

# Non-State Actors, Public Goods, and Political Accountability in Africa

KATE BALDWIN

My current research analyzes politics in contexts where the state has a limited role in the provision of basic public goods. In many places in the developing world, traditional leaders, NGOs and other non-state actors provide important local public goods. I am interested in understanding the circumstances under which non-state actors are effective in providing local public goods, and the effects their activities have on political accountability, state building and distributive politics. Below, I describe two of my current research projects on these topics.

In Liberia, clan chiefs play a key role in local governance. Interestingly, there is great variation across communities in the mode of selecting clan chiefs. Together with Eric Mvukiyehe at Columbia University, I am conducting a project that investigates whether communities where clan chiefs are selected through participatory processes have more accountable and effective local governance institutions. We identify the effects of participatory processes by taking advantage of a break in the process of selecting clan chiefs in Liberia at the end of the civil war. At the end of the war, local chiefs in some areas were appointed by higher level authorities, while chiefs in other areas were selected by their communities; however, all chiefs who became incapacitated after 2002 were replaced by chiefs selected through participatory processes.

This project draws on rich survey data and outcomes from behavioral games conducted with members of more than 70 clans in Liberia. The surveys and behavioral games were administered in December 2010 and January 2011. The

results show that the participatory selection of chiefs results in more consultation at the community level and increased overall levels of participation. However, it also reduces levels of contributions to local public goods, suggesting chiefs selected by community members may be less effective at enforcing cooperation. We are currently in the process of conducting open-ended interviews with clan chiefs and elders in a smaller number of communities in order to understand why clan chiefs selected



in participatory processes are less effective in enforcing cooperation.

Across Africa, NGOs play an important role in local public goods provision and service delivery, and NGOs are often viewed by donors as an important tool for delivering aid in contexts where governments are corrupt. But do the governmental activities of NGOs have (unintended) consequences on the political engagement of citizens, their evaluations of their elected representatives,

and their ability to hold politicians accountable? Although NGOs' activities could increase participation and create new institutions that counterbalance the state's power, they could also have less salutary effects on civic engagement if they make local governance seem less relevant or if they are captured by the existing political elite.

The major difficulty in evaluating the effects of NGOs' activities is the selection bias in where these organizations choose to work. This project is unique in that it takes advantage of a randomized evaluation of a NGO's poverty alleviation activities in Ghana, which is being run by Dean Karlan and Christopher Udry at Yale University. The project "piggy-backs" on this randomization to do a "secondary experimental analysis" that looks at the impact of the intervention on a new outcome. Specifically, I examine the effect of the NGO's intervention on the breadth of political participation and the ability of voters to turn incumbents out of office during Ghana's most recent local elections (held in December 2010/January 2011). I have done this by combining data on the location of the experimental communities with records obtained from local governments. The results will shed light on whether NGOs increase or decrease political participation, and whether they make it easier or more difficult for citizens to hold their elected representatives accountable.

*Kate Baldwin is assistant professor of political science and affiliate faculty in the Center for African Studies.*