The engagement of adolescent girls in politics when the electoral environment for women is uncertain

Abstract

This paper investigates the political engagement of adolescent girls when the electoral environment for women is uncertain. We demonstrate that this environment simultaneously provokes less/more engagement in adolescent girls when women who are "role models" lose/win the election by reducing the expected general effect of empowered women on adolescent girls in politics. We use close elections in a mixed-gender race (RD estimate) as an empirical strategy for three reasons: to obtain unbiased estimated causality between the variables; to compare the robust difference in engagement of two possible electoral results (defeat/victory); and to observe if there are discontinuities provoked by the behavior of adolescent girls with regard to women’s electoral target: victory. We verified that two discontinuities exist and might be justified by the electoral disappointment/euphoria of adolescent girls with regard to the quasi-reached electoral target. In addition, guided by their value function, a growing margin of female victory/defeat provokes increasingly less engagement on the part of adolescent girls to vote in the next election. The positive influence of empowered women on the political engagement of adolescents is tiny when the result is close to the target, given that we find an increase/reduction in adolescent registrations to vote when women are elected/defeated: the difference between them is 1.0-1.6 p.p. Unlike the literature, our measure of engagement in politics is not generated from a survey (a measure of the perception of the aspirations of adolescents) but from the non-compulsory registration of adolescents in the 16-17 age-band for voting in Brazil.