Discussion of 'Sick of Politics?'

Bas Machielsen (discussant)

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Short Summary

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- ▶ The paper uncovers the causal effect of political office on (i) income, (ii) general health, and (iii) mental health
  - ▶ Political office: being appointed (!) as a mayor, or being elected into the national Norwegian parliament
- ▶ Study uses objective administrative data on public health service usage to gauge general and mental health
- ▶ Research Design: (Generalized) difference-in-difference:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \sum_{r=-4, r\neq-1}^{4} \tau_r I_r + \sum_{r=-4, r\neq-1}^{4} \beta_r I_r \times \text{Elected}_i + \theta \text{Elected}_i + \epsilon_{it}$$

with time $r = -1$ acting as the normalized difference.

- ▶ The treatment is defined as the appointment (as mayor) into political office
- ▶ Suggested channel: deterioration of mental health through slander in the media

Discussion Plan

Discussion Points

- ▶ Is the treatment the right treatment?
  - ▶ More refined ways of gauging the mental-health related impact of politics?
- ▶ Is the control group the right control group?
- ▶ Ultimately, the answer to these questions might be "yes"

Treatment

- ▶ A significant part of the motivation of the paper concerns harassment and slander
  - ▶ These two are responsible for the potential deterioration of mental health following assumption of political office
  - ▶ But this is left out of the empirical design altogether

  Using the names and party affiliations of candidates, we have collected the daily appearances in each media outlet for all candidates running for national-level office and all local-level mayoral candidates (i.e., first-ranked candidates).

- ▶ It seems that you do have individual-level data of media appearance
  - ▶ About 30 hits per month: provided this concerns enough unique mayors, you can use this data (how: next slides)
  - ▶ The pooling of mayors subject to slandering with mayors who are "left alone" might also be a principal reason for the null effects you find

Treatment

- A suggested more refined treatment group would be mayors subjected to slander / disapproval
  - With mayors "left alone" serving as a control group
- Complication: you (presumably) want to isolate the channel: Slander $\rightarrow$ Mental Health from Policies $\rightarrow$ Slander $\rightarrow$ Mental Health
  - Media hits before they assume office can only be related to slander / approval and is plausibly orthogonal to policies (conditional on covariates like gender)

Treatment: Text Processing

- ▶ How to distinguish mayors subjected to slander/disapproval from mayors subjected to flattering/approval?
- ▶ NLP-based approach:
  - ▶ Sentiment analysis
  - ▶ Manually classify articles as "slanderous", "neutral" or "flattering"
- ▶ Use e.g. random forest to classify the remaining articles on the basis of e.g. a document-term matrix, a tf-idf matrix, or embeddings of the text in a language model
  - ▶ Can be transparent and externally validated
- ▶ Timing issue: effect of past and contemporaneous slander
  - ▶ Pre-election more likely to be exogenous

Control Group

- ▶ Taking the treatment definition as given, what is the most plausible control group?
- ▶ Candidates with the same demographic profile ignores selection (i) into candidacy and (ii) from candidacy into office
- ▶ From Dal Bo, Finan, Folke et al. (2017):

  this positive selection is present even when conditioning on family (and hence social) background, suggesting that individual competence is key for selection

- ▶ Maybe a more plausible group (but estimates with less precision): only the candidates
- ▶ In case of Lower House treatment: close elections