

Preferences for Political Coalitions in Spain

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Abstract

Spanish political parties opt whether or not to form alliances with other parties for a number of reasons, one of which being the coalition preferences of their voters. This work explores to what extent party preferences and ideological proximity on the two main dimensions of political competition in Spain affect voters' coalition preferences. Using survey data from 2009, we find that voters' coalition preferences are greatly affected by ideological proximity, especially on the left-right axis, whereas decentralization preferences are much more salient for the supporters of regionalist parties. However, this general pattern varies depending on the coalition being assessed.

Keywords: Coalition Governments; Coalition Preferences; Ideological Proximity; Preferences for Decentralization; Spatial Models; Spain.

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Introduction

Democracy has now existed in Spain for over 30 years, and in that time none of its eleven legislative terms has produced a coalition government. However, more than half of these governments have been single-party minority cabinets (six out of the eleven). Spaniards, therefore, have considerable experience of seeing inter-party agreements in the legislative arena in order to pass laws. Furthermore, coalition cabinets are the norm rather than the exception at the regional level (i.e. governments of the Autonomous Communities). Hence, Spanish voters are familiar with coalitions, and more generally with agreements between parties; but at the same time, to date, there have been no coalition governments at the national level.

Several authors have sought to address the question as to why this has been the case. Some argue that the reason that coalition governments do not form in Spain is due to the interplay of parties' strategic incentives. For instance, Reniu (2001) and Reniu and Bergman (2003) argue that the 'coalitional resistances' of Spanish political parties are not due to an intrinsic rejection of being members of coalition governments *per se*, but rather because Non-State-Wide Parties (NSWPs) are rational when evaluating various goals: NSWPs estimate, first, the political influence they might have while sitting on the opposition benches. Second, they evaluate the consequences of political alliances for intra-party cohesion. And last but not least, they assess their vote-seeking objectives in future national and regional elections.

These claims are in line with Strom's (1984, 1990) consideration of minority governments as rational solutions, under certain conditions. In the case of Spain, opposition parties are often able to exercise influence over policy while at the same time avoiding the attrition resulting from participating in government. Similarly, Müller and Strom (1999) argue that parties frequently forgo immediate office-seeking goals in exchange for future vote-seeking benefits. For all these reasons, Spanish single-party minority cabinets appear to be a rational outcome in the government formation process.

However it is important to note that the vote-seeking argument has an implicit 'built-in assumption' regarding the reaction of voters to inter-party agreements. If Spanish parties are

willing to remain in opposition without tasting the sweetness of cabinet, it is because they anticipate, among other factors, the response of voters. If parties trade office for votes, this must be because voters may react badly to specific coalitional strategies. Although voters seem to be significant actors in this story, their reactions to actual or potential coalitions, and the reasons underlying them, are not at all clear.

In this work we seek to investigate this issue in detail. We will first examine the general influence of party preferences on coalition preferences. That is, we will analyse whether having voted for a certain party affects what type of government Spanish voters prefer and which specific coalitions they support or oppose. Also, we will consider if there are further elements that help voters make up their minds about these preferences. Second, we will investigate the role of ideological proximity on the two traditional axes of party competition in Spain, specifically on voters' preferences for coalitions. We will also focus in on various groups of party supporters in order to evaluate which ideological dimension weighs most heavily in their building of coalition preferences. That is, in a multidimensional space of political competition, potential coalitions can be distant on one axis but close on another, and that scenario requires voters to decide which dimension is most salient for them in order to support, or to oppose, a given inter-party agreement.

Coalition Preferences: What Do We Know?

Parliamentary systems are prevalent all over Western Europe. Elections in these systems can produce a clear winner who controls an absolute majority of seats and who is able to form a single-party majority government. However, most often various parties need to pact with each other in order to reach the necessary 50 per cent seat share threshold to be able to pass laws and make policy. These deals can take the form of coalition governments or policy-specific agreements between opposition parties and the minority government in office.

Although these kinds of inter-party pacts are extremely frequent in multi-party parliamentary systems, we still know relatively little regarding what voters think about them. Clearly, parties accept or reject coalitions for reasons that go beyond the reaction of the electorate yet, they

are also concerned about what their voters think about them. It is therefore surprising that '[w]orks on coalition formation and survival have traditionally focused on tactical and policy considerations at the elite level, and frequently neglected the role of voters' (Jou 2010). As a result, the very notion of voters' coalition preferences has received scant attention in previous political science research.

In recent years various studies have emphasised the role of coalition preferences in predicting voting behaviour. According to Kedar (2005) voters can, and often do, exhibit outcome-oriented behaviour by sacrificing their vote for the party that is closest to their own position and opting for another party in order to make the formation of their preferred coalition more likely. Evidence of this has been provided for the independent role of coalition preferences on voters' behaviour for countries such as Austria (Meffert & Gschwend 2010), Belgium (Gschwend & Hooghe 2008), and Israel (Bargsted & Kedar 2009; Blais et al. 2006), among others. However, the dependent variable for these studies has still been party choice, rather than coalition preferences.

Additionally, Jou (2010) has focused on how policy preferences of voters constrain parties' coalition choices and affect their subsequent electoral performance in New Zealand and Japan. Nonetheless, this author does not deal with voters' coalition preferences as such, and the main aim of his study is to understand parties' coalitional strategies and not voters' coalition tastes.

Hence, the more basic question of what determines coalition preferences in the first place (that is, taking them as the dependent variable) has seldom been addressed. But do voters have coalition preferences? Are voters prepared to evaluate abstract objects such as coalitions? In a spatial scenario, voters place themselves in different dimensions. From a proximity perspective, they should then rank their preferences with regard to parties and coalitions: those closest to them in the first positions, those further apart, last. This however assumes that voters are able to identify the location of the objects to be ranked. For parties, the problem is not so serious. Parties are at the centre of political life. They are the objects to which the public and media pay attention. Voters receive information about their positions and platforms in campaigns, but also during the legislative term. For coalitions, though, the situation is more

ambiguous. Except in very specific cases, coalitions are hypothetical constructs with positions and characteristics that are not immediately retrievable by voters. Voters' views on coalitions might merely be derived from the views of their individual members. However there may be other factors at play that help us explain why some coalitions are preferred over others.

The study of the predictors of coalition preferences dates back to Norpoth (1980), who analysed the preferences of the (West) German public with respect to the coalitions formed by party leaders during the 1961-76 period. Almost 20 years later, Thurner and Pappi (1999) also chose the German case and addressed the question of whether or not coalition preferences mirrored party and candidate preferences. However they did so only in passing, as their main goal was to analyse voters' choice at election polls, rather than coalition preferences themselves.

Very few other studies have inquired about the explanatory factors behind voters' preferences for coalitions. In one, Meffert, Gschwend & Schütze (2009) found that the party preferences of Austrian voters precede their coalition preferences, because a longer time is spent answering survey questions related to the latter. Nonetheless, they also claimed that coalition preferences are more than just weighted averages of party preferences. They concluded that party preferences are indeed the most important predictors of preferences for pacts, but they only explain a limited amount of the variance. Candidate evaluations also seem to play a significant role whereas, quite surprisingly, ideological and policy-based explanations largely fail to provide any further explanation. They conclude by arguing for the necessity of future research, which the present work in part seeks to address (Meffert, Gschwend & Schütze 2009, p. 14):

The considerable unexplained variance rather suggests that other factors must play a role as well that were not captured in the analysis. But most important, it implies that coalition preferences are to a considerable degree independent of party preferences and a unique and necessary predictor of vote decisions. The challenge to future research is clear. Not only have these findings to be replicated for other countries with multiparty systems, but better explanations about the sources and origins of coalition preferences are necessary.

An interesting scenario to do that is precisely one in which no formal coalition governments have formed, such as Spain. It is true that if voters' evaluation of abstract constructs such as coalitions is difficult in most party systems, it should be even more complex in a country like Spain.¹ However as previously mentioned, Spanish voters are extremely familiar with inter-party agreements and also with coalition cabinets at regional levels. On the other hand, the absence of coalition governments could also be viewed as an advantage, as voters will not be biased in favour of certain arrangements that they have (or have not) experienced before, versus others. In any case, it is intriguing to ask why these governments have not formed at national level. Knowing more about the attitudes of voters towards coalitions could provide us with clues to better understand Spanish (non-) coalitions. This is the key aim of this paper.

Coalition Preferences in Spain: What Should We Expect?

The political space in Spain is traditionally characterised by the presence of two dimensions of electoral competition. To the traditional left-right dimension one has to add a second axis regarding the territorial organization of the state: more centralised vs. more decentralised. The existence of heterogeneous feelings of national belonging in the different territories of the country shapes Spaniards' preferences towards decentralization and the Spanish political system as a whole (Moral 1995; Fernández-Albertos 2002). Obviously, voters and parties place themselves on more dimensions, since there are issues that fall beyond the scope of either of the two. Nevertheless these two better reflect the Spanish political space and can also be considered to serve as a heuristic for many other issues.

The placement of the Spanish political parties in this two-dimensional space can be identified in a number of ways, one being how voters view them. Figure 1 shows the positions of the PSOE, PP, IU, and the most significant regionalist parties in these two political axes, ranging from zero to ten, according to Spanish voters in 2009.² Although the ideological variation across Spanish regionalist parties is worth noting, we only plot the placement of the regionalist parties CiU, ERC and PNV for presentational purposes.³

The circles represent the averages of parties' attributed placements, which seem to be consistent with conventional wisdom, at least from the perspective of the resulting rank-orderings. IU is the leftist state-wide party, followed by the regionalist ERC, by the centre-left PSOE, and then the conservative PP, with the two largest regionalist parties (CiU and PNV) more or less in between the latter two. On the axis relating to the territorial organization of the state, the PP appears as the most pro-centralization, followed by the PSOE and IU. The regionalist parties obviously emerge as the most pro-decentralization.

Given the positions of Spanish political parties on the two main dimensions of political competition in the country, we can easily imagine the placement of the coalitions that could credibly form in Spain.⁴ As coalitions can be considered to be the sum of their parts, we should logically expect the location of the potential coalitions in this two-dimensional space to be consistent with that of their member parties. Hence, the portrayal of the political space of Spanish (credible) coalitions on each axis would look something like in Figure 1 (coalitions in triangles).

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

These mean locations are simply the result of averaging the placement attributed by the interviewees to each potential partner. This provides a rough assessment of the spatial location of coalitions on the two main axes of political competition in Spain, although from an ordinal point of view the resulting placements reflect what most Spanish voters would think about these coalitions.

Given this spatial illustration, and also that the only possibility for a single-party government to form would be an office run by either the PSOE or the PP, we can now present what we expect regarding the coalition preferences of Spanish voters. First, regarding the preferences for the generic type of government, we could say the following:

IU voters would i) prefer a single party not to win an absolute majority of seats in parliament (namely, they would like to avoid a single-party majority government by the PSOE or the PP), but ii) it is not so clear whether they would prefer a coalition or a single-party minority

government in generic terms. The latter would clearly depend on the specific coalition being formed. Therefore, generically, IU voters are not expected to have any clear preference for a coalition government.

PSOE voters would prefer a single party to win an absolute majority of seats in parliament only if the winning party was the PSOE, but not if it was the PP. Hence, i) PSOE voters' generic preferences for single-party majority governments as opposed to single-party minority or coalition offices have no clear direction. ii) As for the dilemma between the latter two, the answer would again depend on who would be the leading party. If it was the PSOE, then a single-party minority government would be preferred as it would leave the party in the best position to negotiate with the other parties, depending on the specific policy. Conversely, though, any PP-led coalition would probably be better than a single-party PP government from the PSOE voters' view.

For *PP voters*, the situation would be very similar. i) No clear preference regarding a single-party majority vs. a minority or a coalition government, and ii) no clear preference regarding what type of government should form if no single-party obtained an absolute majority of seats, whether it be a multi-party or a single-party cabinet. Just as with PSOE voters, therefore, the preferences for the type of government are too context-specific to derive a clear-cut expectation.

For the *voters of regionalist parties* it is clear that they would prefer no party (i.e. the PSOE or PP) to win an absolute majority of seats, since that would give their parties no opportunity to influence policy-making at all. Regarding the second choice between a coalition and a single-party minority government, regionalist voters would prefer one or the other depending on the specific coalition. CiU and PNV may benefit more from a PP or a PSOE minority government rather than a PSOE-IU coalition or a PSOE-PP one, while ERC voters would more clearly prefer any coalition except an agreement between the two main parties.

Any further pattern emerging in the empirical analyses may respond to which coalitions voters believe are more likely to form (which would make it clearer whether a coalition or a single-party minority government is preferable) or to other more generic tastes for or against

specific types of governments that are also unobservable. For instance, a single-party minority government could be preferred because of their tendency to offer median policy outcomes in each dimension, or less preferred because of their greater instability. None of this, though, can be captured by the data we have available.

Beyond generic preferences, this paper will also look at which specific coalitions Spanish voters prefer. First, simply looking at the party choice of voters, we can expect the preferred coalitions (among the menu of credible coalitions in Figure 1) to be the following:⁵

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The expectations summarised in Table 1 are derived from a proximity perspective, where one assumes that voters would opt for the alternative closest to its own spatial placement. For the doubtful cases (IU and ERC voters when PP is the formateur), the two specified alternatives are almost at an equal distance to the placement of their own party. For instance, ERC voters may prefer the average PP-REG. coalition from the point of view of the decentralization dimension, but a PP-PSOE would be closer to ERC's position on the left-right axis. Obviously, the specific choice would depend on which dimension was more salient for each voter. We will address the dimension saliency issue below.

It is worth mentioning that these are “on average” expectations. It is clear that not all voters of a given party hold the same ideological position, and it is neither the case that all of them would place each coalition at the same point. We have thus derived the expectations on voters' coalition preferences from the attributed placement of their respective parties and the average position of the coalitions. Nonetheless, to evaluate the importance of ideological proximity on the coalition preferences of Spanish voters, we also take an individual-level perspective.

More specifically, we first expect that the farther a given voter places a specific coalition from herself, the less likely she is to prefer that coalition. This should be true for the two main axes of political competition. However, an open question would be (the proximity to) which of the two dimensions matters more for coalition preferences. As said, both the traditional left-right

dimension and that regarding the territorial organization of the state are clearly prevalent in the political debate. However, some have found that while the traditional left-right dimension matters for all Spaniards when it comes to the time to cast their ballot at the polls –regardless of their partisanship– the decentralization dimension is only relevant for regionalist partisans (Aguilar and Sánchez-Cuenca 2008). One could easily apply this rationale to the sphere of coalition preferences and hypothesise that while proximity on the left-right axis is going to matter for all Spanish voters, proximity on the decentralization axis will only be relevant for the voters of regionalist parties.

A more conservative approach would simply expect that for all voters but regionalists the left-right dimension will be more salient than the decentralization one in their assessment of coalition alternatives, while for regionalists both dimensions would be equally important.

All these are Spain-specific hypotheses that can nonetheless be contextualised into a more general theoretical framework. We have first argued that *ceteris paribus* voters will generically prefer the type of government that is more likely to deliver policies closer to their preferred ones. Second, we have hypothesised that voters' coalition preferences will be guided by ideological proximity (especially) on the axes that are more salient for the parties they have voted for. These arguments can easily apply to broader settings where more than one dimension of political competition is present and/or where there are significant single-issue parties. The scope of this paper, however, is limited to the case of Spain.

Data, Variables, and Methods

In this empirical study there are mainly two dependent variables. The first relates to the preferences of Spanish voters for the generic type of government, while the second refers to preferences for coalitions between specific parties. For the analysis of the former, we draw on one of the survey questions that asks whether the respondent prefers a party winning an absolute majority of seats or not and, if the latter, whether the preferred alternative would be a single-party minority government or a coalition cabinet. As a result, we run two separate probit regressions: one taking the dichotomous choice between single-party absolute majority

and not, and another considering the dichotomy between a coalition and a single-party minority government.

The second dependent variable of this study is voters' preferences for specific coalitions. Its operationalization is based on two questions. The first asks the following: 'If general elections were to be held tomorrow and they were won by the PSOE without an absolute majority, which of the following alternatives would you prefer?' The choice set is composed of: i) PSOE governing in coalition with IU, ii) PSOE governing in coalition with UPyD, iii) PSOE governing in coalition with regionalist parties, iv) PSOE governing in coalition with PP, v) PSOE governing alone, followed by the conventional don't know, don't answer options. The same applies for the second question, with the PSOE substituted by the PP; although the question does not offer the respondent the bizarre possibility of a PP-IU coalition.⁶

It is true that the question explicitly asks for *governmental* coalitions. Although there have been no coalition cabinets in the national arena, one might rather safely extend the logic of preferences for governmental coalitions and consider preferences for legislative coalitions (in Laver & Schofield (1990) terms) or inter-party agreements more generally. That is, we can interpret support for a given coalition as support for parties giving priority to pacts, deals, and agreements in legislative policy-making with one another, rather than with other parties. Given the number of minority governments that Spain has had, these sorts of agreements have been very prevalent.

For the analysis of the type of government generic preferences, the main independent variables are the standard ideological self-placement on a zero to ten left-right scale (*Left-Right*), and self-placement on the zero to ten axis that measures preferences for decentralization (*Preferences for Decentralization*). To differentiate among specific party voters, we have also included the variable *Vote Recall* on the 9 March 2008 elections, in the form of various groups of dummies depending on the particular econometric model. Additionally, we control for the experience of voters regarding different types of governments by incorporating the *Share (of legislatures) with Single-Party Majority Governments in the Autonomous Community*, the *Share of Single-Party Minority Cabinets* and the *Share of Coalitions*. We include the former in the analysis of the generic preference for single-party

absolute majorities, whereas we incorporate the latter two in the analysis of the choice between a coalition vs. a single-party minority.

For the analysis of specific coalition preferences, we include the *Vote Recall* variables to identify which are the preferred coalitions for each group of voters. In the final analyses, the main independent variables measuring ideological proximity are *Distance to Alternative (Left-Right)* and *Distance to Alternative (Preferences for Decentralization)*, referring to the absolute difference between the self-placement of the individual and the placement attributed by her to the coalition on the left-right and decentralization dimension, respectively. Since we do not have data on how voters locate coalitions spatially, we follow the same approach as graphically illustrated above and consider the placement of coalitions as a non-weighted average of the attributed values to the parties forming the coalition.⁷ In order to evaluate whether the effect of proximity on each dimension varies across individuals with different partisan interests, we also interact the *Distance to Alternative* variables with *PID (Party X)*, which is a dummy that captures whether the interviewee sympathises with party X. Given the alternative-specific nature of some of these variables, we use a conditional logistic regression as a statistical technique.

Finally, in order to isolate the effect of our main explanatory variables, several additional controls are introduced both in the analysis of generic and specific coalition preferences. These are standard socio-demographic variables such as *Gender (Female)*, *Age*, and *level of Education* dummies (none, primary, secondary, vocational training, mid-university, superior). Although all analyses are run controlling for these variables, the related estimates are not displayed in the tables for the sake of presentational simplicity.

Results

Table 2 displays the estimates regarding the type of government generically preferred by Spaniards.⁸ The dependent variable in columns 1 to 4 refers to preferences for (one) or against (zero) single-party absolute majorities in parliament. Ideology seems to exert the strongest effect, with left-wing voters being more inclined to dislike single-party majority governments,

compared to minority and coalition governments. Similarly, those who are more pro-decentralization tend to prefer the latter to the former. Additionally, voters who live in Autonomous Communities with a higher prevalence of single-party majority governments tend to prefer, on average, absolute majorities. Regarding different groups of voters, their preferences tend to be in line with expectations, with IU, ERC, and PNV voters being generally unfavourable to single-party absolute majorities. PP voters, on the other hand, prefer the latter, while for PSOE voters the direction of the preference is not clear. Rather surprisingly, CiU voters are not clearly against single-party absolute majorities. Although it is clear that at the nationwide level a single-party absolute majority would leave this regionalist party aside, it is also true that CiU has traditionally formed single-party governments in the regional arena, and that may explain the emerging pattern here.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Columns 5 to 8 present the estimates for the dependent variable coding voters' generic preferences for coalitions (one) relative to single-party minority governments (zero).⁹ Interestingly, ideological self-placement does not seem to matter in this particular dilemma, while party preferences only have explanatory power in a couple of cases. IU voters tend to prefer coalitions rather than single-party governments, while CiU voters again show a preference for single-party governments. Also, we find that the more the Autonomous Community of the voter has been under the rule of single-party minority cabinets, the less likely it is that they support these governments and tend to prefer coalitions instead. As expected, we find less clear patterns for this dilemma due to the uncertainty regarding hypothetical coalition formation processes.

Table 3 presents the conditional logit estimates to evaluate the effect of party choices on the preferences for PSOE- and PP- led coalitions (columns 1 to 3 and 4 to 5, respectively). Regarding the former, the first thing we see is that party choices predominantly influence coalition preferences in the expected directions. IU voters tend to prefer a PSOE-IU coalition, while regionalist party voters largely prefer a PSOE-REG. coalition, and their most disliked alternative would be a grand coalition between PSOE and PP (especially for PNV and ERC voters). PP voters seem to reject any alternative that does not include their party in

government (i.e. they have a clear preference for a PSOE-PP coalition, and are against PSOE-IU and PSOE-REG). Interestingly, the voters of the formateur tend to favour a PSOE-IU coalition and dislike the other two alternatives. As for PP-led coalitions, an agreement between this party and the regionalists is preferred over a PP minority government by all voters, except, precisely, PP voters. On the other hand, a grand coalition led by the PP would be preferred by PSOE voters but not by those of the PP, while the voters of the regionalist PNV show an overt opposition to this coalition.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Concerning the ideological proximity arguments, we also ran conditional logit analyses and summarised the results in eight two-way plots (illustrated in Figure 2) showing the influence of ideological proximity (distance to alternative) on each axis, on the conditional probability of the choice of the preferred coalition.¹⁰ It is clear that the two main independent variables play an important role in voters' coalition preferences. In the two leftmost plots we can see that the farther they place the parties forming the coalition from their self-placement in the ideological space, the less likely is that alternative to be preferred both on the left-right and decentralization dimensions and both for PSOE- and PP-led coalitions. It is worth mentioning, though, that coalition preferences seem to be more sensitive to distance on the left-right axis than on the decentralization dimension. This is in line with the expectations stated in the third section of this paper, as well as the previous literature. The downward slopes of the solid lines (left-right dimension) are steeper than the dashed ones (decentralization dimension), although this is far clearer for the preferences about the coalitions led by PSOE.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

However, this general pattern varies notably if we examine different partisan attachments in the remaining six plots. It is clear that PP sympathisers tend to place more emphasis on the left-right dimension, rather than decentralization, to choose their preferred coalition. That is, they seem to accept coalitions that are distant from themselves on this dimension, but are much more sensitive to deviations on the left-right axis. In sharp contrast, regionalists are more willing to allow farther apart coalitions on the left-right dimension, whereas

decentralization preferences are much more salient for them when building their coalition priorities. Interestingly, IU partisans follow the general pattern in the case of PSOE-led coalitions, but when the PP is the formateur their coalition preferences seem to respond more to the decentralization dimension rather than the left-right one. This probably has to do with their general aversion to a grand coalition PP-PSOE relative to an agreement between PP and regionalist parties. Finally, those identified with PSOE follow the general trend in their preferences for PP-led coalitions, but their choice of coalition partners when their party is the formateur seem to respond more or less equally to both spatial dimensions.

It is perhaps a bit surprising that in a couple of rare cases the distance effects appear to change sign. This counter-intuitive pattern emerges for IU and regionalist partisans in the case of PP-led coalitions. The most plausible interpretation may be that in these cases the decentralization dimension completely dominates that of the left-right, so that voters ignore the latter to the extent that it even appears to have an effect in the opposite direction of what one would expect. If this is the case, the identified patterns might be better viewed as spurious relationships created by the dominance of one dimension over the other, rather than an odd substantive finding on ideological proximity.

Concluding Remarks

This work has aimed at studying voters' preferences for coalitions using the particular case of Spain after the 2008 elections. It has explored the coalition preferences of Spanish voters by concentrating on the effect of party preferences and ideological proximity on the two traditional dimensions of political competition in the country for different groups of partisans.

We have first shown that Spanish voters' generic preferences for different types of cabinets are not only influenced by their party preferences, but also by their ideological placement on the left-right and decentralization axes, as well as by the experience they have with different types of cabinets in their Autonomous Community. The further to the right, the more likely the voter prefers a single-party majority government (even after controlling for vote choice), and the more pro-decentralization, the less likely. On the other hand, the preference between

coalitions and single-party minorities seems to respond more to idiosyncratic reasons that are less related to ideological and party preferences.

In our second set of analyses we have found that party preferences significantly determine specific coalition preferences (namely, support or opposition to governmental agreements between specific parties), but ideological proximity to the coalition is perhaps even more important. Our empirical results have revealed that voters are more sensitive to proximity on the left-right dimension than on the decentralization axis for their coalition preferences. However, regionalist partisans are a notable exception, as they are much more willing to accept a distant coalition on the left-right axis as long as it is located closer to their more salient territorial dimension.

In sum, we believe this study has taken a step forward toward a greater understanding of the determinants voters' coalition preferences and toward providing better explanations about their sources and origins.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1 Specific Preferences for Coalitions (Expectations)

	PSOE Formateur	PP Formateur
IU Voters	PSOE-IU	PP-PSOE or PP-REG.
PSOE Voters	PSOE (Min.)	PP-PSOE
PP Voters	PSOE-PP	PP (Min.)
CiU Voters	PSOE-REG.	PP-REG.
ERC Voters	PSOE-REG.	PP-REG. or PP-PSOE
PNV Voters	PSOE-REG.	PP-REG.

Table 2 Generic Preferences for Type of Government

	Single-Party Absolute Majority				Coalitions VS. Single-Party Minorities			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Left-Right</i>	0.114*** (0.017)	0.089*** (0.021)	0.085*** (0.020)	0.079*** (0.023)	-0.028 (0.027)	0.009 (0.034)	0.001 (0.032)	-0.005 (0.035)
<i>Prefs. for Decentralization</i>	-0.039*** (0.013)	-0.029** (0.014)	-0.028** (0.013)	-0.029** (0.014)	-0.001 (0.020)	0.000 (0.021)	-0.002 (0.020)	0.000 (0.022)
<i>% of SP Maj. in the AC</i>	0.401*** (0.115)	0.320** (0.127)	0.335*** (0.120)	0.397*** (0.133)				
<i>% of Coal. in the AC</i>					-0.010 (0.203)	0.037 (0.225)	0.017 (0.210)	0.021 (0.232)
<i>% of SP Min. in the AC</i>					0.941*** (0.348)	1.070*** (0.375)	0.913** (0.357)	1.183*** (0.390)
<i>Vote Recall (All Dummies)</i>	No	Yes			No	Yes		
<i>Vote Recall (IU)</i>			-0.497** (0.198)	-0.515*** (0.193)			0.569** (0.274)	0.602** (0.268)
<i>Vote Recall (PSOE)</i>			0.007 (0.082)	Ref.			-0.030 (0.125)	Ref.
<i>Vote Recall (PP)</i>			0.200* (0.103)	0.205* (0.110)			-0.174 (0.173)	-0.124 (0.176)
<i>Vote Recall (CiU)</i>			-0.201 (0.159)	-0.197 (0.160)			-0.366* (0.208)	-0.358* (0.211)
<i>Vote Recall (ERC)</i>			-0.629*** (0.218)	-0.631*** (0.217)			0.109 (0.248)	0.108 (0.247)
<i>Vote Recall (PNV)</i>			-0.493*** (0.150)	-0.468*** (0.152)			-0.025 (0.191)	-0.041 (0.196)
<i>Vote Recall (Abstention)</i>				0.070 (0.104)				-0.216 (0.157)
<i>Constant</i>	-0.271 (0.245)	-0.278 (0.262)	-0.194 (0.255)	-0.253 (0.271)	0.511 (0.369)	0.232 (0.391)	0.379 (0.396)	0.360 (0.407)
Observations	2376	2189	2376	2020	1385	1251	1385	1165
Pseudo R ²	0.059	0.072	0.067	0.072	0.014	0.038	0.023	0.033

Estimates for *Gender*, *Age*, and *Education* variables, not displayed.

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3 Conditional Logit Analyses

	PSOE-led Coalitions			PP-led Coalitions	
	PSOE-IU (1)	PSOE-REG. (2)	PSOE-PP (3)	PP-REG (4)	PP-PSOE (5)
<i>Choice-specific Constant</i>	-0.054 (0.306)	-0.358 (0.310)	0.121 (0.284)	-0.260 (0.297)	0.521** (0.258)
<i>Vote Recall (IU)</i>	3.332*** (0.551)	0.556 (0.644)	0.123 (0.752)	1.392*** (0.404)	0.636 (0.397)
<i>Vote Recall (PSOE)</i>	0.809*** (0.160)	-0.331* (0.173)	-0.773*** (0.173)	0.326* (0.175)	0.486*** (0.148)
<i>Vote Recall (PP)</i>	-1.134*** (0.287)	-0.924*** (0.273)	0.947*** (0.171)	-1.328*** (0.240)	-0.377** (0.157)
<i>Vote Recall (CiU)</i>	0.338 (0.477)	2.025*** (0.384)	-0.224 (0.460)	1.727*** (0.340)	0.210 (0.367)
<i>Vote Recall (ERC)</i>	0.673 (0.462)	2.004*** (0.393)	-1.176* (0.681)	1.582*** (0.369)	-0.210 (0.433)
<i>Vote Recall (PNV)</i>	-0.152 (0.397)	2.121*** (0.274)	-3.110*** (1.032)	1.337*** (0.246)	-1.453*** (0.389)
Observations	9748	9748	9748	6273	6273
Pseudo R ²	0.169	0.169	0.169	0.110	0.110

Estimates for *Gender*, *Age*, and *Education* variables, not displayed.

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 1 Party and Coalition Positions in a Two-Dimensional Space

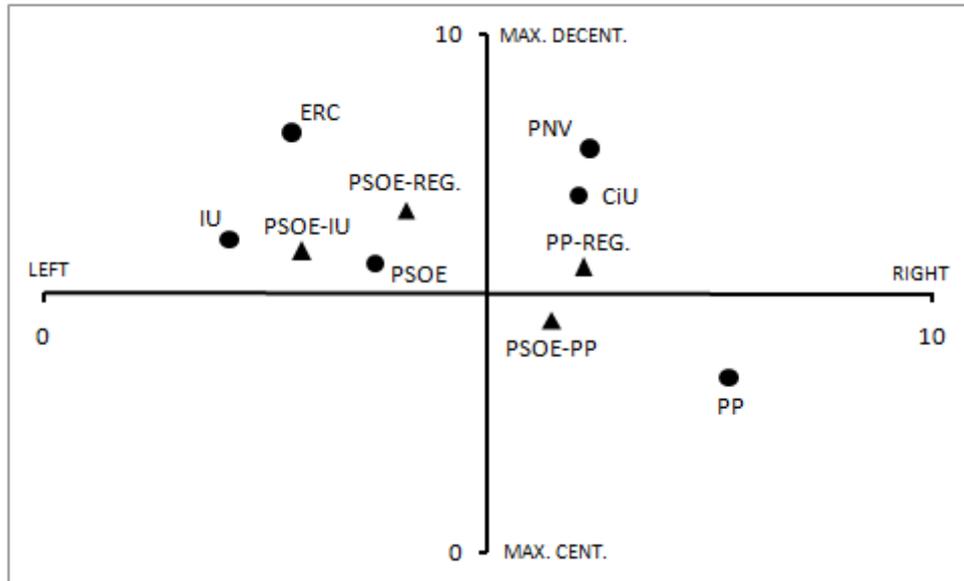
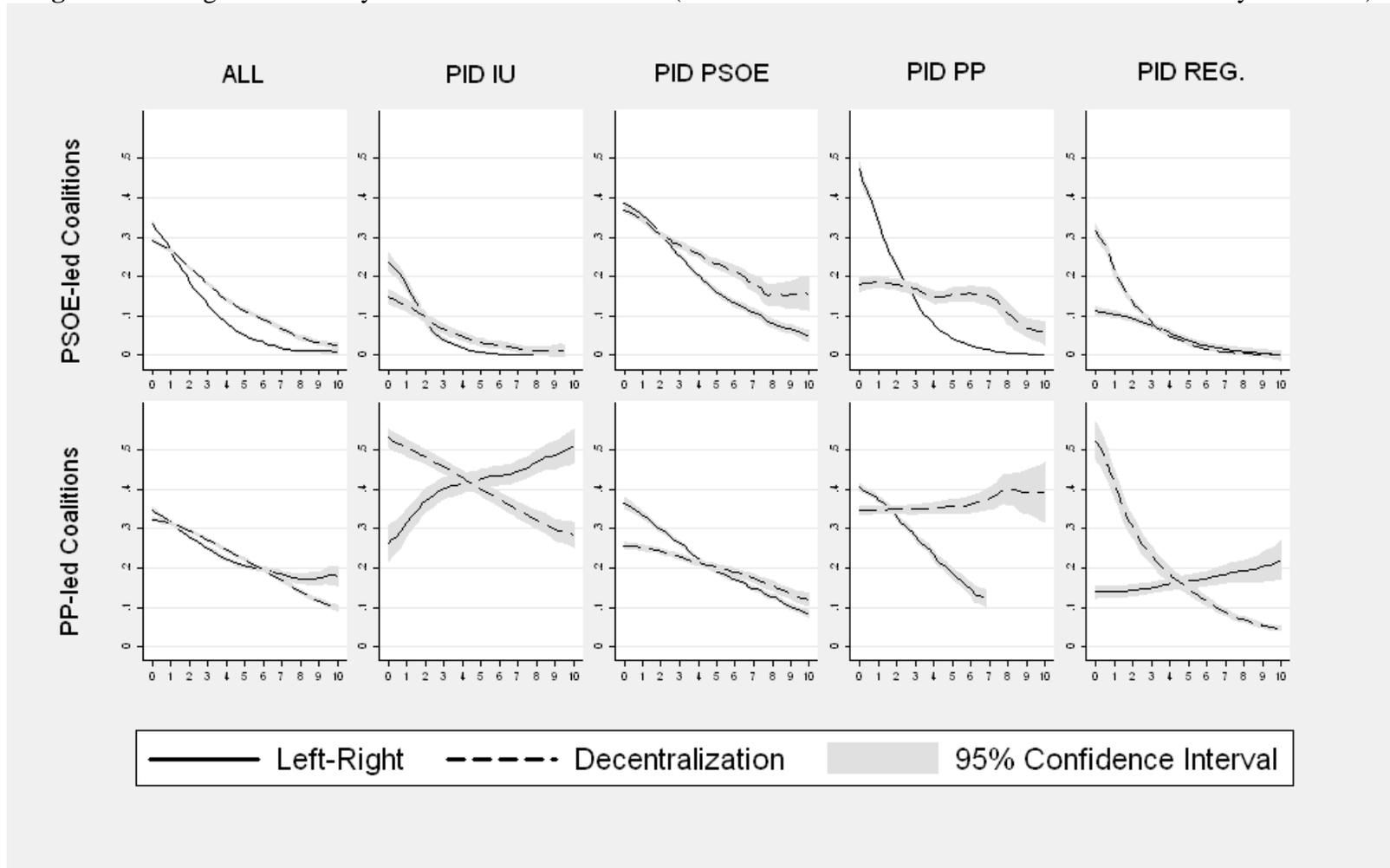


Figure 2 Ideological Proximity and Coalition Preferences (Distance to Alternative and Conditional Probability of Choice)



Notes

¹ González et al. (2008) argue that in countries like Chile attitudes toward coalitions are more salient and even predictive of party preferences since they tend to be stable, enduring, and effectively form significant opposing blocks. However, in most multi-party systems such as Spain they tend to be less salient, unless they exist as current or very recent governments.

² PSOE refers to the largest Spanish social-democratic party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español). PP is the largest conservative party (Partido Popular). IU stands for Izquierda Unida, the leftist nationwide party (formerly communist). The survey data come from the 2799 study of the Spanish *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS). The averages are weighted by territorial representativity.

³ CiU (Convergència i Unió) and ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) are two Catalan parties, the former considered to be center-right and the latter to be left-wing. PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco) is the largest regionalist party in the Basque Country typically considered to be Christian-democratic and center-right.

⁴ The potential coalitions do not include PP-IU because it is not a credible governmental agreement. Also, the party Unión Progreso y Democracia (UPyD) is left out of the analyses due to the reduced number of cases in which the preferred coalition was either PSOE-UPyD or PP-UPyD, and above all the very small number of 2008 vote recalls for and identifications with that newly created party (founded in 2007).

⁵ The expected preferences for single-party minority governments of PSOE and PP voters assume that this type of cabinet leaves their party more room to pursue its desired policies, closing deals with this or that partner depending on the specific policy and circumstances.

⁶ The alternatives with UPyD as a partner are dropped from the analyses. See footnote four.

⁷ These averages are clearly a very rough account of what would be the ideological position of each coalition. Any weighted average (e.g. by electoral or seat share), though, would create problems to differentiate between coalitions given the much larger size of the two main parties with respect to the others. In any case, from a rank-ordering perspective, the unweighted averages make sense.

⁸ All analyses are corrected using a sampling weight for the territorial representativity of the survey, which denotes the inverse of the probability that the observation is included because of the sampling design.

⁹ This dependent variable is based on a question that is only asked to those who in the first place oppose single-party absolute majorities. As a consequence, the estimates in Table 5 may suffer from a sample selection bias.

Accordingly, we ran a Heckman probit where the selection equation determined the preference for non-absolute majorities and the outcome equation was the preference for coalitions vs. single-party minority cabinets.

Nonetheless, the post-estimation Wald tests never allowed the rejection of the null hypothesis of independence of equations. This is why we opted for the presentation of two separate equations for each model. Heckman probits are available from the author upon request.

¹⁰ Local polynomial smooth plots with confidence intervals. The results displayed in traditional estimates' tables are available from the author upon request.