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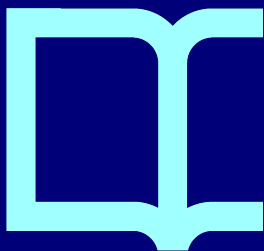
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Ethnic alignment in divided regions: Individual and contextual factors

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Ethnic alignment in divided regions: Individual and contextual factors

The literature on substate nationalisms in Western democracies usually understands ethnicity as a defining feature of regional parties advocating for group or/and territorial recognition. However, the role of ethnicity for state-wide parties competing in regional elections has not received the same attention. Using observational data at the census section level for the Basque election of 2016, this paper shows how state-wide parties can be even more affected by ethnic alignment than regional parties. A key element presented here is the role of contextual effects that generate intra-group variations, resulting in different patterns of electoral boundaries. State-wide parties have an uneven distribution of vote indicating the difficulty of reaching wide segments of the electorate, a pattern that is only broken to some extent by the emergence of new political parties. On the other hand, some regional parties can be more successful both in non-core areas and reaching non-core voters in nationalist strongholds.

Keywords: ethnicity, regional parties, state-wide parties, elections, nationalism, contextual effects

Introduction

The electoral role of ethnicity has been widely explored in a variety of contexts. However, Western political studies often assume, albeit implicitly, that ethnicity is mostly characteristic of regional parties pushing forward the territorial cleavage in the

form of self-determination -either internal or external- demands. Contrary to this conventional wisdom, this paper argues that in certain contexts state-wide parties can be even more affected by ethnic alignment. Analyzing socio-demographic and electoral data for the regional elections of 2016 in the Basque Country, I argue that this relation is associated to the interaction among three factors; the ethnic alignment of voters, the parties' capacity to reach non-core voters, and contextual effects related to the territorial distribution of the population.

Instead of the most usual analysis based on opinion polls, the research uses census data for the Basque regional election of 2016, combining traditional regression methods with ecological inference. The results confirm that a primary conception of ethnicity remains a salient factor to understand territorial politics in Western contexts for both regional and state-wide parties. The analysis also shows that the electoral success of political parties is not only associated to maximizing supports within their core base but to the capacity of reaching non-core voters. Lastly, the evidence indicates how ethnic alignment is not simply a matter of extreme parties on the territorial axis but also of moderate ones. These variations have to do with specific configurations of ethnic alignment, the parties' electoral boundaries and contextual effects.

The analysis shows that in some circumstances state-wide parties can be more affected by the ethnic alignment of voters than regional parties, and this has a lot to do with the territorial distribution of population. The results also suggest the necessity to rely not only on the sociodemographic characteristics of the population, but also on how the aggregated characteristics of the territory may generate differentiated patterns of electoral behaviour. A key finding of the analysis is that the heterogeneous electoral behaviour of population born in the rest of Spain plays a key role in the success of a moderate regional party such as the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), as this group of

population would have a higher probability of voting for regional parties in areas with a high density of Basque-born and Basque-speaking population. This indicates an important distinction to understand the success of political parties in divided societies with segmented electoral markets: the difference between the relative homogeneity of a party's base and the relative heterogeneity of a group's behaviour. Moreover, this association is mediated not only by individual factors but also by contextual effects related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the environment where individuals live in.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Sections 2 and 3 introduce the notion of voter alignment, ethnic boundaries and their interaction with contextual effects as defined here. Section 4 presents the data and the two complementary methods of analysis used here, while Sections 5 and 6 discuss the results and possible implications for further research.

Voting alignment, electoral boundaries and contextual effects.

Ethnicity is classically defined as a sense of groupness associated to a subjective believe in a common ancestry and culture (M. Weber, 1978, p. 385). Elements such as birth, religion, language or race are external markers that can characterize group members. The openness of these markers is important for ethnic-making processes because they expand or contract the potential boundaries of the group (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1031). For instance, membership can be defined as sharing a biological ancestry but also by having born, speak the language or even to live in the territory associated to the group. This dynamic conception of ethnicity also reflects how individuals belong to a group through different socialization mechanisms including nation-building policies, responding to a variety of rational incentives and motivations (Laitin, 2007). In the electoral arena, the

association between a primary marker of ethnicity such as place of birth and the parties' electorate can reflect the expanded or contracted character of ethnic boundaries. Parties' capacity to reach non-core voters would reflect how voter alignment along a given social cleavage such as ethnicity follows a dynamic rather than a deterministic relation. Therefore, the existence, intensity and characteristics of an ethnic electoral alignment can be explored from a quantitative perspective.

In order to do so, ethnicity is used here as a category of analysis inspired by the classical work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) on the politicization of social cleavages into the electoral arena (Brancati 2006, p. 136). This is, ethnicity is not assumed as a category of practice from which individuals rationalize their behaviour but as a category of analysis (Brubaker 2002). As any other social cleavage, the electoral salience of ethnicity requires of a structure of political opportunity, particularly devolved institutions with competitive elections (Máiz 2003, p. 201). In plurinational states with significant minority nationalisms, self-government institutions reinforce the competitive interaction between state and substate nationalist discourses. This is the case of Spain, where the so-called State of Autonomies was expected to foster dual identities and a stable institutional framework. Nevertheless, the territorial cleavage has remained as a key issue of political competition (Erk & Anderson, 2009; Herranz de Rafael, 1998; Meadwell, 2009; Moreno, 2001). The distinction between ethnicity as a category of practice and analysis also avoids taking for granted that certain parties (i.e. regional ones) are almost by definition 'ethnic'. The question is then to what extent a party can have an ethnic component in terms of the electoral alignment of its voters.

Drawing on the literature on ethnic boundaries, parties can experience different variations on the contracted/expanded character of their electoral boundaries, particularly in societies with a relevant ethnic divide (Barth, 1969, p.15; Wimmer,

2008b, p.975). Parties with a contracted boundary would find their main electoral base within a homogenous category, while an expanded boundary can allow them to obtain significant supports across groups beyond ethnic lines. This is, where regional and state-wide parties obtain their supports from a single category of voters we would find a situation of pure cross-cuttingness, while a perfect overlapping would imply parties compete not only within but across categories (Selway 2011:119). Nonetheless, it is important to remark that electoral markets are not always perfectly segmented, this is, some parties may vary in their capacity of appealing across groups, while others may sustain their electoral performance in appealing to contracted groups of voters (Zuber 2012:932).

In these asymmetrical contexts, parties may have different incentives to expand or contract their electoral boundaries. Nationalist movements in diverse societies can emphasize overarching issues such as welfare or democratic values over ethnocultural elements, or at least to approach them in inclusive rather than exclusive terms, particularly when a too narrow boundary can be detrimental to their potential success (Guibernau, 1999; Keating, 2001). Even nationalist movements with strong ethnocultural roots will include a civic and political dimension in their repertoires and manifestos, given the sociodemographic characteristics of the population. A mere ethno-cultural discourse would exclude a relevant portion of the citizenry difficulting the possibilities of electoral success, and this would encourage the inclusion of elements related to democratic values or welfare policies in the nationalist discourse (Goikoetxea, 2013; Pérez-Agote, 2006). Thus, ethnicity as a resource of mobilization at the substate level can go associated to a variety of conceptions of the nation and political demands for self-government (Hale 2008, p. 39; Máiz 2003, p. 197).

It is important to remark that these patterns can affect both regional and state-wide parties, even though the literature has often neglected this aspect of party competition (Brancati, 2006; Chandra, 2011; Kuzio, 2002; Máiz, 2004). Wherever there is a structure of opportunity that can be used as a resource for political mobilization, then ethnicity can become salient in a variety of dimensions such as political discourses or group practices. In the electoral arena, this salience would imply that individuals behave significantly along ethnic lines, despite the existence of civic elements in the nationalist discourse both at the substate and state level. If relevant in electoral terms, we will find a significant association between ethnicity and vote that can be particularly salient in those cases where a significant portion of the population is born outside the region. Thus, the general expectation is that the association between ethnicity and vote can operate for both types of parties, with state-wide (regional) parties performing better in areas with higher percentages of population born in the rest of Spain (Basque Country).

This ethnic alignment can affect political parties depending on the socio-demographic configuration of voters and can have a strong influence on the different types of parties competing in the regional arena. Moderate parties may have stronger incentives to expand their electoral boundaries while more extreme parties can succeed by maximizing their performance within a contracted boundary under a logic similar to that of 'niche' parties (Adams, Clark, Ezrow, & Glasgow, 2006; Massetti & Schakel, 2016; Serrano & Bonillo, 2017; Wimmer, 2008a). Thus, extreme parties may feature a stronger ethnic alignment as they will perform better among their core electoral base. In the Basque case, both post-electoral surveys (see for instance CIS-3154) and recent expert-survey data (Zuber & Szöcsik, 2018) situate the right-wing pro-Spanish *People's Party* (PP) and far-left pro-Basque coalition *EH-Bildu* as the parties with a more

extreme position in the territorial axis. Thus, a first general hypothesis would read as follows:

H1: Extreme parties in the center-periphery axis will feature higher levels of ethnic alignment than moderate parties.

Territorial distribution of population and contextual effects

However, sociodemographic characteristics of the population do not shape individual preferences and choices isolated from the environment where they live in. The territorial distribution of vote and the complexity of divided societies with segmented markets such as the Basque Country indicates that more than a simple linear relation may be in place. Indeed, as displayed in Figure 1 density functions at the electoral section level suggest that regional parties have a more homogeneous distribution of vote than their state-wide counterparts. This is, state-wide parties tend to concentrate their results in a limited number of sections while there is a relevant portion of sections where they perform poorly.

Figure 1. Territorial distribution of regional and state-wide parties vote

These variations could have to do with the socio-demographic spatial distribution of Basque population. The massive immigration to the Basque Country from other parts of Spain since 1960s was concentrated in industrial suburbs, with the capital Bilbao being a case in point. However, the density functions indicate regional parties obtain significant supports even in electoral sections with lower levels of Basque-born population. Figures 2 and 3 focus on Bilbao's metropolitan area to illustrate this pattern for an area with high levels of population born in the rest of Spain. State-wide parties obtain good results and a significant portion of their electoral

supports in this area, but they hardly penetrate in nationalist strongholds surrounding the city's metropolitan area. Nevertheless, regional parties are also able to obtain significant results in the city despite it could represent a more difficult environment given its socio-demographic characteristics.

Figure 2. State-wide parties' support in the metropolitan area of Bilbao

Figure 3. Regional parties' support in the metropolitan area of Bilbao

This exploratory data suggests the association between ethnicity and vote is neither linear nor only affected by individual factors. Social behaviour is defined by individual features but context that can add relevant effects by means of different mechanisms of assimilation and acculturation that have been studied from the field of psychological, social and political sciences (Berry 1997, p. 10; Burbank 1997). Indeed, the literature has long discussed how diversity and environmental characteristics can affect individual attitudes. However, there is not a generally accepted consensus on the intensity and direction of this influence (Laitin 2007, chap. 2; Pettigrew & Tropp 2012).

One of the main controversies in the field is the distinction between 'contact' and 'threat' effects. Linked to classical theories on neighbourhood consensual effects (Miller, 1978), intergroup contact would tend to reduce prejudices. At the electoral level this results in voting patterns more similar to the aggregated characteristics of the area where the individual lives (Macallister et al 2001:59). Conversely, the general expectation for 'threat' theories is that intergroup contact can reinforce conflict. From this perspective, the presence of a relevant percentage of a given group tends to increase hostility, leading to a threat effect (Taylor 1998). This threat effect can result in higher proportion of political mobilization including voting for more extreme parties in the

relevant cleavage that defines the political arena, a classical case being white voters' behaviour in the US (Enos, 2016). An additional layer of complexity emerges as the effects of diversity are also associated to the size of the territorial units analyzed, with bigger areas more prone to generate 'threat effects' (Kaufmann & Harris 2015, p. 1566). In subnational contexts with a relevant territorial cleavage, a 'contact' effect could facilitate what Wimmer defines as boundary blurring, resulting in a process of ethnic dealignment (Wimmer 2008a, p. 1041), while a 'threat' effect would reinforce the ethnic alignment of voters.

In a case such as the Basque, a factor of interest from this perspective is to assess to what extent individuals born in the rest of Spain develop different attitudes depending on the concentration of population of the same origin around them. At the electoral level this group could remain closer to state-wide parties following an ethnocultural reproduction pattern, while a significant vote for nationalist parties would reflect some sort of assimilation associated to contextual effects. This is, sociodemographic characteristics in terms of origins can interact with the context in more complex ways as found in other cases (e.g. Hierro 2015). To explore this association, it is necessary to consider the spatial distribution of population in the Basque Country, which still reflects the massive migrations from the rest of Spain during the 1960s and 1970s.

Addressing the combined effects of individual characteristics and contextual factors derived from the territorial distribution of the population has received little attention even in those cases that explore possible patterns of assimilation in subnational arenas such as the Basque case (De La Calle & Jeffrey Miley, 2008a Díez-Medrano, 1994). Some research has explored a possible trend of assimilation and support for self-determination among population with at least one parent born in the rest of Spain, but

the quality of the available data -usually with small subsamples from opinion studies- often leads to inconclusive results (De La Calle & Jeffrey Miley 2008b, p. 717) . For other cases such Catalonia, the percentage of population born in the rest of Spain seems to be associated to lower levels of Catalan identification even among population born in the region (Barceló 2014, p. 715). However, an often-neglected aspect is how different levels of diversity in a given subregional territory may foster assimilationist (voting more similar to the majority) or reactive (strengthening ethnic alignment) attitudes. This has often to do with the territorial level of analysis used, at most the municipal level, which result in comparing observations of a very diverse size which can not fully capture the internal heterogeneity of the units analyzed. These possible variations would reflect how ethnocultural reproduction and factors such as nation-building policies do not generate homogeneous results but depend to some extent on the context where they take place. Thus, beyond a general trend of ethnic alignment, a ‘contact’ perspective would suggest that population born outside the Basque Country would tend to vote more often for major regional parties in areas with high levels of population born in the Basque Country, denoting some degree of ethnic dealignment. The direction of this moderation effect is still a matter of discussion, but according to the existing literature we should expect a contact effect, as we are dealing with small areas. This hypothesis can be summarized as follows:

H2: Population born outside the Basque Country will vote more for major regional parties in areas with high levels of population born in the Basque Country

To explore the role of contextual effects we can also consider interactions between relevant factors at the individual level such as origins and language. In Quebec, Loewen et al (2015, p. 138) found that nationalism was more determinant for Bloc

Québécois in areas with higher percentages of English speakers, suggesting the existence of an interaction between ethnicity markers that were affected by their territorial distribution. In the Basque case, the evidence suggests that ethnocultural components associated to ancestry have historically declined in front of more inclusive elements such as speaking the regional language (Conversi, 1990). The consolidation of inclusive ethnic boundaries would reinforce the 'civic' components of Basque identity such as will or to live and work in the country (Peral 2013, p. 70). This could have important moderation effects on ethnocultural reproduction patterns, for instance among individuals born in the region from parents born in the rest of Spain. Moreover, the percentage of population born in the region or the knowledge of the regional language could add a contextual effect to be incorporated in the sociodemographic characterization of the units of analysis. Thus, the interaction between elements associated with ethno-cultural characteristics can produce relevant moderation effects, but the question is the direction of such effects. Some research on ethnic studies in divided or segmented societies Selway (2011) has found that the interaction between variables such as ethnicity and religion (where religion is a salient issue) can increase polarization. Adding the territorial perspective with small units of analysis can illustrate how the association between vote and percentage of population born in the Basque Country varies with the context where these elements are at play. Contextual effects could reflect whether a certain environment has an independent effect on vote, interacting with primary factors that exert a relevant influence over electoral behaviour. This implies that ethnic markers are influential not only as an individual feature but also as a contextual factor, and then different configurations can be expected. In our case, where the available variables of interest are place of birth and language, the interaction between these two elements can exert a relevant moderation effect on party choice.

Thus, from the interaction between individual factors such as language or origins and the environmental characteristics we can define the third hypothesis in the following terms:

H3: The association between percentage of Basque-born population and regional (state-wide) parties' vote is stronger as the percentage of Basque-speakers grows (declines).

Data and Methods

The data used here comes from the regional election of 2016 in the Basque Country. It was the third election held in the region since 2009, when the pro-independence radical left was banned from standing in the election due to its links with the terrorist group ETA. This had allowed the *Partido Socialista de Euskadi* (PSE-PSOE) to form a minority government with external supports from the PP and *Unión Progreso y Democracia* (UPyD) (de la Calle & Sanchez-Cuenca, 2009). After the permanent ceasefire of the terrorist group ETA in 2011, the PNV returned to office in the early election of 2012. A wide pro-independence and left-wing electoral coalition (EH-Bildu) came in second place while state-wide parties suffered a severe loss of votes. In 2016, the PNV won again the election with 37,4 per cent of the vote, while the coalition *EH-Bildu* lost four points but remained as the second party in parliament with 21,1 per cent of the vote. PSE-PSOE's fell to 11,9 per cent, almost twenty percentual points below their results in 2009, while the PP's obtained 10,1 per cent of votes. The election witnessed the first participation of *Podemos*, a state-wide party that since 2014 had emerged in the Spanish arena with a pro-left, populist platform that obtained 14,8 per cent of the vote (Kioupkiolis, 2016).

The electoral dimension of ethnicity and nationalism has been usually analyzed with survey data. The accuracy of survey design and response represents a methodological challenge for behavioural studies, particularly in polarized contexts or when asking controversial questions (Biemer, Groves, Lyberg, Mathiowetz, & Sudman, 2011; Lensvelt-Mulders, 2008). Individuals can be reluctant to express their preferences or may not have a clear position on certain issues for a variety of reasons such as social desirability or cross-pressures (Johnson, Burris, O'Rourke, & Owens, 2002; Rodon & Guinjoan, 2018; Tourangeau & Smith, 1996; W. Weber & Saris, 2015). Contexts with high levels of polarization or even historical violence as found in the Basque Country can affect how individuals respond to sensitive questions related to political attitudes or electoral choices. For instance, according to individual responses in post-electoral surveys, reported turnout in 2016 was of 79,9 per cent, twenty points higher than the actual results¹. Moreover, there are significant differences between real and self-reported vote. This affects especially extreme parties in the national cleavage such as the PP or EH-Bildu, with more than six points of difference between self-reported and actual vote. Even more importantly, more than 17 per cent of self-declared voters preferred not to express their choices.

While these variations are not uncommon and do not discredit the information provided by opinion studies, they show certain limits due to survey design, technical questions or individual factors. Thus, exploring alternative sources of information and methods using observational data can complement these traditional approaches. To increase consistency, we analyze census and electoral data at the section level. This is the smallest administrative unit available for statistical purposes in Spain, in contrast with the usual approach based on the municipal level, which can underestimate the heterogeneity among and within units of analysis (Lepič, 2017; Mansvelt, 1999).

Furthermore, to control for the possible limitations of observational data to a reasonable extent, we use two complementary methods of analysis.

First, we run a Seemingly Unrelated Regression (Zellner, 1962). This method analyzes observational data for multiple dependent variables with the same set of explanatory variables, without assuming they have independent effects (Jackson, 2002; Kyriacou & Morral-Palacín, 2014; Meguid, 2015). The results of this model do not vary significantly from running multiple linear regressions for each dependent variable, but it increases parsimony and facilitates interpretation. To offer a more complete account we also include turnover as a dependent variable, computing the results over the total electoral franchise instead of taking only valid vote, a usual choice in the literature that often overlooks the portion of the electorate that do not participate in the elections. Independent variables are computed from the data available at the section level. The first variable is percentage of eligible voters born in the Basque Country. It is computed from data on place of birth gathered by local councils as a continuous census and correspond to 2016, the same year of the election. The second variable of interest is the percentage of Basque speakers for each electoral section, available from the last census conducted in Spain in 2011.

The relation between place of birth and language can offer interesting insights. According to official data, approximately 17 per cent of the population has Basque as mother tongue, 12,5 per cent are new speakers and 17,7 per cent has some knowledge of the language². Thus, even though origins and language are strongly correlated, the relation with identity and electoral behaviour can not be assumed to follow a simple linear association neither at the level of nationalist discourses nor of individual attitudes (Costa-Font & Tremosa-Balcells 2008). To capture the specificities of the Basque case, where population -particularly from younger generations- born in the region can acquire

a knowledge of the language by ethno-cultural reproduction but also by socialization in school, the model includes an interaction between these two variables to explore whether the slopes of the regression lines between party vote and percentage of population born in the Basque Country vary for different levels of Basque speakers.

The model also includes as control variables the percentage of population over 65 years old from the continuous census of 2016, and the percentage of unemployment and population with a university degree for each section from the census conducted in 2011, variables that according to the literature tend to have a significant effect on participation (Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004; Gallego, 2007; Rubenson, Blais, Fournier, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004). Introducing the proportion of elder people in the model also allows to control for the socio-demographic history of the region, not only controlling for age as an individual factor but also capturing the specific composition of the sections analyzed. In particular, it can capture the strength of ethnocultural reproduction patterns of individuals born in the region from parents born outside the Basque Country, which could result in lower percentages of vote for regional parties in these sections.

The percentage of population unemployed adds a control to the economic factor. It is well established in the literature how ideology and economical questions are key determinants of vote, but in the case of minority nations there is also evidence of how polarization around the national dimension can interact with these factors (De la Calle, 2005; Medeiros, Gauvin, & Chhim, 2015; Nadeau, Lewis-Beck, & Bélanger, 2013; Pallarés, Muñoz & Retortillo, 2006). Moreover, electoral alternatives in the Basque Country cover the whole ideological and national spectrum, and this can blur the distinction between class and ethnic politics or the influence of economic perceptions on electoral choices (Díez-Medrano 1994, p. 879; Strijbis & Leonisio 2012). In general,

the economic situation seems to affect support for incumbent parties at the regional level, and this would be in accordance with the electoral results of the PSE-PSOE in the election of 2012 election, that was nonetheless characterized by an unstable government after the radical left was banned from the electoral race of 2009 (Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez 2013, p. 503). On the other hand, the elections of 2016 were held in the aftermath of the Spanish economic crisis. Even though the Basque Country was less affected than the rest of Spain, the question is whether unemployment can be a significant determinant of vote or, rather to the contrary, the specific configuration of the ideological and national cleavages in the Basque Country will limit its possible effects.

Second, I run an ecological inference model to calculate party vote at the section level by groups of birth. Ecological inference methods try to overcome problems of individualistic fallacy that can arise in linear regression analysis based on aggregated data (Owen & Grofman 1997; Teune & Przeworski 1970, p. 72). This topic has generated a methodological debate on how to deal with the challenges of analysing aggregated data to estimate the proportion of voters who vote for a given party in a single or in two consecutive elections (for a broad overview of these debates, see Park, Hanmer, & Biggers, 2014). I use the statistical package *EiPack*, developed by Lau, Moore and Kellermann (2012) for R software. This package departs from earlier ecological inference techniques that received criticisms pointing out some key limitations (Agnew, 1996a; Gary King, 1997). For instance, they initially assumed that proportion of votes from each group considered do not vary significantly across constituencies, this is, vote at the unit level is considered as independent from the overall results and that there is not spatial dependence among constituencies, putting

into question the very existence of contextual effects (Agnew 1996b; Chandra 2000, p. 21; King 1996; King et al. 2004, p. 7).

To address these issues, the model used here is based on further developments applying a Multinomial-Dirichlet model with Markov chain Monte Carlo simulations (Rosen et al. 2001; Wakefield 2004). These methods offer more robust results and also allow to work with tables bigger than 2x2, that is, with more than two variables for each row and column (Lau, Moore, & Kellermann, 2006). The analysis is developed over five clusters defined by place of birth to prevent possible linear assumptions about the territorial units. Calculating estimates over clustered units of analysis allows to work with more homogeneous groups without losing explanatory capacity, given the large number of units available, a strategy that has been applied in recent studies (Puig & Ginebra, 2014a, 2014b). Moreover, clustering can also capture the heterogeneity of population born in the Basque Country and the possible contextual effects that may result from the internal composition of each electoral section.

The clusters computed are summarized in Table 1. The four groups reflect a clear relation between percentage of population born in the rest of Spain and political parties' performance. In general, regional parties obtain better results as the percentage of population born in the Basque Country grows, while the relation is the opposite for state-wide parties. Abstention seems also strongly associated to percentage of population born in the Basque Country.

Table 1. Clustered electoral sections. Mean values.

Results

Table 2 lists the estimated coefficients for each political party and abstention of the SUR model. The model explains a relevant percentage of the variance for all cases

confirming that Basque-born and Basque-speaking population are important determinants of vote. However, interactions suggest important moderating effects between Basque-born population and Basque speakers that affects party vote in different ways. The results of the interaction are significant for all the cases except for the PNV, a party that receives a significant support even in sections with low levels of Basque-born population associated with low levels of Basque-speakers. Indeed, the party's performance in areas with higher levels of Basque-born and Basque-speaking do not reflect a significant interaction between these two variables. Thus, the model reflects the party's ability to expand its electoral boundaries beyond a simple association between origins and language. On the other hand, the party's performance is positively associated instead to sections with higher percentages of elder people. Considering that an important segment of older generations did not have access to education in the regional language, this could explain why the percentage of population born in the Basque country is not associated to language and vote to the PNV, as the percentages of Basque speakers among this group of population is lower.

Table 2. Seemingly unrelated regression model of party vote

The rest of independent variables also has remarkable effects. Sections with higher levels of elder population are in general more participatory, adding evidence to the lower rates of participation among younger generations. The model also indicates that unemployment is not a strong determinant of vote for major parties, reinforcing the evidence that electoral pluralism in the Basque Country could blur the effects of the left-right cleavage. The main exception is the PP, where the positive coefficient of unemployment and university degree reflects how the party obtains better results in more affluent sections. While unemployment has no remarkable effects as a determinant

of party vote, it has a strong and negative effect over participation. Electoral mobilization is weaker in economically disadvantaged areas, which are also characterized by high levels of population born in the rest of Spain, low levels of education and elder population.

Significant interactions are displayed in Figure 4, representing predicted probabilities of vote for PSE, PP, Bildu and Podemos. There is a general association between vote and percentage of Basque-born population, but the interaction with language suggests interesting variations. A relevant ethnic alignment is found for moderate parties such as the PSE, whose vote declines as Basque-born population grows, but this trend is mitigated in sections with lower levels of Basque-speakers. As for Podemos, the party has difficulties in densely Basque-speaking sections with high levels of Basque-born population, but it obtains a stable share of vote in low-to-middle Basque-speaking sections regardless of the percentage of population born in the region, suggesting a better performance in areas with higher percentages of young population. The PP and Bildu confirm that more extreme parties in the territorial cleavage feature a more intense pattern of ethnic alignment. Conservatives perform better in sections that concentrate low levels of Basque-speaking and Basque-born population, while the party's support rapidly falls when this last group grows, even in areas with small percentages of Basque-speakers. Lastly, Bildu's shows the strongest association between high levels of Basque-born and Basque-speaking population, almost tripling its votes as compared to sections with lower percentages of speakers. All in all, the results indicate that more extreme parties in the territorial axis tend to maximize supports within contracted electoral boundaries.

Figure 4. Predicted coefficients of vote for PSE, Bildu, PP and Podemos by percentage of population born in the rest of Spain

However, the ethnic alignment of a party's territorial base does not fully account for the capacity to reach non-core voters or the extent to which voters behave differently depending on their environment. To explore whether groups behave homogeneously, ecological inference allows to estimate the electoral choices of individuals at the section level for each of the clusters introduced in the previous section of the paper, indicating the existence of contextual effects. Table 3 displays the estimated coefficients of party vote for population born in the rest of Spain. Regional parties perform relatively well even when the presence of this group of population is stronger, while vote for state-wide parties is more stable, regardless of sociodemographic variations at the section level. The average coefficients indicate that turnout increases for this group in sections densely populated by Basque-born population, suggesting a contextual effect that increase participation on otherwise less mobilized voters.

Table 3. Estimated proportion of vote by population born in the rest of Spain. EI's estimates

Higher levels of participation have repercussions on how this increment is distributed among parties, suggesting important contextual variations. These variations are better illustrated plotting the predicted coefficients of the ecological inference model for population born in the rest of Spain (Figure 5) clustered by origins (with lighter points representing lower levels of population not born in the Basque Country) and plotted against the percentage of Basque-speaking population (horizontal axis). This representation helps to visualize different patterns of vote and cross-sectional variations. The PNV shows a remarkable capacity to improve results among this group of population as the percentage of Basque-born population grows. Percentage of Basque

speakers seems to have a limited effect, in accordance with the regression model that found no significant effect in the interaction between origins and language. Bildu is also able to obtain significant results across all sections, yet no visible pattern emerges except for a low support in areas with high levels of Basque-born and Basque-speaking population. This could indicate that the moderate discourse of the PNV can be more successful in these contexts, while a more radical platform may generate an oppositional effect in nationalist strongholds among population not born in the region.

Figure 5. Vote estimates for population born in the rest of Spain by clustered electoral section

Among state-wide parties, the PP's performance declines dramatically in sections other than those with the strongest concentration of voters born in the rest of Spain. This pattern confirms that extreme parties in the territorial dimension would be more affected by an ethnic alignment. Rather interestingly, PSE's supports are lower precisely in PP's core areas, while it improves in areas from middle-to-low levels of population born in the rest of Spain. In sections more densely populated by Basque-speakers and Basque-born population, both parties tend to decline to a rather stable pattern of support. As for Podemos, no clear territorial pattern emerges. The lack of contextual effects can reflect the positive association to younger generations and higher levels of education found in the regression model. Lastly, abstention's coefficients confirm a contextual effect that results in a differential mobilization effect, with higher levels of participation as Basque-born population grows, where turnout is in general above the average.

Table 4. Estimated proportion of vote by Basque-born population. EI's estimates

Table 4 summarizes the estimated coefficients of vote for clustered Basque-born population. The overall results suggest a clear pattern related to the growing proportion of this group at the section level. Regional parties improve their results as the sections become more homogeneous in terms of Basque-born population. In line with the estimated coefficients of the SUR model, Bildu's performance is more influenced by this trend than the PNV. State-wide parties follow an opposite trend and receive a decreasing support from this group as the percentage of Basque-born population grows. Given the assumption that the probability of having at least one parent born in the Basque Country increases with the percentage of Basque-born population, the estimated voter coefficients reflect how ethnocultural reproduction affects differently regional and state-wide parties. These patterns arise more clearly in the graphical representation of estimated coefficients displayed in Figure 6, which follows the same structure of Figure 5 for Basque-born population.

Figure 6. Vote estimates for Basque-born population by clustered electoral section

The graphical representation of the EI coefficients also confirms how the PNV expands its electoral boundaries among Basque-born population in different socio-demographic contexts. Except for a poor performance in sections combining low levels of population born in the region and a low percentage of Basque-speakers, beyond a certain threshold of Basque-born population the party obtains a stable support regardless of the sociodemographic characteristics of the section. As for Bildu, the party features a stronger pattern of ethnic alignment, but it also has a remarkable capacity to penetrate in

more mixed areas. The party also shows the same difficulty found for the PNV in penetrating homogeneous areas with low levels of Basque-born and Basque-speaking population. These areas are precisely where state-wide parties perform better among both groups of population. The existence of electoral enclaves without evidence of significant contextual effects points to the power of ethno-cultural reproduction patterns in homogeneous contexts.

However, beyond a certain threshold ethnoregional parties seem more successful in obtaining significant supports even in more mixed areas and homogenous Basque-born population areas, while state-wide parties follow a clear declining pattern of alignment among this group associated to higher Basque-born and Basque-speaking areas. In these environments, population born in the Basque country seems to be significantly less appealed by state-wide parties than in contexts with higher levels of historical immigration from the rest of Spain. If we consider the previous evidence on voting proportions for population born in the rest of Spain, it is plausible to suggest a contact effect that, even in more mixed environments, results in significant supports for regional parties. To sum up, both findings suggest how in certain contexts regional parties are more able to expand their electoral boundaries than state-wide parties. This goes against the conventional wisdom often found in the literature that assumes ethnicity playing a role mostly or exclusively for regional parties, and the importance of including the territorial distribution of vote and contextual effects to unveil these mechanisms.

Conclusions

Understanding the role of ethnicity in divided regions with a salient territorial question requires of an integrated approach combining voting alignment, ethnic boundaries and

contextual effects. Even though the literature has addressed the electoral role of ethnicity in a variety of cases worldwide, in Western contexts this role has been often only applied to regional parties. The evidence presented here suggests that ethnicity - even understood in basic terms- plays a relevant role not only for regional parties but also for state-wide parties. This integrative framework, tested upon observational data for small units of analysis, also offers a complementary approach to the traditional use of survey data. Departing from a primary conception of ethnicity defined as place of birth, we characterize the electoral base of political parties in terms of the ethnic alignment of voters, pointing at important contextual effects expanding or contracting their electoral boundaries.

Beyond long-lasting debates on the civic-ethnic components of nationalism, the results demonstrate that ethnicity as a category of analysis is a key determinant of vote in a Western context not only for regional but also state-wide parties. Thus, the theoretical and empirical dimension of ethnicity should be conceived as a basic cross-cutting dimension interacting with other relevant factors. This is particularly important in divided societies with cross-cutting cleavages that result in segmented electoral markets, where parties' electoral support may follow different patterns. Accordingly, the relevance of a primary conception of ethnicity must be seen as multifaceted rather than univocal determinant of vote, interacting not only with individual but also with contextual factors. From this overall perspective, there are several elements that can be incorporated into the academic debate within this field of research.

First, the ethnic homogeneity of its electorate is a measure to assess whether and to what extent a party can be defined as 'ethnic', complementary to the supply approach that characterizes parties through their political platforms, their behaviour in political institutions, their electoral manifestos or other sources such as experts-surveys. Second,

when analyzing regional arenas in Western contexts this approach must be applied not only to regional but also to state-wide parties, as they can be even more affected by ethnic alignment. Third, this approach allows to explore potential combinations between a party position in the territorial axis and its electoral boundary, which is particularly important to better understand the role of ethnicity and place in divided societies. Fourth, the focus on voter behaviour along ethnic lines indicates that a party's electorate can be relatively homogeneous, but this does not imply that the electorate's behaviour is homogeneous too. Fifth, the combination of ethnicity and other sociodemographic characteristics with contextual effects suggest how the structure of party vote can vary from maximizing support within a contracted group to expanding their electoral base beyond their core voters. Lastly, patterns in the territorial distribution of the population along a salient social divide such as ethnicity must be considered. The influence of individual sociodemographic factors take -literally- place interacting with the context where individuals live.

The use of observational data has allowed to explore the salience of ethnicity at the party, group, and section level. The electoral base of political parties can follow a homogeneous ethnic alignment, yet the electoral choices of individuals may simultaneously be characterized by heterogeneous patterns, reflecting ethnocultural and contextual effects. These effects are reflected in voter proportions for both groups of population examined here. The general association between origins and vote works for both regional and state-wide parties and suggests that the role of ethno-cultural reproduction patterns is particularly strong in homogeneous contexts. However, the evidence also suggests different variations around the ideal types of contracted and expanded boundaries, with a regional party such as the PNV showing remarkable features of the latter. The results also show how parties' performance can follow

different patterns, with relevant variations between maximizing supports in a given segment of the electorate and having expanded boundaries to reach non-core voters. For instance, a party's vote can be unevenly distributed across the territory even when it obtains a similar level of support among their core voters. Moreover, voter alignment at the party level is compatible with a given group behaving differently depending on its sociodemographic characteristics and contextual effects.

Focusing on group behaviour, contextual factors have remarkable effects that unfold nuanced interactions within groups. For instance, population born in the rest of Spain has a more diverse behaviour than a mere ethnocultural reproduction approach would expect. This group has indeed a higher probability to vote for state-wide parties, particularly in areas with a strong majority of population born in the rest of Spain. However, the increasing turnout associated to Basque-born and Basque-speaking environments seems to benefit regional parties that can reach a higher portion of the electorate born in the rest of Spain. The capacity to penetrate among this group of population as their presence in relative terms declines suggests a 'contact' rather than a 'threat' contextual effect. It is only in those sections with a strong presence of population born outside the Basque Country and the lowest percentages of Basque-speaking population where a strong ethnic alignment is found for this group, an aspect that would be in accordance with the literature discussed earlier associating threat effects to a greater territorial scale. Moreover, this is compatible with the fact that state-wide parties are defined to a great extent by the ethnic alignment of their electoral base. These two simultaneous claims unfold an important distinction not always sufficiently addressed in the literature: a party's electorate can be more or less homogeneous, thus reflecting an ethnic alignment, but this does not necessarily imply that the electorate as a whole behaves homogeneously.

Lastly, the aim of the paper was also to complement the traditional approach to the 'ethnic' question in Western democracies by means of aggregated instead of survey data. Aggregated data offers the opportunity of having a deeper -yet for a limited number of variables- account of sociodemographic and electoral information at the territorial level. The combination of different techniques sheds light on the parties' capacity to reach beyond their traditional electoral base and the role played by the territorial distribution of population. Achieving significant results among 'non-core' voters and territories can be fundamental for the relative success of political parties, particularly when certain thresholds in terms of ethno-cultural characteristics of the population are reached. Needless to say, the approach used here also presents important limits and raises relevant questions for future research. The existence of significant contextual effects invites to further explore causal mechanisms between electoral behaviour and origins, from the possible existence of ethnic enclaves to the long-term dynamics of interaction between identity formation and political attitudes. Quantitative analysis traditionally developed in the field of electoral studies and minority nationalisms must go beyond the use of opinion polls and rely upon the opportunities offered by aggregated data, but the nuanced interactions between ethnocultural factors and political behaviour would deserve further research not only from a quantitative but also from a qualitative approach.

Footnotes

1 Data from the post-electoral survey conducted by the *Centro de Investigaciones*

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[14309](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/CA/1_encuestas/estudios/listaMuestras.jsp?estudio=14309)

[2](#) Data retrieved from the official Basque Institute of Statistics, available at

http://en.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0009500/ti_Evolucion_linguistica_indice_BILA_en_la_CA_de_Euskadi_por_territorio_historico_y_grupo_de_edad__2016/tbl0009565_i.html

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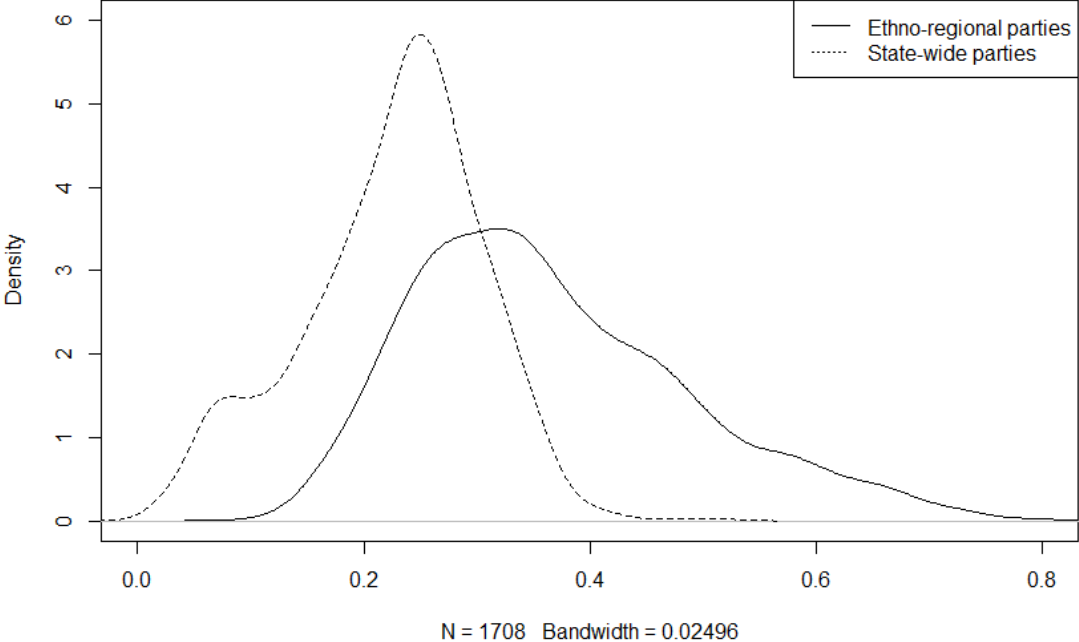
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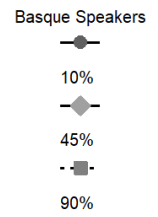
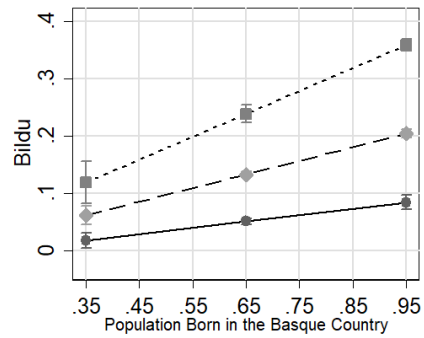
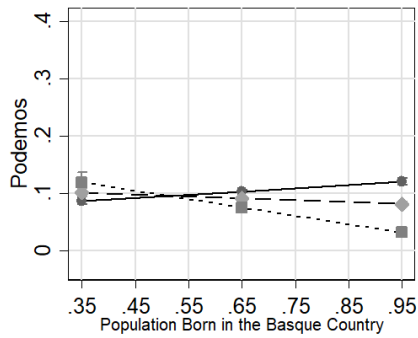
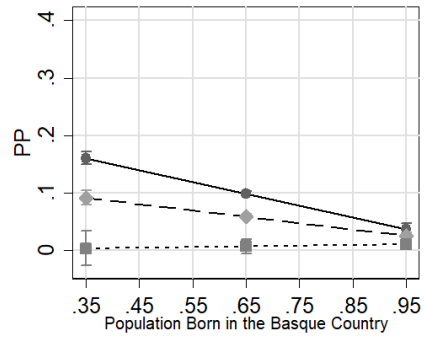
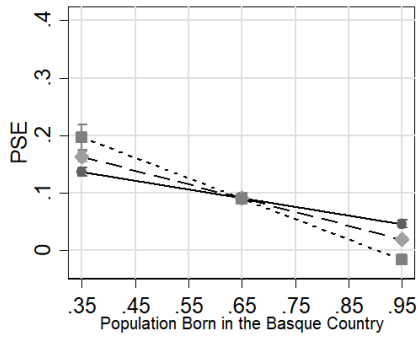
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Distribution of ethno-regional and state-wide parties





Predicted coefficients of party vote

