Gender, Electoral Incentives, and Crisis Response: Evidence from Brazilian Mayors

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UEA NORTH AMERICAN MEETING 2021
The Paper

- Did female and male Brazilian mayors pursue different COVID policies?
- Did aspirations to be re-elected affect their choices differently?

- RDD: Compare municipalities with close male/female mayor wins
- Compare choices of mayors who were not facing term limits

**Hesitant Integrity vs Determined Nefariousness:**
- Female mayors delayed lockdown but re-opened later
- Results driven by electorally motivated mayors
1. Gender & Electoral Incentives

- Response differences are based on mayors’ beliefs about voters:
  - Low number of COVID deaths -> vote for incumbent female mayor
  - Low economic/social disruptions -> vote for incumbent male mayor

- How to separate leadership differences from (beliefs over) voter preferences?
  - Do findings point to gender specific crisis management?
  - Or do they just reflect different incentives?

- Explore which strategy was ex post more successful for female, male mayors
2. Building a Testable Model

- Generic known unknown about COVID policy response
  - Saving lives now vs. damaging/losing them long-term

- When designing model elements, need to think carefully about
  - distribution of policy returns over time
  - voters’ time horizons and time preferences
  - gender differences in time preferences

- Study post-election evolution of deaths, costs and mayor approval rates
3. Measuring Response and Effect

- COVID response measured using qualitative indicators (laws, decrees)
- Were there policy trade-offs within some municipalities?
  - Do dimensionality reduction (factor analysis)
  - Use proxy based on outcomes (electricity use, employment, output)
- Explain earlier in text that # of recorded COVID deaths is exogenous
  - Introduction: key institutional feature of Brazil is autonomy of mayors
  - Lots of evidence on exogeneity in appendix but little in text
Congrats!

- Hot research topic and interesting question
- Clever use of RDD and institutional features
- Very careful and thorough econometric analysis
- Clear description of the findings
- Great empirical basis to take to a model