'No Formalities Please!' Broker Practices in the Municipal Governance of New Delhi

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This paper analyses the ways in which informal mediation channels facilitate service delivery in the Citizen Service Bureaus at the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and give rise to an interplay between formal and informal institutions. In particular, the personal backgrounds of brokers as informal mediators and how they ensure their acceptance amongst service seekers are explored. Further, the motivations of the service seekers to solicit help from these mediators as well as institutional responses from the municipal administration along with other relevant actors like the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi are examined.

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Planning, provision, and access to services across all cities in India, including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), are marked by the presence of a parallel form of service delivery mechanism that facilitates informal governance. The inadequacy of the supply-side apparatus to deliver public services creates a conducive environment for brokers to emerge and sustain themselves as intermediaries between the bureaucracy and service seekers.

This paper seeks to answer the question of how informal mediation channels facilitate service delivery in the Citizen Service Bureaus (CSBs) at the MCD. In order to fully understand the dynamics of the informal institutions within the MCD, the paper focuses on the following three sub-questions: First, who are these informal mediators and how do they ensure their sustenance and acceptance amongst service seekers? Second, how do service seekers access services from the CSBs? Third, how do formal institutions perceive and respond to these informal mediation practices?

These questions are set in the broader context of diversity of public services and coordination problems that point towards issues of access, productivity, personalisation, and quality, which have so far received relatively limited attention (World Bank Group 2017). These inconsistencies often give rise to certain local informal practices that fill the access-to-public-service-delivery gap. This paper also aims to contribute to the literature on the interdependence of formal and informal governance institutions that lead to "multi-centric" or "poly-centric" governance arrangements marked by complex patterns and sources of authority (Khan Mohmand 2016: 6; Hooghe and Marks 2003: 234).

The findings presented in this paper are based on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a quantitative survey conducted by the first author from 1 August to 4 September 2018 in the zonal MCD offices in Delhi's South and North municipal corporations. Snowball sampling was used to identify experts employed at the local think tanks, non-governmental organisation (NGO) practitioners, Resident Welfare Association (RWA) representatives, local political representatives (councillors), officials and bureaucrats working at the MCD, and officials of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD). In total, 17 semi-structured interviews were held.

Unfortunately, none of the 17 interview respondents allowed for the recording of the interviews, but detailed notes were taken and transcribed on the same day and were analysed

using Microsoft Office programmes (Excel and Word). The first author also conducted participant observation of brokers outside municipal offices using the "shadowing technique," that is, a technique that "involves a researcher closely following a member of an organisation over an extended period of time" (McDonald 2005: 456). Finally, a survey was directed at 15 service seekers in North and South MCD each. The sampling procedure entailed selecting every third service seeker who approached the brokers during a period of one week at both South and North Delhi municipal offices. In addition, the study draws on secondary sources, including NGO and think tank reports as well as news media. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent of all study participants, including for the participant observation, and replacing the interviewees' names with codes in the text (for the list of interviewees, see Appendix 1, p 53).

Municipal Structure and Mediation Practices

The MCD is a locally elected body that operates within a defined, limited jurisdiction and administers a selected list of services enshrined in India's 74th constitutional amendment related to decentralisation of administrative authority. However, this decentralisation has not been completely realised in practice as many of these services are in fact delivered at the state level.

New Delhi is a bustling metropolis with nearly 17 million inhabitants (GOI 2011). The residents of the megacity of Delhi are mainly migrants, with close to 25% lacking access to formal housing and basic utilities (Sheikh and Banda 2014: 1). Citizen services provided by municipalities are thus important in building a resident's confidence in being a lawful resident.

The governance of Delhi is a topic of much deliberation by policymakers due to its position as the capital of the country. The region hosts the institutions of the federal government (centre), the GNCTD, and the municipal administration of 272 wards by means of the MCD, which technically controls 94% of the geographical area (and 95% of the population). The other municipal divisions include the centre (New Delhi Municipal Council [NDMC]) and the cantonment (under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence).

The GNCTD came into power in 1993 and oversees matters related to transport, health, family welfare, food, and other commercial supplies. The GNCTD established numerous autonomous agencies responsible for the delivery of certain essential services like water (Delhi Jal Board [DJB]), electricity (Delhi Vidyut Board [DVB]), transport (Delhi Integrated Multi-modal Transit System [DIMTS]), and slum maintenance (Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board [DUSIB]). All other services related to solid waste management, garbage disposal, upkeep of commercial areas, maintenance of parks and green spaces, licensing of commercial activity, registration of births and deaths, and other citizen services are managed by the MCD. Based on the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2011 (issued on 29 December 2011), the MCD was divided, in 2012, into three new corporations, namely North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), and East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC).

Figure 1: Citizen–State Relationship in a Broker-mediated Transaction
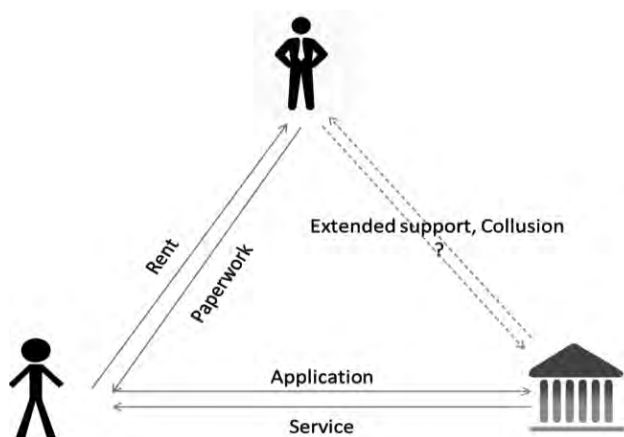
Source: Authors' construction.

While the MCD is mainly responsible for operational civic services, it also offers administrative services such as birth and death registration, property and estate matters, addressing local grievances, community centres for public use, and the provision of trade licences. The governance framework of the city is complex owing to the special status of New Delhi at the juncture of local, state, and national jurisdictions (Sheikh and Banda 2016). The fact that there are some overlaps of authority responsible for the same services (that is, centre, state, and the municipality) impedes systematic provision of basic services and leads to confusion on the part of the citizens in terms of who is responsible for which service. Citizens thus struggle to access the CSB services by themselves and are forced to make use of local mediators, agents, consultants, touts, or fixers (De Wit 2016).

To complicate matters further, the MCD also includes 12 zonal offices across its three sub-MCDs. Every municipal zone hosts a CSB, which is primarily responsible for all interactions related to the payment of property taxes, licensing, the booking of municipal halls/parks for community events, and for birth and death registration. The CSBs provide access to basic yet important municipal administrative services at a nominal fee, except in cases—including trade penalties and property taxes—that have a differential fee band (based on the size of the transaction).

The scholarly literature on citizen–state interactions in India has categorised them into three main types, namely political clientelism, bureaucratic "gate-keeping," and informal brokering. There is a substantial literature discussing the first two types within urban local governments, but the mediation practices by informal brokers motivated by an opportunity for profit are relatively understudied (Berenschot 2010; Blundo 2006; Copus and Erlingsson 2013; De Wit and Berner 2009; Fuller and Harriss 2001; Kumar and Landy 2012; Jones et al 2014: 35). This paper, therefore, focuses on the third type.

Informal brokering refers to a system of public service delivery that can be considered as privatisation of street-level bureaucracy. Informal brokers serve as an usher for the service seekers who take them (or their file) through the maze

of public officials in return for a going rate for these services (De Wit and Akinyoade 2008). These informal brokers gain acceptance or informal legitimacy from the community of service seekers to continue operations and sustain themselves. Figure 1 (p 47) illustrates the citizen–state mediation via a private broker.

As we can see, the service seeker approaches the broker for the correct documentation in exchange for a small fee to avoid having their application rejected by the responsible bureaucrat. The seeker then submits the application to the office and pays the official fee for the required service. The seeker, in some cases, may require extended support from the broker and requests him (brokers are usually men) to also submit documentation to the particular institution in exchange for a premium fee. This extended support may suggest a sense of collusion as there is a possibility that the broker shares a portion of the premium fee with the office holder at the institution. However, this possibility lies outside the scope of our study.

Conceptual Framework

Institutions, defined as the "rules of the game," often begin with an informal, communal approach created, communicated, and enforced outside the sanctioned channels (Hodgson and Knudsen 2006). The emergence of informal institutional practices within formal governmental structures is often witnessed in relatively weak state institutions and operates in a dizzying arena of personal networks, clientelism, corruption, clans and mafias, civil societies, traditional culture, and a variety of judicial and bureaucratic norms. Informal institutions are thus defined by G Helmke and S Levitsky as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, which are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 725).

These shared values within an informal institutional framework create a common understanding of socially acceptable behaviour and guide the practices within these institutions. The formal and informal institutions are either deemed competing or complementing on the basis of the outcomes and effectiveness of formal rules. While one camp treats informal institutions as functional (convergent) entities that solve problems related to interface and coordination, the other camp considers informality in service delivery to be dysfunctional (divergent) and an impediment to service provision. Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 728) developed a two-by-two matrix as a typology of functional and competing modes of formal–informal institutions (Table 1).

This matrix is used in the analysis section to assess the situation observed on the ground from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The typology provided by Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 728) is based on the outcomes and effectiveness of informal and formal rules in a given context. The outcome

Table 1: Typology of Informal Institutions

Outcomes	Effective Formal Institutions	Ineffective Formal Institutions
Convergent	Complementary	Substitutive
Divergent	Accommodating	Competing

Source: Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 728).

variables dictate whether the results of these rules are in line or at variance with what one may expect from strict adherence to formal rules. The effectiveness variables, on the contrary, represent the extent to which these formal rules are realised in practice. It is understood that where the rules and procedures are ineffective, the probability of enforcement will be low (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 728).

Complementary informal institutions, a result of convergent outcomes and effective formal institutions, usually fill in essential governance gaps and may often enhance efficiency in service delivery. Accommodating informal institutions arise in situations of strong formal systems but divergent outcomes. Such institutions are often created by actors who dislike formal structures and outcomes but use these rules to their advantage without actually violating them. The formal systems withstand or accommodate these institutions in the light of future contingencies and are considered as enhancing stability, if not efficiency (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 730). In the case of ineffective formal institutions, the rise of competing informal institutions tends to violate rules, reflecting divergent outcomes by structuring incentives that are incompatible with formal rules.

Finally, substitutive informal institutions tend to replace formal institutions that do not perform well, but the informal institutions constructively achieve the expected outcomes of the formal ones. For example, in rural India, local community leaders have a high familiarity and social legitimacy with village dwellers and tend to become the most trustworthy access points for seeking public services due to the lack of connectivity with the state machinery. Indeed, (substitutive) informal local governance institutions (ILGIs) operate completely or partly outside formal structures of the state but facilitate or influence the official state institutions responsible for key governance functions, including service delivery, dispute resolution, and electoral representation.

In the analysis section, the informal institutionalisation of brokers who assist service seekers to access administrative services is examined from multiple vantage points, including those of the brokers, the bureaucrats, the GNCTD, expert opinion, and the authors themselves.

Findings

Brokers: The first research sub-question focuses on the identity of the brokers and their legitimacy. On the morning of the first visit to one of the four zonal offices at the SDMC offices in Lajpat Nagar, there were around 30 service seekers outside the premises of the public information centre (PIC). The PIC is the first window or gateway to the municipal administration in any zone to which any citizen is expected to go in order to navigate through the zonal office and its departments.

In a typical CSB office, a couple of officials may be seen providing basic support to understand the needs of the seeker and guide them to the relevant window and also sometimes to review paperwork. More often than not, the seeker needs to undertake a second trip with correct or rectified paperwork,

mostly assisted via the touts and brokers outside the CSB. These brokers usually set up makeshift premises under a tree or at a street corner with a foldable table or a table made with construction bricks with a bamboo stool. They assist service seekers with the required documentation in exchange for a nominal fee, ensuring that the job gets completed in the same visit. The tasks usually include filling out an application form for birth/death registration or a similar service, using their typewriters.

At the SMCD office, the CSBs were open from 10 am until 1 pm, and the brokers also stayed for half the day. One of them did basic typing work for any application that a service seeker had to make for the purpose of birth, death, or licensing registration, and in some cases even assisted with the calculation of property taxes. This broker usually charges a nominal fee of ₹30 for completing application forms and around ₹250 for property tax calculation, mainly because the ticket value (that is, the official cost of transaction) for the latter task was higher. Another broker in front of the SDMC office went a step further than that and even offered to make the application inside the office on the seeker's behalf, for which he requested a lump sum and charged a premium (₹100). There was usually a fixed rate for each of the services offered and it operated like a micro-marketplace, that is, services were offered as in oligopolistic competition with few service providers and high barriers to entry.

In Karol Bagh, the zonal office of the NMCD was located in a crowded locality and its physical appearance seemed relatively run-down compared to the relatively well-maintained and clean appearance of the SDMC zonal office. The differences between the offices and their surroundings influence the role of brokers. For example, the Lajpat Nagar zone in South Delhi is relatively well-off, with higher rates of tax collection from its residents, and operates in a much more seamless manner than the Karol Bagh CSB in the north where most of the residents are small shopkeepers fearing frequent sanctions by the MCD on commercial activity and new forms of taxes. The quality of citizen service provision is relatively poor here, and limited awareness of online services also increases the need for brokers. On the contrary, the South Delhi brokers stated that since 2013–15—when many CSB services became available online and as people became more aware about these services being available online—their work had considerably decreased.

The participants interviewed for this study have worked as brokers for 7 to 15 years. They sat together and had a seemingly healthy sense of competition. Their visiting cards characterise them as consultants in order to communicate an image of independent service professionals.

In addition to the interviews and participant observations with several brokers at each corporation, two brokers—one at SDMC and the other at NDMC—were "shadowed" for a week each in order to understand their routine and everyday operations as the first point of contact for most citizens. Their profiles are as follows. First is Pawan Singh of the SDMC, Lajpat Nagar zone, Delhi.

Pawan Singh, 36 years, a broker outside the SDMC office in Lajpat Nagar, does the mediation work on a part-time basis. He claims that although he has been working here for the past seven years, his work was greatly affected due to the digitisation of these citizen services around 2013.

> I have been here for the past seven years now and it started with multiple visits for getting the licence for my dad's shop that made me have multiple visits as the paperwork wasn't complete; I started assisting the main tout here and started getting opportunities to earn an extra buck as I was jobless after college.

The profile of Pankaj Sharma of the NDMC, Karol Bagh zone, Delhi is as follows:

Pankaj Sharma, 39 years, has been sitting on a boulder or under a tree for the past 15 years helping people complete their documentation for any work they may have at the zonal office of NDMC in Karol Bagh. He likes to be known as a consultant who also files his own income tax, often more than what is applicable to build a strong official income base for easily procuring a loan from a bank in the future. A father of two girls, Pankaj's journey as a broker began after completing his college education, which left him literate and skilled but without a job. He came into this line of work by accident, when he was trying to help a friend who operated a telephone booth at the MCD office, and soon after the new property tax norms were introduced, there was a huge influx of applications that required help.

> It was during that time that my friend asked me to come and help file these property tax applications for people, which means filling the form, doing the calculations and preparing paper-work. We made a good ₹100 in 2003 for every case.

While the brokers interviewed and shadowed for this study refused to have their work associated with any corruption, they claimed that the officials inside do seek rents in different ways—a situation that they encountered once they had come into direct contact with them. Overall, it seemed that over the last 15 years or so, most brokers had emerged due to unemployment and a distinct familiarity with the municipal processes, which provided them with a certain practical knowledge that they could commodify as a consulting or support service in exchange for a nominal fee.

Nature of service-seeking practices: We further found that many service-seeking citizens queued up at the CSBs every day soliciting the help of brokers for minor rectifications in paperwork and documentation, while others at the PIC tried to understand where to go with their requests. As an example of a typical service seeker and their request, we share the field notes taken by the first author.

> An old lady mistook me for an officer at the MCD and sought help in getting her papers migrated from the municipal pension scheme to the state-government pension scheme. This reform was being implemented in 2018 as, due to a paucity of funds with the municipalities, the state government (via the corresponding MLA—that is, Member of Legislative Assembly at the state level) was taking over these disbursements. The old lady needed a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the municipal office, but there was some error on her registered name with the MCD office for which she needed an affidavit (undertaking).

Similar interactions with other service seekers (KI 13–15) at both the SDMC and NDMC pointed to the presence of significant levels of trust between service seekers and brokers, even though there is no legal accountability associated with the promise of service delivery by the broker.

Although most of these services were available online, there were some natural barriers like the complexity of the system, the information technology illiteracy of the seeker, or a lack of time and patience that pushed these people to the brokers. This emerged as one of a few key insights from the survey of 30 respondents (15 each) across the NDMC and SDMC (corroborating and adding to the findings by Sony et al 2015).

The main survey findings show that a majority of service seekers approached the brokers for application work, mainly due to the complex official procedures, chiefly, for birth/death registration (30%), matters related to property tax (20%), etc. Most service seekers were from a lower middle-income level with graduate-level education, yet their relative lack of confidence in completing the documentation and dealing with the complexity of the procedure rationalised a genuine need for "support" from brokers. The brokers claimed that very few extremely poor people even visit the DMC, as they are not aware of any government benefits due to their marginalisation.

It is interesting to note that even though 39% of people visiting these offices were graduates, none of the respondents was able to use any online service offered by the MCD. This was largely because they did not know that these services were offered and/or were unfamiliar with information and communications technology.

In a nutshell, service-seeking behaviour in the SDMC and NDMC offices was mostly driven by a lack of knowledge about online services, lack of confidence, and paucity of time in some cases. The seekers had faith in these brokers as they did not want to make a second visit, spending money on transport and potentially losing a day's wage.

Institutional responses: Turning now to the third research sub-question, the informal brokers' mediation practices are not considered to be an illegal activity in India as they operate just like any other "advisory" or "consultancy" firm where an agency or individual is hired for a particular service. The same idea was echoed by experts E 1 and E 3—with E 1 claiming that the arrangement is just like a travel agency that a broker may operate and so it is completely legitimate. E 3, however, claimed that while it is legitimate, it reflects an embarrassing capacity gap in the public institution concerned—an outcome of being unable to create systems that citizens can cope with and access directly. Our findings show that there are three main institutional responses to the presence of these brokers: no response, e-governance, and doorstep delivery.

As for the first institutional response, that is, no response, some officials regarded the brokers' work to be complementary to their own work, but most were indifferent about the presence of these brokers and claimed to be self-sufficient. While one of the experts (E 1) had indicated that the two groups often collude and share profits from the mediation transactions facilitated by brokers, at least two officials (KI 4 and KI 11) denied having any relationship with the brokers and claimed that the human resources persons deployed at the counters were sufficiently trained to guide all service seekers efficiently. The officials further stated that although they acknowledge that the brokers outside are constructive in their actions and may be performing complementary work (KI 11), they cannot be integrated or accommodated in the municipality's operations.

> I know that these touts are there outside the gate for years now. We do not care about them as long as they don't open a physical office there as that would be illegal! It is a public space and people come here for official work and spend almost all of their day here. Anyone can help anyone and if they charge a fee for it, it is their business. The people [service seekers] must have faith in the way we offer services and ask for help. It is unfortunate if there is a trust deficit. (Commissioner, Department of Health Licence, NDMC, interview KI 11)

The acknowledgement of the presence of touts and brokers by the officials, and the claim that they have no working relationship with them, is interesting as it is public knowledge that the brokers are doing government work in return for payment.

Turning now to the second institutional response, the e-governance stimulus in New Delhi arguably came about as a response to multiple problems associated with the lack of internal capacity in formal institutions with respect to the burgeoning resident population, high volumes of corruption and mediation at institutional premises, lack of information disbursement and poor grievance redressal, the digitisation of other services in the private sector, and the availability of information technology resources (Sony et al 2015).

Starting in 2003, the MCD commissioned information technology companies to build a master web portal that would automate numerous public service platforms and shorten the long queues for all registration and licensing services. It further promised to provide 71 services across 40 departments and ensure transparent and accountable local governance in New Delhi (Staff 2009). The key objectives of this initiative were to bring the MCD closer to people and to provide more convenient options to interact with the MCD.

According to two brokers (B 1 and B 2), the digitisation of the CSBs was achieved in around 2013. In practice, however, only a limited number of people are even aware of the digitisation of these services, and they remain unable to use them because of the complexity of the system or their lack of information technology literacy. The service-seeker survey indicated that 68% of all respondents (approximately 54% in NDMC and 81% in SDMC) were not aware of the availability of the online services, and those who were did not use them—either because they did not work, they were considered too complicated, or due to the lack of access to a computer or the internet.

The third type of institutional response to the mediation by brokers involves the doorstep delivery of public services. In September 2018, the GNCTD came up with a pilot initiative of doorstep delivery of 40 (at the time of writing, this number had grown to 70) administrative public services that are

expected to eliminate the need for intermediaries. The services include caste, marriage, and income certificates; driving licences; ration cards; access to old-age and handicapped-persons' pension schemes; and new water and sewer connections (Delhi Government 2017). Under the doorstep delivery service, a third-party private contractor, contracted as part of a public–private partnership (PPP), sends out agents, also known as mobile *sahayaks* (mobile helpers) to people's homes to deliver the service and charge a nominal fee of ₹50 (*Times of India* 2018). The same service is gradually expected to expand to encompass municipal services (interview with KI 12). Figure 2 shows a flowchart of the doorstep delivery model used in the GNCTD's new scheme.

According to a self-evaluation after the first year of operation, there were more than 1.3 million calls for doorstep delivery service requests but only 2,16,054 were actually registered—though of the latter, 99.5% were successfully delivered. Given this poor performance in terms of lack of capacity to register the calls, it is not surprising that direct-window applications are still the most popular kind and that approximately 80% of services are still delivered through that channel (*Hindustan Times* 2019). A feedback rating system via SMS from the citizen to the centralised data centre is put in place for the service seekers to prevent the sahayaks from engaging in petty corruption practices (Delhi Government 2017).

Analysis

The research findings are analysed through the framework developed by Helmke and Levitsky (2004) discussed in the section on conceptual framework. The model includes four types of informal institutions depending upon the "outcomes" and "effectiveness" of formal institutions. While convergent outcomes are those whose results are in line with what one may expect from the design of these rules, the informal institutions within this arrangement may be complementary (to effective formal institutions) or substitutive (for ineffective formal institutions). Divergent outcomes lead to accommodating and competing types of informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 728).

The key informant (KI) interviews asked each category of actors, that is, experts, service seekers, and the brokers themselves as well as the government officials, to qualify the nature of brokerage as a type of informal institution according to the framework.

First, the experts on urban local governance interviewed for this study (E 1–E 4) qualified the role of brokers (as informal institutions) as complementary, that is, the brokers tend to fill gaps in service delivery and are compatible with convergent outcomes. In particular, the experts argued that the brokers provide key services when demand increases suddenly and formal systems cannot cope with it.

Second, the service seekers who usually approach the brokers in the MCD to provide CSB services that are not very expensive to pursue placed the informal broker institutions under the "competing" type based on a divergent outcome (of paying a fee to a broker rather than the government office).

Figure 2: Flowchart of Doorstep Delivery Mechanism by GNCTD
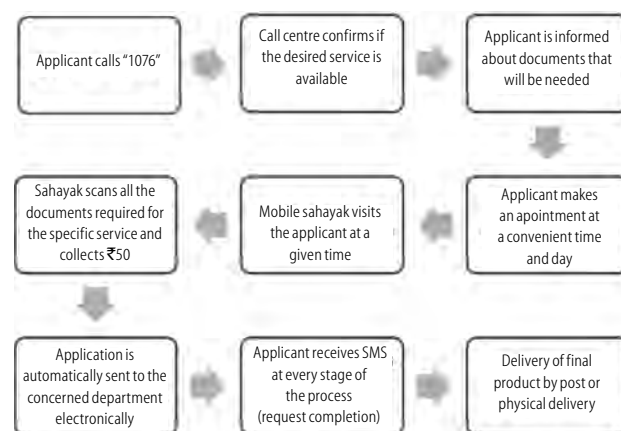
Source: Created by authors based on media reports (Kangkan 2018; Nath 2018).

The majority of seekers believe that the formal systems are too complicated, slow, corrupt, and intimidating to approach, making them waste time and possibly a day's wage. Brokers, however, achieve the tasks much more time-efficiently upon payment of some "speed money," that is, the consultancy fee (interview with KI 12).

Third, as alluded to above, the GNCTD seems to regard these brokers as "institutional weeds" that need to be removed as soon as possible as they can have a "parasitical effect" on the service seekers, especially those that are vulnerable (interview with KI 12). The GNCTD finds the new doorstep delivery of administrative services to be an "accommodating" institution, considering the legitimacy granted to a brokering institution and acknowledging certain systemic deficiencies so that "no rules are violated." The doorstep delivery mode arguably provides a way for the government to reconcile the interests of all actors involved, namely the service seeker, government, and the brokering private institution (interview with KI 12).

Finally, the brokers seem to consider themselves as performing the role of a "substitutive" informal institution as illustrated by the account by one of them (B 2) at the NDMC:

> It is impossible for the MCD to operate without us as they are a corrupt bunch of professionals and will not move an inch without being offered a bribe. The administration has kept the systems deliberately complicated with minimal effort towards citizen education programmes. People feel more comfortable coming to us as we explain the process patiently. The poor attendant inside hardly has any time to deal with so many seekers at once.

The brokers rely on their familiarity with the formal institutional system to fill the service-delivery gaps, out of a personal profit motive and against the intention of the formal institutions, leading to convergent outcomes in practice.

However, seen from an outsider observer's perspective, we find that the brokers' work ultimately undermines the legitimacy and credibility of the public institutions. While they assist citizens with their errands, they do so without any incentive of providing welfare and, in fact, potentially exploit the vulnerable service seeker financially, thereby creating an environment of possible coercion or mistreatment. We thus place the brokers in the "accommodative" group within the matrix

as, owing to their participation, the rules of engagement are altered but the service delivery contract is respected.

Conclusions

Against the background of access problems due to incomplete paperwork, a lack of confidence, and education or time constraints, this paper sets out to critically examine the emergence and sustenance of the informal private brokers (also known as middlemen, agents, facilitators, or touts), the service-seeking behaviour of citizens through these brokers, and the key institutional responses to informal mediation. The brokers facilitate transactions on behalf of the service seekers with the MCD for services offered at the level of the CSBs in exchange for a nominal (affordable) fee. The paper further articulates the conceptual understanding of these broker-led transactions as "informal institutions" following a set of socially shared rules of trust and cooperation, leading to the delivery of these services.

The study found that the brokers emerged and evolved due to systemic deficiencies in the public institutions, a lack of institutional capacity to serve the high numbers of service seekers, and the complex design of the service delivery process. The brokers who were shadowed in this study had been in their occupation for up to 15 years and had mainly encountered this "profession" either by gaining familiarity with the process after multiple visits for their own personal work or due to unemployment and having been introduced to this work by an acquaintance within the system. The brokers gradually gained acceptance and legitimacy with the service seekers and became an integral part of service delivery, perceiving themselves as taking on a substitutive role in the system.

With respect to service-seeking behaviour, the results from the survey show that service seekers were usually low on confidence and not aware of the availability of these services online, and a majority came from a low economic class. They were sensitive to costs involved in multiple visits to the MCD and thus were in need of support to accomplish the objective in just one visit. The usual tasks of the brokers included filling in relevant official forms, affidavit undertakings, calculating property tax, or making payments. While all of these are available online, around two-thirds of the seekers were unaware of this, and the remainder found the online system too complicated or encountered technical difficulties.

Institutional responses fell into three categories: no response, administrative reforms in the form of e-governance,

and the introduction of the new doorstep delivery of administrative services by the GNCTD. Public officials inside the premises were indifferent to the brokers' operation as long as there was no apparent corrupt practices happening that caused customer distress. The experts and GNCTD officials however claimed that the general public suffer in multiple ways without the brokerage service, including through the (opportunity) cost of multiple visits to office premises.

E-governance has so far failed to displace the brokers due to multiple problems, including a lack of user awareness of online services, information technology illiteracy, complicated software design, and vulnerable server hardware.

The third type of institutional response, which was partly also a response to the failure of e-governance, was the GNCTD's initiation of home delivery of public services. While almost all registered calls were fulfilled, the vast majority of requests were not registered in the first place due to technical problems and capacity issues; as a result, the direct-window method still remains the most popular option.

The findings were then analysed in light of the conceptual framework developed by Helmke and Levitsky and qualified the role of brokers as performing four possible types of informal institutional function depending on both the governance outcomes and interactions with formal institutions and the perspective of the various stakeholders. At a basic level, the analysis confirmed the model's assumption that formal institutions often constrain actors' expectations and behaviour and become a trigger for the emergence of informal rules (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 733). It is possible to argue that the existence of these brokers will be necessary until the formal institutions become robust and effective. Future research may focus on the various types of brokers involved in public service delivery and their motivation in the age of digitisation and increasing internet literacy.

In terms of policy implications, the findings and analysis of this study point to the need for comprehensive administrative reform that targets the strengthening of formal institutions along with demand-side readiness. For example, while robust e-governance platforms may seem promising, it is important to ensure the widespread availability of technical infrastructure and capable bureaucratic personnel tasked with these operations. On the demand side, seemingly basic tools such as a robust helpline number and ushering facilities at the physical premises are needed in order to guarantee self-sufficiency in obtaining citizen services.

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Appendix 1: The List of Cited Interviewees and Codes

Respondent Type	Organisation	Designation	Code
Expert	United Residents Joint Action (URJA)	CEO	E 1
Expert	PRAJA	Project officer	E 2
Expert	Centre for Policy Research (CPR)	Research fellow	E 3
Expert	CPR	Research director	E 4
Key informant	North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC)	Commissioner—licensing and registration	KI 11
Key informant	GNCTD—DDC (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi, a think tank within the GNCTD)	Facilitator (employee)	KI 12
Key informant	SDMC	Service seeker	KI 13
Key informant	NDMC	Service seeker	KI 14
Key informant	NDMC	Service seeker	KI 15
Key informant	SDMC	Broker 1 (Pawan)	B 1
Key informant	NDMC	Broker 2 (Pankaj)	B 2