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Timeline

2020

Sample Size

Roughly 1,300 university students in Bogotá

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Young Adult Compliance with COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies in Bogotá, Colombia

Abstract

The effectiveness of COVID-19 mitigation recommendations like social distancing and mask wearing depends critically on whether people comply with them, especially young adults who are less likely to suffer severe complications from the virus, but more likely to be infected by it and spread it. In Colombia, researchers are working with IPA to better understand young adults' compliance with COVID-19 mitigation recommendations and to evaluate the effectiveness of various informational nudges in boosting compliance.

Policy Issue

In countries around the world, COVID-19 mitigation policies have focused on social distancing and hygiene. Less stringent policies offer voluntary guidelines while more stringent ones impose mandates with penalties for noncompliance. But the effectiveness of any mitigation policy depends critically on compliance. Encouraging young adults to comply with COVID-19 mitigation policies is particularly important: they are less likely to suffer severe complications from the virus but, in many contexts, are more likely to be infected by it and spread it.¹

Informational interventions, or “nudges,” may be an effective and low-cost means of boosting young adult compliance. Nudges could have different themes: for example, they could emphasize the private benefits of compliance—reducing the likelihood that the recipient will contract a severe case of COVID-19—or the public benefits—helping the recipient avoid infecting others who are more vulnerable, including the elderly. To design and implement these nudges, policy makers need information about whether young adults comply with policies, the drivers of variation in compliance, the real and perceived barriers to compliance, and the relative effectiveness of different types of nudges. In this study, researchers are collecting information on the characteristics of compliance and implementing a randomized evaluation to test the relative effectiveness of different informational interventions among university students in Bogotá, Colombia.

Context of the Evaluation

In Latin American countries such as Colombia, young adults make up a larger proportion of the population than in the Global North, making compliance in this population particularly important in limiting the spread of COVID-19.² This study is focused on Bogotá, one of the cities in Colombia hardest hit by COVID-19, where strict mitigation measures remained in place during the study period.³ The participants are university students in the city.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers from the Inter-American Development Bank are working with IPA and the Rosario Experimental and Behavioral Economics Lab (REBEL) to design and evaluate an information campaign aimed at boosting compliance with COVID-19 mitigation policies.

To evaluate the impact of different informational nudges on compliance, approximately 1,300 university students were randomly assigned to one of four groups:

- **Comparison:** This group received a placebo informational treatment about classical music.
- **Private benefits:** This group received information emphasizing the benefits of complying for the respondent.
- **Public benefits:** This group received information emphasizing the benefits of complying for others.
- **Private and public benefits:** This group received information emphasizing the benefits of complying for the recipient and for others.

A baseline survey elicited information on participants’ compliance with mitigation measures, perceived barriers to and incentives for compliance, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, political and civic attitudes and activities, and implicit attitudes towards mitigation measures.

At the end of the baseline survey session, participants received an information session according to their treatment group assignment. They were also invited to receive two emails

in the following week with incentives to engage with the informational nudges.

After the emails were sent, researchers administered an endline survey to collect information on compliance, perceived barriers to and benefits of compliance, and implicit attitudes towards mitigation measures. Results will inform ongoing mitigation policies and plans to relax them.

Results and Policy Lessons

Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

Sources

¹ Backhaus, Andreas. 2020. "Coronavirus: Why It's so Deadly in Italy." *Medium*. March 13. <https://medium.com/@andreasbackhausab/coronavirus-why-its-so-deadly-in-italy-c4200a15a7bf>.

² "Population Pyramids of the World from 1950 to 2100." 2019. *PopulationPyramid.net*. December. <https://www.populationpyramid.net/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/2020/>.

³ Pritchard, Oli. 2020. "Strict Quarantine to Return to Bogotá." *The Bogotá Post*. July 10. <https://thebogotapost.com/strict-quarantine-to-return-to-bogota/47133/>.

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