

THREE

Strategic Voting in Changing Times

The 2016 Election in Spain

Ignacio Lago

As chapter 1 discussed, there are both nationwide and district-level logics for strategic voting. The 2016 election in Spain offers an interesting scenario for examining the rationales behind them. Proportional representation (PR) elections in Spain have given rise to a considerable amount of district-level strategic voting since the 1970s (Cox 1997; Gunther 1989; Lago 2008, 2012; Selb 2012). As most of the districts select five or fewer seats, there is room for strategic voting to affect the allocation of seats among parties. However, the government composition has been much less relevant in voters' calculus of voting. All elections have led to single-party governments. For decades, even when no party received a majority, it was relatively easy for the party with a plurality to get the support of subnational parties in exchange for increased regional power and without having to make substantial changes to national economic or social policies.

The December 2015 election dramatically changed the institutional incentives for strategic voting. First, two new parties, the far-left Podemos (We Can) and the center-right Ciudadanos (Citizens) emerged as strong competitors, though with unequal results across districts. Second, for the first time after the twelve national elections held since the restoration of democracy, the parliament failed to choose a prime minister, resulting in an early election in June 2016. Thus, the 2016 election was Spain's first in which possible agreements between national parties to form a government

were an issue during the campaign, thereby increasing the possibility of strategic voting.

This chapter examines the strategic behavior of voters in the June 2016 election to determine how quickly voters' calculus of voting is updated in an established democracy when incentives for strategic voting change. Specifically, the chapter investigates whether voters strategically deserted Podemos and Ciudadanos in districts where they had poor chances of winning seats, and whether voters coordinated around those parties with better chances of being in the government after the election. In other words, this chapter discusses two of the three kinds of outcomes under PR that might motivate strategic voting discussed in chapter 1—supporters' desire to have their party win more seats, and voters' seeking to affect which parties will be in government after the election. The data come from an Internet survey conducted by the Making Electoral Democracy Work project (www.chairelectoral.com/medw.html) during the election campaign.

Arguments

The electoral system for Spain's lower chamber (Congreso de los Diputados) provides strong incentives for strategic voting to affect the allocation of seats among parties. Elections occur under the d'Hondt formula, with closed party lists and a 3% threshold at the district level (which might matter only in the two biggest districts, Madrid and Barcelona). The 350 MPs in 2016 were elected in 52 districts with magnitudes ranging from 1 (Ceuta and Mellila) to 36 (Madrid). The mean district magnitude was 6.73, and the median was 5. Most of the districts (27 of 52) selected 5 or fewer seats. For decades, Spain has had two major political parties, the center-left Socialist Party (PSOE) and the center-right Popular Party (PP); a minor party, the formerly communist United Left (IU); and many subnational parties, particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country. In the eleven elections held from 1977 to 2011, the best third-party results were the IU's 10.64% of the votes and 21 seats in 1996. Not surprisingly, a substantial body of research has provided robust evidence of strategic voting in small districts, in particular among IU supporters (García Viñuela and Artés 2012; Gunther 1989; Lago 2008, 2012; Selb 2012). In Gunther's words (1989, 842),

This *prima facie* case for the presence of sophisticated voting is strongly corroborated when the voting behavior of these respon-

dents is broken down by province in accord with the number of deputies sent to the Cortes from each district. Respondents with highly favorable attitudes toward the third- and fourth-place parties in large provinces were about twice as likely to vote for them as sympathizers of those same parties in small provinces.

Conversely, which parties would be in government had never been an issue, since all previous Spanish elections had led to single-party governments, with the winning party taking between 159 seats (1993) and 202 seats (1982) in the first eleven elections held after the restoration of democracy (a majority requires 176 seats). When the party winning the election did not reach the majority of seats, the shared expectation was that getting the support of subnational parties would be relatively easy. Both the PSOE and the PP behaved in this way. To the best of my knowledge, the only estimates of strategic voting to affect the government formation are provided by Lago (2005). Most Spanish elections between 1979 and 2000 show no evidence of this type of strategic voting, and in general terms, national-level strategic voting is much weaker than it is at the district level.

Although institutional arrangements have remained unchanged, in the 2016 election the incentives for behaving strategically at both the district and national levels changed substantially. The emergence of Podemos and Ciudadanos, mainly as a consequence of the economic crisis and widespread corruption (Orriols and Cordero 2016), in the December 2015 election had tremendous effect. As table 3.1 shows, they received 20.8% of the votes and 69 seats and 14.1% of the votes and 40 seats respectively. Their vote shares exhibit a larger variation across districts than do the shares of the two largest parties. While Podemos and Ciudadanos got seats in 71% and 50% of the districts, respectively, this share was substantially higher for the PP (94%) and the PSOE (96%). In other words, the number of voters who had the incentive to vote strategically substantially increased over previous elections. Table 3.2 displays the voters' left-right placement of the four main parties.

For the first time since the restoration of democracy, the 2016 election presented voters with clear incentives to coordinate around those parties with a better chance of joining the government after the election. The inability to choose a prime minister after the December 2015 election became a crucial issue in the 2016 campaign. After the 2015 election, Felipe VI first nominated Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the PP, to form a new government, but Rajoy turned down the mandate, postponing his candidacy by arguing that he had a verified majority against him. Felipe's

next choice, PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez, accepted the mandate but failed to pass an investiture vote on March 2, winning support from only 131 MPs (PSOE + Ciudadanos + a minor regional party, Canary Coalition) and being rejected by 219. At the same time, as figure 3.1 shows, the PSOE trailed Unidos Podemos in the polls conducted before the election, the first time the PSOE had fallen behind another leftist party since the restoration of democracy. In sum, PSOE supporters had room to engage in strategic behavior if they cared about the parties that would be in government after the election.

In the 2016 campaign, party leaders clearly stated their goals for government formation after the election. The PSOE leader declared, “We will not support a PP government or support [Podemos leader] Pablo Iglesias as the president.”¹ However, according to Iglesias, “Everyone is clear that we will not have an absolute majority. Any formula of government implies an agreement, and . . . we want to govern with the PSOE.”² Rajoy proposed “a grand coalition with the PSOE.”³ And Ciudadanos’s leader, Albert Rivera, declared his party’s willingness “to sit down and negotiate with PP and PSOE a plural, broad, and overarching government. But only if it is to change things.”⁴

TABLE 3.1. Results of Spanish National Elections, 2015 and 2016

	Party					
	PP	PSOE	Podemos ^a	Ciudadanos	IU ^b	Others
2015	28.9%	22.2%	20.8%	14.1%	3.7%	14.0%
	123 seats (49 districts)	90 seats (50 districts)	69 seats (37 districts)	40 seats (26 districts)	2 seats (1 district)	28 seats —
2016	33.0%	22.7%	21.1%	13.1%	—	10.2%
	137 seats (50 districts)	85 seats (49 districts)	70 seats (38 districts)	32 seats (20 districts)	—	26 seats —

^aIn 2015, Podemos + En Comú + Compromís + En Marea; in 2016, Podemos + En Comú + Compromís + En Marea + UP – UPeC.

^bUnidad Popular: Izquierda Unida + Unidad Popular en Común.

TABLE 3.2. Voters’ Left-Right Placements in Spain, 2016

	Party			
	Unidos Podemos	PSOE	Ciudadanos	PP
Mean	3.14	4.03	5.36	6.62
Std. Dev.	1.61	1.70	1.40	1.45
N	503	283	250	337

Source: Data from MEDW survey, 2016.

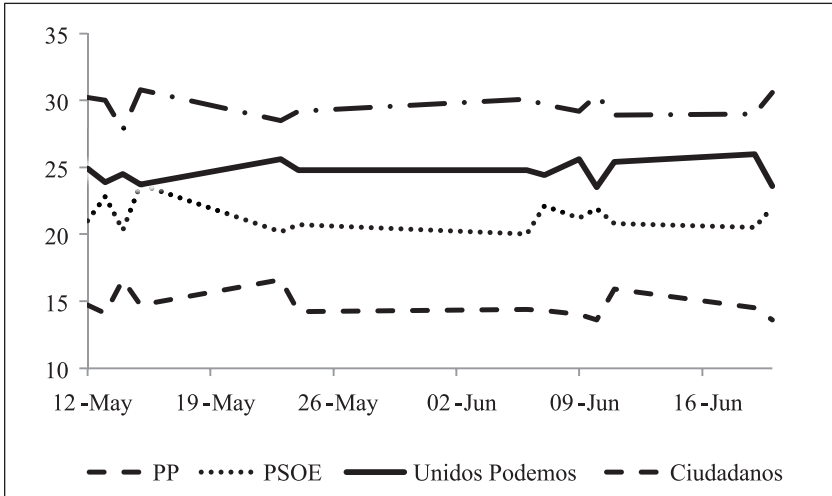


Fig. 3.1. Pre-election Polls (%). (Data from <http://www.argos.gva.es/es/encuestas/>)

So did the supporters of Podemos and Ciudadanos and the PSOE respond to the incentives to behave strategically? The incentives for district- and national-level strategic voting differ for the supporters of the three parties. First, I expect that district-level strategic considerations should be more important for Unidos Podemos than for Ciudadanos's supporters for two reasons. First, Spain has for decades had more leftist parties than rightist parties, meaning that voter coordination around viable parties has been an issue for leftist voters but not for rightist voters. In addition, in 2016 Podemos and IU formed a preelectoral coalition, Unidos Podemos, and strategic voting has been widespread among IU supporters for decades. All else equal, Unidos Podemos's supporters should be more aware of the incentives to behave strategically than the Ciudadanos supporters. Moreover, Unidos Podemos is a viable competitor in more districts than Ciudadanos. I do not expect that voters strategically deserted the PSOE for district-level considerations because it was viable in more districts than Podemos (2015) or Podemos plus IU (2016).

Second, voters motivated by the desire to affect the government composition had more incentives to strategically desert Ciudadanos than Unidos Podemos in favor of the PP and the PSOE, respectively. According to the twelve surveys published between mid-May (when Podemos and IU agreed to form their coalition) and six days before the election (see figure

3.1), Unidos Podemos was ahead of the PSOE by between 1 and 6 points. However, Ciudadanos supporters had strong incentives to vote strategically. The 15-point difference in the December 2015 election remained more or less constant during the 2016 campaign. As table 3.3 shows, when asked about parties' chances of being in the government after the election (with 0 = very unlikely and 10 = very likely), voters clearly saw Unidos Podemos's chances as greater than those of the PSOE. Similarly, PP supporters saw their party's chances as 1 point greater than those of Ciudadanos. Both differences are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Finally, in contrast with the 2015 election, Unidos Podemos supporters faced no incentives to vote strategically for the PSOE, which was doing slightly better in polls.

Data and Methods

The survey was conducted June 13–26, 2016, and closed before the election started on June 26. A representative sample of 2,278 people were interviewed online.⁵ The questionnaire included vote intention and two questions regarding respondents' perceptions of the various parties' chances of joining the government after the election and of winning at least one seat in the respondent's district.⁶

The empirical analysis focuses on those voters who had the opportunity to vote strategically—that is, those respondents whose first preference was Unidos Podemos, Ciudadanos, or PSOE.⁷ There are three dichotomous dependent variables. When explaining pre-election vote intention for Unidos Podemos, the variable takes the value 1 if the respondent intends

TABLE 3.3. Preferred Party's Chances of Joining the Government after the Election (mean value)

Party	Chances of Joining Government	<i>t</i> -Test (unpaired)
PP	7.37 (2.17)	<i>t</i> = 5.97*** N = 716
Ciudadanos	6.36 (2.20)	
PSOE	6.72 (2.13)	<i>t</i> = -2.57*** N = 790
Podemos	7.49 (2.13)	

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses; ****p* < 0.01.

to vote for Unidos Podemos and 0 if the respondent intends to vote for another party. When explaining pre-election vote intention for Ciudadanos, the variable takes the value 1 if the respondent intends to vote for Ciudadanos and 0 if the respondent intends to vote for another party. Finally, when explaining pre-election vote intention for the PSOE, the variable takes the value 1 if the respondent intends to vote for the PSOE and 0 if the respondent intends to vote for another party.

As table 3.4 illustrates, the great majority of respondents intended to vote for their first preference, especially in the case of Unidos Podemos. In other words, at a first glance, relatively little strategic voting occurred. Given that the dependent variables are dichotomous, logistic regressions have been run with clusters for districts.

The two key independent variables are voters' perceptions of Unidos Podemos, Ciudadanos, and PSOE's chances of joining the government after the election and of winning at least one seat in the respondent's district. Both are measured using a scale going from 0 (very unlikely/no chance at all) to 10 (very likely/certain to win). There are three controls in the models. First, the party's rating using an 11-point feeling thermometer ranging from 0 (dislike) to 10 (like) is included. We know that the formation of electoral expectations is particularly sensitive to wishful thinking: voters with strong partisan preferences tend to overestimate the chances of their preferred party (Mutz 1998, chapter 6; Blais and Bodet 2006; Guinjoan et al. 2014; Meffert et al. 2011). Second, the models include a political awareness scale going from 0 (no information at all) to 2 (maximum level of information).⁸ Third, the age (in years) of respondents is included.

Table 3.5 provides descriptive statistics for the variables. As the table shows, 95% of respondents whose first preference was Podemos intended to vote for Unidos Podemos, 79% of respondents whose first preference

TABLE 3.4. Individuals' First Preferences and Vote Intentions, 2016

	Vote Intention					<i>Total</i>	
	PP	PSOE	Unidos Podemos	Ciudadanos	Other		
First Preference	PP	327	0	0	8	13	348
	PSOE	3	267	1	16	12	299
	Unidos Podemos	0	5	417	1	12	435
	Ciudadanos	20	11	9	229	23	292

Source: Data from MEDW survey, 2016.

Note: Numbers in each cell indicate the number of individuals.

was Ciudadanos intended to vote for Ciudadanos, and 93% of respondents whose first preference was the PSOE intended to vote for the PSOE. The empirical analysis tests the extent to which strategic considerations affect those who stick to their first preference.

Table 3.6 shows how those individuals whose first preference is Podemos, Ciudadanos, or the PSOE rated the four main parties' chances of winning seats in the respondent's district. Both Podemos and PSOE

TABLE 3.5. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Unidos Podemos vs Other party (N = 429)				
Vote intention	0.95	0.20	0	1
Podemos's rating	8.51	1.59	1	10
Unidos Podemos's chances of joining government	7.38	2.08	0	10
Unidos Podemos's chances of winning seats	8.38	2.16	0	10
Information	1.08	0.53	0	2
Age	42.64	13.86	18	81
Ciudadanos vs Other Party (N = 277)				
Vote intention	0.79	0.41	0	1
Ciudadanos's rating	7.87	1.76	0	10
Ciudadanos's chances of joining government	6.55	2.09	0	10
Ciudadanos's chances of winning seats	7.58	2.54	0	10
Information	1.07	0.53	0	2
Age	46.28	13.42	18	80
PSOE vs Other Party (N = 249)				
Vote intention	0.93	0.25	0	1
PSOE's rating	8.10	1.48	4	10
PSOE's chances of joining government	6.93	2.08	0	10
PSOE's chances of winning seats	8.45	1.96	0	10
Information	1.00	0.57	0	2
Age	49.29	12.72	18	80

TABLE 3.6. Respondents' Assessments of Parties' Average Chances of Winning Seats in the Respondent's District

	Party			
	Unidos Podemos	PSOE	Ciudadanos	PP
Podemos supporters	7.83 (2.57)	6.76 (3.20)	5.80 (3.33)	6.37 (3.60)
Ciudadanos supporters	6.26 (3.29)	7.21 (3.07)	7.33 (2.66)	7.52 (3.09)
PSOE supporters	6.26 (3.03)	7.81 (2.25)	6.11 (2.91)	6.85 (3.20)

Source: Data from MEDW survey, 2016.

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses.

supporters gave the highest chances of winning seats to their favorite party, while Ciudadanos supporters credited better chances to the PP than to Ciudadanos. In general terms, respondents' assessments of a party's chances declined as the ideological distance between the respondent and the party increased. This finding provides evidence of wishful thinking and strong ideological preferences.

Results

Table 3.7 shows the results of the estimates. In all the models, the party's rating has the expected positive sign, but the findings are statistically significant (at the 0.01% level) only for Unidos Podemos and Ciudadanos. The more respondents like Unidos Podemos and Ciudadanos, the higher their probability of voting for them. The gap between the ratings of the favorite party and the other three main national parties is much lower for the PSOE's supporters than for the Podemos and Ciudadanos supporters, meaning that the party's rating does not significantly increase the probability of voting for the PSOE. The level of political information and age

TABLE 3.7. Vote Intention in the 2016 National Election in Spain

	Models		
	1 Unidos Podemos vs. Other Party	2 Ciudadanos vs. Other Party	3 PSOE vs. Other Party
Podemos/Ciudadanos/PSOE like/dislike rating	0.74*** (0.16)	0.37*** (0.11)	0.06 (0.23)
Podemos/Ciudadanos/PSOE's chances of being in the government	-0.11 (0.17)	-0.019 (0.125)	0.099 (0.147)
Podemos/Ciudadanos/PSOE's chances of winning seat(s) in the district	0.35** (0.11)	-0.16 (0.10)	0.017 (0.245)
Information	-0.98 (0.54)	0.48 (0.26)	0.32 (0.60)
Age	0.021 (0.024)	0.018 (0.018)	0.042 (0.036)
Constant	-3.43** (1.66)	-1.34 (1.16)	-1.19 (1.51)
Pseudo R^2	0.44	0.09	0.06
N	424	274	247
# of clusters	43	46	45

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

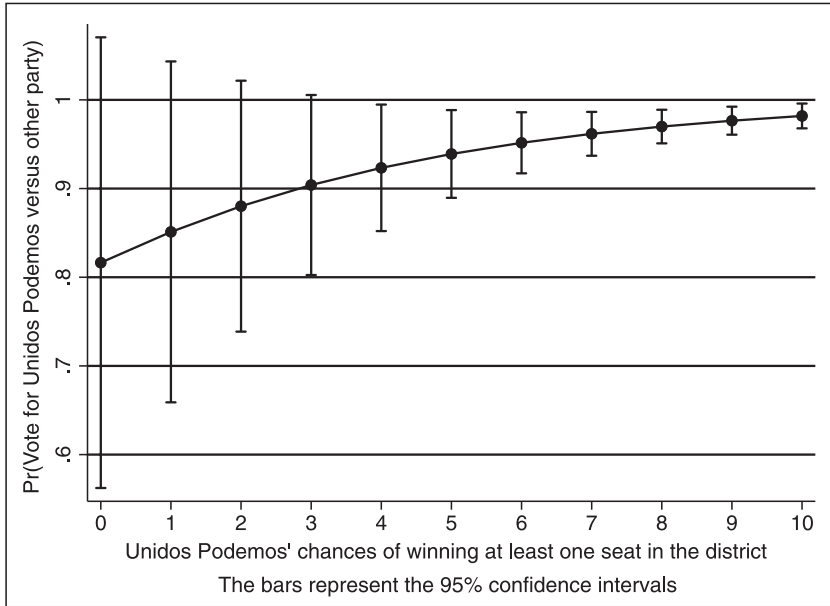


Fig. 3.2. The Impact of the Chances of Winning a Seat in the District on the Probability of Voting for Unidos Podemos

do not significantly affect the probability of supporting Unidos Podemos, Ciudadanos, and the PSOE.

When explaining why respondents intended to vote for Unidos Podemos instead of any other party, Unidos Podemos's chances of winning at least one seat in the respondent's district (Model 1) positively affect the probability of supporting Unidos Podemos and are statistically significant at the 0.05 level: the better the chances attributed to Unidos Podemos, the more likely a respondent is to support the party. Figure 3.2 shows the effect of the variable. For those respondents whose first preference is Unidos Podemos and who think that the party has no chance of winning a seat in the district (value 0), the probability of supporting the party is 0.82; for those who think that the party is certain to win seats (value 10), it is 0.98. However, Unidos Podemos's chances of joining the government after the election do not make a difference for respondents: the variable is not statistically significant, and the coefficient is close to 0.

When explaining the decision to support Ciudadanos rather than another party, Ciudadanos's chances of being in government and of winning at least one seat in the district do not significantly affect the vot-

ing decision. The two variables are far from statistically significant at the conventional levels. Similarly, the PSOE's chances of joining the government and of winning at least one seat in the district are not relevant when accounting for the decision to vote for the PSOE or any other party. Thus, district-level factors are more relevant than national-level factors in explaining strategic voting in Spain. This finding is in line with the evidence provided by Daoust (this vol.) for Canada.

Parties' chances of winning seats in the district have differing impact for Unidos Podemos and Ciudadanos for two reasons. First, Ciudadanos's supporters are not completely aware of its chances of winning the seat, since voter coordination around viable parties has not been an issue for rightist voters. Table 3.8 examines the accuracy of assessments of Unidos Podemos's and Ciudadanos's chances of winning a seat in the district. I regress the 0–10 scale on a dummy variable capturing whether the party won seats in the district in the 2015 election.⁹ If voters are well informed about parties' viability, attributed chances in those districts in which the party won seats should be greater than in those districts in which the party won no seats.

As table 3.8 shows, the chances of Unidos Podemos are 3.25 points greater in districts where it won seats than in those where it did not, and the variable is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, there is no statistically significant difference in Ciudadanos's chances in the two types of districts. In addition, many districts have very few respondents whose first preference is Ciudadanos. Those districts where Ciudadanos won no seats in 2015 had only 55 Ciudadanos sympathizers, and only 1 voted for the PP. Those districts where Ciudadanos won at least one seat in the 2015 election had 191 Ciudadanos sympathizers, 25 of whom voted for the PP.

Finally, it is puzzling that the parties' chances of joining the government make no difference for voters in an early election held after the par-

TABLE 3.8. Accuracy of Expectations, 2016

	Unidos Podemos	Ciudadanos
Seat in the District in the Previous Election	3.25** (1.22)	0.66 (1.72)
Constant	7.02*** (0.92)	8.69*** (1.45)
R^2	0.002	0.0003
N	774	708
# of Clusters	47	50

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

ties failed to reach an agreement to choose a prime minister. Table 3.9 examines the importance of the formation of a government for voters in 2016 relative to 2011. Respondents in both Catalonia and Madrid cared more about which parties formed the government in 2011 than in 2016, a result that warrants further research.

Conclusions

Spain's June 2016 election provides an ideal scenario to see how quickly voters react to a dramatic change in the incentives to behave strategically as a consequence of the emergence of new national parties winning seats in many but not all districts and the failure to elect a prime minister six months earlier. The pool of voters with incentives to vote strategically—to affect both the allocation of seats among parties and the formation of a government—substantially increased in comparison with previous elections.

The study finds only a small amount of planned strategic desertion when explaining the decision to vote for Unidos Podemos instead of another party: the probability of voting for Unidos Podemos slightly increases along with the respondent's belief that the party is more likely to win a seat in the district. However, there is no evidence of strategic desertion motivated by the desire to affect the government composition or strategic consideration at the district level when accounting for the decision of supporting Ciudadanos and the PSOE.

TABLE 3.9. Importance of Government Formation to Individual Voters, 2011 and 2016

	Sample		
	Spain	Catalonia	Madrid
2011 election	—	7.36 (2.59) <i>N</i> = 933	7.81 (2.44) <i>N</i> = 962
2016 election	7.29 (2.66) <i>N</i> = 2,217	6.31 (2.92) <i>N</i> = 531	7.55 (2.84) <i>N</i> = 232

Source: Data from MEDW survey, 2016.

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses. *N* = number of respondents. The election was held on November 20, 2011. The data for 2011 come from pre-election surveys in Barcelona and Madrid conducted between November 10 and November 18, with representative samples of 773 (Barcelona) and 976 (Madrid) individuals interviewed. All surveys conducted by Harris/Decima (now Nielsen), relying on panels of respondents. The sampling was based on a stratified, quota-based approach. Quotas were set by controlling for age, gender, and education status. For further details see www.chairelectoral.com/medw.html

Three reasons explain the very low amount of strategic desertion overall. First, voters do not seem particularly concerned about which parties join the government. In line with the experimental evidence provided by Blais et al. (this vol.), Spanish voters did not update and use the information about the parties' chances of being in government when making vote choices. Second, Ciudadanos's supporters were much less aware than Podemos's supporters of the incentive to behave strategically at the district level. Finally, wishful thinking and strong ideological preferences hamper strategic behaviors.

NOTES

1. <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2016/06/20/57679a8846163f695f8b456e.html>
2. <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2016/06/21/5768538fca4741440a8b4578.html>
3. <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20160621/402667693916/entrevista-rajoy-8-al-dia-streaming.html>
4. <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20160620/402624990066/si-los-extremos-se-imponen-al-centro-espana-seguira-bloqueada.html>
5. The analysis is weighted for age, gender, region, and education.
6. The operationalization of strategic voting in this chapter is slightly different than in other chapters as a consequence of the availability of data. For example, respondents' beliefs about parties' chances of being in government are available only for their preferred party. The variables in the models capture preferences and beliefs only about the preferred party.
7. The specific question in the survey capturing the first preference is categorical: "All in all, which party do you like the most?"
8. The survey includes two questions about factual political knowledge: "Please indicate whether the following statement is true or false: A party needs to get at least 3% of the votes across the whole country in order to be represented in Parliament" and "Please indicate whether the following statement is true or false: The leader of the party with most votes automatically becomes the Prime Minister." Each right answer scores 1; wrong answers or "don't know/no answer" score 0.
9. A focus on the results of Podemos or of Podemos and IU together makes no difference.

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