

Examining the Effects of College Education on Democratic Attitudes in China: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis

Authors : Gang Wang

Abstract : Education is widely believed to be a prerequisite for democracy and civil society, but the causal link between education and outcome variables is usually hardly to be identified. This study applies a fuzzy regression discontinuity design to examine the effects of college education on democratic attitudes in the Chinese context. In the analysis treatment assignment is determined by students' college entry years and thus naturally selected by subjects' ages. Using a sample of Chinese college students collected in Beijing in 2009, this study finds that college education actually reduces undergraduates' motivation for political development in China but promotes political loyalty to the authoritarian government. Further hypotheses tests explain these interesting findings from two perspectives. The first is related to the complexity of politics. As college students progress over time, they increasingly realize the complexity of political reform in China's authoritarian regime and rather stay away from politics. The second is related to students' career opportunities. As students are close to graduation, they are immersed with job hunting and have a reduced interest in political freedom.

Keywords : china, college education, democratic attitudes, regression discontinuity

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