

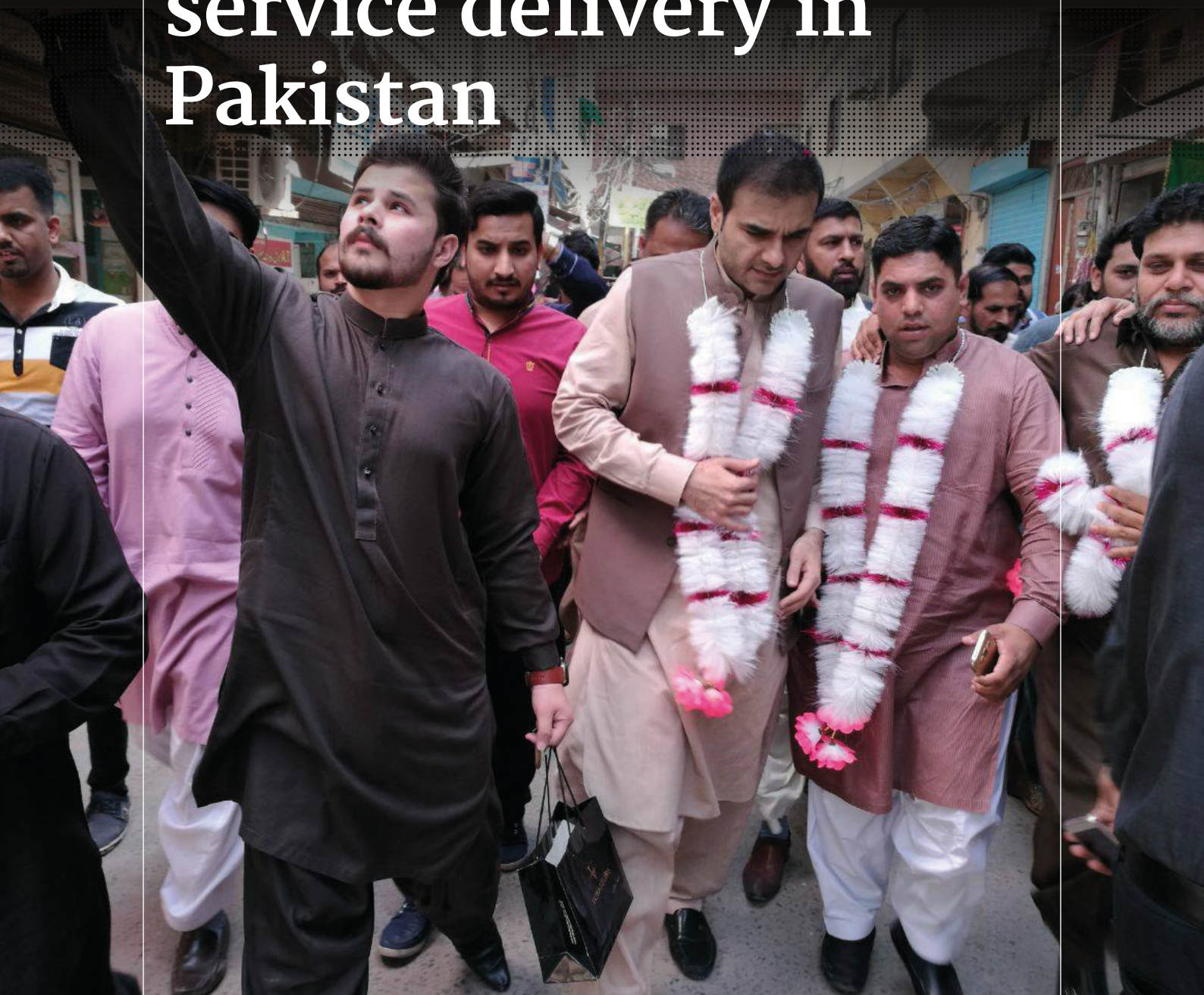
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MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

RESEARCH BRIEFING

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT

Competing to deliver? Political workers and service delivery in Pakistan



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Summary

Why do some citizens receive better municipal services than others?

Comparative political economy is deeply concerned with this question, but most answers so far suggest that unequal access to these services is determined by either class or partisan voting. Our research in Pakistan found that the unequal provision of functional municipal services is a particular challenge in the central neighbourhoods of megacities in emerging democracies.

What explains this trend? The difference in urban citizens' access to services in Lahore

appears to be linked to the density of party worker networks at the local level, and to levels of electoral competition faced by political representatives. This is an important finding for policy purposes because it establishes the intrinsic value of multiparty competition, which, in and of itself, can make politicians more responsive to citizens' demands for the provision of services, even when institutions are weak. These findings suggest that improvements to service delivery will require institutional reforms that strengthen channels of political accountability at the local level.

Key themes

- Service delivery
- Responsiveness
- Political parties
- Political accountability

Box 1. Research design and methods

Our research examined the relationship between the unequal provision of functional municipal services and political competition among elected politicians and political party workers. To achieve this, we used a carefully constructed research design.

- We selected a mix of competitive and non-competitive national assembly (NA) constituencies that directly border each other in Lahore's city centre: NA-121, NA-122 and NA-124. Of the 13 constituencies in Lahore, NA-122 was the second-most closely contested in the 2013 general elections – PTI lost this seat by a vote margin of less than 5% – while NA-121 was the fifth-most closely contested, and NA-124 was the second-least competitive. This sampling design allowed us to examine the association between service delivery and electoral competition faced by elected representatives.
- Within these constituencies, we worked in four provincial assembly constituencies. Following the 2013 election, PTI holds the provincial seat in two constituencies (147 and 148) and PML-N holds the seat in the other two (146 and 149).
- We surveyed all 43 union councils⁴ that fall completely within these provincial assembly constituencies, excluding two union councils that are composed primarily of elite government or private housing societies.
- We recorded the number of party workers present in each union council, and the political parties that they represent. Political party leaders rely on party workers to organise votes in neighbourhoods and communities during elections, and to aggregate and convey citizen demands. We were thus able to examine the association between service delivery and competition at the level of party workers.
- Our data came from a survey of 2,127 randomly selected adults of voting age in these 43 union councils, and from about 40 interviews with local party workers. The survey asked respondents about their access to important government-provided municipal services.⁵ The quality of these services and the channels they use to articulate their demand for these services.

Why do citizens in urban centres have uneven access to municipal services?

The rapid growth of the population of Lahore, Pakistan's second biggest city, has resulted in a substantial increase in the demand for municipal services. And, as in many megacities worldwide, the government has failed to keep up. Providing all of the city's 11 million residents with functional municipal services remains a major challenge for the state.

Yet Lahore is the capital of Punjab province, and home to the top leaders in Pakistan's two largest parties, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), known as PML-N, the party in government both at the national level and in the province, and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), its main opponent at both levels. Despite Lahore's political importance, there is considerable variation in access to government-provided functional municipal services.

Why do some citizens in megacities such as Lahore receive access to functional municipal services, when others do not? Comparative political economy is deeply concerned with this question, but most answers so far suggest that unequal access to services is determined either by class – richer citizens get more and better services than poorer citizens – or by partisan voting, in which those constituencies that support the ruling party get better service provision.

However, most studies on unequal access to public service provision in developing country

cities have focused on service provision in urban informal settlements or slums. They have tended to ignore the question of unequal provision in formal settlements or central urban neighbourhoods. How big is the issue of access to functional services in these neighbourhoods? What is the logic behind the targeting of services here?

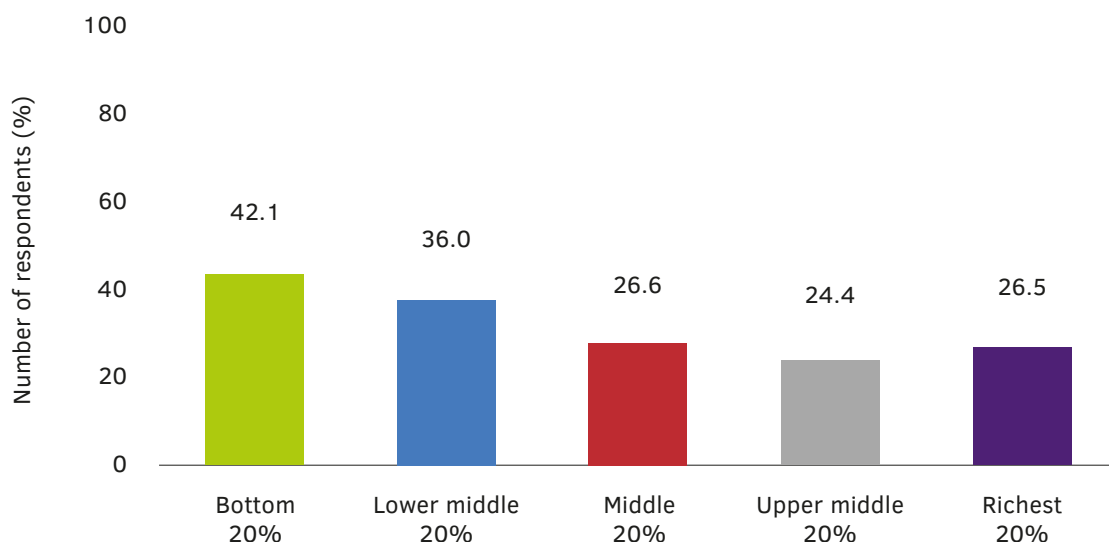
The extent of uneven service provision in central urban neighbourhoods

Our expectation was that these residents should enjoy similar levels and quality of municipal services, but we found that this was not the case, as the following graphs demonstrate.

Dysfunctional services are widespread across neighbourhoods, poorest residents worst affected

The quality of the government services provided remains a real challenge for many in Lahore's central neighbourhoods. The majority of our survey respondents (56.4%) reported having access to only moderately functional services, while a further 32.1% reported having access to dysfunctional government services. Figure 1 shows that most of those reporting dysfunctional services are in the bottom 40% of the expenditure distribution. But residents across all quintiles receive services of variable quality: even within the richest quintile, over a quarter of respondents (26.5%) reported being provided with poor-quality services.

Figure 1. Residents with dysfunctional municipal services, by expenditure quintile

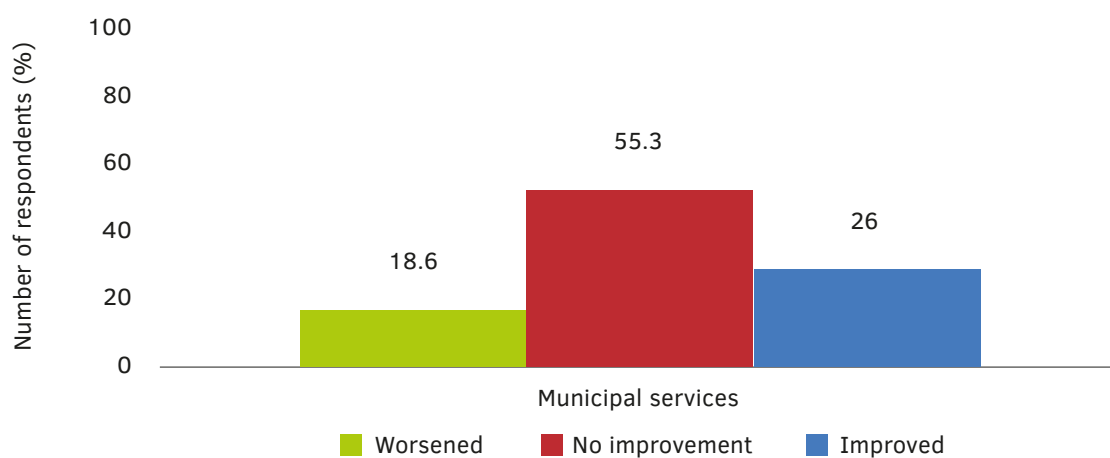


Improvements in services are variable

We asked residents if the quality of municipal services provided by government had improved between the 2013 election and the time of our survey (February–March 2017).⁶ Figure 2, which shows residents’ perception of improvements, highlights the considerable variation in this. Over half of all respondents (55.3%) said there had been no change, 26% said these had improved, while 18.6% said they had worsened.

These three figures demonstrate that some residents of Lahore, who live in the heart of a city that is home to much of the province’s main development infrastructure and is a centre of political power, receive adequate levels of quality municipal services, while others in the same city do not. The next question for our research was: why is this the case?

Figure 2. Perceived improvements in the quality of services provided

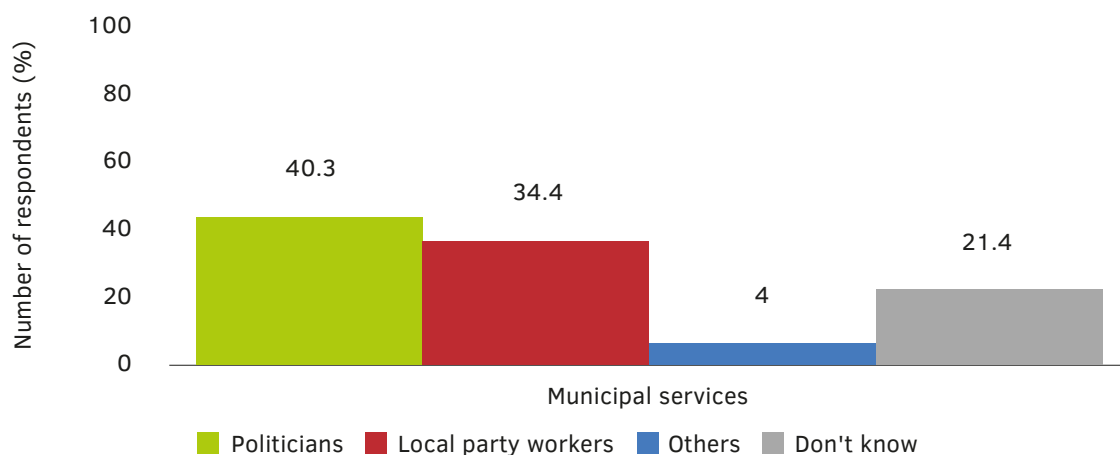


Who is responding to citizens’ needs?

Which intermediary channels are in place to respond to citizens’ demands for municipal services? The main channels can be direct between citizens and the providers of municipal services – referred to as the ‘short route’ (World Bank 2003) – or indirect, where intermediation is done by political actors, i.e. the ‘long route’ (Ibid.).

During our survey, we asked respondents who reported an improvement in service delivery between 2013 and 2017 to identify the actors responsible for this. The responses, shown in Figure 3, suggest that in the areas we studied, politicians (national and provincial) and local party workers are the main drivers for improving

Figure 3. Actors responsible for the improvement in municipal service provision during 2013–2017, as perceived by survey respondents



municipal services, rather than, for example, state departments, civic organisations or users' associations. This suggests that the 'long route' is the main channel for improvements, and that politicians and political party workers are central to the provision of municipal services.

It is possible, therefore, that the puzzle of uneven access to functional municipal services has much to do with the conditions that make *politicians and their party workers responsive to the needs of citizens* within certain communities and neighbourhoods. So, under which conditions are politicians responsive to voter needs and preferences?

Literature on this subject (Khemani, Dal Bó, Ferraz, Finan and Stephenson, with Odugbemi, Thapa and Abrahams 2016; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2006; Przeworski, Stokes and Manin 1999) tells us that politicians' behaviour is conditioned by competition. But what kind of competition matters for service delivery? Is it competition between politicians competing for electoral seats at the national and provincial levels that matters, or is it localised competition between the party workers who work with voters on a daily basis?

Unpacking the logic of political targeting

Our research found that there is a greater improvement in service delivery in areas where a higher number of party workers are present in a union council, and where there is a more equal distribution across different competing parties. In other words, *the density of party worker networks*, and the *political competition across local party workers*, influence service delivery: where there are more party workers and greater competition between them, service delivery is more likely to improve.⁷

We found that service delivery is even more likely to improve when national- and provincial-level electoral constituency politics are also competitive (measured as the margin by which the winning party / candidate won their national or provincial assembly seat). Further, improvements in service provision are more likely to take place where competition between national and provincial politicians is combined with localised competition.

At the same time, we found that when there are few formal incentives for making service delivery more responsive in weakly institutionalised political systems such as that in Pakistan, competition between local workers seems to be a good device for keeping politicians disciplined. Our research suggests that competing local party workers *create pressure on politicians to deliver in terms of service delivery*, and that these pressures are communicated upwards

through party machines. These pressures matter more if national politicians are actively competing with their opponents for local votes.

We explored these mechanisms in more detail in two union councils that lie close to one another, in order to better understand how the structure of party organisational networks – in particular, partisan competition between local party workers – leads to better service delivery. Both union councils had a comparable level of service provision in 2013, but by the time of our survey in 2017, conditions in one had stayed largely the same, while the other had registered a significant improvement in citizens' perception of the delivery and quality of municipal services. Interestingly, the two councils had very different numbers of political party workers and a different partisan balance. The one with greater improvements had more party workers and more intense political competition between them.

Interviews with party workers in these two union councils allowed us to explore in greater detail how the relationship between party organisational networks, partisan competition and service delivery works. When there are more party workers operating within communities on a daily basis (e.g. communicating with citizens, collating their demands, and transmitting these upwards), there is a greater chance that citizens' demands will reach politicians. When these party workers operate within a competitive environment – in which brokers associated with different parties are actively performing the same functions within the community – the transmission of demands becomes even more efficient. And when the higher-tier politicians receiving these messages are themselves actively competing with rivals who they are only likely to beat by small margins, their propensity to respond to the demands emanating from the local party machine is greater.

At the same time, politicians in tight contests may also put more pressure on their local party workers to perform better. This, combined with the pressure from local competitors from other parties, keeps the links between party operatives and politicians active, and motivates workers to foster and maintain their own contacts with government departments in order to resolve emerging issues quickly. Added to this is the desire to build personal reputations in the process, which can help local workers to grab the party's attention when the time comes to nominate party candidates for local government elections.

More party workers operating within a locally competitive environment thus means that voters have a larger number of channels for communication and interaction with politicians and government departments. The *density* of political party workers at the local level underpins

Politicians' responsiveness to citizens is conditioned by how political party organisations operate within their constituencies, and by competition at both the constituency level and among local party workers

politicians' responsiveness to voters, and it is a combination of competition among elected politicians and local party workers that matters for service delivery.

Policy implications

Emerging democracies like Pakistan⁸ – where political parties are internally weak and dependent on the power, influence and resources of individual politicians – often have weak accountability structures, within which politicians are largely unresponsive to the service delivery needs of their constituents. Our research shows, however, that politicians' responsiveness to citizens is conditioned by *how political party organisations operate* within their constituencies, and by *competition at both the constituency level and among local party workers*. This is important: it shows that more politically dense and competitive environments cater better to citizens' service delivery needs.

Multiparty competition and dense political engagement have intrinsic value that can motivate elected representatives to deliver essential services to their voters, even where political accountability is weakly institutionalised, and where political parties tend to function around the appeal – often populist – of strong individual politicians. In other words, here is more evidence that politics and democracy matter for public service provision.

These lessons may transfer to other urban contexts where clientelist party machines operate within weakly institutionalised, but politically competitive, contexts. What does this mean for institutional reforms in emerging democracies? We offer the following suggestions.

- It is important to experiment with the introduction of public reporting systems that provide information on service provision at

the lowest level of the jurisdiction at which citizens elect provincial and national leaders. The information that is provided should be specific to the actions of politicians and resulting outcomes, so that citizens can evaluate the relative performance of different political competitors at the local level.

- There is a need to support institutional reforms that remove opacity in the assignment of functions between politicians and bureaucrats, and between higher and lower tiers of government. This will ensure that information about performance is clearly attributable at the local level, and that there is less scope for politicians to blame extraneous institutional factors for poor delivery.
- Reform programmes must include interventions that strengthen the long route of political accountability, as this is a critical component for getting essential services to people (as opposed to the 'short route' of social accountability). Bureaucratic reforms that are implemented in a non-competitive political environment may lack an important piece of the puzzle.
- There is a need to support institutional reforms that map budgetary flows at the level of the lowest jurisdictions at which provincial and national politicians are elected, and to make this information public.
- The Election Commission of Pakistan should produce a white paper on the state of political competition, which should map the variations in electoral competition at the lowest level. The aim of this paper should be to provide public information for citizens and political parties, and to identify areas of low competition.

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⁴ The lower tier of local government in Pakistan.

⁵ Municipal services include street lights, garbage removal, the provision of garbage bins, modern sanitation, and drinking and piped water. Services are classified as 'dysfunctional' when respondents rated the quality of service that they have access to as being very poor or poor. They are classified as 'functional' when they rate the quality as being very excellent or good, and the remaining category is classified as 'moderately functional'.

⁶ We use 2013 as our reference point as we were interested in mapping the changes in provision since the last general election, held in May 2013.

⁷ All our findings remain, even after we controlled them for a number of other factors that could potentially explain the difference in improvements across households (e.g. respondent demographics such as age, gender, education and income; the social centrality of the respondent within the community; the political participation, views and partisan politics of each respondent).

⁸ Pakistan has experienced intermittent military rule since independence in 1947, and consistent interventions against political parties during these regimes have not allowed parties to develop strong organisational structures. Pakistan's most recent transition to democracy was in 2008.

About this research briefing

This research briefing is based on a longer piece of forthcoming research on politics, voice and responsiveness in urban Pakistan. The study was carried out by researchers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK; the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, Pakistan; Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan; and Harvard Kennedy School, USA.

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About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

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Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's Research, Evidence and Learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

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Front cover photo: Political workers from a constituency in urban Punjab. Credit: Khurram Rohale Asghar media team.

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