

# Government responsiveness boosts citizen reporting

Good governance relies on citizen input to improve public services - but if citizens do not believe officials will respond, governments can face a disengagement dilemma.

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Based on Mark T. Buntaine, Daniel L. Nielson, and Jacob T. Skaggs. 2021. "Escaping the Disengagement Dilemma: Two Field Experiments on Motivating Citizens to Report on Public Services," [BJPS](#).

## The Policy Problem

Citizens have important information about the delivery of public services that could help governments improve these services. But in places where citizens expect little of their government, citizens don't always share this information. As a result, governments that want to improve public service management need to find effective ways to create and sustain citizen engagement. We study this problem in the context of solid waste management in Kampala, Uganda where most waste is openly burned, which contributes to severe air pollution.

## Key findings and proposed solutions

- Local governments must respond to specific citizen concerns if they want to harness the information that citizens have about public service delivery.
- New technologies offer ways to engage citizens, and to increase the nimbleness of government responsiveness to citizen concerns.
- Increased citizen engagement in public service monitoring has the potential to help local governments improve their public service delivery.

## What We Found

When citizens received communications from their city government about how citizen-reported information was used, citizen reporting increased significantly. This increase was sustained over the course of several months. How citizens were selected into becoming monitors of public services did not have an effect on the effectiveness of these communications. Results were the same if the citizen monitors were recruited at random or nominated by local community members.

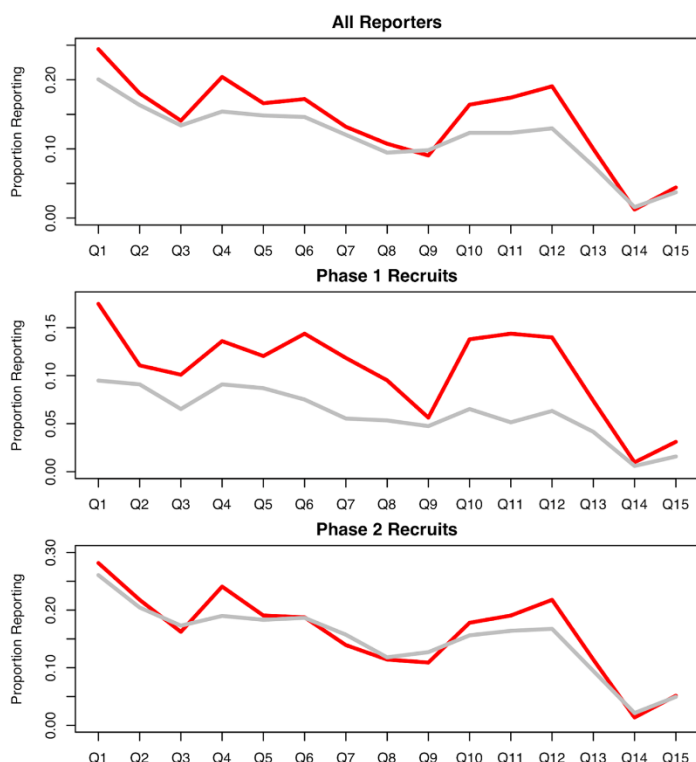


Figure 4. Proportion of reporters who offered information on local public service conditions over time. *Note:* red indicates reporters who received government communication. Grey denotes citizens who did not.

## What We Did

We ran a field experiment around citizen participation in the delivery of solid waste management. In the first phase, we recruited citizens from across Kampala, Uganda through both community nominations and a random selection process. These citizen reporters were tasked with monitoring solid waste services and given opportunities to communicate their assessment to local government actors. In the second phase, we randomly divided citizen reports into a group that received communication from their city government about how reported information was used, and a group that did not.