Go the distance: left–right orientations, partisanship and vote.

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Abstract

Do ideological orientations have different effects on citizens without party ties, citizens who identify with a particular party and citizens who identify with other parties? What conditional effects do partisan and ideological orientations have on the vote? Difficulties and controversies over definitions of partisanship and left–right ideology, their reciprocal effects and how these are overshadowed in analyses including both heuristics have discouraged scholars from conducting extensive comparative research on this topic. I test to what extent the effects of left–right orientations on voting differ depending on party attachments and how this relationship is influenced by party polarization. Results using data from 77 harmonized national studies in 17 European countries suggest that the effects of partisanship on vote choice are not additive to those of left–right orientations, while the latter are conditional on party identification. Thus, partisans, non-partisans and partisans of other parties respond differently to left–right distances. These differences are more pronounced when the degree of polarization is considered.

Keywords: left–right, partisanship, polarization, vote, spatial models

1. Introduction

Scholars have disagreed for decades about the relationship between left–right and partisan orientations and vote choice. According to the Michigan School, voters' decisions are mostly based on their partisan attachments, while spatial voting theories suggest the opposite and highlight the role of left–right self-placement in electoral choice. Both left–right and partisan identifications provide frameworks to evaluate political actors and policies; however, it is still under discussion

whether individuals make their choices based on their partisan attachments or on their left–right orientations.

Partisan and left–right identifications are closely related and do not change independently (Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995; Schmitt, 2009), which makes difficult to assess what their actual net effect on vote choice is. Moreover, the traditional approach to study partisan attachments is based on the American bipartisan system. This entails at least two major difficulties for the study of European politics. The first is that a different measurement of partisanship has to be used because the scale from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican" cannot be exported to multiparty systems (Budge, Crewe and Farlie, 1976; Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema, 2017). The second is how this scale equates to the liberal–conservative ideological scale. Because political perceptions are shaped by partisanship and partisanship in the United States involves only two parties, being a partisan implies a partisan bias that reinforces the differences in the ideological values of Democrats and Republicans (Bartels, 2002). This not only means that partisanship is exclusive but also implies that this identification carries a distinctive worldview that sometimes conflicts with that of those who are not partisans of the same party. However, in European multiparty systems, partisan orientations are not binary—citizens can choose between several options that include a wider ideological variety (Berglund et al., 2005). Moreover, partisan attachments are non-exclusive, as citizens can feel close to more than one party.

Following this traditional approach, studies usually consider whether someone is a partisan of a specific party or not, without paying attention to the effect of being a partisan of other parties and to how partisan affections influence perceptions of ideological proximity and their subsequent

impact on the vote (Lachat, 2015). It is therefore often assumed that the effect of partisanship is additive to that of left–right orientations, meaning that the impact of ideological proximity is the same for all individuals and the probability of voting for a party increases when someone is a partisan of that party. This approach conveys that partisans of other parties are grouped with those without partisan attachments. Thus, in most studies effects of partisanship become evident only for the partisans of the party of interest to the researcher, while the effects of left–right orientations are assumed to be the same irrespective of the type of party attachment (Lachat, 2015).

In this paper, I address this conflict and discuss the extent to which left–right ties affect vote choice depending on the type of partisan attachment. I assess the simultaneous influence of partisan loyalties and left–right ideology on the vote and disentangle the impact of spatial factors on the vote for partisans of a given party, partisans of a different party and non-partisans[1]. This discussion is enriched by the assessment of how ideological polarization affects partisan and left–right orientations, which also serves to test the robustness of the results. Because ideological conflict between parties (i.e. polarization) reinforces partisan ties and makes partisanship more determinant for vote choice (Schmitt, 2009; Vegetti, 2014; Lupu, 2015), I test here the extent to which the relationship between different partisan attachments and left–right orientations is affected by high and low polarization. As will be seen, context also plays a role in determining the effect of left–right and partisan orientations on electoral choice.

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[1] Lachat (2015) concludes that one has to consider not only whether someone is a partisan of a party but also whether someone is a partisan of another party, as this would affect the effect of spatial factors and electoral preferences.

While researchers have so far assumed that ideological distances equally affect partisans of the party, partisans of other parties and non-partisans, I argue here that left–right orientations have a different impact on voters depending on the type of their partisan ties or the lack of them.

2. **The interplay between left–right ideology and partisanship in European multiparty systems**

Despite the controversy about its difficult conceptualization, left–right ideology[2] is the main axis of party competition in Europe (Corbetta, Cavazza, and Roccato, 2009; Mair, 2007; Thorisdottir et al., 2007; Zechmeister, 2006). The widespread use of the left–right semantics in European politics is the result of their integrative (Jost, Federico and Napier, 2009; Carmines and D'Amico, 2015) and dynamic nature (de Vries, Hakhverdian and Lancee, 2013:236). However, some scholars are cautious when pointing out the relevance of left–right orientations in political behaviour and argue that ideological orientations work as a mirror, if not as a surrogate, of partisan preferences (Huber, 1989, 599; Inglehart, 1984:38; Klingemann, 1979:227–232) because most citizens are not able to understand the meaning components of the left–right metaphor (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964). Recent research, however, challenges this view and puts the focus on the independence of ideological and partisan affiliations (Mason, 2015; 2018; Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017).

There are two main mechanisms by which left–right ideology affects vote choice. First, from a functional approach, the left–right metaphor can be understood as an aggregator of policy positions that enables the spatial comparison between parties' policies and citizens' preferences (Downs,

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[2] In this paper, I use the terms ideology and left–right ideology indistinctly.

1957; Knutsen, 1995; Fortunato, Stevenson and Vonnahme, 2016). This way, voters can size their relative distances in policy terms to parties and, in multiparty systems such as the European ones, infer the likelihood of different coalitions. Secondly, left–right ideology works also as a social identity that reflects self-categorization within a group (Devine, 2015; Mason, 2018). In this case, the link between an individual and his or her self-designated ideology transcends the pursuit of policy preferences and is also emotional. In both cases, instrumental and affective ideological self-identification help citizens, even in contexts of limited information, to organize their voting preferences by spotting which parties are more/less likely to deliver individuals' preferred policies or by highlighting which are the allied/opponent options.

The conceptualization of partisanship is less controversial than that of left–right ideology. Partisanship can be defined as a "long-term, affective, psychological identification with one's preferred political party" (Berglund *et al.*, 2005, p. 105) or, more generally, "the tendency to support one party rather than another"(Bartle and Bellucci, 2009, p. 1). As with ideology, it has an instrumental and an expressive perspective (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015; Bankert, Huddy and Rosema, 2017). The expressive approach focuses on the identitarian component of partisanship, which would be the result of early socialization. Hence, the link between partisans and party is mostly affective, a relationship that might equate to the one between sports fans and their favourite team (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015; Bankert, Huddy and Rosema, 2017).

The instrumental approach appeals to the attachment to a party that is ideologically close to an individual's position. In this case, the link to the party is more psychological, because it is the product of an evaluation of party supply. This implies, on the one hand, that partisan loyalties can be updated depending on changes in an individual's or a party's ideological and issue preferences

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(Fiorina, 2002). On the other hand, this approach allows for non-exclusive partisanship because, in multiparty systems such as the European democracies, an individual might consider him- or herself a partisan of more than one party (Pappi, 1996; Garzia, 2013:534). However, once individuals think of themselves as partisans, their self-designated ideological position and the perceived ideology of the party are no longer independent. Thus, in case of ideological veers of a preferred party, partisans might adapt their left–right position to this programmatic turn or could even perceive a wider ideological distance than the actual gap between them and the party. Even more, partisans may also misperceive other parties' left–right positions and update their perceptions based on what their expectations concerning cabinet formation in coalitional systems are (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013). This is why researchers should consider not only the effect of being a partisan of a given party on vote choice but also how being a partisan of other parties affects the electoral decision by distorting perceptions of ideological distances. These perceptions are affected by what policies parties promote as well as by their parliamentary competition, i.e. partisans of a moderate opposition party might see the government party as more distant than other opposition parties even if it might actually be ideologically moderate. This is more problematic when party loyalties are mostly based on affective attachments.

Overall, citizens learn from the interplay between left–right and partisan attachments which parties can be considered allies and which enemies (Fortunato, Stevenson and Vonnahme, 2016:1213). This, in the end, drives vote choice. Nevertheless, the extent to which citizens decide on the basis of their partisan or left–right identities is not easy to determine because, as described above, both are closely connected. While excluding partisanship from analyses on vote choice would bias the effect of ideology, the impact of partisanship can be overrated when left–right self-placement is

not considered. Partisan and ideological identifications are so closely related that the only way to correctly assess their impact on the vote is by including both factors in statistical models (Jessee, 2012:103–4). However, the main explanations with regard to citizens' political behaviour often pay attention to either partisanship or ideology.

While Anthony Downs (1957) introduced the left–right ideological axis of his spatial models as a key element to understand citizens' decisions and the usefulness of shortcuts to overtake their lack of political information, the Michigan School highlighted partisanship as the factor with a higher predictive power of voters' choices. Together with this, difficulties resulting from the different measurement of partisan identification and ideological self-placement have often led researchers to focus on just one of these two heuristics. Related to this, the role of ideology in political behaviour is often questioned owing to the relevance of its partisan component. However, partisanship is also affected by left–right preferences. This sort of vicious circle hinders analyses of the actual impact of left–right and partisan orientations on vote choice.

Concerning party systems, Downs' ideological axis fits well into European multiparty systems, but the way partisan orientations are measured in the United States cannot be exported easily to the complex European systems with a much diverse party supply (Budge, Crewe and Farlie, 1976). The traditional dichotomy that has been used to measure partisanship is not sufficient to approach European multiparty systems. While in the American two-party system being a partisan of the Republican (Democratic) party implies exclusivity, in Europe voters can feel close to more than one political option. Even more, in the multiparty systems in Europe, due to the existence of several parties competing for representation and electoral and coalition agreements, partisan attachments might be weaker than those observed in the United States (Huddy, Bankert and Davies, 2018).

3. **Reconciling spatial models and partisanship.**

The assumption that individuals' and parties' ideological positions affect vote choice is key in Downs' (1957) spatial theory of party competition. The smallest distance on the left–right scale between an individual and a party is considered to be the voter's best choice, the one with the highest utility[3]. This *proximity model* represents a parsimonious way to explain political behaviour through an easy-to-understand spatial metaphor. However, voters' utility measures are not comparable, as their perception of parties' positions varies from one individual to the other (Westholm, 1997). Similarly, the process by which individuals locate themselves on the ideological scale is also influenced by the positions they believe their preferred party or candidate has (Boatright, 2008:118). However, to assess the impact of ideological distances as a predictor of vote choice, the extent to which citizens are able to correctly locate their party on the ideological axis is not relevant. What is of interest here is whether and how individuals perceive parties to be more or less distant—which is ultimately is key for their vote choice.

Another problem is that partisan identification does not fit well with spatial models. The assumption that citizens' choices are rational and respond to a calculated utility based on parties' ideological placement or policy stances opposes the idea of a vote anchored to partisan loyalties. In *A Unified Theory of Party Competition* (Adams et al., 2005), the authors reconciled these

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[3] The utility function of voter *i* for party *j* can be written as

$$U_{ij}^p = \alpha^p - \beta^p |v_i - p_{ij}|,$$

with α^p and β^p (> 0) being unknown constants, v_i the numerical ideological position of voter *i* and p_{ij} the position of party *j* as perceived by voter *i*.

opposed visions about the way citizens make their choices by including within a same model spatial or policy factors and "behavioural factors" such as party identification (Lachat, 2015: 641–642) and stated that "(ideology) and partisanship together have greater influences on voter choice than either factor alone" (Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005). In European multiparty systems, however, the concept of partisanship is less functional (Shively, 1979; cited also by Berglund et al., 2005:106) and the association between left–right ideology and partisanship is complex because there are several parties competing in the same ideological spectrum.

Romain Lachat (2015) already tested the effect of partisan orientations in spatial models, but he focused on issue ideology instead of left–right identification. His findings, although limited to the Netherlands, demonstrated that the impact of issues on the vote is conditional on partisanship. However, ideological identities are more stable and less vulnerable to the political agenda than issues. Left–right identification anchors vote much more than issue stances and is more stable. Since there are no great shifts in individuals' or parties' ideological positions (Dalton and Mcallister, 2015), left–right—also as a super-issue (Inglehart, 1984; Knutsen, 1995; Eijk, Schmitt and Binder, 2005:166)—is much more adequate to test the relationship between the effects of spatial factors and partisanship on the vote.

4. **Theoretical expectations concerning left–right distance, partisanship and the role of context.**

I have already highlighted the main difficulties that discouraged researchers from conducting extensive studies on the relationship between left–right positions, partisanship and vote choice. The net effect of ideological and partisan orientations on electoral choice is difficult to disentangle

in some cases due to methodological or technical limitations. In the analysis of individual vote choice in European democracies, partisanship is measured with a dummy variable whose values depend on whether voter *i* is a partisan or not of party *j*. When including partisanship in the models, it is expected to have an additive effect; that is, being partisan would have an impact on vote choice that is constant and added to the effect of ideology. According to this, being a partisan increases the probability of voting for a party, assuming that the impact of ideology is the same for partisans of a party, partisans of a different party and individuals without partisan attachments. However, partisans have a heuristic to guide their choices that non-partisans lack, which is also associated to their ideological identity. This makes the impact of left–right positions necessarily different for partisans and non-partisans. Hence, the main expectation is that the impact of left–right ideology is moderated by—and therefore conditional on—partisanship (Lachat, 2015:645). This is to say that, when an individual identifies with a party, his or her responsiveness to spatial factors such as ideology differs to that of a non-partisan (Lachat, 2015:642). Due to these considerations, the main hypothesis to be tested in this paper is that the effect of left–right ideology is conditional on partisanship (H1).

However, it can also be expected that partisans of a party are more prone to vote for the party they feel attached to irrespective of the ideological distance. Similarly, it was already discussed here that partisans of another party are expected to behave differently than non-partisans. Left–right orientations cannot have the same effect on the vote of partisans of another party, which is due to their in-group bias, making them see other options as more ideologically distant of what they actually are (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012). Following the sports metaphor, supporters of a team cannot have the same attitude towards other teams as those who are not emotionally attached to

any. Consequently, the main hypothesis can be refined by taking into account the distinctive levels of partisanship. In this sense, partisans' voting decisions would be less affected by left–right orientations than independent voters' choices, no matter if they are partisans of the party or of another party (H1a). If this hypothesis is not rejected, we could assess that also partisans of a different party are less affected by left–right ideology, which means that approaches considering only the dichotomy between partisans of the party under study and others neglect the effect of partisan attachment to a different party.

4.1. Expectations concerning contextual effects

As is well known, context plays an important role in structuring the linkage between party identification and ideology (Zaller, 1992; Dancey and Goren, 2010). In elections in which individuals are encouraged to think in ideological terms, the effect of left–right positions is more evident. This is, when ideological disagreement between parties is clearer, left–right proximity is more relevant for vote choice (Dalton, 2008; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder, 2005; Lachat, 2008; Lupu, 2015). In the same way, high party polarization makes the differences between parties evident and consequently strengthens party loyalties (Van der Eijk, Schmitt and Binder, 2005; Schmitt, 2009; Lupu, 2015; Vegetti, 2014) and its impact on the vote. Ideological polarization— i.e. the degree of dispersion of parties in a political system on the left–right dimension (Dalton 2008)—shapes individuals' ideological perceptions and affects the impact on the vote of partisan and ideological identities (Rogowski, 2018). Consequently, it is difficult to assess the extent to which ideological conflict fosters citizens' electoral choices when both left–right and partisan attachments are simultaneously considered. This is because, again, in the case of those with party affiliation, the partisan and ideological identities of partisans are not independent but interact.

According to this, I develop here two complementary hypotheses that should clarify the role of left–right orientations and partisanship in vote choice in contexts with different levels of ideological disagreement between parties.

H2a. In contexts of high polarization, spatial effects (left–right ideology) have a higher impact than in contexts of low polarization (see e.g. Eijk et al., 2005; Lachat, 2008).

H2b. In a highly polarized context, the effect of partisanship should also be higher than in a scenario in which parties' positions are not ideologically distant (Lupu, 2015:351; Schmitt, 2005).

With these hypotheses, I assess the relevance of context but also test the robustness of the results by considering the net effect of left–right orientations and partisanship under different levels of polarization.

5. Data and methods

This paper aims to provide a *generic analysis* approach (van der Eijk et al., 2006) of the relationship of left–right self-placement and partisanship on voting choice by studying a high number of elections, involving several countries and adopting a long-term perspective. In doing so, I use data from the The True European Voter project, which assembled and integrated datasets of 157 national election studies that were conducted in 23 European countries between 1956 and 2013.

Since I am dealing with several multiparty systems in this paper, it is not manageable to use voting for a specific party as the dependent variable due to the huge amount of categories that would be

needed to identify vote choice in so many different electoral contexts (van der Eijk et al., 2006:426). Thus, the unit of analysis here is not the elector but his or her party evaluations—dyads of voters and parties in elections[4]. Hence, the dependent variable, voting, is a dichotomous variable: the party was voted (1) or not (0). The great advantage of this approach is that it provides an answer to what affects voting behaviour without being constrained by party-specific questions. The procedure followed to build up the *stacked* data matrix reshapes all variables into generic ones from party-oriented batteries. This makes it possible to answer generic questions because parties and individuals are not defined as categories but by their properties.

One of the two main independent variables is the distance between a party's perceived ideological position and a respondent's ideological self-placement. As shown in Table 1, left–right distances have been re-scaled from 0 (respondent perceives there is no ideological distance between him or her and the party) to 1 (respondent perceives the party as the most ideologically distant). Because the dependent variable is a combination of party and respondent, the measure of partisanship is easy: two dichotomous variables, one that takes the value 1 when the respondent is a partisan of the party and 0 when not, and another variable that takes the value 1 when the respondent is a partisan of a different party and 0 otherwise.

As a control variable I include y-hat affinities between sociodemographic characteristics of the individual and the specific party[5]. This synthetic sociodemographic variable measures the importance of sociodemographic characteristics for voting for a party which is different for every

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[4] See the number of party stacks by election in Table A.1 in the Appendix.
[5] Y-hats are included in the set of variables of the True European Voter stacked database. According to the codebook of the project, these y-hats were calculated considering all the available social-structural characteristics and are centered around the party mean within each election. To know more about this variable, see Schmitt et al. (2015).

party–respondent dyad (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; van de Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007).

Concerning the measurements of ideological polarization of party systems, I include the data on polarization for each of the 77 elections.[6] Polarization was calculated using the following formula by van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder (2005):

$$Pol = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}|C-x_i|w_i}{Pmax},$$

where C is the ideological centre of the party system (or the weighted mean), x the ideological position of a party, w the party weight measure as the vote share and $Pmax$ the theoretical maximum share of votes a party can have.

According to this formula, a polarization equal to 0 means that all parties in the party system have the same ideological position, while 1 means that parties with an equal weight in parliament (i.e. equal number of seats) are positioned on the extremes of the left–right scale.

Table 1. Summary statistics/selected variables

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Left–Right distance	515,675	0.302	0.252	0	1
Partisan of the party	515,675	0.126	0.331	0	1

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[6] See Table A.2 in the Appendix.

Partisan of a different party	515,675	0.490	0.500	0	1
Sociodemographics y-hats	515,675	-0.077	0.706	-2.882	7.073
Polarization	515,675	0.379	0.090	0.100	0.607

The main hypothesis to be tested is that the effect of left–right ideology on the vote is conditional upon partisanship. It is expected that partisanship has a higher impact on the vote because individuals who support a party are less prone to vote for a different one no matter what the ideological distance is, while non-partisans are more likely to choose on the basis of spatial factors such as left–right distance. This is usually modelled by including an interaction term of partisanship and ideology (ideological distance). However, the *stacked* data matrix, in which the units of analysis are respondent–party dyads, allows for treating ideology in a different way and overcoming the technical limitations of discrete choice models. With the generic approach it is possible to include ideological proximity between each party and each respondent. In this way, I can specify multilevel models with a parsimonious design and add cross-level interactions with macrolevel variables. By doing so, I run multilevel logit models with varying intercepts at four levels, with the grouping levels being party–respondent, respondent, election and country (Gelman and Hill, 2006). I subsequently add the interaction terms of ideological proximity, partisanship and between these and the polarization for the corresponding election, resulting in three models that vary in complexity. As the interpretation of these models could be cumbersome, I use Markov Chain Monte Carlo methods (Geyer, 1992) to generate 1,000 samples, run multiple simulations of the previous models and estimate the probabilities to vote for a party according to respondents'

left–right ideology, assessing whether they are or are not partisans of the party. Results are discussed in the next section.

6. **Results**

Following the procedure described in the previous section, the results of the generic analyses shown in Table 2 confirm the expectations and support hypothesis H1 of the moderating effect of partisanship on ideology. The interaction between partisanship and left–right orientations reduces the effect of the latter. Thus, the impact of left–right orientations on vote choice is conditional on partisan affinities.

Left–right distance has a significant negative effect on the vote in all three models, and these effects remain even after including polarization in the interactions. This means that ideological distance reduces the probability of voting for a party for partisans and non-partisans. However, these effects of left–right orientations are conditional on party affiliation. On its side, partisanship has a significant impact on vote, and partisans of a party are very likely to vote for this party even when they consider it ideologically distant (H1).

Table 2. Multilevel logistic regression models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Left-Right distance	-4.11***	-2.27***	-1.97***
	(0.04)	(0.13)	(0.17)
Partisan of the party	2.77***	1.06***	1.34***
	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.08)
Partisan of a different party	-2.11***	-2.09***	-2.23***
	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.09)
Left-Right distance * Partisan of the party	1.06***	0.84***	-0.84**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.29)
Left-Right distance * Partisan of a different party	0.27**	0.33***	1.00**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.33)
Sociodemographic Characteristics (Y-hats)	0.37***	0.35***	0.35***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Polarization		0.91*	1.00*
		(0.43)	(0.43)
Left-Right distance*Polarization		-4.91***	-5.71***
		(0.33)	(0.44)
Partisan of the party * Polarization		4.78***	3.94***
		(0.17)	(0.22)
Partisan of a different party * Polarization		-0.00	0.36
		(0.18)	(0.24)
Left-Right distance* Partisan of the party * Polarization			5.04***
			(0.83)
Left-Right distance * Partisan of a different party * Polarization			-1.80*
			(0.87)
Constant	-0.61***	-0.93***	-0.97***
	(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.18)
AIC	262150.38	259497.20	259449.70
BIC	262261.80	259653.08	259627.85
Log Likelihood	-131065.19	-129734.60	-129708.85
Num. obs.	509883	506159	506159
Num. groups: Respondent	91348	90816	90816
Num. groups: Election	77	76	76
Num. groups: Country	17	17	17
Var: Respondent (Intercept)	0.00	0.00	0.00
Var: Election (Intercept)	0.07	0.06	0.06
Var: Country (Intercept)	0.17	0.13	0.13

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

The distinctive effect of left–right distances on the electoral decision of each of the types of voters requires a more detailed analysis though. Looking at the coefficients shown in Table 2, it is clear that the impact of spatial effects is different depending on whether the voter is a partisan of the party, a partisan of a different party or a non-partisan or independent individual. Partisans' vote is more affected by party loyalties, but this does not mean that they are more immune to the effect of ideological distance than non-affiliated voters. As shown in Figure 1, the probability that partisans vote for their party drops quickly as a function of left–right distance, but the odds of partisans casting a vote for their party are yet very high. That is, a partisan will vote for his or her party with at least a 50 per cent probability unless the party is perceived to be very distant on the ideological scale (if party and partisan are more than 6 points away from each other on a left–right scale from 0 to 10). Thus, when the position of the individual and that of the party are too distant, partisan affinities do not guarantee that the individual casts the vote for this party.

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of voting for a party by left-right distance and partisanship.
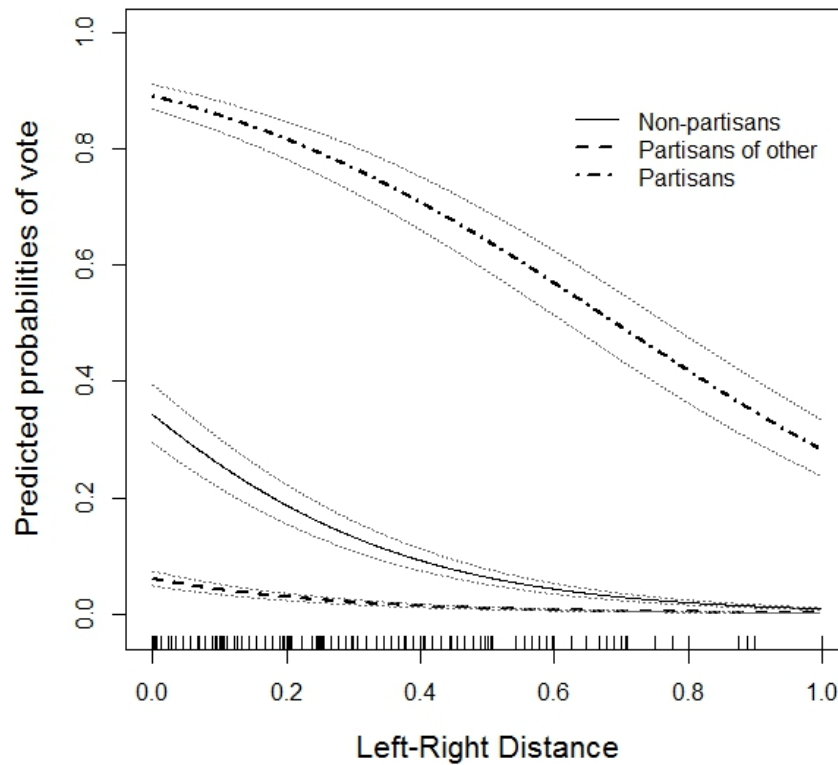
Note: MCMC estimates are based on the first model presented in table 2. Adjusted predictions with 95% confidence intervals.

The probability of voting for a party when being a partisan of a different party is so low, even in the case of full ideological congruence, that left–right distances seem to have no impact. Looking at the almost flat curve that shows how likely it is for a partisan to vote for a party he or she does not support, the drop in probability is smaller when left–right distance increases. However, this is a consequence of a floor effect similar to what is observed for non-affiliated individuals. Thus,

because the probability that a partisan votes for his or her party is very high, there is much more room for this likelihood to drop and, despite what the coefficients of the interactions indicate, left–right considerations have a higher average impact on the vote of partisans.

Nevertheless, the role of ideology on the electoral choice of partisans of another party and independent voters is not minor when looking at it by sections. When left–right proximity is high (less than 3 points away on a 0–10 scale), an increase of distance makes much more difference for non-partisans than for partisans. Conversely, when the party is seen to be on the other side of the ideological scale, ideological distance affects the probability of voting for a party more for partisans than for non-partisans. This suggests that partisans are more permissive with policy changes or small ideological adjustments of their own party and not so sensitive to small relative gaps between them and their party. However, when the party is perceived as too distant on the left-right scale, it might be the consequence of a major political change, which made a partisan to be disappointed with her own party. It has to be noted that partisan biases can also have a negative effect and that partisans might punish their party's decisions and overestimate the distance between them, although this might not respond to actual ideological reasons.

In the case of non-partisans, small distances are more crucial. If someone is a partisan of another party, his or her assessment of other parties is already biased by his or her partisan loyalties; hence, even parties considered only slightly distant on the ideological scale quickly disappear from the menu of electable choices. In the case of independent voters, their perceptions are less biased and their assessment of parties depends more on their ideology; therefore, even small distances count. When distances are very large, it does not make much difference how large the distance is because parties are already discarded when they are perceived to be 2 or 3 points away.

According to these results, the main argument of this paper is supported; left–right positions have a distinctive impact on voters depending on what their partisan identities are or whether they lack them. Citizens' vote is differently affected by spatial factors depending on their partisan affinities and on how large the perceived distance between them and the party is. Thus, the evidence presented here only partially supports H1a, and it is thus possible to reject this expectation because partisans' decisions are not less affected by left–right considerations.

As explained above, scholars have approached the study of ideological conflict between parties without considering the interrelation between ideological and partisan identities. When the interactions between perceived left–right distance, partisanship and polarization are taken into account, results change significantly. Figure 2 shows the results of the third model presented in Table 2 with the triple interactions for left–right orientations, partisan attachments and polarization[7].

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[7] In order to obtain the predicted probabilities of voting for a party, I estimated the 20th (0.30) and 90th (0.4911) percentiles as values of low and high polarization.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of voting for a party by left-right distance and partisanship considering low (left side) and high (right side) polarization.
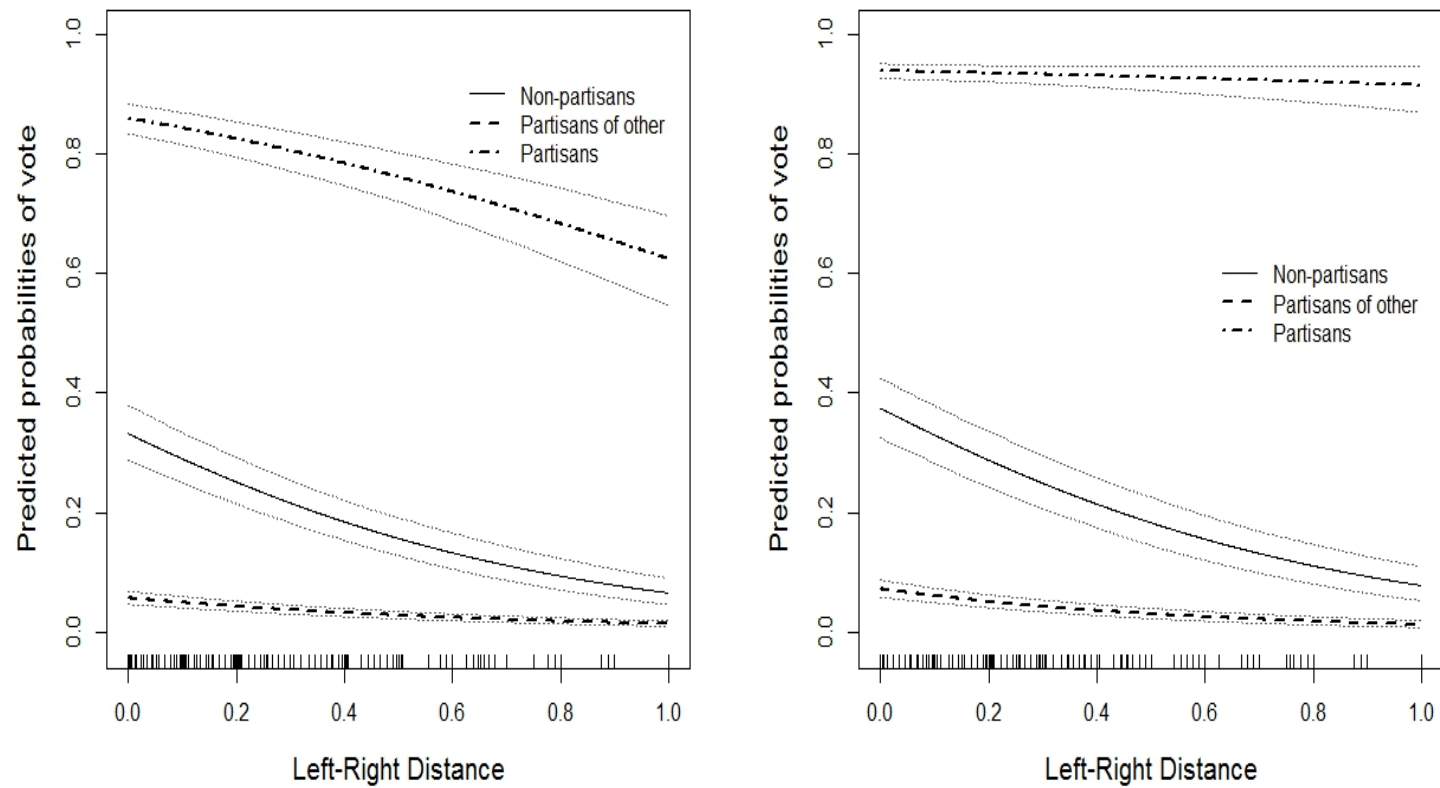
Note: MCMC estimates are based on the third model presented in table 2. Adjusted predictions with 95% confidence intervals.

For those without partisan affinities, the slope is slightly steeper in the right panel, meaning that the impact of left–right proximity is somewhat higher in a context of high polarization than in a scenario of low polarization (H2a). However, the effect of ideological conflict between parties is yet very modest. Thus, in a highly polarized election, an independent voter is similarly likely to vote for a party he or she perceives to be closer on the left–right scale than in elections in which the ideological conflict between parties is less evident. Nevertheless, while in both contexts independent citizens would vote for parties that are closer to their positions, distant parties have slightly less chances of being voted in highly polarized contexts. This would also be the case for partisans of another party.

Conversely, for partisans of a given party, the effect of left–right orientations on the vote is highly determined by the degree of ideological conflict between parties. As shown in figure 2, when polarization is low, partisans' vote seems to be affected by left–right considerations (the probability drops from ~0.85 to ~0.6); when polarization is high, left–right distance makes absolutely no difference for them because the probability of voting for a party in a highly polarized context is stable for partisans of a given party with a minimal incidence of left–right orientations. Thus, Hypothesis 2a must be partially rejected because, in a context of high polarization, spatial factors do not affect partisans' vote. This might be the consequence of the fact that in polarized contexts partisans perceive their party as closer than in non-polarized contexts.

I also hypothesized that the effect of partisanship would be higher in a highly polarized context (H2b). Results confirm these expectations; partisans of a party are more likely to vote for their party in a scenario in which parties are ideologically distant. Moreover, in that case the probability is stable and does not respond to spatial effects. With low polarization—if party and partisan are

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more than 2 points away from each other on a left–right scale from 0 to 10—the probability of casting a vote for this party drops below 80 per cent, but the probability in a context of high polarization is sustained and reaches 90 per cent.

However, it is worth noticing that partisans of a different party would be more affected by ideology when polarization is high; however, the probability of voting for a different party that is ideologically close is, in this case, below 10 per cent.

7. Discussion

Even though left–right and partisan orientations have a vivid presence beyond the academic world, the relationship between these two heuristics has been neglected and the question of their net effect on the vote has hardly been approached. The reasons for this were, among others, related to methodological and technical difficulties that have been overcome here. Traditionally, partisanship was considered to have an additive effect to the one of left–right orientations, but this study highlighted that the effects of left–right ideology are conditional on partisanship and vary between partisans, partisans of a different party and non-partisans. Individuals without partisan ties respond to spatial left–right leanings and these in turn have an effect on their vote choice. Partisans seem to be immune to spatial effects, as they are more likely to vote for their party irrespective of their ideological position. However, the effect of perceived ideological distance is more important when partisans perceive their party to be further away on the left–right scale. Partisans of a different party behave again differently. While the probability of them voting for a party that is not the one they support is very low, they also respond differently to spatial effects and, in this case, small

distances matter more for the vote. This should encourage researchers to approach studies on vote choice going beyond a mere dichotomy between partisans and non-partisans.

This paper not only discussed the interaction between partisanship and left–right ideology by paying attention to its effects on the vote but also took into account party system polarization. This contextual factor proved to affect ideological and partisan identities and how these determine electors' choices. Again, the impact of left–right orientations is moderated by citizens' partisan attachments, but when polarization is considered, the different response of each of the three groups to left–right distances is even more evident.

Polarization, as expected, contributes to strengthening the roles of partisan and left–right orientations on the vote. When disagreement between parties is more evident, the vote of non-partisans and partisans of a different party is more the result of their ideological affiliations. However, partisans are less sensitive to left–right orientations in polarized contexts, while non-partisans' vote choice is more likely affected by spatial effects. The problem here is that polarization also influences how individuals perceive party positions, so it can be the case that a reinforcement of partisanship is a consequence of a prior reinforcement of ideological identities. Future research should address how partisan and ideological leanings are constructed and how they respond to external stimulus.

All this has interesting consequences for future studies of the vote. In the case of analyses predicting vote choice without including partisanship, the effect of ideology will be biased, as it has been shown that it is significantly less relevant for partisans. Also, parties can learn from here that their electoral floor depends more on the number of their partisans than on their left–right

positions. Partisans might forgive ideological shifts of parties, while changing positions could be a good strategy to attract independent voters. Under conditions of high polarization, parties might find incentives to shift their positions because, in such a context, partisans' vote has not much to do with left–right orientations.

Beyond the merits of this research, there are some questions pending for future analyses. The effects of left–right ideology and partisanship were disentangled and analysed in two different contexts: lowly and highly polarized elections. I assessed the effects of left–right distance on the vote of partisans of the party, partisans of a different party and non-partisans, and noted their different response to spatial effects. However, we know very little about the path followed to forge partisan and ideological identities. It could be expected that the way an individual shapes his or her ideology would determine the extent to which he or she is responsive to spatial effects. This is, if an individual's left–right position is the consequence of partisan orientations, it could be expected that he or she will not be equally affected by spatial factors than in the case of those whose partisan orientations are derived from their ideological attachments. While further research should explore this, the present analysis not only contributes to a better understanding of the actual role of partisan and ideological identities on vote but also highlights the necessity of distinguishing between three types of voters depending on their partisan preferences. Moreover, it also showed that the effect of partisanship is not additive to that of left–right orientations and how the relationship between these two heuristics changes according to the degree of polarization in an election.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Number of Party-Stacks by Election

Election	Party stacks
Austria 2008	5
Estonia 2011	6
Finland 2003	8
Finland 2007	8
Finland 2011	8
Germany 1976	3
Germany 1983	4
Germany 1987	4
Germany 1990	4
Germany 1998	5
Germany 2002	5
Germany 2005	5
Germany 2009	5
Germany 2013	5
Greece 2009	5
Greece 2012	7
Hungary 1998	7
Hungary 2002	4
Iceland 1983	6
Iceland 1987	6
Iceland 1991	5
Iceland 1995	6
Iceland 1999	5
Iceland 2003	5
Iceland 2007	5
Iceland 2009	5
Iceland 2013	6
Ireland 2002	6
Ireland 2007	6
Ireland 2011	6
Italy 1996	8
Italy 2001	6
Italy 2006	7
Italy 2008	6

Italy 2013	7
Netherlands 1982	8
Netherlands 1986	7
Netherlands 1989	9
Netherlands 1994	10
Netherlands 1998	10
Norway 1977	6
Norway 1981	7
Norway 1985	6
Norway 1989	6
Norway 1993	8
Norway 1997	7
Norway 2001	7
Norway 2005	7
Poland 1997	5
Poland 2001	8
Poland 2005	8
Poland 2007	4
Poland 2011	5
Portugal 2002	5
Portugal 2005	5
Portugal 2006	5
Portugal 2009	5
Spain 1993	4
Spain 2000	5
Spain 2008	5
Sweden 1979	9
Sweden 1982	9
Sweden 1985	9
Sweden 1988	9
Sweden 1991	9
Sweden 1994	9
Sweden 1998	9
Sweden 2002	9
Sweden 2006	9
Sweden 2010	9
Switzerland 1971	6
Switzerland 1999	5
Switzerland 2003	5

Switzerland 2007	5
Switzerland 2011	7
Turkey 2011	4

Table A.2. Polarization by Election

Election	Polarization
Austria 2008	0,1705
Estonia 2011	0,3661
Finland 2003	0,2422
Finland 2007	0,3074
Finland 2011	0,272
Germany 1976	0,4784
Germany 1983	0,423
Germany 1987	0,4721
Germany 1990	0,3386
Germany 1998	0,2315
Germany 2002	0,3576
Germany 2005	0,2887
Germany 2009	0,3362
Germany 2013	0,3006
Greece 2009	0,2909
Greece 2012	0,4627
Hungary 1998	0,3695
Hungary 2002	0,607
Iceland 1983	0,5911
Iceland 1987	0,4193
Iceland 1991	0,4286
Iceland 1995	0,3977
Iceland 1999	0,4042
Iceland 2003	0,3554
Iceland 2007	0,3506
Iceland 2009	0,3732
Iceland 2013	0,3543
Ireland 2002	0,1977
Ireland 2007	0,1862
Ireland 2011	0,2434

Italy 1996	0,6026
Italy 2001	0,5304
Italy 2006	0,5646
Italy 2008	0,4055
Italy 2013	0,42
Netherlands 1982	0,4651
Netherlands 1986	0,5121
Netherlands 1989	0,4334
Netherlands 1994	0,3062
Netherlands 1998	0,2978
Norway 1977	0,3674
Norway 1981	0,3563
Norway 1985	0,3166
Norway 1989	0,2947
Norway 1993	0,373
Norway 1997	0,3016
Norway 2001	0,3896
Norway 2005	0,3971
Poland 1997	0,28
Poland 2001	0,4459
Poland 2005	0,3213
Poland 2007	0,2462
Poland 2011	0,1003
Portugal 2002	0,2889
Portugal 2005	0,2416
Portugal 2006	0,3163
Portugal 2009	0,2668
Spain 1993	0,4427
Spain 2000	0,3581
Spain 2008	0,4175
Sweden 1979	0,4594
Sweden 1982	0,5069
Sweden 1985	0,4911
Sweden 1988	0,425
Sweden 1991	0,4063
Sweden 1994	0,429
Sweden 1998	0,4277
Sweden 2002	0,3951
Sweden 2006	0,4246

Sweden 2010	0,4475
Switzerland 1971	0,2618
Switzerland 1999	0,2664
Switzerland 2003	0,3237
Switzerland 2007	0,3205
Switzerland 2011	0,3708
Turkey 2011	0,5057