

The Electoral Consequences of Political Scandals in Spain

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Abstract

Previous studies of the electoral consequences of corruption in Spanish local elections (Jiménez, 2007; Fernández-Vázquez and Rivero, 2011; Costas et al., 2011) have found that voters do not necessarily punish corrupt mayors. As has been pointed out in the comparative literature, the average loss of electoral support by corrupt incumbents is small and does not prevent their reelection most of the times (Jiménez and Caínzos, 2006). What remains unsolved, however, is the remarkable variability in this pattern. This paper explores the micro-level variables that might mediate the effect of corruption scandal on the votes. We focus on three factors: ideological closeness to the incumbent party, political sophistication, and employment status. Our results provide only partial support for our hypothesis, suggesting that the effects of corruption are much more complex than what may seem at first sight.

1. Introduction

One of the leading theories of voting behavior argues that people hold accountable incumbents for their performance in office during the previous term. According to this idea, which dates back to Key (1966), as people progressively value better the outcomes produced by the current ruler/s, they become more likely to vote for her/their reelection. Hence, politicians in government that have not misbehaved are, *ceteris paribus*, more prone to stay in power after the next election. The question, however, that evidently follows from this claim is what accounts for the already well-established lack of electoral punishment of political scandals?

Trying to specify those factors that create such disconnection between political corruption and incumbents' survival in office, political scientists have frequently referred to the "paradox of unpopular corruption and popular corrupt politicians" (Kurer, 2001). On the one hand, individuals seem to learn about episodes of political corruption and come to dislike them. On the other hand, works drawing on case studies or comparative evidence generally agree that political scandals have very small electoral effects. Thus, rather than serving as a way of identifying "bad types", corruption is deemed highly inconsequential for the act of voting. Although political scandals have been employed in several studies of voting behavior, it was not until very recently that the underlying mechanism accounting for their lack of effect started to be investigated. The question motivating this fresh look on the role of corruption now is rather simple: what is it that is so wrong about corruption and why does not it have any electoral impact?

The answer, we will argue, lies in the recognition that individual characteristics of the citizens can potentially have an important modifying impact of their voting behavior. Hence, the principal theory justifying this seemingly paradoxical lack of electoral punishment for political scandals is that of individual heterogeneity. The idea behind this theory is that when an episode of corruption takes place, a certain combination of constraints, incentives and information has to exist in order to drive people to change their political preferences and vote against the incumbent. Although the absence of electoral punishment of political scandals has been detected in the case of Spanish local elections, it is still unclear whether the logic of heterogeneous electoral effects of corruption could apply to such institutional context, where vote choice is typically determined by local causes and the explanatory power of other classic factors of electoral behavior is accordingly low. Small levels of electoral punishment of corrupt leaders not

only turn the research question of this paper more intriguing, but, more importantly, they make the political problem involved in it more pressing, creating severe difficulties in establishing a real accountability linkage between the rulers and the ruled.

The aim of this study is to address this question more carefully by looking at the Spanish local elections in 2007 and 2011. In so doing, we also provide the first explicit and comprehensive test of the existence of non-linear effects of corruption on vote totals of a given party. We focus on a particular case of study in which we could actually expect corruption to play a certain role, namely Spanish local elections, because this phenomenon is relatively common there. Although we provide a more detailed definition of corruption later in the paper, it is sufficient for the moment to define it as “the misuse of public office for private gain” (Bardham, 1997). For citizens registered in municipalities where the local incumbent has been charged with corruption, voting for her reelection could entail several negative outcomes – namely, distortion of economic performance, erosion of the legitimacy of the government and decrease of the interpersonal trust in a given society. The interesting question, then, is whether corrupt mayors are less likely to be reelected as a result of her misbehavior.

After providing the theoretical framework within which this question will be examined, we argue in detail how political scandals are expected to have a non-linear impact on the electoral performance of the incumbents. We then provide tests for three hypotheses. First, we analyze whether voters are less likely to punish corrupt mayors that are ideologically closer. Second, we focus on the role of political sophistication, comparing the propensity to vote an incumbent involved in a case of corruption whether the voter is highly educated or not. Finally, we examine whether the potentially negative impact of corruption on voters’ behavior is significantly stronger for those that are currently unemployed. All in all, these models do seldom reveal strong interactive effects of corruption on subsequent electoral preferences.

2. The Electoral Consequences of Corruption Scandals

2.1 Political Corruption and Electoral Accountability

Political corruption is known to have negative economic, political and social consequences. When political representatives “misuse public office for their private gain” (Sandholtz and Koetzle, 2000), they undermine basic principles of a representative democracy, such as

accountability, equality, and inclusiveness (Warren, 2004). Empirical studies have shown that pervasive political corruption hinders economic growth and generates income inequality (Nye, 1967; Mauro, 1995; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Endemic corruption also affects international investment and the quality of service that the public administration provides (Lambsdorff, 1999). At the political level, citizens are less trustful of corrupt incumbents (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Magalhaes, 2006). Finally, when corrupt practices are the norm within a country, social trust is lower, thus hampering social exchanges (Della Porta, 1997).

Given its widespread negative effects, one would expect citizens to view political corruption as something to be avoided, and therefore to punish their representatives when they are involved in such practices. More specifically, if we assume that elections serve the double purpose of selecting competent representatives and creating incentives for them to remain in good standing (Fearon, 1999), we should observe that citizens not only do not vote again for those who were involved in corruption scandals, but also do not select parties that include members accused of being corrupt. As a result, from this normative perspective, we should find the electoral punishment of corrupt incumbents to be large enough to prevent their reelection.

However, previous research seems to offer a completely different perspective. In the case of U.S. congressional elections, the studies of Peters and Welch (1980) and Welch and Hibbing (1997) show that, between 1968 and 1990, 75% of running corrupt incumbents was reelected. In 1992, after the House Bank scandal was uncovered, even though 60% of congressmen were guilty of at least one overdraft, only 7.5% of those that ran for reelection were defeated in the general election (Banducci and Karp, 1994; Jacobson and Dimock, 1994). Furthermore, Fackler and Lin (1995) show that information about corruption has a significant negative impact on the electoral performance of incumbent presidents, and that corruption is not a good predictor of their probability of being reelected. Studies of the Watergate and Lewinsky scandals demonstrate that corruption had significant but small effects on incumbents' electoral performance (Uslaner and Conway, 1985; Jacobson, 1999).

Comparative studies of this issue offer a similar insight. In Spain, Jiménez (2007), Fernández-Vázquez and Rivero (2010) and Costas et al. (2010) highlight that around 70% of the mayors involved in corruption scandals before the 2007 local elections were reelected, and that this type of scandal had a very minor impact on the election results. In a similar study of the

2011 elections, Barberá and Fernández-Vázquez (2012) also found that corruption scandals had a limited electoral effect. The study of Lafay and Servais (1999) yields a somewhat lower but still puzzling figure: 57.5% of mayors in scandals situations were reelected in the 1995 French local election. Moreover, a thorough study of Italian legislative elections from 1948 to 1994 (Chang et al. 2010) points to a similar percentage: 51% of charged deputies were reelected, compared to 58% of the putatively honest representatives.

In conclusion, despite our normative expectations, previous studies clearly show that, although corruption scandals usually do have significant effects on electoral behavior, their influence is usually quite modest (Jiménez and Caínzos, 2006, p.194); and often the magnitude of the electoral punishment is not sufficient to prevent the reelection of corrupt incumbents. For instance, as Welch and Hibbing (1997) explain in summarizing the results of Peters and Welch (1980), “Most incumbents during the time period they studied had a safety zone of sufficient size to survive the loss of 6 to 11 percentage points in electoral margins that charges of corruption bring about.” In other words, these results seem to be driven by what Kurer (2001) calls the “paradox of unpopular corruption and popular corrupt politicians.”

A dimension of this puzzle that is usually neglected is that electoral corruption has very heterogeneous electoral consequences. A more thorough look at the electoral fortunes of corrupt representatives in the previous examples shows a large variation in the outcome of a corruption scandal. While some corrupt mayors, members of congress or deputies lost more than half of their previous vote share, many others were able to maintain or even to improve their previous electoral support, easily gaining reelection. What can account for these differences? Previous literature has focused primarily on the specific characteristics of the corruption scandal and the politician involved in it (Chang et al., 2010, Rivero and Fernández-Vázquez, 2011) or the institutional setting (Manzetti and Wilson, 2007, Tavits, 2007, Ferraz and Finan, 2008), but little attention has been given to the individual variables that mediate the impact of political corruption on the vote choice (Klasnja et al., 2012, Anduiza et al., 2014).

2.2 The Heterogeneous Electoral Effects of Corruption Scandals

The core of our argument is the idea that the electoral punishment of incumbents charged with corruption, measured as the loss in support in the election following the formulation of the charges, is neither homogeneous at the aggregate level nor at the individual level, and that it is inadequate to presume that every corruption scandal will have the same electoral impact.

Corruption should not be misunderstood as a simple phenomenon – that is, with direct consequences and a uniform effect on the electorate – but rather as a complex process, with an uncertain impact, mediated by many factors operating at different levels. More specifically, we hypothesize that there are three types of causal mechanisms that affect the extent to which voters hold their representatives accountable: constraints, incentives, and information. In other words, a citizen may knowingly vote for a corrupt politician when he is constrained to do so, when he lacks incentives to withdraw his electoral support, or when he does not have enough information. The existing literature focuses on how macro-level factors affect these three elements. The institutional setting in which the scandal takes place, the characteristics of the corruption charges, and who is accused with them, as well as the political context that surrounds it have been found to mediate the electoral consequences of corruption, due to either of the three causal mechanisms.

In the first place, institutional configurations that ease the identification of responsibility (Tavits, 2007) have been found to increase political accountability because they allow voters to evaluate and punish their representatives more effectively. Persson et al. (2003), Kunicova and Rose-Ackerman (2005), and Chang et al. (2010) discuss how different aspects of the electoral system constrain voters' ability to punish representatives individually. Manzetti and Wilson (2007) show that the strength of democratic institutions is a significant mediating factor in the relationship between corruption and government support. How a corrupt representative (and her party) reacts to the scandal also constrains voters' ability to exercise political accountability (Barreiro and Sánchez-Cuenca 2000). In some occasions, the corrupt incumbent decides to “retire strategically” (Kanthak, 2011) in order to limit the negative electoral consequences for her own party. However, as Chang et al. (2010) show, the empirical evidence is inconclusive.

Secondly, the political, social, and economic context in the moment of the election also plays an important role in defining voters' incentives to punish corruption. Some citizens may be

willing to establish an “implicit trading” (Rundquist et al., 1977) with a corrupt incumbent if her performance in office is positive. For example, Barberá and Fernández-Vázquez (2012) found that corrupt practices that revert in a short-term economic benefit are rewarded electorally. However, a frequent conclusion in the literature is that information is the crucial element explaining to what extent citizens punish political corruption. Ferraz and Finan (2008), Golden et al. (2010) and Chong et al. (2011) examine how exogenous flows of information about corrupt practices reduce voters’ support for corrupt representatives, as posited by a theory of political accountability where the informational environment is essential in facilitating electoral control.

As we can see, most existing studies test their hypotheses using macro-level data, despite the fact that the causal mechanisms they use to justify their findings have a micro-level rationale. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how individual-level factors, such as partisanship, political interest, and cognitive skills mediate voters’ reaction to corruption scandals. To our knowledge, only two studies have examined these relationships systematically. Klasnja et al. (2012) find that increased personal exposure to corruption and increased perception of the prevalence of corruption in politics drive voters away from the incumbent. Anduiza et al. (2014) show that voters’ perception of corruption charges depends on whether their partisan affiliation aligns with that of the politician involved, but this partisan bias disappears for individuals who are more politically sophisticated.

Following up on these studies, we argue that two sets of individual factors explain the extent to which citizens knowingly vote for a corrupt politician. On one hand, ideological / partisan affiliation and voters’ evaluations of the political performance of the corrupt incumbent affect individual incentives to reward or punish him. As Anduiza et al. (2014) argue, even when voters are informed about the corruption charges, they may still decide to show their support because they either do not give credibility to the accusation (Barreiro and Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000), or they do not consider it important enough compared to other aspects of the incumbent’s performance in office.

In this specific case we test the impact of party and ideological attachment to the party in office or incumbent. Rundquist et al. (1977) already suggested how individuals who strongly felt attached to the corrupt party are more likely to not change their vote. In the same vein, voters will support a particular candidate even if he is corrupt when they share the ideological position.

As we mentioned above, voting for corrupt candidates with similar ideologies may be explained 1) because ideological voters give less credibility to the cases of corruption coming from their preferred parties, especially when cases were suited by the political opposition, 2) because they give preeminence to other aspects of the incumbents' performance, or 3) because they cannot find an alternative good candidate from the ideological point of view, and resign themselves to vote for the previous corrupt incumbent (Persson et al.. 2003). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals are more likely to vote for a corrupt incumbent when they share the same ideological position.

The second set of factors is related to voters' level of information about the corruption charges. Not all citizens are equally exposed to political information, and these differences are particularly acute when it comes to their local representatives, whose actions do not receive broad coverage in the media. Furthermore, even if they receive the same level of information, understanding the nature of corruption charges and who is involved in the scandal is a complex process that requires a certain level of political sophistication, which increases the heterogeneity in voters' awareness of the political scandal. Accordingly, we state the relevance of education for the understanding of corruption and allocation of responsibilities among the corrupted politicians, regardless their party or ideological affiliation. This mechanism was already pointed out by McCann and Domínguez, (1998) who found for Mexico that better educated respondents are more likely to accurately perceive the incidence of corruption in their cities. As a result, and using education as a proxy, we hypothesize that both political interest and political sophistication affect the extent to which voters punish corruption:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals are more likely to vote for a corrupt incumbent when they are less politically sophisticated.

The third factor considered in this article evaluates the assessment of corruption by unemployed individuals. Previous studies on political behaviour and corruption has not accounted for employment status as a factor that may mediate the relationship between voting and corruption. A first attempt was carried out by Popova (2010) for the case of Russia, finding that corruption has an indirect and homogeneous effect on the voting behaviour of individuals

regardless of their employment status. However, there is a broad literature on economic voting that points out the important effect of employment status on the likelihood to vote the incumbent (Maravall and Fraile 2001). The collective of unemployed people suffers the negative consequences of the economy and, as a result, are more likely to blame incumbents for poor performance. Accordingly, we assume that unemployed have additional reasons to vote and punish corruption through their vote than other individuals. Unemployed citizens are particularly sensitive to public policies, since their income depends on social or unemployment benefits, and their likelihood of finding a job depends on the quality of the employment programs implemented by the government. Given that corruption has a negative impact on economic growth, investment, and social redistribution (Theobald, 1990; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Treisman, 2000), we thus hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Individuals are less likely to vote for a corrupt incumbent when they are unemployed.

3. Research Design

3.a Corruption Scandals in Spanish Municipalities, 2003-2011

Spain is a particularly interesting case of study given the multiplicity of corruption scandals that have emerged at the local level there over the past decade. The large heterogeneity in the demographic and political composition of Spanish municipalities ensures that we have enough variation to test our hypotheses. Spain also has one of the highest levels of political corruption in Western Europe according to Transparency International, which makes our findings substantively relevant. Furthermore, different corruption scandals were particularly salient during the electoral campaigns in 2007 and 2011, when most journalistic accounts of the results highlighted the apparent lack of electoral punishment with headlines such as “Corrupt incumbents are forgiven by voters” and “Voters are immune to corruption” (see El País, May 29th, 2011, or El Mundo, May 23rd, 2011 for some examples).

The apparent lack of electoral accountability in Spanish local elections has been examined by Jiménez (2008), Rivero and Fernández-Vázquez (2010), Costas et al. (2010), and

Barberá and Fernández-Vázquez (2011). Using only aggregate-level data, these authors find that corruption scandals had a significant electoral impact; on average, corrupt incumbents lost around 5% of their previous vote share. However, in most cases this change was not large enough to prevent the reelection of the incumbent mayor.

In this paper we revisit the analysis of these studies to understand the magnitude of the electoral punishment after a corruption scandal. However, our contribution lies in the use of individual-level data from the post-election surveys conducted by the “Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas” (Center for Sociological Research, CIS) in 2007 and 2011 (surveys 2707 to 2719 and 2870 to 2872). We are grateful to the CIS for providing access to a partially non-anonymous version of these surveys that allowed us to identify the municipality in which each respondent is registered to vote. By combining these surveys with the existing data sets of corruption scandals between 2003 and 2011 (Jiménez, 2008; Barberá and Fernández-Vázquez, 2012), we were able to distinguish which individuals were exposed to a corruption scandal in our period of analysis.

Our dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator measuring whether the respondent voted for the incumbent party at the local level (value 1) or not (0). Abstention has been coded as a missing value, and all our regression models apply case wise deletion. Our assumption is that corruption does not have a significant effect on turnout. In order to show that this is indeed the case, as a robustness check we have replicated all our models with individual turnout as a dependent variable. Results do not show any systematic difference in this regard between “corrupt” and “non-corrupt” municipalities and are available upon request.

Our other explanatory variables are: a) Ideology, measured on a 10-point Likert scale where 1 is extreme left and 10 is extreme right, b) Education, which ranges from lower to higher levels of education (values from 1 to 10), c) Unemployment, a *dummy variable* coded with value 1 for unemployed people and 0 for the rest (this includes employed citizens, retired people, students, housewives, etc.). Additionally, several other socio-demographic variables are used in the analyses as controls, namely age, sex, and the percentage of unemployed population in the municipality.

3.b The effect of corruption and voters' characteristics

Until recently, research on electoral behavior has been dominated by a persistent dichotomy between explanations at the individual level and others that highlight the impact of aggregate factors on election results. Many studies have analyzed the individual-specific characteristics that are related to vote choice. In this regard, it has clearly been established that political attitudes and socio-demographic factors have an important effect on citizens' voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960; Harrop and Miller, 1987; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009). However, there is also much research pointing to the important effect of contextual characteristics such as the state of the economy (e.g., Powell and Whitten, 1993; Whitten and Palmer, 1999), government's performance in different areas (e.g., Ferejohn, 1986; Weatherford, 1987; Fearon, 1999), or political scandals (Jiménez and Caínzos, 2006) on the electoral prospects of parties. More recently, though, scholars have aimed to overcome this traditional dichotomy, pointing out that, rather than separate logics, both levels of aggregation should be considered as complementary, as they affect political behavior in interaction one with another (Anduiza, 1999).

To be sure, the combination of a variety of explanatory factors that operate at different levels of aggregation is not exclusive to electoral behavior research. Thus, multi-level analysis has been employed by scholars in order to explain different phenomena such as political tolerance (Peffley and Rohrschneider, 2003; Weldon, 2006), political accountability at the sub-national level in America (Rudolph, 2003), attitudes towards democracy in Africa (Mattes and Bratton, 2007), support for agriculture subsidies in OECD countries (Park and Jensen, 2007), trust in political institutions in Europe (Criado and Herreros, 2007), trust in American politicians (Kelleher and Wolak, 2007), electoral malpractices (Birch, 2008), and membership in political associations (Morales, 2006), among others.

This piece of research is aimed at analyzing particular mechanisms linking individual decisions and contextual characteristics. We have claimed earlier that individuals' responses to corruption are not homogeneous. Rather, they depend on certain individual characteristics that should be accounted for in order to successfully deal with the effects of aggregate factors on voters' behavior. This particular way of modeling behavior is increasingly more frequent in the literature and has, in our view, yielded very fruitful results. Understanding that citizens are part of a context that conditions their behavioral motives and rationale is thus a very important step in

order to provide overarching explanations in the context of voting behavior (Johnston *et al.*, 2005; Pardos-Prado and Dinas, 2010).

The logic behind this paper is that factors that explain electoral behavior yield a different impact depending on both individual and contextual characteristics. It cannot be just assumed that there is a direct and automatic link between governments' action (such as public investment, or political corruption) or its outcomes (such as unemployment levels) and citizens' support for the party/ies in office. On the contrary, when analyzing the impact of the former on the latter, it is important to take into consideration factors such as whether there is a single-party or a coalition government, or whether the same party holds office at both the national and the local level. Similarly, assuming that corruption scandals have a direct impact on every citizen's chances to vote for the party/ies in office seems naïve in the light of the negative findings in the literature. Awareness of corruption varies across groups of voters, as also does the degree to which they may be willing to take that information into account when casting their vote. Individual-specific characteristics moderate or exacerbate the effect of corruption scandals.

All these arguments justify the inclusion of variables at different levels of aggregation. Usually, multi-level models and cross-level interactions are the best way to proceed in this regard. However, multi-level models are somewhat more demanding in terms of statistical power, which is of special concern to studies of corruption, where effects found are often small (which does not always mean nonexistent) and conditioned by different variables. For this reason, we will mainly present results coming from ordinary regression models, although we will also report whether results change substantially when multi-level models are employed instead.

4. Results

We performed different logistic regression analyses in order to test our hypotheses. Even if most of our expectations relate to interaction effects between corruption and several individual-specific characteristics, we started out by checking whether there is a negative effect of corruption on vote for the incumbents in Spanish local elections. Following this, we performed several interaction models in order to allow for the possibility that corruption scandals do not have a homogeneous effect but rather depend on the party and the election that we look at.

Results are presented in Table 1. As in the rest of the models, the dependent variable was vote for the incumbent. Apart from the relevant variables, several other socio-demographic variables were used as controls, namely age, sex, education, and being unemployed; the percentage of unemployed population in the municipality was introduced in Models 1 and 2 as a further control.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

As can be observed in Model 1, corruption scandals do not seem to have a significant effect on support for the incumbent. In fact, the effect of the coefficient goes in the opposite direction than expected (i.e., it is positive). This is, however, not surprising, given the panoply of negative results that, as mentioned, have been found by other scholars in this regard. It is, nevertheless, possible that corruption only affects certain parties and at certain elections. For example, we did not expect a strong effect of corruption in the 2011 local elections. These elections were seen by many analysts and commentators as a perfect opportunity for voters to punish the bad economic performance and the dramatic austerity policies of the party in national office (i.e., the Socialist Party – PSOE). Thus, it is possible that voters did not have in mind local issues, including local corruption scandals, when they cast their vote. Model 2 seems to support this expectation. In order to facilitate the interpretation of all the interactions included in the model, we provide the marginal effects of corruption expressed in terms of probability to vote for the incumbent in Table 2. We do so by distinguishing by local election (2007 and 2011) and party (socialist party – PSOE, conservative party – PP, and “others”). Let us focus on the 2007 election first. As can be seen, corruption had a negative effect on the probability to vote for incumbents of both PP and PSOE, the main nationwide parties in Spain. This is indeed clear proof that voters are not totally immune to corruption scandals. However, when the rest of the parties are looked at, it turns out that the effect in this case is positive and significant, which is certainly striking. Most of the cases of corruption among small parties (classified as “others”) were concentrated in one regional party of the Canary Islands (the Canary Coalition party), which seems to have taken advantage of rather than been damaged by corruption scandals. It is

difficult to know why this is the case, but we suggest that the spread of certain clientelistic networks by some small local parties, especially in small villages, may be part of the explanation.¹

When we look at 2011, however, results do not follow the same pattern in any regard. Much as expected, the effect of corruption was not statistically significant for any party in that particular election year. This finding supports our claim that the effect of corruption may also depend on certain contextual factors related to the characteristics of electoral competition.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Results also provide some evidence that corruption may have an effect on the electoral prospects of parties on occasion. We, however, hypothesized that this effect must vary depending on certain voters' characteristics. Thus, according to H1, the chances that an individual decides to support a corrupt incumbent will be higher when both voter and incumbent share the same political orientations. In order to test this, an interaction between corruption and the respondents' declared ideological position was introduced. As we already pointed out, the latter is measured by a 10-point Likert scale where 1 is extreme left and 10 is extreme right. As the relationship between ideological self-location and vote is expected to be negative for left-wing parties and positive for right-wing parties, we split the sample into incumbents of PP, on the one hand, and incumbents of PSOE on the other. We also controlled for the percentage of votes obtained by the incumbent party in each municipality in the previous election. Further, we ran different models for 2007 and 2011, since effects of corruption in the latter year do not seem likely on the basis of our previous findings.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

¹ It must be mentioned that effects did not change when random effects by municipality were introduced. In fact, the negative effect of corruption on support for PSOE incumbents became even more strongly significant in the hierarchical model ($p < 0.001$).

The interaction between corruption and ideology does not provide strong support for H1 (see Models 3-6). None of the interaction coefficients come up significant at first sight. However, since the statistical significance of the interactions is impossible to assess by only looking at the coefficients and the standard errors, we also computed the discrete effect of corruption on electoral support of the incumbent for the whole range of ideology. Only in one of the cases did we find a statistically significant impact: in 2007, the effect of corruption seems to decrease further the chances to vote for a PSOE incumbent for those who declare themselves center to center-right voters.² This effect is shown in Figure 1 and is indeed significant. It seems that moderate voters, especially those located in positions 5 to 7, were much more reluctant to vote for a PSOE incumbent when corruption charges were in place. This negative effect is somewhat reduced (even though it is still significant) for those located between positions 7 and 10, probably because the chances for those voters to support a candidate of PSOE are already quite low.³ Moreover, all the effects remained significant after the introduction of random-effects by municipality.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

On the basis of our next hypothesis (H2), less sophisticated individuals are expected to be less affected by corruption when casting their vote. To test this hypothesis, we used education as a proxy for political sophistication. Thus, a standardized measure where 0 corresponds to individuals with no formal education and 1 to the maximum level of education was interacted with corruption in Table 4 (Models 7-10). On the basis of our calculations, the marginal effect of the interaction was only significant in 2007 (see the plots in Figure 2), and suggested that more educated voters were less likely to vote for PSOE incumbents when these were corrupt that year. It must be said, however, that the statistical significance was not reached when a hierarchical

² Results of non-significant interaction effects are not shown here, but they are available upon request.

³ A similar effect is found for PSOE in 2007, but in this case it is not statistically significant.

model was used, but we tend to think that this is due to the lack of statistical power in these models. Interaction effects were not found for PP incumbents in any case.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Our last hypothesis referred to voters' employment status. It is possible, we argued, that voters who are unemployed have a more negative opinion of political corruption because of the implications that the latter may have in terms of lack of investment in job-generating activities or in social policies (H3). In order to test this hypothesis, we proceeded as before introducing an interaction, this time between corruption and personal jobless situation. Results are shown in Table 5 (Models 11-14). Again, the interaction effect is not evident at first sight, but the marginal effects of corruption on the variable of interest are shown in Table 6. As can be observed, corruption does not seem to increase punishment of the incumbent among unemployed voters in general. There is, however, an exception: unemployed voters were less likely to vote for PSOE incumbents when these were corrupted,⁴ although the effect disappears again when a hierarchical model is employed.

[TABLES 5 AND 6 ABOUT HERE]

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 find only partial support in our data. Interestingly enough, corruption mediates the effect of other factors only in the case of PSOE. This suggests that, even if both parties were negatively impacted by corruption (at least in 2007), some voters were particularly prone to punish corrupted PSOE incumbents, whereas in the case of PP this effect

⁴ Another exception is the PP in 2011. In this case, it is employed voters that seem more likely to support corrupted PP incumbents. However, the effect is hardly significant at standard levels.

was more homogeneously distributed. All in all, evidence supports our argument that the effects of corruption are much more complex than may seem at first sight.

5. Conclusion

Our central argument in this paper is that electoral punishment of incumbents with corruption charges is not homogenous. This is so because different individuals give a different weight to corruption scandals in their vote decisions, but also because the extent to which corruption has an impact on the vote depends pretty much on the type and characteristics of the elections that we look at. We thus argued that it is wrong to presume that every corruption scandal will have the same electoral impact, or that it will affect all political parties or all voters to the same extent.

Evidence from Spanish local elections supports our arguments in several regards. First, we have shown that corruption had a negative impact on the support of the two main statewide political parties in the 2007 local elections. A positive effect was also found for other parties, but this was very much driven by a small local party who seems to have actually gained support in those places where their incumbents were accused of corruption. This indeed deserves further research and is an interesting finding that demonstrates that effects of corruption may also vary not only across individuals or elections, but also across political parties.

In contrast with the 2007 elections, no significant impact of corruption was found in 2011. We had argued earlier that this was much expected, since great attention was paid in those elections to aspects of national politics related to the economic crisis and the austerity measures put forward by the socialist government. The saliency of national-specific issues may have led voters to relegate the issue of local corruption to a lower level of importance. This, we think, is a key aspect that shows that the effect of corruption cannot be taken for granted.

We also claimed that corruption has a different effect depending on the characteristics of voters. Thus, three hypotheses were developed regarding ideological position, political sophistication and personal economic situation. The expectation was for voters that are closer to the political position of a given party to be less affected by corruption than the rest. In other words, voters will be less likely to punish a corrupt incumbent that is close to their own

ideological position. We thus compared the effect for PP and PSOE incumbents respectively and found some support for this first hypothesis in our data. In 2011, an election year for which significant effects of corruption had not been found, the chances for center, center-right and right-wing voters to support PSOE incumbents greatly diminished when corruption charges were present. However, we did not find any other significant effect of the interaction between ideology and corruption in any other case.

With regard to the second hypothesis, politically sophisticated voters were expected to punish corrupt incumbents with more intensity. Partial support for this hypothesis was found, but only in 2007, when more educated voters tended to punish more PSOE incumbents when charges of corruption had been leveled against them. Evidence for our third hypothesis was also found only in this single case. We had argued that unemployed voters should be more reluctant than employed voters to support a corrupt incumbent, and it was only for PSOE incumbents in 2007 that we found a significant effect in this regard. Effects for these last two hypotheses were not strong enough so as to remain significant when a multilevel model was introduced. This, however, should be taken with some caution. Should we interpret this as a proof that no effect is really present, we might be running the risk of incurring in a type-II error. It is possible that a weak effect does still exist and that the lack of significance may be caused by a more demanding kind of analysis for which more statistical power would perhaps be needed.

Be that as it may, this paper provides evidence that some corruption effects do indeed exist, but that these are neither homogeneous nor constant across elections. Indeed, much more research has to be done in order to identify the conditions under which corruption has an impact on voters' behavior. But the fact that some effects appear to be present is good news for democratic accountability as it shows that voters or at least some groups thereof are not totally immune to corruption after all.

6. References

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APPENDIX: TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Effects of corruption on the propensity to vote for the incumbent (dependent variable) in Spanish local elections

VARIABLES	(1) Baseline	(2) By party and election
Corruption	0.225 (0.144)	1.100*** (0.319)
conservative incumbent (PP)		0.882*** (0.200)
socialist incumbent (PSOE)		1.038*** (0.189)
other incumbents		Ref.
2011 election	-0.185* (0.0987)	-0.743** (0.332)
corruption : 2011 election		0.0241 (0.677)
2011 election : PP		0.945*** (0.340)
2011 election : PSOE		0.243 (0.333)
corruption : PP		-1.284*** (0.351)
corruption : PSOE		-1.973** (0.910)
2011 election : corruption : PP		0.727 (0.737)
2011 election : corruption : PSOE		0.665 (1.108)
unemployed	-0.0497 (0.0604)	-0.0680 (0.0621)
Percent of unemployed	-0.00260 (0.0121)	-0.00601 (0.0117)
Age	0.00644*** (0.00148)	0.00612*** (0.00149)
Education	-0.531*** (0.120)	-0.621*** (0.119)
Male	-0.0668* (0.0384)	-0.0675* (0.0388)
Constant	-0.254 (0.174)	-1.006*** (0.240)
Region dummies	YES	YES
Observations	11,992	11,992

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses;
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2. Marginal effects (probabilities) of corruption on the propensity to vote for the incumbent

2007 Elections		2011 Elections	
PP	-0.241***	PP	0.007
PSOE	-0.348**	PSOE	-0.112
OTHERS	0.254***	OTHERS	0.198

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01; they are obtained from Model 2 in Table 1; control variables are set at their means (continuous) or their modes (dummies).

Table 3. Interaction effects of corruption and ideology on the propensity to vote for the incumbent

VARIABLES	(3) 2007-PSOE	(4) 2007-PP	(5) 2011-PSOE	(6) 2011-PP
age	0.00378 (0.00374)	0.0107*** (0.00398)	0.00763** (0.00384)	0.000817 (0.00346)
education	-1.154*** (0.222)	0.482 (0.297)	-1.506*** (0.293)	-0.286 (0.245)
male	-0.135 (0.0832)	-0.0994 (0.104)	-0.122 (0.113)	-0.0701 (0.102)
corruption	-1.143 (2.075)	0.992 (2.182)	1.581 (1.364)	-0.961 (1.632)
ideology	-0.598*** (0.0409)	1.474*** (0.122)	-0.710*** (0.0425)	1.219*** (0.124)
corruption * ideology	0.0668 (0.307)	-0.200 (0.436)	-0.398 (0.282)	0.267 (0.342)
unemployed	0.0104 (0.167)	0.0207 (0.242)	-0.237 (0.149)	0.0520 (0.143)
Percent of unemployed	2.234*** (0.587)	2.129 (1.326)	4.184*** (0.688)	1.970** (0.971)
Constant	2.286*** (0.390)	-9.971*** (1.129)	1.520*** (0.512)	-6.290*** (1.416)
Region dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	2,281	2,557	2,338	2,834

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses;
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure 1. Discrete change in the effect of ideology produced by corruption on the propensity to vote for a PSOE incumbent in 2011

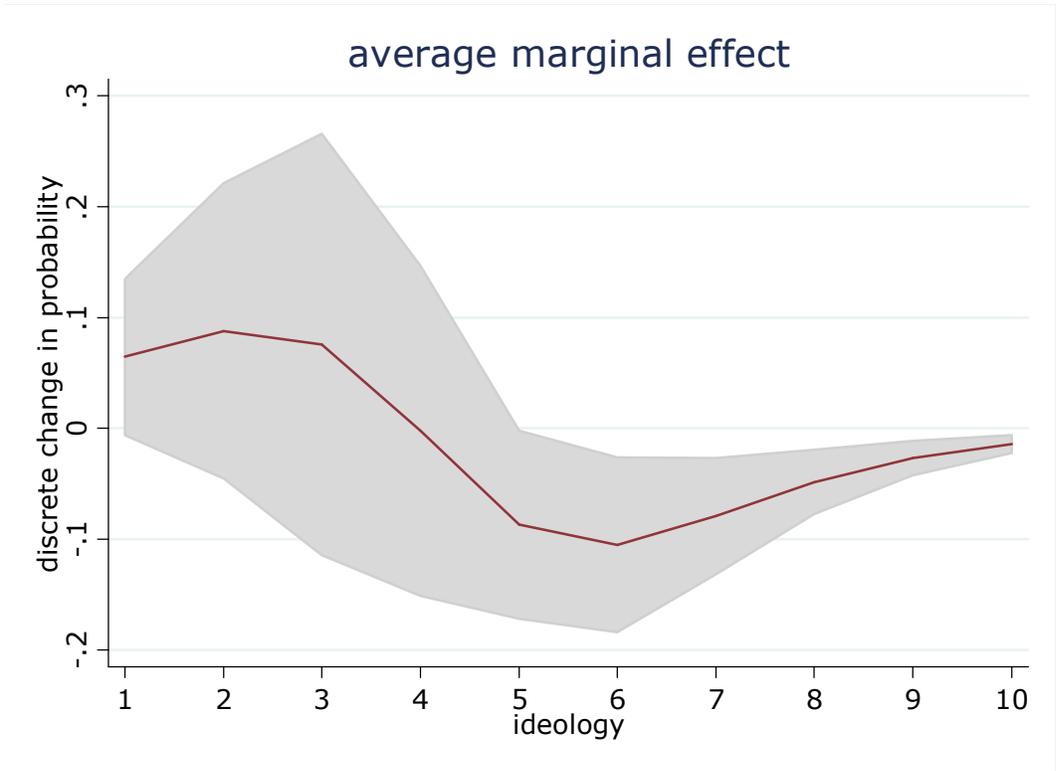


Table 4. Interaction effects of corruption and education on the propensity to vote for the incumbent

VARIABLES	(7) 2007 - PSOE	(8) 2007-PP	(9) 2011-PSOE	(10) 2007-PP
age	0.000372 (0.00297)	0.0164*** (0.00282)	0.00476* (0.00246)	0.00805*** (0.00273)
male	-0.0441 (0.0776)	-0.120 (0.0911)	-0.0663 (0.0835)	-0.0897 (0.0767)
corruption	0.497 (1.659)	0.225 (0.451)	-0.478 (0.547)	0.341 (0.555)
education	-0.965*** (0.190)	0.135 (0.250)	-1.021*** (0.254)	-0.398* (0.211)
corruption * education	-2.660 (3.332)	-0.633 (0.752)	0.207 (1.352)	0.297 (0.881)
Percent of unemployed	2.063*** (0.506)	1.461* (0.766)	3.893*** (0.562)	2.017*** (0.620)
Constant	-0.361 (0.293)	-1.500*** (0.578)	-1.920*** (0.344)	-0.214 (0.762)
Region dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	2,543	2,850	2,664	3,147

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses;

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure 2. Discrete change in the effect of education produced by corruption on the propensity to vote for a PSOE incumbent in 2007

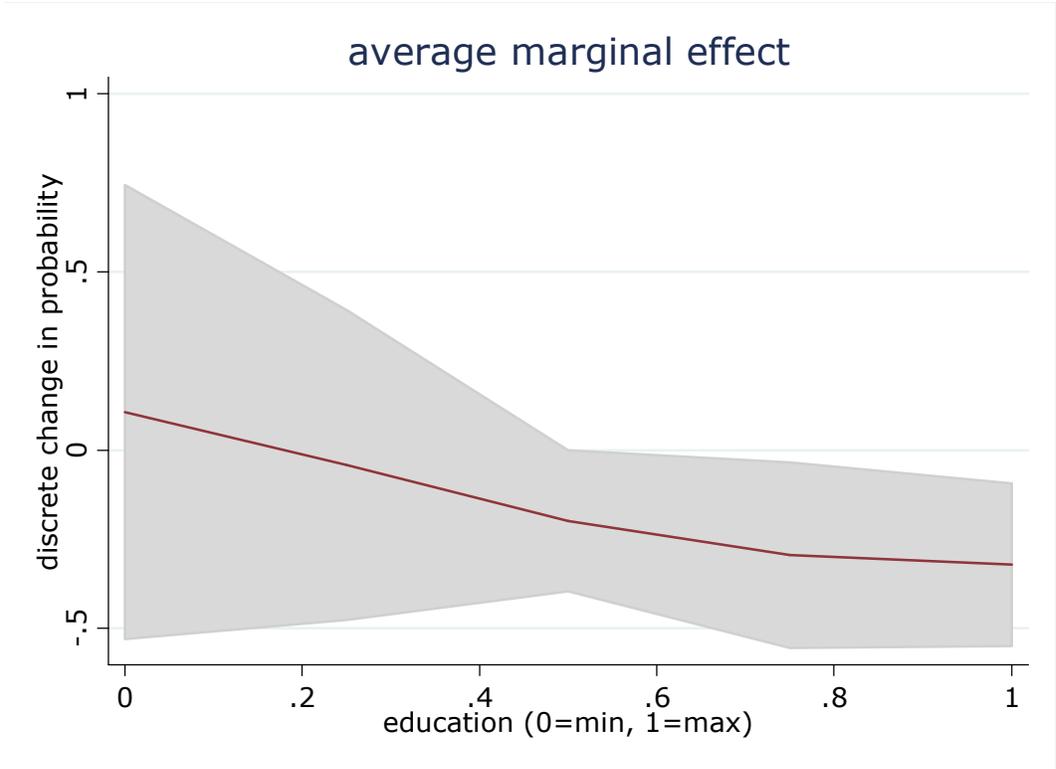


Table 5. Interaction effects of corruption and employment status on the propensity to vote for the incumbent

VARIABLES	(11) PSOE-2007	(12) PP-2007	(13) PSOE-2011	(14) PP-2011
age	0.000279 (0.00307)	0.0163*** (0.00288)	0.00309 (0.00260)	0.00767*** (0.00285)
education	-1.008*** (0.193)	0.104 (0.255)	-1.063*** (0.255)	-0.394* (0.215)
male	-0.0536 (0.0783)	-0.119 (0.0906)	-0.0734 (0.0837)	-0.0851 (0.0761)
corruption	-0.646 (0.679)	-0.0983 (0.205)	-0.353 (0.288)	0.476 (0.297)
unemployed	-0.0410 (0.145)	-0.117 (0.132)	-0.241** (0.113)	-0.0244 (0.112)
corruption * unemployed	0.166 (0.707)	0.433 (1.038)	-0.235 (0.624)	0.163 (0.597)
Percent of unemployed	2.126***	1.456*	3.895***	2.040***
Constant	-0.349 (0.301)	-1.469** (0.582)	-1.792*** (0.343)	-0.204 (0.765)
Region dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	2,528	2,838	2,653	3,139

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses;
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 6. Marginal effects (probabilities) of corruption on the propensity to vote for the incumbent depending on employment status

	2007 elections		2011 elections	
	PSOE	PP	PSOE	PP
Employed	-0.158	-0.024	-0.080	0.116*
Unemployed	-0.118***	0.085	-0.117	0.154

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. Coefficients are obtained from Models 11-14 in Table 5; control variables are set at their means (continuous) or their modes (dummies).