

Texting Complaints to Politicians: Name Personalization and Politicians' Encouragement in Citizen Mobilization

Comparative Political Studies

2017, Vol. 50(10) 1325–1357

© The Author(s) 2016

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0010414016666862

journals.sagepub.com/home/cps

Guy Grossman¹, Kristin Michelitch², and
Marta Santamaria³

Abstract

Poor public service provision and government accountability is commonplace in low-income countries. Although mobile phone-based platforms have emerged to allow constituents to report service deficiencies to government officials, they have been plagued by low citizen participation. We question whether low participation may root in low political efficacy to politically participate. In the context of a text message-reporting platform in Uganda, we investigate the impact of adding efficacy-boosting language to mobilization texts—(a) citizen name personalization and (b) politician encouragement—on citizens' willingness to report service deficiencies to politicians via text messages. Both treatments, designed to increase internal and external efficacy, respectively, have a large, positive effect on participation. The results are driven by traditionally less internally efficacious constituents (females) and less externally efficacious constituents (those represented by opposition party members), respectively.

¹University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

²Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA

³Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain

Corresponding Author:

Guy Grossman, Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania, Stiteler Hall,
208 S. 37th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.

Email: ggros@sas.upenn.edu

Keywords

African politics, experimental research, political economy, representation and electoral systems

Many low-income countries experience persistently abysmal provision of public services, such as health, education, water, and infrastructure (Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2006; Ross, 2006). Given generally weak political accountability mechanisms, citizens are increasingly being encouraged to play a greater role in directly holding service providers to account (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2015; Banerjee, Cole, Duflo, & Linden, 2007). While some studies have shown that citizens are successful at monitoring service providers directly (Bjorkman & Svensson, 2009), most others report disappointing outcomes (Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerster, & Khemani, 2010). Although further investigation into these mixed results is necessary, scholars have recognized that many community monitoring initiatives are constrained by low participation rates rooted in classic collective action problems (Barr, Packard, & Serra, 2014). Indeed, directly monitoring service providers, and pressuring them to adequately perform, imposes non-negligible financial, time, and even social costs on citizens (Blair, Littman, & Paluck, 2015).

In response, recent studies have begun testing the effectiveness of encouraging citizens to report service delivery deficiencies to public officials using text-message platforms (Rezaee, Hasanain, & Khan, 2015). This approach has three main advantages. First, text messaging partially mitigates the collective action problem by significantly lowering the cost of participating in community monitoring initiatives. Second, such initiatives encourage citizens to engage in, rather than circumvent, political accountability mechanisms to improve service delivery (Kosack & Fung, 2014). Indeed, given that governments are ultimately responsible for public service provision, initiatives that bypass the government are unlikely to be sustainable or to produce widespread change (Khemani, 2007). Third, text-messaging platforms rely on the comparative advantages of citizens and politicians: While citizens have better information about service delivery deficiencies, elected officials are better positioned to enforce higher quality service provision (Olken, 2007).

Notwithstanding the alleged benefits of text message-reporting platforms, they have relatively low participation rates (Grossman, Humphreys, & Sacramone-Lutz, 2016), in part, we argue, due to a low sense of political efficacy. Political efficacy is commonly defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one’s civic duties” (Campbell,

Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p. 184), and has been shown to be positively correlated with political participation (Finkel, 1985). Many governments, especially in low-income countries, have historically been unresponsive to citizens' needs and preferences and have often repressed political participation altogether. Thus, citizens in such countries are unlikely to perceive many benefits from reporting public service deficiencies.

In this study, we test whether low citizen participation in reporting service delivery problems to elected officials via text messages may be improved by using mobilization strategies that are explicitly designed to address the problem of low efficacy. We do so by embedding a "mobilization" experiment in the "Get Involved!" initiative, an innovative platform that allows citizens in Uganda to communicate anonymously with their local government representatives via text messages. In partnership with a Ugandan non-governmental organization (NGO), the platform has been implemented in 125 randomly selected subcounties across 20 Ugandan districts. Our partner NGO invited local opinion leaders to community meetings at which attendees learned not only about the platform and how to use text messages to report service delivery problems but also about national service delivery standards and elected representatives' duties to address deficient services. Attendees of these meetings, who form the experimental subject pool, were also (truthfully) informed that their elected representatives had been trained to receive and respond to messages using the platform.

As part of the study, our partner NGO sent weekly "blast" text messages to the meeting attendees for a period of 6 months. In these messages, the NGO inquired whether a particular service delivery standard had been violated, and if so, encouraged message recipients to report it to their local representatives using the "Get Involved!" platform. To implement the experimental interventions, our partner made small modifications to these weekly text message blasts.

In one treatment, the mobilization request was personalized by adding the citizen's name to the weekly text message (*Citizen Name*). This treatment sought to increase citizens' sense of *internal* efficacy—that is, the belief that one has the personal ability to participate effectively in politics (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). By adding the citizen's name, the NGO sends an unambiguous signal to subjects that they are eligible to participate and that their participation is desirable. In a second treatment, an explicit encouragement from the citizen's elected representatives was included in the weekly text message (*Councilors' Encouragement*). This treatment was designed to increase citizens' *external* efficacy—that is, the responsiveness of government authorities to citizens' demands writ large (Niemi et al., 1991). Informing citizens that their elected officials (named in the text message) want to hear from them

signals that the representatives take citizens' voices into account. These treatments were implemented in a 2×2 factorial design.

We find that both mobilization strategies have positive and significant effects on the likelihood that citizens will contact their elected representatives via the text platform at least once during the study period. When administered alone, *Citizen Name* and *Councilors' Encouragement* increase the participation rate by 2.75 and 1.3 percentage points, respectively, from a base rate of about 3.4 percent. These effects size are on par with Get Out The Vote (GOTV) initiatives (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2009). Interestingly, we find no additive or multiplicative effect when examining the treatments in tandem. Our interpretation of this null result is that the *Citizen Name* treatment (the stronger of the two), which also appeared first in the weekly blasts, met an overall efficacy ceiling effect for political participation.

Examining heterogeneous treatment effects reveals evidence that is consistent with the proposed mechanisms (i.e., that name personalization and politician encouragement operate through internal and external efficacy). Women, who are widely characterized in the literature by lower internal efficacy, participated significantly less than their male counterparts in the baseline condition. However, the *Citizen Name* treatment, designed to increase internal efficacy, closed the gender participation gap. Similarly, citizens represented by opposition (vs. ruling party) representatives, a population characterized in the literature by lower external efficacy in electoral authoritarian regimes such as Uganda, participated significantly less in the baseline condition. However, the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment, designed to increase external efficacy, eliminated the partisan-based participation gap. Taking these and other findings into account, we discuss and rule out alternative explanations, for example, that the treatments increased participation due to attention grabbing or feelings of deference or compulsion out of fear.

This study contributes to the literatures on political participation, political efficacy, and efforts to harness new information communication technologies (ICTs) to catalyze democratization. Most broadly, it extends a rich scholarship that investigates how political participation may be increased by using theoretically driven mobilization strategies (Green & Gerber, 2015). Unlike the bulk of studies investigating interventions to increase electoral participation, however, this study focused on strengthening political participation *between* elections, when it typically declines. Improving participation between elections is important, since this time period is when policy legislation and implementation takes place (Michelitch & Utych, 2015). Furthermore, this study contributes to the debate on the ability of text messages to mobilize citizen political participation (Dale & Strauss, 2009; Malhotra, Michelson, Rogers, & Valenzuela, 2011). It does so by demonstrating that even small variations in

mobilizing text messages closed participation gaps for traditionally less efficacious groups. This result has important policy implications, as it reassures us that new ICT innovations may help to close, rather than widen, traditional participation gaps (Grossman, Humphreys, & Sacramone-Lutz, 2014).

This study also contributes to the vibrant political efficacy literature. The vast majority of studies examining efficacy and participation have been conducted in advanced democracies, where government responsiveness is relatively high and citizens have higher and more equitable levels of resources with which to be politically engaged (e.g., Balch, 1974; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). We join a handful of past studies (e.g., Baloyra, 1979; Bratton, 1999; Coleman & Davis, 1976; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2010; Madsen, 1978; Seligson, 1980) in investigating efficacy and participation in a low-income non-democracy, where internal efficacy has a lower and more uneven starting point, and where government responsiveness is disproportionately directed toward ruling party affiliates. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to test whether political participation can be increased by attempting¹ to exogenously boost internal and external efficacy. While we do not dispute the idea that internal and external efficacy are distinct, the finding that the treatments did not interact to increase participation (additively or multiplicatively) suggests there may be an overall efficacy ceiling for political participation.

Finally, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores the effect of ICTs on various dimensions of democratization. The bulk of this work has sought to understand how citizens' political opinions and behavior are affected by the expansion of mass communication platforms—such as cable television, radio, and the Internet—that disseminate elite-sourced information to citizens in advanced democracies (Gentzkow, 2006) and low-income countries (Keefer & Khemani, 2014).² A smaller, but growing, body of work instead examines how the expansion of ICTs allows *citizens* to be sources of information by conveying political preferences (Blaschke et al., 2013) and grievances (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies, 2016), as well as reporting political violence (van der Wind & Humphreys, 2016) and corruption (Blair et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

A long-standing theme in the study of politics is the notion that political participation is hindered by collective action problems. One strand of the literature on political participation has thus focused on identifying observational factors (at the micro, meso, and macro levels) that motivate individuals to participate despite free rider incentives (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995).

Another strand of the literature has instead examined whether political participation may be increased by alleviating incentives to free ride through interventions that either raise the perceived benefit of participation (e.g., evoking a sense of civic duty) or reduce participation costs (e.g., assisting voter registration).³

There have been attempts to harness ICTs to further reduce the cost of mobilization (for recruiters) and grassroots participation (for citizens). In rich societies with a well-developed ICT infrastructure, past work has tested, for example, the relative efficacy of mobilization strategies that use phone, text messages, email, or social media (Davis, 1998), and has documented the growing utilization of ICTs to contact public officials (e.g., signing online petitions; Malhotra et al., 2011).

As ICT infrastructure expands to low-income countries, there has been a growing interest in harnessing cell phone and other technologies to catalyze political participation and democratization more broadly. Political participation in the developing world is often constrained by limited financial resources, low levels of education (including civic education), and limited development of traditional interest aggregators such as workers' unions. By facilitating cheap, immediate, and anonymous communication, cell phones have the potential to increase political engagement by reducing both the monetary and time costs of participation (Peña-López, 2016). However, recent studies examining mobile-based communication platforms report relatively low uptake rates (Blair et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2016).

One key reason why citizens in the developing world may choose not to use ICT communication platforms is that they tend to have a low sense of political efficacy. The concept of political efficacy implicitly assumes that extrinsic motivations, or instrumentality, underlie a decision to act in the political arena: citizens are more likely to be politically active if they believe their participation will bring about change (Campbell et al., 1954). In many developing countries, however, especially those suffering from high corruption and low political competition, citizens are naturally skeptical that their actions will make a difference (Lieberman, Posner, & Tsai, 2014). It thus follows that strengthening citizens' sense of efficacy could, in turn, increase political participation levels.

Political efficacy has two related, yet analytically distinct, dimensions: internal and external efficacy (Craig & Maggionto, 1982). *Internal efficacy* refers to beliefs about one's own ability to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics. Scholars have demonstrated that higher socioeconomic status (e.g., material resources, literacy) and membership in civic organizations are associated with higher internal efficacy (Verba, Burns, & Scholzman, 1997). In the developing world, citizens have overall lower levels of such resources. In particular, citizens have more limited access to

formal education of the kind that would imbue civic education and other skills that would enhance understanding and accessibility of the political system, and subsequently, efficacy to politically participate (Bleck, 2015).

Furthermore, some citizens may refrain from participating due to social barriers that dictate who should and should not be active in the public sphere. Gaps in one's sense of internal efficacy across population subgroups are thought to be larger in developing countries, which tend to be more hierarchical and traditional. Especially in rural areas, local hierarchies and traditional norms can strongly determine who may participate and to whom the system will be responsive (Tripp, 2012). For example, women and poor citizens tend to receive fewer investments in material and educational resources and are often viewed as having little role in politics. Participation gaps based on gender or socioeconomic status are thus relatively large in developing countries, in part because of such internal efficacy gaps (Isaksson, Kotsadam, & Nerman, 2014).

External efficacy refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to citizen demands (Niemi et al., 1991). Whereas internal efficacy pertains to citizens' assessments of their own *personal* ability to contribute meaningfully to the political process, external efficacy pertains to assessments of citizens' *shared* ability to elicit government responsiveness (Craig et al., 1990). Perceptions of government responsiveness depend on the extent to which the government allows citizens to exercise their voice, and whether it uses citizen input to inform policy priorities, which naturally varies according to the political context (Coleman & Davis, 1976). In rich liberal democracies, the context in which most studies of political efficacy and participation take place, government responsiveness is relatively higher—partially due to the institutionalization of quintessential interest aggregators such as workers' unions, business associations, and political parties.

By contrast, many developing countries, in Africa and beyond, have had a history of colonialism, followed by bouts of single-party rule, military dictatorships, civil wars, and rigged or failed elections. Such governments actively repressed (and many continue to repress) various forms of political participation. The advent of multiparty elections ushered in by the end of the Cold War has opened up opportunities to politically engage. However, such opportunities are heavily clustered around elections, leaving the many years in between elections with little contact between citizens and the government (Michelitch & Utych, 2015). More so, many of those interactions are characterized by clientelistic exchange rather than establishing government accountability for public service delivery (Wantchekon, 2003). In addition, citizens commonly lack information on public service delivery standards and government responsibilities, which further lowers expectations regarding government responsiveness (Gottlieb, 2016). Taken together, citizens across the developing world

are naturally skeptical that raising their voices—for example, by requesting improvements to vital public services—would make much of a difference (Madsen, 1978).⁴

Furthermore, a lack of genuine political competition can render the system more responsive to political “insiders” (ruling party supporters) than political “outsiders” (opposition party supporters; Coleman & Davis, 1976; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). Indeed, the modal regime type in the developing world is an electoral authoritarian regime in which some forms of elite contestation are allowed, but the incumbent’s grip on power is assured (Schedler, 2006). In such systems, ruling parties often punish areas that support the opposition (e.g., those areas receive fewer development funds from the central government; Weinstein, 2011) and render it almost impossible for opposition politicians to make headway in legislative processes (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Thus, external efficacy for voters represented by opposition party members tends to be lower than for those represented by ruling party members.⁵

Building on the political participation literature that underlines the importance of mobilizing strategies, in this study, we examine whether a local NGO can increase political participation—here, the utilization of a text-message platform in Uganda to report public service deficiencies—by using mobilization strategies that are explicitly designed to increase internal and external efficacy.

Study Context

This study involved partnering with a leading Ugandan NGO, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE). In 2013, ACODE launched the innovative “Get Involved!” text-message platform, which allows citizens to anonymously report public service delivery deficiencies to elected representatives via text. The experimental interventions are embedded in the context of this program. In this section, we discuss relevant details of this study context.

Ugandan District Government

Uganda offers a good context in which to test whether a local NGO can mobilize citizens to use a text-message-based political communication platform through appeals that are designed to improve generally low efficacy rates. Public service delivery in Uganda is poor (Wane & Martin, 2013), and political accountability institutions are relatively weak. The central government is responsible for formulating national policies and standards and, to a large extent, determines level of service provision through earmarked

transfers that make up the bulk of the districts' revenue base. Uganda's 112 district governments, the level of government directly below the central government, are responsible for crafting local policy, formulating integrated development plans based on local priorities and needs, and implementing, regulating, and monitoring public service delivery (Lambright, 2011).

District local governments are comprised of a civil service bureaucracy and an elected legislative body, the district council. District councils, comprised of approximately 15 elected councilors, are vested with the political and executive authority necessary to implement policy, including the powers to make laws in the form of district ordinances and bylaws (as long as they do not conflict with the constitution). Bureaucrats are chiefly responsible for implementing public services and projects according to the budget and work plan crafted annually in collaboration with the district's political arm and passed by the district council.

District councilors have four core areas of legally defined job duties: legislative (e.g., passing motions in plenary), attending lower level local government sessions (e.g., subcounty and village councils), interfacing with the electorate (e.g., being available to hear citizens and consult civil society groups), and monitoring public services (e.g., visiting schools to monitor whether legally defined service delivery standards are met). Therefore, councilors can affect public service delivery via several avenues in addition to approving the budget and work plan. They may play important roles through committee work, lobbying technocrats regarding targeted service delivery improvements, monitoring service providers, organizing communities to demand better services, and advocating on behalf of their constituents.

Councilors are elected to represent subcounties at the district level. In 2006, Uganda implemented a gender quota mandating that at least one third of councilors are female, in an effort to increase women's access to politics. To achieve this goal, "special woman" constituencies, in which only female candidates can compete, were overlaid on top of "regular" subcounty constituencies, such that special woman constituencies encompass between one and three subcounties, depending on the size of the population. Thus, citizens are represented by two councilors: a regular (usually male) councilor who represents a single subcounty and a female councilor who represents up to two additional subcounties. Both types of councilors are elected in first-past-the-post, single-member constituency elections.

Political Participation and Efficacy in Ugandan Districts

Current political participation and efficacy in Uganda is influenced by its political system and history. Following independence in 1962 and throughout

the Cold War period, Ugandans experienced authoritarian rule under Milton Obote, followed by military dictatorship under Idi Amin, both of whom largely repressed civic engagement. In 1986, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), led by Yoweri Museveni, came to power following a protracted civil war. Since then, Uganda has been characterized as an electoral authoritarian regime in which the ruling party allows multiparty competition (since 2005) but represses many opposition activities (Tripp, 2010).

On one hand, Uganda allows some forms of genuine, if incomplete, political contestation, common to many developing countries in Africa and beyond. For example, domestic and international observers consider national elections to be relatively free, and local elections are relatively competitive.⁶ On the other hand, Uganda has weak democratic institutions (a score of -1 in Polity IV scale) with a strong executive branch and a weak parliament. In addition, the government continues to significantly limit the activities of opposition parties, civil society advocacy groups, and the media (Tripp, 2010).

This history can explain, in part, why levels of political participation and efficacy in Uganda are generally considered to be low. In 2012, the authors conducted an original survey of more than 6,000 randomly selected citizens in 262 subcounties across 20 Ugandan districts.⁷ The data reveal that although Ugandans are (for the most part) relatively engaged at the village level, they do not articulate their interests and preferences to representatives at higher government levels, including the district government. For example, 40% of the citizens surveyed had never talked to their village chair; however, a much higher proportion had never directly engaged with the subcounty councilor (81%), district regular councilor (91%), or women councilor (93%).⁸ Relevant for this study, Ugandans rarely, if ever, report public service delivery deficiencies to a political actor at any level. For example, only 12% of respondents reported ever taking any action to help address provision problems in public health services. Traditionally marginalized populations, such as women and the poor, were found to be less likely to be engaged (Online Appendix Tables SI-2 and SI-3), which is consistent with past findings (Isaksson et al., 2014). Indeed, there is no formal reporting system for citizens to contact elected representatives.

Commensurately, internal efficacy is low, particularly among women and the poor (Online Appendix Tables SI-2 and SI-3).⁹ A reasonable proxy for internal efficacy in our survey is the expected influence that someone “like the respondent” has on elected representatives at the village, subcounty, and district levels. Whereas 59% of women report that they cannot influence the actions of the subcounty chairperson “at all,” the share is only 46% for men.¹⁰ These findings are consistent with the fact that the Ugandan political system has not been particularly responsive to women, especially at the local

government level, despite the introduction of gender quotas for elected representatives (Clayton, Josefsson, & Wang, 2014).

“Get Involved!” Texting Public Service Deficiencies to Politicians

Against the backdrop of persistently low levels of public service delivery, weak political accountability institutions, and weak political communication channels between citizens and district councilors, ACODE launched the “Get Involved!” program in 2013 in 20 Ugandan districts.¹¹ The program entailed implementing an innovative text-message platform that was designed to allow constituents to report service delivery problems to their elected representatives.¹² The platform allows citizens to contact their councilors by sending anonymous text messages to a short-code number, at no cost, in all major languages spoken in the study area.¹³ ACODE’s staff regularly logs into the platform and classifies messages thematically before forwarding them to the intended recipient. ACODE also compiles monthly reports for each councilor detailing the contents of the messages sent by constituents.

Information on the new text platform was disseminated at parish-level community meetings. These meetings, which were jointly designed by the research team and ACODE and conducted by ACODE staff, were intended to introduce the “Get Involved!” platform and train meeting attendees on its use. They also included civic education modules on Uganda’s public service delivery standards, the different national and local government mandates, and district officials’ roles and responsibilities to address citizens’ priorities and needs in service delivery. Meeting attendees were also (truthfully) informed that councilors were also being trained on using the system. Councilors were also fully informed and invited to all meetings in their constituency.

To maximize the platform’s impact, ACODE mobilized local opinion leaders to attend the meetings, targeting lower level government officials, religious leaders, public service providers (e.g., teachers, health workers), village committees (e.g., parent–teacher associations [PTAs]), and civil society organizations (e.g., women and youth groups). It was hoped that meeting attendees would disseminate information about the process to other community members. To that end, ACODE distributed fliers and posters to meeting attendees that included information on the new service and instructions on how to send text messages via the platform. Meeting attendees registered their name, gender, position, and phone number on sign-in sheets and gave their explicit consent to receive follow-up information from ACODE via text. These meeting attendees comprise this study’s experimental subject pool.

ACODE held 343 community meetings in 125 subcounties across Uganda, which were attended by more than 7,000 constituents. Aggregate attendance information is presented in Online Appendix Table SI-6. Although district councilors were invited to attend meetings in their constituency, only 22% of meetings were attended by councilors; 33% of regular councilors and 61% of special female councilors did not attend any meetings in their respective constituency.

After the community meetings, ACODE began sending attendees weekly text messages in their local language to increase uptake. The messages inquired whether specific public service delivery standards had been violated and encouraged recipients to report them using the text platform. A total of 20 weekly text-message blasts were sent by ACODE between February and August 2014, prompting citizens to consider problems in a wide range of public services such as health, education, and infrastructure.¹⁴ ACODE sent a total of 122,715 text messages to the meeting attendees during the study's 6-month period.

Experimental Design and Hypotheses

We implement two treatments in a 2×2 factorial design by adding language to the weekly baseline text-message blasts. The two treatments were designed to increase external and internal efficacy, respectively, given the concern that low levels of political participation are due to a low sense of efficacy in this context.

One way to increase citizens' sense of external efficacy is to send a credible signal of government responsiveness—for example, by notifying constituents that their elected representatives care about their preferences, priorities, and needs. Thus, in the first treatment, our NGO partner added language to the text stating that the district councilors (who are named in the message) wish to hear about any service delivery deficiencies from their constituents. We refer to this treatment as *Councilors' Encouragement* and hypothesize that constituents assigned to this treatment would be more likely to use the new text platform.

Hypothesis 1a (H_{1a}): *External efficacy:* adding politicians' encouragement (*Councilors' Encouragement* treatment) to the weekly mobilization messages will increase the likelihood that constituents will report service delivery deficiencies via the text-messaging platform.

Our second mobilization strategy aims to mitigate the problem of a low sense of internal efficacy. There are various reasons why citizens may not feel

(internally) efficacious; for example, they may believe they are not sufficiently informed, do not have the qualifications, or lack a sufficient understanding of politics to be effective in the political arena. Regardless of their source, *general* mobilization campaigns are unlikely to induce participation from citizens who might conclude that the invitation to act is directed at other, more efficacious, citizens rather than themselves (Grossman et al., 2016).

One way to increase internal efficacy is to personalize mobilization efforts. Personalization unambiguously signals that the mobilizer believes the targeted individual has the capacity to act and that his or her individual actions are meaningful. A closely related effect is that personalizing an invitation to participate induces a sense of agency over one's actions. In the context of our study, one simple, yet powerful, way to personalize text-message requests for political action is to address recipients by name (Haynes, Green, Gallagher, John, & Torgerson, 2013). We hypothesize that the appeal to contact one's local representative about service delivery problems will be more effective when the recipient's name is added to the body of the message. We refer to this treatment as *Citizen Name*.

Hypothesis 2a (H_{2a}): *Internal efficacy:* personalizing the weekly mobilization messages by adding citizens' names (*Citizen Name* treatment) will increase the likelihood that they will report service delivery deficiencies via the text-messaging platform.

Past observational studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between personalized mobilization requests and political participation (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999). Those studies suffer, however, from obvious selection problems: mobilizers tend to target the people they believe would be most susceptible to their mobilization efforts (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002).

We list two text-message blast examples sent to the community-meeting attendees, encouraging them to use the Get Involved! platform. The first example focuses on education, and the second focuses on access to water:

- Hello [**No name/Citizen Name**] are there more than 3 pupils per textbook in UPE? [**you should report/Hon. Councilor [Name] & Mrs. Councilor [Name] want to hear**] violations of legally defined standards at 7300.
- Hello [**No name/Citizen Name**] do you have to wait more than 30 minutes for water? [**you should report/Hon. Councilor [Name] & Mrs. Councilor [Name] want to hear**] violations of legally defined standards at 7300.

Because the baseline text-message blasts use relatively strong language to motivate political engagement, the treatment effects measure the marginal effect of small modifications above and beyond basic appeals to participate. Although the relatively strong appeal used in the baseline (control) condition reduces the likelihood of finding treatment effects, using such a control better isolates the effects of politician encouragement and personalizing mobilization requests than a pure control of receiving no text-message blasts.

Finally, we are also interested in the interaction of the two treatments. The previous literature has conceptualized these two types of efficacy as operating largely independently of one another, especially outside of advanced high-income democracies (e.g., Craig & Maggionto, 1982). Given that *Citizen Name* arguably increases citizens' sense of internal efficacy, while *Councilors' Encouragement* arguably increases external efficacy, we expect the two treatments to have additive or multiplicative effects.

Hypothesized Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

We posit heterogeneous treatment effects that will help uncover whether the treatments affect participation by elevating internal and external efficacy. Namely, we expect that less efficacious populations experience larger treatment effects than more efficacious populations. First, one's sense of external efficacy is largely a function of the political system. In a non-democratic context, external efficacy should be higher among political "insiders" as compared with "outsiders," because non-democratic governments tend to be more responsive to their core supporters than to oppositional areas. We thus expect that councilors' encouragement would be more effective at increasing participation for those living in opposition-led constituencies.

Hypothesis 1b (H_{1b}): *Heterogeneous effects: Councilors' Encouragement* treatment will have a greater effect on participation rates for citizens who are represented by opposition party members than for those represented by NRM councilors.

Second, although we hypothesized that the *Citizen Name* treatment would, on average, increase service deficiency reporting, we expect it to be more effective for citizens who have lower internal efficacy. We only have the data on meeting attendees from the registration sheets, which limits the subgroup analysis we can conduct. One prominent covariate available on the registration sheet, however, is gender. Since women in the study area are less efficacious than their male counterparts (Online Appendix Table SI-2), we

hypothesize that name personalization will be more effective at increasing women's likelihood to report service delivery problems via the system, as compared with men.

Hypothesis 2b (H_{2b}): *Heterogeneous effects:* personalizing the invitation to contact district councilors by using subjects' names will have a greater effect on participation rates for women than for men.

Data, Variables, and Estimation Strategy

The study's key dependent variable, (*Text*), is a binary indicator that is equal to 1 if subject i from district j sent at least one text message to her district councilors via the ICT platform after receiving ACODE's first text message blast, and 0 otherwise. Alternatively, we use a count variable that measures the total number of text messages subject i sent during the 6-month study period. ACODE began sending text-message blasts only after it had held all community meetings in all districts. The dependent variable only considers post-treatment text messages from meeting attendees (texts sent by meeting attendees after ACODE began sending its text-message blasts). We created a variable named *Engaged* to denote those who used the text platform after a community meeting and before receiving any text-message blasts and treated it as a pre-treatment covariate of interest.

In total, 345 meeting attendees sent at least one text message via the platform, representing a participation rate of about 5%. Out of those 345 users, 297 sent a single message, and the maximum number of messages from a single user was 20. Figure 1 provides information on the distribution of messages by district, demonstrating large inter-district variation.

We begin estimating the effect of the two treatment factors (*Citizen Name*, *Councilors' Encouragement*) on meeting attendees' participation by running the following base regression equation using ordinary least squares (OLS):

$$Text_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 T1 + \beta_2 T2 + \beta_3 T1 \times T2 + u_{ij}, \quad (1)$$

where T1 (*Citizen Name*) and T2 (*Councilors' Encouragement*) are the exogenous treatment variables defined above and u_{ij} is the error term. In the second model, we add district fixed effects (d_j), and in the third model, we instead add \mathbf{X} , a vector of individual- and councilor-level covariates. Individual-level controls include indicator variables for female and for a formal leadership position in one's community and an indicator measuring whether the individual sent a text message via the system after a community meeting but before ACODE began sending weekly text-message blasts.

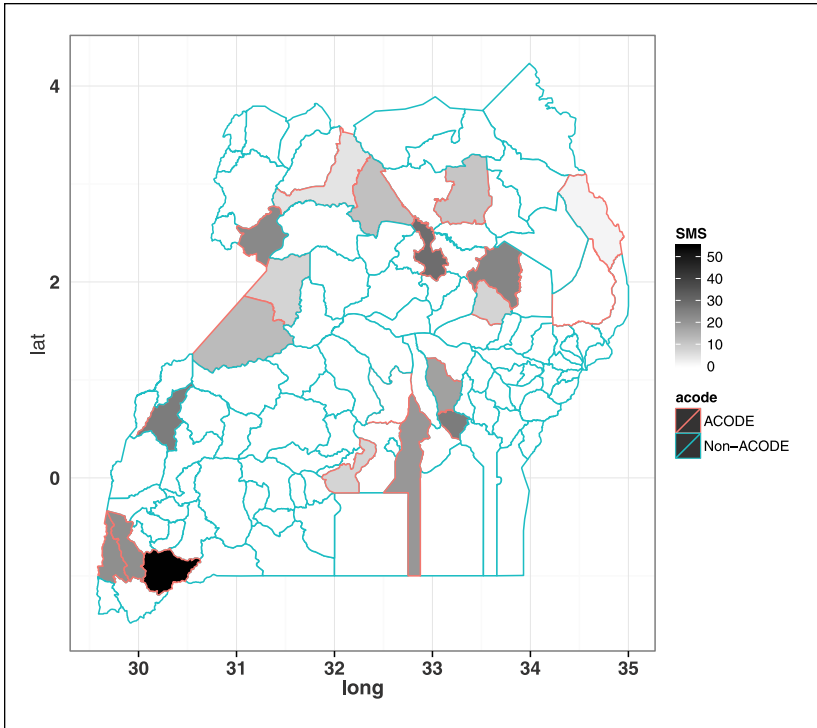


Figure 1. Total number of SMS by district.

Figure provides information on the number of text messages sent by meeting attendees by district during the study period. The mean number of messages per district is 17. SMS = short message service; ACODE = Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment.

Councilor-level covariates include partisanship and community-meeting attendance. Following Lin (2013), covariates enter the model with a full set of interactions with the treatment indicators. Finally, the fourth model specification includes district fixed effects, both individual- and councilor-level covariates and their interactions with the two treatments. In all models, we cluster standard errors at the subcounty level, which is the randomization unit. Table 1 provides summary statistics of all variables used in the analysis.

Implementation Challenges

We faced two challenges in the experiment's implementation. First, the randomization unit was intended to be the subcounty, which would apply to all parish-level community meetings within the subcounty.¹⁵ The rationale for

Table 1. Summary Statistics.

	Count	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variables					
Sent text (Binary)	7,232	0.050	0.219	0.000	1.000
Total texts sent (Continuous)	7,232	0.091	0.576	0.000	20.000
Individuals' covariates					
Female	7,149	0.288	0.453	0.000	1.000
Formal position	7,232	0.175	0.380	0.000	1.000
Engaged	7,232	0.019	0.136	0.000	1.000
Councilors' covariates					
Both NRM	7,232	0.587	0.492	0.000	1.000
Regular councilor attended meeting	6,738	0.269	0.443	0.000	1.000
Women councilor attended meeting	6,891	0.279	0.449	0.000	1.000

NRM = National Resistance Movement.

randomly assigning the treatment at a higher-than-individual level was to avoid possible spillover effects.

However, in a subset of subcounties, the treatment was erroneously assigned at the level of the *community meeting*. The reason, which we explain in greater detail in the online appendix (Section F), stems from the fact that ACODE staff used multiple spellings of a subcounty name on the handwritten registration forms across parish-level community meetings in 59 (out of 125) subcounties. Such spelling variations represent small differences in the order of two characters or usage of different vowels (e.g., “ADEKOKWOK and ADIKOKWOK,” “AGAGO T/C and AGAGO TC,” and “BUGANAGARI and BUGANGARI”), rather than a systematic cultural or historically motivated spelling difference. The handwritten community-meeting registration forms were digitized manually (whereby each row is a meeting attendee), before being appended into a single data set. We overlooked these slight differences in the spelling of a subcounty name across multiple community meetings. In other words, treatment was randomly assigned at the parish-level community meeting rather than the subcounty level in these 59 cases. In addition, within the 59 affected subcounties, treatment was randomly assigned at the registration form level in 17 community meetings because of different spellings of a subcounty name on different registration sheets within the same meeting.

Although the process by which a subcounty name was spelled differently is seemingly random, we perform several statistical checks to ensure that these different treatment randomization levels do not affect the findings. First, we alleviate a possible concern that subcounties that have had a uniform name spelling are somehow different from subcounties that

appeared in the randomization data set with multiple name spellings and that these differences may somehow be driving our results. We assemble a large set of subcounty characteristics and demonstrate that these are well balanced across the different “types” of subcounties (Online Appendix Table SI-26). Second, we drop the subcounties with multiple spellings and estimate the OLS model in the sample in which treatment randomization went as planned. We find that the results are robust (Online Appendix Table SI-28). Finally, we estimate the models using wild bootstrap clustered standard errors, which are more conservative when cluster sizes are uneven, and find that the results are almost identical to those obtained using OLS (Online Appendix Table SI-30). Given the seemingly random source, the statistical checks, and the large number of units of analysis, we believe this error is not driving any results.

We also faced a second implementation challenge: One of Uganda’s cell phone providers (MTN) briefly suspended access to the “Get Involved” platform. Thus, MTN users received fewer text-message blasts than users of other providers. We thus checked whether the mean number of messages individuals received from ACODE during the study period (17, range = 14–20) is balanced across treatment groups. We find that it is indeed balanced (Online Appendix Table SI-5), likely because MTN users are spread throughout the country. Furthermore, the study’s findings are robust to the inclusion and exclusion of a variable capturing the number of text messages that each subject received (Online Appendix Table SI-16). Thus, we conclude that there is no reason to believe that the temporary service suspension affected the study’s results.

Main Results

We report findings on the main effects of the two variants of weekly mobilizing text messages on the experimental subjects’ participation rate. The results are reported graphically for ease of presentation: dots represent point estimates, and surrounding lines represent 95% confidence intervals (see Online Appendix Section 4, for tabular results). The results reported in the text below are derived from models including district fixed effects with no additional controls.

We begin by testing Hypothesis H_{1a} ; that is, that citizens exposed to a credible signal that their representatives are interested in hearing from them are more likely to report service delivery problems via the text platform. The right-hand panel of Figure 2 shows the average marginal effect of the *Councilors’ Encouragement* treatment conditional on the other (*Citizen Name*) treatment. We find that this treatment has a positive and significant

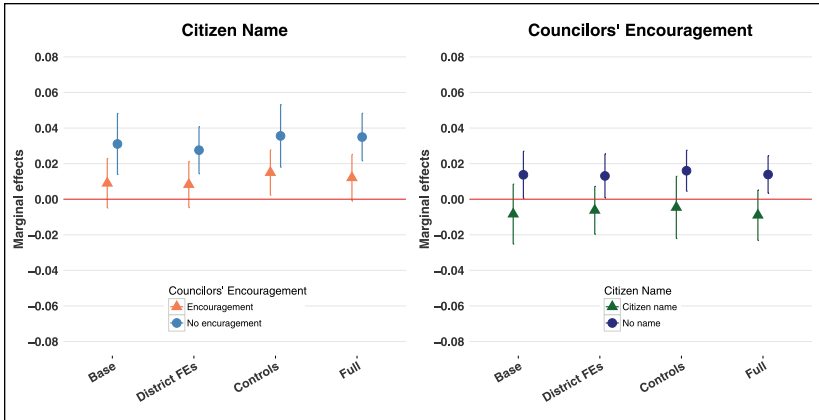


Figure 2. Main results: Average conditional marginal effects.

The figure shows the average conditional marginal effects derived from four OLS regressions models, described above. *Base* refers to Equation 1; the *District FEs* model adds district fixed effects to the base model; *Controls* adds individual and councilor covariates and their interactions with treatment indicators to the base model; and the *Full* model includes district fixed effects, both individual- and councilor-level covariates, and their interactions with the two treatments. FE = fixed effects.

effect, but only when the recipient’s name is not added to the weekly text-message blasts (1.3 percentage-point increase in the probability of reporting at least one complaint; p value = .085). This effect is substantial, considering that the base participation rate is 3.4% in the control group. Notably, adding *Councilors’ Encouragement* to the weekly text-message blasts has no effect when used in conjunction with the *Citizen Name* treatment (point estimate is -0.01 ; p value = .444).

We now turn to testing Hypothesis H_{2a} ; that is, that personalizing the weekly mobilization messages by adding citizens’ names will increase uptake. The left-hand panel of Figure 2 shows the average marginal effect of the *Citizen Name* treatment conditional on the *Councilors’ Encouragement* treatment. We find that using the citizen’s name, which was designed to mitigate low *internal* efficacy, increases the participation rate by 2.75 percentage points when the councilors’ encouragement is not mentioned (p value < .001), but only by 0.8 percentage points when the treatments are applied together, which is below standard significance levels (p value = .296).¹⁶

Figure 3 shows the predicted probabilities of contacting one’s elected councilor via the “Get Involved!” system for each of the four treatment groups. The predicted value of the dependent variable for the *Citizen Name* treatment group is 6.4%, equivalent to an 88% increase from the base

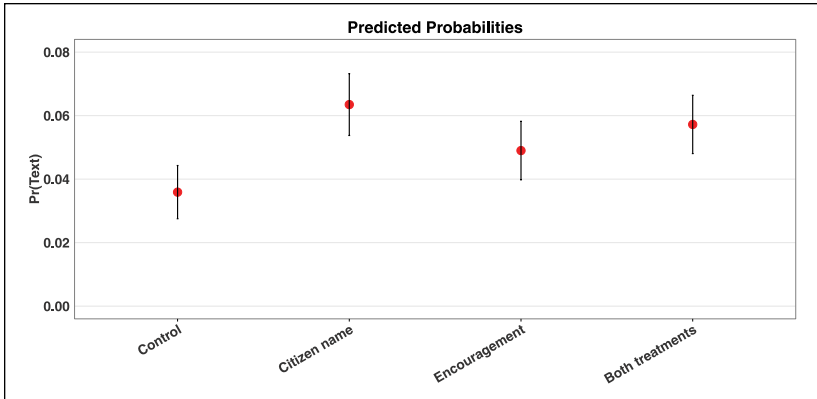


Figure 3. Main results: Predicted probabilities.

Predicted probabilities of the four treatment groups from a base model with no controls, but that includes district fixed effects.

participation rate of 3.4%. The predicted value for the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment group is 4.9%, equivalent to a 44% increase from the base rate. When both treatments are added to the basic weekly text-message blasts, the predicted probability of contacting one's elected councilor is 5.7%, equivalent to a 68% increase from the base participation rate.

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

We now examine two testable implications of the theoretical framework formalized in Hypotheses H_{1b} and H_{2b} regarding heterogeneous treatment effects.

Partisanship of Elected Representatives

We begin by testing Hypothesis H_{1b} : that sending a credible signal regarding the responsiveness of elected district councilors should have a greater effect on uptake in opposition areas, where past work has shown that citizens have lower external efficacy. We do so by analyzing the effect of the two treatments as a function of the district councilors' party affiliation. Specifically, we compare uptake by treatment status for constituents whose councilors caucus with Uganda's ruling party (NRM) and those whose councilors caucus with opposition parties. By contrast, we do not expect the effect of the treatment aimed at increasing internal efficacy (*Citizen Name*) to be influenced by councilors' party affiliations.

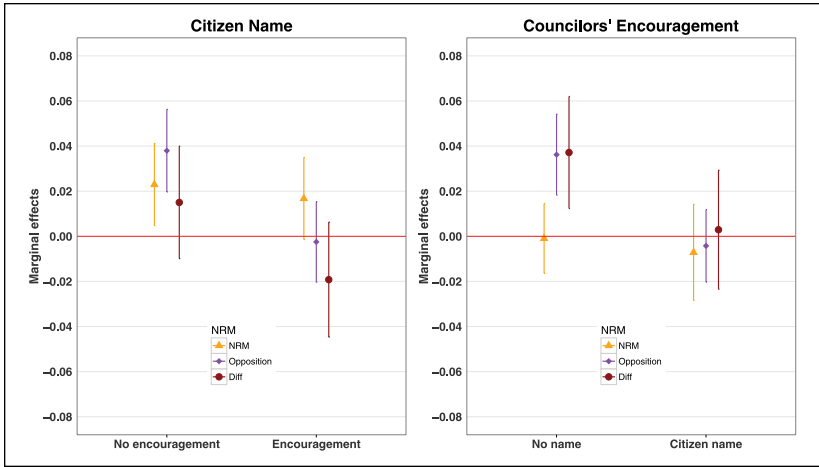


Figure 4. Average conditional marginal effects of the four treatment groups by councilors' party affiliation (derived from a base model with no controls, but that includes district fixed effects). NRM = National Resistance Movement.

Average conditional marginal effects graphs are reported in Figures 4 and 5. As is shown in Figure 5, in the control condition—when neither the citizen's name nor the councilors' encouragement is added to the weekly text-message blasts—participation rates in NRM-controlled areas (4.6%) are more than 2 times larger than in opposition-controlled constituencies (1.9%). As hypothesized, the effect of the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment is large, positive, and significant; Figure 4, right-hand panel), but only for those represented by opposition councilors (+3.6 percentage points, p value = .001).

By contrast, the marginal effect of *Councilors' Encouragement* is effectively zero for those represented by NRM councilors (p value = .920). Importantly, as the right-hand panel of Figure 5 shows, the large partisanship-based participation gap we identify in the control condition is all but eliminated in treatment groups that include councilors' encouragement. We also find that personalizing the mobilization request has a positive significant effect irrespective of the party affiliation of constituents' elected representatives, at least when applied without the councilors' encouragement. However, this conditional marginal effect is slightly larger in opposition-controlled constituencies (+3.8 percentage points, p value = .001) than in NRM-controlled constituencies (+2.3 percentage points, p value = .040), though this 1.5-percentage-point difference is not significant (p value = .3221).

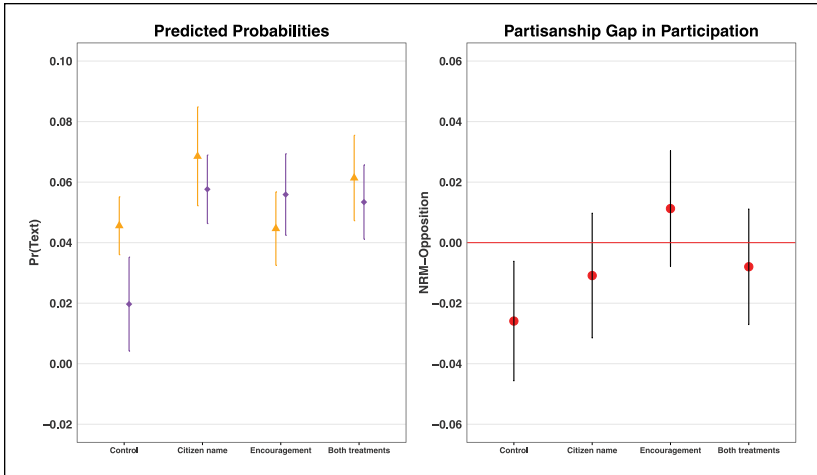


Figure 5. Treatment effects conditional on partisanship.

The left-hand panel shows the predicted probabilities of texting one's councilor by treatment and councilors' party affiliation. The right-hand panel shows the participation gap by councilors' party affiliation for each of the four treatment groups. Both are derived from a base model with district fixed effects and no controls. NRM = National Resistance Movement.

Constituent Gender

We now test Hypothesis H_{1b} : That the average marginal effects of personalizing the mobilization request (*Citizen Name*) are larger for traditionally marginalized populations such as women. Average conditional marginal effects by gender as well as predicted probabilities from base models with no controls are reported in Figures 6 and 7. Given that women are traditionally marginalized from politics and commensurately less efficacious in this context, it is normatively important to discover whether the gender gap in participation might be addressed through mobilization strategies by local NGOs.

In the pure control group, we find that female citizens are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to contact their elected representatives. While 4.1% of males reported service delivery problems in the control group, only 2% of females from this group chose to contact their elected officials using the Get Involved! platform (p value = .007). Focusing on the effect of personalizing the mobilization request (*Citizen Name* treatment, Figure 6, left-hand panel), we find that the average conditional marginal effect of adding citizens' names alone is higher for female constituents (+4 percentage points) than for males (+2.3 percentage points). Although the 1.7 [−0.9, −4.3] percentage-point difference in the marginal effects of *Citizen Name* falls slightly

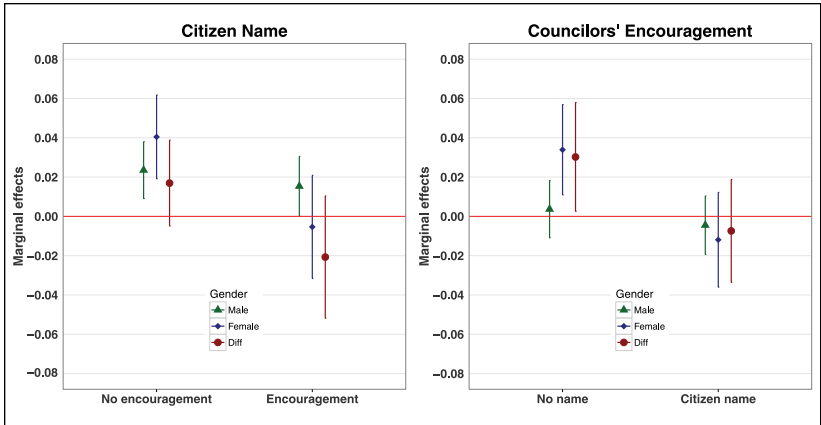


Figure 6. Average conditional marginal effects of the four treatment groups by gender (derived from a base model with no controls, but that includes district fixed effects).

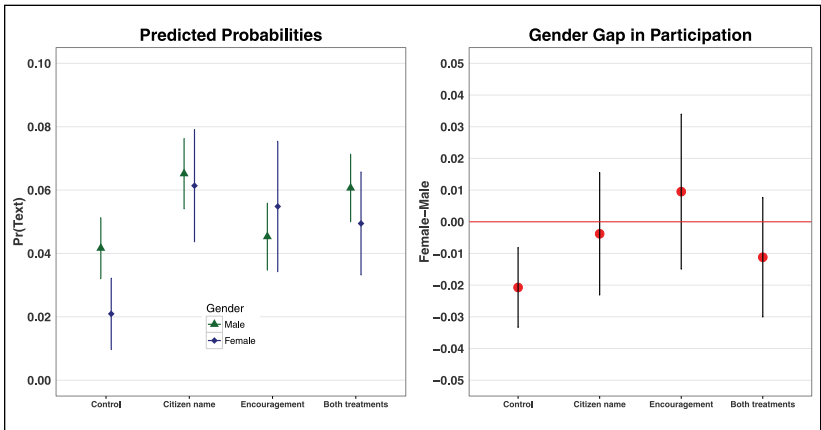


Figure 7. Treatment effects conditional on gender.

The left-hand panel shows the predicted probability of texting one’s councilor by treatment and gender. The right-hand panel shows the gender-based participation gap for each of the four treatment groups. Both panels are derived from a base model with district fixed effects and no controls.

below significance (p value = .190), the right-hand panel of Figure 7, which plots the gender gaps in participation, demonstrates that it all but eliminates the gender gap we observe in the baseline (control) condition.

Turning to the average conditional marginal effects of the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment, we again find a clear divergence between male and female respondents (Figure 6, right-hand panel). While the average conditional marginal effect of *Councilors' Encouragement* for females is large and significant (+3.4 percentage points, p value = .016), it is effectively zero for males (+0.4%; p value = .679); this difference of 3.1 percentage points in marginal effects is itself significant at the 90% confidence level (p value = .073). The right panel of Figure 7 shows that this mobilization strategy also eliminates the gender gap in participation. This finding is consistent with the idea that Ugandan politics is less responsive to women and women's issues (Clayton et al., 2014).

Robustness Checks

To test the robustness of the results, we implemented several checks and alternative model specifications. We briefly describe these checks here, relegating results in tabular form as well as more detailed discussions to the online appendix. First, we have uneven cluster sizes. Even if the cluster number is high (here 125 subcounties), unbalanced cluster sizes could lead to biased standard errors and over-rejection of the null hypothesis. We thus follow the procedure proposed by Cameron, Gelbach, and Miller (2008) and estimate regressions using wild-bootstrapped standard errors. All core results remain significant (Online Appendix Tables SI-29 and SI-30).

Second, as demonstrated in Figure 2, the study's main results are insensitive to the inclusion of district fixed effects as well as individual and councilors' covariates (Online Appendix Table SI-12), or to logit regressions instead of OLS (Online Appendix Section E.5). Third, the results are robust to different dependent variable specifications; for example, using a continuous dependent variable rather than a binary indicator (Online Appendix Table SI-20) or dropping messages that are merely "Yes" or "No" responses to the questions posed in the weekly text-message blasts (Online Appendix Table SI-21). Fourth, the findings are robust to controlling for whether citizens used the platform after the community meeting but before ACODE began sending weekly text-message blasts (Online Appendix Table SI-17) and to the inclusion of an additional control variable that accounts for the number of blast messages received by the citizen (Online Appendix Table SI-15).

Discussion

The two experimental interventions examined in this article—the *Citizen Name* and the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment—added onto mobilizing

text-message blasts effectively increased citizens' rate of reporting public service delivery deficiencies to politicians via a text-message platform. These findings contribute to an active debate about the utility of text-message mobilization for political participation (Dale & Strauss, 2009; Malhotra et al., 2011), especially because we demonstrate that even small variations in the text-message language can significantly affect rates of political participation.

Encouragingly, the treatments closed participation gaps in the baseline condition between more and less efficacious subpopulations. The *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment (designed to increase external efficacy) increased participation by citizens represented by opposition party councilors to a rate that is comparable with citizens represented by ruling party councilors. The *Citizen Name* treatment (designed to increase internal efficacy) increased participation by women compared with that of men. Interestingly, we also find that the *Councilors' Encouragement* treatment also had a greater effect on women than on men. This result is consistent with scholarship showing the Ugandan political system to be less responsive to women and women's issues (Clayton et al., 2014; Tripp, 2012), which could certainly lower women's perceptions of system responsiveness and therefore their sense of external efficacy. Taken together, these findings are normatively important as they point toward strategies allowing NGOs to mobilize traditionally less efficacious populations to participate in politics at rates that are on par with their more efficacious counterparts.

One study limitation is that the data are limited to behavioral outcomes and covariates of meeting attendees from the meeting registration sheets. No survey exists in which we could have conducted manipulation tests. Although we do not have direct quantitative evidence that the treatments affected political participation through internal and external efficacy rather than through other possible pathways, the core study findings are less consistent with other potential mechanisms through which the treatments might operate.

We briefly consider alternative mechanisms. First, it could reasonably be argued that the *Citizen Name* treatment is effective because it grabs recipients' attention by breaking through the clutter of messages that cell phone owners receive. However, we do not know of a theory that suggests that attention grabbing would be more effective for citizens represented by opposition versus ruling party politicians or women over men. Second, feelings of deference or compulsion due to fear of punishment may be another possible mechanism to consider, especially given the non-democratic nature of Uganda's political system. However, the strongest deference-provoking language was arguably used in the *control* group, where weekly text-message blasts began with the phrase "*you should report.*" More so, ACODE facilitators repeatedly stressed (and demonstrated in practice) to attendees in all

community meetings that incoming text messages were anonymized by the platform to avoid such feelings.

We turn to briefly discuss avenues for future research. The fact that ACODE's mobilization strategies increased citizen uptake raises the question of whether the text-message platform, or perhaps the number or content of the texts, ultimately affected politician behavior and/or service delivery. Access to the text platform as a whole was randomly assigned to half of the councilors across the 20 districts in which ACODE operates, allowing for causal identification. Preliminary findings suggest that access to the "Get Involved!" platform did not affect councilors' performance in their legally defined duties (e.g., legislative duties, contact with the electorate, monitoring public services, lower level local government participation) or budget spending on service delivery and infrastructure improvements. However, in a survey of close to 200 councilors who participated in the "Get Involved!" program, close to half (47%) of respondents reported that they regularly used the information culled from citizens' text messages to do their jobs; many specifically named their legislative duties. We have therefore embarked on a follow-up project in which we have collected (and are currently coding) plenary session and committee meeting minutes to explore whether treated councilors are responsive to constituents' complaints.

Interestingly, combining both treatments did not produce additive or multiplicative effects. Given that previous research has long demonstrated that external and internal efficacy are two separate dimensions that affect political participation independently (e.g., Balch, 1974; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Craig et al., 1990), this result is surprising. Although we do not wish to dispute the idea that internal and external political efficacy are analytically distinct, there may be an overall efficacy ceiling affecting political participation, which can be met by either of the dimensions. If an overall efficacy ceiling for political participation exists, it may have been met by the stronger of the two treatments, and the first treatment to appear in the text—the *Citizen Name* treatment. Future work should further investigate the possibility of an overall efficacy ceiling for political participation.

Finally, the fact that ACODE recruited (to the most part, but not exclusively) local opinion leaders to the community meetings raises questions regarding the external validity of these results to a more representative sample. On one hand, this study's subject pool is likely to be more politically efficacious than the average Ugandan villager. There might, therefore, be an overall downward bias compared with a more representative sample, given that the treatments have shown to be more effective for less efficacious citizens. On the other hand, the study results could reflect an upward bias if citizens must meet a certain threshold of engagement or socioeconomic status

(correlated with formal and informal leadership positions) to use a cell phone and respond to mobilization efforts. Continuing to test mobilization strategy effectiveness in text-message platform participation among different subpopulations is an important avenue for future work, given the low uptake found in many studies with different types of samples (Blair et al., 2015; Blaschke et al., 2013; Marathe et al., 2016; van der Wind & Humphreys, 2016).

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that citizens' participation in a text-message platform to report public service deficiencies to elected district-level representatives in Uganda *increased* as a result of two strategies modifying mobilizing text-message blasts. The weekly blasts inquired whether a service delivery standard had been violated and encouraged citizens to report it over a new text-message platform. The first strategy entailed adding the citizen's name to personalize the message and thereby increase subjects' sense of internal efficacy. The second strategy entailed adding an encouragement that one's elected representatives wish to hear about public service deficiencies to raise expectations of system responsiveness and thereby increase subjects' sense of external efficacy. Both treatments, when applied alone, have relatively large, positive, and significant effects on participation rates in reporting public service deficiencies. We find no additive or multiplicative effect when the two treatments are applied together, perhaps due to an overall efficacy ceiling reached by the citizen's name intervention, which was the stronger of the two interventions and the one that came first in the weekly texts.

Furthermore, we find that both treatments were more effective for traditionally less efficacious populations. The elected representatives' encouragement closed the gap in participation between citizens represented by opposition versus ruling party representatives, which is consistent with the idea that those represented by opposition party members, a less participatory and *externally* efficacious group in electoral authoritarian regimes (Coleman & Davis, 1976), would be more responsive to *external* efficacy-boosting mobilization messages. In a parallel fashion, the name personalization closed the gender gap in participation, consistent with the idea that women, a less participatory and *internally* efficacious group, would be more responsive to *internal* efficacy-boosting mobilization messages. The *Councillors' Encouragement* treatment also closed the gender gap, however, which was not a hypothesized result. Given that Uganda's political system tends to be less responsive to women (Clayton et al., 2014), this result is consistent with our contention that this treatment is successful at mitigating low levels of external efficacy.

These results contribute to debates about the extent to which cell phones and other ICT innovations may be harnessed to increase political participation and other aspects of democratization and development (Peña-López, 2016). Although ICTs lower political participation costs, they can be ineffective if citizens do not anticipate meaningful benefits from taking political action (Lieberman et al., 2014). Given the recent history of repression of citizens' political participation in much of the developing world, low political efficacy in government responsiveness is likely to continue plaguing the uptake of such technologies. Of course, low government responsiveness and low levels of political participation are mutually reinforcing. Researchers and policymakers should continue to investigate ways to encourage government responsiveness through mobilization strategies to increase citizen political participation (e.g., Gottlieb, 2016), especially for marginalized groups (Tripp, 2012). In particular, we underscore the importance of discovering how to increase political participation that occurs *between* rather than *around* elections, when legislation and public service implementation take place and elected representatives feel little accountability pressure from citizens to perform in delivering vital public services promised around campaign time (Lindberg, 2010).

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank our partners at Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), in particular Phoebe Atkunde, who led the implementation of the Get Involved! program; our project managers Christine Goldrick, Ana Garcia Hernandez, and Austin Walker; and intern Lindsay van Landeghem. The Democratic Governance Facility made funding for this project possible. This study received institutional review board approval through Innovation Poverty Action (IPA) and research permits through The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Although the treatments were designed to improve efficacy, we use the term *attempt* in the absence of a quantitative manipulation check, as discussed further below.
2. Even more broadly, this study contributes to a growing development literature that explores whether text messages affect behaviors such as increasing savings

- (Karlan, McConnell, Mullainathan, & Zinman, 2016), paying fines (Haynes, Green, Gallagher, John, & Torgerson, 2013), conserving energy (Gleerup, Larsen, Leth-Petersen, & Togeby, 2010), or reducing smoking (Free et al., 2011).
3. Within this literature, GOTV interventions are arguably the most well studied, having compared the relative effects, and cost-effectiveness, of large and small variations across many recruitment techniques (Green & Gerber, 2015).
 4. Where government responsiveness is low, citizens may reasonably believe that “ordinary” (nonviolent) forms of political participation are futile, and disengage from politics (Croke, Grossman, Larreguy, & Marshall, 2016), or instead engage in violent political behavior (Campante & Chor, 2012).
 5. Even in competitive democracies, citizens who support the losing, or opposition, party have been found to have less external efficacy than those supporting the ruling, or winning, party; see, for example, Clarke and Acock (1989).
 6. For example, only 13% of district chairman incumbents remained in their seat after Uganda’s 2011 local elections.
 7. We provide additional information on the survey in the Online Appendix Section B.
 8. More so, only 2% of respondents wrote a letter to their district councilor in the past 12 months, and only 3% tried contacting their councilor via text or email. Ugandans are also unaccustomed to attempting to inform their elected representatives indirectly; for example, only 8% of respondents have ever called a radio talk show or wrote a letter to a local newspaper (Online Appendix Table SI-1).
 9. Unfortunately, the survey does not measure external efficacy, nor do other public opinion surveys in Uganda, to our knowledge.
 10. The share of female respondents who report they cannot influence the behavior of the village chairperson “at all” is 30% compared with 18% for male respondents.
 11. These include Amuru, Amuria, Buliisa, Gulu, Hoima, Jinja, Kamuli, Luwero, Mpigi, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, Nebbi, Ntungamo, Rukungiri, Soroti, Mukono, Kabarole, Lira, Kanungu, and Agago.
 12. The platform has been programmed and maintained by <http://www.dsmagic.com/>; Digital Solutions, a Ugandan company.
 13. Luganda, Runyankole, Ateso, Acholi, Madi, Lubra, Karamanjogo, Swahili, and English.
 14. A complete list of weekly “blast” messages is provided in Online Appendix Table SI-8.
 15. In Uganda, several nearby parishes form a subcounty, and a parish is comprised of three to ten nearby villages.
 16. The effect of *Citizen Name* is significant when councilors’ encouragement is added to the weekly text-message blasts only when controlling for covariates, as the left-hand panel of Figure 2 makes clear.

References

- Andrabi, T., Das, J., & Khwaja, A. I. (2015). *Report cards: The impact of providing school and child test scores on educational markets* (World Bank Policy

- Research Working Paper No. 7226). Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2610916
- Arceneaux, K., & Nickerson, D. W. (2009). Who is mobilized to vote? A re-analysis of 11 field experiments. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53, 1-16.
- Balch, G. I. (1974). Multiple indicators in survey research: The concept "sense of political efficacy." *Political Methodology*, 1, 1-43.
- Baloyra, E. A. (1979). Criticism, cynicism, and political evaluation: A Venezuelan example. *American Political Science Review*, 73, 987-1002.
- Banerjee, A. V., Banerji, R., Duflo, E., Glennerster, R., & Khemani, S. (2010). Pitfalls of participatory programs: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in education in India. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2, 1-30.
- Banerjee, A. V., Cole, S., Duflo, E., & Linden, L. (2007). Remedying education: Evidence from two randomized experiments in India. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122, 1235-1264.
- Barr, A., Packard, T., & Serra, D. (2014). Participatory accountability and collective action: Experimental evidence from Albania. *European Economic Review*, 68, 250-269.
- Bjorkman, M., & Svensson, J. (2009). Power to the people: Evidence from a randomized field experiment on community-based monitoring in Uganda. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124, 735-769.
- Blair, G., Littman, R., & Paluck, E. L. (2015). *Inciting action against corruption in Nigeria*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Blaschke, S., Carroll, P., Chaves, D. R., Findley, M., Gleave, M., Morello, R., & Nielson, D. (2013, February). *Extrinsic, intrinsic, and social incentives for UNICEF's crowdsourcing development information in Uganda: A field experiment*. 6th Annual Conference on the Political Economy of International Organizations, Universities of Mannheim and Heidelberg, Germany.
- Bleck, J. (2015). *Education and empowered citizenship in Mali*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Brady, H. E., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (1999). Prospecting for participants: Rational expectations and the recruitment of political activists. *American Political Science Review*, 93, 153-168.
- Bratton, M. (1999). Political participation in a new democracy: Institutional considerations from Zambia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 32, 549-588.
- Cameron, A. C., Gelbach, J. B., & Miller, D. L. (2008). Bootstrap-based improvements for inference with clustered errors. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 90, 414-427.
- Campante, F. R., & Chor, D. (2012). Why was the Arab world poised for revolution? Schooling, economic opportunities, and the Arab Spring. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26, 167-187.
- Campbell, A., Gurin, G., & Miller, W. E. (1954). *The voter decides*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.
- Chaudhury, N., Hammer, J., Kremer, M., Muralidharan, K., & Rogers, F. H. (2006). Missing in action: Teacher and health worker absence in developing countries. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(1), 91-116.

- Clarke, H. D., & Acock, A. C. (1989). National elections and political attitudes: The case of political efficacy. *British Journal of Political Science*, *19*, 551-562.
- Clayton, A., Josefsson, C., & Wang, V. (2014). Present without presence? Gender, quotas and debate recognition in the Ugandan parliament. *Representation*, *50*, 379-392.
- Coleman, K. M., & Davis, C. L. (1976). The structural context of politics and dimensions of regime performance: Their importance for the comparative study of political efficacy. *Comparative Political Studies*, *9*, 189-206.
- Craig, S. C., & Maggiotto, M. A. (1982). Measuring political efficacy. *Political Methodology*, *8*, 85-109.
- Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior*, *12*, 289-314.
- Croke, K., Grossman, G., Larreguy, H. A., & Marshall, J. (2016). Deliberate disengagement: How education decreases political participation in electoral authoritarian regimes. *American Political Science Review*, *110*, 579-600.
- Dale, A., & Strauss, A. (2009). Don't forget to vote: Text message reminders as a mobilization tool. *American Journal of Political Science*, *53*, 787-804.
- Davis, R. (1998). *The web of politics: The Internet's impact on the American political system*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Finkel, S. E. (1985). Reciprocal effects of participation and political efficacy: A panel analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, *29*, 891-913.
- Free, C., Knight, R., Robertson, S., Whittaker, R., Edwards, P., Zhou, W., . . . Roberts, I. (2011). Smoking cessation support delivered via mobile phone text messaging (txt2stop): A single-blind, randomised trial. *The Lancet*, *378*, 49-55.
- Gentzkow, M. (2006). Television and voter turnout. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *9*, 931-972.
- Gleerup, M., Larsen, A., Leth-Petersen, S., & Togeby, M. (2010). The effect of feedback by text message (SMS) and email on household electricity consumption: Experimental evidence. *Energy Journal*, *31*, 113-132.
- Gottlieb, J. (2016). Greater expectations? A field experiment to improve accountability in Mali. *American Journal of Political Science*, *60*, 143-157.
- Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Grossman, G., Humphreys, M., & Sacramone-Lutz, G. (2014). "I wld like u WMP to extend electricity 2 our village": On Information Technology and Interest Articulation. *American Political Science Review*, *108*, 688-705.
- Grossman, G., Humphreys, M., & Sacramone-Lutz, G. (2016, June). *Information technology and political engagement: Mixed evidence from Uganda*. Paper presented at the European Political Science Association Annual Conference, at Brussels, Belgium.
- Haynes, L. C., Green, D. P., Gallagher, R., John, P., & Torgerson, D. J. (2013). Collection of delinquent fines: An adaptive randomized trial to assess the effectiveness of alternative text messages. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *32*, 718-730.
- Isaksson, A.-S., Kotsadam, A., & Nerman, M. (2014). The gender gap in African political participation: Testing theories of individual and contextual determinants. *Journal of Development Studies*, *50*, 302-318.

- Karlan, D., McConnell, M., Mullainathan, S., & Zinman, J. (2016). Getting to the top of mind: How reminders increase saving. *Management Science*. Advance online publication.
- Karp, J. A., & Banducci, S. A. (2008). Political efficacy and participation in twenty seven democracies: How electoral systems shape political behaviour. *British Journal of Political Science*, 38, 311-334.
- Keefer, P., & Khemani, S. (2014). Mass media and public education: The effects of access to community radio in Benin. *Journal of Development Economics*, 109, 57-72.
- Khemani, S. (2007). Can information campaigns overcome political obstacles to serving the poor? In S. Devarajan & I. Widlund (Eds.), *The politics of service delivery in democracies—Better access for the poor* (pp. 56-69). Washington, DC: Expert Group on Development Issues.
- Kosack, S., & Fung, A. (2014). Does transparency improve governance? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17, 65-87.
- Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G. M. S. (2011). Who votes in Africa? An examination of electoral participation in 10 African countries. *Party Politics*, 17, 767-799. doi:10.1177/1354068810376779
- Lambright, G. M. S. (2011). *Decentralization in Uganda: Explaining successes and failures in local governance*. Boulder, CO: FirstForumPress.
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the cold war*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lieberman, E. S., Posner, D. N., & Tsai, L. L. (2014). Does information lead to more active citizenship? Evidence from an education intervention in rural Kenya. *World Development*, 60, 69-83.
- Lin, W. (2013). Agnostic notes on regression adjustments to experimental data: Reexamining Freedman's critique. *The Annals of Applied Statistics*, 7, 295-318.
- Lindberg, S. (2010). What accountability pressures do MPs in Africa face and how do they respond? Evidence from Ghana. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48, 117-142.
- Madsen, D. (1978). A structural approach to the explanation of political efficacy levels under democratic regimes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 22, 867-883.
- Malhotra, N., Michelson, M. R., Rogers, T., & Valenzuela, A. A. (2011). Text messages as mobilization tools: The conditional effect of habitual voting and election salience. *American Politics Research*, 39, 664-681.
- Marathe, M., O'Neill, J., Pain, P., & Thies, W. (2016). ICT-enabled grievance redressal in Central India: A comparative analysis. In *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development* (p. 4). Ann Arbor, MI: ACM Press.
- Michelitch, K., & Utych, S. (2015). *Electoral cycle fluctuations in partisanship salience: Global evidence from 86 countries* (African Studies Association Conference Paper). Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B359WuuooIBfd0pEYjdFc2M4TnM/view>
- Niemi, R. G., Craig, S. C., & Mattei, F. (1991). Measuring internal political efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study. *American Political Science Review*, 85, 1407-1413.

- Olken, B. A. (2007). Monitoring corruption: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia. *Journal of Political Economy*, 115, 200-249.
- Peña-López, I. (2016). *World development report 2016: Digital dividends*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Rezaee, A., Hasanain, A., & Khan, Y. (2015). *Crowdsourcing government accountability: Experimental evidence from Pakistan*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Rosenstone, S. J., & Hansen, J. M. (2002). *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America* (Longman Classics edition). Longman Publishing Group.
- Ross, M. (2006). Is democracy good for the poor? *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 860-874.
- Schedler, A. (2006). *Electoral authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Seligson, M. A. (1980). Trust, efficacy and modes of political participation: A study of Costa Rican peasants. *British Journal of Political Science*, 10, 75-98.
- Tripp, A. M. (2010). *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Tripp, A. M. (2012). *Women and politics in Uganda*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- van der Wind, P., & Humphreys, M. (2016). Crowdseeding in Eastern Congo: Using cell phones to collect conflict events data in real time. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 60, 748-781.
- Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 1051-1072.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics* (Vol. 4). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wane, W., & Martin, G. H. (2013). *Education and health services in Uganda: Data for results and accountability* (Technical report). Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Benin. *World Politics*, 55, 399-422.
- Weinstein, L. (2011). The politics of government expenditures in Tanzania, 1999–2007. *African Studies Review*, 54, 33-57.

Author Biographies

Guy Grossman is an assistant professor at the political science department at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Kristin Michelitch is an assistant professor at the political science department at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

Marta Santamaria is a graduate student at the Department of Economics and Business at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain.