



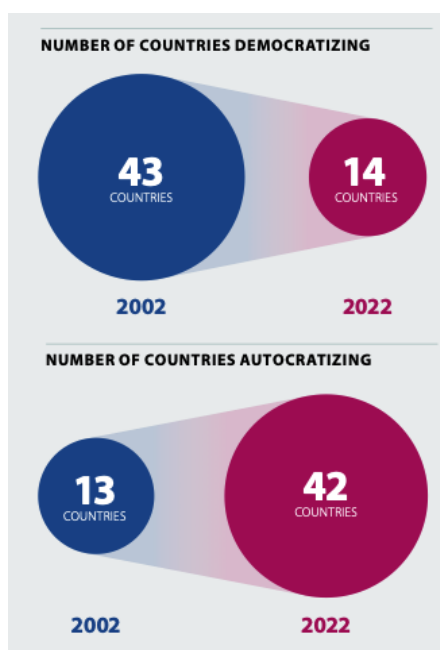
# PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP ONLINE

## Challenges and New Directions in Civic Education

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## A worrying global trend: The wave of autocratization



Source: V-Dem Democracy Report 2023

## What drives this trend? Popular autocrats?



Turkey



Hungary



USA



India

“For democracy to endure, their leaders and *citizens* must internalize the spirit of democracy” (Diamond 2008: 294; also Claassen 2020)

## Premise of this project

To love democracy is....

- ▶ to understand it
- ▶ to value it
- ▶ to fight for it



## How to make a case for democracy?



## CIVIC EDUCATION



Civic education programs promote political knowledge, engagement, and support for democratic values among ordinary citizens.

How can we best design programs to achieve this goal?

## Key challenges to traditional (adult) civic education

- ① **Extending its reach**, particularly to those in ideological echo chambers and those difficult to reach with more traditional forms of democracy promotion, e.g. those less educated or interested in politics, younger people, and women.
- ② Finding **innovative, cost-effective methods** to convey the critical role of upholding democracy amid increasing global skepticism.

Project DEMED addresses these challenges by using social media to conduct civic education campaigns, offering a cost-effective and wide-reaching method.

## Social media: The end or the savior of democracy?



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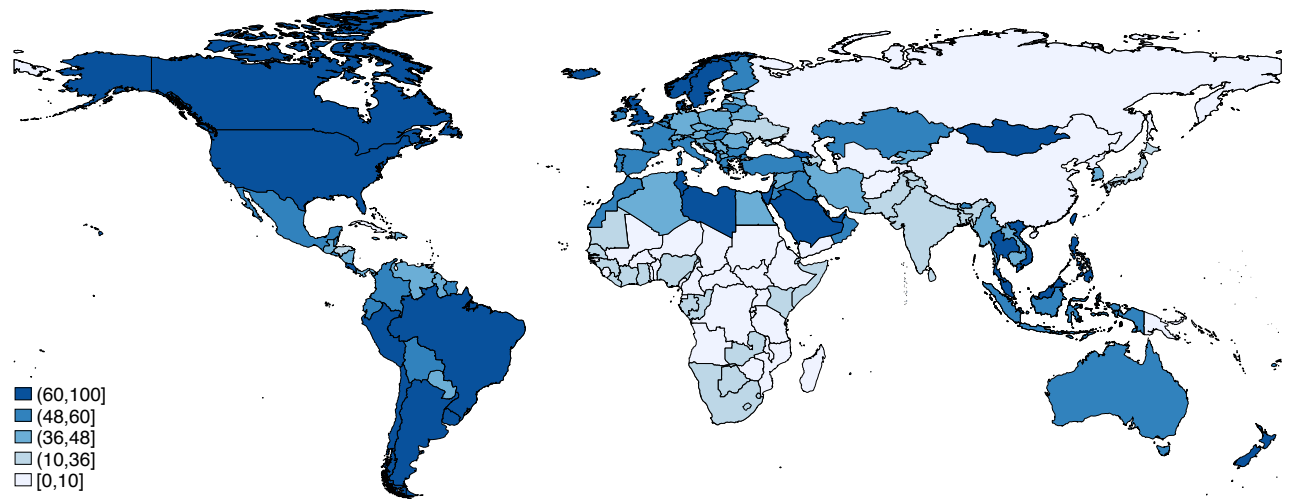


Turning the potential of social media on its head.

## Advantages of social media advertisement campaigns

- **Massive reach:** Billions of people worldwide, coming from nearly all social backgrounds and countries, use social media websites daily.
- **Circumventing state control:** Especially in autocracies, social media platforms' relatively decentralized structure, allows more space for pro-democratic voices compared to traditional media structures, which are often controlled by the regime.

## The global reach of Facebook: Users per country



(active at least once per month, 2019)

## Introducing the DEMED study

## Civic education treatments: Format and delivery

- ▶ 3 minute-long videos promoting the virtues of democracy.
- ▶ Format: animated scenes, voice-overs, and background music.
- ▶ The tone of the videos was informative and upbeat.
- ▶ Content is abstract and only refers to democracy and non-democracies in general.
- ▶ One country comparison between Lithuania and Belarus.

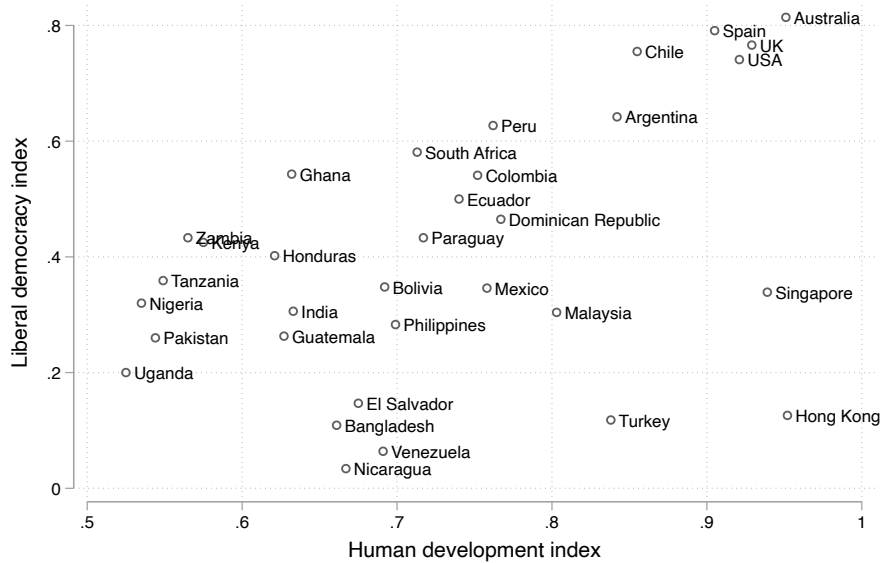
**Example:** Rights treatment - <https://youtu.be/YBePPaG0Bg8>

## Civic education videos focusing on different aspects of democracy

- ① Protection of civil, social, and economic **rights**
- ② Checks and balances, e.g. **institutions** such as independent parliaments and courts
- ③ The economic and social **outputs** produced by democratic systems, e.g. economic growth, public goods
- ④ **Placebo**: the advantages of space exploration

**Experimental design:** People were randomly assigned to watch one of the videos.

## 33 countries included in our study



Countries: English or Spanish official language  
+ Turkey as a key case

## Research Design

- ▶ Data collection: May 6 to October 5, 2023
- ▶ Over 90,000 people saw our videos, and over 60,000 people completed surveys.
- ▶ Research participants were recruited online using Facebook ads.
- ▶ Sample is NOT representative of the populations.
- ▶ Survey was administered through Qualtrics.

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Take a 10-min survey, join the lottery for Amazon.com gift cards\*

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\*Restrictions apply: see amazon.com/go/ingl

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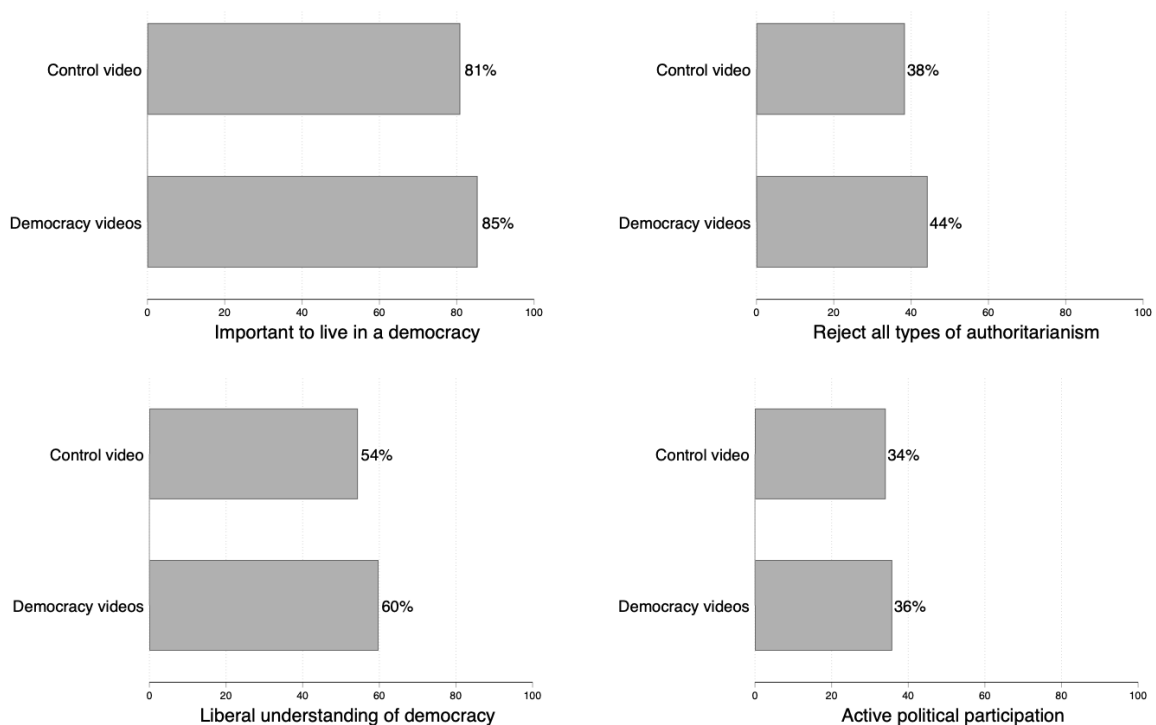
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# I. Can Online Civic Education Promote Democratic Citizenship?

## Main effects on democratic support and active citizenship

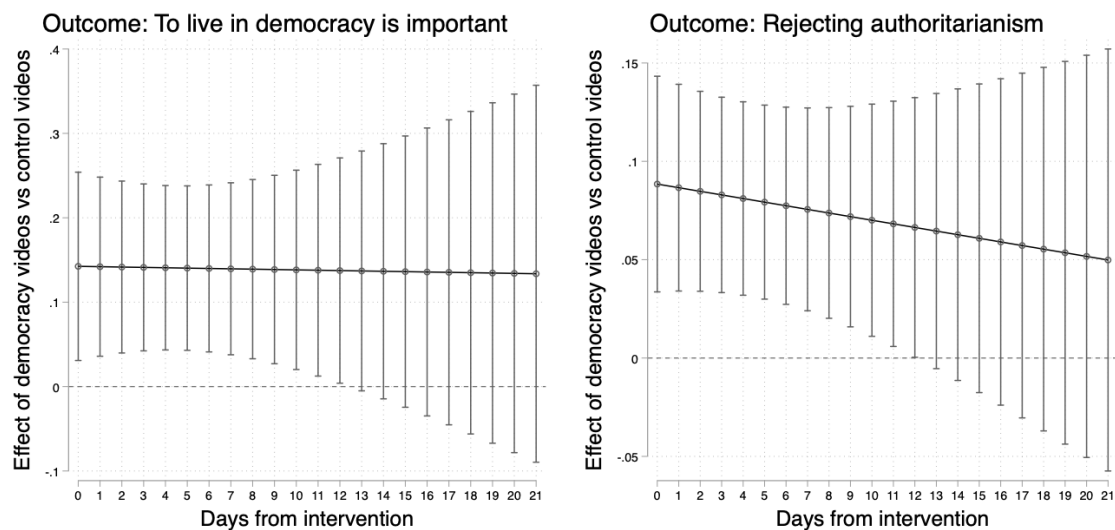


## Lesson learned

Online civic education videos positively impact key outcomes:

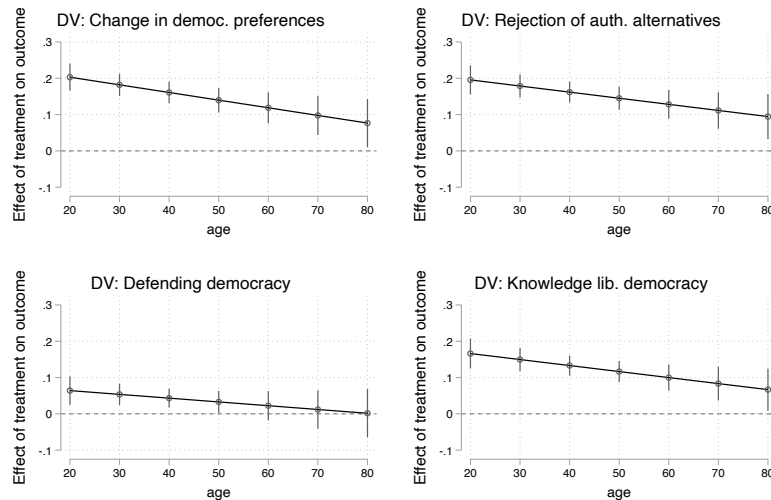
- ▶ Bolstering preference for democracy
- ▶ Reducing approval for non-democratic forms of governance
- ▶ Increasing the inclination to vote for democratic candidates
- ▶ Increasing knowledge about key components of liberal democracy
- ▶ Enhancing respondents' political engagement

## How long do the effects of online civic education last?



- ▶ The positive effect of the democracy videos is still statistically significant after almost two weeks.

## Do these interventions work better among some individuals?



- The effects of the videos were greatest among those who have a greater need for political education, e.g. younger and less politically interested voters.

## Which pro-democratic arguments have the strongest impact?



*Institutional constraints on executive power and promotion of the rule of law*



*Protection of individual rights and liberties*



*Performance in providing positive economic, health, and environmental outcomes*

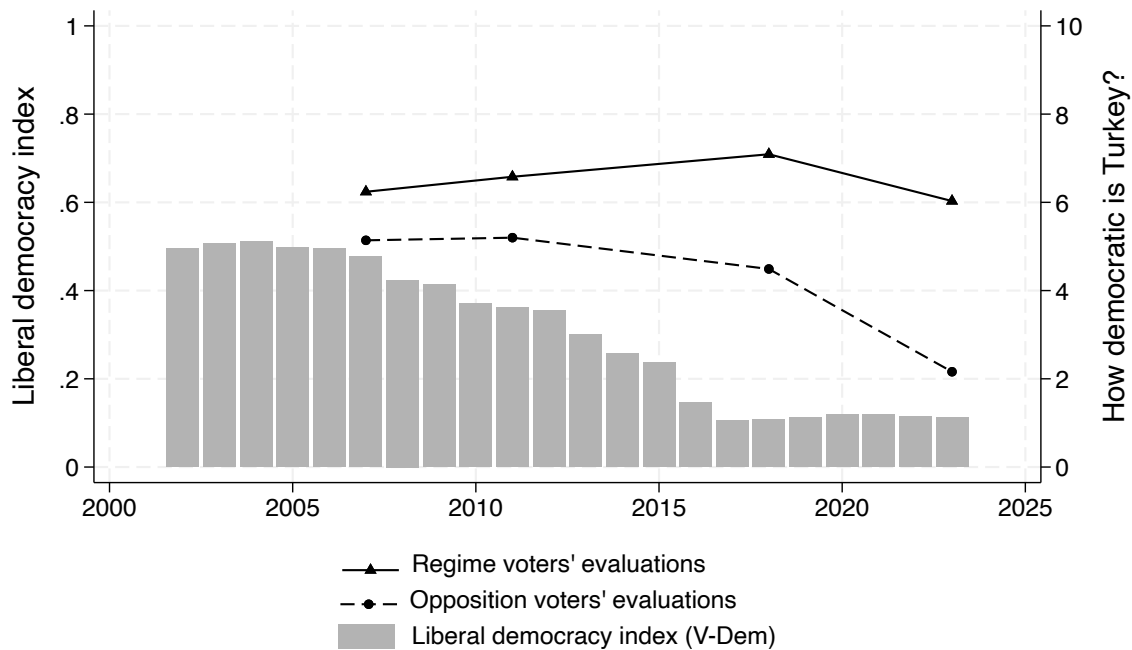
- We found emphasizing democracy's liberal aspects, particularly its rights and institutions, to be more effective than arguments emphasizing democracy's economic benefits.

## II. How to Best “Sell” Democracy in Autocracies?

### Challenges of civic education in autocratic contexts

- ▶ Autocratic regimes often criminalize and punish criticism, especially from civil society organizations that threaten their stability.
- ▶ Autocratic regimes are frequently accompanied by increased polarization and political propaganda, which strengthen partisan identities.
- ▶ In such environments, conducting civic education campaigns that openly criticize the regime’s authoritarian nature can be risky or counterproductive.
- ▶ Citizens living under these regimes often have serious misconceptions about the anti-democratic nature of their political systems.

## Perceptions of how democratic Turkey is



## How to promote democracy in an authoritarian context?

### Positive & gain treatment:

This video introduced an ideal democratic context in which citizens enjoy a wide range of political rights and freedoms.

The treatment evoked positive emotions (happiness and inspiration) among respondents

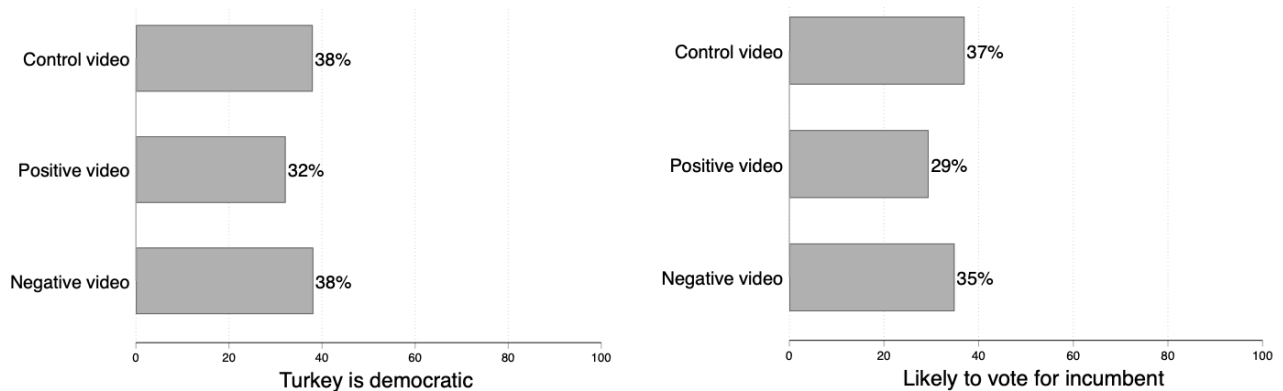
### Negative & loss treatment:

This treatment introduced the authoritarian context in which citizens lack political rights and freedoms and suffer from political repression.

The treatment evoked negative emotions (fear and anger) among respondents

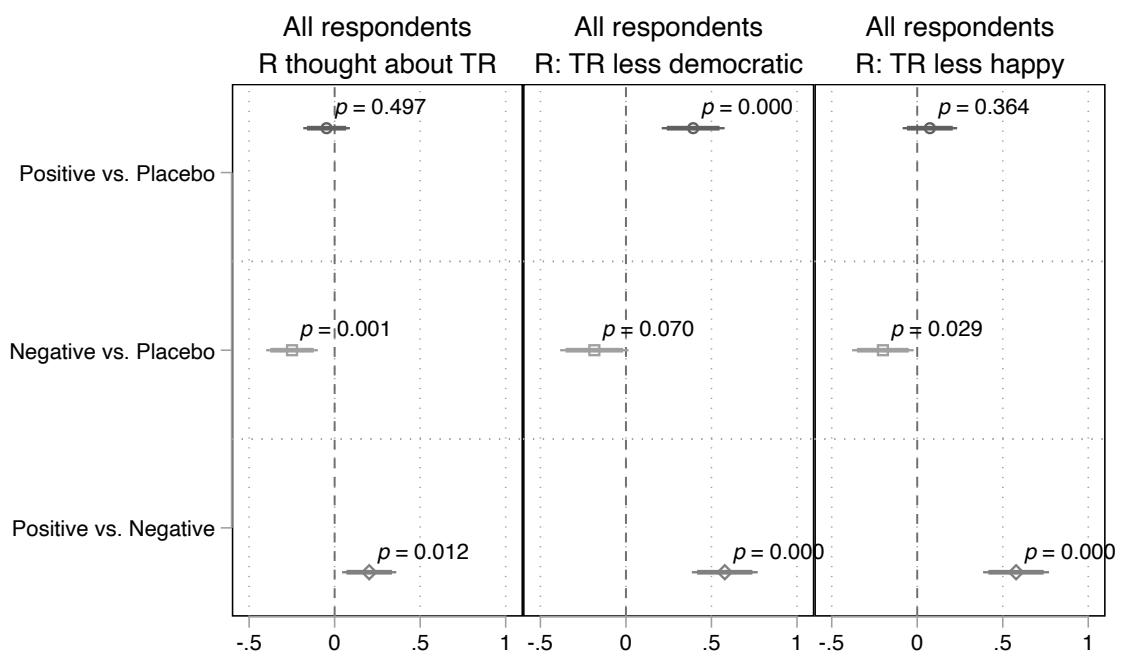
### Placebo: Space exploration

## Do people understand how (un)democratic their country is?



- Positive democratic civic education frame made people see their government as less democratic and reduced their likelihood of voting for the ruling party.

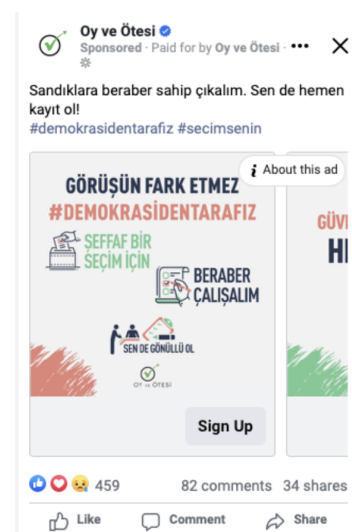
## Mechanism: What do our videos evoke?



### III. Can Online Tools be Used Effectively on the “Real World” Internet or Social Media Feeds of Civil Society Organizations?

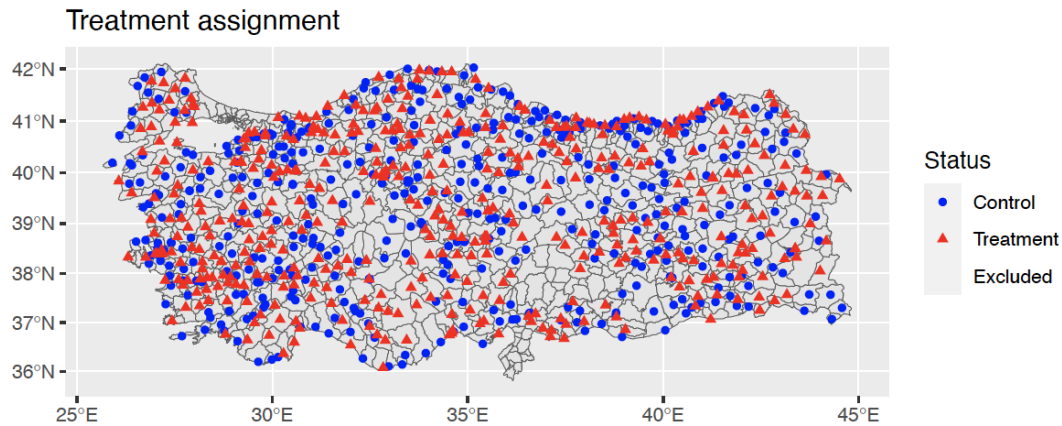
#### Mobilizing election monitors via social media ads

- Collaboration with a Turkish CSO "Vote & Beyond" (V&B) to aid their efforts to recruit independent election monitors for the 2023 presidential election.
- Goal: Comparing traditional recruitment efforts (emails, media, followers) to running paid social media ads.



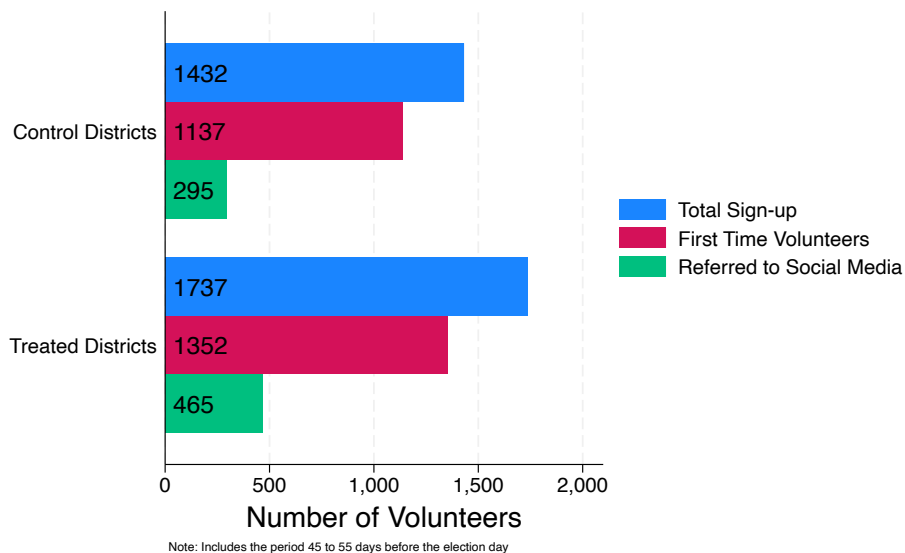
“Let’s protect the ballots together. Join us!”

## Using Meta local targeting tools for randomization

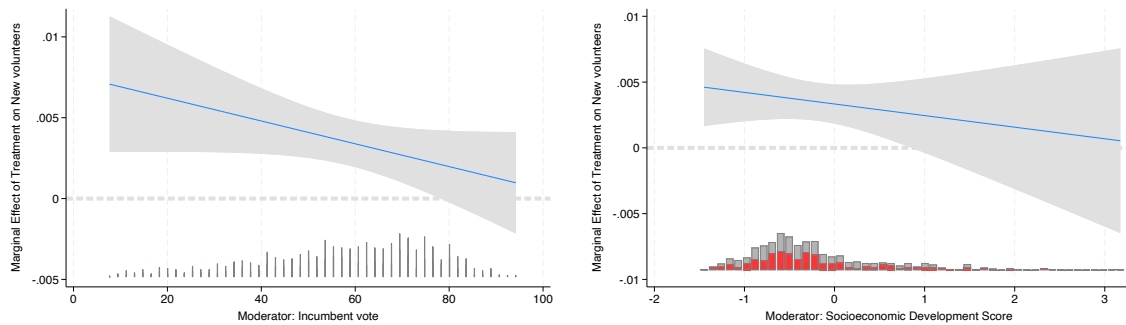


- Fieldwork: 26 March - 9 April 2023
- The ad was published on V&B's Facebook and Instagram pages.
- Recruitment data was collected via an Expression of Interest form.

## Descriptive results: Number of new volunteers during the campaign period



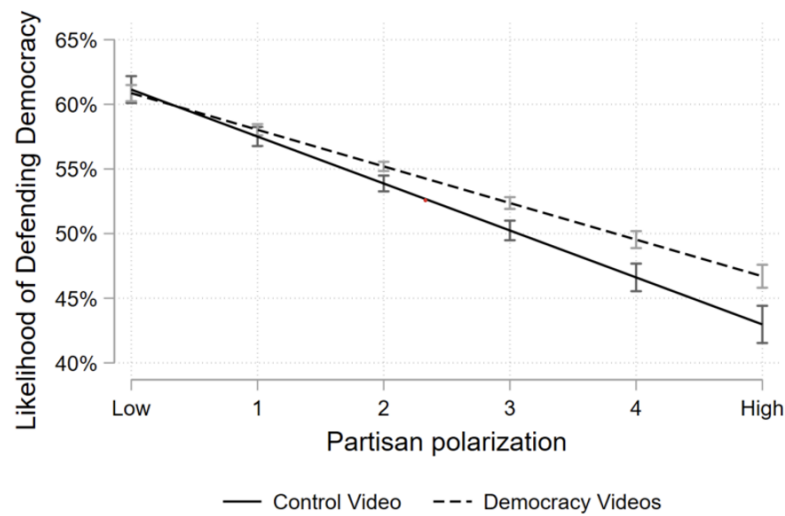
## In which districts were online advertisements most useful?



- Using social media ads can boost recruitment for CSOs, especially in poorer and opposition areas.

## IV. Can Online Civic Education Mitigate the Negative Consequences of Extreme Partisan Polarization?

## Partisan polarization and its negative effect on democracy: Voting for democracy or party loyalty?



- Online civic ed. decreases the negative impacts of partisan polarization and enhances sympathy for democratic parties.

## Recommendations for Practitioners and Democracy-Promoters

- Give Greater Emphasis to Online Platforms
- Customize Messages for Political Context
- Extend Efforts to Combat the Anti-democratic Effects of Political Polarization
- Target Marginalized Groups and Underrepresented Groups

THANK YOU!

