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Ideological Proximity and Voter Turnout in Multi-Level Systems: Evidence from Spain.

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Abstract

Does ideological proximity between the individual and political parties determine electoral participation in regional elections, as much as in national elections? Does the degree of self-rule of a region affect the interplay between ideological distance and turnout? This article addresses these questions and provides empirical evidence drawing upon individual-level and regional-level data from 53 regional elections and 4 national elections in Spain. Results indicate that citizens are more likely to vote when they perceive there is at least one congruent policy option among the party supply, and this happens at both regional and national levels. However, whether the closest party is in national government or whether it is a regionalist organization has a dissimilar impact on turnout in different tiers. This relationship between the type of party which is most ideologically proximate and electoral participation is partially affected by the degree of regional autonomy of the territory.

Introduction

Most regions in Europe have increased their level of self-governance over recent decades and as a consequence there is now more at stake in regional elections (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2010, 53–55; Schakel 2013, 632). In parallel with this process of decentralisation, national governments have fewer competences, which means that national politics might be seen as less relevant to citizens than it once was in the past. With sub-state elections becoming more common and regions gaining more self-rule, the level of interest in understanding what drives regional turnout has increased. However, most research on sub-state elections relies on aggregate data and focuses on institutional settings to explain voters' behaviour in multi-level systems (Cancela and Geys 2016). Similarly, there are scholars who promote a reassessment of the extent to which the national arena is also affected by regional issues (Golder et al.

2017) and how, in some cases, sub-national elections are at least as relevant to voters as national ones (Cutler 2008). Also, and despite some laudable contributions to the study of the differences between citizens' behaviour in elections at different tiers of multilevel systems (Schakel 2013), there is no empirical evidence of the extent to which individual perceptions of the policy positions of parties influence turnout at both regional and national elections.

As citizens are "represented through and by parties" (Sartori 1968, 471), it is reasonable to think that the extent to which individuals see their political views and policy preferences supported by a party matters in their electoral decision. That is, citizens would be more likely to participate in elections the more they perceived that their policy preferences are represented by the parties contesting those elections. However, the interplay of different levels of government might have a distinct influence on how the pursuit of policy representation affects individual turnout because policy authority is shared between national and regional institutions. In this way, and because with the advance of decentralisation there is more contamination between electoral arenas (Cabeza 2018), the degree of self-rule of a region might influence the impact that the ideological congruence between a citizen and the different viable parties has on individual turnout at state and sub-state elections.

This article makes a novel contribution to the literature on the effects of supply-side factors on turnout at the national and regional levels. These analyses rely on the case of Spain, a country selected for its territorial heterogeneity where decentralisation is asymmetric across and within regions which, despite having a high degree of self-rule, differ in the share of competences between national and sub-national governments. Spanish regions also vary with respect to the time when these powers were transferred to the regional entities as these transfers are the result of negotiation between the central and the regional executives (León 2012). This variation across and within regions as to how fast and how far they were granted devolution makes the Spanish case an excellent choice to test how ideological congruence

determines electoral participation in multi-level systems, as well as to assess the extent to which variations in the degree of decentralisation affect the way in which the electoral menu determines turnout at both regional and national levels.

The data used in this research contains information about the specific number of competences and the economic capacity of each Spanish region together with individual-level data from 53 regional elections and 4 national elections in Spain. Despite the limitations of being a single case study, results suggest that while ideological proximity determines the decision to vote, its impact differs across the two levels of government depending on whether the closest party is in national government or whether it is a regionalist party. This association of electoral participation, ideological congruence and type of party is also influenced by the degree of decentralisation.

Ideological congruence and the calculus of voting

At every election, citizens choose between voting and abstaining. According to the rational choice model, this decision is driven by a calculus of the costs and the expected benefits of casting a vote (Downs 1957; Blais 2000; Blais, Young, and Lapp 2000). Psychological and social motivations drive turnout and impact the individual utility of voting by outweighing the associated costs of a single vote that is unlikely to be pivotal to the electoral outcome. As their vote is also an instrument to express their opinions about the policies which parties deliver, citizens participate even when the perceived utility of voting is low (Edlin, Gelman, and Kaplan 2007). However, even when an individual's vote is unlikely to be decisive, a voter would be more willing to turn out when there is a viable option that represents her political stances. Thus, the spatial theory of party competition highlights the ideological proximity between an individual and the political supply in a democracy as being a key factor of electoral behaviour (Downs 1957; Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006). When citizens evaluate

the different alternatives in a party system and find an option that is in line with their ideology or that might contribute to deliver certain policies, they also find incentives to cast a vote. If citizens are indifferent to or alienated from parties because they believe their policy preferences are not well represented by them, abstention seems a more likely possibility than in a scenario in which citizens perceive there is at least one party whose position is close to their own (Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006). Using an analogy with the non-political world, it can be expected that an individual would be more likely to go to a restaurant if she finds the menu is appetizing.

Beyond the act of voting, ideological congruence between voters and parties is essential for democracy because it also affects citizens' satisfaction with the political system (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011). However, scholars have drawn attention to the scarcity of empirical research on the consequences on electoral behaviour of policy congruence between voters and parties (Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego 2014, 291). Thus, most researchers accept that ideological proximity between citizens and parties is desirable and it encourages political participation but, strikingly, very few have tried to assess the actual effect on turnout of left-right distances between parties and individuals. Some research has been done into how parties adapt their stances to those of their average voter in order to pursue more seats in parliament, which suggests that policy congruence is, at least, beneficial in order to attract voters (Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011).

One of the few works specifically addressing the relationship between ideological congruence and individual turnout is the one by Lefkofridi, Giger and Gallego (2014). According to them, citizens participate more in national elections when there are congruent options, but the impact of left-right distances on voters' abstention is smaller than thought and it is heavily affected by the disproportionality of the electoral systems. Their estimates of party positions

though were based on expert survey data, so the distances they calculated do not take into account the fact that individuals' perceptions might differ from those of the experts.

Studies of individual turnout in multilevel systems also lack empirical evidence about the effects of left-right distances. However, according to recent research, regional branches of state-wide parties might see electoral benefits when deviating from the official guidelines of the party at the national level in order to get closer to the position of their regional electorate (Müller 2013; Alonso, Cabeza, and Gómez 2015; Klingelhöfer 2016; Baumann, Debus, and Klingelhöfer 2017) or, similarly, parties show a more pro-European profile if the region has received more European funds (Gross and Debus 2018). Nevertheless, in all these works it has generally been assumed that congruence encourages participation in multilevel systems but this has not yet been tested.

Ideological congruence and turnout in multilevel systems

In multilevel systems, national politics often contaminates other arenas (Cabeza 2018, 29) and, as a result of this, citizens think that the most important issues are decided at the national level (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Consequently, voters whose political participation is motivated by their policy preferences could see the national parliament as a more relevant actor than a regional one. Moreover, national politicians are usually more salient in media than those involved in regional and local politics, which makes citizens understand not only that in this arena there is more at stake, but also this prominence of national politics provides individuals with more and better information about what parties offer for general elections and what the social consequences of their electoral behaviour are likely to be. Overall, in comparison with a regional vote, one might expect that ideological congruence between citizens and party supply would be a better predictor of turnout in national elections.

Nevertheless, as decentralization becomes more widespread, at least in Western Europe, there are more voices drawing attention to the necessity of studying regional politics on its own terms and not as a lower-ranking arena for national politics (Golder et al. 2017). This also includes the necessity of estimating the relevance of ideological congruence between individuals and parties.

Similarly to what recent studies on European elections have shown on how the current greater influence of the European Union has been followed by an increase of the relevance of European issues for voting behaviour (de Vries 2010; de Vries and Hobolt 2016), scholars of regional elections are drawing attention to how national factors might be less relevant predictors of political behaviour at the regional level than they were decades ago. With countries being more decentralised and regional institutions becoming more powerful, citizens experiencing decentralisation for several years are much more aware of how decisions are taken at different levels of government and how the distribution of competences between state and sub-state governments has a differential impact on their daily lives (León 2012). Thus, the pre-eminence of national elections is much more disputed the more that decentralisation advances and there are more citizens who make their electoral decision based on level-specific considerations (Cabeza 2018).

Also, in subnational elections parties can better address citizens' demands because they appeal to a smaller and more homogeneous electorate than in national elections. Even in the case of large regions, parties can be more specific about their policies and focus on the most important issues for the voters of that region. According to this argument, the geographic concentration of voters' policy preferences is a factor that determines not only individual electoral behaviour but also party supply (Jurado 2014; Jurado and León 2019; Falcó-Gimeno 2018). Thus, citizens seeking policy representation could find it easier to assess their relative ideological distance from the parties competing in regional elections and would have a better

understanding of the consequences of their decision to participate or abstain. In line with this, citizens also evaluate the chances they have to influence more directly those policies that affect them. In sub-national ballots the probability of a single vote being decisive for the electoral outcome is still very tiny, although higher than in national elections. However, it could happen that elections in lower-level chambers are more proportional due to the effects of differences in size of different districts. As an example, one party might be very influential in a regional parliament while having very little or no representation at all in the national parliament. This way, a citizen casting a vote to select her representatives for the regional chamber might think that the chances of making her voice heard are higher than in national elections where it is more difficult due to the rules of seat allocation. According to this, there is evidence about how disproportionality makes ideological congruence between voters and parties less relevant for turnout (Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego 2014). Building on all these considerations, I have formulated the following hypothesis:

H1: Ideological congruence affects turnout in regional elections just as much as in national elections.

The relevance of parties' priorities

The menu of choices in regional and national elections is not the same. Those parties competing in both arenas target their policy aims at different groups in each process (Falcó-Gimeno and Verge 2013; Falcó-Gimeno 2018; Jurado 2014). In this case, in national elections parties appeal to a broader audience in order to mobilize as many voters as possible, while in sub-national elections their policy offer might prioritize local concerns over national policies. This means that parties also consider which issues to emphasize in order to maximize their appeal to the greatest possible number of voters and this does not necessarily mean that they change their ideological stances. Also, it could be the case that an individual is equally distant

from two parties who pursue different policy aims. Then, she has more incentives to vote if there is an ideologically congruent alternative which also pays attention to issues that are most important to her (Reher 2016).

In multi-level systems, there is a trade-off between national and regional policy preferences. Regionalist parties target regional demands and include them in their policy aims. By way of contrast, nationwide parties and, more specifically, parties in the national government have a more geographically diffuse support and, moreover, they are more limited by their political activity in the first-order arena (Heller 2002, 658). Thus, the extent to which ideological proximity between individuals and parties affects turnout might also be moderated by the policy aims which the parties target. This way, in the case of national elections, citizens can better anticipate the social consequences and policy implications of the electoral outcome if the party which is ideologically closest to them has been part of the national government and this political party then tries to get re-elected by appealing to a larger electorate and addressing the most important concerns of the national electorate. Because of this, I hypothesize:

H2a: The impact of ideological congruence on individual turnout in national elections increases if the most ideologically proximate party is in national government at the time of the elections.

Similarly, regional voters have more incentives to vote if the main concerns of the regional community are addressed by the competing parties. In this respect, regionalist parties make regional issues more salient and are more likely to have influence in a regional parliament than in a national one. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2b: In regional elections, the impact of left-right proximity on the individual utility of turning out increases if the most ideologically proximate party is a regionalist party.

Ideological congruence, turnout and the degree of devolution

So far I have discussed the reasons why ideological congruence between voters and parties might have a differential impact on turnout depending on the tier of government. However, not all countries have achieved the same level of decentralisation, and neither do all regions enjoy the same degree of self-rule. This means that what is at stake does not depend exclusively in resolving whether regional politics are subordinate or not to national politics (Jeffery and Hough 2003:211). There are regions with more competences and autonomy than others and, consequently, there are territories in which regional institutions are more salient and more meaningful for citizens. Because what is at stake in regional elections depends on the balance of self-rule and shared-rule authority exercised by regional governments (Schakel and Jeffery 2013, 335), it could also be argued that the effects of party supply on electoral participation depend on the degree of decentralisation of the region, meaning that in less devolved territories the extent to which parties adapt their offer to the region is less an incentive to vote because citizens would be less concerned about regional issues as subnational institutions are less relevant to their lives. Something similar would happen in national elections in territories with a high degree of self-rule where regional institutions are more important. This can be hypothesized as follows:

H3: Individual turnout in regional elections compared to national elections is less (more) affected by perceived political stances of parties in less (more) devolved regions than in territories with more (less) self-government.

Case selection

Because variability in the characteristics of the regions and in the degree of decentralisation is needed to test these expectations, I focus on the case of Spain, a country with territorial

heterogeneity, subnational communities with national traits, and diverse patterns of decentralisation (Vall-Prat and Rodon 2017) . Spanish regional institutions have a high degree of authority and several regionalist parties have seats in the national parliament, and others even compete with state-wide parties also in territories without distinct identities (Pallarés and Keating 2003; Hooghe et al. 2016). Spain is “something akin to a multiparty federal democracy” (Heller 2002, 658) whose Constitution, approved in 1978, set the paths by which the Spanish *Comunidades Autónomas* could have access to different degrees of self-rule. According to this, Andalusia plus the historic regions¹ (Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia and Navarre) had a fast-track to self-government that allowed them to experience devolution before the other 12 Spanish regions. The process of decentralization in Spain is very flexible and produces asymmetries between regions because it is based on bilateral negotiations between central and regional governments according to which competences can be transferred from the state to the sub-state level or they can even be recentralized (Falcó-Gimeno 2014; Vall-Prat and Rodon 2017). Differences between Spanish regions in the number and nature of the competences transferred to them allow assessments on how citizens in somewhat decentralised compared to highly decentralised territories might behave differently in respect to their participation in national and regional elections (see e.g., León 2011; 2012; 2014).

Data and methods

The Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (*CIS*) collects data regularly after each regional and national election and these datasets have been publicly available since 1996. From these, I selected and recoded post-electoral surveys of 53 regional processes that included questions about individual left-right self-placement and perceived ideological positions of parties

¹ The historic regions are historical nationalities with a distinct culture and language. In this case I have also included in this group Navarre, which is not recognized as an historic region in the Constitution, but which is often included in this group (Vall-Prat and Rodon 2017, 729).

competing in each of the regional elections and then pooled them into a single database. This database includes individual-level data from two regional elections in Andalusia², four regional elections in Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, and three in all the remaining territories covering the period between 2005 and 2016. Similarly, I pooled into a single dataset the post-electoral surveys of the national elections of 2004, 2008, 2011 and 2015. These datasets were selected based on the availability of the required questions and with the aim of covering the broadest timeframe possible. This way, I have two datasets to work with: one with data from 53 regional elections in 17 regions with a total of 50,229 observations, and a dataset with four national elections with representative samples for all 17 regions and with 19,970 observations.³

As this paper deals with the question of to what extent turnout is affected by ideological distances between individuals and parties, the dependent variable here is a dichotomous variable covering reported electoral participation. The main explanatory variable is ideological congruence between an individual and the political parties competing in the election. Here I follow the definition of congruence used by Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego (2014, 296) where congruence C_{ij} is the absolute distance between an individual's left-right self-placement P_j (1-10) and the perceived position of the party P_{ij} (1-10). For a better understanding, this value is multiplied by -1. Thus, the more congruent, the closer to 0:

$$C_{ij} = -\min|P_j - P_{ij}|$$

It has to be noted that there could be more than one party equidistant from a respondent's position, so for each individual there might be more than one party considered as "the closest party". Also, those individuals who reported their left-right self-placement but could not

² In the case of Andalusia, regional elections held in 2008 and 2004 took place at the same time as the national elections and the questions concerning the perceived ideological positions of political parties refer to the national level only. For this reason, I did not include data from these two regional studies.

³ The final datasets that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon request.

locate on the scale any political party received the highest score of incongruence (-9) because it could be argued that these citizens are completely alienated from or indifferent to the electoral menu⁴. This strategy however, conveys a problem: citizens who did not vote for other reasons than the party supply are likely to say their behaviour was due to the lack of ideologically congruent options. To solve this issue and as a robustness check, all tests were replicated after excluding those cases whose congruence scores were less than -5.

To measure the type of closest party (i.e. the most congruent with an individual's ideology) I defined a dummy variable that scores 1 when it is a party in the national government and 0 if it is not part of the national executive. Also, another dichotomous variable identifies whether the closest party is a regionalist party or not.

While these would be the main explanatory variables, I also included in the analyses whether or not the individual has a radical ideology, that is, whether she locates herself on the extreme ends of the ideological scale (positions 1-2 and 9-10)⁵. As control variables I considered socio-demographic characteristics that might affect individual political participation such as gender, age, education and occupational status⁶.

I hypothesized that the degree of self-governance of a region would affect the impact of ideological stances on turnout at both regional and national levels, therefore, analyses include macro level variables that capture the level of decentralisation. Although the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al. 2016) is widely accepted as an indicator of how devolved a territory is, I am not using it here, firstly because the last available data is for 2010 while this

⁴ As a robustness check, analyses were replicated without these individuals who despite placing themselves on the ideological scale did not locate any political party and results did not significantly change.

⁵ The reason to pay attention to ideological extremism is that Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego (2014) showed that extremist citizens participate more when there are viable congruent options.

⁶ Gender is measured by a dummy variable that takes value 0 when male and 1 when female. Education is also a dichotomous variable and takes value 1 when the respondent has higher education and 0 if not. Occupational status is measured by a dummy that scores 1 when the individual is unemployed and 0 otherwise. Finally, age is included as a continuous variable together with its squared term. More information about the variables can be found in tables A.1. and A.2. in the Appendix.

research includes elections until 2016 and, secondly because there is only a small variability in the scores for Spanish regions as all of them have a high degree of self-rule, they can claim their authority on several political issues in their Statutes of Autonomy and this makes them score similarly on the ten different dimensions that are taken into account in the Regional Authority Index. For these reasons, I use other measures that better reflect the territorial heterogeneity of Spain. Because decentralisation refers mainly to a region's economic capacity and policy domains under the rule of regional governments (Vall-Prat and Rodon 2017, 721) and the policies with the greatest impact on citizens daily lives are those related to their welfare, I include as a macro level variable the number of transferred competences from the state to the region relating to education, health, environmental and social policies. This is an important measure because regional authority in Spain is enhanced by transfers of competences from the central government as the result of bilateral negotiations between the national and the subnational executives (Falcó-Gimeno 2014, 209). To gauge the size of the economic capacity of the territory, I use the regional budget per capita of the region. Data on these two variables were obtained from the dataset created by Falcó-Gimeno (2014) and completed by Vall-Prat and Rodón (2017).

Finally, as the dependent variable is dichotomous, I run logistic multilevel regression models with interactions between the main individual predictors, cross-level interactions with the macro level variables and varying intercepts for elections (that is, a dyad of region and year of the election). This strategy of analysis responds to the hierarchical structure of the data and to the expected variability in turnout between elections due to factors not included in the models (see Gelman and Hill 2006). Each of these three models is run with each of the two datasets (national and regional). The novelty here is that in the case of the national elections I consider the region also as a unit of analysis, so observations are grouped by year of the elections and also by the region in which the respondent lives.

Analysis

The aim of this research is to disentangle the role played by ideological congruence on turnout in multilevel systems. Based on aggregate data, researchers have held opposite views about the individual motivations that lead citizens to cast a vote in regional elections. Figures 1 and 2 show that citizens who vote usually find congruent choices among the electoral menu⁷.

There is however more variance in the congruence of those who abstain in national elections than in the case of non-voters in regional elections. This could evidence a higher level of alienation or indifference towards political parties at the national level or, as this figure only shows the mean of each group and its 95% confidence interval, the result of a biased sample⁸.

⁷ See also figures A.1. and A.2. in the Appendix with results for only those individuals whose congruence scores are between -5 and 0.

⁸ It must be noted that samples in national studies from the regions in which the confidence intervals of those who reported their abstention are wider- these are La Rioja, Murcia and Navarre- are smaller.

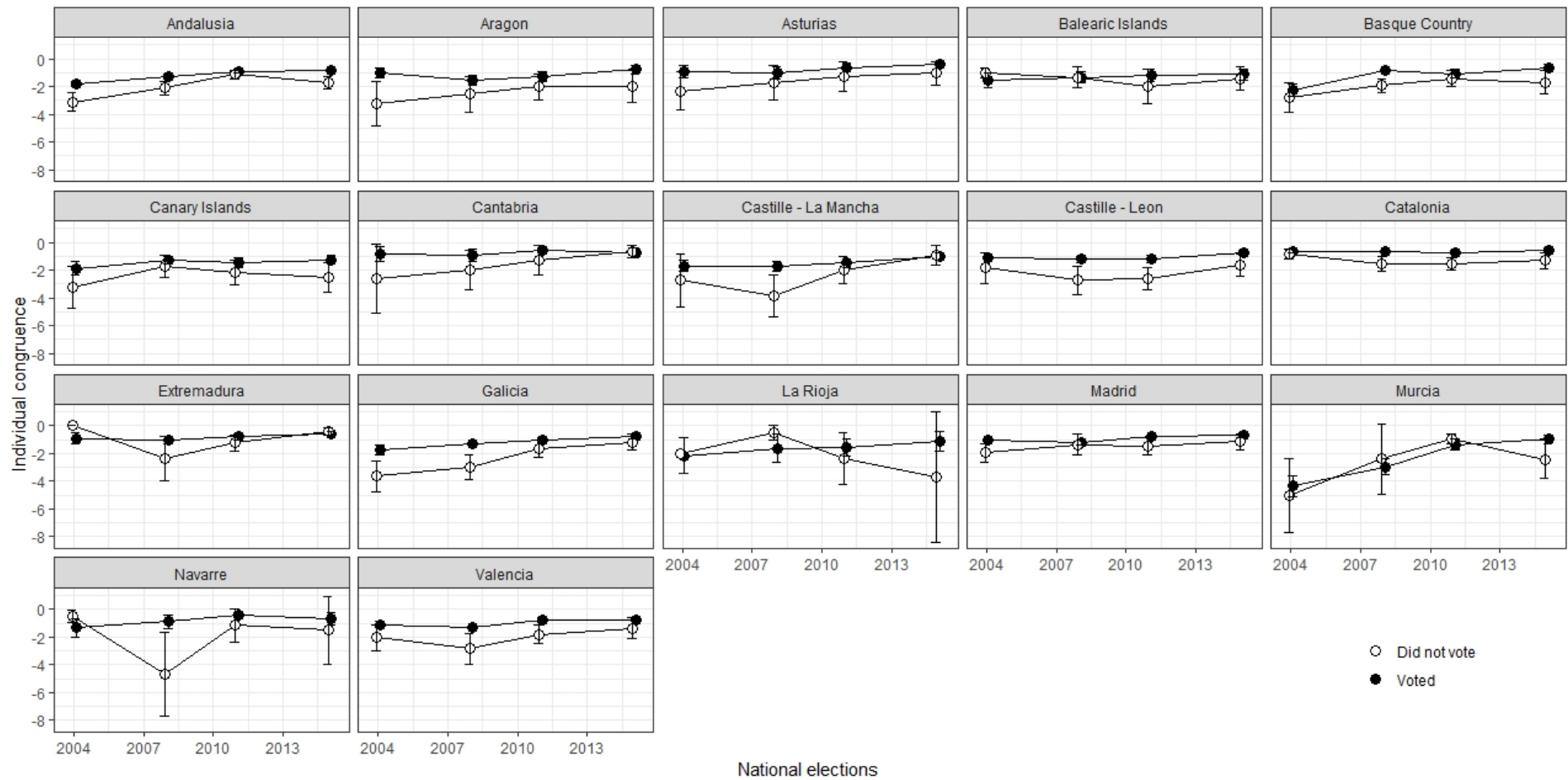


Figure 1. Citizens perceived distance to closest party by electoral participation in national elections

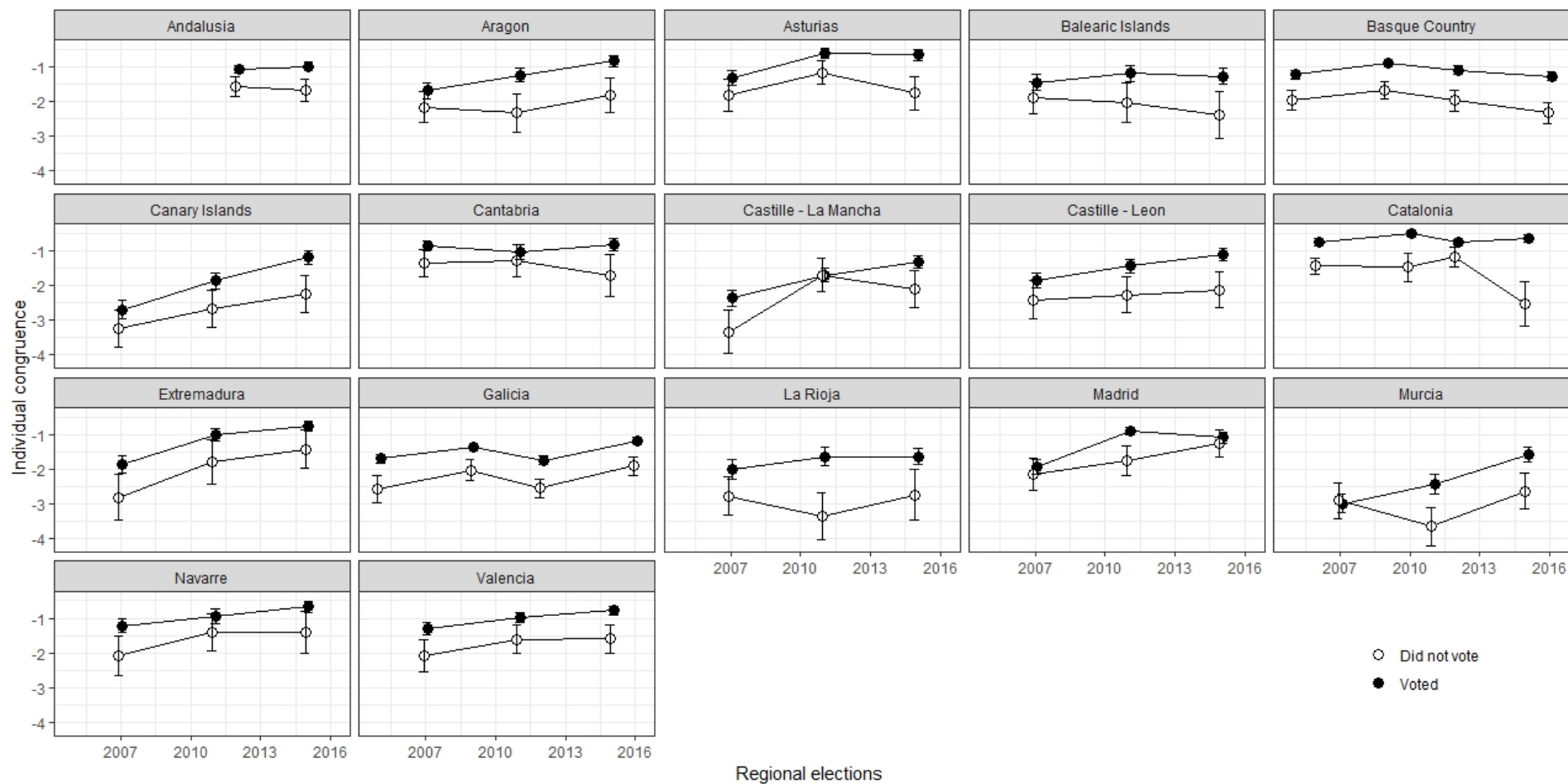


Figure 2. Citizens' perceived distance to closest party by electoral participation in regional elections.

In regional elections, with few exceptions, distances between citizens who did not vote and their perceived closest party are higher than in the case of those who participated in the elections. On average, citizens who vote perceive political parties as less distant than those who abstain. Although this basic preliminary analysis is already pointing to the existence of a link between congruence and turnout, it is also an invitation for a more refined assessment of this relationship.

Table 1 presents the results of the multilevel analysis. To test the effects of ideological proximity between the individual and the perceived closest party on turnout, I first ran a model which included control and main explanatory variables (models 1 and 2) separately for each of the datasets (national and regional). Then I included the interaction terms between ideological congruence and the variables on the type of closest party and ideological extremism of the respondent (models 3 and 4). Looking at them, it is worth highlighting that the coefficients for both regional and national elections are very similar. Basically, sociodemographic characteristics have almost the same impact on turnout in both national and sub-national electoral processes and all of them reach standard levels of statistical significance.

Table 1. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence	0.12*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.00)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.00)
Extreme ideology			0.28** (0.09)	0.42*** (0.05)
Closest party in national government			-0.16* (0.07)	-0.08* (0.04)
Closest party: Regionalist			0.10 (0.09)	0.20*** (0.04)
Congruence X extreme ideology			0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.01)

Congruence X closest party in national government			0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party			0.15* (0.07)	0.20*** (0.03)
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)
Age ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.05 (0.05)	0.06* (0.03)	0.05 (0.05)	0.06* (0.03)
Higher education	0.39*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.04)	0.38*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.04)
Unemployed	-0.37*** (0.06)	-0.37*** (0.04)	-0.37*** (0.06)	-0.38*** (0.04)
(Intercept)	0.42* (0.17)	0.04 (0.10)	0.44* (0.17)	-0.05 (0.10)
AIC	12729.26	41210.59	12710.78	40931.45
BIC	12792.48	41281.18	12821.41	41054.96
Log Likelihood	-6356.63	-20597.29	-6341.39	-20451.72
Num. obs.	19970	50229	19970	50113
Num. groups: election	68	53	68	53
Var: election (Intercept)	0.16	0.08	0.17	0.08

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded “1” if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and “0” otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

According to these results, there is no evidence to reject the first hypothesis because ideological congruence between individual self-placement and parties’ perceived positions predicts turnout in both regional and national elections. These results are robust because this association remains significant also in analyses including only observations with scores of congruence equal to or higher than -5⁹. What is more, compared to models including citizens whose perceived distance to the closest party is equal to or more than 6 points on the left-right scale, ideological proximity makes turnout even more likely in models containing only

⁹ See models in table A.3. in the Appendix.

observations within a regular range of congruence. Also as a robustness check analyses were replicated without including data from the historic regions whose strong regional identity and their special access to competences granted in the Constitution could have affected the results. These analyses without the historic regions, though, do not show significant changes¹⁰.

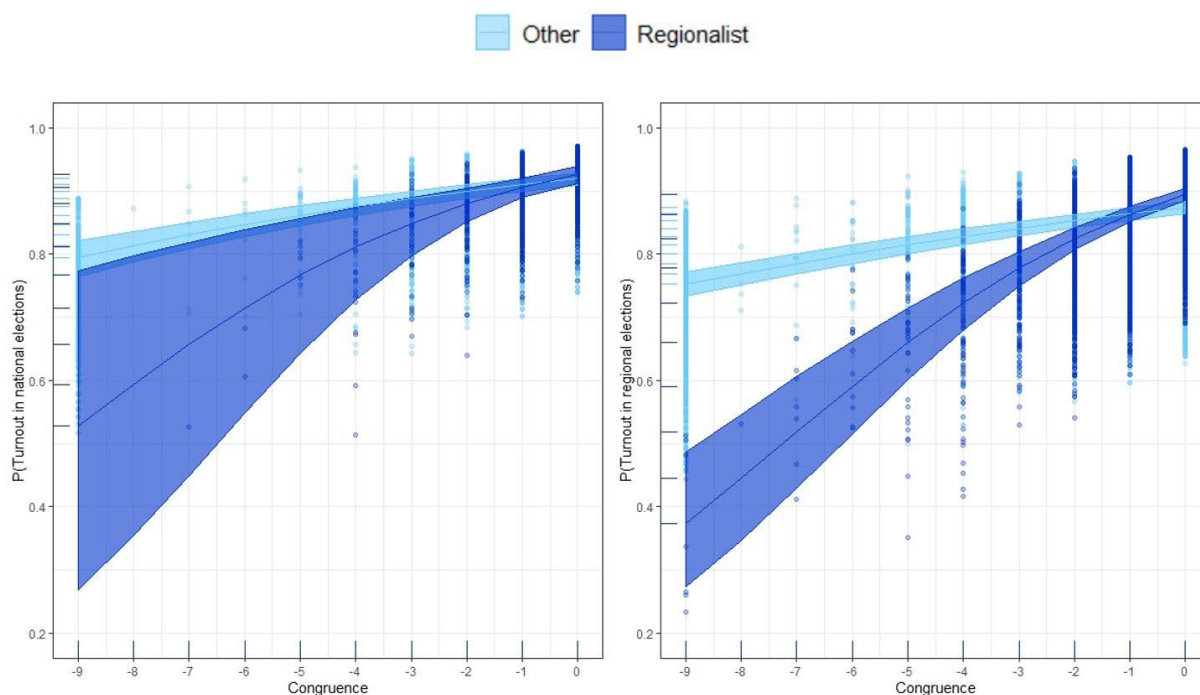
The results in respect of hypotheses H2a and H2b require more discussion. Individuals whose most proximate party is in the national executive would be less likely to participate but their probability of turning out is higher in regional elections. However, the interaction with congruence of having as your closest party one in national government does not reach standards of statistical significance, hence it can be stated that the effect of this factor does not change depending on the distance between the individual and their closest party. This evidence drives us to reject hypothesis H2a. When turning our attention to the effects of having a regionalist party as the closest party, the picture changes. In this case, it can be said that the effect on turnout of having as the least distant party a regionalist one depends heavily on ideological congruence.

Because the interpretation of interactions in logistic regressions can be tricky (see Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006) I calculated the predicted probabilities of turnout for each context depending on congruence and the type of closest party. Figure 3 shows how, for general elections, the confidence intervals for individuals whose least distant party is a regionalist one and for others whose most proximate party is not a regionalist one slightly overlap. This means that in both cases individuals have a similar probability of turning out. In the case of regional elections (on the right), the probability of voting by those whose closest party is a regionalist party would be heavily determined by policy congruence between the individual and the political party. A citizen who perceives as her closest party a regionalist one but still finds its ideology as very distant – that means more than 5 points of distance on the 1-10

¹⁰ See models in table A.4. in the Appendix.

ideological scale – has a lower likelihood of participating in the regional elections than someone whose preferred party is not a regionalist one. However, when a voter perceives their closest party is a regionalist party and this is seen as less than 2 points on the ideological scale away from her position – i.e. a regionalist party is, in terms of distances, the closest party and it is completely or almost completely congruent with the citizen's position– the probability of voting is higher than in the case of an individual with full congruence with a non-regionalist party.

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of turnout by ideological congruence by type of party in national (left panel) and regional (right panel) elections.



Note: Estimates are based on the third and fourth multilevel logistic regression models presented in table 1. Adjusted predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals.

Altogether, in the case of regional elections, when the closest party is a regionalist party, the effect of congruence on turnout is more relevant. Then the probability of a citizen going to the ballot box will increase significantly if there is an option that is congruent with her policy preferences. However, it is worth mentioning that these results do not change when removing

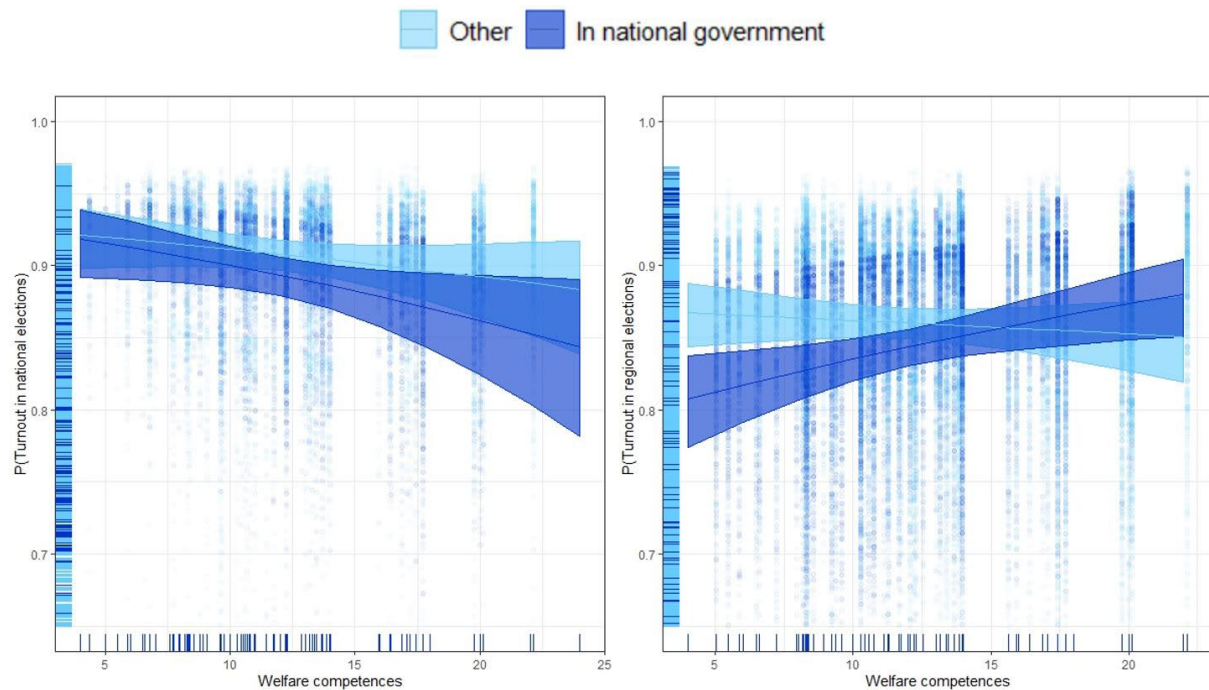
cases of extreme incongruence but the significance of the closest party being a regionalist disappears if historic regions are excluded from the analysis.

I also hypothesised that the effect of congruence on turnout might be altered by the degree of economic and political decentralisation (H3). With the aim of assessing how political and economic capacities of the region might affect the association between a citizen's ideological distance to the electoral menu and their probability to vote, I included separately in the models, together with their interactions with the variables of ideological congruence and type of closest party, two variables: one with the number of regional competences in relation to welfare and, in a different model, one with the regional budget per capita¹¹. Surprisingly and for both regional and national scenarios, considering these regional characteristics does not significantly change the results of the previous analyses and, no matter the degree of decentralisation of the region, the higher the distance from the available parties, the more likely it is that citizens abstain. However, again there are some interesting findings related to the type of closest party that deserve further clarification. As shown in Figure 4, in regional elections if the closest party is in national government the probability of voting increases with the competences connected to welfare of the region. Moreover, in regions with less self-rule citizens are more likely to vote if the closest party is not in national government, but the likelihood of voting when the most proximate party is in the national government increases the more that the regional government is responsible for welfare policy. Similar results apply when assessing the economic capacity of the region. Nevertheless, this is not the case for national elections in which citizens whose most congruent option is in national government are not significantly different from those with other preferences and, despite the overlap of the

¹¹ See models in Table A.5. in the Appendix.

two confidence intervals, the slope is negative indicating a slightly opposite relationship between closeness to a party in government, advanced decentralisation and turnout.

Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of turnout by welfare competences of the region by type of closest party in national (left panel) and regional (right panel) elections.



Note: Estimates are based on the first and second multilevel logistic regression models presented in table A.3. Adjusted predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals.

This way, I have shown that higher ideological congruence increases the probability of voting in both national and regional elections, but also these analyses lead us to think that citizens' motivations to vote in regional elections in less devolved territories might respond more to national dynamics. In regions with less self-rule, the probability for individuals to turn out and vote with the same distance to the closest party will increase if this is a party of the national opposition. When there is "less at stake", citizens are more likely to vote if there is a policy congruent option that, in addition, is not in national government. On the contrary, in regions with higher autonomy, voters' regional turnout does not depend on the role played in

national politics by the less distant actor but only on the policy offer of the electoral menu. Thus, in regions with a greater amount of self-rule, individuals would behave similarly in national and regional elections, while in less devolved territories what drives citizens to vote would be more affected by national politics¹².

Conclusions

This research has explored how perceived ideological distances between citizens and political parties affect electoral turnout in multilevel systems. Results discussed in this paper provide empirical evidence of how the electoral menu at regional and national levels is not irrelevant when it comes to mobilizing voters to go to the ballot boxes. In preparing this paper I used individual level data from regional and national surveys that were gathered, harmonised and pooled in two datasets. This allowed me to approach important questions for researchers of elections in multilevel systems that, until now, have not been tested. The strategy followed here responds to the demands of those researchers of regional elections that emphasized the necessity of studying regional politics on its own terms and not as a lower rank arena of national politics. All in all, despite the abundant literature on the topic, there is no other research with individual-survey data on the impact of ideological proximity on electoral participation in both national and regional arenas.

Beyond the merits of the methodology, the analysis presented here provides support for a refinement of traditional models on the calculus of voting and theories of electoral behaviour in regional and national elections. First, it has been shown that the policy offer at the regional

¹² While these results remain accurate for the case of analysis without extreme incongruence (See table A.6. in the Appendix), this is not the case when historic regions are not included (See table A.7. in the Appendix). However, it must be noted that these are the Spanish regions with more competences and higher regional budget per capita so excluding these from the analysis implies using a sample that does not contain the most devolved regions.

level affects citizens' utility of vote. This, at least, might be the case for highly devolved territories as the one studied here. Thus, whether citizens find a social utility of voting in different tiers of government and whether the reasons that drive them to do so are the ones discussed in the theory presented here requires more empirical evidence. Second, further research on this topic will have to consider not only that citizens are more likely to abstain if parties are perceived to be too distant from their position or if they disagree with or are indifferent to parties' ideologies. Future analyses on the impact of congruence on vote should also include the role played by the closest party at the different levels of government because this research has shown that in multilevel systems this might even moderate the effect of congruence on turnout.

One of the limitations of the study however is that, despite the territorial heterogeneity of Spain, results shown here draw upon a single country. All Spanish regions have a high degree of autonomy and citizens have lived in a decentralised state long enough to be aware of the importance of regional institutions. Because the empirical evidence provided here suggests that there is a differential effect of ideological congruence on turnout depending on the degree of self-rule of the region, further research should consider replicating this research using data from territories with a low degree of regional autonomy. Equally, a similar analysis of a decentralised country with territorial homogeneity would contribute towards clarifying whether the calculations citizens make before deciding to vote or to abstain are based on their policy preferences and the level-specific supply of parties, or whether this decision is made to balance what is going on at other levels. In any case, this research should contribute to overcoming traditional assumptions on the subordination of regional elections to national issues and be a step towards a better understanding of citizens' electoral behaviour in multilevel systems.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Descriptive statistics of selected variables: National elections

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Turnout	19,970	0.896	0.305	0	1
Congruence	19,970	-1.167	2.338	-9	0
Closest party in national government	19,970	0.339	0.473	0	1
Closest party: Regionalist	19,970	0.152	0.359	0	1
Extreme ideology	19,970	0.133	0.339	0	1
Regional welfare competences (x100)	19,970	13.342	4.150	4.370	22.140
Regional budget per capita (x100€)	19,970	41.197	13.201	5.052	84.435
Age	19,970	47.358	17.505	18	99
Age ²	19,970	2,549.181	1,777.858	324	9,801
Gender	19,970	0.500	0.500	0	1
Higher education	19,970	0.196	0.397	0	1
Unemployed	19,970	0.139	0.346	0	1

Table A.2. Descriptive statistics of selected variables: Regional elections

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Turnout	50,229	0.845	0.362	0	1
Congruence	50,229	-1.413	2.649	-9	0
Closest party in national government	50,229	0.308	0.462	0	1
Closest party: Regionalist	50,113	0.279	0.449	0.000	1.000
Extreme ideology	50,229	0.132	0.339	0	1
Regional welfare competences (x100)	50,229	12.735	4.255	5.020	22.140
Regional budget per capita (x100€)	50,229	42.713	12.653	5.052	86.317
Age	50,229	47.759	17.480	18	99
Age ²	50,229	2,586.508	1,791.557	324	9,801
Gender	50,229	0.494	0.500	0	1
Higher education	50,229	0.183	0.387	0	1
Unemployed	50,229	0.133	0.339	0	1

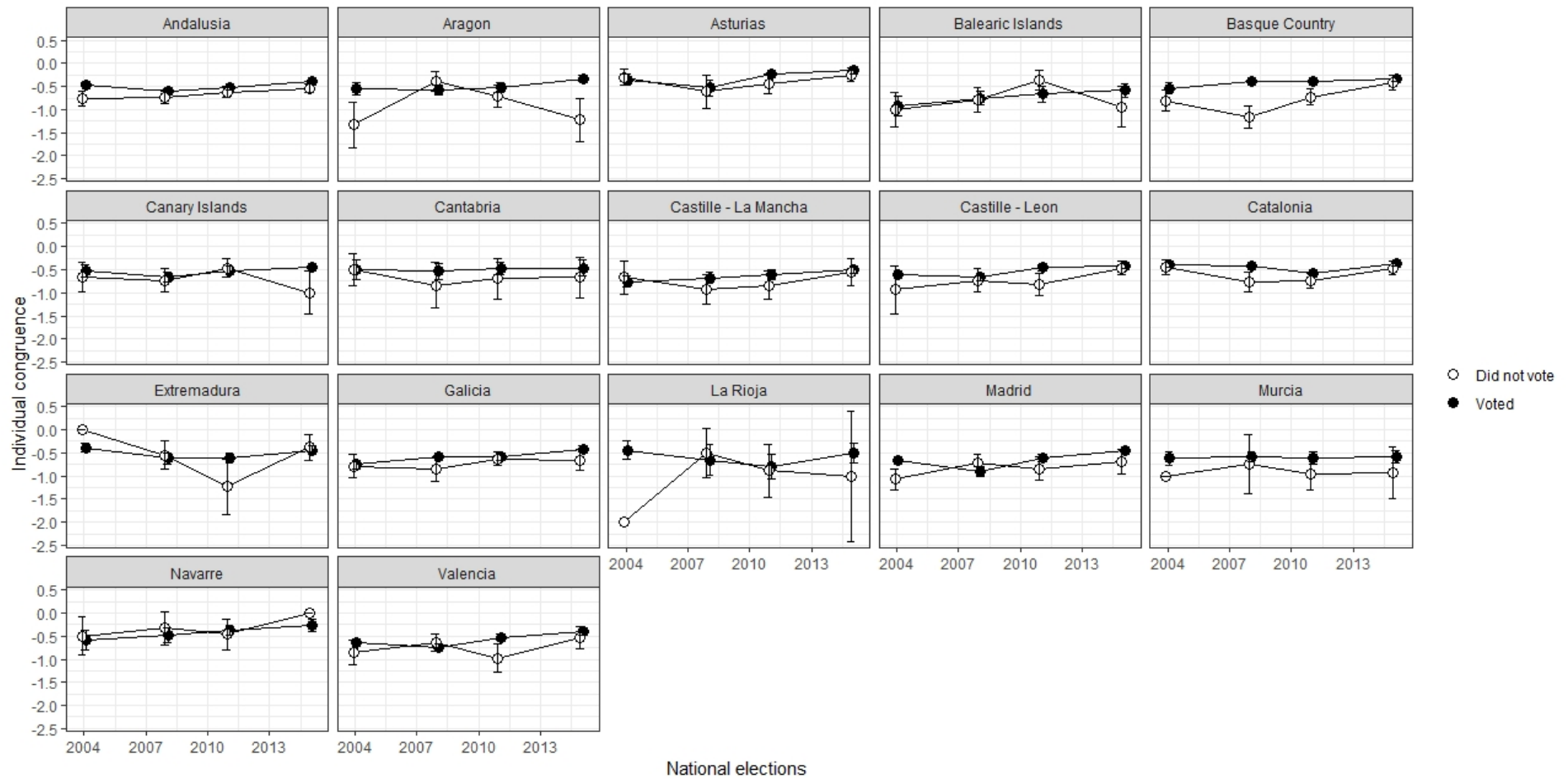


Figure A.1. Citizens perceived distance to closest party by electoral participation in national elections. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0.

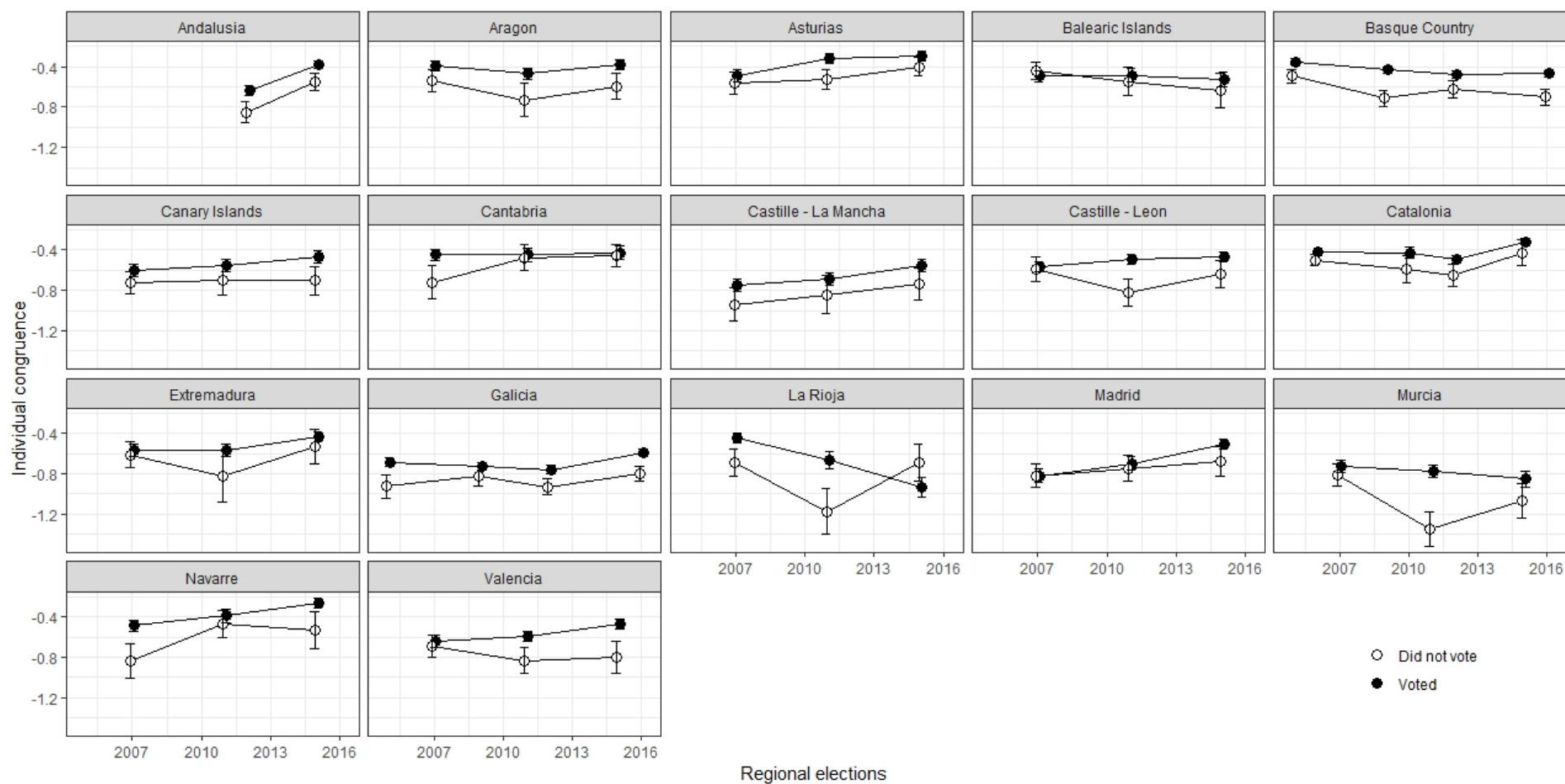


Figure A.2. Citizens perceived distance to closest party by electoral participation in regional elections. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0.

Table A.3. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0.

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence (-5 to 0)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.05)	0.24*** (0.03)
Extreme ideology			0.34*** (0.10)	0.41*** (0.06)
Closest party in national government			-0.26*** (0.07)	-0.13*** (0.04)
Closest party: Regionalist			0.01 (0.09)	0.16*** (0.04)
Congruence X extreme ideology			0.08 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.04)
Congruence X closest party in national government			-0.15* (0.06)	-0.08* (0.03)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party			0.00 (0.08)	0.13*** (0.04)
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)
Age ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.01 (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.03)
Higher education	0.41*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.04)	0.40*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.04)
Unemployed	-0.32*** (0.07)	-0.36*** (0.04)	-0.33*** (0.07)	-0.37*** (0.04)
(Intercept)	0.46* (0.18)	0.15 (0.11)	0.49** (0.18)	0.07 (0.11)
AIC	11313.24	35692.24	11294.54	35457.15
BIC	11375.84	35761.98	11404.09	35579.16
Log Likelihood	-5648.62	-17838.12	-5633.27	-17714.58
Num. obs.	18483	45138	18483	45022
Num. groups: election	68	53	68	53
Var: election (Intercept)	0.15	0.08	0.16	0.09

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded "1" if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and "0" otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table A.4. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0. Historic regions not included in the analysis.

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence (-5 to 0)	0.22*** (0.04)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.33*** (0.05)	0.26*** (0.03)
Extreme ideology			0.42** (0.14)	0.41*** (0.09)
Closest party in national government			-0.29*** (0.08)	-0.23*** (0.05)
Closest party: Regionalist			-0.33 (0.19)	0.08 (0.07)
Congruence X extreme ideology			-0.05 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.06)
Congruence X closest party in national government			-0.19* (0.07)	-0.10* (0.04)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party			-0.21 (0.17)	0.11 (0.07)
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
Age ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.06)	0.04 (0.04)
Higher education	0.42*** (0.09)	0.33*** (0.05)	0.41*** (0.09)	0.32*** (0.05)
Unemployed	-0.34*** (0.08)	-0.32*** (0.05)	-0.34*** (0.08)	-0.32*** (0.05)
(Intercept)	0.51* (0.22)	-0.01 (0.14)	0.59** (0.22)	0.03 (0.14)
AIC	7684.37	18784.10	7660.33	18723.93
BIC	7744.28	18848.79	7765.18	18837.14
Log Likelihood	-3834.18	-9384.05	-3816.16	-9347.97
Num. obs.	13221	24017	13221	24017
Num. groups: election	52	38	52	38
Var: election (Intercept)	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.05

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded "1" if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and "0" otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table A.5. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections, including cross-level interactions with regional competences on welfare and regional budget per capita.

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence	0.10*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.02)
Extreme ideology	0.28** (0.09)	0.40*** (0.05)	0.28** (0.09)	0.40*** (0.05)
Closest party in national government	0.04 (0.19)	-0.54*** (0.10)	0.14 (0.19)	-0.43*** (0.11)
Closest party: Regionalist	-0.14 (0.27)	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.02 (0.29)	-0.04 (0.11)
Regional welfare competences	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)		
Congruence X extreme ideology	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.01)
Congruence X closest party in national government	0.02 (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party	0.14* (0.07)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.14* (0.07)	0.20*** (0.03)
Congruence X regional welfare competences	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party regionalist	0.02 (0.02)	0.02* (0.01)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party in national government	-0.02 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)		
Regional budget per capita			-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Congruence X regional budget per capita			0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Regional budget per capita X closest party regionalist			0.00 (0.01)	0.01* (0.00)
Regional budget per capita X closest party in national government			-0.01 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)
Age ²	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***

	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.05	0.06*	0.05	0.06*
	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)
Higher education	0.38***	0.35***	0.38***	0.35***
	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.04)
Unemployed	-0.36***	-0.38***	-0.37***	-0.38***
	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)
(Intercept)	0.67*	0.04	0.51	-0.11
	(0.26)	(0.17)	(0.26)	(0.18)

AIC	12713.05	40904.22	12714.52	40917.70
BIC	12855.28	41063.01	12856.76	41076.49
Log Likelihood	-6338.52	-20434.11	-6339.26	-20440.85
Num. obs.	19970	50113	19970	50113
Num. groups: election	68	53	68	53
Var: election (Intercept)	0.15	0.08	0.16	0.08

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded “1” if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and “0” otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Table A.6. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections, including cross-level interactions with regional competences on welfare and regional budget per capita. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0.

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence (-5 to 0)	0.36*** (0.10)	0.24*** (0.06)	0.43*** (0.10)	0.19** (0.06)
Extreme ideology	0.35*** (0.10)	0.39*** (0.06)	0.34*** (0.10)	0.39*** (0.06)
Closest party in national government	-0.07 (0.20)	-0.60*** (0.10)	0.06 (0.20)	-0.52*** (0.11)
Closest party: Regionalist	-0.19 (0.28)	-0.07 (0.11)	-0.02 (0.30)	-0.16 (0.12)
Regional welfare competences	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)		
Congruence X extreme ideology	0.08 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.07 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.04)
Congruence X closest party in national government	-0.15* (0.06)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.14* (0.06)	-0.08* (0.03)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party	0.01 (0.08)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.01 (0.08)	0.13*** (0.04)
Congruence X regional welfare competences	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party regionalist	0.01 (0.02)	0.02* (0.01)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party in national government	-0.01 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)		
Regional budget per capita			-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Congruence X regional budget per capita			-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Regional budget per capita X closest party regionalist			0.00 (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)
Regional budget per capita X closest party in national government			-0.01 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)

Age ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.03)
Higher education	0.40*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.04)	0.40*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.04)
Unemployed	-0.32*** (0.07)	-0.37*** (0.04)	-0.33*** (0.07)	-0.37*** (0.04)
(Intercept)	0.80** (0.27)	0.16 (0.17)	0.61* (0.27)	0.01 (0.18)
AIC	11297.08	35435.96	11297.15	35441.44
BIC	11437.92	35592.83	11438.00	35598.31
Log Likelihood	-5630.54	-17699.98	-5630.58	-17702.72
Num. obs.	18483	45022	18483	45022
Num. groups: election	68	53	68	53
Var: election (Intercept)	0.14	0.08	0.15	0.08

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded “1” if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and “0” otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Table A.7. Determinants of individual turnout in national (models 1 and 3) and regional (models 2 and 4) elections, including cross-level interactions with regional competences on welfare and regional budget per capita. Observations with ideological congruence from -5 to 0. Historic regions not included in the analysis.

	National (1)	Regional (2)	National (3)	Regional (4)
Congruence (-5 to 0)	0.37** (0.13)	0.15 (0.08)	0.51*** (0.13)	0.16 (0.09)
Extreme ideology	0.42** (0.14)	0.41*** (0.09)	0.42** (0.14)	0.41*** (0.09)
Closest party in national government	-0.16 (0.24)	-0.34** (0.13)	0.04 (0.24)	-0.63*** (0.15)
Closest party: Regionalist	-0.88 (0.49)	-0.04 (0.18)	0.13 (0.80)	-0.39 (0.25)
Regional welfare competences	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)		
Congruence X extreme ideology	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.06)
Congruence X closest party in national government	-0.18* (0.07)	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.18* (0.07)	-0.09* (0.04)
Congruence X closest party regionalist party	-0.21 (0.17)	0.12 (0.07)	-0.19 (0.18)	0.11 (0.07)
Congruence X regional welfare competences	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party regionalist	0.04 (0.04)	0.01 (0.02)		
Regional welfare competences X closest party in national government	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)		
Regional budget per capita			-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.00)
Congruence X regional budget per capita			-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Regional budget per capita X closest party regionalist			-0.01 (0.02)	0.01* (0.01)
Regional budget per capita X closest party in national government			-0.01 (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)
Age	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***

	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age ²	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Higher education	0.40***	0.32***	0.41***	0.32***
	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.05)
Unemployed	-0.34***	-0.33***	-0.34***	-0.32***
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.05)
(Intercept)	0.85**	-0.13	0.68*	-0.27
	(0.33)	(0.20)	(0.32)	(0.22)
AIC	7664.91	18727.18	7663.19	18711.01
BIC	7799.73	18872.74	7798.00	18856.57
Log Likelihood	-3814.46	-9345.59	-3813.59	-9337.50
Num. obs.	13221	24017	13221	24017
Num. groups: election	52	38	52	38
Var: election (Intercept)	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.04

Comments: Multilevel logistic regression models with random intercepts at the election level. The dependent variable is coded “1” if the individual voted in the last national (Models 1 and 3) or regional (Models 2 and 4) elections and “0” otherwise; standard errors in parenthesis. In all models, observations are grouped by region and year of the election.

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05