

Authors

Rachel Glennerster
UK Department for International Development (DFID)

Joanna Murray
Development Media International (DMI)

Victor Pouliquen
Paris School of Economics



The Media or the Message? Experimental Evidence on Mass Media and Modern Contraception Uptake in Burkina Faso¹

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Rachel Glennerster (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office)
Joanna Murray (Development Media International)
Victor Pouliquen (University of Oxford)

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Abstract

Mass media can spread information and disinformation, but its impact is hard to rigorously measure. Using a two-level randomized controlled trial covering 5 million people, we test both exposure to mass media (with 1,500 women receiving radios) and the impact of a high-quality, intensive 2.5 year, family planning mass media campaign in Burkina Faso (8 of 16 local radio stations received the campaign). We find women who received a radio in noncampaign areas induced contraception use by 5.2 percentage points ($p=0.009$) and had more conservative gender attitudes. In contrast, modern contraceptive use rose 5.9 percentage points ($p=0.046$) in campaign areas and 5.5 percentage points ($p=0.000$) among those given radios in campaign areas. Births fell 10%. The campaign changed beliefs about contraception but not preferences, and encouraged existing users to use more consistently. We estimate the nationwide campaign scale-up led to 225,000 additional women using modern contraception, at a cost of US\$7.7 per additional user.

JEL codes: J13, J16, L82

Keywords: Mass Media Campaign, Radio, Modern Contraception, Family Planning, RCT.

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Corresponding author: Victor Pouliquen victor.pouliquen@economics.ox.ac.uk



Centre for the Study of African Economies
Department of Economics, University of Oxford, Manor Road Building, Oxford OX1 2JD
T +44 (0) 1865 271084 F +44 (0) 1865 281447 E csae@economics.ox.ac.uk W www.csae.ox.ac.uk

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Mass media can spread information and disinformation, but its impact is hard to rigorously measure. Using a two-level randomized evaluation covering 5 million people, we test both exposure to mass media (with 1,500 women receiving radios) and the impact of a high-quality, intensive 2.5 year, family planning mass media campaign in Burkina Faso (8 of 16 local radio stations received the campaign). We find women who received a radio in

noncampaign areas reduced contraception use by 5.2 percentage points ($p=0.039$) and had more conservative gender attitudes. In contrast, modern contraceptive use rose 5.9 percentage points ($p=0.046$) in campaign areas and 5.8 percentage points ($p=0.030$) among those given radios in campaign areas. Births fell 10%. The campaign changed beliefs about contraception but not preferences, and encouraged existing users to use more consistently. We estimate the nationwide campaign scale-up led to 225,000 additional women using modern contraception, at a cost of US\$7.7 per additional user.

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