

OSTROM WORKSHOP COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Leonard Wantchekon

Department of Politics, Princeton University

“The Curse of Good Soil? Land Fertility, Roads, and Rural Poverty in Africa”

Monday, November 14, 2016

12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Ostrom Workshop, 513 N. Park



Using a global poverty map and standard soil productivity measures, we find that the poorest districts in Africa are more likely to have better (not worse) soil quality and that land fertility is higher in districts with worse roads. Our results are robust to a battery of controls and alternative measures of poverty and soil quality. The results indicate that transportation costs are the main drivers of poverty in Africa and that isolation might turn soil quality into a curse. More specifically, in districts with poor infrastructure, the poverty rate increases as soil quality gets better. We provide evidence for causality by using least-cost paths from mining areas to ports, and colonial road networks, as instruments for current transportation costs.



Leonard Wantchekon is professor of politics, international affairs, and economics (by courtesy) at Princeton University. His research is broadly focused on political and economic development, particularly in Africa. His specific interests include the economics infrastructure, education and human capital externalities, democratization, clientelism, the resource curse, and the long-term social impact of historical events. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the founder of the African School of Economics (ASE) ([website](#)).

Presentations are open to the public and are live streamed (see our website for URL and papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855-3151).