

# UCLA

## UCLA Previously Published Works

### Title

Disengaged by Choice? A Research Agenda for Understanding Low Urban Youth Turnout in South Africa

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6qq0w59q>

### Authors

Berinsky, Adam J  
de Kadt, Daniel  
Orkin, Kate  
et al.

### Publication Date

2016-08-26

Peer reviewed

MIT

POLITICAL SCIENCE

---

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Political Science Department

Research Paper No. 2016-30

Disengaged by Choice?

A Research Agenda for Understanding Low Urban Youth Turnout in South Africa

Adam Berinsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Daniel de Kadt, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Kate Orkin, Oxford University

Daniel N. Posner, University of California, Los Angeles

Do Not Cite or Circulate Without Permission from Author

**Disengaged by Choice?**  
**A Research Agenda for Understanding Low Urban Youth Turnout in South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

Adam Berinsky  
MIT

Daniel de Kadt  
MIT

Kate Orkin  
Oxford

Daniel N. Posner  
UCLA

**Abstract:** Widespread electoral participation is a foundational element of a healthy democracy and an important mechanism by which voters exercise governance oversight. Existing work attributes low voter turnout in developing countries either to poor voter knowledge or to disillusionment with flawed electoral institutions. Yet turnout often remains low and sometimes declines as democracy matures, despite voters gaining basic knowledge about, and trust in, electoral processes. This problem is particularly acute in young urban communities. This study considers a driver of participation not previously explored in developing countries—the motivation to vote stemming from the intrinsic value of the act itself. In this paper we present preliminary evidence from survey data, focus groups, and a large-scale pilot experiment in South Africa that, taken together, suggest that a lack of motivation may be an important constraint on the political participation of young urban voters. We examine the relative efficacy of informational messages about how, when, and where to vote; motivational messages about why voting is important; and a combination of both, on voter registration and turnout. We hope to expand this work into a field experiment targeting 6,000 youth in urban Gauteng, South Africa. In concert with South Africa’s Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), Activate!, a network of youth leaders, and JPAL-Africa, the broader study will produce actionable evidence to improve outreach, bolster participation, and improve governance in South Africa and similar developing countries.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for APSA 2016, Philadelphia. The focus group and experimental results reported here were funded by the J-PAL Governance Initiative. A superb team of South African research assistants facilitated the fieldwork. We are extremely grateful to Kate Muwoki for managing the focus group team and to Emma Lambert-Porter for managing the experimental team. We are also grateful to Devin McCarthy and Alyssa Staats for their excellent research assistance. We thank the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa for assisting us in various ways throughout the project. We thank Benjamin Roberts and the HSRC for sharing the South African Social Attitudes Survey. Commentary on various versions of this project has been provided by EGAP, and seminars at MIT and Oxford. Corresponding author: ddekadt@mit.edu.

## Introduction

Conventional approaches to encouraging electoral participation in new democracies are geared toward contexts where elections are flawed, voters uneducated, and media constrained. Researchers have evaluated interventions to improve the quality of electoral systems (Ichino and Schundeln 2012, Callen and Long 2012, Asunka et al. n.d.) and campaigns encouraging citizens to improve electoral processes themselves, by, for example, reducing electoral violence (Collier and Vicente 2014), reporting electoral fraud (Aker et al. 2011), or being less susceptible to vote-buying (Vicente 2014). Researchers have also examined the effects of improving information about candidates' performance (Ferraz and Finan 2009, Banerjee et al. 2010, Humphreys and Weinstein 2012, Chong et al. 2014) and policies (Fujiwara and Wantchekon 2013). Researchers have run non-partisan campaigns providing information about voting processes and the act of voting itself. Aker et al. (2011) find that a door-to-door campaign providing basic information on voting improved turnout 4.9 percentage points in Mozambique; Gine and Mansuri (2010) find a door-to-door campaign with women emphasizing electoral process and ballot secrecy increased turnout 15.2 percentage points in Pakistan. Quasi-experimental evidence also suggests that citizens are responsive to reducing the costs associated with voting (Brady & McNulty 2011, de Kadt 2016), and that voting once can induce longer term participation (Meredith 2009, de Kadt n.d.).

In middle-income democracies such as Botswana, Colombia, India, Ghana, or South Africa, governance and accountability challenges remain severe, yet turnout is low and sometimes declining. In South Africa, the setting we study, turnout has declined dramatically since the first democratic election in 1994, in which 86% of the voting-age population participated. This dropped to 72% in 1999, 58% in 2004, rose slightly to 60% in 2009, and then dropped again to 57% in 2014 (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014). Turnout is even lower in off-cycle local government elections, which may have major consequences for the quality of local public service provision. Conventional approaches to increasing voter participation—often developed in *lower*-income contexts—may be poorly suited to *middle*-income settings like South Africa, where literacy is relatively high, there is credibly free media, citizens have widespread access to information about candidates and parties, and there is widespread knowledge about how to vote.

The decline in participation rates in middle-income countries may instead reflect higher opportunity costs on voters' time or more informed disillusionment with politics. Indeed, there is also evidence that even within lower- and middle-income countries, political participation is declining in income and wealth (Kasara and Suryanarayan 2015, Nathan 2016). Our first contribution is to use both qualitative and experimental evidence to illuminate how to stimulate electoral participation in a middle-income political context unlike those studied previously.

We are particularly interested in low turnout in a specific sliver of the population – young urban citizens. Young populations are often politically and economically marginalized. In South Africa, the “Born Free” generation—the cohort of under-30s whose formative years did not involve any experience of apartheid—participates at much lower rates than either their older compatriots or youth in other African countries (Scott et al 2011). In 1999, 77% of youth 20-29 were registered to vote, but this dropped to 65% in 2009 and 59% in 2014. Older cohorts, meanwhile, have registered at rates of between 85 and 90% throughout the post-apartheid era

(Schulz-Herzenberg 2014). Figure 1 shows an analysis of self-reported turnout in South Africa from a series of nationally representative surveys, 2003 to 2011 (HSRC 2011), demonstrating the dramatic drop off in turnout among younger voters.

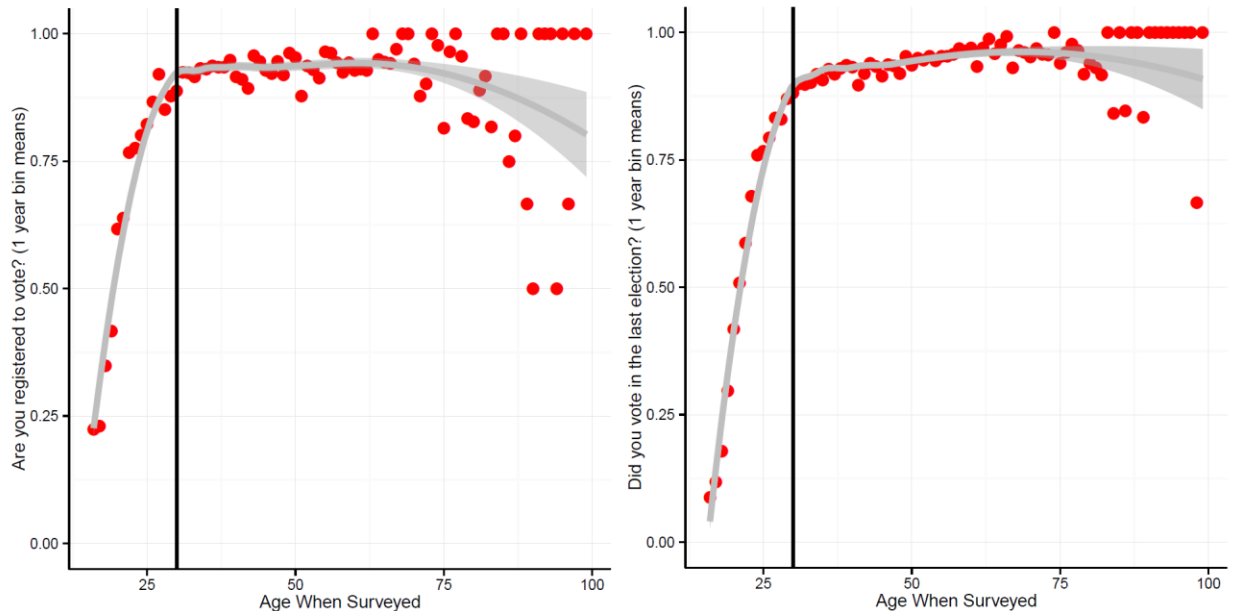


Figure 1: Mean self-reported registration status and turnout by 1 year age bins. Data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey, analysis by authors.

The sharp reduction in turnout by youth is not merely a registration issue, since youth are also less likely to vote when registered: only 58% of registered 20-29 year olds voted in 2009, compared to between 80 and 90% of older registered voters (Scott et al 2011). Evidence suggests that this divergence is only growing: in a nationally representative 2013 survey, youth aged 16-19 and 20-24 were much less likely to report intending to vote in the 2014 elections than youth of the same age in 2008 (Roberts et al 2014).

Likewise, urban turnout in South Africa is lower than rural turnout. Using administrative data provided by the IEC and census data provided by Statistics South Africa, we find that there is a strong and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) *negative* relationship between population density (a proxy for urban-ness) and turnout. This relationship holds across 7 election cycles (1999 – 2014) and is robust (neither the point estimates nor the statistical significance change) to the inclusion of various economic and demographic variables. There is some evidence that poorer voters are beginning to exit the electorate, but this appears to be an urban and rural phenomenon (Everatt, 2016).

Crucially, evidence from analyses of survey data suggest that the low level of participation among South African urban youth appears not to be due to a lack of awareness about how to register or to vote. South Africans under 30 are actually more knowledgeable about how to register and vote and more trusting of the electoral process than older cohorts (Roberts et al 2014). This may be due to a focus on procedural information in the school civics curriculum that was implemented in 1998 (Allais 2009). However, while the curriculum emphasizes *how* to vote,

it does not emphasize the *value* of voting. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that youth are much more likely than adults to think that their vote makes no difference and less likely to be interested in politics or to say they think that voting is their civic duty (Roberts et al 2014). Many of the young focus group participants in our pilot work told us that participation was unimportant because government was not responsive to their wishes. Further, recent work shows that young voters in South Africa are particularly invariant to the costs of voting, which suggests that a lack of motivation may be a crucial constraint on their participation (de Kadt 2016).

Our second contribution is testing the relative importance for electoral participation of information about how and where to vote and motivations for why one should vote. Theory in political science differentiates between these two inputs to political participation (Harder and Krosnick 2008). It suggests that procedural knowledge about when, where, and how to vote is likely to act only on ability and not motivation. Learning why to vote may, however, generate greater motivation to participate. Given the context outlined above, theory suggests that campaigns to get out the vote in middle-income democracies should focus on motivation rather than information.

Limited evidence from low-income countries suggests motivational messages are not always effective. As noted, Gine and Mansuri (2010) found providing citizens in Pakistan with procedural information about how to vote had large effects on turnout. But they found that a motivational message (based on the premise that voting influences policy) had no effect. Procedural information in Ferree et al.'s (2011) study in Uganda actually reduced turnout (possibly due to fear of intimidation), while a message providing both information (a reminder of the election date) and motivation (discussing the importance of voting) had no effect. However, the current literature cannot separate the effects of information and motivation because interventions have invariably included elements of both types. The central study we propose will bridge the gap between a practical experiment and underlying theory in political science by disentangling the effects of:

1. Procedural knowledge about when, where, and how to vote;
2. Motivations for voting; and
3. Interactions between procedural knowledge and motivations.

Explicitly, we test whether providing eligible but currently unregistered voters with a carefully piloted, clearly expressed motivation for why they should participate in the upcoming elections, delivered face-to-face, improves their propensity to register and to vote. Using a factorial experimental design, we test the relative efficacy of motivational appeals compared to procedural information, and whether the two combined are more effective than each separately. Further, we examine whether relationships differ by gender.

Our third contribution is a focus on broader electoral participation—the dual acts of registration and actually voting. With few exceptions, most studies consider only how best to generate turnout among registered citizens. We focus on those not registered to vote, which is novel in studies of election mobilization in the developing world. In South Africa, where there are costly bureaucratic barriers to registration and low levels of registration and turnout among the urban youth, establishing how to encourage entry to the political process (via registration) is key.

## Research design

The proposed main study will be situated in the lower-income, lower-literacy communities on the outskirts of Johannesburg and Tshwane, two large cities in Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province and the country's economic center. In Gauteng, we will target young South Africans aged 18 and 29 who are eligible but not registered to vote. Gauteng had the lowest rates of youth voter registration in 2014, with 46% 18-29-year olds registered compared to 57% nationally. The study will take place during the run-up to the registration period for the 2019 national and provincial elections (NPEs). The main study constitutes the final phase of a 3-phase research program. Phases 1 and 2, now complete, involved extensive qualitative and quantitative piloting of our motivational messages.

**Phase 1.** We conducted qualitative research with 72 young people, both registered and unregistered voters, in two urban sites in Gauteng and, for contrast, one rural site in Limpopo. We discussed participants' thoughts about the importance of voting, their reasons for (not) registering and voting, where they got information about politics, and who or what influences their decisions relating to political participation. Participants also provided feedback on the various different motivational messages that we had designed based on our knowledge of the South African context and the political science literature on political participation. Participants explained why they were convinced or unconvinced by each of the messages and advised us on how they could be made more effective.

Three main findings emerge from the qualitative research. First, youth are disengaged from the political system for two distinct reasons. Some unregistered young people were not registered because, more broadly, they were not politically engaged. They did not express strong dissatisfaction with political parties, politics or the political system. These youth were simply relatively apathetic about politics in general. As a result, they did not read the news or know much about government. However, a second segment of young people were very civic-minded, community-oriented or passionate about particular causes. One unregistered voter was running the youth committee at his church; another was involved in a community NGO; a third had worked for the IEC as a voting station monitor. They were also very interested in politics – they had high levels of political knowledge, they followed the news, and they had strong opinions on various political parties. However, they saw not registering or not voting as a political act through which they expressed their disillusionment with the political system. They did not see elections as an effective way to make change. Essentially, this second group, rather than being straightforwardly “disengaged” from politics, were actively “disengaged by choice.”

Our second main finding was that both voters and engaged non-voters were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with and alienated by politics. Engaged non-voters and voters had much more in common than either group had with fully disengaged non-voters. Those who were not engaged did not have particularly strong opinions on many political issues. Among those who were engaged, respondents overwhelmingly thought elections were relatively free and fair and had high levels of trust in the IEC, but they did not trust political parties or politicians to deliver services to the population. They felt dissatisfied with high unemployment, poor service delivery, and perceived government corruption, from low levels of government or the presidency. They

were particularly scathing about municipal government: while they could give some examples of national government delivering social grants or antiretroviral drugs, they struggled to give examples of municipal government delivering services. They did not know their local councilors, and where they did, they felt councilors were much more accessible to and interested in older than younger voters. Voting or not voting were different responses to the same dissatisfaction: voters thought their votes might express dissatisfaction and result in change, whereas non-voters thought that government ought to deliver before they began voting. One, in an urban site, said: “I will only vote if [the councilors] prove themselves.” Another, in the rural site, said: “I will not vote until things change.”

Third, we found modest, although interesting, differences in the themes and patterns that emerged in rural and urban areas. Rural youth were more strongly influenced by their parents’ actions: they often said that their parents influenced whether they voted or whether they followed politics. Likewise, they were more likely to cite examples of where government had delivered social grants or public works jobs, in part because in a poorer rural area, these were likely to form a larger proportion of the total income earned by the community. Otherwise, rural and urban young people were strikingly similar. Young people who were politically engaged were equally well-informed about politics, aware of current issues and able to express their opinions. Although there is a common perception that rural voters are blindly ANC-aligned, urban youth were no more or less likely than rural youth to be supporters of opposition parties (in part because the rural area we choose is in a province, Limpopo, that is a stronghold for the Economic Freedom Fighters), and they were no more or less likely to express dissatisfaction with the ruling party.

**Phase 2.** With these qualitative insights in hand, we then conducted a large-scale lab-in-the-field experiment to assess the effectiveness of seven different motivational messages (which we had revised and updated based on the feedback received in phase 1) in stimulating the intention to register and the intention to vote in the next year’s local government elections.<sup>2</sup> We interviewed 3,189 participants in 23 sites around Gauteng. After a short common baseline text reminding participants that the next elections are just around the corner and emphasizing the importance of voting, individuals were randomly assigned to receive one of the seven messages (or a control), and were then re-surveyed about their political behavior and beliefs. The messages invoked:

1. One’s duty to vote as a responsible citizen (*obligation as a citizen*)
2. One’s special obligation to vote as a young person, given that most young people do not vote (*obligation as youth*)
3. One’s obligation to take advantage of a right that was born from years of struggle and sacrifice (*obligation from history*)
4. The fact that every vote counts and can make a difference (*efficacy*)
5. The fact that youth are underrepresented in parliament (*descriptive representation*)

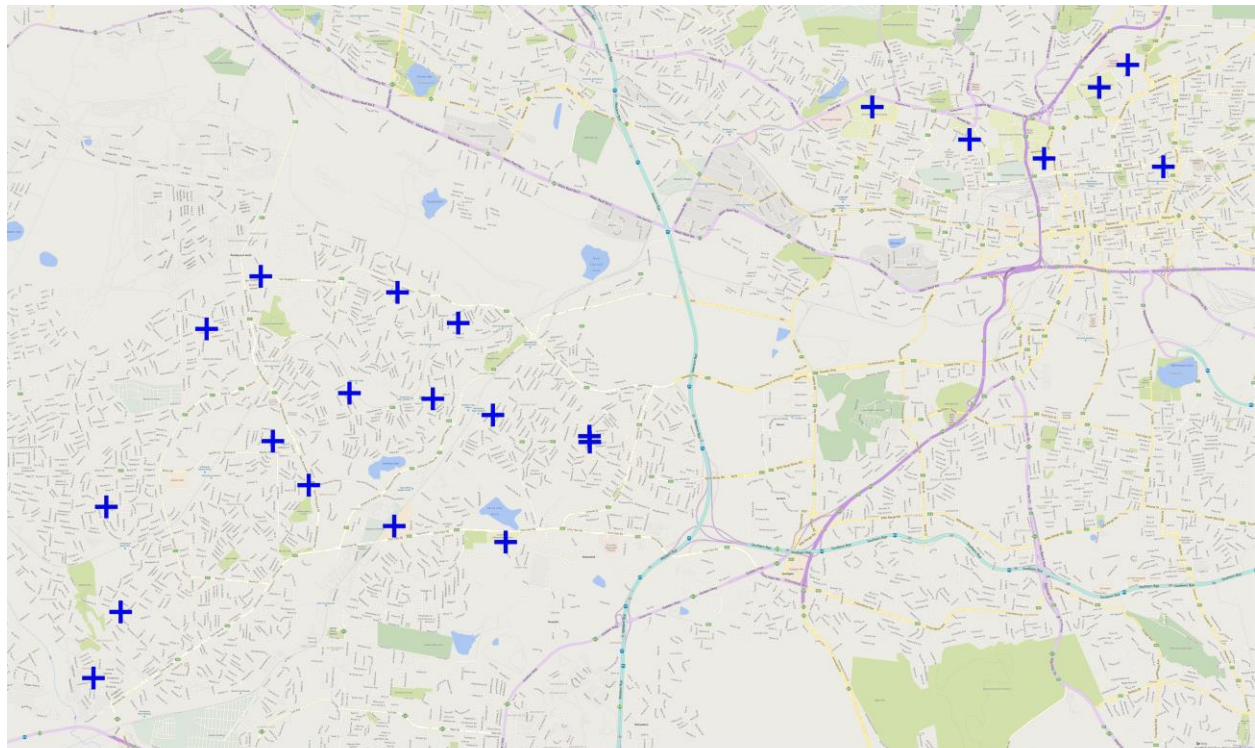
---

<sup>2</sup> Our fieldwork took place in July-September, 2015 and the elections were held in August, 2016. However the IEC undertook major registration drives on March 5-6 and April 9-10 2016, so opportunities to register to vote were more proximate to our fieldwork than the elections themselves. The pre-analysis plan is at <http://www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/845>.



6. The fact that issues of concern to youth—especially unemployment—are accorded insufficient priority by the country’s elected leaders (*substantive representation*)
7. The fact that your friends and neighbors will know if you do not vote because your thumb will not be marked (*social pressure*)

Subjects were recruited from a mix of University campuses (the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand), further educational vocational schools, and multiple community centers and public halls in Soweto. The locations of the various research sites are shown in Figure 2, which demonstrates the geographic diversity of the subject pool.



## Research Sites in Johannesburg July - August 2015



Figure 2: Research sites around Johannesburg. The cluster at the top is Johannesburg Central. The cluster at the bottom left Soweto.

For four weeks a dedicated team of recruiters, either on campus or on the streets surrounding the research sites, approached potential subjects to ask if they would like to participate in a research study. Subjects were offered a small financial incentive for participation (roughly 1 or 2 dollars, depending on location). If the subjects indicated their interest, we screened them for appropriate age (18 – 30), and registration status using the IEC’s mobile app (which makes it possible to verify a citizen’s registration status by inputting their South African ID number). Once a subject was successfully screened, they were brought to the research site and assigned an interviewer. Following the informed consent protocols, interviewers asked subjects a battery of pre-treatment questions. Responses were recorded on a mobile device. Subjects were then automatically randomized into one of eight conditions (7 treatments and control). The control condition moved

directly onto the post-treatment survey questions. If treated, the interviewer read the randomly selected prompt (one of the 7 outlined above, and in detail in the appendix) to the subject in a practiced and persuasive manner. The post-treatment survey component then followed.

Unsurprisingly, pre-treatment balance between the control and treatment conditions is very good, with the number of statistically significant differences no different from chance. To estimate the effects of the various interventions, we compare post-treatment self-reported intention to register and intention to vote, controlling for covariates and a range of surveyor and site fixed effects (as proposed in our pre-analysis plan).

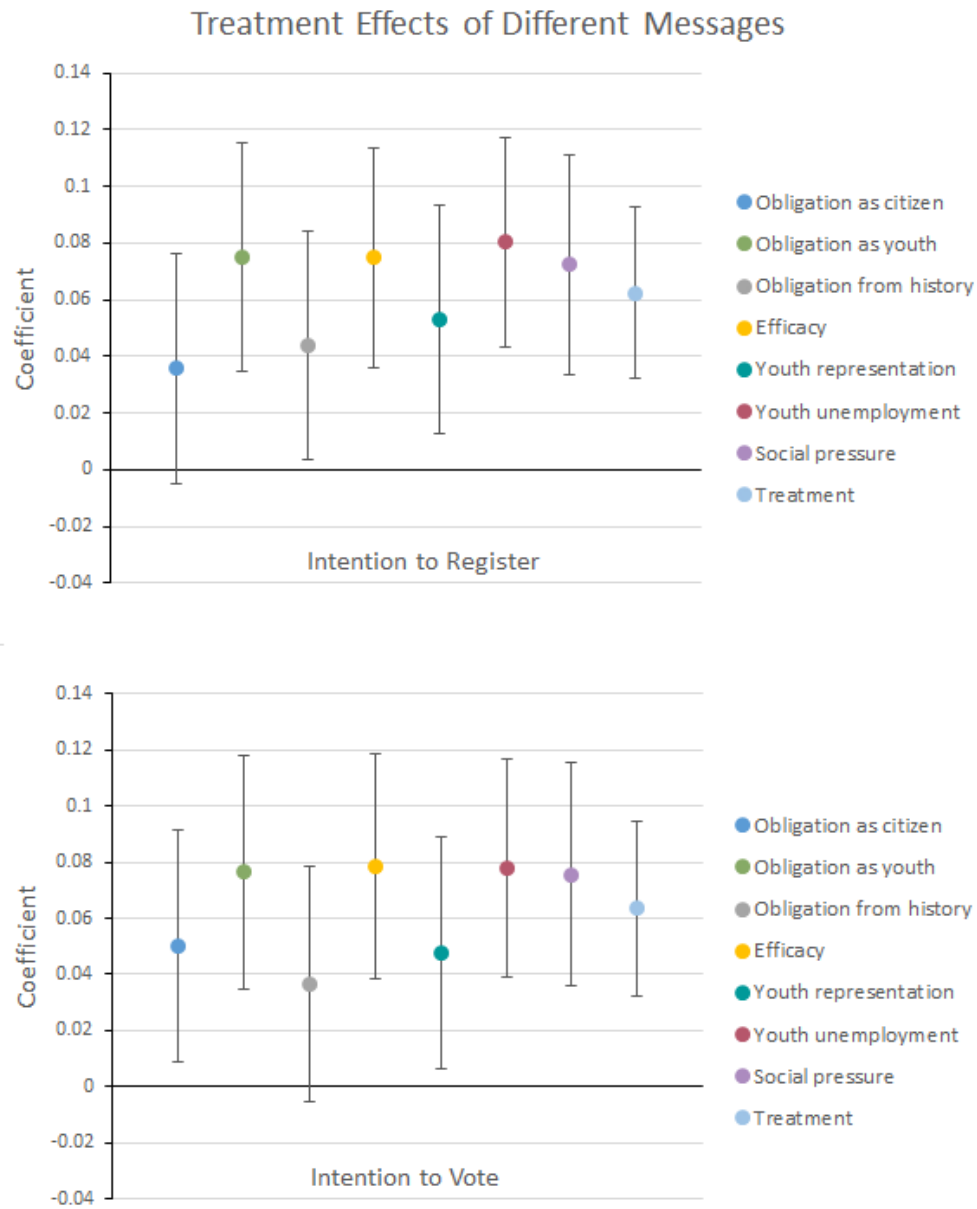


Figure 3: Average Treatment Effects estimated with OLS. Top panel relates to registration intention. The bottom panel to voting intention.

The key results of the lab-in-the-field pilot are presented in Figure 3. They suggest that *motivational* messaging can have profound effects on self-reported intentions to register and to vote. In particular, messages focusing on youth-centric motivations like citizens' obligations as young people or the need to address youth unemployment were particularly successful, raising the intention to register and to vote by between nine and ten percentage points. We also found that messages invoking social pressures can increase stated intentions to register and to vote.

We find some suggestive evidence that motivational interventions targeted at young people are especially effective. In particular, those that focus on "obligations as youth" and youth issues like unemployment appear to be most effective (though not distinguishable in magnitude at statistically significant levels). Further, we find evidence that traditional motivational messaging that has been used in many parts of the world (including South Africa) is the least effective – that which focuses on straightforward "duty" as a citizen. Interestingly, South African youth also appear to be less influenced by messages that recall the struggle history – likely because they themselves have no experience of the struggle period. It is plausible that this effect would be greater among rural youth who, as noted in the discussion of the phase 1 results, are more likely to follow their parents' political behaviors.

Although stated intentions to register or to vote may reflect demand bias as much as actual changes in attitudes or behaviors, these results nonetheless give us confidence that we should be able to design a powerful and resonant motivational message for the main study, in which we plan to measure not just intentions but actual behavior.

**Phase 3.** Given these findings – both qualitative and quantitative – we now plan to conduct a large-scale field experiment in Gauteng during the open registration period in the lead-up to the 2019 NPEs. Using data from the 2011 census and publicly available IEC data, we will select 120 lower-income, lower-literacy, largely black African voting districts that experienced either low or medium turnout in previous elections (one voting district attaches to one polling station, with around 2,000 people per district). We will screen all households in these districts to create a sampling frame of all individuals in the target population: young people between 18 and 29 who are South African citizens and eligible but not registered to vote.<sup>3</sup> We will then survey a random sample of 6,000 of these citizens.

### *Design*

All 6,000 subjects will participate in a 30-minute baseline survey to capture demographic information, political attitudes, political efficacy, and political knowledge. We will then randomly assign individuals to one of four groups, blocking on voting district and multiple covariates to maximize efficiency. The four groups are determined by a fully-crossed factorial design, using two factors, information and motivation. The main experiment will thus have four arms:

---

<sup>3</sup> We will confirm each participant's registration status by using their South African ID number to query the IEC's online database, which provides real-time information about registration status.

1. Control (C): individuals are surveyed, baseline and endline.
2. Information only (T1): procedural and bureaucratic information about where/when to register and vote.
3. Motivation only (T2): motivational messaging based on phase 2 results.
4. Information and motivation (T3): individuals receive both messages.

Approximately one week after the original baseline, individuals not in the control group will receive one of the three treatment messages (T1, T2, or T3). Messaging will consist of a one-on-one 3 to 5 minute face-to-face communication from a voter educator using a script and a flyer. Face-to-face communication is the strongest possible medium (Gerber and Green 2000), and is widely used by the IEC in South Africa, and by other electoral commissions in Africa. Groups will be re-surveyed shortly after the election to measure their registration, voting status, political opinions, beliefs about voting, political efficacy, and political knowledge.

In contrast to our pilot work, in which we measured our outcomes via participants' stated intentions to register and to vote, in the main study we will supplement these self-reported indicators with behavioral data based on publicly available administrative data on registration (we will use the IEC's mobile app not just to confirm that participants are not registered prior to admission into the study but also to test whether their registration status changes following treatment). We are also in negotiations to acquire individual-level voting data from the IEC. We will estimate the main effect of information (comparing T1+T3 with C+T2) and the main effect of motivation (comparing T2+T3 with C+T1). Comparisons of T1, T2, T3, and C will yield estimates of various marginal effects (and comparisons of effects).

### *Power Calculations*

We calculate the minimum detectable effect size (MDES) in standard deviations for an individual-level trial clustered by site (voting district) with power = 0.8, alpha = 0.05, covariate  $R^2 = 0$ , blocking  $R^2 = 0.05$ , and  $\sigma^2 = 0.05$ . We adjust the calculations to account for our binary dependent variable. These assumptions are conservative: we will block on baseline covariates and control for additional covariates. We calculate MDES for 120 clusters with 50 subjects per site, divided into the four factorized arms above. For marginal effects, such as information (T1) v motivation (T2), we compare 12 individuals in T1 to 12 in T2 in each site. The MDES is 0.121. For our main outcome, registration rates, we assume a baseline registration rate in the control of 50% (before registration drives for the 2014 election in Gauteng, 48% of young voters were registered), so the standard deviation is ~0.5. For marginal effects on registration, we can thus detect changes of ~6.05 percentage points. Main effects compare 25 v. 25 per site, such as comparing T1 and T3 (pooled) v C and T2 (pooled) to give the average effect of providing information. The MDES for main effects is 0.093, so we can detect changes of ~4.65 percentage points. The minimum detectable effect (MDE) for binary interactions with main effects (e.g. main effects interacted with gender) is 6.05 percentage points, the same as for marginal effects. For interactions with marginal effects (e.g. T1 v T2 by gender), the MDE is 7.8 percentage points.

In general, these minimum percentage point effects are in line with the magnitudes we find in our piloting study, which typically range from 5 to 10 percentage points (see Figure 1)—

although we cannot completely rule out that these effects will be somewhat lower when we measure them via behavioral outcomes rather than through self-reported intentions to register and to vote. Previous studies providing information and motivation combined in developing countries find effects on turnout between 3.2 and 15 percentage points. Our estimated detectable effects are at the mid-to-lower end of this spectrum.

However, unlike these studies, we focus on the unregistered. The only other study of registration campaigns finds that a door-to-door campaign in France increased voter registration by 2.4 percentage points when only 7% of individuals are not registered to vote (Braconnier et al 2014). In our study setting, by contrast, trends from previous elections suggest close to 52% of our target population will be unregistered, so the potential effect of our study is much larger. For secondary outcomes like political attitudes (e.g. a 5-point scale with standard deviation of 0.25), our MDE is even smaller: 3.02 percentage points for marginal effects and interactions with main effects and 2.33 percentage points for main effects.

### *Spillovers*

While spillovers are typically thought of as a major threat to the validity of experiments, we seek to understand the dynamics of spillover as effects in and of themselves. While we will only work with 50 subjects per voting district (of roughly 2,000 people), there is the possibility that participants in our study will talk to each other. To estimate whether spillover effects occur we are considering implementing a randomized saturation design (Baird et al. 2012). We will evenly block-randomize all 120 voting districts into three saturation levels—low, medium, and high. In the low condition, 29/50 subjects will be in control, and 21/50 (7 subjects per treatment arm) will be treated. In the medium condition, 17/50 will be in control, and 33/50 (11 per arm) will be treated. In the high condition, 8/50 will be in control, and 42/50 (14 per arm), will be treated. To detect spillovers, we will compare control subjects across saturation levels, and make the adjustments necessary to estimate unbiased effects.

Further, we also intend to include a social network battery in our pre-treatment survey, in which we ask subjects to list the five young people they spend most time with, and provide contact details. We will then contact these subjects in the post-treatment phase and check whether communication occurred, whether they are registered and voted, and thus whether spillover effects are present.<sup>4</sup> If they are, we will adjust our treatment effect estimates appropriately, but we view spillovers as an important question for policies intended to increase turnout.

### **Conclusion**

Current explanations of urban youth turnout seem unable to account for the perilously low turnout rates in middle-income democracies. This paper reports the results of extensive qualitative fieldwork and a large-scale pilot experiment designed to investigate the lack of urban youth formal political participation in South Africa. Our preliminary evidence suggests that a large portion of youth – both urban and rural – are at least partly constrained in political

---

<sup>4</sup> Note that we can confirm the registration status of people in the network remotely via the IEC mobile app, as well as via self-reports.

participation by an absence of motivation to engage in *formal* political channels – what we term as being “disengaged by choice”. This group of non-voters and non-registered citizens is typically engaged in politics in alternative ways – joining civic groups, protesting, or simply being highly informed about politics. However, they lack motivation to convert that political interest into formal engagement. Providing motivational messaging appears to go some way to relaxing this constraint, and those messages targeted at youth issues appear most effective. Our intended full-scale field experiment will allow us to test whether motivational messaging can really be used to raise formal political engagement this heavily under-represented group.

## Bibliography

- Aker, J., Collier, P., & Vicente, P. C. (2011). Is information power? Using cell phones during an election in Mozambique. Document présenté à School of Business and Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 20.
- Allais, S.M. (2009). Building and Sustaining Systems for Delivering Education: The Role of the State. In: A. McLennan and B. Munslow, eds. *The Politics of Service Delivery*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Asunka, J., Brierley, S., Golden, M., Kramon, E., Ofosu, G. (forthcoming). Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies. *British Journal of Political Science*.
- Baird, S., Bohren, A., McIntosh, C., & Ozler, B. (2012). Designing experiments to measure spillover and threshold effects. Unpublished Working Paper.
- Banerjee, A., Kumar, S., Pande, R., & Su, F. (2010). Do informed voters make better choices? Experimental evidence from urban India. Unpublished Working Paper.
- Blais, A., & Young, R. (1999). Why do people vote? An experiment in rationality. *Public Choice*, 99(1-2), 39-55.
- Braconnier, C., Dormagen, J. Y., & Pons, V. (2014). Voter Registration Costs and Disenfranchisement: Experimental Evidence from France. Unpublished Working Paper.
- Callen, M., & Long, J. D. (2012). Institutional corruption and election fraud: evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan. Unpublished Working Paper.
- Chong, A., La Porta, R., Lopez- de- Silanes, F., & Shleifer, A. (2014). Letter grading government efficiency. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 12(2), 277-299.
- Collier, P., & Vicente, P. C. (2014). Votes and violence: evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria. *The Economic Journal*, 124(574), F327-F355.
- Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior*, 12(3), 289-314.
- de Kadt, D. (forthcoming). Voting then, voting now: The long term consequences of participation in South Africa's first democratic election. *Journal of Politics*.
- de Kadt, D. (2016). Bringing the polls to the people: How increasing electoral access encourages turnout but exacerbates political inequality. Unpublished Working Paper
- Everatt, D. (2016). The era of ineluctability? Post-Apartheid South Africa after 20 years of democratic elections. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(1), 49-64
- Ferraz, C., & Finan, F. (2009). Electoral accountability and corruption: Evidence from the audits of local governments (No. w14937). National Bureau of Economic Research.

- Ferree, K., Dowd, R., Jung, D., & Gibson, C. C. (2011). Getting out the vote, Uganda style: Social and political context and turnout in an African election. Unpublished Working Paper.
- Finkel, S. E. (1985). Reciprocal effects of participation and political efficacy: A panel analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, 891-913.
- Freedman, P., & Goldstein, K. (1996). Building a probable electorate from pre-election polls: A two-stage approach. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 60(4), 574-587.
- Fujiwara, T., & Wantchekon, L. (2013). Can informed public deliberation overcome clientelism? Experimental evidence from Benin. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(4), 241-255.
- Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2000). The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 653-663.
- Giné, X., & Mansuri, G. (2011). Together we will: evidence from a field experiment on female voter turnout in Pakistan. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 5692.
- Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2008). Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 102(01), 33-48.
- Harder, J., & Krosnick, J. A. (2008). Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(3), 525-549.
- Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. (2012). Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Uganda Preliminary Analysis. Unpublished paper.
- Ichino, N., & Schündeln, M. (2012). Deterring or displacing electoral irregularities? Spillover effects of observers in a randomized field experiment in Ghana. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(01), 292-307.
- Kasara, K., & Suryanarayan, P. (2015). When do the rich vote less than the poor and why? Explaining turnout inequality across the world. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 613-627.
- Mattes, R. (2012). The 'Born Frees': The prospects for generational change in post-apartheid South Africa. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 133-153.
- Nathan, Noah L. (forthcoming). Local ethnic geography, expectations of favoritism, and voting in urban Ghana." *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2011). Independent Electoral Commission Presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs 13 October 2011. Accessed online: <http://www.pmg.org.za/>.
- Pattie, C., & Johnston, R. (1998). Voter turnout at the British General Election of 1992: Rational choice, social standing or political efficacy? *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(2), 263-283.



- Petrocik, J. R. (1991). An algorithm for estimating turnout as a guide to predicting elections. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 643-647.
- Roberts, B., Struwig, J, Gordon, S. (2014). IEC Voter Participation Survey 2013/14. Human Sciences Research Council: Pretoria
- Roberts, B., Struwig, J, Gordon, S., Ngungu, M. & Jordaan, A. (2013). The state of democracy in South Africa. Human Sciences Research Council: Pretoria.
- Schulz-Herzenberg, C. 2014. South Africa's 2014 National and Provincial Elections. Hanns Seidel Foundation.
- Scott, D. Vawda, M., Swartz, S. and Bhana, A. (2011). Punching below their weight: Young South Africans' voting patterns. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria.
- Vicente, P. C. (2014). Is Vote Buying Effective? Evidence from a Field Experiment in West Africa. *The Economic Journal*, 124: F356–F387.

## Appendix

Introductory message (all except control):

Now I'd like to talk to you about the importance of voting in our democracy. As you may know, the next elections are just around the corner. In 2016, South Africa will vote in local government elections, to decide which party and politicians will run your municipality. It matters a lot for our lives which party or politician controls local government, so it's very important that you vote in the election.

MESSAGE 1: obligation as a citizen

Voting is a crucial part of being a responsible citizen of South Africa. As a citizen, you have an obligation to everyone to make your voice heard in the elections. The more people who vote, the stronger our democracy is, and a stronger democracy means a stronger South Africa. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 2: obligation as youth

Voting is a crucial part of being a responsible citizen of South Africa. Unfortunately, most young people in South Africa usually don't vote. Even though more than half of South Africans are under 25 years old, most voters are much older! As a young person, you have an obligation to everyone to make your voice heard in the elections. The more young people who vote, the stronger our democracy will become, and a stronger democracy means a stronger South Africa. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 3: obligation from history

Just 21 years ago, the majority of South Africans gained the right to vote. Before that, most of them -- including many people just like you in communities just like this -- didn't have the right to choose the people who would represent them in government. In 1994, after decades of struggle and sacrifice, we became a democracy, and everyone gained the right to vote. Voting is a crucial part of being a responsible citizen of the new South Africa. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 4: external efficacy

Remember, every vote counts! Even a single vote from a person like you can make a big difference in deciding who gets to run the country. That's because whoever you vote for, your vote will be counted, and it will never be ignored. You can make the difference. So make sure your voice is heard, and be part of decision making in South Africa. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 5: descriptive representation

Did you know that most politicians in national parliament are over 50 years old, while most South Africans are under 25 years old? Although things are slowly starting to change, national politics still seems to be an old person's game. Even in local councils, politicians are usually older than the people they represent. Though the youth are the majority, very few young people are part of government at all. You can change that by voting! But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 6: substantive representation (youth employment)

Young people in South Africa face an unemployment crisis. Almost half of all young people, people just like you, can't find work, even though they want to. The jobs shortage means people can't provide for themselves or their families. In a democracy like South Africa, the best way for you to fix this problem is by voting and making your voice heard. That's because the only way to get politicians to deal with the issues young people care about, like the jobs crisis, is to make politicians hear what you have to say. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?

MESSAGE 7: direct social pressure

It looks like a lot of South Africans are going to do their duty and vote in 2016. But some people still won't participate, and let everyone down. Did you know that anyone can check whether you are registered? And if you don't vote, your friends, neighbors, and family will know because they can check for the mark on your thumb. So make sure you don't let them down, and get out there and vote. But to vote, you have to get registered, so don't forget to register to vote. Can we count on you to register and vote?