

It takes a Village Election: Turnover and Performance in Local Bureaucracies

In many countries, local governments struggle with inefficiency and corruption, often perpetuated by entrenched elites. This paper explores how leadership changes affect bureaucratic performance at the local level. Combining detailed personnel surveys with a regression discontinuity design in a large sample of Indonesian villages, we show that turnovers in village elections revitalize local bureaucracies, disrupt nepotistic networks, and improve local government performance. Bureaucrats under new leadership become more engaged, receive higher pay, and are less likely to be tied to past or present village officials, resulting in a more responsive bureaucracy that interacts more frequently with citizens and better understands their needs. This leads to higher levels of public service provision, measured in both administrative data and surveys conducted with citizens. Together, these findings suggest that leadership changes can mitigate elite capture and improve governance at the grassroots level.