Experimental Research

The big idea:

- Understanding social processes is very often rendered difficult or impossible because of confounding.
  - For example, perhaps good institutions cause growth, but perhaps it is the other way around, or perhaps other third things cause both good institutions and growth.

- You can essentially eliminate confounding concerns by linking research to randomized interventions.
  - This makes sure that (in expectation), treatment and comparison groups differ only with respect to the intervention you care about.

- Experimentation is not (primarily) a measurement strategy, it is an inference strategy.
  - It can be combined with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods measurement.
Illustrations: Countering Vote Buying

• **Question.** Vote buying works by creating an **implicit contract** between buyers and voters. Can characterizing vote-buyers as dishonest break the sense of obligation?

• **Intervention:** Non-partisan radio campaigns used in **India** airing ads in 5 languages on 60 stations

• **Results:** Campaigns results in 7 point drop in vote share of vote buying party (measured using official data)

• **Source:** Green and Vasudevan (2015)
Illustrations: Countering electoral fraud

• **Question:** Can simple ICT technologies reduce the incentives of polling officials to engage in fraud?

• **Intervention:** Letters sent to polling officials in Uganda saying tallies would be photographed and compared against official results

• **Results:** The letters:
  – increased the frequency of posted tallies by polling center managers in compliance with the law
  – decreased fraud as measured by the sequential digits found on tallies
  – decreased the vote share for the incumbent president

• **Source:** Callen and Gibson 2015
Illustrations: Preventing participation in Conflict

• **Question**: Can engaging vulnerable youth in economic programs make them less likely to engage in armed conflict?

• **Intervention**: post conflict skills training program administered in northern Liberia to a random sample of vulnerable youths.

• **Results**: Along with economic gains, program participants were less likely to make contact with agents recruiting for fighters to go to war in neighboring Cote d’Ivoire

• **Source**: Blattman 2014
Illustrations: Clientelism and Deliberation

• **Question:** Can campaign strategies that employ more programmatic policy platforms benefit politicians and reduce clientelistic campaigning?

• **Intervention:** Town hall meetings discuss candidate platforms in random samples of villages in **Benin**

• **Results:** Turnout unaffected, clientelism reduced, vote share of dominant candidates weakened

• **Source:** Fujiwara and Wantchekon (2015)
Illustrations: Electoral rules & the quality of governance

• **Question:** Do electoral rules affect what kind of politicians get elected and how well they perform?

• **Intervention:** As part of Afghanistan CDD intervention, there was variation in whether single member or multi-member districts were used for electing village representatives.

• **Results:** Representatives elected in elections with a multi-member district are **better educated** and exhibit **less extreme policy preferences**

• **Source:** Beath et al 2014
Illustrations: Community monitoring of service providers

• **Question:** Can local oversight improve the quality of health service delivery?

• **Intervention:** Community interface meetings with clinics and communities with goal setting and citizen oversight

• **Result:** Massive reductions in *child mortality* and increases in child weight

• **Source:** Bjorkman and Svensson 2009
Illustrations: Experiments as measurement devices

• Sensitive items, such as support for extremist groups (Pakistan)

• Collective action capacity (Liberia)

• Social Cohesion (Nepal)

• Electoral Fraud (Ghana)

• Discrimination (Many “audit” studies)
But also many negative results:

• There is little evidence that CDR programs produce any of the social benefits claimed for them.

• Electoral observers displace fraud to neighboring unvisited areas.

• Although more information about political corruption can sometimes result in less support for corrupt politicians, it can also depress political engagement.

• Participation in decision making may often be only performative.

• Many interventions we thought would work don’t seem very reliable.
And many areas with very little evidence

• Are **demobilization and reintegration** programs effective?

• When does **decentralization** improve the quality of government?

• **Comparative interventions**: Is CDR more or less effective than empowering the state?
And very few areas with consolidation of evidence

- CDR is one of the few areas where multiple RCTs have sought to address the same question.
  - But even these examine different versions using different measures.

- More generally, the lack of replication raises real concerns around external validity

- EGAP metaketas seek to address this problem
What is a “Metaketa”? 

- Strategy to seek generalizable answers to major questions of scholarly and policy importance
- Integrated research programs
- Independent teams of researchers, open calls
- Projects in parallel around the world
- Integrated inferences
What problem does a Metaketa solve?

• Incentives for individual researchers do not necessarily generate the optimal set of studies for knowledge accumulation
  – Publication bias
  – Little replication of existing studies
  – Value of being first
  – Little coordination across countries, even with similar interventions
  – Persistent bias against policy relevance
Five pillars

1. **major themes**: major questions of scholarly and policy relevance

2. **collaboration and competition**: teams work on parallel projects, they collaborate on design but may produce conflicting results

3. **comparable interventions** and outcomes: differences in results attributable to contextual factors and not to differences in design

4. **analytic transparency**: analytic transparency: design registration, open materials, and third-party analysis prior to publication

5. **formal synthesis** based on ex-ante planning and integrated publication to avoid file-drawer bias
Current Round

• Fund and coordinate a series of experimental projects that assess the role of information in improving political representation in developing countries

• Administered by the Center on the Politics of Development at UC Berkeley

• Fall 2013 through Spring 2018

• $1.8 million grant
Substantive and Policy Motivation

• Many practitioners and theorists emphasize the need for high quality public information on the performance of politicians. An informed electorate is at the heart of liberal theories of democratic practice.

• But does information really make a difference in institutionally weak environments?
  – Does it lead to the rewarding of good performance at the polls or are voting decisions going to be dominated by ethnic ties and clientelistic relations?

• Where and when is it most likely to make a difference?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>PIs</th>
<th>Information on…</th>
<th>Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>Can Common Knowledge Improve Common Goods?</td>
<td>Adida, Gottlieb, McClendon, &amp; Kramon</td>
<td>legislative performance of deputies in the National Assembly</td>
<td>Legislator performance info provided publicly or privately and a civics message</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Common Knowledge, Relative Performance, &amp; Political Accountability</td>
<td>Larreguy, Arias, Querubin, &amp; Marshall</td>
<td>corruption and the misuse of public funds by local government officials</td>
<td>Leaflets distr. door-to-door vs. leaflets w/cars using loudspeakers</td>
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<td>India</td>
<td>Using Local Networks to Increase Accountability</td>
<td>Chauchard &amp; Sircar</td>
<td>financial crimes against Members of the state assembly</td>
<td>Door-to-door campaigns vs. public rallies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Accountability &amp; Incumbent Performance in Brazilian Northeast</td>
<td>Hidalgo, Boas, &amp; Melos</td>
<td>performance gathered from audit reports of the local government</td>
<td>Report cards &amp; an oral message</td>
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<td>Burkina</td>
<td>Citizens at the Council</td>
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<td>service delivery by the municipal government</td>
<td>Scorecard vs. attending local council meeting</td>
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<td>Faso</td>
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<td>Uganda I</td>
<td>Information &amp; Accountability in Primary &amp; General Elections</td>
<td>Raffler &amp; Platas Izama</td>
<td>service delivery by the local government</td>
<td>Recorded candidate statements viewed publicly &amp; privately</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda II</td>
<td>Repairing Information Underload</td>
<td>Nielson, Buntaine, Bush, Pickering &amp; Jablonski</td>
<td>service delivery by the local government/ variation in info effect if $ from foreign donors?</td>
<td>Information sent by SMS to randomly sampled households.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Timeline

2014

UGANDA

2015

BENIN

2016

BURKINA FASO

2017

INDIA

2014

BRAZIL

2015

MEXICO

2016

UGANDA
Learning and learning about learning

• Bonus:
  – Cross-validation analysis strategy designed to assess what we learn from any subset of studies about the other studies --- provides a strategy to answer whether inferences have external validity
  
  – Experimental stage to assess whether and what policy makers learn from these studies
Possible Future Metaketas

• **Community monitoring**: Where and when does community monitoring improve local service delivery?

• **Corruption**: What type of auditing strategies are most effective at reducing political corruption?

• **Taxation**: Does decentralization of tax raising authority strengthen local government?

• **Natural Resources**: Can increased scrutiny of resource contracting reduce adverse effects of resource extraction at local or national levels?

• **Post conflict stability**: Do post conflict reintegration programs reduce conflict risks?
Challenges to Implementing Metaketatas

• May require complex partnerships:
  – Some may be within control of researchers (eg Information Campaigns)
  – Some may require coordination with practitioners (eg Development Projects)
  – Some require coordination with governments (eg tax regimes, bureaucratic reforms)

• Require minimal homogeneity of interventions across contexts

• Require minimal “power”. Current aims of 6 or 7 are modest---especially give risks of failure of any individual study

• Both social scientists and practitioners have to really care about the answer
SDG 16 & EGAP

• Consciousness of the importance of SDG 16 on multiple levels:
  – Recognition of the **intrinsic importance** of governance outcomes
  – Possible integration of information on governance into **national data systems**

• Consciousness of the challenges:
  – Heightened need to identify **what works** in these areas
  – Heightened need to assess how best to **measure outcomes**