**PUBLIC CONTRACTS AND POLITICAL CONTESTABILITY: INSIGHTS FROM FRENCH INSTITUTIONAL CATERING**

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***ABSTRACT***

Building on the recent literature on third-party opportunism in public contracting (Beuve & al, 2014, Moszoro & al., 2016, Spiller 2008), we compare the design of procurement contracts when the service is buy either by a private organization or a public body. We rely on a dataset made of all contracts signed in 2015 by one of the largest French company in the catering sector. We test two propositions: (i) private-to-private contracts are less rigid than private-to-public contracts for the provision of the same service; (ii) in the subsample of private-to-public contracts, the level or contractual rigidity increases with local political contestability. With the help of a data reading software and textual analysis, we collect textual data that account for contract rigidity. We find that public-to-private contracts are more rigid than private-to-private contract. Based on a subsample of public to private contracts, we also look whether contractual rigidity depends on political contestability. We find that political contestation (using several measures) influence the contractual rigidity. These results support the view that political factors are important drivers of contractual design when the buyer is a public body.

*Keywords:* Contracts, Institutional Catering, Political Oversight, Private and Public Procurement, Rigidity, Third Party Opportunism.