Governance

Strengthening the foundations for development

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Governments are tasked with delivering basic services such as education, security, and infrastructure, but access to and quality of these services is often undermined by poor oversight, corruption, and lack of community participation.

While countless programs aim to address these issues, their effectiveness is often not clear. IPA's governance research investigates ways to increase the performance of the government institutions that serve as the foundation for development. Our research teams have shed light on pressing questions including how to reduce vote-selling, how to increase the demand for government accountability, how technology can be used to reduce corruption, and how information can improve voting behavior, but many unanswered questions remain.

Key Governance Policy Lessons

1. Informing citizens about policy positions and quality/qualifications of political candidates can change voter behavior.

2. Well-designed financial incentives can increase performance.

Policy Influence: Using Evidence for Crime Reduction in Bogotá, Colombia

The city government of Bogotá worked with an IPA research team to develop affordable, innovative policies and to rigorously evaluate their impact to discover what was worth scaling. The study found that cleaning up streets and replacing lights led to a reduction in crime on the streets that received the services, and appears to have modestly reduced crime on nearby streets as well. Doubling police patrols in high-crime areas led to a reduction in crime in those areas, but crime spilled over to surrounding areas. The mayor's office is now using evidence from the evaluation to inform its policies and is now testing related approaches—such as installing police cameras—to discover their effect on crime.

Key Findings

IPA has worked with researchers to create evidence from more than 40 governance studies. Explore a few of our key findings below and find all of our governance findings at www.poverty-action.org/governance.

Exposure to political debates bolstered voters' knowledge and changed voting behavior in two countries[1,2]

In Sierra Leone, watching debates substantially increased political knowledge, policy alignment, and vote shares for higher-quality candidates. The debates also encouraged politicians to invest more in their constituencies, both during the campaign and one year later. A similar study in Uganda found that watching video interviews of parliamentary candidates during party primary and multiparty elections increased knowledge about the candidates and increased the likelihood that voters would change away from their intended vote choice on Election Day. *Read more >> www.poverty-action.org/study/debates-impact-voter-knowledge-initiatives-sierra-leone and www.poverty-action.org/publication/meet-candidates-videos-and-voting-behavior-uganda*

A local budget transparency initiative increased accountability in Uganda[3]

In areas where the political leadership was not aligned with the central government, empowering local politicians to exercise closer oversight over the local bureaucracy increased local politicians' monitoring effort and the frequency with which they sought to improve service delivery. *Read more >> www.poverty-action.org/study/budget-transparency-and-political-oversight-uganda*

The introduction of payments technology reduced leakage in India[4]

Advances in payments technology have the potential to improve the efficiency of slow and corrupt public welfare programs. Researchers found that Smartcards, which coupled electronic transfers with biometric authentication, resulted in a faster and less corrupt payments process without adversely affecting program access, even though system was not fully implemented. *Read more >> www.poverty-action.org/study/impact-smart-card-electronic-transfers-public-distribution*

Monitoring linked to clear, credible incentives increased teacher attendance in India[5]

Teacher and health care worker absenteeism are problems around the world. This study found that monitoring teacher attendance at school with cameras, and providing

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financial incentives for their attendance, succeeded in increasing attendance. *Read more >> www.poverty-action.org/study/encouraging-teacher-attendance-through-monitoring-with-cameras-rural-india*

Performance pay for tax collectors led to higher tax revenue in Pakistan[6]

Performance pay schemes led to a 46 percent increase in tax revenue, and did not impact taxpayer satisfaction or the accuracy of tax assessment. *Read more >> www.poverty-action.org/study/property-tax-experiment-punjab-pakistan-testing-role-wages-incentives-and-audit-tax-inspectors*

Sources

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3. Raffler, Pia. 2016. "Does political oversight of the bureaucracy increase accountability? Field experimental evidence from an electoral autocracy." Working paper, Yale University.

4. Muralidharan, Karthik, Paul Niehaus, and Sandip Sukhtankar. 2014. "Payments infrastructure and the performance of public programs: Evidence from biometric smartcards in India." Working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research.

5. Duflo, Esther, Rema Hanna, and Stephen P. Ryan. 2012. "Incentives Work: Getting Teachers to Come to School." *American Economic Review*, 102(4): 1241-78.

6. Khan, Adnan Q., Asim I. Khwaja, and Benjamin A. Olken. 2015. "Tax farming redux: Experimental evidence on performance pay for tax collectors." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131(1): 219-271.

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is a research and policy non-profit that discovers and promotes effective solutions to global poverty problems. IPA designs, rigorously evaluates, and refines these solutions and their applications together with researchers and local decision-makers, ensuring that evidence is used to improve the lives of the world's poor. Our well-established partnerships in the countries where we work, and a strong understanding of local contexts, enable us to conduct high-quality research. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that now impact millions of individuals worldwide.