

# Citizens' Political Knowledge and the State of Local Governance Interest Determination in Uganda

John Mary Kanyamurwa<sup>1</sup>, Joseph Okeyo Obosi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Kyambogo University, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science & Public Administration, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

## Email address:

[jmkanyamurwa@kyu.ac.ug](mailto:jmkanyamurwa@kyu.ac.ug) (J. M. Kanyamurwa)

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**Abstract:** The state of citizens' political knowledge in shaping local governance interest formulation patterns has been identified as a vital mechanism in democratic systems for centuries. Nevertheless, political knowledge proficiencies remain remarkably scanty among ordinary citizens in the developing world, with significantly few studies directly engaging this local governance reality. The paper discusses how political knowledge influences the changing local interest determination dynamics to reinforce local governance functionality in Uganda. From a sample size of 99 respondents, the study used descriptive qualitative methods and techniques to collect data and analyze the responses. The study found out that notwithstanding institutional inconsistencies, local farmers were considerably more influential in local interest determination compared to politically erudite citizen groups. There were limited structures for citizen participation in decision-making processes, yet likewise found nascent progressive virtual platforms for local interests' deliberations mostly based on digital and traditional media platforms. The nature of drivers which framed political knowledge were typically influenced by structural, political, economic and international dynamics. The study recommended that in order to address the local citizen participation constraints, profound local governance policy transformation interventions should be embarked on to reinforce local infrastructure, the local economy and expansion of education and the democratic space for civil society agencies' operations.

**Keywords:** Citizens' Political Knowledge, Political Awareness, Local Governance Interests, Interest Determination, Political Knowledge Drivers

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## 1. Introduction

Political knowledge is a leading dynamic in the proper functioning of local democracy as it underpins important grassroots decisions, which ultimately influence the determination of local interests. The latter interests entail citizens' local infrastructure, services, priorities, accessible public logistics, choice of agile local leadership, inclusive and transparent decision making systems. The discourse on citizens' political knowledge has extensively been putatively established over the decades as an integral component in the determination of citizen interests located at the centre of local democracy [1-3]. Empirical analysis about citizens' political knowledge has focused on how it was distributed among societal groups, its application scope and citizen participation modes as central undercurrents in the process of shaping citizen local interests [4-6]. This growing investigation has

been essentially based on the pertinent conceptual linkages between political knowledge and interest determination, with most scholarship emphasizing these elements, which have developed even more significance to public administration. These concepts have ultimately become core aspects for frameworks analysing local governance processes [3, 43, 44]. At a more practical level, the perspectives on citizen political competence and local governance participation underscore the fundamental dynamic for political knowledge dispersion, and ultimately, how such political knowledge is utilized at the local level. Yet, there are inadequate analyses contextually drawing out direct connections to local interest formulation processes in terms of contextual interests, accessibility, quality and finally citizen service consumption of the same.

Likewise, evidence suggests that citizens were less inclined to participate in local processes due to political knowledge shortfalls, apathy and preoccupied in individual local

engagements rather than communal ones [10-12]. Whereas political knowledge is delineated as the amount of correct information a citizen possesses, citizen participation is understood as active and democratic involvement in the functioning of local governance processes for the public good [13, 14]. In other words, participation in local governance gives citizens opportunity to shape what and how public information was accessed, policies set, local priorities established, targeting, voicing tax apportioning, structuring programmes, and finally local resource usage. Nonetheless, the dynamics in these concepts and the policy interactions between state officials and citizens as perceived in these lenses have undergone shifts in recent times. A plethora of scholarship establishes insightful local governance institutional modifications which have fundamentally redesigned patterns of political interest at the local level [15, 16].

The shifts in the new spaces for citizen-local state interaction and the consequent interests determined point to greater governance interactions which the present paper investigates. In the context of local governance, which has been described as the web of process interfaces between local state officials and non-state actors to design official local public interventions, this paper focuses on three interrelated scholarly aspects. First, exploring the distribution of citizens' political knowledge at the local level and its consequence on the local interests determined. Second, by means of the same sample, the dynamics in the emerging platforms of local participation and the extent to which these forums framed local governance preference patterns are established. Third, the political knowledge drivers influencing citizens' political knowledge and local interests' determination processes are explored; with focus on the evidence that these elements may constitute the essential means by which citizens' participation in local governance processes effectively determine their preferences. In this perspective, the article answers three questions about the central elements of citizen political competence and how they interrelate with the changing local interest determination dynamics: (i) how does the distribution of political knowledge under local governance help determine citizens' local interest? (ii) how does citizens' political knowledge condition their involvement in emerging virtual participation forums to frame their local interests? (iii) What contextual political knowledge drivers influence citizens' prospects for shaping their local interests?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The governance theory was selected to guide the conceptualisation of this study. Essentially used to undergird the theoretical aspects of the relationship between political knowledge and local decision making contexts in which resolutions are taken about local interests, the governance theory provided the framework for overall analysis. Again, considered fundamental in local governance analysis, this is one of the theories developed to facilitate the conception of the nature and outcomes of decision making, how local actors interact and the political behaviour exhibited in the

government, private agencies and the citizenry domains of interface at the local level [17, 18]. The governance theory has many variants, but this study was based on Stocker's (1998) perspective. The theory makes a number of postulations. Firstly, governance is assumed to have two facets; the conceptual and the practical aspects of local engagement. While the former, perspective deals with the ideal as analysed by scholars, the latter angle of governance is taken as the framework within which decisions are effectively made by stakeholders in society as they debate their common needs. Consistent with the governance theory's first population, the decision-making process is also based on resources allocated to the local level as a key determinant in the local governance processes [17].

Secondly, the governance theory assumes that the art and craft of governance is a set of formal and informal institutions, acting in participatory networks of local actors drawn from, but also beyond government. In other words, governance is a series of dynamic relationships that denote the blurring of boundaries across the public and private realms, with responsibilities for tackling political and socio-economic concerns in society, particularly those that connect to cherished goals [17]. Thirdly, the theory also assumes, as depicted in recent scholarship, that governance is the power dependence on local relationships among central societal institutions involved in collective action; but equally about actors' autonomous self-governing capacity [19]. Finally, the governance theory recognizes key stakeholders' capacity to get things done. On the part of government, this capacity does not rest on its power to solely rely on its authority, but rather to use its weight to steer societal players to interact in participatory contexts. Analysis of the theoretical assumptions deemed directly relevant to the papers' key arguments reveals several practical issues applicable to the broader field of public administration and management.

One of the theory's assumptions perceives governance as a process that involves autonomous self-governing networks of actors. This supposition implies that all the stakeholders who get involved in governance contexts have the necessary competence needed to interact effectively for their own good. However this paper, *inter alia*, questions the extent to which all actors, including the ordinary citizens, are able to use their political knowledge to participate in the grassroots forums to make appropriate input in local public policies and programmes. The other directly germane assumption is that governance, as a broad web of relationships at the local level, implies inbuilt capacity to get things done. Relatedly, the theory, according to scholarship that underpinned this study, further postulates that the capacity for delivering governance outcomes goes beyond governmental power to forcefully drive other societal players to participate, but rather the ability to provide direction to local stakeholders [17]. Indeed, the capacity for delivering improved governance outcomes appears to emerge from the interrelationships within and beyond government, but with implicit questions on the specific roles of the actors at the local level, which this paper profoundly investigated. This assumption further emphasizes

the range and plurality of stakeholders who underlie governance at different levels, as debated in this paper. The theory also implicitly recognizes ordinary citizens as an integral part of the local stakeholders, suggesting that these actors have to contribute to the overall functionality of local governance institutions.

The theory in general provided a suitable guide to the analysis of whether ordinary citizens, as one category of stakeholders at the local level, had the political knowledge competence necessary to effectively participate in local governance to advance their interests. Besides, notwithstanding the general nature of assumptions on the competence of the stakeholders, the governance theory provided the framework for analysing whether all local actors contributed to the dimensions required getting things done in a manner that reflected actors' local interests [18]. Thus, despite the general nature of the governance theory which, for example, simply mentions stakeholders' capacity rather than political knowledge which is investigated in the paper, the theory was overall academically suitable. The stakeholders' capacity underscored by the theory was construed to refer to political knowledge, and was analysed in the paper as such.

### **3. Situational Analysis on Political Knowledge and Local Interests**

Largely understood within the context of the governance theory, there is a growing number of studies which address local decision contexts which have in contemporary epochs acknowledged key benefits arising from engaging the local state. This research emphasizes the significance of existing evidence generally and widely accepted ideas which maintain that citizen participation in governance structures improves the design and execution of local initiatives. Overall, the interfaces in governance, data shows, help to create inclusive local structures that represent all actors' needs. Scholarship in this perspective further contends that citizen participation in the planning process provides direct benefits by contributing applicable ideas, identifying the specific nature of local priorities and ownership of the resulting local governance systems [20-23].

Relevant viewpoints in another strand of citizen participation literature analyse the nature of local projects, knowledge of local settings, programmes, general cooperation and active involvement as vital elements for engendering incentives for sustainable local governance enterprises. Yet again, most current research sheds new light on the central local governance values arising from participation of which citizen political engagement in local decision contexts is crucial. Equally pertinent to this paper are the arguments raised in relevant studies relating to local participation for enhanced identification of relevant local action, beliefs, values, local priorities and unique societal attachments to particular local initiatives [24-29]. While these analyses hardly investigate the underlying citizens'

political knowledge attributes that inevitably energize local political action, they are relevant to this paper. Overall, the current analyses in this area support the efforts which highlight the significance of citizen participation in local governance, especially in terms of information diffusion among the public in order to fulfil their citizenry functions to society. In addition, although these citizen participation themes are echoed in African and local contexts, particularly emphasizing issues of low participation, political knowledge as an attribute, is barely investigated. In this respect much of the current literature on citizen involvement in local governance pays particular attention to the strengths associated with local decision making structures. This literature, nonetheless, scarcely discusses political knowledge as a central mechanism necessary for effective local state engagement, how and why it is distributed in society the way it is as well as how such a knowledge distribution pattern influences local interest determination.

Related analyses of local political participation in local governance suggest that there has been an increasing amount of studies on emerging modes of local state engagement in recent years. Available evidence presents central perspectives on emerging participation forms, platforms and the role of information styles of dissemination for local citizen participation. Dominant in these scholarly narratives are the traditional media platforms mainly referring to radio and television as well as new media that strongly focus on the role of mobile phone based social media tools in local governance interactions. Contemporary research in this area has further highlighted rising new participation structures at the local level, particularly of a virtual nature, but sometimes in settings characterized by inadequate communication facilities which the governance theory underscores [24, 30-38, 18, 39, 40, 41].

These studies, however, barely examine how the emerging participation structures are organized, the funding arrangements for the new participation modes and the results arising from the gradual embrace of these new spaces, the identity of citizen groups who patronise them and the nature of interest patterns determined, if any. Neither do these studies explore the link between citizen participation as an offshoot of political knowledge, a strategic variable in this paper, nor local interests as influenced by the new local participation platforms. Besides, existing literature scarcely addresses the emerging participatory landscapes in terms of who actively utilises them to advance local interests and to what effect. Consequently, the nature of available evidence brings to light some critiques whose relevance is to clarify the theoretical gaps in the debate on emerging local participation forums and the role of political knowledge in fast changing local environments. Lastly, there is a large volume of published studies describing the role of a diversity of local participation drivers.

Systematically emphasizing the fundamental dynamics for local decision making, pertinent studies discuss participation barriers as well. A fundamental strand of this scholarship investigates the role of dynamic forces associated with the

regime in power, technological shifts and international forces as vital influencers of local governance interaction systems. These studies ultimately make another crucial argument, identifying specific drivers, some defined by context while others are shaped by institutional ethos and local officials' nature of leadership as they engage with citizens in local governance processes. The research in this area adds socio-economic factors, central of which is formal education, and the larger globalization linked forces as playing a pivotal role in the dynamics seen in political knowledge. These studies further raise concerns on the role of societal changes in diverse local political participation settings as well as the barriers that explain the limited citizen influence in local matters [42-44, 27, 45, 3, 46-48, 5].

These studies, though within the governance theory framework fall short of central insights on citizen political knowledge and local interest determination realities. Thus, although these academic accounts help to underscore the nature and significance of citizen participation in local governance, they barely investigate the centrality of political knowledge in African local governance contexts. Again, most of the explanations advanced either make less direct inferences to the Ugandan context or analyse the political knowledge drivers in general national contexts. Finally, the link between the political knowledge drivers in local governance and the extent to which citizens are able to use their political knowledge to determine the consequent local interest patterns has not been established. Thus, guided by the governance theory, this paper set out to critically examine the role of drivers and inhibitors of political knowledge in the process of determining local interests.

#### 4. Research Design and Methodology

We studied the associations between citizen political knowledge and local interest determination using qualitative about citizen political knowledge and local governance in Mbarara District, Uganda. This investigation took the form of a case study design with a qualitative methodology and utilized the interview method to conduct in-depth exploration of the study variables. As argued by Yin (2018), case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as groups of citizens, government processes, context, place such as the civic level, functions or phenomenon or other specific societal element. Involving qualitative methods (and quantitative methods sometimes), the basic features of a Case Study entail investigation of small units of a setting or process, a location, profound and insightful study of qualitative or quantitative phenomena and usually continuous in nature [49].

The respondents were carefully selected using heterogeneous purposive sampling in order to obtain several independent datasets, richer data in terms of collective understanding of the links between citizen political knowledge and local interest determination. As a non-probability sampling method, convenience sampling was used to select respondents from ordinary citizens, elected

politicians, bureaucrats and civil society officials based on the rationalization that each category needed to provide insight into the variables under examination. To achieve the paper objectives, we selected the study population from the targeted adult male and female respondents, totalling 331 respondents from (5) sub counties and (1) municipality of the district. Basing on this sample, we interviewed 99 (30%) of the respondents as the sample size, which according to Saunders, et al. (2003), sufficiently reflects the characteristics of the larger population. The subjects finally selected comprised (38) ordinary citizens, (26) elected politicians, (15) bureaucrats, (13) civil society officials and (7) key informants selected from senior district and sub county officials.

Data were collected using qualitative open-ended questionnaires, Key Interview (KI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides as relevant techniques, with FGD memberships ranging between 7-13 respondents. Ordinary citizens were selected to provide data about their own self-assessed knowledge, whether they participated in local governance processes and whether their involvement helped determine local interests. Elected politicians were mainly selected to provide data about how ordinary citizens' political knowledge was distributed among social groups, links with local interest determination and the significance of emerging digital participation platforms.

Civil society officials likewise provided data on emerging forms of local participation, whether these helped to frame local governance preferences and their eventual delivery at all. Bureaucrats on their part mainly provided information about both the emerging citizen participation platforms and the nature of political knowledge drivers that defined local interest determination. While open-ended questionnaires were administered to ordinary citizens; the politicians, bureaucrats and civil society officials were interviewed in KI and FGD arrangements with the aid of an appropriate interview guide. To gather orderly, insightful and well collaborated data from all levels of local governance, (3) FGD were organized for elected politicians targeting village/ward chairpersons, sub county and district local councilors as distinct categories.

For analogous rationale, (2) FGD meetings were held for bureaucrats at sub county and district levels as well as (1) FGD for civil society officers at the local level. A translated open-ended questionnaire was made available to cater for all the selected ordinary citizens, who were only comfortable with the local language, Runyankole. The interview and open-ended questionnaire data were analysed using INvivo 12 software. This qualitative data analysis package designed to rationally analyze data from diverse sources which helped explore links between the citizen political knowledge and local interest determination. A series of stages were followed to analyse the data collected. These encompassed, as a first step, cleaning, editing, securitizing and reviewing the data to ensure correctness and accuracy of the responses gathered. Second, in order to gain insights into linkages in the variables, we constructed sets of evidence to support identification of

the linkages sought. Third, restating the research questions to match data with the paper's theoretical framework was the next step. Ultimately, we created 107 codes as a result of careful study of the entire corpus in the NVivo software. Fourth, all sections of the corpus were continuously reviewed in order to consistently assign the codes considered central in answering the overall research question.

Fifth, analysis of the data continued with assigning of the codes to the themes under "political knowledge", "determination of local interests" and the related subthemes. The coding process entailed assigning codes by theme, subtheme; for example, coding gender as Male #1 or Female #1. Sixth, in order to analyze the similarities and differences among respondents, comparisons between categories of participants (cases) were made, basing on respondents' demographic attributes such as age, location, occupation and level of governance. Accordingly, data collected from ordinary citizens were coded as "OC". In contrast, data from KI and FGD were respectively coded as "KI" and "FGD", but also itemized as per individual respondent categories.

Consequently, codes for data sources were sequentially coded as OC#1-OC#38, while those for KI ran from KI#1" - "KI #7"; with FGD ones consecutively coded as "FGD#1 - FGD#6". Seventh, coding patterns were identified following particular relationships observed between political knowledge and local interests indicators explored throughout the data. Eighth, the final procedures entailed organization, focus and ensuring the data analysis process was consistently in line with the paper themes identified in the literature.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

The study findings and discussion were based on analysis of the data collected from the respondents based on the three objectives or research questions/themes, namely: Citizens' political knowledge dispersion and local interest determination patterns; emerging forms of local participation framing local governance preferences; and nature of political knowledge drivers shaping citizens' local interests discussed in the perspective of the governance theory.

### 5.1. Citizens' Political Knowledge Dispersion and Local Interest Determination Patterns

This section presents and discusses qualitative data generated from 99 respondents' feedback to clarify the relationship between the citizens' state of political knowledge, its dispersion among them and the local interest determination patterns in shifting governance settings. Asked how citizen political knowledge was understood, most feedback displayed in the NVivo software presented it as awareness of local power dynamics (OC#3, OC#12, OC#21, KI #1, KI #4, KI #6, FGD#1 Male 3, FGD #2: Male 1, FGD #4 Female 1, FGD #5 Male 3). In conformity with the first theme of the paper, there were further opinions which suggested that citizens must have well-founded local institutional and structural relationships' knowledge and roles (OC#33, KI #1, KI #3, KI #4, FGD #2 Male 4, FGD#5 Male

7). Additional feedback seen in the NVivo system suggested that active local engagement by citizens was a central feature for politically knowledgeable citizens (OC#2, OC#17, OC#18, OC#29, KI #2, KI #4, FGD #2 Female 1, FGD#6 Female 2). Emphasizing what NVivo results indicated as a consensus among the respondents in the context of the paper's first theme, one district political leader interviewed in a KI capacity, revealed that:

My view of political knowledge is that citizens who have such [aptitude] should know local institutions, local systems and how such bodies function using the political power they hold in the local council system. I believe such citizens should also hold firm political opinions about what they consider as important issues for their area and attend local meetings to express such concerns (*Interview held with KI#1, a district elected official on November 21, 2020*).

In contrast, analysed within the participation analytical framework, the question directed to respondents on what they considered as to be local interests indicated several varied opinions as observed in NVivo. Consequently, local interests ranged from availability and quality of infrastructure such as local markets, the state of local bridges and drainage to transportation infrastructure, comprising feeder and community roads (OC#1, OC#27, OC#36, KI #4, KI #7, FGD #4 Female 2). Data further indicated that local interests further comprised local health care structures, ease of access and availability of the expected health services and sanitation (OC#9, OC#11, OC#20, OC#38, KI #1, KI #5, FGD #3 Male 4, FGD#4 Male 7). The NVivo analysed data on local interests, in addition, heightened the school system, ICTs access, community development services such as adult learning for the elderly as fundamental in local interests (OC#13, OC#14, KI #3, KI #3, FGD #5 Male 2, FGD#6 Male 7). In response to the same question on local interests, a member of a village chairpersons' FGD clarified that common local interests consisted of:

Publicly provided services such as education, health, hygiene, youth skills training, energy, water, agricultural projects, services and diverse government-supported income generating activities, in most cases designed to respond to local poverty summarize local citizens' interests (*FGD#5 Male 3, held with Local Council 1 politicians on 11 December 2020*).

Furthermore, in response to questions on how ordinary citizens assessed themselves on citizen political knowledge, NVivo results were concise. Mostly, intended to ascertain the amount of accurate information about local governance held respondents, the questions covered their awareness of local common interests and political knowledge on local voting considerations. Self-assessed political knowledge data was further obtained about local governance institutions, leaders' roles, engagement with local officials on citizens' local preferences and awareness of the local budget resource flows. Collaborated by other respondents, on average, data obtained suggested that religious leaders, school teachers and professional consultants possessed the highest political knowledge, followed by farmers, traders, medium scale

processors and manufacturers (OC2-11, 7, 20-26, 35, KI #3, KI #4, FGD #3 Male 2, FGD#6 Male 3). In a hierarchy of citizen political knowledge, results indicated that transporters, corporate employees in the private sector, civil servants, musicians and fashion designers constituted yet another category of citizens whose political knowledge was lower than that of peasants. Paradoxically, in terms of participation in local governance processes, NVivo data suggested that the peasants and artisans' category participated more than the clerical and scholarly ordinary citizens despite their manifestly higher political knowledge. Compared to the transporters, corporate employees, civil servants, musicians and designers; the peasants and artisans still performed better in terms of participation in the governance landscape. Yet, whereas peasants and artisans attended more local meetings, they were still found inadequate and with most of those who attended inactive. The latter finding partly explains why despite the involvement of the peasants and artisans in local processes, they were unable to determine the patterns of their local interests. In addition, despite the higher knowledge among religious leaders, teachers and consultants they hardly determined the patterns of local interests mostly because their involvement in local processes were minimal (OC1-3, 14-17, 21, 22, 26-31, 36, KI #1, KI #3-5, FGD #3 Female 2, FGD#5 Female 1).

Answering the same question on whether there was a linkage between citizen political knowledge and participation, data implied that since transporters, corporate employees, civil servants, musicians and designers best answered the question. This category of ordinary citizens, as NVivo data revealed, had the lowest measure of local governance political knowledge and similarly the lowest level of participation (OC6, OC7, OC11, OC14, OC15, OC17, OC20, OC33, 38). The dynamics that explain the discrepancies in citizen political knowledge and local participation was mostly the nature of community engagements, particularly for clerical and scholarly professions, civil servants' elitism engagements within the community and financial status which drew peasants and artisans to attend community engagements. Finally, liberalization was identified as a key factor in the discourse as the business community was found to be fully engaged in an entirely liberalized market where transporters, corporate employees, musicians and designers barely had consideration for local governance processes (OC4, OC8, OC20, KI #3, KI #6, FGD #3 Male 2, FGD#5 Male 5). The underlying message in the debate on political knowledge distribution in society and the determination of local determination of interests suggests a discrepancy between repetitively structured local interests, often with fixed budgets covering the same local items notwithstanding the real parties that determined these local interests. Thus, despite the changing circumstances in terms of increasing inequalities, deteriorating local infrastructure, quality of social services, technological innovations and youth unemployment, local interests largely remained undelivered.

Overall, the feedback received on political knowledge mostly underlined citizens' correct knowledge of local

institutions, structures and procedures as key in the respondents' perception of political knowledge. Nonetheless, emerging as equally important was the notion of engaging the local state to express what the local citizens took as their fundamental local interests; which the data suggested principally comprised availability, level accessibility and quality of local public services. Thus, the discourse in this paper points to citizens' political knowledge as demonstration of correct political information citizens should possess in order to fully participate in a democratic society' decision making processes at the local level. In other words, citizens' political knowledge is used to pinpoint the dynamics in citizen political capabilities for determining local interests as they participate in local decision making.

Multiple scholarly accounts in past scholarship are confirmed in this study's findings, particularly emphasizing low citizen participation due to apathy, low levels of civic awareness and generally insufficient stock of correct political information [43, 8, 51]. Another central concern that pertinent past studies established was validated by this paper's results, addressing itself to the major dynamics that undermine citizen political knowledge located in the local governance structures. The latter evidence is underlined by Reichert (2016) who discusses local effects of short political activity among citizens at the local level as strongly associated with poor governance indicators. However, as a leading view on governance emphasizes, there was emerging evidence of local organization in terms of CSO operations to improve democratic outcomes in the 2000s [52]. Nevertheless, as this paper's empirical findings suggest, contemporary scholarly investigations hardly discuss the local finer citizen political knowledge dispersion issues among societal groups as discovered by the data generated for this paper. For example, whereas previous studies indicated that ordinary citizens collectively possessed insufficient political knowledge for effectively participating in local decision making forums, findings for this paper established fresh results. New findings suggest that farmers and artisans, the group perceived to have inadequate political knowledge, participated more in local meetings than those perceived to be more politically knowledgeable. However, despite the latter finding the peasants were unable to shape local interests in similar fashion to clerics and scholarly-oriented citizens who barely participated in local processes despite their higher political knowledge. In other words, this paper emphasizes that neither did higher political knowledge necessarily guaranteed more participation in the local governance landscape nor did narrow involvement by peasants lead to effective local interest determination.

## ***5.2. Emerging Forms of Local Participation Framing Local Governance Preferences***

The second theme in the debate on the linkages between emerging forms of local participation and determination of local interests' was similarly generated from 99 respondents, composed of ordinary citizens, elected politicians,

bureaucrats and civil society. Firstly, NVivo findings indicated that the emerging digital platforms were spontaneous, unstructured, in most cases impromptu and organised in response to some local occurrences such as crime, road accidents and demonstrations (OC2, OC11, OC29, KI #1, KI #3, KI #4, FGD #1 Male 4, FGD#3 Female 1, FGD#6 Male 11). Nonetheless, results also suggested that there were some local radio and television shows which were officially organised mainly by the district council, which would pay for such media engagements, often consequently limiting the frequency of such platforms due to the expenses involved (FGD #3 Male 5, FGD#5 Male 3; FGD#5 Male 4). Secondly, in response to the question about the scope of emerging modes of citizen participation in local governance, results illustrated the rather narrow range for the digital medium available and accessible by ordinary citizens. Findings indicated that the emerging structures' scope where citizens engaged the local state was mostly on interactive local television and radio, with the public participating through live call ins, Facebook, WhatsApp and short mobile phone messages (OC12, OC19, KI #2, KI #3, KI #4, FGD #1 Male 4, FGD#3 Female 1). In an FGD interview with district politicians, the scope was summarized as follows:

The available functioning platforms for hosting participatory exchanges between district leaders and citizens are just three local radio stations and a television, with ordinary citizens participating by calling into the programmes.

Thirdly, in response to a question on the characterization of citizen groups who participated in the emerging digital citizen platforms, data suggested the participants and contributors were mostly dynamic and responsible citizens. The participants were also assessed as financially secure to afford mobile phones, including smart ones, pay for airtime costs, digitally savvy, able to use Facebook and had access to national electric grid or in position to afford solar power (OC1, OC2, OC11, OC25, KI #1, KI #3, KI #4, KI6, FGD #1 Male 4, FGD #1 Male 6, FGD#3 Male 5). These findings agreed with responses on ordinary citizens' competencies to determine the patterns of local their local interests which emphatically pointed to the role of local officials in determining local interests. Data indicated that citizens were mostly not able to influence the nature of local interest patterns determined, arguing that these were mostly the work of local officials who shaped them the way they wanted (OC4, OC5, OC13, OC22, FGD#6 Male 2-7, 9 and Female 2).

In contrast, while acknowledging the low citizen participation in both physical and emerging virtual settings, the officials maintained that the ordinary citizens determined their own interests through local elections (KI #1, KI #2, KI #4 KI #5, FGD #1 Male 10, FGD #2 Male 7, FGD #4 Male 2, FGD #4 Male 3, FGD #5 Male 2). Finally, responding to a question on the efficacy of emerging modes of citizen local participation, most feedback suggested that these settings were not adequately influential to determine local interests, especially light of few people participating. This section specifically explored how citizens perceived political

knowledge, how local interest patterns were determined, which citizen categories possessed more of it and how it influenced their participation in local processes. Heavily interested in how political knowledge was used, the section also expounds circumstances in the discourse why it was not used to influence local interest patterns in local spaces.

The section sets out to clarify the linkages between the state of citizen political knowledge in the emerging participation forums and the process of local interest determination patterns in Uganda's local governance landscape. Discussing how political knowledge affected the emerging modes of citizen participation, the ultimate aim of this process was to analyse how such new engagements influenced the determination of local interests. Fundamental in the findings which agreed with previous research were predominantly those which addressed the steady growth of emerging local participation forums, the low citizen participation in the new modes and the rising popularity of the virtual spaces [30, 31, 37, 43].

Of equal significance to the debate on political knowledge and local interest determination were new empirical perspectives which are highlighted in this paper. First was the finding on how the new forums, largely virtual in nature were organized, sometimes initiated by the media houses but also by the local governance units. Second was the finding on the emerging structures' scope, narrow in scope due to policy, socio-economic and local infrastructural concerns; elements that restricted the participation results arising from the gradual embrace of the new spaces. Third, among the notable new results underlined by this paper comprise the new participation modes' funding arrangements and costs involved in the diverse communication tools amidst stringent local budgets. New results further underline the identity of citizen groups which frequented the new spaces, leaving majority of poor citizens outside the new realms of local participation. Besides, the new digital forums barely delineate citizen participation as a result of political knowledge nor clearly help identify whose local interests are determined in these platforms.

### ***5.3. Nature of Political Knowledge Drivers Shaping Citizens' Local Interests***

In regard to the linkages between the drivers for political knowledge and how they shaped local interests, divergent subtexts repeatedly emerged, with data in the NVivo system showing multidirectional themes in the discourse. In response to the question on central drivers that shaped citizens' political knowledge, most analyses in the data identified political factors as fundamental among the concerns which influenced citizen political knowledge, and thus, affecting their competencies to determine local interests. Leading in the discourse were public policy initiatives such as the colonial era graduated tax abolition, road equipment distribution to districts and local governance structures' powerlessness. In the words of some respondents:

Some policies introduced by the central government influenced citizens' political knowledge affecting their

ability to determine local interests. The policies undermined citizens' need to attend local meetings where they could demand for infrastructural interests among other significant local interests. Yet these local needs were delivered to local governance units without the citizens' demands in a local decision making forum.

Feedback to the same question on what political knowledge drivers were and the connection to their local interests further acknowledged the role of economic perspectives in local governance. Mainly rotating around household incomes, the economic factors equally entailed unemployment, size of local budgets, agricultural yields and changing rural urban migration patterns in recent years (OC1, OC2, OC11, OC25FGD#2 Female 1; FGD # 7 Male 3; FGD#8 Female 2). Besides, whereas other themes emphasized education, civic awareness scope, the discourse as guided by NVivo data also suggested availability and accessibility of communication infrastructure as vital drivers of political knowledge in local political settings (OC1, OC2, OC11, OC25, FGD#2 Female 1; FGD # 7 Male 3; FGD#8 Female 2). Relevant themes observed in the data comprised international dynamics such as economic liberalism which expanded market engagements, keeping some citizens in the market rather than decision making spaces in the local governance setting (KI #6; KI#9 FGD #3 Male 4, Male 5 & FGD#5 Male 2). In other words, individual interests rather than communal ones constitute another perspective within which to understand the relationship between political knowledge drivers and the consequent local interest patterns determined.

Similar to the general debate on citizens' political debate and interest determination, the study generated some findings that corroborated contemporary scholarship. Most of these findings almost consistently echoed empirical evidence on social factors such as poverty, education gaps and internal migratory factors in citizen political knowledge dynamics as emphasized in previous literature [42, 34, 43, 44, 27, 45, 3, 46, 47, 41]. Emphasizing the changing nature of societal dynamics in local governance, the new results in regard to drivers of political knowledge clarified on the role of regime, technological changes, unemployment, rural communication infrastructure and international factors (specifically economic liberalization) in defining who participates in local governance, who does not and why. These new findings similarly have implications on how the state is effectively in charge of determining local interests, suggesting the local governance processes were seen as influenced by pseudo-democratic dynamics associated with most developing states.

## 6. Conclusion

The results underscore Uganda's local governance landscape exclusivity, largely emphasizing the inability of both the higher political knowledge groups and those that possessed lesser stocks of correct political knowledge inability to effectively determine local interests. Thus, as results emphasized, the interplay of other societal dynamics

together outweighed the centrality of citizen political knowledge in the determination of local interests, largely leaving this central democratic function to local officials. In regard to new virtual participation settings, the overall picture suggests that part of the emergent citizen participatory decision-making spaces for local state engagements were through the rather nascent but progressive digitalization processes of the local civic discourse. Saddled in local contradictions involving stringent local budgets, erratic scheduling of local issues on the new platforms and costly participation requirements, the new modes of local citizen participation still constituted an opening for advancing local governance processes. In addition, although the new digital platforms largely excluded a large component of ordinary citizens, they equally advance local democracy, progressively opening up the new forums for citizens to participate in local decision making contexts. Consequently, ordinary citizens were barely capable of radically determining local governance priorities largely due to a local network of civic shortfalls, policy contradictions and infrastructural dearth. The general implication for the discourse likewise demonstrates that the nature of drivers which framed political knowledge, and, thus, patterns of local interest determination; were historical, political, economic and international in character. Within the governance theory confines, the paper suggests civic education policy reform; consistent interactive media shows scheduling, local communication infrastructural reforms and enhanced local budgets for improving local democratic engagements. To address the governance constraints inhibiting local citizen participation, a recommendation for a robust multi-pronged policy landscape for local governance by the state is suggested. The recommended policy reforms should strengthen the local economy and expand the democratic setting for apposite civil society agencies' participation.

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