

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

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*This article studies the effect of domestic observers deployed to reduce irregularities in voter registration in a new democracy, and in particular, the response of political parties' agents to these observers. Because political parties operate over large areas and party agents may relocate away from observed registration centers, observers may displace rather than deter irregularities. We design and implement a large-scale two-level randomized field experiment in Ghana in 2008 taking into account these spillovers and find evidence for substantial irregularities: the registration increase is smaller in constituencies with observers; within these constituencies with observers, the increase is about one-sixth smaller on average in electoral areas with observers than in those without; but some of the deterred registrations appear to be displaced to nearby electoral areas. The finding of positive spillovers has implications for the measurement of electoral irregularities or analysis of data collected by observers.*