

E-government in the global South – Machine politics as usual?

The effects of e-government on relations of clientelism and patronage, between poor people and informal intermediaries (a research outline)

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Purpose and background

Local politics and government service delivery in parts of the global South are characterized by patterns of **clientelism** and **patronage**, often involving poorer segments of the society as “clients” of **informal intermediaries** (brokers, fixers, patrons).

E-government through **telecenters** should provide more avenues for poor people to access government information and services. This should **decrease** the **monopoly** that informal intermediaries (brokers, fixers, patrons) hold over government information and services. Hence, the **dependency** of poor people on informal intermediaries should **decrease** as well.

How correct are these expectations about e-government? Theories from clientelism suggest **some nuances**:

Alternative expectations

Poor people who are entitled to government services will prefer access to government services through informal intermediaries instead of through telecenters only.

Reason: poor people need to **maintain (cordial) relationships** with informal intermediaries in their daily struggle for survival.

Moreover, poor people who are **not entitled** to government services, will remain dependent on informal intermediaries for access to government services.

Reason: if e-government leads to a strict enforcement of rules for government service delivery, then **informal intermediaries remain the only means of access to government services**.

Intermediaries who feel threatened by telecenters will influence telecenters through **venue-capture** and **information hoarding**, or through **leverage over the back-office (bureaucracy)**.

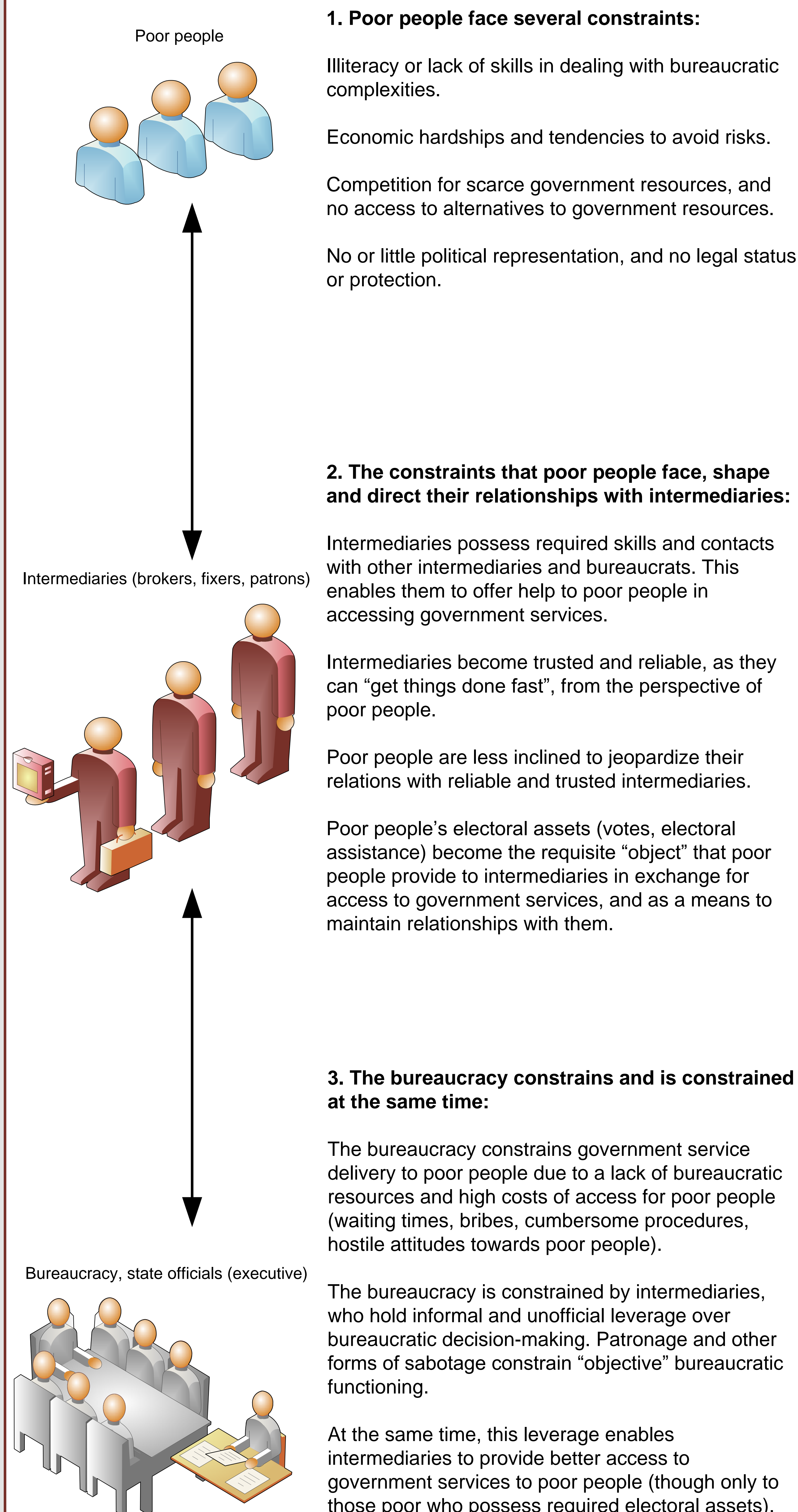
However, venue-capture also increases the likelihood that poor people who are not entitled to government services, can access telecenters and use e-government services.

The more **all-encompassing** an e-government service is, the **less scope** there is for intermediaries to **maintain monopolies** to government service delivery.

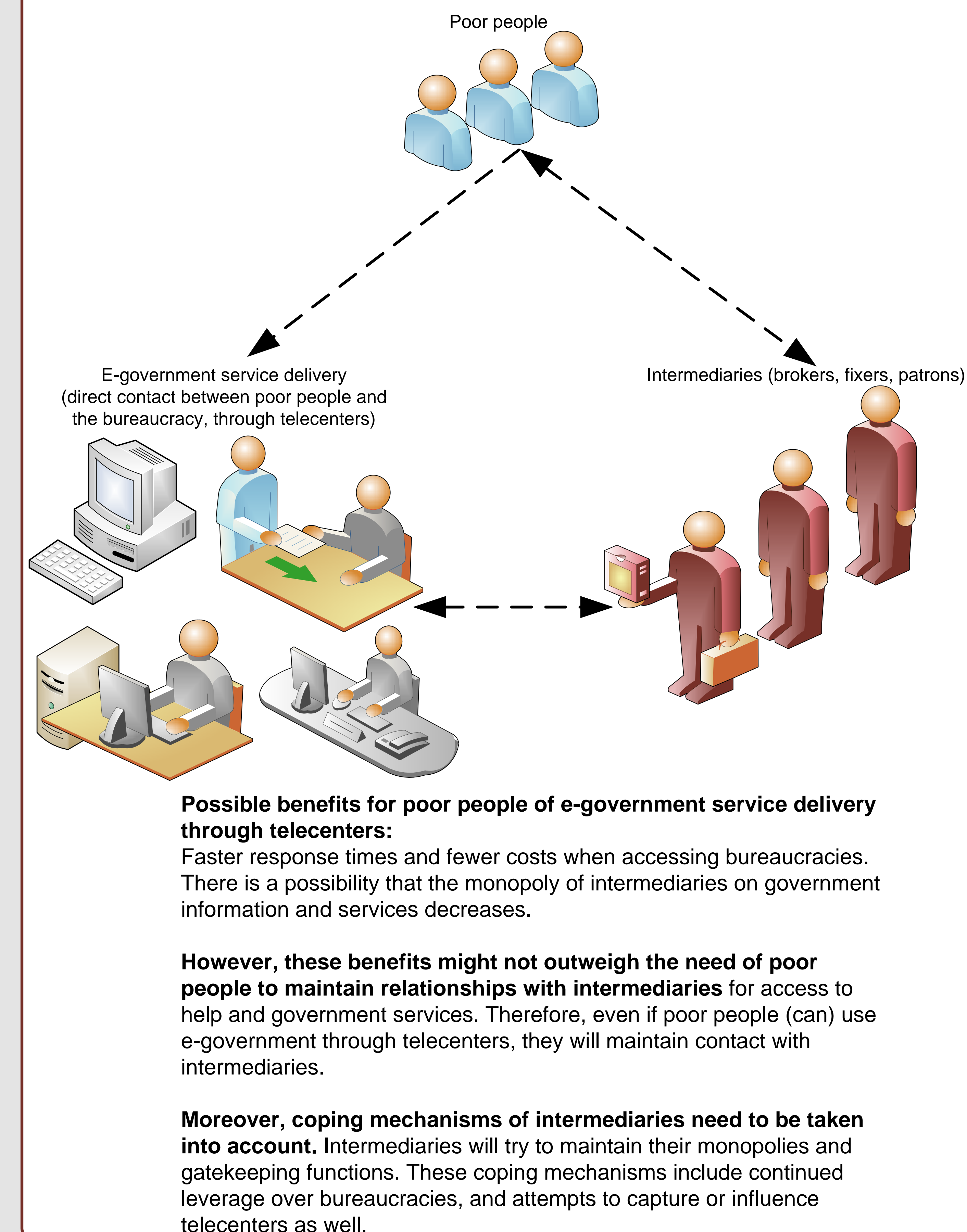
Methods

Social network analysis – differences in the **number**, **frequency**, **purpose** and **results** of contacts between different actors (clients, brokers, fixers, patrons and bureaucrats), through participant observations and interviews, and surveys.

Patterns of clientelist relationships (without e-government)



Possible patterns of clientelist relationships? (with e-government)



Open issues

Choice of location and (set of) government service(s).

Choice of technology – include other (shared) technological devices (mobile phones, radios, smartcards, ATMs, etc.)?

Methods: comparison within cases over time, or between cases?

Methods: how to take into account sensitive aspects of clientelist (illicit and illegal) activities?