When Does Transparency Improve Public Goods Provision?  
Street-level Discretion, Targetability, and Local Public Service Delivery  

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Motivation

- Considerable variation within countries when it comes to accessing public goods and services
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- Patterns of access also vary among different aspects of service delivery (Kramon and Posner 2013; Batley and Mcloughlin 2015)
- What is the role of transparency in explaining such differences?
Transparency and Public Goods Provision

- Increasing attention to political institutional factors (not only economic) as potential determinants of variations in access to public services (i.e. Lieberman 2014)
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- Increased government transparency widely expected to improve the quality of public service delivery: derived from the logic of PA theory: reduces information asymmetries and allows for monitoring
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- Increased government transparency widely expected to improve the quality of public service delivery: derived from the logic of PA theory: reduces information asymmetries and allows for monitoring
- Empirical findings on effects of transparency on improved access to service delivery are surprisingly mixed (Joshi 2013; Bauhr and Grimes 2014; Chong et al 2015; Malesky et al 2012; Björkman and Svensson 2012; Keefer and Khemani 2012; Fox 2015)
Transparency and Street-Level Discretion

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- Transparency may redress these information asymmetries
Hypothesis

Transparency has a stronger effect on the quality of service provision in sectors where street level discretion is high than in sectors where street level discretion is lower.
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  - Studying non-democratic setting means we can distinguish transparency from democracy

Dependent Variables:
- Quality of education, quality of health services, quality of infrastructure (access to improved water and roads)

Independent Variables:
- Budget and poverty list transparency

Control Variables:
- Self-reported economic conditions, level of education, gridded population data, nightlights data (to proxy economic growth)

Commune level fixed effects regressions (and pooled OLS regressions)
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Vietnam Provinces
Vietnam Provinces and Communes
Vietnam Population (2015 WorldPop)
Results

- Commune-level increases in transparency positively associated with commune-level increases in quality of education

Also see positive association with commune-level increases in quality of health services

No association between changes in commune-level transparency and access to improved water or roads

Similar results in pooled, cross-sectional regressions

Suggestive evidence in favor of our hypothesis that effects of transparency are conditional on degree of street-level discretion
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Next Steps

- Need better understanding of Vietnam context - actors involved in service provision, incentives, contingencies, and feedback loops

Participation at local levels

Vertical accountability towards citizens

Control of corruption in the public sector

Public administrative procedures

Your suggestions??
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