

Accepted Manuscript

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Stephen Ansolabehere, M. Socorro Puy

PII: S0261-3794(16)30489-9

DOI: [10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.008)

Reference: JELS 1870

To appear in: *Electoral Studies*

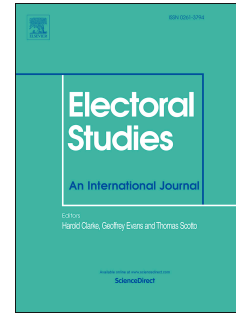
Received Date: 9 December 2016

Revised Date: 1 August 2017

Accepted Date: 20 September 2017

Please cite this article as: Ansolabehere, S., Puy, M.S., Measuring issue-salience in voters' preferences, *Electoral Studies* (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.008.

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Measuring issue-salience in voters' preferences*

Stephen Ansolabehere[†] M. Socorro Puy[‡]

October 24, 2017

Abstract

We provide a new approach to the measurement of issue salience that explains how the salience of an issue among voters and the position of the parties on a given issue interact to each other and determine vote choices and aggregate election results. Analyzing the spatial model of voting, we show how voting probabilities can be estimated by a multinomial logit regression where the ideal policy locations of voters on each issue dimensions are independent variables, and where no individual specific perception about the location of the political parties is used in the regression. The pieces of survey information that are used to calculate issue-salience are: i) specific position of respondents on each issue dimension, ii) vote choice, and iii) the policy position of parties on each issue dimension, which is measure by the mean perceived position. Rather, only an aggregate estimate of party positions on issues is needed. To demonstrate the mechanics and value of the approach, we analyze regional elections in the Basque province of Spain. In that region, we find that the left-right dimension is about two times more salient than nationalism. The nationalism issue is, however, more divisive than the left-right issue. This shows that the issue that voters care more about, may not coincide with the issue on which the parties offer more distinctive policies.

Keywords: Issue-voting; Salience; Priming; Ideology; Nationalism.

*The authors gratefully acknowledge the comments and corrections from Bernard Grofman, Rosalia Greco, Juan Luis Jiménez, David Karol and Jim Snyder. Socorro Puy gives special thanks to Ingrid Maurer for her guidance developing discrete choice modelling. This version has also benefited from the suggestions of the seminar audience in Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, the 12th. Social Choice and Welfare Meeting in Boston College, the 35th. Arne Ryde Symposium in Universidad de Málaga, the XXII Encuentro de Economía Pública in Universidad de Santander, Universidad Pablo Olavide de Sevilla, the Erasmus Workshop on Political Economy at the University of Rotterdam, the EPSA Meeting in Vienna and the Spatial Model Workshop at the University of Konstanz The second author gratefully acknowledged financial assistance from Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación under the project ECO2014-53767.

[†]Department of Government. Harvard University. 1737 Cambridge St, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. Tel. +1617-495-2148. E-mail: sda@gov.harvard.edu

[‡]Corresponding Author: Departamento de Teoría e Historia Económica, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales. Universidad de Málaga. Campus de El Ejido, 29071 Málaga, Spain. Tel. +349521312. E-mail: mps@uma.es

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