



Political identity bias in interpersonal attitudes: Explaining affective polarisation in the 2023 Spanish general election

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Abstract | Introduction: This paper aims to test which has a greater influence on affective polarisation (AP) in a multi-party system such as the Spanish one: partisan identity or ideology. In doing so, we review the validity of the expressive approach to partisanship and we test the biases that political identities can cause. **Method:** We use a strict measure based on a feeling thermometer regarding ordinary people depending on the party they vote for and their ideology and we propose a formula to estimate the levels of difference in interpersonal political affect (DIPA). Subsequently, linear regression models were developed using data from a national representative sample survey conducted during the election campaign for the July 2023 general elections ($n = 1,223$). **Results:** Strong positive partisanship influences individual AP in a prominent way both when attitudes are expressed towards partisan or ideological groups. This contradicts the widespread discourse regarding the primacy of ideology in European multiparty systems. Moreover, we show that the overlapping between these two identities is not significant in explaining the phenomenon. **Conclusion:** AP is a group identity-based phenomenon even outside the U.S, which invites us to interpret it using the theories of social psychology.

Keywords: Partisanship, intergroup relations, affective polarisation, social identity, ingroup bias, interpersonal attitudes

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Sesgo de identidad política en las actitudes interpersonales: Explicando la polarización afectiva en las elecciones generales españolas de 2023

Resumen | Introducción: Este artículo pretende comprobar qué influye más en la polarización afectiva (PA) en un sistema multipartidista como el español: la identidad partidista o la ideología. Para ello, revisamos la validez del enfoque expresivo del partidismo y ponemos a prueba los sesgos que pueden provocar las identidades políticas. **Método:** Utilizamos una medida estricta basada en un termómetro de sentimientos hacia personas corrientes en función del partido al que votan y de su ideología y proponemos una fórmula para estimar los niveles de diferencia en el afecto político interpersonal (DIPA). Posteriormente, se desarrollaron modelos de regresión lineal a partir de los datos de una encuesta nacional representativa por muestreo realizada durante la campaña electoral de las elecciones generales de julio de 2023 ($n = 1223$). **Resultados:** El partidismo positivo fuerte influye de manera destacada en la PA individual tanto cuando las actitudes se expresan hacia grupos partidistas como hacia grupos ideológicos. Esto contradice el discurso generalizado sobre la primacía de la ideología

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en los sistemas multipartidistas europeos. Además, mostramos que el solapamiento entre estas dos identidades no es significativo para explicar el fenómeno. **Conclusión:** La PA es un fenómeno basado en la identidad de grupo incluso fuera de Estados Unidos, lo que nos invita a interpretarla utilizando las teorías de la psicología social.

Palabras clave: Partidismo, relaciones intergrupales, polarización afectiva, identidad social, sesgos endogrupales, actitudes interpersonales

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Spain is cited as one of the world's most affectively polarised democracies (Gidron et al., 2020). The levels of polarisation in the country have grown considerably in recent years, with no academic consensus on its origin. In addition, Spaniards turn their partisan feelings into expressions of social distance more fiercely than voters from other countries (Tichelbaecker et al., 2023). As a result, Spain represents a fundamental case for testing the theories that have hitherto struggled to explain affective polarisation (AP).

For ten years, social scientists have questioned the origins of the rise in affective hostility that pits voters against each other in most of the world's democracies (Reiljan et al., 2023). Two approaches have been proposed to explain the phenomenon: the social identity approach (Iyengar et al., 2012) and the ideological approach (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). Significant efforts have been made to demonstrate which of these two variables has a greater effect when trying to explain the maximisation of group biases. Relying on data from the US, Orr and Huber (2020) demonstrate that "policy positions are more important to interpersonal evaluations than partisanship". Westwood et al. (2018), on the other hand, reveal that partisan identities are more important in explaining interpersonal discrimination than other social identities. These authors incorporate data from Spain, but limited only to the Basque Country.

While the question of whether partisanship outweighs ideology has previously attracted interest, the existing evidence remains insufficient, as a clear consensus has yet to be reached. Using the particularly interesting context of Spain, we will show that the influence of partisanship or ideology depends to a large extent on which element is used to categorise individuals, which will help to resolve a wide-ranging debate still unresolved in the literature. In this view, it is difficult to suggest that ideology is more important than partisanship or vice versa. One identity or the other may be activated at different times according to strategic or circumstantial elements.

In any case, through this research we will demonstrate that, under certain conditions, the identity-expressive dimension of partisanship is more powerful than the ideological-instrumental dimension. This statement is highly relevant in the Spanish case. As Spain is a multiparty parliamentary system, the expressive component of partisanship has been marginalised in favour of the ideological component in explanations of political behaviour or attitudes. When explaining AP in Spain, particular focus is given to the concept of ideological blocs (Orriols & León, 2022; Comellas & Torcal,

2023). These studies consider ideological blocs as major identity benchmarks, which means that partisan identities are not enough to explain group-based biases in the political field. This is part of a long tradition of underestimating partisanship among Spanish social scientists. This tradition has made ideological self-positioning the best predictor of partisan identity, ahead of social cleavages.

Besides these two major explanatory approaches, the literature has addressed the challenge of transferring a concept (AP) born of a two-party system to European multiparty systems, where determining outgroups and ingroups can prove more complex and not correspond accurately to partisan lines (Harteveld, 2021). Nevertheless, said systems are interesting study topics because, contrary to expectations, they are not less polarised than the U.S., particularly when referring to southern and eastern European countries (Reiljan, 2020).

Is the problem what you are, what you think or all at once?

Papers that defend explanations based on the Social Identity Theory (SIT) adopt Tajfel et al.'s (1971) minimal group paradigm. For this paradigm, discrimination processes can occur between two social groups even if there is no real conflict of interest. The mere categorisation an individual performs by establishing their ingroup and outgroup(s) would be a sufficient condition to favour the group to which they belong over the others. When applied to politics, we could argue that voters do not always have such contrasting ways of thinking, and it is their partisan identity—which in turn becomes a social identity—that generates biases, promoting negative judgments concerning rival party voters (Iyengar et al., 2012). As a result, the influence of social identity on self-concept explains that for those individuals with strong feelings of attachment, known as positive partisanship, defending the group becomes a personal issue.

Adopting partisanship as a form of social identity strongly rooted in the individual is known as the expressive approach to partisanship (Bankert et al., 2017). This approach argues that the affective attachment to parties is relatively independent of their policy positions or the satisfaction of interests and responds, rather, to a sense of emotional belonging. From this point of view, partisanship is more connected to the psychological-sociological plane. This transcends the instrumental view of partisanship, which, from the rational understanding of the voter, subordinates their partisan identity to the coincidence between the group's ideo-

logical positions, the individual's preferences, and the utility maximisation principle (Huddy & Bankert, 2017).

On the assumption that the rejection of "them" occurs due to them being categorised as members of the outgroup, for the *party-over-policy* hypothesis, knowing an individual's position regarding an issue influences polarisation just because it signals partisan identity (Dias & Lelkes, 2022). This approach has gained popularity in North American literature given the country's political tradition, marked during the twentieth century by minor ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans, which made partisan identification the primary anchor for explaining political behaviour. Studies such as the one by Huddy et al. (2015) support this hypothesis by finding that individuals with a strong partisan identity reacted with more heightened emotions to scenarios of the ingroup's electoral defeat or victory than those with a weak partisanship level. Similarly, they proved that individuals with strong ideological views did not get more excited than others about positive or negative scenarios for their ideologically like-minded group (Huddy et al., 2015).

Thanks to this type of evidence, we started to understand partisanship based on an expressive approach rather than an instrumental one, which implies more stability in partisan identification, partisan identity having more influence on political behaviour, and a behaviour conducive to protecting the group's status beyond the parties' specific actions or changes in the elite's views (Huddy et al., 2018). Donald P. Green and his colleagues are among the most notable authors of the expressive approach. In their works, they understand partisanship as a cohesive device of pre-political social identities reflected in voters' minds when estimating on which side of the political competition people who are like them are (Green et al., 2002).

On the other hand, the approach that prioritises ideological disagreement over partisan identity adopts a Downsian view of the phenomenon: animosity grows due to the principle of convergence between the groups' ideology under evaluation and the individual's ideology (Algara & Zur, 2023). Individuals ideologically closer to their party's positions and those furthest away from the other party's ideology will express the most ingroup attachment and outgroup rejection. This shows that individuals have a notable concern for the argumentative content of political competition and that they are not driven by team spirit alone. Perceived ideological distances increases the sense of competition: the opponent's victory may have crucial consequences for one's own interests (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016).

Authors focusing on ideological differences as a driver of AP adopt this instrumental view of partisanship. They defend the viewpoint that the sense of mutual dislike among voters increases because their ways of thinking and policy preferences are growing further apart. The differences between liberals and conservatives in the U.S. or between the left and right in Europe lead to wide-ranging disagreements on disparate issues, from economics to morals. These ideological preferences are predictors of feelings towards partisan groups associated with ideological labels (Abramowitz, 2021).

The widening ideological gap between partisan groups coincides with a process of alignment or overlapping between ideology and partisanship that heightens emotional reactions (Lelkes, 2021). Democrats are becoming more and more liberal, and Republicans are increasingly conservative. Transversality—which once moderated the effects of group identity—is dead. The underlying reasoning is similar to what Mason (2018) suggests about the alignment of social groups and partisan groups. Classifying identities, ways of thinking, or categories within the partisan groups increases the sense of distance between them. Some studies add a third dimension to the alignment logic: the lack of sociological and ideological transversality is not the only influence, but the fact that issue-specific positions are increasingly related to each other in different dimensions also intensifies outgroup rejection (Bougher, 2017).

Method

Despite the broad consensus on defining AP as a tendency to show animosity towards rival party voters and avoid interaction with them, the most recurrent measurement of the phenomenon employs a feeling thermometer on parties as abstract groups and not towards the people who vote for them (Gidron et al., 2023). Politically motivated interpersonal hostility is the hallmark of AP, which emphasises the psycho-sociological basis of this process. However, calculating differences in feelings towards one's own party and others' parties does not ensure that the feelings of ordinary voters are addressed.

We subscribe to authors who, like Knudsen (2021), understand feeling thermometers towards parties as indirect measurements of the phenomenon. By focusing on the influence of group biases on affect towards ordinary voters, we take a more psychological view of the phenomenon that attempts to explain the origins of certain processes of politically motivated discrimination. Measurements centred on feelings towards people are more restrictive because they concretise the aim of affective evaluation (Comellas, 2022). It is plausible to think that such concretisation—more subject to social desirability—guarantees an expression of dislike towards the outgroup that would not happen conversely. Individuals who are polarised in more substantive and profound matters would be in more trivial issues too. We also suspect that the type of identity that defines the object of affective evaluation may make partisanship or ideology more influential.

Whether we use the feeling thermometers towards parties or individuals with a particular partisan or ideological identity, converting these scales into a single AP indicator is based on measuring differences between the score given to the ingroup and that given to the outgroups (Iyengar et al., 2012). Considering these initial debates on the operationalisation of the phenomenon and the measurement formula, we aim to describe the interpersonal affective dynamics produced between voters of the four main Spanish parties (PSOE, PP, Vox, and Sumar) and between the two ideological blocs. We will subsequently analyse which factors mainly help

predict the level of individual AP, taking ordinary people as the object of attitudinal expression.

Using multivariate analysis models, we compare the effect that two types of strong attitude have on AP (partisan or ideologically based), one associated with a strong positive partisan identity (SPPID) —the problem is what you are— and the other linked to a strong ideology (SID) —the problem is what you think—. Additionally, we assessed the contribution of the overlapping between ideology and partisanship, asking whether the combination of the two identities increases AP levels. The hypotheses to be tested are:

H1a. Strong partisan identity primarily drives affective polarisation when measuring feelings towards people based on their party affiliation.

H1b. Strong partisan identity significantly influences affective polarisation, even when measuring feelings towards people based on their ideology.

H2. The overlapping of a strong partisan identity with a strong ideology increases affective polarisation.

We use the Third Spanish Survey of Political Polarisation's open-source dataset produced by the Murcian Public Opinion Research Center (CEMOP). This dataset includes 1,223 interviews conducted via CATI system between July 10 and 21, 2023, with a representative sample of the Spanish population over 18 years old. The study's fieldwork coincided with the July 23 general election campaign, so the results take on particular significance, given previous evidence of the relevance of electoral contexts in strengthening partisan identities and ideological disagreements (Hernández et al., 2021).

The operationalisation of the dependent variable is based on a classic feeling thermometer in which respondents were asked about their level of sympathy or rejection towards people who vote for different parties or who hold different ideologies. Then, we applied a formula to estimate the levels of difference in interpersonal political affect (DIPA) to this “feeling thermometer towards groups of people”. The first step in the calculation determines the individual's affiliation with one of the partisan (PSOE, PP, Vox, Sumar) or ideological (left-wing, right-wing) groups. For this, we used their voting preferences or partisan sympathy if they did not confirm their voting preferences. The selection of vote+sympathy as the variable that allows us to indicate which group the individual belongs to has a solid basis: 93.2% of PP voters, 87.3% of PSOE voters, 80.3% of Vox voters and 73.8% of Sumar voters give the highest score on the feeling thermometer to the party they voted for and give lower scores to all the others. That is, the decision to vote for a party in Spain is strongly linked to feelings of belonging.

Once we knew the respondents' political affiliation, we considered the value individuals (*i*) gave to the people in their ingroup (ft_{in_i}). The score given to ingroup is subtracted from the score given to members of each of the outgroups ($ft_{out_{i,p}}$), and then the total is calculated. The resulting value is normalised between 0 and 1, applying the traditional formula: $Z_i = (x_i - \text{minimum}(x)) /$

(maximum(*x*) – minimum(*x*)). The maximum will be obtained by multiplying 10 by *n* – 1, with *n* being the number of parties or ideological groups analysed. In a four-party system, the maximum for DIPA (parties) will be 30 ($(10 \cdot (4 - 1)) = 30$). If this same system has two ideological groups, the maximum value of DIPA (ideologies) will be 10 ($(10 \cdot (2 - 1)) = 10$). The non-normalised result may be negative if the individual gives less score to his or her ingroup than to the outgroups. Examples of the formula's application are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

$$DIPA_i = \sum_{p=1}^n ft_{in_i} - ft_{out_{i,p}}$$

$$DIPA_i \text{ (normalised)} = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^n (ft_{in_i} - ft_{out_{i,p}}) - ((-10 \cdot (n-1)))}{(10 \cdot (n-1)) - (-10 \cdot (n-1))}$$

Table 1. Example calculation of DIPA (parties)

Group membership	Feeling thermometer (vote based) (FT _v)				DIPA normalised	
	PP FT _v	PSOE FT _v	Vox FT _v	Sumar FT _v		
PP	10	0	0	0	30	1
PSOE	5	10	1	7	17	0.78
PP	6	5	5	3	5	0.55
PSOE	3	7	0	6	12	0.70
PP	0	0	10	0	-10	0.33
PSOE	10	10	10	10	0	0.50

Table 2. Example calculation of DIPA (ideologies)

Group membership	Feeling thermometer (personal ideology based) (FT _i)			DIPA normalised
	Left-wing FT _i	Right-wing FT _i	DIPA	
Left-wing	10	0	10	1
Right-wing	0	9	9	0.95
Left-wing	9	3	6	0.8
Right-wing	5	8	3	0.65
Left-wing	8	8	0	0.5
Right-wing	9	7	-2	0.4

Regarding the independent variables presented above, strong positive partisanship (SPPID) is estimated based on a scale of sympathy/rejection towards the four main Spanish parties, where 0 means “maximum rejection” and 10 “maximum sympathy”. SPPID —formulated as a dummy variable for the regression models— takes the value 1 when a voter gives their own party a value of 8–10 on the sympathy/rejection scale and 0 when their affiliation is less than 8 or they “don't know/don't answer”. Positions below 8 (below the upper quartile) are estimated to coincide with a spectrum of

weak partisanship, indifference or even negative partisanship. The recoding of the scale is essential to differentiate and apprehend the SPPID concept. With this variable, we included the social identity hypothesis (*party-over-policy*) based on social psychology and intergroup relationship theories.

The second independent variable is strong ideology (SID), based on the traditional self-positioning scale in Spain, where 1 is the far-left, and 10 is the far-right. SID takes the value 1 when the individual positions themselves on one of the two ideological poles (1–3/8–10) so that their ideological position on the general left/right spectrum moves away from the centre and, therefore, has a powerful definition. SID takes the value 0 when the individual identifies with central positions, does not have a pronounced ideology or is not positioned on the scale (scoring 4–7 or answering “Don’t know/No answer”). Overall, we assume the left/right ideology positioning is a “super-issue” —according to the instrumental approach— but at the same time a powerful group identity (Comellas & Torcal, 2023). Lastly, we consider three control variables: gender, age and educational level (as a dichotomous variable that takes the value 1 when the individual has university studies and 0 in all other cases).

Results and discussion

Affective polarisation in the context of the 2023 Spanish general election

Before analysing the influence of partisan identity and ideology in their strongest versions on AP, we will present a descriptive analysis. The results presented on Table 3 show a general tendency towards ingroup favouritism. Citizens show more positive feelings towards people who vote for the same party as them or with whom they share their ideology.

Table 3. Feelings towards groups of people (based on what they vote and their ideology) according to the respondent’s voting preference or partisan sympathy

Vote+ sympathy	PP M (SD)	PSOE M (SD)	Vox M (SD)	Sumar M (SD)	Leftists M (SD)	Right-wingers M (SD)
PP	7.55 (1.82)	4.55 (2.59)	5.00 (2.72)	3.61 (2.73)	4.41 (2.63)	7.07 (1.97)
PSOE	4.07 (2.28)	7.68 (1.74)	1.44 (2.15)	6.39 (1.96)	7.28 (1.91)	4.19 (2.30)
Vox	6.32 (2.64)	2.86 (2.71)	7.98 (2.21)	1.93 (2.53)	2.85 (2.66)	7.05 (2.57)
SUMAR	3.65 (2.22)	6.82 (1.62)	1.20 (2.02)	8.05 (1.40)	7.92 (1.49)	3.34 (2.35)

Secondly, Table 4 shows the results obtained in the sample for the DIPA indicator (for party-based and ideologically-based groups). The DIPA average was 0.68 (parties) and 0.67 (ideologies) for the sample set. This allows us to conclude that the levels of AP based on partisan or ideological identities are very similar, i.e. that the group

biases and emotional reactions caused by both types of identity are analogous.

Table 4 shows that Vox and Sumar voters in both cases develop a slightly more pronounced individual AP than those who identify with mainstream parties (PSOE and PP). However, the Bonferroni correction *post hoc* tests revealed that the differences in the DIPA averages were only statistically significant for PP, while the other differences are very similar. Only this party’s voters show a comparatively distinctive attitudinal bias. This would therefore be the true asymmetric condition of AP in Spain. Moreover, we observed that voters in the far-right ideological positions show slightly more polarisation than those on the far-left, but centre-left voters (position 5) exhibited a more marked AP than centre-right voters (position 6), demonstrating again that polarisation is not perfectly symmetrical. The available evidence shows that asymmetry does not always occur in the same direction. While at the poles the right is more polarised than the left, in the central positions the opposite is true.

Table 4. Affective polarisation with DIPA formula

	DIPA (parties)			DIPA (ideologies)			
	Valid N	M	SD	Valid N	M	SD	
Voters with voter preference or support for different parties	PP	212	0.65	0.12	222	0.63	0.17
	PSOE	251	0.68	0.11	264	0.66	0.16
	Vox	107	0.72	0.14	110	0.71	0.17
	SUMAR	141	0.71	0.10	140	0.73	0.15
Individual’s ideology	1 and 2	91	0.74	0.09	93	0.76	0.15
	3 and 4	159	0.69	0.10	163	0.68	0.15
	5	195	0.65	0.12	206	0.61	0.15
	6	67	0.63	0.09	69	0.58	0.12
	7 and 8	131	0.68	0.11	133	0.68	0.15
	9 and 10	57	0.76	0.14	60	0.77	0.20
Valid sample set	711	0.68	0.12	736	0.67	0.17	

Subsequently, we conducted a bivariate analysis (see Table 5 and Table 6) to examine how the independent and control variables interact with the dependent variable. We found that voters with a SPPID and those positioned at the two poles of the ideological scale showed a higher DIPA result than those who did not have such strong attitudes, either by using parties as a group referent, or by using ideologies as a group referent. Hence, a SPPID and a SID are related in much the same way to levels of interpersonal hostility.

Regarding the respondents’ gender-based differences, we observed that women had slightly higher AP than men. In this case, it could be interpreted as how the linking of gender issues and feminist or anti-feminist values can generate social distancing effects. Notwithstanding, we must highlight that these differences could

Table 5. Bivariate analysis of individual affective polarisation levels (DIPA parties)

		Count data	DIPA average	SD	Statistical significance
SPPID	No SPPID	269	0.61	0.09	**
	Yes SPPID	442	0.72	0.11	
SID	No SID	415	0.65	0.11	**
	Yes SID	296	0.73	0.11	
Gender	Male	371	0.67	0.12	*
	Female	340	0.69	0.11	
Age	18–30	101	0.65	0.11	**
	31–44	189	0.67	0.11	
	45–64	257	0.69	0.12	
	65 and over	164	0.71	0.11	
Educational level	University	348	0.68	0.11	
	Other	363	0.68	0.12	

** 99% confidence level; * 95% confidence level. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) or a *T* test for independent samples depending on the independent variable's level of measurement.

Table 6. Bivariate analysis of individual affective polarisation levels (DIPA ideologies)

		Count data	DIPA average	SD	Statistical significance
SPPID	No SPPID	277	0.59	0.12	**
	Yes SPPID	459	0.72	0.17	
SID	No SID	436	0.62	0.15	**
	Yes SID	300	0.74	0.16	
Gender	Male	374	0.66	0.15	*
	Female	362	0.68	0.17	
Age	18–30	104	0.65	0.14	**
	31–44	193	0.65	0.16	
	45–64	265	0.66	0.17	
	65 and over	174	0.71	0.17	
Educational level	University	358	0.67	0.15	
	Other	378	0.67	0.18	

** 99% confidence level; * 95% confidence level. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) or *T* test for independent samples depending on the independent variable's level of measurement.

be influenced by the interaction of partisan identity or ideological positions with gender since women who support Sumar showed higher AP than men of the same party, while men who support Vox showed higher AP than women who support Vox. As for age-related di-

ferences, AP tends to increase proportionally with the respondents' age, which agrees with previous research (Phillips, 2022). Finally, we did not observe any significant differences regarding the respondents' level of education. Higher levels of education do not distinguish less discriminatory or tribal attitudes.

Drivers of affective polarisation in Spain

To test the hypotheses, we implemented four multiple linear regression (MLR) models using the set of variables mentioned in the Methods section and presented in the section on the bivariate analysis. The first models do not include the interaction between a SPPID and a SID, whereas the second do. H1a is tested by way of the first model on Table 7 and H1b is tested by way of the first model on Table 8. H2 is tested by way of the second model in both Tables. In the most complete model (2), we estimate the following multiple linear regression equation:

$$Y_i (\text{DIPA}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{SID}) + \beta_2 (\text{SPPID}) + \beta_3 (\text{SID} \times \text{SPPID}) + \beta_4 (\text{Gender}) + \beta_5 (\text{Age}) + \beta_6 (\text{Educational level}) + \varepsilon$$

Regression model 1 (Table 7) shows that a SPPID ($\beta = .381$, $p < 0,001$) has more influence on individual AP than a SID ($\beta = .210$, $p < 0,001$) within the left-right spectrum when we measure feelings towards people according to their partisan identity (H1a). This can also be clearly seen in Figure 1. This is evidence that partisanship has an expressive component that is related to intergroup biases. The expressive component is more powerful than ideology, even when ideology is strong.

But what happens if we measure DIPA in relation to ideologies? We run linear regression models (see Table 8) predicting DIPA (ideologies) and SID becomes the most influential variable ($\beta = .299$, $p < 0,001$). The type of identity that most affects attitudes of discrimination is the one that has been used to categorise the object of evaluation (see Figure 2). We demonstrate how sensitive the study of AP is to the way the dependent variable is operationalised (the choice of the basic identity of the group being evaluated) and the risk of falling into tautological explanations.

So far, we have obtained evidence that partisanship is at least as important as ideology in explaining AP. Looking more closely at the results of the regression models, we realise that the difference between the explanatory strength of a SID and a SPPID is more marked in the case of model 1 Table 7 than in the case of model 1 Table 8. A SPPID is almost as influential as a SID in explaining interpersonal affective attitudes according to ideology ($\beta = .286$, $p < 0,001$). However, a SID is clearly less influential than a SPPID when predicting interpersonal affective attitudes as a function of the party for which an individual votes.

As a result, although partisanship in Spain has always been thought of as an irrelevant form of identification, our data question this narrative and confirm that in multiparty systems where ideology has classically occupied a central place, partisanship has important consequences (even when we try to explain attitudes towards ideological groups). This undermines

the idea that partisanship is subordinated to ideological identity and demonstrates that both ideology and partisanship are relevant on their own and are deeply imbricated, but without an incontestable causal hierarchy. Rather than trying to argue that partisanship is more important than ideology or vice versa, we should accept that both forms of identity are very powerful in creating bias.

Regarding H2, we found that in no case is the coefficient for the interaction term SPPID × SID statistically significant. The overlapping of these variables does not exacerbate the phenomenon. When an individual combines a SID with a SPPID, it does not increase their AP levels compared to individuals who only have a SPPID or a SID. The effect of partisanship does not depend on ideology, its influence will be constant regardless of what happens to the ideology. This provides support for the idea that partisanship and ideology have relevant and independent effects, so it is not appropriate to assign a subordinate role to partisanship.

Table 7. MLR models to explain DIPA (parties)

	(1) β	(2) β
SID	0.210 **	0.258 **
SPPID	0.381 **	0.385 **
SPPID × SID		-0.060
Gender		0.027
Age		0.110 **
Educational level		0.004
Constant	0.607 **	0.557 **
R ²	0.229	0.243
Adjusted R ²	0.227	0.236
N	711	711

** 99% confidence level; * 95% confidence level

Table 8. MLR models to explain DIPA (ideologies)

	(1) β	(2) β
SID	0.299 **	0.338 **
SPPID	0.286 **	0.287 **
SPPID × SID		-0.049
Gender		0.038
Age		0.092 **
Educational level		-0.003
Constant	0.568 **	0.504 **
R ²	0.212	0.223
Adjusted R ²	0.210	0.216
N	736	736

** 99% confidence level; * 95% confidence level

With regard to the socio-demographic variables, gender does not appear as a significant individual AP factor. As

anticipated in the bivariate analysis, gender-based differences seem influenced by partisan and ideological identities. However, we did find that age was a significant predictor, with a 99 percent confidence level. This finding invites us to delve deeper into the generational component of the intergroup political conflict and its possible link with changes in values and forms of socialisation. In turn, educational level did not present any influence, as was shown in the bivariate analysis.

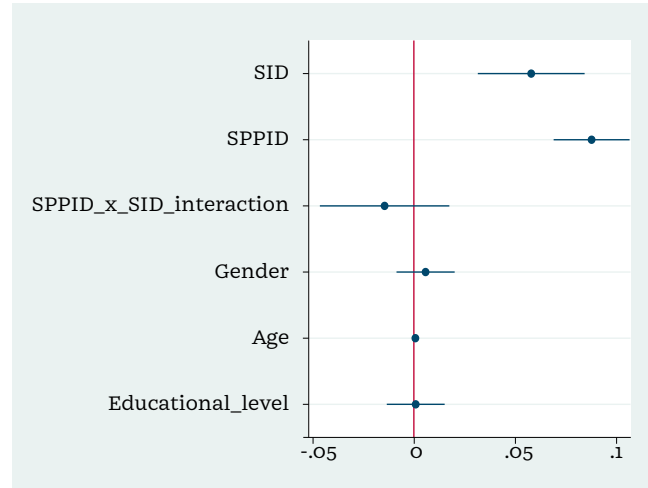


Figure 1. MLR model coefficients (DIPA parties)

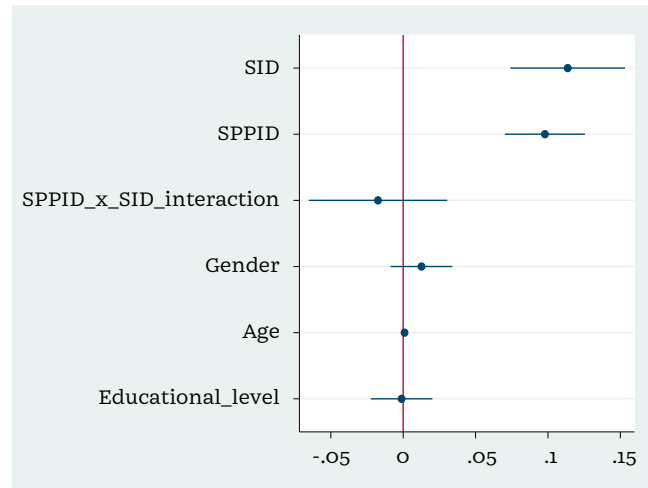


Figure 2. MLR model coefficients (DIPA ideologies)

As we have pointed out, in the regression models we included a variable that would analyse the interaction between SPPID and SID. This variable is calculated as the product of the two explanatory variables, and Tables 8 and 9 describe the nature of individual AP in this interaction. Individual AP is always more marked in voters with strong partisan identity and strong ideology, although this combination was not statistically significant in the regression models.

As shown on Table 9, there is a higher level of individual AP (taking parties as a referent) when a respondent only has a SPPID compared to those who only have a SID. The difference is 5.88%. The mean difference is statistically significant (ANOVA $p < 0.001$). However, as

reflected on Table 10, the difference in AP (taking ideological groups as a reference) when respondents only have a SID compared to those who only have a SPPID is only 1.50%. These analyses also demonstrate that the consequences of partisanship are more prevalent and consistent in attitudes of bias by political origin, even when the categorisation of individuals does not coincide with party lines.

Table 9. DIPA (parties) for the interaction between SID and SPPID

	Valid N	DIPA (parties)	SD
No SID and no SPPID	199	0.60	0.08
No SID and yes SPPID	216	0.70	0.12
Yes SID and no SPPID	70	0.66	0.09
Yes SID and yes SPPID	226	0.75	0.11
Total	711	0.68	0.12

Table 10. DIPA (ideologies) for the interaction between SID and SPPID

	Valid N	DIPA (ideologies)	SD
No SID and no SPPID	206	0.57	0.11
No SID and yes SPPID	230	0.67	0.16
Yes SID and no SPPID	71	0.68	0.13
Yes SID and yes SPPID	229	0.76	0.17
Total	736	0.67	0.17

Furthermore, a strong partisan identity with no strong ideology was more common among respondents than vice versa, contradicting again the extended view that there is a weak level of partisanship in Spain. This finding is coherent with the results obtained in the multiple linear regression model and the bivariate analyses and reinforces their scope.

In short, all results suggest that a SPPID is important for understanding interpersonal AP, also when we take into account ideologically based hostilities. This research does not dismiss the role of ideology in AP but does call for moderation of the enthusiasm displayed in most studies on Spain and Europe regarding ideologies being the major explanatory mechanism of AP.

When Spaniards judge someone or decide whether they want to have a relationship with a person based on their political views, important biases arise from their partisan identities. Accordingly, no less attention should be paid to partisanship over ideological identities. Thus, the theoretical framework linked to the psychology of groups and social identity comes into play when we want to approach this phenomenon. Parties are fundamental in translating the popular will and are a powerful identity referent. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that the creation of strong emotional ties with these groups explains the way we relate to others. On the other hand, the soundness of the ideological/parliamentary blocs depends on changing strategical interests, and their construction is more artificial, contextual and symbolic than social and deep-rooted.

As highlighted by Huddy et al. (2018), the influence of partisanship continues to be debated in Europe. Despite this, the evidence provided by these authors points out that those with strong partisan identities in Europe also act on the basis of motivated reasoning and describe emotional reactions of group defence and self-esteem regardless of any issue consideration. This confirms that bias conditioning attitudes and behaviours are based on feelings of belonging that, by definition, cannot have an instrumental explanation.

Conclusion

The data from this research support a change in the general perception of partisan identification in Spain, adopting a more expressive approach that recognises the importance of partisan affiliation *per se* as a condition capable of causing a certain type of group bias among people. By explaining the DIPA standardised levels using linear regression models, we confirm that a SPPID is a variable with a robust potential to predict interpersonal love/rejection, both towards partisan-based groups and ideologically-based groups.

More generally, and beyond the Spanish case, this article's findings have important implications for studying AP in multiparty systems. First, we have argued that the way in which the dependent variable is operationalised is critical, so that not only should feelings towards individuals be captured as a function of their party, but also as a function of other political identities such as ideology or even as a function of certain political positions. This should lead us to avoid establishing narratives that prioritise some political identities over others. Identities will be more salient depending on the context that activates them. The second contribution of this article is related to the nature of partisanship in Spain. Given that in the Spanish case the expressive approach was particularly difficult to demonstrate, its confirmation becomes powerful evidence. Finally, by proving that the overlapping between ideology and partisanship does not contribute decisively to the explanation of the phenomenon, we confirm the autonomy of partisanship and its ability to influence voters' attitudes on its own.

Our findings invite us to rethink the role of partisan identities in Spain and in Europe, which have traditionally been underestimated or analysed only based on instrumental assumptions. Our study shows there are more voters with a strong partisan identity than a strong ideological identification in Spain, which puts the partisan dealignment theory in contention.

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Data availability statement

The dataset of the III National Polarisation Survey in Spain from which all the analyses in this article have been made is available at the following link: <https://acortar.link/JP9w7J>

Conflict of interest disclosure

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics statement

We use an unrestricted public access dataset, fully anonymised. The survey was conducted in strict compliance with Spanish laws on statistical confidentiality and personal data protection.

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