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Let's party!
The impact of local festivities on the incumbent's electoral support

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Do local festivities affect an incumbent's re-election prospects? Despite the relationship between local public policies and political behaviour is a central topic in political science, the effect of the organisation of leisure events on voting patterns has been largely neglected. Using data from Spain, we show that Mayors doubling the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities during the last year of the legislature benefit by around two per cent points in upcoming elections. Two mechanisms account for this relationship. First, changes in the budget given over to festivities enhance the incumbent's support when the spending on local festivities during the previous years of the mandate was generous. Second, local festivities bring about positive rewards when the financial situation of the municipality is stable. Overall, our article sheds light on the need to consider other domains beyond "core" public policies when assessing the dynamics behind an incumbent's re-election.

Keywords: local festivities, local elections, incumbent, Spain, bullfighting.

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1. Introduction

One of the main goals of political parties—if not *the* main goal—is to win elections. As famously stated by Downs (1957), parties do not win elections to design policies but design policies to win elections. Following this line of reasoning, a vast amount of scholarly literature has sought to establish what types of policies generate an electoral reward for incumbents. Notwithstanding this prolific literature, existing works have not yet contemplated the electoral impact of one of the most visible local policies that mayors in several countries can deliver: annual public festivities. Local annual festivals or patron saint festivals are common in many countries in the world, normally last for several days and tend to be highly popular events. During the festivity, dozens or even hundreds of events are organised and mayors frequently appear in public. In addition, local councils decide how much money they allocate to public festivities and which organisations and groups receive funds for carrying out public events. This institutional arrangement may pave the way for patronage transactions.

In a multi-level environment, in which different layers of government coexist, mayors undoubtedly have the advantage of being closer to their citizens. However, their electoral result is strongly conditioned by how the mayor's party is performing in the upper arenas of government. Thus, mayors are aware that their path to re-election not only relies on the design of “traditional” public policies—street maintenance, the building of new parks, rubbish collection...—, but also on other public initiatives that can increase a mayor's visibility, influence citizens' satisfaction and, on some occasions, facilitate the distribution of funds and patronage among loyal supporters.

We contend that public festivities can play such role. Hence, in this article we attempt to answer the following question: Does spending on local festivities generate an electoral reward for the local incumbent? If this is the case, why do we observe such positive

effect? We study these questions by examining the electoral effect of spending on local festivities in Spain, where *fiestas patronales* or *fiestas mayores* represent very special events in people's calendars. Our empirical strategy proceeds in two steps. First, we compile and use an original dataset and analyse information regarding spending on festivities from more than 2,000 municipalities between 2011 and 2015. We show that Mayors doubling the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities during the legislature obtain in the upcoming elections a share of the votes two per cent points higher. Second, we explore the mechanisms and examine why spending on local festivities generates a positive electoral reward. Our results show that the local incumbent's support appears to crucially depend on the amount of money the Mayor has devoted to public festivities during the first years of his/her mandate and, to a lower extent, on the municipality's financial situation.

Overall, our article contributes to our understanding of the relationship between social and leisure events and political behaviour at the local level. Despite local festivities are mainly circumscribed to the Hispanic-Latin and Catholic world, our findings shed light on the potential effect of other types of social events (festivals, concerts, sports events...) that are present elsewhere in the world. More in general, our article brings to light the need of political scientists to consider other domains beyond the "core" public policies—education, health, or infrastructures—when attempting to understand the dynamics behind an incumbent's (re-)election.

2. Theoretical arguments

Across representative democracies, elections allow citizens to make governments accountable. In line with the standard minimalist conception of democracy, voters assess the incumbent's performance in office and, accordingly, punish or reward the

cabinet. Following this classical logic, previous literature has endeavoured to ascertain whether (and what type of) public policies generate an electoral bonus for the incumbent. For instance, Levitt and Snyder's (1997) found evidence that federal spending benefits U.S. House of Representative incumbents. Katsimi and Sarantides (2014), in a cross-country study, show that the level of public spending positively impacts the prospects for re-election. Similarly, Brender (2003) shows that the fiscal performance of Israeli mayors substantially affects their probabilities of re-election; or Guzman (2016) shows that in Peru the provision of public services leads voters to reward the incumbent.

As the brief summary included above illustrates, extant research has mainly focused on “core” public goods—education, health, infrastructure. This has led scholars to focus on certain policies which, despite they undoubtedly represent the lion's share of local public spending, they are normally coordinated with other supra-local administrations (Montero 2001), thus making the identification of its effects on electoral outcomes difficult to disentangle. In contrast, less is known about the effect of spending on local policies considered more “trivial”. In other words, besides the “core” policies, mayors also hold the responsibility of other areas they can fully control, with no need for coordination with supra-local authorities and few constraints in their organisation and implementation. One of the options at their disposal is the organisation of local festivities.

Local festivals, local parties or other *patron* festivities are an important annual event and represent an important feature in the calendar. Many countries in the world (Mediterranean, Latin American, Asian or Oceanian countries, among others) set aside several days to popular entertainment and/or to honour the local saint or patron (Richards 2007).

Besides the finding that public festivals—including local festivities, ethnic festivals, cultural, or sportive events—have positive economic returns for the municipality (Del Barrio, Devesa, and Herrero 2012); local festivals are considered important as they touch upon the people's most immediate worldview and are often a source of local patriotism. Similarly, a large literature in political science has concluded that identity/patriotism is an important driver of political mobilization (Tajfel 1981; Fowler and Kam 2007; Huddy 2013). Festivities have also positive externalities to communities and to individuals' everyday life. Indeed, previous qualitative research has shown that festivals bring people together and contribute to bonding (Durkheim 2001; Arcodia and Whitford 2006; Stevenson 2016). Quantitative research has also reported that festivals increase connectedness and trust within a community and foster citizens' engagement in politics (Atkinson and Fowler 2014). Overall, the literature has shown that public festivities increase social interaction and promote subjective well-being (Chang, Wray, and Lin 2014); enhance identification with the community (Bennett and Woodward 2014; Hazareesingh 2003); and contribute to identity building (Zhang et al. 2019).

Despite this flourishing literature, previous works have not yet addressed the extent to which local festivals transcend the economic, cultural and identity dimension and have electoral consequences as well. By focusing on festivities, we are able to complement the findings of previous studies on the effect of local policies on vote choice in at least three ways.

First, among all the different layers of government, local governments are more likely to be contaminated by the dealings of other levels of government (Guinjoan 2014). In multi-level settings, citizens have a hard time knowing which administration is in charge of a particular policy and local cabinets need to share responsibilities or coordinate with higher levels of government (Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001). As a

result, mayors very often struggle to make their policies visible to the public and hence to reap its benefits. Compared to other policies, local festivities emerge as an important tool at the Mayor's disposal for breaking down this complexity and directly speak to local voters.

Second, festivities increase the mayor's visibility among the public. During the festivity, the mayor normally presides over the most important events (he/she attends the religious ceremonies, gives the inauguration speech, etc.). In fact, citizens expect mayors to attend and speak at many community activities, which creates an excellent opportunity to target a broad audience. In sum, local festivities, compared to other public policies, become the perfect occasion for the local government to take political credit, increase its visibility and interact with potential supporters (Del Barrio, Devesa, and Herrero 2012).

Third, by studying the impact of local festivities on vote choice, we are able to complement the existing literature by studying the effect of a policy that is likely to be observed in the immediate future. Previous research has mainly focused on policies such as infrastructures, education or health, which often require a long period of time to be designed and implemented and the electoral rewards may be distributed across several legislatures. This literature assumes, sometimes by default, that time does not matter, that is, it rarely takes into account that, as we know, voters change their perception of the effect of policies over time (Atkinson and Fowler 2014; Bechtel and Hainmueller 2011; Fiorina 1978). In contrast to most public policies, the design and execution of local festivities can arguably be done in a shorter period of time. The expectation is that mayors, who act as rational vote-seeking actors, may have incentives to use festivities as a more flexible tool to increase citizens' satisfaction, which in turn

is likely to generate positive electoral rewards. Hence, the effect of spending on local festivities is more likely to be observed with no significant delay.

Although, as mentioned above, we are not aware of any empirical analysis that tackles the same question, we have some indirect evidence that festivals have a positive effect on political and attitudinal outcomes. In the context of Mexico, Atkinson and Fowler (2014) show that Saint's day *fiestas* provide temporary but large shocks to the connectedness and trust within a community, but that they have a negative effect on political participation. Addonizio et al (2007) found that festivals organised during Election Day in the U.S. mobilized voters, increasing turnout by 6.5 per cent points. Recently, Hopkins and Pettingill (2018) show that in cities where the team won the World Series or the Super Bowl within a month of the election the incumbent received a larger share of the votes. Or, consistent with the idea that leisure events matter for politics, Durante and Zhuravskaya (2018) show that, in order to minimize news coverage of its military interventions, the Israeli government is more likely to undertake these actions during sports events.

More concretely, we expect spending on festivities *in the year prior* to the local election to have an impact on the incumbent's electoral support. Despite electoral mandates typically last from four to five years, we follow the political business cycle literature (Lewis-Beck 1988; Fair 1988; Guzman 2016) and the economic voting studies (e.g. Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier 2006; Healy and Lenz 2014) and expect that the effect of spending on local festivities on an incumbent's electoral success depends primarily on the last's year spending—rather than on the whole mandate's spending.

It is important to clarify that the local opposition party/ies will also have incentives to seek positive electoral rewards by politicizing and criticizing many aspects of the local festivity, especially the budget allocated to it. However, our contend is that local

festivities are imbued in the local culture and, therefore, any criticism against their core elements might even have a backlash effect. Empirically, we expect any electoral benefit potentially extracted by the opposition to be compensated by the positive rewards received by the incumbent. In addition, if challengers indeed extract an electoral benefit from going against the budget of local festivities, this would go against our alternative hypothesis and, as a consequence, represents a more stringent test of our argument.

Hence, our baseline expectation reads as follows:

H₁: The higher the share of the local budget allocated to local festivities in the year prior to the election, the higher the electoral support for the incumbent party will be.

After empirically checking whether there exists an effect of spending on festivities on the incumbent's share of the votes, we go a step further and assess the potential mechanisms that might explain the relationship. We outline two expectations: the *bread and circuses* hypothesis and the *satisfaction* hypothesis.

The first expectation, the *bread and circuses* hypothesis, argues that local festivities will entail a larger electoral reward for the incumbent if the public event that is organised is highly visible. The original expression—coined by the Roman poet Juvenal to decry the selfishness of common people and their neglect for wider concerns—implies that festivities might be used as a tool to generate public approval. This will essentially be achieved by organizing events that bring about diversion and satisfaction among the public. In practical terms, this means that the organisation, for instance, of a concert that targets a very small group of fans is likely to have a smaller effect than inviting a very popular band. To capture this empirically, we focus on a highly visible event organised in many Spanish local festivities: bullfighting events. Bullfights have great political,

cultural, and symbolic salience in South-West Europe and much of Latin America. They are particularly relevant in Spain (Brandes 2009), where the event comes tinged with connotations of religion, class conflict, Spanish nationalism, political corruption, and *machismo* (Mitchell 1991; Douglass 1999). Hence, we raise the following specific expectation:

H₂: The positive effect of spending on local festivities in the year prior to the election will be greater when highly visible events (bullfighting events) are organised.

The second expectation is the *satisfaction* hypothesis. We know that public events provide opportunities for increasing social interactions and relationships (Chang, Wray, and Lin 2014; Newman, Tay, and Diener 2014), which, in turn, enhance an individual's well-being and quality of life by means of strengthening his/her sense of belonging to a community (De Neve 2000; see also Hazareesingh 2003; or Bennett and Woodward 2014). This is particularly the case in local festivities, as many events are co-organized with the civil society and take place in public spaces. Citizen's satisfaction may also increase during local festivities if the local economy receives an important boost (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal 2004).

The rewarding mechanism, however, will not only depend on the amount of money the municipality devotes to local festivities. Rather, we expect this to be conditioned by the citizen's satisfaction with the performance of the local government. We suggest two, non-exclusive, potential mechanisms explaining the satisfaction hypothesis. First, we argue that mayors will receive an electoral reward for organising local festivities when the economy of the municipality is performing well. We proxy the economic situation of the municipality by taking into account the percentage of the local debt, over the municipality's total budget, in the year of the election. If the local debt is high, citizens are likely to be more dissatisfied with the local government and, subsequently, high

spending in local festivities may even backfire against the local incumbent. Conversely, when the local debt is low and the financial situation of the municipality is positive, spending on local festivities might entail positive electoral rewards for the incumbent.

H_{3.1}: The positive effect of spending on local festivities will be conditional on the (positive) municipality's financial situation.

Second, we also argue that the rewarding mechanism for the incumbent party will be particularly strong in those municipalities with consistently high levels of spending throughout the legislature. Hence, we expect a cumulative effect, that is, high levels of spending in local festivities during the year before the election will only lead to a substantive positive impact in the upcoming elections for the incumbent if the local council has delivered financially generous festivities in the previous years.

H_{3.2}: The positive effect of spending on local festivities will be conditional on the municipality's spending on festivities during the legislature.

Local festivities in Spain

To assess the extent to which the resources allocated to local festivities may improve the electoral results of the incumbent, we use Spain as a case study. There are many reasons that make this country an ideal scenario. First, local elections in Spain always take place on the fourth Sunday in May, every four years. In 2015, local elections were held on the 24th of May. This institutional design fixes local election in time and, therefore, mayors cannot call for an early election or postpone it strategically.

Second, most local festivities in Spain—as it is the case of many cultural festivals worldwide (Yeoman et al. 2004)—take place during the summer. This is relevant as it implies that we have our potential effect concentrated at a similar moment in time across Spanish municipalities.

Third, local festivities organised all over the country represent a mass leisure phenomenon and a major factor in boosting local ‘patriotism’ (López-Bonilla, López-Bonilla, and Sanz-Altamira 2010). Some of the most iconic events have their origin decades or centuries ago and, in many public speeches given by the mayor or other council members before they introduce the events, a message of the importance of shared history is transmitted. For instance, the local council usually publishes a booklet to publicize the festivities’ events and sends a free copy to every resident. It is common that the booklet includes a greeting introduction by the mayor with direct or subtle political messages. Also the local TV and radio devote much time and resources during the festivities to cover the events, including many interviews to the mayor or other local councillors.

Fourth, Spanish local municipalities have limited powers to collect taxes and to deliver public services. Although municipalities have some competences regarding education and social services, these matters are mostly at the hands of the Autonomous Communities or the central government, and their execution by the local executive crucially depends on the availability of resources, which are usually scarce. Thus, the ability of the municipal government to position itself as competent on these issues in a complex multi-level environment is rather limited. In contrast, the organization of local festivities is mainly a local matter: local executives can decide how much money they spend, the type of activities they organize or any other related aspect. The cost of organising local festivities is relatively low compared to the cost of providing social services. Most importantly, the mayor has full autonomy in deciding not only the amount of money allocated to the *fiesta*, but also which groups and associations are funded. Indeed, while some of the activities that take place during local festivities are directly organised by the local council itself, others are organised by local groups and

are subsidised by the city council, which may pave the way for patronage transactions, and become a discretionary tool for incumbents seeking re-election (Lomnitz 1995).

3. Data and methods

We test the impact of spending on local festivities on electoral support by employing a newly created dataset that combines different sources of information at the municipality level. We were able to obtain information for 2,104 municipalities. Although these represent 25.9% of the total number of municipalities (in 2015 Spain had 8,124 municipalities), we have large variation on geographical coverage, election results and patterns of public spending on festivities.¹ The included municipalities are home of around 64% of the total Spanish population (nearly 30 million people of the 46 million people living in Spain in 2015).²

Our outcome of interest is the difference between the percentage of votes received in the 2015 local elections by the mayor's party at the end of the 2011-15 mandate, and the party's share of the vote in the 2011 elections.³ Figure 1 shows the distribution of votes for all parties (bar) and the kernel distribution for the four main parties with mayors in Spain in 2015.⁴ The variable resembles a normal distribution, with a mean value of -

¹ Since 2010, it has been possible to obtain publicly available and detailed data on the allocation of resources within the yearly local budget. The municipalities from the Basque country and Navarre regions are the exception to this rule, as long as they do not belong to the so-called Communities of common regime, and are hence excluded from the dataset.

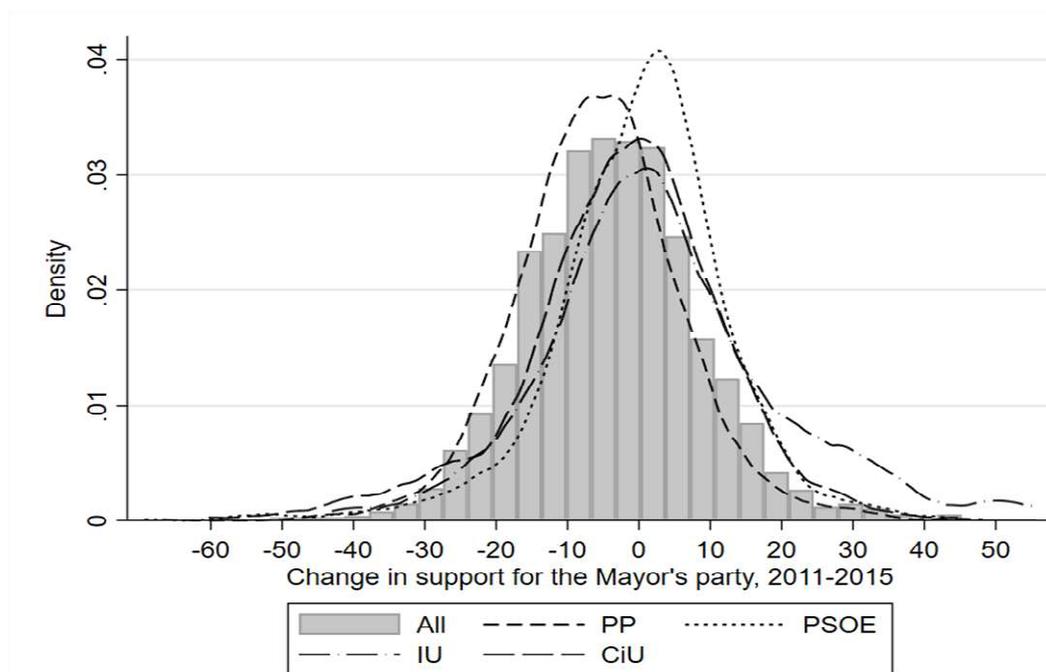
² Appendix S2 in the supporting information explores the correlates of missing values. Results show that the main factor driving the inclusion or not of the municipality in the sample is the log of the population, with larger municipalities being much more likely to be included than small ones. To circumvent this, Table S3d in the supporting information replicates the results from Model 3 in Table 1 by dropping large municipalities from the selected sample until we get a balanced panel in terms of population (column 2) and in terms of the log of the population. Results confirm the evidence found in our main models.

³ We focus our attention on the party whose mayor is in office at the end of the 2011-2015 legislature instead of the elected mayor after the 2011 elections because the mayor may have changed during the legislature, as a consequence of a vote of no confidence. The source of the data is the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.

⁴ Although other parties hold a larger number of mayors than Izquierda Unida (for instance, the regionalist Partido Aragonés Regionalista), they mostly govern in small towns for which we do not have data on festivities. We group them together in the "Others" category.

3.54. The negative value essentially means that, during this period, incumbents lost on average 3.5 per cent points in the 2015 election as compared to the 2011 election. The kernel distributions for each party are displayed in dotted lines. The distribution of the variable in our sample is skewed to the left for the PP, with a mean loss of 7.44 per cent points from one election to the other. On the other hand, the PSOE made a slight gain of 0.24 per cent points, IU gained 1.91 points and the Catalan nationalist CiU lost 1.96 points.⁵

Figure 1. Histogram of the change in support for the mayor's party in 2015, by political party



Note: Histogram of the differences in support for the Mayor's party in 2015, before and after the local elections, using model specification number 1 in Table 1. Party lines are displayed using Kernel density estimation. N=2,104.

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this article to explain why the PP (and to a lesser extent CiU) lost a substantial share of the votes. However, two main factors can be mentioned. First, the emergence of new political competitors in 2015, both on the left (Podemos) and on the right (Ciudadanos); second, the PP (and CiU in Catalonia) had been in charge of most of the municipalities in the 2007-11 legislature and voters may have penalised the parties for the bad economic outcomes experienced during this period (Rodon and Hierro 2016).

The main explanatory variable is the *percentage change in the per capita amount of money spent on festivities between the 2011-2013 period and 2014*. We use the percentage change of the per capita amount of money allocated to festivities in 2014 instead of 2015 because, although local elections in 2015 took place on the 24th of May, local festivities take place, for the most part, during the summer (once elections have been held). Also, as mentioned above, we follow the established finding in the literature on economic business cycle and economic voting and expect that it is the change in the last year's spending on local festivities that affects the incumbent's success. Figure S1a in the supporting information plots the histogram with the distribution of the variable.⁶

In order to account for the heterogeneous distribution of our main independent variable across other variables, as well as to prevent idiosyncratic reasons explaining the variation in the vote for the mayor, we introduce the following control variables:

- *Mean per capita amount of money spent on festivities between 2011 and 2013*: the inclusion of the mean in the per capita amount of money spent on local festivities in 2011, 2012 and 2013 serves as a baseline reference for the level of spending in local festivities in each municipality. This variable accounts for the fact that the change in spending in local festivities may be affected by previous levels of spending, as well as

⁶ The variable takes a value close to -1 when a municipality has reduced the amount of money allocated to local festivities from a certain sum to (almost) nothing. The value for increases in the sum of money allocated to local festivities is not bounded and, therefore, in order to obtain a normal distribution and to be able to properly estimate the effect for the most part of the sample, we have attributed a value of 1 to all those municipalities that had a high value (4.2% of the sample—these are those municipalities that more than duplicated the sum of money devoted to festivities). This criterion not only allows us having a symmetrical and bounded measure, but theoretically also accounts for the positive but marginally decreasing impact of suddenly increasing the amount of money allocated to local festivities. Note that results hold if municipalities above the value of zero are dropped from the sample or if we allow the measure to have a higher upper bound—yet, the one-point impact of the percentage change in the per capita amount of money spent on festivities between the 2011-2013 period and 2014 becomes smaller as the observed pattern is not monotonic but rather asymptotic.

for potential ceiling (floor) effects in those municipalities with high (low) levels of spending in the past.⁷

- *Change in turnout rate (2011-15)*: We adjust for the change in the turnout rate between the 2011 and 2015 elections. The change in the budget given over to local festivities may indirectly affect the electoral results by boosting (or reducing) turnout.

- *Incumbent party before the 2015 local elections*: we include a series of dummy variables capturing the party holding office before the 2015 local elections. These account for the heterogeneous change in support for parties between the 2011 and 2015 elections (see figure 1). Categories are the PP (the reference category; it governs in 1006 municipalities in our sample), the PSOE (692), Izquierda Unida (68) and the Catalan Convergència i Unió (257). The remaining parties are collapsed into the ‘Other parties’ category (81).

- *Competitiveness (reversed)*: A variable that captures the distance between the winner party and the first-loser party in the 2011 elections. The measure serves as an indicator of the level of satisfaction with local politics, where large values indicate that the 2011 elections left a one-party dominant city council.

Apart from these political variables, we include a series of economic controls in our empirical models:

- *Change in the budget per inhabitant (2011-2014)*: the change in the budget per inhabitant in the municipality between 2011 and 2014 may explain a boost in support for the mayor not directly attributable to the amount of money spent on local festivities.

As before, we use the budget change between 2011 and 2014, instead of 2015, as most local festivities take place during the summer (and local elections take place in May).

⁷ Appendix S2 in the supporting information shows that, once controlling for other covariates, the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities is higher near election periods (2011 and 2014). The inclusion or exclusion of the control variable that captures the mean per capita amount of money spent on festivities between 2011 and 2013 does not change our results.

Finally, to account for different baseline levels in the local budget, we control for the budget per inhabitant in 2011.

- *Change in the unemployment rate (2011-2015)*: As a measure of the economic situation of the municipality, we control for the difference in the percentage of unemployment between June 2011—when the incumbent started the term—and May 2015—when the new elections took place. A control for the unemployment rate in June 2011 is also included as a baseline.

- *Change in the percentage of the municipalities' debt (2011-2015)*: We control for the change in the percentage of the municipality's debt over the municipality's total budget. This measure provides an indication of the global state of the local finances and captures a different type of information than the level of unemployment of the municipality, which is a much individual-focused measure. As in previous cases, we also control for the percentage of the municipality's debt in 2011.

- *Population*: we control for the log of the population in 2015. This is a relevant variable since the per capita amount of money given over to local festivities depends largely on the population of the municipality. In fact, on average we observe that small towns usually spend a larger per capita amount of money on local festivities than medium/large cities. Hence, we include the logarithmic transformation of the population to account for the asymptotic relationship between the population and the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities as municipalities become more populated.

- *Percentage of foreign population in the municipality*: we also control for the percentage of population born outside Spain living in the municipality in 2014. The control is relevant because immigration drives voting patterns (Bergh and Bjørklund 2011; see Pardos-Prado and Molins 2010 for the Spanish case) and, crucially, the level

of support for public spending depends on the size of the immigrant population (Burgoon and Rooduijn 2020).

As mentioned above, our primary goal is to assess whether spending on local festivities increases the incumbent's share of the votes in the upcoming local elections. To do so, we use a series of quantile regression models with fixed effects by region (*Autonomous Community*).⁸ Each region has its own institutional, contextual and party system characteristics and, therefore, it is important to remove all unobservable characteristics across regions that might affect our estimates. The use of region fixed effects effectively means that we are comparing the difference in voting outcomes in municipalities within the same region that have different spending patterns on local festivities.

In the second part of the empirics, we dig into the mechanisms that underpin the relationship between the budget devoted to local festivities and the incumbent's electoral success. We test two potential explanations by interacting our main explanatory variable—the percentage change in the per capita amount of money spent on festivities between the 2011-2013 period and 2014—with different indicators that tap into each of the mechanisms. For doing so, as in the first part of the empirical analysis, we use a quantile regression. First, the *bread and circuses* hypothesis is tested using a dichotomous measure identifying whether the municipality holds bull events during the course of the year 2015. If the hypothesis is true, we expect to find a positive effect of local festivities' spending on the incumbent's electoral support in places where the number of bullfighting events is larger.⁹

⁸ Quantile regression estimates the conditional median (or other quantiles) of the response variable. The use of quantile regression is appropriate when the conditions of linear regression are not met, in most cases due to the presence of outliers in the response measurements (see Verardi and Croux 2009). As a robustness check, table S3a in the supporting information replicates the analysis by using a robust OLS regression. This estimation procedure enables us to prevent results to be highly sensitive to outliers and, thus, compromising the validity of the regression model.

⁹ Data comes from the newspaper *El País* and does not contain information from the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha. This region has 919 municipalities, 155 of which were included in the

Second, we test the *satisfaction* hypothesis by using the percentage of the municipality's debt over the total budget in 2015. Our expectation is that the reward mechanism should be conditional on a municipality's financial situation being positive. We interact the percentage change in the per capita amount of money spent on festivities between the 2011-2013 period and 2014 with the percentage of debt in 2015. We use the total municipality's debt as a measure of a municipality's financial strength instead of the change in the debt during the legislature. The first provides a (desired) global portrait of the state of the economy in the municipality—high debt, bad economic situation. In contrast, the change in the debt during the legislature may be used by incumbents to improve their electoral prospects in upcoming elections (c.f. Cox and McCubbins 1986; Lindbeck and Weibull 1987), thus confronting the expected negative outcomes with positive tensions.

Finally, we complement the *satisfaction* hypothesis by testing the extent to which the electoral rewards of the change in the budget allocated to festivities between 2013 and 2014 are conditional on the local government having delivered satisfactory local festivities during the previous years of the mandate. For this, we interact our main independent variable with the mean of the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities during the years 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Table S1a in the supporting information summarises the sources of data of our variables, and Table S1b provides basic descriptive statistics for our empirical analysis.

original festivals database, thus reducing the model from 2,056 observations to 1,901. If we use alternative specifications of the variable (e.g. a count of the number of bull events taking place in the municipality during the year, or its logarithmic transformation) we obtain the same results.

4. The effect of spending on local festivities on support for the incumbent

Table 1 reports our first set of results. The first model includes our main independent variable, the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014, as well as its baseline category (the mean of per capita amount of money spent on festivities between 2011 and 2013) and the demographic controls—the log of the population and the percentage of foreign population living in the municipality. The main independent variable has a positive coefficient, yet very close to zero, not achieving statistical significance. The negative coefficient for the log of the population shows that the percentage of vote for the Mayor party decreases as the population grows. Finally, results show that municipalities with a larger share of foreigners are more likely to vote for the incumbent.

The null finding for our main independent variable is not surprising given the large heterogeneity in the change in support for each party in the 2015 elections (see Figure 1). In Model 2, we include a series of dummy variables identifying the party governing before the 2015 local elections, along with a control for the change in the turnout rate between the 2011 and the 2015 elections. Results show that Mayors doubling the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities during the last year of the legislature obtain in the upcoming elections a share of the votes 2.5 points higher. Likewise, if the Mayor halves the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities during this period of time, he/she can expect the electoral results to worsen by 1.2 per cent points. As for the remaining variables, the dummy indicators for the incumbent party before the 2015 elections (reference category, the PP) shows a similar pattern to the one observed in Figure 1. In addition, the negative coefficient for the difference in turnout indicates that in those municipalities where turnout increased between the 2011 and the 2015 elections, the party's Mayor performed worst.

When in Model 3 we include the economic variables, the coefficient for the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 moderately increases from 2.4 to 2.7, while the coefficients for the controls included in the previous models do not change. Among the new controls the model includes, the change in the budget per inhabitant between 2011 and 2014 turns out to be the only explanatory variable.

Finally, in Model 4 we include a control for the (reverse) level of competitiveness in the 2011 elections (i.e. the difference between the winner and the second party). The negative coefficient shows that, not surprisingly, in those municipalities where the margin of victory in the 2011 elections was very large, the Mayor's party suffered a loss in support in the 2015 election. Most importantly, despite the coefficient for the main independent variable is moderately reduced, the results show that, by doubling the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities during the last year of the legislature, Mayors obtain an electoral reward of 1.8 per cent points in the upcoming elections.

Table 1: Support for the party of the Mayor in the 2015 elections

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Δ % per capita money festivities ₂₀₁₁₋₁₃₋₁₄	0.172 (0.861)	2.390** (0.795)	2.709*** (0.804)	1.811* (0.756)
Mean per capita money festivities ₂₀₁₁₋₁₃	-0.013+ (0.008)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)	0.002 (0.007)
(log) Population ₂₀₁₅	-2.322*** (0.219)	-1.753*** (0.207)	-1.765*** (0.225)	-2.156*** (0.212)
% foreign population ₂₀₁₄	7.732* (3.618)	7.366* (3.366)	7.594* (3.407)	3.923 (3.202)
Δ Turnout ₂₀₁₁₋₁₅		-0.684*** (0.062)	-0.658*** (0.063)	-0.719*** (0.059)
<i>Party Mayor</i>				
PP		[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]
PSOE		6.897*** (0.651)	7.139*** (0.653)	5.649*** (0.619)
IU		4.962** (1.547)	5.101** (1.581)	3.538* (1.494)
CiU		4.413** (1.513)	5.502*** (1.494)	3.450* (1.406)
Other parties		9.200*** (1.619)	9.682*** (1.613)	8.996*** (1.520)
Δ Budget/inhabitant ₂₀₁₁₋₁₄			0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Budget/inhabitant ₂₀₁₁			-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Δ Unemployment ₂₀₁₁₋₁₅			-0.045 (0.033)	-0.040 (0.031)
% Unemployment ₂₀₁₁			-0.014 (0.015)	-0.042** (0.014)
Δ Local debt ₂₀₁₁₋₁₅			-0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)
% Local debt ₂₀₁₁			-0.131+ (0.077)	-0.122+ (0.072)
(log) Margin of victory of the Mayor ₂₀₁₁				-3.172*** (0.282)
Constant	18.726*** (2.008)	5.978** (2.011)	7.828*** (2.323)	21.683*** (2.408)
Region FE	$\sqrt{\quad}$	$\sqrt{\quad}$	$\sqrt{\quad}$	$\sqrt{\quad}$
Observations	2,104	2,104	2,013	2,013
Pseudo-R ²	0.0935	0.1613	0.1690	0.1991

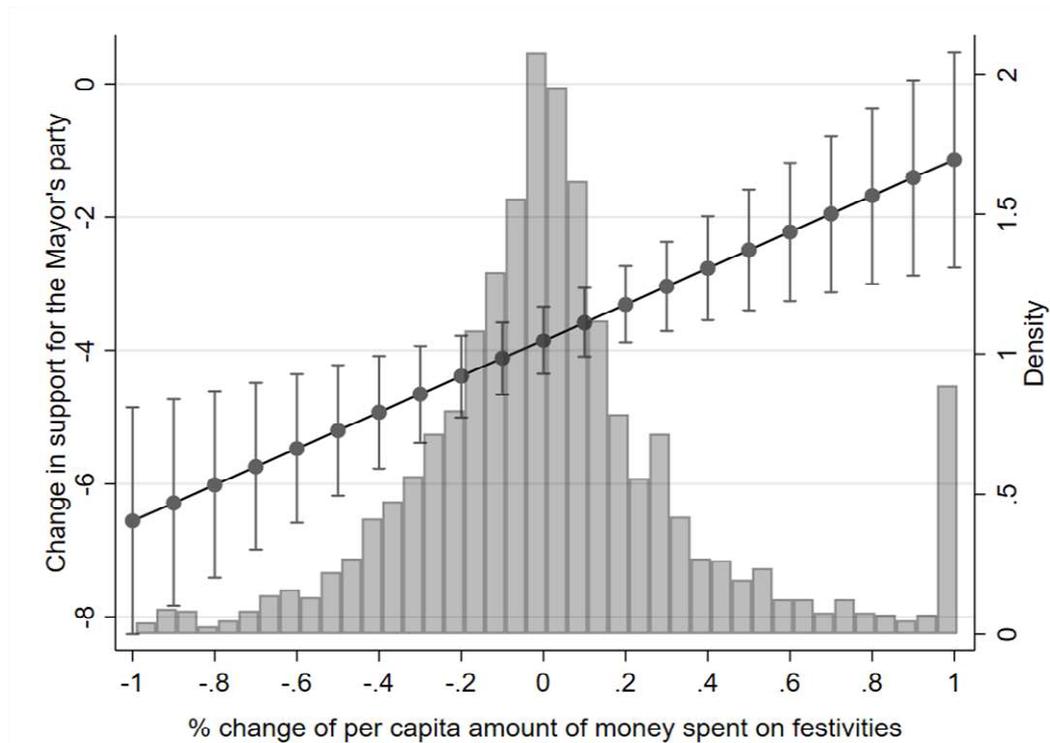
Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Finally, to visually illustrate the results, figure 2 plots the expected impact of the change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and

2014 on the performance of the incumbent party in the upcoming elections (according to model 3).

Figure 2. Predicted impact of the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014, on change in support for the Mayor's party in 2015



Note: Predicted impact of the change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 on the differences in support for the mayor's party in 2015, before and after the local elections, using model specification number 3 in Table 1. The histogram shows the distribution of the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014. N=2,013.

5. Exploring the mechanisms

In the previous section we have shown that, by increasing the per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities in the year before local elections, Mayors are able to obtain a positive electoral reward in the upcoming election. Yet, why do we observe such positive effect? In the theoretical section, we posited two potential mechanisms.

First, the *bread and circuses* hypothesis defends that the positive effect of spending on festivities might particularly come from the organisation of highly visible events, such as bullfighting. Departing from the model specification 3 in Table 1, we test this mechanism by interacting the change in spending between 2011-13 and 2014, with a dichotomous measure identifying whether the municipality holds bull events during the year or not. Panel top left in figure 3 plots the marginal effects of the change in the per capita amount of money allocated to festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 on the differences in support for the mayor's party in 2015, depending on whether municipalities hold or not bull events during the course of the year.¹⁰ Results show that the presence or absence of bull events in the municipality is not able to explain to differences in support for the party Mayor. These results hence do not show support for our *bread and circuses* hypothesis and indicate that spending on local festivities does not exert a positive influence only when the organised events are highly visible.

Our second expectation posited that the effect would take place when festivities take place in contexts where it is possible to trigger citizens' satisfaction (*satisfaction hypothesis*). This general mechanism can be divided into two logics.

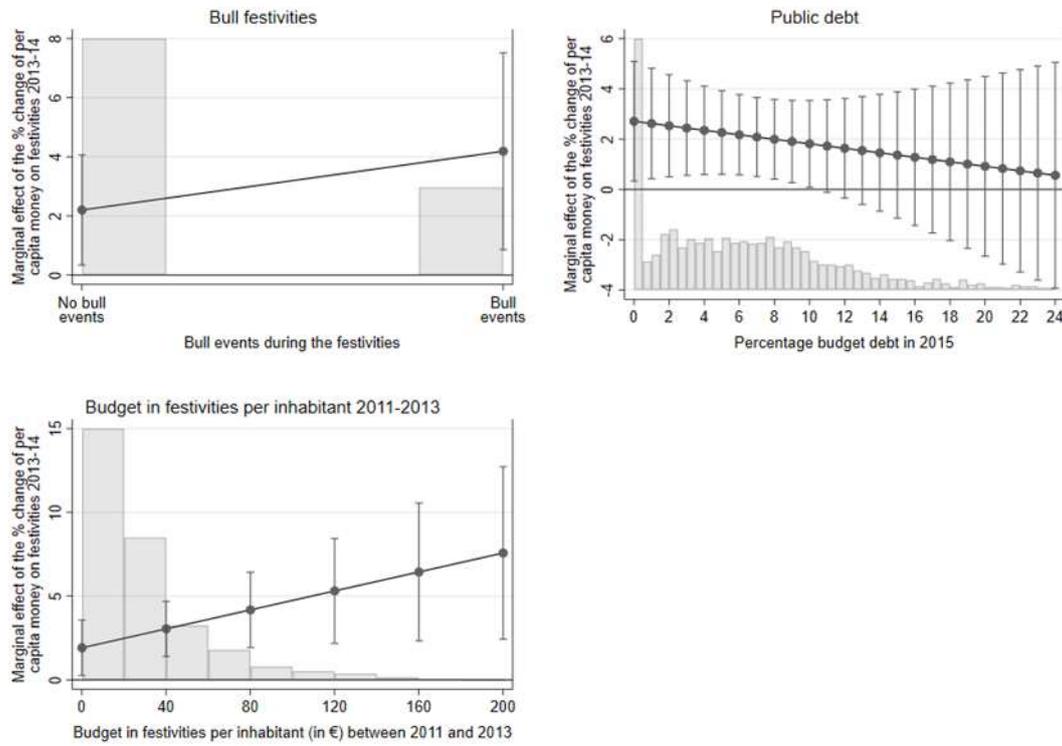
First, the effect of changes in the money allocated to local festivities would be particularly strong in municipalities where local governments achieve budget stability. The top right panel in figure 3 shows that, as expected, the marginal effect of the money allotted to festivities is only significant for municipalities with a level of debt in 2015 below the 10% of their total yearly budget. However, the overall change is not statistically significant, and the use of a robust OLS regression instead of a quantile regression (see table S3c in the supporting information) shows a flat slope across the

¹⁰ Table S3b in the supporting information shows the different results of the interaction models, using a series of quantile regression models with region fixed effects. Table S3c does the same by using a robust OLS regression.

different values of the percentage of debt. We hence need to read these results with a grain of salt.

Second, in the satisfaction hypothesis, we also posited that the effect of a change in spending in local festivities would be particularly strong when the local government has satisfactorily delivered local festivities throughout the mandate (proxied as the mean budget allocated to festivities during the period 2011-2013). As shown in the bottom left panel, in this case the evidence is strongly supportive of our hypothesis. The positive slope shows us that the change in the per capita budget allocated to local festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 is very weak when the money devoted to festivals during the legislature was (nearly) zero. However, as the resources allocated to local festivities during the 2011-13 increase, the rewarding mechanism of the change in money devoted to festivals in the year before the local election skyrockets. For instance, if the municipality spent a mean of 40€ per inhabitant in the 2011, 2012 and 2013 on the local festivity, doubling this amount of money in the 2014 election would entail a 4 per cent point improvement for the Mayor's party in the next election. Also, if the previous amount of money was 80€ instead of 40€, spending 160€ per inhabitant on local festivities in 2014 would lead the incumbent to improve their electoral results by more than 5 per cent points. In other words, spending on local festivities in the year prior to the elections has a positive effect when during the legislature the local government kept spending levels relatively high. Overall, the two later plots show considerable evidence in favour of the satisfaction hypothesis.

Figure 3. Marginal effect of the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 on the differences in support for the mayor's party in 2015, across different moderators



Note: The top left-hand plot shows the marginal effect of the percentage change in the per capita amount of money allocated to festivities between 2011-13 and 2014 on the differences in support for the mayor's party in 2015, across the values of the (log of the) number of bull events organised in the municipality (N=1,865). The top right-hand plot shows the same marginal effect, across the values of the percentage of local debt in 2015 over the total municipality's budget (N=1,947). The bottom left-hand panel displays the marginal effects across the values of the mean per capita amount of money allocated to local festivities between the years 2011 and 2013 (N=2,013).

6. Conclusions

In multi-level settings, voters are not always able to distinguish which level of government is responsible for each policy implemented and, therefore, the reward-punishment mechanism might not function as expected. This is especially true for local governments. Mayors and local councils usually have limited powers regarding several

policy areas and their work is often overshadowed by other supra-administrations with more power and media presence. In this regard, local festivities emerge as an attractive policy tool for gaining visibility, increase popularity and, ultimately, improve the incumbent's chances to get re-elected in the upcoming elections.

In this article, by using data on Spanish local elections between 2011 and 2015, we show that money allocated to local festivities boosts the electoral performance of the incumbent party. Mayors doubling the per capita amount of money devoted to local festivities during the last year of the legislature benefit by around two per cent points in the upcoming election. The substantive effect might seem small, but one needs to take into account that many contests are marginally decided and such increase may very well decide some electoral races. In the second part of our empirical analysis, we tentatively delve into the potential mechanisms accounting for this relationship. Our results show support for our *satisfaction* hypothesis, but not for the *bread and circuses* hypothesis. Indeed, we find some evidence that changes in the money given over to festivities enhance the incumbent's support when the financial situation of the municipality is favourable (low level of public debt). Much stronger, though, are the results showing that changes in the money given over to festivities enhance the incumbent's support when the spending on local festivities during the previous years of the electoral mandate has been generous.

In sum, our results confirm that local festivities are an important policy tool to boost the incumbent's electoral prospects, and they suggest that the rewarding mechanism may mainly be linked to the voter's satisfaction with the functioning of the local government, rather than with the organisation of visible events (such as bullfighting). These results are relevant as they touch upon one of the most visible local policies that

mayors in several countries can control, and whose effects on electoral results had been totally neglected until now.

Despite our contribution, future scholars should focus on exploring the extent to which the evidence found in Spain can travel to other contexts where local festivities play a prominent role in the collective imaginary, such as other Southern European countries, as well as Latin American, Asian or Oceanian countries. In addition, the logic behind local festivities is arguably not very different from the organization of public festivals or other types of leisure events—concerts, sports events, or festivals. Leisure events can have an influence on people’s opinion towards their local government and, as such, future research should consider them as potential factors explaining differences in vote choice. Likewise, upcoming research could investigate further the potential mechanisms accounting for the observed relationship. One could, for instance, refine the *bread and circuses* logic and explore whether the effect of local festivities persists in municipalities where negative exogenous events affect the incumbents. Finally, the mechanisms could also be better addressed by relying on individual-level data. In this regard, the occurrence of local festivities during the course of a survey fieldwork would serve as a quasi-experimental exogenous treatment to assess the impact of a local festivity on myriad political, psychological or managerial issues. For all these purposes, however, scholars would need to rely on better sources of data than the ones currently available.

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