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MIT GOV/LAB Political Behavior of Development Curriculum

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Overview

Why do people in developing countries make the political choices that they do? Under what conditions can citizens get elites to do what they want, and when are elites able to exert control over citizens? Why does governmental performance remain so poor in many developing contexts despite citizen efforts, international aid, and civil society initiatives? How can practitioner-academic research collaborations explore these questions?

This curriculum tackles these questions by drawing on new and old literatures from institutional, sociological, psychological, and political economy perspectives. The curriculum begins with a series of topics to help explore and incubate potential research collaborations with practitioner organizations, ideally in a way that promotes engaged scholarship, or collaboration between academics and individuals outside the academy based on principles of reciprocity and resulting in the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources.

I) Practitioner Academic Collaboration. The practicum component of the curriculum involves supervised practical application of these theories of government accountability and the political behavior of development. These readings explore the uses and ethics of research in policy and practice, different models of practitioner-academic collaborations, and the ways in which these collaborations can contribute to theoretical knowledge as well as better practice in governance and accountability.

II) Citizen Side: State, Society, and Political Behavior in Developing Contexts. The objectives of these readings are: first, to evaluate what we know about political behavior and state-society relations in contexts where democratic institutions are weak, state capacity is low, and/or regimes are changing; and second, to think collectively about how to move empirical research and theoretical understanding of these questions forward. We will use our discussions to identify the common themes and questions that we think should define the emerging research agenda on the political behavior of development.

¹ For questions and to provide feedback please contact MIT GOV/LAB Faculty Director, Professor Lily Tsai (l_tsai@mit.edu).

III) Government Side: Governance and Accountability. We will discuss and evaluate theories of government accountability, and theoretical literature on the ways in which formal and informal institutions shape the behavior of actors within the state and the interactions between state and societal actors. What are different institutional arrangements that promote government accountability and public goods provision? How do states control their agents and elicit compliance and cooperation from citizens? What are different models of the relationship between state and civil society?

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Practitioner-Academic Collaboration

The “aid-research-industrial complex”

What (perverse) incentives and constraints face practitioners and academics working in accountability and participation?

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The uses of research in policy and practice

What are the different ways in which practitioners use research? Under what conditions are practitioners more likely to use research? When do they use different types of research? What does it take to produce research that is useful to policy and practice? What does it take to produce research that is useful to practitioners and that contributes to theoretical knowledge? What do academics need to do? What infrastructure ought to be in place?

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Models for practitioner-academic partnerships in accountability and participation

What are different types of practitioner partners for collaborative research? What are different models for practitioner-academic collaborations?

- Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) Metaketa Initiative in The Monkey Cage, *Washington Post*: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/08/this-new-initiative-is-trying-to-make-scientific-research-more-reliable/?utm_term=.48b74eb8c652
- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL): <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/>
- The Gettysburg Project: <http://gettysburgproject.org/>
- Scholars Strategy Network (SSN): <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/>
- Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA), University of California, Berkeley: <http://cega.berkeley.edu/>
- Matchmaking for evaluators and practitioners:
 - Research for Impact: <http://www.research4impact.com/>
 - Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP): <http://egap.org/content/start-egap-evaluation>
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Ethical considerations in practitioner-academic collaborations

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Methods for applied research and engaged scholarship

Randomized control trials (RCTs), action research, participatory action research, intervention experiments, field research methods, fieldwork preparedness

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Citizen Side: State, Society, and Political Behavior in Developing Contexts

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Voting and “representation”

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Government Side: Governance and Accountability

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State control of agents and the behavior of bureaucrats

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State control of citizens and voluntary citizen compliance

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State and civil society

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