

Tune in to Governance

An Experimental Investigation of Radio Campaigns in Africa

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Can private media help improve government performance by motivating and assisting citizens to hold officials accountable? This research project investigates the influence of private media on individual citizens and local governments in Uganda. Specifically, we are conducting a randomized controlled field experiment whereby private FM radio stations¹ broadcast information about the past performance and current projects of some local governments but not others. Pre- and post-treatment surveys will allow us to compare the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of otherwise similar citizens who do and do not have access to specific information about their local government officials. We will assess which individual-level traits make citizens more susceptible to media influences, and in which ways. We will also compare the subsequent performance of officials who were exposed to the media spotlight and those that were not. Additionally the research will reveal the differential effects of providing information through news bulletins versus talk shows that provide for dialogue between citizens and officials. Finally we will investigate whether the tone of talk show discussions matters more or less than the information content delivered during the shows.

The Consequences of Changing Media Environments

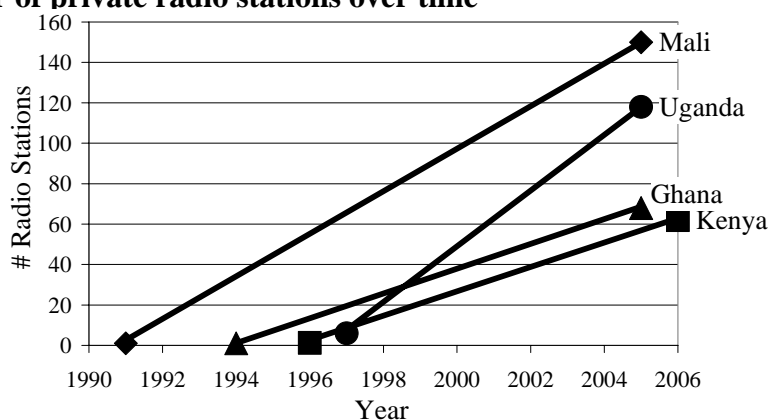
In theory, mass media can play an important role in ensuring government accountability and efficacy by reducing information asymmetries between officials and constituents and by mobilizing citizens to defend their interests (Stromberg 2004; World Bank 2002a; Keefer & Khemani 2005; Sen 1994; Madamombe 2005). Political agency models reveal that government officials often face incentives to conceal their true interests and actions from citizens. In order for constituents (principles) to motivate government officials (agents) to act in the public interest, citizens require independent means of tracking government behavior. In addition, mass media can help to communicate government policy objectives and actions to citizens thus increasing citizen compliance and involvement. The media can be especially crucial for ensuring accountability in developing countries where alternative sources of political information are scarce and top down institutionalized mechanisms for detecting and punishing malfeasance are often absent or ineffective (Lawson 2002; Sekhon 2004; Stiglitz 2002). As a result, donors, activists, and policy-makers have invested heavily in programs to increasing the capacity,

¹ Radio is the dominant news source in Africa. Round 3 Afrobarometer surveys from the sixteen countries record that: 59 percent of respondents say they listen to news on the radio daily, 29 percent watch television news daily, and 11 percent read a newspaper daily. Only 9 percent say they never listen to news on radio, 44 percent never watch television news, and 55 percent never read newspapers.

independence, and reach of mass media (for example see: Eltzroth & Kenny 2003; Hume 2004; Schieck 2003; United Nations Development Programme 2003; World Bank 2002a, 2002b).

Historically, mass media in Africa were limited in their ability to provide citizens with local reports, or news that was critical of government. However, the explosion of FM radio stations on the continent in recent decades holds new promise for promoting good governance.² In 1985 there were only 10 independent radio stations in the whole African continent, but by 2003 there were at least 80 in South Africa alone (Eltzroth & Kenny 2003). Figure 1 shows similarly dramatic increases in four other countries. In addition to the multiplication of media sources, there has also been a considerable increase in the political content of media. For example, reading and discussing newspaper articles and interactive live call-in talk shows are the most listened to radio programs in Ghana and Uganda (interviews with: Agyenim-Boateng 2005; and Brenya 2005; see also: Mwesige 2004).

Figure 1: Number of private radio stations over time³



Despite the remarkable proliferation and diversification of the media in Africa, there are reason to question current assumptions about the power of the media to effect positive change in mass publics and government officials. Literature from advanced industrial democracies shows that people often rely on information shortcuts, cues, heuristics and the advice of other people.⁴ Individual-level characteristics as well as the form and tone of media presentations are likely to condition media effects in Africa as well as in the US. Furthermore, individuals are only persuaded to consider and act on new information when the provider is perceived to be knowledgeable and trustworthy (Lupia & McCubbins 1998; Ladd 2004; Gussin & Baum 2004; Gentzkow & Shapiro 2006). Surveys from post-authoritarian democracies in Africa reveal that respondents trust government owned broadcast media more than private media, despite the propagandist legacies of government sources (Moehler & Singh unpublished). Without studies of media effects in developing democracies, it is impossible to determine whether information-seeking citizens will eagerly embrace new broadcasters and the information they provide, or be weary of relying on unfamiliar sources when making political choices. Even if citizens are

² For studies of media in Africa that extol the benefits of private media for democracy and governance see: (Bengali 2005; Bourgault 1995; Fardon & Furniss 1994; Hyden et al. 2002; Nisbet & Moehler 2005; Tettey 2002)

³ Communications Commission of Kenya; Ghana National Communications Authority 2005; Moggi & Tessier 2001; Mwesige 2004; Tower 2005; Uganda Communications Commission; Yankah 2004.

⁴ Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Norris 2000; Popkin 1991; Jerit et al. 2006; Druckman & Lupia 2000; Zaller 1992; Lupia et al. 2000; Mutz et al. 1996.

receptive of new media, it remains unclear as to whether these sources have the ability to change citizen knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in ways that enable them to influence public officials.

Unfortunately, empirical work on media effects in developing countries is extremely sparse. Most research has focused on the production, distribution, and quality of the media, rather than on how citizens or governments respond to media messages. Some recent studies of media effects on governance have relied on variation in the existing media environment, either cross-nationally (for example: Brunetti & Weder 2003; Norris & Zinnbauer 2002), or within countries (Besley & Burgess 2002; Majumdar et al. 2004; Reinikka & Svensson 2004). While informative, many such “natural experiments” suffer from endogeneity and missing variable biases. It is difficult to establish the independent effect of media on civic culture or government performance by merely exploiting existing data on media audiences, distribution, and independence.⁵

We employ a randomized-controlled field experiment to evaluate the effect of radio broadcasts on citizen knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as on government performance: The statistical properties of random assignment provide treatment and control groups that are equivalent on average in all respects except for their exposure to the treatment intervention. Therefore, differences between citizens and government officials in treatment and control groups following the experiment can be attributed to the media broadcasts. The key hypotheses we will evaluate are as follows:

H1: Citizens who are exposed to information about their local governments over the radio will be more politically knowledgeable and engaged than those who are not.

H2: The effect of radio broadcasts on citizen attitudes about local government and government officials will depend on the content of the information messages; radio broadcasts about local governments that are performing above average will be associated with higher political trust and legitimacy, while radio broadcasts about local governments that are performing below average will be associated with lower political trust and legitimacy.

H1b and 2b: Individual level factors (such as media attention, trust in private radio, education, partisanship, initial political knowledge and engagement) will condition the effect of radio broadcasts on citizen knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

H3: Political dialogues (talk shows) will have a greater influence on citizen knowledge, attitudes and behaviors than announcements (news bulletins).

H4: The tone of the political dialogue will condition the effect of information content on political trust and legitimacy.

H5: Government officials who are exposed to the media spotlight will perform better thereafter than those officials who are not.

H6: Political dialogues (talk shows) will have a greater influence on government performance than announcements (news bulletins).

⁵ Several scholars have employed randomized experiments to examine the effects of citizen monitoring and government audits on government performance (For examples see: Björkman & Svensson 2007; Finan & Ferraz 2005; Olken 2005). Our research contributes to these studies by focusing on the role of media.

Randomized-Controlled Field Experiment

Content of Media Campaigns

Our research project is designed to broadcast information about some randomly selected subcounty governments but not others so that we can easily compare between individuals and governments that receive attention in the media and those that do not. Under the Local Government Development Project (LGDP) funded by the World Bank, each subcounty receives approximately US\$23,000 annually to spend on basic development projects. The performance of each subcounty is evaluated in a publicly available external audit, “The Annual Assessment of Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures for Local Governments”. Furthermore, the amount of money each subcounty is awarded the subsequent year is dependent on the audit results from the previous year. We are broadcasting information on a random selection of subcounties including: 1) their relative performance on last year’s audit, 2) whether they were penalized or rewarded due to last year’s performance; 3) the subcounty project work plans and budgets for the current year, 4) and who to contact in each subcounty to report complaints or suggestions. In addition, elected chairpersons from randomly selected subcounties will be invited to participate in talk shows on the same topic. We believe that the information about LGDP and the statements of elected officials will be both interesting and useful to the general population, especially within the context of the current local government system where public participation is encouraged in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of service delivery. Although the information we are broadcasting is technically available to the public, in-depth interviews with citizens in 2006 revealed that the vast majority are unaware of this information.

Experimental Design and Treatments

There are two main treatment effects in the proposed design: A) news bulletins; and B) talk shows. We plan to purposively select 240 subcounties located across three radio broadcast/language areas. From the initial 240 sites, we will randomly select 120 subcounties to receive treatment A, the news bulletins. We will also randomly select 120 subcounties from the initial 240 to receive treatment B, the talk shows including elected officials. Since the random selections for the two treatments are independent, there will be some overlap of the two, meaning that some subcounties will be discussed in both news bulletins and politician statements, some in only the news bulletins, and some will receive only the politician statements. The remaining subcounties will not be discussed at all. Table 1 displays the *approximate* distribution of treatments amongst the original sample—the exact overlap of the two treatments cannot be determined until after the sampling is done.

Table 1: Approximate distribution of subcounties in treatment and partial control groups

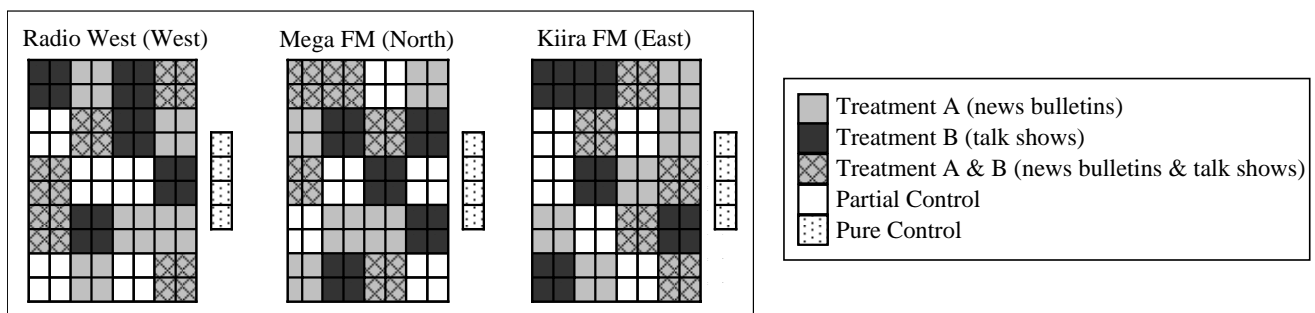
	Partial Control	Treatment B (talk shows)	Total
Partial Control	~60	~60	120
Treatment A (news bulletins)	~60	~60	120
Total	120	120	240

For treatment A, the news bulletins, we will develop short announcements for each of the 120 randomly selected subcounties. We will arrange for the news bulletins for each subcounty to be played on local FM stations five times during different news time slots over the course of two months. For treatment B, we will produce and broadcast call-in talk shows that discuss the performance and projects of only the 120 subcounties that were randomly sampled to receive the treatment. Elected subcounty chairpersons will be invited to appear on the shows. The host of the show will be responsible for ensuring that the basic information about each subcounty (the same as what is presented in the news bulletins) is presented during the talk show and that they remain on the topic. To increase the numbers of individuals who listen to the talk show broadcasts, we will arrange to have promotional announcements of upcoming shows.

In addition, we will record the shows and conduct a content analysis that records the number of positive, negative, and neutral statements about each subcounty. Because the tone of the show will be determined by the hosts, guests, and callers, we expect that the tone will not match exactly with the content of the information conveyed about government performance (i.e. the relative rating of each subcounty in the Annual Assessment). We will thus be able to assess the effect of program tone on individuals and governments independently from the information content conveyed.

Notably, all the individuals living within the broadcast ranges (both those in the treatment groups and those in the partial control groups) will potentially be able to listen to the news bulletins and talk shows. What distinguishes the individuals in the treatment and partial control groups is not whether they can receive the broadcasts, but whether they receive information about *their* own subcounties, or only about other subcounties in the area. For this reason, we refer to the subcounties within the listening areas that are not included in the broadcasts as “partial control groups”. We will also purposively select comparable regions that are completely outside the range of the radio broadcasts, which we refer to as “pure control sites”.⁶ It is also important to note that not all the individuals who live in the broadcast range will listen to the broadcasts. However, we expect that a sufficient number of individuals will tune in to generate observable effects. Figure 2 illustrates a sample distribution of listening areas with control and treatment sites. Subcounties are clustered to minimize contamination and to reduce costs; clusters are randomly selected into treatment groups.

Figure 2: Sample distribution of treatment and control subcounties



⁶ It is not possible to randomly select treatment sites and pure control sites due to the radio distribution patterns in Uganda; there is no way to prevent individuals in the randomly selected control sites from listening to the same programs as those in the treatment sites. Therefore we have two types of control groups. Due to random selection, the treatment sites and the partial control sites will be identical on average, but both are exposed to radio messages about the LGDP program. The pure control group is not randomly selected, so we can not guarantee that they are identical, but citizens in the pure control sites will not have access to the radio programs about LGDP in their home areas.

Measuring and Evaluating Treatment Effects

In order to evaluate the effect of the treatments on individual citizens, we will conduct random sample surveys of approximately 1200 adult Ugandans living within the treatment sites, the partial control sites, and the pure control sites. There will be two waves of panel surveys: The first will be before the media treatments and the second will be after the treatments, but with the same individuals who were interviewed in the first wave.⁷ The survey instruments will be designed to record civic knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics. We will thus be able to evaluate the total effect of the programs as well as the individual-level characteristics that make some individuals in the treatment groups more susceptible to media influences than others. Where possible we will supplement respondent statements with observations⁸ and survey experiments.

To evaluate the effect of the media campaigns on local government performance we will compare the results of the Annual Assessments for the years before and the year after the treatments. We will use results for all the subcounties in Uganda, not solely those where the broadcasts were aired, to determine whether those subcounties that were in the listening range but not discussed were also affected by the treatments.

We will employ multivariate statistical analysis to assess effects while controlling for possible confounding factors at the individual and the local government levels of analysis. The controlled randomized design should yield comparable groups, but we will check for comparability and include control factors to improve accuracy. We will also use multivariate analysis to investigate whether the effects of the treatment are conditional on factors such as education, age, and media attention at the individual level, and size, initial level of performance, and wealth at the subcounty level.

⁷ In the second wave survey, we will interview the original respondents from the first wave, plus an additional random sample of individuals so as to assess interviewer effects.

⁸ For example, interviewers will record the location of radios in households and the stations to which the radios are tuned.

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