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Juan March Institute

Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (CEACS)

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Author(s): Roussias, Athanassios; Calle Robles, Luis de la

Date 2011

Type Working Paper

Series Estudios = Working papers / Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones,
Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales 2010/257

City: Madrid

Publisher: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales

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WORKING PAPERS

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SPATIAL OR PERFORMANCE VOTING?

Luis de la Calle and Nasos Roussias

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Luis de la Calle and Nasos Roussias are Junior Researchers at the Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, Juan March Institute.

INTRODUCTION

The literature on voting behavior has dealt extensively with the heuristics citizens use in order to reach a voting decision. We know that individuals pay attention to the ideological positions of parties; they prefer voting for parties that are located close to them (Downs 1957, Enelow & Hinich 1984) or in the same side of the Left-Right spectrum (Rabinowitz & MacDonald 1989). We also know that citizens use shortcuts, such as partisan identities, in order to facilitate decision making; instead of trying to decipher the often complex policy proposals of parties, they simply vote for the party they identify with (Fiorina 1980; Green et al. 2002). However, we know little about the decision mechanisms citizens with no partisan identities use. How do independents decide who to vote for? Do they behave similar to partisans or do they use different heuristics?

This paper deals with these questions, proposing an account that explains the voting decision mechanisms of independents. In particular, we show that the independents form a rather cohesive group, which shares several distinctive characteristics: they are more likely to be located in the center of the Left-Right spectrum, to be torn between the two main parties, and to change their vote between elections. In short, these potential voters are under crossfire, from both the Left and the Right and thus have a hard time making voting decisions. Given this difficult situation independents are in, the use of ideological distance is of little help (as they are likely to be close to both main parties). Thus, the main heuristic they use is the performance evaluation of both big parties, that is, the government and the opposition.

We test this using a specifically designed survey examining the Spanish party system. We use questions honing in on the evaluation of both PSOE (government) and PP (main opposition) and find that while performance is important in determining vote choice, it is much more important for independents. Citizens with no partisan attachments punish (reward) harshly negative (positive) performance from the government; they are equally strict with the opposition evaluation. This is an

important finding, as it indicates the disparate ways in which partisans and independents reach voting decisions.

This paper is structured in four sections; in the first we define independents and discuss several of their distinguishing characteristics. In the second part we present our theory of (retrospective) voting; in the third part we conduct the empirical analysis and show our results. A last part concludes, pointing out the implications of our findings, as well as possible extensions of the research.

INDEPENDENTS: DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

A voluminous literature on partisanship exists, with the “*American Voter*” being a point of reference (Campbell et al 1960). According to Campbell and his coauthors, party identification is based on the notion of self-classification, and not on previous voting behavior; citizens are asked to state if they think themselves as belonging to a political party. The exact wording of the question, as it is used in the American National Election Studies (ANES) is: “generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” An additional survey item then probes how strong is the attachment citizens feel towards parties.

This direct way of asking individuals what is their partisan attachment exploits the bipartisan character of the American political system. However, such an approach does not travel well in countries with multi-party systems, which are the norm across the world. The way the partisanship question was translated for such environments is indirect; it first asks about the presence of a partisan attachment abstractly, and then probes for the party the respondent feels attached to. In particular, the wording used in the European Election Studies (EES) is the following: “Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?”¹ This allows for the

¹ The exact wording may vary across surveys probing for partisanship in multiparty systems, but the logic is the same.

revelation of partisan identities even in party systems with numerous parties.

Independents in the multiparty framework are typically defined in a negative way; they are those not expressing a partisan identity. The lack of an expressed attachment is what we also use to define independents. In particular, we use a question which asks about partisan identities through an anchoring vignette (King et al 2004): “Some people consider themselves as sympathizing with a political party, even though they may not always vote for it. Others, in turn, do not manifest such sympathies towards any party. In general, do you consider yourself as sympathizing with some party?”² It then follows up with a question about the party they identify with, as well as the intensity of the identification (strong, moderate, weak).

We operationalize independents as those answering “No” in the first question (p. 45) and create a dummy variable, with “1” representing independents and “0” partisans”.³ We also create a continuous variable that measures partisanship intensity, ranging from 0 (independents) to 3 (strong partisans), using the follow-up question (p. 45b).⁴ Table 1 shows that out of a sample of 3255 individuals across Spain, more than half do not identify with a particular party.⁵ In particular, 53.8% of the respondents claim not having a partisan

attachment; 10.1% are weak partisans, 27.9% moderate partisans and only 8.2% are strong ones.⁶

TABLE 1. Party Identification Descriptives

Party Identification	Frequency	Percent
0 (Independents)	1751	53.8
1 (Weak Partisans)	329	10.1
2 (Moderate Partisans)	908	27.9
3 (Strong Partisans)	266	8.2
Total	3255	100

The abundance of independents in the sample is illuminating; independents are not an aberrant group as they constitute a majority among citizens.⁷ Moreover, one should not commit the mistake of identifying independents as being apolitical. Independents have ideological leanings that fall all over the ideological spectrum, as can be seen in Table 2. Out of all independents, only 5.6% self-identify as apolitical, while 29% chose the DK/NA category. Moreover, they are more likely to characterize themselves as liberals (16.5%) in comparison to partisans (11.4%), while they are less likely to identify with ‘stronger’ ideological labels, such as conservative, socialist, communist or nationalist.

Even though independents label themselves as having some sort of political label, they are much less likely to participate in elections than citizens with a party ID. Almost a quarter of all independents did not vote in the 2008 elections, while a fifth of them abstained in the 2004 ones (Table 3). In stark contrast, less than 1/15 and 1/20 of partisans abstained in these elections respectively. The same pattern is observed with respect to casting a blank vote, with independents being almost five times as likely to cast one in comparison to partisans. Moreover, the set of habitual non-voters or those casting blank in both the 2004 and 2008 elections is overwhelmingly comprised of

² In the original the wording is: “Algunas personas se consideran simpatizantes de un partido político, a pesar de que no siempre votan por él. Otras, en cambio, no manifiestan una simpatía hacia ningún partido en concreto. En general, ¿se considera usted simpatizante de algún partido?”

³ We also include as independents all those failing to answer this question; they only constitute 1.2% of the sample.

⁴ In doing so, we are avoiding the trap that Petrocik (2009) identified by which the conflation of party “leaners” with pure independents biases the electoral impact of partisanship.

⁵ These numbers are quite in line with the results that Barnes et al. (1985) found in their study of the first seven years of democracy in Spain after the end of the dictatorship. In this sense, it seems as if more than two decades of additional democratic experience yielded little in terms of creating more partisans.

⁶ All cross-tabulations and analyses presented are weighted by region.

⁷ These numbers still lie behind partisanship rates in Western European countries such as Germany (Arzheimer 2006) or the UK (Sanders 2003).

TABLE 2. Partisanship and Ideological Leaning

Ideology & Partisanship	Partisans %	Independents %	Total
Conservador/A	15.5	10.5	12.8
Demócrata Cristiano/A	8.1	5.7	6.8
Liberal	11.4	16.5	14.1
Sociodemócrata	9.8	8.3	9.0
Socialista	29.2	11.5	19.7
Comunista	3.2	0.9	1.9
Nacionalista	5.6	2.9	4.2
Ecologista	3.3	4.6	4.0
Feminista	1.4	1.1	1.3
Otras Respuestas	2.7	3.2	3.0
Apolítico	1.3	5.6	3.6
n.s.	6.7	22.1	15.0
n.c.	1.8	7.2	4.7
Total	1,504	1,751	3,255

TABLE 3. Independents, Turnout and Blank Votes

Participation & Abstention	Partisans	Independents	% Inds/Total
Abstention 2004	4.9	20.2	84.1
Blank 2004	0.6	2.9	82.7
Abstention 2008	6.4	24.5	85.2
Blank 2008	0.8	4	81.7
Abstention/Blank in both elections	2.8	18.5	88.6

independents. More than 18% of independents did not vote or cast blank in both elections, while less than 3% of partisans did the same. Clearly, independents either have a very hard time of reaching a voting choice or are less likely to participate in elections.

Perhaps more interesting, however, is the self-placement of independents on the left-right axis and the comparison with partisans. A plurality of independents (33.1%) locates themselves on the middle of the L-R axis. Only 17.3% of partisans on the other hand place themselves on 5. Moreover, more than 51% of independents are located on the 4-6 range, while only 37% of the partisans do so. On the flip side, few independents are located on the extremes; only 3.7% are located on the 0-1 range and 1.3% on the 9-10 one. Many more partisans are in the extremes, as one would expect; 11.5% and 4.4% are in the 0-1 and 9-10 ranges respectively. Finally, a significant share of independents refuse to place themselves on the axis, choosing

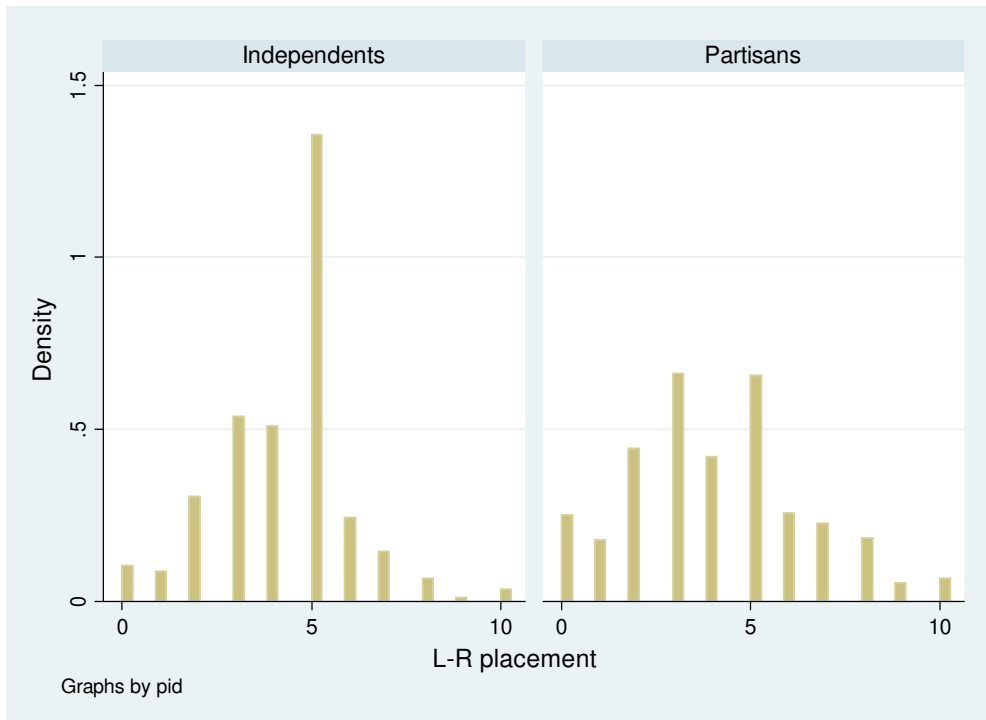
“don’t know”/“don’t answer” response, while much fewer partisans did so (21.5% & 6.2% respectively). Table 4 lists the percentages and frequencies for each category, while Figure 1 draws the histograms of these frequencies. It becomes clear that the concentration of Independents that place themselves on “5” is much higher than any other point on both distributions.

The distributions of partisans and independents along the L-R axis highlight several differences between the two groups. First, the mass of partisans on the extremes of the distribution, in conjunction with the lack of independents in the same area, indicates a link between partisan identification and ideological self-placement. Voters that locate themselves on the extremes of the ideological spectrum are most likely to express an affinity towards a party, since such extreme positions are usually associated with some specific political grouping. On the other hand, the concentration of independents on the center of the ideological continuum can

TABLE 4. Independents, Partisans and L-R Placement

L-R placement	Independents %	Partisans %
Left	2.1	6.6
1	1.6	4.9
2	5.3	10.3
3	10.1	16.7
4	10.8	11.8
5	33.1	17.3
6	7.5	8.5
7	4.8	7.5
8	2.1	6.0
9	0.4	2.0
Right	0.9	2.4
DK	13.9	3.8
NA	7.6	2.4
Total	1751	1504

FIGURE 1. Partisanship and L-R Placement



be interpreted in multiple ways. It could be that the lack of partisan identities is the outcome of the ideological positioning of voters, which are caught between the two main political forces of the center-right and center-left, and thus are unable to create an attachment to either. It could also be that positioning oneself on the center of the spectrum is understood as choosing a neutral or non-committal position. Such an interpretation would also be consistent with

the high numbers of independents who refuse to place themselves on the ideological continuum.

Regardless of the interpretation one chooses to believe, the point that is clear from the self-placement of voters is that independents clearly exhibit characteristics that set them apart from partisans. As such, even if independents do not form a cohesive group (or a group at all), it is important to investigate further their characteristics in

order to identify if they also behave differently in the electoral arena, and how they reach their decisions. We thus now move on to analyzing the consistency of the voting behavior of partisans and independents.

SWING VOTERS, PROPENSITIES TO VOTE AND INDEPENDENTS

The discussion so far has indicated that the independents share some characteristics that create questions about the rigidity of their preferences and their overall electoral participation. We have seen that they are more likely to abstain from elections and that they tend to be located in the middle of the ideological spectrum. One could thus wonder about their voting behavior and its continuity over time. Once independents decide to participate in elections, do they vote for the same party repeatedly (as one would expect from partisans) or do they change their vote? Put it differently, are independents simply lacking a partisan identity but share the voting persistence characteristics of partisans, or are they swing voters?

This is an important question, but it is not the only reason for studying swing voters. They are of particular interest since they, alongside new voters, are the ones driving changes in electoral results. Generally speaking, a relatively small percentage of citizens deciding to change their votes between elections may be enough to result in a change in government. This holds even stronger if the tendency to swing is overwhelmingly in one direction and the flows of voters switching goes from one major party to another. Thus, swing voters are an interesting quantity by themselves, and worth a brief examination.

Swing voters are generally defined as those citizens that change the party they vote between elections. The identification of swing voters is relatively easy in two-party systems, through questions about vote recall.⁸ However, things become more

complicated once we go into the world of multiparty systems, especially when new parties can easily enter the electoral competition. Moreover, if some parties happen to exist between elections, then those that voted for it by definition will have to either abstain or vote for a different party. Furthermore, the multiplicity of parties means that the ideological distances between parties are much smaller in comparison to a bipartisan world. Thus, even though a citizen may have radically changed her opinions, she may still change her vote due to a small change in the relative party positions.

These issues notwithstanding, there are several possible ways to identify swing voters. If the point is to create a picture that can be comparable to bipartisan systems, one could only focus on vote shifts between the two main parties, PP and PSOE. Such a choice however, would lead to misleading inferences, as depending on the issue of relevance, several other parties may be located between these two parties in the ideological space. Thus, the decision to abandon, let's say PP, does not automatically mean a decision to support PSOE; if anything, that would be the exception, not the rule, as PP voters probably do not feel that their most preferred exit choice is PSOE.

We therefore decided not to restrict the definition of swing voters and look at all those that change their vote between elections, not just the voters of the two big parties. This way we can get a fuller picture of swing voters and have more confidence in the inferences we make about their behavior. We thus operationalized swing voters as all those that changed vote choice between the two 2004 and 2008 elections, including those that decided to abstain and cast a blank ballot (Swing 1). This is the most expansive definition we could come

with the recent elections winner. However, the primary point of this section is not to measure perfectly swing voters (although it is desirable) but to explore the relationship between partisanship, independents and swing voters. Thus, in the discussion that follows we recognize the limitations emerging from the way swing voters are measured through the vote recall questions, but believe that that the results are illuminating as to the questions at hand.

⁸ It is true that vote recall questions suffer from significant problems, as survey respondents tend to "forget" their previous voting choices, or prefer to state that they have voted for a party different from the one they really did, either trying to provide "consistent" answers or to side

up with and we identify 673 swing voters, or 21.9% of the sample. We also created a second definition that focuses on swinging between any parties in the two elections, but excludes those that abstained, cast a blank ballot or did not tell us who they voted for (Swing 2). This definition thus focuses on those that made a discrete party choice in both elections and identifies 226 swing voters, or 11.9% of the sample.⁹

Having defined swing voters, we can now take a look at their relationship with partisanship. Table 5 shows the crosstabs between Swing1 and Swing2, and partisanship. For both definitions we can observe that independents are much more likely to change their voting behavior between the two elections than partisans are. While more than 1 in 4 independents change their vote between elections (27%)

This relationship between independents and swing voters indicates several things. First, it reinforces our intuition that independents voting decisions are not as rigid as those of partisans. Independents are more open to changing parties over time, exactly because they seem to lack this psychological attachment partisans have. Furthermore, their higher proclivity to change vote reinforces the idea that they are under cross-pressure from multiple parties simultaneously, since they are more likely to be located in the center of the ideological spectrum. However, we don't know if that is also true about swing voters; where are they located in the left-right axis?

Table 6 shows the self-placement of stable and swing voters. The picture we see is quite similar to the one we saw above about independents. Swing voters are much

TABLE 5. Swing Voters and PID

PID	Change for all Voters & Non-Voters (Swing 1)			Change between Party Voters Only (Swing 2)		
	No Swing	Swing Voters	Total	No Swing	Swing Voters	Total
Independents	1190	441	1631	658	136	794
%	73.0	27.0	100	82.8	17.2	100
Partisans	1194	239	1432	1106	101	1207
%	83.3	16.7	100	91.6	8.4	100
Total	2383	680	3063	1764	237	2001
%	77.8	22.2	100	88.2	11.9	100

Swing1: Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 33.2754$ Pr = 0.000

Swing2: Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 32.0882$ Pr = 0.000

only 1 in 6 partisans (16.7%) do so. The differences are even starker if we only look at those citizens who vote for parties in both elections; while 1 in 12 partisans (8.4%) change their vote, twice as many independents (17.2%) change vote as well. However, while these differences are statistically significant (chi-square tests), the correlation between partisanship and swingers is not that strong ($r_{\text{swing1-pid}} = -0.1$, $r_{\text{swing2-pid}} = -0.13$).

⁹ We actually played around with various more definitions of swing voters: looking only at swinging between PP and PSOE, excluding and including abstention, as well as various others. Results do not differ, and for theoretical reasons we stick with the two ones included in the main text.

more likely to place themselves on the center of the spectrum, compared to those that don't change their vote, regardless of the definition used. More than a third of swing voters locate themselves on "5", compared to about a fifth of the stable voters. If we expand the center to include those on "4" and "6", we see that around 40% of stable voters locate themselves there, compared to more than 54% of swing voters for both definitions. The evidence is clear; swing voters overwhelmingly are located in the center of the spectrum, much more so than those not changing their vote.

This juxtaposition of the self-placement of stable and swing voters provides more indication that voting decisions become more difficult, the more centrally located

TABLE 6. Swing Voters, PID and L-R Placement

L-R Placement	Change for all Voters & Non-Voters (Swing 1)			Change between Party Voters Only (Swing 2)		
	No Swing %	Swing Voters %	Total %	No Swing %	Swing Voters %	Total %
Left	4.6	2.9	4.2	5.4	5.3	5.4
1	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.6	4.9	3.8
2	7.5	8.0	7.6	9.2	10.8	9.4
3	13.5	11.6	13.1	16.4	10.4	15.6
4	10.7	14.4	11.5	12.3	10.7	12.2
5	22.7	34.6	25.4	18.2	38.1	20.6
6	8.1	7.2	7.9	9.3	5.1	8.8
7	6.7	4.0	6.1	8.3	4.5	7.9
8	4.7	1.2	3.9	5.7	1.0	5.1
9	1.2	0.8	1.2	1.6	0.9	1.5
Right	1.9	0.3	1.5	2.3	0.7	2.2
DK	9.5	8.5	9.2	5.2	6.2	5.3
NA	6.0	3.2	5.4	2.5	1.5	2.4
Total	2383	680	3063	1764	237	2001

Swing1: Pearson $\chi^2(12) = 56.6693$ Pr = 0.000
 Swing2: Pearson $\chi^2(12) = 42.4553$ Pr = 0.000

voters are. It also shows that there is a close link between being an independent and swing voters; both groups have a mass that is located in the center and thus are under cross-pressure from multiple parties. However, it remains unclear how exactly this cross-pressure is manifested and how voters perceive it. In order to understand this better we need to investigate the propensities voters assign to voting for parties.

The propensity to vote (PTV) is a variable measuring how likely a citizen is to vote for a party. Each respondent is asked to state her probability of voting for each party, given options from 0 to 10, with the former indicating absolute certainty of never voting for it, while the latter representing always voting for it.¹⁰ Instead of using the PTVs for all parties, we decide to focus on the PTVs voters assign to the two major parties, PP and PSOE. We do that for several reasons; first, the two

parties are on opposite sides of the center and voters are likely to perceive them as such. Second, since these are the main parties, it is likely that voters will also perceive them as the main government contenders. Third, they are not extreme parties, in the sense that voters tend to assign them closer to the center of the spectrum and thus they are the parties that would put centrally located voters under cross-pressure.

Thus, in order to isolate the cross-pressures created from PP and PSOE we created a variable which is the absolute difference in the PTVs assigned to PP and PSOE. The variable ranges from 0 to 10, with 0 representing identical PTVs for the two parties, while 10 represents that the voter has assigned the maximum PTV for one party and the minimum for the other. The distribution of the variable has one clear mode on zero, and two small spikes, on five and ten (Figure 2). This indicates that overall, voters either consider it equally likely they will vote for PP and PSOE, or they are absolutely sure they will always vote one while never voting for the other.

However, looking at the whole sample together is not that informative. There are bound to be differences between the PTVs partisans and independents assign and thus

¹⁰ The exact question in the questionnaire is p22, and goes like this: "...me gustaría que me dijera cuál es la probabilidad de que Ud. Vote a cada uno de los partidos,..., utilizando para ello una escala de 0 a 10, en la que el 0 significa que "con seguridad no le votaría nunca", y el 10 que "con seguridad le votaría siempre".

we need to separate them. Table 7 does that, breaking the PTV difference among partisans and independents (left panel). Once we do that we immediately note that independents are much more likely to value identically the main two parties, with partisans being more likely to assign the maximum difference. In particular, 33.2% of independents give equal PTV to PP and

PSOE, while only 12.4 of partisans doing so. If we include PTV differences up to 2, we find almost 50% of independents being torn between PP and PSOE, compared to around 23% of partisans. Looking at the other extreme, we find that 22.8% of partisans assign a difference of 10 between the two, with only 6.8% of independents doing so.

TABLE 7. PTV Difference, PID and Swing Voters

PTV difference PP/PSOE	PID			Change between Party Voters Only (Swing2)		
	Independents %	Partisans %	Total %	No Swing %	Swing Voters %	Total %
0	33.2	12.4	23.0	10.9	28.8	13.0
1	8.2	4.9	6.6	4.5	12.2	5.4
2	8.3	6.1	7.2	7.1	9.4	7.4
3	6.5	6.1	6.3	5.8	10.1	6.3
4	7.3	6.5	6.9	6.8	7.7	6.9
5	12.3	10.0	11.2	11.4	10.7	11.3
6	6.9	8.1	7.5	8.6	7.3	8.5
7	5.6	9.1	7.3	9.5	4.0	8.8
8	4.1	7.7	5.9	7.9	5.9	7.7
9	0.9	6.3	3.6	5.2	2.6	4.9
10	6.8	22.8	14.6	22.4	1.3	19.9
Total	1491	1438	2929	1661	219	2929

PID: Pearson $\chi^2(10) = 258.2608$ Pr = 0.000

Swing2: Pearson $\chi^2(10) = 74.3094$ Pr = 0.000

FIGURE 2. PP and PSOE PTV Difference

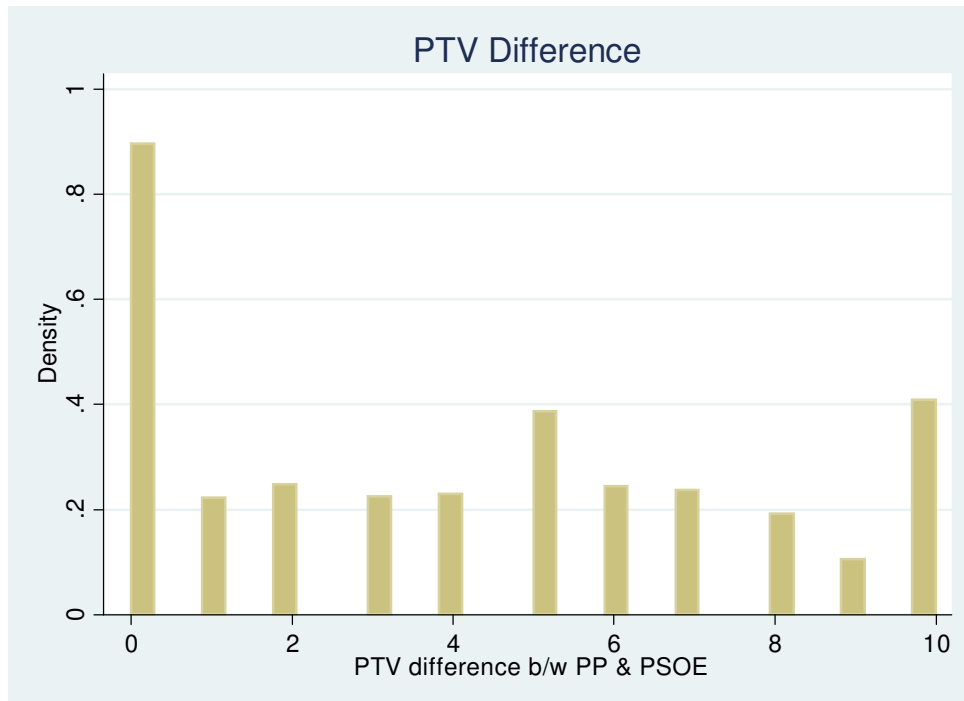
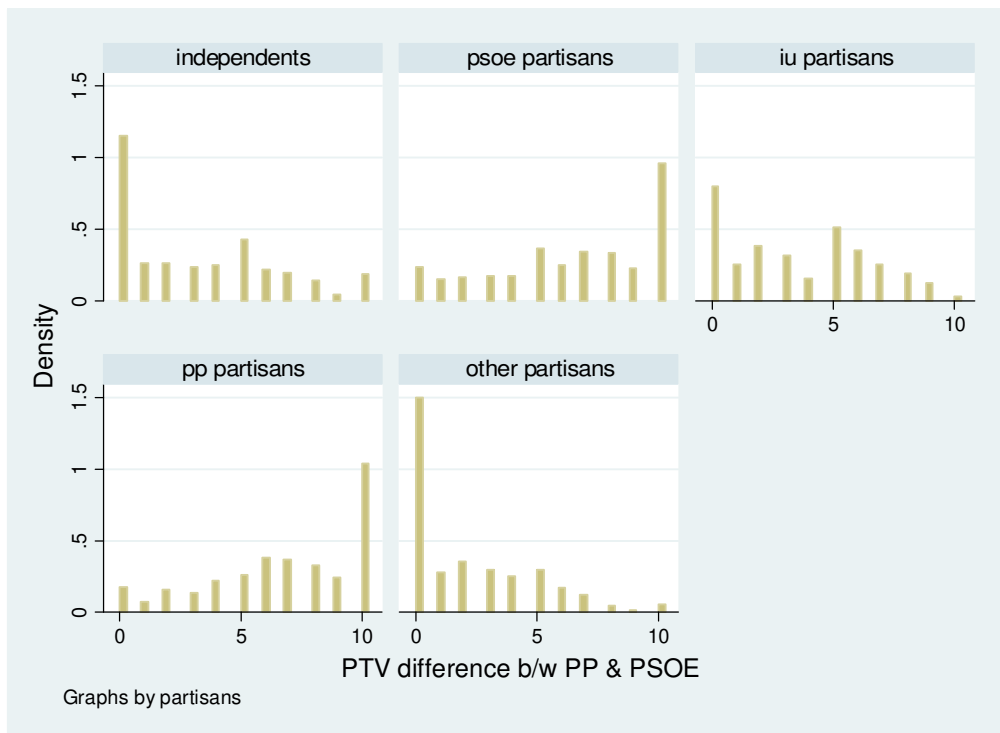


FIGURE 3. PTV Difference and Party Partisans



These differences can be better gleaned at if we actually break down partisans by the party they support. Figure 3 draws histograms of the PTV difference by PP, PSOE, IU and other partisans, as well as independents. We can notice three things here: first, PP and PSOE partisans are the ones where the modal category is 10, as one would expect. IU partisans are more split and they are more likely to assign equal probability to vote for PP and PSOE. Finally, independents and other partisans are overwhelmingly assigning the same PTV to both parties, with the rest of the distribution being relatively flat.¹¹

This is a very telling picture, and provides solid evidence regarding the difficulty independents have in making voting decisions. It verifies that indeed independents are under cross-pressure from the two big parties and makes their voting decisions difficult. This is also evident if we look at the PTV differences of swing voters (right panel of Table 7). Among those that did not change their voting

choice between 2004 and 2008, 10.9% give the same PTV to PP and PSOE; on the other hand, 28.8% of swing voters do so. The difference is quite stark even if we look at PTV differences up to 2 points; more than half of swing voters are in that range, compared to less than a quarter of stable voters. Even more striking is the split for the maximum difference of the PTVs; while only 1.3% of swing voters have a maximum PTV difference, 22.4% of stable voters give very different PTVs to PP and PSOE.

Putting everything together, we have a pretty comprehensive picture about independents, their characteristics and the tradeoffs they face. We know that they are numerous and that they tend to locate themselves on the center of the Left-Right axis. We also know that even though they are not apolitical, they tend to vote much less than partisans do. Moreover, when they vote they tend to change their vote much more often than partisans do. This seems to be related to the cross-pressures they are facing, due to their location between the two big parties and the equal probabilities they assign to voting them. So, our central question remains: how do independents decide who to vote for? The next section delves into that in detail.

¹¹ It is important to note that the “other partisans” category is dominated by CIU and PNV supporters, which are not likely to vote for PP and PSOE; this should explain the strong mode observed on 0.

INDEPENDENTS AND VOTE CHOICE

In this section, we move deeper into the analysis of how independents decide their vote. In previous parts of the paper, we have shown that citizens not feeling close to any political party bear some common characteristics that make worth analyzing them in comparison to party loyalists. Independents are more willing to switching parties, to locate themselves in the middle of the ideological scale, and to avoid giving strong opinions about salience issues.¹² Besides, independents spend fewer resources on gathering political information, and tend to consider that the two largest parties of the country are quite similar on many “capacity” issues.¹³ Given these two features, less information but also less commitment to specific parties, how do independents select their vote?

We suggest here two heuristics to answer the question. On the one hand, we hypothesize that independents could give more weight to spatial distances when voting, compared to partisan citizens. Thus, independents would resemble the real median voter, given their propensity to place themselves in the centre of the ideological distribution. Still, we remain agnostic about the type of spatial thinking they would use: either proximity or directionality.¹⁴

¹² For the sake of space, we do not report these results here. On issues such as immigration, decentralization, crime and environment, independents always place themselves on average between the PP partisans and the PSOE partisans.

¹³ Independents do not manifest strong divergent opinions with regards to the capacity of the two largest statewide parties to abide their electoral promises, maintain internal party unity, avoid graft behavior or remain away from big interests.

¹⁴ According to Kedar (2005), voters anticipate that party positions will be shifted towards the centre of the ideological spectrum if coalitions are necessary to govern. Besides, directional voting seems to work better when voters are not very sophisticated with regards to political knowledge (Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989). Given that independents in our sample have lower levels of political knowledge and prefer coalitional governments rather than single-party

On the other hand, it is said that independents, free of partisan blinders, would be more open to reward good governments and punish bad incumbents. If this is true, we should expect to see independents giving more weight to the performance of the incumbent when making a decision about their vote. Moreover, the chances of the main opposition party should increase when the fate of the incumbent goes down because of a bad performance. This mechanism may not work similarly for smaller parties, since the safest strategy to change the government record is to switch between the largest parties.

In order to test these two hypotheses, we use the “propensity to vote” (PTV, henceforth) question, included in the survey. We ask if the PTV of each party is significantly different for independent voters, and if yes, what factors drive the difference: spatial voting (ideology and nationalism) and performance. As usual, the spatial hypothesis is tested by controlling the distance in the scale between the place where the voter locates herself and the place where she locates the parties. The two most relevant dimensions in Spanish politics are used in this analysis: ideology and the territorial scale (nationalism). Following the convention, two proxies were created: proximity and directionality.¹⁵ If the hypothesis is correct, we should expect to see a stronger effect of the spatial indicators for those voters without partisanship, regardless of party size.¹⁶

Secondly, performance is measured following p23 in the survey (“En su conjunto, ¿cómo calificaría la gestión que está haciendo el gobierno del PSOE? Muy

cabinets, directional voting may have a larger impact on their vote decision. However, many independents place themselves in the centre of the ideological dimension. For them, proximity can make more sense, since they otherwise would be unable to make a decision based on directionality.

¹⁵ For nationalism, we used the voter’s status quo to calculate the directionality indicator.

¹⁶ This would be different if independent voters establish some electoral size below which the odds of voting for third parties decrease significantly (something like the region of acceptability).

buena, buena, regular, mala, muy mala”) and p24 (idem, but for the main opposition party, PP). Although there is no information about the performance in opposition of third parties, this should not be a big concern, because the effect of performance should be more relevant for those parties with the capacity to govern. The expectation here is that independents will give a larger PTV for the PSOE if they think this party is doing a very good job in government –and just the other way around: a lower PTV if they think the government is faring very badly. As for the PP, the main opposition party, there are two expectations: on the one hand, the PTV for the PP could vary automatically as a direct consequence of the effect of the incumbent performance, yielding a higher PTV value the lower the evaluation of the government; on the other hand, this automatic effect could be mediated by the own evaluation of the opposition party. In other words, bad evaluations of the incumbent may not be translated in a larger support for the main opposition party if independents think the latter is also doing a bad job.

Besides testing the two aforementioned hypotheses, we also include other independent variables. We control for party identification for the two largest parties in the sample (PSOE and PP), and for minor parties when the PTV to those minor parties are analyzed (see table 12). The usual suspects in electoral studies are also included: age, gender and education. Finally, the proxy on political information and social class were dropped because they were largely determined by education.

All the models hereafter are OLS regressions weighted territorially when the sample includes all the country (but not so when the regression deals only with either the Basque Country or Catalonia). Table 8 presents the first set of results, with the PTV for the PSOE as the dependent variable. Models 1 and 2 show that independents weigh more heavily the performance of the PSOE when evaluating their propensity to vote for this party, compared to partisan voters.¹⁷

¹⁷ We do not report the coefficient for “being an independent” on its own because it is significant most of the time. However, this coefficient is

To the contrary, the spatial effects are far from offering a clear picture. Model 1, which does not include interactions between the spatial variables and being an independent, shows that directionality works better for ideology, whereas proximity does the same for nationalism. In other words, it seems that the PSOE is able to pull left-wing voters, but it only attracts close voters in the nationalist dimension – perhaps because of the existence of strong nationalist parties in this dimension. Model 2 includes the interactions of independents with the proximity and directionality variables. Somehow counterintuitively, independents reduce the effect of proximity on nationalism: for this group of voters, the farther the PSOE is from their position, the larger chance of giving better evaluations of this party. However, the combined effect of the nationalist dimension is almost negligible for independents. On the other hand, the directional effect of ideology is basically driven by independents: for them, the more to the left, the more chances of giving high evaluations to the PSOE. This result is in line with the expectation that independents value more the largest parties. Thus, instead of decreasing the evaluation of the PSOE when the independent voter moves to the left, it actually goes up, because these voters do not seem to significantly consider the possibility of voting for the smaller left-wing parties.¹⁸

Finally, the controls work as expected: PSOE partisans, younger voters, women and those with lower levels of education give better evaluations of the socialist party.¹⁹ In brief, Spanish independent voters give more importance to the incumbent performance than partisan voters when thinking about their propensity to vote for

positive for the PTV for PSOE and PP and negative for the rest of the parties.

¹⁸ The interaction between directional voting on ideology and being an independent for the PTV for IU is negative, which is coherent with the finding just discussed (see table 12).

¹⁹ Although “age” could have thought of as working in the opposite direction (the older the voter, the better her evaluation of PSOE), it turns out that the PSOE receives better evaluations of the youth. A U-shaped relationship between the two variables was tested, but no significant result came out.

TABLE 8. PSOE PTV

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
	All Sample	All Sample	Equidistant	Catalonia	Basque Cy.
Independent	2.021*** (0.44)	1.596*** (0.45)	2.82* (1.29)	2.621** (0.90)	1.173 (1.00)
Performance	-0.967*** (0.09)	-0.956*** (0.09)	-1.25*** (0.26)	-1.171*** (0.17)	-0.756*** (0.20)
Indep*Performance	-0.376** (0.12)	-0.374** (0.13)	-0.54† (0.34)	-0.494† (0.26)	-0.059 (0.29)
Ideology (proximity)	-0.004 (0.01)	-0.005 (0.01)		0.015 (0.01)	0.007 (0.02)
Indep*Ideology (prox)		0.010 (0.01)		-0.054* (0.03)	0.000 (0.03)
Ideol. (directionality)	0.059*** (0.01)	0.026 (0.02)		0.098*** (0.03)	0.041 (0.06)
Indep*Ideology (dir)		0.120*** (0.03)		-0.064 (0.07)	0.177 (0.10)
Nationalism (prox)	-0.016*** (0.00)	-0.025*** (0.00)		-0.019** (0.01)	-0.028*** (0.00)
Indep*Nation (prox)		0.020** (0.01)		0.024* (0.01)	-0.002 (0.01)
Nationalism (dir)	-0.005 (0.01)	-0.010 (0.01)		-0.013 (0.01)	-0.018 (0.01)
Indep*Nation (dir)		0.008 (0.01)		0.036* (0.02)	-0.019 (0.02)
PSOE PID	3.139*** (0.18)	3.098*** (0.18)	3.24*** (0.75)	3.178*** (0.35)	4.132*** (0.37)
PP PID	-0.874*** (0.21)	-1.050*** (0.21)	-0.13 (0.59)	-0.533 (0.38)	-0.098 (0.62)
Age	-0.007* (0.00)	-0.006 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.006 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)
Sex	0.101 (0.10)	0.082 (0.10)	-0.24 (0.30)	0.407* (0.19)	-0.063 (0.21)
Education	-0.135*** (0.04)	-0.138*** (0.04)	0.08 (0.11)	-0.237*** (0.07)	0.092 (0.08)
Constant	7.699*** (0.41)	7.871*** (0.41)	7.80*** (1.23)	7.858*** (0.82)	4.763*** (0.97)
R2	0.52	0.53	0.41	0.47	0.49
Prob > F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	2040	2040	194	705	491

† p<0.12, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

PSOE. On the other hand, the spatial effects have barely a different impact on these two types of voters. Leaving aside those effects, model 3 offers a more stringent test of our theory. Voters placing themselves in the middle of the two largest parties should reward more a good incumbent performance if they do not feel identified with any particular party. To run this test, we selected those voters whose ideological placement met the following equation:

$$(PP \text{ placement} - \text{self-placement}) - (\text{self-placement} - PSOE \text{ placement}) = 0$$

In other words, we want to select those voters placing the PP in the right tail of the ideological continuum, the PSOE in its left tail, and themselves in between and equidistant from the two parties. Only 6 percent of the sample met this criterion. Although the effect of performance on incumbent voting is considerably higher for the equidistant voters (compared to models 1 and 2), holding a party identification does no longer involve a statistically significant reduction at standard levels on such effect. It seems that these equidistant voters are already very sensitive towards performance, even if they manifest closeness to a party, which they do in smaller numbers than the rest of the population (31 percent vs. 48 percent).

Models 4 and 5 in table 8 look at the two Spanish regions where nationalist parties are very strong in order to investigate whether independents behave differently there. Catalan independent voters also value performance highly -even if this time the coefficient is significant only at the 6% level. As for the spatial effects, independents in Catalonia only value significantly more than partisans the impact of proximity on ideology and the impact of directionality on nationalism. This means that independents would be in Catalonia more pure “downsian” voters with regards to the ideological scale, but more directional with regards to the nationalist scale. In other words, PSOE in Catalonia attracts independents located ideologically close to the party, as well as independents far from the party on the nationalist scale but located on the same tail of the distribution.

The Basque Country offers a different picture.²⁰ Performance, nationalist proximity and nationalist directionality have similar effects on partisans and independents. Only ideological directionality has a significant effect (at the 8% level) for independents. This could be indicating again the capacity of PSOE to attract far left-wing independent voters that may see worthless to vote for small left-wing parties. In brief, Basque independents do not seem to have a different behavior in comparison to partisans. This could be reflecting two not necessarily unrelated patterns. Firstly, it is well known that a considerable portion of Basque voters underreport their vote choice (Urquizu 2005). If the same happens with party identification, it is expectable that actual partisans would be conflated with pure independents, biasing the real effect of performance on pro-incumbent voting. Second, it has been also shown that Basque voters are especially reluctant to rely only on performance to choose their party ballot. Moderate nationalist voters keep supporting the nationalist incumbent regardless of their evaluations of its performance in office (Aguilar and Sánchez-Cuenca 2007). If non-nationalists conceal their real party identification, and moderate nationalists manifest a strong inclination to endorse nationalist incumbents, it is no wonder that a larger effect of performance on independents is not found in this region.

In table 9 we offer another view on similar data at the country-wide level. Rather than comparing independents with all partisans, we break down in model 1 the last category into four different values: PSOE, IU, PP and other partisans. A cursory look at the results shows that the interactions for partisans are most of them positive, which weakens the effect of performance on the PSOE PTV. Besides, ideological directionality and nationalist proximity keep their significant effects on the evaluation of the PSOE. But the goal of this exercise is to graph the effect of performance on the PSOE PTV for different groups of partisans. In doing so

²⁰ As a curiosity, the Basque Country is the only region where the negative effect of education on the PTV for PSOE does not hold.

TABLE 9. PTVs and Partisanship

	M1 PSOE PTV	M2 PSOE-PP PTV
PSOE partisans	0.644 (0.50)	3.613*** (0.25)
IU partisans	-1.633 (0.94)	1.418** (0.46)
PP partisans	-3.554*** (0.73)	-5.358*** (0.32)
Other partisans	-0.954 (0.72)	0.285 (0.29)
Performance	-1.354*** (0.09)	-2.078*** (0.09)
PSOE*performance	0.563*** (0.17)	0.926*** (0.15)
IU*performance	0.428 (0.29)	0.651* (0.29)
PP*performance	0.529** (0.18)	1.181*** (0.18)
Other*performance	-0.023 (0.20)	0.421* (0.20)
Ideology (prox)	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.013 (0.01)
Ideology (dir)	0.052*** (0.01)	0.088*** (0.02)
Nationalism (prox)	-0.014*** (0.00)	-0.012** (0.00)
Nationalism (dir)	-0.003 (0.01)	0.007 (0.01)
Age	-0.007* (0.00)	-0.011* (0.00)
Sex	0.097 (0.10)	0.203 (0.15)
Education	-0.134*** (0.04)	-0.159** (0.05)
Constant	9.732*** (0.40)	1.419*** (0.38)
R2	0.52	0.67
p	0.000	0.000
N	2036	2004

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

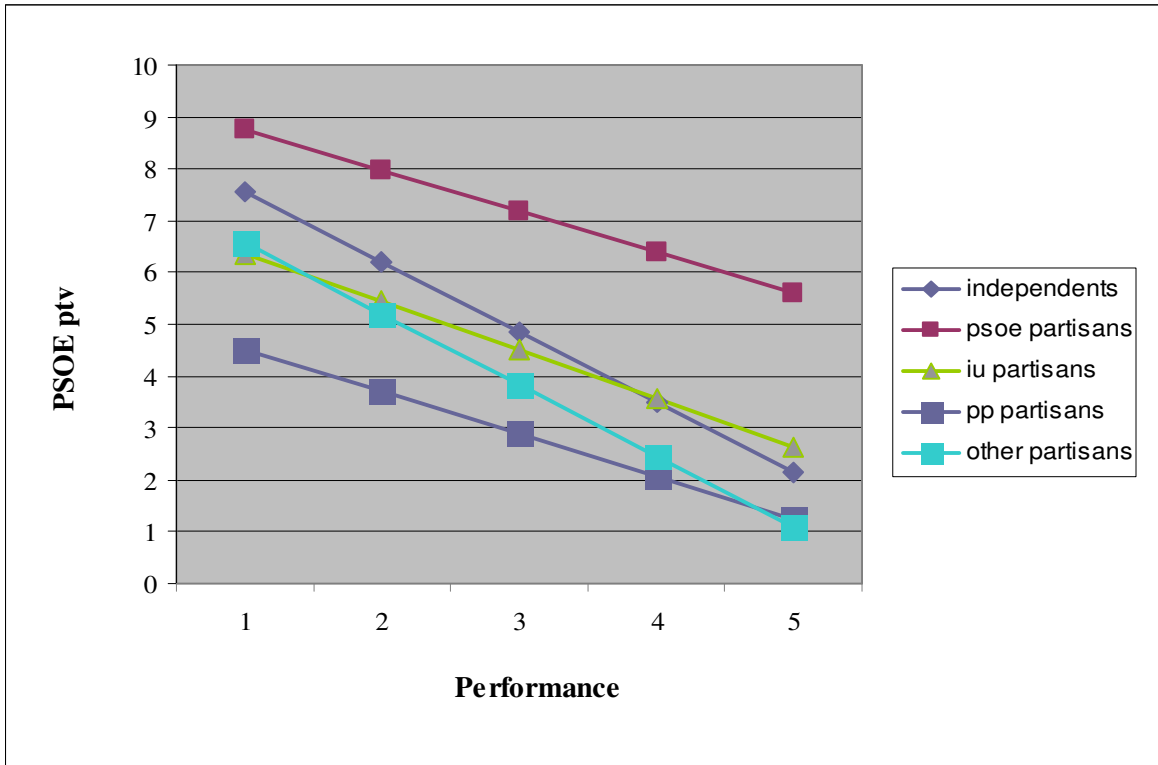
we can avoid the effect of canceling out the differences between independents and partisans by conflating all partisans in a unique category. Figure 4 maps this effect.

By setting the rest of the variables on their means, this figure shows that the slope for independents is more pronounced than for any other group of voters: if we leave

“other partisans” aside, independents rank the PSOE second when they think the incumbent is doing a very good job, but they rank it second to last when their evaluation is just the opposite. Obviously, PSOE partisans always give the best evaluation, whereas PP partisans always give the worst.

performance on voters’ evaluations of the PSOE and PP. Figure 5 shows how the contrast between the evaluations of the incumbent performance vs. the opposition performance affects the chances of giving different PTV for the two largest parties (PSOE and PP). For the sake of simplicity, we only included one category for

FIGURE 4. Effect of Performance on the PSOE PTV for Different Groups of Voters

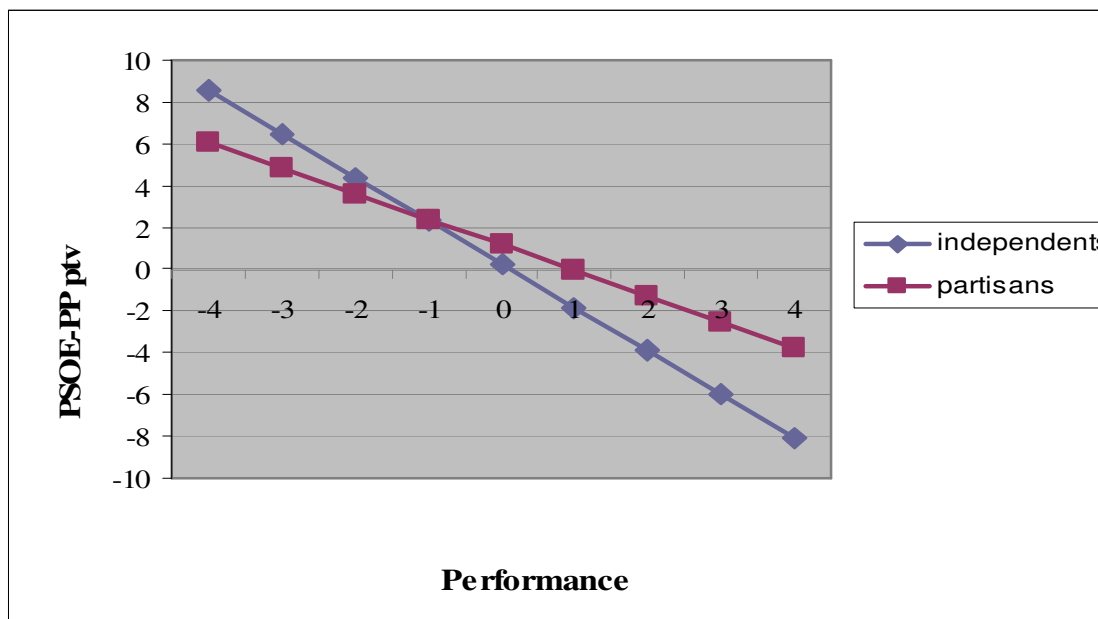


Model 2 in table 9 adds more information. The dependent variable is the difference in the PTV between PSOE and PP (p2201-p2202). The variable goes between -10 and 10, and the higher the value, the larger the difference in favor of the PSOE. We also created a new variable for performance, which calculates the difference between the incumbent performance and the performance of the main opposition party (p23-p24). In this case, the variables go from -4 to 4, and the higher the number, the worse the evaluation of the incumbent (PSOE). We included five groups of voters (independents, PSOE, PP, IU and other partisans). The results resemble those of the previous model, with all partisan categories reducing the effect of

partisans. As said above, this produces artificial results –i.e., that independents seem to have the largest PTV for PSOE, instead of PSOE partisans-, but makes the interpretation easier. Two things must be noted. First, the slope of performance for independents is consistently higher. And second, independents holding the same opinion about the performance of the two largest parties do not distinguish between them and therefore their PTV evaluations are almost identical.

After having analyzed the incumbent, we move the analysis to the opposition parties. It was hypothesized above that independents, free of partisan identities, should give a larger weight to the incumbent performance when voting, and

FIGURE 5. Effect of Differential Performance on the PTV for the Two Largest Parties



the results supported this hypothesis. Now it's time to check the other part of the story: if independents having bad opinions about the incumbent turn to the main opposition party. If this is true, we should observe: (i) the PP PTV goes up when independents value badly the incumbent performance (table 10); and (ii) the PTV of other opposition parties is not affected by the opinions independents have about the incumbent performance (table 11).

Table 10 includes OLS regressions for all Spanish voters (weighted territorially) of the PTV for the PP. There are four models. The first two models include the evaluation of the incumbent performance (p23, PSOE), whereas the last two replace it with the evaluation of the main opposition party (p24, PP). This is a key test, since the crudest formulation of the performance hypothesis would assume that independents do not care about how the main opposition party fares—they only look at the incumbent performance and if this is bad, they switch. A more nuanced version would propose that independents also care about the shape of the main opposition party.

Models 1 and 2 show that the evaluation of the incumbent performance is a key variable to account for independents' evaluation of the PP, regardless of the spatial controls we included in the

regression. Ideological directionality and nationalist proximity are also the main interactions at work for independents when evaluating the PTV for PP.

Models 3 and 4, to the contrary, show that the differential effect of performance on PTV for independents is not that stable if the performance of the PP is considered and the spatial variables are included into the model. Actually, the coefficient for ideological directionality becomes stronger, indicating that good evaluations by independents of the PP performance could be driven by the absence of relevant parties on the right-wing tail of the ideological scale. In brief, bad evaluations of the incumbent performance seem to guarantee a good PTV for PP, but this effect is not significant if the performance of the own PP is considered.

Finally, table 11 analyzes the effect of the evaluation of the incumbent performance on the chances of giving high PTV for other opposition parties. The first two models deal with the two other statewide parties (IU and UPD). Models 3 and 4 include Catalan parties (CiU and ERC), and the final three models look at Basque parties (PNV, EA and Aralar). We include the simplest model, without interactive effects between the spatial variables and partisanship.

TABLE 10. PP PTV. Spanish Sample (Weighted by Territory)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Independent	-1.159** (0.43)	0.358 (0.48)	2.687*** (0.46)	2.180*** (0.46)
PSOE performance	0.319*** (0.08)	0.336*** (0.08)		
Ind*psoe perfor	0.639*** (0.12)	0.471*** (0.12)		
PP performance			-0.720*** (0.08)	-0.840*** (0.08)
Ind*pp perfor			-0.472*** (0.11)	-0.166 (0.12)
Ideology (prox)	-0.017*** (0.00)	-0.010 (0.01)	-0.010* (0.00)	-0.006 (0.01)
Ind*ideology (prox)		-0.001 (0.01)		0.003 (0.01)
Ideology (dir)	0.053*** (0.01)	0.039* (0.02)	0.064*** (0.01)	0.037* (0.02)
Ind*ideology (dir)		0.095** (0.03)		0.120*** (0.03)
Nationalism (prox)	-0.015*** (0.00)	-0.008* (0.00)	-0.008*** (0.00)	-0.005 (0.00)
Ind*nation (prox)		-0.016** (0.00)		-0.007 (0.00)
Nationalism (dir)	0.011 (0.01)	0.013* (0.01)	0.017*** (0.00)	0.015** (0.01)
Ind*nation (dir)		-0.013 (0.01)		0.004 (0.01)
PSOE pid	0.138 (0.18)	0.411* (0.18)	0.057 (0.17)	0.173 (0.17)
PP pid	4.845*** (0.22)	5.448*** (0.23)	4.448*** (0.22)	4.928*** (0.22)
Age	0.002 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.002 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)
Sex	-0.072 (0.10)	-0.097 (0.10)	-0.128 (0.10)	-0.137 (0.10)
Education	0.008 (0.04)	0.017 (0.03)	0.044 (0.03)	0.049 (0.03)
Constant	1.950*** (0.42)	1.252** (0.43)	5.374*** (0.42)	5.384*** (0.42)
R2	0.57	0.58	0.60	0.62
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	2055	2020	2010	2010

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

TABLE 11. PTV for minor Parties

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Party	IU	UPD	CIU	ERC	PNV	EA	ARALAR
	All sample	All sample	Catalonia	Catalonia	Basque Cy.	Basque Cy.	Basque Cy.
Independent	-1.487** (0.53)	-0.564 (0.71)	1.709 (0.96)	0.111 (0.94)	1.744 (1.15)	-0.472 (1.40)	-0.946 (1.36)
Performance	-0.506*** (0.11)	0.269* (0.14)	0.006 (0.18)	-0.939*** (0.18)	-0.496* (0.23)	-0.573 (0.31)	-0.598 (0.31)
Ind*perfor	0.046 (0.15)	0.144 (0.19)	-0.274 (0.28)	-0.057 (0.25)	-0.063 (0.32)	0.320 (0.36)	0.378 (0.37)
Ideology (prox)	-0.004 (0.01)	-0.021* (0.01)	-0.047** (0.02)	-0.034*** (0.01)	-0.037* (0.02)	-0.025 (0.02)	0.017 (0.02)
Ideology (dir)	0.106*** (0.01)	0.069* (0.03)	-0.040 (0.06)	0.013 (0.02)	-0.061 (0.06)	-0.009 (0.05)	0.062* (0.03)
Nation (prox)	-0.011** (0.00)	-0.017*** (0.00)	-0.017* (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	-0.029** (0.01)	-0.026** (0.01)	0.013 (0.01)
Nation (dir)	0.006 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)	0.013* (0.01)	0.035*** (0.01)	0.016* (0.01)	0.006 (0.01)	-0.026*** (0.01)
PSOE pid	-1.423*** (0.21)	0.191 (0.30)	0.361 (0.36)	-1.317*** (0.36)	-0.210 (0.53)	-0.774 (0.57)	-1.425** (0.54)
PP pid	-1.890*** (0.27)	-0.548 (0.33)					
CIU pid			4.520*** (0.33)				
ERC pid				3.173*** (0.39)			
PNV pid					5.266*** (0.39)	1.891*** (0.52)	1.096* (0.52)
EA pid						4.645*** (0.67)	3.831*** (0.80)
ARALAR pid							
Age	-0.012** (0.00)	-0.012* (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	-0.019** (0.01)	0.017* (0.01)	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.012 (0.01)
Sex	-0.138 (0.13)	-0.348 (0.18)	0.130 (0.21)	0.389 (0.21)	-0.305 (0.25)	-0.492* (0.25)	-0.391 (0.24)
Education	0.049 (0.05)	0.071 (0.07)	0.043 (0.09)	-0.009 (0.09)	0.111 (0.10)	0.211* (0.10)	0.206* (0.08)
Constant	6.568*** (0.56)	3.311*** (0.75)	3.088*** (0.88)	6.496*** (0.96)	3.658** (1.27)	4.961*** (1.48)	4.878*** (1.36)
R2	0.29	0.16	0.32	0.37	0.41	0.20	0.23
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	1.617	894	638	613	474	455	454

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

The main finding of this table is a negative one: it does not report any significant interaction between being an independent and the incumbent performance. Congruent with our expectation, independents use the incumbent performance as a cue to vote for the main opposition party but they do not extend this rule to evaluate smaller parties in opposition. Obviously, a good alternative check would be to analyze in regional elections if independent voters replace the PP with the main opposition party at play (CiU in Catalonia, PNV in the Basque Country).

The survey we are steadily exploiting in this book did not include questions about regional elections. However, we can still use other Spanish surveys to check if the main implications of this article's argument also hold for regional elections. A systematic search of CIS surveys produced only two convenient datasets at the regional level: the post-electoral 2009 regional election survey in the Basque Country (CIS#2795), and the post-electoral 2006 regional election survey in Catalonia (CIS#2660).

Given that the Basque survey shows the same peculiarities aforementioned²¹, we close this paper with an analysis of the 2006 Catalan election. This is not strictly comparable either to the results reported above, since Catalans had a coalition government during the 2003-2006 legislature, making it more difficult the attribution of responsibility for the previous performance. Two other caveats distinguish this survey. Firstly, the dependent variable is built from the vote recall question, given the absence of the PTV indicators. And second, the "party identification" question uses a different, less nuanced wording. Thus, the interviewed are asked to indicate their "degree of closeness" to the political

parties operating in the region, from very close (1) to very distant (5), with an intermediate "nor close nor distant" (3). Drawing on this question, we have created two proxies for PID. The first one considers as "independents" all voters that do not feel "very close" or "close" to any party. The second indicator resembles the first one, but gets rid of the voters always expressing "dk/na" answers in the party closeness questions. Catalan independents make up around 30 percent of the electorate in this survey (31 percent with the first proxy and 24 percent with the second). Therefore, the number of independents counted with these methods is sensitively lower than in the other survey used in this paper, where 53 percent of the Catalan sub-sample did not identify with a party.

Table 12 reports the logit models of voting for PSC, ERC, ICV, CiU and PP. Three comments are in line. Firstly, the incumbent PSC suffers from bad performance evaluations, being the negative effect still bigger for the independent voters (models 1 and 2). Second, this effect does not seem to affect similarly to PSC's partners in government -ERC and ICV (models 3-6). Finally, bad performance of the incumbent benefits the main regional-wide opposition party, CiU, but not the main state-wide opposition party, PP (models 7-10). Actually, independents seem to punish the PP even if they think the PSC cabinet did not perform well. However, independents did not vote more for CiU than partisan voters based on performance. As CiU played a major role in the approval of the new Statute of Catalonia, it would be interesting to analyze whether independents also held this party responsible for the "fiasco" of the Maragall government. Absent good survey data, we cannot but leave this question unanswered.

²¹ For any of the three indicators of party identification we built, there are from 6 to 15 percent less partisans in the Basque Country than in Catalonia, which would point to undeclared partisanship. Furthermore, the 2009 regional election was affected by the banning of the pro-secessionist Batasuna, forcing separatist citizens willing to vote to select the PNV ballot, even if they may disapprove of Ibarretxe's performance.

TABLE 12. Determinants of Vote Recall in the 2006 Catalan Regional Election

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M8
Party	PSC ind1	PSC ind2	ERC ind1	ERC ind2	ICV ind1	ICV ind2	CIU ind1	CIU ind2	PP ind1	PP ind2
Independent	3.82* (1.55)	4.04** (1.51)	0.90 (1.59)	1.10 (1.53)	2.85 (1.99)	3.33† (2.01)	0.65 (1.44)	1.06 (1.42)	5.92** (2.14)	5.58** (2.03)
Performance	-0.36* (0.15)	-0.36* (0.15)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.05 (0.15)	0.41** (0.13)	0.42*** (0.13)	0.37 (0.30)	0.36 (0.29)
Indep*perfor	-0.85† (0.49)	-0.84† (0.47)	-0.20 (0.50)	-0.21 (0.47)	0.06 (0.46)	-0.02 (0.45)	0.37 (0.38)	0.24 (0.38)	-1.18** (0.51)	-1.33** (0.57)
Party ID ^a	4.53*** (0.61)	4.63*** (0.61)	3.45*** (0.39)	3.50*** (0.39)	5.23*** (1.26)	5.30*** (1.28)	-1.18** (0.25)	-1.19** (0.25)	4.30*** (1.11)	3.64*** (0.84)
CiU PID	-1.86*** (0.31)	-1.86*** (0.31)	-0.66* (0.26)	-0.66* (0.26)	-1.30** (0.40)	-1.30** (0.40)	4.11*** (0.53)	3.99*** (0.48)	-1.03** (0.52)	-1.14** (0.53)
Ideol. Prox.	-0.33*** (0.10)	-0.32*** (0.10)	-0.41*** (0.12)	-0.41*** (0.12)	-0.38*** (0.11)	-0.38*** (0.11)	-0.43** (0.07)	-0.43** (0.07)	-0.45*** (0.13)	-0.45** (0.12)
Nat. Prox.	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.30*** (0.07)	-0.30*** (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)	0.00 (0.07)	-0.19** (0.06)	-0.19** (0.06)	-0.25** (0.11)	-0.26** (0.12)
Education	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.09* (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.05)
Sex	0.31 (0.21)	0.30 (0.21)	0.50* (0.23)	0.49* (0.23)	0.15 (0.24)	0.14 (0.24)	0.08 (0.20)	0.07 (0.20)	0.29 (0.44)	0.27 (0.44)
Age	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	0.01† (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.03† (0.01)	0.03† (0.02)
Constant	-3.78** (0.91)	-3.91** (0.91)	-2.04** (0.79)	-2.10** (0.79)	-5.35** (1.46)	-5.45** (1.48)	-4.59** (0.79)	-4.51** (0.74)	-6.63** (2.20)	-5.94** (1.88)
R2	0.47	0.48	0.45	0.45	0.37	0.37	0.49	0.49	0.55	0.54
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	1202	1202	1204	1204	1094	1094	1221	1221	1201	1201

^a All models include as controls the identification with the party choice regressed and identification with the main opposition party, CiU. The models for CiU also controls for identification with PSC.

Source: CIS 2660. † p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

CONCLUSIONS

Scholarly work on electoral behavior has largely focused on the impact of different shortcuts, such as party identification and ideology, on how voters choose a party ballot. In this paper we contribute to this literature by investigating how a sizable portion of the electorate, those not having a party identification, vote. Instead of relying on ideology, we suggested here a novel theory that emphasizes the relevance of the incumbent's performance on independent voters. Independents, we contend, are voters who want to have their hands free to

choose between the parties with the largest prospects of governing. In order to reduce the costs of party switching, independents place themselves in the centre of the ideological dimension, avoiding ideological or party dissonance. Finally, independents vote on performance: if the incumbent fares well, independents vote for it; if it does a poor job, they switch to the main opposition party.

In this paper, we tested this theory with Spanish data from the CIS survey no. 2799. Descriptively, we showed that independents tend to locate themselves on the center of

the Left-Right axis; tend to change their vote much more often than partisans do; tend to avoid giving strong opinions about salience issues; and tend to consider that the two largest parties of the country are quite similar on many “capacity” issues. Although independents also seem to vote in lower numbers, they still make up a large constituency with tie-breaking electoral power.

In the final section of the paper we compared whether independents vote based on ideology or performance. Our results confirm that even after controlling for ideological voting, independents give more weight to the performance of the incumbent than partisan voters. Some implications of the argument also hold. Firstly, independents do not take into account the incumbent’s performance when evaluating their odds of voting for third, smaller parties. Second, in Catalonia, where a nationalist party, CiU, was the main opposition party until the recent regional elections, independents switched from the regional incumbent, PSOE, to the main nationalist party when the incumbent’s performance was not good, but this transfer did not work towards the PP. However, the Basque Country follows a different dynamic, since independents in this region do not seem to rely more on performance than partisans.

Some caveat remains for further research. Spain has offered a nice fit for our theory because it has only two state-wide parties with real options of taking office, and coalition governments are very rare. In countries such as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, where coalition governments are the norm, independents may have to recur to different rules of electoral choice, given the existence of more cabinet-leading parties within the party system, and the trouble to assign responsibility for the incumbent’s performance. Thus, to further investigate the scope conditions of our argument, a comparative analysis is absolutely necessary.

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