

Local electoral rules and political participation

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The paper investigates the effect of electoral rules on the political participation of the residents, as reflected in voter turnout. It focuses on Italian municipalities, where voting schemes are differentiated by the size of the city: a single ballot system applies to municipalities with less than 15,000 inhabitants, while a dual ballot system is in place above that threshold. By exploiting this discontinuity, the paper finds that the dual ballot increases political participation. The estimated effect is about 1 percentage point. Moreover, further empirical findings point to the fact that this not negligible effect is likely to act through a number of channels: a wider political representation, politicians of higher quality, and greater fiscal discipline. Finally, we argue that the beneficial effect of the dual ballot system is persistent: treated municipalities exhibit higher political participation in nationwide voting contexts too.