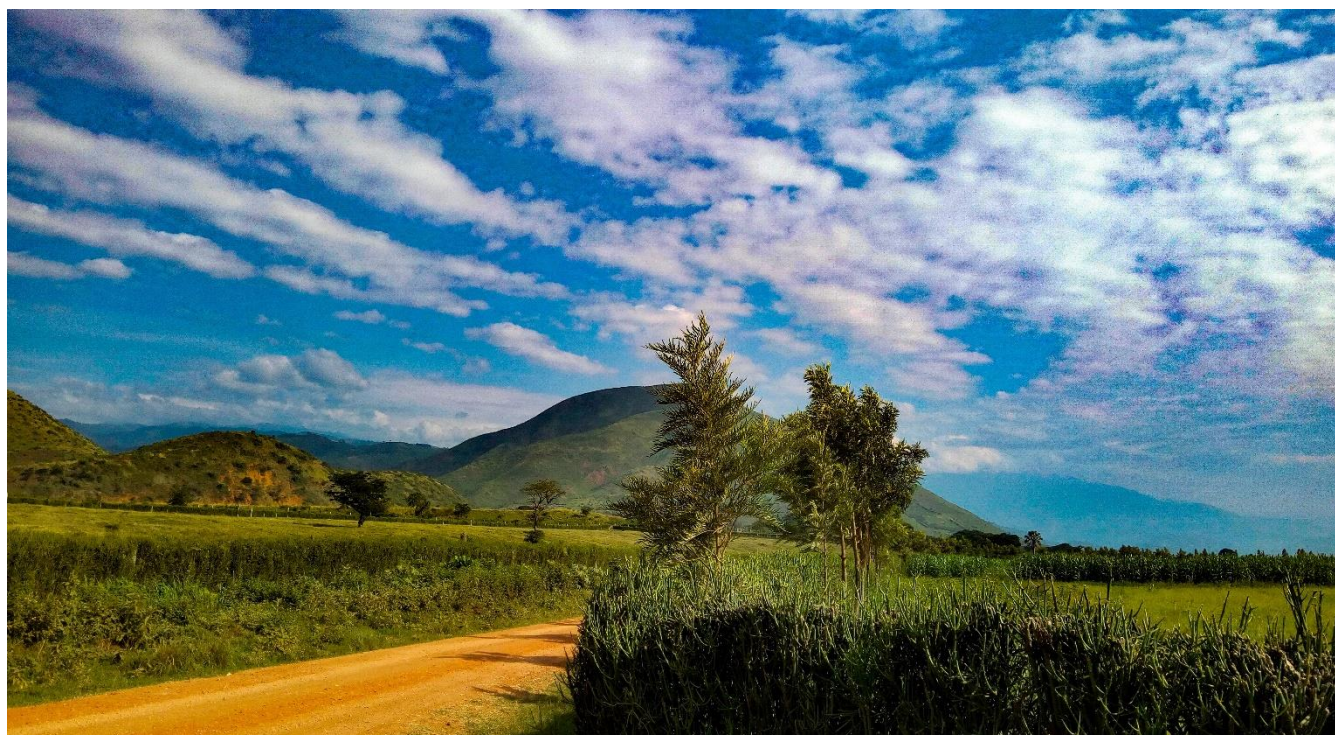


RESEARCH INSIGHT

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VOTING BY LINING-UP IN LOCAL ELECTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM UGANDA



Background and Motivation

Following decades of colonialism and a violent political history, Uganda has reached a state of relative stability and economic growth. The Ugandan decentralization reform initiated in 1992 is exceptional among developing countries in terms of the scale and scope of the transfer of power and responsibilities to the local level. Decentralized governance, pushed under the Museveni government since 1986, represented part of the political strategy of the new regime to install a new and revolutionary concept of democracy: democracy that is participatory, grassroots based, and popular.

Uganda had its first local-level elections, i.e., the village and parish (LC1 and LC2), under the multi-party political system, in July 2018. Regular elections have occurred at the district, county, and sub-county levels (LC3, LC4, and LC5) with relatively high voter turnout. At the local level, there had been no formal elections since 2002. That is, since the multi-party political system was put into place in 2005. While elections at the higher levels are conducted by secret ballot, these recent local elections (LC1 and LC2) took place by a voting method where voters line up behind the candidate of choice (see figure 1, for a visual representation of the method)

Voting procedure

	Mean	S.D.
<i>Number of Voters</i>		
Average number of voters	92.028	(38.771)
Average number of female voters	51.000	(20.665)
Average number of male voters	41.028	(20.024)
Number of male/female voters roughly equal	0.556	(0.504)
<i>Voting Procedure</i>		
Election Officer Present	0.920	(0.274)
Party Officials Present	0.180	(0.388)
Police Officer Present	0.280	(0.454)
Voters' ID Verified	1.000	(0.000)
Verified by ID Card	0.525	(0.506)
Voting by lining up on time	0.324	(0.475)
Delay time (minutes)	43.400	(43.777)
Officer counted votes carefully	0.919	(0.277)
Officer signed summary form	0.878	(0.331)
Officer declared. election	0.920	(0.274)
Winner got most votes	0.973	(0.164)
Election fair	0.865	(0.347)
Winner nominated VEC members	1.000	(0.000)
Vote approved by show of hands	0.312	(0.468)
Vote approved by shouting loudest	0.604	(0.494)
Discussion around nominations	0.792	(0.410)

There was an average of 92 voters per site, with the highest number of voters on site recorded as 225 and the lowest being 26. From this average, 55% of voters were female and 45% were male. The observation drawings above also indicate that there was a group of voters who were not allowed to vote but were still present. The election procedure ran smoothly. Voters were properly informed of the formalities for the procedural measures. Their voter IDs were verified and an election officer was almost always present and treating voters equally. In 92% of villages the officer counted the votes carefully. The average time delay, relative to the official start-time of the election was less than an hour (roughly 45 minutes). While 87% of surveyors perceived the election as

fair, they also identified concerns that voters had about the election process. This can be seen in the ways that people switch lines, the worries they have over others knowing for whom they voted for, repercussions for their choices and a majority preference for the secret ballot method.

At the end of the election, votes were counted correctly and in almost all instances the winner was selected accordingly. Following the rules, the Winner then nominated other members of the VEC, and as reported in 79% of villages, their candidacy was then discussed by the villagers and voted upon. Nominations were approved either by a show of hands (see figure 3) or by shouting the loudest. Across 60% of villages surveyed, shouting “yes” or “no” was how nominations were approved and in 30%, by show of hands.



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Figure 3, lining up (left), raising hands to vote after discussion about candidate nomination

Election abuses

Voters forced to vote for candidates	0.000	(0.000)
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Female voters abused	0.054	(0.229)
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Female candidates abused	0.000	(0.000)
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Election violence	0.216	(0.584)
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Voter Interactions

Voters argue with voters	0.351	(0.484)
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Voters wait for others to line up	0.297	(0.463)
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Voters call out to voters to line up	0.135	(0.347)
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Women voters call out to voters to line up	0.400	(0.548)
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Voters Switched Lines	0.216	(0.417)
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Women voters switched lines	0.625	(0.518)
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Voter's waited to see others' votes before making decision	0.306	(0.467)
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Primary gender who waited to see others' votes are women	0.364	(0.505)
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Candidate Interactions

Candidates Called out to Voters	0.027	(0.164)
Candidates Argued with each other	0.054	(0.229)
Candidates Argued with Voters	0.108	(0.315)
Candidates Intimidated Voters	0.000	(0.000)

Based on survey responses and observations, voter and candidate behavior indicating voter intimidation was rare although there were some arguments and conflicts. Voters were seen arguing with each other in 35% of villages and some form of violence around the elections erupted in 22% of villages. In 11% of villages candidates were seen to be arguing with voters but candidates did not appear to intentionally intimidate voters in any villages and in very few instances had the candidates called out to voters to line up behind them. So while there were communications between candidates and voters, the process did not appear to be highly antagonistic.

There were however instances of voters being influenced in one way or another. In 31% of villages, voters waited to see who others voted for. Line switching occurred in 22% of villages whereby in 63% of those occurrences, the primary gender switching was women. Among the 14% of villages where voters called out to other voters to join them, 40% of these instances were primarily women. After the election, voters told surveyors that they switched to new lines to avoid punishment from the newly elected candidate.

Voter perceptions

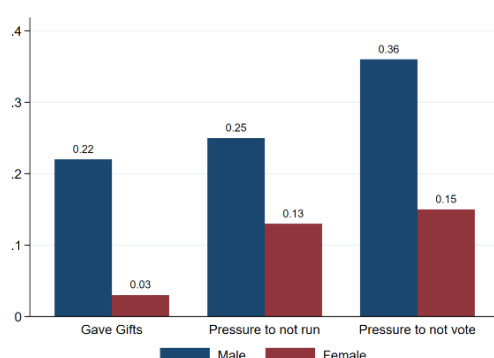
	Mean	S.D.
Free to vote for preferred candidate	0.92	(0.28)
Choice affected by other voters	0.10	(0.30)
Properly informed about procedures	0.98	(0.15)
Election officer treated voters equally	0.95	(0.23)
Prefer Secret Ballot	0.60	(0.49)
Problems after election because of vote	0.24	(0.73)
Voters did not vote because of lining up	0.70	(0.46)
People Vote by Ethnicity	0.16	(0.36)
People Vote for Political Party	0.26	(0.44)
People Vote by Religion	0.07	(0.25)
Worried – Candidates knew who voted for	0.36	(0.48)
Worried – Political Party knew who voted for	0.06	(0.23)
Worried – Villagers voting for other Party know	0.06	(0.23)
Worried – Villagers from different tribe know	0.07	(0.26)
Worried – Villagers from different religion know	0.04	(0.20)
Worried – Relatives know	0.09	(0.29)

Voters left after votes were counted for all candidates 0.73 (0.40)

Voters were also surveyed regarding their perceptions of the election. The results portray a varied image. While 92% of voters said they were free to vote for their preferred candidate, 60% still said they preferred the secret ballot method and 10% said their choices were affected by other voters. In spite of the relatively few instances of violence and coercion from other voters, it was reported that voters did worry that candidates and other actors knew who they voted for.

Over a third of voters were concerned about political candidates knowing their preferred candidates. At the same time, 32% of voters also expressed concerns about openly showing their vote to other groups present at the election. These groups include the political party, villagers voting for the other party, their relatives, and villagers from different tribes and religions. These concerns may be linked to the 24% of voters who reported that they faced problems after casting their votes for an opposing candidate. We know that anonymity is not afforded in this context, and when voters cannot hide their vote they can at least lessen their visibility in the lines. As a result, we see in 73% of villages, voters left right after votes had been counted for their candidate with a near equal portion of men and women hurriedly leaving the lines.

Candidates on voter pressure before and after the elections



After the election we conducted a household and candidates survey, which revealed that during the campaigning, male candidates were more likely to give gifts to voters. Men candidates were also more likely to include in their campaign promises solving problems of conflict, public good, and government programs. Female candidates, instead, focused more on women's issues and public good provision.

Male candidates faced more adversity during the election, where 25% felt pressure to not stand for election, and 36% thought there was some pressure on voters not to vote. As previously mentioned, nearly a quarter of voters reported that they experienced problems because of their vote and 70% of voters speculated that those who did not vote were avoiding the lining up process.

Key Takeaways

Uganda has been rated by Transparency International the 151st worst out of 176 countries in terms of government corruption despite the end of limited political pluralism in 2005. Voting-by-lining presents a unique opportunity to witness real-time transparent voting. From the findings, we see that instances of corruption or voter intimidation was limited if present at all in observations. Yet, when asked, the majority of voters (60%) still prefer the secret ballot method compared to the lining-up method. Public pressure and security in choosing a candidate that aligns with a common demographic is likely present given that line switching occurred during the election process and that voters shared that they had concerns about candidates knowing who they voted for. While the process itself was largely non-violent and voters report that they still felt free to vote for their preferred candidate, the fact that a quarter of voters face problems after the election on the basis of their vote and that many do not vote to avoid the lining up is important to consider. There is also the issue of voters being pressured not to vote as suggested by male politicians. This study has shown that while voting by lining-up offers a possible cheaper and administratively easier method and we find that voter intimidation and voter fraud were small in these election villages there are multiple factors to keep in mind related to whether the voters are really free to vote for whom they want, and that the safety and security of voters is still at risk when deciding who should lead them.

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