

Paper proposal for the X AECPA Congress. GT 4.4: “Actitudes y comportamiento político: aspectos metodológicos”

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Paper title: Combining experimental and survey data to understand political participation. An examination of potential bias.

Behavioral questions in survey research do not control the context in which participation takes place while economic lab experiments pose questions regarding their external validity. Our study “Political participation, norms of citizenship, and heterogeneous motivation: Experimental and survey evidence” combines both methodologies in order to test specific hypothesis regarding citizens’ political involvement. Political behavior research usually relies in survey questions measuring past behavior. This makes it difficult to address theoretical expectations regarding the effect of the specific context and the role of individuals’ motivations. Therefore we designed an economic experiment that permitted to control the environment and induce participants’ motivations. Other main independent variables were measured by a reduced version of the European Social Survey. In this presentation we will focus on methodological aspects of the interplay between survey and experimental data, e.g. the validity of survey data in the context of lab experiments. Specifically, our setting allows assessing the potential bias in the answers to the questionnaire introduced by the wish of participants to justify their behavior in the experiment. In order to identify this potential bias, we run two series of laboratory experiments. The first one included the questionnaire after the experiment, while the second will conduct the survey at a separate point in time.

The results of our mixed methods research design show that it is a useful strategy to test complex theories. Beyond the satisfactory results of this exercise, the combination of survey and laboratory data offers interesting insights for a follow up methodological investigation regarding the external validity of laboratory experiments in political participation research. To do so the second experiment series, which we are currently conducting, examines the potential bias between the two instruments and therefore will allow drawing conclusions regarding the most adequate strategy to integrate this combination of methods in further research. Our contribution in this colloquium will present the first results of this second exercise.