CREDIT OR BLAME: NON-STATE PROVISION OF SERVICES AND POLITICAL SUPPORT IN AFRICA


Committee:
Margaret Levi (Co-Chair), Katherine Stovel (Co-Chair), Mary Kay Gugerty (GSR), Edgar Kiser, Michael Ward.

Zambia entered into the post-colonial period as a middle income country that was perceived to have considerable growth potential. Among sub-Saharan African countries, Zambia suffered one of the most rapid economic declines, which started in the early 1970s. As in many other developing countries, multilateral and bilateral donors responded to the economic crisis by channeling on- and off-budget aid to Zambia. The response of international and domestic NGOs and churches was to fill the gap in service provision left by a shrinking Zambian state.

In contexts like Zambia, where a variety of actors including donors, NGOs and religious institutions provide public goods and services, attribution judgements can be difficult to make and sometimes, incorrect. I introduce a theoretical framework that seeks to explain the factors that influence citizens' attribution judgements. I argue that attribution decisions are a function of citizens' prior expectations and beliefs about service delivery, the extent to which government and non-state actors signal their contributions to citizens and, citizens' perceptions of the quality of service provision. I test these expectations using unique household survey data I collected in three of Zambia's nine provinces between 2008 and 2009 and find some support for my expectations.

I then extend the logic of the fiscal contract to consider the implications for citizens' perceptions of their government's legitimacy and their quasi-voluntary compliance with government laws and regulations when actors other than the state are involved in providing basic services. On the one hand, when citizens credit non-state actors for high-quality service provision or blame the government for low quality service provision, they are less likely to view the government as legitimate and are less likely to quasi-voluntarily comply with government laws and regulations. On the other hand, when citizens view their government as essential to leveraging and regulating external resources, non-state service provision might strengthen citizens' legitimating beliefs and quasi-voluntary compliance.

I test these competing hypotheses using a combination of case studies, survey data, and qualitative interviews that I collected in Zambia, as well as Afrobarometer data. I find that citizens who credit donors and non-state actors for service provision are more likely to report evading taxes and governmental fees. I also find that the more citizens credit their national government for service provision, the more likely they are to report complying with taxes and fees and to view their government as legitimate. There is no evidence of a negative association between donor and NGO service provision and legitimating beliefs in Zambia or across sub-Saharan Africa. These findings suggest that while donor and non-state actor service provision may not be undermining citizens' legitimating beliefs, they maybe weakening a state's ability to collect taxes from its citizens.