

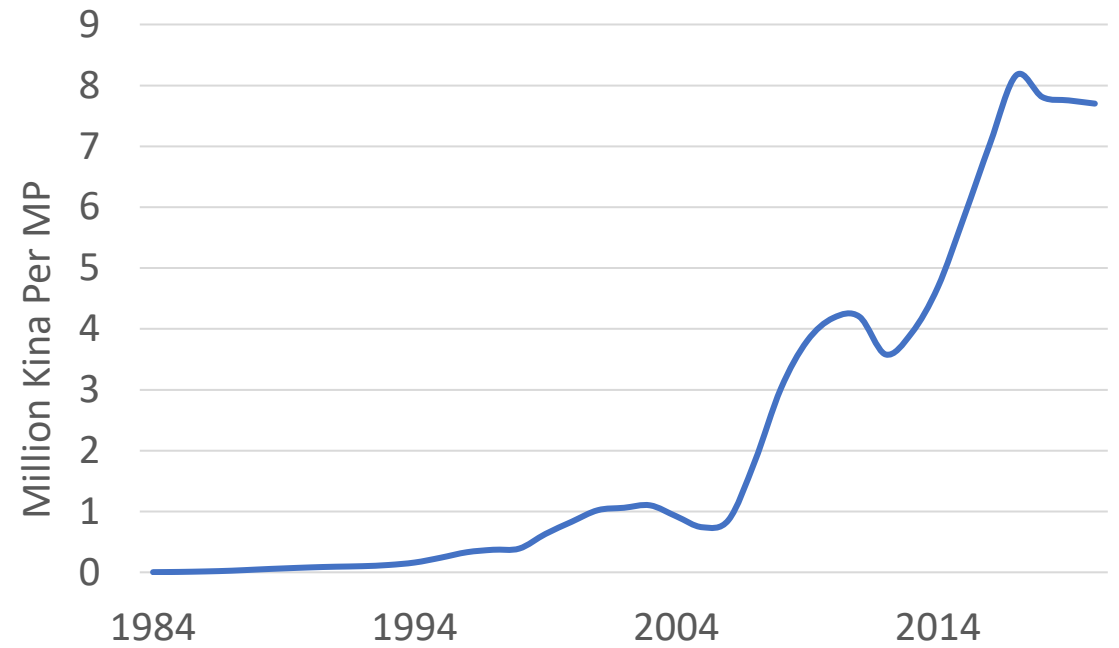
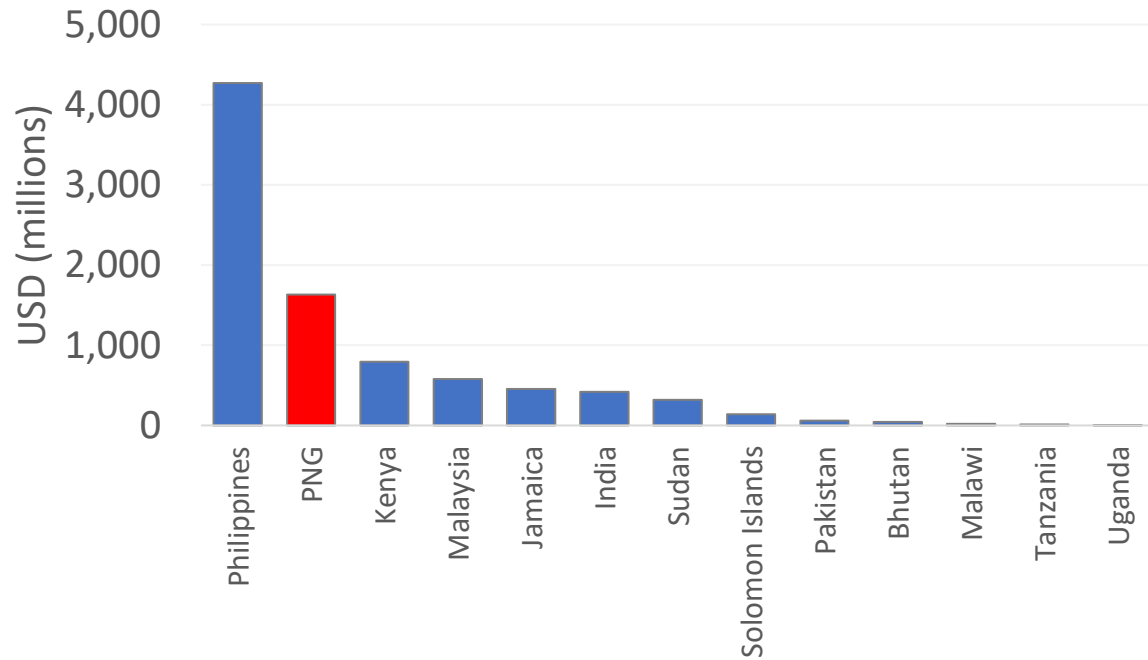
Does DSIP funding help MPs win elections in Papua New Guinea?

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A research puzzle



MPs get a lot of District Service Improvement Program (DSIP) funding

Plenty to spend it on

Should provide a major incumbency advantage

But about 50% of MPs lose seats each election

Is DSIP money actually helping MPs win?

How can we test if DSIP grants are helping MPs win?

PNG has massive malapportionment. Some electorates are much bigger than others.

Smaller electorates get more DSIP per capita.

This means that if DSIP money helps MPs, should see higher re-election rates in smaller electorates because in these electorates MPs have a lot more DSIP money *per person*.

Of course, smaller electorates might be different in other ways, which might affect election results, but we can control for some of these differences in multiple regression analysis and eliminate their effects.

Easy!

Well it sounds easy, but one big problem

Many different ways of operationalising tests.

DSIP from final year or over 5 year term?

Population from census (outdated) or roll (inaccurate)?

Do we look at whether MP wins or % of votes they get?

Pool data or time series?

Our solution: do everything & see most common result.

Note: Using data from before 2022.



“There’s so much evidence, we should put some aside for a different case.”

Findings



96 regressions! Only 14% of findings statistically significant and positive (2% statistically significant and negative). By chance alone we'd expect 5%.

Another problem

But perhaps it's harder to win in smaller electorates, for some reason we don't understand, and which you didn't control for in your regression?

Good question.

However, we can help rule out this problem by looking at smaller electorates before DSIP funding was introduced.

When we do this we find no evidence that it was harder to win in smaller electorates. Competition in smaller electorates is very similar to larger ones (except smaller ones have more DSIP money per person).

To summarise

All electorates get the same amount of DSIP money, whether they are large or small.

This means smaller electorates get more DSIP money per person.

This should mean that sitting MPs should do better electorally in smaller electorates, because they can give people more money.

But MPs don't do better in smaller electorates (and this isn't because smaller electorates are harder to win in because of other factors).


So DSIP money doesn't seem to help MPs electorally.

So why is DSIP money failing to help MPs win?

- Voters know about it and expect more?
- MPs aren't that good at spending it?
- Too many impediments to spending (government, District Authorities)?
- Not enough money?

We'd love to hear your thoughts!

Read our paper...



Australian National University

Development Policy Centre
 Crawford School of Public Policy
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Do DSIP funds help PNG MPs win?

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Abstract

District Services Improvement Program (DSIP) funds are constituency development grants which members of parliament in Papua New Guinea (PNG) exert considerable control over. Similar funds exist in a number of other countries, but on a per capita basis PNG's funds are some of the highest globally. The funds are also controversial, and often said to be tools of patronage. In this paper, we study whether the funds have any discernible impact on MP re-election rates. We do this by taking advantage of the natural experiment afforded by malapportionment in PNG. DSIP funds are given in equal amounts to all constituencies. Owing to substantial malapportionment, larger electorates receive considerably less funding per capita. We test whether incumbents are more likely to win re-election in smaller electorates where DSIP funding is higher on a per capita basis. Despite including (and excluding) a large range of controls, as well as different variants of variables, we find only very limited evidence of a difference in re-election rates. We also show that this is not simply because it is inherently harder to be re-elected in smaller electorates. We do find some evidence of DSIP money being associated with higher incumbent vote shares. However, even this evidence is limited. The balance of available evidence strongly suggests that having more DSIP money does not help MPs win re-election on average.

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