# Can information improve rural governance and service delivery? – Kosek and Wantchekon, 2018 - World Development

* Rural areas present logistical challenges due to their remoteness that can make government accountability and service delivery especially challenging and tenuous.
  + They are often less economically integrated, public services are delivered in an environment with both poor information among service providers about the demands of service user, and poor information among service users about the mandates and capabilities of service providers.
  + In such an environment, policymakers may use information asymmetries to their advantage, to the detriment or rural citizen’s welfare (Olken, Banerjee, Hanna & Kyle, 2018). Especially when levels of education and political engagement of the citizenry are relatively low (common feature in rural settings).
  + Despite these challenges, unskilled workers have a much higher valuation of government services than do more skilled workers (Serrato & Wingender, 2014).
* When citizens have information, they can better articulate their policy priorities and provide electoral support for good governance more broadly (Wantchekon, Lopez-Moctezuma, Fujiwara & Lero, 2015; Wantchekon, 2017).
* In rural, developing county settings, simultaneously bringing together relevance, power, and incentives may be especially challenging due to low capacity to receive, understand and act on information. However, the payoffs of doing so in such setting might be largest.

# Greater Expectations: A Field Experiment to Improve Accountability in Mali – Gottlieb, 2016 - American Journal of Political Science

* There is a consensus in the theoretical literature that information about government performance is a necessary condition for political accountability (Barro 1973, Besley 2006, Ferejohn 1986).
  + When voters are uncertain about the actions of their politicians good performers cannot guarantee reelection, so it is harder for voters to motivate them to perform well or respond to their interests. It is thus puzzling why some recent attemps to increase voter information have failed to improve politician accountability (Banerjee, Green et al. 2010; Chong et al. 2012; de Figueiredo, Hidalgo, and Kasahara 2011; Lieberman, Posner, and Tsai 2014).
    - Performance information is not sufficient, voters also requires an appropriate reference point.
  + Due to low levels of civic education and poor access to credible media outlets, the information necessary to construct such reference point is lacking in developing countries.
  + Voters in developing democracies will hold politicians to low performance standards and fail to sanction poor performance at election time, providing insufficient incentives for political accountability.
* Low voter expectations of politicians have negative implications for both government accountability and the democratic system itself.
  + When the public has little esteem not only for individual politicians but also for the democratic system, citizens fail to defend their democracy from autocratic takeover.

# Determinants of institutional trust: the role of cultural context – Andriani and Kaasa, 2022 – Journal of Institutional Economics

Institutional trust plays an important role in economic growth (Hwang, 2017; Knack and Keefer, 1997; Sumanjeet, 2015). If government is perceived as trustworthy and is believed to enforce the law, assure property rights and keep tax legislation stable, then more investment and other economic activity can be expected (Knack and Keefer, 1997). Institutional trust is essential in the governance of a modern state since enabling citizens to accept government authority supports the legitimacy, effective functioning and stability of democratic systems (Hooghe et al., 2015; Mishler and Rose, 2005),

In her influential work, Cairncross (1997) predicted that the digital revolution would bring about "the death of distance," fundamentally transforming how information flows across space.

Literature contribution

We contribute to three pieces of literature.

First, we contribute to the emerging literature on the geography of trust by documenting a striking urban-rural divide in institutional trust across Africa. Building on insights from McKay et al. (2023) and Asher et al. (2018), we show citizens living in remote areas report higher trust in political institutions compared to those near capitals, even with limited exposure to state institutions and reduced access to information infrastructures. We attribute this \textit{uninformed trust} to two key mechanisms: (1) information scarcity, as limited access to government performance information in remote areas (Adida et al., 2020) generates inflated perceptions of institutional quality; and (2) rational inattention, as citizens have weaker incentives to acquire political information when direct encounters with the state are infrequent (Gottlieb, 2016).

Second, we contribute to research on the political economy of capital cities by examining how the diffusion of national institutions varies with distance from the capital. Building on seminal work by Campante and Do (2014) and Campante et al. (2019), we document a sharp spatial decay in the strength of national institutions as one moves further from the capital. The reach of the central state - in terms of both service provision and citizen engagement with politics - dissipates rapidly in peripheral areas. We argue that this pattern reflects the limited capacity of African states to project power over vast hinterlands (Herbst, 2000), resulting in a stark divide between well-integrated urban cores and weakly governed rural peripheries (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020; Pierskalla and Schultz, 2017). This uneven distribution of state presence, in turn, perpetuates a spatial equilibrium of low development and weak accountability in isolated regions (Provenzano, 2024).

Third, we contribute to a rapidly growing literature on the role of digital media in governance by highlighting how mobile internet expansion can disrupt the informational and institutional inequalities between urban and rural areas. Our results demonstrate that the accountability-enhancing effects of internet access are most pronounced in previously isolated regions, where the sudden influx of information acts as a "liberation technology" (Diamond, 2010) - empowering citizens to monitor government performance and demand political change. However, we also find that the transformative potential of digital connectivity depends crucially on (1) the reliability of online information, as the spread of misinformation can breed disillusionment rather than empowerment (Cariolle et al., 2024; van Zoonen et al., 2024); and (2) citizens' sense of political efficacy, as information alone is insufficient to motivate action if citizens doubt their ability to influence politics (Chong et al., 2015; Conroy-Krutz, 2018). These findings underscore the importance of complementing technological expansion with civic education initiatives aimed at cultivating a politically engaged rural citizenry (Gottlieb, 2016; Grossman et al., 2024).

Taken together, these contributions advance our understanding of how the interplay between geographic, informational, and psychological factors shape the quality of governance in developing democracies. By integrating insights from political geography, institutional economics, and information economics, we provide a novel framework for analyzing the joint effects of spatial isolation and information deprivation on citizens' trust in and engagement with the state. Our findings highlight both the challenges and the opportunities for cultivating accountability in an era of rapid technological change, with important implications for policies aimed at bolstering state capacity and deepening democracy across Africa's diverse territorial contexts.

Our paper contributes to three pieces of literature.

First, we contribute to the literature on the geography of trust by providing evidence of how distance shapes citizens' political trust. While prior work documents how institutional trust varies with distance from administrative centers (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; Bland et al., 2023, Li, 2004) and tends to be higher in rural areas (McKay et al., 2023; Neal et al., 2016, Li, 2004), we isolate the role of information frictions through the expansion of mobile internet. Our findings demonstrate that when mobile internet expansion reduces these frictions, remote populations' high trust declines toward levels observed near capitals - suggesting information barriers, rather than other rural-urban differences, drive the spatial trust gradient. Methodologically, we advance this literature by employing a border discontinuity design that allows us to compare individuals from the same ethnic group across borders, isolating the effect of distance from confounding cultural and geographical factors.

Second, we extend the political economy literature on capital cities (Herbst, 2000) by showing how their strategic placement affects not just corruption (Campante and Do, 2014) and conflict risk (Campante et al., 2019), but also patterns of citizens' political trust and democratic engagement. Our border discontinuity design complements Michalopoulos and Papaioannou's (2014) finding that national institutions' effects weaken with distance from capitals. We reveal how this institutional gradient creates systematic variations in how citizens develop trust, with implications for democratic accountability (Provenzano, 2024; Gottlieb, 2016), service provision (Asher et al., 2018; Bland et al., 2023), and state capacity (Pierskalla and Schultz, 2017; Müller-Crepon, 2023). Our instrumental variables approach using lightning strikes builds on recent methodological innovations (Manacorda and Tesei, 2020; Guriev et al., 2021) to address endogeneity concerns in infrastructure placement.

Third, we contribute to research on internet's role in governance by examining how connectivity reshapes spatial patterns of accountability. While studies show internet access can reduce governance satisfaction (Guriev et al., 2021, Cariolle et al, 2024, Chong et al., 2015), increase political mobilization (Manacorda and Tesei, 2020, Fergusson and Molina, 2019, Enikolopov, Makarin and Petrova, 2020)., and strengthen electoral accountability (Donati, 2023, Bhandari et al., 2023, Besley and Burgess, 2002), we demonstrate that its effects on trust and accountability vary systematically with distance from capitals. This spatial heterogeneity adds a new dimension to our understanding of when information enhances accountability (Dunning et al., 2019; Kosec and Wantchekon, 2020), suggesting that mobile internet expansion potential depends on pre-existing spatial patterns of state presence and citizen engagement. We also highlight potential risks, as demonstrated by recent work showing how internet access can facilitate misinformation (Cariolle et al., 2024; Van Zoonen et al., 2024) and erode national identity (Choi et al., 2023).