

«Misvoting in the Ballot: Random Power to Parties and its Effect on Politicians and Policies» (with M. Cervellati, G. Gulino)

Abstract

A natural experiment allows isolating the role of parties for the selection of politicians and policies. We exploit lotteries used to set the position of party symbols on all ballot papers in Italian local elections for over a decade. We document and quantify the existence of systematic, but random, electoral noise in the allocation of votes across parties. We find that even small perturbations in the power of parties impact policies. Randomly treating a party with a boost in votes shifts coalition policies towards this party's platform, but only for the more divisive electoral issues. Changes in relative political power within majorities also lead to the appointment of cabinet members with significantly different socio-demographic characteristics, while no effect is detected for policy-maker level of education. The unintentional experiment also helps shedding light on the role of party ideologies.