Feedback on “Reelection Backfire”

Dongil

*Theory in general*

* The key issue is that the theory is a bit convoluted. Narrowing it down to a couple of the most important building blocks might help.
* It is not clear to me why self-interested local politicians would prefer the “efficient” distribution of public goods to their reelection. This is the part that I find hard to swallow.
* Your argument that reelection-minded politicians would choose to delegate when they worry about the policy outcome is valid (pp. 12-13).
* I therefore suggest an alternative theoretical framework which help interpreting empirical results.

*Alternative Theory (Accountability, Differentiation, and Global Public Goods)*

* Simply put, this framework emphasizes the effect of local elections on a public good provision that requires state-level *coordination* among local polities.
* You could start with discussing electoral accountability in democracy as your case provides a great opportunity to examine the effect of electoral incentives on a politician behavior.
* In theory, local elections (that is, a mechanism offering reelection incentives) help voters hold politicians accountable for their actions. Elections would thus lead to more *local* public goods provision by disciplining politicians. They also make politicians remain responsive to the demands from their voters.
* However, some types of public goods require a nation-wide systematic *coordination* among local governments. One good example is to prevent the spread of the coronavirus across regions within a country. Another good example would be to fight against drug cartels and provide security and safety to all citizens globally. Unless the initiative is coherently orchestrated at the national level, a success in a locality would result in only the “balloon effect” where drug organizations simply move to the other localities where crimes are less well clamped down.
* In this sense, *local* elections may hamper the provision of *global* (i.e., nation-wide) public goods by incentivizing local politicians not to delegate their authority over providing public security. Taking the bull by horns offers many electoral advantages to the incumbent politicians.
  + They can more easily take credit for their policy outcome (if voters are informed).
  + They can signal their competence to their voters (if they are indeed competent type).
  + They can appeal to voters by showing their responsiveness to voters’ demands (if voters reward a politician’s responsiveness separately from his/her competence).
* In sum, the total effect on public security provision is hard to predict a *priori*. On the one hand, reelection incentives encourage local politicians to put in more *individual* effort through accountability mechanism. On the other hand, they also could dampen motives for devoting *collective* effort (or *concerted* effort) by allowing them to refuse to delegate their local authority to the central government. This mechanism can be called “differentiation” logic.
* This framework is most useful when questioning the central role of local elections in providing public goods provision and most closely linked to your second insight (pp. 5-6) about the negative implication of electoral incentives.

*Empirical results*

* In Figure 2, why is t-1 missing?
* In Figure 5, the estimates and the CIs for outcomes other than public security and traffic are almost identical. Why is this the case? Is it because those outcomes are bundled in the agreement?
* Why is the estimate for public security is as small as -0.1? This seems to be too small compared to the estimate for aggregate data (around -0.5). Am I missing something?
* To me, Figure 6 suggests that political alignment with the governor does not moderate the effect of reelection incentives on mayor’s delegation choice. Though there appear to be some difference between estimates, it may not be statistically significant at the conventional level.
* Figure 7, what is the difference between the legend “interaction” and “total interaction”? Is the degree of concern variable a dummy indicator (High versus Low)? It is hard to grasp what is going on in Figure 7.
* In Figure 8, what do you mean by “identifying political forces?”
* In Figure 12, is it possible to break down the aggregate data into two subgroups (delegation and non-delegation groups) and see if there is any difference between them?