CAN INFORMED PUBLIC DELIBERATION OVERCOME CLIENTELISM? EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM BENIN

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This paper provides experimental evidence on the effect of "informed" town hall meetings on electoral support for programmatic, non-clientelist platforms. The experiment takes place in Benin and involves real candidates running in the first round of the 2006 presidential elections. The treatment is a campaign strategy based exclusively on town hall meetings during which policy proposals made by candidates are "specific" and informed by empirical research. The control is the "standard" strategy based on campaign rallies followed by targeted or clientelist electoral promises. We find that the treatment has a positive effect on self-perceived knowledge about policies and candidates. The data also suggests a positive effect of the treatment on turnout and electoral support for the candidates participating in the experiment. The results suggest that new democracies may contain electoral clientelism by institutionalizing the use of both town hall meetings in electoral campaigns and policy expertise in the design of electoral platforms.

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