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POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



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Public Management in Bihar

(provisional report February 2026)

Evidence from a survey of more than 1,700
public sector employees

Martin Haus (LSE)

Ashmita Gupta (ADRI)

Daniel Berliner (LSE)



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Acknowledgement

This report draws on the results from an in-person survey across four different departments in Bihar:

- Health Department
- Education Department
- Social Welfare Department
- Rural Development Department

We are thankful to the departments and their leadership for their support for this project.

This project was funded by the International Science Partnership Fund (Grant #111218).

The survey was implemented by the field team of the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) from December 2024 – March 2025. We would like to extend our thanks to the team at ADRI Patna who made this project possible.

Many of the questions included in the survey build on earlier work such as the Global Survey of Public Servants and have been fine-tuned and translated for this survey.

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Executive summary

1. The purpose of this report is to support and inform the efforts of the Government of Bihar in improving its public services to ensure it caters to the needs of its citizens. This report focuses on four key public services that particularly matter for those citizens who face multi-dimensional poverty. We therefore included those public employees who overlook or deliver the following services:
 - a. Primary and Upper-Primary Schools
 - b. Health Sub-Centers¹
 - c. Anganwadis
 - d. MGNREGS

The project was funded by the International Science Partnership Fund under grant number #111218.

2. The survey included three levels of the administration tasked with policy implementation (district, block², and frontline) and was conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, covering all 38 districts of Bihar. A total of 1,767 responses were gathered with 84 from the district-level, 311 from the block-level, and 1372 from the frontline. In addition, 1,000 schools, 893 health sub-centers, 957 anganwadis, and 734 offices at district, block, and Gram Panchayat level were surveyed to record infrastructure, staff attendance, and service-specific outputs. All surveys were conducted in-person. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive public employee survey of this kind in Bihar.
3. The survey assesses (1) the perceptions, attitudes, and motivations of public managers and frontline staff which shape their effort levels and day-to-day work thereby impacting the quality and quantity of services received by citizens, (2) management practices of public managers and the perceptions of these practices by those who are subject to them within the bureaucratic hierarchy, (3) citizen-state interactions, (4) resources available to public managers and frontline staff, and (5) the level of service provision citizens receive across departments and geographies.
4. Public employees generally report high levels of job satisfaction. However, we find strong sorting to managerial positions based on gender, caste, and socio-economic background with those coming from more privileged backgrounds reaching prestigious managerial positions with better pay and working conditions.

¹ Some of the health sub-centers were upgraded to health centers but the report will use “sub-centers” throughout for a more concise presentation.

² In Bihar, administrative blocks and community development blocks coincide.

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5. Overall, we find a highly committed workforce with a preference for working in the public sector. At the same time, especially frontline workers frequently report that they have to do tasks where they do not see a purpose or tasks that are repetitive. Salary satisfaction at the frontline, with the exception of the education department, is also relatively low.
6. Frontline staff reports that there are too many rules that create obstacles in their work. More than two in five frontline staff outside the education department also report that they often feel they are on their own. At the same time, many report a willingness to increase effort levels if others reciprocate with similarly working harder.
7. Around two in five district officers and one in three block officers stated that they undertook actions that contributed to achieving their work that personally exposed them to risk (such as being blamed for subsequent failures) within the last six months.
8. Managers see it as their main task to ensure rule-following rather than encouraging subordinates to come up with their own solutions. A majority of managers also believes that subordinates will be lazy unless closely monitored, implying a high level of distrust.
9. Frontline staff overwhelmingly see block-level officers as the most important senior officials in their everyday work.
10. Office infrastructure has severe deficiencies with many offices lacking drinking water and female toilets. Many block offices also lack cars, making field visits difficult.
11. Frontline facilities face a concerning level of infrastructure shortfall. Basic infrastructure like electricity or tap water are missing across many facilities with anganwadis and health sub-centers being particularly underresourced. We also find that low literacy districts have an even more pronounced shortfall of basic infrastructure.
12. While schools were generally open, many anganwadis and health sub-centers were closed. This is particularly severe for health sub-centers with some districts where more than 80% were closed when enumerators visited them.

Recommendations

- 1) Undertake specific programs and initiatives to ensure a higher number of women, non-General castes, and socio-economically poorer candidates aspire for and succeed in reaching managerial leadership roles through outreach, career counselling, and handholding.
- 2) Work on building trust across the bureaucratic hierarchy and simultaneously redesign the workdays of frontline staff to avoid repetitive tasks and those with a lack of perceived purpose.
- 3) Reconsider the purpose of utilising technology: rather than increasing surveillance and reporting requirements, rebalance the use of technology to assist rather than surveil frontline staff, and utilise technology to automate odd tasks that cost frontline staff time.
- 4) Recognise the importance of block-level managers and invest in their offices, fill vacancies swiftly and regularly, and consider equipping block officers with vehicles for field visits.
- 5) Leverage the pro-poor potential of managerial bureaucrats and recognise their leadership role and the importance of their management practices at block- and district-level for frontline motivation. Prepare state cadre bureaucrats for their leadership role through dedicated training and mentoring at BIPARD.
- 6) Invest in office infrastructure including female toilets to prepare the ground for more women in leadership positions.
- 7) Urgently undertake capital investments in frontline facilities including anganwadis and health sub-centers through convergence with VB – G RAM G prioritising those districts currently lagging most (such as low-literacy districts).
- 8) Consider increasing job security and remuneration for frontline staff (especially for health and social welfare) and signal that steady wages are an expression of recognition for their hard work.
- 9) Bundle capital investments in office and frontline infrastructure with rekindling trust between managerial bureaucrats and frontline staff to allow a synergy effect to materialise.
- 10) Consider undertaking continuous and regular government analytics to get a pulse of how managerial bureaucrats and frontline staff feel about their work.

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Introduction

The findings in this report are based on a survey with public sector employees across the district-, block-, and frontline-level conducted in all 38 districts of Bihar between December 2024 and March 2025. This project was led by Martin Haus (LSE), Dr Ashmita Gupta (ADRI) and Professor Daniel Berliner (LSE), and funded by the International Science Partnership Fund (grant number # 111218).

The survey covered those public employees responsible for implementing four core public services in Bihar: primary and upper-primary schools, health centers or sub-centers, anganwadis, and MGNREGS. In particular, the following posts were included:

1. District
 - a. District Education Officer
 - b. Civil Surgeon / Chief Medical Officer
 - c. District Program Officer ICDS
 - d. District Program Officer MGNREGS
2. Block
 - a. Block Education Officer
 - b. Medical Officer in-charge of Block-level Primary Health Center (MOIC)
 - c. Child Development Officer (CDPO)
 - d. Program Officer MGNREGS
3. Frontline
 - a. Teachers and Headmasters
 - b. Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) / Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)
 - c. Anganwadi Worker / Anganwadi Helper
 - d. Gram Rojgar Sevak

A total of 1,767 responses were gathered with 84 from the district-level, 311 from the block-level, and 1,372 from the frontline. The survey was conducted in Hindi by trained enumerators of the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI). Prior to the start of the survey, no-objection certificates were issued by the four departments.

Distribution of respondents by level and department

Level	Department	Number of respondents
District level	Education	17
Block level	Education	58
Frontline	Education	533
District level	Health	20
Block level	Health	92
Frontline	Health	282
District level	Rural Development	27
Block level	Rural Development	86
Frontline	Rural Development	71
District level	Social Welfare	20
Block level	Social Welfare	75
Frontline	Social Welfare	486

Distribution of surveyed facilities by type

Facility type	Number of surveyed units
District office	120
Block office	606
Gram Rojgar Sevak office	8
Anganwadi	957
Health Center	893
School	1000

Respondents were selected at random. In a first instance, blocks were selected across each district. Our sampling strategy was blocked at district-level and selected at least two blocks in each district. The choice of blocks was random among those for which the databases on frontline sites contained a sufficient number of faculties. Blocks where pilots were conducted were excluded from the pool. Within blocks, Gram Panchayats were selected at random, and within these, schools, anganwadis, and health sub-centers were selected at random. In total,

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199 blocks out of the 534 total blocks in Bihar (as per 2011 census) were selected. Enumerators were provided with clear instructions about how to randomly select staff at frontline sites. Several attempts were made for managerial bureaucrats. Sampling aimed to ensure geographical breadth and maximising representativeness within logistical constraints. As such, the evidence in this report is not necessarily representative of the entire state. Our descriptive findings should be interpreted with this in mind. All surveys were conducted in-person with tablets.

Respondents across districts



1 Composition of the sample

- a. The findings in this chapter are based on the composition of the survey sample which is not necessarily representative of the public sector employees responsible for the four services included. It should therefore be treated with caution and any conclusions about the actual composition of the public sector should be avoided.
- b. Overall, our sample indicates that managerial posts are dominated by men with the exception of managerial posts in the social welfare department.
- c. Women dominate frontline posts in the social welfare and health department whereas the rural development department across all levels is heavily male dominated.
- d. Managerial posts are disproportionately held by those from the General caste category.
- e. Managerial bureaucrats come from more privileged backgrounds whereas frontline workers are more likely to come from more marginalized socio-economic families.
- f. While managerial bureaucrats in the social welfare departments are overwhelmingly female, most of them are coming from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.
- g. This suggests strong sorting by gender, caste, and socio-economic background to administrative levels. The Government of Bihar may want to consider additional measures to support women, those from marginalized caste backgrounds, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds to aspire for and succeed in reaching leadership roles at the block- and district-level. It might also want to pay attention to remuneration and job security aspects of frontline staff under a lens of gender equity, especially in the case of the health and social welfare department. Additionally, attracting more women to the rural development department might be considered.

1.1 Gender

Our sample indicates a sharp difference in gender composition across departments and levels.

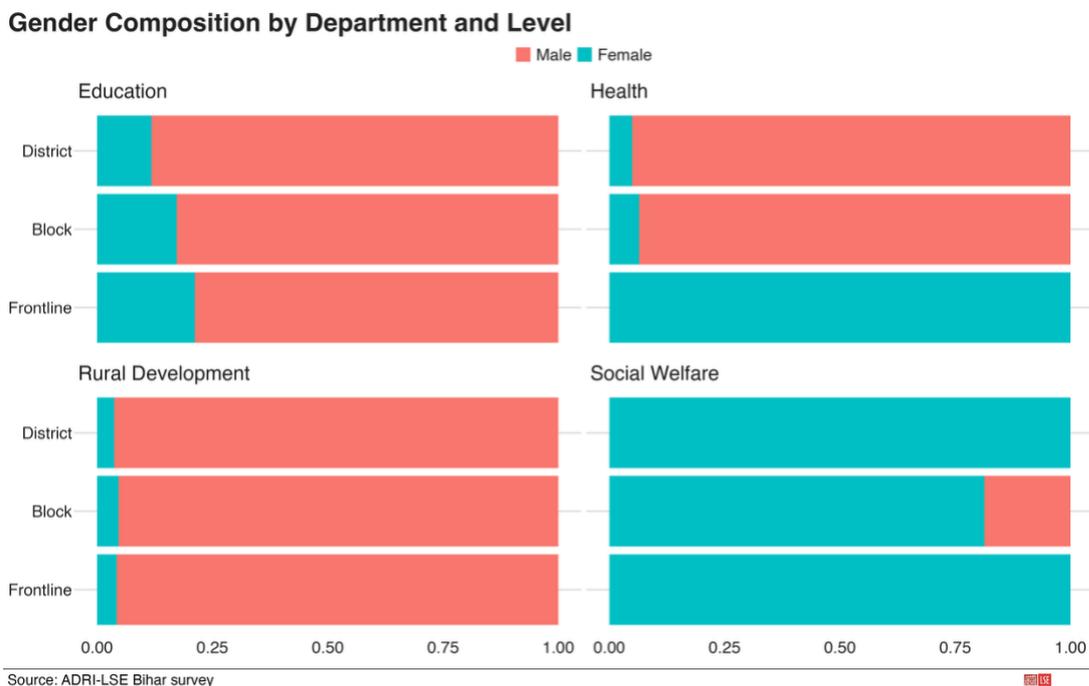
For school education, our sample has a higher share of teachers or headmaster who are male. This is likely an overestimate of the real gender imbalance. Nonetheless, the data indicates that the share of female staff declines the higher one moves in the administrative level with the post of District Education Officer (DEO) being heavily male dominated.

Rural development is heavily male dominated across all administrative levels and has only a very low number of female staff.

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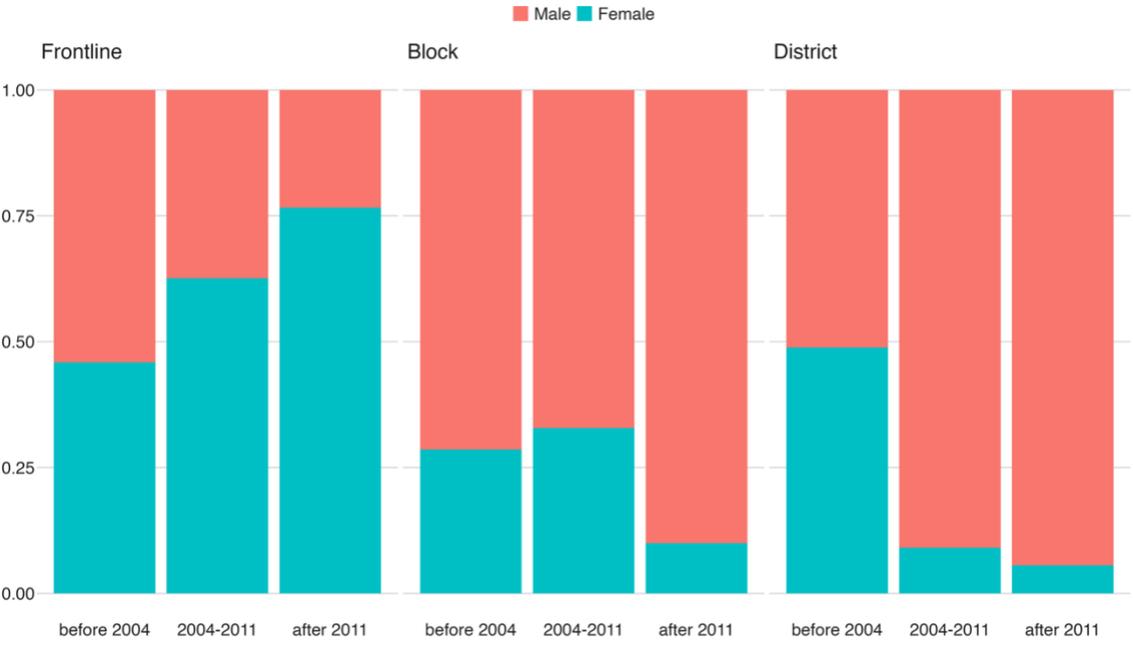
Social welfare and health are both heavily female dominated at the frontline. This is not surprising given that their frontline staff for the positions considered in the survey are almost exclusively female. In the case of Social Welfare, this predominance of women also applies to managerial level. In contrast, block- and district-officials in the health department are predominantly male, despite a frontline workforce that is almost exclusively female.

The figure below depicts the sample composition by department and level.



When considering gender composition by recruitment year, we find remarkable stability across recruitment years. Splitting the survey into three recruitment periods (before 2004, 2004-2011, and since 2011), we cannot find a closing of the gender gap for managerial positions although there is an increase for women among our pool of frontline workers. This is likely due to an expansion of health and early childcare services where frontline staff is female dominated.

Gender Composition by Administrative Level over Time



Overall, the lowest paid and most fragile positions (in terms of remuneration and protection) are frontline positions in the health and social welfare department. These are almost exclusively dominated by women. Except for managerial positions in the social welfare department, more desirable positions (with better pay or some civil service protection) remain heavily male dominated and there is no apparent closing of the gender gap for managerial positions.

1.2 Caste

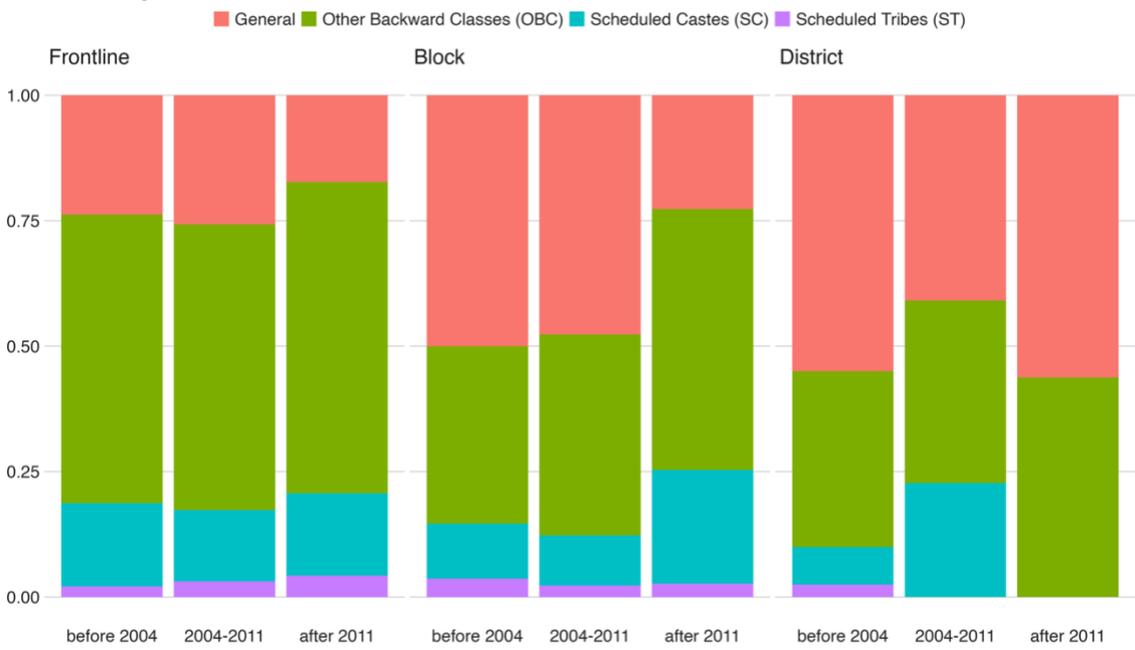
We also find strong sorting to administrative levels by caste. While Other Backward Classes (OBCs) make up the bulk of frontline workforces across departments, General castes become more dominant among higher levels of the administration. This overrepresentation is particularly stark given the share of General castes being around 15.5% in the population, according to the 2022 Bihar Caste-Based Survey. Below we exclude those who refused to provide this information.

Caste composition by department and level



When splitting caste composition by recruitment year, we can find an increase of the share of OBC and SC block-level officials over time but not for the district-level. For post 2011 recruitments at district-level, more than half comes from General castes.

Caste composition over time

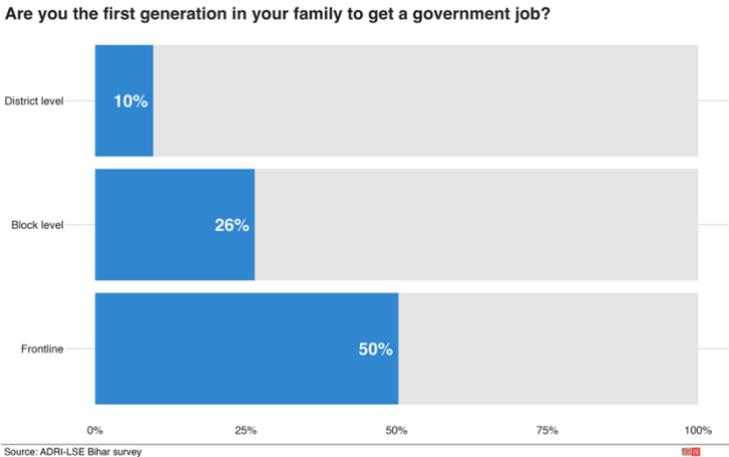


Overall, our findings indicate that General castes are dominant in managerial posts while the frontline has a large share of OBCs.

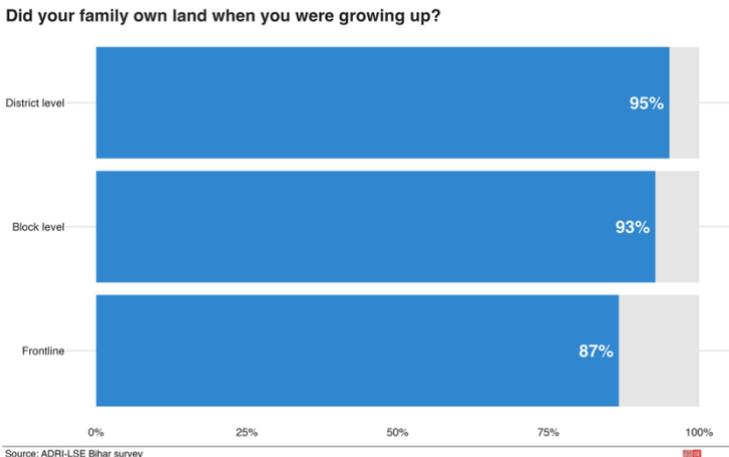
1.3 Socio-economic background

We find strong sorting by socio-economic background to administrative levels. Bureaucrats at managerial levels generally come from more privileged backgrounds.

First, only 10% of district officials in our sample report that they are the first generation in their family to get a government job whereas half of frontline respondents report that this is the case.

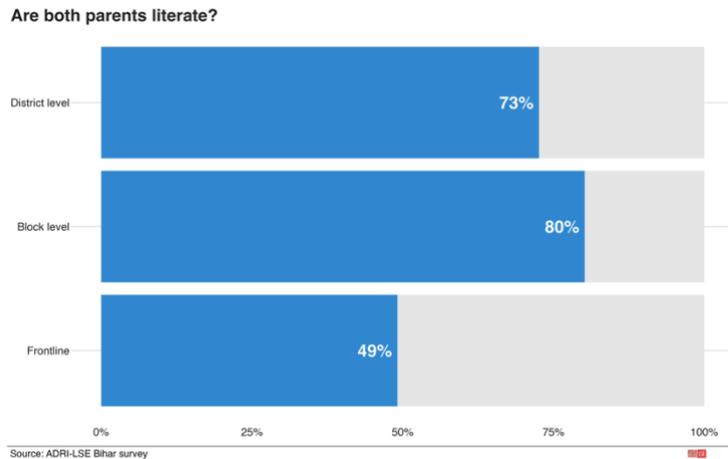


Second, while most respondents across all levels come from families who owned land, there are around 13% of the frontline respondents reporting that they come from landless families.

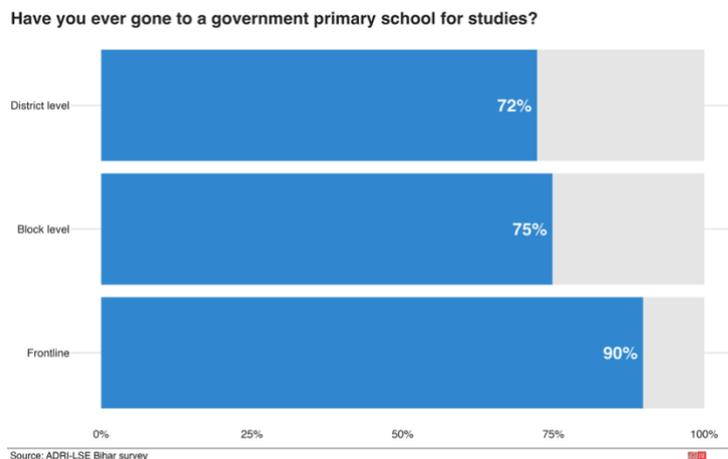


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Generational educational capital also differs by administrative level. While only around half of frontline respondents report that both their parents are literate, this number is more than two thirds for managerial bureaucrats in our sample.



Considering the schooling of respondents themselves, similar differences emerge. 90% of frontline respondents report that they went to a government primary school whereas this number is 75% or less for managerial bureaucrats.



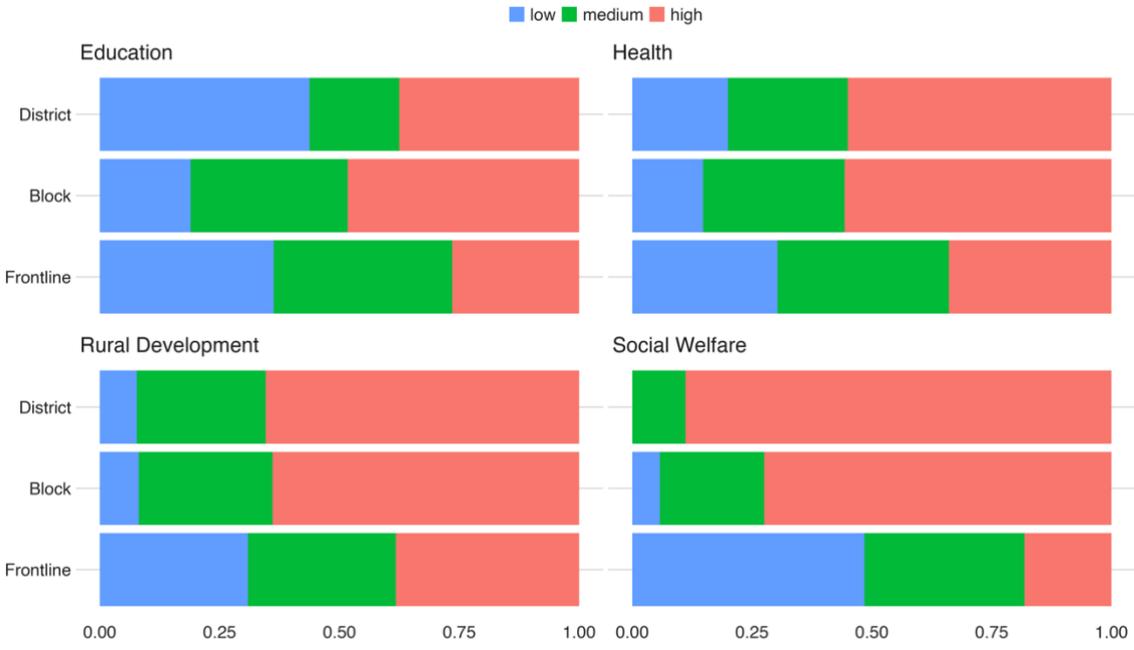
Taken together, a clear pattern emerges of socio-economic background predicting the administrative level. These aggregate measures by level, however, mask considerable heterogeneity by department. To provide a compact overview, we next consider the first principal component of all these measures (i.e., whether they are the first generation in their family to hold a government job,

whether their family had land when they grew up, whether both of their parents are literate and whether they went to a government school for primary education) combined to create an index that allows us to reduce the above information to a single score for each bureaucrat, split this component into three bins for the entire sample, and provide an overview by department-level.



A principal component analysis is a technique that allows to reduce the dimensions of a measure. It combines multiple aspects into a single number (i.e., dimension) and automatically weighs different input measures.

Socio-economic composition by level



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



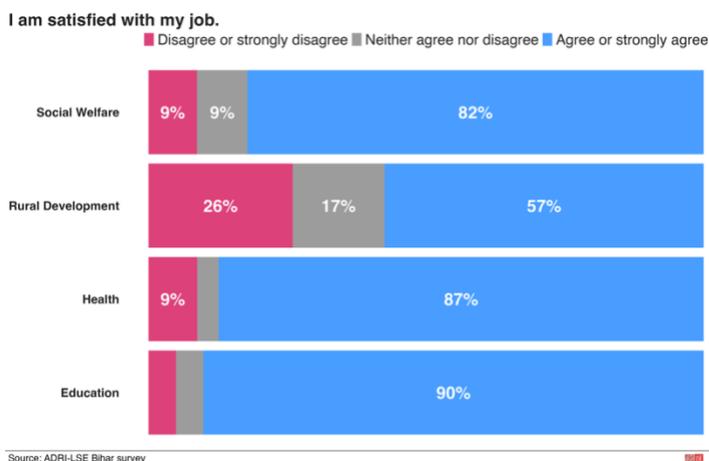
This illustrates that for our sample, the social welfare department shows the strongest sorting of socio-economic background to administrative levels. At the same time, the social welfare department, as indicated above, is the only department where women are the majority in managerial posts in our sample. Together with the present information, this indicates that women from more privileged backgrounds can secure managerial posts in the department. The education department has a sizeable share of lower socio-economic background managerial bureaucrats in our sample.

2 Perceptions, attitudes, and motivations

- a. Job satisfaction is generally high, and respondents are committed to the public sector.
- b. Salary satisfaction is low among the frontline workers in the social welfare and rural development department.
- c. A sizeable share of frontline respondents states that they often do repetitive tasks or tasks where they do not see a purpose.
- d. Two thirds of frontline workers indicate their willingness to work harder if others reciprocate.
- e. A majority of frontline staff report that rules create obstacles in their work and around one in three frontline workers report a sense of loneliness in their work.
- f. The Government of Bihar might consider reviewing the work routines of frontline staff to limit the number of repetitive tasks and leverage technology to automate some of them. It might also consider increasing discretion for frontline staff by streamlining rules and empowering them. This might be balanced by increased peer monitoring which simultaneously could address the sense of loneliness among frontline workers. Ensuring steady and higher wages especially for the female workforce at the frontline of health care and early childhood service provision could contribute to gender equity and worker satisfaction. Recent steps in this direction by the Government of Bihar already took place after our survey concluded and are therefore not reflected in the responses.

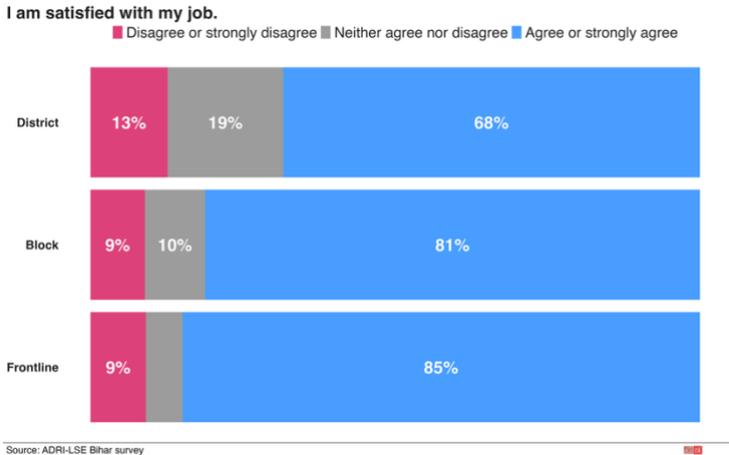
2.1 Satisfaction, public sector preference, and fulfilment

Overall, respondents report high job satisfaction across departments with a somewhat lower level for the department or rural development.

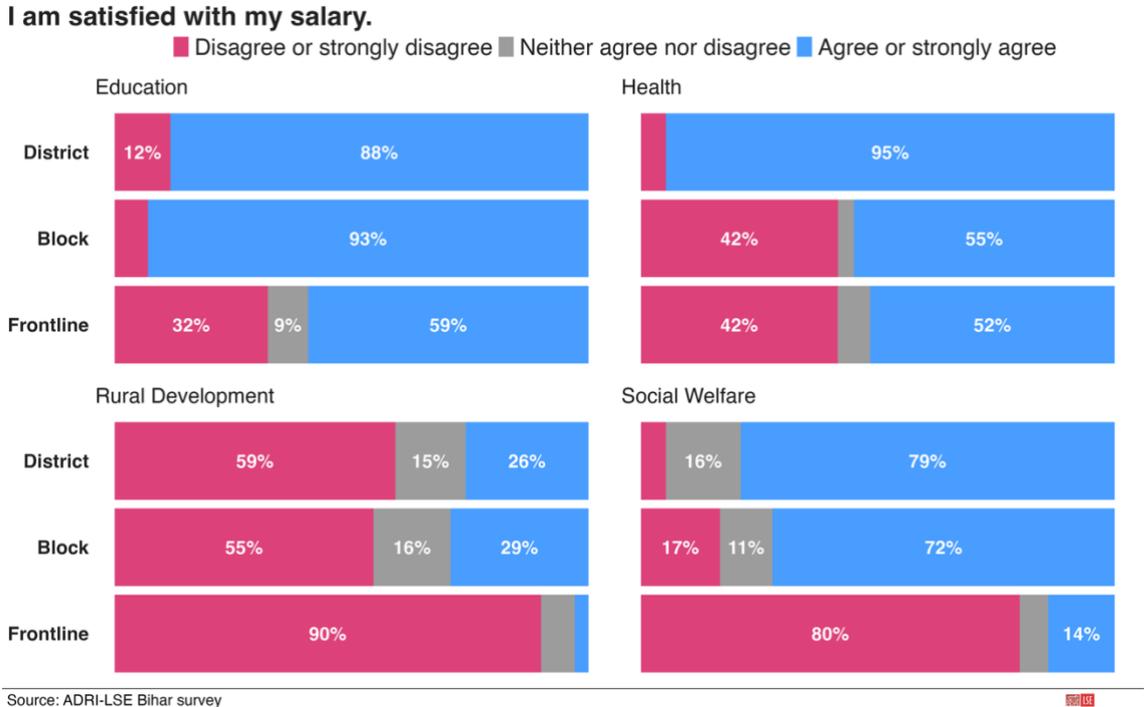


Splitting the sample by administrative level reveals that job satisfaction is highest

among frontline workers and lowest among district respondents.



While overall job satisfaction is a very broad question, we next consider if respondents are satisfied with their salaries. We find that there is generally less satisfaction with salaries at the frontline. This is particularly severe for the rural development and social welfare department.

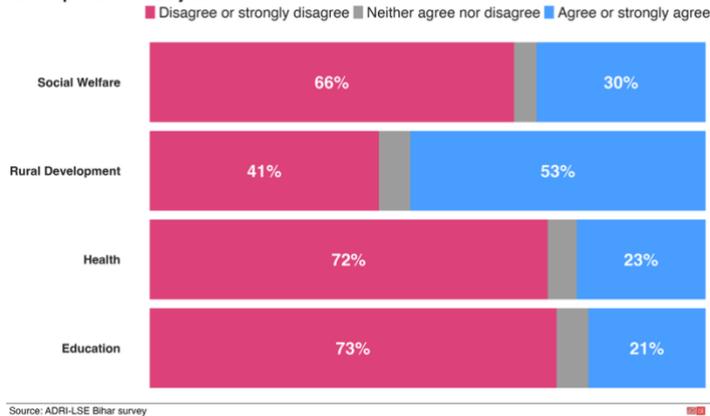


We next consider the question whether respondents feel a strong loyalty to the public sector or whether they would, if the same level of job security and salary were offered in the private sector, prefer to work there. We find that there is a

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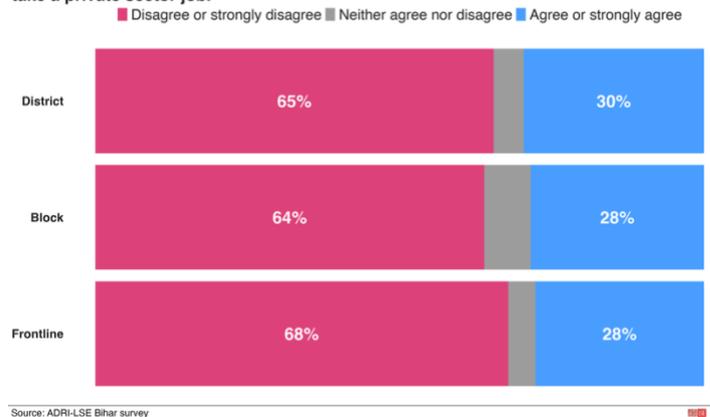
strong commitment to the public sector except for respondents in the rural development department.

If the same job security and salary were offered in the private sector, I would prefer to take a private sector job.

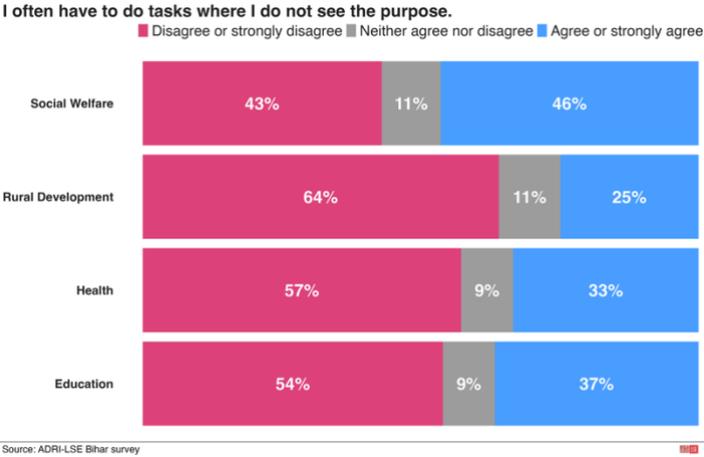


When splitting by administrative levels, we find a slightly stronger commitment to the public sector by frontline staff despite their low satisfaction with remuneration.

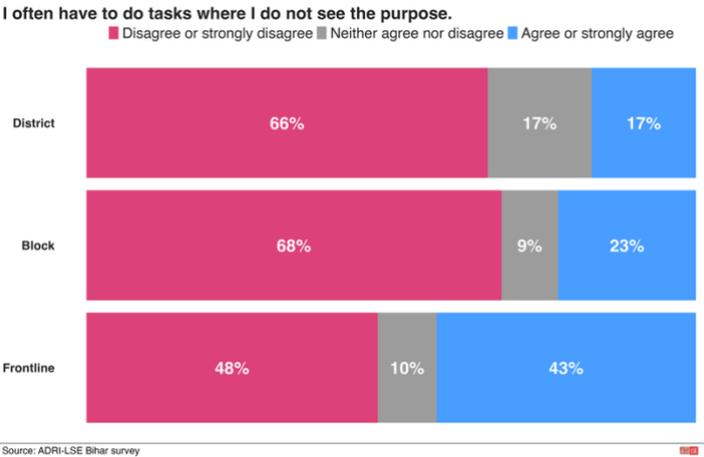
If the same job security and salary were offered in the private sector, I would prefer to take a private sector job.



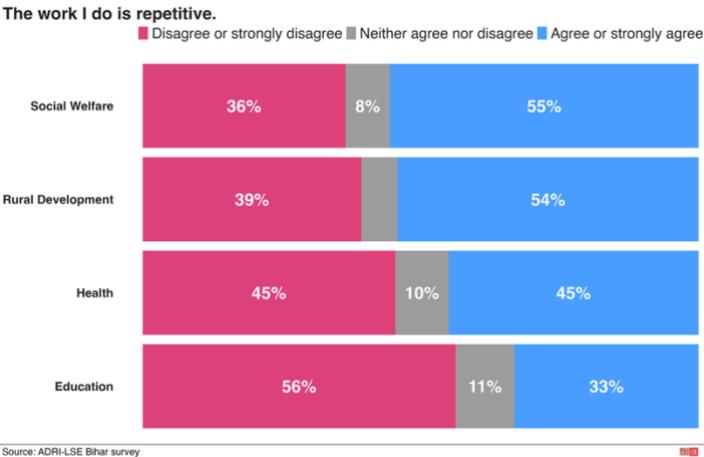
We next consider whether respondents see a purpose in their everyday work. A considerable share of respondents agrees with the statement that they often do tasks where they do not see a purpose. In the case of the social welfare department, almost half either agree or strongly agree with this statement.



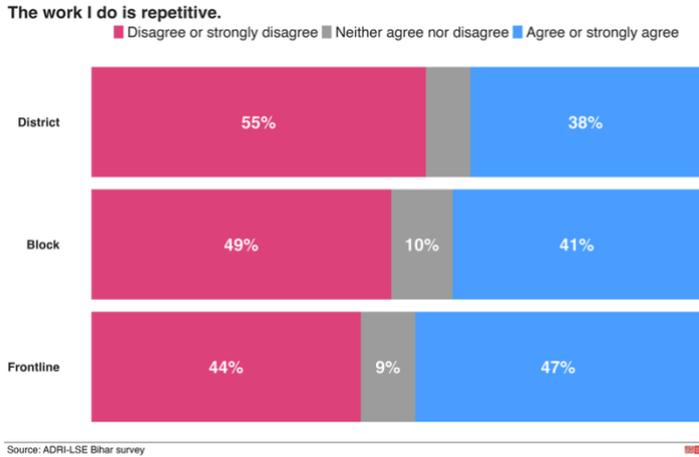
When looking at administrative levels, we find that this sense of a lack of purpose is particularly severe among frontline staff.



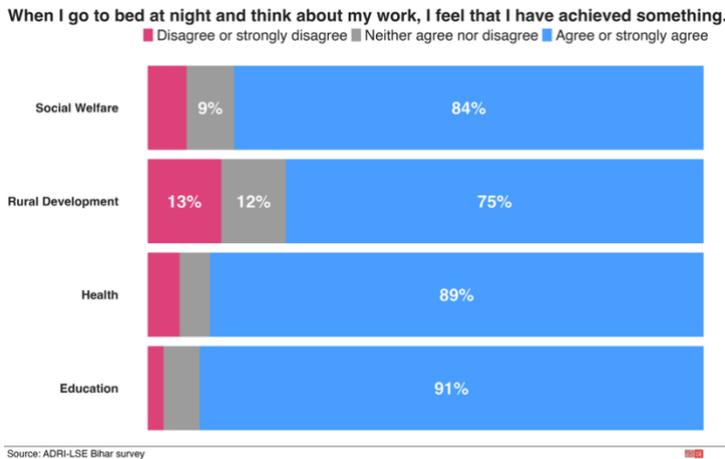
We also asked respondents if they think the work they do is repetitive. Around half of respondents in all departments but education report that they feel that the work they do is repetitive.



Splitting by administrative level, we find that this perception of repetitiveness is particularly severe among frontline respondents but sizeable throughout administrative levels.

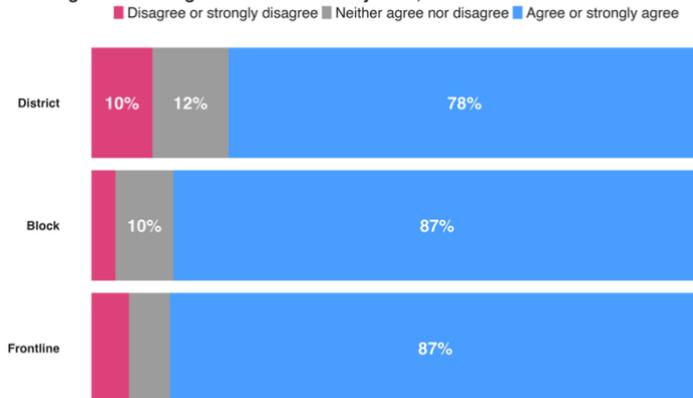


We next consider if respondents feel a sense of fulfilment at the end of their workdays. We find that respondents across all departments feel a sense of fulfilment albeit there is a considerable number of respondents from the rural development department that report that they do not feel that they have achieved something at the end of their workdays.



When considering respondents by administrative level, we find that this sense of fulfilment is somewhat weaker for those farthest removed from directly providing services to citizens.

When I go to bed at night and think about my work, I feel that I have achieved something.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



While job satisfaction in general is high and respondents report a strong commitment to the public sector, salary satisfaction is particularly low among respondents from the social welfare and rural development departments and for the frontline overall.

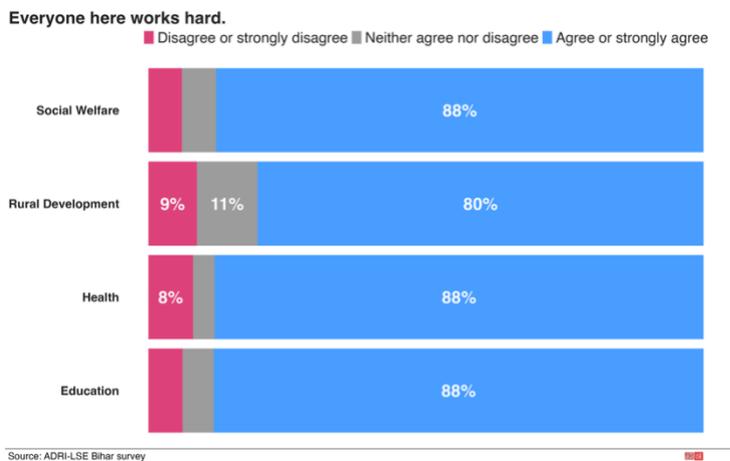
Worryingly, a sizeable share of respondents from the frontline-level report that they often do tasks that are repetitive or where they do not see a purpose. On the other hand, there is a high sense of fulfilment associated with providing services directly to citizens. Taken together, this hints at a highly committed and intrinsically motivated workforce which could be further supported by streamlining processes and redesigning workdays to ensure less repetitiveness and a higher sense of purpose for everyday tasks.



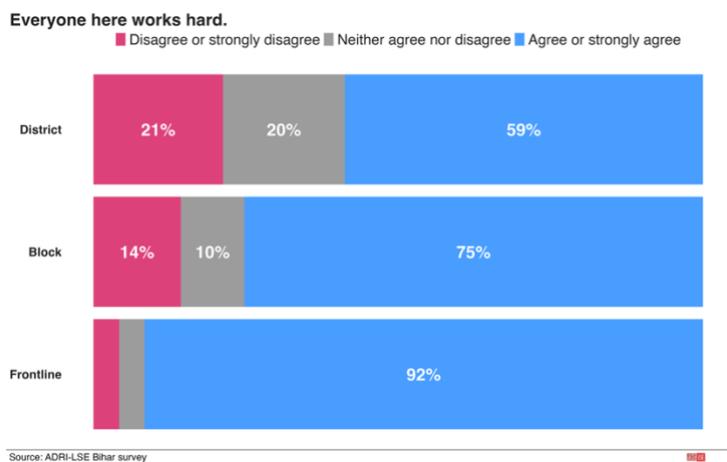
Since our survey took place, the Government of Bihar has undertaken steps to improve the remuneration of ASHA workers (by increasing their incentives from Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000) which is not reflected in the responses above. The same applies to Anganwadi Workers and Helpers who recently saw a hike in their honorariums (from Rs 7,000 to Rs 9,000 for AWWs and from Rs 4,000 to Rs 4,500 for AWHs).

2.2 Perceptions of the working environment

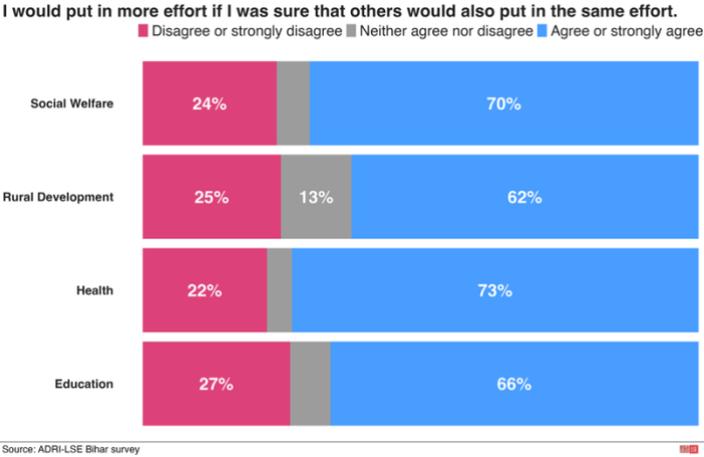
We asked respondents if they feel that everyone is working hard to get a sense of the perceptions around effort levels of colleagues. Overall, respondents indicate high levels of agreement with the statement that everyone works hard.



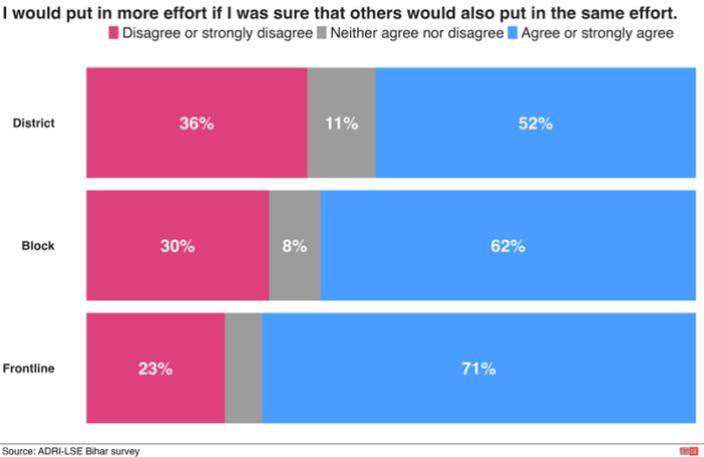
Across administrative levels, this perception is particularly widespread among the frontline whereas more than one fifth of district-level respondents do not agree with the statement.



However, when asked whether respondents themselves would be willing to exert more effort if others would reciprocate, i.e., respond with equally higher efforts, a majority across all departments agrees with the statement, indicating that there might be room for higher effort levels.



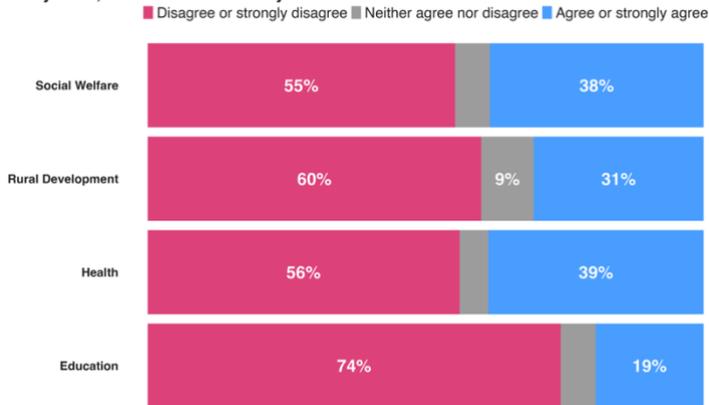
When splitting by administrative levels, we find that this willingness to work harder if others would join them is particularly strong among frontline respondents.



When asked whether they often feel that they are on their own, we find that around one third or more among social welfare, rural development, and health respondents say that they often feel on their own.

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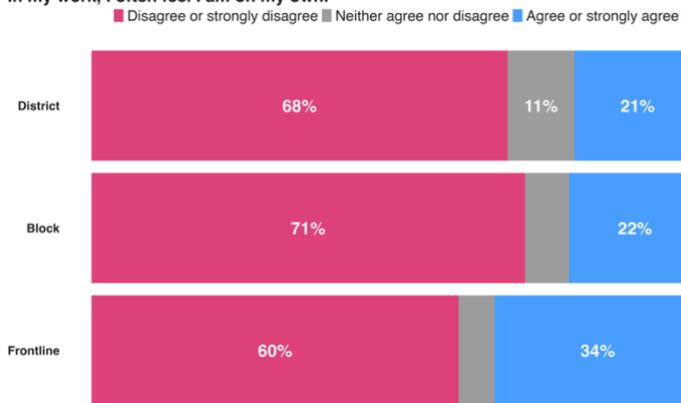
In my work, I often feel I am on my own.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

When splitting by administrative levels, we find that this sense of loneliness is particularly prominent among frontline respondents.

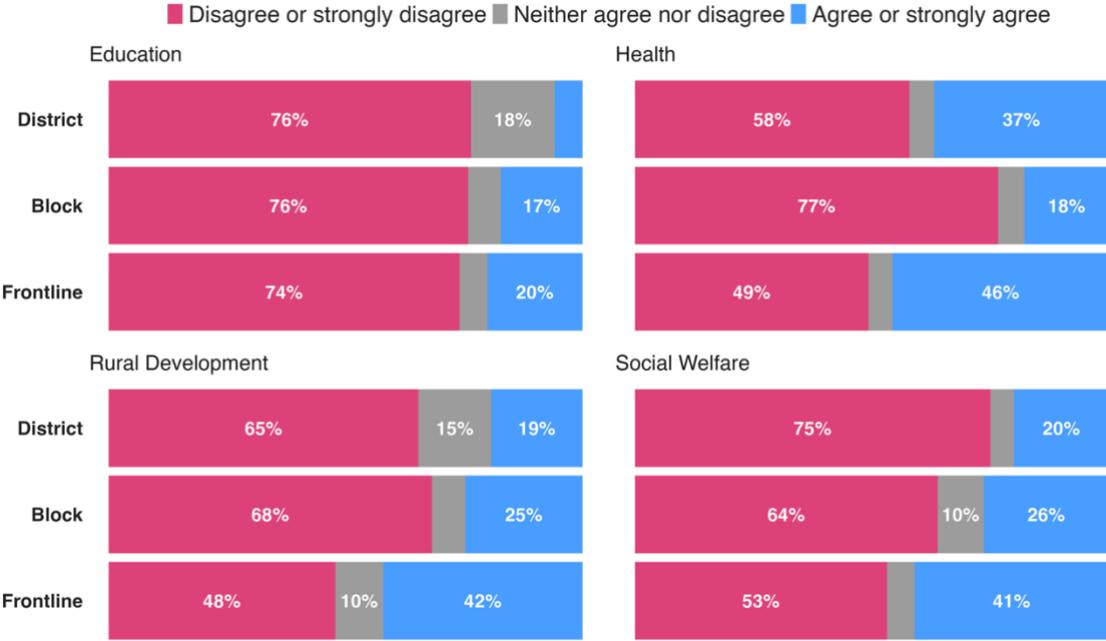
In my work, I often feel I am on my own.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Splitting these further reveals that this holds for all frontline staff outside schools.

In my work, I often feel I am on my own.

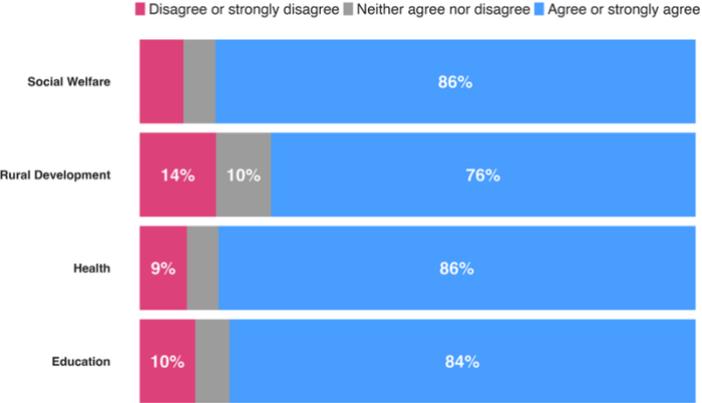


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We further asked respondents if they get praise for good work. Overall, there is a strong sense that good work gets recognised across all departments.

When I perform well, I get praise and recognition at work.



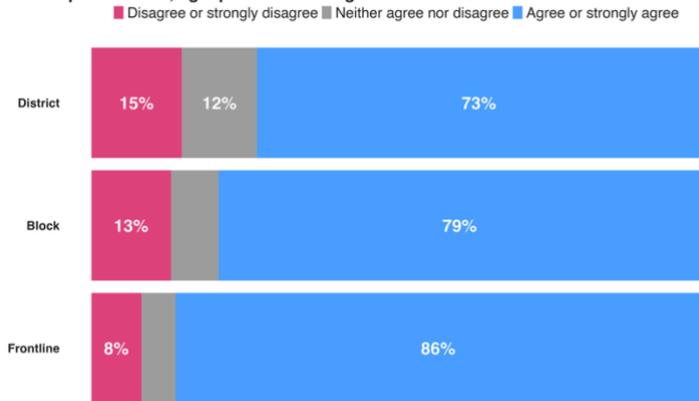
Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



When splitting by administrative levels, this sense of recognition for good work declines the higher one moves in the administrative hierarchy.

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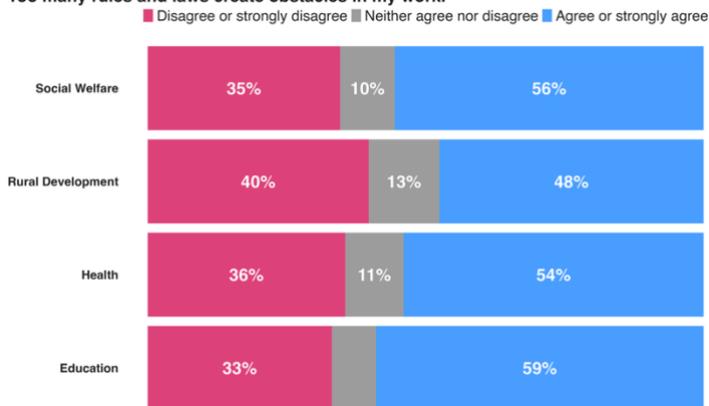
When I perform well, I get praise and recognition at work.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

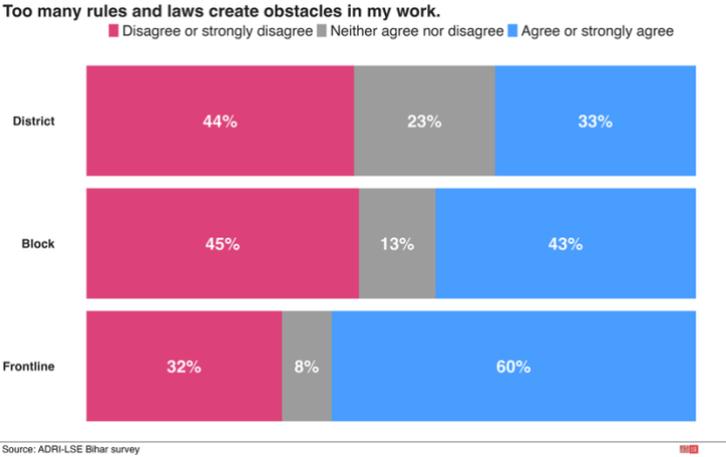
When asked if too many rules create obstacles in their work, around half or more of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement.

Too many rules and laws create obstacles in my work.

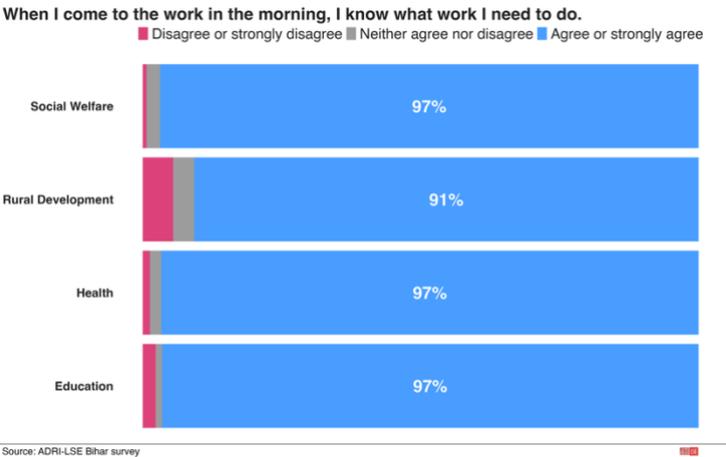


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Splitting by administrative level indicates that this is perception of a lack of discretion is particularly pronounced among frontline staff.

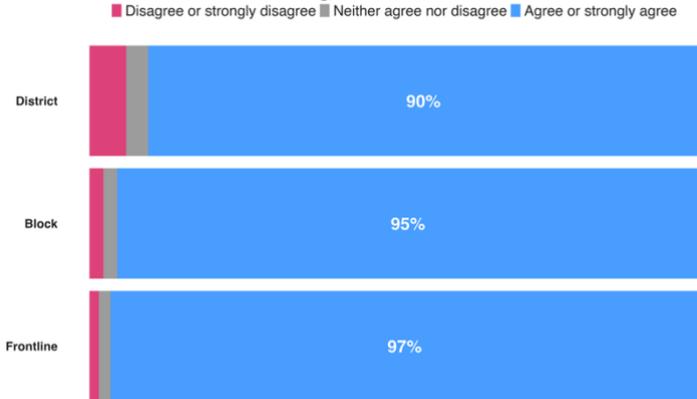


Do respondents know what they need to do when coming to work in the morning? Overwhelmingly, respondents state that they do.



Splitting by administrative level indicates that there is a slightly larger share among managerial bureaucrats who do not know what to do when coming to their offices in the morning.

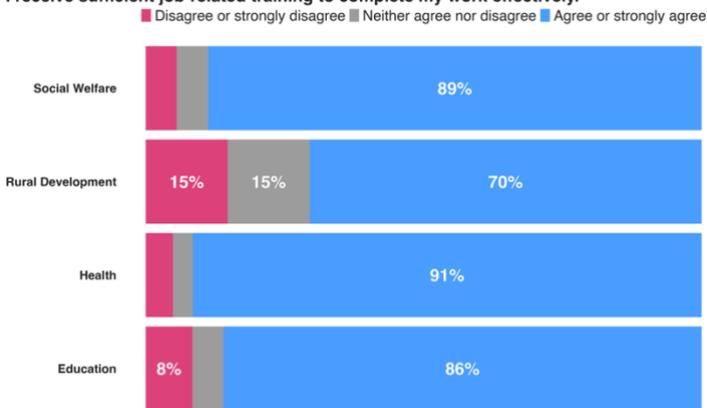
When I come to the work in the morning, I know what work I need to do.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

When asked whether they received sufficient job training, an overwhelming majority of respondents report that they do with slightly higher shares of respondents indicating further training needs in the rural development and education department.

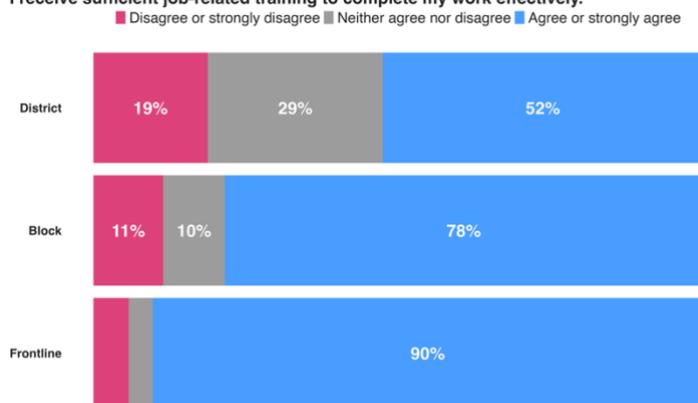
I receive sufficient job-related training to complete my work effectively.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Splitting by administrative level indicates that the need for additional training is most pronounced at the district-level.

I receive sufficient job-related training to complete my work effectively.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

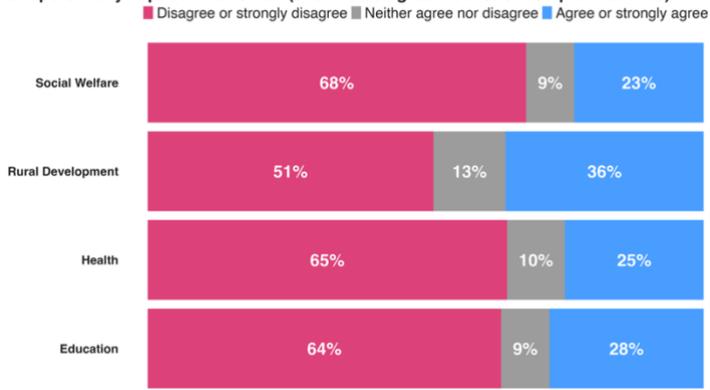


Taken together, our survey indicates that there is generally a positive perception around effort levels of colleagues, most pronounced at the frontline. At the same time, there is room for improvement as more than two thirds at frontline workers indicate they would be willing to work harder if others did so as well. This indicates an area for managerial bureaucrats to address by coordinating increases of effort-levels within frontline units. At the same time, a majority of frontline workers report that too many rules create obstacles in their work, indicating a need for increased discretion and flexibility. Around one in three frontline staff report a sense of loneliness when it comes to their work. This might be particularly relevant for frontline staff outside multi-teacher schools as it is these workers who spend much of their working day on their own. A higher level of support and opportunities for peer exchange might boost their confidence. For managerial bureaucrats, our findings indicate that around one in five district respondents openly admit that they need more training. Such training could address other concerns indicated in this chapter, such as how to coordinate higher effort levels among frontline workers or how to instil a higher sense of companionship among frontline staff. Retraining existing managerial bureaucrats might be particularly cost-effective. Such training could also include selected frontline staff and state-level representatives to jointly address redesigns of formal rules and procedures which are often perceived as obstacles.

2.3 Risk-taking, autonomy and transfers

Around one quarter of respondents across departments report that they undertook actions that contributed to achieving their work but personally exposed them to risk with a higher share for respondents from the rural development department.

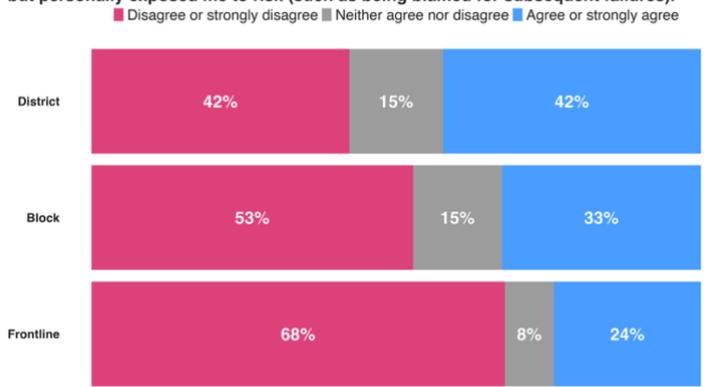
In the past six months, I have undertaken actions that contributed to achieving my work but personally exposed me to risk (such as being blamed for subsequent failures).



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Across administrative levels, we find that managerial bureaucrats report higher levels of risk-taking with more than two in five district-level respondents reporting that they undertook such risks within the past six months.

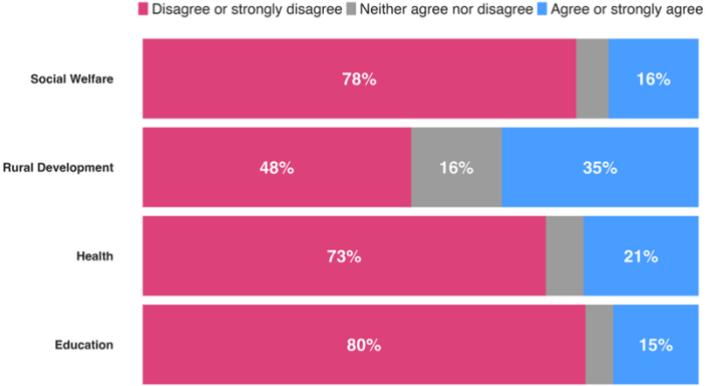
In the past six months, I have undertaken actions that contributed to achieving my work but personally exposed me to risk (such as being blamed for subsequent failures).



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Perceptions of political interference are particularly common among respondents from the rural development department where around one in three report that their day-to-day decision making is subject to intervention from political actors, politicians or political parties.

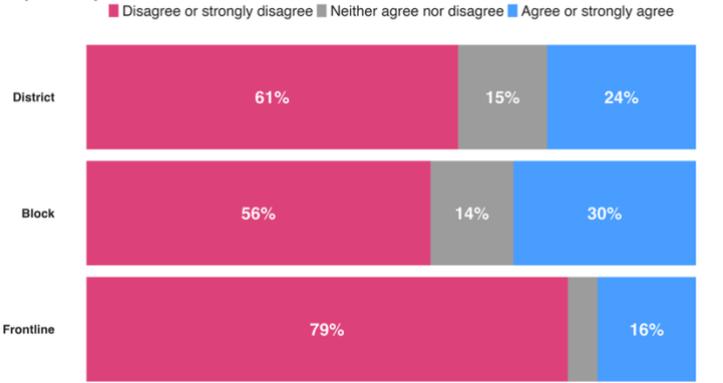
My day to day decision making is subject to intervention from political actors, politicians or political parties.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

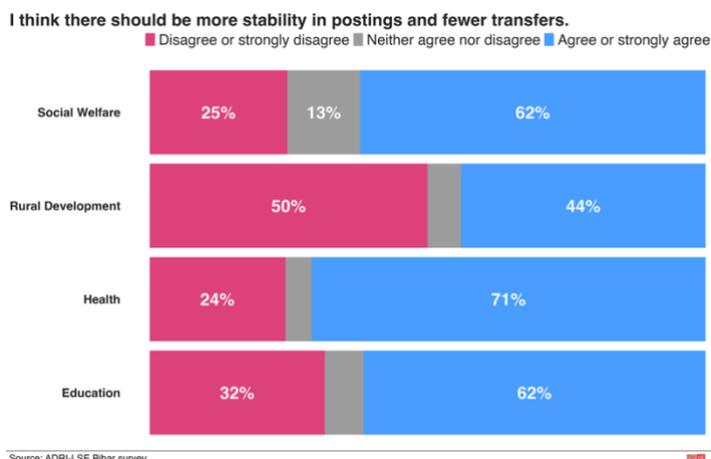
Splitting by administrative level reveals that political interference is more common at managerial levels than the frontline.

My day to day decision making is subject to intervention from political actors, politicians or political parties.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Post stability is a concern across department with 44% of rural development respondents and 71% of health respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that there should be more stability in postings and fewer transfers.



Splitting by administrative level indicates that especially at the frontline, respondents feel that more stability in postings would be desirable.



Overall, the responses indicate that both risk-taking and political interference are most common at the managerial level. This might be addressed by strengthening the state-level support for district- and block-level bureaucrats by providing reassurance for risk-taking and by taking a more flexible approach to the application of formal rules.

Bureaucrats who undertake risks to ensure higher quality of service provision should be treated distinct from those who bend rules for illicit aims. Ensuring a consistent, supportive, and mutually coordinated understanding of when, where, and for what purposes bureaucrats are encouraged to respond flexibly to local needs and delimiting areas where strict rule-following is essential might provide reassurance to bureaucrats and lower their level of perceived exposure when undertaking innovative initiatives. At the same time, this might strengthen the bond between managerial bureaucrats and the state-level leadership and provide reassurance in cases of political interference. In the case of transfers, managerial bureaucrats are split about whether there should be fewer transfers. This might, however, be influenced by the perceived desirability of their current posting. In the case of frontline workers, around two thirds would prefer fewer transfers. While transfers might generally increase the insulation of the bureaucracy and lower risks of capture or collusion for corrupt means, their impact on motivation and satisfaction should also be considered.

3 Management practices

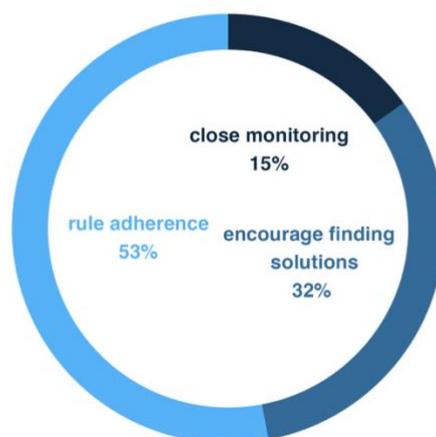
- a. Managerial bureaucrats see their main tasks as ensuring that rules are followed.
- b. A majority of managers believe that subordinates will be lazy unless they are closely monitored, indicating a high level of distrust.
- c. Frontline workers overwhelmingly report that block officers are the most important senior officer in their everyday work and generally report positive evaluations of their managers.
- d. The Government of Bihar may want to undertake exercises that allow to build trust across administrative levels. Retraining state-cadre officials to reconsider their role as managers to be more than ensuring rule adherence might be a cost-effective way of improving state effectiveness. For this, more clarity about where both managerial bureaucrats and frontline staff have discretion might be useful. As block officers are seen as crucial by frontline staff, a steady and swift filling of vacancies is crucial.

3.1 Perspectives of managers

We asked managers what they consider their main task. Overall, more than half of all managerial bureaucrats stated that their main task is rule adherence. Around one third opted for encouraging subordinates to find their own solutions to problems while 15% see close monitoring as their most important task.

The main task of a manager is...

all managerial bureaucrats



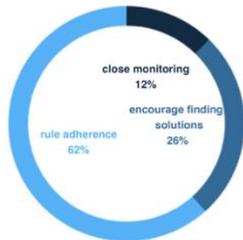
Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Splitting by department reveals that the emphasis on rule adherence is slightly stronger in the education and health department whereas more than one in three respondents from rural development and social welfare consider encouraging

subordinates to find their own solutions their main task.

The main task of a manager is...
Education



The main task of a manager is...
Health



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



The main task of a manager is...
Rural Development



The main task of a manager is...
Social Welfare



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

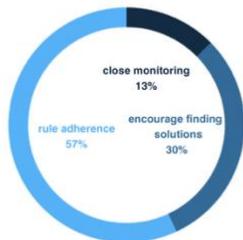


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Splitting respondents by administrative level, we find little heterogeneity: for both levels, most managerial bureaucrats see rule adherence as their main task.

The main task of a manager is...
District



The main task of a manager is...
Block



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



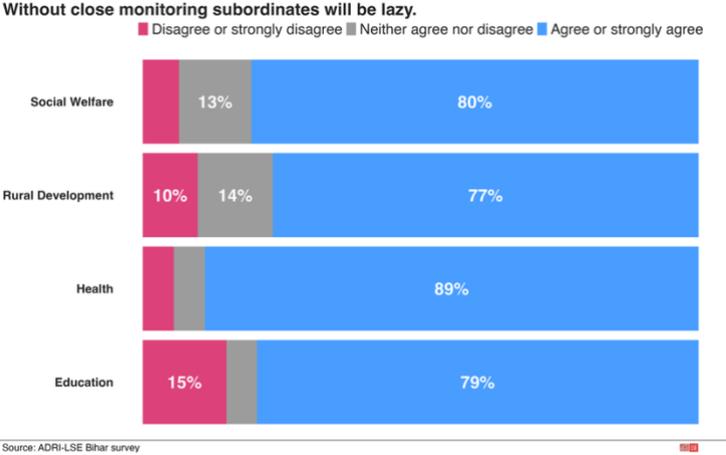
Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



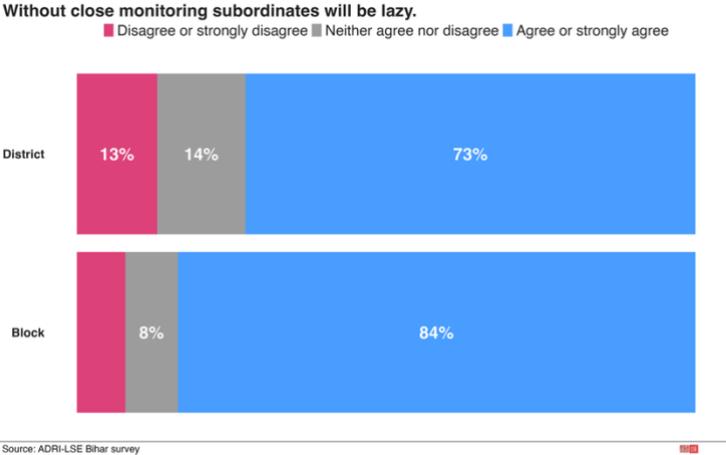
We further asked managerial bureaucrats whether they think that they consider it their job to practice tasks with subordinates if these do not know how to do their task. Almost all managerial bureaucrats responded that they consider it part of their duty to practice such tasks with their subordinates. This holds across departments and administrative levels. Similarly, managers state that a sense of equality is important to keep subordinates motivated, and that protecting

subordinates from undue influence is part of their job.

Managers, however, appear to have low trust in subordinates and more than three in four across departments report that subordinates will be lazy unless closely monitored.



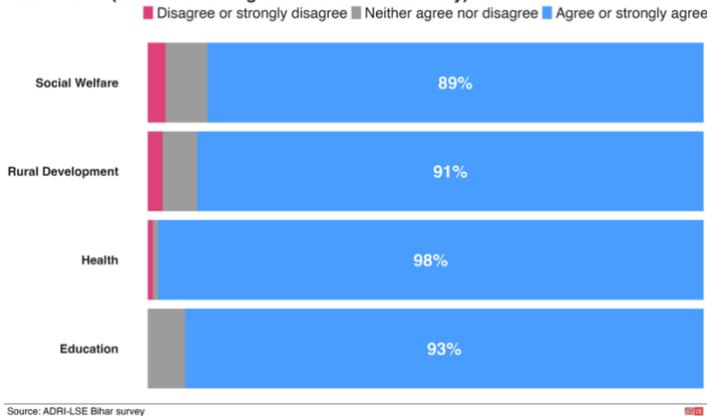
This view holds across administrative levels.



Finally, we asked managers if they think subordinates need to be disciplined if they divert from rules even if they provide a good reason for it (e.g., ensuring effective service delivery). Almost all managers responded that they see such a need for disciplining for any diversion from rules. This, too, holds across administrative levels.

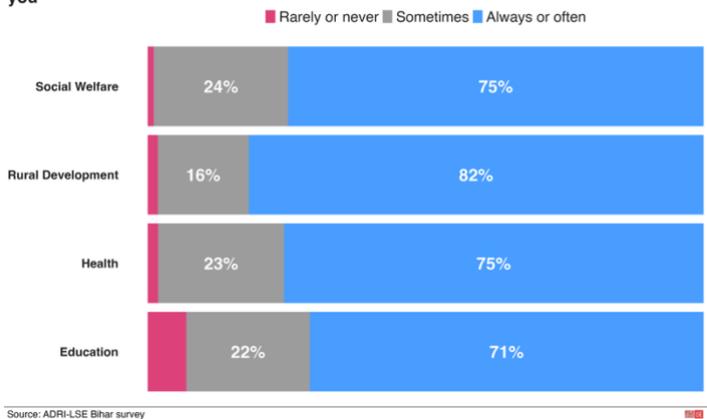
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Subordinates need to be disciplined if they divert from rules even if they provide a good reason for it (such as ensuring effective service delivery).



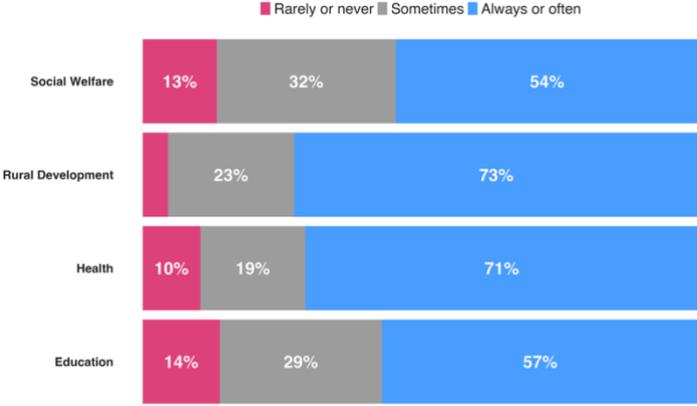
We also asked managerial bureaucrats how often they discuss different topics during meetings and in conversations with their colleagues. Managerial bureaucrats noted that most of them frequently discuss work-related problems with fellow officers.

Frequency of discussions of work-related problems of the employees who work under you



Attempts to influence decisions are also common themes in conversations with other officers.

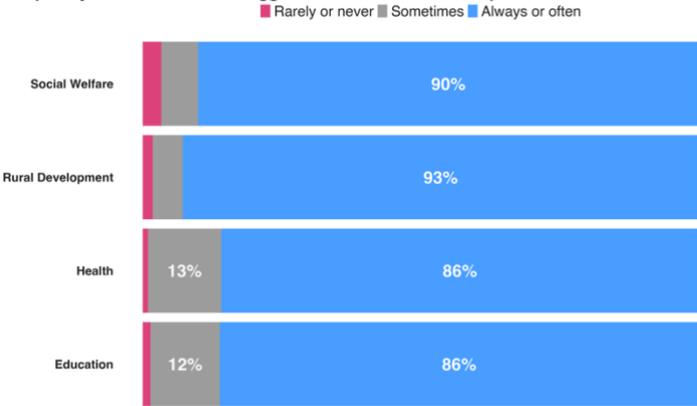
Frequency of discussions of issues related to attempts to influence decisions



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Similarly, work improvements feature frequently in conversations.

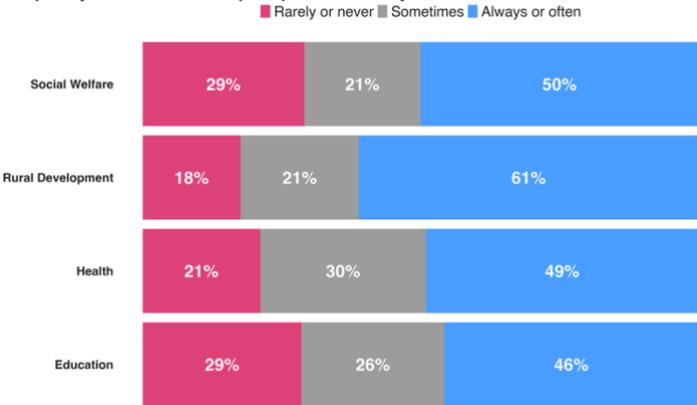
Frequency of discussions of suggestions related to work improvements



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

While less frequent, discussions of poor performance by certain officers were also not uncommon across departments.

Frequency of discussions of poor performance by certain officer

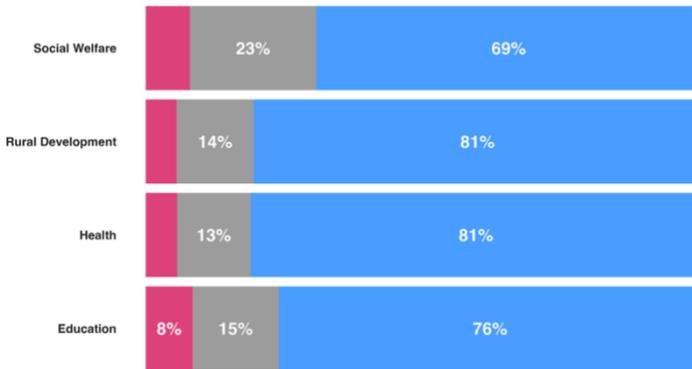


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

At the same time, good performance by certain officers was reported to be even

more frequently discussed.

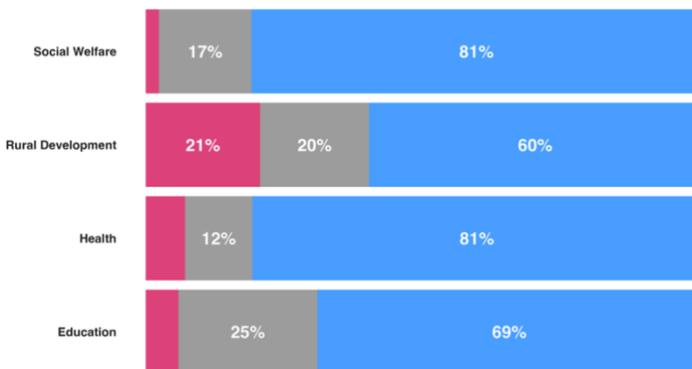
Frequency of discussions of good performance by certain officers
 ■ Rarely or never ■ Sometimes ■ Always or often



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Details about how to fill out forms frequently feature in conversations with fellow officers.

Frequency of discussions of details of how to fill out forms
 ■ Rarely or never ■ Sometimes ■ Always or often



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Overall, responses by managerial bureaucrats indicate that they put a major emphasis on rule-following. A sizeable majority across departments and administrative levels has low trust in subordinates working hard unless closely monitored and there is generally a strong feeling that any diversion from rules, even if there are good reasons for it, needs to lead to disciplinary action. At the same time, managers paint a rather positive picture about their own attitudes and roles, claiming they see it as their role to practice tasks with subordinates, instil a sense of equality, and protect them from undue influence. Taken together, this might hint at a need for trust building across administrative levels, and more reassurance for managerial bureaucrats to allow for local discretion when this is used to improve service provision. This connects with the perceptions of managers more frequently reporting that they take risks while frontline staff reports that too strict rules

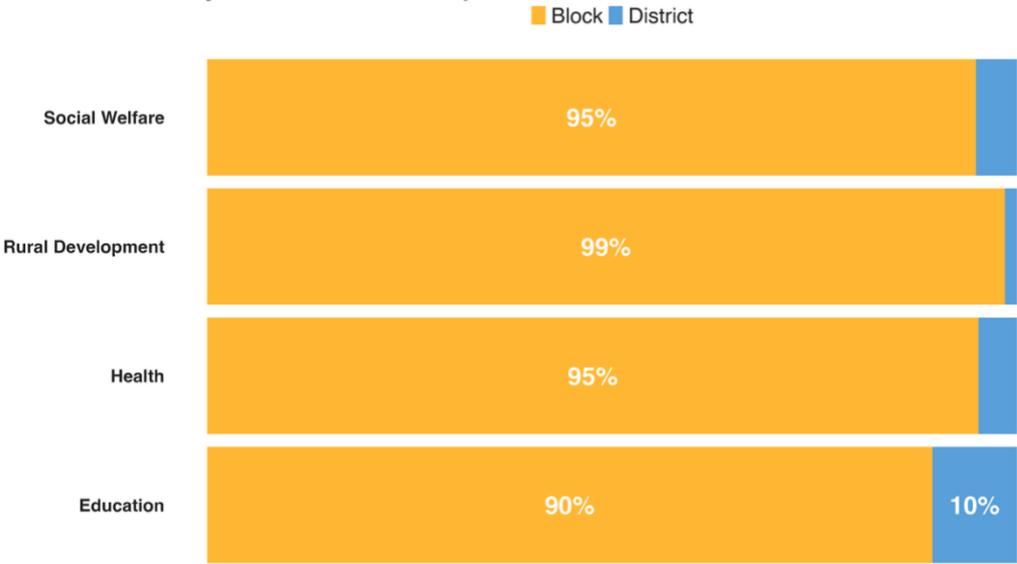
hinder their work. Taken together, providing more clarity about areas where rules can be applied more flexibly and autonomy to managerial bureaucrats to judge whether the use of discretion is for good reasons might allow for less emphasis on rule-following and more attention to actual service delivery. This, however, is likely only successful when managerial bureaucrats and frontline staff can overcome the apparent trust deficit.

3.2 Perspectives of subordinates

We next consider the perspectives of those who are managed. This includes primarily frontline workers who are managed by both, district and block officials as well as block officers who are supervised by district officers.

In the case of frontline workers, we asked which managerial officer they considered more important in terms of their daily work - district or block officials. Overwhelmingly across all departments, frontline workers report that block-level officials are the most important senior officers for them.

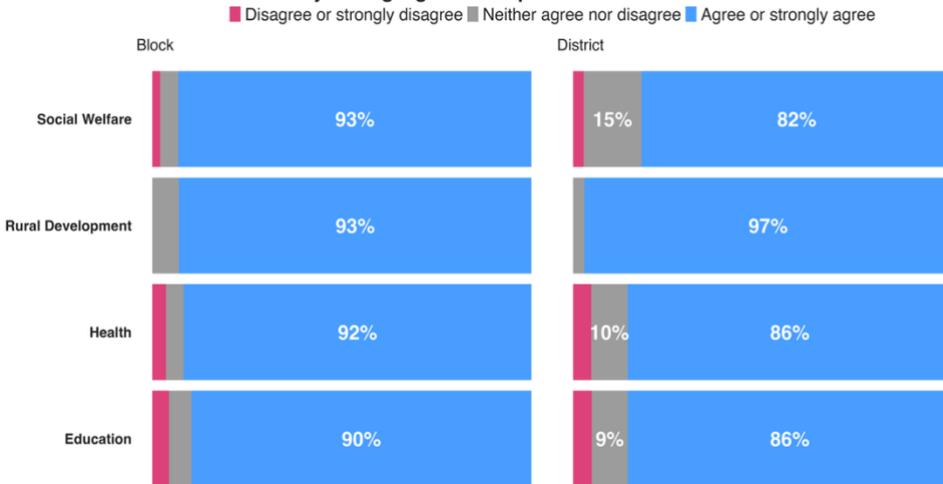
You are supervised by officers at different levels. In terms of your daily work, which senior officer do you consider more important?



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



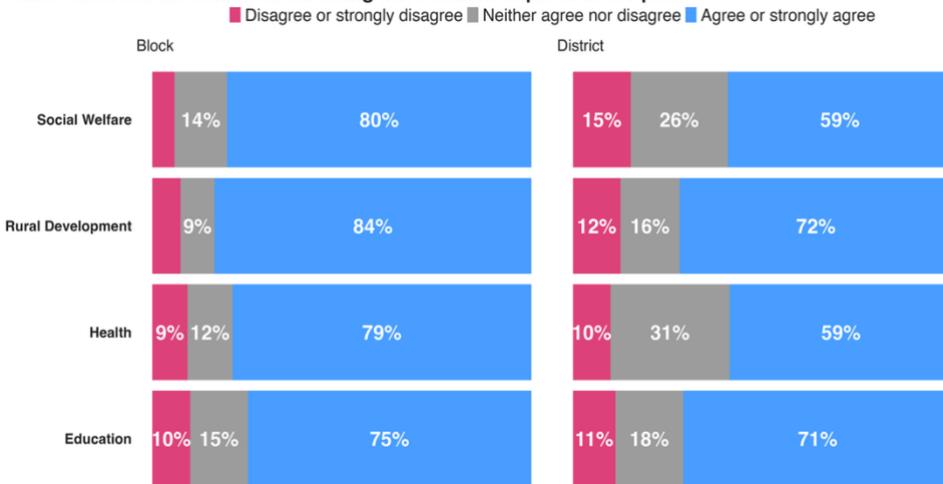
The current senior officer leads by setting a good example.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

A majority further states that they have observed senior officers doing more than required in the post. This is more pronounced for block officials than district officials with higher shares of frontline staff neither agreeing nor disagreeing in the case of district officials. This might be due to fewer interactions with the higher level of administration.

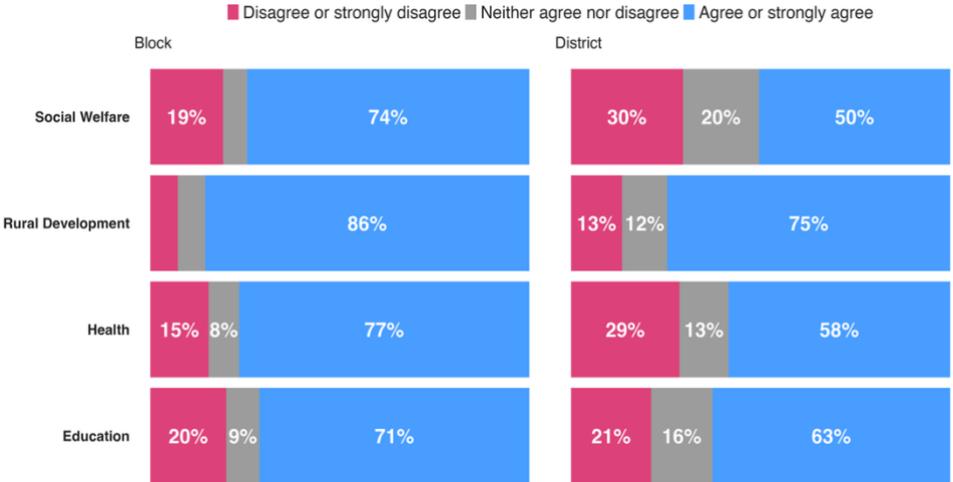
I have observed the senior officer doing more than is required in the post.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

While most frontline workers agree with the statement that they feel the senior officer is one of them, the perceived sense of equality is lower for district officials.

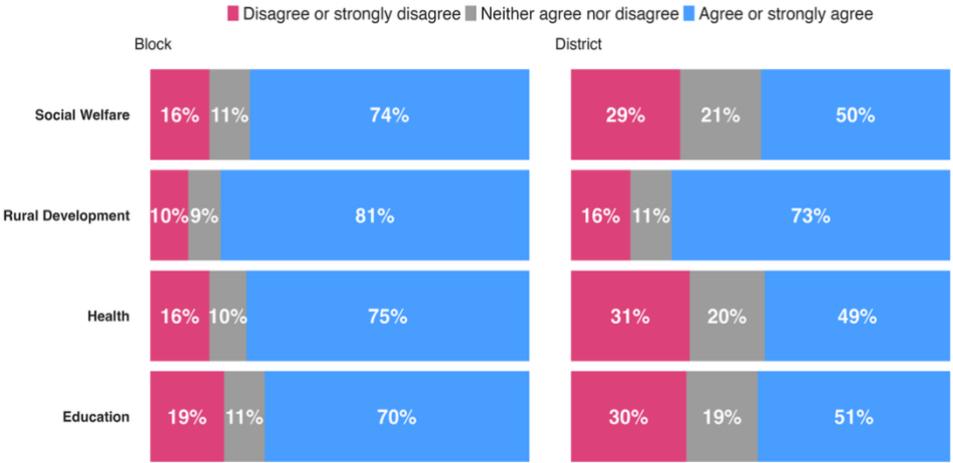
I feel the senior officer is one of us.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

A similar picture emerges for the statement that senior officers contribute their time even if it is outside of their role if there is too much work for staff.

If there is much work for the staff, our senior officer contributes their time even if this is outside of their role.

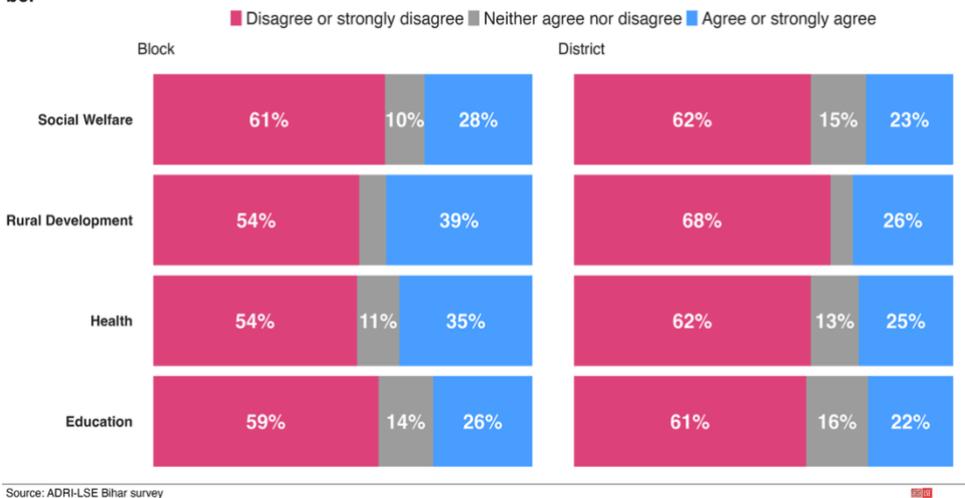


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Frontline workers also overwhelmingly state that their senior officers have a clear vision of what they want to change, slightly more pronounced for block officers. The perception of being treated fairly in case of complaints if these are not the fault of frontline staff appears to generally be high. Most senior officers are also said to not only give instructions but show how things are done.

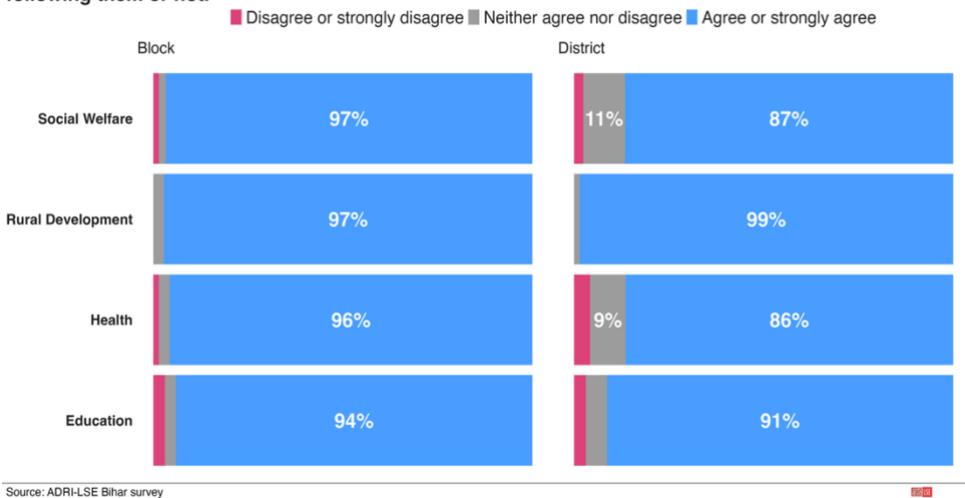
Asked if the type of supervisor is widely known even before senior officers start a new post, the picture is mixed. Nonetheless, many senior officers appear to be generally known to frontline staff even before their arrival in a new post.

Before my current senior officer arrived, I had already figured out what kind of supervisor he/she would be.



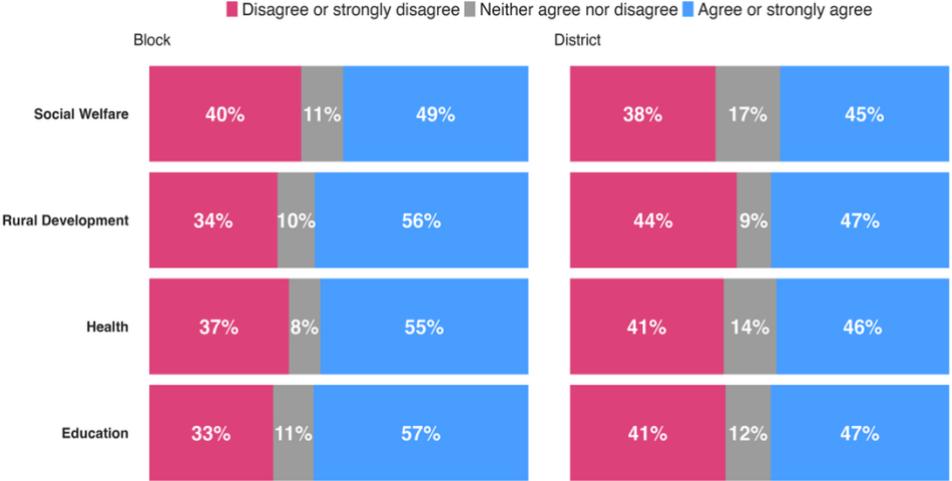
An overwhelming majority of frontline staff agrees or strongly agrees that instructions are very detailed, and their implementation is closely monitored.

The instructions given by the senior officer are very detailed, and they closely monitor whether you are following them or not.



However, when asked if frontline staff is given discretion in how they go about implementing guidelines, the picture is more mixed. This indicates that the level of discretion differs by senior officer.

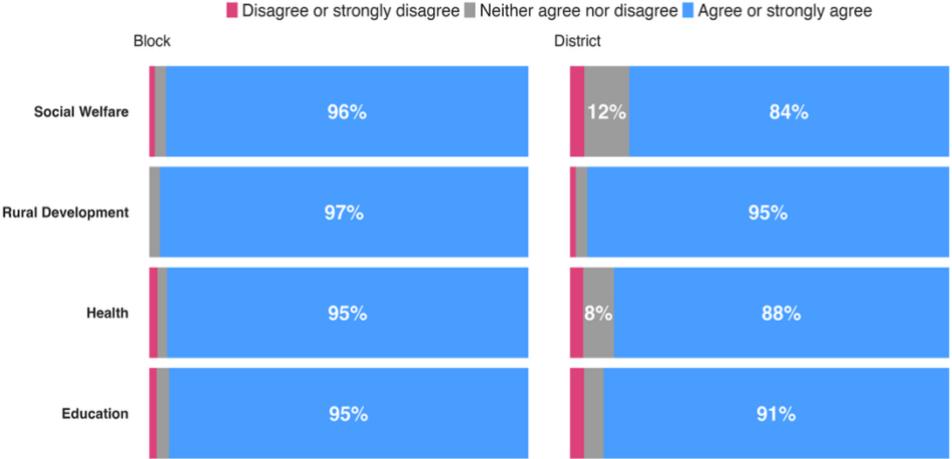
You are given guidelines by the senior officer but how to implement them is left up to you.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

At the same time, frontline workers see little agency among senior officers in adapting instructions and state that they think that senior officers simply pass down instructions from above.

The senior officer simply passes down the instructions from above, and monitors you to ensure that you do not overlook any instructions.



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Overall, frontline workers have largely positive impressions of their supervisors (albeit these responses might be particularly prone to social desirability bias). Across departments, block level officials are the most important supervising officers in the eyes of frontline staff. This indicates the need to ensure that vacancies are filled swiftly for these posts and block supervisors are supported with training and resources to fill this leadership role. Both district and block officers, however, are perceived to merely pass orders down from above and put a lot of emphasis on monitoring their implementation. Allowing for more flexibility and enabling block and district

officials to adapt guidelines to local needs might be a potential avenue to improve service provision. The level of autonomy granted by supervisors to frontline staff in how they implement orders differs and might be another aspect to address in in-service-training to ensure that more frontline staff feel empowered to make use of their professional judgements to cater to local needs. Importantly, frontline staff generally state that supervisors have clear visions, and enabling block and district officials to undertake this leadership role effectively could be aided by a wider recognition that these state-cadre officers play a crucial leadership role for their departments and the frontline staff within it, similar to IAS officers in the cross departmental coordination at district-level.



Social desirability bias occurs when respondents sense that certain answers are seen as desirable by others. Others can be enumerators but also society more broadly or, as in our case, senior officials. While we assured respondents anonymity, they might still prefer not to take the risk of voicing unfavourable opinions about their superiors.

4 Infrastructure and resources

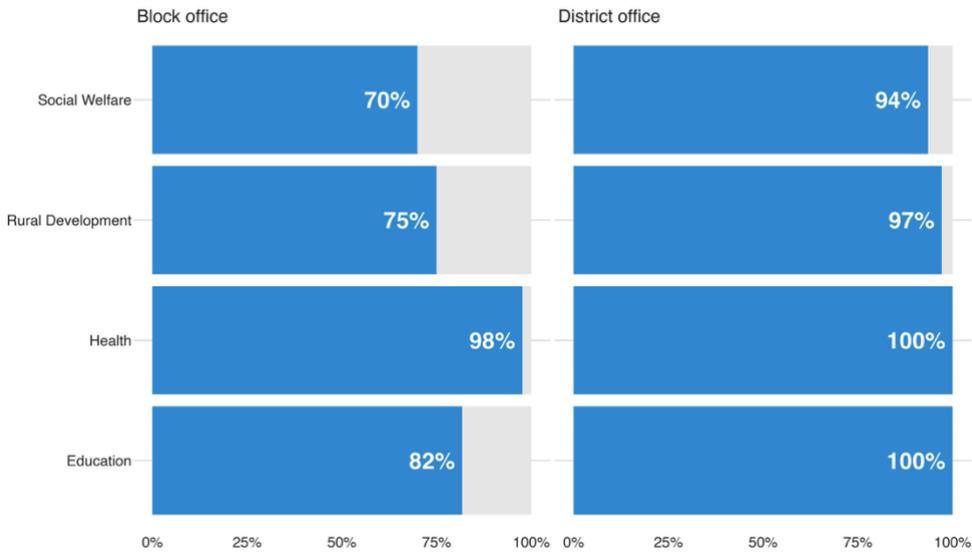
- a. Office infrastructure at the block and district level is mixed. While computers and electricity are widely available but across levels, toilets for female staff are lacking and many block offices do not have cars.
- b. Frontline infrastructure requires improvement across departments. More than half of anganwadis and health sub-centers do not have a working toilet and only one in five has tap water. Only around half of anganwadis have electricity. Schools also lack basic infrastructure violating basic minimum norms.
- c. Lower literacy districts face an even more severe shortfall of basic infrastructure, risking exacerbation of existing inequities within the state.
- d. The Government of Bihar may want to invest in managerial offices. Urgent capital investments in basic infrastructure for frontline facilities are required. Anganwadis and health sub-centers face a concerning shortfall of basic infrastructure. Investing in early years and basic health is smart investment, and not doing so severely undermines the state's development potential, not least as the brains of Bihar's youngest children are irreparably damaged through widespread stunting. These capital investments might be phased in prioritizing the most lagging districts and converged with VB – G RAM G to lower costs and generate employment.

4.1 Office infrastructure

Our survey not only interviewed public sector workers but, in a separate form, also captured infrastructure across offices and frontline facilities. Starting with offices, we included some essential infrastructure elements to get a better picture of the working conditions of managerial bureaucrats.

While most offices have a functional internet connection, sizeable shares of block offices with the exception of the health department did not have a functional internet connection.

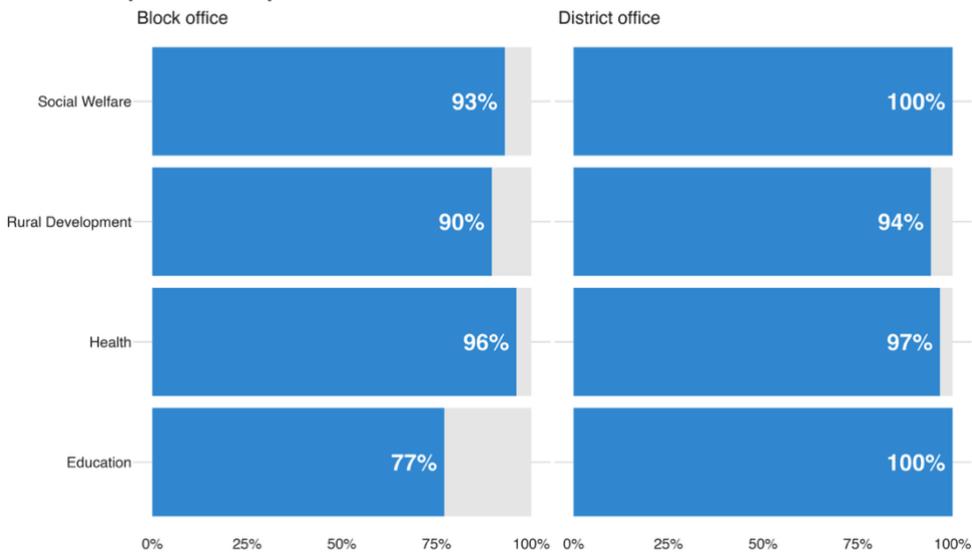
Functional internet connection



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Similarly, most offices have functional power backups with some exceptions. E.g., almost a quarter of block education offices did not have a functional power backup.

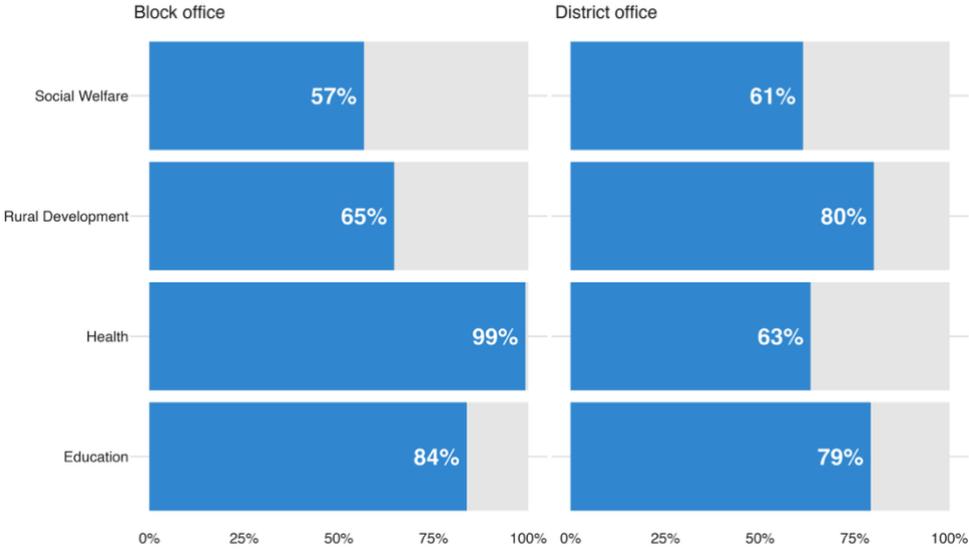
Functional power backup



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Worryingly, a sizeable share of both block and district offices did not have functional drinking water facilities.

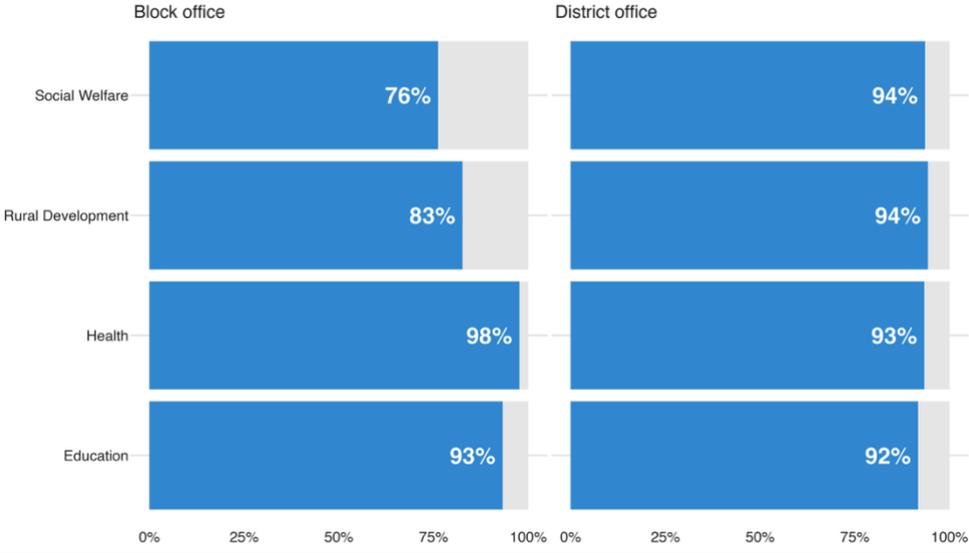
Functional drinking water



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

While most offices had functional toilets with running water, almost one in four social welfare block offices lacked this basic facility.

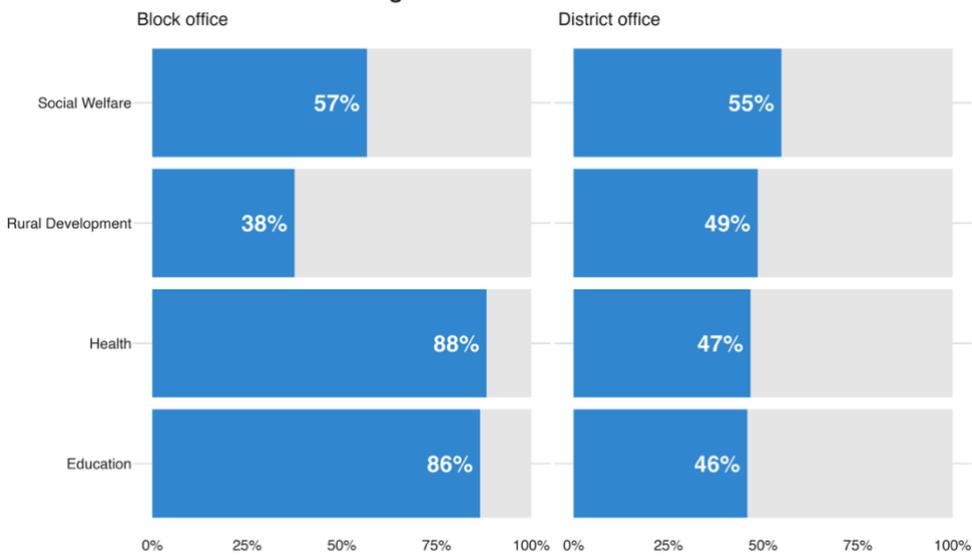
Functional toilet with running water



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

The share of functional toilets dedicated for women is low overall. Even at the district-level, only around half of the offices had a functional female toilet with running water.

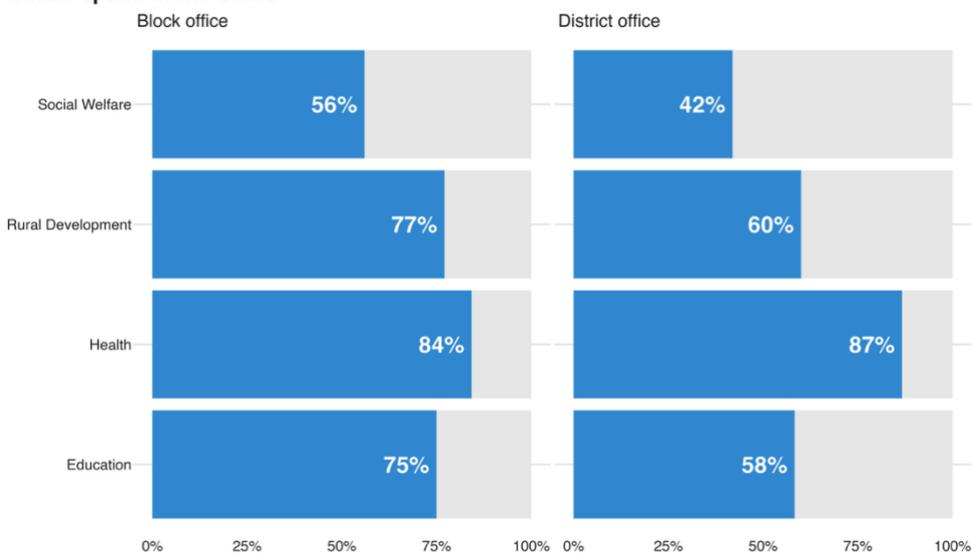
Functional female toilet with running water



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

A mixed picture emerges for whether offices have some kind of social spaces for staff to gather or rest.

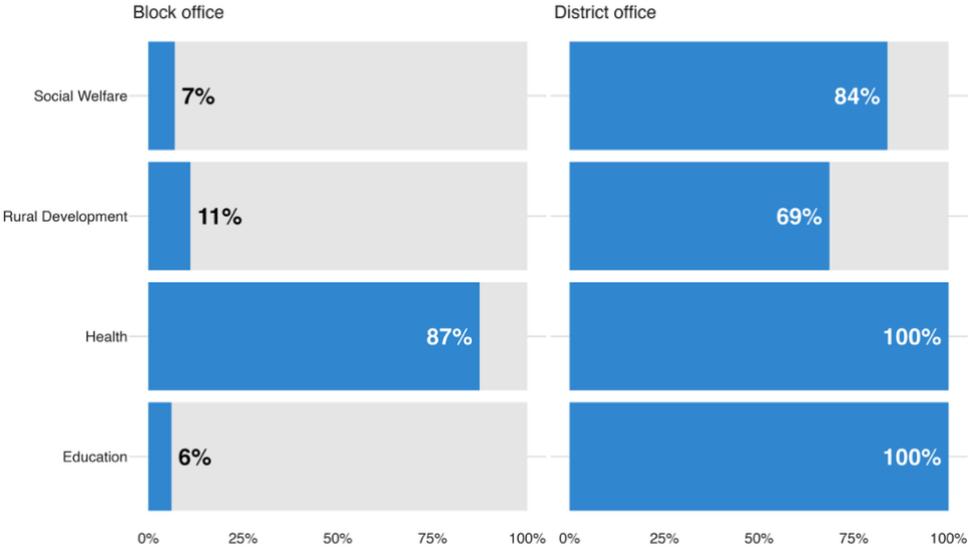
Social space in the office



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

A contrasting picture emerges for the availability of air conditioning (AC). While most district offices (with lower shares for rural development) have AC, with the exception of block offices in the health department, most block offices have no AC.

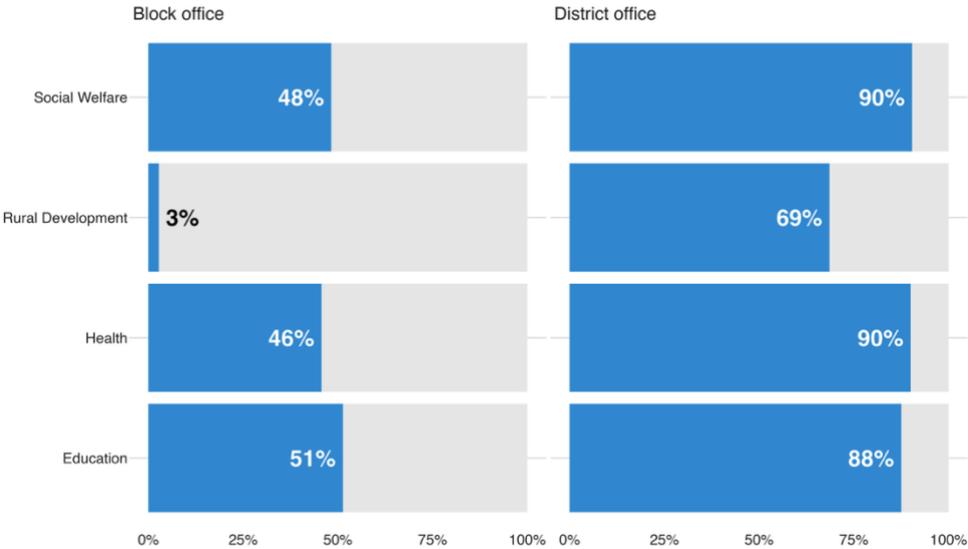
At least some offices with AC



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

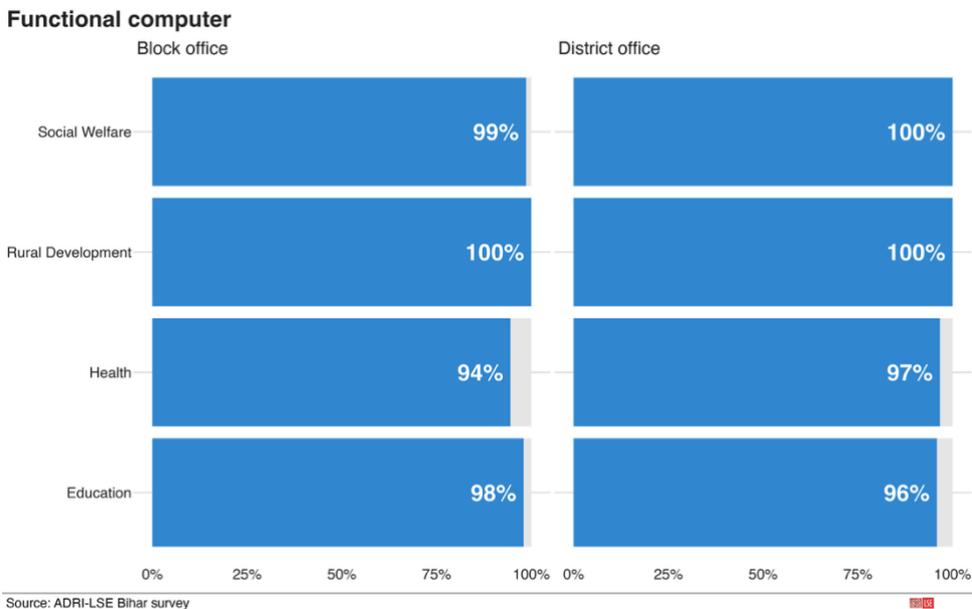
Around half of block offices have cars available to them with the exception of rural development where these are generally unavailable. Even at the district-level, around 1 in 10 (or 3 in 10 for rural development) did not have a functional car available.

Functional four wheeler



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Functional computers are available in almost every office.

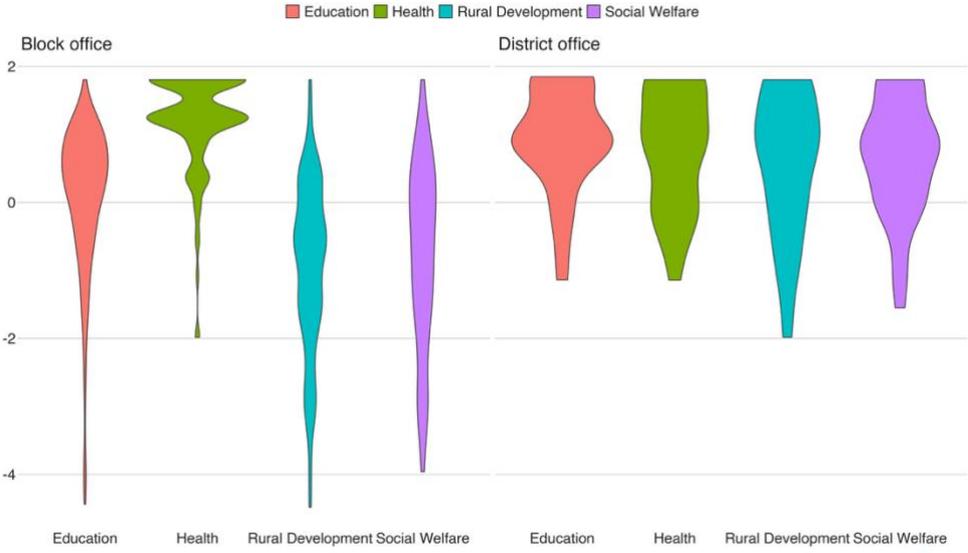


To get a better overview about the distribution of office resources across departments and administrative levels, we next consider the first principal component of these binary office resource indicators³ to generate an office resource index. By considering the distribution, we can better understand where infrastructure gaps persist.

Overall, district offices are, as expected, better resourced (a higher index score indicates better infrastructure). There is considerable variation especially for block offices where some block offices have severe deficiencies in basic infrastructure.

³ This includes binary indicators for: functional internet connection, power backup, drinking water, toilet with running water, female toilet with running water, at least some offices with AC, four wheelers, and computers.

Office resource index



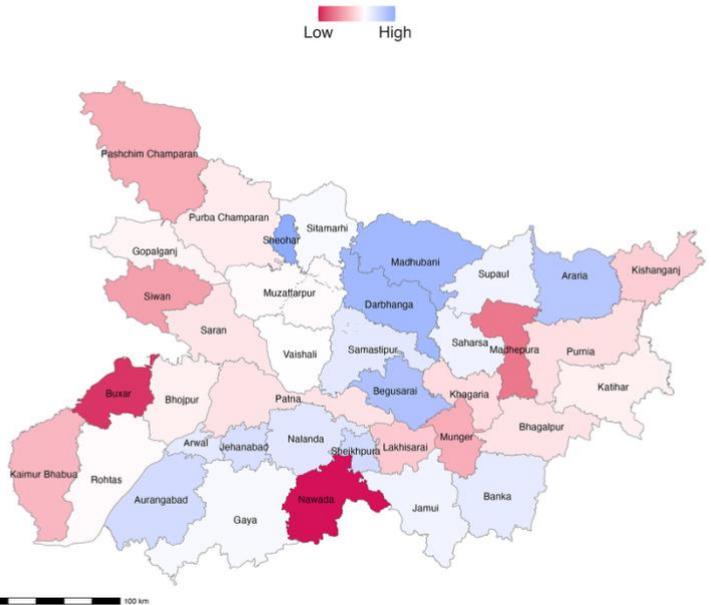
Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We next take this information to get a better understanding about the geographical distribution of office infrastructure. For this, we take the office resource index and generate a relative score by department and level. This allows us to compare office infrastructure provision across districts in relative terms.

The below map reveals some of the districts most lagging in office infrastructure such as Buxar, Nawada, and Madhepura.

Office Resource Index



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey





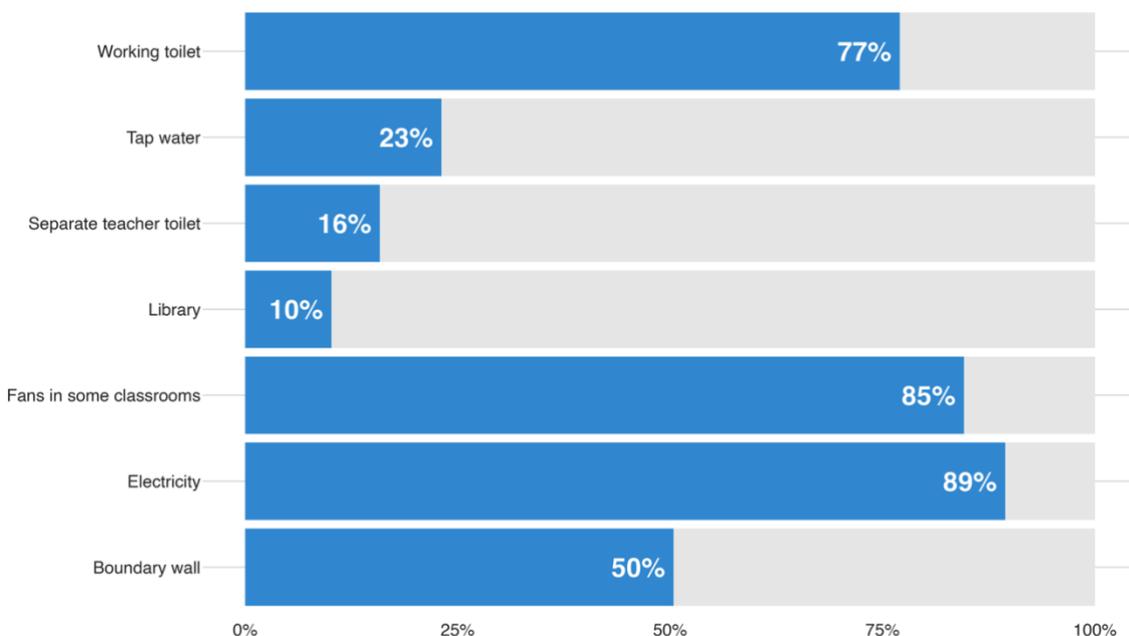
Office infrastructure at the block and district level is mixed. While computers and electricity are widely available, severe deficiencies exist for toilets for female staff and cars at the block level. Block offices within departments show wide variation in the availability of basic infrastructure, and some offices are severely under-resourced. Making sure that basic infrastructure is widely available might improve working environments and the morale of staff. Making sure that all block and district offices have working toilets for female staff is important for gender equity. As block officials are the most important supervisors for frontline staff, equipping all of them with cars can allow more frequent interactions even with far-flung schools, health centers, anganwadis, and MGNREGS worksites in rural blocks.

4.2 Frontline infrastructure

We next consider infrastructure at schools, anganwadis, and health sub-centers. Statistics that follow are covering those frontline facilities that were open when an enumerator visited them (we will discuss more about the share of open facilities in the next chapter). The below information is based on 966 schools, 896 anganwadis, and 575 health sub-centers surveyed across the state.

For schools, we find that around three in four schools have a working toilet but less than one in five have a separate toilet for teachers. Tap water is only available in 23% of the schools surveyed. In nine of ten schools, there were no libraries. More than one in ten schools do not have electricity or fans. Half of schools had a boundary wall.

School Infrastructure

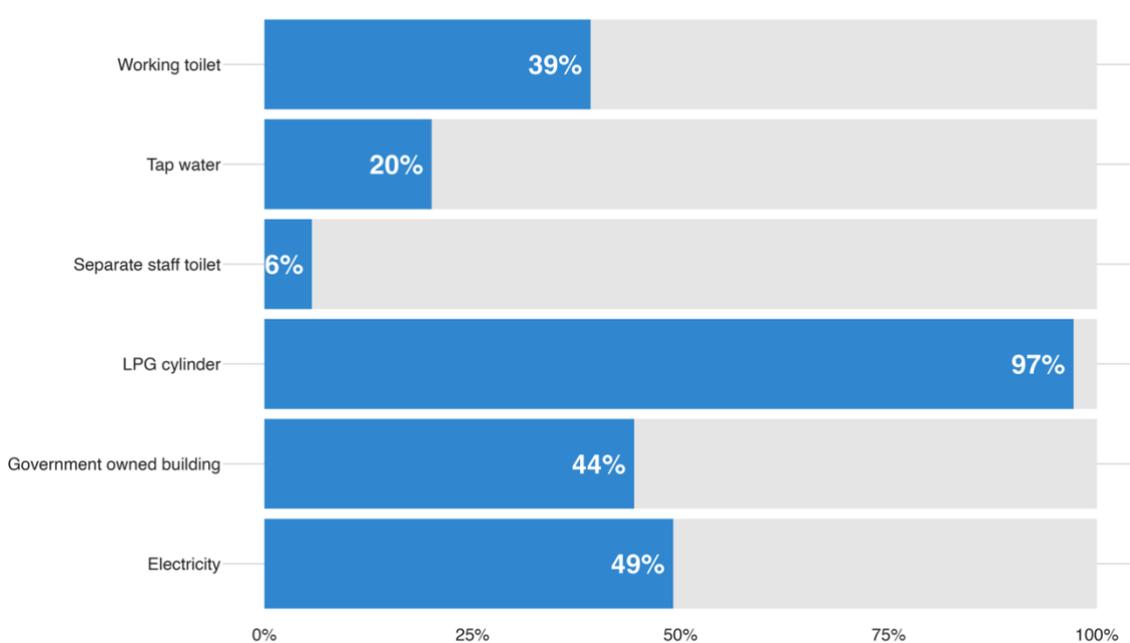


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We next consider anganwadis. Generally, anganwadis have poorer infrastructure than schools. Less than half of anganwadis had a working toilet and only one in five had tap water. Very few anganwadis have separate toilets for staff. In contrast, almost all anganwadis had LPG cylinders for food preparation. Less than half of anganwadis were located in buildings owned by the government and around half had electricity.

Anganwadi Infrastructure

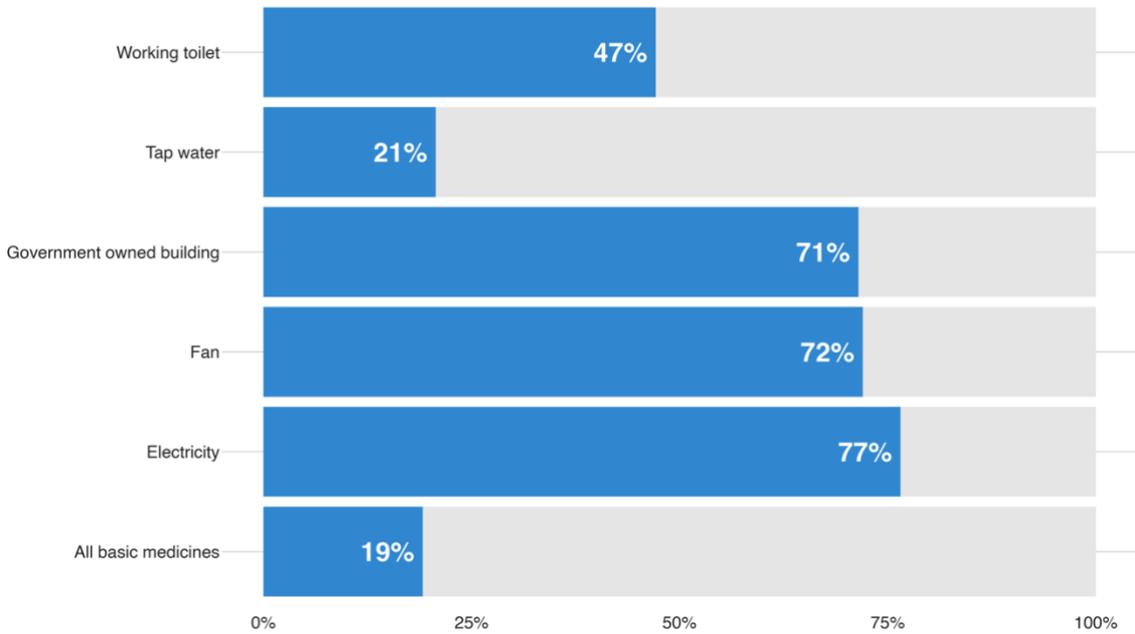


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We next consider health sub-centers. We find that only half of the centers have a working toilet and only one in five had tap water. Around 71% were located in government-owned buildings and more than 70% had fans and electricity. Only one in five centers had available all basic medicine which we defined as paracetamol, iron + folic acid, ORS, zinc sulphate, diclofenac sodium, calcium carbonate + vitamin D3, cotton, surgical gloves, bandage, cord clamp, and povidone iodine solution + ointment. All of these were part of the list of essential drugs, medical devices and consumables for health sub-centers published by the Department of Health, Government of Bihar, in 2018.

Health Sub-center Infrastructure

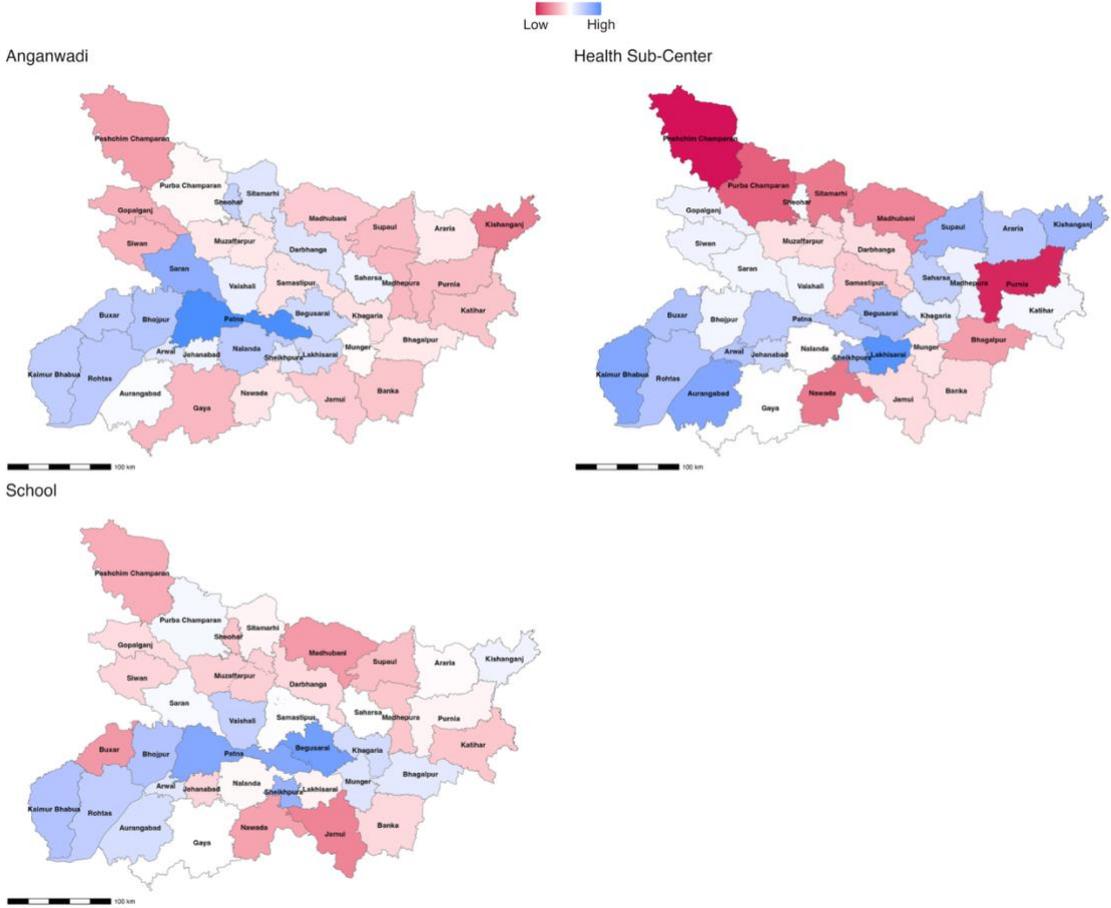


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey

Similar to the previous geographical overview for offices, we below detail information on the frontline resources by department and district based on a composite index of frontline resource indicators.⁴

⁴ The composite index is specific to each service using all the indicators included in the above figures for each facility type.

Frontline Resource Index



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



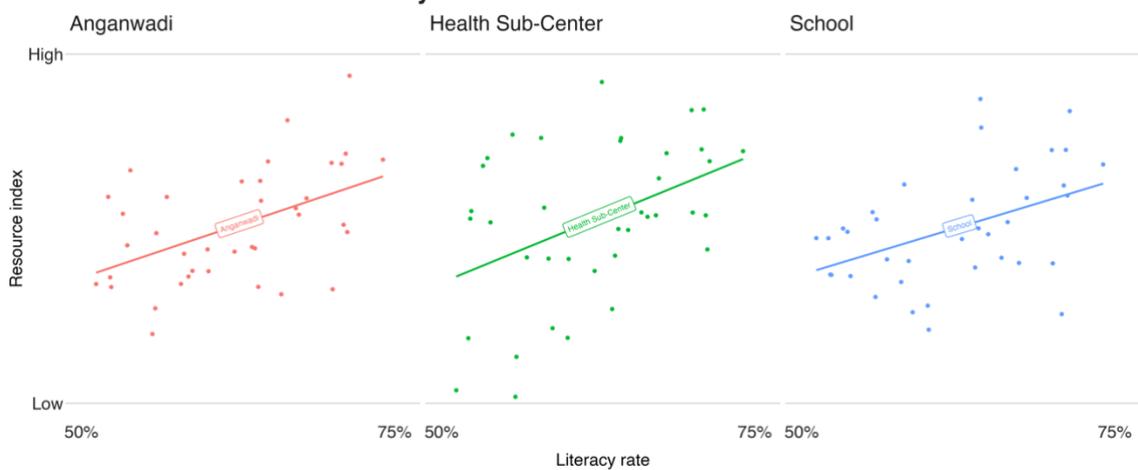
We next also investigated which characteristics of a district can predict frontline resources. Overall, we find strong evidence that anganwadis, health sub-centers, and schools have fewer resources in districts with a lower literacy rate. Below, we plot the average resource index of all frontline sites in a district (y-axis) and the literacy rate of the district (using the 2011 census rates). We then add a linear regression trend line to allow visualising the direction. A line with an upwards slope indicates that the average resource index increases with the literacy rate of a district. This holds across all services. The finding is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).



Statistical significance is a concept that allows to quantify how certain we are that findings are not just a product of chance. Imagine you flip a coin three times and it results in head all the time. How certain can you be that the coin is manipulated? It turns out one cannot be very certain after three times as each time, if it is a fair coin, there is a 50% chance that you will get a head. The chance that this

happens three times in a row is $0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.125$, so still a 1/8 probability. In the case of the frontline resources, our sample is large enough and the trend strong enough to reject with high confidence that the literacy rate of a district does *not* predict frontline resources – in other words, we are confident that there is a correlation between literacy rate and frontline resources, and that this relationship is positive, i.e., higher literacy rate districts have better resourced anganwadis, health sub-centers and schools *on average*. This addition of *on average* means that we talk about a general trend, still allowing for some low literacy districts to have relatively well resources schools, for instance.

Frontline Resources and Literacy Rate

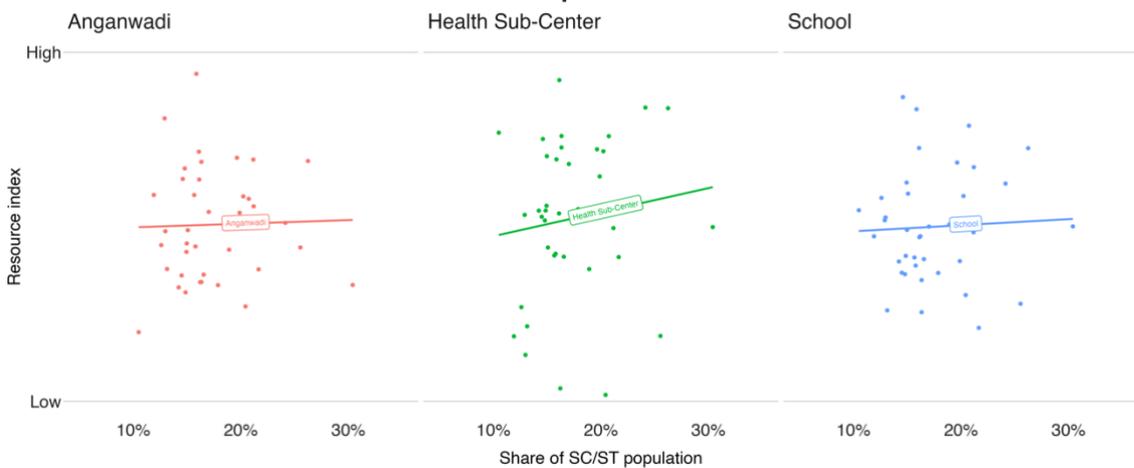


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We also undertook a similar exercise using, instead of the literacy rate, the share of the SC and ST population (based on the 2011 census). We cannot find a statistically significant relationship, i.e., we are not confident to reject the possibility that the share of the SC/ST population has *no* relationship with how well anganwadis, health sub-centers, and schools are resourced.

Frontline Resources and Share of SC/ST Population



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



A word of caution is required here: what we test is a simple linear correlation with one predictor (the share of SC/ST population at district-level). It is possible that there is still systematic allocation of public goods (such as schools) or their resources away from SC/ST neighbourhoods. Recent research by Asher et al (2025) using data from 1.5 million neighbourhoods in India indicates that discrimination against SCs and Muslims in public good provision is often not visible when considering the aggregate (such as at the district level) as discriminatory practices and segregation might manifest at a more localised level. This also has important implications for policymakers interested in improving equity: attempts to improve the equity in resource allocation can be undermined at the local level.



Frontline infrastructure requires improvement across departments. More than half of anganwadis and health centers do not have a working toilet and only around one in five has tap water. Improving this basic infrastructure is essential to improve working conditions for the female workforce providing these essential services to citizens. This needs to be addressed on a priority basis. Anganwadi infrastructure is particularly poor with only around half having electricity. Many anganwadis do not have permanent, government-owned buildings and are generally in a dilapidated condition. Anganwadis are key to the future of Bihar and tasked with providing the most essential services for mothers and Bihar's youngest children. While LPG cylinders have reached anganwadis on a large scale, basic infrastructure is still lagging. For the future of Bihar, fiscal space should on a priority basis be explored by both the center and the state to invest in Bihar's anganwadis. Similarly, health centers require investments in toilets, water provision, and medical supplies on a continuous basis. Schools also lack basic infrastructure and require further infrastructure investments to comply with basic

minimum norms. Separate teacher toilets and boundary walls are particularly lacking across many schools. Additionally, our analysis reveals a concerning pattern: those districts lagging in literacy also have the lowest resources across anganwadis, health sub-centers, and schools. To achieve equity, there is a clear need to prioritise infrastructure provision in the least developed districts across all departments. Importantly, convergence with VB – G RAM G can ensure that infrastructure improvements are not only cost effective but also generate employment.



The World Development Report 2018, the World Bank's flagship report on education, stresses that investments in high-quality programs for early years pay off. Not doing so puts Bihar's future at risk. The report also cites a study by Nelson et al (2017) that illustrates, using magnetic resonance images (MRIs) of children's brains, how stunting harms the brains of children with the damage being visible on MRIs of 2-3 months old infants. The implication for Bihar is clear: NFHS-5 data (2019-2021) indicates that 43% of Bihar's children are stunted. This underlines the urgency for Bihar to invest in its anganwadis mobilising all available resources (fiscal and otherwise) to address this failure of delivering basic necessities to its youngest citizens.

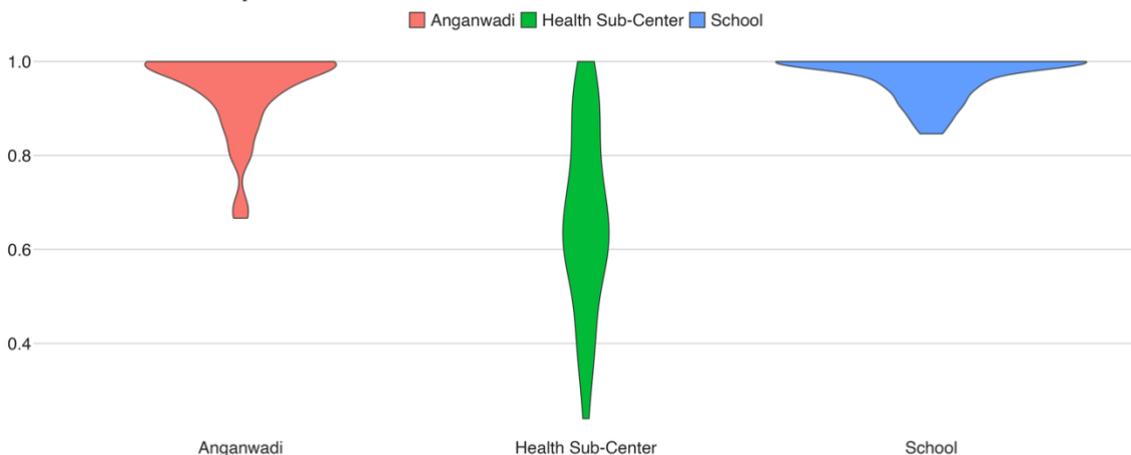
5 Outputs and outcomes

- We find concerning levels of closed facilities, especially for anganwadis and – most severely – for health sub-centers.
- Despite close tech-based surveillance through real-time monitoring systems, services are frequently unavailable for citizens.
- Concerningly, a higher share of closed anganwadis and health sub-centers is found in those districts which have a higher share of SC/ST.
- The Government of Bihar may want to undertake steps to ensure the availability of staff at all facilities during opening hours. Instead of relying on tech-based surveillance, peer monitoring paired with improved working conditions (such as female toilets) alongside steady wages might provide pathways to ensure higher staff attendance and motivation. Recognising the limitation of top-down monitoring to enforce attendance appears essential and is supported by international research.

5.1 Open facilities

We next consider the first basic step for citizens to receive their services: open facilities. A closed health center does not provide any benefit to citizens. We first consider aggregate shares of open facilities at district-level. Overall, we find that schools are largely all open. In contrast, there are districts where 20% or more of anganwadis were closed when enumerators visited them. Health sub-centers are the most concerning with many districts where 60% or less of their health sub-centers were open.

District Share of Open Facilities

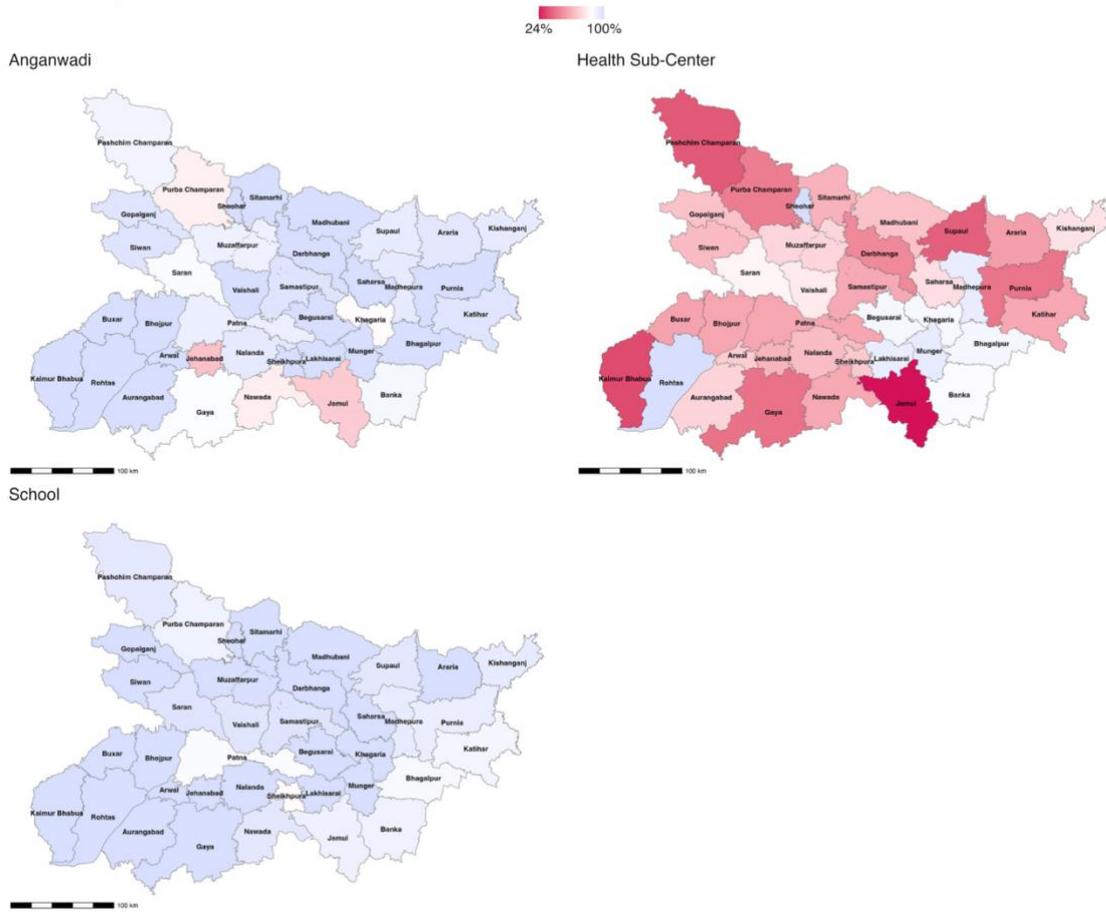


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We next project these findings onto a map to visualise how closed facilities are distributed geographically. This highlights again the severe issues for health sub-centers and, in several districts, anganwadis.

Share of Open Facilities

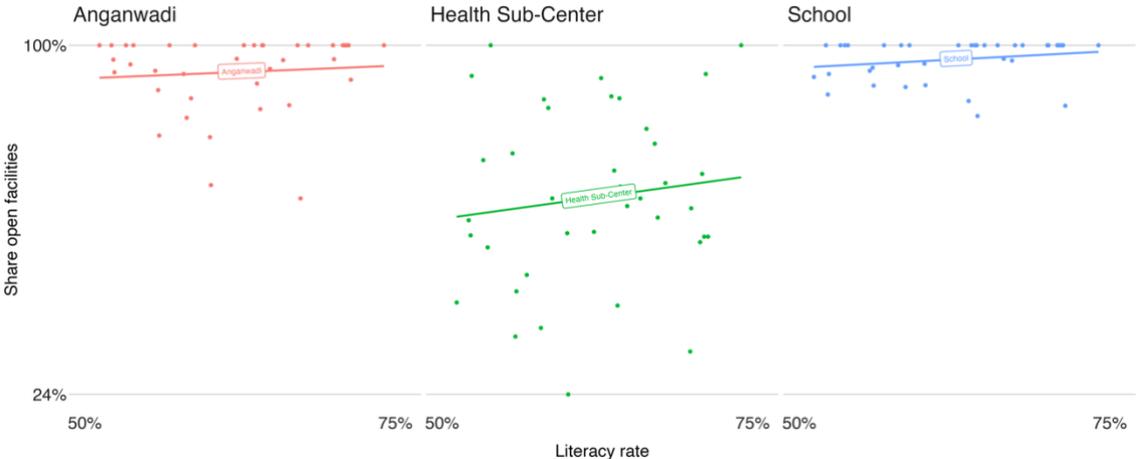


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



Like previous exercises for resources at frontline sites, we next check if citizens in lower literacy-rate districts are more likely to find their facilities closed. We do not find statistically significant correlations between a district’s literacy rate and the share of open anganwadis, health sub-centers, or schools (albeit there is a slight upwards trend, indicating that higher literacy districts tend to have a higher share of open facilities, but we cannot confidently reject the possibility that this is due to chance).

Open Facilities and Literacy Rate

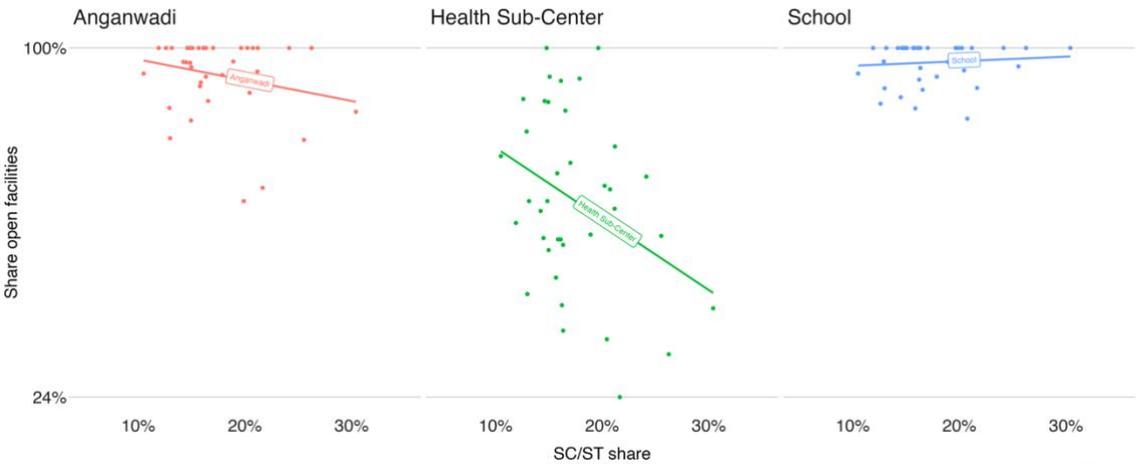


Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We do, however, find a statistically significant correlation with the share of SC/ST population in a district: districts with a higher share of SC/ST have a lower share of open facilities. As there is little variation in the openness of schools, these results are due to differences in the share of open anganwadis and health sub-centers.

Open Facilities and SC/ST Share



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



 We find concerning levels of closed facilities, especially for anganwadis and - most severely - for health sub-centers. While our data does not allow to disaggregate the reasons for closure (which could include unsanctioned staff absence as well as vacancies or sanctioned leave for training or other purposes), the bottom line remains that from the point of view of citizens, undertaking the journey to a

health sub-center to find it closed is highly unsatisfactory and could, in the worst case, result, e.g., in the death of a mother and her unborn child. There is therefore a pressing need to ensure continuous staff presence at both anganwadis and health sub-centers. Anganwadi and health workers are under close tech-based surveillance through real-time monitoring systems but still frequently unavailable for citizens. This indicates the limits of top-down tech-focused monitoring, a limitation also highlighted by international research. A recent World Bank study on Bihar's health system instead suggested to focus on steady wage structures and improved peer-to-peer monitoring (Khemani et al 2020). Our findings are in line with these recommendations as more than 50% of frontline staff reported to be unsatisfied with their salaries and anganwadi and health workers frequently reported that they are feeling on their own. As noted previously, anganwadi and health staff, consisting practically exclusively of women, is particularly poorly paid. We also highlighted the poor infrastructure in anganwadis and health sub-centers. Without working toilets and running water, it seems unjustified to put the onus of the blame for closed facilities on frontline staff. More research is needed to be better able to disaggregate the reasons for staff absence. In addition, closed facilities are more frequent in districts with a higher SC/ST share which appears particularly concerning. There is an urgent need to address these shortfalls in service provision to ensure that every woman, man, and child has access to essential health care in rural Bihar.

5.2 Staff absence

We next consider in more detail patterns of staff absence. In this case, we treat closed facilities as zero staff present. Overall, we find that schools and anganwadis have comparable staff absence above 20% whereas this figure is almost 60% in the case of health sub-centers.

Below we present the geographical pattern of staff presence. It is particularly concerning that for some districts, staff presence in health sub-centers is below 20%.

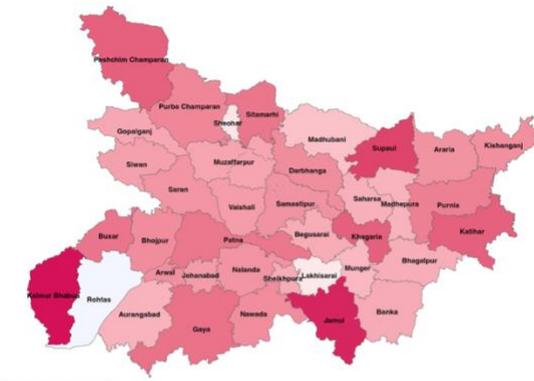
Share of Staff Present



Anganwadi



Health Sub-Center



School



Source: ADRI-LSE Bihar survey



We can, however, find no clear pattern of staff absenteeism correlating with either the literacy rate or the share of SC/ST in the population.

Conclusion

Our report indicates both, strengths and weaknesses of how Bihar's public sector is equipped and managed, and how well it delivers to its citizens. Our findings hint at several possible reform paths.

Among the strengths of Bihar's public sector are a generally committed and satisfied workforce that is largely able to get a sense of fulfilment from their work. Encouragingly, our embedded conjoint experiment (reported separately) revealed a pro-marginalised potential among managerial bureaucrats that can be leveraged to fight multi-dimensional poverty. In short, the picture our report paints about the people behind the posts is generally more positive than widely believed.

At the same time, our report also indicates severe shortfalls. There is an urgent need for capital investments in frontline facilities and a need to ensure well equipped managerial offices. This includes across all levels female toilets to ensure that women find an acceptable and welcoming working environment. The high number of closed facilities, especially for anganwadis and health sub-centers raises serious concerns and questions the efficacy of tech-based surveillance to enforce staff attendance.

Our findings hint at possible reform paths that include dedicated career counselling and mentoring programs to make the bureaucracy more representative of the society it serves. This is particularly relevant for managerial positions where women and those from marginalised caste or socio-economic backgrounds are underrepresented.

To leverage the potential of the people staffing Bihar's public sector, our findings suggest that trust is an essential ingredient for better worker motivation and thereby state effectiveness. This requires taking seriously concerns voiced by frontline staff about repetitive tasks and a lack of purpose. Instead of utilizing technology to surveil frontline staff (and at times increasing their reporting burden), technology can instead be used to automate odd tasks and to assist frontline staff. At the same time, more emphasis should be put on relational work between managers and frontline staff and among peers at the frontline. Our findings show a widespread sense of loneliness of frontline staff. Building bonds across administrative levels therefore appears as an effective way to improve effort levels. Encouragingly, frontline staff widely agreed that they are willing to work harder if others do so as well.

Our findings also indicate that state-cadre bureaucrats matter. Similar to IAS officers who have a leadership role in coordinating across departments at district-level, it is the state-cadre bureaucrats at block- and district-level who frequently interact with frontline staff and who hold an important leadership role. Recognising their importance and providing them with the training for this difficult role can allow to provide them with the necessary tools and mindset to coordinate higher effort levels across frontline staff in their blocks and districts.

Our report indicates severe gaps in service provision and some of our findings around closed health sub-centers and underresourced anganwadis are alarming. Ensuring a steady and high-quality provision of these services is key to realizing Bihar's potential. To achieve this, both capital investments and rekindling public management are required. Building state capacity and reforming public service provision systems takes time and commitment. Bringing about change is not accomplished by tinkering formal rules (albeit this may be part of the process) or simply increasing fund allocation.

To make sure that all citizens of Bihar receive high-quality services, a broader reform effort is needed but we also want to stress that this is not impossible. Bihar has in the past shown how the state can be transformed. The challenges for health, education, early childhood services, and employment generation differ from those departments which mainly face logistical tasks. Unlike building roads, these services are more difficult to monitor from above – one cannot send an engineer to a health center to audit its service provision after the fact. The services in this report have a large human component to it and in order to improve them, recognising this fact rather than problematising it appears justified: our findings indicate that there is a positive potential among Bihar's public sector workers across levels and management practices should build on this asset rather than meeting frontline workers with suspicion.



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About the authors

Martin Haus is a PhD candidate at the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Previously he has also been Associate Lecturer (Teaching) in Public Policy at University College London where he taught a postgraduate course on public management. His research interests concern bureaucracies, service delivery, and the political economy in low- and middle-income countries with a particular focus on state capabilities and management practices within the public sector and a regional focus on India. Most of his work till date put an emphasis on Bihar, a state he visited many times and spent considerable time in. He has so far undertaken fieldwork in around half of Bihar's districts.

Ashmita Gupta is an Assistant Professor of Economics and Member Secretary of the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI), Patna. She applies rigorous econometric methods to study social and development challenges, with publications in leading journals such as the *Journal of Development Economics* and the *IMF Economic Review*. She has been actively providing evidence-based policy inputs in Bihar, linking research to public policy and institutional reform. She previously held postdoctoral positions at Wageningen University and the Indian Statistical Institute, Chennai, and earned her Ph.D. from the University of Houston, with earlier degrees from Jawaharlal Nehru University and the University of Delhi.

Daniel Berliner is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, and Deputy Head of Department for Education, in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. He joined LSE in 2017, and previously was Assistant Professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota and, and Post-doctoral Research Fellow at Freie Universität Berlin. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Washington in 2012. His primary research focuses on the roles of information in politics and governance. This includes studying how policymakers learn from ordinary people; the impacts of information on both voter and bureaucratic behaviour; the politics of transparency, accountability, and participation reforms; and transnational multistakeholder governance reform initiatives. His research has appeared in journals including the *American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, and *World Development*.



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Asian Development
Research Institute (ADRI)

Department of Government

The London School Economics
and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI)

BSIDC Colony
Off Boring Patliputra Road
Patna 800 013

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