Local governance in Benin

A guarantee of sustainable development?

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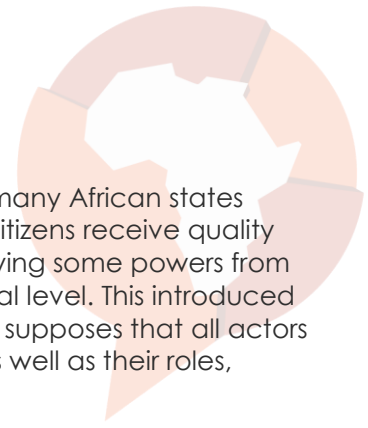
Introduction

Faced with the disappointing performance of centralized systems, many African states opted for decentralization in the 1990s in a bid to ensure that their citizens receive quality services (Anago, 2009). In theory, decentralization involves withdrawing some powers from the central state and transferring them to elected bodies at the local level. This introduced the concept of local governance, whose practical implementation supposes that all actors understand the institutional framework within which they function as well as their roles, responsibilities, and room for maneuver.

In Benin, since the installation of the first communal and municipal councils in February 2003, decentralization has become one of the pillars of development, making better governance in local matters a fundamental element of the process. Municipal councils have taken on a number of responsibilities once left to the central state, such as maintaining local marketplaces and community hygiene, issuing bicycle licenses, and collecting some taxes. In order to manage and monitor financial resources allocated to local bodies, the central state established the Communal Development Support Fund (*Fond d'Appui au Développement des Communes*) in 2008.

Despite good intentions and political decisions in favor of the decentralization process, good governance in our communities faces significant hurdles. Local populations express dissatisfaction with local councillors, and the transfer of powers and financial resources from the central state to local bodies is still not completely effective.

Fifteen years after the first steps toward local governance in our municipalities, what lessons should be learned? How do Beninese citizens assess this governance process, and what roles do they play in its implementation? Has decentralization impacted the most vulnerable, i.e. the poorest? What are the interactions between local councillors and their constituents?

Afrobarometer data from Benin make it possible to examine citizen perceptions of local governance. Our analyses reveal that popular assessments of local government performance are largely negative and haver worsened over time. We find a link between the level of popular trust in the municipal council and the perceived quality of local governance, as well as between communal development and perceptions of the local authority's activities.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in more than 30 African countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

In Benin, samples of 1,200 adult citizens yield country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. This analysis focuses on data collected in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Interaction between citizens and local government is limited: More than seven in 10 Beninese did not contact a municipal councillor during the preceding year to discuss an important problem or give them their views. Women are less likely than men to contact their local representative.

- Six in 10 Beninese disapprove of the way their municipal council has performed its job in maintaining roads and local marketplaces and keeping the community clean. Between 2005 and 2014, job ratings on road maintenance and community hygiene declined by more than 10 percentage points.

- Disapproval of local council performance is higher among the most educated and the poorest citizens, but varies little by whether citizens have had contact with a local government representative.

- About half (53%) of the Beninese population trust their municipal council "somewhat" or "a lot." This proportion has been fairly stable over time but varies significantly by region, ranging from 36% in Littoral to 74% in Borgou.

- Higher trust levels appear to be correlated with more favorable perceptions of local government performance. But local authorities' activities are perceived most favorably in regions that are least developed.

- More than half (52%) of Beninese engage as citizens by taking part in community meetings, but only 16% attended a municipal council's accountability session during the previous year.

- There is a positive correlation between local governance and civic engagement.

- Keeping populations informed about the municipal council's action plan and budget and implementing programs to benefit marginalized groups are actions that positively affect public evaluations of local government performance.

Contact with municipal councillor

Decentralization means proximity between elected officials and their constituents as well as an extension of the local authority's responsibilities to the management of local issues, such as the maintenance of public spaces, collection of local taxes, and regulation of land use.

To start with the concept of proximity linking local government and the people they govern, Afrobarometer data from five surveys over the period 2005-2017 show that three-quarters of Beninese citizens did not contact municipal councillors about an important problem or to give them their views (Figure 1). Men (up to 36%) are two to three times more likely than women to have contacted a municipal councillor at least once during the year preceding the survey (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Contact with a municipal councillor | Benin | 2005-2017
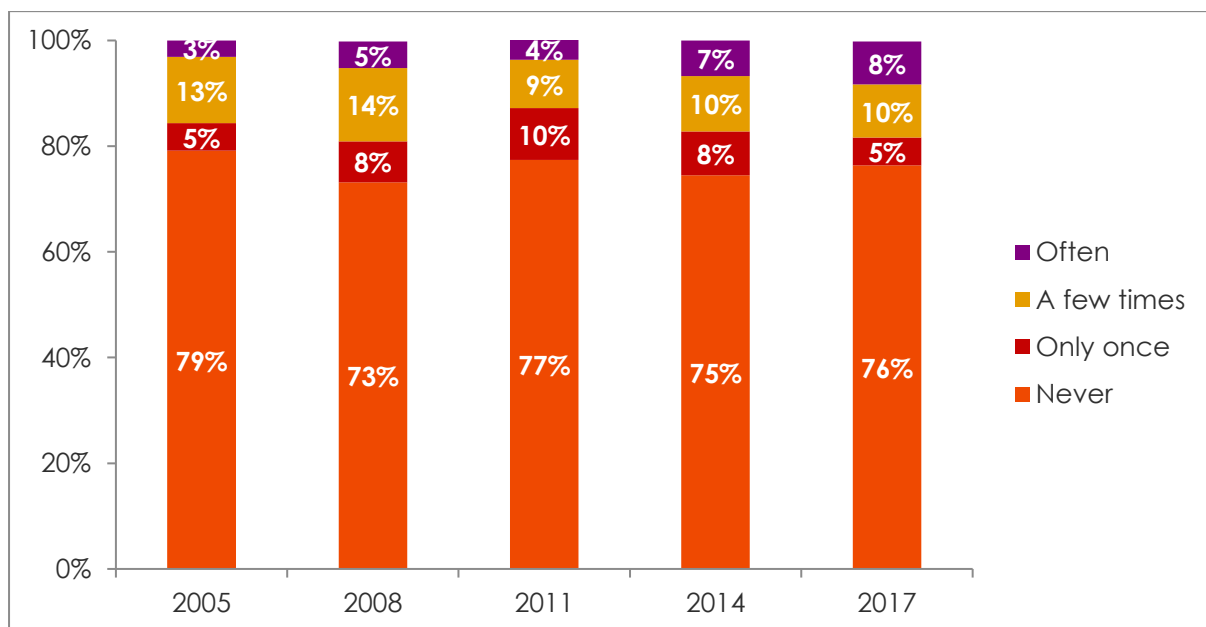
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A municipal councillor?

Figure 2: Contact with a municipal councillor | by gender | Benin | 2005-2017
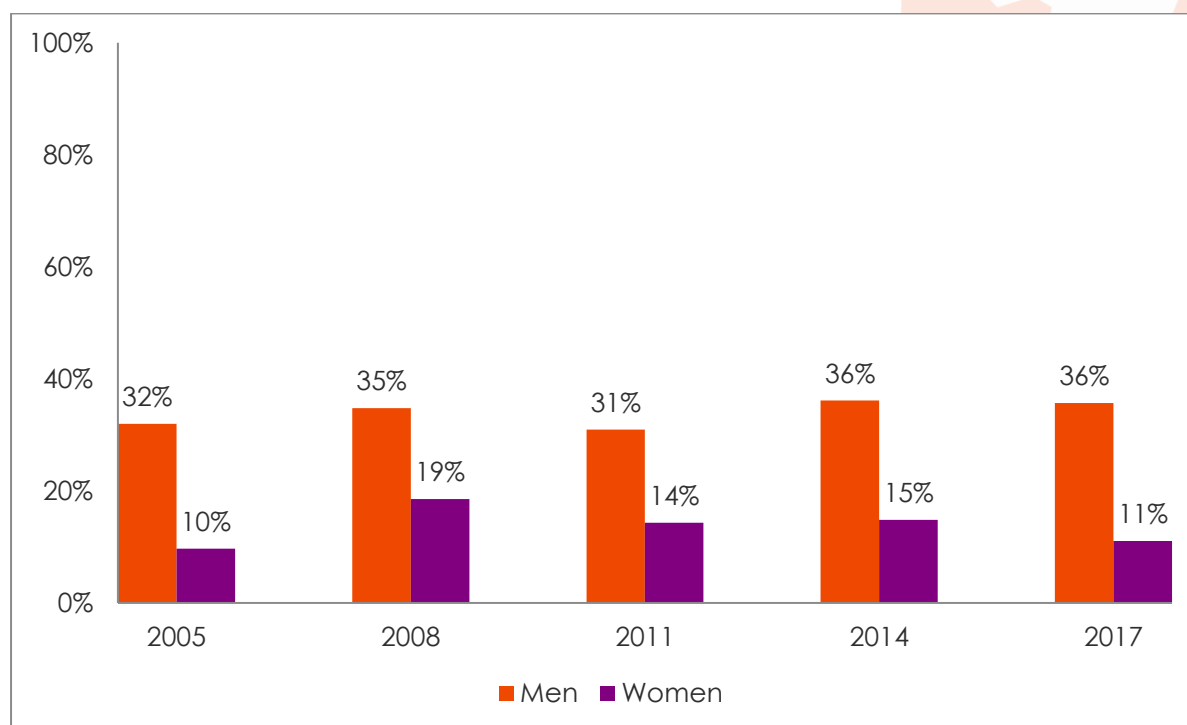
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: a municipal councilman? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

If most of the population never contact their local authority, is proximity a guarantee of good local governance?

Perceptions of local governance

Poor performance of the local authority

Local governance means that the community's elected officials must do all they can to promote the local economy and the well-being of the community. To examine this angle of local governance, several rounds of the Afrobarometer survey asked respondents: *"What about local government? I do not mean the national government. I mean your municipal or local government council. How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"* Different survey rounds asked about different issues. Among these are local road and marketplace maintenance; community hygiene, such as trash collection; food hygiene in restaurants and food stalls; local budget management; collection of permit fees for bicycles and carts; collection of local taxes; and land-use management. In this study, we focus on issues asked about during more than one survey round: road maintenance, local marketplace maintenance, and community hygiene.

We observe that on all three issues, on average more than two-thirds of Beninese say that local government performance is "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 3). Assessments are most negative with regard to road maintenance in the community. Between 2005 and 2014, the proportion of people dissatisfied with council performance in maintaining local roads increased by 11 percentage points, from 63% in 2005 to 74% in 2014, with a 79% peak in 2011. On community hygiene, too, the proportion of disapproving citizens increased by 13 percentage points over the period.

Figure 3: Negative assessment of local council performance | Benin | 2005-2014
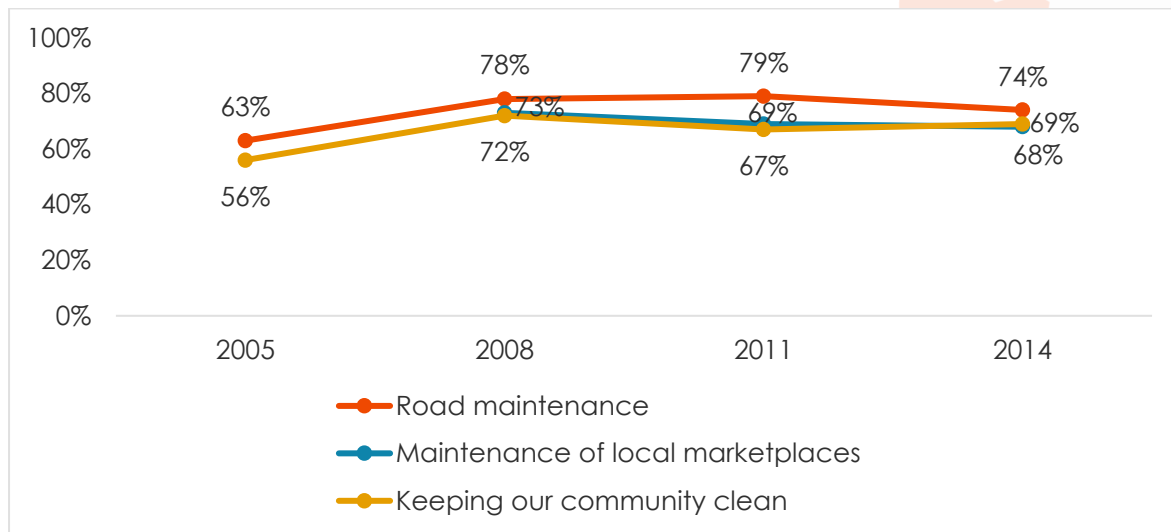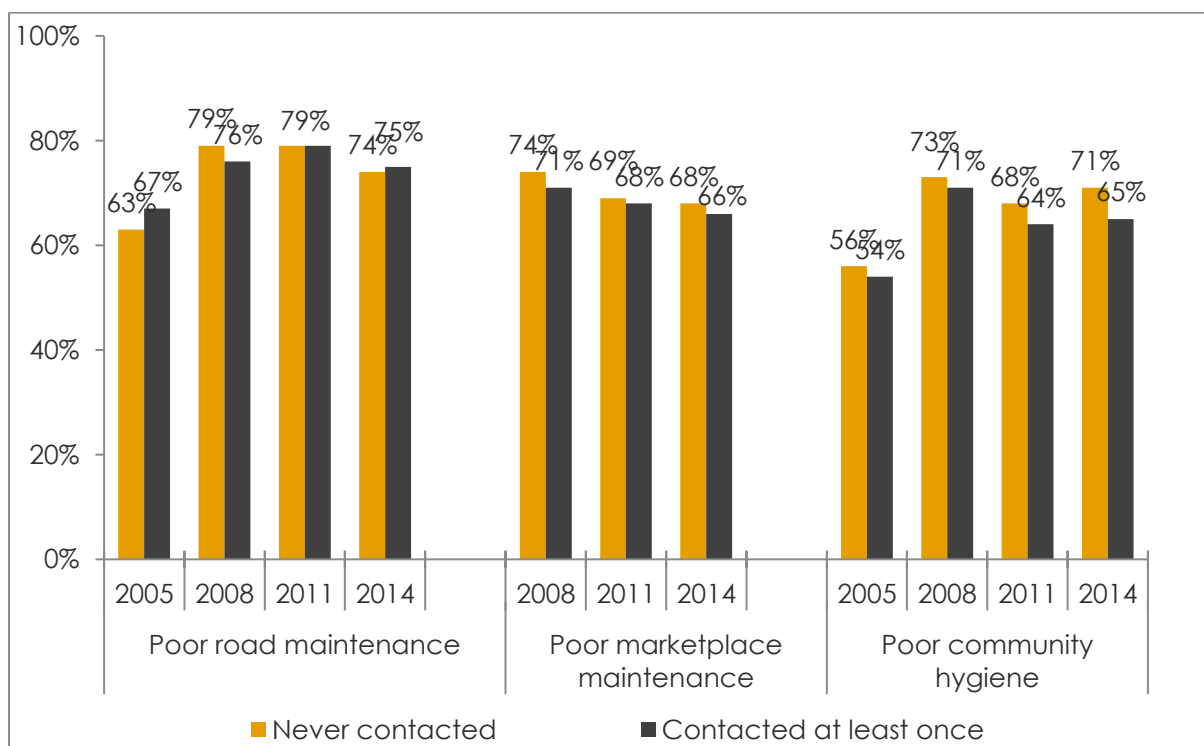

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Contact with councillors and local governance

Does contact with local government affect perceptions of its performance? As Figure 4 shows, assessments of local government performance are similarly negative, regardless of whether respondents had contacted a local councillor during the preceding year. Given the survey's margin of error of +/-3%, it is only with regard to community hygiene (in 2011 and 2014) that we see a slightly less negative assessment of council performance among those who have been in touch with a councillor.

Figure 4: Negative assessment of local council performance | by contact with a local councillor | Benin | 2005-2014
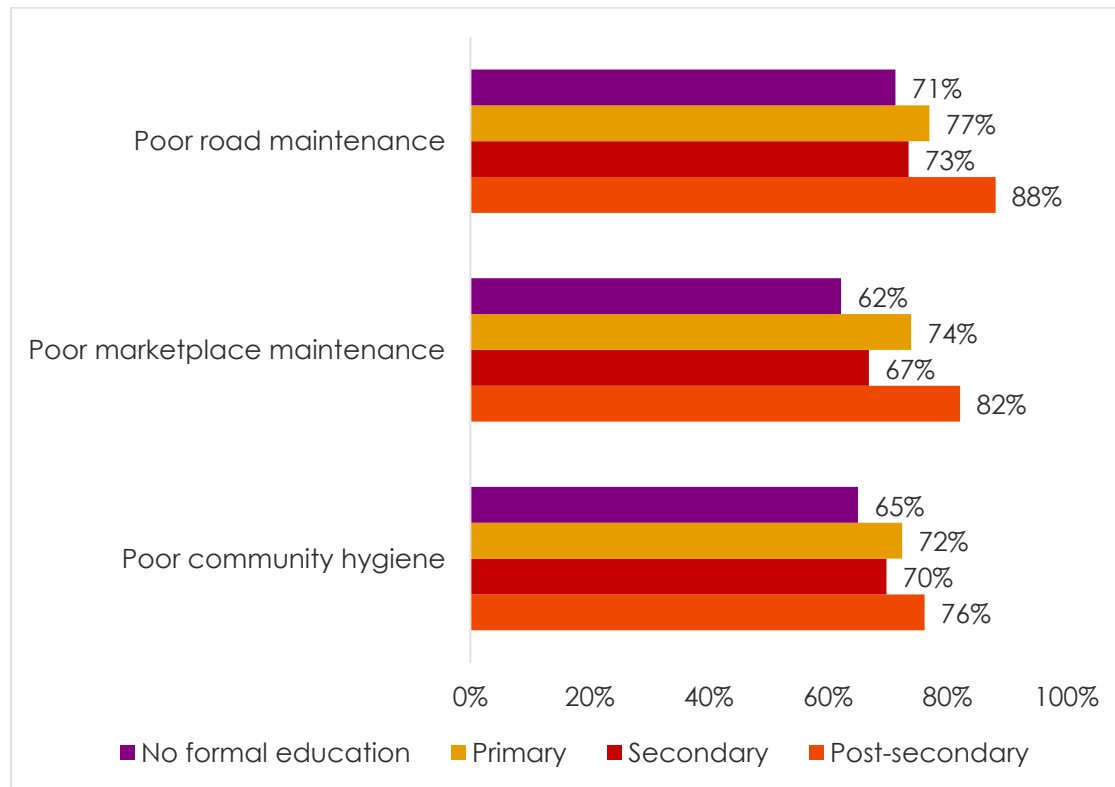

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Perception of local governance based on education and poverty level

A majority of citizens offer negative assessments of local government's performance on these issues, whatever their educational level. However, we observe that respondents with post-secondary qualifications are more disapproving than their less-educated counterparts (Figure 5). For example, as regards road maintenance, 88% of those with a post-secondary education describe the local council's performance as "fairly bad" or "very bad," compared to 71%-77% of those with less education.

Figure 5: Negative assessment of local council performance | by education level | Benin | 2014

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

To examine whether citizens' level of wealth is associated with their assessment of local government performance, we use the Lived Poverty Index, which is calculated based on how often respondents or their families went without certain basic life necessities during the 12 months preceding the survey: food, clean water, medicine or medical care, cooking fuel, and a cash income. Response options range from "never" to "just once," "several times," "many times," and "always."

In 2005 and 2008, a majority of Beninese at all poverty levels disapproved of local government performance, with greater disapproval by those suffering more intense lived poverty (Figure 6). We observe two trends for assessments of road maintenance. First, disapproval increases from 2005 to 2011, with differences of 13 percentage points for the non-poor (61% to 74% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad"), 23 points for people living in low poverty (54% to 77%), 13 points for the moderately poor (67% to 79%), and 9 points for the very poor (74% to 83%). Second, disapproval remains high among respondents with high and moderate lived poverty but declines (to 49% and 69%, respectively) among those with no or low lived poverty.

For local marketplace maintenance and community hygiene, assessments also vary by level of lived poverty, showing declines in disapproval among respondents with no or low lived poverty.

Figure 6: Negative assessment of local government performance | by lived poverty | Benin | 2005-2014
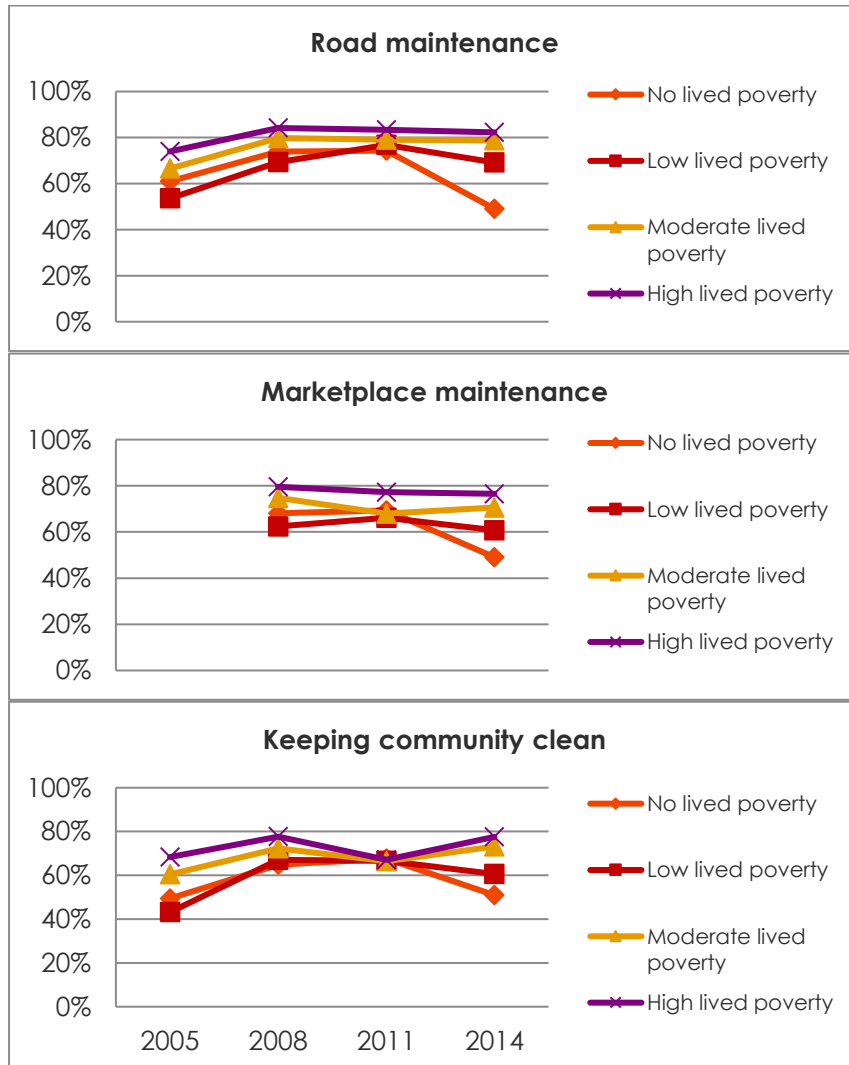
Respondents were asked*: How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")*
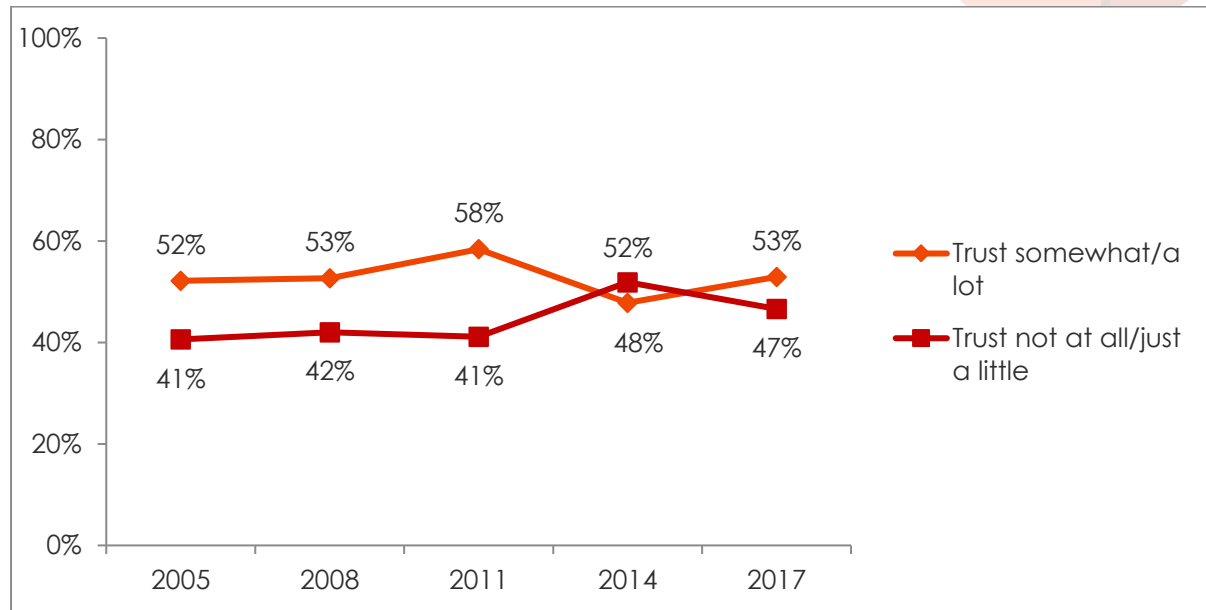
Trust in the municipal council

Trust in political institutions is essential to the stability of society and the smooth functioning of democracy, helping determine people's willingness to cooperate in the achievement of collective objectives and the funding of public goods (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). Moreover, Bratton and Gyimah (2016) found that trustworthy institutions contribute to achievement of the development objectives that Africans prioritize. Thus, in this section, we look at how trust in the municipal council relates to perceptions of local government performance.

Afrobarometer measures Institutional trust through responses to the following question: "*How much do you trust each of the following institutions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?*" As Figure 7 shows, from 2005 to 2017, about half of Beninese citizens have said

they trust their municipal council "somewhat" or "a lot," while about four in 10 have expressed "just a little" or no trust. Trust has ranged from a peak of 58% in 2011 to a low of 48% three years later, with a rebound to 53% in 2017 – about the same level as a decade ago.

Figure 7: Trust in the municipal council | Benin | 2005-2017

Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following institutions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your municipal/communal council?*

By region (called "département"), trust in municipal councils is lowest in Littoral (36% "somewhat" or "a lot"), Ouémé (40%), and Atlantique (42%) regions (Table 1). On the other hand, the Borgou region (74%) stands out with the highest level of trust, followed by Atacora (67%), Alibori (64%), Couffo (59%), Plateau (57%), and Zou (53%). Compared to 2005, the Borgou and Littoral regions maintained the same positions at the top and bottom. From 2005 to 2017, the Atacora and Alibori regions consistently stayed above the national average in trust, while others had fluctuations. For example, trust in the municipal council in the Borgou region was below the national average in 2011.

Table 1: Trust in the municipal council | by region | Benin | 2005-2017

	2005	2008	2011	2014	2017
Borgou	84%	65%	51%	53%	74%
Atacora	61%	73%	79%	72%	67%
Alibori	61%	63%	53%	59%	64%
Couffo	34%	48%	81%	45%	59%
Plateau	47%	50%	72%	51%	57%
Zou	36%	58%	49%	47%	53%
Donga	73%	77%	68%	59%	51%
Collines	70%	59%	51%	57%	49%
Mono	38%	45%	60%	57%	49%
Atlantique	47%	44%	49%	33%	42%
Ouémé	46%	41%	64%	38%	40%
Littoral	30%	31%	41%	30%	36%
National	52%	53%	58%	48%	53%

Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following institutions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your municipal/communal council? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Trust in the municipal council and local governance

To examine the relationship between trust in the municipal council and perceptions of local government performance, we use data from Afrobarometer Round 6 (the latest round in which the questions about local government performance in maintaining roads, marketplaces, and community hygiene were asked).

As shown in Table 2, there is a positive correlation between trust and the perception of municipal council performance, that is, communities in which large proportions of citizens trust the municipal council "somewhat" or "a lot" are more likely to approve of local government performance when it comes to maintaining roads, marketplaces, and community hygiene. On the other hand, where trust proportions are low, approval rates for local government performance tend to be low as well.

Table 2: Correlation between trust in the municipal council and local government performance | Benin | 2014

|	Pearson correlation coefficients	
	Bad performance	**Good performance**
Trust municipal council somewhat/a lot		
Road maintenance	-0.277[*]	0.277[*]
Local marketplace maintenance	-0.399[**]	0.389[**]
Community hygiene	-0.297[*]	0.241
Trust municipal council just a little		
Road maintenance	0.119	-0.117
Local marketplace maintenance	0.181	-0.183
Community hygiene	0.136	-0.104
Don't trust municipal council at all		
Road maintenance	0.228	-0.233
Local marketplace maintenance	0.342[**]	-0.324[*]
Community hygiene	0.239	-0.194
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level		

Source: Afrobarometer Round 6, author calculations

The model works well for a majority of municipalities in Benin. Figure 8 graphically depicts this link at the local level. For example, we see the municipality of Kérou, where citizens expressed very high levels of trust in the municipal council and express a low level of local governance disapproval. The same goes for the municipality of Glazoué with regard to road maintenance and community hygiene.
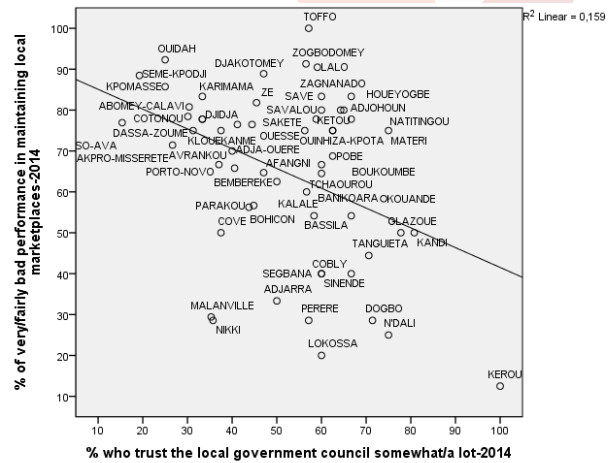
Figure 8: Trust in the municipal council and local governance | by municipality | Benin | 2014
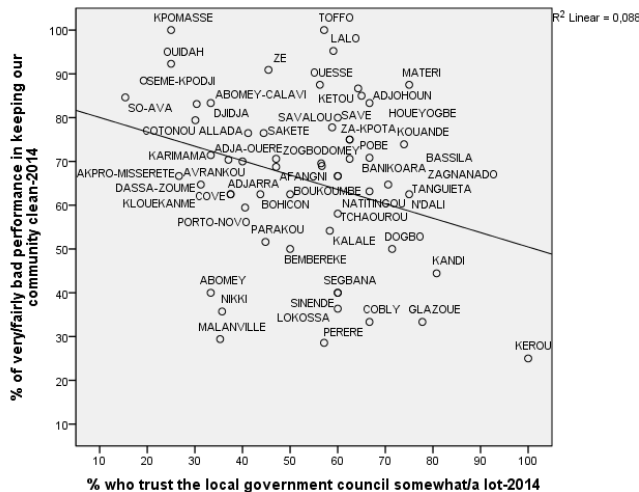
Road maintenance
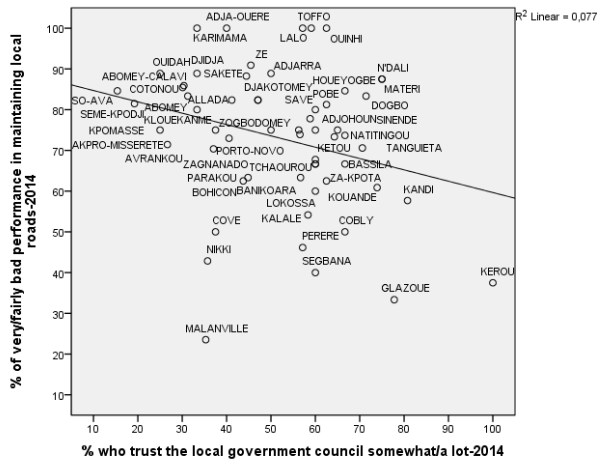
Marketplace maintenance

Keeping community clean

While trust is a lubricant for political systems, it also seems likely that a well-functioning local government would increase public trust, creating a virtuous cycle of good governance.

Local governance and sustainable grass-roots development

Local governance is intended as a response to development problems faced by African states. Good local governance implies the establishment of rules, procedures, institutions, and mechanisms enabling citizens to express their interests, exercise their rights, and partake in the development of their community (Amadou, 2008). Moreover, the phrase "good governance" has come to be accepted as a mode of governance characterized by respect for human rights, political openness, participation, tolerance, administrative capacity, efficiency, and the establishment of partnerships to ensure decision-making based on broad consensus that also takes into account the perspectives of the poor (Hounsounon, 2016). Based on this definition, we want to examine the link between good governance and decentralization. Practically, we create a local governance index and use the Human Development Index (HDI) as a proxy for sustainable development.

Changes in the HDI and regional disparities

In addition to income, the HDI comprises aggregate data on health and education. According to statistics from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Économique, or INSAE) in Benin, particularly the modular Integrated survey on household living conditions (Enquête Modulaire Intégrée sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages, 2010) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2014) explored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its national report on human development (2015), the level of human development improved in all regions of Benin between 2011 and 2014 (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Changes in the HDI | by region | Benin | 2011-2014
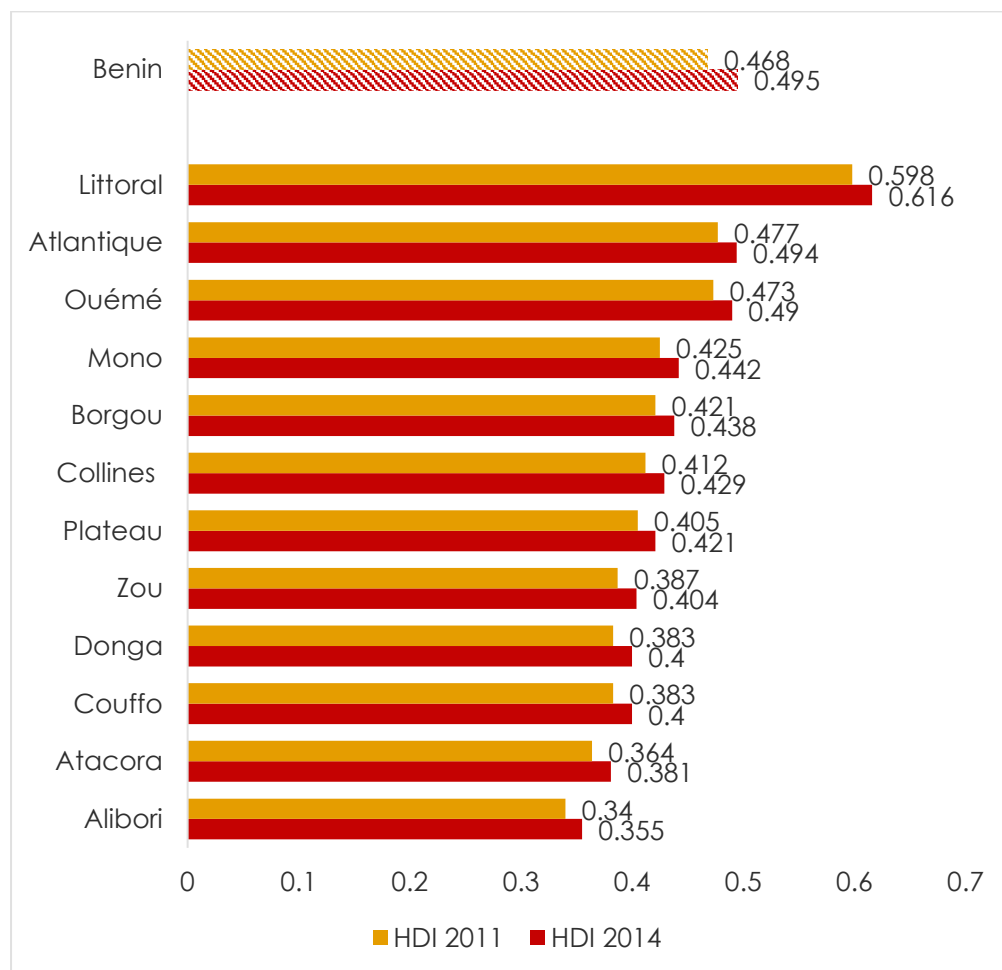
Source: INSAE and author's calculations

Alibori, the only region in the "very low HDI"[1] category since 2011, also presents the lowest development level countrywide in 2014. Atacora, Couffo, and Donga remain in the category of "low HDI" regions despite improvements since 2011. Zou, which appeared in 2011 in the category of "low HDI" regions, rose to the "medium-low HDI" group alongside Borgou, Collines, Mono, and Plateau. HDI levels in Atlantique and Ouémé are "medium HDI" regions, while Littoral remains the only "high HDI" region.

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[1] These categories correspond to relative thresholds related to the national average. They are based on a mapping by the Institute of Statistics and do not correspond to the international thresholds mentioned in the national report on human development.

Local governance performance index

In order to pinpoint the link between local governance and grass-roots development, we create a local governance performance index. This index is a valid summary measure of three local governance variables, namely popular assessments of local government performance in maintaining roads, marketplaces, and community hygiene (see Appendix Table A.2 for details). In our multiple correspondence factorial analysis, we initially recode the variables into two modalities (0=bad performance and 1=good performance) and exclude missing data and "don't know" and "refused to answer" responses. The combination is statistically reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (.8419). The scores obtained suggest that the principal axis opposes respondents who say that the local authority displays good governance to respondents who say otherwise. Finally, we standardize the index on a scale of 0 to 100; a low value of the index corresponds to bad government performance, and a higher value means better local governance performance.

Figure 10 presents local council performance scores by region, based on 2014 data. The lowest scores are recorded in the Atlantique and Littoral regions, followed by Littoral, Couffo, Plateau, and Zou. At the other extreme, citizens offer favorable appraisals – but still below a score of 50 – of local governance in Alibori and Borgou.

Figure 10: Local governance performance index | by region | Benin | 2014
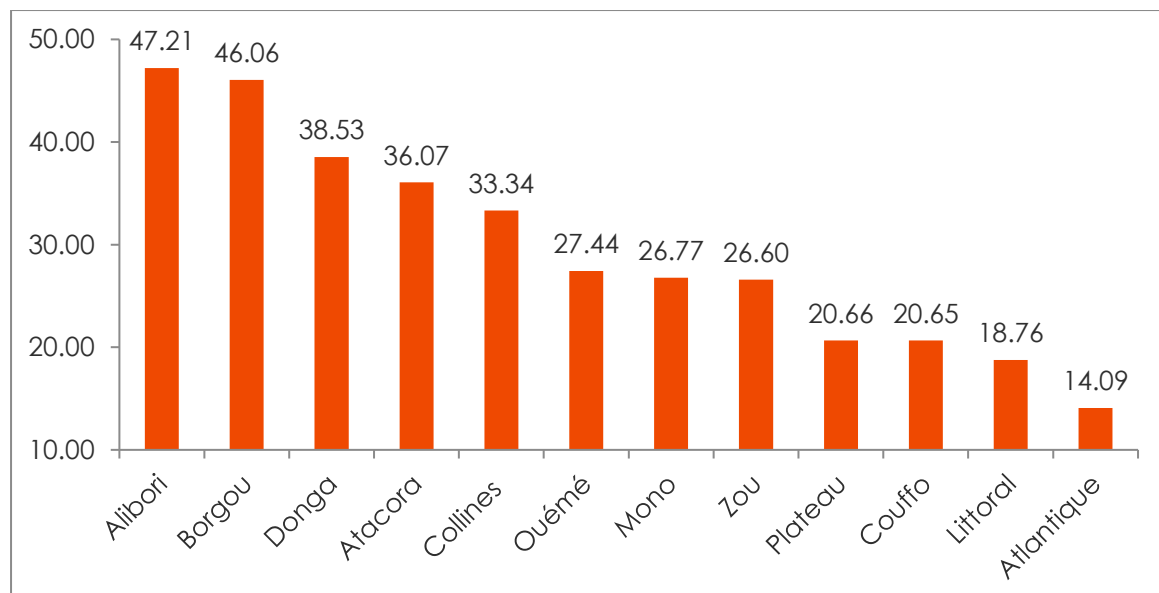
Source: Author's calculations

Focusing on the link between sustainable grass-roots development and the quality of local governance in Benin, one observes in Figure 11 that evidence for such a link is somewhat mixed. This confirms previous results on the link between decentralization, regarded as the basis for local governance, and the quality of socio-public services provided by local authorities. Indeed, the literature on the issue is rich, but the results are mixed and controversial (Hounsounon, 2016).

Figure 11 suggests that regions with a low level of development are those in which the local authority's activities are most appreciated by citizens. For example, in Alibori and Borgou, the development level is low and medium-low, respectively, while relatively large proportions of citizens approve of the performance of their municipal council. This result contradicts that described for Atlantique and Plateau. Indeed, this situation reflects an intrinsic analysis of revenue, schooling, and life expectancy at birth thresholds in these regions as integrating factors of the development level. One could probably conclude that a higher education level in the regions will enable citizens to assess the local authority's activity from various angles. However, these conclusions remain hypothetical and require thorough analyses.

According to the same source, Littoral is an atypical region, because it has a high development level although its local governance performance score is low.

In contrast, Ouémé and Atlantique are characterized by an average level of human development but different levels of municipal council performance in the management of local issues.

Figure 11: Local development and municipal council performance | by region | Benin | 2014
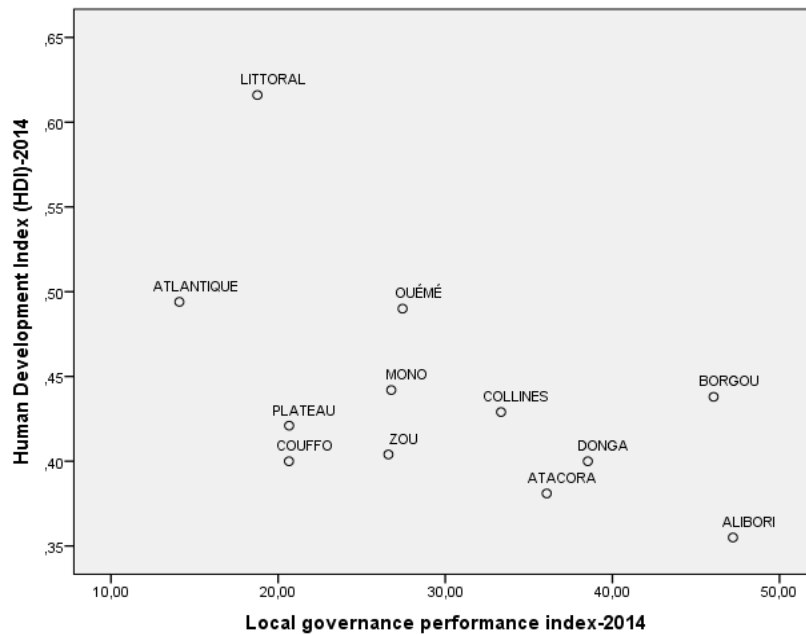
In sum, we do not find clear evidence for the hypothesis that the most developed regions are those in which local governance is most successful. We turn now to consider another channel through which local governance may be expressed – civic engagement as a monitoring agent for good governance.

Role of civic engagement

The debate on governance concentrates for the most part on the efficiency of institutions and regulations governing society: transparency, engagement, responsiveness, accountability, the rule of law (Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace, 2010). Thus, the culture of civic engagement is regarded as a battle horse of good governance. Moreover, it appears that decentralization democratizes public action by bringing decision makers closer to citizens. According to Leftwich (1993), this proximity, which is missing in centralized political systems, favors civic engagement and makes local governing bodies more responsible and qualified and less corrupt than central governing bodies.

To highlight this ideal and support our analyses, we examine several civic engagement variables, based on Afrobarometer questions about whether respondents participated in certain actions in their community during the 12 months preceding the survey. As shown in Table 3, substantial proportions of Beninese expressed their citizenship through civic activities. Half (52%) of respondents say they attended a community meeting at least once (once or twice (8%), sometimes (20%), or often (24%)), and 40% more say they would do so if they had the chance. Similarly, 53% say they got together with others to raise an issue.

Looking at the variables specifically related to local governance, we observe that 31% say they attended a public meeting organized by the municipal council or city hall, with 57% who say they would do so if they had the chance. And 16% attended at least one

accountability session ("*reddition des comptes*," a public information session that all municipalities are required to conduct at least once a year), in addition to 68% who say they would attend one if they had the chance.

Table 3: Civic engagement | Benin | 2017

		Attended a community meeting	Got together with others to raise an issue	Attended a meeting organized by the municipal council or city hall	Attended an accountability session of the municipal council or city hall
Yes	Often	24%	22%	11%	6%
	Several times	20%	24%	12%	6%
	Once or twice	8%	7%	8%	5%
No	Would if had the chance	40%	39%	57%	68%
	Would never do this	8%	7%	12%	14%

Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

A cross-reference with respondents' education level reveals that the less educated are slightly more inclined to attend a meeting or an accountability session organized by the municipal council or city/town hall than their more educated counterparts (Figure 12).
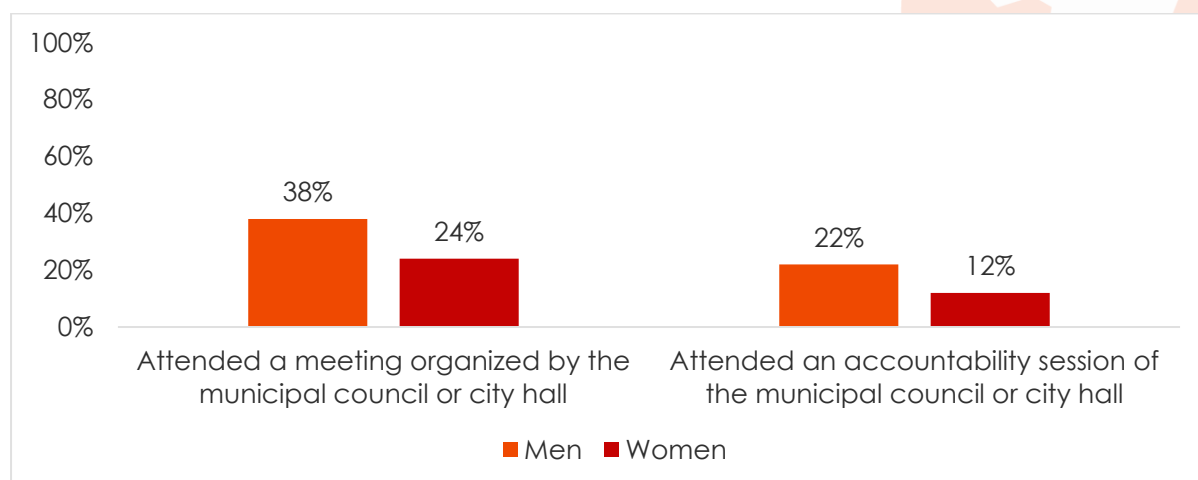
Figure 12: Civic engagement | by education level | Benin | 2017
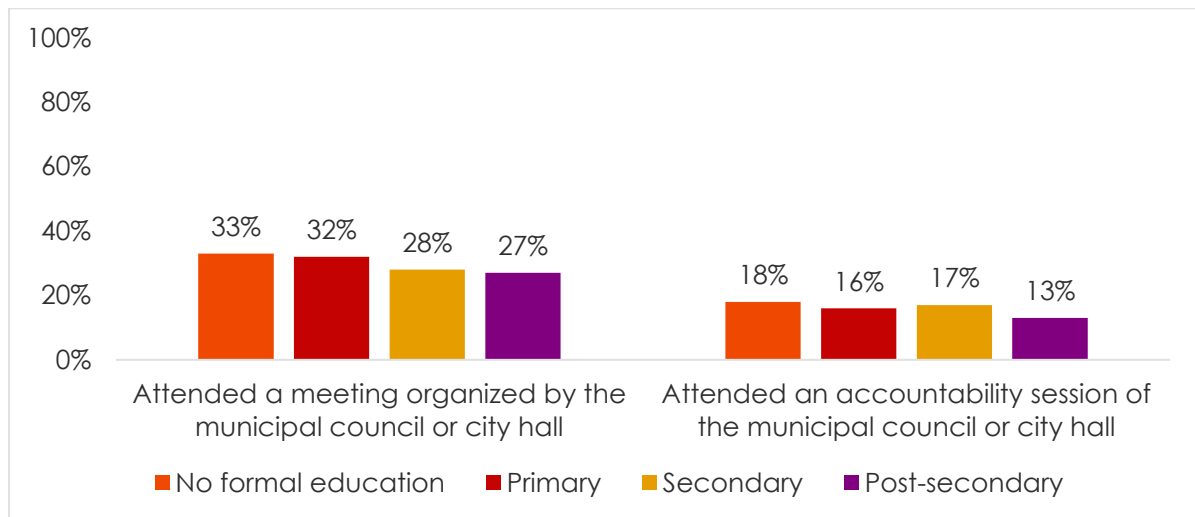
Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

The gender breakdown in Figure 13 reveals that men are more likely than women to engage in civic activities. Almost four in 10 men (38%) say they attended a meeting organized by the municipal council or city hall during the previous year, compared to 24% of women. As for accountability sessions by the municipal council, the level of men's participation (22%) is almost double that of women (12%). These statistics shed light on the importance of a push for gender balance in civic engagement at the local level.

Figure 13: Civic engagement | by gender | Benin | 2017

Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

Regions show strong variability in civic engagement (Table 4). In the Atacora region, three-quarters (76%) of the adult population say they took part in at least one community meeting during the preceding years – double the level of Atlantique residents (39%). Similarly, 43% of Atacora residents say they attended a public meeting organized by the municipal council or city hall – more than twice the proportion of Donga residents (17%), who also come in last with regard to attending accountability sessions by the municipal council or city hall (3%, vs. 32% in the Collines region). As for getting together with others to raise an issue, two-thirds (66%) in Borgou say they did so, compared to 41% in Alibori. Clearly local governance, regarded as an involvement by grass-roots populations, is implemented to different degree in the various municipalities of Benin.

Table 4: Civic engagement | by region | Benin | 2017

	Attended a community meeting	Got together with others to raise an issue	Attended a meeting organized by the municipal council or city hall	Attended an accountability session with the municipal council or city hall
Atacora	76%	59%	43%	20%
Collines	68%	62%	42%	32%
Borgou	63%	66%	35%	26%
Plateau	61%	61%	29%	15%
Alibori	57%	41%	33%	21%
Mono	57%	63%	26%	15%
Couffo	51%	49%	40%	17%
Donga	48%	52%	17%	3%
Zou	48%	43%	32%	15%
Ouémé	40%	53%	29%	22%
Littoral	40%	54%	21%	11%
Atlantique	39%	43%	24%	7%

Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance? (% who say they did so at least once)
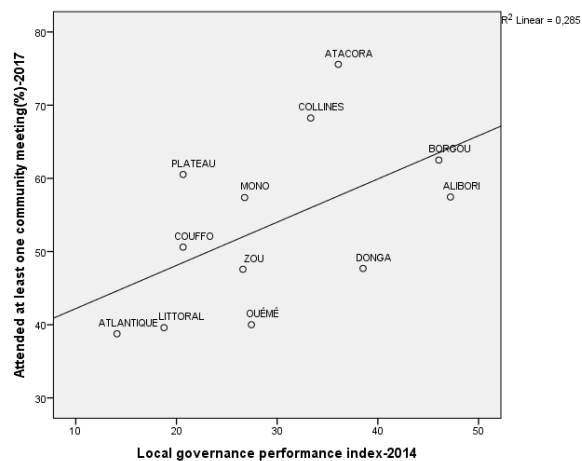
Local governance and civic engagement

In order to better determine the link between good local governance and civic engagement, we use the local governance performance index discussed above and consider the engagement variables probed with the 2017 data, namely attending an accountability session and any meeting organized by the municipal council or town hall, getting together with others to raise an issue, and partaking in a community meeting. Analyses in this section are based on the hypothesis that a good level of local governance can encourage stronger civic engagement. We use the local governance performance index based on 2014 data and civic engagement indicators drawn from 2017 with the expectation that the quality of governance accumulated at a time "t" could contribute to strengthening civic engagement at a time "t+1."

Figure 14 depicts the relationship between the variables. We observe a positive correlation between good governance and civic engagement on these four indicators. For example, municipalities in Atacora, Collines, Borgou, and Alibori regions, where participation in community meetings was massive, perceive a better government performance. A positive correlation between attendance at a public meeting and the municipal council's performance suggests that citizens are more ready to attend a meeting at city hall if they appreciate the performance of city hall in managing the communal heritage.

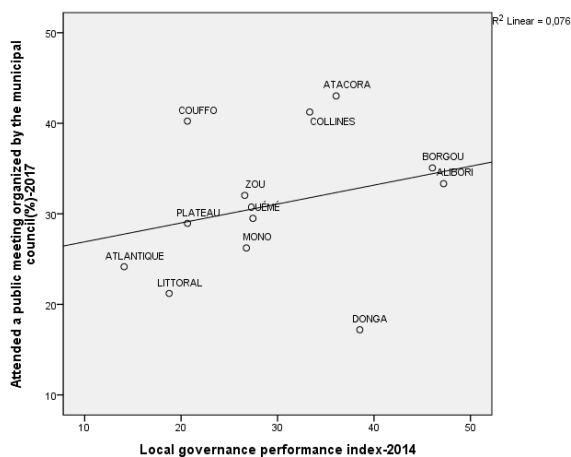**Figure 14: Civic engagement and local governance** | Benin | 2017

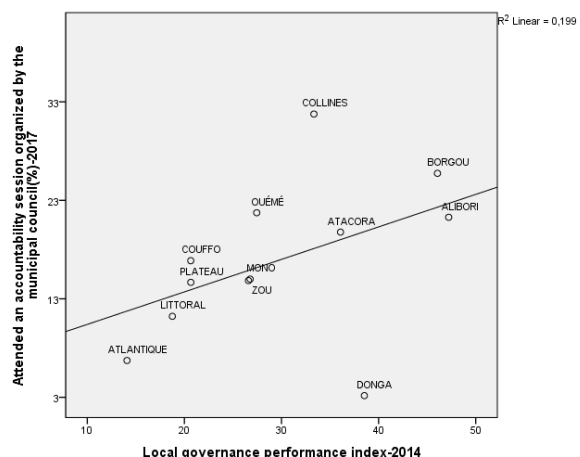### Attending a community meeting

Joining with others to raise an issue
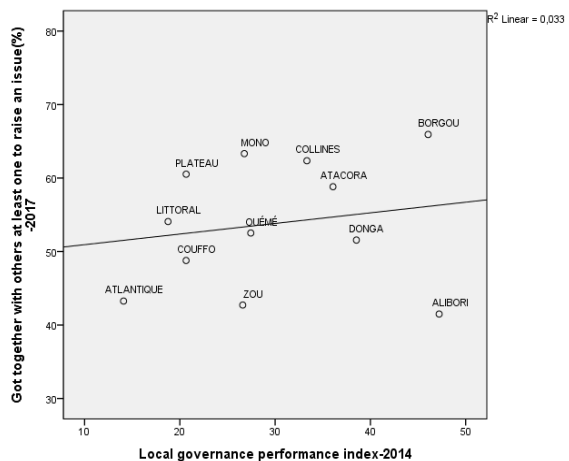
Attending a meeting by local government

Attending an accountability session

If good local governance increases civic engagement, it is also obvious that with appropriate data, one could test the hypothesis that civic engagement improves the activity of the local authority and consequently local governance.

Regression analysis

To determine factors that contribute to good governance at the local level, we conduct a regression analysis, using a linear estimate by ordinary least squares. The dependent variable is the local governance performance index described above. Independent variables are taken from four groups (detailed in Appendix tables A.1 and A.3):

- Political and civic engagement variables
- Community engagement variables
- Socio-demographic variables
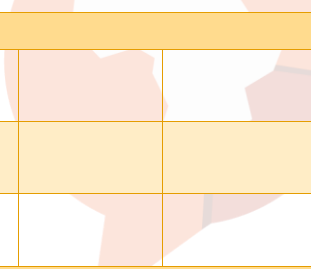- Variables related to municipal council activities

Results and discussion

We carried out four different estimates based on the groups of variables. The results are presented in Table 5.

In community engagement, only membership in a religious group that holds meetings outside worship services is associated with local governance performance at a statistically significant level. This association is strong and negative, indicating that citizens who are active in such groups are less likely to perceive good local governance. One possible explanation might be that rather than devoting time and energy to community issues, such groups focus on typically religious or fraternal support issues.

Table 5: Estimates of good local governance factors | Benin | 2017

Performance index of the municipal council	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Community engagement				
Discuss political matters with friends/family		-0.787 (1.791)		
Joining a religious group		-2.791** (1.313)		
Joining a voluntary association or community group		0.542 (1.527)		
Attending a community meeting		1.078 (1.452)		
Getting together with others to raise an issue		-0.106 (1.336)		
Political and civic engagement				
Interest in public affairs			0.204 (1.135)	
Contacting a municipal councillor			1.703 (1.324)	
Contacting media, such as calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper			4.017** (1.703)	
Contacting a government official to ask for help or make a complaint			-2.869 (1.910)	
Participating in a demonstration or protest march			-3.354** (0.896)	
Trust in the municipal council			8.365*** (1.214)	

Socio-demographic characteristics				
Lived Poverty Index	-9.275*** (1.248)			
Employment	-1.841* (1.050)			
Education	-2.115*** (0.544)			
Municipal council activities				
Serving the people's interests			1.530* (0.896)	
Municipal councillors' involvement in acts of corruption			-4.514*** (1.467)	
Informing populations about council's action plan				4.615* (2.455)
Informing population about council's budget				5.322** (2.440)
Allowing people to participate in council's decision-making processes				2.537 (2.192)
Consulting others before making decisions				3.244 (2.034)
Offering efficient means for managing complaints about councillors				1.479 (2.423)
Guaranteeing a better management of resources				3.473 (2.132)
Conducting activities to benefit marginalized groups				5.971*** (1.810)
Constant	48.83*** (2.670)	29.62*** (2.618)	21.41*** (4.516)	-26.08*** (3.545)
Observations	1189	1181	1159	1061
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
R-squared	0.053	0.004	0.091	0.205

*Standard errors between brackets; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

Political and civic engagement variables also show significant effects. The results suggest that contacting the media, such as calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper, has a positive and significant effect on good local governance. This may mean that citizen feedback via the media makes municipal authorities aware of the quality of their management and thus enables them to improve their work.

But when citizens often take part in a demonstration or protest march, it negatively and significantly impacts their assessment of local authority performance.

The level of public trust is a key determinant of good local governance; as discussed above, trust is a lubricant for local governance, though it seems likely that the effect could move in both directions. In addition, when political party leaders are seen as worrying more about serving the interests of the people rather than their own ambitions, this positively influences local governance performance.

As regards the socio-demographic characteristics, the results show that respondents' lived poverty, level of education, and employment status negatively and significantly impact the assessment of local governance performance.

The lived-poverty estimator is in line with the idea that to the extent that citizens fail to satisfy their basic needs, there is no good local governance. Poverty alleviation as an indicator of good local governance must increase the ability of citizens and their representatives to

control relevant evolution dynamics at the local and global levels (Klein & Raufflet, 2014). Accordingly, we discover that when citizens' lived poverty increases by a unit, that leads to a 9.275-unit deterioration of the municipal council's performance score.

The results also indicate that citizens with more education and those who are employed are more likely to disapprove of local council performance. The perception of municipal councillors' involvement in corruption also worsens the assessment of local governance performance.

But certain actions by the municipal council seem to positively affect local governance performance, including informing the public about the council's action plan and budget and undertaking activities to benefit marginalized groups.

Conclusion

This study examines the notion of local governance and highlights factors contributing to its flowering. Our analyses reveal that Beninese citizens largely disapprove of the management of key local issues and do not fully exploit the concept of proximity between grass-roots actors.

Built on proximity, good local governance is characterized by accountability, in which participation in a public meeting or accountability session organized by the local authority, like other political engagement activities, becomes visible evidence of good municipal council performance.

The results of the econometric analysis reveal the link between local government performance and a variety of factors, such as citizen trust, lived poverty, level of education, employment status, and inclination to contact the media. On the flipside, local government can take actions that consolidate not only its client base but also positive public perceptions of its performance. These include programs to help marginalized groups and better public information about local government's programs and budget.

In the end, we reaffirm that good local governance is integral to development, i.e. that shifting action from the central state to communal institutions undoubtedly constitutes an entry point to sustainable grass-roots development.

To explore these data, visit our online data analysis tool at
www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.
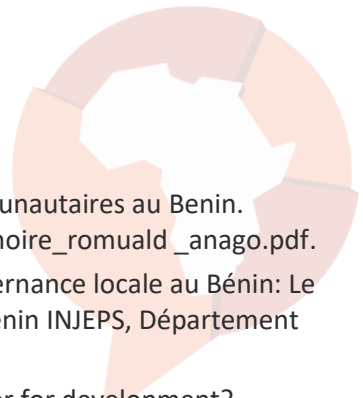
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Appendix

Table A.1: Descriptive analysis of variables

Variable	N	min	average	sd	max
Interest in public affairs	1197	0	1.497911	1.030977	3
Discuss political matters with friends/family	1198	0	.9482471	.6721524	2
Joined a religious group	1194	0	.7345059	.9204933	3
Joined a voluntary association or community group	1199	0	.7422852	.9657603	3
Attended a community meeting	1198	0	2.124374	1.344088	4
Got together with others to raise an issue	1199	0	2.070892	1.333708	4
Contacted municipal councillor	1200	0	.4858333	.9204194	3
Contacted media, such as calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper	1198	0	1.062604	.8176748	4
Contacted a government official to ask for help or make a complaint	1197	0	1.015873	.7122309	4
Participated in a demonstration or protest march	1198	0	.8739566	.8709397	4
Trust in the municipal council	1196	0	1.452341	1.006374	3
Municipal councillors' involvement in acts of corruption	1179	0	1.599661	.816344	3
Informing populations on the council's action plan	1167	1	2.167095	.8065004	4
Informing populations on the council's budget	1172	1	2.069113	.8158349	4
Allowing people to partake in the council's decision-making processes	1182	1	1.957699	.7925804	4
Consulting others before making decisions	1120	1	2.179464	.8396602	4
Offering efficient means for managing complaints about councillors	1119	1	2.003575	.7446804	4
Guaranteeing better management of resources	1171	1	2.003416	.8196238	4
Conducting activities to benefit marginalized groups	1173	1	1.990622	.8266554	4
Employment	1200	0	.7075	1.090689	3
Education	1198	0	2.155259	2.135964	7
Lived Poverty Index	1199	0	1.493912	.9106793	4

Table A.2: Questions used to build the local governance performance index

What about local government? I do not mean the national government. I mean your municipal or local government council. How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?					
	Very badly	Fairly badly	Fairly well	Very well	Don't know
A. Local road maintenance	1	2	3	4	9
B. Local marketplace maintenance	1	2	3	4	9
C-BEN Keeping our community clean, for example through trash pickup	1	2	3	4	9
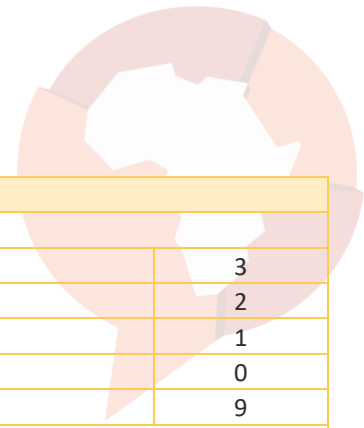
Table A.3: Questions used for estimates

Political and civic engagement variables	
Question: How interested would you say you are in public affairs?	
Very interested	3
Somewhat interested	2
Not very interested	1
Not at all interested	0
Don't know	9

Question: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?

	Never	Only once	Sometimes	Often	Don't know
A. A municipal councillor	0	1	2	3	9

Question: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens when they are dissatisfied with government performance. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

	YES			NO		
	Often	Several times	Once or twice	Would if had the chance	Would never do this	Don't know
A. Joined others in your community to request action from government	4	3	2	1	0	9
B. Contacted the media, like calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper	4	3	2	1	0	9
E. Participating in a demonstration or protest march	4	3	2	1	0	9

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

	Not at all	Just a little	Somewhat	A lot	Don't know
E. Your municipal council	0	1	2	3	9

Variables related to the municipal council's activities	
Question: Do you think political party leaders in this country are more interested in serving the people's interests, or more interested in advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?	
More in serving the people – Strongly agree	5
More in serving the people – Agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	3
More in serving their own political ambitions – Agree	2
More in serving their own political ambitions – Strongly agree	1
Don't know	9

Question: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

	None	Some of them	Most of them	All of them	Don't know
Municipal councillors	0	1	2	3	9

Question: How do you think your municipal/communal council implements the following actions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

	Very badly	Fairly badly	Fairly well	Very well	Don't know
A. Informing populations on the council's action plan	1	2	3	4	9
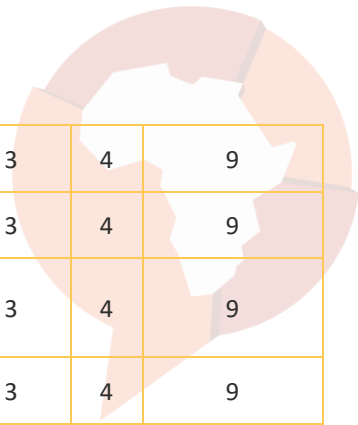
B.	Informing populations on the council's budget (i.e. resources and usage)	1	2	3	4	9
C.	Allowing people like you to partake in the council's decision-making processes	1	2	3	4	9
D.	Consulting others (including traditional leaders, civil society, the community) before making decisions	1	2	3	4	9
E.	Offering efficient means for managing complaints about councillors or civil servants	1	2	3	4	9
F.	Guarantee that local resources are affected to public needs rather than private interests	1	2	3	4	9
G.	Conducting activities that benefit marginalized groups (for example people living with handicaps, youth, women)	1	2	3	4	9

Community participation variables

Question: When you get together with your friends and family, would you say you discuss political matters?

Frequently	2
Occasionally	1
Never	0
Don't know	9

Question: Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member?

		Official leader	Active member	Inactive member	Not a member	Don't know
A.	A religious group that meets outside of regular worship services	3	2	1	0	9
B.	Some other voluntary association or community group	3	2	1	0	9

Question: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

|		YES			NO		Don't know
		Often	Sometimes	Once or twice	Would if had the chance	Would never do this	
A.	Participating in a community meeting	4	3	2	1	0	9
B.	Getting together with others to raise an issue	4	3	2	1	0	9

Socio-demographic variables

Question: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? *[if yes:]* Is it full-time or part-time? *[if no:]* Are you presently looking for a job?

No (not looking)	0
No (looking)	1
Yes, part time	2
Yes, full time	3
Don't know	9

Question: What is your highest level of education?

No formal schooling	0
Informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)	1
Some primary school	2
Primary school completed	3
Intermediate school or some secondary school/high school	4
Secondary school/high school completed	5
Post-secondary qualifications other than university (diploma or degree from a polytechnic or college)	6
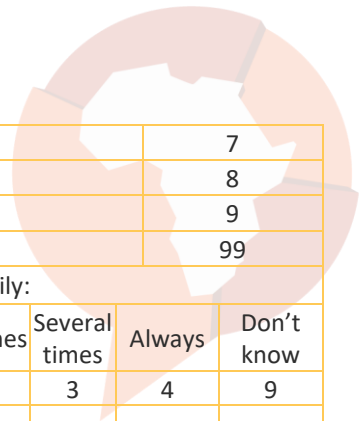
Some university	7
University completed	8
Post-graduate	9
Don't know	99

Question: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family:

		Never	Just once or twice	Sometimes	Several times	Always	Don't know
A.	Gone without enough food to eat?	0	1	2	3	4	9
B.	Gone without enough clean water for home use?	0	1	2	3	4	9
C.	Gone without medicines or medical treatment?	0	1	2	3	4	9
D.	Gone without enough fuel to cook your food?	0	1	2	3	4	9
E.	Gone without a cash income?	0	1	2	3	4	9

Source: Afrobarometer

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