

Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Uganda

CSDS PROJECT FACT SHEET 2010

Identifying the conditions under which citizens make demands of elected politicians—and politicians are in turn responsive to those demands—is a central concern to practitioners and researchers interested in governance and development. Relations of accountability are fundamental to the effective functioning of democratic institutions, yet the mere existence of democratic institutions does not guarantee that politicians are truly accountable to their citizens. In recent years there has been an important focus on the role that information might play in improving the quality of relations of accountability.

However the effects of political transparency are not well understood. Political transparency may be critical to improving governance in developing areas, but it is also possible that in some settings it has no effect. Indeed increased transparency can even have adverse effects if it leads to political conformism.

We are leading a major evaluation of the effects of political transparency on parliamentary accountability to address this question. Started in 2006, the study, structured around the performance of Uganda's 8th parliament, is one of the largest examinations of the effects of political information on political behavior and accountability undertaken to date.

The main elements of the project and the strategy are as follows:

- **The scorecard.** The key political information examined is a detailed scorecard on MP performance produced on an annual basis by a Ugandan NGO (AFLI) with support from international donors (primarily the DDP – the Deepening Democracy Programme) and the research team. Initial results suggest that the scorecard accords well with voter and MP perceptions of MP quality. The second session scorecard is available at http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/Scorecard/2008_Scorecard.pdf
- **The strategy.** The estimation of the impact of the scorecard depends on two core sources of (exogenous) variation that were introduced in 2007 and 2008 on the politician and voter side respectively: first, in December 2007 it was preannounced to all MPs that (a random) 50% of constituencies would have robust dissemination campaigns prior to the 2011 elections; second, in October 2008 a small (random) sample of voters in clusters in all constituencies were provided with copies of their MPs' 2007 (first session) scorecards. A final variation is to be introduced in January 2011 with the dissemination of data from the fourth and fifth sessions to clusters (LC1s) in selected constituencies. These sources of variation provide an extraordinary opportunity to assess the effects of political information both on the behavior of politicians and voters. A description of the strategy and early results is provided here: <http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/scorecard2010.pdf>
- **Early results.** The scorecard has generated tremendous interest among voters and politicians in Uganda. And since the launch of the scorecard we have seen close monitoring of scores and a

dramatic rise across the board in participation rates in parliamentary activities. Early results on the effectiveness of the scorecard on the voter side suggest that political information may have a dramatic effect on voting behavior. Using a survey based experiment we found that for voters who in the past did not support the MP, learning that an MP scored in the top quartile produces a 25 point increase in the probability of reporting an intention to vote for the MP. For voters who in the past did support the MP, learning that an MP scored in the bottom quartile produces a 15 point decline in the probability of reporting an intention to vote for the MP. A complete model of effects shows very strong voter responses that are a function of past attitudes and new information.

- **Larger Impact.** The results of the larger study will not only have implications for our understanding of political accountability in developing countries, but will also provide insight into the importance of continuing with this intervention, the most salient features of the intervention, and the most effective groups to target in future dissemination efforts.
- **Next steps: Elections and Endline survey 2011.** Much of the data for assessing the impact of the scorecard will come from public sources: on the voter side from official data on electoral behavior in February 2011, and on the MP side from changes in MP scorecard performance in the fourth and fifth sessions. The implementation of an additional endline survey in March 2011 to complete the panel begun in 2008, however, will allow for much more rigorous and nuanced understanding of the effects of the scorecard. In particular, data from an endline survey will strengthen our ability to determine: (a) the *validity* of results (b) the incidence of possibly *adverse* effects of transparency (c) the *mechanisms* through which political information matters and (d) the *populations* that are most affected. In all, this data is critical for determining whether this type of governance intervention really makes a difference and whether and how such attempts to improve relations of political accountability in developing areas should be extended.
- **Investigators:** Macartan Humphreys (Columbia University) and Jeremy Weinstein (Stanford University). We are also collaborating with Robert Sentamu on understanding how the form in which information is received conditions voter responses. Note that Jeremy Weinstein is presently serving at the National Security Council and is on leave from this project until Fall 2011.

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