# Meet the Candidates: Information and Voting Behavior in Primary and General Elections

Melina Platas[*] and Pia Raffler[†]

October 3, 2017

Early draft – please do not circulate further.

## Abstract

How does the effect of information on voting behavior vary between intra- and interparty competitions? Primary elections are a critical process for candidate selection in many countries, yet our knowledge of how voters make decisions in these intra-party contests is limited, especially in developing countries. We conduct a field experiment to explore how access to political information in the form of debates among parliamentary candidates influences voter knowledge and behavior in 480 polling stations in the 2015 party primary and 2016 general elections in Uganda, a country with a dominant ruling party. We find that watching candidate videos increased knowledge about candidates in both elections. While there was no average treatment effect on turnout in either election, those who received bad news about their intended vote choice relative to their priors, were more likely to stay home on election day in the general elections but not in the primary election. Second, we find differences between primary and general elections in how voters made decisions about whom to vote for in light of the new information provided by the videos. We find that in primary elections, voters in the treatment group were more likely to switch their vote to the candidate perceived as the best performer. This was not the case in the general election. In the general election, voters in the treatment group were, perhaps surprisingly, more likely to switch away from the ruling party and toward opposition candidates. We investigate several mechanisms underlying switching away from the ruling party. We find no evidence that good or bad news, defined relative to priors, about candidates affected vote choice in either election. Our findings contribute to the literature on primary elections in developing countries and the literature on voter behavior in hybrid regimes.

# 1    Introduction

Poorly performing politicians are prevalent in many developing democracies and considered an important impediment to economic growth. One critical question for development is thus: How can voters be enabled to select better politicians? One common approach is to provide them with information about candidates so that they can deduce candidate quality more accurately. However, evidence on the effect of information on vote choice is mixed (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2012; Ferraz and Finan, 2008; Pande, 2011; Chong et al., 2014), speaking to the importance of the electoral and political context in shaping the effectiveness of such interventions. We identify one such contextual factor, intra- versus inter-party contests, and systematically study how the effect of information varies across these two types of elections.

Primary elections play a central role in the selection of candidates for political office. Although intra-party elections have been studied extensively in the American context and are believed to strongly affect the national electoral and political environment (Boatright, 2013; Hall, 2015), much less work has examined these elections in the context of nascent democracies. Primary elections may be particularly important in party strongholds, as well as in countries with strong or hegemonic ruling parties, the latter of which have numerous electoral advantages over their opponents. In countries and constituencies such as these, the primary election is effectively the main election – whoever wins the primary is almost certain to win the general election. What role does information play in candidate selection in primary elections, and how does this differ from inter-party electoral environments?

One critical distinction between primaries and general election is that party identity is held constant in the former. We test whether information about candidates running for political office has different effects on voting behavior, both turnout and vote choice, in the context of intra-party and inter-party electoral contests. IWe hypothesized that negative information about a candidate relative to a voter's prior would have a stronger negative effect on turnout in the general election, where switching vote choice also implies crossing partisan lines and prospective voters may thus be more likely to stay home in the presence of negative updating. Second, we expected information

to have a relatively greater impact on vote choice in intra- versus inter-party contexts for similar reasons. We expected voters to be more willing to update and incorporate new information into their voting decision in contexts where party identity is held constant.

We test these hypotheses through a large field experimented implemented in the context of a paradigmatic dominant party system, Uganda. The National Resistance Movement has held power since 1986 and controls about two-thirds of seats at all levels of government. While large parts of the country are dominated by the ruling party, pockets with party competition exist. Uganda is a good test case since the ruling party selects its candidates at all levels of government save the presidency through open-list primary elections in which all registered party members – 72% of all voters[1] – get to select the party's candidates, resulting in similar electorates across the two elections.

The study took place during elections for Member of Parliament in eleven parliamentary constituencies during primary and general elections held in Uganda in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Information about candidates, including policy positions, experience, and plans for office, was provided to voters in the form of debate-like videos of candidates that were publicly screened in randomly selected polling station catchment areas. In contrast to the bulk of the existing literature, we provide information on *all* candidates rather than just the incumbent. Recent work has shown that viewing candidate debates affects vote choice in the context of Sierra Leone, a poor country with an emerging democracy (Casey, Glennerster and Bidwell, 2016). We worked directly with a consortium of partner organizations and a film production company to develop a uniform video format, and worked in cooperation with the major political parties in Uganda to conduct the intervention across eleven constituencies distributed across the north, west, east and central regions of the country. We recorded nearly one hundred parliamentary candidates across the two elections from all the political parties represented in the selected constituencies and screened the videos in 240 villages to an audience estimated at over 30,000 citizens in the weeks leading up to the elections, and conducted panel surveys with over 8,000 registered voters.

---

[1]In our sample, replace with nationwide figure.

We find that watching candidate videos increased knowledge about candidates in both primary and general elections. Voters assigned to the treatment group were able to name a larger share of candidates and were more likely to know their policy positions. Second, the effect of information on turnout differed weakly across the two elections. While there was no average treatment effect on turnout in either election, those who received bad news about their intended vote choice, where the type of news is determined by the degree of policy alignment and difference between expert assessments of candidate quality and voters' prior beliefs about candidate quality, were significantly more likely to stay home on election day in the general elections but not in the primary election. The difference in effect sizes between the two elections is not statistically significant.

Third, we find differences between primary and general elections in how voters made decisions about whom to vote for in light of the new information provided by the videos, albeit less so than we anticipated. We find that in primary elections, voters in the treatment group were more likely to switch their vote to the candidate perceived as the best performer in the video by the majority of respondents. This was not the case in the general election. In the general election, voters in the treatment group were, perhaps surprisingly, more likely to switch away from the ruling party and toward opposition candidates. We find no evidence that good or bad news about candidates affected vote choice in either election.

We investigate several potential mechanisms underlying switching away from the ruling party. The evidence suggests that voters do not switch away from ruling party candidates because these candidates perform badly – on the contrary, all except one ruling party candidate scored above the median with respect to popular and expert measures of debate performance. It is also not the case that response bias is driving this result. In other words, voters in the treatment group are not simply more willing to report their vote choice for opposition candidates than those in the control group. Rather, it appears that the treatment affected the vote choice of a set of ruling party-leaning voters who held relatively open attitudes toward opposition parties. In the face of new information about all the candidates, these voters switched away from the ruling party candidate and toward the opposition candidate. Providing information about all candidates rather than just the incumbent

4

may reduce uncertainty about opposition candidates and bolster their legitimacy.

We make several contributions to existing literature. First, we add to the literature on information and voting behavior, which thus far has yielded mixed results (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2012; Ferraz and Finan, 2008; Pande, 2011; Chong et al., 2014). In the most coordinated set of studies to date, of which one arm of this study was a part, a meta-analysis found no effect of information on turnout or vote choice (Dunning et al., *Forthcoming*). Our work specifically seeks to examine the way in which context conditions the effect of information on voting behavior. We conduct an identical experiment in two consecutive elections, one of which is an intra-party and one of which is an inter-party contest. We thus hold constant country and constituency, and are able to estimate the effect of the treatment in these two different types of electoral environment. Indeed, we find that information has different effects on the same pool of voters depending on the type of election, thus adding to our knowledge of how and when voters update their priors in the face of new information, and how such updating affects their subsequent behavior.

Second, we add to a small but growing body of work on the role of primary elections outside the U.S. and Western Europe (for examples of this work see Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006); Ichino and Nathan (2012, 2013a)). While primaries are recognized as central to candidate selection in the U.S. (Hall, 2015; Ansolabehere et al., 2010; Brady, Han and Pope, 2007a), there has been relatively little work on understanding how these elections affect the political environment in Africa. We focus in particular on the differential effect of information on voter behavior in primary as opposed to multi-party elections, but we also provide rare descriptive information about voters' knowledge and attitudes about candidates in primary elections.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses the theory and related literature. Section 3 provides an overview of the political context, followed by a description of the research design, including the content and process of debate recording and screening, hypotheses and analytic approach in Section 4. Section 5 presents and Section 6 discusses the results. Section 7 concludes.

# 2   Primary Elections in Comparative perspective

In the American politics literature, party primaries have been found to result in the election of candidates at extreme ends of the ideological spectrum, which some have argued has contributed to increasing polarization in the American political environment. In the context of a two-party system in American politics where preferences are ideologically oriented on a left-right spectrum, candidates for political office are posed with a strategic dilemma: how to appeal to their party constituency on either the right or left side of the ideological spectrum while remaining competitive in the general election where the preferences of the median voter are closer to the center (Brady, Han and Pope, 2007*b*). In other words, politicians must determine where to place themselves along the ideological spectrum bearing in mind that the preferences of the electorate in the primary election are distinct from those in the general election. Voters, meanwhile, in deciding which candidate to vote for, must balance candidate "purity" in terms of ideology with candidate "electability" in a general election (Hall, 2015).

While our understanding of how party primaries affect representation, polarization, and voter behavior is far from complete in the American context, the effect of party primaries on political behavior and candidate selection is even more limited in the context of developing countries and nascent democracies. The role of political ideology is downplayed altogether, particularly in the study of African politics, where ethnic voting remains the dominant narrative, with good reason in many countries, for explaining vote choice. Political parties are often weak, or considered so, and the practice and implementation of party primaries rarely studied.[2] We argue that, just as in American politics, party primaries are an important part of the electoral process – in particular in countries with dominant parties, where primaries may be more influential in selecting political leaders than general elections.

There are important differences, however, between primaries in the American context and that of nascent democracies. While in American politics, the study of legislators focuses largely on their

---

[2]Important exceptions include Ichino and Nathan's work on the determinants of adoption and the effects of legislative primaries in Ghana (Ichino and Nathan, 2012, 2013*b*).

positioning on an ideological spectrum, in the context of emerging democracies, there is rarely a uni-dimensional policy space (if one indeed can be said to exist anywhere) on which political parties place themselves. The manifestos of political parties often look quite similar. There may be some issues on which political parties distinguish themselves, but it is difficult to place these issues on a uni-dimensional spectrum, and the issues may vary considerably over time and across countries. Thus, in emerging democracies, we care about primaries not primarily because of how they might affect ideological polarization, but rather because of how they might affect the pool of candidates running in the general election. If higher quality candidates are elected in primary elections, the average candidate quality in the general election will be higher as well.[3]

In developing democracies, political parties may or may not hold distinct policy positions with respect to social and economic issues, but party polarization can exist nonetheless, particularly if party affiliation is tied to clientelism. For example, affiliation to a dominant or hegemonic political party at the individual or village level (if the vast majority of villagers are known to support the party) may grant considerable benefits with respect to informal or formal handouts, ranging from cash to the construction of new schools and roads. There may also be a perception that only parliamentarians who are members of the ruling party are able to access state resources and deliver goods and services to their constituents. Indeed, one member of parliament whom we interviewed said that in order to get anything for constituents, "you have to associate with the NRM... There is no way you could do it as opposition or even an independent."

For information about a candidate's valence to sway a voter's decision, this information must trump other considerations voters take into account when making a choice over a set of candidates, including ethnic, religious, partisan, or other identities. Thus, political information is less likely to matter in environments polarized along any of these dimensions. We focus in particular on polarization along political party lines, which is common in both developed and developing democracies, though possibly for different reasons. In developed democracies, political parties are

---

[3]It is important to note that losing in a primary election does not necessarily preclude one from participating in the general election, although political parties try to prevent this from occurring. In Uganda, for example, candidates who lose in the NRM primaries frequently run as independents in the general elections.

often characterized by policy positions and can be placed on an ideological scale ranging from conservative to liberal with respect to social and economic policy.

# 3  Voting and Partisanship in Uganda

The NRM, which has held power in Uganda since 1986, comprises a majority of seats in parliament (68%), a majority of district chairpersons (77%), and a majority of sub-county chairpersons (71%).[4] A large percentage of the remaining seats at all levels are held by independents, many of whom are NRM leaning and who ran as independent candidates because they lost in the NRM primary elections. Combined, the six opposition parties only hold 19% of seats in Parliament. At the same time, a recent opinion poll found that 75% of respondents stated they would likely vote for the same party as they voted for in the previous election if the election was held that day.[5] Among our sample of over 4,800 registered voters in the NRM primary elections, 61% reported that they considered party affiliation as more important than individual merit in deciding whom to vote for as area MP. In our sample of registered voters in for the general election, 72% of respondents reported that they had been registered to vote in the 2015 NRM primaries. Thus, partisan considerations, and especially membership in the ruling party, are very important for vote choice, likely more so than other identities, such as ethnicity, particularly at the local level where constituencies are relatively ethnically homogeneous.

Given the strong position of the ruling party and consistency in voting, many observers argue that the real electoral competition occurs during NRM primaries rather than in the general election. One local politician explained: "If you are not the flagbearer [candidate representing the ruling party in the general election] it is very difficult to go through. [...] Once you capture the flag of NRM that is the beginning of the journey."[6] More generally, candidates' party identification can affect a voter's assessment of the quality of the candidate, and the voter's prior belief about

---

[4]Calculations based on official data from the Electoral Commission as of 2011.

[5]Opinion poll commissioned by the daily newspaper, the *Daily Monitor* and implemented by Research World International, Ltd., in April 2014.

[6]Qualitative interview with an NRM councilor, CII1.

the candidate. In different contexts, party identification can signal different kinds of candidate attributes of candidate quality, ranging from their likely policy positions to their likelihood of being able to access state resources. Parties with a longer track record or who have comprised a relatively larger proportion of successful candidates previously are likely to produce stronger prior beliefs about the current candidate in question. If party identification strongly signals candidate quality and predicts prior beliefs about candidates, the effect of additional information is likely to be relatively small. Thus, we expect the effect of information to be greater when party identification cannot be used in this way. That is, we expect that the effect of information about candidate valence on vote choice to be greater during the primary elections (an intra-party environment), where party affiliation is held constant, than in the inter-party environment of the general election.

**Low information about candidates**

Elections have a mixed reputation in Uganda. While 57% of our baseline respondents in the general elections consider it very unlikely that "powerful people" can find out how they voted, only 39% consider it very likely that the counting of votes will be free and fair (n=4,709).[7] Voters are poorly informed about candidates. Three to six weeks before the scheduled general election, a minority of interviewed voters knew a given candidate's positions on three salient policy issues: the proliferation of administrative units (22% correct), a proposed ban on candidates found to have engaged in vote buying (25% correct), and the priority sector for the constituency (24% correct). Further, they had relatively little knowledge about candidates' education, occupation, religion, and even ethnicity.

---

[7]Interestingly, the reputation of primary elections is slightly better. Restricting to the subset of voters who are eligible to vote in the primary elections to ensure comparability of samples, 62% compared to the same 57% consider the ballot to be secret. The share of voters who expect the elctions to be free and fair does not differ across the two types of elections.

# 4 Research Design

This field experiment took place in eleven of Uganda's 249 directly elected parliamentary constituencies. The candidate debates were recorded with all available candidates prior to the primary elections held by Uganda's ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), in mid-2015 and the general elections held in early 2016. A detailed timeline of the study is included in Appendix B.

## 4.1 Meet the Candidates videos

In this study, information about candidates was provided in the form of a video recording in which candidates for the office of Member of Parliament answered a set of questions about their policy preferences, qualifications for office, personal characteristics, and relevant experience. We selected questions that we expect to provide voters with information along two primary dimensions: *policy* and *image*. Policy includes candidates' policy positions on several important policy issues. Providing information about candidates' positions allows voters to determine the extent to which policy alignment exists between the voter and the candidate on a set of three issues: 1) constituency policy priorities, 2) the creation of new administrative units (districts), and 3) the legal consequences for those convicted of vote buying.

Additional questions allowed candidates to share information about their qualifications and performance. Questions on qualifications and performance, together with the overall image a candidate displayed in the course of the video, contribute to a voter's knowledge about the second dimension, candidate image. We employ the definition of candidate as suggested by Hacker (2004), a cognitive representation made in the process of voter perceptions of candidate messages. A discussion of the measurement of the extent of policy alignment and candidate image is provided in Section 4.2 and in Appendix F. The precise wording of the questions asked of candidates can be found in Appendix D.

The intervention was implemented in collaboration with a consortium of partners, including

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the Department of Political Science at Makerere University, the Agency for Transformation, a Ugandan civil society group, and Leo Africa Forum, a Ugandan civil society group organizing regional and national policy debates. The project was designed in consultation with the Uganda Electoral Commission and the NRM Electoral Commission.

We invited all candidates for are MP in a given constituency into a TV studio in Kampala to respond to a set of standardized questions about their policy positions and qualifications. The responses were then edited to produce one candidate 'debate' video per constituency. For both primaries and general elections, trained moderators facilitated the candidate debates to ensure uniformity of treatment across constituencies. MP candidates were invited to a professional TV studio in Kampala several weeks prior to the election. Moderators ensured that each candidate answered every question and each candidate received equal time, and debates were held in local languages. The recordings were professionally edited to give the appearance of a debate: After brief introductions, all recorded candidates answered one question in turn before moving on to the next question. Their names and party affiliations were blended in to increase name and face recognition.

These videos were then screened publicly in a randomly selected set of polling stations within the constituency, in a "village road show". This intervention is similar to the one studied by Bidwell, Casey and Glennerster (2014) in Sierra Leone.

We think of our information treatment as providing information along two different dimensions, candidates' policy platforms and candidates' characteristics (commonly referred to as *candidate image* (Hacker 2004)):

1. Policy

    (a) Policy priorities for the constituency
    (b) Position on a contentious issue: District splitting
    (c) Position on a contentious issue: Legal consequences of vote buying

2. Image

    (a) Qualifications (education, career history, community experience)
    (b) Personal characteristics that best prepares them for office
    (c) Performance: Achievements that show the candidate will be a good representative

In the primary elections, 80 percent of candidates participated, while in the general elections, 91 percent of candidates participated.

**Constituency Selection and Assignment**

The candidate debates took place in a total of 11 constituencies. The sample of constituencies eligible for selection into either the intra or inter-party treatment condition was determined by assessing the competitiveness, likelihood of violence, and other factors affecting the ability of project consortium to screen the film. First, a set of 58 rural constituencies were selected using the following criteria for competitiveness: (a) having different winning parties in the past two elections (2006 and 2011) (b) not having the same Member of Parliament serve for two different parties, and (c) having average vote margins across the past two elections of 20 percent or lower. Urban constituencies, i.e. constituencies located within city or municipal boundaries, were excluded from the sample.

Then, the research team conducted interviews with a set of key informants, including journalists, members of political parties, political analysts, and staff at Innovations for Poverty Action to gather information on past violence and the likelihood of violence, whether a constituency was located in a difficult to reach area, and whether the presence of multiple languages would prohibit the screening of the film in a single language (thereby preventing a subset of constituents from being able to understand the information being provided). After excluding constituencies for the aforementioned reasons, a total of twenty-seven constituencies remained eligible for inclusion.[8]

Figure 1 maps the constituencies in our sample. Constituencies are relatively evenly split between having an incumbent from the NRM (four), an opposition party (four) or an Independent (three). The incumbent was running in either the general elections and/or the NRM primary elections in nine of the constituencies. In the 11 constituencies we worked in, the number of candidates running in the primaries ranged from two to nine candidates, with a median of four candidates and

---

[8]In one constituency, Bugweri, the incumbent had served the previous term, violating criteria a). However, this constituency was included because the original result tally showed a different party winning the 2011 election. The result was eventually overturned. In any case, this series of events shows the constituency to be highly competitive.

a mean of 4.5. All primary candidates were male and members of the ruling party.
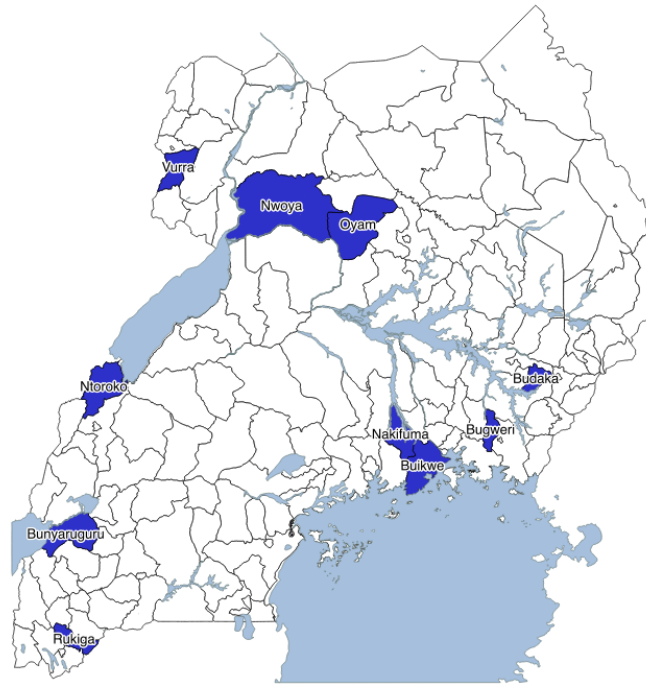


Figure 1: Map of constituencies in sample

**Polling Station Assignment to Treatment**

The primary unit of randomization was the polling station. In the 11 study constituencies, we randomly assigned polling stations to one of the following: a) primary elections - public screening, b) primary elections - control, c) general elections - public screening, and d) general elections - control. In each constituency, we randomly assigned half of the eligible polling stations to receive a public debate screening and half to serve as control, for a total of 120 treatment and 120 control polling stations in each election round.

To ensure that polling stations were geographically distributed in the constituency and that no adjacent villages were selected into the sample, we randomized in two stages. First, parishes were assigned to one of four treatment conditions. To ensure orthogonality across the survey rounds, and to enable us to measure interaction effects between the two election rounds, we used a factorial design (see Table 1), with the treatment and control assignment in the general and the primary

13

elections, respectively, being the two dimensions.[9] In each study round, primaries and general elections, only one polling station per parish was included in the "public" sample – and assigned to the public treatment or control condition – in order to minimize spillover.

|  | | Primaries | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | | Treatment | Control |
| General Elections | Treatment | TT | TC |
|  | Control | CT | CC |

Table 1: Randomization Two-by-Two

Within each parish, we selected the three polling stations with the highest overlap between a polling station catchment area and its 'main' village.[10] We define the main village as the village contributing the highest number of voters to a polling station according to the updated voter register of the National Electoral Commission (2015). Overlap is defined as the percentage of voters in a given polling station that come from its main village. For example, a polling station where 90% of voters come from the village contributing the highest number of voters is considered to have higher overlap than a polling station where only a maximum of 20% of voters come from one village. We chose this strategy to maximize overlap between a village and a polling station catchment area in the general elections.[11]

The three sample polling stations per parish were then randomly assigned to be part of the primaries sample or the general election public sample.[12] Randomization was blocked at the constituency level. Since the elections we analyze were held at the constituency level, this strategy effectively blocks on legislative performance of the incumbent, level of electoral competition, quality of service delivery, performance of the incumbent in the debate, number of challengers, and other

---

[9]Eligibility criteria for parishes were: At least two polling stations in the parish, only one randomly selected parish per urban area (town council).

[10]To minimize spillover, we excluded polling stations from the sample which: (a) were part of the sample of the other Metaketa Uganda team, and/or (b) had a main village where voters were registered in polling stations in two different parishes.

[11]The zoning of primary polling stations is different in the primary elections, where one village typically corresponds with a village, rendering high overlap in the general elections all the more important for the sake of comparability of results across the two rounds of elections. We invited voters from other but the main village to attend the public screening during the general elections.

[12]A subset of polling stations was randomly assigned to a companion study arm with individual level randomization in the general election. Results of this study are presented in (Platas and Raffler, Forthcoming).

constituency level characteristics.

For the NRM primary elections, each gazetted village in Uganda serves as a polling station. For the general elections, each polling station serves several villages, with an average of 550 voters per polling station in the 2016 general elections. There were over 24,000 polling stations, with an average of 110 polling stations per constituency, in the 2016 general elections.

**Respondent Assignment to Treatment**

We sampled a random subset of 20 voters in each polling station assigned to a group treatment or control to participate in the survey. We relied on official voter registers for the process of randomization at the level of the respondent. For the NRM primaries, only those eligible to participate in the primary elections, that is, registered NRM voters, were eligible for participation in the study. For the general elections, only registered voters were eligible for participation in the study. Since endline data collection was done per phone, we restricted our sample to those who could be reached via cell phone. We asked respondents whether there was *any* number they could be reached at. The vast majority of sampled respondents were able to provide a phone number, whether their own or the one of a relative, friend, or neighbor. When the number provided was not their own, multiple calls were made until the owner of the phone was able to locate the respondent to hand the phone over to them.[13]

## 4.2 Data

Data on the primary outcomes of interest, vote choice and turnout, were collected in two ways. First, we obtained official voting records disaggregated at the polling station level for both the primary and general elections.[14] Second, we obtained individual level voting outcomes through a phone survey on the evening of the election for all treatment and control groups. In addition to

---

[13]We are in the process of entering data from tracking sheets. In the four (relatively central) constituencies we have entered thus far, 2% of respondents were excluded at the listing stage because they could not be reached by any phone.

[14]Polling station records for the NRM primaries were collected by phone from local chairpersons in each village in the study.

the exit poll, we conducted a baseline survey in all treatment arms and a posterior survey in the treatment group only.

**Survey Data and Study Stages**    The stages of interaction with the primary respondents, i.e. all those sampled for the household survey, are outline below.

1. Baseline survey to elicit baseline characteristics and priors. At the end of the baseline survey, respondents were given an invitation card to attend the debate screening. The invitation card contained their respondent ID. They were told that if they attended the debate and were willing to conduct a brief interview afterwards, they would receive a small compensation in the form of airtime (about USD 0.50) conditional on presenting the invitation card.

2. Public debate screening. The debate screening was held at a central location in the polling station catchment area. It was open to the public and advertised in advance.

3. Posterior survey. Within 24 hours of the debate screening we conducted a posterior survey with respondents from the primary sample.

4. Phone-based exit poll. All respondents in the panel sample were called on the evening of election day to ask about their individual voting behavior. For a random subset of respondents (50%) we conducted an 'exit poll plus' which also elicited political knowledge, perceived likability of the candidates and information on candidate behavior in the polling station catchment area. Respondents who could not be reached the on Election Day were tracked over the course of the coming days.

In control areas, steps (2) and (3) were skipped.

**Electoral Data**    The data for candidate vote share and turnout comes from official polling station electoral returns. For the general election, data on both outcome variables were collected by the Electoral Commission and available at the polling station level. For the primaries, we collected

16

election returns directly from the polling station returning officers the evening of the election by phone.[15]

**Intervention surveys**   At each screening, enumerators conducted a short survey including the time of day of the screening, number of attendees, gender composition, and noted any events or incidents that may have affected the treatment.

## 4.3   Dependent variables

We consider four different dependent variables in this study.

- **Political knowledge** (0-3) is an additive, continuous index combining respondents' knowledge on MP roles (0-1), the share of candidates in their constituency whom they can name (0-1), and the share of candidates in their constituency for whom they can correctly name their priority sector (0-1). It is measured during the "Plus" component of the exit poll, which was conducted with a random half of the exit poll sample.

- **Turnout** is a binary measure that takes a value of 1 if the respondent reports that they voted on election day *and* can answer two verification questions about the election process correctly during the exit poll, 0 otherwise.

- **Vote choice** is a binary variable for each voter-candidate dyad, which takes the value 1 if voter $i$ reported voting for candidate $j$ in the exit poll of our survey and answers the two verification questions correctly, and 0 otherwise.

- **Switch** is a binary variable for each voter which takes the value 1 if a voter voted for a different candidate than reportedly intended at baseline[16] or did not vote at all, and 0 otherwise.

---

[15]Returning officers expected our calls – we called them two days in advance of the election – and received a small compensation (5,000/= UGX or about USD 1.20).

[16]Respondents were asked at baseline: "If [NRM primary elections/general elections] were held tomorrow, which candidate would you vote for as member of parliament for this constituency?"

We recognize the potential of overreporting with respect to turnout, which is common in surveys, and address it using verification questions that those who in fact voted are much more likely to answer correctly than those who did not. First, the question is phrased "While talking to people about today's primary elections, we find that some people were able to vote, while others were not. How about you - were you able to vote or not?" to minimize social response bias by signaling that it we understand that it may have been beyond people's control whether they were able to vote. Second, we asked verification questions which only voters who voted in the respective election are likely to be able to answer correctly.

In the primaries, the first verification question asks whether the vote choice was handwritten or pre-printed on the ballot paper (it was pre-printed). 93% of respondents who said they had voted answered this question correctly. The second verification question asks whether they candidate they voted for was wearing a suit or a t-shirt in the photo on the ballot paper. This is a trick question, since there were no photos on the ballot paper. The correct answer is thus that neither is true since there was no picture. 90% of respondents who said they had voted answered this question correctly. In the general elections, biometric machines for voter verification were used for the first time. We took advantage of this fact and asked voters which of their fingers was used to verify their identity. 79% of respondents who said they had voted answered this question correctly (right thumb).

In the analysis we only consider people who answered these questions correctly (85% of primary respondents who reported having voted, 79% of general election respondents) as having in fact voted. Robustness checks with responses taken at face-value are included in the Appendix and yield similar results. Similarity with official election records gives us further confidence in out data: Self-reported, verified turnout in our sample was 75%, compared to 70% according to the official election records for our polling stations. The 5% difference can be explained by the fact that we removed voters who are registered but deceased or no longer living in a village from our sampling frame as well as those too sick or old to respond to a survey.

We are less concerned about social response bias in favor of certain candidates, since the videos

treated all candidates equally and did therefore not suggest a desirable response. Section 6 explores this issue further.

## 4.4 Defining good and bad news

In addition to our treatment variable, we also construct a variable indicating the type of news about each candidate a voter received in watching the video or would have received if they had been assigned to treatment. News – good or bad – is a function of a voter's priors about a given candidate with respect to policy alignment and several dimensions related to candidate image (Hacker, 2004). Our method for defining type of news is discussed briefly here and outlined in detail in the preanalysis plan and Appendix F.

For policy positions, we consider it as good news if a candidate's policy preferences are more aligned with those of the voter than anticipated, or are as aligned as anticipated (thus offering greater certainty), and as bad news otherwise. The distance (N) between the prior and the information provided determine the degree to which news are good or bad. We consider it "very good news" if a voter had a prior that a candidate's policy position was not aligned, but the position is indeed aligned (+++), as "good news" if a voter didn't have a prior on whether the policy positions were aligned and finds out that they are aligned (++) and as "weakly good news" if a voter's prior that policy positions are aligned is confirmed, thus reducing uncertainty (+). Conversely, we consider it "very bad news" if a voter had a prior that policy positions were aligned but the information reveals that they are not (—), as "bad news" if a voter did not have a prior and the information reveals that they are not aligned (–) and as "weakly bad news" if a voter's prior that policy positions are not aligned is confirmed (-). This is summarized in the table below.[17]

---

[17]We also assess the possibility that candidates convince voters to change their policy preferences. To do so, we ask respondents after watching the debate what their policy preference is. If it is different from the one reported at baseline, we ask them what made them change their mind.

|        | Information |           |
|              |        | Align | Non-align |
| Prior | Align      | +     | —         |
|        | Non-align  | +++   | -         |
|        | Don't know | ++    | –         |

For candidate image, we first collect voters' priors at baseline on a set of dimensions of candidate quality. These dimensions include: competence, understanding of policy issues, eloquence, trustworthiness, and genuine interest in voters' interests (goodwill). We then ask a panel of Ugandan experts, consisting of journalists, researchers, and members of civil society, to code the quality of each candidate along five of dimensions. Both voter priors and expert assessments are measured using the same questions and scale. We use expert assessments because they are relatively objective and allows us to make predictions about which voters should receive positive and which should receive negative news about a given candidate through the debate, given their priors about a candidate.

| Dimension | Category ($k$) | Weight ($w_k$) |
|---|---|---|
| Policy | Alignment on constituency policy priority | a |
|  | Alignment on national policy priority | b |
|  | Alignment on position on district splitting | c |
| Candidate image | Competence | d |
|  | Understanding of policy issues | e |
|  | Eloquence | f |
|  | Trustworthiness | g |
|  | Goodwill | h |

.

Since our treatment is a bundle of information along candidate image and policy dimensions, we construct a weighted average of good/bad news across the different categories. To do so, we ask each respondent at baseline how they weight the different categories of information when deciding how to vote.[18] We then use these weights to construct a respondent specific average of the type of

---

[18]The survey question reads: "There are many factors people take into consideration when deciding how to assess a candidate. I'm going to read you a few such factors. For each of them, please tell me how important you consider them in your personal evaluation of candidates for area MP – very important, somewhat important, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant. *List of criteria:* (a) Whether a candidate thinks that the same issues are a priority for your constituency as you do. (b) Whether a candidate has the same policy priority for Uganda as a whole as you. (c) Whether a candidate holds the same position as you on whether or not more districts should be created in Uganda. (d) How well a candidate understands policy issues. (e) How well qualified, considering

information they receive. We note that our results with respect to good and bad news are robust to an alternative specification where all dimensions receive equal weight.

## 4.5  Covariates

We include a vector of pre-specified covariates in our analysis. All control variables were measured at baseline and standardized. They include respondent's age, gender, education, assets (index), identification with the ruling party, past turnout, whether a respondent expects the ballot to be secret (four point scale) and fair (four point scale), respondents' access to political information, whether a respondent considers the information provided in the debate as salient, and the extent to which a debate is the preferred source of information of a respondent (both questions asked before respondents were informed of the debate). In specifications where the voter-candidate dyad is the unit of analysis, the vector of controls also includes the following candidate specific variables: coethnicity with the candidate, cogender with the candidate, the factual knowledge a respondent has about a candidate, whether a respondent intends to vote for a given candidate, whether a respondent has voted for a given candidate in the past election cycle, and expected clientelism of a candidate (four point scale). Details about the operationalization and measurements of these variables are included in Appendix E.

## 4.6  Balance and attrition

We were able to reach 85% of enrolled respondents at endline (78% during the primary phase of the study, 92% during the general election phase). Attrition is balanced across treatment and control. As Table 11 in the Appendix shows, treatment is mostly balanced when regressing the treatment dummy on all baseline covariates. The p-value for the joint hypothesis tests are 0.887 for the pooled sample, 0.993 for the general election sample, 0.850 for NRM members in the general elections, and 0.710 for the primary sample, respectively. Two variables (wealth and perceived

education, job, and life experience a candidate is to represent your constituency. (f) How well a candidate can express him/herself. (g) How likable a candidate is as a person. (h) Whether you can rely on a candidate to follow through on what they say."

credibility of videos as information source) are slightly imbalanced and included in the vector of controls.

## 4.7 Estimation

We estimate Equation 1

$$E(Y_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \sum_{j=1}^{k} (\nu_k Z_i^k + \psi_k Z_i^k T_i) \tag{1}$$

where $Y_i$ refers to the outcome measure for voter $i$, $T_i$ to the treatment assignment of voter $i$, and where $Z_1, Z_2, ..., Z_k$ are covariates as specified above, standardized to have a 0 mean. Standard errors are clustered at the polling station level (the unit of randomization) and constituency fixed effects are included. The unit of observation is the individual voter $i$. We show results for the pooled sample (column 1 in the following tables), as well as the general elections (column 2) and primary sample separately (column 4). For greater comparability with the primary sample, we also include estimation results for the subset of general election respondents who are NRM members and were thus eligible to vote in the primary election (column 3). Tables in the Appendix show results from a pooled model with interaction terms instead of split samples.

# 5 Results

## 5.1 Political knowledge

First, we consider the effect of the debate intervention on an intermediate outcome, political knowledge. As shown in Table 2, the screening of a debate video in the village had a large, positive effect on political knowledge. The treatment resulted in a slight increase in general knowledge on the responsibilities of members of parliament, and increased candidate specific knowledge. In particular, the share of candidates for whom respondents could correctly identify their priority sector for the constituency increased by 7.0 percentage points, and the share of candidates of whom respondents

knew the name increased by 13.8 percentage points in the general elections, and by 4.1 and 9.8 percentage points, respectively, in the primary elections. We suspect that the reason why the MP responsibilities component was not significant in the primary election only was because the index included several questions with little variation.

Table 2: Treatment effect on political knowledge

|  | (1) Index | (2) MP roles | (3) Candidates | (4) Priority sector |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | 0.240*** | 0.032** | 0.070*** | 0.138*** |
|  | (0.026) | (0.014) | (0.017) | (0.011) |
| Treatment x Primaries | -0.094** | -0.025 | -0.029 | -0.040** |
|  | (0.040) | (0.019) | (0.025) | (0.018) |
| Primaries | 0.291*** | 0.213*** | 0.093*** | -0.015 |
|  | (0.027) | (0.014) | (0.018) | (0.010) |
| Constant | 1.270*** | 0.477*** | 0.677*** | 0.116*** |
|  | (0.017) | (0.010) | (0.012) | (0.006) |
| N | 4,657 | 4,657 | 4,657 | 4,657 |
| $R^2$ | 0.306 | 0.247 | 0.268 | 0.198 |
| Treat + Treat x Prim | 0.146*** | 0.007 | 0.041** | 0.098*** |
|  | (0.028) | (0.012) | (0.017) | (0.014) |

*Notes:* Column (1) shows treatment effects on the additive political knowledge index (scale 0-3), Columns (2-3) show results on its components, each scaled 0-1: (2) MP responsibilities known, (3) the share of candidates known, and (4) the share of candidates for whom the priority sector can be correctly named. The unit of observation is the individual voter. The sample is pooled across the primary and general election (public screenings) and restricted to a random subset of respondents who received the "Plus" survey at endline. The bottom panel shows the linear combination of *Treatment* and *Treatment x Primaries*. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10.

## 5.2   Turnout

Next, we consider the effect of the debate intervention on turnout. We hypothesized that the effect of the treatment on turnout would be conditional on receiving bad news about the candidate for whom the voter intended to vote, and that this effect would differ between the primary and general election. Specifically, we thought turnout would be affected to a greater extent in the general election where voters with strong party allegiance may be reluctant to switch to a better performing candidate and instead simply stay home on election day. As can be seen in Table 3, the intervention had a significant negative effect on turnout among the subset of voters who received bad news

23

about the candidate they reported planning on voting for at baseline. In the pooled sample, turnout decreased by an estimated 3.8 percentage points among this subset of voters. The effect is largest among registered NRM members in the general election (4.4 percentage points). While the coefficient is not significant in the primary elections, the magnitude of the effect is comparable. Note that a rather high share of respondents – towards 70 percent – were eligible to receive negative news about their intended vote choice. Since bad news is defined relative to a respondents' prior, this implies that voters had excessively high expectations of their favorite candidates.

Table 3: Treatment effect on turnout

|  | (1) Pooled | (2) GE | (3) GE-NRM | (4) Primary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | -0.026 | -0.004 | -0.039 | -0.054 |
|  | (0.025) | (0.029) | (0.033) | (0.040) |
| Treat x Bad news | -0.013 | -0.031 | -0.006 | 0.016 |
|  | (0.024) | (0.030) | (0.033) | (0.037) |
| Bad news | -0.008 | -0.008 | -0.017 | -0.026 |
|  | (0.016) | (0.020) | (0.023) | (0.024) |
| Constant | 0.780*** | 0.770*** | 0.790*** | 0.787*** |
|  | (0.016) | (0.018) | (0.020) | (0.024) |
| N | 6,387 | 3,823 | 2,932 | 2,564 |
| $R^2$ | 0.020 | 0.029 | 0.029 | 0.047 |
| Treat + Treat x Bad news | -0.038** | -0.036* | -0.044* | -0.038 |
|  | (0.019) | (0.021) | (0.023) | (0.032) |
| Mean (Bad news) | 0.679 | 0.668 | 0.683 | 0.697 |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is verified, self-reported turnout. The linear combination of *Treatment + Treatment x Bad news* reported in the bottom panel can be interpreted as the average treatment effect on turnout conditional on receiving bad news on one's intended vote choice. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10.

Table 13 in the Appendix shows results for the fully saturated model with a triple interaction between Treatment, Primaries and Bad news on intended vote choice.[19] As Table 12 in the Appendix shows, we do not find an average effect of the treatment on turnout for the pooled sample nor any of our subsamples.

---

[19]Here, we find that receiving bad news on one's intended vote choice results in a weakly significant decline in turnout in the general election of 3.8 percentage points (p-value = 0.093), but not in the primary election (p-value = 0.262). Note, however that the point estimates are almost exactly the same across the two elections.

## 5.3 Vote choice

Next, we turn to an analysis of the effect of receiving good and bad news on vote choice. Here, the unit of analysis is the voter-candidate dyad. In other words, we ask, did the intervention affect the propensity of voter $i$ to vote for candidate $j$, conditional on whether the voter received positive news about candidate $j$ during the debate?

As discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2 and Appendix F, since the assessment of some aspects of performance are subjective and since we only have the assessment of respondents in the treatment group, we use the degree of policy alignment and the difference between expert assessments of candidate quality and voters' priors about candidate quality along these same dimensions to determine whether or not a voter receives or would have received good news about a particular candidate. To estimate the effect of the debates on vote choice conditional on the type of predicted news a respondent has/would have received, we estimate the following equation:

$$E(Y_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 T_i Goodnews_{ij} + \beta_3 Goodnews_{ij} + \sum_{j=1}^{k} (\nu_k Z_i^k + \psi_k Z_i^k T_i) \qquad (2)$$

where $Y_{ij}$ refers to the binary vote choice of voter $i$ with regard to candidate $j$, $T_i$ to the treatment assignment of voter $i$, and $Goodnews_{ij}$ indicates whether voter $i$ received (treatment group) or would have had received (control group and non-compliers in the treatment group) had they seen the video. As before, $Z_1, Z_2, ..., Z_k$ are covariates as specified above, standardized to have a 0 mean. Standard errors are clustered at the polling station level (the unit of randomization) and constituency fixed effects are included. We restrict the sample to viable candidates, defined as those receiving at least ten percent of the vote share. As shown in Table 4, we find that there is no effect of either good or bad news as we define it on vote choice in either the primary or general election.

Table 4: Treatment effect on vote choice

| | Good news | | | | Bad news | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Pooled** | **GE** | **GE-NRM** | **Primary** | **Pooled** | **GE** | **GE-NRM** | **Primary** |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Treatment | -0.013 | -0.012 | -0.016 | -0.014 | -0.011 | -0.014 | -0.006 | -0.005 |
| | (0.008) | (0.009) | (0.011) | (0.013) | (0.015) | (0.013) | (0.016) | (0.023) |
| Treat x Distance | 0.002 | -0.007 | 0.003 | -0.005 | 0.007 | 0.008 | 0.003 | -0.006 |
| | (0.008) | (0.009) | (0.013) | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.013) | (0.016) | (0.016) |
| Distance | -0.020*** | -0.010 | -0.060*** | -0.022** | -0.052*** | -0.027*** | -0.046*** | -0.004 |
| | (0.006) | (0.007) | (0.009) | (0.009) | (0.008) | (0.010) | (0.012) | (0.011) |
| Constant | 0.209*** | 0.232*** | 0.227*** | 0.198*** | 0.386*** | 0.393*** | 0.397*** | 0.416*** |
| | (0.007) | (0.006) | (0.008) | (0.009) | (0.012) | (0.009) | (0.011) | (0.016) |
| N | 9,338 | 5,398 | 4,047 | 3,940 | 7,193 | 4,497 | 3,430 | 2,696 |
| $R^2$ | 0.197 | 0.222 | 0.053 | 0.183 | 0.076 | 0.228 | 0.085 | 0.213 |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is verified, self-reported vote choice. The unit of observation is the voter-candidate dyad. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.10$.

## 5.4  Switching

Next we examine whether those who watched Meet the Candidates videos were more likely to switch away from their intended vote choice that those who did not. As shown in Table 5, which shows results for four samples: the pooled sample of both primary and general election, the sample of general election voters, the sample of NRM members in the general election, and the sample of NRM primary voters. We find that in the pooled sample, voters in the treatment group are indeed more likely to switch away from their intended vote choice. This effect was driven by voters in the general election. The effect size is larger for the NRM members in the general election, suggesting that those who report affiliation to the ruling party are especially likely to change their vote choice after viewing the videos.[20]  It is also worth noting that levels of switching are quite high even in the control group. In the general election, just under half of voters in the control group voted for someone different than their intended vote choice, and in the primary, more than half of voters in the control voted for someone they had not stated an intention to vote for. There is thus clearly a high degree of uncertainty about vote choice at the parliamentary level in both primary and general

---

[20]We note that results differ when pooling respondents from the general and primary elections and including an interaction term here. See Table 14.

elections.

Table 5: Treatment effect on switching

|  | (1) Pooled | (2) GE | (3) GE-NRM | (4) Primary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | 0.037** | 0.035* | 0.043* | 0.034 |
|  | (0.018) | (0.020) | (0.023) | (0.025) |
| Constant | 0.437*** | 0.448*** | 0.423*** | 0.510*** |
|  | (0.014) | (0.013) | (0.015) | (0.018) |
| N | 7,316 | 3,949 | 3,015 | 3,367 |
| $R^2$ | 0.046 | 0.044 | 0.045 | 0.103 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. *Switch* is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if a voter did not vote for the candidate whom she was planning to vote for at baseline (self-reported), 0 otherwise. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10

Whom did voters switch to and from? In the primary elections, seeing the videos made voters more likely to switch to the debate winner, defined as the candidate deemed as the best performer in the video by either the local expert panel or by the respondents, as assessed during the posterior survey. The treatment had no such effect in the general elections.

Table 6: Treatment effect on switching to debate winners

|  | (1) Expert Pooled | (2) Popular Pooled | (3) Expert GE | (4) Popular GE | (5) Expert GE_NRM | (6) Popular GE-NRM | (7) Expert Primary | (8) Popular Primary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | 0.016 | 0.015* | -0.001 | 0.006 | -0.010 | -0.001 | 0.032** | 0.025* |
|  | (0.010) | (0.008) | (0.011) | (0.010) | (0.013) | (0.010) | (0.015) | (0.013) |
| Constant | 0.086*** | 0.082*** | 0.096*** | 0.088*** | 0.100*** | 0.085*** | 0.057*** | 0.067*** |
|  | (0.008) | (0.006) | (0.008) | (0.007) | (0.009) | (0.008) | (0.007) | (0.008) |
| N | 5,175 | 7,323 | 2,889 | 3,983 | 2,223 | 3,039 | 2,286 | 3,340 |
| $R^2$ | 0.029 | 0.032 | 0.031 | 0.026 | 0.039 | 0.028 | 0.134 | 0.053 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10

In the general election, we instead observe systematic variation in patterns of switching by the party of the candidates.[21] As Table 7 shows, the treatment significantly increased the share of voters who switched away from the NRM candidate in their constituency, while it had no such

---

[21]The following exploration of mechanisms was not prespecified.

effect on switching away from the opposition or independents. Instead, the treatment resulted in voters switching to opposition candidates, as can be seen in Table 8.

Table 7: Treatment effect on switching from parties

|  | (1) From NRM GE | (2) From NRM GE-NRM | (3) From Ind GE | (4) From Ind GE-NRM | (5) From Opp GE | (6) From Opp GE-NRM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | 0.052*** | 0.062*** | -0.010 | -0.012 | -0.000 | -0.002 |
|  | (0.016) | (0.019) | (0.013) | (0.014) | (0.009) | (0.009) |
| Constant | 0.206*** | 0.211*** | 0.136*** | 0.135*** | 0.089*** | 0.063*** |
|  | (0.010) | (0.012) | (0.010) | (0.011) | (0.006) | (0.006) |
| N | 3,946 | 3,014 | 3,870 | 2,960 | 3,870 | 2,960 |
| $R^2$ | 0.037 | 0.035 | 0.084 | 0.089 | 0.105 | 0.089 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10

Table 8: Treatment effect on switching to parties

|  | (1) To NRM GE | (2) To NRM GE-NRM | (3) To Ind GE | (4) To Ind GE-NRM | (5) To Opp GE | (6) To Opp GE-NRM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | -0.016 | -0.017 | 0.009 | 0.014 | 0.019** | 0.015* |
|  | (0.010) | (0.011) | (0.008) | (0.009) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| Constant | 0.097*** | 0.089*** | 0.047*** | 0.044*** | 0.049*** | 0.045*** |
|  | (0.007) | (0.008) | (0.005) | (0.006) | (0.005) | (0.005) |
| N | 3,946 | 3,014 | 3,870 | 2,960 | 3,870 | 2,960 |
| $R^2$ | 0.024 | 0.029 | 0.048 | 0.053 | 0.075 | 0.079 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10

Tables and 7 and 8 suggest a substitution effect from the NRM towards the opposition. To investigate this further, we restrict the sample to voters who reported intending to vote for the NRM candidate at baseline (62% of the sample) and assess the treatment effect on their propensity to abstain or cast a ballot for the ruling party, independent candidates or opposition candidates. Table 9 summarizes the results. The treatment reduced the NRM vote share among this sample by 6.3 percentage points. Respondents either abstained (3.7 percent, p-value = 0.110), voted for an opposition candidate (1.9 percent, p-value = 0.044), or voted for an independent candidate (0.5 percent, p-value = 0.610).

Table 9: Treatment effect on voting behavior among those intending to vote NRM

|  | (1) Voted NRM | (2) Abstained | (3) Voted Opp. | (4) Voted Indep. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | -0.063*** | 0.037 | 0.019** | 0.005 |
|  | (0.024) | (0.023) | (0.009) | (0.009) |
| Constant | 0.655*** | 0.234*** | 0.053*** | 0.044*** |
|  | (0.016) | (0.014) | (0.006) | (0.007) |
| N | 2,433 | 2,433 | 2,393 | 2,393 |
| $R^2$ | 0.046 | 0.029 | 0.134 | 0.060 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. The sample is restricted to respondents who reported at baseline that they intended to vote for the NRM candidate (62% of the general election sample). All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.10$

# 6 Discussion

Thus far, our results show relatively equivalent levels of learning about candidates that took place in response to watching the debate videos during both types of elections, but somewhat different effects on voting behavior. The evidence is suggestive that voters in the treatment group in the general election who received bad news about their intended vote choice were less likely to turnout, and we find strong evidence that a number of voters in the general election responded to the treatment by shifting their votes away from the ruling party candidate. Meanwhile, those in the primary election treatment group were more likely to vote for the candidate who was perceived to have performed best in the video by either voters or experts, but this effect was not observed for the general election.

What is going on? Our predictions about the differences in response to information treatments between intra- and inter-party electoral contests have borne out, but not necessarily in the ways we expected. We expected that information would matter more for vote choice in the primary election, and indeed voters seem to update "as expected" to a greater extent in the primary election – that is, they are more likely to switch their vote to the best performer, a result also observed in response to viewing debates in Sierra Leone (Casey, Glennerster and Bidwell, 2016). But surprisingly, voters in the general election responded to videos by moving away from ruling party candidates. Why?

What does this mean for understanding information and voter behavior?

Our expectation was that partisans would rather stay home than switch their vote to another party. This turned out not to be entirely the case, which suggests that partisanship – especially among members of the ruling party – may not be as binding as assumed, at least for some voters. In this section we address several mechanisms underlying switching away from the ruling party.

First, it could be the case that the ruling party candidates simply performed poorly, and the videos thus revealed their poor quality relative to the other, and especially opposition candidates. To investigate this possibility, we created a variable that indicates whether or a not a given candidate is above or below the median in terms of popularly assessed performance, derived from a question asking respondents to rank video performance across candidates. In fact, we find that ten of the eleven ruling party candidates scored above the median in terms of performance in the video, and seven were deemed the debate winner by the largest share of respondents, suggesting that it is not relatively poor candidate quality that is driving voters away from the ruling party. This may also help explain why we do not find an effect of switching to the best performing candidate in the general election – as shown in Table 10, the best performers as assessed by voters in most cases was the ruling party candidate – but these were the very candidates voters were most likely to switch away from.

Table 10: Candidate Party, Winners and Debate Winners in General Election

| Constituency | Best performance (Popular) | Best performance (Expert) | Winner (Election) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oyam South | UPC | UPC | UPC |
| Vurra | NRM | DP | NRM |
| Ntoroko | IND | IND | NRM |
| Nwoya | FDC | NRM | FDC |
| Bugweri | NRM | FDC | FDC |
| Rukiga | NRM | FDC | NRM |
| Buikwe South | DP | DP | NRM |
| Nakifuma | NRM | IND | NRM |
| Budaka | NRM | NRM | NRM |
| Lugazi | NRM | IND | NRM |
| Bunyaruguru | NRM | IND | NRM |

The picture becomes more nuanced when we turn to performance *relative to prior expectations*. We find that while NRM candidates were perceived to have performed well compared to other

candidates, they still fell short of voters' very high expectations of them. In other words, they performed poorly relative to voters priors. Voters intending to vote for the NRM are substantially less likely to receive good news on the NRM candidate (31.6 percent) than on other candidates (61.7 percent). However, this is not driving the observed effects: NRM-leaning voters receiving bad news on their intended vote choice are no more or less likely to switch away from their intended vote choice.

Second, it could be that voters are afraid to report voting for candidates outside the ruling party, and especially for opposition candidates, in a context where one party dominates the electoral space so profoundly. Respondents may be wary that enumerators were sent by the government – either the ruling party, the president, or a related institution – and may therefore be reluctant to report support for the opposition to them. Perhaps respondents in our treatment group, with whom our research team interacted more frequently than with those in the control group (since the former saw a video and also took an additional survey), came to downgrade the possibility that enumerators were affiliated with the government, and were therefore more inclined to truthfully report support for the opposition. To assess this possibility, we re-estimated our main analyses differentiating between voters who did and did not report a belief at endline that those conducting the study were sent by the government. If response bias was driving our results, we would expect the treatment to have a weaker effect on respondents who believed that the research team was sent by the government. As shown in Table 15 in the Appendix, we find the opposite: treatment respondents who thought the government sent our enumerators are *more* likely to report switching away from the ruling party (not significant, p=0.350).

Having ruled out these two possible explanations for switching away from ruling party candidates, we examine individual level predictors of switching from the ruling party. Here, while far from definitive, the evidence suggests that those who switched away from the ruling party in response to our treatment were voters who were NRM-leaning but held relatively open attitudes toward other parties at baseline. We conduct a series of analyses to examine the relationship between individual characteristics measured at baseline and the likelihood of switching away from

the ruling party. Some of the factors that predict switching include a relatively small difference in reported "closeness"[22] to the NRM versus other political parties, greater uncertainty in intended vote choice, and belief in secret ballot. Together, these characteristics begin to pain a picture of the type of voter who is swayed away from the ruling party by watching the videos.

It could be that these NRM-leaning but open-minded voters would not have, in the absence of watching the video, had enough information to feel comfortable switching away from the NRM, or that, by simply seeing all the candidates on the same platform, felt that the opposition candidates stood a chance to win in what is commonly seen as a playing field tipped toward the ruling party. While we cannot definitively say whether or which of these might be occurring, both would fit the evidence, and further research could seek to disentangle how and when voters in a dominant party environment feel sure and secure enough to vote for the opposition.

# 7    Conclusion

How does information affect voting behavior? This study has shown that context matters, and specifically that voters respond differently to the same information depending on whether the electoral contest is intra- or inter-party. We conducted a field experiment involving over 8,000 Ugandan voters and nearly 100 candidates in eleven parliamentary constituencies in the 2015 primary elections of Uganda's ruling party and in the 2016 general elections. We recorded debate-like videos of candidates answering a set of questions about their policy positions, background, and experience and screened these videos in 240 polling stations across the country. Voters in both elections learned about candidates through the videos, and were able to name more candidates and identify candidates' policy priorities than voters who did not watch the videos.

Voters in the general election who received bad news through the videos about their intended vote choice, defined as degree of policy alignment and the difference between expert assessments and voter priors on candidate quality, were significantly more likely to stay home on election day.

---

[22]Where the survey question asks, on a scale of 1-7, how close a respondent feels to each of the main political parties.

While effect sizes are similar in the primary election, they are not statistically significantly different from zero. These findings suggest that some voters in an inter-party contest would rather not vote than switch to a better performing candidate.

Voters across the two elections also responded differently to candidate videos with respect to vote choice. In particular, voters in the primary election who watched the videos were more likely to switch to the candidate perceived as the best performer, but not in the general election. Perhaps surprisingly, voters in the general election who watched the videos were more likely to switch away from the ruling party candidate and toward opposition candidates. Voters who switched away from the ruling party were more likely to hold open attitudes toward opposition parties and less attachment to the ruling party. Thus, the new information seemed to nudge them to give opposition candidates a chance.

We can rule out the possibility that those switching away from the ruling party did so because these candidates performed badly in the videos, and also rule out that response bias is driving our results. While we cannot definitely identify the mechanism underlying the switch from ruling party to opposition candidates, we suggest two possibilities we suggest. First, the very act of candidates from different parties, including the ruling party, appearing in a joint video, may have led some voters to believe opposition candidates stood a chance and that the election was indeed conducted on a somewhat level playing ground, rather than being dominated by the ruling party. Second, it could be that the videos provided airtime that opposition candidates may have otherwise lacked, and thus enabled voters open to non-ruling party candidates to learn more about the other contenders.

In either case, the evidence suggests that videos about candidate are a promising means of sharing information with voters, and do indeed shape voting behavior. These videos can also help provide a more level playing field in an electoral environment dominated by one party, and as such may strengthen the electoral environment in the context of a dominant ruling party.

33

# References

Ansolabehere, Stephen, John Mark Hansen, Shigeo Hirano and James M Snyder. 2010. "More democracy: The direct primary and competition in US elections." *Studies in American Political Development* 24(2):190–205.

Benoit, William L, Glenn J Hansen and Rebecca M Verser. 2003. "A meta-analysis of the effects of viewing US presidential debates." *Communication Monographs* 70(4):335–350.

Bidwell, Kelly, Katherine Casey and Rachel Glennerster. 2014. "Debates: The Impact of Voter Knowledge Initiaitives in Sierra Leone." Working Paper.

Boatright, Robert G. 2013. *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primary Challenges*. University of Michigan Press.

Brady, David W, Hahrie Han and Jeremy C Pope. 2007*a*. "Primary elections and candidate ideology: Out of step with the primary electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(1):79–105.

Brady, David W, Hahrie Han and Jeremy C Pope. 2007*b*. "Primary elections and candidate ideology: Out of step with the primary electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* pp. 79–105.

Brubaker, Jennifer and Gary Hanson. 2009. "The Effect of Fox News and CNN's Postdebate Commentator Analysis on Viewers' Perceptions of Presidential Candidate Performance." *Southern Communication Journal* 74(4):339–351.

Carey, John M and John Polga-Hecimovich. 2006. "Primary elections and candidate strength in Latin America." *The Journal of Politics* 68(3):530–543.

Casey, Katherine, Rachel Glennerster and Kelly Bidwell. 2016. "Debates: Voting and Expenditure Responses to Political Communication." Stanford Business School, Working Paper No. 3066.

Chong, Alberto, Ana L De La O, Dean Karlan and Leonard Wantchekon. 2014. "Does corruption information inspire the fight or quash the hope? A field experiment in Mexico on voter turnout, choice, and party identification." *The Journal of Politics* 77(1):55–71.

Ferraz, Claudio and Frederico Finan. 2008. "Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes*." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123(2):703–745.

Hacker, Kenneth L. 2004. "Analysis of Candidate Images." *Presidential Candidate Images* p. 211.

Hall, Andrew B. 2015. "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" *American Political Science Review* 109(01):18–42.

Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy Weinstein. 2012. "Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Uganda Preliminary Analysis." *Columbia and Stanford Universities* .

Ichino, Nahomi and Noah L Nathan. 2012. "Primaries on demand? Intra-party politics and nominations in Ghana." *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4):769–91.

Ichino, Nahomi and Noah L Nathan. 2013*a*. "Do Primaries Improve Electoral Performance? Clientelism and Intra-Party Conflict in Ghana." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(2):428–441.

Ichino, Nahomi and Noah L Nathan. 2013*b*. "Do Primaries Improve Electoral Performance? Clientelism and Intra-Party Conflict in Ghana." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(2):428–441.

Pande, Rohini. 2011. "Can Informed Voters Enforce Better Governance? Experiments in Low-Income Democracies." *Annual Review of Economics* 3(1):215–237.

Platas, Melina and Pia Raffler. Forthcoming. Meet the Candidates. Field Experimental Evidence on Learning from Politician Debates in Uganda. In *Information and Accountability: A New Method for Cumulative Learning*, ed. Thad Dunning, Guy Grossman, Macartan Humphreys, Susan Hyde and Craig McIntosh. Cambridge University Press.

Schill, Dan and Rita Kirk. 2014. "Courting the Swing Voter Real Time Insights Into the 2008 and 2012 US Presidential Debates." *American Behavioral Scientist* 58(4):536–555.

# Appendices

# A   Additional Tables

Table 11: Balance

|  | (1) Pooled | (2) General | (3) GE-NRM | (4) Primary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.002 |
|  | (0.001) | (0.001) | (0.003) | (0.003) |
| Female | 0.055 | 0.062 | 0.059 | 0.043 |
|  | (0.059) | (0.071) | (0.079) | (0.089) |
| Education (years) | -0.002 | 0.004 | 0.005 | -0.007 |
|  | (0.008) | (0.010) | (0.012) | (0.012) |
| Wealth index | -0.059* | -0.069 | -0.097* | -0.068 |
|  | (0.035) | (0.046) | (0.053) | (0.047) |
| Closeness to NRM | 0.007 | 0.021 | 0.008 | -0.019 |
|  | (0.019) | (0.015) | (0.017) | (0.018) |
| Turnout in last election | 0.062 | 0.046 | 0.100 | 0.076 |
|  | (0.059) | (0.073) | (0.094) | (0.088) |
| Ballot not secret | 0.005 | 0.004 | 0.021 | -0.000 |
|  | (0.023) | (0.027) | (0.030) | (0.033) |
| Elections free and fair | -0.012 | 0.018 | 0.022 | -0.052 |
|  | (0.023) | (0.028) | (0.032) | (0.037) |
| Video salience | -0.051 | -0.015 | 0.061 | -0.092 |
|  | (0.063) | (0.085) | (0.095) | (0.088) |
| Videos preferred source | 0.057** | 0.042 | 0.029 | 0.082** |
|  | (0.025) | (0.032) | (0.036) | (0.035) |
| News consumption | -0.003 | 0.034 | 0.046 | -0.042 |
|  | (0.026) | (0.035) | (0.040) | (0.039) |
| N | 8,161 | 4,357 | 3,269 | 3,804 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.887 | 0.993 | 0.005 | 0.006 |
| Prob $>$ Chi$^2$ | 0.002 | 0.003 | 0.850 | 0.710 |

*Notes:* Logit regression of the treatment indicator on the vector of non-demeaned covariates. Closeness to NRM refers to the self-reported closeness to the ruling party relative to the next preferred party. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10.

Table 12: Treatment effect on turnout, split sample

| | (1)<br>**Pooled** | (2)<br>**GE** | (3)<br>**GE-NRM** | (4)<br>**Primary** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment | -0.023 | -0.021 | -0.033 | -0.019 |
| | (0.017) | (0.019) | (0.021) | (0.027) |
| Constant | 0.765*** | 0.759*** | 0.767*** | 0.731*** |
| | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.012) | (0.019) |
| N | 8,136 | 4,354 | 3,268 | 3,782 |
| $R^2$ | 0.024 | 0.028 | 0.028 | 0.056 |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is verified, self-reported turnout. The unit of observation is the voter. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.10$.

## Table 13: Treatment effect on turnout, pooled sample

|  | (1) | (2) |
|---|---|---|
| Treatment | -0.025 | -0.005 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.030) |
| Treatment x Primaries | 0.004 | -0.053 |
|  | (0.037) | (0.052) |
| Primaries | -0.038 | 0.006 |
|  | (0.026) | (0.033) |
| Bad news |  | -0.000 |
|  |  | (0.021) |
| Treatment x Bad news |  | -0.033 |
|  |  | (0.030) |
| Primaries x Bad news |  | -0.021 |
|  |  | (0.032) |
| Treatment x Primaries x Bad news |  | 0.054 |
|  |  | (0.048) |
| Constant | 0.766*** | 0.771*** |
|  | (0.013) | (0.018) |
| N | 8,136 | 6,387 |
| $R^2$ | 0.024 | 0.020 |
| Treat + Treat x Primaries | -0.021 |  |
|  | (0.029) |  |
| Treat + Treat x Bad news |  | -0.038* |
|  |  | (0.023) |
| Treat+ Treat x Bad news + Treat x | | -0.038 |
| Primaries + Treat x Primaries x Bad news | | (0.034) |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is verified, self-reported turnout. In column (1), the bottom panel shows the linear combination of *Treatment* and *Treatment x Primaries*. In column (2), it shows the linear combination of emphTreatment + Treatment x Bad news, which can be interpreted as the average treatment effect on turnout conditional on receiving bad news on one's intended vote choice in the general election and the corresponding linear combination for the primary election, i.e. the average treatment effect on turnout conditional on receiving bad news on one's intended vote choice in the primary election. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10.

Table 14: Treatment effect on switching

|                       | (1)        |
| --------------------- | ---------- |
| Treatment             | 0.025      |
|                       | (0.023)    |
| Treatment x Primaries | 0.027      |
|                       | (0.038)    |
| Primaries             | 0.069***   |
|                       | (0.027)    |
| Constant              | 0.443***   |
|                       | (0.015)    |
| N                     | 7,316      |
| $R^2$                 | 0.047      |
| Treat + Treat x Prim  | 0.051*     |
|                       | (0.029)    |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. *Switch* is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if a voter did not vote for the candidate whom she was planning to vote for at baseline (self-reported), 0 otherwise. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.10$

Table 15: Switching and enumerator perception

|                        | (1)<br>Switch<br>General | (2)<br>Switch<br>GE-Intend NRM | (3)<br>Switch from NRM<br>GE-Intend NRM | (4)<br>Switch to Opp<br>GE-Intend NRM |
| ---------------------- | ------------------------ | ------------------------------ | --------------------------------------- | ------------------------------------- |
| Treatment              | 0.016                    | 0.023                          | 0.023                                   | 0.012                                 |
|                        | (0.030)                  | (0.036)                        | (0.036)                                 | (0.016)                               |
| Treat x Government sent | 0.026                   | 0.053                          | 0.053                                   | 0.004                                 |
|                        | (0.040)                  | (0.048)                        | (0.048)                                 | (0.025)                               |
| Government sent        | -0.024                   | -0.042                         | -0.042                                  | 0.008                                 |
|                        | (0.030)                  | (0.035)                        | (0.035)                                 | (0.017)                               |
| Constant               | 0.457***                 | 0.368***                       | 0.368***                                | 0.055***                              |
|                        | (0.022)                  | (0.026)                        | (0.026)                                 | (0.012)                               |
| N                      | 2,585                    | 1,592                          | 1,592                                   | 1,569                                 |
| $R^2$                  | 0.054                    | 0.062                          | 0.062                                   | 0.136                                 |

*Notes:* The unit of observation is the voter. *Switch* is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if a voter did not vote for the candidate whom she was planning to vote for at baseline (self-reported), 0 otherwise. *Government sent* takes value 1 if a respondent said at endline that enumerators were sent by the government or an affiliated body. All models include constituency fixed effects and covariates. Standard errors are clustered by polling station. *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.10$

# B   Timeline

Polling stations assigned to the treatment group received screenings 1-3 weeks prior to the primaries and 1-3 weeks prior to the general election. [edit: postponed primaries.]

**Primaries**
August 2015: Recording of primary debates
August 2015: Baseline survey
September 2015: Public screenings and posterior survey
October 2015: Party primaries[23]
Ocotber 2015: Phone based exit poll of respondents and returning officers

**General elections**
December 2015: Recording of general election debates
January 2016: Baseline survey
Late January 2016: Public screenings and posterior survey[24]
February 2016: General elections
February 2016: Phone based exit poll of respondents

# C   Human Subjects

IRB protocols were approved at Stanford University (Protocol ID: 33547), Yale University (Protocol ID: 1504015711) and Innovations for Poverty Action (Protocol ID: 5898). The project received local human subjects approval from the Mildmay Uganda Research Ethics Committee and approval from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (Protocol ID: SS 3781) and the Ugandan Office of the President.

# D   Debate Script

**Introduction**

MEET THE CANDIDATES
Welcome to this "Meet the Candidates" session! Today, NRM parliamentary candidates in the primaries for [insert constituency name] answer questions about their background, qualifications and positions on important policy issues.

These candidates are competing in the primary elections of the National Resistance Movement, which are scheduled for the end of September. The winner from this race will become the NRM flagbearer for [insert constituency name] in the February 2016 general elections. Before we hear from your candidates, there are a few things you should know about your Parliament.

WHAT DOES PARLIAMENT DO?

---

[23]Postponed last-minute from September 2015

[24]At this time, individual screenings and surveys for a companion study also took place in different polling stations.

Your government is made up of three branches. These are: the Parliament, the Executive, and the Judiciary. These three branches all have different roles but they work together.

Parliament, which is made up of Members of Parliament, makes the laws that govern Uganda.

The Executive branch, which includes the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet, implements and enforces the laws written by Parliament.

It is important to know Members of Parliament are not responsible for implementing laws or government programs, and do not control district budgets. This means that Members of Parliament are not directly responsible for engaging in development projects in their constituencies, such as the construction of roads, schools, or health facilities.

SO WHAT DO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT DO?

Your Member of Parliament represents your interests by participating in the making of laws that guide the government. He or she does this by . . .

1. Raising and debating issues of national importance

2. Following up on the implementation of government programs in your constituency

3. Attending Local Council meetings to observe implementation of government programs

4. Making petitions to Parliament on your behalf

5. Helping to decide how funding is allocated in the national budget

Anyone who wants to stand for member of Parliament must have a minimum set of qualifications. In order to stand for Member of Parliament, a person must:

1. Be a citizen of Uganda

2. Be a registered voter

3. Completed a minimum formal education of Advance Level standard or its equivalent

And now, we are excited to introduce – your candidates!

[SHOW: CANDIDATE PHOTOS AND NAMES ]
[Note: in case any candidates do not appear, include the following: Candidate[s] X, Y , Z were offered the opportunity to participate in this session but did not]

[PRESENTED BY]
This event has been made possible by a group of civil society organizations and academic institutions, and is supported by the NRM and national Electoral Commission.

Now, let's get started!

**BACKGROUND [30 seconds]**

Thank you for participating in this "Meet the Candidates" session. Please begin by telling us a little bit about your **background** and **qualifications** for running as Member of Parliament for [insert constituency name].

**CONSTITUENCY PRIORITIES [2 minutes]**

Members of Parliament have the opportunity to influence which **policy issues** are prioritized. It is important to prioritize because there are limited resources available to tackle problems, and so some issues will receive more attention than others from government. Here is a list of key sectors.

- Education

- Infrastructure, like roads and bridges

- Security, like the police and military

- Healthcare

- Agricultural development

- Energy supply

- Creation of jobs

- Water and sanitation

In your opinion, what is the single most important issue for the people in your constituency? If elected as Member of Parliament, what concrete actions will you take to address this issue?

**DISTRICT CREATION [2 minutes]**

In the last ten years, many **new districts** have been created in Uganda. The debate about district creation is ongoing. Some people support and others oppose the creation of more districts in the coming years. What about you? Do you support or oppose the creation of more districts in Uganda, and why?

**MONEY AND POLITICS**

Some people argue that **money plays too large a role** in politics in Uganda. For example, money is sometimes used to buy votes, which is illegal but common. Do you think that candidates convicted of vote buying should be banned from contesting any elections for five years? Why or why not?

**PERFORMANCE [2 minutes]**

Please tell us about any **achievements** that show that you will be a **good representative** for the people of this constituency.

**CHARACTERISTICS [1 minute 30 seconds]**

Individuals may have many characteristics that make them good candidates for elected office. What is the **most important characteristic** of yours that makes you the best person to represent this constituency?

## CLOSING

Thank you to all of our candidates for participating in this Meet the Candidates session. We wish you the best with your campaigns.

Thank you to our viewers for watching this program. **Your vote matters!**

Election day for the NRM primaries is scheduled for the end of September. If you have questions about voting, or questions about the NRM primary election, please contact your local NRM official.

Thank you and good evening.

# E  Dependent and Independent Variables

## E.1  Dependent Variables

The main dependent variables of interest are vote choice and turnout, which we will collect at the polling station and individual level.

**Polling Station-Level Outcomes**

We will collect polling station level official election results for both the NRM primaries and general elections:

1. *VoteShare*: The vote share of each candidate, calculated at the level of the polling station.

2. *TurnoutShare*: The percentage of registered voters who voted on election day. The denominator for the primaries comes from the NRM voter registration list, and for the general elections comes from the national voter register. The numerator is the number of valid votes.

**Individual-Level Outcomes**

1. *Vote*: Vote choice is a binary variable for each voter-candidate dyad, which takes the value 1 if voter $i$ reported voting for candidate $j$ in the exit poll and 0 otherwise. "Which candidate did you vote for for member of parliament of your constituency?"

2. *Turnout*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if the respondent reports that they voted on election day, 0 otherwise.

**Polling Station-Level Outcomes – Secondary Dependent Variables**

In addition to these primary dependent variables, we examine another set of secondary dependent variables, collected from a random subset of respondents[25] during the exit poll survey, and aggregated at the level of the polling station:

1. *CandResponse*: Composite index indicating candidates' response to the intervention, consisting of the two variables below:

   - *CandVisits*: Number of visits to a polling station catchment area each candidate made in the previous month.

   - *CandSpend*: Amount reported spent per candidate on individual respondents in the form of sugar, salt, fuel and money in the course of the campaign.

2. *PartyResponse*: Measure of party's response to the intervention. A count variable of the number of times a party representative has visited the village, as reported by a subset of respondents in the exit poll.

**Individual-Level Outcomes – Secondary Dependent Variables**

The following are another set of secondary dependent variables, collected from a random subset of respondents[26] during the exit poll survey, and measured at the individual level:

1. *PolKnow*: An index consisting of the variables listed below.

   - *MinRequirements*: Count variable of correctly identified minimum qualifications for individuals contesting as member of Parliament. Wrong answers enter negatively.

   - *MPResp*: Count variable of correctly answered true-false questions on MP responsibilities.

   - *CandKnow*: Count variable (0-5) of correctly answered questions about individual, randomly selected MP candidates, including: percentage of candidates correctly named, party (for general election), policy position on district splitting, priority area for constituency, position on banning candidate engaged in vote buying.[27]

## E.2 Independent Variables

### E.2.1 Treatment Variables

1. *T*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if respondent is assigned to receive any treatment, 0 otherwise.

---

[25]Due to budget constraints these questions will only be collected from a subset of respondents. The exact number is yet to be determined, pending additional funding.

[26]Due to budget constraints these questions will only be collected from a subset of respondents. The exact number is yet to be determined, pending additional funding.

[27]One concern is that candidates may take different positions in the debates than they do elsewhere in the campaigns, and thus voters receive conflicting information on candidate positions. This is indeed possible, but very difficult to measure since candidate statements are infrequently recorded in the media, as they are in the US context. If candidates do provide conflicting information, this would bias us against finding a treatment effect.

2. *Public*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if respondent is assigned to receive the public (group screening) treatment, and 0 otherwise.

3. *Private*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if respondent is assigned to receive the individual (private screening) treatment, and 0 otherwise.

4. *Poll*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if a respondent is assigned to receive the poll treatment, and 0 otherwise.

5. *Watch*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if respondent attended the public or watched the private screening, and 0 otherwise.

6. *Change (N)*: Distance between priors and information received, $L_{ij} = P_{ij} - Q_{ij}$. The construction of this variable is described in detail in Appendix F.

7. *GoodNews ($L^+$)*: An indicator variable taking the value 1 if a respondent received – or would have received, in the case of the control group – good news during the screening, relative to the respondent's priors, i.e. $L_{ij} \geq 0$. The construction of this variable is described in detail in Appendix F.

8. *t*: Number of days passed between the screening and the election.

9. *N*: Strength of news, defined as the distance between Priors (P) and information content (Q), as defined by the expert panel.

### E.2.2  Individual Characteristics and Moderators

1. *CandInfo*: Count variable (0-8) consisting of: Does respondent feel informed about a candidate, whether correctly identifies candidate's highest level of education, religion, ethnicity, main occupation and policy positions.[28]

2. *PolKnow*: Count variable (0-9) of the political knowledge of a respondent at baseline, including: The number of public offices for which a respondent can correctly tell the name of the office holder, including district councilor, district chairperson, current MP and speaker of Parliament. A count variable of correctly answered true-false questions on MP responsibilities.

3. *OfferGifts*: A variable indicating whether a respondent has been offered any gifts from a candidate during this election campaign.

4. *ExpectFavor*: A variable indicating whether a respondent expects to receive any personal favors from a candidate if elected.

5. *SecretBallot*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent is confident in the secret ballot, 0 otherwise.

---

[28]This is a more comprehensive version of the outcome variable CandKnow. Since we collect CandKnow during a short phone based interview on election night we can only include a subset of the baseline questions in the outcome measure.

6. *PartyID*: Extent to which respondents are attached to one party relative to others (self-reported).[29]

   - *PartyMember*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent is a member of the political party and 0 otherwise

   - *PartyOpenness*: Count variable 1-7 of how open the respondent is to voting for the party they are a member of/feel close to.

   - *PresMPCongruence*: Count variable for past voting behavior. 0 if the respondent did not vote for the MP or presidential party candidate in the previous election, 1 if they voted for either the MP or the presidential party candidate in the previous election, and 2 if they voted for both the MP and presidential party candidate in the previous election.

7. *CoEthnic*: 1 if respondent and candidate are co-ethnics, 0 otherwise.

8. *VoteNext*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent plans to vote in the upcoming elections, and 0 otherwise.

9. *PastTurnout*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent reported voting in the previous parliamentary elections, and 0 otherwise.

10. *PastTurnoutPrim*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent reported voting in the previous parliamentary primary elections, and 0 otherwise.

11. *PastVoteParty*: Which party did you vote for in the last Parliamentary elections?

12. *PastVoteCand*: Which candidate did you vote for in the last Parliamentary elections?

13. *IntendedVote*: Intended vote choice (candidate) as reported at baseline.

14. *PastSupport*: Takes a value of 1 if the respondent reported having voted for a given candidate in either the 2010 or 2015 primary elections or the 2011 Parliamentary elections.

15. *VoterNRM*: A measure that takes a value of 1 if respondent is part of the eligible sample of the primaries (registered NRM members), and 0 otherwise.

16. *AccessInfo*: We assess respondents' self-reported interest in consuming political information as well as more objective measures of media consumption for different outlets (radio, newspapers, and TV) (composite index).

17. *Clientelism*: How likely is it that the candidate will offer something, like for example sugar, salt, fuel or money, in return for votes in the upcoming (NRM primary) election for area MP?

18. *SecretBallot*: How likely do you think it is that powerful people can find out how you personally vote during the upcoming (NRM primaries) elections, even though there is supposed to be a secret ballot in this country?

---

[29]The sum of openness (1-7) to other parties that they do not consider their preferred party)

19. *Fair*: How likely do you think it is that the counting of votes during the upcoming (NRM primary) elections will be fair?

20. Salience: Takes value 1 if the respondent considers "Whether the candidate shares my political views", "Whether the candidate is effective at delivering services and bringing benefits to this community", or "The personal characteristics of a candidate" , i.e. topics the debates provide information about, as the most salient information in response to the question "I am going to read you a list of possible information you could learn about a candidate running for area MP for this constituency. Suppose you could receive information about ONE of these things. I'd like to ask you to tell me about which of these you would most like to receive information." Other response options are "How well a candidate performs his/her duties in Parliament, for example, attendance in plenary sessions and council or committee meetings", "Whether the candidate has been accused of committing a crime", and "Whether the politician has been engaged in corruption".

21. Source: Respondent's ranking of debates as preferred source of information about a politician, relative to others listed.

22. Primary: Takes value 1 if the respondent was part of the primary elections phase of the study.

23. *Demographics*: Age, education, gender, assets, marital status, household composition, employment status.

24. *Certainty*: A respondent's self-reported certainty, measured on a 5 point scale, where they are asked how well informed they feel about a given candidate.[30]

25. $t$: Number of days between screening and election.

26. *Results*: Whether or not endline data was collected before (0) or after (1) results were officially announced.

27. *ResultsCorrect*: Whether respondent can correctly name the announced winner.

28. *PerceivedWinner*: Takes value 1 if a respondent reports that a certain candidate has been announced as winner regardless of whether that's true.

29. *Winner*: Takes value 1 if a candidate is the winner of the election.

30. *Incumbent*: Takes value 1 if a candidate is the incumbent.

# F   Defining Good and Bad News [edit or cut]

**Dimensions**

We think of our information treatment as providing information along two different dimensions, candidates' policy platforms and candidates' characteristics (commonly referred to as *candidate*

---

[30]In piloting we asked certainty about each prior on a given candidate, but found that respondents became frustrated with these questions. Unlike other projects in the Metaketa, we provide not only multiple pieces of information but also information about many candidates, such that asking about the certainty for each candidate-prior pair is not feasible.

*image* (Hacker, 2004)).[31] In the debate, we have three questions related to each dimension. The policy questions ask candidates to describe their policy priority sector for the constituency, for the nation and their position on a controversial policy, district splitting. We are interested in the degree to which the positions of a given candidate align with the preferences of a given voter, which we assess at baseline. Here, good and bad news can be objectively defined by comparing a respondent's prior preference on whether a candidate's policy position aligns with the actual alignment revealed in the debate. This approach is applicable to both the treatment and the control group.

With regard to candidate characteristics, we differentiate between three different categories: competence, understanding of policy issues, and eloquence. For each of them, we collect priors, voters' posteriors (in the treatment group) and expert assessments, all measured on the same scale.[32]

**Aggregation**  Since our treatment is a bundle of information along candidate image and policy dimensions, we construct a weighted average of good/bad news across the different categories. To do so, we ask each respondent at baseline how they weight the different categories of information when deciding how to vote.[33] We then use these weights to construct a respondent specific average of the type of information they receive.

For the policy dimension, we define news as

$$L_{ijk} = P_{ijk} - Q_{ijk}$$

where we consider news as good if $L_{ijk} \geq 0$ for individual $i$, politician $j$, and category $k$, and as bad news otherwise. For the candidate image dimension, we directly measure $L_{ijk}$ for the treatment group and estimate it for the control group, as discussed above. We then rescale $L_{ijk}$ to [-1, 1] and aggregate the news for the six categories, using the weights $w_{ik}$ collected during the baseline survey.

$$L_{ij} = \sum^{k} (weight_{ik} * L_{ijk})$$

Since we have a measure of the 'true' news content as perceived by the individual for the treatment group (overall assessment), we also consider tweaking this algorithm to better match the agnostic measure. We refer to this measure as the *constructed indicator*.

---

[31]American Politics has a rich literature on voters' perceptions of candidate characteristics and the importance of debates for shaping them (Schill and Kirk, 2014; Brubaker and Hanson, 2009; Benoit, Hansen and Verser, 2003).

[32]For the subjective measure we also consider two categories stressed by citetmccroskey1999goodwill: trustworthiness and genuine interest in voters' interests (goodwill). We are skeptical that these measures can be coded up objectively by an expert panel and therefore consider them additional dimensions for an expanded (alternative) subjective measure.

[33]The survey question reads: "There are many factors people take into consideration when deciding how to assess a candidate. I'm going to read you a few such factors. For each of them, please tell me how important you consider them in your personal evaluation of candidates for area MP – very important, somewhat important, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant. *List of criteria:* (a) Whether a candidate thinks that the same issues are a priority for your constituency as you do. (b) Whether a candidate has the same policy priority for Uganda as a whole as you. (c) Whether a candidate holds the same position as you on whether or not more districts should be created in Uganda. (d) How well a candidate understands policy issues. (e) How well qualified, considering education, job, and life experience a candidate is to represent your constituency. (f) How well a candidate can express him/herself. (g) How likable a candidate is as a person. (h) Whether you can rely on a candidate to follow through on what they say."

| Dimension | Category ($k$) | Weight ($w_k$) |
|---|---|---|
| Policy | Alignment on constituency policy priority | a |
| | Alignment on national policy priority | b |
| | Alignment on position on district splitting | c |
| Candidate image | Competence | d |
| | Understanding of policy issues | e |
| | Eloquence | f |
| | Trustworthiness* | g |
| | Goodwill* | h |

*expanded subjective measure only

For the constructed indicator, we consider different aspects of the information contained in the debate screening separately.

**Policy dimension**   We measure the priors ($P_{ijk}$) and the information content ($Q_{jk}$) for each of these categories $k$ for each politician $j$ and individual $i$. For policy positions, we consider it as good news if a candidate's policy preferences are more aligned with those of the voter than anticipated, or are as aligned as anticipated (thus offering greater certainty), and as bad news otherwise. The distance (N) between the prior and the information provided determine the degree to which news are good or bad. We consider it "very good news" if a voter had a prior that a candidate's policy position was not aligned, but the position is indeed aligned (+++), as "good news" if a voter didn't have a prior on whether the policy positions were aligned and finds out that they are aligned (++) and as "weakly good news" if a voter's prior that policy positions are aligned is confirmed, thus reducing uncertainty (+). Conversely, we consider it "very bad news" if a voter had a prior that policy positions were aligned but the information reveals that they are not (—), as "bad news" if a voter did not have a prior and the information reveals that they are not aligned (–) and as "weakly bad news" if a voter's prior that policy positions are not aligned is confirmed (-). This is summarized in the table below.[34]

| | | Information | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Align | Non-align |
| Prior | Align | + | — |
| | Non-align | +++ | - |
| | Don't know | ++ | – |

**Candidate image**   Defining good and bad news with regard to candidate image issues is more difficult, since the perception of information conveyed about candidate quality in a debate clip is to a degree subjective. Since we cannot have respondents in the control group give us a rating of the candidates performance, we have to rely on prediction.

To do so, we ask experts to assess the performance of each candidate along each dimensions, and compare it to a voter's prior. For the subjective assessment, we will ask respondents in the

---

[34]We also assess the possibility that candidates convince voters to change their policy preferences. To do so, we ask respondents after watching the debate what their policy preference is. If it is different from the one reported at baseline, we ask them what made them change their mind.

treatment group whether watching the debate screening changed their mind on the three categories – competence, trustworthiness and goodwill of a given candidate – and if so in which direction and to which degree. We then use this data to construct ratings of each candidate's performance with regard to each of the three categories.

**Overall assessment**  We also assess respondents' priors, posteriors and expert assessment with regard to the overall debate performance. [35] The overall assessment treats the debate as a black box. Let $L_{ij}^+$ be good news and $L_{ij}^-$ be bad news for individual $i$ and politician $j$. After the screening, we ask respondents in the treatment group to tell us on a five point scale the degree to which they were positively or negatively surprised by the performance of a given candidate. This gives us a subjective measure of good or bad news for each candidate-respondent dyad in the treatment group, where a positive surprise is considered good news and a negative surprise is considered bad news. Since we cannot gather this data from respondents in the control group, as we do not have an endline survey in control areas, we predict it based on baseline characteristics.
For the objective approach, we compare an individual voters' prior about a candidate expected debate performance with the expert assessment of the candidate's performance.

**Ranking of measures**

We deem the objective measure by dimension to be the primary measure of good and bad news, for three reasons: First, the objective expert assessment allows us to make predictions on how we expect voters should react to news. Second, the objective assessment is closest to approach used by the other Metaketa projects. Third, we deem it more structured to construct the indicator rather than using overall performance.
If we construct the indicator well, it should correlate highly with respondent's subjective assessment on whether the debate provided them good or bad news on a given candidate. To tie our hands on the construction of the good news/bad news indicator before analyzing outcome data but still take advantage of the fact that we have a 'true' measure of the degree to which each respondent was positively or negatively surprised by a given candidate[36], we will update the preanalysis plan with the final indicator construction after having analyzed the posterior data but prior to having access to the data from the exit poll. If the constructed indicator does not correlate well with the agnostic measure – which could be the case if (a) respondents misreported the weight they attach to different considerations in assessing a candidate, (b) the weight changed, or (c) we are not measuring important information content conveyed in the debates – we will rely on the overall measure from expert assessments instead, and report results with the constructed indicator in the Appendix.[37]
When respondents did not have a prior on a given candidate and dimension, we code good news/bad news based on their response in the posterior survey when we ask them whether the debate video changed their views about a certain candidate and dimension positively or negatively.

---

[35]Similarly to the subjective candidate image assessments, we use baseline characteristics to predict voters' overall subjective assessment of a candidate for the control group.
[36]Assuming they respond truthfully to the question above.
[37]To be decided and registered prior to having access to outcome data.

# G   Risks to Inference and Mediation Strategies

Randomly assigning polling stations *within* a constituency to be either treated in the primaries or the general elections is necessary in order to have statistical power to compare treatment effects across the two types of elections. One challenge, however, is that the winner of the NRM primaries will be invited to participate in debates twice – in the primaries and in the general elections, thus potentially modifying part of the treatment. We do not expect debates to affect which candidate wins. However, just participating in debates in the primaries may affect the behavior of the NRM candidate in the debates we organize in the general elections (or the strategies s/he uses in reaction to the debates). We will collect survey and observational measures of the performance and strategies used by the different candidates in both elections.[38]  If debates during the general election favor lesser known candidates, i.e. the opposition, improved performance by the NRM candidate would bias us against finding a treatment effect during the general election.

We minimize spillover between treatment and control polling stations by only working in one polling station per parish in each election round.[39]

Carry-on effects from the primaries to the general election are another concern. In other words, respondents in the general election sample may hear of the debate performance of candidates during the primaries, and adjust their expectations about the winning primary candidate in the general elections accordingly. Note that carry-on effects will be balanced across treatment and control groups by design (see Table 1), so this is an issue of external not internal validity. We are not too concerned about carry-on effects, since we consider it unlikely that respondents will learn about the specific information relayed in the debates. Three to four months will pass between the primaries and the general elections debate screenings. We will get some measures of carry-on effects during the endline survey for the general elections, by asking respondents whether they heard about the debate and whether according to their knowledge any candidate performed better than the others. Hence, while we cannot completely rule out spillover and carry-on effects, we can minimize the risk, measure spillover and formulate expectations in which direction it may have affected the average treatment effect in the general election round.

---

[38]We separately plan to assess the extent to which candidates alter their campaign rhetoric and promises in an intra- vs. inter-electoral environment.

[39]With the exception of polling stations assigned to the individual treatment, which only be located in parishes assigned to the control group of the public intervention during the general elections, thus making spillover from public to individual very unlikely. We are not concerned about spillover from the individual treatment, since a relatively small number of people per village will be treated individually in private.