Service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy

Findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

June 2017

Cover photo: case files and reference books lay waiting during a brief recess at the magistrate's court in Makeni, Sierra Leone. © Aubrey Wade.

Preface

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on state-building, service delivery and livelihood recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations. It began in 2011 with funding from the UK's Department for International Development, Irish Aid and the European Commission.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core questions, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception period in which the consortium set about identifying major evidence gaps:

- To what extent and under what conditions does the delivery of basic services and social protection contribute towards state legitimacy in fragile and conflict-affected situations?

- How do external actors attempt to develop the capacities of states in fragile and conflict-affected situations to deliver better services – and how fit for purpose are the dominant approaches?

- What do livelihood trajectories in fragile and conflict-affected situations tell us about how governments and aid agencies can more effectively support the ways in which people make a living?

From 2011 to 2016 – the duration of SLRC's first phase – the consortium implemented packages of quantitative and qualitative research across eight countries affected by fragility and conflict to varying degrees: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

This paper is one of a series of 'synthesis reports' produced at the end of SLRC's first phase. These reports bring together and analyse all relevant material on SLRC's overarching research questions, with a view to drawing out broader lessons that will be of use to policy makers, practitioners and researchers. There are five in total:

- Service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy. A synthesis of SLRC's material on the first overarching research question above.

- Service delivery and state capacity. A synthesis of SLRC's material on its second overarching research question.

- Livelihoods, conflict and recovery. A synthesis of SLRC's material on its third overarching research question.

- Markets, conflict and recovery. A more focused synthesis of the role that markets and the private sector play in processes of livelihood recovery. It links to and informs the 'Livelihoods, conflict and recovery' report.

- Tracking livelihoods, service delivery and governance. A synthesis of SLRC' cross-country survey findings, drawing on two rounds of data collection with the same respondents.

Although specific authors were responsible for the analysis and writing of each synthesis report, all must ultimately be considered products of a collective, consortium-wide effort. They simply would not have been possible without the efforts and outputs of SLRC's various partner organisations. They include the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in the UK, the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University in the USA, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies at Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), Focus 1000 in Sierra Leone, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

CEPA	Centre for Poverty Analysis (Sri Lanka)	**OECD**	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee		
DFID	Department for International Development	**PML-N**	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
		PTI	Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	**SCD**	Systematic Country Diagnostic
EC	European Commission	**SLRC**	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
GN	Grama Niladhari (Sri Lanka)		
NCCR	Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research	**VDC**	Village Development Committee (Nepal)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute	**WDR**	World Development Report

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Executive summary

State-building has provided the framework for international engagement in countries affected by conflict for at least the past decade. Despite this, there remains a surprising lack of certainty about how aid can best be used to support the restoration of state functionality and the repair of state-citizen relations, both of which are often assumed to have collapsed under the weight of conflict.

Service delivery is considered one of the few viable 'entry points' into this complex enterprise, offering donors and agencies a relatively tangible means of supporting these processes. The central logic here is that, by building governments' capacity to deliver their 'core functions' – typically seen to include things like basic services, security and order – it is simultaneously possible to heal the strained relationships between citizens and state actors, which is, in turn, considered good for peacebuilding. It is for this reason that, particularly since the formation of the New Deal in 2011, service delivery programming in conflict-affected situations has become rebranded as an instrument of state-building, with particular emphasis on its assumed legitimating qualities.

The problem is that this logic is based more on received wisdom than empirical evidence. While lessons from history suggest that public service provision has often been a central component of the social contracts that accompany processes of state formation, these ideas have been applied to modern state-building policy in a fairly reductive fashion and with little in the way of updated empirical support.

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) has attempted to help change that. Established in 2011 with funding from the UK's Department for International Development, Irish Aid and the European Commission, SLRC has carried out a series of studies designed to test some of the assumptions that underpin much of the aid spending in this area. The purpose of this report is to synthesise and make sense of this collection of studies.

What we did

Focusing on sub-national regions of eight fragile and conflict-affected countries – Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda – SLRC has used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine the links between people's experiences with service delivery and their relationships with the state. Analysis considered a range of basic services – including health, education, and water and sanitation (WASH) – but also extended to social protection transfers and livelihoods assistance.

The 'quantitative core' of SLRC's approach has been a panel survey administered to more than 8,000 individuals, in five of the eight countries, at two separate points in time (in most cases, 2012 and 2015). Interviewing the exact same respondents in both rounds has enabled the SLRC to build a rigorous, longitudinal dataset that directly tracks changes in people's livelihoods, their access to services and their relationships with authority over time – and, crucially, to identify relationships between these things. Alongside the survey, SLRC has also implemented packages of qualitative work designed to generate more in-depth case study material as a complement to the statistical analysis. A full list of all relevant SLRC studies covered in this report can be found in Section 2, along with detail on the Consortium's methodological and conceptual approach to these issues.

Legitimacy is a notoriously difficult-to-measure concept. The SLRC approach to navigating this has been to focus primarily on *empirical value-based legitimacy* – in short, people's own beliefs about and perceptions of a given authority's trustworthiness (in this respect, most of the country survey instruments have focused on government actors). It is clear from a stocktake of the recent literature on state-building – see Section 3 – that while this approach does not tell us everything about legitimacy, it does tell us some things. SLRC's research is thus best understood as an attempt to shed light on a *particular segment* of a longer causal pathway connecting

people's beliefs about authority, the expression of those through perceptions and moral attitudes, behavioural changes vis-à-vis compliance with rules and norms, and the whole multitude of factors that have potential influence over these issues. Moreover, despite these caveats of the approach, a better understanding of what shapes the way people living in conflict-affected and recovering countries *think* and *feel* about their governments remains a valuable empirical contribution in and of itself – regardless of whether 'actual legitimacy' follows.

What we found

Within the literature, there is growing recognition that it is the dynamics of *how* services are provided that shapes whether they are capable of delivering legitimating effects (or rather, *indications* of legitimating effects via changes in beliefs and perceptions). The SLRC evidence lends broad support to this idea, but also raises some questions about the ability of public services to help 'cement in' social contracts across diverse contexts. Three sets of key findings stand out from the SLRC's research in this area.

The first is that **service delivery is just one of many factors shaping people's perceptions of government – and it is rarely the most important**. Perception changes appear to be more strongly associated with what one might think of as 'bigger' and 'deeper' variables. For example, shifts in political context, such as regime change in Pakistan and Sri Lanka and the enactment of a new constitution in Nepal, proved particularly influential. So too were a series of what statisticians call 'time invariant' characteristics, including gender, ethnicity and location – all important underlying aspects of identity that appear to heavily and consistently condition people's views towards those in power.

Straightforward, 'exterior' aspects of provision such as physical distance-related access and provider identity, matter very little when it comes to shaping people's perceptions. Neither the quantitative or qualitative research suggest these particular characteristics possess a strong or consistent 'legitimating potential'. Therefore, it raises questions about whether governments must necessarily be at the frontline of delivery in situations of conflict and recovery.

In contrast, the SLRC evidence does suggest that **certain aspects of the way in which services are delivered and experienced – their more 'interior' dimensions – can influence the way people think about government**. Social

accountability emerges as particularly important, with grievance mechanisms linked to positive perception change present in a number of cases. Participation also matters, which can occur when citizens are engaged through community meetings and consultations. But what also comes out strongly is the potential for service delivery to actively damage people's perceptions of government. This is particularly the case when people have had bad experiences at facilities or in those spaces of accountability and interaction. Indeed, these characteristics prove to be more influential than subjective assessments of service quality that use satisfaction rankings. Linked to this is the finding that, across a wide range of SLRC's qualitative research, perceived unfairness, corruption or exclusion are important factors influencing how people connect their experience of services to their views of government. This speaks to the idea, already established by historical evidence, that services have the potential to act as vehicles for transmitting or signalling wider norms and values – both for the good, and the bad.

What it all means for policy

The SLRC evidence provides insights into how to think more appropriately about legitimacy and its relationship with service delivery in fragile and conflict-affected situations. As a starting point, there is an **important role for the underlying narratives about and expectations of the state in influencing how people respond to services**. 'Legitimating narratives' vary by country, and even by sub-national region and social group, essentially meaning that the precise nature of legitimacy looks different from one place to the next (and indeed, can change over time). The implication is that processes of legitimation are driven not by a uniform set of pre-established normative factors, but by factors that are ultimately contextual – provision of basic services and transfers may or may not come into the picture. Prior political and historical analysis of the local sources of legitimacy is therefore an absolute must when it comes to establishing whether service delivery is likely to carry any real degree of legitimating potential in a given setting.

It follows that **legitimacy can be better understood as a relational quality rather than a characteristic of a given organisation or institution**. This means that the narratives, norms and expectations of those conferring legitimacy – citizens – are as important as the more objective characteristics of services and the technical functioning or pure capacity of the state. It also means that, if a process of legitimation is to occur, then the

performance, decisions and rules of governance actors must be perceived and experienced as fair and in line with citizens' fundamental beliefs. If they are not, then as the evidence suggests, a process of *de*-legitimation is possible. In this sense, the state is less understood as an object than as a set of relationships built around different, sometimes competing, legitimating narratives (which may or may not include those around the delivery of services).

In addition to these conceptual insights, **a series of more practical policy recommendations emerge from SLRC's evidence. There are six in particular:**

- **Do not overestimate the contribution of service delivery to political legitimation**. State-building strategies that place a heavy emphasis on services as a route to improved perceptions of government, and potentially increased political legitimacy, are overly simplistic. In some contexts, there will likely be little to no legitimating effect of improved service delivery, particularly when improvements are taken to mean expansion and scale-up in and of itself. Instead, the role of broader changes to the political context – including changing political settlements, new constitutions, major regime alterations – as well as historically rooted structural factors are likely to act as much more powerful conditioning factors.

- **Prioritise and deliver services for their own sake, but recognise that they may simultaneously have political effects**. Regardless of whether it contributes to legitimacy, service delivery is important in its own right. Investing in better provision can be justified on the basis of the more 'traditional' yet still crucial impacts that quality services are capable of delivering, especially in relation to human welfare and wellbeing. At the same time, from a political perspective, there is a case for taking a 'do no harm' approach to programming to mitigate the potential delegitimating effects of bad service delivery.

- **Invest in understanding historical and political narrative factors that influence how services may be responded to and interpreted by different social groups**. Pay attention to the way that services in general and in particular are framed by individuals, households, communities and societies. This requires understanding the role that services may or may not have played in earlier processes of state formation, during periods of conflict, and throughout phases of recovery.

- **Do not conflate local and national**. The evidence shows that changes in both political context and service delivery are filtered quite differently on the basis of scale. There appears to be a fairly widespread 'local advantage' in terms of perception change, whereas national-level actors seem to accrue lower levels of 'reward'. The problems of perceived exclusion or unfairness additionally seem to project upwards. It is, therefore, important to 'disaggregate the state' when considering processes of legitimation.

- **Design and implement programming that responds to these conditions**. While there may be an understandable imperative to emphasise access to services in places affected by and recovering from conflict, SLRC's findings suggest that issues of design and process are important in avoiding negative perception change. In these settings, perhaps more than anywhere else given their potential volatility, programming needs to be able to support robust contextual awareness, local variation, and learning and adaptation. This includes remaining open and flexible to the possibility that changes in service delivery may generate unintended consequences vis-à-vis people's relationship with the state.

- **Learn more about the complex links between services, perceptions and legitimacy**. The SLRC research sheds light on a particular part of the causal pathway underpinning these issues, and can be used to develop more sophisticated and refined theories of change for programming. But other parts of that pathway remain quite poorly understood.

Image: interview, Afghanistan. Credit: Ihsanullah Ghafoori, edited by James Mauger.

1 Introduction

This synthesis paper presents the findings of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) about people's 'experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations', and connects these findings to relevant theory and related empirical evidence on state legitimacy.[1] This question of state legitimacy – and of how to build or strengthen it – is important because it bears on domestic and international strategies to stabilise and establish state authority in such situations. In particular, SLRC studied closely the possible relationships between public services and people's perceptions of government, at both central and local levels, in order to investigate the question of 'whether government provision of basic services actually contributes to state-building via its possible effects on state legitimacy'.[2]

A prominent line of argument – with a heavy influence over development programming in fragile and conflict-affected situations – holds that the provision of public services is an important source of state legitimacy. While there is limited evidence for this orthodoxy, and considerable nuance regarding the foundations of state legitimacy in the academic literature, the positioning of service delivery as a route to state legitimacy continues to occupy a central position in the state-building policy agenda (Carpenter *et al.*, 2012; Mcloughlin, 2015a). SLRC research has now generated a robust and wide-ranging quantitative and qualitative evidence base to affirm that this relationship is far from simple.

Instead, what the evidence shows is that many other factors are involved in shaping people's perceptions of government – and that where public services *do* play a role, their effects are not straightforward but rather conditional on a series of contextual factors. The evidence supports a conception of legitimacy that emphasises its relational aspects – the norms, expectations, narratives and experiences that shape different people's relationship to the state are very important. They condition heavily the impact that the presence, absence, quality and process of delivering public services have on people's perceptions of their governments.

1.1   Structure of the report

This synthesis report is split into six remaining parts. **Section 2** introduces the SLRC research on this theme in

1   See www.securelivelihoods.org/content/2251/What-we-do. SLRC's other two research themes focus on building state capacity, and livelihoods and economic recovery in and after conflict.
2   As above.

greater depth, starting with an overview of the programme as a whole before outlining its methodological and conceptual approach to the study of services and legitimacy. Within this section, a list of all relevant SLRC research on this theme – i.e. of each SLRC study referenced in this report – can be found in Table 1.

In positioning the contribution of SLRC's work in this area, **Section 3** reviews the conceptual underpinnings of approaches to state-building that emphasise services' potential to contribute to political legitimacy, and examines its limitations. This discussion draws on a prior literature review carried out during SLRC's 'inception phase' (see Carpenter *et al.*, 2012), as well as an updated sweep of the relevant literature to capture more recent developments.

Sections 4 to 6 constitute the analytical core of the paper, reviewing and synthesising both SLRC's quantitative and qualitative work on factors influencing people's perceptions of government – alongside, where appropriate, relevant material from the wider literature. **Section 4** turns first to some of the *most* significant factors that shape perceptions. As it turns out, these are *not* rooted in the data on services at all, but rather derive from other aspects of the research

on context, expectations and experiences. Moving on to the specific role of service delivery, **Section 5** reviews SLRC's findings on what might be considered the 'straightforward' aspects of services, such as access and the provider's identity. **Section 6** examines service delivery further, considering the Consortium's findings on the role of process (how something is designed and delivered), experience (the actual nature of people's interactions with services and their providers) and narratives (the political backdrop against which services are judged) in shaping perceptions. In each of these three analytical sections, SLRC empirical research is signposted through the use of **bold font** when discussing particular countries, helping readers to distinguish between SLRC's own evidence and that from the wider literature (see also Table 1 in Section 2 for a full listing of the SLRC studies drawn on in this report). Additionally, a short 'abstract' at the beginning of each of the three sections summarises the key points arising from each.

Finally, **Section 7** concludes by i) drawing out what this all means for how one might think about and understand the relationships between service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy, and ii) identifying six implications for policy making in this area.

2 Methods and material

The aim of this section is to introduce SLRC's research into the relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy. It is formed of three sub-sections, beginning with a short overview of both the SLRC research agenda as a whole and its broad methodological approach. It then moves on to a more specific discussion of how SLRC has engaged with the subject of services and legitimacy, with particular attention paid to its investigation of experiences, perceptions and expectations. It is in this sub-section that a full listing of all relevant studies can be found, each with a hyperlink to its online location. The section ends by reflecting on some of the more conceptual issues affecting, and indeed constraining, studies of legitimacy.

2.1   What is SLRC?

SLRC is a six-year (2011-2016) cross-country programme, primarily concerned with better understanding processes of state-building and recovery in eight countries, all of which are or have been affected by conflict in some way. These include Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nepal, Uganda, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Sri Lanka.

The SLRC's research has focused on three core themes:

1   **The links between service delivery and state legitimacy**. Work under this theme has looked at the way in which basic services (including health, education, water and sanitation) and transfers (including social protection payments) interact with and influence the relationships between citizens and authorities. More specifically, it has sought to test the assumption that improvements in service delivery also generate improvements in the way citizens think about and relate to government. This report represents the synthesis of SLRC's material on this first area of research.

2   **The links between service delivery and state capacity**. Whether or not services carry with them a 'legitimating quality', their delivery remains important in a more basic sense: ensuring populations get educated and remain healthy are fundamental objectives in their own right. SLRC research under this theme has asked what state capacity to deliver effective services in fragile and conflict-affected situations actually looks like, and critically explored the way in which international actors think about and operationalise ideas of 'capacity building'. SLRC's research into state capacity has been synthesised in a separate report (see Denney *et al.*, 2017).

3   **Livelihood recovery.** The emphasis of work under this theme has been on understanding how individuals, households and communities stay afloat during conflict and rebuild their livelihoods afterwards. Among other things, it has sought to examine the role that markets, infrastructure, aid programming and state support play (or not) in the process of recovery. The full range of SLRC livelihoods research has been synthesised in Maxwell *et al.* (2017), while a more tightly focused synthesis of SLRC's 'market studies' can be found in Mallett and Pain (2017).

In order to generate evidence that addresses each of these three themes, SLRC has implemented packages of both quantitative and qualitative research in selected sub-national regions of its eight focus countries.

The quantitative part of the SLRC programme comprises a five-country longitudinal panel survey, administered twice to the same respondents with a roughly three-year interval separating the two waves (the synthesised findings from this work are presented in Sturge *et al.* [2017a], and are drawn on extensively throughout this paper). The SLRC panel presents an opportunity to go beyond cross-sectional analysis, generating information about changes in the sample over time and the specific trajectories that individuals and their households have followed. More specifically, the surveys were designed to generate information about changes in:

■   People's livelihoods (income-generation, asset portfolios, food security, constraining and enabling factors within the broader institutional and geographical context);

■   Their access to basic services (education, health, water), social protection and livelihoods assistance; and

■   Their relationships with governance processes and practices (participation in public meetings, experience with grievance mechanisms, perceptions of major political actors).

In the interest of openness, it is worth highlighting three characteristics of the SLRC surveys that should caveat the resulting findings. First, the surveys were not designed to be nationally representative. Rather, they were focused on testing a series of hypotheses and potential relationships between different variables within each of the three themes, and to examine whether any patterns emerge across the five contexts. Second, due to the lifespan of the programme, data has been drawn at only two points in time, thus limiting the ability of the research to capture and analyse long-term trends and changes. And third, because the survey instruments covered a wide range of

topics and themes, the design team had to make difficult choices about how much data they would be able to realistically generate on each, with implications for the depth and sophistication of specific measures and proxies. For example, a survey tasked solely with better understanding people's access to basic services would be able to incorporate multi-dimensional measures of that particular variable – something which was not possible in the SLRC surveys given the breadth of their investigation.

In addition to the extensive survey work just described, SLRC partners each engaged in a wide programme of qualitative field research on a range of themes suited to the particular context. Specific methods were varied, ranging from participant observation and ethnographic immersion to in-depth interviews with key informants and research participants.

Both SLRC's quantitative and qualitative research was informed and designed in response to literature reviews carried out during the Consortium's early 'inception phase', which also gave rise to each of the three overarching research themes. For the purposes of this synthesis report, the original literature review by Carpenter *et al.* (2012) – on service delivery and social protection in conflict-affected situations – has been revisited and updated with existing literature.

2.2   How were people's experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state studied?

SLRC approached this complex research theme through a combination of its quantitative and qualitative research.

The survey research gathered data on various individual, household and contextual factors, people's access to and experience of various public services and livelihoods assistance, while also measuring people's reported

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Box 1: Survey questions on perceptions of government

1   To what extent do you feel that the decisions of those in power in the government reflect your own priorities?

[Respondents asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5]

2   Do you agree with the following statement? "The government cares about my opinions".

[Respondents asked to select either 'no' or 'yes']

perception of the state at central and local levels. By doing so, it was able to investigate relationships between these and other factors, as well as the effect of changes over time on these relationships. The survey asked about two aspects of state performance in particular: the degree to which respondents feel government decisions reflect their priorities, and whether government 'cares about my opinions' (Box 1).

Each of the questions in Box 1 was asked twice: in relation to local government, and in relation to central government.[3] It is these questions that form the basis of the dependent variables.[4] Subsequently, regressions were run against these four separate dependent variables. Part of the analysis thus involved reading across the four regression outputs to establish patterns and consistencies, as well as to prise out variations according to level of government. In this report, where appropriate, we state which dependent variable we are referring to, referring to them as the 'reflect priorities' and 'cares about opinion' dependent variables. The survey was specifically designed to investigate several hypotheses related to services, presented in Box 2.

In addition to analysing these service delivery issues, the survey was used to explore additional hypotheses about what may influence perceptions of local and central government. These factors include individual and household characteristics such as gender, education level and, in some cases reported ethnicity or caste. They also attempt to capture the impact of experiences, such as worsening perceived safety, recent economic or other shocks, or displacement. These hypotheses present a picture of the relationships between various factors – both objective and subjective – and people's reported perception of government at both national and local levels.

Each country partner also engaged in significant programmes of qualitative research across SLRC's three themes, which included some places where the SLRC survey itself could not be implemented.[6] This research, while varying by country, included a focus on people's experience and perceptions of public services, and their interpretation of these in relation to the state. In some cases, the qualitative research was carried out in the same localities as the survey and was more closely aligned with the survey questions. In others, the country teams investigated a wider range of experiences, and the link between the quantitative and qualitative findings was less direct. A full listing of all relevant SLRC research on service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy can be found in Table 1 on the following page , which also includes hyperlinks to each study.

2.3   Scope and conceptual issues

The underlying rationale behind SLRC's focus on perceptions of the state is a concern with the sources of legitimacy in conflict-affected situations. This is due to the importance legitimacy is purported to have for other important outcomes, such as stability. However, as already made clear, the SLRC survey does not, in fact, measure legitimacy directly. Similarly, much of the qualitative research approaches this question indirectly, via people's experience of services, their reported perceptions and expectations, and the narratives they give regarding the state's role. This measurement problem is common in the study of legitimacy – and, in fact, there is no single agreed way to measure the concept. As Mcloughlin describes in a careful exploration of this problem, since one 'cannot observe it directly', legitimacy 'reveals itself through thoughts and behaviours' (Mcloughlin, 2015b: 1).

> **Box 2: Selected research hypotheses on services and the state[5]**
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> ■   Respondents living in households that have better access to basic services, social protection or livelihood assistance have more positive perceptions of the government
>
> ■   Respondents who have a more positive experience with basic services have more positive perceptions of the government
>
> ■   Respondents who have access to grievance mechanisms within public services have more positive perceptions of government
>
> ■   Respondents with higher levels of civic participation have more positive perceptions of government

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3   In some countries – DRC, for example – respondents were also asked about a wider range of governance actors, including customary authorities such as local kings and chiefs.

4   Minor variations to phrasing and language were adopted by each country team with maximum standardisation as the objective. This is another reason why the data has been analysed as a set of national results, and not as a cross-national dataset.

5   For the full set of hypotheses, see Mallett *et al.* (2015: 8-15).

6   Despite the inability to implement the survey, a significant research programme was implemented in Afghanistan. In South Sudan, the second wave of the survey was cancelled due to security concerns following the outbreak of factional fighting. In Sierra Leone, research on state capacity was undertaken without a survey.

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Country	Study	Methods
Afghanistan	Synthesis of SLRC research into politics and governance in Afghanistan Jackson, 2016	Synthesis of multiple studies, primarily qualitative
	Networks of access Jackson and Minoia, 2016	Briefing based on Jackson (2016)
	Mapping village-level governance Pain and Sturge, 2015	Village-level surveys; focus groups; key informant interviews; cluster analysis
DRC	DRC baseline survey de Milliano et al., 2015	Survey ($N = 1,259$}
	DRC panel survey Ferf et al., 2016	Survey ($N = 1,040$)
Nepal	Access to water services in Rolpa Acharya et al., 2015	In-depth interviews; key informant interviews; also draws on Nepal baseline survey
	The Drinking Water and Sanitation programme in Ilam Acharya et al., 2016	Key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups
	Old Age Allowance in Rolpa KC et al., 2014	In-depth interviews; key informant interviews; also draws on Nepal baseline survey
	Taxation and livelihoods in Jhapa and Sindhupalchok Mallett et al., 2016	Survey ($N = 1,039$); in-depth interviews; key informant interviews
	Access to health services in Rolpa Paudel et al., 2015	In-depth interviews; also draws on Nepal baseline survey
	Nepal panel survey Sturge et al., 2017b	Survey ($N = 2,855$)
	Access to education in Rolpa Tandukar et al., 2015	In-depth interviews; key informant interviews; also draws on Nepal baseline survey
	Local peacebuilding committees in Bardiya Tandukar et al., 2016	In-depth interviews; key informant interviews; focus groups
Pakistan	Pakistan panel survey Shahbaz et al., 2017	Survey ($N = 1,772$)
	Perceptions of post-conflict livelihood interventions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shah and Shahbaz, 2015	Focus groups; key informant interviews; also draws on Pakistan baseline survey
Sierra Leone	Malnutrition and local health-seeking behaviour in Kambia Denney and Mallett, 2014	Semi-quantitative survey on causes of malnutrition; in-depth interviews; focus groups
	Health systems strengthening Denney and Mallett, 2015	Synthesis of multiple studies, primarily qualitative (focus groups; key informant interviews; in-depth interviews)
Sri Lanka	Social protection and state legitimacy Godamunne, 2015	In-depth interviews; key informant interviews; also draws on Sri Lanka baseline survey
	State service delivery at 'critical moments' Godamunne, forthcoming	Focus groups; key informant interviews; also draws on Sri Lanka baseline survey
	Sri Lanka panel survey Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017	Survey ($N = 1,183$)
	Access to water and sanitation in Jaffna Lall, 2015	Participant observation; immersion; informal interviews; focus groups; key informant interview
	Perceptions of livelihood services in conflict-affected fishing communities Mayadunne and Phillips, 2016	Focus groups; in-depth interviews; key informant interviews; also draws on Sri Lanka baseline survey

Country	Study	Methods
South Sudan	**Livelihoods, services and perceptions of governance in Uror and Nyirol** Maxwell *et al.*, 2014	Key informant interviews; in-depth interviews; focus groups
	An analysis of Operation Lifeline Sudan Maxwell *et al.*, 2015	Key informant interviews; in-depth interviews; participant observation
	Complexities of service delivery and state-building Maxwell *et al.*, 2016	Based on synthesis of multiple studies
	Livelihoods, services and perceptions of governance in Pibor Santschi *et al.*, 2014	In-depth interviews
Uganda	**Recovery in northern Uganda** Mazurana *et al.*, 2014	Briefing based on Uganda baseline survey
	Uganda panel survey Marshak *et al.*, 2017	Survey (*N* = 1,554)
Cross-country	**Basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations** Carpenter *et al.*, 2012	Literature review, also involving systematic reviews
	Cross-country survey synthesis – baseline Mallett *et al.*, 2015	Synthesis of five country baseline surveys
	Cross-country survey synthesis – panel Sturge *et al.*, 2017a	Synthesis of five country panel surveys

The SLRC panel survey focuses on attitudes: specifically, on people's reported 'perceptions of government'. The way in which these thoughts may or may not relate to behaviours is important, but is not the direct subject of SLRC's research. However, these perceptions of government are in themselves an important step along any imputed causal chain between service delivery and state legitimacy. As legitimacy represents a set of beliefs in the right to rule, people's perceptions of government can be seen as a kind of empirical staging post (Levi *et al.*, 2009). Even if this leaves important questions about the final sources of political legitimacy unanswered, the role of perceptions of government on issues of concern in conflict-affected states makes the inquiry significant.

A second conceptual issue conditions what can be drawn from the SLRC survey about legitimacy. In theory, legitimacy is focused on what would typically be referred to in the governance field as the state or regime, rather than an individual incumbent government. In other words, legitimacy describes 'approbation of the state's rules of the game, or the underlying system of rules and expectations from which the actions of government derive' (Mcloughlin, 2015b: 3). However, there is a recognised methodological problem wherein surveys have been shown to have difficulty adequately and consistently distinguishing the concepts of state and government, particularly across contexts as diverse as the SLRC study sites (Guerrero, 2011; Mcloughlin, 2015b: 5).

In tackling this issue, the survey instruments adopt the more widely used government terminology, but also ask questions that focus on general assessments of government functioning rather than approval of specific actions, parties or individuals. The advantage of having a significant body of qualitative work to draw upon is that it can help to clarify, to some degree, the ambiguities raised by these conceptual issues.

3 State-building, perceptions of the state and legitimacy

Legitimacy is a belief in the right to rule, and it is therefore a crucial ingredient in stable and effective governance. A major focus of state-building policy in 'fragile states' has been on generating legitimacy through addressing capacity deficits and building up state services. In theory and other research, legitimacy has been theorised to have a range of sources and, more recently, emphasis is being placed on shared norms and beliefs.

At its root, political legitimacy describes a situation where citizens 'believe in the state's right to rule over them and are willing to defer to it' (Gilley in Mcloughlin 2015b). Beyond its positive normative associations, this legitimacy has important practical implications. Policy-makers are particularly concerned about legitimacy because it is seen as the foundation of more concrete outcomes of concern, such as stability or compliance. The greater the legitimacy that institutions and associated public actors enjoy, the less they must rely on other means of social regulation such as coercion or co-optation to generate stable and effective governance (Lee *et al*., 2014: 637; Tyler, 2006: 376). This concern is especially salient in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Approaches to international assistance in such contexts have become heavily focused on generating legitimacy through state-building approaches that emphasise services and their role in improving perceptions of the state. This approach, however, does not adequately take into account the more nuanced current understandings of the legitimacy's origins in theory and evidence.

3.1 The state-building imperative

Since 2001, the narrative that fragile states can be the source of international security threats has combined with awareness that poverty is increasingly concentrated in states suffering from persistent conflict and weak institutions. This has created a push for increased aid to fragile and conflict-affected situations (Collier, 2007). Many bilateral and multilateral aid organisations have explicit targets for assistance to such places, although different definitions are applied from place to place. The 2015 UK overseas development assistance strategy echoes previous guidance by calling for 50% of aid to be targeted to fragile and conflict-affected situations – backed further by DFID's first-ever economic development strategy, published in early 2017. It also explicitly links this allocation with crisis prevention, national security and the concentration of poverty in countries affected by conflict

and fragility (HM Treasury and Department for International Development, 2015).

This emphasis on state fragility has been reflected in aid flows. Official overseas development assistance (ODA) from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) list of 'fragile states' nearly doubled per capita between 2000 and 2015. The 50 countries on the 2015 OECD 'fragile states' list account for more than half of all ODA since 2007 (OECD, 2015: 22). However, the allocation of this assistance is highly skewed: since 2002, 22% of the ODA to places affected by conflict and fragility has been directed at Afghanistan and Iraq alone. This weighting is reflected by the central position these country experiences now play in shaping the narrative of how to 'rebuild states' in the twenty-first century (OECD, 2015: 22–23).

The dominant understanding of the modern state in international development emphasises the state's central role in providing institutions and services. The SLRC synthesis report on state capacity highlights the key role that this model has played in promoting capacity development in aid discourse and practice for several decades. It finds an approach to understanding capacity that has been 'deficit-driven', 'supply focused', and 'state-centric' (Denney et al., 2017). More recently, and particularly since the early 1990s, variously labelled 'collapsed', 'weak', 'failed' and 'fragile' states are thus – implicitly or explicitly – conceptualised as a departure from this norm (Zartman, 1995). In these contexts, the state struggles to play the central role in service delivery, competing with alternative providers to deliver goods and services such as security, justice, health and education.

In short, 'fragile states' are, in practice, often conceptualised as states which have failed to fulfil a set of functions, leaving a 'sovereignty gap' which needs to be 'fixed' or 'filled' (Ghani et al., 2005; Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). A lack of state capacity is understood as a key factor in weak state legitimacy, and conversely, legitimacy
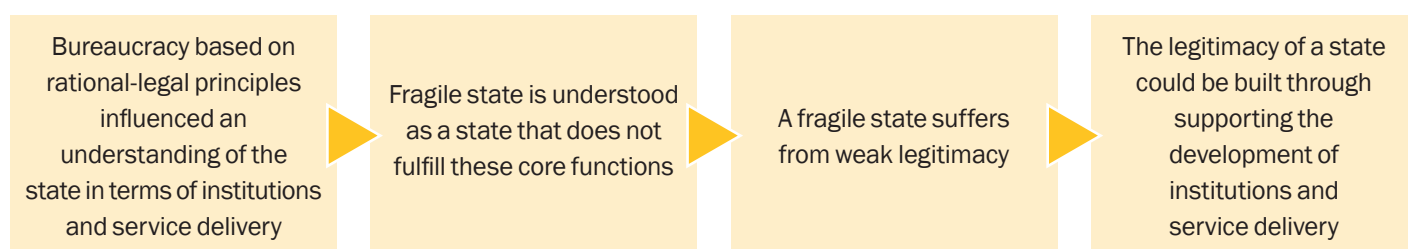
is understood as something which can be strengthened through building capacity (Figure 1). The response has been an international focus on state-building, referring to 'actions undertaken by national and/or international actors to establish, reform, and strengthen state institutions where these have been seriously eroded or are missing' (Rocha Menocal, 2011: 1719).

Legitimacy has thus become central to thinking about how states can transition from conflict and instability to more sustainable development. It is also seen as linked to the state's ability to deliver certain services, though arguments and emphasis vary on the importance of specific services such as security and justice, or more contextualised approaches. While such a 'social contract' is clearly something of a caricature, this model's influence is also evidenced in the repeated aid mantras of 'connecting people with the state' and 'bringing government closer to the people'.

This approach to understanding state legitimacy implies that service delivery may contribute to state legitimacy through 'penetration', or the visible presence of state institutions. There is a long tradition of analysis – much of it critical – of public services as an important instrument in states establishing efficient presence in and control of the national territory, as well as in socialising its inhabitants (Duchacek, 1970; Newman, 2006; Paddison, 1983; Scott, 1998). In simple terms, public services are a way to make the state visible to its citizens – they are citizens' direct line to government (Van de Walle and Scott 2011). Equally, they form the basis for the state's demands for revenue and acquiescence. A corollary of this conventional wisdom is that the attribution of services to the state itself – often interpreted as direct provision – is considered an important foundation for legitimacy as well. SLRC's research interrogates this convention, specifically by illuminating the relationships between service delivery and an intermediate causal factor in the form of people's perceptions of government.

The theoretical underpinnings of the capacity deficit model

Figure 1: The 'capacity deficit' model of the fragile state

| Bureaucracy based on rational-legal principles influenced an understanding of the state in terms of institutions and service delivery | ▶ | Fragile state is understood as a state that does not fulfill these core functions | ▶ | A fragile state suffers from weak legitimacy | ▶ | The legitimacy of a state could be built through supporting the development of institutions and service delivery |

Source: McCullough, 2015: 9

of state-building are often ascribed to Max Weber's concepts of rational-legal authority in modern bureaucratic states, and his definition of the state as a 'human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, 1946: 78). These foundations have tended to create a version of legitimacy that is seen as the consequence of authority or what is sometimes called 'state-ness' or 'statehood': 'the ability to plan and execute policies and enforce laws', and 'stable and effective political power' (Fukuyama, 2004: 7; Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016; Rotberg, 2004: 2-3). The result has been called a 'Neo-Weberian institutionalist approach' to state-building:

> *This approach is characterized by a fixation on state capacity; state institutions are seen as autonomous from their social grounding, while societal cohesion is neglected. The monopolization of violence is further taken out of its specific historical context and, in a social evolutionary logic, theorized as necessity in processes of post-conflict reconstruction. (Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016: 13)*

This view of the state-building challenge as one of capacity has been treated with increasing nuance in recent years by academics and practitioners. More attention is paid in writing about state-building to the distinctions and the interplay among broad factors such as capacity, authority and legitimacy. There is a recognition that 'constitutive' elements of the state, such as a stable political settlement and the ability to secure borders or territory, may have more impact than 'output' domains, such as services (OECD, 2011: 31; Public Sector and Governance Group, 2012; Teskey *et al*., 2012).

The 2011 World Development Report on *Conflict, Security and Violence* emphasised the importance of 'delivering early results' in building confidence among citizens, but also emphasised that this was to open space for more sustained institutional transformation (World Bank, 2011: 128). Also agreed in 2011, the New Deal for Fragile States outlines five key Peace and Statebuilding Goals to guide the mutual efforts of fragile states and their international partners: the first and last of these goals are 'legitimate politics' and 'revenues and services', respectively (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2011: 2).

However, while these insights highlight the political and endogenous drivers of state-building processes, they have proven harder to translate into international development practice. There is increasing emphasis on deeper country-level political economy analyses, which is seen in the new World Bank Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD). Political settlements analysis is also an increasingly common watchword, if not yet consistently defined or applied (Parks and Cole, 2010). In part, this is because engaging in support to constitutive domains of the state is a considerably more complex, potentially politicised and risky task. At the same time, an emphasis on results and metrics such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have also 'had powerful impacts on aid flows', particularly around human development objectives that are often connected with (some) services (OECD, 2015: 66; Teskey *et al*., 2012: 7).

This continued focus on traditional capacity and services functions can be illustrated, if crudely, by ODA spending in fragile states across the five Peace and Statebuilding Goals of the New Deal. In 2012, total ODA to 50 countries classified as 'fragile states' included only 4% for 'legitimate politics', 1.4% for 'security', and 3.1% for 'justice', which contrasts with the 45.4% spending for the other two goals of 'economic foundations' and 'services' (Hingorani, 2015; OECD, 2015: 68). An even higher 46.1% of was not directly attributable to New Deal objectives at all.

3.2   The sources of legitimacy

The model of state-building described above focuses on characteristics or qualities of the state as an autonomous or objective organisation in assessing its strength, weakness and its legitimacy. These characteristics' influence on legitimacy are often conceptualised as related to a state's performance (output) on one hand, or processes (input) on the other. Performance or output sources of legitimacy are related to understanding states as organisations with given capacities and authorities. Process or input sources of legitimacy relate to the way in which these functions are performed, and often incorporates elements of participation, inclusion, or other aspects of the procedures and rules used to shape state action (Mcloughlin, 2014: 2).

Other discussions go beyond this distinction to identify other sources. Some of these build on the lesser discussed dimensions used by Weber, of traditional and charismatic authority. Others relate to the states' position within an international system. In one of the most used typologies of the sources of legitimacy, the OECD distinguishes four (2010: 9-10):

- Input or process
- Output or performance
- Shared beliefs
- International norms.

Approaches to identifying various sources of legitimacy tend, therefore, to characterise legitimacy as a quality enjoyed by the state by virtue of the state's particular characteristics, attributes or performance. The OECD's inclusion of 'shared beliefs' is an important step beyond such a conception, acknowledging that state legitimacy is not just about process or performance, but is heavily rooted in various aspects of 'collective identity', such as religion and tradition (OECD, 2010: 28-29). Nevertheless, even this approach emphasises an aggregate quality of the state in relation to an abstract citizenry writ large, rather than more particular relationships between the state and individuals, or groups within the collective.

However, there is a strand of research on legitimacy that departs from viewing the state as an autonomous organisation that stands apart from society. Such 'relational' approaches understand the state as:

> *A phenomenon constituted by the relations among human beings, first and foremost. The focus of inquiry should be on how and why people 'do', or enact, the state by practicing behaviour and making arrangements which lead scholars to talk about a 'state'. (Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016: 9)*

Beetham (2013) advances a conceptualisation of legitimacy that incorporates how norms, expectations and beliefs contribute to the mutual construction of legitimacy. In this view, legitimacy has three dimensions. The first dimension of legitimate power is its conformity to established rules; the second is that the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate groups; and the third is the expression of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation (Beetham, 2013: 20).

This second dimension of *justifiability in terms of shared beliefs* captures an important aspect of the relational model of legitimacy. It is generated by the alignment – or lack thereof – between the beliefs held by specific individuals or groups and the normative content of the rules, both formal and informal, governing the power relation in question. This is very different from the simple – and tautological – formulation that the belief that a given form of rule is legitimate is itself a source of legitimacy. Instead, norms and beliefs have an independent status: 'a given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms

of their beliefs' (Beetham, 1991: 11). In this model, the justifiability of power derives from shared beliefs, either about the qualities of the power holder, or the degree to which the power arrangement serves a recognisable general interest. Legitimacy is a subjective quality, arising out of the features of the relationship between those granting legitimacy and that to which it is applied – sometimes known as *referee* and *conferee*, respectively.[7] Through this lens, there is also more room to understand aspects of the legitimacy of informal or non-state actors, an important theme in SLRC research on people's decisions about accessing non-formal services in places like Sierra Leone, South Sudan and the DRC.

This approach must also be distinguished from process approaches in which legitimacy is seen to arise via externally derived qualities such as participation, inclusiveness or equity. In a relational approach, these qualities are filtered through contextually specific and varying interpretations. For example, the process-based approach does not completely account for the influence of norms in how much or what kinds of predictability, equitability, justifiability and accessibility are necessary to achieve legitimacy in different locations or among different groups.

Recent work by Mcloughlin (2015b: 9), building on a substantial body of research into the question, categorises aspects of service delivery and their influence on the construction of legitimacy. These categories relate to different levels of mutual understandings around the importance and nature of the service in question, broad understandings of how the state should function, and the dynamic sense of how these change, and are changed, over time by the actions of individuals and organisations.

In this type of approach, people's perceptions of the state form an important building block or stepping stone to understanding legitimacy because they illustrate services' subjective impact on popular perceptions. However, beyond an imputed relationship with legitimacy, it is important to understand that the data reported in the following sections is of interest in itself. This is because it responds to Mcloughlin's call for 'an empirical approach to understanding what citizens expect from the state and how they evaluate it, as opposed to a normative one based on preconceived universal values' (2014: 2). These perceptions have implications for policy, as well as for a broader understanding of the sources of legitimacy.

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7   For a more detailed description of these concepts, see Lamb (2014: 23-30). For clarity, these terms are avoided in what follows in favour of the actual referees and conferees in SLRC's approach: citizens of a given locality on the one hand, and local and central state administration on the other.

4 The role of context, background and experiences

Contextual changes and historically-grounded narratives about services have a big impact on people's perceptions of government. So too do individuals' background characteristics. Some experiences – at contextual, household or individual level – also have an impact, while others do not.

The most prominent SLRC finding on the relationship between services or livelihoods support and people's perceptions of the state is that *other* things are much more important – and more consistently so. These other things include broad contextual changes seen from the perspective of individuals and groups, static characteristics of those holding perceptions about government such as identity, and differences in their lived experience at the levels of individuals and households.

4.1 Changes in political context

One of the advantages of having undertaken a range of qualitative research and contextual analysis, in addition to SLRC's survey research, is that much broader changes in the environment in which research takes place can be captured. In a single study like SLRC's, covering a period of several years across eight countries, it was inevitable that some or all of these country and sub-national contexts would experience significant contextual shifts. While it is not possible to rigorously connect these large-scale changes with perceptions, the combination of broad changes in the descriptive statistics and the findings of the qualitative research and contextual analysis are telling. In particular, three of the five SLRC 'survey countries' experienced significant political transformations during the course of the study. This seems to have been important in shaping the way people perceive government, writ large.

In **Pakistan**, the SLRC survey and much of the qualitative research took place in two heavily conflict-affected districts of Swat and Lower Dir. In these districts, large-scale displacement took place and was quickly followed by a powerful natural disaster in the form of flooding (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017: 30). Due to SLRC's thematic focus on conflict-affected populations, the first round of the survey targeted localities with experience of conflict and displacement. The severity of this contextual focus may provide insight into what are very low levels of belief in local and central government behaviour – in the first round, the percentage of respondents who believed that both central and local government 'never' reflect their priorities was over 90% (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017).

However, this perspective changes significantly for the second round of the survey, though against a backdrop of continuing low levels of belief in either government's propensity to 'care' about respondent's opinions or 'reflect' their priorities. The number of people with the extremely negative view that local government 'never' reflects their priorities fell from 90% to 60%, while for central government, it dropped from 94% to 62%.

An important political transition took place in Pakistan between the two rounds of the survey that may help contextualise these changes. In 2012, the Pakistan People's Party remained in power nationally. The previous system of elected local governments had been eroded from 2008 and local government was largely absent. In its place, bureaucratic bodies handled local functions. In 2015, prior to the second wave of the survey, new governments at national level under the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) at the provincial level, had taken power. In addition, elected district local government was re-established in 2015, indicating a more significant structural transformation than simply a change in political party – and one that could be seen to increase the potential responsiveness of local administration. Political party does seem to be important: in Swat, where the newly elected district government is aligned with the provincial government of the same party, there was a more significant jump in the 'cares about opinion' variable than in Lower Dir, which was ruled by an unaffiliated party (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017: 77).

In **Sri Lanka**, there were similarly significant changes to the political landscape, with the 2015 election of a northern-supported government under President Maithripala Sirisena. As SLRC focused on conflict-affected northern regions of the country, this represented a major political shift beyond a routine rotation in power. And the data reflect this change dramatically: the percentage of respondents who reported that central government 'cares' about their opinions grew from 44% to 65%, while respondents reporting that central government 'ever reflects their priorities' grew from 17% to 40% (Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017). The linkage between this national contextual shift and the figures is reinforced by the lack of any similar or consistent jump in perceptions regarding local government.

In **Nepal**, there were important structural changes as well, with the enactment of a new constitution in 2015. The sample in Nepal generally experienced improvements in perceptions of local and central government on both variables, with local government improvements more pronounced (Sturge *et al.*, 2017b). While these factors are harder to trace directly to the constitution, its passage – together with the work of local peace committees and the role of 'All Party Mechanisms' – might suggest a broader recognition of consensus-based politics emerging (Byrne and Klem, 2015: 228). This may, in turn, be linked to patterns of perceptions.[8]

These shifts also illustrate the difficulty of accurately distinguishing between the perceptions of underlying state structures from those of the government of the day. In fact, the shifts described comprise both party changes but also significant changes to state structures (or the underlying political settlement), which highlights that our clear distinction between them may be misplaced. The ease of conflating these two concepts may, in itself, indicate the relative weakness or changeability of state legitimacy in fragile settings.

Other contextual shifts may include further outbreaks of conflict. While there was no opportunity for SLRC to carry out the second round of the survey in **South Sudan**, a separate study, implemented in the country's Western Equatorial State before and after the 2013 crisis broke out, found a significant 10% jump in people holding negative perceptions of the central government's performance. This supports the impact of contextual changes on perceptions (Rigterink *et al.*, 2016: 87).[9]

4.2   Fixed characteristics and identity

In addition to interrogating the relationships between service delivery and perceptions of government, the SLRC survey is able to analyse – albeit using a different model – the relationships between certain 'fixed characteristics' and people's perceptions of government (Box 3).

Time-invariant factors, such as gender and other aspects of identity, have a strongly significant relationship with perceptions of government. This suggests that despite the effect that changes between rounds may have had on

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8   Other SLRC countries, such as Afghanistan, also encountered major changes in political conditions but these cannot be captured in the report since the full SLRC survey could not be implemented in-country.
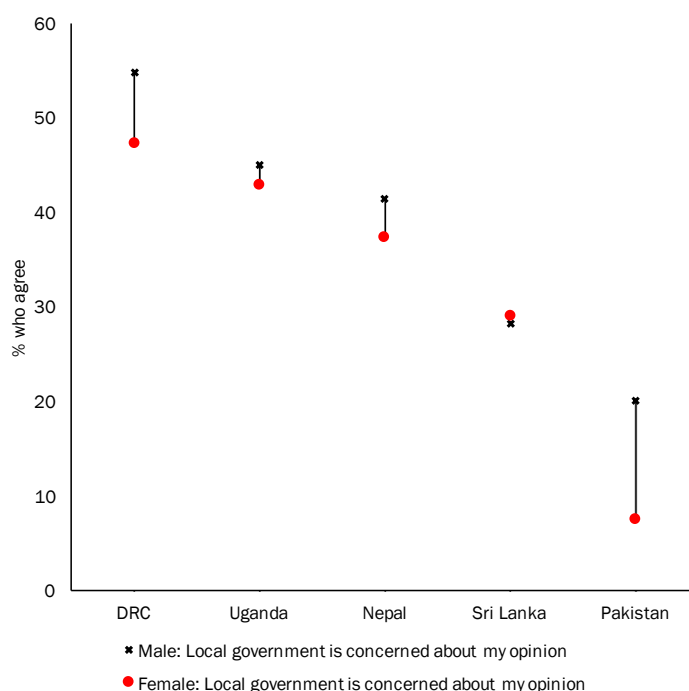
9   This survey was done by the Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP). It focused on the impact of the Local Government Service Delivery Project (LGSDP) on trust in government, and willingness to contribute to public goods and how being exposed to violence shapes preferences, as expressed through political participation and contribution to public goods.

Figure 2: Perceptions of local government, by gender of respondent (pooled data)

✱ Male: Local government is concerned about my opinion
● Female: Local government is concerned about my opinion

Note: This figure presents the pooled perceptions data for local government across both waves.

perceptions over a three-year period, other characteristics of the individual and their experience are important foundations for how they perceive local and central administration. Locality is another important factor, which is explained by its role as a relative proxy for some other invariant factors.

The survey results suggest a general pattern – though not universal – of worse perceptions of government among women than men. Across **Pakistan**, **Nepal**, **Uganda**, **Sri Lanka** and **DRC**, women had consistently poorer assessments of central government's reflection of their priorities or opinion. Interestingly, however, the effect of gender was more varied in perceptions of local government, ranging from more negative perceptions from females than males in **DRC**, to more positive perceptions from females than males in **Sri Lanka** (see Figure 2). This variation illustrates the importance of understanding people's relationship with local administration in a disaggregated way from perceptions of the state at national level, and the different factors that may condition these local perceptions across genders. For example, qualitative work from **South Sudan** illustrated that, in some localities, women tend to discuss issues related to

basic services more frequently than men (Maxwell *et al.*, 2014: 18). In **Sri Lanka**, an analysis of state delivery of services during the drought and flood of 2014 indicate that for Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim women, legitimacy is built and reinforced by ensuring a safe and secure physical environment (Godamunne, 2017).

Higher education level has a significant link to more positive perceptions, albeit only in **Nepal** and **Sri Lanka**. However, this effect is significant only at the threshold level of literacy. The importance of literacy as a proxy for other forms of inclusion or access may be one explanation for this, but little qualitative work focused specifically on education was available to expand on these findings.

The strongest time-invariant predictors of perception of government are ethnicity and location. 'Ethnicity' is significant at least once in every set of country regressions, and 'location at baseline' is significant in either four or five countries out of five. In **Nepal**, an overall pattern of improved perceptions, particularly of central government, is also marked by increases among particular ethnic, religious or caste groupings. The Madhesi as well as Muslims both began with the lowest perceptions of local and central government, and experienced the largest increase between rounds: among the Madhesi, for example, a rise from 5% to 23% in those who agree that

central government cares about their opinion was observed. These are potentially related to the contextual change represented by the passage of the constitution – although given that the Madhesi also include some of the more vehement opponents of that constitution, this is perhaps an unexpected result. What it may therefore be reflecting is the rise of a consensus-based politics alluded to previously, and possibly a differential impact of such changes on the most marginalised groups (Sturge *et al*., 2017b).

In northern **Sri Lanka**, the broad patterns of perceptions follow a relatively explicable ethnic pattern, with Sinhalese respondents more positive about central government and Tamils more positive about local government (Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017).

In **DRC**, location was an important variable, as it also represented considerable differences in circumstance. Of the three districts surveyed, Nyangezi was notable in the low level of conflict both before and during the two waves of the survey. Respondents from Nyangezi were significantly more positive about their perceptions of government. They also reflected the common pattern across all districts that perceptions got progressively worse as one asked about customary, local and finally central government actors (de Milliano *et al*., 2015: 44; Ferf *et al*., 2016: 79–80).

This group- or category-based variability in perceptions across the three countries mentioned – ethnicity / caste in **Nepal** (Figure 3), ethnicity in **Sri Lanka** (Figure 4) and location in **DRC** (Figure 5) – is visually illustrated in the three figures to the right. In each, the perception change within each 'category' is situated against the mean perception change for the sample as a whole.

The general point is that the impact of time-invariant characteristics is important, but in different ways, in different contexts. Even the relatively consistent impact of gender across countries can vary when local government is considered, as Figure 2 illustrates. So too can gendered perceptions differ *within* countries, highlighting intersectionality's importance when it comes to assessing the influence of identity-based factors. As a single yet illustrative example, perceptions of local government in **DRC** differ substantially not just by gender, but also by where men and women happen to be living – Figure 6 below uses pooled survey data (i.e. from across both waves) to reveal how mean perceptions of local government vary by the combination of both location and gender. Taking the two districts of Bunyakiri and Nzibira, it

is clear that respondents in the former have a generally higher 'approval rating' of local government than those in the latter. However, drilling even further rdown into the data eveals that female respondents in Bunyakiri in fact

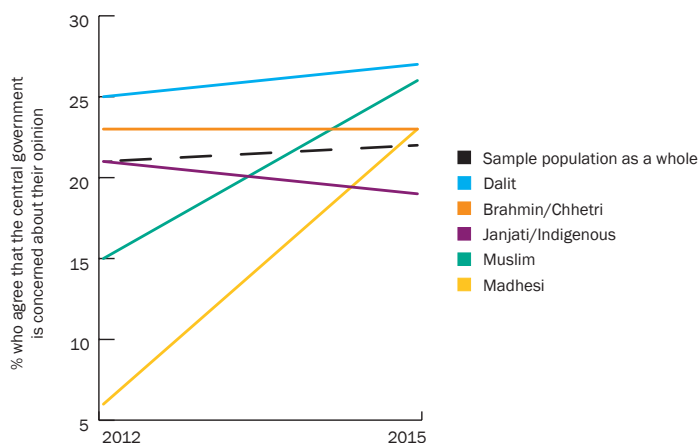**Figure 3: Changing perceptions of central government over time, by ethnicity / caste in Nepal**

Figure 4: Changing perceptions of central government over time, by ethnicity in Sri Lanka
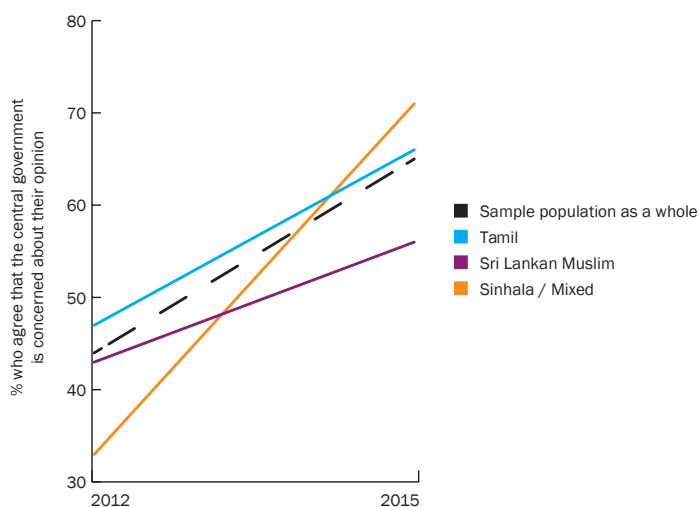

Figure 5: Changing perceptions of central government over time, by location in DRC
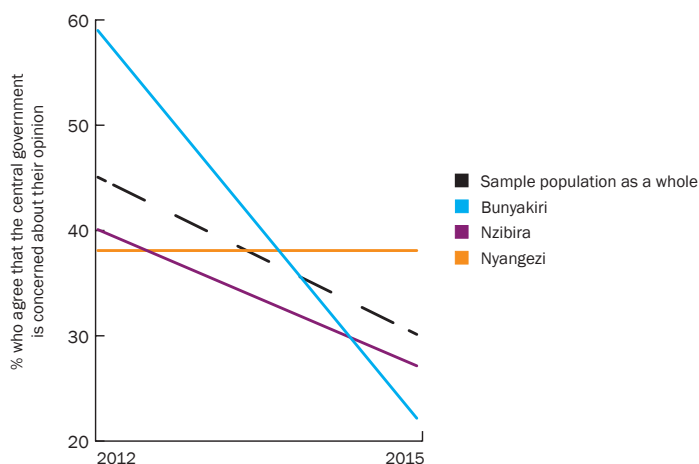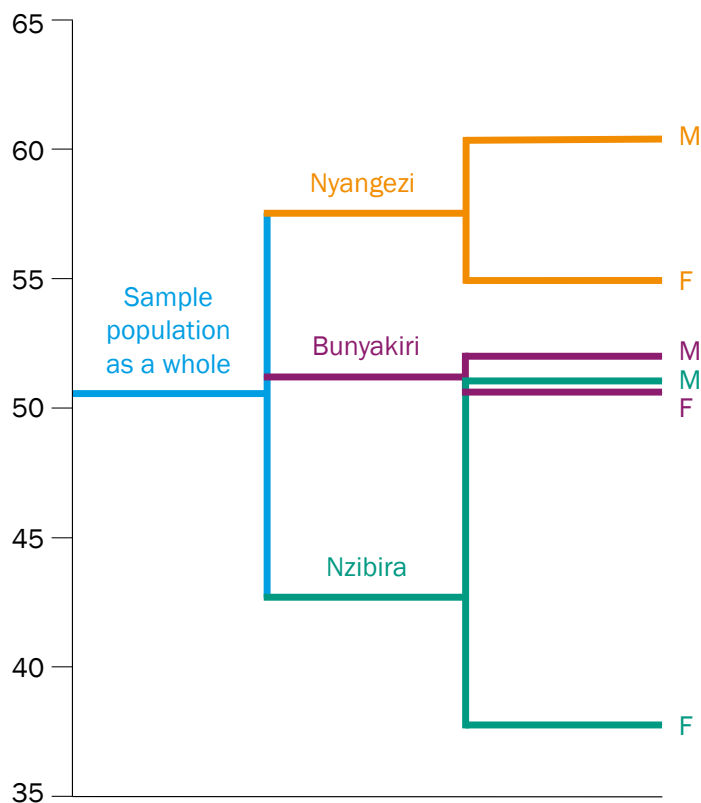
Figure 6: Perceptions of local government in DRC, disaggregated by location and gender

have generally worse perceptions than men in Nzibira, something which is concealed if one were to only consider a location-based disaggregation.

4.3   Household or individual experiences

In addition to various fixed characteristics of individuals, a range of background experiences at household or individual level were seen to influence perceptions of government. Shocks come out as especially important.

In several study sites, it is economic shocks in particular that are often associated with lower perceptions of government. In **Pakistan**, this effect holds at both local and central levels (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017: 14, 78); for **Uganda** and **Sri Lanka**, it holds for central government (Marshak *et al.*, 2017; Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017); and in **DRC**, the effect is focused only on the local informal actors included in the survey design for that country (Ferf *et al.*, 2016: 81). Curiously, in **Nepal**, an economic shock in the second wave was correlated with an improvement in perceptions of local government, highlighting the varied way in which experiences may be filtered (Sturge *et al.*, 2017b).

As with the impact of shocks, both crime and displacement

appear more influential than more general measures of perceived safety and security. This indicates that household-level impacts are significant, and often more so than contextual changes. For example, the survey did not find linkages between changes to perceived security in a local sense and perceptions of government. However, specific instances of insecurity, such as victimisation by crime or displacement, do have significant effects. For example, in **DRC** 'the experience of crime does affect the household or household members directly and is consequently very likely to affect the respondents' perceptions' (Ferf *et al.*, 2016: 80-86). One particularly interesting result is in northern **Uganda**, where displacement actually improved perceptions of local government's responsiveness to respondent priorities, perhaps reflecting some awareness of focused efforts to support recovery (Marshak *et al.*, 2017).

4.4   Summary

Important drivers of perceptions of government arise from contextual political changes, particularly where these involve structural changes to elements of the underlying political settlement or a shift in the existing narrative. For example, the reinstatement of electoral politics at district level in **Pakistan** or the local development of peacebuilding mechanisms and the passage of even a heavily contested constitution in **Nepal**, appear to have shifted the landscape of perceptions in very significant ways.

These effects, however, are conditioned and filtered through other experiences and characteristics of group-based identity. Gender is an important factor, and a fairly consistent one in the countries studied. Much more work could be done to further understand how gender-based expectations, norms and experiences shape perceptions. Ethnicity, location and other aspects of identity are important predictors, though in curious ways – in some cases, the seemingly most marginalised may experience the biggest changes in perceptions.

Finally, household experiences, particularly when negative and as directly experienced, whether shocks or displacement, can condition responses. These findings highlight the degree to which perceptions of the state are driven by quite fundamental factors that are not immediately amenable to influence by development programming.

5 Service provision and perceptions of government

It is hard to measure access. To the degree that SLRC has done so, it does not drive perceptions on its own. Provider attribution does not work in the way that is typically assumed, and is filtered by expectations. The type of service is also important, and shaped by context-specific narratives and expectations.

The main concern of the first strand of SLRC's overarching research agenda is the relationship between services and perceptions of government. At its simplest, this involves testing whether 'better access to basic services, social protection, or livelihood assistance' leads to 'more positive perceptions of the government', as stated in the research hypotheses in Box 2. The quantitative research shows that this relationship is not very clear at all. When combined with more qualitative analysis, we see that measuring access is more complicated than might be assumed. Furthermore, both sets of results imply that issues like whether the service is attributed to the state, or even the particular service in question, may be important but are themselves filtered by a range of expectations and narratives. This finding is significant as it challenges an assumption embedded in much of aid supporting service delivery – that improving access to security, justice, health, education or water and sanitation will improve the state-citizen relationship.

5.1   Access and perceptions of government

In short, SLRC has not found that simple measures of access – reported journey times to a health centre or water point, or receipt of livelihoods assistance or a social protection payment – drive more positive perceptions of government.

There are a few exceptions in the survey research – in **Pakistan**, the receipt of a social protection payment did improve perceptions of local government, and in northern **Uganda**, health and education access did influence perceptions of both levels of government marginally (Marshak *et al.*, 2017; Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017: 78). Qualitative work in both countries suggests that local particularities may help explain these exceptions. For example, the extremely low baseline of service provision for the affected communities studied in Uganda may help explain why reactions to renewed access are positive (Mazurana *et al.*, 2014).

A wider analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative SLRC research suggests that access as measured in these ways is problematic, and obscures the important factors that people report as important in their consideration

of services. This is broadly in line with recent quantitative research by Derick Brinkerhoff and colleagues (2017). This work uses Afrobarometer data from 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to paint a far more complicated relationship between physical distance to services and people's perceptions of authority than is sometimes assumed.

The first observation arising from this analysis is that journey times can obscure many other factors that are relevant to access. In **Sri Lanka**, qualitative interviews with government officials and others presented a more nuanced picture. Even as facilities remained the same or were reconstructed, and road conditions improved, factors such as the absence of doctors and other staff, lack of public transport, and local variation between rural and urban areas were still reported as influencing access by respondents (pers. comms. with SLRC Sri Lanka team).

This is reinforced by other research, such as SLRC's work in the Rolpa district of **Nepal**. Despite long journey times to health centres, respondents generally indicated that the quality of services – and their cost – were more important in shaping their behaviour than the distance itself (Paudel *et al.*, 2015). And so too in **Sierra Leone**, where physical distance is just one of a series of factors driving rural communities' uptake of government-run health facilities, including: perceived effectiveness, based to a large extent on the nature of past experiences; associated costs (user fees, transportation, lost time); the manner in which clinic staff relate to and deal with patients, shaped in turn by the particular identities of 'users' and 'providers'; the influence of 'traditional' cultural beliefs and practices; and the role of household power relations, which circumscribe decisions and choices vis-a-vis health-seeking behaviour (Denney and Mallett, 2014). In **Pakistan**, this complex picture may be illustrated by the fact that some increase in journey times to water sources was actually seen as positive, as there were also improved perceptions of quality. Qualitative analysis suggests this may have been connected to improvements in security, thereby facilitating access to better facilities (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017: 78).

Similarly, for social protection, the simple receipt of a payment was generally not associated with changes in perception of government, except for the odd case of improving perceptions of central government in **Pakistan** (perhaps in response to expectations around natural disaster), or even declining perceptions (as in northern **Uganda**). The qualitative research indicates that more specific factors around social protection payments may colour their impact on perceptions. In **Nepal**, research indicated that the low value of the social protection payment combined with irregular delivery and the difficulty

of accessing payments, undermined the potential for viewing payments positively. This finding was consistent with studies reporting that receipt of the Child Grant by Dalit households had no impact on perceptions of government for similar reasons (Adhikari *et al.*, 2014; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2015).

Second, there is evidence from the study that changes in the costs of services to users are important short-term determinants of perceptions. Starting to pay official fees for a health centre was associated with a worsening of opinions in **Pakistan** (local and central government) and **Nepal** (central only). Starting to pay official fees for water was also associated with a worsening of opinions of local government in **Sri Lanka**. In **Uganda**, starting to pay official water fees led to an improved perception of central government, possibly reflecting the particularly low-perception baseline in access. The implication may be that where a given service may be considered more central to the social contract, having to pay has a negative effect – as in **Sri Lanka** – but where the baseline is little to no expectation of service at all, new access, even if costly, may produce positive responses (as in northern **Uganda**).

Some forms of participation can begin to look like a means of simply collecting money or labour for the provision of a service. In the Ilam District of **Nepal**, the provision of a new water infrastructure with the support of government programmes was combined with municipality offices collecting user fees. Qualitative interviews showed that these fees were associated with user demands for a more regular and reliable service, and 'numerous respondents echoed the complaint that the Municipality Office is reluctant to manage the [drinking water points] and only collects its monthly fees', while some users 'wished to pay more and receive a better service' (Acharya *et al.*, 2016: 20-24). These variations suggest an interesting dynamic where even reactions to new costs can vary depending on how these costs are framed against prior expectations of the state.

5.2   Who provides the service

As discussed in Section 2, the capacity deficit model of state-building implies an emphasis on attribution for service provision to the state – the state needs to 'get credit' for the services provided to enjoy improvements in how it is viewed by the population. This is arguably why so much capacity support in fragile and conflict-affected situations is designed to strengthen formal government structures – as demonstrated in the synthesis of SLRC's work on state capacity development (Denney and Mallett, 2017). Some understandings emphasise the local importance of such attribution: through the process of serving the

peoples' everyday needs via, for example, social welfare, state legitimacy can be engineered at a local level. Further, in the absence of such processes by the state, public trust may anchor with other social and cultural bodies (e.g. religious bodies) that cater to peoples' needs. As a result, alternative forms of social legitimacies are created by norms and institutions that people have substituted (Roberts, 2013: 7).

However, SLRC presents a more complex picture. Not least, even the question of attribution seems complicated. In the survey data, the attribution of a given service to state or non-state providers seems to have changed much more frequently than changes in the actual facility used by respondents. This suggests a range of ambiguities over assigned responsibility (Sturge *et al*., 2017a).

There is also a big difference in the effect that attribution of a service has depending on the sector in question. In relation to healthcare, there are no cases in which a change to government attribution of a health facility is associated with a positive change in perceptions of government (in fact, there is even one case showing a negative association with perceptions of central government, in **DRC**). However, when water provision became attributed to government in **DRC** and **Uganda**, central government enjoyed improved perceptions; as did both levels in **Nepal** (Sturge *et al*., 2017a). Coupling this survey data with some of the qualitative research shows that the understanding of the provider is more complex than simply who operates or funds frontline facilities.

Narratives around responsibility are more important at times than these 'factual' elements of attribution for services. For example, in **South Sudan**, qualitative research also found that people's attribution of services was neither consistent, nor particularly important in shaping how they claimed to perceive government. In the past, South Sudanese citizens had little experience of state institutions providing services and a long history of international actors delivering services. After signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and the formal end of the second civil war, international NGOs and agencies continued to play a key role in service delivery (Maxwell *et al*., 2016). Where expectations of services were low, or geared towards international / NGO providers, service provision did not drive perceptions; and in other places where non-state providers were providing a service, the government still received credit for its role in enabling or coordinating this work (Maxwell *et al*., 2016: 3).

In **Nepal**, even where state education was perceived to have improved, this improvement was seen as contingent on education committees or individual staff, and not attributed to government effort. Detailed interviews showed an almost complete absence of awareness or expectation around local government roles in primary education (Tandukar *et al*., 2015: 25-27). In **Sri Lanka**, the issue of provider is important, but understood through the lens of the service experience – the health sector's increased privatisation is seen to have reduced its quality as well as introduced new costs to the process of accessing the service (Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017). In **Sierra Leone**, the qualitative research showed that users do not look at healthcare providers and see 'state' and 'non-state' distinctions, but rather see one system of multiple providers that both cooperate and compete in a way that cannot be explained by 'zero sum' logics (Denney and Mallett, 2014). What's more, the ways in which these plural health systems work were found to vary substantially even within a single district. This implies a relatively granular level of analysis is needed to understand these dynamics (the work by Pain and Sturge [2015] reveals a similarly localised, highly variable pattern in the way village-level governance works in **Afghanistan**).

Other research supports the notion that context and expectations can condition how who provides a service may impact on perceptions of state or other actors. In Uganda, experimental evidence reported by Findley *et al*. (2016) shows that citizens' perceptions of aid are more positive when there are higher perceptions of corruption. Some studies reverse the causality: qualitative studies of delivery programmes for water or school meals across India, Bangladesh and Kenya suggest that legitimacy – input and output – varies across initiatives, and can be seen as an independent driver of success or failure (Beisheim *et al*., 2014). SLRC's qualitative work on the health sector in **Sierra Leone** echoes this approach, noting that positive perceptions and trust in the health system are actually needed to contribute to its functioning (Denney and Mallett, 2015). In short, it is the service itself and how it is framed that appears to influence how people think about government, not the provider's identity.

5.3   Type of service

Overall, the relationship between access to basic services and perceptions of government is not supported. Despite this, however, one of the complexities of the SLRC data is that interesting aspects of the qualitative work highlight big differences in the way different types of services are framed in different contexts. These differences are important when we come to consider more subjective drivers of people's perceptions, such as their expectations and the narratives surrounding the state's role.

Different types of service may have different associations in different contexts, and may be more or less closely associated with core elements of the state's identity or role.[10] There is considerable discussion in the literature on social protection supporting the idea that it may enjoy an important status in citizen-state relations or the generation of 'social contracts', particularly via imputed contributions to social cohesion and resilience (Babajanian, 2012: 20-22). A closer look, however, indicates that the evidence is limited and mixed – studies of both cash transfer programmes and social funds tend to support potential positive impacts on perceptions of the state, but are often conditioned both by perceptions of elite capture or unfair distribution as well as pre-existing levels of cohesion and / or conflict in communities (Carpenter *et al.*, 2012: 63-65). A difficult balance in determining the impact of social protection programmes appears to be the promotion of inclusion or prevention of exclusion on the one hand, while preventing negative perceptions of unfair or politically biased distribution on the other (Babajanian, 2012: 30-36). These findings thus support the general notion that social protection programmes may contribute to positive perceptions, but are subject to other important underlying factors.

This dynamic appears to have been very important in **Sri Lanka**, where social protection provision is regarded as a fundamental component of the state-society contract. This could be due to Sri Lanka's long history of social welfare provision, with some services, such as health, education and state pensions being delivered to the war-affected during the war. Across locations and ethnicities there is a notion that state provision of services is a citizen's right. In Sri Lanka, qualitative work following up the first round of survey research found widespread shared expectations around social protection programmes, due to their long history and relatively extensive coverage:

> *Singling out social protection as a primary means to state legitimacy is problematic, especially as social protection is regarded as a right of citizenship. Thus, perceptions are largely influenced by men and women's expectations and experiences about what the state should deliver and how it delivers. (Godamunne, 2015: vi)*

However, the survey results did not indicate a link between receipt of social protection payments and more positive perceptions. Instead, it is posited that the expectations around such payments – which are found to vary in nuanced yet important ways between districts, shaped by factors as diverse as 'trajectories of life experiences, histories of displacement, and access to programmes and services during the war' (ibid.: 27) – and shortcomings in their distribution and targeting (their 'flawed implementation', as the report puts it) combine to undermine the positive impact (Godamunne, 2015: 25-26; Sanguhan and Gunasekara, 2017). In short, high expectations may be a double-edged sword as they can also be more easily disappointed.

In **Nepal**, the provision of a pension has been a longstanding policy, and includes efforts to promote social inclusion through positive discrimination for certain caste groups. This service is seen to have certain 'social contractual' dimensions by many interviewees, for example, in its recognition of the relationship established between the state and older people, despite concerns about the amount of benefit or difficulties involved in accessing the transfer. Other research on the Child Grant in Nepal supports this pattern of a greater impact on perceptions by social protection-type payments (KC *et al.*, 2014: 24).

The common thread in this range of qualitative work is that people in different contexts relate to particular services in different ways. This is also conditioned by the historical role and narratives of the state's functions, more recent expectations, and the way in which the services are practically implemented. In short, subjective factors such as expectations may create challenges to improving perceptions.

5.4   Summary

The SLRC survey results demonstrate clearly that some of the simplest implications of a capacity-deficit approach to understanding state-building do not hold. Simple measures of access, or attribution of a service to government, do not strongly or consistently influence people's perceptions. Neither does the relationship, should it exist, run in a single direction. In part, this is because these quantitative measures obscure more complicated relationships.

Access is seen to comprise much more than journey times, encompassing aspects of service quality, cost and implementation. Expectations and narratives about who is meant to provide a given service, and who is actually seen to be doing so, can vary between different social groups and locations – even for the same facilities and programmes. Again, these expectations and narratives vary widely between different types of services in different contexts.

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10   In 2012, the provision of universal healthcare topped a poll comparing the popularity of 12 different 'symbols' of Canada (Cheadle, 2012).

6 The public service experience

> Aspects of the way services are delivered can influence perceptions. The role of both a means for reporting problems, and the existence of problems are particularly important, and suggest perceptions may be more strongly influenced by bad experiences than other factors, like access to or attribution of services. These results are quite varied – participation is important, but different forms of participation and in different degrees. The perception of unfairness or exclusion is a 'special kind of problem' that is even more important.

While the previous section demonstrates the need to reject the simplest relationships between service delivery and perceptions of government, SLRC has also generated considerable data to help understand some of the more complex processes that *do* seem to be important. These relationships find support in the literature, particularly in the growing emphasis on 'process legitimacy' (Fisk and Cherney, 2016; Levi and Sacks, 2009; Stel *et al.*, 2012).

In SLRC, aspects of the 'way in which services are provided' are captured at several levels. At the most basic, respondents have talked about their overall and specific levels of satisfaction with different aspects of health, education and water services, as well as their experiences of problems. There has also been work done – both in the survey and among qualitative studies – on aspects of process, such as levels of participation in aspects of service planning or delivery, and the existence and use of grievance mechanisms.

6.1 Satisfaction and problems

In general, the survey data indicate consistently high levels of satisfaction with *most* of the services across *most* of the countries, which is interesting given the low scores on perceptions of government. There were several significant associations between changes in satisfaction and perceptions of government, but to very different degrees. Overall satisfaction with health services appears multiple times as a significant factor in improving perceptions. However, this is inconsistent across countries in terms of where the effects seem to fall between local government and central, and across the 'cares about opinion' or 'reflects priorities' items (Sturge *et al.*, 2017a). This finding in the panel survey echoes cross-sectional findings from the baseline that where services are provided, some aspects of perceived quality, particularly around especially salient services like health, may impact on perceptions. At the same time, however, there do not appear to be any particular variables or aspects which consistently or uniformly shape people's

perceptions (Mallett *et al.* 2015: 45). There is also very little consistent evidence across the other services studied to suggest links between the perceived quality of water provision, education, or social protection and perceptions of the state.

However, using an alternative way of assessing satisfaction with services, the situation changes significantly. When the survey moves beyond reported satisfaction to asking if respondents had actually experienced a problem with any of their services over the past year, there are more consistent results (see Table 2 below). 'Problem' was not specifically defined in the survey, but left open to respondents' interpretation. In the survey regressions, those who experienced more problems with services between waves lowered their perception of government in three out of five countries (**Nepal** and **Uganda** for local government only, **Pakistan** for both tiers of government) (Sturge *et al.*, 2017a). The salience of certain services seems to be echoed in the impact of problems: in **DRC**, where health satisfaction drove perceptions, problems with health services specifically were also a powerful dampener on the perceptions of local government (Ferf *et al.*, 2016, 83).[11]

Qualitative research reinforces the importance of experienced problems. SLRC's research in **Sierra Leone** demonstrates that repeated experiences of poor quality service at health clinics can undermine people's trust in the government's capacity to provide decent care. Prior treatment by government health staff deemed to be rude or disrespectful can undermine people's trust in the public health system more broadly (Denney and Mallett, 2015). In some villages, it was also suggested that

negative attitudes of this kind were most pronounced for poor members of the community, whose physical appearance would be interpreted by clinic staff as an indication of their lower socio-economic status (ibid.: 24). Qualitative research that identified poor experiences of health services in Rolpa, **Nepal** shows how these tend to be attributed to central government, which explains its performance in the survey measures (Paudel *et al.*, 2015). As described in Section 4.3, the long history and shared expectations around social protection provision in **Sri Lanka** actually increased the impact of 'experiential' components of the service on people's positive and negative perceptions (Godamunne, 2015).

When it comes to perceptions and services, negative experiences appear to have a bigger impact than positive experiences. Essentially, experiencing improving access or satisfaction with services is linked, at best, to relatively small positive changes in people's perceptions of government. More often than not, however, there is no association at all. But experiencing a *problem* with a service appears more consistent and sizeable in its link with (negative) perception change.

6.2   Participation and grievance handling

In the survey, a strong set of results relate to participation and accountability measures, including knowledge of grievance mechanisms and community meetings, and being consulted about services. In several sets of country regressions, this cluster of variables is significant, and there is consistency across those countries in the direction of the relationship (see Table 3). The logic follows: if specific experienced problems (as with concretely experienced

Table 2: Illustrating the specific regressions in which 'number of problems experienced with service delivery' is statistically significant

	DRC[12]		Nepal		Pakistan		Sri Lanka		Uganda		Outcome variable
	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	
# of problems experienced with service delivery			●		●	●			●		'Cares'
			●						●		'Reflects'

Note: For the independent variable 'number of problems experienced, there are four sets of regression results per country. This is because the survey used two perception indicators (i.e. outcome variables) – 'cares about my opinion' and 'reflects my priorities' – in each country, and asked these questions in both local and central government. This table illustrates the specific regressions in which the independent variable was found to be statistically significant.

11   Additional analysis was run on the DRC dataset because this survey generated information on a wider range of governance actors than the other country instruments (which focus primarily on formal government). When using the DRC's alternative governance index, significant relationships emerge between experiences with health services and perceptions of governance actors. These links do not show up when applying the more standardised cross-country regression methods, which are this report's primary focus.

12   When using the DRC's alternative governance index in regression analysis (see footnote 10), the number of problems experienced with health services is found to share an underlying association with negative perception change in relation to both customary governance actors and local government.

Table 3: Illustrating the number of regressions in which accountability-related variables are statistically significant

	DRC		Nepal		Pakistan		Sri Lanka		Uganda		Outcome variable
	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	Local	Central	
# of grievance mechanisms known about			•	•				•	•		'Cares'
			•	•			•	•	•		'Reflects'
# of meetings known about			•						•		'Cares'
			•						•	•	'Reflects'
# of services consulted about			•				•				'Cares'
							•				'Reflects'

Note: For each independent variable – 'grievance mechanisms', 'meetings' and 'consulted' – there are four sets of regression results per country. This is because the survey used two perception indicators (i.e. outcome variables) – 'cares about my opinion' and 'reflects my priorities' – in each country, and asked these questions in both local and central government. This table illustrates the specific regressions in which each independent variable was found to be statistically significant.

insecurity) are among the bigger drivers of perceptions of government, then having a means to report or address those problems is likely to be important too.

People's perceptions of local government – that is, whether or not local government priorities reflected theirs, and whether or not local government is concerned about citizens' views – improved in some cases where officials consulted people about a given service. Hence, people's perceptions about the space for consultation and feedback about services did, in some cases, predict people's perceptions about local government. The extent of this effect seemed to increase as the analysis moved from simple awareness of meetings on different services, to having been consulted, and finally to the knowledge of specific grievance mechanisms. In **Nepal** and **Uganda**, knowledge of more meetings between rounds was linked to an improvement in perceptions of local government (and in one case, central government). In **Sri Lanka**, being consulted more times about basic services between rounds was linked to an improvement in people's perceptions of local and central government. Those who increased their knowledge of grievance mechanisms between rounds saw an improvement in government perceptions in three countries (for both tiers of government in **Nepal** and **Sri Lanka,** and local government in **Uganda**) (Sturge *et al.*, 2017a). On the other hand, where there is little expectation or relationship between basic services and people's perceptions – as in the case of **South Sudan** – then qualitative evidence suggests that levels of participation many not be all that important. Here, the study found that 'lack of input does not seem to impact [citizen] perceptions of government' (Maxwell *et al.*, 2014:

27), and it may also help account for the lack of significant survey results in **DRC** and **Pakistan**.

SLRC's qualitative research was able to reinforce the importance of consultation, participation, and grievance or accountability mechanisms. It also allowed these relationships to be understood in a more detailed way, as they are not always simple.

A detailed study of two schools in Rolpa, **Nepal** supports the survey findings that there can sometimes be positive effects from accountability mechanisms, with school management committees perceived as important channels for communicating problems (Tandukar *et al.*, 2015). Also in Nepal, various participatory water management bodies have been introduced since the end of the civil conflict in 2006, including elected district water management committees and user groups. Qualitative research in the same districts as where the surveys took place indicated strong positive associations with these mechanisms, particularly among user groups, which enabled citizens to '[become] actively involved in managing their own water' (Acharya *et al.*, 2015a: 21). However, these positive associations were strongly linked to a perception that the Village Development Committees (VDCs) – i.e. the ones ultimately responsible for managing and funding these services – were not fulfilling their duties.

This negative perception is even more pronounced when the central government's contribution is considered. In a parallel study of municipal areas of a different district, respondents felt that the separation between the management responsibilities of these bodies and the

formal 'ownership' of the service and budgets by local state institutions, was a cause of the delivery problems. Some thought that the management committees should be given more formal authority, though there were also doubts over capacity (Acharya *et al.*, 2016: 25).

An important strand of SLRC's research in **Afghanistan** focuses on the efforts to introduce processes like participation through community-driven development programming. This work found that the functioning of participatory institutions introduced in this way is heavily conditioned by prior patterns of governance (Pain and Sturge, 2015: 23-25). These findings echo large-scale evidence reviews on 'induced' participation that emphasise local management conditioned by the capacity of local participatory institutions, and the coherence of the responsibilities and support given to them by state institutions (Mansuri and Rao, 2013: 8, 222-223). Additionally, an assessment of 12 service provision initiatives across four countries, including DRC and Nepal, found that such models can often improve services. However, it also found that they only support legitimacy in a minority of cases; that this was due to differences in how they were run (i.e. their process) rather than in the results they produced (i.e. their outcome). The impact of a clear division of roles, decision-making, accountability, communication and formalisation support the general finding that processes are an important aspect of turning performance into improved perceptions (Stel *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, it is the detail of the experience that appears to matter, rather than the mere presence of spaces of accountability and participation *per se*. SLRC's research in **Sri Lanka**, for example, illustrates how the processes that play out in these spaces are not always for the good. One interviewee in Godamunne's (2015) social protection study described how even though he had access to the local Grama Niladhari (GN) – a key government contact point for service delivery – the interactions that took place were essentially worthless, and even potentially damaging:

> *If we say something to the GN, he does not care about it. We are expressing our needs to the GN office but they are not considering these things. We cannot fight with them and we cannot raise questions against them. If we do so, they will not include us in the upcoming programmes. (Cited in Godamunne, 2015: 17)*

The same study found that women in all research sites across three districts felt reluctant to participate in public meetings organised by state officials, instead either

sending a male relative or not attending. And although not implemented by SLRC, a recent study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) of the Child Grant in Nepal found a similar pattern vis-à-vis interactions with the local formal state (Hagen-Zanker *et al.*, 2015). According to that study, '[a] culture of "not speaking out" seems to prevent certain individuals from asking questions to and of their government' (ibid.: 54). It appears to most acutely affect Dalit women, who felt 'helpless' in the face of a government 'formed of big people' (ibid.: 37; 38). These findings speak to the way in which underlying, historically rooted relationships between power holders and citizens effectively 'condition' the present-day experience of participation and accountability, which are often treated as neutral and value-free aspects of 'good governance'. Moreover, the nature of these relationships is not singular, but rather structured by the identity of the agents in question (e.g. in terms of gender, age, caste, ethnicity, and so on).

6.3 Unfairness and exclusion – a special kind of problem

Negative experiences or judgements about services are important for perceptions of government. When these negative experiences or judgements also conflict with a population or individual's sense of fairness, they can be even more important. Service delivery can be particularly prone to such judgements through its distributional effects (Mcloughlin, 2015a). This is reflected in the increasing attention in the literature on legitimacy to subjective or contextually-specific notions of fairness, as noted recently by Mcloughlin (2015b: 11):

> *[T]here is convincing evidence across different contexts that the perceived fairness of the process by which authorities and institutions make decisions and exercise authority is a key aspect of people's willingness to comply with it.*

Discussion of the service experiences studied by SLRC would not be complete without a more detailed exploration of the link between people's perceptions of unfairness and exclusion and their perception of government. This dimension of beliefs about services and the state comes through very strongly across a range of SLRC's qualitative research, and represents perhaps the most important contribution of the supplementary research to the survey's findings (which does not capture this particular aspect of people's experience).

Even where services are not the main driver of people's perceptions, the evidence suggests that poor performance

and perceived unfairness can undermine perceptions of government. In **South Sudan**, which in general had not exhibited much in the way of public expectations around service provision, perceived inequities in the distribution of emergency aid were the source of negative perceptions, particularly of the government's higher tiers (Maxwell *et al.*, 2016: 3). When it came to public service beyond emergency assistance, the drivers of people's perceptions were complex and layered. Narratives about the new government's relative inexperience, the importance of the independence struggle, and domination and marginalisation among South Sudan's ethnic groups all played a role in how service delivery was interpreted.

For example, Lou Nuer and Murle populations in Jonglei State held perceptions of government that were influenced both positively and negatively. Positively by a sympathy for the recent formation and perceived lack of resources of the Government of South Sudan; and negatively by the perception that they had been marginalised, particularly in security issues, but also in terms of service delivery and political participation, by what they perceived to be a Dinka-dominated state and national government. These perceptions were different between those of central state institutions and local chiefs, with the negative view attached to the higher tiers of government (Maxwell *et al.*, 2014; Maxwell *et al.*, 2016). Interestingly and importantly, these negative perceptions were much more pronounced and intense among displaced Murle populations, interviewed after their displacement to Juba (Santschi *et al.*, 2014: 28).

In **Pakistan**, qualitative work in the same two districts as the survey identified a strong perception of politicisation or favouritism in the delivery of social protection and livelihoods: 'those with fewer political and social contacts (social capital), women, landless farmers (tenants), those living in marginal and remote areas and extremely poor people were often deprived of assistance' (Shah and Shahbaz, 2015: 30). A majority of respondents did not think the strategy of selecting focal persons (who were mostly local influential persons) was appropriate, and frequently complained about misuse of power, favouritism and corruption. Developing the analysis, two separate issues were identified: '1) structural factors that affect access to aid that mean agencies unwittingly excluded the poor; and 2) elite capture.' (Shah and Shahbaz, 2015: 22). Poor targeting of livelihoods and social protection provision was also observed in northern Uganda, with assistance often going to better off households (Mazurana *et al.*, 2014) – although it must be noted that receipt of such assistance may also be related to a household's ability to access and use the transfer (e.g. certain agricultural inputs may be intrinsically more suited to, and worthwhile

for, land-owning households).

In **Nepal**, similar perceptions of lack of influence or marginalisation drove views of why water services were poor, and reinforced a worse perception of central government over local government (Acharya *et al.*, 2015). In particular, this was seen to be related to the political influence – or rather lack thereof – of a given locality and its representatives, a problem for which central government was typically perceived to be responsible (Acharya *et al.*, 2015). The same was true for health services: 'People blame central government corruption for all kinds of problems, whether concerning medicines, human resources, or the technical inefficiency of Health Posts and Sub-Health Posts' (Paudel *et al.*, 2015: 22).

By contrast, where heavy expectations existed of services – such as social protection programmes in **Sri Lanka** – the perception of fairness in the distribution of such services was very important for the perception of the service itself. One study drawing on 62 interviews about social protection interventions across three districts (Mannar, Trincomalee and Jaffna) found that the government's visibility in the provision of various forms of social protection is high (Godamunne, 2015). The GN is generally seen as the primary provider of information about the programmes. People also typically reported going to the GN whenever they experienced a problem with an intervention.

Yet, there were strong perceptions among interviewees that the continuation of patronage politics made it both harder for some and easier for others to receive social protection transfers, regardless of formal eligibility. These biases can create an inequity in the transfer distribution process, contributing towards a situation in which poorer, disconnected individuals lose out as a result of bargains formed between wealthier, more powerful members of society. In some parts of the country – notably, the relatively conservative province of Jaffna – beneficiary selection appears to have been skewed by the 'patriarchal values of public officials', with women receiving a disproportionately low share of transfers (ibid.: 27). Evidence from fisher communities also suggests that perceptions of politicisation or ethnicisation of services and resources are common (Mayadunne and Phillips, 2016: 12-13). In a rare SLRC study that looked at the actual behaviour of actors (informal sector fishermen in northern Sri Lanka) towards state authorities found that the formal rules and procedures of the state actors such as the Department of Fisheries, the navy and the police are challenged because they are seen to lack consistency,

predictability, fairness and trust by the minority Muslim fishermen (Lokuge, in draft).

At the same time, these patterns of exclusion may be complicated or unexpected. Research on sanitation in Jaffna showed that the ties between caste and the provision of sanitation services can produce unexpected results. For example, despite its subordinate status, the local caste group is historically tied to employment in the sanitation sector, and services can be strong where providers are rooted in the community, or the community is a vote bank for political actors involved in service provision. Variation in access can also be found within marginalised groups (Lall, 2015). Even among the 'lower caste' community members studied in Jaffna, only a small minority viewed caste as the primary driver of discrimination, with more respondents in an ethnographic study expressing discrimination as a function of the group's cultural or behavioural characteristics, as perceived by themselves or 'outsiders' (ibid.: 12).

Wider literature seems to support the idea that exclusionary practices in the delivery of services can damage perceptions of state legitimacy. Qualitative research in Liberia, Nepal, and Colombia found that unequal or exclusionary access to public goods was detrimental to citizens' views of the state's right to rule (Dix *et al.*, 2012). In the influential 'Quality of Government' study, Rothstein (2009) empirically demonstrates that in developed states, greater impartiality in the exercise of state power – including through service delivery – is positively associated with higher levels of trust in government.

A key question is how expectations and perceptions of unfairness interact. Equity is not the same as perceived unfairness – equity is an external value, while fairness is a subjective or relational value having to do with the perceiver's position. It also follows that fairness and unfairness may be perceived differently and simultaneously by different individuals or groups, and that these judgements about the same service can vary, according to who is passing judgement. Using an example from post-war Iraq, Brinkerhoff *et al.* (2012) note that attempts to promote equity by expanding services to previously excluded groups reduced the state's overall legitimacy gains as they ran counter to the interests of previously dominant (primarily Sunni) groups. As Mcloughlin (2015b: 5) argues, '[p]articularly in divided societies, perceived favouritism towards one group may support the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of that group, whilst simultaneously undermining it amongst others'. Mcloughlin's more recent work in Sri Lanka adds

empirical flesh to this, demonstrating how perceptions of unfairness vis-a-vis education reform helped aggravate armed insurrection in the north (Mcloughlin, 2017). In SLRC's qualitative work, one example may be the observation that early accession of Dalits to social protection, though targeting a marginalised group, might have had a delegitimising impact among other groupings in **Nepal** (KC *et al.*, 2014: 25).

There are two important observations to make about the significance of these qualitative findings. First, since unfairness is often based on perceptions of group behaviour or treatment, things that act as proxies for groups, or actual groups themselves, will be important variables. Patterned variations in these perceptions – as among ethnic or geographic locations – can thus be the transmission mechanism for the importance of geographic, ethnic or other invariant factors in the survey data described in Section 3.2. This helps to explain the findings that these other factors can be very important in shaping perceptions, connecting the role of these more fixed factors with the relational and experiential elements outlined here.

Second, the patterns by which issues such as these play out in negative perceptions of government across different levels are important. One of the key contributions of SLRC is the focus on both the quantitative and qualitative components in distinguishing between perceptions of central and local governments. A general finding is that perceptions of the local government's responsiveness is better than that of central government, which is seen in both waves (see Table 4).

These findings are reinforced when other local institutions are included. In **DRC**, where local informal chiefs were also included in the study, they enjoyed more positive perceptions than formal government institutions (of which

Table 4: Changing perceptions of local and central government, by country

Country	% respondents who agree that local gov. cares about opinion		% respondents who agree that central gov. cares about opinion	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
DRC	50.3	50.8	45.3	29.5
Nepal	33.8	44.2	21.2	22.0
Pakistan	5.6	27.9	4.0	21.5
Sri Lanka	60.3	57.9	44.0	65.3
Uganda	41.1	46.4	36.2	45.0

local did better than central). Other survey data on South Sudan by the London School of Economics' Justice and Security Research Programme reinforces the higher levels of trust given to executive chiefs, headmen and elders as opposed to Boma or Payam administrators, with armed forces enjoying the least trust of all (Rigterink *et al.*, 2016: 56). Parastatal coordination and peacebuilding mechanisms in **Nepal**, such as the District and Village Peace Committees, show the same pattern of reported effectiveness being greater locally (Tandukar *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, collaborative research between SLRC and the International Centre for Tax and Development (ICTD) finds that, in both **Nepal** and **Sierra Leone**, taxes administered by local non-government actors are often perceived as either fairer or more transparent than formal, legally sanctioned taxes (Jibao *et al.*, 2017; Mallett *et al.* 2016). (Incidentally, the Nepal study also finds that while the number of taxes paid is positively, if loosely, correlated with better perceptions of government, the association runs negative when people feel they do not receive anything in return for their payments – i.e. when we consider the relationship between the number of 'unrewarded taxes' paid and perceptions of government).

How perceived problems play out may vary between local and central government. Perceptions of unfairness, exclusion or corruption in **South Sudan** and **Nepal**, for example, tended to be blamed on the higher levels of government (Acharya *et al.*, 2015; Maxwell *et al.*, 2016). In **Sri Lanka**, where social protection was such a core expectation, qualitative work suggested negative experiences of this type were attributed more to local officials, though it should be noted that these are, in general, the officials of central government rather than the representatives of local authorities (Godamunne, 2015: 27-28).

It is, therefore, difficult to be certain how de/legitimisation processes occurring at the very local level 'aggregate up' to form broader relationships between the state and citizen. For this, we need models that can account for contextually-specific norms and expectations towards central and local government separately, as well as various understandings of the relationship between them.

6.4   Summary

Beyond simple questions of access, aspects of how services are delivered are important in shaping their impact on people's perceptions. Generalised levels of satisfaction with services – as with access – do not seem to have a very consistent effect on people's perceptions, except in the case of certain locally-salient sectors, and health in particular. However, the converse experience of concretely encountered problems appears to be a more powerful driver of worsening perceptions of government. It may be through this optic that the importance for reversing negative perceptions of various forms of participation and grievance mechanisms can be understood.

Across a large range of SLRC's qualitative research, perceived unfairness, corruption or exclusion are identified as important factors in how people connect their experience of services to their views of the local and central state. As these perceptions are patterned according to factors that may map onto invariant characteristics found in the survey data (e.g. gender, ethnicity), they may help explain the importance of such characteristics in the survey data on perceptions of government. Finally, the qualitative research suggests that such negative perceptions can apply differentially to local or central levels of government. Again, this suggests the importance of particular narratives and expectations on the state's role across levels.

Image: interview, Nepal. Credit: Georgina Sturge, edited by James Mauger.

7 Conclusions

This synthesis report has explored several levels at which SLRC examined the drivers of perceptions of government, and how they may be connected to services in conflict-affected settings. These levels include aspects of the service itself, such as access, type and provider, as well as process elements including perceived satisfaction, problems experienced, and opportunities for participation. These have been set against other, contextual, household and individual factors that may be seen to shape perceptions of government in SLRC's qualitative and survey research.

Across all the SLRC survey results, what is perhaps most striking is their lack of consistency. There is not one model that works everywhere. While significant associations emerge, they do not do so across all five survey countries or locations. Even the most consistent findings – for example, the effect of experienced problems, or the role of gender – have their exceptions. What this variability reinforces is the importance of *other factors* in shaping the way presence, experience and processes of service delivery translate into people's perceptions of government at different levels. This is confirmed by the incorporation of a Random Effects (RE) model into the analysis for the second wave of the survey, as well as the findings regarding contextual, household and individual characteristics and experiences.

The effects of service-related factors on people's perceptions of government also operates in complex ways. The experience of service delivery appears to be conditioned by, or refracted through, the *intersectionality* of multiple identity-based variables, stretching beyond gender to include a combination of characteristics such as ethnicity, caste, age and location. This intersectionality is an important avenue of future exploration with this and other data.

When the survey results are complemented by the qualitative research, it is clear that this variation is also a result of the influence of service-related factors, which are conditioned by expectations and narratives about what the state is, what it provides, and what services mean in given contexts. The research allows us to make connections between some of these expectations and the important experiential dimensions of services – particularly perceptions of unfairness or exclusion.

7.1 Narratives and expectations about the state

The qualitative research highlights that underlying narratives about the state and its role can have an important influence on how people respond to services. This is the 'relational' dimension of peoples' norms and expectations about government and the services it provides. Distinct from

service quality or process, which focus on provider-side problems and processes, the relational dimension instead focuses on the beliefs and experiences of the users and other citizens (a theme that was also found in SLRC's research on capacity – see Denney and Mallett, 2017). Some donor literature has come to recognise this, criticising the direct or indirect equation of process or political legitimacy with democratic, rational-legal legitimacy. It argues that 'people's ideas about what constitutes legitimate political authority are fundamentally different in Western and non-Western states' (OECD, 2010: 8). However, this analysis remains at an aggregate level – not a societal, communal, household or individual one.

Several broad narratives about the state appear in SLRC's work. These vary around whether the state is particularly associated with service delivery, and whether expectations around that delivery are fairly high and historically rooted, or not.

One key narrative is that the most important feature of the state is often not about services, but rather about whether the state does or does not provide access to influential sources of potential security, problem-solving support or resources for one's community or network group (Jackson, 2016; Jackson and Minoia, 2016). This narrative is echoed in SLRC's qualitative work across several countries, but is most prominent in Afghanistan. In this model of a 'networked state' (Jackson, 2016), there are few expectations that the main function of the state is to provide services of a particular kind, and people's engagement with it are shaped by this expectation. The state, in such circumstances 'of limited statehood', is an avenue for personalised action among community members to overcome collective action problems, when there is not yet sufficient generalised trust beyond the local level (Börzel and Risse, 2016: 149).

In other cases, such as in South Sudan, the sources of legitimation of the state were also reported to be derived from elsewhere – in particular, the successful struggle for independence. Qualitative fieldwork in three counties of the South Sudan study found that while people did discuss their desire for services, they had very low expectations of the government's ability or responsibility to provide them directly (citing the new regime's inexperience). Instead, these expectations were directed towards NGOs or international agencies (Maxwell *et al.*, 2014).

In other situations, people's perceptions were shaped by a robust set of expectations around services. In Sri Lanka,

a long history and political narrative around services such as social protection, and to some degree health, were powerful factors shaping the way respondents viewed the strengths, or more usually the shortcomings, of state provision. In others, notably northern Uganda, years of low baseline delivery had so undermined expectations of state provision that it possibly contributed to unexpected outcomes such as positive changes in perceptions of government after displacement or paying fees to receive water services.

Of course, expectations and narratives like these can co-exist, and even conflict with each other. For example, in examining water provision in Nepal, respondents vigorously agreed that a local area's political importance was an important factor for services, but also complained that this situation can result in inequitable services (Acharya *et al.*, 2015). In the DRC, despite baseline expectations being low, some specific issues were mentioned during fieldwork, such as the broken election promise to provide free education for the first four years of primary school. Models of legitimacy that emphasise norms and expectations would suggest that the impact of service provision on people's perceptions will be influenced by these expectations, and these expectations certainly influenced the perception of respondents, but are not captured *per se* in the survey.

At this level of 'macro-narrative', it seems possible to distinguish situations where services form a significant part of shared beliefs about the state, from those where other narratives are paramount. This legitimating narrative may be based on historical, cultural, or more recent orientations arising from, for example, a peace process or aid programme. And within this framework, if services are significant, are expectations (for example, of universality) high or low? It is interesting to consider whether and how different types and levels of expectations about services influence the importance of experiential factors, like problems experienced or participation on people's view of government. There is some evidence here that where expectations are high, or historically rooted, these factors are powerful in shaping perceptions – particularly when these relate to negative perceptions based on problems. If so, understanding the outlines of these expectations may be very important in framing many aspects of service delivery if it is to avoid the risks of leaving these unmet or disappointed. As Mcloughlin's (2017) recent research in Sri Lanka suggests, where expectations *do* go unmet and government promises *do* get broken, in some cases a delegitimation effect seems possible.

As well as these 'macro-narratives', other expectations shape people's views of how services are being delivered. Among the more prominent ones in SLRC's qualitative work are the reported impacts of perceived exclusion or unfairness on perceptions of how state services are performing. Rather than adhering to a simple 'process' legitimacy model, in which certain procedures are seen to generate legitimacy, fairness appears to be subjective and relative, and sometimes can be contradictory among groups. These 'meso- and micro-narratives' at group or even household level can be focused on a range of issues, ranging from the selection of beneficiaries, to perceptions of group exclusion or geographic and political disadvantage.

Key questions involve the pace of change and the dynamics at different levels. How quickly, particularly in volatile fragile contexts, do narratives at large and smaller scales change about what people expect in respect of services? What are the influences of major political transitions, or the impact of aid programmes and other development initiatives on these expectations? How is exclusion understood and attributed to different state actors, and how do different kinds of social cleavages manifest themselves in differential responses to exclusion at local and national levels?

7.2   Support for a relational model of legitimacy

This synthesis of SLRC's qualitative work and the importance of expectations and narratives found in it thus lend support to a relational model of legitimacy. Here, the norms and expectations of those conferring legitimacy are as important as other factors, such as the objective characteristics of services, the state or level of government. As a growing literature on psychology and legitimacy emphasises, an important aspect of those norms and expectations includes 'that authorities and institutions are viewed as more legitimate and, therefore, their decisions and rules are more willingly accepted when they exercise their authority through procedures that people *experience* as being fair' (Tyler, 2006: 379; emphasis added).

In this sense, the state is less understood as an object than as a set of relationships built around different legitimating narratives, which may or may not include those around the delivery of services. In post-conflict contexts, the emergence of such forms of 'grounded legitimacy' need to combine rational-legal elements with other traditional sources (Clements, 2008: 27; Clements, 2014). Ironically, some have observed that this realisation represents a return to Max Weber's social theory, via his

historical and social analyses (Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016). There are parallels to this relational model emerging in other fields. They too emphasise the interpretative frameworks of the subject themselves, rather than their objective situation, when explaining states of mind, such as wellbeing:

> Relationships thus form a central focus, as both the means through which (psychological and material) goods are distributed and needs are met, and as intrinsic to the constitution and experience of wellbeing. (White, 2015: 2)

In a close parallel to SLRC's findings on perceptions of government, subjective perceptions of wellbeing are also shaped by factors such as 'places of residence – the countryside or the city – and positioning by social structure, of age, wealth, gender, or generation' (White, 2015: 6). When taken together, dimensions of material circumstance, subjective interpretation, and relationships, all shape states of mind in the complex way that SLRC has measured.

SLRC provides important general support for, and nuance to, the role of expectations and narratives in filtering the impact of service delivery on people's perceptions of the state. It also extends this analysis in two very specific ways.

First, it sheds significant new light on the role of negative experiential factors in shaping perceptions of government, and the way that these play out against background 'macro-narratives'. The survey data on the impact of problems experienced with services on perceptions of government raises important questions about how experiential factors and expectations interact in more than one direction. At the same time, the qualitative work highlights the importance of meso- and micro-narratives around exclusion and unfairness, and the way that these may themselves be filtered through broader expectations of services.

Second, it hints at important differences in the way factors such as service delivery may influence perceptions at different levels of government. In particular, the evidence of variation between perceptions of local and national governments suggests that these categories may be further expanded to encompass the spatial aspects of services, structures and agency. Just as the identity and characteristics of the conferees 'granting' legitimacy vary, so too should the state be disaggregated: '[i]n effect, the "state" is not one but several objects of legitimation' and one cannot draw conclusions directly or summarily about the effects of the legitimation of one on the others

(Mcloughlin, 2015b: 4). This disaggregation has thus far tended to focus on different manifestations (organisational, ideological, identity) of the national state, but needs to be expanded to incorporate territorial manifestations.

7.3   Implications for policy and practice

A concern of SLRC from the outset has been to use the knowledge generated around public services and perceptions of the state to inform the way governments and development partners deliver services in conflict-affected settings. In such settings, generating legitimacy and its related benefits has been an important concern of state-building efforts, which have often focused on addressing capacity deficits or building up state delivered services. However, legitimacy is a fluid and difficult concept to both theorise and measure, and is increasingly understood to have complex underpinnings, including contextually-specific shared norms and beliefs. SLRC provides a wealth of evidence to consider when operating within this complexity.

1.   Don't overestimate the contribution of services to political legitimation

Strategies for state-building that heavily emphasise services as a route to improved perceptions of government and potentially increased political legitimacy are overly simplistic. So too are blanket endorsements of the importance of certain services or providers being the main route to legitimacy. In fact, the role of broader changes to the political context, such as changing political settlements, new constitutions, or major changes to regime will be much more likely to generate shifts in the pattern of attitudes and perceptions about state organisations. History matters too: the kind of place that services (in general and in particular) have in public understandings of the state are a product of past trajectories and narratives around state formation.

The importance of this background can run counter to an often carelessly applied notion of post-conflict settings as a relatively 'blank slate', in which any new service delivery is bound to be viewed positively. The nature of political settlements prior to, and arising after, conflict, shape people's narratives and expectations about the state and the role of services within it. Finally, many contextual and experiential factors in individual localities, groups and households will drive perceptions more forcefully than changes to specific services. This is not to say that services are never important, but that their role is conditioned by many other factors, both objective and subjective.

2.   Prioritise and deliver important services for their own sake, but recognise they may have political effects

Using legitimation effects to drive service provision policy is unlikely to produce the results desired. Simply increasing the availability of given services, or ensuring they are delivered by state agencies, does not produce a consistent effect on people's perceptions of government. Instead, governments and development partners must continue and expand the use of other policy- and context-relevant criteria to prioritise the delivery of key assistance and services, and see these as components of their broader development strategies. Doing so with clear and manageable objectives that are realistic in context is important.

Having said this, it is also important that the providers of public services recognise that these activities can and do have political impacts and effects. In particular, the way in which they are provided has consistently appeared to be important, but not always in consistent ways. For example, some aspects of participation seem to produce positive changes in some settings, but these are tempered by expectations about participation, and competing experiences and narratives about exclusion, corruption or other concerns. Two specific things seem important to consider.

The first is that the ground level experience of receiving a service is important. From this perspective, the relationships between people and providers, and particularly the ability to recognise or respond to experienced problems, are equally or even more important than raising awareness or participation during planning stages. The second is that these processes and procedures will not be able to influence every perception or narrative. Where there are overriding narratives of exclusion or unfairness, these often adhere to higher levels of the state and will not be overcome through local processes alone.

3.   Invest in understanding historical and narrative factors that influence how services may be interpreted

For these reasons, likely interactions between service programmes and people's perceptions cannot be understood without due attention to the way that services are framed by individuals, households, communities and societies. Investment and effort in understanding the role that services have played in earlier processes of state formation, during conflict and after is needed. This understanding needs to go beyond the level of priorities

as expressed in the surveys or political economy analysis of interests that is often flagged as the default knowledge base for contextualised programming.

While such information may be useful, governments and development partners need to better understand the narratives about services that inform people's view, what they symbolise in relation to their experience, and how they relate particularly to localised and subjective notions of exclusion, inclusion and fairness. Such work depends on extensive use of local knowledge and partnership, ongoing engagement in knowledge generation and not just ex ante analysis and feedback loops. A concrete area in which this kind of research can be used is in the design and use of different kinds of participatory and feedback mechanisms that are sensitive to underlying expectations and narratives about such processes.

4.   Don't conflate the local and national levels

An important result from SLRC research is the distinctions that emerge between perceptions of central state and local government organisations. These distinctions demonstrate that both the background political changes and the service-related factors discussed above can be filtered quite differently to local and national levels. There appears to be a fairly widespread 'local advantage' in perceptions, whereby national states seem to garner lower levels of baseline positive feeling, and where major problems of exclusion or unfairness can often be projected upwards. Of course, what this implies for programming may vary both vertically and horizontally. People's expectations about the role of local government, and its position on particular localities, can be expected to influence the link or lack thereof between perceptions at different levels.

5.   Design and implement programming that responds to these conditions

What would be some principles for service delivery programming that are more likely to respond to the above policy implications? Specifically, how can services be supported – as they often must be – at scale when cross- and within-country context and variation are so important?

While conflict-affected settings necessitate rapid needs assessment and urgency, these considerations need to be supplemented by extra effort to take stock of pre-

existing contextual information. This should include the subjective expressions of people's norms and expectations. While there may be an understandable imperative to emphasise access, the findings also suggest that issues of process, especially around expectations of fairness and inclusion or exclusion, will be very important in avoiding negative perceptual effects.

In these settings, perhaps more than anywhere, programming needs to be able to support robust contextual awareness, local variation, and learning and adaptation. Management practices and accountability frameworks need to incorporate flexibility in responding to the likelihood that unexpected consequences and new micro-narratives will emerge in response to programming. In implementation, there are advantages of using a range of providers in different contexts, or allowing and learning from variation in forms of implementation and participation. The state does not have to be the main or only provider of services to be associated with them perceptually.

It is important to consider these implications in the light of two, distinct but related, concerns. The first is the one that has taken up the bulk of discussion in this paper – understanding more about how legitimacy and states are built or formed, and whether and how services play a role. The second has been less prominent, but is of equal or perhaps greater importance for those interested in SLRC's work – how, given these relationships, is it best to deliver services, and to ensure these are effective and not counterproductive?

6.   Learn more about services, perceptions and legitimacy

A final implication of this research is that it clearly shows the importance of using mixed methods, and continually deepening the qualitative understanding of relationships between services and state-building. Simple measures of access to services can obscure details of how issues like distance or time are perceived in practice, details that can be illuminated through qualitative research. However, it also demonstrates the immense potential of ambitious survey methods, even under the most difficult circumstances. Finally, there is considerable scope for more focused research in the future that aims to draw out the delicate linkages between perception and more performative dimensions of state legitimacy.

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