

Decentralized Social Services and Electoral Participation in Nascent Democracies

There has been a long posited relationship between political participation and education provision in democracies. Education is thought to bolster regime credibility by responding to mass needs, socialize citizens into proper forms of participation, and strengthen civil society (Almond and Verba 1965; Lipset 1959; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Dahl 1971; Bunce and Wolchik 2007; van de Walle 2003). Since the Education All Campaign and Millennium Development Goals poured millions of dollars into expanding access to primary school in Sub Saharan Africa, we have seen a massive increase in enrollment coincide with many regimes' transitions to democracy.¹ In Mali, primary school enrollment rates jumped from less than 30% in the pre-democratic era to 77% in the 2006 -2007 school year.² However, the democratic effects of these increases in enrollment are uncertain. This paper examines the effects of "community schools" programs in Mali to explore the effect of increased access to social services on citizens' political behavior in the 2009 local elections.

In older forms of state-led education, the state used education as a tool to socialize students and to monitor its population. In the current era of liberalized education, many of the expanded educational opportunities are facilitated by private, religious, and NGO-led community schools in partnership with the Malian state. One of the most significant contributions to new enrollment in Mali was the USAID-funded community schools project, which built schools in partnership with local communities that had no previous access to

¹ Between 1999-2004, primary school enrollment in Africa increased by 27% (EFA Monitoring Report 2007).

² Malian Ministry of Education Annual Report 2006-2007.

educational facilities. The program, in line with Mali's decentralization efforts, stressed communities' ownership and central role in the management of the schools. These community schools now account for approximately 17% of all primary school enrollment in Mali.³ This paper examines the effect of community school programs on parents' political participation in the 2009 local elections. It asks: Do communities which have benefitted from education infrastructure and community resource management training have higher rates of turnout and more candidates running in local elections than communities that did not benefit from such programs?

In 1998, Mali embarked on a ten year education reform program called PRODEC. It was conceptualized under three subheadings: access, quality, and decentralization.⁴ Donors pushed for increased access to improve dismal primary school enrollment rates as well as decentralization as a strategy to foster greater institutional accountability. One of the most successful programs funded through PRODEC was USAID's community school program, which between built more than 1,740 schools between 1996 and 2003.⁵ The majority of these communities had no previous access to educational facilities. Working under the decentralization rubric, NGOs, such as World Education and Save the Children, worked closely with selected communities to build schools using local materials, recruit teachers, and create school management committees. The creation of school management committees was designed to bolster parents' ownership of schools and their participation in the management. Under the community school model, parents were responsible for paying for and managing the

³ Ministry of Education Annual Report 2006-2007

⁴ PRODEC Ministry of Education 2001

⁵ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/673582/USAID-Africa---Mali-Country-Profile>

school and staff, while the state provided technical support and monitoring of classrooms. Partner NGOs offered monitoring and capacity building support for parents including literacy programs. Throughout the program, parents were encouraged to vocalize their preferences and concerns to the state, with hopes that this would foster more participatory civil society and ultimately, more accountable state institutions.

My project explores the effects of community schools beyond their initial objective of increasing access to basic education. It investigates their role in stimulating political participation and asks: how do community schools programs impact parents' and community members' broader political participation? I hypothesize that communities which benefitted from school infrastructure and management program will have higher rates of participation and competition in the April 2009 local elections than those that did not benefit from the same programs. ***H1: School districts with higher numbers of community and public schools per population will have higher turnout rates than those districts with fewer numbers of community and public schools.*** I expect greater participation to be driven through multiple mechanisms. First, community school program were designed to help parents utilize their "voice." Albert Hirschman (1971) postulates that this exercise of voice is key to improving institutional performance. Hirschman argues that successful previous exercise of voice will encourage citizens and clients to vocalize their concerns and preferences in the future. On the contrary, citizens who do not think that their voice will be "heard" will refrain from putting the effort into providing institutional feedback. If community and public schools are seen as open and responsive to parents' aspirations, perhaps this may encourage parents' to exercise their

voice on a broader level – through political participation in local elections. Public schools have adopted the same form of management through school management committees.

Continuing with Hirschman's logic, state-sponsored social service provision may help to bolster the legitimacy of state institutions. Regimes, as well as rebel groups and religious sects, have all used the provision of public goods to better their reputation and instill loyalty in their citizens.⁶ More loyal citizens, who are satisfied with the regime's performance, would feel a greater duty to participate in politics – to vote, campaign, and run for office.⁷ Therefore, citizens who receive state-led education services would have a greater respect for the state and willingness to participate in institutional channels than those who do not benefit from such services. Finally, we can imagine the physical location of a school as public gathering space that facilitates collective action. In many of these rural locations, a public or community school may be the lone infrastructural-symbol of the state in rural communities.

A second hypothesis draws from the above mechanisms to posit that the effect of public or community schools on political participation will be different than that of private or religious providers. Religious providers and private providers operate in a hierarchical fashion without input from parents or the larger community. In contrast, in public and community schools, school management programs are designed to foster more cohesive and organized civil society through previous collective decision-making. Parents using these religious or private

⁶See Abernethy 1968 for a discussion of Catholic school's use of education provision to recruit converts in Nigeria. Weinstein 2007 demonstrates rebels use of education to build support; Carrie Wickham Rosefsky chronicles the Muslim Brotherhood's use of social service provision to gain political support in Egypt; Jonathon Fox 1994 and 1996 demonstrates how Mexican President Carlos Salinas used decentralized service provision to build support for the central government.

⁷ This loyalty can foster what David Easton (1975) refers to as diffuse satisfaction for the ruling regime, which encourages them to continue to participate in channels they view as legitimate.

providers, exit out of state services, and are thus less invested in those government institutions (Hirschman 1971; Boyle 1999). Parents pay school fees to the directors of these establishments. However, those parents whose children attend community or public schools have more invested in the government's management of these institutions. They make up the managerial bodies that run the schools. My hypothesis contends that parents whose children attend public or community schools will be more invested, and therefore more active, in local politics. Therefore, H2: ***Parents who send their children to community or public school will be more likely to be registered to vote, vote, or run for office than parents who send their kids to private or religious schools or no school at all***⁸.

Methodology

To test Hypothesis 1, I will use Ministry of Education and National Election data for the upcoming 2007 local elections. I will trace education provision data per school district as an independent variable to see if greater numbers of community and public schools in certain school districts do correlate with a more active participation in local politics (higher average voting turnout, higher numbers of registered voters, more candidates competing in local elections) in those school districts. I will complement this quantitative data with semi-structured interviews with NGO staff, parents, teachers, and school administrators who participated in the community school program and those in an area that did not to determine if the presence of school infrastructure and the community schools program affects citizens' perceptions of government and participation in politics.

⁸ I will control for socioeconomic variables such as income and level of education.

In addition, my research team will conduct exit poll surveys with voters in five different sites: two urban, two rural (one with community school) and one with no access to schools to observe demographics of voters, etc. These sites will be chosen at random from all eligible school districts in Bamako (for urban) and within a 30 minute radius (for rural). If hypothesis one is correct, I anticipate that most voters with school aged children will have sent their children to a public or community school. Using Ministry of Education data, I will compare the percentage of voters sending their children different schools types with the school district average. In addition, my hypothesis predicts, that there will be higher voter turnout and more campaign activities (more posters, greater presence of electoral campaigns) in communities that have community schools compared to ones without.

To investigate hypothesis 2, I am collecting household survey data from two hundred households located within two school districts in Bamako. One school district was selected to over-sample the number of parents sending their children to private school. The other district was selected to oversample parents sending their children to public school. The school districts were divided into squares by placing a grid over the map of the district. Then different squares were selected at random as departure points for the survey. My survey asks questions about educational choices of respondents (which school does your child attend) as well as questions about their perception of the state and their levels of political participation. I will run regressions on the data to see if higher rates of political participation coincide with parents sending their children to certain school types. Hypothesis two would predict that parents who send their children to community or public school would vote at a higher rate than those that

send their kids to madrassas, private schools, or no schools at all – when controlling for other socio-economic factors.

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