

# Why Undertake Field Research?

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# Why do Fieldwork?

1. Because many things about the world you can do pathbreaking research on are not contained in any book, article or set of lecture notes.
2. Therefore, in fieldwork you get new facts, ideas, questions, hypotheses (Example 1: A new hypothesis about why Botswana has been so successful since independence; Example 2: Why have women been so politically powerful in Igboland?)
3. You may get a question to which you can't find an answer or the materials with which to build an answer, or you might not realize what the right materials are (Example 3: Getting Botswana into Perspective).
4. Because experiencing something first-hand is essential if you want to understand it, or interpret what it means, or how it connects to other phenomenon (Example 4: The egalitarianism of African society as seen in Sierra Leone; Example 5: Exchanging *k'intus* in Bolivia).
5. Because what is contained in books might not be correct! (Example 6: Researching the Paramount Chieftaincy in Sierra Leone)
6. Because you might find out that one of your own ideas is completely wrong!!!! (Example 7: La Gata and Chance in Colombia).
7. Because most social science was developed by interpreting the history of western societies which was used to formulate "universal laws". The non-western world played little role in this and has been widely under-studied. Generalizations based on western history may not fit non-western societies well. (Example 8: supernatural power and politics in the Congo; Example 9: The Really-Existing Colombian state; Example 10: Another hypothesis you wouldn't have thought of without doing fieldwork).

# Botswana as a Successful Society

- When I got puzzled by this in 1997, I could find no explanation of it, or ones that were patently wrong (a colleague of mine at UC Berkeley told me the country was successful because it was run by white South Africans).
- Existing studies focused on the “proximate explanations” – good policies etc.
- But I was looking for something deeper; why had Botswana avoided so many of the syndromes which had be-devilled post-independent Africa particularly in the political realm (think Chinua Achebe’s *Man of the People* or *Anthills of the Savanna*).
- There was only one thing for it – go to Botswana and start asking people.
- I identified scholars at the University of Botswana, it was the historians Thomas Tlou and Neil Parsons who were the most useful.

**Example 1:** A New Hypothesis. The Pula (rain) and Ipelegeng. Thomas Tlou's hypothesis about Botswana





# Roots of Female Power in Igboland

- Traditionally women have been remarkably empowered politically in Igboland.
- The innovation of “Dual Sex” political systems seems unique in world history.
- But where did this empowerment come from?
- Potentially connected to many factors; gender division of crops, yam and coco yam; women’s control of trade and the market.
- Fieldwork suggested a clear pattern which is that women are more powerful in a location when it is close to large bodies of water and different incarnations of “Mammy Water” are worshipped as deities.



## **Example 2: A New Hypothesis.**

Eze Nwanyi

Nwanyibuife Irona

in Oguta, Imo State

February 2022

Pouring libations to the pots of  
the different water deities who she  
worships.

# Back to Botswana

- When you go to Botswana you are stuck by the persistence of traditions and the extent to which post-colonial governments, starting with those of Seretse Khama, were able to base their legitimacy in traditional notions of authority.
- It is not that some scholars have not seen this. But how much importance to attach to this sitting in your office?
- They were able to preserve traditional notions of participations, consensus and consent which revolved around the *kgotla*.
- Similar institutions existed everywhere in Africa but in Botswana they were able to uniquely institutionalize this.





PLATE 8.2 Public assembly in the Ngwato royal *kgotla*, Serowe, 1935 [RAI-3981]

*The African Photographs of Isaac Schapera* (2007) U of C Press





PLATE 8.1 Public assembly in the Kgatla royal *kgotla* (court), Mochudi [RAI-3951]



### Example 3: Getting Botswana in Perspective. Fieldwork at Bontleng Kgotla, Gaborone.





The man who started it all:  
Khama III *Kgosi* of the  
Ngwato 1875-1923  
-sitting on a Leopardskin



# Equality in Africa

- Historically much of Africa was characterized by political equality. Jan Vansina argued that “the ability to **refuse** centralization while maintaining the necessary cohesion among a myriad of autonomous units has been the most original contribution of western Bantu tradition to the institutional history of the world” (*Paths in the Rainforests*, p. 237).
- Mary Douglas starts her seminal ethnography *The Lele of Kasai* (on Congo) by stating “Those who have had anything to do with the Lele must have noticed the absence of anyone who could give orders with a reasonable hope of being obeyed”. (1963,1)
- Philip Gulliver’s reconstruction of social networks among the Ndendeuli of Tanzania (*Neighbours and Networks*) shows how “big men” who were skilled at making connections emerged and become “notables”. But that they should “not be so ambitious that they sought to acquire authority. For a notable to attempt that was almost certain to defeat his own ends. He could not directly compel some of his neighbours to particular courses of action ... His neighbours would have reacted strongly against the suspicion of authoritarianism, or pretension to it” (1971, 244-245).



**Example 4:**  
The Semiotics  
of Equality:  
New year  
festivities in  
Sembehun,  
Bagruwa  
chieftaincy,  
Moyamba  
District,  
Sierra Leone

You wear the same  
clothes to show you  
are all equal.

# Studying the Rise of the Cocaleros

- With a Bolivian colleague of mine Pablo Selaya a Professor at the University of Copenhagen, we were trying to study the rise of the political party the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism).
- This was based on indigenous politics and captured the state in 2006.
- How was this possible in a country so dominated by elites and where indigenous peoples had suffered discrimination and marginalization.
- It seemed to be related to the attempt of previous governments to eliminate coca production.
- But it was only when we did fieldwork in Oruru province that we understood how this all fit together.



# Coca and the Ayllus

- “The ayllu, in its most general definition, is a group of individuals cohering as a social body around a place, ancestor, or task that provides a unifying focus. The ceremony of *hallpay*, in which the participants exchange *k'intus* and share the coca's *sami* with sacred Places, provides the framework within which this social cohering takes place . . . Through coca, the Earth, the Places, and the Ancestors are integrated with human society” (Catherine Allen, 2013, *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community*, pp. 108-109).
- Here *hallpay* is coca chewing.
- Here *k'intus* is the ceremonial offering of three coca leaves.
- Here *sami* is the supernatural essence of coca, or the supernatural forces associated with in.
- “To do *hallpay* properly ... is to be a Runa a “real person”. To chew coca leaves is to affirm the attitudes and values - the habits of mind and body - that are characteristic of indigenous Andean culture” (Allen, 2013, p. 7-7).



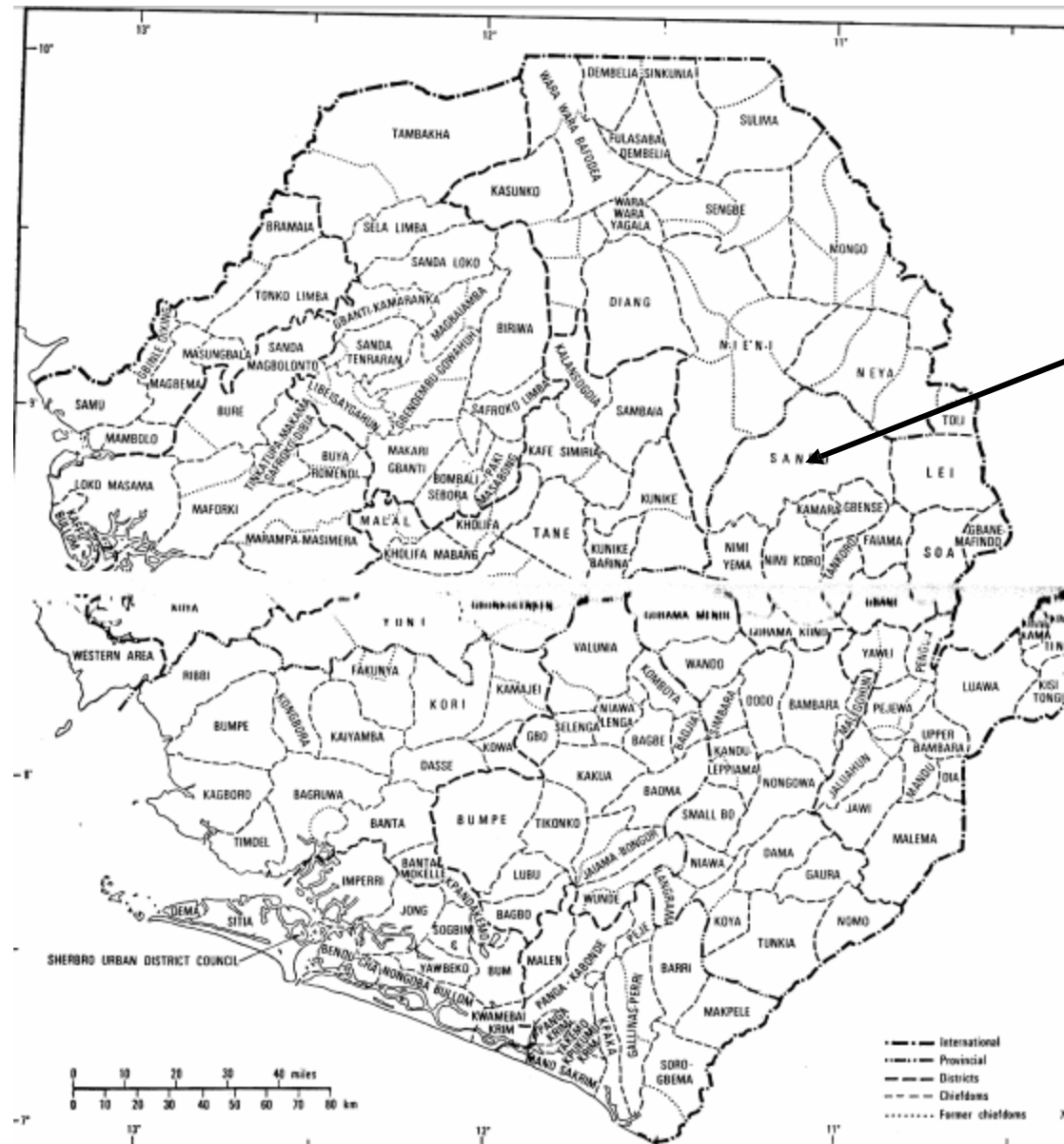
**Example 5:**  
Exchanging *k'intus*  
In Orinoca, Oruro,  
Bolivia.  
January 2020.

Imagine making kola  
and palm wine illegal  
in Nigeria?  
Wouldn't there be a  
political reaction?

# Researching Indirect Rule in Sierra Leone

- Colonial indirect rule was based on around 180 Paramount Chieftaincies.
- The standard academic narrative about these is that they are “decentralized despots” who were empowered, even created by the British.
- Often blamed for the civil war.
- To my amazement, having read this literature, in focus group after focus group Sierra Leoneans clearly regarded the Paramount Chiefs as legitimate rulers and opposed initiatives to reform them.
- So we developed a survey instrument to try to collect the oral histories of the chieftaincy and the origins of the “ruling families” elites who are eligible to propose candidates for the chieftaincy.
- What we found was immense continuity with pre-colonial institutions and elites.

# Chieftaincies in Sierra Leone

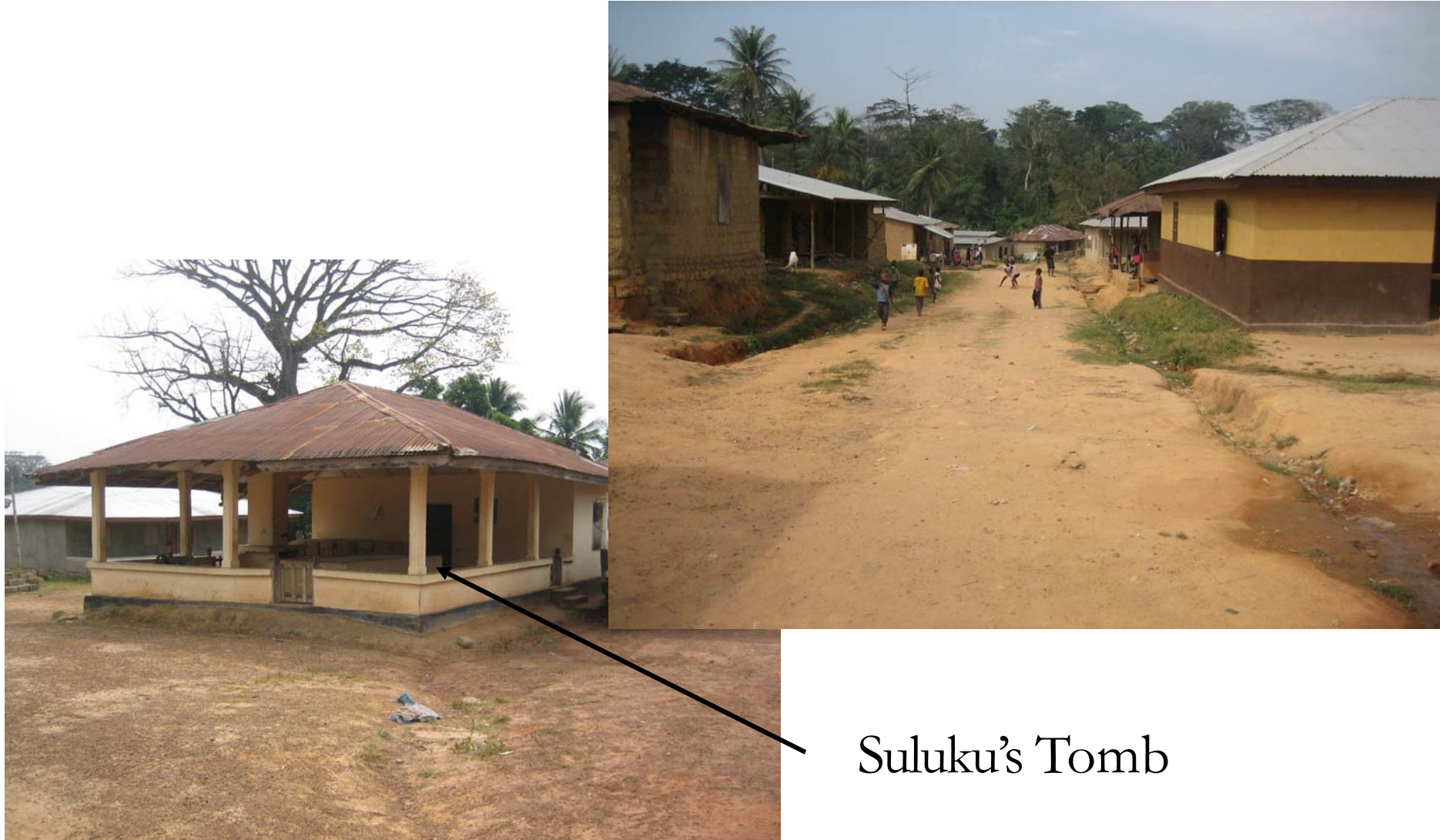


# King Suluku's Country

## Sando



# Kayima, Sando Chieftaincy, Sierra Leone, Fieldwork, December 2009



Suluku's Tomb

## Example 6: Chief Suluku's great grandson, Paramount Chief Sheku Fasaluku – a colonially created Decentralized Despot?



# A Hypothesis Killed by Fieldwork

- Colombia has very clientelistic politics with a huge amount of vote buying in elections.
- It also has departmental gambling monopolies which are run mostly by gangsters.
- Like “La Gata” The Cat (Enilse López).
- A hypothesis we developed is that the *chanceros*, the people who sell chance tickets which allow you to bet on the outcome of the departmental lottery are a network of people who buy votes.









Fieldwork  
with María  
Teresa  
Ronderos





**Example 7:** A failed hypothesis.  
Chanceros  
Fieldwork in Santa Fé de Antioquia,  
Colombia  
November 2010.

## (Les Toxines du corps) Bulletin d'Analyse



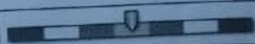
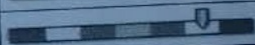
Nom: MBULA  
Post-nom : LISONGOLA  
Fonction : Consultant  
Chiffre: 165cm, 65kg





Sexe: Masculin

Âge: 36

Date d'examen: 04/08/2019 10:13

### Résultats du test actuel

Éléments du test	Valeurs Normales	Valeur de mesure réelle	Résultat du test
Boissons gazeuses	0,209 - 0,751	0,531	
Le rayonnement électromagnétique	0,046 - 0,167	0,127	
Tabac / nicotine	0,124 - 0,453	0,431	
Pesticides toxiques	0,013 - 0,313	0,42	

Référence:  Normal(-)  Anomalie légère(+)  Anomalie modérée(++)  Anomalies sévères(+++)

Boissons gazeuses:	0,209-0,751(-)	0,751-0,844(+)
	0,844-0,987(++)	>0,987(+++)
Le rayonnement électromagnétique:	0,046-0,167(-)	0,167-0,457(+)
	0,457-0,989(++)	>0,989(+++)
Tabac / nicotine:	0,124-0,453(-)	0,453-0,525(+)
	0,525-0,749(++)	>0,749(+++)
Pesticides toxiques:	0,013-0,313(-)	0,313-0,406(+)
	0,406-0,626(++)	>0,626(+++)

### Description des paramètres

**Boissons gazeuses:**  
Ces boissons excitantes n'ont pas ou peu d'électrolytes. Si la personne boit ces boissons après l'exercice, il est propice à l'organisme d'ajouter de l'humidité après l'exercice et, éventuellement, les résultats dans la réduction de la pression osmotique extracellulaire liquide dans l'organisme en raison de l'absorption de beaucoup d'humidité pour accélérer la perte des intracellulaire électrolytes. Certaines personnes aiment boire de l'eau glacée après l'exercice. Bien que les gens se sentent frais après avoir bu de l'eau glacée, mais la consommation immédiate après l'exercice

Toxicology report of our enumerator William in the Congo who accused the others in our survey team of using witchcraft to poison him in 2019.



chronique, emphysème et obstruction chronique des voies respiratoires dans l'une des principales incitations. Etude expérimentale trouve que la cigarette peut endommager les cils de la muqueuse bronchique, deviennent plus courtes, affectant les franges de la clairance. Quatrièmement, l'impact sur le tractus digestif: la sécrétion d'acide gastrique peut entraîner une augmentation du tabagisme en général, que les non-fumeurs a augmenté de 91,5%, et peut inhiber la sécrétion pancréatique de bicarbonate, résultant de la charge accrue d'acide duodénale, induite par des ulcères. La nicotine dans le tabac peut réduire le tonus du sphincter pylorique, facile à reflux biliaire, ce qui affaiblit l'estomac et du duodénum du facteur de la défense, afin de promouvoir l'inflammation chronique et les ulcères, retard de cicatrisation des ulcères et à l'original. En outre, le tabagisme peut réduire tonus du sphincter inférieur de l'œsophage, facile de provoquer une œsophagite par reflux

#### **Pesticide Résiduel:**

Après l'utilisation de pesticides dans les organismes, les pesticides agricoles et de l'environnement dans le corps d'origine, les métabolites toxiques, produits de dégradation et les impuretés en général est appelé résidus de pesticides? Les gens ont tendance à négligées l'organisme qui est contient des résidus de pesticides, toxiques métabolites et produits de dégradation. En fait, non seulement le métabolites ou d'impuretés dans les médicaments d'origine pour la toxicité chronique et de l'égalité ou plus graves, les pesticides peuvent altérer les hormones de l'homme à des troubles de sécrétion des femmes, oligozoospermie hommes, le taux de survie des spermatozoïdes est faible, les pesticides pénètrent dans l'organisme par les reins dans le cadre du foie conversion ou de décharge, ce qui augmente la charge de travail de l'organisme, une partie du sang, des protéines du sang capacité de liaison afin de réduire l'apport d'oxygène, une partie de la déposition de pesticides solubles dans les graisses du tissu adipeux.

Pour le Centre Médical Traditionnel La Guérison Divine

**==Dr Chance Mupika==**

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# Research in Gemena: The Bokoko Equilibrium

- Doing fieldwork in Gemena, DRC, for a different project, we realized that the relationship between supernatural authority and politics was very similar to that described in many of these classic ethnographies so we decided to collect some data.
- Mair (*Witchcraft*, 1969, p. 47) says “Most African peoples believe that witchcraft ‘runs in families’, whether they suppose that it is an inherited quality, or that parents teach it to their children.”
- In Gemena supernatural power is called Bokoko and our enumerators found it bizarre when we initially refused to research it because they viewed it as so central to politics.
- Bokoko means “power of the ancestors” so this is clearly inherited or potentially so.

# Researching Force and Witchcraft

- Wyatt MacGaffey points out that in Kongo society both witches and chiefs had the power to kill. The difference is that witches use this in the private interest (like eating corpses) while chiefs use this in the public interest.
- “The chief (mfumu) ... controls occult powers and bears, as the sign of his authority to do so, the mvwala or delegate's staff. Like them, he is principally concerned with defeating witchcraft; he has special powers enabling him to 'see' the evil in men's hearts, and he may possess charms and other devices which protect against witches and cure diseases.”
- The chief is distinguished by the power to kill, which is regarded as proof of supernatural support.

THE RELIGIOUS COMMISSIONS OF THE BAKONGO

31

	<i>Public interest</i>	<i>Private interest</i>
Death	chief ( <i>mfumu</i> )	witch ( <i>ndoki</i> )
Life	prophet ( <i>ngunza</i> )	magician ( <i>nganga</i> )

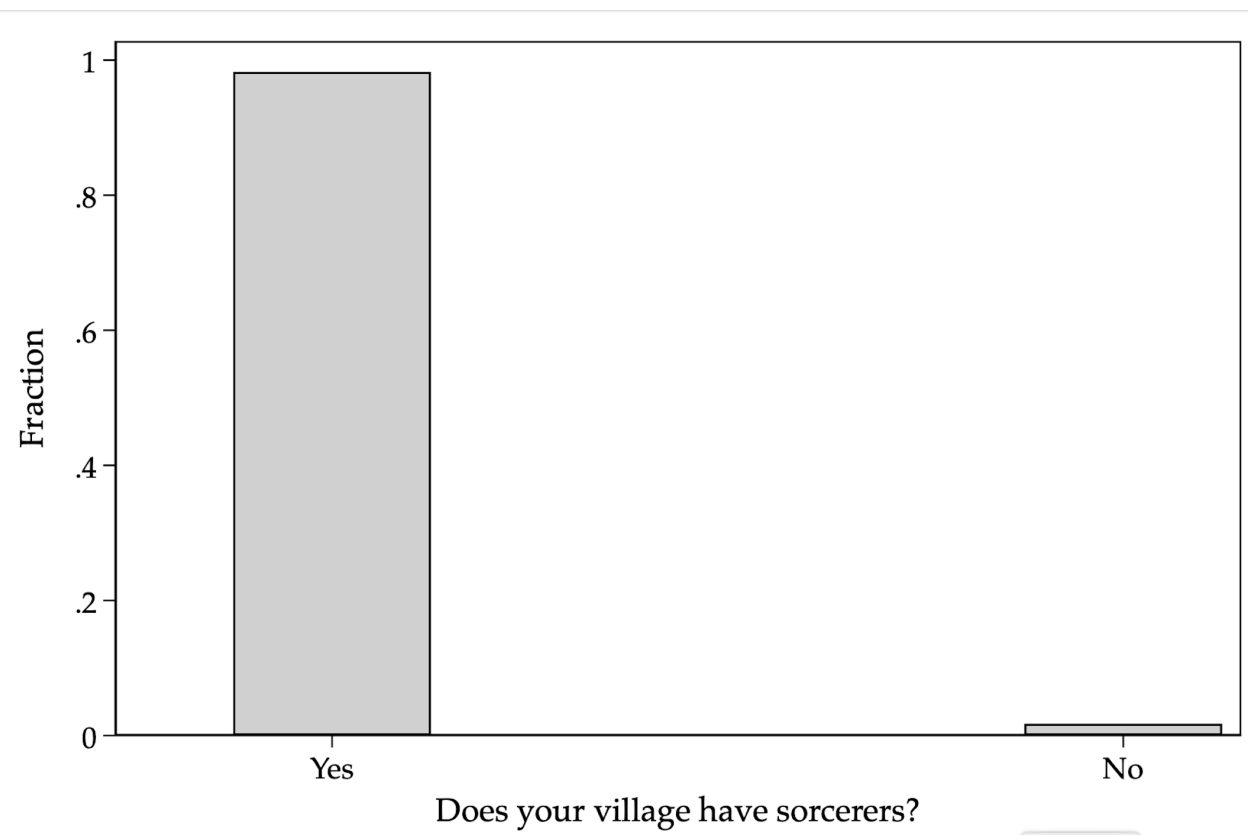
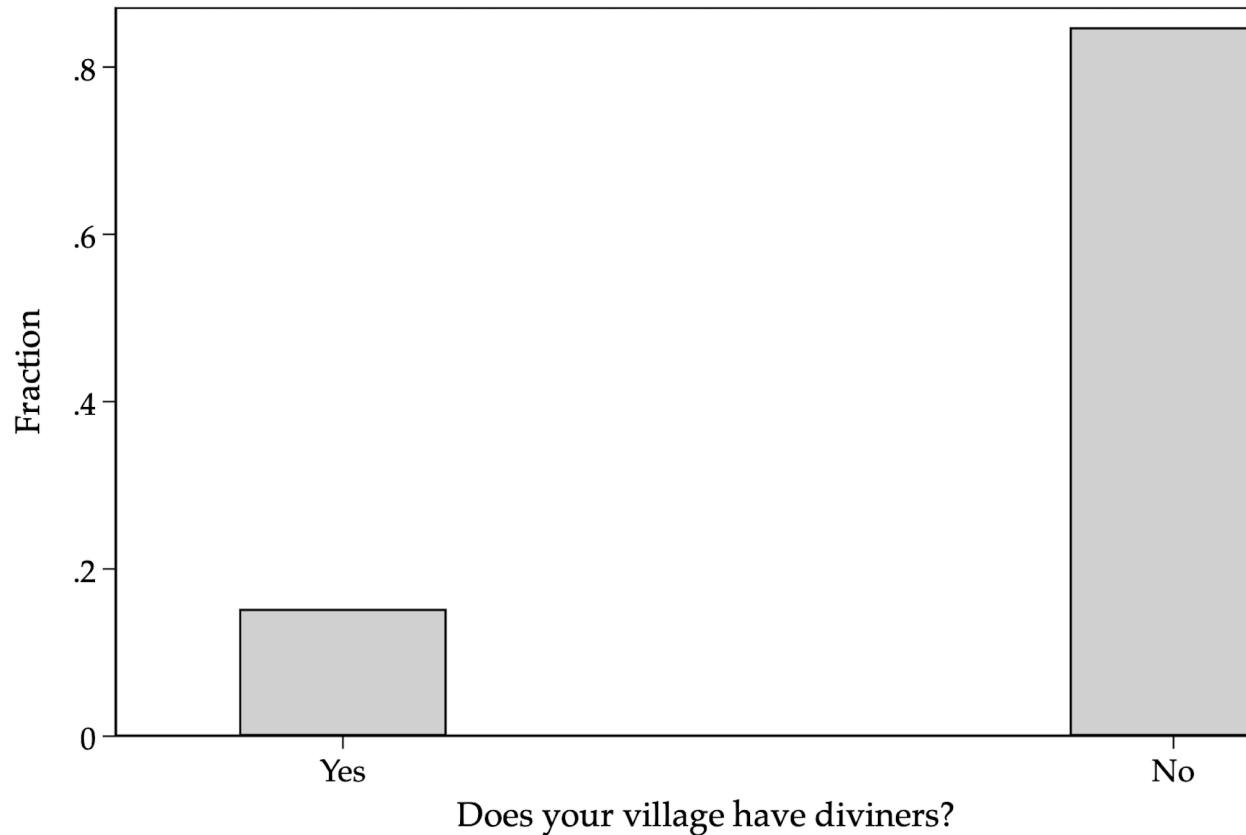
MacGaffey, Wyatt (1970) "The Religious Commissions of the Bakongo,"  
*Man*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Mar., 1970), pp. 27-38

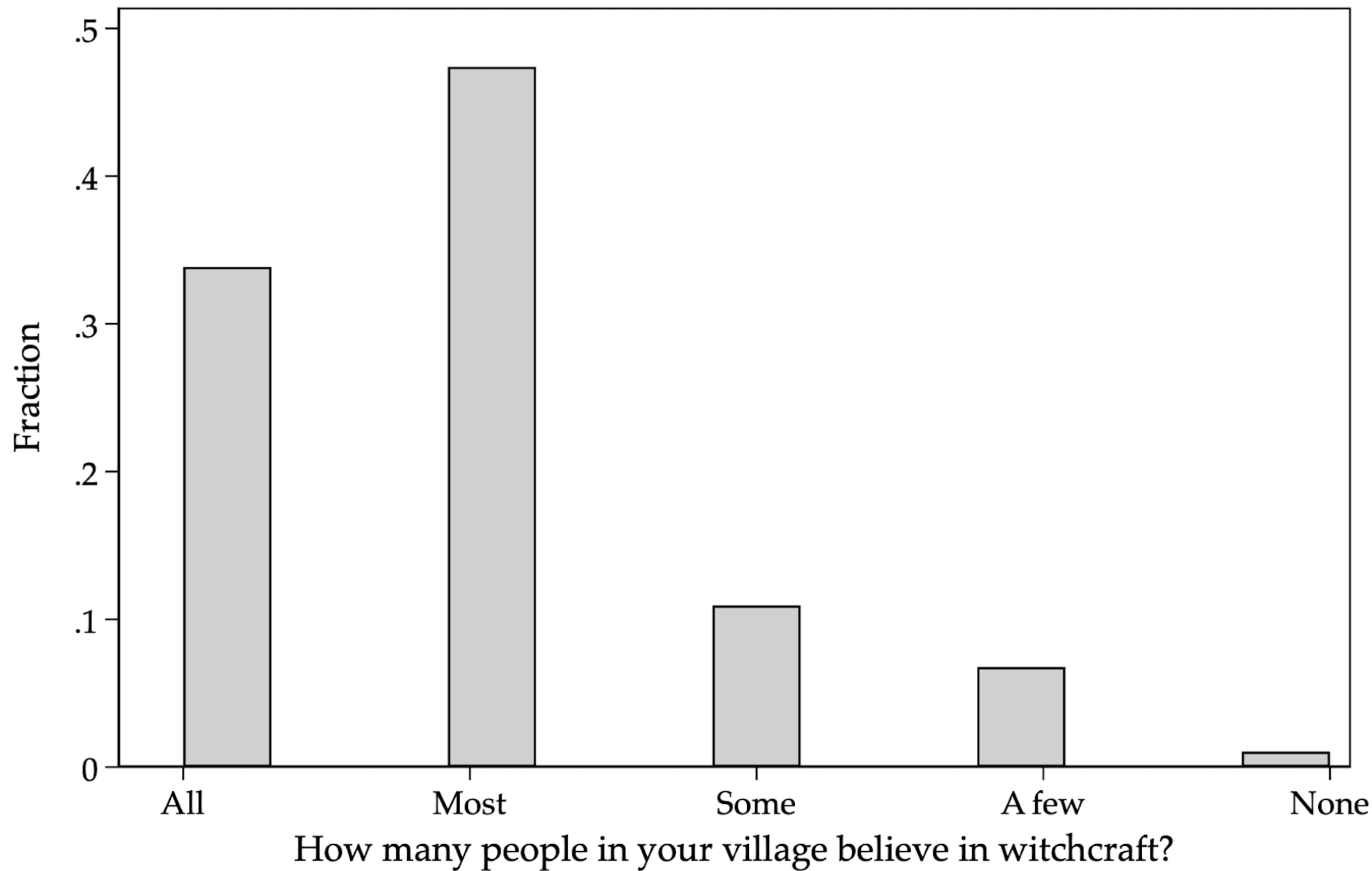
# Survey Evidence

- We asked people if there were witches or diviners, in their village, which our enumerators translated with the word “sorcery” (“sorcellerie” in French) so I use it here.
- Chiefs were asked to rate their own Bokoko, but we also asked other people in the villages (including village ‘sages’) where we collected data to rate how strong the Bokoko of the chief was.

# The Presence of diviners and Sorcerers

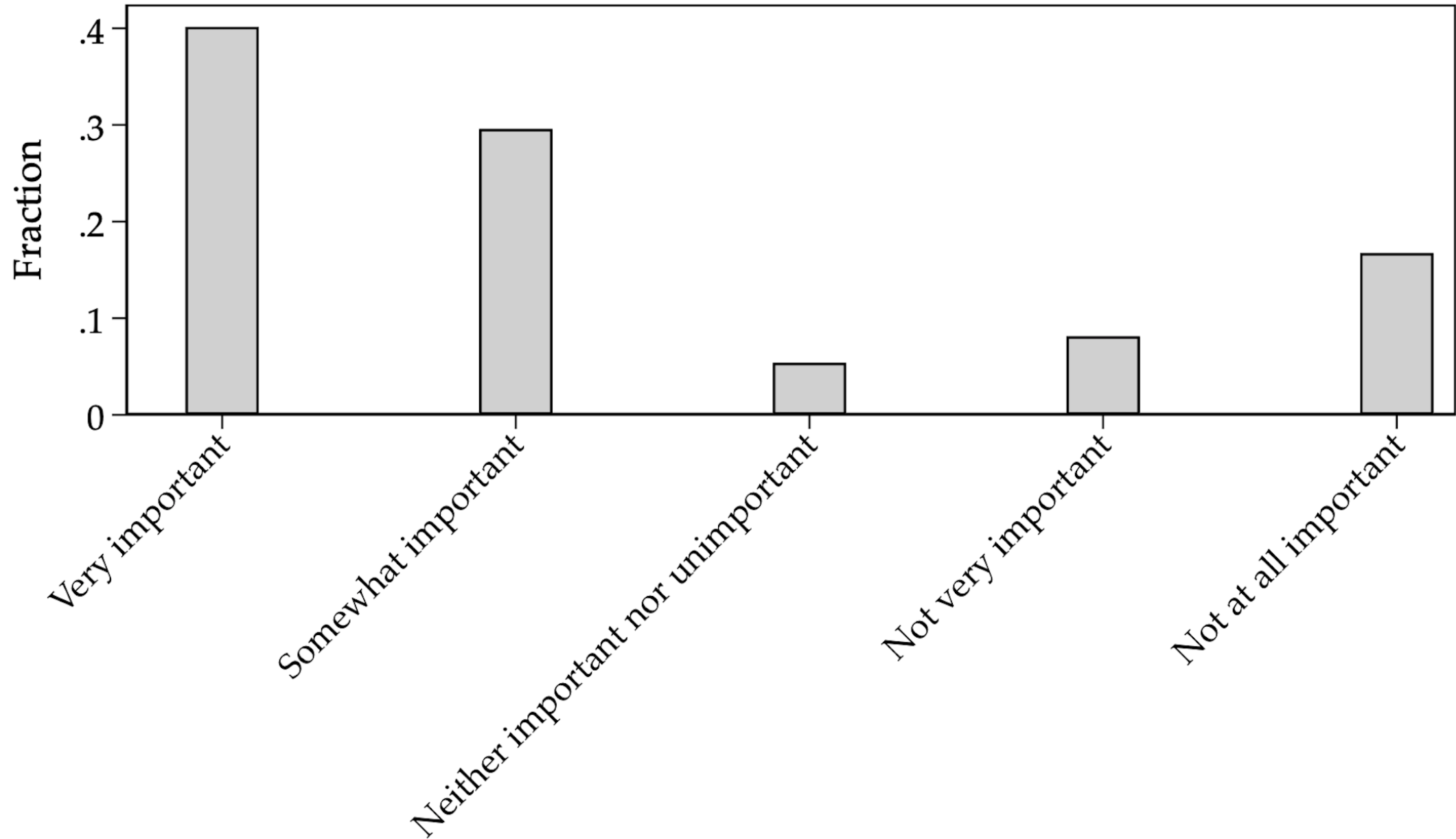
- nearly everyone reports there are sorcerers in their village



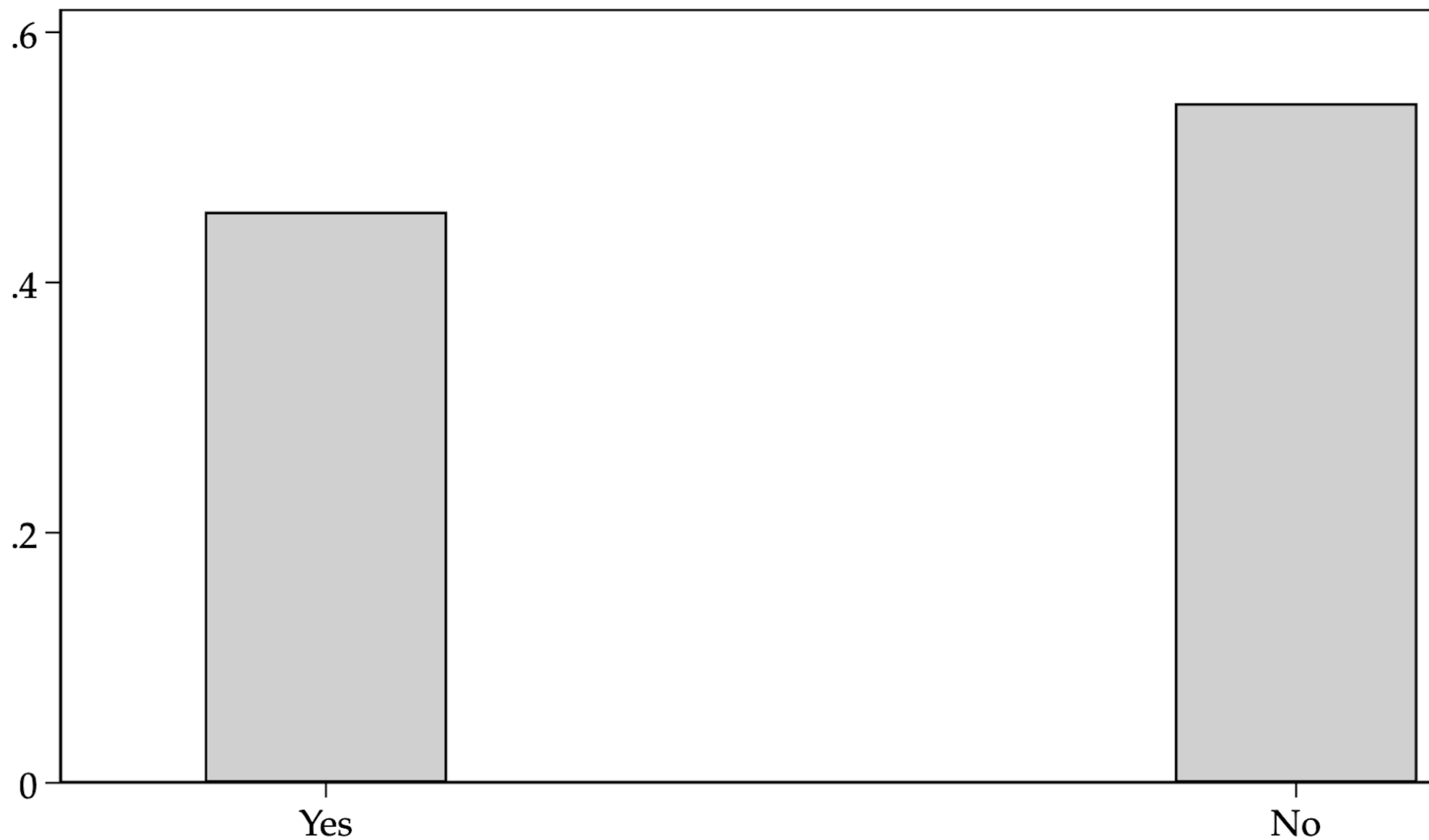




## How important is bokoko for a village chief?

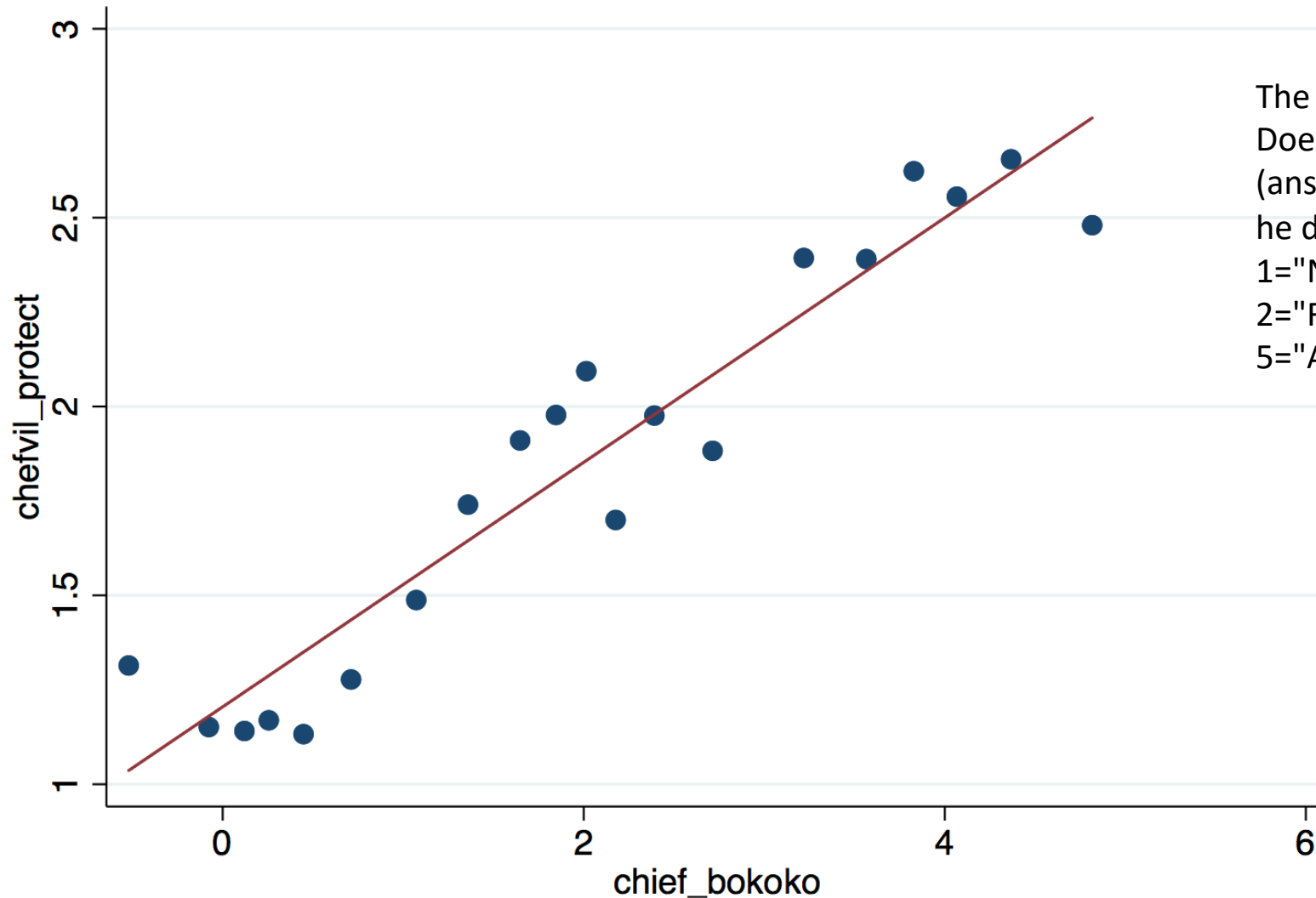


Village chief has weak bokoko is a top-3 village problem



Village chief has weak bokoko is a top-3 village problem

# You expect the chief to protect the village the more Boko he has



The question is:

Does the chief use Boko to protect the village?

(answers go from 0-5, where 0="Never,

he does not have this ability",

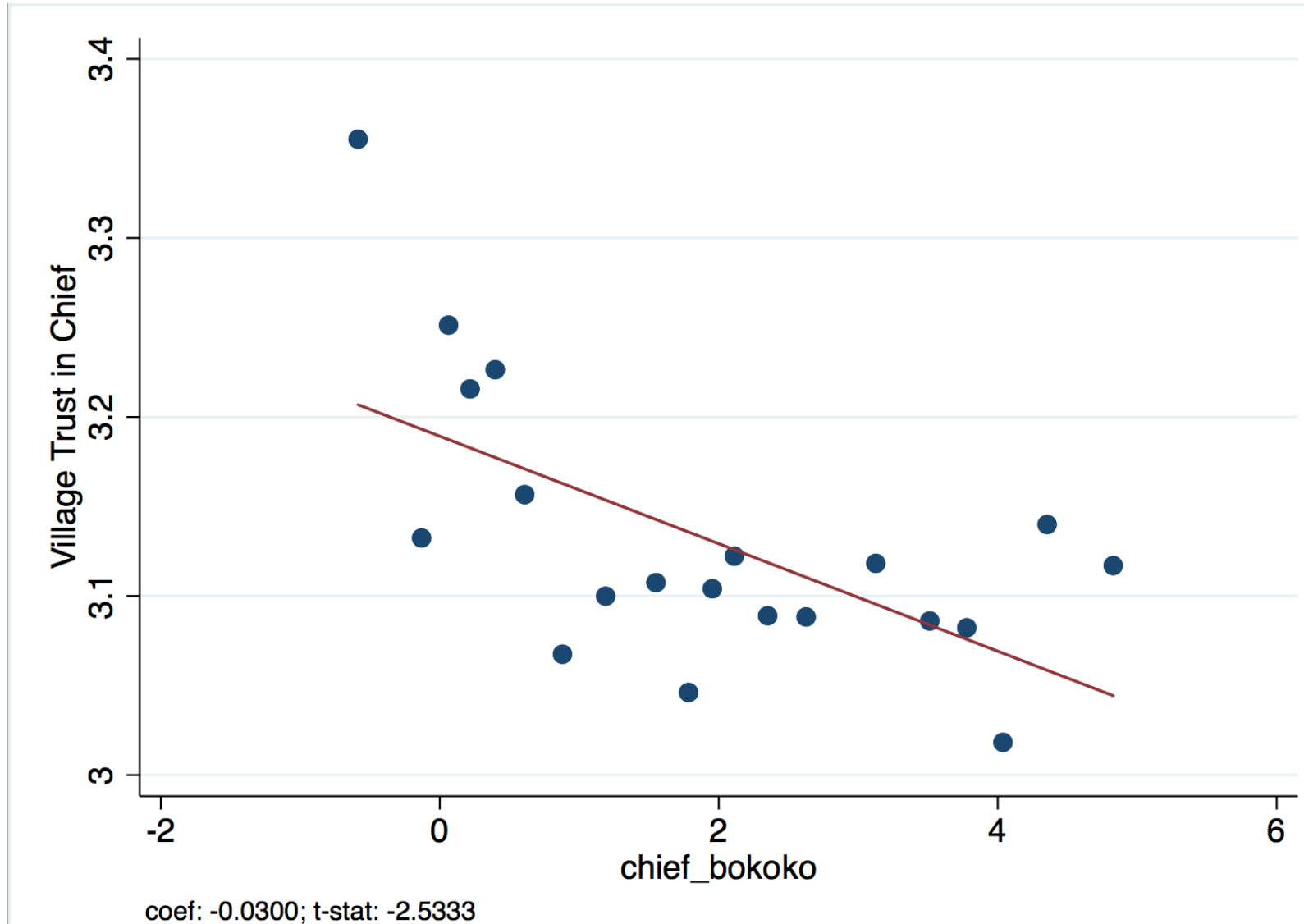
1="Never, he does not use this ability",

2="Rarely", ...,

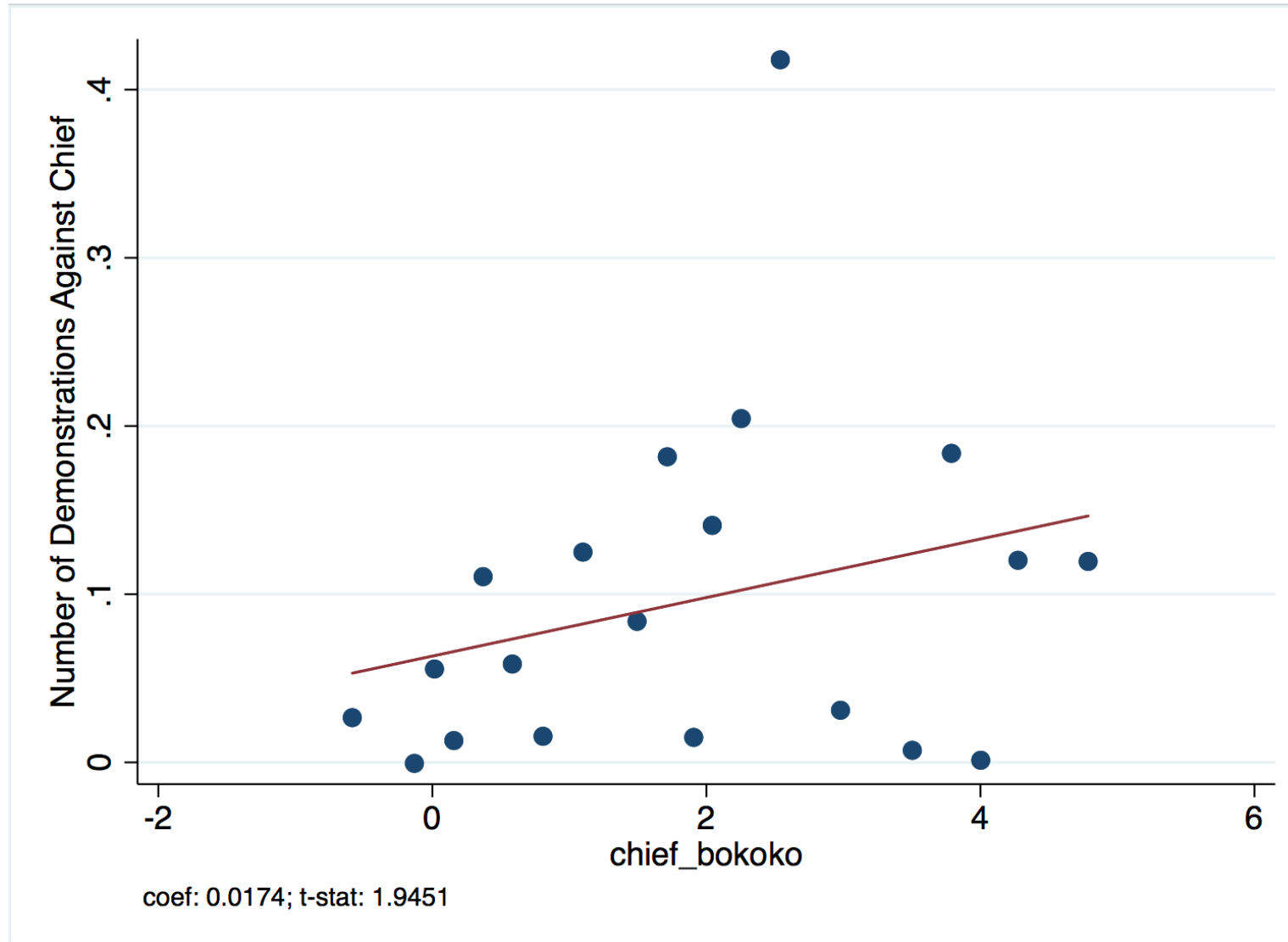
5="Always")

coef: 0.3237; t-stat: 11.9902

# You don't trust a chief with strong Bokoko: The double-edged sword



And you protest against him (actually this is where Prophets come in according to MacGaffey)



# Example 8: Contrasts with Western Intuitions

- I think one can only think of this as the political economy of a completely different **ontological order**.
- In western society we choose politicians to provide public goods.
- In Congo, a primary concern is to elect chiefs who can deal with supernatural threats to the community.
- The relationship between citizens and chiefs is very different than that between citizens and the government in western societies.



# At Night

- Here is a great research topic.
  - In Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* he documents many types of taboos “A weaver who worked after sunset, when God shuts the door of the world, would become blind” (74). Smiths cannot work at night.
- “Inauguration rituals require chiefs to demonstrate not only the secular power to execute people .. “in daylight”, but also the power to cause death mysteriously and at a distance ‘by night’” (MacGaffey, 32-33)
- He points out how those with power can “see by day and by night” and that healers were accused of “employing the self-same gestures which served ‘by day’ to heal the sick, ‘at night’ reinfected their clients and stole their souls” (MacGaffey, 33)
  - In the Sierra Leone civil war one had the concept of the SOBEL “soldier by day, rebel by night” – see David Keen's book).

# The Really Existing Colombian State

- A particularly western notion is what the state is supposed to look like and do.
- In his 1953 book *Alur Society : A Study in Processes and Types of Domination* Aidan Southall develop a model of a hybrid state which fused state like institutions with lineage groups which seems to be a much more accurate depiction of really existing states in Africa.
- Interestingly, it fit Colombia quite well too.

- (1) Territorial sovereignty is recognised but limited and essentially relative, forming a series of zones in which authority is most absolute near the centre and increasingly restricted towards the periphery, often shading off into a ritual hegemony.
- (2) There is centralised government, yet there are also numerous peripheral foci of administration over which the centre exercises only a limited control.
- (3) There is a specialised administrative staff at the centre, but it is repeated on a reduced scale at all the peripheral foci of administration.
- (4) Monopoly of the use of force is successfully claimed to a limited extent and within a limited range by the central authority, but legitimate force of a more restricted order inheres at all the peripheral foci.
- (5) Several levels of subordinate foci may be distinguishable, organised pyramidally in relation to the central authority. The central and peripheral authorities reflect the same

<sup>1</sup> Loc. cit.

## Characteristics of a Segmentary State

model, the latter being reduced images of the former. Similar powers are repeated at each level with a decreasing range, every authority has certain recognised powers over the subordinate authorities articulated to it, and formally similar offences differ in significance according to the order of authorities involved in them.

- (6) The more peripheral a subordinate authority is the more chance it has to change its allegiance from one power pyramid to another. Segmentary states are thus flexible and fluctuating, even comprising peripheral units which have political standing in several adjacent power pyramids which thus become interlocked.

# Segmentism and Paramilitarism in Colombia

- In 2006 34 paramilitary blocks consisting of around 35,000 armed men demobilized in Colombia.
- 2011 Maria Angélica Bautista and I got fascinated by a series of newspaper articles describing fascinating revelations of how these groups operated which came out because of the transitional justice process.
- The articles suggested that some paramilitary groups built all sorts of public goods and replaced an absent state.
- We asked María Teresa Ronderos; “is this true”? Her answer was “I don’t know, let’s go and find out”. So we went to the Magdalena Medio to see if the newspaper articles were true.
- They were ...





## UNIDAD NACIONAL JUSTICIA Y PAZ

### DESPACHO 2

AUTODEFENSAS CAMPESINAS MAGDALENA MEDIO AÑO 2.000



**FRENTE CENTRAL  
RAMON MARIA ISAZA  
ARANGO  
ALIAS EL VIEJO,  
MUNRA, PATRON, EL  
SEÑOR**



**FRENTE CELESTINO  
MANTILLA  
JHON FREDY GALLO BEDOYA  
ALIAS PAJARO**



**FRENTE OMAR  
ISAZA  
WALTER OCHOA  
GUISAO  
ALIAS EL GURRE**



**FRENTE ISAZA  
HEROES DEL  
PRODIGIO  
OLIVERIO ISAZA  
GOMEZ  
ALIAS TERROR O  
RUBEN**



**FRENTE JHON  
ISAZA  
OVIDIO ISAZA  
GOMEZ  
ALIAS ROQUE**



**FRENTE JOSE LUIS  
ZULUAGA  
LUIS EDUARDO  
ZULUAGA ARCILA  
ALIAS MACGUIVER**

# School built by paramilitaries, Vereda Piedras Blancas





# The road between La Danta and San Miguel





# Paramilitary built Health Center, La Danta, Sonsón





# The Bullring of La Danta

The sacred  
family





**ESTATUTOS**  
**DE LA**  
**ORGANIZACION FRENTE JOSE LUIS ZULUAGA**

**TITULO PRIMERO**

**DISPOSICIONES PRELIMINARES**

**DEFINICION Y NATURALEZA DE LA ORGANIZACION**

El Frente **JOSE LUIS ZULUAGA** constituye en el campo militar una organizaci6n antissubversiva en armas y en el campo politico un movimiento de resistencia civil que representa y defiende derechos e intereses desatendi dos por el estado y gravemente vulnerados por la violencia guerrillera, actuando dentro de un marco de criterios politicos e ideol6gicos que defienden los pilares fundamentales en los cuales se apoya su origen y naturaleza.

**TITULO SEGUNDO**

**PRINCIPIOS FUNDAMENTALES- PLATAFORMA IDEOLOGICA**

La plataforma ideol6gica que sustenta el marco politico del movimiento se apoya en los siguientes principios fundamentales:

# Example 9: The Colombian Segmentary State

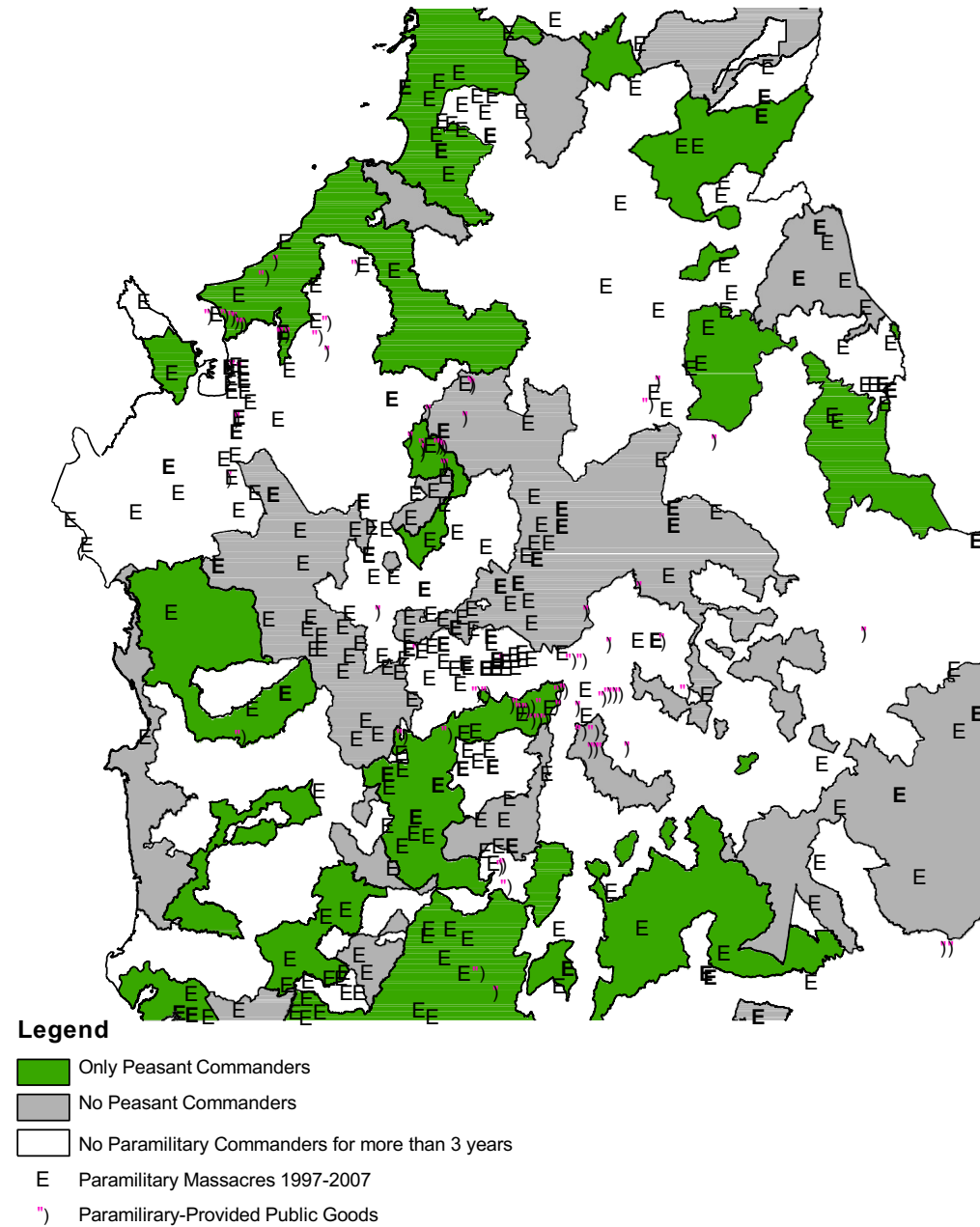
- It is only when you get into the periphery of Colombia and look at the state from the bottom up that you begin to understand how it actually works.
- You can't figure that out by sitting in your office at the University of the Andes (where I teach every summer).

# Example 10: Another Hypothesis you wouldn't have thought of

- During fieldwork we interviewed in prison the commanders of the Peasant Self-Defense Forces of the Middle Magdalena.
- McGuiver (Luis Eduardo Zuluaga) was particularly intelligent and articulate.
- We got him to think through why different paramilitary groups behaved in such different ways. Why did some invest so heavily in public goods (a hearts and minds strategy) while others used a lot more violence.
- His explanation was to do with the socialization of the commanders. He pointed out that the commanders who provided public goods had a particular social background he called “campesino” (peasant) which he associated with a particular set of values and moral beliefs.
- In ongoing research we have constructed a dataset of the behavior of different fronts and have found a great deal of evidence for his hypothesis – fronts commanded by peasants provided more public goods and engaged in less violence than fronts who were commanded by other types of people.



# Massacres and Paramilitary-Provided Public Goods by Social Origin of Commanders in Magdalena Medio and Urabá



# The Real Reasons to do Fieldwork

- It is fun!
- It will change your life.
- Social science is fundamentally inductive (remember my mother's story of the **burnt toast**); it is a dialectical interaction between theories and ideas and facts and evidence.
- You go backwards and forwards, it never finishes, but sometimes you stop and write up what you know.
- For me, the interesting part of social science is about people and their complexities. Not about structures or constraints. You have to grapple with the people and struggle for generalizations or commonalities in the human condition.