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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 <u>consolidation </u>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
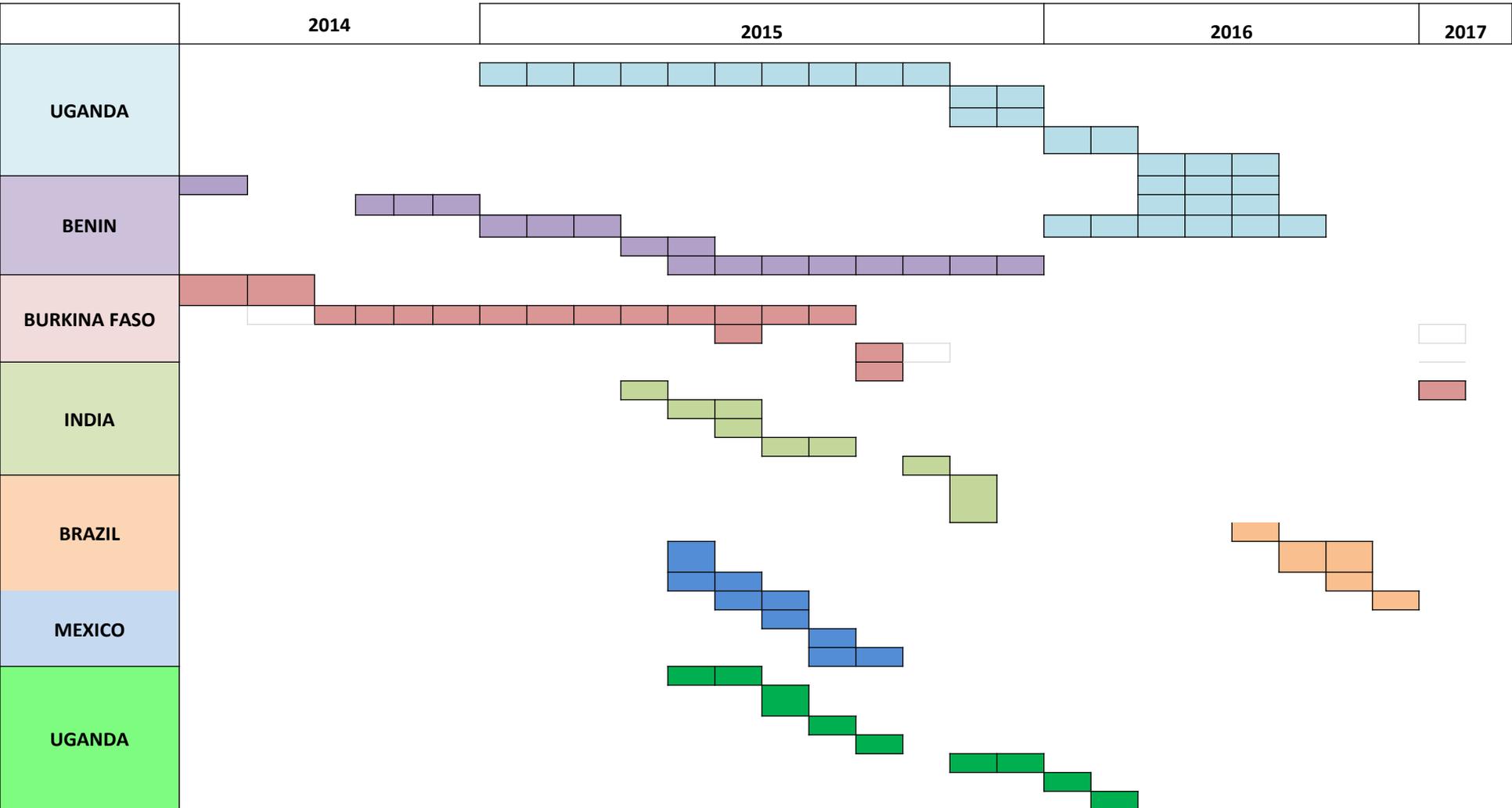
Current Round

- 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?

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

Timeline

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 Metaketas

- 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**