



## EVIDENCE-INSIGHTS-POLICY

# POLITICAL SELECTION AND BUREAUCRATIC PRODUCTIVITY

### CONTEXT

In local government institutions, nationally appointed bureaucrats and locally elected politicians manage the implementation of public policies and the delivery of services. However, despite strong theoretical foundations, there is little evidence for which selection traits, if any, of politicians and bureaucrats, matter for local service delivery. Habyarimana, Khemani and Scot (2018) address the empirical gap by gathering rich data in an institutional context of district governments in Uganda.

### DATA

To measure traits such as integrity, altruism, personality and public service motivation among politicians and bureaucrats, the authors conducted a field survey of 770 local politicians and 1,357

district bureaucrats across 75 districts in Uganda during September – December of 2015. For a productivity measure of the district organization, the authors adopted administrative data on the implementation of nationally mandated public health programs.

### FINDINGS

The integrity of local politicians is the most relevant selection trait affecting public health service delivery. A one standard deviation higher average integrity among local politicians is associated with a 0.2 to 0.4 standard deviation higher measure of performance in health service delivery. In terms of concrete indicators of health coverage, an increase of 1 standard deviation in the average integrity of politicians is correlated with a 4.4 percentage point increase in child delivery at government facilities

(9% increase at the mean), a 3.8 percentage point increase in the share of pregnant women preventively treated for malaria (6.7% at the mean), and a 2.8 percentage point increase in pregnant women having at least four antenatal care visits (8.2% at the mean).

In combination with theory, this evidence suggests that politicians with integrity are more motivated to pursue the public good, not the extraction of private rents, and are therefore more effective in improving service delivery. Thus, policy makers seeking to build local capacity in poor countries should take political selection seriously.

