

Councils and Indirect Rule in British Africa*

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Abstract

Did Western colonial rule transform political institutions in Africa? Although a rich historical literature examines the philosophy and practice of indirect rule, we have little systematic evidence about how the aims of colonizers interacted with the structure of indigenous institutions to shape local governance patterns. We first explain why it is usually optimal for colonizers to delegate authority to whatever institutions were traditionally in place, even in historically decentralized areas. We then analyze originally compiled data on African institutions in the precolonial and colonial periods for nearly 500 subnational units across British Africa, focusing on the presence of executive constraints in the form of councils. Colonial councils were widespread, reflecting precolonial precedents. Early agents who lacked traditional authority often failed to keep the peace and raise revenue in a context of rapid socioeconomic change. Pressure from below prompted British officials to reintroduce systems of executive constraints based on precolonial models.

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INTRODUCTION

How did Western colonial rule impact the development of political institutions in Africa? The imprint is unmistakable at the international and national levels. Europeans imposed a state system with fixed boundaries and introduced Western-style elections, both of which largely survive today (Herbst 2000; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016; Lee and Paine 2024; Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet 2024). However, these higher-level institutions often had limited reach during and after the colonial period. Instead, throughout much of the colonial period, subnational institutions formed the backbone of European administration. Rural African elites usually exercised some degree of autonomy under colonial systems of “indirect rule.” Traditional chiefs from this era remain influential in African politics to this day (Baldwin 2015; De Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Archibong 2018; Wilfahrt 2022; Baldwin and Ricart-Huguet 2023; Brierley and Ofosu 2023; Henn 2023; Nathan 2023). These observations raise crucial questions. To what extent did incorporation into the colonial state transform precolonial institutions? How did this process vary based on the structure of precolonial institutions? And what legacies did this leave for the postcolonial state?

We explain why it was often optimal for colonizers to delegate authority to whatever institutions were traditionally in place, even in historically decentralized areas. Despite their military superiority, colonizers were limited by the realities they encountered on the ground. Colonizers had to take seriously the traditional sources of constraints on unilateral decision making by African rulers. Early agents of indirect rule, who lacked this traditional legitimacy, struggled to maintain order and generate revenue amid rapid social and economic changes. Widespread dissatisfaction among Africans created pressure to implement institutional reforms. Empirically, we analyze original data for a comprehensive sample of subnational political institutions across British Africa, often considered the quintessential example of indirect rule. We demonstrate that subnational councils were widespread, highly correlated with precolonial institutions, and exerted meaningful decision-making powers.

Our findings build off and revise a rich literature on the theory and practice of indirect rule. Though approaches vary, the main focus is on patterns of delegation and institution-building from the perspective of the colonizers. The structure of local institutions plays a more minor role. The most common comparison is between British indirect rule and French direct rule, including historical ev-

idence on distinct governance patterns and more recent social-scientific studies that analyze long-term consequences (Crowder 1964; Crowder and Ikime 1970a; Lee and Schultz 2012; McCauley and Posner 2015; Letsa and Wilfahrt 2020). Yet each empire, especially the British, exhibited extreme intra-imperial diversity in the forms of local institutions. Existing studies capture one crucial dimension: within the British empire, governance tended to be more indirect wherever British officials perceived the existence of more centralized or more organized states (Gerring et al. 2011; Müller-Crepon 2020). But this is only one way in which patterns of precolonial governance varied. Rulers varied not only in the size and centralization of their domains, but also the constraints on their authority. In precolonial Africa, institutional constraints were the norm and unchecked authority was the exception. How did historical accountability institutions such as councils influence decisions over colonial indirect-rule institutions?

The main answer in existing work is that historical accountability institutions *did not matter* during the colonial period. Mamdani (1996) provides the most widely cited characterization of local institutions under British colonial rule. He argues that in legally bifurcated states, which prioritized the rights of white settlers, rural African chiefs who governed under practices of indirect rule lacked any institutional constraints on their authority over their subjects. This system of “decentralized despotism” (p. 8) was a creation of British rule. Regarding the position of the chief under this system, “there is no question of any internal check and balance on the exercise of authority, let alone a check that is popular and democratic. The chief is answerable only to a higher administrative authority” (p. 54).

The idea that the British were routinely able to install institutions of their own choosing builds on earlier theories by Ranger (1983) about the “invention of tradition” in the British empire and also relates to careful studies of particular regions such as Eastern Nigeria (Afigbo 1972), Northern Ghana (Nathan 2023), Kenya (Tignor 1971), Eastern Uganda (Roberts 1962), and Zambia (Posner 2005).¹ This research yields valuable insights into the local realities of colonial rule in these regions, especially earlier in the colonial period. Nonetheless, even when considered collectively, these works do not analyze a representative sample of British Africa. Instead, they focus disproportionately on regions where precolonial institutions were highly decentralized. Even Mamdani

¹For a more recent example of invented chieftaincies, see Robinson (2024).

(1996), cited 12,000 times by scholars examining varied times and places, primarily analyzes atypical settler colonies such as South Africa (Spear 2003, 9).² Other scholarship on local African councils overlooks the colonial period, instead focusing on the precolonial period (Baldwin 2015; Ahmed and Stasavage 2020; Stasavage 2020), the present day (Baldwin and Holzinger 2019; Baldwin, Muyengwa and Mvukiyehe 2022), or both (Neupert-Wentz and Müller-Crepon 2023).³

Thus, existing work on indirect rule in British Africa is incomplete in at least three ways. First, the cases studied are not representative. In fact, without systematic data, it is difficult to establish exactly what would constitute a representative sample. Second, existing studies provide little insight into either the structure of local institutions or the constraints on power embedded within them. Finally, existing studies often treat indirect-rule institutions as reflecting a static choice made at the start of the colonial period (e.g., delegation to a centralized ruler, invention of a powerful chief), rather than as the dynamic outcome of ongoing interactions between colonial policies and African preferences.

Our theory addresses how rulers choose agents to govern territories outside the metropolitan core, given fundamental goals such as keeping the peace and extracting resources. When metropolitan agents are prohibitively expensive, the ruler needs to decide what type of indigenous agent to appoint in each locality. Agents with traditional sources of legitimacy can more effectively carry out the ruler's directives, but appointed non-traditional agents should exhibit greater loyalty to the colonizers. We explain why the optimal choice is usually for colonizers to delegate authority to whatever institutions were traditionally in place, even in regions with historically decentralized governance. Applied to our context of British Africa, this framework recovers the standard expectation that the British should delegate authority to rulers of precolonial states, where present (although we also anticipate that councils should accompany such rulers wherever those institutions had a historical basis). The key implication that departs from existing research applies to historically decentralized areas. Even if appointed agents who lacked traditional sources of legitimacy were chosen in the low-information environment of the early colonial period, socioeconomic changes and rising African discontent should challenge the favored status of these artificial chiefs.

²For critiques of Mamdani's thesis applied elsewhere, see Alexander (2006, 22); Harris (2014, 22).

³For global studies that connect precolonial institutions to contemporary political regimes, see Giuliano and Nunn (2013); Bentzen, Hariri and Robinson (2019).

The appointment of colonial agents is a dynamic, not static, choice. In reaction to pressure, we expect British officials to reintroduce accountability institutions such as councils (which pervaded decentralized areas prior to colonialism), even if they required modification from their precolonial form to satisfy colonial aims.

We assess these theoretical expectations by analyzing a large and systematic sample of nearly 500 subnational governance units across British colonial Africa. British Africa is not only the canonical case in widespread debates about indirect rule, but also exhibits the type of precolonial variation needed to assess our hypotheses while offering sufficiently detailed and disaggregated data. The local governance units, known at the time as Native Authorities, were the primary governing institution of British rule in rural areas. Each Native Authority consisted of chiefs and/or councils that exercised jurisdiction over a specified subnational territory. The jurisdiction of some Native Authorities coincided with a single precolonial state, whereas other Native Authorities combined people who had previously lived under disparate polities. Native Authorities provided government services such as a legal system, land allocation, and the regulation of local markets. They were also important providers of local education and health care, which they financed through the management of Native Treasuries empowered to collect local taxes.

Our primary source of data on these colonial institutions is a comprehensive survey of District Officers conducted in the late 1940s. The responses to this survey, now held in the British National Archives, formed the empirical basis for Lord Hailey's *Native Administration in the British African Territories* (Hailey 1950a,b, 1951a,b, 1953), a five-volume comparative study of systems of local government in African colonies. Our sample includes units from the eleven colonies for which the Hailey surveys and other sources provide quantifiable information on the structure of local institutions and other contextual information, yielding 462 subnational governance units in total. Collectively, the sample covers almost every British colony in Africa.⁴ In Appendix C, we provide

⁴Empirically, our approach therefore follows the general shift in studies of colonialism toward measuring institutions and outcomes at a more disaggregated scale than the national level. Boone (2024) provides a general appeal to this approach. Examples of more fine-grained units in existing work on Africa are precolonial African states (Müller-Crepon 2020; Dasgupta and Johnson-Kanu 2021; Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet 2024), colonial districts (Huillery 2009; Ricart-Huguet 2022), Native Treasuries in four British African colonies (Bolt and Gardner 2020), and paramount chieftaincies in Sierra Leone (Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson 2014). Elsewhere, in Spanish America, Garfias and Sellars (2021, 2024) and Chiovelli et al. (2024) analyze the local implementation of direct-rule agents such as *corregimientos* and *intendants*.

qualitative evidence on three additional cases for which these sources lack any, or sufficiently detailed, information: South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Sierra Leone.

We coded numerous new variables that capture colonial-era institutions and conditions. Our main variable is the form of indirect-rule institutions which took shape over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, indicating whether each Native Authority consisted of a solo chief, a chief and council, or a council only. We also compiled information about numerous other aspects of Native Authority institutions, including council membership and public spending; and coded covariates capturing the local population, economic activities, and other local attributes during the colonial period. Finally, the Hailey volumes provide background on the historical construction of the Native Authority system in each colony. This allows us to make systematic comparisons over time, albeit at a much less fine-grained level than our main institutional data from the survey responses by District Officers.

For the precolonial period, we drew from sources that describe institutional structures immediately prior to European colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century. The basis of our originally compiled data is 38 volumes of the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (edited by Daryll Forde), which cover close to 200 African societies. To cross-check, we also consulted dozens of historical and ethnographic monographs and articles. We constructed a three-valued variable for precolonial political institutions: state with an authoritarian ruler, state with a constrained ruler, or decentralized political institutions. We thus assess not only whether a state existed at all on the eve of colonialism, but also information about executive constraints. For reasons discussed later, our variable improves substantially upon quantitative measures of precolonial institutions used in previous research, in particular Murdock's (1967) *Ethnographic Atlas*. Previous research does not adequately classify the diversity of precolonial institutions in a manner that enables assessing our hypotheses, and our new data help to open up a black box in quantitative research on precolonial institutions.

Supporting our theory and contrary to existing claims, we find that local councils were common in the colonial period and their presence overwhelmingly reflected precolonial precedents. In areas where precolonial councils constrained rulers, Native Authority institutions contained councils. This includes historically decentralized areas as well as centralized areas with historical constraints on rulers. Native Authorities comprised of solo chiefs — in the “decentralized despotism” mold

of Mamdani (1996) — were comparatively rare and confined largely to the emirates of Northern Nigeria, where precolonial rulers had also governed without meaningful constraints. Ironically, the region commonly cited as paradigmatic of British indirect rule was in fact exceptional, which is possible to show with our more systematic sample.

In many cases, subnational colonial institutions during the 1940s reflected departures from earlier colonial practices, as anticipated by our theoretical framework that examines agent selection as a dynamic rather than static choice. In many areas with historically decentralized institutions, British colonial officials at first attempted to govern through indigenous agents who lacked traditional sources of legitimacy, like the “Warrant Chiefs” of Eastern Nigeria. Here and elsewhere, the later shift towards councils reflected a broader effort to reform colonial governance during the turbulent interwar decades, replacing appointed agents who had struggled to maintain order and collect taxes. During the 1930s and 1940s, this led to a resurrection of precolonial systems of accountability and councils, although often scaled up over larger territories to create economies of scale in local administration and allow for the entry of new voices.

Nor were local councils mere window dressing. Various pieces of evidence demonstrate that councils recognized by the colonial state exercised independent decision-making powers and acted as a meaningful constraint on chiefs. The overwhelming majority of counselors had independent sources of authority, either as traditional elites or through popular selection, as we demonstrate by analyzing original data on council membership and how counselors were selected. By contrast, few counselors were chosen by the Native Authority chief or British administrators. Moreover, the composition of councils was highly correlated with precolonial practices. Patterns of public spending are also indicative of the influence councils had on local policies. Native Authorities with legally recognized councils tended to spend a greater fraction of their budget on public goods and less on officials’ salaries. Through councils, often accompanied by finance committees with wider membership, Africans were able to boost spending on desired areas such as education and medical services.

Our findings have important implications for ongoing debates about African institutions and the legacies of colonialism. The prior absence of more systematic data obscured the relationship between precolonial institutions and African local governments under indirect rule. In fact, given

the heterogeneity inherent in colonial practices, systematic data such as ours are needed simply to describe the institutional structures under indirect rule (in particular the previously overlooked role of councils). Moreover, our analysis challenges arguments that Africans lacked agency in shaping colonial institutions and that British administrators were usually able to unilaterally wipe away existing institutions by permanently installing authoritarian chiefs. Instead, British officials had compelling incentives to respond to African demands for local institutional constraints — not out of benevolence, but because these reforms furthered their colonial aims of keeping the peace and collecting revenue. Consequently, subnational colonial councils became widespread and affected policy. Collectively, this evidence suggests that attributes of colonialism above the subnational level may provide a more compelling explanation for the difficulty of establishing durable executive constraints in post-colonial Africa. We return to this question about legacies in the conclusion.

THEORY: CHOOSING AGENTS UNDER INDIRECT RULE

Colonial governments in Africa were not the first to confront the challenges of remote administration in new territory. Throughout history, colonizers have sought to achieve the overarching aims of maintaining order and collecting revenue.⁵ A key element in this choice is what type of agent to appoint; different types of agents vary in their loyalty, effectiveness, and cost. The headline implication of our theory is that when cost is a binding constraint, it is usually optimal to delegate authority to whatever institutions were traditionally in place. This prediction aligns with existing theories for localities with a clear centralized ruler (e.g., Kabaka of Buganda). However, contrary to existing work, we contend that this implication also usually applies to areas without state-like institutions. Appointed agents like Warrant Chiefs can be expedient in circumstances of low information about local conditions and military pacification. However, as societal pressures rise and colonizers gain information, it becomes optimal to delegate to institutions with traditional sources of legitimacy. The choice of colonial agent is dynamic, not static.

⁵For diverse scholarship that emphasizes these objectives, see the Conceptual Prologue to [Finer's \(1997\)](#) treatise on the history of government (in particular pp. 66–70) and [Padró i Miquel and Yared's \(2012\)](#) theoretical analysis of principal-agent problems in imperial governance.

TRADEOFFS IN TYPE OF AGENT

Colonizers can choose to delegate substantial local authority to indigenous actors, a practice known as indirect rule. Within this broad mantle, colonizers decide between two ideal-types of agent: traditional elites with a high degree of local legitimacy and installed agents who lack this basis. Whereas traditionally legitimate agents tend to be more effective, they also are also less beholden to the colonial administration — and therefore less inherently loyal.

Traditionally legitimate elites tend to have better information about their population. Among other advantages, superior information can help to uncover plots of revolt before they manifest. Such actors also tend to be better at inducing the quasi-voluntary compliance needed to effectively collect direct taxes (Levi 1989). However, these same sources of local legitimacy can also be used against the colonizer. Local elites are better positioned to themselves rebel or otherwise conspire against the colonizer (Finer 1997, 66–70). Even after consolidating foreign rule, they can leverage various “weapons of the weak” that undermine colonial control (Scott 1987; Abernethy 2000).

The other ideal-type of indirect-rule agent is an installed indigenous agent who lacks traditional legitimacy. This could entail, for example, appointing an agent based in a nearby area (a common practice in French Africa) or inflating the powers of an individual who traditionally lacked such powers (e.g., Warrant Chiefs in Southern Nigeria). Installed agents have the converse pros and cons of traditionally legitimate agents. On the one hand, installed agents derive their elevated status from colonial control, which increases their loyalty toward colonial officials. On the other hand, the local population is more likely to resist foreign impositions. This lessens the effectiveness of appointed agents by reducing their ability to prevent revolts or extract direct taxes.

Alternatively, colonizers can eschew indigenous agents entirely and govern the territory directly through official metropolitan agents or unofficial settlers. However, crucial scope conditions that mitigate against using agents from the metropole apply to our empirical setting — high salaries (Frankema 2009; Gardner 2012; Cogneau, Dupraz and Mesple-Soms 2021) and geographic limitations on European settlement (Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001; Paine 2019). Given the prohibitive costs of constructing a Weberian-style bureaucratic state, we focus on the choice between types of indirect-rule agents.

OPTIMAL CHOICE OF AGENT: COUNCILS IN DECENTRALIZED AREAS

Given these pros and cons, how does the colonizer choose between traditionally legitimate and installed agents? One key factor is the degree of centralization in precolonial institutions, as studied in existing work (Gerring et al. 2011; Müller-Crepon 2020). Effective local administration requires economies of scale. This leads colonial officials to prioritize elites whose scope of authority extends beyond a small locality (e.g., only a single or small cluster of villages). If the colonizer secures basic promises of allegiance from local elites with a centralized basis, aspects of traditional administration can be repurposed under foreign rule. Furthermore, colonizers often have more hierarchical political institutions at home. Therefore, they tend to better understand how to delegate authority to elites who themselves command allegiance under hierarchical political institutions. For these reasons, we concur with much existing work by anticipating that delegation to traditional elites is more likely in areas with centralized political institutions.⁶

Historically decentralized areas pose greater administrative challenges. Existing work contends that colonizers necessarily install non-traditional agents like Warrant Chiefs; if no king could be found, they would make one. We contend instead that non-traditional agents were the expedient choice under more circumscribed conditions. Colonizers often misunderstood traditional sources of authority and constraints in African societies. Thus, when establishing an administration in a low-information environment, non-traditional agents would constitute the default choice. Even when the local population disapproved of this choice, the military pacification campaigns associated with installing early administrations would usually suffice to deter movements against colonially chosen agents. However, over the longer term, we anticipate that various types of pressures would reopen the choice of loyal-but-ineffective agents. Installed agents may prove themselves hopelessly ineffective as the local population turns against invented despots who lack local accountability. Moreover, socioeconomic conditions change over time. Revolts and other forms of agitation by colonial subjects create pressure on colonizers to pivot to another type of agent.

Non-traditional agents are not the only option in historically decentralized areas; institutions that

⁶The strength of this preference also depends on the goals of metropolitan governance, which lies outside the scope of our framework to explain. Colonizers such as France and Portugal generally sought a greater degree of assimilation, or at least association, between their colonies and the metropole, which created incentives against using traditionally legitimate agents (Crowder 1970; Crowder and Ikime 1970a; Müller-Crepon 2020).

replicate certain aspects of traditionally legitimate institutions could constitute a viable alternative. Historically decentralized areas are not “ungoverned” spaces (Murtazashvili 2016) and may have “complex” institutions that empower disparate members of society through village councils, age grades, purchased titles, and secret societies (McIntosh 1999). Foreign institutions often create prohibitive transaction costs for colonizers with limited knowledge of newly conquered territory. However, after gaining experience and learning over time, the colonizers can seek to restructure earlier institutions in ways to achieve economies of scale. For example, they can scale up councils to encompass larger areas than single villages. The drawbacks of autocratic installed agents increase the relative attraction of delegating authority to institutions with stronger local accountability.

Socioeconomic changes reinforce the desire to reform earlier local institutions. Incorporation into a larger political structure through territorial expansion or constructing an empire inevitably yields some degree of change. For example, traditional indigenous agents lose some powers while gaining others, and they will strategically manipulate indigenous institutions to align with the new principal-agent relationship created by the ruling power. The promotion of new modes of economic output such as cash crops and cultural influence from the metropole (e.g., religious missionaries) will also create new elites (Pengl, Roessler and Rueda 2022).⁷ New voices create novel demands for incorporation into local institutions. Local governance through expanded councils is better able to accommodate such demands than autocratic governance through appointed agents. For the same reason that institutions of accountability are lauded for promoting better governance in Western societies (North and Weingast 1989; Acemoglu and Robinson 2020), locally accountable agents can serve colonizers’ goals of minimizing revolts and collecting revenue.

In sum, we anticipate that colonizers will often choose to delegate governance to whatever institutions were traditionally in place, which includes but is not limited to areas with centralized pre-colonial states. The scope conditions that yield this implication for historically decentralized areas include the prior ineffectiveness of autocratic non-traditional agents, improved information about precolonial institutions, socioeconomic changes, and newfound pressure from local actors.

⁷As an example from colonies outside of Africa, the end of slavery in the West Indies created a new Black middle class while reducing the power of white plantation owners (Owolabi 2023).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: APPLYING THE THEORY TO BRITISH AFRICA

Matching the implications of our theory to the realities of non-settler areas of British Africa yields expectations for which types of indirect-rule institutions colonizers would construct. Areas with precolonial states supplied effective rulers that colonizers could repurpose. In historically decentralized areas, by contrast, the conditions that would favor agents with traditional legitimacy did not emerge until the interwar period. Autocratic non-traditional agents proved themselves to be ineffective, socioeconomic changes created new pressures, and the colonizers gained information about precolonial constraining institutions such as councils. Thus, after early trial-and-errors, we anticipate that the British would largely delegate governance to institutions resembling whatever had been in place before the colonial imposition.

PRECOLONIAL POLITIES

Two key attributes of precolonial Africa structured the subsequent choices made during the colonial period. First, most African polities were relatively small scale, but some larger, more centralized states emerged. Second, institutionally constrained rulers were the rule rather than exception.

Precolonial Africa was populated by thousands of distinct political units, most of which were very small (Southall 1970, 231). The ease of exit in regions with low population density and readily available land made it difficult to concentrate autocratic powers (Herbst 2000; Stasavage 2020). Many African societies jealously guarded the internal autonomy of their local community (Vansina 1990, 119), which often resulted in small-scale political units with significant institutional checks on unilateral authority. For example, in Igboland in Eastern Nigeria, each village had an elaborate structure of councils. Alongside other types of societies such as lineage groups and secret societies, local councils collectively made decisions for the community (Afigbo 1981). Villages tended to be divided into two halves that created what Green (1947, 16) calls a system of “checks and balances.” Farther north in Nigeria, the Tiv were organized by small-scale units such as descent groups and lineages. In East Africa, many societies were organized around a rotating sequence of age grades that diffused and continually rotated power, which provided a check against the emergence of centralized authority (Bernardi 1985).

General pressures against autocratic power concentration often checked executive authority even where more centralized polities emerged. In the Asante region of the Gold Coast, the Mpayimfo (council) consisted of elders who were senior members of their kindred groups. The Asantehene did not reach decisions without gaining agreement from these elders (Rattray 1929, 77; Busia 1951, 14; Wilks 1975, 387–413). Similarly, in the major states in Yorubaland (Western Nigeria), each oba (ruler) claimed divine powers. However, in practice, the obas consulted with a council of elders on all important decisions (Usman and Falola 2019, 25; Ogundiran 2021, 191–92).

Highly autocratic states were rarer. They tended to emerge in areas of high population density or where states controlled trade routes or lucrative natural resources. Jihadists founded the militaristic Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria by conquering long-standing Hausa states, which had captured proceeds from the trans-Saharan trade (Adeleye 1971; Smaldone 1977). Councils existed in each the roughly two dozen emirates into which the Caliphate was organized, but these bodies had little influence (Johnston 1970, 172). Structures could also change over time as the resources available to rulers shifted. Prior to the nineteenth century, the kabaka (ruler) of Buganda exercised power alongside bataka elites, who held hereditary positions as heads of clans, sub-clans, and lineages. However, by the nineteenth century, the kabakas had amassed sufficient power to remove bataka chiefs whom they opposed (Fallers 1960, 64; Kiwanuka 1971, 101–2). In Buganda and elsewhere, increased access to European guns in the nineteenth century enabled rulers to concentrate power (Goody 1971; Reid 2012). For example, by shifting from an aristocratic cavalry force to enslaved soldiers, emirs within the Sokoto Caliphate shed one of the few constraints they had faced previously.

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

Administrators in British Africa shared the standard colonial goals of keeping the peace and raising revenues. The high costs of employing metropolitan officials prompted London to rely primarily on African agents (Kirk-Greene 1980; Berry 1992; Iliffe 2007; Richens 2009; Gardner 2012; Bolt and Gardner 2020).⁸ British officials could more easily identify agents with suitable authority in

⁸Within the colonies in our sample, the main areas in which the Native Administration was not used were areas of white settlement in Kenya (see also our discussion of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in Appendix C) and the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia (for discussions of direct rule in mineral-rich areas outside of Africa, see Engerman and Sokoloff 2011 and Garfias and Sellars 2024 on Spanish America and

regions with a history of political centralization. In Buganda, for example, the Uganda Agreement of 1900 delegated a high degree of authority to the Kabaka and his council, the Lukiiko (Low and Pratt 1960). In Northern Nigeria, under the rule of Frederick Lugard, the paradigmatic institutions of British Indirect Rule (Native Authorities, Native Treasuries, and Native Courts) were formalized between 1914 and 1917 (Lugard 1922).

By contrast, in areas of small-scale and decentralized precolonial polities, early British officials often misunderstood authority structures that lacked an easily identifiable head. In areas such as Southern Nigeria, the British engaged in extensive repression and military pacification to establish control (Tamuno 1972). British administrators were rotated frequently and usually lacked a deep familiarity with their posted area and its political history. This impeded their ability to make informed decisions when constructing a new administrative apparatus, which often entailed on-the-spot decisions. Thus, in the early years, it was expedient to install chiefs as executive agents of the regime, many of whom lacked sources of traditional legitimacy. Empowered by the British administration and lacking indigenous institutions to check their power, Warrant Chiefs in Southern Nigeria, headmen in Kenya, and similar agents elsewhere often developed autocratic powers and were highly corrupt and repressive (Tignor 1971; Afigbo 1972).

However, several shocks during the interwar period revealed inadequacies with the status quo. In many areas, installed agents proved ineffective at collecting taxes and maintaining order. In Southern Nigeria, riots occurred in Warri in 1927–28, followed by the Aba Women’s War farther east in 1929. These revolts responded to the initial attempts to collect direct taxes in each area and the unpopularity of the Warrant Chiefs who sought to collect them (Ikime 1966; 1968, 436–38; Afigbo 1972, 207–48). Similarly, in Kenya, nationalist agitation and protests in the 1920s signaled discontent with local headmen (Schilling 1976, 221). In Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), officials complained about fiscal ineffectiveness — inadequate economies of scale in areas with small-scale indigenous authority — despite the absence of revolts. Colonial officials lamented that the Native Authorities “controlled so few people that they were unable to support independent treasuries and

Naseemullah and Staniland 2016 on India). Additionally, some urban areas were exempt from the Native Authority ordinances. In the major port cities, African-elected municipal governments oversaw local affairs, and these areas also elected members to territory-wide legislative councils starting in the 1920s (see Lee and Paine 2024 for a general overview and the Hailey volumes for discussions of specific cases).

could never become effective units of local government.”⁹

Seismic socioeconomic changes also occurred over time. Early colonial administrations generated revenue streams primarily by building infrastructure to promote export production of a small number of primary commodities. In many colonies, this fostered economic growth and expanded the taxable surplus. However, this growth was highly vulnerable to shifts in global prices, and several prolonged bouts of contraction occurred during the interwar period (Broadberry and Gardner 2022). The impact of these economic upheavals on living standards led to growing political activism among African producers. They demanded increased provision of public services, which the colonial governments had few resources to meet. Moreover, new classes of literate Africans emerged (often but not exclusively in more urban areas) who sought to leverage their voice in decisions over local governance.

In sum, applying our general theoretical framework to British Africa in the interwar period yields an expectation of delegation to traditionally legitimate agents. Some areas had a history of autocratic rule, which we expect to persist during colonial rule. But much of precolonial Africa was governed through constraining institutions such as councils. Despite earlier colonial practices of installing non-traditional chiefs, the twin stimuli of anti-tax revolts and socioeconomic changes should prompt reforms that promote institutions with a greater degree of local accountability. We anticipate that the shift toward councils would be most pronounced in historically decentralized areas (which were most prone to have earlier loyal-but-ineffective agents), but should also occur in areas with a history of centralized but constrained rulers. Consequently, decentralized areas and areas with constrained precolonial states should more frequently have councils as part of their Native Authority than areas with authoritarian precolonial states; and areas with any type of precolonial state should be more likely to have a chief as part of their Native Authority than decentralized areas. In the remainder of the paper, we assess these and subsidiary theoretical hypotheses using originally compiled data on precolonial and colonial institutions in British Africa.

⁹“Notes on African local government in Northern Rhodesia,” in UK National Archives CO 1015/524.

DATA

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The British administrative scheme featured, in descending order of size: provinces, divisions, districts, Native Treasuries (NTs), and Native Authorities (NAs). Throughout, our unit of analysis is the NT. Our sample consists of 462 NTs across British Africa, including 203 in Nigeria, 87 in Gold Coast (Ghana), 52 in Tanganyika (Tanzania), 42 in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 26 in Kenya, 16 in Nyasaland (Malawi), 13 in Gambia, 12 in Uganda, nine in Bechuanaland (Botswana), and one in each of Lesotho and Swaziland (Eswatini).

Although we measure colonial political institutions at the level of the NA, we use NTs as the unit of analysis. This choice reflects theoretical and practical considerations. British assessments about the scale of effective authority applied to fiscal units, which were the NTs. Comparing NT units, rather than observations that include many small NAs, in some sense helps to make the units in the data set more easily comparable to each other, although NTs nonetheless varied in their perceived importance and population within and across colonies. Moreover, this was the level at which fiscal authority was exercised, a key component of the decision-making powers of Native Authorities. Practical limitations also inform our choice of NTs over NAs as the unit of analysis. It was difficult enough to collect covariate data at the level of the NT, and we unfortunately lack sufficient information to do so at the level of the NA. Although we were able to compile comprehensive maps of NTs from the UK National Archives in London, we lack comparable maps for individual NAs. In practice, as we discuss later, the distinction makes little difference for our main outcome variable; within NTs with multiple NAs, there is almost no institutional variance.

PRECOLONIAL INSTITUTIONS

We coded an original variable for precolonial institutions, using colonial NTs as the unit of analysis. Our coding proceeded in three steps.¹⁰ First, we distinguished between states and decentralized areas. To do so, we built upon a recent dataset of precolonial African states from Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024). Their data set draws in large part from the *Historical Atlas of Africa*, edited by the eminent historians Ajayi and Crowder (1985). This source includes a series of regional

¹⁰Appendix A.1 provides details and Appendix Table A.2 presents summary statistics by colony. Appendix B.1 provides excerpts from our codebook.

maps of precolonial African states between the 1850s and 1880s.¹¹ The underlying conceptualization for determining which polities constituted *states* is Fortes and Evans-Pritchard’s (1940, 5) criteria of “Group A” societies, meaning they have “centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions—in short, a government.” Extending the data from Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024) yields a list of 58 states, as described in Appendix A.1.

Our main innovation was the second step: measuring whether institutional constraints were present for each state. Based on extensive historical and anthropological sources, we coded a binary variable for whether a council imposed effective institutional constraints on the ruler. To determine this, we sought to answer the following types of questions using our sources, with affirmative answers indicating an effective council. Did the ruler regularly consult a council? Did a council regularly influence policy decisions? Was the ruler unable to regularly override the desires of the council? The scholarly literature suggests many ways in which rulers could be constrained and made accountable, but we chose this definition because it is concrete and relatively straightforward to measure. We consulted the relevant volumes of the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (edited by Daryll Forde), which we cross-checked using dozens of additional books and articles about individual cases.

Precolonial institutions were not static. States rose and fell over time (e.g., the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire in the 1820s) and institutional constraints fluctuated as well (the earlier-discussed example of Buganda). Nonetheless, institutions such as constraints on the executive tended to reflect longer-term forces such that measuring the influence of councils in the late nineteenth century provides an informative snapshot. Moreover, Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024) include only states in existence prior to 1850, all of which still existed on the eve of colonialism.¹²

Third, we matched each precolonial state to a Native Treasury. This was straightforward. In all but two cases, the associated Treasury was named after the historical state. In all cases, the location of the last capital for the state was located within the associated NT, as we verified with our digitized maps.¹³

¹¹The maps also indicate regions that came under early colonial control. Among the precolonial states in our data set, only Lesotho (colonized in 1878) came under European control before 1885.

¹²Appendix B.1 addresses another possible concern about using colonial-era anthropological accounts.

¹³Appendix Table A.1 lists each precolonial state and associated NT(s).

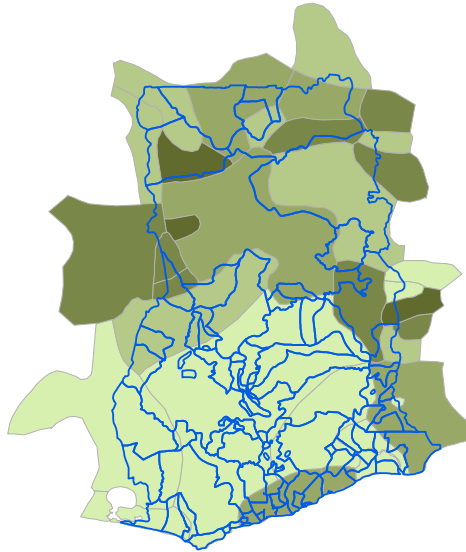
Overall, the precolonial institutions for each NT are scored as either (a) state with an authoritarian ruler, (b) state with a ruler constrained by an influential council, or (c) decentralized institutions. The latter are NTs without any precolonial state matched to it. Although we do not directly measure institutions in areas with decentralized institutions, extensive anthropological and historical evidence catalogs the prevalence of political constraints on rulers and of village governance entirely through councils. Earlier we mentioned village councils in cases such as the Igbo in Nigeria and various age-grade-based societies in East Africa. Thus, we interpret NTs with decentralized institutions as ones with historical institutional constraints (and thus, on this dimension, similar to states with constrained rulers).

Existing data sets cannot replicate our relatively fine-grained measure of precolonial institutions. Earlier variables that capture aspects of precolonial institutional constraints use ethnic-group units from anthropologist George Murdock, either the *Ethnographic Atlas* for Africa or the Standard Cross-Cultural Survey (SCCS). Several scholars have amended the SCCS to code constraints on the powers of precolonial rulers and the influence of councils (Murdock and Wilson 1972; Tuden and Marshall 1972; Ross 1983; Ember, Russett and Ember 1993; see Baldwin 2015 and Ahmed and Stasavage 2020 for recent uses in political science of these council variables). However, these data are not suitable for our purposes. The SCCS contains 186 polities across the world, and only six located within the eleven African colonies in our dataset. By contrast, our dataset incorporates 462 NTs in these colonies. Furthermore, the ethnic units from Murdock (1959) constitute a much more highly aggregated unit than actual polities in precolonial Africa, and his list and polygons exhibit little overlap with colonial district and Treasury boundaries. Therefore, despite broad coverage of Africa, using this source to measure precolonial institutions would induce an unacceptable amount of measurement error for our units. In Figure 1, we illustrate these discrepancies for Ghana.

COLONIAL INSTITUTIONS

We compiled numerous new variables that capture colonial-era institutions and conditions. Our primary sources are the five volumes of Lord Hailey's *Native Administration in the British African Territories* (Hailey 1950a,b, 1951a,b, 1953) and the extensive primary source material that Hailey

Figure 1: Native Treasuries and Murdock Ethnic Groups in Ghana



Notes: Murdock ethnic groups in green and NT borders in blue.

used to construct these volumes, which we accessed from the UK National Archives in London.¹⁴ The Hailey surveys constituted the first attempt to systematically characterize Native Administration in British Africa. This enabled us to develop fine-grained measures of the subnational institutions for the 1940s, reflecting reforms which took place over the course of the previous decade. However, the Hailey volumes also provide background on the development of the Native Authority system in each colony, which enables us to make systematic over-time comparisons at a more highly aggregated level.¹⁵ We are unaware of comparable data sources for other empires, but the wide variety in precolonial institutions across British Africa make this setting ideal for empirically assessing our theoretical implications.

Indirect-rule institutions. For each NT, we calculate the fraction of NAs within the NT with the following institutional structures, which differ in whether a chief and/or council was legally

¹⁴The surveys are from the TNA CO/1018 series; see Bolt and Gardner (2020) for a lengthier description. Colonial sources raise important concerns about bias. However, available evidence suggests that Hailey attempted to accurately characterize local political institutions—even where such assessments were inconvenient to local officials, some of whom complained about the reports. See Memorandum on “Lord Hailey’s Report on Native Administration and Political Development,” 7 November 1944, in Kenya National Archives BW1/1/559.

¹⁵Appendix A.2.1 provides a timeline of important ordinances by colony.

recognized in the colonial *Gazettes* as part of the Native Authority.¹⁶

- Solo chief, e.g., the Emir of Kano in Northern Nigeria. He had an advisory council, but this body was not legally recognized as having powers as part of the Native Authority.
- Chief and council, e.g., the Ada Manche and the State Council in the Gold Coast.
- Council only, e.g., the Ndoki Clan Council in Eastern Nigeria. For this and the preceding two types, we code subnational institutions based on the structure of the Superior Native Authority, although many encompassed lower-level Subordinate Native Authorities that lacked the full powers of NAs.
- Federal council, which consisted of a higher-level Native Authority council that controlled the Native Treasury (e.g., Local Native Councils in Kenya, federal councils of chiefs in Tanganyika and Nyasaland, and District Councils in Eastern Uganda) and multiple lower-level Native Authorities, typically solo chiefs, who retained various powers delegated to authorities at a more local level. For our main analysis, we group federal-council NAs with council-only NAs. Such cases are coded solely based on the higher-level council; this Native Authority controlled the power of the fisc because it corresponded with the jurisdiction of the NT, our unit of analysis. However, we also present a robustness check in which we group these cases with chief-and-council NAs, which reflects the institutions for the lower-level NAs as well.

As shown in Appendix Table A.3, the average number of NAs per NT was 3.2 across the entire sample, although this varied substantially by colony. NTs with multiple NAs exhibit almost no variance in subnational institutions. In 444 of 462 NTs (96%), every NA within the NT (including the lower-level NAs with a federal council) had the same regime type, that is, either solo chief, chief and council, or council only. This observation alleviates a possible concern that using NTs as the unit of analysis creates ecological inference problems. Furthermore, NTs that contained a large number of NAs usually had Treasury-wide federal councils.¹⁷

¹⁶Appendix Table A.3 presents summary statistics by colony and Appendix B.2 provides excerpts from our codebook.

¹⁷A small number of NAs were a confederacy of chiefs. We count these as council-only NAs because no chief was individually recognized as an NA. In four cases, the District Officer was the Native Authority. For three, there were other NAs within the NT, and we calculate the fraction of each type of NA while ignoring

Membership of councils. The existence of legally recognized councils would not be particularly meaningful if they routinely lacked independent sources of authority or any decision-making powers. Thus, one important piece of information is who participated on these councils. For each council,¹⁸ we used descriptions from the Hailey volumes and surveys to score how the counselors were selected: elites, popularly selected, chief-appointed, or British-appointed. Using this information, we computed (a) which type of member comprised the *plurality*, and (b) whether *any* members of each type sat on the council.¹⁹

We also compiled information on the presence of finance committees.²⁰ These committees were intended to facilitate greater local control over Native Treasury estimates. They were generally composed of members of the wider council and sometimes joined by mission-educated members of the local community. For example, according to the Hailey surveys, the finance committee of the Kwahu Native Treasury in the Gold Coast included “one chief, two elders and two members trained in and working in occupations connected with finance.”²¹ These committees varied in terms of their size, capacity, and level of activity. However, the surveys note that many took an active role in determining the priorities of Native Treasury spending. For example, the Hailey surveys described the Finance and General Purposes committee of the Central Kavirondo LNC in Kenya, as an “extremely lively” committee which “scrutinises estimates with great care and in great detail.”²²

Native Treasury expenditures. To assess whether the presence of councils affected outcomes, we examine the composition of public expenditures by Native Treasuries, drawing from various sources to construct original measures.²³ Budgets recorded in colonial archives distinguish between expenditures on administration (which included the salaries of chiefs, counselors, and lower-level District Officer NAs. For the Kigezi treasury in Uganda, the District Officer was the only NA, and we drop this NT from the data set.

¹⁸Our sample of councils includes informal advisory councils (e.g., the aforementioned example from Kano), in addition to councils included as part of the Native Authority.

¹⁹Appendix A.2.2 details the coding procedure, Appendix Table A.5 presents summary statistics, and Appendix B.2 provides excerpts from our codebook.

²⁰Appendix Table A.7 presents summary statistics.

²¹TNA CO 1018/10.

²²TNA CO 1018/25.

²³Appendix A.2.3 provides supporting details and Table A.6 presents summary statistics.

level officials) and public goods such as education, medical services, and road maintenance. Disaggregated spending data for individual NTs is available only sporadically, and thus we can measure this variable for only a subset of colonies in a single year in the 1940s. As a result, local spending has been neglected by research on the history of colonial fiscal systems.²⁴ This paper is one of the first to use data on the composition of expenditures by individual Native Treasuries.

Covariates. Various factors could have influenced the form of indirect-rule institutions. Economies of scale could have made certain types of institutions more efficient, which motivates controlling for population and population density in our regressions. We also control for numerous variables that encompass the major sources of colonial economic activity, which in turn could have influenced the importance of each NT and perhaps subnational political institutions: total value of cash crops (the source of export revenue); fraction of land alienated for Europeans (because Europeans, where they settled, were major economic and political actors); and distance from the center of each NT area to the nearest railroad, coastline, and colonial capital (all sites of major economic activities). Finally, we control for whether a Christian mission was located within the area of the NT.²⁵

Appendix [A.3](#) provides details on our digitized NT maps, measurement of variables, sources, and missing observations. Appendix Table [A.4](#) presents summary statistics.

COUNCILS IN BRITISH AFRICA

Evidence from British Africa supports our theoretical expectations, which we first assess with cross-tabulations and qualitative evidence. Starting in the late 1920s, officials throughout British Africa responded to pressure from Africans as well as concerns about economies of scale and economic fluctuations by prioritizing African institutions with greater traditional legitimacy. In historically centralized areas, traditionally legitimate elites usually gained status early in the colonial period, but their councils gained wider legal recognition. In historically decentralized areas, variants of the model originally introduced in Nigeria spread throughout British Africa to reg-

²⁴For exceptions, see Gardner (2012); Bolt and Gardner (2020); Müller-Crepon (2020).

²⁵All covariates are logged except the mission indicator. Existing research suggests that other factors, such as historical Islamic states, affected subsequent outcomes in large part by conditioning the impact of missionaries (Bauer, Platas and Weinstein 2022).

ularize the powers of traditionally legitimate Native Authorities and their accompanying Native Treasuries and Native Courts. The Native Authority ordinances allowed great leeway to adapt the form of these institutions to local conditions, including the recognition of councils. For example, Tanganyika’s ordinance of 1926 (which, subsequently, was widely adopted elsewhere) defined Native Authorities as “Chiefs or other native or *any Native Council* or groups of natives declared as such by Government” [our emphasis].

As a result of these reforms, by the 1930s and 1940s councils were empowered as meaningful actors for fiscal and other matters. In historically decentralized areas like Eastern Nigeria, Kenya, Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Nyasaland (Malawi), a typical manifestation was to scale up local participatory institutions, in particular councils, to larger administrative units. Such institutions varied widely in their fiscal efficacy (Hailey 1951a, 165), but served their intended purpose of broadening the scope of authority. Financial limits on the colonial state created incentives for British administrators to allow traditional elites and popularly selected individuals to participate on councils, which were equipped with bodies such as finance committees to enable them to participate in the budgeting process.

SUMMARY STATISTICS AND CROSS TABULATIONS

Using our new data, we identify a previously unrecognized pattern: legally recognized councils were pervasive in British Africa by the 1940s. The bottom row of Table 1 shows how rare solo chiefs were—only 17% of Native Authorities. The remaining Native Authorities included councils, either chief and council (36%) or council only (47%).²⁶ This observation contrasts starkly with the standard portrayal of “decentralized despotism” and unchecked chiefs everywhere, and also underscores the extreme heterogeneity in indirect-rule institutions.

Supporting our theoretical expectations, the table also demonstrates the high correspondence between precolonial institutions (rows) and colonial institutions (columns) with regard to the presence of chief executives and/or councils. Native Authorities without a council (solo-chief NAs) pervaded areas with authoritarian precolonial states (89%), but were rare in areas with a constrained state (9%) or decentralized institutions (12%). Native Authorities without a chief (council-only

²⁶As noted earlier, in the analysis we group federal-council NAs with council-only NAs unless otherwise noted.

Table 1: Cross Tabulations: Indirect-Rule Institutions

Precolonial/Colonial	Solo chief	Chief and council	Council	Totals
Authoritarian state	89%	11%	<1%	7%
Constrained state	9%	91%	0%	12%
Decentralized	12%	30%	58%	81%
Totals	17%	36%	47%	N=462

Notes: Appendix Tables A.2 and A.3 provide more detailed summary statistics for precolonial institutions and Native Authority institutions, respectively, disaggregated by colony.

NAs) were common in areas with decentralized institutions (58%), but essentially absent in NTs containing precolonial states. As a corollary of these two patterns, constrained states usually had chief-and-council NAs (91%).

Members of subnational councils had independent bases of power and were not mere mouthpieces of either Native Authority chiefs or the British administration. As shown in Table 2, councils typically consisted of a plurality of either elite (56% of all councils) or popularly selected members (30%). By contrast, councils were rarely dominated by members appointed by either the Native Authority chief (12%) or British officials (3%). Moreover, these institutional forms correlate with their precolonial predecessors. Chief-dominated councils were mostly confined to areas with authoritarian precolonial states,²⁷ elite-dominated councils were most prevalent in areas with constrained precolonial states, and popularly selected members were most prevalent in historically decentralized areas (although, even there, less prevalent than elite members).

Table 2: Cross Tabulations: Composition of Councils

	Elite	Popular	Chief-app	British-app
Authoritarian state	44%	7%	48%	0%
Constrained state	73%	18%	9%	0%
Decentralized	54%	33%	9%	4%
Totals	56%	30%	12%	3%

Notes: Appendix Table A.5 provides more detailed summary statistics for council members, disaggregated by colony.

PATTERNS ACROSS COLONIES AND TIME

Our theory emphasizes the dynamic choice of colonial agents; earlier installed agents can be replaced if proven to be ineffective. In Table 3, we summarize subnational political institutions over

²⁷Reflecting the patterns from Table 1, councils with a plurality of chief-appointed members were mostly confined to areas with solo-chief NAs. These councils served only in an advisory capacity without formal discretion over policy decisions.

time by using the Hailey volumes to characterize institutional forms earlier in the colonial period, albeit at a much more highly aggregated level than our later, post-reform data.²⁸ The table indicates a reasonably high degree of persistence across the colonial period in areas with precolonial states, albeit with a greater emphasis on (legally recognized) councils over time. By contrast, early institutions in decentralized areas tended to be more arbitrary. However, they were largely replaced by the 1930s amid the introduction of the canonical “indirect rule” institutions, the Native Authorities and Native Treasuries. Councils of various forms became widespread.

Table 3: Comparing Indirect-Rule Institutions over Time – General

Precolonial states		
<i>State</i>	<i>Early subnational institutions</i>	<i>Native Authority institutions</i>
Sokoto – Northern Nigeria	Chief (traditional)	Solo chief
Yoruba – Southern Nigeria	Chief (traditional)	Chief and council
Benin – Southern Nigeria	Direct rule	Chief and council
Ashanti – Gold Coast	Direct rule	Chief and council
Buganda, etc. – Uganda	Chief and council (traditional)	Chief and council
Barotseland, etc. – N. Rhodesia	Chief and council (traditional)	Chief and council
Tswana – Bechuanaland	Chief and council (traditional)	Chief and council
Lesotho, Swaziland	Chief and council (traditional)	Chief and council
Decentralized areas		
<i>Region</i>	<i>Early subnational institutions</i>	<i>Native Authority institutions</i>
Southern Nigeria	Warrant chiefs (arbitrary)	Council-only
Colony – Nigeria	Council (traditional)	Council-only
Colony – Gold Coast	Chief and council (traditional)	Chief and council
Northern Terr. – Gold Coast	Chief (arbitrary)	Chief and council or solo chief
Gambia	District Heads (arbitrary)	Chief and council
Kenya	Headmen (arbitrary)	Federal council
Eastern/Northern Uganda	Chief (arbitrary)	Federal council
Tanganyika	Chief (traditional)	Federal council or solo chief
Nyasaland	Principal headmen (arbitrary)	Federal council or solo chief
Northern Rhodesia	Chief (arbitrary)	Chief and council

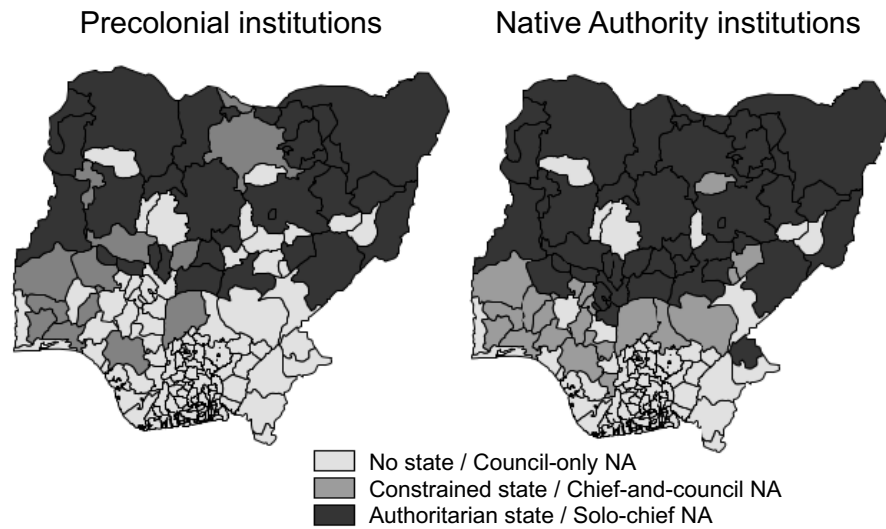
Notes: This table groups each precolonial state and decentralized area into broad regions to compare subnational colonial institutions types over time. For the early subnational institutions, “traditional” indicates that the institutions had a basis in precolonial patterns whereas “arbitrary” signifies that (for the most part) they did not.

Nigeria. This case illustrates the core spatial and temporal patterns, as shown in Figure 2 and Table 4. Nigeria exhibits substantial within-colony variation, with a precolonial history of authoritarian states in the North (most important, the Sokoto Caliphate), a mix of constrained states (Yoruba) and decentralized areas in the West, and decentralized areas in the East.

²⁸Appendix A.2.1 provides details.

Early in Nigerian administration, the key difference was between areas with and without pre-colonial states; councils played no role. Reports from the 1920s compare Native Authorities by district, distinguishing between first- or second-class chiefs and the appointed “Warrant Chiefs.” Areas with precolonial states (regardless of whether the state was authoritarian or constrained) consisted almost exclusively of first- or second-class chiefs recognized as solo-chief Native Authorities. By contrast, the decentralized areas of Eastern and Western Nigeria (Southern Nigeria) consisted primarily of Warrant Chiefs.

Figure 2: Comparing Precolonial and Colonial Institutions in Nigeria



Notes: The maps depict Native Treasury boundaries. For each, the color reflects which type of institution was a plurality within the NT.

Table 4: Comparing Indirect-Rule Institutions over Time – Nigeria

	1920s			1930s/40s		
	1st/2nd Class Chief	Warrant chief	District head	Solo chief	Chief and council	Council only
Authoritarian state	95%	0%	5%	98%	1%	<1%
Constrained state	100%	0%	0%	42%	58%	0%
Decentralized	18%	56%	27%	9%	14%	77%

Notes: 1930s/40s data from our main data set, with averages computed over NTs; 1920s from the UK Military Report on Nigeria (United Kingdom War Office 1929). The latter source describes institutional form at the district level, which was straightforward to merge with our precolonial institutions data (measured at the less aggregated level of the Native Treasury).

The form of indirect-rule institutions changed minimally over time in Northern Nigeria. The

Sokoto Caliphate had covered much of this territory. Authoritarian governance in the early colonial period reflected precolonial precedents and persisted over time. Most emirs had advisory councils, but the councils were not legally empowered as part of the Native Authority. The emir appointed the entire council in more than half the former Sokoto emirates, and few Native Treasuries had finance committees (9%). Reflecting minimal constraints, Native Treasuries spent more on salaries (31% of all expenditures) than they did on education, medical, and roads combined (26%).

By contrast, colonial institutions changed starkly over time in Southern Nigeria because earlier installed agents did not work. By the 1940s, councils had become universal, as 98% of Native Authorities were either council only or chief and council. Moreover, these councils acted as meaningful decision-makers. No councils were dominated by chief-appointed members. Instead, popularly selected members predominated in Eastern Nigeria (plurality on 66% of councils; remainder were elite) and elite members predominated in Western Nigeria (79%; remainder were popularly selected). Africans routinely played a role in determining budget estimates through finance committees, which existed in 94% of NTs in Western Nigeria and 84% in Eastern Nigeria. Reflecting the priorities of counselors with greater accountability to the local population, spending on public goods (average of 32% in both regions) exceeded expenditures on salaries (15% in Eastern Nigeria and 22% in Western Nigeria). A key reason the discrepancies vis-à-vis Northern Nigeria with regard to public goods were not even greater is because missionaries and other private associations accounted for almost all schools in the South—98% of primary schools in Eastern Nigeria and 96% in Western Nigeria (Hailey 1951a, 101, 150). Thus, Native Treasuries spent very little on education throughout Nigeria.²⁹

Among the major states of Yorubaland, reforms in the 1930s and 1940s empowered councils alongside chiefs. This reflected the long-standing status quo,³⁰ despite earlier British attempts to inflate

²⁹Education accounted for an average of 4.8% of total expenditures in Northern Nigeria (where missionaries were heavily restricted; Hailey 1951a, 40), 3.4% in Eastern Nigeria, and 2.8% in Western Nigeria. Hailey notes (p. 128) that education spending was higher in the Warri Province in Western Nigeria (on average, 9% of expenditures in our data set), where the missionary presence was lower and Native Authorities were responsible for more schools.

³⁰According to Brown (1950, 17), “[t]he term ‘Sole Native Authority’ has an autocratic sound that was in fact divorced from the realities of the situation [in Yorubaland]. No action which was going to affect the local community would normally have been taken by a Sole Native Authority without full consultation with the council.”

the powers of loyal chiefs such as the Alafin of Oyo (Atanda 1973). The shift represented the new British emphasis that “the doctrine that the jurisdiction of any Native Authority must be based on the consent of the people over whom such authority would be exercised,” as they feared a repeat of the anti-tax revolts in Warri and Aba in the late 1920s (Atanda 1973, 249). These protests were “against the new type of authority which the Warrant Chiefs wielded; against the concentration of authority in a few hands. . . . The Alafin [of Oyo] was not a warrant chief in the Eastern Nigeria sense, but . . . from 1901 he was wielding authority of a new type, and that over the years this authority did become just as objectionable as that of the Warrant Chiefs. . . . [B]ecause the people became dissatisfied with the new order, they evinced a desire to return to a system which had operated successfully under different conditions, i.e., the pre-colonial system” (Ikime 1968, 436–38). As a specific example, in the early 1930s in Ibadan, English-educated men with non-chiefly backgrounds pressured the British administration and traditional leaders for membership on a reformed council (Vaughan 2000, 36). These types of demands guided subsequent British reforms.

The decentralized areas of Southern Nigeria also experienced extensive reforms to empower councils and usually eliminate Native Authority chiefs entirely. Responding to fears of renewed anti-tax revolts, the British collected hundreds of Intelligence Reports to learn more about traditional institutions and customs. These identified the traditional importance of very local-level councils, often corresponding to specific villages. The British replaced the Warrant Chiefs with clan and district councils throughout Eastern Nigeria, which combined and scaled up traditional village organizations (Hailey 1951*a*, 159–60; Noah 1987). For example, the Ndoki Clan Council in Rivers Province included members of numerous individual villages that had historically coalesced into seven different groups, and the Village Councils and Group Councils comprised lower-tier elements of the Native Administration.³¹ To gain a sense of the magnitude of scaling up under these new institutions, there were approximately 76,000 people per Native Authority in Owerri Province.³² By contrast, the contemporaneous population in the village of Owerri was estimated at 1,730 (Meek 1933, 5). Thus, if the Owerri village was typical for its eponymous province, the scaled-up Native Authorities and Native Treasuries were more than forty times larger than the

³¹Intelligence report CSE 1/85/5128. Collected by the authors from the archives in Enugu, Nigeria.

³²Population data from Hailey (1951*a*, 147) and number of clan councils from p. 161. In Owerri province, essentially every Native Authority clan/district council had its own Native Treasury.

traditional village units.

British policies were similar in Tivland, a formerly acephalous area of Northern Nigeria that had resisted conquest by Sokoto. British administrators initially misunderstood traditional institutions and tried various schemes over time to impose authority and collect taxes. They eventually settled on a scaled-up Native Authority council populated by local clan fathers, and popular demands by the Tiv prompted the creation of a paramount chief in 1947 (Dorward 1969).

Other decentralized areas. Reforms in Kenya resembled those in Southern Nigeria, replacing earlier ineffective agents. Early on, local headmen who lacked any traditional standing served as executive agents of the regime. Nationalist agitation and protests in the early 1920s prompted the establishment of Local Native Councils (LNCs), which operated at the larger scale of the Native Treasury and gained important fiscal powers. “The violence made the danger of unregulated African political activity clear to government officials, but they also realized the hazards of totally repressing political expression . . . The local native council, then, was to be a safety valve, an acceptable framework for African political expression and action” (Schilling 1976, 221). The jurisdiction of the new LNCs encompassed numerous local headmen (average of 15.1 headmen per NT), who became a minority element on the councils. The explicit goal was for LNCs to increase the scale of local government and expand representation beyond traditional elders in a context of widening local fiscal powers (Hicks 1961). Across the 21 LNCs in Kenya, the average composition was 61% elected members (who could not be headmen), 23% nominated headmen, and 16% other nominated members. In the South Nyanza LNC, for example, the elected members were schoolteachers, traders, and farmers (Hailey 1950a, 155).

Kenya’s LNCs prioritized education spending. In 1930, the commissioner of the Central Province concluded, “the demand for education is genuine and widespread [which] is proved by the large sums voted by the Local Native Councils of Fort Hall, Kiambu and Nyeri amounting to £20,000 for the establishment of ‘C’ schools and the anxiety shown by the councils to get them started” (quoted in Mambo 1981, 63). Among all colonies, Kenya’s NTs spent the largest fraction of total expenditures on education, averaging 25%. In South Kavirondo LNC in Kenya, the survey notes that the “finance and general purposes committee deals with the estimates and hears the views of the

department officers when arguing the claims of their departments for financial allocations.”³³

Major reforms in Tanganyika and Nyasaland also scaled up traditional institutions. In many districts, higher-level federal councils were created to pool together lower-level NA chiefs (whose jurisdictions more closely resembled precolonial precedents) into a common Native Treasury. In these two colonies, the average Native Treasury comprised 6.9 lower-level Native Authorities. For example, in the Bukoba District of Tanganyika, eight bakama (chiefs) were recognized as NAs. They were joined in a federation, the Council of Bukoba Chiefs, and the only NT in Bukoba was the “Treasury of the Council of Bukoba Chiefs.” Although the lower-level Native Authorities (many of whom were solo chiefs) retained various powers, they lacked a key instrument—control over the fisc—that had facilitated earlier corruption by Warrant Chiefs and headmen. In the reformed system, only the higher-level council exercised this authority. Some of these federal councils were inchoate even by the late 1940s, but many served their primary purpose of providing input into the operations of the Native Treasury. In the Zomba district of Nyasaland, for example, items were routinely “included in the estimates on the recommendation of the Native Authorities.”³⁴

Northern Rhodesia began as a corporate colony, and early policies by the British South Africa Company enabled chiefs to accumulate authoritarian powers. However, following reforms in the 1930s, all the Superior Native Authorities took the chief-and-council form.³⁵ These councils had a traditional basis, as “[c]hiefs in the earliest times have had to rely on their Councillors for advice [on important matters]. It took a Chief with an unusually strong personality to act as a dictator . . . but for the great majority of Chiefs it was the Councillors who put the brake on, and the freedom of speech which was normally permitted by custom in a tribal gathering tended to give the rule of the Chief a certain democratic flavour” (Billing 1959, 137).

Other precolonial states. Reforms during the interwar period were, overall, less impactful in areas with precolonial states. In some historically centralized areas, councils were influential throughout the colonial period, such as Barotseland (Northern Rhodesia), the Tswana states (Bechuanaland), Lesotho, and Swaziland. Colonial policies, especially in Lesotho, clarified the relationship

³³Survey CO 1018/25.

³⁴Survey CO 1018/60.

³⁵These reforms also entailed scaling up, as each Superior Native Authority encompassed several or more Subordinate Native Authorities.

between the paramount chief and his council, but these councils had a traditional basis.

Colonial intervention elevated the powers of councils, relative to precolonial trends, in Buganda and the neighboring states of southwestern Uganda. By the end of the nineteenth century, the kabakas of Buganda had amassed substantial authoritarian powers, in particular vis-à-vis lower-level county chiefs. However, the Uganda Agreement of 1900 enshrined extensive powers for the native council, the Lukiiko. These stipulations reflected concerted bargaining by influential county chiefs in Buganda during negotiations over the Agreement (Low and Pratt 1960, 73–74). “[T]he Agreement quite clearly deprived the Kabaka of his single-handed legislative and judicial functions” that he had enjoyed prior to colonial imposition. Instead, “by the Agreement the *Lukiiko* became none the less quite unmistakably a ‘council’; that is, it became a legislating institution, and not just a gathering of chiefs, however important” (pp. 130–31). Its members consisted primarily of important land chiefs who held their positions independent of the kabaka (p. 135), which weakened the kabaka’s powers relative to the precolonial era (p. 145). In the neighboring states of Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro, councils were also influential throughout the colonial period.³⁶

The Ashanti Colony (Ghana) was an anomalous case in which the British temporarily ended the royal line (1896–1935). However, when the Ashanti Confederacy was restored in 1935, the main political institution was the Ashanti Confederacy Council, which consisted of the Asantehene and his leading chiefs (Hailey 1951a, 233–34; Tordoff 1966). Throughout the Ashanti Colony, Native Authorities consisted of chiefs and their State Councils, comprised primarily of traditional elites.³⁷ The Hailey surveys emphasize the degree to which councils such as that in the Kwahu Native Authority constrained chiefs: “In practice the President has only one vote and though his personal influence and hereditary position go a long way towards producing decisions, these factors can only be exercised in a direction in which he considers his councillors likely to follow.”³⁸ Moreover, these

³⁶Colonial manipulation in the aforementioned cases was more extensive with regard to territorial jurisdiction. The Tswana states, Swaziland, and Lesotho all lost significant area to white settlers. Within Uganda, Buganda, Ankole, and Toro gained territory at the expense of Bunyoro (Green 2008; Low 2009).

³⁷Throughout the entire Gold Coast (Colony, Ashanti, Northern Territories), elite members comprised the plurality on 98% of councils.

³⁸Survey CO 1018/10. The opinions of the populace more broadly were also important because of the threat of destoolment: “The Chiefs and their Councils were unwilling or unable to make Bye-laws which would meet with any opposition from their people, for if they attempted to enforce them, this might result, and did result in some cases, in their destoolment” (Hailey 1951a, 200).

councils influenced the budget-setting process. For example, in the Mampong district, “Preparatory drafts are now, in most cases, drawn up by Finance Boards and Area Committees. These are then discussed with the District Commissioner before being placed before the Chiefs. The final draft is approved at a full meeting of the Divisional or Sub-Divisional Council.”³⁹

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Using the full sample and accounting for various confounders, the following regression tables support our main hypotheses by confirming a robust association between the structure of precolonial institutions and three key aspects of colonial institutions: the presence of councils and/or chiefs in the Native Authority and how counselors were chosen. The presence of councils also influenced public finance. Native Authorities containing a council allocated a lower fraction of expenditures to administration (salaries) and a higher fraction to public goods, and more often had a finance committee.

INDIRECT-RULE INSTITUTIONS

Replicating councils. Table 5 examines correlates of which Native Authorities contained a legally recognized council. In Columns 1–3, the dependent variable measures for each NT the fraction of NAs with a council (either a chief-and-council or council-only NA). In Columns 4–6, the dependent variable is council-only NAs. The estimating equation, which we estimate with OLS, is:

$$\text{NA COUNCIL}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_N \cdot \text{DECENTRALIZED}_i + \beta_C \cdot \text{CONSTRAINED PCS}_i + \beta_X \cdot X_i + \epsilon_i.$$

To assess our theoretical expectation that Native Authorities would contain councils in areas where councils were important prior to colonialism, we compare the two types of precolonial areas with meaningful councils and executive constraints, CONSTRAINED PCS and DECENTRALIZED, to the omitted reference category AUTHORITARIAN PCS. Throughout, PCS stands for “precolonial state.” Columns 1 and 4 are the baseline specifications that contain only the main explanatory variables. We add different covariates, X_i , in the subsequent models. In Columns 2 and 5, we control for

³⁹Survey CO 1018/7. Across the entire Gold Coast, we have information on the budget-setting process for 33 of the 87 NTs. The vast majority (31) report some form of council involvement in setting budget estimates.

colony fixed effects to account for idiosyncratic differences in the implementation of Native Administration ordinances across colonies. In Columns 3 and 6, we add the substantive covariates described earlier. For each specification, we present robust standard error estimates in parentheses.

Table 5: Replicating Institutional Constraints

	DV: NA includes a council			DV: Council-only NA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	0.766*** (0.0561)	0.801*** (0.0417)	0.667*** (0.0615)	0.580*** (0.0256)	0.753*** (0.0311)	0.666*** (0.0454)
Constrained PCS	0.798*** (0.0663)	0.704*** (0.0690)	0.671*** (0.0762)	-0.00438 (0.00432)	0.342*** (0.0546)	0.171*** (0.0520)
Population			-0.0721*** (0.0179)			0.0657*** (0.0221)
Population density			0.0374** (0.0155)			0.00401 (0.0177)
Value of cash crops			0.0547*** (0.0145)			-0.0143 (0.0204)
% alienated land			0.0203** (0.00947)			-0.0563*** (0.0203)
Distance from rail line			-0.00261 (0.0135)			-0.123*** (0.0189)
Distance from capital			-0.0403** (0.0183)			0.0742** (0.0311)
Distance from coastline			0.0145 (0.0146)			-0.0430** (0.0201)
Missionary station			0.0138 (0.0325)			0.0787* (0.0428)
Intercept	0.112** (0.0536)	0.285*** (0.0656)	0.978*** (0.201)	0.00438 (0.00432)	-0.388*** (0.0711)	-0.506* (0.269)
NTs	462	462	430	462	462	430
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.279	0.431	0.366	0.212	0.401	0.343
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

The basic specification in Column 1 recovers the cross tabs presented earlier while demonstrating the statistical significance of the precolonial-institutional variables. This conclusion is unaltered when adding colony fixed effects (Column 2) or covariates (Column 3). In Columns 4–6, we analyze council-only NAs. As anticipated by the cross tabs, the decentralized cases are distinct from authoritarian-PCS cases, but the constrained-PCS cases are not.⁴⁰

⁴⁰The statistical significance of CONSTRAINED PCS in Columns 5 and 6 is a statistical artifact of fitting a linear model with a dependent variable that is 0/1 for almost all observations. As Table 1 shows, no NT with a constrained PCS had any council-only NAs. See also the logit regressions in Table A.9.

Replicating chief executives. Table 6 examines correlates of Native Authority chiefs. In Columns 1–3, the dependent variable measures for each NT the fraction of NAs that included a chief, that is, either solo-chief or chief-and-council NA. In Columns 4–6, we examine correlates of solo-chief NAs. The estimating equation is qualitatively similar to that presented above except here the main explanatory variables are CONSTRAINED PCS and AUTHORITARIAN PCS. Our theoretical expectation is that chiefs should be replicated in areas with precolonial states, in contrast to the omitted reference category DECENTRALIZED.

Table 6: Replicating Chief Executives

	<u>DV: NA includes a chief</u>			<u>DV: Solo-chief NA</u>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Authoritarian PCS	0.580*** (0.0256)	0.753*** (0.0311)	0.666*** (0.0454)	0.766*** (0.0561)	0.801*** (0.0417)	0.667*** (0.0615)
Constrained PCS	0.584*** (0.0252)	0.411*** (0.0503)	0.495*** (0.0417)	-0.0319 (0.0423)	0.0967* (0.0521)	-0.00385 (0.0448)
Population			-0.0657*** (0.0221)			0.0721*** (0.0179)
Population density			-0.00401 (0.0177)			-0.0374** (0.0155)
Value of cash crops			0.0144 (0.0204)			-0.0547*** (0.0145)
% alienated land			0.0563*** (0.0203)			-0.0203** (0.00947)
Distance from rail line			0.123*** (0.0189)			0.00261 (0.0135)
Distance from capital			-0.0742** (0.0311)			0.0403** (0.0183)
Distance from coastline			0.0430** (0.0201)			-0.0145 (0.0146)
Missionary station			-0.0787* (0.0428)			-0.0138 (0.0325)
Intercept	0.416*** (0.0252)	0.635*** (0.0678)	0.840*** (0.247)	0.123*** (0.0165)	-0.0860* (0.0479)	-0.645*** (0.164)
NTs	462	462	430	462	462	430
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.212	0.401	0.343	0.279	0.431	0.366
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: The DV in columns 1–3 of this table is the inverse of the DV in columns 4–6 of Table 5. The DV in columns 4–6 of this table is the inverse of the DV in columns 1–3 of Table 5. However, the estimates differ because the set of PCS indicators differs. Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

As in the preceding table, the baseline specifications in Columns 1 and 4 recover the cross tabs presented earlier while demonstrating the statistical significance of precolonial institutions. The remaining specifications add either colony FE or substantive covariates. Both types of precolonial-

state areas more often had a chief within the NA. However, only NTs with authoritarian PCS are robustly more likely to have solo-chief NAs; and also note the discrepancy in the magnitude of the coefficient estimates between authoritarian and constrained PCS in Columns 4–6.

Robustness checks. Appendix A.5 presents various robustness checks for Tables 5 and 6. In Table A.8, we demonstrate that our results are not sensitive to unobserved covariates, using a metric from Altonji, Elder and Taber (2005). In Table A.9, we replace the linear link with a logit link after making each dependent variable binary, based on whether a plurality of the NAs within the NT had the specified type of institution. In Table A.10, we group federal-council NAs along with chief-and-council NAs rather than council-only NAs. Finally, we address the possibility of non-independence of NA institutions within provinces in two ways. First, in Tables A.11 and A.12, we average each variable at the provincial level and re-estimate the models using provinces as the unit of analysis. Second, in Tables A.13 and A.14, we re-run every specification from the original tables with robust standard errors clustered at the province level.

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCILS

Local councils were not mere window dressing. Various pieces of evidence demonstrate that councils recognized by the colonial state exercised independent decision-making powers and acted as a meaningful constraint on chiefs.

The prevalence of powerful councils before colonialism helps to explain why most members of subnational colonial councils were independent in the sense of gaining selection by their traditional-elite status or popular selection, as opposed to selection by the Native Authority chief or British administrators. In Table 7, each triplet of columns analyzes a different dependent variable, each of which indicates whether a plurality of members on the council were of the specified type: elites in Columns 1–3, popularly selected in Columns 4–6, appointed by the Native Authority chief in Columns 7–9, and appointed by a British official in Columns 10–12.⁴¹ For each DV, the series of specifications follows those in the preceding tables.

For most types of counselors, our clearest expectations are for decentralized areas. The weakness

⁴¹In Columns 10–12, we instead use a variable for *any* British-appointed members because there are so few councils in which British-appointed members comprised a *plurality*.

Table 7: Precolonial Correlates of Council Members

	DV: Elite plurality			DV: Popular plurality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	-0.0966 (0.0602)	-0.0347 (0.0549)	-0.116* (0.0609)	0.188*** (0.0472)	0.245*** (0.0402)	0.182*** (0.0524)
Intercept	0.634*** (0.0533)	0.00386 (0.00710)	1.114*** (0.272)	0.146*** (0.0391)	0.973*** (0.0261)	0.228 (0.243)
NTs	402	402	375	402	402	375
Provinces	57	57	57	57	57	57
R-squared	0.006	0.285	0.105	0.028	0.312	0.158
Covariates			✓			✓
Colony FE		✓			✓	
	DV: Chief-appointed plurality			DV: Any British-appointed members		
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Authoritarian PCS	0.391*** (0.0975)	0.456*** (0.0982)	0.366*** (0.101)			
Decentralized				0.104*** (0.0253)	0.0271 (0.0288)	0.139*** (0.0323)
Intercept	0.0907*** (0.0149)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.0674 (0.155)	0.0244 (0.0171)	-0.00301 (0.00428)	-0.461*** (0.143)
NTs	402	402	375	402	402	375
Provinces	57	57	57	57	57	57
R-squared	0.093	0.307	0.201	0.018	0.652	0.149
Colony FE		✓			✓	
Covariates			✓			✓

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. Appendix Table A.16 reports estimates for all covariates, the list of which is identical to those in the preceding regression tables. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

of traditional authority figures should yield relatively few chief-appointed and elite members, and relatively more popularly selected and British-appointed members. Thus, most columns estimate DECENTRALIZED, leaving NTs with a precolonial state as the omitted reference category. The exception is that for chief-appointed members, we anticipate differences among precolonial states, depending on whether the ruler was autocratic or constrained. The stronger prerogatives of chiefs descending from authoritarian precolonial states should yield more chief-appointed members than elsewhere. Hence in Columns 7–9, we estimate AUTHORITARIAN PCS. We confirm these expectations in the table. We demonstrate similar findings in Appendix Table A.15 using different criteria for distinguishing elite and popular counselors.

PUBLIC FINANCE

Our final results demonstrate that councils exerted a meaningful influence on fiscal outcomes. As suggested by the examples presented earlier, across the entire sample we expect that Native Trea-

suries with councils spent more on public goods and less on administration, which encompasses salaries (mainly salaries for members of the NA). Table 8 confirms these expectations using data from the 1940s. The fraction of expenditures on administration is the dependent variable in the first three, and the fraction of total expenditures on education, medical care, and roads is the dependent variable in the last three. The sequence of columns for each outcome mirrors those in the previous tables, although now SOLO-CHIEF NA is the main explanatory variable. The baseline specifications show that solo-chief NAs correspond with an increase of 18.5% in the fraction of expenditures on administration, from a base level of 21.0%. Conversely, solo-chief NAs correspond with a decrease of 6.9% in the fraction of expenditures on public goods, from a base level of 34.2%.

Table 8: Public Expenditures

	DV: Administration %			DV: Public goods %		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Solo-chief NA	0.185*** (0.0196)	0.138*** (0.0146)	0.112*** (0.0256)	-0.0687*** (0.0142)	-0.0471*** (0.0139)	-0.0688*** (0.0185)
Intercept	0.210*** (0.00969)	0.140*** (0.00724)	-0.206** (0.0924)	0.342*** (0.00837)	0.352*** (0.0137)	0.331*** (0.0945)
NTs	309	309	293	309	309	293
Provinces	42	42	42	42	42	42
R-squared	0.202	0.621	0.369	0.049	0.188	0.109
Colony FE		✓			✓	
Covariates			✓			✓

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. Appendix Table A.17 reports estimates for all covariates, the list of which is identical to those in the preceding regression tables. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

The reforms that implemented councils across most of British Africa also created finance committees, which enabled African counselors to influence the budget process. In Table 9, we demonstrate a strong correlation between NA councils and the existence of finance committees. As shown in Column 1, the baseline prevalence of finance committees is 65.1% in NAs organized as either chief and council or council only. By contrast, solo-chief NAs reduce this frequency to 5.3%.

Table 9: Finance Committees

	DV: Finance committee		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Solo-chief NA	-0.598*** (0.0408)	-0.536*** (0.0475)	-0.387*** (0.0505)
Intercept	0.651*** (0.0266)	1.000 (0.000)	1.657*** (0.240)
NTs	399	399	374
Provinces	54	54	54
R-squared	0.214	0.571	0.424
Colony FE		✓	
Covariates			✓

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. Appendix Table A.18 reports estimates for all covariates, the list of which is identical to those in the preceding regression tables. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

CONCLUSION

British indirect rule in Africa was not a simple story of continuity or change. Like all imperial rulers, the British considered the loyalty and effectiveness of different possible agents. In areas with precolonial states, the choice was relatively straightforward — delegate authority to traditional institutions. In historically decentralized areas, invented chiefs created early in the colonial era were loyal but largely ineffective at keeping the peace and collecting revenue, especially in the face of socioeconomic changes occurring during the interwar period. British officials responded to African pressure by creating a new system of councils that replicated, in some sense, the type of accountability mechanisms that pervaded precolonial Africa. A major difference was that the treasury units were scaled up to achieve economies of scale for fiscal allocations. Overall, across British Africa, precolonial political institutions mattered. African preferences and pressure resulted in local institutions that did not resemble the image of “decentralized despotism” often cited in the literature. We substantiate this new perspective with original data on precolonial and colonial institutions in local governance units across British Africa.

A possible counterargument to this interpretation of our findings is that regardless of institutional form, colonial chiefs were necessarily more authoritarian than their precolonial predecessors; chiefs were accountable to colonial administrators, not the populations they governed. Undoubtedly, in many cases currying favor with British administrators enabled chiefs to remain in power after losing popular support (Crowder and Ikime 1970b). But other forces pushed in the opposite

direction. Rulers lost control over the means of coercion. Although many precolonial African societies were communities-in-arms (Smith 1976), more authoritarian rulers often had standing armies. In the Sokoto Caliphate, emirs had a permanent corps of titled officers that commanded enslaved persons and had discretion to call up reserves to pursue war (Smaldone 1977, 39–41). Under colonial rule, Sokoto emirs, the Kabaka of Buganda, and rulers in Mendeland and Temneland (Sierra Leone) all lost their standing armies and “war boys.” Thus, there is not obvious evidence of an “intercept shift” whereby precolonial constraints (even if preserved on paper) necessarily became weaker during colonialism. In neither the precolonial nor the colonial era was it generally true that “the person of the chief signifies power that is total and absolute, unchecked and unrestrained” (Mamdani 1996, 54).

Although “invention” and “decentralized despotism” provide poor generalizations of British indirect rule, any claims of “continuity” and “persistence” require significant modification as well. Indirect rule necessitated reliance on African leaders with some degree of traditional status, but in practice this allowed for wide variation. In areas with small-scale polities, the British delegated authority to Native Treasuries that covered much larger areas and populations than traditional polities. These were undoubtedly colonial constructions, albeit overwhelmingly in the form of scaled-up councils (an institution with a traditional basis) rather than solo chiefs with vast discretion over a Native Treasury.

Our findings also offer an important implication for studying postcolonial legacies, in particular by suggesting a puzzle about the difficulty of establishing executive constraints in postcolonial Africa (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Bratton and van de Walle 1997). Many draw a direct link from colonial indirect rule to postcolonial authoritarian regimes (Lange 2004 provides an overview of such arguments). This conclusion is difficult to substantiate on the basis of our evidence. Local African institutions were not a blank slate that Europeans could wipe away, at least not without concerted effort. Africans had innovated various forms of institutional constraints on rulers that, despite many challenges during the colonial era, they were able to recreate (at least in part) in Native Authority institutions because of British decentralization practices. Among other implications, this observation opens up the black box of British colonial institutions for studies demonstrating a correlation between precolonial and present-day local institutions, such as Neupert-Wentz and

Müller-Crepon (2023).

By contrast, national-level institutions across Africa were indeed a blank slate. In the late nineteenth century, Europeans invented artificial states that were much larger than traditional polities, even compared to the larger precolonial states (Wesseling 1996; Herbst 2000; Englebert 2002; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016). National-level elections, political parties, and citizenship rights typically emerged only after World War II (Owolabi 2023; Lee and Paine 2024). Traditional constraints on local rulers that worked effectively could not usually be scaled up successfully to the national level. This was particularly so because of their heterogeneity. For example, in Nigeria, the methods of accountability differed among the Yoruba, Tiv, and Igbo. Indeed, different parts of Igboland had different mechanisms of accountability and constraint. At the same time, these societies were merged with those of Northern Nigeria, which had few constraints on rulers. We conjecture that the sheer difficulty of forging a social contract over new institutions that would impose accountability and constraints at the national level enabled many postcolonial rulers to discard executive constraints. They exploited internationally created ideas about sovereignty and the colonial centralization of institutions, such as the fiscal system and the army, which local institutions could not discipline. This alternative agrees in a sense with some existing work, yet is steeped in our observation about the prevalence of executive constraints at the local level in precolonial and colonial Africa. Perhaps the roots of postcolonial authoritarian regimes in Africa are largely centralized rather than decentralized, a vital avenue for future research.

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Appendix for *Councils and Indirect Rule in British Africa*

In Appendix A, we provide supporting information for our data on precolonial institutions (Appendix A.1), colonial institutions (Appendix A.2), and spatial data and covariates (Appendix A.3). We also present summary statistics (Appendix A.4) and additional regression tables (Appendices A.5 and A.6). Appendix B presents excerpts from our lengthy codebook. Appendix C discusses additional cases excluded from our statistical sample: South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Sierra Leone.

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A ADDITIONAL DATA INFORMATION AND TABLES

A.1 DATA FOR PRECOLONIAL INSTITUTIONS

For coding precolonial institutions, our main innovation is to code constraints on the ruler for each precolonial state in our data set. This process proceeded three steps. 1. Compiled a list of precolonial states. 2. Coded whether each precolonial state had meaningful executive constraints. 3. Matched precolonial states with Native Treasuries.

Step 1: Distinguishing states from decentralized areas. We built upon a recent data set of precolonial African states from Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024), which draws in large part from the work of two eminent historians of Africa, J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder. Specifically, Ajayi and Crowder (1985) present a series of detailed regional maps of the location of major African polities in the nineteenth century. Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024) consulted various sources to verify which polities in these maps met the basic criteria for a state laid out in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940, 5), who define “Group A” societies as those with “centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions—in short, a government.” The main sources they used were Stewart (2006), Butcher and Griffiths (2020), and Paine (2019), in addition to numerous country-specific monographs. Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024) also provide detail on how their data set differs from and improves upon the widely used data set of ethnic-group institutions from Murdock (1959, 1967).

We include every state from the list in Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024). We also add states in two regions for which the maps in Ajayi and Crowder (1985) are not sufficiently precise. In total, we identify 58 distinct states.

1. Ajayi and Crowder (1985) provide a large and less detailed map of all of Africa in which they depict several Tswana states: Kwena, Ngwato, and Rolong. However, their detailed regional map for southern Africa does not depict any Tswana states. Following Schapera (1940, 1955), we distinguish the eight main Tswana states and include each in our data set.
2. Ajayi and Crowder (1985) do not disaggregate the constituent components of the enormous and highly decentralized Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria. We therefore consulted additional sources to identify distinct states and dynasties within its geographical confines, primarily the detailed maps in Johnston (1970, Map 2) and Smaldone (1977, 55), the detailed overview of each emirate in Hogben and Kirk-Greene (1966), and supporting details from Adeleye (1971). The Caliphate was formed in the early nineteenth century by a Fulani jihad that initially conquered numerous historical Hausa states in what later became Northern Nigeria, and also expanded farther east and south to incorporate many previously decentralized peoples into the empire. There were eighteen distinct emirates, three of which had subemirates of their own (seven total).¹ And despite the Fulani conquests in Hausaland, many of the original ruling dynasties survived (often fighting Sokoto emirates throughout the nineteenth century). To create a denominator for the ruling dynasties, we considered only

¹We group an additional subemirate depicted in the maps, Pategi, as part of the Nupe emirate because it was not territorially separated until British intervention in 1898, which resulted in a member of the pre-Fulani Nupe dynasty gaining the title of emir.

the set of original Hausa states, including the seven Hausa Bakwai and the seven Banza Bakwai listed in Hogben and Kirk-Greene (1966, 82). For each, we used the detailed narratives from this source to determine which Hausa dynasties existed and governed a statelike entity upon British conquests at the turn of the twentieth century: Daura (fled to Zango to resist the Daura emirate), Zazzau (fled to Abuja to resist the Zaria emirate), Kebbi (migrated to Argungu to resist the Gwandu emirate), Zamfara (migrated to Anka and peacefully submitted to Sokoto suzerainty), Yauri (migrated to Yelwa and peacefully submitted to the suzerainty of the Gwandu emirate), and Nupe (resided in the new capital Bida of the Nupe emirate, usually peacefully).²

Step 2: Coding institutional constraints on rulers. Given our list of precolonial states, we coded an original dichotomous variable for whether the ruler of each precolonial state was authoritarian or constrained by a council. We collected information on three criteria. The first is the most important and provides the primary basis for our coding decisions. The last two were supplementary. We did not use either as the sole basis for coding any cases as constrained absent any evidence suggestive of the first criterion.

1. **Relationship vis-à-vis a council.** To determine whether the ruler was constrained by an effective council, we sought to answer the following types of questions using our sources, with affirmative answers indicating an effective council. Did the ruler regularly consult a council? Did a council regularly influence policy decisions? Was the ruler unable to regularly override the desires of the council?
2. **Choosing and deposing chiefs.** Did the council play a role in selecting new rulers? Did a council have the formal right to depose rulers who committed transgressions or were otherwise deemed unworthy? If so, did they use those powers frequently?
3. **Selecting counselors.** Did any influential counselors gain their positions independent of the ruler?

Additional important distinctions that inform our coding decisions are:

- **Despotic vs. infrastructural power.** We are interested in constraints on despotic power, that is, the presence of elites organized at the center that could influence the rulers's decisions. Another source of constraints arises from the generic difficulty for any pre-modern ruler to project authority over space, hence limiting infrastructural power. There is no variation in the latter source of constraints for any precolonial African polity with political organization above the village level, as all were severely constrained on this dimension. Thus, if the sources indicate constraints but only with regard to projecting authority across space, that information is insufficient to code the ruler as constrained.
- **De facto vs. de jure power.** In many cases, the ruler was theoretically absolute (and perhaps divine), but in practice constrained by other elites. In such cases, the information about the extent of de facto rather than de jure power informs our coding decision.

²Several met this criterion but were ultimately incorporated into French Niger rather than British Nigeria: Gobir, who fled to Tibiri; and the Habe Katsina dynasty (not to be confused with the Fulani Katsina dynasty that replaced it), who fled to Maradi.

- **Legislative vs. judicial constraints.** Our main coding criterion takes into account information about legislative power (i.e., making policy decisions) rather than judicial power. We document instances in which the ruler faced some constraints on his ability to unilaterally decide court cases, yet a council did not constrain his legislative power. We code such cases as authoritarian.

Step 3: Matching precolonial states with Native Treasuries. It was straightforward to match each precolonial state with a Native Treasury (see Table A.1) because of the high overlap in names. Essentially all of the 58 precolonial states in our dataset had a Treasury named for it.³ Using the spatial polygons for precolonial states from Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet (2024) and information on the (last) capital (data mostly from Stewart 2006), we additionally verified that each precolonial state and the corresponding NT aligned geographically. Among the precolonial states with named treasuries, for all but two we code a one-to-one correspondence between the precolonial state and the Native Treasury. The exceptions are the Asante state, which we link to all 29 Treasuries in the Crown Colony of Ashanti; and Borgu, which we link to the two NTs in the Borgu district of Northern Nigeria. These two NTs are Bussa and Kaiama, and the best evidence suggests these were independent political entities within the constellation of precolonial Borgu states (Crowder 1973). In sum, we code 87 NTs (out of 462 total) in our dataset as having a precolonial state.

³One exception was the historical Hausa state of Zamfara, which became a tributary to Sokoto and was later incorporated into the Sokoto NT. In two cases, the British chose a Hausa dynasty to govern an area that had been conquered by a Sokoto emirate: the Habe Daura dynasty (which resided at Zango throughout the nineteenth century) gained control of the Daura emirate, and the pre-Fulani Nupe dynasty gained control of the Pategi emirate.

Table A.1: Matching Precolonial States with Native Treasuries

State	Province	District	Native Treasury
<u>Basutoland (Lesotho)</u>			
<i>Basuto</i>			National
<u>Bechuanaland (Botswana)</u>			
<i>Malete</i>		Gaberones	Malete
<i>Tlokwa</i>		Gaberones	Tlokwa
<i>Kgatla</i>		Kgatleng	Kgatla
<i>Kwena</i>		Kweneng	Kwena
<i>Rolong</i>		Lobatsi	Barolong
<i>Tawana</i>		Ngamiland	Tawana
<i>Ngwaketse</i>		Ngwaketse	Ngwaketse
<i>Ngwato</i>		Ngwato	Ngwato
<u>Gold Coast (Ghana)</u>			
<i>Asante</i>	Asante		29 NTs in Ashanti Colony
<i>Dagomba</i>	Northern	Dagomba	Dagomba
<u>Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)</u>			
<i>Barotse</i>	Barotse	Barotse	Barotse
<i>Bemba</i>	Northern	Kasama	Chitimukulu & Bemba
<i>Kazembe</i>	Western	Kawambwa	Kasembe & Lunda
<u>Swaziland (Eswatini)</u>			
<i>Swaziland</i>			National
<u>Uganda</u>			
Buganda	Buganda	Buganda	Buganda
Nkore	Western	Ankole	Ankole
Bunyoro	Western	Bunyoro	Bunyoro

Italics: Constrained precolonial state.

Table A.1, continued

State	Province	District	Native Treasury
Nigeria (Western Provinces)			
<i>Egba (Abeokuta)</i>	Abeokuta	Egba	Egba
<i>Benin</i>	Benin	Benin	Benin
<i>Ijebu</i>	Ijebu	Ijebu	Ijebu
<i>Ibadan</i>	Oyo	Ibadan	Ibadan
<i>Ife</i>	Oyo	Ife	Ife
<i>Oyo</i>	Oyo	Oyo	Oyo
Nigeria (Northern Provinces)			
Adamawa	Adamawa	Adamawa	Adamawa
Muri	Adamawa	Muri	Muri
Bauchi	Bauchi	Bauchi	Bauchi
Gombe	Bauchi	Gombe	Gombe
Jemaari	Bauchi	Katagum	Jamari
Katagum	Bauchi	Katagum	Katagum
Misau	Bauchi	Katagum	Misau
Lafia	Benue	Lafia	Lafia
Keffi	Benue	Nasarawa	Keffi
Nasarawa	Benue	Nasarawa	Nasarawa
Bornu	Bornu	Bornu	Bornu
Dikwa	Bornu	Dikwa	Dikwa
<i>Borgu</i>	Ilorin	Borgu	Bussa, Kaiama
Ilorin	Ilorin	Ilorin	Ilorin
Lafiagi	Ilorin	Pategi-Lafiagi	Lafiagi
Pategi	Ilorin	Pategi-Lafiagi	Pategi
<i>Igala</i>	Kabba	Igala	Igala
Kano	Kano	Kano	Kano
Kazaure	Kano	Kano	Kazaure
Hadejia	Kano	Northern	Hadejia
Daura	Katsina	Katsina	Daura
Katsina	Katsina	Katsina	Katsina
<i>Abuja</i>	Niger	Abuja	Abuja
Lapai	Niger	Abuja	Lapai
Agaie	Niger	Bida	Agaie
Nupe (Bida)	Niger	Bida	Bida
Kontagora	Niger	Kontagora	Kontagora
Jema'a	Plateau	Jemaa	Jemaa
<i>Argungu (Kebbi)</i>	Sokoto	Argungu	Argungu
Gwandu	Sokoto	Gwandu	Gwandu
<i>Yauri</i>	Sokoto	Gwandu	Yauri
Sokoto	Sokoto	Sokoto	Sokoto
<i>Zamfara</i>	Sokoto	Sokoto	Sokoto
Zaria	Zaria	Zaria	Zaria

Italics: Constrained precolonial state.

Bold: Emirate or subemirate within the Sokoto Caliphate.

A.2 DATA FOR COLONIAL INSTITUTIONS

The body of the paper describes most of our data on colonial institutions. Here we provide details on three additional items: 1. Timelines of Native Authority ordinances across colonies. 2. Membership of councils. 3. Expenditure data.

A.2.1 Timelines of Native Authority Ordinances across Colonies

The following provides colony-specific information on the timing of major policies pertaining to native administration. We also used this information to code pre-1930s colonial institutions for each region, presented in Table 3. The narratives appear in the same order as in the summary statistics tables. All the following draws from the five Hailey volumes.

Nigeria (Northern provinces)

- Native Authority Proclamation of 1907: Empowered chiefs (who were recognized by the colonial government) to issue legal orders; Native Courts were created earlier in 1900.
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1916: In principle, this ordinance applied the North's system throughout all of (recently amalgamated) Nigeria.
- Native Revenue Ordinance of 1917: Created Native Treasuries.

Nigeria (Western provinces)

- Native Courts Proclamations of 1900 and 1901: Created a system of Native Courts that comprised the main system of administration until later Native Authority ordinances. This enabled the creation of Warrant Chiefs. However, the British occupation of the Yoruba states (and neighboring states in Western Nigeria) was based on individual treaties, which limited the colonial government's jurisdiction and executive authority.
- 1904–1914: Each of the major Yoruba states agreed to abrogate their earlier treaties with the British, which enabled the extension of British judicial authority and Native Courts.
- 1916–1918: The system originally created for Northern Nigeria was applied to the West: “Lugard obtained permission in 1916 to introduce direct taxation in Yorubaland, Egba and Benin, and in 1918 an amending Ordinance was passed extending to Southern Nigeria the Native Revenue Ordinance of 1917 which had applied before only to the Northern Provinces. The procedure of native administration embodied in the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916 was then introduced in the areas above mentioned, and was gradually extended to other areas west of the Niger, the latest being the Asaba Division of the Benin Province and the four Divisions of the Warri Province.” As we show in the paper, as of the 1920s, most of the historically decentralized parts of Western Nigeria were governed by Warrant Chiefs, and all of the precolonial state areas were governed by first- or second-class chiefs.
- 1940s: As of 1939, there were five solo-chief Native Authorities in Western Nigeria, which corresponded with the major states. By 1949, these had all been converted to chief and council NAs, which legally recognized the importance of the councils. Overall, “[t]he first effect of the introduction of the Native Authority Ordinance was to enhance, in form at

all events, the status of the ruling Chiefs, but its subsequent working emphasized the need for according fuller recognition to the accredited community leaders, derived, as has been shown, from a variety of sources, on whom the authority of the ruling Chiefs rested in the indigenous system.”

Nigeria (Eastern provinces)

- Native Councils Ordinance of 1906: Similar to Western Nigeria, development of a system of Native Courts that “became the main if not the only instruments of executive control.” This yielded the creation of Warrant Chiefs.
- 1914–1916: Nigeria-wide ordinances (Native Courts, Native Authorities) made little difference in Southeast because without an attempt at direct taxation, the British did not reform the warrant chief system.
- 1928: Introduction of direct taxation.
- 1930s: Replacement of warrants chiefs with various councils (Clan, Group, Village), which reflected the information gathered from Intelligence Reports in the early part of the decade. “The chief purpose of these inquiries was to determine as far as possible the natural limits of the different units which should be recognized for administrative purposes, and to discover the true seat of indigenous authority in them. The result was the recognition, for the purpose of the Ordinance, of a very great variety of units of Native Authority which only in a few instances consisted of a traditional Chief or Chief in Council (these being mainly in the Cameroons and Ogoja Provinces and in the Onitsha Division of Onitsha Province) and for the most part consisted of Group or Clan Councils or Village Councils.”

Nigeria (Colony)

- Lagos was the most important part of the Colony (roughly 60% of its population in the late 1940s), but was exempt from the Native Authority ordinances that applied to the rural district areas of the Colony.
- Before 1938, village heads were selected by traditional means (popular selection of candidates from leading families), and they directly administered their areas with minimal regulation by the colonial government.
- Native Authority (Colony) Ordinance of 1937: Initiated a system of Native Authorities, which was “based mainly on the town or village Councils, but embracing also the Chiefs above mentioned and certain other traditional elements.”
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1943: Applied throughout Nigeria (except Lagos), but with the special provision for the rural district parts of the Colony area that chiefs could not be a part of the Native Authority: “the Governor may appoint as Native Authority any Council or any group of persons (provided that such Council or group of persons is composed of not less than five persons), but no provision is made for the appointment of a Chief or Chief and Council, as in the Protectorate. Alternatively, the Governor may appoint a District Officer as the Native Authority.”

Gold Coast (Ghana)

- Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1878: Regulated the powers and jurisdiction of Native Authorities in the newly created Gold Coast Colony. Chiefs were empowered to enact bylaws “with the concurrence of their Chiefs, Captains, Headmen and others who by Native Customary Law were the Councillors of their Stools.”
- 1896: The British deported the Asantehene (ruler of Asante) and dissolved the Ashanti Confederacy, and subsequently established a more direct form of rule in the Ashanti Colony.
- Ordinance of 1906 for the Northern Territories: Minimally regulated the powers of chiefs. “Administration was limited at the outset to making provision for the maintenance of law and order, and where traditional Chiefs appeared to have the necessary authority, they were recognized as agencies for this purpose. . . . There is a general agreement that the results were unfortunate in more than one direction. The backing of the Administration gave a coercive power to Chiefs whose own position was in many cases that of religious rather than secular heads, and they used it for their own private gain, either by extortion or by levying in the form of money the ritual tribute accorded to them by religious custom.”
- Native Administration (Colony) Ordinance of 1927: Brought Native Administration in the Gold Coast Colony more in line with policies in other colonies. “It defined the position of the States’ Councils and the relative positions of the Paramount Chief and other Chiefs. It prescribed a procedure for election and destoolment.” Hailey characterizes the measure as largely ineffective, though, because “[i]t did nothing to control the use of Stool resources by the establishment of Native Treasuries.”
- Native Authority (Northern Territories) Ordinance of 1932 and Native Treasuries Ordinance of 1932: Introduced institutions along the lines of those in Nigeria and Tanganyika. “[T]he Native Authorities and the Subordinate Native Authorities have in the majority of cases been gazetted as composed of a Chief and his Council. The composition of the Councils is governed by local custom, and it does not appear that the Administration has so far taken steps to regulate their membership.” Hailey also notes, though, that “[t]he degree to which the Native Authorities are dependent on the advice or support of their Councils varies greatly.”
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1935 for Ashanti: Ashanti Confederacy was officially recognized and the Ashanti Confederacy Council was granted the powers of a Native Authority. Introduced Native Treasuries.
- Ordinance of 1936 and Native Administration Treasuries Ordinance of 1939: Created Native Treasuries in Gold Coast Colony.
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1944: Hailey characterizes the earlier ordinances for the Gold Coast Colony as a transitional phase (owing to the early treaty relationships between the Crown and smaller states near the coast), and this ordinance created a more regular form for the Native Authorities. Almost all the Native Authorities were recognized as Paramount Chief and the State Council (plus several confederacies of chiefs).

Tanganyika

- Pre-WWI: German Commissioners repurposed the system the Sultan of Zanzibar had constructed in the coastal areas. The Sultan's officers (mainly Arab or Swahili), known as Akidas, administered native affairs. Some of the more influential traditional village headmen (Jumbes) were recognized alongside Akidas.
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1926:
 - Modeled after the Native Authority system in Nigeria, and introduced Native Treasuries. The system “aimed at making the fullest use of the traditional institutions of rule existing in African society.”
 - Native Authorities defined as “Chiefs or other natives or any Native Council or groups of natives declared as such by Government.” In practice, though, most Native Authorities were solo chiefs because of the difficulty of identifying proper councils. As Hailey describes, “there would in this Territory be some difficulty in giving formal recognition to a Chief's Council as part of the Native Authority organization since the Elders or other advisers are very seldom a regularly constituted body and in many cases the identity of those to whom a Chief looks for advice or support is not brought definitely to the knowledge of the officers of the Administration. There is also a considerable diversity in the extent to which a Chief considers himself free to act without reference to the Elders or other advisers, and it is clear that there are instances in which the grant to him of legal powers as a Native Authority has given him a more absolute position than that which older native custom would have allowed him. There are, on the other hand, cases in which tribal custom has not yet allowed this situation to arise, and a Chief would not venture to make an important decision without calling a ‘baraza,’ which would be attended not only by Elders, but by Headmen and other members of the tribe.”
 - Although most of the lower-level Native Authorities were solo chiefs, they did not exercise unilateral control over a Treasury. Instead, “[i]n a number of areas [the Native Authorities] have also been federated in Councils of Chiefs which, while discharging certain functions, such as the conduct of joint Treasuries or the making of Rules of general application, do not in other respects override the powers of the individual Chiefs recognized as Native Authorities.”

Northern Rhodesia

- Administration of Natives Proclamation of 1916: Implemented under corporate rule (British South Africa Company). “Under this provision Chiefs were able to exercise considerable control over their people.”
- Native Authorities Ordinance of 1929: Passed after Northern Rhodesia transitioned to Crown rule. Made Native Administration in Northern Rhodesia more uniform with the rest of British Africa, but did not introduce Native Treasuries. “[T]he results were limited by the absence of any training of the Chiefs in financial responsibility.”

- Ordinances of 1936: Applied the systems developed in Tanganyika and Nyasaland to Northern Rhodesia. Main change was to introduce Native Treasuries. The Superior Native Authorities consisted of “a Paramount Chief or other leading Chief, but in some others a Council of Chiefs or a Tribal Council. It is however noteworthy that in every case the Government Notification did not confer powers either as a Superior or Subordinate Native Authority on a Chief individually, but on the Chief and a tribal or other Council.”

Kenya

- Native Authority Ordinance of 1912: Empowered local Headmen, many of whom lacked traditional status.
- Amendments of the Native Authority Ordinance (1924, 1933): Implemented Local Native Councils, twenty of which existed by 1936.
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1937: Introduced Native Treasuries and provided “a more systematic form to the Local Native Councils, which have now attained, at all events in the more advanced Districts, a position of importance far greater than could have been foreseen when they were first instituted.”

Nyasaland

- District Administration (Native) Ordinance of 1912: Instructed District Residents to create Administrative Sections (which did not necessarily correspond with tribal divisions) administered by Principal Headmen. “Principal Headmen were not necessarily to be persons who had hitherto been recognized as Chiefs or headmen, and consideration was to be given to the claims—which might often be superior claims—of other persons of good standing ‘who have assisted the Resident in native administrative matters in the past.’ . . . While therefore this system did not exclude the use of traditional Native Authorities as agencies of local rule, its first intention was to utilize both them and the ‘selected’ Principal Headmen mainly as executive agents of the Administration.”
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1933:
 - Modeled on Tanganyika’s Native Authority Ordinance of 1926. Substituted traditional authorities for the Principal Headman as Native Authorities, and introduced Native Treasuries.
 - “The Native Authority was now defined as any Chief or other native or native council or groups of natives declared to be established as a Native Authority, and a Chief was defined as any native recognized as such by the Governor.” All of the Native Authorities, though, were solo chiefs. “The Chiefs have no formally constituted Councils, but have Advisers who are in some cases sub-chiefs, in others headmen, and in others persons holding traditional posts in the tribal organization. The Protectorate Administration does not intervene to decide their numbers or their personnel.”
 - Although all the lower-level Native Authorities were solo chiefs, Treasuries were operated at the more highly aggregated district level. Instead, “[t]he institution of the

Treasury system has been followed by a movement, initiated by the Administration, to secure the federation of the different Native Authorities in a District, in order to provide for a pooling of their resources and for the issue of uniform rules on matters of common interest to them.”

Gambia

- 1913 Ordinance, which concerned Native Courts and District Heads: Regulated the exercise of District Heads’ judicial functions. This was based off a list published in 1895 of seventeen District Heads, which “included a certain number of Chiefs belonging to former ‘mansa’ families, together with others appointed on purely personal grounds.”
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1933: Following the model from Tanganyika, gave “the Governor power to create Native Authorities, these being any Chief or other native or a Native Council or group.” Regulated the powers and responsibilities of Native Authorities.
- Protectorate Ordinance of 1935: Granted Head Chiefs the authority to supervise tax collection.
- Native Authority (Amendment) Ordinance of 1944: Introduced a system of informal councils into the Native Authority Organization, which replaced Head Chiefs as solo NAs.
- Protectorate Treasuries Ordinance of 1945: Introduced Native Treasuries.

Uganda

- 1900–01: Agreements with Buganda, Toro, and Ankole: Conferred powers upon each of these traditional rulers in a precocious form of indirect rule. In Buganda, the ruler (Kabaka) was explicitly recognized alongside his council (Lukiiko).
- 1900s: Baganda agents began to govern and install chiefs in Eastern and parts of Northern Uganda.
- Native Authority Ordinance of 1919: Created a more regular form of Native Administration outside Buganda. By the end of the 1920s, earlier-installed Baganda agents outside Buganda were largely replaced by local elites.
- 1920: Native Councils in Toro and Ankole were officially delegated certain legal powers, which reflected long-standing practices.
- 1933: Agreement with Bunyoro that officially recognized long-standing privileges of the ruler (Mukama) and his council (Rukurato).
- 1936: Introduced a system of councils in Eastern Uganda. The District Councils managed the levying and collection of taxes, and prepared the budget and expenditure estimates for the Native Treasuries.
- 1940s: Introduced a system of councils in Northern Uganda, designed after the District Councils introduced earlier in Eastern Uganda.

Bechuanaland (Botswana)

- Proclamation of 1899 to create Tribal Reserves. The resultant system of rule, as described by the Resident Commissioner in 1904, permitted “a very wide latitude to the Paramount Chiefs in the management of their own people,” and thus the traditional councils (Kgotla) remained unaltered in their importance.
- Native Administration Proclamation of 1934: Enacted a Native Administration system that followed the general model from Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. In addition to regulating the powers of Native Authority chiefs, “[t]he Proclamation made provision for the formal establishment of a Tribal Council. It was laid down that the Chief and the tribe having assembled in Kgotla, the Chief should designate (and subsequently notify to the Magistrate) the persons who under Native custom were entitled to act as his Councillors.”
- Native Treasury Proclamation of 1938: Created Native Treasuries in the Tribal Reserve areas.

Basutoland (Lesotho)

- This was an unusual dependency in which a single monarch (Paramount Chief) had jurisdiction over the entire territory. Throughout the period of European occupation, the monarch and his council enjoyed substantial autonomy, although official Native Authority and Native Treasury ordinances were not implemented until later. A National Council, which built on the longer tradition of popularly attended meetings (pitsos), was first created in 1903.
- Native Administration Proclamation of 1938: Formally regulated the powers of the Paramount Chief with regard to issues such as law making and the recognition of lower-level chiefs.
- Native Treasury Proclamation of 1946: Created a National Treasury under the control of the Paramount Chief, who was to be advised by a finance committee comprised of members nominated by the Paramount Chief and elected by the Basutoland Council.

Swaziland

- This was an unusual dependency in which a single monarch (Paramount Chief) had jurisdiction over the entire territory. Throughout the period of European occupation, the monarch and his councils enjoyed substantial autonomy, although official Native Authority and Native Treasury ordinances were not implemented until later. The Paramount Chief relied on two councils throughout the colonial period, the Liqoqo (inner/privy council) and the Libandhla (national/popular council).
- Native Administration Proclamations of 1946 and 1950: Formally regulated the powers of the Paramount Chief along the lines of the earlier proclamation in Basutoland.
- Native Treasury Proclamation of 1950: Created a Swazi National Treasury under the control of the Paramount Chief. As of the writing of the Hailey volume, a finance committee was being formed.

A.2.2 Membership of Councils Data

We count a counselor as an elite member if he⁴ (a) gained a local title by hereditary means, and/or (b) held an *ex officio* seat on the council, that is, the traditional title automatically qualified them for a seat on the council (e.g., the Asafoatse-ngwa, or army captains, who served on the Ada State Council in the Gold Coast). Other members gained their seats by a popular selection process, either through direct means (e.g., local election) or indirectly (e.g., selection by a lower-level council). The Egba Central Council in Western Nigeria included elites as well as both types of popularly selected members: “13 ex-officio titled members and 73 elected members, including four women. The elected members, originally appointed by their respective towns and villages, were in June 1949 elected by taxpayers, at elections supervised by Administrative Officers, voting being by show of hands. The four women were elected by the Councils of the four Sections into which the Egba Native Authority is divided” (Hailey 1951a, 113–14). Coding members as appointed by the Native Authority chief or by British administrators (e.g., District Officer) was straightforward and involved minimal coder discretion.

Notably, the Egba Central Council constituted a rare exception to the general pattern of male counselors. In five areas in Western Nigeria (including Egba), women gained elected seats on the NA council or a Subordinate Native Authority council. Queen Mothers held seats on the Ashanti Confederacy Council, Divisional Councils in Ashanti, the Fante Confederacy Council, and the Ligoqo in Swaziland. The latter cases reflected the traditional importance of Queen Mothers, who also played a role in selecting a new ruler. Similarly, almost every NA chief was a male, although the Hailey documents mention four chieftainesses: Tawana in Bechuanaland, Isoka in Northern Rhodesia, Kalolo in Nyasaland, and Unyanyembe in Tanganyika. Additional examples were female paramount chiefs in Mendeland in Sierra Leone (Day 2016) and a female warrant chief in Eastern Nigeria in the early twentieth century (Achebe 2011).

A.2.3 Expenditure Data

Data on spending by Native Treasuries was not reported consistently or in the same format across all colonial governments. Often, as in the Hailey reports (Hailey 1950a,b, 1951a,b, 1953), data are reported at a higher level of aggregation, either by district or province. We compiled estimates at the NT level from various sources listed below. Data were collected as close as possible to 1948, the year the Hailey surveys were conducted, but due to availability constraints we were unable to obtain data for the same years for all colonies.

Categorizations of Native Treasury spending varied by colony. The most common categories were those used in the Gold Coast: Administration, Medical, Education, Works, Extraordinary, and Agriculture. The main items of spending under Administration were the salaries of chiefs, councillors, and other local officials. Nigeria had a more detailed disaggregation scheme that distinguished between central Native Treasury administration, district heads and village heads, as well as categories like Police, Judicial, Surveys, and Forestry. To make consistent comparisons across colonies, we collected data on administration as a share of total spending. For Nigeria, we included central administration, district heads, and village heads. We also added together works,

⁴See below for the exceptions of female counselors.

medical, and education spending to create a combined measure of the share of expenditures on public goods.

Not all colonies reported spending in a format which we could use. Northern Rhodesia, for example, only distinguished personal emoluments from other spending. While this would have allowed us to measure the amount spent on salaries as opposed to other forms of spending, we did not use it because the categorization was inconsistent with the others. Similarly, Nyasaland did not report spending on roads, one of the components of our public goods variable.

Sources:

- Ghana: Gold Coast, *Report on Local Government Finance* (Accra, 1952).
- Kenya: Kenya, *Report on Native Affairs 1946-7* (Nairobi, 1947).
- Nigeria: Eastern Provinces, *Native Financial Statements* (Lagos, 1940); Northern Provinces, *Native Treasury Estimates* (Lagos, 1940); Western Provinces, *Native Financial Statements* (Lagos, 1940).
- Tanzania: Hailey Surveys CO 1018/68-75.

A.3 SPATIAL DATA AND COVARIATES

Digitized maps. We sourced and digitized maps of Native Treasury (NT) for all colonies in our sample except Gambia; given its small geographical size, we assume every covariate takes the same value for each of its NTs. We lack maps for 10 NTs in the Gold Coast and 42 NTs in Nigeria. For these, we used district maps where possible and assume that all covariates take the same value for every NT in the district; Carl Müller-Crepon graciously shared the shapefiles for colonial districts used in Müller-Crepon (2020). Ultimately, given the broad coverage of our maps, we lose only 7% of observations when we control for substantive covariates (e.g., Table 5, Column 3). For the Gold Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, and Nyasaland, we use digitized maps of NTs from Bolt and Gardner (2020). In Lesotho and Swaziland, a single NT covered the entire colony. We used several sources for maps of Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia, which we then digitized.⁵

Covariates. We combined other spatial data sets with NT polygons to compute covariates:

- **Population and population density.** We used two sources for population. First, Bolt and Gardner (2020) collected census data at the NT level in the 1950s, which covers most NTs in Nigeria, Gold Coast, Kenya, and Nyasaland. Second, the Hailey books provide nearly complete coverage of population data in the late 1940s, although measured at a higher level of aggregation: usually at the district level, but in a few cases only at the province level. We use the most disaggregated data point available for each unit. For observations in which population is measured at a more aggregate level than the NT, we assume that population density was constant across all NTs within the given census unit. For population density, area is in square kilometers (computed from our spatial polygons).
- **Value of cash crops.** We first digitized a map from Hance, Kotschar and Peterec (1961). They measure the value of crops in 1957, but it is unlikely that the distribution of values over areas is very different than in the late 1940s. One dot on the map represents \$289,270 of exports by value. We use the sum of these dots within each NT as the variable. When taking the log, we add 1 to each observation because of the many NTs with zero points.
- **European alienated land.** For districts with a substantial European presence, the Hailey books provide information on the percentage of land area alienated for European use. We assume this percentage is the same for every NT within the district. We assume this percentage is 0 in areas where Hailey does not discuss land alienation. When taking the log, we add 1 to the percentages.
- **Distance variables.** We used ArcGIS to calculate the distance between the centroid of the NT and the specified feature, either rail lines, capital city, or coastline. Data on capital cities from colonial Blue Books, and data on railroads from Jedwab, Kerby and Moradi (2017).
- **Mission station.** The variable indicates whether a mission was located within the area of the NT. Spatial data on the location of missions from Nunn (2010).

⁵Tanganyika: “Provinces and districts,” in Atlas of the Tanganyika Territory (Survey Division, 1948), p. 15; Tribal and ethnographic map 1950, Royal Geographical Society archives Tanzania VFS/G1. Northern Rhodesia: “Population Map,” in Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Federal Atlas (Salisbury: Federal Department of Trig and Topo Surveys, 1960), map no. 9; Tribal Areas 1933, Royal Geographical Society, Zambia Gan VFS 3; Gardner (2012), map 5.2.

A.4 SUMMARY STATISTICS TABLES

Table A.2: Summary Statistics: Precolonial Institutions

Colony	# NTs	Authoritarian state	Constrained state	No state
Nigeria	203	0.14	0.06	0.80
Eastern	95	0.00	0.00	1.00
Northern	59	0.49	0.10	0.41
Western	39	0.00	0.15	0.85
Colony	10	0.00	0.00	1.00
Gold Coast	87	0.00	0.34	0.66
Tanganyika	52	0.00	0.00	1.00
N Rhodesia	42	0.00	0.07	0.93
Kenya	26	0.00	0.00	1.00
Nyasaland	16	0.00	0.00	1.00
Gambia	13	0.00	0.00	1.00
Uganda	12	0.25	0.00	0.75
High Commission*	11	0.00	0.91	0.09
Averages	462	0.07	0.12	0.81

Notes: The cells in the table present the fraction of NTs for each colony with each of the three types of precolonial political institutions: authoritarian state, constrained state, or no state.

*The High Commission territories included nine NTs for Bechuanaland and one for each of Basutoland and Swaziland.

Table A.3: Summary Statistics: Native Authority Institutions

Colony	# NTs	NAs per NT	Solo chief	Chief & council	Council only	Federal council
Nigeria	203	1.9	0.24	0.15	0.62	0.00
Eastern	95	2.1	0.02	0.02	0.96	0.00
Northern	59	2.0	0.78	0.11	0.11	0.00
Western	39	1.5	0.00	0.56	0.44	0.00
Colony	10	1.3	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Gold Coast	87	1.0	0.01	0.83	0.16	0.00
Tanganyika	52	7.1	0.36	0.04	0.14	0.46
N. Rhodesia	42	1.0	0.00	0.76	0.24	0.00
Kenya	26	15.1	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.88
Nyasaland	16	6.5	0.55	0.00	0.01	0.44
Gambia	13	1.0	0.00	0.92	0.08	0.00
Uganda	12	5.3	0.00	0.33	0.67	0.00
High Commission	11	1.6	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
Averages	462	3.2	0.17	0.35	0.34	0.13

Notes: For each NT without a federal council, we calculate the fraction of NAs with each of the three types of institutional arrangements (solo chief, chief and council, council only), and each cell reports the average of these scores by colony. As noted in the text, this is essentially an indicator variable for each NT, as there is almost no variance on institutions within an NT. For the federal-council NTs, the entire NT is denoted as a federal council. However, for the column NAs per NT, we count every lower-level NA within each federal-council NT.

Table A.4: Summary Statistics: Covariates

Variable	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Population (log)	430	10.96	1.21	7.37	14.87
Population density (log)	430	2.93	1.46	-1.53	6.74
Value of cash crops (log)	430	0.94	1.21	0.00	5.41
European alienated land (log)	430	0.62	1.26	0.00	4.52
Distance from rail line (log)	430	4.18	1.24	0.60	6.71
Distance from capital (log)	430	5.66	0.86	2.32	7.15
Distance from coastline (log)	430	5.26	1.39	0.30	7.27
Missionary station (binary)	430	0.48	0.50	0.00	1.00

Notes: This table summarizes the value of each covariate for the 430 NTs without missing data on any covariate; some of the variables have observations for more than 430 NTs.

Table A.5: Summary Statistics: Membership of Councils

Colony	# NTs	Elite		Popular		Chief appointed		British appointed	
		Any	Plurality	Any	Plurality	Any	Plurality	Any	Plurality
Nigeria	185	0.72	0.49	0.74	0.41	0.09	0.09	0.02	0.01
Eastern	85	0.71	0.34	1.00	0.66	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Northern	51	0.61	0.61	0.20	0.06	0.33	0.33	0.02	0.00
Western	39	0.92	0.79	0.79	0.21	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.00
Colony	10	0.70	0.00	1.00	0.90	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.10
Gold Coast	86	0.99	0.98	0.09	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.00
Tanganyika	32	0.63	0.56	0.28	0.19	0.19	0.13	0.19	0.13
N. Rhodesia	40	0.80	0.45	0.15	0.08	0.78	0.48	0.00	0.00
Kenya	23	0.00	0.00	0.91	0.70	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.30
Nyasaland	13	0.69	0.69	0.08	0.00	0.46	0.31	0.00	0.00
Uganda	12	1.00	0.25	0.92	0.67	0.33	0.08	0.67	0.00
High Comm.	11	0.18	0.09	1.00	0.82	0.09	0.09	0.00	0.00
Averages	402	0.73	0.56	0.51	0.30	0.17	0.12	0.11	0.03

Notes: The table presents the frequency of each type of council member, disaggregated by colony and averaged across NTs. To calculate the composition of the council for each NT, we first coded whether each Native Authority had any and/or a plurality of such members, and then averaged these scores for any NT that contained multiple NAs. The sample size for each colony is smaller than in Appendix Table A.3 either because some NTs lacked a council or we lack information about its composition.

Table A.6: Summary Statistics: Native Treasury Expenditures

Colony	#NTs	Admin	Education	Medical	Roads	All PGs
Nigeria	155	22.8%	3.8%	8.1%	17.9%	29.8%
Eastern	64	15.4%	3.4%	9.2%	19.7%	32.3%
Northern	59	31.5%	4.8%	6.4%	14.8%	26.0%
Western	32	21.6%	2.8%	9.0%	20.2%	32.0%
Gold Coast	82	14.1%	18.7%	8.0%	8.5%	35.2%
Tanganyika	47	51.8%	15.7%	10.2%	4.0%	29.9%
Kenya	25	24.5%	25.3%	12.2%	10.7%	48.2%
NA with council	240	21.1%	11.9%	9.2%	13.1%	34.2%
NA without council	69	38.7%	9.2%	7.1%	11.4%	27.7%
Averages	309	25.0%	11.3%	8.7%	12.7%	32.8%

Notes: The cells in the table present the average fraction of expenditures on the specified item (with all public goods constituting the sum of the preceding three columns), disaggregated by colony or type of NA institutions.

Table A.7: Summary Statistics: Finance Committees

Colony	#NTs	Finance committee
Nigeria	171	62.0%
Eastern	71	84.5%
Northern	57	8.8%
Western	34	94.1%
Colony	9	100%
Gold Coast	86	88.4%
Tanganyika	52	1.9%
Northern Rhodesia	39	0%
Kenya	24	70.8%
Nyasaland	15	13.3%
High Commission	7	100%
Uganda	5	100%
NA with council	320	65.0%
NA without council	79	7.6%
Averages	399	53.6%

Notes: The cells in the table present the fraction of Native Treasuries with a finance committee, disaggregated by colony or type of NA institutions.

A.5 ADDITIONAL REGRESSION TABLES – INDIRECT-RULE INSTITUTIONS

Here we present details on a series of robustness checks, which we briefly summarized following the analysis of Tables 5 and 6.

Sensitivity to unobserved covariates. Table A.8 shows that the coefficient estimates from Tables 5 and 6 are relatively insensitive to unobserved covariates. Therefore, although it is impossible to control for every possible confounder, if the covariates included in these tables are substantively relevant, then there is less reason to believe that omitted covariates would overturn the results. We analyze a commonly used metric from Altonji, Elder and Taber (2005) that estimates how large the bias from unobserved covariates would need to be for the true coefficient to be 0 in a statistical model, given the degree by which adding observable covariates changes the estimates from a baseline model without covariates. Large positive numbers and negative numbers indicate highly robust results.

Columns 3 and 6 in each table contain the set of substantive covariates. The sample is smaller in these specifications because of some missing data in the covariates (only 430 of 462 NTs). To calculate the Altonji et al. metric for these models, we re-ran the baseline specifications (Columns 1 and 4) on the restricted sample and used those coefficient estimates (unreported) as the basis for comparison.

Table A.8: Sensitivity to Unobserved Covariates

	Column in Table 5				Column in Table 6			
	(2)	(3)	(5)	(6)	(2)	(3)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	neg.	6.9	neg.	neg.				
Constrained PCS	7.5	5.4			2.4	7.8		
Authoritarian PCS					neg.	neg.	neg.	6.9

Logit regressions. This table replaces the continuous dependent variables with binary outcomes, based on whether at least half the NAs in the NT had the specified type of institution. No NTs with a precolonial state (either authoritarian or constrained) had a majority of NAs with council-only NAs, and we omit the uninformative specifications for council-only NA or any-chief NA. The number of observations is smaller in Columns 2 and 5 than in the baseline specification because of perfect prediction by the logit model, not missing data.

Table A.9: Logit Regressions

	DV: Any council (binary)			DV: Solo chief (binary)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	3.841*** (0.557)	5.495*** (1.050)	3.377*** (0.635)			
Authoritarian PCS				3.938*** (0.558)	5.690*** (1.057)	3.464*** (0.635)
Constrained PCS	4.248*** (0.712)	3.920*** (1.198)	3.954*** (0.846)	-0.310 (0.496)	2.022*** (0.650)	-0.456 (0.581)
Population			-0.833*** (0.182)			0.765*** (0.182)
Population density			0.379*** (0.146)			-0.390** (0.156)
Value of cash crops			0.583*** (0.189)			-0.519*** (0.187)
% alienated land			0.362 (0.255)			-0.508 (0.378)
Distance from rail line			-0.0860 (0.158)			0.0960 (0.165)
Distance from capital			-0.398 (0.289)			0.508* (0.260)
Distance from coastline			0.155 (0.174)			-0.174 (0.192)
Missionary station			0.161 (0.319)			-0.131 (0.332)
Intercept	-1.946*** (0.535)	-5.025*** (1.088)	7.856*** (2.217)	-1.992*** (0.159)	-0.552* (0.288)	-11.19*** (2.120)
NTs	462	384	430	462	297	430
Provinces	61	46	61	61	42	61
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using a logit link with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Alternative measure of colonial councils. In this table, we group federal-council NAs with the chief-and-council NAs. We re-estimate the specifications for which this recoding alters values of the DV: Columns 4–6 of Table 5 and Columns 1–3 of Table 6.

Table A.10: Alternative Measure of Colonial Councils

	DV: Council-only NA (alt.)			DV: NA includes a chief (alt.)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	0.414*** (0.0256)	0.679*** (0.0398)	0.324*** (0.0440)			
Authoritarian PCS				0.414*** (0.0256)	0.679*** (0.0398)	0.324*** (0.0440)
Constrained PCS	-0.00438 (0.00432)	0.272*** (0.0590)	-0.0104 (0.0533)	0.419*** (0.0252)	0.407*** (0.0498)	0.334*** (0.0409)
Population			-0.0354 (0.0223)			0.0354 (0.0223)
Population density			0.0329* (0.0182)			-0.0329* (0.0182)
Value of cash crops			-0.0293 (0.0198)			0.0293 (0.0198)
% alienated land			-0.0800*** (0.0180)			0.0800*** (0.0180)
Distance from rail line			-0.0810*** (0.0203)			0.0810*** (0.0203)
Distance from capital			0.114*** (0.0298)			-0.114*** (0.0298)
Distance from coastline			-0.100*** (0.0213)			0.100*** (0.0213)
Missionary station			0.0535 (0.0407)			-0.0535 (0.0407)
Intercept	0.00438 (0.00432)	-0.317*** (0.0743)	0.611** (0.263)	0.581*** (0.0252)	0.638*** (0.0671)	0.0651 (0.243)
NTs	462	462	430	462	462	430
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.121	0.458	0.323	0.121	0.458	0.323
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Province as unit of analysis. We change the unit of analysis from NTs to provinces. Each variable is an average over the values for every NT within the province.

Table A.11: Province as Unit of Analysis for Table 5

	<u>DV: NA includes a council</u>			<u>DV: Council-only NA</u>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	0.874*** (0.216)	0.871*** (0.201)	0.759*** (0.168)	0.630*** (0.0657)	0.691*** (0.114)	0.742*** (0.121)
Constrained PCS	0.872*** (0.238)	0.777*** (0.246)	0.717*** (0.200)	-0.0393 (0.0587)	0.0534 (0.179)	-0.00857 (0.156)
Population			-0.0924 (0.0793)			0.0807 (0.0675)
Population density			-0.0117 (0.0437)			0.00542 (0.0476)
Value of cash crops			0.0844 (0.0618)			-0.0877* (0.0516)
% alienated land			-0.0163 (0.0332)			-0.0604 (0.0676)
Distance from rail line			-0.0537 (0.0415)			-0.231*** (0.0671)
Distance from capital			-0.0955 (0.0598)			0.0226 (0.0638)
Distance from coastline			0.0262 (0.0393)			-0.000976 (0.0470)
Missionary station			0.0394 (0.106)			-0.0574 (0.169)
Intercept	-0.0110 (0.208)	0.214 (0.238)	1.694* (0.864)	-0.0331 (0.0331)	-0.111 (0.169)	-0.0319 (0.569)
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.491	0.584	0.631	0.483	0.606	0.663
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.12: Province as Unit of Analysis for Table 6

	DV: NA includes a chief			DV: Solo-chief NA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Authoritarian PCS	0.630*** (0.0657)	0.691*** (0.114)	0.742*** (0.121)	0.874*** (0.216)	0.871*** (0.201)	0.759*** (0.168)
Constrained PCS	0.669*** (0.0683)	0.638*** (0.140)	0.750*** (0.105)	0.00230 (0.0965)	0.0933 (0.162)	0.0419 (0.106)
Population			-0.0807 (0.0675)			0.0924 (0.0793)
Population density			-0.00543 (0.0476)			0.0117 (0.0437)
Value of cash crops			0.0877* (0.0516)			-0.0844 (0.0618)
% alienated land			0.0604 (0.0676)			0.0163 (0.0332)
Distance from rail line			0.231*** (0.0671)			0.0537 (0.0415)
Distance from capital			-0.0226 (0.0638)			0.0955 (0.0598)
Distance from coastline			0.000963 (0.0470)			-0.0262 (0.0393)
Missionary station			0.0573 (0.169)			-0.0394 (0.106)
Intercept	0.403*** (0.0492)	0.420*** (0.127)	0.290 (0.535)	0.137*** (0.0323)	-0.0848 (0.147)	-1.453* (0.749)
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.483	0.606	0.663	0.491	0.584	0.631
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Standard errors clustered at the province level. The specifications in the following tables are otherwise identical to those in Tables 5 and 6, but here we use a more conservative procedure for clustering standard errors (by province).

Table A.13: Table 5 with Province-Clustered Standard Errors

	<u>DV: NA includes a council</u>			<u>DV: Council-only NA</u>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	0.766*** (0.0790)	0.801*** (0.0627)	0.667*** (0.0876)	0.580*** (0.0703)	0.753*** (0.0723)	0.666*** (0.0729)
Constrained PCS	0.798*** (0.0925)	0.704*** (0.0925)	0.671*** (0.0943)	-0.00438 (0.00435)	0.342*** (0.104)	0.171** (0.0770)
Population			-0.0721** (0.0276)			0.0657** (0.0320)
Population density			0.0374 (0.0256)			0.00401 (0.0252)
Value of cash crops			0.0547*** (0.0166)			-0.0143 (0.0229)
% alienated land			0.0203* (0.0121)			-0.0563* (0.0318)
Distance from rail line			-0.00261 (0.0222)			-0.123*** (0.0310)
Distance from capital			-0.0403 (0.0251)			0.0742 (0.0635)
Distance from coastline			0.0145 (0.0270)			-0.0430 (0.0348)
Missionary station			0.0138 (0.0385)			0.0787 (0.0525)
Intercept	0.112 (0.0715)	0.285*** (0.0859)	0.978*** (0.286)	0.00438 (0.00435)	-0.388*** (0.0967)	-0.506 (0.463)
NTs	462	462	430	462	462	430
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.279	0.431	0.366	0.212	0.401	0.343
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors clustered at the province level.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.14: Table 6 with Province-Clustered Standard Errors

	DV: NA includes a chief			DV: Solo-chief NA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Authoritarian PCS	0.580*** (0.0703)	0.753*** (0.0723)	0.666*** (0.0730)	0.766*** (0.0790)	0.801*** (0.0627)	0.667*** (0.0876)
Constrained PCS	0.584*** (0.0700)	0.411*** (0.0916)	0.495*** (0.0688)	-0.0319 (0.0796)	0.0967 (0.0817)	-0.00385 (0.0627)
Population			-0.0657** (0.0320)			0.0721** (0.0276)
Population density			-0.00401 (0.0252)			-0.0374 (0.0256)
Value of cash crops			0.0144 (0.0229)			-0.0547*** (0.0166)
% alienated land			0.0563* (0.0318)			-0.0203* (0.0121)
Distance from rail line			0.123*** (0.0310)			0.00261 (0.0222)
Distance from capital			-0.0742 (0.0635)			0.0403 (0.0251)
Distance from coastline			0.0430 (0.0348)			-0.0145 (0.0270)
Missionary station			-0.0787 (0.0525)			-0.0138 (0.0385)
Intercept	0.416*** (0.0700)	0.635*** (0.0815)	0.840* (0.431)	0.123*** (0.0354)	-0.0860 (0.0726)	-0.645*** (0.232)
NTs	462	462	430	462	462	430
Provinces	61	61	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.212	0.401	0.343	0.279	0.431	0.366
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors clustered at the province level.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

A.6 ADDITIONAL REGRESSION TABLES – MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCILS AND PUBLIC FINANCE

The following first presents a robustness check for Table 7 using an alternative measurement of elite/popular counselors, and then reports all coefficient estimates from Tables 7–9.

Alternative measurement of elite/popular counselors. For our main measure, either of the following two characteristics were sufficient to code a council member as an elite: the individual (a) gained a local title by hereditary means or (b) held an *ex officio* seat on the council, that is, the traditional title automatically qualified them for a seat on the council. We also coded an alternative version in which elite members must have gained their titles by hereditary means, and otherwise they are coded as popular members. In this table, we re-run the models from Table 7 using these alternative versions of the elite and popular counselor variables.

Table A.15: Alternative Measurement of Elite/Popular Counselors

	DV: Elite (alt.)			DV: Popular (alt.)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	-0.225*** (0.0603)	-0.180*** (0.0527)	-0.199*** (0.0643)	0.316*** (0.0492)	0.391*** (0.0449)	0.265*** (0.0582)
Population			-0.0651** (0.0287)			0.0168 (0.0257)
Population density			0.00652 (0.0247)			0.0609** (0.0246)
Value of cash crops			0.0515** (0.0251)			-0.00294 (0.0224)
% alienated land			0.0756*** (0.0220)			-0.102*** (0.0223)
Distance from rail line			0.0746*** (0.0276)			-0.0658** (0.0256)
Distance from capital			-0.00699 (0.0375)			-0.0219 (0.0359)
Distance from coastline			0.00657 (0.0258)			-0.0268 (0.0281)
Missionary station			-0.103* (0.0543)			0.0650 (0.0480)
Intercept	0.622*** (0.0537)	0.0200 (0.0198)	0.973*** (0.275)	0.159*** (0.0404)	0.957*** (0.0412)	0.369 (0.252)
NTs	402	402	375	402	402	375
Provinces	57	57	57	57	57	57
R-squared	0.033	0.427	0.105	0.067	0.492	0.213
Colony FE		✓			✓	
Covariates			✓			✓

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Regression tables with all coefficient estimates reported. The following are identical to Tables 7–9, but with all coefficient estimates reported.

Table A.16: Table 7 with All Coefficient Estimates Reported

	DV: Elite plurality			DV: Popular plurality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Decentralized	-0.0966 (0.0602)	-0.0347 (0.0549)	-0.116* (0.0609)	0.188*** (0.0472)	0.245*** (0.0402)	0.182*** (0.0524)
Population			-0.0821*** (0.0279)			0.0338 (0.0237)
Population density			0.0139 (0.0253)			0.0534** (0.0245)
Value of cash crops			0.0835*** (0.0237)			-0.0349* (0.0200)
% alienated land			0.0322 (0.0205)			-0.0586*** (0.0203)
Distance from rail line			0.104*** (0.0265)			-0.0952*** (0.0233)
Distance from capital			0.0365 (0.0392)			-0.0654* (0.0364)
Distance from coastline			-0.0582** (0.0257)			0.0380 (0.0263)
Missionary station			-0.0637 (0.0543)			0.0259 (0.0462)
Intercept	0.634*** (0.0533)	0.00386 (0.00710)	1.114*** (0.272)	0.146*** (0.0391)	0.973*** (0.0261)	0.228 (0.243)
NTs	402	402	375	402	402	375
Provinces	57	57	57	57	57	57
R-squared	0.006	0.285	0.105	0.028	0.312	0.158
Colony FE		✓			✓	
	DV: Chief-appointed plurality			DV: Any British-appointed members		
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Authoritarian PCS	0.391*** (0.0975)	0.456*** (0.0982)	0.366*** (0.101)			
Decentralized				0.104*** (0.0253)	0.0271 (0.0288)	0.139*** (0.0323)
Population			0.00415 (0.0172)			0.0710*** (0.0176)
Population density			-0.0328** (0.0135)			-0.0249 (0.0172)
Value of cash crops			-0.0349** (0.0158)			0.00944 (0.0152)
% alienated land			0.0172 (0.0126)			0.0194 (0.0155)
Distance from rail line			0.0123 (0.0147)			-0.0329* (0.0168)
Distance from capital			-0.00796 (0.0209)			-0.0525** (0.0256)
Distance from coastline			0.0376*** (0.0122)			0.0352* (0.0206)
Missionary station			0.0809** (0.0357)			-0.0346 (0.0319)
Intercept	0.0907*** (0.0149)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.0674 (0.155)	0.0244 (0.0171)	-0.00301 (0.00428)	-0.461*** (0.143)
NTs	402	402	375	402	402	375
Provinces	57	57	57	57	57	57
R-squared	0.093	0.307	0.201	0.018	0.652	0.149
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.17: Table 8 with All Coefficient Estimates Reported

	DV: Administration %			DV: Public goods %		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Solo-chief NA	0.185*** (0.0196)	0.138*** (0.0146)	0.112*** (0.0256)	-0.0687*** (0.0142)	-0.0471*** (0.0139)	-0.0688*** (0.0185)
Population			0.0422*** (0.00861)			0.00130 (0.00865)
Population density			-0.0474*** (0.00821)			0.0102 (0.00813)
Value of cash crops			0.00416 (0.00890)			-0.00170 (0.00660)
% alienated land			0.00231 (0.00630)			0.0102 (0.00698)
Distance from rail line			-0.00640 (0.00924)			0.00647 (0.00810)
Distance from capital			0.0321** (0.0160)			-0.0309** (0.0156)
Distance from coastline			-0.0107 (0.00930)			0.0214*** (0.00810)
Missionary station			0.0115 (0.0155)			0.0169 (0.0136)
Intercept	0.210*** (0.00969)	0.140*** (0.00724)	-0.206** (0.0924)	0.342*** (0.00837)	0.352*** (0.0137)	0.331*** (0.0945)
NTs	309	309	293	309	309	293
Provinces	42	42	42	42	42	42
R-squared	0.202	0.621	0.369	0.049	0.188	0.109
Colony FE		✓			✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.18: Table 9 with All Coefficient Estimates Reported

	DV: Finance committee		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Solo-chief NA	-0.598*** (0.0408)	-0.536*** (0.0475)	-0.387*** (0.0505)
Population			-0.0406 (0.0264)
Population density			0.0863*** (0.0206)
Value of cash crops			0.0648*** (0.0198)
% alienated land			-0.0242 (0.0175)
Distance from rail line			0.0507** (0.0218)
Distance from capital			-0.122*** (0.0336)
Distance from coastline			-0.0761*** (0.0255)
Missionary station			-0.0774* (0.0406)
Intercept	0.651*** (0.0266)	1.000 (0.000)	1.657*** (0.240)
NTs	399	399	374
Provinces	54	54	54
R-squared	0.214	0.571	0.424
Colony FE		✓	

Notes: Models are estimated using OLS with robust standard errors. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

B EXCERPTS FROM CODEBOOK

Here we present excerpts from the detailed coding notes we compiled for each case to code both precolonial and Native Authority institutions. The case notes will be available in full upon publication.

B.1 PRECOLONIAL INSTITUTIONS

Our information about precolonial institutions draws heavily from anthropological accounts compiled during the colonial era. We briefly address concerns about our sources before providing excerpts from the codebook. Although the use of such sources has become standard practice in social scientific work on precolonial states in Africa, some criticize this trend because many dates of observation occurred after significant economic change and European intervention had taken place (Henderson and Whatley 2014). This undoubtedly created challenges to constructing accurate accounts. However, we believe that, if anything, the bias induced by inaccuracies would tend to go against our characterization that institutional constraints were widespread in precolonial Africa. Qualitative histories of Africa in the late nineteenth century suggest that there was a tendency for African states to become increasingly autocratic over this period. For example, in Buganda, anthropologists highlight that governance had become more autocratic over time prior to colonization. This is not an isolated case, as the drift towards increasingly authoritarian rule in the nineteenth century was observed in several regions of Africa. Given the difficulty of constructing oral histories farther back in time, it is natural that anthropologists would attempt to characterize the most accurate snapshot of precolonial politics possible, which would be on the eve of colonization. Yet to the extent that the late nineteenth century was an unusually autocratic period in African governance, this would make it more difficult to find evidence of institutional constraints.

B.1.1 Bornu (Northern Nigeria)

Coding: Bornu, ruled by the Shehu, had become an *authoritarian state* by the nineteenth century as prior checks on the executive had weakened.

Details: Bornu was an ancient state in West Africa. It was part of the historical Kanem-Bornu empire before breaking off to form its own empire. The sources indicate that constraints on the Shehu weakened considerably over time. “The whole Council of State (Nokena) is only a shadow nowadays, surviving from the aristocratic constitution of an earlier period, and has no longer any effective power . . . Now it is only the will of the sovereign and the influence of his favorites that count” (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966, 333). The council members “gradually came to regard themselves as princes, and at the end of the fifteenth century Ali Dunama greatly curtailed their powers” (Temple 1922, 435). The Bornu Council of State “is composed of members of the royal family, the brothers and sons of the Shehu, together with the state councillors . . . who themselves fall into two categories: the free-born representatives of different national groups, and the military commanders . . . who are of slave origin” (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966, 332).

B.1.2 Buganda (Uganda)

Coding: Buganda, ruled by the Kabaka, had become an *authoritarian state* by the nineteenth century as prior checks on the executive had weakened.

Details:

- The elite class of bataka (clan, sub-clan, and lineage heads) were originally able to check the king when they had ruled alongside him as a hereditary chiefly council. However, they lost their power during the “growth of royal despotism during the eighteenth century,” as one king began replacing hereditary chiefs with new chiefs loyal to him (Kiwauka 1971, 100-101). “There is no doubt that the authority of the Kabaka was greater in the nineteenth century than it had previously been. Previously there had been many checks on his authority,” including the bataka elites, national gods, and officers who “could suggest and advise, and were expected to do so” (Fallers 1960, 64). “Before the reign of Mutebi, a king could have his wishes blocked by the opposition of the chiefs. But by the eighteenth century a strong king could easily ignore the protests of the notables as demonstrated by the policies of Tebandeke . . .” (Kiwauka 1971, 100). In the nineteenth century, “the central authority of the Kabaka was increasing at the expense of the bataka and the spokesmen for the gods . . . By the time of first recorded history, the Kabaka had an absolute right to rule the country—symbolized by his ‘eating Buganda’ at the time of his coronation” (Fallers 1960, 64).
- Later chiefs could replace bataka elites at will, including for positions that were previously hereditary. “As royal despotism expanded, it became easier for the kings to get rid of unwanted chiefs.” By the nineteenth century, Bataka had lost their ancient privileges and “the balance of political power had shifted more into the royal hands than it had ever done before” (Kiwauka 1971, 101-102). “It was said that the Kabaka was the head of all the bataka.” One Kabaka replaced the clan heads with administrative chiefs, while another substituted “direct appointments to some ssaza [county] chieftainships which had previously been hereditary” (Fallers 1960, 64). “The Kabaka, once established, had great power in his own right, which he exercised throughout the kingdom through his court officials and his chiefs . . . in the nineteenth century the power of the Kabaka increased and he became strong enough to appoint chiefs where previously the position had been inherited” (Fallers 1960, 61-63). Hailey (1950a, 14) also describes how at least six of the saza (county) posts were hereditary at the beginning of the eighteenth century but that changed during that century. “The reason for the change was doubtless the expansion of Buganda and the growing authority of the Kabaka vis-a-vis the hitherto powerful families.”

B.1.3 Oyo (Western Nigeria)

Coding: Oyo, ruled by the Alafin, was a *constrained state* throughout the nineteenth century. Councils influenced day-to-day policy decisions and affected the selection and replacement of Alafins.

Details:

- A Council of Seven, called the Awyaw Mesi, drew its members from seven lineages; these members are referred to as semi-hereditary nobility (Talbot 1926, 571). The chief of the counselors was called the “terrestrial chief” whereas the Alafin was the “celestial chief” (Forde 1951, 22). According to Talbot (1926, 571), “No law could be promulgated” without the consent of the Awyaw Mesi.

- Another powerful council was the Oyo Mesi, the council of head chiefs. In theory, “the king was supposed to have the last word” in disagreements. Yet in practice, “the king was reduced to the position of figure head” and “real power fell to the Oyo Mesi who were the civil lords of the commoners” (Imoagene 1990, 25). “Thus the king was very effectively checked not only by the Ogboni cult but also by the Oyo-Mesi” (Imoagene 1990, 26).
- The Awyaw Mesi chose and could depose the Alafin. The three “Fathers of the King” nominated elections, among whom the Awyaw Mesi chose. The new Alafin typically came from a different branch than the late Alafin (Talbot 1926, 568). The head of the council “had the right to demand the [king’s] death if he proved to be a failure or a tyrant.” Supposedly, this event was fairly common (Talbot 1926, 571).

B.1.4 Barotse (Northern Rhodesia)

Coding: Barotse was a *constrained state* throughout the nineteenth century. The main council (which was divided into sub-councils) influenced day-to-day policy decisions and could replace the king.

Details:

- The kuta, or council, was the main ruling body and had many sub-councils, where “matters of national importance might originate . . . Attempts were made to get agreement between the three councils before the king was called on to give the final decision” (Turner 1952, 37). “The councils of the two real capitals interlock into a single council in which councillors of Lwambi rank below those of Namuso. This council was until 1947 the real ruling body of Loziland” (34). “In all routine matters the Kuta worked as one composite body . . . In other matters, and particularly those involving issues of major importance to the Lozi, the Kuta was divided formally into the three Councils”—the Sikalo, Saa, and Katengo (Hailey 1950b, 96). The first council was comprised of minor commoner councillors and the king’s stewards. The second was comprised of all the other councillors (princes and commoners) except for the two most senior ones, and the third consisted of the senior councillors of the second council and the two most senior officials, the Ngambela and the Natamayo (Caplan 1970, 3-4).
- The council could not act without the king’s approval, but the king could not in practice override the council if its opinion was united. “If all three Councils agreed a decision was taken. If not, the Councils sat again, this time having the advantage of knowing each other’s views, including those of the Sikalo, which were reported to the other Councils. If they could not agree the Sikalo’s decision had the greatest weight, but the Paramount and Ngambela might follow the Katengo’s decision against both upper Councils. It is said that they respected the Katengo ‘as speaking for the mass of the people’” (Hailey 1950b, 96). “Because of the different interests into which all these members of the ruling class were divided, it was difficult for them to unite against the King. But if they did reach a consensus of opinion, it was hazardous for the King to adopt an opposing policy” (Caplan 1970, 4).
- The counselors depended on the king for their positions and promotion. However, because the king could be any member of the royal family, they also could choose to support a rival

candidate for king at any time, in hopes of gaining a better position. “The King could appoint any commoner to any place in the established hierarchy of council titles, or to the Ngambelaship. This both augmented and diminished the power of the King, for while his subjects depended on him for promotion, he was perpetually open to the threat that, if antagonized, they would rally behind a prince whom they would attempt to substitute for the incumbent” (Caplan 1970, 3). “In this way, then, permanent intrigue at every level of government inhered in the system, no man from King to the most subordinate councillor enjoying secure tenure of office” (Caplan 1970, 3). “As the Lozi themselves say, the state is always on the verge of revolt” (Caplan 1970, 3). The system of territorial division, however, ensured that no councillor or prince could accrue “a solid localized block of men.” Power was instead concentrated in the capital (Caplan 1970, 4-5).

- The Ngambela was the chief minister who wielded considerable power (Hailey 1950*b*, 96; Turner 1952, 37). The Ngambelaship was the highest position a commoner could aspire to, and was “greatly dependent on the King’s favour” for his position. However, it was also his duty to represent the nation and perform “his function to oppose a King who ruled unjustly” (Caplan 1970, 3).

B.2 NATIVE AUTHORITY INSTITUTIONS

B.2.1 Bornu (Northern Nigeria)

Coding: Bornu was a NA/NT in the eponymous district and province in Northern Nigeria. The Native Authority was a solo chief with an entirely chief-appointed council.

Details. From Hailey (1951a, 55): “In the Bornu Division the Shehu, who is sole Native Authority, has an Advisory Council of six, the Waziri (£1,000) who is in charge of District affairs and prisons; the Mukaddam (£600) who is in charge of the police and of Maiduguri town; Mainia Kanandi (£540), the first legal member; the Wali (£450) the second legal member and in charge of agriculture and forestry; the Ma’aji (£450) who is the Treasurer and supervises the co-operative societies; and Shettima Kashim (£510) who is the Education Officer. Two of the Council (Mukaddam and the Ma’aji) are Shuwa Arabs appointed on merit; the Waziri and the Mainia Kanandi come from traditional families. The Advisory Council is appointed by the Shehu and approved by the Resident.”

B.2.2 Buganda (Uganda)

Coding: Buganda was a Native Government in Uganda with its own treasury. The NA was chief and council, and the council had a plurality of chief-appointed members with a minority of each of elite and popularly selected members.

Details. From Hailey (1950a): Britain’s foundational treaty with the Kabaka of Buganda, the Agreement of 1900, provided the constitution for Buganda. Hailey stresses the unique extent of autonomy in Buganda given the Agreement of 1900, which “contemplated that the Kabaka should, subject to certain conditions, exercise direct control over the natives of Buganda. Given the circumstances existing in 1900, that provision clearly applied primarily to requirements such as the maintenance of law and order or the administration of justice . . . As the picture presents itself to-day, the Native Government provides a large part of the machinery for the administration of law and order and of justice, while the Protectorate Government provides the greater part of the services ministering to the social and economic needs of the Province” (8).

The NA was a chief and council. “The Native Government has been gazetted as the Native Authority . . .” (18). Later he clarifies that the “Native Government” refers to both Kabaka and Lukiko: “As has been shown, not only are the laws enacted by the Kabaka and Lukiko subject to the assent of the Governor, but it is expressly provided that in this respect the Native Government must explicitly follow the advice tendered to it through his representatives” (22).

Hailey provides extensive detail on the composition and powers of the council:

- “The Kabaka was to ‘exercise direct rule over the natives of Buganda,’ to whom he was to administer justice through the Lukiko or Native Council . . . The Kabaka’s Council of the Lukiko was to discuss and pass resolutions on all matters concerning the native administration of Buganda; but the Kabaka was to consult the representative of the British Government in Uganda before giving effect to such resolutions . . . Subsequent Agreements of 1910 and 1937 made it clear that this Article of the 1900 Agreement was to be interpreted as conferring on the Kabaka and Lukiko the power to make, with the consent of the Governor, laws

which were to be binding on natives in Buganda” (6). Later he states: “The machinery for effecting Buganda legislation is the Kabaka and Lukiko. The Great Lukiko at Mengo . . . is a body which, as will be seen, has also important functions in the field of administration, and supplies the members of the supreme judicial court of Buganda. Its legislative business was formerly concentrated at its annual session, but arrangement have now been made for it to hold quarterly sessions” (9).

- Hailey then describes how the membership of the Lukiko evolved over time. Before 1939, the council consisted almost entirely of Kabaka-selected chiefs, who served as official members. The Kabaka agreed to reforms in 1939 that added non-official members, and in 1945 he assented to further reforms to introduce elected members. On p. 10, Hailey provides an exact composition since 1946, which we use to code the council composition variables in the dataset. Overall, despite these changes, chief-appointed members remained the plurality on the council.
 - 38 chief-appointed members: The Kabaka selected the ministers (3), Kabaka’s nominees (6), Gombolola chiefs (15), and Miruka chiefs (14).
 - 20 elite members: The saza (county) chiefs formed “the higher ranks of the civil service in Buganda and are appointed by promotion or transfer or on merit” (14). We code these members as meeting both criteria for elites because they gained their positions *ex officio* and many of the positions had recently been hereditary. However, given the rise of royal absolutism in Buganda in the century prior to colonization, the historical status of some of these appointments was in flux. As Hailey notes, appointment by merit “has not always been the case. Whilst there is insufficient evidence to speak with certainty of all the nine posts which existed up to the reign of Junju in the late eighteenth century, it is clear that at least six posts, those of Mugema, Kago, Kasuju, Kangawo, Kitunzi and Katambala, were hereditary in accordance with Buganda rules of succession. As examples, the titles of Mugema dating from Kintu and Kasujju dating from Kimera were hereditary (for former in one and the latter in two families) for possible five hundred years and only ceased to be so in modern times, as did that of Katambala, which had been hereditary in one family since its establishment three hundred years before.”
 - 36 popularly selected members. These “unofficial” members are elected by the following process: “The 20 Sazas [counties] elect for the Kabaka’s selection the 36 unofficial representatives, in numerical proportion according to the population of each Saza. The representatives of each Saza are elected by the representatives of the Gombololas [next administrative level down], and the representatives of the Gombololas are elected by the Muluka [smallest administrative unit] representatives. Each Muluka elects 2 representatives from among its registered voters” (10). The Kabaka plays a role in the selection of these unofficial representatives, but his influence was “largely nominal.” Instead, it represented “the attempt to combine the Kabaka’s right of selection with the element of popular representation introduced by the 1945 Law.”

B.2.3 Oyo (Western Nigeria)

Coding: Oyo was a NA/NT in the eponymous district and province of Western Nigeria. The Native Authority was chief and council with an elite-plurality council and some popularly selected members.

Details. From Hailey (1951a, 120): “The administration was until 1945 vested in the Alafin, assisted by an Advisory Council of 12 Chiefs from Oyo Town. In 1945 the Alafin abandoned his status as sole NA, and the composition of his council was changed to 11 Chiefs from Oyo, eight Chiefs from other towns in the Division and five nominated members. As the result of a further reorganization in 1949 the Council now consists of 13 Oyo Chiefs, 17 Chiefs from other towns, and 18 elected members, making, with the Alafin, a total membership of 49. The Council includes two women; all the elected Councillors are literate. The Council has six working Committees. The composition of the Councils of the five NAs has also been revised, with the purpose of increasing the number of elected Councillors, and nomination by Chiefs or Societies has been abolished.”

B.2.4 Barotse (Northern Rhodesia)

Coding: Barotse was a NA/NT in the eponymous province of Northern Rhodesia. The Native Authority was chief and council. The council was elite-plurality with a minority of chief-appointed members and non-hereditary elite members.

Details. From Hailey (1950b, 95); see also survey CO 1018/55:

- “It will be simplest to state at once the form which the native administration has now taken. It consists of the Paramount Chief and his Council at Lealui, as Superior Native Authority, with five Subordinate Native Authorities, consisting of a Chief (or District Head or President) and the local Kuta.”
- “The chieftom of the Paramount is hereditary, in the patrilineal line. The present Paramount Chief, Mwanawina, is a son of Lewanika and a half-brother of Imwiko the late Paramount. The headquarters Council at Lealui, which, as shown above, is now known as the Saa-Sikaloo, has no rigidly prescribed membership, but the nucleus consists of a body of some 25 office holders, described as ‘sitting on the Right,’ though it may be attended also by certain members of the ruling family and others holding traditional Court posts described as ‘sitting on the Left,’ so that the numbers normally entitled to attend may be taken as between 30 and 40 in all.”
- “The office holders are (1) the Chief Minister (Ngambela) whose appointment has always been a prominent feature of the Lozi organization, seven of the nine holders of the post having been ‘commoners’ or of commoner descent, one a member of the ruling family, and one the son of a former Leashimha of Sesheke. The present occupant of the post was an interpreter in the Protectorate. (2) The Administrative Secretary—a comparatively recent creation. He is well educated and has served in the Protectorate. (3) The Chief of the judicial side (Natamoyo), traditionally the ‘Keeper of the King’s Conscience,’ and always a member of the ruling family. (4) The Mukulwakashiko, the traditional Chairman of the former Saa Council. (5) Three Indunas, holding the senior posts of Education, Agriculture and

Development. (6) Fifteen Councillors, of whom five are Indunas seconded in rotation from each of the five District Kutas, this being an innovation since 1946. (7) Five Indunas, holding less important 'departmental' posts. The non-traditional appointments are now made on merit and educational qualifications, but the narrow range of higher education in Barotseland tends to involve a preference for persons brought up at Lealui, who are mainly of Lozi or mixed Lozi descent."

B.2.5 Kwahu (Gold Coast)

Coding: Kwahu was a NA/NT in the Birim district of the Gold Coast Colony. The Native Authority was chief and council, and the council was plurality elite and with a minority of popularly selected members.

Details. The following is quoted in Survey CO 1018/10:

“Question 7. (a) The Kwahu Native Authority comprising the Omanhene of Kwahu and his state Council. This State Council comprises:

1. Nana Akuamoa Akyeampon, Omanhene of Kwehu (President)
2. Kwasi Abora, Odikro of Atibie and Gyasene of Kwahu
3. Kwame Sei, Krontihene of Abene
4. Kwabena Adueni, Gyasene of Abene
5. Kwasi Amoa, Kyidomhene of Abene
6. Kwasi Banah, Odikro Sadan
7. Ntri Amponsam II, Adontehene of Kwahu, Abetifi
8. Owusu Mensah II, Kyidomhene of Kwahu, Pepease
9. Diawuo Afari II, Odikro of Akwaseho and Twafohene of Kwahu
10. Kwaku Kunnipa III, Ohene of Twenedurase
11. Kwakye Ababio, II, Odikro of Nteso
12. Agyepon Baadu II, Ohene of Bukuruwa
13. Yao Ntim, Benkumhene of Kwahu, Aduamo
14. Dwamena Ayiripe II, Ohene of Bukuruwa
15. Kofi Ampadu, Ohene of Mpraeso
16. Kwasi Ameyao, Odikro of Kwahu Tafo
17. Kwabena Fofie, Okyeame, Abene
18. Kwasi Nyako, Nifahene of Kwahu, Obo
19. Ohene of Obomeng
20. Kwasi Bosompem II, Odikro of Bepong
21. Kwasi Mireku II, Odikro of Asakraka
22. E.Abednego Mensah, Councillor, Nkawkaw
23. E.J.O.Ababio, Councillor, Nkwatia
24. Kofi Nkansah, Councillor, Abetifi
25. Kwaku Domfe, Councillor, Nkawkaw
26. D.B.Asante, Nominated member, Abetifi
27. Yao Appa, Councillor, Pepease
28. Yao Fori, Councillor, Obomeng
29. Kwahu Amo, Councillor, Abene

(b) The chiefs within the Native Authority are traditional rulers inheriting their position in the matrilineal line. Selection within the line is made by the stool family who present their selection to the Gyase or keeper of the household.

(c) In Kwahu the Council mainly composed of traditional members of the State Council but is leavened by number of selected intelligentsia from various walks of life. This selection is made by the State Council. There has been no occasion for the Administration to intervene in prescribing or influencing the composition of the Council, except in the general way of advising that non-traditional members would be of help in running affairs.

(d) The Native Authority is a body with in this case the Paramount Chief as its President. In practice the President has only one vote and though his personal influence and hereditary position go a long way towards producing decisions, these factors can only be exercised in a direction in which he considers his councillors likely to follow.

(e) In only a few cases are the chiefs literate. All non-traditional members are literate, comprising about 25 per cent of the Native Authority.”

B.2.6 Ada (Gold Coast)

Coding: Ada was a NA/NT in the Ho district of the Gold Coast Colony. The Native Authority was chief and council, and the council was comprised entirely of elites.

Details. The following is quoted in Survey CO 1018/10:

“**Question 7.** (b) The Chiefs and Elders who constitute the Native Authority are traditional and hereditary (patrilineal).

(c) The Native Authority consists of the Ada Manche and the State Council which is constituted as follows

State Mankralo

9 Asafoatse-ngwa from the 9 tribes

6 Wornors (2 from the Tekperbiawe tribe)

1 Chief Linguist

4 Elders and Headmen

2 Djasetsets of Kabiawe Tribe

1 Asafoatse

1 Paramount Stool Father

9 Private gentlemen.

The names of members of Native Authority are approved by Government and therefore in theory intervention by the administration is possible. In practice, no intervention has in fact taken place. The Chiefs who are members of the Native Authority are very greatly dependent on their own tribes for advice and support.

(d) Ada Manche gets £3-2-6 per month. (about £37.5 per year).

(e) While it is becoming increasingly common for educated men to be appointed as Chiefs, the standard of literacy in the Native Authority is at present very low.”

B.2.7 North Nyanza (Kenya)

Coding: North Nyanza was a NA/NT in the eponymous district of the Nyanza Province of Kenya. The Native Authority was council-only; this coding is based on the higher-level Local Native Council, although there were also lower-level NA headmen. The council was primarily popularly selected members, with some DO-appointed members.

Details. From Hailey (1950a, 151–55):

- “In North Nyanza District the Locations, which originally took account of tribal divisions, were at one time more numerous, but have since been reduced in number as a matter of administrative convenience. Though the status of ‘Chiefs’ is not hereditary (save possibly in the exceptional case of Mumia’s chieftom) there is no doubt that in a number of cases they represent an inherited tradition, and have been selected from what are recognized locally as ‘chiefly’ families. Some of the present Headmen claim that there have been chiefs in their families for many generations, and of only two could it be said that they belong to families who have previously had no such connection. The method of selection is elastic; in some cases a man is clearly indicated by family position, while others are appointed after a process of consultation with the inhabitants of a Location, which has something of the character of election. But in each case the final choice is that of Government, and there is no traditional body of Elders, such as are found in the Bantu areas of some other territories, who are recognized as entitled to select a chief. Fourteen of the present Headmen are literate.”
- “The system of Local Native Councils has now been in force for nearly a quarter of a century in the Province, and has become an important feature in the administration of native affairs, more especially in the three Nyanza Districts.”
- “In North Nyanza District the election of members is arranged so as to secure one representative for roughly 13,000 inhabitants, and the 20 Locations are sub-divided into electoral units for this purpose. The names of candidates are put forward at locational meetings, and election, which is sometimes keenly contested, follows the ‘line-up’ procedure. It has, however, been proposed that a list of candidates should in the future be nominated at meetings of the Locational Advisory Councils. The tendency has been to select younger educated men, and there are several Makerere students among the present members.”
- “There is a general agreement that the Councils, as now constituted, provide an effective representation of different aspects of local opinion, including that of the younger element in the population, and their deliberations are marked by free and open discussion. This on occasion takes the form of strong criticism of Government measures, but the Nyanza Councils have not developed the tendency, noticeable in some of the Kikuyu Councils, to exhibit a standing opposition to the Government on political grounds. While the District Commissioner remains the central and most responsible figure in the Councils, his position has tended to become one of guidance rather than control. Most of the routine deliberations of the Councils take place under the chairmanship of the African Deputy Vice-Presidents; the Councils sit once a quarter, and much of their detailed work is transacted in Standing Committees.”

B.2.8 Bukoba (Tanganyika)

Coding: The Treasury of Council of Bukoba Chiefs was a NT in the eponymous district in the Lake Province of Tanganyika. There were eight solo-chief NAs who were federated into a district-level council that controlled the treasury, creating a council-only NA. The council consisted solely of the constituent NA chiefs, which we code as elite only.

Details. From Hailey (1950a, 227):

- “In the Bukoba District the eight Chiefs (Bakama) who, as already indicated, are of Hima stock, have an hereditary status. They administer their areas through sub-chiefs (Bami) who have not necessarily a traditional standing, but are selected by the Bakama, and it is said that the latter have a tendency to keep the post as far as possible in the family.”
- “The Chiefs have no regular Councils, and it was frequently said in the past that they paid less regard to consultation with responsible and representative bodies of Elders than is usual elsewhere.”
- “The eight Chiefs are federated in the Council of the Chiefs of Bukoba (the Council of Bakama) which is gazetted as a Native Authority, and is in practice a deliberative and financial body whose legislative functions are limited to making Orders under Section 8 and Rules under Section 15 of the Ordinance for the whole of the chiefdoms and controlling the Treasury of the District. In these respects it has been more effective than many of the other federated Councils in the Province, partly because of the relatively large revenue of the Treasury, but perhaps even more because the Council had for some years the advantage of the service of an outstanding African Secretary.”

B.2.9 Calabar (Eastern Nigeria)

Coding: The Calabar Province of Eastern Nigeria contained 28 NTs and 46 NAs, all of which were council-only. The councils had a plurality of non-hereditary elite members with a minority of popularly selected members.

Details. From Hailey (1951a, 160–61): “In the Calabar Province the great majority of Native Authorities are normally Clan Councils, which were in fact at one time meetings of family Heads. But their attendance was irregular, and it at times consisted largely not of family Heads, but of their representatives, so that the Councils tended to deteriorate into mass meetings, and to fall into the hands of undesirable elements. They have now been reorganized so that only recognized members attend, and are composed of Village or family representatives. Some of the Councils are very large, but efforts are being made to reduce them in size; an example is the Efik-qua-Efut Council, which was reduced in 1947 from 165 to 80 members, including roughly 50 per cent. representing the educated and professional classes. Similarly the Aro Council now includes one traditional member for each village, together with 23 elected representatives, while the Enyong Council has been reduced from 100 to 33, some of whom are traditional and some are elected members. All these Councils include a fairly high proportion of literate members and the percentage is continually increasing.”

C ADDITIONAL CASES: SOUTH AFRICA, SOUTHERN RHODESIA, AND SIERRA LEONE

The statistical sample we analyze in the paper includes eleven countries for which the Hailey books and archives provide extensive detail on local institutions. Here we provide qualitative evidence from three additional cases for which these sources lack any, or sufficiently detailed, information at the local level: South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Sierra Leone. The first two cases differ from those in the main sample because of their large white settler populations. Both were more directly governed and not subject to Native Administration. Nonetheless, until hardline white governments took power after World War II, councils were more important than individual chiefs within the limited domain of governance tasks delegated to Africans. Sierra Leone, by contrast, did not have white settlers and was governed by a variant of the Native Administration system. Although chiefs in Mendeland and Temneland lacked legally recognized councils, unlike most of the Native Authorities in our sample, this reflected a tradition of more authoritarian pre-colonial polities. Across all three cases, the larger states (Zulu in South Africa, Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia, and various in Sierra Leone) were reduced in power and territorial scope. Overall, these cases largely support our overarching findings: colonial institutions reflected precolonial patterns, which accounted for the prevalence of councils in British Africa.

C.1 SOUTH AFRICA

Precolonial political institutions. Contemporary South Africa consisted of several large cultural areas prior to European expansion and colonial rule. The Nguni peoples were located in modern Natal and down into the Eastern Cape in the 19th century.⁶ The most well known of the Nguni groups are now the Xhosa, Swazis, and Zulus. The Sotho peoples were also important. Their descendants formed the modern states of Lesotho (Basotho peoples) and Botswana (Tswana peoples), and Sotho also spread east into the Transvaal, where the Pedi people resided. North of Johannesburg, the Venda and Tsonga made up two distinct cultural groups. Non-Bantu peoples, such as the Khoisan, were indigenous to the Cape.⁷ While also acknowledging important differences, Schapera (1956, 208) observes, “All South African forms of government share certain basic features.”

Constrained precolonial states predominated in the area, as we have shown was common across Africa. Neither the Nguni nor Sotho peoples were ever unified politically, and they instead formed various chieftaincies. Some became quite large centralized states, particularly the Zulu, Swazi, and

⁶Our information is much better for the 19th century. Historians broadly agreed that large migrations and population movements occurred through the early 19th century.

⁷We provide only a brief overview of the large literature on precolonial South Africa. The essays in Schapera (1937b), Hammond-Tooke (1959), and Thompson (1969) provide useful, if dated in many ways, overviews of the different cultural groups. Schapera (1956) is an incisive overview of many of the political systems. Soga (2013b,a) provides important overviews of the main Nguni groups, and Sheddick (1953) does so for the Southern Sotho peoples. Many important studies analyze specific peoples, polities, and their institutions, for example Beinart (1984) on the Mpondo of the Eastern Cape.

Basotho in the 19th century.⁸ Hereditary chiefs governed these domains (Schapera 1937a, 174). Chiefs governed with, and were effectively constrained by, various types of councils. Although “the chief is the executive of his tribe . . . he must always consult with his council, both private and public” (Schapera 1937a, 178). Schapera (1937a, 182–84) emphasizes that the council acted as a check on the chief and was “expected to warn and even reprimand him if he goes wrong.” The inner council of a chief tended to be informal and was made up of elders, trusted advisors, and relatives. But the chief occasionally had to consult a “much wider, more formal council” that examined all the chief’s decisions, which they could “freely discuss and criticize . . . They may accept, modify or reject.” Consequently, the popular council “exercises the greatest check upon his behaviour.”⁹ These councils were often so powerful that “[a]mong the Nguni, Shangana-Tsonga and Venda this council is in effect the governing body of the tribe.”¹⁰ Schapera concludes that in the Nguni and Sotho worlds, a chief was “very seldom absolute ruler and autocratic despot . . . The existence of these councils greatly limits the Chief’s actual exercise of his power.” Schapera (1956, 144) reproduces the oft-quoted Tswana proverb, “A chief is chief by grace of his people.” He compares this to the Tsonga version: “The elephant is the trunk,” meaning “just as the elephant cannot seize anything without its trunk, so the chief cannot do his work without his subjects.”¹¹

European administration before apartheid. South Africa differs from our core cases because extensive European settlement yielded more direct rule. European magistrates and, later, Native Commissioners exercised executive authority at the local level. One consequence of colonial interference, though, was to weaken the powers of chiefs. Moreover, laws regarding African affairs tended to focus more on councils than chiefs.

European magistrates dominated the initial administration of the Cape Colony, which caused chiefs to “disappear as the recognized authority over the tribe” (Hailey 1957, 420). The Glen Grey Act 1894 changed this situation by implementing “a practical system of Local Government in Native areas” (Hailey 1957, 420). One key reform was to introduce District Councils, which continued to de-emphasize the role of chiefs. “Measures such as the Glen Grey Act fundamentally altered such vital matters as access to land and marginalized chiefs” (Evans 1997, 166). A contemporary

⁸See Duminy (1989) and Eldredge (2018) on the emergence of the Zulu state and Eldredge (2015) for a regional and comparative perspective.

⁹“His” with the exception of the famous kingdom of the Lovedu, which was ruled by a Rain Queen (Krige and Krige 1943).

¹⁰Lestrade (1930) and Stayt (1931) describe the traditional political system of the Venda, which differed in some ways from nearby polities. For example, Lestrade (1930, 311) points out when discussing the Venda chief that “greater stress is laid on the sacred as opposed to the secular character of [his] person.” By contrast, “[a]mong the Cape Nguni and Southern Sotho the chief has comparatively little ritual significance” (Schapera 1956, 214).

¹¹This assessment is overwhelmingly shared by the existing scholarly literature and standard textbooks. For example, Sansom (1959, 267) proclaims, “The traditional ruler faced his people or their representatives in the councils of the tribe or nation . . . A ruler was, therefore answerable to his people.” In Davenport’s (2000, 46) characterization, “Chiefs had councils but these “were of various kinds, formal and informal . . . All societies, even the Zulu in normal times, laid stress on the principle of government by discussion and consent. The pitso of the Sotho, the imbitso (imbizo) of Nguni chiefdoms, the libandla of the Swazi . . . provided a sounding-board for the ruler as he tried to determine the big issues of state.” See also Hammond-Tooke (1969) and Davenport (1991).

administrator noted, “Many of the chiefs look upon councils as designed to supplant them” (Herbst 1930, 482). The councils were particularly developed in the Transkei, where the District Councils sent representatives to a general council, the Bunga. Yet these councils did not reproduce the precolonial councils mentioned above.¹² They were more like the innovations we described in the text in Kenya, and they covered areas much larger than precolonial polities.

Cape, Natal, Orange, and Transvaal were amalgamated into the Union of South Africa in 1910, which led the other regions to adopt policies similar to those in the Cape.¹³ In 1920, a uniform system of administration was created with the Native Affairs Act 23. It extended to the entire country the system of District Councils that had originated in the Cape under the Glen Grey Act. The membership was partially elected and partially appointed. The district Magistrate served as the head of the council, and the councils had broad powers to raise local rates to fund medical and educational services. “Each district council was composed of twelve members, of whom six were nominated by the magistrate and six were elected by Africans, subject to the magistrate’s approval” (Evans 1997, 185).

Later reforms granted some powers to chiefs, albeit very limited relative to Native Authorities elsewhere in British Africa. The Native Affairs Act of 1920 was greatly augmented in 1927 by the Native Administration Act. The Act “made some concession to . . . the principle of using Native Authorities as part of the machinery of rule. It not only provided for the appointment of Chiefs and Headmen but gave them some measure of executive authority” (Hailey 1957, 428). In principle, the appointed chiefs had to have traditional authority. The Act states, “As a rule chieftainship . . . vests in a particular family and the person who is entitled under Native custom to the office is appointed to the position” (Rogers 1949, 12). Yet the powers of chiefs were nonetheless limited. The main reform in the 1927 Act was to appoint Native Commissioners, whose primary duty was to “exercise control over and supervision of the Native people for their general and individual welfare” (Rogers 1949, 9). The Native Commissioners and their deputies were authorized to “collect taxes due and payable by Natives” and to “exercise such civil and criminal jurisdiction as may be conferred upon them, and shall carry out all laws and regulations applying to Natives” (Rogers 1949, 9). Chiefs merely “render[ed] assistance in tax collection” (Rogers 1949, 13) and “had no judicial powers unless these were expressly conferred, and it was mainly in Natal that such powers were given” (Hailey 1957, 428).

The reference here to Natal is a reflection that the chiefs in Zululand, the most powerful African state in the region, were able to maintain greater authority. Though the Zulu king Cetshwayo was

¹²Some works, however, see some loose connections: “Bodies modeled to some extent on the old informal Council have been created and developed with a great amount of success in the Cape” (Brookes 1924, 252).

¹³In the pre-Union period, British administrators played a more important role in the colonies neighboring the Cape. In Natal, from 1850 onwards, the reforms of Theophilus Shepstone yielded a policy in which “newly appointed Chiefs had to be given jurisdiction” (Hailey 1957, 423) because many areas had no chiefs as a consequence of Zulu conquest. These “[c]hiefs exercised judicial powers, but were . . . subject to the general control of the Magistrates” (Hailey 1957, 421). The general balance of the literature is that this period in Natal was a fairly textbook type of indirect rule though with quite intrusive colonial authority. By contrast, the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics more directly ruled Africans by appointing Native Commissioners (Hailey 1957, 425–26).

initially exiled after his defeat in 1879, he returned in 1883 and was succeeded by his son Dinuzulu in 1884. Zululand was annexed by Britain in 1887 and amalgamated into the Union of South Africa in 1910. Dinuzulu was succeeded by his son Solomon kaDinuzulu in 1913. The Zulu state had been fragmented into initially 12 and then more chieftaincies after 1879 and while neither Dinuzulu nor his son were recognized as Zulu king they maintained much of their traditional powers and legitimacy. They resisted the implementation of the District Council in Natal, see Marks (1986) and MacKinnon (2001). After Solomon's death in 1933 the regent Mshiyeni managed to get himself recognized as 'Acting Paramount Chief of the Zulu' until Solomon kaDinuzulu's son Cyprian Bhekuzulu was finally recognized by the Apartheid regime in 1948 as the Zulu king.

Overall, European governance of rural Africa was undoubtedly more direct than in the cases from our statistical sample, even if scholars disagree about how this system worked in practice and about the extent to which the councils wielded authority.¹⁴ The 1927 legislation restored some power to chiefs, yet they continued to lack powers common elsewhere for chiefs in British Africa.

Native governance under apartheid. In 1948, the National Party gained power. Their implementation of repressive apartheid policies, despite resistance by Africans,¹⁵ radically changed patterns of European governance over Africans in a more authoritarian direction (Posel 2011). However, only after an extremist white government took power did colonial governance patterns break the precolonial tradition of constrained rulers.

The centerpiece policy for administering Africans was the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, which was "an attempt to restructure the government of the reserves on more traditional lines, but in practice came to mean the establishment of a system of indirect rule through the medium of subservient . . . chiefs" (Davenport 1991, 347). Hailey pointed out that the 1951 Act "has assigned to the chiefs a role which . . . had not previously been regarded in the Union as appropriate to them—namely, as chairman of Native Councils entrusted with the expenditure of funds for local services" (Hailey 1957, 430). This Act began the transition towards the separate ethnic homelands, or Bantustans, that the Apartheid government would start to make self-governing in the 1960s (following

¹⁴Hailey (1957) contends that "the Council system, while providing for a measure of Local Government, has been largely a projection of the system of magisterial rule" (426). Nonetheless, Africans could clearly exercise some authority in the District Councils, and "powers of a somewhat similar character [as Native Commissioners in South Africa] have been exercised by the Executive in many of the British dependencies" (432). Evans' view is, "State policy condensed all the authority of the central state in the local Native Commissioners, bestowing upon them with considerable power to demand the submission of Africans in the reserves" (Evans 1997, 163). Later he concludes, "The council system, which formed the basis of local government in the Transkeian territories, is perhaps best viewed as a parallel but subordinate institution to magisterial authority" (Evans 1997, 184). See also Perham (1934) on direct rule policies, Dubow (1989) on the evolution of local administration in this period, and Hammond-Tooke (1975) and Ntsebeza (2005) for case studies set in the Eastern Cape.

¹⁵Africans contested the administrative transition and the intensification of apartheid, which is well-covered in the academic literature. Mager and Mulaudzi (2011) provide an overview and discussion of the historiography, and Beinart and Bundy (1980) provide an earlier discussion. Seminal studies are that of Delius (1997) in Pediland, with the Pondoland uprising in the 1950s being perhaps the most famous instance, discussed by Mbeki (1964). See also Kepe and Ntsebeza (2011) and Kelly (2015) for nuanced discussions.

the Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959). The 1951 Act also sidelined or disbanded the previous councils. In 1955, the Bunga (general council) of the Transkei disappeared and was replaced by “a bastardized mimicry of tribal government in pre-conquest society.” The act “introduced a pyramidal structure composed of three levels, with each level controlled by chiefs and headmen: a single Transkeian Territorial Authority to replace the Bunga, with a Paramount Chief instead of the (white) Magistrate” and “numerous Tribal Authorities would form the base of the entire edifice” (Evans 1997, 250). “Closing down the Ciskei bunga and finding chiefs to place in charge of people accustomed to elected representatives meant silencing the voices of respected, educated men and riding roughshod over the wishes of ordinary people” (Mager and Mulaudzi 2011, 394). Many studies emphasize the extent to which the apartheid state manipulated “tradition.” For example, “The Bantu Authorities Act augmented the powers of the chiefs and headmen. In some instances, the act necessitated creating chiefs and tribal affiliations where none existed or where their authority had collapsed” (Mager and Mulaudzi 2011, 389).

The 1951 Act and the new strategy by the National Party government seems to have created clear instances of the type of “decentralized despotism” that Mamdani (1996) highlighted. Unlike typical British colonies, the goal was identify local leaders who could suppress nationalist agitations by younger and more educated individuals. Kaiser Matanzima is a famous example. In 1963, self-government was given to the Transkei with a legislature organized to give chiefs a majority and to elect the Chief Kaiser Matanzima, Pretoria’s favored candidate, as premier (Davenport 1991, 362–63). The rise of chief Mangosutho Buthelezi in KwaZulu is another notorious case (Mare and Hamilton 1987).¹⁶ Yet the case of Buthelezi, who was the traditional prime minister of the Zulu kingdom, is also notable because it coincided with the sidelining of his cousin, the Zulu king, which contrasts with the pattern elsewhere of favoring traditional royal lineages. Consequently, Buthelezi “prevented the royalist lobby from securing an executive king” (Mager and Mulaudzi 2011). Nevertheless, below the king, numerous cases support the contention that the 1951 Act allowed chiefs to take control in way which they had not done previously, and “it was only through an alliance with segregationists and the forces of state and capital that Zulu chiefs secured their control of the reserve political economy” (MacKinnon 2001, 590).¹⁷

In sum, South African governance eventually converged upon a pattern that resembled colonially created “decentralized despotism.” However, these developments occurred nearly four decades after South Africa gained dominion status. It is unclear how to compare the political project of the National Party to British colonialism, given the vastly different goals and constraints faced by European policymakers.

C.2 SOUTHERN RHODESIA (ZIMBABWE)

Precolonial political institutions. Prior to the colonial period, Southern Rhodesia was primarily divided into two large cultural areas, Matabeleland in the west and Mashonaland to the east. In the 19th century, Matabeleland was united politically under the guise of the Ndebele state, which was a product of a great migration from South Africa in the 1830s. Chief Mzilikazi, originally an ally of the powerful Zulu king Shaka, fell out and migrated north with his followers, eventually settling

¹⁶Murray (1992) presents case studies from the Orange Free State.

¹⁷Parcells (2018) is an interesting study of the impact of the 1951 Act on Zulu chiefs.

around Bulawayo (Omer-Cooper 1978). Along the way, he incorporated many peoples, similar to the creation of the Ngoni “snowball” state in Malawi (Barnes 1954).¹⁸ Mashonaland was far less uniform. In fact, the notion of being “Shona” seems to have emerged only in the colonial period. What became Mashonaland was united by broad cultural and linguistic features and was the residue of different local polities: Karanga, Mutapa, or Rozvi (Mazarire 2009; Holleman 1951).

Ndebele rulers faced substantial constraints on the exercise of power. The political institutions of the Ngoni resembled those we discussed for precolonial South Africa, given their shared origins. Descendants of Mzilikazi created a line of hereditary kings that governed the Ndebele state. One of his sons, Lobengula, was king at the time of the invasion of the British South Africa Company in 1890. Beneath the king was a hierarchy of councils and administrative positions. For example, “Assisting the king was a hierarchy of the three great councillors of the nation, and of two councils, the *izikulu* and the *umpakati*” (Kuper and van Velsen 1954, 64). The state was divided into provinces, which were themselves divided into regiments that were each based in a “town” with a system of chiefs and “a sort of ‘town council’” (Kuper and van Velsen 1954, 65).

The Shona peoples were divided into many different polities but appeared to have shared some important characteristics.¹⁹ “The tribe under the hereditary chief is the widest functioning political unit,” and Shona tribes “appear to have no formal councils comparable to those of the South-Eastern Bantu” (Kuper and van Velsen 1954, 28–29). Nevertheless, there were important executive constraints. “The chief, however, is assisted and to a large extent controlled by the heads of wards and villages and by a panel of personal advisers” (Kuper and van Velsen 1954, 28–29). Chiefs were also constrained by spirit mediums who played important religious but also political roles. Bucher (1980, 37) notes, “A chief in whose area a powerful spirit medium resides has to be careful to avoid incurring negative sanctions of the territorial spirit for disobeying his orders,” and spirit mediums intermediated between the people and chiefs (Garbett 1969).

Colonial administration. Governance patterns in colonial Southern Rhodesia resembled those just described in South Africa. Prior to the rise of the National Front in 1962, direct rule by white settlers suppressed the powers of chiefs, who had to compete with councils in the limited domain for local autonomy exercised by Africans. The empowerment of chiefs began only after 1962, and largely failed to contain nationalist agitation.

The British South Africa Company governed Southern Rhodesia until 1923, when the colony became self-governing. Henceforth, white settlers enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the British government and Colonial Office over the design of political institutions absent in most British African colonies. The country was divided into provinces, each of which was divided into six or eight districts (Weinrich 1972, 5). These “native districts, [had] a Commissioner in each, and subdivisions where necessary” (Jollie 1935, 975). These districts did not conform in a simple way into precolonial polities, and sometimes cut across them (Hughes 1974, 16). Underneath the districts were chiefdoms. In 1974, there were 252 of these units led by government-recognized chiefs (Hughes 1974, 16).

¹⁸Kuper and van Velsen (1954, 47-53) provides a condensed history of the migration and founding of the Ndebele state in Zimbabwe.

¹⁹Beach (1980) and Beach (1994) are seminal overviews of Shona history and society; see also Holleman (1951).

The autonomous settler government rejected the model of indirect rule prevalent in British Africa. The likely reason was that the white government wanted greater control over the African population to force them to work on the white-owned farms. As Howman, a senior administrator in the Ministry of Native Affairs, put it, “There was no building up of ‘native authorities,’ no ‘tribal treasuries,’ no reconstruction of ‘native courts’ with criminal jurisdiction, and the masses of thought and action necessary to implement such ideas” (Howman 1959, 133). A contemporary commentator stated, “We do not envisage building up native States within our State; we are not trying to preserve a social system which is obsolete and inefficient in a modern world” (Jollie 1935, 982). Writing later, Hughes was adamant that “Rhodesia never adopted the theory of ‘indirect rule’” like the colonies administered by the British Colonial Service (Hughes 1974, 124). More recent scholarship concurs with these assessments. For example, Karekwaivanane (2017, 47) noted how Southern Rhodesia contrasted with “other British colonies in Africa which adopted ‘Indirect Rule’ in the 1920s and 1930s.” Alexander even directly compares the nature of administration in Zimbabwe in this period to Mamdani’s thesis, concluding that it was “a far cry from a system of ‘indirect rule’ on the model propounded by Mahmood Mamdani” (Alexander 2006, 22).

The destruction of the Ndebele kingdom provides the clearest example of how Rhodesian settlers approached governance over Africans differently than in most British colonies. Elsewhere, large and more institutionalized states such as the Sokoto Caliphate and Buganda facilitated indirect rule. In Zimbabwe, the opposite happened. After the Second Matabele War in 1896,²⁰ the state was destroyed institutionally. Kuper and van Velsen (1954, 18) note that “no Ndebele king was recognized in place of Lobengula and the Government refused to permit any resurgence of a strong centralized kingship. Instead, many subsidized chieftainships were established. Shona and Ndebele were put on the same footing, and the chiefs (Shona and Ndebele) were permitted to exercise limited jurisdiction under the control of Native Commissioners.” Writing in the 1950s, they conclude, “Today there is no distinct central authority for Ndebeleland as such. The kingship is no longer recognized” (Kuper and van Velsen 1954, 69). This did not change in subsequent decades.

Rather than relying on Africans for local governance, provincial and district commissioners were the primary administrators in native areas (Weinrich 1972, 5). “The native commissioners’ authority extended over the whole economic and political life of the African people. The most important powers which the African chiefs had traditionally exercised were transferred to native commissioners.” Native commissioners were in charge of land allocation, settlement, cattle permits, labour procurement for European settlers, and contact with missionaries and businessmen (Weinrich 1972, 10). Moreover, “The extensive powers granted to native commissioners were intended to limit the influence of chiefs among their people and to make Africans directly dependent on European administrators” (Weinrich 1972, 11). Weinrich’s assessment that “The real rulers of tribal trust lands are not chiefs but European bureaucrats” (Weinrich 1972, 165), and that the heightened power of white officials tended to reduce the power of chiefs, is standard in the literature. A typical assessment is that the tribal authority “found itself permanently crippled by the loss of its two principal sources of power: the secular custody of the land and the right to punish criminals . . . It was only in the 1960s, under entirely different and for them immeasurably more difficult circumstances, that chiefs and headmen were again officially given some use of these powers” (Holleman 1969, 17).

²⁰This was known as the First Chimurenga in Zimbabwe; see Ranger (1967) for a seminal analysis.

Kuper and van Velsen (1954, 69) conclude in 1954 that “rule is still fairly direct.”

The initial institutionalization of local government came with the Native Affairs Ordinance of 1910. This act defined the role of chiefs, who were given limited authority to assist with the collection of taxation and as constables. Chiefs had no judicial powers until 1937 and then were not given jurisdiction over criminal cases (Hailey 1957, 441). With the 1927 Native Affairs Act, the responsibilities of chiefs were increased, as with the 1927 Act in South Africa. However, their powers seem to have been fewer in practice than in South Africa. Hailey comments, “In the present practice the use made of chiefs varies widely, but is largely of an informal character” (Hailey 1957, 441).

A system of councils, mirrored roughly on South Africa, was also adopted. In 1923, the sentiment was to “let the chiefs and headmen, with a few more natives elected by the heads of kraals and a few nominated by the Government, be constituted a Council” (Annual 1923, 89). In 1930, Advisory Boards for the local administration were constituted with an equal number of elected members and of chiefs and headmen, with the Native Commissioners as chairmen. These boards were given no power, however. They were replaced by councils in 1937 with the passage of the Native Councils Act. This established Councils in the Native Reserves consisting of Chiefs or Headmen, other Africans approved by the Governor and elected by the people, and the Native Commissioner as chairman (Hailey 1957, 442; Weinrich 1972, 14). The councillors were elected “by the inhabitants, men and women,” of the area. “The method of election is left to the people” and can range from a preference for traditional leaders to a group acclamation or a secret ballot (Howman 1959, 135). Yet these councils lacked powers typical of Native Authorities elsewhere in British Africa. Even after 1937, “This was not a recipe for the creation of powerful ‘native authorities’: chiefs had no budgets, no trained staff, no criminal jurisdiction in their courts, no law making authority” (Alexander 2006, 23). The 1937 act was superseded by the African Councils Act of 1957, largely the work of Howman (Alexander 2006), which increased the powers of the councils. Chiefs and headmen were *ex officio* members.

In 1962, the Rhodesian Front (RF) came to power. Ian Smith led the party with an explicit agenda to declare independence. This marked the rise of a more apartheid-type regime and the RF government adopted a similar strategy to the South African National Party for governing Africans. They attempted to increase the powers of chiefs as a tool for controlling nationalism. Weinrich notes, “One act after another was passed by parliament to increase their power” (Weinrich 1972). These included the 1967 Tribal Trust Land Act which returned to the chiefs the power to allocate land to their subjects and the 1969 African Law and Tribal Courts Act which greatly strengthened their judicial powers extending them to include criminal cases (see Chapter 4 of Karekwaivanane 2017). In 1973, it was stated in parliament, “Government regards chieftainship as the traditional local government . . . he (the Chief and his various ‘councils’) is the development authority . . . it is desirable to bring the chiefs more fully into the administrative structure of the local government machine” (Hughes 1974, 129). The consensus of the academic literature, however, is that in the face of mounting national mobilization and eventually an armed insurgency, these policies were a failure. Alexander sums them up by stating, “The Rhodesian state did not ‘win’ the struggle for chiefs’ allegiance and it transformed the chieftaincy into neither an effective instrument of control nor a legitimating stamp for settler rule” (Alexander 2006, 84).

Our summary of this case is similar to South Africa. In contrast to Native Authorities elsewhere in

British Africa, chiefs retained a limited amount of authority over “traditional” issues, such as civil disputes, but were generally not used by the administration until the 1960s. Councils, consisting of a combination of elected and nominated officials and traditional chiefs, were created to oversee public services and other administrative issues. However, they lacked local legitimacy and only began to have access to resources by the 1940s and after the 1957 Act.

C.3 SIERRA LEONE

Precolonial political institutions. For our purposes, the colonial era in Sierra Leone began when Britain declared a Protectorate over the interior in 1896. Previously, a colony had existed in Freetown since 1806, and residents of Sierra Leone engaged in centuries of trading relations with Europe. As a consequence, institutions had certainly changed as a result of trade, especially the slave trade. Nevertheless, our the main empirical questions concern the impact of colonialism on institutions as they stood prior to British governance. Therefore, we characterize political institutions in the 19th century in the interior of Sierra Leone. We discuss Mendeland in the south and Temneland in the north, the two areas for which we have the most detailed information about institutional history.²¹ Although leaders were checked in some important ways, constraints were less institutionalized than in many precolonial African states.

In Mendeland, Abraham (2003) identifies nine distinct larger states. All were weakly institutionalized and lacked a central administration. Instead, they were a loose amalgam of lower polities, what he calls the “countries.” The larger states were recent creations by charismatic “big men” (and one “big woman,” Madam Yoko) and were held together by expedience and patronage (e.g., Galinhas/Vai state under Siaka and Mana) or charisma (e.g., Luawa state under Kai Londo). Higher kings consulted with lower chiefs, but there do not seem to have been more formal councils as with the Nguni and Sotho peoples. There were other constraints, such as the Poro Society, which was a secret society which spanned the entire country. At the level of the states, there was a lack of an established hereditary principle for choosing rulers, though as we will see, hereditary succession occurred nonetheless.

In the Galinhas area in the eighteenth century,²² “it seems improbable that any ruler controlled more than a handful of towns” (Jones 1979, 246). The first written description of the system of government in Galinhas dates back to 1796. The slave trader Dalton gave an oral account to Governor Macaulay, who noted

“This [the Vai] Country is divided into a great many towns or districts, each of which has a voice by a delegate in a congress which assembles for the purpose of regulating

²¹For Mendeland, Abraham (2003) reconstructs the state system as it existed in the middle of the century (see also Little 1951). Jones (1979, 1983) provides a uniquely detailed history of the Galinhas state on the border with Liberia; and see Hollins (1929) and Wylie (1969) for the Luawa state. For Temneland, we rely primarily on Dorjahn (1960), Ijagbemi (1968), Howard (1972), Wylie (1977), and Bangura (2017). Many standard works, such as McCulloch (1950), claim to present evidence on all of Sierra Leone but, in effect, have information only on the Mende and Temne. Useful evidence on the Limba is contained in Finnegan (1965), Fyle (1979a), and Fanthorpe (1965); and Fyle (1979b) discusses the Yalunka. However, little systematic evidence exists about precolonial institutions of other groups, such as the Kono or Susu (although see tangential references in Wylie 1977).

²²Note that Galinhas is often spelled Gallinas, and is alternatively referred to as Vai.

the affairs of the Kingdom. These also elect a King who becomes their organ and who is invested with unlimited power to execute their resolves, but he cannot go beyond these” (Jones 1979, 188-9).

The sources paint a picture of a bottom-up federation with a “minister . . . who in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have been called the speaker . . . who announced the decisions and judgements . . . of the king in his absence” (Jones 1979, 192).

In the 19th century, King Siaka centralized the Galinhas polities. He was a newcomer to the area and probably managed to take control over trade, particularly the slave trade. As late as 1808, he was just one of numerous competing chiefs. By the 1830s, however, chiefs of different sections (countries) came together at his capital of Gendema to consider “legislation” that would apply to all of them and to resolve disputes. Siaka’s power stemmed from several sources. In addition warfare and selling slaves, he pursued a strategy of fostering kinship ties by marrying (him and his son Mana) into elite families in Sakrim, Bari, Soro, Perri, Kpanga, and Tewa. In 1853, Mana succeeded Siaka. Mana died in 1872 and was succeeded by his brother Jaia. The state fell into civil war and Jaia was killed in 1884, just prior to the formalization of British control over the interior. Overall, starting in the early 19th century, “Siaka managed to create a sort of confederation, in which chiefs of different sections occasionally came together to agree on legislation which would apply to them all and to hear disputes affecting the different sections. Dalton’s account from 1796 demonstrates that this was not a totally new arrangement. However, in Siaka’s reign, the scale was larger and the position of the king more important” (Jones 1979, 246).

Northeast of the Galinhas state, Kai Londo ruled the Luawa state in the second half of the 19th century.

“He ruled with a heavy hand. He was so powerful and his intelligence network so efficient, that nothing of consequence occurred without coming to his ears . . . he was hardly merciful to his enemies; on the contrary, he was ruthless with them and understandably so. He could have inspired love in the people he defended, but in the ordinary people, he seems to have inspired more fear and terror than love. Above all, Kai had many personal slaves” (Abraham 2003, 94).

Despite some gains in centralization during the 19th century, neither the Galinhas or Luawa states were very institutionalized. Jones (1979, 412–13) argues that “Neither Siaka nor Mana can be said to have formed a bureaucracy or hierarchy of officials to administer their kingdom: even at its peak, Galinhas was little more than a confederation held together by respect for a particular chief and by common economic interests.” He also notes

“The traditional territorial unit throughout this area . . . was merely a group of towns linked by kinship and historical ties and ruled by a landowner. Occasionally a war chief unattached to a particular descent group might bring together several clans under his rule; but his control never became institutionalized, because the religious power of the ancestors (represented by the Poro) could be turned against him” (Jones 1979, 245).

Here Jones identifies the Poro Society as a significant constraint on executive power. This political society for men, along with the Bundu and Sande societies for women, stretched across Sierra

Leone. It was highly important politically as a check on the power of chiefs and as a supra-chieftaincy institution that linked not just Mendeland, but the whole of Sierra Leone (see Little 1965a,b on the political importance of the Poro). Chiefs were members, but “it does not follow that they govern or influence the concerned action of the Poro,” which “can act independently of the chiefs” (Goddard 1945, 31; see Warren 1926 for an early colonial view).

As another constraint on the executive, rulership of larger states such as Galinhas and Luawa was not based on a deep hereditary ideology. Instead, Siaka and Kai Londo became kings because of personal achievements; that is, they were “big men.” Abraham (2003, 74) notes that in choosing a precolonial chief, “The election was carried out after due consultation with the country and provincial chiefs and the ‘Big Men’ or ‘elders.’” Similarly, in Gaura, another large state that emerged in the 19th century, he describes: “the people of Gaura were still mourning the death of their late king Gbatekaka when the Governor asked them to elect a successor. Meetings were then held by the sub-chiefs and leading men to come to a unanimous decision.” It seems that Hollins (1928, 26) is discussing this level of governance when he says about Mende chiefs that “it may be confidently stated that a Mende chief is not a despot, but a constitutional ruler—custom rather than strict law framing the constitution. Custom forbids him certain acts and insists that in an important matter he should only act after consultation with his ‘big men.’” Nonetheless, in Galinhas, hereditary succession occurred in practice; Siaka was succeeded by two of his sons.

The hereditary principle was more established at the lower level of “countries.” Hollins (1928, 28) noted in the 1920s, “The office of chief in Mende country is usually regarded as the property of the family of the traditional founder,” suggesting a hereditary principle. While discussing precolonial Mende political institutions, McCulloch (1950, 16) reports, “In former days the position of *ndomahei* [paramount chief] followed in direct line of descent from the founder of the chiefdom.” Further, “The Chief was formerly assisted by an advisory council as today in chiefdoms still run under the old system . . . As these persons were often members of the Chief’s kin group, his power was more or less autocratic” (McCulloch 1950, 17).

Overall, the sources paint a mixed picture, which is perhaps inevitable because of heterogeneity within Mendeland, a cultural area that lacked a single centralized polity. Evidence for councils is missing at the level of the more highly aggregated state, but is present in the lower-level countries. However, even these seem to have been largely informal and not as broadly representative as the types of councils we saw with the Nguni or Sotho peoples of southern Africa, or indeed many cases discussed in the text such as in southern Nigeria.

In Temneland, the situation was similar. Many traditional polities governed by hereditary rulers were, in the 19th century, absorbed into larger states. The main difference was that invasions influenced the creation of larger states. The countries in Temneland were coerced into joining larger entities, whereas in Mendeland the larger polities emerged through a more cooperative process.

In Port Loko, Wylie (1977, 33) notes that “the chief was chosen from among the candidates of a royal patrician . . . He held office for life.” He was “selected from among eligible candidates by certain of the titled sub-chiefs.” But elsewhere, there appear to have been multiple families with the right to advance candidates. McCulloch (1950, 61) says, “The Paramount Chief is chosen from among the oldest suitable male member of the ruling house or houses, i.e., the kin group that traces

descent from the first settlers of the chiefdom.” McCulloch emphasizes the possibility that several families will have legitimate claims (see also Biyi 1913 and Thomas 1916 and the discussion in Dorjahn 1960, 126-8). As in Mendeland, chiefs had relatively informal councils composed of the sub-chiefs, and a speaker who came from a particular family and section chiefs (McCulloch 1950, 63-64).

In the 19th century, most of Temneland was challenged militarily and larger polities emerged. Wylie documents how Moriba Kindo emerged as a *santigi*, a Muslim title for a town chief. By 1816, he had set himself up as king of Port Loko with a new title of *Alkali*. Previously, independent chiefs were integrated into Moriba’s state with the title of *almami* and were appointed by him. The type of state that emerged was clearly more centralized than in Mendeland. Referring to the authority of kings under new model, Wylie notes that “the traditional checks on his power might be gradually undermined, if not wholly subverted” (Wylie 1977, 171). Nevertheless, the picture is complicated. There was clearly a lot of heterogeneity, and some parts of Temneland better preserved their previous institutions (Dorjahn 1960).

Colonial administration. Precolonial institutions largely persisted under British rule. The most obvious change was to weaken the larger ruling states. In the 1890s, the British created a precocious and independent model of indirect rule in which they broke up the larger states. The constituent countries became chieftaincies whose rulers were recognized as paramount chiefs (PCs) and whose local elites became ruling families from whom subsequent chiefs were chosen. Although other changes under British governance reduced constraints on chiefs, the general pattern was not one of inventing authoritarian chiefs.

Colonial administration spread into the interior of Sierra Leone gradually in the 19th century as British officials signed numerous treaties with African rulers. In 1896, Britain declared a Protectorate and incorporated African rulers as paramount chiefs (PCs) into a system of chieftaincies (Abraham 1979). This system of indirect rule emerged not as the outcome of a political philosophy on the lines later developed by Lord Lugard in Nigeria, but instead because this arrangement reflected the equilibrium balance of power. British officials deemed it not possible to do anything else. Harris (2014) discusses various proposals to take over the interior (see also Fyfe 1964, 13-15). Influential Krio intellectuals such as Sir Samuel Lewis and J.C.E. Parkes discussed similar plans.²³ Despite in principle favoring a governance structure akin to direct rule, they recognized the likelihood of destabilizing consequences and of other difficulties (Fyfe 1964, 196, 259; Wylie 1977, 181).

After the British annexed the interior, they recognized individual elites in each lower-level country unit as elites of the new chieftaincies. In the south, this resulted in the fragmentation of the Mende state system. Comparing Abraham’s (2003, 70) reconstruction of pre-existing states to the contemporary paramount chieftaincies reveals that the paramount chieftaincies were much smaller. The paramount chieftaincies that map onto precolonial states, such as Galinhas, Banta, Bumpeh, and Tikongoh, were much reduced compared to the states that preceded them. The precolonial Kpaa-Mende state illustrates this pattern of fragmentation (see the map in Abraham 2003, 136).

²³Krio refers to the Creole peoples of Freetown. They descended from many different African groups, but had formed a distinct culture and identity by the late 19th century.

Here, a group of pre-existing countries with well-defined rulers united loosely in the 19th century into the bigger Kpaa-Mende state. As Abraham (2003, 71) describes

A number of provinces with a distinct historical, geo-political or cultural identity formed what might be called a ‘country,’ ruled by a country chief, which was generally recognized as a chiefdom during the colonial period. . . . The identities of these countries were forged in more peaceful times in their history, and long pre-dated the war era [second half of the 19th century] . . . the tier above this comprising a number of countries, may be labelled the state proper, over which a king ruled.

In 1896, the British recognized these country chiefs as paramount chiefs alongside the local elites whom they recognized as “ruling families” (Fenton 1932, 3 calls them “crowning houses”). There is an almost one-to-one mapping between the 19th century countries that collectively formed the Kpaa-Mende state and modern chieftaincies in the Moyamba district.

In the institution that subsequently emerged, PCs were elected for life by the Tribal Authority (TA) and only members of the designated ruling families were eligible. This system remains today. Historically, the TA comprised elites and elders. The system is more democratic today because there is one member of the TA for every twenty taxpayers in the chieftaincy. Nevertheless, this only determines the number of members of the TA, and the specific individuals are appointed by the likes of elites, elders, and local counselors. When the sitting PC dies, an election is held. Anyone from a ruling house can run and the electors are members of the Tribal Authority. Fenton (1932, 5) describes the system as follows

The Tribal Authority is defined as the Paramount Chief and his councilors and men of note, or sub-chiefs and their councilors and men of note . . . one might expect the average chiefdom to have a TA of between thirty and forty persons.

The system of chieftaincies did not become institutionalized until the 1930s. In 1937, systematic Ordinances defined the powers of chiefs as Native Authorities with Native Treasuries (Hailey 1957, 534). Earlier, Goddard (1926, 83) noted, “The chiefs are territorial rulers and have jurisdiction, derived from their former pure native jurisdiction and confirmed by the Government.” According to Hailey (1957, 534), “Previous Ordinances . . . had not gone farther than to lay down the general principle that local administration should be carried on through Chiefs.” Overall, it does not seem that much changed in practice, and this trend was strengthened by the fact that the British allowed the PCs to decide whether to opt into the new system. It took over a decade before they all did so (Kilson 1966, 29). British officials applied Native Authority labels to local officials in Sierra Leone that resembled those used elsewhere in British Africa, but this seems to have simply formalized a system that already existed.

This system yielded a high degree of institutional persistence in the lower-level countries. Many, although not all, changes lessened the authoritarian powers of rulers. Colonial PCs were weaker than precolonial big men in several clear ways. First, they controlled far less territory and fewer people. Second, they seem to have been much less rich. Consider, for example, Siaka’s successor and son Mana. “As the supreme political authority, he owned the largest number of slaves; and he was widely thought to have about 500 wives” (Jones 1979, 313). Third, slavery—clearly a large source of wealth of kings like Siaka and Mana—was abolished in 1927 (Grace 1975). Fourth, precolonial rulers had independent large armies of “war boys” (Fenton 1932, 3), which vanished

after 1896 (see Alldrige 1910, 174 for a photograph of a contemporary Mende village surrounded by fortifications, or “war fences”).

Moreover, even with the more rigid system of ruling families, many precolonial constraints persisted. This included not only the Poro society, but also the system of landowning families. Most chieftaincies in Sierra Leone have histories in which various families claim ownership stemming from the original occupation. The institutionalization of chieftaincies under colonialism did not disrupt the strength of these families.

“A chief holds land just as any individual does—that is, he has his share in the land belonging to his family. As regards all other lands in the chiefdom, he is the guardian of the rights of the different families . . . owning these lands. . . . In none of the districts of the Protectorate is there any evidence that any land was set aside for the office of chief” (Goddard 1926, 88, 89).²⁴

Councils also persisted in the same form, albeit relatively weak and informal, in which they existed in the 19th century. Prior to the institutionalization of the TA, PCs had “a Council of the form recognized by local custom . . . The membership of the Council depended in practice partly on selection by the Chief, but they were seldom a formally constituted body, and often consisted only of members of the Chief’s family” (Hailey 1957, 534). This assessment resembles that of McCulloch (1950, 17) for the precolonial era, who additionally contends, “Under the Native Administration system the council has been placed on a wider basis.” Unlike in many places we have analyzed in this paper, for example Eastern Nigeria or Kenya, Sierra Leone did not have a system of councils formally recognized in the colonial *Gazettes* until the 1940s and 1950s, and even then they were dominated by the PCs. But precolonial chieftaincies either in Mendeland or Temneland, as we have seen, do not seem to have had a formal council either. The available accounts suggests that the TA was in fact closely modeled on precolonial institutions.

In contrast to the many ways in which changes under colonialism reduced the powers of chiefs, the institutionalization of indirect rule freed chiefs from other constraints. Abraham (1979) argues that colonial rule, by institutionalizing the ruling houses, reduced the scope for upward social mobility into politics. He concludes that one consequence of indirect rule was that “the traditional democratic basis of Mende chiefship was radically undermined” (Abraham 1979, 305). In his view, the types of informal councils we have seen became much less effective in the colonial period. Wylie (1977, 195) makes a similar argument for Temneland. Yet Abraham (1979, 272) also points out that as a consequence of colonial rule, the chiefs in many ways became less powerful and “were unable to enforce their authority over their subjects in the traditional fashion.” In a similar vein, Wylie (1977, 205) concludes that “the resulting transformation in the chiefly power base hardly makes up for the loss of independence or for the transformation in prerogatives, rights, and duties.”

Ultimately, colonial interference empowered chiefs in some ways and constrained them in others. Generally, PCs were less powerful than the rulers of larger precolonial states in Mendeland or Temneland. They ruled much smaller territories and fewer people, and lacked slaves or independent military forces. The real argument, then, is about the lower chiefs of countries. There seems to be a great deal of persistence in the way they were chosen and who was eligible to stand. To some

²⁴See also McCulloch (1950, 27).

extent, more informal councils were formalized and broadened under the TA, but there is also a lot of continuity here. Chiefs lost many powers, particularly judicial ones. Other institutions that placed checks and balances on chiefs, like landownership and secret societies, also persisted. Yet it is not clear if they stayed as powerful as they had been in the 19th century. For example, Dorjahn (1960) discusses a case in Temnland in which Poro authority over a PC had weakened. We have also seen that Abraham and Wylie argue that democratic mechanisms were weakened because PCs gained backing from the colonial state. Trying to assess the balance of evidence, Dorjahn (1960, 132) notes

“Informants insisted that in pre-Protectorate times chiefs were ‘good,’ that they were loved and respected, and that corruption and extortion became rampant only with the coming of the British. These same informants on different occasions, however, provided ample documentation that excesses occurred then as well as in more recent times.”

Harris’ conclusion is, “All in all, chiefs lost some powers and gained others.” He references Mamdani’s thesis when highlighting that “[o]ne observer has gone as far as labelling these new era chiefs . . . as ‘decentralized despots.’” Yet Harris contends that “the Sierra Leonean institutions of chieftaincy had survived and retained a good proportion of its legitimacy during the transition” (Harris 2014, 22).

Harris’ observation here is key and suggests one way of assessing the balance of the forces at work, at least today. Despite the end of colonialism 61 years ago in Sierra Leone, the chieftaincy is still a vibrant institution. The 2009 Chieftaincy Act reconfirmed the institution along the lines that emerged in the colonial period. Perhaps this can be dismissed as a case in which institutions persisted simply because of the generic difficulty of switching institutions, but more likely it points to the legitimacy of the institution in Sierra Leone. One simple way of demonstrating this is via data in the 2020 Afrobarometer.²⁵ Sierra Leoneans were asked “How much do you trust each of the following?” among a specified list of institutions. There are four possible answers in addition to “refused to answer” and “don’t know”: “Trust a lot, trust somewhat, just a little, not at all.” Aggregating the answers to “a lot” and “somewhat” and calling it trust for short, we find that a mere 33% of people trust parliament, 43% trust the anti-corruption commission, and 56% trust the president. By contrast, 63% trust traditional leaders, and this figure rises to 78% in rural areas. It seems improbable that PCs would be despotic but still evince such overwhelming levels of trust among the population.

Overall, as our discussion shows, the Sierra Leone case is complicated. There was a classic form of indirect rule in which the British worked with legitimate traditional rulers. With regard to larger states, colonial chiefs were undoubtedly less powerful than their precolonial predecessors. Regarding the lower-level country chiefs, there is contradictory evidence about the impact of colonialism on the power and behavior of these rulers. The British did not innovate institutions like the councils in Kenya, and there was no need for the type of Warrant Chief system created in southern Nigeria. But even here we have seen that many countervailing mechanisms were at work. Some potentially led towards more authoritarian practices, but many others worked in the opposite direction.

²⁵<https://afrobarometer.org/countries/sierra-leone-0>.

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