

Transparency and Corruption

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Transparency is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. It ensures that public officials and civil servants act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the **general public can hold them to account**. It is the surest way of guarding against **corruption**, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.

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 - 1 Multinational firms
 - 2 The courts (legal system)
 - 3 Political system (e.g. impeachment; firing)
 - 4 **The public** (“vote the rascals out”)

Electoral accountability challenge

- 1 **Elections** provide a mechanism for holding politicians to account
- 2 The accountability logic presupposes that voters have access to information about politicians' actions
- 3 But in many developing countries, opposition parties, civil society groups and the media are under-resourced or captured →
- 4 The fact that there is more information “out there”, does not in itself mean that the information reaches the public

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 - 2 **Public disclosures** in extractive industries
 - 3 **Crowdsourcing:** e.g, “I Paid a Bribe” (India)
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- **Pressing need to inquire whether these efforts are effective**

Key questions

- 1 Are voters taking advantage of transparency initiatives to better sanction and reward incumbents?
- 2 Are politicians changing their behavior in response to campaigns that increase the transparency of their actions?

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- 3 Coordination failure
- 4 Hard to assign responsibility
- 5 Criminality not always shunned by voters
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What's does research have to say?

Thorny questions to answer rigorously

- A correlation between transparency/information and politicians' actions (or voting) does not mean that a causal effect is at work
- Unobserved factors might contribute to greater transparency and also affect politicians and voters' behavior
- Isolating out these unobserved factors is really hard: hence the growing use of (controlled and natural) experiments

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- 1 Study scarcity
- 2 Study heterogeneity
- 3 Selective reporting (publication bias)

Metaketa I: Information and Accountability

EGAP developed a knowledge cumulating model that may be of interest:

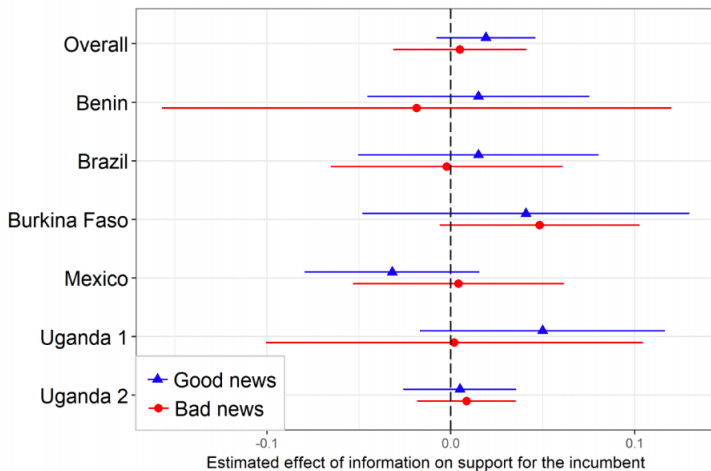
- 1 **Replication** of similar interventions across contexts
- 2 **Harmonization** of theory, measurement & analysis
- 3 **Reliable designs** high-powered experiments, PAPs
- 4 **Reporting standards**, including integrated publication

The inaugural Metaketa explored the effect of incumbent performance information on voter behavior

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 - Public and high saturation dissemination
 - Where competitiveness is high
 - When political information is combined with civic education
 - Non-partisan (and non-coethnic) are more receptive to information

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 - Media revelations of mayoral and MP malfeasance and of corruption reduced incumbent re-election in Mexico, Brazil, and Italy
 - We don't know exactly why this is the case (coordination, expectations, repetition and internalization)

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- 4 **The *amount* of media coverage on its own does not guarantee strengthening of political accountability**
 - Media outlets must be *independent*; i.e., free from elite capture
 - Media power, however, needs to be constrained via regulation
 - Robust national media is insufficient for addressing local malfeasance

What we know and don't know: politicians

- 1 Politicians can derail transparency efforts (e.g., discredit source)
 - Humphreys & Weinstein (2012) vs. Grossman & Michelitch (2017)
- 2 Politicians can and do respond by improving performance
 - Institutionalizing the information dissemination
 - Early buy-in around methodology
 - Timing considerations
 - Where levels of political competition are relatively high

In conclusion

- 1 Invest in media quality and independence, including at the local level
- 2 Institutionalize transparency dissemination campaigns (not one-off)
- 3 Strengthen top-down accountability (e.g., court's independence)
- 4 Support opposition parties