

Can term limits accelerate women's access to top political positions? Quasi-experimental evidence from Italy

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Motivation

- ▶ Increased presence of women in entry-level positions..
 - ▶ Social norms, female labor force participation, educational attainment
 - ▶ Most policies (e.g. quotas) have focused on the *entry-level* of politics

- ▶ ... but still low numbers at top:
 - ▶ Europe, 41 countries (Ceciarini, 2019):
 - ▶ 29% councilors, 27% of MPs
 - ▶ 15% mayors, 12% Prime ministers

- ▶ Some obstacles:
 - ▶ Leaky pipeline + **pipeline is long**

- ▶ Can the generational change introduced by term limits benefit historically underrepresented groups, such as women, access political power?

How can term limits affect female representation?

1. 'Replacement' of incumbents
 - ▶ Strength of incumbency advantage → term limits binding
 - ▶ Likelihood of new candidate being a woman
 - ▶ Presence of women at lower levels of politics (societal changes, gender quotas...)
 - ▶ Likelihood of being nominated by party leaders/members (electoral concerns, networks, gender biases...)
 - ▶ Female candidate winning the election (voters preferences, quality of candidate)
2. 'Selection' into politics:
 - ▶ Term limits tend to shorten political careers: more or less attractive for male/female candidates?
3. 'Exposure' effect:
 - ▶ Convergence or additional gains from more frequent exposure to female mayors?

This paper

- ▶ How and when can term limits increase women's representation in higher-level positions?
- ▶ We exploit quasi-exogenous variation introduced by policy changes in Italy.
- ▶ Extension of term limits from 2 to 3 five-year terms:
 - ▶ 2014: Municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants
 - ▶ 2022: Municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants
- ▶ Context with steady increase of female representation at the grassroots + heterogeneity.
- ▶ Main questions:
 - ▶ How do term limits affect representation?
 - ▶ Impact on female representation: replacement, selection, or exposure effects?
 - ▶ When can term limits increase female representation?
 - ▶ Trade-offs: replacement vs. experience

Preview of results

- ▶ Term limits extension delay access of female mayors
 - ▶ ↑ Older, more experienced mayors
 - ▶ ↓ Female mayors ($\beta=4-10$ p.p., wrt 15% baseline)
- ▶ Mechanism:
 - ▶ Replacement ✓
 - ▶ Selection ✗
 - ▶ Exposure effect ✗
- ▶ When are term limits most effective?
 - ▶ Effect increasing in the share of women at lower levels of the hierarchy - possible complementarity with entry-level quotas

Outline

Introduction

Institutional setting & term limits reform

Data

Empirical analysis

Do term limits affect representation?

Replacement vs. selection

Is there an exposure effect ?

When can term limits increase female representation

Confounding policies & robustness

Institutional setting

Municipalities

- ▶ Around 8,000 municipalities
- ▶ Elections are held every 5 years, citizens elect mayor + council members.
 - ▶ Municipalities with less than 15k inhabitants: 2/3 of seats to the list supporting most voted mayoral candidate
- ▶ Levels of government:
 - ▶ Mayor: main player
 - ▶ Local council (*consiglio comunale*): It is the municipality's main legislative and decision-making body. It votes for the municipal budget.
 - ▶ Executive committee (*giunta comunale*): Designated by the mayor (among elected council members), it implements decisions taken by the local council.

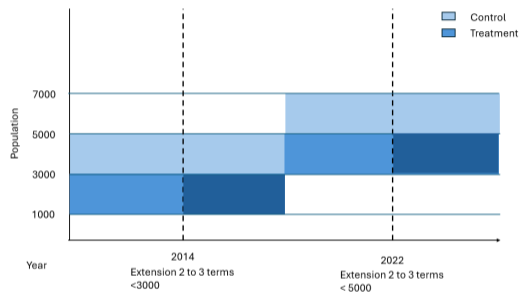
Term extensions: treatment and control groups

2014 reform:

- ▶ Sample: 1,000 - 5,000 inhabitants
- ▶ Years 1993-2021
- ▶ *Three-terms limit*: from 2 to 3 5 year terms less than 3,000 inhabitants, > 2014

2022 reform:

- ▶ Sample: 3,000-7,000 inhabitants
- ▶ Years 1993-2022
- ▶ *Three-terms limit*: 2 to 3 5 year terms less than 5,000 inhabitants, > 2022



Institutional setting

Other policies at these thresholds

1. Salaries of mayors

- ▶ Salaries rely on population thresholds, including the 3,000 and 5,000 thresholds
- ▶ Historically salary differences constant
- ▶ \uparrow 15% salary in municipalities below 3,000 in 2020

2. Gender quotas in candidates lists and double preference voting:

- ▶ Introduced in 2013 in municipalities above 5,000 inhabitants
- ▶ No short term impact on mayors ...
- ▶ ... potentially a delayed effect showing up in 2022

3. Gender quotas in municipal executive committees

- ▶ Introduced in 2014 in municipalities above 3,000 inhabitants
- ▶ DID estimates for 3,000 in 2014 capture the joint impact of this quota and term limits

→ We will account for these policies in the empirical analysis.

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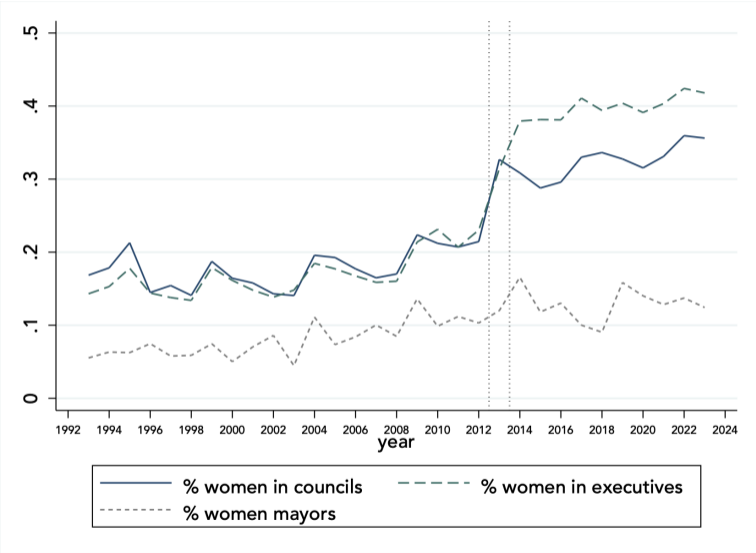
When can term limits increase female representation

Confounding policies & robustness

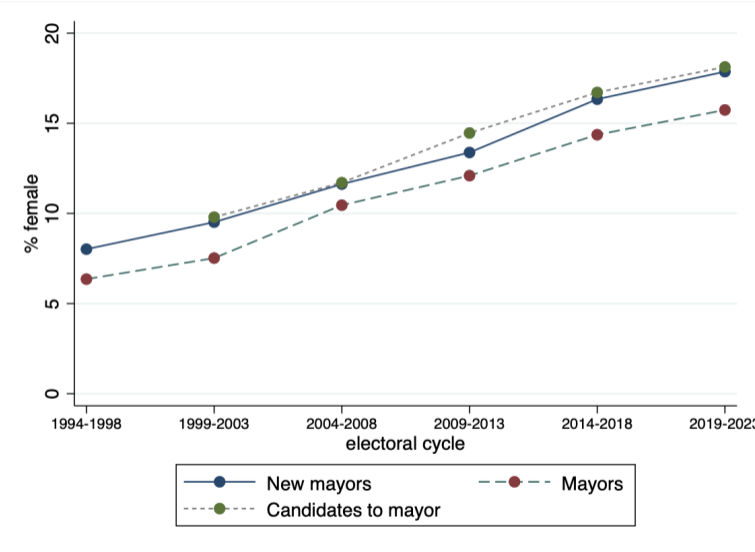
Data

- ▶ Years 1993-2023
- ▶ Municipalities in regions with ordinary status
- ▶ Around 5,000 municipalities with more than 1,000 and less than 7,000 inhabitants
- ▶ High probability of re-election: 66% of incumbents who rerun are re-elected
- ▶ Increased presence of women in politics in local governments in Italy between 2000-2020
 - ▶ Female council members: from 18% to 33%.
 - ▶ Female executive members: from 17% to 38%.
 - ▶ Female mayors: from 7% to 15%

Female representation and gender policies at lower hierarchy levels



More women among newly elected mayors and candidates



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Difference-in-differences estimation

For each reform, we estimate separately the following two-way fixed effects model:

$$Y_{mt} = \alpha + \beta \cdot \text{ThreeTermsLimit}_{mt} + \gamma_m + \eta_t + \varepsilon_{mt} \quad (1)$$

- ▶ where the outcome variable Y_{mt} is measured at the level of municipality m and election year t
- ▶ $\gamma_m + \eta_t +$ are municipality and election year fixed effects
- ▶ *ThreeTermsLimit* takes value one in municipalities affected by the term-limit extension
- ▶ Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level
- ▶ Main identifying assumption: **parallel trends assumption**
 - ▶ No prior differences in levels in main outcome variables Balance 2014 Balance 2022
 - ▶ .. or trends Parallel trends

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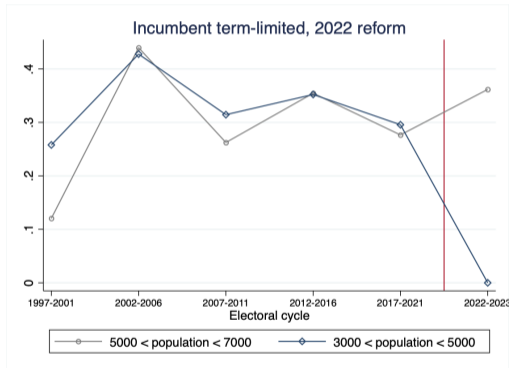
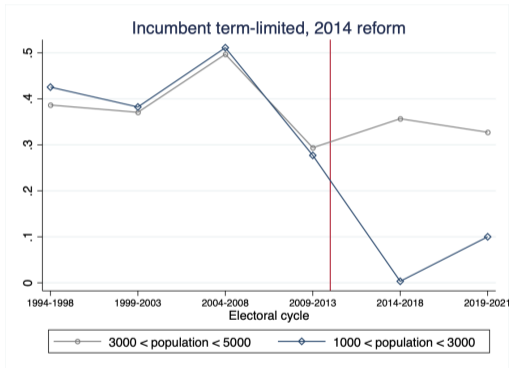
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Confounding policies & robustness

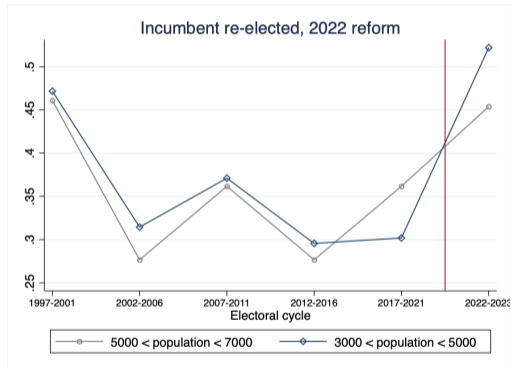
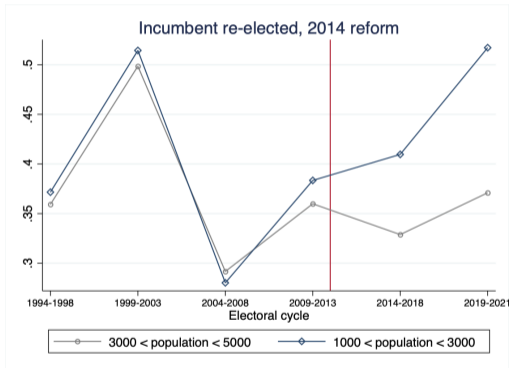
Term limit extensions decreased the share of term limited incumbents..

$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.32$ (s.e.=0.01); $\beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.36$ (s.e.=0.06)



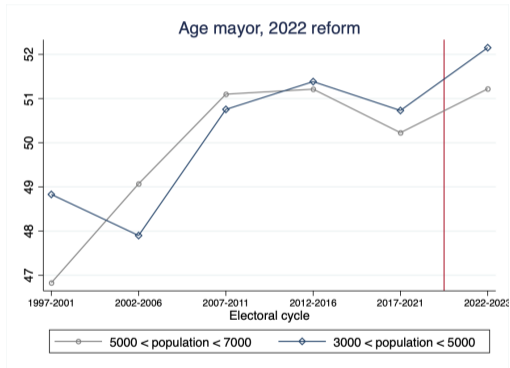
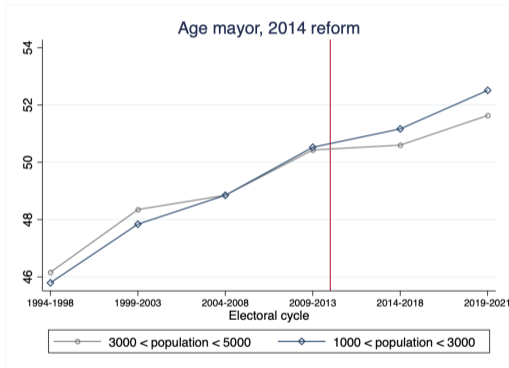
.. Leading to more frequent re-election of existing mayors

$\beta_{DID}^{2014}=0.11$ (s.e.=0.02); $\beta_{DID}^{2022}=0.17$ (s.e.=0.08)



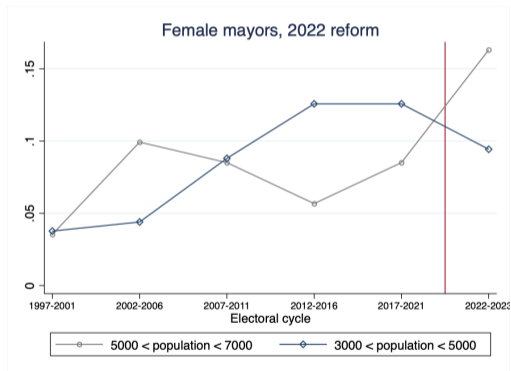
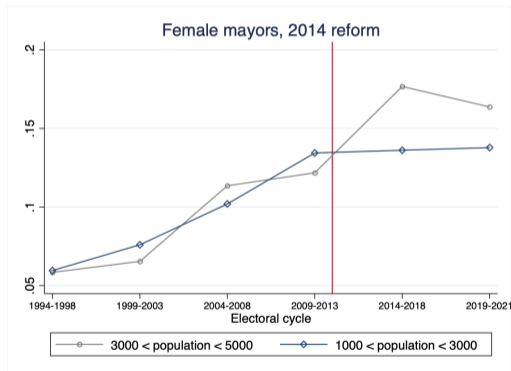
Delaying access of younger cohorts..

$\beta_{DID}^{2014}=0.86$ (s.e.=0.45); $\beta_{DID}^{2022}=0.65$ (s.e.=1.04)



.. Leading to stagnant growth in female representation in affected municipalities (mayors)

$$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.04 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.01\text{)}; \beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.10 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.04\text{)}$$



Replacement vs. selection?

- ▶ Heterogeneity analysis of effects by incumbent in 1st and 2nd term can help disentangle replacement from selection.
- ▶ In municipalities where the incumbent was in the 2nd term, the extension of term limits implies that
 1. Replacement effect
 2. Selection effect
- ▶ In municipalities where the incumbent was in their 1st term:
 1. No replacement effect yet
 2. Selection effect
- ▶ Reform only matters when incumbent in second term → replacement effect

▶▶ Impact by term, 2014

▶▶ Impact by term, 2022

Is there an exposure effect ?

- ▶ Municipalities with more frequent turnover are more exposed to female mayors
- ▶ → Growth rate differences in female representation in the medium term?
- ▶ We compare the short-run effect of term extensions with the “mid-term” effect (second cycle of elections after the introduction)
 - ▶ If an exposure effect was present, we would observe the gap in female mayors increasing in treated vs. control group
- ▶ However, we see if anything a smaller impact in the second cycle of elections (-0.02, se: 0.02) ▶ Impact in second election cycle

When can term limits increase female representation?

- ▶ Term limits are most effective if there are women at lower levels of the hierarchy
 - ▶ Heterogeneity by previous presence of women at lower levels of the hierarchy for 2014 reform
▶ Interaction: presence of women before
 - ▶ Voters vs. pool of potential female candidates to mayor?
 - ▶ Larger effect in 2022, when in the treatment group municipalities had been exposed to gender quotas for 8 years
- Potential complementarity with quotas at entry-levels

Impact of 2014 reform, by share of women in previous executive councils

	(1) Incumbent term-limited	(2) Female candidates	(3) Mayor re-elected	(5) Age mayor	(6) Female mayor
Three terms	-0.29*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.10 (0.51)	0.04** (0.02)
Three terms X Women in previous executive	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.04)	0.12* (0.06)	2.75* (1.61)	-0.42*** (0.06)
Observations	12,337	12,302	12,337	12,342	12,342
Mean	0.315	0.183	0.362	51.17	0.165

- Note also that the effect is larger in 2022 (- 10 p.p. (se: 0.04) vs. -0.04 (se: 0.01)) - the treated group in 2022 has larger presence of women in executives due to introduction of quotas in 2014.

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Is the effect driven by confounding policies?

- ▶ **Executive gender quota** Not driven by gender quotas - would predict effect concentrated in municipalities that had *lower* female representation in executives pre-policy, recall we have seen the opposite ▶ **Heterogeneity by women in executive before** + effect concentrated in 2nd term
- ▶ **Delayed effects of lower-level gender quotas?** In 2022, policies above 5000 threshold - control for number of previous elections with quotas, result unchanged
▶ **Quota effect table**
- ▶ **Mayor salaries** Restrict analysis to cover until 2019 (as opposed to 2021), when a change in mayor remuneration applied at the 3000 threshold, no change in results
▶ **Restricted sample results** (Gagliarducci and Nannicini, 2013 do not find effect on female representation)

Robustness

- ▶ Randomization inference and placebo introduction of treatment ▶ Placebo
- ▶ Bounds on treatment effect estimated based on Rambachan and Roth, 2019: main estimate robust to 0.75 x deviation from parallel trends observed in pre-treatment period ▶ Treatment effect bounds
- ▶ Regression discontinuity: similar estimates, less precise (using discontinuity in differences) ▶ Regression discontinuity

Conclusion

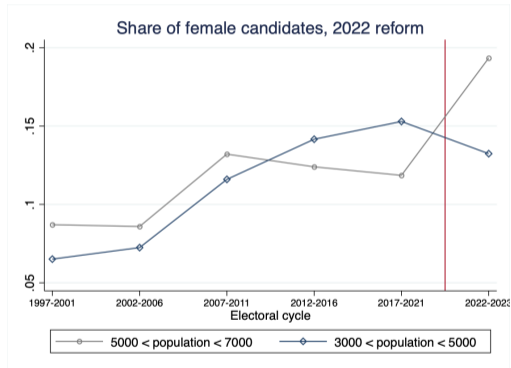
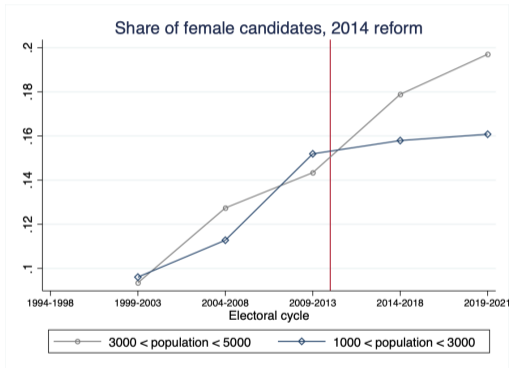
- ▶ Term limits can help bridge the representation gap between entry-level and top-level political positions, especially in times of rapid societal change
 - ▶ Effective policy tool to address directly top-level political representation, without waiting for (possible / delayed) effects from entry-level policies
 - ▶ Particularly effective when growth rate in lower-level positions is high, and in the presence of quotas, suggesting complementarity
- ▶ Future work
 - ▶ Long term effects (2024 election)
 - ▶ Budget effects in municipalities that would have been more likely to elect a female mayor

Outline

Back-up slides

Stagnant rate of growth of female candidates

$$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.02 \text{ (s.e.}=0.01\text{)}; \beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.08 \text{ (s.e.}=0.03\text{)}$$



Impact of the 2014 reform

Extension of term limits in municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants

Sample: years 2004-2019 (see [years 1994-2018](#))

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Incumbent term-limited	Female candidates	Incumbent re-elected	Terms as mayor	Age mayor	Female mayor
Three terms	-0.32*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.02)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.86* (0.45)	-0.04** (0.01)
Observations	11,118	11,100	11,118	11,136	11,136	11,136
Mean	0.353	0.189	0.345	0.539	50.81	0.175

Impact of the 2022 reform

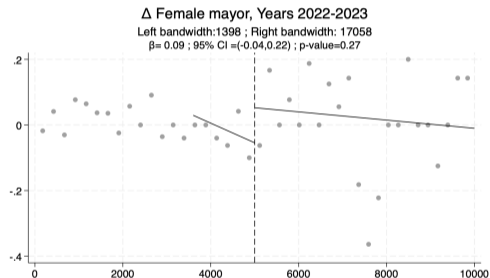
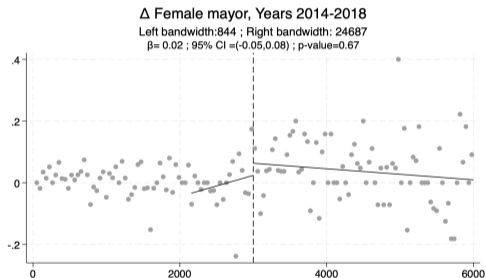
Exploiting the 5,000 inhabitants threshold

Sample: years 2013-2023 (see [years 2003-2022](#))

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Incumbent term-limited	Female candidates	Incumbent re-elected	Terms as mayor	Age mayor	Female mayor
Three terms	-0.36*** (0.06)	-0.08** (0.03)	0.17** (0.08)	0.28*** (0.11)	0.65 (1.23)	-0.10*** (0.04)
Observations	3,066	3,085	3,066	3,114	3,114	3,114
Mean	0.338	0.182	0.448	0.803	51.80	0.160

Difference-in-discontinuities: female mayors, by municipality size

► Back



Balance pre-treatment - 2014 reform

► Back

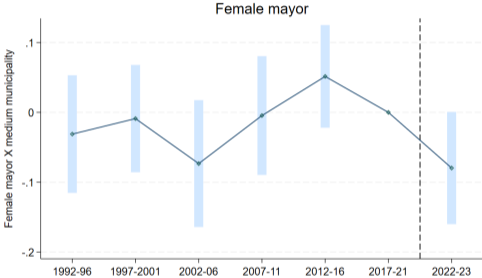
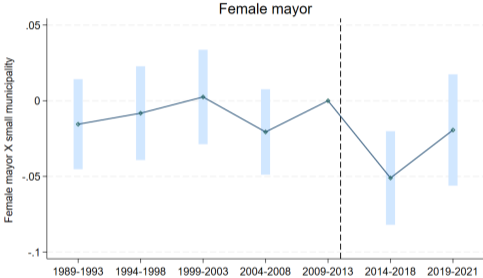
	3,000 < population < 5,000		1,000 < population < 3,000		
	N	Mean	N	Mean	Difference
Term-limited incumbent	3917	0.39	8715	0.40	0.010
Number of candidates	2931	2.64	6562	2.31	-0.329***
Female candidates	2935	0.12	6562	0.12	-0.002
Re-elected mayor	3917	0.38	8715	0.39	0.008
Age mayor	3919	48.41	8721	48.23	-0.200
Years since entering council	3919	8.38	8721	8.43	0.016
Female mayor	3919	0.09	8721	0.09	0.003

Balance pre-treatment - 2022 reform

► Back

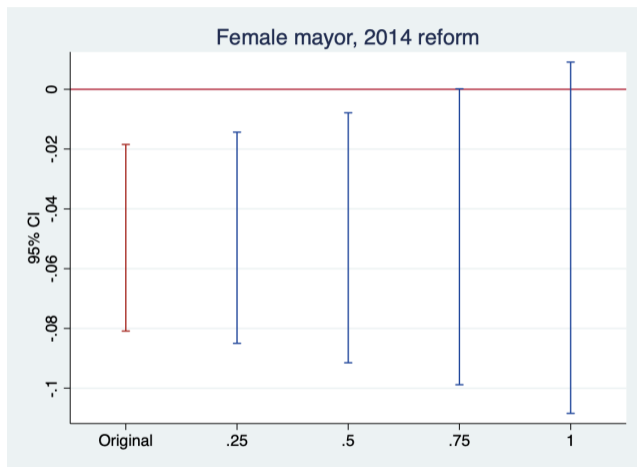
	5,000 < population < 7,000		3,000 < population < 5,000		
	N	Mean	N	Mean	Difference
Term-limited incumbent	2755	0.34	4873	0.36	0.019**
Number of candidates	2631	2.90	4681	2.58	-0.315***
Female candidates	2628	0.15	4685	0.15	-0.008
Re-elected mayor	2755	0.38	4873	0.37	-0.010
Age mayor	2773	49.24	4890	49.75	0.414
Years since entering council	2773	9.84	4890	10.23	0.285
Female mayor	2773	0.11	4890	0.12	0.006

Previously groups evolved similarly



Treatment effect bounds (Rambachan and Roth, 2023)

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Support deviations from parallel trends 0.75 to those observed in pre-treatment period.

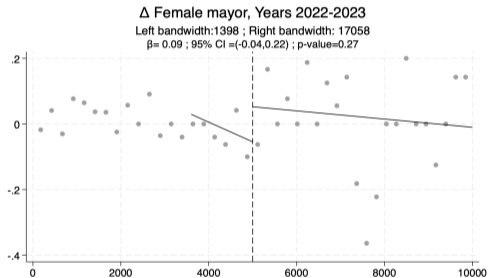
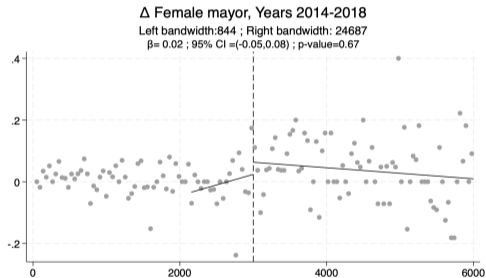
Lagged gender quota effects: 2022 election

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	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Female	Female	Female
	mayor	mayor	mayor
Three terms	-0.10*** (0.04)	-0.10** (0.04)	-0.09* (0.05)
Council gender quota		0.01 (0.02)	
1st election with quota			-0.02 (0.02)
2nd election with quota			0.04 (0.03)
3rd election with quota			-0.03 (0.07)
Observations	4,642	4,642	4,642
Mean	0.160	0.160	0.160

Regression discontinuity design: female mayors, by municipality size

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Placebo treatment

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	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Incumbent term-limited	Female mayor	Female mayor	Female mayor	Female mayor
Placebo treatment 2009-2013	-0.00 (0.03)	0.021 (0.02)	0.021 (0.02)	0.126 (0.44)	-0.006 (0.14)
Observations	5,984	6,389	6,389	6,389	6,014
R-squared	0.236	0.656	0.656	0.665	0.699
Years	1993-2018	1993-2018	2004-2018	2004-2018	2004-2018
Population	1000-5000	1000-5000	1000-5000	1000-5000	1000-5000
Regions	Ordinary	Ordinary	Ordinary	Ordinary	Ordinary
Mean	0.281	0.0889	0.0889	48.24	14.29

Table 1: Placebo treatment

Exposure effects?

Impact in the second cycle of elections after 2014 reform

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	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Incumbent term-limited	Female candidates	Incumbent re-elected	Terms as mayor	Age mayor	Female mayor
Three terms	-0.22*** (0.02)	-0.03* (0.01)	0.13*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.04)	0.69 (0.58)	-0.02 (0.02)
Observations	8,712	8,686	8,712	8,721	8,721	8,721
Mean	0.330	0.197	0.371	0.574	51.67	0.165

Impact of the 2014 reform, by terms of incumbency

Exploiting the 3,000 inhabitants threshold - Sample: years 2004-2018

<i>1st term</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Incumbent term-limited	Incumbent re-elected	Female mayor	Female executive
Term limit extension	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.01)
Observations	5,720	5,720	5,720	5,720
Mean	0	0.508	0.132	0.237
<i>2nd term</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Incumbent term-limited	Incumbent re-elected	Female mayor	Female executive
Term limit extension	-1.00*** (0.01)	0.27*** (0.02)	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.01)
Observations	3,457	3,457	3,457	3,457
Mean	0	0.276	0.142	0.246