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Voting without ideology. Evidence from Spain (1979-2008)

¿Cómo votan las personas que no tienen ideología? Análisis del comportamiento electoral de los votantes sin ideología en España, 1979-2008

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ABSTRACT

Although non-ideological voters make up a considerable share of the electorate, the literature has systematically overlooked their voting behaviour. Using Spanish electoral data from the 1979-2008 electoral period, we seek to identify the alternative cues—in the absence of ideology—these voters may use when casting their ballot. We do not find that evaluations of the incumbent's performance have a greater influence on non-ideological voters, as the retrospective voting literature suggests. Nor do we find that other shortcuts such as candidate evaluations or party identification are used more by this group when they vote. Instead, our results indicate that non-ideological voters have exchanged

RESUMEN

A pesar de que constituyen un porcentaje relevante del conjunto del electorado, los votantes que manifiestan en las encuestas no tener ideología han sido sistemáticamente ignorados por la literatura empírica sobre voto. Gracias a la explotación de la serie electoral del CIS desde 1979 hasta 2008, en este artículo analizamos qué estrategias emplean los votantes para decidir su voto cuando no disponen de ideología. Por un lado, la evidencia no confirma que el voto del electorado sin ideología esté más influido por su percepción de la gestión del gobierno, tal y como sugiere la literatura de voto retrospectivo. Tampoco otros factores como la evaluación de los candidatos políticos o la identidad de partido parecen ex-

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the traditional ideological shortcut for simple pro-incumbent voting as a decision rule.

plicar el comportamiento diferencial de este grupo de votantes con respecto a los votantes ideológicos. Por el contrario, nuestros resultados indican que los votantes sin ideología muestran una tendencia estadísticamente significativa a votar en favor del partido que controla el gobierno.

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that voters do not cast their ballot randomly. Research on electoral behaviour has consistently proved that ideology is one of the main determinants of citizens' political decisions. However, a considerable portion of the electorate in most developed democracies report having no ideology. The aim of this paper is to unravel how non-ideological voters make up their minds when they decide their vote. Do they use alternative shortcuts when ideology is not available? To advance our findings, we do not find evidence that non-ideological voters rely more on alternative shortcuts such as government performance, leadership or party identification. What we do find is a clear pattern of incumbency bias among this electorate.

The study of the electoral behaviour of voters without ideology has important implications for the literature on electoral studies. In this field, non-ideological voters¹ have traditionally been excluded from statistical models. Regardless of their number, voters without placement within the 10-point-range ideological scale have been thrown into the dustbin of missing voters (cases), that is, voters with no say in the explanation of electoral outcomes. This rationale usually takes on the implicit rather than explicit assumption that non-ideological voters behave in a similar fashion to ideological voters. As a consequence, the absence of these non-ideological voters does not impact on empirical analyses. Instead of taking this hypothesis for granted, this article aims to empirically test this implicit assumption on the voting randomness of non-located voters.

The research strategy of the paper is as follows. Firstly, we show that voters reporting no ideology comprise a minor but nonetheless significant portion of the electorate in most developed democracies. Secondly, we study the electoral behaviour of this group of voters focusing on the Spanish case. Spain is a suitable case study as the volume of non-ideological voters is around the average for developed democracies. Moreover, the Spanish National Election Study series (CIS) provides comparable datasets which allows following an in-depth and longitudinal approach by creating a pooled cross-sectional panel that covers all the national elections held in Spain between 1979 and 2008. In this second section, we firstly show the incumbency bias among the Spanish non-ideological electorate and then, we analyse whether these voters use other available shortcuts more than their ideological counterparts. We end the paper with a discussion and some concluding remarks.

¹ In this paper, we use «non-ideological», «unlocated» and «non-located» indistinctively to refer to the absence of individual self-placement in the ideological dimension.

1. UNLOCATED VOTERS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The literature on electoral behaviour agrees that when people engage in politics they do it, on average, with very low levels of information (Converse, 2000). This is because being informed about politics always bears costs: «the cost of political information is never zero», as Downs put it (1957, p. 240). However, it is also true that these costs do not prevent people from taking political decisions (i.e. voting levels are quite high across the world relative to the costs which each voter is supposed to incur when casting her ballot). Given this fact, scholars working on electoral behaviour have tried to uncover the main guidelines that people use to make decisions in politics.

In this respect, ideology has been considered one of the main shortcuts enabling the electorate to save on information costs in politics (Ferejohn, 1990; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman et al., 1991; Hinich & Munger, 1994; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; MacKuen et al., 2003; Kuklinski & Quirck, 2000). For instance, Popkin (1991) points out that voters follow a «low information rationality» when they decide where to cast their vote and that ideology becomes the predominant shortcut available to reduce information costs in politics. He also sees ideology as a fruitful device for political parties when organising the political contest, because it allows them to illustrate more clearly the differences between them and their competitors in the eyes of the electorate.

Even though ideology is a strong predictor of how both parties and voters behave in politics, a considerable number of voters do not place themselves on the ideological continuum. For the purposes of this paper, «non-located» voters are those who refuse to locate themselves on the left-right ideological scale, i.e. those who provide a «don't know/no answer» (dk/na) response.

The validity of the «dk/na» option in surveys has long been debated in public opinion literature. Converse (1964) has pointed out that some respondents report answers without having underlying attitudes. The opposite may also be true: some dk/na responses may not be real non-attitudes. False negatives —as Gilljam and Granberg (1993) call them— are those who apparently show a non-attitude, but turn out to take a position if the question is posed differently. Certainly, the dk/na option may accommodate different meanings —ignorance, indecision or uncertainty about the meaning of the question asked (Sanchez & Morchio, 1992).

Obviously, in our study we cannot be entirely sure whether dk/na respondents are actually non-ideological voters (or indeed if those who place themselves on the left/right scale are truly ideological voters), but there is some evidence that unlocated voters are genuinely reporting a non-attitude. In the Spanish CIS barometers of April 2006 and October 2008, apart from the traditional left-right scale question, there is also an alternative item regarding

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affiliation to the main ideological families (conservative, liberal and socialdemocrat, among others). In both years, almost two thirds of dk/na on the left/right scale also did not explicitly report an ideology on the alternative scale. Hence, we find high consistency in both questions which seems to qualify our dk/na respondents as «true negatives».

Researchers on electoral studies tend not to consider these voters as significant or influential, and consequently exclude them from their models. However Table I clearly shows that for most developed democracies, those without a specific location within the ideological dimension exceed 10 percent of all voters². The percentages range from an insignificant

TABLE I

Unlocated Voters in Comparative Perspective (CSES dataset)

Country	Sample size	% Unlocated ^a	% Turnout IV ^b	% Turnout UV ^c
Norway 97	2033	2.19	86.59	55.56
Denmark 98	1973	3.45	96.72	77.59
Germany 98	1900	8.02	93.39	77.5
Switzerland 99	2011	8.15	64.23	22.29
United States 96	1533	8.21	77.4	64.52
Iceland 99	1569	8.95	92.93	69.9
Belgium (Walloon) 99	1960	10.31	93.02	87.07
Belgium (Flanders) 99	2179	12.02	99.07	98.64
Israel 96	1087	13.47	92.97	84.87
Australia96	1798	1.9	99.07	98.27
Spain 96	1198	14.44	90.71	78.63
Portugal 02	1206	14.66	75.76	38.57
Spain 00	1189	14.74	83.97	57.78
Sweden 98	1154	15.64	90.43	76.51
United Kingdom97	2753	17.47	85.51	71.26
Netherlands 98	2082	19.56	92.13	70.83
New Zealand 96	3949	19.93	97.89	89.23
Canada 97	1814	31.93	88.53	77.05

^a Unlocated voters are those respondents who do not place themselves in the traditional left/right ten-point scale.

^b Share of respondents who have ideology and voted in the previous national elections. Ideological Voters.

^c Share of respondents who have no ideology and voted in the previous national elections.

SOURCE:


Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 1996-2001).

² We use module one of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) to build table I. CSES is a comparative post-electoral study that includes about 30 democracies. This dataset offers common variables concerning demographics, voting behaviour and political preferences among others. The dataset can be downloaded at <http://www.umich.edu/~cses/>.

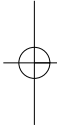
2 percent in Norway to almost 32 percent in Canada. On average, unlocated voters represent 13 percent of the electorate. Therefore, this type of voter comprises a small but nonetheless significant proportion of the electorate in most democracies.

Table I shows that the electoral participation of unlocated voters is lower in every country. Despite the remarkable 17percent gap between located and unlocated participation, almost three quarters of the latter group turn out to vote. In short, voters with no ideology still represent a significant proportion of those who finally decide to go to the polls on Election Day. Their potential influence on the electoral results should not be overlooked, given that they represent almost 11 percent of all participants.

2. HOW DO UNLOCATED VOTERS VOTE? EVIDENCE FROM DEMOCRATIC SPAIN



In the previous section, we have seen that non-ideological voters make up a small yet significant share of the electorate in most developed democracies. We shall now focus on the behaviour of Spanish voters in all the General Elections since 1979. We select this case because Spain is a representative country among developed democracies in terms of the level of non-ideological citizens. Around 14 percent of the total population are unlocated, which is slightly above the mean (13.2 percent). The National Research Centre (CIS) provides comparable surveys dating back to 1979. The battery of items included in the CIS electoral surveys series is comparable across time because the question wording is similar—the Appendix at the end of the article describes how the variables used in this analysis were coded.



In this section we analyse whether Spanish unlocated voters cast their ballot differently to their located counterparts. Thus, our null hypothesis is that there is no difference between these two groups. After rejecting the null, we proceed to check whether unlocated voters make more use of other shortcuts such as pro-incumbency bias, government performance, leadership effects and party identification.

Table II details vote choice in every Spanish election (from 1979 to 2008) for both ideological and non-ideological voters³. According to the table, the vote share for the incumbent is higher in all elections for unlocated voters than for their ideological

³ The table is built with the CIS post-electoral surveys for 1982 (N=2394), 1986 (N=8286), 1989 (N=3084), 1993 (N=5001), 1996 (N=5338), 2000 (N=5283), 2004 (N=5377) and 2008 (6083) (catalogue survey numbers 1327, 1542, 1842, 2061, 2210, 2384 and 2559, respectively). For the 1979 elections we use the DATA post-electoral survey (N=5439), because the CIS post-electoral survey of that year does not contain the ideological self-placement item. The percentages in the table are calculated by following the same procedure used in Carabaña (2001). We weigh the results found in the post-electoral survey with the actual results of the election in order to avoid misreporting the real vote due to bandwagoning with the winner.

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TABLE II

Vote for Parties by Ideological Placement in the Spanish Elections

	Vote Recall	Ideological Voters (%)	Unlocated Voters (%)	Total (%)
1979	<i>Incumbent (Christian Democrats - UCD)</i>	34.19	<i>39.68</i>	34.79
	Socialist Party (PSOE)	30.54	29.97	30.36
	Communist Party (PCE)	10.85	9.96	10.76
	Conservative Party (CD)	6.1	5.6	6.05
	Others	18.32	15.8	18.04
1982	<i>Incumbent (Christian Democrats - UCD/CDS)</i>	9.04	<i>12.31</i>	9.47
	Socialist Party (PSOE)	47.42	46.72	47.33
	Conservative Party (AP)	25.65	2.53	25.89
	Communist Party (PCE)	4.36	1.13	3.95
	Others	13.53	12.31	13.37
1986	<i>Incumbent (Socialist Party-PSOE)</i>	41.07	<i>46.83</i>	41.75
	Conservative Party (AP)	24.62	24.55	24.61
	Centrist Party (CDS)	8.89	7.68	8.74
	Communist Party (IU)	4.6	2.76	4.38
	Others	20.83	18.18	20.51
1989	<i>Incumbent (Socialist Party-PSOE)</i>	38.02	<i>52.47</i>	39.87
	Conservative Party (PP)	26.86	19.88	25.96
	Centrist Party (CDS)	8.8	2.14	7.95
	Communist Party (IU)	10.09	2.64	9.14
	Others	16.22	<i>22.87</i>	17.08
1993	<i>Incumbent (Socialist Party-PSOE)</i>	37.81	<i>47.94</i>	39.07
	Conservative Party (PP)	35.69	30.97	35.1
	Communist Party (IU)	10.28	5.37	9.67
	Others	16.22	15.71	16.16
1996	<i>Incumbent (Socialist Party-PSOE)</i>	36.57	<i>46.95</i>	37.68
	Conservative Party (PP)	39.27	35.24	38.84
	Communist Party (IU)	11.24	4.83	10.55
	Others	12.92	12.97	12.93
2000	<i>Incumbent (Conservative Party - PP)</i>	41.85	<i>53.02</i>	43.07
	Socialist Party (PSOE)	33.58	28.63	33.04
	Communist Party (IU)	8.62	2.24	7.92
	Others	15.96	16.12	15.97
2004	<i>Incumbent (Conservative Party - PP)</i>	36.66	<i>45.38</i>	37.64
	Socialist Party (PSOE)	43.15	38.63	42.64
	Communist Party (IU)	5.35	1.9	4.96
	Others	14.84	14.08	14.75
2008	<i>Incumbent (Socialist Party-PSOE)</i>	46.38	<i>47.17</i>	46.44
	Conservative Party (PP)	38.63	41.62	38.87
	Communist Party (IU)	4.14	0.28	3.82
	Others	10.86	10.92	10.86

SOURCE:

Post-electoral surveys of Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). See footnote 3.

counterparts. The gap between these two types of voters ranges from less than 1 point in 2008 to 14.45 points in 1989. In seven out of nine elections the unlocated support for incumbents is over 45 percent. It only falls below this percentage in the first two elections. In addition, in all elections except 1982⁴, the party in government has always been the political option most voted for by non-ideological voters.

Unlocated voters show a greater inclination to vote for the incumbent regardless of the ideology of the party in government; this pattern applies to left-wing governments (from 1982 to 1996 and after 2004), right-wing governments (from 1996 to 2004) and centrist governments (from 1979 to 1982). Moreover, it occurs both during periods of economic recession (for instance, 1993) and periods of economic growth (for instance, 2000). Finally, this incumbency advantage also exists when the party in government is defeated (especially in 1996 and 2004). In short, unlocated voters are more unwilling to withdraw their support from defeated incumbents, but once new governments are settled, the non-ideological electorate once again becomes a more solid supporter of the incumbent.

The data that we have presented allows us to reject the null hypothesis: unlocated voters clearly do not behave in the same way as located voters when they cast their ballot. Table II shows that there is a markedly different pattern of voting behaviour between these two groups. The pro-incumbent bias of non-ideological voters is both significant and persistent over time⁵.

2.1. *Explaining the incumbency advantage in Spain*

How can we account for this incumbent bias pattern of voting? There is a body of research that focuses on explaining the pro-incumbent bias effect in American politics and gives us interesting insights applicable to non-ideological voters. A considerable amount of this literature uses aggregate data in order to establish which specific government resources

⁴ The centrist UCD party, which emerged from the Francoist regime collapsed during its second term in office. From the resignation in 1981 of the then UCD prime minister, Adolfo Suárez, to the 1982 General Election, several party leaders left the party: some of them joined Adolfo Suárez to form a new Christian Democratic party; while others moved to the other two major parties, the Socialist PSOE and the Conservative AP. Thus, the spectacular electoral defeat of the UCD government did not take anyone by surprise (Gunther & Hopkin, 2002).

⁵ In all elections except 1982 and 2008 differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The recent 2008 election demands an explanation. Although the party in office, the PSOE, was able to attract the largest share of unlocated voters, it did not do enough to persuade a considerable proportion of these voters not to vote for the conservative PP. As some political commentators have observed, socialist efforts to activate territorial and social issues with the intention of pushing the PP towards the far right side of the ideological aisle backfired with centrist voters (Torcal and Lago, 2008). This failure prompted Zapatero's political strategists to moderate the discourse and try to appear as the real party standing for the status quo (see L. R. Aizpeolea, «Hoja de Ruta del PSOE a la moderación», *El País*, 8 December 2007). In the end, socialists did not seem to have been successful in changing the discourse, since a larger than normal number of unlocated voters cast the PP ballot.

(i.e. case-work services, transfers, informational saliency) explain the incumbent's advantage over the challenger (Mayhew, 1974; Cover, 1977; Fiorina, 1981b; Cox & Morgenstern, 1995). However, these findings usually do not shed much light on which particular characteristics of unlocated voters make them more prone to support the government.

On the other hand, Erikson's work (1972) seems more useful, regardless of the fact that he still uses aggregate data. He considers that the increase in independent voters in the 60s may be behind the rise in the incumbency advantage in the US. Indeed, the lack of partisan attachments would lead to the enhancement of the incumbent's visibility in voter decisions (1972: 1240). This finding has been more rigorously confirmed by studies at the individual level, using either cross-sectional data (Ferejohn, 1977; Cox & Katz, 1996) or panel data (Romero & Sanders 1994). A plausible implication is that the same may be said for those with no ideological attachments, as political competition in Europe mainly consists of ideology attachments rather than party identification (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989).

Finally, Bartels (1996) finds a very interesting pattern of electoral behaviour among less informed voters in the American context. He argues that relatively uninformed voters are more likely, other things being equal, to support parties in government and Democrats. On average, Democrats perform almost two percentage points better—and incumbents nearly five percentage points better—than they would if all voters in presidential elections were, in fact, fully informed. He suggests that supporting the incumbent is perhaps simply a kind of natural default option for voters too uninformed to compare the candidates on their merits. And his conclusions point in the same direction as ours: «Whatever the sources of the aggregate discrepancies between actual vote choice and hypothetical *fully informed* vote choice may be, however, they suggest very clearly that political ignorance has systematic and significant political consequences» (1996: 220).

If Erikson considers that being non-partisan has an impact *per se* on incumbent saliency and electoral advantage, Bartels finds a possible causal link between them. It may be possible that non-partisan voters have lower information levels which would explain why they tend to vote more for the incumbent. The parallelism with unlocated voters emerges strongly, since we know that such voters are less educated and less informed about politics, as table III shows⁶.

Drawing from this research, we should expect the higher incumbent voting likelihood of unlocated voters to disappear when education and information are included in the model.

⁶ Besides, women and the elderly are overrepresented within the group of unlocated voters.

TABLA III

Socio-demographic profile of ideological and non-ideological voters according to their main characteristics (vertical percentages)

Variables		Ideological Voters (%)	Unlocated Voters (%)
Sex	Men	51.40	37.86
	Women	48.60	62.14
Age (groups)	18-30	26.94	22.43
	31-45	28.76	22.18
	46-65	28.47	30.09
	+65	15.83	25.30
Education	Primary	55.13	71.69
	Secondary	18.08	13.24
	Vocational Training	11.19	7.69
	University (intermediate)	7.74	3.59
	University (superior)	7.64	3.63
Political knowledge (standardized)	Mean (0: low/1: high)	0.75	0.21

Modal values of categorical variables shown in bold.

SOURCE:

Post-electoral surveys of Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). See footnote 3.

Together with an information-based control, we also ask whether the «usual suspects» explaining electoral behaviour may account for the bias we have found in the Spanish data. Here we consider three main alternative shortcuts.

First, voters may value the performance of the party in office when they decide their vote (Key, 1966; Fiorina, 1981a; Ferejohn, 1986; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Manin, 1997; Przeworski, Manin & Stokes, 1999). Thus, positive assessments of the incumbent's performance will yield a vote for the government. Secondly, voters may focus their attention on the main traits of each candidate in the electoral race—to name only a few, whether the candidate is knowledgeable, reliable or inspiring, and whether the candidate performs a strong leadership role within their ranks (Wattenberger, 1991). We already know that incumbents always have an advantage over their challengers in terms of higher popularity as long as they control the political agenda and have greater influence on the media. Hence, unlocated voters' propensity to vote for the incumbent could be driven by better evaluations of the incumbent's leadership and/or greater importance given to leadership when voting. Thirdly, party identification may work as a psychological tie learnt in the early stages of political

socialization that allows voters to reduce the costs of taking political decisions (Verba et al., 2005) and parties to gather votes from partisans who always tend to think that party rivals would have done the job worse (Campbell et al., 1960; Schickler & Green, 1997; Bartels, 2000). In this vein, the incumbency bias of non-ideological voters may be explained by the higher number of incumbent partisans within this group.

Table IV reports logit models⁷ of voting for the incumbent using our pooled cross-sectional panel that covers all national elections since 1979⁸. Model A estimates the effect of not having ideology without including any control variable. As expected, the coefficient is positive and strongly statistically significant. On average, the probability of voting for the incumbent among unlocated voters is 4 percentage points higher than among the remaining population.

In model B, we include economic performance and leadership as well as some socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education and information). As mentioned above, we are especially interested in focusing on the effect of political information: either directly (with the «information» variable) or indirectly (through education levels). If the incumbent bias of non-ideological voters is led by their lack of information, then we should expect the *unlocated voter* coefficient to become non-significant.

In general, the data support Bartels' hypothesis (1996) in the sense that less political knowledge (*information*) increases the odds of voting for the incumbent. The other traditional demographic variables included in model B —*age*, *sex*, *education*— also seem to play an important role. Nonetheless, despite controlling for all these variables, the incumbency bias of unlocated voters remains significant. The magnitude of the coefficient associated with non-ideological voters does not vary, but the standard error increases, which reduces the significance level of the coefficient from $p < 0.01$ to $p < 0.05$.

As expected, economic performance and leadership report very significant coefficients. However, they do not seem to account for the higher probability of voting for the incumbent that unlocated voters exhibit.

⁷ The dependent variable takes value 1 when respondents vote for the incumbent party and value 0 otherwise. Due to the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable, the most suitable method is the logistic regression. All models in table IV include year fixed effects.

⁸ The table is built with the CIS pre-electoral surveys for 1979 (N=1183), 1982 (N=1300), 1986 (N=25667), 1989 (N=2471), 1993 (N=2496), 1996 (N=6642), 2000 (N=24000), 2004 (N=24109) and 2008 (N=18221) (catalogue survey numbers 1189 1325, 1526, 1838, 2059, 2207, 2382-2384, 2555, 2750-2757, respectively). Even though we would prefer to use the CIS post-electoral surveys, most of them do not contain some of the relevant independent variables included in our statistical analysis.

TABLA IV

Logit Models of Voting for the Incumbent in the Spanish Elections, 1979-2008

	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D	Model E
Unlocated	0.15*** (0.03)	0.15** (0.06)	1.56*** (0.15)	1.05*** (0.20)	0.33*** (0.11)
Sex (female)		0.12*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.07)
Age		-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Education (secondary)		-0.43*** (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.04)	-0.43*** (0.05)	0.04 (0.10)
Education (professional formation)		-0.27*** (0.06)	-0.21*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.06)	0 (0.11)
Education (intermediate)		-0.57*** (0.07)	-0.28*** (0.05)	-0.58*** (0.07)	-0.12 (0.13)
Education (superior)		-0.68*** (0.07)	-0.37*** (0.05)	-0.68*** (0.07)	-0.26** (0.12)
Political Knowledge (standarized)		-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.05)
Prime Minister's evaluation		0.63*** (0.01)	0.78*** (0.01)	0.63*** (0.01)	0.52*** (0.02)
Economic performance		0.50*** (0.02)		0.53*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.04)
Unlocated x PM evaluation			-0.23*** (0.02)		
Unlocated x Economic Performance				-0.34*** (0.07)	
Party identification (incumbent party)					4.53*** (0.21)
Unlocated x Pid					-1.07* (0.56)
Year (1982)	-1.72*** (0.14)	-0.47* (0.25)	-0.72*** (0.28)	-0.46* (0.25)	
Year (1986)	0.46*** (0.07)	1.11*** (0.12)	1.18*** (0.12)	1.12*** (0.12)	
Year (1989)	-0.68*** (0.08)	-0.24* (0.13)	-0.07 (0.13)	-0.24* (0.13)	
Year (1993)	-0.18** (0.09)		0.76*** (0.14)		
Year (1996)	-0.34*** (0.08)	0.19 (0.12)	0.26** (0.13)	0.19 (0.12)	
Year (2000)	0.17** (0.08)	0.84*** (0.13)	1.23*** (0.13)	0.84*** (0.13)	0.07 (0.08)
Year (2004)	0.04 (0.07)		1.18*** (0.12)		
Year (2008)	0.32*** (0.08)	1.36*** (0.12)	1.40*** (0.12)	1.36*** (0.12)	
Constant	-0.23*** (0.07)	-5.45*** (0.15)	-5.46*** (0.14)	-5.54*** (0.15)	-4.18*** (0.20)
Number of obs	46873	25879	41037	25879	7361
Wald chi2(13)	1282.29	5587.69	8532.62	5612.95	1333.36
Prob >chi2	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R2	0.0226	0.3744	0.3942	0.3751	0.4776

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Robust standard in parentheses.

SOURCE:
CIS electoral surveys 1979-2008. Catalogue survey numbers: 1189, 1325, 1526, 1838, 2059, 2207, 2382-2384, 2555, 2750-2757.

2.2. *Do unlocated voters use alternative shortcuts more when they vote?*

In general, models A and B confirm that the incumbency bias of non-ideological voters remains statistically significant when we include control variables. Hence, our results show that these voters have a higher tendency to use incumbency voting as a decision rule but we do not know the causal mechanism behind this finding. In this section we test whether our other three relevant shortcuts (government performance, leadership and party identification) are used more by non-ideological voters than their ideological counterparts.

The first hypothesis we test comes from the retrospective voting literature. Some authors consider that governments are less accountable to ideological voters because ideology constrains the effect of government performance on voting calculus. Recent research on accountability models has highlighted that ideology mediates the relationship between vote choice and government performance (Stokes, 1996, and Maravall & Przeworski, 1998). Government responsibility for economic performance is filtered through a voter's ideological lens: for instance, those voters closest to the government may look for exogenous causes to explain economic crises and, on the contrary, may be more inclined to give the government credit for good economic conditions. Hence, governments may be rewarded or punished regardless of their actual performance in office when ideology is taken into account. One implication of this theory is that we might expect voters without an ideological lens to follow a stronger pattern of economic voting. Therefore, governments should be more accountable to non-ideological voters for their performance.

The second hypothesis suggests that unlocated voters give more importance to candidate evaluations than ideological voters. Several authors (Bartle, 2005; Wattenberger, 1991) have emphasised the strong effect of leadership on those voters not using other relevant shortcuts to vote. However, these studies focus on ideological voters without saying anything specific about the implications of candidate-centred politics for non-ideological voters. Only Bartels (2002) mentions the possibility of stronger effects of candidate evaluations on moderate voters' behaviour (those without strong party identification (PID) or those who are ideologically moderate). However, the empirical evidence seems to refute this hypothesis. As far as we know, only a recent article by Lavine and Gschwend (2007) deals with the very difficult question of how voters with different levels of ideological capacity make up their minds as to how to cast their vote. Using US data between 1984 and 2000, they found that voters use different shortcuts according to their level of political sophistication. Even though issue voting is very costly, ideology allows voters to form political opinions on different topics. On the other hand, non-ideological voters use PID and assessments of candidate character when deciding who to vote for.

Finally, the third hypothesis suggests that those with no ideology may still consider themselves as followers of specific parties and vote for them. As Verba, Schlozman and Burns stress (2005: 105) «party identification is sometimes constructed as a way for citizens to cut information costs in making vote choices: that is, knowing a candidate's party affiliation reduces the need for detailed information when voting». In this sense, for those voters lacking ideology, party identification would work as a *second-best* type of shortcut. Moreover, according to Inglehart and Klingemann (1976), the left-right continuum can be broken down into two different elements: the partisan and the pure ideological component. The former refers to the fact that the acquisition of partisan preferences and the left-right frame go together in most political cultures in such a way that those who identify with a given political party also locate themselves in the corresponding point along the left-right continuum. The dual nature of the ideological scale provides the rationale for non-ideological voters to rely on party identification when deciding their vote: without the pure ideological component of the scale, the other, party identification, would act as the cost-saving device those voters need when casting their ballot.

Unfortunately, «party identification» has not been afforded as much attention in Europe as in the US (some exceptions are Schickler and Green (1997); Budge et al. (1976)). Electoral research in Europe has considered it as a proxy of vote recall (Blais et al., 2001; Barnes, 1989)⁹. As a result, Spanish surveys seldom include party identification in their questionnaires, which prevents us from carrying out a more thorough analysis of the influence of party identification on voting for non-ideological voters. Among all the studies used in this article, only the 1986 and 2000 pre-electoral surveys ask about this issue.

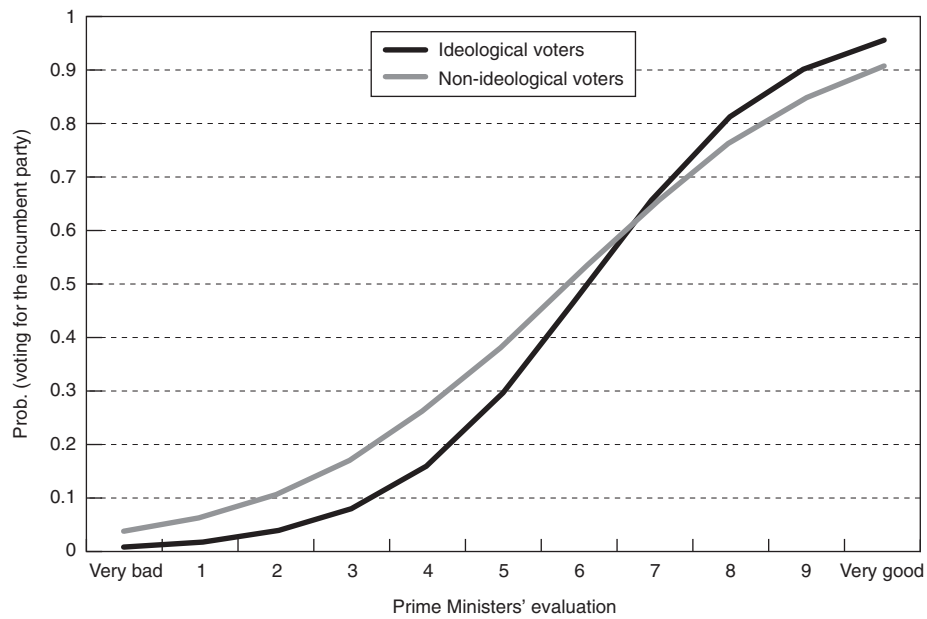
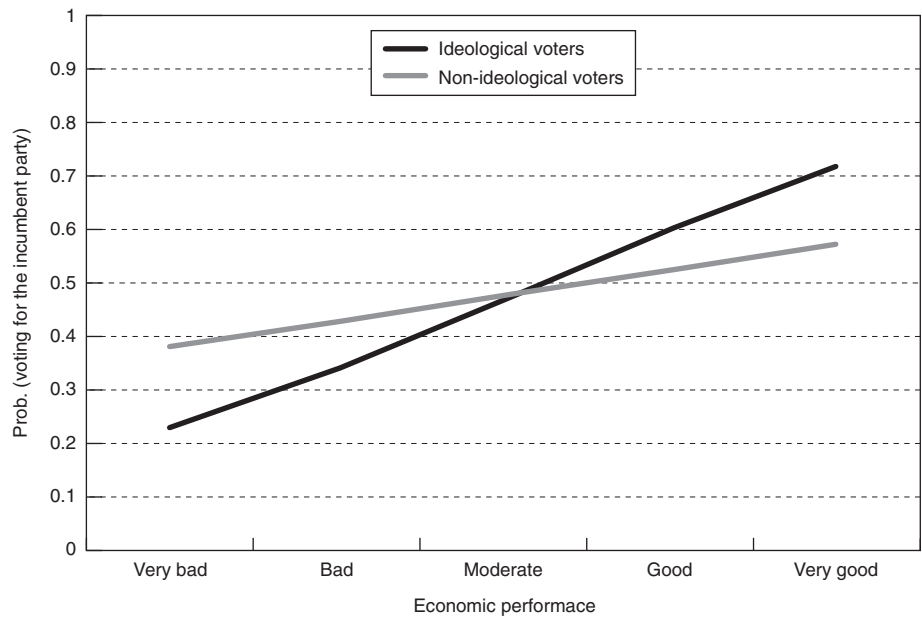
To test these three hypotheses we estimate new models that incorporate the interactive effects of being unlocated and our three shortcuts: performance (model C), leadership (model D) and party identification (model E). Since we hypothesise that the effect of these shortcuts is higher for non-ideological voters, we should expect a significant and positive effect of the interactive coefficient. The results do not lend any empirical support for the expected higher effect of the alternative shortcuts among non-ideological voters. On the contrary, their effect on the odds of voting for the incumbent for unlocated voters is lower. The interaction coefficient of government performance is negative and statistically significant. Hence, we do not find support for a stronger economic voting pattern for non-ideological voters. Similarly, the negative coefficient of the leadership interaction indicates that the effect of incumbent leadership is lower for non-ideological voters. Figure 1 plots the estimated probabilities of voting for the incumbent in the 2000 elections of both unlocated

⁹ For instance, CIS data for the 2000 General Election show that 99 percent of Socialist partisans said they voted for the Socialist Party.

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FIGURE I

Odds of Voting for the Incumbent by Performance and Leadership, 2000



and ideological voters across the performance and leadership range. The slope is less pronounced for unlocated voters in both figures, which means unlocated voters are less responsive to government performance or leadership qualities when they decide their vote.

Finally, neither are unlocated voters more likely to vote according to their party identification. In fact, the interaction shows again the opposite effect to our hypothesis. On average, the probability of voting for the government for ideological voters who did not identify with the government was only 0.34, but this probability increases to 0.41 for voters with no ideology. On the other hand, virtually all incumbent partisans (0.98 for ideological voters and 0.96 for unlocated voters) reported voting for the party in government. Contrary to our expectations, party identification exerts a stronger effect on ideological voters than on their non-ideological counterparts.

In summary, all statistically significant interactions of the B models show a negative sign which allows us to confidently reject the hypothesis that voters with no ideology tend to use the alternative shortcuts more when they decide their vote while non-ideological voters seem only to rely more on the pro-incumbency decision rule.

3. DISCUSSION

The results do not clarify the causal mechanism behind the relationship between not having an ideology and voting for the incumbent. Why do the unlocated show a greater inclination to vote for the government? It is difficult to think of any governmental-particularised benefits or services such as transfers or constituency casework that mainly benefit non-ideological voters. They tend to be elderly people, which means that they are net receivers of pensions and other social transfers. However, this is not what lies behind the incumbent bias. Our models indicate that elderly people actually have a lower propensity to vote for the incumbent. Neither can unemployment benefits explain the incumbency bias since non-ideological voters do not have a different propensity for being unemployed¹⁰.

A possible alternative explanation might be that this bias is not caused by a lack of information, but instead by the source of information that unlocated voters use. It is possible that non-ideological voters are more likely to consume incumbent-biased media. In the Spanish case, for instance, there is some evidence to support this thesis. Table V shows the

¹⁰ Voters with no ideology are under-represented within the employed population, but this is not due to unemployment but rather to retired people and housewives (or househusbands). Data are available on request.

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TABLE V

TV Audience and Party Favouritism according to the Electorate

	TV watched by... (Colum %)		According to respondents, this TV favours... (Row %)				
	Located	Unlocated	PP	PSOE	Others	No bias	Num. obs.
1993 ^a							
TVE1	59	65.4	0.5	23.0	0.2	76.3	634
TELECINCO	11.5	11.5	2.4	11.3	0	86.3	124
ANTENA3	23	13.5	16.9	5.4	0	77.7	242
OTHERS	6.5	9.6	0.4	2.3	9.4	87.5	128
Num. obs.	1099	89					
2004 ^b							
TVE1	40.2	46.4	27.6	2.4	1.3	68.7	675
TELECINCO	40.7	29.7	4.4	13.5	0.8	81.3	642
ANTENA3	15.6	21	13.5	3.6	1.1	81.8	275
OTHERS	3.4	2.8	2.8	4.8	8.5	83.9	647
Num. Obs.	2000	421					

^a Incumbent: Socialist Party (PSOE).^b Incumbent: Conservative Party (PP).

SOURCE:

See footnote 11.

TV channel preferences of Spanish voters in two different years, 1993 and 2004¹¹. It is worth mentioning that unlocated voters are more prone to watch those channels that, according to respondents, favour the government. In 1993, when the socialist PSOE was in office, those respondents who perceived a political bias on TV stations (about 20 percent of the sample) considered that the first public channel (TVE1) favoured the government whereas they thought that Antena 3 favoured the opposition party. Interestingly, unlocated voters were more likely to watch the pro-government public station (TVE1) and, in contrast, the ideological voters were more prone to watch the pro-conservative Antena3. A similar pattern emerges in 2004, when the conservative PP was in government. In that year, unlocated voters tended to tune in more to the public channel (TVE1) and Antena 3, which were considered by survey respondents as the most pro-government stations.

There is evidence elsewhere that the influence of the media on the electorate is particularly important for those voters with weak ideological attitudes (Gunther, Montero & Wert, 1999).

¹¹ There are no suitable CIS surveys for studying the ideological bias of the Spanish mass media. We have only found data for 1993 in the Cross-National Election Study Project-CNEP survey (N=1448) and the Demoscopia 2004 post-electoral survey (N=2929).

Therefore, the potential influence of incumbent-biased media on unlocated voters is especially worth taking into consideration.

However, it is difficult to explain why this pattern occurs. It is reasonable to think that unlocated voters prefer TVE1 because they are elderly people, who have always been loyal to the first national channel, but the patterns are less clear for private channel preferences. Perhaps we might seek the answer in the pro-governmental behaviour of these private TV stations during different time periods. Thus, Telecinco viewers showed clear-cut support for the PSOE government in 1993, as did Antena3 viewers did the same with respect to the PP government in 2004, which is exactly the same bias that we found in the TV viewing patterns of the unlocated voter.

In so doing, the match between governments and unlocated voters is such that the latter seem to always watch those TV channels ideologically closest to the current incumbent, even in the presence of changes in government. In other words, unlocated voters would update their channel preferences by taking into account which party took over in government. In that sense, channel preference would be a by-product of party preference.

The results in this section do not clearly show the causal mechanism behind the incumbency bias of non-ideological voters. Further research should focus on which unmeasured incumbency resources make the incumbent more visible to unlocated voters as compared with their counterparts. It could be the case that this incumbency bias is not related to governmental resources or strategies, but instead may essentially be voter attitude related. As Mayhew (1974) hypothesised «incumbency cue» may be a plausible alternative for voters who lack party identification. Possibly, the absence of ideology may lead to the same outcome.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article's point of departure was that electoral studies should pay more attention to those voters with no ideology. We saw that the numerical relevance of this group varies across countries, but in most of them voters with no ideology exist in sufficient numbers to merit the study of their electoral behaviour. Focusing on the electoral patterns of Spanish non-ideological citizens, we found that they tend to vote more for the party in government. This incumbency bias has manifested itself in almost every Spanish elections since 1979, regardless of the ideological tendency of the party in office. Since non-ideological voters represent between fourteen percent (according to CSES surveys) and one fifth of the Spanish electorate (according to CIS surveys), this bias has important implications for the chances of government re-election.

We have tested whether alternative shortcuts could account for the way in which unlocated voters vote. Specifically we have considered the effects of the incumbent's economic performance, leadership evaluation and party identification on the odds of voting for the incumbent. On the one hand, we do not find conclusive evidence that the pro-incumbent bias of non-ideological voters is a statistical artefact that disappears these bringing those alternative shortcuts into the models.

On the other hand, we do not find support for the hypothesis that non-ideological voters take incumbent performance or candidate evaluation more into account than their ideological counterparts when they vote. The lack of an ideological shortcut does not seem to push these voters into using these heuristics in a differential fashion.

Neither do we find support for the hypothesis that a lack of political information lies behind the behaviour of non-ideological voters, as can be inferred from Bartels' argument for explaining the incumbency bias in American politics. However, there is some tentative evidence that this group of voters tends to watch TV channels that favour the government. This suggests that there may be some factors that we cannot identify that make governments more visible to citizens with no ideology.

We do not find it surprising that non-ideological voters behave differently, given that several political science studies have proved the key position of ideology in voter choice. Hence, it does not seem implausible to think that having no ideology apparently must have some implication on how voters rationalize their decisions in politics. What is more puzzling is the specific pattern that emerges from the Spanish case. As the incumbency advantage persists after introducing our controls, many questions remain unanswered. Future research should continue to explore what specific features make governments more attractive to non-ideological voters and what kind of heuristics these voters have in mind when they vote for the incumbent. The research agenda should not be limited to Spain; it is important to find out whether this incumbent bias can be generalised to other countries or whether it is rather a «country effect». However, as we already know that ideology has analogous implications on political behaviour in different countries, it seems reasonable to expect the same in its absence.

APPENDIX: VARIABLE CONSTRUCTION

Non-ideological voter (unlocated). The non-ideological voters are those who do not place themselves on the traditional 10-point left-right scale. The variable is dichotomous and takes value 1 when respondents chose the «don't know» or «no answer» option and value 0

otherwise. The original question in the survey is formulated as follows: «When we talk about politics we usually use the terms left and right. In this card [which it shows a ten point scale] there are different boxes going from left to right. In which box would you place yourself?»

Political Information. Standardized index of party leader knowledge ranging from 0 to 1, where 0 means that respondents did not know any leader and 1 when they knew all leaders. The original question in the survey is formulated as follows: «Now I will read out some names of different political leaders. I would like you to tell me whether you know them and to rate their performance. Rate them from 0 to 10, where 0 means very bad and 10 means very good».

Performance. Variable based on voter's evaluations of the national economic performance measured on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (very bad). The original question in the survey is formulated as follows: «Focusing on the current general economic situation of Spain, would you describe it as very good, good, not bad, bad or very bad?»

Sex. Dichotomous variable where female is coded as 1 and male is coded as 0.

Age. Continuous variable where the minimum value is 18 years old.

Education. Categorical variable ranging from 1 to 5 (1=primary school or less; 2=secondary; 3=vocational training; 4=intermediate; 5=higher). The original question in the survey is formulated as follows: «What official higher education qualifications do you have?»

Leadership. Variable (from 0 to 10) that evaluates the performance of the leader of the party in government, who in Spain has always been the head of the government as well. The original survey question is the same as the one used in the *Political information* variable.

Party identification. Dichotomous variable where 1 means that the voter identifies with the party and 0 otherwise. For 1986 we use the survey question: «I will name some political parties. I would like you to tell me if you feel very close to, close to, indifferent to, far from or very far from each party». Voters who feel close or very close to the party are coded as identifying with the party. For 2000, the survey item is as follows: «Would you mind telling me whether you feel close to a particular party and, if so, which one?» Those who acknowledge feeling close to the party in office or to the main oppositional party are coded as 1 in «pro-government partisans» and «anti-government partisans» respectively.

Incumbent. Variable which takes value 1 when the respondent voted for the incumbent party and value 0 otherwise. Those who did not turn out to vote were considered as missing

cases. Spain has never had a coalition government, so there has been always a single party holding incumbency status.

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