

Corruption information and vote share: A meta-analysis and lessons for survey experiments*

Trevor Incerti[†]

July 4, 2019

Abstract

Do voters hold politicians accountable for corruption? Field experiments that provide voters with information about corrupt acts of politicians then monitor vote choice are now standard. Similarly, vote-choice survey experiments commonly inform respondents of corrupt acts of hypothetical candidates. Meta-analysis demonstrates that the aggregate treatment effect of corruption information on vote share in field experiments is approximately zero. By contrast, corrupt candidates are punished by approximately 33-35 percentage points across survey experiments. This suggests that while vote-choice survey experiments may identify the effect of informational treatments in hypothetical scenarios, the point estimates they provide may not be representative of real-world voting behavior. I explore publication bias, social desirability bias, and differences in experimental design and context as potential explanations for this discrepancy. Finally, I suggest examining the probability of voting for specific theoretically motivated candidates in conjoint experiments when researchers have priors about the conditions that shape voter decision-making.

Word count: 9057

*I am extremely grateful to Peter Aronow, Alexander Coppock, Angèle Delevoye, Devin Incerti, Joshua Kalla, Daniel Mattingly, Susan Rose-Ackerman, Frances Rosenbluth, Radha Sarkar, and Fredrik Sävje for invaluable feedback and suggestions. Any and all errors are my own.

[†]PhD Student in the Department of Political Science, Yale University. 115 Prospect St New Haven, CT 06520-8301. Email: trevor.incerti@yale.edu. Phone: +1 805-455-6126