

Researchers

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Timeline

2015-2016

Sample Size

2,070 participants

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Improving Performance-Based Voting through Citizen Engagement and Information in Burkina Faso

Abstract

Democratic accountability relies on performance-based voting, in which citizens vote based on candidates' expected or previous performance. Yet, if citizens do not have this information, they cannot use it to inform their vote choices. Researchers are working with Innovations for Poverty Action in Burkina Faso to evaluate whether inviting citizens to experience local governance firsthand and/or providing them with standardized information about incumbents' performance can increase performance-based voting in local elections.

Policy Issue

Democratic accountability relies on performance-based voting, in which citizens vote based on officials' present or expected future performance in office. When voters make decisions based mainly on party loyalty or appeals to their identity group instead of performance, politics loses its competition, reducing the accountability of government. Yet, if citizens do not have access to information about officials' performance in office, or if they lack awareness about the roles and responsibilities of government officials, they cannot use this information to inform their vote choices. This research provides new evidence from Burkina Faso about whether offering citizens firsthand experience with municipal decision-making, and/or providing them with standardized information about the performance of incumbent local politicians, can affect performance-based voting.

Context of the Evaluation

In Burkina Faso, municipal council meetings typically take place four times per year. The president of a municipal council is an important local leader, taking on the responsibilities of a mayor. Working directly with citizens and municipal councils, the Burkina Faso Local Government Support Program (PACT) seeks to strengthen the capacity of local governments by fostering accountable and citizen-oriented local public service delivery.

In 2014 and 2015, Burkina Faso underwent a political transition, in which elected government officials—including local officials in municipal governments—were temporarily suspended and replaced by externally appointed special delegations. New local elections were held in May 2016 in which members of the transitional special delegations were not eligible to run.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers are working with Innovations for Poverty Action and the Burkina Faso Local Government Support Project (PACT) to conduct a randomized evaluation in rural municipalities in Burkina Faso, assessing the impact of inviting citizens to visit municipal councils and/or informing them about the performance of incumbent politicians on performance-based voting. Researchers randomly assigned 2,070 people to one of the following four groups:

Municipal council (special delegation) meetings: Citizens in this group received a personal invitation from the president of the delegation inviting them to attend a municipal council meeting and share their views there. A local councilor representing the invitee's village personally delivered the letter, which also outlined the agenda for the meeting.

Performance information: Citizens in this group received detailed, accurate information about the performance of their previous elected municipal government. This performance information was collected in 2014, prior to the political transition, and is therefore clearly attributable to the previously elected municipal government, rather than to the non-elected municipal councils.

Participants watched a 10-minute slide show with a voiceover that covered performance information on nine critical indicators of the municipality's service delivery performance in primary education, health, water and sanitation, and administrative services. At the end, participants received a weighted overall rating of the previous municipal government's performance, both relative to national targets and in terms of their municipal government's rank within the region. The slide show was designed to be accessible to illiterate populations in many different vernacular languages.

Performance information and municipal council (special delegation) meetings: Citizens in this group were invited to the municipal council meetings and received the performance information.

Comparison group: Citizens in this group were not given municipal performance

information or invited to attend a municipal council meeting.

Researchers are analyzing whether being invited to attend the municipal council meetings and/or receiving performance information for the municipal government affects whether citizens are planning to vote, performance-based voting (i.e., the weight that voters place on performance information when they decide who to vote for), and who citizens plan to vote for. Researchers are also investigating whether prior experience with the municipal government affects how voters in the performance information and municipal council meetings groups use the new information in their vote choices.

Results and Policy Lessons

Results forthcoming.

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