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Citizens' Political Knowledge and Participation in Monitoring Local Government Programs in Two Districts of Uganda

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Abstract

Broad political knowledge better equips citizens to discharge the responsibilities of good citizenship, such as monitoring local government programs. Empirical studies show a connection between citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring activities in contexts other than a decentralized local government system in a developing country. Thus, in this paper, we set out to provide new empirical evidence by assessing the link between citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring local government programs in Buliisa and Kampala districts of Uganda. We employed a convergent parallel research design. We gathered data using survey questionnaire, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. We analyzed quantitative data using STATA and performed thematic analysis for the qualitative data. Generally, results showed that the level of political participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs was significantly and positively associated with their level of knowledge of local political affairs. This was especially marked in Kampala compared to Buliisa district. Conclusively, the nature of the association between the aforesaid variables could differ depending on the form of local political knowledge and/or the nature of political participation being measured.

Keywords: citizen participation, civic competence, government program, local government, monitoring local government, political knowledge

1. Introduction

This paper extends the supposition that civically competent citizens ought to possess some level of political knowledge in order for them to actively participate in and influence the activities of local governments (Almond & Verba, 1989; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kleinberg & Lau, 2019). We ask the following questions: What is the relationship between civic competence and political participation under decentralization in Uganda? Does the association differ between rural and urban citizens? To what extent is citizen's political knowledge linked to their participation in monitoring programs in a decentralized local government system? The link between citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring programs in a decentralized system of local government would emphasize the value of political knowledge because a substantial part of the citizenry needs to be politically active for democracy to function well (Putnam et al., 1993; Tam, 2023).

Prima facie, political theory proposes that having broad political knowledge better equips citizens to discharge the responsibilities of good citizenship (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kleinberg & Lau, 2019), such as monitoring local government programs. However, citizens with insufficient political knowledge also participate in monitoring local government programs. Their lack of knowledge is bridged with mechanisms such as cognitive heuristics (Colombo & Steenbergen, 2021; Popkin, 1991), the "on-line model of information processing" (Lodge et al., 1995, p. 310), and the wisdom of crowds (Simoiu et al., 2019; Surowiecki, 2005). Scholars show that where the design of institutions of local governance is the same in both urban and rural areas, the civic-ness of the community rather than socio-economic development explains the differences in their level of political participation (de Goede, 2017; Mamdani, 2018; Putnam et al., 1993). The decentralization structure in Uganda is the same in urban and rural areas. In this paper, we assess how the urban–rural divide moderates the posited link between political knowledge and political participation in a decentralized system of government.

Empirical studies show the link between political knowledge and participation in governance in contexts other than a decentralized local government system in a developing country like Uganda, where the level of political knowledge is scanty (Kanyamurwa & Obosi, 2022). Familiar contexts, for instance, include political knowledge and participation in elections and voting (Héroux-Legault, 2023). Other contexts involved non-political knowledge vis-à-vis participation in wildlife conservation (Ostermann-Miyashita et al., 2022), rural environmental management (Christensen et al., 2021), and monitoring of specific government projects (Munene & Severina, 2020).

Based on this background, we address the first specific objective of the study: to assess the association between citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring local government programs in Buliisa and Kampala districts. The findings of this study are capable of contributing to political theory about the aforesaid linkages in the context of decentralized political systems, particularly in Uganda, where there is a dearth of studies engaging this link (Kanyamurwa & Obosi, 2022). Previous studies that have engaged the link are discussed in the subsequent section.

1.1 Literature Review

In this section, we present literature related to the citizen's political knowledge and their participation in monitoring local government programs. We highlight that political participation takes place in specific contexts, which in this case are decentralization and the political and civic culture of a nation. We draw on two theories to contextualize the study, namely, the political and civic culture of a nation and the theory of participatory democracy.

1.1.1 Decentralization in Uganda

Political participation takes place within a given context, such as the decentralized system of governance. Decentralization is promoted globally as a policy tool for instituting democratic governance and a mechanism for addressing development ills (Manor, 1999). Decentralization supports participation by taking decision-making close to the people, empowering the people to demand transparency and accountability from the policy-making elites, and placing resources closer to the people (Carrasco & Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

Historically, decentralization existed in Uganda before colonialism. However, the on-going process of decentralization, which is based on the five-tier Local Council and Committee (LC) system, evolved from the Resistance Council and Committee (RC) system of the National Resistance Movement (NRM). The NRM developed the RC system during the bush war (1981–1985) and introduced it in areas it controlled. Upon taking power in 1986, the NRM government rolled out the RC system to the rest of the country (Banjwa, 2022; Makara, 2020). To provide a clearer context for the LC system of decentralization, it is important to recap the decentralization systems in Uganda prior to the NRM.

1.1.2 Decentralization Before 1986

Before colonialism, Uganda had both stratified and non-stratified societies. Stratified societies had power distributed vertically through a system of administration headed by the king. Political power was centralized flowing from the king through a chain of chiefs to the grassroots. In non-stratified societies political power was spread horizontally through the social unit held together by the clan. The chief and council of elders held power in non-stratified societies, and exercised a form of decentralized democracy which did not support authoritarianism (Kasozi, 1994; Mamdani, 1995).

Under colonial rule, the British altered the system of local government and appointed individuals to serve as agents of colonialism. Under the colonial administrative structure, the District Commissioner was in charge of protectorate administration, and the Legislative and Executive Council (LEGCO) was responsible for policy matters. The British appointed chiefs in whom all local authority (i.e., executive, legislative, judicial, and administrative) was fused (Ibingira, 1973; Kanyeihamba, 2002; Mamdani, 2018; Mutibwa, 2016). Despite the creation of body-corporate councils, standing committees, and elected councils between 1949 and 1955 in districts, the central government retained control through the District Commissioner, and the Governor (Karugire, 1988; Lubanga, 1996; Mamdani, 2018). However, after World War II, the British attempted to democratize administration by increasing membership of the

natives in LEGCO; nominated members outside Buganda; appointed natives to ministerial posts; introduced political parties; and organized elections (Ibingira, 1973).

Post-colonial governments inherited a relatively democratic system of government. However, from 1964 president Milton Obote, through the Urban Authorities Act (1964) and the Local Administrations Act (1967), stripped local councils of their powers and placed them under the minister of local government. The 1967 Act also gave the chief considerable local executive, legislative, judicial, and administrative authority. Upon seizing power in 1971, president Idi Amin (1971–1979) dissolved local governments and placed them under district commissioners and paramilitary chiefs directly answerable to the central government (Kasozi, 1994; Makara, 2000; Mamdani, 1995; Mutibwa, 2016). Following the collapse of Amin's government in 1979, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) introduced the "*Mayumba Kumi*" (ten–household cells) committees, a system of local administration at village level, which mainly served as security committees. Milton Obote's second government (1980–1985) reverted to the system of local administration implemented in his first regime (Karugire, 1988; Kisakye, 1996; Mamdani, 2018; Tukahebwa, 1998). The transient regime of president Tito Okello that toppled Obote in 1985 was deposed in 1986 by the NRM before it could institute changes in local administration.

1.1.3 Decentralization Under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government (1986–Present)

The NRM replaced the colonial chiefship and councils with a system of popularly elected Resistance Councils and Committees (RCs) and began a process of reforming the local government system. It sought to build participatory and representative democracy for people at all levels of governance (Banjwa, 2022; Kisakye, 1996; Makara, 2020; Mamdani, 1995; Nsibambi, 1991). The RC system evolved into the present Local Council and Committee (LC) system.

The LC system of local government is a devolved model of decentralization that transfers power from central government to local governments. It is a five-tier hierarchical administrative structure of councils and committees, starting with the village (LC1), then the parish (LC2), sub-county (LC3), county (LC4), and district (LC5). At each level, there is an elected executive committee to run the local government. The LC system offers all adult residents in a locality an equal right and platform to participate in local government (Makara, 2020; Mamdani, 1995; State & Makara, 2017).

Despite its merits, however, the LC system is not without weaknesses. Primarily, it limits the direct participation of citizens in elections to the voting of the village (LC1), sub-county (LC3), and district (LC5) chairpersons. The representatives or chairpersons indirectly elect or nominate the rest of the members of the councils and executive committees, respectively. (Makara, 2000; Mamdani, 1995, pp. 117–118; Muhumuza, 2014). Besides that, programs to promote civic competence such as the *Chaka-Mchaka* civic education program and civic education in schools were not sustainable or have not received adequate support respectively (Bimbona & Rwengabo, 2020).

In summary, decentralization is not a new practice in Uganda. Pre-colonial societies practiced a form of decentralization which was rather democratic. The colonial local administrative

system was largely undemocratic for much of the colonial period. However, after 1945 the British instituted democratic reforms in local government. Post-independence regimes between 1964 and 1986 perpetuated the undemocratic models of colonial chiefship and local councils and committees in local governance. From 1986, the NRM started the process of expanding the space for citizens' participation in democratic governance. However, it is worth noting that programs for building a civically competent citizenry have not fully developed.

1.2 Conceptualization of Variables

In this section, we operationalize the core variables of the study, which include decentralization, political knowledge, political involvement, civic competency, and the urban–rural divide.

1.2.1 Decentralization

Decentralization is "a *process of state reform*, where a hierarchical, centralized system of political and administrative state institutions is being replaced by more decentralized and dispersed arrangements involving two or more levels of government. Decentralization also denotes the *resulting situation or status* after such reform initiatives." (Carrasco & Mukhopadhyay, 2023, p. 4). It consists of three dimensions, namely, (1) deconcentration, or administrative decentralization; (2) fiscal decentralization; and (3) devolution, or democratic or political decentralization. The elements of decentralization that Carrasco and Mukhopadhyay (2023) describe fittingly characterize the current decentralization process in Uganda (Local Governments Act, 1997; Local Governments Amendment Act, 2017). For instance, in democratic decentralization such as the LC system in Uganda, there is "an elected representative body at the subnational level which takes decisions" and "represents the citizens vis-à-vis the local administration, higher levels of subnational government, the nation state, or other legal entities." (Carrasco & Mukhopadhyay, 2023, p. 5).

1.2.2 Political Knowledge, Political Participation, and Ordinary Citizens

Political knowledge is an individual's "understanding of the relationships, demands, resources, and preferences of specific influential others" that "shapes the willingness of followers to engage in proactive behaviour" (Granger et al., 2020, pp. 1–2). It is a primary component of civic competence (Hoskins et al., 2012, p. 3). Political participation is "any action by citizens that is intended to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures and is fostered by civic engagement" (Sairambay, 2020, p. 124). One form of formal political participation of specific relevance to the present study objective is "participation in community organizations" at the local level. Alongside it are "party-political participation" and "socio-political participation" (Reichert & Print, 2019, p. 4; Sairambay, 2020). In this study, the phrase ordinary citizens refers to "individual private citizens, not elites or people in power" (Sairambay, 2020, p. 122).

Empirical studies associating knowledge and the participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs have provided mixed results. On one hand, scholars reveal a link between level of knowledge and the capacity of citizens to monitor government or

community programs (Mushemeza, 2019; Raffler et al., 2019). However, the link depends on clearly understanding the roles of citizens and leaders in the monitoring process. It also requires implementing monitoring in ways that compel citizens to support the exercise (Evans et al., 2019). On the other hand, empirical studies report inadequate or no link between the political knowledge of citizens about community programs and their participation in monitoring them. Other factors, such as self-efficacy, must accompany knowledge for it to solicit citizen participation (Enchikova et al., 2021). Examining previous studies revealed empirical knowledge areas that this study can broaden, particularly in contexts where the citizens have differing levels of political knowledge and operate in a decentralized system of government in both urban and rural areas.

1.2.3 Civic Competence

Civic competence (or citizen political competence) is the ability of a group or an individual to exert political influence on governmental officials to act to benefit that group or individual because the officials believe that they will risk some deprivation if they do not act. If an individual or group "can" exert political influence, they are civically or politically competent. However, if they "believe" they can exert political influence, they are "subjectively competent." Their subjective beliefs about their competence are the precursor to what may eventually turn out to be an actual influence (Almond & Verba, 1989, pp. 136–139).

For this study, we equate civic competence with subjective competence, which is a realistic estimate of actual civic political competence. This is because: (1) a subjectively competent citizen is more likely to be an active citizen; and (2) decision–makers may act on the assumption that ordinary citizens could actually act according to their belief to influence (Almond & Verba, 1989, pp. 136–139). We include four dimensions from the Civic Competence Composite Indicator 2: 'Participatory Attitudes', 'Citizenship Values', 'Social Justice Values', and 'Knowledge and Skills for Democracy' (Hoskins et al., 2012, p. 3).

Although decision-making is concentrated in the hands of few people, usually governmental elite, citizens should be able to control them if democracy is to function well. To do so, a substantial part of the citizenry needs to be civically competent and politically active (Almond & Verba, 1989; Putnam et al., 1993; Tam, 2023). However, it is of worldwide concern that civic competence and active citizenship are low or reducing, which undermines participatory democracy (Chando, 2021; Kanyamurwa & Obosi, 2022; Kerr & Hoskins, 2023). Hence, national governments worldwide are prioritizing the promotion of key competencies of citizens, such as civic competence(Hoskins et al., 2012).

1.2.4 The Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural political divide is a situation where urban and rural areas in a country have sharply diverging dominant political views that appear to be driven, at least in part, by diverging economic fortunes, locality and population density (Accordino, 2019). Globally, there is an urban–rural political divide, which is intensifying and fostering political polarization based on locality and, thus, democratic vulnerability (Mettler & Brown, 2022, p. 130).

In the context of local government and performance in terms of political participation, there are two primary postulations about the rural-urban divide. First, the civic-ness of the community rather than the level of socio-economic development explains the differences in the level of performance where the design of the institutions of local governance is the same in both urban and rural areas (Putnam et al., 1993, p. 102). Second, poorly designed and different governing institutions and structures that disconnect between urban and rural are a primary obstacle to the successful democratization and administration of local governments (Mamdani, 2018). The LC structure of local government in Uganda is the same in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, civic competencies, not differences in the institutional design, should explain the differences in political participation.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the two theories that guided this study. They are the political and civic culture of a nation model and the theory of participatory democracy.

1.3.1 The Political Culture and Civic Culture of a Nation

The first model this paper draws on is the political culture and civic nature of a nation by Almond and Verba (1989). Political culture refers to "the specifically political orientations—attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system" (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 12). Orientation refers to the internalized aspects of objects and relationships. It comprises three components. First, the "cognitive orientation," or knowledge and beliefs about the political system, its roles and the incumbents of these roles, its inputs, and its outputs. Second, the "affective orientation," or feelings about the political system, its roles, personnel, and performance. Third, "evaluational orientation," i.e., the judgments and opinions about political objects that characteristically involve the combination of value standards and criteria with information and feelings. The objects of political orientation are: (1) the general political system; (2) the self" as a political actor; (3) the political or input process; and (4) the administrative or output process. The input process is the flow of demands from society into the polity and the conversion of these demands into authoritative policies. An output process is the ways by which authoritative policies are applied or enforced (e.g., courts) (Almond & Verba, 1989, pp. 14–15).

Civic culture is "the ways in which political elites make decisions, their norms and attitudes, as well as the norms and attitudes of the ordinary citizen, his relation to government and to his fellow citizens" (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 3). According to the civic culture model, in both successful and unsuccessful democracies, there is a mixed political culture where there are politically active individuals (i.e., participants) and politically passive individuals (the subjects), regardless of civic competence. Importantly, the active political role does not displace or replace the subject roles for the individual. Instead the two orientations persist and modify the intensity of the political involvement and activity of the individual, keeping politics in its place (Almond & Verba, 1989).

Civic culture is particularly appropriate for democratic political systems because it means that governmental elites must respond to the desires and demands of citizens. Maintaining this

balance between governmental power and its responsiveness helps explain the appropriateness, to a democratic political system, of the mixed patterns of political attitudes associated with civic culture (Almond & Verba, 1989).

1.3.2 The Theory of Participatory Democracy

Pateman's (1970) theory of participatory democracy posits that people can only exercise effective control over their everyday lives if they directly participate in the decision-making processes that happen in their immediate locality. The theory advances three goals of participatory democracy: i) to achieve more and more direct citizen participation in decision-making; ii) to develop a more active and informed citizenry that is aware of the nature of the collective problems of society; and iii) to strengthen public commitment to democracy.

The theory of participatory democracy makes three assumptions. First, participating in self-governance gives citizens a sense of political efficacy and empowerment. Second, participatory democracy develops the political intelligence of citizens. However, developing political intelligence requires citizens to access knowledge for making effective political judgments and about the political, social, and economic institutions that affect their lives. Third, participation breaks the monopoly of state power and extends democratic control beyond the political realm. Breaking the state monopoly of power gives citizens the opportunity to learn democracy by practicing self-governance within a small unit (Pateman, 1970).

The theory of participatory democracy is relevant to this study because deliberation and collective decision-making, the modes of political participation advocated by the theory, apply to local government and enable citizens to engage in processes addressing community needs. Additionally, citizens become politically astute, feel efficacious and empowered to impact policy and to exercise oversight over technocrats and political leaders. Furthermore, the technocrats who execute public policy do not solely control decision-making but work harmoniously with politicians and citizens within the framework of local government. Lastly, breaking state monopoly expands space for citizens' political participation within the context of decentralization.

2. Method

In this section, we outline the methodology that we followed in investigating the research problem. It includes the convergent parallel research design, the study population and sampling process, the data collection methods, and the data management and analysis procedures.

2.1 Data Collection Methods

We conducted this study using a convergent parallel research design. This design is suitable for collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data separately but simultaneously before merging it during reporting (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

We employed purposive sampling to select the study districts, Buliisa and Kampala in

Uganda, based on their performance in the Local Government Councils Score Card Initiative (LGCSCI). LGCSCI assesses district council performance in monitoring service provision, participation in lower local governments, the leader's contact with the citizens, and the individual performance of the LC5 executive (Muyomba-Tamale & Cunningham, 2019). Buliisa and Kampala represented districts with poor and top performances in LGCSCI and rural and urban local governments, respectively. We selected two study sites in each district through a process of multi-stage simple random sampling.

Data were collected from 603 respondents selected using purposive and convenient sampling. That is, 417 survey respondents, 151 FGD participants, and 35 key informants. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was acceptable, as Cronbach's alpha (α) ranged from 0.76 to 0.914 (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Research assistants were experienced in research and community work and fluent in English and native languages spoken in the study areas. Most interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, except for respondents who declined to have their voices recorded. We improved the trustworthiness of the data through data source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

2.2 Quantitative Data Management and Analysis

Quantitative data were entered and cleaned using IBM SPSS v29. Then, the various variables relating to one theme were grouped (transformed) into a single variable using both the preliminary median and confirmatory log10 procedures. We examined the dataset for extreme univariate outliers using normality plots with tests and for multivariate outliers using a Mahalanobis distance test.

Thereafter, quantitative data analysis commenced with assessing assumptions and model selection. Tests of normality aided in "assessing the best statistical methods for data analysis." (Hatem et al., 2022, p. 4), which for this study was nonparametric statistics analysis. Kolmogorov-Smirnov's tests ($n > 100$) of normality showed the dataset was not normally distributed ($p<0.001$) (Table 1 and 错误!未找到引用源。). The Brant test for parallel lines (proportional-odds) assumption revealed significant ($p < 0.05$) chi-square statistics for the categorical and ordinal variables knowledge of LC1 functions and services provided by the LC1 committee. These violated the proportional-odds assumption. So, we fitted the generalized ordered logit (gologit) analysis model, also called the partial proportional odds (PPO) model (Lee, 2019; Long & Freese, 2014; Weisburd et al., 2022; Williams, 2006, 2016).

The gologit model was fitted using the gologit2 command for STATA, with alpha = 0.05. Gologit relaxes the parallel-lines assumption for the explanatory variable(s) without compromising the analysis and/or the conclusions reached therefrom. Gologit2 can fit models that are less restrictive than the parallel-lines models fitted by other methods, albeit more parsimonious and explainable. Further, Gologit2 can fit three specific cases of the generalized model, consider the ordered characteristic of the categorical dependent variable and return the contribution information of the independent variable(s), support linear constraints, estimate survey data, and compute estimated probabilities (Weisburd et al., 2022; Williams, 2006,

2016).

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
Transformed Variables	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Knowledge of Government Officials	.365	417	.000	.633	417	.000
Knowledge of Number of LC1 Exec Members	.376	417	.000	.743	417	.000
Knowledge of LC1 Functions	.427	417	.000	.595	417	.000
Knowledge of Services by LC1	.382	417	.000	.627	417	.000
Monitoring Local Government Programs	.208	417	.000	.866	417	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2. Confirmatory Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests of Normality Using Log Transformed Variables

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
Log Transformed Variables	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Log Knowledge of Government Officials	.374	405	.000	.631	405	.000
Log Knowledge of Number of LC1 Executive Members	.137	405	.000	.928	405	.000
Log Knowledge of LC1 Functions	.423	405	.000	.635	405	.000
Log Knowledge of Services by LC1	.368	405	.000	.717	405	.000
Log Monitoring Local Government Programs	.222	405	.000	.859	405	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Gologit2 fits J-1 binary logistic regression models, where J is the number of categories of the dependent variable. For instance, in a five-category dependent variable, four binary logistic equations were fitted corresponding to the dependent variable: the participation of citizens in monitoring LG programs. Gologit compares all the categories greater than the current category to those less than or equal to the current category (i.e., >vs≤ category comparison). When interpreting results for each panel, the expressed category of the dependent variable and all the lower–coded categories serve as a reference group. Positive coefficients, therefore,

indicate that higher values of the independent variable make it more likely that the respondent will be in a higher category of dependent variable than the current one. Negative coefficients, on the other hand, indicate that higher values of the independent variable increase the likelihood of being in the current or a lower category of the dependent variable (Datta et al., 2023, pp. 375–376; Williams, 2006, 2016).

2.3 Qualitative Data Management and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis began during data collection from FGDs and interviews. Guided by the principles of grounded theory, we noted potential themes and patterns in the data during and after each interview or FGD. This initial analysis informed the adjustments to subsequent sessions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). We translated and transcribed the recordings of interviews and FGDs from the native languages to English. The audio recordings of English interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim. We labelled, typeset, edited and saved the transcripts and field notes alongside audio recordings on a password-protected laptop. After data collection, we performed a detailed, orderly, and thematic qualitative data analysis following an inductive approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This involved the following steps: (1) familiarizing with data ; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for and developing themes; (4) reviewing themes to harmonise with the coded text; and (5) reporting findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Results

This section outlines the findings of the study. Findings about the association between the political knowledge of citizens and their participation in monitoring local government programs are presented first. Thereafter, findings in relation to the moderating urban–rural divide are delineated.

3.1 Knowledge of Political Affairs and Participation in Monitoring LG Programs

Generally, results showed that respondents with little or no knowledge of political affairs tended to participate less in monitoring LG programs, and vice versa. This was especially prominent in Kampala district compared to Buliisa district. Table 3 presents the results of a partially constrained generalized ordered logit (gologit) model with logit odds ratios assessing the association between political knowledge and the participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs.

For the five categories of the outcome variable (citizens' participation in monitoring local government programs), we fitted four regression equations and computed an ordered logit odds ratio for each category (i.e., *never, rarely, sometimes,* and *frequently*); *always* was the reference category. Knowledge of the number of LC1 executive committee members (Prop OR = 2.7; 95% CI = 1.92–3.67) and district of residence (Prop OR =2.1; 95% CI = 1.22–3.74) were not significantly associated with the level of participation by citizens in monitoring local government programs. Each has a single constant odds ratio (2.7 and 2.1, respectively) across the four regression equations. Citizens' knowledge of government officials, functions of the LC1 executive, and services provided by the LC1 executive had a different odds ratio for each of the categories of the dependent variable (citizens' participation in monitoring local

government programs) (错误!未找到引用源。). These relationships are detailed below.

3.2 Knowledge of Selected Government Officials

Respondents with little or no knowledge of selected government officials and local leaders were linked to less participation in monitoring LG programs, and vice versa. This was more noticeable in Kampala district compared to Buliisa district. Odds ratios (错误!未找到引用源。) showed that holding all other variables constant, respondents who reported not knowing selected local government officials were 0.42 times more likely (than those who reported knowing the officials) to identify themselves as *sometimes* (or *rarely* or *never*) participating in monitoring LG programs (OR = 0.42; 95% CI = 0.19–0.94); 0.71 times more likely to identify as *rarely* or *never* (OR = 0.71; 95% CI = 0.39–1.30) participating; and 0.46 times more likely to identify as *never* (OR = 0.46; 95% CI = 0.25–0.85) participating at all. However, respondents who reported not knowing selected local government officials were also 1.12 times likelier than those who reported knowing the officials to identify themselves as *always* (in the higher categories) rather than *frequently* (OR = 1.12; 95% CI = 0.37–3.36) participating in monitoring LG programs.

Table 3. Generalized Ordered Logit Estimates (Odds Ratios) – Monitoring LG Programs

Participating in Monitoring LG Programs	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Never						
Knowledge of Government Officials	.460793	.1439235	-2.48	0.013	.2498288	.8499026
Knowledge of Number of LC1 Executive Committee	2.657158	.437408	5.94	0.000	1.924407	3.668917
Knowledge of Functions of LC1 Committee	.5475022	.1531856	-2.15	0.031	.316394	.9474219
Knowledge of Services Provided by LC1 Committee	1.22578	.3085511	0.81	0.419	.7484274	2.007592
District of Residence	2.137719	.6086244	2.67	0.008	1.223509	3.735029
_cons	1.025415	1.01489	0.03	0.980	.1473789	7.13451
Rarely						
Knowledge of Government Officials	.710705	.218886	-1.11	0.268	.3886267	1.299709
Knowledge of Number of LC1 Executive Committee	2.657158	.437408	5.94	0.000	1.924407	3.668917
Knowledge of Functions of LC1	.3259802	.0981326	-3.72	0.000	.1806952	.5880791

Committee						
Knowledge of Services Provided by LC1 Committee	1.320478	.3272865	1.12	0.262	.8123759	2.146374
District of Residence	2.137719	.6086244	2.67	0.008	1.223509	3.735029
_cons	.3369507	.3337186	-1.10	0.272	.0483648	2.347487
Sometimes						
Knowledge of Government Officials	.4191855	.1719955	-2.12	0.034	.1875646	.936832
Knowledge of Number of LC1 Executive Committee	2.657158	.437408	5.94	0.000	1.924407	3.668917
Knowledge of Functions of LC1 Committee	.5295517	.2090017	-1.61	0.107	.24432	1.147778
Knowledge of Services Provided by LC1 Committee	.7015773	.1942566	-1.28	0.201	.4077464	1.207149
District of Residence	2.137719	.6086244	2.67	0.008	1.223509	3.735029
_cons	.2059417	.2263365	-1.44	0.150	.0238917	1.775177
Frequently						
Knowledge of Government Officials	1.11539	.6272237	0.19	0.846	.3704808	3.358055
Knowledge of Number of LC1 Executive Committee	2.657158	.437408	5.94	0.000	1.924407	3.668917
Knowledge of Functions of LC1 Committee	1.365441	.7929969	0.54	0.592	.4374487	4.262053
Knowledge of Services Provided by LC1 Committee	.2541181	.1299009	-2.68	0.007	.0933073	.6920787
District of Residence	2.137719	.6086244	2.67	0.008	1.223509	3.735029
_cons	.0157093	.0230314	-2.83	0.005	.0008876	.2780394

Note. _cons estimates baseline odds; n = 417; Log likelihood = -526.19468; Wald chi2(14) = 164.38; Prob > chi2 = 0.0000; Pseudo R2 = 0.1635.

3.3 Knowledge of the Functions of LC1

Overall, respondents with little or no knowledge of selected functions of LC1 tended to participate less (*never*, *rarely*, or *sometimes*) in monitoring LG programs, while those with

greater knowledge of the functions participated more. Limited knowledge of LC1 functions was so apparent in Kampala compared to Buliisa.

Odds ratios (错误!未找到引用源。) revealed that respondents who reported not knowing selected functions of LC1 executive were 0.53 times more likely (than those who reported knowing the functions) to identify themselves as *sometimes* or *rarely*, or *never* (i.e., being in the current or lower category) participating in monitoring LG programs (OR = 0.53; 95% CI = 0.24–1.15), 0.33 times more likely to identify as *rarely* or *never* participating (OR = 0.33; 95% CI = 0.18–0.59), and 0.55 times more likely to identify as *never* participating at all (OR = 0.55; 95% CI = 0.32–0.95). However, some respondents who reported not knowing selected functions of LC1 executive were 1.37 times likelier than those who reported knowing the functions to identify themselves as *always* (i.e., in the higher category) rather than *frequently* (the current category) (OR = 1.37; 95% CI = 0.44–4.26) participating in monitoring LG programs.

Most respondents mentioned functions of the LC1 executive committee that corresponded with those directly related to their daily care and were outlined in the Local Governments Act 1997 (Chapter 243). This indicated that the knowledge of the respondents was accurate. Some of the functions that the respondents mentioned included the following: assist in the maintenance of law, order, and security in the village; receive and solve problems or disputes reported to it by residents of the village; initiate, encourage, support, and participate in self-help projects; mobilize people, materials, and technical assistance in relation to the self-help projects; and monitor and supervise projects and other activities undertaken by the government, local governments, and nongovernmental organisations in their area. In relation to monitoring LG programs, a respondent described the functions of the LC as follows:

> *My role, and basically other staff of my office, is to oversee all government projects which are within my area of jurisdiction. We monitor the schools, the landing sites, the roads and other government programs such as operation wealth creation (**Key Informant, Local Council Official, Buliisa**).*

Though the people's knowledge of the LC1 functions was accurate, the local leaders still needed to be visible in regularly mobilizing and including all the people in order to improve their chances of participating in LG programs. Highlighting this necessity, an FGD participant observed:

> *We do not engage in local council activities because we are not invited for these activities. Local council leaders segregate. They usually choose people they want or those who voted for them. They should at least organize meetings every month so that we know what is going on in the community (**FGD participant, Kabalagala Parish, Kampala**)*

3.4 Knowledge of Services Provided by LC1

The findings on the association between knowledge of services provided by LC1 and the participation of citizens in monitoring LG programs were mixed. Overall, concerning their participation in monitoring LG programs across the categories (*never*, *rarely*, *sometimes,* and

frequently), there was no striking difference between the number of respondents who reported knowing and not knowing the services provided by LC1 executive committees.

The odds ratios (错误!未找到引用源。) showed that respondents who reported not knowing services provided by the LC1 executive committee were 1.32 times more likely (than those who reported knowing the services) to identify themselves as *sometimes* rather than *rarely* (OR = 1.32; 95% CI = 0.81–2.15) participating, and 1.23 times more likely to describe themselves as *rarely* instead of *never* (OR = 1.23; 95% CI = 0.75–2.01) participating in monitoring local government programs. That is, they were more likely to be in the higher category than in the current one. However, respondents who reported not knowing services provided by the LC1 executive were 0.70 times more likely (than those who reported knowing the services) to identify themselves as *sometimes* or *rarely* or *never* participating (OR = 0.70; 95% CI = 0.41–1.21) and 0.25 times more likely to identify as *frequently* or *sometimes*, *rarely,* and *never* participating (OR = 0.25; 95% CI = 0.09–0.69) in monitoring LG programs. They were less likely to identify themselves as *always* participating in monitoring LG programs (错误!未找到引用源。). That is, respondents who reported not knowing the services provided by the LC1 executive tended to identify more with *sometimes, rarely,* or *never* participating in monitoring LG programs than those who reported knowing the services.

A variety of services in the study area were delivered through routine activities and/or programs or projects. The services that the respondents mentioned that the LC1 provided corresponded with those outlined in the second schedule (30, 31) part 2-5 of the Local Governments Act 1997 (Chapter 243). A respondent in Buliisa district explained:

> *For example, maybe those roads have not been slashed or there is an area with no culverts. Sometimes you may find the taps blocked and the water not flowing. It is not our job to repair them. So we just report to the LCs, then they also talk to the concerned people on the other side, and they come and rectify the problem here (KI, Buliisa District).*

Besides the maintenance of community roads, respondents identified other services that included the enforcement of proper methods for the disposal of refuse and the construction, operation, and maintenance of water supplies (e.g., wells and dams). The civil servants in the sub-counties monitored services and programs or projects implemented to deliver them to the lower local governments.

> *Mechanisms for disseminating the knowledge of the functions and services provided by the LCs included: community meetings, the citizen/client charters, radio talk shows and Barazas. Besides the Local Government Councils Score Card Initiative (LGCSCI), the Baraza also doubles as a monitoring mechanism. While discussing these mechanisms, a respondent stated: We inform the public about the roles of different offices during community Barazas. We also use radio talk shows. In the town council we have a client's charter, which explains how civil servants should relate with the community, what services to offer and at what time (**Key Informant, Local Council Official, Buliisa**)*

In Uganda, a Baraza is a community-based information forum for monitoring the performance of government programs by citizens at local government level. Also each electronic broadcaster in Uganda is legally obligated to provide one-hour of free radio/television airtime per week towards promoting government programs. However, the frequency and effectiveness of these channels of knowledge dissemination to citizens are often hindered by budget constraints. The LGCSCI only assesses district council performance in monitoring service provision; their participation in lower local governments; leader's contact with the citizens; and individual performance of LC5 chairpersons and councilors.

The citizens' knowledge of the services provided by the LCs did not always translated into their participation in LG programs. This happens when the available LG programs do not align with the interests of the citizens. While discussing this matter, a respondent explained:

> *Sometimes you want them to go for a project like processing food and yet somebody is interested in goat rearing. Maybe that is what he best knows. If you force them to go into whatever you think is right, the project collapses (**Key Informant, Sub county Official, Buliisa**).*

3.5 Knowledge of the Number of LC Executive Members

Respondents with knowledge of at least one member of the 10 members LC1 or LC2 executive committee tended to participate more in monitoring LG programs compared to those without any knowledge of any member of the committee. The variable knowledge of the number of LC (1 and 2) executive members met the parallel-lines assumption. More respondents who reported knowing at least one LC1 or LC2 executive member also reported participating in LG programs than did those who reported not knowing any LC executive committee members.

From the odds ratio perspective, all other variables constant, respondents who reported knowing at least an LC1 or LC2 executive member were 2.66 times more likely to identify themselves as participating in monitoring LG programs than did respondents who reported not knowing any LC executive (OR = 2.66; 95% CI = 1.92–3.67) (错误!未找到引用源。).

3.6 Interaction with the Urban–Rural Divide (District of Residence)

A greater proportion of respondents from Buliisa district reported greater participation in monitoring LG programs than did those from Kampala. The variable district of residence met the parallel-lines assumption. That is, the odds ratio is the same across the categories of the dependent variable (错误!未找到引用源。). This means that, holding all other variables constant, Buliisa respondents were 2.14 times more likely to identify as participating in monitoring LG programs than did respondents from Kampala district (OR = 2.14; 95% CI = 1.22–3.74) (错误!未找到引用源。).

Although knowledge of and opportunities for participation in LG programs were linked with attendance at LC meetings, many residents did not attend meetings if they did not expect to receive meeting allowances. Concerning this, a key informant from Buliisa Town Council stated:

> *We are even encouraging other LC1s and LC2s to know what is implemented within their areas of jurisdiction. But the problem is that few people attend meetings, even if you invite them. The issue of meeting allowances is betraying us because people want to attend meetings where they will get allowances (KI, Buliisa Town Council).*

Expecting meeting allowances or transport refunds by residents when invited to meetings was especially common in urban areas, where residents were more preoccupied with attending to the rigours of urban life. While highlighting poor attendance at community meetings in their zone, a respondent observed:

> *The total estimated population in our local council 1 zone is about 500 people. But out of that number less than 20 attend local council meetings. It is usually the landlords who attend the local council meetings but the tenants rarely attend **(FGD Participant, Badongo Zone LC1, Kampala)***

Some local council leaders were unable to organize and conduct community meetings and activities. This was primarily because of organization limitations as a result of time constraints. Underlining this weakness, a respondent said:

> *There is no cooperation amongst the local council leaders in Kosovo Zone. So they cannot conduct any local activity or meeting in the zone. This sabotage amongst local leaders also leads to poor cooperation among the people in the area **(FGD Participant, Kosovo Zone LC1, Kampala)***

4. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study vis-à-vis the chosen theoretical framework and empirical evidence from related previous studies. A discussion about the association between the citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring local government programs is presented first. Then a discussion about the moderating urban–rural divide follows.

4.1 Political Knowledge and Participation in Monitoring LG Programs

Political theory repeatedly considers citizens with broad political knowledge as better equipped to discharge the responsibilities of a good citizen (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kleinberg & Lau, 2019). In our study, we assess how political knowledge is associated with the participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs in a decentralized system of government moderated by the urban–rural divide. We reveal mixed results, suggesting that the direction of association in settings of low political knowledge is not straight-forward. There was evidence of a statistically significant association between political knowledge and participation of citizens in monitoring LG programs arising from three (out of four) specific knowledge areas assessed: (1) the number of LC (1&2) executive committee members that citizens knew, (2) knowledge of selected local and central government officials, and (3) knowledge of LCI functions. The findings on the knowledge of services provided by LC1 executives were mixed.

On the one hand, our study reveals that knowledge of local political leadership is

significantly and positively associated with participation in monitoring local government programs. Citizens who demonstrated knowledge of an increasingly higher number of LC executive committee members also tended to increasingly participate in monitoring LG programs when compared to those who didn't know any members of the LC executive committee. This finding is consistent with earlier empirical evidence, which shows that knowledge about "influential others" (such as local leaders) "shapes the willingness of followers to engage in proactive behavior" (Granger et al., 2020, pp. 1–2). However, the link may not be that straight forward because other factors may hinder the participation of citizens in LG programs even when they are adequately knowledgeable about local political leadership. Such factors include: limited knowledge about specific LG programs (Mushemeza, 2019); dysfunctional local government units and/or structures (Mushemeza, 2019); a low level of self-efficacy among citizens (Lieberman & Zhou, 2022); and the absence of supportive citizen monitoring structures (Mushemeza, 2019). Younger citizens also tend to display lower levels of political participation, although they may possess adequate levels of political knowledge (Deželan & Moxon, 2021).

On the other hand, our study reveals that knowledge of local political leadership is significantly and negatively associated with participation in monitoring local government programs. That is, citizens with limited political knowledge may, in fact, show higher political participation. Our findings reveal that proportionately more citizens who did not know (compared to those who knew) the specified local or central government officials and/or functions of the LCI executive committee participated more regularly in monitoring LG programs, albeit marginally (1.12 and 1.37 times more, respectively). This behaviour is predictably plausible, especially in situations of information shortage. Consequently, citizens rely on low-information rationality (Popkin, 1991), the "on-line model of information processing" (Lodge et al., 1995, p. 310), and the wisdom of crowds (Simoiu et al., 2019).

Alternatively, "it is also possible that the negative association is due to the specific kind of knowledge" other than knowledge of selected local or central government officials and knowledge of the functions of the LCI executive committee (Reichert, 2021, p. 14). Others have found that citizens need to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, just as local leaders ought to know theirs, if they are to successfully participate in monitoring government projects (Mushemeza, 2019). Where the knowledge of citizens about their roles and responsibilities was inadequate, their level of participation in monitoring community committees was equally low (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights [ISER], 2018). The current study shows that citizens' knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and those of their local leaders to provide specific services was quite accurate when compared with those outlined in policy or related documents. This accurate knowledge of roles and responsibilities could partly explain the greater participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs, even though their knowledge of selected government officials was inadequate. As long as the citizens saw the services expected from the LC executive, their identity did not matter. Instead, it was incumbent upon the citizens to also discharge their responsibility and participate when called upon.

4.2 Interaction with the Urban–Rural Divide

In our study, we performed a supplementary analysis to assess whether there was a connection between the urban–rural divide and the participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs. There was evidence of a statistically significant association. It was noticeable that rural dwellers (Buliisa district) were twice as likely to participate in monitoring LG programs as urban dwellers (Kampala district). The demands of urban life, which compete for their time, partly explain the poor participation of urban residents in LG programs (Das & Chattopadhyay, 2020). In addition, geographical proximity of a person to others with dissimilar socio-economic characteristics undermines civicness by negatively affecting a person's trust of other citizens, hindering their participation in local community activities (Andriani et al., 2023). Furthermore, the design of the local government structure in both Kampala (an urban area) and Buliisa (a rural area) is the same. Therefore, the civicness of the community should explain the difference in the level of their performance in monitoring (Putnam et al., 1993).

4.3 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the association between the citizens' political knowledge and their political participation in monitoring local government programs in a decentralized system of government. To achieve this objective, we employed a convergent parallel research design. We gathered data using survey questionnaire administration, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). We analyzed quantitative data using STATA and performed thematic analysis for the qualitative data.

Overall, the present study suggests that the level of participation of citizens in monitoring local government programs is associated with their knowledge of local political affairs. However, there were exceptions to the general rule, which suggested that depending on the local knowledge area and/or nature of political participation, the nature of association could be different. Notably, this study was conducted in only two districts of Uganda, a small sample. Therefore, further research is recommended to determine the link between the knowledge of political affairs of citizens and participation based on a larger sample size of many districts before drawing generalized conclusions.

5. Recommendations

- Local government monitoring mechanisms such as the Local Government Councils Score Card Initiative (LGCSCI) should also be introduced to the lower local governments in order to improve citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring LG programs at those levels.

- Financial interventions should be introduced to ensure that funds for mechanisms aimed at improving citizens' political knowledge and their participation in monitoring LG programs (e.g. radio talk shows, citizen/client charters, Barazas and Local Government Councils Score Card Initiative) are regular and sufficient.

- Statewide civic education programs such as the defunct *Chaka-Mchaka* patriotism program should be reviewed and tailored to the needs of each local government in order to sustain or enhance the civicness of the citizens and ultimately their participation in

monitoring LG programs.

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