Pre-analysis plan

Double preference voting conditioned on gender and preference for diversity in Italian local elections 2018

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a double preference voting system conditioned on gender on the voting behavior of voters participating in municipal elections in Italy on the 10th of June, 2018. The primary outcome of interest will be the difference between the vote expressed by experiment participants having the option to vote for two candidates without constraints on gender, and the ballot cast by the participants having a gender constraint on votes (between-subjects difference). The secondary outcome of interest will be the difference between the vote cast with just one preference to the votes cast for candidate pairs (within-subjects difference).

The investigation will be conducted through a field experiment with potential participants to the local elections of 10th June, 2018 in Italy during the week previous to the local elections, from the 4th June 2018 to the 9th June 2018. The questionnaire will be administered in a digital format to a panel of residents in municipalities where local elections are held. We aim at a sample size of 2500 participants, who will be randomly divided in a treatment and counterfactual group. Cues on potential explanatory variables of the voting behavior of the participants and markers for preference for diversity will be also collected through the experiment.

Introduction

Background

In 2013, a new electoral system was implemented in municipal elections in Italy with the objective of increasing female participation in politics at the municipal level. The new voting system, coupled with a gender quota on lists, allows any voter from a municipality with a population of more than 5000 inhabitants to cast two preferences votes for members of the municipal council in the preferred list, given the two candidates have a different gender. If a voter fails to comply with the gender requirement, her second vote is discarded.

Compared to gender quotas in party lists, which have not always proved to be an effective mechanism to increase female participation in politics (Esteve-Volart & Bagues, 2012), the new electoral system significantly increased the share of women councillors in the municipalities where it was implemented. One explanation for this increase in representation was the ability of the new voting system to reveal the voter's true preferences in a more efficient manner compared to the single vote scenario (Baltrunaite et al., 2016). At the root of the model and explanation for the positive outcome on women's participation of Baltrunaite et al. (2016) is the assumption that the candidate preference rankings of the majority of voters are such, that voters will have a male candidate at the top of their preference ranking, followed by a female candidate. However, it is a question of interest whether this effect was actually driven by the revelation of true preferences of voters or from the new electoral system itself.

With this field experiment, we therefore ask the following questions: What is the impact of giving two preference votes on voting behavior, conditional and unconditional on gender? Would people display the same preference for diversity, were they given the opportunity to vote for two candidates unconditional on gender? Do votes differ when participants are asked to vote for one candidate compared to two candidates due to a different framing of the voting choice?

Purpose of the study and outcomes of interest

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a double preference voting system conditioned on gender on the voting behavior of voters participating in municipal elections in Italy on the local elections of the 10th of June, 2018.

The primary objective of the study is to observe whether voters would express different preferences were they able to cast votes without gender constraints, compared to the gender

restricted voting scenario. Therefore, the difference in these two ballots cast (*between-subjects*) is the primary outcome of interest for this study. The treatment group of the experiment is the group asked to vote for two candidates conditioned on gender, while the counterfactual is represented by people asked to vote for two candidates without gender constraints.

A secondary outcome of interest (*within-subjects*) is to observe whether the votes cast for one candidate differ from the votes cast in the case there are two candidates - therefore, whether the choice of one compared to two candidates affects the framing of the voting decision: when individuals vote for two candidates, do they vote for a candidate pair, or do they still rank candidates individually as in the single-vote scenario? In practice, this will mean observing whether the ballot containing two candidates does or does not contain the candidate the participant has voted for in the single-vote question.

Experimental design

Intervention dates

4 June 2018 - 9 June 2018

Description

The investigation will be conducted through a field experiment with potential participants to the local elections of 10th June, 2018 in Italy. The methodology used to conduct the experiment is the computer assisted web interviewing system (CAWI), where the panelists are required to answer a set of 4 questions, in which the question on voting behavior varies whether the individual panelist is assigned to the treatment or the counterfactual group.

The questions the panelists will be asked are the following:

1. (*Qualifying question on municipality)* - the questionnaire will only be available for completion if the participant is a resident of one of the municipalities for which we have been able to collect detailed candidate and list information;

2. Which is your preferred list of the ones presented for the local elections of 10th June 2018 in your municipality?

3a. Now, assuming you can vote for two candidates, who would you vote for - independently of gender of the candidate? (*question 3 for the counterfactual group*)

3b. Now, assuming you can vote for two candidates, who would you vote for if you had to vote for two candidates of a different gender? *(question 3 for the treatment group*)

4. Please tick the candidates you know personally, of the ones running for election in the municipal council.

5. If you have a partner, is your partner working in a remunerated employment outside the household?

In the questionnaire, participants are asked to tick their preference for a candidate from a list of candidates for the position of municipal council. To proceed in answering the questionnaire, they are obliged to select an option (or the relevant amount of options, in case they are asked for the two votes). Questions are arranged in decreasing order of importance.

The survey is completed by an italian company specialized in market research. The complete questionnaire related to the survey based on the questions above (in italian) will be made public as soon as the field experiment is completed. Panel participants have a monetary incentive to complete the questionnaire, and they are rewarded based on the number of questionnaires they successfully complete.

Outcomes of interest

I. Between-subjects: difference between votes cast for the couple of candidates conditioned on gender vs. couple of candidates chosen unconditional on gender

The main outcome of interest for the field experiment will be the difference between the vote expressed by the experiment participant in case they have the option to vote for two candidates without constraints on gender, and the ballot cast by the participant if she has a gender constraint on her votes (is forced to vote for a man and a woman).

II. Within-subjects: difference in votes cast for single candidates compared to votes cast for candidate pairs

A secondary outcome of interest is to observe whether the votes cast for one candidate differ from the votes cast in the case there are two candidates - therefore, whether the choice of one compared to two candidates affects the framing of the voting decision from the individually first preferred candidate to the best preferred couple of candidates. Since the implementation of the new electoral law

Randomization method

Randomization is performed by assigning a number to each of the panelists involved in the trial in the order they appear in the database of the company. Based on the assigned numbers, two groups are formed: the first, composed of participants assigned with an even number, and the second collecting participants who received an odd number. The even group will receive one version of the questionnaire, while the odd group will receive the other version. Randomization is performed by the company giving the questionnaire to the panelists based on the above instructions.

Randomization Unit

The randomization is performed at the individual respondent level.

Sample size and power considerations

We plan on collecting a sample size of approximately 2500 participants. The final number of answers collected will depend on the response rate of the panelists in the digital panel provided by the company implementing the survey. If the desired sample size of 2500 is effectively collected, we should be able to detect a 5% difference in the two groups with a 80% probability.

Other characteristics collected from the participants and clustering

Given the sample size of 2500, our main outcome of interest will be the difference between the votes cast for two candidates between the treatment and the control group. In addition to this, participants to the experiment are also asked:

(a) Whether they are personally acquainted with the candidate; and
(b) Given they have a partner, whether their partner works in a remunerated employment (outside the household).

These characteristics could influence the answer of the participants, and therefore, a characterization based on these variables will be added to the paper as a descriptive complement. The first factor influences the choice of candidates independent of gender, while the second factor might influence the preference for diversity within the candidates chosen. Recent evidence on the impact of personal interactions with candidates suggests that personal interaction with candidates affects the support received by individual candidates, although modestly (Cantoni & Pons, 2016). In addition, labour market participation of women may also affect voting behavior (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2008) and is therefore included in the questionnaire. The prior is that personal knowledge of the candidate will shift support towards this candidate, and that and labor force participation of the spouse will increase preference for diversity.

Finally, another variable taken into account for the interpretation of results will be the difference between votes cast by participants in small municipalities (population <5000) compared to participants in large municipalities. The reason for this classification is participants from larger municipalities might already have framed the voting decision in terms of two candidates of a different gender, while participants in

smaller municipalities, where the double preference voting conditioned on gender is not in place, might not have framed the voting decision in these terms.

References

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