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Increasing Political Participation in Mozambique

Evaluation questions

This impact evaluation explores the effects of two initiatives to increase voter turnout and political participation in Mozambique. First, given poor newspaper coverage and limited access to information, the evaluation asks if increased distribution of a free newspaper can increase voter turnout and participation?

Second, given the opportunities presented by low-cost cellphone technology, this evaluation also asks if SMS campaigns can increase political participation? And, if they can, what type of SMS campaign is most effective?

Design and Methods

Twenty municipalities (see Figure 1) were randomly selected to receive a free weekly newspaper, called @Verdade (see Figure 2). Within each treatment municipality, polling locations (194 in total) were randomly selected into a treatment group (received the newspaper) and a control group (did not receive the newspaper). A panel survey was conducted before and after the election with 1,523 randomly sampled individuals divided across these intervention and control areas.

To assess the independent effects of encouragements via SMS messaging on participation, survey respondents were randomly assigned to different SMS condition and control groups. Of particular interest was assessing what type of message would work best. As such, some respondents received very basic messages simply reminding them of the election while others received enthusiastic personalized messages.

Figure 1: Treatment municipalities



If personalized messages matter, does the identity of the sender also matter? To test if individuals are more receptive to appeals from people like them, the evaluation explores whether the gender or the age of the sender relative to the receiver influences participation.

Measuring political participation

The study measured different forms of political participation, including voting and sending an SMS text message to an election hotline or to elected officials. Given the challenges in measuring voter turnout through a survey, the study tested four measures, including:

- Self-reports
- Self-reports adjusted by knowledge of the electoral procedure (e.g. knowledge of the polling station location)
- The opinion of the interviewer
- Replication of the voting

Findings

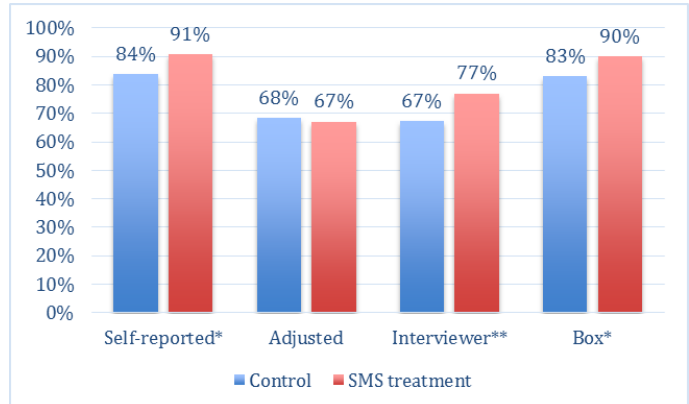
The evaluation found the following:

- Those who received free newspapers were no more likely to vote or participate in other ways than those who did not. It is important to note, however, that political violence in the country overshadowed the local elections in @Verdade's content.
- Those who received an SMS were more likely to vote, as measured by three of four measurements of voter turnout, than those that did not receive a message (see Figure 3). Those receiving SMS messages were also more likely to send messages with a political participation content.

Figure 2: Example of @Verdade



Figure 3: Subjects receiving an SMS are more likely to vote across three measures of voter turnout



- Personalized SMSs were not more likely to influence voter turnout than non-personalized messages, but they might have encouraged recipients to participate politically through SMS.
- The positive, enthusiastic messages were no more likely than neutral messages to influence voter turnout or SMS political participation.
- Receiving an SMS from a similar individual was no more likely to correspond with turnout but might have encouraged supporters of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) party to vote, who might have otherwise had incentives not to turnout because of an already expected victory. Male influence was positive for men, but mixed for women.

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