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TITLE:

Legal threat, moral appeal and social information - Testing enforcement strategies in the field (Gerlinde Fellner, Rupert Sausgruber, Christian Traxler)

ABSTRACT

As in many other countries, Austrian households who own a TV and/or a radio are required by law to register and pay a monthly TV license fee that is used to finance public broadcasting. In practice, the system is susceptible to free riding since public TV and radio programs can be received without paying and enforcement measures are weak. A specialized agency detects households who evade TV license fees and contacts them through mailings. In a natural field experiment, we vary the messages of these letters. In particular, we implement a *legal threat* – stressing the legal consequences of evasion –, *social information* – pointing out the high level of compliance – and a *moral appeal* to fair compliance behavior. In total, 48.000 mailings were sent in six different treatments and additionally, a control group was established that does not receive any mailing. Comparing new registrations between different experimental groups, we find the legal threat to be the most powerful strategy.