Government Banks, Competition and Interventions in Credit Markets

Gustavo Joaquim
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

Felipe Netto*
Columbia University

José Renato Haas Ornelas
Central Bank of Brazil

Abstract

We study a large scale intervention in the Brazilian banking sector, characterized by a sudden increase in the supply of public credit at low interest rates. Using confidential credit registry data, we show that the increase in competition is successful in reducing private banks interest rates without large crowding out of private credit, and that larger reductions in interest rates are experienced by smaller firms. However, despite charging lower interest rates, public banks experience substantial worsening of borrower quality after the intervention. We show that the deterioration of public banks' credit portfolio is connected to loans to levered firms, and rule out alternative explanations based on asymmetric information or worse screening standards. Finally, we show that increases in government credit do not translate into higher local output. This indicates a tradeoff between state owned banks' ability to affect interest rates through increases in competition and the cost of interventions caused by a worsening of borrower quality.

*Corresponding author: f.netto@columbia.edu