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All Eyes on Them
A Field Experiment on Citizen Oversight and Electoral Integrity*

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Abstract

Can Information and Communication Technologies help citizens monitor their elections? We analyze a large-scale field experiment designed to answer this question in Colombia. We leveraged Facebook advertisements sent to over 4 million potential voters to encourage citizen reporting of irregularities and varied whether candidates were informed about the campaign in a subset of municipalities. Total reports, as well as evidence-backed ones, experienced a large increase. Across a wide array of measures, electoral irregularities decreased. Finally, the reporting campaign reduced the vote share of candidates dependent on irregularities. This light-touch intervention is more cost-effective than monitoring efforts traditionally used by policymakers. (JEL D72, C93, P16, O17)

Clientelism, voter intimidation and electoral fraud are part of the long list of electoral irregularities that persistently threaten democratic institutions in the developing world (World Bank 2017). Politicians draw on those different strategies, often combining several of them, as a way of distorting elections to their advantage. Beyond the direct consequences of undermining fair elections and eroding political accountability (Stokes 2005; Hicken 2011), a growing amount of evidence has shown that different types of electoral irregularities also

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