

"Does the number of candidates increase turnout? Evidence from two-round elections in France »

We estimate the causal effect of the number of candidates on turnout using data from two-round elections in France where two or three candidates participate in second round depending on their score in the first round. We use two empirical strategies: a RDD applied to approximately 14 000 official district results in legislative and cantonal elections since 1978, and a post-election survey conducted the week following the 2012 legislative election. We find that a third participating candidate increases the share of valid votes by more than 5%-points. We further test the mechanism and find evidence for the alienation theory according to which individuals are more likely abstain when there is no candidate with whom their preference resonates. By contrast, the causal effect does not seem to be driven by an increase of competitiveness, nor a mobilisation against the extreme right.