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

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April 10, 2019

Introduction

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- Key question of electoral accountability.
- 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?

Methods

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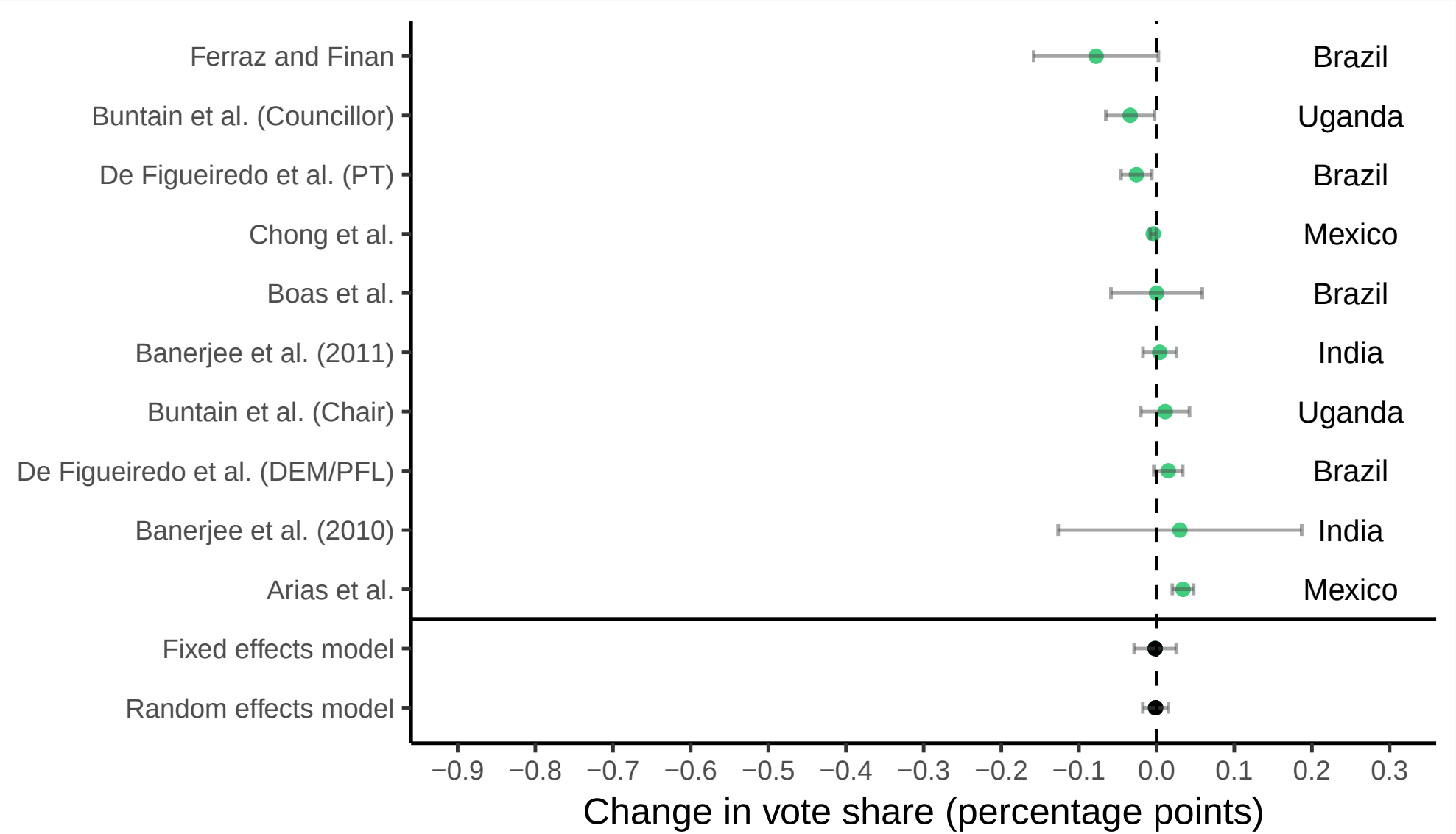
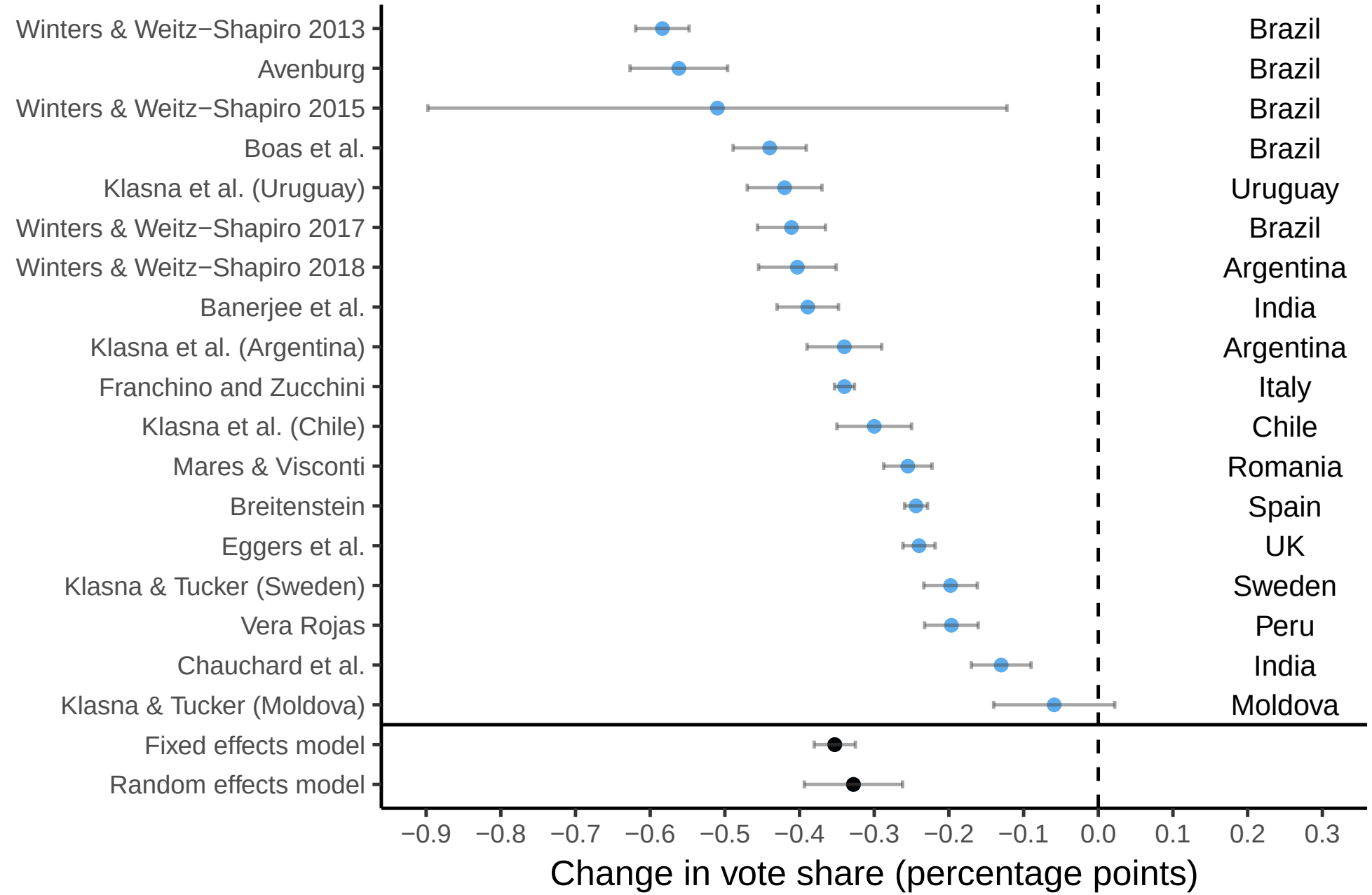
- Studies that use non-binary vote choices are rescaled into a binary vote choice.
- Point estimates, standard errors and/or confidence intervals are not always explicitly reported (4 cases). In these cases standard errors are estimated by digitally measuring coefficient plots.

Results

Results: Field Experiments



Results: Survey Experiments



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  - 66% 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 0.32 (significant at 1% level), while the overall estimate across studies is -.33.
    - 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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- But, traditional method of analysis (comparing magnitudes of individual average marginal component effects) may be misleading.

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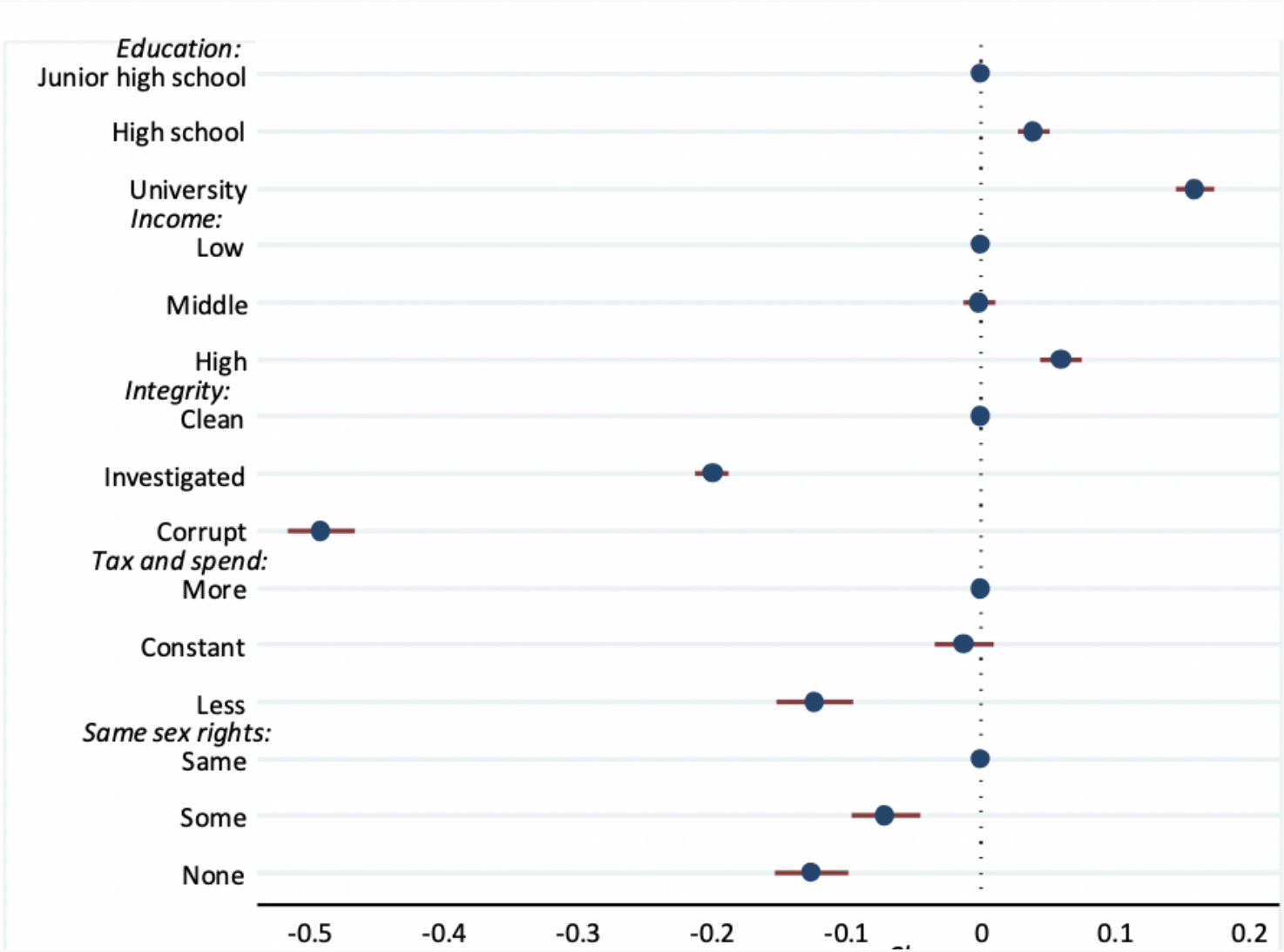

Figure 1: Franchino and Zucchini (2015) conjoint: AMCE plot

Survey complexity and conjoint experiments

Proposal: 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.

- E.g. What is the probability of a Democrat voting for a typical Democratic candidate who is corrupt?

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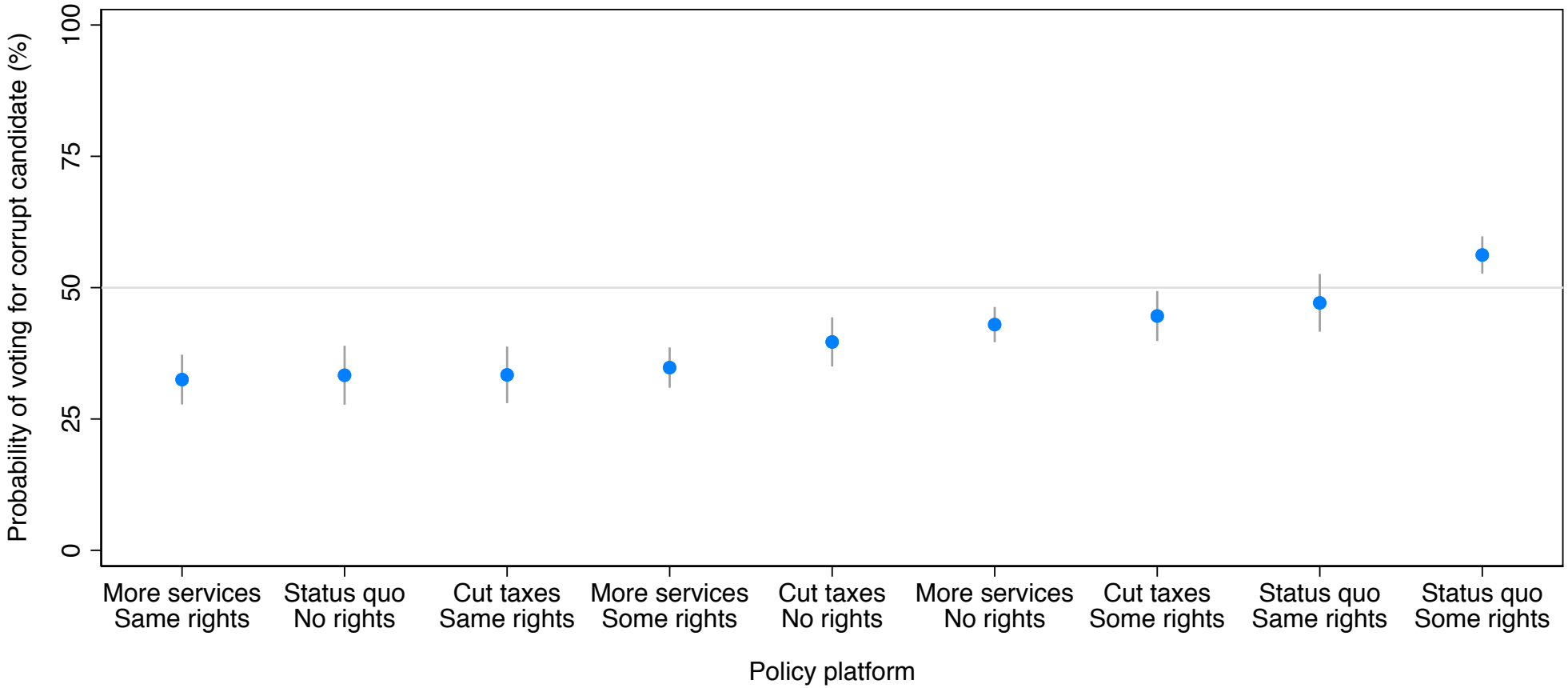

Figure 2: Franchino and Zucchini (2015) conjoint: can policy positions overcome corruption (conservative respondents)?

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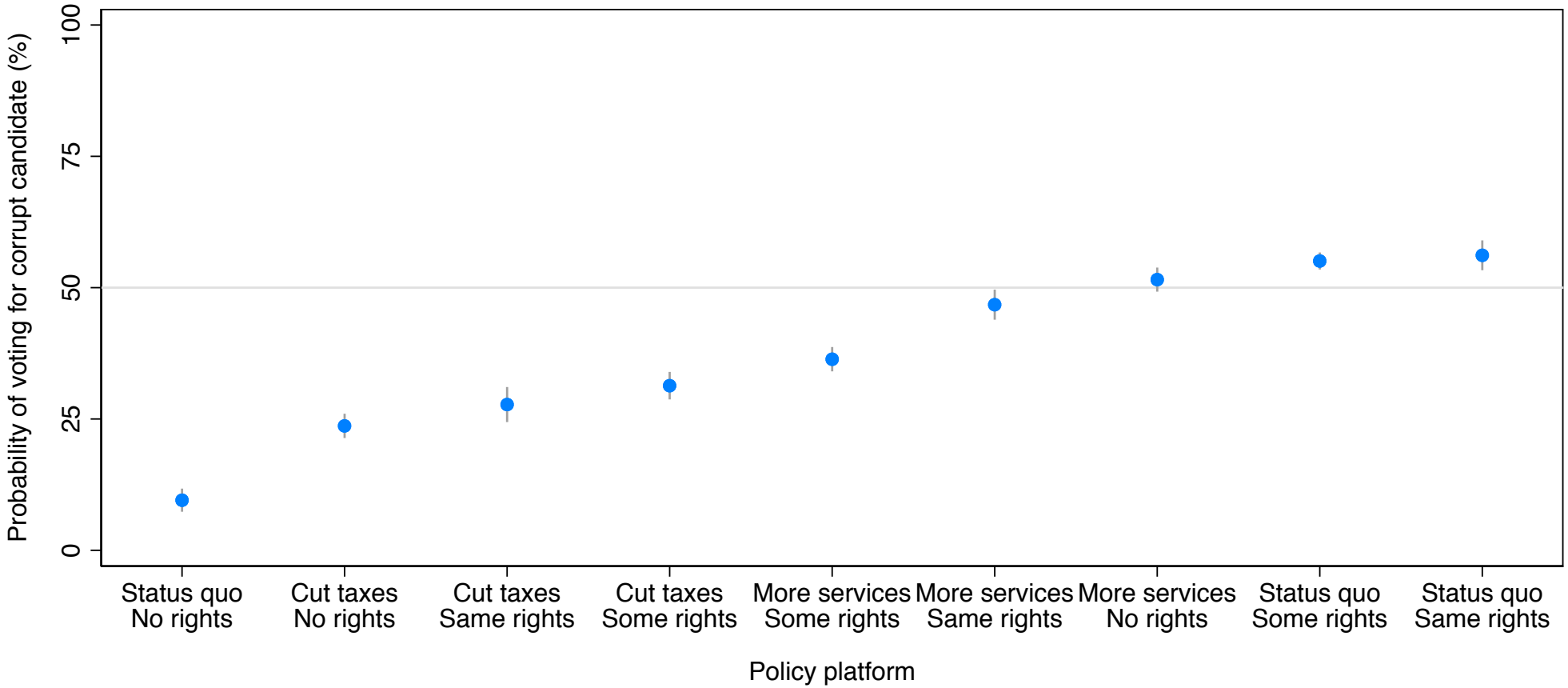

Figure 3: Franchino and Zucchini (2015) conjoint: can policy positions overcome corruption (liberal respondents)?

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  - Zero in field experiments.
  - -33 to -35 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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- Researchers should exercise caution when interpreting actions taken in hypothetical vignettes as indicative of real world behavior such as voting.

References

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