

Provide one paragraph to one-page report highlighting the significance of this presentation to Pakistan Studies.

My paper investigates the impact of strengthening local governance in schools, by engaging school-level actors, on school and student performance. School councils, comprising of parents, community members and the head teacher, in primary and middle schools in 21 districts of Punjab, Pakistan's largest province, receive a non-salary budget to make improvements in school inputs. However, much of the funds remain unspent at the end of the financial year. To encourage the utilization of funds given to council members, the provincial government in Punjab spearheaded the School Council Mobilization Program (SCMP), hiring a call center to make regular calls to the members. Approximately, 50 percent of all primary and middle schools in the province (comprising of 80,000 council members) were reached out as part of the program every month from May to December 2015. Using multiple datasets (administrative, survey, test scores, call center data) and a difference-in-differences strategy to estimate a causal impact of the program, I find that schools where council members received the SCMP calls were likely to spend 45% more funds in absolute terms, compared to schools that did not receive the calls. However, the increased expenditure did not translate into improved outcomes for the schools or students rather, the outcomes were adversely impacted in SCMP schools. For example, students do worse in Math, English and Urdu by approximately a tenth of a standard deviation in SCMP schools compared to non-SCMP schools. The paper offers a discussion on the mechanisms that help explain the adverse results of this large-scale intervention.

My work is significant to Pakistan studies in several ways. First, it expands our understanding of local governance of public institutions in Pakistan. Second, my research merges four sources of rich public and restricted-use datasets from Pakistan in innovative ways to address critical facets of the education system in Pakistan. These data sets have not been used in prior research. Third, I provide rigorous evaluation of a specific effort to improve community participation and voice in local educational decision-making in Punjab, which is at the forefront of reforms in education. Fourth, my study has direct implications for public policy, because it carefully teases out mechanisms that explain the contexts under which information dissemination to strengthen local committees in schools may or may not work. Fifth, the focus of my study involves methods of engagement that can be replicated or scaled-up for outreach in other contexts and in social sectors beyond education within Pakistan. Together, my dissertation contributes to our general understanding of the challenges and benefits of large-scale education programs specifically in Pakistan, and in resource-constrained contexts in general.