Allocating Campaign Effort in Spain: Evidence from Four General Elections

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Abstract: Controlling for district magnitude, party characteristics and election effects, we find that the major Spanish parties -PP and PSOE- mobilise districts where they are more likely to win a new seat or are in danger of losing one they already hold. As a determinant of campaign intensity, the predicted closeness of the district race is more relevant in the smallest districts. We also find that Spanish parties mobilise their strongholds, an effect as important as the closeness of the district race. We suggest that in the mobilisation choices made by Spanish party elites political finance motivations might play a role.

1. Introduction

Voter mobilisation is a key feature in the electoral process. Since the individual incentives for voting are weak, in the run up to elections self-interested political parties provide information and other incentives to persuade voters to go to the polls (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, Johnston et al. 2012). The literature relating party mobilisation to voter turnout is abundant (Cox & Munger 1989, Caldeira et al. 1990, Holbrook & McClurg 2005, Nickerson et al. 2006). However, the determinants of the geographical distribution of campaign activities are a less researched subject. Exploring the campaign strategies of the two major Spanish parties, the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE), we aim to improve our understanding of how parties invest mobilisation effort in a context characterized by closed party lists and multi-member districts.

Examining the Spanish case is particularly suitable for our purposes. First, previous literature builds on evidence from the single-member district systems of the United States and the United Kingdom. We want, however, to put forward a more general model of mobilisation that also applies to campaign activities in proportional representation (PR) systems and other areas of the world, such as Southern Europe. Spain employs a closed-list PR system based on the D'Hondt formula. There are 350 seats in the Spanish lower house (*Congreso de los Diputados*), which are elected from 50 multi-member districts (*provincias*) whose magnitude varies considerably and two single-member districts. This implies that Spanish elections encompass a wide-ranging variety of scenarios regarding the level of disproportionality of the electoral outcomes.

Secondly, given that Spain's electoral system operates with closed party lists and multi-member districts, no representative has a geographic electorate for which she is solely responsible and, consequently, there are no incentives to undertake individual mobilisation activities to seek a personal vote. Instead, campaigns are mainly run at the national level and it is the business of the national party elites to decide where and with which intensity to mobilise.

Finally, it is important to study Spain because its closed-list PR system is frequently used in other South European countries, such as Portugal and Turkey. According to Johnson and Wallack (2003), almost one fifth of the electoral systems in the world in the early 2000s combined closed lists with proportional representation; and Norris (2004, p. 41) shows that lists are closed in more than 50 per cent of the cases (35 out of 64) where a proportional formula is employed to allocate seats to parties.

By focusing on Spain, we examine the mobilisation activities of the two major national parties, PP and PSOE. Our dataset consists of 400 district observations with the campaign activities of both parties for the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2011 general elections. These elections include two victories of each party and two competitive and two non-competitive races, providing a convenient diversity of scenarios to test our hypotheses. In the four elections analysed, PP and PSOE were the only parties that competed effectively for national office and that were able or close to gain seats in all 50 proportional constituencies.

Our purpose is to study the behaviour of Spanish party elites in allocating campaign effort across districts. We contend that Spanish parties try to maximise campaign effectiveness by concentrating their activities in swing districts in which mobilisation efforts yield higher expected returns. Targeting swing districts is the main goal of parties in majoritarian systems, as the literature on campaigns has shown (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, Carty & Eagles 1999, Denver et al. 2003). However, in PR systems like the Spanish one, parties also have incentives to allocate some campaign resources to core districts. All resources invested in a single-member district will be wasted if a party does not actually win the seat at stake. In contrast, parties may have incentives to maximise votes in a multi-member district where they do not win any seat. Under the Spanish political party-funding regime, parties receive public subsidies for campaign expenses based on the number of votes and the number of seats. So if a party mobilises a district and as a result increases its vote share, it is rewarded with public funds even when that campaign effort does not give the party any extra seat.

Our empirical tests show that controlling for district magnitude, parties target districts where the allocation of the last seat is more uncertain and where they traditionally attain higher vote shares. We also find that districts with a higher proportion of undecided

voters do not attract more mobilisation effort. This result was unexpected because, according to previous research, election campaigns are, at least partially, targeted to persuade undecided voters (Popkin 1991, McClurg & Holbrook 2009).

The article is organised as follows. The second section presents the main characteristics of the Spanish party and electoral systems. Section 3 discusses how parties allocate campaign activity across electoral districts and poses several hypotheses about the behaviour of party elites. In section 4 we examine how to measure campaign effort, which is our dependent variable. Next we describe the independent variables and the statistical models. In section 6, we present the results and in section 7 we conclude.

2. Elections and parties in Spain

Elections in Spain are held under the D´Hondt formula with closed party lists and a three per cent district-level threshold. Ignoring the two single-member districts of the North African autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla,[1] 348 MPs are elected in 50 districts with magnitudes ranging from 2 (Soria) to 36 (Madrid). The median value of the district magnitude distribution is 5, the mean is around 7 and the standard deviation is around 6. In the sample of 12 contemporary districted PR systems examined by Monroe and Rose (2002) to measure the 'variance effect', Spain shows the third highest district magnitude variation. As every multi-member district is assigned an initial minimum of two seats, with the remaining 248 being distributed among districts according to their population, the Spanish electoral system is among the 20 most malapportioned cases in the world jointly with Turkey (Samuels & Snyder 2001). According to Montero and Riera (2009), the mean effective number of electoral and parliamentary parties has been 3.5 and 2.6, respectively, whereas the Gallagher's index of electoral disproportionality in the ten elections held from 1977 to 2008 has ranged from 4.4 to 10.6.

Since the founding election in 1977, the Spanish party system has mostly consisted of two major national parties, the centre-left Socialist Party (PSOE) and a centre-right party (formerly, Union of the Democratic Centre [*Unión de Centro Democrático*, UCD] and afterwards Popular Alliance-Popular Party [*Alianza Popular-Partido Popular*, AP-

PP]), a small national left-wing party (the former Communist Party now United Left [*Partido Comunista de España-Izquierda Unida*, PCE-IU]), and several regional parties, mainly from Catalonia and the Basque Country. In this paper we study the strategic campaign decisions of the two main parties, PSOE and PP, in the 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2011 general election campaigns. We choose these parties because they are the only ones that get representation in almost all the fifty multi-member districts in these elections. The PSOE won the 2004 and 2008 elections with 42.6 per cent and 43.9 per cent of the votes and 46.8 per cent and 48.3 per cent of the seats, respectively, defeating the PP by a narrow margin. By contrast, the PP won the 2000 and 2011 elections with 44.5 per cent and 44.6 per cent of the votes and 52.3 per cent and 53.1 per cent of the seats, respectively, followed on both occasions by the PSOE at a considerable distance. No other party received more than 7 per cent of the votes or more than 5 per cent of the seats in any of these four elections.[2]

As far as we know, only Criado (2004) and Lago et al. (2012) have systematically examined party mobilisation strategies in Spanish elections. Using data from the 1996 and the 2000 general elections, Criado concludes that closeness is not the only explanatory variable to account for party mobilisation across districts, which also depends on the number of electors per seat. Lago et al. (2012) examine the 2009 European election and the 2011 general election finding that electoral competitiveness and district magnitude increase the number of district visits by party leaders, whereas local organization does not seem to be relevant in party mobilisation strategies. Our paper complements these findings as it studies a larger time span and tests a broader range of hypotheses.

3. A model of district mobilization: theoretical expectations

How do party elites allocate their mobilisation effort across districts? Election campaigns are an essential part of the democratic process that helps parties to achieve their goals. In order to win elections parties need votes. The individual incentives to vote are, however, weak. As the rational choice literature has emphasised, the likelihood that an individual vote turns out to be decisive is almost nil (Downs 1957, Riker & Ordeshook 1968). Therefore, parties have strong incentives to mobilise voters by reducing their information costs to vote, enhancing their feeling of duty and raising the

stakes of the election. Election campaigns play, thus, a crucial role in overcoming the collective action problem of voters.

There is a vast literature studying the effects of campaigns on voters. Research has shown that campaigns are successful at increasing voter turnout (Cox & Munger 1989, Holbrook & McClurg 2005, Nickerson et al. 2006) and persuading swing voters (Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Green 2011). Thus, campaigns seem to be a helpful tool to win elections. However, campaign resources are limited and the electorate is large. When an election approaches, parties have to decide where to allocate their mobilisation activities and which districts should be targeted.

Our starting point is that parties are mainly office-seekers. That is, they are electoral machines that distribute their campaign resources in the most efficient way to win office. If this rationalization principle holds, parties will attempt to maximise the number of seats they attain in each election. So, we expect that Spanish parties will concentrate their mobilisation activities in districts in which it is more likely that campaign efforts will involve winning additional seats. We specifically consider two features of Spanish districts' potential to swing: district closeness and share of undecided voters.

The first expectation corresponds with the standard hypothesis set up in the literature based on single-member district systems to explain electoral mobilisation in marginal districts. If parties want to maximise their seat share, they will be especially attentive to the districts where the margin of votes to the last seat allocated (either won or lost) is narrower. In districts in which the allocation of the last seat depends on a few votes, party elites have a greater probability to influence the election outcome. Since small shifts of the party vote share in the district can alter the allocation of a seat, such districts are particularly attractive for electoral mobilisation.

This behaviour has been widely documented in the literature as the main driver of parties' campaign effort. However, the evidence draws mainly either from single-member district systems, such as the United States (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993), the United Kingdom (Denver et al. 2003, Johnston et al. 2012), Canada (Carty & Eagles

1999, and Australia (Forrest 1997, Forrest et al. 1999), or from multi-member district countries where elections are held under candidate-centred rules, such as Ireland (Marsh 2000, Johnson forthcoming). In this article we test whether parties in the Spanish closed-list PR system also focus on swing districts. We expect this to be the case. The fact that more than one seat is allocated per district should not refrain parties from trying to maximise seats by targeting those districts where the stakes for an extra seat are higher.

Apart from mobilising districts where the last seat is at stake, Spanish parties will also target those districts in which there is a larger share of electors that have not decided yet which party to vote for. After all, undecided voters provide a favourable ground for the well-documented activation effect of campaigns (Popkin 1991, McClurg & Holbrook 2009). In addition, the number of undecided voters has been growing over the last decades in most democracies, turning them into a relevant electoral group. In the case of Spain, they amount to 15 per cent of the electorate (Orriols & Martínez 2014). Thus, our expectation is that parties will allocate more activities to districts with a higher proportion of undecided voters, as it seems easier for parties to obtain their support than to convert those voters who have already made up their mind.

The two previous hypotheses portray parties' rational strategies to concentrate effort in those districts in which obtaining additional seats seem to be more attainable. However, focusing on districts in which seats are at stake can come at the cost of losing support among core supporters. Building on Cox and McCubbins (1986), we argue that party elites seek to achieve other goals than maximising seats for a number of reasons. First, keeping their strongholds mobilised yields parties long-term benefits. As Díaz-Cayeros et al. (2008, p. 11) state, all parties need to constantly respond to the concerns of their main constituencies. Otherwise, they "*will be condemned to unstable electoral coalitions that need to be constructed every time elections are held, confronting high risks of opportunism.*" A stable core of supporters is particularly useful for the rainy days, when the party will be in the opposition and unable to use government resources.

Secondly, parties have also financial motives to mobilise their strongholds. In many parliamentary systems such as Spain, the political finance regime rewards parties for the votes that they win in general elections and not only for their seats. This gives parties

incentives to campaign where they usually win more votes. Third, strongholds might also be particularly suitable for campaign mobilisation because parties can rely on more voluntary work there. Since most electioneering at the district level consists of labour-intensive activities (like party rallies), a strong local party organization lowers the effective cost of mobilising the district.

Fourth, parties may mobilise strongholds as a response to internal pressures. Previous research has emphasised the importance of local organizations and their bargaining power within the parties (Denemark 2003, Hopkin 2009). Local elites are interested in bringing the national party leaders to the district as this offers them an opportunity to raise issues of local concern. Also, the literature on national coattails shows that local and regional elites benefit from the electoral success of national co-partisans (Rodden & Wibbels 2011). In Spain, general election outcomes at the district level are a good predictor of results in regional elections (León 2014). Taken all these arguments together, our third hypothesis will argue that parties allocate part of their campaign resources to their strongholds.

On the basis of the previous discussion, we hypothesize that Spanish parties will combine a strategy of targeting districts where the expected electoral margin to the last seat assigned is narrower (H_1) or there is a larger proportion of undecided voters (H_2) with a strategy of allocating campaign activities to parties' strongholds to mobilise their core voters (H_3). Although these strategies follow different logics, they are compatible and examining which logic prevails is an empirical open question.

Before testing the validity of these hypotheses, we turn to a couple of interactive effects that could be formulated as complementary hypotheses. In some multi-member district settings, like Portugal or Spain, the number of elected seats varies amply from one district to another. The impact of electoral competitiveness and the share of undecided voters are expected to vary according to the number of seats allocated to each district. In low magnitude districts, parties will be inclined to mobilise more intensely. The rationale for this is malapportionment. The shares of seats allocated to small districts in the Spanish electoral system are much greater than their shares of population (Montero & Riera 2009). Within this context, self-interested parties will tend to focus on those districts where the ratio of electors to seats is lower and, hence, the marginal returns to

mobilisation are higher. Small districts in Spain generate such incentives. Therefore, our last hypotheses are that the positive effect of the closeness of the district race or the share of undecided voters on the number of mobilisation activities organized by parties in a given district gets weaker as district magnitude increases (H_4 and H_5).

4. Measuring district effort

District mobilisation is our dependent variable. The literature on elections has proposed different ways to measure mobilisation efforts at the district level. These can be divided into two types: self-reported measures and district indicators. Research relying on self-reported measures uses the information provided by pre-election polls on the number of respondents contacted by party agents before an election. This is a widely used measure in the literature focused on the U.S. (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, chapter 6, Huckfeldt et al. 2009, Johnston et al. 2012). However, for our analysis this is not an interesting measure. The main method of party contacts in Spain is through the postal mailing of ballots and leaflets. For parties with a parliamentary group, like PP and PSOE, such mailing is costless because the central government reimburses such expenses. In fact, both parties contact every eligible voter in the country making this measure useless to distinguish between mobilised and non-mobilised districts. In other words, all voters would turn out to be mobilized according to this measure.[3]

Another possibility could be to use the financial resources transferred by party elites to the district (Johnston & Pattie 1995, Denver et al. 2003, Benoit & Marsh 2003, Criado 2008). We cannot employ this variable because parties in Spain do not disclose the distribution of their electoral spending by district. Finally, measuring electoral canvassing is not an option either because Spanish political parties have never made an extensive use of it (Ramiro & Morales 2004).

To measure parties' mobilisation effort, we adopt a different approach. Instead of relying on voters' self-reported proxies of mobilisation or indirect measures of party effort, such as party expenses by district, we focus on the number of rallies and events with the candidate to prime minister and other senior national party leaders in each district. Our dependent variables are compiled using information from the archives of

the two leading Spanish newspapers: *El País* and *El Mundo*. Most partisan rallies are reported in both newspapers, so results are not dependent on the campaign coverage of the two newspapers. Our measures are presumably free from ideological bias because we have built them using the information provided by a centre-left and a centre-right newspaper. In addition, as far as we know, journalists do not have incentives to focus on specific districts. Although certain parts of Spain might receive less attention during the year, the focus of attention during this period is the campaign, not the district. Wherever the campaign of the main parties takes place, the attention of the newspapers gets there. Small parties might obtain less campaign coverage, but in a country with a strong bipartisan bias, both PP and PSOE get all the attention during the month previous to the election. When an election is approaching, each newspaper appoints a journalist (or a team of journalists) that will inform about the activities of the main leaders of the parties. So it seems unlikely that events in certain parts of the country will be more reported in the papers that those held elsewhere.

Our first measure, *party rallies*, tracks the number of rallies held by party candidates or other senior national party leaders of the PSOE and the PP in each district during the four weeks preceding the general election. We consider as a senior national party leader any member of the national board of each party, any current member of the cabinet if the party is the incumbent, and any former minister. Similar measures have been employed before to capture campaign strength (Shaw 1999, Franz & Ridout 2007, Fisher & Denver 2008, Gallego et al. 2012, Lago & Martínez i Coma 2013). Criado (2008) also builds a mobilisation variable by counting the visits to the district of the party candidate for prime minister, even though she restricts her analysis to the official electoral campaign, which in Spain lasts for two weeks. We use the broader time span of one month, as parties begin their mobilisation activities well before the official campaign begins. We focus on national rather than regional leaders because the mobilisation of the latter is less costly. Moreover, the mobilisation of regional leaders does not vary much across districts, since all the regional leaders mobilise in one way or another their respective constituencies. The national leaders of the party are, however, a more scarce resource and the campaign committee must decide where to send them.

A convenient feature of *party rallies* is that it is a direct measure of district campaigning. In addition, we believe that this variable captures the incentives of a party

to mobilise a district as a whole. It could be argued that rallies are organized by party elites just to boost the morale of party activists, but the effects of rallies extend further. Huckfeldt & Sprague (1992) claim that those who participate in the rallies propagate the messages through the social network provided by family, job and friendship relations. Downs (1957, p. 229) also considers the use of personal contacts to reduce the costs of political information a rational behaviour. Therefore, we have reasons to presume that the rallies held by a party in a district influence people other than the participants in the rally, such as those electors who are undecided or prone to abstain.

The range of the *party rallies* measure goes from 0 to 4 for the PP and from 0 to 3 for the PSOE. In Table 1 we classify the districts by the intensity of mobilisation using this variable. A district classified as non-mobilised is not one in which there is no investment of campaign effort at all. There is partisan mobilisation in every district before a general election, but our measure does not count the mobilisation efforts undertaken by the local party organizations. A value of zero for *party rallies* indicates that central party elites did not select a particular district to hold campaign rallies involving the presence of the national leaders of the party. The data presented in Table 1 also show that the structure of mobilisation was quite similar for PP and PSOE in the four analysed elections.

(Table 1 about here)

Party rallies, however, does not capture all the campaigning undertaken by national elites at the district level. While this measure of campaign intensity captures the main mobilisation activities, it does not include all the campaign actions organized by the national party in the districts. To take into account such shortcoming, we build a new variable adding to party rallies other mobilisation efforts. The new measure, that we call *party events*, captures all the campaign actions organized by the party in a district that are reported in the national newspapers. The *party events* variable includes national leaders' rallies and adds to them the visits to the district by current or former ministers and other national leaders in order to promote the list of party candidates to the lower chamber. It includes the visits by the candidate to prime minister or the national party leaders to inform the business associations, unions and cultural organizations about the

party platform. The correlation of *party events* with *party rallies* is 0.68, showing that both variables assess differently an analogous underlying behaviour.

Table 1 also shows the degree of mobilisation using the *party events* measure. The main improvement of *party events* over *party rallies* is that it captures more campaign effort while remaining a direct measure of party activity at the district level. The range of values of *party events* extends from 0 to 11 for the PP and from 0 to 12 for the PSOE, showing a substantial variation in parties' effort across districts. In at least a third of the districts, both parties deploy no mobilisation at all. The majority of the districts are moderately mobilised, hosting one or two events with national leaders. Lastly, there are only a few districts where parties display an intense effort, organizing three or more events.

To sum it up, since the geographical distribution of electoral spending is not available in Spain and we cannot use survey information on party contacts for the reasons stated above, we build two measures of parties' mobilisation at the district level: *party rallies* (R) and *party events* (E). Both measures are based on the presence of top party leaders in the local campaign and, as such presence is expensive (opportunity cost of the leaders' time plus travel, security, rental and advertising expenses), they are in our view reliable indicators of the campaign effort made by parties in the individual districts.

It may be argued that, although the number of events in a district reflects the purpose of party elites to mobilise that district, its components (rallies and other events) differ significantly in a number of ways. First, a party rally involves a much more intense mobilisation of effort by the party campaign organization than the activities included in the non-rallies component of events. Secondly, it seems likely that rallies have also a stronger mobilisation potential than other activities included in the events variable. To take into account such differences we have built a third measure of the dependent variable weighting the rallies and non-rallies components of events. We define the *events weighted* measure as E(w)=0.75*R+0.25*other events.[4] So we employ three measures of district mobilisation to test our hypotheses: rallies (R), events (E=R+other events), and E(w).

There are three features of the Spanish system of campaign finance that reinforce the value of our measures versus other variables with more tradition in the literature, like party expenses. First, campaign regulation in Spain bans parties from buying television time for advertising and restricts the amount they can spend on publicity in radio, newspapers and billboards. However, party expenses on the mobilisation activities captured by our measures are not subject to specific limits, although they are included in the overall limit to campaign spending (García Viñuela & Artés 2008). Therefore, the campaign activities measured by *party rallies* and *party events* offer us a unique insight into the priorities of party elites. Secondly, legal spending limits incentivise parties to conceal campaign expenses in order to avoid sanctions if they exceed the established limits. So, the use of parties' reported spending by district, if available, might misrepresent the real level of parties' mobilisation efforts. Finally, district campaigning has become increasingly centralised over the last decade (Denver et al. 2003; Gibson & Römmele 2009; Fisher, Cutts & Fieldhouse 2011). This also applies to Spanish general elections. According to Criado (2004, p. 20), as much as an 83 per cent of the campaign budgets of the two major Spanish parties is managed by the parties' headquarters, while the remaining 17 per cent is transferred to the party organizations in the districts. Therefore, we believe that *party rallies* and the weighted and non-weighted *party events* are the acceptable measures of our dependent variable.

5. Data, independent variables and methods

The main independent variables are operationalized as follows. As a measure of district competitiveness, we use *district closeness*. This variable is inspired in Criado (2008) and is defined as the difference in the vote shares between the party that is predicted to win the last seat in the district and the runner up. We expect a negative coefficient of this variable because the smaller its value (that is, the narrower the distance in vote shares to the last seat), the stronger the incentive of parties to mobilise such a district.

To build *district closeness* we could use either lagged information from the previous election or contemporary information from pre-election polls. Although the literature tends to rely on the former, we think that using current information (that is, the predicted closeness of the district race according to pre-election polls) is an improvement on those measures. Parties will rarely undertake mobilisation activities

based on past information if there are more recent data available to them about district conditions.[5] We measure the predicted *district closeness* as a percentage of the eligible voters in the district since, according to Cox (1988), party elites think in terms of percentages.

The *undecided* electorate variable is defined as the percentage of respondents in each district who report that they have not decided yet which party they will vote for in the forthcoming election at the time the pre-election poll is conducted:

$$undecided = \frac{\#\, undecided}{\#\, respondents} \times 100$$

The incentives of parties to target their electoral strongholds are operationalized through the *party strength* variable. This variable uses the party share of the district vote in the previous general election to evaluate the importance of vote-maximising strategies.[6]

Finally, we have included in the analysis other factors that affect the level of campaign activity and could bias the estimates if they were omitted. First, we control for the number of seats allocated to each district. District magnitude varies widely in Spain and party decisions to mobilise a district may be dependent on the number of deputies that the district elects.[7] Secondly, we include an *incumbent* variable in the models because the strategies adopted by parties to influence voters' decisions may vary if a party is ruling or is in opposition during the campaign period.[8] Being the incumbent provides the party in government with more resources for campaigning. Yet, the responsibilities in government of the leaders of the incumbent party can increase their time constraints. Finally, we also include election fixed effects to account for the different contexts in which the four elections were contested.

The descriptive statistics for all the variables employed in the analyses are displayed in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here)

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To construct our variables, we have relied on two data sources. Electoral returns are taken from the official results published on the website of the Ministry for Internal Affairs (*Ministerio del Interior*). Several of our variables aggregate individual election-related data at the district level. This information is taken from the Centre for Sociological Research (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, CIS) pre-election polls (poll numbers 2382, 2555, 2750 and 2915).[9] The CIS samples of the 50 constituencies in the pre-election polls are designed to be representative of the population of eligible voters at the district level because they aim to predict the distribution of seats per district a month or so before the official campaign begins.[10]

As for the methodology, our dependent variables are tally variables that count the number of times a mobilisation activity occurs in an election campaign. These variables are supposed to present either a Poisson or a binomial distribution. To apply the Poisson model the variance of the dependent variable should be equal to the mean (Green 2003, p. 709). For our data, the variance of all the dependent variables is twice the mean. So, given the over dispersion of the data and the skewness of its distribution, we use a negative binomial procedure to estimate the parameters. However, as a robustness check, we also replicate the results using Poisson and OLS estimations to show that the findings do not depend on the type of econometric model used.[11] Moreover, since the observations in our dataset are drawn repeatedly from the same districts, we cannot assume that they are independent of each other. All models are, therefore, estimated with clustered standard errors at the district level to allow for the possible autocorrelation of the error terms.

A last methodological point is the potential risk of endogeneity of some of our main independent variables. Since some of them are built using contemporary data, it could be argued that it is the mobilisation of parties that leads to district closeness and not the other way around. However, given the periods of time in which our dependent variables were compiled and the polls were conducted, this is not necessarily a problem. In three out of four elections, all our party events and rallies took place after the pre-electoral polls were taken. More specifically, the collection of data for the 2004, 2008 and 2011 pre-election surveys finished on the 15th of February, the 4th of February, and the 23rd of October while we started our period of observation on the 15th of February, the 11th of February and the 24th of October, respectively. The only problem seems to arise

regarding the 2000 election, when the data collected for the pre-election poll ended on the 28th of February, that is, only 13 days before the election. However, the results are robust to the exclusion of this year as well.

6. Results

In this section we discuss the district effects estimated by our statistical models. Table 3 contains the main set of analyses. In particular, models 3.1 to 3.3 display the general mobilisation models with all the observations for both parties. Then, to check the findings of the general model, we run again the negative binomial regressions on the three dependent variables in models 3.4 to 3.9 for PP and PSOE separately. This allows us to test whether both parties behave similarly or they have different campaign strategies.

(Table 3 about here)

The empirical results support two of the three main hypotheses we set out to explain the allocation of campaign activity. The overall models suggest that the predicted competitiveness of the district race has a significant impact on the distribution of effort across the individual districts. This result is consistent with our first hypothesis. The effect of parties' electoral strongholds on mobilisation is also validated (H_3). However, contrary to our second hypothesis, the proportion of undecided voters at the district level does not appear to be a factor in the allocation of campaign effort.[12]

The results support the idea that parties allocate strategically their mobilisation effort across districts in order to increase their number of seats in the legislature. An implication of the rational choice theory is that parties should mobilise more intensely where the last seat is easier to win or to lose (i.e., districts in which the value of *closeness* is smaller). As expected, the estimates of the predicted *district closeness* in the pooled models are consistently negative, statistically significant, and robust to the measurement of campaign intensity. In models 3.4 to 3.9 it can be seen that the effect found in the pooled models also holds for each party. Both in the overall and the party models, the effect is more significant when the weighted measure of events is used.

We have argued that, apart from winning new seats, parties have incentives to mobilise their strongholds for several reasons. Our results support this hypothesis. *Party strength* at the district level is a significant predictor of the allocation of campaign effort in the general model. However, it is less significant than the effect of *district closeness*, especially in the individual party models no matter the dependent variable used.

Contrary to expectations, we find no significant influence of the *undecided* electors on campaign intensity. The parameter estimates are generally positive, although indistinguishable from zero in all the specifications. This is a striking result because the activation of latent preferences is a pervasive finding of the literature on campaign effects. One would expect that districts with a larger share of undefined voters offer more potential for party mobilisation but our estimates reject this hypothesis.

Figure 1 plots the main results (drawing upon models 3.1 and 3.2). It can be noticed that there are substantial effects on parties' mobilisation effort both as a result of *district closeness* and *party strength*. In both cases, there is a difference of around one predicted campaign event between a very competitive district (or a party stronghold) and a non-competitive district (or a district where *party strength* is small). However, when we plot the predicted number of events conditional on the share of undecided voters, differences are not statistically significant. Similar results, but lower in magnitude, are found for rallies.

(Figure 1 about here)

To account for the robustness of our results to the estimation method, Table 4 replicates the models in Table 3 using a Poisson procedure instead of a negative binomial one. The magnitude and significance of the coefficients remain at similar levels, so our results are presumably not dependent on the choice of a particular statistical model. Only the *district closeness* and *party strength* estimates fall slightly below conventional levels of significance for the PSOE non-weighted *events* model (model 4.7), but in the remainder models the results of Table 3 hold.[13]

(Table 4 about here)

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Table 5 contains another set of robustness analyses that takes into account the distribution of the dependent variables. Most of the districts either host one campaign event or rally or none. Only very big districts host several events or rallies. This means that the distributions of our dependent variables' are skewed to the left. We tackle this in two ways. First, we replicate the models by jackknifing one district at a time in models 5.1 to 5.3. The results are robust to this procedure as the size and significance of the coefficients are basically the same. Secondly, to reduce the effect of outlier districts where many campaign activities take place, in models 5.4 to 5.6 we take as dependent variables the square roots of the original measures. Ideally, we would use the logged form, but we cannot do it as around a third of districts do not host any rally or event with national leaders and we cannot calculate the logarithm of zero. Therefore, we use the square root of the events and rallies measures. The results again remain unchanged and robust to this specification, showing that they are not driven by the most extreme observations. Table 5 shows the estimations for the general mobilisation models, but the results do not change either if we use the party models.

(Table 5 about here)

Finally, in Table 6 we analyse if parties' incentives to mobilise voters in close districts are conditioned by district magnitude (H_4 and H_5). Table 6 includes the general models of Table 3, but now interacting the number of seats elected by each district both with the closeness measure and the share of undecided voters. Models 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 show that the impact of the closeness of the district race on the distribution of campaign effort is more important in smaller districts. This means that the incentives to invest effort in a competitive district are more relevant when the district is small.

If we simulate the results for a small district (one where only three seats are allocated), the predicted number of events decreases by 50 per cent if it goes from being very competitive (district closeness=1 per cent) to being non-competitive (district closeness=10 per cent). The reason is that, due to electoral malapportionment, fewer votes are required to achieve a new seat in small districts. Yet, the impact of district closeness on the number of campaign events is smaller in large districts. If we take, for instance, a district with a high magnitude (14 seats), the predicted number of events decreases by 10 per cent when we compare a highly competitive district (district

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closeness=1 per cent) with a non-competitive district (district closeness=10 per cent). Thus, the effect is much stronger in the three-seat district than in the fourteen-seat one.

Apart from the moderating effect of seats on the impact of district closeness, we also find a positive and significant effect for the non-weighted events model interacting the undecided voters variable with district magnitude (model 6.4). However, this effect is of small size and not robust, as the interaction is not significant for the rallies and the weighted events models (models 6.5 and 6.6). Altogether these results confirm both the surprising irrelevance of the proportion of undecided voters in a district to explain Spanish parties' campaign strategies and the importance of close races, particularly in small districts.

(Table 6 about here)

6. Conclusions

Focusing on a closed-list PR country like Spain and using empirical evidence from the general elections held between 2000 and 2011, we find that the campaign choices of the two major Spanish parties follow a dual logic. First, they concentrate their campaign effort in districts where the last distributed seat is more attainable. Second, they also mobilise where they are electorally stronger. This second finding differs from what we would expect in a plurality system, where parties have weaker motives to invest effort in safe districts. However, such behaviour fits the incentive structure of the Spanish political finance regime: By allocating campaign activities to their strongholds, Spanish parties receive public funds to pay for their organizations and campaign expenses.

An unexpected finding of our study is the non-effect of the share of undecided voters in explaining parties' campaign strategies at the district level. The existing literature assumes that election campaigns are at least partially aimed to persuade undecided voters. Our models do not confirm this tenet. A reason for this result maybe the limitations of the variable we use. Our undecided measure is noisy because it may include voters unwilling to reveal their true preference to the pollster and also because poll respondents tend to over-report their electoral participation. So parties may learn

over time that it is not rewarding to focus their mobilisation activities on the number of undecided voters at the district level. Whatever the reason, further research is needed to account for the mismatch between the theoretical expectation and the empirical result.

In spite of the peculiarities of the Spanish party system (i.e., no coalition governments at the national level to date and existence of important regional parties) and electoral rules (i.e., considerable district magnitude variance and malapportionment), our analysis has implications for other South European countries with similar electoral rules, such as Portugal and Turkey. It would be interesting to test our hypotheses in other closed-list PR systems to test the robustness of the findings reported here. Moreover, it would be convenient to complement our analysis with other specifications of the dependent variable, such as party expenses where such information is available. Finally, it may be interesting to examine in the future to which degree parties' decisions may respond to the behaviour of their competitors. The analyses performed in this article are based on the assumption that party elites decide how to allocate resources independently of each other, but it could also be argued that parties target some districts in an attempt to offset the mobilization efforts of their opponents.

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[1] We drop these two districts from the analysis because parties pay little attention to them in their campaigns as they are frequently safe districts.

[2] To be more specific, United Left (*Izquierda Unida*, IU) and Union, Progress and Democracy (*Unión, Progreso y Democracia*, UPyD) are excluded from the analyses because the former was almost irrelevant in the 2004 and 2008 elections (less than 6 seats in each of them) and the latter only run in the 2008 and 2011 elections. Moreover, since our dependent variable uses newspaper information, as explained below, including these two small parties could bias the analysis because it is likely that the newspapers do not cover all the campaign activities held by these parties.

[3] Empirical evidence from post-election surveys support this point because the proportion of voters that declared having been contacted by parties does not significantly differ across districts.

[4] We have also used different weights, such as E(w')=0.67*R+0.33*other events. Results are similar and are available upon request.

[5] In the four examined elections, the correlation between predicted closeness and actual closeness by district was + 0.58. This shows that contemporary information from the CIS pre-electoral polls predicts well enough how close the election in each district is.

[6] Results are robust to alternative specifications of the party strength variable that comprise more previous elections (such as the average vote shares in the last two or three general elections), or the percentage of city councillors of each party per district. The use of these alternative measures makes us believe we do not have an endogeneity problem in our estimations. These results are available upon request. We are confident that our party strength variable is a good proxy of the influence of the local party branch in the national organization in the case of the PP because the number of delegates that the local branches send to the National Convention depends on their previous general election results. In the case of the PSOE, the former is not a direct function of the latter. However, the distribution of delegates between provinces still correlates (+ 0.33 in the 2012 Party Convention) with the vote share in the previous election.

[7] District magnitude is relevant not only because the district allocates more seats, but also because in larger districts strategic voting will be less likely (Lago 2008, García-Viñuela et al. 2015).

[8] Incumbent takes value 1 for the PP in 2000 and 2004 elections (0 otherwise), and value 1 for the PSOE in the 2008 and 2011 elections (0 otherwise).

[9] Although formally dependent on the *Ministerio de la Presidencia* of the Spanish Government, the CIS is an independent agency, with its own legal status and funding. Its purpose is to conduct scientific studies of the Spanish society.

[10] This is the reason why the sample size of the pre-electoral surveys is four times larger than the size of the post-election surveys. Obviously, the CIS survey is one of several surveys conducted during these days. We are not claiming that parties only consider it when allocating their mobilization effort. What we claim is that the CIS survey captures important information to decide parties' strategies.

[11] All the mentioned robustness tests are available upon request. Results are also robust to bootstrapping.

[12] We have re-run the analyses using percent of abstainres in the past election as an independent variable and have found the same null results.

[13] The party models are also robust in two additional ways. As the decisions on where to organize an event or a rally can be interdependent between parties, we have first of all included the number of rallies or events of one party as an independent variable in the other party's model. Secondly, we have estimated the number of events and rallies for each party simultaneously with seemingly unrelated regressions. The results of these exercises are available upon request.