

RESEARCH STATEMENT

I study the design of organizations that deliver public goods. The dominant provider of public goods in most contexts is the public sector. As such, my thesis research studies the determinants of public sector productivity in a developing country setting, with implications for the public sector more widely.

The literature on the determinants of public sector productivity has been constrained by a lack of detailed data on public sector projects and the organizations that implement them (Banerjee et al, 2007). To address this deficiency, I have created the most extensive data set on public sector projects to date. I use this data to analyze a number of key margins in the design of organizations that deliver public goods.

My job market paper, *“The Causes and Consequences of Political Interference in Bureaucratic Implementation: Evidence from Nigeria”*, investigates whether political competition causes politicians to interfere in bureaucratic decision-making. Using data from Nigeria, I find that politicians in highly-contested constituencies are more likely to both delegate to decentralized organizations, and provide informal incentives to bureaucrats implementing projects in their constituencies. To establish this, I assembled a uniquely comprehensive data set on public sector organizations and outputs. To assess the separate impacts of the delegation and incentive margins, I use an instrumental variables strategy. I find that the key channel through which politicians who face high levels of political competition are able to improve bureaucratic output is through delegation. Once politicians have delegated to the most effective organizations in government, applying pressure to marginally change bureaucrats’ incentives has limited impacts. This paper provides some of the first evidence on the channels through which political competition impacts on the productivity of the bureaucracy.

In *“Management of Bureaucrats and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from the Nigerian Civil Service”*, co-authored with Imran Rasul, I study how the management practices that bureaucrats operate under, correlate to the quantity and quality of public services delivered. We supplement information on a sample of 4700 projects (which is slightly different from that used in my job market paper) with a survey I conducted to elicit information about management practices in the 63 civil service organizations responsible for these projects, following the approach of Bloom and Van Reenen [2007]. We find that management practices matter: a one standard deviation increase in autonomy for bureaucrats corresponds to significantly higher project completion rates of 18%; a one standard deviation increase in practices related to incentives and monitoring corresponds to significantly lower project completion rates of 14%. We provide evidence that the negative impacts of practices related to incentive provision/monitoring arise because bureaucrats multi-task and incentives are poorly targeted, and because these management practices capture elements of subjective performance evaluation that further leave scope for dysfunctional responses from bureaucrats. The backdrop to these results, where 38% of projects are never started, implies there are potentially large gains to marginally changing management practices for bureaucrats.

To undertake this work, I have generated a number of working papers that detail the creation of unique elements of the data. Papers on the creation of complexity indicators for infrastructure projects, on the surveying of civil servants, and on the frontiers of

research in the area of public service delivery will be useful resources for the wider profession.

I plan to use the data set that supports my thesis work for a number of further research papers. A key question that arises from my job market paper is what facilitates or retards the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. For example, the data I have collected allow me to investigate how the structure of ethnic affiliation amongst bureaucrats impacts on organizational performance. Similarly, questions generated by the paper on management are initiating new projects that aim to better understand the relationship between project characteristics and the optimal incentive schemes for implementing those projects.

My thesis work is the beginning of my research agenda on public sector organizations. I plan to further develop my data on the Nigerian public sector, and extend the surveys I have implemented there to other developing countries. In the developed world, I am currently working with local government in London to undertake experiments on how they deliver public services to their residents, and collecting data on public good provision in both the US and UK. I have already obtained two uniquely detailed historical data sets linked to the provision of public goods in Britain, which I plan to work on over the next few years.

Beyond the public sector, I see a broad range of organizational designs for the provision of public goods. With colleagues at University College London and Harvard, I have designed an experiment that assesses how different types of organization function in the provision of a standardized public good. I am working with the Nigerian Government to set up implementation of this experiment.

Overall, I have a broad research agenda planned for both the short and medium term, and the passion to drive it. My ambition is to generate frontier data sets and harness novel theory to better understand the provision of public goods across the world.