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Improving Political Communication: Results from a Pilot Field Experiment in Pakistan

This paper presents results from a pilot field experiment where a low-cost and scalable technology---Interactive Voice Response (IVR)---helped improve political communication in Pakistan by allowing a politician to robocall a large number of his constituents in his own voice to ask them questions and receive feedback. We find that constituent take-up of the technology is high --- 30.8 percent of those called answered at least one question asked by the politician. We find suggestive evidence that those who received the calls stated improved perceptions of government competence and place greater emphasis on incumbent performance in their stated voting decision making calculus. The calls also improve evaluations of the incumbent, especially when estimating support using an endorsement experiment. A follow-up call by the politician cross-randomizes whether the politician exhibits responsiveness to the feedback from voters. A responsive follow-up increases all of the outcomes, although none of the estimates are precisely estimated. The main takeaway of the pilot is that communication from politicians using IVR can encourage constituents to engage more effectively with the democratic process in some ways.