

Can Informed Voters Enforce Better Governance? Experiments in Low Income Democracies

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Abstract

This article evaluates a body of recent work which uses field and natural experiments to answer this question. A common finding in the literature is that voter behavior is malleable and that information about the political process and politician performance improves electoral accountability. Limited availability of information thus provides one explanation for the persistence of low quality politicians and the existence of identity politics and electoral malpractices in low-income democracies. Understanding how voters can gain access to credible sources of information and how politicians react to improved information about their performance are promising avenues for future research.

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1 Why Hasn't Democracy Delivered Better Politicians?

Democratic forms of governance are by now commonplace in low-income countries but the quality of their elected governments, as measured by corruption indicators and social sector performance, remains significantly worse than in high-income democracies (see, for instance, Mauro (1995); Hall and Jones (1999); UNDP (2002)).¹ What explains this apparent voter unconcern with the quality of governance in poor countries?

One possibility, often described as the modernization hypothesis, is that low levels of education cause low-income countries to have more poorly functioning democracies (Lipset, 1959). Almond and Verba (1963), for instance, famously wrote, "The uneducated man or the man with limited education

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¹In 2008 the average (standardized) World Bank control of corruption score for democratic low-income and lower middle income countries was -0.64 which was not far above the score for currently undemocratic countries of -0.94, but was significantly below the average score of 1.31 in the high-income group. The government effectiveness scores for low and lower-middle income democracies (-0.67) and non-democracies (-0.93) were similar, but the score for high-income democracies (1.36) was significantly higher (tabulations based on World Bank's Governance Indicators 2008 dataset (The World Bank, The World Bank) combined with democracy data from Polity IV Project)

is a different political actor from the man who has achieved a higher level of education” (p. 315). According to this view higher levels of education improve a country’s civic culture and citizens’ ability to make rational electoral choices. Furthermore, by increasing income levels education may indirectly raise the value of high quality politicians for citizens (Lipset, 1959). This view is supported by cross-country evidence which identifies a positive correlation between levels of education and the extent of democratization (Glaeser et al., 2007). However, more recent evidence suggests that this link may not be causal – after controlling for country fixed effects, changes in education levels across countries are not correlated with changes in democratic practices (Acemoglu et al., 2008)

Others have explored the possibility that political and economic development are instead co-determined, potentially by a country’s institutions (Acemoglu et al., 2001).² According to this view low levels of economic development will be accompanied by weak institutions. Elections, even if they occur, will be marred by electoral malpractices and largely captured by the ruling elite (see, for instance, Acemoglu et al. (2010); Simpser (2008)). According to this view, what others interpret as voter apathy reflects, instead, the lack of agency available to voters in low income countries.

This review examines a third possibility – that a well functioning democracy requires voters to be informed about the political process and politician actions. If low levels of economic development are accompanied by limited political knowledge among voters, then democracy will deliver worse politicians in low income countries. Unlike the modernization hypothesis this view suggests that policy interventions, such as audits and information campaigns, can increase electoral accountability. And, in contrast to the institutions view, this view predicts that improvements in the information available to voters can directly reduce electoral malpractices.

Can data help us distinguish between these views? The last decade has witnessed significant progress in the use of modern econometric techniques, especially instrumental variable approaches, to identify the role of demographics, institutions and information in explaining cross-country differences in the quality of government. However, the coarseness of available instruments has ultimately limited the ability of this literature to disentangle channels of influence and led to an increased emphasis on the use of micro-data based studies (Pande and Udry, 2005; Acemoglu, 2010). Such studies, which typically exploit within-country (exogenous) variation in institutional design, information flows or educational attainment help us differentiate among these views by providing more direct evidence on voter behavior and its malleability, or lack thereof.

Even with micro-data understanding what influences voter behavior poses unique challenges. Variations in observed voter choices usually reflect differences in who stands for election and differences in what is known about them. How do we determine whether observed voter choices reflect the true underlying voter preferences *or rather* choices that are constrained by limited information about politician performance and/or qualifications? Here, I review a recent experimental literature which addresses these challenges by (inducing and) exploiting random variation in the information available to

²It is hypothesized that the choice of institutions is, in turn, determined by events that occur during critical historical junctures which cause large scale institutional reform.

voters while holding institutions and demographics constant.

A first set of papers in this literature evaluate the efficacy of directly providing voters information on incumbent performance and of exposing voters to politicians from groups underrepresented in politics (e.g. women). These papers find significant evidence that better informed voters change their electoral behavior in order to select better performers.

A second set of papers in this literature evaluate a broader question: Can informing voters about the importance of politics and the potential costs of electoral malpractice and identity politics (in terms of subsequent policy outcomes) alter voter behavior? These papers find that areas that receive these information campaigns typically see significant increases in turnout and reductions in electoral malpractice.

These findings challenge simple modernization theories which suggest that voters in low income countries care less about the quality of government. They also do not support the deterministic view that historical accidents define long-run political and economic outcomes in low income countries. Rather, the weight of the evidence suggests that lack of information prevents voters from using elections to effectively screen candidates and discipline incumbent behavior. Voters are very willing to update their beliefs in response to new information and the magnitude of estimated responses are typically large. It is possible that this last fact reflects greater returns to information provision when education levels are low.

These results suggest that public policies such as mandatory provision of information about politicians may significantly improve governance in low income countries (on this, also see Djankov et al. (2010)). This evidence also opens up several avenues for future research. How can we create credible sources of information in low income countries? How will politicians respond to improvements in voter information about their activities? An ongoing challenge for this research agenda is disentangling the roles of motivation and information in influencing voter behavior. Does voter behavior respond to information because voters are now more knowledgeable *or rather* because the campaign, independent of any information it provided, succeeded in energizing voters? The answer to this last question is essential in determining the likely generalizability of the experimental findings.

The rest of the review is organized as follows. Section 2 describes how variations in voting behavior across rich and poor countries have led to different theories for the poorer performance of democracies in poor countries. Section 3 discusses how recent field experiments have sought to understand these differences through the lens of voter information. In Section 4 I summarize the challenges afforded by the experimental evidence for existing theories and open questions for research.

2 Do Voters Behave Differently in Rich and Poor Countries?

Cross country differences in the quality of elected government are accompanied by significant differences in voter behavior between rich and poor countries.

A key marker of political participation in democracies is voter turnout. In rich countries income

and literacy rates positively predict turnout. Using data on 324 national lower house elections which occurred in high and middle income countries between 1972 and 1995, Blais and Dobrynska (1998) found that turnout increased by 16 percentage points when illiteracy declined from 85% to 12% (the sample average). Similarly, turnout increased by 13 percentage points when GNP per capita increased from a low of \$163 to the average of \$7,614 in the sample.

The cross-country correlation between education and turnout is paralleled by a positive correlation between years of schooling and propensity to vote in the micro-data for rich countries. For the US, the classic survey data study by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) showed that citizens with a college degree were 38 percent more likely to vote than people with fewer than 5 years of schooling. The effects for income were weaker. Twenty years later, a large-scale two stage survey of voluntary activity of the American public reported similar correlations (Brady et al., 1995). Reviewing the empirical evidence for rich countries, Lijphart (1997) shows that “class bias” (higher turnout for voters with higher income, greater wealth, and better education) exists for most rich democracies, though the effect is often smaller relative to the US.³

If political participation improves the quality of government (Glaeser et al., 2007) then this evidence suggests that countries with more educated populations, which are usually also richer countries, will have better governments. However, an important piece of evidence against this view is the much weaker link between education and political participation across low-income countries. Electoral turnout data from 109 democratic countries shows that while the average for high-income countries is 68.7%, it is only 5.5 percentage points higher than the average for the low and lower-middle income group.⁴ Similarly, a pooled cross-section regression using data for presidential and legislative elections from Latin America between 1980 and 2000 shows no significant correlation between literacy and voter turnout (Fornos et al., 2004).⁵

Within-country evidence relating education and voter turnout is also more mixed for low and middle income countries. World Values Survey data (for thirteen low and lower middle income countries) shows a positive correlation between education and voting – the probability that an individual with complete primary education votes is 28 percentage points higher than that of an individual with no formal education). In contrast, Afrobarometer survey data for sixteen African countries suggests that college educated individuals are 12 percentage points *less* likely to vote than those with no formal education.⁶

Why does lower education fail to systematically predict lower political participation in low income countries? And how does this relate to the quality of governance in these countries?

³Combining data for seven European countries and Canada, G. Bingham Powell (1986) finds that the turnout among college-educated workers is 10% higher than for those with primary education.

⁴The average turnout was 65.6%, with a standard deviation of 14.5% , maximum 95.17% (Australia) and minimum of 28.3% (Haiti). Calculations based on the most recently available turnout data from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, <http://www.idea.int>.

⁵While income per capita in these data are positively associated with turnout, this correlation is not robust to the inclusion of controls.

⁶Author’s tabulations.

A first possibility is that voters in low-income settings exhibit greater preferences for private transfers or clientelism. Huntington and Nelson (1976) famously described the nature of such clientelistic relationships in poor democracies: “In traditional societies, patron-client relations provide a means for the vertical mobilization of lower-status individuals by established elites...The introduction of competitive elections gives the client one additional resource – the vote – which he can use to repay his patron for other benefits.” If the poor and less educated value clientelistic policies more and such policies are more common in low income settings then this may explain why the less educated to participate at higher rates in low income societies.

The impact of clientelism on participation by the less educated may be complimented by electoral malpractice. Some of the most famous evidence on how the poor and less educated are more susceptible to vote-buying come from the era of urban machines in the United States. Drawing a comparison between new nations such as Malaysia and Philippines and the urban political machines in US cities, Scott (1969) argued that the most fundamental quality shared by the mass clientele of the machines was poverty.⁷

More recently, Brusco et al. (2004); Stokes (2005) shows that machine politics in Argentina target the poor. Blaydes (2006) reports similar evidence for Egypt, showing that illiterates turned out at more than twice and sometimes at three times the rate of literates in the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary and 2005 presidential elections. She argues that this turnout difference reflects greater vote buying among the poor. Finan and Schecter (2010) argue that vote-buying is more prevalent among individuals who are more willing to engage in reciprocal behavior. Using survey and experimental data from Paraguay, they document higher vote-buying among the less educated.

The link between vote-buying and turnout, however, could also go the other way. Some electoral malpractices increase turnout, some don't. In situations where vote buying is not feasible or the secret ballot makes it hard to know actual voting behavior parties may seek to instead intimidate poor and less educated voters and prevent them from voting (Bratton, 2008; Cox and Kousser, 1981) or may use electoral violence. Wilkinson (2004) argues town-level electoral incentives account for where Hindu-Muslim violence breaks out in India, and that state-level electoral incentives explain when and where state government uses its police force to prevent the riots.

In sum, this set of arguments suggests that voter preferences and institutions *rather than* education *per se* determines political participation and governance outcomes in low income settings.

In this review we discuss a recent body of experimental evidence that lends support to an alternative hypothesis. While education can play a role in predicting governance the relevant channel is not participation but rather political knowledge or information (for evidence on the link between education

⁷He cited Banfield and Wilson (1966) who emphasized that “almost without exception, the lower the average income and the fewer years of schooling in a ward, the more dependable the ward's allegiance to the machine”. For the United States Nichter (2008) provides several examples of turnout buying in the 2004 US elections, for instance five Democratic Party operatives in East St. Louis were convicted in federal court for offering cigarettes, beer, medicine and \$5 to \$10 rewards to increase turnout of the poor. One party official pleaded guilty and testified that operatives offered individuals rewards “because if you didn't give them anything, then they wouldn't come out.”

and political knowledge see Milligan et al. (2004)).⁸

One justification for why political information among citizens predicts governance outcomes is provided by the political agency literature (Barro, 1970; Ferejohn, 1986; Persson et al., 1997; Besley, 2006). Models in this literature characterize political behavior as a principal agent problem, where voters are the principals who seek to control the actions of the agents they elect – the politicians. Politicians vary in honesty. While honest politicians implement the policy favored by voters, dishonest politicians can obtain rents by implementing the policy not favored by the voters. More informed voters are better able to use elections to screen and discipline voters. Hence, electoral accountability is increasing in voter information.

The idea that lack of information constrains electoral accountability is also consistent with the higher incidence of clientelism in low-income settings. For instance, using evidence from the introduction of conditional cash transfers for the poor in Mexico De La O (2009) argues that voters use the incidence of clientelistic policies to learn about politician behavior. Villages that were randomly chosen for the program 21 months before the 2000 presidential election saw an increase in turnout of 7 percent and an increase in incumbent vote share of 16 percent as compared to villages that entered the program only 6 months prior to the election. She interprets the fact that time lapsed since program entry predicts the extent of preference for incumbent as suggesting that citizens who learned the most about the program changed their voting behavior the most.

Another important feature of politics in low-income settings is the prevalence of ethnic politics. Limited information about politician quality provides a rationale for this; Ethnic networks provide informal insurance and enable information flows (Habyarimana et al., 2007; Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). Furthermore, a politician's ethnic identity is often a good predictor of redistributive preferences (Pande, 2004; Besley et al., 2007). All else being equal, both reasons will cause voters to favor politicians belonging to their own ethnicity and this will provide the party that represents the majority ethnic group with an electoral advantage. This may, in turn, reduce elections to a mere 'counting of heads' and lessen the role of elections as a source of accountability (Horowitz, 1985). Consistent with this hypothesis Norris and Mattes (2003); Posner et al. (2010) report a significant electoral advantage for the party representing the ethnic majority in Sub Saharan Africa.

Is political competition dominated by ethnic parties associated with the election of lower quality politicians? Using measures of country-level ethnic politics from Freedom House country reports Banerjee and Pande (2009) demonstrate a positive correlation between ethnic politics and country-level measures of political corruption. They use a two-dimensional model of politics to argue that forces that make a politician's ethnic identity more salient reduce voter emphasis on honesty, even

⁸Strategic models of voting provide one reason for why information may be related with participation (Feddersen and Pesendorfer, 1997). These models claim that if voters share identical preferences then even with costless voting less informed voters will choose to delegate their vote to the more informed (and so abstain from voting). Improvements in information will be associated with higher turnout. While there is some supportive evidence for this thesis from media studies in rich countries (Gentzkow, 2006; Stromberg, 2004; Snyder and Stromberg, 2010), the responsiveness of voter turnout to priming exercises suggests that this is unlikely to provide the main explanation for turnout patterns in rich or poor countries.

though voters care about politician honesty *per se*. If low quality politicians are useful to the party for other reasons (e.g. are good for campaign finance) then parties, in turn, will exploit the ethnic bias among voters. As a result low quality politicians, who help the party conduct activities such as raise funds, will persist in equilibrium. Banerjee and Pande (2009) provide empirical support for this thesis using panel data from a North Indian state.

However, while better knowledge about politician quality will strengthen voter incentives to not elect low quality candidates, whether improvements in information will suffice to reduce ethnic preferences and improve governance outcomes is less clear.

The modernization hypothesis, for instance, would predict that ethnic networks and clientelist policies have high returns for the less educated voters in the developing world. It is only as countries become richer that the relevance of ethnic networks and publicly provided private goods is reduced (Lizzeri and Persico (2001)). Hence, improvements in information may do little to alter voter willingness to trade-off politician identity against other dimensions of quality in low-income settings.

Alternatively it may be that, holding everything else constant, lower levels of political information cause voters in poor countries to sell their vote more cheaply (either in response to preferred clientelism or explicit vote-buying). In such situations informational improvements will better align voter preferences and electoral outcomes. Media studies from low income countries provide some support; increased media presence improves electoral accountability, as measured by government responsiveness to weather-related food shortages and calamities (Besley and Burgess, 2002).

Below I review the experimental evidence on how these trade-offs play out.

A different dimension of identity politics relates to gender. Women are a demographic group that are both less educated and exhibit significantly lower rates of political participation in poor countries. They are less likely to vote and to hold elected office.⁹

It may be that social norms are particularly binding in poor countries. Or, information may play a role; if party politicians believe that women make ineffective leaders and/or are disliked by voters then they are unlikely to field women and, therefore, neither parties nor citizens will learn about women's ability to lead. Limited presence of women in politics may worsen the quality of representation afforded by elected governments, particularly for female members of the electorate. Men and women typically exhibit different policy preferences, and in rich countries this translates into significant differences in voting patterns across genders (see, for instance, Edlund and Pande (2002); Edlund et al. (2005)). For low income countries, differences in male and female policy preferences have been linked to differences in the types of work they do (Beaman et al., 2010; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). If women in poor countries are less likely to vote and be elected then they will also have less policy influence.

Against this background I review the experimental literature on information and voter behavior.

⁹Although the proportion of female parliamentarians at the national level has increased by 8 percent in the decade from 1998 to 2008, the current global average of 18.4 percent remains low. At mid-year 2009, only 17 heads of state or government were women (UNIFEM, 2010).

3 Do Better Informed Citizens Vote Differently? Experimental Evidence

A recent body of literature exploits natural and field experiments that improve the information about politicians available to voters in order to identify the role of information in influencing voter behavior in low income countries.

This experimental literature is closely related to an older political science literature, often described as the *Get Out the Vote* literature (GOTV), which has used field experiments to understand the determinants of voter turnout in the United States. The GOTV literature, in general, concludes that personalized campaigning messages such as door to door canvassing and social pressure are effective methods of getting citizens to vote (Gerber and Green, 2000). This literature places less emphasis on disentangling the role of mobilization from voter information in affecting turnout.

In contrast, studies in the development field have emphasized experimental designs and evaluation methods which allow researchers to identify the role of information in influencing voter choices. Here, I review papers which seek answers to two questions. First, how do voters react to information about politician performance? Second, does information about the importance of voting and how policy is made influence voter behavior? Table 1 summarizes the basic experimental design and main results for all papers reviewed in this section.

3.1 Does Learning about Politicians Matter?

How do voters learn about a politician's quality and policy preferences? A first line of research asks whether voters use campaigns to learn prospectively about politicians. A second directly tests a key prediction of political agency models – does information about incumbent performance influence voter willingness to re-elect them? A third line of research asks whether voters use information about incumbent performance to update their priors about the effectiveness of leaders drawn from that group. I summarize the main findings below.

3.1.1 Do Campaigns Influence Voters?

In-person political campaigns gain prominence in environments with low media penetration and low levels of education. Election campaigns in low income democracies are typically colorful affairs involving rallies, entertainment and often explicit gift-giving by parties.

A first set of field experiments exploit randomized variation in the nature of political campaigns to examine how prospective policy promises made during campaigns influence voting behavior.

Wantchekon (2003) randomized the form of political campaigns during Benin's national election and examined whether voters favor clientelism *per se* and whether this, in turn, increases ethnic voting. The experiment was unique in that it involved campaigning by real presidential candidates competing in the national election.

The experiment was conducted in eight non-competitive districts of Benin (four were incumbent dominated and four opposition dominated). In each district two villages were randomly chosen for treatment and in treatment villages the incumbent and challengers were assigned different campaign messages. Within a district, the incumbent was assigned a public good campaign in one treatment village and a clientelist campaign in the second village. The challenger was always assigned the opposite. Both campaigns focussed on the same issues, which included education, health care and development. However, the public good campaign stressed the issue as part of a national program (*project de societe*) while the clientelist campaign stressed the issue as a specific project to transfer government resources to the region. The clientelist message also highlighted the candidate's ethnic affiliation. Outcomes in a treatment village would be compared to the control where the candidates continued to use their typical campaign which combined elements of the clientelist and public goods campaign.

The evaluation was based on a comparison of survey outcomes across treatment and control villages. The paper does not report any effects of the campaign on turnout. The main finding is a significant and positive clientelist treatment effect as measured by candidate vote share. In addition, there is a significant and negative public policy effect on incumbent candidate's vote share. Finally, women are more likely to vote in favor of the candidate providing the public policy message. As described in Table 1 the estimated effects are large.

Survey-based outcome measures often raise the concern of priming. However, the fact that the intervention took the form of an actual campaign in which voters in a treatment village were exposed to both clientelist and public good campaigns limits this concern. On the other hand, the relatively small sample size (eight treatment villages for each treatment) makes the heterogeneity analysis harder to interpret.

The paper's main finding is that voters respond positively to clientelistic campaign messages. However, does this finding inform us about voter preferences or rather about the credibility of clientelistic versus public policy messages? Put differently, what signal about politician quality were voters expected to extract from the treatment?

A follow-up experiment conducted during the first round of the 2006 presidential election sought to shed some light on these questions. It examined whether the institutional form of campaigning influences the credibility of campaign promises and, therefore, voter responsiveness (Wantchekon, 2009). The intervention occurred in two stages. First, a conference including party members and policy experts was held where parties devised very specific policy platforms. In the second stage town hall meetings were held in a random sample of villages – during these meetings parties described their platforms and based on voter feedback amended them.¹⁰ The typical meeting lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours and between 6 to 10 meetings were conducted over two weeks in each village. In contrast, the control villages continued to receive the traditional election campaign where the politician delivered a mixture of targeted and clientelist promises, typically during a festive rally in which cash and gifts

¹⁰The town meetings opened with the party member giving a fifteen minute speech on the problems facing the country and solutions suggested by the candidate. This was followed by an open debate during which issues were contextualized and proposals amended in light of voter feedback.

were also distributed.

Survey results show that villagers in treatment villages perceived election campaigns as more informative, especially about the policy process. This translated into increased turnout – the expert-led-deliberative campaign increased turnout by an average of 7.3%. This is particularly striking given the lower incidence of vote-buying in treatment villages. Results on candidate vote-shares suggests positive effects of the campaign – the experimental candidates garnered 66.7% of the vote in the treatment villages, compared with 60.7% in the control villages (however, the statistical significance of the difference is unclear).

How likely is it that information, rather than motivation, drove the impact of the campaign? The author presents evidence that voters in treatment villages were better informed about the candidates and the problems facing the country. Yet, it may still be that higher turnout largely reflects the motivational aspects of the campaign. It may also be that voters responded positively to politicians' willingness to engage in deliberation rather than to the message itself. Finally, the fact that vote-buying was restricted (by design) in the experimental villages affords yet another explanation for why candidate vote shares were influenced.

The findings of these papers clearly demonstrate the responsiveness of voter behavior. However, they also underline real difficulties with interpreting the impact of treatments which seek to inform voters prospectively about leader behavior. In environments with limited policy commitment the credibility of campaign promises is likely low. Hence, it is unclear whether differences in political campaigns should cause voters to update their priors and in which direction.

In contrast, papers which examine how voters use information on incumbent performance afford tighter tests of the information hypothesis. Such tests build on a key prediction of the political agency model – that voters should use retrospective voting to ensure electoral accountability. Recent papers provide experimental evidence which supports this prediction.

3.1.2 Do Voters React to Information about Incumbent Performance?

In 2003, as part of an anti-corruption program, Brazil's federal government began to select municipalities at random to audit their expenditures of federally-transferred funds. Audit findings were made publicly available and disseminated to media sources. Using a dataset of corruption constructed from the audit reports, Ferraz and Finan (2008) compare the electoral outcomes of municipalities audited before versus after the 2004 elections, with the same levels of reported corruption.

The paper focuses on re-election rates for incumbent mayors. Among municipalities where 2 violations were reported, the audit policy reduced the incumbent's likelihood of reelection by 7 percentage points (or 17 percent) compared to the re-election rates in the control group. The effects increase to almost 14 percentage points in municipalities with 3 violations associated with corruption. These effects were more pronounced in municipalities where local radio was present to broadcast the information. Compared to municipalities audited after the elections, the audit policy decreased the likelihood of re-election by 11 percentage points among municipalities with 1 radio station and where 2 violations

were reported. Radio exacerbates the audit effect when corruption is revealed, and also promotes non-corrupt incumbents. When corruption was not found in a municipality with local radio, the audit actually increased the likelihood that the mayor was re-elected by 17 percentage points.

The role of incumbent performance in influencing his re-election prospects is also examined by Banerjee et al. (2010). They conducted a field experiment which provided slum dwellers with report cards on councillor performance in the run-up to the Delhi municipal elections. Municipal councillors are elected from single member jurisdictions using plurality rule and enjoy access to discretionary spending funds. Their main responsibilities include attending and addressing issues in the legislature and attending committees which provide oversight on service delivery.

The experiment was conducted in conjunction with a NGO which used India's Right to Information Act to obtain disclosures on legislator spending, committee attendance and participation in the legislature. In addition, affidavits filed by candidates were used to obtain information on the education, assets and criminal charges for the incumbent and the two main challengers in each jurisdiction. These data were then summarized in a report card, and a leading Indian newspaper published two report cards per day in the run-up to the election.

The experimental evaluation occurred in 10 jurisdictions. In each jurisdiction the full sample of slums were mapped and 20 slums (each corresponding to a polling station) were randomly selected for treatment (giving a sample of 200 treatment and 575 control slums). The treatment had three phases. First, households received a door to door campaign in which they were informed about the legislator's responsibilities. Then, each household in the treatment slum received a copy of the newspaper containing the report card for his and neighboring jurisdiction (on the day of newspaper publication). Finally, a focus group was held to help slum-dwellers understand the data presented in the report card.

The intervention was evaluated using official electoral returns at the polling-station level. In examining the impact of performance, the evaluation considered two kinds of yardstick competition. First, comparing the two incumbents featured in a single newspaper, was the relatively better-performing incumbent rewarded by voters? Second, do incumbent qualifications (relative to the challengers) matter?

The intervention was associated with a 3.5 percentage point increase in turnout in control slums. The turnout effects may have been caused by the motivational aspects of the campaign. However, the effect of the campaign on incumbent vote share demonstrates the relevance of information for voter behavior. For the median performing incumbent, the campaign had no impact on the vote share. However, for the best performing incumbent the treatment increased vote share by 7 percentage points. Voters exhibited sophistication in interpreting qualification information. If the incumbent moves from being the best qualified candidate (in terms of education, assets and criminality) to the second-best candidate then this reduced his vote share by 6.2 percentage points.

The paper also considers the impact of the intervention on vote buying. The Delhi elections were marked by a significant incidence of vote-buying, which included plying voters with alcohol and offering them cash. To measure vote-buying, observers sat in a random sample of treatment and control slums the night prior to the election and noted the incidence of different types of vote-buying. Overall, the campaign caused a 19 percentage point decline in vote-buying through cash bribes. In this case

identifying the causal mechanism is, however, harder. Voters may have responded to better information by increasing the price at which they sell their vote. Alternatively, parties may be more wary of vote-buying in areas that had an NGO campaign.

Finally, a recent paper from Mexico examines the impact of information about incumbent governments in a setting where the incumbent *cannot* stand for re-election. In Chong et al. (2010) the authors implement three treatments in Mexico – the first group of precincts received information about municipalities’ overall spending, the second group received information about distribution of resources to the poor and the third group received information about corruption. Since incumbents could not stand for re-election, voters could only use this information to infer about likely party performance in the next term. The authors report a significant decrease in voter turnout but no change in incumbent vote share in places with extensive corruption. In contrast, voters turn out at higher rates and provide more support for incumbent parties when they are exposed to information about high levels of government spending to the poor.

The turnout findings associated with high corruption differ from those reported by Banerjee et al. (2010) and, more generally, by papers that suggest that negative experiences are a strong motivating force for voters Washington (2006); Bloom and Price (1975); Hastings et al. (2007). One possibility is that voter’s metric for using information for retrospective voting varies when they vote over party *not* candidate. If it is harder to infer differences in the quality of new candidates from party identity (and this may be exacerbated by information on past incumbent’s performance), then voters may react by simply not voting.

In the absence of term limits, the experimental evidence supports the basic premise of political agency models – voters in low income countries use information to enforce electoral accountability. However, does the role of information extend to changing voter beliefs about which types of individuals make good leaders? The third strand of literature examines this.

3.1.3 Do Gender Quotas Influence Subsequent Voter Choices?

Voters may use performance of the incumbent to correct mistaken priors about the leadership quality of other individuals who share incumbent attributes. Changing stereotypes about groups is most likely to occur when the leader belongs to a group which is underrepresented in politics, one such group being women. The increasing use of political affirmative action for women raises the possibility of quota-induced representation influencing voter beliefs about the effectiveness of women leaders and, therefore, their future electoral behavior. Two recent papers exploit natural experiments to examine this.

Beaman et al. (2009) use random variation in mandated exposure to female leaders across village councils in the Indian state of West Bengal to examine whether exposure to female politicians influences voters’ future behavior. In West Bengal villages, local decision-making is undertaken by a village council which consists of a set of elected councilors. These councilors elect a chief councilor, or Pradhan. In every council election since 1998, a third of councilor positions in each council and a third of Pradhan positions across councils in a district have been randomly reserved for women. Only

women can run for election to a reserved position.

The paper documents that women are effective leaders – relative to leaders elected from unreserved positions, they invest similar amounts in most public goods (and more in water) and are less likely to take bribes.

Electoral data on unreserved councilor positions across all village councils in a West Bengal district shows that relative to councils which never had a reserved Pradhan almost twice as many women stood for, and won, these positions in councils where the Pradhan position had been reserved for women in the previous two elections. Data from a larger set of six West Bengal districts shows similar gains for women contesting Pradhan elections in councils where the Pradhan position is currently unreserved. In the May 2008 election the share of female Pradhans was 11% in councils where the Pradhan position had never been reserved and 18.5% in councils that were continuously reserved for a female Pradhan between 1998 and 2008. As incumbency rates are very low, this increase was almost entirely due to new entrants. Being exposed to female leaders, therefore, makes villagers more willing to vote for women.

To directly examine whether the electoral gains were related to voters updating their beliefs about the effectiveness of female leaders the paper presents two types of evidence – vignette and speech evidence where the gender of the leader described (or heard) was randomly varied and evidence from Implicit Association Tests (which investigated villager stereotypes regarding the association of women with domestic jobs and men with leadership jobs) was examined.

Speech and vignette data shows that men living in villages that had never been reserved judged the hypothetical leader as significantly more effective when the leader's gender was experimentally manipulated to be male (rather than female). The evaluation gap disappears in currently or previously reserved villages. Similarly, IAT based measures of gender-occupation stereotypes shows that exposure to female leaders (through reservation) increased the likelihood that male villagers associated women with leadership activities (as opposed to domestic activities). Thus, while deep preferences and social norms are difficult to erode, voters beliefs on effectiveness remain malleable and play a significant role in the voting decision.

Corroborative evidence comes from Bhavnani (2009) who examined similar questions in an urban setting – municipal councillor elections in Mumbai. He finds that the probability of a woman winning office conditional on the constituency being reserved for women in the previous election is approximately 5 times the probability of a woman winning office if the constituency had not been reserved for women. He finds suggestive evidence that an important channel was party officials learning that women can make effective leaders and win elections.

3.2 Does Learning About the Importance of Voting Matter?

A second set of papers in the experimental literature on voter behavior has, in common with the US GOTV literature, focused on non-partisan information campaigns typically delivered by civil society organizations. Here again, a striking finding is the responsiveness of voter behavior. However, a key

challenge faced by these papers is disentangling the role of motivation (or mobilization efforts) from learning in influencing voter behavior. I describe three papers and how their experimental design seeks to disentangle channels of influence.

3.2.1 Are Women Less Motivated or Informed?

What constrains female political participation in low income countries? One view is that low levels of education and limited female labor force participation makes them disinterested in the political process. Another view is that patriarchal systems constrain the political freedom women can enjoy. Both suggest a limited role for informational campaigns in increasing female participation in politics.

Evidence from a field experiment in rural Pakistan that informed female voters about the importance of politics provides evidence to the contrary (Gine and Mansuri, 2010). Female literacy rates in the study areas was below 20%. The experiment was conducted in the two weeks prior to the 2008 national election. Randomization occurred at the level of geographic clusters within a village and within treated clusters a random sample of households were randomly assigned to receive the awareness campaign via a door to door campaign. There were two treatment arms: one which focussed on the relationship between electoral process and policy and the second which included an additional module on the significance of secret ballot. Turnout increased by 12% for women in treatment clusters with similar sized effects in the two treatments. The treatment, however, influenced women's ability to keep their voting decision secret - husbands in treatment areas were less able to predict their wives' voting decision. Finally, there were significant spillovers: control women in treated clusters behave as if they had been directly treated.

The magnitude of the estimated effects is striking. In the US, nonpartisan canvassing has been shown to raise turnout rate by 7-9%. To achieve even higher effects among a population that, in general, faces significant constraints on mobility suggests that Pakistani women were very willing to take the act of voting seriously. However, it is less clear whether these findings demonstrate that information matters over and above motivation.¹¹

3.2.2 Do Voters Care about Electoral Malpractice?

One of the more glaring examples of electoral malpractice is electoral violence. Can information about the importance of elections and enabling voters to coordinate actions (which may have been hindered by limited communications between voters) influence voter behavior *and* the incidence of electoral violence? Collier and Vicente (2008) examine these issues in the context of the 2007 Nigerian election which was marred by significant violence – during the two days of Nigerian election over 300 citizens were killed. The field experiment featured a campaign against political violence conducted by a major international NGO, *ActionAid*, which specializes in community participatory development. The main campaign slogan was, “No to political violence! Vote against violent politicians”.

¹¹Even if it is motivation we are unable to disentangle the role of pure persuasion from voters wishing to have their policy preferences implemented (If political parties clearly differed in their policy priorities then one possibility would have been to examine the impact of the campaign on vote shares).

The field experiment spanned 24 census enumeration areas (each area had roughly 500 voters), of which half were randomly selected for treatment. The effectiveness of the campaign was measured in three ways – by a household survey, via citizen willingness to declare their preference for violence free elections by mailing in a postcard and via objective measures of political violence collected by observer journalists.

The campaign caused voters to report a 10% improvement in political freedom and an 11% decline in conflict within the local community. These improvements in citizen perception were accompanied by large but noisily estimated improvements in citizen willingness to directly take action as evidenced by their willingness to return the postcards.

The intervention increased turnout by 7 percent, and in the presidential election this was associated with a decline in the vote share of the opposition candidate. The authors argue that these results suggest that electoral violence works by depressing turnout – the turnout evidence, however, is not conclusive since the campaign clearly included a voter mobilization aspect. Therefore, the authors examine incumbent vote shares. The fact that the campaign also had the effect of decreasing the vote share of the candidate associated with violence while the vote shares of the other two main presidential candidates were not significantly changed by the campaign suggests that the campaign also succeeded in transmitting information to voters about candidate characteristics.

3.2.3 Are Voter Preferences about Politician Quality Malleable?

Banerjee et al. (2010) worked with an NGO in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh to evaluate the impact of two non-partisan campaigns. Treatment villages for the two campaigns were drawn from the same set of jurisdictions. The first campaign encouraged villagers to not vote along caste lines and instead vote for the candidate who is best able to deliver development. The core campaign message was *Development issues affect everyone in your village, not just the members of one caste. Vote on development issues rather than along caste lines.* The second campaign encouraged villagers to not vote for corrupt campaigns and again exhorted villagers to vote for the candidate who will deliver development. Here, the campaign message was *Corrupt politician steal money set aside for development funds and do nothing for you. Vote for clean politicians that care about your development needs.*

The campaign message was delivered in treatment villages by a NGO team using multiple methods, a prominent one being a puppet show. The paper uses a combination of survey and electoral data to evaluate the caste campaign and electoral data to evaluate the corruption campaign. The two campaigns had strikingly different effects, with the caste campaign significantly more effective. The caste campaign increased turnout by 7.6% and the survey data shows a 9 percentage point decline in voting for the caste preferred party.

However, one may worry that survey results reflected priming – voters in treatment villages report what they think surveyors want to hear. To address this concern, the authors examine whether the declines in caste-based voting are related to the quality of politicians. If the campaign caused voters to reevaluate the trade-off between voting along caste lines and voting for a high quality candidate then

declines in caste preferred voting should be concentrated in groups whose caste preferred candidate is also of lower quality. To measure quality, they rely on criminal charges. A striking phenomenon of Indian politics has been the rise of criminals in politics (Golden and Tiwari, 2009). The treatment effects are only present for caste preferred candidates who face heinous charges. If most citizens vote along caste lines (in the absence of the treatment), then we would expect the incumbent to represent the majority caste in the jurisdiction. This would suggest that the patterns discerned in the survey data should be reflected in incumbent vote shares in the electoral data. Consistent with this, the paper finds that the caste treatment reduced the incumbent vote share when the incumbent faced heinous criminal charges.

In contrast, the corruption campaign largely left voter behavior unaffected. One interpretation of the differing results of the two campaigns is voters' ability to interpret the campaign message. They could easily relate to caste voting and knowledge of criminal politicians was widespread. Hence, the campaign caused voters to re-evaluate the trade-off between ethnic voting and criminality. In contrast, in an environment where corruption is the norm voters are unable to translate broad messages about fighting corruption into concrete action regarding whom to vote for. This interpretation is consistent with the earlier findings that voters react to specific information about incumbent's corruption records.

4 What are Avenues for Future Research?

The experimental literature on voter behavior has drawn attention to the malleability of voter behavior and to the importance of information for good democratic practices. However, this literature also poses several challenges for future research. Here, I discuss three challenges.

4.1 How do Outcomes Change?

The experimental literature has largely focussed on how voter campaigns and information disclosures influence electoral accountability. Underlying this is a presumption that voter activism will cause politicians to act more in voters' interest. However, one could imagine that voters have incentives to connive with local elected officials – greater information may increase the rents that some set of voters (often described as the elite in the literature) can extract from elected officials without actually improving the quality of governance (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2000). Whether this dominates the anti-corruption electoral impact of improved information remains an open question.

That said, some support for the view that information improves performance comes from media studies which document a positive association between media presence and policy activism by elected governments (e.g. Besley and Burgess (2002)). However, evidence on which dimensions of politicians performance are influenced by greater electoral accountability and the channels of influence remains understudied.

One outcome for which there is evidence is corruption. Using a randomized experiment in the context of Indonesian village road projects, Olken (2007) found that government audits are effective

in reducing corruption. Increasing the probability of audit from 4 to 100 percent, reduced missing expenditures by 8 percentage point. Importantly, the effect of the audits is most pronounced for village heads who are up for reelection. This result suggests that anticipation of electoral accountability (here, the fact that villagers would get to know audit results) may lead to better performance. Non-experimental evidence which corroborates this finding comes from Finan and Ferraz (2009). Relative to Brazilian mayors who faced a term limit, those who could stand for re-election misappropriate 27 percent fewer resources.

Finally, it is also worth noting that citizens' may prefer democratic modes of service delivery, even when it leaves outcomes unaffected. For instance, Olken (2010) evaluates a field experiment in 49 Indonesian villages where as part of a development plan, each village proposed two infrastructure projects, one "general project" proposed by the village at large and one "women's project" proposed exclusively by women in the village. The political process through which the village chooses the two projects was randomly assigned to either the plebiscite or representative meetings. While election-based plebiscites substantially increased satisfaction among villagers, knowledge about the project, perceived benefits, and willingness to contribute, they had limited effects on project choice (and seemed to lead to elite capture of the project in the case of the women's project).

4.2 How do Politicians Respond to Better Informed Voters?

The field experiments reviewed vary voter information holding other features of the political process constant. However, a general principle of political economy emphasized, for instance, in Acemoglu (2010) is that "large-scale shocks and policy interventions will create political economy responses from those who see their economic or political rents threatened or from those that see new options to increase these rents".

One can imagine politicians reacting to anticipated increases in voter information in multiple ways; They may stop engaging in corruption or they may simply change when and how they engage in such behavior. Bobnis and Fuertes (2009) examine the effect of disclosure of local government corruption practices on the longer-run performance of municipal governments in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, the central government has established a systematic mechanism to conduct municipal government audits, which are then made publicly available and disseminated to media sources. As a result politicians can anticipate when their constituency will be audited. The pre-election release of audit reports led to significant short-term reductions in municipal corruption levels and an increase in incumbent mayors electoral accountability. However, municipal corruption levels in the subsequent term are higher in municipalities audited preceding the previous election and these are concentrated among municipalities shown to have refrained from rent-seeking activities in the first audit.

Such findings suggest an important need to understand how politicians react to anticipations of improved voter information and how the design of other political institutions may limit or exacerbate their ability to limit the impact of improvements in information.

4.3 Is there a Role for Mandatory Public Disclosures?

Finally, how should public policy seek to increase information available to voters in low income democracies? In the short to medium run, relying on media may not suffice. Although low-income countries have witnessed significant changes in the nature and scales of media (UNDP, 2002), many of them are far from having an independent media whose role is to provide citizens with objective information. For instance, using the freedom of press ratings published annually by Freedom House, we find that in 2008, only 20% of 92 low and lower-middle income countries had an independent media. Half of the sample had a partially free press, and in one third the press was rated as not free. In contrast, in more than 80% of high-income countries, the press was rated to be independent. Equally, increases in political competition may not suffice – information transmission by political parties may simply not be credible.

One promising possibility is requiring public disclosures by elected officials and candidates for public office. Djankov et al. (2010) examines the relationship between disclosure rules and several measures of the quality of government, including corruption, using a new database of financial and business disclosure of members of the lower house of parliament (MPs) in 175 countries. They find that high- and upper-middle income countries require disclosures and make them publicly available more often than the rest of the world. Moreover, these countries also have the highest disclosure scores, while low-income countries have the lowest disclosure scores. They also show that public disclosure, as opposed to disclosure by MPs to the Congress is associated with a better government. For instance, voluntary disclosures available to the public increase a country's government effectiveness score from the World Bank governance indicators by 0.242 points. However, whether governments in low income democracies will have the incentives to implement such laws remains an open question.

5 Conclusion

This article reviews a fast growing experimental literature on voter behavior in low-income countries. Since the set of experiments is reasonably large and the economic environments are sufficiently diverse, it is possible to identify robust patterns in the data. Voters in low-income settings are receptive to new information about politician performance and are willing to vote on the basis of this information. Evidence from the large-scale natural experiments, such as Ferraz and Finan (2008) and Beaman et al. (2009), suggests that politicians and parties are not able to completely undo the effect of new information (through disinformation campaigns or electoral malpractice). Thus, changes in voting patterns translate into electoral penalties for worse performers.

Voter choices suggests a strong preference for high quality non-corrupt politicians. Many scholars have puzzled over the difference between *de jure* and *de facto* institutions in low-income settings, and have often suggested limited scope for improvements in governance in countries with a history of extractive institutions. This body of evidence offers a more optimistic view – credible information can help voters influence the choice of politicians even in settings with weak institutions and electoral

malpractice. As discussed in section 4 understanding when and how voters are able to reduce the distance between the *de jure* and *de facto* institutions they face remains a fertile area for future research.

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Paper	Country	Question	Experimental Design		Outcomes	
			Treatment	Experimental design	Turnout	Vote share
A. Learning about Politicians						
Wantchekon (2003)	Benin	Do voters favor clientelistic policies over national public policies?	Politician varied campaign speech Treatment 1: <i>Clientelist</i> (specific promise to village or region) campaign speech, Treatment 2: <i>public policy</i> (nationally oriented message) Control: <i>mixture of clientilist and campaign speech</i>	Village N=24 Treatment: Clientelist: 8, Public Policy: 8 Control=8	Not evaluated	15 pp higher vote share with clientelist speech in South, and 17pp higher vote share for opposition candidates. Up to 24 pp lower vote share for public policy speeches in the North. Women's vote share for public policy messages was higher by as much as 38 pp for opposition candidate.
Wantchekon (2009)	Benin	Can deliberative campaigning make voters favor public policies over clientelism?	Politician varied campaign strategy. Treatment: policy platforms devised through expert consultation and amended in "informed town-hall meetings; Control: mixture of targeted or clientelist promises and no town hall meeting.	Villages N=36? Treatment: 12 Control: 24	Turnout was higher by 7.3 pp in villages that were exposed to programmatic campaigns. ¹	6 pp increase in vote share of programmatic candidates. ²
Finan and Ferraz (2008)	Brazil	Does information on incumbent performance increase electoral accountability?	Treatment: Pre election audits on incumbent corruption record Control: Audits occurred after the election	Municipality N=373 Treatment: 205 Control: 168	Not evaluated	7 pp lower re-election probability for incumbent who committed two corruption violations in municipalities with pre-election audit; 11pp lower if radio station present in municipality.

¹ Treatment effect on turnout calculated using data collected at various voting booths from 8 districts (8 treatment villages, involved in the experiment immediately after all the votes were counted.

² The treatment effect on vote shares was calculated using electoral returns from 8 districts. 3 districts were not included because an accurate vote count on the election day could not be obtained, but vote share data obtained from the post-election survey shows that the treatment effect was positive in two districts and negative in one district. The average treatment effect remains positive if the missing districts were included.

Banerjee, Kumar, Pande and Su (2010)	India	Does information on incumbent performance increase electoral accountability?	Treatment: Received pre election report cards on incumbent performance and candidate qualifications Control: No report cards	Slum polling station N=775 Treatment:200 Control 575	3.5 pp increase in turnout in treatment slums	5.7 pp decline in vote share for the incumbent who had a worse performance relative to other incumbent featured in the same newspaper.
Chong, de la O, Karlan and Wantchekon (2010)	Mexico	Does information on incumbent performance increase electoral accountability?	Treatment1 : Information on municipalities overall spending Treatment 2: Information about distribution in poverty program Treatment 3: information on corruption	Precincts N=150 for each treatment	T1 and T2 had no effect. T 3 reduced turnout where corruption was high: an 11 percent drop if all spending was corrupted.	T1 and T3 had no effect. Incumbent party share was increased by T2 when incumbent spent more on the poor.
Bhavnani (2009)	India	Does having a woman leader improve future electoral prospects of female candidates?	Treatment: Ward was required to have female representative for one election cycle Control: Ward was never required to have female representative	Ward N=118 Treatment: 37 Control: 81	Not evaluated	17.9 pp higher probability of woman winning in wards reserved in the previous election.
Beaman et al (2009)	India	Does having a woman leader improve future electoral prospects of female candidates?	Treatment: Village council was required to have female leader for either one or two election cycles Control: Village council never required to have female leader	Village council (Gram Panchayat) N=165; Treatment: Reserved once: 71, Reserved twice: 20 Control: 74	Not evaluated	3.7 pp higher probability that a woman stands for election and 5.8 pp higher probability of winning in village councils where leadership positions had been reserved for women in previous two elections.
B. Learning about Policy production function						
Collier and Vicente (2008)	Nigeria	Does grass-root anti-violence campaigns change voters' behavior and candidate choices?	Treatment: Area was exposed to anti-violence campaign during election. Control: Area was not exposed to campaign during election.	Neighborhoods and villages N=24 Treatment: 12 Control: 12	Turnout is 9% higher in districts with anti-violence campaigns.	4 pp decline in vote share of candidate portrayed in the media as espousing instability decreased in treatment areas.
Gine and Mansuri (2010)	Pakistan	Is lack of information a barrier to political participation by	Treatment 1: Door to door campaign that informed women about the importance of electoral process for	Geographical clusters within villages	12% increase in turnout; similar effects	8 pp decline in male knowledge about women's chosen candidates in treatment areas.

		women? Are there spillover effects in information campaigns?	policy (T1); Treatment 2: T1 combined with information emphasizing significance of secret balloting (T2); Control: no campaign	N=64; Treatment:43 Control: 21	for T1 and T2 Significant spillover effects: untreated women in treated clusters behave as treated women.	
Banerjee, Green, Green and Pande (2010)	India	Can voters be persuaded to not vote along ethnic lines? Can voters be persuaded to vote against corruption?	Caste Treatment: Vote for development not along ethnic lines Corruption Treatment: Vote against corruption Control: No village campaign	Village clusters Caste treatment N=601 Treatment=104; Control=497 Corruption treatment N=529; Treatment=102; Control= 427	7.6% increase in turnout in caste treatment villages; no effect of corruption campaign	35 pp decline in incumbent vote share if incumbent faced heinous criminal charges. No effect of corruption campaign