

Effect of Foundational state design processes, transitional political processes, and election support intervention on willingness to participate or help

Evidence shows that participatory processes have a harmful effect on willingness to help or participate outcomes.

Geographic focus: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect:Harmful effect ($g=-0.029$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 2 effect sizes)

Short summary

Participatory selection processes for local leadership in Liberia had a small but harmful effect on willingness to help or participate in collective activities. While such processes increased community consultation and political engagement, they simultaneously reduced contributions to local public goods and weakened cooperation enforcement. Overall confidence in this cell is low due to the limited number of studies and inconsistencies in the evidence findings.

Long summary

The intervention

The intervention involved participatory processes for selecting clan chiefs in rural Liberia following the civil war. Communities opted for open voting procedures—lining up or raising hands—to select leaders, with counts verified by traditional councils or independent observers. The study examined whether communities adopting participatory selection methods experienced different political and social outcomes compared to those maintaining appointed leadership systems.

How the intervention is expected to work

Participatory leadership selection is theorized to enhance political engagement, accountability, and community consultation by involving citizens directly in governance decisions. However, greater inclusivity may reduce chiefs' authority and weaken their capacity to enforce cooperation, potentially leading to lower collective contributions to public goods. Thus, while participatory processes promote political inclusion, they may inadvertently undermine local cooperation mechanisms.

The evidence base

The cell includes one quasi-experimental impact evaluation conducted in Liberia, employing a difference-in-differences strategy combined with surveys and behavioral games to assess outcomes. Given the single-study evidence base, findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Evidence findings

The evidence indicates that participatory chief selection increases consultation and political participation but decreases local cooperation and willingness to contribute to public goods. The harmful overall effect on willingness to help reflects reduced enforcement capacity of participatory leaders. The overall confidence in the cell is low due to the limited evidence base and inconsistent findings across measured outcomes. There is 1 impact evaluation in the cell and evidence summaries of the study are provided here:

Included study

Baldwin & Eric (2011) examine the effects of participatory processes for selecting clan chiefs in rural Liberia. After the civil war, some chiefs were appointed by higher authorities, while others were selected by their communities. All chiefs who became incapacitated after 2002

were replaced through participatory processes, providing a natural experiment to study the effects of these processes on established institutions. The research employs a difference-in-difference estimation strategy to identify the effects of participatory processes independent of timing effects. The study draws on survey data and outcomes from behavioral games conducted in 70 clans across 13 of the 15 counties in rural Liberia. Within each clan, 15 households were targeted for interviews, and additional community-level activities were conducted to measure contributions to public goods. The participatory selection of chiefs increases consultation at the community level and raises levels of political participation both locally and nationally. However, it also reduces contributions to local public goods, suggesting that chiefs selected through participatory processes may be less effective at enforcing cooperation. The study finds that participatory processes do not result in the selection of more educated or connected chiefs, but they do lead to more consultative leadership. The study is rated as medium confidence because it is a non-experimental study and only partially describes the intervention.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is low due to the limited number of studies, with only one study rated as medium confidence.

Other outcomes in the study:

Community and state governance/ Civic Participation / Government performance