

Who Benefits from Nationalist Conflict? Vote Choice in the 2017 Regional Election in Catalonia

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Abstract

According to a prominent argument, nationalist conflict benefits parties with extreme positions. Parties with more extreme positions gain votes and those that remain moderate lose votes. However, according to conventional perspectives on voting behaviour, issues have little influence on the way people vote. We consider the exceptional election held in Catalonia in December 2017 following a period of intense conflict surrounding an illegal independence referendum. We show that cross-pressures between prior vote choice and reactions to the events largely account for vote changes. While most Catalans reacted to the events of the referendum crisis in ways that were consistent with their party's positions, some did not. We find that former supporters of parties with nuanced reactions to the crisis shifted to more extreme parties if they had strong pro- or anti-independence reactions. We conclude that nationalist conflict does benefit extreme parties at the expense of moderate, particularly left-wing, parties.

Keywords: Nationalism; Secessionism; Conflict; Voting Behaviour, Spain, Catalonia

Who benefits from nationalist conflict? According to a prominent argument, conflict benefits parties adopting extreme positions. When group identities become salient in heterogeneous societies, in order to remain viable, parties have to adopt strong positions in defence of their group. Parties with more extreme positions gain votes and those that remain moderate lose votes (Horowitz 2000; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). However, according to conventional perspectives on voting behaviour, issues have little influence on the way people vote. A long line of research on voting behaviour suggests that votes are largely rooted in stable characteristics, notably demographics (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968) or long-term attachments to parties (Campbell et al. 1960). Thus, in this view, it is unlikely that short-term factors like issues associated with nationalist conflict influence votes.

More recent studies provide reasons to expect conflict to shift votes. There is evidence that many voters are ambivalent about their party and may be induced to switch parties (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2013). Moreover, Hillygus and Shields (2008) show that many citizens have strong attitudes that conflict with their party and change their vote choice when those attitudes become salient. Nationalist conflict thus may influence vote choice if it primes issues on which voters disagree with the parties they support.

A sequence of spectacular events related to nationalist conflict occurred in fall 2017 in Catalonia. First, the regional government held a referendum on regional independence on 1 October that the Spanish government and Constitutional Court had deemed unconstitutional. In response, the Spanish government sent riot police to prevent the vote. Nevertheless, over two million Catalans participated in the referendum and over 90 per cent voted in favour of independence (Generalitat de Catalunya 2017a).

Nearly a month later, the Catalan Parliament voted to declare Catalan independence. The Spanish government responded by suspending Catalan regional autonomy and called an election to the Catalan Parliament. While the anti-independence *Ciutadans* (Cs, Citizens) party won a plurality of votes and seats, pro-secessionist parties won a narrow majority of seats (Generalitat de Catalunya 2017b). Overall, pro-independence parties received a nearly identical vote share as in the previous election. Does this stability mean that the exceptional events that took place in fall 2017 had no influence on vote choice and confirm the argument that vote choice is determined by long-term factors?

To assess the influence of the events surrounding the independence crisis on Catalans' vote choice in 2017, the [authors' project] project ran a pre-electoral survey of voters in the eight days leading up to the election with 1500 respondents. They were recruited by Survey Sampling International (SSI) and completed an online questionnaire programmed using Qualtrics. It began on 13 December and ended the day of the election.¹ This survey is unique in being the only academic survey conducted in the context of the 2017 Catalan election and in including original questions assessing Catalans' reactions to the conflictual events that occurred in fall 2017. Despite being a pre-election study, it got vote choice from a comparable share of respondents as the post-election study by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). The vote distribution in the survey was also as close to the election result as the CIS survey (see Figure A1 in the Supplementary Appendix).² Moreover, in spite of our reliance on vote intentions, it was conducted right before the election, allowing us to assess Catalan voting behaviour almost at the same time as they voted.

We first consider the literature on the influence of events on vote choice. We then present background on recent developments in Catalan politics, focusing on increasing polarization between pro- and anti-secessionist parties in recent years. In the following section, we discuss reactions to the exceptional events that occurred in fall 2017. We show that most Catalans had strong attitudes with respect to these events. While most people had attitudes that were consistent with their 2015 vote choice, some did not. We then show that Catalans' reactions to these events influenced their vote choice. In particular, many Catalans whose reactions to the events of fall 2017 were inconsistent with the positions of the party they voted for in 2015 moved to a party with a position that was closer to their own.

DO POLITICAL EVENTS INFLUENCE VOTE CHOICE?

According to the theory of ethnic outbidding, when group identity becomes salient in heterogeneous societies, politics becomes polarized between groups. Voters focus on parties' stances vis-à-vis group identity. Parties must show their supporters that they are the best defenders of their group. Parties that adopt ambiguous stances with respect to group identity are punished by voters who reward parties that more clearly defend their group. In short, when intergroup conflict is salient, voters switch from moderate parties to parties with more extreme positions (Horowitz 2000; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972).³

Conventional perspectives in the study of voting behaviour strongly challenge this argument. The Columbia school found that citizens' party preferences are largely fixed and determined by their demographic characteristics and thus short-term factors like events can only have limited influence on vote choice (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968). Relatedly, the Michigan school

found that citizens possess largely stable identifications with parties which induce them to vote for the same party most of the time (Campbell et al. 1960). Around the same time, Converse (1964) showed that voters largely have unstable preferences that do not fit together into coherent ideological bundles. Because of these long-term attachments and because most voters lack strong attitudes on political issues, these early perspectives doubted that short-term factors could influence vote choice (see Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, Chapter 8 for a review of this discussion).

Other studies inspired by Downs (1957) claim that vote choice is explained by citizens' policy preferences. Studies on voting behaviour in Catalonia and the Basque Country have argued that both nationalism and ideology are important determinants of voting behaviour (e.g. Balcells 2007; Fernández-Albertos 2002). However, while such studies show that vote choice is associated with such policy predispositions, these are long-term attitudes. They thus do not show that opinions developed in response to events lead to changes in vote choice.

According to a more recent perspective, political events do influence vote choice (Holbrook 1996; Hillygus 2010). Such influence is partly rooted in voters' ambivalence towards parties. Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) argue that partisans frequently have attitudes that run counter to their partisanship and which make them critical partisans. Such conflicting attitudes reduce their likelihood of voting for their party and make them less biased towards it. Relatedly, Hillygus and Shields (2008) argue that when issues on which citizens have strong attitudes that conflict with their vote choice become salient, they change their vote to make it more consistent with those attitudes. Even if this only moves a small number of votes, such votes may be consequential in a highly competitive environment in which the winner and loser are nearly tied (8).

Many recent studies of voting behaviour consider the influence of both long-term, like demographics, partisanship, and policy predispositions, and short-term factors, like events and policy issues. Most recent research shows that both long- and short-term variables help account for vote choice (e.g. Orriols and Rodon 2016). Many of these studies have adopted the multi-stage model proposed by Miller and Shanks (1996), which allows scholars to assess the impact of both long- and short-term influences on vote choice. It assesses the impact of short-term variables by considering their impact controlling for long-term stable variables. We adopt this approach in the analyses that follow. If events matter, we should find that reactions to them are associated with vote choice even when controlling for longer-term variables.

BACKGROUND ON THE FALL 2017 CRISIS IN CATALONIA

For most of the time since the Spanish transition to democracy, the largest player on the Catalan political scene has been *Convergència i Unió* (CiU, Convergence and Union), a coalition of two centre-right nationalist parties. It controlled the regional government from 1980 to 2003. The main opposition party was the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC, Party of Catalan Socialists), which, while affiliated with the national *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), is formally independent of that party. From 2003 to 2010, the PSC led two tripartite left-of-centre coalitions with left-wing *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV, Initiative for Catalonia Greens) and pro-independence *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC, Catalan Republican Left). The coalition's main accomplishment was reforming Catalonia's statute of autonomy, which sets the terms of regional self-government, in 2006. Both

the CiU and left-of-centre governments focused on language policy and increasing Catalan autonomy, which for years encountered little opposition.

However, during the tripartite governments, opposition to Catalan nationalism became more vocal. In 2006, a new party, *Ciutadans* (Cs, Citizens), voicing clear opposition to Catalan nationalism, entered the regional parliament. The *Partido Popular* (PP, People's Party), the state-wide conservative party, which has always been a minor player in Catalan politics, also became more vocal in opposing Catalan nationalism. It contested the new regional statute before the Spanish Constitutional Court, which in 2010 struck down many important articles of that reform.

Perhaps partly in response to this decision, increasing numbers of Catalans began to demand independence (Rico and Liñeira 2014). For years, ERC was the only party advocating independence in the Catalan Parliament. CiU had always preferred to pursue increased autonomy within Spain. That changed in 2010, when a new party, *Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència* (SI, Catalan Solidarity for Independence) won four seats in elections to the regional parliament. In the same election, *Convergència i Unió* regained control of the regional government. In 2012, after failing to reach an agreement with the central government on increased fiscal autonomy, CiU for the first time began to support secession. Unexpectedly, however, in regional elections held that year, it lost both votes and seats. The other big loser was the Party of Catalan Socialists, which had always supported moderate nationalism. The big winners were ERC and the far-left pro-independence *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (CUP, Popular Unity Candidacy). While pro-secessionist parties gained votes, so did parties opposing independence. *Ciutadans* more than doubled its vote share. The PP also increased its share of votes, although more modestly. In short, parties that had traditionally held moderate positions on

nationalism lost support, while those with more extreme positions, both in favour of and against independence, gained support.⁴

The new CiU government was committed to holding a referendum on Catalan independence. However, the Spanish constitution prohibits such a vote and the Spanish government, under the *Partido Popular* since 2011, vowed to do everything in its power to block a vote on secession. Unable to hold a real referendum, in 2014, the Catalan government held a non-binding popular consultation on secession. The following year, one of CiU's component parties, *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC, Democratic Convergence of Catalonia), joined forces with ERC to hold what they considered a 'plebiscitary' vote on independence. The objective was to obtain a mandate to make Catalonia an independent state (Junts pel Sí 2015). They proposed that, if their alliance, which they called *Junts pel Sí* (JxSí, Together for Yes), obtained a majority of seats in the Catalan Parliament, they would make Catalonia an independent state. In the end, they obtained neither a majority of seats nor of votes. They were able to form a government though with the support of the more extreme secessionist CUP. The other component of CiU, *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC, Democratic Union of Catalonia), refused to join the pro-independence bloc. Instead, in 2015, for the first time since the transition to democracy, it ran on its own and won a meagre 2.5 per cent of the vote.

The Catalan Socialists again lost support. Left-wing *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV, Initiative for Catalonia Greens), *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (EUiA, United and Alternative Left) and state-wide *Podemos* (We Can) formed a coalition that they named *Catalunya Sí que es Pot* (CSQP, Catalonia Yes We Can). It, however, won a disappointing 8.9 per cent of the vote, less than those parties had received in 2012 without *Podemos*. In contrast, anti-secessionist

Ciutadans more than doubled its vote share. As in 2012, parties with moderate nationalist positions lost support, while those with clearer stances on that issue gained votes.

Following the election, *Junts pel Sí* formed a government with the support of the CUP under the leadership of Carles Puigdemont. During its mandate, as promised in its electoral program, the Puigdemont government took unilateral steps towards independence, which culminated in the 1 October 2017 referendum on independence.

The Spanish government had made it clear that it would not allow a referendum on secession (Mármol 2017). Therefore, it was not surprising that it acted to prevent the 1 October referendum from being held. What was less expected was that the Spanish government, controlled by the PP at the time, sent the police to prevent Catalans from voting. Over 1000 Catalans were injured on that day while participating in the vote (CatSalut 2017).

On 27 October, the pro-independence parties brought a resolution declaring Catalan independence to a vote in the Catalan Parliament. It passed with majority support although most anti-independence deputies walked out of the chamber. In reaction to the declaration, the Spanish government removed the Catalan government, invoked Article 155 of the Spanish constitution to suspend Catalan autonomy, and called an election to the Catalan Parliament for 21 December.

Parties' reactions to the events of fall 2017 mostly reflect the side of the independence divide they are on. Both partners making up *Junts pel Sí* as well as the CUP supported the referendum, opposed the police intervention, supported the declaration of independence, and opposed the suspension of autonomy. Conversely, *Ciutadans* and the PP backed the anti-secessionist side of each of these events. The Socialists and especially the parties that made up *Catalunya Sí que es Pot* in 2015 and *Catalunya en Comú* in 2017 had more nuanced positions.

The Socialists were opposed to the illegal referendum and independence declaration and supported the suspension of autonomy. However, they were very critical of the police intervention (Sierra 2017). Many Socialist politicians also opposed the suspension of autonomy (Masreal and Barrena 2017). CSQP was divided over the illegal referendum (Gamissans 2017) and supported holding a legal referendum (Catalunya en Comú-Podem 2017). They clearly opposed the declaration of independence though (Masreal and Barrena 2017). At the same time, they were very critical of both the police intervention (Pascual and Vázquez 2017) and the suspension of Catalan autonomy (Masreal and Barrena 2017).

The election held on 21 December 2017 does not seem to have significantly changed the political situation in the Catalan Parliament. The pro-independence and anti-independence vote shares barely changed despite all the major events that took place since 1 October (see Figure A5 in the Supplementary Appendix). Parties supporting secession obtained 47.8 per cent of votes in 2015 and 47.5 per cent in 2017. Parties opposing independence got 50.6 per cent of votes in 2015 and 50.9 per cent in 2017. Looking at individual parties, however, we can see that there were some notable changes. Support for the most anti-nationalist party *Ciutadans* jumped from 17.9 to 26.4 per cent, thus winning the most votes and seats in the election. Support for the PP plummeted from 8.5 to 4.2 per cent. The Socialists' vote share increased from 12.7 to 13.9 per cent, although this increase is less impressive when we consider that, in 2017, it joined forces with *Units per Avançar* (United to Advance), a small party formed by former members of UDC, which had been dissolved earlier that year. The left-wing coalition *Catalunya en Comú-Podem* (CEC-Podem, Catalonia in Common-We Can) obtained a point and a half less than its 2015 counterpart (CSQP). On the pro-independence side, the two partners that ran together in 2015 as

part of *Junts pel Sí* ran separately in 2017. *Junts per Catalunya* (JxC, Together for Catalonia), the coalition created right before the election by Puigdemont's party, which had earlier changed its name from *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) to the *Partit Democràta Europeu Català* (PDeCAT, Catalan European Democratic Party) won slightly more votes than ERC (21.7 per cent compared to 21.4 per cent). The CUP lost nearly half its support, dropping from 8.2 to 4.5 per cent.

Despite these changes in support for individual parties, Catalonia seems to be split into two stable electoral blocs. Comparing 2015 vote recall with 2017 vote choice, we can see that most Catalans voted for a party on the same side of the independence divide in both years. Ninety-three per cent of those who recalled voting for a pro-secessionist party in 2015 supported a pro-independence party again in 2017. Eighty-six per cent of Catalans who recalled voting for an anti-independence party in 2015 supported such a party again in 2017.⁵

There were some changes within blocs, however (see Table A1 in the Supplementary Appendix). *Ciutadans* retained a large majority of its voters. However, the PP and the PSC lost two out of five of their 2015 voters, with *Ciutadans* gaining most of those. The left-wing coalition in 2017, CEC, also lost two out of five of its predecessor's voters. Unlike the PP and the Socialists, CEC lost more votes to pro- than to anti-independence parties. Votes for the 2015 pro-independence alliance *Junts pel Sí* mostly went to one of the parties that replaced it in 2017, *Junts per Catalunya* or ERC. The CUP retained half of its 2015 supporters. Its deserters mostly opted for ERC. In the analyses that follow, we determine whether the events of fall 2017 account for these changes.

CATALANS' REACTIONS TO THE EVENTS OF FALL 2017

How did Catalans react to the events surrounding the fall 2017 independence crisis?

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Catalans' attitudes with respect to independence, whether Catalonia has a right to hold a referendum, as well as reactions to four decisions made by the Catalan and Spanish governments. These are the decision of the Catalan government to hold an illegal referendum on independence, the Spanish government's decision to prevent the referendum, the Catalan government's decision to declare independence, and the Spanish government's decision to suspend Catalan autonomy. All questions were asked on scales from 0 to 10, where 0 means totally oppose and 10 means totally support.

[FIGURE 1 here]

We can see that Catalans were strongly divided on independence. Thirty per cent answered that they totally oppose independence, 31 per cent that they totally support it and 39 per cent that they are between the two extremes (i.e. placed themselves between 1 and 9). A right to hold a referendum was less divisive. Over half strongly supported such a right (53 per cent), while only a small minority was totally opposed (16 per cent). We can also see that the actions

taken by the Catalan government were most divisive. Just over a third (35 per cent) of Catalans strongly opposed the illegal referendum on independence, while just over a quarter (27 per cent) strongly supported it. While two out of five (41 per cent) strongly opposed the independence declaration, one out of five strongly supported it (20 per cent). Catalans were more united in their rejection of the actions taken by the Spanish government. A solid majority (63 per cent) strongly opposed Madrid's decision to send the police to prevent the referendum, while just over one out of ten (12 per cent) strongly supported that decision. Fifty-two per cent strongly opposed suspending Catalan autonomy, while one-fifth (21 per cent) strongly supported it. What is most striking is how extreme Catalans' views were. Over sixty percent of respondents gave one of the most extreme responses to each event (0 or 10 on the 0 to 10 scale). Catalans thus had strong reactions that may have cross-pressured some voters.

Reactions to events were strongly but imperfectly related to support for independence. Correlations between independence support and reactions to each event range from 0.61 to 0.85. The strongest correlations are those with the reaction to the decision to call the illegal referendum (0.85) and the reaction to the independence declaration (0.85). Correlations with the decision to send the police to stop the referendum (-0.61) and the decision to suspend Catalan autonomy (-0.71) were weaker.

Reactions to events are strongly interrelated. We ran a principal components analysis of the different items and found that the first component accounts for seventy-four per cent of the variance in the items. We therefore created a scale of agreement with the pro-independence side in the referendum crisis to assess reactions to the events. We rescaled the reactions to Catalan government decisions from 0 to 1. We rescaled the reactions to Spanish government decisions so

that the highest score is coded 0 and the lowest score is coded 1. That way it indicates agreement with the Catalan side of each issue. We then took the sum of these rescaled reactions to each event. Higher scores thus indicate greater agreement with the Catalan government and disagreement with the Spanish government. It ranges from 0, indicating perfect disagreement with the Catalan government and strong agreement with the Spanish government, to 4, indicating the reverse. Internal consistency is strong (Cronbach's alpha is 0.88). It can be interpreted at the number of decisions on which a voter sides with the pro-independence camp.

How do reactions to the events of fall 2017 relate to prior vote choice? Figure 2 shows the distribution of the reaction scale by the party a voter supported in 2015. To simplify the figure, we round reaction scale scores to the nearest integer. As we can see, most 2015 PP and pro-independence party voters had attitudes that were clearly favourable towards the Spanish and Catalan government sides, respectively. Nearly four out of five (79.3 per cent) former PP supporters had scores below one, while similar percentages of former *Junts pel Sí* and CUP supporters (80.2 and 84.2 per cent, respectively) had scores over 3. *Ciutadans* voters had much less clear anti-secessionist reactions though. Only three out of five (57.3 per cent) took consistent pro-Spanish positions in the conflict. PSC and CSQP voters had the most ambivalent attitudes. Close to a quarter of 2015 Socialist supporters are in the middle of the scale (27.8 per cent are between 1.5 and 2.5). Most CSQP voters (59.3 per cent) are between 1 and 3 on the scale.

We found that considerable numbers of 2015 Socialist and CSQP voters were cross-pressured on the reactions scale. We consider 37 per cent of 2015 Socialist voters and 14 per cent of CSQP voters were cross-pressured because of their anti-independence reactions. We also

consider 22 per cent of CSQP voters to be cross-pressured because of their pro-independence reactions. Less than 10 per cent of supporters of other parties were cross-pressured. We next consider the influence of events on vote choice in 2017 and, in particular, whether cross-pressures induced 2015 CSQP and PSC voters to switch parties.

EVENTS OF FALL 2017 AND VOTE CHOICE

To assess the impact of events on vote choice, we run two types of models. First, to assess the overall impact of events on vote choice, following the approach suggested by Miller and Shanks (1996), we regress vote choice on the reactions scale as well as controls. We include control variables that previous studies of voting in Catalonia and elsewhere have shown to be important. These are demographics (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1968; Orriols and Rodon 2016), ideology (Downs 1957; Fernández-Albertos 2002), support for independence (Orriols and Rodon 2016), evaluations of the state of the economy (Bosch 2016; Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2010) and of the level of corruption in the parties governing Catalonia and Spain (Orriols and Cordero 2016; Rodríguez Teruel and Barrio 2016). We also control for support for the principle that the Catalan government should be able to hold a referendum on independence to distinguish reactions to events from this longer-term attitude. See the Supplementary Appendix for more information about question wording and the coding of variables.

Models include both main effects and squared terms of each continuous variable in order to allow for non-linear relationships between attitudes and vote choice. We run both a model

with a binary dependent variable distinguishing voting for a pro-independence party (Pro-Ind) from voting for parties opposing independence and a model with a variable representing vote choice for each of the major parties.⁶ Second, to assess the impact of cross-pressures on changes in vote choice, we run separate models among 2015 voters of each party who faced cross-pressure.

Table 1 shows the marginal effects of reactions scale scores on vote choice. These are the differences in the probability of voting for each party (or of voting for a pro-independence party) associated with supporting the Catalan government on one more event (i.e. an increase of one point in the scale). Coefficients from these models are in Tables A2 and A3 in the Supplementary Appendix. As we can see, reactions to these events were strongly associated with the decision to vote for a pro- or anti-independence party. Supporting the Catalan side on one more event led to an increase in the probability of supporting a pro-secession party of nearly thirteen percentage points. Overall reactions to events were most strongly associated with support for ERC and *Ciutadans*.

[TABLE 1 here]

We next consider cross-pressured voters. We saw above that there are three cases in which at least ten per cent of 2015 supporters of a party had reactions scale scores that were inconsistent with their parties. Many 2015 PSC voters strongly supported the anti-independence side in the fall 2017 conflict although the Socialists appeared ambivalent with respect to some of the events. Moreover, many 2015 CSQP voters were strongly supportive of either the Catalan or

Spanish sides in the fall 2017 conflict in spite of the ambivalent positions taken by the parties that made up that coalition.

We regress a binary dependent variable indicating that a voter moved to a party with positions more consistent with their reactions on the reactions scale as well as controls.⁷ We limit models to respondents who voted for the relevant party in 2015. We find that anti-independence reactions led former supporters of the PSC towards one of the parties with clearer anti-independence positions (*Ciutadans* or the PP). Close to half (44.9 per cent) of 2015 PSC voters with the strongest anti-independence reactions (below 1 on the scale) switched to one of those parties. The marginal effect of moving from the centre (2) of the reactions scale to the anti-independence extreme (0) is an increase in the probability of voting for either *Ciutadans* or the PP of thirteen percentage points ($p=0.046$). However, only 16.9 per cent of 2015 CSQP voters with strong anti-independence reactions switched to a party with a clearer anti-independence position (PSC, Cs, or the PP). The marginal effect of moving from the centre of the reactions scale to the anti-independence extreme is among former CSQP voters is five percentage points but not significant ($p=0.609$). We did find a more consequential effect of pro-independence reactions among former CSQP voters. Just over half (50.3 per cent) of CSQP voters with strong pro-independence reactions switched to one of the pro-independence parties in 2017 (JxC, ERC or the CUP) in 2017. The marginal effect of moving from the centre of the scale to the pro-independence extreme is twenty-nine percentage points ($p=0.010$). In sum, reactions to the events of fall 2017 moved PSC voters with strong anti-independence reactions towards parties that more strongly opposed independence. Meanwhile, they moved CSQP voters with strong pro-secessionist reactions towards parties supporting independence.

So far our analyses have shown that reactions to events are strongly associated with vote choice in 2017 as well as with changes between 2015 vote recall and 2017 vote choice. In particular, we found that many former Socialist and CSQP voters left those parties to support more extreme, respectively anti-independence and pro-independence parties. But, all in all, how much did these events benefit or hurt the various parties?

Table 2 shows estimates of the overall net gain or loss, in percentage points, for each party as a result of voters' overall reactions. We estimate them by predicting vote choice using our main models with respondents' actual event reactions and with neutral reactions (i.e. at the midpoint of the reactions scale). We then take the difference between estimated percentages supporting each party with actual reactions and neutral reactions as our estimate of the number of percentage points gained or lost due to reactions to an event. These simulations allow us to compare actual vote percentages taking into account voters' actual reactions to the events of fall 2017 to vote percentages under a counterfactual scenario in which Catalans had neutral attitudes, that is, everyone had been exactly at mid-point (2) on the 0 to 4 scale.

We can see that the events of fall 2017 overall boosted support for pro-independence parties by almost twelve percentage points. Events appear to have benefited ERC on the pro-independence side. Events also boosted the *Ciutadans* vote share by just over eight points. The biggest losers were the Socialists and *Catalunya en Comú*. The polarizing events of the referendum crisis thus appear to have helped ERC and *Ciutadans*, while hurting the left-wing parties with more nuanced positions. This provides strong support for the argument that intergroup conflict benefits parties with extreme positions at the expense of more moderate parties.

[TABLE 2 here]

CONCLUSION

Scholars of ethnicity and nationalism have argued that conflict between groups helps extreme parties at the expense of moderate parties. According to this ethnic outbidding argument, when identity is salient, parties must adopt extreme positions in favour of their group in order to avoid losing votes. Much of the literature on voting behaviour would doubt that voters actually shift from parties with moderate positions to others with more extreme stances. However, we point to a recent perspective focusing on voters who are cross-pressured, that is who have strong attitudes that are inconsistent with their prior vote choice. We consider the case of the 21 December 2017 regional election held in Catalonia, which followed a major crisis surrounding an illegal referendum on independence.

We have assessed reactions to decisions made by the Catalan and Spanish governments in the referendum crisis of fall 2017. We found that most Catalans had strong reactions to those events. Moreover, while most voters reacted to the events in ways that were consistent with their prior vote choice, a substantial minority faced cross-pressures between loyalty to their party and strong reactions to one or more of the events. That was especially the case of previous voters who supported one of the two left-wing parties that took nuanced positions on independence-related issues, the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* and *Catalunya Sí que es Pot*.

We also considered the influence of reactions to events on vote choice, particularly on voters who had strong attitudes that conflicted with their vote choice in the 2015 election. We

found that Socialists with strong anti-independence reactions switched to parties more strongly opposing independence and that CSQP voters with strong pro-independence reactions switched to parties supporting independence. Thus, events helped parties taking extreme positions at the expense of those taking moderate positions. This finding supports the ethnic outbidding argument and is troubling for the stability of societies facing nationalist conflict.

¹ To our knowledge, this is the only survey that was run specifically in the context of the election and that included questions on independence.

² We got vote choice from 87.1 per cent of respondents. CIS obtained the same information from 86.2 per cent of those who claimed to have voted (or 77.7 per cent of all respondents). Figures A2 to A4 compare the distributions of key demographics in our survey and in the CIS

³ Note that this perspective has also been challenged in the literature on group conflict. As Chandra (2005) points out, citizens are often members of cross-cutting groups, thus preventing politics from becoming polarized between two opposing groups.

⁴ For all Catalan election results, see: http://governacio.gencat.cat/ca/pgov_ambits_d_actuacio/pgov_eleccions/pgov_dades_electorals/

⁵ All survey statistics reported in this paper are weighted on the basis of age, sex, education, and province.

⁶ Note that we only consider respondents who stated that they had already voted or that they intended to vote for one of the seven most important parties (*Ciutadans*, PP, PSC, *Catalunya en Comú*, *Junts per Catalunya*, ERC, CUP). This decision is justified because those who gave other responses (“Don’t know”, “Prefer not to answer”, “Other”, “Blank vote” or “Null vote”) were twenty-seven percentage points less likely to state that they would certainly vote. Therefore, we focus on the respondents who likely cast a ballot on election day.

⁷ Note that, to avoid losing degrees of freedom, we dropped control variables that did not have significant effects in these models. The square of reactions to events was dropped from all cross-pressure models.

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Figure 1 Distributions of Reactions to Events and Related Attitudes

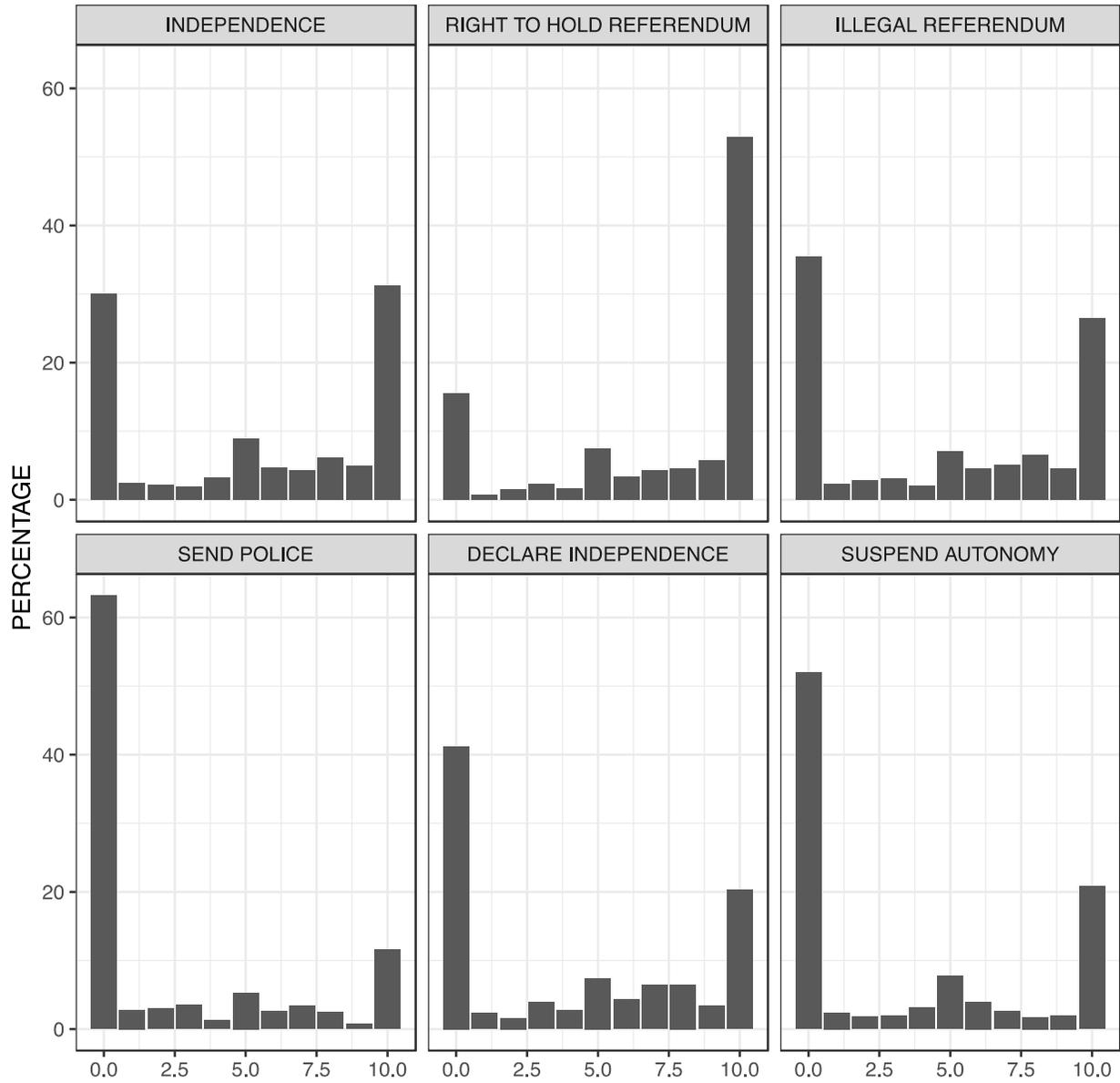


Figure 2 Distribution of Reaction Scale by 2015 Vote Choice

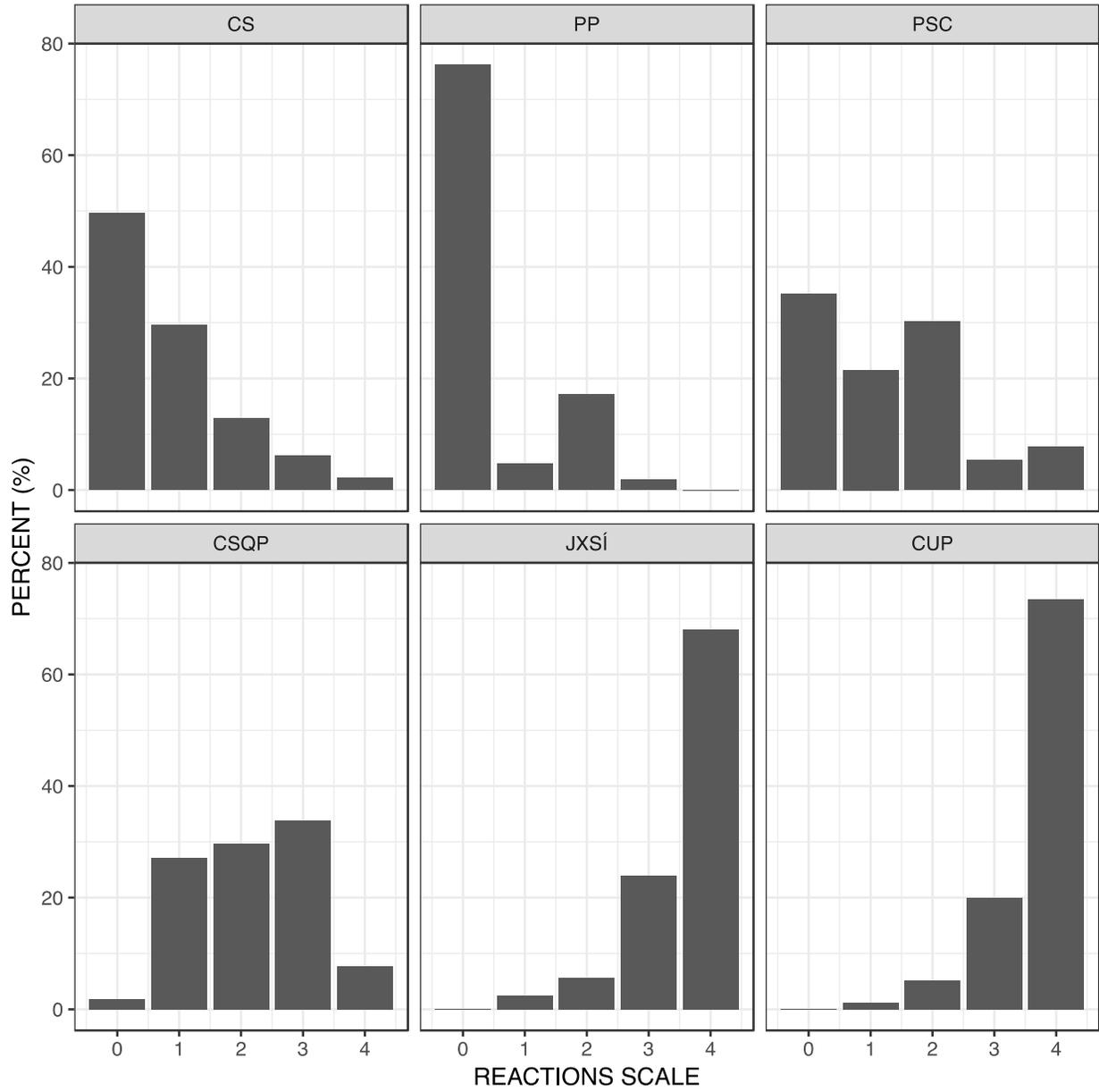


Table 1 Marginal Effects of Reactions to Events

Pro-Ind	Cs	PP	PSC	CEC	JxC	ERC	CUP
12.8	-6.8	-4.4	2.0	-1.6	-0.6	8.3	3.1

Note: these are predicted percentage point differences in the probability of voting for each party

associated with supporting the Catalan government on one more event

Table 2 Estimated Overall Net Gains and Losses Due to Events (Percentage Points)

Pro-Ind	Cs	PP	PSC	CEC	JxC	ERC	CUP
11.6	8.1	1.7	-9.0	-12.7	0.4	11.2	0.3

Note: this table shows changes associated with reactions scale scores.