

Local Media and the Spread of Ebola: Evidence from Guinea

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Abstract

This paper studies the role of local media in halting the spread of a major epidemic in the context of the Ebola outbreak in Guinea in 2014-16. Using original data from Guinea and a quasi-experimental design based on exogenous variation in radio signal reception by distinct media outlets, combined with the timing of distinct information campaigns about Ebola, I study the effect of local radios on the spread of the disease. The results show that sustained access to a local radio program informing about protective measures, encouraging treatment, addressing Ebola rumors and new burial practices, lowered social resistance behavior, increased treatment uptake and led to a drop in infected cases in places with local radios, compared to places with non-local radios. Access to local radios affected cultural norms, such as burial practices, and facilitated technological adoption, but there is no evidence of impacts on private actions, such as chlorine use.

Keywords: media effects, local information, radio, cultural change, technology adoption, state capacity, public goods

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