

# Elected vs. Traditional Leaders and Local Public Goods Provision in a Weak State

Kate Baldwin\*

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## **Abstract**

What types of leaders can solve the collective action problem involved in providing local public goods in bureaucratically weak states? Drawing on data from Zambia, this paper analyzes the effects of both elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and hereditary chiefs in organizing local contributions to public goods. Elected leaders are typically thought to have greater incentives than unelected leaders to provide local public goods. However, by examining the effect of both MP and chief deaths on the organization of local public goods within communities, I find little support for this claim. In contrast, deaths of chiefs cause significant reductions in locally funded public goods, but deaths of MPs do not, and the absence of the latter effect cannot be explained by the strength of local party institutions. The results indicate a need to reassess the role traditional chiefs play in local governance.

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\*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Yale University. Mailing address: 115 Prospect Street, P.O. Box 208301, New Haven, CT 06520. Telephone: 203-432-1736. Fax: 203-432-6196.  
E-mail: [katharine.baldwin@yale.edu](mailto:katharine.baldwin@yale.edu)

Local communities often organize their own public goods in developing countries with weak states. In the absence of central government financing, schools are built through community fundraisers and roads are cleared through voluntary labor from local households; a wide variety of infrastructure projects are funded through these types of informal taxes (Ostrom 1990; Olken and Singhal 2011). Although scholars have paid considerable attention to the characteristics of communities that better allow them to overcome the collective action problem involved in organizing these projects, much less attention has been paid to the role of leaders in facilitating local public goods and the types of leaders best positioned to do so.

The dominant perspective on political accountability suggests that elected leaders should be more effective than unelected leaders in organizing contributions to local public goods. Elected representatives have electoral incentives to work at facilitating local public goods if these are valued by citizens (Buono de Mesquita et al. 2003; Lake and Baum 2001). In addition, they may be more effective in organizing community members to contribute to projects because they can draw on an electoral legitimacy (Dal Bo, Foster and Putterman 2010; Grossman and Baldassarri 2012). In contrast, unelected leaders are thought to prioritize private goods and to therefore put little effort into projects that benefit their broader communities.

However, some unelected leaders may have incentives to provide local public goods. This paper focuses specifically on the incentives of traditional chiefs, a broad group of leaders who have power by virtue of their association with the customary mode of governing their community. Traditional leaders coexist with elected leaders in many weak states (Logan 2009).

The mode of selecting traditional chiefs varies from place to place, but they are not as a rule regularly elected, and they frequently rule for life. In part for these reasons, social scientists have generally been skeptical of their ability to play constructive roles in governance and development (Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson 2014; Mamdani 1996; Ntsebeza 2005). Yet, empirically, there have been few assessments of their effectiveness in organizing local public goods. Theoretically, once we extend our analytic lens to consider non-electoral mechanisms of accountability, there are reasons to think traditional leaders might have positive effects on governance and collective action in particular.

This paper draws on evidence from Zambia to analyze the effects of elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and unelected traditional chiefs on the production of local public goods through informal taxes. This is a setting where neither chiefs nor MPs are explicitly tasked with organizing informal taxes and community

contributions to local public goods, but where qualitative evidence suggest both sets of leaders *try* to do so. To identify the effects of MPs and chiefs on public goods provision, the analysis compares the effects of vacancies in the position of chiefs and MPs following the death of the previous office holder. During the time period under study, both types of leaders died in office at high rates, creating leadership vacancies that are exogenous to other political and economic variables.

Drawing on a data set measuring the contributions of 16,000 rural households to local public goods, the paper shows that elected MPs are no more effective than unelected chiefs in organizing local public goods. In fact, deaths of chiefs caused significant reductions in the provision of locally funded public goods, but deaths of MPs did not. This finding overturns prevailing assumptions about the benefits of elected versus traditional leaders, encouraging a reassessment of the role of traditional leaders in local governance.

## **Local Leaders and Informal Taxes in Weak States**

In developing countries with weak bureaucracies, many local public goods are funded in part through community contributions collected outside the formal tax system. As a result of the state's poor revenue stream, many important public goods – including schools, roads, bridges, water and sanitation projects – are not entirely funded by the state. Instead, community members contribute resources directly to local leaders who informally take on the role of organizing the project. Olken and Singhal refer to systems of local public goods coordinated by local leaders but enforced through informal norms and institutions rather than the formal legal system as “informal taxes” (Olken and Singhal 2011)). Ostrom uses the term “co-production” to refer to the provision of projects in part through contributions from the state and in part from community contributions (Ostrom 1996). Informal systems of funding and accessing infrastructure and social services are widespread, especially in rural areas of developing countries (MacLean 2010).

The provision of local public goods through decentralized voluntary contributions is potentially subject to collective action problems. Community members may prefer to freeride on the efforts of others (Olson 1965). They may also be willing to contribute only insofar as they believe other people will do so, creating coordination problems (Fischbacher, Gächter and Fehr 2001). Social scientists have comprehensively studied how the characteristics of communities affect their likelihood of successfully providing decentral-

ized public goods (Ostrom 1990; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Habyarimana et al. 2007). However, although scholars have long acknowledged the critical role of leaders in overcoming collective action problems (King, Johnson and Van Vugt 2009), there has been limited scholarship on the types of leaders best positioned to organize locally financed public goods.<sup>1</sup>

The dominant theoretical lens in political science suggests elected leaders should be more effective than unelected leaders in organizing local contributions to public goods. Elections are supposed to provide a mechanism that ensures politicians represent the interests of the public, rather than their own private interests. Elected leaders have incentives to exert effort to facilitate public goods that benefit large numbers of the electorate that unelected leaders do not have (Barro 1973; Ferejohn 1986). At the national level, democracies do invest more in centrally funded public goods (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Stasavage 2005; Lake and Baum 2001).

In addition, elected leaders may be more effective than unelected leaders in organizing locally funded public goods due to the legitimacy conferred on them by virtue of being elected. Lab experiments demonstrate that people are more likely to comply with rules decided in a democratic fashion (Dal Bo, Foster and Putterman 2010), and that elected monitors are more effective than randomly selected monitors in encouraging contributions in public goods games (Grossman and Baldassarri 2012). These results suggest elected leaders have advantages over unelected leaders in mobilizing local collective action.

Yet, elected leaders plausibly face some challenges when it comes to organizing collective action. Specifically, they often have short time horizons, as they may not be in office after the next election, even if they exert effort to facilitate local public goods.<sup>2</sup> Local collective action can best be accomplished through the construction of local institutions that change the incentive structures of citizens. Elected leaders may not be willing to invest time and resources into building local institutions to facilitate the provision of public goods the full benefits of which will only be realized over the medium to long term (Dionne 2011).

However, elected leaders are not the only leaders who can play a role in facilitating public goods. In many developing countries, especially in rural areas, they coexist with traditional leaders (Logan 2009). The term traditional leader refers to a broad group of leaders who have power by virtue of their association with

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<sup>1</sup>For important exceptions, see Grossman and Baldassarri 2012; Turley et al. 2015.

<sup>2</sup>This is particularly the case in the developing world, where there is often an incumbency disadvantage.

the customary mode of governing a community.<sup>3</sup> Although their precise mode of selection varies in different places, in general, they are not regularly elected and rule for life.

What does this imply for chiefs' incentives to organize local public goods? They do not have electoral incentives to invest in local public goods, and they cannot draw on electoral legitimacy to encourage community compliance with their instructions. In part for these reasons, social scientists have generally been skeptical of their ability to play constructive roles in governance and development (Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson 2014; Mamdani 1996; Ntsebeza 2005). Traditional chiefs have been thought to prioritize private benefits for themselves above the needs of their communities.

However, traditional leaders may have non-electoral incentives for organizing local public goods. Historically, most local chiefs have lived full-time in the communities they lead and derived a large portion of their income from local sources (Baldwin 2016). As a result, many chiefs' economic and social well-being is closely tied to the well-being of their communities as a whole. In cases where traditional leaders remain economically and socially embedded in their communities, they may have incentives to bear costs associated with facilitating local public goods that benefit the broader community. Furthermore, because they rule for life, traditional leaders have two advantages over elected politicians. First, they have longer time horizons, and may therefore be more willing than elected leaders to invest in local organizational capacity whose up-front costs will only be recovered over time. Second, they accumulate more on-the-job experience in organizing their communities.

Thus, in contexts in which traditional leaders are economically and socially embedded in their communities, they are likely to be effective in mobilizing local contributions to public goods. Their social and economic connections to their communities have the potential to compensate for the absence of electoral incentives to organize local public goods. Under these circumstances, they may even be more effective than elected politicians, whose shorter tenure in office prevents investment in the local organizational capacity necessary to accomplish collective action.

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<sup>3</sup>I use the term *associated* with custom to avoid suggesting they are appointed or govern according to time-unchanging pre-colonial customs. For a similar definition, see Holzinger, Kern and Kromrey 2016.

## Leaders and Public Goods in Rural Zambia

I study the effects of elected representatives and unelected chiefs on the provision of local public goods in rural Zambia. Zambia is an example of a democratic but bureaucratically weak state. The country has held five national elections since the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1991, and – having achieved the two turnover rule – would be considered by many to be on the way to democratic consolidation (Huntington 1991). But this democratic progress has not been matched by increases in bureaucratic efficiency.

Revenue collection is a particular problem for the Zambian government. Individuals outside the formal economic sector pay little formal tax (Von Soest 2007). In rural Zambia in particular, the state bureaucracy is all but absent. Post offices, police posts, and other bureaucratic institutions are few and far between.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the state's weak tax base and low bureaucratic capacity, many local public goods are funded in large part by community contributions. Olken and Singhal calculate that 23 percent of rural Zambian households have contributed labor to community projects in the past five years, 7 percent have made informal cash payments during the same time period, and 3 percent of households have made both types of payment (Olken and Singhal 2011). Rural citizens also frequently make other types of contributions to community projects, such as sitting on project monitoring committees or even providing land for projects. During the time period being studied, there were particular incentives to mobilize informal taxes, as there were several donor-initiated social funds that provided financing for local public goods contingent on community contributions.<sup>5</sup>

I consider the role of two sets of leaders in facilitating co-produced local public goods, MPs and chiefs. MPs are citizens' most important elected representatives.<sup>6</sup> During the period studied, Zambia had 150 MPs elected from single member constituencies. Parliamentary elections are held every five years and there are no term limits. MPs serve as full-time representatives and they are well-compensated for their work; in

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<sup>4</sup>According to the nationally representative sample included in the 2009 Afrobarometer survey, just 5 percent of rural residents live in communities (psus) with post offices and just 12 percent live in communities with police stations.

<sup>5</sup>The EU supported a Micro-Projects Unit (MPU) during this time period. The World Bank funded a series of three social funds, SRP I (1991-1995), SRP II (1996-2000) and ZAMSIF (2001-2010).

<sup>6</sup>Zambians also elect ward councilors to represent them in district-level local governments, but ward councilors are not full-time representatives; they are expected to hold full-time jobs in addition to their elected position. They represent communities that are considerably smaller than either constituencies or chiefdoms. Anecdotally, they are less important than MPs in organizing local public goods.

2007, backbenchers were paid the equivalent of 25,000 US dollars. In rural areas, they represent 58,000 citizens on average.

Zambian MPs' primary constitutional duty is to reflect the views of their constituents in the legislature, helping to pass laws that reflect their concerns. However, in practice, their primary task is viewed as securing targeted goods (Posner 2005), especially the provision of local infrastructure and other public goods in their constituencies (Barkan et al. 2010).<sup>7</sup> For example, since 1995, each constituency has had a constituency development fund (CDF) to provide projects in the areas of education, health, water, agriculture and transport. The MP makes decisions about how these funds are spent, in theory in consultation with a structure of constituency development committees and ward development committees below them.

Yet, MPs often have weak connections to their local community for a number of reasons. First, there is very high turnover of MPs in Zambia; one year following the 2006 parliamentary election, the average rural MP had been in power for only two years. Second, MPs in Zambia are not required to reside in the constituency they represent, and many of them visit their constituencies infrequently. Only one in five rural MPs listed a local address in the parliamentary handbook in 2007.

In addition to elected MPs, rural Zambians are represented by hereditary chiefs who rule for life. Rural Zambia is divided into 286 geographically defined chiefdoms, encompassing an average of 19,000 people across numerous villages. Chiefs are selected from among the eligible members of the local ruling family upon the death of the previous chief, and they govern their chiefdoms with the assistance of sub-chiefs and headmen. Traditional chiefs have formal recognition from the Zambian government, but they have historically received very small allowances from the state. For example, in 2007, they received less than \$100 US dollars monthly from the government to support all of their activities.<sup>8</sup> As a result, most chiefs are dependent on subsistence farming, local enterprises (shops or mills), and gifts from their subjects for their material well-being. The vast majority of chiefs live full-time in their chiefdoms.

Zambian chiefs have only a few legally recognized powers, related to land administration, maintaining village registrars and prevention of riots/"unrest".<sup>9</sup> The main component of their day-to-day work is not

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<sup>7</sup>For evidence on the importance of constituency service elsewhere in Africa, see Lindberg and Morrison 2008, and Lindberg 2010.

<sup>8</sup>This has recently changed, with the value of the the allowances chiefs are paid dramatically increasing between 2011 and the present.

<sup>9</sup>The Lands Act, Laws of Zambia, CAP 184 (1995); The Registration and Development of Villages Act,

officially recognized by the state. For example, chiefs have unofficial courts in which they adjudicate cases. Chiefs play no role in the collection of formal taxes (and they have not since the colonial period), nor are they legally mandated to collect informal taxes to fund local public goods provision.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of chiefs versus rural MPs in Zambia, drawing on data on the communities they represent, their demographics and their job attributes. There are three areas that are noteworthy for smaller differences than might plausibly be expected. First, neither elected MPs nor traditional chiefs are legally mandated to collect informal taxes to fund local public goods provision; as a result, to the extent that one set of leaders is more important in playing this function than the other, it is not because of their official job description. Second, although chiefs represent smaller areas than MPs, both in terms of population and geographic area, the sizes of the communities are not qualitatively different in that both are multi-village entities in which leaders cannot have personal relationships with all community members. Third, chiefs are not significantly less likely to be female than rural MPs in Zambia; both chiefs and MPs are overwhelmingly male. However, there are three additional dimensions on which chiefs and MPs differ dramatically: their technical ability, their political incentives and the strength of their social and economic connections to the communities they lead.

The two sets of leaders differ strongly in characteristics related to technical abilities, but without either set of leaders having an obvious advantage over the other. MPs appear to have greater explicit knowledge, as they are more educated, and plausibly more energetic, due to their younger age. But chiefs potentially have more implicit knowledge, because they rule for longer periods of time. As a result, it isn't clear which leader has *higher* technical ability when it comes to organizing local public goods.

On political incentives, only MPs have electoral incentives to govern for the benefit of the majority. MPs are elected every five years, and therefore must think about re-election prospects when governing. Zambian chiefs inherit their positions and rule for life. They do not face being thrown out of office for ignoring the interests of the public, but they do have incentives to think about long-term interests, whether these are private- or public-spirited. As a result, MPs have clear incentives to invest more in public goods with immediate benefits, but it is less clear they should put more effort into facilitating public goods with medium or long-term benefits.

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Laws of Zambia, CAP 289.6.18 (1971); The Chiefs Act, Laws of Zambia, CAP 287.11.1 (1965).



Table 1: Comparing Chiefs and MPs in Rural Zambia

	Chiefs	MPs
Selection process	Inherited	Elected
Mandate to collect informal tax	No	No
Average area (sq. km)	2374	6227
Average population	19,098	58,281
Percent female	9	12
Percent completed secondary educ.	38	93
Average age	60	48
Years in power	15	2
Percent local address	95	21
Allowances and salary (US \$)	\$750	\$ 25,220

Data from leaders in power in 2007. Sample includes only MPs representing majority rural constituencies. Allowances and salaries listed are for regular chiefs and private members.

Finally, the two sets of leaders differ in their social and economic connections to their communities. On this dimension, chiefs are more downwardly accountable than MPs. Chiefs are vastly more likely to provide local contact addresses than MPs. They are also more dependent on the economy in their local community for their material well-being than MPs, who receive generous allowances and salary from the state. Thus, chiefs would appear to have greater social and economic incentives to provide local public goods for their communities.

Because the set of leaders who are chiefs and MPs respectively have several characteristics that distinguish them, when I compare the effects of chiefs and MPs on public goods provision, I am comparing leaders who differ on each of the distinct dimensions highlighted above. Existing scholarship on public goods provision has tended to focus on leaders' electoral incentives, and, to a lesser extent, their education levels (Besley and Reynal-Querol 2011). These are dimensions on which traditional chiefs are inferior to MPs. But I hypothesize that traditional chiefs' greater social and economic connections to their communities, their longer time horizons and their higher levels of implicit knowledge may compensate for their electoral and educational deficits when it comes to facilitating local public goods.

## Research Design

### A Quasi-Experimental Approach around Leader Deaths

I test the effectiveness of chiefs and MPs respectively in organizing local public goods through informal taxes using a quasi-experimental approach. Specifically, I use an unfortunate fact of Zambian politics between 1994 and 2004: both hereditary chiefs and elected MPs died in office at high rates. As a result, I can use lapses in leadership caused by chiefs' and MPs' deaths to examine the effects of each set of leaders on the collection of informal taxes and the provision of public goods.

The death of chiefs in office is a function of the fact that they rule for life and that age is one of the qualifications considered when “royal families” meet to select the next chief. In a five year period, almost one quarter of chiefdoms will have their chief die and this will lead to a gap in leadership that averages about 6 months as the royal family of the chiefdom mourns the old chief and then gathers to select a new one. Because multiple members of the royal family are eligible to ascend to the throne in most Zambian chiefdoms, there is not typically an heir apparent during this period, and chiefdoms experience lapses in leadership in the interim.<sup>10</sup> Whether a chief dies in office during a particular time period should be independent of the local political and socioeconomic context. The primary cause of death among chiefs in Zambia is illness and disease. Car accidents are a distant second. As a result, the death of chiefs allows the estimation of the effects of traditional leaders on local public goods provision and community mobilization.

More surprisingly, more than one in eight MPs dies in office during the time periods considered. Almost all MPs are under 60 years old, and they are elected every 5 years, so in most countries in most time periods, we would not expect to see such a high death rate, most of which were attributed to unspecified illnesses.<sup>11</sup> However, the time period I am studying was the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Zambia, and a time when access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) was very limited. Although explicit attribution of deaths to HIV/AIDS was uncommon during this period, long-time parliamentarian Guy Scott (who later became

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<sup>10</sup>A well-respected elder may be appointed as a “caretaker” in the interim, but these leaders provide only the most basic oversight of the chiefdom. Most importantly, they are not recognized by the government, so they are not able to fulfill the same development roles as an installed chief.

<sup>11</sup>In addition, three of the MP deaths between 1994-1998 and 2000-2004 were due to car accidents, one of which occurred in suspicious circumstances (Baldwin Nkumbula). There are two other cases where the death of the MP also fueled suspicion; Cuthbert Nguni died after allegedly being ill-treated during a stint in jail, and Ronald Penza died in an armed burglary. The main results are robust to dropping these cases.

acting president) claimed that a majority of MP deaths during this time period were related to HIV/AIDS.<sup>12</sup> The two-fold increase in MP deaths in Zambia from the 1980s to the 1990s is also consistent with this claim (Chirambo 2007). Because the main toll of HIV/AIDS is during the last two years of life, many of these MPs would have appeared healthy during their election campaigns, but then died during the following five years (Chirambo 2007; Fox et al. 2004; Rosen et al. 2003). Indeed, during this time period, it is likely that constituents and even most MPs themselves were unaware of their HIV/AIDS status during election campaigns. As a result, the death of elected MPs is also plausibly exogenous to the local political and socioeconomic context. Following the death of an MP, there is a leadership gap that averages 3 months.<sup>13</sup>

The death of chiefs and MPs can thus be used to assess the value of each type of leader in organizing local public goods via community contributions. The occurrence of deaths is both plausibly and demonstrably exogenous to political considerations, as I show in the next section (unlike the length of time it takes to replace a leader, which is often driven by cleavages within the community).<sup>14</sup> On average, leader death proxies for lapses in leadership of six months in the case of chiefs and three months in the case of MPs, though these are minimums on the length of time communities have incapacitated leaders in cases where death was preceded by debilitating illness.

The identification strategy used in the paper is influenced by Jones and Olken (2005) in that it also uses the deaths of leaders in office to identify their effects on policy and programming outcomes. In their seminal paper, Jones and Olken measure the effect of having better or worse leaders by measuring variance in outcomes around leadership deaths. In contrast, this paper's approach is to identify the effect of leaders by comparing programming outcomes in periods with and without gaps in whether an office is filled.

## **Data**

The main outcome of interest is the provision of local public goods financed in part through community contributions or informal taxes. I measure this using two waves of the *Zambian Living Conditions Monitoring*

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<sup>12</sup>IRIN, Stigma – The Fear of Helplessness, November 29, 2002. <http://www.irinnews.org/fr/node/208355>.

<sup>13</sup>Once the electoral commission is made aware of an MP's death, Zambian law requires that it must hold a by-election to replace the MP within 3 months, although they are not always able to meet this standard.

<sup>14</sup>In addition, better data is available on the timing of deaths than is available on the length of lapses in leadership.

Survey, which was administered to nationally representative samples of Zambians in 1998 and 2004. Across the two waves of the survey, 16,000 rural households were surveyed. These surveys are particularly well suited to this analysis because they asked numerous questions about a comprehensive list of local projects. Survey respondents were asked about the provision of 24 different kinds of public and private goods in their community in the previous five years (1994-1998, or 2000-2004). In addition, they were asked whether anyone in the household had provided materials, labor or funds for these projects, a measure of informal taxes.

I focus my analysis on the three most frequently co-produced local public goods during these time periods. I define local public goods as co-producible if they can be provided in significant part via community contributions (in cases where a project was provided, on average 25 percent or more of respondents said they had contributed in some way to the project). Three types of projects in the data set were frequently co-produced: school building projects, school improvement projects (i.e. rehabilitating existing schools, rather than building new ones) and borehole projects. The top panel of table 2 provides summary statistics for the main outcome variables used in the analysis, all of which are measured at the household level. For each of the three types of projects, I consider both whether the household reported this type of project occurring in their community in the past five years and whether they reported contributing to it, through resources or labor. The most common type of co-produced public goods are school improvement projects (reported by 33 percent of households), followed by school building projects (reported by 17 percent of households), and then boreholes (reported by 16 percent of households).

Statistics on the deaths of chiefs and MPs in office are reported in the bottom panel of table 2. Information on the tenure of chiefs is not readily available from the Zambian government. I coded whether chiefdoms experienced the death of their chiefs by reviewing hundreds of files housed at the Department of Chiefs' Affairs in Lusaka, looking for notices on the deaths and installations of chiefs. In total, I was able to code whether a chief died between 1994-1998 and/or 2000-2004 for 95 percent of the chiefdoms included in the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey. A chief died in 99 of the 398 chiefdom periods in the data (25 percent of cases).

Information on MPs' deaths between 1994-1998 and 2000-2004 was collected from government gazettes, statutory instruments and newspaper articles. The death of the MP triggers a by-election in Zambia, and in

Table 2: Summary Statistics for Main Variables

Variable	Obs.	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Household-level					
School built	15921	0.166	0.372	0	1
Contributed school building	15920	0.087	0.282	0	1
School improved	15895	0.326	0.469	0	1
Contributed school improv.	15869	0.150	0.357	0	1
Borehole built	15945	0.156	0.362	0	1
Contributed borehole	15931	0.052	0.221	0	1
Chiefdom/constituency-level					
Chief death	398	0.249	0.433	0	1
MP death	210	0.129	0.336	0	1

most cases it was possible to use information from the statutory instruments on these by-elections to determine if the cause of the by-election was the previous MP's death. In other cases, the cause of the by-election was determined from newspaper reports. The two time periods over which the outcome variables are measured (1994-1998 and 2000-2004) both cross two parliamentary terms, with a parliamentary election in the middle (in November 1996 and December 2001, respectively). The variable MP death takes a value of one if the MP died in either of the parliamentary terms. I was able to collect information on MP deaths for all the rural constituencies included in the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey. An MP died in 27 of the 210 constituency periods in the data (13 percent of cases).

One plausible concern with using deaths to estimate the effects of chiefs and MPs on local infrastructure is that poor infrastructure – especially clinics – may cause a higher rate of deaths. In fact, in the Zambian case, low quality local health infrastructure is unlikely to be associated with a higher rate of chief or MP deaths. The Zambian government has a policy of transporting chiefs to Lusaka for treatment at the University Teaching Hospital if they get seriously ill, and paying the bills for these stays. As a result, chiefs' access to health care should be fairly even across the country. MPs also have very uniform access to health care through the parliamentary health plan provided to MPs and their immediate families. Figures 1 and 2 display the chiefdoms and constituencies in which chiefs and MPs died between 1994-1998 and/or 2000-2004, and the location of health centers in 2004. Importantly, there is no clear geographic pattern in the deaths of leaders.

Figure 1: Map of Chief Deaths and Health Centers (2004)

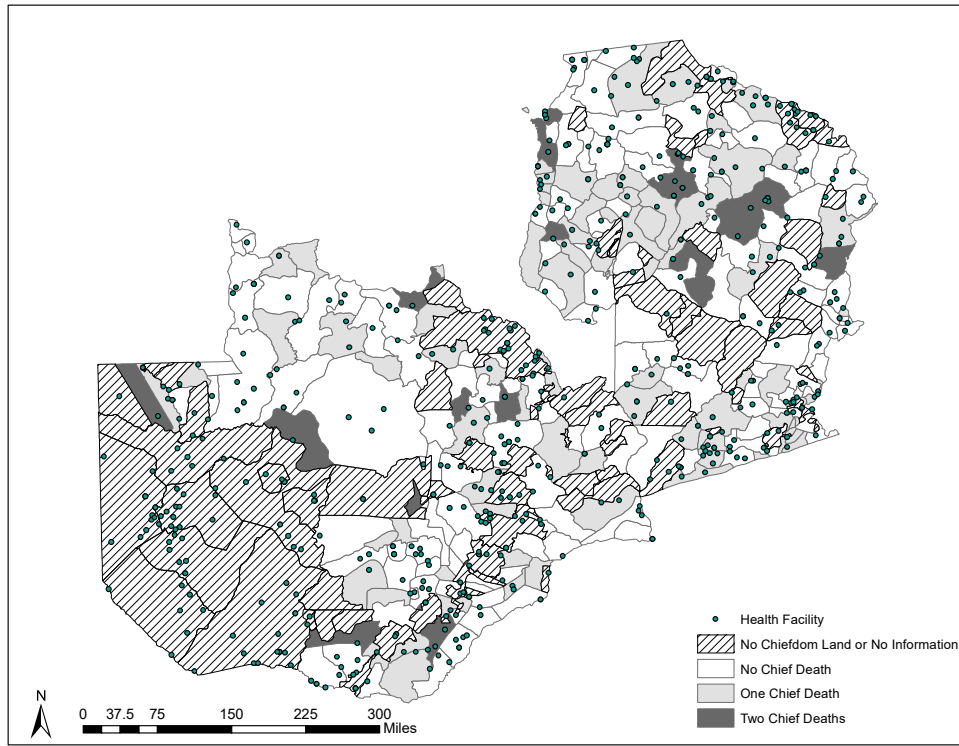
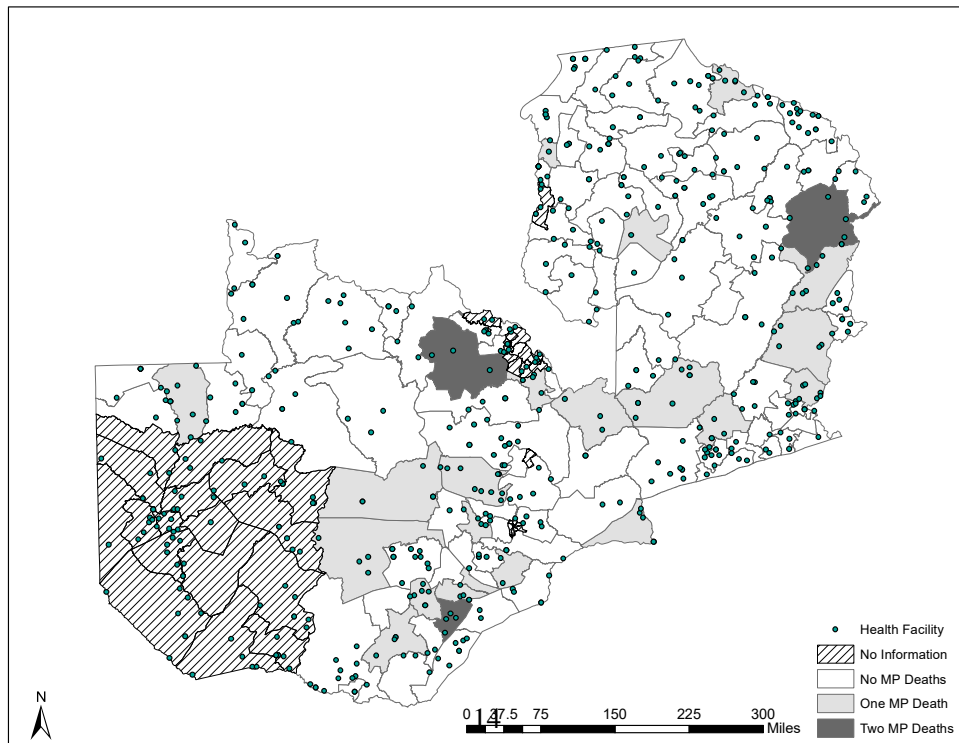


Figure 2: Map of MP Deaths and Health Centers (2004)



The top panel of table 3 provides further evidence that chiefdoms and constituencies in which the leader dies in office are otherwise very comparable to places where the leader does not. It compares population characteristics, drawing on chiefdom and constituency-level data from the 2000 census, and health service access, drawing on data on the location of health clinics and hospitals in 2004 from the Ministry of Health. The first three columns compare chiefdoms with and without chief deaths, and the second three columns compare constituencies with and without MP deaths. Reported p-values are calculated from models that include survey fixed effects and clustered standard errors, as in the main specification described in the next section.

The data indicate that chiefdoms in which the chief dies are very similar to chiefdoms in which they do not. They are similar in their sizes, levels of socioeconomic development, ethnolinguistic diversity, political engagement and access to health facilities. Constituencies in which MPs die are also broadly similar to those in which they do not on demographic variables. There is a significant difference in service access between these two sets of constituencies – places where MPs die are significantly *closer* to hospitals than places where they do not – but insofar as this difference runs counter to intuition, this unexpected relationship can plausibly be attributed to chance.

Even if the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of communities in which chiefs and MPs die are broadly similar to those in which they do not die, the characteristics of the leaders who die may differ from the characteristics of leaders who do not die. Insofar as the attributes of leaders are related to communal priorities or community characteristics, this would be problematic. The bottom panel of table 3 considers how the characteristics of chiefs and MPs affect their likelihood of dying in a particular period.

The first three columns compare the characteristics of the chiefs who died during the survey reporting periods to the chiefs who did not. Old chiefs and chiefs who have been in office longer are more likely die, as one might expect. But, because chiefs inherit their positions for life, the age and tenure of chiefs are both plausibly exogenous to other chiefdom characteristics that might affect local collective action; they depend mainly on the date on which the previous chief was installed. More importantly, there is no evidence that powerful chiefs with stronger bases of support have different likelihoods of dying; chiefdoms in which chiefs die do not have significantly more junior chiefs or significantly larger ethnic minority groups.

Because constituencies select their MPs every five years, there is greater concern that the characteristics

of MPs could reflect community priorities or local candidate pools. In the last three columns in the bottom panel of table 3, I analyze the characteristics of MPs who die in office compared to those who do not. Because the two time periods over which the outcome variables are measured cross parliamentary terms, I consider how the characteristics of the MPs in power at four points in time – January 1994, January 1997, January 2000 and January 2002 – affect the likelihood of them dying in the next two or three year period.<sup>15</sup>

One might worry that communities who elect old or ill MPs are systematically different from communities who elect young and healthy MPs but, interestingly, the age and length of time the MP has been in power are not associated with their likelihood of dying in office. There is little evidence that powerful MPs have different likelihoods of dying, whether this is measured by their ministerial status or their membership in the incumbent party. I also consider the relationship between MP death and weak candidate pools, as measured by whether the MP won more than 80 percent of the vote or not (Dominant MP), and do not find a significant relationship. MPs who died won a significantly higher share of the popular vote compared to MPs who did not die, but this effect is driven entirely by intertemporal trends – both the proportion of the vote for incumbent MPs and the proportion of MPs dying declined over time – and the difference is not statistically significant once adding election fixed effects.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the deaths of chiefs and MPs both appear to be exogenous to other community characteristics that could affect communal collective action. However, the death of a leader bundles systematically with other aspects of leadership trajectories. In particular, for most of the leaders in our data set, death is preceded by a period of serious illness, which also likely reduces the activity level of leaders. Insofar as both terminal illness and death reduce leader capacity, the effect being measured in this paper is perhaps best characterized as incapacitation. The measure of the death of a chief typically captures both a period of illness prior to death and then a leadership lapse that averages 6 months. The measure of the death of an MP also usually captures both a period of illness prior to death and then a leadership lapse that averages three months.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>In most instances, the MP in power in January 1997 is the same as the MP in power in January 2000.

<sup>16</sup>The p-values in table 3 are calculated with survey fixed effects but not election fixed effects.

<sup>17</sup>In the case of chief deaths, the variable may also incorporate the effect of having a new inexperienced chief. In additional analysis in the appendix, I show that the effects observed in this paper are unlikely to be driven by new chiefs, as similar effects are obtained when looking at the effect of illness distinct from death.



Table 3: Balance Statistics for Chief and MP Deaths

	Chiefs			MPs		
	No death	Death	p-value	No death	Death	p-value
Chiefdom/constituency characteristics						
Population size	20835 (18087)	19256 (14711)	0.386	57362 (25829)	56830 (20970)	0.908
Proportion literate adults	0.442 (0.081)	0.446 (0.081)	0.724	0.469 (0.091)	0.484 (0.074)	0.357
Proportion adults working in agriculture	0.764 (0.198)	0.742 (0.216)	0.354	0.710 (0.201)	0.773 (0.143)	0.064
Proportion adults with full-time formal sector work	0.030 (0.029)	0.029 (0.030)	0.735	0.042 (0.034)	0.046 (0.041)	0.654
Proportion adults born in district	0.790 (0.114)	0.782 (0.118)	0.535	0.765 (0.113)	0.783 (0.111)	0.478
ELF	0.456 (0.262)	0.457 (0.276)	0.968	0.463 (0.248)	0.463 (0.269)	0.998
Proportion registered voters	0.454 (0.098)	0.459 (0.083)	0.665	0.455 (0.006)	0.463 (0.017)	0.657
Population density	19.5 (24.3)	24.3 (3.29)	0.129	18.7 (23.5)	16.0 (12.6)	0.441
Contain health center	0.691 (0.463)	0.667 (0.474)	0.641	0.934 (0.248)	0.926 (0.267)	0.866
Distance from hospital	67.4 (41.0)	64.5 (41.4)	0.571	66.2 (40782)	48.9 28174	0.012
Chief/MP characteristics						
Above 60	0.505 (0.501)	0.646 (0.482)	0.036	0.031 (0.172)	0.037 (0.192)	0.769
Years in office	14.6 (13.1)	21.0 (18.1)	0.002	3.34 (3.88)	4.52 (5.03)	0.207
Senior chief	0.164 (0.371)	0.111 (0.316)	0.146			
Prop. chiefs' tribe	0.620 (0.304)	0.622 (0.307)	0.960			
Minister				0.150 0.358	0.111 0.320	0.647
Incumbent party (MMD)				0.743 (0.438)	0.815 (0.396)	0.522
Dominant MP				0.076 (0.266)	0.185 (0.396)	0.326
Prop. vote for MP		17		0.593 (0.164)	0.663 (0.122)	0.019

Notes: Table displays means and standard deviations in parentheses.

## Results

I examine the value of chiefs and MPs in orchestrating community contributions to local projects by studying the effects of their deaths on co-produced local public goods and the payment of informal taxes to fund these goods. Specifically, I measure the effects of their deaths on household-level reports of these outcomes using the following equations:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_{chief} + \gamma_j + \epsilon_i$$

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_{MP} + \gamma_j + \epsilon_i$$

where  $i$  denotes households,  $D_{chief}$  denotes the death of the chief,  $D_{MP}$  denotes the death of the MP,  $\gamma_j$  are fixed effects for each survey period, and the error is clustered by chiefdom or constituency respectively.<sup>18</sup> Only rural areas of Zambia are included in the analysis.

Table 4 shows the effects of chief deaths and MP deaths respectively on whether a respondent said a particular infrastructural project had been built in their community in the previous five years and whether they said their household had contributed to the project. On school building projects, the death of the chief in the previous five years caused five percentage points fewer people to report that a school had been built in their community (statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level), and three percentage points fewer people to report contributing to a school building project (statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level). On school improvement projects, the death of the chief caused four percentage points fewer people to report a school improvement project in their community (though this is not statistically significant), and had no measured effects on contributions to school improvement projects. On borehole projects, the death of the chief caused five percentage points fewer people to report a new borehole (statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level) and three percentage points fewer people to report contributing to the building of boreholes (statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level). Thus, chiefs would appear to play critical roles in organizing new schools and boreholes through informal taxes, but are less important in organizing community contributions to school improvement projects.

In contrast, the death of MPs does not cause statistically significant decreases in the provision of any

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<sup>18</sup>I estimate the effects of each leader's death separately because data on chief death is missing for some observations. In the appendix, I show that the results are very similar if I estimate the effects of chief and MP deaths in the same model.

Table 4: Effects of Deaths on Co-produced Goods

	School built	Contributed school	School improved	Contributed improvement	Borehole built	Contributed borehole
Chief death	-0.054*** (0.020) 15159	-0.025* (0.013) 15158	-0.040 (0.032) 15130	-0.005 (0.022) 15105	-0.052** (0.023) 15192	-0.027*** (0.008) 15178
MP death	-0.029 (0.028)	-0.005 (0.018)	-0.059 (0.036)	-0.025 (0.025)	0.002 (0.035)	-0.002 (0.013)
N	15925	15924	15899	15873	15949	15935

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance at the 90, 95 and 99 percent confidence levels respectively.

of the three types of projects. MP deaths do not significantly decrease reports of school building projects or household contributions to them. They have larger negative but still statistically insignificant effects on school improvement projects and the informal taxes paid toward these projects. They also do not effect either reports of borehole projects or household contributions to them. Thus, the evidence suggests MPs do not play a consistent role in mobilizing informal taxes to fund local public goods.

Yet, before we can conclude that MPs play little role in mobilizing informal taxes, we need to rule out alternative explanations for why their deaths have little effect on community contributions to local public goods. An alternative explanation for the absence of an effect of MP deaths could be that local party institutions are very effective in covering gaps in parliamentary leadership (and are better at doing this than traditional institutions are at covering gaps in traditional leadership). In the Zambian case, where local party structures are very weak, this seems unlikely. The only legally recognized party in the 1970s and 1980s – UNIP – had very weak local party structures by the time multiparty elections were introduced in 1991. The governing party during the time periods studied, MMD, never established strong grassroots organizations independent of the trade union movement, leaving it with a tenuous grassroots presence once cleavages emerged between the party and unions soon after taking power in 1991 (LeBas 2011). Between 1994 and 2006, other parties were even weaker, largely built around the personalities of their leaders with little local organization (Rakner 2003).

Still, to show that the null results on MP death are unlikely driven by the strength of party institutions, I

Table 5: Effects of MP Deaths on Co-produced Goods – Dropping Stronger Parties

	School built	Contributed school	School improved	Contributed improvement	Borehole built	Contributed borehole
MP death	-0.029 (0.029)	-0.001 (0.019)	-0.042 (0.041)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.001 (0.043)	-0.003 (0.016)
N	13675	13675	13653	13634	13703	13695

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance at the 90, 95 and 99 percent confidence levels respectively.

Table 6: Effects of MP Deaths on Co-produced Goods - Controlling for By-Elections

	School built	Contributed school	School improved	Contributed improvement	Borehole built	Contributed borehole
MP death	-0.034 (0.046)	-0.012 (0.030)	-0.042 (0.060)	-0.006 (0.038)	0.058 (0.037)	0.011 (0.018)
By-election	0.006 (0.041)	0.008 (0.026)	-0.019 (0.050)	-0.021 (0.029)	-0.063** (0.026)	-0.014 (0.015)
N	15925	15924	15899	15873	15949	15935

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance at the 90, 95 and 99 percent confidence levels respectively.

show that MP deaths do not have a larger impact on community contributions to local public goods if we drop the constituencies in the data set with the strongest local party institutions. In the 1990s, the Eastern province of Zambia was a UNIP stronghold, and Lusaka province and the Copperbelt were MMD strongholds.<sup>19</sup> In table 5, I drop the constituencies held by UNIP in Eastern province and by MMD in Lusaka province and the Copperbelt at any point between 1994 and 1998. Once we eliminate the places with the strongest local party structures, the effect of MP deaths remains small and statistically insignificant in all instances, suggesting strong parties are not compensating for leadership lapses in the office of MP.

Another plausible explanation for the absence of an effect of MP deaths relates to the dynamics of

<sup>19</sup>During this period, UNIP won 7 of 8 by-elections held for constituencies they had previously held in Eastern province, and 0 elsewhere. MMD won 10 of 10 by-elections held for constituencies they had previously held in Lusaka province and the Copperbelt, but only 70 percent of by-elections for seats they held elsewhere.

the process of replacing deceased MPs; in particular, MP deaths trigger by-elections which might result in inflows of resources that crowd out local contributions. We can parse the effects of by-elections from deaths because – although deaths always lead to by-elections – there are many other events that can lead to by-elections, including resignations and MPs switching parties. Table 6 shows that by-elections as a rule do not increase the production of local public goods. Furthermore, even once controlling for them, MP deaths continue to have little effect on either co-produced public goods or household contributions to them.

A final concern is the duration of the leadership lapse following the death of an MP. As noted above, the average length of leadership lapses following the death of an MP is 3 months, and it is possible this simply isn't enough time for their absence to affect programming. In contrast, the average length of leadership lapses following the death of a chief is 6 months. However, the length of time communities have de facto incapacitated leaders is likely to be longer than the length of the leadership vacancy in cases where leaders die of illness; in these cases, leaders are likely to be working at reduced capacity for a number of months before their death too.

In table 7, I drop MPs who died in accidents, rather than from illness, from the analysis, in order to see whether the results are stronger when MPs are incapacitated for longer periods. When looking only at deaths caused by illness, the death of the MP during a given period causes statistically significant reductions in reports of school improvement projects (statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level) and household contributions to these projects (statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level). However, their deaths continue to have little effect on household contributions to school building projects and borehole projects, and they do not significantly reduce reports of these projects occurring. This suggests MPs played an important role in brokering school improvement projects during this time period, but they did not play a critical role in mobilizing household contributions for locally financed public goods more generally. The likely reason for MPs playing an important role in facilitating school improvement projects is a specific program run through the Ministry of Education during this period to upgrade basic schools; MPs were explicitly encouraged in parliament to apply for funds to improve school infrastructure in their constituencies.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Zambia's Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Program (BESSIP) set aside millions of dollars for upgrading schools. MPs were actively encouraged to request funds for schools in their constituencies. See, for example, the speech by the Minister of Education, Andrew Mulenga, in the *Daily Parliamentary*

Table 7: Effects of MP Deaths on Co-produced Goods - Only Ill MPs

	School built	Contributed school	School improved	Contributed improvement	Borehole built	Contributed borehole
MP death	-0.034 (0.028)	-0.007 (0.030)	-0.102*** (0.058)	-0.048* (0.025)	-0.034 (0.037)	-0.004 (0.018)
N	15612	15611	15586	15562	15636	15623

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance at the 90, 95 and 99 percent confidence levels respectively.

Taken together, the evidence in this section does not support the idea that elected MPs are systematically better than unelected chiefs at mobilizing local public goods through community contributions. Instead, traditional chiefs are the ones who play critical roles in organizing new schools and new boreholes through community contributions. MPs have little measured effects on the construction of *new* locally financed infrastructure projects, though they may affect projects to improve existing schools. It is striking that the only type of project that the death of traditional chiefs does not significantly effect is precisely the project for which there is an effect of MP death, suggesting some division of labor between these two leaders. It may be that the ability to broker Ministry of Education resources toward existing schools is particularly important for school rehabilitation projects, and MPs have an obvious advantage here; in contrast, the ability to organize local collective action may be particularly important for school building and borehole projects, and chiefs appear to have an advantage here.<sup>21</sup>

Importantly, the absence of MPs' effects on school and borehole building cannot be explained by the strength of political parties in managing leadership transitions. It also does not appear to be due to the specific dynamics of replacing elected leaders.<sup>22</sup> Instead, chiefs in Zambia simply appear better positioned to organize informal taxes than MPs are. In the next section, I discuss why this might be.

*Debates for the First Session of the Ninth Assembly*, March 26, 2002.

<sup>21</sup>More generally, there may be smaller collective action problems involved in upgrading existing infrastructure (compared to building new infrastructure) because user communities are already defined.

<sup>22</sup>In the appendix, I provide further evidence that suggests it is not the length of the leadership transition that is driving the different effects. When chiefs are ill with what is very likely HIV/AIDS related illnesses, this also causes decreases in local contributions to public goods, but when MPs are similarly ill, this does not cause decreases.

## Discussion

Why do traditional chiefs play a more important role in organizing community contributions to local public goods than elected MPs in Zambia? As discussed earlier, this is not the result of a formal division of responsibilities. In addition, there is not an informal norm that prevents MPs from engaging in this type of effort; both MPs and chiefs often *try* to mobilize communities to work together for communal projects. However, chiefs are typically more effective at doing this, something that is openly acknowledged by many Zambian MPs. In interviews with the author, numerous MPs described how it was easier to get community members to make contributions for local infrastructure projects if they involved traditional chiefs.<sup>23</sup> Chiefs were described as being able to “unlock” the community, mobilizing them to provide either resources or labor for projects.<sup>24</sup>

Chiefs and MPs in Zambia differ in a number of their characteristics, as table 1 highlighted. The two sets of leaders differ in their education levels, their community embeddedness and their tenure in office. As a result, the effects of chief and MP deaths estimated in this paper are bundled treatments, and we cannot empirically determine whether one characteristic of chiefs is paramount in explaining their greater effectiveness in organizing collective action. However, the difference in education levels between chiefs and MPs is unlikely to explain chiefs’ greater effectiveness in organizing collective action; by this measure, chiefs have lower competency and should be less effective.

It is more plausible that chiefs are better positioned than MPs to mobilize communal labor because of their stronger local connections. Although both chiefs and MPs lead large multi-village communities, almost all chiefs live full-time in their communities, while many MPs do not. This allows chiefs to build strong local networks that they can use to mobilize community members for collective projects. If this is the main reason why chiefs are more effective than MPs in organizing informal taxes, Zambian MPs could potentially become more effective at organizing local public goods by spending more time in their constituencies.

However, another reason chiefs might be better positioned than MPs to mobilize communal labor is their longer tenure. This gives chiefs long time horizons, potentially encouraging greater investment in

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<sup>23</sup>Interview with MMD MP, Eastern Province, Oct. 19, 2008; with cabinet minister, Lusaka, Nov. 10, 2008.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with MMD MP, Lusaka, Nov. 11, 2008.

local networks that they can use to mobilize their community over their lifetimes. It also allows chiefs to accumulate greater on-the-job experience than MPs. Interestingly, several Zambian MPs acknowledged that the longer tenure of chiefs gave them important advantages in mobilizing communities to act collectively. For example, a senior member of the governing party told me, “Politicians will come and go, but the chief will always be there.”<sup>25</sup> Another MP described chiefs as being able to organize communities for projects or other forms of collective action in a way that MPs could not because they were more established.<sup>26</sup>

Importantly, if it is chiefs’ longer tenure that makes them more effective at mobilizing community members, then elected MPs will always be fundamentally disadvantaged compared to chiefs who rule for life. In this case, there is less room for reforming the characteristics of MPs to make them more effective in organizing collective action; their disadvantage in this realm is fundamental in that it stems from them being subject to regular re-election. In states with stronger bureaucracies, elected officials with limited experience and short time horizons work alongside bureaucrats to accomplish policy goals that require experience and long-term investment; in weak states, elected officials may need to work closely with unelected chiefs to achieve the same outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

The dominant theoretical lens in political science suggests elected leaders should be more effective than traditional chiefs in organizing collective action to produce local public goods. Unelected leaders are thought to have little incentive to facilitate public goods that benefit large numbers of community members rather than focusing on accumulating private goods for themselves. Yet the evidence in this paper finds MPs are no more effective than chiefs in facilitating locally produced public goods; instead, the weight of the evidence suggests that chiefs are more effective than MPs when it comes to organizing local contributions to public goods.

One way to reconcile the papers’ results with prevailing theoretical explanations would be to reconsider whether the types of projects examined are really public goods, or if they could be private goods that mainly

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<sup>25</sup>Interview with senior MMD leader, Lusaka, Nov. 3, 2008.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with cabinet minister, Lusaka, Nov. 10, 2008.



benefit chiefs.<sup>27</sup> This seems unlikely because chiefdoms are large, and the households surveyed within chiefdoms are rarely in the chiefs' villages. In addition, although an individual chief could plausibly capture most of the benefits from a new borehole, new schools have much broader benefits. Finally, auxiliary analysis shows that many of the households who report projects in their communities also report benefiting from them.<sup>28</sup>

Instead, the evidence suggests that unelected chiefs are simply better positioned than elected MPs when it comes to facilitating locally financed public goods. This may be because they have stronger social and economic connections to the communities they lead, because they have more on-the-job experience, or because they have longer time horizons. Further research is necessary to unpack the specific characteristics and qualities of chiefs that make them more effective than MPs in organizing community members to contribute to local public goods.

The evidence in this paper is exclusively from Zambia, but - insofar as the differences between chiefs and MPs in Zambia are similar to the differences that characterize them elsewhere - there are reasons to think the results would hold in other African countries where the two sets of leaders operate in parallel. Across sub-Saharan Africa, chiefs are generally unelected, in contrast to parliamentarians. Surveys conducted through the African Legislators Project suggest African MPs tend to have high levels of education, but limited experience representing their constituencies (Mattes and Mozaffar 2011); in contrast local chiefs have limited education but strong social and economic connections to their communities elsewhere in Africa where surveys have been conducted (Baldwin and Mvukiyehe 2015; Humphreys et al. 2014). Although caution is always necessary in extrapolating too much from any particular case, the positions of MPs and chiefs in Zambia appear fairly representative of sub-Saharan Africa in this sense.

This paper focuses specifically on the effects of chiefs and MPs on public goods provided in significant part through community contributions, but – insofar as the collective action required in these settings is analogous to that required for other types of social cooperation – the findings have potential relevance for a much wider range of outcomes. Traditional chiefs may also be uniquely positioned to enforce compliance with rules and to organize collective political action. Indeed, evidence from lab-in-the-field experiments

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<sup>27</sup>This line of argument is made in Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014).

<sup>28</sup>This analysis is in the appendix.

in Liberia and Uganda suggest traditional authorities are more effective than elected leaders in organizing many forms of social cooperation (Blair 2016; Goist and Kern 2016). This highlights the need for a broader reassessment of the role traditional chiefs play in local governance.

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