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Jia, Mofei; Kopsacheilis, Orestis; Kujansuu, Essi; Popova, Anna

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Mofei Jia¹, Orestis Kopsacheilis², Essi Kujansuu³, Anna Popova⁴

¹Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou/China
²Technical University of Munich/Germany
³University of Innsbruck/Austria
⁴Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich/Germany

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E-Mail: joerg.peters@rwi-essen.de	Hohenzollernstraße 1-3	www.i4replication.org
RWI – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research	45128 Essen/Germany	

A comment on "Jobs and Political Participation: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Ethiopia" by Aalen et al.

Mofei Jia (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University) Orestis Kopsacheilis (Technical University of Munich) Essi Kujansuu (University of Innsbruck) Anna Popova (LMU Munich)

Abstract

Aalen et al. (2024) examine the effect of employment on political participation among women job applicants living with a partner in Ethiopia, using 'intention to treat'-estimates and data from a randomized control trial in the field. In the first stage, the authors find that job offers increased formal employment and earnings. They find no significant effects of job offers on political interest, raising issues, or protest activity but they find negative effects on participation in community meetings, and on internal and external political efficacy. We successfully computationally reproduce the main claims of the paper. Because the data provided is quite limited in its scope, we do only three robustness checks, nevertheless, no large issues come up in the robustness checks.

1. Introduction

Aalen et al. 2024 use data from a randomized control trial conducted in Ethiopia to study whether employment affects political participation. Most of the data is originally collected for another study investigating the impact of employment on intimate partner violence. For this reason, the sample is restricted to women job applicants living with a partner at the time. This data is collected from five industrial parks in Ethiopia, from companies that specialize in the shoe and garment industry. The qualified workers were randomly assigned to get a job offer, after which their employment status, earnings, and political participation were measured in several points in time.

The data is structured in a panel-data format with surveys that were collected before randomization (wave 1); after 6 months (wave 2), after 12 months (wave 3), after 18 months (wave 4); and finally after around three years (wave 5). Data from surveyed women before randomization (wave 1) serve as the baseline. The original study data collection ran from 2016-2020 (last baseline data was collected in 2018), the study was pre-registered on the 9th of November 2017, while the additional data wave (5) was pre-registered on the 6th of June 2019 (first observation collected on the 7th of October 2018; the next ones – on the 4th of July 2019 and finished on the 6th of April 2020).

The results suggest that job offers increased both formal employment and income but had no positive effect on political participation. More specifically, their analysis is based on an 'intention-to-treat (ITT)' model. Table 3 (page 664) provides support for the claims that job offers increased formal employment and income. It reports the effects of treatment on employment and earnings after six months (panel A) and after 34 months (panel B). The coefficient of the treatment on 'any wage job' is 0.40 with SE=0.025, which is significant at p<0.01. The coefficient of treatment on 'Earning from Wage Job' is 1,726.8 with SE=172.6, significant at p<0.01. Standard errors are robust and regressions control for list fixed effects (block).

Table 4 (p. 665) and Table 6 (p. 667) summarize the analysis supporting the claim that the treatment has no effect on political participation. The authors find null results for three out of four measures of political participation and a negative result for one of the measures. More specifically, the coefficients suggest no effect on 'political interest' - 0.00056 (SE = 0.026) without controls and 0.0052 (SE=0.025) with controls: Table 4, columns 5 and 6 respectively) or 'raising an issue' -.0034 (SE=0.023) without controls and -0.031 (SE=0.023) with controls: Table 4, columns 7 and 8 respectively). They also find no treatment effect on 'Protest Last Year' -0.0098 (SE=0.023) without controls and -0.0096 (SE=0.023) with controls: Table 6, columns 3 and 4 respectively). They find a significant negative effect of political participation on attendance of community meetings: -0.12 (SE=0.028) without controls and -0.12 (SE=0.027) with controls (Table 4, columns 1 and 2 respectively), with both coefficients being significant at p<0.01. Standard errors are again robust and regressions control for list fixed effects (block).

In the present report prepared for the Institute for Replication, we investigate whether their analytical results are computationally reproducible and further test their replicability and robustness. In terms of reproducibility, we successfully reproduced the results using the code provided in the replication package. We were able to obtain all tables and figures from the main part of the paper. We did not encounter any coding errors. It is important to note that the data provided consists only of the variables relevant for the analysis but not all answers to the questionnaire, thus, we state that raw data was not provided and the extent to which we could tackle robustness or evaluate the quality of raw data is limited. To assess the robustness of the results, we analyze the results for compounding the variables into a single index, correct for multiple hypothesis testing, and take individual averages for the panel data (to account more for correlations between individual's observations). We find that the results are largely robust to these corrections. Given the limited scope of data (unavailability of raw data), we were limited in the robustness tests that we were able to do.

2. Computational Reproducibility

The replication package found here [Replication Data for: "Jobs and Political Participation - Evidence from a Field Experiment in Ethiopia" - The Journal of Politics Dataverse] includes analysis data and analysis code only. There is no raw data or cleaning code, although the authors provide verbal explanations of what data variables are based on. We can therefore only attempt replication from the analysis data.

We successfully replicate all results in the main paper from the analysis data. The analysis code with the analysis data produces the same output as presented in the paper. We find no coding errors (although, for us it was not immediately clear that clustered SEs with cluster size 1 is equivalent to robust standard errors). Table 1 further summarizes the availability of data and code and the reproduction results for this paper.

	Fully	Partial	No
Raw data provided			Х
Cleaning code provided			х
Analysis data provided	х		
Analysis code provided	х		
Reproducible from raw data			Х
Reproducible from analysis data	Х		

Table 1: Data and code availability and reproducibility

2.1 Discrepancies Between Pre-analysis Plan and Article

This study builds on a dataset that is collected for another one on partner violence (Kotsadam & Villanger, 2022), which has been pre-registered (<u>AEA RCT Registry</u>). This study on political participation uses this original dataset in non-pre-registered ways, which they are very open about. For the purposes of this study, they add an additional wave of data collection (wave 5), which they pre-register here (<u>AEA RCT Registry</u>). We can therefore only analyze consistency with the pre-analysis plan regarding the last wave of data collection. We do not find deviations from the pre-analysis plan that are not acknowledged by authors in the main part of the paper or appendix. The deviations mentioned in the paper concern the lack of variation in data: in the pre-analysis plan, the authors intended to exclude variables with more than 95% of the responses being the same but included the results in the main paper for completeness.

3. Robustness Reproduction

We run three kinds of robustness analyses. In the first one, we construct simple indexes from the political participation variables and test if the effects of employment are significant for this composite variable. The second type of robustness analysis corrects for multiple hypotheses testing, checking if the results are robust for this type of correction. Last, for the pooled dataset, instead of regressing each individual wave

observation as the dependent variable, we construct an average per person, to better account for the fact that individual observations are correlated over time and run the analysis on the averages.

3.1. Index of political participation

It is not self-evident what variables should be included into an index of political participation and how each variable should be weighted. Acknowledging this, we are still interested in constructing an index of political participation from the variables used in the paper. We found the effects of employment to be robust on the index, regardless of how we constructed it.

We used two different indices. The first variable, that we call "naive", is a simple sum of the four dummy variables: "meeting_last_year" that reflects if the participant attended a meeting in the last year, "attend_meet_Kebele" that reflects if the participant attended a Kebele meeting in the last year, "interested" that reflects if the participant reported having interest in politics (scoring 1 or 2 in a scale from 1= very much 2 = somewhat, 3= not very, 4= not at all), and "raise_last_year" if she raised an issue within the last year, normalized by dividing the value by 4. What we call "index" is a z-standardized sum of the same four dummy variables, that is, their means have been normalized to 0 and the remainder is divided by the standard deviation. For the panel data, we used the equivalent variables (with the added "_r" in the end of the variable name).

Table 2: Indexes for political participation							
Panel A	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)			
	Naive	Naive	Index	Index			
Treatment	-0.062***	-0.056***	-0.51***	-0.46***			
s.d.	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.16)	(0.15)			
p-value	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002			
Control mean	0.40	0.40	0.25	0.25			
Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls			
N	1259	1259	1259	1259			

Table 2 summarizes the results for the indices. There is no original comparison in the paper by Aalen et al. 2024.

Panel B	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Naive	Naive	Index	Index
Treatment	-0.045**	-0.044**	-0.37**	-0.36**
s.d.	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.17)	(0.16)
p-value	0.026	0.027	0.026	0.028
Control mean	0.40	0.40	0.14	0.14
Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls
N	1054	1054	1054	1054
Panel C	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Naive	Naive	Index	Index
Treatment	-0.065***	-0.065***	-0.53***	-0.54***
s.d.	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.12)	(0.12)
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Control mean	0.44	0.44	0.25	0.25
Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls
N	4561	4561	4561	4561

3.2. Multiple hypothesis testing corrected q-values

We use multiple hypothesis test corrected q-values a'la Benjamini–Yekutieli (Benjamini, and Yekutiel 2001) and Bonferroni (Bonferroni 1936) procedures that in principle correct for the fact that the same hypothesis is tested with different variables. What we discover is that almost all of the original results are robust to this correction, however, this is largely not the case with Wave 5 (only one result out of 4 remains significant at 10% level with Benjamini–Yekutieli, while with Bonferroni, 1 remains significant at 5% level and another at 10% level). This result is noteworthy given that this is the only pre-registered round of data collection, however, given that the authors are summarizing their main results as a null result, this robustness result is in line with the original paper. The full set of MHT-corrected results are reported in Table 3, where we also report the p-values of the original estimates in the paper, that were not reported in the original paper.

Table 3: Multiple hypotheses test corrected results

	Communi meeting	ty	Kebele m	eeting	Interested		Raised Issue	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
A. Wave 2 (first follow-up)								
Treatment	-0.12***	-0.12***	-0.100***	-0.090***	-0.00056	-0.0052	-0.034	-0.031
robust SE	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Original p- values	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.982	0.836	0.137	0.168
q-value Yekutieli	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.003	0.999	0.999	0.379	0.468
q-value Bonferroni	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.003	0.999	0.999	0.546	0.674
Control mean	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.34	0.34	0.23	0.23
N	1,262	1,262	1,261	1,261	1,26	1,26	1,262	1,262
R-squared	0.07	0.17	0.09	0.20	0.17	0.21	0.11	0.17
Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls
B. Wave 5	(fourth foll	ow-up)						
Treatment	-0.052*	-0.056*	-0.079**	-0.072**	-0.1938	-0.1951	-0.045	-0.045
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Original p- values	0.095	0.070	0.010	0.016	0.888	0.849	0.113	0.110
q-value Yekutieli	0.314	0.292	0.085	0.136	0.999	0.999	0.314	0.307
q-value Bonferroni	0.379	0.280	0.041	0.066	0.999	0.999	0.452	0.442
Control mean	0.49	0.49	0.45	0.45	0.35	0.35	0.33	0.33
N	1,054	1,054	1,054	1,054	1,054	1,054	1,054	1,054
R-squared	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.16	0.29	0.29	0.14	0.16
Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls	Block	Controls
C. Waves 2–5:								
Treatment	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.097***	-0.097***	-0.2024	-0.2025	-0.059***	-0.059***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Original p- values	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.891	0.887	0.001	0.001
q-values Yekutieli	0.000	0.000	.0.000	.0.000	0.999	0.999	0.002	0.002

q-value Bonferroni	0.000	0.000	0.000	.0.000	0.999	0.999	0.002	0.002
Control mean	0.55	0.55	0.51	0.51	0.40	0.40	0.31	0.31
N	4,564	4,564	4,563	4,563	4,562	4,562	4,564	4,564
R-squared	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.17	0.19	0.07	0.08
Controls	Block	Block	Block	Block	Block	Block	Block	Block
Wave FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

3.3. Average values per individual

The third robustness check collapses the panel data structure by taking an average over the waves per individual participant. With this data manipulation, we cannot no longer include the wave fixed effects and hence we compare our robustness check only to the models without these wave fixed effects (columns 1, 3, 5, and 7 of Table 4 in the original paper). We find that the coefficients are slightly smaller but all the results that were significant at 1% level remain significant at the same level and therefore are robust to this check. The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Robustness check taking individual averages							
Panel A: original	(1) Community Meeting	(2) Kebele Meeting	(3) Interested	(4) Raised Issue			
Treatment	-0.10***	-0.097***	-0.0024	-0.059***			
s.d.	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.017)			
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.891	0.001			
Control mean	0.55	0.51	0.40	0.31			
N	4,564	4,563	4,562	4,564			
R-squared	0.06	0.07	0.17	0.07			
Controls	Block, no wave FE	Block, no wave FE	Block, no wave FE	Block, no wave FE			
Panel B: Robustness check	(1) Community Meeting	(2) Kebele Meeting	(3) Interested	(4) Raised Issue			

Treatment	-0.092***	-0.075***	-0.0059	-0.052***
s.d.	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.018)
p-value	0.000	0.001	0.746	0.003
Control mean	0.54	0.50	0.40	0.31
N	1,282	1,282	1,282	1,282
R-squared	0.10	0.10	0.29	0.15
Controls	Block, no wave FE			

To summarize, our robustness checks indicate that the original results are quite robust to all the alterations that we tried.

4. Conclusion

In summary, in this replication report, we successfully reproduced the main results of the paper. More precisely, we were able to get the same output as shown in the paper with the analysis code and data provided in the replication package of the published paper. And we find no coding errors. However, we do notice that the data provided is quite limited in its scope. No raw data or cleaning code is provided in the paper. Furthermore, there may be some pre-registration issues given the timeline of running this field experiment. As a result, what we can do for replication is a bit limit. We do only three robustness checks, i.e., 1. constructing indexes from the political participation variables; 2. using multiple hypotheses testing; 3. constructing average values per person. According to our robustness checks, in general, no large issues are detected.

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