servant</th>
<th>go to civil</th>
<th>go to religious</th>
<th>go to ngo</th>
<th>go to generic</th>
<th>go to other</th>
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<td>4.436***</td>
<td>2.213***</td>
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<td>-2.953***</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.400)</td>
<td>(0.346)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
<td>(0.614)</td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
<td>(0.267)</td>
<td>(0.517)</td>
<td>(0.425)</td>
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<td>(0.224)</td>
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<tr>
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Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

7 In the survey, there were 12 different questions regarding who individuals went 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.