

Pre-Analysis Plan: Rewarding Contention: Social Activism and Political Capital in Spain

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1 Introduction

Does activist experience translate into political capital? This project examines the relationship between contentious and electoral politics in times of crisis by investigating the effect of a candidate's social movements background on support for their candidacy for public office, perceptions of their qualifications, character, and ideological position. Using a candidate choice experiment in Spain, I propose to test whether voters reward prior involvement in contentious politics and if so, whether they do so for some social movements but not others. Finally, I aim to unpack the signal that activist experience sends to the voters, providing insight into what drives voters' (dis)approval of activists-turned-politicians.

2 Study Setting and Sample

The study will be conducted in June 2016 in the run-up to the Spanish national election, which takes place on June 26, 2016. I will be working with Survey Sampling International to recruit a sample of 1,000 Spanish adults from SSI's proprietary panels, the core of SSI's online sample, as well as from participants of online communities, social networks, and different websites. Participants are invited via banners, invitations and various types of messaging and then screened for quality

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before being included in the sample. The survey will be offered on PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones. The survey will be hosted and administered in Qualtrics by the researcher.

3 Hypotheses

It is well established in political science that voters use candidate characteristics, such as gender, race, religion, occupation, age, education, and even physical attractiveness as cues in voting decisions (McDermott, 1998; Sigelman et al., 1995; McDermott, 2005; Hart et al., 2011; Campbell & Cowley, 2014) and to draw inferences about candidate's ideological position and goals in office (Conover & Feldman, 1989; Koch, 2002). Interestingly, some characteristics (e.g. occupation) influence voters' perceptions of candidate's experience or qualifications but are not rewarded when it comes to vote choice (Campbell & Cowley, 2014). Based on this vast literature, I expect that voters will infer beliefs and policy goals, but also character traits such as honesty and incorruptibility, from candidates' involvement in social movements.

I argue that there are two ways in which candidate's social movement background influences vote choice. First, activism reduces uncertainty around the candidate's ideal point. More specifically, voters receives better information about where the candidate falls on the ideological spectrum than if relying on party cues alone. This is because activism is a costly (time sacrifice, risk of arrest etc.) and thus credible signal of ideological beliefs. Given that most new social movements, particularly in the Spanish context, such as feminist, anti-austerity, or ecological movements, are left-leaning movements, voters will infer a left-wing position from an activist background. This brings me to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1A: Respondents will place candidates with contentious experience further on the left than candidates from the same party without the social movement experience, including candidates with labor union experience.

Hypothesis 1B: Respondents will be more certain about the ideological placement of activist candidates than other candidates.

This, in turn will influence vote choice:

Hypothesis 1C: Respondents on the left side of the political spectrum will be more likely to support candidates involved in social movements (believed to be proximate to their own ideal point). In contrast, respondents on the right side of the political spectrum will be less likely to vote for a candidate with a social movements experience (believed to be further away from their own ideal point).

Second, in addition to an informational channel, there is a character or integrity component, which, unlike the information channel which has differential effects, should increase support for social movements candidates across the political spectrum. I argue that activists are considered more honest because of their lack of association with and opposition to the corrupt establishment, as well as presumed values-based (as opposed to opportunistic or career-oriented) involvement. Because they are believed to have demonstrated selfless commitment to social issues, they are likely to be perceived as Davids fighting against the Goliath of the governmental and business elites.¹ This distinguishes them from labor union activists who - despite advocacy for social issues and workers' rights - belong to highly institutionalized organizations with close ties to politics and therefore are often grouped together with the establishment as culprits, not victims, of the crisis.

Hypothesis 2: All respondents, regardless of their ideology, will consider activist candidates to be more honest and more likable.

Hypothesis 3: Activist credentials: Sacrifice will strengthen these effects. Activists who were arrested for their involvement in a social movement (relative to those described as having committed time) will be even more likely to receive support of left-wing voters and even less likely to receive support of right-wing voters.²

In the atmosphere of declining trust in institutions, parties, and professional politicians, however, voters might simply favor outsiders, regardless of their experience. This would suggest that social movements background provides no additional advantage or carries no additional penalty than simply not being part of the establishment. In this case, we would observe no difference in support

¹Much of the anger of the Spanish indignados has been directed against “políticos y banqueros,” politicians and bankers, who are seen as part of the same corrupt establishment.

²Observational studies in sociology, for instance in post-transition South Korea, have also shown that voters reward dissidents' for their experience in pro-democracy movements and that candidates discuss the sacrifices (e.g. number of times arrested) they made during the contentious phase when running for office (Shin & Chang, 2011).

for candidates with trade union involvement, business experience, or social movement activism, only between political insiders and outsiders.

Hypothesis 4: Candidates will be rewarded for being a political outsider more than experience, be it political, trade union, business, or activist.

Hypothesis 5: Crisis effect: Among those respondents who rate the economic situation in Spain as bad or very bad, those who were asked the question at the beginning of the survey (and thus primed to think of the economic crisis) will be more likely to declare intention to vote for political outsiders and social movement activists.

I will also test whether skills gained in social movements organizing are considered transferrable into the political realm.³ If they are, leaders of social movements should be considered more qualified for political office than rank-and-file members and just as qualified as leaders in business or labor unions.

Hypothesis 6: Leadership effect: Candidates described as having held leadership positions either in the party or in the movement will be rated as more competent/qualified by the respondents. However, leadership in the movement will strengthened the activism effect described in H1C when vote choice is concerned.

Finally, I will explore the differences between activism in distinct movements. I picked the movements: anti-eviction, 15M or indignados movement, and pro-democracy movement for the following reasons. An anti-eviction movement provides an example of a clearly left-wing, recent social movement, which has been very active, relatively successful, and advocates for an issue, which has affected hundreds of thousands of Spaniards since 2008. Evictions have been one of the most widespread, enduring consequences of the financial crisis in Spain and I expect that housing rights activists will likely be rewarded for their involvement by most left-wing voters. However, considering actions that PAH, one of the most active anti-eviction groups, organized against Partido Popular, this background will likely be considered a liability by right-wing voters.

³Kendall et al. (2013), using experimental evidence from Italy, show that campaign messages about competence of the candidate increases support more than messages about ideology. Thus, whether or not leadership in social movements sends a message about competence might matter for vote choice.

15M or indignados movement, on the other hand, is a case of a broad movement, which arose in response to the economic crisis, protesting austerity measures and calling for more participatory democracy. Nearly 80% of the population agreed with the movements' claims during the peak of its activity in 2011, though support was highest among the sympathizers of the left and the young (Calvo et al., 2011). Participation in the movement was widespread but varied in cost - from peaceful demonstrations to occupations that lasted for months - and I expect that this experience is ambiguous enough and has been normalized to an extent, where it does not send a strong activism signal and will be more likely to receive support even from more conservative voters.

Finally, the pro-democracy movement provides an example of a movement, which has succeeded in achieving its goals and is likely to be supported by the majority of respondents. Thus in this case, activist past should be an asset across the political spectrum, especially that opposing an authoritarian regime is associated with much higher risk than a democratic one. In sum, the intention is to test the impact of involvement in social movements, which vary on the dimensions of extremeness, divisiveness, and success - how extreme the activists of those movements are expected to be, how likely the respondents are to sympathize with the movement's goals, and whether those goals have been achieved.

4 Experimental Survey Design

I plan to use a conjoint experimental design, in which voters will be asked to choose between two hypothetical candidates.⁴ Certain aspects of candidate's background will be randomized to identify the causal effect of a candidate's social movement experience on voters' perception of them and willingness to vote for them (Hainmueller et al., 2014). In this candidate choice experiment, survey respondents will be presented with short bios of two hypothetical candidates running for a political office.⁵ Within each candidate's biography, I will randomly vary six characteristics: the candidate's gender (male or female), education (high school, university graduate or Ph.D. degree), new entry into politics (political outsider or experienced politician), type of non-political experience (business/labor union involvement/anti-eviction movement/15M or indignados

⁴Hainmueller et al. (2015) demonstrate that paired conjoint designs similar to the one proposed here perform remarkably well in capturing the effects of attributes, which drive voting behavior and come very close to behavioral benchmarks.

⁵Prior to seeing the profiles, respondents will be asked standard background questions.

Table 1: Conjoint Study Attributes and Levels

| Gender | Education | Party | Politician | Experience | Costly Signal |
|--------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Female | High School | PP | Outsider | Labor Union | Arrest |
| Male | University | PSOE | Politician | Business | Leadership in the movement |
| | Doctorate | Ciudadanos | | Indignados/15-M | Time |
| | | Podemos | | Pro-Democracy | Leadership in the party |
| | | | | Anti-eviction | |
| | | | | | |

movement/pro-democracy movement against the Franco dictatorship), political party, which combines the newcomer/established and left/right dimensions (PSOE - established & left, Podemos - new & left, PP - established & right, Ciudadanos - new & right) and costly signal (arrest for movement activity, time commitment, leadership position in the movement/organization, leadership position in the party). See Table 1 for a list of all attributes and levels. Sample profiles are provided in Section 6.2 in the Appendix.

Each of the six attributes of each candidate will be randomly assigned but constraints will be placed on randomization because of the implausibility of some combinations such as a member of PP who is an anti-eviction activist or arrests during protest in the cases of business experience. Each respondent will see four pairs of profiles,⁶ presented side-by-side, with each pair of profiles on a separate screen. On the same screen as each candidate pairing, respondents will be asked questions, which will serve as dependent variables. First, in a question that resembles real-world voter decision-making, they will be asked to choose between the two candidates. Second, respondents will be asked to rate each candidate on a 7-point scale. Third, respondents will be asked to place each candidate on an ideological scale,⁷ and asked about their certainty about this placement. Fourth, they will be asked about their perception of candidate’s competence and character traits: honesty, likeability, and the person who best represents interests and ideas of someone like them.

⁶This is a conventional number of tasks in conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al., 2014), low enough to alleviate concerns about respondent fatigue.

⁷The question mirrors the ideological self-identification question asked to respondents in the beginning of the study.

5 Estimation of Effects

I will follow the estimation technique for conjoint experiments as discussed in [Hainmueller et al. \(2014\)](#). Respondent characteristics, which will be considered as moderators of the effects are:

- 1) ideology and a constructed indicator variable for distance between respondent's ideology and candidate's perceived ideology position - see Hypothesis 1C
- 2) assessment of the economic situation in Spain and question order - see Hypothesis 5
- 3) party identification and a dummy for a match between respondent's and candidate's party
- 4) respondent's protest history - I expect those with personal protest experience to be more likely to favor activists
- 5) union membership - similarly, union members should be more likely to vote for candidates with trade union background

The remaining demographic covariates (gender, age, education, voting behavior) will be used only to assess how the sample compares to a nationally representative sample.

6 Appendix

6.1 Survey Questions

All questions are modelled after questions regularly asked by CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), one of the main research institutes in Spain.

6.1.1 Demographic Questions

1. Evaluation of the economic situation: To start with, thinking about the general economic situation in Spain, would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, very bad?
scale: 1 (very bad), 2 (bad), 3 (neither bad nor good), 4 (good), 5 (very good) [randomized order: beginning/end of survey]
2. Gender (Male/female)
3. Age (18-24) (25-34) (35-44) (45-54) (55-64) (65 and up)
4. Education: scale with 6 categories. Which is the highest level of education that you have had? (regardless of whether you have completed it or not)
1 (I have less than 5 years of formal education), 2 (Primary education) 3 (Secondary education 1st stage), 4 (Secondary education 2nd stage) 5 (Vocational education), 6 (Higher education)
5. Left-right: When talking about politics, people often use the expressions “left” and “right.” On a scale where 1 is “left” and 10 is “right,” where would you place yourself?
6. Election: Did you vote in the last election? (Yes/No)
7. Party closeness: For which of the following parties do you feel more sympathy or which one do you consider closer to your own ideas? (List of parties, respondent can only mark one party)
8. Union membership: Are you a member or affiliate of a trade union? (Yes/No)
9. Protest: Please tell me, in the last 3 years, have you attended a demonstration or a protest, never, one time, more than once? 1 (Never), 2 (Once), 3 (More than once)

6.1.2 Outcome Questions

1. If you had to make a choice without knowing more, which of the two would you vote for?
2. Please rate each candidate on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating “very bad” and 7 indicating “very good.”
3. When talking about politics, people often use the expressions “left” and “right.” On a scale where 1 is “left” and 10 is “right,” where would you place Candidate A/B?
4. How certain are you that this is their ideological position? (7-point scale from 1 - “not at all” to 7 - “absolutely certain”)
5. Which of the two would you guess is:

- more competent
- more honest
- more likeable
- a person who better represents the ideas and interests of people like you?

6.2 Sample Profiles

The profiles are modeled after typical bios of Spanish politicians from different parties. Order of attributes is randomized to avoid primacy and recency effects. Only gender “candidate[female/male]” and political party, and then experience and signal, are restricted to always appear consecutively in a randomized order to ensure a logical structuring of the biographies.

Candidate A

Candidate [female] of Partido Popular. Received a PhD degree. Has long political experience. A manager of a small firm. Leader of the party on the local level.

Candidate B

Candidate [male] of Podemos. Completed a university education. Never before belonged to a political party. Activist against evictions. Arrested during a protest.

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