



**Global perceptions of  
urban land tenure security**

Evidence from 33 countries

March 2019

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## PRINDEX

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# Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Aim of the report	6
<b>2. Approach and methodology</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Approach	8
2.2 Methodology	8
<b>3. Data analysis</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Characteristics of tenure insecurity in urban areas	10
3.2 The relationship between de jure and de facto tenure security	16
<b>4. Policy implications</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 Targets of policy interventions	20
4.2 The potential role of titling	20
4.3 A sharper focus on renters	20
<b>References</b>	<b>22</b>

## Figures

Figure 1: Tenure security and insecurity among urban respondents by country	7
Figure 2: Difference in tenure insecurity between urban and rural areas	10
Figure 3: Average tenure (in)security by tenure type in urban and rural areas	12
Figure 4: Percentage of renters in urban versus rural areas (including percentage point difference)	12
Figure 5: Tenure insecurity among poorest (bottom 40%) and wealthiest (top 40%) of respondents (including percentage points difference)	14
Figure 6: Difference in Tenure insecurity between young (18-24) and old (55+) age groups	15
Figure 7: average share of age groups by tenure type	15
Figure 8: Share of respondents living alone as urban renters versus general population	15
Figure 9: Difference in tenure insecurity between women and men in urban areas	16
Figure 10: Proportion of urban and rural respondents with formal documentation (including percentage point difference between urban and rural)	17
Figure 11: Tenure security among urban owners/renters with formal and no documentation	17
Figure 12: Difference in tenure insecurity among urban owners/renters with formal documentation over those with no documentation	18
Figure 13: Tenure security among urban owners and renters	19

## Tables

Table 1: Sample size by country and location	8
Table 2: Primary reasons for feeling tenure insecure by tenure status	13

# Abstract

This report uses unique household survey data from 24,870 respondents in 33 countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia to investigate correlations between demographic, economic and spatial characteristics and perceived tenure insecurity. We find that: (1) urban and rural dwellers have particularly large differences in tenure insecurity levels in certain countries; (2) renters are at considerable risk of tenure insecurity; (3) insecurity in urban areas is also

linked to income, age and household size; and (4) legal documentation does not necessarily correspond with de facto tenure security, especially when it comes to feelings of security among renters. Overall, the results suggest that the parallel existence of formal and informal land markets is an incontrovertible reality in rapidly urbanising markets, particularly when it comes to securing the tenure of poor or young people as well as people living in rental accommodation.

# 1. Introduction

The world is rapidly urbanising, especially in emerging and developing economies. By 2050, the urban population will have tripled, increasing by 2.5 billion people (UN, 2018). In Africa alone, that number will surge from 548 million to nearly 1.5 billion, projected to double every 15 years (Marx et al., 2013). This transformation requires careful and far-sighted urban planning to avoid growing concentrations of urban poor. Lack of urban planning has already resulted in one in seven of the world's population living in poor quality, usually overcrowded housing in urban areas (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014). This equates to over a billion urban residents who dwell in what can only be considered slum housing (Revi and Rosenzweig, 2013). Particular concentrations have emerged in Africa, where UN-HABITAT (2010) has estimated that over 60% of the urban population lives in informal settlements or slums.

Solutions are difficult to implement as formal municipal governments often face extreme limitations in their ability to plan urban areas, infrastructure and resources. But there is a key strategy in tackling urban poverty that has received relatively little attention in the literature on urbanisation: secure tenure can encourage household investments and thereby have a major impact on poverty alleviation. This effect can manifest itself in many ways, such as encouraging household improvements (Field, 2005; van Gelder, 2009; Galiani and Schargrodsky, 2010), increasing labour force participation and incomes (Field, 2007) and making credit more accessible (Cantuarias and Delgado, 2004). By safeguarding land rights in urban areas and successfully assimilating new urban residents, policy-makers can create knock-on effects on tackling urban poverty (Durand-Lasserve, 2006) and provide an 'urban dividend' for their countries (Manuel and Calderón, 2015).

While there is broad agreement that secure property rights are necessary for urban development, be it in the form of equitable growth, household welfare or social or political engagement, there is less consensus on how policy can secure tenure in towns and cities. Specifically, evidence is mixed on whether *de jure* tenure security, provided by formal documentation, necessarily leads to *de facto* security in the form of perceived tenure security. In the 2000s, this discussion

was dominated by the narrative that property rights need to be private and individual, expressed in a formal and legal form and backed by the state (de Soto, 2000). However, since then, the centre of gravity has shifted towards the recognition that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to underpin formal property rights by titling in order to ensure security of rights, depending on how such rights are recognised and enforced in a particular context (Deininger, 2003; Mattingly, 2014). Communal property rights can, under some circumstances, be superior (Platteau, 1996).

While the relationship between *de jure* and *de facto* tenure security has been explored in urban areas, the studies are largely restricted to specific countries and cities.<sup>1</sup> Prindex data collected across 33 mostly developing countries in 2018 sheds light on this relationship at a global, comparative level for the first time (Figure 1). It allows us to observe where formal property rights correlate with perceived tenure security across a diverse set of countries, enabling us to confirm or challenge previous evidence. Nationally representative individual-level data also allows us to identify patterns of certain groups affected by low *de facto* or *de jure* tenure security in cities, such as renters, women or people on low incomes.

## 1.1 AIM OF THE REPORT

This report aims to provide answers to three broad research questions:

- 1. Who is affected by perceived tenure insecurity in urban areas?** Are certain demographic, socioeconomic and spatially distributed groups disproportionately affected by perceived tenure insecurity in urban areas? How does Prindex data compare to existing evidence of urban residents who are affected?
- 2. How is perceived (*de facto*) tenure security linked to (*de jure*) legal status in urban areas?** Is there a correlation between perceived tenure security and tenure security backed by formal documentation in urban areas? Where there is a difference, which countries and which groups are affected? How does Prindex data compare to existing evidence on the relationship between *de facto* and *de jure* tenure security?

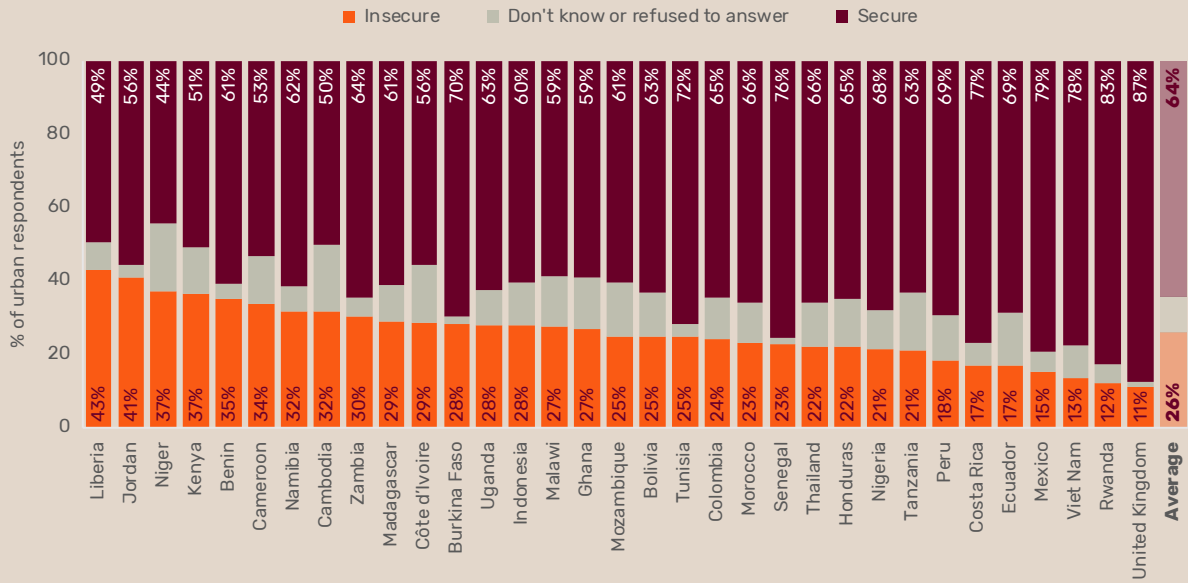
1 See, for example, Payne et al.'s (2009) case studies of Dakar in Senegal and Ekurhuleni metropolitan area in South Africa.

### 3. Does the data reveal any implications for policy?

Do the results indicate that formal documentation is necessary to provide tenure security in urban areas or does policy need to take a more flexible and context-specific approach? Do certain groups who

perceive high levels of tenure insecurity need to be targeted by policy interventions? Does Prindex data, coupled with insights from other, national-level data sources and indicators, reveal any broad policy recommendations?

**FIGURE 1: TENURE SECURITY AND INSECURITY AMONG URBAN RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY**



*Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same. The difference in tenure security and insecurity between individual countries is, more often than not, statistically insignificant. The graphic should therefore not be interpreted as a 'ranking' of countries.*

*Source: authors using Prindex data.*

# 2. Approach and methodology

## 2.1 APPROACH

To answer the three main research questions, we start with a brief assessment of the state of the evidence on the distribution of tenure insecurity in urban settings, both in contrast to rural areas and within urban areas themselves; and on the link between formal documentation and perceived tenure security. We then explore what light Prindex's data can shed on this evidence. Finally, we bring the two together to discuss what this might mean for how policy interventions are designed and implemented to improve tenure security in urban areas.

We have – purposely – not included two important strands of literature in this paper. One concerns the important relationship between tenure security – both de facto and de jure – and gender equality (see, for instance, Cousins et al., 2005; Varley, 2007; Pandey, 2010). While we include an analysis of differences in tenure insecurity between men and women, gender is explored in greater detail across both urban and rural settings in a separate paper (Prindex, 2019). The other strand concerns the plethora of studies on the impact of tenure security on wider aspects of urban household welfare, be it in the form of encouraging housing improvements (e.g. van Gelder, 2009; Galiani and Schargrotsky, 2010), businesses (e.g. Banerjee, 2004; Boudreaux, 2006), credit access (e.g. de Soto, 2000) or more (or less) active land markets. Future rounds of data collection will create a longitudinal dataset of perceived tenure insecurity combined with other factors which will enable us to explore these causalities in greater detail.

## 2.2 METHODOLOGY

In line with efforts to build a comparable dataset for tracking progress in the land sector, we report on perceived tenure security against the following question:

*In the next five years, how likely or unlikely is it that you could lose the right to use this property, or part of this property, against your will?*

We conducted interviews in each country among a nationally representative sample of people 18 years or older with a total sample of just over 53,000 respondents, of which nearly 25,000 lived in urban areas

**TABLE 1: SAMPLE SIZE BY COUNTRY AND LOCATION**

Country	Urban	Rural	Total
Burkina Faso	283	977	1,260
Benin	286	683	969
Bolivia	787	207	994
Cambodia	193	798	991
Cameroon	741	755	1,496
Colombia	3,270	726	3,996
Costa Rica	737	244	981
Côte d'Ivoire	584	586	1,170
Ecuador	742	243	985
Ghana	671	784	1,455
Honduras	501	479	980
Indonesia	1,862	2,104	3,966
Jordan	887	122	1,009
Kenya	537	1,456	1,993
Liberia	455	504	959
Madagascar	296	897	1,193
Malawi	130	871	1,001
Mexico	2,499	497	2,996
Morocco	915	595	1,510
Mozambique	487	949	1,436
Namibia	431	567	998
Niger	258	1,206	1,464
Nigeria	1,155	1,758	2,913
Peru	1,123	357	1,480
Rwanda	168	800	968
Senegal	448	564	1,012
Tanzania*	1,046	2,972	4,018
Thailand	768	1,180	1,948
Tunisia	690	322	1,012
Uganda	329	1,649	1,978
United Kingdom*	451	519	998



**TABLE 1 CONT'D: SAMPLE SIZE BY COUNTRY AND LOCATION**

Country	Urban	Rural	Total
Viet Nam	746	1,289	2,035
Zambia	394	617	1,011
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,870</b>	<b>28,277</b>	<b>53,147</b>

*\*30 respondents in the UK were classified as 'other' and 3 in Tanzania were unclassified.*

(Table 1). In all countries except the United Kingdom (UK), a multistage stratified cluster sampling approach was used to select respondents using the latest available census data. In the UK, surveys were conducted over the telephone and respondents were selected from national landline and mobile phone lists. As we aim to interview a representative sample of the adult population, not the head of household or the most knowledgeable person

about the dwelling or land, we used a randomisation process to identify which household adult was selected for interview. Questionnaires were localised to ensure that the questions could be understood unambiguously, particularly in relation to types of documentation. Through these interviews, we collected data on a range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of respondents, and on land-related variables that may influence perceived tenure security, such as documentation and ownership status. Interviewing individuals allows us to present results for both men and women, and young and old people, and compare their situations.

We used descriptive cross-tabulations to analyse the data<sup>2</sup> on urban tenure security. Given the low number of respondents living in urban areas in some countries – notably Niger, Malawi and Cambodia – we were cautious and excluded some individual country figures from charts and tables where necessary.

2 Where relevant, an asterisk (\*) next to a number denotes that the difference observed is statistically significant at a 90% confidence level. Percentage point=pp.

# 3. Data analysis

Data analysis took place in two separate stages. First, we investigated respondents who were affected by tenure insecurity in urban areas, identifying groups using a host of spatial, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. In the second stage, we explored the link between de jure and de facto tenure security in urban areas by comparing rates of formal documentation with perceived tenure security. Where possible, we compared these results with existing evidence and comparable data.

## 3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF TENURE INSECURITY IN URBAN AREAS

Previous studies have identified perceived tenure insecurity as being *higher* in urban areas compared to rural ones (e.g. Ghebru et al., 2016). Ghebru et al. attribute this not only to the commodification and individualisation of land, but also to the economic value of plots, which is higher in urban areas characterised by a vibrant economy and active land markets. This contributes to higher 'private' tenure risk linked with boundary-specific disputes as opposed to 'public' tenure risks associated with government expropriation in rural areas. Active land markets can also have a negative impact on tenure security, especially if they are associated with distress sales (Cousins et al., 2005) or sales in peri-urban locations to which residents have been relocated from informal inner-city settlements (Deutsch, 2006).

A second strand of literature relevant to this paper studies the process of urbanisation rather than the effect of residing in urban areas per se. Competition for land from urban growth can increase tenure insecurity (Adam, 2014), as can speculative land acquisition by urban elites (Sitko and Jayne, 2014). Evidence shows that the impact of urban transitions is particularly significant in peri-urban areas, where secure tenure has increasingly come under the threat of urban expansion (Narain, 2009). Growing demand for land for urban purposes thereby results in compulsory acquisition by governments,<sup>3</sup> sweeping aside local customary land rights (Toulmin, 2006).

Furthermore, peri-urban areas are typically under customary tenure systems which may not be able to cope with a rapid increase in more individualised forms

**FIGURE 2: DIFFERENCE IN TENURE INSECURITY BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS**



*Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same.*  
*Source: authors using Prindex data.*

3 See, for instance, recent studies of rural expropriations in Oromia, Ethiopia (Kumsa, 2012; Tura, 2017).

of tenure in urban areas (Arko-Adjei, 2011; Naab et al., 2013; Locke and Henley, 2016). The development of active land markets, population increases, migration and urbanisation can therefore erode the social cohesion that is the main legitimacy of customary tenure systems (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997; Augustinus and Deininger, 2005). This process has resulted in more landless people in peri-urban areas (Ubink, 2008), causing widespread tenure insecurity, land-related conflicts (Fobih, 2004; Quan et al., 2004) and, in some cases, a complete breakdown of customary regimes (Arko-Adjei, 2011; Naab et al., 2013; Siechiping et al., 2015; Wehrmann and Antonio, 2015).

### **3.1.1 Tenure insecurity in rural and urban areas**

The average rate of perceived tenure insecurity among urban dwellers is 26%, two percentage points (pp) higher than observed among respondents living in rural areas. Greater divergence between urban and rural dwellers' tenure insecurity is evident in certain countries (Figure 2). This is particularly the case for countries where urban residents are more insecure than rural ones, especially in Thailand, Niger and Kenya, where the difference is 10 percentage points or more.

In the majority of the remaining countries, the difference between the two subgroups is negligible, but Burkina Faso and Ecuador stand out as two contrasting examples, where tenure insecurity is significantly higher in rural rather than urban locations. In Burkina Faso, anecdotal evidence suggests that conflicts related to land are a serious problem of increased severity. Studies have cited various issues in rural areas of the two countries, including younger heads of household calling into question the authority of traditional systems dominated by elders (Mathieu et al., 2003), a rapid influx of investment in farmland (Ouedraogo, 2006), and large flows of internal migration and increasing tensions between groups, including pastoralists and sedentary farmers (Gray, 2002). A recent study of 1,932 households over 377 rural villages found that 53.1% perceived at least some risk of conflict over their household (Linkow, 2016), which is broadly in line with the 47.9% observed in rural areas according to our data. No such concrete comparative evidence exists for Ecuador, but the Latin American country has been plagued by political instability in rural regions of late, particularly in the northern province of Esmeraldas.

In urban areas, our data generally supports the view that a very large poor urban population occupies land

and/or buildings in which it does not have a strong right to remain (Mattingley, 2014). On average, over one in four urban residents are insecure, a figure that could continue to grow as urbanisation accelerates and low-income households gradually become the majority residents of many cities. Taking sub-Saharan Africa as an example, our results suggest there could be more than 60 million adults currently living in urban areas who are tenure insecure. By 2050, this could have increased to over 210 million, assuming rates of tenure insecurity remain the same. The findings also suggest that while overall differences between tenure insecurity in urban versus rural areas are marginal, urban tenure insecurity is particularly relevant in certain country contexts where it should be targeted by policy-makers.

The single most important group of respondents affecting differences in tenure security between urban and rural areas are renters. Similar to existing studies (see, for example, Morris et al., 2017), our data demonstrates that perceived tenure insecurity is higher among renters than owners. While rates of tenure insecurity are similar among renters in urban and rural (41%) areas (see Figure 3), renters are considerably more likely to reside in urban areas (Figure 4). Côte d'Ivoire and Bolivia<sup>4</sup> are the only two countries in our 33-country sample in which the share of renters in rural areas is higher than it is in urban areas.

### **3.1.2 Factors linked to tenure insecurity in urban areas**

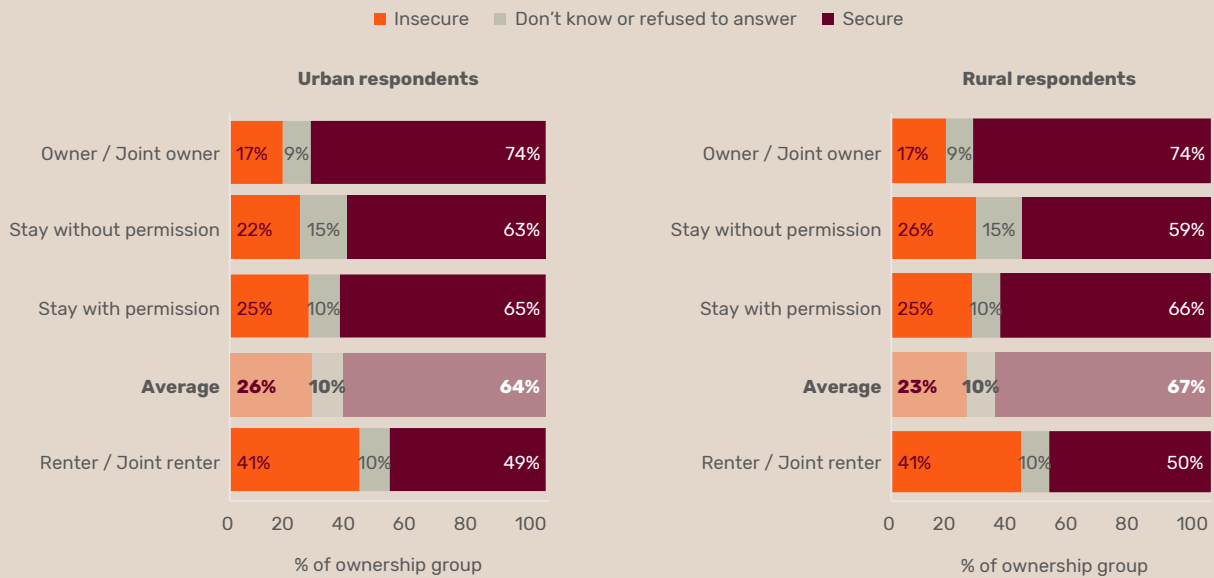
Given that our measure of tenure insecurity considers the likelihood that respondents will lose the right to use their property, some degree of tenure insecurity is inherent in renting. Renting is by nature associated with flexibility and therefore also with active land markets. However, transience can be both voluntary and involuntary. Urban residents may value the flexibility and lack of commitment associated with private renting, which may not therefore reflect itself in feelings of tenure insecurity. Rental markets can offer young, low-income households the necessary flexibility when moving into cities, enabling them to respond quickly and easily to changing livelihood opportunities (Payne et al., 2009). Alternatively, having to move dwellings can be associated with constraint (Morris et al., 2017). The consequence of this has already been observed in developed countries, where barriers to home ownership or limited access to scarce social housing mean that for many private renters this status is no longer transitory, but a long-term or even life-long prospect (Stone et al., 2013).

4 This observation should be cautiously considered given the low sample size affecting Bolivian renters.

Our data suggests that the source of tenure insecurity lies in a lack of alternatives combined with an often substantial power imbalance between landlords and tenants (Kemeny, 2001; Hulse et al., 2011). The overwhelming reason that renters give for feeling

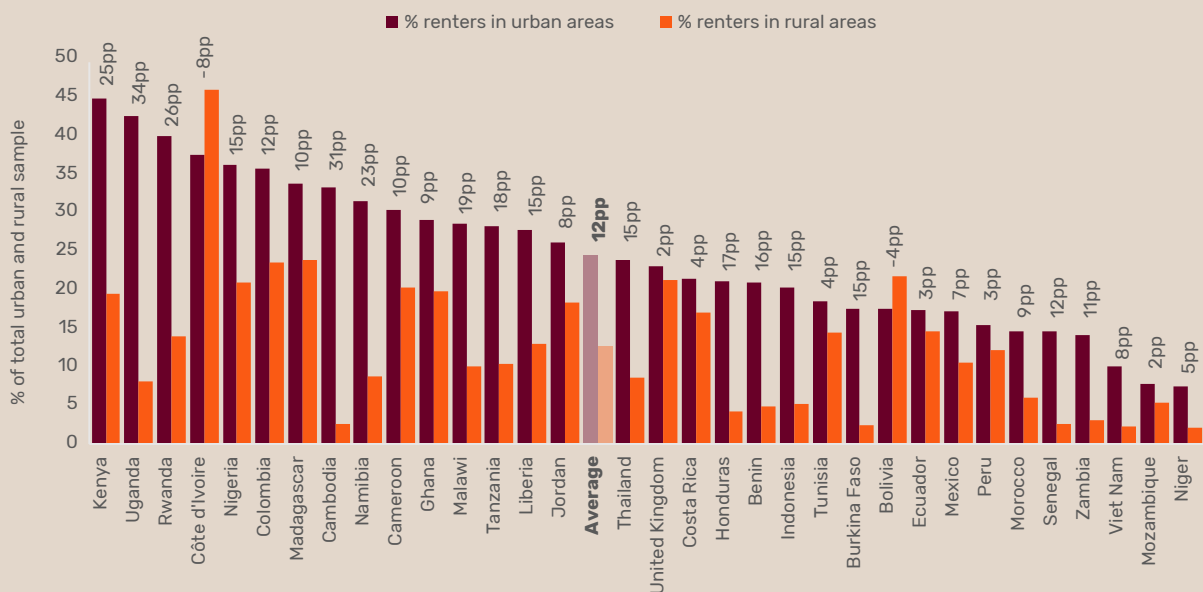
insecure is 'being asked to leave by owner/renter' (see Table 2), although there is great variation across countries. On average, 57% of respondents across the 33 countries cite this as a reason for feeling insecure, with rates ranging from 92% in Burkina Faso to 28%

**FIGURE 3: AVERAGE TENURE (IN)SECURITY BY TENURE TYPE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS**



Note: due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%. 'Stay without permission' includes responses coded 'other'. Source: authors using Prindex data.

**FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF RENTERS IN URBAN VERSUS RURAL AREAS (INCLUDING PERCENTAGE POINT DIFFERENCE)**



Source: authors using Prindex data.

**TABLE 2: PRIMARY REASONS FOR FEELING TENURE INSECURE BY TENURE STATUS**

	Renters			Owners		
	The owner/ renter may ask me to leave	Lack of money or other resources	Disagreements with family or relatives	Disagreements with family or relatives	Government may seize this property	Lack of money or other resources
Burkina Faso	92%	37%	7%	12%	80%	4%
Tunisia	90%	12%	3%	11%	12%	16%
Rwanda	89%	14%	2%	17%	63%	31%
Madagascar	85%	17%	0%	20%	19%	14%
Zambia	80%	28%	0%	15%	16%	12%
Liberia	78%	15%	18%	32%	21%	32%
Viet Nam	76%	16%	4%	15%	26%	17%
Senegal	72%	31%	14%	19%	15%	28%
Benin	65%	19%	0%	33%	7%	0%
Ghana	64%	20%	23%	24%	18%	7%
Namibia	63%	26%	10%	17%	4%	23%
Thailand	61%	10%	0%	6%	13%	9%
Tanzania	60%	14%	6%	13%	31%	12%
Nigeria	59%	20%	6%	28%	35%	13%
Malawi	59%	25%	4%	22%	59%	0%
Morocco	58%	50%	0%	39%	7%	12%
Mozambique	58%	12%	0%	23%	21%	8%
Jordan	55%	19%	7%	12%	0%	26%
Mexico	55%	21%	8%	16%	8%	17%
Côte d'Ivoire	53%	36%	6%	38%	21%	15%
Colombia	53%	23%	4%	12%	10%	20%
Indonesia	51%	8%	1%	32%	10%	12%
Uganda	50%	17%	7%	31%	32%	20%
Bolivia	48%	7%	3%	17%	16%	9%
Cameroon	46%	18%	3%	19%	24%	11%
Honduras	41%	20%	3%	6%	0%	21%
Costa Rica	39%	25%	8%	7%	8%	28%
Niger	38%	10%	7%	18%	20%	9%
Peru	34%	35%	7%	11%	10%	24%
Ecuador	33%	8%	5%	5%	9%	12%
United Kingdom	30%	36%	11%	20%	12%	34%
Cambodia	30%	12%	0%	3%	27%	13%
Kenya	28%	25%	1%	9%	9%	20%
Average	57%	21%	5%	18%	20%	16%

Source: authors using Prindex data.

in Kenya. By contrast, reasons that owners cite for feeling insecure are more multifaceted, with the most common given as 'government may seize this property' (20% across countries) followed by 'disagreements with family or relatives' (18%). The possibility of government seizures is particularly important among urban dwellers in Burkina Faso, Rwanda and Malawi, although small sample sizes should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results.

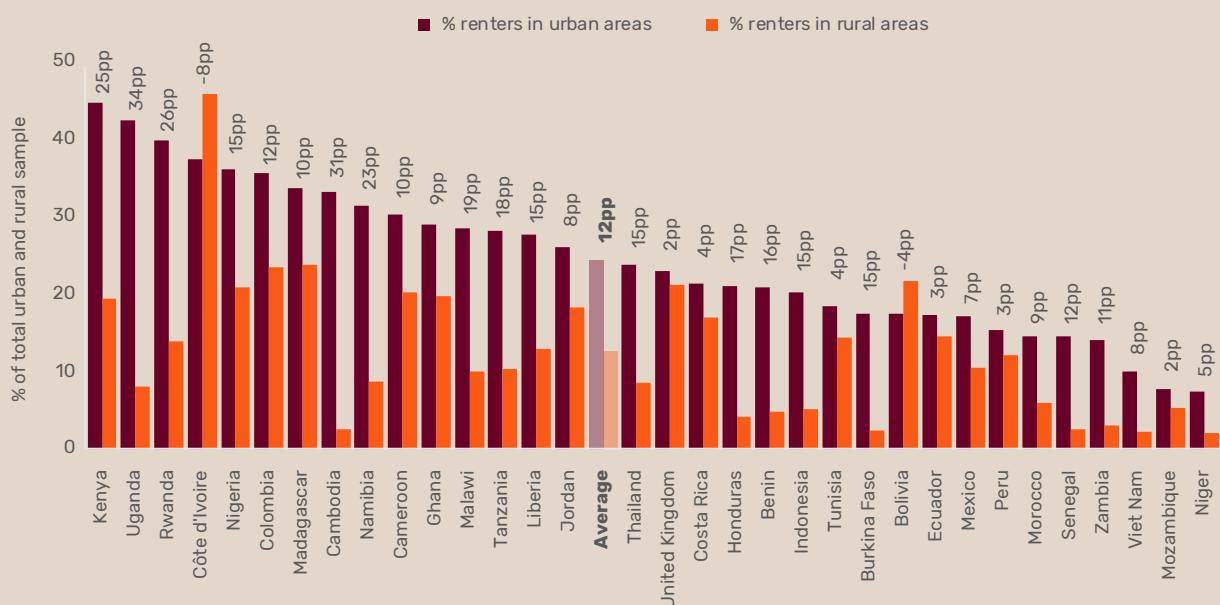
'Lack of money or other resources' is one of the most common reasons given for feeling insecure by owners (16%) and renters in urban areas (21%) alike. Although the causality is ambiguous and previous studies have often focused on the impact of titling on household income rather than household income on tenure security (see, for example, Field, 2007 or Galiani and Scharfrodsky, 2010), we found that low-income respondents represent another group characterised by higher levels of tenure insecurity. Defined here as being categorised in the lowest two income quintiles (bottom 40%), low income can cause tenure insecurity if rental (or in the case of owners, mortgage) payments cannot be made, resulting in eviction. It has been shown in existing literature that poor people are particularly vulnerable to forced evictions or market-driven displacement, particularly in the aftermath of titling programmes (e.g. Durand-Lasserve, 2006). The vulnerability of poor households can be seen in Figure 5, which shows that rates of insecurity are up to

34 percentage points higher among urban respondents in the poorest 40% than they are in the wealthiest 40%. At the same time, there has been evidence showing that wealthier households are less secure than they would otherwise be as their land often has a higher value, which can in turn make that land more attractive for others to initiate conflict over (Linkow, 2016). The comparison of income groups in some countries, for instance in Zambia, Colombia and Cambodia, may show evidence of this phenomenon considering that rates of tenure insecurity are similar between income groups.

In the developed and developing world alike, the young urban poor have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group. Our data shows that young people are prone to feeling insecure about their tenure (Figure 6). Furthermore, the correlation between age and tenure insecurity is separate from the relationship between renters and the likelihood of eviction. In most countries, the share of young people who live in rented housing is significantly lower than the overall share of young people in the sample, with most 'staying with permission' of family members (36%, see Figure 7).

Along with being middle-aged (25–54 years), urban renters are disproportionately more likely to live by themselves. Figure 8 shows that the share of single-person rented households in urban areas is 26% compared to 13% in the general urban population. This

**FIGURE 5: TENURE INSECURITY AMONG POOREST (BOTTOM 40%) AND WEALTHIEST (TOP 40%) OF RESPONDENTS (INCLUDING PERCENTAGE POINTS DIFFERENCE)**



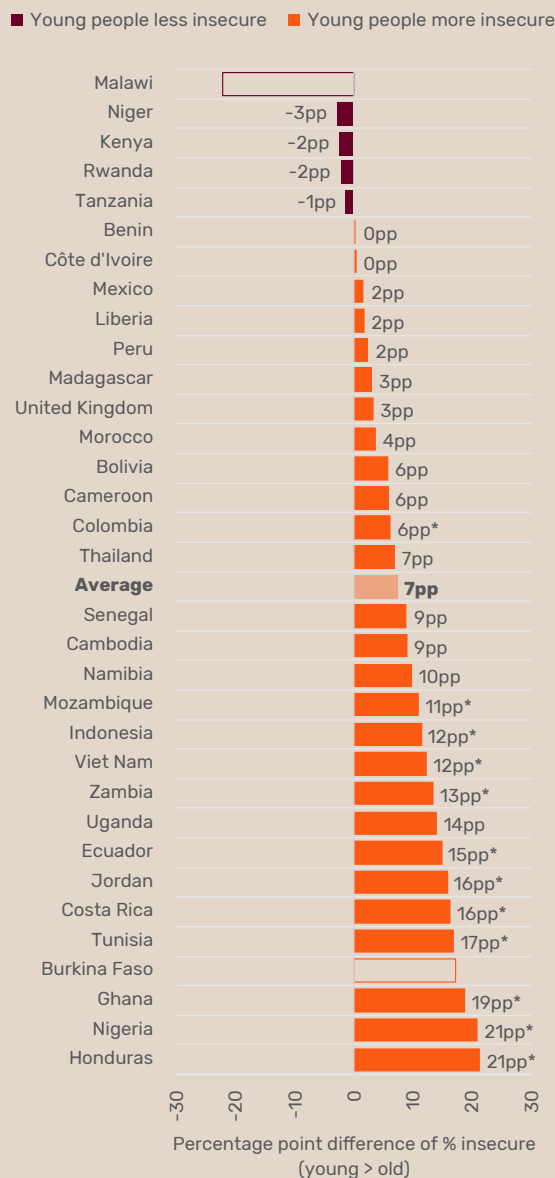
*Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same.*  
*Source: authors using Prindex data.*

suggests that single-person households are particularly exposed to tenure insecurity as a result of being an especially prevalent group within rental markets.

As in the overall sample, there is very little difference between the average rates of tenure insecurity between men and women in urban areas, suggesting that women perceive a similar likelihood of losing access or use

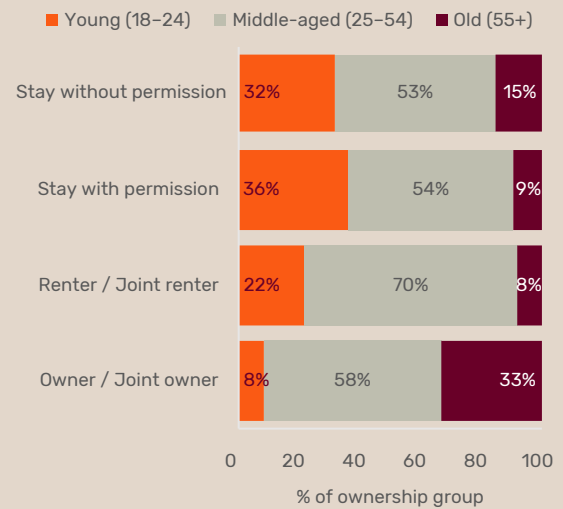
of land than men in urban contexts. However, other measures of de jure and de facto tenure security in the literature may reveal different patterns which are important in particular countries. For instance, while van Gelder and Luciano (2015) find a lack of correlation between gender and a similar measure of tenure insecurity (probability of eviction), they observe a positive correlation with 'fear of eviction'.

**FIGURE 6: DIFFERENCE IN TENURE INSECURITY BETWEEN YOUNG (18-24) AND OLD (55+) AGE GROUPS**



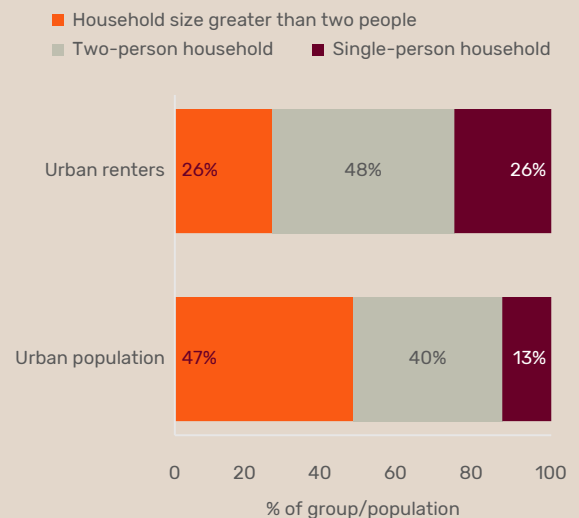
Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same. Unfilled bars indicate a very high level of uncertainty due to a small sample size. Source: authors using Prindex data.

**FIGURE 7: AVERAGE SHARE OF AGE GROUPS BY TENURE TYPE**



Note: due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%. Source: authors using Prindex data.

**FIGURE 8: SHARE OF RESPONDENTS LIVING ALONE AS URBAN RENTERS VERSUS GENERAL POPULATION**



Note: due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%. Source: authors using Prindex data.

Female respondents in urban areas do express significantly higher rates of tenure insecurity in some countries, most notably the UK, which is the only high-income country (HIC) within the sample of 33 countries (Figure 9). While it is much too early to draw conclusions about a gender trend in developed countries, we will pay close attention to this observation when the survey is carried out in further HICs in the coming year.

### 3.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DE JURE AND DE FACTO TENURE SECURITY

It is now broadly accepted that tenure security is not just a matter of legal or illegal formal status but 'a matter of perception as well as law' (Payne et al., 2009). The evidence of this dichotomy primarily stems from the impact that land titling programmes have had on perceived tenure security. Evidence that titling enhances feelings of tenure security has been found in Indonesia (Reerink and van Gelder, 2010) and Senegal (Payne et al., 2008; 2009). There are also surveys that cite security as a primary reason for wanting a title in Mexico (Angel et al., 2006), Ecuador (Lanjouw and Levy, 2002) and Peru (Cantuarias and Delgado, 2004).

However, other studies suggest that titling may not be necessary in contexts where de facto security is already high. Evidence of unauthorised settlements where this is the case exists in Egypt (Sims, 2002), India (Banerjee, 2004), Mexico (Angel et al., 2006), Peru (Kagawa and Turksra, 2002), South Africa (Allanic, 2003) and Tanzania (Kironde, 2006).

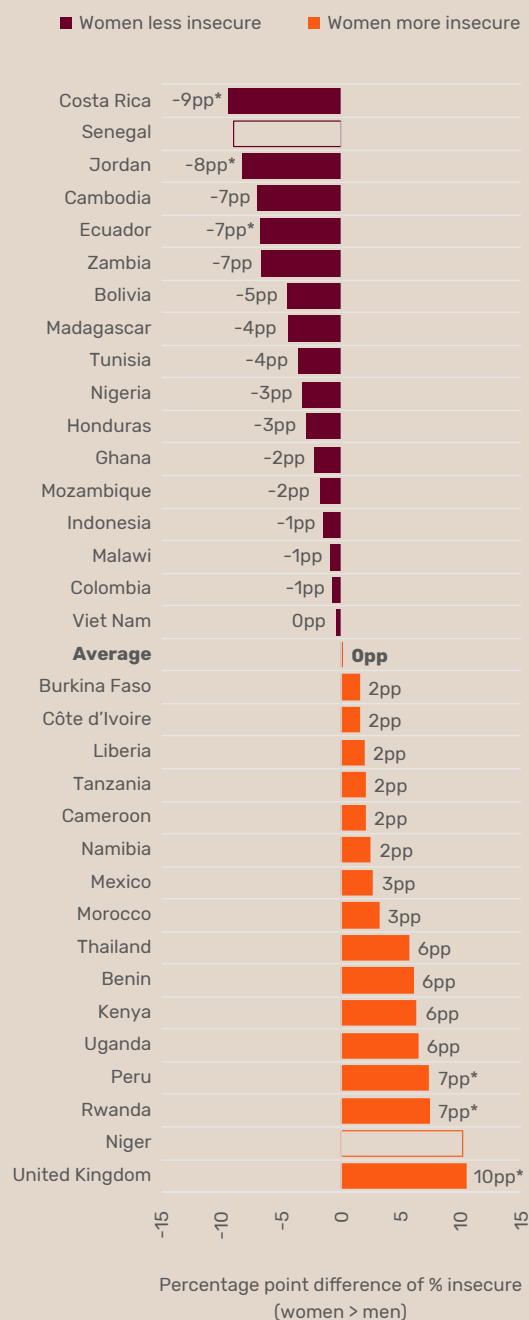
In other cases, authors have argued that titling programmes can result in a reduction in security because it makes the poor vulnerable to either forced evictions or market-driven displacement (see, for example, Sukumaran, 1999; Banerjee, 2002; Sims, 2002; Durand-Lasserve, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; World Bank, 2006).

Whether or not the impact of titling is positive, there are two important points to consider when analysing this relationship.

First, the effect of titling on perceived tenure security inevitably depends on contextual factors, in particular previously existing levels of de facto security (Durand-Lasserve et al., 2007). Where de facto security is already high,<sup>5</sup> titling may not be necessary.

Second, as argued by Payne et al. (2009), increased security may be achieved through several other means

**FIGURE 9: DIFFERENCE IN TENURE INSECURITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN URBAN AREAS**

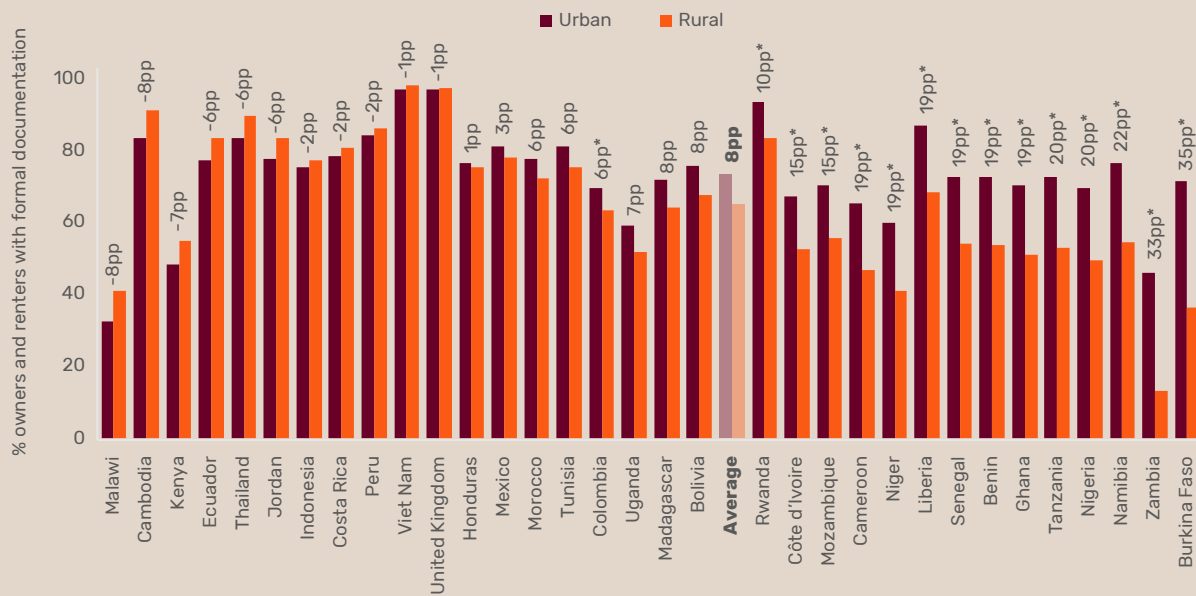


*Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same. Unfilled bars indicate a very high level of uncertainty due to a small sample size. Source: authors using Prindex data.*

5 See, for instance, studies of de facto security within unauthorised settlements in Egypt (Sims, 2002), India (Banerjee, 2004), Mexico (Angel et al., 2006), Peru (Kagawa and Turksra, 2002), South Africa (Allanic, 2003) and Tanzania (Kironde, 2006).



**FIGURE 10: PROPORTION OF URBAN AND RURAL RESPONDENTS WITH FORMAL DOCUMENTATION (INCLUDING PERCENTAGE POINT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL)**



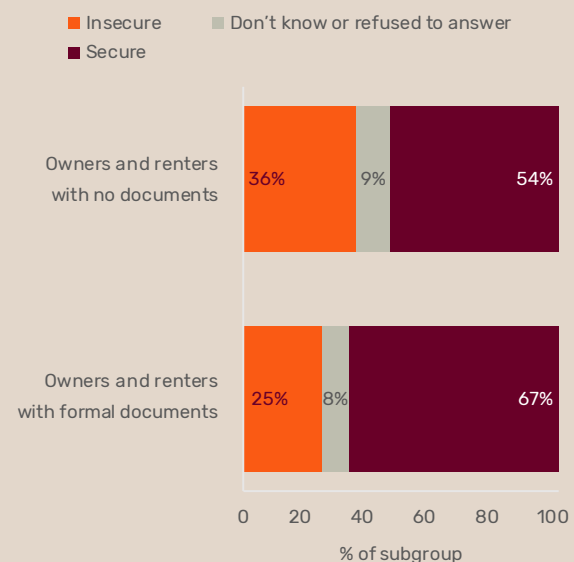
Source: authors using Prindex data.

than titling. One of the most important alternative means exists in the form of a local authority providing roads, water, electricity and other infrastructure or services to urban dwellers (see, for example, Kessides, 1997; Angel et al., 2006). In other contexts, communities and local institutions establish their own mechanisms for governing land markets, relying on social relationships to broker access to land or confer legitimacy to transactions (Royston, 2013).

To our knowledge, there has been no previous analysis of the prevalence of formal property rights between urban and rural settings on a global and comparative scale. Prindex data can be of enormous value here as it can establish where interventions are necessary. Our data shows that the average rate of formal documentation is 7% higher among urban respondents (50%) than people living in rural areas (43%). This is broadly in line with non-empirical evidence that has previously suggested that between 30% and 50% of urban residents in the developing world lack any kind of legal document to demonstrate ownership (Payne and Durand-Lasserve, 2012).

Figure 10 displays overall rates of formal documentation between urban and rural respondents, showing the percentage point difference between the two as a number. In 15 of the 33 countries, a higher proportion of urban dwellers reported having formal documentation than their rural counterparts. While there is an average

**FIGURE 11: TENURE SECURITY AMONG URBAN OWNERS/RENTERS WITH FORMAL AND NO DOCUMENTATION**

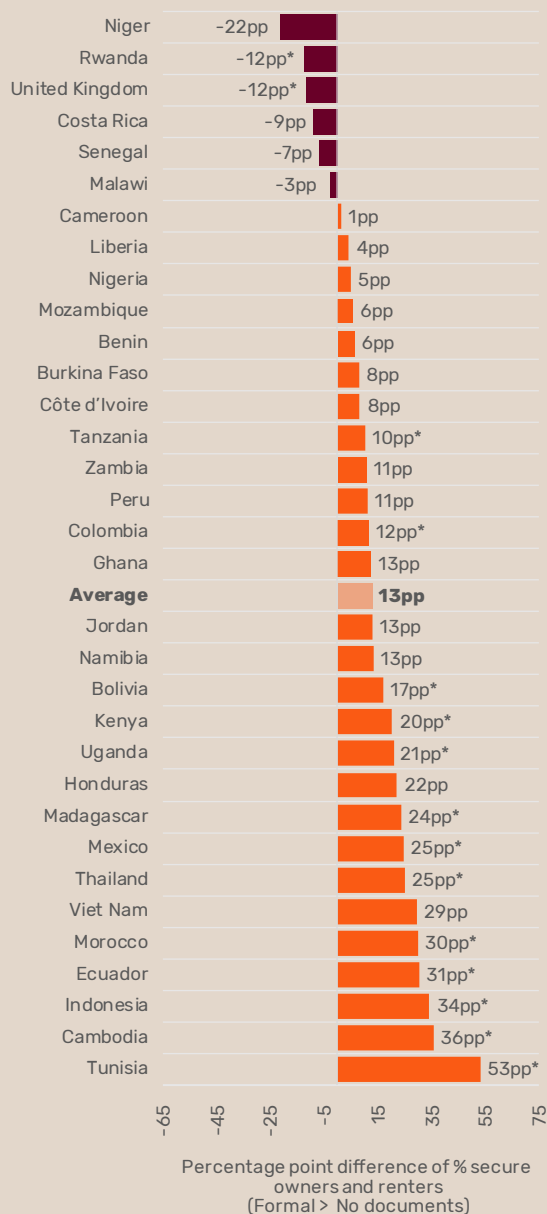


Note: due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%. Source: authors using Prindex data.

difference of 8 percentage points here across all countries, tenure security among rural dwellers was 2 percentage points higher than among urban ones.

Figure 11 illustrates that across the 33 countries tenure security is higher among owners and renters with formal documents (67%) than those without any formal or informal documents (54%) in urban areas. Although this does not prove a causal link, there is a 13 percentage points difference, suggesting a positive correlation between formal documentation and tenure security.

**FIGURE 12: DIFFERENCE IN TENURE INSECURITY AMONG URBAN OWNERS/ RENTERS WITH FORMAL DOCUMENTATION OVER THOSE WITH NO DOCUMENTATION**



*Note: numbers were rounded to zero decimal places; there are small differences between countries that may be observed by the size of the bars even though the number is the same.*  
*Source: authors using Prindex data.*

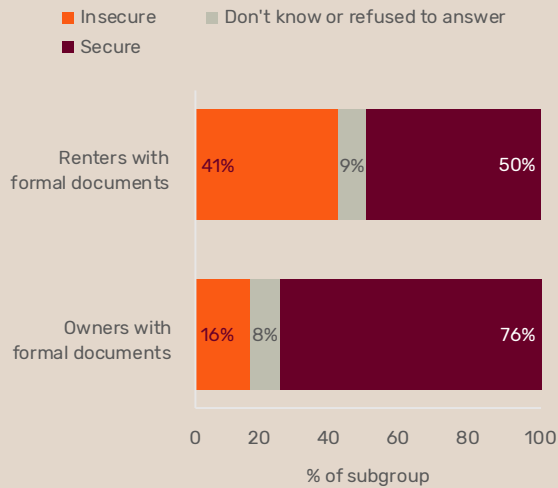
The country-level results displayed in Figure 12 need to be treated with caution due to small sample sizes. For instance, there are just eight owners and renters in the UK's sample who do not possess any formal or informal documentation. With this caveat in mind, in 13 of the 33 countries formal documentation is correlated with greater perceived tenure security, suggesting a relationship between de jure and de facto property rights in those country contexts. It is evident from these examples that the two forms of secure tenure therefore go hand in hand in some contexts.

However, this relationship is not evident in a majority of the country-level sample. Among the 17 sub-Saharan African countries, for example, 14 display percentage point differences between the security of owners and renters with formal documentation that is *below* the 13% average observed across all countries. For example, renters and owners in Niger who say they have formal documentation display rates of tenure security that are 22% lower than for urban dwellers without any documents. The Nigerien case has been cited in the literature as an example of how formalisation led to a scramble for land and increased conflicts in a context of institutional competition and limited administrative capacity (Benjaminsen et al., 2009).

On balance, the initial country-level evidence does not lend support to arguments that de jure security necessarily translates to de facto security. This suggests that the rationale for titling programmes in urban areas should be assessed carefully in each context. This needs to be explored in more detail through deeper dives with larger sample sizes in particular countries, and across a large number of countries to get a better idea of whether titling can have an impact on improving perceived rates of tenure security in urban settings.

However, the correlation between formal documentation and tenure security is particularly strong when we compare urban owners with urban renters. Specifically, urban owners who possess formal documentation display overwhelmingly higher rates of security than renters with documents of the same classification (Figure 13). This could suggest that formal titling can help secure de facto security among owners in urban areas, but that other methods should be considered when it comes to securing the tenure of renters, who we have already identified as a group particularly vulnerable to perceived insecurity. It also lends additional support to evidence that titling can lead to market-driven displacement of poor people (e.g. Durand-Lasserve, 2006), who in turn tend to reside in rented accommodation and are therefore particularly vulnerable to forced evictions or sudden increases in rent.

**FIGURE 13: TENURE SECURITY AMONG URBAN OWNERS AND RENTERS**



*Note: due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%.  
Source: authors using Prindex data.*

Aside from formal titling, we looked for alternative household characteristics that could be correlated with perceived tenure security. Specifically, arguments have been made that a sense of security may be *created* by infrastructure investment in urban areas. For instance, Kessides (1997) has argued that infrastructure improvements providing less than legal title can create sufficient informal security of tenure to permit residents to invest and acquire other services. Angel et al. (2006) come to a similar conclusion in Mexico, arguing that titles do not encourage home owners to make improvements to their homes. However, we could only find mixed evidence of this in the data available to us, which included variables capturing households that had access to a reliable water supply, waste collection and latrine facilities. In some countries, notably Nigeria, the relationship was even negative, with respondents who had a reliable water supply reporting tenure insecurity that was 10% higher than among households that were not attached to such infrastructure.

# 4. Policy implications

## 4.1 TARGETS OF POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Our results indicate that urban dwellers are an important target of interventions to increase tenure security: we observed that perceived tenure insecurity is higher among urban versus rural dwellers, largely due to the higher proportion of renters who reside in urban areas. Other demographic groups that are particularly affected by tenure insecurity in urban areas include the poor, the young and people who live alone.

## 4.2 THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF TITLING

Our data implies that formalisation of tenure security, largely in the form of titling, may not necessarily lead to increased feelings of tenure security in urban areas, particularly where lack of money or other resources is an important driver of perceived tenure insecurity. However, this depends not only on the country-specific context, but also on the tenure status: owners are significantly more likely to benefit from the provision of formal documentation than renters, where the relationship between formal property rights and tenure security is less evident. This is particularly marked when it comes to owners who are concerned by the security of their tenure due to boundary disputes, for whom titling may be an effective policy solution. However, titling alone may not resolve key drivers of tenure insecurity, as lack of financial resources was cited as one of the main reasons why urban owners feel insecure.

Titling programmes also need to be wary of inducing forced evictions or market-driven displacement (Durand-Lasserve, 2006). Examples where titling programmes have made the poor and renters vulnerable to forced evictions or market-driven displacement include Afghanistan (World Bank, 2006), India (Sukumaran, 1999; Banerjee, 2002), Egypt (Sims, 2002), Cambodia and Rwanda (Durand-Lasserve, 2006). In some instances, landlords who obtained titles raised rents to meet the costs of titling and/or of improvements resulting from investments, leading to the displacement of households that did not wish – or were unable – to pay the higher rent (Payne, 1997). For example, Payne et al. (2008) demonstrated in the case of Senegal that rents increased sharply as newly regularised shack owners transferred onto renters the costs of tenure regularisation and physical upgrading.

## 4.3 A SHARPER FOCUS ON RENTERS

For renters, the data suggests that alternative interventions may be needed to tackle feelings of insecurity within this group. For instance, recognising administrative or legal mechanisms for conferring tenure security can be more successful in the case of renters than attempting systematic titling efforts. Examples include occupancy registers, plot or shack enumerations, provision of infrastructure services that register households or zoning plans declaring whole areas as settlements.

For renters, simple measures would be to guarantee longer notice periods or to provide inner-city social housing. Others have called for policies to restrict large-scale commercial landlords while encouraging smaller 'petty landlords', citing evidence that highly complex tenure relationships involving multiple layers of subletting with leases of different lengths emerge from the former (Aina, 1990). If successful, such measures would contribute to reducing tenure insecurity in urban settings in general, considering that the higher proportion of renters in urban areas largely explains overall differences of perceived tenure insecurity against rural settings.

Another option would be to ease pathways into ownership for renters. Given that renters do not have control over residential or infrastructure improvements in their dwellings, it is unclear how improving tenure security among this group would lead to the household-level improvements in urban development that are so necessary in the rapidly urbanising developing world. Nonetheless, there are other spill-over effects that can be achieved by improving feelings of tenure security among renters, not least because it improves their wellbeing by reducing incessant anxiety and fear. Lack of concern can be offset by economic and social capital (Morris et al., 2017) such as making productive investments in education, labour markets or the general community instead of, for example, guarding plots of land.

Overall, Prindex's results lend support to recognising that the parallel existence of formal and informal markets is an incontrovertible reality of urban land markets in fast-developing cities. Government housing

agencies can improve tenure security among owners through titling, potentially causing knock-on effects on residential and infrastructural investments at the household level. At the same time, other solutions will be needed to satisfy the burgeoning demand from lower income groups, particularly young people, single people and people in rented accommodation who cannot afford formal housing (Bertaud, 2010). Finding ways to facilitate the functioning of markets that poor people cannot afford to access – and expand these – is a critical function of urban land

policy (Napier et al., 2013). This is particularly relevant to rental markets, which offer young, low-income households the necessary flexibility when moving into cities. Poor households that lack adequate incomes to meet long-term financial commitments and that need to respond quickly and easily to changing livelihood opportunities may prefer short-term tenure options such as rental accommodation (Payne et al., 2009) where governments can improve rental conditions and protect vulnerable renters from landlord exploitation.

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