

# Going Beyond Individuals: Understanding the Influence of the Political Context on Informational Shortcuts

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TESI DOCTORAL UPF / ANY 2012

DIRECTOR DE LA TESI

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Para Xavi, mi incondicional apoyo  
y  
A la memoria de Ramona,  
una mujer avanzada a su tiempo





## Agradecimientos

Es difícil realizar una tesis sin contar con la colaboración y complicidad de terceros, no solo académicamente sino en el terreno personal. Pero más difícil es agradecer en unas pocas líneas a todas aquellas personas que te han ayudado, y sobre todo, no olvidarse a nadie. Espero no dejarme a nadie en el tintero.

Una de las personas que más me han ayudado en este proceso, es Ignacio Lago. He tenido el privilegio de que me acogiera entre su camada de estudiantes y me tutorizara la tesis. Atrás quedan los días en los que entraba a su despacho con vagas ideas, y tras la discusión, salir con un boceto de paper. Quisiera agradecer su estímulo intelectual, motivación y guía todos estos años: el respeto intelectual mostrado en todo momento -a pesar de la distancia existente-, la claridad de sus directrices, el fino equilibrio entre la rigidez y la flexibilidad en los tempos, y su más que puntual *feedback*, han facilitado, sin duda, la realización de la tesis. Más allá del proyecto de tesis, no quiero perder la ocasión de agradecer su implicación en buscar financiación cuando las becas se acababan, de brindarme la oportunidad de incluirme en sus proyectos de investigación, y de su constante preocupación por mi futuro profesional. Soy consciente que estas líneas no pueden agradecer todo lo que has hecho estos años por mi, moitas grazas.

Quiero también agradecer a las primeras personas que me encaminaron hacia el doctorado, Rafa Martínez y Xavier Coller. Ambos desde sus clases en la Universitat de Barcelona, despertaron mi curiosidad por saber más y me animaron a seguir por la senda académica. En concreto, Xavier Coller me impulsó a cruzar el Atlántico durante la licenciatura y me inició en la investigación social. Es de esos profesores necesarios en la trayectoria de todo estudiante, su calidad humana, entusiasmo y estímulo, son una guía en el crecimiento intelectual y personal.

Otros académicos, ya en la etapa doctoral, han alimentado mi interés por la ciencia política. Mis más sinceros agradecimientos a Gabor Toka, por descubrirme el mundo de las heurísticas, a Robert Fishman y Javier Astudillo por sus inolvidables clases de investigación social y a Mariano Torcal por abrir una ventana en el

conocimiento del comportamiento electoral. A Gary King y Pippa Norris, quienes desde sus clases en la Universidad de Harvard supusieron un punto de inflexión en abordar la investigación y el proyecto de doctoral. Entrando en el terreno de lo personal, quisiera también agradecer la confianza de Francesc Pallarés, su apoyo y empatía en momentos críticos, y por ofrecerme la oportunidad de colaborar en sus proyectos de investigación. A Jorge Rodríguez por su ayuda en los primeros años del despegue del proyecto doctoral. A Mariona Ferrer, por esa proximidad amigable que te acompaña en las charlas improvisadas. A Luís Ortiz quien a través de su buen hacer en los seminarios de tesis y sus comentarios contribuye a plantearte nuevos enfoques, y en definitiva, a mejorar el trabajo. Y también agradecer a Romain Lachat su ayuda cuando el *stata* se bloquea.

Mis compañeros de doctorado han supuesto una nota de humor y aire fresco a través de tertulias en las comidas, cafés y meriendas; Silvia, Tània, Abel, Marc, Toni, Ixchel, Cecilia, Mònica, Núria, y Queralt. Seguro que me he dejado a alguien. El Despacho de asociados ha sido otro de los puntos de encuentro y de intercambio de ideas y anécdotas, gracias a Carlos, Michaela, Alex, Andrés, Elena o Marga, por vuestras charlas entre clase y clase. También quiero agradecer a Gerardo, su apoyo y ayuda en los primeros años del doctorado, y a Wieke por sus comentarios de ciertas partes de la tesis. Marc y Pablo al margen de formar parte activa de las tertulias, han contribuido con sus comentarios a mejorar la tesis. A Kelly, Mike, Tracey y Sunnee agradecer la ayuda con la corrección del inglés. Y a Till agradecer su ayuda en métodos, y por ser de esas personas brillantes que sin apenas conocerte, te ofrecen su incondicional ayuda.

También quisiera agradecer a mis dos sociólogas de cabecera, Mao-Mei y Marta, por ser mis confidentes, por buscar siempre la parte positiva y optimista de las situaciones, por vuestro apoyo y consejos todos estos años. A pesar del tiempo y la distancia, Carol sigue siendo una referencia, gracias por tus comentarios, tu contagiosa alegría y tu luz a través de la red. Y siguiendo con la parte personal, mil agradecimientos a mi viejo amigo, Alex, por tantos y tantos años. Crecer con tu amistad junto a interminables tardes de apoyo, de escucha y de críticas, ha supuesto un bálsamo contra el desasosiego que da subir determinados escalones. A Ely, a

la que tanto echo de menos más allá de las nuevas tecnologías, gracias por estar siempre ahí. A Santi, gracias por hacerme ver la importancia de cuidar los pequeños detalles, por enseñarme a marcar distancia mental, y porque los jueves siempre tienen razón.

Mi familia ha significado una de las piezas indispensables para completar el *puzzle* de quién soy y de mi equilibrio personal estos años. Gracias a mis padres, que sin saberlo tanto me han apoyado. A Paqui, por ser un modelo de superación y constancia en situaciones complejas, sin queja. A Avelino, por su sentido de la justicia, del humor y enseñarme a ver más allá de lo aparente. Gracias a los dos por dejarme decidir, volar, tener autonomía, equivocarme y superarme. A mis hermanos, David y Javi, por vuestro inestimable apoyo. A mis bienvenidas hermanas, Raquel, con su callada inteligencia y Saray, con su explosión de ocurrencias, gracias por compartir las ajetreadas sobremesas de domingo. A la benjamina de la familia, Claudia, que a través de juegos tanto me has hecho reír y aprender. Y como no, a la Frasca, la matriarca de la familia, con su preocupación y constante cuidado, cuya armonía, sólo la pueden conseguir los que han vivido la perspectiva del tiempo. También mis agradecimientos a Mari Carmen y Ricardo, por esas sobremesas en las que acabamos arreglando el mundo, siempre regados por un generoso vino tinto. Y por último, y no por ello el menos importante, a Xavi, mi compañero inseparable, por tu apoyo y comprensión todos estos años, por hacerme ver la luz al final del túnel, por tu confianza y estímulo a crecer sin reservas. Esta tesis va dedicada a ti, y a mi gran ausencia Ramona, una referencia como mujer y persona a la que tanto necesito y tanto le hubiese gustado estar aquí para compartir este momento.

Durante el transcurso de la tesis, a veces tienes la sensación de que se para el tiempo, es hora de poner a funcionar el reloj, y ver qué caminos depara el futuro. Son tiempos convulsos y difíciles pero estoy segura de que con vuestra compañía, apoyo y complicidad la senda será más distendida. Muchas gracias a todos.

Barcelona, 15 de Julio 2012



## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the omission in the literature of how political context influences the performance of informational shortcuts. In line with this research gap, the first article suggests that parliamentary and party-oriented systems encourage the performance of ideology, party identification and leadership, as their use increases the probability to participate in elections. The second article focus on Spain and two contextual shortcuts - incumbency and electoral polls-. The findings indicate that peripheral voters has the highest propensity to vote for left wing parties when the polls show that the left party is going to win the elections and is the challenger in salient elections or the incumbent in a non-salient election. The third article analyses the Spanish case and the impact of leader evaluations and ideology on vote choice over time. The findings manifest that while ideology becomes more important, the utility of leader evaluation is reduced once the informational context becomes more stable.

## **Resumen**

Esta tesis aborda la omisión en la literatura de cómo el contexto político influye en el funcionamiento de los atajos informativos. En línea con esta limitación en la literatura, el primer artículo sugiere que los sistemas parlamentarios y los sistemas orientados a partidos promueven un mejor funcionamiento de la ideología, la identificación partidista y el liderazgo, ya que su uso incrementa la probabilidad de participar en las elecciones. El segundo artículo se basa en España y dos atajos contextuales –estar en el gobierno y los sondeos electorales. La evidencia indica que los votantes periféricos tienen la mayor probabilidad de votar a partidos de izquierdas cuando en elecciones relevantes los sondeos muestran que el partido de izquierdas va a ganar las elecciones y está en la oposición o cuando está en el gobierno en elecciones no importantes. El tercer artículo analiza el caso español y el impacto de las evaluaciones de los líderes y la ideología en el voto a través del tiempo. Los resultados manifiestan que, si bien la ideología se vuelve más importante, la utilidad de la evaluación el líder se reduce una vez que el contexto informativo se vuelve más estable.



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“The central task of [a natural] science is to make the wonderful commonplace: to show that complexity, correctly viewed, is only a mask for simplicity; to find the pattern hidden in apparent chaos.”

Simon [1969:3]

“Political information is to democratic politics what money is to economics: it is the currency of citizenship.”

Delli Carpini and Keeter [1996:8]

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **General Introduction**

Democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 1). However, with few exceptions, the existing research on political behavior has reached the familiar verdict that most citizens know little about politics, do not care to know much about it, and often make ill-considered and superficial judgments (Kuklinski et al., 2001: 410). The importance of political (dis)information lies in the fact that it might erode two critical foundations in representative democracies: the representation of citizens’ interests and the control of politicians. Informed citizens are more likely to be attentive to politics, to be more opinionated and to participate in politics in a variety of forms (Krosnick and Milburn, 1990; Verba et al., 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Thus, political knowledge not only aids in the construction of real interests, but it also helps assure that those interests become part of the governing process (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 7).

In addition, unequal distribution of political knowledge calls into questions political equality, as some groups may be less successful in expressing and introducing their preferences in the political process (Althaus, 2003). Political information is also relevant for

holding politicians accountable (Ferejohn and Kuklinski, 1990; Maravall, 1999; Adserà et al., 2003). Without information “the problem of political control arises because the collective principal – the electorate- finds it difficult to precommit itself to a reward schedule for the incumbent that depends on performance in office” (Ferejohn, 1990:7). All considered, an equitably informed citizenry helps to ensure that a democracy is both responsive and responsible.

Nowadays, scholars are not concerned with documenting the magnitude of political disinformation, but rather in exploring how voters can overcome their lack of information and still be competent in their political decisions. In this sense, the literature proposes two solutions: the Condorcet or “magic” aggregation and the use of heuristics. A minor part of the literature indicates that even when individuals make poor decisions based on limited knowledge, electorates can exhibit a high level of aggregate sophistication. That is, when individuals’ preferences are summed or averaged into measures of collective opinions, much random error or fluctuation in individuals’ opinion may cancel out, leaving a stable and reasonable collective public opinion (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 362). The other part of the literature proposes the use of heuristics to make reasoned opinions and voting decisions. The political heuristics literature centers on two interrelated ideas: (1) neither an organized belief system nor much factual knowledge is necessary to adequate performance; rather (2) citizens can compensate for their absence by relying on heuristics, or mental shortcuts, to make their decisions (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001: 294).

The conception that voters use heuristics to surpass their scarce political information has revolutionized the traditional models of voting behaviour and has generated a new model of voting behaviour: the bounded rational model. The practitioners of the political heuristic approach have focused on individual characteristics –mostly the political sophistication of voters- to verify under what conditions people can take advantage of heuristic thinking. However, a growing number of studies have criticized the existing research for not including the political context in the explanation of shortcuts (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000; Dalton and Anderson, 2011). This research emphasizes that voters do not make decisions in isolation but are influenced by the political context in which they interact. The contexts are inhabited by political actors

and organizations, but it is the institutions that arise and persist there that provide scripts for political processes (Shepsle, 2005: 25).

In general, institutions are “the rules of the game in a society, or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North, 1990: 3). Research that connects people’s political behaviour and the political context includes the formal political institutions such as the electoral rules and party systems and the specific dynamics of elections (Dalton and Anderson, 2011; Anduiza, 1999) as a part of the political context.<sup>1</sup> Given the importance of the political context, this thesis advances the existing literature one step further as it includes characteristics of the political context in the explanation. It is necessary to analyse how the political context affects heuristic reasoning to have a better understanding on how heuristics guide individuals in their political decisions.

### ***1.1. From irrational to bounded rationals: towards a new model of voting?***

As is well known, three models deal with the explanation of voters’ political choices and attitudes; The Sociological, the Psychological and the Economic or rational school. Although the three schools disagree in whether the act of voting responds to expressive or instrumental concerns (Harrop and Miller, 1987), the three share the same inquiry: “the capacity of individual citizens to function in democratic politics” (Carmines and Huckfeldt, 1998:224). The practitioners of these schools bring into the debate the importance of an informed citizenry. However, they respond differently to the electorate’s ability to deal with their level of political knowledge and interest in political matters (Dalton and Wattenberg: 1993:193-194) as determinants of the vote choice.

The first work that addresses individual data on electoral behaviour was the *People’s Choice* by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, who in

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<sup>1</sup> The characteristics of elections includes among others the saliency of elections, the dynamics of the electoral competition or party strategies in elections, for further information, see Anduiza, 1999.

1944 gave birth to the sociological model of voting behaviour or the “Columbia School”. These authors aimed to explore the influence of political campaigns on individuals’ vote intentions. Contrary to their initial assumptions, they found great stability in terms of voting intentions and further vote choice, as only few voters switch back and forth. As a result, these authors conclude that political campaigns influence little to individuals’ voting decisions. Instead, their explanation for the determinants of vote choice was based on social-group-based motivations what led to their celebre affirmation; “a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially” (1944: 27). The political preferences of individuals are determined by their social position or group membership. Voters are influenced by their family, co-workers and fellow organizations’ members when forming a political opinion or deciding for which party to vote. As a result, a voter can decide between competing parties based on cues such as the endorsements of labour unions, business associations, religious groups, and the like –as well as the group appeals of the parties themselves. The stable group base of each party means that many voters develop standing partisan predispositions that endure across elections, further simplifying the decision process (Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993: 196).<sup>2</sup>

The Psychological approach also known as the “Michigan School”, emphasizes the use of cues, in this case partisanship, as the main factor in explaining political attitudes and vote choice. However this approach focuses on the psychological determinants of voting preferences rather than the historical long-term factors that predefined the individuals’ position in the social structure. Thus, in the seminal publication *The American Voter*, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes develop the funnel of causality model rooted in the role of party identification as the main long-term psychological predisposition that determines voting behavior. Party identification is understood as “the individual’s affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment [and] political party

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<sup>2</sup> The Columbia Scholars influenced the Western European electoral studies of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), which are the most representatives of this approach. According to these authors, it is the positions voters have in the social cleavages or the structure that determines their vote option. Within the common social divisions, the authors indicate the socio-economic cleavages (occupation, income or status) as well as the social cleavages rooted in religiosity, race, ethnicity, region, or the urban-rural residence.



serves as the group toward which the individual may develop identification, positive or negative, of some degree of intensity” (Campbell, et al., 1960: 121-122). This affective commitment to one party is developed in pre-adult life through parental political socialization (Campbell et al. 1960; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Miller and Shanks, 1996) resulting in a stable predisposition through a person’s life time that is unlikely to change.

Although the Michigan school considers that the sociological characteristics might influence the development of party identification, it is more than simply a political reflection of a voter’s upbringing and current social status. Such social characteristics have limited value in providing an evaluative framework that structures the different phenomena that citizens encounter (Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993:197). In this sense, party identification is a perceptual screen through which the individual filters the political information that is received and evaluates it accordingly. As a consequence, voters shape their political attitudes and behaviors according to their partisanship and not the other way around. In this sense, party identification functions as a political cue that enables voters to cope with political information.

Although the Sociological and Psychological schools differ in the type of cues –social groups’ endorsements or partisanship- that explain individuals’ political behaviour, they share a concern with the civic competency of citizens. Both models center on individuals’ cognitive capabilities and political knowledge and are surprised to find low levels of political information in the citizenry. In this sense, the Columbia School manifests:

“Our data reveal that certain commonly assumed requirements for the proper functioning of democracy are not in the behavior of the average citizen... many voters show no real involvement in elections” (Berelson et al., 1954:307-310).

And the Michigan School concludes that:

“A substantial portion of the public knows little about what government has done on these issues

or what the parties propose to do. It is almost completely unable to judge the rationality of government actions; knowing little of particular policies and what has led to them, the mass electorate is not able to appraise either its goals or the appropriateness of the means chosen to serve these goals” (Campbell et al., 1960:543).

In this way, both schools question if voters meet the requirements set by the classic democratic theory of enlighten citizens. Nevertheless, the last school, the economic approach, constructs a model of voting based on the limited information of individual citizens. The influential and pioneering formulation of Downs in *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, emphasizes the rationality of individuals in their voting decisions. As in markets, individuals try to maximize their own utilities. As a result, each citizen will vote for the party that he believes will provide him with a higher utility than any other party. In this way, “the theory assumes that the voter recognises his own self-interest, evaluates alternative candidates on the basis of which will best serve this self-interest, and casts his vote for the candidate most favourably evaluated” (Enelow and Hinich, 1984:3). This is how a rational voter would behave in an unrealistic world of complete and costless information. In the real world, uncertainty and lack of information prevent even the most intelligent and well-informed voter from behaving in precisely the fashion described (Downs, 1957: 45-46). Since the acquisition of information is costly and the probability to cast a ballot that makes a difference is minimal, it is rational not to be informed. Rather, citizens have strong incentives to reduce the cost of acquiring and gathering information and, as a result, they will use informational shortcuts. In this way, party identification is seen by the rational choice scholars as a mere cognitive shortcut -and not as a social identity or an affective and emotional link with a party- that allows voters to cope with the cost of being informed. Similarly, Downs emphasizes the use of ideologies to help the voter differentiate political parties upon a wide range of issues without the necessity of being highly informed.

Then, while the sociological and psychological models of voting see the voter as a prisoner of their social group and attitudes and conceive the voter as irrational and ill-informed, the rational

economic approach sees the voter as a utility-maximizer and, as a result, a rational ignorant. Nevertheless, voters are neither pawns of his social group nor powerful calculating and utility-maximizing machines. They are cognitively limited, perhaps, but by no means cognitively crippled. They are boundedly rational (Jones, 2001:78). Herbert A. Simon, the first in introducing the bounded rationality explanation in human behavior argues, through a series of works, that people are not omniscient calculators (1947, 1990). The low-information rationality or bounded rationality approach appears to answer the limits of the two models of voting, and it has been considered as a new approach to voting behavior.

The core argument is that individuals are constrained by limited cognitive capabilities and incomplete information, thus their actions are not completely rational but intently rational (March, 1994). Individuals are cognitive misers for two motives: “One is rational: all resources must be allocated economically, and that includes cognitive effort. The second is that they are bounded by their evolved cognitive architectures to do so” (Jones, 2001: 107). As a result, individuals have developed a large number of cognitive mechanisms for dealing with a limited cognitive architecture. Heuristics “represent cognitive shortcuts, rules of thumb for making certain judgments or inferences with considerably less than the complete search for alternatives and their consequences that is dictated by rational choice” (Law and Redlawsk, 2006: 25).

This new conception of the voter as a bounded rational has impregnated the current trend in the political behaviour literature. Nowadays there is a consensus that voters are not omniscient calculators but political decision makers that have a limited ability to perceive and calculate (Lupia et al. 2000: 9). However, the debate continues about whether these cognitive limitations and the alternative solution of informational shortcuts can close the informational gap. A major part of the literature assumes that shortcuts guide individuals in their political decisions by the mere fact of using them. Thus, through the use of political shortcuts, individuals would behave as if they were well-informed. Nonetheless, this assumption can be questioned as the effectiveness of heuristics are measured considering individuals’ characteristics. What these studies forget is the importance of the political context in shaping people’s behaviors and attitudes. As a result, the context

can influence the type of information available and the cost of acquiring it, and as an extension, the manner voters employ their informational shortcuts. This thesis departs from the bounded rationality approach and the use of heuristics in particular to introduce new evidences into the debate over the effectiveness of heuristics. In this sense, this thesis goes beyond individual characteristics to show the influence that political institutions and the dynamics of the electoral competition can have in the way shortcuts guide voters in their political decisions.

## **1.2. The tenets of cognitive heuristics**

The model of bounded rationality was originally articulated by the political scientist Herbert A. Simon, who in his seminal piece *Administrative Behavior* (1947) introduced the term by analyzing the collective choice in organizations. His successive works have provided a framework for explaining individuals' behavior under the premise that human cognition is limited. Apart from the area of public administration and public-policy, his formulations rapidly influenced other areas of social science including economy, psychology or political behavior. Nevertheless, it is the modern discipline of cognitive psychology that has provided more insights on how people make decisions given their limited information-processing capacity and how they utilize heuristic reasoning. Cognitive psychology's findings about meaning and information usage go beyond cues and information shortcuts to describe models of reasoning, processing aids, and calculation aids, all of which can be applied to the analysis of voters' decision (Popkin, 1991:15).

It is during the early 70s' that the pioneering psychological studies of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky provide a theoretical basis for the study of heuristic reasoning. This research has influenced the latter works of informational shortcuts in political behavior literature. Heuristics are judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice (Sniderman et al., 1991:19). Thus, in examining how people deal with limited information, Kahneman and Tversky identified four

specific heuristic reasoning principles: representativeness, availability, adjustment and anchoring, and simulation.

First, a person who follows the heuristic *representativeness* evaluates the probability of an uncertain event, or a sample, by the degree to which it is: (i) similar in essential properties to its parent population; (ii) reflects the salient features of the process by which it is generated. In many situations, an event A is judged more probable than an event B whenever A appears more representative than B (Kahneman and Tversky, 1972: 431). When judging by representativeness, one compares the essential features of the event to those of the structure from which it originates. “Hence, the construction of stereotypes is a prerequisite for reliance on the representativeness heuristic. That is, the decision maker judges whether an item is a member of a specific parent population by comparing the item’s characteristics with those of the stereotypical member of that population” (Mondak, 1994:121). For example, if a voter has to evaluate a new candidate from a conservative party, the voter can base his judgment on the beliefs or stereotypes that he associates with being a conservative.

Second, “a person is said to employ the *availability* heuristic whenever he estimates frequency or probability by the ease with which instances or associations could be brought to mind... The availability heuristic uses strength of association as a basis for the judgment of frequency” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973: 208-209). In judging by availability, people can retrieve relevant information from their long-term memory. For example, in order to vote for a political candidate, the voter can use specific information in his memory, such as the type of public policies that the different candidates have implemented when they were in government. While judgment by availability turns on the ease of retrieval of specific concrete examples, judgment by representativeness centers on the characteristics of abstract stereotypes (Mondak, 1994:121).

Third, *Anchoring and adjustment* is a simplifying decision-making process in which individuals form an initial response and then it is adjusted by considering additional information related to that response (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Following with the first example, the voter can base his initial judgment on the conservative label, but the voter may adjust this judgment once new information

about the candidate is received. Finally, the *simulation* heuristic consists in constructing the output of a simulation as an assessment of the ease with which the model could produce different outcomes, given its initial conditions and operating parameters (Kahneman and Tversky, 1982: 201). By generating and using these rules of mental simulations, several scenarios are likely to arise such as prediction, assessing the probability of a specified event, assessing conditional probabilities, performing counterfactual assessments or assessing the causality of an event (Kahneman and Tversky, 1982). The *simulation heuristic* facilitates decision making when information is lacking ... as decision makers mentally play out sequences of events relevant to the judgment under consideration (Mondak, 1994:123). For instance, in deciding for which candidate or party to vote, voters can try to predict how the different parties may solve different issues.

Political scientists have borrowed the concept of heuristics from cognitive psychology to explain how subjects make reasoned choices despite a lack of information thanks to the assistance of heuristics. However, “political scientists typically have specified alternative heuristic principles rather than investigating the political significance of representativeness, availability, anchoring and adjustment, and simulation, being the work of Popkin (1991) an exception” (Mondak, 1994:123). Popkin (1991) uses both representativeness and availability heuristics in theorizing about how citizens make political judgments in the presidential vote. Specifically, Popkin suggests that people judge a candidate on the basis of how well a candidate fits their scenarios or scripts. When voters see a new candidate in the media, they extrapolate the observed personal characteristics to unobserved personal data as the performance on future presidential policies. Thus, people compare their evidence about a candidate with their mental model of a good president (1991: 74-75).

Similarly the works of Ottati and Wyer (1990) and Iyengar (1990) utilize the “accessibility” and “stereotypes” heuristics models which can be associated with the representativeness and availability heuristics proposed by Kahneman and Tversky. However, there are several political analyses that have proposed different heuristics principles. For example, Sinderman et al. (1991) refer to a desert heuristic and likability heuristic. The likability heuristic is a

calculus of a person's beliefs weighted by his or her likes and dislikes of politically strategic groups –for instance liberals and conservatives- to estimate their stand on issues. Similarly, the desert heuristic is a shorthand rule for deciding whether a person or group deserves assistance according to whether they can be held responsible for the problem before them (Sniderman et al., 1991). However, both the likability and the desert heuristics can refer to stereotypes that are activated by the representative heuristic what makes to form a political judgment.

Despite the exceptions mentioned (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman et al., 1991), “political science has strayed qualitatively from the psychological track on which it set out, and as a result it is beset by major conceptual ambiguities in terms of what a heuristic is and how it operates” (Druckman et al., 2009: 494). Thus, psychologists are more concerned with identifying individuals’ black box, how voters process information and make inferences to define heuristic reasoning. They deeply analyze the situations in which heuristic reasoning is used as cognitive-saving or as a part of extensive computational thinking. In political science, nearly anything can be constructed as a heuristic if the standard is full information (Druckman et al., 2009:494). Rather than defining heuristics principles, political scientists have focused on the specific shortcuts or rules of thumb that voters employ in their voting decisions and the directions of these decisions.

### ***1.3. The use of shortcuts in the political behaviour literature***

The theoretical development of heuristics in contemporary political science began in the early 1990s with the studies of Sniderman et al. (1991) and Popkin (1991) (also see Ferejohn and Kuklinski, 1990). In his *The Reasoning Voter*, Samuel Popkin provides a view for the voter based on a low-information rationality: “The term low information rationality –popularly know as “gut” reasoning – best describes the kind of practical thinking about government and politics in which people actually engage. It is a method of combining, in an economical way, learning and information from past experiences, daily life, the media, and political campaigns. This

reasoning draws on various information shortcuts and rules of thumb that voters use to obtain and evaluate information and to simplify the process of choosing between candidates” (Popkin, 1991: 7). In this year, the other classical research on political heuristics was published under the title *Reasoning and Choice explorations in political psychology* by Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock. Their study also revolts against the minimalist conception of citizens in previous models of voting and follows Simon’s low-rationality concept in arguing that citizens can compensate for their limited information about politics by taking advantage of judgmental heuristics (Sniderman et al., 1991: 19).

Following these initial works, a growing number of studies have emerged to give a deeper understanding of cognitive shortcuts in political judgments. Fundamentally, this research focuses on two core inquiries; what are the types of shortcuts individuals use in their political decisions, and to what extent do shortcuts help voters to behave as if they were fully informed. Regarding the use of shortcuts, literature on political heuristics assumes that all voters employ shortcuts in making sense of politics. In Lau and Redlawsk words: “Political heuristic use is nigh onto universal” (2006:236). In addition, these rules of thumb are generally employed automatically without any conscious forethought (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006: 25) and are unavoidable parts of the decision making process (Jones, 2001:68). Among the most utilized informational shortcuts that people employ in their political decision are; partisan or ideological schemas (Downs, 1957; Hamill et al., 1985; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006), leader evaluations (Mondak and Huckfeldt, 2006; Cutler, 2002; McDermott, 1997), candidates’ position at public polls (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006), incumbency (Bartels, 1996; Popkin, 1991), or group endorsements (Lupia, 1994; McDermott, 2009) .

Party and ideology are the two most widely used shortcuts for identifying political figures and making sense of politics (Conover and Feldman, 1989, Law and Redlawsk, 2006). Political party stereotypes and ideological schemas contain citizens’ knowledge, beliefs and expectancies about the different competing political parties (Rahn, 1993; Hamill et al., 1985). In this way, party labels provide cues that help citizens to choose policy positions on novel issues (Druckman, 2001; Conover and Feldman, 1989) and to evaluate political candidates and parties (Campbell et al., 1960;



Downs, 1957). Similarly, many people interpret information about government in terms of partisan conflicts (Conover and Feldman, 1989). In this sense, ideological orientation summarizes the issues and cleavages that structure political competition (Downs, 1957; Inglehart, 1990). Because political parties have policy reputations (Snyder and Ting, 2002) and the policy preferences of party adherents in the mass electorate tend to line up with partisan stereotypes (Green et al., 2002) and ideological schemas, citizens are able to make sense of politics and evaluate politicians and parties in light of the stereotypes they possess (Rahn, 1993). Accordingly, citizens can use partisan and ideological cues to make the same decisions they would if they were fully informed even in low-informational elections (Downs, 1957; Druckman, 2001; Schaffner and Stred, 2002).

Candidate evaluation and person stereotypes are possibly the most important (or at least most frequently employed) heuristics in politics for the simple reason that they are not restricted to the political realm but are used by people in all aspects of their social lives (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006: 233). Demographic characteristics such as a candidate's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and personal appearance, in particular the cues related to competency and integrity are important because the voter can estimate a candidate's policy preferences or ideological position (Cutler, 2002; Mondak and Huckfeld, 2006). However, empirical findings offer mixed evidence: some studies indicate that personal characteristics have no effect when other information such as partisanship or ideology are available (Riggle et al., 1992) while other studies indicate that voters use both sociodemographic and ideological criteria (Cutler, 2002).

Additionally, for candidates who are incumbents or who have spent a long period of time in a prominent position, voters can make judgments about competence based on observation of "actual" behavior while the challenger can only be judged by talks on those events (Popkin, 1991: 65-66). However, this shortcut may have different implications for low and highly informed voters. For poorly educated individuals, judgments about the incumbent are a more important consideration than comparison of the two candidates. Thus, the dominant consideration is whether the incumbent is doing a satisfactory job. On the contrary, well

educated individuals focus not on the impression of incumbent performance but rather compare the two candidates' qualities and competence (Sniderman et al. 1991, 171-172).

Public opinion polls reported in the media are shown to be a reliable shortcut as they provide information to the public about which party is preferred by the majority of the population (Ansolabere and Iyengar, 1994; Blais et al. 2006). On the one hand, polls reduce cognitive overload during an election campaign as they tell voters which candidates are ahead in a campaign and which could never win (Law and Relawsk, 2006: 234). Thus information from polls reduces individuals' cognitive effort and allows them to focus on searching for information about candidates that are leading in the polls. On the other hand, polls may influence the decision making process by providing information for strategic voting or the contagion (or bandwagon) effect (Blais et al. 2006). In this sense, polls may lead individuals not to vote for a given party that is perceived to be unlikely to win. At the same time, contagion may affect voters' decision making as it is shown that people evaluate parties more positively if they are expected to win the elections, and to evaluate parties more negatively if their chances of winning seem to be slight.

Finally, in judging parties or policies, people can use public statements by elected officials or interest groups as informational shortcuts (Lupia, 1994; McDermott, 2009; Arcenaux and Kolodny, 2009). Group endorsements are expected to be a cognitive shortcut as people may rely on specific group endorsements' opinion or support for a specific party instead of carefully searching for each party's stances on issues. Thus, this shortcut reduces the need for substantive information as the voters transfer the cognitive effort to the group endorsement. All that is necessary is to learn the candidate endorsed by a group and a cognitively efficient inference can be made based on one's own attitude toward the endorsing groups (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lupia, 1994). However, there are contradictory findings on who are more likely to use this shortcut. In this sense, some studies show that there are no differences regarding the political sophistication of individuals and use of endorsements (Sniderman et al., 1991; Lupia, 1994) while others shows that it is the most politically sophisticated who use endorsements the most (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001).

Apart from different types of shortcuts, a harder question is whether employing heuristics allows voters to make decisions as if they were fully informed. In other words, how efficient is heuristic reasoning in guiding individuals in their political decision making? As in the type of shortcuts employed, scholars have centred on the political sophistication of voters to assess the effectiveness of shortcuts. Similarly, the empirical evidence is mixed. Although the initial works assumed that shortcuts were effective by the mere fact of using them, irrespective of the degree of individuals' political information (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman et al. 1991; Lupia, 1994), some scholars have noted the fallibility of shortcuts (Bartels, 1996; Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000; Druckman et al. 2009). In Kuklinski and Quirk's words: "Our point is simply that the benefits of the heuristics described in some of the leading studies are in fact debatable. Accordingly, any broad conclusion that people achieve competence via heuristics is also debatable" (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000: 159). Then, there is no clear answer to what extent individuals can reach competent decisions as if they were well-informed, irrespective of their level of political sophistication.

However, another important factor in explaining the effectiveness of shortcuts, apart from individual political sophistication, is the influence of the political context. In this sense, the differences in using political shortcuts by individuals can be determined by the political context in which the shortcuts are used. As the political environment can reduce or eliminate the advantage that comes with individuals' education (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001) it might also influence the advantage that comes with political sophistication. Thus, it is necessary to shift the attention to the political context to analyse its impact on the way shortcuts assist citizens in their political decision making.

#### ***1.4. Shortcomings in the political heuristic literature: the importance of including the political context***

There is one fundamental limitation that practically has not been addressed in the heuristic literature: the influence of the informational context. Most psychological research focus on the individuals' characteristics that bring them to make judgments through the use of heuristics. This perspective has influenced the political scientists who analyse the use of heuristics and take into account voters' features. In general, modern electoral research regularly treats voters as autonomous political actors, often ignoring the effects of the political context (Klingeman and McAllister, 2009; Dalton and Anderson, 2011). However, political science is highly contextual, being "united by the desire to understand, explain, and predict important aspects of contexts where individual and collective actions are intimately and continuously bound" (Druckman and Lupia, 2006: 109). As Anderson states, "people do not live in a vacuum. They form attitudes and make choices in variable environments, which come in the form of formal institutional rules that govern people's behavior or in the form of differential economic, social and political conditions that shape people's interpretations and actions" (Anderson, 2007: 590). First, formal political institutions shape the options voters face... Second, the political context may also affect how voters make party and candidate choices in an election. Third, context may shape parties' and candidates' incentives when communicating with voters and the kind of information voters use to make their decisions (Dalton and Anderson, 2011: 4). In sum, the environment can either enhance or fail to enhance the quality of political judgments through two channels: information and motivation (Kuklinski et al., 2001: 411).

Following these arguments, it is reasonable to expect that the political context can influence the type and effectiveness of informational shortcuts by the way in which it shapes the political information available in the system. Information is relevant for the heuristics reasoning principles that Kahneman and Tversky identified - representativeness, availability, adjustment and anchoring, and simulation. Taking into account that beliefs about attributes, in turn, depend on information (Druckman and Lupia,

2000: 5), the stereotypes or schemas that individuals use in their heuristic reasoning may depend also on political information. For instance, voters need information to build the comparative scenarios to make inferences through representativeness. They also need information stored in their memory to execute the availability heuristic or to adjust and anchor their judgments. But a large body of research shows that the political context influences the political information available in the system. Thus, the characteristics of the electoral competition and the institutional arrangements are shown to influence the amount of individuals' political information (Gordon and Segura, 1997). For instance, political campaigns provide voters with political information to make political decisions on the state of the economy or party stances (Arcenaux, 2005; Nicholson, 2003).

In addition, it has been demonstrated that the characteristics of the mass media may reduce or increase the informational gap between individuals based on differences in education or interest in politics (Jerit, et al., 2006; Iyengar et al., 2010). In this way, "just as political environments can vary in the quality of the information they provide, so can they vary in the extent to which they encourage thoughtful evaluation" (Kuklinski et al., 2001: 413). Then, the political context may induce voters to invest effort in getting informed, and to reduce or even eliminate the psychic limits that would guide them towards more thoughtful thinking in the decision making process (Rahn et al., 1994; Kuklinski et al., 2001). What can be deduced from these studies is that political context mediates the cost of acquiring and processing political information. Thus, if the political context influences individuals' political information and motivation towards careful thinking, it might also influence the type of shortcuts individuals use as well as the degree to which individuals can take advantage of them. In fact, if voters are in a position to overcome their informational shortfall by taking advantage of judgmental shortcuts, it is because public choices have been organized by political institutions in ways that lend themselves to these shortcuts (Sniderman, 2000:68).

Despite the importance that the political context may have on informational shortcuts, there are no studies that address this topic. To my knowledge, there are only a few studies that have examined political context and the use of political shortcuts (Huber et al.,

2005; Kroh, 2009). Basically, these works analysed the impact of political institutions in promoting the use of specific shortcuts.<sup>3</sup> However there is no evidence on how the effects of using shortcuts on individuals' political decision may differ according to the political context in which shortcuts are used. In other words, no research has yet treated shortcuts as an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable, in order to examine the different impact that political context might have on the way shortcuts guide individuals' political decisions.

Additionally, as a consequence of focusing mainly on individual features, the literature on heuristics does not take into account how the political context and its impact on individuals may change over time. The characteristics of political information may vary not only across institutions but across time. For instance, the amount and the type of information available during a campaign may vary over elections. It is within this changing informational context that people make judgments and take advantage of shortcuts. This fact implies to consider not only the static political institutions, but the dynamics that the electoral competition may have on shortcuts. Furthermore, the traditional static conception of heuristic reasoning leaves unexplored the learning process that voters may experience over elections. Voters become informed about politics through daily-life experiences and monitoring the mass media and electoral campaigns (Popkin, 1991; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). This information is used as running tallies that voters incorporate in their informational shortcuts (Popkin, 1991). Thus, people learn politics over time and it may have implications for the way they take advantage of shortcuts.

However, most political psychology research relies on experimental evidence that is based on mock elections with new candidates and parties, information that individuals learn in few minutes. This is an element far from reality because it is difficult to find elections or electoral campaigns where voters start with no information. In fact, in real elections parties and some times candidates tend to be stable, which facilitates the learning process and the use of cues. Despite

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Huber et al., (2005) find that strong party discipline and the few parties in government, increase partisanship. On the other hand, Kroh (2009) examines which political contexts promote the ideological thinking.

the differences in the way information is presented in experiments and in the real world, experiments can have complete control over every aspect of the mock election (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006: 61). In their experimental justification, Law and Redlawsk conclude that “we chose less realism for greater control” (2006: 63). Although experiments can help in controlling factors, the use of “real data” in the exploration of shortcuts can incorporate further findings on how they operate over time as well as how people learn and incorporate new information in their judgmental shortcuts.

In sum, the heuristics literature has emphasized individuals’ features to explain the type of shortcuts and the effects of using them in guiding individuals’ political decisions. However, the practitioners of heuristics research forget that individuals do not live in isolation and can be influenced by the political context in which they behave. As a result, there are no studies that examine how political context mediate the way shortcuts help individuals. This thesis dissertation introduces into the analysis of political shortcuts the effect of political institutions and time to shed some light on one of the main research gaps in the cognitive saving approach.

## ***1.5. Thesis outline***

This thesis addresses the omission in the literature of how political context influences the performance of informational shortcuts. Particularly it includes on the analysis of shortcuts the characteristics of the electoral and party system as well as the specific dynamics of party competition over elections. As a result, it focuses on three different political institutions; the form of government, the party versus candidate oriented systems and the number of parties. Regarding the dynamics of electoral competition, the expected electoral results and the incumbent effect are also considered. Similarly, the time effects are analysed and how passing from a low to a high informational electoral context over time impacts the effects of using shortcuts.

Similarly, this research focuses on the effects of using five cognitive shortcuts: party identification, ideology, leader evaluation, electoral polls, and incumbency. Although these shortcuts are

considered to be some of the most utilized by voters in their electoral decisions, they have different characteristics that can make the electoral context to influence them differently. On the one hand, party and ideological schemas are considered a response to individuals' long term predispositions while leadership is related to a short-term factor. In addition, incumbency and electoral polls can be framed as short-term factors but are distinguished from the other three because they are part of the informational context. It is information that changes and people need to "learn" election after election.

At the same time, in order to analyze the effects of using these judgmental shortcuts under different political contexts, two electoral decisions are considered; whether and how to vote. These two political decisions are associated with political information and are the most common form of participation in politics. On the one hand, empirical evidence shows that a higher education or politically informed population has a higher propensity to participate in elections. On the other, informed voters hold more stable opinions and electoral preferences and know better how to articulate their political preferences in the vote choice. As these decisions require political information, they are the dependent variables employed to analyze the effects of using shortcuts under different political contexts.

This thesis is structured through the compilation of three articles that have specific research questions in line with the research gap in the literature on heuristics; to study the impact of shortcuts across institutional contexts and across time. The first article addresses the question of which institutional contexts render party identification, ideology and leadership promoters of electoral participation. The argument is that some institutions may reduce the cost of being informed, resulting in a better performance of these three heuristics, which would imply a higher participation in elections for those who use these judgmental shortcuts. Three types of institutions are included in the analysis: the government form, the effective number of parties and the disjunctive of having a more candidate or party-oriented system. Thus, a comparative analysis follows, which includes the diverse countries of the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* dataset (II module). The main findings show that in parliamentary systems, these three shortcuts function better while



party-oriented systems encourage the well-functioning of partisanship and leadership. However, the effective number of parties has no impact. This evidence contributes to the existing political shortcuts literature as it demonstrates the importance of political institutions on the effects of using shortcuts.

The second paper focuses on Spain and two informational shortcuts; incumbency and poll results. The aim is to consider these shortcuts to explore the conventional wisdom that a high turnout benefits left wing parties (DeNardo, 1980). This assumption is far from clear as there is mixed empirical evidence that indicates a positive and a non-existent relationship (Highton and Wolfinger, 2001; Fisher, 2007). In general there are three causal mechanisms that have been employed to explain this conventional wisdom: the composition of the electorate, the bandwagon effect and the anti-incumbent mechanism. While the bandwagon effect assumes that a higher turnout leads to better results for the party who is leading the electoral polls (Grofman et al. 1999), the anti-incumbent effect indicates that a higher turnout is bad news for the party in government (Hansford and Gomez, 2010; Lago and Montero, 2010). The composition of the electorate implies that the lower socioeconomic status of voters makes them participate less in elections. However, when this collective participates, it has a higher propensity to vote for leftist parties because these parties can better defend their interests (DeNardo, 1980; Nagel and McNulty, 1996).

The argument of this paper is that this conventional wisdom is unclear because it has not included in the explanation the three mechanisms at play. In addition, it is necessary to disentangle the signs of the three mechanisms as they can reduce this relationship or strengthen it if the three factors go hand in hand to increase the vote towards left wing parties. The findings indicate that the composition of peripheral voters is important in explaining their higher propensity to vote towards left wing parties. Nevertheless, it is when the polls show that the left party is going to win the election and it is the challenger in salient elections or the incumbent in a non-salient election that this propensity is the highest. Thus, when the two informational shortcuts push positively towards the vote for left wing parties, the relationship between peripheral voters and votes for left wing parties is the highest.

Similarly, these two shortcuts have a different impact on peripheral and core voters in their voting decisions; electoral polls and incumbency have a higher impact on peripheral voters in their predisposition to vote for left wing parties only if these two shortcuts have a positive sign. In general, this article is another piece of evidence that the political context, in this case the contextual shortcuts, matters in explaining individuals' political decisions, at the time that it shows different effects according to the individuals' features. Thus, it particularly contributes to the existing literature as it introduces the electoral dynamics of competition in elections through two contextual informational shortcuts –incumbency and electoral polls- to show their impact on the decision for which party to vote. In addition, it shows how these two shortcuts can activate a higher predisposition to vote for a party –specifically, left wing parties- or deactivate it.

The last paper examines the impact of ideology and leader evaluation on vote choice over time. Particularly, this research questions how voters assign different utilities to ideology and leader evaluations in their voting decision process according to the degree of (un)certainty in the informational electoral context. This fact is particularly relevant in new democracies as the foundational electoral period is characterized as being unstable and uncertain, which is translated into being a low-informational context. In the foundational democratic period, party system institutionalization tends to be low (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007), which implies less stability in party programmatic stances and electoral strategies. In addition, the mechanical and psychological effects of the electoral laws are unclear (Lago and Martinez, 2012) and the mass media is in the process of incorporating the plurality of interests in the society as well as gaining independence from the old regime (Voltmer, 2008). However, these characteristics may evolve over time. In this sense, it is not the mere passage of time but the convergence towards a more stable and fruitful electoral system that permits voters to learn (Tavits, 2006) and to use shortcuts accordingly.

Through examining the Spanish case and two electoral periods, the foundational in contrast to the most recent elections, this research captures two scenarios: a low and a higher informational context. The findings manifest that while ideology gains importance, the

utility of leader evaluation is reduced once the informational context becomes more stable and fruitful. Concretely, ideology will determine voters' choice as the informational context becomes richer. On the contrary, leader evaluation will become more important when the political context is unstable and information is poor. Thus, this article brings new evidence to light on the importance of time and how the richness of the informational context explains the effects of shortcuts. Then, it shows that there is a trade-off in using ideology and leadership depending on the stability of the informational context.

To summarize, this dissertation contributes to the heuristic literature by including an important new factor in the study of shortcuts: the importance of the political context. In this sense, this research provides evidence on how political institutions, the dynamics of the electoral competition as well as the effect of time can modify the use and performance of shortcuts in guiding individuals in their electoral decisions.

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## Chapter 2

### 2. Going beyond individuals: How heuristics perform under different institutional settings

*Abstract : This article examines which institutions promote a better functioning of ideology, party identification and leadership by measuring the effects of their use in the propensity to participate in elections. Literature specialized on heuristics tends to assume that shortcuts can effectively assist individuals in their electoral decisions correcting for their lack of political information. Nevertheless, these studies have mainly focused on individual characteristics forgetting the effect that political institutions can have in facilitating or hampering the assistance of shortcuts. With a multilevel logit analysis, this study seeks to integrate the electoral context in the study of political shortcuts. The findings suggest that parliamentarian and party-oriented systems substantially encourage the performance of these three shortcuts, while the effective number of parties has no impact.*

Key words: heuristics, party identification, ideology, leadership, political institutions, turnout

## **2.1. Introduction**

Informed citizens are more likely to be attentive to politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), participate in politics in a variety of ways (Verba et al., 1995) and to hold political opinions (Krosnick and Milburn, 1990). Despite the positive implications that political information can have on citizens, the general level of political knowledge is low (Althaus, 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Literature on heuristics indicates as a solution the use of shortcuts as efficient decision rules that help individuals to make up their minds on political issues, guiding them on their political decisions even with low levels of political information (Lupia, 1998; Sniderman, 1991; Popkin, 1991; Lau and Redlawk, 2006). Nevertheless, it is far from clear that shortcuts always assist individuals or assist them in the same way. Specially, if this literature validates this assumption focusing on individual attributes and within experiments. As practitioners of this approach forget, the political context is not constant and may affect the performance of heuristics. Then, it is necessary to measure how heuristics work under different institutions to finally asses this assumption. The main argument of this article is that political institutions can influence the characteristics of the political information available in the system, affecting indirectly how shortcuts assist individuals in reducing the cost of acquiring this political information. Concretely, I will focus on how three shortcuts -party identification, ideology and leadership- guide voters on their decision to participate in elections under three institutional settings: the presidential or parliamentary form of government, the candidate or party oriented system and the number of political parties.

One of the main functions of shortcuts is to reduce the cost of being informed, therefore, to measure how effective they are, it is necessary to evaluate the impact of their use in a political decision that requires information, such as voting. Apart from the normative reasons to study electoral participation<sup>4</sup>, in relation to heuristics,

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<sup>4</sup> Low electoral turnout is considered bad for a representative democracy, because it will have implications on the political system legitimacy (Franklin, 1999), quality of a democracy (Powell, 1982), unequal influence of individuals on the political process (Lijphart, 1997; Althaus, 2003; Verba et al. 1995)



turnout is a valuable dependent variable as it is positively associated with political information (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba et al., 1995; Dreyer, 2005; Sondheimer and Green, 2010). According to the intermediation effects that institutions can have on heuristics, they will have different levels of reducing the informational cost needed for voting. As a result, the same shortcut used in different institutions, it will lead to different propensities to vote. Therefore, the research question behind this article is: Under which institutional contexts do party identification, ideology and leadership promote electoral participation?

In answering this question, this article aims to shed light on one of the main gaps in the heuristics literature: to include the role of institutions in explaining the performance of shortcuts. This analysis surpasses the literature limitation of measuring the effectiveness of heuristics only with individual features by comparatively analyzing the effects of using shortcuts under different institutions. Then, it gives a richer and deeper understanding of how heuristics perform and assists citizens regardless of their personal characteristics. Furthermore, this study does not make use of mock experimental elections studying the role of heuristics in a common political act such as voting and in real elections. At the same time, I employ a multilevel logit analysis, the most appropriate technique to integrate the individual and contextual level variables, but one that has not been widely used in the cognitive-saving approach. The findings suggest that institutions play a role in how heuristics operates and reduce the cost obtaining political information. In particular, parliamentarism and party oriented systems have a positive impact in all the three shortcuts analyzed. Contrary, the number of parties does not have an impact on the saving-cost function of heuristics. Thus, it is necessary to include the role of institutions in explaining how, in real politics, shortcuts help individuals in their political decisions.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review about political shortcuts, institutions and turnout. The next section specifies the model, and explains why party or candidate attachment as well as ideology can have different effects on voting according to the political institutions in which voters make decisions. Section 4 describes the variables included in the

model as well as how they have been operationalized. The last two sections present the main findings and the conclusions.

## ***2.2. Going beyond individual characteristics: the importance of including institutions in the study of heuristics***

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1970s, the information processing approach addressed the use of heuristics as simple decision rules that might satisfy citizenship requirements of the democratic classic theory even in the absence of high levels of information.<sup>5</sup> Downs is the pioneer of the idea that voters will utilize heuristics and informational shortcuts to overcome the cost of being informed in taking all kinds of political decisions (Downs, 1957). Heuristics are “judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice” (Sniderman et al., 1991:19). Lau and Redlawsk (2001) identify five types of shortcuts: those relying on a candidate’s party affiliation, a candidate’s ideology, endorsements, poll results and a candidate’s appearance.

Although heuristics are assumed to be effective, experiments have been the most common method used to verify this assumption. This imposes serious limitations if we try to apply the conclusions to real politics. Furthermore, this literature does not move beyond the

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<sup>5</sup> The other part of the literature proposes the aggregation of individual preferences as a solution. Converse explains that the aggregation process separates the signal from the noise improving the signal-to-noise ratio. When you aggregate, the random responses of the uninformed (noise) will tend to cancel each other, leaving non-random responses of informants (the signal) reflected in the average public (1990, 378). Page and Shapiro provide an alternative called “collective rationality”. They argue that the opinions of respondents have parts of random and parts of non-random components, and when they are aggregated, it underlies the central tendencies of the no-random part in the aggregate parameters of collective opinion. As a result, the collective policy preferences are “predominantly rational, in the sense that they are real –not meaningless, random “nonattitudes”; generally stable and understandable” (1992, Xi preface)

individual-level characteristics to examine the broader context in which these shortcuts are used. The cognitive-saving approach sees individuals as autonomous and isolated decision makers that do not interact with their social networks or political institutions. As a consequence, these studies have only emphasized the impact of individual features in explaining how heuristics function, but they forget that individuals do not live in a vacuum and that their behavior can be influenced and shaped by their political context.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, these analyses have been focused on Western democracies -especially on American politics- and few studies have done comparisons cross-nationally.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the debate on the effectiveness of heuristic loses applicability and relevance when applied beyond the North American context to different institutional settings that may cause differences in how heuristics guide citizens independently from their individual cognitive structure.

Institutions can shape individuals' preferences, attitudes and political behavior. As Anderson states, "people form attitudes and make choices in variable environments, which come in the form of formal institutional rules that govern people's behavior or in the form of differential economic, social and political conditions that shape people's interpretations and actions" (Anderson, 2007: 590). In the same vein, institutions influence the information available to individuals, its quality and the way in which individuals acquire and process it. For instance, Jerit et al. (2006) suggest that political knowledge can be influenced by the features of the information environment.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the political context can influence "the

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<sup>6</sup> To see critics on the individual characteristics and well-functioning of heuristics as a cost saving see Althaus (2003), Delly Carpini and Keeter (1996), or Kinder (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Usually these studies focus on the importance of the informational context on the civic competence and political information or sophistication of individuals, (see Gordon and Segura (1997) and Krassa (1990)) but pay less attention to shortcuts.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, these authors demonstrate, in a US study, that higher levels of information in TV media coverage benefits the least educated almost as much as the most educated, while the educated learn disproportionately more from newspaper coverage. The authors conclude that environment may reinforce or diminish the relationship between education and levels of political knowledge.

aggregate level of citizens' competence, and it reduces if not eliminates the advantage that normally accompanies education and political sophistication" (Kuklinski et al., 2001: 422). Apart from the level of political knowledge, political environment also influences voters' attention, retention and use of political information (Krassa, 1990). Then, given the importance of institutions in structuring and shaping the characteristics of the political information, and how individuals acquire it, it is reasonable to think that institutions may also influence the degree in which heuristics assist citizens. In this way, political context by structuring political information and the public choices will help citizens to overcome their information shortfall and to take advantage of judgmental shortcuts (Sniderman, 2000).

In general, shortcuts will help voters in any political decision that is associated with information, such as turnout, by reducing the informational cost of voting. The rational choice model holds that in a basic political decision such as turnout, an individual will balance the expected benefits of voting (B), multiplied by the probability (P) that the voter will cast a decisive vote and the cost (C) of going to vote (Downs, 1957).<sup>9</sup> The cost corresponds, "on one hand, to the amount of time one feels she needs to spend assembling and digesting the information about candidates and parties in order to decide which party or candidate to vote for and, on the other hand, to the time spent going to the poll, voting, and returning" (Blais, 2000:83). Information not only affects the costs (C), but the other components of the act of voting. Thus, a voter needs information to know the benefits that can be obtained by voting or to know how close an electoral race is to verify the probability that his or her vote can make a difference.

In this way, it is fairly demonstrated that information is a key factor in explaining electoral participation, as it reduces the cost of participation. In addition, the effects of information on voter turnout can be even larger than the ones measured by conventional

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<sup>9</sup> Apart of the rational choice model, literature on voter turnout give alternative explanations on why people vote, such as; the individuals' resources (information or time), the sense of civic duty or the expressive motivation in voting. For further information and review of these approaches see (Blais, 2000). Nevertheless, all the theories insist on the cost of participation and they converge on the conceptualization of these costs (Blais, 2000: 14).

literature if this relationship can be enforced by a third exogenous factor. For instance, Dreyer (2005) by informing randomly a faction of the electorate to discount the effect of an exogenous variable, shows with a natural experiment in Copenhagen that the effect of being informed increases the propensity to vote by 20 points. Thus, on one hand, voting in elections requires information (Dreyer, 2005; Lutz, 2006), and on the other, heuristics reduce this informational cost and assist citizens in this electoral decision. Hence, turnout is a valid political decision to measure the performance of shortcuts as it positively related to political information. Nevertheless, institutions, as an exogenous factor, may modify and mediate this relationship. As the cost of gathering, selecting, transmitting, evaluating and analyzing information can be shifted from the voter onto someone else (Downs, 1957), in this case to the political institutions, they may influence the cost of voting ( $C$ ). If institutions assume the transferable informational costs, then the cost-saving function of heuristics will be reinforced. As a result, shortcuts will assist voters more effectively, reducing even more the informational cost and increasing the propensity to vote. Thus, the use of shortcuts will not have uniform effects on the likelihood to vote because it will depend on the type of institutions in which shortcuts are used.

Summing up, it is far from clear that shortcuts are always effective in saving the informational cost or that their use produces uniform effects for all voters. It is necessary to go beyond individual characteristics and to analyze how the institutional setting interact with heuristics to see if individuals can reduce the cost of being informed and to act- with the assistance of shortcuts- as if they were fully informed.

### ***2.3. The effects of political institutions on partisanship, ideology and leadership on voter's turnout: Theoretical model and hypotheses***

In this article I will focus on party identification, ideology and the identification with a leader. There are two fundamental reasons for this. First, these three shortcuts are especially sensitive to political context and political parties' performance. Partisans tend to rely on their parties or their candidates as a source of information, a connection that allows political elites to communicate with and give information to their supporters (Campbell et al., 1960). This argument can be extended to ideological voters because the voter will tend to pay attention to parties that are close to her/his ideological political family. Thus, the way in which political parties communicate and transmit information may especially affect the effectiveness of these shortcuts. Second, these are three of the most used heuristics by voters in representative democracies. By analyzing these three shortcuts together, we can obtain a broad picture of how individuals manage heuristics in different electoral contexts and how heuristics work to assist citizens.<sup>10</sup>

The identification with a party and ideology are considered to be two of the most important long-standing orientations that help to explain individuals' political attitudes, opinions and behavior. At the same time, partisan ties and ideology are heuristics in the sense that they help to orient individuals to the complexities of politics by providing a framework for assimilating and structuring political information with respect to political issues (Dalton et al., 2000:20; Eijk et al., 2005). Although these long-term predispositions are two of the most utilized by voters, short-term factors have become more influential in individuals' voting decisions and political actions. For instance, identification with a political leader is gaining importance in explaining voting behavior. "In the absence of party cues, voters

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<sup>10</sup> In a broad perspective, partisanship and ideology are important in the sense that positively influence the support for political parties and the political system (Holmberg, 2003; Paskeviciute, 2009), with an effect on the quality and efficiency of democratic governance (Norris, 1999). Besides, these two long term predispositions help to anchor the vote choice (Dalton et al., 2000) which can be translated in more stable systems.

will rely more heavily on the appeal of the candidates' personalities in order to decide their vote" (McAllister, 2007: 583). Additionally, candidate's personal appearance can activate social stereotypes that infer other attributes of the candidate. In addition, leaders' stands on issues can be used as a cognitive shortcut to the electoral decisions' judgments (Riggle et al., 1992).

In general, as these three shortcuts synthesize political information, those who use them are more likely to vote (Campbell et al. 1960; Dalton, 2006; Bartels, 2000). Nevertheless, the strength of this relationship can be determined by the dynamics of the electoral context. As public options become less clear and less organized, the cost of acquiring political information increases. Thus, the cost of clarifying what the parties stand for, their proposed policies and their political programs will be transferred to the voters' shortcuts and not to the political context. As a result, a shortcut will perform worse, because it will not be as easy to save the informational cost as in a more cooperative context. At the same time, institutions may influence the type of information available and, as a result, the type of heuristics that voters will use in making a political decision. For instance, empirical evidence demonstrates that the use of partisanship increases with a greater clarity of party responsibility and with higher party discipline (Huber et al., 2005: 384). Under these circumstances, it may be that the shortcut promoted by the context may function better than other existing shortcuts. Specifically, the three institutions analyzed here -the form of government, the effective number of parties and the importance of a candidate on the electoral system- present characteristics that affect this informational cost and may indirectly influence the effectiveness of shortcuts in guiding voters to participate in lower house elections.

In the case of the form of government, the dynamics of the electoral competition on presidential or parliamentary systems may affect the utility of these three shortcuts. In a presidential system, voters recognize the importance of the presidency relative to other political offices, as legislative candidates are more prone to make use of their party's presidential candidate when campaigning for legislative elections (Samuels, 2002; Golder, 2006). As a result, citizens perceive a link between the presidential and congressional contest and they evaluate the presidential candidates to guide the vote in the

congressional election (Mondack and McCurley, 1994). Nevertheless, parliamentary systems do not have this contamination effect as legislative elections choose both the prime minister and members of the Congress. Thus, the different nature of lower house elections in both systems will lead to an emphasis on candidates in presidential systems while parliamentarism will be more focused on political parties. For instance, McAllister (1996: 286) indicates that in presidential systems, a national election focuses attention on the candidates who seek office reinforcing the focus on the candidates' personal characteristics. Parliamentarism, by contrast, is more likely to direct attention toward the whole package of party policies, platforms, and candidates, rather than personalities. Following this argument, it is plausible that identification with a party and ideology reduce better the information cost related to parties and their programmatic issues more in parliamentarian than in presidential systems. Similarly, as presidentialism focuses on candidates, the identification with a leader will summarize better the differences between candidates, and as a result, leadership will be decisive in reducing the cost of participating in legislative elections.

Another factor that may reinforce the relationship between the use of these shortcuts and their informational cost-saving role is the salience of the elections in each type of regime. In parliamentarian systems, legislative elections are crucial because in addition to electing the parliamentarians, they will have implications in electing the prime minister and members of the cabinet. In presidential systems, they will have effects only for electing the members of the parliament and are, therefore, perceived as second-order elections. Consequently, parties will tend to mobilize more voters in parliamentarian than in presidential systems, as there is more at stake with each election. Thus, politicians will have an extra incentive to assume the cost of structuring and summarizing information for voters. As a result, in lower house elections, people will participate more in parliamentarian systems than in presidential because the national lower house is more powerful and elections will be more decisive (Jackman, 1987; Blais, 1998, 2000, 2006; Fornos et al. 2004). Thus, on one hand, the electoral dynamics lead parliamentarian systems' voters to use ideology and party identification. But on the other, the salience of the elections will allow voters a better use of these two shortcuts because it is easier



to associate this information already structured by parties to the shortcuts available in the electoral competition. Hence, I hypothesize that ideology and party identification will function better under a parliamentary system - leading to a higher propensity to vote- than under a presidential system.

***Hypothesis 1.1.** In parliamentary systems the use of partisanship and ideology, will reduce the informational costs more than in presidential systems, and they will increase more the probability of voting.*

***Hypothesis 1.2.** In presidential systems the identification with a leader will be more important in reducing the cost of voting, being their users more likely to vote than if they were in a parliamentary system.*

This explanatory model can be employed on the electoral systems and the incentives that electoral rules produce when allocating seats between parties and within parties' candidates, and more specifically, if the system is more oriented toward candidates instead of their parties. In fact, "the relevant distinction between person voting and list voting; and the related assumptions are that when we vote for persons, who is who (with what credentials) makes a difference and may become a decisive factor, whereas where we vote for lists we basically vote for a party (its symbol, ideology, program, platform) and the party largely controls, in turn, the individual winning" (Sartori, 1994:16). The work of Chin and Robinson (2005) gives empirical evidence to Sartori's assumption. They experimentally tested the differences in acquiring information in different party lists contexts as well as their implications for the use of shortcuts. The authors find that in single member districts (SMDs) individuals look for more political information on candidates than do individuals under proportional (PR) systems. Additionally, their main conclusion is that in SMDs the identification with a party is less important in deciding the vote than in a closed-list proportional system. The reason behind is that the utility of obtaining more information is higher in SMDs as the voter can opt for individual candidates rather than the entire candidate party list. In fact, Huber and his colleagues (2005) found that

moving from a system with closed lists to one with open lists will decrease partisanship 17.5 percent points. Thus, the utility of the identification with a party or an ideology will be higher in systems that encourage party lists. Under those electoral systems, parties are more prone to give information about the party group as a whole and not to emphasize individuals (Carey and Shugart, 1995). Consequently, the shortcuts that can better reduce this type of data are ideology and party identification, resulting in a higher probability to vote for those who use them. On the contrary, in those systems where the candidate is more valuable, leadership will increase the probability to vote because it will better save the cost of voting as this shortcut frames better the nuances of candidates. Thus,

***Hypothesis 2.1.** Ideology and partisanship will better assist citizens in a party oriented system and, as a result, they will lead to a greater likelihood to vote than in a personal oriented system.*

***Hypothesis 2.2.** Leadership will be a more effective shortcut in personal than in party oriented systems and, as a result, its use will increase the probability of voting more in these systems than in party oriented systems.*

Another element of institutional context is party system characteristics. Literature on party system competition indicates that multiparty systems lead to more electoral offers and to accentuate ideological differences between parties than in a two party system (Downs, 1957; Andrews and Money, 2009). Nevertheless, it is far from clear that this produces positive effects on the individuals' decision making and informational costs. In fact, literature on electoral behaviour demonstrates a negative relationship between the number of political parties in a parliament and the use of ideology or partisanship (Huber et al., 2005; Enyedi and Todosijevic, 2009; Kroh, 2009). Similarly, it also shows a negative relationship between the number of parties and the probability of voting (Jackman, 1987; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Jusko and

Shively, 2005; Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2009).<sup>11</sup> The common causal explanations behind these findings are associated with the complexity of the informational political context either because there is more information available on the system or because it is more confusing. First, as in a multiparty system more choices will be offered, it will be more information on the system and it will increase the cost of being informed. Furthermore, this cost can also be higher as the information becomes more confusing. As the number of parties increase, the possibilities to form coalition governments will be higher. Under these circumstances, elections become less decisive and more uncertain (Jackman, 1987) and, it becomes more difficult for voters to assess responsibility for policy outcomes (Huber et al., 2005: 372). Then, although a greater number of parties suppose to represent a broader political spectrum it seems that the cost of acquiring information would be higher. If this is the case, it will be more difficult for voters to associate the issues and party proposals to the cues related to shortcuts. As a result, it will be more difficult for shortcuts to assist citizens in reducing the cost of voting, as the number of parties increase, resulting in lower propensity to vote;

***Hypothesis 3.** The greater the number of parties, the less guidance will be provided by identification with a party, leadership or ideology, and the propensity to vote will be lower.*

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<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless there are some studies that verify a positive relationship between number of parties and aggregate turnout (Brockington, 2004; Fisher et al., 2008).

## **2.4. Data and methodology**

To assess the impact of using any of these three political shortcuts on turnout in relation to the political institutions in which the voter performs I use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) database, specifically, the second module (2002-2006)<sup>12</sup>. The CSES is composed of voting, demographic, district and macro level variables. Unlike other cross-national studies, the CSES includes a group of experts that elaborate the district and macro-level data. This design facilitates both cross-level and cross-national analyses, and particularly to compare the effects of electoral institutions on citizens' political behavior. This project is conducted on more than forty countries and is focused on post-election surveys. A positive aspect is that the cases go beyond the traditional Western democracies. Thus it comprises a greater variation in the political context, and it will give robustness to the conclusions reached. The sample of countries as well as the explanatory and main independent variables are reflected in Appendix 1 and 2. Countries in which the vote is compulsory have been excluded from the sample as the relationship of using any shortcut with turnout would be biased. In these countries is not possible to disentangle whether people vote because shortcuts assist them on this political decision or because the system punishes them for not going to the polls.<sup>13</sup>

Since the hypotheses interrelate individual and aggregate factors, multilevel modeling is the appropriate method to conduct the analysis and verify the hypotheses. In multilevel research, "the data structure in the population is hierarchical, and the sample data are viewed as a multistage sample from this hierarchical population" (Hox, 2002:1). Thus, with this technique I will be able to determine the individual and group level effects on individuals' electoral participation as well as the moderating effect that group level variables can have on the explanatory variables. A general model follows the next equation:

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<sup>12</sup> For precise information and data see [www.cses.org](http://www.cses.org)

<sup>13</sup> As the positive effects of obligatory voting on turnout depends on its degree of enforcement (Blais, 2006), I have excluded exclusively those countries in which the CSES have marked them as having strictly or weakly enforced sanctions: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile and Peru.

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}X_{ij} + \gamma_{01}Z_j + \gamma_{11}X_{ij}Z_j + u_{1j}X_{ij} + u_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

Where  $[\gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10} X_{ij} + \gamma_{01} Z_j + \gamma_{11} Z_j X_{ij}]$  contains the fixed coefficients and the segment  $[u_{0j} + u_{1j} X_{ij} + e_{ij}]$  contains the random effects of the model. In particular:

- $\gamma_{00}$ : is the intercept
- $X_{ij}$ : Represents the individual explanatory variable(s)
- $Z_j$ : Represents the group level variables
- $X_{ij}Z_j$ : Is the cross-level interaction
- $u_{0j}$ : are the errors at the highest level
- $u_{1j}X_{ij}$ : is the error term connected to  $X_{ij}$ .
- $e_{ij}$ : is the residual error term at the lowest level.

Since the explanatory variable  $X_{ij}$  and the error term  $u_{ij}$  are multiplied, the resulting total error will be different for different values of  $X_{ij}$ , a situation that in ordinary multiple regression analysis is called “heteroscedasticity” (Hox, 2002: 14). This is one of the reasons why running an ordinary regression is not recommended as the variance of the residual errors is not independent from the values of the explanatory variables.

### *Measurement of variables*

The **dependent variable, individual turnout in legislative elections**, is dichotomous and it will take values 0 (when the voter states that s/he has not voted) and 1 (when s/he has voted).

The main **independent variables**, the use of party identification, ideology and leadership have 0 and 1 values.<sup>14</sup> **Partisanship** has a value of 1 if the individual has responded that s/he feels close to any political party while 0 if s/he does not. **Ideology** is recoded as 1 if the voter can locate themselves in a left-right scale (from 1 to 10) and 0 if the individual can not. Finally, **leadership** will have a value

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<sup>14</sup> The question used in the case of partisanship is: Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?. In the case of ideology: In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? In the case of leadership, the question used is: Regardless of how you feel about the parties, would you say that any of the individual party leaders/presidential candidates at the last election represents your views reasonably well?

of 1 if the person identifies himself with a leader and 0 if s/he does not. In addition to the key independent variables described above, **educational level** and **age** will be included in the model as control variables as these two variables have shown to be important in explaining individual turnout.

Regarding the contextual level and, according to the hypotheses, I will include three main variables:

**Form of government:** It is coded as 1 for parliamentary systems and 0 for presidential systems.<sup>15</sup> The CSES includes this variable and I have complemented it with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES project).<sup>16</sup>

**Effective number of parties:** The most common formula to measure the party system fractionalization is the “effective number of parties” by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) that is calculated in terms of voter support for parties.<sup>17</sup> I have used this index calculated by Gallagher and Mitchell (2008).<sup>18</sup> These authors have measured the effective number of parties for over 900 elections in more than ninety countries. Thus, I take into account the number of parties at the electoral level for each country and the specific year for which the CSES dataset has collected the data.

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<sup>15</sup> The different nature of presidential systems as well as whether elections are concurrent may affect the way individuals use shortcuts. For instance, studies on turnout show that participation is higher in legislative elections that happen the same day or year as presidential elections (Fornos et al.: 2004; Blais: 1998). Unfortunately, there are not enough presidential cases in the sample to analyze differences among presidential systems. Doing so would lead to few or no cases in some categories, which can produce inconsistent results. As a result, I have opted for comparing parliamentary and presidential systems in general.

<sup>16</sup> For further information see: <http://www.ifes.org/>

<sup>17</sup> The precise formula (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) is:

$$N_2 = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2} ;$$

Where  $P_i$  is the fractional share of votes of the  $i$  party.

<sup>18</sup> For further information see:

[http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php)

**Personal or party oriented systems:** In this case I employ the measurement of Carey and Shugart (1995).<sup>19</sup> These authors measure the degree of personal reputation with three indicators: ballot, pool and votes. Regarding the ballot variable, the authors differentiate if parties control the access or order of candidates, assigning a value of 0 if parties control both, 1 if they control the access and, 2 if parties do not control either of them. Pool measures if a vote for one candidate can contribute to the number of seats for his or her party. It ranges from 0 (the pooling extends across the whole party) to 2 (there is no pooling). The vote variable distinguishes among systems in which voters can cast only a single vote for a party (0), for multiple candidates (1) or a single vote for a candidate (2). All the values close to 0 mean party oriented systems while the 2 indicates that a system encourages the candidate. Then I have created an index variable that compiles all these three variables, and it goes from 0 party oriented to 6 personal oriented systems.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.5. Results**

Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 display the results of the multilevel logit analysis for each of the three shortcuts. In general, in the first column, or model one, presents the covariates without the interactions. The remaining models include the interaction effects between the specific institution and the shortcut. I will pay special attention to the interaction terms, as I am mainly interested in the modulating effects of institutional context on shortcuts in turning out to vote.

Table 2.1 shows the coefficients for partisanship. In model 1 we can see the influence of macro-level variables on an individual's propensity to vote. Models 2 to 4 include the coefficients for the interaction terms. All of them show the signs expected by the hypotheses and, with the exception of the effective number of

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<sup>19</sup> I have employed the updated version of this index measured by Johnson and Wallack (2007), in the Database of the Electoral Systems and the Personal Vote, <http://polisci2.ucsd.edu/jwjohnson/espv.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Johnson and Wallack (2007) do always not assign a whole value to each of the three indicators. As a result, the resulting variable may include decimals (see appendix 2).

parties, all are statistically significant. This confirms the modulating effects of institutions on the relationship between party identification and turnout. Thus, the positive sign of the interaction term in model 2 indicates that there are more differences in the probability of voting between partisans and non-partisans in parliamentary than in presidential systems. As a result, party identification works better as a cost-saving measure in parliamentary systems.

[Table 2.1 about here]

Similarly in model 4, the negative sign shows that the differences between partisan users and non-users in the propensity to vote would be lower as the systems turns toward a more personal-oriented system. At the same time, the interaction term between the number of parties and partisanship is not statistically significant, thus there will be no impact of the fractionalization of parties on the way in which this shortcut guides citizens in their decision of going to the polls.

The coefficients for ideology are shown in table 2.2. In this case, the different effects of using ideology under different institutions are significant in two of the three institutions; the government form and the personal voting, as in the case of partisanship. Thus, the positive direction of the interaction coefficient in model 2 indicates the differences in the propensity to vote between ideological and non-ideological voters are higher in parliamentary than in presidential system.

[Table 2.2 about here]

Similarly, as expected in the hypothesis, the coefficient of the interaction term in model 4 is negative showing that going toward a more personal oriented system, the differences in the probability to vote will be lower between those who use and those who do not use ideology as a heuristic. This implies that ideology performs better in a system in which the party has more determinacy. The number of parties has no impact on the effects of using ideology as the interaction term is not significant.

In the case of leadership, in table 3.3, we can appreciate that only the candidate or party orientation variable seems to have a



mediating effect between this shortcut and turnout. Thus, in the case of the personal oriented systems the differences in the expected probabilities for voting for those who identify with a leader and those who do not would be lower than in a party oriented system. The remaining institutions are not significant, implying that the differences in the probability of voting between those who use leadership and those who do not are similar, no matter the government form or the number of political parties.

[Table 3.3 about here]

Although the coefficients present a first approximation of the effects of institutions on how well heuristics guide citizens in going to the polls, it is not possible to know the magnitude of them and to compare exclusively between those individuals who are using shortcuts. This requires calculating the probability of voting for each of the shortcuts in the different institutional scenarios as well as their marginal impact. Hence, I have used statistical simulations to compute these probabilities and their uncertainties.<sup>21</sup> Table 2.4 displays the predicted probabilities of voting that a person has using each of the shortcuts under different institutions. The table also presents the first differences between heuristic users and between non-heuristics users in different institutional scenarios. To calculate the first differences, I estimate the change in the predicted probability that a heuristic user has moving from one institutional scenario to the other as well as for the non-heuristic users. In the case of continuous contextual variables I have taken into account the highest and lowest values of the variable. Thus, in the case of the number of parties I compare the changes in probabilities that heuristics users have moving from a 10.46 parties scenario to a 2.05 parties. Similarly, I will measure the changes in the probability of voting between heuristics users that interact in a personal oriented system, or value 5, and a party oriented system, or value 0.

[Table 2.4 about here]

Table 2.4 reflects that those who identify with a party in a parliamentary system vote 15 percent more than if they were in a

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<sup>21</sup> A positive aspect of simulating probabilities is that it corrects the sampling error and the fundamental uncertainty in obtaining them (King et al., 2000).

presidential system, holding constant the remaining variables. Although these differences in absolute terms are statistically significant, showing that partisanship functions better in parliamentary systems, it is necessary to measure the marginal impact of a shortcut to further assess this finding. As in parliamentary systems party identifiers improve 19 points with respect to non-party identifiers while in presidential systems they improve approximately 21 points, it could be said that partisanship functions better in presidential systems. Nevertheless, this last comparison should be relaxed. As the base line –the probability of non-party identifiers- is different in both systems, it is necessary to take into account the marginal improvement of a shortcut to assess its larger impact. In other words, the increase of 19 points when the base line is 0.64 is greater than the improvement of 21 points when the base line is 0.46. Consequently, I have calculated the marginal impact with the following ratio:

$$\text{Marginal impact} = \frac{p_{\text{shortcut (vote)}} - p_{\text{Non-shortcut (vote)}}}{1 - p_{\text{Non-shortcut (vote)}}$$

The numerator is the absolute improvement -in terms of probability- of using a shortcut in a specific scenario; or, in other words, the difference in the probability of voting between those who use a shortcut and those who do not. The denominator is the remaining improvement that a shortcut can do.

Table 2.4 shows the marginal impact of each shortcut and scenario. Figure 2.1 displays graphically the marginal impact of party identification only on those institutions in which the differences in the propensity to vote are significant between partisan users. Then, in Table 2.4 and Figure 2.1, we can appreciate that the marginal impact of party identification is bigger in parliamentary than in presidential systems, which confirms the hypothesis.

[Figure 2.1 about here]

In the same vein, those who identify with a party are 13 percent more likely to vote in a system where the party is more important than if they were in a candidate- oriented system, being this difference statistically significant. The marginal impact is also higher in party oriented systems, as Figure 1 shows. Thus, I can

confirm the hypothesis that stated that partisanship worked better in a parliamentary system and in a less candidate-oriented system. Under those institutions party identification will better reduce the cost of being informed and will be more effective as those who use this shortcut show a greater likelihood to vote. Contrary to this, the number of parties does not show any effect on partisan users. Initially, for those voters who use partisanship the propensity to vote is 6 percent points higher in a system with 10.46 parties in comparison with a 2.05 party system, but these differences are not statistically significant. As a result, it is not worth taking into account the marginal impact of partisanship as the number of parties does not explain group differences.

In the case of ideology, we can appreciate in table 2.4 that ideological voters in a parliamentary system are 17 percent more likely to vote than their equivalents in a presidential system. Furthermore, as we can appreciate in figure 2.2, the marginal impact of ideology is also larger in parliamentary systems, confirming the hypothesis.

[Figure 2.2 about here]

Although the coefficient on the interaction term was significant in the case of personal versus party oriented systems and this shortcut, the first differences in probabilities are not. Thus, even those who use ideology under a party oriented system have 11 percent more probability to vote than if they were in a candidate centered system, as expected the hypothesis, this difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, the number of parties does not modulate the relationship between ideology and the propensity to vote. The difference in probability to vote between ideology users in a party system that goes from 2.05 parties to 10.45 is only 3 percent, and it is not significant. In fact, as table 2.4 manifest, the marginal impact of ideology is similar no matter if the electoral system is more centered on the party or the candidate or the number of parties.

Leadership shows similar results than the party identifiers. In figure 2.3, we can see how, contrary to the hypothesis, leadership functions better in parliamentary systems, leading to their users to have a 14 percent greater probability of voting than if they were in a presidential system, holding the rest of variables on the model

constant. This argument can be reached if we see the marginal impact of leadership on figure 2.3, which it is larger in parliamentary rather than presidential systems.

[Figure 2.3 about here]

The same can be said in the case of electoral systems oriented toward parties instead of their leaders. Thus, those who identify with a political leader will have 14 percent lower probability of voting in a candidate-oriented system than in a party-oriented system, contrary to what was expected by the hypothesis. The marginal impact also confirms that the effect of leadership is bigger in party-oriented systems. At the same time the first differences in using this shortcut under different number of parties are not statistically significant, implying that this party system characteristic does not affect the effects of using this shortcut.<sup>22</sup> In short, contrary to the hypotheses, leadership functions better under parliamentary systems and in party-oriented systems as the difference in the expected probabilities and marginal impact indicate.

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<sup>22</sup> The fact that the effective number of parties (ENP) does not mediate between these three shortcuts and turnout may be explained by a non-linear effect of the ENP and turnout (Taagpera and Shugart (1989), Grofman and Selb (2011)). In a recent study, Grofman and Selb (2011) indicate in their Figure 1 how after a specific threshold of number of parties, the positive linear relationship between ENP and turnout disappears turning the line almost flat or even negative. To explore the non-linear relationship, I have divided the sample between those countries below and above the median number of parties (4.09), and I have rerun the models. The probabilities are shown in appendix 3. Multilevel logit coefficients are available upon request. The probabilities in the appendix 3 show that ENP seems to mediate only in the case of identification with a political party and in countries where the ENP is below the median. In this case, the impact of partisanship is higher as the number of parties increase from 2.05 to 4.09 parties. This fact indicates that there may be a division between a low or high number of parties. Nevertheless, one should interpret these results cautiously as the number of cases is low (15 cases). Further research is required on the different effects that low versus high number of parties can have on shortcuts, as well as how other contextual factors may be necessary to make ENP to have an impact (Grofman and Selb, 2011).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

Theoretical and experimental works emphasize the effectiveness of heuristics in assisting voters in their political decisions without the necessity of acquiring encyclopedic knowledge. Nevertheless, this literature does not go beyond individual characteristics. As Norris (2004: 23) criticizes, “far less is known about the psychological effects of how the public, politicians, and parties respond to electoral rules, and, hence, the underlying reasons for some of these relationships.” This article makes some progress in the cognitive-saving approach by introducing institutions as a factor that influence the utility of heuristics. Thus, it analyzes the indirect effects of electoral institutions and party system characteristics on the performance of three shortcuts: ideology, partisanship and leadership. The performance of a shortcut in saving the informational cost to individuals is measured by the propensity to vote of individuals once they use a specific shortcut under different institutional settings.

The findings demonstrate that institutions matter in explaining the utility of heuristics and their informational cost-savings function. Therefore parliamentary systems seem to have a positive impact on the three shortcuts analyzed and not only on party identification and ideology as the hypothesis established. This implies that in parliamentary, rather than presidential systems, takes in a major sense the cost of structuring and summarizing the political information, and does not transfer the whole informational saving-cost to shortcuts. As the salience and importance of lower elections are higher in parliamentary systems, parties will have an extra incentive to clarify the political information available in order to mobilize voters. Furthermore, the fact that leadership functions better in parliamentary than in presidential systems can be explained by the fact that politics has become more personalized, especially in established parliamentary democracies (McAllister, 2007: 584). Additionally it is necessary to take into account the base of leadership. If the linkage between leadership and voters is more focused on the party programmatic issues or ideological instances rather than the personal traits of the candidate, even the system focuses more on party cues, it would be contributing to improve also the candidate cues. This argument can also be utilized on the party versus candidate oriented systems, in which leadership has

manifested, contrary to the hypothesis, to function better in a party oriented system. As in leadership, partisanship and ideology have a lower impact on systems that are centered on candidates. The institution that does not seem to have an impact on the performance of shortcuts is the number of parties in the parliament. Then, it is far from clear whether the mere fact of increasing the number of parties leads to a more complex or ambiguous informational system. It is necessary to go beyond this argument and find the dynamics of the electoral competition and the incentives for parties in saving the cost of becoming informed and its consequences for shortcuts.

As the article has demonstrated, the mere fact of using a shortcut is not always enough to reduce the informational cost of being informed, it is important to include institutions in this argument. If institutions affect shortcuts by its implication in the political information, further research is needed to analyze how and which institutions modify the amount and characteristics of political information accessible in the systems. Devoting further studies in answering these issues will provide a more complete understanding of how shortcuts operate under different institutional settings and when they can assist effectively citizens in their political decision-making.

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**Table 2.1****Intermediation effects of institutions on party identification (PID) and turnout**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
PID	0.993 <sup>***</sup>	(0.031)	0.932 <sup>***</sup>	(0.043)	0.976 <sup>***</sup>	(0.097)	1.154 <sup>***</sup>	(0.052)
Education	0.197 <sup>***</sup>	(0.010)	0.197 <sup>***</sup>	(0.01)	0.197 <sup>***</sup>	(0.010)	0.197 <sup>***</sup>	(0.01)
Age	0.028 <sup>***</sup>	(0.001)	0.028 <sup>***</sup>	(0.001)	0.028 <sup>***</sup>	(0.001)	0.028 <sup>***</sup>	(0.001)
Constant	-1.285 <sup>***</sup>	(0.361)	-1.258 <sup>***</sup>	(0.362)	-1.278 <sup>***</sup>	(0.362)	-1.352 <sup>***</sup>	(0.362)
<i>Second level</i>								
Gov. form	0.807 <sup>***</sup>	(0.227)	0.764 <sup>***</sup>	(0.229)	0.807 <sup>***</sup>	(0.227)	0.802 <sup>***</sup>	(0.227)
N of parties	0.030	(0.067)	0.029	(0.068)	0.028	(0.068)	0.031	(0.067)
Personal voting	-0.103	(0.066)	-0.103	(0.067)	-0.103	(0.066)	-0.075	(0.067)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>								
PIDxGov_form			0.130 <sup>*</sup>	(0.062)				
PIDxN Parties					0.004	(0.021)		
PIDxPersonal vote							-0.077 <sup>***</sup>	(0.019)
<i>Random effects</i>								
$\sigma^2 \mu_0$ (2nd level variance)	0.578	(0.077)						
<i>N of level 1 units</i>	41803							
<i>N of level 2 units</i>	30							

<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).

**Table 2.2**  
**Intermediation effects of institutions on Ideology and turnout**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
Ideology	0.877***	(0.040)	0.802***	(0.051)	0.834***	(0.139)	0.993***	(0.068)
Education	0.183***	(0.010)	0.184***	(0.010)	0.183***	(0.010)	0.183***	(0.01)
Age	0.029***	(0.001)	0.029***	(0.001)	0.029***	(0.001)	0.029***	(0.001)
Constant	-1.554***	(0.348)	-1.480***	(0.348)	-1.515***	(0.368)	-1.660***	(0.354)
<i>Second level</i>								
Gov. form	0.755***	(0.220)	0.594**	(0.229)	0.754***	(0.219)	0.754***	(0.221)
N of parties	0.018	(0.066)	0.016	(0.065)	0.009	(0.072)	0.019	(0.066)
Personal voting	-0.098	(0.067)	-0.097	(0.067)	-0.098	(0.067)	-0.047	(0.072)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>								
IdeolXGov_form			0.190*	(0.080)				
IdeolxN Parties					0.011	(0.032)		
IdeolxPersonal vote							-0.058*	(0.028)
<i>Random effects</i>								
$\sigma^2 \mu_0$ (2nd level variance)	0.555	(0.075)						
<i>N of level 1 units</i>	40719							
<i>N of level 2 units</i>	29							

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).

**Table 2.3**  
**Intermediation effects of institutions on leadership and turnout**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E	Coeff.	S.E
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
Leadership	0.942***	(0.031)	0.919***	(0.042)	1.037***	(0.099)	1.010***	(0.048)
Education	0.203***	(0.010)	0.203***	(0.010)	0.203***	(0.010)	0.202***	(0.010)
Age	0.028***	(0.001)	0.028***	(0.001)	0.028***	(0.001)	0.028***	(0.001)
Constant	-1.211***	(0.337)	-1.203***	(0.338)	-1.260***	(0.341)	-1.236***	(0.338)
<i>Second level</i>								
Gov. form	0.697**	(0.212)	0.674**	(0.214)	0.697**	(0.212)	0.692**	(0.212)
N of parties	0.011	(0.063)	0.011	(0.063)	0.022	(0.064)	0.011	(0.063)
Personal voting	-0.124*	(0.062)	-0.123*	(0.062)	-0.124*	(0.062)	-0.108 <sup>+</sup>	(0.062)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>								
LeaderXGovform			0.051	(0.062)				
LeaderXNParties					-0.022	(0.022)		
LeaderXPersonal vote							-0.034 <sup>+</sup>	(0.019)
<i>Random effects</i>								
$\sigma^2 \mu_0$ (2nd level variance)	0.534	(0.073)						
<i>N of level 1 units</i>	38558							
<i>N of level 2 units</i>	29							

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).



**Table 2.4**

**Predicted probability to vote, first differences and marginal impact by shortcut and institutional scenario**

	Government Form			Number of parties			Person/Party orientation		
	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.
	Parliam	Presid	Parliam vsPresid	Max= 10,46	Min = 2,05	10.46 vs 2.05	Max= 5	Min = 0	5 vs 0
Party id.	0.838	0.680	0.157***	0.794	0.753	0.041	0.687	0.822	-0.135 **
No Party id.	0.645	0.462	0.183***	0.595	0.539	0.056	0.509	0.599	-0.090
<b>PID Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.452</b>	<b>0.243</b>	--	0.395	0.324	--	<b>0.332</b>	<b>0.376</b>	--
Ideology	0.735	0.563	0.173***	0.679	0.647	0.032	0.596	0.711	-0.116
No ideology	0.513	0.370	0.143***	0.464	0.444	0.021	0.428	0.483	-0.055
<b>Ideol Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.290</b>	<b>0.178</b>	--	0.249	0.240	--	0.259	0.254	--
Leadership	0.779	0.634	0.146***	0.710	0.713	-0.002	0.630	0.774	-0.143 **
No leadership	0.577	0.414	0.164***	0.532	0.485	0.047	0.430	0.560	-0.130 *
<b>Lead Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.375</b>	<b>0.193</b>	--	0.354	0.258	--	<b>0.229</b>	<b>0.346</b>	--

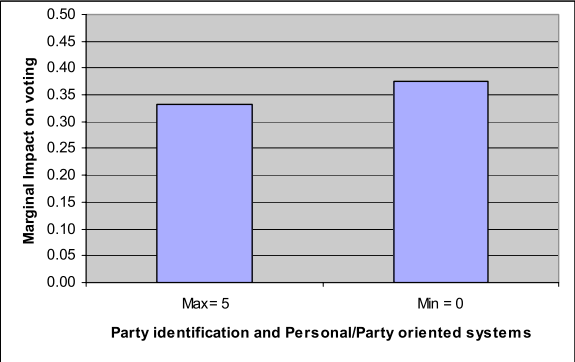
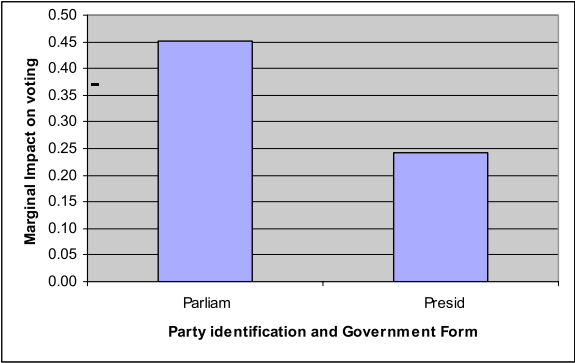
\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01

First differences in probability: Each difference measures the change in the predicted probability associated with moving from a parliamentarian to a presidential system, or from the highest to the lowest value in the case of the effective number of parties and the party / personal oriented systems for each of the heuristic users.

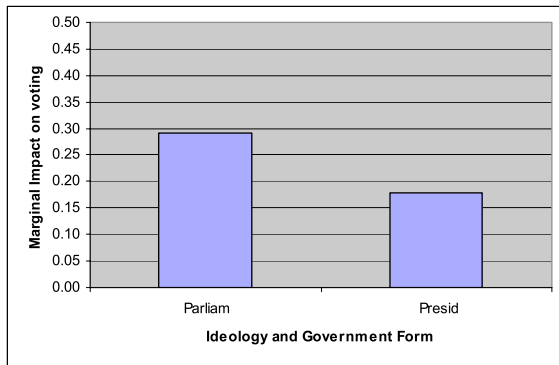
Marginal impact: In bold are those rates in which the first differences between shortcut users are statistically significant.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).

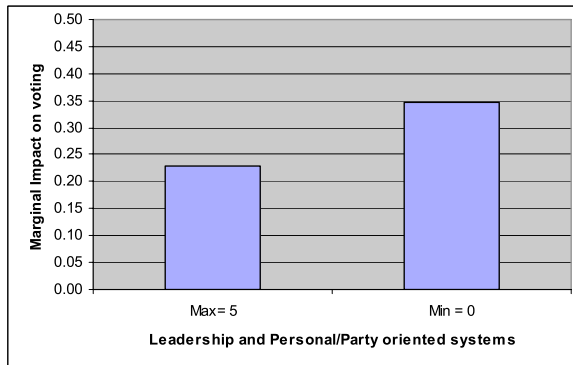
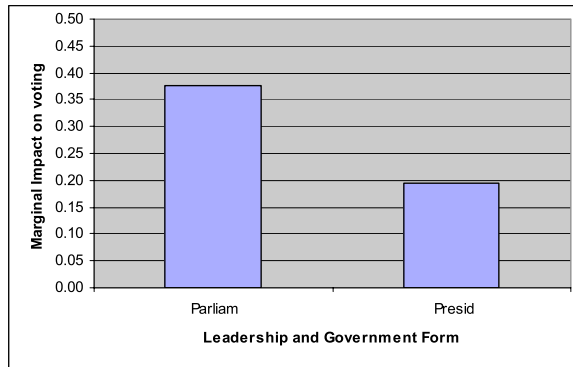
**Figure 2.1**  
**Marginal impact of party identification on turnout**



**Figure 2.2**  
**Marginal impact of ideology on turnout**



**Figure 2.3**  
**Marginal impact of leadership on turnout**



## Appendix 1. Use of partisanship, ideology and leadership by country

Country	Partisanship		Ideology		Leadership	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Albania	39.9%	60.1%	2.1%	97.9%	27.6%	72.4%
Bulgaria	57.3%	42.7%	--	100.0%	56.4%	43.6%
Canada	61.5%	38.5%	--	100.0%	32.1%	67.9%
Switzerland	55.1%	44.9%	3.3%	96.7%	20.4%	79.6%
Czech Republic	36.3%	63.7%	8.3%	91.7%	44.3%	55.7%
Germany_1	62.3%	37.7%	4.0%	96.0%	42.1%	57.9%
Germany_2	50.6%	49.4%	--	100.0%	25.2%	74.8%
Denmark	50.0%	50.0%	3.7%	96.3%	26.6%	73.4%
Spain	38.7%	61.3%	12.1%	87.9%	27.2%	72.8%
Finland	53.4%	46.6%	9.6%	90.4%	48.8%	51.2%
France	44.2%	55.8%	1.9%	98.1%	40.4%	59.6%
Great Britain	64.6%	35.4%	25.9%	74.1%	33.3%	66.7%
Hungary	47.4%	52.6%	8.5%	91.5%	18.9%	81.1%
Ireland	71.1%	28.9%	22.1%	77.9%	22.2%	77.8%
Iceland	45.8%	54.2%	6.5%	93.5%	44.5%	55.5%
Israel	37.6%	62.4%	3.9%	96.1%	43.1%	56.9%
Japan	39.8%	60.2%	--	--	47.0%	53.0%
Korea	60.0%	40.0%	12.0%	88.0%	77.8%	22.2%
Mexico	48.1%	51.9%	24.8%	75.2%	61.8%	38.2%
Netherlands	60.5%	39.5%	1.6%	98.4%	--	--
Norway	58.7%	41.3%	3.7%	96.3%	28.2%	71.8%
New Zealand	45.0%	55.0%	20.9%	79.1%	17.3%	82.7%
Poland	58.2%	41.8%	22.5%	77.5%	60.9%	39.1%
Portugal 02	48.2%	51.8%	8.2%	91.8%	41.0%	59.0%
Portugal 05	55.1%	44.9%	10.5%	89.5%	48.2%	51.8%
Romania	0.1%	99.9%	27.0%	73.0%	51.9%	48.1%
Russia	58.0%	42.0%	27.9%	72.1%	38.7%	61.3%
Slovenia	78.7%	21.3%	--	100.0%	64.7%	35.3%
Sweden	51.2%	48.8%	2.2%	97.8%	36.3%	63.7%
United States	43.2%	56.8%	13.3%	86.7%	22.6%	77.4%

Germany\_1 is a mail back survey while Germany\_2 is a telephone survey.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (2<sup>nd</sup> module)

## **Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics for contextual level variables**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Type of government</b>	<b>Effective number of parties</b>	<b>Personal voting</b>
Albania	Parliamentarian	10.46	3.57
Bulgaria	Presidential	3.91	0
Canada	Parliamentarian	3.78	5
Switzerland	Parliamentarian	5.44	2
Czech Republic	Parliamentarian	4.82	1
Germany	Parliamentarian	4.09	2.48
Denmark	Parliamentarian	4.69	2
Spain	Parliamentarian	3.00	1
Finland	Presidential	5.65	2
France	Presidential	5.22	5
Great Britain	Parliamentarian	3.59	5
Hungary	Parliamentarian	2.94	2.28
Ireland	Parliamentarian	4.13	3
Iceland	Parliamentarian	3.94	0
Israel	Parliamentarian	7.05	0
Japan	Parliamentarian	3.22	5
Korea	Presidential	3.36	0.94
Mexico	Presidential	3.19	2.4
Netherlands	Parliamentarian	6.04	2
Norway	Parliamentarian	6.19	1
New Zealand	Parliamentarian	4.17	2.54
Poland	Presidential	4.50	2
Portugal 02	Presidential	3.03	0
Portugal 05	Presidential	3.13	0
Romania	Presidential	3.90	0
Russia	Presidential	6.61	2.50
Slovenia	Presidential	6.02	0
Sweden	Parliamentarian	4.51	2
United States	Presidential	2.05	5

Sources: Type of government; Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (2<sup>nd</sup> module) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

Effective number of parties; Gallagher and Mitchell (2008).

Personal/party oriented systems; Johnson, and Wallack (2003).

Electoral Systems and the Personal Vote. <http://polisci2.ucsd.edu/jwjohanson/espv.htm>

### Appendix 3.

Predicted probability to vote, first differences and marginal by shortcut and institutional scenario for those countries with ENP below the median

	Government Form			Number of parties			Person/Party orientation		
	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.
	Parliam	Presid	Parliam vsPresid	Max= 4.09	Min = 2.05	4.09 vs 2.05	Max= 5	Min = 0	5 vs 0
Party id.	0.719	0.502	0.217***	0.681	0.494	0.188*	0.476	0.697	-0.220 ***
No Party id.	0.483	0.282	0.201***	0.415	0.315	0.100	0.284	0.444	-0.161 **
<b>PID Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.247</b>	<b>0.063</b>	--	<b>0.149</b>	<b>0.136</b>	--	<b>0.091</b>	<b>0.192</b>	--
Ideology	0.562	0.356	0.207***	0.524	0.464	0.059	0.377	0.574	-0.197 **
No ideology	0.357	0.224	0.133***	0.395	0.210	0.185*	0.217	0.377	-0.159 **
<b>Ideol Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.151</b>	<b>0.092</b>	--	0.267	0.044	--	0.058	0.180	--
Leadership	0.7435	0.5494	0.194***	0.697	0.560	0.137	0.521	0.733	-0.213 ***
No leadership	0.5168	0.3411	0.176**	0.466	0.319	0.147	0.298	0.497	-0.199 **
<b>Lead Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.290</b>	<b>0.133</b>	--	0.234	0.077	--	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.261</b>	--

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01

First differences in probability: Each difference measures the change in the predicted probability associated with moving from a parliamentarian to a presidential system, or from the highest to the lowest value in the case of the effective number of parties and the party / personal oriented systems for each of the heuristic users.

Marginal impact: In bold are those rates in which the first differences between shortcut users are statistically significant.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).

**Predicted probability to vote, first differences and marginal by shortcut and institutional scenario for those countries with ENP above the median**

	Government Form			Number of parties			Person/Party orientation		
	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.	Probability to vote		First diff.
	Parliam	Presid	Parliam vsPresid	Max= 10.46	Min = 4.13	10.46 vs 2.05	Max= 5	Min = 0	5 vs 0
Party id.	0.853	0.695	0.158***	0.850	0.766	0.084	0.759	0.807	-0.049
No Party id.	0.673	0.502	0.171***	0.695	0.561	0.134	0.662	0.542	0.120
<b>PID Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.494</b>	<b>0.309</b>	--	0.540	0.356	--	0.565	0.276	--
Ideology	0.761	0.594	0.168**	0.762	0.649	0.113	0.683	0.654	0.030
No ideology	0.564	0.356	0.208***	0.557	0.436	0.121	0.754	0.222	0.531 ***
<b>Ideol Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.367</b>	<b>0.118</b>	--	0.352	0.222	--	--	--	--
Leadership	0.725	0.586	0.139**	0.772	0.620	0.152	0.646	0.661	-0.016 **
No leadership	0.539	0.372	0.166**	0.517	0.447	0.070	0.505	0.430	0.075 *
<b>Lead Marginal impact</b>	<b>0.352</b>	<b>0.159</b>	--	0.263	0.275	--	0.364	0.199	--

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01

First differences in probability: Each difference measures the change in the predicted probability associated with moving from a parliamentarian to a presidential system, or from the highest to the lowest value in the case of the effective number of parties and the party / personal oriented systems for each of the heuristic users.

Marginal impact: In bold are those rates in which the first differences between shortcut users are statistically significant.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Module 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002-2006).







## Chapter 3

### **3. Composition, bandwagon and incumbent factors: How they contribute to the conventional wisdom? Evidence from Spain**

*Abstract: This article focuses on the relationship between turnout and the implications for the electoral performance of left wing parties. Through analyzing the Spanish case, this article tests how the socioeconomic composition of the electorate interacts with the bandwagon and incumbent effects which are the three main causal mechanisms that explain this relationship. The findings indicate that the composition of peripheral voters is important in explaining their higher propensity to vote for left wing parties. Nevertheless, it is when the polls show that the left party is going to win the election and it is the challenger in salient elections or the incumbent in a non-salient election that this propensity is the highest. On the contrary, being a peripheral voter does not suppose an advantage for left wing parties, when the bandwagon effect or the electoral position of the party exert a negative influence.*

**Key words:** Conventional wisdom, peripheral voters, socioeconomic composition, bandwagon effect, incumbent effect, turnout, vote choice.

### **3.1. Introduction**

Conventional political wisdom indicates that high turnout benefits left wing parties (DeNardo, 1982.; Nagel and McNulty, 1996; Pacek and Radcliff, 1995; Tucker et al., 1986). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence of this association is far from clear. There are studies that challenge this conventional wisdom and argue that there is not a relationship or it is not significant (Tucker and Vedlitz, 1986: 1296; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001; Teixeira, 1992; Fisher, 2007). What previous studies miss is that there are several mechanisms jointly involved in the relationship and they may push in different directions. Then, on one hand it is problematic to test the association without including all mechanisms in the same picture, as the effect of one mechanism may be conditioned on the signs of the omitted variables. On the other hand, it is necessary to take into account the direction of each of the mechanisms as they can work together or they can struggle in boosting the performance of left wing parties.

In general, there are three main mechanisms that the literature has employed to test the conventional wisdom; the composition, the bandwagon and the anti-incumbent mechanisms. The composition of the electorate has been the main factor that scholars have used to explain the affects of turnout rates on the electoral fortunes of left wing parties. Non-habitual voters are considered to be less educated, less partisan, less opinionated and more susceptible to short term factors (Campbell et al. 1960; Lijphart, 1997; Teixeira, 1992; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). Their lower socioeconomic status makes this collective to have a higher propensity to vote for leftist parties when they participate, because these parties can better defend their interests (DeNardo 1980; Pacek and Racliff, 1995; Nagel and McNulty, 1996). In that case, high turnout will provide an adequate scenario for leftist parties to translate the majority status of a population –lower status- into a majority of those who vote in an election (Tucker et al. 1986:1292). Additionally, the bandwagon effect links a turnout increase with the support for the party that is leading in the electoral polls (Grofman, et al. 1999; Teixeira, 1992). Similarly, the incumbent effect assumes a better performance for the party that is the challenger when the participation is high (Hansford and Gomez, 2010; Lago and

Montero, 2010). However, it is unclear if left wing parties always benefit from the participation of peripheral voters, particularly when heuristics, such as the incumbent or the bandwagon effects, are interacting in their vote choice.

Through analysing the Spanish case, this research tries to contribute to the conventional wisdom approach by jointly considering the signs of the mechanisms involved in the relationship. The general argument is that left wing parties are going to benefit from the participation of peripheral voters when the two remaining mechanisms jointly contribute to it. In this way, Spain is an interesting case study as it is one of the countries in which the relationship between turnout and left share is the highest. This fact implies that at least the composition of peripheral voters explains the conventional wisdom. Without the existence of this relationship, it is senseless to analyse how the other two factors may strengthen or erode it, as being a peripheral voter has no affect on the party choice. Consequently, a cross-sectional pool panel is created with all the national elections held in Spain between 1979 and 2008. Additionally, a two-step strategy is followed, first to categorize an individual as a peripheral or a core voter according to his/her probability to participate in an election. The second step analyses the electoral choice of these voters considering the positive or negative effects that the other mechanisms involved may have on voting for a leftist party. The findings show that when the three mechanisms go hand in hand, peripheral voters have the greatest probability to vote for a left wing party and the differences with respect to core voters are at the maximum. On the contrary, when the mechanisms have different signs, the differences between the two types of voters disappear.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review about the conventional wisdom approach. The next section specifies the model and the hypotheses to test. Section 4 justifies why Spain is an appropriate case to study. The last sections explain the methodology employed, the results and the conclusions.

### **3.2. Turnout effects on electoral preferences: Literature review**

To verify empirically the link between turnout and electoral outcomes, aggregate level studies basically analyze how the percentage of turnout is related to the percentage of the left share of the vote either at a national or electoral district level. In this way, DeNardo's first and influential work gives partial support to the conventional model. He regresses the Democratic share of the vote in United States House elections against voter turnout and concludes that a large turnout will help the minority party in a district. Concretely, he demonstrates that the Democrats benefit more from a large turnout in Republican districts than the Republicans benefit in Democratic districts (1980: 418). Nevertheless, the author also finds that this relationship has become weaker over time.

A large body of literature has followed DeNardo's pioneering work. Most of the studies have found a positive relationship between turnout and vote percentage for leftist parties but condition this association on three causal mechanisms; the composition of voters, the bandwagon effect and the incumbent factor.<sup>23</sup> The majority of studies focus on the composition of the electorate (DeNardo, 1980, Nagel and McNulty, 1996; Hansford and Gomez, 2010) or their socioeconomic characteristics (Pacek and Radcliff, 1995; Martinez and Gill, 2005). This research assumes that if non-voters are mainly close to left wing parties or if they maintain a lower socioeconomic status than habitual voters, when turnout increases it will imply a better performance for left wing parties.

Secondly, the bandwagon effect links a turnout increase with the support for the party that is leading the electoral polls (Grofman, Owen and Collet, 1999; Teixeira, 1992). Several research papers manifest the impact of the electoral polls in the electoral preferences

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<sup>23</sup> A fourth factor that turnout literature points out is the competition effect (see Grofman, Owen and Collet (1999)). This mechanism emphasizes that turnout will increase under a close race competition. Nevertheless, this effect does not directly link a turnout increase with the electoral fortunes of one particular political party. As a result, this effect will not be taken into account as the main goal of this research is to see the consequences for left wing parties' performance.

and public opinion of voters (Fleitas, 1971; McAllister and Studlar, 1991; Irwin and Holsteyn, 2002; Faas et al., 2008; Sonck and Loosveldt, 2010). In this way, public opinion polls are shown to be a reliable shortcut as they provide information to the public about the views of which is the party preferred by the majority of the population (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). By doing so, campaign results may influence the behavior of voters and thus who will be elected. In this way, McAllister and Studlar (1991) through several British general elections assess the positive effect between the party that is doing well in the polls and its electoral support.<sup>24</sup> The argument behind this relationship is the fulfillment of voters' motivation to vote for the winning candidate (Bartels, 1985). Additionally, the support towards the candidate who is leading in the polls can be perceived as the political norm, or it could be a subconscious decision, caused by the prevailing attitudes and values of the wider social context (McAllister and Studlar, 1991; 721).

In relation to the type of voter, it is known that these short-term heuristics can influence differently core or peripheral voters. In fact, the more peripheral the involvement of voters, the more susceptible they become to their voting decisions being influenced –by electoral polls (Fleitas, 1971:438). Then, although the conventional wisdom assumes that peripheral voters tend to vote for left wing parties, it is not clear that this group will support this party when it is not leading in the electoral polls. For instance “the weaker party identification of usual nonvoters suggests that they would be more likely to jump on the bandwagon of the winning campaign than to vote consistently Democratic” (Grofman et al., 1999: 358). Then, when the left party is not leading in the electoral polls, the bandwagon factor pushes against the positive effect of being a peripheral voter. The resulting net contribution, to vote for or against a left wing party, will depend on the magnitude of the composition and bandwagon effects.

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<sup>24</sup> The electoral polls can also induce to an underdog effect which makes people to sympathize with the candidate or party that is going to lose the elections. For more information on the different effects and magnitude of electoral polls on people's electoral behavior see Fleitas, (1971); McAllister, (1991) or Hardmeier, (2008). It should be noted that this article will focus on the bandwagon effect as it is manifested to be stronger than the underdog effect (Hardmeier, 2008).

Similarly, numerous studies confirm that voters tend to support in a higher sense the political party that is in government (Gelman and King, 1990; Goidel and Shields 1994; Ansolabehere, et al., 2000; Desposato and Petrocik, 2003; Benoit and Marsh, 2008). Nevertheless, this positive influence may revert against the party who is in government when the electoral participation in a given election is high. In this way, some studies manifest a lower performance for those parties that are in government when there is a turnout increase (Grofman, Owen and Collet, 1999; Hansford and Gomez, 2010; Lago and Montero, 2010). It is what the literature has pointed out as the “anti-incumbent effect”. Then, it is not the incumbency factor on its own but it should be combined with the saliency of elections to evaluate its impact on the electoral performance of parties.

According to these authors, several arguments explain this negative relationship. In general, a higher turnout may be related to an increase unpopularity of an incumbent that would lead to an increase in voters who seek to unseat them turning out at the polls (Grofman et al., 1999: 359). Additionally, core voters are on average more supportive of the governmental status quo than peripheral votes because they play a more active role in establishing the status quo in previous elections (Hansford and Gomez, 2010: 271). As a result, the assumed higher predisposition of peripheral voters to vote for a left wing party will be reinforced when the party is in an optimum electoral position. This is situation in which the left party is the challenger in a salient election or the incumbent in a non-salient election.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, this relationship will be eroded when the left party is not in a privileged electoral position, that is when it is in the government in salient elections or in the opposition in non-salient elections.

In general, the majority of studies that give empirical evidence to a turnout increase and a left wing partisan advantage use aggregate observations. However, this research uses mainly individual

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<sup>25</sup> Grofman et al. categorize it as a combination of the competition and incumbent effect. Nevertheless, I prefer not to use the term competition, as the general literature understands it as a close electoral results in elections (which may imply an incentive for a turnout increase) and not as an optimum electoral position for a party to improve its electoral results.



explanations to justify this relationship, particularly the social composition of the electorate. This fact questions which is the most appropriate level of analysis to deal with this relationship. Although some research questions on the topic can be addressed with an aggregate data analysis,<sup>26</sup> it is problematic to explain the mechanisms behind a finding with a different level of analysis (King et al., 1994:30). Turning to the individual level, the majority of studies focus on the differences between voters and non-voters in terms of their political preferences and socioeconomic status.

On one hand, most research on turnout emphasizes the importance of resources such as education as a key to overcome the cost of going to the polls, being notable differences between occasional and common voters (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Miller and Shanks, 1996). On the other hand, the political preferences of voters and non-voters seem to differ, although it is a topic that has been less explored. In a classical study Campbell et al. (1960:110) indicate that non-voters are more Democratic than voters, having as a result differences in the partisan composition of these two groups. Recent investigation confirms this finding (Citrin et al., 2003; Highton and Woldfiger, 2001) while highlighting the importance of the mobilization of voters because it can account for the variation of turnout in between elections and as an extension on the electoral outcomes. In this way, it is not clear that once these non-voters are mobilized to vote which would be their vote choice (Lijphart, 1997: 4). To do so, it is necessary to include on the model other factors that influence turnout and the electoral choice of voters which may help us to disentangle why the conventional wisdom.

Unfortunately, the remaining effects -bandwagon and incumbent- have been tested separately and without taking into account the type of voter. However, it is reasonable to think that the strength of the relationship between the composition of the electorate and the vote for left wing parties may be conditioned on the signs that bandwagon and the party electoral position may take. The argument is that peripheral voters are going to have their highest propensity to

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<sup>26</sup> For a review and a discussion of the different questions that literature on turnout effects has explored as well as the appropriate level of analysis see (Grofman, Owen and Collet (1999); Fisher (2007)).

vote for a left wing party when both bandwagon and party electoral position positively mediates this relationship. On the contrary, it is not clear that the positive influence of being a peripheral is going to prevail when any of the other two factors pushes against the vote towards left wing parties. As a result, this article seeks to contribute to the conventional wisdom approach by disentangling the three mechanisms involved and analyzing under which situations the composition of peripheral voters implies a better performance of left wing parties.

### ***3.3. Hypotheses: Connecting the three mechanisms at play***

As the bandwagon and the party's electoral position mediate the relationship between being a peripheral and to vote for left wing parties, it is necessary to consider the signs of the two factors to finally assess this association. As a result, different electoral scenarios can be established according to the positive or negative expected influence of the two factors. Departing from the conventional wisdom approach, the first and primary scenario is the one in which the bandwagon and challenger factors are not considered. In this average situation, it is assumed that the association between turnout and left share is higher than zero, in other words, the mere fact of being a peripheral will lead to a higher predisposition to vote for left wing parties. As a result it can be hypothesized:

*H1: On average, peripheral voters will have a higher predisposition to vote for left wing parties than core voters.*

Considering the two short-term factors, the most favorable scenario is the situation in which both, bandwagon and the electoral position factors positively push in the same direction to vote for a left wing party. Particularly, the left wing party would be leading the electoral polls, and it will be the challenger in a high participative elections or in government in a low participative elections. Under this electoral situation, it is reasonable to expect that the relationship

between peripheral voters and to vote for left wing parties is going to be the strongest. In this way, it can be hypothesized that:

*H2: It is when the left party is expected to win the elections and it is in an optimal electoral position that peripheral voters are going to have the highest predisposition to vote for a left wing party. As a result, the difference between peripheral and core voters in their predisposition to vote for a left option is at the maximum.*

The opposite scenario, is the one in which both bandwagon and electoral position factors negatively mediate the association between being a peripheral and to vote for a left wing party. In this way, the left wing party will not be leading in the electoral polls, and it will be the incumbent in salient elections or the challenger in non-salient elections. This situation can be hypothesized as the worst scenario as both factors push against the positive effect of being a peripheral voter. As a result it can be hypothesized:

*H3: it is when the left party is expected to lose the elections and it is not in an optimum electoral position that peripheral voters are going to have the lowest predisposition to vote for a left wing party. As a consequence, the differences between core and peripheral voters in their propensity to vote for a left wing party it is going to be at the minimum.*

It is in these two extreme electoral scenarios that can better predict the implications for a left wing party. In the most favorable scenario the three factors go hand in hand in voting for a left wing party, while in the worst, only the component of the electorate, particularly peripheral voters, pushes it. Consequently, in the best situation peripherals are expected to have the greatest propensity to vote for a left party, while in the worst, they are assumed to have the lowest. As a result and in terms of comparing the two types of voters, it is reasonable to expect that the differences between peripheral and core voters are going to be higher in the best than in the worst scenario. Nevertheless, what it is more uncertain to predict is if in the worst favorable scenario the differences between

peripheral and core voters are going to be significant. It will depend on how strong the three mechanisms involved are. Similarly, it is difficult to predict the effects of the component of the electorate when the bandwagon and the party electoral position factors have different signs. In this intermediate situation, it is unclear if the differences between the two types of voters are going to hold. As in the less favorable electoral situation, the crucial aspect is the magnitude of the mechanisms in mediating the relationship of being a peripheral and his party choice.

### ***3.4. Case selection: Spain and the conventional wisdom under review***

To test the hypotheses, it is necessary to have a case in which the composition of peripheral voters determines an advantage for left wing parties. In other words, it is necessary to have a country in which -at least on the aggregate level-, the variation of turnout carries an increase on the left share of the vote and this is the case of Spain. In one of the most recent comparative studies, Fisher (2007) analyses at the country level the relationship between turnout and the percentage of voting for left wing parties. In this relationship, Spain manifests one of the strongest correlations. Furthermore, the author also analyses the relationship between change in turnout in between elections and change in the percentage of left electoral results. Although most of the countries analysed manifest a positive trend, only Spain has a statistically significant relationship. The Spanish extreme case, then, offers an excellent opportunity to discern the causal mechanisms behind the conventional wisdom. If in a country this relationship is weak or non-existent it would not be possible to analyse how the mechanisms influence the peripheral voters' behavior as the composition effect would have no effect on the party choice.

Particularly, the general national elections held in Spain during the 1979 and 2008 period will be analysed, from the last election to

present.<sup>27</sup> Table 3.1 displays these elections gathered according to the electoral scenarios established in the hypotheses. The table also shows in parenthesis and under the particular year, the turnout and vote share associated with the main leftist political party, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) by the electoral year. The best hypothetical scenario for a left wing party is the one in which both bandwagon and the electoral position have positive signs, this is the case for the 1982, 1986 and 1989 general elections. In these three elections, the electoral polls show the PSOE as a clear winner. Additionally the socialist party was in an optimal electoral position; it was the challenger in the 1982 election while the turnout rate was above the mean, meaning that it was a salient election, or it was the incumbent in a non-salient election, the 1986 and 1989 general elections. These electoral years are connected to the second hypothesis; as a result, it is expected to find the strongest relationship between being a peripheral and to vote for the PSOE.

[ Table 3.1 about here ]

The worst hypothetical electoral scenario for the PSOE is represented by the 1979, 1993, 1996 and 2000 national elections. In all these elections the electoral polls did not show the PSOE in the lead. Moreover, the leftist party was not in an advantaged electoral position. In this way, the 1979 and 2000 elections the PSOE was in the opposition but the turnout rate was below the mean, meaning that the elections were not salient. And in the 1993 and 1996 elections the PSOE was the challenger in high participatory elections. This electoral scenario is represented by the third hypothesis, then, peripheral voters are expected to have the lowest likelihood to vote for a left wing party as the bandwagon and party electoral position negatively impact the relationship.

In an intermediate situation, there are the 2004 and 2008 elections. In the 2004 election, the PSOE would only benefit from the optimal electoral position as it was the challenger in a high participatory election, but it would not benefit from the bandwagon effect as the electoral polls showed close electoral results. On the contrary, in the 2008 election the socialist party would only benefit from the

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<sup>27</sup> The 1977 first general national election is not included as it is the constituent election.

bandwagon effect but not from being in an optimal electoral position. Even though there are not explicit hypotheses for this scenario, the implication for peripheral voters in their assumed higher propensity to vote for the PSOE will be analysed.

### **3.5. Research design**

#### **Data**

In order to test the behavior of peripheral voters in terms of their predisposition to vote for left wing parties in each of the electoral contexts, post-electoral surveys from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) will be used.<sup>28</sup> Particularly, I have created a pooled cross-sectional panel that covers all the national elections held in Spain between 1979 and 2008.<sup>29</sup> In this way, there will be enough individual cases, particularly of peripheral voters, to estimate the coefficients and to reach robust conclusions. Additionally, there will be variation in terms of electoral scenarios, what it will allow to have variation in terms of the incumbent and bandwagon effects.

#### **Measurement of variables and method**

In order to validate the hypothesis a two step strategy will be followed. The first step measures a voter's propensity to participate in a specific election in order to classify them as a perpetual non voter, peripheral or core voter. The second step analyses the propensity to vote for a left wing party according to the type of voter that it has been measured in the first step. Regarding the method, given the dichotomous component of the dependent variables in both phases, logit regressions will be run. The main variables of the models, the values that they can take as well as the main descriptives are shown in the appendix 1 and 2.

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<sup>28</sup> For further information regarding the CIS datasets see; <http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/index.html>.

<sup>29</sup> The concrete study datasets ordered by election year are: 1327, 1542, 1842, 2061, 2210, 2384, 2559, 2757.

## **1<sup>st</sup> step: Identifying peripheral voters; the importance of the composition effect**

Following the conventional wisdom, those with a lower socioeconomic status have a higher propensity to support left wing parties than core voters. Nevertheless, it is known that those with a lower socioeconomic status have a lower probability to participate in an election (Lijphart, (1997); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, (1995); Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980); Dalton, (2006)). Thus, in order to capture the composition effect of the electorate, it is necessary to take into account their probability to participate in an election. It is this propensity that will define if a person belongs to a core, occasional voters or a perpetual nonvoters' group. Some studies have measured peripheral voters as those who manifested not voting in previous elections.

Nevertheless it is risky to measure peripheral voters with the participation in a previous election to predict the participation in the current election for several reasons. First, a high proportion of the electorate does not remember if they have participated in previous elections. Secondly, in case they give an answer, it may be imprecise as the time length between the previous election may be large. Thirdly, if the voter manifests s/he has not voted, it is not easy to unravel if it is a chronic abstentionist, or an occasional voter in which it may bias the results. At the same time, if the voter manifests that s/he has voted, it is not possible to know if it is a peripheral or a core voter. Additionally, "naïve models which attempt to capture the degree of habit by using turnout in the previous election to explain turnout in the current election may exaggerate the importance of habit as they fail to take unobserved characteristics into account" (Denny and Doyle, 2009: 18).

As a result, I propose an alternative way of measuring these three types of voters that corrects these potential problems by estimating the probability of voting that an individual has in the "current" election and according to their socioeconomic characteristics. Then, I have included a logit model that shows the factors that the literature has proven to be relevant in turnout to estimate this propensity; educational level, gender, age, age squared, and if the

voter can or can not locate himself in the left-right scale.<sup>30</sup> As the datasets analyzed are post electoral surveys, the dependent variable is whether they participated in the last national election. The coefficients of the model as well as resulting expected probabilities to participate can be seen in appendix 2.

Once we have the expected probabilities to participate, a rigorous criterion to divide the probability in three thresholds to separate and define each type of voter is found. Usually, aggregate level literature assumes that turnout change in between elections is due to occasional voters going to the polls since core voters always participate and perpetual non-voters never participate. Then, the magnitude of each of these three types of voters is determined by the turnout rates of a country. In this way, we can use the minimum and maximum electoral rates to establish these thresholds. In the Spanish case, we assume that core voters are the 68 percent of the population, as this is the minimum turnout rate through the electoral period analyzed.<sup>31</sup> As the maximum turnout rate is 80 percent, we suppose that 20 percent of the population is the perpetual non-voters. As a result, the difference, a 12 percent, can be considered as peripheral voters. Then, these percentiles, 20 and 32, are used to divide the probability to participate in the last election into the three types of voters.<sup>32</sup> Then those with the probability to vote below the percentile 20 are the perpetual non-voters. The group in between the probability to vote of the percentile 20 and 32 are the peripheral voters and those with a higher probability to vote than the percentile 32 are the core voters.

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<sup>30</sup> The political competition in Europe mainly consists on ideology attachments rather than party identification (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1989). That is why we have chosen ideology to determine the social component of the electorate. Moreover, the identification with a party was not available in all datasets. It should be taking into account that it was not possible to include more independent variables in the model, because there were not equal or similar questions along the years of the post electoral surveys.

<sup>31</sup> The turnout rate by each election year has been, 68.04% for the 1979 election, 79.97% for 1982, 70.49% for 1986, 69.74% for 1989, 76.44% for 1993, 77.38% for 1996, 68.71% for 2000, 75.56% for 2004 and 73.85% for 2008 election.

<sup>32</sup> Descriptives about the resulting composition effect variable can be seen in appendix 2, table 3.



## ***2<sup>nd</sup> step: composition effect and the propensity to vote for a left wing party***

In order to analyse the consequences of the composition factor on the vote choice, two groups will be compared, the peripheral and the core voters. The perpetual abstentionists will not usually participate in the elections, and in case they do, there will not be enough cases to estimate their electoral preferences. At the same time, it is important to include in the same model peripheral and core voters to consider how their probability to vote for left wing parties change in different electoral scenarios. Thus, we will be able to test if only the composition of the electorate is enough to opt for left wing parties, as the conventional wisdom manifests. Or if the differences between these two groups of voters occur under specific electoral contexts, particularly when the bandwagon and the electoral position factors positively contribute to a vote towards left wing parties.

The dependent variable is the party choice that the peripheral voter has manifested to vote in the national elections. As the main argument to test is how and when this collective is associated with a higher probability to vote for left wing parties, two values are assigned to this variable. A value of 1 is coded in the case the voter has voted for the main left wing party and 0 in case the voter has opted for the main right wing party. As a left wing party is included to vote for the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE).<sup>33</sup> While voting for the right wing party is included to vote for the *Partido Popular* (PP).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The Izquierda Unida (IU) is the other political party relevant in the left electoral competition at the national level. Nevertheless their voters have been excluded from the model, as this party has never been in government and it has never been leading the electoral polls. Thus, the two main explanatory factors, incumbent and bandwagon may have different effects for IU voters than for peripheral voters. As a result, other behaviors such as the split-ticket voting may occur, but this is out of the scope of this paper.

<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that in the 1979, 1982 and 1986 national elections, those who have voted for *Unión Centro Democrático* (UCD) have also been coded as 0 as this party represented the centre-right in the electoral competition. This party had a relevant position on these elections, being the incumbent in 1979 and 1982 election, as a consequence, their voters are included on the analysis.

The independent variable, the composition factor, takes the value 1 when the individual is a peripheral voter and 0 when the individual is a core voters.

### **3.6. Findings**

Table 3.2 displays the logit regression coefficients for voting for the PSOE left wing party. It should be noted that the logit models have been weighted where it was required by the sampling procedures of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*. Model 1 shows the coefficients for peripheral voters in comparison to core voters including in the analysis all the elections to capture the average electoral scenario. Models 2 through 5 indicate the coefficients dividing the sample into the concrete electoral scenarios in accordance with the hypotheses.<sup>35</sup> As the logit coefficients do not show the magnitude in voting for the PSOE it is necessary to calculate the expected probabilities. Then, we will be able to realize how important it is being a peripheral voter in supporting a left wing party and how the bandwagon and incumbent mechanisms may reinforce or reduce this relationship. As a result, table 3.3 presents the predicted probabilities that peripheral and core voters have in voting for the PSOE. These probabilities have been calculated according to their respective coefficients of models 1 to 5. At the same time, the table includes the marginal effects between the two types of voters.

Table 3.2 and model 1 test the differences between peripheral and core voters, in an average scenario which includes all the elections analyzed independently from the signs that the bandwagon or position on the elections may take. The coefficient is positive and significant, that means that being a peripheral voter increases the probability to vote for a left wing party in comparison to core voters. In terms of the expected probabilities we can appreciate in

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that I have tried to include and interact the three variables inside the model; composition, bandwagon and incumbent. Nevertheless, as all the variables are dichotomous there were problems of collinearity. As a result, I have divided the sample according to the different electoral scenarios.

table 3.3 and model 1 that peripherals are 3 percentage points more likely to vote for the PSOE than core voters. This finding is in line with the conventional wisdom approach that brings us to accept the first hypothesis.

[ Table 3.2 and 3.3 about here ]

Model 2 in table 3.2 displays the coefficients for peripheral voters under the hypothesized most favorable electoral scenario for a left wing party. The coefficient indicates that peripheral voters have a higher propensity to vote for the PSOE than core voters when this party is expected to win the elections and it is on an optimal electoral position; the party is the challenger in a salient elections or it is on the government in a non-salient elections. Under this situation, the difference between the two types of voters is remarkable. As model 2 in table 3.3 indicates peripheral voters are 11 points more probable to vote for a left wing party than core votes.

The worst hypothesized scenario in which the two contextual factors, bandwagon and electoral party position, negatively mediates on the higher predispositions of peripheral voters is presented in model 5 in table 3.2. We can appreciate that under this situation the coefficient is positive but it is not significant showing that the effects of the composition of the electorate disappear. Similarly, the expected probabilities in table 3.3 indicate that although peripherals have 2 more points in their propensity to vote for the PSOE than core voters, this difference is not significant. Comparing the significance of the coefficients and the probabilities that peripheral voters have under the most and worst favorable electoral scenarios the third hypothesis can be confirmed. In the less favorable electoral situation for a left wing party, peripheral voters not only have the lowest probability to vote for the PSOE but the difference with respect to core voters is also lower.

In view of the differences in the expected probabilities, we can appreciate how the differences between the two types of voters are the maximum in the best hypothetical scenario. Then, the second hypothesis can be confirmed, as peripherals remarkably different from core voters in their propensity to vote for the PSOE when the two factors, bandwagon and electoral position, positively contribute to this relationship. Additionally, the propensity to vote for the

PSOE is reduced for both types of voters as long as the two factors present a negative sign. This trend is particularly notorious for peripheral voters who show to be more influenced by the two contextual factors. In one hand it is demonstrated that the differences between the two types of voters are reduced in the intermediate and worst scenario but on the other these reduction is not progressive. In fact, the differences between peripheral and core voters disappear once both or any factors, the bandwagon or the optimal electoral position do not positively influence the relationship.

The intermediate scenarios, in which only one of the two factors is assumed to have a positive intermediation effect are shown in models 3 and 4 of table 3.2. The coefficients in both models are negative which would imply that peripherals have a lower probability to vote for the PSOE but these differences are not statistically significant. In connection with this argument, the corresponding expected probabilities in table 3.3, the models 3 and 4 show that core voters present a higher probability to vote for the socialist Spanish party but this difference is not significant.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

The conventional political wisdom approach emphasizes that high turnout rates boost the electoral results of left wing parties. There are three main mechanisms that scholars have used to justify this relationship; the socioeconomic component of the electorate, the bandwagon and the anti-incumbent effect. Nevertheless, these causal mechanisms have been separately tested ignoring that they may interact. As a result, they can go hand in hand adding to the three of them a positive effect towards a vote for leftist parties. Or they can have different signs in which the opposing effects may overwhelm the link between participation and a better performance of left wing parties. This gap has brought this article to integrate the three mechanisms using Spain as a case study.

Through comparing peripheral voters, who are the main reason for turnout rate change, with core voters, the findings confirm that the socioeconomic component of the electorate is a relevant factor in

explaining the vote towards left wing parties. This is not new evidence and it has been frequently confirmed by the electoral behavior literature (DeNardo, 1982, Martinez and Hill, 2005). Additionally the findings manifest that it is important to take into account the signs of the short-term heuristics to explain this association. Thus, it is when the two factors have a positive sign that the composition of the electorate produces more differences in voting for the Spanish Socialist party (PSOE). This is the electoral scenario in which the bandwagon is positive through which the PSOE is expected to clearly win the elections and the party is in an advantaged electoral position, to be the challenger in salient elections or in the government in non-salient elections. Under this electoral situation it is when peripherals have the highest predisposition to vote for the Spanish Socialist party, and the difference with core voters is also the greatest.

On the contrary when any of these two factors present a negative sign, the composition of the electorate does not have an effect as the difference in the likelihood to vote for the Spanish socialist party between peripheral and core voters disappears. This is the electoral scenario in which the PSOE is not heading the electoral polls or it is not in an optimal electoral position, being the challenger in a non-salient election or in the government in a salient election. The conclusion can be extended to the worst electoral scenario hypothesized, when both mechanisms negatively impact the composition of the electorate.

As we have seen, peripheral voters may be influenced by more than one shortcut at time, as a result, for instance the net contribution of their socioeconomic component in predicting their political choice may swing. As a result, the conventional wisdom may or may not occur according to the influence of the electoral position of the party or bandwagon factors. This article has gone one step further showing with a case study how the three mechanisms play in predicting the vote for left wing parties. Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to include more cases in which to test these three mechanisms considered relevant by the literature. Then, we will be able to broadly affirm when and how the conventional wisdom approach may occur.

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**Table 3.1**  
**Election year by the bandwagon and electoral position expected effect**

		<b>Bandwagon</b>	
		Psoe is expected to win +	PSOE is not a clear winner -
<b>Electoral position</b>		<b>Best scenario</b>	<b>Intermediate scenario</b>
		PSOE challenger & turnout ↑	+
PSOE government & turnout ↓	<b>1986</b> <b>1989</b> (70.49)    (69.74) (44.06)    (39.60)		
		<b>Intermediate scenario</b>	<b>Worst scenario</b>
PSOE challenger & turnout ↓	-		<b>1979</b> <b>2000</b> (68.04)    (68.71) (30.04)    (34.16)
PSOE government & turnout ↑		<b>2008</b> (73.85) (43.87)	<b>1993</b> <b>1996</b> (76.44)    (77.38) (38.78)    (37.63)

High turnout is coded when the turnout rate is above the turnout mean of the 1979-2008 period (73.36%) while low turnout is coded when the turnout is below the mean.

The first row is the election year, in parentheses the second and third row indicate respectively the turnout rate and the PSOE's vote share of the particular election year.

**Table 3.2**  
**Logit Regression of voting for a left wing party (Spanish Socialist Party)**

	<b>Model 1 Average Scenario</b>	<b>Model 2 Best Scenario</b> Bandwagon (+) Electoral Position (+)	<b>Model 3 Intermediate Scenario</b> Bandwagon (-) Electoral Position (+)	<b>Model 4 Intermediate Scenario</b> Bandwagon (+) Electoral Position (-)	<b>Model 5 Worst Scenario</b> Bandwagon (-) Electoral Position (-)
<b>Composition</b>					
Peripheral	0.133*** (0.051)	0.610*** (0.136)	-0.053 (0.129)	-0.202 (0.147)	0.106 (0.067)
Core	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Constant	0.249*** (0.016)	0.794*** (0.043)	0.478*** (0.041)	0.562*** (0.039)	-0.143*** (0.023)
N (weighted)	18758	3261	2855	3522	9120
Pseudo R2	0.0003	0.0063	0.0000	0.0005	0.0002

Standard errors in parentheses; \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Source: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* post-electoral datasets 1979-2008

**Table 3.3****Predicted probabilities to vote for the PSOE by type of voter and electoral scenario**

	<b>Model 1 Average Scenario</b>	<b>Model 2 Best Scenario</b> Bandwagon (+) Electoral Position (+)	<b>Model 3 Intermediate Scenario</b> Bandwagon (-) Electoral Position (+)	<b>Model 4 Intermediate Scenario</b> Bandwagon (+) Electoral Position (-)	<b>Model 5 Worst Scenario</b> Bandwagon (-) Electoral Position (-)
Peripheral	0.594	0.802	0.604	0.589	0.491
Core	0.562	0.689	0.617	0.637	0.464
Marginal dif	0.032***	0.113***	-0.013	-0.048	0.026

The expected probabilities are calculated with their respective model coefficients in table 2

## Appendix 1: Variables and values of the voting for a left wing party model (2nd step)

Table 1. Turnout and Partido Socialista Obrero Español vote share

Election year	Turnout	PSOE share
1979	68.04	30.04
1982	79.97	48.11
1986	70.49	44.06
1989	69.74	39.6
1993	76.44	38.78
1996	77.38	37.63
2000	68.71	34.16
2004	75.66	42.59
2008	73.85	43.87
Average	73.36	39.87

Source: <http://www.elecciones.mir.es>

Table 2. Variables included in the 2nd step logit model

Variable description	
<b>Dependent variable</b>	
Vote choice	1 Socialist Party (PSOE) 0 Popular Party (PP)
<b>Independent variable</b>	
Composition	0 Core voters 1 Peripheral voters
<b>Selecting variables</b>	
Bandwagon	1 PSOE expected to win (1982, 1986, 1989, 2008) 0 Otherwise (1993, 1996, 2000, 2004)
Electoral position	1 Positive effect for PSOE (1982, 1986, 1989, 2004) 0 Negative effect for PSOE (1979, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2008)

Source: Bandwagon and incumbent: data compiled by the authors based on ARGOS, Archivo Histórico Electoral, <http://www.pre.gva.es/argos/archivo/> and The Ministerio del Interior: <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/>

## Appendix 2: Identifying peripheral voters (1<sup>st</sup> step)

**Table 1. Logit regression of Voting in last election.**

	Participation in last elections
Ideology	1.109*** (0.033)
Education	0.046* (0.0197)
Gender	0.0008 (0.0299)
Age	0.100*** (0.0044)
Agesq	-0.0008*** (0.0000)
Constant	-1.706*** (0.113)
N	39,109
Pseudo R2	0.0636

Standard errors in parentheses;

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

Source: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* post-electoral datasets 1979-2008.

**Table 2. Variables and values of the participation in “current” election model**

	Mean	Min	Max	Description
<b>Dependent Variable</b>				
Vote in previous election	0.845	0	1	1= Yes 0= No
<b>Independent Variables</b>				
Ideology	0.799	0	1	1= Person locates in the left/rigth scale 0= Person does not locate
Education	2.426	1	4	1= Person did not finish primary school through 4=Person has university degree
Age	46.830	18	99	Age of the individual
Gender	0.483	0	1	1=Man 0= Woman
<b>Expected probability to vote*</b>				
Probability	0.854	0.470	0.937	The probability to participate has been predicted after running the logit model.

**Table 3. Type of voter percentage by the election year**

	1979	1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008
Perpetual abtentionists	16.95	24.14	21.44	21.61	21.34	18.46	19.84	17.47	13.67
Periheral voters	9.82	15.20	14.68	14.28	13.52	12.71	12.23	11.21	8.08
Core voters	73.24	60.65	63.87	64.12	65.15	68.82	67.93	71.32	78.24
N (weighted)	5,296	2,331	3,392	3,002	4,869	4,858	5,144	5,235	5,980





## Chapter 4

### **4. The electoral dynamics of leadership and ideology: Learning to use shortcuts in new democracies**

*Abstract: Ideology and leader evaluations are two of the most widely used shortcuts by citizens in the electoral process. However little is known on how these two shortcuts evolve when voters go from a low to a high informational context. To reproduce these separate electoral contexts, this paper analyses the Spanish case and the evolution of leader evaluations and ideology from the foundational electoral period to the most recent and stable electoral period. The findings show that there exists a trade-off in using ideology and leader evaluations in individuals' voting decisions. Thus, while ideology becomes more important, the utility of leader evaluation is reduced once the informational context becomes more stable and richer.*

**Keywords:** Leader evaluation, ideological distance, voting choice, informational context, new democracies.

## **4.1. Introduction**

Citizens use a range of heuristic devices to reduce the cost of being informed and to make sense of politics even in uncertain and complex informational environments (Sniderman et al., 1991; Popkin, 1991; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). Nevertheless, “although this research has been instructive regarding any specific heuristic devices used by the citizen, less is known regarding the relative utility of particular and sometimes competing bases of judgment” (Huckfeldt et al. 2005:12). In addition, this line of study falls short of explaining the manner in which shortcuts are used in differing informational context (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000). In order to address these gaps in the literature, the present study ask a central question: How do voters use leader evaluations and ideology when they make decisions in different informational contexts?

Ideology and leader evaluation are considered to be two of the most widely used shortcuts in voting decisions (Downs, 1957; Dalton 2011). However the majority of studies which indicate that there is a trade-off between leader evaluations and ideological thinking focus on the political sophistication of individuals (Mondak and Huckfeldt, 2006; Huckfeldt et al. 2005; Kam, 2005; Lavine and Gschwend, 2006); thus, this line of research ignores the importance of the informational context. The present study argues that there is a trade-off between the effects of using leadership and ideology according to the richness of the informational context in which these shortcuts are used. In this sense, previous research shows how in low-information or complex elections, candidate evaluations and their personal characteristics are prominent in the voting decision process (McDermott, 1997; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). However, less is known on how voters assign different utilities to leader evaluations or ideology in their voting decision when passing from low to high-information elections.

This debate becomes more evident in new democracies where the first democratic elections are usually associated with a low-information context. During foundational elections, voters will face an uncertain informational context as the party system and the electoral rules are new (Lago and Martinez, 2012; Gallego et al., 2012). Furthermore, in such electoral periods, the mass media is

unlucky to incorporate a plurality of social interests (Veltmer, 2008). Nevertheless, the party system, and the programmatic issues that structure the political debate can become more stable in the course of several elections. Moreover, in participating in elections, voters can learn the effects of the electoral system, resulting in a higher-informational context. This evolutionary process leads voters to attribute different utility levels to diverse shortcuts in their decision making processes. Therefore, the current research hypothesizes that during the foundational elections leader evaluations become crucial for voters as candidates are the primary political information and an easy cue to learn. Nonetheless, over time, as the political system becomes more stable and certain, the informational context will guide individuals to rely more on ideology.

To test this argument, the Spanish case is analyzed using post-electoral data gathered since the initial elections until the most recent one. The selection of Spain was determined by two major factors: Spain is presently considered a stable democratic regime and it has not suffered any fundamental institutional reform since the establishment of democracy. The findings support the proposed hypotheses which state that leadership has a greater impact on individuals' vote choice during the initial democratic elections while ideology gains importance over time.

The following section presents the particular informational context in new democracies. The third section introduces the arguments of the different utilities which leader evaluation and ideology may have in new democracies. The fourth section explains why Spain is an appropriate case to study the electoral dynamics of shortcuts. The next section explains the data employed on the analysis as well as the main variables included on the statistical models. The fifth section discusses the findings of the analyses. The sixth, and final, section presents a brief summary of the present study.

## ***4.2. Information and shortcuts; the importance of the informational context in new democracies***

Political information is fundamental for the well-being of democracies. Citizens who are politically informed can better construct their interests, leading to those interests becoming part of the governing process (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Verba et al., 1995). Political information in representative democracies is also critical for controlling politicians and making them accountable (Ferejoh et al., 1990; Maravall, 1999; Adserà et al. 2003, Fraile, 2008). In Adserà and her colleagues' words (479:2003): "A well-informed and politically mobilized electorate matters more than the level of economic development to ensure good government". Heuristic reasoning (and other kinds of bounded rationality) seems to close the gap between more and less informed citizens. Thus, the use of shortcuts will allow poorly informed citizens to behave as their highly informed counterparts. Nevertheless, if political information depends not only on individual features but on the political context (Kuklinski et al., 2001; Jerit et al., 2006; Barabas et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010), heuristics should also be conditioned by the electoral context in which they are used.

In a comparative study, Iyengar et al. (2010) demonstrate that the importance of individual-level motivational factors varies across contexts; they are less important in information-rich environments, but critical in information-deprived situations. Thus, the prevailing level of information is affected jointly by both demand and supply variables. In this sense, in an information-rich environment the information gap between the most and least motivated will be reduced (2010, 292).<sup>36</sup> Gordon and Segura (1997:143), for their part, suggest that where political arrangements make information more costly or less useful to the citizen individual performances

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<sup>36</sup> Concretely, the authors frame the informational context on the national media systems. Iyengar et al. 2010 differentiate between market-based and public service national media systems in which the last system has a higher coverage of hard news (politics, public administration, economy and science). As the results show, the knowledge gap between the more and the less interested is widest in market-based than public-oriented media. What manifests the impact that information-rich or information-deprived context may have on citizens.

will, on average, suffer. On the other hand, where political information is likely to be clear, plentiful, and useful, the citizenry should, on average, appear more sophisticated. In relation to heuristics, political context, by structuring political information and the public choices, will help citizens to overcome their information shortfall and to take advantage of judgmental shortcuts (Sniderman, 2000). As a result, political context, in influencing the characteristics of the political information, may affect the type of shortcut that a person uses as well as how useful this heuristic is in guiding voters in their political decisions.

This debate should be more emphasized in new democracies; implying a further complexity for the topic of political information and the use of shortcuts. In nascent democracies, voters face weak or inexistent political institutions characteristic of low-information contexts. In some cases, the longevity of authoritarian regimes means that the transition faced a *tabula rasa*, in which the institutional context should be invented and learned almost *ex novo* (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1989; Lago and Martinez, 2012). This weak institutional context primarily affects the political party system and the mass media, two main institutions which provide political information to citizens.

In new democracies, party system institutionalization tends to be low (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007), there is thus a lack of stability in party organization, partisan offers, and candidates strategies. Political parties lack permanent and attached electorates which normally allow them to anchor and delimit the electoral market (Biezen, 2003) which results in a weak programmatic and ideological linkage between voters and parties (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006). Under a fluid party system it is unlikely that voters can identify the programmatic and ideological positions of parties, resulting in a low level of political information. This limited knowledge of party platforms makes voter less able to align their policy preferences with the available options (Greene, 2011). Similarly, founding elections imply uncertainty regarding the consequences of the electoral system; the number of parties competing in the elections, and the vote shares for the different parties (Lago and Martinez, 2012; Andrews and Jackman, 2005). Thus, uncertainty over any of these three particular types of information leads to more generalized uncertainty over the

relationship between electoral rules and electoral outcomes (Andrews and Jackman, 2005: 67).

Moreover, mass communication media is the mean by which citizens and political representatives communicate in a reciprocal effort to inform and influence (Mughan and Gunther, 2000:1). As gatekeepers, it is claimed that the news media should ideally serve as the classical agora by bringing together a plurality of diverse interests, voices, and viewpoints to debate issues of public concern. This gatekeeping role is often regarded as particularly important during election campaigns, when citizens can make an informed choice only if media cover all parties and candidates fairly, accurately, impartially, and without undue favoritism toward those in power (Norris, 2000). In fact, several studies emphasize that attention to news media is associated to greater political interest, knowledge and a better understanding of politics (Newton, 1999; Holtz-Bacha, 1990).

Nevertheless, it is difficult during the first years of a democratic regime for new media systems to incorporate a plurality of interests. As the choices of the media systems are “constrained by existing institutional structures and arrangement, value systems persist and shape the behavior of elites and citizens alike, and –last not least–many of the decisions made immediately after the breakdown of the old regime are dictated by the drama and urgency of the situation rather than long term vision of an ideal democracy” (Veltmer, 2008: 28). This fact may contradict the notion of an autonomous media that incorporates a diverse and balanced range of political perspectives. Additionally, unlike in established democracies, new democracies typically lack 24-hour television news outlets, broad Internet access, and high newspaper circulation rates (Greene, 2011:400). Therefore, the emergent transitional mass media system may deliver limited political information in terms of time and plurality, possibly affecting the quality and the quantity of the information available on the system.

The specific characteristics associated to a party system, electoral rules and mass media in foundational elections lead to a more uncertain and unstable political informational environment. Nevertheless, this instability might evolve towards a more stable and rich informational context. In environments which are noisy,

confusing, or rapidly changing, adaptation is not smooth, but is rather episodic and disjointed (Jones, 2001). It is thus reasonable to think that people will adapt their shortcuts along the democratic period according to how the informational context develops. In this way, the study of new democracies permits to capture the low-informed political context that accompanies the initial democratic years as well as its evolution towards a richer-informed situation. Hence, by examining new democracies, this research contributes on the field of informational shortcuts by introducing a dynamic perspective on the analysis of shortcuts and particularly by studying how the effects of using shortcuts evolve when passing from a low to a higher informational political context.

### ***4.3. The evolution of leadership and ideology utilities in new democracies: arguments***

The main argument of the present research is that voters in low-informed political contexts will focus more on leaders, while those in high-informed contexts will focus on ideological cues when deciding which party to vote for.

Comparative research has emphasized that voters' reliance on candidates varies over time, between institutional contexts or across parties, (Aarts et al., 2011; Carey and Shugart, 1995; Curtis and Blais, 2001; Lobo, 2008).<sup>37</sup> The underlying idea of these studies is that by shaping the political supply side of voting, institutional settings provide incentives for voters to draw on evaluations of politicians instead of, for instance, policies when casting ballots (Kroh, 2004: 7). This argument can be used in the case of new democracies. Where the informational context is uncertain and unstable, such as in foundational elections, a basic information that parties provide is the head or leader of the party. As political parties may start from scratch, the letter of introduction to society is their principal candidate. It is the political leader who has to explain the

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<sup>37</sup> However, in traditional democracies there is no clear evidence of the role of the personalization of politics over time (Hayes, 2009; Holmberg and Oscarsson: 2011).

party's position on issues, the political program as well as to structure the political debate. Thus, leader evaluations become accessible to all voters; thus, a special cognitive effort is not necessary, even in the most deprived information environments (Stroh, 1995).

As an easy-to-use information, party leader evaluations serve individuals as a cognitive shortcut in deciding which party to vote for (Cutler, 2002; Lavine and Gschwend, 2006; Mondak and Huckfeldt, 2006). Similarly, as the parties are new actors on the democratic system and the ties with the society are weak, voters are more likely to use the party leaders as a decisional factor in their voting process (Blais, 2011). As a result, voters will start to know the party system through their political leaders, becoming a crucial shortcut in their voting decisions during the foundational period. In Curtice and Blais' words (2001:19): "Leader may matter not because their ability to win votes independently of their party on the basis of their personal appeal but rather because they have a decisive impact on voters' evaluations of the parties that they lead". Additionally, as the party leader becomes a central figure in the political competition, the mass media will contribute to the promotion of leaders. As Mainwaring and Zoco's state: "In contrasts –to western democracies-, in post-1978 democracies in countries with weak democratic heritages, television became a mass phenomenon before parties were deeply entrenched in society. Candidates for executive office can get their messages across on television without the need to rely on well-develop organization, allowing the emergence of personalistic candidates" (2007:197). Thus, in the foundational election, the political context reduces the cost of using leadership and, as a result, voters have a greater incentive to use the evaluation of political candidates to decide which party to vote for. As a result, the first hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: The effect of leader evaluation on the vote will be higher in low-informed elections than in high-informed elections.*

Nevertheless, the impact of leadership on voting may fluctuate over time according to how the informational context changes and how



parties structure the political landscape. In a new democracy, the first elections occur amidst turbulence and uncertainty, where parties have limited information on voter's preferences and voters have to learn how to perform in democratic elections. However, over time and elections, parties and electors may learn through an iterative process (Dawisha and Deets, 2006; Dalton and Weldon, 2007; Tavits and Annus, 2006). On the one hand, parties experiment and learn, through repetition, how to campaign effectively for votes. This learning, in turn, creates the conditions for the next election (Olson, 1998:11). Thus, parties learn through elections how to provide cues and party labels that can orient voters to choose them. On the other hand, voters learn through performing in elections what the parties are, their platforms and issue positions, as well as how to use shortcuts that help them make sense of politics. As Rose and Munro states (2009: 43): "The adaptation of political elites to election results can quickly lead to the supply of parties becoming steady from one election to the next. Voters offered the same alternatives can learn, by a process of trial and error, which party best represent their views".

Thus, from these findings it can be argued that the political learning of voters occurs because there is a certain stability of the supply of parties; or in other words, the political information offered to voters is stable. Apart from facilitating the learning process, if parties make the available choices more stable and consistent over time, the elections will be held in a higher informational context. Thus, voters may be able to learn how to use other shortcuts connected with issue preferences and the ideological positioning of parties. In this sense, party electoral coordination is necessary in order to provide ideological cues to citizens. When parties try to coordinate they decide whether to compete alone, in a coalition or withdraw according to the expected viability of parties. If electoral coordination fails, too many political parties may set up at a given ideological position, leading voters to have poor expectations either on the position of parties or in reference to their electoral success (Cox, 1997). As a result, few elections may come up, until the coordination of parties reaches an equilibrium and voters learn to use the ideological cues that parties provide.

If the initial low-informational elections guide voters to use leadership, once the informational context becomes richer, voters

may take advantage of other shortcuts, such as the left-right dimension, when sorting through the available political parties.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the left-right orientation summarizes the issues and cleavages that structure political competition (van der Eijk, et al. 2005: 167; Inglehart, 1990). For instance, Inglehart describes the scale as a sort of super-issue dimension that represents the “major conflicts that are present in the political system” (1990: 273). In this way, the simple structure of a general left–right scale can summarize the political positions of voters and political parties. Ideology, therefore, appears as an information saving device that citizens use to guide their political decisions (Downs, 1957; Sniderman et al., 1991; Popkin, 1991). Nevertheless, for ideology to work as an information device, it is necessary that voters learn about parties’ programmatic stands (Fraile, 2008). For this to take place there needs to be certain stability on the parties’ supply side. Thus, when programmatic stands are available from parties, and if this information becomes clearer through elections, ideology can have a higher impact in evaluating which party to vote for than is expected to have in foundational elections. Hence, as a greater number of democratic elections take place, individuals should be more prone to be guided by ideological voting. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

*H2: The effect of ideology on voting will be greater in high-information elections than in low ones.*

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<sup>38</sup> Although the use of ideology might be associated with sophisticated voters that conceptualize ideology as a result of the liberal-conservative philosophy, the high use of the left-right orientation in some countries’ puts this approach into question. For instance, Best and McDonald (2011) show that the majority of the public in most CSES countries can locate themselves on this Left–Right scale (nearly 90 percent on average)

#### **4.4. Case selection: Spain**

There are theoretical reasons to consider that voters assign different utilities to leader evaluation and ideology on their voting decisions according to the richness of the informational context in which these shortcuts are used. In order to test this assumption, the study of new democracies permits to capture the maximum differences between low and high informational electoral contexts. The foundational period, associated with a low-informational context, can be compared with a more stable electoral period, in which the informational context becomes richer. In this sense, it is necessary to select a third wave democracy with a current stable and consolidated system as it is Spain. As it has been a long time since the initial elections occurred in western democracies, it is not possible to study the whole democratic period as individual data does not exist. And taking a shorter period would not accurately capture the two informational scenarios. Additionally, to study a single case with differences in the stability of the electoral competition across-time permits to control for other institutional settings that may influence the type and effects of shortcuts.

Apart from having electoral competition which became stable over time, Spain meets another important condition: its electoral rules remain unchanged since the foundational elections. If either the party system supply does not become stable or after a few elections the electoral system changes, the informational uncertainty that characterized foundational elections will not be adequately reduced. In this way, Spain has a proportional electoral system and a parliamentarian form of government that have been constant since the reestablishment of the democratic regime. Apart from data availability and constant electoral rules, the Spanish case possesses differing levels of party system competition stability since the foundational electoral period. In the present, Spain is considered a stable democracy with a long democratic experience (11 elections). Thus, there was an initial phase in which voters experience not only new parties but how to perform with a given electoral system. And there is a second phase where the political institutions are constant and the electoral competition becomes stable what generates a higher-informational context.

In this sense, for 40 years Spain was depoliticized by the Francoist dictatorship. By the time of the first genuinely free elections in 1977, only Spaniards over 60 had personal experience with competitive parties and elections (Barnes et al. 1985, 697). In the 1977 foundational elections almost all parties were new with the exception, of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Communist Party (PCE) at the national level. However, the continuity of some parties did not necessarily imply organizational continuity to any minimal degree, let alone continuity in leadership or programmatic orientation (Gunther et al., 2005: 215). Thus, the creation of political organizations, the inexperience of their leaders, the insecure linkages between the new parties and their electoral clienteles in a substantially transformed social structure, and the circumstances of the democratic transition itself were conducive to partisan instability (Gunther et al. 2005: 215).

Additionally, the collapse of the *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD) in 1981 - the winning party for the 1977 and 1979 elections- as well as the profound crisis and organizational decline of the Communist party during this initial democratic period (Gunther and Montero, 2000), culminated in the 1982 general election in the unique electoral realignment that the Spanish case has suffered during the whole democratic period. In the 1982 general election, all parties experienced substantial change, and the structure of the party system was fundamentally altered. The new distribution of electoral preferences was markedly unbalanced and tilted toward the left, with the PSOE assuming a “predominant” position in the party system. The PCE was reduced to a minimal electoral presence, while on the right, the Alianza Popular (AP), which had nearly disappeared in the 1979 election, emerged as the principal opposition party, increasing its parliamentary delegation from 9 seats in 1979 to 106 (Gunther et al. 2005: 206). In fact, the Spanish party system became remarkably stable (both in terms of total volatility and especially in inter-bloc volatility) following the massive party-system realignment of 1982 (Gunther and Montero, 2000: 8).

Thus, two different periods can be established in terms of informational stability: one in which elections were held in a low-information context and the other in a higher-informed context. The former encompasses the period from 1977 to 1982, where elections

were characterized by an unstable party system and electors were learning the effects of the new electoral rules; two factors which lead to an uncertain informational environment. The latter period ranges from the 1986 election up to the most recent one on 2008 where the party system was institutionalized, bringing a clearer, more stable and richer informational environment to voters. Additionally, it is over the second or third round of elections that voters learn the effects of the electoral rules and behave accordingly (Dawisha and Deets, 2006; Tavits and Annus, 2006). As a result, while in the first stage voters may use leadership as an informational shortcut in their voting decisions, in the second period, the stability of party programmatic statements may incentivize voters to make more use of other shortcuts that require a clearer informational context, such as ideology.

At the same time, this research focus on the current three main national parties that have competed since the 1977 foundational elections; The Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)), which can be considered a center-left party; the Popular Alliance Party (Alianza Popular) or its heir, the Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP), a center-right party; and the Communist party (Partido Comunista Español (PCE)) or its successor, the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU), categorized as a left-wing party.

#### **4.5. Data, operationalization and method**

To analyze the impact of the informational context on the influence of leadership and ideology, Spanish post-electoral survey data is used. In this way, a pooled cross-sectional panel which covers the national elections held in Spain between 1979 and 2008 elections was created. Particularly, for the 1979 and 1982 general elections, the DATA S.A studies are used. In the case of the 1986-2008 electoral period, post-electoral survey data from the Spanish *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) were utilized.<sup>39</sup> In the case of

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<sup>39</sup> To be specific, the number of studies included are: 1542, 1842, 2061, 2210, 2384, 2757, for the 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2008 election year respectively.

the 2004 election, the TNS/*Demoscopia* study is employed as the CIS post electoral survey does not have the main independent variables used in this analysis. Additionally, it should be noted that the 1977 general election was the first democratic election held in Spain that had the aim to elect a constituent assembly to elaborate the 1978 Constitution law. Nevertheless, this foundational election is not included in the analysis as there is no available individual survey data.<sup>40</sup>

In order to examine how the utility of leadership or ideology fluctuates over time, it is necessary to choose an electoral decision in which electors need information as it is the voting choice. Following this argument, the dependent variable is the **vote choice** for any of the three main national political parties; the PSOE, the PCE/IU or the AP/PP.<sup>41</sup>

Table 1 of the appendix provides further details on the dependent variable, as well as for the main independent variables included in the analyses. As for the main independent variables:

- **Leader evaluation** is measured by taking into account the 0-10 thermometer scale in which 0 indicates that the voter has a very bad party leader evaluation while 10 means that the evaluation is very good.
- In the case of **ideology**, it is measured through the ideological distance between the voter and each of the three political parties analyzed on the study. Thus, this distance is measured as the absolute differences between the voter's self-position in the left-right scale and the voter's party location in the left-right scale.
- To capture the level of uncertainty in the informational context, the **electoral period** variable was created and takes the value 1 for all the elections from 1986 until 2008, while

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<sup>40</sup> This factor tends to favor the null hypothesis as the initial election is expected to have the most uncertain informational context. Thus, even if differences in the way voters use leader evaluation or ideology in the two electoral periods can be found, it is important to note that the whole impact of informational context in voters' behavior can actually not be fully explored.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that that for the 1979 election, the vote for the *Union de Centro Democrático* (UCD) is included instead of the vote for the AP/PP. The UCD was the party that won the 1977 and 1979 election but collapsed in 1982 with being the PP the main electoral beneficiary of its disappearance.

0 is assigned to the 1979 and 1982 elections. As it is explained in the case selection section of this paper, research has shown that after the 1982 Spanish national election there is an evident stability of party competition; and, as a result, the subsequent elections had more stable informational contexts. Therefore, in order to thoroughly analyse the impact of the stability of the party system and of the electoral rules on the influence of ideology and leadership, the elections are divided into these two election groups.<sup>42</sup>

- Additionally, gender, age and educational level were included in the analysis as control variables.

Given the nature of the dependent variable and the main independent variables, leader evaluation and ideological distance, a conditional logit regression technique was employed. Contemporary choice theory generally conceptualizes choice as a deterministic function in which the decision to vote for a party is assumed to be based on utility maximization. Thus, individual choice is commonly construed in two states. In the first stage, individuals assess the utility of each alternative, and the way in which they do so is referred to as the utility function. In the second stage, the decision rule specifies how these utility assessments lead to an actual choice (van der Eijk et al., 2006:427). This concept of utility maximization assumes that the different attributes of the diverse alternatives can be combined in a single value. However, this is unrealistic since voters may take into account different utilities; for instance, they may use differing leader evaluations when deciding which party to vote for. This specification leads to the utilization of a probabilistic choice approach.<sup>43</sup> Thus, this research adopts a conditional logit model that is in line with the probabilistic choice approach. The conditional logit allows the choice option to be function of the characteristics of both the individual and the choice alternatives variables:

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<sup>42</sup> As the aim of this research is to capture the average effect of these two different electoral contexts on the impact of judgmental shortcuts, an election by election analysis would require different assumptions. Running regressions for each year separately would imply to assume a linear relationship of these two shortcuts over time.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on the properties of the probabilistic and discrete voting choice models see van der Eijk et al., 2006 and Alvarez et al., 1998.

$$U_{ij} = \beta X_{ij} + \psi_j a_i + u_{ij}$$

Where  $X_{ij}$  indicates a variable measuring the characteristics of alternative  $j$  for individual  $i$ . In this study, two variables are considered as an alternative based: the evaluation of leaders and the ideological distance for each of the three political parties. And  $a_i$  is a vector of variables measuring individual-specific variables for individual  $i$ . What are the control variables - age, gender and education - in the present research.

## **4.6. Results**

The results for the conditional logit are presented in Table 4.1. Model 1 includes leader evaluation and ideological proximity as choice specific variables while introducing the individual dependent control factors. Model 2 and 3 add the interaction terms LeaderXPeriod and Ideological DistanceXPeriod, respectively. In order to avoid multicollienarity, each interaction was examined in separated models. Similarly, all the models are weighted when required for the sampling procedures.

In line with previous research, the estimates in the first model indicate that leader evaluation is has a positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) influence on vote choice. Thus, the higher the positive evaluation of leaders, the higher will be the probability to vote for their respective parties. Conversely, the ideological distance has a negative and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) influence on vote choice. Thus, as the ideological distance with a given party increases the probability to vote for this party will decrease. Regarding the individual-base variables, older respondents show a positive significant effect ( $p < 0.001$ ) for voting for PSOE and PP parties in comparison with PCE/IU voters. The electoral period also has a positive significant effect ( $p < 0.001$ ) on vote choice. Thus, in contraposition to IU voters, the probability to vote for the PSOE or AP/PP party is higher during the most recent elections than during the foundational period. Higher education shows a negative significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) impact in the probability to vote for the PSOE while it presents no effect for the probability to



vote for the AP/PP. Gender coefficients indicate no significant effect on the probability to vote for a party.

[Table 4.1 about here]

Model 2 adds the LeaderXElectoral Period interaction term to model 1 equation. The coefficient for this interaction indicates a negative significant effect ( $p < 0.001$ ) on vote choice. Thus, as hypothesized, the effect of leader evaluation on vote choice is lower in the most recent elections than in the foundational period. Nevertheless, in order to generate a deeper insight on the magnitude of the electoral period on leadership, the predicted probabilities in choosing a party were calculated with the model 2 coefficients. Figure 4.1 plots the average predicted probabilities for voting for any of the three parties (PCE/IU, PSOE and AP/PP) over the whole range of leader evaluation values in the two different electoral periods, holding the remaining variables constant at their means. The solid line displays the probabilities in the most recent period while the dashed line shows the probabilities for the initial elections. As this figure shows, the line is steeper during the foundational period; hence, leadership in that period had a higher impact on the vote choice. Nevertheless, over time, it seems that the impact of leadership decreases, further supporting the first hypothesis.

[Figure 4.1 about here]

Model 3 adds the Ideological DistanceXElectoral Period interaction to Model 1 estimates. In this case, the interaction term is negatively statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the impact of the ideological distance on vote choice is higher during the second electoral period. In other words, as the ideological distance with a party increases, the probability to vote for this party will decrease, being this effect stronger during the most recent electoral period. As in the case of leadership, the average predicted probabilities in choosing a party were calculated with the model 3 coefficients. Figure 4.2 plots the predicted probabilities for voting for a party over the whole range of ideological distances in the two different electoral periods, holding constant at their means the remaining variables. As expected, the solid line is steeper, showing that

ideology has a higher impact on voting choice during the most recent electoral period compared to the foundational one.

[Figure 4.2 about here]

When the distance is 0, or in other words, when there is ideological congruence between the voter and the party, individuals show a higher probability to vote for the party in the most recent period than in the foundational period. On the contrary, when this ideological distance increases, voters show a lower propensity to vote for a party in the recent period. Thus, the second hypothesis is supported as ideology is shown to have a higher effect over time and, particularly, when passing from a low to a higher informational context.

In sum, leader evaluation and ideological distance matter in helping individuals in their voting choice. Nevertheless, the impact of time and especially the richness of the informational context mediates this relationship. Thus, as expected, ideological distance has a higher utility for individuals in their vote choice as elections goes by. However, the impact of leader evaluation on voting is reduced over time as elections are held in a higher informational context.

## **4.7. Conclusions**

Although there are few studies that jointly analyze the use of more than a single shortcut, it is not clear whether different shortcut utilities compete or complement each other in helping individuals in their political decisions (Huckfeldt et al., 2005). Similarly, less is known on how the political context, and particularly, how a low or high informational electoral context, can mediate the utility of shortcuts. This research gap becomes particularly important in the case of new democracies as the electoral competition is, initially, more uncertain and unstable, which make elections a lower-informed phenomenon than in consolidated democracies. Therefore, it is far from clear if in new democracies voters assign the same utilities to ideology or to leader evaluations through the course of

time. It is, thus, reasonable to think that that these utilities may change as the informational context becomes stable and richer.

Trough examining the Spanish national elections over the entire democratic period, this article gives new evidence on how leader evaluation and ideological proximity evolve according to the stability of electoral competition. Particularly, the findings manifest that the utility of ideology increases as times goes by. When parties are stable, they can provide information on programmatic stands which individuals have the opportunity to learn through experiencing elections. In this sense, ideological proximity is more relevant when the informational context is more certain and fruitful. Similarly, as it was hypothesized, there are significant differences between foundational elections and the more recent electoral period in terms of the impact of leader evaluations. Thus, when the informational context is richer, voters assign a lower utility to leader evaluations. In this sense, leader evaluations decrease while ideology gains importance when elections evolve into a higher informed political context.

Although the utility of leader evaluations decrease through time, it remains a relevant electoral factor. This fact can be explained by the changes on the informational bases of judging candidates along a democratic period. Experimental research indicates that individuals will rely on personal traits in sorting out their vote choice when other information, such as the candidate's stands on specific issues or their political ideology, is not available (Riggle et al., 1992; Mondack and Huckfelt, 2006). In this way, to maximize the "rationality" of their candidate impressions, voters should attempt to obtain information about where the candidates stand on the issues, and then calculate the distance between their own positions and those of the candidates (Lavine and Gschwend, 2006: 141). Following this argument, leadership can be useful in low and high informational environments, but the content of the information used in the decisional process will differ. Thus, in high-information context, voters may still find useful party leader evaluations because the party ideology and programmatic stands influence such evaluation. As a result, further research on the content of shortcuts is needed in order to have a better knowledge on how informational context affects the utility of leadership.

Additionally, further research should also be devoted to include in the analysis the specific characteristics of mass media, party and electoral systems; factors which are directly responsible for the richness of the political context. This type of study, in order to be thorough, would include new or young democracies, possibly resulting in greater knowledge the manner in which informational context affects the utility of shortcuts.

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**Table 4.1. Conditional logit models of party choice.**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	PP/IU	PSOE/IU	PP/IU	PSOE/IU	PP/IU	PSOE/IU
<b>Vote-alternative factors</b>						
Leader evaluation	0.727*** (0.018)		0.805*** (0.023)		0.728*** (0.018)	
Ideological distance	-0.611*** (0.016)		-0.568*** (0.018)		-0.412*** (0.040)	
LeaderXPeriod			-0.138*** (0.020)			
IdeologyXPeriod					-0.248*** (0.043)	
<b>Individual-alternative factors</b>						
Gender	-0.216* (0.097)	-0.177* (0.081)	-0.221* (0.098)	-0.175* (0.077)	-0.244* (0.098)	-0.178* (0.081)
Education	0.148* (0.059)	-0.118* (0.051)	0.168** (0.060)	-0.119* (0.049)	0.145* (0.060)	-0.116* (0.051)
Age	0.021*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)
Electoral Period	0.836*** (0.125)	0.340** (0.105)	0.295* (0.150)	0.366*** (0.107)	0.913*** (0.118)	0.368*** (0.100)
_cons	-0.272 (0.263)	0.682** (0.226)	-0.349 (0.267)	0.655** (0.220)	-0.246 (0.258)	0.670** (0.223)
<i>N</i>	49857		49857		49857	
<i>Log pseudolikelihood</i>	-4860.20		-4828.04		-4833.69	

Standard errors in parentheses; +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Figure 4.1. Expected probabilities to vote for a party and leader evaluation

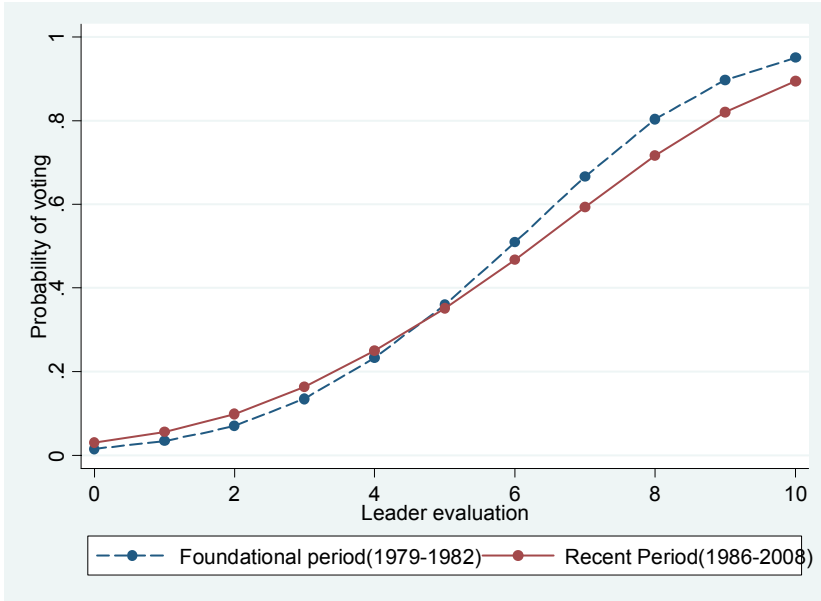
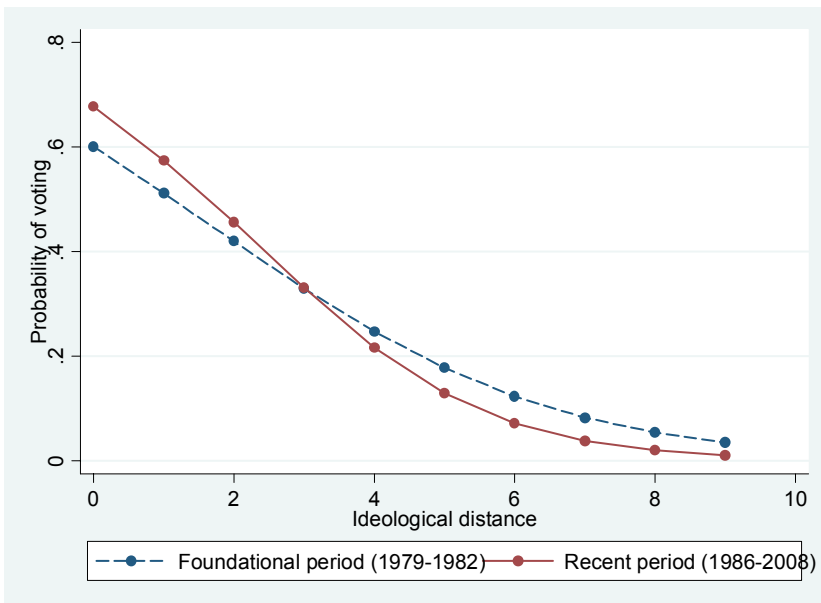


Figure 4.2. Expected probabilities to vote for a party and ideological distance



## Appendix 1: Descriptives statistics

Table 1 Summary statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Foundational period (1979-1982 elections)					
PSOE leader valuation	10320	5.96	2.59	0	10
AP/PP leader valuation	10330	4.30	3.04	0	10
PCE/IU leader valuation	10285	3.34	2.69	0	10
PSOE ideological distance	9088	1.88	1.86	0	9
AP/PP ideological distance	9079	3.48	2.57	0	9
PCE/IU ideological distance	5518	2.80	2.14	0	9
Age	10893	41.04	21.25	1	78
Education	10793	2.56	0.76	1	4
Gender	10896	--	--	0	1
Recent period (1986-2008 elections)					
PSOE leader valuation	46630	5.50	2.82	0	10
AP/PP leader valuation	47497	4.86	3.07	0	10
PCE/IU leader valuation	37781	4.10	2.60	0	10
PSOE ideological distance	25345	1.79	1.78	0	9
AP/PP ideological distance	25597	3.53	2.47	0	9
PCE/IU ideological distance	24642	2.58	2.00	0	9
Age	54701	45.63	22.67	1	98
Education	54287	2.39	0.89	1	4
Gender	54740	--	--	0	1







## Chapter 5

### 5. Conclusions

Although its tenure in political behaviour research has been short, the heuristic reasoning has a large group of studies that emphasize individuals' use of shortcuts as a way to make reasoned political decisions despite the low levels of political information. However, the main limitation of these studies is the importance of the political context in explaining how shortcuts assist voters in their political decisions. Psychological research on heuristics has influenced the political science literature to examine cognitive heuristics in an individual perspective. As a result, the aim of political scholars has been to verify the assistance of shortcuts by paying close attention to individuals' political awareness and sophistication. However, these scholars forget that voters do not behave in isolation, but rather within a political context that shapes their attitudes and political behaviors. Since the political context might increase or reduce the effects of the individuals' informational gap and the characteristics of the information available in the system, it is reasonable to expect that it might influence informational shortcuts.

Thus, it is essential to include in the explanation the impact of the political context. In line with this previous limitation, this dissertation has explored how political context may mediate the assistance of shortcuts on voters' decision processes. Operating within a broad perspective of the political context, this research examines the impact of political institutions, the electoral dynamics of political competition and the effects of time on informational shortcuts. Similarly, it includes some of the most utilized political shortcuts by voters in their political decisions; partisanship, ideology, leader evaluation, incumbency and electoral results. In this way, this study goes one step beyond individuals to analyse how shortcuts guide voters in their political decisions according to the political context in which they interact.

Chapter 2 addresses the impact of using partisanship, ideology and leadership on the decision to participate in an election under different institutional contexts. The empirical evidence shows that partisanship functions better under parliamentarian than in presidential systems and in more party-oriented systems. Under these institutions the use of party identification increases the likelihood of voters in participating in elections. The characteristics of parliamentarian and party oriented systems center the political competition on political parties where candidates are within the boundaries of the party framework. As a result, voters focus on the whole package of party policies and platforms. The system then facilitates party information, which drives voters to use partisan and ideological cues more effectively. As with party identification, being located in a left right scale has a larger impact in parliamentarian systems. However, the party or candidate orientation feature seems not to influence ideology.

Surprisingly, parliamentarian and party-oriented systems promote better leadership performance. This finding can be explained by the fact that parliamentary systems are becoming more presidential (Mughan, 2000; McAllister, 2011). In parliamentary systems, the development of the mass media, the increasing complexity of government and party policies, and weakening social and partisans loyalties have all contributed to focus more attention on the role of leaders (McAllister, 2011: 69). Although this trend is general, there are differences within parliamentary systems. In this sense, party leaders, and particularly prime ministers, are more powerful in parliamentary systems with one-party majority governments than in coalition or minority governments. Then, as in presidential systems power is divided between the president and the legislature, leader evaluations should play a major role in Westminster-style countries (Blais, 2011:5). Consequently, it is not clear that presidential systems guide voters to a better use of leadership. It is necessary to consider additional characteristics of both forms of government to have a deeper understanding on how leadership operates.

Similarly, the effective number of parties does not mediate the relationship between any of these three shortcuts and turnout. Additional analysis has suggested the possibility of non-linear relationships. Thus, partisanship appears to perform better as the number of parties increases, but including in the analysis only those

cases below the median number of parties. In all, the comparative analysis manifests the importance of political institutions in explaining the performance of shortcuts. Institutions influence the cost of being informed by facilitating specific political information to voters. This fact makes shortcuts assist voters differently according to the political institutions under which are used. In this first approximation, the government form and the party/person oriented systems appear to influence the performance of partisanship, ideology and leadership, which makes voters differentially participate in elections.

Apart from political institutions, this thesis has also explored the effects of using shortcuts when considering the dynamics of electoral competition as a part of the political context. For that purpose, chapter 3 examines the conventional wisdom approach which argues that a high turnout benefits the electoral results of left wing parties. As high turnout implies that low socioeconomic voters participate in a given election, and given their higher propensity to vote for left wing parties, a turnout increase will benefit left wing parties. Particularly, this chapter analyses the different impact that electoral polls and incumbency may have on vote choice. Apart of being informational shortcuts, these are the two main mechanisms involved in the conventional wisdom approach joint with the social component of voters. Additionally, these two shortcuts capture party competition in a given election as electoral polls indicate how close the race is or who may win the election, whereas incumbency captures the performance evaluation of the past government. The conventional wisdom assumption is tested through the Spanish case, which on the aggregate level has the strongest relationship between the turnout rate and the share vote for left wing parties (Fisher, 2007).

The argument is that the signs of the contextual shortcuts, electoral polls and incumbency, matter in explaining the higher propensity that peripheral voters have in voting for left wing parties. Both mechanisms have to push towards the vote for left wing parties to contribute to the conventional wisdom evidence. The results confirm this argument. On average, peripheral voters have a higher probability to vote for left wing parties than core voters, which supports the conventional wisdom approach. However, it is when these contextual shortcuts positively guide peripheral voters to opt

for left wing parties that this relationship is the strongest. Thus, on one hand, it is necessary for polls to indicate that the left wing party is expected to win the elections in order to activate the bandwagon effect. On the other, it is necessary that the left wing party is the challenger in a salient election or the incumbent in a non-salient election to positively contribute to this relationship. This result manifests that each factor is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Then, in order to examine the conventional wisdom argument, the two shortcuts must be involved on the analysis to disentangle their signs.

An additional finding is that these two shortcuts have a different impact on core and peripheral voters. In particular, when both the electoral polls and incumbency shortcuts encourage left wing voting, their impact is stronger on peripheral voters than core voters, in comparison with the average scenario. This evidence questions the assumption in the literature that shortcuts have a similar effect regardless of individuals' features.

In sum, this article contributes to both literatures on political shortcuts and conventional wisdom. First, it takes the conventional wisdom assumption one step further, as it indicates the importance of disentangling the direction of the three mechanisms at play: composition of peripheral voters, bandwagon and incumbency. Second, it shows the importance of electoral competition dynamics for to the two contextual shortcuts that guide voters in their voting decisions. The positive influence of electoral polls and incumbency shortcuts towards left wing parties induces peripheral voters to vote for them more than when these two shortcuts exert a negative influence.

This research has considered another feature of the political context: the effect of time. Particularly, the fourth chapter has addressed the impact of shortcuts once the informational context becomes more stable and certain over time. Accordingly, this research has analyzed the impact of two shortcuts —leadership and ideology— on vote choice within low and high informational political contexts. For this purpose, the Spanish case is examined and two contextual scenarios are considered: the foundational electoral period and the most recent elections. The study of a new democracy and the foundational period allows us to isolate a low informational context.

During the initial elections of a new democratic regime, the institutionalization of the party systems is low, voters and parties face a new electoral system and the mass media has still to gain independence from the previous regime and to strengthen as an organization. These characteristics result in an uncertain and low informational context. However, over elections, voters might experience the effects of the electoral systems and the party system might become more institutionalized, which provides a richer informational context.

In view of the findings, it can be concluded that leader evaluation has a higher impact during the foundational electoral period but it has decreased in importance over the years. To the contrary, ideology -or the ideological distance with a party- has a reverse pattern; it has a lower effect on the vote choice during the initial years of the democratic period and increases its impact over time. The empirical evidence suggests the importance of the informational context as a cue provider. In this sense, a low informational context such as the foundational period of more uncertain political information, leadership is an easy cue to learn. As a result, voters base their political judgments on this cue. Over time, as information is more stable, voters learn and adapt to the new context, which brings other types of cues such as ideology for their voting decisions. As in previous chapters, this is another piece of evidence that manifests how the context shapes the effects of shortcuts on vote choice by influencing the type of information available in the system.

To conclude, this research sheds light on the importance of including the context in the explanation of shortcuts. As evident, the institutional context, the dynamics of the electoral competition and the characteristics of the informational context modify the impact of using shortcuts in the decision making process, and concretely, in the propensity to participate in elections and the probability to vote for a party. As a result, the political context influences the capacity that shortcuts have to guide individuals in overcoming their informational shortcomings. This evidence makes for future studies, the necessity to incorporate the political context to better analyze the performance of shortcuts.

## **5.1. Limitations of the thesis and directions for future work**

At the beginning of century XXI, the research of Kuklinskli and his collaborators (2000, 2001) theoretically manifested the implications of the political context on political information and subsequently have questioned the effectiveness of heuristics under specific political contexts. This project has provided the first empirical evidence on how the context matters in explaining the performance of shortcuts in assisting citizens' electoral decisions. The main findings bring us to conclude that using some shortcuts under specific institutions or competitive scenarios increase the probability a voter will participate in an election or vote for a concrete party. As a result, this evidence assumes that the shortcut functions better or is more effective when the voter has, for instance, a higher predisposition to participate or to vote for the respective party. However, are these shortcuts effective enough? In chapter 2, it is evident, for example, that those who identify with a leader have a 0.77 probability of participating in a parliamentary system and 0.63 in a presidential system. Although leadership appears to function better in parliamentary systems, in strict terms, we cannot be sure if this probability is good enough to affirm that the shortcut is effective. Similarly, we can not asses whether the shortcut is functioning in presidential systems.

This underlying measurement of shortcuts' effectiveness is based on the direction and not the quality of political decisions, in which election outcomes accurately reflect the needs and desires of voters. This concern can be framed in a broader limitation of the literature in analyzing the effectiveness of shortcuts. The problem is that no consensus has been reached about what this ideal should be (Druckman et al., 2009: 493). The most common standard of comparison is full information when the studies focus on individual characteristics. In this way, simulations are introduced in the analysis to see individuals' responses under a full information situation. Similarly, comparisons between low and high informed individuals verify the effectiveness of shortcuts.

However if both voters, ill or full informed, follow a similar pattern in the effects of shortcuts, two conclusions can be reached. First,

shortcuts effectively assist both voters, particularly in the low-informed population as they behave as the well-informed population, which is a common conclusion in the literature. Second, it can also be concluded that the shortcut is not effective, no matter the type of voter. These contradictory conclusions can be reached because we lack an index that provides an objective measurement of the effectiveness of shortcuts. Thus, any attempt to standardize the measurement of shortcut efficiency would contribute to the comparison of shortcuts across contexts and individuals.

This dissertation has focused its attention on the effects of using shortcuts on voters' voting decisions under different political contexts. However, further research should be done in order to ensure the effects that the political context may have on using different political shortcuts. In other words, using shortcuts should also be a dependent variable. If the impact of using shortcuts on voting decisions depends on the context, as has been seen in this thesis, the formation of shortcuts and their availability should be conditioned by the context as well. Then, it would be interesting to go one step backwards and focus on the use of shortcuts itself as it might facilitate the introduction of informational context mechanisms and individual characteristics on the formation of shortcuts. As the information necessary to use heuristics might often be missing from the citizens' environment, focusing on the use of shortcuts may disentangle the causal mechanisms that lead people to use specific informational shortcuts.

In general, people should draw better inferences from the broader and longer-standing features of politics (political parties, ideologies). On the contrary, people should have more difficulty when they make inferences from or directly assess narrower or shorter-term features: singular events, aspiring leaders, and changing social or economic conditions (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001:182). This fact questions the nature of the political context and the degree to which these institutions remain stable over time or are exposed to short-term changes. In terms of the political context, this research has utilized both kinds of institutions. On one hand, the form of government, the effective number of parties or the personalization of politics, are institutions that remain stable over time. On the other, the contextual shortcuts such as incumbency, electoral polls or the level of information in a context are

characteristics that may change with the passing of elections and time. However, these short-term factors are focused mainly in Spain, which questions whether the conclusions reached can be exported to other electorates and countries. Thus, introducing new cases into this research would shed more light on the effects that party strategies and the changing information environment might have for the performance of shortcuts. In this sense, the study of new democracies, in comparison to traditional democracies, can provide new evidence because the political context is more unstable and varies more over time.

Additionally, there is one institution that to my knowledge has not been explored in the field of heuristics: the mass media. Chapter 4 is an attempt to theorize the implications of the mass media in the learning process of voters and the performance of shortcuts. However, a deeper analysis should be pursued in order to empirically test the performance of shortcuts against the characteristics of the mass media. As mass media is one of the main sources through which individuals get informed, it might have implications not only for the political information available in the system but also for informational shortcuts.

In view of the weaknesses in the literature and this thesis, research still needs to be done on introducing more political institutions, more short-term features of political competition and more cases in the analysis of political shortcuts. In addition, the causal mechanisms that encourage the performance of shortcuts in some contexts should be tested. Given these factors, the next step in studying political shortcuts is to move towards a contextual theory of political shortcuts that jointly analyzes individual characteristics, political contexts and the effectiveness of shortcuts.

In sum, this dissertation has provided insight into the importance of the political context for explaining the performance of shortcuts for individuals' electoral decisions. Thus, to further examine shortcuts it is necessary to move beyond individual characteristics and introduce the political context into the explanation. In this sense, a contextual theory of political shortcuts can be a promising path for improving the young field of heuristics with a more complete understanding of the use and performance of political shortcuts.



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