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Universidad
de Navarra
Navarra Center for
International Development

8th NCID Research Workshop on Development Economics

**Navarra Center for International Development,
Institute for Culture and Society
University of Navarra**

Fundación Ramón Areces (Madrid), April 4th-5th 2019

Stéphane Straub - Voting Corrupt Politicians Out of Office? Evidence from an Experiment in Paraguay

This paper challenges the conventional wisdom that giving voters more power - both formally through the use of more “open” electoral systems, and informally through easier access to information about politicians’ wrongdoings - will necessarily result in them voting corrupt politicians out of office. First, focusing on a comparison between closed-list and open-list proportional representation systems, we show theoretically that opening the lists is likely to generate a large shift of vote shares in favor of the traditional, most corrupt parties. Second, we design a survey experiment to test these predictions in Paraguay, and find strong supporting evidence. Last, we do not find in our context that the lack of information about politicians’ wrongdoings is a major obstacle preventing voters to vote out corrupt politicians; if anything, we find that under the more open system, supporters of the incumbent party actually exhibit a “preference” for corrupt politicians.