EGAP Research Design Tool – Example

Basic Information
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Program Title: Political Debates and Voter Knowledge in Honduras

Research Question and Theory
What are the intended outcomes of the program?
The overall goal of the program is to spread information in Honduras to increase voter knowledge and the alignment of voters with candidates that best address their needs. We aim to improve the selection of candidates such that their policy positions better match those of their constituents, and increase their accountability to constituents once they're in office.

How do your program's activities lead to its intended outcomes?
By hosting, filming, and showing political debates in the lead-up to local and national elections, the program's implementers will expose voters to the candidates' policy platforms and backgrounds. When voters know a candidate's policy positions they should be more capable of choosing the candidates that might best serve them. In addition, they will be more capable of judging candidate quality. Once candidates are in office, the fact that voters have more information about what their representatives have promised should increase their performance.

What are potential unintended consequences of the program?
If candidates know that their debate performance is going to be widely seen, they may take the opportunity to voice a popular platform or opinion on which they have no intention of following through or that they really might not agree with. Consequently, rather than increase

voters' connection to the election process, this could have the opposite effect, and voters could become disillusioned with politics altogether. Furthermore, the debates may give politicians a platform to justify their bad performance and may in fact make voters less likely to hold them accountable.

Do you expect the treatment to work differently for certain individuals/groups/communities? Which ones?
We expect that the debates will have a bigger impact on voters who are not already getting information on their representatives' policy positions and performance.

Recommendation: How many different versions of the treatment are there?
Three

Treatment 1: Whole debate (participants watch video of whole debate in video halls hired to show it in specific communities)

Treatment 2: Radio debate (participants listen to the entire debate on local radio stations)

Treatment 3: No debate (participants are not exposed to any debate materials from this project)

Is it possible to use a factorial design?
Yes. We can use a factorial design to look separately at the effect of the video and radio programs, as well as the combined effect.

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to the debate increases voters' knowledge of candidates' performance and positions.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to candidates' debate performance increases voter turnout.

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to candidates' debate performance increases voters' ability to select candidates who are high-quality and whose policy positions are well aligned with voters' preferences.

Hypothesis 4: Exposure to candidate's debate performance via television will have stronger effects than exposure via listening to the debate via radio.

Do you have any existing evaluations of similar programs that you can share? No

Measurement
What are the outputs and outcomes that are important to measure?
Outputs: Number of debates watched/listened to

Outcomes: Voter knowledge; Voter turnout; Candidate quality; Alignment of candidate positions and voter preferences

Key Measure 1: Voter knowledge of candidate positions and characteristics, measured by a post-election survey

Key Measure 2: Voter turnout (collected from local officials, as well as in follow-up surveys)

Key Measure 3: Candidate quality, measured by candidate education and experience

Key Measure 4: Alignment of voter and candidate policy preferences, measured by surveys of voters and candidates pre-election

Can any of these key outputs or outcomes be measured with administrative data?
Yes, Measure 2 can be measured with data on turnout from the National Electoral Commission.

Will any of these outcomes require special methods for measuring sensitive data?
We will potentially require special methods if the government is not willing to share voter turnout data with the research team. Self-reported voter turnout is consistently exaggerated so we may rely on voters showing their registration cards.

In an ideal world, how many periods of data collection would you like to do?
Three: baseline surveys of candidates and voters (three months before election), immediate post-election surveys, and endline surveys of voters (30-45 days after the election).

Do you have any existing data on similar outcomes that you can share?
Yes, we can share past election results from Honduras at the polling station level and a survey on voter preferences and knowledge that we did last year.

Power and Randomization
Is the program delivered to individuals, communities, or something else? Could you give the program to one individual/group/community and not the other?
This program is designed to be delivered at the community level, given that information is likely to pass between individuals within a community during pre-election discussions. In rural Honduras, people move between localities relatively infrequently, so spillovers across communities are unlikely, although we should design the study to validate this assumption. There are no ethical issues with withholding the treatment from some localities, as they will still be able to receive information from existing sources such as regular print, radio, and television coverage of the campaigns.

Let's talk about the most important outcome. How big do you think the effect on this program will be?
Humanitarian.org's survey around the last election revealed that around 40% of citizens surveyed could identify their representatives' positions on the three policy issues that were

most important to them (50% could identify at least two out of three correctly, and 65% could identify at least one). They expect that our debate coverage will increase this by five percentage points in treated localities, assuming that we can reach 10% of adult citizens in treated localities and approximately half of them learn accurate information about their representatives.

How big of an effect on that outcome would you consider a success?
A five-percentage point increase would be a success compared to other programs, considering the cost of this program.

What do you expect the range of that outcome to look like in your study population?
In Humanitarian.org's survey during the election four years ago, 40% could identify their representatives' position (out of three possible choices) on at least three issues, 50% on at least two, and 65% on at least one.

When one person/group/community gets your program, does that affect any others? Which ones?
Yes, since voters are likely to share the information they learned from the debates with their family, friends, and neighbors.

Is it necessary to design to measure spillover effects?
Yes, Humanitarian.org is interested in understanding whether and how the information is transmitted between voters.

Should the evaluation use a clustered design?
No

What are the potential channels for spillover transmission?
Word of mouth

(For clustered designs) How similar are the individuals/groups/communities in a cluster?
N/A

What is the appropriate individual unit?
Localities

What is the appropriate level for clustering?
N/A

How many units are there?
Our program will be rolled out in Intibucá department, which contains 104 villages and 910 hamlets (total 1014 localities). Humanitarians.org has enough funding to provide the TV and/or radio program to 100 of these for a total sample of 200.

How many clusters are there?

N/A

Randomization: Logistics and Ethics
Is it logistically possible for you to do a baseline survey?
Yes, and they plan to do so

What is the total pool of individuals/groups/communities that could potentially get your program?
Every locality in Intibucá department

Are there any ethical reasons that randomly deciding who gets your program is a problem?
No, because we are not withholding information or preventing anyone from seeking out candidate information. We do not have the budget to provide the program to every locality, so randomly allocating it is a fair distribution rule.

Benefits and Risks
How flexible are you in terms of the schedule and design of the intervention?
The intervention needs to be scheduled at the same time as the upcoming election in Honduras. They have expressed flexibility in terms of the exact timing of baseline and endline, how randomization is done, and how key outcomes are measured.

What are the main benefits that you hope to get out of this evaluation?
They are looking to find the effects of this particular program, with an eye towards using it in other countries that Humanitarians.org works with.

When researchers work on evaluation we typically get unrestricted access to the data. Are there any ethical or other reasons why this may be a problem for you?
No objections

Is an RCT a good evaluation strategy for this program?
Conditionally recommended

Under what conditions would you recommend an RCT for this program?
An RCT would be recommended under the following conditions:
1) Depending on power calculations, N=200 may be too small to detect treatment effects of the expected size for key outcomes. In this case we would recommend an RCT if Humanitarians.org or the research team could obtain funding to expand the program.
2) If Humanitarians.org and the research team are able to determine spillover channels and either determine that they are very unlikely to spread across localities or design to measure them.

Why (or why not) is an RCT the appropriate method for this evaluation?
We are looking to measure the impact of an added source of information on individuals, for which an RCT is ideal. Also there is enthusiasm from Humanitarians.org staff to use this method

because they want to decide whether to scale up either radio or television debates in their other country programs.

What are the next steps?
The next step would be a follow-up meeting with all of the implementing partners and researchers to address the conditions described above.

How many potential evaluators should EGAP suggest?
Two

What kind of materials would they like to receive from potential evaluations? (Ex: CV, 3-5-page design proposal, references, etc.)
CV, 2-3-page design proposal, and references

Other General Notes
n/a

Executive Summary
The PDVK program is a voter information program that takes place over the course of one election cycle in Honduras. Voting-age adults will be exposed to either a full video of the candidates' debate, a radio recording with sound bites, or no treatment. The program operates under the assumption that exposure to debates will increase voters' knowledge of candidate positions, increase voter turnout, and help voters align with politicians whose policy positions are most closely aligned with their preferences.

Strengths: Proposed design would allow identification of the locality-level effect of availability of pre-election candidate debates on electoral outcomes.

Weaknesses: Spillover channels may be difficult to identify. In addition, because control localities will still be permitted to seek out any information they would like, it is likely that the effect size will be small.

Opportunities: Humanitarians.org has strong relationships with the local electoral committees from which we would need to seek approval.

Threats: Honduran elections frequently get postponed at the last minute, so there is a chance that the program could start, treat people, and then the election gets postponed.