

Why did PSOE lose in the general elections in Spain in 2011?

An analysis of electoral behaviour

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Abstract:

The goal of this article is to identify the factors that led the voters of *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) in 2008 to abandon electorally this political party in the 2011 general elections and opt for other alternative. In 2011, PSOE obtained its worst electoral result in history as it lost more than four millions voters with respect to 2008. I argue that the explanation must combine short-term (valence issues, party leaders, retrospective evaluation) and long-term factors (party proximity) and that its explanatory power differs depending on the alternative for which the voter opted. Methodologically, I employ multinomial logistic regression as the most appropriate technique for the analysis of individual electoral behaviour with a nominal dependent variable that has more than two categories. I use data from a panel survey study carried out by *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* between November 2011 and January 2012.

Palabras clave:

Elections, Spain, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, electoral behaviour

1 Introduction

In November 2011 Spain held general elections and after almost eight years in opposition, *Partido Popular* (PP) got to power receiving absolute majority in the House of Deputies. After to mandates of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) received the smallest electoral support in its post-transitional history. In a context of deep economic crisis, socialist erosion and with Alfredo Rubalcaba, according to the public opinion polls most popular minister of the leaving government, as the party's Secretary General, the incumbent party lost more than four million of votes with respect to its 2008 elections result (Table 1). At the same time, *Partido Popular* improved only moderately its electoral outcome and a great part of the votes went to small and nationalist parties. This gave place to an interpretation of this result more as a socialist's defeat than as a victory of *Partido Popular* (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012; Kennedy 2012, Chari 2013) and underscores the necessity to know what factors explain the electoral abandonment of PSOE voters of 2008.

Table 1: Electoral results 2008 and 2011

	2011		2008	
	Votes	% valid	Votes	% valid
PP	10,866,566	44.63	10,278,010	39.94
PSOE	7,003,511	28.76	11,289,335	43.87
IU	1,686,040	6.92	969,946	3.77
Other parties	4,459,308	19.69	2,911,393	12.42
Total valid	24,348,886		25,734,863	
Abstention	11,113,050	(31.06%)	9,172,740	(26.15%)

The goal of this paper is to identify the factors that led the socialist voters from 2008 to abandon electorally PSOE in 2011. In this context, some authors interpreted the electoral results as a collapse of PSOE (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012), outlining some of the possible reasons of this breakdown as it obtained is worse results in history (Kennedy 2012; Chari 2013). The principal hypothesis of this article is that the reasons of why the voters abandoned PSOE differ according to the option they chose for, i.e., either voting for other party or abstention. The results suggest that the electoral abandonment of PSOE owes to a combination of factors like the figure of new Prime Minister, retrospective evaluation of the PSOE government, capacity to handle the unemployment issue and proximity to PSOE.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, I examine the theoretical perspectives used to explain the electoral behaviour in the European countries with special emphasis on the Spanish case and I formulate the hypothesis. Second, I present the data used, the codification of the variables used, the method and estimate the statistical model. Third, offer the results of the model and some possible explanations of the socialist voters. Finally, I conclude with some final remarks and comment on possible future scenarios.

2 Electoral behaviour and economic crisis in Europe (2008-2013)

2.1 Theoretical discussion of electoral behaviour

There has been a growing interest in the electoral repercussions of the current economic crisis.¹ Given the context of the worst economic crisis in the last 50 years in Europe, it is not surprising that the majority of the analysis focused on the role of economy and its effect on the electoral and voting behaviour.²

Recent investigations have stressed the growing importance of the economy in the electoral decisions in a historical perspective and its differentiated impact when the economy works well and when it goes bad (Anderson 1995; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2012; Palmer and Whitten 2011; Clarke *et al.* 2011b; Lindvall *et al.* 2013). This is, among other reasons, due to what has been known as a “*grievance asymmetry*” (Mueller 1970; Bloom and Price 1975) which refers to a situation where voters value less positive economic evolution than punish the deterioration of the economic problems (see Nezi 2012), i.e., economic voting is stronger in the a context of economic crisis when the voters are more affected. In a across time perspective, the strength of economic voting is increasing also due to the weakening of social cleavages which opens more space for electoral reasoning based on economy (Freire and Costa Lobo 2005; see also Gunther and Montero 2001).

The magnitude of economic voting is conditioned by various aspects that have been recently underlined by the comparative literature. Thus, it is important the political context related to the institutional design of each country and the clarity of responsibility, and its attribution by the voters, for the decisions made by the government (Powell and Whitten 1993), either in the form of

¹ See the recent volumes of *Electoral Studies* (Vol. 31, N° 3 and Vol. 32, N° 3) or *South European Society and Politics* (Vol. 17, N° 2), among others.

² See the articles in the volume 31 (N° 3) of *Electoral Studies*.

government (executive legislative relation) or type of government/legislative coalition. The attribution of responsibility also weakens in a context of changing exposition to globalization and the international economic context. In that sense, the politicians can elude the responsibility for the economic crisis, depending on the communicational capacity, blaming instead the process of European integration, supranational institutions or multinational banks. This kind of responsibility attribution also depends on the level of information available to the voters and its political sophistication (Hellwig and Coffey 2011) and the governmental communication capacity (Rohrschneider *et al.* 2010; Karyotis and Rüdiger 2013).

From the methodological point of view, the recent research on electoral behaviour in Europe in general and on economic voting in particular (Nezi 2012; Freire and Santana-Pereira 2012; Rohrschneider *et al.* 2010; Bellucci 2012) has underlined the “restricted variance” (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013) problem of the retrospective evaluation of the economy which basically points to the situation in which the vast majority perceive it as bad or very bad.³ In this way, when introduced in the statistical models, it can suppose the insignificance of this variable that behave more like a quasi-constant and does not differentiate between the voters of one and the other party given that almost everybody perceives the economy to be in bad shape.

Certainly, this does not mean that the economy is not important for the voters’ electoral decision as was shown by some authors (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013; Freire and Santana-Pereira 2012). However, this situation requires other empirical strategy or research design. As to the first, Fraile and Lewis-Beck (2013) employ the strategy to create exogenous economic variables and objective economic indicators (GDP growth) and the across time comparison by pooling various survey from different elections from the last three decades in Spain (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2012). Other authors use directly objective macroeconomic data (Nezi 2012).

With respect to the second strategy and given the Spanish national context and the data availability (relatively big panel data survey), analyse only the voters that voted in 2008 for PSOE but in 2011 chose other option (either another political party or abstention). Put this way, we

³ In the panel survey used in this paper, 0.1% of the interviewees answered that the economic situation in the last four years improved a lot, 0.6% that it did a little bit, 4.8% thought that stayed the same, 18.8% that it worsened a little bit and 74.5% that it worsened a lot.

want to know the factors that led the voters to change their preferences with respect to 2008 and thus provoked the defeat of *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* in 2011.

Until now, the research on the last national elections in Spain has focused either on the analysis of the economic voting (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013) or on more qualitative studies (Martín y Urquizu-Sancho 2012; Kennedy 2012; Chari 2013) offering some possible explications which I will test empirically. Thus, I evaluate to what extent these ideas permit to inquire into the reasons of the socialist defeat and to whether the reasons that lead to vote for the possible alternatives are similar or different among them.

Therefore, this paper focuses on one of the paradigmatic cases where the incumbent party suffered a devastating loss (LeDuc and Pammett 2013) and was one of the last countries where the governing party was punished in the anticipated national elections (Bartels 2012; Bosco and Verney 2012). It is one of the countries called PIGS where, as is the case of Spain, the governing coalitions are less complex and this, in change, makes it easier for the voters to identify who is the responsible for the economic results (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2012).

From the theoretical standpoint, the article evaluates the effect of both short term and long term factors on the decision of the PSOE voters to abandon electorally the party to the detriment to other options. In particular, it focuses on five independent variable related to the retrospective voting, issue ownership, personalization of politics, responsibility for the economic crisis and the role of 15-M mobilisation, discussed in the following section. These theoretical approaches are employed to search for the explications of the vote decision of those who had voted for the PSOE in 2008 but who opted for other alternative in 2011 and thus contribute to a more complete vision of the electoral behaviour of the Spaniards in 2011.

2.2 Electoral behaviour in Spain

The debate about voting determinants has a long tradition in Spain. After the first studies centred on the socioeconomic and ideological variables (Gunther and Montero 1994 and 2001; Torcal and Medina 2002, 2007; Torcal 2010; Calvo *et al.* 2010), with the passage of time in late 1990s the economic voting perspective was introduced to the study of electoral behaviour in Spain (Fraile 2002, 2005; Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2012 and 2013). Recently, various articles have focused in the specific role of party leaders and its evaluation (Rico 2007, 2009, 2010). Moreover, the panel

surveys have permitted the study of electoral campaign effects (Martínez i Coma 2008; Fernández-Albertos and Martínez i Coma 2010).

Thus, this research on Spain, together with the traditional theoretical frameworks and the recent electoral studies of voting behaviour during the current period of economic crisis, are used as a basis to formulate the hypothesis in this paper and to assess to what extent these existing explications help to understand the electoral abandonment of PSOE. This study focuses on the specific part of the Spanish electorate, those who had voted PSOE in 2008 y and abandoned the Socialist Party electorally in the elections held in November in 2011. Given that PSOE lost more than four millions of votes between the two elections, it is of interest to know the factors that explain this electoral desertion.

The vast majority of the research concludes that the voters punished the incumbent governments in the last elections, either because of the economic results or its performance in general (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013). In this sense, the most evident hypothesis point to the fact that the voters abandoned PSOE due to its poor government performance during its last mandate.

H1: Those who consider that PSOE did not do a good job in the government will tend to vote for other party.

During the last years before the 2011 elections the problem of unemployment had been deteriorating. This was also reflected in the CIS panel surveys. Thus, this issue was the most worrying and discussed of this economic crisis in Spain. Moreover, already from the period of Aznar's governments (1996-2004) prevails the perception in the public opinion that the *Partido Popular* is more qualified to handle the economic issues (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012; Chari 2013, see also Urquizu 2011). This idea goes in line with the more general argument that some political parties are more qualified or prepared (or perceived as so) to tackle and solve some issue than other parties (Rohrschneider *et al.* 2010; Bellucci 2012) and with the voters rewarding electorally the more qualified party (Clarke *et al.* 2011b).

H2: Those who consider that PP or other party is more capable to handle the issue of unemployment will have smaller probability to vote for PSOE.

Other authors claimed that it is not so much about the evaluation of the economic situation and rather about the attribution of responsibility (i.e., about who is to blame) for the crisis so that the economic voting can come into play, as well as for the electoral decision in general (Powell and Whitten 1993; Anderson 2000; Hellwig and Coffey 2011). This can depend both on the capacity of the government to communicate its vision and on the voters' sophistication. One recent study has how the voters decided not to blame the German government for the economic crisis and thus not to punish the incumbent so strongly. As has been suggested by Martín and Urquizu-Sancho (2012), Zapatero's government was reluctant to acknowledge the bad economic situation, trying to blame the *Partido Popular* and pointing to the fact that the current economic model was originated by the politics of the previous government, i.e., during the Aznar's mandates.

H3: Those who blame PSOE for the bad economic situation will tend to vote other party.

The works of Rico (2009; 2010) also evidence the importance of party leaders in the electoral decision of the Spaniards. In 2011, PSOE finally chose Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba to be its candidate for Prime Minister. Its principal opponent, Carme Chacón, former Defence Minister decided to decline its candidacy when PSOE resolved not to call for internal elections (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012). This decision brought some critics about possible pressures received by Chacón in order not to present itself as a precandidate. Thus, the leadership of Rubalcaba, the procedure that lead to his selection, its incapacity to invert the vote intention as reflected in the public opinion surveys and the impossibility to communicate the reason of the economic crisis and justify the measures taken by the government probably affected the support of the PSOE leader. For its part, *Partido Popular* was led by Mariano Rajoy, who has been Aznar's successor since 2004. The CIS survey permits evaluate partisan leaders asking the people about who they want to be the next Prime Minister.

H4: Those who don't want Rubalcaba to be the next Prime Minister will vote for other party.

The 2011 elections also registered an important emergence and reinforcement/strengthening of small parties, alternative to the two principal political parties in Spain. This goes in line with a more general tendency in Europe where smaller parties get more and more important as challengers of the traditional parties (Gómez Fortes 2008). Thus, it is probable that smaller and

nationalist parties (continuing with the tendency from regional elections held earlier in 2011⁴) have obtained the votes of the disillusioned with PSOE and PP, not feeling represented by either of them (Kennedy 2012; Chari 2013). In Spain, these sectors have identified and/or participated in the activities of the 15-M movement (Chari 2013), though this movement did not support directly any of the political parties (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012) and did not form its own party.

H5: Those who feel sympathetic with the activities of 15-M movement will vote for smaller parties.

Recent studies of Spanish electoral behaviour have also pinpointed also other possible explanatory factors of vote choice. These elements are considered here as control variables in the statistic model. For example, Rico (2010) stressed the importance of proximity with political parties or its ideas for the electoral decision of the Spanish voters (see Nezi 2012 for the case of Greece). Thus, it is probable that those who feel close to PSOE would vote for that party, being among the most loyal voters and supporting the party even in highly hostile context. Traditionally, ideology – position on the left-right scale, and socioeconomic variables have been also highlighted as an important factors for the vote orientation (Gunther and Montero 1994 and 2001; Torcal and Medina 2002, 2007; Torcal 2010). Finally, in the European context there has been a growing discontent with the politics and disenchantment of the citizens with functioning of the democracy in general and among the youths in particular (Kennedy 2012). Therefore, I include a variable that measures the level of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in particular among those who decide not to participate in the 2011 elections (Martín and Urquizu-Sancho 2012).

3 Data, method and variables

This paper makes use of the data from a panel survey (Nº 7711) carried out by *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS), an official Spanish polling institution. In its pre-electoral part (Nº 2915), the survey interviewed 17,194 persons representative at the national level. In the post-electoral part, CIS interviewed 6083 from the original sample. The panel design of the survey minimizes the effect of “adjustment” of the answers in the post-electoral part according to the vote of the person as it permits to use the pre-electoral answers to operationalize the independent variables. This is especially relevant in this paper where the goal is to study the behaviour of the PSOE voters in 2008.

⁴ See Barreiro and Sánchez-Cuenca (2012) for an analysis of the regional and local elections.

In this way, the sample analysed here is limited to the persons that had voted in 2008 for 2008 and either opted for abstention or voted again for PSOE, or for PP, *Izquierda Unida* or other small party. Therefore, I leave out those who did not vote for PSOE in 2008, those who could not vote in 2011, those who did not answer the corresponding question, left the ballot blank or invalid in 2011. This results in a sample of 1809 persons.

From the pre-electoral part of the survey I take the questions about the evaluation of the PSOE government, the preference for the future Prime Minister, the capacity to handle the most important problem as perceived by the people in the sample (Unemployment), proximity to PSOE, ideological orientation and the socioeconomic variables (sex, age, education). From the post-electoral part I employ the questions about the responsibility for the economic crisis, opinion about the 15-M movement and the satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Spain.

In order to identify the factors that explain the electoral abandonment of PSOE by those who voted for this party in 2008 and opted for other alternative in 2011 I employ multinomial logistic regression given that the dependent variable – choose PSOE, other party (PP, IU or small/alternative parties) or abstention – is a nominal one with more than two categories that cannot be ordered. This technique is the most suitable for multiparty systems and also permits to include those who did not vote as one of the categories. Moreover, it offers a more complex picture than when analysing only two options – either PSOE and PP or PSOE and any other option – as would be the case when using binomial logistic regression. Thus, using multinomial logistic regression permits estimate the probabilities for each option that had those who voted for PSOE in 2008.

The dependent variable that I try to explain in this paper is the electoral alternative that the voter of PSOE from 2008 opted for in the general elections in 2011. Given the multiplicity of possible options and given the objectives of this paper, I code variable into five categories: 1: PP, 2: IU, 3: Other small and/or nationalist party, 4: Abstention and 5: PSOE (as a reference category for reason of interpretation).

The principal independent variables permit contrast the hypothesis put forward in the previous section and include both short-term and long-term factors. At the same time, its selections responds to the comparative literature about electoral behaviour during the current crisis, the

research carried out in the Spanish context and the recent more qualitative articles about the last general elections in Spain held in 2011.

The first explanatory variable – *evaluation of PSOE* – refers to the opinion about the performance of PSOE in the government during the last four years. It is a categorical variable where 0 means “good” or “very good”, 1 “regular” and 2 “bad” or “very bad”. The second variable – *responsibility for crisis* – captures the opinion about who is responsible for the economic crisis. Therefore 0 denotes “Other factor” and is the reference category (RC), 1 stands for “Government”, 2 for “International economic situation” and 3 for “Banks”. Though there are more possible responses, these are the most mentioned by the persons interviewed.

The third independent variable – *capacity on unemployment* – is a categorical one with three values and grasps the opinion about which party is the most capable to handle the problem that most preoccupies the citizens. Thus, 0 stands for “PSOE” (RC), 1 for “PP” and 2 for “Other party”. The fourth variable – *next prime minister* – reflect the opinion on who the persons interviewed would prefer to be the next Prime Minister (*Presidente de Gobierno*). Again, it is a categorical variable with three values: 0 is “Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba” (RF), 1 is “Mariano Rajoy” and 2 is (Other person).

The fifth explanatory variables – *approval of 15-M* – is a continuous variable that captures how sympathetic the person feel about the activities of the 15-M movement. This variable goes from 0 (do not like at all) to 10 (totally like).

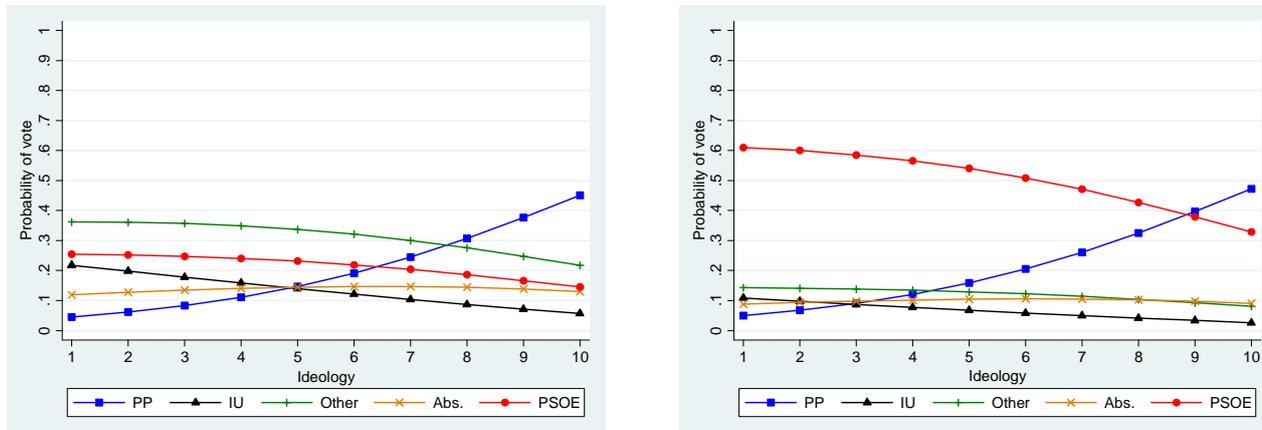
In include also a number of control variables. The first one – *proximity to PSOE* – is a dummy variable that gets the value of 1 when the person feels proximity to PSOE and 0 when it feels closer to any other party or does not answer. The second one – *functioning of democracy* – that measures the levels of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Spain obtaining values form 0 (completely unsatisfied) and 10 (completely satisfied). The third one – *ideology* – captures the ideological position of the interviewee on the left-right scale which goes from 1 (extreme left) and 10 (extreme right).

The model also includes the following sociodemographic variables. *Sex* is a dummy variable where 0 is “man” and 1 is “woman”; *age* is a continuous variable and *educational level* coded into three categories: 0 means no education or primary level, 1: secondary level and 2: higher education.

4 Results

The results of the statistical model evidence the importance of both short-term and long-term variables among the factors that explain the electoral abandonment of PSOE in the last general elections of 2011. However, these factors differ according to the alternative the voters (of PSOE in 2008) opted for. In fact, the only variable that is statistically significant for all the options is feeling proximity to the incumbent party. This is rather self-evident given that I am analysing persons that had voted for PSOE already in 2008 and confirms the importance of proximity to a party as has been suggested by some authors (Rico 2010). In practice, this underpins the necessity that parties have of persons that are sympathetic to them and its ideas given that this proximity works as a inoculation against all other factors (see Figure I).

Figure 1: Effect of voters’ proximity to PSOE⁵



The rest of the variables is significant with respect to some but not other electoral alternatives that had those who voted for PSOE in 2008 (Table 2). For its part, the only variables that are not significant in any case are the functioning of democracy and sex. As to the first one, it is interesting

⁵ For the sake of interpretation of the regression coefficients, I present predicted probabilities using the *SPost* command developed by Long and Freese (2001). When the variables is not manipulated in order to show its effects, all the continuous variables are set to its mean and the categorical as follow: *evaluation of PSOE*: ; *responsibility for crisis*: other factor; *next prime minister*: other person; *educational level*: secondary; *capacity on unemployment*: other party; *sex*: woman; *educational level*: secondary.

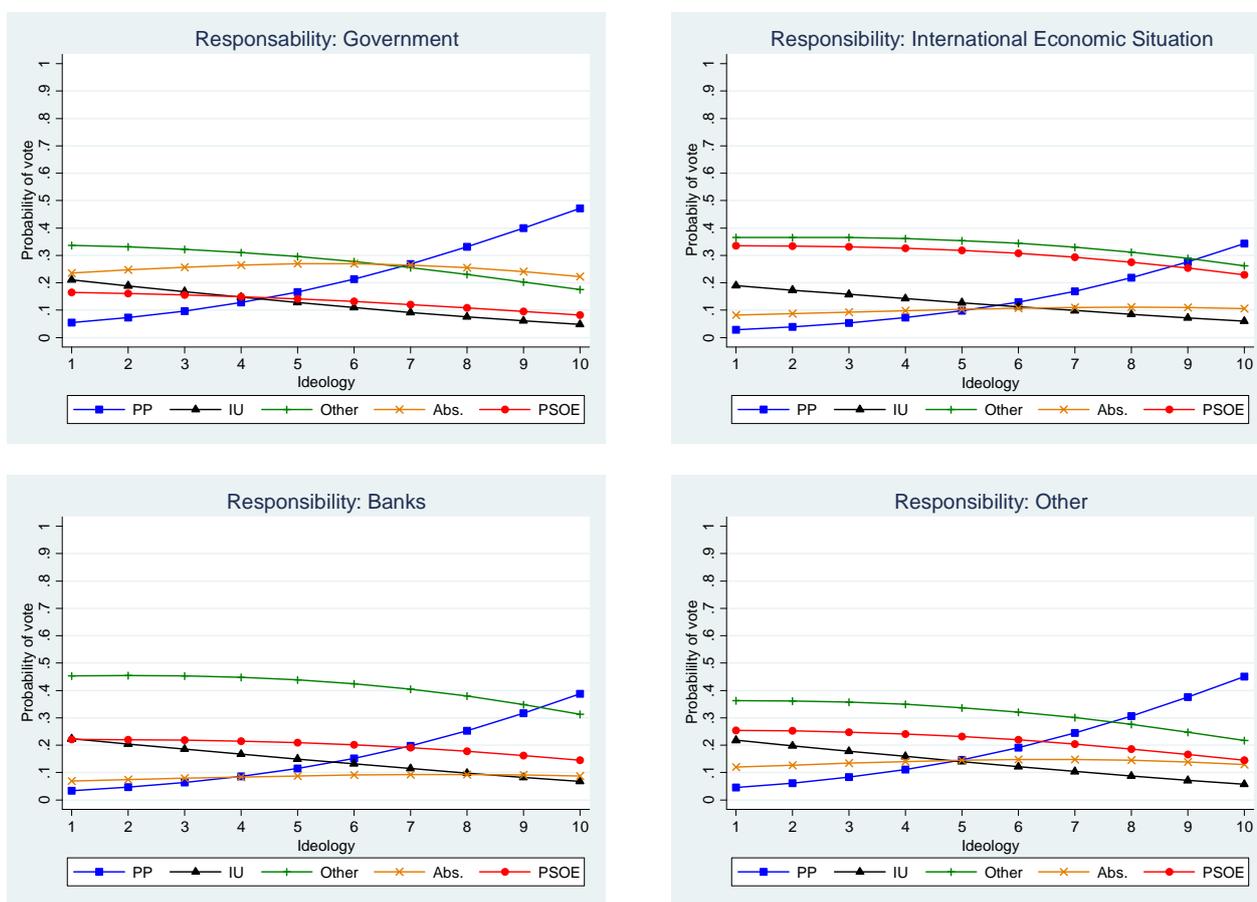
that the voters that opted for abstention instead of staying loyal to PSOE did not do it because of its general disenchantment with the functioning of the democratic system.

Table 2: Explanatory factors for electoral abandonment of PSOE in 2011 (Multinomial logistic regression)

	<i>PP</i>		<i>IU</i>		<i>Other political party</i>		<i>Abstention</i>	
	<i>b</i>	Odds ratio	<i>b</i>	Odds ratio	<i>b</i>	Odds ratio	<i>b</i>	Odds ratio
Sex (RC: Man)								
Woman	-0.048 (-0.219)	0.953	0.085 (0.234)	1.088	0.069 (0.202)	1.072	0.101 (0.295)	1.106
Age	-0.022** (0.008)	0.978	0.002 (0.009)	1.002	-0.01 (0.007)	0.99	-0.041*** (0.012)	0.96
Educational level (RC: None or primary)								
Secondary	0.01 (0.256)	1.01	0.870** (0.295)	1.372	0.326 (0.257)	1.386	0.378 (0.335)	1.459
Higher	-0.289 (0.274)	0.749	1.013** (0.295)	1.564	0.746** (0.267)	2.108	-0.497 (0.412)	0.608
Ideology	0.318*** (0.085)	1.374	-0.087 (0.093)	0.917	0.005 (0.083)	1.005	0.071 (0.104)	1.074
Proximity to PSOE (RC: No)								
Yes	-0.773** (0.234)	0.462	-1.576*** (0.276)	0.207	-1.807*** (0.225)	0.164	-1.177*** (0.329)	0.308
Responsibility for crisis (RC: Other factor)								
Government	0.617 (0.324)	1.853	0.402 (0.413)	1.495	0.36 (0.341)	1.433	1.112** (0.397)	3.04
International economic situation	-0.732* (0.302)	0.481	-0.415 (0.351)	0.66	-0.27 (0.311)	0.763	-0.66 (0.435)	0.517
Banks	-0.151 (0.29)	0.86	0.166 (0.338)	1.181	0.362 (0.274)	1.437	-0.4 (0.413)	0.67
Next prime minister (RC: Rubalcaba)								
Rajoy	2.604*** (0.318)	13.514	0.02 (0.559)	1.02	0.668 (0.376)	1.951	1.524** (0.442)	4.592
Other person	1.26*** (0.32)	3.524	0.576 (0.386)	1.778	0.712* (0.305)	2.037	0.926 (0.394)	2.524
Evaluation of PSOE (RC: Good)								
Regular	0.521 (0.55)	1.685	1.180* (0.542)	3.254	0.973* (0.478)	2.646	-0.252 (0.642)	0.777
Bad	1.392* (0.544)	4.021	1.156** (0.578)	4.776	1.529** (0.496)	4.614	0.58 (0.676)	1.786
Capacity on unemployment (RC: PSOE)								
Partido Popular	0.988** (0.33)	2.685	0.19 (0.384)	1.21	0.908** (0.345)	2.478	1.274* (0.624)	3.573
Other party	0.228 (0.308)	1.256	-0.316 (0.282)	0.729	0.786** (0.269)	2.194	1.641** (0.555)	2.524
Functioning of democracy	0.068 (0.049)	1.071	-0.066 (0.055)	0.936	0.015 (0.045)	1.015	-0.079 (0.073)	0.924
Approval of 15-M	-0.127** (0.042)	0.88	0.234*** (0.06)	1.263	0.036 (0.043)	1.037	-0.043 (0.055)	0.958
Constant	-2.545 (0.894)		-3.678 (1.032)		-2.424 (0.906)		-1.112 (1.066)	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.536							
McFadden R ²	0.273							
N	1399							
Robust standard errors in parentheses								
*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05								
Reference category (RC) for the dependent variable is PSOE and for independent variables are indicated in parentheses and bold								

In this sense, the results go partially in line with the hypothesis posed here. The evidence is less conclusive in the case of the responsibility for the economic crisis as attributed by the voters and put forward by the recent literature on economic voting in Europe. The only ones who seem to punish the incumbent party for its responsibility for the economic crisis was those who did not want to vote in the last election in 2011. Though in a similar way, those who were blaming the international economic situation had lesser probability to vote for PP instead of PSOE. Nevertheless, the responsibility for the crisis as an explanatory factor is rather limited for the electoral option in 2011.

Figure 2: Effect of responsibility for the economic crisis



The next two variables are related to the retrospective and prospective evaluation of PSOE and PP. On the one hand, those who believe that PSOE did a bad (or regular) job in the government had major probability to opt for other party (Figure 3). In particular, this is the case of *Izquierda Unida* and other small parties. On the other hand, the capacity to resolve the most preoccupying problem in Spain – unemployment – was another statistically significant factor. In the current context, this can be seen as a prospective evaluation and also a valence issue ownership and

valence problem. Those who considered that either *Partido Popular* or other party is more capable of handling the unemployment issue decided to support other party (with the exception of IU) or for abstention. Thus these findings go in line with the hypothesis put forward here as well as the conclusion of other authors for Great Britain and Germany (Clarke *et al.* 2011a and 2013)

Figure 3: Effect of evaluation of PSOE

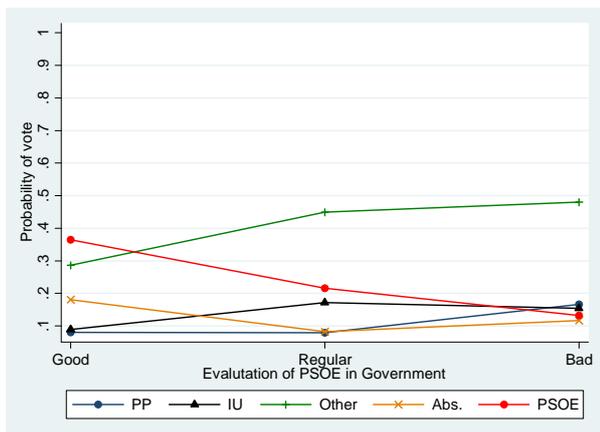
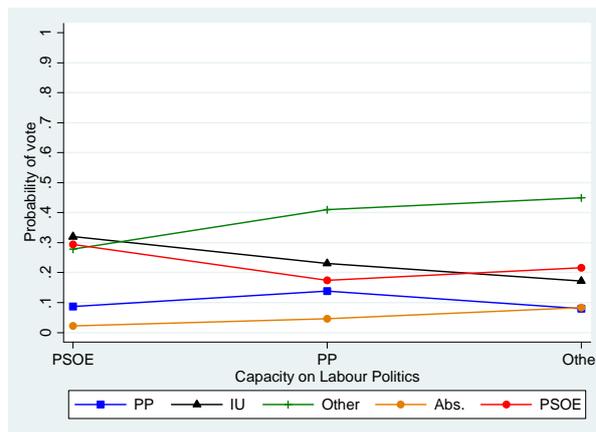


Figure 4: Effect of capacity on unemployment



The model also evaluates the importance of party leaders perception for the electoral abandonment of PSOE (Figure 5). Thus, it evidences that those who preferred Rajoy (as opposed to Rubalcaba) either chose PP or abstention instead of stay loyal to PSOE. For its part, those who preferred other person (neither Rajoy nor Rubalcaba) had also mayor probability to vote either for PP or other party rather than PSOE. This confirms and contributes with further empirical evidence of the growing importance of party leaders on the partisan choice in Spain (see Rico 2007 and 2009).

Figure 5: Effect of next PM

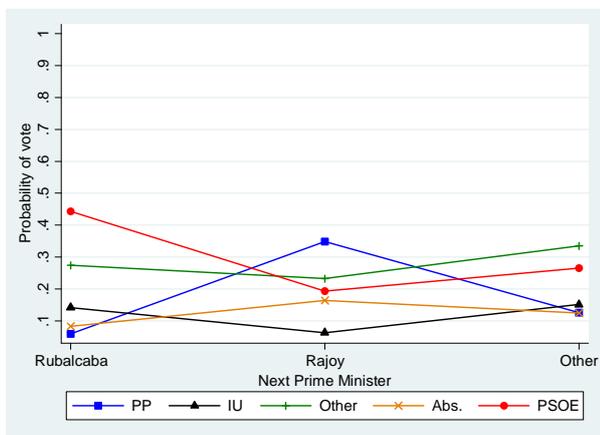
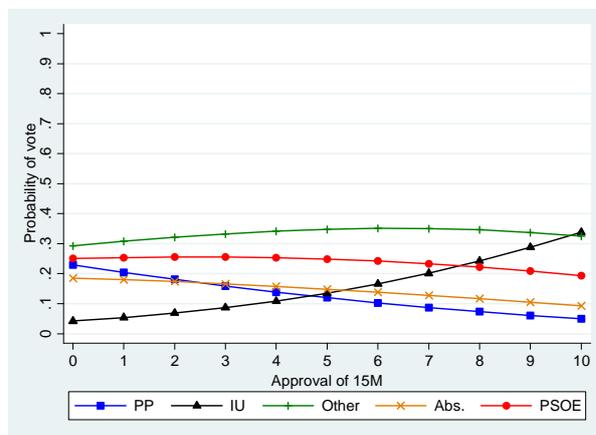


Figure 6: Effect of 15-M movement



Finally, feeling sympathetic to the 15-M movement is a factor that explains and is highly important for the abandonment of PSOE voters towards the more leftist *Izquierda Unida* (Figure 6) This probably evidences that the people that has participated in the 15-M activities and felt some proximity to the movement were, according to the public discourse, more leftist and IU was closest to its position and claims and that PSOE was not able to capture those more leftist voters. Conversely, those who opted for PP had rather distant position and, therefore, less likely to vote for PP then for PSOE when sympathetic with the movement.

In a complementary manner, it is interesting to see the role of ideology in the electoral choice. This variable is significant only in the case of PP. This evidences that the persons with more centrist (or even rightist) position has preferred to vote for *Partido Popular*. It is probable that these voters have rather centrist ideological position, are more volatile and PSOE ceased to be an alternative for them. At the other extreme of the ideological spectre, the ideological position does not differentiate those who chose IU, other party or abstention. This could suggest that those who passed to IU were less different from those loyal to PSOE than those who went away to the PP.

5 Conclusions

This paper has tried to show how a combination of short-term and long-term factors related with the retrospective evaluation of the socialist government, valence issues (unemployment), the figure of the next Prime Minister, and the proximity to PSOE explains the electoral abandonment of the incumbent socialist party in the last general elections in 2011. More importantly, it evidences that the reasons that led those who voted in 2008 for PSOE to change for other alternative in the general elections of 2011 differed among the options.

In this way, the factors that are significant for those who opted for PP are the person of the next Prime Minister, retrospective evaluation of PSOE, capacity on unemployment and approval of 15-M activities (negatively). In the case of those who elected IU, the most prominent factors are the retrospective evaluation of PSOE and the approval of 15-M movement (positive). With respect to those who chose other political party, the most important factors are retrospective evaluation of PSOE, capacity on unemployment and to a lesser extent the person of the next Prime Minister. Finally, those who did not want to vote

In the current context marked by a huge electoral abandonment of PSOE and only a little electoral improvement of PP, the winner of the elections, becomes more important to explain the reasons of the abandonment of the incumbent party, given that it finds itself immersed in the internal process of search for a new identity looking for the reasons that led to the voters' abandonment. This would justify the research design proposed here to analyse the electoral behaviour in a context where the vast majority of the voters agree that the economic situation is bad or very bad and has deteriorated in the last four years and thus does not manage to distinguish between the voters of one party and the other.

At the same time, the different reasons that explain the electoral abandonment of PSOE towards other options (PP, IU, Other party or Abstention) justify the methodological selection of multinomial logistic regression as a most appropriate technique to contrast the hypothesis (see also Freire and Santana-Pereira 2012) in a context of growing electoral strength of smaller and/or nationalist parties.

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