Applied Economics Letters ›

Volume 26, 2019 - Issue 19

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Party-crashers or wallflowers? The lack of strategic voting in experimental primaries

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Pages 1641-1648 | Published online: 16 Mar 2019

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2019.1591585 Check for updates

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ABSTRACT

Open and semi-open primaries allow members of opposing political parties to participate in the selection of candidates for the general election. This feature has led to the claim that partisans will ‘cross-over’ and vote in the rival party’s primary, thereby sabotaging that party’s selection process. Using an experimental election, in which it is costly to vote, we find that most voters vote sincerely or not at all, and find little evidence of strategic voting.

KEYWORDS:

Voting experiment primary types

JEL CLASSIFICATION:

D72 H11

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Highlights

- We conduct an experiment of voting under different primary types.
- We examine voter choices in primary and general elections when costs increase.
- Voters are largely unwilling to engage in strategic voting.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the College of Charleston Summer Undergraduate Research Funding program for help funding this research, and Daniel Taber and Kathryn Abbott for their research assistance. Partial funding for this project came from the Center for Public Choice & Market Process, School of Business, College of Charleston. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at annual meetings of the Southern Economic Association, Economic Science Association and of the Public Choice Society. Monika Koeppl-Turyna and Matthew Holian provided helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

[1] For the role of primaries in European countries and Latin America see Pennings and Hazan (2001) and Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006).

[2] As in the real world, the proportion of strategic votes was calculated using the number of voters as the denominator.

[3] Strategic voting has ramification not just for participation, but for electoral outcomes. Issues like these are discussed in more detail in Blackwell and Calcagno (2014).

Additional information

Funding

This work was supported by the Center for Public Choice & Market Process, School of Business, College of Charleston; College of Charleston Summer Undergraduate Research Funding;

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