Deterring or Displacing Electoral Irregularities? Spillover Effects of Observers in a Randomized Field Experiment in Ghana

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Elections and Electoral Irregularities in New Democracies

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- Academic concerns: electoral behavior, vote outcomes, democratic development
- Practice/policy concerns: how to improve the quality of elections
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- Cover up extra votes (ballots or voters) on election day with credible turnout rates.

- Lower likelihood that problems will be noticed/fixed than on election day.

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- Key: political parties operate over space, so observers might just push problems from one registration center to another.
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Voter Registration in Ghana, August 2008
Model with Spillovers
Since party agents operate with distances/locations of registration centers in mind, we need to know this, too → GIS project, georeferencing constituency maps and geocoding polling stations.
Randomized field experiment in Ghana in 2008 in cooperation with the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) to establish a lower bound on registration irregularities.
Setup of Experiment
Mixed Message: deterrence but also displacement

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- **Spillovers:** Increase in the number of registered voters is about 2.5 percentage points *greater* when an electoral area in a 5km radius is visited by an observer.

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# Means of Pre-Treatment Variables by Treatment Assignment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registered Voters in 2004</th>
<th># ELA in 5 km</th>
<th># ELA in 10 km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$T^C = 1, T = 1$ (a)</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$T^C = 1, T = 0$ (b)</td>
<td>2196</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$T^C = 0, T = 0$ (c)</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (a) – (b)              | -271                      | -0.4          | -0.5          |
|                        | (382)                     | (0.4)         | (0.7)         |
| (b) – (c)              | 397                       | 0.6           | 0.6           |
|                        | (253)                     | (0.3)         | (0.5)         |

Standard errors from t-tests in parentheses. N=863 ELAs.
Model with Spillovers

\[
Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_{ij} + \beta_2 T^c_i + \sum_d (\beta_{3d} \cdot t_{dij}) + \sum_d (\beta_{4d} \cdot T_{ij} t_{dij})
\]

\[
+ \sum_d (\beta_{5d} \cdot n_{dij}) + \sum_d (\beta_{6d} \cdot T_{ij} n_{dij}) + \mu_b + \epsilon_{ij}
\]

where \( t_{dij} \) is the number of electoral areas assigned observers in distance \( d \) of electoral area \( j \) in constituency \( i \) and \( n_{dij} \) is the number of electoral areas in distance \( d \) of electoral area \( j \) in constituency \( i \). \( d=0–5 \) km, 5–10km, etc.

Local deterrence: \( \beta_1 < 0 \)
Displacement to neighbors: \( \beta_{3d} > 0 \)
## Effect of Registration Observers on Percentage Change in Registration from 2004 to 2008, with Spillovers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) OLS</th>
<th>(2) OLS</th>
<th>(3) IV</th>
<th>(4) IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment constituency ($T^C$)</td>
<td>$-0.0386^{+}$</td>
<td>$-0.0384$</td>
<td>$-0.0327$</td>
<td>$-0.0332$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0216)</td>
<td>(0.0230)</td>
<td>(0.0222)</td>
<td>(0.0234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA with observer ($T$ or $V$)</td>
<td>$-0.0272^{+}$</td>
<td>$-0.0356^{*}$</td>
<td>$-0.0456^{*}$</td>
<td>$-0.0474^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0153)</td>
<td>(0.0169)</td>
<td>(0.0203)</td>
<td>(0.0214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA with observer ($T$ or $V$)</td>
<td>$0.0288^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.0273^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.0235^{**}$</td>
<td>$0.0232^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 5 km</td>
<td>(0.0067)</td>
<td>(0.0067)</td>
<td>(0.0080)</td>
<td>(0.0087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA with observer ($T$ or $V$)</td>
<td>0.0086</td>
<td>0.00901</td>
<td>0.0020</td>
<td>0.0026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 5–10 km</td>
<td>(0.0064)</td>
<td>(0.0073)</td>
<td>(0.0060)</td>
<td>(0.0068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$T$ (or $V$) * ELA with observer</td>
<td>$-0.0075$</td>
<td>$-0.0159$</td>
<td>$-0.0039$</td>
<td>$-0.0053$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 5 km</td>
<td>(0.0115)</td>
<td>(0.0139)</td>
<td>(0.0132)</td>
<td>(0.0161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$T$ (or $V$) * ELA with observer</td>
<td>$0.0261^{**}$</td>
<td>$0.0159$</td>
<td>$0.0289^{**}$</td>
<td>$0.0267^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 5–10 km</td>
<td>(0.0087)</td>
<td>(0.0114)</td>
<td>(0.0102)</td>
<td>(0.0128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># ELA in $d$ &amp; interactions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block FE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disturbances clustered at the constituency level; robust standard errors in parentheses. $N = 863$. $^{+} p < 0.10$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$