

The Spanish 2023 general elections: unexpected snap elections to survive in power*

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Abstract

The 2023 Spanish General election was a snap election called unexpectedly by the PM Pedro Sánchez the day after the local and regional elections in May 2023. Turnout was higher than expected (66.6%) and the result confirmed the high degree of multi-dimensional polarisation in Spanish society. Right-wing parties improved their position: the mainstream conservative PP increased its support mainly at the expense of Ciudadanos and the far-right VOX. Yet, parties on the left, especially the incumbent PSOE, performed better than predicted by polls and, together with the seats won by regional parties, were able to keep a dominant position in Congress. A left-wing minority coalition cabinet was ultimately formed with two parties in government (PSOE and Sumar) and the parliamentary support of several regional parties. Parliamentary support was reached after an agreement that includes decentralisation measures and an amnesty to repair the judiciary consequences of the 2017 independence referendum in Catalonia, which showcases the multilevel and multidimensional complexity of Spanish politics.

Keywords: general elections, Spain, coalition, polarisation, Catalonia

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The electoral cycle that took place between 2015 and 2020 was a reality check in Spanish politics.¹ Since its transition to democracy in the late 1970s, Spain has often been regarded as a successful example of democratisation (Linz & Stepan 1996), and of regional accommodation and decentralisation (Colino & Hombrado 2015; Sala 2014). The electoral law has also been praised for its balance in representation and accountability (Carey & Hix 2011), and Spain remained for a long time a European outlier regarding the emergence of the far right (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). In many ways, Spain was often perceived by many as a paradigm of political stability.

Since the 2010s crevices to these views emerged. On one hand, the 2009 economic and financial crisis steadily discredited the two largest political parties: Partido Popular (PP, right-wing), and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, left-wing), and two new parties: Unidas Podemos (UP, far-left) and Ciudadanos (Cs, liberal right) arose prominently (Rodon & Hierro 2016). On the other hand, the exhaustion of the decentralisation model resulted in a large political and constitutional crisis in Catalonia, with a rise of pro-independence demands and a referendum on independence in October 2017—violently deterred (Rodon & Guinjoan 2022)—that ended up in imprisonment, sentence to jail, or exile of some Catalan political leaders. Against this backdrop, these events largely influenced the 2019 elections, and the situation in Catalonia boosted support for the far-right party VOX all over Spain (Turnbull-Dugarte 2019). After the 2019 election, and for the first time, Spain experienced a coalition cabinet. Yet, coalition ruling proved to be one the least important of the problems the government had to face during this mandate. The Covid-19 pandemic, wars, and economic considerations were important aspects during 2019–23 period that, according to the retrospective and the economic voting literature (Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000), should have had a negative impact on the incumbent in the 2023 election.

¹ Other recent reports in the Elections in Context series include Kosiara-Pedersen (2023), Durovic (2023), Garzia (2023) and Arter (2024).

Nonetheless, after the 2023 election, the Spanish party system seems to have regained some stability and have consolidated some of the characteristics that emerged in the 2010s. What used to be characterised as an imperfect bipartisan system has now become a multi-party system with two main parties—PP and PSOE—, two medium parties—Sumar and VOX—, and several non-state-wide parties. Despite party system consolidation, the 2023 election result reflected important political changes. The PP regained support and it became the largest party in parliament—benefiting from the disappearance of Cs. While VOX has lost supports, which has prevented a straightforward turn towards far-right policies as it happened elsewhere (Garzia 2023), the 2023 election also showed that the PP’s possibilities to rule are completely tied to the fate of the far right. Among the left, both PSOE and Sumar have been able to maintain crucial electoral supports and, most importantly, the capacity to reach agreements with minor parties. The Spanish left parties’ ability to rule is ultimately subject to their ability to reach an agreement with regional parties.

To understand better the current political scenario in Spain, this article contextualises the background, the motivations of voters’ decisions in the 2023 election, and the government formation process that ensued. By using post-election survey data, we present original pieces of evidence that uncover the individual-level factors explaining switches in partisan support, as well as how the fragmentation of the right over time has been a key aspect in shaping the contemporary nature of Spanish politics.

Background to the Election

Previous Legislative Term

After the November 2019 election, PSOE was the largest party and reached an agreement with UP, forming the first-ever national-level coalition government in Spain. To be effective, and hence reach the absolute majority of seats in the Congress of Deputies, the agreement between the two main parties also required the support of several re-

gional left-wing political parties. The votes of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), a Catalan left-wing pro-independence party, were needed and in exchange the PSOE promised to make concessions to appease the Catalan conflict and to pardon Catalan leaders sentenced to jail for organising the 2017 independence referendum. With the support of UP and ERC, Pedro Sánchez was elected Prime Minister.

While in 2019 it seemed territorial policies would dominate the political agenda, the Covid-19 pandemic took centre stage barely a few weeks after the cabinet was formed. The high uncertainty related to the pandemic led to a rally around the flag effect, especially in the early stages (De Vries et al. 2021). The initial reaction of the government was to centralise powers in the policy areas of Health, Defence, Transports and Security (Vampa 2021).² Yet, Spain was still one of the countries with one of the largest mortality rates linked to coronavirus (Kontis et al. 2020). Although the initial stages of the pandemic were of consensus between the different parties (except the far-right), the large centralisation of powers made regional parties oppose the loss of control in healthcare—one of the areas where decentralisation had unfolded the most. Moreover, the tension between individual freedoms and government action gained salience in the public debate—Spain had one of the largest and strictest lock-downs in Europe (García-Prado et al. 2022)—and right-wing parties soon started to disapprove lockdown measures accusing the government of harming the economy.

The Spanish economy suffered greatly during the pandemic, largely because of its reliance on certain economic sectors such as tourism, hardly hit by lockdowns. Partly thanks to the funds distributed by the European Union but also to other laws enacted during the legislative term, economic policies—including labour reforms and increases in minimum salaries and pensions—gathered popular support. These reforms, mostly benefiting lower-income groups, lost the political spotlight as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, when the soaring inflation strained household economies. However, special reductions in indirect taxes and limits on energy prices—gas, electricity,

² Amat et al. (2020) found there was an increase in technocratic attitudes and an increased willingness to trade individual freedom for security and personal protection.

and petrol—contributed to appease discontent. By the end of the term, Spain had one of the lowest inflation rates and the Spanish economy recovered faster than the other economies in the Eurozone. Many economic macro-indicators (e.g., GDP growth) were better than in 2019.

The increasingly good state of the economy during the 2019–2023 term, did not prevent a rise in political tensions. Government decisions during the lockdown and the normalisation of the PP–VOX alliances contributed to increasing levels of polarisation.³ Isabel Díaz-Ayuso (PP), the president of the Madrid region, perfectly incarnates the rising polarisation in Spain as she championed the confrontation of health policies and individual freedoms during the pandemic, getting closer to the far-right positions (Bernacer et al. 2021).⁴ Moreover, Díaz-Ayuso unchained an internal battle in the PP that culminated in a change in the party leadership in early 2022. Alberto Nuñez Feijóo—until then president of the region of Galicia—took over as leader of the conservatives and, although he initially represented the moderate face of the right, the tone and the discourses of the PP gradually radicalised (see section ‘[Electoral campaign](#)’ below).

Finally, the need to seek the votes of pro-independence parties throughout the legislative term implied some changes in the territorial conflict dimension: a board of negotiation was set between the Catalan and the Spanish governments and the latter (partially) pardoned the sentences of the Catalan leaders in jail. Although during the legislature the bid for independence in Catalonia was not as salient as it used to be, the election of Catalan leaders in exile, including the former president of the Generalitat Carles Puigdemont, as MEPs in 2019 brought the Catalan political conflict to the European level.

³ Ideological and affective polarisation was not only a phenomenon discussed on academic settings but it also picked an interest among the population and social scientists published popular science books around the topic (Miller 2023; Torcal 2023).

⁴ In Madrid, anti-covid measures were kept to the minimum, at the expense of mortality rates (Konstantinoudis et al. 2022), as *freedom* was prioritised to support small businesses, especially those in the service sector.

Local and Regional Elections in May 2023

Local and regional elections took place on 28 May 2023.⁵ The right-wing parties framed the local/regional elections as an initial plebiscite on the central government's performance and, for the right-wing parties, it was a dress rehearsal for the upcoming general election that was expected to take place in December 2023. The result of these elections brought a leap of confidence for the right-wing bloc. The PP increased their local representatives by about 15% and VOX more than tripled their local councillors, which paved the way for new right-wing mayors in a large number of municipalities. Left-wing and regionalist parties—with the exception of EH-Bildu—lost supports and, in many cities and regions previously ruled by left-wing and regionalist parties, a PP-VOX coalition was able to oust the left cabinet (see Table B.2).

The Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, had a very quick (and unexpected) reaction to these electoral results and the day after the election he announced a snap election that was to take place on 23 July 2023. As later acknowledged by his campaign team, his strategy relied on the expectation to mobilise leftist voters shortly after the formation of PP-VOX coalition cabinets in regional and local governments. Yet, his decision was also perceived as highly risky because a general election had never before taken place during summer. Most importantly, when the election was called, polls looked bad for the Socialists and for another potential left-wing coalition executive. This posed high uncertainty regarding its potential effects on electoral participation—which tends to favour the right, if it is low (Rodon 2009).

Electoral Campaign

The snap election caught almost all parties and political leaders off guard. On the one hand, right-wing parties received this decision enthusiastically as they had just

⁵ Regional elections took place in 12 regions (out of 17): Aragón, Asturias, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla - La Mancha, Comunitat Valenciana, Extremadura, Balearic Islands, Comunidad de Madrid, Murcia, Navarra, la Rioja.

obtained great results in local and regional elections. The party that was especially wrong-footed was Cs, which, after several defeats in the polls, opted to not run in these elections. Thus, more than 1.5 million former Cs voters were up for grabs. On the left-hand side of the political spectrum, UP was in the midst of an internal struggle on whether to join the new platform—Sumar—promoted by the vice president Yolanda Díaz to unite all left-wing parties on the left of the PSOE. UP eventually—and reluctantly—chose to join the platform.

The initial polls seemed to reflect a large disadvantage for the PSOE but a large number of voters—approximately 40%—remained undecided about whom to vote for (Figure A.1). In most polls the left block did not have more seats than right-wing parties. Yet, when the pre-electoral campaign started on June 2023, the vote intention steadily increased for the PSOE. This was, in part, thanks to the high level of media exposure of the PM Pedro Sánchez, who had multiple appearances in TV shows. However, after the one-to-one debate between Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo, this upward tendency for the PSOE stagnated. After the rise in supports for the left-wing block in the polls, the right-wing parties—VOX but also by the PP—campaigned often employing false claims regarding macroeconomic indicators and positing doubts about the well-functioning of postal voting procedures after figures on vote-by-post requests rose substantially.⁶ By and large, the campaign took place on a harsh tone and a rising polarisation until the day of the elections.

Election Results

Before analysing the 2023 electoral result, a few words on the Spanish electoral law are needed. The electoral system is based on Proportional Representation rules. The number of constituencies is large (52) and all electoral districts are allocated at least 2 MPs with the final number of MPs being allocated according to each district's pop-

⁶ The number of mail votes was the largest in Spanish democratic history and around 7% of voters voted by mail (see Figures A.2 and A.3).

ulation. This results in multiple low magnitude constituencies, where only the two largest parties—PP and PSOE—are likely to obtain seats, some medium constituencies where VOX, Sumar and/or regional parties can also obtain seats, and a few large truly proportional constituencies. This system, despite having been defined as the sweet spot between accountability and representation (Carey & Hix 2011), also has a strong conservative bias (Rodon 2009), and strongly favours strategic voting decisions in medium to low district magnitude districts (García-Viñuela et al. 2013; Lago 2011).

Table 1 compares the 2023 election results to the November 2019 election.⁷ Starting by looking at the turnout rate, we see that 66.6% of the eligible voting population participated, a figure in line with previous poll estimations and a relatively high figure considering the date of the election—amidst the holiday season. Nonetheless, turnout was not homogeneous across Spain and it was lower in peripheral and regions with distinct national identities.

Regarding the distribution of votes and seats, the PP largely increased its supports and became the largest party. Yet, the radical right VOX was one of the parties decreasing the most: it lost 21 MPs and, despite remaining the third largest party, its seats were not enough to give an absolute majority to the right block. On the left, the PSOE was able to maintain its electoral support—it received almost 1 million additional votes compared to 2019—and gained one seat, while Sumar, despite losing a few seats, retained a key influence for the formation of a left-wing coalition. Finally, the 2023 election reflected an overall decline in the number of MPs by regional parties, mostly due to the losses of Catalan pro-independence parties. This can partly be explained because of voters' demobilisation and because some voters seemed to have supported the PSOE or Sumar to prevent a right-wing cabinet. Yet, their seats remained decisive to form government majorities. Basque nationalist parties maintained their overall support and representation, but the left-wing Basque nationalists

⁷ Results at the upper chamber looked very different due to a majoritarian electoral system that resulted in an absolute majority for the PP.

Table 1: Electoral Results to the Spanish Chamber of Deputies in November 2019 and July 2023

	2023			2019 (Nov.)		
	Seats	Votes		Seats	Votes	
	N	(000s)	(%)	N	(000s)	(%)
PP	137	8,160	33.1	89	5,047	20.8
PSOE	121	7,822	31.7	120	6,792	28.0
VOX	33	3,057	12.4	52	3,657	15.1
SUMAR ^a	31	3,045	12.3	35	3,119	12.9
ERC	7	466	1.9	13	875	3.6
JxCat	7	395	1.6	8	530	2.2
EH-BILDU	6	335	1.4	5	278	1.1
PNV	5	277	1.1	6	379	1.6
BNG	1	154	0.6	1	120	0.5
CCa	1	116	0.5	–	–	–
UPN	1	52	0.2	–	–	–
Cs ^b	–	–	–	10	1,650	6.8
Más País–Compromís ^c	–	–	–	3	507	2.2
CCa-PNC-NC ^d	–	–	–	2	124	0.5
CUP	0	100	0.4	2	247	1.0
NA+ ^e	–	–	–	2	99	0.4
PRC ^b	–	–	–	1	69	0.3
Teruel Existe	0	20	0.1	1	20	0.1
Turnout	350	24,952	66.6	350	24,508	66.2

Sources: Central Electoral Commission (2023) and Ministry of Interior (2019)

Percentages in relation to the total number of valid votes (votes for parties + blank ballots).

^a Sumar is a coalition between Podemos, IU, Más País, En Comú Podem, Compromís, and other regional left-wing parties. For a detailed list: <https://app.juntaelectoralcentral.es/svtjec/descargarFichero?tipo=tipoCoalicion&codigoCoalicion=34041>

^b Decided not to run in the 2023 elections

^c This coalition joined Sumar in the 2023 elections

^d This coalition was not repeated in 2023 and CCa and NC run independently.

^e A coalition between PP, UPN, and Cs in 2019 in Navarre was not repeated in 2023.

(EH-Bildu) have now more strength in the Spanish Congress than right-wing Basque nationalists (PNV) for the first time in history.

Who Voted and Who Voted for Whom?

One of the most important question marks regarding the 2023 election relates to mobilisation. As mentioned before, the Socialists designed a campaign to confront voters with a choice: they either turned out to vote (for them) or they would face a government with the far-right. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, the PP's rhetoric also revolved around the need to go to the polls and bring about a new government after five years of a Socialist cabinet.

In order to examine the turnout patterns, as well as the main drivers of vote choice, we turn to individual-level data and we analyse the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) post-election survey data. The survey was conducted in the first two weeks of September 2023 and it includes around 10,000 responses—representative of the voting-age population. Using these data, we estimate several multinomial models with the recalled vote as an outcome and several variables as regressors. To simplify the analysis, we restrict it to the four main Spanish-wide parties, that is, PSOE, PP, VOX and Sumar.⁸ The models include the respondents position on the Left-Right scale (0 Extreme Left, 10 Extreme Right), and controls for age, gender, income, municipality size and occupation. Results are shown in Tables B.4, B.5, and B.6.

In the first models, we examine the correlates behind a respondent's change in vote choice between 2019 and 2023. Although the 2019 recall vote might be affected, among others, by people's memory and projection bias, it will provide a first indication of the capacity of the different parties to keep previous voters and win or lose others. Figure 1 shows the relationship between a respondent's position on the LR scale and the (predicted) probability of voting for the same party between 2019 and 2023 or transitioning to another one.⁹ The top graph shows that the Socialists were able to keep voters across the left-wing side of the ideological spectrum—despite a slight leftist

⁸ The number of observations for the NSWV is comparatively low. In addition, these parties are mainly competitive in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where the electoral competition follows a different logic compared to the rest of Spain (Rodon 2020).

⁹ We only kept transitions of substantive interest and with enough observations to run the analysis.

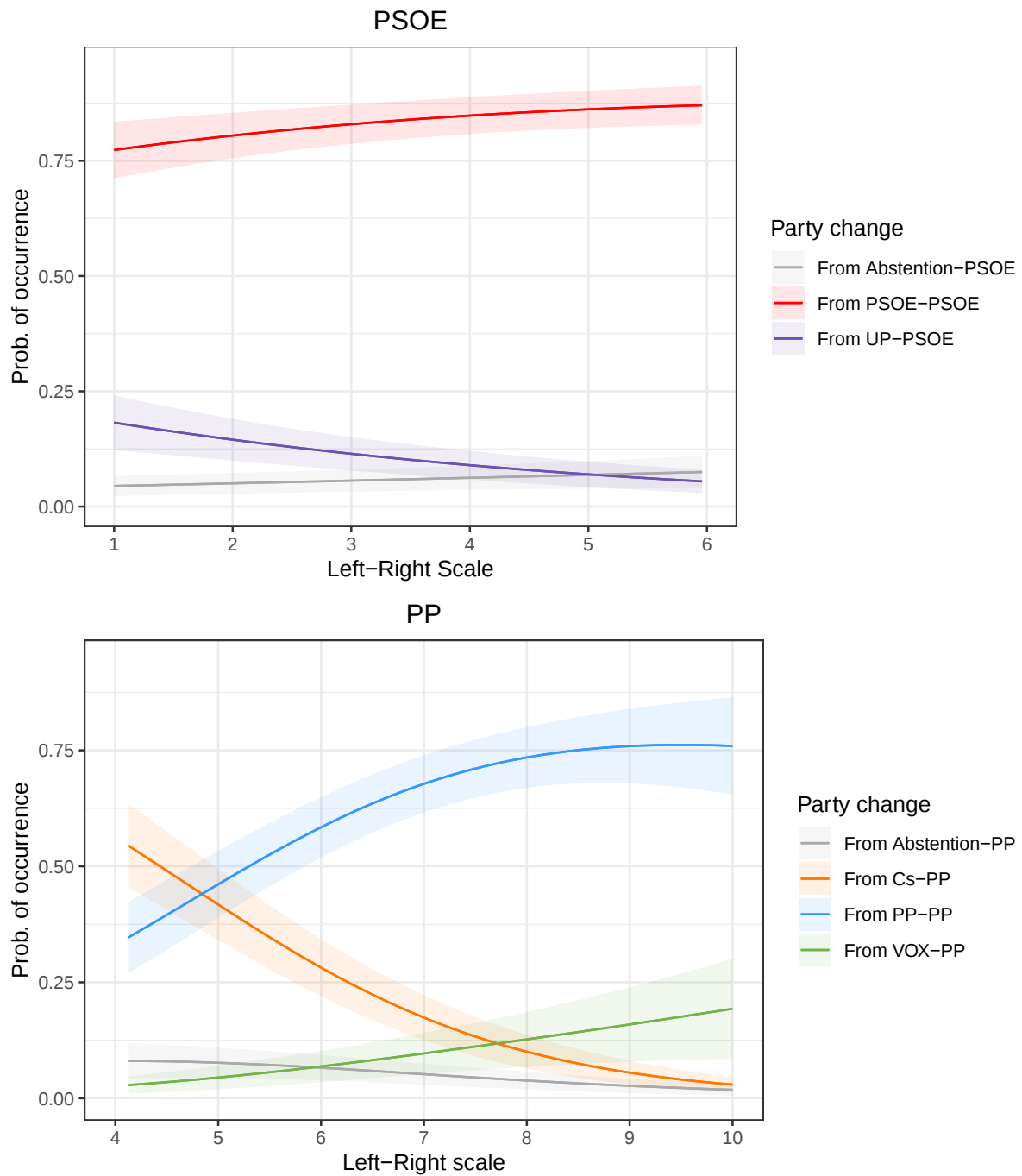
downward trend, differences are not statistically significant. In contrast, some former far-left voters who supported UP in 2019 opted for the Socialists in 2023. Although the trend is not as prominent, we also see that some 2019 abstainers voted for the Socialists in 2023. Therefore, and as explained before, the Socialists were able to perform better than predicted by the polls. As this first analysis indicates, one of the reasons was their capacity to mobilise most of their former supporters, as well as concentrate the support of the left-wing block—and partly at the expense of their coalition allies.

On the bottom graph, we see a similar logic applied to the PP. The conservatives won back many centrist voters who supported Cs in 2019—recall the party did not run in 2023—and even mobilised some former abstainers. Most crucially, some VOX voters in 2019 opted for the PP in 2023. Although the PP made inroads into the far-right camp, the party did not recover its dominant position on the right-hand side of the ideological spectrum. The far-right VOX had in 2019 much support in smaller districts, where the effective threshold to obtain a seat is comparatively higher (Lago 2011) and VOX lost many of these seats in 2023. These seats were not always won by the PP. Before the emergence of the Spanish far-right, the PP had a dominant position from the centre-right to the far right that put it in an *a priori* better position, as the left camp was always more fragmented than the right.¹⁰

How was the PP able to act as a dominant party on the right? This can be seen in Figure 2, which displays the relationship between an individual's L-R position and the mean perceived location of the PSOE (top graph) and the PP (bottom graph). For the PSOE, the relationship between both variables is linear and constant over time; far-left individuals (likely Sumar voters) see the PSOE as more centrist than centrist individuals, who in turn locate the party on the centre-left. Far-right individuals perceive the Socialist on the far left. Crucially, the pattern is different for the PP and centrist in-

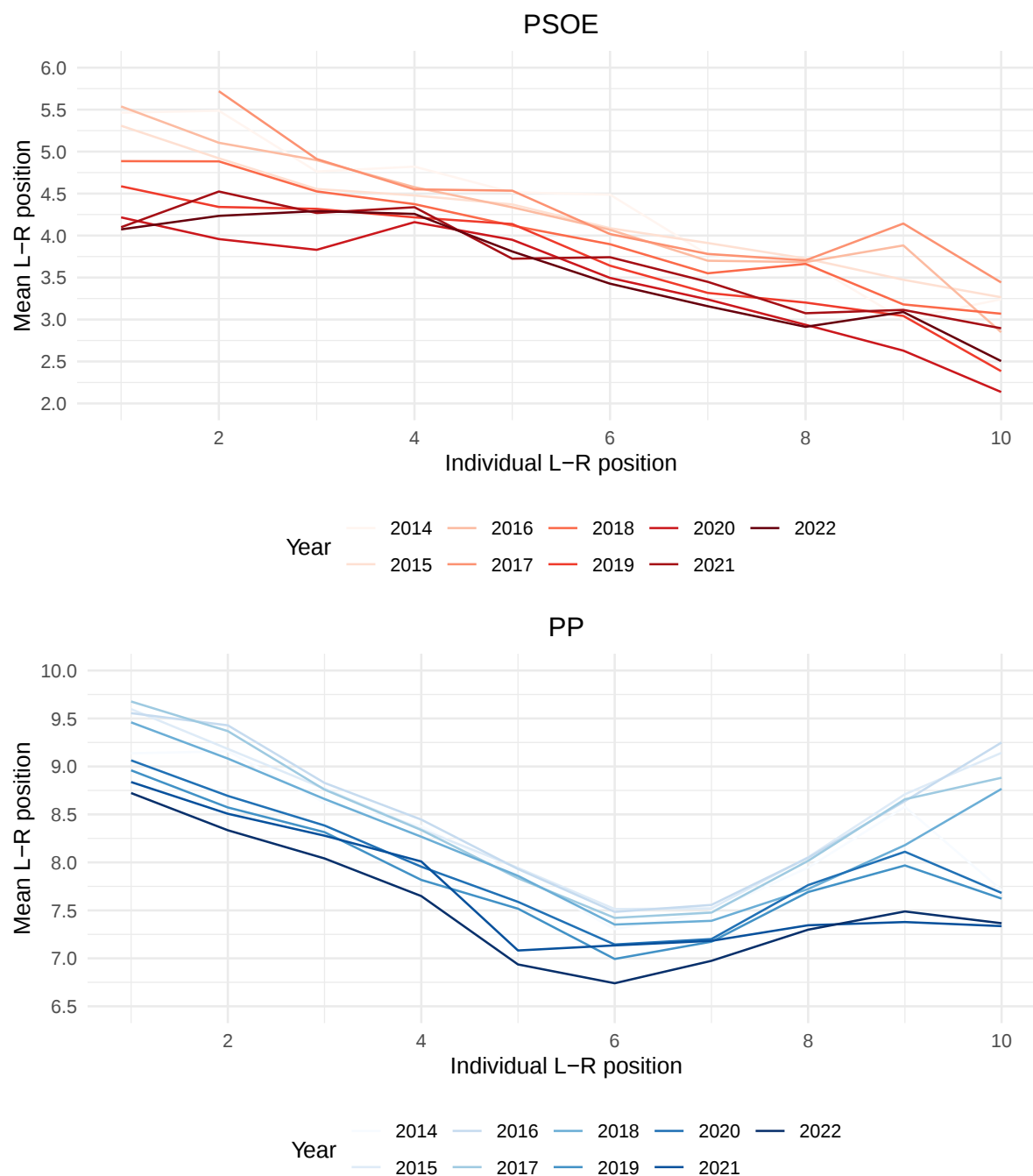
¹⁰ This picture of the Spanish political competition needs to be complemented with at least two important points: First, despite the PP traditionally being the sole force on the right, the Spanish median voter has been on the centre-left (4.6 on the survey employed on this article). Second, there have been many attempts to create alternative political parties that would occupy the centre to the right of the political spectrum. Before VOX, Cs was able to become a party with representation in the chamber. Yet, before Cs the majority of these attempts were unsuccessful.

Figure 1: The relationship between a R's position on the left-right scale and vote transitions (2019-2023)



dividuals have generally perceived the conservatives as more centrists than far-right voters. In turn, far-right voters used to locate the PP on far-right positions—as far-left individuals did. Therefore, the PP was able to have a dominant position from the

Figure 2: The relationship between a respondent's position on the left-right scale and the perceived position of PSOE and PP



centre to the right of the ideological position partly thanks to its capacity to have a 'chameleonic effect', that is, to portray different perceived ideological positions as a function of people's ideological position. In other words, the ideological lenses were

powerful enough on the right-wing camp so that the supply matched with the demand. Interestingly, the bottom graph shows that when the far-right started becoming electorally competitive in 2019 onwards, the PP lost this ‘chameleonic’ capacity.

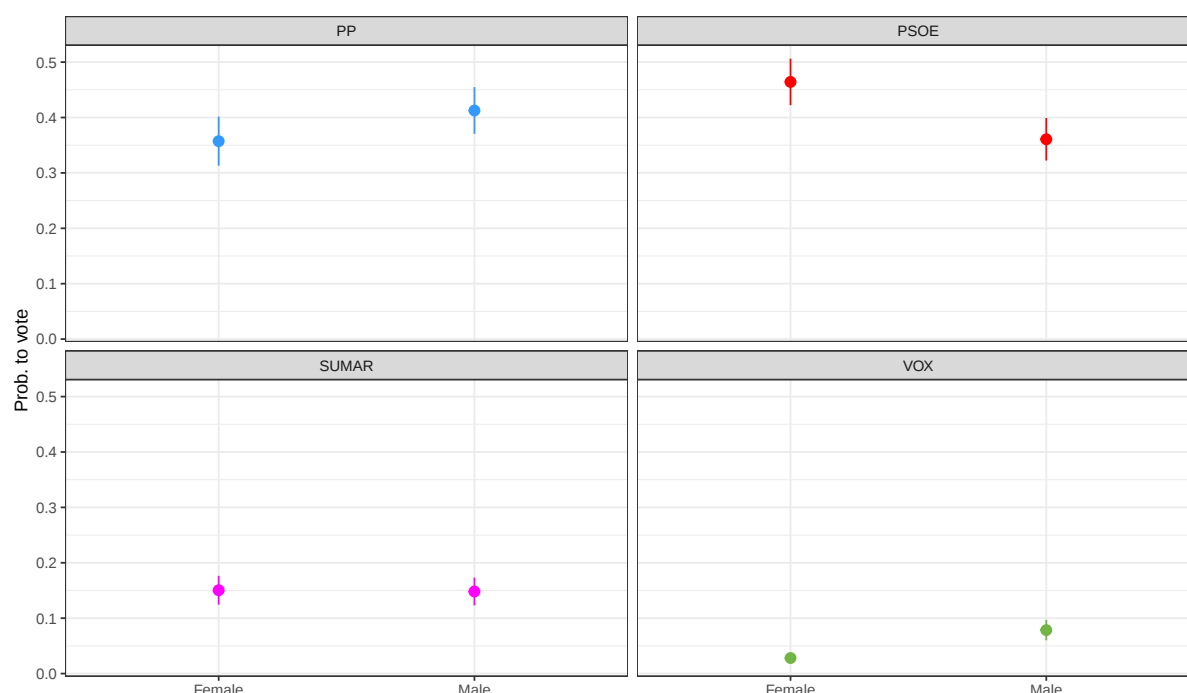
Finally, one additional point of interest in the election was the effect of gender on vote choice. In the 2019–2023 legislature, both UP and PSOE championed many initiatives related to gender equality. The most politically charged law was popularly known as the ‘only yes means yes’ sexual consent law, which underlined the need for explicit consent as the key to women’s sexual freedom. The PP and VOX voted against the law and its implementation was contentious because some judges interpreted the law as a way to automatically reduce some prison sentences as the new law created a wider range of sentencing. Overall, the new law created much judicial and political dispute.

In light of the relevance of the gender issue, it is interesting to analyse the gender gap in voting patterns for the different parties. Figure 3 shows the predicted probabilities of voting for the four main Spanish parties for men and women. As documented by previous research (Anduiza & Rico 2022), we observe that men were twice as likely to vote for the Spanish far right. Interestingly, we also observe that women were more likely to vote for the PSOE, while there are no gender differences for Sumar voters, despite gender equality being a prominent electoral topic for them.

The New Government

Once votes were counted and seats allocated, the government formation process was not straightforward, since the electoral results required a multi-party agreement to reach a legislative majority. The Spanish King, after a first round of interviews with political leaders, gave Alberto Núñez Feijóo, as the leader of the largest political party, the opportunity to form a cabinet. He was then subject to an investiture vote in September 26 but he was only supported by PP, VOX, and two regionalist right-wing parties (UPN and CCa)—172 votes—and rejected by the rest of the parties—178 votes. After a

Figure 3: The relationship between gender and voting for the main Spanish parties



second round of interviews with political leaders, the King appointed Pedro Sánchez as a formateur for a second attempt to form a new government. Constrained by a legal time limit to form government after the first investiture vote—otherwise there is an automatic call for new elections—the PSOE made a quick agreement with Sumar and the left-wing Galician regional party (BNG), and started negotiating with Basque and Catalan regional parties.

The toughest part of the negotiation was with Junts per Catalunya (JxCat), as they required a direct contact with his leader, the former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont—still chased by the Spanish police and courts as the main leader of the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. In addition, JxCat demanded a political amnesty for those events related to the Catalan independence referendum, and an official and wider recognition of Catalan language both at the national level and at the EU, and further fiscal decentralisation. These negotiations were a difficult move for the PSOE and Pedro Sánchez, who had advocated for the judiciary prosecution of Puigdemont in the

past—even during the election campaign—and had argued against an amnesty for the 2017 events.

Yet, arithmetic needs and political strategy pushed the PSOE and JxCat to reach an agreement. The agreement included the political amnesty for all those prosecuted for the independence referendum, the legalisation of speeches in Catalan, Basque, and Galician in Spanish Congress, the commitment to promote Catalan as an official language in the EU, and a generic agreement to support further decentralisation during the legislative term. Moreover, the PSOE also agreed with ERC the complete decentralisation of the railroad network to the Catalan government, and the forgiveness of part of the regional administrations debt, on top of similar agreements regarding the amnesty and linguistic recognition. The terms of these pacts unchained a series of protests in the capital, Madrid, initially supported by the PP and VOX and led by far-right groups. On several occasions, these protests turned into riots and the police had to intervene to prevent a violent escalation.

In the end PSOE and Sumar formed a coalition government with the parliamentary support of almost all peripheral regional parties, which granted Pedro Sánchez an absolute majority of votes. The vote took place on November 16, 2023 and a new government was formed the following week. Ministers were apportioned proportionally to the number of MPs of PSOE and Sumar, in a distribution resembling the Gamson's (1961) law, with the PSOE holding 17 portfolios and Sumar 5.

The 2023–2027 legislative term will not be easy for a minority coalition cabinet. While in the previous legislative term the PSOE could reach agreements with different partners, this is no longer possible. Unless the right-wing bloc decides to collaborate with government, the only viable option in the beginning of the legislature was to legislate with the support of regional and pro-independence parties. Since the political turmoil in 2017 due to the independence referendum and the subsequent actions by the Spanish institutions, the relationship between all actors is strained. In the first instance of the legislature we saw some patterns that might be common in the legis-

lature beginning in 2023. The right-wing parties maintained an aggressive tone and attitude towards the cabinet and its agreements with regional parties, in an attempt to put pressure on the government. As seen in this article, the PP is electorally pressured by the far-right and attempts to find a balance between the centre and the far-right in order to recover its dominant position. Taking advantage of their key role in Congress, Catalan and Basque parties maximised their demands, also as a result of an internal competition logic—PNV and Bildu, as ERC and JxCat, compete to be the largest political party in the Basque Country and Catalonia respectively. This multi-level competition is another rock on the road that parties will have to pass on their negotiations to reach agreements. In turn, in the beginning of the legislature Sumar saw that Unidas Podemos, one of its largest members, abandoned the coalition. Although the regional parties have already achieved some legislative changes regarding language rights—for the first time, it is now allowed to speak in all official languages at the lower chamber—the Spanish government did not meet the promise they made to declare Catalan, Basque, and Galicia official EU languages—at least not yet. The amnesty law will be another of the multiple litmus tests this government will have to pass, almost daily, if it wants to survive for a full legislative term.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Online Appendices

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A Graphs

Figure A.1: Timing of vote choice

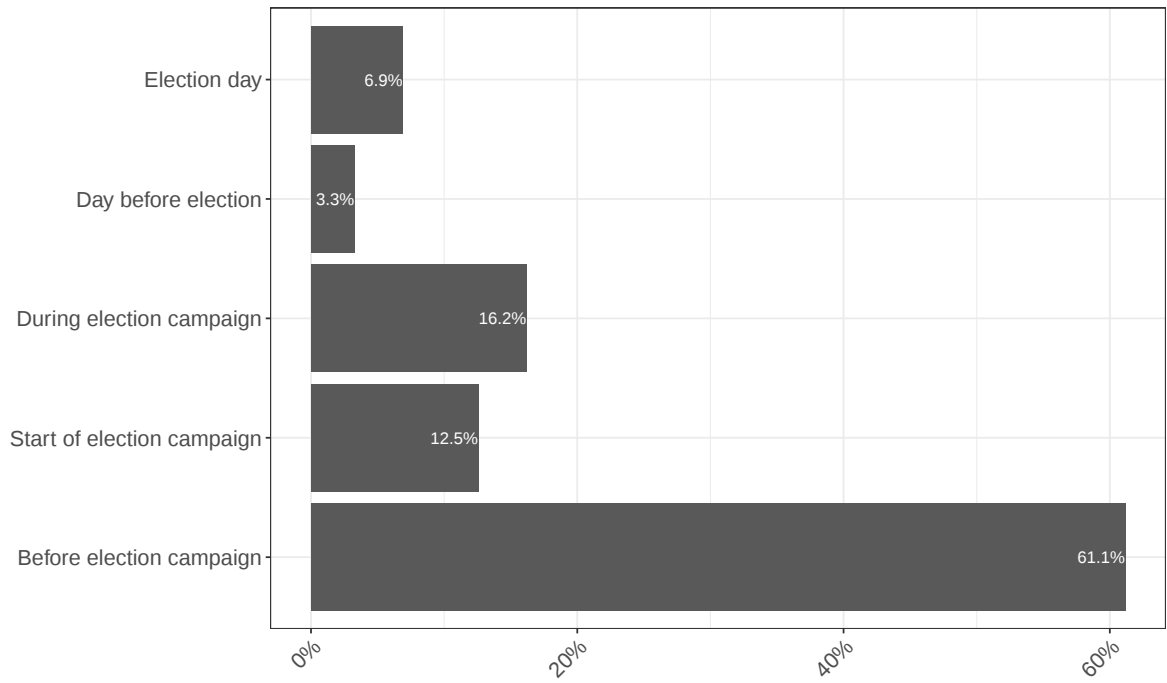


Figure A.2: Evolution of Mail Vote in General Elections in Spain since 2000

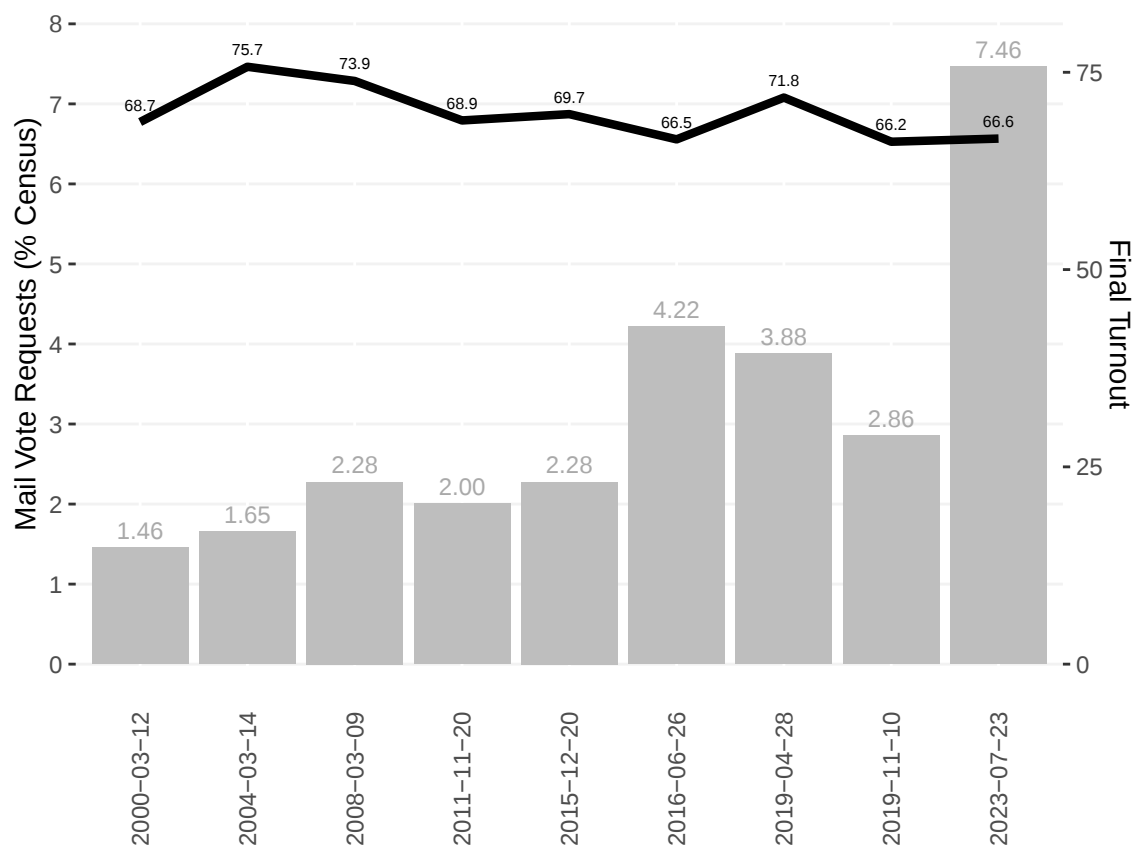
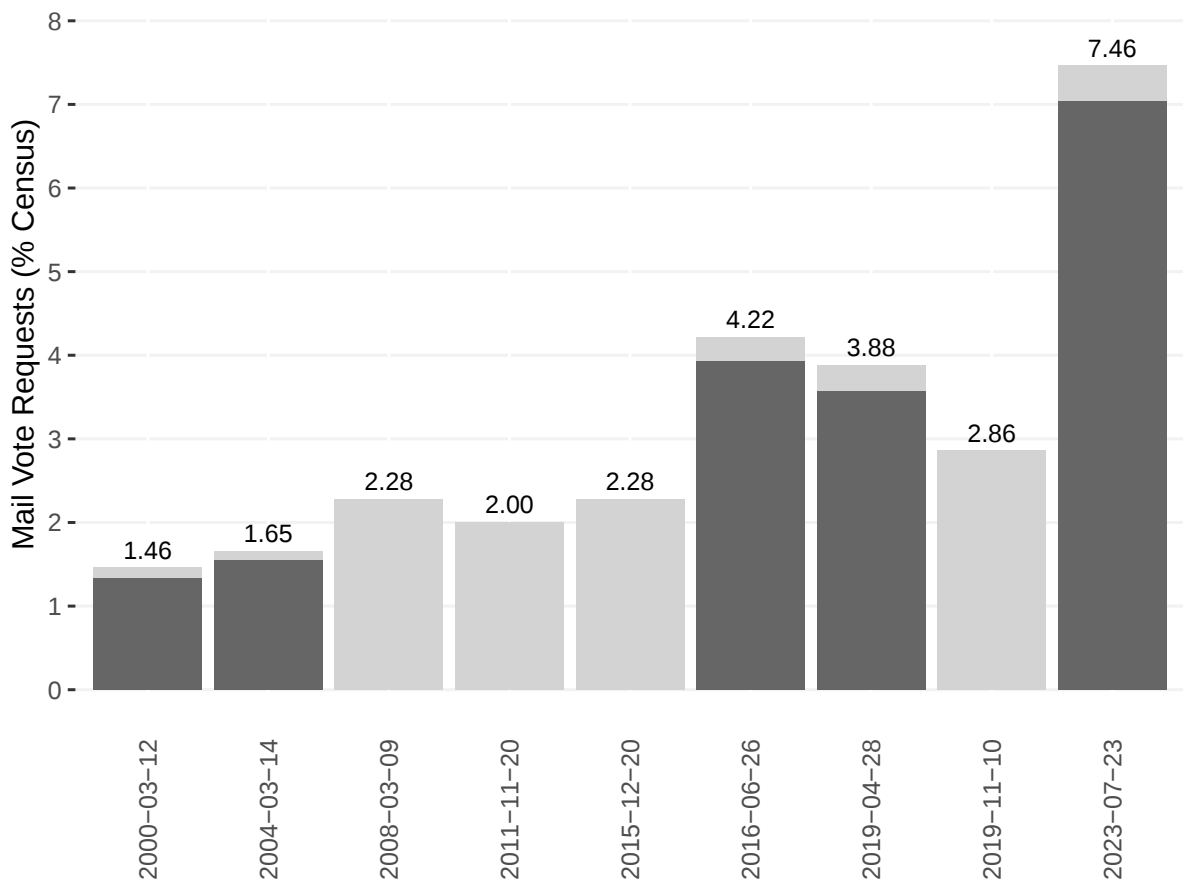


Figure A.3: Mail vote requests and mail vote cast over time



Darker gray represents the total number of mail vote cast per each election

B Tables

Table B.1: Electoral Results to Spanish Local Elections in 2019 and 2023

	Local Councillors		Change
	2023	2019	(%)
PP	23,412	20,364	+14.97
PSOE	20,784	22,341	– 6.97
ERC	2,903	3,125	– 7.10
JxCat	2,683	2,804	– 4.32
VOX	1,695	530	+219.81
EH-Bildu	1,399	1,262	+10.86
PNV	986	1,055	– 6.54
Podemos ^a	640	1,509	– 57.59
Cs	392	2,787	– 85.93

^a It includes Podemos, IU, and ECP in Catalonia

Table B.2: Regional cabinets in 2023 and 2019

	Change	2023		2019	
		Govt. ^a	Coal. ^b	Govt. ^a	Coal. ^b
Aragón	Yes	PP	VOX	PSOE	–
Asturias	No	PSOE	–	PSOE	–
Canarias	Yes	R ^c	–	PSOE	–
Cantabria	Yes	PP	–	R	PSOE
Castilla - La Mancha	No	PSOE	–	PSOE	–
Comunitat Valenciana	Yes	PP	VOX	PSOE	P ^d & R
Extremadura	Yes	PP	VOX	PSOE	–
Balearic Islands	Yes	PP	VOX	PSOE	P & R
Comunidad de Madrid	No	PP	–	PP	–
Murcia	Partial	PP	VOX	PP	–
Navarra	No	PSOE	P & R	PSOE	P & R
Rioja	Yes	PP	–	PSOE	–

^a Head of Regional government party and largest party in government

^b Other parties in coalition

^c R stands for Regional or Non-State Wide Party

^d P stands for Podemos

Table B.3: Summary statistics

	N = 8,073
Dependent variables	
2023 vote choice	
PP	1,974 (34%)
PSOE	2,102 (36%)
SUMAR	1,141 (20%)
VOX	610 (10%)
Unknown	2,246
Vote transfer (left)	
From Abstention-PSOE	181 (9.7%)
From PSOE-PSOE	1,466 (78%)
From UP-PSOE	223 (12%)
Unknown	6,203
Vote transfer (right)	
From Abstention-PP	175 (11%)
From Cs-PP	300 (18%)
From PP-PP	1,104 (66%)
From VOX-PP	82 (4.9%)
Unknown	6,412
Independent variables	
Ideology	4.79 (2.42)
Unknown	393
Sex	
Female	4,021 (50%)
Male	4,052 (50%)
Age	51 (17)
Occupation	
Student	339 (4.2%)
Working	4,639 (57%)
Unemployed	695 (8.6%)
Other	449 (5.6%)
Pensioner	1,951 (24%)
Municipality size	
Less 10k	1,600 (20%)
Between 10k-100k	3,071 (38%)
Between 100k-1M	2,690 (33%)
More 1M	712 (8.8%)
Income	
Less 1800	2,348 (29%)
Between 1800-3900	3,493 (43%)
More 3900	1,872 (23%)
DK/NA	360 (4.5%)

¹ n (%); Mean (SD)

Table B.4: Multinomial estimates for vote transfers (left)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	From PSOE-PSOE	From UP-PSOE
	(1)	(2)
Ideology (L-R scale)	−0.081 (0.050)	−0.347*** (0.068)
Male	0.114 (0.181)	0.264 (0.219)
Age	0.053*** (0.009)	0.001 (0.010)
Working	1.937*** (0.343)	2.275*** (0.441)
Unemployed	1.945*** (0.436)	1.885*** (0.557)
Other occupation	3.071*** (0.802)	3.690*** (0.875)
Pensioner	1.492*** (0.519)	1.903*** (0.647)
Municipality 10k-100k	0.107 (0.233)	0.361 (0.289)
Municipality 100k-1M	0.093 (0.244)	0.498* (0.300)
Municipality >1M	0.017 (0.367)	−0.001 (0.473)
Income 1.8k-3.9k	0.125 (0.222)	0.236 (0.270)
Income >3.9k	0.232 (0.270)	0.120 (0.329)
Income DK/DA	−1.024** (0.452)	−0.639 (0.589)
Constant	−2.024*** (0.424)	−1.191** (0.543)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,171.288	2,171.288

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Reference category: From Abstention-PSOE

Table B.5: Multinomial estimates for vote transfers (right)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	From Cs-PP	From PP-PP	From VOX-PP
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideology (L-R scale)	−0.243*** (0.081)	0.387*** (0.068)	0.580*** (0.100)
Male	−0.030 (0.219)	−0.198 (0.195)	0.867*** (0.325)
Age	0.018* (0.009)	0.043*** (0.008)	0.0003 (0.013)
Working	2.152*** (0.467)	2.220*** (0.414)	3.283*** (1.073)
Unemployed	1.720*** (0.587)	1.551*** (0.512)	1.913 (1.319)
Other occupation	1.457** (0.623)	1.192** (0.543)	2.804** (1.228)
Pensioner	1.107* (0.662)	1.850*** (0.574)	2.252* (1.271)
Municipality 10k-100k	0.283 (0.292)	0.078 (0.255)	0.437 (0.409)
Municipality 100k-1M	−0.056 (0.298)	0.025 (0.256)	0.213 (0.421)
Municipality >1M	0.763* (0.428)	0.443 (0.391)	−0.136 (0.688)
Income 1.8k-3.9k	0.974*** (0.297)	0.431* (0.243)	0.452 (0.400)
Income >3.9k	0.806** (0.320)	0.362 (0.266)	0.296 (0.433)
Income DK/DA	−0.115 (0.644)	0.077 (0.481)	−0.562 (0.892)
Constant	−1.403* (0.759)	−4.971*** (0.674)	−8.493*** (1.381)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,716.718	2,716.718	2,716.718

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Reference category: From Abstention-PP

Table B.6: Multinomial estimates for vote choice

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	PSOE (1)	SUMAR (2)	VOX (3)
Ideology (L-R scale)	−1.082*** (0.033)	−1.381*** (0.039)	0.348*** (0.029)
Male	−0.396*** (0.087)	−0.159 (0.104)	0.884*** (0.111)
Age	−0.002 (0.004)	−0.023*** (0.005)	−0.030*** (0.004)
Occupation, ref.: Student Working	−0.191 (0.247)	0.291 (0.279)	0.577** (0.288)
Unemployed	0.029 (0.294)	0.457 (0.332)	0.820** (0.340)
Other occupation	−0.203 (0.315)	−0.162 (0.379)	0.676* (0.366)
Pensioner	0.469 (0.306)	0.572 (0.355)	0.511 (0.362)
Municipality size, ref.: <10k Municipality 10k-100k	−0.100 (0.120)	0.108 (0.145)	0.184 (0.141)
Municipality 100k-1M	−0.162 (0.122)	0.154 (0.148)	0.083 (0.147)
Municipality>1M	−0.015 (0.172)	0.688*** (0.200)	0.238 (0.200)
Income, ref.: <1.8k Income 1.8k-3.9k	−0.329*** (0.113)	−0.265** (0.134)	−0.313** (0.131)
Income>3.9k	−0.573*** (0.128)	−0.631*** (0.153)	−0.387*** (0.149)
Income DK/DA	−0.109 (0.274)	−0.815** (0.378)	−0.408 (0.286)
Constant	6.129*** (0.315)	6.759*** (0.354)	−3.131*** (0.386)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,151.570	10,151.570	10,151.570

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Reference category: PP vote