Compulsory Voting and Random Votes: Evidence from Brazil

Alessandro Freire
Universidade de Brasília

Mathieu Turgeon
The University of Western Ontario

4 June 2019
Compulsory voting

- increases turnout
- reduces inequality in participation

But, what about the second-order effects of compulsory voting?

And, in particular, does compulsory voting increase random voting?
Research Questions

1. How prevalent is random voting under compulsory voting?

2. Is random voting a socially undesirable behaviour?

3. Is random voting more common in low-profile, low-information elections?

4. Who is most like to vote randomly?
Indirect evidence of random voting or voter engagement:

- Ballot order effects (stronger under compulsory voting)
- Candidates’ photographs effects
- Decreased importance of proximity voting under compulsory voting
- Compulsory voting increases invalid balloting (blank and spoiled ballots)

In general, effects are strongest among least interested and least likely to vote (under voluntary voting or if voting were voluntary).
Hypotheses

**H1:** Random voting should be more common in low-profile, low-information elections

**H2:** Random voting should be more prevalent among less engaged voters
Data & Methods

Data:

- Survey data from a national online panel of adult Brazilians conducted in September 2018 (n = 8008)
- Survey includes direct question and a list experiment to measure random voting
Dependent variable:

Admitting to have vote randomly (four elected offices):

a. conventional question

b. list experiment

*Respondents were randomly assigned to the conventional question and control list or treatment list

Estimation strategy:

- Maximum likelihood (ML) estimator adopting a logit (for the conventional question) and a binomial logistic (for the list experiment) models. \texttt{R} package \texttt{list} (Blair and Imai, 2010)
Conventional question about random voting:

Do you usually vote for any candidate whatsoever for [state representative, federal representative, governor, president] only because voting in compulsory?

   Yes
   No
Random voting as measured by the list experiment

Let’s now talk about some of the things people generally do during elections. Please indicate HOW MANY of these things from the following list you usually do. We do not need to know which of these things, we are merely interested in the number of things from that list you usually do. Would you say that you do 1, 2, 3, 4, (5) or none of these things?
Data & Methods

Control list (items randomly ordered each time)

- Change channel on TV to avoid watching the publicly-subsidized electoral propaganda
- Use a candidate or party button or sticker
- Watch a debate between candidates on TV
- Avoid talking about politics among friends and family
Treatment list (items randomly ordered each time)

- Change channel on TV to avoid watching the publicly-subsidized electoral propaganda
- Use a candidate or party button or sticker
- Watch a debate between candidates on TV
- Avoid talking about politics among friends and family
- Vote for any candidate whatsoever for [state representative, federal representative, governor, president] only because voting in compulsory
Proportions of random voting by elected office


Est. Proportions/Diff. in Proportions

0.3
0.2
0.1
0.0
−0.1
−0.2
−0.3
Differences in prop. of random voting between elected offices (form direct question)
Determinants of random voting by elected office

**Education**

- College
- No college

**Political Interest**

- High
- Low

**Voluntary voting**

- Would vote
- Would not vote

**Political knowledge**

- High
- Low
Summary of findings

- Random voting is somewhat prevalent under compulsory voting
- Random voting is not perceived as a socially sensible behaviour
- Random voting is more common in low-profile, low-information elections
- Less engaged voters (low-educated, disinterested, and voters who would prefer not to vote if voting was voluntary) are all more likely to vote randomly
Thank you!