Does providing corruption information reduce vote share? A meta-analysis

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April 8, 2019

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Introduction

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- Recent ARPS review (De Vries and Solaz (2017)): "Empirical evidence to date is mixed, and it often suggests that the electoral punishment of corruption is rather mild."
- Is evidence actually mixed? What have we learned from a recent explosion of experimental research on this subject?

List of experimental studies

Table 1: Field experiments

Study	Country	Treatment	Vote share
Arias, Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2018)	Mexico	Fliers	Positive
Banerjee, Green, Green, and Pande (2010)[1]	India	Newspaper	Null
Banerjee, Kumar, Pande, and Su (2011)[2]	India	Canvas/Newspaper	Null
Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo (2018)	Brazil	Fliers	Null
Buntaine, Jablonski, Nielson, and Pickering (2018)	Ghana	SMS	Null/Negative
Chong, De La O, Karlan, and Wantchekon (2014)	Mexico	Fliers	Negative
De Figueiredo, Hidalgo, and Kasahara (2011)	Brazil	Fliers	Null/Negative
Ferraz and Finan (2008)	Brazil	Audits	Negative

List of experimental studies

Table 2: Survey experiments

Study	Country	Treatment	Vote share
Avenburg (2016)	Brazil	Information	Negative
Banerjee, Green, McManus, and Pande (2014)	India	Information	Negative
Breitenstein (2019)	Spain	Information	Negative
Boas et al. (2018)	Brazil	Information	Negative
Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner (2018)	UK	Information	Negative
Franchino and Zucchini (2015)	Italy	Information	Negative
Klašnja and Tucker (2013)	Sweden	Information	Negative
Klašnja and Tucker (2013)	Moldova	Information	Null
Klašnja, Lupu, and Tucker (2017)	Argentina	Information	Negative
Klašnja et al. (2017)	Chile	Information	Negative
Klašnja et al. (2017)	Uruguay	Information	Negative
Mares and Visconti (2019)	Romania	Information	Negative
Vera Rojas (2017)	Peru	Information	Negative
Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013)	Brazil	Information	Negative
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Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2016)[1]	Brazil	Information	Negative
Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2017)[1]	Brazil	Information	Negative
Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2018)	Argentina	Information	Negative

Methods

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- Treatment: corruption information provision.
- Outcome: (incumbent) vote-share.
- Random assignment of information regarding incumbent corruption, followed by measurement of voting outcomes.
- Includes both published articles and working papers.
- Excludes experiments that inform all respondents that the politician is corrupt.
    - E.g. Compare one type of information provision (e.g. source) to another.

Analytical details

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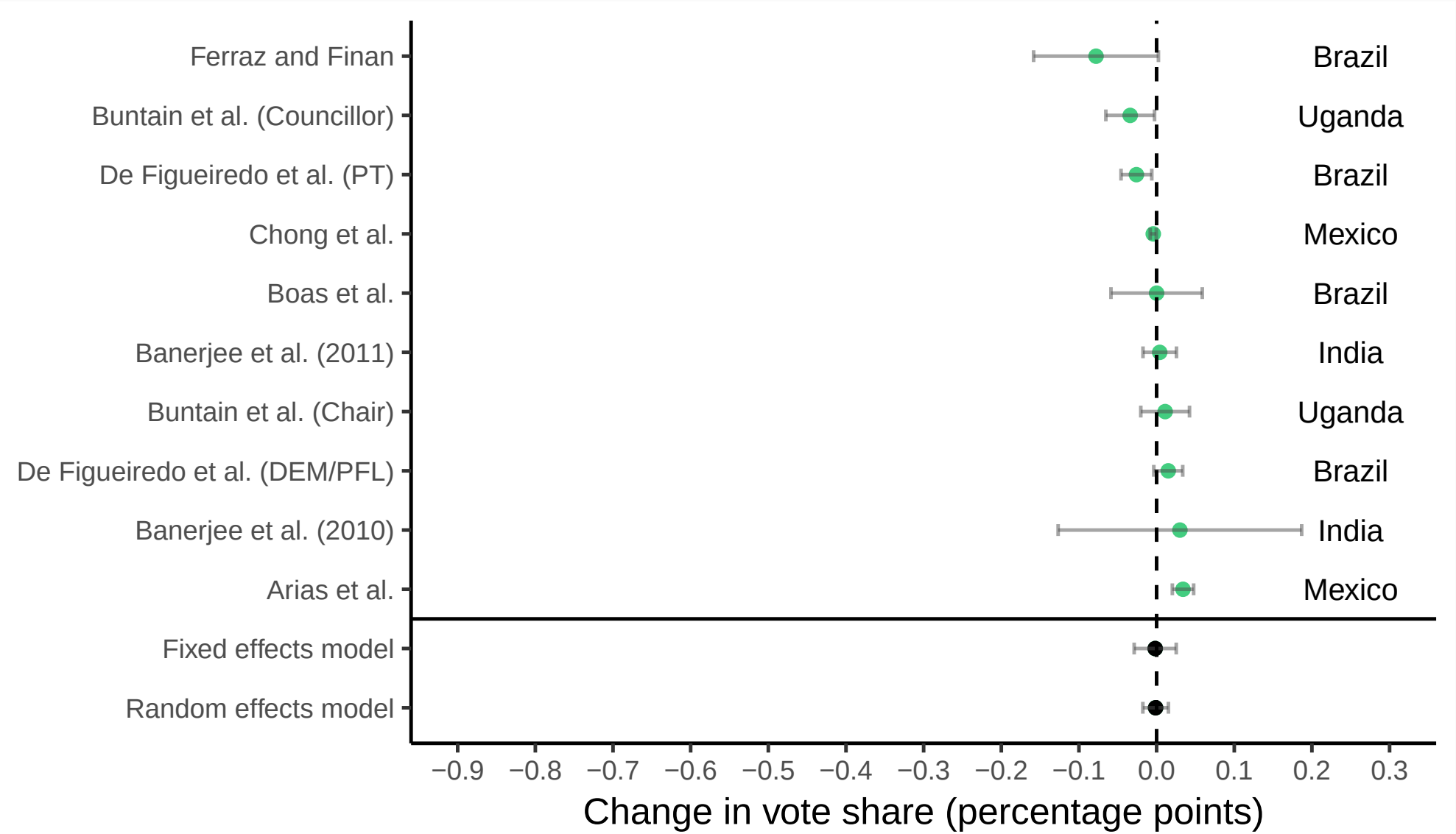
- Studies that use non-binary vote choices are rescaled into a binary vote choice.
- Point estimates, standard errors and/or confidence intervals are not always explicitly reported (4 cases). In these cases standard errors are estimated by digitally measuring coefficient plots.

Results

Results: Field Experiments



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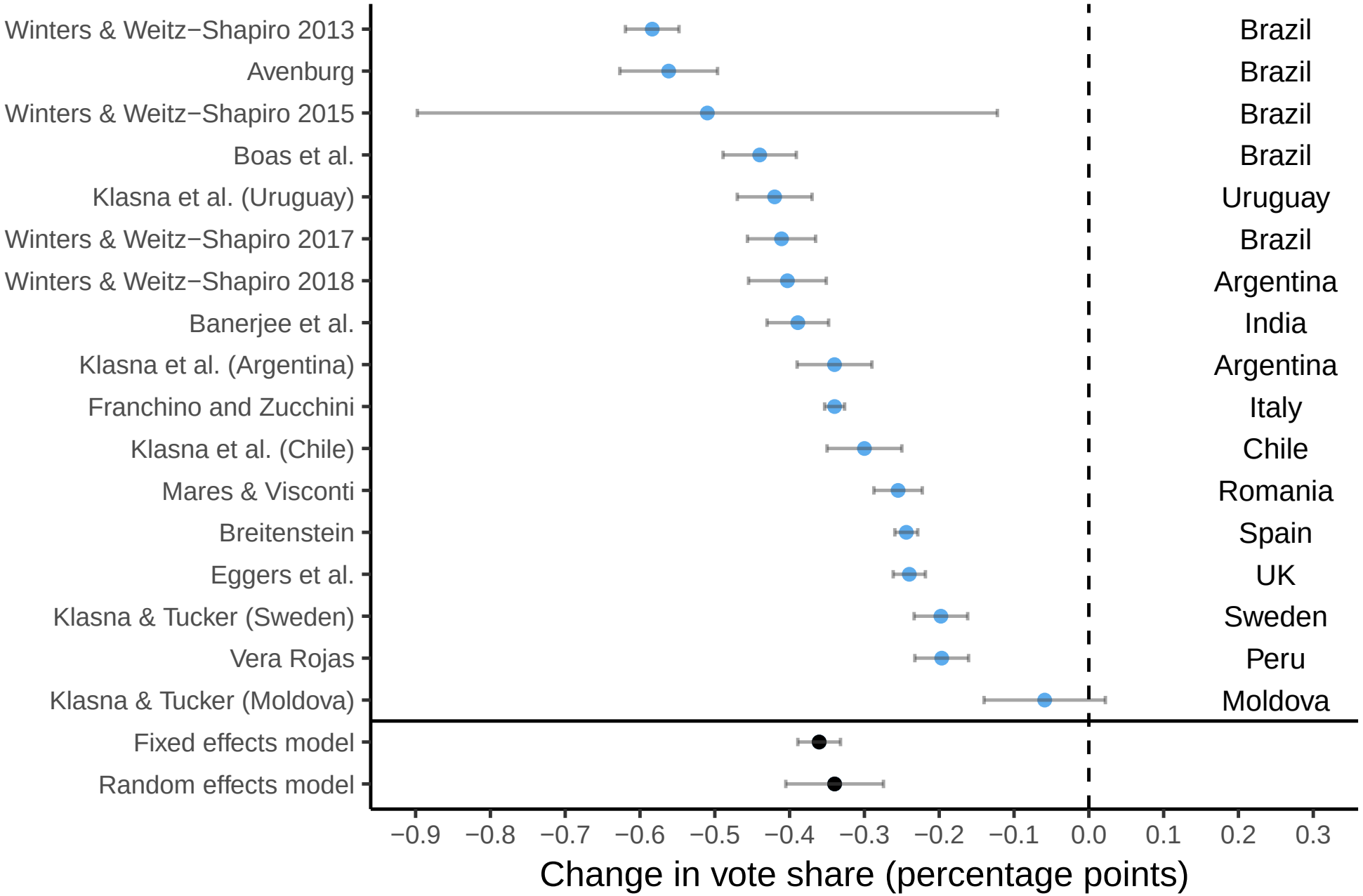

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  - 70% of the total heterogeneity across studies can be accounted for by including a dummy variable for type of experiment.
  - Point estimate of this dummy variable (0 = survey, 1 = field) is equal to 0.33 (significant at 1% level), while the overall estimate across studies is -.34.
    - Mixed effects meta-analysis with moderator.

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- Publication bias and/or p-hacking
- Social desirability bias
- Lack of complexity in survey experiments.
- Analyzing/interpreting results of survey experiments incorrectly.

Publication bias and p-hacking

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But, differences in experimental design likely account for the difference in the magnitude of treatment effects.

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- How to overcome social desirability bias in survey experiments?
  - Perform experiments during actual elections using real candidates.
  - Use list experiments, which have been shown to make a difference in admission to vote-buying (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012).

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Randomizing more candidate characteristics may more adequately capture moderating factors and reduce social desirability bias.

- But may be best not to compare magnitudes of individual AMCEs (e.g. corruption AMCE vs. partisan AMCE).
- Instead, compare the probability of voting for a candidate with outlier characteristics such as corruption to the probability of voting for a realistic candidate without this characteristic.

Survey complexity and conjoint experiments

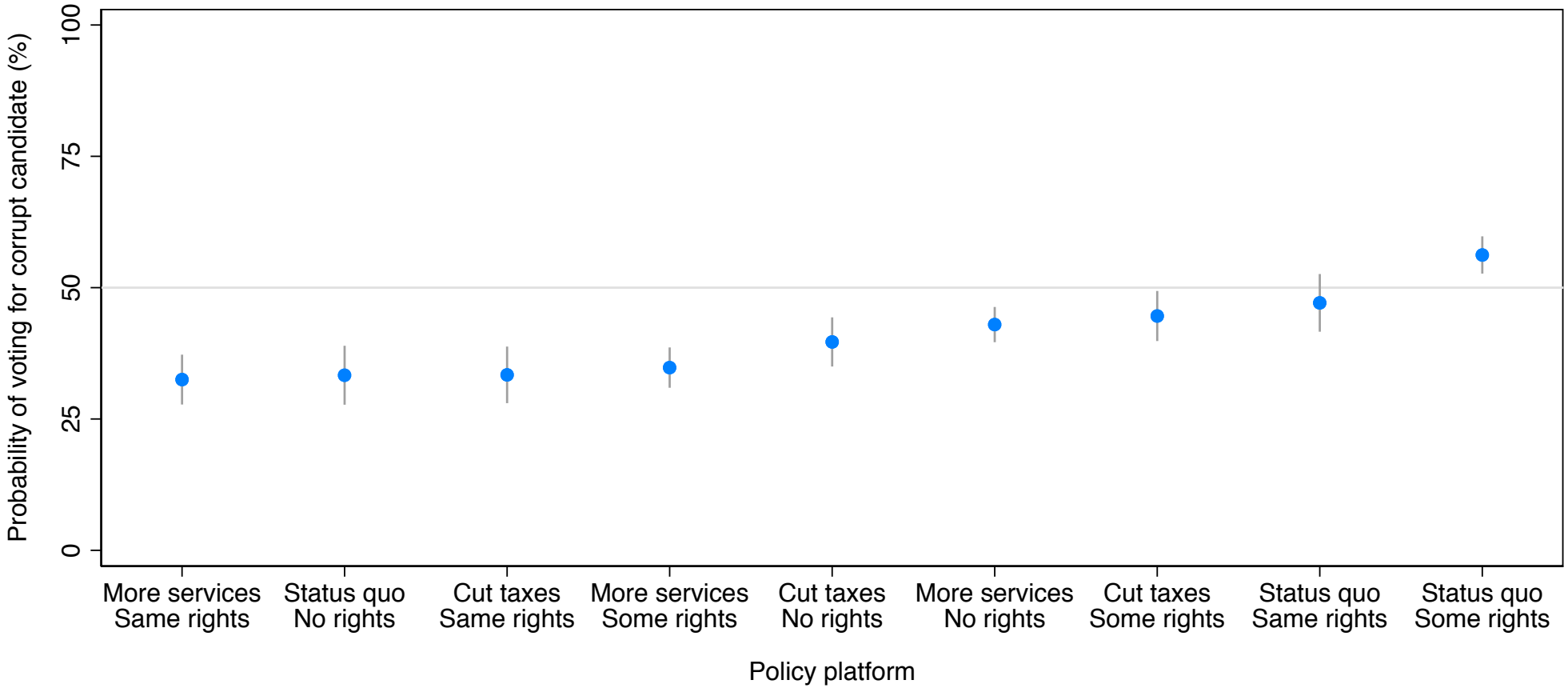

Figure 1: Franchino and Zucchini (2015) conjoint: can policy positions overcome corruption (conservative respondents)?

Survey complexity and conjoint experiments

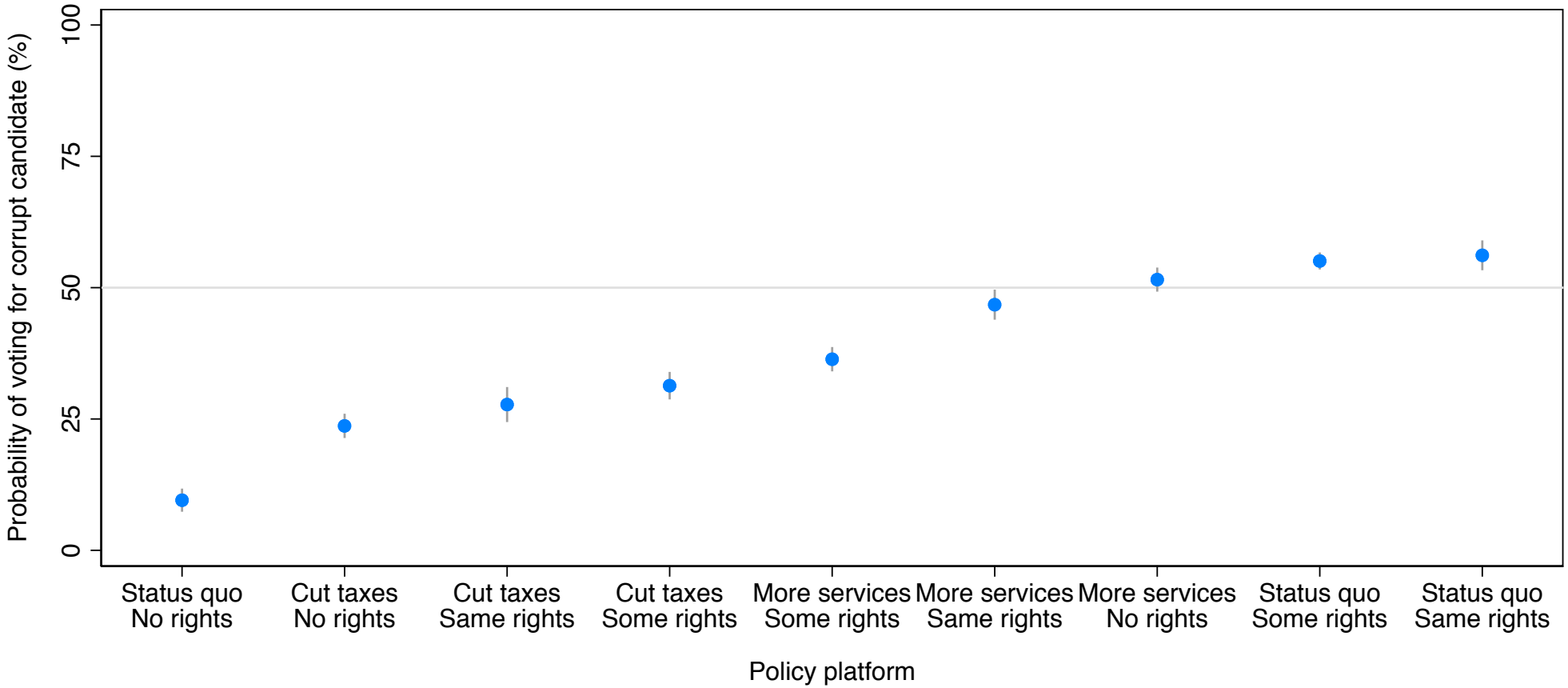

Figure 2: Franchino and Zucchini (2015) conjoint: can policy positions overcome corruption (liberal respondents)?

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Conclusion

- Effect of corruption information on vote-choice differs drastically between field and survey experiments.
  - Null in field experiments.
  - -34 to -36 percentage points in survey experiments.
- Discrepancy does not seem to be driven by publication bias/p-hacking.
- May arise from social desirability bias, lack of complexity and/or realism of hypothetical vignettes, and misinterpretation of results from conjoint experiments.

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- Vote-choice survey experiments may provide information on the directionality of informational treatments, but point estimates they provide may not be representative of real-world voting behavior.
- Researchers should exercise caution when interpreting actions taken in hypothetical vignettes as indicative of real world behavior such as voting.

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