Abstract: How party strategies vary by electoral systems remains largely unexplored in election studies. Using a comparative statics analysis with qualitative and quantitative data from Spanish national and European elections, we test how party strategies vary across two different electoral systems. We use the number of visits to districts by the party leaders of the main Spanish political parties to determine if targeted party strategies are driven by district magnitude, the share of the population entitled to vote in every district, the number of districts and/or the district-level electoral competitiveness. Our results show that the frequency of visits to districts by party leaders is clearly affected by electoral systems, mainly by the number of districts and district population.

Keywords: party strategies, mobilization, electoral systems, party competition, district magnitude.

*We thank José Antonio Bermúdez, Antonio Hernando, Ramón Luque and Francisco Pimentel for their kindness to be interviewed and for giving us the permission to quote their answers in this paper. Ferran Martínez offered helpful comments. The authors acknowledge financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, research project 412-2009-1004, and the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, research project CSO2010-1639. The raw data and other information can be found at http://repositori.upf.edu/handle/10230/16286/.
Introduction

Contemporary representative democracies hinge on elections. Put in a parsimonious way, through their vote, citizens decide which policies they want implemented and which politicians to put in charge of their implementation. However, voting is a “not so simple act” (Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993: 193), but the result of a causal chain with several links and actors involved. First, citizens’ choices cannot be understood without first attending to the existing supply of parties or, more specifically, to the entry decisions made by party elites. Before the election occurs, and mainly based on their chances of winning seats, political parties have to decide at the local and national level whether they enter the race alone, engage in some form of pre-electoral coordination or stay out. Second, those parties entering have to define their campaign strategies to influence voters’ decisions. That is, they have to make policy proposals and explain how these policies would affect citizens' welfare, allocate their resources across districts and select their candidates. Finally, citizens have to decide whether they vote or stay home, first, and second, those who vote have to choose a given party.

Surprisingly, while the conventional wisdom, embodied in the $M + 1$ rule, has established that entry and voting are crucially affected by electoral systems (Cox, 1997), we know much less about to what extent the strategies adopted by political parties in election campaigns are shaped by electoral systems. Few studies have examined the strategies adopted by political parties in election campaigns (Leighley, 1995) and, with some remarkable exceptions (Cox, 1999; Karp, Banducci and Bowler, 2007), how party strategies vary by electoral system remains largely unexplored. For instance, when developing a multidimensional indicator of professionalized campaigning based on ten observable practices, Gibson and Römmle (2009) do not consider whether parties allocate their limited resources in an optimal way across districts in a particular election. Additionally, in all these comparative studies party strategies are considered as independent variables instead of dependent variables; they examine the effectiveness of voter mobilization strategies or how successful parties are at mobilizing voters under different electoral systems, but not how party strategies vary across electoral systems. In sum, a parsimonious empirical model explaining how parties define their campaign strategies to influence voters’ decisions is still lacking. There are at least two implications of this gap. First, if party strategies vary across countries and/or districts within countries depending on the different incentives provided by electoral systems, it
is not possible to infer from election results or any proxy of campaign strategies as party contacting how effective campaign strategies are. To determine if campaigning is more effective in single-member plurality (SMP) electoral systems than in proportional representation (PR) electoral systems, for instance, we have to know which kind of campaign efforts take place in each type of electoral system. If party strategies differ across electoral systems, not controlling for this difference would bias the results of cross-national studies as a consequence of a problem of endogeneity. Second, if campaigning varies across countries and/or districts, electoral behaviour cannot be convincingly explained by various individual and contextual determinants, that is, forgetting the second link in the causal chain: the model would be misspecified.

The goal of this paper is to examine how electoral systems shape campaign strategies (i.e., the actions taken by parties to influence voters’ decisions) through a proper comparative statics analysis. We use qualitative and quantitative data from national (Lower House) and European elections in Spain to determine whether visits to districts in the election campaign by the leaders of the main national parties is driven by district magnitude, the share of the population entitled to vote in every district, the number of districts and/or the district-level electoral competitiveness. While the 350 members of the Lower House are elected in 52 districts in which magnitude ranges from 1 to 36, the 50 seats in the European Parliament are elected in a single national district, using the D’Hondt method of proportional representation with closed lists in both cases. Our findings show that the frequency of visits to districts by party leaders are clearly affected by electoral systems, mainly by the number of districts and district population.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section the previous literature and our theoretical arguments on how electoral systems shape campaign strategies are shown. The third section describes our case study, data and methods. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the results of the empirical analysis. Section six presents our conclusions and suggestions for further research.
Arguments

According to the conventional wisdom, as electoral rules affect the translation from mobilization efforts to votes, seats and portfolios, election campaigns vary across electoral systems and the degree of salience of the election (Katz, 1980). Based on comparative statics conjectures, Cox (1999: 412-3) summarized how district magnitudes and electoral formulas should affect turnout incentives in the following way: “PR is expected to foster stronger links between parties and social groups than SMP [single-member plurality], hence boosting the payoff in votes to any given mobilizational effort, with MR [majority runoff] being intermediate. The payoff in seats of any given increment in votes should be middling in size and relatively low in variance under PR as compared to SMP, with MR again being intermediate. Finally, the payoff in portfolios of a given increment in seats can be murky in PR systems without pre-announced coalitions. In contrast, close national contest should boost turnout only in locally close districts under SMP and MR”.

Surprisingly, very few studies have empirically examined how the strategies adopted by parties are shaped by electoral systems. As is well known, a substantial body of literature has demonstrated the efficacy of party canvassing, particularly spending, on mobilizing voters. For instance, in a recent piece using data from a three-wave panel survey for the 2010 British general election, Johnston et al (2011) show that parties focus their mobilization efforts in the last weeks before an election on those in marginal districts that are likely to vote for them, and that such tactics are successful; the more ways in which respondents were contacted by a party, the more likely they were to vote for it. Additionally, we know that the impact of district campaigning varies by electoral context depending on four elements: the competitiveness of the election, whether a significant change in an election is anticipated, the degree of coordination of campaigns (namely a function of the number of target seats), and the ‘national mood’, i.e., the popularity of a given party (Fisher et al, 2011: 917-818).¹

However, most previous research on party strategies in election campaigns looks at the decision that party elites take in individual elections in isolation or at best in a sequence of campaigns within the context of a single country, mainly in Britain and the

¹ See Criado (2008) for an analysis of the impact of parties’ mobilization strategies at the district level on their vote share in the Spanish 1996 election.
United States (see Denver et al, 2003 and Pattie and Jhonston, 2009). The main implication of these single country studies is that the electoral system is a constant and therefore it is not possible to know whether the factors found to influence campaigns are idiosyncratic to that electoral system or can be generalized to other electoral systems. In one of the few studies to examine how party mobilization varies by electoral system, Karp et al (2007) found that party contact is far greater in candidate-based systems than in PR systems. Additionally, showing whether voters in different systems are more or less responsive to campaign contact is only part of the story when analyzing party strategies across electoral systems. If parties do not engage in the same level of activity everywhere to mobilize voters, examining how successful parties are at mobilizing voters is clearly endogenous. That is, party strategies have to be explained as dependent variables before estimating the impact of more specific campaign strategies across systems. Without understanding how party strategies take place, it is not possible to fully explain the effectiveness of party canvassing. To the best of our knowledge, only Denemark (2003) has empirically studied how campaigning at the constituency level is a function of the electoral system. He shows that, although not easily, parties adapted their campaigning to the change from a SMP/plurality system to a mixed member proportional representation (MMP) system in New Zealand in the 1990s. In short, “MMP destroys the FPP [first-past-the-post] primacy of geographical constituencies, marginal seats and critical or wasted votes and, instead, promotes a tactical emphasis on issue constituencies and nationwide appeals for party list votes” (Denemark, 2003: 609). Consequently, parties devoted more of their campaign budgets to the overall campaigns, and less to local constituency campaigns for the electorate vote. Although valuable, this paper does not systematically test hypotheses about how party strategies change depending on the electoral system and therefore it is not possible to make robust causal inferences.

This paper takes one step toward showing how electoral systems shape party strategies in election campaigns. To analyze the differences between electoral systems we shall consider how changing a (the) single parameter –district magnitude and consequently the number of districts–, changes the incentives for campaigning. As it

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2 In the paper by Artés and García Viñuela (2007) on regional elections in Spain, campaign spending is also studied as the dependent variable. However, it is hypothesized to depend on at office-seeking motivations, public budgets and law making capacities, but not on electoral systems.
will be explained later on, our analysis relies on European and national elections in Spain. While in the former the 50 MPs (2009 election) are elected in a single national district, in the latter the 350 MPs are elected in 52 districts ranging from 1 to 36 seats (2011 election) matching with the administrative provinces—a territorial division of the country carried out in 1833. Our unit of analysis will be provinces as they are perfectly comparable geographic units in both types of elections. All the remaining elements of the electoral system are exactly the same in both elections.

In sum, the strategy is based on a proper comparative statics analysis concerning how mobilization changes when electoral institutions change. This is similar to Cox’s approach (1999), but using real evidence instead of hypothetical values or conjectures. Given that data on how parties allocated their funds by province during the 2009 and 2011 election campaigns are not available, the frequency of visits to each province by party leaders will be the measure of the amount of effort parties devoted to mobilization. As the face of the campaign, the leader naturally garners significant media attention which means a targeted effort should reap extensive regional and local exposure. Modern and effective election campaigns are increasingly nationalized, centralized and a leader-dominated affair (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Gibson and Römmle, 2009).

According to the decision-theoretic model by Cox (1999), the amount of effort parties devote to mobilization in a particular district depends jointly on three things: first, how effort translates into votes; second, how votes translate into seats; third how seats translate into portfolios. When only two years have elapsed between the 2009 European election and the 2011 national election in Spain, the first of these translations, mainly a function of the quality of parties’ links to social groups, is constant. Similarly, as no executive is selected in European elections and the informal rule is that all the portfolios are for the winner in national elections, the third translation is irrelevant in our case. Consequently, given that the only difference between the two elections is the electoral system, in particular district magnitude and the number of districts, the impact

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3 More properly, there are 50 provinces and two autonomous cities, the single-member districts of Ceuta and Melilla, in Africa.
4 See Cox (1999: 398-9) for a similar point.
5 There is a 3 percent threshold at the district level in Lower House elections and not in European elections, but it is completely irrelevant.
of how votes translate into seats on mobilization can be perfectly estimated. In other words, the ‘all else equal’ assumption is not hypothetical, but a fact.

When changing from a single national district (in the European election) to a districted electoral system (in the national election), the incentives for mobilization clearly differ. First, in the European election the payoff in seats of any given increment of votes as a consequence of mobilization efforts is exactly the same everywhere. Accordingly, parties will invest more heavily in the most populated areas/provinces given that they can get more votes there. How concentrated mobilizational efforts (i.e., visits by party leaders) were on some particular provinces will depend on the amount of resources parties have, whether the impact of the visits of party leaders on the vote was linear or not, or the voters’ visit saturation threshold. In the national election, the number of individuals entitled to vote in each province (i.e., the number of seats to be allocated in the district) also matter. However, party mobilization will be less driven by this variable as the rate at which a mobilizing party gains seats when it gains more votes differ across districts: the closer the local race or, in other words, when there are marginal seats, the higher the chance that mobilizational efforts could make a difference. Additionally, it can be hypothesized that if districts are large, party mobilization will be especially sensitive to close races. That is, a significant interaction between district-level competitiveness and district magnitude/population is suggested.

Second, the impact of district-level population should be lower and the cross-sectional variance in campaign efforts should be higher in districted electoral systems than when using a single national district also due to the higher number of districts in the former. As Cox (1999: 398-9) explains, “if the number of districts is not held constant, then a decline in variance [in mobilization] as the number of seats per district increases may result simply because there are fewer, larger and more similar districts … even if one computed the variance across comparable geographic units, such as precincts or counties”

Finally, the impact of the number of individuals entitled to vote in provinces is also (marginally) conditioned by how well apportioned electoral systems are. All else equal, if the population of provinces is exactly the same in electoral systems using a single national district than in districted electoral systems (i.e., both electoral systems
are perfectly apportioned), the rate at which a mobilizing party gains seats in a given province when it gains more votes is equal. However, when there is a significant malapportionment in a districted electoral system and malapportionment favours small districts at the expense of large districts, as it normally happens (Samuels and Snyder, 2001) the rate will be higher in large provinces and lower in small provinces in European elections in comparison with national elections.

To see this point, imagine a country divided into four provinces, A, B, C and D and suppose that the 10, 20, 30 and 40 percent of the population, respectively, lives in each one of them. In national elections the four provinces are the districts while in European elections there is a single national district. If the system is perfectly-apportioned in national elections, the 10 percent of the seats will be elected in A, the 20 percent in B and so on. All else equal (turnout or local competitiveness, for instance), when parties have to decide which provinces will be visited by the party leader in European and national elections, the incentives are exactly the same in both elections: votes are translated into seats exactly in the same way. Suppose now that the system is malapportioned in national elections (systems using a single national district are perfectly apportioned by definition) and then the votes of some citizens weigh more than the votes of other citizens. For instance, the 15 percent of the seats will be elected in A, the 25 percent in B, the 25 percent in C, and the 35 percent in D. In this scenario parties face a stronger incentive to invest their resources in small districts in national elections than in the previous one, while in European elections the situation has not varied. In the unlikely scenario that large districts were favoured by malapportionment in national elections, the incentive structure would be the inverse than when malapportionment favours small districts.

All these arguments connecting mobilization strategies and electoral systems, based on a rational choice institutionalist approach, are challenged by what can be denominated as the ‘party-centred’ approach. As Hopkin (2009: 195) argues, institutional changes are mediated by parties’ internal dynamics at their inception, and consequently the effects of these changes on party behaviour may be limited due to the inertias of long-standing party organizational arrangements. The empirical evidence provided by Denemark (2003: 615) strongly supports this crucial role of organizations and the idea that parties are not unitary actors. As he explains when studying the impact
of electoral reform in New Zealand, “while the party elites were aware well before the campaign began of the need to embrace new tactics to maximize party list votes, the first MMP election in 1996 reflected important residues of the FPP mindset … Every party encountered significant resistance from local candidates to priority being given to campaigning for party list votes. … the patterns of constituency-level activities in the first election campaign under MMP reflected the important influence of inertia amongst the various political actors involved”. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that parties’ mobilizational strategies hardly respond to the incentives provided by electoral systems, at least in the short term, due to the pressures of local organizations.

On the basis of the previous discussion, the relationship between electoral systems and the frequency of visits to each province by party leaders can be formulated as follows:

\[ H_1: \text{the party leader will visit more provinces in districted electoral systems than in electoral systems with a single national district.} \]

\[ H_2: \text{all else equal, the number of visits of the party leader to the most populated provinces will be higher in electoral systems with a single national district than in districted electoral systems.} \]

\[ H_3: \text{the higher the local competitiveness -the degree of uncertainty in the allocation of seats- in districted electoral systems, the more likely the visit of the party leader to a district. The impact of local competitiveness will be particularly important in the most populated districts as the two incentives for party mobilization are simultaneously met.} \]

\[ H_4: \text{the stronger the local organization, the more likely the visit of the party leader to a province.} \]
**Data and methods**

The hypotheses are examined through both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of party mobilization in the 2009 European election and the 2011 Lower House election in Spain. There are two reasons for selecting European and national elections in Spain as our empirical case. First, there are significant differences between the electoral systems, mainly in district magnitude, the number of districts and the level of malapportionment. The 50 Spanish European MPs are elected in a single national district, while the 350 members of the Lower House are elected in 52 districts in which magnitude ranges from 1 to 36. The well known endogeneity bias when estimating the impact of campaign spending or mobilizational effort on the vote (Benoit and Marsh, 2003), disappears in European elections in Spain, while in national elections is expected to be weak. In their study of spending effects in Japan, Cox and Thies (2000) found that the endogeneity of campaign spending faded as district magnitude increased to a maximum of 5. The district median magnitude in national elections in Spain is 5 and the mean is 6.73, therefore virtually all districts are marginal (Blais and Lago, 2009). Additionally, while the electoral system in European elections is by definition perfectly apportioned, in national elections malapportionment is severe. The largest district, Madrid, has the 13.75 percent of the national population entitled to vote, but only the 10.29 percent of the seats are elected there; in the smallest districts, Ceuta and Melilla, the percentage of the national population entitled to vote is 0.18 and 0.16 percent, respectively, but the 0.29 percent of the seats is elected in each one of them. Not surprisingly, according to Samuels and Snyder (2001), Spain is the country with the highest level of malapportionment among EU countries. Finally, in both electoral systems the allocation of seats to parties is proportional to the votes and follows a D’Hondt system of closed party list proportional representation. There is a completely irrelevant three percent threshold at the district-level in Lower House elections.

Second, when studying the impact of electoral systems on party mobilization in cross-national comparisons, there is the possibility that our model omits some important factor that accounts for variations in party mobilization across countries. Because the socio-demographic composition of districts or the electoral support of parties vary a lot across and within countries, the cross-national evidence may not be quite as reliable as

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6 See Benoit and Marsh (2003) for a similar point in Irish local elections.
we would hope. However, as said before, districts in Lower House election in Spain match with the nineteenth century administrative provinces and then they are perfectly comparable in European and national elections. Accordingly, provinces will be the unit of analysis. And given that only two years have elapsed between the 2009 European election and the 2011 Lower House election, it is hardly arguable the existence of differences due to a temporal gap.

The quantitative empirical analysis of party strategies will be focused on two national parties, the center-left Socialist Party (PSOE) and the center-right Popular Party (PP). These are the only two parties in Spain that are viable in every district. The inclusion of subnational parties that only enter the race in one region in national elections or small national parties with an anecdotal presence in many districts in national elections, but viable in European ones, would bias the estimates. In the former case, parties can invest heavily everywhere, while in the latter what the analysis would be capturing entry decisions, but not party mobilization.

The dependent variable in both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis is the number of visits to every district made by the candidate that topped the list in European elections –Juan Fernando López Aguilar for the PSOE and Jaime Mayor Oreja for the PP– and the candidate that topped the list put out by the district of Madrid in national elections –Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba for the PSOE and Mariano Rajoy for the PP–. We counted each meeting or event that the party organized in each of the provinces which involved the presence of the leader of the party in the election.

As can be seen in Table 1, the number of visits to districts in the 2011 Lower House election (the PSOE, 26; the PP, 22) is higher than in the 2009 European election (the PSOE, 19; the PP, 23) for the PSOE, but lower for the PP. The variable ranges from 0 to 2 for the PSOE and from 0 to 2 for the PP in the national election, and from 0 to 5 for the PSOE and from 0 to 8 for the PP in the European election.

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7 Viability means being the expected winner of a seat in a district or at least the expected first loser (Cox, 1997).
8 Additionally, the comparison would be noisy as in European election some subnational parties join an alliance, while in national elections they enter alone.
9 As is well known, the (informal) rule is that the candidate to prime minister of national parties in Spain was at the top of the list in the district of Madrid, the capital.
In the quantitative analysis, given that the dependent variable is far from having an unbounded, symmetric, bell-shaped distribution, Poisson regression is usually regarded as an appropriate approach for analyzing variables measuring the number of times a particular event occurs (King, 1989). As Poisson regression is more demanding than OLS in terms of the number of observations, observations for the PP and the PSOE and/or European and national elections have been merged in the models.

The four independent variables have been operationalized as follows:

- The number of individuals entitled to vote in each province, population, has been included as the national share of individuals entitled to vote in each province. The expected sign of the variable is positive and the coefficient should be larger in European elections than in national elections.

- Following Blais and Lago (2009), district-level competitiveness in the 2011 Lower House election has been defined as the minimum number of votes required by the PSOE and the PP in order to gain or lose an extra seat in each district divided by the number of individuals entitled to vote in the districts. That is, although in some districts it can be the same value, two shares, one for each party, have been computed in every district. We have calculated the inverse of the variable to facilitate the interpretation and then the higher the value, the higher the competitiveness in a given district for a given party. The variable has been calculated according to the results of the previous Lower House election, in 2008. The expected sign of the variable is positive.

- The strength of local (province) party organizations has been measured as the national share of delegates that each province sent to the 2008 PP National Congress and the 2011 PSOE National Congress. Among many other functions, the PP and the PSOE national leaders are elected by the delegates attending these Congresses. The variable gives an estimation of the relative force of local

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10 Note that a given district can be marginal for one of the two parties but not for the other if there is a third (or more) viable party entering the local race.
organization and the extent to which they can lobby in electoral campaign to count on the visit of party leader. The expected sign of the variable is positive.

- Finally, to test some interactions, a dummy variable, *European election*, that equals 1 for provinces in the 2009 European election and 0 for provinces in the 2011 Lower House election, has been defined.

![Table 1: Descriptive statistics](image)

The data used to test the hypotheses in the qualitative analysis were collected through a series of semi-structured face to face interviews with the campaign managers of the four largest national parties, the PSOE, the PP, the post-communist United Left (IU) and a new party founded in 2007 that entered the Lower House in 2008, Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD). Two minor national parties, the IU and the UPyD, have also been considered here to test the robustness of our findings, and to confirm that the results are not just idiosyncratic to large parties. The interviews were carried out across the period December 2011-February 2012. The personnel interviewed were José Antonio Bermúdez (Electoral vice-coordinator of the PP campaign committee in the 2011 national election), Antonio Hernando (Electoral vice-coordinator of the PSOE campaign committee in the 2011 national election), Ramón Luque (Campaign manager

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11 In the case of the delegates, there are only 51 observations instead of 52 for the PP. In one province – Navarra– there is coalition between the PP and a regional party, UPN. As a result, the PP did not have delegates representing Navarra in the 2008 National Congress.
for the IU in the 2011 national election), and Francisco Pimentel (Campaign manager for the UPyD in the 2011 national election).

Results (I): Quantitative analysis

The frequency of visits to each province by party leaders in the 2009 European elections and the 2011 Lower House election are displayed in Figures 1 and 2. Some significant differences are immediately apparent. First, the largest province, Madrid, was visited 8 times by the leader of the PP (the 35 percent of the total number of visits) and 5 times by the leader of the PSOE (the 26 percent of the total number of visits) in the European election campaign, but only twice in both cases in the national election campaign (the 9 percent for the PP and the 7 percent for the PSOE of the total number of visits). As we will see later on, there is a stronger positive correlation between the population of provinces and the frequency of visits in European elections than in national elections, as our second hypothesis predicted. Second, our first hypothesis is strongly supported by the descriptive empirical evidence. As expected, the variance in the visits of the party leader is higher in the districted electoral system (the national election) than in the electoral system with a single national district (the European election). While 24 provinces were visited (26 visits) by the leader of the PSOE in the 2011 Lower House election, only 14 provinces (19 visits) were visited in the 2009 European election. Similarly, the PP leader visited 21 provinces (22 visits) in the 2011 Lower House election and 16 provinces (23 visits) in the 2009 European election.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) The fact that the number of visits of the PP leader was higher in the 2009 European elections than in the 2011 Lower House election rejects that the difference between elections was just an expression of the well known second-order election model. That is, the lower importance of European elections is not correlated with a lower number of visits for both parties.
Figure 1: Frequency of visits to each province in the 2009 European election

Figure 2: Frequency of visits to each province in the 2011 Lower House election
In the analysis of the determinants of the number of visits to provinces in the 2009 European election and the 2011 national election in Spain, we have run three specifications when combining European and national elections and two when national elections are considered alone\textsuperscript{13}. The observations for the PSOE and the PP have been merged. All the models are clustered by district/province in order to correct for the non-independence of the data structure. The results are displayed in Table 2. In the first model, apart from the constant, \textit{Delegates} is statistically significant at the 0.001 level and has the expected positive sign: the higher the number of delegates a province sent to the National Congress, the higher the probability of being visited by the national leader. The dummy variable identifying provinces in the European election is not statistically significant. That is, controlling for the number of delegates, the number of visits does not depend on the type of the election. These findings strongly support the crucial role of local organizations when designing campaign strategies, as our fourth hypothesis suggests. However, given that \textit{Delegates} and \textit{Population} are very strongly correlated, 0.81, it is not possible to reject that the number of delegates at the province level simply captures the impact of the number of entitled voters\textsuperscript{14}.

Not surprisingly, when replacing \textit{Delegates} with \textit{Population} in the second model, \textit{Population} is also statistically significant at the 0.001 level and has the expected positive sign: the higher the number of entitled voters in a province, the higher the probability of being visited by the national leader. The fit of the second model is slightly better than in the first one, suggesting that \textit{Population} and not \textit{Delegates} is the most relevant variable. Which of these two variables is the most relevant has to be clarified with the interviews with the campaign managers. The dummy variable identifying provinces in the European election is again not statistically significant.

\textsuperscript{13} When including district-level competitiveness in the models, the European election has to be excluded given that, by definition, this variable cannot be calculated when there is a single national district.

\textsuperscript{14} When a unique model including simultaneously \textit{Delegates} and \textit{Population} is run, the coefficients of both variables decrease but remain statistically significant.
Table 2:
The determinants of the number of visits to provinces in European and national elections in Spain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>European and national elections</th>
<th>National Election</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegates</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
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<td>European Election</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Election*Population</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
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<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness*Population</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-1.37***</td>
</tr>
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<td>208</td>
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<td>Clusters #</td>
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<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
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<td>-155.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses. **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Finally, in the third model combining European and national elections, an interactive term between provinces in the European election and the number of entitled voters is added to the previous model. The interaction term is statistically significant at the 0.01 level and positive: the impact of population is greater in the 2009 European election in comparison with the 2011 national election. As can be seen in Figure 3, this supports our second hypothesis that the number of visits of the party leader to the most populated provinces will be higher in electoral systems with a single national district than in districted electoral systems. The impact of Population is statistically different in the European election than in the national election when at least the ten percent of the total population lives in a given province. Additionally, the model produces a statistically significant negative coefficient on European election, while the positive impact of Population decreases, although it remains statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
In models 4 and 5 provinces only in the 2011 Lower House elections are considered as a consequence of including the level of competitiveness as independent variable. In the fourth model, Population is again statistically significant, at the 0.01 level, and has again the expected positive sign. On the contrary, Competitiveness is not statistically significant and has a negative sign. However, as shown in model 5, the interaction between Population and Competitiveness is statistically significant at the 0.001 level and goes in the expected positive direction: the impact of local competitiveness is particularly important in the most populated districts. According to Figure 4, competitiveness matters in those districts with at least the two percent of the total population living there. This (partially) supports our third hypothesis.
Results (II): Qualitative analysis

Drawing on findings from extensive in-depth interviews with the campaign managers or members of the campaign committees of the four main national parties in Spain in the 2009 European election and the 2011 Lower House election, we explore the extent to which party elites respond to the incentives provided by electoral systems to allocate resources differently. Three points consistent with our arguments and our previous findings will become evident. First, the number of individuals entitled to vote in a given province/district plays a more important role in European elections than in national elections. Second, when allocating their resources in national election campaigns, the existence of marginal seats is crucial. Third, pressures from local organizations do not seem to condition party mobilization.

Population and district magnitude

Every respondent was asked to determine the importance of local population to decide which provinces/districts are visited in elections campaigns. The answers were consistent across respondents and across parties. According to one of the campaign architects for the PP,

“In the European election there is only one single national district and therefore gathering the maximum amount of votes is what prevails. The more votes you
get, the higher the chances you have of increasing your representation. On the contrary, in national elections an increase in the number of votes does not imply an increase in the number of seats, since it is possible that in this district you have already reached your electoral limit because the next seat to be obtained is very far from the votes you can get.”

One of the leaders of the PSOE campaign committee offers the same statement:

“In European elections the criteria to determine where to go in the campaign is exclusively based on the demographical weight, in comparison to national elections, where the weight in terms of the number of seats elected in each district is relevant, but also it is relevant where there is more risk of a transfer of votes to another party.”

Not surprisingly, the respondents from the minor national parties also outlined a similar strategy. In the IU,

“In the case of European elections we don’t need to visit those districts where the party might gain a (or another) representative, since in the European elections there is a single nationwide district. For these elections the criterion to determine how the resources are distributed is exclusively the population. The party decides where to go depending on the number of voters that each territory has and on the chances to get a good electoral result there. Consequently, in European elections the party does not go to small cities but only to the main cities in Spain.”

And in the UPyD,

“In the European election our candidate visited the provinces with the largest populations and others that were not high in the ranking of population, like Asturias, but where the electoral results in other elections were good, meaning that we had real chances to win something in other elections.”
− District-level competitiveness in national elections

Having considered the impact of population on the visits of party leaders, attention must turn to the role of district-level competitiveness in Lower House elections. The respondents’ answers are clearly consistent with our prediction that competitiveness fosters party mobilization.

The member of the PP campaign committee summarized the strategy as follows:

“Due to the type of electoral system [in Lower House elections] we have in Spain the fight is not the same in all districts. We know in advance which may be the electoral results in certain districts, especially in the small ones. Then, we establish what it is called the “priority districts” in order to concentrate the efforts in those districts where there is more at stake, where there are marginal seats. … Therefore you distribute your presence in a district or in another during the campaign on the basis of the number of marginal seats you can get, those seats which are under dispute.”

The campaign architect for the PSOE agreed, saying,

“There are always districts where you have to devote an especial effort. We have electoral maps where we can determine which are the preferential electoral districts. We have done this throughout the campaign in what we have called ‘electoral cartography’. It is the electoral cartography that determines in which districts devoting a concrete effort could allow us to maintain the same electoral result. We use electoral cartography especially in what concerns the party mobilization, the distribution of publicity and in determining where efforts have to be devoted in order to perform a campaign the more close as possible to the people.” And consequently, “in national elections you go to those districts where you can defend, maintain or increase a given electoral result –which depends on the electoral expectations of the party … On the contrary, in European elections our mobilization exclusively depends on the population. In Huelva for instance we were not expecting to hold a meeting but eventually we went there the last day of campaign because diary polls were telling us that in Huelva [5 seats]
support was decreasing. In Huelva, in case of having a single nationwide constituency, we wouldn’t have gone there.”

Similarly, the campaign manager for the IU put it this way:

“We devoted large amounts of resources to the districts of Seville, Valencia, Asturias, Malaga, Cadiz and Alicante, where we had real chances to get our first seat. In Barcelona and Madrid surveys were pointing that we had the two first representatives guaranteed so that we dedicated special efforts to gain the third seat in each of the districts … Particularly, the rank of the efforts devoted during the campaign was the following: 1st, Seville; 2nd, Madrid; 3rd, Barcelona, 4th, Valencia; 5th, Asturias; 6th, Malaga; 7th, Cadiz; and 8th Alicante. And in the last days of the campaign we put two advertisements in local newspapers in Alicante and Malaga since we realised that we were very close to get a seat. In the remaining districts the party spends very few resources since we don’t have any chance of obtaining representation. In these cases instead of sending the leader of the party, Cayo Lara, to hold a meeting we send another person from the party, and at the end the amount of money that we devote to these districts is very low.”

Finally, the campaign architect for the UPyD described the focus of campaign as follows,

“In the national election, the decision about which districts Rosa Díez [the national leader] visited was taken as a function of the number of seats elected in each district and the chance of the UPyD to win seats. Rosa Díez visited those districts which had more seats to be allocated, like Madrid [36 seats], Barcelona [31 seats], Valencia [16 seats], but also some smaller districts where polls where telling us that we had real chances of winning a seat, like Granada [7 seats]. All in all, in those large districts where we didn’t have a chance of winning seats such as Barcelona we made much less of an effort.”
– Pressures from local organizations

Finally, respondents were asked to define the role of local organization in campaign strategies. This variable does not play any significant role. The statement from the member of the PSOE campaign committee was typical:

“Local organizations do not have any relevant paper in determining the allocation of resources during electoral campaign. Strategy in this sense is colder.”

The leader of the UPyD campaign committee offers a similar assessment:

“The number of affiliates of the UPyD in the districts or petitions from the local organizations of the UPyD to receive a visit by Rosa Diez [the national leader] did not have any influence [in the 2011 national election].”

Conclusions

Political parties have a crucial role in elections, and parties’ campaign strategies have often been used to explain changes in voting behaviour. Yet the current literature has not adequately explained how party strategies themselves vary depending on electoral systems. And, therefore, using them as explanatory variables without first establishing under what conditions party strategies change means that past results are potentially biased.

In this paper we have aimed to close this gap by showing that electoral systems shape campaign strategies by creating the strategic conditions under which political parties must manoeuvre. Our results, based on two different elections and electoral systems in Spain, demonstrate that political parties adapt their resource-allocation initiatives to the incentives provided by electoral system features. Our findings, based on visits by party leaders, have been corroborated by in-depth interviews with campaign managers.

Specifically, we have found that the variance in the number of visits by the party leaders will be higher in districted electoral systems than in electoral systems with a single national district. And, the number of visits by the party leaders will be higher, the higher the population of eligible voters in each province, in electoral systems with a
single national district than in a districted electoral system. Lastly, we have found that the closer the district electoral race and the higher the population in that district, then the more frequent the visits from the leaders will be, in a districted electoral system. According to interviews, local organization does not seem to be particularly relevant in party mobilization strategies.

In sum, political party strategies, such as campaign resource-allocation, is conditioned by the number of districts and the district population, and future cross-national studies should control for this variation, when examining the effectiveness of party strategies, for example.

Using the data on party leader visits could also be a useful tool for measuring election interest in districts, using panel surveys. And, how might the number and variation of party leader visits change within a campaign? If we assume that this might change according to developments in the campaign, such as polling data indicating a steep increase or decrease in support, or region-specific issues coming to the fore, then this might be a worthy investigation.

How does our evidence hold up when applied to other countries with different electoral systems? Given the huge differences between electoral systems in national and European elections within EU countries, a cross-national test in EU countries could better demonstrate the validity of our results.

References

