

Where to Spend the Money? A Survey Experiment on Electoral Institutions and Party Expenditure at the District Level

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03/28/2018

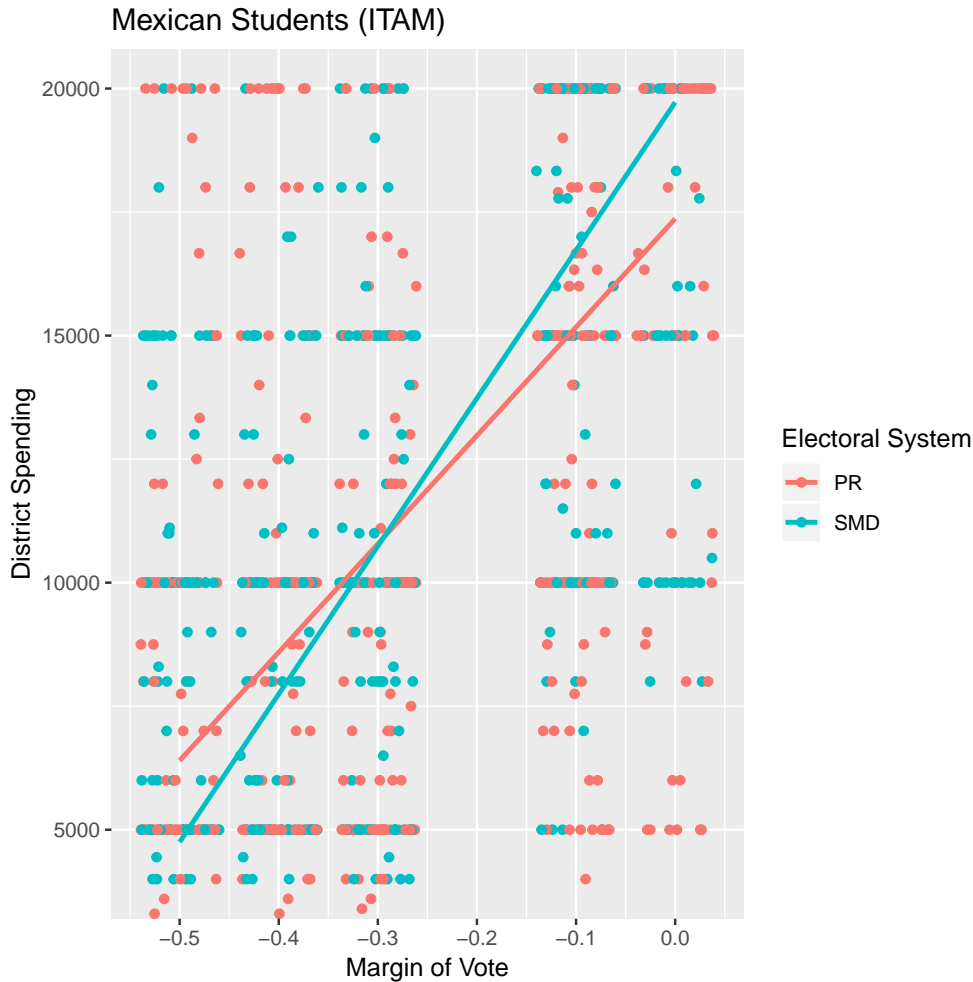
Abstract

This paper is part of dissertation research that examines the impact of electoral institutions on how political parties choose to engage in vote buying practices at the district level. Regardless of electoral rules, parties tend to concentrate their vote buying spending in the most competitive districts as opposed to party strongholds in order to maximize their electoral gains. This research argues that Proportional Representation (PR) systems enable political parties distribute their vote buying activities more evenly between party strongholds and competitive districts in comparison to Single Member District (SMD) systems. In the face of difficulty in testing this theory empirically, the paper takes advantage of the unique political structure of Mexico, which uses both SMD and PR systems in its elections. The survey experiment with Mexican students -who are exposed to both of the systems- seems to provide evidence consistent with paper's main theoretical claim.

1 Introduction

The consequences of electoral systems have been a widely debated topic in political science for several decades. The argument that Proportional Representation performs better on several aspects of democratic life goes back to John Stuart Mill's Considerations on Representative Government (Mill, 1861). Likewise, the reason for and consequences of several European countries' shift from Single Member District (SMD) system to Proportional Representation in Europe was a theme that was discussed in the 1970s (Rokkan, Campbell, Torsvik, & Valen, 1970). Ever since, the scholarly work has made important advances on our knowledge on how electoral institutions may help us explain certain political phenomena.

Perhaps, our most widely accepted piece of knowledge is that the choice or comparison of the two widely used electoral systems -majoritarian vs. proportional- brings a trade-off between accountability and representation (Diamond, 1999)(Carey & Hix, 2011)(Persson & Tabellini, 2003). The advantage of Proportional Representation is clear: when each district in a country elects multiple representatives, this will enable different political opinions to be heard both at the local and national assemblies. Although these opinions may not constitute majority even at the very district they were chosen, let alone at the national level, the PR system gives a voice to minority opinions without allowing them to be crushed by the choices of majorities. The downside of this system is that when constituents are not happy with how things are at their constituents, it is hard to pinpoint *the* responsible person, as all representatives will be pointing each other.



References

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