



The Limits of Awards for Anti-Corruption: Experimental and Ethnographic Evidence from Uganda

Background

- Traditional anti-corruption strategies have focused on monitoring and punishment, but these approaches have limited success in societies where corruption is deeply entrenched and socially tolerated. This study seeks to find out if non-monetary awards and public recognition could encourage integrity and shift social norms against corruption in a setting where bribery and favoritism are widely accepted.

Study Overview

- This research involved two field experiments in Uganda: One offering local leaders the opportunity to receive awards for managing public projects with integrity, and another informing community members about the award winners to assess whether recognition influenced public perceptions. Ethnographic methods, including interviews and focus groups, were also used to explore the broader social and psychological impacts of these interventions.

Learn More

- Buntaine, M. T., Bagabo, A., Bangerter, T., Bukuluki, P., and Daniels, B..(2023), The Limits of Awards for Anti-Corruption: Experimental and Ethnographic Evidence from Uganda. *J. Pol. Anal. Manage.*.. doi:10.1002/pam.22540
- <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22540>

Key Takeaways

- The authors found that the opportunity for public recognition did not lead to better project oversight, nor did it change leaders' or residents' attitudes toward corruption.
- While leaders were initially enthusiastic about receiving awards, they often felt powerless to enforce transparency due to systemic corruption at higher levels of government.
- Informing community members about recognized leaders did not lead to increased public expectations for integrity or greater willingness to hold officials accountable.
- Many leaders indicated that financial incentives would have been more effective than symbolic awards in motivating ethical governance.
- These findings suggest that changing deeply rooted corruption norms requires sustained, multi-year interventions rather than short-term recognition programs.