

Discussion of
*“Good Politicians: Experimental Evidence on Motivations for
Political Candidacy and Government Performance”*

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Motivation: How can we incentive “good” politicians to enter politics?

This paper: study the role of information (salience of non-pecuniary incentives) in political selection

- ▶ Field Experiment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
 - ▶ **Critical Juncture:** The 2015 local government reform
 - ▶ Electing village councils for the **first time**
 - ▶ Randomly sample **9,310** individuals across **192** villages
- ▶ X = Informational treatments at the village level
 - ▶ Encouraging citizens to run
 - ▶ Salience of **personal** or **social** benefits and **neutral** info
 - ▶ Exploring intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to run
 - ▶ **One-on-One** meetings, **public** meetings, or both
- ▶ Y = candidacy, election, policy, citizen satisfaction



Results in “a nutshell”

1. Decision to run for office

- ▶ social benefits vs neutral info: $+1pp$; private benefits vs neutral info: $-0.9pp$
- ▶ social benefits vs private benefits: $+1.8pp$ (**86%** w.r.t private mean!!!)

2. Election probability

- ▶ social benefits vs neutral info: $+0.5pp$; private benefits vs neutral info: $-0.7pp$
- ▶ social benefits vs private benefits: $+1.2pp$ (**120%** w.r.t private mean!!!)

3. Policy alignment with citizens' preferences – also citizens' satisfaction and trust

- ▶ social benefits vs neutral info: gap $\downarrow 7.04$; private benefits vs neutral info: $\uparrow 2.36$
- ▶ social benefits vs private benefits: policy gap $\downarrow 9.4$ (**13.4%** w.r.t private mean!!!)

Crucially: Results driven by **public meetings** not by **one-on-ones**, largest when both

Assessment and Contributions

- ▶ Super interesting, well-written, and refreshing paper: plenty of food for thought
 - ▶ I commend the authors for such an impressive project and fieldwork effort
- ▶ Relevant question and extremely well-thought chain of outcomes
- ▶ **Main contributions** (in my view)
 - ▶ If not the first, definitely part of the very nascent literature on **who become a politician** in a developing country setting
 - ▶ Definitely the first one looking at the whole chain of downstream outcomes, starting with the selection
- ▶ Made me consider some additional questions. I turn to them next.

1. Why did this intervention work so well?

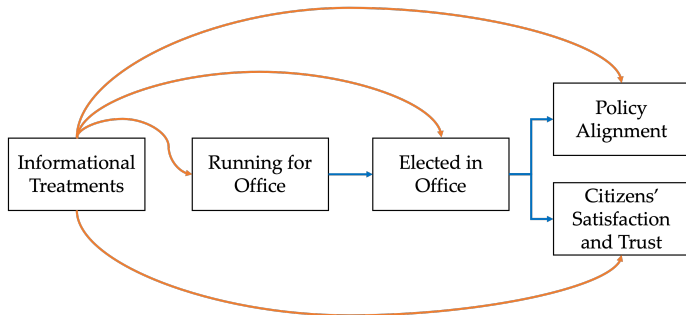
Back to the question: Why do we not usually attract “good” politicians?

- ▶ **Optimistic view** – Citizens’ Prior beliefs about politics and information asymmetries on the benefits of office requires a *refresher* in the proper conditions (maximizing intrinsic and extrinsic motives)
- ▶ *Potential Implication*: Mandatory education on political values? Widespread town-hall meetings pre-elections? Candidate training?
- ▶ **Less optimistic** – This context is not the typical election: No role of parties, completely new seats, no priors. Yet, a big part of the problem of selection into politics is that
 1. politics tend to be elite-captured
 2. entrenched beliefs about politicians and politics (especially in contested seats)
 3. political parties select candidates (additional barriers beyond information)
- ▶ *Lessons for other contexts*: ?

2. Who are the compliers on each step? I

Effects on pair of links in the chain of causality, but no evidence on **mediation**

- ▶ Convincing set of results in all “reduced form” relationships



- ▶ Authors provide evidence about potential mechanisms in reduced form as well
 - ▶ Pro-social behavior, extrinsic motivation, community coordination, leadership

2. Who are the compliers on each step? II

Effects on pair of links in the chain of causality, but no evidence on **mediation**

- ▶ Not as clear when it comes to results on the chain of causality
 - ▶ *Opening to alternative interpretations:* e.g., The treatment is not information but something else coming from the public meetings: These might have helped to solve other collective action issues even amongst those already interested and who would anyways run for office.
- ▶ In particular: The conditional results (IV estimates) are a bit underwhelming
 - ▶ **No effects** on election probability conditional on running
 - ▶ **No effects** on policy outcomes conditional on election
- ▶ We do care about $\Pr(\text{Run}|\text{Info})$, $\Pr(\text{Elected}|\text{Run})$ and $\Pr(\text{Close Policy}|\text{Elected})$
 - ▶ **Suggestion 1:** Give a bit more structure and estimate all steps jointly (e.g., SEM and impose exclusion restrictions you argue in the paper)
 - ▶ **Suggestion 2:** Use sample estimators to get at estimates of these nested population quantities

3. Long-term effects and the boost of new politicians in Pakistan?

This was a massive push for **new faces**, what is happening now? please, tell us more!

There are many additional papers here but,

- ▶ Are there any long-term effects of this intervention?
 - ▶ Boosted selection into politics, future candidacies, or new political careers?
 - ▶ What about party affiliation/ideology?
 - ▶ Did villages replicate the meeting format for subsequent elections?
 - ▶ Are there new faces in “the Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Department”?



Conclusion

- ▶ Super interesting paper and great contribution
- ▶ Some reflections
 1. Understanding why the intervention worked so well in this context is key. How do we incorporate the role of parties and entrenched beliefs so common in other contexts?
 2. Fundamental to understand the set of compliers at each stage. Who is the citizen at the margin running for office, winning, and implementing 'good' public policy
 3. What are the potential long-term impacts of this type of informational intervention? In particular in the political careers and the pool of candidates in the next elections