

**Voting for the Lesser Evil:
Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment in Romania**

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Abstract

In many elections around the world, voters choose among politicians that differ not only in their personal background characteristics and policy promises, but also in their history of dishonest conduct. While recent literature has begun to investigate the conditions under which voters punish electoral corruption, we know relatively little about whether citizens penalize different forms of illicit activities carried out by politicians differently. In this paper, we present the results of a candidate choice experiment embedded in a survey fielded prior to the 2016 Romanian local election. We asked voters to choose between two hypothetical candidates, randomly varying several attributes, including different unlawful electoral activities. We find that citizens tolerate some forms of political malfeasance less than others depending on whether the illicit activity (a) infringes on voters' autonomy and (b) is a target of anti-corruption campaigns.

Keywords: Corruption, clientelism, intimidation, vote choice, conjoint design, Eastern Europe, Romania.