

Do Electoral Systems Affect the Incumbent Probability of Re-election? Evidence from Italian Municipalities.

This paper studies the effects of different electoral systems on the incumbent probability of being re-elected for mayors, assessors and councillors in Italian municipalities. The features of the reform on the local electoral system, introduced by the Italian central government in 1993, allow to implement a Difference-in-Discontinuities Design, which combines a Regression Discontinuity Design with a Difference-in-Differences approach. Exploiting this empirical strategy the paper identifies the causal effect of a majoritarian system, as opposed to a proportional system, on the incumbent probability of being re-elected. The results show that in majoritarian systems, where the mayors have more power to implement policy and the allocation of responsibility is concentrated in their hands, the probability of their re-election is higher. In addition, there is evidence that mayors use public spending to increase their probability of re-election, and that the effect of the majoritarian system is higher when the coalitions supporting the mayors are composed by a smaller number of parties. Finally, no evidence is found that assessors and councillors have different probability of being re-elected in the two electoral systems.