

Bureaucratic Incentives and Administrative Data Production

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May 5, 2024

Abstract

One core but understudied task of bureaucrats globally is the production of state data. When central governments rely on data reported by decentralized governments to make policy or target resources, decentralized bureaucrats and their political principals may face incentives to report strategically, thereby altering the quality of administrative data. This paper documents how these incentives shape decentralized bureaucrats' data production behavior by pairing original surveys with rich administrative microdata on two data-collection processes in Colombia. Specifically, I conduct surveys of bureaucrats in municipal governments who are responsible for submitting data on contracts and possible social program beneficiaries to the central government. By linking survey responses to public administrative microdata submitted by each municipality, I detect variation in reporting behavior that varies with bureaucrats' conditions of employment. These distortions are small to moderate in magnitude, but are nevertheless likely to have non-trivial distributive consequences.

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