

# Judicial Subversion: The Effects of Political Power on Court Outcomes

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## Abstract

Are politicians in power treated more leniently in court? We show that Brazilian mayoral candidates charged with corruption are 65 percent less likely to be convicted if they narrowly win the election. Politicians play no direct role in the judges' careers, suggesting that formal independence does not insulate the judiciary from political influence. The effect is driven by districts with few judges and by judges with higher career instability. The favoritism in judicial decisions could lead to an adverse selection of politicians in elected offices: Politicians charged with corruption are more likely to run for election and to become the next mayor.

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# 1 Introduction

Keeping elected politicians accountable to the law is essential for political and economic development. Legal checks on politicians can prevent public funds embezzlement, ensure free and fair elections, reduce political violence, and create a predictable investment climate (North and Weingast 1989; Voigt, Gutmann, and Feld 2015). Such an outcome, however, might be difficult to achieve in practice. Judges and other agents of justice often face strong incentives not to enforce the law towards powerful politicians. Elected officials might have the power to make a judge’s career difficult, to starve the budgets of law enforcement institutions, or to offer easier access to government jobs and services to friendly judges and their families.

In response, most modern societies impose rules to make the judicial system immune to political influence. These rules secure the life-time tenure of judges and ban them from most outside jobs, especially in the executive. There are often similar rules protecting the independence of prosecutors. Are these rules sufficient to remove all influence of political power over judicial decisions? Some studies show that the judiciary favors elected politicians or their party when politicians control the nomination or promotion of the judges (Ramseyer and Rasmusen 2001; Sanchez-Martinez 2017; Mehmood 2019; Poblete-Cazenave 2021). As far as we are aware, however, there is no causal evidence showing whether judges favor politicians in office when politicians have no formal control over the judges’ careers. This is an important gap in the literature, since in a majority of countries, trial judges are not directly nominated or promoted by politicians (Garoupa and Ginsburg 2009). If judges who do not directly depend on politicians for their careers are still swayed by political power, we can conclude that simply removing formal powers to nominate and promote judges from politicians is insufficient to protect these judges from political influence.

In this paper, we study corruption cases called *Ações de Improbidade* ("improbity cases") involving local politicians in the trial courts of the Brazilian state and federal judiciaries. A range of formal rules ensuring that judges are immune to political influence are in place in Brazilian trial courts: Judges are difficult to remove, cannot be transferred to other positions against their will, and are not allowed to have any other job except teaching. Politicians have no direct influence over the judges’ careers—they are appointed by a competitive exam administered by the appeals court, which also determines promotions. Appeals court judges are nominated by the appeals court

itself, except for one fifth appointed by the state governor or the president. Finally, judges receive a very high salary, placing them among Brazil’s top earners. Similar rules apply to the public prosecutors who are in charge of the prosecution.

Knowing whether these rules are sufficient to prevent politics from influencing judicial decisions is challenging. If elected politicians are more likely to win in court than others are, it is hard to know if this difference is due to political influence or if they just tend to have stronger cases (Priest and Klein 1984). We solve this empirical challenge by using a close election regression discontinuity design, focusing on corruption cases filed before the election.<sup>1</sup> If close elections are decided at random, marginal electoral winners and losers will, on average, tend to be involved in similar corruption cases at the time of the election. We can then conclude that systematic differences in court outcomes between marginal electoral winners and losers are causally due to the election result. In our main regression, we find substantial effects of political power on judicial outcomes—marginal winners are 65 percent less likely to receive a penalty and 69 percent more likely to be acquitted than marginal losers are. There is no such difference for cases decided before the election.

In the second part of the paper, we ask *why* judges are less likely to convict politicians in power. First, we show evidence suggesting that the effect is not driven by mayors influencing judges through legal means—by hiring better lawyers. Marginal electoral winners do not increase the quantity or quality of their lawyers substantially more than electoral losers do after the election. Furthermore, there seems to be an effect of winning the election also for cases in which the lawyers have done all the formal work *before* the election.

We then show evidence that points to two non-legal mechanisms: favor exchanges and career concerns. While we cannot document a quid pro quo favor exchange, we argue that a collusive relationship between the mayor and the judge is more likely in districts with few judges. Consistent with such a mechanism, we find that the effect is driven by districts with only one or two judges. We do not, however, detect a larger effect when the court is located in the municipality of the mayor than when the court is located in a neighboring municipality. This result suggests that any favors offered to the judge by the mayor are not tied to the location of the court. For instance, the mayor offering contracts to the judge’s relatives is a more likely mechanism than, say,

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1. A similar regression discontinuity design is used by Sanchez-Martinez (2017), Assumpção and Trecenti (2020), and Poblete-Cazenave (2021).

municipal lawyers helping out in the court.

Career concerns seem, at first glance, unlikely to be an important explanation of our results—mayors play no role in appointing or promoting judges, and trial judges rely on the appeals court for their careers. Politicians at the state and federal levels do, however, have influence over the appeals courts—notably by appointing a share of the judges and determining the judiciary’s budget. A judge with career concerns might thus be reluctant to convict a mayor aligned with powerful political interests at the state or federal levels. Perhaps surprisingly, we find evidence consistent with career concerns being part of the explanation. First, we find that judges with a higher tendency to move between judicial districts and thus relying more on the appeals court for their careers are more influenced by the election. Second, our estimates indicate that the effect is larger if the judge is untenured and if the politician’s party has appointed appellate judges. In the Appendix, we present results suggesting that judges who convict mayors are more likely to be promoted by a seniority criterion than by a merit criterion.

We end our analysis of the mechanism by discussing five additional explanations we believe are unlikely to be major drivers of our result: Law enforcers not wanting to interfere with the local government due to social costs concerns, judges wrongly attributing winning a close election to be a signal of probity, elected politicians destroying evidence, judges being averse to media attention, and interlinkages between Ações de Improbidade and criminal cases.

A lower conviction rate among politicians in power gives politicians charged with corruption incentives to stand for election. In the final part of the paper, we show correlations consistent with such incentives leading to an adverse selection of politicians in elected offices. Politicians who become implicated in an Ação de Improbidade just before the election are estimated to be more likely to enter a mayoral race and to become the next mayor than could otherwise have been predicted.

The question of how to create a judicial system immune to the subversion of the politically powerful has captivated researchers at least since Montesquieu (1989), spawning a large literature across the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> The number of studies seeking to measure the degree to which judges act independently from the executive is, how-

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2. See Helmke and Rosenbluth (2009) and Hilbink and Ingram (2019) for recent surveys of the political science literature. Seminal studies include Landes and Posner (1975), Ramseyer (1994), Weingast (1997), and Glaeser and Shleifer (2002).

ever, limited.<sup>3</sup> Existing studies almost all take place in settings where politicians have control over the career paths of law enforcers. The only exception we are aware of is Assumpção and Trecenti (2020), also in the Brazilian setting, which find no evidence that elected politicians are favored in small-claims cases. Our main contribution is thus to demonstrate that politicians in power might receive a favorable treatment by the judicial system even when they have no formal control over the careers of judges or prosecutors.

We also see our paper as a contribution to the broader literature on political corruption. This literature has focused on when voters punish corruption.<sup>4</sup> There are, however, reasons to believe that electoral accountability alone cannot curb corruption.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Avis, Ferraz, and Finan (2018) find that while federal audits in Brazil tend to reduce corruption, this reduction is mostly due to an increase in the perceived *non-electoral* costs of engaging in corruption. Our study adds to a small number of papers shedding light on the legal costs of engaging in corruption, perhaps the most important non-electoral cost.<sup>6</sup> By showing that judges are biased towards elected politicians, we also contribute to the large literature on judicial bias, which tends to focus on ethnic or ideological biases.<sup>7</sup> Our paper further adds to the literature on political selection (e.g., Dal Bó et al. 2017; Cavalcanti, Daniele, and Galletta 2018; Fisman, Schulz, and Vig 2019; Artiles, Kleine-Rueschkamp, and León-Ciliotta, *forthcoming*) by showing that a legal system protecting the powerful might lead to an adverse selection of politicians. Finally, we contribute to the literature on how the structure of the judicial career might influence decisions. While this literature has mostly focused on elected or politically appointed judges and prosecutors (e.g.,

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3. See Ramseyer and Rasmusen (2001), Helmke (2005), Sanchez-Martinez (2017), Mehmood (2019), Assumpção and Trecenti (2020), and Poblete-Cazenave (2021). For related studies focusing on prosecutors or police see Nyhan and Rehavi (2017), Gordon (2009), Davis and White (2019), Michaelowa, Panda, and Martin (2019), and Downey (2021).

4. E.g., Ferraz and Finan (2008), Banerjee et al. (2014), and Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo (2019). See Ashworth (2012) for a review.

5. While Ferraz and Finan (2008) found that voters do punish corruption, electoral punishment might not be sufficient to deter corruption and term-limited politicians do not face reelection incentives (Barro 1973; Ferraz and Finan 2011).

6. This literature has focused on cross-country or cross-state correlations (e.g., Cordis 2009; Alt and Lassen 2008; Aaken, Feld, and Voigt 2010). Exceptions include Litschig and Zamboni (2019) and Alt and Lassen (2014). Closest to our paper are Gordon (2009), Nyhan and Rehavi (2017), and Davis and White (2019) who study partisan bias among prosecutors in corruption cases.

7. E.g., Shayo and Zussman (2011), Abrams, Bertrand, and Mullainathan (2012), Alesina and Ferrara (2014), Rehavi and Starr (2014), Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang (2018), and Cohen and Yang (2019).

Berdej  and Yuchtman 2013; Lim 2013; Nyhan and Rehavi 2017; Downey 2021), we show evidence suggesting that career concerns could affect judicial decisions also in settings where judges are selected by competitive public exams.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we describe the legal remedies against corruption in Brazil, the careers of Brazilian judges and prosecutors, and which tools Brazilian local politicians have at their disposal to benefit or harm law enforcers. In Section 3, we explain how we constructed the data set of corruption cases involving local politicians, and in Section 4 we introduce the empirical strategy we use to estimate how being elected affects judicial decisions. We present our main results, showing that politicians are less likely to be convicted of corruption if they win the election, in Section 5, while in Section 6 we seek to explain why. In Section 7, we show that politicians have a higher probability of standing for election and of becoming the next mayor if they are implicated in an *A  o de Improbidade*. We conclude in Section 8.

## 2 Institutional context

In this section, we first describe the legal remedies against corruption among elected officials in Brazil, with a focus on *A  es de Improbidade*. Then we describe in detail the judges and the prosecutors who are involved in the cases and the general organization of the judicial system. Finally, we describe the relevant features of the Brazilian government. All rules described in this section are documented in Appendix A.3.

### 2.1 The legal remedies against political corruption in Brazil

There are three types of civil suits addressing corruption and less serious administrative malfeasance: *A  o Civil de Improbidade Administrativa* ("A  o de Improbidade"), *A  o Civil P blica*, and *A  o Popular*. In this paper, we do not consider criminal cases against corruption. Criminal cases against a mayoral candidate are sent to the appeals court if the politician wins the election—a rule colloquially known as *foro privilegiado*—making it difficult to interpret a close election regression discontinuity estimate for these cases. Among the civil suits, we focus on *A  es de*

Improbidade since they are the most serious and they cannot be settled.<sup>8</sup>

Ações de Improbidade can be filed against any act by a public official that either violates administrative principles, causes damage to the treasury, or leads to illicit enrichment of the official. Typical cases involve the hiring of public workers without proper procedure and fraud in government contracting. Only the public prosecutor or the entity harmed by the corrupt act can bring the lawsuit. We consider only cases filed by the public prosecutor in this paper. The possible penalties are loss of office, loss of political rights for 3–10 years, reimbursing the treasury, fines up to 100 times the monthly wage, and the prohibition of receiving government contracts for 3–10 years. Politicians see the loss of political rights as one of the most severe penalties since it includes not being able to run for elected office.

The cases filed by the public prosecutor are typically initiated by someone filing a complaint to the prosecutor. The prosecutor then investigates (*inquérito civil*) and chooses whether to file a case depending on the outcome of the investigation. Ações de Improbidade involving local politicians are tried in the federal judiciary if the alleged corruption or malfeasance involves funds transferred to the municipality by the federal government.

An example of a typical case in our data is an Ação de Improbidade filed by the public prosecutor against the mayor of the municipality Fartura in the state of São Paulo. The mayor had awarded a contract to provide fuel to the municipality to a firm owned by the son of the vice mayor, which is illegal. The judge, however, acquitted the mayor, arguing the misconduct was not done in "bad faith".<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 Brazilian trial court judges and prosecutors

Judges and public prosecutors at the trial courts in the state and federal judiciaries are formally independent of politics. State and federal judges are appointed by a competitive public exam administered by the state appeals courts (*Tribunal de Justiça*) and the federal appeals courts (*Tribunal Regional Federal*), respectively. Similarly, the public prosecutors are appointed by a competitive public exam administered by

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8. Ação Popular can only reverse political or administrative decisions, and leads to no further penalties for the politician, whereas Ação Civil Pública can lead only to fines and injunctions.

9. In Ações de Improbidade it is typically not enough to demonstrate that the law was broken—it must also be proven that it was broken in "bad faith." This requirement is a widespread reason for acquittals. Sentences including the words *não* ("no") and *dolo* ("intentional misconduct") appear in 70 percent of all acquittals for which we have the legal justification.



the state or federal chief prosecutor. Judges and prosecutors earn a very high wage—just their official wage places them among Brazil’s top earners, not counting several perquisites such as housing allowances.

Judges and prosecutors are insulated from political influence by three constitutional provisions (see Appendix A.3). Politicians at the federal and state levels have, however, some formal powers over the judiciaries and the public prosecution. We explain these powers, the career paths of judges and prosecutors, and the organization of the judicial system in the following subsections.

### 2.2.1 The judiciary

State and federal trial judges enter service as substitute judges (*juiz substituto*). After a two-year probation, if the judge did not commit any irregularities, she is granted tenure and becomes a regular judge (*juiz vitalício*), which happens almost always. Later, the judge can be promoted to a court chief judge (*juiz titular de vara*), which means she is now tied to a specific court in a low-level district, typically in a small municipality, and is the first step to progressing to higher-level districts and, eventually, to the appeals court.<sup>10</sup>

Promotions are dependent on decisions made by the appeals court on criteria that alternate between seniority and merit.<sup>11</sup> The seniority criterion depends on the time of service and can be ignored only by a two-thirds vote of the appeals court. The merit criterion is based on a ballot vote among the appeals court judges. The chief appeals judge chooses among the judges who received the most votes. The promotion of a judge who appears in the merit list three times in a row or five times in total is, however, mandatory. In federal courts, the president has the final call on who is promoted by merit to the appeals court among the three judges who received the most votes.

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10. The court chief judge is required to live in the judicial district she is stationed, except by authorization of the appeals court.

11. This alternation is implemented at the *entrância* level in the state judiciary and directly from the first to the second instance in the federal judiciary. For example, if the last promotion to some level was by the seniority criterion, the next promotion to the same level must be according to the merit criterion. Open positions can be filled either by judges in the same level (*remoção*) or by judges from the level below (*promoção*). In the state judiciaries, *remoção* follows the same alternating criteria as *promoção*, and judges from the *entrância* below are considered for positions filled by the merit criterion only if there are no interested judges in the same *entrância*. In the federal judiciary, *remoção* is always by the seniority criterion and judges from the same region (*região*) seeking a position by *remoção* are prioritized.



Another formal influence of politics is that one fifth of the state and federal appeals court judges are nominated by the state governor and the president, respectively. These seats are filled alternately by public prosecutors and lawyers. The organizations representing public prosecutors or lawyers prepare a list of six candidates that are reduced to three by the appeals court.

The movement of judges between courts is highly dynamic (see, e.g., Dahis, Schiavon, and Scot 2020). Judges that are not yet court chief can be freely transferred between judicial districts and regular judges can substitute for another judge or be designated "auxiliary" judge in a different, sometimes higher-level, district or the appeals court. These movements between judicial districts depend on decisions made by the appeals court and thus represent an extra source of influence of the appeals court over lower-level courts.

### **2.2.2 The public prosecution**

The state and federal public prosecution have a parallel structure to the judiciary with sections in each judicial district. The public prosecution (*Ministério Público*) is formally independent of both the executive and the judiciary and is often called the fourth branch of government. Public prosecutors also receive tenure after two years of service and are promoted by the chief prosecutor. They are required to live in the judicial district they are stationed, except by authorization of the chief prosecutor. The state and federal chief prosecutors are appointed by the governor and the president, respectively, for a two-year term with the possibility of a one-term renewal. In practice, the governor and the president choose the chief prosecutor from a list of three candidates prepared after a vote among the prosecutors, but they are not obliged to choose from this list. Prosecutors have broad discretion in deciding which cases to work on, but any decision to drop a case is subject to review by the chief prosecutor.

## **2.3 Brazilian mayors**

Brazilian mayors are elected via a first-past-the-post electoral system, except for cities with a population greater than 200,000, which have a second-round run-off between the top two candidates if none received more than 50 percent of the votes.

The main responsibilities of the mayor are to administrate the city budget and

to collect municipal taxes. In doing so, the mayor has the power to contract firms and hire municipal workers. Many municipal employees are hired via a competitive civil service exam and receive tenure after three years of service, but there are some categories of jobs that give the mayor almost total discretion in deciding whom to hire, such as commissioned posts and temporary jobs.

## 3 Data

In this section, we explain how we built a data set of Ações de Improbidade involving local politicians and present summary statistics.

### 3.1 Judicial data

Our main data source is the daily official publication of each appeals court, called *Diário de Justiça*. The law requires appeals courts to publish all judicial decisions in these outlets, including trial court decisions, among several other minor statements about the case. In Figure A.2 in the Appendix, we show an extract of a Diário de Justiça publication. To generate a data set from this source, we use regular expressions to select all publications on Ações de Improbidade and then extract the names of litigants, lawyers and judges, the judicial district, and decisions. We use all available issues of the Diário de Justiça across all state and federal appeals courts, except the state appeals courts of Rio Grande do Sul and Distrito Federal.<sup>12</sup> In Figure A.1, we show the available coverage of the Diário de Justiça over time by appeals court.

Each case is identified by a unique number, allowing us to track cases over time. This number includes the year the case was filed. In the case of a final decision, we extract the penalties applied to each defendant, where this is explicitly stated. A defendant is considered convicted if he or she is found to have received a penalty. A defendant is considered acquitted if there is a final decision containing the expression "julgo improcedente" (petition denied) or explicitly stating that the defendant was acquitted (*absolvido*). If we are not able to identify any final decision, we code the

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12. The Diário de Justiça of the state judiciary in Rio Grande do Sul does not record the court case type (*classe*), so we were unable to identify which cases were Ações de Improbidade. Distrito Federal is the territory of Brazil's capital and federal government and does not have any municipalities or local elections.

case as not yet decided.<sup>13</sup> Note, however, that being *coded* as not decided does not necessarily mean that the case has not been decided in reality. It could be that we have missed some decisions or that there has been a final decision in the case before our first available date in the Diário de Justiça. The latter is not infrequent—there are publications regarding appeals and sentence execution in a case even after the final decision. We still keep these cases in our sample, since removing them in an automated way is tricky. As the start of the Diário de Justiça is predetermined, keeping these cases should not lead to any bias in our estimates, except that we will consistently overstate the number of undecided cases.

The Diário de Justiça lists the names of the lawyers registered on the case in every publication, in most states together with their unique registration number with the *Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil* (OAB). We use this information to create a data set with all the lawyers registered on each Ação de Improbidade at each publication date. From this data set, we calculate *lawyer experience* by the number of previous Ações de Improbidade that the lawyer has worked on and *lawyer success rate* by the share of these cases that has led to a full acquittal.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the Diário de Justiça records promotions of judges. We extract this information for the courts that consistently record if the promotion was by the seniority or merit criterion.<sup>15</sup> We were not able to consistently identify the judge in the state judiciaries of Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Piauí. These judiciaries are thus excluded whenever we use judge information in our regressions. The *Conselho Nacional de Justiça* provides the number of chief judge positions (*varas*) by judicial district.

We complement the Diários de Justiça with data from the courts' online systems provided by *Digesto*—a legal intelligence firm. This gives us the exact filing date of the case, the disputed value, and the case subject. See Section A.4 for details.

## 3.2 Electoral data and matching

We use election results and candidate characteristics from the electoral authorities (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*) and construct a data set of all candidates for mayor

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13. A publication in the Diário de Justiça is considered to be a final decision if it contains any of the phrases "julgo procedente," "julgo parcialmente procedente" or "julgo improcedente."

14. A decision is considered a full acquittal if it contains the expression "julgo improcedente".

15. These courts are TRF2, TRF5, TJAC, TJAL, TJBA, TJCE, TJES, TJGO, TJMA, TJMS, TJMT, TJMG, TJPE, TJSC, TJSP, TJRJ and TJRO. The abbreviations TRF and TJ stand for Tribunal Regional Federal (federal court) and Tribunal de Justiça (state court), respectively.

between 2004 and 2016.<sup>16</sup> We keep only candidates who either won the election or received the second-most number of votes—the runner-up.<sup>17</sup> We match court cases to politicians on perfect name matching, ignoring accents.<sup>18</sup> We match only within states—if a defendant in a case in the state judiciary of Paraná has the same name as a candidate in the state of Goiás, it is not considered a match.

Our main estimation sample consists of all cases that are *pending at the time of the election*: Cases filed before the election but with no identified final decision prior to the election.<sup>19</sup> We consider only cases with the public prosecutor among the plaintiffs. In the Appendix section A.5, we compare all close election candidates with the candidates appearing in our sample. The candidates in our sample differ from the average candidate by having more political experience: Over 75% of the candidates are ex-mayors. This is expected since a politician need to be in office to commit an act of administrative improbity.

### 3.3 Summary statistics

In Table 1, we present summary statistics for our main estimation sample of all identified Ações de Improbidade involving candidates in the 2004–2016 local elections, pending at the time of the election. There are 4,484 observations. Most of the cases—81 percent—involve previous mayors, and 36 percent involve incumbent mayors running for reelection. We observe the politician receive a penalty in 13 percent of the cases, while in 13 percent of the cases the politician is acquitted and in 67 percent we have not been able to identify any final decision.<sup>20</sup> Note that due to the discussion in Section 3.1, the true share of undecided cases is lower. The cases have a long duration—for cases that received a final decision, the average time between filing and final decision is almost seven years.

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16. Data on municipalities such as population, GDP, and geographic coordinates are all from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

17. In elections with a second round run-off, we focus on the second round. In Appendix A.7, we show that the main result is robust to including only first-round elections.

18. In Appendix A.7, we show that the main result is robust to excluding common names.

19. When we do not know the exact filing date, we keep a case only if it has a publication the Diário de Justiça before the election or the filing year inferred from the case number is before the election year.

20. In the remaining 7% of the cases, we have identified a final decision without being able to ascertain whether the politician was acquitted or convicted.

Table 1: Summary statistics

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Incumbent mayor	0.36	0.48	4,484
Incumbent city councillor	0.02	0.14	4,484
Ex mayor	0.81	0.39	4,484
Politician convicted	0.13	0.34	4,484
Politician acquitted	0.13	0.33	4,484
Court case not yet decided	0.67	0.47	4,484
Federal court	0.39	0.49	4,484
2016 election	0.48	0.50	4,484
2012 election	0.32	0.46	4,484
Years between filing and decision	6.71	3.64	1,492
Years between filing and election	3.88	2.80	4,479
Years between election and decision	3.29	3.05	1,492
Municipality population (1000)	71.09	400.43	4,481
Court located in municipality	0.35	0.48	4,484
Number of judges in district	3.93	10.20	4,481
Number of lawyers	3.59	3.93	2,836
Average lawyer experience	9.94	12.31	2,836

*Notes:* Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. *Politician convicted* is an indicator for whether the politician is recorded to have received any penalty, whereas *Politician acquitted* is an indicator for the final decision containing the expression "julgo improcedente" (petition denied) or explicitly stating that the defendant was acquitted. The experience of a lawyer is defined as the number of other Ações de Improbidade she has worked on prior to the election.

## 4 Empirical strategy

We want to estimate the effect of political power on judicial decisions. If politicians in power are shown to be more likely to win in court than opposition politicians, this difference in win rates does not prove that decisions are affected by the political power of the litigant—elected politicians and politicians out of office are likely involved in different types of cases. The ideal experiment would be to randomly allocate elected offices to politicians and look at the effect on judicial decisions on *already filed* cases. We exploit close elections to simulate this experiment. In particular, we look at corruption cases filed before the election, and not yet decided at the time of the election, comparing politicians who marginally won the election with politicians who marginally lost the election. The idea is that the winner of a close election is as good as randomly determined. Thus, winning and losing politicians should, on average, be involved in similar cases before the election, and any systematic difference in judicial decisions has to be due to the outcome of the election.

As our main specification, we use the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The specification for the local linear regression is

$$y_{ic} = \alpha + \beta E_i + \gamma M_i + \delta E_i M_i + \varepsilon_{ic} \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  is a politician and  $c$  is a corruption case. The variable  $M_i$  is the electoral win margin of the politician, and  $E_i$  indicates whether the politician was elected.<sup>21</sup> The outcome  $y_{ic}$  varies, but in the baseline model it is a dummy for whether the politician was convicted. To avoid researcher discretion in the choice of control variables, we tie our hands by using no controls. As a placebo check, we run the above regression for cases decided before the election. If close elections are indeed randomly determined, we should not see any effect of the election on these cases. We also report the main result using standard local linear specifications for different bandwidths, including the Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012) optimal bandwidth. We cluster standard errors at the municipality by election-year level.

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21. The win margin is defined as the difference in the votes received by the elected mayor and the candidate receiving the second-most number of votes, divided by the total votes cast.

## 5 Main results: Are winners of close elections less likely to be convicted?

In Table A.1, we show the results of the estimation of Equation 1 with a wide range of pre-election covariates as outcome variables. If close elections are indeed randomly determined, there should be no systematic differences between marginal winners and losers in these variables. In the first two rows, we consider all candidates in the 2012–2016 local elections. Marginal winners are not significantly less likely than marginal losers are to be involved in an Ação de Improbidade at the time of the election, or earlier. Thus, less corrupt politicians do not seem to systematically win in close races. The regression discontinuity histogram in Figure A.4 in the Appendix also shows no evidence of a discontinuous decrease in politicians charged with corruption at the threshold for winning the election. In the rest of Table A.1, we show the balance within the estimation sample of Ações de Improbidade pending at the time of the election. The results are consistent with the outcome of close elections being randomly determined. The estimated difference between marginal winners and losers is statistically significant at the five percent level for only one variable—whether the politician has higher education. In the Appendix Table A.6, we show that our main result is robust to controlling for all the covariates where the estimated difference is statistically significant at the 15% level and to controlling for all the remaining covariates in Table A.1.

In Column 1 of Table 2, we present the result of estimating Equation 1 with outcome variable whether the politician is convicted. We estimate that marginal electoral winners are 11 percentage points less likely than marginal electoral losers are to receive a penalty. This effect is sizable, given that the estimated conviction rate among marginal losers is 17 percent. The coefficient is statistically significant at the one percent level. In Figure 1, we show a clear downwards jump in the rate of convictions when the number of votes passes the threshold necessary to win the election. We present local linear regression discontinuity estimates for different bandwidth sizes in Figure A.5, including the Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012) optimal bandwidth. The optimal bandwidth selectors choose bandwidths of 12 and 22 percentage points, but the effect is statistically significant at the five percent level for any bandwidth greater than five percentage points.

In Column 2 of Table 2, we show the result of the placebo test. Reassuringly, there



Table 2: Main regression discontinuity results

	Politician convicted (1)	Placebo (2)	Politician acquitted (3)	Court case decided (4)
Elected (se)	-0.11*** (0.036)	-0.0017 (0.016)	0.067** (0.032)	-0.04 (0.050)
N	4484	6763	4484	4484
Bandwidth	0.117	0.166	0.097	0.129
Mean Marg. Loser	0.17	0.053	0.065	0.31

*Notes:* Regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .

is no effect of winning the election on cases decided *before* the election. The absence of a discontinuity in the conviction rate for cases decided before the election can be visually inspected in Figure A.3 in the Appendix. In Table A.7 in the Appendix, we show that our main result is robust to excluding cases with no pre-election publication in the Diário de Justiça, and in Table A.8 in the Appendix, we show that the main result is robust to various levels of standard error clustering.

There could be two reasons why a defendant in an Ação de Improbidade has not been convicted: He has been acquitted, or he is still waiting for a decision. In Columns 3 and 4 in Table 2, we consider these two outcomes. The point estimates suggest that the main reason for a lower conviction rate among marginal winners is that they are more likely to be acquitted. We estimate that candidates are 6.7 percentage points more likely to be acquitted and 4.0 percentage points less likely to have their case decided if they win the election. Only the effect on acquittals is statistically significant. Moreover, in Section 5.1, we show that there is no sign of an increase in convictions of the elected mayor after his term is finished, indicating that judges are not just postponing convictions of electoral winners.

In Table A.2, we decompose our main result by office and the various types of penalties. We detect statistically significant effects across all the penalties.

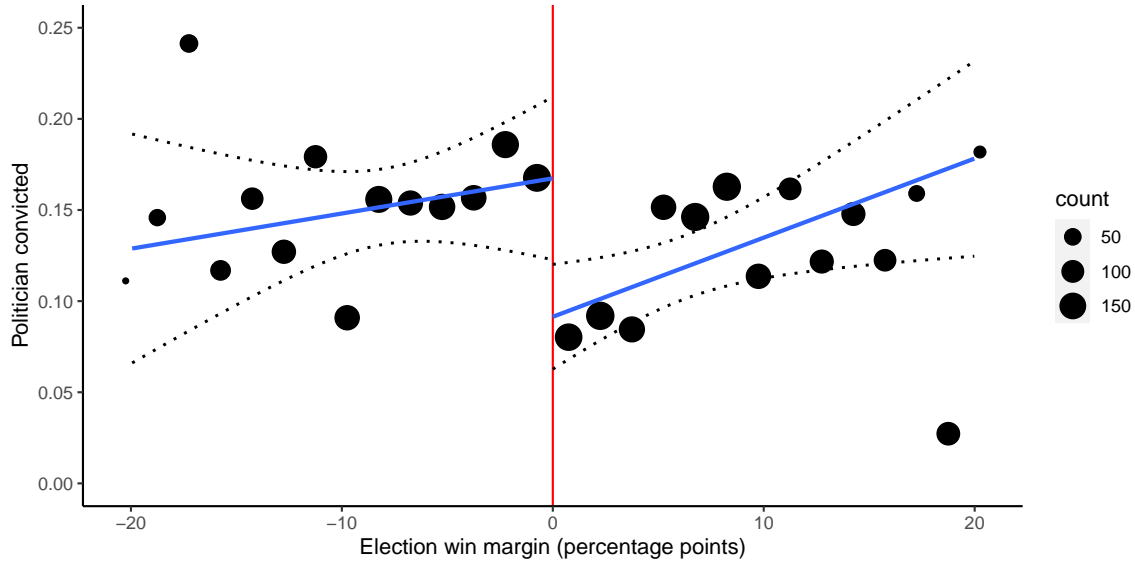


Figure 1: Regression discontinuity plot. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. A politician is considered convicted if he or she is recorded to have received a penalty in the Diário de Justiça. The size of the dots indicates the number of observations in each bin.

## 5.1 The timing of the effect

When does the gap in conviction rates among marginal winners and losers appear? Does the gap show any sign of closing after the term of the marginal winner as mayor is over? To answer these questions, we estimate Equation 1 with outcome variable whether the case has ended in a conviction within  $x$  years after the election where  $x$  varies from zero to six years. Figure 2 presents the results. The dotted and the solid lines show the estimates for marginal winners and losers, respectively, using the local linear fit. The regression discontinuity estimate is the difference between the two lines. The estimates indicate that there are almost no convictions involving marginal winners in the first year after they take office. The slope of the solid line is steeper than the dotted line up until 1.5 years after the election, meaning that there are also more convictions involving marginal losers in the second year after the election. From about 1.5 years and onward, the two lines run in parallel, suggesting that the number of convictions involving marginal winners and losers is roughly equal.

Interestingly, judges are not just postponing convictions until the mayor is out of office—we do not see more decisions involving marginal winners than involving losers in the two years after the mandate of the marginal winner is over. Instead, there

seems to be a permanent gap in the number of convictions, with no sign of closing even six years after the election. The difference in the number of convictions between marginal winners and losers is statistically significant at the five percent level starting from the first year after the election.

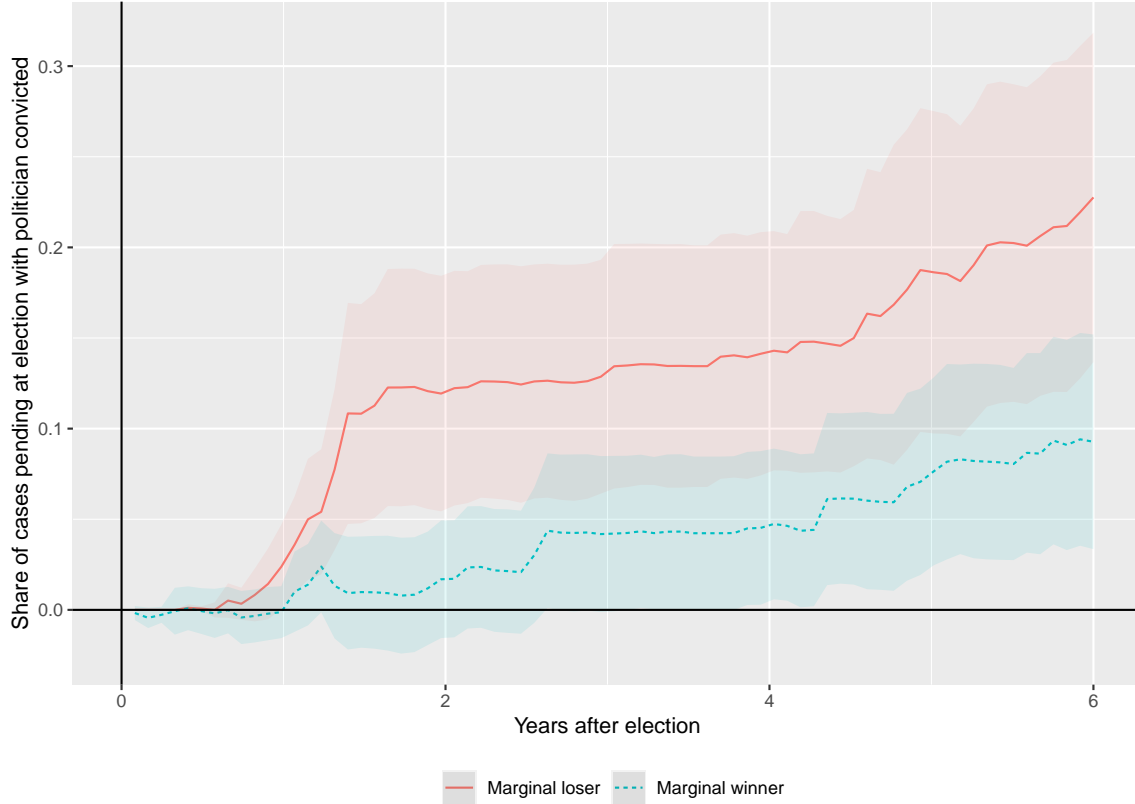


Figure 2: The timing of the effect. The estimated shares of Ações de Improbidade pending at the time of the election in which the politician has been convicted. Excluding the 2016 election. Estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The outcome variable is whether the politician is convicted within  $x$  years of the election. The estimates for marginal winners and losers are obtained using the local linear fit. 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Standard errors clustered at the municipality by election-year level.

## 6 Mechanisms: Why are politicians in power convicted at a lower rate?

There could be many reasons why politicians are less likely to be convicted of corruption if they get elected. In this section, we first show evidence suggesting that the effect is not driven by mayors influencing judges through legal means—by hiring better lawyers. Then we offer some evidence supporting two *non-legal* mechanisms: favor exchange and career concerns. Finally, we discuss other potential mechanisms.

### 6.1 Do electoral winners have superior lawyers?

Electoral winners might be convicted at a lower rate because they are represented by better lawyers. The most direct test of whether our result is driven by lawyers is to measure if marginal electoral winners tend to register more or better lawyers on their cases than losers do after the election. This test is possible since the Diário de Justiça lists the lawyers in each publication regarding the case. As proxies for the quality of each lawyer we use *lawyer experience* defined as the number of other Ações de Improbidade the lawyer has worked on before the election, and *lawyer success rate* defined as the share of these cases in which there was a full acquittal, conditional on being decided before the election. For each case, we calculate the average quantity and quality of lawyers in Diário de Justiça publications after and before the election, and define the *post-election increase* as the difference between these two numbers.

In Table 3, we show the result from estimating Equation 1 with outcome variable the post-election increase in average lawyer quantity and quality. The point estimates indicate that, on average, marginal winners and losers increase the number of lawyers by, respectively, 0.78 and 0.68 after the election. The difference in effects is not statistically significant. In contrast, the lawyers working for marginal winners have, on average, experience from 0.6 more cases after the election, whereas the same number for marginal losers is -1.9. This difference is statistically significant at the five percent level. Compared to the average lawyer experience of ten cases in our sample, however, this difference is relatively small and unlikely to substantially affect the conviction rate. Finally, there is virtually no difference between marginal winners and losers in average lawyer success. In sum, marginal winners do not increase the quantity or quality of their lawyers substantially more than marginal losers do after the election.

Table 3: The effect of winning the election on the quantity and quality of lawyers

	<b>Post-election increase in:</b>		
	Number of lawyers (1)	Average lawyer experience (2)	Average lawyer success (3)
Elected (se)	0.1 (0.347)	2.5** (1.132)	0.01 (0.025)
N	1278	1278	840
Bandwidth	0.20	0.13	0.17
Mean Marg. Loser	0.68	-1.9	-0.017

*Notes:* Regression discontinuity estimates where the outcome variable is the difference between the average of the respective variables across all publications made in the Diário de Justiça after the election and the same average before the election. Only cases with publications in the Diário de Justiça both before and after the election. The experience of a lawyer is defined as the number of other Ações de Improbidade she has worked on prior to the election. Her past success is the share of these cases which has lead to a full acquittal, conditional on the case having been decided before the election. Coefficients estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .

There might be changes to the quality of legal counsel that looking at the lawyers formally registered on the cases does not detect. As an additional test, we consider cases where the lawyers have done all the formal work before the election.<sup>22</sup> If electoral winners are convicted at a lower rate due to having better lawyers, we should expect to see no effect of winning the election on such cases. In the Panel A of Table 4, we show the outcome of estimating Equation 1 for cases where the lawyers made their final allegations before the election.<sup>23</sup> While the relatively small sample size ( $N = 201$ ) does not allow us to make strong conclusions, we estimate a 28.4 percentage point lower conviction rate for marginal winners than for marginal losers in these cases. In addition to suggesting that lawyers cannot be the only reason marginal winners are convicted at a lower rate, this result indicates that part of the effect comes from politicians influencing the *judge*, as opposed to from politicians influencing prosecutors and witnesses.

## 6.2 Favor exchange

Mayors might seek to influence the judge through favors or threats. For instance, they can award municipal jobs or contracts to relatives of the judge or use municipal lawyers to help the judge in her work.<sup>24</sup> While we do not have direct evidence on such quid pro quo exchanges, we consider two indirect tests. First, it is likely easier for the mayor to cultivate a collusive relationship with the judge if there are few judges in the district.<sup>25</sup> Second, some favors—e.g., municipal lawyers helping out in the court—are easier to provide if the distance between the court and the municipality is small.

For the first set of results in Panel B of Table 4, we divide our sample into politicians tried in a district with more than the median (two) number of judges and politicians tried in a district with only one or two judges and estimate Equation 1 for these two sub-samples. The point estimate for the politicians tried in districts with

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22. In our sample—due to overcrowded dockets—it typically takes several years between the lawyers have made their final allegations (*alegações finais*) and the judge’s decision.

23. We consider the final allegations to have been made if there has been a publication regarding the case including the term *alegações finais* in the Diário de Justiça before the election.

24. Cash bribes is another possible favor. While judicial corruption exists in Brazil, we see cash bribes as unlikely to drive our results since both the marginal loser and the marginal winner arguably would be equally willing to bribe the judge. Also, as shown in Section A.7.3, the effect is, if anything, larger for less liquidity-constrained politicians.

25. Since cases are randomly assigned to judges, a mayor needs a quid pro quo relationship with all the judges in the district to successfully collude with the judiciary.

few judges is 16 percentage points, compared to only one percentage point for districts with more judges. The difference is statistically significant, with a  $p$ -value of 0.02. This result is consistent with the effect being partly driven by a collusive relationship between the judge and the mayor. In the Appendix Table A.10, we show that this result is not driven by the size of the municipality—the estimated effect of winning the election on convictions is essentially the same for large and small municipalities.<sup>26</sup>

In the second set of results in Panel B of Table 4, we exploit the fact that judicial districts are typically composed of several municipalities, with the largest municipality hosting the court. We can thus divide our sample into politicians tried in a court located in their municipality and politicians tried in a neighboring municipality. The point estimates are similar for both cases, and the difference is not statistically significant.<sup>27</sup> This result suggests that any favors being exchanged are not tied to the location of the court. For instance, the mayor offering of contracts to relatives the judge is a more likely mechanism than, say, municipal lawyers helping out in the court.

### 6.3 Judicial careers

Mayors play no formal role in the promotion of judges.<sup>28</sup> Trial judges may, nevertheless, have career incentives to be lenient with mayors. State and federal politicians—connected to local politicians through party networks—determine the salaries of judges, the judiciary’s budget, and appoint some appeals court judges. These formal powers mean that the court administration, headed by the appeals court’s chief justice, becomes politicized.<sup>29</sup> The court administration could use its power over the allocation of substitute judges or promotions by the merit criterion to exert pressure on trial judges. In this section, we show four pieces of evidence consistent with judges favoring politicians in power due to career concerns. The first three are based on the heterogeneity of the regression discontinuity results. We show that the election has a higher impact on: Judges who tend to switch between judicial districts, untenured

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26. Larger municipalities tend to be in districts with more judges. The number of judges in a district, however, also depends on the number and size of the other municipalities in the district and on whether the case is filed in a state court or in a federal court.

27. In the Appendix Table A.10, we show the results remain unchanged when we also consider the median distance between the municipality and the court.

28. Many of the points in this section also apply to prosecutors. Since we lack data on the careers of the prosecutors, however, we focus on the judges.

29. See, e.g., Zaffalon (2018).



judges, and judges sentencing a mayor whose party has appointed appellate judges. The fourth piece of evidence, which we show in the Appendix Table A.12, suggests that judges who convict elected mayors are more likely to be promoted by seniority than by merit.

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, judges frequently move between judicial districts, and the appeals court plays an important role in determining these movements. Judges who tend to switch between judicial districts might worry that their decisions in politically sensitive cases could influence their careers. We measure a judge’s *career instability* by the probability that the judge works in different districts in two randomly drawn days in the two years before the election.<sup>30</sup> To prevent that the election influences the judge’s identity, we focus on the *pre-election judge*, the judge on the case in the last publication in the Diário de Justiça before the election. Consistent with career concerns, we estimate in the first of results of the Panel C of Table 4 that winning the election reduces convictions by 18 percentage points if the pre-election judge has a higher than median career instability, compared to 1.5 percentage points otherwise. The *p*-value of this difference in effects is 0.06.

In the second result of Panel C, we use another measure of career stability—whether the judge is tenured. Judges receive tenure after two years on the job and before that are more susceptible to influence by the appeals court. Before a judge’s tenure, the appeals court determines their stationing between districts and has the power to fire them from the job. While the limited number of untenured judges in our sample makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions, the point estimates indicate that untenured judges are substantially more influenced by the election: The coefficient for untenured judges is more than twice as large as the coefficient for tenured judges.

Suppose mayors are favored due to the judges’ career concerns. Then, we might expect the effect to be larger for politicians from the party in charge of appointing appellate judges—the governor’s party for state judges and the president’s party for federal judges. In the third result of Panel C, we assess whether the effect is larger if the mayor’s party has appointed appellate judges in the past—i.e., current appellate judges are likely to have been appointed by the mayor’s party. The point estimate is 57% higher for decisions involving mayors with such party connections than for other decisions, although we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no differences.<sup>31</sup>

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30. In the Appendix Table A.10, we show that the results are similar if we instead focus on the past year and the past three years.

31. In the Appendix Table A.10, we show the result is similar if the mayor’s party appoints appellate

Table 4: Heterogeneous effects: Testing mechanisms

		Coef.	(se)	N	Band- width	Mean Marg. Loser	p-value of Diff.
<b>A: Lawyers</b>							
Case ready for decision before election	Yes	−0.284*	(0.152)	201	0.12	0.16	0.25
	No	−0.105***	(0.036)	4283	0.13	0.17	
<b>B: Favor exchange</b>							
More than median (two) judges in district	Yes	−0.009	(0.045)	1698	0.14	0.09	0.02
	No	−0.163***	(0.048)	2783	0.12	0.21	
The court is located in the municipality	Yes	−0.102**	(0.049)	2130	0.13	0.13	0.90
	No	−0.110**	(0.049)	2354	0.14	0.20	
<b>C: Judicial careers</b>							
Judge has above median (0.3) career instability	Yes	−0.180**	(0.070)	994	0.12	0.19	0.06
	No	−0.015	(0.054)	995	0.21	0.11	
Judge tenured	Yes	−0.107**	(0.048)	1778	0.13	0.15	0.31
	No	−0.254*	(0.138)	201	0.14	0.24	
Politician’s party has appointed appellate judges	Yes	−0.156***	(0.053)	1553	0.11	0.18	0.35
	No	−0.090*	(0.047)	2931	0.13	0.17	

*Notes:* Regression discontinuity estimates for different sub-samples.  $p$ -value of Difference is the  $p$ -value of the difference in estimated effects between the two sub-samples, assuming that the two sub-samples are independently drawn. A case is considered ready for decision before the election if there has been a publication regarding the case including the term *alegações finais* in the Diário de Justiça before the election. The number of judges is calculated as the number of regular judge positions (*varas*) in the judicial district, excluding substitute judges. The *career instability* of a judge is the probability that the judge is working in different judicial districts in two randomly chosen days in the two years before the election. A judge is considered not tenured if she has less than two years of experience. To avoid censoring we here exclude cases decided shorter than two years before the start of the Diário de Justiça. A party has appointed appellate judges if it has been the governor's (president's) party for cases in the state (federal) judiciary at any time since 2002. Coefficients estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level. \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

In the Appendix Section A.8, we select all decisions made during the four years the mayor is still in office and look at the future careers of the judges who made these decisions. Conviction decisions are correlated only with promotions by seniority, which are usually mechanical, in contrast to promotions by merit that depend on a vote by the appellate judges.

## 6.4 Other mechanisms

### 6.4.1 Psychological mechanisms

Law enforcers could be more lenient with electoral winners without expecting anything in return. For instance, moving forward with a case involving an elected politician could impede the functioning of local government, and it might be better for society to wait until the politician's mandate is over. Given that we do not see any sign of an increase in the number of decisions involving marginal winners after the end of the mandate (Figure 2), we doubt, however, that this mechanism is the main driver of our result.

Another example of such a mechanism is that judges could wrongly attribute who wins in a close election to be a signal of probity. This mistake could happen if, for instance, electoral winners are less likely to be corrupt than electoral losers are, and the judge is not aware that the election was closely contested. We do not have a good way of testing this mechanism. It seems unlikely, however, that the judge, who is required to reside in the judicial district and often would serve as an electoral judge overseeing the local election, does not know that an election was decided with a small win margin.

### 6.4.2 Destruction of evidence

A large share of the evidence used to convict in an Ação de Improbidade is in the form of documents. If such documents are in the hands of the municipality, an elected politician is in a good position to destroy evidence, making it harder to convict politicians in power. There are two reasons to believe that the destruction of evidence is not the main driver of our result. Most importantly, the prosecution collects most of the evidence during the investigations before they file the case (*inquérito civil*)—before the election. Also, in Section 6.1 we found that there seems to be an effect for judges at the time of the decision.

cases ready for decision at the time of the election. There is no production of evidence after the case is ready for decision, except under extraordinary circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

### 6.4.3 Media attention

Since judges seem to postpone decisions involving politicians in power, one explanation could be that judges do not want to decide politically sensitive cases to avoid media attention. If this were the mechanism driving our result, we would expect, however, to also see fewer acquittals involving electoral winners, since acquitting an elected politician of corruption charges have the potential to generate much press attention. Also, in Table A.11 in the Appendix, we find no clear relationship between local media presence and the effect on court outcomes of winning the election.

### 6.4.4 Spillovers from criminal cases

Mayors in Brazil have special privileges in criminal court cases called *foro especial por prerrogativa de função*. Criminal cases involving mayors are tried in the appeals court, not in the trial courts. The accusation of a politician in an Ação de Improbidade often involve criminal acts, which means that there might be a criminal case running in parallel, investigating some of the same facts. If a mayoral candidate wins the election, any criminal case in the trial court is sent to the appeals court. This change in the jurisdiction over criminal cases can impact Ações de Improbidade for two reasons. First, it becomes harder for the prosecutor in the Ação de Improbidade to collaborate with the prosecutor in the criminal case. Second, the Ação de Improbidade judge must take into account criminal acquittals due to a ruling over a fact. These interlinkages between criminal cases and Ações de Improbidade cannot, however, be the only explanation of our result. We have collected criminal cases involving local politicians in the state of São Paulo, which represent 8% of all cases in our sample. There are four times as many Ações de Improbidade as there are criminal cases. Thus, even if each criminal case is related to an Ação de Improbidade, this channel alone seems unlikely to generate a large effect.

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32. The judge could ask for the further production of evidence even when the case is ready for decision (*converter o julgamento em diligência*), if there are strong reasons to believe that any additional evidence will influence the decision. For cases in our sample, the judge rarely asks for such extraordinary production of evidence.

## 7 Incentives for corrupt politicians to run for election

We have documented that electoral winners are less likely than electoral losers are to be convicted of corruption. This favorable treatment could lead to an adverse selection of politicians in elected offices, as politicians facing corruption charges might seek political power to escape punishment. In this section, we investigate if politicians implicated in an Ação de Improbidade are more likely to stand for election and to get elected. While we do not have a source of random variation in the filing of Ações de Improbidade, we do our best to control for differences in the probability of running in future elections due to observable variables. We create a balanced panel of all candidates in the 2004–2016 local elections, including the years the politician did not stand for election, and estimate the regression

$$y_{imt} = \alpha_{mt} + \beta F_{it} + \gamma F_{it}T_{it} + \mu_t + \eta X'_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where  $i$  is a politician,  $m$  a municipality, and  $t$  an election year. The outcome variable  $y_{it}$  is whether the politician runs in the mayoral election or becomes elected mayor, and  $F_{it}$  indicates whether the politician has been charged in an Ação de Improbidade since the last election. We interact  $F_{it}$  with the time between the election and filing,  $T_{it}$ , to see if the effect is larger if the case is filed closer to the election. We control for municipality by election-year fixed effects  $\alpha_{mt}$ , as well as fixed characteristics and past career outcomes of the politician  $X_{it}$ .<sup>33</sup> As measures of a politician's past career, we use whether the politician ran for office, got elected, and the win margin, for all previous elections back to 2000, interacted with the office the politician was seeking. The politician characteristics are gender, a quadratic polynomial in age, and an indicator for age being missing.<sup>34</sup>

We present the results in Table 5. Column 1 shows that politicians are eight percentage points more likely than could otherwise be predicted to register as a candidate in the mayoral election if they are implicated in an Ação de Improbidade just before the election. The negative coefficient on "Years between election and filing" indicates that this effect is smaller if the case was filed long before the election. The

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33. The municipality of a politician is defined as the first municipality in which the politician runs for election.

34. Birth date is not reported for 55 percent of the candidates.

Table 5: Incentives for corrupt politicians to run for election

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Running for mayor in next election	Elected mayor in next election
	(1)	(2)
Ação de Improbidade filed	0.080*** (0.007)	0.016*** (0.006)
Years between election and filing	-0.030*** (0.003)	-0.010*** (0.002)
Mean Dep. Var.	0.19	0.08
Observations	2,150,443	2,150,443
R <sup>2</sup>	0.230	0.162

*Notes:* Politicians who have run for election for mayor or city council in the past. ‘Ação de Improbidade filed’ is a dummy for whether an Ação de Improbidade involving the candidate was filed within four years before the election. ‘Years between election and filing’ is the average across all cases filed within those four years, and zero if no cases were filed. We control for politician characteristics, past political career, and municipality by election year fixed effects. Politician characteristics are gender, a quadratic polynomial in age, and an indicator for age being missing. Past political career controls are whether the candidate ran, became elected, and the win margin for all of the previous elections back to 2000, interacted with the office the candidate ran for. Conditional Mean Dep. Var. is the mean of the dependent variable for politicians implicated in an Ação de Improbidade within four years before the election. Robust standard errors. \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

point estimates are significant at the one percent level. The estimate of eight percentage points is large compared to an overall average probability of running for mayor in the next election of 19 percent. A potential explanation for this large effect is that elected mayors receive "foro privilegiado" in criminal cases, which often run in parallel to an Ação de Improbidade. Becoming mayor means that the criminal case is sent to the appeals court, where it is believed that the chances of conviction are lower.

Column 2 considers as outcome variable whether the politician becomes elected. We estimate that politicians implicated in an Ação de Improbidade right before the election are 1.7 percentage points more likely to become the next mayor than could otherwise be predicted.<sup>35</sup> This estimate is also significant at the one percent level. We show the robustness of the results in Table 5 to alternative specifications in Table A.9 in the Appendix.

## 8 Conclusions

We have documented that having a broad set of formal guarantees of judicial independence is insufficient to prevent politicians in power from receiving a more lenient treatment in court. Such judicial subversion can mute incentives against engaging in corruption among powerful politicians and adversely affect the pool of candidates running for elected office. What can be done to avoid this outcome? While we must leave a careful evaluation of alternative policies to future work, our results nevertheless give us some indications of what could help curtail political influence over judicial decisions. First, the fact that our results are driven by districts with few judges suggests that increasing the size of judicial districts could limit the possibility of collusion between the executive and the judicial branches. Second, we have identified one limitation to the formal independence of Brazilian trial judges that could make them susceptible to political pressure, namely a high propensity to move between judicial districts and a discretionary court administration. Reducing this discretion by, for instance, increasing the use of seniority criteria and limiting the number of substitute judges might reduce political influence.

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35. Note that this result does not imply that voters do not punish corruption—the higher chance of electing a mayor involved in an Ação de Improbidade could instead be attributed to the increased number of such candidates.



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For Online Publication

# A Appendix

## A.1 Diários de Justiça

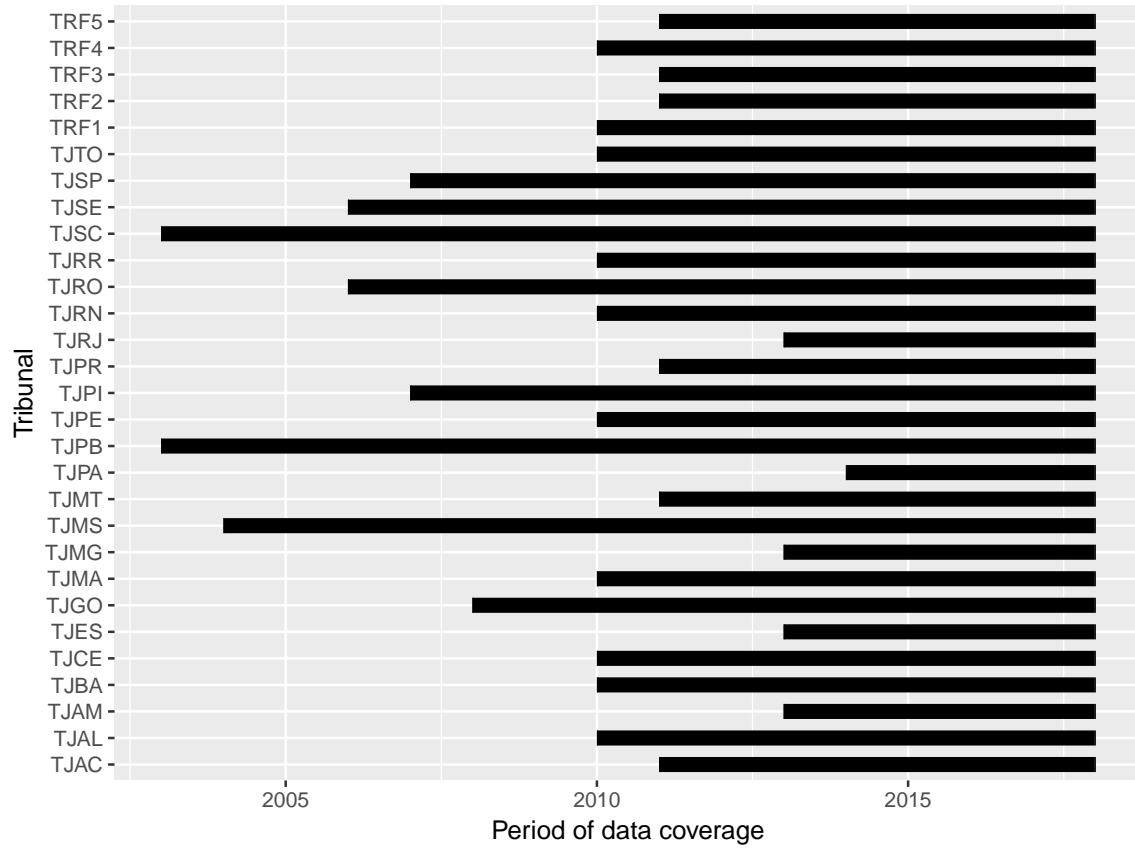


Figure A.1: Coverage over time of the judicial data by appeals court. The differences in coverage is due to how far back the Diário de Justiça is available at the court websites. The abbreviations TRF and TJ stand for Tribunal Regional Federal (federal appeals court) and Tribunal de Justiça (state appeals court), respectively.



**3) AÇÃO CIVIL PÚBLICA POR ATO DE IMPROBIDADE ADMINISTRATIVA**

Processo nº 2801-91.2011 .8.10.0051 (2552/2011) – Themis PG

Requerente: MINISTÉRIO PÚBLICO ESTADUAL

Requerido: LENOILSON PASSOS DA SILVA

Advogado: EZEQUIEL PINHEIRO GOMES (OAB/MA 4566)

**SENTENÇA**

**I – RELATÓRIO**

O MINISTÉRIO PÚBLICO ESTADUAL, por sua representante legal, 1ª Promotoria de Justiça da Comarca de Pedreiras, no uso de suas atribuições constitucionais e legais, ajuizou a presente **AÇÃO CIVIL PÚBLICA POR ATOS DE IMPROBIDADE ADMINISTRATIVA** contra **LENOILSON DOS PASSOS DA SILVA**, qualificados nos autos.

Alega, em suma, que o Município de Pedreiras/MA, realizou em janeiro de 2000 (ainda na gestão do ex-Prefeito Edmilson Gonçalves Alencar Filho, cujo mandato foi encerrado em 31.12.2000, não tendo sido proposta a ação em seu desfavor, diante da configuração da prescrição) a contratação irregular do servidor **Ednaldo de Sousa Pinto**, para a função de Gari, permanecendo

...

**II - FUNDAMENTAÇÃO**

**A) DO JULGAMENTO ANTECIPADO DA LIDE**

Há a possibilidade, *in casu*, do julgamento antecipado da lide, com fulcro no art. 330, Inciso I, do CPC, vez que a questão de mérito é de direito e de fato, porém não existe a necessidade de produzir provas orais em audiência.

Diz o art. 330 do CPC:

*“Art. 330 do CPC. O juiz conhecerá diretamente do pedido, proferindo sentença:*

...

**III - DISPOSITIVO**

Pelo exposto, **JULGO PROCEDENTE O PEDIDO, condenando o requerido, ex-Prefeito Municipal de Pedreiras, LENOILSON PASSOS DA SILVA a:**

**1) Pagar a multa civil de 05 (cinco) vezes** o valor da remuneração percebida pelo réu em 2008, quando era Prefeito do Município de Pedreiras, acrescida de correção monetária, pelo INPC, e juros moratórios de 1,0% ao mês, contados de hoje até a data do efetivo pagamento. O valor da multa reverterá em favor do erário municipal;

**2) Ficar proibido de contratar** com o Poder Público **ou receber benefícios ou incentivos fiscais ou creditícios**, direta ou indiretamente, ainda que por intermédio de pessoa jurídica da qual seja sócio majoritário, pelo prazo de **03(TRÊS) anos**;

**3) SUSPENSÃO DOS DIREITOS POLÍTICOS** pelo prazo de **05 (CINCO) ANOS**;

Figure A.2: Example of a Diário de Justiça publication from the Maranhão state judiciary. A final decision in an Ação de Improbidade. Three dots indicate omitted content.

## A.2 Supporting figures and tables for the main results

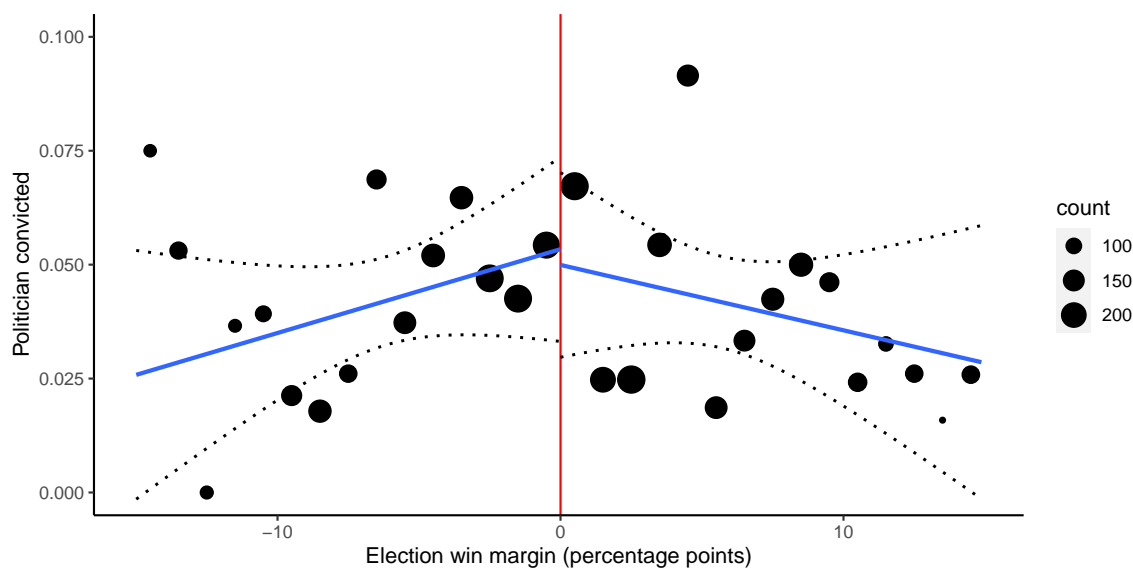


Figure A.3: Placebo regression discontinuity plot. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor decided before the election.

Table A.1: Balance on pre-election variables

Variable	Difference	p-value	Mean	N
Ação de Improbidade pending	-0.001	0.84	0.030	64384
Past Ação de Improbidade	0.002	0.43	0.007	64384
Incumbent mayor	0.060	0.41	0.362	4484
Incumbent city councillor	0.000	0.97	0.021	4484
Ex mayor	-0.033	0.58	0.808	4484
Prior years in elected office	-0.035	0.93	4.740	4484
Prior years as mayor	-0.044	0.92	4.260	4484
Declared wealth (R\$ 1,000,000)	-0.081	0.92	1.908	3936
Federal court	-0.097	0.18	0.393	4484
2016 election	0.050	0.56	0.479	4484
2012 election	-0.100	0.19	0.316	4484
Filing year	0.811	0.20	2009.595	4479
Case ready for decision at election	-0.005	0.78	0.045	4484

Table A.1: *(continued)*

Variable	Difference	p-value	Mean	N
Municipality population (1000)	15.359	0.17	71.093	4481
GDP per capita (R\$ 1000)	3.194	0.15	15.146	4481
Court located in municipality	0.095	0.17	0.347	4484
Number of judges in district	1.252	0.08	3.925	4481
Judge career instability	−0.033	0.49	0.681	1979
Judge tenured	−0.005	0.91	0.901	2030
Number of lawyers	−0.164	0.74	3.590	2836
Average lawyer experience	−1.997	0.32	9.939	2836
Female	−0.009	0.80	0.081	4484
Age/100	0.002	0.88	0.592	3586
Higher education	0.193	0.03	0.552	4484
Occupation: Business owner	−0.066	0.29	0.121	4484
Occupation: Doctor	−0.014	0.73	0.074	4484
Occupation: Civil servant	0.062	0.12	0.054	4484
Occupation: Cattle breeder	−0.005	0.92	0.048	4484
Occupation: Lawyer	0.010	0.82	0.046	4484
Occupation: Farmer	−0.013	0.67	0.043	4484
Occupation: Engineer	−0.010	0.81	0.038	4484
Occupation: Retired	0.018	0.42	0.035	4484
Married	0.042	0.54	0.747	4484
Campaign spending (R\$ 1,000,000)	−0.124	0.33	0.342	4484
Member of the governor's party	0.060	0.23	0.184	4484
Member of the governor's coalition	0.006	0.93	0.338	4484
Member of the president's party	0.069	0.23	0.135	4484
Member of the president's coalition	−0.008	0.91	0.222	4484
Disputed value (R\$ 1,000,000)	−0.607	0.40	3.536	650
Damage to the treasury	−0.123	0.20	0.263	1084
Illicit enrichment	0.001	0.97	0.030	1084
Violation of administrative principles	0.059	0.46	0.185	1084

Table A.1: *(continued)*

Variable	Difference	p-value	Mean	N
<p><i>Notes:</i> Regression discontinuity coefficients showing the estimated difference between marginal winning and marginal losing candidates for various pre-election covariates. Ação de Improbidade pending is a dummy for whether there is at least one Ação de Improbidade involving the candidate pending at the time of the election. Past Ação de Improbidade is an indicator for whether the candidate has been involved in an Ação de Improbidade decided before the election. The first two rows consider all candidates in the 2012 and 2016 elections. The remaining rows consider the balance within our main estimation sample: All Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. A case is considered ready for decision before the election if there has been a publication regarding the case including the term <i>alegações finais</i> in the Diário de Justiça before the election. The <i>career instability</i> of a judge is the probability that the judge is working in different judicial districts in two randomly chosen days in the two years before the election. A judge is considered not tenured if she has less than two years of experience. To avoid censoring we here exclude cases decided shorter than two years before the start of the Diário de Justiça. The experience of a lawyer is defined as the number of other Ações de Improbidade she has worked on prior to the election. Estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.</p>				

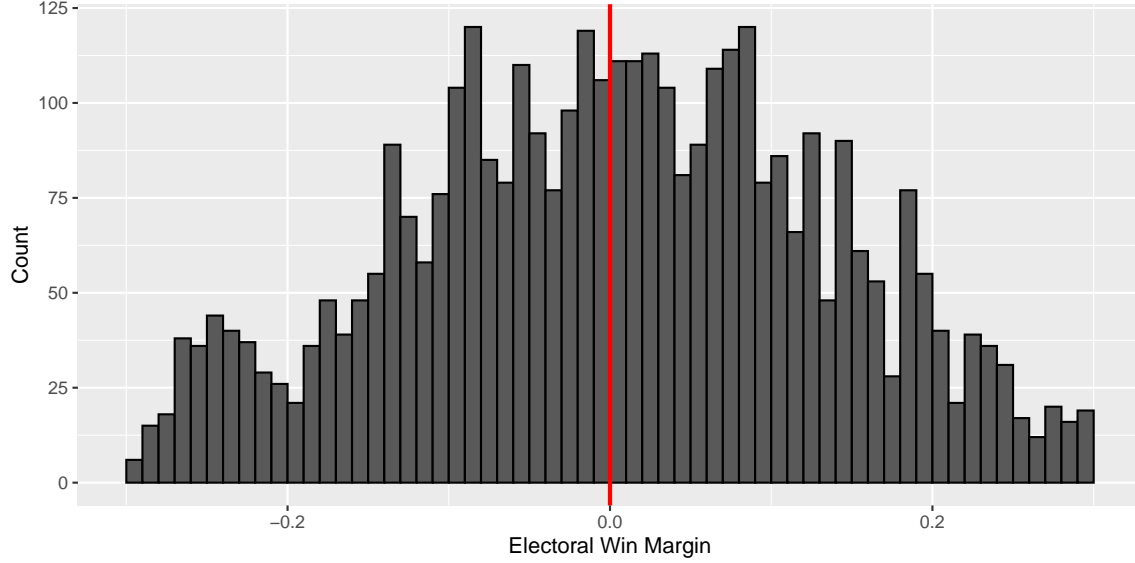


Figure A.4: Regression discontinuity histogram. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election.

Table A.2: Penalties imposed

	Loss of political rights (1)	Prohibited from contracts (2)	Pay back funds (3)	Fine (4)	Loss of office (5)
Elected (se)	-0.1*** (0.034)	-0.087*** (0.026)	-0.075*** (0.025)	-0.097*** (0.031)	-0.062** (0.030)
N	4484	4484	4484	4484	4484
Bandwidth	0.12	0.15	0.14	0.12	0.13
Mean Marg. Loser	0.14	0.12	0.1	0.15	0.085

*Notes:* The outcome variables are dummy variables indicated whether the politician received the respective penalties. Regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .

### A.3 Institutional rules

In this section, we provide references to the laws behind the rules presented in Section 2. In Table A.3, we document the rules guiding the careers of judges and prosecutors. Judges and prosecutors have the following constitutional provisions: (1) Their wages cannot be docked, (2) they are tenured after two years and can be fired only after an unappealable judicial decision, and (3) they cannot be transferred to a different judicial district against their will, except by an absolute majority vote by the appeals court or the National Council of Justice (*Conselho Nacional de Justiça*) in the case of judges or by the respective collegiate council in the case of prosecutors.<sup>36</sup> Besides, judges and prosecutors are prohibited from political activity, working for political parties, and managing private companies (although participation in capital is allowed).

In Table A.4, we document the laws that govern the creation of judicial districts and determine the number of judges. We also use the laws in Table A.4 to match municipalities to their judicial districts as described in Section 4. The state judiciary is divided into judicial districts (*comarcas*), which typically cover between one and three municipalities. The judicial districts are divided into three levels (*entrâncias*), with the most important cities and capitals as the final level. If a district is composed of several municipalities, the court is normally located in the largest municipality. A judicial district might have between one to several hundred judges, depending on its size. In districts with many judges, there are judges specialized in areas such as civil and criminal cases. Each state has its own appeals court. The federal judiciary follows a similar structure, but the judicial districts (*subseções*) cover more municipalities than the state judicial districts. The federal judicial districts are aggregated in five regions (*regiões*), each covering two or more states, with each region having its own appeals court. Cases are randomly allocated to judges if there is more than one judge who has jurisdiction.

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36. For substitute judges in the state judiciary this rule is valid for the *circumscrição judiciária*, an area of contiguous judicial districts.

Table A.3: Judicial rules

Rule description	Law
Ação civil de improbidade administrativa	Law 8429/92
Judges are appointed via public exam	FC Art. 93-I (CA 45/2004)
Prosecutors are appointed via public exam	FC Art. 127 §2 (CA 19/1998)
Judges cannot have wages docked (irredutibilidade)	FC Art. 95-III (CA 19/1998)
Judges cannot be removed from the district (inamovibilidade)	FC Art. 95-II and 93-VIII (CA 103/2019)
Judges have tenure (vitaliciedade)	FC Art. 95-I
Substitute judges can only be moved within circunscrição	Supreme Court MS 27958
Titular judges are required to live in the comarca/subseção	FC Art. 93
Prosecutors cannot have wages docked (irredutibilidade)	FC Art. 128 §5-I-c (CA 19/1998)
Prosecutors cannot be removed from courts (inamovibilidade)	FC Art. 128 §5-I-b (CA 45/2004)
Prosecutors have tenure (vitaliciedade)	FC Art. 128 §5-I-a
Prosecutors are independent from all branches of government	FC Art. 127 §1-§2 (CA 19/1998)
Prosecutors are required to live in the judicial district	FC Art. Art. 129 §2 (CA 45/2004)
Judges are prohibited from political activity	FC Art. 95 §1-III
Judges are prohibited from management	LOMAN Art. 36
Prosecutors are prohibited from political activity	FC Art. 128 §5 II-e (CA 45/2004)
Prosecutors are prohibited from management	FC Art. 128 §5 II-c
Promotion of judges alternately by merit and by seniority	FC Art. 93-II-III (CA 45/2004) and 107-II
State judiciary remoção follows promotion criterion	FC Art. VIIIA (CA 45/2004)
Federal judiciary remoção follows seniority criteria	CJF Res. 248/2013 Art. 29 §3
Federal judiciary sequence of career movements	CJF Res. 248/2013 Art. 26
State judiciary sequence of career movements	LOMAN Art. 81
Merit promotion based on list with three judges	LOMAN Art. 80
Voting rules on the merit criteria	FC Art. 93-II-c (CA 45/04); CNJ Res. 106/10
President chooses federal appeals court judge by merit	LOMAN Art. 5
One fifth of the appeals court filled by lawyers and prosecutors	FC Art. 94 and Art. 107-I

*Notes:* FC stands for Federal Constitution, CA for Constitutional Amendment, and LOMAN for Lei Orgânica da Magistratura Nacional (Complementary Law 35/1979), CNJ for Conselho Nacional de Justiça, and CJF for Conselho de Justiça Federal.

Table A.4: Judicial organization laws

Description	Law
State Judicial Organization	
Acre (AC)	Complementary Law 221/2010 and 341/2017
Alagoas (AL)	Law 6564/2005
Amapá (AP)	Decree 069/1991
Amazonas (AM)	Complementary Law 17/1997
Bahia (BA)	Law n. 10845/2007
Ceará (CE)	Law n. 16387/2017
Espírito Santo (ES)	Complementary Laws n. 234/2002 and n. 788/2014
Goiás (GO)	Law n. 9129/1981 and n. 20254/2018
Maranhão (MA)	Complementary Law n. 14/1991
Mato Grosso (MT)	Law n. 4964/1985 and Complementary Law n. 490/2013
Mato Grosso do Sul (MS)	Laws n. 16511/1994 and n. 4904/2016
Minas Gerais (MG)	Complementary Law n. 59/2001
Pará (PA)	Law n. 5008/1981
Paraíba (PB)	Complementary Law n. 96/2010
Paraná (PR)	Law n. 14277/2003
Pernambuco (PE)	Complementary Laws n. 100/2007 and n. 366/2017
Piauí (PI)	Complementary Law n. 3716/1979
Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	Law n. 6956/2015
Rio Grande do Norte (RN)	Complementary Law n. 165/1999
Rio Grande do Sul (RS)	Law n. 7356/1980
Rondônia (RO)	Complementary Law n. 94/1993
Roraima (RR)	Complementary Law n. 221/2014
Santa Catarina (SC)	Law n. 5624/1979, C. Law n. 233/2002, and Res. 08/07 TJ 2007
São Paulo (SP)	Complementary Laws n. 3/1969 and n. 1274/2015
Sergipe (SE)	Complementary Laws n. 88/2003 and n. 301/2018
Tocantins (TO)	Complementary Law n. 10/1996
Federal Judicial Organization	Law 5010/1966
Judiciary has financial autonomy	Federal Constitution Art. 99

*Notes:* The only practical difference between a "law" and a "complementary law" is that the law is approved with a simple majority of the legislative vote, while the complementary law is only approved with an absolute majority vote.



## A.4 Data from court websites

Detailed information on each court case that cannot be extracted from the Diários de Justiça can be accessed on the court’s online systems. Through Digesto—a legal intelligence firm—we were able to obtain such information on 29% of the cases in our estimation sample. For these cases, we use the filing date and final decisions from the court websites. The data from the court websites also gives us two variables not found in the Diários de Justiça: the disputed value (*valor da causa*) and whether the case is about damage to the treasury, illicit enrichment, or violation of administrative principles. To address concerns about endogeneity of the selection of cases obtained from the court websites, we show that our main result is robust to using only data from the Diários de Justiça in Table [A.7](#).

## A.5 Sample selection: Which mayoral candidates are involved in an Ação de Improbidade?

In Table A.5, we compare all close election candidates from the 2008 to 2016 elections with the close elections candidates involved in a lawsuit in our sample. Candidates in our sample mainly differ from the average candidate by having more prior political experience.

Table A.5: Characteristics of candidates involved in Ação de Improbidade

	Close election candidates involved in Ação de Improbidade	All close election candidates (2008-2016)
Incumbent mayor	0.37	0.23
Incumbent city councillor	0.03	0.10
Ex mayor	0.76	0.36
Prior years in elected office	4.46	2.93
Prior years as mayor	3.84	1.61
Declared wealth (R\$ 1,000,000)	1.72	0.86
Campaign spending (R\$ 1,000,000)	0.30	0.24
Municipality population (1000)	57.45	34.62
GDP per capita (R\$ 1000)	14.78	14.82
2016 election	0.42	0.34
2012 election	0.31	0.34
2008 election	0.17	0.33
Female	0.09	0.13
Married	0.76	0.76
Age/100	0.59	0.56
Higher education	0.54	0.54
Observations	2,485	32,328

*Notes:* Mean characteristics. Candidates in close mayoral elections. The first column includes only the candidates in our estimation sample—candidates with a pending Ação de Improbidade at the time of the election.

## A.6 Robustness for the main results

In Figure A.5, we show the robustness of our main result to standard local linear regression discontinuity specifications with different bandwidth sizes, including the (Imbens and Kalyanaraman 2012) optimal bandwidth. In Figures A.6 to A.7, we show similar estimates for local quadratic and cubic specifications.

In Table A.6, we show that our main result is robust to controlling for the variables that were significant at the 15% level in the balance test, all variables from the balance test, and state fixed effects.

In Table A.7, we show the robustness of our result to sample selection. The first test addresses concerns that the election might influence which Ações de Improbidade enter into our sample. It is not infrequent that we are aware of an Ação de Improbidade that was filed before the election only from publications in the Diário de Justiça made after the election. Bias could be induced if the election affects whether there are post-election publications regarding a case. In Column 1 of Table A.7, we show the result from estimating Equation 1 including only cases that have a publication in the Diário de Justiça before the election. To avoid any possibility for the election to influence our sample, we make sure that all the information we use is from before the election. This approach means that we consider only pre-election publications when matching candidates and defendants, when determining whether the public prosecutor is recorded as a plaintiff, and when classifying the case as an Ação de Improbidade.<sup>37</sup> The estimated coefficient is still statistically significant at the one percent level. As a further robustness check, we show in Column 2 that our main result is still statistically significant at the five percent level if we do not include data from the court websites—addressing concerns about endogeneity of the selection of cases obtained from the court websites. In Column 3, we show that our result is robust to focusing only on elections without a second round run-off.

In Table A.8, we show that the main result is robust to different levels of clustering. In Table A.9, we show the robustness of the result presented in Section 7 to alternative specifications.

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37. In some instances, the type of the court case (*classe*) might change from one publication to another, for instance from an Ação Civil Pública to an Ação de Improbidade. By making sure that the case is recorded as an Ação de Improbidade before the election we avoid concerns that the classification of a court case might be endogenous to the election result.

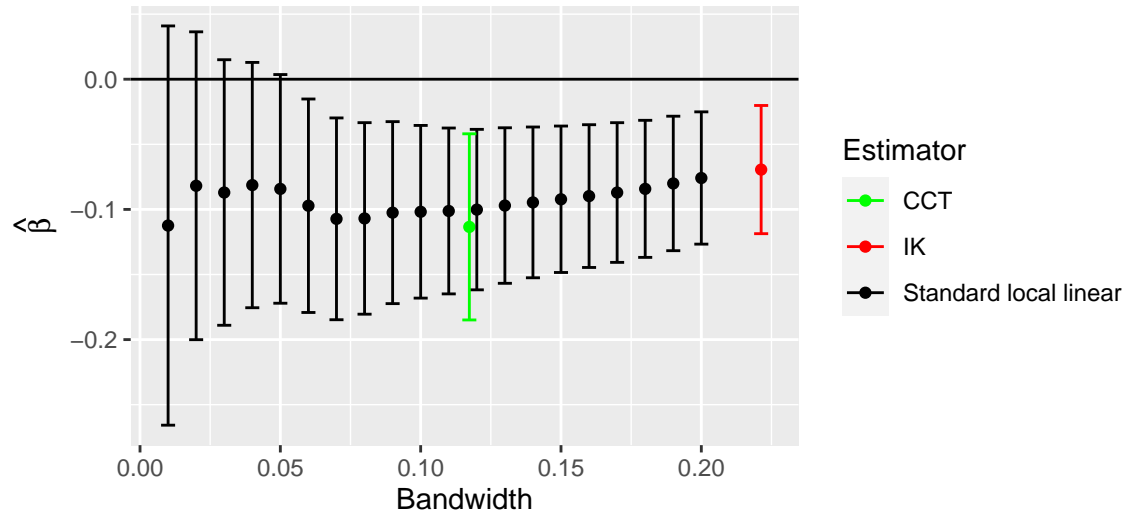


Figure A.5: Regression discontinuity estimates for different bandwidths. The outcome variable is whether the politician is convicted. "IK" uses the Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012) optimal bandwidth. "CCT" uses the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. 95 percent confidence intervals. Standard errors clustered at the municipality by election-year level.

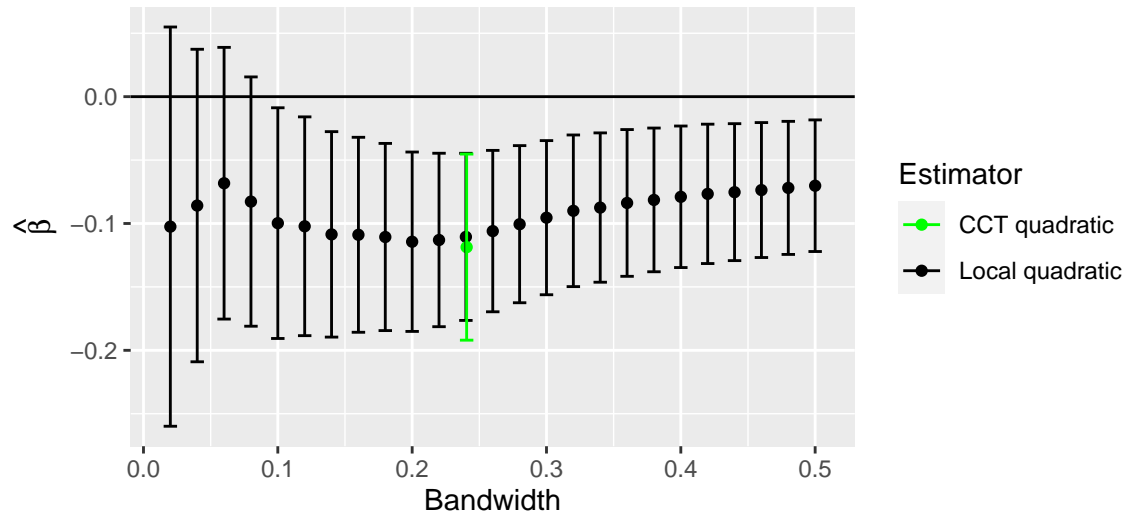


Figure A.6: Local quadratic regression discontinuity estimates for different bandwidths. The outcome variable is whether the politician is convicted. "CCT quadratic" uses the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local quadratic regression for the estimate and local cubic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. 95 percent confidence intervals. Standard errors clustered at the municipality by election-year level.

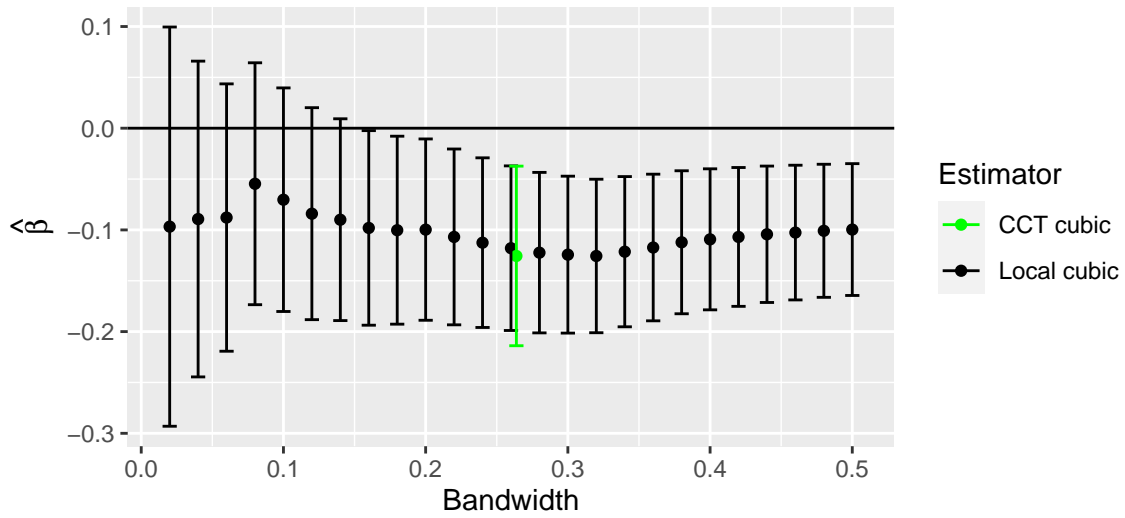


Figure A.7: Local cubic regression discontinuity estimates for different bandwidths. The outcome variable is whether the politician is convicted. "CCT cubic" uses the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local cubic regression for the estimate and local quartic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. 95 percent confidence intervals. Standard errors clustered at the municipality by election-year level.

Table A.6: Robustness: Adding controls

	<i>Dependent variable: Politician convicted</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Elected (se)	-0.11*** (0.036)	-0.092*** (0.032)	-0.09*** (0.034)	-0.09*** (0.031)
State FE			✓	✓
Election year FE			✓	✓
Unbalanced controls	✓	✓		✓
Remaining controls		✓		✓
N	4481	4476	4484	4476
Bandwidth	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12
Mean Marg. Loser	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17

*Notes:* *Unbalanced controls* are all variables for which the estimated difference between marginal losers and winners were statistically significant at the 15% level in Table A.1: Whether the candidate has higher education, the number of judges in the district, whether the candidate is a civil servant, and GDP per capita. *Remaining controls* are all other variables in Table A.1. To not lose too many observations when adding controls, we include indicators for whether each variable is missing as regressors for variables with more than 10 missing observations. Regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality by election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .

Table A.7: Robustness: Sample selection

	<i>Dependent variable: Politician convicted</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Only using pre-election data	Not using data from court websites	Only first round elections	Excluding common names
Elected (se)	-0.13*** (0.047)	-0.1*** (0.036)	-0.12*** (0.037)	-0.11*** (0.036)
N	2081	4247	4367	4484
Bandwidth	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.12
Mean Marg. Loser	0.15	0.17	0.18	0.17

*Notes:* The first column shows the main regression discontinuity result restricting the sample to cases which has a pre-election publication in the Diário de Justiça including the name of the politician as defendant and categorized as Ação de Improbidade. The second column shows the main regression discontinuity result without using data obtained from court websites. The third column shows the main result excluding elections with a second round run-off. The fourth column show the main result excluding politicians with names with log likelihood above -20. Regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .



Table A.8: Robustness: Clustering of Standard Errors

	<i>Dependent variable: Politician convicted</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Elected (se)	-0.11*** (0.036)	-0.11*** (0.037)	-0.11** (0.050)	-0.11*** (0.037)	-0.11*** (0.033)	-0.1*** (0.033)
<b>Level of clustering</b>						
Municipality by election	✓					
Municipality		✓				
Judicial district			✓			✓
Politician				✓		✓
Court case					✓	

*Notes:* The main result with clustering of standard errors at different levels. Columns 1-5 show regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. Column 6 uses local linear estimate with two-way clustering and a 10 percentage point bandwidth. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .

Table A.9: Incentives for corrupt politicians to run for election: Robustness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Running in next mayoral election				
Ação de Improbidade filed	0.259*** (0.008)	0.080*** (0.007)	0.087*** (0.008)	0.081*** (0.008)
Years between election and filing	-0.036*** (0.003)	-0.030*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.003)	-0.029*** (0.003)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.018	0.230	0.209	0.668
Panel B: Elected mayor in next election				
Ação de Improbidade filed	0.112*** (0.006)	0.016*** (0.006)	0.021*** (0.006)	0.021*** (0.006)
Years between election and filing	-0.016*** (0.002)	-0.010*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.002)	-0.011*** (0.003)
Election year FE		✓	✓	✓
Electoral controls		✓	✓	✓
Politician controls		✓	✓	
Only 2012-2016 elections			✓	
Politician FE				✓
Observations	2,150,443	2,150,443	1,315,219	2,150,443
R <sup>2</sup>	0.008	0.162	0.136	0.652

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## **A.7 Robustness for the heterogeneous effects**

For the sake of completeness, we provide additional results on heterogeneous effects in Tables A.10 to A.11. All the variables that are not self-explanatory are defined in the table notes. We give details on data sources and interpretations for some of the results below.

### **A.7.1 Favor exchange**

In Panel A of Table A.10, we show that there are no differences in the estimates between large, small, rich and poor municipalities. These results suggest that our finding that the effect is larger if there are fewer than median judges in the district is not driven by the size of the municipality.

### **A.7.2 Career instability**

In Panel B of Table A.10, we show three measures of career instability. That the judge is working in a different judicial district in the past one year and three years, and if the judge is tenured. All three measures show point estimates higher when judges have more career instability, although we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no differences.

### **A.7.3 Liquidity constraints**

One reason that electoral winners can have better lawyers is that they might be less liquidity constrained due to the official salary and other income from holding elected office. In Panel C of Table A.10, we investigate if the effect of the election on convictions is smaller for less liquidity constrained politicians. We use as proxies for lower liquidity constraints whether the politician has higher education and whether the politician's campaign expenses are larger than the median. The point estimates are larger for both politicians with higher education and politicians with large campaigns. Thus, elected politicians having better lawyers due to liquidity constraints is unlikely to be the main driver behind our result.

Table A.10: Heterogeneous effects: More tests of mechanisms

		Coef.	(se)	N	Band- width	Mean Marg. Loser	p-value of Diff.
<b>A: Municipality size</b>							
Municipality population less than median (18,000)	Yes	−0.123**	(0.049)	2238	0.12	0.18	0.68
	No	−0.093*	(0.053)	2239	0.15	0.16	
GDP per capita above median (\$R 10,000)	Yes	−0.099***	(0.038)	2243	0.17	0.13	0.97
	No	−0.101*	(0.053)	2242	0.14	0.21	
<b>B: Career instability</b>							
Judge has above median career instability (past 1 year)	Yes	−0.119**	(0.055)	988	0.11	0.11	0.73
	No	−0.087	(0.071)	987	0.16	0.18	
Judge has above median career instability (past 2 years)	Yes	−0.155**	(0.071)	993	0.12	0.17	0.18
	No	−0.037	(0.052)	993	0.22	0.13	
Judge has above median career instability (past 3 years)	Yes	−0.161**	(0.073)	722	0.13	0.17	0.15
	No	−0.030	(0.055)	716	0.14	0.08	
<b>C: Liquidity constraints</b>							
Politician has higher education	Yes	−0.121***	(0.046)	2474	0.11	0.17	0.78
	No	−0.101**	(0.051)	2010	0.16	0.19	
Politician has a larger than median campaign	Yes	−0.159***	(0.046)	2673	0.11	0.20	0.13
	No	−0.068*	(0.039)	2878	0.13	0.12	

*Notes:* Regression discontinuity estimates for different sub-samples.  $p$ -value of Difference is the  $p$ -value of the difference in estimated effects between the two sub-samples, assuming that the two sub-samples are independently drawn. The *career instability* of a judge is the probability that the judge is working in different judicial districts in two randomly chosen days in the given number of years before the election. Coefficients estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level. \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

### A.7.4 Media

In Table A.11, we show heterogeneous effects conditional on the presence of local media. The data on local media presence is from the *Pesquisa de Informações Básicas Municipais* (MUNIC) from IBGE. News media with local content is considered important to disseminate news about political corruption and might influence judicial sentencing. We find, however, no clear relationship between local media presence and the effect of winning an election on court outcomes.

Table A.11: Heterogeneous effects: Local media presence

		Coef.	(se)	N	Band- width	Mean Marg. Loser	p-value of Diff.
Municipality has FM radio in 2014	Yes	−0.098**	(0.049)	2551	0.15	0.18	0.74
	No	−0.120***	(0.045)	1931	0.12	0.15	
Municipality has a newspaper in 2014	Yes	−0.187***	(0.062)	1830	0.11	0.20	0.15
	No	−0.076	(0.047)	2652	0.12	0.16	
Municipality has AM radio in 2014	Yes	−0.056	(0.047)	1392	0.14	0.11	0.32
	No	−0.118***	(0.042)	3090	0.16	0.20	
Municipality has a community radio in 2014	Yes	−0.112**	(0.045)	3010	0.13	0.18	0.90
	No	−0.102	(0.063)	1472	0.11	0.16	
Municipality has an internet provider in 2014	Yes	−0.140***	(0.041)	3307	0.13	0.19	0.14
	No	−0.021	(0.069)	1175	0.13	0.12	

*Notes:* Regression discontinuity estimates for different sub-samples.  $p$ -value of Difference is the  $p$ -value of the difference in estimated effects between the two sub-samples, assuming that the two sub-samples are independently drawn. Coefficients estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor pending at the time of the election. Mean Marg. Loser shows the estimated mean of the outcome variable for the marginal loser, using the local linear fit. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level. \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

## A.8 Career incentives

To assess if convicting an elected politician has career consequences for a judge, we select the sample of all final decisions involving candidates for mayor decided within four years after the election—while the elected mayor is in office. We run the regression

$$Y_{jit} = \alpha_s + \mu_t + \beta Elected_{it} + \gamma Convicted_i + \delta Elected_{it} \times Convicted_i + \eta X'_{jit} + \varepsilon_{jit}$$

where  $Y_{jit}$  is a future career outcome of judge  $j$  deciding case  $i$  after election  $t$ ,  $\alpha_s$  and  $\mu_t$  are state and election-year fixed effects,  $Elected_{it}$  and  $Convicted_i$  are dummies for whether the politician involved in case  $i$  is elected and convicted, respectively, and  $X_{jit}$  are control variables. We control for a cubic polynomial in the number of days between the decision and the last date of the Diário de Justiça, the number of days between the election and the decision, the win margin of the politician interacted with whether the politician got elected, the log population and GDP per capita of the municipality, the log population of the municipality hosting the court, the average log population of the municipalities the judge has worked in the past year, and a quadratic polynomial in the number of days the judge has previously worked in the judicial district and overall as a judge. To ensure that we can adequately control for the past career of the judge, we keep only cases where we observe the judge for more than a year before the election.

In Table A.12, we consider as outcomes dummies for whether the judge is recorded in the Diário de Justiça to be promoted by the seniority and the merit criterion, respectively, in at least one occasion.<sup>38</sup> The results reveal an interesting pattern. Judges who convict losing mayoral candidates are estimated to be more likely to be promoted by merit and less likely to be promoted by seniority. In contrast, we estimate that judges who convict mayors are less likely to be promoted by merit and more likely to be promoted by seniority. Only the last coefficient is, however, statistically significant. One explanation of this result could be that judges who convict mayors seek to be promoted via the seniority criterion to avoid opposition to their candidacy from the court administration. Overall, the results in this section suggest that career concerns could be part of the explanation for why judges are less

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38. We consider promotions both from one level to the next (promoção) and within level (remoção), as long as the criterion for promotion is stated in the Diário de Justiça.

inclined to convict politicians in power.

Table A.12: The judge's future career

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Promoted by seniority			Promoted by merit		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politician convicted	−0.007 (0.032)	−0.006 (0.033)	−0.030 (0.033)	0.031 (0.034)	0.050 (0.034)	0.026 (0.033)
Elected	−0.025 (0.028)	−0.023 (0.029)	−0.028 (0.030)	−0.018 (0.023)	−0.008 (0.024)	0.012 (0.027)
Politician convicted x Elected	0.090* (0.046)	0.099** (0.048)	0.097** (0.044)	−0.023 (0.044)	−0.034 (0.045)	−0.043 (0.042)
Mean Dep. Var.	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.12	0.12	0.12
Judge career controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
State fixed effects			✓			✓
Other controls			✓			✓
Observations	1,393	1,364	1,364	1,393	1,364	1,364

*Notes:* Ações de Improbidade involving candidates for mayor decided within four years after the election. Only keeping cases where we know the identity of the judge and the court has the criteria of promotion consistently recorded in the Diário de Justiça. Promoted by seniority (merit) is an indicator for whether the judge is promoted by the seniority (merit) criterion at any point after the decision. All regressions control for a cubic polynomial in the number of days between the decision and the last date of the Diário de Justiça. Other controls are the number of days between the election and the decision, the win margin of the politician interacted with whether the politician became elected, and the log of the population and GDP per capita of the municipality. Judge career controls are log population size of the municipality hosting the court, the average log population size of the municipalities the judge has worked in the past one and two years, and quadratic polynomials in the number of days the judge has previously worked in the judicial district and overall as a judge. Standard errors clustered at the politician level.  $*p \leq 0.1$ ;  $**p \leq 0.05$ ;  $***p \leq 0.01$ .