

# **“Voting corrupt politicians out of office: Evidence from an Experiment in Paraguay”**

**by**

**Karine Van Der Straeten (Toulouse School of Economics, FR)**

joint with: Rumilda Canete, Pepita Miquel (Toulouse School of Economics & IAST) and  
Stephane Straub (Toulouse School of Economics & IAST).

## **Abstract:**

Corruption is a major threat to economic and social development. Democracy in itself is not necessarily conducive to less corruption. Voters may lack information about politicians' wrongdoings, and electoral institutions may make it hard for them to remove corrupt politicians from office. From these premises, one might expect that more information and more "open" electoral systems, that is, systems giving voters more freedom to express their preferences over individual candidates, should help remove corrupt politicians from office. We propose a simple theoretical model describing voters' behavior under closed list and open list proportional representation systems, and derive predictions which challenge these optimistic views about opening the electoral system. Taking advantage of a rare social uprising following a corruption scandal in Paraguay, we design a survey experiment to test these predictions. Consistently with the predictions of our model, we find a large shift in vote shares towards large traditional parties when lists are opened, even though these parties are widely perceived as corrupt by voters. Besides, we find that under the more open system, supporters of the incumbent party actually exhibit a preference for corrupt politicians, and that this is not due to a lack of information. Based on this evidence, we challenge the conventional view that more information and more open electoral systems are necessarily good at fighting corruption.