INFORMATION EFFECTS AND PARTY COMPETITION SET-UPS

A CROSS-CONSTITUENCY STUDY OF SPANISH ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

by

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ABSTRACT

Current research on voting behavior has been shifting focus to the problem of how several aspects of the political, social, or economic context influence the way individuals reason and make up their minds about politics. Contextual variation is frequently understood as that of the information environment, in which one's opportunity to receive high quality political information explains a range of behavioral patterns. This, however, has mostly meant the role of the media (its systemic properties), and less has been said about a related, but conceptually different environmental factor, party competition. In my thesis, I argue that party competition situations represent variations in the information environment. The key mechanism that polarization and fractionalization can influence the programmatic party-citizen linkage in that (1) they create environments in which parties communicate their programmatic content with varying efficiency, and (2) they can therefore denote contexts in which a party-voter ideological congruence varies There is no single powerful theory that can identify, however, the kind of competition set-up that is most successful in informing voters. To see how competition matters, I designed a cross-constituency study of fractionalization and polarization's effect on selected indicators of informed behavior in Spain. The three sets of multilevel and one log-linear analyses are rather of exploratory kind, but some findings suggest that voters in multi-party and less polarized provinces are more aware of the party programs. However, the analysis of congruence does not give enough evidence to contend that they also find the best fitting parties.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

After the demonstration, on my way home cycling, a construction worker asked me what all the fuzz was about. It was a bit difficult to explain as he had never heard about [those involved], but after five sentences he completely understood the story. An internet portal disclosed scandalous information about a politician who therefore had the editor-in-chief fired. His reaction was not that he didn't care. He outraged. You see, the problem is not that people do not give a damn about democracy, but that it does not reach them.

J.A., political blogger, June 4, 2014

So how does democracy get to people? The aim of my thesis is to discuss informed behavior by putting the debate into a comparative perspective, namely, to explore whether the typical ways parties compete with each other foster or dampen the opportunities individuals have to become more engaged with politics.

But how much is at stake with opportunity? The promise of adequate political information is that it helps citizens to consider which political choices serve best their interests. This piece of information, together with the cognitive sophistication as to how to make use of it, is known to be distributed very unequally in the citizenry. Comparative studies, however, shifted the discussion to a sober assessment of the differences in the quality (type and amount) of information that is available from context to context, polity to polity, group to group. Information environments (Jerit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006; Johnson, Phillips Shively, & Stein, 2002; Schoonvelde, 2013), then, may represent significant differences in the opportunities for individuals and groups to make sense of the complexity in politics, perhaps make them more motivated to engage with it. Such line of thought guides media system and political communication research, which argues that properties of democratic media performance,

In this study I demonstrate similar mechanisms but translate them into party competition patterns. This is a promising project for at least two reasons. First, the kind of content associated with media systems is not only up to its systemic properties, but depends on the supply side as well, most importantly the partisan message competition. Secondly, there may be further variation in smaller scale information environments within the same media environments, which can be discerned if the political competition itself is analyzed.

To show how party competition set-ups represent variations in the information environments, I (1) establish an analytical framework in which party system level fractionalization, and polarization the left-right ideological continuum is linked to selected instances of informed behavior: the capacity to distinguish parties and identify their programmatic positions, and whether vote choices achieve programmatic congruence between voters and parties; and (2) explore this linkage in a cross-constituency study, extensively drawing on three data sources: the 2011 Spanish General Election Panel Surveys (CIS, 2011), and data on the competing parties from the 2010 Chapel Hill Expert surveys (Bakker *et al.,* 2012), and the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (Kollman *et. al.,* 2013).

The next chapter builds up the argument, while the subsequent research design elaborates more on the available options for my study in terms of operationalization, as well as on the measurement choices applied here. Chapter 4 is divided into four parts: the first three present multilevel models that estimate information effects, and the fourth builds log-linear model to offer a close up on undecided voters' eventual vote choices. Chapter 5 links back the diverse findings to the theoretical framework, and concludes.

2. THEORY

Just how much does opportunity matter? This analytical chapter sets out to explain what is meant by the concept of the information environment, and to introduce the argument of the present thesis, namely, that patterns of party competition represent significant variations in terms of information environments. A separate section is dedicated to how previous literature links partisan competition, as well as the types of the individual parties, to electoral behavior. Finally, the last section outlines competing hypotheses regarding how party system fractionalization and polarization, the key concepts of this study, can be expected to foster or dampen informed behavior.

2.1. The quality and quantity of political information

One of the oldest concerns in voting behavior research is whether citizens possess the information and competence to make democracy work. Elections, to fulfill the function assigned to them by democratic theory, should serve as mechanisms by which citizens hold their leaders accountable, and send signals about their policy preferences and the underlying values. However, the early empirical studies (Berelson *et al.*, 1944, 1954) already suggest that this kind of reasoning is different from what voting often is about. The Erie and Elmira studies report that choices predominantly follow political socialization and group membership patterns, and that political information (typically that coming from the political campaign), in turn, gets picked up very selectively, filtered by the ideologically homogeneous discussion groups of the family, work place, and the like. Broadly speaking, this means that the accountability mechanism is flawed at the point when people do not evaluate critically all the options offered to them. Although now we have a more subtle understanding of the kinds

of calculus citizens may use to make up their minds about politics, the varying levels of political information, factual knowledge, and the cognitive capacity to make sense of it all, remains a puzzle in current research as well. For instance, research consitently shows that the opinions of large groups of citizens, are frequently inconsistent and differ in range from those of the most knowledgable few, including the political elites (Converse, 1968 and 2000, Caplan, 2007). Thus, there is normative problem based on the Conversian findings: How can we assign competence in voting to an electorate that supports contracitory policies and want inconsequential outcomes? Given the overlap between the politically informed and those who participate more, this also means that the voice, regardless of the substantive message, of a group of people in minority may get more weight in the decision making. And, if informed and uninformed behavior differs on many levels, this unequal capacity on the demand side obviously has an impact on the way political parties campaign, what kind of parties get elected and what the structure of the political power will be (Adsera *et al.,* 2003).

One preliminary point should be made here. This kind of pessimist take on the electorate's capacity has been contested almost since the conception of the idea. An influential stream of research suggests that the informed vote may not differ that much from the uninformed one. As far as efficiency is concerned, Lodge *et al.* (1995) convincingly argues that immediate and external political stimulus (candidate imagery, campaign messages), evoking emotions and interplaying with more long-standing psychological attachments, do lead to information effects. Instead of storing and sorting political information in the encyclopedia fashion, what happens is that citizens recall their impressions when choices are to be made. Popkin's (2006) argument goes in the direction that consistency in the Conversian, ideological sense does not itself equal to competence. In other words, people can be rational without being political

experts. Bits of past experiences, together with the exposure to political campaigns, form what is called the "gut reasoning" (1994), an efficient and sophisticated way of reasoning about how voters evaluate leaders, policies. Ideological consistency, in turn, is not needed to be able to evaluate government performance, or assess the credibility of candidate promises. Page and Shapiro (1992) develop their idea of aggregate rationality looking at a most comprehensive set of policy attitudes in the American public and show the predictable patterns accordingly. Together, these studies indicate the possibility of *low-information rationality*, which already suggests that individual traits, those that motivate people to engage with and learn about politics, tend to adapt to the political environment, and to the kind of information extractable from it. In a sense, the morale of the story is that individual behavior shows remarkable sophistication on every information level.

The presence of low information rationality, however, does not directly disprove the suspicion that the party and policy choices of the citizens could be different if they possessed different type and amount of information. Deliberative experiments, in particular, have shown that information gains, hand-in-hand with the additive effect of public deliberation, do translate into substantial opinion changes (e.g. Fishkin 2001). The effect is most visible when participants become knowledgable about issues that were not particularly salient or important to them before. Surely, one can use limited information to make efficient decisions, but the argument is that one can make a *better* decision if the relevant and accurate information is at hand. Furthermore, the kinds of considerations informed people use when reasoning about politics also tend to be different. Some Deliberative Polls report on good examples when self-referential and retrospective reasoning, by the end of the experiment, is substituted by a public spirited and outcome-oriented logic (e.g. Luskin *et al*., 2002; Fishkin *et al*., 2010).

Even the most sceptical take on what deliberation can achieve has to acknowledge the qualitative difference in political behavior.

The seemingly competing points above, in reality, only imply that political scientists are nowhere near in agreement on what instance of informed behavior they should analyze. A vote cast in awareness about what parties and candidates stand for is arguably one of them. This links with the informed output in a very straightforward and Downsian way (for the definition, see the next sections of this chapter): voters choose the party that stands in closest approximation to them on an issue or dimension that is relevant for the choice itself. This kind of spatial reasoning is, however, not the only possible (or democratically desirable) one; furthermore, it is not always feasible for issues on which not all parties position themselves. Greens, for instance, for long tended to claim ownership on the issues of conservation and sustainable development, whereas the competing parties did not take a tough stance on either the opposite side or in favor. Thus, a second category concerns another, normatively sound expectation, namely, to form well considered opinions, or "informed" policy preferences. In this view, the informed vote does not merely match opinions with alternatives, but the concept reflects on the quality of the underlying opinions themselves. This point is particularly emphasized in the recent works of Anderson and Fossen (2014), who hold that the uncritical acceptance of the party-supplied political space, based on the formal discourse, does not say much about democratic competences the way most deliberative democrats would define the concept. Essentially, the claim is that an informed citizenry is important for democracy in that it preempts elite-driven volatility of the policy priorities or other, merely symbolic issues. A third, albeit more controversial option to define informed behavior is that it should think about politics in terms of public spirited goals, as opposed to dominantly self-

interested terms. This claim also comes from the deliberative democracy literature, where the empirical studies on the possibility of deliberation in the public space are always looking for instances in the discourse indicating collective action, efficiency, justice, or sustainability (Fishkin, 2012). Finally, the fourth relevant conceptualization of informed behavior comes from the literature that considers the theoretical implications of performance politics (e.g. Clarke *et al*., 2009), and contends that retrospective performance evaluations mean that citizens critically evaluate very complex and abstract issues such as governance and responsibility, these being foundational concepts that lever the democratic accountability mechanism.

Bartels' (1996) seminal study is specifically designed to do at least partial justice about the problem of difference between informed and uninformed behavior, by way of estimating that difference in terms of the vote choices of the American electorate. His models are designed to answer whether, through aggregation processes, unsophisticated voters' erroneous decisions cancel out, that is, whether the mass electorate by large behaves as if it was made up of sophisticated citizens. Specifically, there are two theories to be tested: the one of low information rationality, that through the effective use of information shortcuts unsophisticated voters can make similar choices to those those made by sophisticated voters; and the one of the "miracle of aggregation", that uninformed errors should be entirely randomly distributed in the population. . Bartels demonstrates that the empirical facts conform to neither. By contrast, the true extent of information effects seems to vary across personal characteristics and the political context. This follows logically from how the baseline of comparison is constructed: the projected behavior of the fully informed electorate is such that it votes in closest approximation its attitudes, generating from socio-economic status, education, party

identification, and group identification. In that sense, the study does not explicitly go beyond what I have defined as the first category of informed behavior, and even that is understood in a very restricted sense – although it may have implications for the other types well.

Most of the points above converge towards the argument that voters' individual level traits, their *ability* – cognitive capacities or sophistication –, and their *motivation* to engage with political issues (Luskin, 1990) is by no means time-, information-, or context invariant. *Opportunity* is a term coined as the individual-level projection of this contextual variation. Although the ability-motivation-opportunity framework is most routinely used in research on political knowledge, general or domain-specific (Kim, 2009), it can be easily developed for a systematic take on effects that go beyond knowledge gain. For instance, the above cited deliberative experiments artificially increase the individual's opportunities to learn about, understand more, and discuss civic issues. By creating a well specified and controlled opportunity environment, they can safely argue that the detected opinion shifts are information driven (Luskin *et al.*, 2002). Fraile (2013) points out that research often treats ability and motivation as "social constants" explaining a range of possible outcomes (p. 120), whereas both appear to be rather functions of variations in the opportunity, namely, the information-rich, and information poor contexts.

While the concept has immediate plausibility, what has caused most problems is a precise definition and evaluative assessment of the information environments. A most fruitful stream of research concerns the media environment and its structural properties, arguing that the quality of democratic media performance, such as structural, content, and exposure diversity (Toka and Popescu, 2008), represents much of the quality of the information environment as

well. In that sense, the information environment appears to be such that is grasped through specific instances of communication and citizen information, and it is the task of comparative research to collect the available cases. What we have now is a very large range of potential contextual determinants (Gordon and Segura, 1997; Milner, 2006) that offer working hypotheses for comparative assessments. My thesis aims to contribute to the specification of what context means for opportunities. At this point, a comprehensive and "exact" definition of the information environment is both unfeasible and unnecessary.

Before getting on, I should also make clear the limitations of a research agenda that looks for cases in which the context matters by means of its information content. The promise of high quality (that is, adequate, relevant, and credible) information is that it helps citizens to make sense of the choices, realize what parties stand for and in what kind of relationship these stand with their own opinions. On the other hand, not everything is about information, and many mechanisms can be mistaken as information-driven. On the individual level, Gerber *et al.'s* (2010) study is one that shows how different kinds of attachments with politics (like partisanship) can motivate (biased) information search, meaning that information is not always at the cause side of the model. But even if information kicks off the causal chain, research has shown that the initial information input can lead to adversarial effects: it can induce even greater inequalities of politically relevant knowledge and competences, the argument being that the possession of a piece of information determines how much (if any) further information is going to be acquired (Converse 2000). This accelerating process opens up the possibility that initially discouraged people, no matter what the qualities of the opportunity environment are, stay disengaged and ignore political questions altogether. The explanatory power of the individual level traits of ability and motivation may sometimes be

great enough to render the contextual set-up secondary.

To conclude the line of reasoning here, I should highlight the points that remain in the focus of my study. (1) In looking for the instances of informed behavior, one has to adopt a reasonably comprehensive view of what the concept can possibly mean. I collected four overarching categories in which citizens' democratic competences are listed. However, there are potentially endless ways to study them, and probably many others that are not phrased in competence terms. In the present work, I will concentrate on, and discuss the operationalization of in Chapter 3, three outcomes: (a) citizens' capacity to distinguish and identify the competing parties given their programs, which reflects on their awareness about the range of options; (b) citizens' awareness about their own political opinions and capacity to translate them to programmatic preferences; and (c) whether the political choices achieve congruence between parties and citizens programmatic preferences. (2) The notion of the information environment qualifies contexts in which citizens have vary opportunities go access relevant information.

2.2. Why parties? Why party systems?

The idea that parties are sources of information may sound trivial. Still, one has to consider the arguments very carefully to determine the chances parties have to get their message through in different contexts. Some of the control over the information flow is up to the parties as agents, some of it is not. The purpose of this sub-section is to explain the opportunities and constraints the *party linkage model* has in explaining information-driven effects on voting behavior, and more specifically, what role the programmatic content of parties'- and citizens' lef-right spatial calculations have in this model. This is to establish that

the contextual variation in the information environment is, simultaneously, a variation in the party-citizen linkages. Then, in the concluding sub-section, I specify the party competition patterns in which these linkages, and therefore, the information effects, are expected to vary.

The way parties constitute an information environment is inherent in their democratic functions. By this I mean that if parties indeed operate in a manner described by the following theories, they willingly and regularly distribute vast amounts of information to citizens. The functionalist tradition (synthesized by Almond, 1966 (1960)) claims that political communication is a constitutive part of why parties exist at all in that they summarize and simplify the policy options for citizens to choose among them as competing alternatives. Moreover, party politics research soon realized that this function is not merely the provision of information, but a series of processes that links citizens (and various other actors) with institutions, and the political system in general. Russell Dalton and his colleagues (2011) summarize the state of the art theory on *party linkages*, a concept initially developed by Kay Lawson (1980), to describe and compare the wide range of party activities across countries regardless of the regime type or the quality of democracy. Throughout their book, they work with a five-fold typology of linkage types that are more focused on (partisan) democracies: campaign-, participatory-, ideological-, representative-, and policy linkages (p. 17). Briefly, the five concepts denote the possible relationships between parties and popular control, at all the relevant stages of policy selection and the making. As far as the information environment is concerned, probably the campaign linkage and the ideological linkages are most relevant. Former sets the political agenda itself, and the latter accounts for whether and how policy preferences are matched between the electors and the elected (see below).

On the other hand, one can consider linkage types not only in terms of the stages of the political "process", but also in a way that gives a deeper assessment of the type, perhaps of the quality, of information/communication that connects parties with their voters. Such a typology is also powerful in assessing the differences in what forms, for instance, campaign linkages can take. Herbert Kitschelt's linkage typology (2000) is motivated by functional reasons, in that they are meant to describe the kind of collective tasks (including policy making) the linkages cover. However, the three linkage types have significant implications on the causes and the effects of the information flow present in daily politics. Clientelistic and charismatic linkages do not exist to solve problems of collective choice, therefore, parties do not have many incentives to report to citizens about the course of governance, or to collect information about their preferences. The information flow is either merely symbolic, or is not associated with official party communication. *Programmatic* linkages, on the other hand, imply a wide range of policy communication. Before elections, parties may want to convince voters about the desirability and legitimacy of specific policy proposal. The presence of the programmatic linkages, of course, does not exclude the possibility of other types of attachments. From short-term impressions and affect based leader evaluations to group membership and cleavages, other factors play an important role in the citizens' decision making calculus. However, this does not automatically downgrade the importance of programmatic ties.

The question is, then, what determines the quality of programmatic linkages, and their role in linking citizens to politics?

On the very micro-level, even minor things can influence the role of policy-based ties. There may be variation within parties in what kind of campaign strategies they opt for. An increasing number of politicians experiment with individualized campaigning. Using big data on networking and consumption patterns, it has become possible to tailor partisan messages to what is expected to guide the voting behavior of the individuals: what issues they are expected to care about, or the kind of group interest they may feel symphatetic towards. Pulling to the extreme, this may signal a tendency in which the party organization's role is disappearing in expressing positions as coherent ideological goals.

But many scholars argue that parties still undertake their traditional role in offering programs. For instance, the core argument of Dalton *et al*'s book (2011), backed up with evidence from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems datasets, is that parties not only still drive these processes, but the programmatic content is still in agreement with how citizens think about politics. On similar lines, Vavreck (2014) cites studies demonstrating that the "winning" message is universal and is phrased in ideological terms, which not very much different from the traditional campaign strategies.

This immediately leads to the realization that the efficient programmatic communication such that is perceived by the citizens. How is it possible that citizens can make sense of a wide range of policy priorities, and attribute each of them to parties?

The relevant concept here is ideological congruence. Programmatic content is not only such that it centers on single issues. Ideology is the systematic take on how issues are consistent with each other in that they all point towards some perception of what society and politics

should be about. If citizens and parties agree on these broad terms, the policy options will be always nested under a great theme that their ideological stance emphasizes. If programmatic linkages exist between voters and citizens, it manifests in the ideological congruence of the two.

The quality of the programmatic linkages is, of course, dependent on the party itself as well. Party typologies can explain whom and why certain parties wish to represent, such as the Diamond-Gunther typolgy (2003) on parties base properties (organization and supporter base), programmatic orientation, and democratic versus anti-system features.

In my framework I concentrate on the partisan competitions' systemic properties. Stability, for instance, of parties' position, is one such thing, as it has a documented impact on voting behavior, in that citizens tend not to blindly follow current promises, but evaluate them based on how much credit they can give to the party who articulates them (Adams, 2009).

2.3. Fractionalization and polarization

Polarization and fractionalization reflect on two dimension on party competition, while first reflects on the distances between parties programmatic positions, theoretically unrelated to the number of parties, fractionalization is specifically about the number of competing parties (Dalton, 2008). However, the relationship between them has been thoroughly researched. One of the points where they converge is the original Sartorian idea of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, where they represent configurations of party systems. Downs, in his convergence models, added the third party and asked whether it reverses the tendencies, or whether big parties still converge towards the median voter's position.

Fragmentation and polarization create environments in which parties may communicate their programmatic content with varying efficiency, which has implications on congruence. However, there is no single powerful theory that would identify the kind of competition set-up that is most successful in informing voters, and thus achieve congruence. While a more saturated environment, in which inflating number of parties compete with each other, may give politicians more incentives to get their message across, the increasing complexity of the environment can confuse voters if they cannot distinguish all of the parties on common dimensions. Conversely, although polarized environments mean clearer partisan cues that foster low information rationality, the offered options may not quite match heterogenous voter preferences and therefore make informed voting meaningless for large and moderate segments of the population.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The following sections are meant to guide through the options considered and the choices made for the present study, in terms of operationalization, measurement, and case selection. The previous chapter contended that the relational properties of party systems translate into contexts that distribute information of varying quality and quantity. The key argument was that polarization and fractionalization can influence the programmatic party-citizen linkage in that (1) they create environments in which parties communicate their programmatic content with varying efficiency, and (2) they can therefore denote contexts in which a party-voter ideological congruence, as an both an outcome of citizens' choices and, to some extent, partisan positioning given the demand side, varies. However, there is no single powerful theory that would identify the kind of competition set-up that is most successful in informing voters, and thus achieve congruence. While a more saturated environment, in which inflating number of parties compete with each other, may give politicians more incentives to get their message across, the increasing complexity of the environment can confuse voters if they cannot distinguish all of the parties on common dimensions. Conversely, although polarized environments mean clearer partisan cues that foster low information rationality, the offered options may not quite match heterogenous voter preferences and therefore make informed voting meaningless for large and moderate segments of the population. Furthermore, as discussed above, fractionalization and polarization reflect on two distinct dimensions of the party system organization, and the much hypothesized trade-off between them is far from obvious.

To be able to gain a fuller picture of the relationship between information effects and competition set-ups, I designed four separate studies that are meant to examine the

relationship step by step. All four look for meaningful contextual effects of party system fractionalization and polarization, and also explore their connection with the conventional individual level determinants of ability and motivation. Therefore, all four studies have the same set of predictor variables for the sake of comparability. Study 1 asks the basic question whether citizens are able to identify the competing parties in terms of their ideological stances. Study 2 analyzes citizens' left-right ideological positioning, and looks for shifts as an outcome of the political campaign in the varying competition concexts. Study 3 is analyzes party-voter congruence as an outcome of citizens' informed vote choices. Finally, Study 4 is a close-up on undecided voters' preferences.

In the next sub-section, I discuss the case selection and introduce the data sources. The subsequent sections explain the design of the four studies and the operationalization of their dependent variables. The section on Study 1 is somewhat more lengthy, as it details measurement options and choices that are applied in subsequent studies as well. The chapter ends by discussing the independent variables, of the same structure for all studies, and by outlining the expectations towards them in the mixed effects models, given each study's outcome variables of interest.

3.1. Case selection

In an ideal research design, my contextual variables exhaust party systems across the widest range of countries and competition configurations that make a difference when it comes to the information contexts. Countries are naturally the units of analysis of political systems, as they exert large variation in terms of polarization and electoral institutions. Thus, at least theoretically, we should be able answer the question whether in polarized contexts, the

competing parties succeed more in letting people know about how their programmatic differences, or if number of parties increase, the options considered and preferred by the voters increases as well. These are the contexts where the variation in the individual level traits is largest as well, and one can examine the related questions, such as the role of party identification in predicting choices, and its relationship with context.

However, competition is not the only thing that varies across countries. Several contextual determinants may intervene the processes of citizen information, and the above cited media system properties are far from being the ony ones. To be able to focus on competition, and the corresponding party-citizen linkages, one would have to account for a most exhaustive list of such determinants. On the other hand, I have also pointed out to the lack of a grand theory of information environments, that would guide the identification of the factors to control for. In lieu of that, estimates of party system level effects will be imprecise if only ad-hoc controls are applied. Thus, as I contended in Chapter 2, the more reasonable approach seems to document and compare relevant cases that hold at least some of the exogenous variation constant.

Furthermore, I also argued for the need of a comprehensive examination of information effects. Much of the highlighed concepts can be operationalized, and understood better, if one can compare citizen competences before, and as an outcome of, election campaigns, these being the primary vehicles of information effects. For instance, if a researcher wishes to infer from party-voter congruence on informed voting, she has to examine some of the prerequisites of it, like the variability of competences (awareness about parties and programs, thinking in programmatic terms), to be safe to assume such a relationship. By contrast, we do

lack a large number of comparable (that is, harmonized for the empirical study) country-level election panels, in which, for instance, the eventual choices of citizens are recorded together with their pre-campaign opinions. This poses an additional methodological problem to assess the widest range of relevant instances of informed behavior.

To capture the contextual effects party competition, I restrict my analysis to the cross-provincial variation in the number and character of conflicting parties in Spain.

A study of the variation across constituencies bears several advantages. A cross-constituency study fixes many of the possible external conditions. In most political systems, the way parties campaign nationwide is less up to the specific geographical targets, at least in terms of the general programmatic content of their messaging. The media does not have system-level variation, especially in countries where most citizens consume similar news content from similar sources, regardless of the place of residence. From a methodological point of view, this means that a cross-constituency study may give more precise estimates of competition effects – provided that the quality of competition is still different across the constituencies. Cases like that are not rare, however, there are some trade-offs in such a project, too. The range of polarization and fractionalization patterns is, naturally, a lot smaller than expected in a truly cross-country setup. The distribution of the outcome variables of interest is also least variable: while there are enormous between-country differences between people in terms of political socialization and culture, the within-country heterogeneity can be expected to be smaller. I will come back to the discussion of the limitations in Chapter 5.

Recent developments in the Spanish political system attracted considerable scholary interest

in the country as a case study for both party politics and voting behavior. A Barcelona Centre for International Affairs's study (CIDOB, 2013) reports on a devolving two-party system, which has gradually been built up during the party system consolidation period since the transition, to a large extent due to the constituency-by-constituency PR system that regularly produced rather majoritarian representation (Hopkin, 2005). Small district magnitudes usually mean decreasing proportionality, and in Spain, the majority of the provinces decide on 6 seats or less, as opposed to Madrid or Barcelona, both electing more than 30 representatives (p. 381). The two-party tendency is, however, currently undergoing changes due to noticable disenchantment with the performance of the mainstream parties occupying the left-right continuum. This manifests in a constantly decreasing vote share of PP and PSOE, and a simultaneous increase of vote abstention, or of the vote share of the alternative parties (CIDOB, 2013 p. 3). This, again, characterizes the provinces very unequally. While in populous areas the United Left party (IU), and in some of them the relatively new centre-left formation (UPyD) or the green electoral coalitions gain most of the swing votes, in the rest of the provinces the devolution is slower. Furthermore, the presence of the region-specific parties on both left and right gives an additional twist to the competition mechanisms.

This dynamics also means that both the fractionalization of the political system, and the party polarization on the ideological continuum, exerts within-country variation. This study utilizes the unique context in which a range of other system-level determinants, such as the legal framework in which parties can compete, the quality of the democratic institutions, and media system characteristics, are fixed on the country level. Thus research on specific contextual variation with regards to electoral behavior seems especially appropriate.

The Spanish provinces are administrative units that also cover autonomous communities, and function as the electoral districts for the national elections, thus they are the bases of my second-level (grouping) variables in the mixed effects studies (explained in the following sections). The panel structure of The Spanish Election Studies of 2011 (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), 2011) gives a chance to compare citizens' awareness about the political alternatives, as well as the over-time stability of their programmatic attitudes. The first wave is collected on 28 to 45 days before the general elections, giving a snapshot of public opinion right before the political campaign started. The second wave collects information on a remaining sample of 6.082 (a roughly 65% attrition compared to the first wave), 4 to 26 days after the votes had been cast, and were extensively surveyed on their impressions about the campaign as well. The initially large N is also due to the ambition to get a representative sample in each province, which is then proportional to their population sizes in the national pool (CIS, 2011).

3.2. Distinguishing parties and programs (Study 1)

The goal of the first study is to determine whether citizens know what the parties stand for, as an awareness about the competing alternatives has been identified as a precondition of informed behavior. Because much of the learning process in electoral democracies happens during the campaign, I will compare awareness figures between the two waves of the election study, and look for contextual effects accordingly.

The operationalization of awareness can be done in many ways. Competent citizens may be able to distinguish parties based on specific issues and identify their positions. A large part of this competence is based on factual knowledge about party platforms, which can also be

analyzed if the appropriate proxy concepts are identified.

In this study, I focus on the left-right ideological continuum, and ask whether and how much citizens deviate from parties' established positions on that continuum. The left-right political space is frequently seen as a sum of programmatic preferences, that both citizens and politicians can efficiently use for rationalizing what kind of policies parties generally advocate (for a thorough demonstration of usage in a cross-country study, see Dalton, 2011). Which preferences and which issues are part of it, is another question. In the case of programmatic parties' positioning, it may be a quite comprehensive set of issues indicating a consistent view of good governance and societal priorities (Cheeseman *et al*., 2014). For citizens, however, it is a more likely to be a restricted set of issues that are particularly salient for the individual. The salience component means that they have specific memories and/or impressions about political issues in mind when positioning the political parties. The thorough understanding of, and critical reflection on, all parties' manifesto are not consistent with the average voters' sophistication (Converse, 1968); in fact, it is not fundamentally important for distinguishing parties from one another. As far as deviations are concerned, I am interested less in the accuracy of party positioning, and concentrate on whether increasing or decreasing deviations from the accurate placements are detectable in the electorate, given the specified party competition setups. If campaigning as such is successful in informing voters, I expect increasing accuracy in how citizens place parties on the left-right scale.

The most important point here is the estimation of party positions, as this is a recurring theme in all subsequent sections. Several options are available to estimate party positions. I excluded the possibility of candidate survey estimation, my focus being on the assessment of

the party as an organization's position independently from the agents. Broadly speaking, one wants objective measures (to avoid endogenity problems in the estimation process). On the other hand, as I will review now, most available options have significant methodological, as well as substantive problems.

First, I considered the Comparative Manifesto Project's (Volkens *et al*., 2013) *RILE* index, the official policy platform-based estimate of party positions. Despite the stated problems its with validity and reliability (e.g. Benoit, 2009; Mölder, 2013), the exclusively salience-based scale can be informative and objective environmental measures. However, a quick assessment of the competing parties' *RILE* range revealed the following problems. Its theoretical range is -100 to +100, negative values indicating more left-wing salient issues and the positive values indicating right-wing issue stances. By contrast, its empirical reach is substantially smaller. The specific party scores for the 2011 Spanish general elections range from -36 to -3. Translated this on a more familiar 0-10 scale, it yields the impossibly low range of programmatic positions of 1.5, with a minimium of 3.8 (IU) and a maximum of 5.3 (PP). It also indicates that the most-right-wing party is a moderate centrist. To have the framework of comparison, the 2012 European Social Survey Appendix A3 describes IU's ideology as communist (ESS, 2013, p. 49)), while PP is viewed by the public as a sharply right wing party polarizing the political environment. By contrasts, the range of the perceived party positions on the left-right scale, according the Spanish election studies' average perceived positions, is 5.75 (minimum of 2.1 (Amaiur), and the maximum of 7.85 (PP)). Naturally, in terms of salience, it might be the case that these parties indeed do not differ much and there is very little programmatic difference between them, but the examples already showed that we should treat this with skepticism.

There are ways to correct the discrepancies in scale construction from manifesto data, like the confrontational logit method recently proposed by Lowe et al. (2011) and Benoit et al. (2012). However, it is not entirely clear whether data transformation, other than tackling the important methodological issues with the scale, is also able to adress the more substantive issue of the mismatch between the scale and the central tendency of citizens' perception. The range of ideological positions, as perceived by the citizens is reality for them, not individually but as a collective (Dalton, 2008). And one cannot easily dismiss this collective sense of the political spectrum.

Although the public perception about polarization is a more reliable and precise measure for cross-country studies, and the cross-section means are becoming frequently used for estimating the party positions, I am applying a third option. Expert surveys about party positions are being published for an increasing number of cases. For my case, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey's last wave (Bakker et al., 2012) has coverage on Spain, although the data collection period is one year before the election in question. In this, a handful of experts determine the party positions. These measures are naturally closer to what citizens can perceive, furthermore, there are no scale validity issues as experts use a similar 10-point scale to describe ideology.

To assess the precision of the expert survey means as estimators of the party positions, I compared them to the CIS cross-section averages. Due to the small deviations between the two, I use the expert survey estimate wherever the data was available. The one year difference in data colletion results in missing expert data on newly formed electoral coalitions. Thus, to position the green coalition *Equo*, the *Geroa Bai* in Navarra, and the

leftist-nationalist party *Amaiur* in the Araba, Bizkaia, and Gipuzkoa constituencies in Basque Country, I use the survey means to position them.

Another down side of this option is the large variability of expert opinions. As the number of experts is limited, the averages' standard deviations often exceed 1 point (quite a substantive change on a 10 point scale). The first horizontal category, "LR", represents this in Table 1.

Table 1: Expert survey variability

		BNG	CC	CHA	CiU	CpE	EA	EdP-V	ERC	IU	PNV	PP	PSOE	UPD
						Parties								
LR	Mean	2,36	6,18	2,9	6	5,4	4	2,86	3	1,83	6,08	7,33	3,67	5,55
	St. Dev	0,67	0,87	1,29	0,74	0,55	1,04	1,35	1,13	0,72	1,16	0,65	0,65	1,57
	Max	4	8	5	7	6	5	5	5	3	8	8	5	9
	Min	2	5	1	5	5	2	1	1	1	4	6	3	4
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Tax	Mean	1,78	6	1,86	7,18	6,33	3,88	2,25	2,4	0,91	6,36	7,64	3,27	4,11
	St. Dev.	1,48	1,73	1,35	1,6	0,58	1,73	0,5	1,58	0,94	1,43	1,5	1,1	1
	Max	5	10	4	10	7	7	3	5	3	9	10	5	6
	Min	0	4	0	5	6	2	2	0	0	4	5	2	2
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

However, since the averages do not deviate much from the collective perception, but have the additional benefit of being an exogeneous source of data, I treat the expert estimates as the parties "true" position. The emphasis of this study is, in any case, whether the magnitude of the citizens' "mishits" decrease or increase, and as a point of comparison this is expected to be valid – or at least not systematically biased.

The deviations of citizens' party positioning from the expert positioning are computed for

each of the four national parties: PP, PSOE, IU, and UPyD (the regional parties are excluded as are not asked in the irrelevant constituencies). An overview of what these deviations look like, without the provincial clustering, is found in Table 2.

Table 2: The (un)successful positioning of the national parties: the pooled sample

Individual deviations from the expert party positioning (0-10 scale)					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PP pre-campaign	5008	.44	7.33	1,44	0,99
PSOE pre-campaign	4876	.33	6,33	1,34	1,1
IU pre-campaign	4593	.39	8.17	1,21	0,83
UPyD pre-campaign	3029	.01	5,55	1,64	1,29
PP post-campaign	5111	.44	7.33	1,4	1,01
PSOE post-campaign	4696	.33	6,33	2,3	1,13
IU post-campaign	4696	.39	8.17	1,22	0,9
UPyD post-campaign	3199	.01	5,55	1,72	1,35
Valid N (listwise)	2175				

Table 2 reports that, by and large, citizens provided a reasonably close location of the parties on the left-right scale in both waves. The most interesting case is that of PSOE, which indicates that the campaign may have misinformed people with regards to the center-left party's position. Nevertheless, what the national sample conveys may be misleading if the between-constituency clustering matters.

Four sets of multilevel models are built accordingly, to compare the pre- and post-campaign mechanism for each party. The leading questions are as follows:

(1) What kind of information effect does the campaign have? Are citizens more able to

locate the parties?

(2) What are the individual level determinants of a successful location? Is there any difference between the waves?

(3) Does the provincial clustering make a difference?

(4) If so, do the contexts of fractionalization and polarization intervene to the individual level determinants of a successful location?

3.3. Self positioning and the campaign (Study 2)

While the previous study taps on the first kind of competence I highlighted at the end of Chapter 2, this one concerns another instance of informed behavior, namely, whether citizens can think in similar programmatic terms. In this study, I look for the information effects of the campaign by comparing the pre- and post-campaign programmatic thinking. Similarly to Study 1, to proxy this change I use citizens expressed positions on the left-right ideological continuum.

As also pointed out in the previous section, the programmatic content of citizens' left-right calculations may be composed of a smaller set of issue positions. Nevertheless, the first thing to explore is whether citizens' opinions on all issues on which they expressed a stance on appears consistent with their broad ideological positions. Table 3 reports that there is a statistically significant association between the single issue stances and their ideological positioning.

Table 3: Issue positions predicting lef-right positions: pairwise correlations

Correlations

		LR position first wave	LR position second wave
Multiculturalism → no migration	Pearson Correlation	.221	.247
	Sig. (2-tailed) p <	,001	,001
	N	5059	5093
Improve public services → no taxation	Pearson Correlation	,169	,182
	Sig. (2-tailed) p <	,001	,001
	N	4898	4935
Equal rights (same sex marriage) → no child adoption	Pearson Correlation	,331	,356
	Sig. (2-tailed) p <	,001	,001
	N	4880	4907
No dialogue with ETA → dialogue	Pearson Correlation	-,272	-,289
	Sig. (2-tailed) p <	,001	,001
	N	4909	4948
(in the decision making) Popular control → elite control	Pearson Correlation	,182	,209
	Sig. (2-tailed) p <	,001	,001
	N	4952	4986

However, the associations are relatively moderate, although they do tend to strengthen by the post-election wave. Interestingly, the correlation coefficient is smallest on the more taxation – public spending / less taxation – less spending trade-off question. The issue is a substantive part of most understandings of the economic left-right axis, and the expectation would be that people can increasingly associate the left-right spectrum itself with the issues of economic planning.

The information effect my models aim to capture here is whether people reconsidered their left-right positions, as an outcome of the information flow during the campaign. These judgments are driven by deeper underlying values, but sustained and powerful stimulus can lead information effects nevertheless. There are several reasons to believe this is possible. First, before the campaign, people may have had different issues – of personal salience – in

mind when positioning themselves. By contrast,the issues emphasized in the political debates could very well influence the response the survey participants gave. Second, the consideration of the political alternatives, and the strengthening of partisan attachments (resulting in a vote choice) could, if parties succeeded communicating their programs, make people adjust (alternatively, reinforce) their beliefs on what they prefer. These two options can simultaneously be important, because an issue wich changing salience properties can influence one's conception of the good governance, and therefore, think about political preferences.

There is, however, a methodological problem when it comes to explaining panel shifts. Since the beginning of the explorations in survey statistics, scholars have pointed out that, to some extent, changes are rather "noise" in the observation, meaning that individual errors and ad-hoc responses should not be mistaken for meaningful changes in opinions (e.g. Converse and Traugott, 1986; Goodman, 1961). Most of these problems are due to external validity problems in the panel design and measurement error, but – especially in not-controlled and experimental setting, what one can do is to be cautios in interpreting significant changes. Furthermore, in the presence of inconclusive results, one can apply correction techniques to gain in the explanatory power.

To explore the shifts more in detail, Study 2 estimates a multilevel model of the determinants of change, where the dependent variable is the absolute deviance from the initial (pre-campaign) position on the 10 point ideology scale. This is a "log-linear" model in the sense Benoit (2011) uses the expression, where a unit increase on the independent variables multiplies the expected value of the outcome by e^{β} (p. 4.), e being the base of the logarithmic

transformation applied on the outcome variable. In this study, I applied decimal logarithm, therefore, the base is, instead of e, 10.

The leading questions of Study 2 are:

(1) What kind of information effect does the campaign have here? Do citizens deviate in terms of their expressed positions?

(2) What are the individual level determinants of the magnitude of the shifts?

(3) Does the provincial clustering make a difference?

(4) If so, do the contexts of fractionalization and polarization intervene to the individual level determinants of a shift in position?

3.4. Informed voting and congruence (Study 3)

Completing the previous studies, this extends the discussion to whether voting resulted in congruence between citizens and parties ideological positioning. Ideological congruence is a concept that reflects on a match between citizens' and parties' programmatic goals.

For this study, the same expert survey approach is used. It is matched with the re-scaled left-right scale, and a deviation measure is computed. Similarly to the first study, the interesting point here is whether competition patterns facilitate increasing or decreasing deviations.

My second dependent variable is a similarly calculated deviation measure, but this time it is between specific issue positions. Descriptive analysis of the electoral surveys reveal that the single most salient issue is the state of the economy after the crisis and the economic management options the government needs to consider. Since the broad economic left-right

dimension is to a large extent present in what the left-right ideology scale maps out, I chose another economic dimension that more indireclty relates to the left-right scale. In the first wave, an item measures respondents' position on a scale that has less taxation even at the costs of restricted public good provision, whereas the other extreme is more taxation for the sake of better health care, schooling, housing. This is matched with the party of choices position on a similar scale in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, descriptives also reported in the table above.

The leading questions of Study 3 are:

(1) Is there a congruence between citizens and their party of choice in terms of programmatic linkages?

(2) What are the individual level determinants of congruence?

(3) Does the provincial clustering make a difference?

(4) If so, do the contexts of fractionalization and polarization intervene to the individual level determinants of finding the matching party?

3.5. Undecided voters (Study 4)

I apply further restrictions with regards to the underlying population. For this study I analyze the behavior of those who reported themselves undecided in the pre-campaign wave.The leading question is whether in which setups the most informed votes are cast. As this study differs from the previous ones in that it does not have the same variables specified, I will discuss them in the respective section of Chapter 4.

The leading questions of Study 4 are:

(1) independent?

(2) independent?

3.6. The independent variables

The contextual variables are meant to capture fractionalization and polarization. In this design, the effective number of parties is computed using Constituency Level Electoral Data for all the provinces, using the following formula:

$$N = 1 / \sum_{n=1}^{i} p_i^2$$

The effective number of parties is to capture the fractionalization effect, to answer the question whether the inflation in the number of the competing parties foster or dampen informed behavior. This quantity measure is, then, complemented by a polarization index, adopted from Dalton (2008):

$$PI = \sqrt{\sum (party\ vote\ share_i) * (\frac{[party\ LR\ score_i - party\ system\ average\ L/R\ score]}{5})^2}$$

which is near zero if most parties are at the same position on the scale, and reaches 10 in case of maximum distances. For this, similarly to the individual deviance variable, I considered both the Manifesto and the Expert Survey Data. For the sake of consistency, and preserving the maximum perceived variance, I again chose, wherever possible, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data supplemented by the election study survey means if no information was available for the relevant party. The PI takes the left-right position scales for the left-right ideological proximity model, and takes the expert survey's taxation-spending scale for the respective model as an input.

Individual level variables (political interest, average media consumption, party identification, age, education, are also specified. The next section reports on an exploratory analysis that

indirectly suggests one of the mechanisms, namely, that the increasing number of available parties may offer choices that approximate better the choices citizens have.

4. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I estimate the effect of fractionalization and polarization on informed behavior in four studies, by fitting four sets of models. Studies 1 through 3 estimate hierarchical linear (multilevel) models, that is, fit regression lines taken into account the clustered nature of the data. The groups represent 50 Spanish provinces.

The three corresponding sections proceed as follows: First, I present and discuss the distribution of the dependent variables across these groups, and explain how much variance in the outcome is attributable to the clustering. Second, I regress the individual level variables on the outcome variable, and highlight the results. Third, I estimate an intercept and a slope model to see how fractionalization and polarization perform as fixed effects, explaining the group-mean variability. A slope model explicates the relationship between these contextual variables and selected individual level variables. Then, model fits are compared by computing a simple analysis of variance to determine whether the subsequent model specifications produce a significantly better fit in terms of smaller residuals.

Study 4 presents a log-linear modeling of undecided citizens' eventual vote choices, to further explore the kinds of outcomes associated with fractionalization. While all sections provide an overview of the kinds of associations present in the data, the subsequent chapter reviews the results selectively and connects them to the theoretical expectations.

4.1. Study 1

The first question this study asks citizens could locate the four national parties on the left-right ideological scale in a way that is consistent with these parties' positions as provided by

the country experts. The dependent variable is the deviation between the positioning made by the citizens and that by the experts, where the theoretical maximum deviance is 10, if an extreme left party is located on the extreme right. Section 3.2. reported that, in the pooled national sample, deviations in both the pre-campaign and the post-campaign waves averaged at around 1.5. The obvious outlier was the PSOE's positioning, for which the deviations substantially increased, on average, after the campaign. The first step, therefore was the exploration of what the dependent variable looks like across the 50 constituencies. The following boxplots show this between-group variation of the dependent variable for PSOE.

Figure 1: Deviations from the expert party positioning: pre- and post-campaign
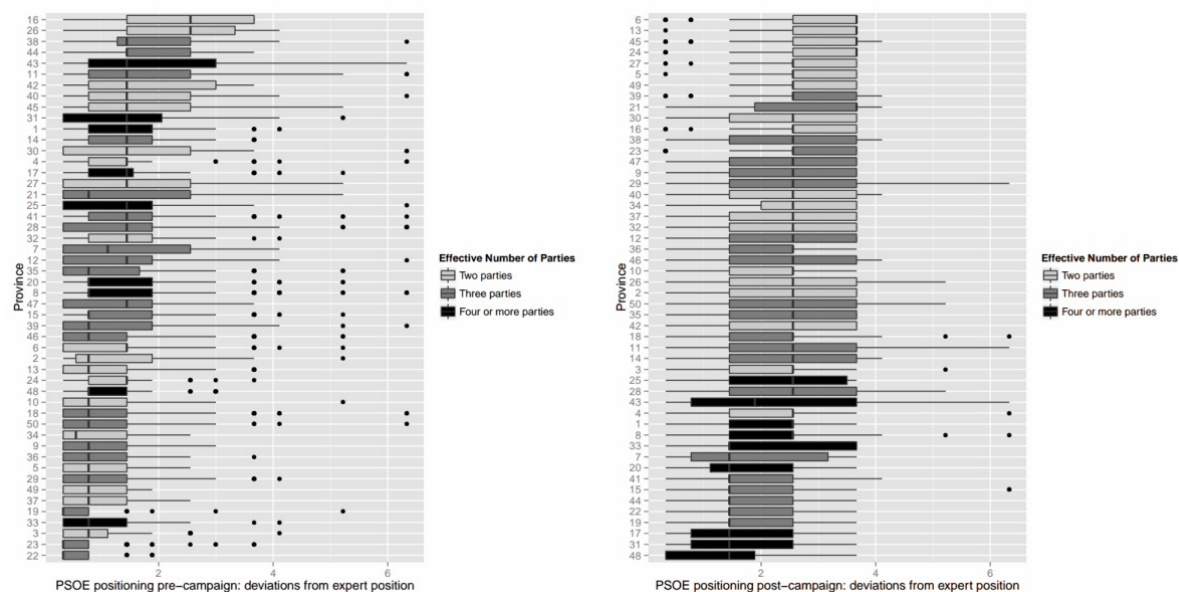
The groups are ordered so that the largest deviations are ordered upwards. The shading reflects one of the contextual variables', here the effective number of parties', range that has been transformed to only roughly indicate which category the province belongs to. It seems that party system fractionalization does have an impact on the between-group variation in this case: although no pattern is visible in the pre-campaign wave, after the elections multiparty constituencies seem to be associated with the smallest deviations, and therefore, with better

citizen information. On a similar pair of boxplots, increased polarization appears to be related with the largest deviations.

Figure 2: Deviations from expert positioning: pre- and post-campaign
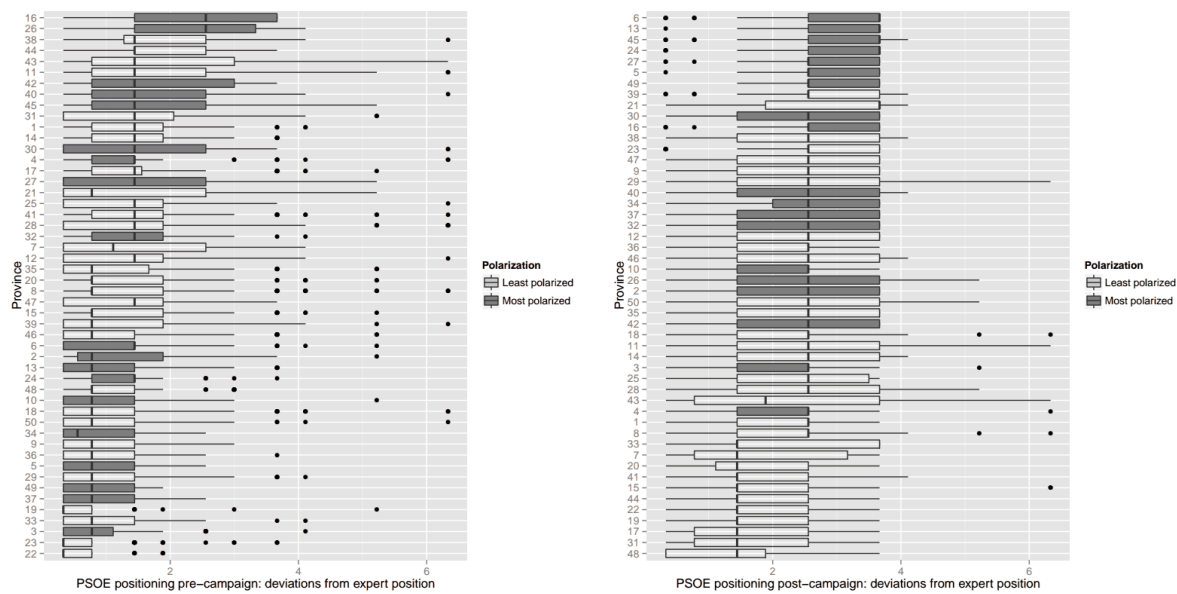
On the other hand, neither has such an obvious effect on the other two parties, where the average deviations were smaller. The corresponding boxplots can be found in the Appendices. In a second step, multilevel models of the determinants were estimated. I only report here the second wave results.

Table 4: PP positioning after the campaign

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	1.385*	1.575*	1.177*	2.405*	2.387*	1.173*
	[1.303; 1.467]	[1.371; 1.778]	[0.795; 1.558]	[1.656; 3.149]	[1.635; 3.133]	[0.790; 1.555]
Urban		0.080*	0.078*	0.078*	0.077*	0.077*
		[0.022; 0.138]	[0.020; 0.137]	[0.020; 0.137]	[0.019; 0.135]	[0.018; 0.135]
Age		-0.002*	0	-0.002*	0	-0.002*
		[-0.004; 0.000]	[-0.004; 0.000]	[-0.004; 0.000]	[-0.004; 0.000]	[-0.004; 0.000]
Education		-0.042*	-0.042*	-0.042*	-0.042*	-0.043*
		[-0.063; -0.021]	[-0.063; -0.021]	[-0.063; -0.021]	[-0.063; -0.021]	[-0.063; -0.022]
Pary identification		0.012	0,01	0.014	0,01	0.014
		[-0.053; 0.078]	[-0.051; 0.080]	[-0.052; 0.080]	[-0.052; 0.079]	[-0.052; 0.079]
Political interest		-0.002	0	-0.002	0	-0.002
		[-0.035; 0.031]	[-0.035; 0.031]	[-0.035; 0.031]	[-0.035; 0.031]	[-0.035; 0.031]
Average media consumption		-0.003	0	-0.003	0	-0.003
		[-0.023; 0.017]	[-0.023; 0.017]	[-0.023; 0.017]	[-0.026; 0.022]	[-0.027; 0.021]
Effective no. of parties			0.135*			0.136*
			[0.025; 0.244]			[0.027; 0.245]
Polarization index				-0.375*	-0.367*	
				[-0.699; -0.049]	[-0.692; -0.040]	
AIC	14425,38	14279.976	14276,3	14276.966	14278,55	14277.483
BIC	14445.000	14338.758	14341.611	14342.279	14356.923	14355.858
Log Likelihood	-7209,69	-7130.988	-7128,15	-7128.483	-7127,27	-7126.741
Deviance	14419.382	14261.976	14256.298	14256.966	14254.548	14253.483
Num. obs.	5111	5071	5071	5071	5071	5071
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,07	0.072	0,06	0.063	0,09	0.099
Variance: Residual	0.965	0.956	0.956	0.956	0.953	0.953
Variance: prov.media_avg					0	0.002

* p < 0.05 ("naïve" *p* value)

Table 5: PSOE positioning after the campaign

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	2.339*	2.038*	2.958*	0.860	0,87	2.963*
	[2.234; 2.446]	[1.800; 2.276]	[2.540; 3.373]	[-0.079; 1.799]	[-0.077; 1.810]	[2.543; 3.382]
Urban		0.012	0,01	0.013	0,01	0.014
		[-0.055; 0.079]	[-0.052; 0.081]	[-0.054; 0.080]	[-0.054; 0.080]	[-0.053; 0.081]
Age		0.004*	0.004*	0.004*	0.004*	0.004*
		[0.002; 0.006]	[0.002; 0.006]	[0.002; 0.006]	[0.002; 0.006]	[0.002; 0.006]
Education		-0.022	-0,02	-0.022	-0,02	-0.022
		[-0.046; 0.002]	[-0.046; 0.002]	[-0.046; 0.002]	[-0.046; 0.002]	[-0.046; 0.002]
Party identification		0.068	0,07	0.067	0,07	0.068
		[-0.008; 0.144]	[-0.011; 0.141]	[-0.009; 0.143]	[-0.006; 0.146]	[-0.008; 0.144]
Political interest		0.007	0,01	0.007	0,01	0.009
		[-0.031; 0.045]	[-0.031; 0.045]	[-0.031; 0.044]	[-0.029; 0.047]	[-0.029; 0.047]
Average media consumption		0.029*	0.029*	0.029*	0,02	0.023
		[0.006; 0.052]	[0.006; 0.052]	[0.005; 0.052]	[-0.007; 0.052]	[-0.006; 0.052]
Effective no. of parties			-0.309*			-0.308*
			[-0.426; -0.191]			[-0.425; -0.191]
Polarization index				0.532*	0.533*	
				[0.121; 0.943]	[0.121; 0.945]	
AIC	14200,18	14042.938	14023,41	14038.658	14038,13	14022.772
BIC	14219.538	14100.949	14087.863	14103.115	14115.475	14100.120
Log Likelihood	-7097,09	-7012.469	-7001,7	-7009.329	-7007,06	-6999.386
Deviance	14194.175	14024.938	14003.406	14018.658	14014.127	13998.772
Num. obs.	4696	4655	4655	4655	4655	4655
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,12	0.121	0,07	0.104	0,14	0.112
Variance: Residual	1.175	1.164	1.164	1.164	1.158	1.159
Variance: prov.media_avg					0	0.003

* p < 0.05 ("naïve" p value)

Table 6: IU positioning after the campaign

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	1.225*	1.103*	1.036***	1.379*	1.373*	1.030*
	[1.164; 1.285]	[0.918; 1.289]	(0.155)	[0.810; 1.945]	[0.802; 1.941]	[0.720; 1.337]
Urban		0.062*	0.061*	0.061*	0.061*	0.059*
		[0.007; 0.116]	(0.028)	[0.006; 0.116]	[0.004; 0.114]	[0.004; 0.114]
Age		0.001	0	0.001	0	0.001
		[-0.001; 0.002]	(0.001)	[-0.001; 0.002]	[-0.001; 0.002]	[-0.001; 0.002]
Education		-0.017	-0,02	-0.017	-0,02	-0.017
		[-0.037; 0.003]	(0.010)	[-0.037; 0.002]	[-0.036; 0.003]	[-0.036; 0.003]
Party identification		-0.005	-0,01	-0.005	-0,01	-0.005
		[-0.068; 0.057]	(0.032)	[-0.067; 0.058]	[-0.067; 0.058]	[-0.067; 0.057]
Political interest		0.041*	0.042**	0.042*	0.042**	0.042*
		[0.010; 0.072]	(0.016)	[0.011; 0.073]	[0.011; 0.073]	[0.011; 0.073]
Average media consumption		0.003	0	0.003	0,01	0.004
		[-0.016; 0.022]	(0.010)	[-0.016; 0.022]	[-0.017; 0.027]	[-0.017; 0.027]
Effective no. of parties			0,02			0.023
			(0.041)			[-0.060; 0.106]
Polarization index				-0.125	-0,13	
				[-0.368; 0.119]	[-0.368; 0.120]	
AIC	12297,52	12188.360	12190,06	12189.322	12191,82	12192.549
BIC	12316.881	12246.372	12254.519	12253.779	12269.171	12269.897
Log Likelihood	-6145,76	-6085.180	-6085,03	-6084.661	-6083,91	-6084.274
Deviance	12291.517	12170.360	12170.062	12169.322	12167.823	12168.549
Num. obs.	4696	4655	4655	4655	4655	4655
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,03	0.032	0,03	0.031	0,05	0.047
Variance: Residual	0.790	0.788	0.788	0.788	0.786	0.786
Variance: prov.media_avg					0	0.001

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 ("naïve" p value).

Table 7: UPyD positioning after the campaign

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	1.724*	1.966*	1.581*	2.158*	2.179*	1.566*
	[1.590; 1.858]	[1.628; 2.303]	[0.930; 2.227]	[0.868; 3.459]	[0.897; 3.467]	[0.920; 2.205]
Urban		0.067	0,07	0.067	0,07	0.068
		[-0.031; 0.165]	[-0.032; 0.164]	[-0.031; 0.164]	[-0.030; 0.166]	[-0.030; 0.165]
Age		-0.001	0	-0.001	0	-0.001
		[-0.004; 0.002]	[-0.004; 0.002]	[-0.004; 0.002]	[-0.004; 0.002]	[-0.004; 0.002]
Education		-0.063*	-0.064*	-0.064*	-0.064*	-0.065*
		[-0.097; -0.030]	[-0.098; -0.030]	[-0.097; -0.030]	[-0.098; -0.031]	[-0.098; -0.031]
Party identification		0.017	0,02	0.017	0,02	0.016
		[-0.096; 0.130]	[-0.095; 0.131]	[-0.096; 0.130]	[-0.098; 0.128]	[-0.097; 0.129]
Political interest		0.008	0,01	0.008	0,01	0.008
		[-0.046; 0.062]	[-0.046; 0.063]	[-0.046; 0.062]	[-0.046; 0.062]	[-0.046; 0.063]
Average media consumption		-0.018	-0,02	-0.018	-0,02	-0.018
		[-0.051; 0.016]	[-0.051; 0.015]	[-0.051; 0.016]	[-0.052; 0.019]	[-0.053; 0.017]
Effective no. of parties			0,13			0.137
			[-0.057; 0.318]			[-0.046; 0.323]
Polarization index				-0.087	-0,09	
				[-0.656; 0.476]	[-0.655; 0.463]	
AIC	10861,82	10746.140	10746,25	10748.046	10750,79	10748.709
BIC	10880.031	10800.688	10806.857	10808.654	10823.516	10821.439
Log Likelihood	-5427,91	-5364.070	-5363,12	-5364.023	-5363,39	-5362.354
Deviance	10855.819	10728.140	10726.249	10728.046	10726.785	10724.709
Num. obs.	3199	3168	3168	3168	3168	3168
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,19	0.190	0,18	0.190	0,27	0.271
Variance: Residual	1.692	1.679	1.679	1.679	1.677	1.677
Variance: prov.media_avg					0	0.001

* p < 0.05 ("naïve" p value)

Fitting the null model had the goal to determine whether the groups differ in terms on the dependent variables. From the reported residual and total variance figures, the intraclass correlation coefficient was calculated, which is a measure of how much of the dependent variable's variance is attributable to the clustering. In all four cases, this is substantially small: 7 (PP) and 9 (PSOE) % for the models of the large parties, while negligible for the other two. Although the specification of the subsequent models does improve something on their fit in terms of smaller residual deviance, they are not going to be interpreted further.

The main similarity between PP and PSOE models is that individual determinants are left intact with the inclusion of the second-level variables as fixed effects. The slope models, which are meant to interact contextual variables with the individual level political awareness variable, also miss to explain different mechanisms as can be seen from both the change in the effect sizes and the corresponding variance components. The coefficients suggest that the grouping membership itself is a good predictor of the expected value of the deviations. On the other hand, in both cases both fracionalization and polarization manage to capture some of the variance in the models. What is more interesting, however, is that they affect differently the two parties. For PP's positioning, an increasing number of effective parties, as well as decreasing polarization, seem to help people to correctly identify the positions. Conversely, the increasing polarization helped citizens to identify PSOE on the ideological scale, and so did the decreasing number of parties.

4.2. Study 2

The aim of Study 2 was to explore the panel shifts discussed in Section 3.3. Citizens' left-right ideological positions seemed to be are connected with, but not exclusively, the highlighted issue positions. Besides a theoretical expectation of being shaped by political

socialization, the presence and salience of political cleavages, campaign shifts can detect a variability that is due to the information effects. The claim was not that voters simply switch positions because of the short-term stimulus of the partisan messages, but rather, that the campaign may make people consider their own programmatic preferences, or perhaps reinforce them.

The dependent variable is the log transformation of the absolute difference between the pre-campaign and the post-campaign positions. The strategy of model building is similar to the previous study. First, a pair of boxplots report on whether panel shifts are related to the defined second-level variables of fractionalization and polarization.

Figure 3: Self-positioning on the left-right scale: panel shifts
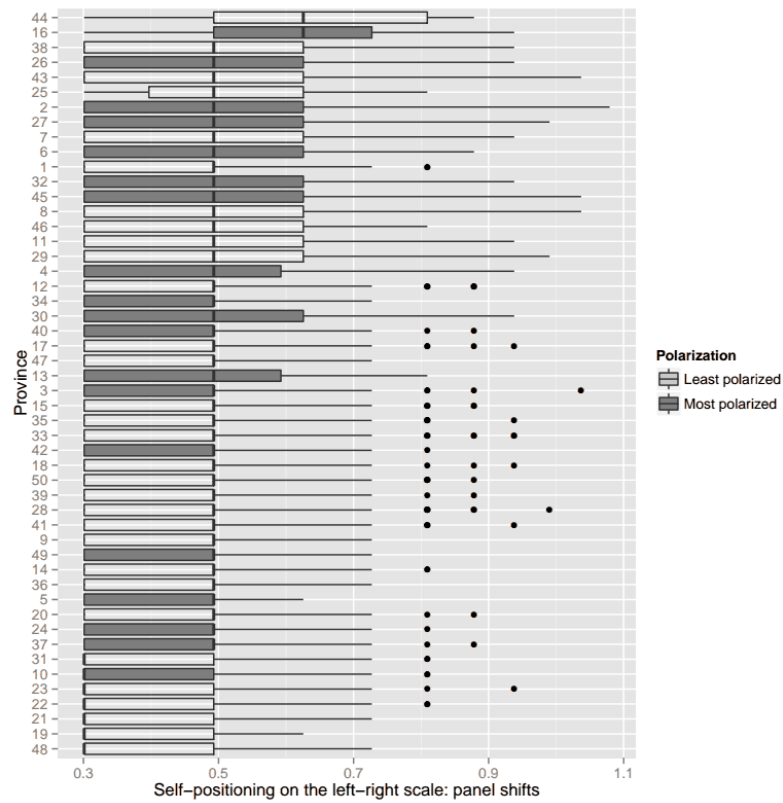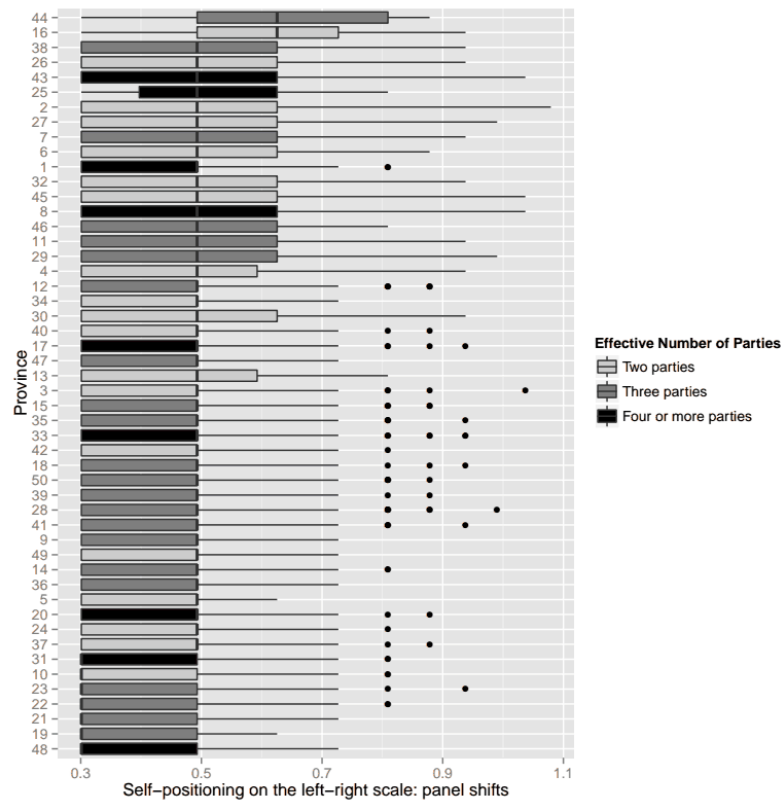
In fact, there is no indication of the presence of a natural clustering. The plots show very little variation across provinces, fueling the suspicion that the cross-constituency modeling may not explain much of the variation.

In building up the model, I only report statistics on the model fit data and on the variance components. The pre-specified set of individual level predictors do not seem to relate to the data, but naturally, education and party identification are significant predictors. This is also related to the problem of panel shift noises, the educated and/or party identifier is more easily able to express political opinions with over-time stability.

Table 8: Log deviations in self-positioning (post-pre campaign)

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	0.461*	0.479*	0.482*	0.490*	0.485*	0.485*
AIC	-4163,44	-4149.979	-4148	-4148.039	-4154,38	-4154.435
BIC	-4144.038	-4091.841	-4083.404	-4083.441	-4076.867	-4076.918
Log Likelihood	2084,72	2083.989	2084	2084.019	2089,19	2089.218
Deviance	-4169.439	-4167.979	-4168.001	-4168.039	-4178.384	-4178.435
Num. obs.	4756	4721	4721	4721	4721	4721
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0	0.001	0	0.001	0	0.003
Variance: Residual	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.024
Variance: prov.media_avg					0	0.000

* $p < 0.05$ ("naïve" p value)

This indicates that those shifts detected in the sample may not be up to information effects, at least not in terms of what the variations of party-voter linkages can explain.

4.3. Study 3

The following two plots show the distribution of the average deviations from province to province.

Figure 4: Deviations from informed choice: left-right dimension (above); taxation-public spending dimension (below)
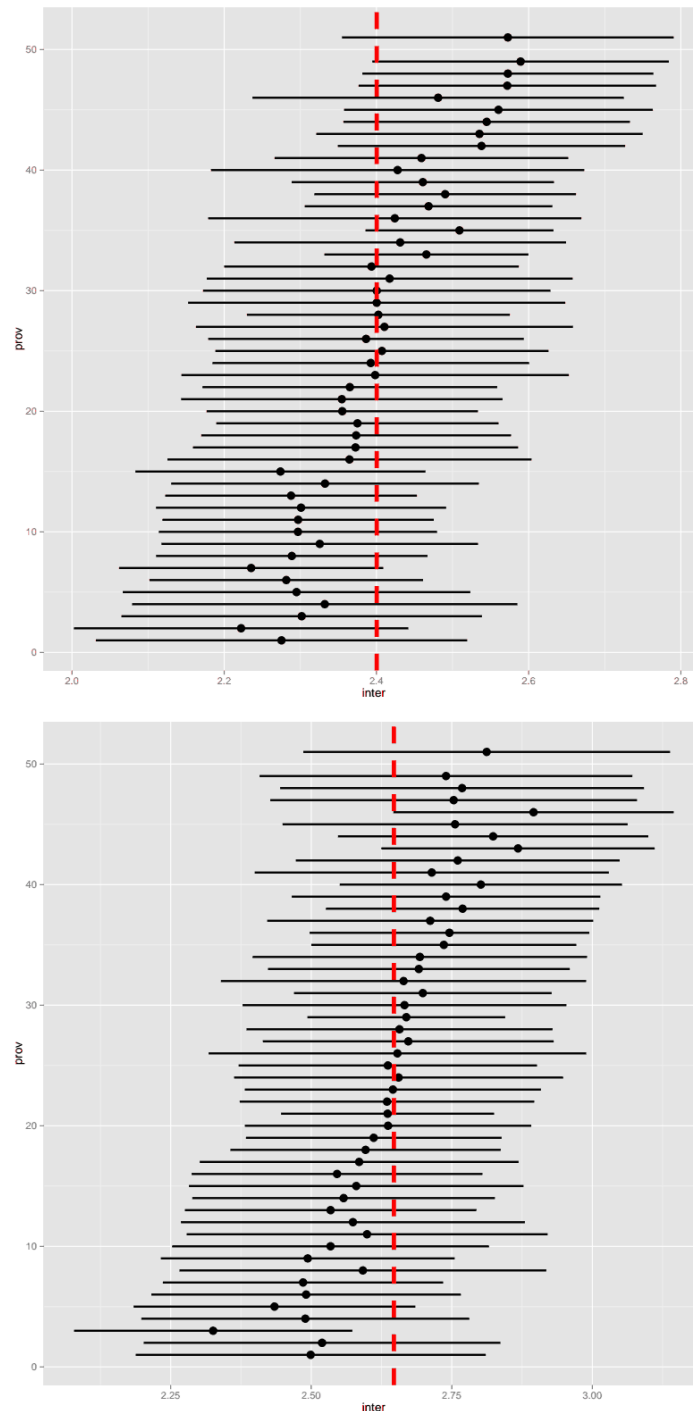
Table 9: Deviations from informed vote: left-right scale

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	1.653*	2.400*	2.451*	2.350*	2.129***	2.546***
	[1.590; 1.715]	[2.120; 2.680]	[2.079; 2.819]	[1.717; 2.978]	(0.306)	(0.183)
Urban		-0.014	-0,01	-0.014	-0,01	-0.011
		[-0.097; 0.069]	[-0.097; 0.070]	[-0.097; 0.070]	(0.042)	(0.042)
Age		-0.006*	-0.006*	-0.006*	-0.005***	-0.005***
		[-0.008; -0.003]	[-0.008; -0.003]	[-0.008; -0.003]	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education		-0.041*	-0.041*	-0.041*	-0.039*	-0.039*
		[-0.071; -0.010]	[-0.071; -0.010]	[-0.071; -0.010]	(0.016)	(0.016)
Party identification		-0.293*	-0.293*	-0.293*	-0.293*	-0.310***
		[-0.403; -0.183]	[-0.403; -0.183]	[-0.403; -0.183]	(0.062)	(0.062)
Political interest		0.001	0	0.001	0	0.001
		[-0.047; 0.048]	[-0.047; 0.048]	[-0.047; 0.048]	(0.024)	(0.024)
Average media consumption		-0.030*	-0.030*	-0.030*	-0.030*	-0.030*
		[-0.059; -0.001]	[-0.059; -0.001]	[-0.059; -0.001]	(0.015)	(0.015)
Effective no. of parties			-0,02			-0.048
			[-0.101; 0.067]			(0.040)
Polarization index				0.023	0,12	
				[-0.233; 0.279]	(0.123)	
AIC	12727,69	12588.049	12589,88	12590.018	12588,83	12588.367
BIC	12746.471	12644.338	12652.422	12652.560	12663.878	12663.418
Log Likelihood	-6360,84	-6285.025	-6284,94	-6285.009	-6282,41	-6282.183
Deviance	12721.685	12570.049	12569.880	12570.018	12564.827	12564.367
Num. obs.	3874	3844	3844	3844	3844	3844
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,02	0.020	0,02	0.020	0	0.000
Variance: Residual	1.548	1.528	1.528	1.528	1.523	1.523
Variance: prov.pid					0,03	0.030

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 ("naïve" p value).

Table 10: Deviations from informed vote: taxation-spending dimension

	Null model	Individual level model	Intercept model 1	Intercept model 2	Slope model 1	Slope model 2
(Intercept)	0	2.647*	0	2.071*	0	2.807***
	[2.638; 2.802]	[2.240; 3.054]	[2.318; 3.371]	[0.986; 3.122]	(0.499)	(0.256)
Urban		-0.038	-0,04	-0.033	-0,02	-0.030
		[-0.159; 0.083]	[-0.157; 0.085]	[-0.154; 0.088]	(0.062)	(0.061)
Age		0.000	0	0.000	0	0.000
		[-0.003; 0.004]	[-0.003; 0.004]	[-0.003; 0.004]	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education		0.026	0,03	0.027	0,03	0.027
		[-0.019; 0.071]	[-0.017; 0.073]	[-0.018; 0.072]	(0.023)	(0.023)
Party identification		-0.192*	0	-0.194*	0	-0.193*
		[-0.343; -0.041]	[-0.344; -0.042]	[-0.345; -0.043]	(0.083)	(0.082)
Political interest		0.052	0,05	0.051	0,05	0.051
		[-0.017; 0.122]	[-0.019; 0.121]	[-0.019; 0.120]	(0.036)	(0.036)
Average media consumption		0.001	0	0.000	0	0.006
		[-0.042; 0.044]	[-0.041; 0.045]	[-0.043; 0.044]	(0.022)	(0.022)
Effective no. of parties			-0,07			-0.060
			[-0.184; 0.047]			(0.052)
pindex_tax				1.114	1,47	
				[-0.762; 3.062]	(0.881)	
AIC	16585,43	16451.616	16452,27	16452.240	16456,67	16458.066
BIC	16604.363	16508.334	16515.289	16515.260	16532.289	16533.690
Log Likelihood	-8289,72	-8216.808	-8216,13	-8216.120	-8216,33	-8217.033
Deviance	16579.433	16433.616	16432.268	16432.240	16432.665	16434.066
Num. obs.	4065	4032	4032	4032	4032	4032
Num. groups: provinces	50	50	50	50	50	50
Variance: prov. (Intercept)	0,03	0.033	0,03	0.033	0	0.000
Variance: Residual	3.435	3.425	3.425	3.425	3.424	3.428
Variance: prov.pid					0,04	0.035

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 ("naïve" p value).

The ICCs here reports that the between-constituency clustering accounts for only 2 % of the total variance. Neither of the specified models can decrease residual variance, and the second level predictor variables are not significant. The deviance is explained by the specified

individual level variables.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that party competition set-ups did not lead to differences in the opportunity for casting an informed vote in this period.

4.4. Study 4

In this section I explore whether variations in the number of relevant parties, which are realistically in competition with each other, determine the strength of the relationship between individuals' political awareness and the eventual choice between the dominant parties or smaller parties. Dominant parties are those that have the strongest campaign presence, and the undecided voters might also face peer pressure towards them by their personal discussion networks. Therefore, if Zaller's model is directly applicable to undecided voters without further qualification, least informed people will only be exposed to their message. On the other hand, undecided voters will probably not voluntarily expose themselves to one party's communication even on the highest levels of political awareness: as explained above, that would indicate stronger partisan attachments and would not make them hesitate about their vote.

The working hypotheses build on this, but they extend to the mechanism across different contexts.

(1) In provinces, where only two parties compete for the vast majority of votes, people least aware of the alternatives will be much more likely to vote for the major parties, than for small parties.

(2) On the other hand, the same effect for the least aware people in provinces where more

parties stand a chance in the competition, will be substantially smaller.

Variables:

My response variable is a composite measure that builds on reported vote choices on one hand, and the chosen party's vote share in the given province, on the other, latter being an indicator from the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (Kollman et. al. 2013). Respondents' vote choice is coded 0 if her reported choice was a party with a vote share in her province of less than 25% (a minimum vote share that went for major, seat winning parties in all 52 provinces), 1 otherwise. That is, the Election Study's individual level party choices were matched with the one party-one province level data in the Elections Archive. This variable is meant to represent whether voters eventually picked a dominant party or not.

The key individual variable is political awareness, which is hypothesized to have, only in the case of undecided voters, a clost-to-linear relationship with the vote choice outlined above. For this, several media consumption, political participation, and knowledge items are available in the second wave of the Election Study. However, I decided to analyze the first wave items regarding the known alternative parties (a question asked right after the confirmation that they had not decided yet between parties), for the following reason. 28% of the respondents reported that they would vote for either of the two major parties, PSOE or PP. They attitudes are not crystallized yet, being undecided; but given the clear left-right ideological cues it is less plausible to think that these voters shared both right wing and left wing ideological attachments, or issue positions. A more realistic explanation is that, for them, the range of the known alternatives is composed of these two parties. The other group of people is those who are hesitating between further alternatives, with or without any of the big parties being part of their calculus. This, admittedly very strict, operationalization is

applied at the current stage of the analysis. Further explorations of how homogeneous these groups are in terms of the established measure of political awareness will be considered.

The measures of the contextual effect are captured entirely from the Elections Archive. This effect is hypothesized to ease the effect of the individual determinant in three or four party districts. Parties' vote share (those with a seat in the national assembly) are reported in the graph below.

Figure 5: Party vote shares, %
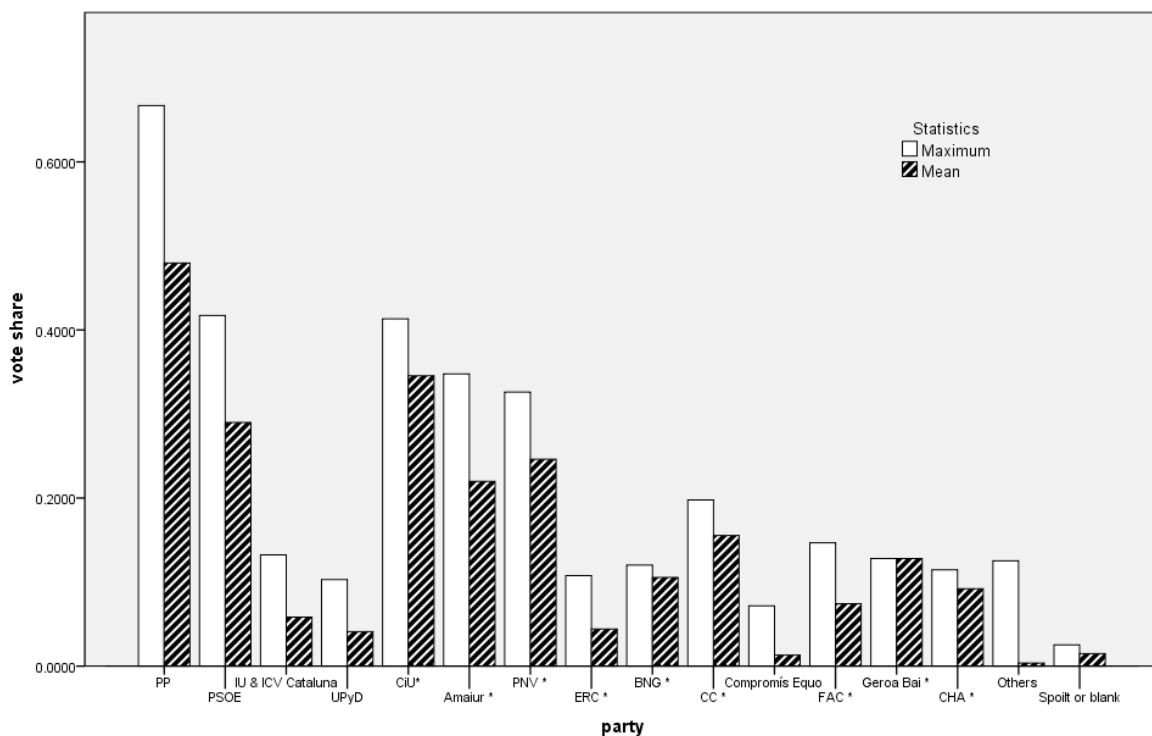
For each province (electoral district), a number of parties attracting at least 10% of the constituency votes are counted. This yields minimum 2, and maximum 4 parties for each

district. To arrive at two equal groups, 3 and 4 party districts were grouped together initially.

Analysis:

As an exploratory analysis, log-linear models are tested for associations between these three variables. *p* values reported are only meant to guide the understanding of a model fit as an indication for how well the hypotheses describes the observed association of these variables.

Table 1: Model selection

	χ^2 Likelihood ratio	df	p
Complete independence: DV & IV1 & IV2 $\alpha = .05$	-	4	-
Direct effects: IV1->DV & IV2->DV $\alpha = .05$	4,35	4	0,04
Missing province effect: IV1 $\rightarrow$ DV $\alpha = .05$	-	4	-
Missing individual effect: IV2 $\rightarrow$ DV $\alpha = .05$	-	4	-
Complete independence: DV & IV1 & IV3 $\alpha = .05$	-	4	-
Direct effects: IV1 $\rightarrow$ DV & IV3 $\rightarrow$ DV $\alpha = .05$	4,54	7	0,11
Missing province effect: IV1 $\rightarrow$ DV $\alpha = .05$		7	-
Missing individual effect: IV3 $\rightarrow$ DV $\alpha = .05$		7	-

First, the grouped contextual variable is used in the structure. The unwelcome possibility of complete independence is excluded based on the Chi-square likelihood ratio figures as they do not offer interpretable statistics. Indirect effects, that is, those that miss the direct effect of either independent variables, is ruled out as they also do not describe this data structure. The direct effects model misses the significance level at $\alpha = .05$. The assumption was that this might be because of the simplistic take on the contextual variable, therefore, the original 2-3-4 parties category was reintroduced to the model.

In this case, the association between both explanatory variables and the response variable, as well as the one between the explanatory variables themselves, seem to indicate an good explanation as to why individual and contextual variables together determine vote choices. Table 3 below reports how well this model predicts the observed frequencies of the sample.

Table 2: Observed/expected frequencies under the specified model

		province dominated by		
		two parties	three parties	four parties
voted for < 25% party	aware only of major parties	40 / 47	25 / 21	16 / 14
	aware of more parties	76 / 69	84 / 88	62 / 64
voted for > 25% party	aware only of major parties	277 / 270	85 / 89	28 / 30
	aware only of major parties	72 / 79	79 / 75	29 / 26

As the structure does not contradict the hypothesis, the following effect sizes are derived and interpreted.

Table 3: The odds of voting for the non dominant (second and so on, messages) parties

	odds of voting for a < 25% party
TWO PARTY DOMINANCE	
aware of only two parties	0,44
THREE PARTY DOMINANCE	
aware of only two parties	0,71
FOUR PARTY DOMINANCE	
aware of only two parties	0,67

The simple expectation, that "less aware" votes go to the biggest parties in two-party contexts, is clearly met. The figure's converse is that the less politically aware voters are more than twice as much more likely to choose the big parties, than their alternatives. On the other

hand, in both three and four party competition situations, compared to that in two party districts, the effect of political awareness decreases, and does not any more fully describe the choices voters eventually make.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of my thesis was to discuss informed behavior by putting the debate into a comparative perspective. The key mechanism to explain was whether party competition set-ups translate into environments that where the opportunities for informed behavior differ. The project utilized a within-country setting where most of the exogeneous factors are fixed. On this other hand, this yielded a much smaller range of options to consider.

In two studies, the number of the available options, and in one, polarization yielded statistically significant effects, although of moderate magnitude. One can be cautios to go on and theorize similar effects in a cross-country study as well. Supposedly, even the small-scale mechanisms can change if the variability of the context increases.

Furthermore, we have seen one instance when the informed behavior may have been helped by polarization's positive effects. On the other hand, individual-level specification of the model did not allow to go deeper and explain why this mechanism is present.

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