

Competence, Loyalty, and Control: Indirect Governance of Violence, Economy, and Religion in Africa

Workshop (24-25th July 2024), WISER, Johannesburg

Scientific organizers:

Youssef Mnaili, WISER, Wits /IAS, CEU

Laura Philipps, WISER, Wits

Keith Breckenridge, WISER, Wits

Call for Papers

Delegation – or indirect rule - is ubiquitous. Leaders at the state level rely on a network of actors, including local and national bureaucrats, judges, central bankers, constitutional courts, and others, to implement orders, policies, and regulations aimed at influencing people's behaviour. Internationally, they turn to entities like international organizations, warlords, and military firms to advance their policies on the global stage. Business executives depend on their corporate officers, managers, and foremen, while Mafia chiefs rely on their henchmen. Similarly, colonial governors used to delegate authority to chiefs for the administration of colonial territories. Ideally, leaders aim to enlist capable and loyal agents to faithfully execute their visions and goals. However, policies are rarely meticulously implemented; rather, they are modified throughout the various chain of delegation. As such, agents may exhibit unpredictable conduct, leading to varied outcomes that affect both the leader and the public interest.

Delegation is a well-discussed feature of colonial history in Africa (Mamdani 1996). Using – and sometimes creating – chiefs or traditional leaders to rule subject populations, colonial powers relied on local leaders to facilitate governance and reduce the costs associated with direct rule (Berry 1992). More recently, historians have also paid attention to other, or more 'ordinary,' African intermediaries who facilitated colonial rule, from interpreters to court clerks to soldiers (Moyn 2014; Lawrance et al 2002). The interest in expanding the category of intermediaries beyond chiefs and traditional leaders reflected a growing concern to conceptualise Africans as more than just victims or collaborators in the colonial project, paying attention to the ways that people made meaning of their day-to-day work, their position in society and how they navigated the hierarchies of colonialism.

The notion of delegation occupies a central position within the domain of political economy. Elected officials frequently delegate authority to intermediaries established by market operators and participants to oversee trading practices and market products. Such intermediaries encompass private market organizations, boards of trade, and exchanges. Regulatory efforts primarily target profit-seeking market participants, including banks, hedge funds, commission houses, and commodity future merchants. Within the context of central banking, governors grapple with decisions concerning the delegation of control over monetary policy to independent central banks, aiming to cultivate market trust, or retaining control to leverage

economic stimulation during politically opportune junctures (Majone, 2001; Bowker, 2013; Elster, 2000).

Moreover, delegation assumes salience within the realm of religion. Existing literature on the political integration of religious groups scrutinizes the processes, mechanisms, and institutions geared towards harnessing the legitimacy of religious groups or fostering their moderation and/or embrace of democratic politics (Villalón, 1995; Baskan, 2011; McCauley, 2013). The management of violence often entails indirect modes of governance. Rather than directly engaging with other states, governments frequently opt for indirect strategies, such as bolstering rebel groups to combat adversaries (Heinkelmann-Wild and Mehrl, 2022; Salehyan, 2010). Additionally, it merits recognition that armed conflicts have undergone a trajectory of increasing privatization (Berdal, 2011; Duffield, 1999). Consequently, private military entities have assumed an increasingly central, albeit contentious, role in the conduct of warfare itself (Carey, Mitchell, & Paula, 2022; McFate, 2014). Similarly, leaders rely on the armed forces and secret police for governance, overseeing the state's administration and appointing top bureaucrats to regulate the nation's ethnic elites and uphold political stability (Hassan, 2020).

For social scientists, the classical framework for addressing delegation is the Principal-Agent problem/theory (P-A). Such an approach had dominated the study of delegation in domestic, comparative, and international politics and across policy fields (Bendor et al. 2001, Eisenhardt 1989, Hawkins et al. 2006, Miller 2005, Pollack 2003). Simply put, PA draws from rational choice theories, arguing that rational instrumental actors systematically delegate most of their activities to agents to lower the transaction costs of policy makings. For PA theory, on the one hand, agents are inherently opportunistic; they exploit their autonomy to further their own self-interest. On the other hand, the main problem of delegation is control. PA assumes an informational asymmetry between principals and agents when explaining the discrepancy between intent and outcome. The agent can dispose of private information which is inaccessible to the principal and thus, can pursue distinct goals. Agents may avoid their duties rather than work and pursue private objectives which differ from those of the principal. The solution is to set a delegation contract that through rewards, penalties, monitoring, and other methods, limits the latitude that agents have for slacking and shirking.

Interestingly, PA theory usually treats agents' competence and loyalty and motivations as secondary concerns. Recently, Abbott et al. (2020, 2022) introduced a new elaboration of principal-agent theory: the Governor's Dilemma (GD). They contend that delegation creates fundamental problems of power and loyalty (2022). On the one hand, they put forward the assumption that even with perfect information, the principal will not necessarily hire a competent agent. Governors are confronted with a trade-off: if they choose competent intermediaries with greater operational capacity, legitimacy, credibility, and expertise, they might lose control over them. The governor cannot simply strengthen its control as this will weaken the competencies of its intermediaries. If they choose incompetent intermediaries that are easier to control, they fear policy failure.

On the other hand, intermediaries are not inherently self-seeking and driven by guile. They may not be purely self-interested and instead motivated by different forms of loyalty (to leaders, policies, or institutions). Interestingly, Abbott et al suggest that each form of loyalty comes with its own challenges. The varieties of loyalties impact governors differently and can affect how well regulations and governance succeed or fail. In practice, loyal intermediaries might go above and beyond what the governor expects, be overly cautious, or commit too much, leading to unexpected consequences that could end up causing problems for the governors (Abbott et al., 2022).

Therefore, the governor's dilemma boils down to effectively balancing mobilizing competence without sacrificing control, engaging loyal intermediaries, and preventing pathological and excessive alignment with intermediary loyalties. The Governor's Dilemma significantly broadens the theoretical landscape of indirect governance studies. More crucially, it challenges the idealized portrayal of the Principal-Agent (PA) theory, demonstrating its inadequacy even in Western cases. Consequently, its application to the African context and the broader Global South may be fundamentally flawed. Hence, the institutional design of indirect governance becomes pivotal in comprehending policy success and failures, as well as changes and continuities in social, economic, and political structures. The main focus of this project is to explore the concepts of power and loyalty in instances of delegation within the African context.

The project spans a wide array of policy areas, covering topics such as the indirect management of the economy, religious influences, and the dynamics of violence. The potential for contributions is vast, and the following are just a few examples of questions that submissions may address:

- What is the relationship between chiefs and other intermediaries in colonial Africa?
- What explains intermediaries' varied relationship to the colonial state?
- How can we conceptualise colonial intermediaries beyond the collaborator/victim dichotomy or the more recent interest in 'agency'?
- How, why and when state co-opt religious leaders?
- How do state officials control religious leaders who may act in ways deemed unruly or contrary to state interests?
- Under what circumstances, why, and how does the state co-opt religious leaders? How do state officials exert control over religious leaders whose actions are perceived as unruly or contrary to state interests?
- How do elected officials navigate the tensions between delegating control over monetary policy to independent central banks for market trust and retaining control for politically advantageous economic stimulation?
- What are the dynamics of interaction between public market regulators and private ones?
- When, why, and how do state leaders engage private military companies?
- What measures are taken when the competence of these companies becomes excessive?
- How do leaders manage control and address the increasing empowerment of military and police institutions?
- What criteria do states consider when seeking the support of rebel groups in foreign countries? How do they enlist their support, and what mechanisms are used to control them?

Submission Guidelines: 500 words abstract and a short Bio to : youssef.mnaili@wits.ac.za

Important Dates

- **Submission Deadline:** 15 March 2024
- **Notification of Acceptance:** 22 March 2024
- **Workshop Date:** 24th -25th July

Format: The organizers will make every effort to cover travel expenses and accommodation in Johannesburg, with the option for hybrid participation also available.